

15. Independence

Allah, the Wise, has said:

لَا تَمُدَّنَّ عَيْنَيْكَ إِلَىٰ مَا مَتَّعْنَا بِهِ أَزْوَاجًا مِنْهُمْ

*(Do not strain your eyes after what We have provided with some of them pairs among them to enjoy)*¹

Imam Sadiq (a.s.) said:

شَرَفُ الْمُؤْمِنِ قِيَامُ اللَّيْلِ وَ عِزُّهُ اسْتِغْنَاؤُهُ عَنِ النَّاسِ

*(The honour of a Mu'min lies in nocturnal worship and his esteem lies in his being independent of the people).*²

Short Explanation

Contrary to the reprehensible attribute of greed is the attribute of independence and self-reliance. In common usage, if it is said that a person has no need for anything, the immediate notion that comes to mind is that he is affluent. However, the actual meaning is to be self-sufficient, self-contained and not avaricious with respect to that which the others possess.

Persons who are independent with respect to God's creation, are highly respected and they possess 'trust in God' which is, by far, the greatest asset.

The fact that begging and seeking from others is censured, is because it erodes away the honour and status of a person, makes him a captive of others and lessens his inclination toward God.

1) A Lesson from the Holy Prophet

One of the companions of the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.) once found himself in severe poverty. His wife advised him to go to the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.) and request his help.

The man approached the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.), but as soon as the Prophet's (s.a.w.) eyes fell upon the man, he said:

“If a person seeks something from me, I shall certainly grant it to him, but if he were to exhibit himself as being self-sufficient and free from want, Allah shall make him affluent.”³

Hearing this, the man said to himself, “The Holy Prophet (s.a.w.) has intended me by this speech of his”.

Without uttering a word, he returned home and narrated the incident to his wife.

His wife said, “The Holy Prophet (s.a.w.) is also human; explain your dilemma to him and see what he has to say.”

The man returned to the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.) for the second time but heard the same sentence from him and again came back home without saying a word. When this was repeated for the third time, the man borrowed a pickaxe from one of his friends and set off towards the mountains. Throughout the day he worked hard to gather firewood, which he sold for some flour and that night, he and his wife had bread for dinner.

The next day, he worked harder and collected more firewood and this continued for several days till he was able to purchase a pickaxe for himself.

After some period, as a result of his hard work, he managed to purchase two camels and a slave, and slowly became one of the affluent ones.

One day, arriving before the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.), he narrated to him the events of his life and the effect of his words, whereupon the Prophet (s.a.w.) responded:

“I had said (before): One who seeks to be independent (of others), Allah shall make him independent.”⁴

2) Alexander And Deozhan

When Alexander was selected the supreme commander of Greece, people from all walks of life approached him to congratulate him upon his selection. However, Deozhan, the well-known philosopher, did not go to meet him and so Alexander himself went to meet Deozhan. Deozhan was a person, who followed the policy of contentment, self-sufficiency and not depending on people.

As he was lying under the sun, he sensed that a large group of people was approaching him. He raised

himself slightly, when his eyes fell upon Alexander, who was advancing with great pomp and grandeur; but Deozhan behaved just as he would behave if an ordinary person visited him.

Alexander greeted him and said, "If you need anything from me, just speak out!"

"I have only one request," said Deozhan. "I had been enjoying the warm sunshine and presently you are obstructing it. Could you move over to one side?"

Those accompanying Alexander considered this speech to be very foolish and imprudent and spoke amongst themselves, saying:

"What a foolish man he is to have wasted such an opportunity!"

But Alexander, who felt dwarfed before the towering contentment and self-sufficiency of Deozhan, fell into deep reflection at these words.

On the way back he turned to his companions who had ridiculed Deozhan and remarked: "Indeed, had I not been Alexander, I would have desired to be Deozhan."⁵

3) Not under Obligation of Avicenna

It has been narrated that once, *Avicenna*, in great ministerial splendour and fanfare, was passing by a sweeper, who was reciting this poem loudly whilst performing his menial work:

O' Soul! I have held you in high esteem, so that you are a means of serenity for the heart.

Hearing this, Avicenna smiled and said to him (derisively), "Indeed, you have truly held your soul in high esteem by engaging yourself in such (lowly) work."

The sweeper stopped his work, turned to him and said, "I make my living by means of this lowly work so that I am not compelled to be under the obligation of the lofty Avicenna."⁶

4) The Recitation of Surah Al-Waaqia'h

A'bdullah Ibn Masu'd had been one of the close companions of the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.) and had developed into being a distinguished and zealous personality of Islam. During the caliphate of U'thman, he suffered a bout of illness, which eventually resulted in his death.

U'thman once came to pay him a visit and finding him distressed, asked, "What distresses you so greatly?"

"My sins," he answered.

"Tell me your wish so that I can fulfill it for you."

“I desire God’s mercy”, replied Ibn Mas’ud.

The caliph asked, “If you permit, I could call for the doctor”.

“It is the Doctor who has made me sick.”

“If you want, I could present you with gifts from the Public Treasury.”

Ibn Masu’d retorted, “At the time when I was in need, you did not give me a thing and now that I am not in need, you wish to shower me with presents!”

U'thman insisted, “Let these gifts be for your daughters then.”

“They are not in need of your presents,” Ibn Masu’d replied tersely. “I have instructed them to recite the chapter Al-Waaqia’h every night, for surely, I have heard the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.) say: One, who recites the chapter Al-Waaqia’h every night, shall never be afflicted by poverty.”⁷

1. Holy Qur’an, ch. Al-Hijr (15), vs. 88.

2. Jaame’ al-Sa’adaat, vol. 2, pg. 108.

3. مَنْ سَأَلَنَا أَعْطَيْنَاهُ وَمَنْ اسْتَعْنَىٰ أَعْنَاهُ اللَّهُ

4. Pand-e-Taareekh, vol. 3, pg. 129; Wafi, vol. 2, pg. 139.

5. Riwaayat-ha Wa Hikaayat-ha, pg. 39; Daastaan-ha-e-Paraakandeh; vol. 2, pg. 66.

6. Namunah-e-Ma’arif, vol. 1, pg. 162; Naameh-e-Daanishwaraan.

7. Daastaan-ha Wa Pand-ha, vol. 7, pg. 112; Majma’ al-Bayaan, vol. 9, pg. 211.

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