

The Contemporary Meaning of Asceticism and Its Role in Human Life: An Analytical Study

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Abstract: The religion of Islam is the embodiment of both external and internal sciences, and encourages its followers to acquire and practice both sciences. The acquisition of external sciences alone is not desirable, nor is the acquisition of internal sciences alone desirable. Similarly, the acquisition of knowledge alone is not desirable, but it should also be accompanied by intention and action, and its promotion and dissemination should also be done. Asceticism is a constant chapter for Sufis, and it is of great importance in their spiritual journey. Inner cleansing and development are not possible without adopting Asceticism, especially since the social problems faced by the individual in the present day can be overcome with the help of Asceticism. So, this discussion is being presented to understand the meaning of Asceticism and to shed light on its benefits in human life.

Keywords: Islam, Asceticism, Zuhd, Spiritual, Desire, Forbidden

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1. Introduction

The religion of Islam requires that both external and internal sciences be acquired, the intention should be pure, what has been learned should be practiced, and its promotion and dissemination should also be done. It should also be kept in mind here that these four matters are interconnected and linked. Among the internal sciences and occupations, the concept of "Asceticism" is among the Sufis, and it is the greatest means of reforming an individual. When this is achieved, not only does personal life become easier, but religious guidance is also better achieved. An attempt has been made to clarify this concept in the topic under discussion.

The literal and idiomatic meaning of Asceticism:

What is Asceticism? In this regard, its literal and idiomatic meaning is explained:

In the language, Asceticism means "to stop." It means to stop doing anything. The linguists have written while explaining its meaning that

[1] «الزهد: ضِدُّ الرَّغْبَةِ وَالْحِرْصِ عَلَى الدُّهُيَا»

Asceticism is the opposite of desire and worldly greed.

Similarly, its meaning has also been explained as:

"الزهد في اللغة: هو الانصراف عن الشيء احتقاراً له وتصغيراً لشأنه للاستغناء عنه بخير منه" [2]

According to the dictionary, 'Zuhd' means: The turning of a person's desire from one thing to another; in such a way that the thing 'from' which the person's desire turned away has become less valuable in his eyes, compared to the thing 'towards' which he had desire.

Meaning of Zuhd:

The word 'Zuhd' is used when a thing is worthless or of little value in the eyes of a person, which must have some value. For example, if there is a pile of dirt in front of you, knowing it to be worthless would not be called Zuhd in the dictionary. Yes, if there is gold and silver in front of you and it has become worthless in your eyes, then it would be called Zuhd in the dictionary.

Zuhd is one of the important positions of the seekers, and like other positions, it is also formed by the combination of knowledge of the situation and action.

Two things are needed for Asceticism: one is something that increases aversion, and the other is something that is arousing and is better than the first thing. Also, the better thing that is arousing aversion must be loved and desired in some way or another. A person who abandons something that is not desired and desired in any way will not be called Asceticism, because a person who abandons clay, stone, and other such things will not be called Asceticism. Rather, a person is called a ascetic who rejects dirhams and dinars, etc., while clay, stone, etc. are not worthy of being interested in them.

Literal definition of Asceticism:

Language Ally: Asceticism means separation, showing aversion. In this context, the definition of Asceticism says: To abandon something out of contempt or aversion or because of worry about it, to separate, to be disinterested in the world [3].

Imam Ghazali writes in his definition of Asceticism that:

To divert one's desire and intention from one thing and turn it towards another thing that is better than the first thing is called Asceticism. Every person who abandons one thing and chooses another because of some compensation or bargain leaves the first thing out of disinterest and chooses the second thing out of desire and liking for it. His state about the thing he has abandoned is Asceticism, while about the thing he has turned towards is called desire and love [4].

This is the meaning that is evident from the following verse of the Holy Quran:

(وَشَرَوْهُ بِثَمَنٍ بَخْسٍ دَرَاهِمَ مَعْدُودَةٍ وَكَانُوا فِيهِ مِنَ الزَّاهِدِينَ) [5]

(And they bought it for a small sum of money, a few dirhams, and they were among the ascetics)

A person who only abandons forbidden things and does not abandon permissible things will not be called an ascetic, even though he has adopted Asceticism from forbidden things, but the custom is that the word Asceticism is used only for abandoning permissible things.

The Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said:

"إذا أراد الله بعبد خيرا زهده في الدنيا ورغبه في الآخرة وبصره بعيوب نفسه " [6]

"When Allah intends good for a servant, He makes him dislike this world and desire the Hereafter, and shows him his faults."

The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said:

"من اراد ان يؤتية الله علما بغير تعلم هدى بغير هد اية فليزهد في الدنيا" [7]

“Whoever desires that Allah should give him knowledge without learning and guidance without seeking guidance, let him be disinterested in the world.”

"من زهد في الدنيا ادخل الله الحكمة قلبه فانطق بها لسانه وعرفه داء الدنيا ودواءها واخرجه منها سالما الى دار

السلام" [8]

For a person who commits Asceticism in this world, Allah Almighty puts wisdom in his heart and releases it on his tongue, and makes him aware of the diseases and cures of this world and takes him out of this world to the house of peace and security.

2. Desire is the Opposite of Asceticism

Shaykh Abu Talib Makki (may Allah have mercy on him) says: You can understand Asceticism in such a way that you want to sell a piece of cloth, and even if this thought prevails over you, you will not be considered ascetic. That is, it cannot be said that you have no desire for that cloth. However, you may be uninterested in that cloth. This can only be achieved when you sell it and find a replacement for it. Therefore, by considering the noble statement of Allah Almighty (and they were among the ascetics), it becomes clear that the one whose soul is in search of something and he willingly lets it go from his hand, then his Asceticism also has a special place due to his struggle. However, if the one who keeps that thing with him and his soul expresses disinterest in that thing, then his Asceticism is also of no use because keeping the Sheikh with him is a sign of having desire for it, and desire is the opposite of Asceticism. Therefore, how can one describe the attribute of a thing that is the opposite of it? It is found in [9].

Different sayings from the signs of Asceticism:

Hazrat Sayyidina Abu Zakaria bin Mu'adh Razi (may Allah have mercy on him) says that the sign of Asceticism is to be generous with whatever is available.

Hazrat Sayyiduna Muhammad bin Khafif Shirazi (may Allah have mercy on him) says that the sign of Asceticism is that one gets comfort and peace by spending the things in one's possession. It is narrated from him (may Allah have mercy on him) that Asceticism is the name of that which makes the heart of a servant separate from the world without any discomfort. Hazrat Sayyiduna Abu Sulayman Darani says that wearing woolen clothes is one of the signs of Asceticism, so it is not appropriate for an ascetic to wear a woolen dress worth three dirhams but have a desire for a dress worth five dirhams in his heart. Hazrat Sayyiduna Imam Ahmad bin Hanbal and Hazrat Sayyiduna Sufyan Thawri (may Allah have mercy on him) say that the only sign of Asceticism is that the servant's hopes are limited. Hazrat Sayyiduna Siri Saqti (may Allah have mercy on him) says that if an ascetic is heedless of his self, his life cannot be pure, and if a scholar is heedless of

Allah Almighty and busy with his self, his life cannot be pure either. Hazrat Sayyiduna Abu Al-Qasim Ibrahim bin Muhammad Nasr Abadhi says that an ascetic is dependent on the world. And the knower of the Hereafter is a stranger and a traveler. Hazrat Sayyiduna Yahya bin Mu'adh Razi (may Allah have mercy on him) says: "There are three signs of Asceticism: acting solely for the sake of Allah Almighty, speaking without any greed, and maintaining honor and dignity without government." He (may Allah have mercy on him) says: "The ascetic smells of vinegar and cotton, while the knower smells of musk and amber [10]."

Difference between a Zahid and an Arif:

Types of Zuhd:

Zuhd is in three forms.

1. Leaving the forbidden is the claim of Zuhd.
2. Leaving the excess of the halal is the special Zuhd.
3. Leaving that which makes one forget Allah Almighty, this is the Zuhd of the Arifin.

Hazrat Ustad Abu Ali Daqq (may Allah have mercy on him) used to say that a Sufi was asked why he adopted Zuhd in the world. He said, "When I renounced most of the things of the world, I disliked the desire for the few things of the world."

Degrees of Asceticism:

The following are the degrees of Asceticism:

- (1) A person who is disinterested in everything except Allah, even Paradise, and loves only Allah, is absolute Asceticism, which is the highest degree of Asceticism.
- (2) A person who is disinterested in worldly pleasures but covets the blessings of the Hereafter, such as the maidens of Paradise, palaces, gardens, rivers, and fruits, is also an ascetic, but his level is lower than absolute Asceticism.
- (3) A person who gives up some of the worldly pleasures and not others, for example, giving up wealth and wealth, not status and fame, or giving up abundance in food and drink, not adornment and adornment, cannot be called ascetic at all. Among ascetics, such a person has the same status as among penitents, a person who repents from some sins and does not commit others. Just as the repentance of such a penitent is valid because giving up forbidden things is called repentance, similarly, the ascetic's Asceticism is also valid because giving up permissible pleasures is called Asceticism. And just as it is possible for a person to be able to give up some forbidden things and not others, so it can also be the case with permissible things [11].

3. Signs of an Ascetic

The first sign: Do not be happy with what you have, nor be sad about what you do not have, as God says:

(كَيْلًا تَأْسُوا عَلَى مَا فَاتَكُمْ وَلَا تَفْرَحُوا بِمَا آتَاكُمْ) [12]

Translation: So that you do not regret what you have not received, nor be happy with what He has given you.

Rather, it is the opposite, that is, be sad about the wealth you have and be happy about what you have not received.

The second sign: In his eyes, both the one who criticizes and the one who praises are equal. The first sign is a sign of Asceticism in wealth, and the second is a sign of Asceticism in the world.

The third sign: Be familiar with Allah Almighty, and the sweetness of obedience to Him prevails in his heart because the heart is not devoid of the sweetness of love; otherwise, it is worldly love.

Asceticism in the context of the necessities of life:

The necessities of life are six: 1. Food. 2. Clothing. 3. Housing. 4. Household goods. 5. Marriage. 6. Wealth (the sixth necessity is the one that is a means to these five, and that is wealth and status)

Providing for family members:

It is not permissible to cause hunger to family members. It is not right to talk about monotheism in front of them at length. Nor is it right to say that starving to death is an enviable livelihood if it is found occasionally. Nor is it right to talk about other things of this kind because it is right for a family member to rely on him like an earner, which is the third level, just as the first Caliph, Ameerul Momineen Hazrat Sayyiduna Abu Bakr Siddique (may Allah be pleased with him), relied on him for earning.

4. It is forbidden to put one's Family in Danger of Destruction.

It is forbidden to live in the forests or at home, separated from one's family,

While relying on Allah, it is forbidden to live in the forests or sit at home, separated from one's family, so as not to have to take care of their needs, because this can lead them to destruction, which is what he is after. The truth is that there is no difference between the trust of the servant and the trust of the family. If the family makes it a habit to be patient for a few days when they are hungry and considers dying of hunger as a means of sustenance and benefit in the hereafter, then it will be permissible for the servant to rely on Allah in terms of his family and family. Since the servant's own life is also included in the family, it is not permissible to waste it. However, if he makes it a habit to stay hungry himself, then it will be correct to rely on Allah. However, if he does not have the strength to stay hungry, because his heart is troubled and he has difficulty in worship, then trusting in Allah is not permissible in such a case. It is not permissible to put one's family to hardship:

Since the soul of a servant is included in his family, his trust is to protect himself from harmful things, just as it is to protect his family. However, it is permissible to make one's body accustomed

to hunger by being patient, while it is not permissible to make one's family accustomed to it. It has become clear to you that trust is not the name of separating oneself from means, but it is the name of relying on remaining hungry for a few days and being content with death if sustenance is not available, as well as living in cities and villages or living in forests, where one may find some grass etc. to eat, but there will be hardship, because eating these things continuously is possible only when one develops the habit of patience [13].

5. Trust in the City is Easier

Trust in the city is easier than trust in the forest, because in the city, means are readily available, although means are available in both places, but people are attracted to external means.

6. Distance from Depression by Adopting Asceticism:

The main causes of mental stress and depression are as follows:

Failure to acquire wealth
Loss of wealth
Loss of job or loss due to the collapse of the stock market
Grief over the loss of a loved one
Fear of loss of life and property
the causes of depression in children are generally parental pressure or poor parental relationships
Most of these causes are related to property in other words, it can be said that this disease is also a religion of materialism. Therefore, if the desire for wealth can be reduced, this disease can be reduced to a great extent.

According to Sufism, the best way to achieve peace of mind is for a person to renounce worldly wealth and spend everything in the path of Allah. However, practicing this method is very difficult for today's man. The desire for more and more forces a person to become ruthless and bloodthirsty for wealth. A person should understand that trying is in his hands, but the result is in the hands of the Provider who provides sustenance to everyone. A person can put a seed in the ground, add water and fertilizer, but can they make this seed whole? Can he save it from becoming food for insects? Can he make flowers and fruits grow on this plant? Can he save it from the weather? Not. Only the One who created this seed, who nurtured it inside the ground, who saved it from rotting and decaying, who saved it from being eaten by insects and birds, who transformed it from a seed into a tree, then took a soft and delicate plant out of the rocky ground, made a tree with a trunk from it and planted fragrant flowers and delicious fruits in it. When a person has nothing in his hands except effort, then he sees things happening against his will. Why does one suffer from depression? Hazrat Abu Bakr Hamdani said two more things: do not refuse whatever comes, and do not collect it. This means that money is a human need and without it, nothing works. Therefore, let it come, provided that it is done lawfully. Then, human needs are not fulfilled by collecting it, but by spending it. Therefore, it should be spent. Being content with the will of Allah and bowing down in submission to Him saves a person from depression. Everything is in the hands of Allah. Not even a leaf moves without His permission. In such a situation, a person has no choice but to be

content with His will in all circumstances. This is specifically advised in the teachings of Sufism. Hazrat Sheikh Abdul Qadir Jilani (may Allah have mercy on him) says: Do not try to obtain blessings and avoid suffering and hardship, because if you have a blessing in your destiny, you will meet it. So, seek it or dislike it. And if suffering and hardship are in your destiny and it has been decided for you, then dislike it or avoid it through prayers. Whether you try to remove it or be patient and try to please Allah Almighty quickly, you will still face troubles. Whether a person is happy or not, the system of the universe operates according to the will of Allah. By accepting this fact, he has no choice but to be content with the will of Allah. If this thought is firmly established in the heart, depression can be avoided to a great extent, and other diseases of this kind will not arise.

It's a different matter that it's not difficult for us to follow this path; it's almost impossible. But we can do this: eliminate the madness of wealth within us, reduce our needs, and be patient with whatever we get, consider it a gift from Allah, and be grateful to Him. If we develop these qualities in ourselves, our personality can change greatly, and we can avoid the shortcomings that a person who worships wealth has.

7. Acceptance and Contentment are the Protectors from Depression

Most people suffer from depression simply because they find people around them to have a better lifestyle than themselves. It is natural for a person to feel inferior when they see others in good condition. However, if you look closely, you will feel that Allah has blessed every person with different kinds of blessings. If one has dollars, another has education. If someone has respect, someone has fame. Someone has a high position, someone has some other quality. A person should understand that no one gets a perfect place here. Everyone has some sort of deficiency. For example, one of the richest people in the world is an American citizen, Bill Gates. He dominates the computer market of the whole world, but Allah has deprived him of the wealth of children. It is not good for a person to feel inferior when he sees others in good condition and then become mentally ill. This disease can only be cured in one way, that a person becomes a person of patience and contentment and learns to be content with the will of Allah. Gilani (may Allah have mercy on him) has pointed out in one of his books, O needy one, if the world and its people have turned their backs on you, if you are anonymous and hungry and thirsty, if your naked body and thirsty liver are rejected by every corner of the earth, mosques and deserts, if you are similarly thrown out of every door, deprived of every purpose, O one with a broken heart full of desires and aspirations, by no means do you say this, Allah Almighty has made you poor and needy, and the world has taken you away from you and left me alone. He has troubled me and not given me peace of mind. He has disgraced me and not given me enough from the world. He has made me anonymous. He has not

given me elevation and status among my brothers and creation. He has bestowed His great blessings on others. They are absorbed in His great blessings day and night. He has given them preference over me and my neighbors, even though we are both believers and Muslims, and our mother is Hazrat Eve and our father is Hazrat Adam (peace be upon him). Have you ever thought about why Allah Almighty has done all this to you? The truth is that your soil is pure and good, and in the form of patience, contentment, knowledge, certainty, and agreement, the rain of divine mercy is about to rain on you continuously, and the light of your faith and monotheism is about to gather. The tree of your faith is strong in its foundation and roots, established and fruitful, growing thick and with high branches. It increases and grows every day, so it does not need any fertilizer or other means to nourish it. Allah Almighty has fulfilled your matter on it and granted you Paradise in the Hereafter and made you its owner. Similarly, He will grant you such blessings in the Hereafter that no eye has seen or heard, and no heart has imagined them. The most important cause of depression is seeing the people around you in a good state and feeling that you are in a bad state compared to them. Struggle in the world is in the hands of man, but its result is not in his hands. A farmer can plant a seed in the ground, but he cannot make it into a trunk and a tree. He cannot make flowers and fruits in it. When the result is not in his hands, He may be worried and cannot change the situation, but he can console his heart by thinking that the result of the struggle he did not get to see in this world will be seen in the Hereafter. Bowing his head before the will of Allah saves a person from depression and mental stress.

There will come a time when the heart will turn and the eyes will turn away.

Allah Almighty warns Muslims not to let their hearts be entangled in the accumulation of wealth and riches, but rather they must prepare for the pleasure of Allah Ahad:

[14] (وَرَحْمَتُ رَبِّكَ خَيْرٌ مِّمَّا يَجْمَعُونَ)

Translation: And the mercy of your Lord is better than the wealth that they accumulate.

Then the Quran discussed wealth in such a way that the trials and evils that arise from it are eliminated, and this is possible in various forms.

Wealth is a temptation:

Wealth is a cause of trial and testing in human life because it is the means of both evil and good. It is the responsibility of man to choose the good to achieve divine pleasure. Allah says:

[15] (وَاعْلَمُوا أَنَّمَا أَمْوَالُكُمْ وَأَوْلَادُكُمْ فِتْنَةٌ وَأَنَّ اللَّهَ عِنْدَهُ أَجْرٌ عَظِيمٌ)

(And know that your wealth and your children are only a trial and that Allah has a great reward with Him)

Translation: And know that your wealth and your children are only a trial and that Allah has a great reward with Him.

There is no place for prejudice and narrow-mindedness in Islam, but pointing to this disease, Baba-e-Urdu Dr. Abdul Haq, while comparing Sufi and Maulvi in his work, says:

"The difference between a Maulvi and a Sufi is that one sees the outward and the other the inward, one sees the word and the other the meaning, one is bound by formalities and imitation and the other is free from them, his eyes fall on evil and the other finds the good in the bad, he acts with cursing and slander and the other with kindness and love, he is strict and violent and the other is gentle and lenient, he forgives very little and his way is to forgive, he becomes great by showing off and he dwells in hearts with humility and modesty, he is curious about the faults of others and the other takes account of his self, he wants to intimidate with his knowledge and the other with his actions [16].

"Wealth is not a manifestation of God's pleasure: The Quran rejects the idea that wealth is a manifestation of God's pleasure and clearly states that an increase in wealth does not mean that God is pleased with it. It says:

(وَقَالُوا نَحْنُ أَكْثَرُ أَمْوَالًا وَأَوْلَادًا وَمَا نَحْنُ بِمُعَذَّبِينَ 35 قَالَ إِنَّ رَبِّي يَبْسُطُ الرِّزْقَ لِمَن يَشَاءُ وَيَقْدِرُ وَلَكِنَّ أَكْثَرَ النَّاسِ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ 36 وَمَا أَمْوَالُكُمْ وَلَا أَوْلَادُكُمْ بِالَّتِي تُقَرَّبُكُمْ عِنْدَنَا زُلْفَىٰ إِلَّا مَن ءَامَنَ وَعَمِلَ صَالِحًا فَأُولَٰئِكَ لَهُمْ جَزَاءُ الصَّغْفِرِ بِمَا عَمِلُوا وَهُمْ فِي الْغُرُفَاتِ ءَامِنُونَ 37) [17]

(And they say, "We have increased wealth and children." And we are not to be punished. Say, "My Lord makes provision easy for whom He wills and determines. But most people do not know what they said: "We have more wealth than you, and we will not be punished." Say, "My Lord gives sustenance to whom He wills and makes it easy for whom He wills, but most people do not know. It is not your wealth or your children that bring you closer to Us, except for those who believe and do righteous deeds. Those are the ones for whom there will be a double reward for what they did."

8. Religious Simplicity

One of the characteristics of Islam is its natural simplicity, which is in perfect harmony with the modern scientific mind. The modern human mind is made up of nature. Therefore, the simplicity that is in nature has become the favorite thing for the modern mind. Only that religion which has natural simplicity can be acceptable to the modern mind. A religion that is devoid of natural simplicity is not acceptable to the modern mind. This is a fact. Except for Islam, all religions have lost natural simplicity, both theoretical simplicity and practical simplicity.

9. Self-reliance, Frugality, and Contentment in the light of Sufi thought.

The Sufis proved through their actions that the kind of society that Islam establishes does not encourage natural inclinations more than necessary. This is why Islam does not give its followers an open license to earn and spend wealth as they wish. Rather, it sets rules and limits, keeping in mind the collective interest of all human beings, and establishes certain principles and regulations

to protect the rights of each individual, the violation of which it considers unlawful and forbidden. Just as it restricts the means of livelihood from legitimate and reputable sources, it also governs the duration of expenditure by its principles. It is not the freedom of a person to waste his earnings in violation of these principles and become free and fearless from the burdens. Islam wants to see the income and expenditure of a person bound by divine orders, and from the very first day, it presents the idea that one day a person will have to give an account of everything that has been given to him in this world. There will be a judge.

[18] (ثُمَّ لَنَسْأَلَنَّ يَوْمَئِذٍ عَنِ النَّعِيمِ)

This caution and moderation in spending is the result of the Quranic teachings.

10. Conclusions

Sufism views materialism and the desire for wealth with great disapproval. The first condition for following this path is that you should spend your wealth in the path of Allah. If a person does not do this, he cannot even follow the path of Asceticism. However, even if you do not intend to follow this path, you can bring about a great change in your life by adopting some Sufi thoughts. Money is the basic necessity of life. Without it, it is not possible to take a single step. But a person can reduce their needs. He should do it and be patient and grateful for whatever he gets. He should not become so crazy in the state of wealth that he could risk his life in the event of deprivation. In this regard, the first method of Sufism is not to accumulate wealth at all, but to be attached to it. According to Sufism, the best way to achieve peace of mind is for a person to renounce worldly wealth and spend everything in the path of Allah. However, practicing this method is very difficult for today's man.

Sufis believe that if a person reduces their needs, it brings many benefits. First, if the needs are reduced, the struggle to acquire wealth will also be reduced, and the time that remains can be spent in worshipping his Lord. Second, he can avoid the wrong things that a person does in the lust for wealth. Third, he has to give an account of everything that a person earns or spends to Allah. Fourth, this state of madness, which gives rise to diseases like depression, can be avoided.

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