Imam al-Jawad’s Spiritual Advice to One of His
It was not unusual for laypeople to approach the Prophet Muhammad and the infallible Imams for advice during life’s ups and downs, and on their journey to God. Receiving good advice helps us learn much about life and how to wisely approach any bumps on the road and to avoid mistakes. It also motivates people to put these thoughts and ideas into action. This paper is a brief explanation of one narration by the ninth imam, Imam al-Jawad (a), wherein a man asks him for advice, and the Imam advises him to five things: to rely on patience, welcome poverty, abandon desires and whims, and to have God-wariness.

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Those who approached the Messenger of Allah and the Imams asked them for advice to tread the path of spiritual journey and mystical elevation and could enjoy special Divine mercy by virtue of the Infallibles’ wise words and light.

Advice plays an important part in our lives. Imam al–Jawad said,

Imam al–Baqir also said, “The one for whom Allah has not made an admonisher from within him, people’s advice will not benefit him.” In other words, the believers take advice only when they admonish themselves first; they are aware of their own faults before others.

In the book Isharat (Sermon on the Mystics’ Ranks), when Avicenna tried to rationalize mysticism, he said that the advice given eloquently by a righteous admonisher can play an important role in making the carnal soul obedient to the peaceful soul.

A man told the 9th Imam, “Give me a piece of advice.” Imam al–Jawad said, “Will you take it?” He responded, “Yes, of course.” The Imam said,
In this pearl of wisdom, Imam al-Jawad mentions five moral principles:

Every moment of the believer’s spiritual journey toward moral perfection takes form through patience in such a way that the farther he gets away from patience, the more imperfect his actions become. Hence, Imam al-Jawad said, “Make patience your cushion [rely on patience].” This metaphor refers to the fact that when one wants to rest, he leans on the cushion. Likewise, a believer needs patience to rely on to have peace of mind.

When the Prophet was asked, “What is faith?” he replied,

Also, according to Imam Ali, the way to the attainment of proximity to God is patience. He said, “Whoever practices patience [in order to reach God’s proximity], he will attain it.” Therefore, patience in all its forms [e.g., to avoid sins and in afflictions] is the best way for faith to flourish.

Among the issues that lower self-esteem or disrupt a believer’s spiritual journey are poverty and financial problems. The Imam said,

In other words, if one tolerates poverty, his self-esteem is boosted, and poverty will not prevent the mystical wayfarer’s moral perfection.

According to the Divine wisdom and Islamic teachings given to us by the Ahlul Bayt, this sentence can be interpreted differently. That is, the mystical wayfarer is “by nature” poor compared to God, Who is “by nature” all-Rich. Accordingly, he considers himself needy, so he becomes cleansed of obstinacy and self-conceit. Imam Ali’s prayer in the Kufa mosque also indicates this:

A main principle in moral perfection is performing deeds void of carnal desires. Carnal desires involve selfishness and egotism and prevent man from acquiring true Divine teachings, while the believer’s security lies in his treading the Divine path. Thus, Imam al-Jawad said in his advice, “Abandon carnal desires.” In other words, the basis of a believer’s actions is God’s orders not his carnal desires.

The most difficult step in the acquisition of moral virtues is the struggle against whims. The Prophet made it clear by calling the struggle against whims “The Greater Jihad.” “Your greatest enemy is your whims within you.” This issue is so important that he also said,

In another hadith, the Prophet referred to the struggle against one’s ego as the most virtuous struggle, saying,

In this regard, Imam Ali said,

Thus, the opposition to carnal desires and abandonment of whims pave the way for attaining proximity of God.

The most important thing for the spiritual wayfarer is to not neglect for a moment the fact that he is
always in the presence of God, Who sees his actions. Imam al–Jawad said,

Regarding this, Imam Khomeini said, “The world is considered the presence of God; do not commit sins in His presence.” Thus, a factor in committing sins is the neglect of one’s being in God’s presence.

The spiritual wayfarer should get help from mystical contemplation, a practice by mystics who consider it a means of salvation and necessity in the spiritual journey; they constantly feel themselves in God’s presence everywhere and under any circumstances to keep away from negligence which prepares the ground for committing sins.

Imam al–Sadiq told Ishaq ibn ‘Ammar:

O Lord! Let me know Your light and bestow upon me Your light–creating beauty.

O’ Lord! When You are present, who else should I seek? And now that You are the observer, what should I say?

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1. 0 Tuhaf–ul–‘Oqul, Ibn Shu’bah Harrani, p.302.
3. 1:0 Bihar–ul–Anwar, vo. 71, p. 90.
4. 1:0 Jami’ al–Saghir, Jalal–u–Din Suyuti, corrected by Ahmad Sa’d Ali, Cairo, 1 “Your greatest enemy is your whims within you.” 1:0 Bihar–ul–Anwar, vo. 68, p. 64.
5. 1:0 Bihar–ul–Anwar, vo. 68, p. 64.

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