

POVERTY REVISITED: PRESENTING POVERTY THE NORMATIVE WAY

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ABSTRACT

This paper delves into the issue of poverty from the Islamic perspective. Particularly, the author aims to present the concept of poverty in the “normative” [as it ought to be] way and enquires whether concerns regarding poverty, or the state of poverty, is for Muslims a justified issue. In other words, are the absence of material supplies and wealth widely seen today in a negative light or is it the real or true poverty - as represented by the Qur’ān (Allah) and (Sunnah) His Messenger (PBUH) - really the poverty worth focusing on? Without adequately understanding what poverty is there cannot be effective solutions and interventions. Employing scriptural evidence vis-à-vis Islamic legal reasoning, we argue that normative poverty, in accordance with the Islamic tradition, is the real poverty and not material poverty.

Keywords: *normative poverty, true poverty, therapeutic antidote, spiritual emptiness, poverty fear, discontentment*

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INTRODUCTION

Poverty appears to be the proverbial fear that grips all, making mankind focus mainly on worldly affairs and pay less attention to matters of the soul (i.e. remembrance of Allah). This is true of Muslims and non-Muslims alike. Confirming this are the numerous international organizations, governments, and non-profits who base their policies and activities towards the reduction of poverty. This raises the question as to how Muslims should conceive poverty, what dimensions of poverty should be of concern, whether poverty as widely construed is really a problem, and whether or not we are threatened by poverty, as Allah says in the *Qur'an*:

الشَّيْطَانُ يَعِدُكُمُ الْفَقْرَ وَيَأْمُرُكُم بِالْفَحْشَاءِ

“Satan threatens you with poverty and orders you to do to bad deeds...”

(Surah al-Baqarah, 2: 268)

Against this backdrop, we revise the concept of poverty towards a normative conception, alleviating the popular fear of material poverty by presenting an alternative and proceeding to offer therapeutic solutions for the former. The paper concludes with a definitive statement on the issue of poverty.

POVERTY RE-EXPLAINED

Arguably, understanding correctly the antithesis of something or a phenomenon might make the comprehension of such a phenomenon become easy. To this end, it has been narrated by Abū Hurayrah that the Prophet (PBUH) said:

ليس الغنى عن كثرة العرض، ولكن الغنى غنى النفس

“Riches does not mean having a great amount of property, but riches is self-contentment...”²

Deducible from the *ḥadīth* is that the direct antonym of richness is poverty, which is defined here as a lack of self-contentment or discontent of the heart. Further clarifying this position is the *ḥadīth* narrated by Abū Hurayrah wherein Allah’s Messenger (PBUH) is reported to have said the following:

² *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukharī*, *ḥadīth* narrated by Abū Hurayrah, Chapter of Making the Hearts go Tender, no. *ḥadīth* 35.

أتدرون ما المفلس . قالوا المفلس فينا من لا درهم له ولا متاع . فقال: إنَّ المفلس من أمتي يأتي يوم القيامة بصلاة وصيام وزكاة ويأتي قد شتم هذا وقذف هذا وأكل مال هذا وسفك دم هذا وضرب هذا فيعطى هذا من حسناته وهذا من حسناته فإن فنيت حسناته قبل أن يقضى ما عليه أخذ من خطاياهم فطرح عليه ثم طرح في النار

“Do you know who is bankrupt? They (the Companions of the Holy Prophet) said: ‘A bankrupt man amongst us is one who has neither dirham with him nor wealth’ He (the Holy Prophet) said: ‘The bankrupt of my Ummah would be he who would come on the Day of Resurrection with prayers and fasts and zakāh but (he would find himself bankrupt on that day as he would have exhausted his funds of virtues) since he hurled abuses upon others, brought calumny against others and unlawfully consumed the wealth of others and shed the blood of others and beat others, and his virtues would be credited to the account of one (who suffered at his hand). And if his good deeds fall short to clear the account, then his sins would be entered in (his account) and he would be thrown in the Hell-Fire... ’”³

Likewise deducible from this *ḥadīth* is that bankruptcy means to be entrenched in sinful acts or evil even in the face of fulfilling ritualistic religious obligations - ultimately leading to the punishment in the Hellfire. Analysing further, it follows that one might have material wealth and yet be poor and discontent, whereas on the other hand a situation might be characterized by the absence of material wealth yet be free of poverty (i.e. being rich in contentment). Viewed from this perspective, poverty should thus be effectively construed as a state of mind which breeds discontent materially cum spiritually and condemns as well as plunges the assumer of such a state in malaise and hopelessness in this world and in the next. However, richness connotes a state of mind filled with contentment, spiritually and materially, elevating the individual to a blissful happiness and positive relevance for this world and the hereafter

³ *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, *ḥadīth* narrated by Abū Hurayrah, Chapter of Virtue, Enjoining Good Manners, and keeping ties of Kinship, no. *ḥadīth* 77.

FEAR OF NORMATIVE POVERTY: THE JUSTIFIABLE POVERTY FEAR

The words *im'laqin*, *faqra*, *miskin*, *muflis* are construed by many to denote the physical absence of material goods which creates fear in the minds of many. However, given the aforementioned exposition, these are not necessarily justifiable fears. Rather, the fear of normative poverty (true poverty) is a fear that is required by Muslims so that he or she can prevent himself or herself from destruction in this world and in the next. This assertion is backed by the *hadīth* narrated by ‘Amr Ibn ‘Awf where he reported that the Prophet (PBUH) said:

فأبشروا وأملوا ما يسرّكم فوالله ما الفقر أخشى عليكم . ولكنني أخشى عليكم أن تبسط الدنيا عليكم كما بسطت على من كان قبلكم فتنافسوها كما تنافسوها وتهلككم كما أهلكتهم

*“.....be happy and be hopeful of that which gives you delight. By Allah, it is not poverty that I fear for you, rather what I fear for you is that worldly riches may be given to you as they were given to those who came before you, and you will compete for them with one another as they competed with one another, and you will be destroyed as they were destroyed...”*⁴

More directly, Abū Darda’ reported that:

خرج علينا رسول الله - صلى الله عليه وسلم - ونحن نذكر الفقر ونتخوفه فقال « أَلْفَقْرُ تَخَافُونَ وَالَّذِي نَفْسِي بِيَدِهِ لَتَصْبِيَنَّ عَلَيْكُمْ الدُّنْيَا صَبًّا حَتَّى لَا يَزِيغَ قَلْبَ أَحَدٍ مِنْكُمْ إِزَاغَةً إِلَّا هَيْهَ وَايْمَ اللَّهِ لَقَدْ تَرَكْتُمْ عَلَى مِثْلِ الْبَيْضَاءِ لَيْلَهَا وَنَهَارَهَا سِوَاءٌ ». قَالَ أَبُو الدَّرْدَاءِ صَدَقَ وَاللَّهُ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ - صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ - تَرَكْنَا وَاللَّهُ عَلَى مِثْلِ الْبَيْضَاءِ لَيْلَهَا وَنَهَارَهَا سِوَاءٌ .

“The Messenger of Allah (PBUH) came out to us when we were speaking of poverty and how we feared it. He said: ‘Is it poverty that you fear? By the One in Whose Hand is my soul, (the delights and luxuries of) this world will come to you in plenty, and nothing will cause the heart of anyone of you to deviate except that. By

⁴ *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, *hadīth* narrated by ‘Amr b. ‘Awf, Chapter of Ascetism and tendering of hearts, no. *hadīth* 9.

Allah, I am leaving you upon something like Bayda (white, bright, clear path) the night and day of which are the same...’’⁵

It is in fact true that the absence or the inadequacy of material goods for a human being is a virtue. The Prophet is reported to have said:

اطَّلعت في الجنة فرأيت أكثر أهلها الفقراء

“I looked into paradise and found that the majority of its dwellers were the poor people....’’⁶ (i.e. those who were actually rich in the real sense of it in the world as a result of being free from normative poverty.)

Abū Dharr reported that the Prophet (PBUH) admonished him to love the poor and to keep close to them:

أوصاني خليل صلي الله عليه وسلم بخصال من الخير أوصاني بأن لا أنظر إلى من هو فوقني وأن أنظر إلى من هو دوني وأوصاني بحب المساكين والدينو منهم وأوصاني أن أصل رحمي وأن أدبرت، وأوصاني أن لا أخاف في الله لومة لائم وأوصاني أن أقول الحق وإن كان مرا، وأوصاني أن أكثر من قول لا حول ولا قوة إلا بالله، فإنها كنز من كنوز الجنة.

“My friend the Prophet (PBUH) admonished me with respect to some good mannerisms, that; I should not look at those above me, but look at those below me (in worldly matters), and also admonished me to love the poor and be close to them and that I should keep ties of kinship, that even if they (my kins) desert me, I should still keep ties with them and that I should not fear the blame of the blamers with respect to fulfilling Allah’s rights and that I should speak the truth even if it is “bitter” (no matter what) and that I should be prolific saying, there is no power or strength, except Allah, (for) it is a tree in paradise...’’⁷

⁵ Sunan Ibn Mājah, *ḥadīth* narrated by Abū Darda’, Chapter of Sunnah, no. *ḥadīth* 5. The *ḥadīth* is also reported in Sunan Ibn Mājah 3997: Book 36, *ḥadīth* 72 and in Jami’ at-Tirmidhi; Book 37, *ḥadīth* 2650.

⁶ *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukharī*, *ḥadīth* narrated by ‘Imran bin Husayn, Chapter of Making the Hearts go Tender, no. *ḥadīth* 38.

⁷ *Ṣaḥīḥ Ibn Hibban*, *ḥadīth* narrated by Abū Dharr, Chapter on the remembrance of the Instruction of Prophet on keeping ties of Kinship and severing ties of Kinship, no. *ḥadīth* 449. This *ḥadīth* is also reported in Musnad Ahmad 21415, 21517.

The Prophet (PBUH) is also reported by Abū Sa‘īd al-Khudrī to have said in his supplication:

اللَّهُمَّ أَحِينِي مَسْكِينًا وَأَمْتِنِي مَسْكِينًا وَاحْشُرْنِي فِي زَمْرَةِ الْمَسَاكِينِ

“O Allah, cause me to live poor and cause me to die poor; and gather me among the poor (on the Day of Resurrection)...”⁸

This is the statement upon which Abū Sa‘īd al-Khudrī concluded that the love of the poor or loving the state of absence of material wealth is a virtue.⁹ The Prophet (PBUH) in fact sanctioned poverty over being rich in an *ḥadīth* narrated by Narrated Sahl bin Sa‘d al-Sa‘id wherein:

عن سهل بن سعد الساعديّ، أنّه قال مرّ رجل على رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم فقال لرجل عنده جالس « ما رأيك في هذا ». فقال رجل من أشرف الناس، هذا والله حريّ إن خطب أن ينكح، وإن شفّع أن يشفّع. قال فسكت رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم ثمّ مرّ رجل فقال له رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم « ما رأيك في هذا ». فقال يا رسول الله هذا رجل من فقراء المسلمين، هذا حريّ إن خطب أن لا ينكح، وإن شفّع أن لا يشفّع، وإن قال أن لا يسمع لقوله. فقال رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم « هذا خير من ملء الأرض مثل هذا ».

“A man passed by Allah’s Messenger (PBUH) and the Prophet (PBUH) asked a man sitting beside him, “What is your opinion about this (passer-by)?” He replied, “This (passer-by) is from the noble class of people. By Allah, if he should ask for a lady’s hand in marriage, he ought to be given her in marriage, and if he intercedes for somebody, his intercession will be accepted. Allah’s Messenger (PBUH) kept quiet, and then another man passed by and Allah’s Messenger (PBUH) asked the same man (his companion) again, “What is your opinion about this (second) one?” He said, “O Allah’s Messenger (PBUH)! This person is one of the poor Muslims. If he should ask a lady’s hand in marriage, no-one will accept him, and if he intercedes for somebody, no one will accept his intercession, and if he talks, no-one will listen

⁸ Sunan Ibn Mājah, *ḥadīth* narrated by Abū Sa‘īd al-Khudrī, Chapter of Asceticism, no. *ḥadīth* 4265. This *ḥadīth* is also reported in *Mustadrak al-Ḥākim*, 7911.

⁹ For similar evidences for virtuosity of material poverty, please read the biographies of the companions of the Prophet (PBUH) by al-Hamid particularly the stories of Mus‘ab Ibn ‘Umayr, Sa‘id Ibn Āmir al-Jumahi and Ubay Ibn Ka‘ab.

to his talk.” Then Allah’s Messenger (PBUH) said, “This (poor man) is better than such a large number of the first type (i.e. rich men) as to fill the earth...”¹⁰

Further buttressing the virtuosity of poverty assertion is the account:

عن أبي هريرة قال: جلس جبرئيل إلى النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم فنظر إلى السماء فإذا ملك ينزل فقال له جبرئيل: هذا الملك ما نزل منذ خلق قبل الساعة فلما نزل قال: يا محمد أرسلني إليك ربك أملكاً أملكاً جعلك لهم أم عبداً رسولاً فقال له جبرئيل: تواضع لربك يا محمد فقال النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم: «لا بل عبد رسولاً».

“Jibreel sat down with the Prophet (PBUH), looked at the heavens and said; this angel (coming down) has never come down since he was created and will not come down (again) until the day of judgement. When the angel came down, he said O’ Prophet, Your Lord has sent me to you (to ask you that) are you a (Prophet-) King or a Servant-Messenger, Jibreel then said, humble yourself before your Lord, He(PBUH) said, No, I am a Servant-Messenger.

...reaching us revealing that the Messenger (PBUH) was given the option to choose between been a Prophet-King or a Servant-Messenger to which he chose to be the Servant-Messenger, humbling himself to Allah, Exalted is He.¹¹

In other words, he chose material poverty (not normative poverty) whilst being a Prophet of Allah. Similarly, Abū Umamah reported that the Prophet (PBUH) said:

إنَّ أغبط أوليائي عندي لمؤمن خفيف الحاذ ذو حظٍّ من الصلابة أحسن عبادة ربّه وأطاعه في السرِّ وكان غامضاً في الناس لا يشار إليه بالأصابع وكان رزقه كفافاً فصبر على ذلك». ثمَّ نفض بيده فقال «عجّلت منيته قلّت بواكيه قلّ تراثه»

“My Lord offered to make the plain and pebbles of Mecca gold, but I said: ‘No, my Lord! Rather I (would prefer) to eat my fill one

¹⁰ *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukharī*, *ḥadīth* narrated by Sahl bin Sa’d al-Sa’id, Chapter of Making the Hearts go Tender, no. *ḥadīth* 36.

¹¹ *Ṣaḥīḥ Ibn Hibban*, *ḥadīth* narrated by Abū Hurayrah, Chapter on the remembrance of the ease on the earth revealed by dream to the Messenger, no. *ḥadīth* 6365. This *ḥadīth* is also reported in Musnad Ahmad 7160

day and to go hungry another,' or he said three days or similar words, 'when I go hungry, I would turn to You in humble entreaty and remember You, and when I am full, I would thank you and praise you...'"¹²

Furthermore, taking a look into the biography (*sīrah*) of the messenger of Allah, we realize that he mostly lived under a state of lack of material wealth (material poverty) whilst guarding himself and the *ummah* from being afflicted by normative poverty. He was so bothered by the latter leading to spiritual emptiness¹³ and not the absence of material wealth, as depicted in his oft repeated supplication:

اللَّهُمَّ مَصْرِفَ الْقُلُوبِ صَرِّفْ قُلُوبَنَا عَلَى طَاعَتِكَ

*"...O Allah, the Turner of the hearts, turn our hearts towards your obedience..."*¹⁴

He in fact sought refuge with Allah from normative poverty as in the *ḥadīth* related by Muslim bin Abī Bakrah wherein the Messenger of Allah (PBUH) is reported to have said:

أَبِي بَكْرَةَ، قَالَ كَانَ أَبِي يَقُولُ فِي دُبْرِ الصَّلَاةِ اللَّهُمَّ إِنِّي أَعُوذُ بِكَ مِنَ الْكُفْرِ وَالْفَقْرِ وَعَذَابِ الْقَبْرِ فَكُنْتُ أَقُولُهُنَّ فَقَالَ أَبِي أَيُّ بَنِي عَمِّنَ أَخَذْتَ هَذَا قُلْتَ عَنْكَ . قَالَ إِنَّ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ كَانَ يَقُولُهُنَّ فِي دُبْرِ الصَّلَاةِ .

*"O Allah, I seek refuge with You from Kufri; poverty, and the torment of the grave"', as part of (His) supplications after every prayer..."*¹⁵

¹² Jami' at-Tirmidhi, *ḥadīth* narrated by Abū Umamah, Chapter on Ascetism, no. *ḥadīth* 44. This *ḥadīth* is also reported in *Mu'jam al-Kabīr*, 7835 and in Musnad Ahmad, 22190.

¹³ This is also the view of some scholars. Scholars like Ibn Wahab, Imam Ahmad, Ibn Uyaynah have earlier opined that the poverty the prophet (PBUH) sought refuge from was poverty of the heart i.e. normative poverty.

¹⁴ *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, *ḥadīth* narrated by 'Abd Allāh b. Amr b. al-'As, Chapter of Allah directing hearts as He wills, no. *ḥadīth* 29. This *ḥadīth* was also narrated by Ā'ishah, mother of the believers, May Allah be pleased with her.

¹⁵ Sunan al-Nasā'ī, *ḥadīth* narrated by Muslim bin Abī Bakrah, Chapter of seeking refuge with Allah after every prayer, no. *ḥadīth* 169.

It is worthy to note that the Prophet (PBUH), who is the best example to follow,¹⁶ left very little material wealth upon his death; not even for his immediate family - a prophetic characteristic buttressing the aversion for material wealth.

A plausible explanation for the virtuosity of material poverty is that such a state more often than not engenders religious submissiveness, commitment, as well as humbleness towards the Creator. Thus, for a Muslim to preoccupy himself or herself with unjustifiable fears of the absence of material wealth is a wrong doing which will most likely impact negatively on his or her religious commitment and culminate into an inability to fulfil his or her purpose of life which is solely to worship Allah. As the *Qur'ān* states:

قُلْ إِنَّ صَلَاتِي وَنُسُكِي وَمَحْيَايَ وَمَمَاتِي لِلَّهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ ﴿١٦٢﴾

“Say, ‘My prayers and sacrifice, my life and death, are all for God, Lord of all the Worlds...’”

(Surah al-An‘ām, 6: 162)

Hence, justifiable fear of impoverishment is the fear of normative poverty, which is in fact a condition of richness.

THERAPEUTIC ANTIDOTE FOR NORMATIVE POVERTY

Categorically, the most fundamental way to remedy normative poverty is to acknowledge Allah’s oneness, lordship, and to extol his attributes correctly.¹⁷ It must be accepted without condition that there is no god but Allah and that Muhammad (PBUH) is the Messenger of Allah, and that He alone deserves worship.¹⁸ In fact, there are not less than seven or nine conditions requisite to professing the testimony of faith, or words of Divine Unity.¹⁹ The Muslim pronouncing the *shahādah* must do so whilst being aware of these conditions. He or she must know the basic meaning of what the testimony means, knowing

¹⁶ *Qur'ān* 33 verse 21, *Qur'ān* 68 verse 4 and *Qur'ān* 60 verse 4.

¹⁷ This innate concept is called *tawhīd* under the Islamic Shariah.

¹⁸ This is the testimony of faith (*Kalimah al-Tawhīd* or *Shahādatayn*). It is to bear witness that there is none worthy of worship except Allah and that Muhammad is His messenger.

¹⁹ Some scholars arrived at seven, some stated nine while some arrived at thirteen altogether all based on the primary sources of the *Qur'ān* and Sunnah. Here, we summarize nine of the conditions.

what is being affirmed and that which is negated. This condition is labelled the ‘knowledge condition’. Evidences for this can be seen in the *Qur’ān* 47: 19 and 43: 86. He or she must also be certain of the *shahādah*. This is the condition of certainty deducible from *Qur’ān* 49: 15, 9: 45, and 35: 26.

A third condition is that of acceptance with one’s tongue and heart as well as the implication that emanates from professing it thereof. Evidence for this is seen in the *Qur’ān* 2: 85. Amongst the condition is that of submission cum compliance which is to physically comply by way of our acts. The rationale for this condition can be found in *Qur’ān* 39: 54, 4: 65, and 4: 125.

The fourth condition is that of truthfulness, which is to say or profess the *shahādah* without hypocrisy or dishonesty, for which the *Qur’ān* also attests to in 2: 8-10. The condition of sincerity is also one of the conditions of professing the *shahādah*. It denotes saying the *shahādah* wholly for the sake of Allah. *Qur’ān* 39 verse 2 and *Qur’ān* 98 verse 5 confirms this condition. Love is also a condition. This invariably means that a professor of the *shahādah* must love the testimony of faith, its implications and all that is associated with it or that emanates from it. Verse 165, chapter 2 of the *Qur’ān* as well as verse 24, chapter 9 of the *Qur’ān* are evidences to this effect. Denying all other objects of worship whilst affirming Allah’s oneness in worship is indeed a condition of saying the *shahādah* and it is the eighth condition. *Qur’ān* 2 verse 256 confirms this. A ninth condition would be to “stick to” the *shahādah* till Allah allows death for the professor. In other words, the Muslim who professes the *shahādah* must adhere to it till death i.e. till he or she dies. *Qur’ān* 3 verse 102 is a testimony to this condition.

Having established the above, the most comprehensive and potent way of curing normative poverty is to get closer to the Creator. The way to do this has been stated by Allah in a *ḥadīth* (e.g. *Ḥadīth Qudsī*) wherein the Prophet (PBUH) said:

إِنَّ اللَّهَ قَالَ مَنْ عَادَى لِي وَلِيًّا فَقَدْ آذَنْتَهُ بِالْحَرْبِ، وَمَا تَقَرَّبَ إِلَيَّ عَبْدِي
بشئٍ أَحَبَّ إِلَيَّ مِمَّا افْتَرَضْتُ عَلَيْهِ، وَمَا يَزَالُ عَبْدِي يَتَقَرَّبُ إِلَيَّ بِالتَّوَّافِلِ
حَتَّى أَحِبَّهُ، فَإِذَا أَحْبَبْتَهُ كُنْتُ سَمْعَهُ الَّذِي يَسْمَعُ بِهِ، وَبَصَرَهُ الَّذِي يَبْصُرُ
بِهِ، وَيَدَهُ الَّتِي يَبْطِشُ بِهَا وَرِجْلَهُ الَّتِي يَمْشِي بِهَا، وَإِنْ سَأَلَنِي لِأَعْطِيْتَهُ،
وَلَئِنْ اسْتَعَاذَنِي لِأَعِيذَنَّهُ، وَمَا تَرَدَّدْتُ عَنْ شَيْءٍ أَنَا فَاعِلُهُ تَرَدَّدِي عَنْ نَفْسِ
الْمُؤْمِنِ، يَكْرَهُ الْمَوْتَ وَأَنَا أَكْرَهُ مَسَاءَتَهُ «

“Allah said, ‘I will declare war against him who shows hostility to a pious worshipper of Mine. And the most beloved things with which My slave comes nearer to Me is what I have enjoined

upon him; and My slave keeps on coming closer to Me through performing Nawafil (praying or doing extra deeds besides what is obligatory) till I love him, so I become his sense of hearing with which he hears, and his sense of sight with which he sees, and his hand with which he grips, and his leg with which he walks; and if he asks Me, I will give him, and if he asks My protection (Refuge), I will protect him; (i.e. give him My Refuge) and I do not hesitate to do anything as I hesitate to take the soul of the believer, for he hates death, and I hate to disappoint him... ”²⁰

Thus by undertaking the compulsory or obligatory duties supplemented with supererogatory duties, the slave of Allah effectively becomes a *walī* (friend) of Allah and stays clear of *adawah* (enmity). Such obligatory acts include the five daily prayers, giving compulsory alms (*zakāh*), fasting in the month of Ramaḍān, conducting the pilgrimage (*hajj*) if the physical cum financial capacity exists, honouring and revering one’s parents, keeping the ties of family or kinship, enjoining good and forbidding evil, carrying out responsibilities towards wife and children, and trusting in Him (Allah) wholly for His sake, as taught by His Messenger, Muḥammad (PBUH).

Avoiding sinful activities or actions which the Creator has prohibited (e.g. engaging in *riba*, adultery, fornication, promoting injustice and corruption, alcoholism, theft, unnecessary suspicions, backbiting and slander, etc.) are also part of the obligatory duties. Equally, swiftly asking for forgiveness and repenting to Allah when both Allah and man’s rights are infringed upon also forms part of these enjoined obligatory duties. Furthermore, complementing the obligatory duties are supererogatory recommended acts which include: reading the non-obligatory prayers (a prescribed number of rak‘ahs) after every obligatory prayer, reading the night prayers (*tahajjud*), undertaking constant remembrance of Allah (*dhikr*) as well as a great deal of charitable acts, acquiring beneficial knowledge and teaching it to people, and constantly asking Allah for help by making supplications. Clearly these are intricately linked to matters of faith or the bolstering of faith. By getting closer to Allah via undertaking these noble deeds, one’s faith is renewed and increased²¹ which then cures normative poverty and therefore ultimately leads to paradise by the

²⁰ *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukharī*, *ḥadīth* narrated by Abū Hurayrah, Chapter of humility, modesty or lowliness, no. *ḥadīth* 91.

²¹ Having faith is a requirement to enter paradise. The Prophet (PBUH) was reported to have said; You shall not enter paradise so long as you do not affirm belief i.e. in all those things which are the articles of faith (*Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, Book 1, *ḥadīth* 101).

Grace of Allah. Most assuredly, in the remembrance of Allah, the hearts find rest (*Qur'ān*, 13: 28).

Given the above, the Muslim recognizes the indispensability of seeking knowledge in addressing normative poverty. The Muslim in his quest for seeking knowledge should learn the Names and Attributes of Allah which increases the faith, continually observe and reflect on the signs of Allah “scattered” across the universe, read the *Qur'ān* in conjunction with the Sunnah of the Prophet (PBUH) extensively and regularly with the right understanding and sincere intention. In essence entering into Islam wholeheartedly is a sure treatment for normative poverty. Allah instructs in the *Qur'ān*:

يٰۤاَيُّهَا الَّذِيْنَ ءَامَنُوْا اَدْخُلُوْا فِي السَّلٰمِ كٰفَّةً وَّلَا تَتَّبِعُوْا
خُطُوٰتِ الشَّيْطٰنِ اِنَّهٗ لَكُمْ عَدُوٌّ مُّبِيْنٌ ﴿٢٠٨﴾

“O you who believe, enter into Islam completely [and perfectly, by obeying all the rules and regulations of the Islamic religion] and do not follow the footsteps of Satan. Indeed, he is to you a clear enemy...”

(Surah al-Baqarah, 2: 208)

CONCLUSION

By and large, the article has re-explained poverty in the normative way, tried to identify the dimensions of poverty worth dreading, and prescribed therapeutic antidotes for those possessing or harbouring such an absence²² which unfortunately happens to be the majority of people today. It is advised that the focus of Muslims should be normative poverty and not an obsession with the absence of material wealth. In fact, a focus on normative poverty by Muslim governments, international organizations, as well as individuals, will create societies of peaceful living, harmonious existence, and brotherly love will guarantee the rights of the human beings as the last Messenger of Allah (PBUH) has said:

ليس لابن آدم حقّ في سوى هذه الخصال بيت يسكنه وثوب يوارى
عورته وجلف الخبز والماء

²² The prescription is also applicable or serves as a prophylaxis for potential harbourers or assumers of normative poverty i.e. the true poverty.

“There is no right for the son of Adam other than in these things: A house which he lives in, a garment which covers his nakedness, and jilf (a piece of coarse bread which has no condiment with it) and water...”²³

To this end, Allah states:

فَإِذَا قَضَيْتُمْ مَنَسِكَكُمْ فَادْكُرُوا اللَّهَ كَذِكْرِكُمْ آبَاءَكُمْ
أَوْ أَشَدَّ ذِكْرًا فَمِنَ النَّكَاسِ مَن يَقُولُ رَبَّنَا آئِنَا فِي الدُّنْيَا
وَمَا لَهُ فِي الْآخِرَةِ مَن خَلَقَ ﴿٢٠٠﴾ وَمِنْهُمْ مَن يَقُولُ رَبَّنَا آئِنَا
فِي الدُّنْيَا حَسَنَةً وَفِي الْآخِرَةِ حَسَنَةً وَقِنَا عَذَابَ النَّارِ ﴿٢٠١﴾

“...but of mankind there are some who say: ‘Our Lord! Give us (Your Bounties) in this world!’ and for such there will be no share in the Hereafter. But of them are some who say: ‘Our Lord! Give us in this world that which is good and in the Hereafter that which is good, and save us from the torment of the Fire!’”

(Surah al-Baqarah, 2: 200-201)

suffices as grand conclusion. To this effect, the following *ḥadīths* best summarize the theme of this paper. Narrated Abū Dharr, the Prophet (PBUH) said:

قال رسول الله: يا أباذر أترى كثرة المال هو الغني؟ قلت نعم يا رسول الله قال: «فترى قلة المال هو الفقير قلت نعم يا رسول الله قال: إنما الغني غني القلب والفقير فقر القلب»

“True poverty is the poverty of the heart and true richness is the richness of the heart...”²⁴

Anas bin Malik narrated that the Messenger of Allah (PBUH) said:

من كانت الآخرة همّه جعل الله غناه في قلبه وجمع له شمله وأنته الدنيا وهي راغمة ومن كانت الدنيا همّه جعل الله فقره بين عينيه وفرق عليه

²³ Jami` at-Tirmidhi, *ḥadīth* narrated by ‘Uthman bin ‘Affan, Chapter of The Things For Which The Son of Adam Has No Right Over Other Than Them, no. *ḥadīth* 38).

²⁴ *Ṣaḥīḥ Ibn Hibban*, *ḥadīth* narrated by Abū Dharr, Chapter on the remembrance of the book of Allah and enjoining Muslims to be patient on what has been endowed for them, no. *ḥadīth* 685.

شملة ولم يأت من الدنيا إلا ما قدر له.

*“Whoever makes the Hereafter his goal, Allah makes his heart rich, and organizes his affairs, and the world comes to him whether it want to or not. And whoever makes the world his goal, Allah puts his poverty right before his eyes, and disorganizes his affairs, and the world does not come to him, except what has been decreed for him...”*²⁵

PERTINENT SCRIPTURES FOR CONTEMPLATION

“Know that the life of this world is only play and amusement, pomp and mutual boasting among you, and rivalry in respect of wealth and children. It is as the likeness of vegetation after rain, thereof the growth is pleasing to the tiller; afterwards it dries up and you see it turning yellow; then it becomes straw. But in the Hereafter there is a severe torment for the disbelieving evildoers, and there is forgiveness from Allah and His Good Pleasure for the believing good-doers. And the life of this world is only a deceiving enjoyment:

اعلموا أنما الحياة الدنيا لعب ولهو وزينة وتفاخر بينكم وتكاثر في الأموال والأولاد كمثل غيث أنجم الكفار نباته ثم يهيج فتره مصفراً ثم يكون حطماً وفي الآخرة عذاب شديد ومغفرة من الله ورضوان وما الحياة الدنيا إلا متاع الغرور ﴿٢٠﴾

“And put forward to them the example of the life of this world: it is like the water which We send down from the sky, and the vegetation of the earth mingles with it, and becomes fresh and green. But (later) it becomes dry and broken pieces, which the winds scatter... and Allah is Able to do everything. Wealth and children are the adornment of the life of this world. But the good righteous deeds that last, are better with your Lord for rewards and better in respect of hope...”

(Surah al-Ḥadīd, 57: 20)

وَأَضْرَبَ لَهُمْ مَثَلِ الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا كَمَا أَنْزَلْنَاهُ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ فَاخْتَلَطَ بِهِ

²⁵ Jami` at-Tirmidhi, *ḥadīth* narrated by Anas Ibn Malik, Chapter on the description of the day of judgement, heart softening/tendering and association, no. *ḥadīth* 2653.

نَبَاتُ الْأَرْضِ فَأَصْبَحَ هَشِيمًا تَذْرُوهُ الرِّيحُ وَكَانَ اللَّهُ عَلَى كُلِّ شَيْءٍ مُّقَدِّرًا
﴿٤٥﴾ الْمَالُ وَالْبَنُونَ زِينَةُ الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا وَالْبَاقِيَاتُ الصَّالِحَاتُ خَيْرٌ عِنْدَ
رَبِّكَ ثَوَابًا وَخَيْرٌ أَمَلًا ﴿٤٦﴾

“And present to them the example of the life of this world, [its being] like rain which We send down from the sky, and the vegetation of the earth mingles with it and [then] it becomes dry remnants, scattered by the winds. And Allah is ever, over all things, Perfect in Ability Wealth and children are [but] adornment of the worldly life. But the enduring good deeds are better to your Lord for reward and better for [one’s] hope...”

(Surah al-Kahfī, 18: 45-46)

‘Abd al-Rahman bin Aban bin ‘Uthmān bin ‘Affan narrated that his father said: “Zayd bin Thābit departed from Marwan at mid-day. I said: ‘He has not sent him out at this time of the day except for something he asked.’ So I asked him, and he said: ‘He asked me about some things we heard from the Messenger of Allah (PBUH) say:

من كانت الدنيا همه ففرق الله عليه أمره وجعل فقره بين عينيه ولم يأتيه من الدنيا إلا ما كتب له ومن كانت الآخرة نيته جمع الله له أمره وجعل غناه في قلبه وأتته الدنيا وهي راغمة

“Whoever is focused only on this world, Allah will confound his affairs and make him fear poverty constantly, and he will not get anything of this world except that which has been decreed for him. Whoever is focused on the Hereafter, Allah will settle his affairs for him and make him feel content with his losses, and his provision and worldly gains will undoubtedly come to him.”²⁶

Uqba b. ‘Amir reported Allah’s Messenger (PBUH) as saying:

قال صلى رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم على قتلى أحد ثم صعد المنبر كالمودع للأحياء والأموات فقال «إني فرطكم على الحوض وإن عرضيه كما بين أيلة إلى الجحفة إني لست أخشى عليكم أن تشرکوا بعدي ولكنني أخشى عليكم الدنيا أن تنافسوا فيها وتقتلوا فتهلكوا كما هلك من كان

²⁶ Sunan Ibn Mājah, *ḥadīth* narrated by Abdur-Rahman bin Aban bin ‘Uthman bin ‘Affan, Chapter on Ascetism, no. *ḥadīth* 4244.

قبلكم». قال عقبه فكانت آخر ما رأيت رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم على المنبر.

*“Allah’s Messenger offered prayer over those who had fallen martyrs at Uhud. He then climbed the pulpit as if someone is saying good-bye to the living and the dead, and then said: ‘I shall be there as your predecessor on the Cistern before you, and it is as wide as the distance between Ayla and Juhfa (Ayla is at the top of the gulf of ‘Aqabah). I am not afraid that you would associate anything with Allah after me, but I am afraid that you may be (allured) by the world and (vie) with one another (in possessing material wealth) and begin killing one another, and you would be destroyed as were destroyed those who had gone before you. ‘Uqbah said that that was the last occasion that he saw Allah’s Messenger on the pulpit...”*²⁷

Abū Hurayrah narrated that the Messenger of Allah (PBUH) said:

ألا إن الدنيا ملعونة ملعون ما فيها إلا ذكر الله وما والاه وعالمًا أو متعلمًا

*“This world is cursed and cursed is what is in it, except for the remembrance of Allah Almighty and what brings one near to Him (i.e. what is conducive to that) or one who has knowledge or who acquires knowledge...”*²⁸

‘Abd Allāh bin Mas‘ūd narrated that the Messenger of Allah (PBUH) said:

لا تتخذوا الضيعة فترغبوا في الدنيا

*“Do not take possession of estates or you will find yourselves seeking after this world...”*²⁹

It was narrated from Ḥārithah bin Mudarrib:

إن العبد ليؤجر في نفقته كلها إلا في التراب

²⁷ *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim, ḥadīth* narrated by Uqba b. ‘Amir, Chapter of the Cistern Of the Prophet (SAW) and Its Attributes, no. *ḥadīth* 38.

²⁸ *Jami` at-Tirmidhi, ḥadīth* narrated by Abū Hurayrah, Chapter on Asceticism, no. *ḥadīth* 19.

²⁹ *Jami` at-Tirmidhi, ḥadīth* narrated by ‘Abd Allāh bin Mas‘ud, Chapter on Asceticism, no. *ḥadīth* 25.

“.....A person will be rewarded for all his spending, except for (what he spends) on building...”³⁰

Jabir b. ‘Abd Allāh reported that Allah’s Messenger (PBUH) said:

فراشٌ للرجل وفراشٌ لامرأته والثالث للضيف والرابع للشيطان

“There should be a bedding for a man, a bedding for his wife, the third one for the guest, and the fourth one is for the Satan...”³¹

It was narrated from Anas Ibn Mālik that the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said:

أما إنَّ كلَّ بناءٍ وبألِّ على صاحبه إلاَّ ما لا إلاَّ ما لا. يعني ما لا بدَّ منه .

“Every building is a misfortune for its owner, except what cannot, except what cannot, meaning except that which is essential or necessary...”³²

The Prophet (PBUH) said to Sa‘d bin Abū Waqqas:

وإنك مهما أنفقت من نفقة فإيتها صدقة، حتى اللقمة التي ترفعها إلى في امرأتك، وعسى الله أن يرفعك فينتفع بك ناس ويضرَّ بك آخرون . ولم يكن له يومئذ إلا ابنة.

“...know that you will never spend anything seeking thereby the Countenance of Allah, but you will be rewarded for it, even (the food) that you put in your wife’s mouth.”³³

³⁰ Sunan Ibn Mājah, *ḥadīth* narrated by Ḥārithah bin Mudarrib, Chapter on Ascetism, no. *ḥadīth* 4302. The *ḥadīth* is also reported in; Al-Adab Al-Mufrad 455: Book 25, *ḥadīth* 14, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukharī*, 5672: Book 75, *ḥadīth* 33; Jami` at-Tirmidhi; Book 37, *ḥadīth* 2671.

³¹ *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, *ḥadīth* narrated by Jabīr b. ‘Abd Allāh, Chapter on being disliked to have beddings and furniture more than one needs, no. *ḥadīth* 67. A similar message is reported in; Sunan Abī Dawud 4142, Book 34, *ḥadīth* 123. Sunan an-Nasa’i 3385, Book 26, *ḥadīth* 190.

³² Sunan Abī Dawud, *ḥadīth* narrated by Anas Ibn Malik, Chapter regarding building, no. *ḥadīth* 465. Also narrated in Sunan Ibn Mājah, Book 37, *ḥadīth* 4300.

³³ *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukharī*, *ḥadīth* narrated by Sa‘d bin Abū Waqqas, Chapter on wills cum testament, no. *ḥadīth* 5. Also reported in Sunan an-Nasa’i 3631, Book 30, *ḥadīth* 21; *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukharī*, 1295, Book 23, *ḥadīth* 54; *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, 162, Book 25, *ḥadīth* 6; *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukharī*, 6733, Book 85, *ḥadīth* 10; Sunan Abī Dawud 2864, Book 18, *ḥadīth* 3.

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