

Explanation of the Four Merits

All the four meritorious qualities mentioned by us above (wisdom, chastity, justice and valour) are such that each of them is a very difficult path, thinner than hair and sharper than a sword. The scholars of moral science have called this "Siratul Mustaqeem", the right path. One who has achieved this path in the world and remained steadfast on it would easily pass over the Sirat Bridge in the Hereafter, because if he walks on this Siratul Mustaqeem there would be no defect in his deeds.

Consider this way to be a space between two written words. It is the smallest but the most upright one. All the writings besides it would be slanted and longer than it. All these writings would not be included in the merits; rather they would be called decline and the merit would be that middle writing alone. All the writings near to this middle one would be closer in merit and those further away would be further from merit also. The moral virtue would be only one and the declines numerous. Not a single word would be steadfast on this middle line.

It is this straight path in whose search remain the wayfarers and guides, day and night. They practice penance to achieve all this but first of all its achievement is very difficult. Even if they find it, it is very difficult to remain steadfast upon it. The feet waver in the slightest difficulty. What can be said of others, the prophets sometimes reached the juncture of "omitting the preferred option" (Tark-e-awla). The correct standard to distinguish this path is the morals of prophets and most of all the morals of the Holy Prophet (S).

It is this balance of deeds in which the actions of people shall be weighed. The Almighty Allah says,

Certainly We sent Our apostles with clear arguments, and sent down with them the Book and the balance that men may conduct themselves with equity. (Surah Hadid, 57:25).

It is evident that none of the prophets were born with a book or a balance, then what does it denote? The fact is that 'book' denotes the book of the existence of the prophet.

Amir'ul-Mu'minin (a.s) says: "O man! You are that magnificent book of Allah, each letter of which reveals

the secrets of providence.”

When the existence of man is the magnificent book of Allah, what can be said of the existence of the prophets? The special miracle of divine power is found in each of their organs and powers. Their senses of hearing, speech and sight are more powerful than those of ordinary people. Their physical organs are superior to those of ordinary people in their special qualities. Even the seeds in the loins or wombs heard the voice of Ibrahim (a.s) when he recited the Call (Azan) for Hajj. His eyes saw the kingdom of the heavens and the earth. Prophet Sulaiman (a.s) heard the conversation of the ant. In this way other prophets were endowed with special powers and qualities. Each verse of the book of their existence is incomparable in its position.

As for the descent of balance, it denotes their good moral behavior. The morals of all people would be judged in relation to them. The criterion of each thing is different. Material objects are weighed in a different kind of balance, and non-perceptible things are weighed differently. The balance of poetic meter is not an ordinary one, or the one used to weigh gold or silver; their weights are also completely different. These weights are also not used in measuring temperature; a thermometer is required for this. In moral science also this criterion is useless. You will find a completely different standard there. In common parlance it is said: The habit of so and so is similar to the habit of so and so. He is like his father in moral qualities.

Thus we come to know that the morals of the prophets is that balance on which the morals of all the nations would be weighed on the Day of Judgment, and the morals of the people would be judged in accordance with the “best of morals” (of the Holy Prophet). Thus as far removed one is from the right path; the less would be the weight of his deeds.

One who is nearer to this true measure would be rewarded most. Allah says, “This weighing would be very accurate.” So that no one gets an opportunity to complain. “One who has done an iota of good or one who has done a little bit of evil” all would be accounted for. Actually this examination would be in relation to this “medium letter”. One who is nearest to it would have the heaviest pan of deeds, and the further away one is from the criterion, the lighter his deeds would become. Now consider how difficult this path is.

If it had been an easy way the divine saints would not have subjected themselves to severe penance and would not have forgone ease and comforts. Even those who are considered the patron saints of mysticism are found helpless and defeated at one time or the other. We can say without any doubt or fear that except for Muhammad and the Progeny of Muhammad no one else succeeded in achieving these positions. If this had not been so, the mystics would not have considered Ali (a.s) as the first guide. These pathways are so elevated that eyes snared by the enchantment of materialism cannot even see properly, then how can they be expected to recognize anything.

Explanation of Every Virtue in the Four Merits

We have already mentioned that every superior quality is rooted in the four merits. The first is wisdom, secondly chastity, third is valour and lastly justice. All the remaining moral virtues like patience, thankfulness, contentment, reliance, generosity, humility, satisfaction, piety etc; that are around forty-eight qualities, are branches of the four main qualities. Let us now briefly study each of these four moral qualities.

Wisdom

It is of two types, theoretical wisdom and practical wisdom. The first is related to the thinking and opinions of man. When one has this type of wisdom one is free from mistakes of judgment and by arranging the preliminaries he is able to draw a correct conclusion. That is why it is said: *Those who are given wisdom are given a great good.*

It is under the heading of this wisdom that all religious sciences come. The philosophies of the world and the divine sciences are also included in it. Divine recognition, certainty of belief and realization is related to this. By its help man is able to save himself from sins; and he can distinguish between right and wrong. The second kind is practical wisdom, towards which one is led after theoretical wisdom.

If one deviates an inch from this medium line one loses the merit of wisdom and it is replaced by some decline or degradation. If he reaches towards the top he learns to fool people with cunning and deceptive knowledge. He becomes deviated and is not anymore connected to wisdom. In the same way if he slides below the medium line, it would be ignorance, and this also has a lot of variations. Ignorance is not a single kind but has a thousand varieties and due to this, man commits innumerable mistakes in the sphere of actions. Thus in the terminology of ethics, a wise one is that who walks straight on the middle line and is not even slightly deviated. You will see many people who apparently are knowledgeable and wise but their actions are found above or below the line of the straight path. In mutual dealings they reach wrong conclusions, while making judgments they are unable to discover the correct causes and they solve their problems using their cunning.

Chastity

This is also the middle line. If one goes above it, it would amount to jealousy and create extraordinary desires. If one goes below it, one would even destroy the permissible desires. They broke the ties of relationships, society and culture and took themselves to the caves of seclusion and thus gave up their life before time. In other words we can say that both types of extremisms are dangerous. Both are considered deviations. A chaste person would only be one who is not afflicted with jealousy and neither should he be the one who sacrifices natural inclinations.

Valour

This is also the middle line. Anything above this is called ferocity or cruelty and if one falls below the line it is cowardice.

Justice

The upper portion of this is referred to as injustice and the lower one is remaining under oppression. To find out these medium lines is beyond the capacity of people. Then to walk upon them with firm steps, the whole life is much more difficult. Even our Holy Prophet (S) who was having the highest morals said on the difficult path that: Surah Hud has made me aged. People asked what the Prophet meant by this? He replied, "It is commanded therein: Be upright!" That is, do not deviate even a little bit from the path of morals. This was such a difficult task that even a personality like the Holy Prophet (S) aged prematurely. What can be said of other people?

It is our claim that none of the companions of the Holy Prophet (S) can say that he/she had all the four qualities with all their variations. It is possible that their followers may have attributed these qualities to them because false beliefs can make clay into gold, but till the time it is proved it cannot be considered true. This superiority was owned only by the Ahl ul-Bayt of the Holy Prophet (S). The chief of Ahl ul-Bayt, Ali (a.s) obtained these qualities directly from the Holy Prophet.

1. Wisdom

The Holy Prophet (S) said, "I am the abode of knowledge and Ali is its gate," and Allah said: And no one knows its interpretation except Allah and those who are firmly rooted in knowledge. And also said: Say Allah is sufficient witness between me and you and one who has the knowledge of the book.

2. Valour

The Almighty Allah said:

...they shall strive hard in Allah's way and shall not fear the censure of any censurer...(Surah Maidah 5:54)

And He said,

...those who fight in His way in ranks as if they were a firm and compact wall. (Surah Saff 61:4)

The Holy Prophet (S) said, "One stroke of Ali on the day of the battle of Trench (Khandaq) was superior to the worship of all men and jinns. And on the day of the battle of Khyber he said,

"Tomorrow I will give the standard to a man, who is victorious and who does not flee; who loves Allah and the Prophet and whom Allah and the Prophet love."

And seeing the courage of Ali the unseen caller called: “There is no brave youth except Ali and there is no sword except Zulfiqar.”

3. Chastity

The Almighty Allah says, “Allah certainly intends to remove all impurities from you O, people of the house and to purify you a thorough purification.” The Holy Prophet (S) said, “O Ali! You are to me as Aaron was to Moses.” That is you are infallible just as he was and like he was the successor of Moses, you are my successor.

4. Justice

The Almighty Allah says in Surah Araaf:

And of those whom We have created are a people who guide with the truth and thereby they do justice. (Surah Araaf 7: 181).

The Holy Prophet (S) also said, “Ali is the most just among you.”

Others could also have been included with Ahl ul-Bayt in these specialties. But they did not have any peers. Also no one else proved to be steadfast on the straight path all ones life, except the Ahl ul-Bayt.

Who could have been a better examiner than the Holy Prophet (S) whether Ali (a.s) had these merits or not. Even if there had been a slight deficiency the truthful tongue of the Prophet would not have uttered Ali's praise. Thus when it is proved that Ahl ul-Bayt had all these basic four merits then their derivations are automatically proved in their perfections because the sum total of all perfections are these four basic qualities.

Now we shall briefly discuss some of the qualities that Ahl ul-Bayt possessed. The most important of these is knowledge because no virtue is possible without it. However we would like to mention a few points as introduction to our discussion.

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