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Chapter 7: How do we Tread the Path to Allah?

Be informed that one who seeks the Path of Allah, who aims at achieving what is with Allah, has to observe certain matters so that he may reach his destination. The Guides to this Path, who are the Ahl al-Bayt (‘a), have guided us to certain matters which will facilitate the achievement of this goal when one becomes familiar with them; otherwise, he will not reach his destination; he will go back on his heels and retreat.

First: One must be aware of the fact that everything good is with Allah; so, he must not seek it from anyone else, nor should he seek anything but such goodness. If you befriend everyone and initiate your friendly ties with people, let this be out of your desire to seek what is with Allah, hoping to please Allah by making your concern to be good to them, to be of benefit to them. People are the dependents of Allah. The one who is loved the most by Allah is that who is the most beneficial to His dependents (*Al-Kafi*, Vol. 2, p. 131), as we are told by Ahl al-Bayt (‘a)¹.

If you seek the sublime status [with Allah] by becoming the one who is loved by Allah the most, according to the sacred hadith, you have first and foremost to be fully aware of this: Be informed that the benefit which you derive from people [to whom you have done favors] is much greater than any favor you have bestowed upon them. It is because of them that you were able to reach a status of being the most loved by Allah; so, do not ask them for any benefit other than this, and do not look at anything else, for there is no other town beyond Abbadan.

If the goal of your befriending them is to be of benefit to them, and when your favors reach them, set your mind upon accepting their ill treatment and do not deal with them likewise, for this is the very first of your favors on them. Furthermore, if you set your mind on abstention of rewarding an evil doer with a similar measure, do not be satisfied with just this. You wish to emulate Ahl al-Bayt (‘a) and their method of being benevolent even to those who mistreated them.

They forgave those who treated them with injustice, visited those who severed their ties from them and

gave those who deprived them. You, then, have to set your mind on wishing that one of them would mistreat you so that you would be benevolent to him, so that through him will you earn the virtue of being good to those who treat you badly. It is then that you emulate the Prophet ('s) and his Ahl al-Bayt ('a), for such is their attitude. Our master, the Commander of the Faithful ('a), has said,

'One who is the most loved by Allah is the one who emulates His Prophet ('s)' (*Nahjul-Balagha*, sermon 160).

When you reward his mistreatment of you by being benevolent to him, you first earn such a lofty station. Then, despite your poverty, want and need, if you reward a wrong-doer with benevolence, Allah, the Praised and the most Exalted One, through His generosity and plentitude, is more apt to reward you when you respond to a bad deed with a good one. You will then, secondly, have won the proof of being worthy of His generosity.

He, Praise to Him, ordered you to be benevolent to one who is mean to you. He did so in order to admonish you that since you did that, He is more worthy than you of benevolence. You are more worthy of being thus treated; so, He thus ordered you to adopt such a way of treating others.

The benefit which you reap from such a treatment is much greater than the benefit which He ordered you to bestow upon the person with whom you beautifully dealt. If you discern well, you will see his mistreatment of yourself. What raised your status is a favor worthy of being appreciated, in addition to rewarding an evil deed with a good one.²

All of this is based on the assumption that the others have mistreated you; otherwise, it is assumed that you are the oppressor, or you feign being oppressed, as can be seen when observing the conditions of most people, for then the matter is much more clear. We have seen how everyone complains and charges others of oppressing him, yet we have never seen two opponents, be they from among the righteous or the evildoers, admitting oppressing or trespassing on each other.

Rather, we still see men of righteousness and piety disputing, each claiming as being oppressed by the other, and that he is the one who had done favors to the other, tolerated him, never lied or dared to antagonize him. Be informed that this is one of the schemes of the evil-insinuating '*nafs*,' its way of making wrong look right so that the matter will be confused.

For this reason, the Wise Legislator rendered the testimony of justice to Himself. He did not permit reliance in this regard on His Justice. Hence, a fair and wise person ought to indict himself with regard to his own self (*nafs*) and reject its testimony in his favor, a testimony which the Legislator rejects. Such is not the one you are accustomed to, the one friendship with whom you initiate, if the purpose of your friendship is to be of benefit to him rather than to benefit from him. You have set your mind at ease when you lost your hope from people, putting an end to coveting what they have.

This, indeed, is the greatest wealth, the wealth of one's nafs. Moreover, the first charity which you bestow upon people is that you spare them your own harm. The first is that you do not hurt them; you do not cause them any harm, then you set your mind on tolerating theirs. Furthermore, let your concern be how to get goodness to reach them. So, if your soul is determined to do that, and if you receive a reward on account of a good deed which you did, this is a blessing which is not expected, something which you enjoy, something that will deeply impress you. And if you see that they have disregarded it, hoping you would accept it from them, accept it.

Accepting it is doing them a good deed even when you have no need for it, for returning it to them will make them unhappy and is a bad deed while you yourself have decided to do no bad deed to them, and thus you are ordered³. And if their goodness was a token of appreciation of getting to know you, and if they expect you to return it to them, accept it from them then return it to them as a new present according to their own wish.

But if their intention is that you accept it from them then you reward them with something else even better, accept it from them and reward them with something more. Such is goodness to them. Do not make them aware of you knowing their intention that they gave it to you in order to get something else in its place; rather, let it look natural, for such is goodness on your part to them.

The outcome, my Brother, is that Allah orders you to be fair, to be benevolent, and just as you treat others, so shall you, too, be treated. And be informed that the cornerstone of being good to people is not giving them money, for we have seen many people spending a lot of money, while such spending is not benevolence at all; rather, it is followed by harm, by causing people grief.

It fits the category of an act of charity followed by the doer with an act of harm as an outcome, even if the goal is benevolence. They simply do not know how to do it properly. All of this is the result of neglecting the principles laid down by Ahl al-Bayt ('a) and not paying attention to their methodology.

If you want to take care of the need of your believing Brother according to the way of Ahl al-Bayt ('a), be informed that they ('a) have said,

'Taking care of someone's need is done through different ways: either minimizing it so it will get maximized, or hastening it so that it will bring happiness, or keeping it as a secret so it will come out into the open.' (*Tuhaf al-'Uqul*, p. 403, in almost the same wording).

If these issues are not combined, taking care of the need cannot be accomplished; rather, it will be incomplete, tinted with displeasure; it may even bring harm to the one in need.

People are such that when they take care of one's need, they violate all these issues. Their actions will not take care of anyone's need as it should be. This is the main reason why they have to swallow the

bitterness of spending so much of their wealth without earning the desired outcome which is: bringing happiness to the heart of a believer. You can see how when they do someone a favor, first they promise to do it for him, then they take their time, so he starts tasting the bitterness of waiting which is more harsh than killing.

Then he tastes the bitterness of many times losing hope that his need will be taken care of. After some time, his need is taken care of, after having tasted the bitterness of asking for help, the bitterness of embarrassment, the bitterness of waiting, the bitterness of losing hope, and the bitterness of feeling embarrassed before the people whom he promised, relying on the promise with which he was given, a promise which was not fulfilled... What pleasure, then, remains after all of this?! Actually, its harm proved to be more than its benefit! Such is people's habit when someone needs them. They do not minimize it and say,

'This is nothing compared to the dignity of a believer whose dignity, according to some traditions, is regarded as greater than that of the sanctity of the Ka`ba'. (Bihar al-Anwar, Vol. 64, p 71).

Rather, they demonstrate the attitude that they did such a great favor to him, expecting him to abandon his worship of Allah, the most Exalted One and the most Great, and worship them as a slave instead!

Also, they do not hide it from the public so it may be closer to sincerity and distant from hypocrisy, becoming a purely intended action hinted at in the qudsi hadith which says,

'Yours is the task of hiding it [from the public], whereas Mine is to make it manifest.'

Instead, they tell the whole world about it. This is one of people's contemptible habits, and observing it needs no explanation.

Be informed, therefore, from what we have already stated, that benevolence does not depend on spending funds but on observing the issues which we have mentioned. Benevolence to a person is doing something according to his own wish while taking precautions against displeasing him.⁴

Anyone whose goal is that you accept what he gives you, your own benevolence is when you do accept it from him. If you wish your hand should be the uppermost, reward him with something better or with the same, actions which are not hidden from those who carefully look into and observe the particulars of the recommendations and norms of conduct of Ahl al-Bayt ('a).

When you socialize with people, base your intention on your desire to be of benefit to them. Have no intention whatsoever to benefit from them, so much so that if you hope for any benefit from them, you should desire it from the One with Whom you do not ever feel disappointed, nor is miserliness near to

Him. Do not let people take most of your time, making them your concern and source of worry, for you are thus ordered by Ahl al-Bayt ('a):

'Decrease the number of those whom you know, and deny knowledge of those whom you came to know.' (*Al-Mustadrak*, Vol. 11, p. 387).

The wisdom in all of this is that they should not divert you from paying your full attention to your Creator. Dedicating one's self to worship, keeping the mind concentrated on doing so rather than on anything else besides it that may distract one from Allah, is a goal that cannot be achieved by too much socializing, and what heat cures is different than that cured by grapes. Someone said to one of the Imams ('a),

'You have sought seclusion at the Aqeeq and rushed to be all by yourself.'

The Imam ('a) answered him by saying,

'Had you tasted the sweetness of [such] seclusion, you would have desired to leave your own self alone!' (*Bihar al-Anwar*, Vol. 75, p. 254).

The goal is that although you do need the people with whom you live, such coexistence should be just as we have described for you.

The goal is not to let yourself be involved in the affairs of the people. One has to divide and distribute his time. You need time to plead to Allah and time to socialize provided such socializing brings you the Pleasure of Allah and is intended just to seek such a Pleasure. Let your share of the first be the most, and let it be your primary concern and objective, for it is required of you in the first place⁵ and so that you may render the second to the first.

If you do not, you will be inclined to please your own self with it, thus it becomes a catastrophe on you. You will then fail to earn anything useful for yourself, be it in the life of this world or in the Hereafter, and you will have fallen into the same oppression and complaint about oppression wherein people have fallen. And you will painfully complain from all those whom you befriended. They, too, will continue to complain against you, so you will never win their pleasure at all.

There is neither goodness nor peace of mind except when one fully sets his heart on Allah, turning to Him wholeheartedly. It is thus that every worry about the responsibilities of this life or about those of the Hereafter becomes easy. Every weariness, distress, hardship and depression results from one being distracted from Allah and running away from Him. This is relevant to the **First** issue of those which bind

anyone who wishes to tread the path to Allah.

Second: He has to observe people's rights with regard to Allah. Observing people's rights with regard to Allah is actually observing Allah's rights. Likewise, neglecting them means neglecting the right of Allah.

If you seek this, be informed that people have numerous rights with which you must be familiar so that you may not be ignorant of Allah's right in their regard. Once you get to know them, you will seek help from Allah to carry them out, to undertake them. If you are incapable of observing them, your own admission of your incapability will stand as your own observance thereof.

One such rights is that they say 'Ali ('a) is a servant of Allah.' How do you discharge your responsibility towards one who says this sacred statement? Rather, how can you know which rights you are obligated to be familiar with? Rather, how can you even imagine what his right is?! Far, far away!

The right of one who believes in this statement is connected to the right of the one to whom it is attached, namely Ali ('a), and the right of Ali ('a) is connected to the right of the Messenger of Allah ('a), and the right of the Messenger of Allah ('a) is connected to the right of Allah Almighty; so, how can anyone undertake the right of Allah while the Messenger of Allah ('a) has said to Abu Dharr,

'The rights of Allah, the most Praised One, are greater than can His servants carry out, and the blessings of Allah are more numerous than His servants can count?! But you must welcome the night repentant and welcome the morning repentant.' (*Bihar al-Anwar*, Vol. 74, p. 76).⁶

The Messenger of Allah ('a) once said to some of his companions as he ('a) pointed to Ali ('a), '

Befriend the friend of this man even if he had killed your father and offspring, and be the enemy of this man even if he were your father or son.' (*Was'ail al-Shi'ah*, Vol. 16, p. 178).

So, if he recognizes his connection with Ali ('a) and his acceptance of the Imam's mastership, you are obligated to forgive him for having killed your father or offspring. What would you say, then, about something much less than that?! Rather, it is not enough if you simply forgive and forget but you have, moreover, to love, to be generous to and to respect him just as the said mastership requires. Actually, even if you offer your own life to be sacrificed for his sake, it will still be little compared to the right of the one to whom he is connected. A poet has done well when he said,

**Not the love for the houses did occupy my heart,
But it is the love for those who lived therein.**

When you demonstrate forgiveness for one who loves the Commander of the Faithful (‘a), Allah is more apt to forgive all your sins as His way of appreciating your acceptance of the Commander of the Faithful (‘a) as your master, for Allah more than you loves the Commander of the Faithful (‘a). When you see that one is falling short in his obedience of the Commander of the Faithful (‘a), yet you take into account the mere connection with the Imam, your respect for the Commander of the Faithful (‘a) will thus weigh even heavier in such a case, for it by itself is worthy of respect.

Perhaps you respect him on account of his own merits that are worthy of respect, not for the mere connection (referred to above), your respect will hence be indicative of the strength of your veneration. Without such strength and intensity, you would not have been able to overcome the objections.

This covers one of the rights, and it by itself suffices, yet you will not be able to carry it out! So what would you say if you add to it the fact that he belongs to the progeny of Ali (‘a)?! And what would you say when you add to this his being one of his guests, or one of his neighbors, or one of the servants of his shrine, or his name is the same or is the same as that of one of his offspring, or his name is indicative of his connection to them, such as *Athe servant of Ali (‘a),’* or the *Aslave of al-Husain (‘a)’?!*

Besides the above are the rights of kinship, neighborliness, companionship, supplication, teaching the Qur’an, teaching a branch of knowledge or a norm of perfection, age, your mujtahid, Imam of the jama`ahaha, one who is benevolent to some of your kinsfolk or neighbors or even inquiring about your well-being, a student, someone who thinks well of you... up to the end of the list of those included in *Risalat al-Huqooq* (bill of rights) of our master Ali (‘a) son of al-Husain (‘a). All are considered as great rights by Ahl al-Bayt (‘a), rights about which one will be questioned on the Day of Judgment (as we read on p. 255 of *Tuhaf al-Uqul*)⁷.

How can you ever be saved from them or find an excuse about them since it has been said that three will complain to Allah on the Day of Judgment: a deserted mosque, a copy of the Qur’an lying down in a house with dust covering it and nobody reading it, and a scholar in his place with nobody listening to him?! (‘Iddat al-Da`i, p. 272). What is the condition of one who is brought to judgment and against whom three lodge complaints with the Just Ruler: (1) a house of Allah, (2) the Book of Allah and (3) a wali of Allah?!

Whose complaint will not be heard? And which of them will deny a right or a sanctity with Allah? These are all great rights; so, how can you seek any excuse about them during that momentous situation? It has been quoted that a person may sneeze but nobody invokes Allah’s mercy for him, so he comes to complain, and injustice to him on the Day of Judgment will be redressed.

So, my Brother who is seeking the right guidance! If you rationally discern through your intellect, the intellect which Allah granted you so that you may see things as they are, you will be concerned about nothing more than admitting your shortcoming and exerting the effort to save your neck from your

responsibilities. You will see that even if they exaggerate in demanding their rights of you, still, you are questioned about the rights which they have against you. Your concern will be to beg for an exemption therefrom. You will apologize to them and go over-board in being benevolent to them as much as you can, hoping Allah will overlook your shortcoming and please them on your behalf with regard to some of their rights.

If you look at people with such discerning foresight with which Allah blessed you, it will be easier for you to seek the path leading to Allah. This covers the **Second** issue.

Third: One must feel uneasy being with people and find ease and comfort being with Allah. A wise person looks after his most important undertaking, safeguarding his tongue, being knowledgeable of the people of his time, feeling uneasy being with the most trusted of his brethren. Anyone who has such merits is included in a supplication by Imam Ali (‘a) who said,

‘May Allah strengthen him and grant him His security on the Day of Judgment’

as we read in *Al-Kafi*, Vol. 1, p. 49. In the same reference, Jabir [ibn Abdullah al-Ansari] is quoted as having said,

‘I visited the father of Ja`far, Ali (‘a), who said to me, ‘O Jabir! By Allah! I am grieved, and my heart is upset. ‘I said to him, ‘May I be sacrificed for your sake! What is the cause of your grief, and why are you depressed?’ He said, ‘O Jabir! If anyone’s heart is filled with pure adoration of Allah, such a heart will be distracted from embracing anyone else besides Him.’ (*Al-Kafi*, Vol. 2, p. 107).

In a letter to one of his followers, the Commander of the Faithful (‘a) wrote saying,

‘One who fears Allah is honored and empowered, satisfied and is never thirsty. He diverts his attention from the people of this world; so, his body is with them while his heart and mind are looking at the Hereafter.’ (*Al-Kafi*, Vol. 2, p. 136).

If a believer, then, feels at ease with the boons granted to him by Allah, having tasted the sweetness of mentioning Allah, he will surely feel uneasy when he departs from such a condition, so he refuses to abandon it. If Allah blesses one of His servants with His support, He would let his heart conform to this condition, occupying him thereby, enabling him, nevertheless, to pay attention to other aspects as they come up.

But if his original concern is paying attention to this condition, so he feels uneasy with such a treasure, desiring to dedicate himself to what he is originally required to do, what is for his own sake first and

foremost, such a feeling of uneasiness will not bear an impact on his senses⁸. Also, describing a believer, the Commander of the Faithful ('a) has said the following:

'His grief is hidden inside his heart, while his elation manifests itself on his countenance' (*Bihar al-Anwar*, Vol. 64, p. 305).

And he may reveal them if the situation demands it, as has been quoted in the dialogue between Imam al-Baqir ('a) and Jabir. Such is the meaning of a believer feeling uneasy even with the most trusted of his brethren.

If you do not encounter such a situation, that is, when you occupy yourself with worshipping Allah, feeling uncomfortable with being with anyone but Him, including the closest of your brethren, being unable to make your social life an excuse for seeking nearness to Allah because the natural disposition will have overcome you, it is then that you will have your share of feeling comfortable with the human race [rather than with Allah].

You will in the latter case become a slave of your own 'self, i.e. nafs.' You will feel pleased when it is pleased and angry when it is angry. You will exit from the honor of worshipping none but Allah, which is why Allah created you in the first place. He, the most Exalted and Great One, has said, **'I have created the jinns and mankind only so that they may worship Me'** (Qur'an, 51:56).

1. Such a meaning may be absent from the minds of many people, including the elite among them. When they bestow favors upon people, they undergo an unaware state of feeling that people owe them for such favors, and this becomes clear when their tongues slip and eyes wander around. The meaning mentioned by the author is one of the requirements of a deep comprehension of the right of Allah Almighty and of the right of those [saints] connection with whom Allah has mandated. It is also one of the requirements of a precise supervision of what goes on inside people's minds. A heart can never be a station for the angelic noors unless it gets rid of such hidden impurities which are regarded as sins by those who are close to Allah even if they appear to look good to the virtuous.

2. This statement is the outcome of one who seeks his Lord and who changes his attitude towards existence and the movement of life. It is from here that knowledge and insight serve as the first introduction to walking towards perfection; so, look into how one who treads the path changes a dispute, which carries a great measure of oppression, into a tool of seeking closeness to the Master, the True One. Through it, a servant of Allah proves to his Master in all his mobility and immobility, especially when he is angry or when stirred by desire, that they cause feet to slip, the feet of the commoners as well as those of the elite. Quite often, both of these bring about a continuous trial and tribulation, through either the fire or through being distant from the truth, the latter no less inflammatory than the first if one only has a heart and listens, and he is a witness.

3. This is another portrait of reality in the methodology of the author. Kindness and good manners are among the essential attributes of one who seeks to tread this path [of seeking Allah]. Quite often have we seen how those who do not have the insight and are seeking the same path causing others harm with a statement or an action, or weakening them, or causing them to be worried in the pretext of elevating them above the life of this world and forsaking people. Thus, they are being

unmindful of the fact that anyone who breaks a Muslim has to mend him (Al-Kafi, Vol. 2, p. 45). Without such mending, Allah may break something of his own self, a breaking for which there is no mending neither in the life of this world nor in that of the Hereafter.

4. The issue of avoiding displeasing others, especially innocent people, is one of which anyone who seeks this path must be mindful, for it often is a cause of failure. Whenever a servant of Allah purifies his intention and gets nearer to his Lord, the seriousness of the offense of displeasing him gets even greater. Allah Almighty is always with those who are displeased (according to Da`awat al-Rawindi, p. 120). And He is swift in supporting His believing servant. It is narrated once that a woman was hurled into the fire of hell on account of a pussy-cat which she confined. She neither fed her, nor did she let her eat of what the earth produces (Al-Had'aiq, Vol. 7, p. 271); so, what would you say about someone in whose heart Allah manifests Himself, so He becomes one of his own concerns?

5. The main responsibility of mankind must not be forgotten. We notice how some beginners occupy themselves with doing what originally pleases Allah, then they get occupied with what distracts them from Allah Almighty. For example, when one enters a mosque in order to reconcile between two disputants, so he thus gets involved to the extent that he starts acting as though he had been one of the disputants; therefore, he starts becoming harsh in making his statements. He may even permit himself to listen to what he is not supposed to, such as one of the disputants going too far so as he reveals a hidden injustice unrelated to the oppressed person. Thus, one starts something for the sake of getting close to Allah as a first step, not as an ongoing process. The solution is: continuation is harder to undertake than initiation, as is well known.

6. Notice this gradual process to which the author attracts our attention and how one who seeks to tread the path which leads to Allah does not look at matters lightly or naively. He moves from the principles till he reaches the objectives, looking at all issues as related to Allah Almighty. And whenever his connection with Him intensifies, so does his realization of His right. Doing injustice to the right of a believer is by no means doing injustice to an individual whose link from his Master is cut off. Rather, it is injustice towards an individual regarding whom Allah Almighty undertook a pledge to defend. And who can confront one whose defender and supporter is Allah Almighty Himself?!

7. The 'bill of rights' [of Imam Zainul-`Abidin ('a)] cannot be ignored by those who seek a path to Allah Almighty. And who is more capable than Zainul-`Abidin ('a) in explaining the rights of Allah and those of His servants?! It is very necessary for one who seeks this path to be familiar with the collection of texts and rights cited from the Imams of Guidance ('a) in the field of seeking the pleasure of Allah Almighty, for they are the most knowledgeable of all people of what brings one closer to Allah. What a disappointment and a loss it is if one exhausts his life-span in repeating the words of one who make claims to have had such knowledge, abandoning those who inhabited houses wherein Allah permitted that He is adored and His Name is lauded?!

8. It is important, as the author has pointed out, to hide such sacred conditions from people. One may not intend anything but goodness when he reveals it, but there is no guarantee that he will not be afflicted with conceit which may impact a person when not being mindful, something to which everyone other than an infallible person is exposed. Add to this the possibility of a believer exposing another servant of Allah, other than himself, to think ill of him, to accuse him of being a pretender. He will thus be violating the order of his Master not to expose himself to being the object of suspicion. The dignity of a believer is one of the issues of righteousness with which Allah, the most Exalted One, never entrusted His servant.

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