

Comment:

What the imām, may his shade prolong, has said about conceit according to the beliefs, the faculties and the deeds, is not confined to the good beliefs. Rather, conceit is found in false beliefs, in ugly faculties, in wrong deeds, too. Perhaps this is far-fetched according to some, for how can one become conceited about his disbelief, hypocrisy, bad faculties and disobedience of Allāh, Praise to Him?! But let him be informed that Allāh, the Praised One, created the human nature as it is: containing the status of being accustomed to something.

If it undertakes a deed more than once, whether this deed belongs to those of the five senses or of the innermost, it likes it and becomes used to it. This status in the soul is one of Allāh's major paths and important factors for uplifting and heading towards perfection. This is so because a good deed, likewise, in earning the stations and virtuous beliefs, may seem to be a problem for the individuals in the beginning, and they require tolerance for hardships and exercises.

But if they are followed by a period of time during which they become accustomed to them, the hardship and difficulty will be removed from it. (Doing something good is a habit, and also a habit is doing evil things). From the standpoint of this status found in the soul, some great men who delved into the meaning of verses referring to torment and to eternity in the fire determined by Allāh, Praise to Him, to the unbelievers and polytheists, is derived from some principles of knowledge and philosophy which we are not here to discuss.

Those who remain tortured for some time reach a state when they feel accustomed to their environment; they become used to it; they are not bored by it. Perhaps this sacred verse is useful to cite in this regard:

“As often as their skins are roasted through, We shall change them for fresh skins (so) that they may taste the penalty” (Qurʾān, 4:56).

This verse supports our argument about the people of the fire particularly if we pay attention to the phrase “... (so) that they may taste the penalty...”. Anyway, we have no knowledge of the facts relevant to the conditions of the world of the hereafter and its horrors, and we must not measure the conditions of that world according to our own: this one.

But it is taken for granted that the soul has the ability to get used to something in this world, that it feels comfortable with any action which it does repeatedly and which the heart likes and gets attached to. If one loves something, this love becomes a barrier between him and seeing the faults of that thing just as this verse of poetry says:

The pleased eyes are too tired to reach a fault,

But the eye of wrath reveals all the faults.

Based on what we have stated when we quoted the imām, may Allāh prolong his shade, that is, the unbelievers, the hypocrites, the unbelievers, those whose manners are contemptible, those whose desires are low, and those who commit transgressions and sins, may all be dragged to admire their disbelief, sins, bad manners and ugly deeds. They may even feel good about them, seeing themselves as having free spirits, revolting against tradition, not believing in whims.

They think that they have the manliness and courage, that belief in the Almighty is a whim, that adherence to the legislated religious laws is an indication of shortsightedness, that the good manners and virtuous wishes stem from weak souls, considering adherence to obligations and forms of worship as signs of weak comprehension and a shortcoming of feelings.

They see themselves from a standpoint as bearing free spirits that are not complicated by whims, not caring about the religious laws but worthy of praise and lauding. All of this is due to the low characteristics setting deep roots within them, and they have become comfortable with them.

They [their faults and sins] look good in their own eyes, so they consider them as signs of perfection as referred to in a sacred tradition in Al-Kāfi from Ali ibn Suwaid from Abul-Hassan, peace be with him, who has said, "Conceit comes in degrees. Among them is the servant of the Almighty sees his bad deed decorated, so he sees it as good, and he admires it, thinking he is doing something good. The Almighty has said,

'Say: Shall we tell you of those who lose most in respect of their deeds, those whose efforts have been wasted in this life, while they think that they are acquiring good by their deeds? They are those who deny their Lord's Signs and the fact of their having to meet Him (in the hereafter): Their deeds will be in vain, nor shall We grant them any weight on the Day of Judgment''' (Qur'ān, 18: 103-5).

The imām, may his shade endure, says the following about those who admire their false beliefs, low desires and ugly deeds: "This group of people includes those who consider themselves as men of knowledge while they are ignorant and the most poor and wretch of all. Doctors of psychology are unable to treat them. Advising and admonishing them have no effect on them; rather, the effect may reflect contrarily on them. These do not listen to proofs; they close their ears and visions against the guidance of the prophets, the evidence of the wise, the admonishment of the scholars.

One, therefore, has to seek refuge with Allāh, Praise to Him, against the evil of the nafs and its schemes: It drags man from transgression to apostasy, and from apostasy to admiration of apostasy. The nafs and Satan, because of underestimating some transgression in the sight of man, afflict him with such transgression.

Once the transgression sets root in the heart, and once it is taken lightly, one is afflicted with a greater transgression by one degree. After its repetition, this, too, falls down in his sight. He underestimates it and commits one greater than it, and so on he progresses in committing transgressions: one step after another. The major transgressions get minimized in his eyes gradually till all the transgressions become unimportant to him. The religious laws, the divine and the prophetic way shrink in his view, so he is dragged into apostasy, disbelief and admiration of them both." Here ends the speech of the imām.

I say that this precious statement and practical piece of wisdom, which we have just cited from the great teacher of manners, may his shade prolong, is one of the unique practical pieces of wisdom and lessons of moral cultivation. The magnanimity of a transgression and sin may fall in the sight of one who commits it as a result of repetition. If transgression, from which we seek refuge with Allāh, becomes something ordinary and not ugly, nobody can imagine there will be a limit for it where one will stop.

Someone whom I trust from among my believing brethren told me once that he was in the presence of one of those who use usury and who trade in it, and that man's hand was shaking, uncontrollable. But this person, as a result of repeating his prohibitive deed, became the first person to take usury in the market of Kermanshah (now Bakhtaran).

The greatest calamity is that this state of being "daring" about transgression causes darkness in the heart that gradually puts out the noor of conviction, so one will find in himself doubt and hesitation with regard to true beliefs. If he does not properly repent and treat this detrimental ailment, he may be dragged as he draws his last breath from life and in the stupor that happens to him at the time of death to putting out the noor of conviction in his heart in its entirety.

He goes from this world in a state of disbelief in Allāh Almighty. If his condition becomes like that, there will be no hope at all for his salvation. The gates of happiness will be closed from all sides. A reference has been made to this in verses and traditions. The Almighty has said,

"In the long run, the end of those who do evil will be extremely evil because they rejected God's Signs and held them with ridicule" (Qur'ān, 83: 14).

In the books of tradition, the effect of sinning in the heart is described as the black spot that keeps getting larger as one keeps repeatedly sinning till it completely encircles it. Abū Ja'far (ع) is also cited in traditions as having said, "Every servant of Allāh has a white spot in his heart. When he commits a sin, a black spot comes out of it. When he repents, that blackness disappears. If he gets deeper into sinning, that blackness increases till it over-covers the whiteness, and the person will never return to anything good." This is the meaning of this verse:

"By no means! But the stain of the (ill) that they do is on their hearts on account of what they used to earn" (Qur'[']n, 83: 14).

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