

Chapter 9: The Psychological Needs

Besides his basic physical needs, the human being also possesses a series of psychological needs whose powerful and decisive pressure for satisfaction is so obvious and evident as to be beyond question. If anyone of these needs is not met properly and in a timely manner, it leaves the path of moderation, leading to disruption in the life of the individual and the community and giving rise to painful disorders difficult to remedy.

The scope of man's spiritual needs, contrary to his material needs, is extensive and unlimited, and that is why these urges cannot be easily confined within limits. Although scientific research concerning psychological needs is of recent origin, these needs themselves are not new and are as ancient as man himself.

All individuals do not stand at the same level in respect of their psychological makeup, and it is the non-uniformity of this makeup that makes them different from one another in respect of their ways of thinking, feeling and behaving. No doubt the role of these factors in the success and failure of individuals is much greater than the differences occasioned by social conventions.

One of the basic psychological needs, which is a consequent of man's love of perfection, is his urge to seek honour and respectability. Many of his activities are directed to achieving this purpose, for man cherishes honour and dignity to the same extent that he resents and avoids indignity and dishonour. At times when his honour and position are in jeopardy, he employs all his powers and means to avert this danger and does his utmost to avoid such a crisis. The sense of failure and the anguish felt at the aspect of dishonour are much more unpleasant than the defeat and inadequacy itself and often turn life into a dilemma or a frightsome nightmare.

The feeling of humiliation creates a terrible storm in some sensitive souls. The world assumes a menacing and absurd countenance in their eyes, and in order to escape its terror and torment they may even be led to take refuge in the dark valley of suicide. However, in this way in order to get rid of a small setback they surrender to the biggest disgrace and humiliation.

In setbacks that reduce man into a wretched and despondent creature, one should try to find a proper

and wholesome way of confronting the situation. The rational way is to channel one's capacities in a proper direction and affirm one's personal worth by pursuing a course of action for which one has a special talent. In this way one can restore emotional balance and recover one's lost personal equilibrium. By compensating for one's inadequacies one can build a life of highest self-respect and self-reliance.

The urge for self-respect, which has been implanted in human nature by the Creator, starts manifesting itself in various forms right from infancy and earlier than other spiritual qualities. The sensitive heart of a child needs love and affection and is eager to receive attention. By nature he expects to receive the maximum attention from those around him and cannot bear to share it with someone else. When another baby is born in the family and receives the greater part of the mother's attention, she cannot find the time to give the attention she gave earlier to her elder child. The latter reacts violently to the presence of the newcomer and views him with resentment and consternation. If the child feels deprived, wronged and unwanted, he may come to harbour a chronic feeling of acute jealousy and envy that manifest as deviant conduct, making him prone to misguidance and deception. There are many children who come to acquire such complexes that make them face many problems in later life.

The rise and fall of nations and their honour or humiliation depends on their spiritual state and qualities, which ultimately depend on their ways of thinking and behaving. Such personal qualities as spiritual merit and pure sentiments are not by any means comparable to other advantages that one may acquire through life such as wealth and social status. It is a fact that the inner causes play a greater role in creating real honour than outward means, for real honour and happiness and dishonour and wretchedness are subject to inner life, although unthinking persons consider the differences of social status as the real factor behind the diverse degrees of respectability.

False Advantages and Distinctions

There are many people in society who make a mistake in identifying the factors that bring respectability. Since their psychological need is not fulfilled through the right means, they resort to deviant and destructive ways to satisfy this urge. Like a drowning man who tries to catch hold of every object in order to save himself, they do not leave any stone unturned in order to earn false distinctions and fake respectability and take recourse in every insignificant means.

For instance, in some persons the appeal of unlimited wealth and innumerable assets may emerge as an urgent need and thirst. This urge, like an inner tyrant, can overshadow their faculty of reason, their sense of justice and awareness of their true interests. Such an unwholesome state turns man into a most tormented and helpless creature who tortures himself in addition to being harmful to others. If the number of such persons were to increase in a community and were they to become a majority, such a society would be in deep trouble.

The problem is that possessing wealth in excess of one's needs is usually accompanied by one of these characteristics, each of which by itself leads man into misfortune and wretchedness. Either it makes one

deviate from the straight path of moderation to indulge in the pursuit of one's desires, or makes one so madly in love with riches that wealth becomes for him an idol and object of worship, on whose altar he is ready to sacrifice everything. Of course, this does not mean that one should not try to obtain wealth and provide for the needs of one's life. But it is a fact that a wealth in excess of one's needs does not affect one's felicity in the least.

Nevertheless, such a feeling in a person is not the basic goal of any psychological need, nor does it guarantee his welfare. The cause of most psychological disorders in people is excessive attention to this one-sided urge, which is far removed from the very notion of spiritual need and its real satisfaction.

Obviously, improper goals cannot be expected to yield worthy and satisfactory results. Inner anguish and dissatisfaction is the logical result of choosing unreasonable and inappropriate goals. Thus we come across countless people who are rich but who have no sense of personal honour and dignity due to their being devoid of spiritual values. They remain defenceless, perplexed and forlorn in the midst of roaring waves of the sea of life, and ultimately their life ends in the same state of defencelessness and forlornness when everything comes to an end with them.

Inner dignity is a refreshing feeling that arises from the depths of one's soul and pervades everything. One who has inner dignity will also enjoy society's respect and honour. True, many people have the desire in their hearts to obtain the highest degrees of honour and wish to shine like stars on the horizon of their community and to impress others with their personal glory and fortunes. They wish that their name be on people's lips and their picture in their hearts. However, in order to attain such a goal one must be realistic and base his life on the foundations of true dignity.

A Western thinker says:

Wealth is not money alone. There are many people with apparently meagre means of life, but if we look carefully we would have to count them amongst the richest of men.

Self respect, personal dignity and other human virtues constitute a spiritual asset safe from the hands of any thief. There are many people who possess these qualities but lack material riches and who command the respect of wealthy people. Money can be acquired with toil and perseverance. How about honour and dignity? These are things which money cannot buy.

I don't know why people ignore the truth and attach so much worth to wealth that undaunted by any danger they run after it, eagerly exposing their life to all sorts of perils. They squander their bodily health and lose their peace of mind and spend a significant part of their lives in toil and drudgery in order to become rich. Alas! For heaps of gold are not worth a minute of human life.

People imagine that wealth can bring them happiness and with it they can restore the lost paradise forever to their lives. They do not know that money cannot buy happiness. Poor folk! The more they advance in its search the farther they recede from themselves and ultimately get lost in its labyrinths. They betray their own souls, their feelings and merits. Neither money is necessary for happiness nor wealth. That which is essential consists of things which are neglected by most people, and one does not

see a single one amongst the seekers of happiness who should be in their quest.¹

When Alexander, the famous Macedonian conqueror was appointed the army's chief commander at the time of the Persian campaign, people from all the various classes came to congratulate him. Diogenes, the well-known Greek sage, who lived in Cornith at the time, did not pay him any attention. Alexander wanted to meet him personally and so he went to see him. Diogenes, who was a self-respecting man, a free soul indifferent to worldly glamour and riches—and these were his prominent qualities—was lying in a tub enjoying the warmth of the sun. When he sensed that a crowd of people was approaching him, he rose his head a little and his eyes fell on Alexander who was coming towards him amidst pomp and glory. As he reposed with indifferent equanimity, he did not see any difference between Alexander and others who were coming with him. Alexander greeted him reverently and said to him, "If you have any wish, I assure you that will not be disappointed." Diogenes said to him, "I have only one request. Until a moment ago I was enjoying the sun and you came and stood in the way of sunlight. Please move a little aside."

Alexander's companions considered these words as foolish. They said to themselves, "Truly, this man is a fool who misses such a golden opportunity." However, Alexander, who felt small in front of what he had observed of Diogenes' dignity and resignation, was deeply shaken. As he returned with his companions, who ridiculed the philosopher's conduct, he said to them, "If I weren't Alexander, I would have liked to be Diogenes."²

At all times there are some people who, ruled as their emotions and acts are by an unhealthy spirit, cannot tolerate the noble station of others. Accordingly, in their encounter with great men they try to project themselves as at least their equals if not their superiors. And since they are devoid of the characteristics of greatness, they try with different means to belittle great men and to block the light of their radiance. However, they never succeed in detracting from the worth of outstanding personalities by their subversive efforts. That is because men of honour and dignity belong to all humanity. The distances of space and time disappear in front of them and their memory leaves an indelible impression in human souls and the star of their greatness and honour acquires even greater brilliance with the passage of time.

The sense of person honour can be helpful in moderating and controlling undesirable infatuations and desires. There may be some who might not have sufficient moral competence and may even exhibit deviant tendencies, yet their sense of self-respect and personal honour prevents them perpetrating from immoral and undesirable actions. This innate asset results in saving them from dishonourable actions.

Honour, from the Islamic Viewpoint

Rising above the animal plane to the higher levels is something which is possible for everyone. That is because the desire to attain perfection is innate in human nature, and this inclination is deeply rooted in the human soul. But, it definitely stands in need of guidance and care. However, one does not need to

be forcefully dragged in order to traverse the downward course of degeneration, because one's base inclinations automatically lead one down the steep path of moral decline.

The real development of man occurs when he has released himself from the grip of base animal desires to become acquainted with the expansive horizon of sublime thoughts. Thus the human being can fall to the low level of a beast, while possessing at the same time the capacity to cast away destructive motives before they become potent and to make the angelic ascent towards the higher world.

The harmony created by Islam between inward and outward factors in the sphere of spiritual development led to a conspicuous success, and throughout history there emerged many individuals who attained through perseverance the high station worthy of their humanity.

From the viewpoint of Islam, everyone's worth and station depend on the extent he partakes of the higher values. Otherwise one would not be worthy of being called a 'human being' in its real sense, and there is no criterion of personal honour and nobility except piety and God-fearing, other outward advantages being insignificant in this respect.

Imam 'Ali, may peace be upon him, said:

There is no honour greater than personal piety.

And the revered Prophet of Islam, may God bless him and his Household, declared:

*Whoever desires to be the most honourable of men, let him be wary of God, the Almighty and the Glorious.*³

From the first moment that the light of God-wariness shines into the heart of a human being possessing faith, he becomes conscious of its worth and significance. It is by virtue of this awareness and his far-reaching vision that he does not seek honour and merit in power and possessions, race and descent. Rather, he evaluates his own personal worth with the criterion of faith and conviction—a power that is truly and definitely effective in this world—and the merits that he has cultivated within. He feels himself to be superior to persons who are devoid of God-fearing and refrains from any kind of humiliating humility. That is because humility and modesty are proper only before God, Who created all the existents and the world of being with His Will, and human beings are His real servants. Basically, humility in front of the unequalled Creator of the world is itself the greatest source of human honour and dignity. The superiority and precedence attained by the pious human being through his relation with the real Source of the world inalienably accompanies him in all phases and situations of life. The light of piety and the purity of soul is so luminous and attractive that others also sense that there is something firm and enduring embedded within the spirit of such a person, which is not hollow or capable of being vanquished by a simple collision. The vital force that lies within a pious person keeps him aware of the realities of life and he never gets swallowed up by the deep and shoreless sea of mundane things for the sake of enjoying life. That is because his intellect and soul are infused with the truths of Islam and he views everything in the

perspective of an Islamic world view. False values are never equated with real values in his realistic evaluation, and it is not possible for base motives to capture his mind and perceptive faculties and to invade his undefeatable spirit.

He courageously resists temptations and illusory desires, for he has understood that no matter how important and precious some things should appear to be, they are insignificant and worthless before God's greatness and majesty and his own higher feelings. With all their abundance they are after all transitory and passing. The Qur'an says:

***That is, 'Do not view with eager eyes the insignificant things that a certain group or community may have been given to enjoy by Us, for the sake of a test, as a manifestation of the transitory life of the world, for your sustenance and provision, which is with your Lord, is much superior and enduring.'* (20: 131)**

Islam attaches so much value to the affairs of the faithful that their station of honour is mentioned along with the majesty of God and His Messenger:

Yet honour belongs unto God, and unto His Messenger and the believers . (63:8)

Refraining from Humiliation

There are many traditions from the honoured sages of Islam about personal honour and its ethical and social value, and they themselves have practically given this great lesson to the people. Husayn ibn 'Ali, the Leader of free men, may peace be upon him, was once asked as to wherein one's honour lay. He said that it lay in the absence of reliance on others:

The Noble Messenger, may God bless him and his Household, points out the same fact in this statement:

*The absence of need does not lie in the abundance of wealth but it lies in inner plenitude.*⁴

A writer says:

Imagine for a moment the richest of men lying in his sick bed and picture his condition in your mind. Wait until his fever rises to a feverish degree burning his body all over. Then cover his bed sheet with a thousand fistfuls of gold and silver and put him in a bed draped in soft silk. If this treasure and adornment can ameliorate his helpless and desperate condition, then you can claim that riches are effective in bringing one happiness. If wealth cannot effect physical well-being, how is it possible for it to rescue the soul from suffering and grief and bring it joy and happiness?⁵

Dr. Marden writes:

If the edifice of our happiness were to be built on material means, it would soon fall and turn into a ruin.

That is because the material world is transitory and subject to change, and all its means are fleeting like flashes of lightning, unenduring like vapour and unstable like fire. It is evident how much one can depend on such fleeting and passing means.

One who seeks joy and comfort through material means is like one who goes to sleep on an iceberg in a tempestuous sea, heedless of the world around him. Soon the iceberg melts and the poor man slips into the arms of its angry waves.

Wealth is a means to remove need, not the asset of felicity. That which makes us happy is the soul's comfort, and here material means have no role. Do not imagine that I wish to underrate the importance of wealth, for it can be an aid to achieving inner comfort if accompanied by wisdom and moderation. It is certain that excess in the pursuit of material means leads to a spiritual imbalance. Soon our souls are invaded by envy, hostility, and violence which are an essential part of a materialistic attitude. We need moderation in order to be happy and to be constantly watchful of ourselves so as not to deviate towards either extremes on the path of life.

We have read in religious stories that in the other world the sinners will pass over a path 'which is hotter than fire, sharper than a sword's edge, and thinner than a hair.' Such is the path of life, as it is finer than a hair and a moment of neglect makes us deviate from it. It is sharper than a sword's edge and we are done with if we are not careful. It consumes like fire and a moment of carelessness is enough to make its sparks set the harvest of our being afire.

If you wish to be happy, do not be unruly and avaricious like fire. Happiness does not harmonise with greed and avarice. The greedy nature is like a disturbed sea and wretched is the man who pins his hopes of peace and tranquillity on a storm.⁶

One of the most important duties of every Muslim interested in his own welfare and desirous of liberating himself from inner bondages is to abstain from every indignity and humiliation. The leaders of Islam have always exhorted people to refrain from pursuing mean goals which do not accord with the real dignity of a Muslim. The Eleventh Imam, may peace be upon him, said:

*How ugly it is for a person of faith to cherish something that would lead him into humiliation!*⁷

One must not pay excessive attention to things of little value in life, becoming so infatuated with them as if there were nothing to be desired beyond them. Such a condition leads to mental degeneration, also subjecting one's emotional being to the degrading influence of insignificant matters which never arise for a moment above their low and limited terrestrial level, and moreover erode the significance of one's humanity. Imam 'Ali, may peace be upon whom, said:

*Hold your own personal worth high by indifference to lowly things and base goals.*⁸

Some people are so possessed with the passion for mundane pursuits that they severely compromise their personal honour and dignity in order to achieve materialistic ends and submit to every humiliation and disgrace. In their pursuit of mundane profit, they approach everyone with whom they come into contact with a feeling of inner need. They adopt peculiar tactics in life and social intercourse and go to

extremes in implementing their plans. They become used to being obsequious and saying things which do not have any meaning beyond expressing personal humiliation and abasement. Such an approach in life reflects the corruption and abasement that have settled on their inner spirit and have run deep roots therein. Imam 'Ali, may peace be upon him, said:

*An hour of humiliation is not effaced by ages of honour.*⁹

Emerson says:

Experienced men of the world know very well that it is best to pay scot and lot as they go along, and that a man often pays dear for a small frugality. The borrower runs in his own debt. Has a man gained anything who has received a hundred favours and rendered none? Has he gained by borrowing, through indolence or cunning, his neighbour's wares, or horses, or money? There arises on the deed the instant acknowledgement of benefit on the one part and of debt on the other; this is, of superiority and inferiority. The transaction remains in the memory of himself and of his neighbour; and every new transaction alters according to its nature their relation to each other. He may soon come to see that he had better have broken his own bones than to have ridden in his neighbour's coach, and that "the highest price he can pay for a thing is to ask for it."¹⁰

The Spirit of Self-Reliance

Self-reliance and high-mindedness are qualities of those who have truly perceived their human worth. If a Muslim inspired by the invaluable teachings of Islam faces a financial crisis, he would continue to endure this unhappy, and occasionally paralysing, condition, but he would never yield to humiliation and abjectness.

Although Islam lays abundant emphasis on effort and activity for earning a legitimate income so that one lives with a head held high, at the same time it warns people from aggravated greed which leads to the slavery of wealth. That is because the bondage of wealth and riches is as much a source of self-abasement and erosion of one's human dignity as dependence and reliance on others.

Imam 'Ali, the Commander of the Faithful, may peace be upon him, makes the following remark concerning the humiliation that results in both the cases.

*Dependence on others and appealing for help impairs the speaker's tongue and vitiates the mind of the courageous and the heroic, and degrades a free human being to the level of an abject slave, besides tarnishing one's dignity and spoiling one's livelihood.*¹¹

*How often richness is more degrading than deprivation!*¹²

*How often there are poor people who are actually rich, and how often there are rich people who are in fact impoverished and wretched.*¹³

The Noble Qur'an describes the people who are without means but dignified in these words:

The ignorant (who are misled by their dignified appearance) suppose them rich because of their abstinence (from asking others for help), but thou shalt know them from their faces; they do not beg of men importunately. (2:273)

Imam Sajjad, may peace be upon him, said:

I would not exchange my self-respect for the most precious thing in the world. 14

Islam considers the expression of gratitude and appreciation as a desirable and outstanding virtue, but it does not permit that one should resort to flattery in the garb of appreciation of others. No Muslim has a right to contaminate himself with a flattery contrary to the dignity and freedom of his self.

The basic condition for expressing gratitude is the spiritual independence and inner satisfaction of one who expresses gratitude and fulfils his human duty when required to do so. However, some people who suffer from moral inadequacy and inner weakness try to conceal their inner abjectness and self-contempt with humiliating and obsequious expressions of admiration. Without doubt, such a condition, which is a reaction prompted by spiritual weakness and is an evidence of inner degradation, does not possess any kind of ethical or educative value.

Imam 'Ali, the Commander of the Faithful, may peace be upon him, makes it explicit in one of his aphorisms that an appreciation mixed with flattery has two harmful and undesirable results; on the one hand it tarnishes the self-respect of the flattering person and on the other causes the other person to be afflicted with the vice of pride:

Excessive praise amounts to flattery, which, on the one hand, causes pride and haughtiness in the addressee and deprives the flatterer of his personal honour on the other. 15

Persons of a noble temperament do not lose themselves regardless of the status and fame they might attain, while persons wanting in self-respect are swept off their feet at the smallest success in attaining status and position.

Imam 'Ali, may peace be upon him, makes this point in an interesting manner:

An honourable person does not act like an insolent ingratiate no matter how high the position he may attain to, being like a mountain that remains unmoved by the gales. But a base person rises to insolence and ungratefulness on attaining the meanest position, like a plant that is shaken to its roots by the softest draft of wind. 16

Foresight

Everyone must weigh the consequences before deciding to do something and he must always take his own self-respect and personal honour into consideration. Those whose intellects are extinguished and whose spirits are dark submit to every kind of ignominy and slavery for the sake of the meanest of goals and they do not refrain from anything in order to attain their petty goals. But are such goals worthy of an honourable human being?

Once a man requested the Noble Messenger, may God bless him and his Household, to give him counsel. The Prophet accepted his request but asked him, `Do you promise to be careful to act according to my advice?' "Yes, I promise," he replied. Thrice the Prophet put this question to him, and after taking his pledge and drawing his full attention to the importance of the matter, he told him: `Whenever you decide to do something, think about its consequences and reflect over the matter. If its consequences appear to be good and proper, pursue it until you get results. But if the consequences appear to be devious and destructive, refrain from carrying out your decision and from performing that act.'" A European scholar writes

One should carefully examine the pros and cons of an action before it is carried out, to see whether the desired goal is worth the effort and sacrifice. Views and opinions differ in this regard, and everyone considers one's goals as better and superior to those of others, and as Marcus says, "The spider is as happy to catch a fly as a hunter to capture a deer in the desert."

Accordingly, everyone has his own goals. Fame should be accompanied by honour, otherwise by itself it is of no use. In bygone days there were some persons who were as famous for being scoundrels as much as the sun is known for its light and the fire for its heat. But what did they get out of this fame except curses and denunciation?¹⁷

The great men who spent their lives in propagating justice and human merit and for the advancement of civilisation are immortal, and time cannot diminish their greatness. This kind of persons transcend space and time by virtue of their brilliant deeds. In all ages and eras their name is on the tongues of men and their memory is inscribed in their hearts and the repute of their greatness reaches new heights every day.

History has nothing to do with the bodies of famous men, but it preserves their spirit in the amber of their beneficial deeds. Men of deeds have a will, sublime like the mountain peaks and a spirit as great as the ocean. Their determination overtakes everything in its stride and their spirit encompasses everything. They do not know despair and give no significance to defeat and, aside from all this, they have a perspicacity of mind. They recognise opportunities when they arise and know how to use them, for opportunity is like a wild deer which does not return once it is lost.¹⁸

True Freedom

The human being is the highest and the most developed of creatures on the surface of the earth. With positive power, effort, and will the human being can grow in all its various dimensions. But if a person concentrates all his energy and effort on the pursuit of base goals and devotes all his power to such matters, how can he realise his true human potential?

The selection of improper goals and their pursuit gradually depletes one's stores of energy, not leaving any sufficient power for the heavenward journey. In that case, the soul begins to stall and incline towards degeneration. Gradually its faculties of consciousness and awareness reach such a low point that it resists any obstacle in the way of its worthless goals and insists on pursuing its self-destructive course.

The developed self which has attained to a degree of humanity possess a characteristic freedom. One who possesses true freedom neither debases himself nor tarnishes his human dignity. He feels life to possess higher goals which are more worthy of being realised than anything else. Desires cannot dominate such a person's will and drive him in any direction they want. Rather, he is in control of his desires and, at the same time, his vital and vivid capacities correctly fulfil their original duties in all the spheres of life.

The worthy human being has a pure soul, a great will, and a sublime goal. The position and station of every individual should be assessed by this criterion: the greater his will, the higher would be the degree of his human personality.

Imam 'Ali, the Commander of the Faithful, may peace be upon him, said:

*A person's worth is proportional to his determination*¹⁹

*The proper thing for someone who has discovered his human dignity is to keep himself at bay from life's abasements and contaminations.*²⁰

Aligning Goals with Capacities

While choosing one's goals, one should keep in view one's power, potential, and capacities and refrain from being unreasonably ambitious, for that would lead to failure and disappointment.

Imam 'Ali, the Master of the Pious, may peace be upon him, makes this interesting remark:

*Whoever asks for something beyond his limits deserves disappointment.*²¹

*Whoever demands something he does not deserve will face Disappointment.*²²

Psychologists describe ambitious goals that are not consonant with a person's capabilities as one of the causes of failure:

The causes of failure lie either within the person himself or in the environment or both. The internal conditions of failure relate to mental and physical ability and health. The other internal conditions consist of personal goals and ambitions. Individuals differ in their capacity to face obstacles. Many people cannot succeed in overcoming their problems due to inadequate capacity. The causes of failure lie within the person himself when he expects more in order to fulfil his needs than he has the capacity to procure. For instance, Ahmad is a healthy young man and an athlete. He takes part in most of the sports at his college and is someone who can make many friends and enjoy their company. However, he is always sad and depressed. Ahmad thinks that people do not appreciate him as much they as should, that he did not get the medals that were received by others, that the newspapers do not print his pictures on the first pages, and things of this kind.

Ahmad's expectations are more than what his abilities would permit. His problem is a product of his own thinking, and it is something commonly observed in individuals, especially young people. If we observe carefully, we would see that many people are not satisfied with their work and their expectations are greater than their abilities would warrant.

Those who have too many expectations from the world are never at peace or happy. If their personal capacities were enough to fulfil their expectations, these expectations would definitely be realised. But the main problem is that expectations often exceed capacity. We have been taught that one can achieve whatever one wants, but we have not been told that this is true when one has the necessary capacity and power. Of course, effort is necessary at all times. Defeat must not stop one from making effort, and everybody must struggle to reach his goal. But goals must be chosen in accordance with one's capacities.²³

Humiliation and Sin

Of the things that severely affect one's sense of personal dignity is vice and commission of sin. One who violates laws and perpetrates actions that are contrary to human honour and merit, will be haunted with a feeling of abjectness and degradation. The sense of shame and guilt continually haunts the sinner as a result of his sinful deeds severely affecting his sense of self-respect and personal dignity. Those who are masters of their desires and in control of their urges restrain themselves from falling into error and corruption and do not approach sin. They have a characteristic sense of personal dignity and mental peace. But such people are a minority in every society, while the majority of people get more or less contaminated with vice in the course of life, and sin casts of its dark shadow on the tablet of their heart.

However, in the same way that physical diseases are capable of treatment, the human spirit and soul is also curable when affected by inner disease. Islam has shown the way of treating this kind of maladies, opening the way of return to health, virtue, and felicity through the means of repentance, and giving the good news of Divine mercy to the penitent.

The Divine emissaries, whose lives were totally free from the traces of sin, have always inspired in the sinners hopes of the Creator's mercy and pardon in order to deliver them from degeneration and

wretchedness and to save them. Through penitence before God and repentance for sins they sought to rescue the sinners from the dangerous spiritual repercussions of inner anguish. Thus by refraining from vices and trying to compensate for their past errors they can efface the remarks of transgression to the extent possible. As a result of it they are freed from self-blame and the anguish of a guilty conscience. That is because the continual feeling of sinfulness is extremely painful and debilitating, and despair from purging of the soul of sin and loss of hope in Divine forgiveness bring irremediable harms as well as many dangers for the victim of vice and the society in which he lives. A human being who values his own personal dignity and felicity should immediately implore God's pardon as soon he falls into sin as a result of carnal urges and feels the burden of sin on his shoulders and the guilt of violating the Lord's commands. By attending to the great station of God, he should ask for pardon and forgiveness. The Qur'an considers this characteristic as a merit of the God-wary:

[The believers are those] who, when they commit an indecency or wrong themselves, remember God, and pray for forgiveness for their sins and who forgives sins but God? and do not knowingly persevere in the things they did. (3:135)

But one who becomes addicted to sin due to its repetition and is enveloped in the darkness of sinfulness does not feel that he is doing something evil or have any scruples. He continues to advance on the filthy path until the moment that the agony of death seizes him. He is neglectful of the great station of his Lord as well as forgetful of his own state. He is devoid of this virtue of the God-wary, and his repentance (at the encounter with death) is not accepted.

Imam 'Ali, the Commander of the Faithful, may peace be upon him, considers refraining from contamination with sins as one of the factors that lead to the attainment of personal honour and dignity:

*One who believes in his personal dignity and honour does not debase himself with sin and vice.*²⁴

*If you desire to attain honour, seek it through obedience (to God).*²⁵

The confession of guilt and the imploring of pardon and forgiveness from God removes the dark stains of sin from one's dignity and recovers one's lost tranquillity of the soul.

Imam Baqir, may peace be upon him, said:

*By God, none is relieved of sin except one who confesses his guilt.*²⁶

Confession of guilt and compensating for past misconduct are also considered among the most essential means of relief from the painful pangs of guilt by psychologists, one of whom says:

When someone commits a wrong, he has a feeling of guilt. In such cases, a mild form of anxiety takes hold of us. Such a feeling is quite proper and appropriate, because it produces a feeling of shame in regard to the mistake that we have committed and restrains us from committing it again in the future. When someone feels guilty, it is better to consult an elderly and experienced person who is wise and

objective. One should do that in order to get rid of this feeling, which is painful in many cases, and also to know to what extent the feeling of guilt is justified. By this method one would have relieved oneself of one's anxiety as well as sought advice and guidance.

Many people conceal their sense of guilt and in this way torture themselves, a punishment dealt out by the subconscious. That is why such a person is always in a state of agitation. But the right way is not that the subconscious be prompted to deal out its punishment. The correct way is to confess one's mistake and find the way to compensate for it.²⁷

It is here that repentance and confession of sin before God bring back one's lost peace, making one stronger to compensate for the past errors and to acquire spiritual merit and edification.

A Big Fault

One of the big moral faults is to constantly complain concerning the conditions of life and to discuss the problems and hardships of one's life with people. In this way one detracts from one's personal worth, belittling oneself and compromising one's dignity.

Mufaddal ibn Qays, one of the disciples of Imam Sadiq, may peace be upon him, was once in trouble due to financial problems and his failure to pay back his debts. One day, he went to see the Imam and began complaining about the conditions of his own life. He described his problem in these words: "I am in debt, and I do not know how to repay it. I have no income to meet my daily expenses. I am perplexed, reeling under the pressure of financial problems. To whatever door I turn, I find it closed upon me." Then he requested the Imam to pray for him so that God Almighty may solve his difficulty.

Imam Sadiq, may peace be upon him, called his servant and said to him, "Bring that bag of gold that was sent by Mansur." The bag was immediately brought. Then the Imam said to Mufaddal, "There are four hundred golden dinars in this bag. Use them to meet your expenses." Mufaddal said, "I did not mention my problems for this. I only wanted you to pray for me." The Imam replied, "Very well, I will also pray for you. But remember, do not discuss your personal problems and difficulties with people, for the very first effect it will have is to make it appear as if you have faced a defeat in life and have been knocked down. Obviously that will belittle you in people's eyes and harm your personal worth and dignity."²⁸

Imam 'Ali, may peace be upon him, said:

*To disclose ones personal problems and difficulties for others is actually to expose oneself willingly to indignity.*²⁹

Gillett Berghes writes:

Why do many people deliberately expose their failures and inadequacies and discuss them, while it is better to keep silent about them? They do so for several reasons, perhaps all of which are wrong and off

the mark. Some people imagine that they would receive other people's applause and admiration and start complaining as a prelude. For some others, it is the result of their self-pity which has taken the form of a chronic illness with them. To say, 'I am at a loss! I don't know how to make ends meet until the end of the month,' indicates an inferiority complex.

Apart from the fact that refraining from discussing one's inadequacies and troubles has certain benefits, the very act of self-restraint is effective in improving your moral character. In the same way that a closed boiling vessel produces high pressure steam, self-restraint also strengthens one and raises the degree of one's self-respect. A man who takes his defeat with a smile, a boy who suffers from a physical difficulty but who does not complain about it or fret over it—these face hardship with a stronger spirit and morale than those who have no control over their tongues and complain continually. Fortitude and self-reliance also enhances their personal worth, wisdom, and influence.³⁰

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 20. *Ibid.*, p. 860.
 21. *Ibid.*, p. 665.
 22. *Ibid.*, p. 662.
 23. Marguerite Malm & Herbert Sorenson, *Psychology of Living*, Persian trans. by Mahdi Jalali, *Rawanshendsl baraye zistan* (Tehran: Amir Kabir Publications 1348 H. Sh.), pp. 337–339
 24. Al-Amidi, *Ghurar al-hikam*, p. 677.
 25. *Ibid.*, p. 314.
 26. Al-Kulayni, *al-Kafi*, vol. 2, p. 426.
 27. Marguerite Malm & Herbert Sorenson op. cit pp. 310–311.

28. Al-Majlisi, Bihar al-anwar, vol. 11, p. 114.

29. Al-Amidi, Ghurar al-hikam, p. 422.

30. From Kelidha-ye khushbakhti, trans. from English by Ahmad Aram (Tehran- Shirkat-e Sahami-ye Intishar, 1347 H Sh.), pp. 101-102.

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