

Ethical Discourses: Volume 1

40 Lectures on Ethics and Morality

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The first of two volumes containing the transcribed lectures of Grand Ayatollah Naser Makarem Shirazi on a range of topics mainly dealing with ethics, morality, and self-building.

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Biography of the Author

The eminent scholar, Ayatullah al-`Uzma al-Hajj ash-Shaykh Nasir Makarim Shirazi was born in the year 1345 AH (1924 CE) in the city of Shiraz, Iran to a religious family who were well known for their great level of spirituality and noble ethical traits. His Eminence finished his elementary school studies in Shiraz and due to his eagerness to learn, his powerful memorizing capabilities and other great talents, he was regarded as one of the extraordinary students from amongst his fellow classmates and because of this, was able to complete two years of studies in one year!

The conditions that existed in Iran in those days obligated this young man – who possessed such a talent and great aptitude to choose the path of University studies to increase his knowledge and attain the higher (material) levels of secular studies. However through the hand of fate and the blessings of the Maintainer of the Universe and his own internal desires, this young man developed an attraction to becoming better acquainted and delve deep into the genuine teachings of Islam, especially since after the spring of 1348 AH (1937 CE) (just after he finished his primary school), the Islamic Seminaries went thru a major transformation and had taken on a completely new form.

His Studies

His Eminence started his formal Islamic studies at the age of 14 in Madressah Agha Babakhan Shirazi and within a short period of time, was able to complete the introductory studies such as Sarf, Nahw, Mantiq, Bayan, and Badi`, which were all needed to advance to the next level of Islamic studies.

After completing these sciences, he turned his attention towards the fields of Fiqh (Jurisprudence) and Usul al-Fiqh (Principles of Jurisprudence) and again, due to the exceptional capabilities that he possessed, was able to finish studying the complete levels of introductory and both the levels of the intermediate Islamic studies in approximately four years (something that normally takes 12 to 15 years)! During this time, a group of students from the Islamic Seminary in Shiraz were also benefiting from the classes that he himself was teaching.

The positive criticisms and personal opinions of His Eminence on the classes being held in Qum and in relation to the need for including extra information within the books that were being taught in the various Theological Seminaries, definitely played a role in the bright future that awaited him. While in religious gatherings in this city, his capabilities, genius, meticulous and deep thought were witnessed by others

and because of this, no one was able to deny his God-given talents.

Whereas this brilliant star was only a mere 18 years old, however through his deep penetrating knowledge and the flowing pen, he was able to write a commentary on the book *Kifayatul Usul* (one of the major books of *ʿIlmul Usul* that must be studied in the Theological Seminary), in which he was able to bring to light the ambiguous issues mentioned in this traditional book. At the age of 18, he formally entered into the Theological Seminary of Qum and for the next five years, was present in the religious gatherings and classes of some of the greatest teachers of those days, such as Ayatullah al-ʿUzma al-Hajj as-Sayyid Muhammad Husain Burujerdi and other great personalities (may Allah be pleased with them all).

In order for His Eminence to become better acquainted with the great scholars, their ideas and thoughts who were studying and teaching in one of the greatest Theological Seminaries of the Shiʿa, in the year 1369 AH (1950 CE), he made his way to the Hawza ʿIlmiyyah of Najaf al-Ashraf in Iraq. It was here that he was able to take part in the classes of some of the greatest teachers such as: Ayatullah al-ʿUzma al-Hajj as-Sayyid Muhsin al-Hakim, Ayatullah al-ʿUzma al-Hajj as-Sayyid Abul Qasim al-Khuʿi and Ayatullah al-ʿUzma al-Hajj ʿAbdul Hadi ash-Shirazi and other great teachers (may Allah sanctify their spirits).

At the age of 24, His Eminence was granted complete *Ijtihad* from two of the great scholars of Najaf al-Ashraf. In addition, Ayatullah al-ʿUzma al-Hajj as-Sayyid Muhsin al-Hakim even wrote a short, but comprehensive letter of commendation for His Eminence's notes on the lessons of *Fiqh* (The Book of *Taharah*).

His thirst for acquiring and gaining more knowledge continued with the great teachers in Najaf al-Ashraf. However, since he did not have the means to survive and continue his studies in this holy city, he was forced to return back to Iran in the year 1370 AH (1951 CE) and make his way back to the holy city of Qum which was now the centre of gathering religious scholars. Once again, he joined the circle of scholars who later on, had a profound impact on his life.

After returning to Iran, Ayatullah Nasir Makarim Shirazi began teaching the intermediate and higher level of studies (*Kharij*) in *Usul al-Fiqh* and *Fiqh*. It is now close to 28 years that he has been teaching these classes in the Theological Seminary which have been warmly accepted and appreciated by a large number of students. In addition, after teaching a large number of the important books of *Fiqh*, he went on to write summaries and notes of these great works. At present the classes of *Kharij* of *Usul* of this great personality are one of the most popular classes in the Hawza ʿIlmiyyah of the Shiʿa and there are close to 2,000 of the most dedicated and dynamic students who take part and benefit from his lectures!

From the beginning of his studies, he was habituated in writing books in various fields of Islamic studies

such as Theology, Islamic Awareness and the issue of Wilayah (of the Ahlul Bait). Moving ahead, he started to write on the Exegesis of the Qur'an, Fiqh and Usul al-Fiqh and is currently known and recognized as one of the greatest writers in the Muslim world.

Political Activities

His Eminence was also very active in the early days that culminated in the Islamic Revolution of Iran and it is because of this fact that he was thrown in the despotic ruler's jail many times. In addition, he was even exiled on three separate occasions to three different cities – Chanharat, Mahabad and Anarak. However after the Revolution, he was appointed to the first council of Representatives and played a pivotal role in writing the first constitution.

The Religious Help and Support

Ayatullah Nasir Makarim Shirazi has been quite active in various fields of teaching and guiding the up-and-coming scholars in the Theological Seminary of Qum, and has embarked on various projects and endeavours, of which we mention just a few:

1. Religious Publications Centre for the Shi`a

From some time back, His Eminence felt the need for the Hawza `Ilmiyyah of Qum to have a general publication organization which would be able to defend the Shi`a from the works that were being published, by those wishing to mislead the people – unfortunately whose number is great.

In addition, this is also something that the Muslims expected from such a great Islamic University such as the Hawza `Ilmiyyah, and thus people from different strata of the community starting from the great Mara`ja Taqlid of the Hawza and others also put forward this request that without doubt, a magazine should be published that would be able to answer the religious enquiries of the youth and give them the answers that they were looking for. In addition, such a publication would be able to fight against the books and magazines that were coming out aiming to mislead the people.

Due to the fact that at that time, there were some minds (within the Theological Seminary) that were not ready to accept such a publication, thus, His Eminence sought out serious and original-writing scholars to place the heavy responsibility on their shoulders of producing such a publication. In this regard, His Eminence, along with a group of other scholars and the assistance of the leaders of the Hawza `Ilmiyyah of Qum and the financial support of well wishers, launched the magazine, “Maktab-e-Islam”.

This magazine was definitely something which was unparalleled in the Shi`a world and maybe from the point of view of its range of circulation – amongst the various religious magazines being published at that time – was the number one magazine across the entire Muslim world. This magazine brought a fresh new path of direction to the great students and thinkers of the Hawzah.

At present, this publication has been going on strong for over 39 years – offering its valuable services to the Muslim world and the Shi`a communities and has found a special spot within the hearts of the youth, the university students, teachers and other noble personalities and it is through this publication that the light of Islam and Tashayya` has been spread from its focal point (Qum) to the entire world.

2. Organizing Gatherings to Offer Lessons in Theology and other Religious Teachings

His Eminence felt that the books that had been written in the field of Islamic Theology were not sufficient, nor were they, with the passing of time, able to answer the questions that were being raised. In addition, these books were also not adequate in addressing the needs of the current era. The traditional books of theology were written centuries ago where the questions that the materialists of today bring up were not mentioned. Also, the traditional books written in the past did not discuss the various world religions who were hoping to impose their values on the world. In addition, the older books brought up issues like those in relation to the Asha`ris and Mu`tazili and others such as these which today discussions on beliefs such as these are no longer applicable as discussions since these were 'seasonal'.

It is because of this fact that His Eminence, relying upon his literary talent and exceptional abilities, was able to present the Theological Islamic beliefs and the five Principles of Religion in an unparalleled way! It is through organizing the theological discussions that hundreds of people were attending that these gatherings were made aware of these issues at hand and through these gatherings, a compact and concise book was compiled and published.

3. Islamic Council to Protect the Youth

His Eminence gave unparalleled lessons on Theology and other lessons and discussions in which his students have been educated in eight different subjects from amongst the different schools of thought throughout the world. It is through these classes that those being trained would be able to discuss and have debates with others, who are busy propagating other beliefs and schools of thought and would also be able to write books concerning their beliefs – they would also be equipped to answer any questions or issues that they put forth.

Within a short period of time, these religious gatherings were able to produce students – each one of which was firmly grounded and specialized in a particular field of study and even today, a group of active youth who are well known authors within the Hawza `Ilmiyyah, are busy studying with. As well, in order to save our dear youth from the clutches of corruption, His Eminence formed an organization called the *Educational Assembly for Protection of the Younger Generation*. One of the outcomes of this assembly is the publication of material that would be attractive to the youth, and his office made them available to the youth very promptly.

4. Struggles Against Deviant Thoughts

On one of his trips to the city of Shiraz, His Eminence came face to face with one of the Sufi groups in this city. A group of people in Shiraz requested him to write a book that would outline the principles of these Sufis – one that would explain their beliefs in a polite and respectful manner. His Eminence, by making use of the resources available to him, sat down to write this book in the year 1953 CE which outlined their beliefs and thoughts, and he named it "*The Manifestation of Truth*".

The method in which he wrote this book caught the attention of the late Ayatullah al-`Uzma Burujerdi (may Allah be pleased with him) and after requesting His Eminence to see him, he congratulated the author for his valuable efforts. In relation to this book, Ayatullah al-`Uzma Burujerdi (may Allah be pleased with him) wrote the following commendation, "I have gone through this book in my spare time and did not find even the smallest of weak points in it. May Allah reward you for your troubles."

5. Establishing Organizations and Centres of Learning

In these regards, His Eminence had made the intention of establishing such organizations in the same number of Ma`sumin (peace be upon all of them) that we have (14) and with the praise of Allah up until now, he has been successful in establishing four such important schools within the Theological Seminary of Qum and two religious organizations for the welfare of the students who are living in the city of Mashad.

6. Writings

The number of publications of His Eminence currently lies at approximately 130 volumes of books which have all been printed – some of which have been reprinted more than 30 times! Some of these have

even been translated into more than 10 living languages of the world and have been published in various parts of the world.

The commentary of the Qur'an authored by him, Tafsir-e-Namuna (The Ideal Commentary) has been translated into many languages, including `Arabic (al-Amthal Fi Tafsir al-Qur'an), and can be found in many homes. In addition to this commentary, he has also authored a thematic commentary of the Qur'an entitled Payam-e-Qur'an (The Message of the Qur'an) which has opened up a new chapter in the field of exegesis of the Noble Qur'an.

In addition, the books he has written on the theological beliefs have been a place where others can seek refuge from the assault of books written with false beliefs in them.

Of the books of Fiqh that he has written, we mention a few: Anwar al-Fuqahah, al-Qawa'idul Fiqhiyyah, Anwar al-Usul and the notes and commentaries on the complete text of `Urwatul Wuthqa which has been printed many times over.

His practical guide for Muslims (Tawdihul Masail) has also been printed many times and has also been translated into `Arabic, Urdu, Turkish, Azari and English.

A complete list of other publications of this great scholar which have been translated into English and are available is as follows. Most of these can be read on his website at www.makaremshirazi.org [11].

1. Ethical Discourses [40 Lectures on Ethics and Morality] – volume 1, 2 & 3 translated by Saleem Bhimji –published by the World Federation of KSIMC [www.world-federation.org] [12]]
2. Khums: The Islamic Tax translated by Saleem Bhimji – published by the Islamic Humanitarian Service [www.al-haqq.com] [13]]
3. Lessons in Islamic Beliefs – Tawhid, 'Adalah, Nubuwwah, Imamah, and Ma'ad translated by Laleh Bakhtiyar – published by Ansariyan Publications [www.ansariyan.org] [14]]
4. Life Under the Grace of Ethics translated by Monir Shafiei – published by the Office of Ayatullah Makarim Shirazi [www.makaremshirazi.org] [11]]
5. Message of the Qur'an – A Thematic Exegesis of the Noble Qur'an volume 1 of 10 translated by Saleem Bhimji – published by the World Federation of KSIMC [www.world-federation.org] [12]]
6. One Hundred and Eighty Questions – volumes 1, 2 & 3 translated by Shahnawaz Mahdawi – published by the World Federation of KSIMC [www.world-federation.org] [12]]
7. One Hundred and Fifty Lessons for Life translated by the office of Ayatullah al-'Uzma Shaykh Nasir Makarim Shirazi – published by Ansariyan Publications [www.ansariyan.org] [14]]

8. Our Beliefs translated by the office of Ayatullah al-'Uzma Shaykh Nasir Makarim Shirazi – published by the Office of Ayatullah Makarim Shirazi [www.makaremshirazi.org] [11]
9. Philosophy of Islamic Rulings written in co-operation with Ayatullah Ja'far Subhani Translated by Sayyid Athar Rizvi – published by Ansariyan Publications [www.ansariyan.org] [14]
10. Summary of the Islamic Rulings translated by 'Ali Abdul Rasheed – published by the Office of Ayatullah Makarim Shirazi [www.makaremshirazi.org] [11]
11. Tafsir of the Noble Qur'an – Suratul Jinn translated by Saleem Bhimji – published by the Islamic Humanitarian Service and the World Federation of KSIMC [www.al-haqq.com] [13] & [www.world-federation.org] [12]
12. The tradition of Ghadir – The Expressive Evidence for Imamate translated by the office of Ayatullah al-'Uzma Shaykh Nasir Makarim Shirazi – published by the Office of Ayatullah Makarim Shirazi [www.makaremshirazi.org] [11]
13. The Noble Qur'an – Translation and Commentary – volume 1 – 4 translated by Mansoor Amini – published by the Office of Ayatullah Makarim Shirazi [www.makaremshirazi.org] [11]
14. The Islamic Laws translated by the office of Ayatullah al-'Uzma Shaykh Nasir Makarim Shirazi – published by the Office of Ayatullah Makarim Shirazi [www.makaremshirazi.org] [11]

Discourse 1: We Must Always Go To The Source of The Problem

Imam 'Ali b. Muhammad al-Hadi (as) was a great Imam who lived under some of the hardest conditions and opposition (to his leadership). It was through the use of the military (of the ruling class of that time), that the Imam was forcefully separated from his Shia (followers); and it is because of this, that there are not many traditions narrated from this Imam.

One of the crimes which the Bani Umayyah and the Bani 'Abbas perpetrated on the nation was the cutting off of all relations and ties between the people and the A`immah of the Ahlul Bait (as). If this cutting off of contact had not been done, then today we would have had countless books at our disposal containing the words of these great personalities.

In the time period between the leadership of Imam Muhammad b. 'Ali al-Baqir (as) and Imam Ja'far b.

Muhammad as-Sadiq (as), we see what kind of valuable treasures were left behind for their followers. However it is after this time, meaning during the time of Imam Musa b. Ja'far al-Kazim (as) in which the limits and restrictions were imposed (on the A`immah (as)).

In any case, there are some short sayings available from Imam 'Ali b. Muhammad al-Hadi (as) even though the words which have reached us from this personality are quite few in number. Nevertheless, we will explain one of the short sayings of this Imam.

خَيْرٌ مِنَ الْخَيْرِ فَاعِلُهُ وَ أَجْمَلٌ مِنَ الْجَمِيلِ قَائِلُهُ وَ أَرْجَحُ مِنَ الْعِلْمِ حَامِلُهُ وَ شَرُّ
مِنَ الشَّرِّ جَالِبُهُ وَ أَحْوَلُ مِنَ الْحَوْلِ رَاكِبُهُ.

“Even better than a good act, is the person who performs the good act; and more attractive than beautiful (words) is the person who speaks beautiful words; and what is more nobler than knowledge is that person who possess knowledge; and what is even worse than wickedness is the person who commits evil; and what is more of an obstruction than the obstruction (itself) is the person that obstructs (others).”¹

In these five statements, the Imam has referred to some very important points.

What is the meaning of these sentences of which, three of them refer to something good, while the other two are in reference to something bad? In reality, the Imam is pointing to one fundamental principle, which is that we must always go in search of the roots and causes (of anything).

If we wish to spread goodness and we want the proliferation of good deeds, then we must go to its source. If we want to prevent bad deeds from taking form, then we must go the root and source of that which is bad. What is more important than good and bad is the person who performs that action.

An important issue that has always been within the society and still exists is that when a group of people decide to fight against corruption, a majority of people look at the effects (of the actual corruption), however they do not go after the causes (that brought that effect into being) and therefore they are not successful. They remove one bad thing however something else takes it place. They proceed to remove the second thing, however, a third thing takes it place – why is this??

This happens because one does not go after the root of a problem and the causes for it coming into existence. Instead, one goes straight to the effect or outcome.

This can be understood in the light of a simple example. Some people may have eruptions (pimples, warts, etc...) on their face, or they may have wounds and abrasions on their body and thus they rush to purchase various types of ointments to remove these various things. However there are other people who take the time to investigate and check if the skin which is nourished (with vitamins and minerals) is

facing some difficulty in the way it works and because of these difficulties, the effects which can be seen on the skin and the body of the person are made apparent.

As is commonly held, the skin of the body is like a plain sheet or surface that reflects what a person does (what he eats, drinks, applies to his body, etc...). Even though putting ointment on the injury or abrasion may suffice temporarily, however it will not remove the actual cause (of the problem) and thus, once again these things may return on another part of the body.

It is a good thing to use these ointments or creams to have temporary relief from what is troubling the person; however in the mean time, one must go in search of a permanent solution and establish the root of the problem.

Right now, there are two major problems which are evident in our society and they are getting worse day by day.

The first problem is in relation to the use of drugs, and the second problem is the open and unrestricted sexual activities taking place.

The age of people who are turning to cigarettes has dropped and even children of a young age are now becoming polluted with this disease (of smoking). According to one of the sources of news, one of the cities near to us (near to Qum), there are over 150 women who are addicted to drugs – even though the experts say that women are typically less likely to become addicted to drugs. However as can be seen, this spiritual sickness of drugs is now common amongst women, children, youth and the young adults.

One way to cure this danger of drug abuse is to arrest all of those who are addicted to drugs, and all those who are dealing in this are executed. This is one way which we can follow. However, this direction will not solve the fundamental problem. Thus, we must see what the root of the addiction to drugs is amongst within each society.

Is it because people have nothing else to do? Is it because they are not religious? Is it because they have not been taught the proper culture, or is it the work and actions of the hidden hand of foreigners who state that if the youth are hooked on drugs, then an important source for us to influence this country will be taken care of??

We will never forget the event in history when the British wanted to take over China so much so that they tried to introduce opium into their culture, however the Chinese understood this and stood up in opposition to the British. The British too, by resorting to their military prowess, brought opium into China and in the books of history this event was recorded as the Opium War.²

By bringing opium into China, they were able to pollute the people, and once the younger generation was polluted with this addiction, the Chinese people then had no source of opposition to their enemies (the British). From the time the British launched the War of Opium, they were able to take benefit from

another problem that the Chinese then had to face – that of controlling the people – more specifically, the youth.

When the Americans were dominating over Afghanistan, it was thought that in the face of the slogans that were being raised, that the roots and causes of tobacco and drugs would be destroyed completely. However it has been stated in the media that the planting and cultivating of opium actually increased and was even greater than before – even more so than the American led war on Afghanistan!

The Americans declare the slogan of human rights and claim that they are fighting against corruption and drug addiction, however they are actually lying! They are in reality, only going after what benefits themselves and what is in their own interests, even if this means that they must destroy everyone else in the world.

Therefore, we must go after the source of the problem. These youth must be taught properly and one important factor is religion. Without doubt, a religious young man or woman will never become addicted to these things. However, once he or she has left the religion, then they will definitely fall into addiction.

Another issue is that of being idle and having nothing else to do. Once a person becomes idle and lazy, then he sees that there is good money to be made from this job (of buying and selling drugs) and thus, he will go after this kind of work. Thus, those people who are idle and lazy will end up being corrupted and (spiritually) polluted.

If we do not sit and think about the plans of our enemy, then how are we going to be able to fight against them?

Therefore, one must go after the real causes of the problems and it is not sufficient to simply rely on the effects of the problems and go after these.

In order to truly understand the causes, we must organize meetings and seminars and arrange programs so that the thinkers of the society can sit down and chart out a course of action for the future of the community.

For simple issues and concerns that come up, we see how many conferences and seminars are held – however for such an important task like this one – there are none?!

The second problem which is spreading right now is in relation to the open and unrestricted sexual activities taking place which are corrupting the youth.

Is it simply enough to place a group of volunteers and army personnel on the street corner and use them to stop the prohibited meeting of young men and women and expect the issue to be resolved, or must we tackle this problem from another angle?

We must see what the roots of this problem are, and one of them is that fewer marriages are taking

place in the society. It has gotten harder and harder for people to get married such as the following reasons:

1. Expectations (on both sides) have become too high;
2. The wedding formalities have become too numerous;
3. The Mahr (dowry) has become too high;
4. The material cost of getting married is too great.

In addition to these, there is also the spread and proliferation of corruption which are causing the youth to become sexually excited (at younger ages). There are some youth who say that with the present situation and conditions, it is very difficult to control their sexual desires.

We would say to them that, “If you wish to watch those bad movies with open eyes, or if you wish to watch those particular CDs and read those magazines and then come and say that it is difficult to control yourself, then first off, you yourself must put an end to these things which are sexually arousing you.”

When these things which cause a person to become sexually excited are easily available – for example, one CD can contain a whole world full of corruption or the InterNet which is full of these things that have made the entire world unsafe from the point of view of moral ethics and other issues – then how is it possible for the youth to control themselves?

Sometimes, wedding parties are arranged which contain things which cause sexual excitement and are full of filth, which go directly against the teachings of the religion. Hundreds of youth become spiritually polluted in one such wedding program in which men and women come together and mix with one another and show themselves off – not to mention the dancing and music. At the same gathering, there are groups of young boys and girls who are single and present in such a corrupt gathering and thus, they too become misguided.

However the youth themselves wish to take part in such a gathering and then at the same time cry out that they are not able to control their sexual desires!

Thus, the factors which lead one to become sexually excited must be removed, and the factors which can lead to early marriages must be put into place.

Thus, we must go back to the root of the problem, whereas in most these issues, we are simply going to the effects and outcomes of them.

However, who is there that will even bother to listen to and hear these words? Even more than this, who is there that is willing and ready to speak these words to the people?!

1. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 75, pg. 370

2. Despite strict government regulations, foreign trade in China expanded during the late 18th and early 19th century. As trade grew, the West found themselves having a large and rising trade deficit with China. They were increasingly anxious to balance their trade. Yet the Chinese, having a self-sufficient economy, showed little interest in Western products. Finally, in 1820, the West found a product which China did not have, and this was opium. Between 1829 and 1855, opium smuggling developed rapidly along China's South Coast. In 1820, 9,708 chests of opium were smuggled in per year. 15 years later, the smuggled opium rose to 35,445 chests, a growth of 400%.

In the 1830's, opium had become a vice in China and virtually all men under 40 smoked it. The entire army was addicted. It affected all classes of people, from the rich merchants to the Taoists. The total number of addicts in China in the 1830's was as high as 12 million. Due to the smuggle of opium, the trade deficit Western countries had quickly turned into a trade surplus. China could not export enough tea and silk to balance the trade. Instead the difference in trade was made up by the export of Chinese silver, which was highly valued for its fine qualities. In the 1835-1836 fiscal year alone, China exported 4.5 million Spanish dollars worth of silver. In 1839, the Chinese opium smokers spent 100 million taels, while the government's entire annual revenue was only 40 million taels. The drain of silver greatly weakened the Chinese government. One government official wrote, "If we continue to allow this trade to flourish, in a few dozen years, we will find ourselves without any soldiers to resist the enemy, and no money to equip an army."

Faced with this problem, the Chinese government opened a debate among the Manchus and senior officials. The debate lasted for two years and in the end a minority group which favoured an uncompromising stand prevailed. In 1839, the emperor issued 39 articles which imposed extremely severe punishments, including death, for smoking and trading opium. Special Commissioner Lin Ze-xu was sent to Canton to ensure the rules were carried out. Lin, while in Canton, made 1,600 arrests and confiscated 11,000 pounds of opium in two months. In June, Lin forced foreign merchants to hand over 20,000 chests of opium. He burned the opium in a public demonstration and scattered the ashes across the sea. When Lin gave the order that Canton should be completely closed to foreign trade, the British opened hostilities and started the Opium War.

China, with its backward army, was overwhelmed and backed down. Commissioner Lin was recalled in disgrace and sent to exile in the Northwest. The first of the unequal treaties, the Treaty of Nanjing was signed. The Opium War, which lasted from 1840 to 1842, ended with China losing in shame. [Taken from:

<http://historyliterature.homestead.com/files/extended.html> [15]]

Discourse 2: Characteristics of The Shia – Part I

The main area of discussion of volume 65 of the compilation of traditions entitled Bihar al-Anwar is in regards to elucidating on the characteristics of the Shia (Sifatush Shia). How helpful it would truly be if we would all read this section (of Bihar al-Anwar) and truly comprehend what a massive responsibility we have been given by being referred to with the sacred title of being the Shia of the Ahlul Bait (as).

A person cannot simply profess to be a Shia nor can one simply say that he is a Shia just because his mother and father were Shia. Being a Shia is a concept so comprehensive that it encompasses many responsibilities which have been thoroughly explained by the Infallibles (as), under the banner of "Sifatush Shia" – the characteristics of the Shia.

Muyassir b. 'Abdul 'Aziz was one of the most well known companions of Imam Muhammad b. 'Ali al-

Baqir (as) and has been highly praised in the books of 'Ilmul Rijal. The 5th Imam (as) has also said the following in relation to Muyassir:

“O' Muyassir! Certainly death was prescribed for you on many occasions, however Allah delayed this event from coming to you since you maintain your family relations (Silatul Rahm) and because you try to alleviate the problems of your family members.”

*Imam Muhammad b. 'Ali al-Baqir (as) once said to Muyassir:

يَا مُيَسِّرُ أَلَا أَخْبَرَكَ بِشِيعَتِنَا؟ قُلْتُ بَلَى جُعِلْتُ فِدَاكَ. قَالَ إِنَّهُمْ حُصُونٌ حَصِينَةٌ
وَ صُدُورٌ أَمِينَةٌ وَ أَحْلَامٌ وَ زِينَةٌ لَيْسُوا بِالْمَذِيعِ الْبَذْرِ وَلَا بِالْجُفَاتِ الْمُرَاعِينِ.
رُهْبَانٌ بِاللَّيْلِ أَسَدٌ بِالنَّهَارِ.

“O' Muyassir! Should I not describe to you who our Shia (true followers) are?” Muyassir replied, “But of course, may I be sacrificed for you (O' Imam).” The Imam continued: “Unquestionably they (our Shia) are like a fortified stronghold; their chests (hearts) are places that preserve the trusts (given to them such as secrets and private information) and are those who have a firm, dignified intelligence; they do not spread rumors that they are told (by others) and are not strict, severe people; nor are they people who show off. During the night time, they are as monks (they stay up in the night, busy in prayer and the worship of Allah) while during the daytime, they are as lions (active, energetic, and involved in the activities of the world and their community).”

In this concise tradition, there are seven characteristics mentioned which one must possess in order to be classified as a Shia. Truly, a veiled and hidden (comprehensive) world of subject-matter and responsibilities has been given to us in this saying.

It is possible that the meaning of “a fortified stronghold” could mean that: “Our Shia are those who are not influenced by the negative propaganda of the enemies.”

Right now, the state of culture of the world is in a very dangerous phase. Our youth are being faced with this (cultural) menace – yet have we found any way to strengthen the inner will of our youth in relation to this cultural onslaught? If we are not able to destroy the causes of this sickness, then we must at least strengthen ourselves (in defence).

This point must also be kept in mind that during the time of the infallible A`immah, one of their greatest complaints was that some of their Shia used to speak openly about their (the A`immah's) secrets. The people of that time were told not to speak about the great rank and status which the A`immah possessed to just anybody. The stations of: Knowledge of the Unseen of the Imam; the Intercession of the Imam for his followers on the Day of Judgement; The Imams being the custodians of the knowledge of the

Messenger of Allah (S); them being witnesses and observers of all of the actions of the Shia and also their rewards and punishments and... were all issues that the common people and the enemies of the Ahlul Bait did not have the ability to hear or accept.

There were some Shia that were very simple minded and would sit in any gathering and would speak about whatever they wanted (about the A`immah) and this act of theirs did not bring about anything except for division, enmity and hatred (for the A`immah). Therefore, the Imam has said, "Our Shia are they in whose chests (hearts), secrets and trusts are kept."

The A`immah have also said that their Shia are those who do not spread secrets of others without any reason; they do not seek to cause division between two people and even worse than this, they do not go to extremes in the religion such as those which have recently come about.

By using the pretext of having firm belief in the Wilayah (of the Ahlul Bait), there are some people who use terminology (in relation to the A`immah) that may lead to disbelief. In addition, they make use of expressions which are not befitting the A`immah and as such, the infallible leaders would never be pleased with such people and their words. Thus, we too must be careful of this new form of Ghulluw or extremism in the faith of Islam.

These people have two defects in them which lead them towards their own destruction. First off they think that if they attribute the characteristics of Allah (SwT) to the A`immah, Sayyidah Zainab (s.a) or the Shuhada' of Karbala, then this is exactly what the definition of Wilayah demands.

The major defect in these people is – keeping in mind the present day and age (that we are living in) which is a time in which various ways and methods of diffusion of news and information are available such that if something happens that makes the news headlines this morning, then within one hour, it will reach the furthest points of the world – that these people use words of exaggeration in relation to the A`immah. It is these incorrect statements which are made and then spread far and wide and strike a huge blow to the Shia populous.

Once they say the things they want to say and then the news reaches to the various cities (of the world), people then proceed to scribble graffiti on the walls of their cities proclaiming the Shia to be disbelievers! After this of course, the enemies start to kill and murder the Shia. These simple minded, unaware people unknowingly utter some words that ultimately lead to the murder of the Shia in another part of the world!

May the curse of Allah (SwT) be upon such uninformed individuals; and may the curse of Allah (SwT) be upon those ignorant, unaware, uneducated people in whose hands are these Majalis (religious gatherings)! We must not let the organization and planning of such gatherings and Majalis lie in the hands of such people. Thus, their planning must stay in the hands of the 'Ulama (scholars) of the society.

From the characteristics that have been mentioned in the tradition under discussion in relation to the Shia is that they do not get angry. Rather they are people who are full of love and possess the traits of elegance and grace; they have the soul and spirit (of action and speech) of 'Ali b. Abi Talib (as) within themselves. They have the spirit of Imam Ja'far b. Muhammad as-Sadiq (as) and the rest of the Infallible Leaders of true guidance within themselves and thus, they even show love and kindness to their enemies!

In addition, the true Shia do not show off. The Imam has said that: "Our true Shia have two different states within themselves. If one of our Shia is busy in the night in the worship of Allah (SwT) and someone sees them, then that person would think that this worshipper has entirely cut himself off from the world and is an ascetic, since he does not take part in the activities of this world. On the other hand, when anyone sees them in the daytime, they would say that he is like a lion in his behavior and is always present in the daily activities of the society, keeping active."

With this said, we can divide the Shia and the Muslims into one of the following five categories:

1. The Geographical Muslim or Shia:

By this we mean a Shia who was born in (for example) Iran. From the point of view of geography, Iran is a country where the Shia live and thus, when they want to count the number of Shia in the world, simply being born in Iran is used as a criteria (for being Shia). Therefore, this humble servant of Allah (SwT) is counted as being a Shia just as all others born in Iran. So then if the person has true belief or not; if he know the names of the A`immah or not; if he can list the A`immah in order that they came or not – it makes no difference. This is what is referred to as the Geographical Shia.

2. Shia by Inheritance:

By this we mean a person whose father and mother were Shia and thus, they were born into a family whose parents are Shia.

3. The Verbal Shia:

These are people who verbally declare that, "We are the Shia of 'Ali b. Abi Talib (as)," however there is no sign of this belief in their actions.

4. The Marginal Shia:

These are Shia that practice the beliefs however are 'border-line' and have not reached the true depths of being a true follower. From the teachings of the Ahlul Bait, the only thing that you can see is their taking part in the 'Azadari (mourning for the death of Imam Husain b. 'Ali (as)) and seeking help and taking the A`immah as an intermediary (Tawassul) and other things such as this – however, how else

can we tell that these are Shia? When the days of 'Ashura come about, they all gather together to beat their chests and attend the Majalis to mourn the death (of Imam Husain b. 'Ali (as)). They also rush to go to Masjid Jamkaran¹ to pray and perform the special prayers there.

We do not wish to say that these things have little importance – rather, they are very, very important, however this is all that they understand from being a Shia and nothing else. As for the characteristic of being “monks during the night (staying up in prayer and worship during the night)” and being “a lion during the daytime (active and involved in the society)” and possessing the beauty of intelligence and preserving the trusts which are given to them (secrets), there are absolutely none of these signs in this group of “Shia”!

5. The True Shia:

These are people who have complete knowledge of the Divine (Allah (SwT)) and the books of the Ahlul Bait (their sayings and words) and their way of life is just as has been mentioned as far as the characteristics have been mentioned in this tradition!

1. A Masjid outside of Qum, Iran which was built by the order of the 12th living Imam. (Tr.)

Discourse 3: Characteristics of The Shia – Part II

The 65th volume of Bihar al-Anwar consists of two important parts, The Greatness of the Shia (فضائل الشيعة) and the Characteristics of the Shia (صفات الشيعة). The chapter on the Greatness of the Shia, illustrates to us the superior status that the Shia possess, while the chapter on the Characteristics of the Shia discuss the characteristics and uniqueness which the Shia should have. For us (those who call themselves Shia), this means that in addition to the noble and lofty rank that is mentioned in the traditions which the Shia possess, they also have a great responsibility by being called Shia.

قَالَ الصَّادِقُ : اِمْتَحِنُوا شِيعَتَنَا عِنْدَ مَوَاقِيتِ الصَّلَاةِ كَيْفَ مُحَافِظَتِهِمْ عَلَيْهَا وَ
إِلَى أَسْرَارِنَا كَيْفَ حَفَظَهُمْ لَهَا وَ عِنْدَ عَدُونِنَا وَ إِلَى أَمْوَالِهِمْ كَيْفَ مَوَاسَاتِهِمْ
لِإِخْوَانِهِمْ فِيهَا.

Imam Ja'far b. Muhammad as-Sadiq (as) has said, “Test our Shia during the times of the (five daily)

Salat – how do they protect them (the Salat) and (also test our Shia) in relation to our (the Ahlul Bait's) secrets – how do they protect them in relation to our enemies; and (also test our Shia) in relation to their money and wealth – how do they spend it among their fellow brothers.”

When the Shia have some work or job to perform and the time for Salat has also arrived, do they give precedence to their work or to the Salat? There are some people who think that the Salat is only to be done when there is nothing else to do, but one tradition tells us that, “Salat in its appointed, initial time (earns) the pleasure of Allah, and Salat in its last time (earns) the mercy of Allah.”

There are even some people from among the Ahlus Sunnah who claim that they are the only true Muslims since they give a great importance to the performance of Salat on time and that we (the Shia) do not!

In relation to the importance of Salat, Imam 'Ali b. Abi Talib (as), in his famous letter of recommendations to Malik al-Ashtar has stated:

إِجْعَلْ أَفْضَلَ أَوْقَاتِكَ لِلصَّلَاةِ. كَيْفَ مُحَافِظَتَهُمْ عَلَيْهَا.

“Make the best of the times that you reserve (during the day) for the Salat and see how all of you (you and your subjects) protect and safeguard this time.”

The word used in this tradition in regards to the Salat is **محافظة**, and this word intends to tell us that many things will cause the Salat to be destroyed. However, the Salat must be protected and of course in these regards, the 'Ulama and scholars must be a practical example for the people.

I will not forget the time when the late Ayatullah Khumayni was teaching classes in the Hawzah 'Ilmiyyah in Qum. We were (at that time) students of the Hawzah, and one day the late Ayatullah Sa'idi had invited us to go to his house and Ayatullah Khumayni was also present at that gathering. We were busying talking and having religious discussions when the time of the Salat came and the sound of the Adhan was heard (in the house). Without even a pause, Ayatullah Khumayni got up, and without any delay or hesitation, started to perform the Salat.

The same rule applies today that wherever we are and whoever we are with, we must give importance to the Salat – especially Salatul Fajr. There are some people that perform the Salat only when they are in the company of others – this is not the Salat (which can be expected from) a student of religion!

Continuing on in the tradition, the meaning of protection of the secrets is to safeguard the status and rank of the Ahlul Bait. By this we mean that the rank which the Ahlul Bait possess must not be spoken about while in the presence of their enemies who do not believe in them (things such as the Wilayatul Takwini (their power and jurisdiction (by the permission of Allah (SwT)) over the universe, Miracles,

Knowledge of the Unseen, etc... which they possess) since these things are nothing other than the secrets of these Noble Personalities.

During our present time, there are some people, who in addition to mentioning their secrets (to the enemies of the Ahlul Bait), also resort to exaggeration in relation to them. For example, some people who compose poems in their praise who out of their own lack of intelligence say things such as Zainab binte 'Ali (s.a) is the manifestation of Allah (SwT) (may Allah (SwT) protect us from such words)!

Poets hold a very high status and the Infallible Leaders used to give them great importance – people such as Da'bal Khaza`i who held a great rank in the sight of the A`immah. However we must strive to make sure that the religious gatherings (Majalis) are not organized and held by people such as this (who write corrupt poems and have deviant thoughts).

Those who are writing poems and composing poetry in relation to the Prophet (S) and the Ahlul Bait must make sure that they present their poems to the 'Ulama first (to read over and make sure they are proper). They must keep away from all forms of exaggeration especially in those instances where the poets are competing with one another to attract the attention of the people.

In regards to this, sometimes we see that one person resorts to Ghuluw (exaggeration of the greatness of the Ahlul Bait) and thus, the next person is forced to present even greater exaggerations, and this act is very dangerous.

The third section of the tradition under review uses the word “مواسات” and this word can be understood in two different ways from its lexical meaning.

The first is to assume that the word comes from the root **وآسي** and the second is that the root word is **آسي** however both of these end up (after the rules of morphology are applied to them) in making the word **مواسات** which is in the meaning of assistance and help.

The Shia is one who is tested through his wealth – how much of it does he keep aside for the help of others?

In our present time, we are faced with many difficulties:

1. Unemployment, which is the real root of all other forms of corruption such as: addiction to drugs, theft, robbery and prostitution;
2. Problems with the youth getting married;
3. Difficulties for people finding affordable housing;
4. Difficulties in going for further education. Many families face the difficulty of providing tuition fees for their youth to go and acquire further education.

Our society consists of people who claim to be Shia, however we see excessive amounts of wealth being wasted on useless things, yet some people in the society do not even have the basic necessities of life!

Therefore, the characteristics of the Shia must also be kept in view and we must remember that we cannot only concentrate on the status and rewards that are promised to the Shia – rather, we need to implement these characteristics within ourselves.

We hope that all of us can keep in mind the commandments of the A`immah in our day to day life and act upon them!

Discourse 4: Characteristics of The Shia – Part

III

Today, we wish to discuss two traditions in relation to the followers of the Ahlul Bait – the Shia. The first tradition concerns the greatness of the Shia, while the second tradition is in regards to the characteristics of the Shia.

دَخَلْتُ عَلَى أَبِي بَكْرٍ الْحَضْرَمِيِّ وَهُوَ يَجُودُ بِنَفْسِهِ فَنَظَرَ إِلَيَّ وَقَالَ لَيْتَ سَاعَةَ
الْكَذِبِ أَشْهَدُ عَلَى جَعْفَرِ بْنِ مُحَمَّدٍ أَنِّي سَمِعْتُهُ يَقُولُ لَا تَمَسُّ النَّارَ مَنْ مَاتَ وَهُوَ
يَقُولُ بِهَذَا الْأَمْرِ.

The narrator of the tradition states that, “I entered the presence of Abi Bakr al-Hadhrami (one of the special companions of Imam Ja'far b. Muhammad as-Sadiq (as)) while he was about to pass away. He looked at me and said, 'This is not the time to speak lies. I bear witness on (the life of) Ja'far b. Muhammad that I heard him say, 'The fire of hell shall never touch the person who dies while believes in this command (the Wilayah of the Ahlul Bait).’”

عَنْ سُلَيْمَانَ بْنِ مَهْرَانَ قَالَ: دَخَلْتُ الصَّادِقَ وَعِنْدَهُ نَفَرٌ مِنَ الشَّيْعَةِ وَهُوَ يَقُولُ
مَعَاشِرَ الشَّيْعَةِ كُونُوا لَنَا زِينًا وَلَا تَكُونُوا عَلَيْنَا شَيْنًا قُولُوا لِلنَّاسِ حُسْنًا إِحْفَظُوا
أَلْسِنَتَكُمْ وَكُفُّوا عَنِ الْفُضُولِ وَقَبِيحِ الْقَوْلِ.

Salman b. Mahran said, “I entered into the presence of as-Sadiq (as) while there were a group of people from among the Shia in his company and he said the following to them, 'O' assembly of Shia! Be a beauty for us (the Ahlul Bait) and do not be a source of embarrassment for us. Speak to the people in good ways and protect your tongues. Save your tongues from speaking things that do not need to be said, and which are detested.”¹

Imam Ja'far b. Muhammad as-Sadiq (as) brings up two issues in this tradition – the first being a general rule and regulation, while the other is a clear example that must be put into practice.

The general rule is that through our actions, we must not be a source of embarrassment for the Ahlul Bait meaning that we must act in such a way that when people look at us, they would immediately send blessings upon those whom we follow and would say, “Congratulations to people such as yourself that have been trained and nurtured as you have been.” We must not be a source of shame for the Ahlul Bait since they are the progeny of the Prophet (S).

The 'Ulama of the Science of Akhlaq have stated that for those traversing the spiritual path towards reaching Allah (SwT), the first step that must be taken is to correct one's tongue, and as long as the tongue and what one speaks is not corrected, the heart will never become purified.

The tongue is the key to the entire essence of a person such that we are able to discern what kind of a person an individual is by his method of speech.

It is stated that:

إِخْتَبِرُوهُمْ بِصِدْقِ الْحَدِيثِ.

“Test and examine people by the truthfulness of their speech.”

If a person's tongue is under lock and key, then one will definitely speak very carefully, with honesty, and will be extremely vigilant in what one says.

One of the ways to protect the tongue is just as the final commandment in the tradition states that one should:

كُفُّوْهَا عَنِ الْفُضُولِ

“Prevent it (the tongue) from speaking excessively.”

Speaking less is one of the first things a person can do to begin his journey on the path towards Allah

(SwT) and this is known in the books of Akhlaq as sumt or keeping quiet.

One scholar has said that there are five things which can any person who has defects within himself become a perfect and complete person and they are: silence, fasting, waking in the night (to pray), seclusion, and the constant remembrance of Allah (SwT).

Truly, if a person were to practice these five things, one would definitely become closer to Allah (SwT).

The first of the points mentioned which is silence, does not mean that one does not speak at all. Rather, it means that one should not speak if it is not necessary and one must avoid and kind of foul or vulgar speech!

1. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 65, pg. 161

Discourse 5: Characteristics of The Shia – Part IV

Our ethical discussion today is a continuation of the topic on the Greatness of the Shia (فضائل الشيعة). The late 'Allamah Majlisi has presented a very detailed discussion in relation to both the Greatness of the Shia (فضائل الشيعة) and the Characteristics of the Shia (صفات الشيعة) and he narrates many traditions in regards to these two issues.

It is very important that all of us read these traditions and know for ourselves – and then convey to others – the meaning of these traditions so that those people who feel proud just because they have the title of Shia attached to them will know that to be a follower of the teachings of the Ahlul Bait (and to be called a Shia) is not an easy task.

We narrate one tradition which even though does not directly speak about the greatness of the Shia, however it addresses a responsibility that a true Shia must fulfill.

In this short tradition from Imam Ja'far b. Muhammad as-Sadiq (as) addressed to Abu Basir, the Imam explains the characteristics of a Shia.

عَنْ مُحَمَّدِ بْنِ إِسْمَاعِيلَ، عَنْ أَبِيهِ قَالَ: كُنْتُ عِنْدَ أَبِي عَبْدِ اللَّهِ : إِذَا دَخَلَ عَلَيْهِ أَبُو
بَصِيرٍ ... فَقَالَ يَا أَبَا مُحَمَّدٍ لَقَدْ ذَكَرَكُمُ اللَّهُ فِي كِتَابِهِ فَقَالَ: (إِنَّ عِبَادِي لَيْسَ لَكَ
عَلَيْهِمْ سُلْطَانٌ) وَاللَّهِ مَا أَرَادَ بِهَذَا إِلَّا الْأَئِمَّةَ وَشِيعَتَهُمْ، فَهَلْ سَرَرْتِكَ يَا أَبَا مُحَمَّدٍ؟
قَالَ: قُلْتُ: جُعِلْتُ فِدَاكَ زِدْنِي ...

It has been narrated from Muhammad b. Isma'il from his father that he said, "I was with Abi 'Abdillah (Ja'far b. Muhammad as-Sadiq (as)) when Abu Basir entered our company. He was breathing heavily when the Imam turned towards him and asked him what was troubling him. Abu Basir said that old age had taken him over and he was finding it very difficult to breathe. He stated that he was on the verge of leaving this world, but worse than all of this, he was worried about what his state would be after death and where he would end up.

The Imam said to him, 'Why are you speaking like this when you have the honour of being classified as a Shia?' At this point, the Imam went on to list the greatness and reasons why one who is a Shia should be proud and every time the Imam mentioned a point, he said to Abu Basir, "Does this not bring pleasure to you (that you possess this trait)?"

Abu Basir would reply to the Imam: "Of course, may I be sacrificed for you, please continue..."

Continuing on, the Imam (as) then said, "O' Abu Basir! Surely Allah has spoken about you, our Shia in the Qur'an when He said, {Surely over My servants no authority shall you (Shaitan) have}1 and verily I swear that Allah has not intended any other servants of His in this verse except the A'immah and their Shia (followers).”2

In relation to Shaitan, there are many questions which the youth have recently brought up, and thus it is necessary to review these queries.

Question 1:

Why did Allah (SwT) create this filthy, despicable creature known as Shaitan who is able to whisper evil thoughts to us and he takes us away from the path of happiness, whereas we were created to traverse the path of happiness and success?

Answer 1:

Allah (SwT) did not create Shaitan as Shaitan – rather, He created him pure and there was even a time when he was classified among the Angels and thus he was not a creation that was made to negatively influence others. Rather, he was a righteous creature and was among the pious, spiritually close worshippers in the presence of Allah (SwT).

However, after choosing the wrong path, he lost his spiritual direction and through his pride and seeing himself as greater than Adam (as) and through his envy and jealousy, he ended up following his low desires. Thus, he sought status and greatness (over Adam (as)) and lowered his rank.

Therefore, the original cause for the spiritual fall of Shaitan was due to him following his low desires and even today, if a person does not follow these in their life, then there is no way that Shaitan can influence him.

In relation to Shaitan, the Qur`an mentions that:

أَبَىٰ وَاسْتَكْبَرَ وَكَانَ مِنَ الْكَافِرِينَ

“But he became conceited and developed pride in himself and thus he was one of the disbelievers.”³

Due to his actions, Allah (SwT) lowered him to the status that he currently has and thus with this said we see that Shaitan was not always Shaitan as we know him to be.

Retort to Question 1:

If Shaitan was part of the group of Angels, and as we know that Angels do not have the ability to make decisions on their own and are all under the command of Allah (SwT), then how did he disobey the orders and turn away from the commandments of Allah (SwT)?

Answer:

Shaitan was not an Angel such that he did not have the power to make his own decisions – rather, he was from among the Jinn.

Question 2:

As it is commonly known, we were all created for happiness and prosperity:

مَا خَلَقْتُ الْجِنَّ وَالْإِنْسَ إِلَّا لِيَعْبُدُونِ

“I (Allah) did not create the Jinn and Mankind except that they should worship Me.”⁴

With this said, why was it necessary to have a creation such as Shaitan who would irritate people. As well, him being a creation who can not be seen and thus, it is not possible to defend ourselves from

him? This (in our opinion) goes against the actual purpose of the creation of mankind.

Answer 2: The Qur`an states that Shaitan cannot influence anyone through his own accord as the doors to the heart of each person are closed to Shaitan. Thus, it is the person himself who opens the door of his heart to Shaitan. In reality, there is not a single despicable creation that can in any way influence either the country which a person lives in, nor the soul of a person:

إِنَّمَا سُلْطَانُهُ عَلَى الَّذِينَ يَتَوَلَّوْنَهُ وَالَّذِينَ هُمْ بِهِ مُشْرِكُونَ

“His authority (that of Shaitan) is only over those who take him as a supporter and who join partners with Allah.”⁵

That person who sets up Shaitan as a partner to Allah (SwT) and follows him (Shaitan) will also be called a Shaitan on the Day of Judgement!

وَمَا كَانَ لِيَّ عَلَيْكُمْ مِنْ سُلْطَانٍ إِلَّا أَنْ دَعَوْتُكُمْ فَأَسْتَجَبْتُمْ فَلَا تَلُومُونِي وَلُومُوا
أَنْفُسَكُمْ

“I (Shaitan) had no authority over you except that I invited you and you listened to me. Therefore, do not reproach or blame me, rather, blame your own souls.”⁶

It is worthy to note that Shaitan himself is one of the means or instruments towards perfection for the human being who is striving to become a complete person, because since struggling and fighting against him will would lead to strengthening ones' own inner faith.

In his book the Philosophy of History, one of the well known writers of the West named Toinby writes that, “I have studied all of the nations of the world and did not find a single civilization except that at one time or another, they were put face to face with a powerful foreign enemy. In order to defend themselves, they gathered all the people together and in the end, were victorious.”

Thus, there is a wisdom in why Shaitan exists. Similarly, if there were no lower desires in a human being, then the mystics ('Urafa) would not become as strong as they are in their closeness to Allah (SwT).

The Qur`an mentions that:

إِنَّ عِبَادِي لَيْسَ لَكَ عَلَيْهِمْ سُلْطَانٌ

“Certainly Shaitan has no control or authority over My true servants.”

The meaning of this verse is not that Shaitan has no control over the Shia, rather, Allah (SwT) is telling us that He is the defender and protector of those people that come towards Him and worship Him.

This is truly a grand station and it is one of the reasons that those who are the true Shia should have pride that they are not under the influence of Shaitan.

The meaning of this verse is also that those people who are under the influence of Shaitan are not true Shia, and therefore this verse actually increases our responsibility as followers of the Ahlul Bait.

The Shia are not people who are Ma'sum (sinless) and thus, it is possible that Shaitan can go after them, however the Qur`an tells us that:

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ اتَّقَوْا إِذَا مَسَّهُمْ طَائِفٌ مِّنَ الشَّيْطَانِ تَذَكَّرُوا فَإِذَا هُمْ مُبْصِرُونَ

“When a thought of evil from Shaitan assaults those people who have consciousness of Allah, then they bring Allah to remembrance, then they are able to see straight (the true path) once again!”⁷

When those people who have tawqā are faced with the evil whispers of Shaitan they rush towards the remembrance of Allah (SwT) (meaning that they bring to memory the rewards and punishments that Allah (SwT) has mentioned in the Qur`an) and in His remembrance, they once again open their eyes to the realities around them.

It is possible that Shaitan can come towards a Shia, but he can not control them and thus, the responsibility of those who are followers of the Ahlul Bait is very heavy.

Thus the powers of Shaitan should have no influence on the individual, society, printed–press, market place and in the temporal and spiritual life of a person and if this does happen (Shaitan takes over) then this is a sign that the person is not really a Shia.

It is our prayer that Allah (SwT) gives us the success to have the pride of being classified as one of those who is a true Shia!

1. Surat al–Hijr (15), Verse 42

2. Bihar al–Anwar, vol. 65, pg. 51

3. Surat al–Baqarah (2), Verse 34

4. Surat al–Nahl (16), Verse 10

5. Ibid., Verse 100

6. Surat Ibrahim (14), Verse 22

7. Surat al-A`raf (7), Verse 201

Discourse 6: If Sahib Al-Zaman Were To Come (Right Now)...

Speaking about our living Imam is both enlightening and one which spiritually trains and educates all of us. The late 'Allamah Majlisi has narrated a tradition in relation to Imam al-Mahdi (as) which states:

إِذَا قَامَ الْقَائِمُ حَكَمَ بِالْعَدْلِ وَارْتَفَعَ فِي أَيَّامِهِ الْجَوْرَ وَامْنَتَ بِهِ السُّبُلَ وَأَخْرَجَتِ
الْأَرْضُ بَرَكَاتِهَا وَرَدَّ كُلَّ حَقٍّ إِلَى أَهْلِهِ وَلَمْ يَبْقَ أَهْلٌ دِينَ حَتَّى يُظْهَرَ الْإِسْلَامَ وَ
يَعْتَرَفُوا بِالْإِيمَانِ.

“When al-Qaim makes his advent, he will judge with justice and during the time of his advent, all forms of tyranny will be removed and the paths (towards him) will be made safe. The Earth will bring forth Her blessings and the rights of each and every person will be given to them and no person who follows any other religion (din) will remain except that they will accept al-Islam and will come towards true faith.”¹

In this tradition, there are seven tasks which have been mentioned that the Imam will accomplish:

1 and 2: The government of justice and the removal of all forms of tyranny: The opposite of justice (عدل) is oppression (ظلم) – not tyranny (جور) – whereas equality (قسط) is the opposite of tyranny (جور) (according to the 'Arabic definition and the Islamic understanding of these words and their meanings).

The difference between justice (عدل) and equality (قسط) is that as justice refers to not taking away the rights of another person, equality means that there is no differentiation between people. Therefore, oppression means that you take something from another for your own self, where as tyranny means that you take something from a person and give it to somebody else.

For example, if I forcefully take away Zaid's house from him for my own personal use – this act is oppression. But if I take Zaid's house and give it to another person – this is tyranny. The exact opposite of this is that I do not take Zaid's house for my own personal use – and this is justice, and if I do not take it for the use of another person – then this is equality. Therefore, equality means that differentiation does

not exist where as justice means that oppression does not exist.

3. The paths will be made safe: The paths towards the Imam will be made safe and secure.
4. Natural Blessings: The Earth will bring forth her blessings, now whether these are the blessings that come about through farming, blessing of the minerals from the Earth or other types of powers and energies that are presently hidden from us – these may all be correct.
5. Responsibilities will be returned to their rightful holder: The rights and responsibilities will be given back to those who have lost them, and this is completely opposite to our present day and age in which a great number of jobs and occupations are in the hands of those who have no knowledge of them, because the issue of who they know has taken precedence over what they know.
6. The Ruling of al-Islam: No other religion will remain on the Earth except for Islam and thus all other religions will fuse into one Religion and that will be al-Islam.
7. Sincere attraction to al-Islam: This part of the tradition has two meanings to it. It is possible that it refers to the point that everyone will become followers of the teachings of the Ahlul Bait, or it could mean that in addition to people showing an outward form of true faith, they will also have the inner belief to make them true believers.

There is a difference that has been mentioned in the traditions in relation to the terms Islam and Iman. Some of the traditions state that Islam is what a person verbally declares and through this declaration, his life is protected and the meat which he slaughters is made permissible to eat. However Iman is that thing which is the true essence (of servitude to Allah (SwT)) which will act as salvation for a person on the Day of Judgement.

In other traditions, it is mentioned that Islam is equivalent to the Masjidul Haram, whereas Iman is (like) the Ka'bah (general and specific). There is a possibility that this explanation could be in reference to the verse of the Qur'an which states:

قَالَتِ الْأَعْرَابُ آمَنَّا...

“The desert 'Arabs say to you (O' Muhammad) that we believe...”²

At the head of all the things that the Imam will perform, we see in the tradition that there are four major things which he will do which we summarize as being:

1. Correcting the Theological Beliefs:

مَا عَلَى ظَهْرِ الْأَرْضِ بَيْتِ حَجَرٍ وَ مَدَرٍ إِلَّا أَدْخَلَهُ اللَّهُ كَلِمَةَ الْإِسْلَامِ.

“There will not remain a single stone house, mud house, nor a tent upon the entire Earth except the word (teachings) of Islam will be in that place (and thus, polytheism will no longer exist).”³

2. Completion of the Intelligence:

The advancement of knowledge and intelligence will also take place (at this time), just as the late 'Allamah Majlisi makes clear by quoting a tradition from the Infallibles in relation to this point:

إِذَا قَامَ قَائِمُنَا وَضَعَ يَدَهُ عَلَى رُؤُوسِ الْعِبَادِ...

“When our Qaim makes his advent, he will place his hand over the heads of the servants...”

It is possible that this means that people will be under the direction and guidance of the Imam.

فَجَمَعَ بِهَا عُقُولِهِمْ وَ كَمَلَتْ بِهَا أَحْلَامَهُمْ.

“...so then (through this act), he will gather together their intelligence and complete their knowledge.”⁴

3. Justice and Equality:

In the various traditions, it has been mentioned that:

يَمْلَأُ الْأَرْضَ عَدْلًا وَ قِسْطًا كَمَا مُلِئَتْ ظُلْمًا وَ جَوْرًا.

“He (the Imam) will fill the Earth with justice and equality just as it had been filled with oppression and tyranny.”⁵

4. Correction of the Moral Ethical Traits:

From the traditions which speak about the signs at the end of time, we can deduce that removing all of the corrupt ethical traits and bringing back the moral values of Islam back to life will be the duty of the Imam.

There are also traditions which state that before the advent of Imam al-Qaim (as), many corrupt ethical traits such as: adultery, theft, bribery, selling less than what one paid for, the drinking of alcohol, murdering of countless innocent people and other such sins will be very common.

Thus, the meaning of this tradition is that when Imam al-Mahdi (as) rises up to remove and eradicate all of these things, the entire valued and cherished system of moral ethics would already be completely destroyed and it is Imam al-Mahdi (as) who will restore it.

Imam al-Mahdi (as) will possess an army, military and many helpers and supporters, just as we recite in the Ziyarat of Ale Yasin:

وَأَجْعَلْنِي مِنْ شِيعَتِهِ وَاتِّبَاعِهِ وَانصَارِهِ.

“So then place me (O' Allah) amongst his followers, supporters and helpers.”

Or as it can be seen in some traditions that:

وَالْمُجَاهِدِينَ بَيْنَ يَدَيْهِ.

”(And place us) among those who struggle and fight in his way.”

That person who wishes to be a helper of the Imam must work tirelessly in these four points mentioned and the one who does not possess any of these four points within himself, however prays to Allah (SwT) to make him of the helpers of the Imam (as) will see that his prayers will be far from being answered.

If the scholars take it upon themselves to introduce this sort of ethical program (in the community) then without doubt, we will see one large class of preparation and upbringing take form among the community members.

Tawassul (to the Imam) is a good thing and it has its own place – however:

وَأَجْعَلْنِي مِنْ شِيعَتِهِ وَاتِّبَاعِهِ وَانصَارِهِ.

“So then place me (O' Allah) amongst his followers, supporters and helpers.”

This request will never be achieved simply through Tawassul and prayer – rather, our belief and acceptance of the Tawhid of Allah (SwT) must be one of sincerity and thus, we must remove all forms and effects of polytheism from our hearts, lives and from the society.

We must practically implement justice and equality in relation to the people and our family and those who are around us and we must make the valuable ethical traits apparent within ourselves. If it was made completely clear for what reasons the Imam would make his advent, then this would definitely change the face of the society.

One who does not possess any of these traits can not expect to stand in the ranks with the Imam. Therefore, it is very good that we actively do something to call the attention of the people towards the goals and objectives of the Imam so that all of us can mound ourselves to becoming better human beings.

We must know that there are hidden hands at work which are striving to pollute the gatherings (majalis) that we hold for Imam al-Mahdi (as) by introducing despicable forms of singing and playing of music as well as breaking other limits of the Shari'ah. Sometimes, the enemy will use such religious gatherings and programs to reach their evil goals, just as the story of Masjid Dhirar through which the enemies wanted to build a Masjid to actually destroy the roots and symbol of what a Masjid stands for!

Thus, the goals and values must be manifested in the correct manner, lest the enemies who are trying to remove the value and worth of such programs become successful in their goals.

We hope that Allah (SwT) accepts this supplication in relation to us:

اللَّهُمَّ اجْعَلْنِي مِنْ أَعْوَانِهِ وَ أَنْصَارِهِ وَ أَتَاعِهِ وَ شِيعَتِهِ وَ الْمُجَاهِدِينَ بَيْنَ يَدَيْهِ.

“O' Allah! Place me from amongst his helpers, assistants, followers and supporters and of those who fight in his ranks.” !

1. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 52, pg. 338

2. Surat al-Hujurat (4!), Verse 14

3. Tafsir al-Qurtubi [Imam Abu `Abdullah Muhammad ibn Ahmad ibn Abu Bakr al-Ansari al-Qurtubi], vol. 12, pg. 300

4. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 52, pg. 338

5. Ibid., vol. 14, pg. 33

Discourse 7: Attaining One's Sustenance

عَنْ ابْنِ عُمَرَ قَالَ: قَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ : لَيْسَ شَيْءٌ تَبَاعِدُكُمْ مِنَ النَّارِ إِلَّا وَ قَدْ ذَكَرْتَهُ لَكُمْ وَلَا شَيْءٌ يُقْرِبُكُمْ مِنَ الْجَنَّةِ إِلَّا وَ قَدْ دَلَلْتُكُمْ عَلَيْهِ. إِنَّ رُوحَ الْقُدْسِ نَفَثَ فِي رَوْعِي أَنَّهُ لَنْ يَمُوتَ عَبْدٌ مِنْكُمْ حَتَّى يَسْتَكْمَلَ رِزْقُهُ، فَأَجْمَلُوا فِي الطَّلَبِ فَلَا يَحْمِلَنَّكُمْ اسْتِبْطَاءُ الرِّزْقِ عَلَى أَنْ تَطْلُبُوا شَيْئًا مِنْ فَضْلِ اللَّهِ بِمَعْصِيَتِهِ، فَإِنَّهُ لَنْ يُنَالَ مَا عِنْدَ اللَّهِ إِلَّا بِطَاعَتِهِ أَلَا وَ إِنَّ لِكُلِّ امْرَأٍ رِزْقًا هُوَ يَأْتِيهِ لَا مَحَالَةَ، فَمَنْ رَضِيَ بِهِ بُورِكَ لَهُ فِيهِ وَ وَسَّعَهُ، وَ مَنْ لَمْ يَرْضَ بِهِ لَمْ يُبَارَكْ لَهُ فِيهِ وَ لَمْ يَسَّعْهُ، إِنَّ الرِّزْقَ لِيَطْلُبُ الرَّجُلَ كَمَا يَطْلُبُهُ أَجَلُهُ.

It has been narrated from Ibne 'Umar that the Prophet (S) said, “There is nothing that will keep you away from the fire of hell except that I have explained it to you, and there is nothing that will bring you closer to Paradise but that I have guided you towards it. Surely the Holy Spirit has brought inspiration into my heart that not a single servant from among you will die until one's sustenance has been completed. So then seek this (your sustenance) in the best possible way (not resorting to the prohibited means).

Do not let the slowness of the sustenance coming to you by the grace of Allah make you seek it by disobeying Him. Surely that which is with Allah will never reach a person except through obedience to Him. Verily for each person there is sustenance (designated for him) that will reach him and there is no doubt in this. So whoever is pleased with one's sustenance, it will bring blessings to one and will be increased; and the person who is not pleased with his sustenance, it will not bring blessings to him nor will it be increased. Surely the sustenance goes in search of a person, just like one's appointed time (death) goes in search of a person.”¹

The Noble Messenger of Allah (S) has stated that, “You must distance yourself from whatever keeps you away from Paradise – either through your speech or actions. In addition, I have commanded and taught you all of the things which bring you closer to Paradise and which keep you away from the Hell fire.”

The purpose of this tradition is to show us that we must strive and struggle to put the laws of Islam into practice and it is this act that separates us (the Shia) from the Ahlus Sunnah, who are of the belief that whatever has not been expressly legislated (in the Islamic texts) is not an applicable ruling (to follow).

With this said, we see that the Ahlus Sunnah give the permission to their Fuqaha to devise their own Islamic rules and regulations through the practice of Qiyas², Istihsan³ and Masalah Mursalah⁴.

Is such a school of thought (that of the Ahlus Sunnah) in which half of their teachings are from Allah (SwT) and the Infallible Prophet of Allah (S), while the other half which are from the whims and desires of the people (their Scholars) the true set of beliefs? Or is the true school of thought in which all of the teachings are from Allah (SwT) and the Ma'sumin (meaning the Shia)? Thus, there is a great difference between these two groups.

Of course the apparent understanding of the verse that states:

أَلْيَوْمَ أَكْمَلْتُ لَكُمْ دِينَكُمْ

“On this day (the 18th of Dhul Hijjah), I have completed your din (al-Islam) for you.”⁵

is just as we have mentioned since the word 'din' includes all of the theological beliefs, practical Islamic laws and the moral and ethical guidelines. Thus, the tradition which we started with shows us that we must deduce the laws of Islam, the theological beliefs and our moral and ethical guidelines through the process of Ijtihad (from the sources of Islam) and we are not permitted to formulate and devise our own laws!

At this point, the following issues must be mentioned:

1. There are some lazy people who feel that by relying on the verse of the Qur'an which states:

وَمَا مِنْ دَابَّةٍ فِي الْأَرْضِ إِلَّا عَلَى اللَّهِ رِزْقُهَا

“There is not a single creature on the Earth except that its sustenance is guaranteed by Allah.”⁶

or by relying on the traditions which state that everyone's sustenance has been decided and specified (by Allah (SwT)), they assume that there is no need to struggle to make ends meet since their sustenance has already been designated and it will reach them in any way (whether they work or not). Thus, they feel that no mouth will remain open except that sustenance will reach it (from Allah (SwT))!

These types of people whose understanding and awareness of the religion and the teachings of the school of thought are very simple and weak give excuses to the enemies (through these sorts of beliefs) that it is religion which causes the problems within the economy of a country. They make other people believe that it is religion itself which leads to a stopping of positive activity which could bring benefits to the (material) life of people.

These people think that it is religion which forces a person to submit his entire presence to such things

(that could otherwise make them productive and well off) and makes them bring forth the excuse that if such and such gift were not granted to him, then for sure they would not have any sustenance reach them (and thus, they would have starved). These types of people also think that if a particular sustenance was meant for them, then definitely without any questions it will reach them (and no one can stop it from coming to them).

This sort of thought gives those who exploit others a very good opportunity to place the yolk of slavery around their necks and prevent them from the most basic of needs and requirements of life.

However, if these people possessed even a minute understanding of the Qur`an and the Islamic traditions, then it would be sufficient for them to reach the following conclusion that Islam requires a person to strive and struggle in order to acquire any sort of benefit in the material and spiritual realms of humanity. In fact, the Qur`an has presented the following verse as the slogan of such people (who strive and struggle):

لَيْسَ لِلْإِنْسَانِ إِلَّا مَا سَعَى

“Mankind will have nothing except that which they strive for.”

In order to be examples and models for the rest of the people, the leaders of Islam (the Prophet and A`immah) used to exert much toil and labour in working and busied themselves in strenuous activity. The previous Prophets too were no exception to this rule. We see that they were shepherds, tailors, cultivators of the fields and farmers.

If the meaning that one's sustenance is guaranteed from Allah (SwT) means that we are to sit in our houses and wait for the sustenance to reach us, then we would not have seen the Prophets and A`immah – who were all much more acquainted and knowledgeable with the teachings of the religion than us – exerting such labour and toil in working!

Therefore, we must state that: the sustenance of each and every person has been determined and fixed, however in the same vein it is based on the condition that a person works and struggles (to acquire it). Any time this condition is not acted upon, then that which has been promised will not come about.

Similar is the case of death: “Each and every person has an appointed time (to die) and his or her lifespan has been determined.” Without doubt the meaning of this speech is not that if a person was to go towards suicide and kill himself, or was to eat or drink something to induce death, that he would remain alive until his appointed time of death. Rather, this means that the body which we have been given has the ability to remain for as long as it has been appointed to remain here (on Earth) on the condition that the principles of cleanliness and hygiene are observed and that a person keeps away from those things which are hazardous to one's health and can lead him to dying sooner.

An important point to mention here is that the verses of the Qur`an and the traditions which speak in relation to the sustenance being specified for every person truly act just as brakes (similar to the brakes in a car that stop the movement of the car) on the thoughts of those people who are greedy, worship the material world and who try to achieve material gains through whatever means possible. It puts a stop to the thoughts of those people who think that if they do not resort to various sorts of oppression or tyrannical acts, then they will not be able to provide (for their families) and lead a (good) material life.

How is it possible that when a person grows and becomes big and has the strength and energy to perform any task that at this stage in his life, Allah (SwT) would forget him? Does the intellect and firm belief in Allah (SwT) permit a person to think that in such a stage (of his life), it is possible that his sustenance would not be provided to him (by Allah (SwT)) such that he must drown himself in the pool of oppression and tyranny and usurp the rights of other people and through greed and gluttony, steal the rights of the oppressed?

Of course we can not deny the fact that some forms of sustenance – whether a person goes after it or not – will definitely come looking for him. Can we deny the fact that the light of the sun shines on our house without us doing anything; or that the rain falls and the weather changes in search of us without anything of our own doing, or can we deny the fact that intelligence, aptitude and ability which was with us from the very first day we were born was put inside us without any struggle and endeavour on our part?

We are also not able to deny the fact that in some instances, a person is not forced to go after something (such as sustenance). Rather, due to some events which occur in his life, some gifts are bequeathed upon him. We may look at such events that happen as purely coincidental, however in reality and keeping in mind the organization of creation (put forth by Allah (SwT)), this too has been done according to some reason.

Without doubt, this sort of sustenance coming to a person is different than the sustenance that comes to him through his own work and struggles, however this sort of blessing, which is sometimes referred to as “coming from nowhere” or in more precise terms, “a gift that was given unexpectedly” is a grace from Allah (SwT) which has reached us.

If we do not look after and take care of such gifts in the proper way, then these too will slip away from our hands and we will be left with nothing or we will be left with something that would not produce any (positive) effects in our lives.

The well known words of the Commander of the Faithful, 'Ali b. Abi Talib (as) contained in letter number 31 of Nahjul Balagha, which he wrote to his son Imam Hasan b. 'Ali (as) states that:

وَاعْلَمْ يَا بُنَيَّ! إِنَّ الرِّزْقَ رِزْقَانِ: رِزْقٌ تَطْلُبُهُ وَرِزْقٌ يَطْلُبُكَ.

“My son, you must know that surely sustenance is of two types: the sustenance that you go after (seeking it) and the sustenance which comes after you (seeking you).”

This tradition emphasizes the issues which we have discussed so far.

In any case, the main point here is that all of the teachings of Islam tell us that:

1. In order to achieve a better life – whether this is the material or spiritual realm – we must exert extra toil and struggle; and the thought that our sustenance has already been determined (by Allah (SwT)) and thus we don't have to work hard for it is completely wrong.⁷

2. This is a lesson to all of those who are students of the Islamic sciences that we must have true faith that Allah, the Most High, will make the sustenance of all of the people of knowledge reach to their rightful owners. Why do we say this? If the scholars of religion fall into the thought of gathering wealth (for themselves), then we see two major dangers that will come from this:

A) The scholars of Islam are supposed to be examples for the people. If the scholars themselves are running after the material aspects of the transient world then they will not be able to be practical role models for the people.

B) The wealth that others (other than the scholars of Islam) hoard does not affect the religion. However, if a scholar of Islam seeks to gather wealth through either the permitted or the unpermitted channels and other means, then this would definitely strike a blow to the religion – this is most definitely the source of all tragedies!

1. Ibid., vol. 77, pg. 185

2. Qiyas: This is an act which can lead (a Scholar) to knowledge or assumption in relation to an Islamic legislation in which there is no clear proof mentioned (in the Qur'an or the Prophetic traditions) to formulate a ruling. The Shi'a Ulama do not consider Qiyas as one of the methods of reaching to the Islamic rulings, however a majority of the Fuqaha of the Ahlus Sunnah accept this method. [Al-Mujiz Fi Usul al-Fiqh, Ayatullah Ja'far Subhani, vol. 1, pg. 16]

3. Istihsan: The lexical meaning of this word is to consider something as good, however in the science of Jurisprudence ('Ilm al-Usul) it means to consider one act as being better than another act without basing this conclusion on any proof from the Islamic legislation (Qur'an and traditions of the Prophet). A majority of the Sunni Fuqaha` such as those of the Hanafi and Maliki schools of law accept this form of deduction whereas the Shi'a and those of the Shaf'i schools are opposed to it. [Al-Mujiz Fi Usul al-Fiqh, Ayatullah Ja'far Subhani, vol. 1, pg. 17]

4. Masalah Mursalah: This term used in the Science of Jurisprudence ('Ilm al-Usul) refers to making a ruling based on the overall goodness (of the ruling) without basing it on any proof from the Islamic sources (Qur'an and the traditions of the Prophet). Some of the scholars of the Ahlus Sunnah accept this method of deduction of the Islamic legislation, however the Fuqaha of the Shi'a are completely opposed to it. [Al-Mujiz Fi Usul al-Fiqh, Ayatullah Ja'far Subhani, vol. 1, pg. 17]

5. Surat al-Maidah (5), Verse 3

6. Surat Hud (11), Verse 6

7. In this regards, please refer to Tafsir-e-Namunah, vol. 9, pg. 20.

Discourse 8: Characteristics Of The Shia – Part V

سَمِعْتُ أَبَا عَبْدِ اللَّهِ يَقُولُ: إِنَّ أَحَقَّ النَّاسِ بِالْوَرَعِ آلِ مُحَمَّدٍ وَشِيعَتِهِمْ كَيْ تَقْتَدِي
الرَّعِيَّةَ بِهِمْ.

I heard Aba 'Abdillah (as) say, “The closest people to precaution and keeping away from sins (al-Wara') are the family of Muhammad (blessings of Allah be upon him and his family) and their Shia (followers) as long as other people are following them (those who claim to be the Shia or followers).”¹

Surely being classified as a Shia is a gift from the Imam to us. The Infallible A`immah and the Prophet (S) are all leaders for the fspeople, and the Shia too must be leaders for the people.

In reality, within an Islamic society, the Shia must be at the forefront and others must follow behind them – just as we see in the south of Lebanon that among the ranks of those who are struggling (for their rights) are the Shia and the others are following them. Everyone knows and recognizes these people (in South Lebanon) as the ones who are sacrificing themselves and giving up their lives for their cause.

Throughout the entire world, the Shia must not only be known for their struggling and opposition (to tyranny) and their active Jihad (against the enemy), rather they must also be role-models and examples in all aspects of life for others to follow

The word Wara' (ورع) is a concept that is even higher than just plain Taqwa (تقوى). Some of the great scholars have said that Wara' can actually be divided into four categories:

1. Level One – The Wara' of the Ta`ibin

(Those who are repentant): In this level, a person is saved from committing open transgressions (against the laws of Allah (SwT)); and the simplest level of this is that of 'Adalah (the character of being just and upright). By this we mean that after committing a sin and performing sincere repentance, the person returns back to the ranks of those who are upright and just ('Adil).

2. Level Two – The Wara' of the Salihin

(Those who are righteous): At this level, a person keeps away from things which are doubtful – meaning that those things which are apparently permitted (halal), however there may be some doubt in regards to

them and thus, a person keeps away from these things as well.

3. Level Three – The Wara' of the Muttaqin

(Those who have Allah-Consciousness): These people refrain from sinning, and also refrain from those things in which there is doubt and those things which are permitted (halal) however in which there is a possibility that they will be dragged towards the forbidden (haram) if they perform these acts. For example, a person who speaks little since he fears that if he begins to speak too much, he may unknowingly backbite another person. In reality, this sort of person has entered into a mental state of:

أَتْرُكُ مَا لَا بَأْسَ بِهِ حَذَرًا مِمَّا بَأْسَ بِهِ.

“I will refrain from those things which there is no problem in performing with the fear that I may go towards those things which are problematic (in performing).”

4. Level Four – The Wara' of the Siddiqin

(Those who are the Truthful Ones): At this level, one turns his attention completely away from everything other than Allah (SwT) because of the fear that he may waste precious time of his life (on other than His Creator). This person also turns his spiritual eyes away from everything other than Allah (SwT) and focuses all of his attention only on Him so that the time of his life is spent in looking towards the Creator.

Truthfully, the most valuable possession of our lives is time, but unfortunately sometimes we waste it and are negligent (of Allah (SwT)). Thus, the truthful ones realize that their level of Wara' is in relation to the time and how they spend it and are careful that they do not waste it in being negligent of Allah (SwT).

Imam Ja'far b. Muhammad as-Sadiq (as) has said that the most precautious of people are the family of the Prophet and their followers (Shia) and that the minimum level that they (the Shia) must be at is the first level – meaning that the Shia must be fair and upright ('Adil) people and leaders for other people. Thus, a Shia must not only be trying to save himself (from the hell fire), but he must also be striving to save others around him.

At the end of Suratul Furqan (25), there are 12 characteristics mentioned for the 'Ibadul Rahman (Servant of the Most Merciful) of which one of them is:

وَالَّذِينَ يَقُولُونَ رَبَّنَا هَبْ لَنَا مِنْ أَزْوَاجِنَا وَذُرِّيَّاتِنَا قُرَّةَ أَعْيُنٍ وَاجْعَلْنَا لِلْمُتَّقِينَ
إِمَامًا

“Those people who say, 'O' our Lord grant us from among our spouses and among our children that which enlightens our eyes and make us an Imam (leader) for those who have Allah-Consciousness.”²

There are people who pray to Allah (SwT) not to leave their children as 'normal children' – rather that they are made as the light of their eyes and examples for other Muslims. These people humbly request Allah (SwT) to make themselves a leader (Imam) of those who possess Taqwa. Some may ask that is this goal to make ones' self superior or greater than other people (in a negative context)? No! Rather, this is a person who is seeking sublimity and spiritual greatness.

Therefore, it is clear that to take the name of Tashayyah' (to be a Shia) and to claim among the people that one is in the ranks of a Shia is something that is very simple, however it is extremely difficult to be a true Shia.

Imam az-Zaman (as) and the rest of the Infallible Leaders of guidance expect more from those who are scholars and those who are studying the Islamic sciences and it is these people that must be examples and role models for the rest of the people so that others can follow them.

Thus, the most important form of Tabligh and conveyance of the message of Islam is that a person develops such a level of Taqwa and Wara' within his soul that the people are able to develop a deep cognizance (ma'rifat) of Allah (SwT) within them. Through this, the people will know who a true human being is and who the true Shias are.

The true Shia are those who are brave, patient, full of love, those who keep away from vices and who refrain from the prohibited acts and who do not have the love of status or position (within society) in their hearts.

The conditions in our present day and age are exclusive to today and we are faced with three major crises:

1. The Political Crisis:

Never ending problems that have taken place today everywhere in which we do not see any positive outcome for the people of the world.

2. The Economic Crisis:

These are problems in relation to affordable housing, the high cost of marriages, problems in relation to unemployment and the tribulations brought about through inflation.

3. The Ethical Crisis:

This point is even more important than the first two especially the crisis which has erupted and engulfed the young boys and girls of the society and is pulling them towards corruption. The reasons for this crisis can be divided into the following three categories:

A) The Spread of Various Technologies:

Various CDs, photos, movies, satellite dishes, and of course the InterNet have made the issue of sex and sexuality something that is easy to get access to for anyone (who wants these sorts of things).

B) Freedom with no Limits and Boundaries:

In other words, slavery under the guise of 'freedom'. By this we mean that people are made slaves of their lower desires under the title of freedom such that Amr bil Ma'ruf and Nahi 'anil Munkar (Forcefully commanding to that which is ethically right and vigorously forbidding from that which is bad or evil) is now something that people feel embarrassed to perform. The freedom that can lead to perfection of mankind (the religion and teachings of Allah (SwT) which came to perfect man) have now been redefined as the reason why mankind has fallen and descended from his true state (of perfection) (meaning that people are blaming religion and saying that it is actually these sets of ethical guidelines which have corrupted mankind).

C) The Hidden Forces:

The enemies are of the belief that if they are able to corrupt the youth, then it will be much easier to take control of them – and this thought is absolutely correct! These people (the enemies of Islam) feel that the only thing stopping them from achieving their goal is the din and akhlaq (moral ethics) of Islam, since when a community becomes polluted by sin and corruption and becomes addicted to smoking and drugs, then they are no longer able to stand up in defiance to the enemy.

Should we remain quiet in the face of these issues and just recite supplications until the reformer (the 12th Imam, may Allah hasten his return) makes his advent? This is the opinion of the person who are timid and lazy.

In Karbala, how many people were present who stood up? Or even at the time of the Prophet of Islam (S) who stood up alone to invite the people to Islam. In addition, Prophet Ibrahim (as) stood alone in his mission. Thus, we must not be afraid of the number of people who are traversing the path of justice:

لَا تَسْتَوْحِشُوا فِي طَرِيقِ الْهُدَى لِلْقَلَّةِ أَهْلِهِ.

“Do not be afraid of traversing the path of true guidance due to the small number of people who are upon it.”

By the grace of Allah (SwT) even today, the number of people who are on this path is not small. On the 15th of Sha'ban, there are more people around Masjid Jamkaran (the Masjid just outside of Qum, Iran which was built under the direct command of the 12th Imam) than there are on the plains of 'Arafat and that too – most of them are young men and women!

If we look at the times of I'tikaf (spiritual retreat to the Masjid), the youth are so anxious and excited that you can not even find a place to sit in the Masjid – and these youth are a part of our army!

The scholars, through their writings and works must be examples so that they are able to stand up in opposition to this moral and ethical crisis. While on this path, our hearts must be content Divine Promises given in the Qur`an and traditions. Even today, people simply see the Scholars and 'Ulama as those who only come during the Month of Muharram to specific areas and localities for Tabligh purposes. These scholars are supposed to come, give lectures, and then gather all of the problems of the people and after returning back home, present the problems to the leaders and those in charge (to help solve them).

As it has been stated, people are of two groups – there is one group of “common people” who say that they will purify themselves during the month of Ramadhan; however it is the “special group” of people who say that during the month of Sha'ban, they will purify themselves and in this state of purity, they will enter into the month of Ramadhan – since the month of Ramadhan is the month of being the invited guests of Allah (SwT) and the guests must first purify themselves.

The tongue and the eyes must be washed with the water of purity during the month of Sha'ban so that one can benefit from the blessings and bounties during the month of Ramadhan. People should also be taught that the month of Sha'ban is the month of self-building and preparing to be the spiritual guests of Allah (SwT).

We pray for the success in performing our responsibilities and actions and that we do not align ourselves with the various political factions (which divide a community).

We ourselves do not have any problems, rather, we ourselves have brought these problems upon ourselves and thus we must all be united since it is the enemies who have equipped themselves to defeat us, and if they were to infuse themselves into our communities, then they will not leave anyone alone!

1. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 65, pg. 166, tradition 21

2. Surat al-Furqan (25), Verse 74

Discourse 9: Characteristics of a Righteous Servant of Allah – Part I

عَنْ ابْنِ عُمَرَ قَالَ: خَطَبَنَا رَسُولُ اللَّهِ خُطْبَةً ذَرَفَتْ مِنْهَا الْعُيُونُ وَوَجَلَتْ مِنْهَا الْقُلُوبُ فَكَانَ مِمَّا ضَبَطْتُ مِنْهَا: أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ، إِنَّ أَفْضَلَ النَّاسِ عَبْدًا مَنْ تَوَاضَعَ عَنْ رَفْعَةٍ، وَزَهَدَ عَنْ رَغْبَةٍ، وَانْصَفَ عَنْ قُوَّةٍ، وَحَلَّمَ عَنْ قُدْرَةٍ...

It has been narrated from Ibne 'Umar that, “The Messenger of Allah (S) once gave us such a speech that made tears flow from our eyes and made our hearts tremble and some of that which we wrote down (of his speech was): 'O' Mankind! Surely the greatest servant (of Allah) is the one who shows humility, even though he may be of high rank or status; and who renounces the world, even though he has a desire for it (its pleasures); and who is equitable and just, even though he has the strength (to oppress others); and who shows forbearance, even though has the ability (to get his rights by force)...”¹

The important issue (which we wish to elucidate upon) that has been mentioned in this section of the tradition is that sometimes a person refrains from committing a sin due to not having the ability to perform that sin. Other times, it is due to not having an attraction to commit that sin – for example, the person who does not like the taste of alcohol (and thus does not drink it) or he likes the taste of it however he does not have the ability (to drink alcohol) or the introductory steps in order to do this sin are not present (for example he does not have money to purchase the alcohol) or he does not drink alcohol due to the negative physical effects that it has on him.

Such a form of refraining from committing a sin for a person who does not have the ability to commit the sin is not important. Rather, what is important is when a person has the ability but he still refrains from committing that sin. Thus, according to the words of the Prophet (S), the best person is the one who, even though he has the status, rank and position in the community, however he is still humble and modest with others.²

In relation to refraining from sins, we see that people are of various types. There is one group of people who do not commit certain sins because deep down in their heart those acts are detested. Thus, every person must look deep within himself and see what prohibited things he has a desire to perform so that he can refrain from those things.

However this point should also be kept in mind that it is difficult for a person to recognize these things by himself as sometimes there are characteristics within a person that he would not realize he has and

maybe after the passing of sixty years of his life, he would then realize that he has these defects. Why is this so? It is because a person never looks at his own self and tries to pick out his own faults and shortcomings.

If a person would like to advance in the spiritual areas of his life and reach to the higher levels of spirituality, then he must look at his own self with a very critical eye so that he is able to pick out his weak points. It is for this reason that it has been said that when one wants to recognize one's own weak points and defects, then he should rely on his enemies or friends who will sincerely criticize him (not those who would hide his defects).

However, better than all of this is when a person learns to criticize himself. If a person knows what forbidden acts he loves to perform then he knows where his defects and slips are and through what channels Shaitan tries to get to him and make use of him, then he will never be held captive by his lower desires or the Shaitan.

In the words of the poet, Mawlavi:

نفس اژدهاست او کی مرده است از غم بی آلتی افسرده است

It is for this reason that the Prophet (S) has said, "The best of people is the one who even though has the liking (to commit a sin) and has the power and ability (to oppress others) is fair and just, and even though he has status, he is still humble."

This advice is addressed to all people, especially the Scholars ('Ulama), but why? It is because the scholars are the leaders of the people and before going to teach others, they must first train themselves.

The more a person's status (within the society) increases, the more his (small) errors and slips become greater (in the eyes of the people). Similarly, when his duties increase and become more sensitive and critical (to be performed in the proper way), there is a greater danger that they may not be fulfilled how they should be.

الْمُخْلِصُونَ فِي خَطَرٍ عَظِيمٍ.

"The sincere people (al-Mukhlisun) are in the greatest danger."

While a person is young, he may commit sins and then say, "When I get older I will repent for this sin." This act of delaying and postponing one's asking for forgiveness is an act of trickery and deceit on the part of Shaitan and obeying one's own lower desires.

There is another person who makes a promise to himself that when the Month of Ramadhan comes along, he will ask for forgiveness. However, as previously mentioned, if a person wishes to be a guest and take part in a banquet, he must first purify himself and put on clean clothing and then go forth to be the guest of another person – not that he takes part in the banquet while wearing dirty, filthy clothes!³

1. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 74, pg. 179

2. The Noble Qur'an considers humility, modesty and refraining from any form of pride and arrogance as being one of the characteristics of a true believer (Mo'min). This is so because pride and arrogance are the first steps on the ladder of disbelief (Kufr) and when a person exercises humility and modesty in the face of truth, he has actually traversed the first steps towards true faith («man). Those who tread the path of pride and self-conceit and who do not submit and prostrate to Allah (SwT) nor do they busy themselves in His praise and glorification will eventually reach a stage in their life where they will not accept the truth which comes to them from the (righteous) servants of Allah (SwT). Thus, the biggest idol (of worship) turns out to be their own souls. (Tafsir-e-Namunah, vol. 17, pg. 146)

3. The great scholar, Shaykh Baha'i has narrated the following incident, "There was a man named Tawbah who was continuously busy in taking account of his soul and the acts which he used to perform. When he reached the age of sixty, he sat down to review his life and the acts that he had performed and realized that 21,500 days of his life had gone by. At this point, he said to himself, "Woe on me! If each day of my life I committed even one sin, then in the minimum, I would have committed at least 21,000 sins! Do I wish to meet Allah while I have 21,000 sins on my record?" At this point, he let out a loud sigh and fell to the ground and passed away on the spot. (Tafsir-e-Namunah, vol. 24, pg. 465)

Discourse 10: Characteristics of a Righteous Servant of Allah – Part II

عَنْ أَنَسِ بْنِ مَالِكٍ قَالَ: قَالَ: يَا رَسُولَ اللَّهِ، مَنْ أَوْلِيَاءُ اللَّهِ الَّذِينَ لَا خَوْفَ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا هُمْ يَحْزَنُونَ؟ فَقَالَ: الَّذِينَ نَظَرُوا إِلَى بَاطِنِ الدُّنْيَا حِينَ نَظَرَ النَّاسُ إِلَى ظَاهِرِهَا، فَاهْتَمُّوا بِأَجْلِهَا حِينَ اهْتَمَّ النَّاسُ بِعَاجِلِهَا، فَأَمَاتُوا مِنْهَا مَا خَشَوْا أَنْ يُمِيتَهُمْ، وَتَرَكَوا مِنْهَا مَا عَلِمُوا أَنْ سَيَتْرُكُهُمْ فَمَا عَرَضَ لَهُمْ مِنْهَا عَارِضٌ إِلَّا رَفَضُوهُ، وَلَا خَادِعُهُمْ مِنْ رَفْعَتِهَا خَادِعٌ إِلَّا وَضَعُوهُ، خُلِقَتِ الدُّنْيَا عِنْدَهُمْ فَمَا يُجَدِّدُونَهَا، وَخَرِبَتْ بَيْنَهُمْ فَمَا يَعْمُرُونَهَا، وَمَاتَتْ فِي صُدُورِهِمْ فَمَا يُحِبُّونَهَا، بَلْ يَهْدِمُونَهَا فَيَبْنُونَ بِهَا آخِرَتَهُمْ، وَيُبِيعُونَهَا فَيَشْتَرُونَ بِهَا مَا يَبْقَى لَهُمْ، نَظَرُوا إِلَى أَهْلِهَا صَرَخَى قَدْ حَلَّتْ بِهِمُ الْمُثَلَاتُ، فَمَا يَرُونَ أَمَانًا دُونَ مَا يَرْجُونَ، وَلَا خَوْفًا دُونَ مَا يَحْذَرُونَ.

It has been narrated from Anas b. Malik that, “We said, 'O' Messenger of Allah! Who are the close, intimate friends of Allah who (Will have no fear upon them nor will they grieve)?' The Prophet replied, 'It is those people who look at the inner aspects of the transient world (the Dunya) while the other people are looking at its apparent aspects (the physical beauties and pleasures). These people (those who are the intimate friends of Allah) are concerned with their eventual outcome (and are thus working for it.) while the (other) people are concerned with this life (and are working for this life).

So then these people (the intimate friends of Allah) die while in the world (do not have the love of the transient world) through the fear that the world may kill them and they also refrain from it (the transient world). They also refrain from those things of the material world that they feel will abandon them and they refuse whatever is offered to them from it (the world). There is nothing in it that tries to cheat them to make them higher except that they try to bring it down. The material world is worn out to them (like an old, worn out piece of clothing) and they refuse to renew it; and the world is demolished in their sight and they refuse to rebuild it.

The material world has died in their hearts and they have no love for it. However, these people (who are the intimate friends of Allah) demolish the material world in order to build their next life. They sell the material world in order to purchase something that will stay with them for eternity. They look at the people of the world and those who have already been brought down and they see these people (the inhabitants of the transient world) as (spiritually) fallen – experiencing the punishment of Allah. Thus they do not see any safety or security except that they have the hope (of Allah) and they do not see any fear except the one that they are afraid of (the punishment and Hell Fire of Allah).”¹

The difference between “خوف” and “غم” is that the first word (خوف – fear) is used in relation to events that will transpire in the future, where as the second word (غم – grief) is used in relation to events that have already passed.

There is a very important question that has been mentioned in this tradition that all of us must sincerely ponder upon. It was asked: “Who are the intimate friends of Allah (SwT) who do not fear the future and do not have grief over what has transpired in the past? ”

The Imam introduced these people to us by saying that, “The intimate friends of Allah (SwT) (Awliya) are those people who have certain characteristics, one of which was that if some people worship this material world, those people (who have no fear nor grief) see the truth of the transient world.”

In relation to those who worship this temporal world, the Noble Qur`an mentions:

يَعْلَمُونَ ظَاهِرًا مِّنَ الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا وَهُمْ عَنِ الْآخِرَةِ هُمْ غَافِلُونَ

“These people (who worship this material world) know the apparent aspects of the life of this world very well, however they are completely heedless of the next life.”²

If these people (who worship the material world) decide to give something in charity, they would first employ mathematical calculations in regards to their donations (to measure their benefit and loss) and then finally would come to the conclusion that, “I have definitely gone into loss as my wealth has now decreased (by giving such a donation).”³

The people who do not worship this temporal world look deep in their hearts and see the act of giving in charity in another way – just as the Noble Qur`an mentions:

مَثَلُ الَّذِينَ يُنْفِقُونَ أَمْوَالَهُمْ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ كَمَثَلِ حَبَّةٍ أَنْبَتَتْ سَبْعَ سَنَابِلٍ فِي كُلِّ
سُنْبُلَةٍ مِائَةٌ حَبَّةٌ وَاللَّهُ يُضَاعِفُ لِمَنْ يَشَاءُ وَاللَّهُ وَاسِعٌ عَلِيمٌ

“The parable of those people who spend their wealth in the way of Allah is just as a grain which (is planted) and then grows seven ears. In each ear is one hundred seeds and Allah increases (the reward) for whomsoever He pleases and Allah is the All-Encompassing, All-Knowing.”⁴

Those people who simply judge and look at everything through the materialistic aspect of life say that: “If we take interest (Riba) then our wealth will increase.” However those who look at things in a deeper context and view things through the spiritual life would say, “Not only will our wealth not increase by taking interest, rather it will actually decrease!”

In regards to this, the Qur`an brings forth a very interesting phrase and says:

يَمْحَقُ اللَّهُ الرِّبَاَ وَيُرِي الصَّدَقَاتِ وَاللَّهُ لَا يُحِبُّ كُلَّ كَفَّارٍ أَثِيمٍ

“Allah removes all the good that comes from Riba (Interest) and makes charitable gifts (Sadaqah) prosper, and Allah does not love every sinning, disbelieving person.”⁵

When a person looks with precision, he will realize that the society in which interest is freely given and taken will end up in poverty and destruction and will also be plagued with insecurity. However, that society in which there is mutual help and assistance and one in which charity and monetary aid are given to one another is the society which will be successful, honoured and dignified (by Allah (SwT)).

During the time of the Hajj before the Islamic Revolution (in Iran), the newspapers were filled with articles asking why at the time of performing the Hajj, so much hard-currency was leaving the country? Why were the Iranians giving all their money to the 'Arabs during the Hajj season?

However since these people (those writing such articles) were simply looking at the material aspects of this life, they were not able to discern that in the place of the few thousand dollars that were leaving the country and being spent, what amount of spiritual benefits and profits the Hujjaj were bringing back into the country!

It is this Hajj which forms the greatness of Islam and which leads to the unity, self-respect and honour for the Muslims, and every heart that goes to that sacred land returns back pure and clean!

We see people who go through unimaginable difficulties, for the life of this world which is nothing more than the span of two (proverbial) days – they go through such difficulties not even knowing if they will be able to benefit and enjoy them in the future.

For example, there was a person who had built a house in Tehran which he spent one and a half years just painting and finishing up the interior of. However, this unfortunate person was not able to benefit from this house (as shortly after building it, he passed away). His “40th Majlis” (the gathering kept forty days after a person has passed away) was kept in that same house! We see how much people strive and struggle for the materialistic pleasures of this world in which they will not live for more than a few days, however, for the next life – which is eternal – they do not put forth any struggles, nor do they even think about it!

The tradition under discussion contains a series of characteristics of the true intimate friends of Allah (SwT) that if we want to summarize, we would divide them up into the following three categories:

- 1) The intimate friends of Allah (SwT) know this material world very well and they know that it is a temporary place in which they will not be staying long.
- 2) These people will never become slaves of the beauties of this world and will never be deceived by the gold and glitter of the temporary abode since they have a good understanding of this world. (Keep in mind that this point is a continuation of the first point).
- 3) They make use of this material world only for what they need and it is upon this ruined transient world through which they build their permanent everlasting abode. Thus, they sell this temporal abode and purchase the next world in its place.

Sometimes we see that Allah (SwT) grants a person a very high station and rank in this world. The question we need to ask is that from where did this great rank come from? When we look carefully at this person, we see that he lived his life in the correct and proper manner and thus transcended from the dirt of this world to the higher realms of the heavens – he went from the low ground to the high, spiritual plains.

On the day of the Battle of Khandaq, the Commander of the Faithful, 'Ali b. Abi Talib (as) struck such a blow with his sword that this act was referred to as being better than the worship of all of the Jinn and Mankind until the Day of Judgement. The Noble Prophet (S) said:

ضَرْبَةُ عَلِيٍّ فِي يَوْمِ الْخَنْدَقِ أَفْضَلُ مِنْ عِبَادَةِ النَّقْلَيْنِ.

“The striking of the sword of 'Ali on the day of Khandaq was better than the worship of all the Jinn and Mankind.”

Why was this so? It is because on that day, the complete and perfect manifestation of true belief (Iman) was face to face with the complete manifestation of disbelief (Kufr). In the book, Bihar al-Anwar, we read the following tradition:

بَرَزَ الْإِيمَانَ كُلُّهُ إِلَى الشِّرْكِ كُلِّهِ.

“The complete manifestation of true faith (Iman) was face to face with the complete manifestation of polytheism (Shirk).” 6

Thus, it is no surprise that the striking of the sword of 'Ali (as) was better than the worship of all of the Jinn and Mankind!

If we truly understand this issue then we would see that within half a day, the victory of all victories and the performance of an act of great importance ust like those which the Martyrs of Karbala carried out, was enacted.

It is at this time that we would see the great value and worth of our lives, and in addition just like the intimate friends of Allah (SwT) (about whom we have been discussing in this talk of ours), we would no longer make the life of this material world our ultimate goal!

1. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 74, pg. 181

2. Surat al-Rum (30), Verse 7

3. There is a tradition from the Messenger of Allah (S) where he has stated that:

أَغْفَلُ النَّاسِ مَنْ لَمْ يَتَعَبَّرْ بِتَغْيِيرِ الدُّنْيَا مِنْ حَالٍ إِلَى حَالٍ

“The most heedless person is one who does not take admonition from the changes in the material world.” (Tafsir-e-Namunah, vol. 13, pg. 13); Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 68, pg. 324, Section 80

4. Surat al-Baqarah (2), Verse 261

5. Ibid., Verse 276

6. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 17, pg. 215

Discourse 11: Five Good Qualities

عَنْ أَنَسِ بْنِ مَالِكٍ، قَالَ: سَمِعْتُ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ فِي بَعْضِ خُطْبِهِ وَمَوَاعِظِهِ: رَحِمَ اللَّهُ
امْرَأً قَدَّمَ خَيْرًا، وَ أَنْفَقَ قَصْدًا، وَ قَالَ صِدْقًا، وَ مَلَكَ دَوَاعِيَ شَهْوَتِهِ وَ لَمْ تَمْلِكْهُ،
وَ عَصَى أَمْرَ نَفْسِهِ فَلَمْ تَمْلِكْهُ.

It has been narrated from Anas b. Malik that, "I heard the Messenger of Allah (S) say in one of his speeches and words of admonition, 'May the mercy of Allah be upon that person who sends forth (for himself) something good; and who gives charity from the middle path (not too much or too little) and who speaks the truth; and who is the owner (in control) of his own desires and is not held captive by them; and who controls his own soul so that it does not take charge over him.'"1

In this tradition, the Noble Prophet (S) sent mercy upon a person who possess the following five characteristics:

1. He is not waiting for others to send things ahead for him (in Paradise), rather he himself sends things forward for his own soul and he tried to make his home in the next life a habitable place.
2. He treads upon the middle path (in giving charity) meaning he is not extravagant, nor is he miserly – when he gives out of his wealth. Thus, he is sure to follow the moderate course – he does not give out so much that he himself becomes poor and without anything, nor does he give out so little that the goodness which he has been given does not reach other people.

It has been mentioned in the Qur`an that:

وَلَا تَجْعَلْ يَدَكَ مَغْلُولَةً إِلَىٰ عُنُقِكَ وَلَا تَبْسُطْهَا كُلَّ الْبَسْطِ فَتَقْعُدَ مَلُومًا مَّحْسُورًا

“Do not make your hand tied to your neck (do not be miserly), nor stretch it forth to its utmost reach (nor be too generous) such that you become blameworthy and destitute.”2

In another verse it states:

وَالَّذِينَ إِذَا أَنْفَقُوا لَمْ يُسْرِفُوا وَلَمْ يَقْتُرُوا وَكَانَ بَيْنَ ذَلِكَ قَوَامًا

“Those who, when they spend, are not extravagant and not stingy, but hold a just (balance) between these (extremes).”³

3. A person's tongue is not polluted with lies and speaking false things.

All of these three things listed so far are good however the emphasis is more on the fourth and fifth characteristics:

4 and 5. What is important here is that a person captures his own soul and enslaves it – one controls and keeps reins over it – not that one is made the slave of his own soul. The complete worth of a person is in this point that he becomes the leader of his own soul and not the slave of it.

For example, when a person becomes angry, is one's own tongue in his control or not? Or when a person has the flames of jealousy burning up inside of him, does his true faith (Iman) put out such a fire? In summary, a person has been placed at the intersection of two roads – one road which leads towards Allah (SwT) and Paradise; while the other path – which is not limited to one particular path, rather it has many other ways branching off of it – is going towards the Hell Fire.

To discuss this issue is very easy, however, to put these things into practice is extremely difficult. Sometimes, our leaders who are traversing the path of closeness to Allah (SwT) (Sair wa Suluk) use the following expression, “He is a person who has done a lot of work (on his soul).” By this phrase they mean that the person has fought against his own soul so much and has fallen down to the ground and gotten back up again and has continued to fight against his soul until the point that he becomes triumphant and has taken control of it for it takes self-discipline to win control over the soul. It also entails to have a complete knowledge of the meaning of the Qur`an and the traditions of the Ahlul Bait in order to continue on this path.

Each and every day, a person who wants to win control over his soul must read the Qur`an, the commentaries of the Qur`an and the traditions and transfer this knowledge into his mind and take energy and power from these things.

There are some people who say that, “We know that such and such act is not right, however when we are about to perform this act, we lose control over ourselves and we don't know why?!”

This is the true meaning of being a servant. A person knows why (he is doing an act) but he does not know how to stop it because he is not the one in control of his own self. It is similar to a driver who is going down a steep hill and his car picks up speed and he says, “I have lost control of my car” and then his car smashes on the side of a mountain or he ends up in the ditch and is killed.

Another example is that of a person at the top of a mountain who is going down at a fast speed with nothing in front of him to control his descent and speed. However, when he reaches the bottom of the mountain, then his speed will eventually slow down and he will come to a rest.

Our souls work in the same manner!

How painful it is for a person that he knows (right from wrong) however he does not have the ability to prevent himself (from sinning) and it is our belief that for that time period when one does not know and commits sins, it is possible that he may not have a great responsibility (in the presence of Allah (SwT)) for what he is performing. But what about for one who knows the intensity of sins and their punishments?

These are all warnings that we must be careful of our actions and that we must send forth good deeds for our own benefit. However, if we fall prey to performing wicked deeds and are not successful in repenting to Allah (SwT) and we leave this world in the state (of being sinners), then we must be ready and prepared to face the consequences.

After we die, the ink in the pen of responsibility will dry up, and at this time, a person will not be able to ask for forgiveness, nor send any good deeds for his use in the next world, thus we must act now – before it is too late!

1. Ibid., vol. 74, pg. 179

2. Surat al-Isra (17), Verse 29

3. Surat al-Furqan (25), Verse 67

Discourse 12: The (Various) Levels of Perfection in Iman

عَنْ نَافِعٍ عَنْ ابْنِ عُمَرَ، قَالَ: قَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ : لَا يَكْمُلُ عَبْدٌ الْإِيمَانَ بِاللَّهِ حَتَّى
يَكُونَ فِيهِ خَمْسٌ خِصَالٌ: التَّوَكُّلُ عَلَى اللَّهِ، وَالتَّفْوِضُ إِلَى اللَّهِ، وَالتَّسْلِيمُ لِأَمْرِ
اللَّهِ، وَالرِّضَا بِقَضَاءِ اللَّهِ، وَالصَّبْرُ عَلَى بَلَاءِ اللَّهِ. إِنَّهُ مَنْ أَحَبَّ فِي اللَّهِ، وَأَبْغَضَ
فِي اللَّهِ، وَاعْتَصَمَ بِاللَّهِ، وَاعْتَصَمَ بِاللَّهِ، فَقَدْ اسْتَكْمَلَ الْإِيمَانَ.

It has been narrated from Nafi' from Ibne 'Umar that the Messenger of Allah (S) said, "A servant's faith in Allah will never become complete until he possesses five traits: complete reliance (al-Tawakkul) in Allah, complete dependence (al-Tafwid) on Allah (what He has decreed), complete submission (al-Taslim) to

all of the commandments of Allah, complete contentment (al-Rida) upon what Allah has decreed, and complete patience (al-Sabr) for the calamities that Allah brings forth; because verily that person who loves for the sake of Allah and hates for the sake of Allah and gives (to others) for the (sake of) Allah and holds back (giving to others) for the (sake of) Allah is one whose faith is complete.” 1

In this tradition, the Messenger of Allah (S) has elucidated upon the various levels (that one must traverse) in order to achieve perfection in one's faith.

Some of the scholars of Akhlaq (ethics and morality) have also more or less mentioned the same points as the stages which one must traverse on the path of Sair wa Suluk (the path of one who is trying to get spiritually closer to Allah (SwT)).

1. Tawakkul:

The first stage is to have complete reliance in Allah (SwT). In reality, the true believer must be one who says, “Since it is through the knowledge, power and mercy of Allah (SwT) that I have been granted true faith («man) and knowledge, I will take Him alone as the One whom I rely upon.”

2. Tafwid:

The second stage is that of complete dependence on Allah (SwT). In the previous stage, it is said that the true believer is walking on the path towards Allah (SwT) which he himself has chosen. However at this stage, the true believer – in reality – says to Allah (SwT), “O' Allah! You know better than I do and thus, I leave everything in Your hands.”

The Difference between Tawakkul and Tafwid:

At the stage of Tawakkul, a person gives precedence to everything that he feels is for his own personal benefit and thus he sees all the limits and restrictions for his own benefit. However in Tafwid, the person knows that he has individual benefits at stake, however he does not see the limits – rather – he leaves them all up to Allah (SwT) (to fulfill) because he has complete reliance upon Him.

3. Taslim:

This stage is even higher than the previously mentioned level. At this stage, personal benefit has no meaning to the person. At the stage of Tawakkul, one's personal wishes and desires were the topic of discussion, however at the level of Taslim, a person does not even consider his own personal desires.

Question:

If it is truly as you say (that one who is at the level of Taslim does not even make known his personal

needs and desires) then there is no meaning to Du'a and supplication, right?

Answer:

The meaning of Taslim is not that we do not ask our needs or desires from Allah (SwT) and that we do not call upon Him. Rather, it means that if we have asked Him for something and our prayers have not been answered (in this world), then we must still submit to Him (in the apparent non-fulfillment of our supplications).

4. Rida:

The stage of Rida is greater than the previously mentioned stages. It can be said that at the level of Taslim, a person still had personal wants and desires, however he has submitted his presence and gives up his wants (to Allah (SwT)). However at the stage of Rida – even within a person's own soul – there is no resistance in relation to his wishes and desires – and this is the difference between Taslim and Rida.

These levels mentioned form the four stages of the spiritual travel towards Allah (SwT) in the hopes of attaining closeness to Him. It is very easy to explain these levels through words, however how far the distance of travel is between each one of them!

Sometimes, these levels are also known as [فناء في الله] or complete annihilation in Allah (SwT). Although it should be kept in mind that the word [فناء] has two meanings, of which the first is the known and rational interpretation which is reaching to the level of Rida. In this stage, a person forgets all of his own personal wishes and desires while in the spiritual presence of the Pure Essence of his Lord and truly this is the correct meaning of the phrase [فناء في الله] which is also the agreed upon meaning in the Islamic legislations and our intelligence.

Of course this in no way contradicts the philosophy of Du'a (supplication) and requesting our needs from Allah (SwT). Thus, the person who has reached to this final stage of perfection of his «man (true faith) – meaning the stage of Rida – is still in need of Du'a and supplicating to Allah (SwT).

All of these stages can be achieved and reached through patience and perseverance. Principally, patience and standing firm is the root of all forms of happiness and contentment.

The fifth piece of advice from the Commander of the Faithful, 'Ali b. Abi Talib (as) in his testament was to observe patience, which in reality acts as the guarantor to being able to perform the first four pieces of advice.

How many times have we seen that in order to reach these levels of perfection, a person readies himself and practices these acts for a few days – however that which is important is that one must have perseverance while treading on this path and must perpetually stay upon it. It has been said many times that any person who has reached the levels of 'Ilm (knowledge), action (upon what he has learned) and

Taqwa, has done so through the patience and perseverance that he displayed while on this path.

In the end of this tradition there is a statement made that love and hate, giving to others and holding back things from others, must all be done sincerely for the sake of Allah (SwT) – since all of these are signs of a person who has perfect «man!

1. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 74, pg. 177

Discourse 13: Two Despised Characteristics: Eating too Much and Looking at Others

قَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ ﷺ وَإِيَّاكُمْ وَفُضُولَ الْمَطْعَمِ فَإِنَّهُ يَسِمْ الْقَلْبَ بِالْقَسْوَةِ، وَ يُبْطِئُ
بِالْجَوَارِحِ عَنِ الطَّاعَةِ، وَ يُصِمُّ الْهَمَمَ عَنِ سَمَاعِ الْمَوْعِظَةِ وَ إِيَّاكُمْ وَ فُضُولَ
النَّظَرِ، فَإِنَّ يَبْدُرُ الْهَوَى، وَ يُوَلِّدُ الْغَفْلَةَ.

The Messenger of Allah (S) has said, “I warn you in relation to eating too much because surely this act poisons the heart by making it hard (no emotional feelings), and makes your body parts lazy and lethargic in relation to obedience of Allah, and it deafens the ears from hearing advice and good counsel. I also warn you in relation to looking around with inquisitiveness because surely this act excites your desires and gives birth to negligence.”¹

In the above tradition, we have been prohibited from eating too much (filling our stomach) and looking at other people and (immaterial) things with inquisitiveness.

1. Eating too much:

The issue of observing moderation in our food is something whose importance we do not know or realize as we are not acquainted with the important benefits – both from the point of view of our physical body and health, and also in relation to our spirit and soul that this action has upon us. Thus, eating too much can be looked at from two different angles: the physical aspect and the spiritual aspect.

A) The Physical Aspect:

It has been confirmed that a majority of the diseases which people are afflicted with are due to eating too much food. There are some doctors that have even brought proof to back up this claim and state that, "Microbes can and do enter the body from four different channels which are air, food, water and sometimes even through our skin and there is no way to prevent these from coming into our system."

When this skin of ours – which is a thick barrier that should prevent microbes from entering our body – has a scratch or wound on it, it is possible that through this injury, microbes can enter the body, thus breaking through this barrier of protection. Thus, we always try to defend ourselves from various types of attacks of microbes and illnesses. In addition, our body develops the means of protection and the defense mechanisms needed so that it does not become a source of infections.

It is also been stated that the extra fat which covers over the tissues in the body is a place where various types of microbes can form and grow – just like a garbage can which is full and if kept in a place for a long time could lead to sicknesses and the spreading of various diseases.

Some of the things which can protect us from such diseases is to burn off all of our excess body fat – and one of the ways that the fat can be burnt off is through fasting. All people can understand this fact since everyone can discern that when there is excess food in one's body which is not absorbed into itself, then the body stores this excess, and in the end, the job of the heart then increases.

In summary we state that when a person becomes heavier, it has a negative effect on all parts of his body and thus the heart and other organs also get sick faster, and naturally the life of the person is cut short. Therefore, if a person is sincerely trying to attain goodness for one's self, he must abstain from eating too much food and one must habituate himself to eating less, especially those people who do not exercise much.

A doctor once said, "For over twenty years I have been trying to cure sick people and my answer to all of the experiences (over these years) that I have seen can be summed up in two phrases: 'moderation in food' and 'exercise.'"

B) The Spiritual Aspect:

The tradition we started with points to three very important spiritual aspects that a person who eats too much will face:

- 1) The first is that a person who eats too much will develop spiritual hardness of his heart.
- 2) The second point is that eating too much will lead a person to becoming lazy and lethargic in his worship. When a person eats heavy food, he is not able to easily perform his Salatul Fajr and when he does wake up for the Salat, he resembles a person who is giddy or drunk. However, when a person eats

light and simple food, then when the time of the Adhan comes, or even before the time of the prayer, he wakes up and is full of joy and energy. He would be in a mental condition to study or to perform the worship of Allah (SwT).

3) The third point is that a person who eats too much will have his ears sealed to listening to and taking heed of advice and good council.

When a person is fasting, we see that his heart has pity and sympathy for others in it and his level of spirituality increases. However when a person's stomach is full, his mind does not work properly and thus, one even becomes spiritually far away from Allah (SwT).

Maybe you yourselves have noticed that during the Month of Ramadhan, the people's hearts are more willing and ready to hear advice and exhortation since through staying hungry and fasting in the day time, the hearts have developed a sense of purity in them.

2. Looking at Others:

What is the meaning of the word "نظر" in this tradition? One is that of looking at a non-Mahram which can lead a person to take his lower desires as his Lord. However this word has a much wider and deeper meaning than just this.

By this we mean that any sort of look with the eyes which can lead a person's lower desires to get excited, may be included in the meaning of this word in the tradition under review. For example: a person passes by a store and while staring with astonishment at the things he sees in the window, he wishes for them and says to himself, "Oh! If only I had those things!" Or a person sees the newest model of car that has come out and has the desire that he had that car. This sort of looking at something and having that longing and desire that he had such a thing can lead to negligence and forgetfulness (of Allah (SwT)). It is these sorts of wishes that make a person attracted and attached to this temporal world.

However the look which is done to take lessons and learn, and which is purely a "religious look" or that look which is for example done to help and reach out to a poor, destitute person or a person who is sick so as to help and cure him is a look that is very highly recommend and has been emphatically emphasized (in our religion).

Point to Consider: Many types of wealth and levels of status in this material world, as has been mentioned in the traditions and Nahjul Balagha, can be described as such:

كُلُّ شَيْءٍ مِنَ الدُّنْيَا سَمَاعُهُ أَكْبَرُ مِنْ عِيَانِهِ.

“Everything that is in the world which is heard about (that people say) is greater than what can be seen of it (greater than it truly is).” 2

As it is commonly stated, “The sound of the kettledrum is pleasing to hear from afar.” From a great distance, the sound of such a drum is nice and pleasing however as a person gets closer and closer to it, he will then realize that it is a flimsy, empty thing which actually hurts the ears!

The late Hadhrat Ayatullah al-'Uzma Burujerdi once gave the following advice to us in one of his lessons, “If a student (of the Hawza) studies Islam with the intention that he wants to reach the level or status that I (Ayatullah al-'Uzma Burujerdi) have reached to, then do not have any doubt about his foolishness and simplicity. You are thinking from afar (not in this position that I am in) and you see that I am at this position of Marja'iyat however I see myself at a station where I am not the master of my own life and how it passes by. I do not even have the ability to control when I take a rest or relax.”

Almost all gifts of this world are just like this.!

1. Ibid., vol. 73, pg. 182

2. Nahj al-Balagha, Speech 114

Discourse 14: Characteristics of a True Believer – Part I

رُوي أَنَّ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ قَالَ: يَكْمُلُ الْمُؤْمِنُ إِيمَانَهُ حَتَّى يَحْتَوِيَ عَلَى مِائَةٍ وَ ثَلَاثَ خِصَالٍ: فِعْلٌ وَ عَمَلٌ وَ نِيَّةٌ وَ بَاطِنٌ وَ ظَاهِرٌ. فَقَالَ أَمِيرُ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ : يَا رَسُولَ اللَّهِ مَا الْمِائَةُ وَ ثَلَاثَ خِصَالٍ؟ فَقَالَ : يَا عَلِيُّ مِنْ صِفَاتِ الْمُؤْمِنِ أَنْ يَكُونَ جَوَّالٌ الْفِكْرَ، جَوْهَرِيُّ الذِّكْرِ، كَثِيرًا عِلْمُهُ عَظِيمًا حِلْمُهُ، جَمِيلٌ الْمُنَازَعَةَ...

It has been narrated that the Messenger of Allah (S) said to the Commander of the Faithful, 'Ali b. Abi Talib (as): “The true believer's faith will be completed when he possesses one hundred and three particularities and these can be divided up into five categories: actions that have been done in the past;

actions that are done and continue to be done (in the present and future); (his) intention; the external characteristics; and the internal characteristics.” The Commander of the Faithful, 'Ali b. Abi Talib (as) said to the Prophet (S), “O' Messenger of Allah! What are these one hundred and three particularities?” The Prophet (S) replied, “O' 'Ali! Of the characteristics of a true believer are that he is continuously in thought; he performs the remembrance of Allah out loud; he possesses a great deal of knowledge; his forbearance is great; and his confrontations (with others) is done with beauty...” 1

In reality, this detailed tradition is a complete course in Islamic ethics (Akhlaq) which the Noble Messenger (S) presented to 'Ali (as). In this talk, the Prophet (S) summarized the Islamic morals into five categories which are: past actions, continuous and future actions, intention, internal characteristics and external characteristics.

What is the difference between [فعل] or past actions and [عمل] or continuous future actions? The first word refers to something which was done in the past and stopped in the past which a person sometimes still performs, whereas the second word refers to any action that is continuously being done.

The Noble Prophet (S) said that, “The first characteristic of a true believer is that he is one who is continuously in thought.” By this we mean that he is not a person who is like a rock that is stationary and stagnant – rather he is one whose thoughts are always continuously progressing and he is always striving to grasp new views and is never satisfied with his level of knowledge.

In this part of the tradition, the Prophet (S) has mentioned that the first characteristic of a true believer is in relation to his thoughts – and this shows the importance of thought in Islam.

The greatest act for a true believer is to continuously be in thought, and as it is said that the form of worship that Abu Dharr performed the most was thought and contemplation. If we seriously think about the outcome of the events (before we perform them) then we would not fall into the difficulties that we are in today.

The second characteristic that has been mentioned is the remembrance of Allah (SwT) out loud – in some versions of the tradition the word [جوهری] has been replaced with the word [جهوری] – however both mean out loud. In our opinion, both forms (of the tradition) relate to the fact that the remembrance of Allah (SwT) should be performed out loud.

It should be noted that by performing the remembrance of Allah (SwT) out loud, this does not go against the intention of doing this act simply for the pleasure of Allah (SwT), since in the Islamic legislation, we have been commanded to remember Allah (SwT) both out loud and also quietly. In addition, we have also been told to give the Sadaqah and Zakat both privately and also in the open and each of these has their own benefit and advantage.

When these acts are done in the open (for others to know about) it is a form of tabligh or propagation of the teachings of the religion; whereas when they are done in private and secrecy, it also brings about a

special spiritual effect to the person.

The third characteristic of the true believer is that he has abundant knowledge. It has been mentioned in the traditions that the Divine reward that is given to a person (for one's acts of worship) is based on their level of knowledge and intelligence. Thus, it is possible that one person prays a two Rak'at Salat and another person performs one hundred Rak'at of Salat, however the person who performed two Rak'at may actually receive more Divine reward than the other person. In reality worship has a coefficient and the coefficient of worship is knowledge and intelligence.

The fourth characteristic of the true believer is that he has a great deal of forbearance. By this we mean that just as his knowledge is vast, his forbearance too is great.

A scholar interacts quite frequently with people within his society and if he does not possess forbearance, then he will definitely fall into troubles. We should take the forbearance and self-control of Prophet Ibrahim (as) as an example. In history, we do not have any group of people who were more corrupt than the people of Prophet Lut (as) and their punishment too was the most frightening of all other forms of punishment:

فَلَمَّا جَاءَ أَمْرُنَا جَعَلْنَا عَالِيَهَا سَافِلَهَا وَأَمْطَرْنَا عَلَيْهَا حِجَارَةً مِّنْ سِجِّيلٍ مَّنضُودٍ

“When Our decree which was issued came to pass, We turned (the cities) upside down and rained down on them brimstones hard as baked clay spread layer upon layer.” 2

Their punishment was such that their cities were turned completely upside down. At one point, the Angels came down to let loose the punishment on these people which consisted of the raining of stones upon them, however they first came to Prophet Ibrahim (as) and gave him the good news that a son was born to him and his wife which made Prophet Ibrahim (as) extremely happy. After hearing this, he prayed to Allah (SwT) for the permission to intercede for the people of the tribe of Prophet Lut (as) and it is quoted in the Qur'an that it was said:

فَلَمَّا زَهَبَ عَن إِبْرَاهِيمَ الرُّوعَ وَجَاءَتْهُ الْبُشْرَىٰ يُجَادِلُنَا فِي قَوْمِ لُوطٍ. إِنَّ إِبْرَاهِيمَ لَحَلِيمٌ أَوَّاهٌ مُنِيبٌ

“When fear had passed from (the mind of) Ibrahim and the glad tidings had reached him he began to plead with Us for Lut's people. For Ibrahim was without doubt forbearing (of the faults of others), tender-hearted, oft-returning to Allah.” 3

It takes a great deal of forbearance for a person to pray for his intercession to reach to a tribe of people (such as that of the people of Lut (as)) and this is one sign of the nobility, forbearance and magnanimous heart that Prophet Ibrahim (as) possessed. Thus with this said the scholar too must have a great deal of tolerance and as much as possible, must try to correct the wrongs within the society slowly and try not to and remove all the wrong doings immediately.

The fifth characteristic of a true believer is that his method of speech is beautiful and when he discusses or speaks to others, it is through beautiful exhortation and he does not resort to a war of words or harsh disputes.

The conditions of our society today are very delicate. The dangers are only one step away from us and in these present conditions, what does our intelligence tell us to do? Should we just take any issue that comes up as a pretext or excuse to jump into the battle arena or does our intelligence tell us that the time we are living in right now is a time that demands harmony and unity?

Thus, we must always go back to the Qur`an:

وَأَعْتَصِمُوا بِحَبْلِ اللَّهِ جَمِيعًا وَلَا تَفَرَّقُوا

“And hold tightly to the rope of Allah all together and do not be divided...”

Is today not the day of unity of the entire nation? What does our intelligence tell us in regards to this?

The writers, those in charge of the government, the representatives of the Parliament, the University students, and all others!! I swear by Allah – we must all wake up!

Does our intelligence tell us that anytime an issue comes up that we must use this as an excuse to gather together and make our way from the Universities to the Masjid or other parts of the city such that the enemies can take advantage of such movements and activities?

It is our hope and prayer that if there is discussion and even disagreement then these take place under the banner of:

جَمِيلُ الْمُنَازَعَةِ.

That we must have beautiful discourses and dialogues with one another as this is one of the characteristics of the true believer we must keep in mind the rules and laws and that the standards of unity are maintained.

A majority of the people within our country are religiously minded and when the Month of Ramadhan or the days of 'Ashura come around, we see the entire scene of the country changes – thus we can say that the people have a strong connection with the religion. Thus, we must gather around the religion which is our source of power and worth and make the best use of this agent that we have!

1. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 64, Section of the Signs of a True Believer, pg. 310, tradition 45

2. Surat Hud (11), Verse 82

3. Ibid., Verses 74 and 75

Discourse 15: Characteristics of a True Believer – Part II

In our previous discourse, we related a tradition from the Noble Prophet (S) which he conveyed to Imam 'Ali (as) where he mentioned that a true believer would not be considered as such until he possess one hundred and three characteristics and these characteristics are divided up into five categories. In our previous discussion, we explained what these five categories were. Now we will relate five more characteristics.

...كَرِيمُ الْمُرَاجِعَةِ، أَوْسَعُ النَّاسِ صَدْرًا، أَذَلَّهُمْ نَفْسًا، ضَحِكُهُ تَبَسُّمًا، وَاجْتِمَاعُهُ
تَعَلُّمًا...

”(The true believer is one who possesses) noble interactions (with others); his (spiritual) bosom is the most expansive from all other people; his soul is the most humbled (of others); his laughing is done (only) with smiling (not out loud); and his gathering (with others) is (only) in order to learn something... ”

1

The first characteristic mentioned above is that a true believer's interaction with others is of a noble nature. This line actually has two meanings:

1. The meetings or interactions that the people have with him are dignified and venerable – meaning that when they want to meet him, if he has the ability he meets with them or he gives them a promise that in the future he will meet with them. If this are not possible then he excuses himself that he will not be able to meet with them. In this regards, the Qur`an states:

قَوْلٌ مَّعْرُوفٌ وَمَغْفِرَةٌ خَيْرٌ مِّنْ صَدَقَةٍ يَتْبَعُهَا أَذًى

“Speaking a good word (to others) and asking forgiveness (from them) is better than charity which is followed by aggravating (the other person).” 2

2. When such a person goes to meet other people, he does so with nobility and dignity. By this we mean that if he needs something from another person, he requests it from him with the proper etiquette – not that he is forceful or persistent in asking the person for a particular thing. Thus, he does not impose himself on others and then due to humility, they are forced or compelled to give him what he wants.

The next characteristic of the true believer is that he is one whose (spiritual) bosom is expansive – meaning that his heart is much more (spiritually) open than all other people. In relation to the spiritual openness of the heart, the Qur`an states the following:

فَمَنْ يُرِدِ اللَّهُ أَنْ يَهْدِيَهُ يَشْرَحْ صَدْرَهُ لِلْإِسْلَامِ وَمَنْ يُرِدِ أَنْ يُضِلَّهُ يَجْعَلْ صَدْرَهُ ضَيِّقًا حَرَجًا

“So then that person whom Allah intends one who is deserving of guidance) to guide (to the Truth) – He opens his heart up (to receive) al-Islam and whoever He intends (that person who is not deserving of guidance) to leave in misguidance, He constricts his heart.” 3

What is the true meaning of having an expansive chest? Those people who possess an expansive (spiritual) chest are able to endure anything that happens to them (things one does not enjoy, difficulties, trials), and he is a person who is not affected by people speaking bad about him and is also one who does not become hopeless quickly.

He is a person who takes in knowledge and information of various types and if a person was to speak or do something bad to such a person, he would keep this in the back of his mind and would not fill his head with the bad things that happen to him. However the person who has a constricted spiritual bosom is the person who, when afflicted with the smallest difficulty becomes upset and does not have the ability to accept and handle trials and tribulations.

The eighth characteristic is that one's soul is humbled. In the language of the 'Arabs, the word [نلت] means humility and the meaning of the word [ذلول] is that of one that is disciplined. However in Persian, the word [نلت] carries with it a very negative connotation – thus, it should be said that this characteristic is in the meaning of humility, meaning that a true believer has extreme humility and is humble in the presence of other people.

Whether another person is great or insignificant, he respects everyone and does not wait or expect that others should show respect to him (first).

The ninth characteristic of a true believer is that he possesses the trait of not laughing with a loud voice. It has been mentioned in the tradition that the Prophet (S) never laughed with a loud voice – thus, even the laughing of a true believer should be done with dignity and following etiquette.

The tenth characteristic of the true believer is that when he is sitting in a gathering, he strives to learn and gain knowledge in something, and one does not busy himself with backbiting and other things which do not pertain to him or which have absolutely no benefit!

1. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 64, Section of the Signs of a True Believer, pg. 310, tradition 45

2. Surat al-Baqarah (2), Verse 263

3. Surat al-An'am (7), Verse 125

Discourse 16: Characteristics of a True Believer – Part III

In our previous discussions, we had begun explaining a tradition from the Noble Prophet (S) in which this great personality detailed one hundred and three qualities which the true believer must possess. Ten of these qualities have been explained in detail, and now we embark on explaining six more characteristics:

مُذَكِّرُ الْغَافِلِ، مُعَلِّمُ الْجَاهِلِ، لَا يُؤْذِي مَنْ يُؤْذِيهِ وَلَا يَخُوضُ فِيمَا لَا يُعْنِيهِ وَلَا
يُشْمِتُ بِمُصِيبَةٍ وَلَا يُذَكِّرُ أَحَدًا بِغَيْبَةٍ...

”(The true believer) is that person who continuously reminds those people who are negligent; they are teachers of the ignorant people; they do not aggravate other people who aggravate him; and they do not interfere in those things which are not their business; and if another person falls into a tribulation, (the true believer) does not rejoice at it; nor does he back-bite another person” 1

The eleventh characteristic of a true believer is that he “continuously reminds those people who are negligent” meaning that the true believer is a person who advises those around him who are inattentive (to the faith).

A person is said to be negligent (Ghafil) when he knows something however he does not pay attention (concerning that thing). For example he knows that drinking alcohol is haram (prohibited) however he does not pay attention to that ruling.

The twelfth characteristic of a true believer is that he is a “teacher of the ignorant person” – meaning that he teaches others around him who may be unaware (of their religious responsibilities). The ignorant (Jahil) is a person who does not know (something).

What is the difference between scolding the person who is negligent and guiding the person who is ignorant and (what is the difference) between Amr bil Ma'ruf and Nahi 'Anil Munkar (Forcefully commanding to that which is ethically right and vigorously forbidding from that which is bad or evil)? These three obligatory acts must not be mixed up or confused with one another.

The negligent person is one who knows the (Islamic) rulings, however he is not attentive (meaning that he has forgotten the issue or ruling at hand). For example he knows that it is prohibited to backbite another person, however he forgets this and may get involved in an act of backbiting.

The ignorant person is the one who does not know the ruling and thus, we wish to teach him the ruling – for example a person who does not know the rulings in relation to backbiting.

The ruling of Amr bil Ma'ruf and Nahi 'Anil Munkar is also something that is performed in regards to an issue in which the person is aware of the issue at hand and the rulings pertaining to it and is neither negligent of it, nor is he ignorant.

With this said, the question arises that what is the ruling of each of these?

In relation to a person who is negligent and inattentive, if the issue is not so important such as the eating of something which is najis (ritually impure), then it is not wajib (obligatory) to remind that person; thus this issue is only limited to those important tasks, for example, shedding the blood of an innocent person thinking that he is a sinner (one for whom the death penalty has been specified for in Islam and must therefore be killed after going through the judicial procedure).

The person who is ignorant to the rulings must be taught them and this act is a wajib (obligatory) one.

In relation to Amr bil Ma'ruf and Nahi 'Anil Munkar in which a person knowingly and intentionally performs a sin, we must command him to good and prevent him from committing evil through the use of kind words.

Thus, each of these three acts is wajib (obligatory), however their scope is quite different from one another.

That which is normally seen among the common population is that they say “Let Musa be on his own faith and 'Isa be on his own faith” (meaning that we should not interfere with other people or pry into their

lives) or some people say that, “You are not going to be in my grave” (so then do not tell me what to do and what not to do) but these are all words which have absolutely no meaning.

We must guide one another and not be indifferent to this issue. It is not equivalent to interfering in the lives of other people. Rather, it has been mentioned in the traditions that the example of a person who lives among a group of sinners is similar to a person who is sitting in a boat in his own area and drills a hole in the bottom of the boat. When other people start to ask him what he is doing he replies, “I am making a hole in my part of the boat” to which the people reply to him, “We all share the same eventual outcome. If the boat has a hole in it, then we will all drown!”

There are other examples in the traditions such as the one in which it states that if a store in the shopping market of town catches fire, then when the people who work in that plaza get together to help put out the fire, the owner of that shop has no right to say “Why are you interfering here – this is my shop!” Since in reply, the people would say, “We too are working in this same plaza and it is possible that the fire from your shop may also affect and burn down our shop.”

These two examples are accurate portrayals of the philosophy behind Amr bil Ma'ruf and Nahi 'Anil Munkar and are proof that this is a general responsibility for all people since we all share a common eventual end.

The thirteenth characteristic of the true believer is that he does not irritate people who irritate him. In the Islamic understanding, we have two terms which are different from one another:

1. 'Adalah:

The meaning of this word is: To that amount that you have been oppressed, you are permitted to oppress the other party (not more than this).

2. Fadilah:

This is something other than 'Adl or justice and in reality, is what we refer to as 'Afw or forgiveness. By this we mean that we do good to a person who does bad to us and this is one of the greatest characteristics, such that the Prophet of Islam (S) has said:

يُعْطَى مَنْ حَرَمَهُ.

“The person who has prevented you (from something) should still be given (his right).”

يُغْفَوُ عَنْ مَنْ ظَلَمَهُ.

“The one who has done oppression should be forgiven.”

يُصَلِّ مَنْ قَطَعَهُ.

“Try to establish ties with the one who broke off relations.”

The perfect true believer does not go after 'Adalah, rather, he goes after Fadilah.

The fourteenth characteristic of a true believer is that he does not interfere in things which are not his business. The phrase in this tradition [ما لا يعينه] is in the meaning of [ما لا يقصده] which means that the true believer stays away from anything that is not related to himself.

One of the most important challenges that people face is when others interfere in things which are none of their business. This even happens at the level of government and also as we see when one country tries to interfere in the affairs and business of another country.

The fifteenth characteristic of a true believer is that if another person falls into a tribulation, he does not rejoice at the misfortune of that person.

In life, we have both good and bad days and a true believer is that person, who when difficulties fall upon him, does not resort to rejoicing at another's misfortune. The true believer is a person who does not say, “You see what kind of troubles Allah has placed upon you! I told you that you should not do such and such an act!” Speaking in such a way to another person is a very cowardly, foolish thing to do and is just like rubbing salt into a wound on the body. Although it is very likely that the person is facing some tribulation due to some bad deeds that he performed, however a true believer must not rejoice at this sort of thing because maybe tomorrow, a tribulation may come his way, since all of us face difficulties in our lives.

The sixteenth characteristic of a true believer is that he does not backbite another person. As for the importance of not backbiting another, it is sufficient for us to mention that the Late Shaykh al-Ansari, in his book al-Makasib has mentioned that if a person who backbites does not ask Allah (SwT) for forgiveness before passing away, then he will be the first person to enter into the hell fire and if he asks for forgiveness and it is accepted from him, then he will be the last person to enter into Paradise.

Backbiting destroys the character and respect of another Muslim and as we know, the character and respect of a Muslim is sacred, just as his blood is sacred and sometimes it can be seen that his character and respect are actually more important than his blood (life)!

Discourse 17: Characteristics of a True Believer – Part IV

In the previous discussions, we had narrated a tradition from the Noble Prophet (S) in which he listed one hundred and three characteristics to Imam 'Ali (as) that a true believer must possess in order to be classified as being complete and one who possesses true faith. Up until now, sixteen characteristics were mentioned and in this discussion, we will cover six more.

...بَرِيئاً مِنَ الْمُحَرَّمَاتِ، وَاقِفاً عِنْدَ الشُّبُهَاتِ، كَثِيرُ الْعِطَاءِ، قَلِيلُ الْأَذَى، عَوْناً
لِلْغَرِيبِ، وَ أَباً لِلْيَتِيمِ...

”(The true believer is one who) stays away from all prohibited things; is at a standstill when it comes to things which are doubtful (in the religion); gives away a lot (to others); bugs and annoys others very little; is a helper to the stranger; and acts as a father to the orphans...”

The seventeenth characteristic of a true believer is that he stays away from all prohibited things, meaning that not only does he refrain from that which is prohibited, but he also keeps away from sins.

There is a difference when we state that a person does not commit sins and when we say that he stays away from sins. There are people who find that when committing certain sins brings about pleasure for them, however because of Allah (SwT), they keep away from these acts. However, sometimes it is possible that through a person's self-building and purification of the soul, one reaches a level that he actually develops an aversion to committing sins and does not gain any sort of pleasure from these acts. It takes a great amount of work and struggle to reach this stage in a person's life such that one can develop pleasure in obeying Allah (SwT) and an aversion to sinning.

The eighteenth characteristic is that one is at a standstill when it comes to things which are doubtful in the religion. Areas of doubt can actually lead to the (performance) of forbidden acts and the one who falls prey to performing acts which are doubtful in the religion, will eventually find himself following the prohibited acts (as well). These doubtful acts resemble the shoulder on the side of the road (which a person driving a car must avoid to stop himself from falling into the ditch) and is something which the true believer must stay away from.

In reality, the doubtful acts are the sanctuary of the prohibited acts and thus, we must stay away from these since their force and power is just like electricity which is so great such that if a person was to get too near this electricity, it would not only pull the person close, but it would also burn him!

In our traditions, there is a good explanation which has been given that states, “Do not enter into the private property of other people otherwise you may be pulled towards usurpation.”

There are many people who have been pulled towards drug addiction in their lives and in the beginning we see that they give the excuse that they are smoking just to pass time and for pleasure, however it reaches a point where they are completely dependent on such things.

The nineteenth characteristic of a true believer is that he gives a great deal to other people. As we know, the word “a lot” is a relative term. For example, if in order to build a hospital which is needed in a society, a rich person (who has millions of dollars) gives \$100,000.00 then this amount may be – in relation to his amount of wealth – something very small. However if a person who is not well off gives \$1,000.00 (which may be a large portion of his savings), then everyone would congratulate him. Therefore, giving gifts and charity are things which are relative.

During the battle of Tabuk, the Prophet (S) asked the people to prepare the Muslim troops for battle and everyone helped quite a bit. Amongst those who gave in the way of Islam, there was a simple worker who in order to help the Muslim army – worked an extra night and whatever earnings he gained on that night, he presented to the Prophet (S). The Munafiqun (Hypocrites) started to make fun of this person, then the following verse of the Qur`an was revealed:

الَّذِينَ يَلْمِزُونَ الْمُطَّوِّعِينَ مِنَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ فِي الصَّدَقَاتِ وَالَّذِينَ لَا يَجِدُونَ إِلَّا
جُهُدَهُمْ فَيَسْخَرُونَ مِنْهُمْ سَخِرَ اللَّهُ مِنْهُمْ وَلَهُمْ عَذَابٌ أَلِيمٌ

“Those who taunt those of the Faithful, who give their Sadaqat (charity) freely, and also those who give to the extent of their earnings and scoff at them (as well); Allah will pay them back their scoffing, and they shall have a painful chastisement.” 1

It was at this time that the Prophet told Abu 'Aqil (the man who had worked extra to help the Muslim troops) to place the dates that he had earned on top of the other dates that others had given so that through his hard work, the entire supply would be filled with Divine spiritual blessings.

The twentieth characteristic of a true believer is that he tries to limit inconveniences to other people. In order for this point to be made clear, we present the following example.

Life is filled with troubles and inconveniences such as the need for everyone to build a house to live in and thus, when this is being done, the place where people would pass from becomes blocked while a

house is being built. However that which is important is that those inconveniences that come about naturally in our daily life must be avoided as much as possible. Thus, a true believer is the person who, if he needs to inconvenience other people, keeps it to a minimum amount.

The twenty-first characteristic is that one helps and assists another person who is in a strange land and is an outsider (in that area).

It is very good to help your neighbours and your close family members however in reality, this is nothing more than “give and take” as today you may help your neighbour and tomorrow he will come to your aide. However that which is important is that you help and assist another person and do not expect that he gives you something back in return for your help. Thus, the highest level of assistance is shown to a foreigner or stranger.

The twenty-second characteristic is that one acts as a father to the orphans. In this tradition, the Prophet (S) did not tell us that the true believer is one who helps, feeds and takes care of the orphan – rather, he told us that he acts as a father to the orphans. This means that any job or responsibility that the father would have over his own children is the same thing that the orphan is entitled to receive.

We must keep in mind that these ethical commandments were explained and brought forth in an environment in which anger and hatred for other people ran strong and had a negative effect on the people and the way they interacted with others.

We hope and pray that Allah (SwT) makes us all successful in being able to fulfill these obligations and that we pay close attention to these characteristics of a true believer who has perfected his faith!

1. Surat al-Tawbah (9), Verse 79

Discourse 18: Characteristics of a True Believer– Part V

In our previous discussions, we had narrated a tradition from the Noble Prophet (S) which he spoke to 'Ali (as) in which he listed the characteristics of a true believer. Twenty-two of these characteristics have been explained, and now we go through four more of the one hundred and three characteristics.

أَحْلَى مِنَ الشَّهَدِ وَأَصْلَدَ مِنَ الصَّوْدِ، لَا يَكْشِفُ سِرًّا وَلَا يَهْتِكُ سِتْرًا...

”(The complete true believer is one who) is sweeter than honey; and is stronger than the outside of a rock; and who does not expose the secrets that people confide in him; and if he himself finds out something about other people, he does not expose this information.”

The twenty-third characteristic of a true believer is that he is sweeter than honey, meaning that interaction with him is something pleasant.

Looking at the lives of the A`immah, especially the life of 'Ali (as), it is commonly known that sitting in his presence and any sort of interaction that others had with him was always something pleasant, as he was a person who had a sense of humor and always spoke with grace.

Some people believe that the more holy or pious a person is, the more stern and harsh he must be, whereas we see that the things which actually make a person progress in various areas such as politics, society, culture, etc... and which also play a very important role in his life, is his pleasant interaction and demeanor with others.

Sometimes, the most difficult of tasks can be solved through pleasant interaction which is full of love and tenderness and carried through with a cheerful face. It is through such interaction that the knots of enmity can be loosened and in which displeasures are removed. In addition, the fire of anger can be put out and chaos and confusion between individuals can be controlled.

The Prophet (S) has stated:

أَكْثَرُ مَا تَلِجُ بِهِ أُمَّتِي الْجَنَّةَ تَقْوَى اللَّهِ وَحُسْنُ الْخُلُقِ.

“The most (important) of things which will bring my Ummah closer to Paradise are Taqwa of Allah and having a good disposition.”¹

The twenty-fourth characteristic is that he is stronger than the outside covering of a rock. Seeing as how sometimes people go to one extreme and think that to be of good character means that a person must give up his rights in the face of his enemy, the Prophet (S) continued his speech by saying that although interaction with a true believer and indeed his character is sweeter than honey (very kind and loving), but at the same time he is not a push over. Rather, in the face of his enemies, he is harsher and harder than a rock (meaning that he does not give in).

It has been mentioned in the Noble Qur`an that a true believer is merciful amongst his friends and fellow believers while he is harsh against the enemies and that he is even stronger and more powerful than

iron and even a mountain:

أَشَدُّ مِنْ زَبْرِ الْحَدِيدِ وَأَشَدُّ مِنَ الْجَبَلِ.

”(The true believer) is firmer and stronger than iron and more powerful than a mountain.”

As we know, a mountain and even iron can be molded and cut through however a true believer can never be cut through, molded or changed. The true believer must be just as 'Ali (as) was. However there are some people who bring up the excuse that since by nature, Imam 'Ali (as) was a very joking person, thus, he was not able to be the leader of a society – however at the same time, we see that he was also powerful and harsh with others. Of course in those areas where the Islamic laws give permission, a person must not be harsh and unsympathetic and it has been mentioned that the person who is harsh with others in this world will be judged with harshness by Allah (SwT) on the Day of Judgement.

The twenty-fifth characteristic of a true believer is that he does not expose the secrets which others confide in him.

What does it truly mean that one does not expose the secrets of others?? We know that during the course of one's life, all of us have secrets which we do not like others to know, because if they were to be known, then this would make life very difficult. Thus, if a person was to relate these secrets to other people and tell them that, “Whatever has been mentioned in this gathering is a trust that you must keep and no one else must know these secrets”, then this must be obeyed.

It has even been mentioned in the traditions that if a person was to tell you something and while telling you, kept looking around him to the left and right to make sure that no one else was listening to what he was telling you, then this is also a sign that what he is telling you is a secret, even though he may not have expressly told you that it was such.

A secret that another believer confides is sacred and must be respected just as the blood of a true believer is sacred. Therefore, the secrets that he keeps with you must be kept hidden from others.

The twenty-sixth characteristic of a true believer is that he does not expose that which is hidden about another person. Exposing this is only possible when the person does not tell you the secret directly – rather, you yourself find out something about him and thus, you keep this thing to yourself and it is this thing which you must not expose to other people.

One of the forms of backbiting is when someone exposes the secrets of another person and spreads hidden information (about others) – things which have become common place in today's day and age. However we must be very careful that even if there is no danger to anyone else and the issue is only related to us but here too, we do not indulge in spreading hidden information.

However if a person has some knowledge of the government, general society, close family members, the youth, the faith of other people, etc... then in these issues, spreading hidden information (about others) is not a problem at all. This issue shares the same ruling of backbiting such that if backbiting a person is more important than the protection of the secrets of the people (backbiting would serve a higher and nobler goal), then it is not a problem. In addition, in the issue of covering the secrets of other people that you yourself are made aware of, this principle too must be put into practice (that sometimes it may be more important to expose such secrets as it would help in serving a higher and nobler goal).

We hope that Allah (SwT) gives us all the opportunity to act according to these guidelines!

1. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 68, pg. 375, Section: Having a Good Disposition

Discourse 19: Characteristics of The True Believer – Part VI

In our previous ethical discussions, we narrated a tradition from the Noble Prophet (S) to 'Ali (as) in which he listed one hundred and three characteristics of a true believer. We have covered twenty-six of these characteristics and in this lecture, we will cover another five of them.

... لَطِيفُ الْحَرَكَاتِ، حُلُوُ الْمُشَاهِدَةِ، كَثِيرُ الْعِبَادَةِ، حُسْنُ الْوَقَارِ، لَيِّنُ الْجَانِبِ...

”(The true believer is one whose) movements are with grace and elegance; seeing him is something that is sweet (pleasing); he performs a great amount of worship; he moves with eloquence and dignity; and he is gentle and loving.”

The twenty-seventh characteristic of a true believer is that his movement is with grace and elegance and when he deals or interacts with the creations of Allah (SwT), he does so with love, and gentleness.

The twenty-eighth characteristic is that seeing and meeting him is something sweet and pleasing and he is never harsh or bitter with others.

The twenty-ninth characteristic is that he performs a lot of worship (of Allah).

Is the meaning of this worship simply related to his Salat and Sawm or is it something else?

As we know, 'Ibadah (worship) is of two types:

1. 'Ibadah in the specific meaning: These are forms of worship which if not performed with the intention of seeking closeness to Allah (SwT) are rendered null and void.
2. 'Ibadah in the general meaning: Any action, which if done with the intention of seeking nearness to Allah (SwT) earns the person a reward, however the intention is not one of the conditions for the correctness of the act.

Thus we can include all actions that we perform in this section and thus when the traditions speak of 'Ibadah, they refer to this meaning.

The thirtieth characteristic of a true believer is that he moves with eloquence and dignity (the word وَقَارٍ and وَقَار both come from the root word of وَقَرَ which is in the meaning of a weighty object).

The thirty-first characteristic is that he is gentle and has love and affection (for others).

Amongst these five characteristics which we just mentioned, there are four characteristics which are related to a person and his interaction with other people. We see that a pleasant interaction and good dealings with others is so important and has a great effect on people whom we are speaking to – whether they be people of the faith or people who are engrossed in this materialistic world.

The enemies of Islam are unyielding on placing the label of violence and aggression on the Muslims and we must show them that although we are:

أَشَدَّاءُ عَلَى الْكُفَّارِ

“Harsh against the disbelievers.”

However at the same time, we are also:

رُحَمَاءُ بَيْنَهُمْ

“Merciful with one another.”

Looking at the lives of the A`immah, we see that they showed love and affection even with those who were not Muslims and who were not at war with the Muslims. For example, in the books of history it is mentioned that Imam 'Ali (as) was once traveling with a Jew and when they reached a place where they were going to separate on their own routes (to their own city), we see that the Imam went a partial way

on the road with the Jew.

Upon seeing this, the Jew told him that he had taken the wrong road to which the Imam replied, “In order to follow the commandments of my religion and observe the rights of the person I am traveling with, I came a short distance on the path with you.” The Jewish man was very surprised at the conduct of the Imam and after a short period of time, he accepted Islam.

Acting according to such a simple injunction in the religion of Islam resulted in a great number of people becoming Muslims:

وَرَأَيْتَ النَّاسَ يَدْخُلُونَ فِي دِينِ اللَّهِ أَفْوَاجًا

“And you will see people entering into the religion of Allah in groups.”

With great regret though, some people who think themselves to be holy, pious people – are in reality just shallow minded individuals, who act in such ways that give an excuse to the enemies (to insult Islam) whereas the principles of our din are not based on aggression or hatred.

In the Qur`an, we have 114 chapters of which 113 of them all start with the words:

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

“In the Name of Allah the Most Merciful, the Most Compassionate.”

Thus, a fraction of 1/114 of Islam deals with anger and harshness, whereas 113 parts of Islam deal with mercy and compassion.

In addition, we have two different types of interaction with people:

1. Acts of showing off which are done to gain some material benefit in this world.
2. Acts which are done with sincerity and come straight from the heart.

The first type of act is quite common in the West – for example in order to gain the pleasure and satisfaction and attract more customers, the people show more care and love to their clientele. It is through this act that they can gain wealth because they know that if they have good interaction with their customers, then they will be able to attract more people to product.

The second type is one of the characteristics of a true believer and when we say that a true believer is one who is pleasant to interact with, it is not done to gain profit from this material world, rather, they do this to unite hearts and get spiritually closer to one another.

The story of Luqman, the Wise, and the advice that he gave to his son, it has been narrated in the Qur`an:

وَلَا تُصَعِّرْ خَدَّكَ لِلنَّاسِ وَلَا تَمْشِ فِي الْأَرْضِ مَرَحًا

“And swell not thy cheek (for pride) at people, nor walk with insolence through the Earth.”¹

The word in this verse [تصعر] comes from the root word of [صعر] and its original meaning is a sickness that a camel becomes plagued with and due to this disease, his neck is contorted to the right or left side.

This verse speaks to people and tells them that they must not develop the same sickness that a camel develops which makes his neck contorted for this sort of spiritual sickness in a person can lead him to turn away from the people. Through the use of this phrase, it is clear that people who have bad etiquette actually possess a sickness. In the continuation and end of this verse we are told that we must not walk the road of pride and this is another characteristic which we must all keep in mind!

1. Surat Luqman (31), Verse 18

Discourse 20: Five Life Giving Lessons and Refraining from Doubtful Things

قَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ : أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ! لَا تُعْطُوا الْحِكْمَةَ غَيْرَ أَهْلِهَا فَتَظْلِمُوهَا، وَلَا تَمْنَعُوهَا أَهْلَهَا فَتَظْلِمُوهُمْ، وَلَا تُعَاقِبُوا ظَالِمًا فَيَبْطُلَ فَضْلُكُمْ، وَلَا تُرَآؤُوا النَّاسَ فَيَحْبَطَ عَمَلُكُمْ، وَلَا تَمْنَعُوا الْمَوْجُودَ فَيَقِلَّ خَيْرُكُمْ، أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ! إِنَّ الْأَشْيَاءَ ثَلَاثَةٌ: أَمْرٌ اسْتَبَانَ رُشْدُهُ فَاتَّبِعُوهُ، وَ أَمْرٌ اسْتَبَانَ غِيَّهُ فَاجْتَنِبُوهُ، وَ أَمْرٌ اخْتَلَفَ عَلَيْكُمْ فَارْجِعُوهُ إِلَى اللَّهِ.

The Messenger of Allah (S) has said, “O' mankind! Do not convey wisdom to those people who are not

worthy (of receiving such teachings), as you would have done oppression to the wisdom; and do not deprive those people who are worthy of receiving such teachings, as then you would have done oppression to them.

Do not seek revenge from the person who has oppressed you for if you do, you would make your worth and value null and void; and do not perform (good) acts for other people to see, for through this you would eliminate (the good) of such acts. Do not prevent yourselves from giving charity otherwise you will reduce the good that is to come to you.

O' Mankind! Verily things are of three types: (1) some of which whose correctness is apparent to you so then follow these (and perform them); (2) actions whose incorrectness is apparent to you so then avoid performing these acts; (3) actions whose performance is of doubt, so then refer the ruling on these to Allah...”¹

This tradition consists of five sections. In the first section, the Prophet of Islam (S) has given us five commandments:

1. We must not convey wisdom and knowledge to those who are not worthy of such teachings, for then we will do oppression to knowledge.
2. We must not deprive those people who are worthy of gaining knowledge from our knowledge since if we do this, we will commit oppression to those people.

From the wordings of this part of the tradition we can deduce that there are specific conditions which must be met for a student of knowledge – the most important is that one must have the (spiritual) ability to accept such knowledge and if this is not within a person, then one is not worthy of acquiring knowledge – that knowledge whose acquisition has been promised a great reward.

The Prophet (S) has stated that, “If there is a person who is not worthy of gaining a (particular) knowledge, then you must not teach it to him since when knowledge falls into his hands, he will use it in the wrong way and will lead the world to destruction. A person who is ignorant and lacks knowledge neither has the power to destroy a land, nor to make it habitable.”

In the present time, those people who are leading the world into corruption are the ones who are at the head of the colonializing governments of the world through the guidance of their self-proclaimed “scholars” and “intellectuals”.

The Qur'an contains many different expressions such as:

هُدًى لِّلْمُتَّقِينَ

”A guidance for those who have consciousness (of Allah).”²

إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ لآيَاتٍ لِّقَوْمٍ يَسْمَعُونَ

“Surely in that (the day and the night) are signs for a people who listen.”³

It is phrases such as these which clearly show us that knowledge without spiritual purification bears absolutely no (positive) results.

Thus, it is clear that true guidance is specifically for those people who have already laid the groundwork (to accept knowledge and further guidance). Based on this, we see that in the past, the true scholars did not give permission to just any student to come and sit in their classes – rather, they tested them in relation to their ethical morals and from this, they would see what level of piety the students were at.

However this does not mean that one has the right to hoard his knowledge! Rather, one must only teach such knowledge to those who are worthy of receiving it and it is through the knowledge that one possesses that he must try to cure the ailments of the people. It does not make a difference if the ailments are in relation to their material life or their spiritual life, although we believe that spiritual ailments and diseases are much worse than the material or physical sicknesses. We believe this since we accept the fact that Allah (SwT) will hold a person responsible for his spiritual illnesses (and not his physical sicknesses), just as it has been mentioned in the traditions that:

مَا أَخَذَ اللَّهُ عَلَى أَهْلِ الْجَهْلِ أَنْ يَتَعَلَّمُوا، حَتَّى أَخَذَ عَلَى أَهْلِ الْعِلْمِ أَنْ يُعَلِّمُوا.

“Allah has not taken a covenant from the ignorant people to learn until he took a covenant from the scholars to teach (the ignorant people).”⁴

In the religion of Islam, learning as well as teaching are both obligatory (wajib) and these two acts are not separate from each other since they are the prerequisite and necessity of one another.

3. If an oppressor commits oppression upon you and you take revenge, then your spiritual worth will be removed because you would end up being just like him.

Of course forgiving the person who has oppressed you should only be carried out when you know that he will not take advantage of your forgiveness and that you forgiving him would not have a negative impact on the entire society (by him then committing other acts of aggression on others under the presumption that they too would forgive him).

4. You must perform all your actions sincerely for Allah (SwT) and must not entertain even the slightest amount of showing off in them.

This is a very difficult task to accomplish and as we know, showing off in one's actions is only one of the springs of corruption of one's good deeds. In this regards, there are many other things such as pride, one's own inner passions and desires, etc... that may come into play to corrupt one's good deeds, and spoil the good work that one performs.

For example, sometimes we perform the Salat so that we become pleased with our own selves and we do not think about other people – this in itself is a form of corrupting our good deeds. Or for example we perform the Salat out of habit, or we perform the Salat Lail so that we can become better than other people or... and it is these and other things that can lead to the corruption of our good deeds.

5. If a person wants something from you, then do not be stingy in relation to it because if you do not give it to the person (yet you are able to) then Allah (SwT) will cut off the bounties that would come to you since:

كَمَالُ الْجُودِ بَذْلُ الْمَوْجُودِ.

“The perfection of a person is that he gives what he has.”

If a host does not bring to his guests whatever he has at home (when guests come over to his house), then he has done oppression to them and in similar way, if the guests ask the host for an excess of things, then they would be counted as oppressors!

The second part of this tradition is divided up into three sections:

1. The actions whose correctness is apparent for all to see.
2. The actions in which the misguidedness and corruption is apparent for all to see.
3. The actions which are obscure from the point of view of:
 - a. The subject matter.
 - b. The Islamic ruling.

This tradition is in relation to the actions in which the Islamic ruling is one of doubt or obscurity and in some traditions, in place of the phrase:

رُدُّهُ إِلَى اللَّهِ...

“Return the (ruling of that particular act) back to Allah.”

it has been mentioned that in those types of actions where we have a doubt as to its ruling, we must exercise precaution, because the questionable actions are the precursor to the forbidden acts.

There are some people who have are habituated in saying:

كُلُّ مَكْرُوهِ جَائِزٍ.

“All the makruh (reprehensible) acts are permitted to be performed.”

To such people who state this, we say to them that yes it is true that we are permitted to act upon an apparent ruling on a particular issue, however when there is clearly a doubt on a particular ruling, then if a person pollutes himself with performing that doubtful action, then slowly the indecency of that particular act will become less in his estimation and thus, he will fall into performing the prohibited!

Allah (SwT) has told us, “Be careful of the evil footsteps of Shaitan” and as we know, one of the most clear examples of following the footsteps of the Shaitan is to perform the acts in which there is a doubt.

Shaitan even misleads the holy, Salatul Lail performing people in a special way. He does not come to them and tell them, “Go out and drink alcohol”. Rather, he starts out by saying, “Salatul Lail is not one of the obligatory Salat, so go ahead and stop performing it.” Once the person leaves this Salat, then slowly, Shaitan would approach him in relation to performing the obligatory Salat right when the time sets in and will say to him, “It is not a condition of the Salat that you perform it right when the time sets in...” and he would continue in this way until the person becomes completely detached from Allah (SwT).

If a person truly wishes to develop a deep spiritual insight and gain spiritual pleasure, then he must keep away from doubtful foods, gatherings, and speech and without doubt, in relation to all of the actions that he performs, the utmost of precaution must be exercised!

1. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 74, pg. 179

2. Surat al-Baqarah (2), Verse 2

3. Surat Yunus (10), Verse 67

4. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 2, pg. 80

Discourse 21: Characteristics of a True Believer

– Part VII

The 25th of the lunar month of Dhul Qa'dah – according to some of our traditions – corresponds with the event known as Dahwul Ard (Earth Day). It is also the day when Imam 'Ali b. Musa al-Rida (as) proceeded on his journey from Madinah towards Tus (in present day Iran).

As for the first event, we know that the meaning of Dahw is to spread or stretch and it is from the following verse of the Noble Qur'an that we extract this meaning:

وَ الْأَرْضِ بَعْدَ ذَلِكَ دَحِيهَا

“And after that He (Allah) spread forth the Earth.”¹

What exactly does it mean to spread or stretch out the Earth and how do we rationalize this theory with today's science which states that the Earth has come from the Solar System (that we exist in) and is actually a piece of the Sun which broke off?

When the Earth was separated from the Sun, it was a ball of fire with molten liquid upon it. After this occurred, air pressure was formed around the Earth from the water which was being transformed into vapor and with this, a period of heavy rains started to fall upon the Earth. This rain took over the entire face of the Earth and after a bit of time, some of the water settled into the Earth and the dry ground that was covered by water began to show.

Thus, the term Dahwul Ard is in the meaning of that day when the dry Earth was brought forth from the rain and water which was upon the Earth, and according to the traditions, this event started from the House of Allah in Makkah.

Looking at the knowledge and science of today, this theory has not been proven wrong.

In reality, this day was a day of great blessing from Allah (SwT), since He brought forth the dry, barren Earth from under the water which led to this planet being suitable for habitation.

In addition, according to some of the books of history, Imam 'Ali b. Musa al-Rida (as) began his journey from Madinah towards Tus on this day and this is also a great Divine blessing from Allah (SwT) for the people of Iran. It is through his footsteps into that country that lead to the habitability, spirituality, sanctity

and the blessings of Allah (SwT) being showered upon them, and if the sacred burial spot of the Imam (as) was not in this country, then the Iranians would have had no place for refuge.

Every year, close to 15,000,000 people perform his visitation (Ziyarat) in order to renew their pledge of allegiance to the Ahlul Bait. It is only through the spiritual shadow of the Imam (as) which covers the country which prevents calamities from befalling the Iranians

In any case, for various reasons, this is a very special day and we pray that Allah (SwT) grants everyone the ability to make use of the Divine Blessings that are accompanied with this day.

We have been narrating a tradition from the Prophet of Islam (S) to the Commander of the Faithful, 'Ali b. Abi Talib (as) in which the Noble Prophet (S) listed one hundred and three characteristics of a true believer and of them, thirty-one have been discussed, and in today's discussion, we cover another four.

...حَلِيمًا إِذَا جُهَلَ عَلَيْهِ، صَبُورًا عَلَى مَنْ أَسَاءَ إِلَيْهِ، يُبْجَلُ الْكَبِيرَ وَيُرْحَمُ
الصَّغِيرَ...

”(the true believer is one who) when a person (says) something out of ignorance about him, is forbearing; patient when a person does something bad act to him; shows respect to his elders and shows mercy to the young ones...”²

The thirty-second characteristic of a true believer is that he shows forbearance when a person acts with ignorance in relation to him, and if the ignorant person says something bad to him, then he bears it with patience and he does not reply to the bad thing with something bad.

The thirty-third characteristic is that he bears with patience when a person intentionally commits something bad to him. The difference between this characteristic and the previous one is that the previous characteristic was in relation to when a person said something bad, whereas this second level, it is in relation to a person doing a bad action against him.

In Islam we have both what is known as the legislative law and the ethical law. The legislative law states that if a person does something bad to you, then you are permitted to do something bad to him in return but only to that limit which he has done to you. In these regards, the Qur`an states:

فَمَنْ اَعْتَدَى عَلَيْكُمْ فَاعْتَدُوا عَلَيْهِ بِمِثْلِ مَا اَعْتَدَى عَلَيْكُمْ

“So then if a person attacks you then you too attack him just as he attacked you.”³

These sorts of laws have been put into place so that those who wish to perform bad deeds would not go to an extreme (of performing bad acts because they know there would be some sort of accountability even in this world). However the ethical law (in relation to this) is that not only should we not retaliate with bad in the face of a bad deed, rather, we should repel the bad act with something nice! In this regards, the Qur`an states:

وَ إِذَا مَرَّ بِاللَّغْوِ مَرُّوا كِرَامًا

“And when they pass by vain and trivial acts, they pass by with dignity.”⁴

إِذْفَعِ بِالَّتِي هِيَ أَحْسَنُ السَّيِّئَةِ

“Repel evil with that which is much better.”⁵

وَ إِذَا خَاطَبَهُمُ الْجَاهِلُونَ قَالُوا سَلَامًا

“And when the ignorant people address them, they (simply) say, 'Peace!'”⁶

This is the ethical law.

The thirty-fourth characteristic of a true believer is that one shows respect to the elders. The issue of showing respect to one's elders and old people of the community has been mentioned quite often in the traditions. The late Shaikh 'Abbas al-Qummi narrates the following tradition in his work Safinatul Bihar:

مَنْ وَقَرَ ذَا شَيْبَةٍ لِشَيْبَتِهِ آمَنَهُ اللَّهُ تَعَالَى مِنْ فَرْعِ يَوْمِ الْقِيَمَةِ.

“The person who shows humility to an old person due to his old age, Allah, the Most High, will protect that person from the evil on the Day of Judgement.”⁷

In another tradition it is mentioned:

إِنَّ مِنْ إِجْلَالِ اللَّهِ تَعَالَى إِكْرَامُ ذِي الشَّيْبَةِ الْمُسْلِمِ

“Surely one of the greatest things of Allah, the Most High, is the showing of respect to the older Muslims.”⁸

The thirty–fifth characteristic of a true believer is that he shows mercy and compassion to those younger than him.

It is well known that when a person meets a, old person, he shows respect simply for the fact that the person is of old age, and when someone meets a younger person he shows him honour and respect because he has committed less sins than him(since he has been on this Earth a shorter time)!

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1. Surat al–Naziyat (79), Verse 30
 2. Bihar al–Anwar, vol. 64, pg. 311
 3. Surat al–Baqarah (2), Verse 194
 4. Surat al–Furqan (35), Verse 72
 5. Surat al–Mu'minun (23), Verse 96
 6. Surat al–Furqan (35), Verse 63
 7. Safinat al–Bihar, under the word شيب
 8. Ibid.

Discourse 22: Characteristics of a True Believer – Part VIII

Our ethical discussions have based on the tradition from the Noble Prophet (S) to Imam 'Ali (as) in which there are one hundred and three characteristics that a true believer must possess. Previously, we have covered thirty–five of these characteristics and in today's gathering, we will explain six more.

...أَمِيناً عَلَى الْأَمَانَاتِ، بَعِيداً مِنَ الْخِيَانَاتِ، إِفْهَةً التُّقَى وَ حِلْفُهُ الْحَيَا، كَثِيرٌ
الْحَذَرِ، قَلِيلُ الزَّلَلِ...

”(The true believer is one who) is trustworthy when given something to keep as a trust; is one who is far away from treachery or deceit; his close companion is piety; his associate is modesty; and in the face of

dangers, he is always; alert and his misguidedness is little.”¹

The thirty–sixth characteristic of a true believer is that when one is given a trust, he takes care of it. This trait plays a very important role in the teachings of the Prophets:

“Allah did not raise up a single Prophet except that he spoke the truth and gave back trusts (that were entrusted to him) to either the righteous person or to the wicked sinner.”²

The reason why the word “trust” has been mentioned in the plural form in this tradition could be due to the fact that it refers to various types of trusts that one is given to maintain.

The trusts of Allah (SwT) that are with us are many, such as: our life, the period of our youth, our health, faith, religion, children, the country we are living in, etc... and all of these are Divine trusts from Allah (SwT) that we must preserve.

If a person's child goes astray or we act in such a way that leads to irrelevancy of the religion of Islam or the teachings of the Ahlul Bait in the eyes of the people, then we have done treachery to the trusts that have been given to us.

Amongst all of the trusts that we have been given, the most important of them is the responsibility and accountability that all of the creations refused to accept and it was only mankind and humanity that accepted it. It is this trust that has such a great status which we must not be negligent of and it is because of this responsibility that when a boy or girl becomes physically mature (Baligh), that we hold programs to celebrate this special occasion. Such a program is completely appropriate and suitable to be held because at this age, the boy or girl is spoken to directly by Allah (SwT) – and this is not something to be taken as trivial!

The thirty–seventh characteristic of a true believer is that one keeps far away from treachery and deceit. By this we mean that the true believer keeps away from all forms of treachery – treachery in relation to wealth, knowledge (which he has been given which he is supposed to pass on to others), the spiritual heart (his emotions and sentiments), etc... The complete true believer is one who keeps away from all sorts of deceits and treacheries.

The thirty–eighth characteristic is that one is the true friend of a believer who possesses Allah consciousness (Taqwa).

As we know, Imam 'Ali (as) is the complete and most perfect example of this part of the tradition, and we see in history that when his brother (Aqil b. Abi Talib) asked him for something more than what was his right from the public treasury, Imam 'Ali (as) said to him that the relationship of being his brother was only up to that point of maintaining family ties and that he would not break the laws of Allah (SwT) even for his own brother.

The thirty-ninth characteristic is that one's close companion is modesty. The topic of modesty has many details associated with it but basically means that one turns away from anything that is a sin. Today, the powers of influence are trying to pull the modesty away from the youth and if they are successful in breaking this shield that is around the youth, then without doubt, the youth will fall prey to many sins.

The enemies (of Islam) try to define modesty (Haya) as being a person possessing a weak soul, whereas this is not the case. We know that modesty in the face of the arrows of the enemies is like a rifle-pit (that protects the one who has this trait).

The fortieth characteristic is that when a true believer faces dangers, he pulls himself together; and when faced with the lower desires of his soul from within and the callings of Shaitan from outside, one is careful and attentive.

In many places in the Qur`an it is mentioned that when the lower desires of the soul and the Shaitan try to pull a person to perform a bad action then they (either the lower desires of the soul or the Shaitan) try and depict that act as being something beautiful and attractive.

For example, one of the the worst sins is to kill another person but even worse than this is when a person kills his own child, and even worse than these two is when a person kills his infant baby. The 'Arabs at the time of Ignorance used to bury their new-born daughters alive and in doing this, they thought that they were actually helping their wife! In reality, Shaitan had actually made their wicked deeds seem beautiful and fair-seeming to them!

The same things can be seen today however in different forms such as under the guise of human rights and fighting against terrorism we see that the United States of America acted out some of the worst forms of treachery around the world!

The forty-first characteristic of a true believer is that his misguidedness is very little. If he possesses any type of this in himself, then he definitely feels disappointed since he is able to see the true face of the actions which he is committing.

We pray that through the spiritual blessings of the Noble Messenger (S), who has spoken these words in this traditions, and through the spiritual blessings of the Commander of the Faithful,'Ali b. Abi Talib (as) who was the one being spoken to, that Allah (SwT) grants us all the success to implement these teachings within our own lives!

1. Ibid., vol. 64, pg. 311

2. Mustadrak Safinat al-Bihar, vol. 9, pg. 519

Discourse 23: On the Occasion of 'Eidul Ghadir

We are on the heels of the commemoration of the glorious event of 'Eidul Ghadir. May Allah (SwT) make this a great day of celebration for all of the Shia, and grant us all the ability to follow in this school of thought which aims to make us true human beings. The ethical tradition and verse of the Qur`an on the occasion of 'Eidul Ghadir concerns the greatness of the Commander of the Faithful, 'Ali b. Abi Talib (as).

هُوَ الَّذِي أُيِّدَكَ بِنَصْرِهِ وَيَا الْمُؤْمِنِينَ. وَأَلَّفَ بَيْنَ قُلُوبِهِمْ لَوْ أَنْفَقْتَ مَا فِي الْأَرْضِ
جَمِيعًا مَا أَلَّفْتَ بَيْنَ قُلُوبِهِمْ وَلَكِنَّ اللَّهَ أَلَّفَ بَيْنَهُمْ...

“He (Allah) it is who has strengthened you (Muhammad) with His aid and with (the company of) the believers. And (moreover) He has put affection between their hearts (the believers). Now if you had spent all that is in the Earth could you have produced that affection? But Allah (alone) has done it...”¹

In this verse, the Noble Qur`an was speaking directly to Prophet Muhammad (S) and saying that one of the miracles of this great personality was his ability to bring the hearts of the true believers together; and in addition, they also rose up to assist the Prophet (S).

The word “بِنَصْرِهِ” translated as “with His aid” points to the Hidden help and assistance which was given (to the Prophet (S)) in various battles that he fought and even in other non-wartime events such as the event known as Lailatul Mabit (the night that the Prophet migrated from Makkah to Madinah). If the help of the Divine was not present, then it is very difficult to say if the Prophet (S) would have been saved (on that night), or not.

Allah (SwT) assists the true believers – actually not all of the believers – rather, only those believers whose hearts are united with one another! In continuation, this verse tells us that the joining of the hearts was not something which the Prophet (S) did by himself, rather, this was brought about through the power of Allah (SwT).

We see that during the time of ignorance of the 'Arabs, there was a great deal of animosity for one another and this hostility was even inherited and passed down from one generation to the next and (even generations later), revenge would be taken against another tribe. Such a hatred and animosity that existed in this group of people could never be removed through the normal means at one's disposal. Thus, Allah (SwT) said that if all that was in the Earth would have been given in charity, still the hearts of the 'Arabs would not have been united – rather, it is through Allah (SwT) that the hearts of the believers were made into one.

In this noble verse of the Qur'an, the word "مؤمنين" has appeared in the plural form and this can be done for two reasons: sometimes it is done to mean the actual, complete definition of the word (in the plural sense of the word), and sometimes it is done to show respect to one person. Thus, the plural is used, however it indicates only one person – and in this verse, both interpretations can be accepted.

In relation to this verse of the Qur'an, the late 'Allamah Amini in his work al-Ghadir² narrated two tradition – one which has been mentioned from the work by Khatib al-Baghdadi who is one of the most well known scholars of the Ahlus Sunnah, and another tradition from al-Suyuti (another well known scholar of the Ahlus Sunnah). In addition, others have also related this tradition.

قَالَ النَّبِيُّ (صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَآلِهِ (وَسَلَّمَ)): لَمَّا عُرِجَ بِي رَأَيْتُ عَلَى سَاقِ الْعَرْشِ مَكْتُوبًا: لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ، مُحَمَّدٌ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ، أَيْدِيَهُ بَعَلِي نَصْرَتُهُ بَعَلِي.

The Prophet (S) said, “When I was taken up (into the heavens on the Me'raj), I saw the following written on the leg of the Throne (of Allah): 'There is no creature or entity worthy of worship except Allah, and Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah and I have strengthened him (Muhammad) with 'Ali and I have assisted him (Muhammad) with 'Ali.’”

عَنْ جَابِرٍ قَالَ قَالَ النَّبِيُّ (صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَآلِهِ (وَسَلَّمَ)): مَكْتُوبٌ فِي بَابِ الْجَنَّةِ قَبْلَ أَنْ يَخْلُقَ اللَّهُ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ بِأَلْفِي سَنَةٍ: لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ مُحَمَّدٌ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ أَيْدِيَهُ بَعَلِي.

Jabir narrated from the Prophet (S) that he said, “One thousand years before Allah created the heavens and the Earth, it was written on the Door of Paradise: "There is no creature or entity worthy of worship except Allah, and Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah and I have strengthened him (Muhammad) with 'Ali.’”

The Divine Throne is the point where the beginning of creation took place and Jannah (Paradise) is the end of the path – meaning that from the beginning to the end (of this universe), the entire trail or pathway is emblazoned with the name of Allah (SwT), the Prophet Muhammad (S) and Imam 'Ali (as). This points to the fact that 'Ali (as) was trained and brought up as the helper, brother, assistant, supporter and protector of the Prophet (S), and in instances where everyone else ran away, it was only 'Ali (as) who stayed to defend the Prophet (S) and the best example of this was during the battle of Uhud.

What is the difference between assistance (نصرت) and confirming (تأييد)? If these two words are used

separate from one another (not in one sentence), then they carry the same meaning. However, when they are used together, then the meaning of confirming (تأييد) is to help one in spiritual affairs while assistance (نصرت) is in the meaning of the physical help one gives to another person.

This tradition quoted above has a message for everyone and it tells us that 'Ali (as) did not reach to the rank that he possessed for nothing. Rather, through his helping the religion of the Prophet (S), he reached to that grand status.

Helping the religion of the Prophet (S) is not achieved through holding gatherings (majalis) to commemorate joyous occasions in the Islamic calendar, nor is it achieved through simple recitation of poems, nor even going for Ziyarat. Rather, that person who claims to be of the Tashayya' (Shia), must traverse on the path of being a fighter for the religion, especially during our present time where various types of attacks are being leveled against the Shia, and those things which the Shia hold sacred.

Of course, this enmity against the Shia clearly shows that the spread of the teachings of the Ahlul Bait (as) and the Shia beliefs are on the increase and thus, the enemies have also risen up against us and our beliefs.

One of the proofs of the truthfulness of the Shia beliefs is the sources and references for all of our beliefs can also be found in the books of the Ahlus Sunnah. In addition, all of the spiritual greatness that have been recorded about the Ahlul Bait (as) in our books are also mentioned in their books!

When it comes to defending the issue of Wilayah and the teachings of the Ahlul Bait (as), we must do so with logic and related proofs and continue such discussions with a cool head and complete control of our entire presence.

It is our hope that Insha–Allah, we are able to be living examples of “أيديه بنصره” and that we too can assist the school of the Ahlul Bait (as)!

1. Surat al–Anfal (8), Verses 62 and 63

2. Mustadrak Safinat al–Bihar, vol. 2, pg. 50

Discourse 24: Four Islamic Commandments and

the Transient Life of this World

عَنْ أَبِي أَيُّوبَ الْأَنْصَارِيِّ قَالَ: سَمِعْتُ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ يَقُولُ: حُلُّوا أَنْفُسَكُمْ الطَّاعَةَ،
وَالْبِسُوهَا قِنَاعَ الْمُخَالَفَةِ، فَاجْعَلُوا آخِرَتَكُمْ لِأَنْفُسِكُمْ، وَ سَعَيْكُمْ لِمُسْتَقَرِّكُمْ، وَ
أَعْلَمُوا أَنَّكُمْ عَنْ قَلِيلٍ رَاحِلُونَ، وَ إِلَى اللَّهِ صَائِرُونَ، وَ لَا يُغْنِي عَنْكُمْ هُنَالِكَ إِلَّا
صَالِحُ عَمَلٍ قَدَّمْتُمُوهُ، وَ حَسَنُ ثَوَابٍ أَحْرَزْتُمُوهُ، فَإِنَّكُمْ إِنَّمَا تَقْدِمُونَ عَلَى مَا
قَدَّمْتُمْ وَ جَازُونَ عَلَى مَا أَسْلَفْتُمْ.

It has been narrated from Abi Ayyub al-Ansari who said: “I heard the Messenger of Allah (S) say: “Cover yourselves with the clothing of obedience (to Allah) and cover (your heart) by going against the desires of your soul. Make your next life by yourselves (through your actions) and make your strivings (in this world) be for your perpetual and everlasting home (meaning the next world).

Know that surely very soon you shall leave this world and you will go back towards Allah; so realize that on that day, nothing will profit you except for the righteous actions that you send forth for yourselves and the good deeds which you save for your own souls. Certainly you are in need of that which you send forth for yourselves and for all the deeds you perform, you will be rewarded and punished accordingly.”¹

In this tradition, we will start with four Islamic commandments and then will work into a discussion concerning the transient aspect of the life of this world. These four Islamic commandments are:

- 1) The things which make a person more attractive is his obedience to Allah (SwT).
- 2) We must clothe ourselves with the clothing of disobedience to the lower-self.
- 3) We must build and decorate the next life by ourselves.
- 4) Our struggles and endeavors (in this life) must be directed to our original (and permanent) abode.

In this tradition, there is a sentence which we must pay careful attention to. We are told that obedience (to Allah (SwT)) is a beautiful garment for the person who wishes to make his countenance beautiful. Thus, the covering which Allah (SwT) has commanded us to adorn ourselves with is the clothing of obedience.

The society in which the laws and regulations of Allah (SwT) are put into practice is a good society and that society which lacks Allah (SwT) is one in which whatever angle and aspect we look at them from, we see (spiritual) sicknesses and immorality.

If there was no concept of a next life involved (for those who do not believe in Allah (SwT)) – which

definitely exists for some people – then even for the life of this world, mankind should still be compelled to follow the orders of Allah (SwT), since it is by following the commandments set by Him that give a person character and elevate his status.

Just imagine a person whose tongue, eyes and all of his body parts are free and not under any sort of control, such that they permit him to perform any wrong act. Compare such a corrupt person with one whose tongue, eyes, heart and entire presence are spiritually aware (of Allah (SwT)) and the Last Day. Naturally, you would develop a stronger attraction to the person who is spiritually cleansed and an aversion to the first sort of person. The first person has removed the covering of obedience of Allah (SwT) from his own heart and has turned into a Fasiq or an open sinner.

The word “فسق” or Fisq comes in the meaning of:

خُرُوجُ النَّبَاتِ عَنِ التَّمْرَةِ.

This means that the seed (of a date) has been taken out from the date and the seed or pit is no longer clothed or covered with the actual edible part of the date. Similar is a person who is a Fasiq as the kernel of his existence has been removed from him and all that remains is his physical shell.

However it is a spiritually cleansed person who obeys the commandments of Allah (SwT) and thus covers himself with the obedience of Allah (SwT).

As for the words of the Prophet (S) in regards to the transient life of this material world, in many traditions we see that the human being has been compared to a traveller in which this world is one of the momentary or temporary sojourns of a person, whereas his final objective is the next life.

This traveller is a person who is not in control of his trip and thus, we see that he was brought to this location, and in the end he will be taken away from this place (against his will). At a resting place, the traveller would naturally prepare and gather the things that he would require in order to continue his journey.

The trips and journeys that people took in previous times and those which are undertaken today differ drastically from one another. In the past when people wanted to travel from one city to another, they would take into consideration the distance between the two points and divide this stretch of land over the amount of distance which they had the ability to cover per day and along the way, would setup a camp to rest.

For example, a hundred kilometer trip would be referred to as a 'three-stage' trip meaning that a person would start his trip by leaving in the morning and whatever place he reached to in the evening would be taken as a resting place and they would rest and sleep (and this would be the first stage of their trip).

Obviously, even stopping to rest and sleep at night was also for some purpose such as:

1. Rest.
2. Protection from the dangers of thieves and wild animals.
3. On these long journeys, there were also people who used to wander around the paths with water (for the travellers to make use of). Those who were travelling and needed water or help with preparing their animals for the next leg of the journey would be provided this assistance by these people. The travelers who reached such a resting spot during the period of their trip never considered that a place as their permanent home.

Without doubt, if our outlook for this world was like these travellers such that it is not our permanent abode and that eventually we must return back to our original home, then our state of affairs would definitely be different than they are right now and we would definitely go through a complete spiritual change.

Our true life is reserved for 'that' place and in the Noble Qur'an we read that:

وَمَا هَذِهِ الْحَيَاةُ الدُّنْيَا إِلَّا لَهُوٌّ وَلَعِبٌ وَإِنَّ الدَّارَ الْآخِرَةَ لَهِيَ الْحَيَوَانُ لَوْ كَانُوا يَعْلَمُونَ

“And the life of this world³ is nothing more than sport and play and surely the abode of the next life – that is the (true meaning) of life – if only they had any intelligence.”⁴

If we truly had this vision in ourselves we would not bother fighting for things like a piece of land or status, or other trivial things.

The resting places that existed in the olden days on the roads differ from the life of this world since the travellers knew that when they reached such a house or locality at night time, they would stay there until the morning and then once the sun was up, they would proceed on their journey. However no one can guarantee us that we will be alive in this world until the morning time until the afternoon?

That which has been explained in the tradition is that there is nothing in this material world that will be of any use or benefit for a person except for two things: the righteous actions which one sends forth for oneself; and the reward for the good deeds which a person does for his own good while in this world.

It is possible that the difference between these two items lies in the fact that righteous actions are the property of the person himself while the rewards given are actually a blessing from Allah (SwT). By this we mean that deeds should be performed which will result in the blessings and grace of Allah (SwT) being showered upon us even if we did not possess any righteous deeds (in our book of actions).

However it should be such that due to the good intentions that we have, we will receive the reward of Allah (SwT) or such that others will perform action and send the reward for us.

In any event, the greatest calamity for humanity is that in this world, we are not able to comprehend the realities!

How beautiful are the words of the Commander of the Faithful,¹Ali b. Abi Talib (as) where he said:

رَحِمَ اللَّهُ امْرَأً عَلِمَ مِنْ أَيْنَ وَ فِي أَيْنَ وَ إِلَى أَيْنَ .

“May the mercy of Allah be upon that person who truly knows where he has come from, where he is (at present) and where he is going.”

Without doubt, our entire existence in this world can be summed up in these three short statements: where we have come from, where we are and where we are going. This means that any person who truly knows and understands these three points will be enraptured within the mercy of Allah (SwT).

In relation to this, there is a well known tradition from the Commander of the Faithful,¹Ali b. Abi Talib (as) in which he stood was standing behind the door to the city of Kufah (Iraq) and started to speak to the dead people and he said to them:

أَمَّا لَوْ أُذِنَ لَهُمْ فِي الْكَلَامِ لَأَخْبَرُوكُمْ أَنَّ خَيْرَ الزَّادِ التَّقْوَى .

“If these people (who are deceased) were given the permission to speak, then surely they would tell each and every one of you that without doubt, the best provision (to send forth) is Allah consciousness (Taqwa).”⁵

A person must continuously repeat this statement to oneself such that one truly understands it and is made aware of its deeper meaning!

1. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 74, pg. 182

2. It has been mentioned in a Farsi Poem that:

من به خود نامدم اینجا که به خود باز روم آن که آورد مرا باز برد در وطنم

“I did not bring myself here such that I can leave on my own, He who brought me here will also take me back to my (original) home.”

3. Another term that is used in the Noble Qur'an is “حياة الدنيا” which has been repeated many times in different Surahs of the Qur'an. This term points to the contemptibility of this world's life as compared to the term “حياة الآخرة” which is the

perpetual and everlasting next life which will never come to an end.

As we know, the word “دنيا” comes from the root letters of “دنو” whose original meaning is being close in relation to place, time, status or rank. Thus, the words “دنيا” and “أدنى” are sometimes used for very small creatures who are close at reach and not for large creatures.

Sometimes, this word is used in praiseworthy areas and other times, this word is used in reference to a vile issue, thus in opposite of something which is good. It has also been used for something which is far away, contrary to something that is close at hand. Since the life of this world is referred to as something small, no value and close at hand, thus, we see that this term is completely appropriate for the life of this world. (Tafsir-e-Namuna, vol. 16, pg. 134)

4. Surat al-`Ankabut (29), Verse 64

5. Short saying number 130 from Nahj al-Balagha

Discourse 25: The Status of Mankind in This Life and in the Next World

قَالَ عَلِيٌّ : أَلَّا وَإِنَّ الْيَوْمَ الْمِضْمَارُ، وَغَدَاً السِّبَاقُ، وَ السَّبْقَةُ الْجَنَّةُ، وَ الْغَايَةُ
النَّارُ...

The Commander of the Faithful, 'Ali b. Abi Talib (as) has said, “You should know that today (this world) is the day to prepare (for the next life), and tomorrow (the Day of Judgement) is the day of competition and the prize (for this competition) is Paradise (for the good doers) and the punishment is Hell (for the evil doers).”¹

In this tradition from our master, the Commander of the Faithful, 'Ali b. Abi Talib (as), we see a very clear explanation of the transient world and the next life. In addition, the picture of the sojourn of humanity in these two places is also presented in this tradition.

In a very interesting explanation of the next life, it has been compared to a competition ground and just as he has said, “Today is the day of preparation.”²

The word “مضمار” comes from the root words “ضمور” and “إضمار” in the meaning of preparing a horse for a competition. As it is known, in order to take part in competitions, horses must go through intense training so that they can eliminate their body fat and prepare themselves for competition against other horses and this entire time frame of preparation and training is known in 'Arabic as “مضمار”.

In reality, the entire world outlook of Islam in relation to this world and the next life can be summed up in the following two sentences:

السَّبَقَةُ الْجَنَّةِ وَالْغَايَةُ النَّارُ.

“...and the prize (for this competition) is Paradise (for the good doers) and the punishment of Hell (for the evil doers).”

Therefore, this world is the place of preparation and is not our final or ultimate goal. During this time of preparation and training, a person must continuously be within the stage of self-building, and if he slips or falls into neglect for even one second while on this path and is not able to develop the necessary prerequisites, then there will be no chance for him in the field of the next life.

Maybe you have heard of the preparation that astronauts go through in their profession? They have a difficult training mission in which they operate in a weight-less environment. Everything that is outside of the gravity of the Earth becomes weightless and even the human being himself is not beyond this law. This state of weightlessness – for the person who has become accustomed to the gravity of the Earth – is a very difficult and frightening state to be put in. Thus, they must be trained in a man-made weight-less environment so that when they are put face to face in such an environment in space, they are not dazed – rather, they are able to accomplish their goals.

These astronauts are placed in a specially designed chamber and are continuously moved up and down – of course in such a way that would not lead to any broken bones – and after coming out of this enclosed chamber, the face, head and feet of some these astronauts are sometimes bloody (due to minor injuries). No matter how much they try and take care to protect themselves, this free falling is not something that a person can come out of easily with no scratches to his body.

This sensation of weightlessness can be experienced on Earth when a person is free-falling – such as when a person falls from a high place down to the ground. For those few seconds that he is in the air, he will experience what it means to be weightless – the same feeling that the astronauts feel! If we consider the journey that astronauts take, we see that it requires a lot of preparation (on their part) accompanied by difficulties and struggles.

Just imagine what is required for the greatest trip – the one towards the next life! How much must a person prepare for that trip and how many difficulties one has to go through and what sort of things must one's soul struggle to fight against so that one would be able to reach that great and exalted status of the next life! Is it possible that without any struggles or difficulties and by not tasting the pain of inconvenience and of bereavement, one can reach to any station or rank (in the next world)?!

There are many people, who in order to reach higher levels and ranks with the military, go through difficult exercises and training and force themselves to experience the pangs of hunger and thirst such that sometimes they go for long periods of time with only water to train the body:

مزد آن گرفت جان برادر که کار

نابرده رنج گنج میسر نمی شود

کرد

“It is not possible to gain the prize without going through difficulties, The one who went through troubles is the one who will get the reward.”

It is here that we must stop and think – What have we done in this world? What stage have we reached to here?3

If we wish to reach to grand and lofty (spiritual) levels and we desire to attain proximity to the Lord, then we must endure and withstand the difficulties and challenges and must struggle against our soul.

If we look at those people who only live for this material world, we see that they have not attained the materialistic pleasures of the world without going through difficulties – thus, how can we assume that without any difficulty or challenge, we would be able to reach to the (lofty levels of the) next life?

This world is the house of difficulties and tests and in this temporary residence, the tests of the close, intimate friends (the Awliyah) of Allah (SwT) are harder and much more difficult (than others face):

جام بلا بیشترش می

هرکه در این بزم مقرب تر است

دهند

“Whosoever is closer (to Allah) in this world will have to give a more difficult examination.”

Some of the examinations (of this world) are general while others are specific. The common people are tested in one way while the close friends of Allah (SwT) are tested in other ways and thus, this world must continuously be a place of competition for all people.

Of course, there are some people, who depending on the time period that they live in, who are faced with special tests related to that specific time. For example, that person who was in the battlefield in Karbala or who was taking part in the Battle of Badr had a special test (that he was put through).

During the Islamic Revolution (of Iran) and the time immediately following the Revolution, the situation was very unique and extraordinary and some people were not able to make it through those days. It is as if there was a sieve or strainer that was busy removing all of those people who were not sincere and only preserved those who were genuine and honest. In that period during the course of the Revolution, those who forgave (others), were aware of what was happening (around them) and who were sincere, etc... were known and well-defined (from the others).

In any case, it was a time period that from one point of view, was very dangerous and something that was confusing to people and from another point of view, it also brought about great happiness and joy.

Therefore, in those areas where the difficult storm of the tests of Allah (SwT) are active, it is that same area where some people actually take benefit from such an environment.

However it is also a very dangerous place for those people who have not prepared themselves (for the tests) and thus, they get caught in the tail wind of such a storm and are destroyed!

1. Nahj al-Balagha, Speech 28

2. It has been mentioned in the Qur'an that:

يَا أَيُّهَا الْإِنْسَانُ إِنَّكَ كَادِحٌ إِلَىٰ رَبِّكَ كَدْحًا فَمُلَاقِيهِ

“O mankind! Surely you are ever toiling on towards your Lord, painfully toiling, but you shall definitely meet Him.” (Suratul Inshiqaq (84), Verse 6)

This verse points to the fact that the nature of this world's life is that it is not free from difficulties or tribulations at any stage and that there is no difficulty or challenge – whether it be physical and related to our bodies, or spiritual and related to our soul – or both – except that they will definitely occur to us.

In many thought-provoking traditions from Imam `Ali b. al-Husain (as) we read that, “Ease and comfort are not present in this world, nor are they for the people who are living here. Ease and comfort are only reserved for Paradise, and difficulties and trials have been reserved for this world for the people of Paradise. It is for this reason that difficulties and challenges have been created in this world and for those who are living here. Thus, any person who receives a measure of this world in his hand, two times this amount will actually be given to him (in this world).”

In other words, whoever gets more pleasure and enjoyment from this life is actually poorer and more needy (than others) since (when he has more in this world), he needs other people to help protect his wealth and for this, he is also in need of more things (to help him protect himself and his wealth). Thus, in the wealth of this material world, there is no way to gain solace and relaxation.

3. In addition to the competition for the next life, in this world too, we have a form of competition which has been referred to as the competition while on the path of spiritual happiness.

It has been mentioned in verse 133 of Surah Ale `Imran:

...وَسَارِعُوا إِلَىٰ مَغْفِرَةٍ مِّن رَّبِّكُمْ

“And compete with one another to reach the forgiveness of your Lord...”

This verse compares the struggling and striving of the righteous doers to the competitors taking part in a contest in this material world. However, the ultimate purpose and aim (of the competition of this life) is the forgiveness of Allah (SwT) and the blessings of the everlasting home in Paradise.

In reality, this verse of the Noble Qur'an has made use of a very interesting, physically demanding similitude which is that: when a person wants to do some act, if he is alone in this endeavour (with no one around him or competing with him), then naturally he would carry out his task slowly and in a normal manner. However, if one was to take his job or work as a competition, that too a competition in which the prize is something very valuable which he has been told about beforehand, then he will definitely put forth all of his energy and strength to get the job done and one will also try to work as fast as possible so that one is able to reach his goal faster.

If the primary goal of this competition (in this life) is to reach the forgiveness (of Allah (SwT)), then it is because it is not possible to reach any spiritual level without first achieving and attaining the forgiveness of our sins, followed by the

purification of the soul.

The first thing which must be performed is the washing away of our sins and then we will be able to reach the level of spiritual proximity to Allah (SwT):

شستشویی کن و آنکه به خرابات درآی

“Spiritually cleanse yourself and remove all that which is bad from yourself.” (Tafsir-e-Namunah, vol. 3, pg. 91)

Discourse 26: The Reasons Why We Are Prevented From a Deep Cognizance (of the things around us)

عَنْ أَنَسٍ قَالَ: خَطَبَنَا رَسُولُ اللَّهِ عَلَى نَاقَتِهِ الْعَضْبَاءِ، فَقَالَ: أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ، كَأَنَّ الْمَوْتَ فِيهَا عَلَى غَيْرِنَا كُتِبَ، وَكَأَنَّ الْحَقَّ عَلَى غَيْرِنَا وَجِبَ، وَكَأَنَّ مَا نَسْمَعُ مِنَ الْأَمْوَاتِ سَفْرٌ عَمَّا قَلِيلٌ إِلَيْنَا رَاجِعُونَ، نُبَوِّؤُهُمْ أَجْدَانَهُمْ، وَنَأْكُلُ تَرَاثَهُمْ، كَأَنَّا مُخَلَّدُونَ بَعْدَهُمْ...

Anas has narrated that, “The Prophet (S) spoke to us while he was (sitting) upon his camel named Al-’Adba` and said, “O’ Mankind! It is as if death has been prescribed for other than us (and that we will never die); and it is as if the truth (the rules and regulations of Allah) are only obligatory upon other than us; and it is as if those who are dead are on a journey and that soon they shall return back to us and that we have only covered them over with dirt while we are busy devouring their inheritance. It is as if after them, we shall remain alive forever...”¹

In this tradition from the Noble Prophet of Islam (S), he has touched upon some of the reasons why we are prevented from having a deep cognizance (of the realities around us). In order for us to have a better understanding of the issue at hand, we begin by engaging in the following introduction:²

In the course of our lives, there are issues which are referred to as “issues that prevent us from having a deep cognizance of the things around us”. Within the Noble Qur`an, there are many verses in these regards, however with complete regret, since we do not have a strong love for the Qur`an, we are negligent of these verses.

Some of these issues which prevent us from obtaining a deeper understanding – which the scholars

have mentioned – include the love of self.

You all have definitely heard the saying:

حُبُّ الشَّيْءِ يُعْمَىٰ وَ يُصِمُّ.

“Love for (a particular) thing makes one blind and deaf.”³

This uncontrolled love would result in a person not being able to see the reality of things around him and in the words of the Noble Qur'an:

...لَهُمْ أَعْيُنٌ لَا يُبْصِرُونَ بِهَا وَ لَهُمْ آذَانٌ لَا يَسْمَعُونَ بِهَا...

“...They have eyes with which they do not see and they have ears with which they do not hear...”⁴

Thus, we see that a person wants to have everything good for himself while he desires everything that is bad should fall upon others.

For example, when a person hears that in a flood or earthquake had taken place in a particular part of town or that there was a car accident, he would not think that it is possible that this same event could one day happen to him and thus, he thinks that all events that happen are independent of one another. Because of this, when he sees such events taking place, they would not have any effect on him and they would not cause any sort of change within him.

It is for this same reason that the Prophet (S) has said, “O' Mankind! What has happened to you?? Why are you in such a sleep of negligence? Do you think that death has only been prescribed for your neighbors and that this will never come to your house? Maybe you have made a covenant with yourselves that you have been given a respite and that you will remain alive for some time to come still!?”

كَأَنَّ الْمَوْتَ فِيهَا عَلَىٰ غَيْرِنَا كُتِبَ.

In addition, some people feel that it is only others who must follow the Truth and obey the rulings of Allah (SwT) and that these laws were only put in place for others and that they are exempt from such rulings:

وَ كَانَ الْحَقُّ عَلَىٰ غَيْرِنَا وَجِبَ.

A similar important speech can also be seen in the enlightening words of the Commander of the Faithful, 'Ali b. Abi Talib (as). One day, this noble personality was taking part in the burial of a fellow Muslim when he saw and heard a person who had a boisterous laugh. The Imam said to him, “Why are you laughing? Do you think that only this person will be brought to the graveyard and that you will never have to see the same day?”⁵

Some of the difficulties that humans face are the (spiritual) veils that cover our understanding and comprehension and thus, the Prophet (S) has said that “The veils of arrogance, unfounded prejudice, pride, following our lower desires, love and hate of other than Allah (SwT) and other things must all be removed. This must be done so that the person is able to make use of the internal Hujjat – meaning his intelligence – to discern between good and bad and so that he would be able to comprehend and find the correct path to tread upon.”

We must accept that it is very much possible that all of the things which are happening to other people can also one day happen to us and just as the 'Arab poet has once said:

بَيْنَا يُرَى الْإِنْسَانُ فِيهَا مُخْبِرًا حَتَّى يُرَى خَبْرًا مِنَ الْأَخْبَارِ.

“At that time when a person is informed of the death of another person, it is then that his own death is also written and recorded (that it will take place).”

Death does not know the difference between young and old – it has no relationships or ties with anyone – and thus, it can and does come after a person unexpectedly.

Pay careful attention to the wording of the tradition and see how carefully the words have been chosen. It is stated, “It is as if death has been prescribed for other than us (and that we will never die).” Who has been promised that they will remain alive for another instant? If there is no possibility of a promise coming to play in this issue of death, then why do we constantly delay and postpone the doing of good deeds?

We leave off repentance and asking forgiveness for our sins until tomorrow or the day after. We are so relaxed and laid-back that before we realize it, time will have passed us by and at that time when we are about to die, any amount of grief or anguish will be of no use.

Our mistake is right here that we all think that those who have died and left us are simply on a trip and that tomorrow, they will be coming back to us. It is us ourselves who have placed them in the ground under the dirt and are now busy in eating up the inheritance that they have left behind for us yet still we act in such a way that we think we are going to live forever!

Just look at the way that some people act in this world and sometimes with great regret, we see that it is

this same inheritance that they leave behind that make the people after them act in the most disgusting and dangerous ways!

One time when we were in Tehran, we were informed that there were two brothers – who were around the ages of 10 – 15 years old. They got upset with one another due to the way that the inheritance was split up between the two of them to the point where they would not even go to each other's house.

We must say to such people that: “Are you certain that you are going to be able to make use of all of this inheritance that has been left for you?” Without doubt, if we think over this just a little bit then the answer will definitely come, “No – since in life there are events which can take place that we as humans are completely unaware of such as that time span between life and death which is a very short time period.” Mankind is still amazed at how short this time span truly is!

Sometimes, some people can be seen as saying: “Allah has surely been merciful to me as I was close to falling off of the edge” – or other such things. All of these things that happen to us are actually trials for us to learn lessons from which we must learn from and then put into action since there is nothing closer to mankind than death however he is ever forgetful of this most important advice.

The greatest advisor or warner for the purification and refinement of the soul is death and thus, we have been advised and recommended to continuously visit the graveyard (to remember our own death).

Going to visit the deceased is not only done simply as a show of respect to those who have gone before us. When we see that we are recommended that we should interact with a believer – whether he is alive or whether he is dead – in a particular way. In addition, we should give him something good and full of blessings so that he can benefit from it. We must also recite Surah al-Fatihah for him and this recitation of Surah al-Fatihah and all of the other things actually have more of an impact and effect on the person before he dies than after he is dead.

When we place our hands upon the grave, we realize that between him and ourselves, there is nothing more than a one meter gap. It is possible that tomorrow, we too will be in that same place that he is in right now. When a person thinks upon this issue, when he thinks about death, then he will definitely try and control his soul:

...وَلِلَّهِ بِذِكْرِ الْمَوْتِ...

“...Control it (the soul) through the remembrance of death...”

At this time will the veils of negligence, pride, etc... be lifted from our eyes, ears and heart, and this is the most important thing that we can do for ourselves – have these veils and curtains lifted from in front of us.

A tradition from the Prophet (S) states:

لَوْ لَا أَنَّ الشَّيَاطِينَ يَحُومُونَ عَلَى قُلُوبِ بَنِي آدَمَ، لَنَظَرُوا إِلَى مَلَكَاتِ السَّمَوَاتِ.

“Surely had the Devils not whispered into the hearts of the children of Adam, they would have been able to (just as Prophet Ibrahim) see into the depths of the heavens.”⁶

Thus, we too could see into the heavens as Allah (SwT) permitted Prophet Ibrahim (as) to do for in the Qur’an, it says:

وَكَذَلِكَ نُرِي إِبْرَاهِيمَ مَلَكَاتِ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَ لِيَكُونَ مِنَ الْمُوقِنِينَ

“And thus did We permit Ibrahim to glance into the depths of the heavens and the Earth so that he would of those who had certainty.”⁷ !

1. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 74, pg. 175

2. No matter how clear and plain the face of reality is for a person, until he is able to see it with his own eyes, one can not fully grasp or understand that thing. In other words, in order for us to have a deep understanding of the realities (of this material world), the follow two things are necessary:

1. The true face of reality must be plain and clear for us and;
2. We must have the tools and apparatus available to see and understand these things.

Is it possible for a blind person to look at the sun? Can a deaf person ever hear the pleasing sounds of the world around him? In the same way, a person who does not have the (spiritual) eyes to see the Truth around him will definitely be prevented from seeing the true face of reality, and those who do not have (spiritual) ears will never be able to hear the verses of the Truth.

It is because of this fact that the first condition that a person who would like to traverse upon the path of the Truth must possess is the purification of the soul and attaining Taqwa (Consciousness of Allah (SwT)) and without these two things, a person will remain in the spiritual darkness and gloom.

In addition, one will be plagued with difficulties and will tread around in a dazed state of mind with no clear path to walk upon. In the Noble Qur’an, it tells us that the way to traverse on this path is through Taqwa:

هُدًى لِّلْمُتَّقِينَ

”(These signs of Allah) is the path of those who are conscious of Allah.”

And this verse points to this reality that we must aim for. (Tafsir-e- Namunah, vol. 11, pg. 143)

3. If a person loves another human being or some inanimate object to an extreme, then we see that this love will usually prevent one from seeing or hearing about the deficiencies, lapses and bad acts (that the person has). Thus, one will not be able to see anything except for good. We narrate a story in relation to this which is proof of the claim that we have just made.

It has been narrated that once there was a man who had fallen in love with a young girl. The father and mother of this daughter were opposed to these two people getting married to one another, however the young man was adamant on marrying this girl. Thus, he ended up spending an exorbitant amount of money and went through great difficulties (to marry her). He continued in this way until he was able to reach his goal and able to marry her. Finally, the lover was able to unite with the one that he loved so much!

This husband and wife were living together and their family unit was one full of warmth and compassion for one another. Gradually though, the love and passion finally went away and the fire of passion that the man had for his wife also subsided. One day, the husband was looking at the face of his wife and saw a white spot near her right eye. He became surprised at this “defect” and said to her, “When did that white spot appear on your face, next to your eye?”

The wife replied that, “It just recently re-appeared.”

The husband replied, “What are you saying??”

The woman smiled and said to her husband, “When I was two years old, I had small-pox and it was near my eyes and from that time, this white spot has been there.”

The husband said, “This is amazing! Why did I not see that mark on your face up until now?”

The woman replied, “The reason is clear! You were deeply in love with me and thus, the lover sees nothing of the one he loves except for good and beauty:

حُبُّ الشَّيْءِ يُعْمَىٰ وَ يُصِمُّ

“The love of a thing makes a person blind and deaf.”

However, now that the fire of passion and love for me has been cooled within your heart, you no longer look at me (in the way you used to) and thus, we are now a “regular” couple. You are now able to see my defects and in reality, you are able to discern between good and bad.” (Guftar Wi’adh, vol. 3, pg. 9)

4. Surat al-A`raf (7), Verse 179

5. Nahj al-Balagha, Short Saying 122

6. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 56, pg. 163

7. Surat al-An`am (7), Verse 75

Discourse 27: Characteristics of the True Believer – Part IX

We were previously narrating a tradition from the Noble Prophet (S) to the Commander of the Faithful, 'Ali b. Abi Talib (as) in which a total of one hundred and three characteristics of a true believer were explained. Instead of aimlessly wandering around (spiritually), the person who wishes to tread upon the path of Islamic 'Irfan (mysticism) should make use and act upon that which is mentioned in this tradition and one will get closer in his journey towards Allah (SwT).

In our previous gatherings, we discussed forty-one characteristics and today, we cover another four characteristics of a true believer.

... وَفُوراً، صَبُوراً، رَضِيّاً، شُكُوراً...

The Prophet (S) continued: "(A true believer) is: dignified (in the face of challenges), patient, content (with whatever Allah decrees for him), thankful (for the blessings that Allah gives him)."1

We can actually place this tradition alongside the Khutbah of the Commander of the Faithful, 'Ali b. Abi Talib (as) given to Hammam in which 110 characteristics that a muttaqin (those who have Allah consciousness) must possess was explained.

Three of the characteristics given by the Commander of the Faithful, 'Ali b. Abi Talib (as) in his talk to Hammam were actually explanations of the words of the Prophet (S) in this tradition:

فِي الزَّلَازِلِ وَفُوراً وَفِي الْمَكَارِهِ صَبُوراً وَفِي الرَّخَاءِ شُكُوراً.

"In the face of calamities they are dignified, and in the face of detestable acts they are patient; and in the face of ease and comfort, they are thankful."2

The forty-second characteristic of a true believer is that of "وفوراً". The word "وقور" is in the meaning of something heavy, and in the Noble Qur'an, we read:

وَ فِي آذَانِهِمْ وَقُوراً

"And in their ears is a heaviness."3

Thus, we see that due to the sins that people commit, Allah (SwT) places heaviness in their ears such that they are no longer able to hear the Truth.

In the above mentioned speech to Hammam, the Commander of the Faithful,, 'Ali b. Abi Talib (as) further said, "They (those who have consciousness of Allah) remain in the time of trials the way they remain in comfort."

Sometimes, we see that certain people are like feathers such that even with the slightest movement (in the world around them), they lose their footing because they have absolutely no foundation. There are others who are like a leaf; others who are like the branches of a tree; and some who are like the entire tree – however even if a strong wind was to come about, it would rip the tree out of the ground by its roots! However a true believer is like a mountain such that even with strong winds – not only does it not move at all, rather the mountain actually makes the wind stop in its place – and a true believer is just like this!

وَأَلْقَى فِي الْأَرْضِ رَوَاسِيَ أَنْ تَمِيدَ بِكُمْ

“And He has set up on the Earth, mountains, standing firm, lest it should shake with you!”⁴

In the commentary of this verse of the Qur`an it has been mentioned that if the mountains did not exist on the Earth, then the winds would have destroyed the all of mankind. Therefore, a true believer is one who is able to stop all sorts of corruption and evil and at the same time, move along with the current.

The troubles which the Commander of the Faithful,, 'Ali b. Abi Talib (as) alluded to in this speech are sometimes in relation to the inner being of the person such as the inner (lower) passions and desires.

It has been mentioned in Surat Yusuf where it has been stated:

وَلَقَدْ هَمَّتْ بِهِ وَهَمَّ بِهَا لَوْلَا أَنْ رَأَى بُرْهَانَ رَبِّهِ

“And (with passion) did she (Zulaykha) desire him, and he (Yusuf) would have desired her, but he saw the evidence of his Lord.”⁵

Sometimes, these troubles are outside forces, such as the evil whisperings of the many external Shaiatin that exist.

The forty-third characteristic is that of showing extreme patience and again, in the speech given to Hammam , the Commander of the Faithful,, 'Ali b. Abi Talib (as) said:

وَ فِي الْمَكَارِهِ صَبُوراً.

“And during the times of distress, one is patient.”

This means that in the face of the distressful events in life, the true, perfect believer has patience. It is not necessary that these distressful events come upon a person with great force – rather, even in issues such as sickness, poverty, losing one's loved ones, etc... one must have patience.

In the life of being a student, or and treading upon the path of being a soldier in the army of Imam al-Zaman (as), and even within the period of our youth, there are many difficulties and challenges that come about and if a person does not have patience and fortitude, then one will not be able to reach any stage in one's life.

We personally know of people who used to fast during the hot days of the summer months and at the

time of breaking the fast, did not even have a piece of bread, or even money to go to the public bath to take a shower! The difficulties of today are definitely much less than this and vary for every individual.

If do not have patience, then what will happen? If we are not patient, will this change our situation in any way? How beautifully Imam 'Ali (as) has put it:

إِنْ صَبَرْتَ جَرَتْ عَلَيْكَ الْمَقَادِيرُ وَأَنْتَ مَأْجُورٌ وَإِنْ جَزَعْتَ جَرَتْ عَلَيْكَ
الْمَقَادِيرُ وَأَنْتَ مَأْزُورٌ.

“If you are patient, then surely that which has been ordained will be granted unto you and you will be rewarded; and if you are anxious or uneasy then surely that which has been intended will also be granted to you but you will be surrounded (by difficulties).”⁶

Thus, it is best that we observe patience until we are able to achieve the reward. One intellectual stated that: “Whenever I am faced with difficulties, I say to myself:

إِنْ لَمْ أَصْبِرْ فَمَا أَفْعَلُ.

The forty-fourth characteristic of a true believer is that one is content with whatever Allah (SwT) decrees for him.

We must strive and struggle, but with all the work that we put forth, it is only that which Allah (SwT) has decreed that will come to pass and a true believer must be content with this – thus, the stages of Rida and Taslim (contentment and submission) are very important levels.

With the progress in science and technology today, there are many things which have become clear and understandable for us, such as when a child develops jaundice at a young age. Today it has been shown that this yellowness of the child is actually an antibiotic that protects the child from other diseases whereas in previous times, it was thought that this is a great problem. There are many other 'problems' which humanity still does not know the reason why they occur but we must be patient despite everything.

The forty-fifth characteristic of a true believer is that one is thankful. In the Khutbah of Hammam , the Commander of the Faithful,, 'Ali b. Abi Talib (as) has stated:

وَ فِي الرَّخَاءِ شُكْرٌ.

“In times of ease, he is thankful.”

Often, when a person is in a good period of security, safety, and peace, one tends to forget Allah (SwT). However when one is plagued with difficulties, then one falls into the remembrance of Allah (SwT). The Noble Qur`an has said:

فَلَمَّا نَجَّاهُمْ إِلَى الْبَرِّ إِذَا هُمْ يُشْرِكُونَ

“And when they reach back to land (after facing difficulties at sea), once again they setup partners with Him (Allah).”⁷

Thus, a true believer is that person who remembers Allah (SwT) at all times – during old age and during one's youth and thanks Allah (SwT) during times of difficulty and ease.

It is our hope that Allah (SwT) gives us all the ability to act upon the words in this tradition, which are sufficient for our entire life time!

Discourse 28: Characteristics of the True Believer – Part X

Continuing on the tradition from the Noble Prophet (S) to the Commander of the Faithful, 'Ali b. Abi Talib (as) in which a total of one hundred and three characteristics of the true, complete believer were explained, we will cover two more in this discussion.

...قَلِيلُ الْكَلَامِ، صَدُوقُ اللِّسَانِ...

”(A true believer) speaks less and is truthful in his speech...”⁸

Thus, the forty-sixth characteristic of a true believer is that he speaks less. In relation to one speaking less, we have numerous traditions which show the importance of this trait since it is through the tongue that numerous sins are committed.

This instrument of sinning is available everywhere, at all times and is very easy to make use of. However as for other sins, there are (other) ways through which they are done and they have a specific time and place in which they can be performed – however the sins of the tongue are the most dangerous ones.

In addition, the tongue is that instrument through which (at least) thirty of the major sins are committed. However for sins such as drinking alcohol or gambling, there is only one instrument of the body at use when performing that sin. Therefore in order to counter the dangers of the tongue, we have been commanded to speak very less – rather – we must observe silence as much as possible.

In relation to the importance of maintaining silence and speaking less, we have many traditions of which, we narrate five short ones from the book Mizanul Hikmah. Contained within each of these tradition is one point in relation to the benefit of not speaking much.

1. Silence – The First Step in the Worship of Allah (SwT):

قال رسول الله : أَلصُّمْتُ هُوَ أَوَّلُ الْعِبَادَةِ.

The Messenger of Allah (S) has said, “Silence is the first form of worship (of Allah).”⁹

Scholars who write and speak about attaining spiritual proximity to Allah (SwT) first off advise their students to observe silence and speak less.

From the point of view of the general (Muslim) population, the person who drinks as much as one drop of alcohol when he is inside a Masjid is a very despicable person – however these same people (who think that this act is despicable) will spend the whole day – from morning to night – in that same sacred place indulging in backbiting, lying, and leveling false accusations against other people and they will not even tire out in the least! This is because the detestability of the sins of the tongue are very less in the eyes of the people and they do not see such things as being bad to perform. But rather, this is one of the most dangerous things since as a sin gets more and more despicable, the more and more people will try to stay away from that sin, but the sins of the tongue are not even considered as anything bad by the common people.

2. Silence Keeps Shaitan Far Away:

قَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ : عَلَيْكَ بِطَوْلِ الصُّمْتِ فَإِنَّهُ مُطْرِدَةٌ لِلشَّيْطَانِ.

The Messenger of Allah (S) has said, “I advise you to prolong keeping quiet since this act repels Shaitan.”¹⁰

When a person speaks a lot, Shaitan is around him, busy listening to what he is saying and at any moment, it is possible that the person's tongue may begin to swerve and one may start to speak bad things. Sometimes the bad feelings, feuds and enmities which take place within families are due to the useless talk that Shaitan enters into.

3. Silence – The Best Protector:

عَنْ عَلِيٍّ (عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ): لَا حَافِظَ أَحْفَظَ مِنَ الصُّمْتِ.

Imam 'Ali (as) has said, "There is no protector better for protecting (a person) than silence."¹¹

We see that sometimes the tongue is the reason why a person is even killed. In the face of jealousy, enmity and other Shaitanic things, remaining quiet is the best protector for a person.

4. Silence – The Source of Dignity:

عَنْ عَلِيٍّ : الصُّمْتُ يُكْسِيكَ الْوَقَارَ وَ يَكْفِيكَ مَوْنَةَ الْإِعْتِذَارِ.

Imam 'Ali (as) has said, "Silence clothes a person with the robes of dignity and reduces the need to always ask for forgiveness"¹²

Those people who speak too much in gatherings are less dignified than others. Thus, it is through maintaining silence that the honour of a person is increased.

In addition to this, a person does not need to always ask for forgiveness because when a person speaks too much, he will fall into the trap of saying things which may necessitate him to apologize more often. This will lessen his spiritual worth – and if he does not ask for forgiveness, then his worth will be lessened. Thus, if he always has to ask others for forgiveness, then his dignity is lowered and similarly, his honour is also lowered in the eyes of the people since he is always forced to ask others for forgiveness for his errors.

5. Silence – The Garden of Contemplation and Reflection:

عَنْ عَلِيٍّ : الصُّمْتُ رَوْضَةُ الْفِكْرِ.

Imam 'Ali (as) has said, "Silence is the garden of contemplation."¹³

The person who speaks too much does not have the time to think, nor does he have time to study and do research. However when one is quiet, new thoughts and views are able to come into his head which get him to start thinking and contemplating on other issues.

Thus, when a person's tongue starts working (and he speaks too much), then there is no opportunity left for him to reflect and ponder. For this reason it has been stated that you should associate yourself with those people who speak less since they will inspire you with wisdom.

This is just a small section on the traditions in relation to silence.

Continuing on, the forty-seventh characteristic of a true believer is that he is truthful in his speech and when one does speak, his words are carefully thought out and truthful. It has been mentioned in the

traditions that truthfulness in speech is one sign of true faith and it has been stated, “Do not examine people through the Salat they perform or the fasts that they keep, rather, examine and test them through the truthfulness of their speech. If their tongue is under control, then they have some worth to them and if their tongue is not under their control, then they have no worth to them and even if they perform worship of Allah, this worship has no merit in it.”

For every single Prophet that Allah (SwT) raised up, He commanded them to follow two principles in their mission:

أَدَاءُ الْأَمَانَةِ وَصِدْقُ الْحَدِيثِ.

“Maintain and return trusts given to them and truthfulness in their speech.”

Every morning, the tongue speaks to the other parts of the body and asks how they are doing. The rest of the body parts reply to the tongue that, “If you leave us, then we will all be okay!”

Insha–Allah, all of us will take this issue as something serious and will speak less and think and will also consider whatever we speak to be a part of the actions that we do (that we will have to account for) and we will not take part in those gatherings in which vain and useless talk is going on.

It is our hope that Allah (SwT) gives us all the ability to act according to these commandments.!

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1. Bihar al–Anwar, vol. 64, pg. 311
 2. Nahj al–Balagha, Speech 193
 3. Surat al–Kahf (18), Verse 57
 4. Surat al–Nahl (16), Verse 15
 5. Surat Yusuf (12), Verse 24
 6. Bihar al–Anwar, vol. 68, pg. 92
 7. Surat al–`Ankabut (29), Verse 65
 8. Bihar al–Anwar, vol. 64, pg. 311
 9. Mizan al–Hikmah, Under the word sumt, tradition 10805
 10. Ibid., tradition 10809
 11. Ibid., tradition 10816
 12. Ibid., tradition 10822
 13. Ibid., tradition 10823

Discourse 29: Confusion Around the World

عَنْ عَلْقَمَةَ بْنِ الْحَصِينِ قَالَ: سَمِعْتُ قَيْسَ بْنَ عَاصِمِ الْمِنْقَرِيِّ يَقُولُ: قَدِمْتُ عَلَى رَسُولِ اللَّهِ فِي وَفْدٍ مِنْ جَمَاعَةٍ مِنْ بَنِي تَمِيمٍ، فَقَالَ لِي: اغْتَسِلْ بِمَاءٍ وَ سِدْرٍ، ففَعَلْتُ، ثُمَّ عُدْتُ إِلَيْهِ وَقُلْتُ: يَا رَسُولَ اللَّهِ، عَظْنَا عِظَةً نَنْتَفِعُ بِهَا، فَقَالَ: يَا قَيْسُ، إِنَّ مَعَ الْعِزِّ ذُلًّا، وَإِنَّ مَعَ الْحَيَاةِ مَوْتًا، وَإِنَّ مَعَ الدُّنْيَا آخِرَةً، وَإِنَّ لِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ حَسِبًا، وَ عَلَى كُلِّ شَيْءٍ رَقِيبًا وَ إِنَّ لِكُلِّ حَسَنَةٍ ثَوَابًا، وَ لِكُلِّ سَيِّئَةٍ عِقَابًا.

It has been narrated from 'Alqamah b. al-Hasin that he said, "I heard Qais b. 'Asim al-Minqari say, 'I was with the Messenger of Allah (S) with a contingent from the tribe of Bani Tamim, when he said to me: "Go and perform a ghusl with water mixed with sidr (a type of tree)." The companion said, "I did as I was told and returned back to the Prophet and said to him, 'O' Messenger of Allah! Give us some good council so that we can make use of this advice." The Prophet said, "O' Qais! Surely along with honour and glory comes abasement; and along with life comes death; and with this world there is the next world; and there is an accountability for everything and there is a Watcher over everything; and for every good deed, there is a reward, and for every bad action there is a punishment."¹

One of the traits of this world is the upheaval that comes along with it. By this we mean that both this world and even humanity themselves – who are a part of this world – will never remain in one state. It is through paying attention to this point that a person's pride and vanity is destroyed since most of the problems and troubles of mankind are due to one's negligence.

Thus, if mankind was not negligent, then they would not easily give themselves up to abasement, nor would they commit sins. In summary it can be said that this negligence is the root of the misfortunes of mankind and in order to remove and protect a person from this wicked state, Islam has brought forth various ways and means that must be employed.

Things which Destroy Pride and Negligence

A) Paying attention to the confusion that take place around the world is enough to wake a person up and make him humble. If one notices that after every period of greatness (of a person or country), there is a period of abasement; after health there is sickness; after safety and security there is danger and anarchy; and after youth there is old age; then one would definitely humble oneself and try to remove all forms of negligence from within oneself.

A person must know that status, wealth, power and all other material bounties are not everlasting and whether one likes it or not, one day, all of these will be taken away.

This truth is something very important that the world will never remain in one state – rather, it is always changing and evolving and thus, we can not rely upon it. Yes, we must take this world as a bridge and a crossing point and a (temporary) residence to prepare ourselves for the next life, however we must understand that it is only the sacred essence of Allah (SwT) which will remain for eternity.

B) Obedience and worship (of Allah (SwT)) are two more things which can remove arrogance and negligence. It is through the Salat that a person can remember Allah (SwT) and remove the negligence within him.

There are some people who ask, “Until when must we perform this Salat?” It must be said to them that, “As long as we are in this world, we must continue performing the Salat since principally, we are in need of this Salat.” We must lift our hands in need in this Salat while in the presence of the One who is completely free of all needs and it is from Him alone that we must ask for the spiritual medicine to cure ourselves. Thus, the Salat will remove our negligence and spiritually awaken us.

C) Facing tribulations and difficulties also removes the veils of negligence from a person. When a person faces difficulties, we see that in the early stages, they are hard to go through, however if we carefully look at these difficulties, they are actually a blessing for us. In other words, these tribulations and all the difficulties which they cause are only one side of a coin while the other side of this coin is the happiness and pleasure that one will achieve (after having passed these tests).

One of the people who used to speak to us from the Mimbar in the past used to give us a very good example and would say, “If the entire highway was clean and flat (with no bumps or side railings on it), then surely a driver would fall asleep at the wheel. However if a portion of the highway was under construction, then the person would stay awake while driving and he would drive with utmost caution and be more alert.” In addition, sometimes a portion of the road (on the side – the shoulder) is made uneven, so that the driver does not fall asleep at the wheel.

Trials and tribulations is similar to this – the apparent aspect of these challenges are things which may upset a person, however there is mercy and blessing contained within them.

Another issue that has been alluded to in this tradition is that a person must know and understand that every act one performs – however great or small – even something involuntary as one's breathing – is under watch and is being recorded.²

Over and above any single creature, Allah the Most High, is watching over and seeing what we do; then the two Angels are commanded to be witnesses and write everything in a book; and even the land that a person lives in and his own body parts will bear witness for or against him on the Day of Resurrection.

In addition, it is mentioned in the tradition that even the day (each and every time period) will also bear witness on the Day of Judgement in relation to our actions and deeds.

Thus in summary we must know that we are under close watch and scrutinized every moment of our lives!

1. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 74, pg. 175

2. Not only are the two Angels – Raqib and `Atid watching everything that we do, however Allah (SwT) is also witness to our actions. Therefore, in the supplication of Kumayl, Imam `Ali (as) says the following:

وَكُلُّ سَيِّئَةٍ أَمَرْتُ بِإِثْبَاتِهَا الْكِرَامَ الْكَاتِبِينَ الَّذِينَ وَكَّلْتَهُمْ بِحِفْظِ مَا يَكُونُ مِنِّي وَجَعَلْتَهُمْ شُهَدَاءَ عَلَيَّ مَعَ جَوَارِحِي، وَكُنْتَ أَنْتَ الرَّقِيبَ عَلَيَّ مِنْ وَرَائِهِمْ، وَالشَّاهِدَ لِمَا خَفِيَ عَنْهُمْ...

“...and for every evil action that You have ordered the Noble Scribes to write down, those whom You have appointed to record all my actions and to be witness over me along with the limbs of my body, while in addition to these, You also observe me and You witness those acts which You have concealed even from them.”

Discourse 30: Six Things Which Lead to Success

عَنْ أَبِي الدَّرْدَاءِ قَالَ: خَطَبَنَا رَسُولُ اللَّهِ يَوْمَ جُمُعَةٍ، فَقَالَ: أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ، تَوْبُوا إِلَى اللَّهِ قَبْلَ أَنْ تَمُوتُوا وَبَادِرُوا بِالْأَعْمَالِ الصَّالِحَةِ قَبْلَ أَنْ تَشْتَغَلُوا وَأَصْلِحُوا الَّذِي بَيْنَكُمْ وَبَيْنَ رَبِّكُمْ تَسْعُدُوا وَأَكْثَرُوا مِنَ الصَّدَقَةِ تَرْزُقُوا وَأَمْرُوا بِالْمَعْرُوفِ تُحْصِنُوا وَانْتَهَوْا عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ تُنْصَرُوا.

It has been narrated from Abil Darda' that: “The Messenger of Allah (S) spoke to us on Jumu'ah and said, “O' People! Turn back to Allah (in repentance) before you die; and before you get too busy (in your life) perform righteous deeds; correct the relationship between yourselves and your Lord so that you may gain felicity; and give a lot of charity (sadaqah) so that you are given (by Allah) sustenance; and enjoin goodness upon others so that you may be protected (from the hell fire) and forbid others from evil so that you may be assisted (by Allah).” 1

In this tradition, the Noble Prophet (S) gave us six commandments to follow:

1) Tawbah – Turning Back towards Allah (SwT)

Tawbah is one of the blessings from Allah, the Most High, to His servants. How beautifully has Imam 'Ali b. al-Husain as-Sajjad (as) put it in his Munajat of the Taibin (Whispered Prayer of Those who Turn in Repentance to Allah) where he calls out:

إِلٰهِي، أَنْتَ الَّذِي فَتَحْتَ لِعِبَادِكَ بَاباً إِلَى عَفْوِكَ سَمِيَّتُهُ التَّوْبَةُ، فَقُلْتَ: تَوْبُوا إِلَيَّ
اللَّهُ تَوْبَةً نَصُوحاً فَمَا عُدْرٌ مَنْ أَغْفَلَ دُخُولَ الْبَابِ بَعْدَ فَتْحِهِ؟

“O' my Lord! You are the One who has opened up for Your servants the door towards Your forgiveness and You named it Tawbah when You said, { Turn back in repentance towards Allah – a sincere repentance } – so what then is the excuse for a person who is negligent in entering into the door after it has been opened?”²

The meaning of the sentence of the Prophet (S) in the tradition under discussion where he states, “Ask repentance before you die” is that immediately after we have committed a sin, we must turn back to Allah (SwT) – and this is because no one knows when death will come upon them.

In the Noble Qur`an, we read the following verse:

وَمَا تَدْرِي نَفْسٌ مَّاذَا تَكْسِبُ غَدًا وَ مَا تَدْرِي نَفْسٌ بِأَيِّ أَرْضٍ تَمُوتُ

“And no soul knows what it shall earn tomorrow and no soul knows in which land it shall die.”³

It has been narrated that the Prophet of Islam (S) – with all of the greatness and nobility that he possessed – would ask forgiveness seventy times every day! We claim to be followers of this great personality, so then how many times a day do we ask forgiveness and turn back to Allah (SwT)?

At night, before we go to sleep, how many acts do we bring to memory that we performed during the day? If a person was to sit, examine and meditate upon his actions everyday and ask for forgiveness (for his evil deeds), then the spiritual darkness would be lifted from one's heart, and the soul would become illuminated with the Divine Light.

It is for this reason that the best of actions that one can do before the break of dawn is to ask for forgiveness.⁴ Thus, a person should wake up in the middle of the night and in the calm of the night, pray and ask for one's needs from Allah (SwT) and pour out his heart to Him – and in the words of the

Qur`an one could be:

مُسْتَغْفِرِينَ بِالْأَسْحَارِ

”Those who seek forgiveness in the early hours.”⁵

Almost all of our major scholars who have written treatises on the spiritual travel towards Allah (SwT) have stated that the first stage in this journey is Tawbah – just as the Prophet of Allah (S) has said:

تُوبُوا إِلَى اللَّهِ قَبْلَ أَنْ تَمُوتُوا.

2) Performing Good Deeds

A person does not always think about his free time, ease and comfort and naturally feels that he will stay young for his entire life. One's thoughts are not always free and thus many obstacles can often be placed in one's path.

If you pay close attention to those around you, then you will notice that there are some people who have everything (materialistically). These people are not lacking anything in their material life however they say, “The yearning to learn and study has been taken away from me.” If one would like to increase knowledge, then one must develop Taqwa within oneself and must work towards self building and purification of the soul since whatever one has is through Taqwa (Allah consciousness). We must also perform good deeds before we get to a stage in our life where we are overcome by difficulties.

3) Reconciliation with Allah (SwT)

We see that, in relation to the events that happen around people, they are of three categories:

There is one group of people who only look at what others are saying; there is another group who look partially at what others are saying and also partially at what Allah (SwT) has commanded them to perform; and the third group are those who only pay attention to what Allah (SwT) has commanded them to do and ignore other people.

Keeping in mind this brief introduction, we see that when any event takes place, a person must see what it is that Allah (SwT) has ordered to be performed and do only that.

By this we mean that the first right that is upon us is that we must see what Allah (SwT) wants and then

we should see what the people are saying. If a person is to first establish a firm relation with Allah (SwT), then in return, Allah (SwT) will correct that person's relation with other people (and thus, whatever the people want will be what Allah wants). This fact can be seen in a hadith from the Commander of the Faithful,, 'Ali b. Abi Talib (as) in which he said:

مَنْ أَصْلَحَ بَيْنَهُ وَبَيْنَ اللَّهِ، أَصْلَحَ اللَّهُ مَا بَيْنَهُ وَبَيْنَ النَّاسِ.

“A person who corrects his relationship between oneself and Allah, Allah will correct the affairs between himself and the people.”⁶

Thus, the only way to reach the path of true happiness is that we establish a close relationship with Allah (SwT).

4) Giving Great Amounts of Sadaqah

Giving Sadaqah to others brings with it two important benefits:

1. One's sustenance will be increased;
2. Maladies and difficulties will be removed from a person.

In relation to an increase in sustenance, we see that this goes against the apparent aspect of this world, meaning that if a person gives charity in the way of Allah (SwT) then according to his bank account and the apparent outcome of this charity, his pocket should be empty. However according to the Islamic narrations, this act will actually increase a person's sustenance and wealth!

One should give Sadaqah in whatever amount possible such that the Prophet (S) has told us that we are even permitted to give away our old clothing as charity (if we don't have anything else to give) and in addition, this act of Sadaqah increases a person's life span.

When starting any journey, it is advisable to count the number of days that one will be away and actually put aside an amount of money to give in Sadaqah and this is something that all of us should act upon because this act of charity will serve as a barrier against anything that may come upon us.

5) & 6) Amr Bil Ma'ruf and Nahi 'Anil Munkar, Forcefully Commanding to that which is Ethically Right and Vigorously Forbidding from that which is Evil

These two important things have great benefit in them and in relation to them, the Commander of the Faithful,, 'Ali b. Abi Talib (as) has stated:

وَمَا أَعْمَالُ الْبِرِّ كُلُّهَا وَالْجِهَادُ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ، عِنْدَ الْأَمْرِ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَالنَّهْيِ عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ، إِلَّا كَنَفْتَةٍ فِي بَحْرِ لُجِيِّ.

“All of the righteous actions, including Jihad in the way of Allah – in relation to the act of Amr bil Ma'ruf and Nahi 'Anil Munkar – can be comparable to the water in one's mouth and the water that is in the deep oceans.”⁷

Not paying attention to an act that another person is doing and leaving him to do as he wishes, which we usually refer to as “minding your own business” or “what does it matter to me,” or due to some other reason such as not wanting to trouble our friends and acquaintances or so as not to be a nuisance, we refrain from this act. There is a famous saying which says, “What is the need to tie a handkerchief around the head when it does not hurt?” Acting in this way will slowly get us to the point that wicked acts will take rule over a society and the righteous doers will become less in number and good acts in general will be forgotten.

This is definitely an empty belief and a great mistake that people think that honour and dignity lie in the hands of other people and not in the hands of Allah (SwT), whereas it clearly says in the Qur`an that:

تُعِزُّ مَنْ تَشَاءُ وَتُذِلُّ مَنْ تَشَاءُ

“He gives honour to whomsoever He pleases and He debases whomsoever He pleases.”⁸

In another place in the Qur`an we read that:

مَنْ كَانَ يُرِيدُ الْعِزَّةَ فَلِلَّهِ الْعِزَّةُ جَمِيعاً

“Whosoever desires honour, then with Allah alone is all the honour.”⁹ !

1. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 74, pg. 186

2. The word used in this verse “نصوح” comes from the root word “نصح” which means sincere advice which one gives to another person. Thus, in this verse it refers to sincere repentance. The Noble Prophet (S) has said that, “Sincere repentance means that a person does not return back to committing the sin (which he has asked forgiveness for), just like the milk of a mother can not return back into her breast.”

Of course sincere repentance can only be accomplished when a person has complete understanding and awareness of the sins and their punishments – meaning that if we feel and know that committing sins will result in the punishment and

burning in the hell fire, then we will never even come close to sins.

3. Surat Luqman (25), Verse 34

4. At the time when peace and tranquility have covered over everything and when all of the negligent people and those who are unaware (of the realities of life) are deep in sleep and the business and transactions of the material world have quieted down, those spiritual personalities and those whose hearts are spiritually alive rise up to remember Allah (SwT). While in His Grand presence, they seek forgiveness and ask for His pardon and drown themselves in the glory of the Divine Light and greatness of their Lord. With their entire presence, they cry out with the call of true monotheism and these people have been mentioned in the Noble Qur'an as follows:

مُسْتَغْفِرِينَ بِالْأَسْحَارِ

“Those who seek forgiveness in the early hours.” (Surat Ale `Imran (3), Verse 17)

Question: Why is it that from all the time that exists in the night and day, only the “late night” (or the early hours of the morning before sunrise) has been mentioned (in this verse), whereas we know that it is permitted to ask for forgiveness and return back to Allah (SwT) at all times?

Answer: Our reply to this question is that because of the calmness of the material world and the tranquility and pleasure that has been achieved through the rest and sleep of the previous day, a person has more opportunity to pay close attention to Allah (SwT) and this explanation can easily be seen through trial and experimentation.

In addition, we see that when it comes to solving difficult issues, many of the scholars would make use of the late night/early morning period because at this time, the light of thought and the soul of the person is brighter and clearer than at all other times. Since the essence of worship and asking forgiveness is paying close attention and having presence of the heart then such a time of the night is the most worthy of all other times. (Tafsir-e-Namuna, vol. 2, pg. 344)

5. Surat Ale `Imran (3), Verse 17

6. Nahj al-Balagha, short saying 89

7. Ibid., short saying 366. A few points must be mentioned here:

(1) The word “معروف” comes from the root word “عرف” meaning something which is known, whereas the word “منكر” comes from “انكار” or something which is unknown.

Good deeds and actions are things that are well known to everyone, whereas bad deeds and things that are not liked are things that are unknown – and thus, the natural disposition (Fitrah) of a person is well aware of the first category, however not acquainted with the second type of action.

(2) Is the act of Amr Bil Ma`ruf and Nahi `Anil Munkar a responsibility that can be deduced through our intellect, or is it something that is simply a commandment from Allah (SwT) to follow?

Some of the Muslim scholars are of the belief that the nature of these two acts (Amr Bil Ma`ruf and Nahi `Anil Munkar) is that they are obligatory (and legislated by Allah (SwT)) but can only be proven from the narrated sources (the Qur'an and traditions) and the intelligence has no part to play in legislating this act. Thus, they believe that our intelligence can not tell us that if we see another person doing a bad or despicable act, then we are to stop him from doing it.

However we must keep in mind the interrelation of the society to one another and that there is no evil act which takes place within the human beings that is only limited to one particular part of that society. In fact, whatever happens can be compared to a fire (which has the potential to spread) and as such it is possible that it affect other areas. Thus, our intelligence has commanded us to act according to these two sources (the Qur'an and traditions). In other words, within the society there is no issue referred to as “individual dangers” and as such, any loss or harm that reaches one person in the society has the possibility of turning into a “societal danger” and it is because of this reason that the mind and intelligence commands a person who is living there to keep his spiritual environment pure and clean and one must not stop at any means to achieve this.

In a tradition from the Noble Prophet (S) he has told us that, “A sinner who lives amongst other people is like a person who has boarded a boat with other people. When the boat reaches the middle of an ocean, if a person takes an axe and begins to make a hole in the boat where he is sitting, the people around him will begin to protest his act to which he will reply, 'I am doing what I want to do because this is my part of the boat!' If the other people who are with him do not prevent him from

this act, then it will not take long that water will fill the entire boat and they will all end up drowning in the ocean.”

With this thought provoking example, the Prophet (S) showed us that the act of Amr Bil Ma`ruf and Nahi `Anil Munkar is something which is logical and the permission for a person to look after and maintain the society is a natural right which goes back and relates to the eventual outcome of the entire society.

(3) The Importance of Amr Bil Ma`ruf and Nahi `Anil Munkar

In addition to numerous verses of the Noble Qur`an, there are also countless traditions in the reliable Islamic sources that speak about the importance of these two great societal responsibilities, in which the eventual outcome and punishment for leaving these two important acts in a society have been mentioned, of which we will mention the following:

It has been narrated that Imam Muhammad b. `Ali al-Baqir (as) said:

إِنَّ الْأَمْرَ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَالنَّهْيَ عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ، فَرِيضَةٌ عَظِيمَةٌ. بِهَا تُقَامُ الْفَرَائِضُ، وَتَأْمَنُ الْمَذَاهِبُ، وَتَجِلُّ الْمَكَاسِبُ، وَتُرَدُّ الْمَطَالِمُ، وَتُعْمَرُ الْأَرْضُ، وَيُنْتَصَفُ مِنَ الْأَعْدَاءِ، وَيَسْتَقِيمُ الْأَمْرُ.

“Surely Amr Bil Ma`ruf and Nahi `Anil Munkar are two great obligatory acts and through these the other obligatory acts are protected and the teachings are also protected; as well, through these trading and transactions are made permissible and oppression is kept away; and the Earth is kept habitable and revenge is taken from the enemies and all other acts relate back to these two duties.”

The Noble Prophet (S) has stated:

مَنْ أَمَرَ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَنَهَى عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ، فَهُوَ خَلِيفَةُ اللَّهِ فِي أَرْضِهِ، وَ خَلِيفَةُ رَسُولِ اللَّهِ، وَ خَلِيفَةُ كِتَابِهِ.

“The person who commands to that which is good and forbids others from that which is wrong (Amr Bil Ma`ruf and Nahi `Anil Munkar) is deemed as the Khalifah of Allah upon His Earth and the Khalifah of the Messenger of Allah and the Khalifah of His Book.”

From these traditions we can clearly deduce that this great obligatory act – before all other things – is a part of the overall plan of Allah (SwT) and the appointment of the Prophets and the sending of the various Divine Books are also a part of His plan.

A person came to the Messenger of Allah (S) while he was sitting on the Mimbar and asked him:

مَنْ خَيْرُ النَّاسِ؟

“Who is the best person?”

The Prophet (S) replied to him:

أَمْرُهُم بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَأَنْهَاهُمْ عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ وَأَتَقَاهُمْ لِلَّهِ وَأَرْضَاهُمْ.

“That person who – more than others – enjoins goodness to others and prevents them from the evil and the one who is the most conscious of Allah and who tries to please Allah more than others.”

In another tradition from the Noble Prophet (S) it has been related that he said, “You must command others to perform righteous deeds and must prevent them from the forbidden acts and if you do not do this then Allah will appoint oppressors to rule over you who will neither show respect to the elders, nor will they show mercy to the young ones. The righteous and pious from among you will supplicate, however their prayers will go unanswered. They will request help from Allah, but He will not assist them and these people will even ask for repentance for their sins, but Allah will not even forgive them their sins.”

All of the emphasis which has been placed on these two obligatory acts have been done, so that we can realize the importance of them which in reality are guarantors for the continuation of all individuals and the societal responsibilities which rule over the soul and life of the people. If these acts are not put into practice then all of the practical laws and principles of ethics and morality will lose their worth and value. (Tafsir-e-Namuna, vol. 3, pg. 37-40)

8. Surat Ale `Imran (3), Verse 26

9. Surat al-Fatir (48), Verse 10

Discourse 31: Dangers of the Tongue

عَنْ نَافِعٍ عَنْ ابْنِ عُمَرَ، قَالَ، قَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ : رَحِمَ عَبْدًا تَكَلَّمَ فَعَنِمَ، أَوْ سَكَتَ فَسَلِمَ. إِنَّ اللِّسَانَ أَمْلَكُ شَيْءٍ لِلْإِنْسَانِ، أَلَا وَ إِنَّ كَلَامَ الْعَبْدِ كُلَّهُ عَلَيْهِ، إِلَّا ذَكَرُ اللَّهِ تَعَالَى، أَوْ أَمْرٌ بِمَعْرُوفٍ، أَوْ نَهْيٌ عَنْ مُنْكَرٍ، أَوْ إِصْلَاحٌ بَيْنَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ. فَقَالَ لَهُ مُعَاذُ بْنُ جَبَلٍ: يَا رَسُولَ اللَّهِ، أَنْوَاحُ بِمَا نَتَكَلَّمُ؟ فَقَالَ: وَ هَلْ يَكُوبُ النَّاسَ عَلَى مَنَاخِرِهِمْ فِي النَّارِ، إِلَّا حَصَائِدُ أَلْسِنَتِهِمْ، فَمَنْ أَرَادَ السَّلَامَةَ، فَلْيَحْفَظْ مَا جَرَى بِهِ لِسَانُهُ

It has been narrated from Nafi' from b. 'Umar that he said, the Messenger of Allah (S) said, "May (Allah) have mercy on that servant who gains benefit when he speaks, or one who is protected through maintaining silence. Surely the tongue is the thing which wields the most authority over a person. Be aware that everything that servant speaks is against him, except for the remembrance of Allah, the High, or the commanding of others to that which is right or preventing them from that which is evil, or setting the affair right between two believers."

One of the companions named Ma'adh b. Jabal said, "O Messenger of Allah! Will we be held accountable for that which we speak?" The Prophet replied, "Is there anything else except an active tongue of a person that will lead him into the hell fire? So then whoever seeks safety (from the fire), then let him protect that which comes out from his tongue." 1

In this tradition, the Prophet (S) alluded to some issues regarding the tongue² and has stated that, "May Allah's mercy be upon that servant whom people can benefit from his speech and who observes silence in order to stay safe and protected." In this part of the tradition, there are two important issues which we must mention:

1. More than anything else which is within the body of a person, it is the tongue which rules and controls one. The peculiarities that exist and which are limited to that person who has a tongue can not be seen in any other body part nor in any other creation.

a. The tongue is always at the disposal of the person. Sometimes the following similitude is given that, "For a person to speak is like drinking water." Even still, if a person wants to drink water we see that there are some prerequisites which must be fulfilled and carried out, however in order to speak there are no prerequisites.

b. The dangers of the tongue cannot be compared to the dangers of any other body part, and the major sins which can be committed by the tongue number about twenty or thirty!³

c. The despicability of the sins of the tongue are not very detested in the sight of the people and when this occurs, then the danger and hazard of performing them also increase. If – may Allah (SwT) protect us – a person performs adultery then he has definitely done a very bad act in the sight of the people. However if he was to backbite another person – then as it is mentioned in the traditions, this is actually worse than adultery and even worse than drinking alcohol and its punishment is much more severe! Normally, in the beliefs of other people, the despicability of the act of backbiting is something minor, or it may not even be considered as something bad at all!

The Prophet (S) then continued his speech and said that, “Everything that a person says is against him, except for three types of speech” and this limit or threshold is a true and factual threshold and there is no room to say that this is a symbolic gesture on behalf of the Prophet (S). These three things include: the remembrance of Allah; Amr bil Ma'ruf and Nahl 'Anil Munkar; and making amends between two believers.

We must make sure that all of that which we speak in this world are limited to these three issues and if we fall out of this boundary, then we will definitely incur loss.

In relation to this tradition, there is an interesting interpretation which should spiritually move some people. We see that after this speech of the Prophet (S), Ma'ad b. Jabal said, “O' Messenger of Allah! Is speaking also something that a person will have to be accountable for!?” The Prophet (S) replied, to him, “Is there anything else except for the remuneration of the tongue that a person will be thrown face first into the hell fire?”

Thus, it is clear that the sins for which a person will be thrown into the hell fire – face first – are not related to the sins performed by the chest, feet or hands – rather it is that which he has earned through his tongue.

It may be that such a punishment has been prescribed since when a person is thrown into the hell fire due to the sins he has committed, he will be thrown into the fire by that thing which led him to commit the sins. Since it is the tongue by which he committed sins, thus, he will be thrown into the hell fire face first. Thus, the first thing to be burnt by the fire is his tongue – and it is this same tongue that lit the fires (of hatred and sin in the world) and it is this organ through which one (innocently) accused people and annoyed others.

Thus, every morning when we wake up from our sleep, we must ask Allah (SwT) to protect us from the evils of the tongue. In addition, when we are ready to go to bed to sleep at night, we must ask forgiveness from Allah (SwT) for the sins which we committed in the day and definitely the tongue of a person puts one into a great difficulty.⁴ !

1. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 74, pg. 187

2. The tongue is the most important instrument for communication between people and for the conveyance of information and data from one nation and generation to another. If this instrument of communication did not exist, then humanity would never have been able to reach the levels which they have arrived at today, nor would they have been able to progress to the great levels of knowledge, intelligence, material gains and spiritual greatness which they are currently in.

The tongue itself is an amazing part of the body of mankind which also carries a very heavy responsibility with it. In addition to helping and assisting a person in swallowing his food, it also plays an important role in the chewing of food. Continuously while one is eating morsels of food, the teeth are hammering down and pushing the food around the mouth and this act is so skillfully performed that the tongue is saved and protected from being crushed by the teeth, whereas we see that it is continuously alongside and flanking the teeth!

Sometime – very rarely – it can be seen that when chewing food, the tongue too gets bitten by the teeth and at this time we scream out in pain!

Thus if the tongue did not possess the dexterity that it has, one can just imagine what would have happened to it! In addition, after one has finished eating food, the tongue actually rubs and wipes the teeth clean of any remaining food which happens to be on them.

More important than all of this – it is through the tongue that we are able to speak and it is by way of the fast, yet controlled movement which is continuously happening that the tongue is able to carry out all of these tasks.

It is interesting to note that Allah (SwT) has placed something so easy to make use of at the disposal of mankind for the task of speaking and verbal communication and this instrument is within reach of everyone. In addition, this body part never feels tired or exhausted, nor does it ask for anything to continue its work with.

Even more amazing than all of this is the talent to speak which has been infused within a human being and has been granted to him to use. Thus, a person is able put together countless sentences in different forms to explain his wonderful and various points of knowledge. What is even more important than all of this is the ability to make up various words and this point can clearly be seen if we study the thousands of languages which exist in the world today. Truthfully:

أَلْعَظْمَةُ لِلَّهِ الْوَاحِدِ الْقَهَّارِ

“The Greatness belongs to Allah (alone) the One, the All-Powerful.” (Tafsir-e-Namuna, vol. 28, pg. 17)

3. In the book, “Life under the Shadow of Ethical Morals” pp. 87–90, Ayatullah al-`U`ma Makarim Shirazi writes that, “The late Faiz Kashani, in his book Mahajjatul Baydha fi Tahdhibul Ahya, and Ghazali in his work, Ihyaul `Ulumud Din have presented a very detailed discussion under the topic of the “Sins of the Tongue.” Ghazali has mentioned twenty types of sins that can take place by this body part, in the following order:

1. Speaking on those issues which a person has no business involving himself in;
2. Speaking too much and idle talk;
3. Speaking on vain issues such as a description of a gathering in which alcohol, gambling and adultery take place;
4. Arguing and quarrelling (picking apart a discussion and arguing with others to find faults with them such as making others feel worthless or boasting about one's self);
5. Disputes, quarrelling and arguing;
6. Making up things while speaking;
7. Speaking bad things or using foul language;
8. Cursing others;
9. Ghina (forbidden singing) and reading poems which contain no truth;
10. Excessive joking;
11. Mocking and making fun of others;
12. Spreading secrets about others;
13. Making false promises;
14. Lying;
15. Backbiting;

16. Spreading talk from one person to another;
17. Hypocrisy in one's speech (two-tongued);
18. Excessively praising others;
19. Being negligent of the specifics of an issue and speaking what one knows with mistakes in his words, which can result in another person being side-lined in issues of life;
20. The common people asking difficult questions in relation to the theological beliefs which are outside the scope and necessity for a person to understand such issues;

It goes without saying that the problems and troubles of the tongue are not limited to these issues which Ghazali has mentioned and that which he has conveyed is just a portion of some of the important sins that the tongue can perform. For example, the below acts are also some of the troubles of the tongue that he failed to mention:

1. False accusations;
2. False testimony;
3. Self praise;
4. Spreading evil, corruption or unfounded information and lies – even if a person does so with the supposition that such things are true;
5. Speaking while in a taje of anger;
6. Being forceful through one's speech with repeated questions (such as that which Bani Isra'il used to do – and others);
7. Hurting others through one's speech;
8. Humiliating someone who has not done anything to warrant this treatment;
9. Denial of the favours of Allah (SwT) through one's speech;
10. Spreading wrong information or encouraging others to perform sins;

In addition, the sins of the tongue are not even limited to these and thus from this discussion, we can see the importance of the tongue.

4. In the words of Mawlawi:

این زبان چون سنگ و فم آهن و ش است آنچه بجهد از زبان، چون آتش است سنگ و آهن را مزین بر هم گزاف گه ز روی نقل و گه از روی لاف زانکه تاریخ است و از هر سو پنبه زار در میان پنبه چون باشد شرار ظالم آن قومی که چشمان دوختند وز سخن ها عالمی را سوختند عالمی را يك سخن ویران کند روبهان مرده را شیران کند

Discourse 32: The World is a Storehouse of Treasures

عَنْ عَبْدِ اللَّهِ بْنِ عَبَّاسٍ قَالَ: سَمِعْتُ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ يَقُولُ: أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ، بَسْطُ الْأَمَلِ مُتَقَدِّمٌ حُلُولِ الْأَجَلِ، وَالْمَعَادُ مِضْمَارُ الْعَمَلِ، فَمُغْتَبَطٌ بِمَا احْتَقَبَ غَانِمٌ، وَ مَتَيْسِرٌ بِمَا فَاتَهُ نَادِمٌ. أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ، إِنَّ الطَّمَعَ فَقْرٌ، وَالْيَأْسَ غِنًى، وَالْقِنَاعَةَ رَاحَةً، وَالْعَزْلَةَ عِبَادَةً، وَالْعَمَلَ كَنْزٌ، وَالدُّنْيَا مَعْدَنٌ... فَبَادِرُوا الْعَمَلَ وَ أَنْتُمْ فِي مَهْلِ الْأَنْفَاسِ، وَ جِدَّةِ الْإِحْلَاسِ، قَبْلَ أَنْ تَأْخُذُوا بِالْكَظْمِ، فَلَا يَنْفَعُ النَّدَمُ.

It has been narrated from Abdullah b. 'Abbas: "I heard the Messenger of Allah (S) say: 'O' Mankind! Before death comes to a person, all sorts of wishes and desires are placed in front of him and surely the Resurrection Day is a field of trial and a competition. (On this day, people will be in one of two groups) The (poor) person will possess (the good form) of envy (Al-Ghibtah). In that same amount as the wealth which he gives (in the way of Allah), will he be successful and dignified. The other type of person is that rich person who possessed things however did not make use of his wealth and did not spend it in the way of Allah and thus, he will be in grief and upset.

O' People! Surely greed is (actually) poverty, and disregarding (that which other people have) is richness, and contentment (with what one possesses) is comfort and distancing ones' self (from people) is worship, and (righteous) actions are a treasure, and this world is the mine (of treasures) ... Thus while you have the opportunity, strive to perform good deeds even if the time remaining for you (on this Earth) is as much as the time between two breaths or the time it takes to mount upon your saddle, before the way of breathing is taken (away from you) at which time any remorse will be of no use."¹

The Noble Prophet (S) brought forth two points in this tradition:

A) Before the time of parting (from this world) and one's death, all of the wishes and desires (which a person possesses) will be presented in front of him.

This part of the tradition may point to the fact that as a person gets older, his (material) desires also increase – and these also become spiritually devoid and less logical as times goes on.²

Thus, this is the danger bell to that person – no matter how old one is, the desires for material things increase. It is this same thing that will prevent a person from making the best of this world in order to prepare oneself to have a better life in the next world.

B) The Resurrection Day is the field and area of actions. The reason why the 'Arabs refer to the competition ground as **مضمار** " is due to the fact that before they would start a horseback riding competition, they would first look to find an open area to practice in and there they would try to get their horses to run as much as they could and it is through this act that they would accomplish two things:

1. The horses would get more training and experience.
2. The horses would get thinner and fitter.

The word **مضمار** " is also in the meaning of becoming thinner and thus, in the 24th khutbah recorded in Nahjul Balagha it is mentioned that, "Today is the day of the competition ground."

This world which we are in is the training ground and the competition is the next life. From this expression, we can deduce that sometimes the area of competition – the competition ground – is also referred to as the **مضمار** " since it is there that the horses will run and will get thinner and fitter.

In any case, according to this commandment from the Noble Prophet (S), the Resurrection Day is the competition ground for actions. We should not think that a person will be able to reach any status in life with long desires and hopes. At that place (on the Day of Resurrection) it is the actions of each person

which will compete with one another, and the person who had more good deeds will be the winner of this competition and whoever had less good deeds and was polluted (with evil and sin) will be the loser.

This world tries to keep everyone busy with long desires whereas in the market of the Resurrection, these desires will serve absolutely no purpose – rather, it is only those actions which produce benefits which will be of use for us.

From the following sentence in the hadith, we understand that people are of two types:

One group is those who are envious (good envy) of others or **مغْتَبِط**, whereas the second group is those who are content or **مَتَيْسِر**. Some people have stated that the first word actually means one who is happy or joyous however according to our opinion, it refers to a poor person who is envious and jealous of others and in the same amount that he spends his wealth in the way of Allah (SwT), in that same amount he will attain happiness and success.

There are some people who possess everything (materialistically speaking) however since they are not able to make use of their wealth, they are always upset and discontent.

In the next sentence, there are six points which have been mentioned:

1) & 2) The wealth and poverty of a person are related to the inside (spiritual aspects) of a person and are not related to his apparent aspects. If a person who possesses a lot was to own everything that is in the world, he would still be poor – and the opposite of this is true as well that if a person who does not pay attention to the material world did not possess anything, he will still be rich. It is the soul which must be full (of spiritual blessings) and which must remain self-sufficient and needless (of others) since the best wealth of a person is his internal and spiritual wealth. Thus, one who possesses everything (materialistically) is actually poor, and one who disregards wealth and material pleasures of this world is the truly wealthy person:

إِنَّ الطَّمَعَ فَقْرٌ، وَ الْيَأْسَ غِنَى.

“Surely coveteousness is poverty while contentment is richness.”

3) A person is in need of rest and relaxation, and if he wishes to find this rest and relaxation, then he must do so by searching deep within oneself since it is through contentment that a person finds ease and comfort:

وَ الْقِنَاعَةُ رَاحَةٌ.

“Contentment breeds comfort.”

and it is due to greed that a person is often put through difficulties and challenges.

4) In order for a person to continuously be in the worship and servitude of Allah (SwT), one must sit in a quiet and tranquil area. By this, we do not mean that one distances oneself entirely from the people. Rather, we mean that during the 24 hour period, one must put aside some time for himself to be with his soul and his Allah. The best time to engage in this contemplation is the last part of the night just before the rising of the sun when normally, most people are asleep. The worship and prayer with full attention and presence of the heart in the middle of the night gives the heart and soul of a person spiritual energy:

وَ الْعُزْلَةُ عِبَادَةٌ.

“...distancing ones' self (from people) is worship...”

5) & 6) The treasures and riches of a person are his actions, and this world is the quarry (where these treasures can be extracted). There are various explanations and similitudes in relation to the world that have been given. For example it has been said that this world is the planting ground for the next life or that this life is a house of admonition and a bridge to cross (to the next life), however it is only in this tradition that it has been mentioned that this world is a quarry, and this is the only place where this similitude has been given. This world is a mine out of which treasures are extracted.

Thus in summary, for that person who makes use of this world (for the next life), this world is not such a bad place.

From these sentences we can deduce that in reality, the world is not something despised and despicable, rather, it is us who have made this world something reviled:

وَ الْعَمَلُ كَنْزٌ وَ الدُّنْيَا مَعْدِنٌ.

“...and (righteous) actions are a treasure, and this world is the mine (of treasures)...”

In closing, the Prophet (S) has ended his dialogue with a discussion on the end of the life of a person and has stated that, “Of those issues which are hidden from people is that of the end of his life. Not a single person knows exactly when or where one will die.”

In the Qur`an, we read the following:

مَا تَدْرِي نَفْسٌ مَّاذَا تَكْسِبُ غَدًا وَ مَا تَدْرِي نَفْسٌ بِأَيِّ أَرْضٍ تَمُوتُ

“And no soul knows that which it will earn tomorrow and no soul knows in which land it shall die.”³

Thus, it is from the wisdom of Allah (SwT) that a person is kept unaware of the time when one will die and keeping this hidden has two benefits which have been mentioned in the book, Tawhid al-Mufaddhal. If man knew the time span of his life, then his existence on this Earth would not fall out of the following two scopes:

1. If he knew he had a long life, then in this scenario, negligence would overtake him and he would reassure himself that, “I have 10, 20 or 50 years left to live and thus, the need to ask forgiveness for my sins can be delayed and it is not necessary to make haste in asking for forgiveness.” Thus, a person will continue to perform sins and pollute himself with negligence and fall into carelessness.

2. If a person knew that he will live for one more hour, one day, one month or even one more year, then life will have no meaning for him as he will say to himself, “I am only going to live one more month, so then why should I go through all of this struggle?” Thus, the pleasure and enjoyment from life would be gone and a person would fall into despair.

This issue has other benefits to it which make a person lean towards the two states at any given time – meaning that he is constantly in a state of fear and hope.

From one point of view, he does not stop stretching forth his hand and at the same time, he does not come close to committing sins since he does not know if he is going to live another hour. In the Islamic narrations this issue has been mentioned quite frequently.

In this tradition, two topics have been mentioned in the following way: In that time period that we have been given respite and are still breathing, we must work – this wording may allude to the fact that in between each breath that a person takes (when he breathes in and then exhales out), the time period between this cycle is something very short. Incidentally, it has also been mentioned that between the beats of the heart of a person, there is a short time period of rest which is referred to as the “respite of the heart” and thus in summary, we see that even in between the breaths which a person takes, there is also a respite between each one and this is the shortest period of time that a person is able to imagine.

The Prophet (S) then stated, “...just as you are given the respite to live, during the time when you are inhaling and exhaling each breath, in that same amount of time, you should not have hope of living in this life for a long period as it is possible that when you exhale you may never inhale again.” Therefore, in this short period of time, you must work towards righteous actions:

فَبَادِرُوا الْعَمَلَ وَأَنْتُمْ فِي مَهْلِ الْأَنْفَاسِ.

“Thus while you have the opportunity, strive to perform good deeds even if the time remaining for you

(on this Earth) is as much as the time between two breaths...”

In the past, it was common that when a noble person mounted his steed, he would place a cloth or some material on the horse (and then mount it) and thus, the Prophet (S) said, “If you have been given respite during your life even for that period that it would take to put on and take off a cloth from your house – meaning such a short period of time – then you must work towards righteous actions since it is very likely that in the next instant, your life would come to a close.”

وَجِدَّةُ الْإِحْلَاسِ.

“...or the time it takes to mount upon your saddle...”

Before the time that you breathe your next breath and do some action that you will later feel guilty about and which will have no benefit for you after and no turning back, you should perform righteous deeds.

If a person has even a small amount of knowledge in relation to the laws of universe, then he would know how close death is to him. In the body of a person, we see two important organs which can easily stop working: the heart and the brain. There are a series of thin veins which are responsible for the nutrients going to the heart and if these thin veins were to break, then a part of the heart would stop working and a person would end up having a heart attack.

Within the brain of a person even, there are various capillary veins and if even one of these was to lose its power, then the brain would stop working – and how tragic it would be if that part of the brain that stopped working happened to be the control centre and this could even happen if the heart was working properly and was healthy but it is the brain which commands the heart in its activities.

Or can we imagine if one of the veins which controls actions of one side of the body was to lose its ability to function causing that side of the person's body to become paralyzed. Or if due to an impact on one of the veins, a person was to develop a blood clot, then in this event too, a person would lose the faculty of movement.

We see that when we are eating food and are swallowing our morsels, this small tongue that we have which is inside the mouth actually covers over the air pipe which is in our throat. If this act was to take place with even the slightest delay, then we know that if a small amount of food was to get caught in our wind pipe, and if through coughing, we could not release this food, then without doubt, our death would be sealed.

Thus in summary, if a person does even a small amount of contemplation on the creation and at his own life, then slowly one would definitely develop thoughts in his own mind that tonight when one goes to sleep, there is a possibility that one will not wake up in the morning!

In any case, these events that take place both within us and outside of our bodies are numerous.

If we take for example these travels that we endeavour which is now a part of everyone's life we see that our journeys that we go on are full of dangers, even if a person is careful and vigilant – however it is possible that others may not have this same vigilance.

Thus, while we are able to and as long as we have the strength and energy, we must go forth to perform righteous actions and leave the accountability with Allah (SwT).

Can we truly say that all of the actions that we have performed were sincerely for Allah (SwT) and that no amount of insincerity or material gain were involved in them?

We must seek refuge with Allah (SwT) because when a person will enter into the presence of the Most High and see his hands empty (of good deeds) and when he is given his book of records in his hand, he will scream out, just as it has been mentioned in the Qur'an:

يَا وَيْلَتَنَا مَا لِهَذَا الْكِتَابِ لَا يُغَادِرُ صَغِيرَةً وَلَا كَبِيرَةً إِلَّا أَحْصَاهَا وَوَجَدُوا مَا
عَمِلُوا حَاضِرًا

“Ah! Woe to us! What a book is this! It leaves out nothing small or great but takes account thereof! They will find all that they did placed before them...” !

1. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 74, pg. 183

2. Without doubt, wishes and desires – or in the language of the `Arabs, Aml (امل) – is the thing which keeps the wheels of life of a person in constant motion, and if this quality was to be removed from the hearts of the people for even one day, then surely the entire system of organization and harmony of the people would be disrupted and very few people would have any reason to stay strive and struggle towards a purpose.

However if this same characteristic and trait transgresses the boundaries and turns into those 'long desires that are far from reach', then this will lead to the worst of traits including being led astray and bad fortune for a person. This can be compared to the water of life which rains down from the skies – however, if this rain was to pour down in large amounts, then this could lead to the destruction and ultimate drowning of a person.

These long desires are the same ones which have been mentioned in verses 1 to 5 of Suratul Hijr (15) in the Noble Qur'an and it is stated that this is the same thing which leads to negligence of Allah (SwT), the truth and the realities around Him:

الرَّ. تِلْكَ آيَاتُ الْكِتَابِ وَقُرْآنٍ مُبِينٍ. رُبَّمَا يَوَدُّ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا لَوْ كَانُوا مُسْلِمِينَ. ذَرُّهُمْ يَأْكُلُوا وَيَتَمَتَّعُوا وَيُلْهَمُ الْأَمَلُ فَسَوْفَ يَعْلَمُونَ. وَمَا أَهْلَكْنَا مِنْ قَرْيَةٍ إِلَّا وَلَهَا كِتَابٌ مَعْلُومٌ. مَا تَسْبِقُ مِنْ أُمَّةٍ أَجْلَهَا وَمَا يَسْتَأْخِرُونَ

“Alif. Lam. Ra. (1) These are the verses of Revelation of a Qur'an which makes things clear (2) Again and again will those who disbelieve wish that they had bowed (to Allah's will) in Islam (3) Leave them alone to enjoy (the good things of this life) and to please themselves: let (false) hope amuse the, soon will knowledge (make them understand) (4) Never did We destroy a population that had not a term decreed and assigned beforehand (5) Neither can people anticipate its term, nor delay it.”

Thus, these long desires and wishes that one can not attain or reach to usually keep a person so busy and preoccupied that one drowns oneself in the world of imagination and fantasy. Therefore, a person removes oneself completely from the realities of life and becomes a stranger to this life and neglects the ultimate aims and purposes of why we are here. In a well known tradition which has been narrated in Nahj al-Balagha (speech 42) from `Ali b. Abi Talib (as) which also speaks about the reality of this issue, it has been mentioned that:

أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ، إِنَّ أَخْوَفَ مَا أَخَافُ عَلَيْكُمْ اثْنَانِ: إِيْتَابُ الْهَوَى وَ طُولُ الْأَمَلِ. فَأَمَّا إِيْتَابُ الْهَوَى فَيَصُدُّ عَنِ الْحَقِّ وَ أَمَّا طُولُ الْأَمَلِ فَيُنْسِي الْآخِرَةَ

“O’ people! Surely the most frightening of things which I warn you about are two: Following the lower passions and having long desires. As for following your lower passions, this will distract you from the Truth and as for having long desires, this will cause you to forget the next life.”

Truly how many people who possessed great abilities, talents and the capacity (to achieve great things in this life) were transformed and changed into weak individuals due to the negative effects of having long desires and wishes. In such a state, the person is no longer any worth or benefit to the society – in fact, he even tramples upon his own self worth and greatness and distances himself from any form of perfection, just as we read in the Supplication of Kumayl:

وَحَبَسَنِي عَنْ نَفْعِي بَعْدُ أَمَلِي

Principally, those desires which go beyond limits always keep a person preoccupied, and thus we see that day and night one must strive and struggle – thinking to himself that he is working towards his own happiness, welfare and well-being whereas we see that actually, he is going towards nothing except loss, failure and discontent. It is these sorts of people who normally – because of the state they end up in end their lives through suicide, and it is their painful and sorrowful life and example which can be used by others who have the spiritual eyes to see (the realities) and the spiritual ears (to hear and understand the truth) as a source of inspiration and learning. (Tafsir-e-Namuna, vol. 11, pg. 119)

3. Surat Luqman (31), Verse 34

Discourse 33: The Signs of a Muslim

قَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ يَقُولُ فِي خُطْبَتِهِ: أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ، إِنَّ الْعَبْدَ لَا يُكْتَبُ مِنَ الْمُسْلِمِينَ حَتَّى يَسْلَمَ النَّاسُ مِنْ يَدِهِ وَ لِسَانِهِ، وَ لَا يَنَالُ دَرَجَةَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ حَتَّى يَأْمَنَ أَخُوهُ بَوَائِقَهُ وَ جَارُهُ بَوَادِرَهُ، وَ لَا يُعَدُّ مِنَ الْمُتَّقِينَ حَتَّى يَدَعَ مَا لَأَ بَأْسَ بِهِ حِذَارًا عَمَّا بِهِ الْبَأْسُ. إِنَّهُ مَنْ خَافَ الْبَيَاتُ أَدْلَجَ...

The Messenger of Allah (S) said in one of his speeches: “O’ People! Surely a servant will not be counted as one of the Muslims until other people are protected from his hand and his tongue; and he will never reach the stage of a true believer until his brother (in faith) is safe from his evil and annoyance, and his neighbour is protected and safe from his harshness and anger; and he will never reach the stage of being one with Taqwa (Allah conscious) until he keeps away from those erroneous actions which

cause him to spiritually pollute himself. Surely the person who fears that he will remain asleep, keeps active and moves at night...” 1

In reality, in this tradition the three words: Muslim, Mo`min and Muttaqi have been explained, and for each of these words, there is a special level that one must strive to attain.

The Prophet (S) stated that, “A person cannot be considered as a Muslim until other people are safe from his hand and tongue and if this is not the case, then such a person is not a Muslim. In addition, a person is not considered a Mo`min until his Muslim brother and neighbours are safe from him annoying or aggravating them.”

The Prophet (S) used two forms of the words “سليم” and “أمن” in this tradition since the reality of Islam is complete submission (تسليم) and also making sure that others are safe or protected from the person (سالم) and both of these concepts are contained within the understanding of the word Islam.

Thus, a person must be safe from both the physical (hand) of another Muslim as well as his tongue.

A Mo`min or true believer is a person whose friends and neighbours are safe from his hands, while a Muttaqi or one who possess consciousness of Allah (SwT) is one who refrains from all doubtful things. If a person pollutes his soul with doubtful actions, then surely he is not a true Muttaqi!

Anyone whose tongue acts like a snake or scorpion and is busy hurting others through his speech whether it be by makes of backbiting, levelling false accusations against others, making fun of other people, humiliating them, destroying their character, cursing them, etc... and injures other people is not considered a Muslim!

There are many people who are tricked and misled by Shaitan and thus when they are involved in a serious conversation, they protect their tongue (from speaking bad things). However when they are busy joking with others, they perform these same things which they would not do while engaged in a serious discussion. For example, when a person is busy joking with others, he may humiliate or make fun of his Muslim brother or bug him and then he will say, that “I was only joking with you and I did not mean what I said.”

Sometimes, such joking is even worse than speaking the truth because when a person is speaking the truth, he is limited and maintains restrictions and boundaries in what he is saying. However when one begins to joke around, then these limits and boundaries are often transgressed.²

If we look carefully through history, we see that court jesters and clowns used to speak truthful things to those in their presence, but they spoke of such truths in their jokes and amusements. The function of them was not just to keep the kings busy, rather, one of the philosophies of them was that whenever those around the king could not tell something very important to him directly, they would pass the information on to the clown or jester and he would convey this information to the king in a way of amusement! Thus, the jokes and playing of the jester was actually more serious than the truth!

A true believer is one who is very respected in Islam and we are not permitted to joke in this way with a true believer nor can we destroy his character or personality. May we seek refuge with Allah (SwT) if one of us – under the pretence of making a joke – destroys the character of another believer!3

At this point, we look at the topic of refraining from doubtful things.

In the Science of Jurisprudence (Ilmul Fiqh), actions which are Makruh (discouraged) fall into the category of being permissible to perform and it has been mentioned that in all areas where there is a doubt – whether the act is obligatory or forbidden – the principle is that it is permissible. However at the same time, there are many instances in which these same doubtful things act as a bridge towards certain forbidden acts. It is for this reason that a person must not make his way to the ultimate level of these permissible acts – meaning the makruh things.

Why? This is said because the final level of the permissible acts is the edge where the forbidden acts begin and there is a possibility that at any moment, a person could trip and fall into the forbidden deeds. In the commentary of Nahjul Balagha of Ibne Abil Hadid it is written that:

أَلَا وَإِنَّ حِمَى اللَّهِ مَحَارِمَهُ.

“Be advised that the protected limits of Allah (which we must not transgress) are those things which He has made impermissible.”4

There is an area which a person is prohibited from entering into and if he moves closer to it, we see that sometimes through transgressing the boundaries, one will become overcome by the evil whisperings such that he may proceed to move forward (towards the haram acts) due to the excuse that:

كُلُّ مَشْكُوكٍ جَائِزٌ كُلُّ مَظْنُونٍ جَائِزٌ.

“All doubtful things are permissible, and all actions which one is uncertain about are (also) permissible.”

Thus, such a person may begin to perform those actions which could cause him to enter into sin and they will be classified as forbidden (haram) acts. All of these acts are permissible to perform, however at the same time we must not approach the boundaries of the forbidden acts since this boundary is one full of danger.

Of course we are not saying that we must refrain from all Makruh (reprehensible) acts, however there is a difference here and in certain instances, we must be extremely careful. If a person wishes to stay away from the danger boundary, then one must also distance oneself from the uncertain and doubtful

acts.

The final sentence in his tradition is that if a person succeeds in destroying the mystique behind sins and no longer feels frightened at performing forbidden acts, then one will easily contaminate one's pure essence. When some sinners speak to others about their life and the actions that they had performed in the past, they say, "The very first time that I performed such and such a sin, I felt my entire body tremble. However after continuously performing that sin, it became second nature for me."

Thus in summary, what protects a person is being frightened of performing a sin. However when committing sins becomes common place, then one resorts to trying to justify sinning and one will try to make every doubtful act something permissible.⁵

1. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 74, pg. 177

2. Some of the sins which result in creating a curtain between a person and Allah (SwT) are: Rejecting and changing the talk that one is hearing when it is vain, futile, joking discussions which only make others laugh. In order to better understand this issue, pay attention to the following traditions:

قَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ: إِنَّ الرَّجُلَ لَيَتَكَلَّمُ بِكَلِمَةٍ فَيَضْحَكُ بِهَا جُلَسَاؤُهُ يَهْوَى بِهَا أَبْعَدَ مِنَ التُّرَيَّا.

The Messenger of Allah (S) has said, "Surely sometimes a person speaks something where those present in the gathering begin to laugh and thus he becomes even further away (from Allah) than the Pleiades (one of the constellations in the sky.)"

قَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ: كَثْرَةُ الْمِرَاحِ، تَذْهَبُ بِمَاءِ الْوُجْهِ.

The Messenger of Allah (S) has said, "Making many jokes results in one's honour being removed."

عَنْ أَبِي مُحَمَّدٍ قَالَ: لَا تُمَارِ فَيَذْهَبَ بِهَاؤُكَ وَ لَا تُمَارِحَ فَيُجْتَرَأَ عَلَيْكَ.

It has been narrated that Abi Muhammad – Imam Hasan b. `Ali al-`Askari (as) has said, "Do not disagree with others or else your respect will be removed; and do not make too many jokes, so that you are not treated with immodesty."

3. Hakam b. Abil `As (the father of Marwan who later on attained the Khilafat) was one of the strongest enemies of the Messenger of Allah (S) and he annoyed the Prophet quite alot. One of the ways that he bugged the Prophet (S) was that whenever the Messenger of Allah (S) would walk through the streets of Makkah, he would follow him and make fun of him and would try to imitate the way and manner in which the Prophet walked. Through this, the enemies of Islam laughed and taunted (the Prophet).

Finally one day, the Messenger of Allah (S) turned around and saw that this enemy was busy in imitating him in his actions, the Prophet told him:

كُنْ كَذَلِكَ

"Stay as you are."

From that point on until the day he died, his body was constantly trembling and he died in a state of intense quivering. (Punishment of Sins, pg. 10)

4. Tafsir-e-Namuna, vol. 4, pg. 232

5. As for the punishment and effects of performing sins, some of the Scholars of Akhlaq have mentioned many punishments and effects that performing sins have on a person of which, we will suffice mentioning just three of them:

1. The Effect on the Soul of the Person. Sin have an effect on the heart and soul of a person who commits them. If the sin had no other effect than to cover the heart with spiritual darkness, then this in itself would be enough to keep away from them.

When an oppressor raises his hand to hit the oppressed person, the first detriment is that the oppressor's heart is darkened. In the Islamic narrations it has been mentioned that for every sin that a person performs, a black dot is placed on one's heart and through the repetition of sins, these black dots increase until the time that they take over the entire heart, and as the Noble Qur'an has stated:

...وَأَحَاطَتْ بِهٖ خَطِيئَتُهُ...

“...and are surrounded by their evil deeds and sins...” (Surat al-Baqarah (2), Verse 81)

By this we mean that when a person's entire presence is polluted with sin, then it is very hard for one to return back to the straight path. At the time when the black dots on the heart are few and the rest of the heart is still bright (with the Divine Light), one must work hard to remove those few black specks, however when the sins become many, then even those few bright spots will become covered over.

2. Effects of Sinning in One's Life: The person is – by nature – societal and one of the most important merits that a person possesses is his interdependence upon others in his life. Thus, if people were to lie to one another, then everyone would lose confidence in each other such that no one else would ever be able to have trust in anyone and everyone would have to be extra careful that others do not fool them. It is because of this that lying and performing sins, slowly transform the societal life of people into a life of individualism and the spirit of help and assistance to others is removed from the society.

3. Effects of Sinning in the Next World: We must fully accept the fact that sins are never destroyed and they are always with a person. For example, a lie that was told many years ago will follow a person step by step – even in the next world – and it will be with him continuously, just as the Noble Qur'an has stated that:

يَوْمَ يَنْظُرُ الْمَرْءُ مَا قَدَّمَتْ يَدَاهُ

“On that day shall humanity see all that their hands had sent forth.”[117]

Therefore, on that day, all of the actions of a person will be physically manifested in front of him.

Discourse 34: Conflict Between Actions and Beliefs

عَنْ عَبْدِ اللَّهِ بْنِ عُمَرَ قَالَ: سَمِعْتُ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ يَقُولُ: إِنَّمَا هُوَ خَيْرٌ يَرْجَى، أَوْ شَرٌّ يُتَّقَى، أَوْ بَاطِلٌ عُرِفَ فَاجْتُنِبَ، أَوْ حَقٌّ يَتَعَيَّنُ فَطُلِبَ، وَ آخِرَةٌ أَظَلَّ إِقْبَالَهَا فَسُعِيَ لَهَا، وَ دُنْيَا عُرِفَ نَفَادُهَا فَأَعْرَضَ عَنْهَا... إِنَّ الْعَجَبَ كُلَّ الْعَجَبِ لِمَنْ صَدَّقَ بِدَارِ الْبَقَاءِ، وَ هُوَ يَسْعَى لِدَارِ الْفَنَاءِ، وَ عَرَفَ أَنَّ رِضَى اللَّهِ فِي طَاعَتِهِ، وَ هُوَ يَسْعَى فِي مُخَالَفَتِهِ.

It has been narrated from 'Abdullah b. 'Umar: "I heard the Messenger of Allah (S) say, "Surely that which is good is what a person anticipates, and that which is bad is what a person keeps away from; and that which is vain is what a person is made to know about and it is avoided; and that which is the truth is clear and apparent when a person seeks it; and the next life is drawing near so work towards it, and it is known that this world shall come to an end, so then turn away from it. Surely that which is the most amazing is that a person who believes and accepts as being true that there is an eternal abode, however he strives and struggles for the abode (of this life) which is transitory; and one acknowledges that surely the pleasure of Allah lies in obedience to Him, however one struggles in going against Him."

1

The sentences in this tradition are somewhat complex, however that which can be noted is that in the beginning of his words, the Noble Prophet (S) wanted to discuss the substance of this material world. In the continuation of the tradition, the Prophet (S) talked about the inconsistencies between the actions and theological beliefs of a person; meaning that the problem with people is not their inability to recognize Allah (SwT) – rather, it is the shortcomings in their (righteous) actions.

The traits of this world are of two types – they are either good or bad. If they are good traits, then they are worthy for a person to seek, and if they are bad, then it is better that a person keeps away from them. In other words, there are a series of truths which are recognized and defined and a person too must recognize these and accept them and must realize that without doubt there is a next life. Each and every person is standing at the threshold of a path, and in order to reach to felicity in the next world, one must put forth an effort and struggle hard.

Each of us must realize that we cannot trust this material world for it has never been loyal to anyone, thus we must try to keep our distance from this material world.

Many times we commit sins and place the blame of this sin on the shoulders of being ignorant and not knowing better – although we do not say that ignorance is not one of the causes of being misled since many of the despicable acts and bad deeds stem from being unaware – however if we were to put this in the balance, we would see that most of the issues (of life around us) are clear and it is the person himself who is to blame.

It has been mentioned in Nahjul Balagha² in relation to a person who denounces the material world as being one of deception and trickery and a wicked place, and the Imam (as) said to him, "O you who denounce the material world and have been deceived by its trickery, tell me where has the world deluded you?"

The Imam then continues and states, "Are these bones of your forefathers and ancestors that are under the ground the things which have deluded you? Is it these graves which are now destroyed which belonged to your friends and relatives the things which have deluded you? Is it the ill people who had fallen sick for nights on end and had been bed-ridden and called you to their side, and through their

cries, screams, yelling and the soul leaving their bodies the thing which has deluded you?”

Imam 'Ali (as) stated that the best of warners are these same corpses that are placed in front of a person and with the chanting of “لا إله إلا الله”, are passed in front of our eyes to see...

فَكَفَىٰ وَعِظًا بِمَوْتِي عَايَنْتُمُوهُمْ، حُمِلُوا إِلَىٰ قُبُورِهِمْ غَيْرَ رَاكِبِينَ، وَ أَنْزَلُوا فِيهَا
غَيْرَ نَازِلِينَ.

“The dead whom you witness suffice as warners. They were carried to their graves, not going themselves, and were placed in them (the grave) but not of their own accord. It seems as if they never lived in this world and as if the next world had always been their abode.”³

In the fall season, we just need to walk through the gardens and look at all of the lessons around us within the dead plants and trees. This is the same garden – which in the spring time – was full of the sound of the nightingales and the sights of all of the other beautiful sights including the budding and blossoming flowers – and this scene is similar to the world around us. Sometimes for a period of six months, sometimes for a period of sixty years and sometimes for a period of... these beauties last. So where are these things that have deluded us? It is the person himself who wished to delude himself and thus, when he sins he tries to place the blame of this act on the world?

It is because of this that we have been told to occasionally pay a visit to those who are buried in the graveyard. At least once a week we should try to make a trip to the cemetery so that we know that our final stage in this world is there. It has been mentioned in the traditions that through visiting the people in the graveyard, our depression and sorrow is reduced, because these feelings are not related to the spiritual aspect of our lives. We show grief because of the fact that we are not able to reach such and such a lofty station (in the material world).

We show grief over not having a nice house! We show grief for many reasons and thus, when we go to the graveyard and see our eventual resting place, our hearts then become as the grave – at ease and full of tranquility.

There is a graveyard in Qum in which many scholars are buried. One day I went to this area of the graveyard and saw many photos above the graves – those of my previous teachers and many of my friends – not just one or two but all of them are buried there. When you see these photos and the graves, then you realize that death has also been prescribed for us and these things that the common people say in relation to death such as: “May Allah protect us from death” and, “May we seek refuge in Allah (from dying)” have absolutely no meaning! Death does not joke around with people – and all nations and religions accept the fact that the final outcome of everyone is death and that not a single person knows exactly when he will die!

The Commander of the Faithful, 'Ali b. Abi Talib (as) spoke some amazing words while on his death bed and summarized everything in one sentence when he said:

أَنَا بِالْأَمْسِ صَاحِبِكُمْ وَأَنَا الْيَوْمَ عِبْرَةٌ لَكُمْ وَغَدًا مُفَارِقُكُمْ.

“Yesterday I was your companion and today I am the lesson (which you should learn from) and tomorrow I will depart from you.”⁴

Thus, we can summarize our life in this world into these three days – yesterday, today and tomorrow.

Therefore, is there any value that a person should commit sins or take the rights of another person? If these things have no value, then let us step forward and try to correct and reform ourselves.

A Conflict Between Actions and Beliefs:

... إِنَّ الْعَجَبَ كُلَّ الْعَجَبِ لِمَنْ صَدَّقَ بَدَارِ الْبَقَاءِ، وَهُوَ يَسْعَى لِدَارِ الْفَنَاءِ، وَ عَرَفَ أَنَّ رِضَى اللَّهِ فِي طَاعَتِهِ، وَهُوَ يَسْعَى فِي مُخَالَفَتِهِ.

“Surely that which is the most amazing is that a person who believes and accepts as being true that there is an eternal abode, however he strives and struggles for the abode (of this life) which is transitory; and one acknowledges that surely the pleasure of Allah lies in obedience to Him, however one struggles in going against Him.”

Sometimes we see that a conflict arises between a person's beliefs and actions – by this we mean that he may believe one thing however his actions go against this. For this sort of a conflict, we must go straight to the source and determine what it is, since a person's beliefs have a direct impact on his actions and similarly, his actions are related to his beliefs.

The difference between mankind and animals is that animals only possess the natural and animalistic instincts to work with, however mankind has the use of power of intelligence – meaning that mankind should think and rationalize and then determine the good and bad in the act which one wishes to perform. Once this is determined, then one should decide how to act. However even though mankind has been given this trait, we see many people still have a conflict between their actions and their beliefs and thus we must analyze where this comes from.⁵

An example of this is in two sentences which the Prophet (S) stated in the tradition mentioned: “It is amazing that a person accepts the Day of Resurrection however all of his endeavours are for this

material world! In addition, it is amazing that a person knows that the pleasure of Allah (SwT) lies in obeying Him, however he leaves this to perform sins!”

From the point of view of psychology, such a disparity between actions and beliefs actually stems from various sources, some of which include:

1) Weak Faith:

One's theological beliefs are weak and in this instance, they get mixed with doubt and uncertainty. This doubt stems from the absence of true acceptance (of the religion) in the heart. Such things also have an impact on the actions that one performs since the actions are a mirror image of that which is inside a person's heart.

When you see a fire burning, it is impossible to think that you will ever bring your hand close to that fire. If we had this same amount of belief in the words of Allah (SwT) then it is impossible that a conflict could ever occur between our beliefs and actions that we perform:

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ يَأْكُلُونَ أَمْوَالَ الْيَتَامَىٰ ظُلْمًا إِنَّمَا يَأْكُلُونَ فِي بُطُونِهِمْ نَارًا وَ سَيَصْلُونَ
سَعِيرًا

“Surely those people who oppressively eat (take) the wealth of the orphan, certainly they are eating fire in their stomachs and soon for them shall there be a punishment of (hell) fire.”⁶

Thus, in order to be protected from these trials and tribulations and calamities, we must make our beliefs firm.

2) Power of the Lower Desires:

On the surface, a person may have good, strong faith – however his lower desires are so strong that they actually take over his faith. In order to prevent this spiritual disease, the person has no other choice but to control his lower desires through the (spiritual) mortification of his soul and this can not be accomplished except by studying the lives of the great Muslims in history, reading about our previous scholars and studying the verses of the Qur`an and the traditions.

3) Negligence:

Such a person has faith and his lower desires are not powerful but this person can be compared to the negligent one who unintentionally goes towards fire or who, due to his negligence, accidentally pours hot water on his hand. In summary, negligence is one of the factors responsible for this form of conflict between one's faith and actions.

The material aspects of this world are so beautiful and alluring that a person becomes negligent of all other things. The path to confront this is through constant thinking – meaning that during the day, a person must set aside some time for contemplation – and the best time is just before going to sleep. One must stop and think for some time about the actions that one performed during the day and what one was not able to do. One should think to himself where one is and why he was brought into this world and what was the purpose of being created? One should ask himself if he has reached close to the purpose of existence on this Earth? In summary, this continuous thinking can result in the curtains of negligence being ripped apart from oneself.⁷

In any case, when we see that there are people who act contrary to that which they believe in, it is due to the reasons mentioned above.

Keeping in mind these issues, from one point we see that we must strengthen our pillars of faith and from another point, we see that we must constantly be engaged in thought.

Our faith can be increased and strengthened through more reading and studying and through performing good, righteous deeds and by restraining our lower desires.

Righteous actions make a person unwavering and steadfast in one's faith; and it increases the nur (Divine Light) of guidance in the heart of a person!

1. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 74, pg. 182

2. Nahj al-Balagha, Short Saying 131

3. Ibid., Speech 188

4. Ibid., Speech 188

5. It is important to mention this point here that the meaning of this speech is that from one point of view, this world is a mirage and can delude people; however from another point of view, it is a place of learning lessons. If a person was to only pay attention to the material aspects of the world and its glitter and gold, then it would take him off the path of truth and make him negligent of the next life and of Allah (Glory and Greatness be to Him). Thus, each and every person must look towards death and those who have died before and take lessons from them and through this, one can remove the negligence from one's heart.

6. Surat al-Nisa (4), Verse 10

7. The following poem explains that which was mentioned:

روزها فکر من این است و همه شب سختم که چرا غافل از احوال دل خویشتم از کجا آمده ام، آمدنم بهر چه بود؟ به کجا می روم؟ آخر نتمایی وطنم مانده ام سخت عجب کز چه سبب ساخت مرا یا چه بوده ست مراد وی ازین ساختنم؟ جان که از عالم علوی است، یقین می دانم رخت خود باز برآنم که همان جا فکنم مرغ باغ ملکوتیم نیم از عالم خاک دو سه روزی قفسی ساخته اند از بدنم ای خوش آن روز که پرواز کنم تا بر دوست به هوای سرکویش پر و بالی بزنم

Discourse 35: The Final Journey and the Remembrance of Death

عَنْ سَالِمِ بْنِ عَبْدِ اللَّهِ عَنْ ابْنِ عُمَرَ قَالَ، قَالَ لِي رَسُولُ اللَّهِ : كُنْ فِي الدُّنْيَا كَأَنَّكَ غَرِيبٌ وَ عَابِرُ سَبِيلٍ، وَ اَعِدُّ نَفْسَكَ فِي الْمَوْتَى، وَ إِذَا أَصْبَحْتَ لَا تُحَدِّثْ نَفْسَكَ بِالْمَسَاءِ، وَ إِذَا أَمْسَيْتَ فَلَا تُحَدِّثْ نَفْسَكَ بِالصَّبَاحِ، وَ خُذْ مِنْ صِحَّتِكَ لِسُقْمِكَ وَ مِنْ شَبَابِكَ لِهَرَمِكَ وَ مِنْ حَيَاتِكَ لِمَوَاتِكَ. فَإِنَّكَ لَا تَدْرِي مَا اسْمُكَ غَدًا.

It has been narrated from Salim b. 'Abdullah from b. 'Umar who said that the Messenger of Allah (S) told me: “Live in the world as if you are a stranger and just passing through and consider yourself as one of those who is already deceased. When you wake up in the morning, do not desire that you should live until the evening and when the evening comes do not think that you will be alive until the morning. Make use of your health before you fall ill, and make use of your youth before you turn old, and make use of your life before you die, since surely you do not know tomorrow (meaning on the Day of Resurrection) what group of people you will be gathered with.”¹

This tradition discusses the most important issue of training (of the human soul) and that is the remembrance of death.

In the traditions, we see that it is been constantly mentioned that we must not have trust or reliance upon this passing world, and in Biharul Anwar it has been mentioned:

حُبُّ الدُّنْيَا رَأْسُ كُلِّ خَطِيئَةٍ.

“Love of the (material) world is the source of all sins.”²

It is the love of this world which is also brought about when a person is negligent of the transient nature and one thinks that this world shall remain forever. When a person engages in such a transaction (with this material world), then one will naturally develop a love and affection for it, and when this happens, it is very difficult to separate one's soul from the material world.

It is for this reason that one of the best ways of training a person and to combat against the performance of sins is to pay attention to death.³

A person must be such that when he wakes up in the morning, he does not assume that he will remain alive until the evening – and when he enters into the evening, he does not consider that he will remain alive until the next morning.

We should all live this state that we may not survive for another moment. It is this same issue – meaning the focus upon Allah (SwT) and turning away from the material world which leaves a deep effect on our souls. A person must truly believe that at any moment, one is in the grips of danger.

For example, pay attention to the heart which makes the blood reach all the parts of the body. The heart is the centre from which the blood is distributed, however it does not take its own nourishment from the blood which is inside itself. In reality, the heart considers itself as equal to all the other parts of the body (and thus waits for the blood to be distributed to it).

Sometimes the walls of the secondary blood veins become very narrow or develop a clot in them – and as it is known, blood can clot very easily. As soon as the blood comes out of the veins, we see that there is something inside it which makes it clot and sometimes it can also be seen that the agents which make up the blood can become contaminated and thus the blood clots right there in the veins and through this clot of the blood is so small – maybe one millimeter in size – however it takes over the channels in the blood vessels and thus, the blood can no longer reach to the heart.

When this occurs, then after a few minutes the heart will stop working and this is what is known as a heart attack.

When a specialist in this field (Physiologist) explains this to a person, that individual will develop fear since he knows that it is possible that he could die at any instant. Sometimes he may even plunge himself into doubts and the evil whisperings may overtake him.

The vessels that pass through the brain are much thinner than those which are contained in the petals of a flower and if there was to be any excess pressure on one of these, and if one of these blood veins was to burst, then with that blood spilling inside the brain, it is very well possible that the person could die.

In addition, it is possible that someone – due to having one bite of food to eat – could also die. When a person is eating, if a small piece of food or something else was to enter into the air-pipe which controls one's breathing, then the only way that this can come out is through coughing it out. However if the morsel of food or thing that went down the pipe was large, then it would stay in the pipe and there is nothing that could bring it out – except for death.

Thus in summary, dying is something that is simple and can come about very easily. Even in the trips we take we see that there are many dangers associated with them and even something like driving a car – even if we ourselves obey all the rules and regulations – it is possible that another person may not be following the rules and thus, due to him, the harm will reach you.

When a person knows that there is absolutely no guarantee in life and living, then why does one still go towards various types of sins? It is from this point that we must remember death and use this remembrance as the powerful breaks on our lives (like the breaks in a car) to prevent ourselves from committing sins.

When the blood is being transferred through our veins, we see that the small ones are right beside the large veins which come out of the heart and return back and feed the heart. Therefore, the heart is just like any other body part which is nourished through the tributary blood veins.

Thus it has been mentioned in the traditions that the most skillful person is one who remembers death the most. As well, in the traditions it has been mentioned that when Imam as-Sajjad (as) used to recite Suratul Hamd and reached the line:

مَالِكِ يَوْمِ الدِّينِ

“Master of the Day of Judgement”

he would continuously repeat this line in order to remind himself of the meaning of this verse. We see that the Imam (as) who possessed such a level of humility and infallibility acted in this way, so how should we who are polluted with sins – act? Thus, it is pertinent that a person reminds himself everyday of death!

1. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 74, pg. 181

2. Ibid., vol. 48, pg. 258

3. From the point of view of the Qur'an, death is something which exists and is a transfer from one world to another world; thus in many verses of the Qur'an, it has been defined or explained as being “توفى” in the meaning of taking something back – the taking of the soul from the body through the Angels. As well, in the Islamic traditions, there are also various words and expressions used in relation to the reality and certainty of death.

It was once asked from Imam `Ali b. al-Husain as-Sajjad (as) what death was, to which he replied, “For the true believer, death is similar to a person removing dirty clothing from his body and removing the heavy chains from around a person and in their place, putting on the most beautiful clothes and the sweetest of perfumes and mounting upon the nicest of steeds and reaching the most appropriate of stations. As for the disbeliever, death is similar to removing his beautiful clothes and being clothed with the roughest clothing and being transferred from a place which he loves to a place which is filthy and being brought to a station which is full of fright and fear where the greatest of punishments will take place.”

In addition, when Imam Muhammad b. `Ali (as) was asked this same question, he replied, “Death is the same sleep that comes after you every night except that the time period of lasting is very long and the person will not wake up from this sleep until the Day of Resurrection.”

Even in Karbala on the day of `Ashura when the battle had become intense, Imam Husain b. `Ali (as) spoke some very beautiful words to his companions in relation to death: “Be proud O' you sons of noble men! Death is simply a bridge which will transfer you from a valley full of difficulties and troubles into a wide, spacious garden of paradise full of perpetual blessings. Which one of you would be upset at being transferred from a prison to a castle? However as for the enemies it

is as if they are being moved from a palace to a prison full of punishment. My father, the Messenger of Allah (S), has said that the world is a prison for a true believer and paradise for a disbeliever and that death is a bridge for the true believer towards paradise while death is a bridge for the disbeliever towards the fire of hell.” Tafsir-e-Namuna, vol. 22, pg. 362

Discourse 36: Paying Attention to Those who Came Before Us

قَالَ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ : إِنَّمَا أَنْتُمْ خَلْفُ مَا ضَيَّيْنَا، وَبَقِيَّةُ مُتَقَدِّمِينَ كَانُوا أَكْبَرَ مِنْكُمْ
بَسْطَةً، وَأَعْظَمَ سَطْوَةً، فَأَزْعَجُوا عَنْهَا أَسْكَنَ مَا كَانُوا إِلَيْهَا (وَغَدَرَتْ بِهِمْ) وَ
أَخْرَجُوا مِنْهَا أَوْثَقَ مَا كَانُوا بِهَا، فَلَمْ يَمْنَعَهُمْ قُوَّةُ عَشِيرَةٍ، وَلَا قِبَلٌ مِنْهُمْ بَدْلُ
فِدْيَةٍ، فَارْحَلُوا أَنْفُسَكُمْ بِزَادٍ مَبْلَغِ قَبْلِ أَنْ تَأْخُذُوا عَلَى فُجَاءَةٍ وَقَدْ غَفَلْتُمْ عَنِ
لِاسْتِعْدَادِ.

The Messenger of Allah (S) said: “Surely you all are the remainders of those who have come before you and the remnants of those who have already passed. Surely those before you were much greater in power and superior in strength and greater in authority and thus even though they were at the pinnacle of luxury and comforts and even though they had complete reliance on this world, He (Allah) still took them to the next life and the most powerful people of their group and their tribe were not able to prevent them from leaving (this world) and not even offering all the money that they had in ransom prevented them from being taken from this world. So before you leave this world without any sort of preparation and while you are in a state of negligence, make sure that you prepare something in great amount (that you will be able to use in the next world).” 1

This tradition is in relation to paying attention to the history of those who have already passed away and this is also an issue that the Noble Qur`an has placed great emphasis upon and which has been alluded to in various verses of the Qur`an.

This tradition tells us that there were nations in the past who were much greater than us in relation to their wealth, children and power and although they had all of this, it still did not stop the Angel 'Izra`il (as) (the Angel of Death), from sparing them, or giving them any respite. Thus, we should fear as well and not be dragged into this same outcome which they were put into of being oblivious to death!

History is one of the six sources of knowledge, since as we know, we are not the first nation of human

beings to inhabit this Earth and who have lived on this planet. Before us human beings were on this Earth and there were other nations too who lived here and their remains and effects have stayed behind for us to examine; and they are of two types:

1. The physical remnants they left behind;
2. Their historical remains.

1. The physical remnants which they left behind include their historical narratives and works. When a person studies these effects of theirs and sees their eventual outcome, then one will easily learn lessons from them.

2. Their historical remnants include things such as the cities which they lived in which were destroyed and the Qur`an alludes to such events: “On your journeys to Sham (present day Syria), you will find the remnants of the destroyed cities of the people of Lut, 'Ad, Thamud and others such nations.”

Why is it that we do not hear the message that these destroyed nations are trying to convey to us? Why do we not learn lessons from them? When we walk by a cemetery, why is it that we do not pay attention to the screams and cries of the dead? Look at the palaces and castles that the kings and leaders had which are now ruins. Look at the remnants that Fir'awn has left behind!

Look at those pyramids which were built with millions of stones and took years to build and in which thousands of workers had a hand in constructing. Even today, not a single person has been able to explain how these huge rocks were gathered and put into place to construct such buildings!

As it has been stated that in that part of the world where the pyramids were built there were no large mountains for thousands of kilometres such that it would be possible that they would have been able to procure rocks to make such monuments. And as it is known these huge buildings were built there to act as graves for the Pharaoh!

All of these things are lesson for us. With all of the power, supremacy and “magic” that they possessed, where they able to keep alive for eternity or to stand up against the face of death?

These examples are all lessons that we must learn from and indeed there are many. Even this evil Shah (that ruled Iran) – Muhammad Rida – it is narrated that upon the roof of his mansion, there were two machines installed that if at night, he wanted to see the sky, he would simply turn a key and the roof would open up (so that he could see the stars). At the time in which he ruled, this was one of the newest pieces of technology that was available. However in the end where did the Shah reach to with all of his pomp and glory? Is it not that in the end, he too was buried under the ground?

The Messengers and Intimate friends of Allah (SwT) – who were as a bouquet of beautiful flowers of creation – were not attached to the material pleasures of this life – so, what can be said about others?

It is for this reason that the Messenger of Allah (S) said, “You should fear that you are travelling towards

the next world whereas you have not yet prepared yourselves for death.”

The preparation for death is to turn back towards Allah (SwT) – Tawbah – meaning that one must sincerely purify one's heart and soul of sins so that one will be ready to meet death!

Discourse 37: Forgiveness and Pardon

بَيْنَا رَسُولُ اللَّهِ جَالِسٌ، إِذَا رَأَيْنَاهُ ضَاحِكًا حَتَّى بَدَتْ ثَنَائِيَاهُ فَقُلْنَا: يَا رَسُولَ اللَّهِ، مِمَّا ضَحِكْتَ؟ فَقَالَ: رَجُلَانِ مِنْ أُمَّتِي جِيئَا بَيْنَ يَدَيَّ رَبِّي فَقَالَ أَحَدُهُمَا: يَا رَبِّ خُذْ لِي بِمَظْلَمَتِي مِنْ آخِرٍ، فَقَالَ اللَّهُ تَعَالَى: أَعْطِ أَخَاكَ مَظْلَمَتَهُ. فَقَالَ: يَا رَبِّ، لَمْ يَبْقَ مِنْ حَسَنَاتِي شَيْءٌ. فَقَالَ: يَا رَبِّ، فَلْيَحْمِلْ مِنْ أَوْزَارِي. ثُمَّ قَاضَتْ عَيْنَا رَسُولَ اللَّهِ وَ قَالَ: إِنَّ ذَلِكَ الْيَوْمَ لِيَوْمٌ تَحْتَاجُ النَّاسُ فِيهِ إِلَى مَنْ يَحْمِلُ عَنْهُمْ أَوْزَارَهُمْ. ثُمَّ قَالَ اللَّهُ تَعَالَى لِلطَّالِبِ بِحَقِّهِ: اِرْفَعْ بَصْرَكَ إِلَى الْجَنَّةِ، فَاَنْظُرْ مَاذَا تَرَى؟ فَرَفَعَ رَأْسَهُ، فَرَأَى مَا أَعْجَبَهُ مِنَ الْخَيْرِ وَ النِّعْمَةِ. فَقَالَ: يَا رَبِّ لِمَنْ هَذَا؟ فَقَالَ: لِمَنْ أَعْطَانِي ثَمَنَهُ. فَقَالَ: يَا رَبِّ، وَ مَنْ يَمْلِكُ ثَمَنَ ذَلِكَ؟ فَقَالَ: أَنْتَ، فَقَالَ: كَيْفَ بِذَلِكَ؟ فَقَالَ: بَعْفُوكَ عَنْ أَخِيكَ. فَقَالَ: قَدْ عَفَوْتُ. فَقَالَ اللَّهُ تَعَالَى: فَخُذْ بِيَدِ أَخِيكَ، فَادْخُلَا الْجَنَّةَ. فَقَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ: فَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ، وَ أَصْلِحُوا ذَاتَ بَيْنِكُمْ

“One day the Messenger of Allah (S) was sitting down and we saw him laugh until you could see the whiteness of his front teeth. We said to him, 'O Messenger of Allah! Why are you laughing?'

The Prophet replied, “Two men from my nation were in the presence of My Lord when one of the two men said, 'O Lord! Take my rights (that the other person owes me in this world) from the other person.' Allah, the Most High, said (to the other person), “Give your brother back his rights (which you took from him in the world).'

Then the second man said, 'O Lord! There are no more good deeds remaining (for me to give him) in place of the oppression that I did to him.' The first person (who had been wronged) then said, 'O Lord then place all of my sins on his back.' At this point, the Prophet began to cry and said, 'Today is the day

which the people will be in need of a person to place their sins on.'

Allah, the Most High, then told the person who was trying to get his rights back, 'Lift your eyes up towards the Paradise and tell me what you see?' So the person lifted his head and saw that which amazed him from amongst goodness and blessings. The man then said, "O' Lord! Who is this for?' Allah replied, "This is for the person who gives his worth over to me." The person questioned, 'O' Lord! And who is the one whose worth is that?' Allah said, 'You.' The man then said, 'And how is that possible?'

Allah replied, 'By you forgiving your brother (you have given your worth over to me).' The man then said, 'Surely I have forgiven him.' At this time, Allah, the Noble and High, said, 'So then take your brother by your hand and both of you enter into Paradise.' The Messenger of Allah (S) then said, 'Have consciousness of Allah and sort out the disagreements between yourselves.'"1 and 2

In this tradition, there are two very important points which we must pay attention to:

1. In the next life, there will be no other way to repay the debts which were left over from the material world and there will not be a way to become absolved from any responsibilities that one was under (in this world). Thus, the material rights which are on a person will be transformed into spiritual rights (in the next life).

For example, if in this world a person does not pay back his loans, then according to a verse of the Qur`an:

يَوْمَ لَا يَنْفَعُ مَالٌ وَلَا بَنُونَ

"On the day when neither wealth nor sons will profit anyone..."3

on this day (Day of Judgement), one must repay his debts through his good deeds. If a person does not have any good deeds to give out, then one will have to accept the other person's sins on his record.

This is a very important issue that no matter how many good deeds a person possesses, when he enters into the field on the Day of Resurrection, he may end up as a penniless beggar – what else does he have to give to other people except his deeds?

No matter how few sins a person may have on his record, here, in that great location, his sins may be increased. A question which may arise is how is it possible for a person to take on the responsibility of the sins of other people?

It is for this reason that while in this world, we account all our actions and pay back any debts that we

have on us since. If for example, Allah forbid, we insult a person then we must seek his forgiveness since that which is even more important than the wealth of a Muslim is his honour and dignity.

It has been mentioned in Biharul Anwar that:

إِنَّ أَرْبَى الرَّبَا عِرْضُ الرَّجُلِ الْمُسْلِمِ.

“Surely the worst form of usury is the destruction of the dignity of a Muslim for no reason.”⁴

If we destroy the honour and dignity of a person in this world and do not make amends for it, then the compensation will be taken from our good deeds (in the next world) and if we do not have any good deeds with us, then we will have to take upon their sins. Thus, not only will we have to bear the weight of our own sins on our shoulders, but we will also have to bear the sins of others, just as it is mentioned in the Qur`an:

وَلِيَحْمِلْنَ أَثْقَالَهُمْ وَأَثْقَالًا مَعَ أَثْقَالِهِمْ وَ لَيُسْئَلُنَّ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ عَمَّا كَانُوا يَفْتَرُونَ

“They will bear their own burdens and (other) burdens along with their own, and on the Day of Judgement they will be called to account for their falsehoods.”⁵

The next part of the hadith mentions the station of forgiveness, and what a great status it is for the one who forgives others! It has been mentioned in the traditions that:

ثَمَنُ الْجَنَّةِ الْعَفْوُ.

“The price of Paradise is forgiveness”

It is not an honour or distinction for a person that if he sees another person doing a bad deed that he keeps this in his heart such that one day he can take revenge on that person, because this act of taking revenge is for the animals.

There are some people who consider taking revenge as being a proof of their courage and bravery and are of the belief that if a person was to strike a blow to someone, then one must strike an even harder blow to that person, however the opposite of this is true in Islam. If a person strikes a blow upon you, and you forgive him, then this is a sign of your courage and that you have complete control over your soul and thus, a hostile and revenge-seeking person is not one who is truly successful.

In this relation, not only should we forgive another person, rather even greater than this is that we must try and destroy the difference that exists amongst the believers and if we are able to do this, then we should then and convert the entire society into one that is built upon forgiveness of others and not seeking revenge.

If this characteristic does not take shape within a society, then surely its opposite will eventually become more and more common in a society which will result in the entire population being in disharmony, disunion and dissension. Such issues may never come to an end but the only way that they can be put to rest is through forgiving one another!

1. Ibid., vol. 74, pg. 180

2. In this tradition we see that the issue of the Day of Resurrection is mentioned in the past tense and this may have been done because the present tense verb is used to denote an event that will for sure happen in the future; or it may also be done as a form of revelation which came to the Prophet (S).

3. Surat al-al-Shuara` (26), Verse 88

4. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 72, pg. 222

5. Surat al-`Ankabut (29), Verse 13

Discourse 38: Fleeing From Death

قَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ : مَنْ عَدَّ غَدًا مِنْ أَجَلِهِ، فَقَدْ أَسَاءَ صُحْبَةَ الْمَوْتِ.

The Messenger of Allah (S) has said, “A person who considers tomorrow as being a part of his life, shows that he is definitely not pleased with dying.”¹

A person must not take tomorrow for granted and must not sit down and chart out a program (for the future), since this sort of a desire means that one is not pleased with dying and this act of not being pleased with death will result in negligence in the life of this world.²

Of the very important issues which separates those who worship Allah (SwT) from those who worship the material world is their understanding in relation to the issue of death.

Those who believe in the oneness of Allah (SwT) recognize death as being a “second birth” and consider it as being the beginning of a new life and in their point of view, death is nothing but a transfer from one house to another house in which they are then freed from the impediments of this world and

are brought into a wide, and spacious other world.

However the materialists consider death as being the end of everything and it is because of this fact that they are not ready to give their lives for the greater worths or to offer a sacrifice except if it is done under duress and pressure. At the same time, those who sincerely worship Allah (SwT) have no problem with killing or being killed in His path and are ready to sacrifice their lives and wealth and they only fear Allah (SwT).

It is from this point that we can understand to what extent faith in the resurrection plays in the perfection of mankind. After the belief in the resurrection, there is no other belief or conviction other than Tawhid which plays a role in the building of the character of a person and we see that all of the Prophets were sent to invite people to these two issues and this constant reminder of the next life was done for a purpose.

There is an anecdote in relation to Ayatullah al-'Uzma Burujerdi where it was stated that someone once said about him that, "This man has firm belief in the Day of Resurrection." When you first hear these words, they may make you laugh – as if it is possible that a Muslim such as Ayatullah al-'Uzma Burujerdi would not have faith in the Day of Resurrection!? However we must look deeper into this lofty statement since the meaning of "firm belief" is one which plays a role in the life of a person – it is this firm belief whose beginnings stir a person to work and perform deeds only to attain the pleasure of Allah (SwT) and is not the sort of belief that does not have any impact or effect on the soul and life of a person.

In relation to the Day of Resurrection, there are many important issues and because of this, in lectures, writings and classes held on self-building, this issue on the Day of Resurrection must be emphasized.

A Muslim who has firm faith in religion considers the life of this world as simply being a bridge and introductory place to the Next Life. It may be possible that one of the proofs why we recite the following line (a minimum) of ten times per day is so that we do not forget this reality.

مَالِكِ يَوْمِ الدِّينِ

"Master of the Day of Judgement."

If we keep this event in mind and do not forget it, then our entire presence will become enlivened. Thus, that which we wish to mention is that there are many people who in relation to their theological beliefs are believers in tawhid and the Oneness of Allah (SwT), however in relation to the next life, they are materialists.

In other words, they have firm belief in the beginning and end of all creations, but when it comes to their

actions, we see that they are actually afraid of death. It can be said that they feel that death is actually the end of all things and that there is nothing after it. This variance between belief and actions is definitely a great calamity.

When we, from a practical point of view, do not believe in the Day of Resurrection, then we do not practice self-sacrifice. It is through our deeds and actions that we show that we do not believe in the following verse of the Qur`an which states:

وَلَا تَحْسَبَنَّ الَّذِينَ قُتِلُوا فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ أَمْوَاتًا بَلْ أحيَاءٌ عِنْدَ رَبِّهِمْ يُرْزَقُونَ

“And do not consider those who have been slain in the way of Allah as being dead, nay rather, they are alive in the presence of their Lord receiving sustenance.”³

We are so attached to the life of this material world and fond of the lower desires and passions that we have become negligent of the Day of Resurrection.

According to the tradition we started with, that person who has firm belief in that Day is always ready (for death). He does not consider tomorrow as definitely being a part of his life, rather it is the opposite of this. He supposes that tomorrow his death will come and thus, he makes sure that his accountability and deed of records is clean (of bad deeds) and is prepared and ready to meet death at any time.⁴

In many verses of the Qur`an it has been mentioned that on the Day of Resurrection or at the time of giving up one's life, a person will call out his last request:

حَتَّىٰ إِذَا جَاءَ أَحَدَهُمُ الْمَوْتُ قَالَ رَبِّ ارْجِعُونِ لَعَلِّي أَعْمَلُ صَالِحًا فِيمَا تَرَكْتُ
كَلَّا إِنَّهَا كَلِمَةٌ هُوَ قَائِلُهَا وَمِنْ وَرَائِهِمْ بَرْزَخٌ إِلَىٰ يَوْمِ يُبْعَثُونَ

“Until that time when death comes to one of them he says, 'O' Lord return me back to the world so that I may work righteous deeds which I left behind in the world.' But by no means! These are only words which they say and thus behind them is a partition (Barzakh) until the day when all will be raised up.”⁵

In all of these instances, the Qur`an – either clearly and explicitly, or through the use of a metaphor or allegorically answers these protests by one word: “كَلَّا” – which means “But by no means”.

The rule of perfection does not permit a person to return back to this world, just as it is not possible for a fetus which comes out of its mother's womb to return back. From the point of view of this spiritual voyage of perfection which mankind is on, it is impossible to return back – whether one leaves this world and is “born” into the next world perfect or with deficiencies.

When we see that this is how the issue is, then should we not pay extra attention to the life of this world? While traversing this path, should we not be strict with ourselves and think more about this issue?

It is because of this that we must think a lot about the Day of Resurrection and we should not let even a single day pass by where we do not ponder on death and the Resurrection; and if we are able to correctly ponder on this issue and clothe our actions with these thoughts (of the next life), then we will see that our entire presence will be draped in the divine light and purity!

1. Tuhaf al-`Uqul

2. Most people are normally afraid of death and there is only a small group of individuals who laugh in the face of death and eagerly welcome it with open arms – they trade-in the coarse ornate garment of this life for the perpetual and ever-lasting life of the next world. However we should look at why death, its manifestation and even the mention of this word immediately causes trouble to some people:

1. Lack of Belief in the Life after Death: The principle proof is that these people do not have faith in the life after death – and if they have faith in this, then we see that their faith is not something firmly rooted within them and this belief has not taken charge of their thoughts and emotions.

The fear that mankind feels from destruction and non-existence is natural just as we see that people are afraid of the darkness at night – but why? This is because darkness is the non-existence of light. So why do they fear death? Since they think that they are traversing the same path of non-existence and annihilation. However if mankind was to have complete faith and conviction that this material world which we are living in is a prison for a true believer and paradise for a disbeliever just as the tradition tells us:

أَلَدُنْيَا سِجْنُ الْمُؤْمِنِ وَ جَنَّةُ الْكَافِرِ

“The world is a prison for the disbeliever and a place of paradise for the disbeliever.”

then one would not have this fear of death.

If mankind was to truly believe that this physical body is actually a receptacle for the soul and when this receptacle is broken, it is only then that the soul will be freed and at that time one will be able to soar with one's friends. If one was to sincerely believe that “The hijab which covers over the life and realities of a person are due to the dust which makes up his body”, then without doubt, one would truly wish to be freed and released from this covering!

Death is a garden for the higher spiritual realms and is not one for the spiritual beings and this vessel that one is currently contained in is only good for the proverbial two or three days – truly if a person was to believe these things about death, then one would never fear dying – rather, one would take this world as a path to travel towards perfection.

Thus, in the tradition of `Ashura we read that, “As the circle of the enemies grew in force and their pressure intensified around Imam al-Husain (as) and his companions, their faces grew more and more illuminated and brighter and even those old men who made up the companions of the Imam (as) were seen smiling and laughing on the day of `Ashura. When these people were asked why they were acting like this, they replied ‘We are in this mood as in a few hours we will be blessed to drink from the cup of martyrdom and we will be taking the Hurul `Ain in our arms!’”

2. Love and Attraction to this Material World: Another reason why people fear death is because they have an unreasonable love for this material world. They fear that death will bring a separation between themselves and that which they truly love and it will cause their hearts to be separated from their loved ones and all of those things which have made their material life easy and full of pleasures and luxuries – and this is something which they can not handle.

3. No Good Deeds: Since their container of good deeds is empty and the container of evil deeds is full, people fear death. We read in the tradition that, “A person once came to the Messenger of Allah (S) and asked him, ‘O Messenger of Allah! Why do I not have love for death within me?’ The Prophet replied, ‘Do you have any wealth?’ The man replied, ‘Yes I do.’”

The Prophet said to him, 'Have you sent any good for yourself?' The man replied, 'No.' The Prophet then said to him, 'It is because of this reason that you do not like death (since your book of good deeds is empty).”

Another person went to see Abu Dharr and asked him the exact same question that the Prophet (S) was asked above, that why does he feel hatred for death? Abu Dharr replied, “You have a hatred for death since you have made this life habitable and have destroyed your next life. It is natural that a person does not like that he should be transferred from a place which is habitable to a place which he has destroyed.” (Tafsir-e-Namuna, vol. 24, pg. 121)

3. Surath Ale `Imran (3), Verse 169

4. The following poem describes this:

تا در آغوشش بگیرم تنگ تنگ مرگ اگر مرد است گو نزد من آی او زمن دلقی ستاند رنگ رنگ من از او جانی ستانم جاودان

5. Surat al-Mo'minin (23), Verse 99 and 100

Discourse 39: How to Keep Away from Doubtful Things and the Lower Desires (of the Soul)

قَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ : إِنَّمَا يُوتَى النَّاسُ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ عَنْ إِحْدَى مِنْ ثَلَاثٍ: إِمَّا مِنْ شُبْهَةٍ فِي الدِّينِ ارْتَكَبُوهَا أَوْ شَهْوَةٍ لِلذِّهْنِ أَثْرُوهَا أَوْ عَصَبِيَّةٍ لَحْمَةٍ أَعْمَلُوهَا. فَإِذَا لَاحَتْ لَكُمْ شُبْهَةٌ فِي الدِّينِ فَاجْلُوهَا بِالْيَقِينِ، وَإِذَا عُرِضَتْ لَكُمْ شَهْوَةٌ فَاقْمَعُوهَا بِالزُّهْدِ، وَإِذَا عَنَّتْ لَكُمْ غَضَبَةٌ فَادُّوهَا بِالْعَفْوِ. إِنَّهُ يُنَادِي مُنَادٍ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ مَنْ كَانَ لَهُ عَلَى اللَّهِ أَجْرًا فَلْيَقُمْ، فَلَا يَقُومُ إِلَّا الْعَافُونَ، أَلَمْ تَسْمَعُوا قَوْلَهُ تَعَالَى: فَمَنْ عَفَا وَأَصْلَحَ فَأَجْرُهُ عَلَى اللَّهِ

The Messenger of Allah (S) said, “Surely when the Day of Judgement comes about, everyone will be grouped according to one of three deeds (and put into the hell fire): It may be due to the doubtful things of the faith which they performed; or it may be due to the desires of the lower self which had an effect on on; or it may be due to the prejudice which had been acted upon 1.

So then if any confusions or doubts come to you in matters of your religion, then remove them through certainty (of faith); and if your lower desires come upon you then stand up against them through asceticism; and if anger takes you over, then remove it through forgiveness. Surely the Caller will call out on the Day of Judgement that whoever has any rights upon Allah should stand up and take them back from Him. So then none except those who forgave others (in this world) will stand up – have you not heard the words of Allah, the Most High, “So he who forgives and makes correct the relations, his

reward is with Allah.”²

In this tradition, the Noble Prophet (S) has explained to us the way to flee from the lower desires of the soul and doubtful things and has stated that these affairs are made clear through possessing certainty of the heart. In addition, the lower desires of the soul can be cut off through observing self-discipline. However as for the fire of discrimination – whichever form it may be – this must be cooled with the power of forgiveness, and it is due to the things which have been mentioned in this tradition that people will enter into the Hell Fire.

However, there are a group of people who are protected when in the presence of sins and are not dragged towards these sorts of deeds. For example, it is impossible to think that a true religious Scholar would – may Allah protect us – drink alcohol or gamble. However, a young individual who has been placed in a polluted environment in which these sins take place would quickly be attracted to these things.

In addition, those who have knowledge of the religion would not be pulled easily into doubtful issues, whereas this may not hold true for the “common people”. Sometimes, when the person wants to justify something, he searches through the verses of the Qur`an and the traditions and will try to find some ambiguous issue and then hold firm onto that – he will pre-judge something and bring forth proofs which are weaker than the a spider's web.

However, we must first see what Allah (SwT) and the Prophet (S) have truly said and must consider ourselves as students of the Qur`an – not teachers of the Qur`an!

Thus, it is for this reason that the Prophet (S) said that the source of people going to the hell fire are three things: following doubtful things, discrimination and adhering to lower desires of the soul.

In continuation of the tradition, the Prophet (S) has mentioned, “On the Day of Resurrection, a caller will proclaim that anyone who has any reward to claim from Allah (SwT) should stand up. At this point, only those people will stand up who – during the time of anger – had chosen the path of forgiveness and pardoned their brother in religion.”

After this, the Prophet (S) himself answers the question which was posed that, “Why do these people have a right on Allah?” The Prophet (S) states that, “Have you not heard this verse of the Qur`an which states:

فَمَنْ عَفَا وَأَصْلَحَ فَأَجْرُهُ عَلَى اللَّهِ

“So he who forgives and makes correct the relations, his reward is with Allah.”

Therefore, we too must strive to establish love between our fellow Muslims.

O' Allah! You have ordered us to forgive one another, however You are more worthy of forgiveness than we are, we have committed oppression upon our own souls, so please forgive us! !

1. The word “تعصب” (Ta`asub) and the word “عصبية” (‘Asabiyyah) comes from the root word “عصب” in the meaning of tape or a connector which joins together things which became separated. Later on, these words were used for any sort of interaction or relation between people; however this word is usually used in the meaning of excessiveness in relations and is not a good term or word to use.

In the Islamic narrations, 'Ta`asub' has been introduced as a despicable ethical trait and has been severely discouraged to such a point that in a tradition from the Noble Prophet of Islam (S), we are told that:

مَنْ كَانَ فِي قَلْبِهِ حَبَّةٌ مِنْ خَرْدَلٍ مِنْ عَصَبِيَّةٍ، بَعَثَهُ اللَّهُ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ مَعَ أَعْرَابِ الْجَاهِلِيَّةِ.

“The person who has even the weight of a mustard-seed of nationalism in his heart, Allah will raise him up on the Day of Judgement with the pre-Islamic desert `Arabs.”

In another tradition, this time from Imam Ja`far b. Muhammad as-Sadiq (as) we read that:

مَنْ تَعَصَّبَ أَوْ تَعَصَّبَ لَهُ، فَقَدْ خَلَعَ رِبْقَةَ الْإِيمَانِ مِنْ عُنُقِهِ.

“A person who shows discrimination or is discriminated against, surely has severed true faith from himself.”

From the Islamic narrations, we can deduce that it was Iblis who was the first creation to show discrimination. In the Khutbah known as al-Qasiah (Khutbah 192) in Nahj al-Balaghah, the Commander of the Faithful, `Ali b. Abi Talib (as) has mentioned in detail and completely clarifies the issue of nationalism and discrimination, and we will quote just an excerpt from it:

أَمَّا إبليسُ، فَتَعَصَّبَ عَلَى آدَمَ لِأَصْلِهِ وَطَعَنَ عَلَيْهِ فِي خَلْقِهِ، فَقَالَ: أَنَا نَارِيٌّ وَأَنْتَ طِينِيٌّ.

“As for Iblis, he showed bigotry over Adam due to his origin and challenged him in relation to his creation and said, “I am made from fire and you are made from Earth.”

The Imam (as) then continued:

فَإِنْ كَانَ لَا بُدَّ مِنَ الْعَصَبِيَّةِ، فَلْيَكُنْ تَعَصُّبُكُمْ لِمَكَارِمِ الْخِصَالِ وَ مَحَامِدِ الْأَفْعَالِ وَ مَحَاسِنِ الْأُمُورِ.

“So if you are compelled to show discrimination, then let your discrimination be due to righteous etiquette, characteristics and beautified (good) deeds.”

In this tradition we clearly see that firmly standing for that which is the truth is something good, and not only is this act not considered as discrimination, rather, it is through this act that the soul of a person is actually emptied from all the incorrect actions of the ignorant and filled with true faith. We read in a tradition from Imam `Ali b. al-Husain (as) that when this Imam was asked about bigotry, he replied:

الْعَصَبِيَّةُ الَّتِي يَأْتُمُّ عَلَيْهَا صَاحِبُهَا، أَنْ يَرَى الرَّجُلَ شِرَارَ قَوْمِهِ خَيْرًا مِنْ خِيَارِ قَوْمِ آخَرِينَ. وَ لَيْسَ مِنَ الْعَصَبِيَّةِ أَنْ يُحِبَّ الرَّجُلُ قَوْمَهُ، وَلَكِنْ مِنَ الْعَصَبِيَّةِ أَنْ يُعِينَ قَوْمَهُ عَلَى الظُّلْمِ.

“That form of discrimination for which a person is considered as a sinner is when a person sees the worst of people in his nation as being better than the best people of another nation. Discrimination is not that a person loves those of his own

nation, rather, discrimination is when one helps his own people in committing oppression.” (Tafsir-e-Namuna, vol. 15, pg. 354)

2. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 74, pg. 180

Discourse 40: Training of the Soul

عَنْ إِبْنِ عَبَّاسٍ قَالَ: قَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ: يُرَى جَزَاءُ مَا قُدِّمَ، وَ قَلَّةُ غِنَا مَا خُلِّفَ وَ
لَعَلَّهُ مِنْ حَقِّ مُنْعِهِ وَ مِنْ بَاطِلِ جَمْعِهِ.

It has been narrated from b. 'Abbas that the Messenger of Allah (S) said, “That which is sent forth will be seen and that which is left behind will have the least benefit, and woe upon those people who have left things behind (which will be of no use to them in the next life) – that which they left behind was either an entitlement which they prevented others (from using) or was something worthless which they had collected (to make use of) but it had no benefit.”¹

If we read this tradition with the verbs as being in the passive form, then its meaning would be, “That which will be sent forth will be seen and that which will be left behind will have the least benefit and woe upon those people who leave things behind (which will be of no use to them in the next life) – that which they leave behind was either an entitlement which they prevented others (from using) or was something worthless which they had collected (to make use of) but had no benefit.”

This tradition points to the material possessions which a person has at his disposal while living in the world. If these possessions are sent forth before hand in preparation for the other life, then according to this tradition, the person will see all of these things there. This same issue can also be seen in various verses of the Qur`an and in one particular verse of the Qur`an in which we read:

إِنَّا أَنْذَرْنَاكُمْ عَذَابًا قَرِيبًا يَوْمَ يَنْظُرُ الْمَرْءُ مَا قَدَّمَتْ يَدَاهُ وَ يَقُولُ الْكَافِرُ يَا لَيْتَنِي
كُنْتُ تُرَابًا

“Verily, We have warned you of a penalty near – the Day when man will see (the deeds) which his hands have sent forth, and the Unbeliever will say, ‘Woe unto me! would that I were (mere) dust!’”²

A person will definitely see everything that he sent forth for himself – and in other words, this verse clearly alludes to the issue of Tajassumul A'mal or the Physical Manifestation of our Actions – not that the reward or the effects of the act which were done will be seen. Thus, the material benefits which a person delayed in sending forth will have the least amount of benefit for him – especially if he had attained these things through illegitimate means. Thus, the important issues concerning the actions of a person revolve around the training of the soul (just as the topic of this discussion mentions).

Question:

What consequence do the actions of a person have (upon him and others)?

Answer:

A person's actions have two effects: (1) The external outcome or the societal effects; and (2) the guiding effect on the soul and it is this aspect – the training of the soul – which is the important issue.

Let us suppose that a person gives away something in the way of Allah (SwT) by offering something in charity – we see that this charity has two products or outcomes: The first outcome is that the society is saved from uneasiness and discomfort when the needy person is given a portion of this gift. The other aspect is the training of the souls (through this act of charity). Simply having a person who is willing to give up one's wealth of this world and who is seeking to strengthen the soul by means of sacrifice and piety in the way of Allah (SwT) – this act of his will slowly be transformed from a mere (physical) act into an usual and common action (that one will constantly perform) and in the end, this act of his will become a regular habit and second nature for him.

A great number of actions only see the first aspect (as has been mentioned above). For example, a person may give something in charity, however his intention or purpose is not Allah (SwT) – rather, he performs this act to show off to others. Sometimes it is possible that a person – in order to attract the love of his close friends – and not for Allah (SwT) or for showing off – will perform an act of goodness – thus, this act is done for a reason or goal which does not belong to anyone (neither Allah, nor himself). The effect of this type of charity remains only within the society and it does not have any effect on the soul of a person because it was not done sincerely for Allah (SwT).

It has been seen that there are some people who state the following in relation to their will or bequest, “Even though I myself did not make use of my wealth, however I shall bequest that after my death, my money should be spent for righteous acts.” This person is definitely negligent of the fact that the bequest he made has a weak effect on the training of one's soul even though through this will, he may end up making a group of people rich!

Thus, any good that is done for a person after his death does not result in an honour for him because he gave his wealth to somebody else to do good in his name.

If a person was to bequeath all of his wealth – and even though such a will is not correct (from the Islamic point of view) – however this act still does not have any affect on the training of one's soul.

Thus, after death, what kind of an effect can these acts have on a person?

In a well known tradition from the Messenger of Allah (S) it has been mentioned that a person made his will and stated that after his death, the entire supply of dates which were in his storage tower should be distributed amongst the poor people directly by the Messenger of Allah (S). When the person died, the Prophet (S) acted just as the man had written in the will. When the distribution of the dates had finished, it was noticed that in the corner of the date silo, one withered, dried up date remained.

The Prophet (S) picked up this dry date and said, “If the deceased man had given this one dry date in charity with his own hands, it would have been better for him than giving his entire store-house of dates in charity through my hands.” This is the case since the training of the soul was contained within giving that one dry date by his own hands.

As for that which will truly benefit a person on the Day of Resurrection is a pure heart (Qalb-e-Saleem) just as we read in the Noble Qur`an:

إِلَّا مَنْ أَتَى اللَّهَ بِقَلْبٍ سَلِيمٍ

“Except for the one who comes to Allah with a pure heart (Qalb-e-Saleem)”³

The response of the healthy heart can be seen in its outward actions which are a direct result of the inner soul, spirit and etiquette of a person and it is for this reason that we are told that we must make our intentions pure and sincere.⁴

Some people question, “Why do you speak so much about the intention of a person?? Such and such a person built a hospital and no matter what his intention was, what difference does this make? In any case and whatever his intention was, there are thousands of unfortunate and downtrodden people who are making use of the hospital!”

However, this sort of thought is rejected in Islam and such words and opinions are a grave error since this is only in relation to the outward and material aspect of a deed done, however that which is important is the internal aspect of an action, which also has an affect on the training of a person.

We are of the firm belief that all of our actions help him us achieve perfection and reach the ultimate aim and purpose of life which is:

إِلَّا لِيَعْبُدُونَ

And this purpose is the worship and cognizance of Allah (SwT).

The fruits of the world of creation are none other than the sincere servants – meaning the perfect human being – and this ultimate goal can not be accomplished except with a pure intention and thus, it has been mentioned in Bihar al-Anwar (volume 76, Page 210) that:

إِنَّمَا الْأَعْمَالُ بِالنِّيَّاتِ.

“Surely all actions are based on the intention.”

The word here **الأعمال** “ or actions include all deeds and actions – not only those of 'Ibadat or worship. Thus, if a person was to pay attention to the meaning of this tradition, then one will definitely send things forth for oneself and would not wait for others to perform this task for him.⁵

We see that the food which a person eats can be divided into two categories:

- (1) Food which enables one to continue living and
- (2) Food which only increases the fat content of one's body and adds to the overall body weight.

In the same way, anything which a person acquires while in this temporal world can also be divided into two categories:

- (1) Those things which can help and benefit one (in the next life) and
- (2) Those things which only add excess weight to one (and do not benefit one in the next world and one will have to be accountable for them on the Day of Resurrection).

The extra weight and excess body fat can be withstood by the body even though it is of no benefit to the physical self, however on the Day of Resurrection, a person must also give account of this, just like the wealth which put a person through difficulty and did not benefit one in this world. In other words, there is toil but no benefit; there is accountability, but no advantage. Those people who send things ahead for themselves will benefit from those things, and that which remains behind will not necessarily help them.

Therefore in summary, the most important issue in relation to the training of the soul is sincerity. Whenever the sincerity of a person increases, the effects which they have on one's soul in training will also increase and thus, possessing sincerity is the first step on the path towards attaining spiritual closeness (to Allah (SwT)).

There is a very important treatise concerning Sair wa Suluk (attaining spiritual closeness to Allah (SwT))

which has been attributed to the late Bahrul 'Ulum⁶. In the final section of this work, there are things mentioned which make us think that it has not been written by Bahurul 'Ulum, however the first and second section – meaning almost two-thirds of this treatise expound upon important issues which form the basis of the tradition found on page 22, which states:

مَنْ أَخْلَصَ لِلَّهِ أَرْبَعِينَ صَبَاحاً، جَرَتْ يَنَابِيعُ الْحِكْمَةِ مِنْ قَلْبِهِ إِلَى لِسَانِهِ.

“One who sincerely dedicates himself to Allah for forty mornings will have springs of wisdom (al-Hikmah) flow from his heart to his tongue.”

Thus in summary, if our actions are not performed with sincerity, then they will be like a lamp which others will be able to benefit from (its light) however, this lamp may burn a person himself and one will not benefit from it in the least. However, if our actions are performed with sincerity, then not only will others benefit from them, but in addition, we too will get the most benefit out of them!

1. Ibid., vol. 74, pg. 179

2. Surat al-Naba (78), Verse 40

3. Surat al-Shu`ara (26), Verse 89

4. In verses 88 and 89 of Suratul Shu`ara, in describing the Day of Resurrection we read that on that Day nothing except a Qalb-e-Saleem will be of any benefit.

The word 'Saleem' which is from the word Salamat has a clear explanation and it means a heart which is far removed from any form of spiritual sickness and ethical and theological corruption. In the Noble Qur'an, in relation to the hypocrites, it is said:

فِي قُلُوبِهِمْ مَرَضٌ فَزَادَهُمُ اللَّهُ مَرَضًا

“In their hearts is a disease and Allah has increased this disease.” (Surat al-Baqarah (2), Verse 10)

In many meaningful traditions, Qalb-e-Saleem has been introduced in the following manner:

1. In a tradition from Imam Ja`far b. Muhammad as-Sadiq (as) he states that Qalb-e-Saleem is:

وَكُلُّ قَلْبٍ فِيهِ شِرْكٌ أَوْ شَكٌّ فَهُوَ سَاقِطٌ.

“And any heart in which there is polytheism or doubt, that heart has (spiritually) plummeted and is of no worth.”

This means that a heart which lacks these things is 'Qalb-e-Saleem'.

2. From another point, we know that having a strong affection to the material aspect of this world and the worship it causes a person to deviate and gravitate towards sins as mentioned that:

حُبُّ الدُّنْيَا رَأْسُ كُلِّ خَطِيئَةٍ.

“Love for this world is the beginning of all sins.”

Therefore, Qalb-e-Saleem is the heart which is devoid of love for this material world, just as Imam Ja`far b. Muhammad as-Sadiq (as) has stated in another tradition under this same verse of the Qur'an, that:

هُوَ قَلْبٌ الَّذِي سَلِمَ مِنْ حُبِّ الدُّنْيَا.

“This is a heart which is safe from the love of the material world.”

3. The final word on this discussion is that Qalb-e-Saleem is that heart in which there are none except Allah (SwT) and this can be seen in the words of Imam Ja`far b. Muhammad as-Sadiq (as) in response to a question which was asked from him in regards to the verse of Qalb-e-Saleem to which he replied:

أَلْقَلْبُ السَّلِيمُ الَّذِي يَلْقَى رَبَّهُ، وَ لَيْسَ فِيهِ أَحَدٌ سِوَاهُ

“The Qalb-e-Saleem is a heart which meets its Lord and there is none other than Him in that heart.”

It goes without saying that the meaning of Heart in these examples is the soul and essence of a person (and not the physical heart) – (Tafsir-e-Namuna, vol. 15, pp. 273 – 274)

5. In the words of Sa`di:

برگ عیشی به گور خویش فرست کس نیارد زبس، تو پیش فرست

6. This work can be read at: www.al-islam.org/al-tawhid/sayrsuluk/ [16] (Tr.)

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