

Barriers to Human Growth and Becoming the Deputy of God on Earth

Why is Understanding the Barriers to Human Growth Important?

Personal development, social growth, progress, and human growth are keywords that we have encountered at least once in our lifetime. These terms are applicable in various fields of personal and social life. It is almost impossible to find a person who is not seeking growth and progress in at least one area of their life. Personal growth and development are also among the main subjects in self-knowledge, and as we have emphasized before, acquiring knowledge without committing to the path of human growth not only lacks value but can even lead to greater problems.

The ultimate goal of human growth is to become similar to Allah and to achieve the status of the representative of God on earth. To reach this goal, we must grow. But what is the path to growth and how do we attain the highest status of creation? Are we aware of the resources and barriers to human growth and our journey toward achieving this status?

Imagine that a car racing competition is going to be held on a track. All participants are given the chance to see the layout of the track, the race course, and the finish line. Drivers must accurately locate the finish line, also identify the best routes and the obstacles along the way. Recognizing these obstacles helps them reach the finish line more easily and quickly. This awareness, along with knowing the best routes to the target point allows them to avoid the obstacles, and set a better record in reaching the finish line.

Our journey in life is much like the path taken by these drivers. We are tasked with traversing a path and reaching a specific final point. This path is the journey of human growth, and the endpoint is the purpose of creation. The obstacles are designed in accordance with the path of human growth. To prevent slowing down, stopping, or regressing on our journey, we must recognize these barriers.

Some of the barriers to human growth include issues such as the rule of the false self, excessive focus and attachment to lower perfections, laziness, apathy, inactivity, arrogance, narcissism, jealousy, negligence, doubt, polytheism, irritability, sadness, fear, and superstition. Given the large number of barriers to human growth, this article will briefly address a select few.

The Rule of the Material Dimension: One of the Greatest Barriers to Human Growth.

Attaining the status of God's deputy on earth is deeply tied to free will and the power of decision making. One of the most important decisions for attaining this position is adopting a lifestyle aligned with human values. By recognizing the challenges that hinders this choice, we can essentially identify the barriers to human growth.

We are human beings when the supra-rational dimension of our existence governs us. Therefore, one of the greatest obstacles to achieving the position of God's representative on earth is the dominion of the false self and excessive focus on the lower dimensions of our being. It is no exaggeration to claim that all our problems stem from the resistance of our lower selves against our true self. Often, in order to preserve our inanimate, vegetative, animalistic, or intellectual selves, we lose

and belittle our true and eternal self. Yet, even the development of these lower faculties of our being requires the rule of our true self over them.

When the spiritual or supra-rational dimension rules our being, then our true self has taken control. In fact, the human dimension controls us when nothing is more beloved than Allah, the Infallibles (Peace Be Upon Them), and struggle in the way of Allah (*jihad*). However, if because of negligence or the rule of the false self, we prioritize anything above these three, the human dimension loses its control, and as the Quran describes it, we become *fasiq*¹.

Any government is interested in maintaining its authority and power. What causes the destruction of a government is neglecting its internal and external enemies. Similarly, if we aim to establish and preserve the human and spiritual governance within ourselves, like any political and military government, we must prepare ourselves for war against adversaries because adversaries are perpetually seeking to destroy the ruling government. Therefore, there is no guarantee that the happiness, calmness, and kindness we feel today will persist because the estimative, imaginal, vegetative, and animalistic adversaries of our being are always lurking, ready to attack us during our moments of negligence to seize the control from our human dimension.

If our spiritual dimension does not hold authority, it cannot control our relationships, decisions, behaviors, and thought patterns. In that case, the lower dimensions of our being such as estimative, lustful, worldly, vegetative, and even intellectual may dominate.

¹. Quran, 9:24

Without the rule of the supra-rational dimension of our being, our soul will ultimately lead itself to destruction, and we will be deprived of human growth and the attainment of the ultimate purpose of creation.

Laziness and Apathy: The Root of All Setbacks

Whether we believe in the hereafter and life beyond death or view life as limited to this world, achieving happiness, comfort, and peace requires effort and action. According to the demands of both this world and the hereafter, we must possess the necessary skills to achieve these goals. We must create conditions that ensure not only a fulfilling worldly life but also a good hereafter. Laziness and apathy are among the significant obstacles on the path to success in this endeavor, and they are among the most important factors contributing to misery in both this world and the hereafter. Imam al-Baqir (Peace Be Upon Him) has warned us against these two traits, considering them the keys to all vices ².

Laziness and apathy are the barriers for the infinity-seeking soul and diminish our motivation in taking action and moving toward human growth. God, as the Mentor (*Rabb*), has created the infinity-seeking soul of human beings solely for the purpose of becoming similar and drawing closer to Him. However, when He sees us being lazy and apathetic in our efforts and training within the “gym” of this world, He becomes disappointed in us and leaves us to figure it out on our own. According to the words of Imam Ali (Peace Be Upon Him) in Sermon 17 of *Nahj al-Balagha*,

². “Avoid laziness and apathy, these two are the keys to every vice.” Majlisi, *Bihar al-Anwar*. vol.78, p.175.

“Among all the people the most detested before Allah is he who is devoted to his self.”

Everything in this world has its own purpose and existential philosophy. For example, a gym has been designed to engage us in sports and physical activity. We should ponder upon our own existential philosophy in this world. Enrolling someone in a coma and incapable of movement in a martial arts class is clearly absurd. Similarly, it is equally ridiculous for a healthy person to go to the gym but not engage in any training.

Most of us humans have yet to realize that this world is like a gym for us, where we are meant to achieve the purpose of our creation and become similar to God. In other words, we have not acknowledged the womb-like nature of this world. The relationship between this world and the hereafter is similar to the relationship between the mother's womb and this world. Just as a fetus in the mother's womb gradually prepares for life in this world, we too must, in the womb of this world, get closer each day to the purpose of our creation and the status of God's deputy on earth and attain human growth. If we fail to plan properly during our time in this world to achieve the ultimate purpose of our creation, neglect to take action, and fall into laziness and apathy, we will not reach our final destination. Laziness, whether personal, social, generational, national, and civilizational is one of the barriers to human growth and attaining the status of God's deputy on earth.

Laziness and apathy are the reasons for many worldly failures as well, including failure in choosing a spouse, marriage, parenting, selecting a field of study, career decisions, and managing economic issues. These two traits can cause even the

worldly successes that we achieve to ultimately work against us. Moreover, they may leave us facing deep regrets and torment in matters related to the hereafter.

Fear and Sadness: Barriers to Human Growth

The enmity of Satan toward human beings is evident, and God has repeatedly warned us about the attacks of Satan and his hostility. Satan does not want us to reach the ultimate purpose of our creation, by employing various tools such as creating sadness, fear, and feelings of inferiority. These tools are among the barriers to human growth on the path of becoming God's representative on earth.

Satan knows well that the key to healing our hearts is happiness, so he seeks to make us sad with his constant whispers in our ears and hearts ³. Sadness is the message of Satan, specifically the negative and materialistic kind of sadness. Such sadness limits us, prevents us from drawing closer to God, and leads us to self-forgetting by taking away our will and motivation for self-improvement.

Such sadness cultivates anxiety and discomfort, eroding well-being and resulting in depression. This depression isolates us, draining our ability to move forward. Consequently, someone who does not move will not reach his destination.

Sadness is a type of *fisq* and a departure from our normal state. Just as the material dimension of our being can become ill, the spiritual dimension of our being is also vulnerable to diseases. Sadness is one of these dangerous illnesses. Imam Ali (Peace Be Upon Him) considers “sadness and grief to be a disease of the soul” ⁴. This illness

³. “Whispering is an act of Satan, one that aims at causing grief to the believers.” (Quran, 58:10)

⁴. “Sadness is the sickness of the heart.” *Ghurar Al-Hikam Wa Durar Al-Kalim*

can distance us from fulfilling our human potential and lead us to the depths of Hell.

Another key objective of Satan's attacks is to create anxiety and fear ⁵. Fear weakens and humiliates us, leading to jealousy, arrogance, vanity, irritability, and hopelessness. Essentially, Satan's fourfold attacks target fearful individuals, the people whose minds are always filled with fear of the future or worries about the past. Fear disrupts and paralyzes all our movement toward eternity and achieving the status of God's deputy on earth. It gradually takes away our faith, peace, and security. Fear also causes us to flee from the struggles in which the potential for our growth lies hidden.

In this article, we highlighted the importance of recognizing the barriers to human growth. Obstacles hinder our speed and progress toward eternity, but recognizing these obstacles helps us overcome them. It allows us to fulfill the ultimate purpose of creation more easily and quickly.

We also discussed three main obstacles, including the rule of the false self, laziness and apathy, as well as fear and sadness. We stated that neglecting the human dimension and being ruled by external forces lead us to engage in unreal pursuits and prevent us from reaching our ultimate goal and the status of God's representative on earth. These setbacks are often the result of laziness and apathy. We need movement and action to become similar to God. Laziness and apathy are the keys to all evils and among the greatest obstacles to action. Regarding fear and sadness, we pointed out that these two are the tools used by Satan to prevent us

⁵. "It was Satan who suggested to you the fear of his allies." (Quran, 2:175)

from reaching the purpose of our creation. If we fall into sadness and fear, we will lose the ability to grow and will gradually lose our faith.

If you know any other barriers to human growth, feel free to share your insights with us.