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## Sermon 175: O people who are (negligent of Allah but) not neglected (by Allah)...

*Warning to neglectful people, and about the vastness of his own knowledge*

ومن خطبة له (عليه السلام)

في الموعدة وبيان قرباه من رسول الله

O people who are (negligent of Allah but) not neglected (by Allah), and those who miss (doing good acts) but are to be caught. How is it that I see you becoming removed from Allah and becoming interested in others? You are like the camel whom the grazer drives to a disease-stricken pasture and a disastrous watering place. They are like beasts who are fed in order to be slaughtered, but they do not know what is intended for them. When they are treated well they think that day to be their whole life, and eating their full to be their aim.

أَيُّهَا الْغَافِلُونَ غَيْرُ الْمَغْفُولِ عَنْهُمْ، وَالتَّارِكُونَ الْمَأْخُودَ مِنْهُمْ، مَالِي أَرَاكُمْ عَنِ اللَّهِ  
ذَاهِبِينَ، وَإِلَى غَيْرِهِ رَاغِبِينَ! كَأَنَّكُمْ نَعَمُ أَرَاخَ بِهَا سَائِمٌ إِلَى مَرْعَىٰ وَبِيٍّ، وَمَشْرَبٌ  
دَوِيٍّ، وَإِنَّمَا هِيَ كَالْمَعْلُوفَةِ لِلْمُدَىٰ لَا تَعْرِفُ مَاذَا يُرَادُ بِهَا! إِذَا أَحْسِنَ إِلَيْهَا تَحَسَّبُ  
يَوْمَهَا دَهْرَهَا، وَشَبَعَهَا أَمْرَهَا

By Allah, if I wish, I can tell every one of you from where he has come, where he has to go and all his affairs, but I fear lest you abandon the Messenger of Allah – peace and blessing of Allah be upon him

and his progeny – in my favour. I shall certainly convey these things to the selected ones who will remain safe from that fear. By Allah, Who deputed the Prophet with Right and distinguished him over creation. I do not speak save the truth. He (the Prophet) informed me of all this and also about the death of every one who dies, the salvation of every one who is granted salvation, and the consequences of this matter (the caliphate). He left nothing (that could) pass into my head without putting it in my ear and telling me about it. 1

وَاللَّهِ لَوْ شِئْتُ أَنْ أُخْبِرَ كُلَّ رَجُلٍ مِنْكُمْ بِمَخْرَجِهِ وَمَوْلَجِهِ وَجَمِيعِ شَأْنِهِ لَفَعَلْتُ،  
وَلَكِنْ أَخَافُ أَنْ تَكْفُرُوا فِيَّ بِرَسُولِ اللَّهِ (صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَآلِهِ). أَلَا وَإِنِّي مُفْضِيهِ  
إِلَى الْخَاصَّةِ مِمَّنْ يُؤْمِنُ ذَلِكَ مِنْهُ. وَالَّذِي بَعَثَهُ بِالْحَقِّ، وَاصْطَفَاهُ عَلَى الْخَلْقِ، مَا  
أَنْطِقُ إِلَّا صَادِقًا، وَقَدْ عَهَدَ إِلَيَّ بِذَلِكَ كُلِّهِ، وَيَمَهِّلُكَ مَنْ يَهْلِكُ، وَمَنْجَى مَنْ يَنْجُو،  
وَمَا لِي هَذَا الْأَمْرِ، وَمَا أَبْقَى شَيْئًا يَمُرُّ عَلَى رَأْسِي إِلَّا أَفْرَغُهُ فِي أُذُنِي وَأَفْضَى بِهِ إِلَيَّ.

O people! By Allah, I do not impel you to any obedience unless I practise it before you and do not restrain you from any disobedience unless I desist from it before you.

أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ، إِنِّي، وَاللَّهِ، مَا أَحْتُكُمُ عَلَى طَاعَةٍ إِلَّا وَأَسْبَقُكُمْ إِلَيْهَا، وَلَا أَنهَاكُمْ عَنْ  
مَعْصِيَةٍ إِلَّا وَأَتْنَاهِي قَبْلَكُمْ عَنْهَا.

## Alternative Sources for Sermon 175

(1) Al-'Amidi, *Ghurar*, 191;

(2) See `Abd al-Zahra', II, 422.

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1. Those who drink from the springs of revelation and divine inspiration see things hidden behind the curtains of the unknown and the events which will occur in the future in the same way as objects can be seen with the eyes, and this does not conflict with the saying of Allah that:

Say: "None (either) in the heavens or in the earth knoweth the unseen save Allah..." (Qur'an, 27:65)

because this verse contains the negation of personal knowledge of the unknown, but not the negation of knowledge which is required by the prophets and holy persons through divine inspiration, by virtue of which they make prophesies about the future and unveil many events and happenings. Several verses of the Qur'an support this view such as:

When the Prophet confided unto one of his wives a matter, but when she divulged it (unto others) and Allah apprised him thereof, he made known a part of it and avoided a part; so when he informed her of it, said she: "Who informed thee of this?" He said: "Informed me, the All-knowing, the All-aware." (Qur'an, 66:3)

These are of the tidings of the unseen which We reveal unto thee (O' Our Prophet Muhammad )...(Qur'an, 11:49)

Therefore, it is incorrect to argue in support of the view that if it is said that the prophets and holy persons possess knowledge of the unknown it would imply duality in the divine attributes. It would have implied duality if it were said that someone other than Allah has personal knowledge of the unknown. When it is not so and the knowledge possessed by the Prophets and Imams is that given by Allah it has no connection with duality. If duality should mean what is alleged, what would be the position of `Isa's (Jesus's) assertion related in the Qur'an namely:

. . . Out of clay will I make for you like the figure of a bird, and I will breathe into it, and it shall become a flying bird by Allah's permission; and I shall heal the blind and the leper and will rise the dead to life by Allah 's permission; and I will declare to you what ye eat and what ye store up in your houses. . . (Qur'an, 3 :49)

If it is believed that `Isa (Jesus) could create and bestow life with Allah's permission does it mean that he was Allah's partner in the attributes of creation and revival? If this is not so then how can it be held that if Allah gives someone the knowledge of the unknown it implies that he has been taken to be His partner in His attributes, and how can one extol one's belief in the oneness of Allah by holding that the knowledge of the unknown implies duality.

No one can deny the fact that some people either see in dreams certain things which have yet to occur in the future, or that things can be read through interpretation of the dream, while during a dream neither do the senses function nor do the powers of understanding and comprehension co-operate. Therefore, if some events become known to some people in wakefulness why should there be amazement over it and what are the grounds for rejecting it, when it stands to reason that things possible in dreams are also possible in wakefulness. Thus, Ibn Maytham al-Bahrani has written that it is possible to achieve all this, because in a dream the spirit becomes free from looking after the body and is removed from bodily connections; as a result of this it perceives such hidden realities which could not be seen because of the obstruction of the body. In the same way those perfect beings who pay no heed to bodily matters, and turn with all the attention of spirit and heart towards the centre of knowledge can see those realities and secrets which the ordinary eyes are unable to discern. Therefore, keeping in view the spiritual greatness of Ahlul Bayt (members of the Prophet's family) it should not appear strange that they were aware of events which were going to occur in future. Ibn Khaldun has written:

"When thaumaturgic feats are performed by others what do you think about those who were distinguished in knowledge and honesty and were a mirror of the Prophet's traits, while the consideration Allah had for their noble root (namely the Prophet) is a proof of the high performances of his chaste off-shoots (Ahlul Bayt). Consequently many events about knowledge of the unknown are related about Ahlul Bayt which are not related about others.." (al-Muqaddamah, p. 23).

In this way there is no cause for wonder over Amir al-mu'minin's claim since he was brought up by the Prophet and was a pupil of Allah's school. Of course, those whose knowledge does not extend beyond the limits of physical objectivity and whose means of learning are confined to the bodily senses refuse to believe in the knowledge about the paths of divine cognisance and reality. If this kind of claim were unique and were heard only from over Amir al-mu'minin then minds could have wavered and temperaments could have hesitated in accepting it, but if the Qur'an records even such a claim of `Isa (Jesus) that - "I can tell you what you eat or drink or store in your houses," then why should there be hesitation over Amir al-mu'minin's claim, when it is agreed that Amir al-mu'minin had succeeded to all the attainments and distinctions of the Prophet and it cannot be contended that the Prophet did not know what `Isa (Jesus) knew. Thus, if the successor of the Prophet advances such a claim, why should it be rejected, particularly as this vastness of knowledge of Amir al-mu'minin is the best evidence and proof for the Prophet's knowledge and perfection and a living miracle of his truthfulness.

In this connection, it is amazing that even having knowledge of events Amir al-mu'minin did not, through any of his words or deeds, indicate that he knew them. Thus, commenting of the extraordinary importance of this claim, as-Sayyid Ibn Tawus writes: "An amazing aspect of this claim is that despite the fact that Amir al-mu'minin was aware of conditions and events, yet he observed such conduct by way of his words and deeds that one who saw him could not believe that he knew the secrets and unknown acts of others, because the wise agree that if a person knows what event is likely to take place or what step his comrade is going to take, or if the hidden secrets of people are known to him, then the effects of such knowledge would appear through his movements and the expressions of his face. But the man who, in spite of knowing everything, behaves in a way as though he is unaware and knows nothing, then his personality is a miracle and a combination of contradictions."

At this stage, the question arises as to why Amir al-mu'minin did not act upon the dictates of his secret knowledge. The

reply to this is that the commands of the shari`ah are based on apparent conditions. Otherwise secret knowledge is a kind of miracle and power which Allah grants to His prophets and Imams. Although the prophets and Imams possess this power always, they cannot make use of it at any time unless and until by the permission of Allah and on the proper occasion. For example, the verse quoted above about `Isa (Jesus) which tells that he had the power to give life, to heal the blind and declare what one ate and stored in his house, etc., he (Jesus) did not used to practise this power on every thing or every corpse or everyone who met him. He used to practise this power only by the permission of Allah and on the proper occasion.

If prophets and other divines acted on the basis of their secret knowledge it would have meant serious dislocation and disturbance in the affairs of the people. For example, if a prophet or divine, on the basis of his secret knowledge, punishes a condemnable man by killing him, there would be great commotion and agitation among those who see it on the ground that he killed an innocent man. That is why Allah has not permitted the basing of conclusions on secret knowledge save in a few special cases, and has enjoined the following of observable factors. Thus, despite his being aware of the hypocrisy of some of the hypocrites, the Prophet extended to them the treatment that should be extended to a Muslim.

Now, there can be no scope for the objection that if Amir al-mu'minin knew secret matters then why did he not act according to them because it has been shown that he was not obliged to act according to the requirements of his secret knowledge. Of course, where conditions so required he did disclose some matters for the purposes of preaching, admonishing, giving good tidings (of reward) or warning (against punishment), so that future events could be fore-closed. For example, Imam Ja`far as-Sadiq (p.b.u.h.) informed Yahya ibn Zayd that if he went out he would be killed. Ibn Khaldun writes in this connection: "It has been authentically related from Imam Ja`far as-Sadiq that he used to apprise some of his relations of the events to befall them. For example, he warned his cousin Yahya ibn Zayd of being killed but he disobeyed him and went out and was killed in Juzajan." (al-Muqaddamah, p. 233).

Nevertheless, where there was apprehension that minds would get worried it was not at all disclosed. That is why in this sermon Amir al-mu'minin avoided more details, in view of the fear that people would begin to regard him higher than the Prophet. Despite all this people did go astray about `Isa (Jesus), and in the same way about Amir al-mu'minin also they began to say all sorts of things and were misled into resorting to exaggeration.

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