

The Four States of the Soul on the Path to Perfection: A Guide Toward Eternity

A Comprehensive Guide to Choosing the Right Path Toward Eternity: How Do We Move Toward Eternity?

As human beings, we are on a continuous journey toward perfection. However, here arises a question: How can we make this spiritual journey and go through its challenges successfully?

If we want to walk on this path, we must first know ourselves. Knowing our personal areas of strength and weakness, our desires, fears, and goals helps us create a precise plan for our spiritual growth. The type of path we choose on this journey will determine the final outcome.

A person who knows the soul and its states is careful with his decisions, relationships, behaviors, and thoughts; he knows that all these factors have a direct impact on the quality and speed of his soul's growth and perfection.

Just as identifying the characteristics of the route, destination, and obstacles is essential on a physical journey, identifying barriers and accelerators is also crucial in moving toward eternity and spiritual growth. If we start walking on this path without awareness and preparation, we may encounter obstacles that could halt our progress or even force us to retreat. To achieve eternal bliss, we must follow the teachings of the Quran and the Household of Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon them) as we walk on this path.

In fact, moving toward eternity is walking on the path of spiritual growth. Knowing the factors that can either slow down or accelerate this movement means being aware of both obstacles and the factors leading to spiritual growth.

In religious literature, four states of the soul are defined, each resulting in specific outcomes: curse (*la'na*), loss (*ghabn*), speed, and excelling (*sibgha*). These states reflect our spiritual condition.

To achieve the purpose of creation, we must identify the factors that lead to speed, excelling, cessation, and regression. Then by utilizing some of these factors and avoiding others, we can adopt the best and quickest form of movement on our journey. In this lesson, after examining the concepts of curse, loss, speed, and excelling, we will also discuss some obstacles to our spiritual growth and also some factors that can enhance our spiritual growth .

Key Concepts in the Journey Toward Perfection

Our soul is the only part of our existence that is moving toward infinity. The soul is a driving force that can guide us toward perfection or destruction. Knowing the different states of the soul helps us adjust the path toward eternity and prevent any potential deviations. The four main states of the soul are: curse, loss, speed, and excelling. These concepts are crucial in determining our spiritual destiny. We will examine these concepts in greater detail below .

Examining the State of Curse and the Concept of the Cursed in the States of the Soul

Being “cursed” means being cast away from divine mercy and straying from the path of truth. This state occurs when, instead of moving toward perfection, we regress and turn our steps to destruction; in fact, a cursed person is one whose today is worse than his yesterday and is spiritually in decline ¹. How can we recognize if we are getting away from God's mercy and the purpose of our creation? Moral characteristics serve as an appropriate criterion for evaluating our position on the path of spiritual growth.

Committing sins, neglecting spiritual growth, and having undesirable moral traits such as arrogance, vanity, and jealousy are warning signs indicating that we are deviating from the right path. The deeper these traits are rooted within us, the greater the degree of deviation will be. Even subtle signs of pride can distance us from divine mercy. According to the words of Amir al-Mu'minin, Imam Ali (Peace be upon him), even boasting about one's shoelaces prevents us from entering Heaven ². Avoiding ostentation, being humble, and steering clear of competition for worldly matters are among the things that protect us from being cast away from divine mercy.

Whenever we feel we are regressing on our journey toward eternity, we must repent and change our behavior to prevent this state and return swiftly to the right path.

Examining the Concepts of Loss and Being Deceived

A loser is someone who has been deceived and inflicted with loss. We are losers when we do not make any progress in our lives, with each day like the last ³. Some of the most significant reasons for becoming a loser include neglecting life's opportunities, laziness, not putting effort into achieving perfection, fear of

change, and being complacent with our current situation. To overcome these barriers, we must gain awareness and knowledge of the concept of perfection in all our dimensions, especially in our human or supra-rational dimension. If we know our existential qualities, we will not waste our time pursuing lower and limited perfections; instead, we will think about the pinnacle of perfections, which is the supra-rational perfection, and strive to attain them. To avoid becoming a loser, we need to have a precise plan and clear goals, and make constant efforts to achieve these goals, as inaction hinders us from achieving our ultimate goal.

Examining the Concept of Speed in the States of the Soul

Regarding the mystical and religious concepts, "speed" means hastening to do good deeds and staying away from sins. The Holy Quran has heavily emphasized this concept ⁴. The most important issue on this journey is choosing the right path. Then, the only thing we need is speed to get to our destination. Piety and ethics are among the most significant factors that help us navigate our path.

To achieve perfection, we must race toward divine forgiveness and avoid laziness and procrastination. Remembering death, making the most of life's opportunities, and avoiding attachment to the world are among the factors that speed up our self-growth and spiritual elevation.

Examining the Concept of Excelling in Moving Toward the Hereafter

"Excelling" means taking the lead in performing good deeds and acquiring knowledge and moral virtues. Excelling on the path to perfection should not stem from hypocrisy or ostentation but should arise from sincere intentions

aimed at getting closer to God. This is the only form of competition encouraged and emphasized in Islam ⁵.

Excelling is only valuable when it is done on the path to perfection and getting closer to God. Any competition over worldly matters or making an effort to be superior to others in this regard is undesirable and condemned. Competition over worldly matters such as wealth, power, and fame, hold no value; rather, they distance us from the primary purpose of creation. This is because these competitions are often accompanied by envy, spite, and hostility, leading to division and discord.

If we want to excel in our spiritual journey, we must always be engaged in learning and make an effort to achieve personal growth. Serving others and doing good works are additional tools for reaching this level of perfection. Jealousy, pride, and holding grudges are among the most significant obstacles to excelling.

Practical Strategies for Achieving Perfection

Reaching perfection is a long-term goal that requires constant effort and dedication. There are various strategies to increase our speed and excelling while avoiding regressing on the journey toward eternity. Observing piety (*taqwa*) and morality are two crucial factors in navigating the states of our soul.

Some of the most important elements that play significant roles in self-growth and spiritual elevation include self-knowledge, self-purification, strengthening our relationship with God, helping others, seizing opportunities, and engaging in reflection and contemplation.

Identifying our strengths and weaknesses and striving for self-improvement are the first and most effective steps on the path to perfection and the journey toward eternity. Self-knowledge helps us fix our weaknesses and enhance our strengths; such efforts will speed up our movement toward eternity. Removing bad traits, distancing ourselves from sin, and cultivating virtuous traits are also essential practices that enable us to choose the right path and move swiftly along it .

The highest goal set on the journey toward eternity is to become similar to God. The best tool for achieving this goal is to build a deeper connection with Him. Saying one's prayers, *dua* (supplication), reciting the Quran, and asking for the intercession of Prophet Muhammad's Household (Peace be upon them), are important tools for connecting with God and receiving His guidance. These tools help us reach the purpose of creation, speed up our movement, excel, and avoid regression and stagnation.

Striving to meet the needs of society and helping others is one of the most important ways to manifest divine attributes and get closer to God. The one who can reflect God's attributes, like a mirror, will find it quicker and easier to traverse the path to perfection.

Making the most out of our time and seizing opportunities are other factors that aid us to be on the right way and speed up our move on the path to spiritual growth. Our lifetime is a valuable asset for achieving perfection. If we appreciate this asset, we will seize every opportunity for learning, growth, and spiritual advancement.

Contemplation and reflection on the signs of creation are also important tools for navigating our movement toward eternity. By contemplating upon divine verses, we can gain a better understanding of life's purpose. The intellect helps

us distinguish truth from falsehood and paves the way for reaching perfection. Studying and acquiring knowledge are essential tools for strengthening our ability to think and reflect.

Obstacles and Challenges on the Path to Perfection

The journey toward eternity on the path of spiritual growth is not easy. There are obstacles on this journey. There are many challenges on this path that we must consciously and diligently overcome. Recognizing these obstacles helps us avoid ceasing and speed up our move; it also allows us to excel on this path. Factors such as negligence, the temptations of Satan, arrogance, being obsessed with outward appearances, and getting away from spirituality are among the most significant barriers to growth and perfection.

In the world full of deception, negligence is considered as a barrier to rapid progress on the path to perfection. Immersing ourselves in worldly matters diverts us from our main life goal; if we forget our main goal, we become entangled in issues that prevent us from being in the right path and may even cause us to regress.

In this lesson, we pointed out that the journey toward eternity is long, dynamic, and filled with ups and downs. On this journey, we race to attain closeness to God and please Him. This is the one arena where excelling beyond others has value.

The journey toward the purpose of creation requires self-awareness, constant effort, and having resilience to overcome obstacles. By knowing the states of the soul and understanding concepts such as curse, loss, speed, and excelling, we can take effective steps to achieve self-growth and elevation, and finally reach

ultimate perfection and please God. This is an endless journey, and we must remain active and dynamic in it until the last moment.

Failures should not lead us to despair or hinder us from moving forward. Self-knowledge is the key factor that effectively enables us to overcome obstacles that cause ceasing and regression on the path to spiritual growth.

¹. Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him and his family) says: "He whose two days are equal, is a loser."

². According to Imam Ali (Peace be upon him), based on the Quran, 28:83, the man who would like his shoelace be better than his friend's, he is arrogant. So, he will never enter Heaven. (Al-Sayyid Radi, Ali b Tawus. *Saad al-soud lin-nofus*. vol.1, 88)

³. Imam Sadiq (Peace be upon him) says, "The one whose two days are equal, is a loser." (Shaykh Hurr Amili, *Wasa'il al-Shia*. vol.11, 376)

⁴. Quran, 3:133

⁵. Quran, 57:21