

Volume
ONE

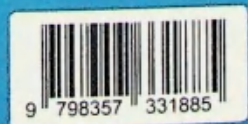
A Commentary on Imam Ali's (as)
Best Sermon on Ethics in Nahj al-Balaghah

A Shower of Goodness

Ali Reza Panahian



People usually get tired of hearing "advice" very quickly. Some people even escape from hearing advice. However, "describing" something does not have the same effect on them, especially when it is describing goodness. Perhaps there is nothing that is able to bring enthusiasm, give enough motivation and increase resolve in people for them to move and do good deeds in the same way that describing goodness is able to do. The Commander of the Faithful (as) has given an artistic description of pious people in the best, most famous sermon on ethics in Najj al-Balaghah, the "Muttaqin (Pious) Sermon." No advice is given in this sermon. It is entirely a description of the virtues and beauties of pious people from the beginning to the end.



**IN
THE
NAME
OF GOD**



© 2022 Bayan Manavi Institute

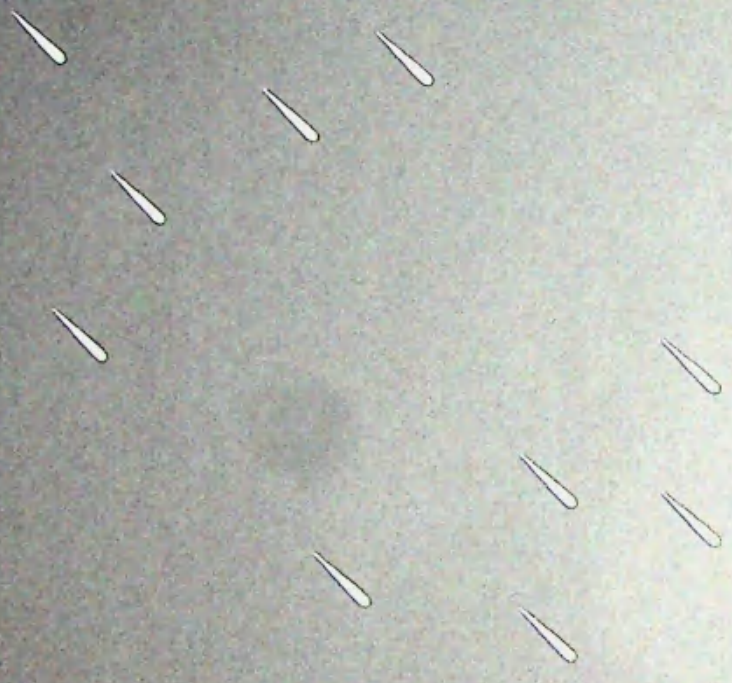
All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form or by any means without prior written permission from the publisher.

A Commentary on Imam Ali's (as)
Best Sermon on Ethics in Nahj al-Balaghah (Volume 1)

A Shower of Goodness

Ali Reza Panahian

Translator: Hoda Shirvani
Editor: Gail O. Babst



**A Shower of Goodness:
A Commentary on Imam Ali's (as) Best Sermon
on Ethics in Nahj al-Balaghah (Volume 1)**

Author: Ali Reza Panahian

Researched and Edited by:

The Asr Bayan Manavi Institute

Translator: Hoda Shirvani

Editor: Gail D. Babst

Published by: Bayan Manavi, Tehran, Iran

Publishing date: December 2022

Website: Panahian.net

Email: salam@panahian.ir

ISBN: 9798357331885

Contents

A NOTE FROM THE PUBLISHER	7
THE BEST SERMON ON ETHICS IN NAHJ AL-BALĀGHAH	9
CHAPTER 1	
BECOMING FAMILIAR WITH THE “HAMMĀM SERMON”	11
CHAPTER 2	
HAMMĀM’S QUESTION	29
CHAPTER 3	
PIETY: SOMETHING NEEDED BY ALL HUMAN BEINGS	55
CHAPTER 4	
THE BEAUTY OF PIETY	69
CHAPTER 5	
BEING PROPER	81

CHAPTER 6

**OUTPUT IS MORE IMPORTANT
THAN INPUT** 89**CHAPTER 7**

WEARING GOOD CLOTHES 111**CHAPTER 8**

HUMBLENESS 125**CHAPTER 9**

CONTROLLING OUR EYES 137**CHAPTER 10**

ONLY USEFUL KNOWLEDGE 157

A Note from the Publisher

People usually get tired of hearing “advice” very quickly. Some people even escape from hearing advice. However, “describing” something does not have the same effect on them, especially when it is describing goodness. Perhaps there is nothing that is able to bring enthusiasm, give enough motivation and increase resolve in people for them to move and act in the same way that describing goodness is able to do. Basically, the method of “describing,” which is used instead of “advising,” is a unique, very effective method that strongly attracts people to become interested in the truth. Ayatollah Bahjat (ra) said, “Referring to the biographies of scholars from the past is like referring to reliable books on ethics.”¹ The reason for this is that these books describe the lives of good people. The Leader of the Revolution, Ayatollah Khamenei, said something similar to this when he was addressing a group of students and teachers from the Islamic seminaries of Qum.²

However, as much as an “artistic, credible description”

has a profound effect on people's souls, it is also extremely difficult to give such a description. The Commander of the Faithful, `Alī (as), gave such a description in the best, most famous sermon on ethics in *Nahj al-Balāghah*, the "Muttaqīn (Pious) Sermon." He delivered this sermon at the request of one of his pious companions, Hammām. No advice is given in this sermon. It is entirely a description from the beginning to the end. In this venerable sermon, which is rare in terms of its beauty, style, audience, comprehensiveness and impact, the Imam (as) has "described" the virtues and beauties of pious people.

This book is a commentary on the first part of this sermon by Ali Reza Panahian, which was delivered in the form of speeches for university students in Tehran University. It is now being published after being compiled, revised and translated.

The Best Sermon on Ethics in *Nahj al-Balāghah*

The book that you are now holding in your hands, *A Shower of Goodness: A Commentary on the Best Sermon on Ethics in Nahj al-Balaghah, Volume 1*, is the first section of Ali Reza Panahian's commentary on the "Muttaqīn Sermon," which is one of Imam `Alī's (as) sermons in the book *Nahj al-Balāghah*. The text of the section of this sermon that will be discussed in this book is as follows:

رُوي أَنَّ صَاحِباً لِأَمِيرِ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ ﷺ يُقَالُ لَهُ هَمَامٌ كَانَ رَجُلًا عَابِداً، فَقَالَ لَهُ يَا أَمِيرَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ صِفْ لِي الْمُتَّقِينَ حَتَّى كَأَنِّي أَنْظُرُ إِلَيْهِمْ. فَتَنَاقَلَ ﷺ عَنْ جَوَابِهِ ثُمَّ قَالَ: يَا هَمَامُ! اتَّقِ اللَّهَ وَأَحْسِنْ فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ مَعَ الَّذِينَ اتَّقَوْا وَالَّذِينَ هُمْ مُحْسِنُونَ، فَلَمْ يَقْنَعْ هَمَامٌ بِهَذَا الْقَوْلِ حَتَّى عَزَمَ عَلَيْهِ، فَحَمِدَ اللَّهَ وَأَثْنَى عَلَيْهِ وَصَلَّى عَلَى النَّبِيِّ ﷺ ثُمَّ قَالَ ﷺ:

أَمَّا بَعْدُ، فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ سُبْحَانَهُ وَتَعَالَى خَلَقَ الْخُلُقَ جِبِينَ خَلَقَهُمْ غَنِيًّا عَنْ طَاعَتِهِمْ أَمِنًا مِنْ مَعْصِيَتِهِمْ، لِأَنَّهُ لَا تَضُرُّهُ مَعْصِيَةٌ مِنْ عَصَاةٍ وَلَا تَنْفَعُهُ طَاعَةٌ مِنْ أَطَاعَةٍ، فَقَسَمَ بَيْنَهُمْ مَعَايِشَهُمْ وَوَضَعَهُمْ مِنَ الدُّنْيَا مَوَاضِعَهُمْ. فَالْمُتَّقُونَ فِيهَا هُمْ أَهْلُ الْفَضَائِلِ، مَنْطِقُهُمُ الصَّوَابُ وَمَلْبَسُهُمُ الْإِقْتِصَادُ وَمَشِيهِمُ التَّوَاضُعُ، غَضُّوا أَبْصَارَهُمْ عَمَّا حَزَمَ اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِمْ وَوَقَفُوا أَسْمَاعَهُمْ عَلَى الْعِلْمِ النَّافِعِ لَهُمْ.»

It has been narrated that one of the companions of the Commander of the Faithful, `Alī (as), by the name of Hammām came to the Imam. He was a devout, pious man. He made this request from the Imam, "O Commander of the Faithful, describe pious people for me in such a way that it is as if I am seeing them." The Imam (as) paused and then said, "O Hammām, practice piety and perform good deeds, because verily God is with those who practice piety and those who do good deeds." However, Hammām was not satisfied with this much. (He asked for more explanation and insisted) until the Imam (as) agreed to describe the features of the "Muttaqīn (pious people)" for him in detail. Thus, the Imam (as) praised God, extolled Him, asked for His blessings on the Holy Prophet (as) and then said the following:

"God the Glorious, the Sublime, created all of creation. He created these without any need for their obedience and while being safe from their sinning. Because the sins of those who sin do not harm Him, nor does the obedience of anyone who obeys Him benefit Him. So He has distributed their sustenance among them and He has put each person in the world where he or she should be. The pious have these superior virtues in this world: their words are proper, their dress is moderate and they have a humble behavior. They close their eyes to what God has forbidden, and they have devoted their ears to only hearing beneficial knowledge."

Chapter _____

Becoming Familiar with the
_____ Sermon

- The Need for Everyone to Be Educated in the Field of Ethics
- How the Sermon Was Delivered
- Outstanding Features of This Sermon
- Pondering Over This Sermon in Solitude
- An Artistic Combination of Thought and Emotions
- Methods Used in This Commentary

The Need for Everyone to Be Educated in the Field of Ethics

In discussions on ethics, sometimes a person hears some advice or receives some admonitions. However, in some cases it is necessary for a person to be educated in this area. Many of us think we have no need for being educated in topics on ethics, and our need for such topics can be resolved based on our common understanding in this area. However, there are many precise points in this field, and in order to be able to understand them, much deliberation and an accurate outlook is required.

Our goal in studying the phrases of the Hammām Sermon is not just to give some advice on ethics in order to improve our morals. More than this benefit, we are

in pursuit of a deep, meticulous exploration into the phrases on ethics, which have been mentioned in this sermon with the in-depth detail that exists in all parts of this luminous sermon from the Commander of the Faithful (as). We wish to satisfy our need to think and reflect about these phrases and on this subject.

■ How the Sermon Was Delivered

In the book *Nahj al-Balāghah*, which was compiled by the late Sayyid Raḍī, this sermon from Imam `Alī (as) has been recorded as sermon number 193.³ He has written, "It has been narrated that one of the companions of the Commander of the Faithful, `Alī (as), by the name of Hammām who was a devout man said, 'Describe pious people for me in such a way that it is as if I am seeing them.' The Imam (as) avoided responding and said, 'O Hammām, practice piety and perform good deeds. Because verily God is with those who practice piety and those who do good deeds.' However, Hammām was not satisfied with this. He insisted until the Commander of the Faithful (as) accepted."

This sermon was delivered by the Commander of the Faithful (as) due to Hammām's question and his insistence. That is why it has become famous as the Hammām Sermon. Hammām was one of the companions and close followers of the Commander of the Faithful (as). Imam Ṣādiq (as) said the following about him, "Hammām was a devout, pure, striving man on this path."⁴ Thus, he had put effort to reach higher spiritual levels, purified his inner being, corrected himself and

put this as his main goal in life. Martyr Muṭahharī said about him, "He had a heart full of love for God and a chest aflame with the fire of spirituality."⁵

According to what Sayyid Raḍī related in *Nahj al-Balāghah*, Hammām asked the Imam to describe pious people for him in such a way that it would be as if he were seeing them, "Describe pious people for me in such a way that it is as if I am seeing them."⁶ He meant, "Describe pious people for me in such a way that I can imagine them clearly in my mind." It is obvious that a person like Hammām, who was one of the companions and close followers of the Commander of the Faithful (as), was a pious person himself. In other words, he was aware of these things himself. Nonetheless, he asked for such information.

The Commander of the Faithful (as) refused and avoided answering in the beginning, and he said, "Practice piety and perform good deeds." When the Imam (as) said this, Hammām insisted very much, and according to some narrations, he asked the Imam with God as a witness to tell him.⁷ So the Imam started describing the features of pious people. After describing more than one hundred characteristics of pious people, and while the Imam (as) was still talking, Hammām called out and passed away. When this happened, the Commander of the Faithful (as) said, "I swear to God, I was afraid this would happen, and that was why I did not want to answer him." Then he said, "Meaningful advice produces such effects on receptive minds."⁸

■ Outstanding Features of This Sermon

1. The reason for this sermon is clear.

This honorable sermon has many exclusive features, some of which cannot easily be found among the traditions and sermons on ethics from other members of the Household of the Prophet (as) and even among the other sermons in *Nahj al-Balāghah*. One of these features is that the reason for this sermon is clear. We may hear many traditions on ethics and even use many of them, but since we do not know the reason and the situation where it was said, we may have a wrong or incomplete understanding of that tradition.

In order to understand the meaning of a tradition or even the verses of the Qur'an better, knowing their "stories" is very important. About the Qur'an too, knowing the "reason for the revelation" of the verses, helps greatly for interpreters to understand the meaning of the divine words. In this sermon, the reason and the situation where this sermon was delivered are completely clear. This feature, which cannot easily be found in the words of the Household of the Prophet (as), plays an important role in being able to correctly understand the phrases of this sermon.

2. Both the audience and the level at which the speech is directed are clear.

Another merit of this speech is that its audience is clear. Consequent to knowing the audience, the level at which the speech is directed becomes clear too. This

information about who the audience of this speech is, is very important. In some cases, the Commander of the Faithful (as) has talked to the people of Kufa. In some cases, his speech was directed to one of the leaders of those who had left the religion (Khawārij). In some cases, he talked to the people of Baṣra who had helped his enemies in the "Battle of Jamal." Sometimes he said something to Mālik Ashtar, and at other times, he whispered something to his son, Imam Ḥasan (as). In each of these cases, if we do not know the audience of these speeches, we may make a mistake in understanding his speech.

On the other hand, when the audience of the speech is clear, the level at which the speech is directed becomes clear too. When the audience is at a high level, naturally the level of the speech of the Commander of the Faith (as) will be high too. In this honorable sermon that was delivered for a person like Hammām, who had such a high spiritual level, it is clear that the level of the speech is very high too. This is to such an extent that it seems no one will be able to consider him/herself to be needless of this speech no matter what his/her level is.

3. Comprehensiveness

Another feature of this speech is its comprehensiveness. There are not many speeches from the Household of the Prophet (as) that have such comprehensiveness. There is information about individual and social relationships, about human beings' relationship with God, about a person's

relationship with himself, about worship acts, about social issues, about various spiritual and psychological matters, and about human beings' characteristics.

Of course, we always feel sorry that this speech was not finished and since Hammām passed away, it was left incomplete. Nonetheless, not many speeches can be found that are this comprehensive. Of course, relatively comprehensive advice has reached us from the Holy Prophet of Islam (s) and also some of the Immaculate Imams (as) in the form of advice that was given to their companions in special situations. However, it seems that none of these have the same sweetness or are as comprehensive as this sermon is.

4. The effect of this speech can be felt immediately.

Another very good feature of this speech is that its effect can be felt immediately. Many traditions have reached us from the Household of the Prophet (as). However, in most of them the effect of the speech is not clear. But the Commander of the Faithful (as) has delivered this speech for a certain audience and its effect was what happened. It is true that all of the words of the Immaculate Imams (as) are effective, but in this case, the Imam has shown us its effect too.

5. It has a mystical style.

Another feature of this sermon is that it has a mystical style. Sometimes words on ethics, jurisprudential issues,

and issues of faith may or may not have a mystical style. This means that these topics can be discussed in two ways, using a mystical style and outlook or without this outlook. For example, consider this advice, "In order to preserve one's dignity, one should not live off of others." This is advice on ethics that does not have a mystical style. We may give the same advice with a mystical style in this way, "It is not nice to live off of others while being in front of a God Who is your Owner and Who has granted so many blessings to you."

In addition to commands on ethics, we can describe faith and jurisprudential issues with a mystical style. Most of the words of this sermon have a mystical style. This is a very important point. That is why the phrases of this sermon can be very helpful in solving the problems of today's people, who increasingly have a tendency toward mysticism and spirituality.

6. It is useful for everyone.

Another feature of this sermon is that it is useful at all times. This speech is not just related to Hammām and to that time, or even to a certain group of believers. This sermon can be used at all times, in all situations and by everyone. Religious knowledge is not limited to a certain situation. Nonetheless, this sermon has an obvious superiority in comparison with other speeches of the Immaculate ones (as). It doesn't matter whether you are a university student, a businessperson, a devout worshipper, an employee, a seminary student, a university teacher, or a Religious Authority. It doesn't

matter what your position is. Your age is not important either. The question is that is it good for you to become a real human being or not?! If you are told the criteria for being a real human being, will you come to this result that it is suitable for you to be a real human being?! This is why I say this sermon is for everyone.

As has already been mentioned, this sermon is at a very high level. However, this does not mean that it cannot be used by people who are at a lower level. This speech has been delivered in such a way that it can be used by people at different levels. Each person can use it in accordance with his/her level of understanding and spirituality and can benefit from its details. It is like the Qur'an, but the level of its words is that of a perfect human being.

7. It is melodic.

Another feature of this sermon is that while it is full of wisdom, it is also beautiful and melodic. The Commander of the Faithful (as) has not just "expressed" some "concepts," he has also "composed" this "song." If a person becomes fond of this sermon, in addition to benefiting from its high wisdom, he/she will be imbued with the beauty of its melody, cadence and rhythm. All rhyming words have a special kind of music and rhythm. According to how they are expressed and what concepts are contained within them, they give a special musical and aesthetic enjoyment to a person. This sermon is also outstanding in this regard.

If you memorize this sermon and read it to yourself with the melody and rhythm that your spirit requires, you will see how much a human being's soul needs melodies and whisperings. You will be able to feel how much your soul is satisfied with this lofty whispering. It is at this time that when you feel the enjoyment and entertainment that comes from this beautiful, uplifting whispering, you see how little enjoyment there is in other music. It is similar to the way that if they play a childish song for you and ask you to join in, since you find it to be at a very low level, you find it difficult to whisper its words and accompany them. Therefore, without this music being forbidden, you put it aside.

We can understand the differences between people's levels with these melodic, lofty themes. Sometimes they recommend not listening to "such and such" music. However, a person whose existence has been filled with a melody as high as the Hammām Sermon will not pursue those childish songs that become famous at times. This means that his soul will no longer permit him to pursue such things.

8. It is descriptive.

Another feature of this sermon is that it has a "descriptive" style instead of giving "advice." Instead of "advising" others to have piety, it "describes" pious people. Advising a person who is not ready to receive that advice is not very useful. Of course, advising is very necessary. But since much background is needed before advice can be effective, it is harder to benefit

from it. However, giving that same advice descriptively infiltrates people's hearts much easier, sinks in and stays in their hearts longer.

This sermon is a description of pious people's virtues, and it is not advice on how to become a pious person. People usually get tired of hearing advice very quickly. Sometimes people even run away from hearing advice. However, you never get tired of reading this sermon. What I have said does not mean that giving advice is useless. In some cases, advice is needed too, and it can have many beneficial effects. However, in a situation where we can choose between giving advice or giving a description, giving a description is usually preferable.

9. It describes "goodness."

Another feature of this sermon is that it describes "goodness and beauties." In describing things, one can describe goodness and beauties, or he/she can describe evils and ugliness. That which is desirable and is an art is for a person to be able to describe goodness and beauties in a sweet, believable way. Otherwise, describing badness is easy. Even the lowliest people are able to do so.

For example, our filmmakers say they can easily portray "Shimr" [the person who martyred Imam Ḥusayn (as)] in their movies. But they are unable to show Imam Ḥusayn (as), who is at the peak of possessing sublime human characteristics, in a way that is believable for the audience. All of the storywriters, screenwriters, character designers and scene designers who work in

the media wonder how they can portray an absolutely good, appealing person who does not have even one dark spot in his life in a way that is truly appealing to the audience. This portrayal should be in such a way that it is believable and not just a slogan, as this would be disappointing and unpleasant to the audience. On the other hand, showing a character that is bad or totally negative does not have these difficulties at all.

This is a very unique situation where the Commander of the Faithful (as) has described goodness and pious people. In order to understand the high status of Hammām, it is enough for us to see that he asked such a question from the Commander of the Faithful (as). If we were in his place, we would have asked, "How can we become good people?" But Hammām wisely asked for a description of pious people. The Commander of the Faithful (as) accepted to carry out this difficult task. By using beautiful phrases and the outlook that he chose, he answered this question in the best way. Describing beauties is truly one of the miracles of the book *Nahj al-Balāghah* and the words of the Commander of the Faithful (as).

If we wanted to ask for something from the Commander of the Faithful (as) that no one else could do, we should have asked exactly the same question. This is what Hammām did, and it is not surprising that he passed away in response to the greatness of the Imam's speech. Of course, we should describe the negative aspects too. Not everyone will become corrected by seeing beauties. Some people have to see ugliness too in order to be able to separate themselves

from the evil of their own vices. How blessed are those people who are able to travel to the end of the path by only seeing beauties.

10. Many commentaries have been written on it.

The features that have been mentioned about this sermon so far were the internal features of this sermon. However, this sermon has an outer feature too and that is the many commentaries on it. Due to the high importance and high status of this sermon throughout history, great scholars have written various commentaries on it in order to clarify the hidden aspects of this luminous speech of the Commander of the Faithful (as). These commentaries have brought the opportunity for those who wished to have a more accurate look at the high concepts of this sermon to be able to reach to the deeper meanings of this luminous speech by referring to these commentaries and benefiting from these great scholars.

■ Pondering Over This Sermon in Solitude

In order to have a better understanding of this sermon, you should pay attention to a few points. The first point is that if it is possible for you to do so, you should surely try to memorize this sermon. The next step is to study its meaning thoroughly and accurately so that its concepts may become completely clear for you. It seems that understanding this sermon and being affected by it are two separate matters. Memorizing

this sermon and studying its meaning precisely are introductions to understanding the beautiful meaning of the words of the Commander of the Faithful (as). However, memorizing and studying this luminous speech does not necessarily mean that one will be affected by it.

In order to be influenced more effectively by this sermon, after understanding it one should ponder over it in solitude for a few moments. Let the shower of goodness of the words of the Commander of the Faithful (as) rain on your heart and its raindrops one by one build your existence in all of its different aspects. In order to have this effect, one should read the whole sermon in one sitting. Reading only certain parts of this sermon will have much less effect. (We will review this point in detail in the following sections.)

I wish a time would come when all of us had learned the Hammām Sermon, and then we held a gathering to read it together. No preaching, speech or sermon is as beautiful as a person reading the Hammām Sermon for him/herself in such a way that it enters his/her heart. Ponder over this sermon in solitude for a few moments and become familiar with it and fond of it. Let this sermon have more of an effect on you by doing this. Using the Hammām Sermon as a medicine for spiritual pains is not something we can do by understanding it, this is done by ingesting it.

One should not put religious knowledge aside in the refrigerator for it to become cold and then use it! We should try to use religious knowledge while it is hot and fresh and still has a beautiful smell. The reason for

the rituals involved in reciting the Holy Qur'an is the same. It is as if the Almighty God wants His servants to go to Him while they are in a special mood. One should not wait to use the knowledge that exists in this sermon when it has become cold and spiritless.

An Artistic Combination of Thought and Emotions

The opportunity that we have to be able to study and ponder over this admirable sermon is a precious opportunity for a person to gain religious knowledge in an atmosphere of beauty and appeal, not due to one's interests and taste, but due to its necessity. The Almighty God has made faith appealing to human beings and has beautified it in their hearts.⁹ In benefiting from this sermon, we should allow the melody of these wise words to enter our hearts.

Thoughts and feelings cannot be separated from each other at all, and they have never been two separate things. Some imagine that a person should pursue scientific work in a situation where he/she puts emotions aside and only pursues the truth. But how can a person be in pursuit of the truth without having any feelings? A person can be in pursuit of the truth only when he/she loves the truth and no other bad likings prevent him/her. Therefore, there is no movement in a person, not even thinking, without feelings being involved. The lowest level of feeling is being curious, and this is a desire. If this desire is polished and cultivated, it will help a person's knowledge to increase greatly.

Therefore, now that the Hammām Sermon has created this opportunity where a person can gain the most beautiful knowledge about ethics in the most beautiful language, one should prize this opportunity.

■ **Methods Used in This Commentary**

1. An explanatory approach instead of propaganda

The method we have used in understanding the Hammām Sermon is an explanatory approach instead of looking at it as a way for propagating religion. We do not want to just beautify our speech using some literary devices. Rather, we have tried to look at the phrases of this sermon in a completely logical way. We have tried to extract some points that are hiding in the beautiful phrases of this sermon and to have a precise, logical discussion about them.

2. Pondering over individual virtues and a combination of them

Two kinds of thought are needed when reading this sermon, pondering over individual virtues and pondering over a combination of them. We have tried to benefit from both of these kinds of ponderings. After looking at the virtues individually, we have looked at combinations of these virtues when they come together. It is very important to pay attention to which direction the Commander of the Faithful (as) has moved after saying one phrase, and what his next phrase was.

Finding the relationship between the Imam's words and the pauses in the sermon, I mean the parts where the subject of the phrases changes, brings many blessings. We should pay attention to the moments when the Imam was silent in the middle of his sermon. There is an explanation for these moments too. There are many hidden meanings in these pauses.

3. Explaining the way to gain virtues

In this luminous sermon, the Commander of the Faithful (as) speaks of many moral virtues. In each section, we will attempt to briefly study the way to gain these virtues. At the end of the sermon, after a person has spent some time becoming fond of the luminous words of the Commander of the Faithful (as), he/she will understand some principles for moving on the spiritual path. We will not talk about these very much because these principles depend more on each person's understanding.

4. A look at vices along with virtues

What the Commander of the Faithful (as) did not do in this sermon - since his audience was a person like Hammām, but which we must do in understanding this sermon - is taking a glance at vices. In this luminous sermon, the Commander of the Faithful (as) only describes virtues. However, for us to explain and understand virtues, we are forced to take a glance at vices too. Looking at and talking about vices causes us to

dislike them, to put increased effort to gradually distance ourselves from them and to move toward virtues. Along with seeing all the beauties that exist in virtues, seeing the ugliness of vices can also help to prepare the background for a person to change.

Chapter 2

Hammam's Question

- Different Types of Questions
- Hammam's question was a good question.
- "Understanding" and "being concerned" are necessary factors for forming a good question.
- Seeing beauty is a true need.

■ Different Types of Questions

As was mentioned previously, the Commander of the Faithful (as) delivered this admirable sermon in answer to the question that Hammām asked him and due to his insistence. Hammām's question was this, "Describe pious people for me in such a way that it is as if I am seeing them."¹⁰ In order to understand the value of Hammām's question, it is necessary for us to consider what place questioning has in the system of religious knowledge.

1. Bad Questions (that bring regression)

"Questions" may be divided into several groups according to the motivation behind them: a good question, a bad question and an unnecessary question.

One group of questions are for moving forward and they bring progress, but there is another group of questions that bring regression. What we mean by this division is not that as soon as a person asks a question, we should put pressure on him and say for example, "Your question will cause you to regress!" No, we should answer people's questions as much as possible. However, if we have a question ourselves, we should be sensitive about the motivation for why this question has come up for us. We should pay attention to the root cause behind the formation of this question in our hearts.

The questions that are based on a motivation that cause regression in us are the ones that arise due to our carnal desires. If carnal desires dominate a person, a person will constantly question that which is against his/her carnal desires. For example, one of the reasons for the topic of the philosophy of ethics being widespread in the West may be this fact that people cannot tolerate some ethical commands. This means that since people did not want to have a barrier of ethical commands surrounding them, they started questioning the philosophy of ethics. For example, they ask this question, "Who has said that this deed is valuable?" Or they question, "This deed was valuable in the past. But how can we be sure that it is still something valuable now?" Or they ask questions like this, "What is the criterion for determining the value of good or bad deeds? Do these criteria change?"

The Most Important Damage Caused by a Bad Question

If a human being's carnal desires are active, if vices have grown roots in his/her being and he/she is not balanced enough, such a person will ask some questions in order to strengthen his/her carnal desires, which will in fact cause his/her regression. The most important damage that comes from such questions is not that it wastes people's time. Rather, the most important damage caused by such questions is that sometimes a person finds probable answers for these questions and then starts "becoming interested" in these answers! After this, he/she will not abandon them anymore.

If you pursue a question that has come to your mind in support of your carnal desires and in opposition to the truth, you will become interested in the worst answer too. This means that you will become interested in even a wrong answer to this question. Therefore, it is good for a person to put importance on his/her questions. A person should not just be in pursuit of finding answers to his questions, he should also spend time pondering and thinking about the motivation for his questions.

Not all questions are worthy of being asked. It is good if we take our questions to a master in ethics or spiritual matters at times and ask him to evaluate our questions. We can ask him to evaluate our questions without answering them to see whether they are good questions or not. A person's way of thinking can be clearly seen in his/her questions. By considering our questions, a master can tell us if there are dangerous defects or problems within us or not.

2. Unnecessary Questions (that don't help us at all)

Another group of questions are not due to a person's internal vices like the first group, but they are unnecessary questions. One kind of unnecessary questions are questions that arise due to not thinking. Sometimes a person does not think, and he constantly asks questions. It has been narrated from `Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā'ī (ra) that he used to say, "I didn't used to ask most of my questions. I kept them so that I could find their answers myself through thinking." We can say that unnecessary questions are questions that "don't take us anywhere." These are questions that a person asks without having made any effort to find their answers himself.

3. Good questions (to bring advancement)

The third group is questions that come to our mind and help us to make progress. We should realize the value of these questions. If such questions come to a person's mind, they bring enlightenment. Following up on these questions will bring enlightenment for a person whether he/she finds the answers or not. But even about these good questions, it is better if a person does not ask them quickly! Such questions do not come to the mind due to a person's carnal desires. They are created due to thinking and are considered to be good questions. Nevertheless, it is better if a person does not rush to ask these questions unless a special necessity requires one to do so.

Why should a person not rush to ask a good question?

Why do we say one should not rush to ask such questions? Because these questions are for the purpose of making progress. Rushing to ask such questions causes the value of the question and also the value of its answer to decrease for a person. It is good for a person to work on the question in his mind for a while, feel sad that he does not know the answer to the question and not release himself from the question very quickly! The aggravation that this question causes for a person brings light for him/her. As a poem says:

Don't drink much water, so that you may be thirsty.

Then water will spring forth from above and below for you.

The reason we are talking this much about a good question is for us to know that if we see that the Commander of the Faithful (as) welcomed a question, we should realize that this question was a very valuable question. Some of those who have written interpretations on *Nahj al-Balāghah* have said that one of the reasons the Commander of the Faithful (as) did not answer Hammām's question in the beginning was so that Hammām's thirst to hear the answer would increase so that the Imam's words would have a more complete effect on his audience.¹¹

Such questions are aggravating, but this aggravation is beautiful and useful. A person should tolerate this aggravation a little so that he may become enlightened,

his thirst increase, and his heart and soul become ready to receive the answer.

Why should we rush to get the answer to some questions? If we pay attention to this, we will see that sometimes there are polytheistic motivations behind our rushing. For example, consider when a person asks, "When will I die?" It is possible that he/she may have some bad motivation behind this question. For example, he wants to get rid of fearing God, clinging to Him, trusting in Him, and begging Him. He wants all matters to be in his own hands!

Or for example, a person asks, "Is God satisfied with me?" This is a nice question, but a person should accept the pain that comes with it. God does not answer this question on purpose so that we may grow. Otherwise, it is easy for God to answer this question in some way. There is definitely light in this ambiguity that God does not answer this question. By knowing some things, we should not try to release ourselves from the hardships involved in having a beautiful relationship with God.

Up until now, we have found one good motivation for not asking a good question. That motivation is, "The aggravation that not asking this question creates in us is beautiful." Also, we found one bad motivation for rushing to find the answer, and that is, "Trying to find release from a good question."

Acting in accordance with what we already know is one way to find answers.

There is another point about good spiritual questions. It is possible that a person's question is a good question;

however, he/she should not ask that question! If we do not ask that question, how will we get the answer? There is a famous answer to this question from Ayatollah Bahjat (ra), which is based on a tradition. When answering people's questions about spiritual growth, he usually said, "Act in accordance with what you already know. God will show what you don't know."¹²

Sometimes, the way to find answers is to act according to what we already know. Especially in spiritual matters, if you act according to the knowledge you have about a matter, you will usually gain knowledge about other parts of it too. In such situations, if a person does not act upon his knowledge, even if they give him the answer, he/she will not accept it. Even if this person appears to accept it, he will not believe it. And even if he believes it, he will not be willing to act upon it. He definitely won't be able to benefit from this knowledge. The Holy Prophet (s) said, "If you act upon what you know, God will teach you what you do not know."¹³ The Commander of the Faithful (as) also said, "You are in need of acting upon what you know more than knowing what you do not know."¹⁴

A person should not always be in pursuit of finding answers. Sometimes he should act upon what he knows so that he may find the answers to his questions. The "Unwān Baṣrī Tradition" is a tradition about mysticism from Imam Ṣādiq (as). The late, eminent mystic, Ayatollah Qāḍī (ra), used to advise his students, "Write the Unwān Baṣrī Tradition for yourself and read it once or twice a week."¹⁵ When Unwān Baṣrī went to Imam Ṣādiq (as), at first the Imam did not answer him so that

the fire that was burning within `Unwān could flame up even more. When `Unwān came to the Imam (as) for the second time and asked him for knowledge, the Imam (as) told him, "Knowledge is not gained through learning. Rather, it is a light that God puts in the heart of anyone whom He wants to guide. If you are one who seeks knowledge, first search for true servitude within yourself. Gain knowledge by acting upon it. Ask God for understanding, so that God may give you understanding of everything."¹⁶

It can be seen in the letters of the Imam of the Time, Imam Mahdi (aj), that he did not answer some questions. It seems he wanted the Religious Authorities to find the answers themselves using the ways that they had learned from the Progeny of the Prophet (as). A person is not supposed to receive all the answers to his questions very quickly. The Almighty God has designed the questions that come up for a person and the effort that he/she must put to find the answers. A person must travel on this path in order to advance.

■ Hammām's question was a good question.

1. Why did Hammām ask for a "description"?

We should realize that Hammām's question was a good question with lofty features. The first feature in Hammām's question that one should take note of is that he was asking for a description, as we mentioned previously. Unfortunately, many people look for advice in spiritual wayfaring. Hammām did not ask the

Imam (as) how to become pious. He asked the Imam to describe pious people for him. However, we do not ask these kinds of questions very often!

Why are we in pursuit of “advice” more than we are in pursuit of “descriptions”?

Why do we prefer asking questions looking for advice more than asking questions in search of descriptions? In analyzing the motivation behind some questions, we have already mentioned some reasons. A person may ask, “What should I do to become a real human being?” This is not like taking classes in the university where you just want to pass them and finish! Sometimes a person wants to find release from his servitude to God by asking his questions. It is as if he wants to get an acceptable grade, finish the class and put it aside so that he may become free from the hardships that he is going through.

In spiritual wayfaring, we do not “reach God.” Rather, we “move toward God.” When talking about God, we do not reach a destiny and stop. We move. Some people ask how they can “reach” God so that they can feel relieved from this struggle to “go and move” toward God. Those who cannot tolerate the fear and enthusiasm of reaching God cannot tolerate the hardships of moving toward God either. Look at the mystical, loving poems of Hafiz. From the beginning to the end of his poems, he is in suspension. In his poems, he talks in such a way as if no door to the barriers [preventing him from moving toward God]

are opening for him. It is as if he has come to stay at the stage of knocking, asking, begging and pleading. We should be careful that if we ask about how to reach God, our goal should not be to find relief from the hardships that are a part of traveling on this path. Some people do not have the patience to travel on this path. It is as if moving toward God is very bitter for them.

A person asked Imam Ṣādiq (as), "How can a person become relieved (and comfortable)?" The Imam replied, "Relief comes with fighting with one's own will." That person immediately asked, "When will a person feel relieved?" The Imam (as) replied, "The first day when he/she enters Heaven."¹⁷ The Imam (as) meant that he should have left and not asked any more questions! That man was after finding relief and being comfortable, not finding the path. Struggling on this path was hard for him, so he wanted to be freed from it.

On the path to spiritual growth, one should announce at some points, "O God, what a nice hardship!" Suddenly, you will see that simple hardships become resolved. Instead, hardships at a higher level will come up for you. Moving toward God has beautiful hardships. But those who look at these things from afar imagine that these hardships are very bitter. However, the truth of the matter is that these hardships are very sweet for those who are interested and willing to put effort. Do not escape from hardships. Announce to God, "I will stand firmly to the end!" Then you will see that your hardships continuously advance to a new, more exalted level. You will feel relieved from your previous hardships, and you will continue to move forward on this path!

Of course, what I have said does not mean that asking questions about the "way" is always bad. No, all of these warnings are so that we will be careful that our motivation for asking questions is not an inferior motivation. Otherwise, many people have asked questions about the "way" from good people, found the way and moved forward on it. But at times we ask about the "way" so that we can reach the destination sooner and free ourselves from moving toward God with its difficult complications. We need to be careful in such a situation and catch our "will" red handed when it is pursuing our carnal desires!

In many cases, our problem is not that we do not know the way. Rather, the problem is that we do not have enough motivation to move forward on this path. Hammām was clever. He asked for the description of pious people so that he could gain "motivation" and "enthusiasm" for becoming a pious person. Hammām's question was very beautiful. We should truly be thankful to Hammām who asked this question from the Commander of the Faithful (as). This question was truly a blessing. Due to the blessing of this question, the beautiful words of the Commander of the Faithful (as) have reached to all those who are seeking truth and spirituality throughout history, and his words will reach to such people in the future too.

2. Hammām's Question: Describe Pious People as if I Am Seeing Them

In addition to asking for a description, Hammām's question has another beautiful aspect too. This question has also been asked with the motivation of wanting to "see." Hammām asked the Commander of the Faithful (as) to describe pious people for him in such a way that it is as if he is "seeing" them. There is a secret behind this watching and seeing that we should pay attention to.

Our vision normally functions as a tool. For example, someone tells us, "There's a really good cell phone out now. Are you going to buy it?" We respond, "I need to see it first." Our vision is a tool for us to buy a cell phone. Purchasing it is also a tool in order for us to be able to use that cell phone. However, in spiritual affairs seeing does not play an instrumental role anymore. Rather, it is a goal itself. There is nothing else after seeing. Hammām saw and passed away. His seeing was his passing away. It is not the case that he saw and passed away because of that!

Some say, "I want to see the Imam of the Time, Imam Mahdi (aj), to ask him..." You may tell such people, "A person who visits the Imam (aj) won't want anything else!" But they will ask, "What is the use of just seeing him?" This means that they consider visiting the Imam to be a tool. Looking or seeing is a plea and a request. Seeing in spiritual affairs is the last action, which is the highest need of a person. After seeing the pious people, the next level is God Himself and meeting Him. Of course, this seeing is something we do with the eyes of our heart and with our entire being.

Longing to Watch and Pleading to See

Pleading to see shows a kind of longing. If this longing takes root in a person, he will reach his goal. Hammām stated that he wanted to see in such a way that the Commander of the Faithful (as) was afraid he would pass away. He was in a sensitive situation. This need to see had arisen in him. That is why the Imam did not want to respond to his request in the beginning. For common people, "seeing" the pious people (Muttaqīn) is a factor that helps to encourage and motivate them to become pious. But for some people, like Hammām, seeing is their highest wish. It is spiritual sustenance. Such a person is not able to refrain from seeing. He wants to feel it and taste it. The best terminology such people use for what they want to experience is "seeing." This is how the Friends of God are.

Seeing is very important. God too values this seeing very much. One of the Prophet's (s) servants by the name of Thawbān liked the Prophet (s) very much and could not tolerate being far from him. One day he came to the Prophet (s) looking pale and his body was very weak. The Prophet (s) asked the reason for his state. He replied, "I am not sick. But when I do not see you, I long to visit you and so I come to visit you. However, today I thought of the Hereafter. I am afraid that I will not see you in the Hereafter. Because if I do not enter Heaven, my situation is clear. On the other hand, if I enter Heaven, you will be at the level of the prophets (s), and I will be at a level that is much lower. Therefore, I will not be allowed to see you."¹⁸ It was at this time that

this verse was revealed, "One who obeys God and the Messenger is the friend of the prophets, saints, martyrs, and the righteous ones to whom God has granted His favors."¹⁹ He longed to be able to continue seeing the Prophet (s) and God respected his longing.

“Understanding” and “being concerned” are necessary factors for forming a good question.

A good question stems from two sources: understanding and being concerned. In order to ask a good question both of these factors should exist together. If only one of them is present, it is not enough. Sometimes questions are due to a person's understanding, but they are not due to his concern. In such cases, especially in spiritual affairs, even if a person gets results, it will be useless. On the other hand, sometimes questions are asked because of one's concern, but they are not supported with a correct understanding.

It has been a long time now that I have been in frequent contact with young people and have been talking with them. During these communications, I have seen an interesting point in many of the spiritual questions that the young people ask. That point is that they have a similar concern, a concern without understanding. That which concerns and pains them is that they would like to know how valuable they are to God. This concern may be present for a short period or for their whole life. For example, they ask, "I committed this sin, but then I repented. Was my repentance accepted?" Or they

ask, "There was a weakness in my journeying toward God. Am I honorable before God, or not?" Or they say, "If I do that certain deed, will God answer me?" The similar concern that such young people have is that they want to clearly understand God's opinion about themselves. But what they should understand is that God has put this ambiguity in His relations with His servants due to certain benefits that this ambiguity has. And this ambiguity will never be completely resolved. This is because a human being's structure is such that his spiritual growth depends on this ambiguity. So this ambiguity does not mean that God is not satisfied with His servant.

Whenever there is a correct concern, there should be a correct understanding along with it so that a good question can be formed. A lack of understanding can often be clearly seen among people who are concerned with spiritual affairs. A while ago, a young university student insisted that I answer his question. He said, "Sometimes I don't have a good spiritual frame of mind. Does this mean that God is not satisfied with me?" I said, "Why do you think if God is satisfied with you, you should necessarily be able to feel it?" He said, "I don't mean I want to feel it materially. I want to feel it spiritually!" I said, "You say spiritually, but you want to feel it mentally. A distinction should be made between spirituality and mental states. There is no need for a person to feel God's satisfaction. This is where we are talking about believing in the unseen."

Usually if a person has a concern, but this concern is not accompanied with a correct understanding, he/she

will ask improper questions. On the other hand, if a person has a correct understanding but he does not have the necessary concern within himself, his question will not have any benefit for him. This is because if a question is not asked due to having an inner concern, the one who is asking does not deserve to find the correct answer. Or if he finds the answer, he will play with it and won't act upon it. Therefore, a good question should stem from two sources: understanding and concern. Each person's spiritual growth depends greatly on the questions that come to his mind based on these two factors.

These two factors can be seen together in Hammām's question. He had a deep understanding, which pushed him to ask so that he could see. He also had a deep concern that caused him to plead the Imam for the answer.²⁰

According to some narrations, a group of the elders of Kufa came to the Commander of the Faithful, 'Alī (as), and said, "We are your true Shi'a who are sincerely fond of you." The Imam looked at them and said, "I don't see the signs of my true Shi'a in you!" When they heard this, all of them lowered their heads and felt ashamed. Hammām asked the Imam to tell them the signs of the true Shi'a.²¹ This shows that this sentence of the Imam when he told them that they were not among the Imam's true Shi'a created a deep concern in Hammām.

The Commander of the Faithful (as) was the one who created this concern and understanding in Hammām. When the Imam said, "I don't see the signs of my true Shi'a in you," he was actually aiming at Hammām's

heart and he wanted this deep concern to be created in him. How good it is if sometimes a concern is created in a person due to God's wrath. Similarly, how good it is if a desire for understanding is created in a person due to God's wrath. These are the results of the advances and retreats that exist in spiritual wayfaring.

■ **Seeing beauty is a true need.**

The beauty of Hammām's question was due to the understanding that was created in him causing him to want to "see." As was said before, seeing is one of our true needs. Seeing is not just a tool. Usually in our material life, we see something in order to obtain it and benefit from it. But from the perspective of mysticism, seeing is not just a tool for one to like and gain. Rather, it is a goal itself. Seeing is the destination according to the ones who are familiar with spiritual affairs. All of us see and understand the beauty of a flower. But there are many who buy a flower in order to give it to someone else to show their affection. In this case, the flower is like a tool. There aren't many people who buy a flower only because it's beautiful. There are few people who truly care about beauty in their life. Those who are willing to spend for beauty are few.

Hammām asked the Commander of the Faithful (as) to describe pious people so that he could become drowned in watching this beauty. Seeing beauty has two steps, and the first step is to understand something is beautiful. The second step is to sense and feel that beauty. Many of us are able to see and understand that

something is beautiful, but this is the first step. Our problem is mostly in the second step, which is sensing and feeling its beauty.

Seeking Beauty: A Characteristic of Great People

The people who wish to see and perceive beauties are great people, because our need for beauty is not one of our primary, essential needs. Psychologists divide people's needs into several categories. They believe that when a person fulfils the needs he has at one level, he then moves to the next level. The first group or level involves the essential, physiological needs of a person, which allow him to stay alive. The second group is the need for safety. And the third group includes the needs that are related to emotions. So the need for beauty is in this higher group.²² Some people only seek beauty after all their other needs have been fulfilled, but there are others who love seeking beauty.

There are not many people who abandon their essential, fundamental needs to pursue their need to seek beauty. If they ask me the reason for my religiosity, I will say, "I am religious because of my fear of Hell and the punishment in the grave." However, the Friends of God follow religion because God is very beautiful. Of course, Hell and the difficulties in the grave exist, but that which causes them to be religious is God's beauty. Hell to them is being deprived from perceiving God's beauty.²³

Abandoning Sinning Due to Its Ugliness

When the Almighty God wishes to discourage His servants from backbiting in the Qur'an, He talks about the ugliness of backbiting.²⁴ It is as if God expects that due to the ugliness of backbiting, people will hate backbiting and abandon it. It is true that the punishment for backbiting is Hell, but it is better for a person to abandon backbiting due to its ugliness and not due to one's fear of the Hellfire. The person who does not backbite due to its ugliness is one who seeks beauty. But a person who does not backbite due to his fear of Hell is a person who is seeking that which benefits him. It is clear that the status of a person who seeks beauty is higher than the one who is seeking that which benefits him.

Carnal desires cause one to become blind to perceiving spiritual beauties. This is why we have been told to keep away from carnal desires. Many use material beauties as a tool for fulfilling their desires. But paying attention to our carnal desires prevents us from perceiving deep, spiritual, human beauties. Unfortunately, in today's world we see that superficial beauties have become a tool for gaining minimal benefits and enjoyments that in the pyramid of a person's needs are at a lower level.

Asking to perceive is suitable for a person who wishes to perceive that deep, profuse beauty and to enjoy this spiritually. It is said that one of the great mystics who lived in the north of Iran started learning Turkish when he was elderly. When people asked him about the reason for this, he said, "I want to understand and feel

Shahrīār's (a famous Turkish, Iranian poet) poems with the same language that his poems were written in." The beauty of his poems was something that nurtured this mystic's soul spiritually. He felt a need to walk among these beauties, so it became necessary for him to learn that language.

The Need to "Feel" Beauties

Understanding beauties has two levels: being aware of beauties and feeling them. For being able to see beauties, we have enough awareness. What we don't have enough of is feeling them. We should have moments where we feel the beauties that we are aware of. Sometimes hearing new words can tear away thin veils, help a person's heart to feel beauties and bring about these moments for him. However, this is not the correct, best way. The correct way is for a person to have leisure time for his soul to be able to gradually understand those moments.

A young man once related for me, "One time when I had gone for Umrah (the recommended Hajj), I decided to recite the entire Qur'an during the time that I was there. So most of my time was spent in the Great Mosque of Mecca (Masjid al-Harām) reciting the Qur'an. One night when I was reciting the Qur'an next to the Ka'ba, I suddenly thought, 'God truly valued me! He talked about me (as a human being) with His Prophet very much!' This made me cry till morning."

Everyone picks up this Qur'an in his or her hands, but who feels its beauty?

The Need to Have an “Open Heart” to Be Able to Feel Beauties

As has been said, being aware of beauties is the first step for one to be able to understand beauties. The next thing that must come about is feeling these beauties. For a mother, her child's greatest beauty is the feeling that she has toward him/her. But strangers look at, for example, the style of the child's nose in order to see his/her beauty. This ability to feel beauties should awaken within us. In order to feel God's beauty and the beauty of His names and traits, we must have an “open heart.”

There was another young man who once gave me a handwriting in which he had written, “On the Night of Destiny, I was pondering over this phrase of the Jawshan Kabīr Supplication until morning, ‘O He Who makes promises and is loyal to them.’²⁵ Suddenly I felt in my heart that there is no one in the world who can make a definite promise and no one in the world who can be loyal to us except God. The only One Who can promise and be loyal to His promises too is the Almighty God. That night this phrase truly affected me.”

In your opinion, how should one “interpret” this phrase for a person so that he can have such a feeling? There is no way to do this. One must open his heart for this beauty to shine within him.

So in order to understand beauties, we must take two steps. The first step involves being aware and the next step is feeling. Of course, sometimes feeling comes before awareness. This means that if the feeling of sensing the Almighty God's beauties is very strong

within a person, with just one of God's names, he can reach to God's other names too. Then he won't need to learn all of God's other names. This shows the importance of feeling.

Ways to Understanding Beauties

1. Not Looking at Unseemly Things

In order for a person to be able to seek beauties in the first place and to next of all be able to see the beauties in the world, he should close his heart's eyes to that which is unseemly in the world. One should not create something unseemly himself. But we are not like this, and many of us create unseemly things ourselves. If a person creates unseemly things himself or does obscene acts, his soul will become dark and he will no longer understand the beauty of the Almighty God.

Once I was abroad talking for a group of people who were not very religious. I said, "Seeking absolute beauty is not a sin. If a person worships beauty, he will reach to where he should!" Someone said, "Based on what you have said, if a person doesn't wear hijab (Islamic dress), this is completely alright. Because a woman has a beauty that God has created, and she wants to show this beauty to others!" I said, "If this is an absolute beauty, there isn't anything wrong with it." He said, "So why do you say this beauty is a sin?!" I said, "Because this beauty is not absolute. It is mixed with an unseemly factor." He asked, "What unseemly factor?" I asked him, "Is it good to break other people's hearts?" He said, "No." I said, "So this is not something

beautiful, right?" He said, "Right." I explained, "If she breaks another person's heart with her beauty, this beauty is accompanied by something unseemly. So this is not an absolute beauty."

In order to understand beauties, one should strengthen his perception of beauty so that he will be able to understand the beauties of the world. Once people asked a musician, "What do you think about the music that is played on TV?" He replied, "I don't listen to such music at all. It will harm my hearing!" A person who sells perfume will not smell just any kind of perfume, because he must keep his sense of smell strong. In the same way, the late Ayatollah Bahjat (ra) would not look at or spend time with everyone so that his heart would not become impure due to the things he would hear and see. Imam Sajjād (as) would constantly advise his children to sit with those who were religious and knowledgeable. If they were not able to find such people, he told them that being alone is better and healthier for one's spirit.²⁶ In order to understand the beauties of the world, some vigilance is necessary. Apart from certain things being lawful or unlawful according to the religious rulings, this vigilance is necessary for a person who wants to be able to perceive beauties.

2. Reciting the Qur'an and Talking to God

Once a person told me, "We live in a city and are negatively affected by different kinds of scenes and conversations without having any choice. What can we do to solve this problem?" I replied, "Recite some of the Qur'an at night and remove the impure, unseemly

things that have entered your heart through your eyes by looking at the beautiful verses of the Qur'an." The first reason we should do this is so that we will have an interest in beauties. Secondly, this will enable us to be able to perceive the beauties of the world. The Prophet of God (as) was asked, "Why do you spend a part of your time asking for forgiveness for your faults to be forgiven?" He replied, "Due to the effects of this world, dust sits on my heart. I remove that dust by asking for God's forgiveness."²⁷

3. Spending Time with People Who Have an Inner Beauty

Another way to be able to taste the beauties of the world is by spending time with the people in the world who have an inner beauty, "beautiful people." The Progeny of the Prophet are said to be "God's face." Spending time with them automatically changes our taste. This is true concerning material matters too. If a person becomes used to eating bad foods for a time, his taste will change and he will no longer like to eat good foods. As we can see, spending time in the world with people who have an inner beauty, the Prophet's Progeny (as), can stimulate a person's interest in beauty.

4. Being Fond of Nature

Another way to be able to understand the beauties of the world is to be fond of nature, which is truly beautiful. People who work in the arts say that one of the sources for understanding beauty is nature. If a person is able to spend time alone in nature at times, this

solitude can have a great influence in stimulating his aesthetic sense. Continuously being in an environment that has been changed and built by humankind, which we call a "city," ruins a person's aesthetic sense because it does not have a high level of beauty. When a person comes out of the architected fence encircling the urban environment, he/she comes into contact with nature that has remained uncorrupted. This contact with nature will affect him/her unconsciously. For those who pay attention to their innate nature and have not been ignoring their innate nature as much, going back to nature is a way for them to correct their lifestyle and culture.

Chapter 5

Piety: Something Needed by All Human Beings

- The Reason for Praising God When Starting to Talk and Its Benefits
- Remembering God's Greatness and Grandeur
- A Person's Love for a Majestic God
- Everyone's Need for Piety Despite Differences Between People
- Differences in People's Tests Depends on Their Dispositions
- A Higher Position and Ability Require More piety
- The Difference Between Piety and Natural Traits
- One of the Difficulties in Practicing Piety

The Reason for Praising God When Starting to Talk and Its Benefits

In answering Hammām's insistence, the Commander of the Faithful (as) started his talk by praising God and sending salutations and greetings to the Holy Prophet (s). Most of the Commander of the Faithful's (as) sermons are like this. Why?

Starting one's talk with remembering God and praising Him, and also with sending salutations to the Messenger of God (s), is first of all a way of being polite. In other words, a person who starts his talk in this way is showing respect to the Almighty God, the Prophet of God (s) and his religion. The second reason for doing this is that this expression of devotion is due to one's affection. It is due to one's heart being filled with love for God and His Prophet.

In addition to these two reasons, doing this has two important benefits. The first benefit is that it reminds others. Starting his talk in this way helped others remember God and His Prophet (s). When a person would see the way Ayatollah Bahjat used to pray, he would be surprised and think, "Is God truly that honorable?! The way he is praying shows that God is very respectable and we should respect Him very much!" When someone respects the Almighty God and the Immaculate Guardians sent by God in the beginning of his talk, this causes others to pay attention to this matter too.

Another benefit that results from starting one's talk in this way is that it is a kind of "announcing your belief." One who remembers God and His Prophet (s) when starting to talk has in fact shown his belief. Of course, this way of talking is not in accordance with some people's way of talking in today's world. Nowadays, some people act in such a way that they wish to say, "We are neutral and no one knows our beliefs." But praising God and sending salutations to the Prophet (s) and his pure Progeny when beginning to talk is a way of announcing our belief. This is why it is necessary to praise God and send salutations to the Prophet and his pure Progeny in the sermons of the Friday Prayer, and actually these sermons are a part of the prayer too. When giving the sermon of the Friday prayer, which is a necessary part of this prayer, a person's beliefs and way of thinking become clear from the beginning.

When we are talking in public, we don't usually mention the name of one of the officials in the

government so that no one thinks we are affiliated with a certain person, party or group. But since we want to be in the Prophet's group, and being in his group means being committed to all that is good, we explicitly announce that we belong to the Prophet's group and party. This announcing of one's beliefs brings a special pleasure with itself that trains a person to be committed to a group.

When you want to get married and you go to the woman's house to talk with her family, if after saying, "In the name of God, the Beneficent, the Merciful," you say, "I would like to start by remembering the Imam of our Time (aj) whom I wish was present here," this is a way of announcing your beliefs. This shows your severe devotion to the Progeny of the Prophet (as). Announcing your belief in this way will bring blessings to your life and increase the Imam's kindness and love for you. This is an enjoyable part of being in a group. Those who want to be a member of the group of those who are religious act in this way due to the reasons which we have mentioned.

Remembering God's Greatness and Grandeur

After praising God and before talking about pious people's characteristics, the Commander of the Faithful (as) started with two short introductions. His first introduction was this, "The pure, sublime God created all beings although He had no need for them to obey Him and was safe from their sins. This is because the

rebellion of the rebellious does not harm Him and the obedience of the obedient does not benefit Him.”²⁸

This phrase is overflowing with descriptions of God’s greatness and grandeur. The truth is that one cannot worship a god that is not great. One cannot love a god that is not majestic. One cannot love a god that is not one and cannot tolerate another god being beside him. We should be careful not to belittle God just for others to be able to accept Him easily. In order to make God sound more appealing, we shouldn’t introduce Him as being a kind God in such a way as to detract from His greatness and grandeur.

To make this matter clearer, consider this example. Imam Reza (as) is very kind. He is famous as being the “gracious” Imam. But if you don’t read the recommended supplication for entering his shrine and don’t respect him, his kindness will not enter your heart very much. When you want to enter his shrine, you should ask for his permission, and this increases your fondness for him in your heart. That which increases your fondness for the Imam in your heart without you seeing it, although no one usually talks about this, is the etiquettes you adhere to when entering the shrine and the etiquettes you adhere to when reading the recommended supplications.

In the same way, in order to become dear in the hearts of His servants, the Almighty God has commanded His servants to pray. Consider this fact that the greatest, most fundamental sentence repeated in prayer is “*Allāhu Akbar* (God is greater).” In each cycle of prayer, a person must bow in front of God three times. Two of

these are in the form of prostration. God does not say, "My dear. My good servant! My little one!" for Him to become dear to His servants. God knows His servants precisely. He knows how He can become dear to His servants. So He says, "Prostrate in front of Me— due to your respect for Me and not due to your love for Me – so that I become dear to you."

■ A Person's Love for a Majestic God

This sentence in the Qur'an is truly majestic, "Say, 'He is the only God.'"²⁹ When God says that He is the only God, this means He cannot tolerate for anyone to be next to Him. Talking in this way about people is not appropriate, but it is beautiful to describe God in this way. Even with regard to His Prophet who was truly a unique person, God had announced that the Prophet would die like the rest of the people!³⁰ This shows us that His being One and His Unity is something that He allows just for Himself. God's majesty causes us to love Him.

The Commander of the Faithful (as) too mentioned that God is great, independent and without any needs, "The pure, sublime God created all beings although He had no need for them to obey Him and was safe from their sins."³¹

No one can harm God! Some people think they are doing God a favor, and they don't sin in order to not bother God! They are not paying attention to this fact that their sinning does not have any effect on God's majesty.

Why did the Commander of the Faithful (as) talk about God having no needs before he spoke of the traits of pious people? Perhaps so that no one would think that his obedience and piety are to benefit God. And no one should think that if he is not pious, he is harming God. What do you think about this? Why did the Commander of the Faithful (as) state in the beginning of his answer to Hammām that God is greater than to be affected by His servant's goodness or badness? Think about the Imam's intention here a little.

Everyone's Need for Piety Despite Differences Between People

Before mentioning the traits of pious people, the Commander of the Faithful (as) spoke about another matter as the second introduction, "So He has distributed their sustenance among them, and He has put each person in the world where he or she should be. The pious have these superior virtues in this world."³²

In this introduction, the Imam (as) emphasized that from the beginning of creation, God created people differently in terms of their financial status, their sustenance and their social status. There are many secrets hidden behind why people have these differences. One person has been born in April and another in May. One person is from this set of parents and another person is from another set of parents. One person was born in this city and another person in that city. One person is white and another person is black. One person has a sturdy build, and another person

has a slim build. One person is emotional, and another person is indifferent. And this list continues.

All of these features have been designed and planned out. God designed all of these. But the Commander of the Faithful (as) said, "Pious people have these superior virtues." This sentence means that you should take into consideration your differences with the person who is sitting next to you, but you should also realize that this does not have any effect on becoming "pious." In other words, despite all these differences, the pious people are those who are virtuous. And this does not depend on their differences in appearance or superficial traits.

You may be a bad-tempered person, while the person sitting next to you is not like that at all. Or you may be a very social person, but the person next to you keeps to himself. People are different. People's inner traits, disposition, situation in society and appearances are different. Despite all of these differences, there is no doubt that everyone should be pious.

Differences in People's Tests Depends on Their Dispositions

Some people think that piety is only suited to certain dispositions. Some people even say, "Being religious depends on a person's disposition. Being religious is compatible with some dispositions but not compatible with other dispositions. Therefore, religiosity and believing in transcendental matters is not a true reality." But actually, if your disposition is compatible with being religious, meaning that some of your

personal characteristics and non-acquired features are compatible with some of religion's commandments, God will take away this kind of religiosity from you with His tests! Your tests will be completely different from a person whose disposition is not compatible with religion. The Almighty God will test you in such a way that if you have become religious due to your inborn, inherent characteristics – and not due to your putting effort and confronting your will – your inner being will show itself, the inner being that you should have corrected with your effort and fighting your will.

Some people naturally prefer solitude. Some people like to live as the mystics do. Some people are naturally ascetic and other people like to be in love. But none of these have much effect in one becoming pious. Piety is something that disrupts all of this. With regard to piety, God tests a person who is naturally ascetic in such a way that he must stop being ascetic because of God. God tests an emotional person in such a way that he has to stop being emotional. Similarly, for each person with any kind of disposition, God designs a test that is in accordance with that person.

Piety means that you abandon a deed that is hard for you to abandon for the sake of God, and you do a deed that is hard for you to do for the sake of God. Of course, for each person doing certain deeds is hard and doing some other deeds is very easy. People are different from each other. But despite all of these differences, there is a key virtue that all believers must have and that is piety.

Sometimes it is impossible or not correct to ignore the differences between people, and we should accept

these differences to some extent. However, piety is something beyond these differences. A person who is bad-tempered may not be able to change his temperament very much. However, he should be a bad-tempered person who has piety. A person who is humorous by nature should be pious and humorous. A person who loves beauty should be pious while loving beauty. We don't need to omit these differences. Perhaps the reason that the Commander of the Faithful (as) spoke about people's differences before talking about the features of pious people is that he wanted to say, "I know that people are different. But despite all these differences, people can be pious."

A Higher Position and Ability Require More Piety

In accordance with how people's sustenance and spiritual position have been distributed, people who have a better, higher position need to be more pious. So in the same way that God has granted these people a special situation, He has special expectations from them too. Any special privilege that a person has should be regulated with piety, otherwise it will lead a person astray. Those people who are more intelligent need to be more pious; otherwise, they will misuse this gift by cheating others. Artists need to be more pious since they are able to win hearts more easily. People who are flexible and able to easily adjust in accordance with each situation need more piety; otherwise, they are in danger of becoming hypocritical.

The Difference Between Piety and Natural Traits

People's good traits are of two kinds. The first kind are the traits that exist in people naturally and are inherited. For example, some people are inherently patient, some people are inherently generous, and so on. The second kind of traits are acquired traits. These are traits that did not exist in a person from the beginning. He has acquired these traits through his own effort. For example, he is not inherently patient, but he works on himself until he gains this trait.

In a tradition, Imam Ṣādiq (as) has spoken about these two kinds of traits, "Truly, a good temperament is something God grants a person. The Almighty God grants this temperament to His servants. A part of it is due to a person's character and the other part is gained due to one's intention and working to acquire it." A person asked the Imam, "Which of these two is superior?" The Imam (as) replied, "A person has no choice in his innate behavior and this is a part of him. But the one who decides to behave well based on his own decision must be persevering in being obedient, and this is superior."³³

During the Sacred Defence, one of my friends who was studying in an Islamic seminary told me, "My roommates and classmates respect me very much. They consider me to be a very luminous, spiritual person. But I myself don't feel this luminosity and spirituality within myself." After we talked some, I realized that he had inherited these traits from his parents. When one

is a student in an Islamic seminary, such traits flourish even more. No one had seen any bad traits from him, but he didn't have any special virtues either. I mean, he hadn't done anything to gain these traits. I told him, "Your soul hasn't been challenged yet to see how good a person you are. God granted you these traits, and for now you are still just using what you had been granted from the beginning."

Piety means moving against the flow of the river. A person whose parents raised him in such a way that he didn't learn to curse others is not doing anything special if he does not curse anyone. Possessing this trait is an introduction and preparation that helps him to gain good traits. But this trait itself is not a criterion to show if he is a good person. Furthermore, some good behaviors are only due to pretending for others. For example, if a cleric does not smile at everyone, people will say, "What a bad-tempered cleric!" This means that his position and situation require that he always smile. But it is not clear how much he is willing to smile because of God. So a part of our good traits are inherited and are not acquired. And another part of our good traits are to deceive others. However, piety is something beyond both of these.

■ One of the Difficulties in Practicing Piety

There is also another point to be mentioned in this regard, but it is hard to talk about this. If the good traits we have are not because of our piety, and if they are inherited or due to being born in a special month, we

should put that good trait aside and then try to act in this way again, but because of God this time. This is one of the difficulties in becoming a real human being. The easiest example of this is eating. Are you able to eat just because of God? It is easy to pray because of God but it is not easy to eat because of God, because you must definitely eat anyway. Are you able to breathe because of God? It is truly hard. Sometimes giving your life because of God is easier than breathing because of Him. It is difficult because we are already breathing, but then we are being asked to breathe just because of God! The same is true about our inherent traits. I naturally have a good trait, but I am asked to have that good trait because of God! This is truly hard.

Chapter _____

The Beauty of Piety

- ✓ The Necessity of Paying Attention to the Beauty of Religion
- The Beauty of the Concept of Taqwā (Piety)
- The Definition of Taqwā (Piety)
- The Truth of Piety: Safeguarding something valuable
- A Loving Analysis of Piety
- Piety can be seen in all love stories.
- The Relation between Piety and Fear
- Two Scientific Bases for Piety

The Necessity of Paying Attention to the Beauty of Religion

Understanding the beauty of religion is an essential, general need. Understanding the spiritual beauties of religion makes religiosity easy for a person. Even if you consider religiosity to be something that is necessary, you should pay attention to this fact that sometimes a human being becomes tired of even fulfilling his necessary needs. Or even if you consider religiosity to be a rational act, you shouldn't neglect the fact that sometimes a person becomes tired of following rational topics.

Understanding the beauty of religion is much easier than practicing religion with love, because love is not gained that easily. Until a person reaches this level to be able to practice religion with love, he should make

up for the lacks in his religiosity with a factor that is actually sweet too. By lack, I mean a lack in motivation and the determination to be religious. Being religious while paying attention to the beauties of religion fills many of the lacks in a person's life and strengthens a person's religiosity very easily. Many people may think this is not necessary or vital, but this is actually tremendously important.

Even now in today's world, they enter impurities into a person's heart by way of a person's eyes, which are seeking to see beauties. That is why you can see that even the arts have become at the service of this world and its low concepts. It is stated in the Qur'an that Satan swore to God that he would make this world look beautiful to His servants.³⁴ Therefore, along with all the various aspects of religion, we should not neglect the beauty of religion. Religion is necessary. Religion is beneficial. Religion answers many of human beings' essential needs. But we should remember that religion is beautiful too. We should not consider religion's beauty to be something minor in religiosity.

The Beauty of the Concept of Taqwā (Piety)

Some of the concepts and words used in religion do not seem beautiful to us the way they should. Not seeing their beauty is either due to us being unfamiliar with the words or due to us having heard them being repeated many times. So not seeing their beauty may be from the point of view of linguistics or due to

repetition. If many of the beautiful things in the world are repeated, they do not look beautiful anymore. If a person has not understood the beauty of a word like piety, it will lose its beauty even more for him when it is repeated. We are not familiar with the word "Taqwā" linguistically, and we are also very far removed from the time when this word was first introduced and when it encompassed various meanings. More importantly, we have not yet experienced this word. Furthermore, this word has been repeated so many times for us that we have become tired of hearing it.

Before talking about the description of pious people, we should try to be able to understand the beauty of the concept of piety a little. If you want to write a memory on a card that you want to give to your dear friend, you will definitely not write the word piety (Taqwā) because this word is not that sweet for you. You probably think this word is more suitable to be used by clerics or elderly people who pay attention to necessities more than paying attention to beauty. However, we should tell those who think they truly care about love, purity and affection that you do not like your friends as much as God does, nor do you have that much talent in writing. God has written the Qur'an for us, and He has used the word piety in it. In terms of an intense elegance and love, He meant to say something like, "I want everything for you, My dear." But unfortunately, we have misunderstood God.

We have not yet grasped the meaning of piety. We should enjoy hearing, "Be pious." A mother addresses her child with phrases like, "You're so cute. My dear.

Come into my embrace, etc.” These phrases are very sweet for her child, and that child enjoys hearing these words very much. The word piety is something similar to these phrases. God is so compassionate that as long as it is not necessary to do otherwise, He only addresses His servants very kindly. But we have not become familiar with the words and concepts that God uses.

■ The Definition of Taqwā (Piety)

How do you define Taqwā? Avoiding? Fearing? Refraining? Being in hardships? We should not try to talk about the necessity and benefits of avoiding, fearing, etc. and tolerate having Taqwā since it is something rational. This is as if we are somehow trying to help the concept of Taqwā! This is not the meaning of Taqwā at all. The truth of Taqwā is much more beautiful than this.

It is good to start with an example in order to define Taqwā (piety). Imagine a woman whose husband has been listed as missing at the war front. She still has hope he will return, so she takes care of herself and her children while remembering him. Whenever she cleans her house, she tells herself, “If my husband returns one day, I’ll tell him, ‘I took care of this house, our children and myself my whole life while waiting for you.’ If he doesn’t return, what I am doing is not to my detriment. It is still to my benefit.” Is this way of taking care of oneself hard and bitter?

Piety means safeguarding oneself for someone else. This safeguarding has three aspects. The first aspect is to know one’s own value. The second factor is recognizing,

knowing, and being fond of the goal. And the third factor is safeguarding oneself because of that goal. A person should first know himself and understand his own value. Then he should know God and understand His position. In the ultimate level, a person knows himself and knows the value of the gem that exists within himself. At the same time, he understands God's special position and the peak of the enjoyment of reaching Him. Therefore, he tries to safeguard himself for the enjoyable moment of reaching God.

The Truth of Piety: Safeguarding Something Valuable

Piety means holding on tightly to a precious gem. When there is nothing in a person's bag, he will even play with his bag negligently. It is not important for him how he is carrying his bag. But when there is something valuable in it, he will hold onto it tightly. He will hold onto his bag in such a way that experienced thieves who are familiar with people's gestures and movements will realize this person has something valuable in his bag. Piety means holding on to something tightly due to its inner value and usefulness. It doesn't refer to holding on tightly to something so that no one will steal it.

We should not define piety as just meaning fearing and avoiding. Some people are cowardly. Even if they are not carrying something valuable, they still tremble when they walk. When we define piety as just meaning fearing and avoiding, the image of a person who is afraid of everything comes into one's mind. If we define

piety in this way, many people who like to be brave and do not like the trait of being cowardly will not want to even get close to the concept of piety. And as a result, piety will be abandoned.

Defining piety as fearing is metaphorical and not a real definition.³⁵ The true meaning of piety is not being afraid. Of course, there is a beautiful fear that is a part of piety that I will mention later. The truth of piety is safeguarding and protecting something that is valuable. Of course, safeguarding something valuable is due to a loved goal. Because if this safeguarding of something is only due to a person wanting to gain benefits, he/she will not have piety in matters concerning the unseen where his/her benefits are promises for the future.

■ A Loving Analysis of Piety

Among human concepts, no concept is as honorable as love. We should define piety using this honorable concept. We cannot accept that God is emphasising the concept of piety, but this concept is at a lower level than the word love that God's servants use. When the Almighty God uses the term piety, He is referring to the best of concepts that people know of plus many other good definitions.

When someone is not present, a person cannot wait for that other person for a very long time and safeguard him/herself for the sake of that other person unless one is truly in love with that other person. As it is commonly said, "Out of sight, out of mind." When a certain person cannot be seen, the memory of this person will gradually

leave one's heart too. Remembering him/her and waiting for him/her will only be possible if one is truly in love with that other person. God is aware of what love is and knows what to do! He has hidden Himself and says, "You must safeguard yourself because of Me!" In order to do this, you have no other way than to fall in love with Him.

The fact that the beloved is hidden makes the love more intense. A love becomes very valuable when you safeguard yourself for one whom you have never seen at all. This is the point where piety becomes linked with love. In piety you have to safeguard yourself for one whom you have never seen or met. The fact that the reward for piety is something promised for the future makes it more enjoyable too.

All the objections that people who are used to sinning have toward religiosity are about the concept of piety. They say, "Why should I safeguard myself? Why should I let go of enjoyments?" He feels it is a pity for him to not use the available enjoyments and to not use himself for everything he wants.

God being unseen has made piety more valuable. Those who make these objections have not yet understood the first two factors involved in piety. These two factors are knowing oneself and knowing God. If they understand these, they will eagerly safeguard themselves for God, and this is the third factor involved in piety.

■ **Piety can be seen in all love stories.**

Piety can be seen in all love stories. The truth of piety cannot be ignored in these stories. The whole

atmosphere of love stories is under the influence of piety. Hafiz, the great poet, said in a romantic poem, "Nothing is written on the page of my heart other than the elegant, standing silhouette of my beloved, which is like the letter 'Alif.'³⁶ What can I do? My teacher didn't teach me any other letters." The first line of his poem is about piety. This means I am careful that nothing else be written on the page of my heart. Why? Because I don't want anything to be on it except the elegant, standing silhouette of my beloved, which is like the letter "Alif."

In the beginning of the Qur'an, God says that if you are a pious person, you can walk on this path, "There is no doubt that this book is a guide for the pious."³⁷ This means that if you have the ability to be able to fall in love and safeguard yourself in order to reach a high, enjoyable goal that you have not yet seen or felt, you can walk on this path.

Have you ever been vigilant about yourself in such a way that you safeguard yourself because of something or someone that you have never seen or felt and about whom you have only heard some things? Piety is a beautiful word. One should understand this beauty. If we do not understand its beauty, we cannot live with it.

Pious people safeguard themselves for someone whom they have not seen and whom they will reach after a long period. Safeguarding oneself cannot take place unless one has a goal that is great in his mind. Since this goal cannot be seen, if a person does not love it, he cannot safeguard himself for it. Pious people are willing to overlook everything and safeguard themselves

because of this goal. This behavior of pious people can only be called "being in love."

■ The Relation Between Piety and Fear

The Commander of the Faithful, `Alī (as), said that pious people have superior virtues. He did not say they sometimes have virtues or they occasionally get close to virtues. No, they have virtues. Goodness is constantly showering down upon them, and one can see the effect of this rain of goodness in their beautiful behavior. For such people letting go of this world is not hard at all. They look at this world reluctantly and pass by it. We should pay careful attention to this reluctance with regard to the world that exists within the secret of piety.

Should we consider this reluctance with regard to the world to be something unwanted or something beautiful? It is true there is fear in piety too. Pious people have a fear and a surprising worry is present within them, which are actually very sweet. Whoever is not in love does not have such worries, "What if his beloved does not look at him? What if his beloved does not accept him?" These worries are for someone who is similar to the example that I gave in the beginning of this discussion about a wife waiting for her husband who has been lost at the front to return from the war. Nothing could be more upsetting for her than her spouse coming back and saying, "Why didn't you take good care of the household? Why did you let many unsuitable people come here?"

Yes, a pious person has a fear and a worry within himself due to the importance of his goal and the love

he has for it. Is this fear something to be condemned? Of course, we should not use the term fear when talking to everyone. Many people are not able to understand this concept of a fear due to one's love.

■ Two Scientific Bases for Piety

Observing piety has two scientific bases, an anthropological basis and ontological basis.

The anthropological basis of piety is that even if we do not consider the beauty of piety, a person naturally feels a need to safeguard himself for something that is sacred and beloved, which he will obtain in the end. Overcoming difficulties is a natural need in people.

If a person is not pious, he (his spirit) will eventually die. When he does not safeguard himself for anyone, as the poet Hafiz said in a poem, "You should pray (the prayer for someone who has died) over that person who hasn't yet died in accordance with my decree." If a person does not safeguard himself at all, he is like a walking dead person, and he can easily see and understand this himself. He will say, "I am not safeguarding myself for anything. I have behaved like a sheep that bites any grass it sees is edible!"

So a person needs piety to feel good mentally. This need has a completely scientific and anthropological basis, which should be taken into account. A person should see his need for piety. Then he must tell God, "O God, I'm thankful You opened up the way to this path for me. If You hadn't opened up this path for me, I'm not sure what I would have done to myself!"

In addition to what has been said, a person's need for piety has an ontological basis too. Look at this world. There are some rules in this world that a person is forced to adhere to, otherwise he will not have a sweet life. One of the rules in this world is that not everything is suitable for you. Look at your digestive system. A person cannot eat everything he wants. The older a person gets, the more he is forced to abstain from eating certain foods. This is how the world is.

God has placed flowers and dirt next to each other. When a person gets to know this world, he realizes that he must have a program and he must choose between different things. Since many people have not yet come to know this world, they are not able to be pious. For example, one of the rules in this world is that no one is able to get his/her right completely. Since some people do not know this, they suffer intensely when they are not able to get their right. But this world is such that a person is not able to get his/her right in most cases. This is not because this person has done something wrong or bad so that he now deserves to be deprived or punished, or it is not because he has done something good so that he deserves to receive a benefit or reward.

In order for a person to be pious, he should know this world. One should not like everything. One should not try to obtain everything he likes. One should not waste the things he likes and has obtained. This is how the world is; otherwise, a person's soul will rebel. This is not related to us needing piety in order to feel good. The world is like this itself.

Chapter _____

- What does it mean to have superior virtues?
- We are tested with God's grace.
- A person should not be in pursuit of gaining virtues!

What does it mean to have superior virtues?

After these two short introductions, the Commander of the Faithful (as) said, "The pious have these superior virtues in this world."³⁸ Among all of God's creatures, pious people are different because they have superior virtues. We do not say a person who only acts piously at times is a pious person. When I pray, if I feel that I have entered prayer like a stranger entering the city of worshiping, and when I leave prayer, I feel like a stranger who is leaving that city, it cannot be said that I am a person who performs my daily prayers loyally. Being loyal to something or someone is different, and a loyal person is treated differently too. It is almost impossible for a person who is devoted to virtues to have vices.

One of my friends who had been a prisoner of war in Iraq for a time along with the late Abū Turābī during the Iran-Iraq War related the following story for me. He said, "I told the late Abū Turābī, 'How patient you are! How is it you never get upset?' He replied, 'Is it possible for a person to learn to talk Chinese all at once?!' 'No, that's impossible. It is extremely unlikely that such a thing could happen,' I answered in surprise. He said, 'Becoming upset should be this much unlikely for you. A believer does not become upset. A believer does not lose his control.'" Such a person is a person with superior virtues.

Having virtues means that you have done something that has created added value within yourself. If your mother is patient and you have become patient as well, this is not a great virtue, because you have not created added value. If your father is kind and you have become kind as well, this is not a great virtue either. Rather, this is an opportunity. Having virtues means that you change yourself and turn your bad points into good points. Harder than this is when there is a good deed that you do very easily. This good deed has become instilled in your mind and it is not an acquired virtue. Now change this into a good deed that you do based on your own will with the intention of getting close to God. Only God knows how difficult this is to do.

■ **We are tested with God's grace.**

There are two kinds of virtues that are vital for us. One kind of virtues are the virtues and the added value

that a person gains. And the other kind are the virtues that we receive from God. The virtues that are granted by God are higher than the first kind. When God wants to talk about this, He talks about it in such a way that it is as if He is telling a secret. "Such is the grace of God which He grants to whomever He wants."³⁹ God says that He will bestow this grace on whomever He wants, not whoever is virtuous. See an example of how the Progeny of the Prophet talk to God, "O God, make us indebted to You by bestowing Your grace on us and do not be hard on us with Your justice."⁴⁰

Actually, God's grace is a tool by which He tests His servants. And this is the secret behind God testing people by way of His Guardians. God likes to bestow His grace on some of His servants [His Guardians]. Why are you jealous about this? Sometimes when God's grace is bestowed on other people it truly annoys a person. For example, if God grants something to the person sitting next to you out of His grace and you see this, how will you feel? One must submit to the way God bestows His grace.

If I say, "Whoever sits and listens to what I say for a few minutes will receive a gift," you have the right to ask for your gift after my talk. But let's suppose I say, "I have a gift and I'll give it to anyone I want after my talk." In this case, people will become divided into two groups. One group will quickly pout and leave. And the other group will sit in hope of receiving that gift. This example was to make it easier to understand. God is saying something like, "I'll bestow My grace on anyone I want." In this case too, people will be divided into two

groups. One group will quickly pout and leave. But the other group will stay and say, "We'll stay whether we are given anything or not."

When God says, "Such is the grace of God which He grants to whomever He wants," no one can raise his voice and say, "God, I begged You and worshiped You so much. So why didn't You grant that to me?" God will reply, "This grace that I bestowed on them wasn't of the kind about which I said, 'Pray to Me for I shall answer your prayers.'⁴¹ It was the kind about which I said, '...to whomever I want.'⁴² In this situation, this is the hardest test of a servant who worships God.

Some people's eyes are fixed on the gifts that God grants out of His grace and benevolence. They say, "We'll ask God for it. If He granted it to us, He has done us a favor. But if He doesn't grant it to us, that is fine. He is God and He doesn't want to grant it to us." These are people whom even if they go to Hell, they will say, "God, although You're punishing me, I still love You."⁴³

God likes you to be humble with respect to the grace that He grants others. God likes you to be accepting if He grants a favor to someone out of His grace and for you to say, "I'm totally fine with this and I am ready to help that person too!" Of course, if saying this was easy, Ṭalhah and Zubayr would have said this too. We should know that when God bestows His grace on a person, it is always due to some positive point that His servant has, even if we aren't aware of it. But when God grants something to someone due to His grace, others are usually blind to seeing that person's positive point.

A person should not be in pursuit of gaining virtues!

A person should never be after gaining virtues. If one says, "I want to become a very good person," and then he starts collecting virtues, it is clear from the beginning that if he becomes good even a bit, he will become corrupted. Pious people did not have this intention that they wanted to gain virtues. Rather, this is something that comes as a result of having piety. This means that on the path to gaining piety, these virtues are automatically generated in a person too.

We should not consider gaining moral virtues to be our goal. Moral virtues are an advantage and the result that comes from walking on the path toward divine grace. They are not the goal. When we see the Commander of the Faithful's (as) description of pious people, we should realize that pious people did not try to move toward these attributes. Rather, as they were traveling the path toward a higher truth, they gained these traits too.

We are standing under a shower of goodness, but we do not want to idolize these good attributes. We should look at these good attributes and virtues as being a mirror for us to be able to see the truth of these good attributes and virtues. What is important is the truth of these virtues. The truth of these virtues is that we should not be in pursuit of them. Virtues are a reflection and a shadow of a truth that is being reflected on a wall. We should not stop when we see this shadow. Instead, we should reach to that higher truth by way of this shadow.

If we stop at good attributes and start counting our good attributes instead of worshiping God, we will become people who worship goodness! We should not consider becoming good to be a goal in itself and try to reach this. We should be in pursuit of gaining piety. Becoming good is a side effect of having piety, and that will automatically come to us as we are traveling the path.

Chapter 6

Output is more important than input

- Pious People's Apparent Features
- Output takes precedence over input.
- The Difficulty of Controlling One's Tongue
- Why is controlling one's tongue so hard?
- Some Small Points with Regard to Controlling One's Tongue
- A person's way of talking shows his/her character, intentions and inner being.
- The Role of the Tongue in Strengthening the Roots of Evil
- The Role of the Tongue in Justifying One's Sins
- The Results of an Experiment: Justifying One's Actions
- The Importance of "Repentance": Stopping the Cycle of Justifying One's Sins
- Silence: A Simple Yet Comprehensive Solution
- Silence: A Passive Solution
- The Advantage of Talking Properly Over Silence
- Pious people's proper way of speaking is due to their inner purity.
- Sometimes when talking we are expressing our judgments about others.
- Transferring Spiritual Illnesses Through Talking
- An Effective Way to Control Talking Badly

■ Pious People's Apparent Features

In the beginning when the Commander of the Faithful (as) was describing the characteristics of pious people, he mentioned some of the apparent features of pious people, "Their words are proper, their dress is moderate and they have a humble behavior. They close their eyes to what God has forbidden, and they have devoted their ears to only hearing beneficial knowledge."⁴⁴

In these sentences, the Imam mentioned some of pious people's apparent features. After mentioning these apparent features, he described the inner truth of these traits. In these sentences, the Imam talked about these people's way of talking, their clothing, behavior, character, and the way they use their eyes and ears. The Imam started by talking about one's way of talking,

which is what shows one's inner being. He ended this section by talking about one's eyes and ears, which are the entranceway to one's heart and inner being.

■ **Output takes precedence over input.**

The Commander of the Faithful (as) first talked about output before he talked about input. In your opinion, is controlling what is within us and becomes manifested more important or controlling the things that are outside of us and which a person wishes to control? The entrance to one's heart is through one's eyes and ears. Apparently, a person should close his eyes and ears in order to protect his heart. However, the truth is that the heart's output is much more important than its input!

The difference between the heart of a person's body and the heart of one's soul is that for the heart of the body, blood should enter from one side of the heart and go out from the other side. But the soul's heart, which is one's true heart is not like this. The soul's heart is the treasure chest for one's entire being and it does not need an entrance. It is like a mine, which one needs to explore. One should see what he has done to himself that he allows such negative things to enter him and why he is affected by such input. When one's heart becomes ruined, his eyes become infatuated with this world. When one's heart becomes ruined, his ears cause him to lose his intelligence.

If a person thinks his heart has become deviated due to one look, he is mistaken. Imam Şādiq (as) said,

“Moving mountains is easier than moving a heart from its position.”⁴⁵ A person’s heart does not change that easily. If the heart’s condition is not too bad, it will not be very vulnerable when facing the input coming from the eyes and ears. Therefore, what is inside the heart is more important than what enters it.

If a person wants to purify his heart so that his eyes will not want to see bad scenes, he should control what comes out from his heart. If he controls his tongue, his heart will gradually become corrected too. In this case, his eyes will not see anything other than beauty. If one corrects his heart, his eyes will not see bad things anymore, and he will not think bad thoughts. Correcting one’s heart is very hard to do. In order to correct one’s heart, one should fix the output coming from his heart. This means correcting one’s behavior, appearance, and above all, one’s tongue.

The Difficulty of Controlling One’s Tongue

Among the one hundred virtues that the Commander of the Faithful (as) talks about in this sermon, the first virtue that he mentions is controlling one’s tongue. This shows the significance and sensitive status of speaking and the importance of etiquettes and moral religious rulings related to the tongue.

About the importance of controlling one’s tongue, I will only mention one tradition. The Holy Prophet of Islam (s) said, “If a person guarantees me that he will control his desires and his tongue, I will guarantee

him Heaven."⁴⁶ These two are important since they can be the cause of one going to Hell. This shows how important they are for a person. A similarity that exists between these two is that controlling them is very hard. It may seem at first look that controlling one's desires is much harder than controlling one's tongue. However, the truth is that controlling one's tongue is much harder than controlling one's carnal desires.

If we are able to overcome the difficulty of controlling our tongue, we will reach to very high values. That is why controlling our way of talking and always talking properly is more important than any other kind of control. One's tongue and talking is much more important than one's eyes. Therefore, if the youth who seek to control their eyes and what they see control their tongue, they will be more successful in controlling their eyes.

■ **Why is controlling one's tongue so hard?**

But why is controlling one's tongue so hard? There are two main reasons for this. The first reason is that a person's inner evil is easily and unwantedly shown by his tongue. The second reason is that the tongue is a manifestation of all bad traits. If one looks at something that is unlawful, his desires have stimulated him to do this. If one slaps another person in the face, his anger has stimulated him to do so. However, any evil that exists in one's heart will be manifested by his tongue and his words.

Controlling one's tongue means controlling the main path. Controlling one's tongue means in fact controlling any evil that exists within a human being. When you

control your tongue regarding your jealousy on the one side, your love for having a high position will also be removed from your tongue and your words from the other side. When you control your tongue regarding arrogance on the one side, your love for this world will also be removed from your tongue and words from another side. In summary, all bad traits affect a person's tongue and help to form his way of talking. A person's tone, voice, the amount he talks and even the stance he takes when talking will change when he controls his tongue. Controlling one's tongue is difficult because there are numerous bad things affecting it.

Some Small Points with Regard to Controlling One's Tongue

Controlling one's tongue does not just mean that a person must avoid saying anything bad. There are some small, important points with regard to controlling one's tongue. When we pay attention to these points, we see that it is almost impossible for us to completely control our tongue. During the time of the war, we had a teacher who was later martyred. He used to say, "I sometimes feel that a certain student will be attracted if I say a kind sentence to him. But when I want to say that sentence, I suddenly ask myself if I am only concerned about my task as a teacher? What if this sentence of mine causes the father of this student who doesn't behave very warmly with him to become less dear to him?! That is why I control my tongue and don't show excessive kindness to him in a way that would be too much."

Controlling one's tongue does not just mean avoiding talking badly, backbiting, accusing others, lying, etc. Even talking kindly has some rules that we must follow. One of the small points that we should be careful about when controlling our tongue is our intention for saying something. For example, one of the features of a person's way of talking is his tone. God will ask us on the Day of Judgment, "Why did you lower your voice some when you were saying hello to that specific person? Was it because he was rich that you changed your tone of voice?" For instance, does a person use a different tone of voice when he is talking to his boss as opposed to one of his employees? A woman can often recognize at home whether her husband is talking to his boss or to one of his employees on the phone due to his tone of voice! Controlling these small points is very hard.

A person's way of talking shows his/her character, intentions and inner being.

The easiest way to know a person is through his speech. Why? Because first of all, talking is the easiest and fastest way that one's character is manifested. The truth of a person's being and character are easily manifested by his words without him having made the least preparation. It is true that a person's character is manifested by everything he does, but all of our behaviors need some preparation. For example, if one wants to overeat, he first has to prepare enough food to be able to overeat. But the tongue and talking require

almost no preparation. Due to this reason, our character, intention, and inner being are very easily and quickly manifested when we talk. The fact that talking is this easy and simple and does not require much will or effort often causes us to say something unintentionally and based on our inner being. This makes controlling our tongue very difficult.

The second reason that our inner being is manifested by our tongue to this extent is that most of our behaviors do not have the ability to show and manifest all of our good or bad points. But the tongue and our talking have this ability that they can manifest diverse dimensions and details of our character and inner being. This is to such an extent that we can often see that all of people's bad points are manifested in their speech, and there is no need for us to be able to see other people's inner being to be able to understand them. The Commander of the Faithful (as) said, "No one conceals something in his heart other than it manifests itself through his unintentional words and facial expressions."⁴⁷

If a person pays a little attention, he can understand all of people's inner characteristics and a summary of their lives by their way of talking. The Commander of the Faithful (as) said, "A person is hidden behind his tongue."⁴⁸ This means that a person's characteristics can be understood from his words. From the way people talk, we can easily understand how jealous or stingy they are, how much they love to hold a position, how pure their intention is, or how simple or complicated they are. It is even possible to understand how their spouse behaves toward them at home. So a person

manifests all his weaknesses through his tongue. In another tradition, the Commander of the Faithful (as) said, "Tongues explain what was hidden in people's inner being."⁴⁹

The Role of the Tongue in Strengthening the Roots of Evil

It is true that our faults are being manifested by our tongue and we are able to hide our faults by controlling our tongue, but this is not our main problem. When we say we need to control our tongue, it is not because we want to prevent our faults from being manifested. There is a much greater reason behind this. The more important problem is that any fault that is manifested by one's tongue will become strengthened in one's heart too.

When a plant rises up from beneath the dirt and is nourished by the light from the sun and by the air, its roots become strengthened too. In the same way, if any fault is manifested by one's tongue, the roots of that badness will become strengthened in his heart. Any fault that is manifested by our tongue had roots in the depths of our heart. In the same amount that we let an evil be manifested, its roots will become strengthened. After this, confronting that fault and eradicating it will become harder.

Based on what has been said, if a person is able to control his tongue and prevent his inner bad points from being manifested, he will weaken the roots of all evils in his heart. Since controlling one's tongue is hard

to do, if one is able to do so, this shows the peak of his control and him having the ability to control his desires. A true hero is the one who is able to control his tongue.

Since there is no cost involved in using one's tongue, one uses it very easily. We should try to make this deed, which is easy to do, be something difficult for our soul to do. Of course, this needs practice and perseverance.

In the same way that the tongue is effective in making bad points and faults grow, it can also be effective in making good points grow. For example, if a person wants to be altruistic, he should be kind to others with his tongue, and this does not require any preparation or special facilities. This will instill altruism in him. A person can strengthen the little motivation that exists in his heart by manifesting his goodness with his tongue.

The Role of the Tongue in Justifying One's Sins

The role of talking and the tongue are very important and have often been neglected. The Holy Prophet of Islam (s) said, "Most of the faults of the son of Adam are due to his tongue. If a person controls his tongue, the Almighty God will conceal his faults."⁵⁰ The superficial meaning of this tradition is that if you do not want anyone to know about your flaws, control your tongue. But its deeper meaning is that if you do not want your flaws to grow and become strong and active, control your tongue.

As has been said before, the tongue manifests a person's inner being. And whatever is within us and

finds the opportunity to be manifested will become strengthened after manifestation. When we make a statement due to a bad motive, we are actually defending that evil within us, and subconsciously that evil will make sense to us. Our action turns our bad motive into a beautiful motive in our eyes. Because we have said this statement, we defend it. After defending it, we cannot see its ugliness. Until we had not manifested this inner evil, it was easier to see the ugliness of this evil and to abandon it. But now that we have said it, we defend it.

The Results of an Experiment: Justifying One's Actions

Psychologists conducted an experiment, which had some interesting results. In this experiment, people were asked to put some spoons in a tray and then empty the tray. They were asked to repeat this several times. Then each person was given a sum of money (unequally) to tell those who were going to do the same thing that this boring experiment was very interesting and instructive! Afterwards they asked the people who had been paid to lie to others, "What did you think of this experiment?" Interestingly, those who had earned more money overall thought it was a useless, nonsensical experiment. On the contrary, those who had received less money strongly defended what they had done, and they considered the experiment to have been useful for the advancement of science!⁵¹ The reason is clear. It is because a person subconsciously defends his actions. In this experiment, that money

was enough for the person who had been paid more to justify his action. He did not need to defend his deed (assuming that he knew this was a one-time experiment and that he would not be paid for such an action again). But when a person has done something in vain and not received much money for this action, his soul pushes him to defend his vain act in order to find some peace of mind.

In general, a person tends to have more motivation to defend his futile deeds. Actually, when he sees that something is very harmful to himself, he increases his accuracy. He says, "Look, you don't know why I did this. The story is so complicated!" Now this nonsensical and even wrong deed is called a complicated deed. Then his mind begins to perform a series of clever actions to justify himself. Why? Because he has done something in vain.

Therefore, when a person brings out an evil that is within himself (such as jealousy) and utters something due to it, (for example, he mocks someone,) he will strengthen this sin (mocking others) with another sin, which is justifying his sin. At the moment, we do not want to talk about justifying wrong behavior. More important than justifying wrong behavior is the fact that a person will no longer see the "ugliness" of that wrong behavior and the "beauty" of a correct behavior. He will become blind to the indecency of that wrong behavior and the goodness of that right behavior. From now on, not only for that behavior but also for any other act that has that same ugliness, he will not see its ugliness. As a result, one "verbal" bad behavior will lead to hundreds

of other bad behaviors. That is why the tongue is the main cause of a human being's misery and decline. One of the Holy Prophet's (s) recommendations was for everyone who believes in God and the Day of Judgment to either speak properly or remain silent!⁵²

The Importance of "Repentance": Stopping the Cycle of Justifying One's Sins

Why is repentance so important in the religious teachings? Because first of all, repentance stops the cycle of justification. But more importantly, it targets and weakens the engines that drive justification, which are arrogance and selfishness. Repentance is an act of confronting oneself, cultivating one's ability to evaluate himself and freeing oneself from his own captivity. This is why the Friends of God were always repenting and asking for forgiveness even though they had not committed any sins. Although it is very bad to sin, if committing a sin is accompanied by repentance, it can be very beneficial to a person because that person is confronting himself.

Why is the tongue the biggest cause of a person's misery? How many sins can a person commit with his tongue? Although the sins of the tongue are very serious, it does not matter how many sins we commit directly with the tongue. The important thing is that the tongue easily causes evils to become permanent within us because these sins are unhesitatingly manifested. A person never realizes what he has established in his being

with his words. In addition, one's tongue and his words cause some things that are ugly to appear beautiful, so a person no longer understands their ugliness. That is why the tongue causes a person to become more miserable.

Another point to note about controlling our tongue is that it is true that God is the best Creator, but we also create. One of the most important things that we create and which is never destroyed is our words. Nothing in the universe will be obliterated. Every word we create is with us, on our face and is presented to the Almighty God and the divine Guardians in a file. If these words have a beautiful appearance and a pleasant smell, they make our faces beautiful and fragrant. But if they have an ugly face and a foul smell, they also make our faces ugly. That is why we need to pay special attention to our tongue and the way we speak.

Silence: A Simple Yet Comprehensive Solution

The easiest way for a person to control his tongue is to remain silent. In addition to increasing a person's wisdom, silence also cultivates, organizes and refines one's thoughts and feelings. When a person speaks about the things he loves without thinking first, his self-control and self-awareness will be less regarding what he likes and dislikes. In other words, the more a person restrains himself from talking, the more his/her thoughts and feelings will develop and grow.

In some traditions, silence has been preferred to speaking. Imam Šādiq (as) said that Prophet David

told his son, Prophet Solomon, "My son, if talking is silver, silence is gold."⁵³ In another tradition, Imam Ṣādiq (as) considered silence to be an endless treasure, an ornament for those who are patient and a covering for the ignorant.⁵⁴

Silence is one of the simplest yet most all-inclusive ways to control one's tongue. If the tongue is controlled, the heart will prosper more and damages will be repaired. Silence is a surprising thing. A person does not need to bring anything into himself from the outside. He can help goodness to flourish from within with his silence. Silence is like planting a seed in soil. When the right season arrives, the seed will grow on its own.

■ **Silence: A Passive Solution**

With all these good effects that were mentioned that come from silence, we must pay attention to one important point. Our outlook toward religion usually has a flaw that enters it unintentionally. What is this flaw? Based on the instructions we hear from religion, we get the wrong impression that religion invites us to be passive in a nice, appropriate way when we are facing the world. You tell someone to do a certain action to be safe from a specific danger, do this other action to be safe from another danger, and so on. When all the instructions you give him are of this type, subconsciously it occurs to him that it's as if he is in a minefield where he should constantly be careful about everything.

A person, who is constantly faced with the warnings and restrictions in religion, gradually comes to believe that religion is trying to protect him from dangers. The natural consequence of such a perception is that he gets tired of religion after a while and says, "Let me live my life! I don't want to think about dangers at all, but you're constantly showing me dangers and ways to prevent these dangers." So he distances himself from religion. Some of the energetic, high-spirited youth cannot accept this view of religion.

If a person is told too much, "Don't do this. Don't eat. Don't go. Be careful, etc.," his soul becomes tired. This is not a feeling that is only experienced by ordinary people who have not developed very much. It is a deep, human emotion that should be valued. Therefore, in the beginning of the Hammām Sermon, the Commander of the Faithful (as) did not say that a believer is silent and does not talk. Rather, he said, "Their words are proper." A believer talks, but he talks properly. It is true that silence is very good, but what is more beautiful than silence is "speaking properly."

■ The Advantage of Talking Properly Over Silence

If the importance of silence has been emphasized in some traditions, it does not mean that silence is superior to speaking properly. Rather, silence has been emphasized because human beings are often naturally plagued by excessive, superfluous speech.

Therefore, we desperately need advice to guide us on the importance and virtue of silence.

Someone asked Imam Sajjād (as) whether it is better to be silent or to speak. The Imam said, "There is harm in both silence and speaking, but speaking is superior if we are safe from the plagues that affect it." He was asked, "How is that possible?" The Imam replied, "God did not send the prophets and their successors for them to remain silent. He sent them to talk. A person will not deserve to go to Heaven by remaining silent, and God's Guardianship does not become obligatory by way of silence. A person will not be withheld from the Hellfire due to his silence. And God's wrath will not be extinguished by silence. All of these only come about with talking. I cannot say that the moon and the sun are equal. You only consider and describe the advantages of silence in comparison with talking, but you ignore (and do not say anything about) the advantages of talking in comparison with silence."⁵⁵

Imam Sajjād (as) himself was a devout, very modest person who was not very talkative. The reason he did not speak to others in many cases was because it was not possible for him to say something at that time. But if a person has a good opportunity to say something, it is much more beautiful if he/she speaks. We cannot escape from the evils of speaking by not speaking forever. One day we must eventually decide to work on ourselves to speak properly. Imam Sajjād's (as) praise of speaking beautifully reflects the fact that religion wants people to be active and not passive.

Pious people's proper way of speaking is due to their inner purity.

Some people always speak properly and correctly without even needing to make an effort. While in Mecca, a scholar saw one of the mystics in a dream. The mystic told him, "Tell that certain person to say whatever he wants." This means that person would never say anything bad. When the Commander of the Faithful (as) said, "Their talking is proper," he did not mean that the pious people control themselves very much so that they do not say anything bad. No, since there is just God in the hearts of pious people, whatever they say is proper. If someone has ninety percent goodness in his heart and ten percent evil, this ten percent of evil will have an effect on most of his words. Pious people do not have even one percent of evil within them. That is why all their words are proper.

Therefore, not only is saying good things more beautiful and better than silence but being a person who "talks properly" is higher than being one who "remains silent" This is because when a person is silent, despite the blessings and benefits that this has, his flaws remain hidden. But if a person speaks properly whenever he says something, this means that there is no evil or fault within him. Because if evil and faults did exist within him, they would have been evident in his speech.

Sometimes when talking we are expressing our judgments about others.

A person must be vigilant and very careful when he is speaking. He must be constantly vigilant about what he says and what crime he commits against himself with his words. One should never be quick to judge others. Making judgments is truly difficult. Doing scientific work is completely different from making judgments. If a person makes an effort when he is doing scientific work, even if he does not come to the correct result, he is appreciated for his effort. But since the rights of others are involved in judging, one must be much more careful. Therefore, a person should not make a judgment unless he is certain. This is very difficult. In conversations, we usually speak about people very easily, judge others and express our judgments about others. When we do this, we are ruining the listener's opinion about those people.

Transferring Spiritual Illnesses Through Talking

The Household of the Prophet (as) strongly recommended not associating with people who do not speak properly.⁵⁶ Every illness is transmitted in one way or another. Many spiritual and mental illnesses are transmitted by way of the tongue. For example, if you talk for a while with someone who is cowardly or speaks badly, he will transmit his illness to you. If you were forced to talk to such a person, do not have a serious

discussion with him. If you have a serious discussion with him, your heart will be harmed. This is why the Friends of God were sometimes known for their humor and wit. One of the reasons for this was that they could not find anyone to have a serious conversation with at times, so they would talk about everything with humor to avoid being affected by others' illnesses. At the same time, they would not hurt anyone's feelings in this way.

An Effective Way to Control Talking Badly

Controlling our tongue is very difficult. One of the most effective ways to control talking badly is to do good deeds with our tongue. If we do this, our tongue will automatically correct and compensate in a bad situation. We can say good things, recite the Qur'an some, ask our mother how she is over the phone, etc. It is very easy to control talking badly by doing a few good deeds.

There is a golden rule in ethics for self-improvement, "In order to be able to do things we cannot do, we must do more of the things we can easily do." To control problems we may have with our tongue, we need to do many good deeds that we can easily do with our tongue. We can give charity with our words. For example, speaking kindly to others brings light to the tongue. A person can achieve many things by using his tongue in a good way.

Another effective way for controlling our tongue is to use our tongue for saying nice things to God. In this

case, our tongue, larynx, and voice will be embarrassed to go elsewhere without our permission. This will help us to control our tongue.

For example, when a suitor goes to a girl's house and wants to speak, he speaks very patiently, in a good tone, with energy and based on his own will. When they offer him tea, he adjusts the tone of his voice precisely, and with a well-controlled voice he says, "Thank you very much." Speak nicely to God in the same way. For example, when you want to say "*Allāhu Akbar* (God is greater)" in the beginning of your prayer, collect yourself and control your tone while saying, "God I want to talk nicely before You."

Unless we speak nicely to God a little, it will be hard for us to stop ourselves from speaking nicely for bad purposes, with polytheistic intentions and from talking vainly. But if we speak nicely with God, He will not allow our tongue to go astray and to be used in a bad way. Good people are people who talk properly. They do not speak in vain. They do not misuse speaking nicely, nor do they use bad language. Imam `Alī (as) did not say pious people do not speak badly; he said they speak properly. Speaking properly has two parts to it. They do not say bad things, and they say good things.

Let's try to speak nicely when praying before God. God sometimes forgives and destroys a mountain of sins because of someone speaking nicely. It has been said in some reminiscences that talking nicely before God and His Friends was very effective and saved people at times.

Chapter

Wearing Good Clothes

- The Second Characteristic of Pious People
- Being Well-groomed with Sincerity
- The Difficulty of Being Sincere with Regard to Our Clothing
- Condemnation of Being Naive in Sincerity
- Clothes: Modern Day Billboards
- Types of Spiritual Demonstrations
- Clothes of the Time: The Best Clothes

The Second Characteristic of Pious People

In discussing the second characteristic of the pious, the Commander of the Faithful (as) referred to the clothes of the pious. He said, "Their clothes are moderate." The fact that the Commander of the Faithful (as) referred to clothing at the beginning of this sermon shows the importance of clothing. Clothing is one of the things that a believer can use to benefit himself and his religion. Clothing is not just for fun, for entertainment or for decoration. Clothing has many uses. Because people have different reasons for using various clothing, both in terms of the appearance of clothing and in terms of the intention that they have when wearing clothes, it is spoken about at the top of the list of pious people's virtues.

■ Being Well-groomed with Sincerity

When we meet other people, we should be well-groomed in appearance. Imam Khomeini (ra) was concerned about his clothing and being well-groomed. Imam Khomeini (ra) was not one to show off, but it was important for him that others see him well-groomed. He even ironed the clothes he only wore at home, and no one usually irons these clothes. It is very important to be well-groomed when we meet other people. We must respect other people's eyes.

When we go among others, we should dress nicely. However, we should not adorn ourselves or dress up in order to be admired by people or to be the center of attention. The Holy Prophet of Islam (s) said, "If a person wears a garment to show off and so that people will look at him, God will not look at him until he takes that garment off."⁵⁷

Sometimes, we respect other people's eyes and think, "These people are human beings, and they should not see a disorderly scene." That is why we dress well so that people can see a well-groomed appearance. This is good. At other times, we respect ourselves as a religious person. For example, we say, "I am religious, and religious people should be well-groomed." It is for this reason that we dress well. This is also good. But sometimes we dress nicely so that people will see us and because of our clothes we will have a higher position and status among people. This is dangerous.

Becoming dear to people is only in the hands of God. God decides who other people will love and who will

be dear to them. Now, if someone puts God aside and wants to be loved and wants to charm people with his clothes, this is one of the things that provokes God's wrath. Therefore, God will not pay attention to this person as long as he is wearing that garment.

■ The Difficulty of Being Sincere with Regard to Our Clothing

The difficulty with clothing is that people usually choose their clothes to be seen by others. When people are alone, they do not usually feel they are forced to wear beautiful clothes. That is, the way a person dresses is a behavior that can be seen by others, and it is very difficult for a person to be sincere when he/she is being seen by others. The utmost beauty of a sincere deed can be seen here. The utmost beauty of a sincere deed is not seen in the Midnight Prayers or when a person is giving charity unseen by others. The highest type of sincere deed is when a person is doing a deed that others can see but he/she is still sincere.

To practice sincerity in our clothing, we can follow the example of Imam Khomeini (ra). If we truly want to dress well to respect other human beings, we should iron our clothes and be well-dressed for the people who live with us at home too. This is a test. Why are we always trying to impress strangers? It is the eyes of our family and acquaintances that are constantly tolerating us. Let's dress well for them.

Having a sincere intention when we are well-dressed is truly a difficult task. We must work to have a sincere

intention in respecting ourselves as human beings, respecting our own faith, respecting our personality in society, respecting the eyes of others, and trying to make tolerating us be easier for others. These are beautiful motives that God has commanded us to have.

Condemnation of Being Naive in Sincerity

Some may say, "I had never thought at all about these details that you have mentioned about sincerity. Even without paying attention to these issues, I was never insincere in my intention." The name of this group of people who think like this is "naive, sincere people." Being a naive, sincere person is not very valuable. On the other hand, being a complex, sincere person is very valuable. This is not something special to say that since it does not occur to me to act dishonestly, I do my deeds with a sincere intention.

If a person is not paying attention to these things and acts sincerely, this does not have much benefit for him. Some are like this and there is nothing wrong with it. We do not want to disturb the peace of those who have achieved this sincerity due to being a naive person. But this is a minimal sincerity. Good, high-level mystics are very intelligent people. For this reason, they see the insincere aspects in every behavior, and while they are able to act with an insincere intention, they do not do so. They could misuse this opportunity. But they know that if they do so now, it will only have superficial, worldly benefit for them. Thus, they avoid such behavior.

The sincere intention of a naive person is of little value, because it does not occur to him at all that if he does this good deed, it will benefit him. We do not seek to promote this kind of sincerity, and we do not consider such a person to be a role model. We want to have sincerity like the good people who take everything into account when they are getting dressed. Naive people who say, "We just put something on" are harming human beings' perfection, because they cause people to think that struggling for perfection is not necessary.

Good-natured, naive people should not be role models for us. A person who does not sin because he does not know how to sin at all, cannot be our role model. One who does not know how to lie at all should not be an example of being honest. One who knows how to benefit in a thousand ways by lying but does not lie should be our role model. The same is true of courage. Getting dressed without paying attention to what we put on is not a valuable deed. We should choose our clothes for the sake of God and to look good in front of others because of Him.

Getting dressed seems like something simple, but there are thousands of small points that we should try to consider in choosing our clothing. In my first year of high school, I had a friend who was very clever, and later on he was martyred. Despite his young age, he had reached mystical heights. Whenever he wanted to buy new clothes, he would buy clothes that were exactly the same color and style as his previous clothes. He would say, "By doing this, I do not break the hearts of those who cannot afford to buy new clothes, and I do not allow my carnal desires to become stronger."

■ Clothes: Modern Day Billboards

The way a person dresses can show several points about him/her. For example, it can indicate his way of thinking and his interests. It can be a sign of his membership in a group with special thoughts or beliefs. It can be a sign of his devotion to a certain ideology. And it can even be a sign of his opposition to his rival's way of thinking. So everyone is carrying a flag, and that flag is his/her type of clothing. Before I used to wear the clothes of a cleric, my father always said, "Wear the clothes of the clerics sooner so that you can be a flag for religion, and so that you may be used for religion."

Sometimes the clothes a person wears are a sign of his religion or inclination toward a religious concept. In Muharram for example, we proudly wear black clothes and say, "As I'm walking in these black clothes, I am a flag for Imam Ḥusayn (as)." Clothes are modern day billboards. Some people try to introduce what they love or what is important to them to others in different ways – for example, with the designs, drawings and logos they have on their clothes. It is good if we too use this opportunity to propagate religion.

One of the problems we face today is that some clothes, such as the chador [a woman's covering that covers her from head to foot], are introduced as being something very religious. Therefore, they are considered to be a symbol of a very religious person. As a result, those who do not consider themselves to be very religious do not feel a need to choose this covering. They say, "We are not very religious. We are

ordinary people, so we go around wearing the clothes that ordinary people wear.”

Other people say, “Some religious people do a lot of wrong things, so I don’t want to look too religious. For this reason, I don’t wear clothes that are known to be for religious people. I want to prove my religion in practice in other ways.” Is this the right way to think? What should we do about this problem? Some of those who say this are honestly speaking the truth. If we examine their hearts, we see that if they are not wearing the clothes that religious people wear, it is only because they do not want to pretend to be something that they aren’t. His or her heart is healthy, and he or she does not want to show off. But this is not a general rule to say that anyone who becomes religious is pretending to be something that he isn’t.

■ Types of Spiritual Demonstrations

To clarify this matter, we need to discuss the different types of spiritual demonstrations.

Some people’s intense spiritual demonstrations and boastings are due to the fact that they have not gained anything from spirituality itself. Therefore, they boast to others that they are spiritual so that they may receive something in this way. For example, a person does not gain anything from prayer, so he tries to gain prestige from his prayer by showing others that he is praying.

There is another group that expresses their spiritual feelings due to their excitement. An example of this is a person who has returned from Hajj and is very excited.

He tells memories of his Hajj experience to everyone he meets, and he tells others about the atmosphere of Hajj. Such a person is not boasting. Rather, his way of talking is because of his excitement.

Another group are those who control their excitement, do not show off their spirituality and who save their spiritual feelings for themselves. However, these spiritual feelings erupt in their hearts and overflow. Hafiz (the great poet) was in this group. The fact that all these mystical demonstrations flow through Hafiz's poems is because these mystical concepts were overflowing from his soul. We can see that at some point he could not stop himself from talking about this. Therefore, some people manifest their spirituality because their inner purity is overflowing. An example of this is someone who is crying for Imam Husayn (as) in a mourning ceremony. He tries to hide himself in that meeting, but after a certain point he cannot prevent himself from moaning out loud anymore.

The reason for some people's spiritual demonstrations is that they are trying to confront their own will. That is, they wear good clothes to restrict themselves with their dress. My late father used to say, "Wear the cleric's clothes so that you can no longer do just whatever you like! Wearing these clothes may be hard for you at first, but by accepting the restrictions that come with wearing this garment, God will reward you." If you look very spiritual with your type of clothes but you do something wrong, people will say, "Sir, why are you doing such a thing?!"

If a person travels with a few good companions, they will not allow him to sin. When one places himself among them, he has in fact put himself on the path toward goodness. When a person is wearing good clothes, many people will no longer dare to associate him with sinning. In fact, clothes are like a fence. In the same way that they do not allow cold air to harm a person, they do not allow people's carnal desires to harm them.

Some wear the clothes that religion recommends due to their social struggle. For example, French women who wear hijab are not willing to take off their headscarves for this reason. They are even willing to be expelled from the university because of their covering, and they will not change their covering. Another example is what happened in the beginning of the Islamic Revolution. The Munafiqin-e Khalq (MEK) were assassinating people who worked for Iran's Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC). Thus, some of those who worked for the IRGC would wear their uniform in society even after work in order to fight this psychological warfare.

Therefore, we must first realize that not all those who wear religious clothing are trying to boast. Secondly, what is wrong with compelling oneself to religious demonstrations for one of the good reasons that have been mentioned? The criterion determining if a spiritual demonstration is good or bad is a person's intention. The criterion showing that a spiritual demonstration is bad is if a person tries to attract people's attention and gain some personal benefit in this way. If this is not the case, spiritual demonstrations with the clothes we wear is not a problem.

■ Clothes of the Time: The Best Clothes

In our discussion about clothing, in addition to one's intention, choosing what type of clothing we wear is also very important. In describing pious people, Imam 'Alī (as) said, "Their clothes are moderate." Clothes being moderate means a person wears clothes that are suitable for his time and his clothes do not make him conspicuous. Someone asked Imam Ṣādiq (as), "Why did the Commander of the Faithful (as) wear cheap, rough clothes, but you wear good clothes?" The Imam replied, "At that time, the Commander of the Faithful (as) wore clothes that the people didn't consider to be bad. But if he wore those same clothes at this time, his clothes would have made him conspicuous. The best clothes for any period are the clothes of the people of that time."⁵⁸ The best clothes are the clothes that are suitable for a person's own time.

Imam Ṣādiq (as) said, "If a person wears clothes that make him conspicuous, whether they are good clothes or bad, his place will be in Hell."⁵⁹ This means even if you wear good clothes that the people of your time do not wear, you will be among the people who go to Hell. For example, it might be said that the Holy Prophet (s) did not wear clothes that had buttons. Now if one wants to wear clothes that do not have buttons, similar to the clothes the Prophet wore, and everyone says, "Oh" when they see him, this is enough to put him among those who will enter Hell.

One should wear clothes that are moderate. That is, he should wear the regular, ordinary clothes of his time. He should not make himself look different from others

with his clothes. Of course, this does not mean rejecting beauty. I mean there is no problem if a person wears the clothes of his time, but he chooses the beautiful clothes from among them that suit him. There is no problem with a person satisfying his need for beauty in these matters.

The Almighty God said in the Holy Qur'an, "(As for) that future abode, We assign it to those who have no desire to exalt themselves in the earth nor to make mischief, and the good end is for those who guard (against evil)."⁶⁰ In speaking about this verse and a person trying to feel superior, the Commander of the Faithful (as) said that if a person likes for his shoelace to be better than his friend's shoelace, he is one example of this verse.⁶¹ If a person wants to wear clothes that cause others to feel they are less than him, this is one of the examples of trying to exalt oneself.

Of course, clothes that make one conspicuous should not be confused with the idea that the youth like variety. A young person usually likes his clothes to be different from the clothes of the previous generation who are now the elders in the society. This is not a problem, and it is completely natural. In these cases, some parents think that their youth have gone astray and have become atheists. But wanting variety is quite natural. Since no guidance is given to young people in society for them to know how to wear clothes in a new form, when a young person wants to wear something different, he naturally goes toward other patterns.

According to the words of the Commander of the Faithful (as), we should always try to wear moderate dress while having a pure intention, and we must

increase our understanding about the motivation behind wearing different clothes. Of course, some believe that the Commander of the Faithful (as) was talking about the dress of piety here and he was not discussing external clothing. But it is more correct to say that clothes themselves are also important and he wanted us to pay attention to the importance of clothes.

If "dressing well" becomes popular in a society, and the reasons for dressing inappropriately are exposed, people will be saved from much waste, prejudice, temptations and obsessions. At the same time, a kind of equality will be created between human beings. As a result, everyone will have peace of mind. I am not saying that everyone should wear the same clothes, but there are some people whose minds and hearts should not be this busy thinking about the form of their clothes. A moderate dress frees a person's soul and prepares him for activities far beyond what shallow-thinking human beings are busy with.

Chapter 6

Humbleness

- The Humble Behavior of Pious People
- Being humble can be difficult
- A law of this world: Achieving something by doing the opposite!
- The Relationship Between Worshiping and Humbleness
- The Value of Humbleness in the Sight of God
- Humbleness: A Strategic Attribute of the Shi'a
- "Humbleness": A Sign of a True Shi'a
- The Harms and Perils of Being Humble

■ **The Humble Behavior of Pious People**

The third virtue that the Commander of the Faithful (as) mentions about the pious is their humble behavior, "They have a humble behavior." Imam `Alī (as) means pious people are humble in the way they walk, sit and deal with others. In this tradition, behavior also includes the way a person looks and talks. Therefore, humbleness applies to all aspects of a person's life.

Humbleness is something extremely complicated, and it may be seen in the various aspects of a person's behavior and manners. Among the extensive discussions on humbleness, we will focus our discussion on humbleness in appearances. That is, we will discuss a person's humbleness in the way he walks and behaves with others.

■ **Being humble can be difficult.**

Humbleness is something that conflicts with the desires that God has placed in a person's being. A natural characteristic of people is that they have a desire to reach to heights, and they like to attain a high station. People have a tendency to compare themselves with others, and it seems they like to get ahead of each other. Nevertheless, the Exalted God advises people to behave in a way that is in opposition to all of these internal desires. A person likes to be praised for his struggle and reaching high worldly and spiritual stations and for the increased merit that he has gained. Despite this liking and merit that exist in a person, God demands that a person behave humbly.

Humble behavior is the behavior of a person who appears not to have anything to show and isn't dear to people. And so people think such a person doesn't have anything to boast and brag about to others. Thus, behaving humbly is difficult for those who possess this characteristic. God, the Almighty, wants people to be both humble and followers of the truth. This expectation from God is very surprising and at the same time it greatly helps to build a person.

Why have I referred to the fact that being humble is both surprising and difficult? This is because if a person does not pay attention to these things, when he tries to be humble, he will experience that being humble in action is unfamiliar to him and difficult to do. This will prevent him from continuing this behavior. God has commanded people to be humble, but God's

command in this regard is contrary to some of people's high aspirations and wanting to gain more and more. If people understand and believe that being humble is difficult, they will not give up when they are confronted by this difficulty. God expects people to carry out this challenging duty. If people obey this command, they will taste an increased sweetness in their lives.

Furthermore, since being humble goes against some of people's other natural traits and is usually difficult to achieve, it is often neglected. Therefore, if a person is not aware of the difficulty involved in being humble and does not struggle and work to be humble, being humble is not something that he will easily achieve. Instead, pride will easily establish roots in his being.

A law of this world: Achieving something by doing the opposite!

There is a law that exists in the world, and if we pay attention to this law, being humble will make sense to us. This law tells us that many things can be reached by doing the opposite. For example, one of the ways to become rich is by lending to others.⁶² Another example is that if you eat a lot, you will become weak and sick. A person should eat less to be strong and healthy.⁶³ Many things in this world work the opposite way to what we think. For instance, you must be kind to people without expecting anything from them in order to be dearer to people. But people think that if they do not expect anything from others, no matter how kind they are, this kindness will not come back to them. But actually, the

opposite is true. When you are kind to others and do not expect anything in return, much kindness begins to flow toward you. A person must understand this law and realize that in order to achieve many things, he must move in the opposite direction. Then he will be able to accept that in order to reach the highest stations and his heart's desire, which is becoming uplifted, he must behave in the opposite way, which is being humble.

The Relationship Between Worshiping and Humbleness

The Holy Prophet of Islam (s) asked some of those who were with him, "Why don't I see the sweetness of worship in you?" They asked him, "What is the sweetness of worship?" The Prophet told them, "Humbleness."⁶⁴

This means that as long as a person has not decorated himself with the attribute of humbleness and humbleness has not become easy for him, he cannot taste the sweetness of worship and he cannot help others to taste the sweetness of worship.

But what does humbleness have to do with worship? Undoubtedly the most important worship act is prayer. In each cycle of prayer, a person bows one time and does two prostrations. This shows us that prostration is twice as important. The most beautiful part of prayer that can be prolonged and from which the most benefit can be gained is the prostrations.

As long as we are not humble before God, the Almighty, and we do not touch our faces to dust, we will not fall in love with God. The source for receiving

everything from God, the Almighty, is prostration. This is why the Imams (as) had long prostrations. God, the Almighty, wants to inject humbleness into our being through the most important worship act.

The first result that comes from this worship act is that a person becomes humble toward others. This is because the real sign of being humble toward God, the Almighty, is a person being humble toward God's creation. The root of a person's misery and misfortune is arrogance. God is ready to deal with any sin in a human being, but he will not tolerate a person's arrogance at all.⁶⁵

The Value of Humbleness in the Sight of God

One of the places where God shows His wrath is in verse 54 of Chapter Al-Mā'idah (The Food) where He says, "O you who have faith! Should any of you desert his religion, Allah will soon bring a people whom He loves and who love Him, [who will be] humble toward the faithful, stern toward the faithless."⁶⁶ The phrase used by God, the Almighty, in this verse speaks of an unconditional love, "...whom He loves and who love Him." In other places, He usually expresses a constraint for His love. For example, He says, "Allah loves those who keep pure,"⁶⁷ "Indeed Allah loves the penitent,"⁶⁸ "Allah loves the steadfast,"⁶⁹ and there are other such examples. But what about these people whom God says He will bring to replace the other people, what are their characteristics that He speaks about loving them without any conditions? The first characteristic

that God, the Almighty, introduces about these people is their humbleness, "Allah will soon bring a people whom He loves and who love Him, [who will be] humble toward the faithful."⁷⁰

The first characteristic God, the Almighty, mentions about these people whom He will bring to replace the previous people is their humbleness toward the believers. God uses the word "adhillah" here, which shows an extreme humbleness. In this verse, He is using the word "adhillah" to speak about someone who is extremely humble while he/she is honorable at the same time. Another characteristic of these people is that they are stern when dealing with the enemy and the unbelievers, "...stern toward the faithless."⁷¹ In other words, standing firmly when facing the unbelievers is only valuable when before that a person has been humble toward the believers. Standing firmly when facing the disbelievers should not be because of the environment one's in, because one's being oppressed at the moment or due to one's own ego. Being proud before the enemy is only valuable if a person has proven his humbleness before that.

A while ago, a student asked me to give him some advice about doing cultural activities in the university dormitory. I said, "Are you willing to wash the clothes of your roommates and the others in the dormitories?" "I want to do cultural activities in the dormitory, not manual labor," he said in surprise. I said, "When you do not like your friend this much that you are willing to wash his clothes, what does it matter to you whether he prays or not? Doing cultural activities with arrogance is

not useful. If you really want your friend's prosperity, you must be humble toward him."

One of the best examples of humbleness is the late Abū Turābī. One of the dear prisoners of war who had been freed narrated that whenever we passed by the late Abū Turābī in the camp where we were being held to go and get a drink of water, he would get up and stand in respect of us. No matter how much we would tell him that we are living here together and you don't need to put yourself out this much, he would keep doing this anyway. This man is a model of humbleness for us today.

Humbleness: A Strategic Attribute of the Shi'a

Regarding verse 54 of the chapter Al-Mā'idah (The Food), the Almighty God states that one of the salient features of the people he will bring in place of the unbelievers is their humbleness. With regard to this verse, a tradition has been narrated that someone asked the Prophet (s), "Who are these people (mentioned in this verse)?" The Prophet put his hand on Salman's shoulder and said, "Him and those related to him."⁷² This statement shows that this group must be among the Shi'a of the Commander of the Faithful (as) and those who love the Household of the Prophet (as). Being humble is a characteristic of the Shi'a. We should consider humbleness to be a strategic trait of the Shi'a.

On the other hand, 'Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā'ī (ra) was of the opinion that this verse is about a group of the believers who

did not exist at the time of revelation and who will come at a later time.⁷³ So the Qur'an says that the first characteristic of the people at the end of time is humbleness toward the believers. In many cases, this humbleness is heartfelt and may not be seen at all. Nonetheless, a believer should not just pretend to be humble. Rather, his heart must be truly humble. The reason for all this emphasis on humbleness is clear. If there are unbelievers in society, it is because some of the believers are acting arrogantly.

■ **“Humbleness”: A Sign of a True Shi'a**

Imam Ḥasan al-`Askarī (as) said in a tradition, “The one who has the most knowledge of the rights of his brothers (in faith) and is the most diligent in fulfilling their rights, has a higher status before God, the Almighty. If a person is humble toward his brothers in this world, he has the status of the truthful (ṣiddīqīn) in the sight of God and he is one of the true Shi'a of `Alī bin Abī Ṭālib (as).” Then Imam Ḥasan al-`Askarī (as) continued on to tell the following story, “During the time of the Commander of the Faithful (as), a father and a son came to the Imam as guests. He honored them, had them sit in the best place of the room and he himself sat in front of them. Then he asked for food to be brought. When Qanbar brought a dish with water for the guests to wash their hands, the Imam stood up and took the dish from Qanbar. He poured water on the father's hands. Then he called his son, Muḥammad bin Ḥanafīyyah, and told him to pour water on the son's hands. Afterwards, he said, ‘Because there should be a difference between

a father and his son, (and a father's honor should be protected in front of his son,) I have behaved in this way." Imam Ḥasan al-`Askarī (as) added, "Whoever follows `Alī (as) in this matter is a true Shi'a."⁷⁴

Humbleness is a strategic trait for the Shi'a. It is true that if we are humble, some people may be bold and arrogant, may not observe our rights, may humiliate us, etc. God knows all this better than we do, but He has commanded us to be humble. Actually, since some people are not humble and it is hard for them to be humble, God wanted humbleness to have these complications so that some people would not be willing to be humble and they would act arrogantly. In this way, a person can recognize who are the true Shi'a and who are just pretending to be Shi'a.

■ The Harms and Perils of Being Humble

The best place to be humble is the place where it is hard for people to be humble. One place where being humble is hard is for a boy to kiss his mother's hand when he is not used to kissing her hand. He says, "We do not have these customs in our family." Doing this may be a little hard, but we should practice doing it. Sometimes it is hard for couples to have the necessary humbleness with each other. Sometimes a person is not able to be humble in a scientific debate. Let's try to practice being humble in these situations too.

Of course, humbleness can have certain harms, and we need to be careful about avoiding these. One of these harms is causing people to feel they owe you.

Whenever you are humble in front of someone, be careful not to act in such a way as if he owes you. If you do this, everything will be ruined.

Another peril regarding humbleness is one's intention for being humble. Being humble should be for the sake of God. Being humble due to fear, greed or wanting to obtain a certain status has no benefit. God is wise and He can easily distinguish between a true humbleness and an artificial one.

The first day when a student goes to the university, his humbleness can be seen in the lines around his eyes. Most of the nerves around his eyes show his humbleness. After a while when he has become acquainted with the environment, found friends and established himself there, his eyes should be seen. His eyes become like the eyes of an eagle. Where did that humbleness of the first day go? Has he become a bad person? No, he is not a bad person. Of course, he was not good at that time either. But in the beginning, he acted hypocritically. Now his appearance and his inner being are the same.

One who is truly a servant of God will walk on the earth with kindness and humbleness, "And the servants of the Beneficent Allah are they who walk on the earth in humbleness."⁷⁵ The source of a person's humbleness is God's mercy. If one is a true servant of God, the Merciful, and has received something from the eternal source of God's mercy, he can easily be humble toward others. If a person is not humble, it is clear that nothing has been granted to him/her from above.

Chapter 5

Controlling Our Eyes

- Controlling one's eyes or heart?
- It is the nature of eyes that they deceive a person.
- Avoiding Negligence by Not "Looking too Much"
- The Philosophy Behind Self-restraint and Shunning Sins
- Practicing self-restraint is a part of the nature of life.
- Adhering to God's Commands: Something I Must Do and Want to Do
- Accepting Deprivations: An Introduction to Self-restraint
- Deprivations will always be with us.
- Having no Need for the Things We Are Deprived of Due to Accepting Deprivations
- Fixing our eyes on deprivations is both painful and devastating.
- Not Thinking about Deprivations: A Beginning to Avoiding Forbidden Actions
- God's Greatness and Avoiding Forbidden Actions
- Ways to Feel God's Greatness

■ **Controlling one's eyes or heart?**

Another characteristic of pious people that the Commander of the Faithful (as) mentioned is that they do not look at things that are unlawful, "They close their eyes to what God has forbidden."⁷⁶ In order for us to know how our eyes should be used, we must first know their function and their significance in our being.

We stated previously that our eyes and ears are the channels for input to our soul, and our tongue is the output of our soul. It was said that what is fundamental and more important in a person's soul, is the output of his soul. It was also said that controlling our output is much more important than controlling our input. But we must pay attention to this point that if a person is hurt by what enters his soul, he must appraise his soul. If a person is easily hurt by his eyes and ears, he should think

about what he needs to do for his heart. If a person's heart and mind are not weak, his eyes cannot harm him.

The eyes do many good deeds. The eyes are the channel for the divine signs to enter into one's heart and even a way to express love. We can find many of the divine signs with our eyes. We can understand the ugliness of sins with our eyes. We can become detached from this world with our eyes. We can see the divine signs with our eyes and understand them with our inner being. God, the Almighty, has given us eyes for us to use in our servitude to Him. For this reason, closing our eyes does not seem to be the main cure for the problems we have with our eyes. To treat the problems that come to us through our eyes, the heart, which is behind the eyes, must be strengthened.

The way we need to deal with our eyes and treat their problems is not easy at all. Some people ask a few superficial questions hoping to comfort themselves and reach the highest desirable levels without having any of the worries that exist in servitude. They ask questions such as, "What can I do to not look at something that is forbidden?" or "What can I do so that the things I see do not have a bad effect on me?" One cannot act like this on the path of servitude at all. Our material life is designed in such a way that it is not that easy to manage it, let alone managing our spiritual life. The main solution for the problems that come to us through our eyes is controlling our heart.

If someone controls his heart, he no longer needs to worry about his eyes very much. Of course, this does not mean we should allow our eyes to see whatever

they want. Actually, the Friends of God who are very sensitive about protecting their heart also have a surprising sensitivity with regard to controlling their eyes. One of the signs that shows the health of a person's heart is not opening one's eyes to many things. If a person has no control over his eyes, obviously there is no spirituality in his heart, otherwise he would not leave this entranceway open.

It is the nature of eyes that they deceive a person.

When talking about eyes, we must not neglect their nature. The Commander of the Faithful (as) said, "Eyes are the scouts (Rā'id) for sedition."⁷⁷ When nomads want to migrate, they first send someone ahead to find a place with water and grass. This person is called a "Rā'id." In this tradition, the eyes are introduced as the "Rā'id"⁷⁸ (scouts) for sedition. That is, the eyes' job is to create the background for sedition. In many cases the eyes mislead human beings. Remember this as a basic principle and always have this possibility in mind that the eyes may make a mistake. The nature of the eyes is such that they often mislead a person. The same eyes that are used for gaining awareness will mislead a person in most cases if they are not assisted by wisdom. The inaccuracies in what the eyes see and perceive provide the ground for error and mistake. Most mental illnesses, misconceptions and mistaken ideas that Satan gives to a person enter in this way. The Commander of the Faithful (as) said in a luminous sentence, "The eyes

are Satan's traps."⁷⁹ This means that one of the very important places from which Satan enters and misleads a person is through his eyes.

The eyes are always deceiving people. For example, one of the reasons we are afraid of death is our eyes. We saw with our own eyes that the grave was narrow and dark, they put this gentleman in it and they poured dirt on him. If a person does not want to be afraid of death, he must either close his eyes to death and burial ceremonies, or he must think hard after seeing someone's death and burial ceremony so that his eyes will not mislead him. Otherwise, his eyes will instill this notion in him that God is cruel and He destroys human beings without them having been guilty of any crime.

Avoiding Negligence by Not "Looking too Much"

The first thing the eyes do is that they create a distance between us and God, and between us and the truth. Eyes only see appearances in the world, and seeing appearances in the world causes us to neglect the inner truth of the world. As a result, we must always be suspicious about our eyes. Now that the eyes can have such a dangerous effect, we must avoid "looking too much." The Holy Prophet of Islam (s) said, "Avoid looking too much because it sows the seeds of lust in the heart and causes negligence."⁸⁰

The Commander of the Faithful (as) said in a luminous tradition, "No organ of the body is more ungrateful than

the eyes. Do not give them what they want, or they will keep you away from remembering God."⁸¹ The eyes are an ungrateful organ. They are not such that if we give them whatever they want, they will obey and listen to us. No, it's on the contrary. If you give them whatever they want, they will cause you to forget God. For this reason, all of us have been ordered to control our eyes and not fulfil their unreasonable demands.

The eyes are such that they naturally deceive a person. In addition to this tendency of the eyes, the visual media in the world today endeavors to double this deceptive power using other alluring attractions. The eyes become infatuated with the world by seeing the attractions of the world. Now if someone hides the ugliness of the world and depicts only its apparent beauties, this can play an important role in seducing human beings. What has happened in the world today that has caused human beings to take material life very seriously is due to the power of the media and it seducing human beings by way of their eyes.

When the eyes are left to their own, they mainly mislead a person causing him/her to make mistakes, which leads to a person being misguided. The reason for a person becoming drowned in his desires is due to nothing other than making mistakes. There is nothing special going on in the world that we need to see, but a person makes this mistake. Becoming familiar with the nature of our eyes should enable us to control our eyes more than before so that we can be careful not to make mistakes.

The danger that comes to us from our eyes is not just due to their laying the groundwork for us to

indulge in our desires. The eyes also cause a person to be frightened of others besides God. For example, when our eyes see a sick person is in bed, we become subconsciously afraid of getting sick and being forced to rest in bed. However, enduring illness for the sake of God is actually very sweet. It has been said in many traditions that an illness for a believer is an atonement of his sins, raises his degree and brings divine mercy.⁸² Imam Şādiq (as) said, "If a believer knew what reward he will receive for enduring difficulties, he would wish that his body would be cut to pieces with scissors."⁸³

One of the occasions when the eyes cause a person to go astray is when he/she is curious. Curiosity is one of the reasons for looking, and this brings the eyes closer to not working properly. Curiosity naturally exists in human beings and causes them to look at everything. But this curiosity may bring a person to look at things that are forbidden. A person cannot easily understand the evil of looking at that which is forbidden to be able to convince himself to turn a blind eye to such things. But a practical way to avoid looking at something that is forbidden is to not be curious about it. We should stand up to any unreasonable curiosity and tell ourselves, "I do not want to know everything!"

The Philosophy Behind Self-restraint and Shunning Sins

It is very beautiful for a person to control his eyes consciously and voluntarily. This control is not only very important and will be the basis for a person's

growth, but it is also directly a part of a person being a human being. Many people are unaware of the reason for the need to shun sins. If human beings' lives have become sunken in vulgarity, it is not because they commit a certain sin or do some specific immoral action. It is due to the fact that the philosophy of shunning sins is dead in today's society.

It is not understandable to people today why they should not touch what is available to them. Or why shouldn't they eat a certain thing when they can eat it? Why shouldn't they say some things when they can say them? Why shouldn't they enjoy certain enjoyments when they can enjoy them? The answer to all these questions must be found in the philosophy of self-restraint.

The ugliest phrase a human being can say is, "I feel like it." A person's view and philosophy of life in this world must be seen in the context of his life. The world around us is designed in such a way that we should definitely be able to restrain ourselves from some things without even thinking about what we imagine are their benefits or harms, because a human being's perfection lies in having self-restraint.

This ability to have self-restraint is something different from thinking if something is beneficial or harmful. That is, even if something seems sweet and pleasurable to a person, he must be able to put it aside. For example, when we want to tell someone not to look at things that are forbidden for them to look at, we do not necessarily have to explain to him that, "Looking at this forbidden scene or object will destroy your

concentration. It will ruin your mood, reduce your affection for others, etc." But sometimes it is necessary for us to say, "Looking at something that is forbidden may sound like it's enjoyable, but don't do it. This is one of the things you should not do!" And telling this to people should be enough. Or for example, it is possible for women to decorate and show themselves off. But they should not do this in front of people who are not members of their intimate family! It is possible for women to attract others, but they must avoid this!

The philosophy and the reason for self-restraint must become clear for us. If the philosophy behind self-restraint and shunning sins becomes clear, human beings will no longer struggle so much with God, with religion, with themselves and with each other. We can see that self-restraint is needed in other dimensions of life too. The world is such that sometimes we have to do exactly the opposite of our wishes. Sometimes a person who wants to enjoy sitting more should run for half an hour before sitting. One who wants to enjoy looking must not look at everything that is before him. One who wants to enjoy eating, should not eat just any kind of food, etc. This rule applies in all aspects of a person's life.

Practicing self-restraint is a part of the nature of life.

Human beings' lives are such that practicing self-restraint is part of the nature of life. If a person does not have self-restraint, it means he does not want to live. It is like someone saying, "I have bought a box

of bananas. I want to eat the whole box in one day!" Naturally, this means that I do not want to live. If we look at terms like "I feel like it" and "I like to..." more precisely, we can understand that these are terms used by those who do not want to live! These words mean I do not want to set boundaries for myself. If someone does not set any boundaries in his life, this means he does not want to live and enjoy his life.

The system of religion works in such a way that God leaves the way open for people and He says, "Be careful yourself. Take care of yourself. Do not abandon yourself so that you won't regret!" Animals live in such a way that they move as much as they can until they are not able to move anymore. Unfortunately, people's lives are the same today in the Western culture. Self-restraint, avoiding doing something when it is possible to do it and not enjoying what can be enjoyed, do not fit in the dictionary of understanding of today's human beings at all. This is a very ugly culture, and it is caused by a foolishness due to which one does not set any limits for himself. For example, a person stays up late at night and says, "Now that I can stay awake, I will stay awake." He stays awake as much as he can, and then he sleeps as much as he can.

When a person accepts the philosophy of self-restraint, he enters into the group of humanity. A person who does not have self-restraint in anything is not considered to be a human being at all. What does God have to say to a person who is not considered to be a human being? God says in the Qur'an, "We have honored the children of Adam."⁸⁴ One who has not

been able to solve the idea of self-restraint for himself, is not yet a human being.

It is very sad when a director makes a film about morals or an Islamic film, but there is no self-restraint shown in it. It subconsciously instills this idea in the audience that a good person is inherently good and has not worked to be good. At times the director may just show that the character in the film has made some change in himself due to certain circumstances, but he/she never shows self-restraint at all. That is, he cannot depict self-restraint that is not based on some other reason. He says, "The character in my story must have a reason not to do a certain act. Having self-restraint that is not based on another reason is impossible! A person would be foolish to behave in that way!"

Adhering to God's Commands: Something I Must Do and Want to Do

Some people think that when God forbids them from doing something, He is forcing them. If someone tells God, "God, they won't listen to You. Why do You prohibit them from doing something and belittle Yourself in this way?! You know if You forbid them from something, they will just become greedier for it. So why do You command and prohibit them so much?!" God says without using words, "I looked at them as human beings and said they will definitely want to practice self-restraint. I was kind to them and gave them a plan for how to practice self-restraint."

God expects people to be happy when He gives these commands and prohibitions, and for them to say that this is something I must do and want to do. If we obey, we have both listened to the commands of the One Whom we love and we have also adhered to the prohibitions. God gave these commands and prohibitions because He wanted the world to be like paradise for His servants. If a person were to set these limits himself, he neither knew where to set limits nor would he enjoy adhering to these limitations.

When some people look at the Friends of God from afar, they think that these people easily accept to be oppressed! God has wronged them, He has forbidden them from enjoying and they have accepted this oppression. Such people must think to themselves that since they are not weak human beings, they will not easily accept this oppression from God!

We need to understand the philosophy behind self-restraint. To do this, we must first "indoctrinate" it within ourselves. After that, we must "practice" and "continue" so that the philosophy of self-restraint can become clear for us. We should start this in situations where self-restraint is not very hard for us. For example, if someone makes us angry and we are able to respond to them, we should try to not say anything. If the situation is such that we can look at something that we should not look at, we should try to stop ourselves from looking. In a situation where one is able to entice others, he or she must stop him or herself from doing so, and other such examples.

Accepting Deprivations: An Introduction to Self-restraint

The Commander of the Faithful (as) has considered one of the characteristics of the believers to be not even looking at things that are prohibited, "They close their eyes to what God has forbidden."⁸⁵ One way to practice self-restraint when facing prohibitions is to not look at the things that we are naturally deprived of in life. After that it will become easier for us to avoid things that are forbidden.

All human beings are deprived of some things in their lives. When we look at our lives and make a simple comparison between what we have and what others have, we will easily realize that other people have some blessings that we are deprived of. Of course, these shortcomings and deprivations are entirely two ways. Others are deprived from having some of our blessings. Although these deprivations may seem unequal, they are perfectly in proportion with our assets and capabilities.

Deprivations will always be with us.

One thing we should not overlook about deprivations is that deprivations will always be with us. Let us not forget that human deprivations will not end. Any deprivation that we remove, another deprivation will still remain or be created in our lives. The story of deprivations in human life is eternal and endless unless one fools himself and makes himself busy with

"misplaced happiness." This means imagining that one has something or the ability to obtain something by means of which all his deprivations will be eliminated.

It is very naive for a person to say, "If I have that certain thing, I won't want anything else!" Deprivations will continue as long as a person is alive. Only if a person is no longer a person or if he passes away can he be freed from deprivations.

A wise person stops himself from thinking about the things he is deprived of. "I don't have this, and I don't want to have it," he tells himself firmly. Such a person is wise, because when he is deprived of something, whether he wants it or not, he is deprived of it. When he seeks in vain to get it, he only hurts himself. Instead of busying ourselves with thinking about the things that are forbidden, it is much wiser to engage our thinking with this truth that, "We are deprived of many things." Let's close our eyes to the things we are deprived of and say, "Now that I don't have it, I don't want to have it either."

Having no Need for the Things We Are Deprived of Due to Accepting Deprivations

If one accepts the fact that he is deprived of many things, this has many effects. One of these effects is peace of mind. But more important than peace of mind is that the world will no longer be able to trick him, and instead it will go to him. God will elevate the soul of this person who adapts himself to the reality of deprivations and closes his eyes to them to such majestic heights that

even if those things are given to him later, he will no longer feel a need or urge for them.

Imam Khomeini (ra) tasted these deprivations for a period, and he accepted these deprivations so beautifully that God gave him everything. It is unlikely that the kings who were plundering this country obtained the things that God gave to Imam Khomeini (ra). No one was willing to sacrifice his life for the kings, but many people were willing to sacrifice their lives for the health of Imam Khomeini. Nevertheless, this sacrifice of the people was not something that was pleasurable or important for Imam Khomeini (ra) at all.

When one accepts that he is deprived of certain things, God will pour those things that he was deprived of in this world on him in such a way that he will not even need to put any effort to obtain them.

Fixing our eyes on deprivations is both painful and devastating.

The Almighty God addresses the Prophet (s) in the Holy Qur'an, and in fact He is addressing the believers when He says, "Do not strain your eyes after what We have given certain groups of them (the unbelievers) to enjoy."⁸⁶

The soul of a person who is always thinking about the things that he is deprived of will be greatly hurt. For some, more important than this spiritual devastation is the fact that their deprivations will increase day by day and the scope of their deprivations will become expanded. This is much more painful.

If we want God to remove this feeling of deprivation from our hearts due to the abundance of our blessings and due to our feeling of being needless of others, we must accept the fact that we are deprived of certain things in life. We must be honest with ourselves and say, "I do not want them because I cannot have them." We have to deal with this issue realistically. Anything that reminds us of these deprivations must be removed from our lives. If watching TV reminds us of these deprivations and bothers us, we must not watch it. If we do not have a house and we pass by a spacious house with a beautiful view, we should not look at that house at all!

Not Thinking about Deprivations: A Beginning to Avoiding Forbidden Actions

There is a necessary beginning to avoiding that which is forbidden, and that is to not think about the things that we are deprived of. How sweet and pleasurable it is to not concentrate our thinking on deprivations if we realize that God has said that the things you are deprived of are forbidden and you should not look at them! It is a great pleasure for us to say, "Ok," to God in this situation. This is because our acceptance is not just because we are deprived of something. It is also because that thing was forbidden to us. That is, not only have we put something that we were deprived of out of our thoughts, but we have also pleased God and brought His satisfaction. And this makes our deed much more beautiful.

The effect of looking at something remains in a person's heart. Whatever we look at will have an effect on our hearts, and this effect will not easily go away. Now if looking at a certain thing is good, it will have a good effect on us. But if it is a forbidden look, it will be destructive.

In order to keep ourselves safe from looking at that which is forbidden, we must first accept the deprivations that we face in our lives. When we humbly accept these, God will give us the pleasure of putting aside that which is forbidden. As Imam Ṣādiq (as) said, "Looking (at someone who is not from one's intimate family) is one of Satan's poisonous arrows. If someone avoids this for the sake of God, God will grant him a faith, which he can taste the sweetness of in his heart."⁸⁷ If a person avoids that which is forbidden but he does not enjoy doing this, it is because he has not accepted the philosophy behind self-restraint. He may avoid that which is forbidden, but he is also upset and complains about this to God.

God's Greatness and Avoiding Forbidden Actions

In a luminous statement, Imam Ṣādiq (as) said, "No one has benefited from anything as much as not looking at something, because no one stops himself from looking at the forbidden other than he has seen the greatness and glory of the Almighty in his heart before that."⁸⁸ He went on to say that the Commander of the Faithful (as) was asked how one can be successful in

avoiding that which is forbidden. The Imam said, "By accepting the reign of the God Who is aware of your inner being."⁸⁹

Avoiding the forbidden requires assistance, and that assistance comes from seeing the greatness of God, the Almighty. We human beings see the material world. When we are in the presence of a great person, not only do we not look at that which is forbidden, we do not even look at anything other than that great person. Now, if we see ourselves standing before God's greatness, we will forget everything else, and the thought of looking at something forbidden will not enter our minds at all. In the world we live in and in the situations we face, it is quite clear that we are standing before the greatness and power of God, the Almighty.

■ **Ways to Feel God's Greatness**

One of the ways to feel the greatness of God, the Almighty, and to instill this in your heart is to prolong your prostrations and bowing in your prayers. One who does not prolong his prostrations and bowing seems to have looked at God's greatness, and then he has quickly stopped prostrating so that he would not be affected by God's glory, the power of divinity and His lordship. It is as if he did not want to accept God's greatness. If someone prolongs his prostration, it is as if he has put himself in a position for the great God to attract him.

Another way to feel God's greatness is to carry out the divine commandments that are against our will.

When we obey the divine commandments that are not really to our liking, God's greatness enters our hearts and we become corrected. For example, one of these commands that is highly emphasized is prayer. If we pray well, our looking will become controlled. God, the Almighty, has commanded us to seek help from prayer. If we get help from prayer,⁹⁰ our other problems will be solved too.

When many scholars wished to give advice with regard to morals, the first factor they emphasized was prayer, and especially praying on time. This shows prayer's special place in our lives. If a person prays well, many of his spiritual and moral problems will be solved.

Another way to feel God's greatness and understand the glory and power of God is to do the deeds that are recommended and to avoid the deeds that are abominable. The scholars were very sensitive to doing the recommended actions and abandoning abominations. This resolve instills God's greatness in a person's heart. Doing a recommended action means that I do something because God likes me to do it. Why shouldn't I, who am a servant of God, not do what God likes me to do? It is narrated that in his lessons on morals, Martyr Quddūsi (ra) addressed the seminary students and said, "Why do you do abominable actions? Don't you know that God doesn't like it?!" This outlook is a prelude to entering God's greatness into our heart. Sometimes a person plants and cultivates God's greatness in his heart by doing a recommended action or avoiding an abominable action.

Chapter 10

Only Beneficial Knowledge

- Disadvantages of Non-Beneficial Knowledge
- Useless, Everyday Knowledge
- Ineffectiveness of Educational Systems
- The method and one's speed in learning are the keys to the flourishing of talents.
- The High Importance of Gaining Knowledge
- Gaining Knowledge: A Believer's Occupation
- The Benefits of Gaining Knowledge
- Seeking to Benefit Oneself by Gaining Beneficial Knowledge
- Is beneficial knowledge only knowledge of religion?
- Harmful Knowledge from the Point of View of Religion

Disadvantages of Non-Beneficial Knowledge

This passage from the words of the Commander of the Faithful (as) is very relevant to those who are engaged in scholarly work, especially students in the seminary or university. In talking about the characteristics of the pious, Imam `Alī (as) continued on to say, "They have devoted their ears to only hearing beneficial knowledge."⁹¹ This sentence clearly emphasizes the importance of gaining knowledge. When the Imam uses the term "devote," the value and importance of paying attention to knowledge becomes clear. On the other hand, this phrase clearly warns that believers, in spite of the great importance given to knowledge, must strictly avoid knowledge that is not beneficial. Knowledge that is not beneficial has certain

disadvantages, and some of these disadvantages are described below.

1. Not Being Able to Become a Scholar

Today, the sciences have become specialized. We can see how engaging in irrelevant studies in the sciences, both in our own field of study or in other fields of study, is a deadly poison. Sometimes we are able to witness how studying any science other than one's own field of specialty is a waste of a specialist's time and energy, and this is very dangerous in scientific work. One of the effects of this will be to reduce a scholar's attention span in his own field of science, thus preventing him from becoming a great scientist or intellectual and preventing him from moving up from being just an employee in the field of science.

Contrary to popular belief, massive knowledge does not make human beings knowledgeable. For this reason, if the internet is not used correctly, it will not help a person to become knowledgeable. Furthermore, it will also prevent him/her from gaining a depth of information in his/her own field due to an accumulation of scattered information. The natural consequences of widespread access to scattered information is a person staying behind in science. That is why people are strongly discouraged today from engaging in irrelevant fields that are not related to their own field of study.

It is not even necessary for a student to study all the sub-branches of a specific scientific field. One university professor who had a history of teaching the

humanities in European universities told me, "I am surprised that some of Freud's famous theories are still taught in Iranian universities while no one teaches those theories in Europe anymore. Today, newer theories have entered the field of the humanities and those theories are addressed. Some of Freud's famous theories should now be seen only in libraries, not in classrooms. Whoever is interested can go and read about his theories in the library. They should not use class time to talk about these theories anymore!"

The Need to Pay Attention to Scientific Planning and the Order of Learning the Sciences

A person who enters a particular field of science does not need to learn all the information that is available in that field. In the process of the formation of a person's scientific thought and mind, it is very important for us to pay attention to these details. It is natural for those who are thinking and planning to review curriculums each year and make changes in them from the previous year. One should not learn a set of knowledge like bricks that have been unloaded on the ground by a truck in one large heap without putting them in order first. Courses that are "prerequisites" in academic disciplines are designed for this purpose.

The design of the order of learning the sciences is very influential. It has sometimes been seen that a student has lost the power of analysis, critique, creative thinking, and summarizing because he has learned and stored a large amount of knowledge without any order.

He can no longer see the next two steps and does not even have the power to distinguish between right and wrong.

If we want to pay attention to beneficial sciences, we must look at science like a minefield. A mine may kill a valuable person like Martyr Āvīnī, and sometimes a mine may be used to destroy an enemy and save an army. If a person drops a mine on the ground without paying attention to what he is doing, he will only destroy himself. A mine must be used in the right place. One cannot work on the battlefield without planning. The field for learning science is both very dangerous and tricky. The market for science is not a free, completely beneficial market. It can be very dangerous in some cases. Therefore, one should be very careful about the boundaries of science.

2. Creating Concepts

The sciences create concepts in our minds. The daily knowledge that we gain creates some concepts in our minds too. After these concepts are created in our mind, a person becomes trapped in a certain mindset and he cannot easily get rid of these ideas. For example, what is your viewpoint with regard to the Congregational Friday Prayer? If you were asked the average age of the worshippers who participate in the Friday Prayer, what age would you guess? Of course, the average age you would guess is over 50 years old. However, many young people attend the Friday Prayer, and certainly the average age of those present at the Friday Prayers

is much lower than this. So what is the reason for such a way of thinking? One of the reasons for this mentality is the media, because the media usually shows the front and middle rows of the people who are praying in the Friday Prayers. These lines are usually filled by elderly men who are not as busy and who have gathered in the mosque hours before the Friday Prayer. On the other hand, if the cameras captured the last rows or even the surroundings outside the mosque, this false viewpoint would not be created in people's minds.

A person's knowledge creates concepts in his mind, and these mindsets receive less attention. According to psychologists, people live more on the basis of their own mindsets than based on their knowledge. People subconsciously consider the psychological effects of their findings and make decisions based on this.⁹²

It is unfortunate that in our academic communities, some professors in the humanities seek to create a negative mindset toward anything related to religion. They read articles from Western scholars in class and create a false mentality in students with their strange assessments. And some professors, due to their personal love or hatred for an issue or subject, transfer a large amount of information to the students in the most negative way possible in order to impose the mentality they want on the students.

A teacher must be very careful about his audience's thinking. It is not right for me to create a falsely negative or positive mentality about a subject because I do or do not like it. In the field of educational technology and

the management of an educational institution, such matters must be taken into consideration.

We must evaluate the purpose of gaining knowledge from a psychological point of view and be careful in how we deal with the sciences. We must be careful not to be someone else's servant in scientific matters. There are many tricks used in conveying scientific ideas. Some people believe that some of the topics that are taught in universities such as in the humanities have been influenced by the viewpoint of the movements of the power seekers, who are trying to use people to their own advantage, that wish to keep people away from the divine truths that exist in the humanities. Therefore, we must be very careful and not increase or compound our ignorance in the name of studying science.

3. Disrupting Concentration

It is by no means correct to say, "Every book is worth reading one time." This is one of the most common misconceptions. Not only is not every book worth reading once, not every piece of information is worthy of us paying attention to it one time. It is true that a person's mental capacity is almost infinite, but it is not at all correct for a person to fill his mind with just any kind of knowledge.

According to the pious, any knowledge that is not beneficial is harmful and should be avoided. One of the disadvantages of non-beneficial knowledge is that it reduces a person's mental focus and concentration. Excess knowledge deprives a person from being able

to focus mentally. Those who are even a little familiar with human beings' mental structure and their inner characteristics know what an important role concentration plays in people's spiritual development. Being able to concentrate and focus not only affects the human body and people's mental powers, it also affects the human soul. The effect of non-beneficial sciences is that they paralyze the human soul.

Being able to “focus” is a very important, necessary skill for religious people.

In any job, people need to have a series of skills. For example, one of the vocational skills of an office worker is familiarity with “writing reports.” Or another example is that some people must know how to drive. Or a soldier must be skilled in shooting. One of the most important and necessary vocational skills for religious people is being able to “focus.” You must avoid anything that ruins your concentration and try to do whatever you can to enhance your focus. For instance, random information, sitting idly in front of the TV and watching whatever scenes happen to be shown ruin a person's ability to focus. On the other hand, nothing brings more focus than heartfelt prayer.

One of the disadvantages of music is that it eliminates our concentration. Of course, some types of music, or a movie, or a cartoon, or an incident may suddenly help us to focus. But this kind of focusing is very different from the focus created by prayer. Newspapers and magazines sometimes help a person to focus in a way

with the type of font, size and color of the font, or by using italics and bolding certain words. These are techniques used in journalism. I am not saying this method is wrong, but if people become accustomed to others helping them to focus, they will lose the ability to focus.

Having the ability to focus is a necessary skill for every religious person for the growth and elevation of his soul. One who does not have the power to focus cannot understand the depths of his soul. Such a person can no longer hear the soft voices of his heart inspiring him. The reason for all this emphasis on the ability to focus is that some knowledge can only be gained by focusing. One of the disadvantages that too much knowledge and scattered awareness has on a person's soul is the loss of one's ability to focus. If a person hears every word, sees everything, and pays attention to every piece of information, his soul will become scattered.

■ **Useless, Everyday Knowledge**

In the same amount that we value knowledge, we must also be afraid of the knowledge that enters our mind without any order and which is extra. Besides the specialized sciences, this point also applies to the everyday information and knowledge that we gain. Many of our sins are caused by unnecessary knowledge. One reason we are told not to scrutinize other people's lives is to preserve their dignity. But this command has other profound aspects too. Another aspect is that this extra knowledge is harmful for us.

Many jealousies are rooted in misplaced information and knowledge. Many desires are rooted in misplaced knowledge. Many entanglements and family problems are related to this misplaced knowledge. And there are other similar examples. This does not mean that we promote ignorance under the pretext of having a better life. The point is that much of the information that we receive only results in our life becoming bitter because it is not for a purpose and it is not complete information.

What are the conditions for knowledge to be beneficial?

We should try to limit ourselves to “beneficial” knowledge, or in other words, useful knowledge. There are certain conditions for knowledge to be beneficial. One of the conditions for knowledge to be beneficial is its completeness. In many cases, incomplete knowledge cannot be an example of beneficial knowledge. Another condition for knowledge to be beneficial involves order and time. That is, we must consider as a part of which collection and set of knowledge is a person attaining that knowledge? Another condition to knowledge being beneficial is its usefulness and compatibility with a person’s previous knowledge. Nonetheless, what the Commander of the Faithful (as) meant by beneficial knowledge is not just the organized knowledge that is taught through a process and for which a person earns a degree. Rather, it can include many kinds of different knowledge in all aspects of human life.

We must be very careful in all areas not to get caught up in non-beneficial knowledge. In the media, in the arts, in scientific work, in scientific environments and in personal communications, we must be careful to avoid non-beneficial knowledge. We need to have a little courage to be able to respectfully and politely prevent each other from talking extra. What are the benefits of talking nonsense and constantly giving one another misplaced information and knowledge in our personal relationships? How beautiful it is to observe the sanctity of thought and to take into consideration what information the other person already has when we enter into ordinary conversations.

The Need to Choose Between Different News and Media Sources

We do not have to look at and pay attention to all the news and reports that are broadcast by the media. On the other hand, news agencies should not give just any news to their audience. This is especially true about the news that is produced and packaged by the world news agencies, which are mainly a part of the large news syndicates and enemies of humanity. There is abundant news in the world, and it is impossible for a person to function properly without carefully choosing which awareness he is to gain from the information that they want to give him.

You cannot even study without making choices in your field of study. And you cannot learn all the information in a field without having a plan, so how do

you expect to hear the daily, general and political news of the world without making choices? The fact that the people of the world were surprised by the collapse of the Soviet Union was due to the selected, unrealistic news that the media fed to the people.

The different types of news affect the human soul and society. The people who design and manage the news media can have a direct impact on different aspects of people's lives based on the news they select and convey to their audience. They can make people zealous about something, or they can cause them to lose interest in it. They can increase human dignity or bring people down closer to the level of animals. It is very important for a person to choose which news he listens to and where he looks in the world to prevent his heart from being damaged. We should continually ask God for only beneficial knowledge to enter our ears, hearts, thoughts and minds during the day.

You don't need to try to hear all the news. Sometimes God brings news to a person. For example, one person walks by you and says something to his friend on the phone, or two people are talking on the bus and say something that you feel was necessary for you to hear now. The same is true about human beings whose lives are managed by God. They do not hear something by chance. Everything they hear has some wisdom behind it. Their whole life has been designed by God.

The Need to Be Careful About What Enters Our Ears

It is true that a person must first watch over his tongue and words. But since others are often not careful in this regard, we ourselves must also be careful about our ears and what we hear. This is an incorrect behavior to turn on the radio as soon as we get in the car. Are we paying attention to what we are doing to our souls? One should not listen to anything without a plan. So this is a mistaken action unless we have a plan to listen to the radio and have clarified the reason for this for ourselves.

Imam Sajjād (as) said, "The right of the ears is for you to keep them pure and not allow everything to enter your heart by way of them. Do not open this channel to your heart (your ears), except for the words of a person whose words are beneficial for you or teach you valuable morals. The ears are an opening for words to enter the heart, and they convey good and bad concepts to it."⁹³

If we are watchful and prevent the entry of unprofitable knowledge, the good thing that will come about is that our intellect, initiative and creativity will increase, and we will produce more new ideas. On the other hand, if a person learns a science outside of his or her field of specialization, for example, or even in his or her field of study but without having a plan, his or her creativity will be reduced.

■ Ineffectiveness of Educational Systems

Numerous positive and negative cultural factors cause young people to continue their education and enter the scientific atmosphere of the universities. But even though this opportunity has been provided for the growth of young people, a small percentage of students actually become “scientists.” Where do you think we should look for the root of this problem?

Among the various factors that exist for most students that stop them from becoming scientists, the most important problem is the educational system itself and the teaching methods used in academic centers and universities. Unfortunately in our universities today, the main concern of many students is just passing the courses. The teaching method used in universities is not such that it causes students to love science, and they do not always teach sciences that are beneficial for the soul. This factor causes the roots of creativity to dry up in many students.

■ **The method and one’s speed in learning are the keys to the flourishing of talents.**

It is very important how we study, how fast we go through the educational system and with what perspective we choose our courses. I was talking to a young seminary student who teaches high-level courses at the seminary. He has become well-known for his activities in the seminary. I asked him the reason

for his success. He said, "When I was reading the book 'Makāsib,'⁹⁴ all of the students were learning half a page of the book from their teacher per day. But in the first year of my studies, I went to a teacher who taught me one line of this book a day. Although I had the needed capacity, I was moving forward at this low speed. All my friends used to make fun of me saying that I would not finish this book in ten years. After a while, the speed of my learning increased. After I had read the whole book and I started teaching it, the same friends who had been making fun of me were forced to come to my class, because I had become the best teacher of this book."

It is very important where a person goes fast and where he slows down. In many cases when one surrenders oneself to the educational system, he loses everything, or at least he loses the ability to produce knowledge. Or he/she may see after a while that only some of his talents have flourished. A teaching institution is obliged to plan in such a way as to try to develop all the talents of its students.

The High Importance of Gaining Knowledge

One aspect that can be seen in the words of the Commander of the Faithful (as) is that we should be careful in every field so that we do not get caught up in useless or harmful knowledge. But another aspect that can also be seen in the Imam's (as) speech is paying special attention to knowledge and gaining knowledge. The Imam has used the word "devoted" when talking

about using our ears to gain knowledge, so he has clarified our duty in this matter.

If someone only follows this first aspect in his words and does not pay attention to the second aspect, he will become lazy in studying. That is, based on the pretext that the educational system is flawed and a person does not have a well-planned schedule for studying, he may stop studying. But Imam `Alī's (as) enlightening advice invites us to dedicate ourselves to beneficial knowledge. What does it mean to devote ourselves to beneficial knowledge? When something has been devoted to a certain task, it means that it is unlawful to use it for something other than what it has been devoted to. If a person devotes himself to beneficial knowledge and he spends his time on anything other than that, it is as if he has committed an unlawful act.

Gaining Knowledge: A Believer's Occupation

A person who is engaged in scientific work should devote himself to his scientific work. It is nonsense for someone who is studying to have several hours of free time just to have fun or to rest more than he needs.

One of the drawbacks of the educational system in our country (Iran) is that it has been organized in such a way that the most energetic age group - high school students - don't have much to do! Many high school students have a lot of free time. This is especially true in their early years in high school when they have not yet begun studying for the exam for entering the

university. The high schools do not allow them to work in a useful job. A high school student does not usually help the family at home very much either. The work is usually done by the parents. The youth having too much free time without having much responsibility affects them negatively.

Life has become easier today. Many of the tasks that people used to do by hand in the past are now done by various machines instead of by people. As a result, human beings' leisure time has increased. Has life become easier so that people can watch more TV?! Isn't this a miserable life?! The believers should be busy with gaining knowledge, and there is nothing that can replace this. If you put something else in place of this, you have darkened your soul. Even worshipping God cannot be a substitute for gaining knowledge.

Scientific work should be a part of our lives. Of course, the current method used in many schools and universities has many shortcomings, but we should not confine ourselves to just finding fault with these systems. We can see how many capable, influential people have worked outside their field of study. For example, we see someone who is a philosopher with new, effective theories, but his/her field of study was medicine. Or another person has said something new in theology, but he/she had studied the natural sciences. These people attend the university for a reason, but when their souls become immersed in science, they become personally interested in a certain subject. The reason for their success is that their personal relationship with science has been formed, independent of organizations

and educational systems that destroy human creativity.

The Holy Prophet of Islam (s) said, "If a day passes without me gaining knowledge that draws me closer to God, God has not made that day blessed for me."⁹⁵ The Messenger of God (s) said that one should seek useful knowledge every day. But as soon as people with shallow thinking learn a small amount and study for a few years, they are so happy and satisfied with this that they put gaining knowledge aside. Gaining knowledge in the first stage is a highly moral issue. In the second stage, it is a highly cultural issue. And finally, it is an issue that serves our individual needs, the needs of society and our needs for a livelihood.

■ The Benefits of Gaining Knowledge

1. Accepting religion easier

Knowledge has an educational effect in that it helps us to realize the complexity of the universe. The first thing any knowledge shows to a person is the complexity of the universe. One who believes in the complexity of the universe becomes prepared to learn about the complexities of religion. Only a knowledgeable person can believe that the universe is complex, and only then can he accept the complexities of religion.

Many people only see things superficially, and they judge about things without having the necessary understanding of the complexities of the universe. This superficial outlook is due to their ignorance and being uneducated. If a person becomes a little involved with scientific topics, he will realize that the universe is very

complex, and so is religion. One of the problems people have with religion is that they do not want to or cannot believe in the complexities of religion.

Knowledge helps a person understand the complexities of the universe. The Commander of the Faithful (as) said, "Knowledge is the light of wisdom."⁹⁶ This means that if a person pursues knowledge, his wisdom will increase and he will be wiser than others. Increasing knowledge increases religiosity. If someone has a higher education but he has not become more religious, he should seek to find the root of his problem. In another tradition, the Commanders of the Faithful (as) said, "Knowledge leads one to the truth."⁹⁷ Doing scientific work subconsciously leads one to accept the truth, and the truth can be discussed with this person easier.

One benefit of understanding religion is that it provides one with a deep understanding and prepares the human mind to understand other sciences. Imam Mūsā Kāzīm (as) said, "Gain a deep understanding of God's religion [Tafaqquh], because this deep understanding is the key to gaining insight."⁹⁸ The word "Tafaqquh" means understanding religion, and it does not mean jurisprudence here. Therefore, if someone understands religion, in any field that he enters he will reach a higher level of understanding.

Religion has many pleasurable complexities that expand a person's thought. As mentioned, understanding religion and knowledge are interrelated. If a person has not done any scientific work at all, he will not understand religion and will not have the ability to understand it. If someone becomes a scientist in a

scientific field, it is easier to talk to him about religious teachings. A knowledgeable person is ahead of others in everything.

2. Eliminating Ignorance and Paving the Way for Guidance

One of the important results of gaining beneficial knowledge is the elimination of ignorance and paving the way for understanding the truth. When a person does not know something, he is unreasonably hostile toward it. As the Commander of the Faithful (as) said, "People are hostile toward the things they do not know."⁹⁹ We usually take a negative stance against the things that we do not know and that are new to us. However, we should seek to discover the truth without any prejudice in such a situation.

Knowledge does not just refer to the things that I know. Maybe someone else is right too! We should not be like an uneducated person who is hostile toward anything that is new to him. This is where one of the afflictions of being uneducated, which is the plague of the ignorant, manifests itself. Instead of admitting ignorance and saying, "I do not know," such a person shows hostility toward scientific methods that he is not familiar with.

If people do not gain knowledge, these hostilities will continue. These hostilities sometimes even lead to people going astray and their misery, especially if they are concerning religious or spiritual topics or about beliefs. Many of people's objections to religious rulings

have no logical reason behind them and are only due to ignorance. For example, one does not know why God has put differences between the rights of men and women. Instead of seeking to eliminate his ignorance, he becomes hostile toward this topic.

One of the reasons for religion's emphasis on gaining knowledge is to eliminate this kind of unawareness. A knowledgeable, scholarly person does not feel hostile toward a topic that easily. One of the functions of knowledge is that it illuminates the areas of a person's ignorance. Knowledge is like a flashlight that shows the infinite expanse of a person's ignorance. This is the psychological effect of knowledge. A person will come to this realization unless his understanding and capacity are so limited that he becomes immersed in that small amount of light shown by this flashlight and he ignores the unlimited radius behind it.

Enlightened scholars are those who, when the light of their knowledge creates a small ray of light for them, they do not pay attention to this small light. Instead, they pay attention to the darkness on the other side of this light, and they wish that this darkness could be illuminated for them too one day. But when short-sighted people see this darkness, they think that there is nothing else going on in the world and they become busy with themselves. On the one hand, knowledge eliminates a person's hostility toward what he does not know. On the other hand, it destroys the foundation of these hostilities, because when one has knowledge, ignorance is no longer an issue.

God's most important test regarding our religiosity is about our knowledge and ignorance. Otherwise, the Qur'an would not have been revealed with such complexity, the divine tests would not have descended on us with such ambiguity, and God would not have remained silent. In the beginning verses of the Qur'an in the beginning of Chapter Al-Baqarah, the Almighty God introduces the first characteristic of the pious as being faith in the unseen. The unseen refers to something we know a part of, but we are unaware of the other part. We have heard about some parts of it, and we have to believe in some other parts of it. We can see parts of it, and we must accept other parts of it based on our thinking.

Knowledge, in addition to eliminating ignorant hostilities due to unawareness, also teaches a person to be cautious. Medical students usually have some stress in the early years of their studies, and they think they might have a variety of illnesses. So they do all the tests on themselves, and the reason for this is clear. They know that a typical headache could be due to a fatal illness. This is the way knowledge is. Knowledge makes a person cautious. This wise caution is absolutely necessary for the human soul. This caution brings a person closer to human values and moves them away from animalistic behaviors.

3. Many Educational Effects

a. Increase in Patience

Gaining knowledge also has many effects on training a person, but this needs to be addressed separately. I

will mention only a few of these effects here. One of the educational effects of learning is that it pushes people to be patient and makes them tolerant. One who becomes patient through gaining knowledge will find it easier to believe in the unseen and to wait to see the results that will be revealed on the Day of Judgment. One of human beings' problems is that they do not have the patience to wait to see the results of some actions in the future.

There is a group of people who do not seek to gain knowledge. This is not because they have a lack of scientific talent. The reason for their lack of interest in knowledge is their impatience and intolerance. Such a person was not raised to be patient and to confront his own will.

In the Hammām sermon, the Commander of the Faithful (as) enumerated about one hundred attributes of the pious. In doing this, he repeated only one virtue twice, and that virtue is the fusion of patience with knowledge. One who becomes knowledgeable and understands the complexity of the world immediately comes to the conclusion that he must be patient. Let's look at this example. If a person wants to build a house, he does not start digging to build a house without a certain introduction. What is that introduction? He obtains an architectural drawing of the house first. But a naive person would say, "What are you doing? I want a house, but you're drawing a picture for me?!" He cannot understand these things.

Knowledge makes a person patient and tolerant. It forces a person to work and to look to the future to achieve his goals. Only people who can wait to see

the results of their scientific experiments can become scientists and change the boundaries of science. Those who want to get immediate results from their work will not get anywhere. Gaining knowledge pushes a person to have patience and forbearance. For a person who has patience and forbearance, religiosity will be easy.

b. Humbleness

Another benefit that comes with gaining knowledge is humbleness. A person who gains knowledge is humble before the universe. A rebellious person does not like to be humble. He likes to pursue his interests directly. The kings and dictators of the world are like this and do not turn to knowledge to obtain their desires. Arrogant, selfish people use sticks and bullets to obtain their desires. But a person who is humble and seeks his interests, pursues knowledge and tries to reach his interests through knowledge.

A knowledgeable person can be humble easier than an ignorant person can, because knowledge does not allow a person to be arrogant. A knowledgeable person knows that he cannot deal with this universe using his own force. The way to deal with it must be learned, and it is knowledge that shows the way to human beings. Having knowledge makes a person humble before the laws that God has established in the universe, and this humbleness is very much needed for religiosity.

When a person becomes knowledgeable, he can be humble when he hears wise words. But if a person is not knowledgeable, his humbleness is worthless, even if he is humble. For example, if an ignorant person says,

"The Commander of the Faithful (as) has said truly amazing things in Nahj al-Balāghah," no one takes his words very seriously. Why? Because this person may say the same thing if someone from his family writes a book too! Since he does not properly understand the value of knowledge, his humbleness is of little value. But when a knowledgeable person is humble, everyone realizes the importance of his humbleness.

c. Growth in Religiosity

The growth of knowledge in society is directly related to the growth of religiosity and spirituality. The more religiosity increases in society, the higher the level of knowledge in society will be. And on the other hand, the higher the level of knowledge in society is, the more spirituality and religiosity will be strengthened in society. For example, if they have an ethics class or meeting once a week in a scientific organization, this can lead to the scientific progress of that group.

Why are pious people interested in gaining beneficial knowledge? Because "gaining knowledge" is directly related to "piety and enlightenment." Some believers think that gaining knowledge should be for a job, social status, or being more comfortable. While knowledge has these major benefits, it can also benefit their religiosity! Gaining knowledge has a close, direct relationship with "piety."

Knowledge has many effects on a person's training and is directly related to many moral virtues. If this connection is clearly understood, the most educated people in society will be religious people. If a person

who claims to be religious does not love science and knowledge and does not have the best education, or he does not seek the necessary knowledge without just being after a degree - he is not a religious person at all.

Knowledge is a believer's entertainment. Perhaps among the religious teachings, the amount that we have been encouraged to pursue knowledge, has not been stressed for any other virtue. Knowledge is something sacred. Our society's culture regarding pursuing knowledge should be such that if someone wants to go to the university, they should ask him about his religiosity and consider only those who are religious to be worthy of studying there. The university should also be in such a way that if someone goes to the university, it should be clear to everyone that because he has become a university student, (that is, he is a person who is pursuing knowledge) naturally he is a religious person. This relationship is quite clear and obvious that religiosity results in gaining knowledge and gaining knowledge results in religiosity.

Seeking to Benefit Oneself by Gaining Beneficial Knowledge

When we enter the sea of knowledge, we must step carefully, know that only beneficial knowledge is important and remember that not all knowledge is worth learning. When facing scattered knowledge, we must consciously practice piety, and by confronting our own will turn our back on such knowledge.

When it comes to beneficial knowledge, one can at times see people who eagerly wish to seek benefits from it for themselves. There is no one in the world who is truly in love who does not eagerly seek his own benefit for himself. Such a person thinks of only one thing, and that is to reach the beloved. He is willing to lose everything in the whole world but his relationship with his beloved not be damaged.

Both love and reason push a person to eagerly seek knowledge for himself. But there are two kinds of reasoning. Worldly reasoning compels a person to seek benefit from this world. Reasoning based on the Hereafter leads a person to piety and being watchful of his/her actions. He who does not take care of his heart is no longer in love nor is he wise. Such a person is bringing pain to his beloved. At a first glance, being very strict may seem to be unpleasant, but strictness exists in every loving, mystical, wise life. If there is no strictness, a person will surely be strict elsewhere when facing goodness. Therefore, there is a kind of seeking to benefit involved in the phrase from Imam `Alī (as), "The pious devote their ears only to beneficial knowledge." There is a kind of seeking to benefit from beneficial knowledge. Which person who is wise or in love does not seek benefits?

Is beneficial knowledge only knowledge of religion?

When the importance of knowledge and gaining knowledge in the Islamic teachings is discussed, this

question is usually asked, "What do you mean by knowledge?" Does this only refer to the knowledge that is directly related to religious matters, or does it include all sciences? Are all the sciences valuable from the point of view of religion, or must a special title apply to it to be considered to be one of the sciences that is referred to by religion?

From the point of view of religion, any beneficial knowledge is valuable. When religion invites people to gain knowledge, it does not just invite them to learn jurisprudence, religious principles, the interpretation of the Qur'an, theology and the other sciences related to religious matters. Of course, the fact that the significance of various sciences is different is another matter. But in the general sense, what religion means by inviting people to study science is not just with regard to a few specific sciences. From the point of view of religion, any science that is beneficial to human beings is valuable, and if someone dedicates himself to learning such a science, it will help to refine him. A science that is beneficial will increase a person's patience, will widen his outlook and will expand the human soul.

Harmful Knowledge from the Point of View of Religion

From the point of view of religion, harmful knowledge is a knowledge that has been founded on a belief that is in contradiction with monotheism and the centrality of God in the universe. A science in which its foundations of thought have been established by the ideas and

concepts of intellectuals who do not believe in God can never enlighten a person and lay the groundwork for human purification. If one accepts the teachings of such a science with certainty, not only has he not gained the results of his struggling to gain knowledge, but he has also trapped himself in the swamp of ignorance in the worst possible way. Such knowledge is harmful, and those who make these teachings a part of the scientific content of books have betrayed human beings.

Of course, we should not prevent the utterance of incorrect, wrong ideas in scientific forums. If a wrong idea does not have the opportunity to be presented in scientific forums, it will never become clear that it is wrong. For example, democracy that has become known as the last human solution to the way of governing, is a big lie. Democracy has not only failed to guide Western people to be able to control their own destiny, but it has also turned those societies into deceptive societies dominated by capitalists. When the issue of democracy is scientifically explained and criticized in human society, this will be a prelude to the Reappearance of the Imam of the Time, Imam Mahdi (aj). All the people of the world need to be knowledgeable for us to be able to save the world.

مكتبة



1. *Dar Maḥḍar Ayatollah Bahjat*, Rakhshād, vol. 1, saying no. 159.
2. Ayatollah Khamenei, the Leader of the Islamic Republic, made these statements in a meeting with students and teachers in the Islamic seminaries of Qum. [Oct. 21, 2010]
3. This being sermon number 193 is according to the order determined by Ṣubḥī Ṣālīḥ for the quotes from Imam `Alī (as) in *Nahj al-Balāghah*. Most existing interpretations and translations of *Nahj al-Balāghah* have been written based on this version of the book.
4. Imam Ṣādiq said,

«كَانَ عَابِدًا نَاصِبًا مُجْتَهِدًا.»

"Hammām was a devout, pure, striving man on this path." (*Uṣūl al-Kāfī*, Kulaynī, vol. 2, p. 226)

5. *Sayrī Dar Nahj al-Balāghah*, Muṭahharī, p. 27.
6. Hammām said,

«صِفْ لِي الْمُتَّقِينَ حَتَّى كَأَنِّي أَنْظُرُ إِلَيْهِمْ.»

"Describe pious people for me in such a way that it is as if I am seeing them."

7. *Kanz al-Fawā'id*, Karājakī, vol. 1, p. 89.
8. Imam `Alī (as) said,

«أَمَّا وَ اللَّهُ لَقَدْ كُنْتُ أَخَافُهَا عَلَيْهِ ثُمَّ قَالَ هَكَذَا تَصْنَعُ الْمَوَاعِظُ الْبَالِغَةُ بِأَهْلِهَا.»

"I swear to God, I was afraid this would happen, and that was why I did not want to answer him." Then he said, "Meaningful advice produces such effects on receptive minds."

9. The Holy Qur'an states,

«وَلَكِنَّ اللَّهَ حَبَّبَ إِلَيْكُمُ الْإِيمَانَ وَزَيَّنَهُ فِي قُلُوبِكُمْ.»

"But Allah has endeared the Belief to you and beautified it in your hearts." (*Qur'an*, 49:7)

10. Hammām said,

«صَفِّ لِي الْمُتَّقِينَ حَتَّى كَأَنِّي أَنْظُرُ إِلَيْهِمْ.»

"Describe pious people for me in such a way that it is as if I am seeing them." (*Nahj al-Balāghah*, Muttaqin Sermon)

11. *Sharḥ Nahj al-Balāghah*, Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd, vol. 10, p. 134.
12. *Bih Sūya Maḥbūb*, Ayatollah Bahjat, p. 136.
13. The Holy Prophet of Islam (s) said,

«مَنْ عَمِلَ بِمَا يَعْلَمُ وَرِثَهُ اللَّهُ عِلْمَ مَا لَمْ يَعْلَمْ.»

"If you act upon what you know, God will teach you what you do not know." (*Al-Fuṣūl al-Mukhtārah*, Shaykh Mufid, p. 107)

14. Imam `Alī (as) said,

«إِنكُمْ إِلَى الْعَمَلِ بِمَا عَلِمْتُمْ أَخْوَجُ مِنْكُمْ إِلَى تَعْلِيمِ مَا لَمْ تَكُونُوا تَعْلَمُونَ.»

"You are in need of acting upon what you know more than knowing what you do not know." (*Ghurar al-Hikam*, Tamīmī, p. 268)

15. *Rūḥ Mujarrad*, `Allāmah Ṭihrānī, p. 176.
16. Imam Ṣādiq (as) said,

«لَيْسَ الْعِلْمُ بِالتَّعْلِيمِ إِنَّمَا هُوَ نُورٌ يَفْعُ فِي قَلْبٍ مَنْ يَرِيدُ أَنَّهُ تَبَارَكَ وَتَعَالَى أَنْ يُبْدِيَهُ فَإِنْ أَرَدْتَ الْعِلْمَ فَاطْلُبْ أَوْلَا مِنْ تُفْسِكُ حَقِيقَةَ الْعِبُودِيَّةِ وَأَطْلُبْ الْعِلْمَ بِاسْتِعْمَالِهِ وَاسْتَفْهِمِ اللَّهُ يُفْهِمُكَ.»

"Knowledge is not gained through learning. Rather, it is a light that God puts in the heart of anyone whom He wants to guide. If you are one who seeks knowledge, first search for true servitude within yourself. Gain knowledge by acting upon it. Ask God for understanding, so that God may give you understanding of everything." (*Mishkāṭ al-Anwār*, Ṭabrisī, p. 326)

17. The tradition is as follows,

«وَقِيلَ لَهُ أَيْنَ طَرِيقُ الرَّاحَةِ فَقَالَ عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ فِي خِلَافِ الْهَوَى قَبِلْ فَمَتَى يَجِدُ عَبْدٌ الرَّاحَةَ فَقَالَ عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ عِنْدَ أَوَّلِ يَوْمٍ يَصِيرُ فِي الْجَنَّةِ.»

A person asked Imam Ṣādiq (as), "How can a person become relieved (and comfortable)?" The Imam replied, "Relief comes

with fighting with one's own will." That person immediately asked, "When will a person feel relieved?" The Imam (as) replied, "The first day when he/she enters Heaven." (*Tuḥaf al-'Uqūl*, Ḥarrānī, p. 370)

18. *Majm'a al-Bayān*, Ṭabrisī, vol. 3, p. 111.
19. *Holy Qur'an*, 4:69.
20. The tradition is as follows,

«فَقَالَ هَمَّامُ بْنُ عُبَادَةَ وَ كَانَ غَابِداً مُجْتَهِداً أَسْأَلُكَ يَا ذِي الْأَرْكَامِ أَهْلَ
الْبَيْتِ وَ حَقْمَكُمُ وَ حَبَابَكُمُ وَ فَضْلَكُمُ تَفْضِيلاً إِلَّا أَنْبَاءَنَا بِصِفَةِ شَيْعَتِكُمْ.»

Hammām bin 'Ubādah was a pious person struggling on the path of God who asked the Imam, "I swear you to the One Who honoured the right of you, the Household of the Prophet (as), and made you special for Himself, the One Who bestowed upon you, made you and excelled you, to inform us of the characteristics of your Shi'a." (*Kanz al-Fawā'id*, vol. 1, p. 89)

21. *Ibid.*
22. For more information, refer to Maslow's discussion on this.
23. The Commander of the Faithful, 'Alī (as), said,

«إِلَهِي وَ سَيِّدِي وَ مُؤَلَّي وَ رَبِّي صَبِرْتُ عَلَى عَذَابِكَ فَكَيْفَ أَصْبِرُ عَلَى فِرَاقِكَ.»

"O my God, Master, Guardian and Lord, if I am able to be patient about Your punishment, how can I tolerate being far from You?" (Phrase from the Kumayl Supplication)

24. The Holy Qur'an states,

«وَلَا يَغْتَابِ بَعْضُكُمُ بَعْضًا أَيُحِبُّ أَحَدُكُمْ أَنْ يَأْكُلَ لَحْمَ أَخِيهِ مَيْتًا فَكَرِهْتُمُوهُ.»

"Do not backbite others. Does one of you like to eat the flesh of his dead brother?" (*Qur'an*, 49:12)

25. This part of the supplication is as follows,

«يَا ذَا الْعَهْدِ وَ الْوَفَاءِ.»

"O He Who makes promises and is loyal to them" (Jawshan Kabīr Supplication)

26. The tradition is as follows,

«عَنْ عَلِيِّ بْنِ الْحُسَيْنِ عَلَيْهِمَا السَّلَامُ أَنَّهُ كَانَ يَقُولُ لِبَنِيهِ خَالِسُوا أَهْلَ
الِدِينِ وَ الْمَعْرِفَةَ فَإِنْ لَمْ تَجِدُوا عَلَيْهِمْ فَالْوَحْدَةُ أَسْوَأُ وَ أَسْلَمُ.»

Imam Sajjād (as) used to tell his sons, "Sit with religious, knowledgeable people, and if you can't find such people, solitude is more peaceful and healthier." (*Masā'il 'Alī bin Ja'far*, p. 338)

27. The Holy Prophet (s) said,

«إِنَّهُ لَيُغَانُ عَلَى قَلْبِي حَتَّى أَسْتَعْفِرَ اللَّهَ مِائَةَ مَرَّةٍ.»

"Dust continuously sits on my heart until I ask for God's forgiveness one hundred times." (*Al-Mujāzāt al-Nabawiyyah*, Sayyid Raḍī, p. 351)

28. Imam `Alī (as) said,

«أَمَّا بَعْدُ، فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ سُبْحَانَهُ وَ تَعَالَى خَلَقَ الْخَلْقَ حِينَ خَلَقَهُمْ غَنِيًّا عَنْ
طَاعَتِهِمْ، أَمِنَّا مِنْ مَعْصِيَتِهِمْ.»

"The pure, sublime God created all beings although He had no need for them to obey Him and was safe from their sins. This is because the rebellion of the rebellious does not harm Him and the obedience of the obedient does not benefit Him." (*Nahj al-Balāghah*, Muttaqīn Sermon)

29. The Holy Qur'an states,

«قُلْ هُوَ اللَّهُ أَحَدٌ.»

"Say, 'He is the only God.'" (*Qur'an*, 112:1)

30. The Holy Qur'an states,

«إِنَّكَ مَيِّتٌ وَإِنَّهُمْ مَيِّتُونَ.»

"(Muḥammad), you will die and all of them will also die." (*Qur'an*, 39:30)

31. Imam `Alī (as) said,

«فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ سُبْحَانَهُ وَ تَعَالَى خَلَقَ الْخَلْقَ حِينَ خَلَقَهُمْ غَنِيًّا عَنْ طَاعَتِهِمْ، أَمِنَّا
مِنْ نَعْصِيَتِهِمْ.»

"The pure, sublime God created all beings although He had no need for them to obey Him and was safe from their sins." (*Nahj al-Balāghah*, Muttaqīn Sermon)

32. Imam `Alī (as) said,

«فَقَسَمَ بِلَيْتِهِمْ مَعَايِشَهُمْ، وَوَضَعَهُمْ مِنَ الدُّنْيَا مَوَاضِعَهُمْ، قَالِمُتَّقُونَ فِيهَا هُمْ أَهْلُ الْفَضَائِلِ.»

"So He has distributed their sustenance among them, and He has put each person in the world where he or she should be. The pious have these superior virtues in this world." (*Nahj al-Balāghah*, Muttaqīn Sermon)

33. The tradition is as follows,

«إِنَّ الْخُلُقَ مَنِيخَةٌ يَمْنَعُهَا اللَّهُ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ خَلْقَهُ فَمِنْهُ سَجِيَّةٌ وَمِنْهُ نِيَّةٌ فَقُلْتُ فَأَيُّهُمَا أَفْضَلُ فَقَالَ صَاحِبُ الشَّجِيَّةِ هُوَ مَجْبُولٌ لَا يَسْتَطِيعُ غَيْرَهُ وَصَاحِبُ النِّيَّةِ يَضْبِرُ عَلَى الْقَاعَةِ تَصَبُّرًا فَهُوَ أَفْضَلُهُمَا.»

Imam Ṣādiq (as) said, "Truly, a good temperament is something God grants a person. The Almighty God grants this temperament to His servants. A part of it is due to a person's character and the other part is gained due to one's intention and working to acquire it." A person asked the Imam (as), "Which of these two is superior?" The Imam (as) replied, "A person has no choice in his innate behavior and this is a part of him. But the one who decides to behave well based on his own decision must be persevering in being obedient, and this is superior." (*Kāfī*, Kulaynī, vol. 2, p. 101)

34. The Holy Qur'an states,

«قَالَ رَبِّ بِمَا أَغْوَيْتَنِي لَأُزَيِّنَنَّ لَهُمْ فِي الْأَرْضِ وَلَأُغْوِيَنَّهُمْ أَجْمَعِينَ.»

"Satan said, 'Lord, because you have caused me to go astray, I shall make earthly things attractive to (people) and mislead all of them.'" (*Qur'an*, 15:39)

35. *Majmū'ah Āthār*, Martyr Muṭahharī, vol. 23, p. 689.

36. The letter «Alif» is one of the letters in the Arabic and Persian alphabets, and it is a straight, vertical line. [Trans.]

37. The Holy Qur'an states,

«ذَلِكَ الْكِتَابُ لَا رَيْبَ فِيهِ هُدًى لِّلْمُتَّقِينَ.»

"There is no doubt that this book is a guide for the pious." (*Qur'an*, 2:2)

38. Imam `Alī (as) said,

«فَالْمُتَّقُونَ فِيهَا هُمْ أَهْلُ الْقَضَائِلِ.»

"The pious have these superior virtues in this world." (*Nahj al-Balāghah*, Muttaqīn Sermon)

39. The Holy Qur'an states,

«ذَلِكَ فَضْلُ اللَّهِ يُؤْتِيهِ مَنْ يَشَاءُ.»

"Such is the grace of God which He grants to whomever He wants." (*Qur'an*, 62:4)

40. The supplication is as follows,

«وَأَمُنْ عَلَيْنَا بِفَضْلِكَ، وَلَا تَسْتَفْضِ عَلَيْنَا فِي عَذَابِكَ.»

"O God, make us indebted to You by bestowing Your grace on us and do not be hard on us with Your justice." (*Munājāt Ilāhiyāt Amīr al-Mu'minīn*, Marzbānī, p. 13)

41. The Holy Qur'an states,

«ادْعُونِي أَسْتَجِبْ لَكُمْ.»

"Pray to Me for I shall answer your prayers." (*Qur'an*, 40:60)

42. The Holy Qur'an states,

«مَنْ يَشَاءُ.»

"...to whomever I want." (*Qur'an*, 14:4)

43. The supplication is as follows,

«وَإِنْ أَدْخَلْتَنِي النَّارَ أَعْلَمْتُ أَهْلِهَا أَنِّي أُحِبُّكَ.»

"Even if You take me to Hell, I will inform the people of Hell that I love You." (This is a phrase from the Sha'bāniyyah Supplication by the Commander of the Faithful, `Alī (as), in *Mafātīḥ al-Jinān*. It is listed under the recommended actions for the month of Sha'bān.)

44. Imam `Alī (as) said,

«مَنْطِقُهُمُ الصَّوَابُ، وَمَلَبَسُهُمُ الْإِقْتِصَادُ، وَمَشِيئَتُهُمُ التَّوَاضُّعُ. عَصَمُوا
أَنْصَارَهُمْ عَمَّا حَرَّمَ اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِمْ، وَوَقَّفُوا أَسْمَاعَهُمْ عَلَى الْعِلْمِ النَّافِعِ لَهُمْ.»

"Their words are proper, their dress is moderate and they have a humble behavior. They close their eyes to what God has forbidden, and they have devoted their ears to only hearing beneficial knowledge." (*Nahj al-Balāghah*, Muttaqīn Sermon)

45. Imam Ṣādiq (as) said,

«إِزَالَةُ الْجِبَالِ أَهْوَنُ مِنْ إِزَالَةِ قَلْبٍ عَنْ مَوْضِعِهِ.»

"Moving mountains is easier than moving a heart from its position." (*Tuḥaf al-'Uqūl*, Ḥarrānī, p. 358)

46. The Holy Prophet (s) said,

«مَنْ ضَمِنَ لِي مَا بَيْنَ لِحْيَتَيْهِ وَمَا بَيْنَ رِجْلَيْهِ ضَمِنْتُ لَهُ الْجَنَّةَ.»

"If a person guarantees me that he will control his desires and his tongue, I will guarantee him Heaven." (*Ma'ānī al-Akḥbār*, Shaykh Ṣadūq, p. 411)

47. Imam 'Alī (as) said,

«مَا أَصْمَرَ أَحَدٌ شَيْئًا إِلَّا ظَهَرَ فِي فَلَائِثِ لِسَانِهِ وَصَفَحَاتِ وَجْهِهِ.»

"No one conceals something in his heart other than it manifests itself through his unintentional words and facial expressions." (*Nahj al-Balāghah*, wisdom no. 26)

48. Imam 'Alī (as) said,

«الْمَرْءُ مَحْبُوءٌ تَخْتِ بِلسَانِهِ.»

"A person is hidden behind his tongue." (*Nahj al-Balāghah*, wisdom no. 148)

49. Imam 'Alī (as) said,

«الْأَلْسُنُ تُتْرَجِمُ عَمَّا تَجَنُّهُ الصَّمَانُ.»

"Tongues explain what was hidden in people's inner being." (*'Uyūn al-Ḥikam*, Laythī, p. 28)

50. The Holy Prophet (s) said,

«أَكْثَرُ خَطَايَا ابْنِ آدَمَ فِي لِسَانِهِ وَمَنْ كَفَّ لِسَانَهُ سَتَرَ اللَّهُ عَرْوَةَ جَلِّ غَوْرَتِهِ.»

"Most of the faults of the son of Adam are due to his tongue. If a person controls his tongue, the Almighty God will conceal his

faults." (*Rawḍah al-Wā'izīn*, Nayshabūrī, vol. 2, p. 469; and with a slight difference, *Thawāb al-'Amāl*, Shaykh Ṣadūq, p. 183)

51. Festinger L, and Carlsmith, J.M. (1959), Cognitive consequences of forced compliance. *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, vol. 58, pp. 203-210.
52. The Holy Prophet (s) said,

«مَنْ كَانَ يُؤْمِنُ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ فَلْيَقُلْ حَيْرًا أَوْ لَيْسَ سَكْتًا.»

"Whoever believes in God and the Day of Judgment should either speak properly or remain silent." (*Kāfī*, Kulaynī, vol. 2, p. 667)

53. The tradition is as follows,

«يَا بُنَيَّ، لَوْ أَنَّ الْكَلَامَ كَانَ مِنْ فِضَّةٍ كَانَ يُنْبَغِي لِلصَّمْتِ أَنْ يَكُونَ مِنْ ذَهَبٍ.»

"My son, if talking is silver, silence is gold." (*Qurb al-Isnād*, Ḥimyarī, p. 69)

54. Imam Ṣādiq (as) said,

«الصَّمْتُ كَنْزٌ وَافِرٌ وَزِينٌ الْخَلِيمُ وَبَيْتٌ الْجَاهِلِ.»

"Silence is an endless treasure, an ornament for those who are patient and a covering for the ignorant." (*Man Lā Yaḥḍuruh al-Faqīh*, Shaykh Ṣadūq, vol. 4, p. 396)

55. The tradition is as follows,

«وَسُئِلَ عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ عَنِ الْكَلَامِ وَالسَّكُوتِ أَيُّهُمَا أَفْضَلُ فَقَالَ عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ لِكُلِّ وَاحِدٍ مِنْهُمَا آفَاتٌ فَإِذَا سَلِمَا مِنَ الْآفَاتِ فَالْكَلَامُ أَفْضَلُ مِنَ السَّكُوتِ قِيلَ وَكَيْفَ ذَلِكَ؟ يَا ابْنَ رَسُولِ اللَّهِ قَالَ لِأَنَّ اللَّهَ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ مَا بَعَثَ الْأَنْبِيَاءَ وَالْأَوْصِيَاءَ بِالسَّكُوتِ إِثْمًا يَنْبَغِيهِمْ بِالْكَلَامِ وَلَا اسْتَجَبَتْ الْجَنَّةُ بِالسَّكُوتِ وَلَا اسْتَوْجِبَ وَلَايَةُ اللَّهِ بِالسَّكُوتِ وَلَا تُوَقِّبَتِ النَّارُ بِالسَّكُوتِ وَلَا تَحْتَجِبُ سَخَطُ اللَّهِ بِالسَّكُوتِ إِثْمًا ذَلِكَ كُلُّهُ بِالْكَلَامِ وَمَا كُنْتُ لِأَعْدِلَ الْقَمَرِ بِالسَّمْسِ إِنَّكَ نِصْفُ فَضْلِ السَّكُوتِ بِالْكَلَامِ وَلَسْتُ تَصِفُ فَضْلَ الْكَلَامِ بِالسَّكُوتِ.»

"Someone asked Imam Sajjād (as) whether it is better to be silent or to speak. The Imam said, "There is harm in both silence and speaking, but speaking is superior if we are safe from the plagues that affect it." He was asked, "How is that possible?" The Imam

replied, "God did not send the prophets and their successors for them to remain silent. He sent them to talk. A person will not deserve to go to Heaven by remaining silent, and God's Guardianship does not become obligatory by way of silence. A person will not be withheld from the Hellfire due to his silence. And God's wrath will not be extinguished by silence. All of these only come about with talking. I cannot say that the moon and the sun are equal. You only consider and describe the advantages of silence in comparison with talking, but you ignore (and do not say anything about) the advantages of talking in comparison with silence." (*Ihtijāj*, Ṭabrisī, vol. 2, p. 315)

56. As an example, Imam Ṣādiq (as) said,

«إِيَّاكُمْ وَ مُجَالِسَةَ الْمُلُوكِ وَ أَيْنَاءِ الدُّنْيَا فَفِي ذَلِكَ ذُهَابٌ دِينِكُمْ وَ يُعَقِّبُكُمْ نِفَاقًا وَ ذَلِكَ دَاءٌ ذَوِيٌّ لَا شِفَاءَ لَهُ وَ يُورِثُ فِسَاوَةَ الْقَلْبِ وَ يَنْسَلِبُكُمْ الْخُشُوعَ.»

"Avoid associating with the kings and servants of this world, as this will destroy your religion and cause hypocrisy in you, and this is a serious disease that has no cure and will cause cruelty of heart and destruction of your humbleness." (*Usul al-Sittah al-Ashar*, a group of scholars, p. 57)

57. The Holy Prophet (s) said,

«مَنْ لَبَسَ ثَوْبًا يُبَاهِي بِهِ لِبَرَاءَةِ النَّاسِ لَمْ يَنْظُرِ اللَّهُ إِلَيْهِ حَتَّى يَنْزِعَهُ.»

"If a person wears a garment to show off and so that people will look at him, God will not look at him until he takes that garment off." (*Kanz al-Ummāl*, Muttaqī Hindī, vol. 15, p. 318)

58. The tradition is as follows,

«حَمَادُ بْنُ عُمَانَ قَالَ: كُنْتُ حَاضِرًا عِنْدَ أَبِي عَبْدِ اللَّهِ عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ إِذْ قَالَ لَهُ رَجُلٌ أَصْلَحَكَ اللَّهُ ذَكَرْتَ أَنَّ عَلِيَّ بْنَ أَبِي طَالِبٍ عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ كَانَ يَلْبَسُ الْخَشِينَ يَلْبَسُ التَّمِيمِضَ بِأَرْبَعَةِ دَرَاهِمٍ وَ مَا أَشْبَهَ ذَلِكَ وَ نَرَى عَلَيْكَ اللَّبَاسَ الْجَيِّدَ قَالَ لَهُ إِنَّ عَلِيَّ بْنَ أَبِي طَالِبٍ عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ كَانَ يَلْبَسُ ذَلِكَ فِي زَمَانٍ لَا يُنْكَرُ وَ لَوْ لَبَسَ مِثْلَ ذَلِكَ الْيَوْمَ لَشَهَرَ بِهِ فَخِيزَ لِبَاسِ كُلِّ زَمَانٍ لِبَاسِ أَهْلِهِ.»

Someone asked Imam Ṣādiq (as), "Why did the Commander of the Faithful (as) wear cheap, rough clothes, but you wear good clothes?" The Imam replied, "At that time, the Commander of the Faithful (as) wore clothes that the people didn't consider to be bad. But if he wore those same clothes at this time, his clothes would have made him conspicuous. The best clothes for any period are the clothes of the people of that time." (*Kāfī*, Kulaynī, vol. 6, p. 444)

59. Imam Ṣādiq (as) said,

«السَّفَرَةُ خَيْرُهَا وَشَرُّهَا فِي النَّارِ.»

"If a person wears clothes that make him conspicuous, whether they are good clothes or bad, his place will be in Hell." (*Kāfī*, Kulaynī, vol. 6, p. 445)

60. The verse is as follows,

«تِلْكَ الدَّارُ الْآخِرَةُ نَجْعَلُهَا لِلَّذِينَ لَا يُرِيدُونَ عُلُوًّا فِي الْأَرْضِ وَلَا فَسَادًا
وَالْعَاقِبَةُ لِلْمُتَّقِينَ.»

"(As for) that future abode, We assign it to those who have no desire to exalt themselves in the earth nor to make mischief, and the good end is for those who guard (against evil)." (*Holy Qur'an*, 28:83)

61. Imam `Alī (as) said,

«إِنَّ الرَّجُلَ لَيُعْجِبُهُ أَنْ يَكُونَ شِرَاكُ نَعْلِهِ أَحْوَدَ مَنْ شِرَاكُ نَعْلِ صَاحِبِهِ
فَيَدْخُلُ نَحْتَهَا.»

"A person may feel proud that his shoelace is better than his companion's. In this case, he will be considered to be an example of this verse." (*Al-Kashshāf*, Zamakhsharī, vol. 3, p. 435)

62. The Holy Qur'an states,

«إِنْ تَقْرَضُوا اللَّهَ قَرْضًا حَسَنًا يضاعفه لَكُمْ وَيغفر لكم والله شكورٌ خليمٌ.»

"If you set apart for Allah a goodly portion, He will double it for you and forgive you; and Allah is the Multiplier (of rewards), Forbearing." (*Qur'an*, 64:17)

63. The Holy Prophet (s) said,

«إِيَاكُمْ وَ الْبِطْنَةَ فَإِنَّهَا مُفْسِدَةٌ لِلْبَدَنِ وَ مَوْرَثَةٌ لِلشَّقَمِ وَ مَكْسِلَةٌ لِلْعِبَادَةِ.»

"Avoid overeating, because overeating spoils the body, brings illness, and causes a person to be lethargic in prayer." (*Da'wāt, Rāwandī, p. 74*)

64. The tradition is as follows,

«مَا لِي لَا أَرَى عَلَيْكُمْ خَلَاوَةَ الْعِبَادَةِ قَالُوا وَ مَا خَلَاوَةُ الْعِبَادَةِ قَالَ التَّوَّاضِعُ.»

The Holy Prophet of Islam (s) asked some of those who were with him, "Why don't I see the sweetness of worship in you?" They asked him, "What is the sweetness of worship?" The Prophet told them, "Humbleness." (*Tanbīh al-Khavāfir, Warrām, vol. 1, p. 201*)

65. Imam Ṣādiq (as) said,

«الْكِبْرُ رِذَاءٌ لِلَّهِ فَمَنْ نَارَعَ اللَّهَ شَيْنًا مِنْ ذَلِكَ أَكْبَهُ اللَّهُ فِي النَّارِ.»

"Greatness is God's robe. If a person disputes with God over some of it (and wants to be arrogant), God will throw him into the Hellfire." (*Kāfī, Kulaynī, vol. 2, p. 310*)

66. The Holy Qur'an states,

«يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا مَنْ يَرْتَدَّ مِنْكُمْ عَنْ دِينِهِ فَسَوْفَ يَأْتِي اللَّهَ بِقَوْمٍ يُحِبُّهُمْ وَيُحِبُّونَهُ أَذِلَّةٍ عَلَى الْمُؤْمِنِينَ أَعِزَّةٍ عَلَى الْكَافِرِينَ يُجَاهِدُونَ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ وَلَا يَخَافُونَ لَوْمَةَ لَائِمٍ ذَلِكَ فَضْلُ اللَّهِ يُؤْتِيهِ مَنْ يَشَاءُ وَاللَّهُ وَاسِعٌ عَلِيمٌ.»

"O you who have faith! Should any of you desert his religion, Allah will soon bring a people whom He loves and who love Him, [who will be] humble toward the faithful, stern toward the faithless, struggle in the way of Allah, not fearing the blame of any blamer. That is Allah's grace which He grants to whomever He wishes, and Allah is All-Bounteous, All-Knowing." (*Qur'an, 5:54*)

67. The Holy Qur'an states,

«وَاللَّهُ يُحِبُّ الْمُطَهَّرِينَ.»

"Allah loves those who keep pure." (*Qur'an, 9:108*)

68. The Holy Qur'an states,

«إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُحِبُّ التَّوَّابِينَ.»

"Indeed Allah loves the penitent." (*Qur'an*, 2:222)

69. The Holy Qur'an states,

«وَاللَّهُ يُحِبُّ الصَّابِرِينَ.»

"Allah loves the steadfast." (*Qur'an*, 3:146)

70. The Holy Qur'an states,

«يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا مَنْ يَرْتَدَّ مِنْكُمْ عَنْ دِينِهِ فَسَوْفَ يَأْتِي اللَّهَ بِقَوْمٍ يُحِبُّهُمْ
وَيُحِبُّونَهُ أَذِلَّةَ عَلَى الْمُؤْمِنِينَ.»

"Allah will soon bring a people whom He loves and who love Him,
[who will be] humble toward the faithful." (*Qur'an*, 5:54)

71. The Holy Qur'an states,

«أَعَزَّةَ عَلَى الْكَافِرِينَ.»

"...stern toward the faithless." (*Qur'an*, 5:54)

72. The tradition is as follows,

«رَوَى: أَنَّ النَّبِيَّ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَآلِهِ سِئِلَ عَنْ هَذِهِ الْآيَةِ فَضَرَبَ بِيَدِهِ عَلَى
عَاتِقِ سَلْمَانَ فَقَالَ هَذَا وَدَوْدَ...»

Someone asked the Prophet (s), "Who are these people (mentioned in this verse)?" The Prophet put his hand on Salman's shoulder and said, "Him and those related to him." (*Majm'a al-Bayān*, Ṭabrisī, vol. 3, p. 321)

73. *Tarjumah Tafsir al-Mizān*, Ṭabāṭabā'ī, vol. 5, p. 643.

74. *Ihtijāj*, Ṭabrisī, vol. 2, pp. 460 – 461.

75. The Holy Qur'an states,

«وَعِبَادَ الرَّحْمَنِ الَّذِينَ يَمْشُونَ عَلَى الْأَرْضِ هَوْنًا.»

"And the servants of the Beneficent Allah are they who walk on the earth in humbleness." (*Qur'an*, 25:63)

76. Imam `Alī (as) said,

«عَصُوا أَنْصَارَهُمْ عَمَّا حَزَمَ اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِمْ.»

"They close their eyes to what God has forbidden." (*Nahj al-Balāghah*, Muttaqīn Sermon)

77. Imam `Alī (as) said,

«الْغَيْبُ رَأْدُ الْفِتْنِ.»

"Eyes are the scouts (Rā'id) for sedition." (*Uyūn al-Ḥikam*, Laythī, p. 33)

78. *Al-Nihāyah FI Gharīb al-Ḥadīth*, vol. 2, p. 275.

79. Imam `Alī (as) said,

«الْغَيُورُ مَصَانِدُ الشَّيْطَانِ.»

"The eyes are Satan's traps." (*Ghurar al-Ḥikam*, Tamīmī, p. 52)

80. The Holy Prophet (s) said,

«إِيَّاكُمْ وَفُضُولَ النَّظَرِ فَإِنَّهُ يَبْدُرُ الْهَوَىٰ وَيُولِدُ الْغَفْلَةَ.»

"Avoid looking too much because it sows the seeds of lust in the heart and causes negligence." (*Uddah al-Dā'ir*, Ḥillī, p. 313)

81. Imam `Alī (as) said,

«لَيْسَ فِي الْبَدَنِ أَقْلٌ شُكْرًا مِنَ الْعَيْنِ فَلَا تُغْطِوْهَا سُؤْلِهَا فَتَشْغَلْكُمْ عَنْ ذِكْرِ اللَّهِ.»

"No organ of the body is more ungrateful than the eyes. Do not give them what they want, or they will keep you away from remembering God." (*Tuḥaf al-'Uqūl*, Ḥarrānī, p. 119)

82. As an example, Imam Riḍā (as) said,

«الْمَرَضُ لِلْمُؤْمِنِ تَطْهِيرٌ وَرَحْمَةٌ.»

"An illness for a believer is for purifying (his sins) and is a divine mercy." (*Thawāb al-'Amāl*, Shaykh Ṣadūq, vol. 1, p. 46)

83. Imam Ṣādiq (as) said,

«لَوْ يَعْلَمُ الْمُؤْمِنُ مَا لَهُ فِي الْمَصَائِبِ مِنَ الْأَجْرِ لَتَمَنَّى أَنْ يَقْرُسَ بِالْمَقَارِضِ.»

"If a believer knew what reward he will receive for enduring difficulties, he would wish that his body would be cut to pieces with scissors." (*Al-Mu'min*, Ahwāzī, vol. 2, p. 255)

84. The Holy Qur'an states,

«وَلَقَدْ كَرَّمْنَا بَنِي آدَمَ.»

"We have honored the children of Adam." (*Qur'an*, 17:70)

85. Imam `Alī (as) said,

«عَصُوا أَبْصَارَهُمْ عَمَّا حَرَّمَ اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِمْ.»

"They close their eyes to what God has forbidden." (*Nahj al-Balāghah*, Muttaqīn Sermon)

86. The Holy Qur'an states,

«لَا تَمُدَّنَّ عَيْنَيْكَ إِلَىٰ مَا مَتَّعْنَا بِهِ أَزْوَاجًا مِنْهُمْ.»

"Do not strain your eyes after what We have given certain groups of them (the unbelievers) to enjoy." (*Qur'an*, 15:88)

87. Imam Ṣādiq (as) said,

«الْطَّيْرَةُ سَهْمٌ مِنْ سِهَامِ إِبْلِيسَ مَسْمُومٌ مَنْ تَرَكَهَا لِلَّهِ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ لَا يَغْيِرُهُ
أَعْقَبُهُ اللَّهُ إِيْمَانًا يَجِدُ طَعْمَهُ.»

"Looking (at someone who is not from one's intimate family) is one of Satan's poisonous arrows. If someone avoids this for the sake of God, God will grant him a faith, which he can taste the sweetness of in his heart." (*Man Lā Yaḥḍuruh al-Faqīh*, Shaykh Ṣadūq, vol. 4, p. 18)

88. Imam Ṣādiq said,

«مَا أُغْتِنُّمُ أَحَدٌ بِمِثْلِ مَا أُغْتِنُّمُ بِعَاصِ الْبَصْرِ لِأَنَّ الْبَصْرَ لَا يُعْصَىٰ عَنْ مَحَارِمِ
اللَّهِ تَعَالَىٰ إِلَّا وَقَدْ سَبَقَ إِلَىٰ قَلْبِهِ مُشَاهَدَةُ الْعَظَمَةِ وَالْجَلَالِ.»

"No one has benefited from anything as much as not looking at something, because no one stops himself from looking at the forbidden other than he has seen the greatness and glory of the Almighty in his heart before that." (*Miṣbāḥ al-Shari'ah*, Imam Ṣādiq (as), p. 9)

89. The rest of the tradition is as follows,

«سَبَّلَ أَمِيرَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ بِمَا ذَا نَسْتَعَانُ عَلَى غَضِّ الْبَصْرِ فَقَالَ عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ بِالْخَمُودِ ثَخْتُ سُلْطَانِ الْمَطْلَعِ عَلَى سِرِّكَ.»

The Commander of the Faithful (as) was asked how one can be successful in avoiding that which is forbidden. The Imam said, "By accepting the reign of the God Who is aware of your inner being." (*Ibid*)

90. Holy Qur'an,

«وَاسْتَعِينُوا بِالصَّبْرِ وَالصَّلَاةِ.»

"And seek help in patience and prayer." (*Qur'an*, 2:45)

91. Imam `Alī (as) said,

«وَقَفُّوا أَسْمَاعَهُمْ عَلَى الْعِلْمِ النَّافِعِ لَهُمْ.»

"They have devoted their ears to only hearing beneficial knowledge." (*Nahj al-Balāghah*, Muttaqīn Sermon)

92. *Ravān Darmāngarī Pūyishī Fishurdih*, Qurbānī, p. 37.

93. Imam Sajjād (as) said,

«وَأَمَّا حَقُّ السَّمْعِ فَتَنْزِيهُهُ عَنِ أَنْ تَجْعَلَهُ طَرِيقاً إِلَى قَلْبِكَ إِلَّا لِبَعْوَهَةِ كَرِيمَةٍ تَخْدُثُ فِي قَلْبِكَ خَيْرًا أَوْ تَكْسِبُ حُلُقاً كَرِيماً فَإِنَّهُ تَابَ الْكَلَامُ إِلَى الْقَلْبِ يُؤَدِّي إِلَيْهِ صُرُوبُ الْمَعَانِي عَلَى مَا فِيهَا مِنْ خَيْرٍ أَوْ شَرٍّ.»

"The right of the ears is for you to keep them pure and not allow everything to enter your heart by way of them. Do not open this channel to your heart (your ears), except for the words of a person whose words are beneficial for you or teach you valuable morals. The ears are an opening for words to enter the heart, and they convey good and bad concepts to it." (*Tuḥaf al-'Uqūl*, Ḥarrānī, p. 257)

94. This book is in the field of jurisprudence and is the text of the lessons that Shaykh Murtiḍā Anṣārī, also known as Shaykh `Aẓam (ra), taught in his class. This book is currently one of the textbooks that is taught at the highest levels in seminaries.

95. The Holy Prophet (s) said,

«إِذَا أَمَى عَلَيَّ يَوْمٌ لَا أُرَدِّدُ فِيهِ عِلْمًا يَقْرِبُنِي إِلَى اللَّهِ، فَلَا بَارَكَ اللَّهُ لِي فِي ظُلُوعِ شَمْسِهِ.»

"If a day passes without me gaining knowledge that draws me closer to God, God has not made that day blessed for me." (*Majm`a al-Bayān*, Ṭabrisī, vol. 7, p. 52)

96. Imam `Alī (as) said,

«الْعِلْمُ مِفْتَاحُ الْعَقْلِ.»

"Knowledge is the light of wisdom." (*Uyūn al-Ḥikam*, Laythī, p. 50)

97. Imam `Alī (as) said,

«الْعِلْمُ يَهْدِي إِلَى الْحَقِّ.»

"Knowledge leads one to the truth." (*Uyūn al-Ḥikam*, Laythī, p. 49)

98. Imam Mūsā Kāẓim (as) said,

«تَفَقَّهُوا فِي دِينِ اللَّهِ فَإِنَّ الْفِقْهَ مِفْتَاحُ الْبَصِيرَةِ.»

"Gain a deep understanding of God's religion [Tafaqquh], because this deep understanding is the key to gaining insight." (*Tuḥaf al-Uqūl*, Ḥarrānī, p. 410)

99. Imam `Alī (as) said,

«النَّاسُ أَعْدَاءُ مَا جَهِلُوا.»

"People are hostile toward the things they do not know." (*Nahj al-Balāghah*, wisdom no. 172)

References



■ Books:

1. *Holy Qur'an*
2. A Group of Scholars. (1363 AHS). *Al-'Uṣūl al-Sittah Ashar*. Qum, Iran: Nashr Dār al-Shabistārī Lilmaṭbūāt.
3. 'Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā'ī, Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn. (1374 AHS). *Tarjumah Tafsīr al-Mīzān*. (5th ed.) Sayyid Muḥammad Bāqir Mūsavī (Trans.), Qum, Iran: Daftar Intishārāt Islāmī.
4. Āmudī, 'Abdulwāḥid bin Muḥammad Tamīmī. (1410 AHL). *Ghurar al-Ḥikam Wa Durar al-Kalim*. (2nd ed.). Sayyid Mahdī Rajā'ī (Res.), Qum, Iran: Nashr Dār al-Kitāb al-Islāmī.
5. 'Arīḍī, 'Alī bin Ja'far. (1409 AHL). *Masā'il 'Alī bin Ja'far Wa Mustadrakātihā*. Mu'assisah Āl al-Bayt Li 'Iḥyā' al-Turāth (Res.), Qum, Iran: Mashr Mu'assisah Āl al-Bayt.
6. Attributed to Ja'far bin Muḥammad (as) (the sixth Imam). (1400 AHL). *Miṣbāḥ al-Sharī'ah*. Beirut, Lebanon: Nashr 'Alamī.
7. *Bi Sūya Maḥbūb*. (6th ed.) (1391 AHS). Qum, Iran: Intishārāt Shafaq.

8. Fattāl al-Nayshābūrī, Muḥammad bin Aḥmad. (1375 AHS). *Rawḍah al-Wa'izīn Wa Baṣīrah al-Mutta'izīn* (1st ed.). Qum, Iran: Intishārāt al-Raḍī.
9. Ḥarrānī, Abū Muḥammad Ḥasan bin `Alī bin Ḥusayn bin Shu`bah. (1404 AHL). *Tuḥaf al-'Uqūl*. (2nd ed.) 'Alī Akbar Ghaffārī (Res.), Qum, Iran: Intishārāt Jāmi'ah Mudarrisīn.
10. Ḥumayrī, `Abdullāh bin Ja'far. (1413 AHL). *Qurb al-Isnād*. Mu'assisah Āl al-Bayt (Res.), Qum, Iran: Nashr Mu'assisah Āl al-Bayt.
11. Ḥusaynī Tihirānī, Sayyid Myḥammad Ḥusayn. (1427 AHL). *Rūḥi Mujarrad* (9th ed.). Mashhad, Iran: Intishārāt Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā'ī.
12. Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd, `Abdulḥamīd bin Hibatullāh. (1404 AHL). *Sharḥ Nahj al-Balāghah*. Muḥammad Abu al- Faḍl 'Ibrāhīm (Res.), Qum, Iran: Nashr Maktabah Āyatullāh al-Mar'ashī al-Najafī.
13. 'Ibn 'Athīr Jazarī, Mubārak bin Muḥammad. (1367 AHS). *Al-Nihāyah Fī Gharīb al-Ḥadīth Wa al-'Athar*. (4th ed.). Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭanāḥī (Res.), Qum, Iran: Nashr Mu'assisah Maṭbūātī 'Ismā'īlīyān.
14. Ibn Bābiwayh, Muḥammad bin 'Alī. (1403 AHL). *Ma'ānī al-Akhbār*. 'Alī Akbar Ghaffārī (Res.), Qum, Iran: Nashr Daftar 'Intishārāt Islāmī.
15. Ibn Fahd Ḥillī, Aḥmad bin Muḥammad. (1407 AHL). *'Uddah al-Ddā'ī Wa Najāh al-Sā'ī*. Aḥmad Muwahḥidī Qumī (Res.), Nashr Dār al-Kutub al-Islāmī.
16. Karājakī, Muḥammad bin 'Alī. (1410 AHL). *Kanz al-Fawā'id*. 'Abdullāh N'imah (Res.), Qum, Iran: Nashr Dār al-Dhakhā'ir.
17. Kūfī Ahwāzī, Ḥusayn bin Sa'īd. (1404 AHL). *Al-Mu'min*. Qum, Iran: Nashr Mu'assisah al-Imām al-Mahdī (aj).
18. Kulaynī, Muḥammad bin Ya`qūb bin Ishāq. (1407 AHL). *Al-Kāfī*. (4th ed.). 'Alī Akbar Ghaffārī and Muḥammad Ākhūndī (Res.), Tehran, Iran: Dār al-Kutub al-Islāmiyah.

19. Laythī Wāsiṭī, 'Alī bin Muḥammad. (1376 AHS). *Uyūn al-Ḥikam Wa al-Mawā'iz*. Ḥusayn Ḥasanī Bīrjandī (Res.), Qum, Iran: Nashr Dār al-Hadīth.
20. Marzbānī, Muḥammad bin 'Imrān. (1378 AHS). *Munājāt 'Ilāhīyāt Ḥaḍrat 'Amīr (as) Wa Mā Nazala Min al-Qur'ān Fī 'Alī*. 'Alī Ūjabī (Trans.), Ḥāshim Rasūlī Maḥallātī (Ed.), Tehran, Iran: Mashr Wizārat Irshād.
21. Mufīd, Muḥammad bin Muḥammad. (1413 AHL). *Al-Fuṣūl al-Mukhtārah*. 'Alī Mīrsharīfī (Res.), Qum, Iran: Nashr Kungirah Shaykh Mufīd.
22. Muṭahharī, Murtiḍā. (1383 AHS). *Majmū'ah Āthār*. Tehran, Iran: Intishārāt Ṣadrā.
23. Muṭahharī, Murtiḍā. (1379 AHS). *Sayrī Dar Nahj al-Balāghah*. (22nd ed.). Tehran, Iran: Intishārāt Ṣadrā.
24. Muttaqī al-Hindī, 'Alā' al-Dīn 'Alī bin Ḥisām al-Dīn. (1401 AHL). *Kanz al-'Ummāl Fī Sunan al-Aqwāl Wa al-Af'āl* (5th ed.). Bikrī Ḥayyānī and Ṣafwah al-Saqqā (Res.), Beirut, Lebanon: Mu'assisah al-Risālah.
25. Qurbānī, Nīmā (1393 AHS). *Rawāndarmāngarī Pūyishī Fishurdi Wa Kūtāhmuddat*. Mabānī Wa Funūn (6th ed.). Tehran, Iran: Intishārāt Samt.
26. Quṭb al-Dīn Rāwandī, Sa'īd bin Hibatullāh. (1407 AHL). *Al-Da'awāt)Silwah al-Ḥazīn(*. Qum, Iran: Intishārāt Madrisah Imām Mahdī (aj).
27. Rukhshād, Muḥammad Ḥusayn. (1389 AHS). *Dar Maḥḍar Ḥaḍrat Āyatullāh al-'Uzmā Bahjat* (11th ed.). Qum, Iran: Mu'assisah Farhangī Samā'.
28. Sharīf al-Raḍī, Muḥammad bin Ḥusayn. (1414 AHL). *Nahj al-Balāghah*. Ṣubḥī Ṣāliḥ (Res.), Qum, Iran: Nashr Ḥijrat.
29. Shaykh Ṣadūq, Abū Ja'far Muḥammad bin 'Alī bin Ḥusayn bin Bābawayh. (1406 AHL). *Thawāb al-'Amāl Wa 'Iqāb al-'Amāl* (2nd ed.). Qum, Iran: Intishārāt al-Sharīf al-Raḍī.

30. Ṭabrisī, Aḥmad bin 'Alī. (1403 AHL). *Al-'Ihtijāj 'Alā Ahl al-Lijāj*. Muḥammad Bāqir Khurāsān (Res.), Mashhad, Iran: Nashr Murtidā.
31. Ṭabrisī, 'Alī bin Ḥasan. (1385 AHL). *Mishkāt al-'Anwār Fī Ghurar al-Akḥbār*. (2nd ed.). Najaf, Iraq: Maktabah al-Ḥaydarīyyah.
32. Ṭabrisī, Faḍl bin al-Ḥasan. (1372 AHS). *Majma' al-Bayān Fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*. (3rd ed.) Faḍlullāh Yazdī Ṭabāṭabā'ī (Res.), Hāshim Rasūlī (Ed.), Tehran, Iran: 'Intishārāt Nāshir Khusru.
33. Warrām bin Abī Firās, Mas'ūd bin 'Īsā. (1410 AHL). *Tanbīh al-Khawāṭir Wa Nuzḥah al-Nawāzīr*. Qum, Iran: Nashr Maktabah Faqīh.
34. Zamakhsharī, Maḥmūd bin 'Umar. (1407 AHL). *Al-Khashshāf 'An Ḥaqā'iq Ghawāmiḍ al-Tanzīl Wa Uyūn al-Aqāwīl Fī Wujūh al-Ta'wīl*. (3rd ed.). Muṣṭafā Ḥusayn Aḥmad (Ed.), Beirut, Lebanon: Nashr Dār al-Kitāb al-'Arabī.

■ Articles:

35. Davīdan Dar Payi Āvāzi Ḥaqīqat: Īmāni Dīnī. A Talk with Muṣṭafā Malikīyān, *Faṣlnāmih Kīyān*. No. 52. (1379 AHS). pp. 21-35.
36. Festinger L, and Carlsmith, J.M. (1959), Cognitive Consequences of forced compliance. *Journal of abnormal and social Psychology*. vol. 58, pp. 203-210.

Detailed Table of
Contents.

A Note from the Publisher	7
The Best Sermon on Ethics in Nahj al-Balāghah	9
Chapter 1: Becoming Familiar with the "Hammām Sermon"	11
• The Need for Everyone to Be Educated in the Field of Ethics	12
• How the Sermon Was Delivered	13
• Outstanding Features of This Sermon	15
• 1. The reason for this sermon is clear.	15
• 2. Both the audience and the level at which the speech is directed are clear.	15
• 3. Comprehensiveness	16
• 4. The effect of this speech can be felt immediately	17
• 5. It has a mystical style.	17
• 6. It is useful for everyone.	18
• 7. It is melodic.	19
• 8. It is descriptive.	20
• 9. It describes "goodness."	21
• 10. Many commentaries have been written on it.	23
• Pondering Over This Sermon in Solitude	23
• An Artistic Combination of Thought and Emotions	25
• Methods Used in This Commentary	26
• 1. An explanatory approach instead of propaganda	26
• 2. Pondering over individual virtues and a combination of them	26
• 3. Explaining the way to gain virtues	27
• 4. A look at vices along with virtues	27
Chapter 2: Hammām's Question	29
• Different Types of Questions	30
• 1. Bad Questions (that bring regression)	30
• The Most Important Damage Caused by a Bad Question	32
• 2. Unnecessary Questions (that don't help us at all)	33
• 3. Good questions (to bring advancement)	33
• Why should a person not rush to ask a good question?	34
• Acting in accordance with what we already know is one way to find answers.	35
• Hammām's question was a good question.	37
• 1. Why did Hammām ask for a "description"?	37
• Why are we in pursuit of "advice" more than we are in pursuit of "descriptions"?	38
• 2. Hammām's Question: Describe Pious People as if I Am Seeing Them	41
• Longing to Watch and Pleading to See	42

• "Understanding" and "being concerned" are necessary factors for forming a good question.	43
• Seeing beauty is a true need.	46
• Seeking Beauty: A Characteristic of Great People	47
• Abandoning Smiling Due to Its Ugliness	48
• The Need to "Feel" Beauties	49
• The Need to Have an "Open Heart" to Be Able to Feel Beauties	50
• Ways to "Understanding" Beauties	51
• 1. Not Looking at Unseemly Things	51
• 2. Reciting the Qur'an and Talking to God	52
• 3. Spending Time with People Who Have an Inner Beauty	53
• 4. Being Fond of Nature	53
Chapter 3: Piety: Something Needed by All Human Beings	55
• The Reason for Praising God When Starting to Talk and Its Benefits	56
• Remembering God's Greatness and Grandeur	58
• A Person's Love for a Majestic God	60
• Everyone's Need for Piety Despite Differences Between People	61
• Differences in People's Tests Depends on Their Dispositions	62
• A Higher Position and Ability Require More Piety	64
• The Difference Between Piety and Natural Traits	65
• One of the Difficulties in Practicing Piety	66
Chapter 4: The Beauty of Piety	69
• The Necessity of Paying Attention to the Beauty of Religion	70
• The Beauty of the Concept of Taqwā (Piety)	71
• The Definition of Taqwā (Piety)	73
• The Truth of Piety: Safeguarding Something Valuable	74
• A Loving Analysis of Piety	75
• Piety can be seen in all love stories.	76
• The Relation Between Piety and Fear	78
• Two Scientific Bases for Piety	79
Chapter 5: Being Proper	81
• What does it mean to have superior virtues?	82
• We are tested with God's grace.	83
• A person should not be in pursuit of gaining virtues!	86
Chapter 6: Output is more important than input	89
• Pious People's Apparent Features	90
• Output takes precedence over input.	91
• The Difficulty of Controlling One's Tongue	92
• Why is controlling one's tongue so hard?	93
• Some Small Points with Regard to Controlling One's Tongue	94

• A person's way of talking shows his/her character, intentions and inner being.	95
• The Role of the Tongue In Strengthening the Roots of Evil	97
• The Role of the Tongue In Justifying One's Sins	98
• The Results of an Experiment: Justifying One's Actions	99
• The Importance of "Repentance": Stopping the Cycle of Justifying One's Sins	101
• Silence: A Simple Yet Comprehensive Solution	102
• Silence: A Passive Solution	103
• The Advantage of Talking Properly Over Silence	104
• Pious people's proper way of speaking is due to their inner purity	105
• Sometimes when talking we are expressing our judgments about others.	107
• Transferring Spiritual Illnesses Through Talking	107
• An Effective Way to Control Talking Badly	108
Chapter 7: Wearing Good Clothes	111
• The Second Characteristic of Pious People	112
• Being Well-groomed with Sincerity	113
• The Difficulty of Being Sincere with Regard to Our Clothing	114
• Condemnation of Being Naive in Sincerity	115
• Clothes: Modern Day Billboards	117
• Types of Spiritual Demonstrations	118
• Clothes of the Time: The Best Clothes	121
Chapter 8: Humbleness	125
• The Humble Behavior of Pious People	126
• Being humble can be difficult	127
• A law of this world: Achieving something by doing the opposite!	128
• The Relationship Between Worshiping and Humbleness	129
• The Value of Humbleness in the Sight of God	130
• Humbleness: A Strategic Attribute of the Shi'a	132
• "Humbleness": A Sign of a True Shi'a	133
• The Harms and Perils of Being Humble	134
Chapter 9: Controlling Our Eyes	137
• Controlling one's eyes or heart?	138
• It is the nature of eyes that they deceive a person.	140
• Avoiding Negligence by Not "Looking too Much"	141
• The Philosophy Behind Self-restraint and Shunning Sins	143
• Practicing self-restraint is a part of the nature of life.	145
• Adhering to God's Commands: Something I Must Do and Want to Do	147

o Accepting Deprivations: An Introduction to Self-restraint	149
o Deprivations will always be with us	149
o Having no Need for the Things We Are Deprived of Due to Accepting Deprivations	150
o Fixing our eyes on deprivations is both painful and devastating.	151
o Not Thinking about Deprivations: A Beginning to Avoiding Forbidden Actions	152
o God's Greatness and Avoiding Forbidden Actions	153
o Ways to Feel God's Greatness	154
Chapter 10: Only Useful Knowledge	157
o Disadvantages of Non-Beneficial Knowledge	158
1. Not Being Able to Become a Scholar	159
o The Need to Pay Attention to Scientific Planning and the Order of Learning the Sciences	160
2. Creating Concepts	161
3. Disrupting Concentration	163
o Being able to 'focus' is a very important, necessary skill for religious people.	164
o Useless, Everyday Knowledge	165
o What are the conditions for knowledge to be beneficial?	166
o The Need to Choose Between Different News and Media Sources	167
o The Need to Be Careful About What Enters Our Ears	169
o Ineffectiveness of Educational Systems	170
o The method and one's speed in learning are the keys to the flourishing of talents.	170
o The High Importance of Gaining Knowledge	171
o Gaining Knowledge: A Believer's Occupation	172
o The Benefits of Gaining Knowledge	174
1. Accepting religion easier	174
2. Eliminating Ignorance and Paving the Way for Guidance	176
3. Many Educational Effects	178
a. Increase in Patience	178
b. Humbleness	180
c. Growth in Religiosity	181
o Seeking to Benefit Oneself by Gaining Beneficial Knowledge	182
o Is beneficial knowledge only knowledge of religion?	183
o Harmful Knowledge from the Point of View of Religion	184
Notes	187
References	205