

Contentment Is the Solution

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Abstract: *This article shows the relation between consumption¹ and contentment² (Qina'ah) from a religious perspective.*

Keywords: *Consumption, Contentment*

¹ The act of buying and using products (oxford advanced learners dictionary)

² By 'contentment' we mean: "Being satisfied with what you have"

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Man, who is God's creation, is always seeking absolute perfection. Exactly because of this nature, he prefers the most beautiful shapes and sizes. If he prefers something, it would be the most perfect; if he wants virtues and spirituality, he would want it in its extreme way and if he focuses on the materialistic and worldly life, it should be the most perfect.

If the worldly life is chosen by someone, he would want the best facilities. At this time consumption starts. Such a person will not limit himself to any amount of facilities and no joy in life will satisfy him because he is constantly seeking more and more. This means more overwhelming effort to gain more.

In this situation, man is transformed into a consumption machine and believes that for having a comfortable life, it is necessary to possess everything. This belief brings the desire to have more and spend more money.

In this stage, greed is born and man will put all his efforts to increase his income and consume as much as he can. Unreachable aspirations and consequently distress come by. Not financial distress but a distress to make more and more money.

Man starts a campaign of luxury and puts himself in trouble to reach these goals. The question is: "Will greed and indulgence and all these wishes lead to a more comfortable life?" The Answer is: "No".

Let's talk about greed. As human beings become greedier, they become more disturbed. Greedy people, never become calm and relaxed. Greedy people are deprived of spiritual peace and the joy of life.

Imam al-Sadiq (*as*) states:

"A Greedy person is deprived of two things and two things will be with him: he is deprived of contentment, so loses

comfort and would be deprived of satisfaction (with what he has), so loses certainty (*yaqin*).”¹

Or Imam Ali (s) states: “The greedy man is not seen at rest.”²

Unreachable dreams and fancies also destroy man’s peace and tranquility. Imam Ali (*as*) states: “He whose wishes become many, his satisfactions will become little.”³ Because, according to Imam Ali (*as*), the main characteristic of wishes is their endlessness and unlimited capacity:

“Wishes have no end”⁴ and “Wishing has no limits”⁵.

Meanwhile, the human life and the capacity of this world are too limited to meet such demands. Therefore, the endlessness of wishes and limitation of capacities will make wishes unreachable and this will obviously lead to dissatisfaction. Accordingly Imam Ali (*as*) says:

“(Unreachable) fancies lead to regret.”⁶

This can be a regret of losing what he could have achieved if he had not gone after unreachable desires and the regret of wasting his precious time and life. On the other hand, if a man has an unreachable desire, he will experience an endless waiting; a waiting which is very sad and disturbing. Therefore, the Imam (*as*) emphasizes that:

“He, who wishes the impossible, will have a long waiting.”⁷

¹ Al-Ameli, *Vasa’il, Al-Shia*, vol. 16, p. 20

² Abdul-Wahid ibn Muhammad al-Tamimi, *Ghorar Al-Hikam Va Durar Al-Kilam*, p. 294, No. 6601

³ *ibid*, p. 314, No. 7304

⁴ *ibid*, p. 311, No. 7202

⁵ *ibid*, p. 311, No. 7204

⁶ *ibid*, p. 314, No. 7300

⁷ *ibid*, p. 312, No. 7225

With these consequences ahead, we should not expect consumerism to lead to happiness.

The solution to the mentioned problems is 'contentment'. Contentment balances all parts of life. Content people try to fulfill their worldly needs but at the same time are satisfied with what God has destined for them. Therefore, they neither protest nor feel unhappy. They are not tied up in their fancies and don't waste their life trying hard to reach what is unnecessary. This makes them satisfied with their life.

Satisfaction is not connected with how much more we consume or spend. Higher consumption will not bring with it higher satisfaction. Rather, the sense of satisfaction and comfort, have a logical connection with the amount of contentment. Imam Ali (*as*) says:

"You are in more need of contentment (even though) you have little provisions (*rizq*) than you are in need of greed in search (of provisions)."¹

He also says:

"The beauty of life is in contentment."²

Imam al-Sadiq (*as*) Quotes Luqman saying to his son: "Be content with what God has assigned for you, so that you have a serene life."³

Real wealth and poverty can be defined by the concept of contentment. Imam Ali says:

"The wealthiest person is he who is satisfied with what God has given to him."¹

¹ *ibid*, p. 391, No. 8985

² *ibid*, p. 391, No. 8990

³ Al-Majlesi, *Bihar Al-Anwar*, vol. 13, p. 419

If you are satisfied with what God has given you, then the least of things will suffice you. But if you feel unsatisfied by what is sufficient for you, then nothing in the world will be enough for you.

Imam Ali (*as*) says:

“He who is satisfied with what God has given him, will not be saddened because of the things that he is deprived of.”²

Serenity and comfort are the differentiating factors between content and non-content people. The greed of the greedy does not increase what God has put aside for them and the contentment of the content does not decrease it. If people learn to be satisfied by their destiny, they undoubtedly will experience comfort and ease of mind. The holy Prophet (*s*) says:

“Be aware that for every person there is a determined share of provisions (*rizq*) and it will reach him one way or another. If he is satisfied with it, it will be blessed and will be increased for him. But if he is not satisfied with it, it will not be blessed and will not be increased for him. The provisions (*rizq*) are in pursuit of the person who they are destined for just as his fate is.”³

Undoubtedly, contentment doesn't mean being lazy and making no effort for making money or working. Contentment and effort are two separate things and they do not contradict each other. Laziness and effort fall in one category and greed and contentment in another. From a functional viewpoint, man is either active or lazy, and from a psychological viewpoint, he is either content or greedy. Without doubt man must try hard to reach what he desires. It's important that his efforts be combined with content and not greed. Imam Ali (*as*) states:

¹ Abdul-Wahid ibn Muhammad al-Tamimi, *Ghorar Al-Hikam Va Durar Al-Kilam*, p. 397, No. 9219

² Seyyed Al-Radhi, *Nahj Al-Balaghah*, p. 536, Hikmah No. 349

³ Al-Nuri, *Mustadrak Al-Vasa'el*, vol. 13, p. 31, No. 14652

“Seek for your provisions (rizq) for it has been guaranteed for those who seek it.”¹

God has guaranteed that he will give us a share of provisions, but there is also a specified duty for us. Sudayr says: “I asked Imam al-Sadiq (*as*): What is the duty of man who is seeking his provisions (*rizq*)?” He answered: “When you opened the door of your store and made everything ready, you have performed your duty.”²

We can conclude that, it is necessary to have a pleasant life and be able to use all available facilities, but asking for more than we can get and having unreachable aspirations, will cause a lot of inconvenience which will lead to psychological stress and frustration. We should not seek absolute perfection in this material world because it does not have the needed capacity to provide us with it.

¹ Al-Nuri, *Mustadrak Al-Vasa'el*, vol. 13, p. 31, No. 14652

² Al-Kulaini, *Al-Kafi*, vol. 5, p. 179