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Question 40: Kiramah (Magnanimity): Stations and Meanings

Question: What is magnanimity (kiramah)? How can we become magnanimous? In Allah's (awj) view, what stations do the magnanimous hold?

Magnanimity means to be far away from lowliness. The soul of he who is pure from every low attribute is called magnanimous. Magnanimity is opposed to lowliness. To reach the highest peak of magnanimity, one must be equipped with piety, which is staying away from anything that leads to sin.

As the Commander of the Faithful, Imam 'Ali b. Abi Talib (ع) has said, "He who is pious will achieve what he desires and Allah will make him to dwell in the house of magnanimity; the house that is Allah's alone. Its ceiling is the Throne of The Lord; its brightness comes from Divine Beauty; angels and the friends and companions of prophets frequent this house."

Brief Answer

Detailed Answer

Magnanimity means to be far away from lowliness. The soul of he who is pure from every low attribute is called magnanimous. Lowliness stands in opposition to magnanimity.

Magnanimity from the Infallibles' Viewpoint

According to a saying of the Noble Prophet (ص), "The Almighty Allah is magnanimous and he likes magnanimity."¹

As Imam 'Ali b. Abi Talib (ع) has said:

1. "He who gives before he is asked to is magnanimous."²

2. "The troubling times do not have an effect on the magnanimous person's soul."³
3. "The magnanimous person is he who stays away from what is forbidden of him and is free from all faults."⁴
4. "The magnanimous person is disgusted with every thing that the low person takes pride in."⁵
5. "The magnanimous person is he who uses his wealth to protect his honour but the low person protects his wealth with his honour."⁶
6. "The person who fathoms the magnanimity and grandeur of the human spirit comes to see the entire world and all that is in it as being of little worth and consequence."⁷

The opposition between magnanimity and lowliness has been clearly demonstrated by traditions of the noble Imams (ع). Magnanimity is an ethical value. It is one of the names of Allah (awj). In contrast, everything that distances man from Allah (awj) has its roots in lowliness. As the Noble prophet (ص) has said, "The love of the world is the root of every sin and the start of every transgression."⁸ The world has been named dunya because it is lesser than everything.⁹

When we pay attention to the fact that lowliness is in opposition to magnanimity and because the words dani, dina'at, and dunya are etymologically from the same root (d-n-y, "to be low"), we cannot seek magnanimity in the love of the world. This is because, as Imam 'Ali b. Abi Talib (ع) has said, "The world makes man abased,"¹⁰ and magnanimity stands in opposition to abasement.

In order to reach the peaks of magnanimity we must arm ourselves with the weapons of piety and stay away from every kind of worldliness. As the Commander of the Faithful, Imam 'Ali b. Abi Talib (ع) has said, "Magnanimity cannot come into existence without piety."¹¹

Allah (awj) says, "The most honourable amongst you with Allah is the most pious."¹²

Imam 'Ali b. Abi Talib (ع) says, "Honour is piety."¹³ He has also stated, "Piety means to stay away from everything that causes one to sin."¹⁴

He has also said, "Certainly fear of Allah is the medicine for your hearts; sight for the blindness of your spirits; the cure for the ailments of your bodies; the rectifier of the evils of your breasts; the purifier of the pollution of your minds; the light of the darkness of your eyes; the consolation for the fear of your hearts and the brightness for the gloom of your ignorance. Therefore, make obedience to Allah the way of your life and not only your outside covering.

Make it your inner habit instead of only an outer routine, subtle enough to enter your ribs through your heart; the guide for all your affairs; the watering place (on the Day of Judgment); the intercessor for the achievement of our aims; asylum for the day of your fears; the lamp of the interior of your graves; the company of your loneliness and deliverance from the troubles of your abodes.

Certainly, obedience to Allah is a protection against encircling calamities, expected dangers and the flames of burning fires. Therefore, whoever has fear of Allah, troubles remain away from him after having been near, affairs become sweet after their bitterness, waves (of trouble) recede from him after having crowded over him, difficulties become easy for him after occurring, generosity rains fast over him after there had been famine, mercy bends over him after it had been loath, the favours of Allah spring forth on him after they been dried and blessings descend over him in showers after being scarce.”¹⁵

The Noble Qur`an introduces man’s spirit as a noble being. If man becomes noble, he has transcended his natural being and found his original kernel. Because obedience to Allah (awj) is in accordance with the kernel of man, disobedience and sin are secondary to him. Honour however is not like this, because it is in the nature of man. Allah (awj) says,

“We honoured man.”¹⁶

If man was created just from dust, honour and magnanimity would not be essential to him. Man however has both a principal and a secondary nature. His secondary nature returns to dust and his essence is related to Allah.

In the Noble Qur`an, Allah (awj) attributes the spirit to himself and the body to the earth.¹⁷ He doesn’t say I created man from dust and an immaterial spirit. Rather He says, I created man from dust then blew of My Spirit into him. Because man’s spirit pertains to the Allah the all-Noble and the all-Honourable, it therefore has a portion of honour. Thus the Spirit of Allah (awj) is no different from the spirit of nobility.

As Imam ‘Ali b. Abi Talib (ع) has said, “Allah has enjoined you to piety. He made it the extent of His happiness and His wish from His servants. Therefore, fear Allah in whose presence you stand and in whose hand is your will, and who sees all your actions and movements. If you hide something, He knows it, and if you show it He will record it. He uses honourable angels to record your actions. Neither do they forget to record what deserves to be written nor do they record what does not exist. You should remember that he who takes up piety, frees himself from mischief, flees darkness by means of the light of guidance, Allah places him in the way station of honour, the house that is reserved for Allah. Its roof is the throne of Allah. Its light is the illumination of Allah’s Greatness. Its pilgrims and friends are the angels and its inhabitants are the Divine Prophets.”¹⁸

1. Muntakhab Mizan al-Hikmah, no. 5493:

عَنْ رَسُولِ اللَّهِ (ص): إِنَّ اللَّهَ كَرِيمٌ يُحِبُّ الْكَرَمَ.

2. Ghurar al-Hikam, no. 1389:

عَنِ الْإِمَامِ عَلِيِّ (ع): أَلْكَرِيمُ مَنْ سَبَقَ نَوَالُهُ سُؤَالَهُ.

3. Ibid., no. 1555:

أَلْنَفْسُ الْكَرِيمَةُ لَا تُؤَثِّرُ فِيهِ النَّكَبَاتُ.

4. Ibid., no. 1565:

أَلْكَرِيمُ مَنْ تَجَنَّبَ الْمَحَارِمَ وَتَنَزَّهَ عَنِ الْعُيُوبِ.

5. Ibid. no. 1771:

أَلْكَرِيمُ يَزْدَجِرُ عَمَا يَفْتَخِرُ بِهِ اللَّئِيمُ

6. Ibid. no 2159:

أَلْكَرِيمُ مِنْ صَانَ عَرْضَهُ بِمَالِهِ، وَ اللَّئِيمُ مِنْ صَانَ مَالَهُ بِعَرْضِهِ

7. Ibid. no. 9130:

مَنْ كَرَمَتْ نَفْسُهُ صَغُرَتْ الدُّنْيَا فِي عَيْنِهِ

8. Ibid., no. 2194:

حُبُّ الدُّنْيَا أَصْلُ كُلِّ مَعْصِيَةٍ وَ أَوَّلُ كُلِّ ذَنْبٍ

9. Ibid., no. 2121:

...إِنَّمَا سُمِّيَتْ الدُّنْيَا دُنْيَا لِأَنَّهَا أَدْنَى مِنْ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ

10. Ibid., no. 2192:

الدُّنْيَا تَذُلُّ

11. Nahjul Balaghah, short saying no. 113:

لَا كَرَمَ كَالْتَّقْوَى

12. Surat al-Hujurat (49), Verse 13:

﴿ إِنَّ أَكْرَمَكُمْ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ أَتْقَاكُمْ. إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلِيمٌ خَبِيرٌ ﴾

Ghurur al-Hikam, no. 6664:

لَا عَزَّ كَالطَّاعَةِ

14. Ibid., no. 6683:

التَّقْوَى أَنْ يَتَّقِيَ الْمَرْءُ كَلِمًا يُؤْتِمُّهُ

15. Nahjul Balaghah, Sermon 192:

فَإِنَّ تَقْوَى اللَّهِ دَوَاءٌ دَاءِ قُلُوبِكُمْ وَ بَصَرُ عَمَى أَفْئِدَتِكُمْ وَ شِفَاءُ مَرَضِ أَجْسَادِكُمْ وَ صَلَاحُ فَسَادِ صُدُورِكُمْ وَ طَهُورُ دَنَسِ أَنْفُسِكُمْ وَ جِلَاءُ عَشَا أَبْصَارِكُمْ وَ...
أَمَّنْ فَرَعَ جَاشِكُمْ وَ ضِيَاءُ سَوَادِ ظَلَمِكُمْ فَاجْعَلُوا طَاعَةَ اللَّهِ شِعَاراً دُونَ دِنَارِكُمْ وَ دَخِيلَا دُونَ شِعَارِكُمْ وَ لَطِيفَا بَيْنَ أَصْلَاعِكُمْ وَ أَمِيرَا فَوْقَ أُمُورِكُمْ وَ مَنَهَلَا
لِحِينِ وُرُودِكُمْ وَ شَفِيعَا لِدَرَكِ طَلِبَتِكُمْ وَ جَنَّةَ لِيَوْمِ فَرَعِكُمْ وَ مَصَابِيحَ لِبُطُونِ قُبُورِكُمْ وَ سَكَنَا لِطُولِ وَحْشَتِكُمْ وَ نَفْسَا لِكَرْبِ مَوَاطِنِكُمْ فَإِنَّ طَاعَةَ اللَّهِ حِرْزٌ مِنْ
مَتَالِفِ مُكْتَنَفَةٍ وَ مَخَافِ مَتَوَقَّعَةٍ وَ أَوَارِ نِيرَانِ مُوقَدَةٍ فَمَنْ أَخَذَ بِالتَّقْوَى عَزَبَتْ عَنْهُ الشَّدَائِدُ بَعْدَ دُنُوبِهَا وَ احْلَوْلَتْ لَهُ الْأُمُورُ بَعْدَ مَرَارَتِهَا وَ انْفَرَجَتْ عَنْهُ
الْأُمُوجُ بَعْدَ تَرَاقُمِهَا وَ أَسْهَلَتْ لَهُ الصِّعَابَ بَعْدَ إِنْصَابِهَا وَ هَطَلَتْ عَلَيْهِ الْكَرَامَةُ بَعْدَ قُحُوطِهَا. وَ تَحَدَّثَتْ عَلَيْهِ الرَّحْمَةُ بَعْدَ نُفُورِهَا وَ تَفَجَّرَتْ عَلَيْهِ النِّعَمُ بَعْدَ
...نُضُوبِهَا وَ وَبَلَتْ عَلَيْهِ الْبَرَكَاتُ بَعْدَ إِزْدَانِهَا

16. Surat al-Isra` (17), Verse 70:

﴿ ...وَلَقَدْ كَرَّمْنَا بَنِي آدَمَ ﴾

17. Surat Sad (38), Verses 71–72:

﴿ ...إِذْ قَالَ رَبُّكَ لِلْمَلَائِكَةِ إِنِّي خَالِقٌ بَشَرًا مِنْ طِينٍ. فَإِذَا سَوَّيْتُهُ وَنَفَخْتُ فِيهِ مِنْ رُوحِي ﴾

18. Nahjul Balaghah, sermon 183:

وَ أَوْصَاكُمْ بِالتَّقْوَى وَ جَعَلَهَا مِنْتَهَى رِضَاهُ وَ حَاجَتَهُ مِنْ خَلْقِهِ فَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ الَّذِي أَنْتُمْ بَعِينُهُ وَ نَوَاصِيكُمْ بِيَدِهِ وَ تَقَلُّبِكُمْ فِي قَبْضَتِهِ إِنْ أَسْرَرْتُمْ عِلْمَهُ وَ إِنْ...
أَعْلَنْتُمْ كَتَبَهُ قَدْ وَكَّلَ بِذَلِكَ حَفْظَةَ كِرَامَا لَا يُسْقُطُونَ حَقًّا وَ لَا يُثْبِتُونَ بَاطِلًا وَ أَعْلَمُوا أَنَّهُ مَنْ يَتَّقِ اللَّهَ يَجْعَلْ لَهُ مَخْرَجًا مِنَ الْفِتَنِ وَ نُورًا مِنَ الظُّلْمِ وَ يُخَلِّدَهُ فِيمَا
...اشْتَهَتْ نَفْسُهُ وَ يُنْزِلُهُ مِنْزِلَ الْكَرَامَةِ عِنْدَهُ فِي دَارِ اصْطِنَاعِهَا لِنَفْسِهِ ظِلُّهَا عَرْشُهُ وَ نُورُهَا بَهْجَتُهُ وَ زُورُهَا مَلَائِكَتُهُ وَ رُفْقَاؤُهَا رُسُلُهُ

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