

Home > Al-Siraj: The Lantern on the Path To Allah Almighty > Chapter 8: A Believer's Conviction is Incomplete Without Certain Merits

Chapter 8: A Believer's Conviction is Incomplete Without Certain Merits

Be informed that you are expected to emulate the Sunnah of your Lord, the most Exalted, the most Great, then the Sunnah of your Prophet ('s), then the Sunnah of your Imam. Imam al-Ridha' ('a) is quoted on p. 241, Vol. 2 of *Al-Kafi* as having said,

'A believer does not reach the degree of conviction (*iman*) until he has acquired three merits: He follows a Sunnah from his Lord, a Sunnah from his Prophet ('s), and a Sunnah from his wali (master, Imam). As for a Sunnah from his Lord, he has to conceal His secret; Allah, the most Exalted, the most Great, has said, 'He (alone) knows the unseen, and He makes no one acquainted with His mysteries, except a messenger with whom He is pleased...' (Qur'an, 72:26-27). As for a Sunnah of his Prophet ('s), it is tolerating people. Allah, the most Exalted and the most Great, ordered His Prophet ('s) to tolerate people, saying, 'Hold to forgiveness; command what is right.' (Qur'an, 7:199). As for a Sunnah from his wali, it is taking to patience during trials and tribulations.'

One who is expected to emulate an Attribute of his Lord whereby He is praised, there is no doubt that he is prepared to assume a great status and a tremendous significance. It is so because Allah thus enables you to enter His abode which He chose and preferred for His friends, the elite ones, the loved ones, and it is Paradise. He, therefore, is bound to guide you to merits which make you look like the residents of such an abode so that you will be on par with the abode and with those who reside therein.

As for the abode itself, it is good and pure in the most perfect purity and light. Its residents are the prophets, messengers, martyrs and the truthful; therefore, the wisdom of the Wise One insists that there should be nobody inside this abode who looks like a stranger. Thus, you in such an abode will not look out of place¹. Through His munificence and mercy on you, He does not want you to abide except in the

good and pure abode; therefore, His Divine care insists on guiding you to the most sublime of attributes, the most perfect, the most shiny, the most precious.

He does not accept that you should emulate any merits except the ones which, due to their distinction, bring you sublimity and greatness, merits which He attributes to His own Self, praising thereby Himself. One whose merits are attributed to Him fits to reside in the abode related to Him. Since his neighbors in the said abode are friends of Allah, He has obligated him to adopt their mannerism. It is then that the Creator, Praise to Him, shall address his soul, which is now good and pure, having adopted such good and pure merits, saying,

'O soul at rest and satisfied! Return to your Lord, well pleased and well-pleasing to Him! Enter, then, [your abode] among My devotees! Yes, enter My heaven!' (Qur'an, 89:27-30).

These merits are numerous. The Imam ('a) selected three of them in particular to be given preference, so much so that he described conviction as hinging on them:

First: One has to keep his secret a secret because most people have shortcomings and are imperfect. But the attributes of perfection are so well known in their goodness, beauty and honor that people wish they have had them to adorn themselves by. Since they run contrarily to what the nafs wants, and since people's determination to oppose their nafs is weak, they feel reluctant to struggle to achieve the above.

But when they find someone with the determination to adorn himself with them, they worry lest he, indeed, should acquire them and thus become superior to them. Since the nafs does not wish to lag behind the peers, actually it by nature wishes to surpass them, these people will try by all means to stop him from achieving his objective with their actions, statements and tricks. One person cannot confront countless people.

The One Who decreed the *Shari'ah* did not make a way for the believer to save himself from all of this except when one conceals his secret. He must not demonstrate what he is determined to achieve. It is then that he will be spared the evil of people. He will then be able to stay connected with that path.

Since Ahl al-Bayt ('a), the skilled doctors and the kind men of wisdom, know that the evil-insinuating nafs is also one of the believer's enemies, belonging to the same category like those that stand to block his way, they ('a) greatly commended the believer to conceal his secret, explaining to him that doing so is one of the attributes of the Lord whereby He praised Himself, and that conviction hinges upon it.

What is meant here is to suspend self-resisting [when listening to Satanic insinuations]: the inclination of the nafs to show-off. The reason is that one to whom such an inclination is manifested will benefit therefrom, or he may be delighted therewith, or his advice or supplication may be solicited, perhaps he will convey such knowledge to those who may benefit from it. There may be other reasons why such a

manifestation is sound².

Such hindering insinuations must be rejected if one is sound of judgment at all due to Allah's will that he should hide his secret from them. He must confide his secrets only to the custodians of the secrets, the mysteries, of the Almighty. A wise person does not abandon the doing of what is more wise. He does not do anything except what is most perfect.

It is concluded from the above that the revelation [of one's secrets] harms people and runs contrarily to wisdom. You, too, must follow the example of your Lord in dealing with wisdom. You must avoid what corrupts; otherwise, it is nothing but corruption even if it has the appearance of righteousness! Our master, Imam Ali son of Imam al-Husain ('a), said the following to al-Zuhri:

'Beware of saying what the hearts reject even if you have an excuse for saying it, for you cannot excuse everyone who rejects what you may say.' (*Bihar al-Anwar*, Vol. 71, p. 156).

Among the poetry attributed to the Imams ('a) is the following:

**The jewels of my knowledge shall I from people hide
Lest an ignorant person should see knowledge and is therewith tried.
Before me, the Father of al-Hasan ('a) said the same and why
To al-Husain ('a), having admonished al-Hasan ('a) thereby.
Lord! If the jewels of certain knowledge I discharged,
I with the sin of adoring idols will be charged.
Thus, some Muslims will find it fit to shed my blood,
Seeing as good what is most abhorred.**

Such knowledge is very well known. There are many incidents which condone hiding a secret and condemn going to extremes in propagating something. The conclusion achieved therefrom is that one who is dominated by love for secrecy and contempt for its revelation sees through the eyes of reason. When he sees an occasion to reveal, he reveals as much as he sees necessary. Thus, he follows the recommendations of Ahl al-Bayt ('a) who have said,

'Do not convey wisdom except to those who are worthy of it; otherwise, you will then do wisdom injustice. Nor should you hold it back from those who are worthy of it; otherwise, you will then be unjust to them.' (*Bihar al-Anwar*, Vol. 2, p. 78).

Be admonished that the attribute of keeping a secret to yourself involves two issues:

One is that a believer has a secret to keep. The other is that he has the faculty of concealing and hiding to the extent that his own nafs will not over-power him so as to reveal and to publicize it. All of this involves the second. As for the first, suffices it what Imam al-Sadiq ('a) once said to al-Mufaddal ibn Salih:

'O Mufaddal! Allah has servants who deal with Him with the sincerity of His secret, so He deals with them with the sincerity of His kindness. These are the ones whose books of reckoning will pass by Him empty, so when they stand before Him, He shall fill them from the secrets of that with which they entrusted Him.'

Al-Mufaddal asked the Imam,

'Master! Why is that?'

Imam al-Sadiq ('a) said,

'He granted them a respite till the time when the custodians [of His secrets] become acquainted with what went on between Him and them.'

Our mentor, 'Abul-`Abbas,' namely Ahmed ibn Fahad, having cited this sacred tradition, said the following by way of comment:

'Do not be unmindful about such lofty stations which are more precious than Paradise itself' (as we read in `Iddat al-Da`i).³

I say that it is to this meaning that a poet refers, having done well when he said,

**The hearts of those blessed with knowledge have eyes
That see what onlookers do not see,
And the Sunnah with secrets silently speaks
What even the honored scribes do not know,
And hearts fly with no wings
To the domain of the Lord of the World.**

All this is relevant to the first tradition.

Second: One has to tolerate people. It is a Sunnah narrated about the Prophet ('s). We have already cited Ali ('a) as saying that the one loved by Allah the most is he who emulates His Prophet ('s). The

wisdom behind it is similar to that about hiding your secret from people. Actually, the latter is one way to tolerate people.

Al-Kafi quotes Imam al-Sadiq (‘a) saying,

‘The Messenger of Allah (‘a) has said, ‘My Lord ordered me to tolerate people just as He ordered me to perform the obligations.’

He also cites his grandfather the Prophet (‘s) as saying,

‘Tolerating people is half the extent of conviction (*iman*), while kindness to them is half the livelihood.’ (*Al-Kafi*, Vol. 2, p. 117).

Then Imam al-Sadiq (‘a) commented saying,

‘Socialize with the righteous secretly and socialize with the sinners publicly; do not be harsh with the latter lest they should oppress you. A period of time will come wherein the only one who safeguards his creed is one thought to be not very smart at all. He accustoms himself to being called unintelligent, one lacking the faculty to rationalize.’ (*Al-Kafi*, Vol. 2, p. 96).

The Imam (‘a) also quotes his grandfather (‘a) as saying,

‘If someone lacks three merits, he cannot accomplish anything: piety which shields him from violating the sanctities of Allah (‘a), manners whereby he tolerates people, and clemency whereby he responds to the ignorance of an ignorant person.’ (*Al-Kafi*, Vol. 2, p. 95).

Imam al-Sadiq (‘a) has also said,

‘One who keeps his hand from harming people keeps away only one hand while they will keep away from him many.’ (*Al-Kafi*, Vol. 2, p. 96).

So, my Brother, what some people, who claim to be on the right track and are pious, say that they do not care about people, that they do not need them, and that they take them lightly, up to the end of such statements which fall in the category of lack of toleration..., all of this is actually following one’s own desires. It is ignorance about the way of Ahl al-Bayt (‘a)⁴.

Many people confuse tolerating people with pretending to get along very well with them, imagining that the mandated toleration is pretension. But the difference between them is quite clear. Contemptible pretension is agreeing on making what is ugly look as though it were beautiful. Or it may be abandoning

its rejection out of the desire to attain what they have, so that one may thus acquire some worldly benefits or win their hearts without avoiding a wrongdoing.

What proves the beauty of kindness and toleration is that it leads to everything good. Traditions are very well known about a Syrian man who spoke inappropriately to Imam Ali son of al-Husain ('a) when the Imam was transported to Yazid, the curse of Allah be on him, in Syria. The Syrian said, 'Praise be to Allah Who killed you, Who proved your claims false and Who relieved the people of your mischief.' When the man finished his statement, the Imam ('a) said to him,

'O sheikh! Do you read the Qur'an?' The Syrian answered in the affirmative. The Imam ('a) asked him, 'Have you read this verse: Say: I ask no reward of you for this except the love of those near in kin?' The Syrian again answered in the affirmative. The Imam ('a) asked him, 'Have you read this verse: Allah only wishes to remove all abomination from you, you members of the family, and to make you pure and spotless (Qur'an, 33:33)?' The old man again answered in the affirmative. The Imam ('a) asked him again, 'O sheikh! Have you read this verse: And give to the near in kin his due right (Qur'an, 17:26)?' The Syrian also answered in the affirmative. The Imam ('a) said to him, 'We are the near in kin, and we are the family of your Prophet ('s)!'

It was then that the sheikh raised his hand to the heavens, wept and dissociated himself from Husain's killer [Yazid]. He wept and repented (*Bihar al-Anwar*, Vol. 45, p. 129). So, look into how kindness attracts one to righteousness!

Toleration means abandoning denial in order to avoid or minimize a wrongdoing, or it may be a precaution against initiating a wrongdoing; so, how can this be compared with that?! Toleration may be a measure to avoid the mischief of the person whom you tolerate, or it may be to attract him to righteousness. All these objectives cannot be rejected. Or it may be the outcome of fear, or to render something wrong ineffective. It is then that kindness, a smile, toleration of harm and rewarding evil with goodness is nothing but toleration about which Allah has said,

'Repel (evil) with what is better: Then will he whom you once hated become, as it were, your friend and intimate! And no one will be granted such goodness except those who exercise patience and self-restraint, none but persons of the greatest good fortune.' (Qur'an, 41:34-35).

And it is similar to this verse:

'... Speak gently to him; perhaps he may take warning or fear (Allah).' (Qur'an, 20:44).

And it is like a statement by Imam al-Sadiq ('a) cited in *Al-Kafi* as follows:

'While the Prophet (s) was once with `Aishah, a man sought permission to meet with him. The Prophet (s) said, 'How bad the [timing of the] tribesman is!. `Aishah, therefore, entered her chamber, and the Messenger of Allah (a) permitted the man to come in. When the man entered, the Messenger of Allah (a) received him with a smile on his sacred face and kept talking to him. When the man finished his talk and left, `Aishah said, 'O Messenger of Allah (a)! You were not pleased with this man coming to meet with you [at a very inappropriate time], yet you welcomed him with your smile and paid him your full attention! The Prophet (s) said, 'The worst of Allah's servants is one with whom you do not wish to sit on account of his sins. (Al-Kafi, Vol. 2, p. 246).

This is how one tolerates others. Such toleration is a sort of taqiyyah. Countless testimonials in favor of taqiyyah exist, so much so that the scholars of exegesis interpret the following verse as referring to it:

'Truly the most honored of you in Allah's sight is (he who is) the most righteous [muttaqi] among you.' (Qur'an, 49:13),

that is, the most fair in observing taqiyyah. It is even said that nine out of the ten portions of faith lies in taqiyyah as we read on p. 172, Vol. 2, of *Al-Kafi*.

Suffices you a statement in *Al-Kafi* by Hammad ibn Waqid al-Fahham who said, 'I once met Abu Abdullah (a) face-to-face, but I turned my face away from him and kept going. After that I visited him and said, 'May I be sacrificed for your sake! I meet you face-to-face but I turn my face away from you out of my fear to trouble you.' He (a) said to me,

'May Allah have mercy on you! But a man met me yesterday at such-and-such a place and said to me, 'O Abu Abdullah!. Yet there was nothing good or beautiful about meeting him.' (*Al-Kafi*, Vol. 2, p. 173).

So, notice how the man earned the Imam's supplication to Allah to have mercy on him when he did not greet him upon seeing him face-to-face, and notice how one did not take note of the Imam's status, so the Imam was not pleased with him and said that 'There was nothing good or beautiful about such a meeting⁵.'

From this incident and its likes, you come to know that a believer may abandon being gracious to someone when his action brings the latter envy and dissension. One may even be gracious to another by speaking ill of him as some Imams (a) did to some of their closest friends; it is similar to the incident when al-Khidr (a) made a hole in a ship so it might be spared confiscation by an oppressive king.

Third: Patience during the time of trials and tribulations. There is no doubt that life is a believer's jail. Any jail producing something good is by itself good. Imam al-Sadiq (a) said the following to a man who

complained to him about being needy:

'Be patient; Allah will find an outlet for you.' Then the Imam remained silent for some time following which he asked the same man, **'Tell me, how is Kufa's jail?'** **'Not roomy at all,'** the man answered, **'and it stinks. Its inmates are in the very worst of condition.'** The Imam said to the man, **'You are already in a jail, and you nevertheless want to be enjoying ease while still being there! Have you not come to know that life is a believer's jail?'** (*Al-Kafi*, Vol. 2, p. 195).

A believer may either be eager for the Hereafter, so the basis of his stay in life is that the latter feels like a prison for him in addition to the other calamities to which he may be exposed⁶. Or he may be one feared as having inclinations for this world, desiring what is in it, so the munificence of the most Wise One comes to disturb him with all kinds of problems so that he may find it [life in this world] repugnant and not feel comfortable therewith; it is the abode of the oppressors. Or he may be weak in his deeds of righteousness, obeying a little [of Allah's commandments]. The munificence of the most Wise One comes not to deprive him of the garment of trials and tribulations. Imam al-Sadiq ('a) has said,

'Had a believer known how many rewards he would have when afflicted with problems, he would have wished to be ripped off with scissors.' (*Al-Kafi*, Vol. 2, p. 198).

Imam al-Sadiq ('a) has said,

'If a believer is tried with an affliction, and if he takes to patience, he will be rewarded with rewards fit for a thousand martyrs.' (*Al-Kafi*, Vol. 2, p. 75).

Imam al-Sadiq ('a) has also said,

'A servant of Allah may have a special status with Allah, the most Great, the most Exalted One, which he earns through one of two merits: his wealth may disappear, or he may be tried with an affliction in his own body.' (*Al-Kafi*, Vol. 2, p. 199).

Affliction, then, may either bring a believer rewards, thus elevating his status, or it may be his penalty and atonement, and both are good and liked by a man of wisdom. As for the rewards, this is quite obvious. As for the penalty, it is on account of narratives from Ahl al-Bayt ('a) that Allah is too Gracious to penalize His servant twice [in the life of this world as well as in the Hereafter]. Anything for which He penalizes him in the life of this world, he is not going to penalize him for it in the Hereafter.

So, if a believer has to be afflicted, he has to be patient. Allah created patience before affliction; otherwise, a believer's heart would have cracked like an egg falling on a solid ground. Imam Ali ('a) is quoted in *Al-Kafi* as having cited the Messenger of Allah ('a) as saying,

'Patience is of *three* types: at the time of affliction, during the time of obedience [of Allah's Commandments] and at the time of avoiding committing a transgression. One who is patient when afflicted till he is solaced, Allah will write for him three hundred degrees between each is like the distance between the heavens and the earth. One who is patient while obeying [his Maker], Allah will write for him six hundred degrees, the distance between each is like the distance between the corners of the earth and the `Arsh. And when one is patient in order not to commit a transgression, Allah writes for him nine hundred degrees the distance between each is like the distance between the corners of the earth and the end of the `Arsh.' (*Al-Kafi*, Vol. 2, p. 75).

Al-Kafi also cites Imam al-Sadiq ('a) as saying,

'We [Ahl al-Bayt ('a)] are quite patient, and our Shi`ah are even more so.'

Someone said to him,

'May I be your sacrifice! How can your Shi`ah be more patient than you?'

The Imam ('a) said,

'It is so because we are patient about what we know, whereas they are patient about what they do not know.' (*Al-Kafi*, Vol. 2, p. 76).

Notice how kind Ahl al-Bayt ('a) are! Notice how they appreciate their Shi`ah, how the latter are rewarded even for the few calamities which are a fraction of those with which Ahl al-Bayt ('a) are afflicted. They want their Shi`ah to be attached to them so that they would not be separated from them.

In the latter case, their Shi`ah would decrease in number and perish, for Ahl al-Bayt ('a) know that their Shi`ah cannot receive salvation except when Ahl al-Bayt ('a) consider them as part of them, making their holy souls and those of their Shi`ah one in kind. It is then that there will be no possibility of rejecting the whole; everyone has to be accepted.

But if each person is judged individually, their Shi`ah will inevitably perish. Their ultimate concern, their earnest objective with regard to their Shi`ah, is that the latter become like them just as the Commander of the Faithful ('a) said,

'One who emulates a people almost becomes one of them.' (*Nahjul-Balaghah*, axiom 207).

Then they perfect all of this with their own intercession and with supplicating for their Shi`ah. For example, the supplication of the Imam of the Time (‘a), may Allah hasten his reappearance and make me one of his sacrifices, which was heard by the Sayyid son of al-Tawus. It is the one in which he, while being inside the vault, supplicates for the Shi`ah of Ahl al-Bayt (‘a). Some of its text has slipped my memory. It includes the following:

‘Lord! Our Shi`ah are of us! They were created of the remnant of our mold and kneaded with the noor of our *wilaya*; so, place us in charge of their affairs, forgive the sins which they have committed out of their reliance on their love for us, and when their scales [of good deeds] become light, make them heavy with the surplus of our own good deeds.’ (*Bihar al-Anwar*, Vol. 35, p. 303, narrated in various different wordings)⁷.

Look at him, may Allah hasten his reappearance, and may He make me his sacrifice, and how he goes to extremes in mixing the Shi`ah with their Ahl al-Bayt (‘a) so that they do not get separated from each other. He once says that both were created from the same mold, and once he says that the followers, sins originate from reliance for salvation from them on love for Ahl al-Bayt (‘a). And once he supplicates to his Lord to complete their shortcoming with the surplus of the good deeds of their masters and of those who love them.

So, brother! They know what we do not. They are the ones who have said,

‘Do not look at the act of disobedience; look at the One Whom you disobey.’ (*Bihar al-Anwar*, Vol. 74, p. 77).

Because of their knowledge of our disobedience, and due to the intensity of their fear for us lest we should perish, they have guided us to the path of salvation which leads to safety. This path is: exerting a real effort to emulate Ahl al-Bayt (‘a) as much as possible, so much so that one’s main concern should be not to forget about them for a twinkling of an eye. This is so on account of what Imam al-Ridha’ (‘a) has said, that is, he is satisfied from a believer (*mu`min*) with his following of his master’s tradition.

He means that such a tradition incorporates all other traditions. Patience, then, in its three stages: during the time of affliction, during the time of obedience and during the time avoiding disobedience, leaves no tradition without including it. It has already been stated in the transmissions relevant to mut`ah that:

‘I hate for any man among you not to adorn himself with a merit done by the Messenger of Allah (‘a).’

The book titled *Al-Faqih* quotes Bakr ibn Muhammad who cites Abu Abdullah (‘a) saying that he asked the Imam (‘a) about the mut`ah. The Imam (‘a) answered,

'I hate for a Muslim man to leave this life and there is one merit of the Messenger of Allah ('a) which he did not do.' (*Al-Faqih*, Vol. 3, p. 463).

It is also narrated that a believer is not complete till he performs the mut`ah (*Al-Faqih*, Vol. 3, p. 466). Imam al-Sadiq ('a), in an agreed upon tradition, is quoted as having said,

'I hate for a man to die leaving one tradition of the Messenger of Allah ('a) without practicing it.' (*Al-Faqih*, Vol. 3, p. 466)8.

This proves that Ahl al-Bayt ('a) do not wish their Shi`ah to neglect any of their practiced traditions. And if someone does so, he will be liable to do something hateful to them [i.e. smear their reputation]; may Allah protect us and our brethren from doing that, and may He enable us to bring happiness to them.

There is no harm here in pointing out to some of their traditions which they very much cared about, so much so that they upheld them and paid attention to them to the extent of treating them as obligations, perhaps Allah will enable us to emulate them in upholding these traditions except when there is a very strong reason not to, and in the presence of more serious obstacles:

Fulfilling a Promise: The way of Ahl al-Bayt ('a) is that a believer must hold himself accountable to fulfilling his promise, out of his precaution against eventualities because of which he may fall into breaking his promise which, in their view, is quite serious9. As long as one cannot control unexpected events, he is not counted as a violator. If he makes a promise, he must uphold it and not falter. One who falters in fulfilling his promise goes against the way of Ahl al-Bayt ('a). Thus, he excludes himself from their motto, entering in the motto of others; may Allah protect us against such a situation.

What brings this notion closer to your comprehension is the will which the Prophet ('s) made to Ali ('a) to pay off his debts on his behalf10 and to likewise fulfill his pledges. Had he not regarded his pledge just as he regarded a debt, and had he not held his conscience responsible for fulfilling it, his greatest excuse would have been death and thus inability to fulfill it; otherwise, he would not have needed to obligate his wasi [the Commander of the Faithful ('a)] to pay off his debts [and fulfill his pledges on his behalf]. Indeed, a poet did well when he composed the following lines:

**A good man is one who does good without a promise,
And one who fulfills a promise is half a man;
But if someone did not do either, he is a woman,
And half a woman is one who insists on so doing.**

Be advised that what we mean by fulfilling a promise, which is the way of Ahl al-Bayt ('a), when obstacles arise and excuses become available, is the situation when one is still able to fulfill his promise. But in the absence of such obstacles, this goes without saying. Breaking a promise without an excuse is surely a defect in the individual and an ugliness even if done by the least of all people. Such a conduct is not worthy of inclusion among the attributes of Ahl al-Bayt ('a) which we would like to urge others to emulate.

Other merits are:

Voluntary Benevolence Beyond and More than a Pledge: They treat this as an obligation. The Prophet ('s) was always gracious in fulfilling his promise, that is, it was his habit, whenever he borrowed, to give to the lender more than what he owed him, so much so that he was very well known for sticking to this habit. As for his Ahl al-Bayt ('a), generosity is their demeanor and benevolence is their mark as we recite in the inclusive ziyarah. They were the embodiment of acting upon this verse:

'Allah commands [the doing of] justice and benevolence...' (Qur'an, 16:90).

It is said that Ali ('a) emancipated one thousand slaves from his own personal toil (*Bihar al-Anwar*, Vol. 63, p. 320). He was not satisfied with just emancipating them, but he provided them with means of earning a livelihood as well. Also, once he promised a bedouin to give him four thousand dirhams, so he sold the orchard which had been planted by the Messenger of Allah ('a). He, thus, gave him what he had promised him and a lot more (*Bihar al-Anwar*, Vol. 41, p. 45).

Voluntary benevolence which exceeds the amount owed, or more than what was promised, has a way in winning people's hearts even if its amount is small. It is understood, from examining the way of Ahl al-Bayt ('a), that they adhered to it.¹¹

Self Denial Even While in Need: Allah Almighty has said,

'... They give others in preference over their own selves, even though poverty is their lot.' (Qur'an, 59:9).

Be informed that if a believer does not uphold self-denial, making that a priority, he will sooner or later be overcome by his own ego, by the desire to oppress, to abandon equity, though it may be for periods of time. He will then stop being a believer (*mu'min*), for a believer is one from whose evil people are safe, unlike one who upholds self-denial.

The maximum impetus of the latter's nafs is that he should abandon such self-denial. So, if he does abandon self-denial, he will not abandon the basis of fulfilling his obligations. At any rate, he will be safe from committing injustice¹².

All of this is a drop in the bucket, yet feeling satisfied with this much is better. Allah's help do we seek; Allah suffices us, and how Great the One upon Whom we rely is!

1. These statements, if absorbed, can turn the worship of a servant of Allah from one resulting from an effort to overcome reluctance to the world of adoration which is in sync with the nature of the mood. Since He wishes the residents of this abode to be all in harmony therein, He loves anything which brings about such harmony. If adoration is a hard undertaking in its first type, it is clear that the worship of a servant will then be involuntary, a manifestation of affectation, earning nothing more than rewards, whereas the true adoration is expected to lift the worshipper to the state of feeling at ease with the Lord of the Worlds. Such an ease makes the worshipper forget any hardship resulting from the effort to earn His Pleasure.

2. These are beautiful portraits of how Satan makes wrong look right. He resorts to the method of decorating falsehood in order to make it look like righteousness. Here is the role of one's insight which unveils such decoration; it is one of the requirements of treading the path to Allah Almighty. Such a decoration is possible in every stage of one's path. It diverts him from what is more important to what is most important. It is, hence, obligatory on every servant of Allah, whenever he goes forward or lags behind, to study the other possible alternatives so that he may select what is better from among similar options. This is closer to acting in accordance with one's actual obligation. This, in truth, is an act that pleases the Lord.

3. For a believer to have a secret in life is a matter which has been overlooked by most people. They have contented themselves with building for the life of this world without having a particular endeavor to do what brings them eternal happiness. Every believer who believes in another life wherein the fruit of his deeds will be manifested has to have one particular concern in the field of bringing about a distinctive connection with his Lord, which is the axis of all his activities. It is clear that the nature of this connection varies from one servant of Allah to another according to what one has been given by the Lord of Existence of abilities till the matter reaches His loved one, the Chosen One ('a) who had with him all certain conditions which neither a close angel nor a sent Prophet could bear.

4. This is a beautiful portrait of reality and of upholding the way of Ahl al-Bayt ('a) from the viewpoint of one who already does so. Holding others in contempt is one of the well known slippery paths in this field due to what the person who treads the path leading to Allah sees of the bright spiritual portraits which may distract him even from his obligation while dealing with people. Actually, if he looks at people as being the dependents of Allah Almighty, and that benevolence to them is one of the manifestations of obedience to the One Who created them, he will never hold a single one of them in contempt, even if the latter may be disobedient to his Lord. It is well known that if all the links of adoring the Lord come to an end, the link of the Creator with the one whom He creates remains to the very end.

5. From this narrative and its likes do you come to know an important principle in the rules of dealing with people as required by Ahl al-Bayt ('a). This principle is: taking everything into consideration when options abound. A believer opts for the most wise course of action, ignoring all others. Rationality, something which is advocated by numerous traditions, requires a believer to look into one matter from various angles so that, having done his calculations, he may arrive at the one which in the end pleases Allah Almighty the most, even when there are other options which please Him, too, but they are no match to his ultimate objective.

6. What a way this is to bring about a feeling of eagerness to those who are suffering from trials and tribulations! The compiler has clarified the effect of tribulation on all kinds of people, starting from the people of the Hereafter and ending with the custodians of the creed. But there is a huge difference between the effect of problems on the people who seek the Hereafter: It increases the latter's eagerness to the abode wherein there is neither tribulation nor exhaustion. It [adversely] affects the people who run after this life. It increases the rewards of those who inwardly feel closer to Allah. Such closeness is prompted by the Divine bliss which is relevant only to His friends, those who follow His Commandments, who are aware of His watchful eyes. It is from this onset that the Divine blessing descends upon those who are satisfied with their lots: 'We belong to Allah, and to Him is our return.' It is well known that the implication here is not simply that we shall be brought

before Him [for judgment] without the existence of a state of link with the Absolute King, with the depth of belonging to Him.

7. Contemplate upon the depth of the emotional link between this Infallible Imam ('a) of the Time and his subjects who shall be gathered under his banner. This should not make anyone wonder, for the Imam adopts the manners of Allah Almighty to the extreme degrees humanly possible. It is well known that the Imam-in-Charge ('a), during his occultation, is not indifferent to what happens to the nation of his grandfather ('a). It is so because he is the one who is most concerned about the events of this time in all their cycles, just as his grandfather the Commander of the Faithful ('a) used to feel the pain suffered by hungry people in Yamamah or Hijaz or anywhere else. From this onset, a person who truly loves someone does not add his own burden of worries to the burden already suffered by the person whom he loves. Rather, he tries his best to decrease his worries by doing whatever is required to remove the grief of his friend. Add to this how he goes far in supplicating for an ease for his hardship; surely there is no ease from hardship for all people except through his reappearance.

8. But one must not be unmindful with regard to the law of making the best option when plenty are available about what is commendable. The traditions, in their first text, call for good merits, leaving the evaluation of practicing them to the individual himself who should rely on his insight and knowledge of the other principles of the Shari`ah. For example, the traditions relevant to the mut`ah, which the compiler mentions, advocate the revival of this tradition which cures a lingering problem in everyday life which cannot be solved except through permanent or temporary marriage, or the alternative is adultery. There is no comparison between what is haram and what is a Sunnah advocated by the Prophet ('s) and by the Imams ('a) from among his offspring. But, by way of comparison, we have to take notice of another text which explains the importance of paying attention to other comparable issues when we implement the Sunnah. The father of al-Hasan ('a) is quoted as having said the following to some of his followers:

'Do not over-emphasize the practice of mut`ah; rather, you should observe the Sunnah. Do not let it [mut`ah] distract you from your beds and lawful wives, or else the latter would disbelieve, dissociate themselves, complain about this practice and [even] condemn us.' (Was`ail al-Shi`ah, Vol. 14, p. 450).

9. Notice the expression of the author, how he emphasizes this point although there is no proof from the Shari`ah that breaking a promise, because of an unexpected event, especially in the presence of the sincere intention to fulfill it, is haram. A believer who watches his conduct reaches a point where he avoids doing anything held by the Lord as ugly and contemptible, though it is not necessarily haram. He does so out of his apprehension lest he should incur the Wrath of the Master even in a degree commensurate with the extent of the deed. A lover is prompted by avoiding doing anything which the one he loves dislikes even if he is not obligated to do so as we, lovers in this world, do. So, what would you say about the love for the One loving Whom is the blessed result of His own munificence and favors?!

10. Historians estimate the debts left by the Messenger of Allah ('a) at the time of his demise to be close to 400,000 dirhams which Ali ('a) did, indeed, pay off during a number of years. ___ Tr.

11. A believer has to absorb the philosophy behind spending in all its Shari`a-related and ethical aspects which include taking into consideration people's feelings. He should bear in mind that what he spends is dealing with the wealth of his Master with the latter's permission, even as he tackles the demands of this Master. So, there should be no amazement after that because what is worthy of amazement is spending from the real wealth, not from the purported wealth. This is why you find them spending while being fearful because they will return to their Master Who will ask them about what they had spent, including spending on commendable causes, because there is a possibility of something wrong with the way whereby they earned the wealth or how they spent it. One of the philosophical aspects of spending is that if one gives someone something by way of charity, he must not follow his giving with reminding that person of it, nor should he follow it with harming him. Doing so nullifies the requirements of benevolence, obstructing the possibility of its being replenished in the future.

12. This observation by the author is beautiful. He sets safe cycles for the believer further from the dangerous ones. He calls for self-denial which, were one to obey his own inclination to abandon it, will still maintain the basis of his spending security against extravagance. This is the way which has to be followed in all ethical fields; otherwise, one who seeks a path to Allah will permit himself to enjoy some permissible facets the legality of which is in doubt, such as talking nonsense or doing what is haram. His nafs will then entice him into looking at what is definitely haram.

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