

The Characteristics of Pious (Sermon of Hammam)

In order to appreciate the attributes of piety and to understand its profundities in detail, let us quote here the famous sermon of Hammam from the Nahjul-Balagha explaining the qualities of pious and God-fearing persons. In this sermon the Commander of the Faithful Imam ‘Ali (a.s.) has explained what piety really means and what sort of human beings pious people are, describing the graphic details of their ways of living, thinking, praying, and dealing with other men.

Hammam was one of the companions of Imam ‘Ali (a.s.), a very pious and God fearing man. He once asked Imam to explain at length the qualities of pious person. He wanted the explanation to be so graphic and so vivid that he could get the picture of a pious man in his mind's eyes. Imam knew that Hammam had a very tender heart and was disinclined to explain piety in the way that Hammam had requested and evading the subject he replied.

“Hammam! Fear God and do good deeds. Remember that God is always a companion of pious and good people!” But Hammam was not satisfied with this reply and wanted to say something more. He pressed so much and others joined him and seconded his request that Imam reluctantly delivered the following sermon. After praising the Lord and praying Him to bless the Holy Prophet (a.s.) Imam thus, continued the sermon as follows:

“When God created mankind He was not in need of their obedience and prayers, neither was He nervous of their disobedience. Because, disobedience or insubordination of men cannot harm Him, similar obedience of obedient people cannot do Him any good. He is beyond the reach of harm and benefit.

After creating man He decided for him the variety of food which his body could absorb and assimilate, and the places which were congenial for him to live and to propagate. Among these human beings excellent are those who are pious and who fear God.”

“They possess pre-eminence and excellence because they always speak truthfully, rightly and to the point, their way of living is based upon moderation, and their mode of dealing with other men is founded on their good will, fellow feeling and courtesy towards them. They deny themselves the things prohibited by God. They concentrate their minds upon knowledge of things which will bring them eternal bliss.

They bear hardships and sufferings as happily as they enjoy comforts and pleasures. If God had not fixed the span of life for each one of them, their souls in desire of attaining His Heaven and out of fear of falling into His displeasure, would not have stayed in their bodies for long.”

“They have visualized mentally the glory of God in such a way that beyond him nothing in this world alarms, frightens or awes them. Everything other than His might appears to them as insignificant and humble. They believe in the Heaven and its blessings like a person who has been there and has actually seen everything of the Heaven with his own eyes.

Similarly, their faith in the Hell and its torments is as strong as that of a person who had passed through its sufferings. They feel that the tortures of the Hell are around them and very near to them.”

“The ways of worldly people make them sorry. They harm nobody. They do not indulge in excessive eating and pleasure seeking. Their wants are limited. Their wishes are few. They have accepted patiently sufferings and adversities in this mortal and transitory life for the sake of eternal bliss which by the grace of God proved for them a very profitable transaction.

The vicious world desired their fellowship but they turned their faces away from it. It wanted to snare them, but they willingly accepted every trouble and discomfort to free themselves from its clutches.”

“Their nights they spend in carefully studying the Qur’an, because, of their weaknesses and shortcomings, and try to find ways from this Holy book for improvements of their minds. In the study of the Qur’an when they came across a passage describing the Heaven they feel highly attracted towards it and develop such a keen desire to reach it; that the Heaven with all its blessings is visualized by their minds, while a passage about the Hell frightens them and makes them feel as if they are seeing and hearing the raging fire and the groans and lamentations of those who are suffering the tortures of the Hell.”

“Nights they spend in praying before the Lord and requesting and beseeching Him to deliver them from the Hell. Days find them occupied with such works that clearly indicate their wisdom, depth of knowledge, virtuousness, and piety. Constant fasting, simple diet: avoidance of every aspect of luxury and regular hard work make them look lean and haggard, but they possess very sound and robust health.

When people hear them discussing various problems of life they often take them to be whimsical fanatic or even half-witted. But it is not so, they are not satisfied with the quality and quantity of the work done by them in the cause of religion and humanity .The more they work the less they feel satisfied. Having

set up a very high standard of efficiency for their work they fell nervous that indolence may not make it impossible for them to attain those heights.”

“If anyone of them is praised for piety, virtuousness and the good deeds done by him, he does not like to be so complimented; he is afraid that such praise may not allure him towards vanity, self flattery, and self glorification. He says, I know my mind and my work more than others, and God knows much more than me.

O Lord! Please do not hold me responsible for what they have said about me. You know very well that I did not instigate them for such praises. Please Lord! Grant me excellence far greater than what they complimented me for. And Lord! Please forgive those of my sins short-comings which they do not know.”

“You will find every pious person possessing the following attributes. He is resolute though tender-hearted and kind. He is unwavering in his convictions and beliefs. He is thirsty for knowledge. He forgives those who harmed him, fully knowing that they have wronged him. Even when owning wealth his ways of life are based upon moderation. His prayers are models of humility and submissiveness to God. Even when starving he will maintain his self-respect. He will bear sufferings patiently.”

“He will resort only to honest means of living. Leading others towards truth and justice, will give him pleasure. He disdains avarice and greed. Though he does good deeds all the time, yet he feels nervous of his short-comings. Every night, he thanks God for having passed one more day under His Grace and Mercy.

Every morning finds him starting the day with the prayers of the Lord. Of nights he is cautious that he may not carelessly waste those hours in comfort and ease. He starts his days happy with the thought the Lord has given him another day to do his duty.”

“If his mind wishes for something unholy and impious he refuses to obey its dictates. He desires to achieve eternal bliss. Worldly pleasures do not interest him. His wisdom is mixed with patience. His deeds reciprocate his words (he does what he says). Inordinate desires do not trouble him. He has few defects in him. He is courteous to others.

He possesses a contented mind. He eats little, he does not harm anybody. He is easy to be pleased. He is strong in his faith. His passions are dead. His temper is controlled.”

“People expect good out of him and consider themselves immune from his harm. Even if he is found among godless people his name will be written in the list of Godly persons. If he is in company of those who always remember God, naturally his name will not be included amongst those who forget Him. He forgives those who harm him. He helps those who have forsaken him and have refused to help him.

He is kind to those who have been cruel to him. He does good to those who do evil to him. He never

indulges in loose talks. He has no vice in him, and his good qualities are outstanding, noticeable, and prominent, when facing dangers and disasters he is calm and undisturbed. In sufferings and calamities he is patient and hopeful. In prosperity he is thankful to God. He would not harm his worst enemy. He will never commit a sin even for the sake of his best friend.”

“Before anybody has to bear testimony to his fault he accepts and owns it. He never misappropriates anything entrusted to him. He never forgets what he has been told. He does not slander anybody. He does not harm his neighbors.

When misfortunes befall any person he does not blame him, neither is he happy at the losses of others. He neither goes astray from the right path nor follows a wrong one. His silence does not indicate, his moroseness nor his laughters are loud and boisterous.

He bears persecution patiently and God punishes his oppressor. He is hard to himself and very lenient to others. He bears hardships in this life to attain eternal comfort and peace. He never wrongs a fellow being. If he avoids anybody it is to retain his piety and uprightness. If he forms contract with anybody it is on account of his kindness and clemency.

He does not avoid anybody because of his pride and vanity, and he does not mix with others with ulterior motives of hypocrisy, pretense, and vile.”¹

“The narrator says that Hammam was hearing the sermon very attentively when Imam reached the above passage, Hammam fainted and died it during the faint. Seeing this Imam said: “By God, I was hesitating to all this to Hammam because of this very reason. Effective advises on minds ready to receive them often bring almost similar result”.

1. Nahjul Balagha, sermon 193.

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