

Lesson 25: The Spiritual Guidance of the Imam

The life of the Prophet (S), as well as his deeds, are a perfect manifestation of the Islamic culture and ideology. He was both the political leader and the legislative authority for the Muslims. He was the messenger of God who received revelations from God and delivered the commands and laws from Allah to people.

He implemented them in the field of Islamic government. His actions were the manifestation of the law, his behaviour pure virtue, and his instructions the guidance and leadership of a strong and wise man. He was not content merely to counsel and advise but rather proceeded to establish a model society founded on true justice.

In dealing with crime the Islamic system gives mundane sanction to the security and satisfaction within the society. It does not defer the punishment of those who damage social happiness to another time. It carries out the prescribed punishment for these people in this world also. Government and leadership together formed the work of this great man.

The Islam system is distinct from other worldly systems of government. Together with this side of the coin, it always looks to the being of each individual, and it always recommends the keeping pace of Islamic laws with the pursuit of spiritual and human virtues.

This latter it is which today civilizations is left to oblivion, and gradually the festering and putrefying results of this are seen. It is because spirituality and moral values are forgotten. The Islamic system has placed special emphasis onto this important point, and the leadership has always established the basis of its philosophy on the spiritual training of mankind.

The majority of men are unaware of the reality of their own exalted human essence, since it is so subtle and delicate that it is only seen by the clear-sighted. In the understanding of the ordinary man, this verdant land of the existence of each human being is situated in an area far from his cogitation and ideation, and he cannot conceive of this land, let alone be a leader towards.

How can man, who, after the passing of centuries and centuries, has still not come to understand even

half of the physical actions and reactions that govern his body, expect to know its metaphysical side? Or give guidance and a way to reach that far objective?

Without any dispute, the leader to this land must be someone the essence of whose existence is in union with the supernatural world and who is in relation with and knows this terrain from being a traveller in its known and unknown valleys. If one has not travelled how can he be a guide?

Is it right to give up spiritual destiny? Should the spiritual genius and sublime essence of man be considered unnoticed and take him to be the equal of a beast and leave him in the world of appetites and the libido?

This is not the true status of man's greatness.

Man, with his spiritual and celestial needs, and with the special genius which God has placed in his character, is the masterpiece of creation, and the sun of the world of created things. This is why he takes his place like the world-illuminating sun in heights beyond reach, and sheds his warmth and heat on all quarters of the world like the rays of the sun.

Since it has been determined thus, man is no mere wanderer in the order of creation: he is a small speck, but the great Divine Sun shines on him, and regards him with his special favour out of all creation.

We can see the results of this favour from God to man along the length of human history in His sending of the prophets God sent the prophets on the basis of this love and favour so that they might lead men and take their great but turbulent spirit to the shore of that great salvation and eminence.

The great Qur'an refers to this reality in numerous verses, as for instance, when Ibrahim (a.s.) asks God:

“And, our Lord, do Thou send among them a Messenger, one of them, who shall recite to them Thy signs, and teach them the Book and the Wisdom, and purify them; Thou art the All-mighty the All-wise” (2: 129)

In this verse we clearly see that apart from knowledge and wisdom and guidance, the purification of the soul, which is the same as spiritual training, is counted as one of the essentials of the calling of the prophets.

In the school of the illustrious Prophet, his followers benefit from this special training, and participate in the following of a dazzling and wondrous path of perfection. Salman Farsi, Abu Dhar, Miqdad, Ammar, Uways and many others are among this distinguished group.

Their beings were pure and righteous springs; they were purified from all badness; they wished for nothing apart from Allah, and saw nothing apart from Him. Only Allah ruled in their beings, throughout their souls, hearts, spirits and bodies.

Similarly, virtue and the refining of the spirit is not a superfluous matter of mere formality, that we should be indifferent to, and set apart from all other matters of life, to be attended to only when we feel like it, or at our leisure. No, virtue is the builder of life and a part of it, even, much more important than it. For, according to the testimony of wisdom and the senses, the great qualities of spiritual virtue and purity are so immense and so fathomless that man can with its protection leave his form and mould and reach to the spiritual life, and realise the high reality of his humanness; till he sees that which is beyond sight.

Indications of Spiritual Life in Islam

“And whosoever does a righteous deed, be it male or female, a believer, We shall surely give him to live a goodly life.” (16: 97)

“O believers, respond to Allah and the Messenger when He calls you to that which will give you life.” (8: 24)

It is obvious that the life, which is mentioned in the above verses, is not the ordinary life. It is nothing but the spiritual life, virtuous human existence, which can only be obtained from the way of righteous action and refinement of the soul.

How is the Spiritual life Found?

As with other phenomena, the finding of the spiritual life requires the fulfilment of certain conditions. The spiritual life is the fruit of man's behaviour and deeds; naturally, that behaviour and those deeds, which are formed by true and righteous training which are taught by celestial teachings.

The command and prohibition of God, which we call the shari'ah, stand in exact correspondence with the truths and realities of the world of creation and the realm of existence, that is to say, creation and genesis. Since we are unaware of the truths of the universe, its workings, its ins and outs and its happenings for our intellects are insufficient, we are ignorant of the behaviour which builds our spiritual lives. But the Imam (a.s.) reveals these high truths and superior workings to man like a wise and loving teacher, with many clear explanations so that we may become filled with bliss and reach to the spiritual life.

So, the way of Islam (din) is the sum total of realities and instructions which are greater than our ordinary understanding and which Allah has explained by means of the Prophet and his pure, unsullied representatives, so that the spiritual life may take root within us, and assure us of eternal bliss.

Now, if we obey the command, salvation will be ours; if not, it is our loss. Just like a child who is placed under instruction, who hears only command and prohibition from his instructor, and who does what is required of him without asking why. Although he does not understand in the depths of the matter what it means, he will, after the passing of the days of his education, live a life of contentment, because of the virtue and praiseworthy ways of action, which were brought into action within him. However, if he revolts

against carrying out the orders of his instructors, it will result in inestimable loss to him.

Life Guidance

Now let us see who is the guarantee for this spiritual life and its perfection, which surely needs a guide?

Will he be found among ordinary men? Or will he be someone who speaks with sureness and dependability, who is in his behaviour free from error, immaculate, and who himself stands on the pinnacle of the spiritual life?

Until God guides someone completely Himself, He does not entrust to him the duty of guiding others.

“Allah – He guides to the truth; and which is worthier to be followed – He who guides to the truth, or he who guides not unless he is guided? What the ails you, how you act?” (10: 35)

More particularly, the Imamate is not leadership in the ordinary sense, for this is the duty of every Muslim, and not confined to the Imam. The meaning of guidance here is esoteric guidance; and those who have not found the spiritual life, to whom the realities of the universe have not been revealed, cannot take on this kind of leadership.

By looking into the ayahs of the Qur'an, which speak of Imamate and guidance, we can see that everywhere that Imamate is mentioned; the subject of guidance is also mentioned in commentary and explanation.

What is Spiritual Guidance?

The Imam, besides being an educator in the commands of Islam, the esoteric side, is also the leader in the esoteric of Islam; he is the wall. That is to say, he takes man through the inner way, the man who has the predisposition and the worthiness, and leads him towards perfection.

This guidance, because it is carried out on the basis of spiritual blessing and inner stations, is called esoteric guidance.

Esoteric guidance is a superior station which the great prophets reached after the station of prophethood. Thus, Ibrahim (a.s.), after he had been made a prophet, was raised by God to the station of esoteric guidance.

“Verily, I make you an Imam for mankind.” (2: 12–4)

When he had reached the station of walayat and esoteric guidance, the Imam (a.s.) can apply himself to great works, which seem miraculous or impossible from the point of view of ordinary people. The Qur'an tells how Asif ibn Barkhya, one of the counsellors of Sulayman (a.s.) could cause the throne of the Queen of Saba to come before Sulayman (a.s.) ahead of her own arrival, in a time shorter than the

blinking of an eye, since he had a certain dominance over the supernatural world and could take away the shutters covering the facts and realities of this world.

Our sinless leaders and Imams – may peace be upon them are situated on a level greater and higher than Asif. The proof of this is the authoritative and documented histories of the narrators, where we find many stories of the spiritual guidance and inner walayat of our Imams.

Therefore, the Imam, since he is in the highest stage of spiritual life, has a kind of spiritual guidance and charisma, which can have an effect on the hearts of worthy and cause a in them, attracting them towards perfection. We can read in histories about the states and conditions of groups of followers of the Imams and how they illuminated their times with their brilliance.

The Man from Damascus

'Ali ibn Khalid was a Zaydi i.e. he did not accept any of the Imam after the fourth Imam, Zayn al-Abidin (a.s.), and he lived in the time of the ninth Imam, Hazrat Muhammad Taqi – may Allah praise him.

He related that he had been in Samarra and he was informed that a man had been brought from Damascus to that place in captivity as a prisoner, who claimed to be a prophet. 'Ali ibn Khalid went to see him, and asked him to relate his story.

“I was busy in worship,” he began, “at the place which they say is the resting place of the pure head of the noble martyr Imam Husayn (a.s.). One night, a man suddenly appeared in front of me, and told me to stand up. I stood up despite myself and went a short way with him when I found myself in the mosque at Kufah He asked me if I knew the mosque, and I said that I did, it was the mosque of Kufah He prayed, and I prayed with him, and then we set out again We had gone no distance at all when I noticed the mosque of Medina He asked for blessings on the Prophet of Allah, and we both prayed there. Then we left and set out once more. Then I noticed we were in Mecca. We circumambulated the Ka'abah left it, and then arrived at our original place, Damascus, after no time at all. Then that person vanished from my sight. A slight breeze came and brushed my face and went....

“A year after that adventure, I saw the very same man. I became greatly gladdened; he took me on the same journey, and like the first time we visited all those places, fully aware. But when he wanted to leave me, I said to him: 'I beseech you, who have such a great power as I see in you, tell me your name.' He said: 'I am Muhammad ibn 'Ali ibn Musa ibn Ja'far.' He was the ninth Imam.

“Now I proceeded to tell everyone I met of this extraordinary event, till news reached Muhammad ibn Abdil-Malik Zayyat He ordered that I be arrested and accused of posing as a prophet. And now, as you see, I am in prison.”

'Ali ibn Khalid asked him if he wanted him to write to Muhammad ibn Abdil Malik about his case. The man told him to write. So he wrote, but in his answer Ibn Abdil Malik wrote:

“Tell him that he can escape from his prison, if he wants, in the same way as he went in the night from Damascus to Kufah and from there to Medinah and Mecca, and then back again to Damascus.”

Ibn Khalid was most depressed by this answer. In the morning, he went to the prison to give the man the answer. But he saw there were many soldiers and a crowd of people coming and going around the prison, so he asked what had happened.

They told him that the prisoner who had claimed to be a prophet had escaped from the prison. No one knew how he had escaped, by going through the ground or by flying!

'Ali ibn Khalid said: “When I saw this, I left my own Zaydi creed and became a follower of Hazrat Javad (a.s.), the ninth Imam.”¹

Maytham at-Tammar

Hazrat 'Ali (a.s.), chief among those who forbear, bought and freed Maytham. He asked him what his name was.

“Salim,” replied.

“But I heard from the Prophet that your name, your true name, is Maytham.”

“He spoke correctly, and you speak correctly; my name, my true name is Maytham.”

“Then stay with the name the Prophet called you by, and leave the other name.”

In this way Hazrat 'Ali (a.s.) bought and freed the slave, but he cast the noose of love around his neck so that he remained with him up to the last moment of his life – even death could not break this link.

Maytham was a free man who had amazing ability, and he gradually attained great honour in the school of 'Ali (a.s.), and took his place among the group of the friends of 'Ali.

He became aware of the subtleties and discovered the realities. He had great love for 'Ali (a.s.); like a thirsty plant in the rain, he was inspired by him. For him he grew; he was totally absorbed in him. With him the light of his heart and the rejoicing of his soul increased. He never sold this happiness to the world of affluence.

One day, Hazrat 'Ali (a.s.) said to him: “When I am gone, you will be hanged; they will scar your body with weapons, and on the third day your beard will be stained with the blood of your eyes and mouth. They will hang you beside the house of 'Amr ibn Harith, together with nine others. The tree they hang you from will be the smallest; come, I will show you the date-palm from whose branch you will be hung.”

And then he showed Maytham the tree.

The years passed and Hazrat 'Ali (a.s.) was martyred.

The Umayyids gained power over the people.

Maytham occasionally went out to look at the tree, prayed there, and spoke to it: "O tree! May Allah bless you! I have been created for you, and you grew for me."

In the year of his martyrdom, Maytham went into the precincts of the Ka'abah and met Umm Salmah.

"I have heard your name from the Prophet," she said, "that he recommended you to 'Ali (a.s.)."

Maytham asked her about Imam Husayn (a.s.), and learnt that he had left the city.

"Convey my salam to him," he said, "and tell him it will not be long before I and he will see each other again in the next world before the Lord."

Umm Salmah ordered that perfume should be brought to scent Maytham's beard, and then said to him: "Soon your beard will be coloured by your blood, in the true way of the Prophet and his family."

Maytham then went to Kufah, where two of Ibn Ziyad's agents arrested him, and took him before the latter. This exchange took place 'where is your God?'

"Lying in wait among the oppressors, and you are one of them."

"What did your master, 'Ali say about you and I?'"

"He said you would hang me together with nine other martyrs, and that my gallows would be the shortest."

"I want to go against the word of your lord, and I shall kill you in another way."

"How can you? He learnt from the Prophet, and the Prophet learnt from Allah. Can you go against Allah? I also know the place of my martyrdom, and I am the first Muslim in whose mouth they will put a bridle. Abdullah ibn Ziyad, his eyes wide open, gave the order to take him immediately to prison. In that prison Maytham gave Mukhtar Thaqafi the good news of his liberty:

"You will kill Ibn Ziyad" he told him, "in revenge for the prince of martyrs, Hazrat Hussayn (as)."

And so it was Maytham was taken to the place of his sacrifice, to the place of his spiritual departure, the place from which his spirit was to soar to the highest and greatest heights of human spirituality. They hung him beside the house of 'Amr ibn Harith, from that very tree that he had been shown.

The people gathered round him, and on the gallows he took the opportunity to tell them of the virtues of Hazrat 'Ali (a.s.) He spoke and unlocked the hearts of the people and they understood.

Ibn Ziyad was informed that Maytham had defamed him, so he ordered him to be gagged so that he

should be unable to speak. Then they attacked him with weapons as Hazrat 'Ali (a.s.), had foretold.

“Allahu Akbar!” he cried.

At the end of the third day, the blood from his eyes and mouth flowed down and stained his beard – may the peace of Allah be with him.²

Uways al-Qarni

The Prophet said: “The scent of heaven is wafting over from Qami. O Uways al-Qami, I am eager to see you. Anyone who sees you should give you my salam!”³

When everyone swore allegiance to Hazrat 'Ali (a.s.) at Dhi Qar, he said: “From Kufah a thousand soldiers, no more no less will come and swear their allegiance to me.”

Then they arrived and Ibn 'Abbes counted them, but found only 999 persons. He was puzzled why there was one person missing.

After a moment, a man came near with armour a sword and a shield, and the other accoutrements of war; he went up to Hazrat 'Ali (a.s.) and said: “I want to swear allegiance to you up to death and self-sacrifice.”

“What is your name?” said 'Ali.

“Uways.”

“Are you Uways al-Qami?”

“Yes.”

“Allahu Akbar! My beloved Prophet, the Prophet of Allah may Allah praise him – told me that I would meet one of his followers named Uways al-Qarni who was one of the party of Allah and His messenger, and who would die a martyr. A numberless group would intercede for him.”

Thus it was that he was martyred in the service of Hazrat 'Ali (as.)⁴

Uways is well known for his spirituality as having a high position. His pleasure was worship, and he had no interest in the things of this world. We can learn from the sayings of Uways the extraordinary nature of the spiritual life of this man.

“I swear by Allah, the thought of death and the fear and trembling at the last days, leaves no place for happiness in this world for the man of faith.”

“When we bid to good and forbid from evil they abuse us but with all that we stand up for the Truth of

Allah.”

Qanbar

Qanbar also was one of those brave people who reached high station by the rays of the spiritual power of the Prophet (S) and 'Ali (a.s.).

He did not fear to tell the truth and to seek the way of righteousness. Although in the eyes of the people of this world he was no more than a slave, in the path of spiritual stations he was intimate to the secrets of 'Ali (a.s.).

The live, powerful, hard-hitting words with which this iron man replied to Hajjaj ibn Yusuf, the bloodthirsty executioner who had the cruelty of a murderer and a criminal, have become well known.

Hajjaj asked him: “What was your work in the service of 'Ali?”

“I made ready his water for wudu “

“When he had finished wudu what did he used to say?”

“He used to recite this ayah: 'So when they forgot what they were reminded of, We opened unto them the gates of everything until, when they rejoiced in what they were doing, We seized them suddenly, and behold, they were sore confounded. So the last remnant of the people who did evil was cut off. Praise belongs to Allah, the Lord of the worlds.’”⁵

“I presume that ayah speaks about me?”

“Yes,” said Qanbar with perfect heroism.

“If I kill you, what can you do?”

“I shall become a man of bliss, and you a man of wretchedness.”

“Confess that you have left 'Ali's service!”

“If I leave his way, will I be guided to a better way?”

Hajjaj could not answer this question, so he said: “I am your killer. Whatever way you wish, let me know, and I shall kill you in this way.”

“I leave that to you. '

“Why?”

“Because however you kill me I shall kill you in that way in the next life. 'Ali, my master, told me that I

should be beheaded cruelly and unjustly.”

So Hajjaj ordered that he be beheaded.⁶

Questions

1. What are the facts that serve as a foundation and corner stone in the project if we assume Islam to be as such?
2. What was of the major attitudes of the Holy Prophet? a) Was it giving lectures, speeches, teachings, administration, or giving judgements?
3. How does Islam deal with criminal activities?
4. Does it leave a criminal case for judgement of God in the next life?
5. If judgement in Islam is based on worldly aspects of life alone or related to the facts of the next life?
6. Do human beings know their assents properly?
7. What steps has Islam taken to educate people spiritually?
8. What facts are ignored in modern civilization?
9. Can men who still do not know about the physical aspects of their lives pass judgement about their metaphysical needs?
10. Can one be a guide without first travelling a road?
11. Can we ignore our spiritual destiny?
12. Can we consider ourselves just like animals without any spiritual values?
13. Why is man considered the son of the world of the created things in a masterpiece that they are in?
14. Why do man receive special favours from God?
15. What is a very good favour that man has received from God?
16. What does verse 129 ch. 2 say?
17. What fact is an essential task for the Prophet?
18. Can you mention three trainees from the school of the Prophet?
19. How was the attitude of these people towards Allah?

20. What form of progress can spiritual virtue bring to man?
21. What does verse 97 ch. 16 and verse 24 ch. 8 say?
22. How are virtues spiritual progress achieved?
23. Do we know all the “ins” and “outs” of the world?
24. Why do we need the Imam and what they would do for us?
25. How can the sharia be helpful to us?
26. What is greater than our understanding and why?
27. What would obeying and disobeying of sharia do to us?
28. What does verse 35 ch. 10 say?
29. What is spiritual guidance?
30. What are some of the characteristics of an Imam?
31. What does verse 24 ch. 4 say?
32. What kind of power would a person who becomes a wali receive?
33. Why do our Imams have greater power and authority than Asif?
34. Why can the Imams better attract people to perfection?
35. Why did Ali ibn Khalib become a follower of Imam As-Sadiq?
36. What happened to the prisoner and why he was imprisoned?
37. Who bought and freed Maytham AT-Tammar and why?
38. What kind of relations did Maytham At-Tammar have with Imam Ali?
39. What kind of a tree did Imam Ali show to him and why?
40. Who did Maytham speak to in the percent of Ka'abah?
41. What did he say about Imam Hussein?
42. Why did Umm salmah offer perfumes to Maytham?
43. Why was Maytham arrested and by who?

44. Who did Maytham give good news in prison and what news was it?
45. Where was Maytham hung?
46. Why did people gather around him?
47. Why did Ibn Ziad cut off the tongue of Maytham?
48. What happened to Uwayth?
49. How many people pledged loyalty to Imam Ali?
50. What has Uwayth said about death?
52. Who was Cumber and what were some of his virtues abilities?
53. What kind of conversation took place between Cumber and Hajjaj Ibn Yusuf?
54. What did Hajjaj do to him?

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1. Shaykh Mufid, Irshad; p. 304–5.
 2. Ibid, p. 152–154.
 3. 'Abbas Qummi, Safinah al-Bihar, vol. 1, p. 53.
 4. Usd al- Ghabah, vol. I p. 152.
 5. Irshad. p. 155.
 6. Irshad. p. 155.

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