

Things which are Helpful for Self-refinement

1. Meditation

One of the most important obstacle for achieving the self-refinement is –negligence. If round the clock we are submerged in worldly affairs, running away from remembrance of death, are not prepared for thinking about dying even for a moment, and if incidentally this thought enters in our minds, we try to deviate from it immediately.

If, we are negligent about the dangerous consequences of moral vices, are not concerned about the indictment for sins and eternal punishment, and the belief in the Day of Resurrection has not penetrated the profundities of our soul beyond a superficial mental concept; then with such negligence, how could we,– take the decision for self-cleansing and refinement, and control and restrain him against his desires?

Negligence, in itself, is one of the most severe psychological disease and is the origin of many other diseases. The treatment of this disease is pondering, foresight, and strengthening the forces of belief.

It is necessary that a human being should continuously keep a strict vigil upon his self, should never forget death, should ponder about serious consequences of self's diseases, indictment for sins and horrible punishment of Hell, and should always keep in mind about the accounting of his deeds on the Day of Judgment. In that case he is ready for self-refinement and should take a definite decision for purifying his heart from sins and other moral obscene deeds.

Imam 'Ali (a.s.) said:

قال على عليه السلام: من عمر قلبه بدوام الفكر حسنت افعاله في السر والجهر.

“Whoever makes his heart's kingdom habitated with continuous pondering –his affairs would become

good in outward appearance as well as inwardly.”¹

2. Reward and Punishment

In order to be victorious in attaining self-refinement and abstinence from sins, we may use the reward and punishment method. In the beginning we must address the self: I have decided to abstain from sins, if you do not cooperate in this matter and committed sins, I am going to punish you with such and such punishment.

That is, if you committed back-biting, I will take a fast for one day, or will speak only the minimum required for one week, will donate such amount for charity, will not drink water for one day, will deprive you from one diet, and will remain under the sun during summer, so that you should not forget about the temperature of Hell's Fire.

After that we must watch over the self strictly so that he does not commit back-biting, and in case he commits it, we must take a bold stand against it without being lenient, and must execute the promised punishment against him. Once, the imperious-self realized that we are serious in refraining from sins and will strictly execute the punishment without least compassion, he will surrender himself before our genuine demands.

If, we implemented this program without any negligence, we may close the paths of Satan's entries, and achieve absolute domination over the self, with the condition that we must take a definite decision and must punish the rebellious-self without showing least compassion.

It is strange that regarding minor violations of civil laws, the violators are indicted and punished, but unfortunately for self-cleansing and refinement this method is not practiced, in spite of the fact that our prosperity and eternal salvation depends upon it. Many of the God's deserving servants by utilization of the same method were able to attain self-refinement, self-cleaning, and self-domination.

The Commander of the Faithful, Imam 'Ali (a.s.) said:

قال علي عليه السلام: نعم العون على أسر النفس وكسر عاداتها الجوع.

“Hunger is the most effective tool for achieving self-domination and breaking habits.”²

And said:

قال علي عليه السلام: من استدام رياضة نفسه انتفع.

“Whoever practices self-asceticism is bound to earn benefits.”³

One of the Prophet's companion said:

“Once on a hot summer day the Prophet Muhammad (S) was sitting under the shade of a tree,. suddenly a man appeared who after taking, off his clothes laid down with bare back upon the hot sand and started rolling over it, alternatively making his back and stomach to bear the hot sand, occasionally covering his face with it, said: 'Oh my imperious-self! You better taste the heat of this hot sand particles, and know it that the heat of Hell ' s fire is for severe and painful than this.

“The holy Prophet (S) witnessed the above scene with interest, and having wore his clothes when the man wanted to return, the Holy Prophet asked the man to come near him, and said: 'I saw you doing some thing strange which is not done by any other person. What was the motive behind this act. ?”

“The man replied: 'Oh Prophet of God: The fear of God forced me to perform this act. By performing this act I said to my self. Taste the temperature of this hot sand and know that the heat of Hell' s fire is much more severe and painful than the temperature of this hot sand.”

“The Holy Prophet (S) said: Yes! you feared God-Almighty the way one should. be really be fearful of Him, and he with this act has glorified you over the angels of His Throne. 'Then he said to his companions: 'Come and stand closer to this man and ask him to pray for you.” The companions assembled around the man and requested him to pray for them. The man raised his hand for prayer and said:

اللهم اجمع امرنا على الهدى واجعل التقوى زادنا والجنة ما بنا.

“O God ! Guide our affairs. make piety provision of our journey, and bestow upon us Paradise in the Hereafter.”⁴

The Commander of the Faithful Imam ' Ali (a.s.) said:

قال على (ع): تولوا من انفسكم تاديبها واعدلوا بها عن ضراوة عاداتها.

“Arise against the self and chastisement prevent: him from becoming addicted to various habits.”⁵

3. Dignity of Human Essence and Strengthening Human Virtues

Earlier, it was pointed out that human self is a precious jewel which has come into existence from the

world of life, knowledge, perfection, beauty, blessing, benevolence, and by nature is the origin of these things. Therefore, if he paid attention towards his exalted position and virtues within his existence, he will then realize that commitment of sins and other moral obscene deeds are below his dignity, and naturally will be disgusted with them.

When he understood that, he is a human being has descended from the Upper Heavens to be God's Vicegerent upon earth, animalistic desires and passions will become worthless in his sight, and desire for achieving moral excellence shall be revived in his existence.

The Commander of the Faithful Imam 'Ali (a.s.) has said:

قال على عليه السلام: من كرمته عليه نفسه هانت عليه شهواته.

*"Whoever appreciated the greatness of his self, will regard passions as insignificant and worthless."*⁶

Imam al-Sajjad (a.s.) was asked:

قيل لعلى بن الحسين عليه السلام: من اعطهم الناس خطرا؟ قال: من لم ير الدنيا خطرا لنفسه.

*"Who is the worthiest person ? 'The one who does not consider this world worthy of his own existence. ' Replied the Imam."*⁷

Therefore paying attention about the exaltedness of human soul, discovering the worth of his existence, and his lofty position, might be helpful in attaining self-refinement and abstinence from sins. If we address our self, we must say:

You belong to the heavenly kingdom of knowledge, life, perfection, virtues, benevolence and blessings; you are the God's Vicegerent upon the earth; you are human and have been created for eternal life of Next World and God's Nearness; you are superior than animals and following animalistic passions is not worthy of your existence.

In this manner attaining self-refinement and abstinence of sins will become easier for us. Also, for self-refinement, each vice must be uprooted gradually by strengthening opposite characteristics, thus, replacing vices with virtues, which turn into habits or second nature.

For example, if we are jealous with respect to a certain individual, becomes sad and annoyed seeing his blessings and happiness, and by means of slander, insult, annoyance, obstruction, and indifference try

to satisfy our own internal psychic disorder –must try to show praise, respect, goodwill, and cooperation towards him.

When we behave in this manner exactly opposite to the feelings of jealousy, slowly, this vice becomes weaker day by day, and eventually is replaced by benevolence. If, we are sick with the disease of stinginess, must imposed upon the self to bear the necessary expenditure for our genuine requirements, so that the undesirable habit of miserliness gradually become uprooted, and eventually become accustomed to spending money and beneficence.

If, we show miserliness regarding payment of religious dues, we must take stand against the self and without paying least attention to self's whims and passions, must remit our religious financial obligations. If, we show hesitation for spending money for ourselves and our family, then the genuine expenditure should be imposed upon the self so that it becomes accustomed to it gradually.

If, because of miserliness we cannot participate in charitable affairs, we must take action by all possible means at our disposal; a portion of our financial assets should be spent in God's Way for supporting the destitute people so that gradually we become accustomed to it.

Of course in the beginning this task might appear as difficult but with perseverance and resistance it would become easier. over all in order to achieve self-refinement and to refrain from immoral deeds the following two tasks should be performed:

Firstly: We should not offer positive response to the demands of immoral and obscene deeds, so that gradually their roots are dried off completely.

Secondly: The virtuous characteristic opposite to that particular vice should be strengthened; and in accordance with this virtuous characteristic, task must be imposed! upon the self so that gradually he becomes used to it, acquiring them as his habit and temperament, ! thus, cutting the roots of wicked deeds forever. The Commander of the Faithful Imam 'Ali (a.s.) said:

قال على عليه السلام: اكره نفسك على الفضائل فان الرذائل انت مطبوع عليها.

*"Force your self to perform good moral deeds, because the wickedness has been incorporated in your inner essence."*⁸

And said:

قال على عليه السلام: عود نفسك فال المكارم وتحمل اعبه المغارم تشرف نفسك وتعمر آخرتك ويكثر حامدوك.

“Make yourself used to performance of good deeds and for tolerance of payment of severe reparation, so that he becomes noble, your Hereafter becomes fruitful, and your admirers become more.”⁹

قال على عليه السلام: الشهوات اعلال قاتلات والفضل دوائها اقتنا الصبر عنها.

“Selfish passions and desires are fatal diseases, and the best medicines are selection of patience and abstinence from them.”¹⁰

4. Renunciation of Bad Company

Human being are susceptible to being influenced with many of the characteristics, etiquette, and behavior of other people with whom they have social association, and in reality become like them, especially their best friends and close social associates play an influential role in their lives. Friendship with corrupt and wicked individuals forces a person towards corruption and evil deeds, while association with righteous people with good morals invites a person towards salvation and goodness.

One of the characteristics of a human being is that he makes himself like others. If, he mixes socially with corrupt and sinful people –he becomes familiar with sinning and other immoral deeds, not only he does not see the ugliness of his actions, on the contrary, regards these acts as manifestation of acts of goodness.

Opposite, to that if his social circle consists of righteous people with good morals, he become thoroughly familiar with good morals and good character and desires to become like them. Therefore, a good friend is one of the greatest blessing of God–Almighty and is considered as an important factor responsible for progress and prosperity of a human being. And opposite to that a bad friend is one of the greatest problem and an important factor responsible for his adversity and deviation.

Therefore. the choice of a friend should not be regarded something as insignificant and unimportant. rather should be treated with utmost importance. because. it determines our ultimate destiny. The Commander of the Faithful Imam 'Ali (a.s.) said:

قال امير المؤمنين عليه السلام: لا ينبغي للمسلم ان يواخي الفاجر فانه يزين له فعله ويحب ان يكون مثله ولا يعينه على عمر دنياه ولا امر معاده, ومدخله ومخرجه منعنده شين عليه.

*“A Muslim should never take a sinful and corrupt person as his friend –because, a sinful friend presents vices as virtues, and desires that his friend should behave exactly like himself A bad friend neither helps a person in worldly affairs nor in the affairs belonging to the Next World, and socialization with him makes a person disgraced.”*¹¹

Imam al–Sadiq (a.s.) said:

عن ابي عندالله عليه السلام قال: لا ينبغي للمسلم ان يواخي الفاجر ولا الاحمق ولا الكذب.

*“It is not appropriate for a Muslim to make friendship with a lewd, stupid, and mendacious person.”*¹²

The Holy Prophet (S) said:

قال رسول الله صلى الله عليه وآله: المر على دين خليله وقرينه.

*“A person is bound to follow the religion of his friend and social companion.”*¹³

The Commander of the Faithful Imam 'Ali (a.s.) said:

قال على (ع): اياك ومعاشره الاشرار فانهم كالنار مباشرتها تحرق.

*“Association with evil person should be avoided strictly, because on evil person is like a burning fire and whoever nears him will be burnt.”*¹⁴

And said:

قال على عليه السلام: اياك ومصاحبة الفساق فان الشر بالشر يلحق.

*“Association With Wicked person should be strictly avoided, because, evil will be associated with evil.”*¹⁵

Also said:

قال على عليه السلام: اخذر مجالسة قرين السو فانه يهلك مقارنه ويردى مصاحبه.

“Strictly avoid companionship with an evil friend, because, he will lead his fellow companion towards destruction and will damage his reputation.”¹⁶

Therefore, if some one is really striving to attain self-refinement, and if has bad friends and evil companions –should quite their company at once, because, with their company refraining from sins is almost impossible.

Bad friends slow down one's determination for self-refinement by encouraging him to get indulge into sins and other immoral deeds. To commit a sin is like a habit, and its quitting shall be possible only, if the socialization with other addicted persons should be avoided.

5. Avoiding Potential Blunders

Self-refinement and refraining from sins forever is something is not an easy rather is a difficult task. A human being is always susceptible to stumble by sinning, because the imperious-self naturally invites him towards vices. Heart –which is the command center for rest of the body is in a state of continuous change or metamorphism, is influenced by external events, issues orders in accordance with the situation it encounters, the things it sees, and the words it hears.

At centers of worships and religious spiritual assemblies the heart naturally shows inclination towards performance of virtuous deeds, and opposite to that at the centers of corruption and vices pulls towards evil deeds. Seeing scenes of spirituality motivates heart towards spiritual matters, while seeing erotic scene of carnal acts makes him seduced.

In a corrupted assembly the hearts becomes inclined to perform similar vices while in a spiritual gathering the heart gets motivated towards God-Almighty. If, he gets associated with worldly people infatuated with accumulation of wealth and properly, the hearts become inclined towards animalistic desires, and if associates with God's pious servants –becomes' motivated towards virtuous deeds.

Therefore, those who are sincerely interested in self-refinement and abstinence from sins must close their eyes and ears from seeing erotic scenes of carnal desires, should not participate in such parties; should not mix socially with such corrupted individuals, otherwise they themselves are most likely to stumble.

It is because of these considerations that Islam forbids a man from participating in religiously prohibited (*Haram*), parties such as gambling, drinking, and other sinful assemblies. Also, looking at the face (with lust), meeting in private, hand-shake, joking and laughing with women who are unlawful (*Na-mahram*)

have been forbidden.

One of the great wisdom hidden behind the recommended Islamic Veil (*hijab*) is related to same matter. Since Islam requires an ideal social environment where self-refinement and abstinence from sins could be made possible. Otherwise, controlling imperious-self shall become impossible, because, the corrupt environment naturally pushes human beings towards corruption, even thinking about sin invites a man to commit that sin ultimately.

The Commander of the Faithful Imam ‘Ali (a.s.) said:

قال على عليه السلام: اذا ابصرت العين الشهوة عمى القلب عن العاقبة.

*“When eye sees an erotic scene –the heart becomes blind from seeing its ultimate consequences.”*¹⁷

And said:

قال على عليه السلام: فكرك فى المعصية يحدوك على الوقوع فيها.

*“Simply thinking about sinful carnal deeds encourages you to commit them eventually.”*¹⁸

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1. Ghirar al-Hukm, p-690.
 2. Ghirar al-Hukm, p-773.
 3. Ghirar al-Hukm, p-647.
 4. Mohajateh al-Baiza, vol. 7, p-208.
 5. Ghirar al-Hukm, p-350.
 6. Nahjul Balagha, saying 449.
 7. Tohf al-Aqool, p-285.
 8. Ghirar al-Hukm, vol. 1, p-130.
 9. Ghirar al-Hukm, p-492.
 10. Ghirar al-Hukm, p-72.
 11. al-Kafi, vol. 2, p-640.
 12. al-Kafi, vol. 2, p-640.
 13. al-Kafi, vol. 2, p-642.
 14. Ghirar al-Hukm, p-147.
 15. Ghirar al-Hukm, p-147.
 16. Ghirar al-Hukm, p-142.
 17. Ghirar al-Hukm, p-315.
 18. Ghirar al-Hukm, p-518.

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