

Imam 'Ali's First Treatise On The Islamic Ethics And Education

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In this book, the author first discusses what ethics essentially is, and the views of various philosophers and schools of thought on it. After explaining the defects of these philosophies, he presents the view of Imam Ali [a] on ethics as derived from a lengthy treatise that he composed.

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Preface

In The Name of Allah, The Compassionate, The Merciful

Just as the human body needs food, clothing and a shelter, so does his soul need ethics and education. A person who is ignorant of the facts of creation, who is not nurtured with moral conducts, and is not void of obnoxious traits is only superficially a human being; he is in fact far away from humanity. Regarding this, Sa'di from Shiraz (the famous poet) says:

What makes a human body honorable is his soul; beautiful garment does not make a man;
If eyes, tongues, ears and noses made a man;
Then what would the difference be between a man and a painting on the wall;
Be truly a man, or else you would be
A bird talking human language;
If you could eliminate your fierce nature you would live a human life all life-long.

For this very reason the significant portions of the agenda of the Prophets and divine Messengers include education and the enhancement of ethical considerations and well-adjusted conduct.

These dignitaries, in accordance with the prevailing situations, have made use of either practical means and suitable behavior, or sermons and maxims, or treatises.¹

Among these treasures is the Treatise of Amir al-Mu'minin (pbnh), which is the subject of the present translation. It is appropriate here to draw your attention to the following points:

What Is Ethics?

According to the Islamic scholars,² ethics includes all human traits which are brought about either by heredity or environment and which make up one's personality influencing one's deeds, conducts thoughts and speech.

Raghib in his Mufradat al-Qur'an says that the two terms "*Khalq*" (creation) and "*Khulq*" (human traits) are, in fact, identical; but the former refers to superficial configurations which are observable with naked eyes, whereas the latter refers to the internal powers and innate goodness which are only observable with the hearts.³

Regarding this, Imam 'Ali (as) has said: "*Khulq* refers to the soul, whereas *khalq* refers to

the body".[4](#)

As the bodies are different among people; some are beautiful, and some are ugly, the souls are different as well; some are nice, others are inhuman. In the final analysis, the structure of human body relies on the rules of creation, which are beyond humans to tamper with; whereas sour behaviors and traits are for the most part learned and are formed through hardships.

Ibn Miskawayh in his book *Taharat al-A'raq* writes, " *Khulq* is one of the traits of human self which entices man to carry out his daily affairs without thinking. It is of two types:

Some part of it is natural and rests on the human nature. An example is when a man becomes furious over minor things or fears insignificant events or becomes happy or depressed.

The other part of it relies on our customs and practices. This part at first rested, no doubt, on thought but later, due to practice and repetition takes on a habitual status; then it works with no thought at all."[5](#)

Thus, our physical traits are not considered as our ethical traits unless they have become constant. For instance, a person does not acquire the trait of generosity by random acts of generosity; neither is he termed brave by just randomly engaging in brave actions.

Thus traits take on the status of *khulq* only when they manifest themselves as constant, occurring without thought or consideration.[6](#)

But this does not contradict the optional nature of these traits since man is capable of either carrying them out or avoiding them as a whole,[7](#) although it is hard to stop doing habitual things.[8](#)

Furthermore, as it is proven elsewhere, since from the beginning he could either form habits or abandon them, thus he has been free from the beginning to make the choices he likes.[9](#)

The Need For Ethics In Life

In order for a man to enjoy all his instincts and wishes to a logical degree, to live at peace with others and to attain prosperity both here and in the hereafter, he has to observe ethical standards.

The advancements and degenerations of human societies do not depend solely on sciences and material progress. Rather, it is the observation of these ethical standards which bring about either prosperity or fall of such societies. The poet says:

Ethics keeps the human race alive; a tribe of humanity which lacks ethics is doomed to die.

At times, the lack of observation of one of the ethical standards might create a human disaster such as the world wars¹⁰ or affect the good desires of a good-doer. On the contrary, observing such standards saves a man who is going to fall, or covers his faults.

Thus, ethics is a requirement for both statesmen and the Messengers of Allah. That is why, the magnificent Qur'an, after eleven oaths, emphasizes that: he who attains salvation is one who purifies his soul of ethical corruptions and the wretched is one who corrupts his

soul:

"قَدْ أَفْلَحَ مَنْ زَكَّاهَا وَقَدْ خَابَ مَنْ دَسَّاهَا"

"He will indeed be successful who purifies it (the soul) and he will indeed fail who corrupts it".¹¹

The Prophet (S) was appreciated by God for holding the highest degree of ethical codes:

"وَإِنَّكَ لَعَلَىٰ خُلُقٍ عَظِيمٍ"

"And most surely you conform (yourself) to sublime morality."¹²

And the secret for his appointment to the prophetic mission was his attainment of highest degree of sublime morality.

But unfortunately, the present world, especially the West, has turned into robots lacking souls and morality codes.

Alexis Carrel, the renowned French scholar, writes in this regard, "As soon as we renounced the precepts of the Gospel, we renounced all interior discipline. The new generation is not even aware that such a discipline ever existed. Temperance, honor, truthfulness, responsibility, purity, self-mastery, love of one's neighbor, heroism are outworn expressions; meaningless words which provoke nothing but a contemptuous smile from the young".

"For modern man, the only rule of conduct is his own good pleasure. Everyone is enclosed in his own egoism like the crab in its shell and, again like the crab, seeks to devour his neighbor.

"Elementary social relations have changed profoundly; everywhere, division reigns. Marriage has ceased to be a permanent bond between man and woman.

"Both the material and the psychological conditions of modern existence have created a propitious climate for the breaking up of family life. Children are now considered a nuisance, if not a calamity.

"This is the final result of having abandoned those rules which, in the past, Western man had the courage and wisdom to impose on his individual and social conduct"¹³

Good Actions And Noble Moral Traits

In the ethical guide-lines of Islam, praiseworthy temperaments have two aspects: good actions and noble moral traits.

Among the good actions are the following:

The cleanliness of body and dress, good humor and smile, respect for others, politeness of speech, visiting the sick, avoidance of haughtiness, and suspicion.

But those human traits, such as magnanimity, justice, keeping promises, trustworthiness, and manhood, which are considered as true human traits, are among noble moral traits. The important point is that attaining good moral actions is more or less possible for nearly everybody: every body can do so by doing the right things such as treating people justly and politely and visiting the sick and avoiding haughtiness.

But the attainment of the noble moral traits and superb human traits is extremely difficult. Not everybody can attain them. Only those individuals can attain such a status, who possess high souls and are in control of their selves, and who are in the habit of respecting human principles and obeying God.

The great Messengers of God, by using the sublime Islamic education, have attempted to encourage people to engage in ethical affairs. The Great Messenger of Islam (S) has said

"افضلُ الناس ايماناً احسنهم خلقاً"

"The most excellent of people in faith are those who are the best in moral traits."[14](#)

On the other hand, the Great Messenger of Allah has mentioned that the reason of his prophetic mission was to perfect the ethical training.

Imam 'Ali has said:

"ذَلُّوا اخلاقكم بالمحاسن وقودوها إلى المكارم"

"Subdue your natures with beautiful actions and lead them toward noble moral traits".[15](#)

The narrator says: I asked Imam Sadiq (as) what the limit of good humor was. He answered:

"تُليّنُ جانِبَكَ وتُطَيّبُ كلامَكَ و تَلقى اَخالَكَ بِبِشْرٍ حَسَنٍ"

"You should be gentle, speak pleasantly and meet your brethren with a cheerful face".[16](#)

A man came to Imam Sadiq (as) and said: "O son of God's Messenger, let me know what the noble moral traits are". Imam as-Sadiq (as) replied to him,

"العفو عمن ظلمك وصلة من قطعك وإعطاء من حرّمك وقول الحق ولو على نفسك"

"Forgiving one who has wronged you, establishing ties with one who has severed relations

with you, giving one who has deprived you, and speaking the truth even if it is against yourself."¹⁷

In his *Sahifah al-Sajjadiyah*, in the supplication Makarim Al-Akhlaq, "The noble moral traits," Imam 'Ali Ibn al-Husayn (as) invokes God by saying:

**"اللَّهُمَّ صَلِّ عَلَى مُحَمَّدٍ وَآلِهِ وَسَدِّدْنِي لِأَنْ أُعَارِضَ مَنْ عَشَّيْتَنِي
بِالنُّصْحِ وَأُجْزِي مَنْ هَجَرَني بِالْبِرِّ وَأُثِيبَ مَنْ حَرَمَنِي بِالْبَدْلِ
وَأُكَافِيَ مَنْ قَطَعَنِي بِالصِّلَةِ وَأُخَالِفَ مَنْ إِغْتَابَنِي إِلَى حُسْنِ
الذِّكْرِ وَأَنْ أَشْكُرَ الْحَسَنَةَ وَأُعْضِيَ عَنِ السَّيِّئَةِ"**

"O God, send your blessings to Muhammad and his offspring, and guide me so that I may counter with good advice whoever acts dishonestly towards me, so that I may make amends with whoever parts company with me, so that I may reward with generosity whoever deprives me, so that I may recompense with union whoever cuts himself off from me, so that I may oppose with excellent mention whoever slanders me, so that I may give thanks for good, and so that I may shut my eyes to evil."¹⁸

The Great Messenger (S), who had been badly hurt by the Quraysh, forgave them when he conquered Mecca.

He allowed Abu Sufyan's house to be a shelter for people.

In the Siffin war, when Mu'awiya had so inhumanly denied Imam 'Ali's army the water of the Euphrates, someone asked Imam 'Ali to do the same to Mu'awiya's army. But he answered, "We will not retaliate for a wrong; we will not deny them the use of water."

When an impolite shopkeeper poured trash over the head of malik al-Ashtar, an important officer in Imam 'Ali's army, Malik went to the mosque and prayed for him and forgave him. When Imam Zayn al-'Abidin (as) was insulted by a relative, he went to his house telling him:

**"فَإِنْ كُنْتَ قَدْ قُلْتَ مَا فِيَّ فَإِنَا اسْتَغْفِرُ اللَّهَ مِنْهُ وَإِنْ كُنْتَ قُلْتَ
مَا لَيْسَ فِيَّ فَعَقَرَ اللَّهُ لَكَ"**

"If what you say is true, I ask God to forgive me. But if what you say is not true, then I ask God to forgive you."

The above-mentioned cases and similar events which are recorded from the Prophet and the Imams of Islam in their diaries are among the noble moral traits.

Thus, there are differences between good actions and noble moral traits.

Good actions are usually a means for material welfare, but noble moral traits are a way to the attainment of spiritual advancement. The former provides our lives with discipline; whereas the latter satisfies human sublime tendencies.

The former are in harmony with personal desires and legitimate self interest, but the latter

deal with interest in others.

All Messengers and Imams of Islam completely enjoyed noble moral traits. But among their students there are few who are in possession of these assets. Anybody who possesses these assets should be thankful to God. Those who lack them should try to acquire them. In this regard Imam Sadiq (as) has said."

**"إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَزَّوَجَلَّ خَصَّ رُسُلَهُ بِمَكَارِمِ الْأَخْلَاقِ فَاْمْتَحِنُوا أَنْفُسَكُمْ
فَإِنْ كَانَتْ فِيكُمْ فَاحْمَدُوا اللَّهَ وَاعْلَمُوا أَنَّ ذَلِكَ مِنْ خَيْرٍ وَإِنْ لَا
تَكُنْ فَاسْأَلُوا اللَّهَ وَارْغَبُوا إِلَيْهِ فِيهَا"**

"God distinguished His Messengers with noble moral traits. Thus, examine yourselves, if you possess them, be thankful to God for these precious assets and know that it is from good; if you lack them, then ask God and supplicate Him for them."[19](#)

A person who possesses noble moral traits has an exalted soul and therefore performs good deeds not out of his material interest but rather for God.

Imam 'Ali (as) says: *"I am amazed when a Muslim goes to another Muslim for some help, but he is turned down."*

**"قَلَوْ كَانَ لَا يَرْجُو ثَوَابًا وَ لَا يَخْشَى عِقَابًا لَقَدْ كَانَ يَنْبَغِي لَهُ أَنْ
يُسَارِعَ إِلَى مَكَارِمِ الْأَخْلَاقِ فَانْهَافًا مِمَّا تَدُلُّ عَلَى سَبِيلِ النِّجَاةِ"**

"Even if he did not expect reward and did not fear the punishment, it would have been proper for him to hasten towards noble moral traits for they are of those things that lead toward the path of salvation."[20](#)

A man from desert came up to the Messenger of God asking him, "O Messenger of God, sometimes a man fights for booty, sometimes for fame and sometimes for the recognition of his bravery; which one of these ways is right?"

The Prophet (S) answered:

"مَنْ قَاتَلَ لِتَكُونَ كَلِمَةُ اللَّهِ هِيَ الْعُلْيَا فَهُوَ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ"

*"The one who fights so that **'..the word of God is the highest..'**, (9:40) - he is on the path of God."*[21](#)

This type of prayers is called "the prayers of free men" by Imam 'Ali (as).

"إِنَّ قَوْمًا عَبَدُوا اللَّهَ رَغْبَةً فِتْلِكَ عِبَادَةُ التُّجَّارِ وَإِنَّ قَوْمًا عَبَدُوا اللَّهَ رَهْبَةً فِتْلِكَ عِبَادَةُ الْعَبِيدِ وَإِنَّ قَوْمًا عَبَدُوهُ شُكْرًا (حُبًّا) فِتْلِكَ عِبَادَةُ الْأَحْرَارِ"

"Some people worship God out of desire (for reward); that is the worship of traders. Some worship God out of fear (of punishment); that is the worship of slaves. But others worship God in gratitude (out of love for Him); that is the worship of free men".[22](#)

In some Islamic traditions the cases of noble moral traits are enumerated. For instance, in Ibn Bekir's tradition from Imam as-Sadiq (as) it is said:

"قُلْتُ جُعِلْتُ فِدَاكَ وَمَا هِيَ؟"

**قال: هُنَّ الْوَرَعُ وَالْقَنَاعَةُ وَالصَّبْرُ وَالشُّكْرُ وَالْحِلْمُ وَالْحَيَاءُ
وَالسَّخَاءُ وَالشَّجَاعَةُ وَالغَيْرَةُ وَالْإِصْرُ وَصِدْقُ الْحَدِيثِ وَأَدَاءُ الْأَمَانَةِ"**

I asked Imam as-Sadiq (as) what the noble moral traits were. He answered, "They are self-control, contentment, patience, thanking God, forbearance, modesty, generosity, bravery, possessing a sense of honor for what is sacred, righteousness, truthfulness, fulfilling the trust."[23](#)

The Role Of Education

The term (*Ta'leem*), which is derived from *'ilm* (knowledge) means to teach, and the term "*tarbiyah*" is derived from "*rabw*" meaning nurture.

Animals, when born, know their duties and plans of life through their instincts. They would need no instructors.

The young fish, after being hatched, know how to swim, breathe, feed, protect themselves against enemies, and how to reproduce. They do not need to be taught.

The Anopheles mosquito is vegetarian but because the new-born insects should feed on worms, the mother hunts a special worm, stings it so that it is paralysed. In this way, the mother provides its new-born with fresh meat. The mother does it through her instinct; not through training.

The bee sucks the sweet nectar, turns it into honey, makes symmetrical shelters and divides the affairs of the hive among individual bees all because of divine inspiration and natural instincts.

"وَأَوْحَىٰ رَبُّكَ إِلَى النَّحْلِ أَنِ اتَّخِذِي مِنَ الْجِبَالِ بُيُوتًا وَمِنَ الشَّجَرِ
وَمَا يَعْرِشُونَ"

“And your Lord revealed to the bee saying: Make hives in the mountains and in the trees and in what they build.”[24](#)

This is the fact which is brought about by Prophet Moses (as) and his brother when they introduced their God to Pharaoh:

"قَالَ فَمَنْ رَبُّكُمَا يَا مُوسَىٰ قَالَ رَبُّنَا الَّذِي أَعْطَىٰ كُلَّ شَيْءٍ خَلْقَهُ
ثُمَّ هَدَىٰ"

“Pharaoh said: And who is your Lord, O Musa? He said: Our Lord is He Who gave to everything its creation, then guided it (to its goal).”[25](#)

The Giver who provided the flower with nectar and the clay with soul;
Gave each one what He deemed necessary.

But man, in carrying out his daily duties and arriving at perfection needs more than instincts and innate inspiration: besides being equipped with wisdom, he needs instructors. He would perhaps walk like animals if he were not helped. He would most probably be dumb if words were not put in his mouth. Mawlawi says:

A deaf person cannot speak; the speaker is the one who has heard from the mother. Thus, in order to recognize facts of the world and to appreciate the secrets of creation, man needs a teacher. Without an instructor, man is unable to grasp such secrets.

Man needs an instructor to nourish his physical and spiritual capabilities and to arrive at his ideals and to prune the wicked parts of his character, If God's Messengers had not risen to correct man, he would, no doubt, have had a much worse life than the Middle Ages. In this regard the Holy Qur'an says:

"لَقَدْ مَنَّ اللَّهُ عَلَى الْمُؤْمِنِينَ إِذْ بَعَثَ فِيهِمْ رَسُولًا مِنْ أَنْفُسِهِمْ
يَتْلُوا عَلَيْهِمْ آيَاتِهِ وَيُزَكِّيهِمْ وَيُعَلِّمُهُمُ الْكِتَابَ وَالْحِكْمَةَ وَإِنْ كَانُوا
مِنْ قَبْلُ لَفِي ضَلَالٍ مُبِينٍ"

“Certainly Allah conferred a benefit upon the believers when He raised among them an Apostle from among themselves, reciting to them His communications and purifying them, and teaching them the Book and the wisdom, although before that they were surely in manifest error.”[26](#)

As you will observe the appointment of a Messenger among the corrupted people to guide them was one of God's blessings.

Still in another verse, God considers the Messengers' teachings as true life, those not receiving it are considered as dead:

" يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا اسْتَجِيبُوا لِلَّهِ وَلِلرَّسُولِ إِذَا دَعَاكُمْ لِمَا يُحْيِيكُمْ "

"O you who believe! Answer the call of Allah and His Apostle when he calls you to that which gives you life".[27](#)

Education Is the Bringing Up Of Capabilities

Sometimes we make a thing out of something without any internal attraction inside that "something". For instance we make furniture out of a piece of wood by working on it. Thus, a character or feature is created.

But some other time, a thing has got internal impetus for change and becomes something else. In this case guidance is necessary and in many others lack of guidance may mislead the object. An example is the child who has the innate capacity for sucking its mother's breast and acquiring knowledge. However, if it is not directed to the right way, it may either die from hunger or stay ignorant or might suck some dangerous objects in place of its mother's breast or might learn some pernicious knowledge which might harm it. This change of the innate capacity into practical acts is called education.

Thus, education is not industry; rather the subject of education should be an organism which has innate capacity for development.

Since man has some innate capacities such as truth-finding, ethical conscience, love for beauty, love for freedom, self-interest, and love for life he needs an instructor who will bring out these capacities and lead them in the right direction.

Quanttime, the famous French psychologist believes that man's soul has four dimensions at the time of birth, i.e. man has the following four capacities at the time of his coming into this world:

1. The Scientific And Rational Capacity Or The Fact-Finding Capacity:

The advancement of science, the discovery of the secrets of creation, the human perseverance in finding facts all stem from this dynamic capacity.

2. Ethical Conscience:

Man is created in such a way that he enjoys doing good deeds, justice, showing piety, discipline, self-control, bravery, sacrifice, and truthfulness.

On the other hand he abhors injustice and lies, uncleanness and debauchery, untidiness

and indecision, meanness and indifference, and the like.

3. Love For Beauty:

Man cares for the beauties in nature such as the blue starry sky, magnificent flowers and sceneries, limpid water with fish swimming in it, beautiful birds, deer in the desert, pleasant songs, elegant paintings, poems, and chirographies and gracious statures. This very capacity has made man create art and enrich life as a whole.

4.The Capacity For Worshiping:

Man believes in God from the bottom of his heart. He has worshiped God throughout the history and has consecrated this worship. To keep this consecration and holiness, he has endured lots of hardships.²⁸

With regard to the above issues a good instructor is the one who guides all man's innate capabilities in the right direction and does not let these abilities go astray.

For instance, man has sexual drive but he should guide it in the right way. Its suppression does not solve any problem. Man loves arts and beauty and must make use of them in the proper way. He should not deprive himself of these assets. Educating and nourishing man's skills is in harmony with the innate characteristic of religion. In this regard the Holy Qur'an says:

**"فَاقِم وَجْهَكَ لِلدِّينِ حَنِيفًا فِطْرَتَ اللَّهِ الَّتِي فَطَرَ النَّاسَ عَلَيْهَا
لَا تَبْدِيلَ لِخَلْقِ اللَّهِ ذَلِكَ الدِّينُ الْقَيُّمُ"**

"Then set your face upright for religion in the right state - the nature made by Allah in which He has made men; there is no altering of Allah's creation; that is the right religion."²⁹

Animals Have Limited Potential For Education:

Animals know their ways of life by instinct. These innate inspirations, which manifest themselves as instincts, drive them toward a limited state of perfection. However, some animals such as dogs, horses, elephants, monkeys, dolphins, foxes and bears possess a higher status of intelligence. They could be trained to protect the herds, the police, and to purchase commodities, and to perform circus performances. We have all seen such extraordinary performances in the films and elsewhere.

But, it is to be noted that the sphere of animal performances is highly restricted because their capabilities are narrower than those of man. For this reason, however hard we try to train them, they will never be able to solve mathematical problems, analyze the inside of the atom, make space-ships to be sent to the Mars or to the Jupiter, to discover medical remedies for hard-to-cure diseases, to cure TB and cancer sufferers and finally to carry on surgical operations on hearts, brains and kidneys.

This is only man who can, through right education, discover everywhere and solve

problems and manifest his capabilities and make himself "God's vicegerent on the earth".

Education Versus Training

As we saw before animals naturally recognize their good and evil, their food sources, and their ways of life. In this way, their capabilities manifest themselves. On the contrary, man knows neither his pains nor their remedies, neither his friends nor his foes, and possesses neither instruments nor his defense mechanisms. He has obtained all these through education and experience:

**"وَاللَّهُ أَخْرَجَكُمْ مِنْ بُطُونِ أُمَّهَاتِكُمْ لَا تَعْلَمُونَ شَيْئًا وَجَعَلَ لَكُمُ
السَّمْعَ وَالْأَبْصَارَ وَالْأَفْئِدَةَ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَشْكُرُونَ"**

"And Allah has brought you forth from the wombs of your mothers - you did not know anything - and He gave you hearing and sight and hearts that you may give thanks."³⁰

In order for man's skills and capabilities to flourish in diverse dimensions such as talking, having high morals, walking, living honestly, and loving justice, he needs instructors. Thus, education helps him improve his knowledge and culture; whereas training is employed to direct his innate capabilities and his spiritual dispositions. An educator teaches him the things he does not know, whereas a trainer guides his innate abilities in the right direction.

Ethics Versus Education

In the past Education was a branch of ethics. It dealt with the educating children and bringing forth their skills. In books written on education the encouragement for learning science and the ways of learning useful sciences were emphasized.³¹ But because of its significance in the lives of people, education raised itself from an inferior position to a completely independent branch of science, now there are numerous valuable books and resources written on it."

Since Imam 'Ali (as) in his erudite letter has emphasized numerous issues in education and has provided us with great samples of the advantages and favors of ethics we have called his article "the first treatise of Ethics and Islamic Education".

The Wrong-Doer Wisdom Needs An Infallible Instructor:

As we saw above, wisdom of man does the functions of instincts of animals. However these two are different in many respects:

a) An instinct, works without the consent of its holder. It does not go astray. Bees have always built their hives hexagonal and ants have always halved the wheat seeds in two halves in order to stop their growth in their under-ground shelters. But being equipped with free-will, man does not have to function in accordance with wisdom's guidelines. Animals have recognized their development through the guidelines of genesis and have to go

forward without their approval.

"ما مِنْ دَابَّةٍ إِلَّا هُوَ آخِذٌ بِنَاصِيَتِهَا إِنَّ رَبِّي عَلَى صِرَاطٍ مُسْتَقِيمٍ"

"There is no living creature but He holds it by its forelock; surely my Lord is on the right path."[32](#)

"إِنَّا هَدَيْنَاهُ السَّبِيلَ إِمَّا شَاكِرًا وَإِمَّا كَفُورًا"

"Surely we have shown him the way: he may be thankful or unthankful."[33](#)

b) An instinct performs an action without any error, but the wisdom makes mistakes when arriving at conclusions from the premises. The environment, lack of sufficient knowledge, wrong education, out-of-place prejudice, lust and anger, and the like, all have their fatal consequences on our wisdom. In this way man is prone to commit mistakes. Thus, he will need an infallible instructor. It is for this reason that God has sent Messengers and Imams to guide people. Imam Musa Ibn Ja'far (as) in his famous treatise tells Hisham.

"إِنَّ لِلَّهِ عَلَى النَّاسِ حُجَّتَيْنِ حُجَّةٌ ظَاهِرَةٌ وَحُجَّةٌ بَاطِنَةٌ فَمَا الظَّاهِرَةُ فَالرُّسُلُ وَالْأَنْبِيَاءُ وَالْإِمَّةُ وَأَمَا الْبَاطِنَةُ فَالْعُقُولُ"

"Allah has provided man with two proofs: the overt proof and the covert proof. The overt proofs are the Messengers and Imams and the covert proofs are the intellects."[34](#)

Messengers and Imams are superb human beings who directly receive religious facts from God who knows all facts in depth. They are infallible beings. Therefore, an education which is based on such a resource will completely rely on truthfulness.

But this does not imply that we will not believe in rational good and bad, and like al-Asha'irah only believe in religious good and bad. Definitely this is not the case. Our wisdom determines the goodness and badness of some acts independent of religion and other factors such as the observation that justice is considered as good and injustice is deemed unfair.[35](#) However if Messengers and Imams did not rise to lead and guide our rational judgments and did not try to evaluate our acts, man could not personally perceive the good and bad nature of such acts. This is because, on the one hand, his knowledge is limited, and on the other hand, factors such as environment, faulty education, unfounded prejudice and the like may influence his judgments.[36](#)

We will find this out in the discussion of the philosophy of ethics.

Education Or Training, Which One Should Precede?

As we have already seen, man is born at birth with a tabula rasa i.e. a blank tablet or a mind not influenced by outside experiences. Our overt senses are canals through which we come in contact with nature and acquire our knowledge. Regarding this, Aristotle has said:

"مَنْ فَقَدَ جِسًّا فَقَدَ عِلْمًا"

"He who is deprived of one of the faculties of sense will suffer the deprivation of the related knowledge."

In this way, we notice that those born deaf are deprived of speech. This is because they have not received the speech signals from others to be able to use them. Concerning this Mawlawi has said,

"One born deaf is definitely dumb.

A speaker is the one who heard the words from his mother."

Elsewhere Mawlawi says, "Man is made more capable through his ears". This is why those born blind can not perceive colors.

Thus, the first things which relate a man to his environment are his senses, or in the terminology employed in the Qur'an, they are the ears, eyes and hearts.³⁷ Then comes the growth of our capabilities and the purification of our self (soul).

But the thing to remember is that science is a means for the control of nature and for the unveiling of the secrets of the creation; whereas purification is a means for the control of our vicious, unyielding self (soul) and for shaping our personalities.

No doubt, if our souls are not controlled, then science will be used for the destruction of the world.

It would be better to leave a drunkard with a sword than let an ill-intentioned person have science at his disposal. There is a maxim which says:

"إِذَا فَسَدَ الْعَالِمُ فَسَدَ الْعَالَمُ"

"When a scholar becomes corrupt, the whole world becomes corrupt."

As we saw in the three verses of the Holy Qur'an which dealt with purification and education, purification was stated prior to the term "education".

Only in one verse is the term "education" used prior to the word purification and that is because of the natural priority which the mechanism of education has for us.

The Four Qur'anic Verses

(1) "كما أرسلنا فيكم رَسُولاً مِنْكُمْ يَتْلُوا عَلَيْكُمْ آيَاتِنَا وَيُزَكِّكُمْ وَيُعَلِّمُكُمُ الْكِتَابَ

وَالْحِكْمَةَ وَيُعَلِّمُكُم مَّا لَمْ تَكُونُوا تَعْلَمُونَ"

"Even as we have sent among you an Apostle from among you who recites to you Our communications and purifies you and teaches you the Book and the wisdom and teaches you that which you did not know".[38](#)

(2) "لَقَدْ مَنَّ اللَّهُ عَلَى الْمُؤْمِنِينَ إِذْ بَعَثَ فِيهِمْ رَسُولًا مِنْ أَنْفُسِهِمْ يَتْلُوا عَلَيْهِمْ آيَاتِهِ

وَيُزَكِّيهِمْ وَيُعَلِّمُهُمُ الْكِتَابَ وَالْحِكْمَةَ وَإِنْ كَانُوا مِنْ قَبْلُ لَفِي ضَلَالٍ مُبِينٍ"

"Certainly Allah conferred a benefit upon the believers when He raised among them an Apostle from among themselves, reciting to them His communications and purifying them, and teaching them the Book and the wisdom, although before that they were surely in manifest error."[39](#)

(3) "هُوَ الَّذِي بَعَثَ فِي الْأُمِّيِّينَ رَسُولًا مِنْهُمْ يَتْلُوا عَلَيْهِمْ آيَاتِهِ وَيُزَكِّيهِمْ وَيُعَلِّمُهُمُ

الْكِتَابَ وَالْحِكْمَةَ وَإِنْ كَانُوا مِنْ قَبْلُ لَفِي ضَلَالٍ مُبِينٍ"

"He it is who raised among the illiterate an Apostle from among themselves who recites to them His communications and purifies them, and teaches them the Book and the wisdom, a though they were before certainly in clear error".[40](#)

(4) One verse mentions Ibrahim's prayers in which he asks God:

رَبَّنَا وَابْعَثْ فِيهِمْ رَسُولًا مِنْهُمْ يَتْلُوا عَلَيْهِمْ آيَاتِكَ وَيُعَلِّمُهُمُ
الْكِتَابَ وَالْحِكْمَةَ وَيُزَكِّيهِمْ إِنَّكَ أَنْتَ الْعَزِيزُ الْحَكِيمُ

“Our Lord! And raise up in them an Apostle from among them who shall recite to them Thy communications and teach them the Book and the wisdom, and purify them; surely Thou art the Mighty, the Wise”.[41](#)

As you notice, in the first three verses purifying precedes educating, but in the last verse the order has changed. As we see purifying precedes educating and this is shown in the first three verses. But naturally education precedes purification and this is shown in the last verse.[42](#)

But some have assumed that since the fourth verse is among Ibrahim's prayers and the Qur'an is just narrating it, therefore, it is man's talk and for this reason may not be a criterion. They continue to assume that because the other three verses are truly God's speech and since purification has preceded education, therefore, it is true. Thus, training and purification should precede education.

But this statement is improper in that a Messenger like Ibrahim would not perform a prayer without considering the right method used by other Messengers. He would not act immaturely. He is one of the prominent Messengers whose statements are verified by God. Leveling such accusations against them would be an insult to them. This is especially true when we observe that the narrated words are in the Qur'an. Therefore, what is said does not include any contradiction.

The arrangement of words therefore, is definitely based on some philosophical considerations.

Thus, in answer to the question: which one should precede: training (purification) or education? We should answer "education" naturally precedes training, but education is higher than training in rank. That is why the above-mentioned verses have used one prior to the other.

The Bases And Philosophy Of Ethics.

Why are some deeds such as sacrifice, forgiveness and chastity considered proper and others such as injustice, lying, megalomania, and treason condemned? What are the criteria behind these judgments? Scholars have differing concepts toward these issues. Each one has a specific view on these questions depending on their world-views. Some of these conceptualizations follow:

1-The School Of Personal Sensuality:

Both in the past and at the present there have been philosophers who believe in nothing except pleasures of life. They say, "The future is uncertain; death might arrive at any moment and may destroy our life. Therefore, we should make best out of our time."

The forerunner of this school was Socrates' student named Aristocles.

According to this school, any action which satisfies man's temporary pleasures is considered an ethical action albeit in its satisfaction some other people get hurt.

But this approach to life degenerates man to the status of an animal and disregards the Hereafter. Too much involvement in the mundane enjoyments does away with security in life and the poor will suffer the most.

Since material pleasures can not satisfy man's spirit, and their satisfaction is neither possible nor beneficial, therefore to found ethical deeds over transitory desires is one step toward nihilism and avoidance of ethics.

2- Epicurism Or Personal Expedience

Epicure, the Greek philosopher (270-341 BC), too, put personal interests as the foundation of ethics. He did not mean temporary or transitory pleasures, however. He is after a pleasure which either lacks later suffering or involves little amount of suffering. He believes man should shun a suffering which does not contain pleasure either now or later.

Epicure has divided pleasures into three groups:

- a)** Natural and necessary pleasures, such as eating, drinking and sleep;
- b)** Unnatural but unnecessary pleasures, such as sexual drive;
- c)** Natural but unnecessary pleasures, such as desire for fame and money.

Epicure, then, goes on to say that the first type of pleasures should be fulfilled to a rational degree. The means to these ends should also be employed. But, according to Epicure, the second type of pleasures should also be satisfied normally. Going to extremes in this regard will lead to troubles.

But, the third type of pleasures which are neither natural nor necessary should be avoided altogether.

As you will see, the last hypothesis is more moderate, well-founded and wise than the previous one. However, it suffers from the following defects:

a) In this notion all aims are directed toward personal worldly interests. Whereas, according to the premises of the notion of the abstractness of self, the avoidance of the integument into material desires in this world may lend a better and flowery chance in the other world. This fact is not included in this notion, however.

b) This notion, like the previous one, reduces man's status to that of animal's in that it is concerned only with personal interests and not with collective interests and has shunned man's heavenly status altogether and has emphasized beastly stomach - filling, anger and lusts. Man, on the other hand, could, through training his skills, soar into the heavens and make the impossible seem attainable.

c) In this notion, the ethical goodness is defined only in the fulfillment of personal interests ignoring common interests as a whole.

The unnaturalness of this view is clear when we observe that others have a right to live like ourselves, too. How is it feasible to enjoy one's interests by destroying other people's rights?

d) A person's interests vary greatly according to one's status. They vary as well with individuals. Therefore, man's interests could not get regularized. On the contrary, ethical orders are highly systematic and well - organized, or else they would bring out chaos.[43](#)

3- The Powermonger School Of Nietzsche

Aristocles and Epicure both believed an ethical act to be in the direction of the attaining of one's instincts and worldly desires. Nietzsche, the German philosopher (1844-1900 AD) had the same view believing that the lust for power is the law of life and should be followed by everybody, even if this might lead to tyranny or deceit. Any thing contrary to this view is doomed from the outset however pious and rightful it might be.

Nietzsche contends that the thought about God and life for human beings should be thrown away altogether, and forgiveness and the like all stem from weakness. He believed the nature is based on the survival of the rich and on the annihilation of the poor. This is, in his view, a sample of ethical act.

This school suffers from a series of serious defects, among which are the following:

a) If the notion of God and the world Hereafter is put aside, then what does ethical act mean? Then who would guarantee the fulfillment of moral and individual obligations?

b) We should accept that the principle of power-loving, like other sensations such as care for humanity and generosity and sacrifice, also has its root in the human nature. Therefore, the same way that we make use of the instincts of self - interest, sexuality, possession and the like to an acceptable degree, we should use the instinct of power-loving wisely.

c) The acceptance of such a view is to consider one dimension of man and to ignore man's other heavenly dimensions. Such an acceptance entails man's fall into the world of beasts. In such a world there is no trace of man's finer feelings. They say even Nietzsche was not inconsiderate towards humanity to such a degree because he is said to have lost his life in order to save a horse's life.

Thus, critics believe Nietzsche has stated such extremist views out of his anger towards some people whom he hated. In a letter to his sister towards the end of his life, he writes, "The older I become, the harder life becomes to me. In the previous years when I suffered a lot I did not feel as depressed as I do now, What has happened? I have lost my confidence in people. But now we see that we have made a mistake. O my God! How lonely I feel now. There is nobody with whom I could laugh or by whose side I could drink a cup of tea. There is no body who can show me affection."[44](#)

4- Affection Towards Others

In contrast to the previous views and what we will see later, the affection view is based on the premise that an ethical act relies heavily on doing good to other people.

This view, which is known as the Indian-Eastern school, considers an act as ethical only when it is employed to do affection towards others. If, however, we perform our duties daily, such actions are not termed ethical. Thus, we will consider an act as ethical if it is rooted in feelings more sublime than individual feelings. The end of an ethical act is to make others benefit from it, and not just the individual.

This view, however, is significant and is contained in most religions. Two points should not be neglected, however.

a) Not every ethical act is in the interest of everybody. There exist many ethical principles which provide for the individual's exultation. They do not of necessity lead to the interests of others. Examples are patience, stamina, self-control and the acceptance of death instead of the acceptance of injustice.

b) There should be a limit to the advancement of affection towards others. Some are peace

lovers and consider it an honor to direct their kindness to men such as Chengiz, Hajjaj, Yazid, Atilla, and Nero, whereas kindness to such people is like showing mercy towards a leopard. In Islam the criterion is: "الْحُبُّ فِي اللَّهِ وَالْبُغْضُ فِي اللَّهِ"⁴⁵

"Love for God's sake and hate for God's sake".

5- The Provision Of Prosperity From The View-Point Of Wisdom

Most philosophers, both ancient and contemporary, from Socrates and Aristotle to Spinoza believe some acts of human beings are at variance with man's prosperity; whereas some other acts are the signs of his magnanimity, prosperity, and his perfection in soul. For instance, man is intolerant with treason, injustice, humiliation, fear and ignorance. But he considers truth worthiness, sacrifice, chastity, bravery, perseverance, wisdom, justice and the like among the signs of his spiritual perfection.

The significant notion in this school is that the criterion for the ethical acts is our wisdom, which is an asset for man and distinguishes man from the beasts. Wisdom functions for man in the same way as instincts do for the beasts.⁴⁶ Those who believe that it is our wisdom which recognizes ethical acts are of the opinion that an ethical act should be defined in the following manner: An ethical act is a balance between excess and dissipation in our affairs, which both provide for man's prosperity and enjoy an eternal beauty. Examples are wisdom, which stands halfway between ignorance and fallacious reasoning, bravery, which stands between fear and imagination, chastity, which stands between voluptuousness and lack of interest, and family justice, which stands between performing oppression and accepting it.⁴⁷

Although most philosophers and Islamic scholars like Avicenna, Khaje Nasir, al-Ghazali, Ibn Miskawayh, al-Naraqı and others have accepted this school when they defined the ethical acts, this school, however, suffers from the following defects:

a) Not in every ethical act can we distinguish a medial point. If such a point existed, it would not mean that it could alone lead to prosperity and not the extreme point, such as science.

b) As we have repeatedly observed the domain of wisdom is extremely limited. Wisdom lacks the power to distinguish all ethical acts. This is for two reasons: on the one hand, wisdom is limited by nature:

"قُلِ الرُّوحُ مِنْ أَمْرِ رَبِّي وَمَا أُوتِيتُمْ مِنَ الْعِلْمِ إِلَّا قَلِيلًا"

"Say: The soul is one of the commands of my Lord, and you are not given aught of knowledge but a little".⁴⁸

And on the other hand, wisdom might lose its impartiality due to wrong education, the explosion of instincts and unfounded prejudices and might not be trusted in finding out the medial point. Thus, wisdom needs the Shari'ah for its protection.

c) Most of the perfection aspects which are the result of being obedient to God and His commands are accounted for in this calculation.⁴⁹

6- Ethical Conscience:

Some scholars from the East or West, including Kant, contend that man is created in such a way as to come across with good ethical acts or bad ones through the guidance of his innate powers; and in practice he finds himself in a position as to either carry them out or stop doing them altogether.

The criterion for judgments of this sort is referred to as "ethical conscience."

Kant, the German philosopher, who died in 1804, accounts for this in the following way: Speculative intelligence, i.e., the agent inside the mechanism is not of high value; but the practical intelligence, i.e., the agent for carrying out the practical affairs, which is also referred to as "ethical conscience" has a definite practicality and its commands are binding.

Kant believes that man, in accordance with ethical conscience, recognizes the nature of good and evil deeds and finds himself responsible to carry out the commands issued by it. An act is considered to be ethical when it has the following characteristics:

- a)** It is voluntary. An act which is carried out compulsorily can not be ethical.
- b)** The carrying out of the act should only be for the sake of duty and nothing else. For instance, a person's act is not considered ethical if he carries it out for a friend, for social acceptance, for material benefits, or for the world hereafter. He has to carry it out only for its own sake. An act may be good but unethical;
- c)** It should be all-inclusive so that it may include the acts of all of those who want to carry out such acts;
- d)** The ultimate goal for that act should be man himself, not other minor objectives;
- e)** It should include man's prosperity although not for his delight.

Of course, this hypothesis has the following positive aspects:

- a)** There exists in man an agent which, with the help of heavenly inspiration, can distinguish good deeds;

"فَالْهَمَّهَا فُجُورَهَا وَتَقْوَاهَا"

"Then He inspired it to understand what is right and wrong for it".[50](#)

And when man opposes it, he is tortured by the scourge of rebuke, driving him crazy:

"لَا أُفْسِمُ بِيَوْمِ الْقِيَامَةِ وَلَا أُفْسِمُ بِالنَّفْسِ اللّوَّامَةِ"

"Nay! I swear by the day of resurrection, nay! I swear by the self-accusing soul".[51](#)

- b)** Man knows, through his conscience, that he is not forced to do an act.

Mawlawi says:

When you say should I do this or that;

My friend, this shows you are free.

c) The best sort of prayers is to carry out a task as thanks to God.

d) Man's status and his magnanimity are higher than for him to fall prey to other desires. Every thing is created for his use. Nothing equals him.

"مَنْ كَرُمَتْ عَلَيْهِ نَفْسُهُ هَانَتْ عَلَيْهِ الدُّنْيَا"

"The world is of little importance to one who regards his soul to be noble."[52](#)

e) All human beings are equal and are therefore, equal in front of human rights.

"أَحِبِّ لِغَيْرِكَ مَا تُحِبُّ لِنَفْسِكَ وَأَكْرَهُ لَهْ مَا تَكْرَهُ لَهَا"

"Love for others what you love for yourself, and dislike for others what you dislike for yourself."[53](#)

Kant's hypothesis suffers from the following defects, however:

a) Our conscience is not strong enough for its recognition to be flawless.

As the speculative intelligence needs guidance and protection, practical intelligence too should be guided and protected. The latter, too, might be unable to distinguish facts, or due to practice and repetition of wrong deeds, might lose its sensitivity.

As we know, the nomadic Arabs used to bury their daughters alive and the people of Fiji Island had a ceremony of burying their parents alive and this gave them a lot of delight.[54](#) Sometimes the professional murderers enjoy carrying out murders; For instance, Nero made a song when he set Rome on fire and the murderers of Karbala, upon the martyrdom of Imam Husayn (as) and his followers, in the presence of 'Ubaydullah bin Ziyad, boasted with honor. They even shamelessly asked for prizes for their wicked deeds

b) It is true that in some cases, the conscience orders us to do good and commands us to stop doing evil, but its commands are not always absolute, nor are they universal. Rather, conscience orders differ in accordance with the degree of the perfection status of people. Some do good things in order to do their duties. Some others do this to enjoy benefits and to avoid losses.

An example will make the point clear: suppose a ill-intentioned person, having a knife in his hand, asks a person for another person's location. If the former tells the truth, then the latter's life will be in definite danger, Is the command of conscience absolute here as Kant puts it, or is it better to tell an expedient lie?[55](#)

c) If the carrying out of one's duties equals man's perfection in spirit, then this will lead to his prosperity as well. Separating these two is not right unless we translate prosperity as sensual pleasure.[56](#)

d) Kant considers goodness subordinate to duty.

But the reverse is true when we see that Allah orders the doing of justice and the doing of good and forbids evil:

**"إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَأْمُرُ بِالْعَدْلِ وَالْإِحْسَانِ وَإِيتَاءِ ذِي الْقُرْبَىٰ وَيَنْهَىٰ عَنِ
الْفَحْشَاءِ وَالْمُنْكَرِ وَالْبَغْيِ"**

Surely Allah enjoins the doing of justice and the doing of good (to others) and the giving to the kindred, and He forbids indecency and evil and rebellion.[57](#)

In other cases Allah commands people to do good things:

"وَأَوْحَيْنَا إِلَيْهِمْ فِعْلَ الْخَيْرَاتِ وَإِقَامَ الصَّلَاةِ وَإِيتَاءَ الزَّكَاةِ"

"We revealed to them the doing of good and the keeping up of prayer and the giving of the alms."[58](#)

As Allama Tabataba'i in his Tafsir al-Mizan and Allama Mutahhari have said the prior to duty justice, sacrifice and evil and the nasty nature of being evil and the good aspect of doing good have been revealed by God.[59](#)

For further defects of Kant's view we refer you to other works in the literature.

7- Keeping One's interests with regards to keeping others' interests

Most materialists such as Russell are of the view that man has cunningly discovered that if he behaves kindly towards others, he will be treated in the same way by others. If he steals the neighbor's cow, for instance, his cows might get stolen later; and if he tells lies, he will hear lies ten times over. Thus, in order to protect himself, man decided to do good to others and to avoid doing harmful deeds. That is why man learned to obey rules.[60](#) Thus, the criterion for ethical acts, according to this view, is the keeping of one's interests besides the keeping of others' interests. In other words, it means to bring man's selfish desires under the control of education.[61](#)

This notion, however, entails many defects among which are the following:

a) It takes away the ethics from its innate sacredness and surrounds it with individual's interests.

But as we have seen before, the spiritual characteristics are beyond this kind of considerations.

b) According to this view, if a person had such a power as to be safe from the ethical harm of wrong-doers, there would not exist any agent to control his bad-temper and his far-reaching wisdom would not create any impediment to his bad-temper. Only when the two sides have equal power can the wisdom entice them to do good. Regarding this, Mutahhari writes, "If Nixon is sitting in front of Brezhnev, both of whom have equal powers, they could be considered ethical individuals.

One thinks why he should throw bomb on the other when the latter has got the same power. But if Nixon is confronted with Viet Kongs, who are weak and vulnerable, there will be no force to stop him from attacking them.[62](#)

c) In the present hypothesis, the eternal nature of self (soul) and the life hereafter is not included.

d) What is the criterion for the ethical act which satisfies the interests of both individual and the community? Neither is wisdom to recognize the ethical act, nor conscience can do this job.

In this view, then, the ethical act does not have any reliable criterion.

8- The philosophy of Ethics in the viewpoint of Freud:

Contrary to the belief of the Islamic and non- Islamic scholars who contend that man is born with innate capacity to evaluate good from bad and in this process the innate inspiration helps him out of hardships, Freud rejects these innate capacities believing that social environment alone is responsible for the establishments of these sensations, perceptions and human character. He writes, "The child imitates the parents' ethical criteria, such as the dichotomy of bad/ good and piety/ wrong-doing.

The superego⁶³ is the result of this absorption.

It represents values, tribal beliefs and social ideals which the child has received from its parents. Other social factors which influence the superego include teachers, priests, police or whoever stands above the child in the society. These factors, however, influence the child much less than the parents.⁶⁴

In many people, ethics might manifest itself in the form of the superego. That is to say, it might severely control the individual. But this is not the result of innate-ethical conscience.

Rather, it is the result of educational-ethical conscience, which reflects the prohibitive reactions of our great-grand fathers. This superego is greatly under the influence of one factor, which is the child's need for parental love. The child assumes that if it disobeys the parents, it will be deprived of this badly-needed affection."⁶⁵

In this regard, Freud firmly states: "The ethical conscience is nothing else than a social spur. Ethical conscience does not represent an innate act of man's inner - being; rather, it is a simple introspection of social prohibition."⁶⁶

In Freud's view, neither in man's history nor in the individual's history has there been the primitive concept of good or bad. These concepts stem solely from outside of man, i.e., in his social context."

The important criticism, which can be leveled at Freud's ideas, is that the good actions and noble moral traits are not based on a reliable and sacred principle. How is a child expected to do right when it is offered unfounded and improper education?

If the good and bad acts did not stem from man's spirit, how could we persuade people in the right direction and inhibit them from doing wrong?

Freud believes that this is done by man's wisdom. Since the Divine Shari'ah, in Freud's ideas, does not protect man's wisdom and since education is different in individuals and since "the superego" results from this differing education, how can man attain the supreme moral conducts and shun nasty behaviors?

9- The communist View on the Philosophy of Ethics.

In the eyes of communists, ethics as well as sciences, philosophy, arts and law and other influential social factors depend heavily on economics and production means.

The slavery, feudalism and capitalism each had its specific characteristics which were doomed to failure in subsequent periods. At the rule of communists, there is a special ethics dominating the society. For instance, extortion, hegemony, theft, confiscation and hurting people all belong to the era of agriculture, feudalism and capitalism. All these are done away with at the time of proletariat and communism, Then it is claimed that these are substituted for by justice, equality and freedom.

However, in the communist system, an act is considered ethical if it can boost the development of the society and can advance the society from the agricultural, feudalistic and capitalistic stage towards the communist state.

Thus, if providing the hungry people with food and supplying the naked men with clothing and the curing of the sick all cause the communist revolution to halt, then these acts are unethical. On the other hand, if not stopping tyranny and not bridging the gaps between people make the revolution successful, then these acts are considered ethical and appropriate!

The communists believe that

"الغايات تُبرر المباديء"

"The objective justifies the means"

Since communism relies on principles such as the following:

- a)** The principles of dialectic materialism.
- b)** Historical materialism.
- c)** Historical determinism.
- d)** Economics as the underlying structure.
- e)** The notion that all revolutions are heading toward socialism.
- f)** The idea that the society is the base and everything should be sacrificed.
- g)** The notion that everything is dependant upon the production means even beliefs and moral affairs.

And since each one of the above principles has been found wrong, there is no room left for an act to be ethical, especially if it is of compulsory nature.⁶⁷ The disintegration of the communistic society and the misery that such a system has forced on millions of people are clear clues to the unfounded nature of the communist system.

Thus, the claim that the criterion for an ethical act should be its impetus to make the process of communism smooth and easy is completely unfounded and ridiculous. This is clearly shown by the disintegration of the communist states of our time.⁶⁸

10.1- The Relativity of Ethics in Hegel's view

Hegel, like communists, is of the opinion that society is always in progress and evolving. He assigns some features to each epoch and believes these features are revealed through the spirit of time.

However, some features and temperaments, such as chastity and restricted relations of men and women could be considered good at a specific era of time, such as at the agricultural age, but may be considered improper at another age, such as the age of automation.

Of course, this notion suffers from other drawbacks as well:

- a) Is every society heading towards perfection? Societies, like vegetation, sometimes progress and at times deteriorate.
- b) What is meant by "the spirit of time"? Who has discovered it? How do we know that these changing features are caused by the spirit of time?
- c) Who has said that chastity was good at one time but bad now?
- d) Who can consider some human traits such as justice, sacrifice and generosity good at one time but bad at other time?[69](#)

Thus, how is it feasible that, on the basis of an imaginary item called "the spirit of time", we should consider ethics a relative thing when we are aware that it has a deep root in man's innate - being?

10.2- Sartre's View

Sartre, who evaluates everything on the basis of personal option, says: there is no criterion for the ethical nature of an act outside man's existence. He, as well, believes in the relativity of ethics. He states: anybody who chooses an act assumes that his choice is good. And if another person chooses another act as good, then he has the right choice, Thus, an ethical act differs in the opinion of different people. Therefore, in this view, the criterion for an ethical act is the one who chooses and nothing else.

This view is wrong, however, since the one who chooses has selected an act because he has preferred it over other acts But do other people also believe that his choice was the best?

A murderer, a thief and a tormenter have, in fact, some rationale for their actions. But having these preferences will not justify their wrong-doings.[70](#)

A Summary of the 10 views: A conclusion:

Each one of the views on the philosophy of ethics mentioned above, dealt with some facts, but ignored others. A survey of these views shows that if ethics were not based on the guidance of Prophets and Imams, it would definitely lead to people's misery instead of their prosperity. How could schools whose criteria for ethical acts are "instant pleasure", "personal interests", "the spirit of time", "personal selection" and "economics and social evolution" lead man towards prosperity, sacrifice, honesty, philosophy and chastity?

Nowadays we witness an increase in wrong-doings, homicides, suicides and corruption in the world, especially in the west; sexual assault to children by close relatives is increasing and 95 percent of people are suffering from tensions.

The statesmen in these communities complain about the situation. Man has been placed in this plight because of the lack of right criteria of ethics.

Some time ago Reagan, the previous president of the United States, in a conference, talked about the horrible increase in murders in the United States: he said the number of victims of murder is beyond 23,000 a year.

Reagan added crimes hurt one third of the families in the United States and the loss in money is about eight billion and eight million dollars.

Reagan confessed that in the United States one person is killed every 30 minutes and nine women are sexually assaulted.

In the same amount of time 67 persons fall prey to theft, 97 persons are subject to assault and 389 houses are prone to the armed robbery.

He said: syndicated crimes done by corrupt statesmen are scandalous for the United States.[71](#)

More recently, the newspaper France ce soir in Paris has reported the number of crimes in France during the year 1989 as four million, 297 thousand and 123, which shows an increase of 7 percent over the previous year (1988).

The same newspaper reports the number of crimes during the first quarter of 1989 has been more than 580,000.

Now more than one billion of the world populations suffer from poverty and malnutrition and shortage of medicines. There are, however, billions of dollars spent for military purposes.

These are just small samples of disorders which are inflicted upon those layers of the world population who are exposed to corrupt schools of thought either in ethics, or in education, or in politics, or in economics or in other social affairs. For a complete picture of the disasters we should refer to relevant books and sources.[72](#)

The Bases and Principles of Ethics and Education In Islam

Against the different schools which have dealt with the philosophy of ethics and education, Islam, too, has offered specific principles and bases. To study these principles one is referred to the Qur'an, tradition, and books on ethics and Hadith. However, a summary of these principles will suffice here:

Man possesses a specific ability for material and spiritual growth. The flourishing of this growth in all phases is possible only in the worshipping God and asking for His help.

However, the Islamic ethics and education are based on monotheism, resurrection, the existence of spirit and its ever-lasting status after death and a preference for spiritual pleasures over material ones. The Islamic ethics and education will emphasize on any action which will help man attain his exultance (which is to have sacred beliefs and proper behavior) and manifest all his spiritual and material abilities and all his personal and social capabilities. In contrast, any act which hinders his growth is prohibited by the Islamic ethical education.

One of the characteristics of the Islamic ethics and education is that they have root in human innate nature. Islam invites people to monotheism, to resurrection, to justice, to piety and to worship. This is because all of these traits stem from his nature. And Ibn al-Athir in al-Nihayah defines "*fitrah*" or nature as:

"إِنَّهُ يُوَلَّدُ عَلَى نَوْعٍ مِنَ الْجِبَلَةِ وَالطَّبِيعِ الْمُتَهَيِّئِ لِقَبُولِ الدِّينِ فَلَوْ

تُرِكَ عَلَيْهَا لِاسْتَمَرَّ عَلَى لُزُومِهَا وَلَمْ يُفَارِقْهَا إِلَى غَيْرِهَا وَإِنَّمَا
يَعْدِلُ عَنْهُ مَنْ يَعْدِلُ لَأَفَّةٍ مِنْ آفَاتِ الْبَشَرِ وَالتَّقْلِيدِ"

"Man is created according to a natural disposition and nature that is inclined to accept religion. If he is left on it, he will continue in accordance with its requirements, and will not separate from it to other than it. One who turns away from it only does so because of an evil in mankind and blind imitation."⁷³

The famous hadith which Ibn al-Athir delves on is the following:

"كُلُّ مَوْلُودٍ يُوَلَّدُ عَلَى الْفِطْرَةِ حَتَّى يَكُونَ أَبَوَاهُ يُهَوِّدَانِهِ
وَيُنَصِّرَانِهِ" 74

"Every child is born according to the original nature until his parents make him a Jew or a Christian."

The following sacred verse, too, emphasizes the same thing:

"فَأَقِمْ وَجْهَكَ لِلدِّينِ حَنِيفًا فِطْرَةَ اللَّهِ الَّتِي فَطَرَ النَّاسَ عَلَيْهَا
لَا تَبْدِيلَ لِخَلْقِ اللَّهِ ذَلِكَ الدِّينُ الْقَيِّمُ"

"Then set your face upright for religion in the right state-the nature made by Allah in which He has made men; there is no altering of Allah's creation; that is the right religion."⁷⁴

One of the characteristics of Islamic ethics and education is that they are based on science, wisdom and logic and not on ignorance, superstition and following by imitation.

The objective of the Islamic ethics and education is to purify man's soul and spirit so that he can make use of all the means that he has at his disposal and in this way could reach the title "God's vicegerent on the earth" and "To meet God".

And since the justification of these principles, traits and aims is only possible in the light of Qur'an, Tradition and all-pervasive researches in the life-giving school of Islam, therefore the details can only be reached by referring to the above-mentioned sources.⁷⁵ I have selected the treatise of Imam 'Ali (as) which is written for his son as a good example.

[A historic and life-giving letter from a unique father for his progressing son:](#)

Although many individuals have written historic letters to their children at specific times and for the education of their beloved ones,⁷⁶ so far as I can tell no letter ever has been so inclusive and so erudite as that written by Imam 'Ali (as) to his son Hasan (as) at a location called Hazirin and after giving up Siffin.⁷⁷ In this journey Hasan (as) was with Imam 'Ali(as).

This historic letter, which is reported by both Shi'ah and Sunni scholars, among whom is Sharif al-Radi who has reported it in letter 31 of Nahj al-Balaghah with a little change in details, is accepted with such a level of admiration that the famous Sunni scholar Abu Ahmad Hasan Ibn Abdullah Ibn Askari, Shaykh Saduq's teacher, has reported it in its entirety in his book called Al Zawajir wa al-Mawa'iz and says about it, "If you can find a piece of practical philosophy which should be written in gold, it is this erudite treatise written by Imam 'Ali(as) in which all chapters of this science and the ways to attain this science, and the ways to arrive at the benefits of ethics and the methods to attain prosperity and the ways to escape pitfalls and how to arrive at the highest degree of exultance are expressed by employing the best kinds of phrases and words."⁷⁸

The interesting point is that Allama Sayyid Hasan al-Sadr in his erudite book called Ta'sis al-Shi'ah writes, "The first person who has written on Islamic ethics and education is Imam 'Ali (as), who wrote this treatise on the return from Siffin. He wrote it for his son Imam Hasan (as). Our scholars have narrated it through different media. Among these scholars are Kulayni, who has reported it in his book called Al-Rasa'il and Sharif al-Radi, who has reported it in his book Nahj al-Balaghah".⁷⁹

For this reason we have called the present book "The first treatise on Islamic Ethics and Education" and have selected it as the best Islamic principle on education and the best source for Islamic ethics.

As it is understood from the text and will be clear in the subsequent chapters, Imam 'Ali (as) does not only have his son in view, but he considers the parents' duties as a whole and a man's duties at different walks of life.⁸⁰

Therefore, this treatise could be the best guide for ethical issues and a good guideline for life. For this reason, I have chosen it as the axis of my discussions. I will report the Islamic ethics and education as Imam 'Ali (as) has in mind.

The principles and issues of this treatise:

Since this treatise includes the factors of man's progress and development, either from the moral aspect or from the viewpoints of politico-social phase, it cannot be studied only from one angle. The principles included in this treatise are:

- 1)** Only man has the ability to acquire complete education; beasts have this ability to a limited degree.
- 2)** The best time for education is the childhood.
- 3)** The father's responsibility in educating the children is more than anybody else.
- 4)** There are clear reasons which prove monotheism and God's power.
- 5)** Life does not depend on this world alone; the hereafter exists and we should prepare provisions for that day.
- 6)** Islam is based on the interests and losses of the society and is the most inclusive religion.
- 7)** The best capital is piety and carrying on the ways of the pious ancestors, i.e., the Prophets and Imams.
- 8)** The best shelter in the ups and downs of life is Allah.

- 9) Saying prayers and being penitent are significant.
- 10) Man is created free; he is not allowed to make a slave out of himself; he should keep his magnanimity at all times.
- 11) Not every wish can be granted; thus, we should engage ourselves with the noblest ones.
- 12) One of the factors which build up a man's personality is the study of good and bad fates of nations of the past.
- 13) A man should make his soul (self) a criterion between he himself and others; what he considers improper he should not consider proper for others.
- 14) The relation of man with his family, government, and his responsibilities and tasks bestowed upon him.
- 15) The ways of self-construction.
- 16) The principles of friendship and its limits.
- 17) In order to guide the society and to stop deviations, a man should make use of giving advice.
- 18) Women's rights and status, without going to extremes.
- 19) Accepting responsibilities and observing the principle of management.
- 20) This world is the home of pain and torment.
- 21) Thinking in religion and making use of useful knowledge.
- 22) Experiencing and making use of the good experiences.
- 23) Being kind to friends and tolerating foes.
- 24) More than one hundred other useful pieces of advice.

Documents for this treatise

Many Islamic scholars, prior to Seyyid ar-Radi, have reported this treatise in their books. Among these books are the following:

1. Muhammad Ibn Ya'qub al-Kulayni in his book al-Rasa'il (died 328 AH).
2. Hasan Ibn Abdullah Ibn Sa'eed al-Askari, the teacher of Shaykh as-Saduq, in the book Al-Zawajir wa'l-Mawa'iz (died in 3rd century AH).
3. Ibn Abd Rabbih in the book al-'Iqd al-Farid, vol. 3, pp.155-156 (d.328 AH).
4. Shaykh al-Saduq in the book called Man la yahdaruhu'l faqih, vol. 3, p.362, vol. 4, p.275 (d. 380 AH).
5. Ibn Shu'bah al-Harrani in the book called Tuhaf al-'Uqul, pp.52-96 (d. 380 AH).
6. Allama al-Barqi in the book al-Mahasin (d. 274 AH).
7. Ibn Maskawayh in the book Al-Hikmah al-Khalidah (d. 421 AH).
8. Shaykh al-Mufid in the book al-Amali and al-Irshad (d. 413 AH).

After Sayyid al-Radi, many scholars have reported either the treatise in its entirety or parts of it in their books.

Among these scholars are:

1. Sayyid Ibn Tawus, in the book Kashf al-Mahajjah (d. 664 AH).
2. Mada'ini in the book Majma' al-Amthal, Vol.1 (d. 518 AH).
3. Mohammad Ibn Yusuf az-Zarandi in the book Durar al-Simtayn (d.750 AH).
4. Qazi Qaza'i in the book Dastur Ma'alim al-Hikam (d.454 AH).
5. Mulla Muhsin Fayz in the book Wafi, vol..1 (d.1091 AH).
6. Al-Muttaqi al-Hindi in Kanz al-Ummal, vol. 8.
7. Shaykh Hurr al-Amili in al-Wasa'il, vol. 8, (d.1104 AH).
8. Sheikh Warram in Tanbih al-Khawatir (d.605 AH).
9. Al-Karajiki in Kanz al-Fawa'id (d.449 AH).
10. Al-Aamidi in Ghurar al-Hikam (d.588 AH).

11. Al-Majlisi in Bihar al-Anwar vol.74 pp.1- 4.[81](#)

Translations and commentaries Used in this Book

As we know, scholars have reported a lot of translations and commentaries for Nahj al-Balaghah.

The number varies from 100 to 200 books which refer specifically to this letter.[82](#)

I have made the best use out of the following translations and commentaries:

1. Sharh Nahj al-Balaghah by Ibn Maytham;
2. Sharh Nahj al-Balaghah by Ibn Abi al-Hadid;
3. Sharh Nahj al-Balaghah by Muhammad Abduh;
4. Sharh Nahj al-Balaghah by al-Rawandi.
5. Masadir Nahj al-Balaghah by Sayyid Abd al-Zahra Husayni.
6. Sharh Nahj al-Balaghah by Mirza Muhammad Baqir Nawab Lahiji.
7. Nahj al-Balaghah by Dr. Subhi al-Salih.
8. The Translation and Commentary of Nahj al-Balaghah by Muhammad Ja'far Imami and Mohammad Rida Ashtyani, supervised by Ayatullah Makarim Shirazi.
9. The Translation and Commentary of Nahj al-Balaghah by Sayyid 'Ali Naqi, Fayz al-Islam.
10. The translation of Nahj al-Balaghah by Dr. Sayyid Ja'far Shahidi.
11. A Complementizer of Sharh Nahj al-Balaghah by Allama al-Khu'i, written by Allama Kamar'ee.

How the Present Book was Published:

As we know, the Islamic Revolution of Iran was based on the intelligence of our nation. Through the guidelines of Imam Khomeini, and the sessions on the exposition of Qur'an and Nahj al-Balaghah, and religious sermons, our nation had reached such a stage of knowledge that they cannot accept any type of government except the Islamic state based on Wilayat al-Faqeeh. In order to implement this government, our nation suffered a lot.

But after the revolution, our scholars became involved in the administrative activities and our revolutionary children were engaged in the struggle against our internal and external enemies and could not carry on their main tasks, which were cultural activities. However, our enemies spread corruption and this led to the worries of our leader, Ayatollah Khamenei. He continuously warned people against these dormant dangers.

This writer, who has been busy carrying out cultural activities, such as the expository classes for Qur'an and Nahj al-Balaghah, once again felt that it was better for him to go back to the publication of religious books. I decided to lessen the amount of administrative activities. Thus, when the second Majlis term was ended, I did not want to be a representative for Majlis any more. I decided to let that place be occupied by those who want it - and they are many - and spend my time on cultural affairs in which there are not many experts.

On the one hand, I started writing book such as 'Ilm-e Hadith, which was published in 3 and a half years, and on the other hand I got involved in teaching position in the university. One of these latter activities was the teaching of Nahj al-Balaghah which is still going on. Up to now more than 170 lessons of it have been broadcast from Gilan province Radio (on Thursday nights) and has got many listeners, One of these listeners was a pilot who was a prisoner in an Iraqi prison, when he came back to Iran together with a huge group of freed soldiers, he said, "there were 80 of us in a prisoner-of-war camp. We used to listen to your

lessons on Nahj al-Balaghah. We enjoyed listening to those lessons. By reproducing them, we enriched the camp greatly."

Among those lessons, was the present historic letter by Imam 'Ali (as) to his son Imam Hasan (as), one portion of which was published in the magazine "The growth of the teaching of Islamic knowledge" and other publications. Then it was edited and became the present book.

I hope it will be satisfactory to Amir al-Mu'minin Imam 'Ali (as) and through his blessings it will be an asset for me in the Hereafter, Amen.

Farwardin 1371, Lahijan - Zeinolabedin Ghorbani

1. On the letters and treatises of the great Imams, peace be upon them, see the book Mada'in al-Hikmah fi Makatib al-A'immah, peace be upon them, by Muhammad Ibn al-Muhsin al-Kashani, son of Fayz al-Kashani, published by Vaziei publications in 2 volumes.
2. . In our future discussions we will see that the basics for ethics are different in the views of the western scholars. What we say here are the beliefs of the Islamic scholars.
3. Raghīb's al-Mufradat, under the term khulq p.158.
4. .Ghurar wa Durar, vol. 7, p.95, vol.3, p,382.
5. .Taharat al-A'raq is juxtaposed to Mulla Sadra's Mabda' wa Ma'ad. p.385.
6. .But as we will later see some consider one's deeds and daings as ethics taking no account of the constant khulq. They think these constant traits are not among good deeds since they are done by habit.
7. . It is true that those temperaments which have taken habitual form usually act without thinking, But it is not the case that they cannot exercise their choice. A man can stop performing such deeds when he decides to. Thus Amir al-Mu'minin (as) has emphasized on the one hand the abandonment of bad habits saying, "Control yourself by abandoning habits; struggle with your desires", and has considered this abandonment as a sort of prayer, on the other hand.
8. . The eleventh Imam, al-Askari (as) has said, "Training an ignorant person and making a person habituated to an act abandon his habit, is like a miracle." (Tuhaf al-'Uqul, p 489).
9. . Refer to Determinism and Free will written by the present author, and Haj Mulla Hadi Sabzvari's Manzumah, p.174.
10. . Napoleon entered the conference at Paris earlier than the others to be saluted by them. The king of Russia did not salute him. This action led to the destruction of Russia. The French army died of cold there, too. Later Napoleon was banished to the Island of Saint Helena. He had to stay there for six years, dying there because of stomach ulcer and for his longing for his family (Qible Islam).
11. . Qur'an 91:9.
12. . Qur'an 68:4.
13. . Reflections on life, pp. 6-7.
14. . Bihar. vol.71, p.383.
15. . Tuhaf al-'Uqul, p.224.
16. . Ma'ani al-Akhbar, p.253.
17. . Bihar, vol. 64, p.368.
18. .Sahifah al-Sajjadiyah, supplication no.20, Makarim al-Akhlaq., trans. W. Chittick.
19. . Usul al-Kafi, vol. 2, p. 56.
20. . Al-Mahajjah al-Bayda, vol. 4, p.121.
21. . Dastur al-Akhlaq fi al-Qur'an, p.566, taken from the erudite book called "Philosophical discourse- ethics from the viewpoints of co-existence and human values" this issue is important and we have made best of it.
22. . Bihar, vol. 78, p 69.
23. .Usul al-Kafi, vol 2, p.56.
24. . Qur'an 16: 68.
25. . Qur'an 20:49-50.
26. . Qur'an, 3: 164.
27. . Qur'an 8:24.
28. . In this regard, refer to the following sources: The religious sense or the fourth dimension of the human soul; Farhangname, vol.8, p.738; Ayatollah Mutahhari's "Book on Education and Innateness."
29. . Qur'an, 30:30.
30. . Qur'an 16:78.
31. . The principles and methods of Education in Islam, p.30.
32. .Qur'an 11:56.
33. . Qur'an 76:3.
34. . Tuhaf al-'Uqul, p.386.
35. . Regarding the rational or religious nature of some acts, refer to The basis of faith by Mulla Abd al-Razzaq

Lahiji, pp.59-62 and the book Husn wa Qubh 'Aqli (Rational soundness and unsoundness), lectures given by Ja'far Subhani.

[36.](#) . Regarding this refer to Islam and human Rights, pp.13-35.

[37.](#) . Qur'an 16:78, And Allah has brought you forth from the wombs of your mothers – you did not know anything – and He gave you hearing and sight and hearts that you may give thanks.

[38.](#) . Qur'an 2:151.

[39.](#) . Qur'an 3:164.

[40.](#) . Qur'an 62:2.

[41.](#) . Qur'an 2:128.

[42.](#) . Tafsir Namunah, vol.1, p.334.

[43.](#) The Bases of philosophy (Mabani-e Falsafe) p 374.

The philosophy of ethics, pp 62-68.

Husn wa Qubh 'Aqli (Rational soundness and unsoundness) p 125.

[44.](#) Sayr-e-Hikmah dar Urubba, vol. 3, p.131.

[45.](#) . Philosophy of Ethics, pp.40-46. Lessons of the Philosophy of Ethics, pp.70-73; The Bases of philosophy, pp.380-382.

[46.](#) . The Bases of philosophy, p.385.

[47.](#) . Refer to al-Naraq'i's Jami' al-Sa'adat, vol.1, p.66; Akhlaq Naseri chapters 3-8; Sayr Hikmah dar Urubba, vol. 1.

[48.](#) . Qur'an 17:85.

[49.](#) Lectures in Ethical philosophy, p.116.

[50.](#) . Qur'an, 91:8.

[51.](#) . Qur'an, 75:2.

[52.](#) . Tuhaf al-'Uqul, p.278.

[53.](#) . Nahj al-Balaghah, letter 31.

[54.](#) . Refer to the book called Islam and Human Rights written by me, p.20.

[55.](#) . Ustad Mutahhari, The philosophy of ethics, p.82. Lectures on the philosophy of ethics, p.92.

[56.](#) . The philosophy of Ethics, pp.45-52. Education in Islam, pp.3-72.

[57.](#) . Qur'an, 16:90.

[58.](#) . Qur'an, 21:73.

[59.](#) . Tafsir Al-Mizan, vol.4, p.305; The philosophy of Ethics, p.55.

[60.](#) . Education in Islam, p.74.

[61.](#) . The Bases of philosophy, p.377, Lectures of the philosophy of Ethics, pp.8-70.

[62.](#) . Education in Islam, p.76.

[63.](#) . Freud assigns three characteristics to man: "Id" which is related to organic pleasures; "Ego" which controls "Id"; and the "superego", which is a person's ethical chastity.

[64.](#) . Freud's psychology, p.46.

[65.](#) . Freud's psychology, p.46.

[66.](#) . Freud's Ideas.

[67.](#) . In this regard refer to the Philosophy of Ethics; Lectures on the philosophy of Ethics; The pseudo-philosophers; The Marxist dialectic methods; Lessons on Marxism; The government of justice after communism; Communism and Democracy; An Evaluation of marxism; Going Astray; An Analysis on marx; society and History from the viewpoint of Qur'an; A critic on Marxism; History and society; The Gorbachev USSR.

[68.](#) . Return to p.16

[69.](#) . Education in Islam, pp.96-97.

[70.](#) . Regarding this refer to Ustadh Mutahhari's Existentialism and the philosophy of Ethics, pp.99-100.

[71.](#) . Jomhuri Islami, Newspaper 8/7/1360.

[72.](#) . See The biggest disease of the twentieth century; Social calamities of our time; The time of Automation; The phase of western civilization.

[73.](#) . Al-Nihayah, vol.3, p.475.

[74.](#) . Qur'an 30:30.

[75.](#) . Refer to the following: Al-Mahajjah al-Bayda, Ihya' al-'ulum, Jami' al-Sa'adat, Bihar, Wasa'il, Wafi, The Educational principles in Islam, The principles and philosophy of education, Islamic Education, Ethics from the view of human values and co-existence, A second glimpse at the Islamic Education.

[76.](#) . Among them is Sayyid Ibn Tawus' Kashf al-Mahajjah li Thamarat il-Muhjah. He wrote it to his son. Also Allama Hilli wrote a will to his son Fakhr al-Muhaqqiqin; this will is at the end of volume 4 of Idah al-Fawa'id. Also there are other examples in the tenth chapter of Sayyid Ibn Tawus's book. In our time, one such example is Imam Khomeini's political and religious will written to his beloved son.

[77.](#) . Siffin is located to the west of Euphrates. In Safar 37 AH there was a battle here between Imam 'Ali's army and the army of Mu'awiya. Seventy thousand men were killed from both sides. Among them were Ammar b. Yasir and Uways (Mu'jam al-Buldan, vol. 4, p.414).

[78.](#) . Kashf al-Mahajjah li Thamarat al-Muhjah, p.157; Ta'sis al-Shi'ah, p.404.

[79.](#) . Loc Cit.

80. Some think he has written it for his son Ibn Hanifiyah, but most scholars do not accept this.

81. On the documents of this treatise refer to Masadir Nahj al-Balaghah by Sayyid Abduzzahra, vol. 3, pp.307-312; Research methods in the documents of Nahj al-Balaghah by Muhammad Dashti, vol. 4, pp.218-320.

82. Refer to Al-Ghadir, vol. 4; Alzory'a vol. 14, Masadir Nahj al-Balaghah, vol.1; Recognition of Nahj al-Balaghah, vol. 2.

A Commentary On Imam 'Ali's Will To His Son Imam Hasan (as)

بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ

"مِنَ الْوَالِدِ الْفَانِ، الْمُقَرِّ لِلزَّمَانِ، الْمُذِيرِ الْعُمُرِ، الْمُسْتَسْلِمِ
لِلدَّهْرِ، الذَّامِّ لِلدُّنْيَا، السَّاكِنِ مَسَاكِنَ الْمَوْتَى، وَالظَّاعِنَ عَنْهَا
غَدَا، إِلَى الْمَوْلُودِ الْمُؤَمَّلِ مَا لَا يُدْرِكُ، السَّالِكِ سَبِيلَ مَنْ قَدْ
هَلَكَ، عَرَضَ الْأَسْقَامِ، وَرَهِينَةَ الْأَيَّامِ، وَرَمِيَّةَ الْمَصَائِبِ، وَعَبْدَ
الدُّنْيَا، وَتَاجِرَ الْغُرُورِ، وَغَرِيمَ الْمَنَايَا، وَاسِيرَ الْمَوْتِ، وَحَلِيفَ
الْهَمُومِ، وَقَرِينَ الْأَحْزَانِ، وَنَصْبَ الْآفَاتِ، وَصَرِيحَ الشَّهَوَاتِ،
وَخَلِيفَةَ الْأَمْوَاتِ"

“From an aged father who is near death, who concedes to the conquest of time, whose life is departing, who has submitted himself to the misfortunes of time, who reproaches the world, and dwells in the abode of the dead which he will leave tomorrow:

To a son who hopes for what is unattainable, who follows the path of those who have perished, prey to illnesses, a pawn in the hands of time, the target of misfortune, a slave of the world, a trader in vanities, a debtor of divine decrees and a captive of death, an ally of anxieties, a companion of sorrows, the aim of calamities, prostrated by desires, and a successor of the dead”.

Commentary

In order to prepare the reader for the later guide-lines, Imam 'Ali (as) has used seven attributes for himself and fourteen adjectives for his son, every one of which could warn the wandering souls and bring them back to reality; the secret behind the difference in the number of attributes used in this letter lies in the age of the reader as well as in the ups and downs that he would encounter in the subsequent years.¹

Now we will discuss those seven attributes which Imam 'Ali(as) employs for himself but are inclusive and involve all parents. These attributes show the degree of indifference that people have shown to that; and he uses them indicating a lot of pain. Now, here are the attributes:

1. From an Aged Father near death

“من الوالد الفان”

It is a fact that anything created is imperishable; this is especially true in the case of man, who, according to rational and narrative reasoning is created to stay and to be ever lasting and not to be mortal.

"قال رسول الله (ص): ما خُلِقْتُمْ لِعَنَاءٍ بَلْ خُلِقْتُمْ لِبَقَاءٍ وَإِنَّمَا تُنْقَلُونَ مِنْ دَارٍ إِلَى دَارٍ"

*Said the Prophet (S): "You have not been created for extinction; rather, you have been created for eternal life. You are only moved from one abode to another"".*²

But with no doubt, the creatures, with the passage of time, will lose their superficial appearances and their bodies will disintegrate, this superficial disintegration is referred to as destruction or mortality. This fact is mentioned in the Holy Qur'an in the following manner:

"كُلُّ مَنْ عَلَيْهَا فَانٍ وَيَبْقَى وَجْهَ رَبِّكَ ذُو الْجَلَالِ وَالْإِكْرَامِ" 86

"Everyone on it must pass away. And there will endure for ever the person of your Lord, the Lord of glory and honor."

And in the Surah al-Qasas, verse 88, this notion is taken care of with the word "perishable":

"وَلَا تَدْعُ مَعَ اللَّهِ إِلَهًا آخَرَ لَّا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ كُلُّ شَيْءٍ هَالِكٌ إِلَّا وَجْهَهُ لَهُ الْحُكْمُ وَإِلَيْهِ تُرْجَعُونَ"

"And call not with Allah any other god: there is no god but He; every thing is perishable but He; His is the judgment, and to him you shall be brought back [Qur'an 28:88]."

Thus, Imam 'Ali (as) in the expression "from the aged father near death" emphasizes that he, too, like every other creature will change superficially and will move from one state into

another. The only thing from him which remains is his spiritual, heavenly aspect, the eternal nature of which is emphasized in Qur'an.³

No doubt, a belief in the lack of stability in the world will stop people from indulging in false pride and negligence. And this is a constructive alert for all those who desire to be the followers of that Imam.

2. Conceding to the conquest of time

“المقر للزمان”

Although man is capable of dominating the earth and the time, and God has made him a dominant factor over all creation,

“أَلَمْ تَرَ أَنَّ اللَّهَ سَخَّرَ لَكُمْ مَّا فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَمَا فِي الْأَرْضِ”

“Do you not see that Allah has made what is in the heavens and what is in the earth subservient to you?”⁴

He is a vulnerable and weak creature, a victim to the system of the truth.

“يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ أَنْتُمُ الْفُقَرَاءُ إِلَى اللَّهِ وَاللَّهُ هُوَ الْغَنِيُّ الْحَمِيدُ”

“O men! You are they who stand in need of Allah, and Allah is He who is the self-sufficient, the praised one.”⁵

It is a fact that man can struggle with nature and disease and microbes, and can bring the natural disasters under control and can, in this way, lower the rate of casualties and increase life expectancy, but it is also the case that he cannot overpower everything. He is born to the world without his consent and lives his childhood and youth; then in old age his sight starts failing, his memory does not function properly, he becomes hard of hearing. His stamina dwindles and loses the power to move around. He finally arrives at a stage of being senile.⁶ This is the conquest of time over us and our submission to it which Imam 'Ali (as) acknowledges in this sentence and in the fourth sentence. This is because, when Imam 'Ali (as) was writing this treatise, he was more than 60 years of age. At this age a man clearly recognizes his weaknesses and the predominance of time.

Nizami (the Iranian poet) says:

The vigor of life is up to the forty;
When forty has passed, your limbs disintegrate;
After the age fifty, your health goes away,
Your eyes weaken and your legs become unstable;
When sixty arrives, your body deteriorates,
When seventy arrives you are sexually impotent;
When you are eighty or ninety,

You would suffer a lot;
And if you ever become one hundred,
It would be death in the form of life;
When gray hair is seen among your hairs,
It is a clue to hopelessness;
You have inserted cotton in your ears,
And you are unwilling to take it out.
Another poet says:
Under this blue dome,
I have lived for sixty years;
When one year passes,
I always regret the pleasures of the last one;
I am surprised at the turning of the world.
Which took away from me everything that it had given me;
My knees and my arms became feeble,
My cheeks and my hairs lost their color;
I lost my strength and,
I lost my teeth one by one;
What is left behind and is heavy,
Is the amount of my wrong - doings and desires;
The Caravan bells warn us to leave.
And the fellow travelers are on the way;
I regret that I don't have a good record of good deeds;
The provision is small but journey is long;
The weight of my sins is too heavy,
Even the mountain looks small compared with my sins;
O God! My sins compared with Your Forgiveness,
Are like straw in front of a torrential flood;
If Your Grace did not assist me,
And if Your merits did not include me:
I would end up in the hell,
Having a miserable status;
I am an ignorant creature, ashamed of my sins,
I am plunged into the sea of sins;
You are the Merciful Creator, You are Self-sufficient,
You are Unique and You are the Forgiver.

Ayyadh Ibn Ghanam and Harun:

When Harun Al-Rashid was heading for Mecca, he went to the house of Ayyadh Ibn Ghanam, a pious Gnostic, at Medina, and asked him for some advice. Harun asked for some water. Ayyadh ordered the servants to bring him some water in an earthen pot. Then Ayyadh asked Harun: "Suppose you were thirsty and you were in a desert and somebody offered you a glass of water on condition that you would give him half of your country, what would you do?"

Harun answered, "I would do what he asks for"

Then Ayyadh said: "Suppose you drank the water but you could not urinate. And suppose a doctor asked the other half of the country to heal you. Would you accept?"

Harun answered, "I would do so."

Then Ayyadh said: "This is my advice.

Life with all its deceitful looks depends on drinking water and then getting rid of it in the

form of urination.

These two abilities are given to us free and we are feeble and fatal. We do not have to be haughty. All we have to do is to obey Allah's commands.

3. Whose life is departing

“ المدبر العمر ”

Life is a precious commodity at man's disposal; it could be used in a profitable bargain or in a hazardous one. It is amazing that people lose it very easily but are jealous towards the wealth of the rich. The great Prophet of Islam (S) told Abu Dharr, giving him a piece of advice:

“كُنْ عَلَى عُمرِكَ اشْحَ مِنْكَ عَلَى دِرْهَمِكَ وَ دِينَارِكَ”

*"Be more miserly of your life than you are of your dirham and dinar."*⁷

We should notice that any breath we inhale is a step towards our graves. Then, why shouldn't we use our breaths in the direction of doing good deeds and why shouldn't we avoid committing sins and indulging in far-fetched desires?

Imam 'Ali (as) has stated, regarding this:

**“رَجِمَ اللّٰهُ اِمْرًا عَلِمَ اَنْ نَفْسُهُ خُطَاةٌ اِلَى اَجَلِهِ فَبَادَرَ عَمَلَهُ وَ
قَصَرَ اَمَلَهُ”**

*"May God have mercy on the person who recognizes that each one of his breaths is a step toward his death and, therefore, hastens to perform good deeds and curtails his desires".*⁸

Imam 'Ali (as) has stated as well:

**“اِنَّ اللَّيْلَ وَالتَّهَارَ يَعْمَلَانِ فِيكَ فَاعْمَلْ فِيهِمَا وَيَاخُذَانِ مِنْكَ فَخُذْ
مِنْهُمَا”**

*"Day and night leave a mark on you; therefore leave a mark on them. They take from you; therefore take from them."*⁹

Of course, if our life is spent for God, it is a big asset and a profitable bargain; or else, death is better. Imam 'Ali ibn al-Husayn (as) in the supplication of Makarim al-Akhlaq asks God:

**"وَعَمْرٍ لِي مَا كَانَ عُمْرِي بِذِلَّةٍ فِي طَاعَتِكَ فَإِذَا كَانَ عُمْرِي
مَرْتَعًا لِلشَّيْطَانِ فَاقْبِضْنِي إِلَيْكَ قَبْلَ أَنْ تَسْتَبِقَ مَقْتَكَ إِلَيَّ أَوْ
يَسْتَحْكِمَ عَضْبُكَ عَلَيَّ"**

"Let me live as long as my life is in unsparing devotion to Your obedience. But if my life becomes a pasture for Satan, then seize me to Yourself before Your hate overtakes me or Your wrath is established against me."[10](#)

Since Imam 'Ali (as) was over sixty at the time of writing this treatise, by using the expression he wishes to warn us that we should have done lots of good deeds prior to the age of sixty. This is because, as the God's Prophet (S) has said, "A man will not have any excuse in such cases."

**"أَبْنَاءُ الأَرْبَعِينَ زَرْعٌ قَدْ دَنَا حَصَادُهُ، أَبْنَاءُ الخَمْسِينَ مَاذَا قَدَّمْتُمْ
وَمَاذَا أَخَّرْتُمْ، أَبْنَاءُ السِّتِينَ هَلِّمُوا إِلَى الحِسَابِ لَا عُذْرَ لَكُمْ، أَبْنَاءُ
السَّبْعِينَ عُذُّوا أَنْفُسَكُمْ مِنَ المَوْتِ"**

"The forty-year olds are like a field whose time of harvest is near. Fifty-year olds, what have you sent forward and what have you left behind? Sixty-year olds, come to the accounting (for what you have done); there is no excuse for you! Seventy-year olds, consider yourselves among the dead!"[11](#)

But it is much to be regretted that, except for the Prophet and a few vigilant individuals, we do not know the significance of this great asset.

Imam (as) has stated in this regard:

"لَا يَعْرِفُ قَدْرَ مَا بَقِيَ مِنْ عُمْرِهِ إِلاَّ نَبِيٌّ أَوْ صِدِّيقٌ"

"No one knows the value of the remainder of his life save a prophet or an eminently truthful believer."[12](#)

Some Pieces of Poetry:

One day, a young man asked an old man:

How is your life with your old age;

He answered: there is something ambiguous in this letter,

Whose meaning you will know only at the old age;
You had better tell me of your strength,
Why are you asking me about my weaknesses?
Keep your youth, since this beloved bird,
Will not stay in this bony cage for long;
The asset which I lost so easily,
You should keep it if you can;
The more I showed rebellion,
The more rebellion showed me the world;
When I lost my capital, I was left with nothing,
Since it is funny to engage in bargain with no capital;
The thief world robbed me of my treasure,
When I was asleep at the time of vigilance.
I lost my life with no benefit or loss,
See how I lost such a precious thing;
I spent it one day at the flower side in the spring,
The other day, I spent it, mourning over the faded flower;
It is a pity that my youth;
Passed away as do spring winds and the flowing river;
This land is the resting-place of the martyrs,
Take your time, observing it carefully;
Count the years you've already lost,
Do not sit counting the months of Capricorn, Scorpio and Gemini;
The dawn caravan is far away yet,
There should be a candle in this dark night;
O friend, while you are in power,
Provide the needy with what they want;
We pretended to be teachers for others,
While we did not recognize A from B.
A burnt wood could not be used as a guide candle,
We should burn a light which gives out light;
Do not waste the time treasure so easily,
Since this precious jewel has got a price;
Parvin will not waste the dear life,
Since she has her wisdom as her guide.

4. Submission to the misfortunes of Time

“المستسلم للدهر”

Sometimes a man acknowledges the enemy's superiority, but he is unwilling to surrender. But sometimes he does not have any other option than surrender. Imam (as) confessed to the power of the world in his expression "conceding to the conquest of time," but he was unwilling to surrender. But when he carefully observed the demolishing events in the world, he surrendered.

However, what is meant by "the misfortunes of Time" might be the hardships and troubles which people put on the way of justice and stop the progressive growth of the society. This is what they did to Imam 'Ali (as) and forced him to stop the Siffin Holy War. Imam 'Ali (as) then metaphorically attributed those in human acts to the world.

For instance, in the Sermon 32 of Nahj al-Balaghah he metaphorically states:

"أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنَّا قَدْ اصْبَحْنَا فِي دَهْرٍ عَنُودٍ وَ زَمَنٍ كَنُودٍ يُعَدُّ فِيهِ
الْمُحْسِنُ مُسِيئًا وَيَزْدَادُ الظَّالِمُ فِيهِ عُتُورًا لَا نَنْتَفِعُ بِمَا عَلَّمْنَا وَلَا
نَسْأَلُ عَمَّا جَهِلْنَا وَلَا نَتَخَوُّ قَارِعَةً حَتَّى تَجِلَّ بِنَا"

"O people! We are living in a time of perversity and an age of ingratitude in which a good-doer is considered an evildoer, and the wrongdoer disdainfully increases in his wrongdoing. We do not benefit from what we know, we do not ask about what we do not know, and we do not fear the sudden calamity until it befalls us."

No doubt, the attribution of perversity and ingratitude is to the people; or else Time itself could not be ungrateful.

5. Reproaching the World

"الذام للدنيا"

The world consists of the sky, the earth, and the creatures. It houses the heavenly bodies, mountains, deserts, plants, animals, and human beings together with the man-made means and instruments, so me of which are useful, others hazardous. Since this world is near to us, it is to be distinguished from the other world which we call hereafter.

A question is raised here: which part of the present world is bad which incites Imam 'Ali (as) to call himself as "a reproacher" of it?

Some have assumed that this world, as a whole, including wives, children, houses, mountains, deserts, the sea, the sky and the earth, is bad and ugly. Therefore, a wise man should disregard the whole world and through sufferings he should spend his life.

Of course, this kind of thinking stems from either a materialistic concept which considers the world as absurd, or is based on dualism: the god of good things and the god of bad. The latter has created all the evil things!

The injustice, repressions and other social hardships may cause such pessimistic attitudes in people.

But in the Islamic world-view, which is based on monotheism, nothing is bad in nature and the world is not absurd. On the one hand the Holy Qur'an states that Allah has created the whole world flawless.

"الَّذِي أَحْسَنَ كُلَّ شَيْءٍ خَلَقَهُ"

"Who made good every thing that he has created".¹³

"مَا تَرَى فِي خَلْقِ الرَّحْمَانِ مِنْ تَفَاوُتٍ"

"You see no incongruity in the creation of the Beneficent God".[14](#)

On the other hand, the Qur'an rejects the absurdity of the world.

وَمَا خَلَقْنَا السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ وَمَا بَيْنَهُمَا لِلْأَعْيُنِ"

"And we did not create the heavens and the earth and what is between them in sport".[15](#)

وَمَا خَلَقْنَا السَّمَاءَ وَالْأَرْضَ وَمَا بَيْنَهُمَا بَاطِلًا"

"And We did not create the heaven and the earth and what is between them in vain".[16](#)

The Qur'an considers every manifestation of the creation as signs indicating monotheism.[17](#) God swears to these signs.[18](#) No doubt, an absurd thing can not be used as a reason for monotheism,

Imam 'Ali (as) himself, in Hikmah 131, severely rebukes anybody who reproaches the world. Thus, considering the world as bad does not coincide with the Islamic world-view, with the Holy Qur'an and with Nahj al-Balaghah. We have, therefore, to find a better explanation for Imam 'Ali's expression "reproaching the world".

Some others have said, although the world as such is not bad, loving it is bad. Imam 'Ali (as) has stated:

"Love of the world is the basis of all wrong-doing"[19](#)

Thus, Imam 'Ali (as) does not rebuke the world itself; rather, he reproaches a liking towards it. But this explanation, too, does not seem to be true because a liking for one's wife, children, possessions, houses, life social positions, which are manifestations of the world, is an innate and natural phenomenon. God has bestowed upon man a liking for self, children, wife, life, and social status so that he could automatically try to improve life and to reproduce offspring. If this innate apparatus were not built in man, he would lose his hopes to live. Thus, how is it that this apparatus is based on some wisdom but the liking towards it is considered bad?

This is especially important when we consider that Islam is a religion of innate nature and no command is issued contrary to it.

**فَأَقِمْ وَجْهَكَ لِلدِّينِ حَنِيفًا فِطْرَةَ اللَّهِ الَّتِي فَطَرَ النَّاسَ عَلَيْهَا
لَا تَبْدِيلَ لِخَلْقِ اللَّهِ ذَلِكَ الدِّينُ الْقَيِّمُ"**

"Then set your face upright for religion in the right state - the nature made by Allah in which He has made men, there is no altering of Allah's creation; that is the right religion".[20](#)

A Third Explanation

What is understood from the Holy Qur'an and Nahj al-Balaghah is this: Neither is the world bad nor a liking toward it. Rather, an excessive reliance on it, which could create a deviation in justice and turn the world into an aim rather than a means, is considered improper.

When the Holy Qur'an introduces the dwellers of hell and their characteristics, it emphasizes the same fact:

**إِنَّ الَّذِينَ لَا يَرْجُونَ لِقَاءَنَا وَرَضُوا بِالْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا وَاطْمَأَنَّنُوا بِهَا
وَالَّذِينَ هُمْ عَنْ آيَاتِنَا غَافِلُونَ "**

"Surely those who do not hope in Our meeting and are pleased with this world's life and are content with it, and those who are heedless of Our communications."[21](#)

As we see, the main feature of these dwellers of hell is their extreme liking towards the world and their negligence towards rightfulness and justice. They have considered the world as an aim by itself and not as a means.

The Holy Qur'an, as well, blames those people who prefer the materialistic world to God or to the Prophet (S) or to the holy wars:

**"قُلْ إِنْ كَانَ آبَاؤُكُمْ وَأَبْنَاؤُكُمْ وَإِخْوَانُكُمْ وَأَزْوَاجُكُمْ وَعَشِيرَتُكُمْ
وَأَمْوَالٌ اقْتَرَفْتُمُوهَا وَتِجَارَةٌ تَخْشَوْنَ كَسَادَهَا وَمَسَاكِنُ تَرْضَوْنَهَا
أَحَبَّ إِلَيْكُمْ مِنَ اللَّهِ وَرَسُولِهِ وَجِهَادٍ فِي سَبِيلِهِ فَتَرَبَّصُوا حَتَّى
يَأْتِيَ اللَّهُ بِأَمْرِهِ وَاللَّهُ لَا يَهْدِي الْقَوْمَ الْفَاسِقِينَ"**

"Say: If your fathers and your sons and your brethren and your mates and your kinsfolk and property which you have acquired, and the slackness of trade which you fear and dwellings which you like, are dearer to you than Allah and His Apostle and striving in His way, then wait till Allah brings about His command: and Allah does not guide the transgressing people".[22](#)

In this verse, too, the different materialistic aspects of this world, including possession, children, brothers, wives and the like, are considered bad only if they intrude on justice and rightfulness.

As it is expressed in other verses, too, the world is not only good, but it is considered as an ornament and a bridge to victory.

"الْمَالُ وَالْبَنُونَ زِينَةُ الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا وَالْبَاقِيَاتُ الصَّالِحَاتُ خَيْرٌ عِنْدَ رَبِّكَ تَوَابًا وَخَيْرٌ أَمْلًا"

"Wealth and children are an adornment of the life of this world; and the ever-abiding, the good works, are better with your lord in reward and better in expectation".[23](#)

What is wrong is to consider the world as an aim. In this regard Allah commands the Prophet (S):

"فَأَعْرِضْ عَنْ مَنْ تَوَلَّى عَنْ ذِكْرِنَا وَلَمْ يُرِدْ إِلَّا الْحَيَاةَ الدُّنْيَا ذَلِكَ مَبْلَغُهُمْ مِنَ الْعِلْمِ"

"Therefore, turn aside from him who turns his back upon our reminder and does not desire anything but this world's life. This is their goal of knowledge".[24](#)

Imam 'Ali (as), too, in Nahj al-Balaghah introduces those who are world-mongers, blaming them:

"ولبئس المتجر أن ترى الدنيا لنفسك ثمنا ومماتك عند الله عوضا"

"It is an evil transaction that you consider the world to be a price for your self and a substitute for what there is with God for you."[25](#)

Thus, as we have already noticed if man enjoys different aspects of life in order to obey God, and to serve people and to collect sufficient provisions for the next world, his action is not only not considered improper, but rather, it is considered proper. Imam 'Ali (as), in Hikmah 131, in blaming the world-mongers, explicitly explains:

"إِنَّ الدُّنْيَا دَارُ صِدْقٍ لِمَنْ صَدَقَهَا وَدَارُ عَافِيَةٍ لِمَنْ فَهَمَ عَنْهَا وَدَارُ غِنَى لِمَنْ تَزَوَّدَ مِنْهَا وَدَارُ مَوْعِظَةٍ لِمَنْ اتَّعَظَ بِهَا، مَسْجِدُ أَحِبَّاءِ اللَّهِ وَمُصَلَّى مَلَائِكَةِ اللَّهِ وَمَهِيْطٌ وَجِي اللَّهِ وَمَتَجَرُ أَوْلِيَاءِ اللَّهِ اِكْتَسَبُوا فِيهَا الرَّحْمَةَ وَرَبِحُوا فِيهَا الْجَنَّةَ"

"The world is an abode of truth and righteousness for those who encounter it with truth, an

abode of well-being for those who understand it, an abode of self-sufficiency for those who take their provisions from it and an abode of admonishment for those who are admonished by it. (It is) the mosque of the lovers of God, the place of prayer of the angels of God, the place of descent of God's revelation and the trading place of the friends of God. They earn (God's) mercy in it and gain paradise in it."

Thus the world is not considered repulsive if the needy person is given what he needs, if a naked person is given clothes and if a hungry person is given food. These acts are deemed as God's worship.

The world would be considered ill-favored if we counted it as our final aim but it would be a proper place if it were used for obtaining God's pleasure. Imam 'Ali (as) in Nahj al-Balaghah has stated:

"وَلَيْعَمَ دَارٍ مَنْ لَمْ يَرْضَ بِهَا دَارًا وَمَحَلَّ مَنْ لَمْ يُوطِنَهَا مَحَلًّا"

"It (the world) is an excellent home for one who is not content with it as a home, and (an excellent) place of residence for one who does not take it as a (permanent) residence."[26](#)

In another place, Imam 'Ali (as) emphasizes that this world is a transitory shelter, not a permanent one. The more we provide provisions for the Hereafter, the better it is.

**"انما الدنيا دارٌ مجاز، والآخرة دارٌ قرار، فخذوا من ممرِّكم
لمقرِّكم"**

"This world is transitory, the Hereafter is permanent. Therefore take (provisions) from your place of passage for your place of residence."[27](#)

Thus, Imam 'Ali (as) reproaches this world only if it interferes with justice and rightfulness. It is obvious that such a world deserves reproach.

People attached to wealth

Here we should make it clear why Imam 'Ali (as) has used expressions which denote reproach of this world.

The fact is that at the time of his caliphate, due to the victories that Muslims had, they became rich and enamoured with wealth; therefore, they indulged in pleasure-seeking and animal instincts, instead of protecting right and justice for others, as was practiced at the time of God's Prophet (S).[28](#)

Imam 'Ali (as) envisioned dormant dangers behind the pleasure-seeking ways of the Muslims in the newly established Muslim communities. In Imam 'Ali's estimation, such comforts would cause the fall of any community.

**"وَإِذَا أَرَدْنَا أَنْ نُهْلِكَ قَرْيَةً أَمَرْنَا مُتْرَفِيهَا فَفَسَقُوا فِيهَا فَحَقَّ
عَلَيْهَا الْقَوْلُ فَدَمَّرْنَاَهَا تَدْمِيرًا"**

"And when we wish to destroy a town, we send our commandment to the people of it who lead easy lives, but they transgress therein; thus the word proves true against it, so we destroy it with utter destruction".

[29](#)
Imam 'Ali (as), in sermon 151, refers to this destructive disaster (i.e. pleasure-seeking) and emphasizes:

**"ثُمَّ إِنَّكُمْ مَعْشَرَ الْعَرَبِ اغْرَاضُ بَلَايَا قَدْ افْتَرَبْت فَاتَّقُوا سَكَرَاتِ
النِّعْمَةِ وَاحْذَرُوا بَوَائِقَ النَّقِمَةِ"**

"You, O company of Arabs, are the targets of calamities that have drawn near; therefore, guard yourselves against the intoxications of wealth and beware of the misfortunes of retribution".

Furthermore, as it was mentioned earlier, attachment to this world entails man's fall from the path of piety; it leads man to forget God, Hereafter and righteousness and justice.[30](#)

This led to Imam 'Ali's deprivation of his right for 24 years, i.e., caliphate on the one hand; on the other hand, within those years when he was the caliph, he was faced with internal wars, turbulences and inhumane acts of his people to the degree that he wished for an early death to terminate his hardships. Ibn Muljim cleft his forehead and Imam 'Ali (as), the bravest man in the history of Islam, stated: *"By the Lord of the Ka'ba, I have won"*.

"فُزْتُ وَرَبِّ الْكَعْبَةِ"

All this led Imam 'Ali (as) to blame the world more than anybody else and warn people against it.[31](#)

6. A Dweller of the Abode of the Dead

"السَّاكِنُ مَسَاكِنَ الْمَوْتَى"

Due to pastimes and pleasures, men sometimes fail to comprehend clear issues. In such cases, they should be notified. For instance, we do not think that men more powerful than us lived on the piece of land on which we now live. They are no longer remembered and we are living in their places.

The Holy Qur'an, upon the drowning of the followers of Pharaoh, emphasizes that:

"كَمْ تَرَكُوا مِنْ جَنَّاتٍ وَعُيُونٍ وَزُرُوعٍ وَمَقَامٍ كَرِيمٍ وَنَعْمَةٍ كَانُوا فِيهَا فَاكِهِينَ كَذَلِكَ وَأَوْرَثْنَاهَا قَوْمًا آخَرِينَ فَمَا بَكَتْ عَلَيْهِمُ السَّمَاءُ وَالْأَرْضُ وَمَا كَانُوا مُنظَرِينَ"

"How many of the gardens and fountains, have they left! And cornfields and noble places! And goodly things wherein they rejoiced; Thus (it was), and we gave them as a heritage to another people. So the heaven and the earth did not weep for them, nor were they respited". [Qur'an 44:25-29]

Imam 'Ali (as), too, having returned from Siffin, arrived at a graveyard next to Kufa and said,

"يَا أَهْلَ الدِّيَارِ الْمُوحِشَةِ وَالْمَحَالِّ الْمُقْفِرَةِ وَالْقُبُورِ الْمُظْلِمَةِ يَا أَهْلَ الثَّرْبَةِ يَا أَهْلَ الْغُرْبَةِ يَا أَهْلَ الْوَحْدَةِ يَا أَهْلَ الْوَحْشَةِ أَنْتُمْ لَنَا قَرَطٌ سَابِقٌ وَنَحْنُ لَكُمْ تَبَعٌ لَاجِقٌ أَمَا الدُّورُ فَقَدْ سُكِنَتْ وَأَمَا الْإِزْوَاجُ فَقَدْ نُكِحَتْ وَأَمَا الْأَمْوَالُ فَقَدْ قُسِّمَتْ، هَذَا خَبْرٌ مَا عِنْدَنَا فَمَا خَبْرٌ مَا عِنْدَكُمْ؟ ثُمَّ إِلْتَقَتَ إِلَى أَصْحَابِهِ فَقَالَ: أَمَا لَوْ أَدِنَ لَهُمْ فِي الْكَلَامِ لَأَخْبَرُوكُمْ أَنَّ خَيْرَ الزَّادِ التَّقْوَى."

"O dwellers of desolate houses, vacant places and dark graves! O people of dust! O strangers! O people of solitude! O desolate ones! You have preceded and gone before us; we will follow and join you. As for your houses, they have been inhabited. As for your wives they have been married (to others), and as for your possessions, they have been divided (amongst others). This is the news that we have. What news do you have?"
Then Imam 'Ali (as) turned to his companions and said: "If they were allowed to speak, they would inform you that **..the best provision (for the journey to the Hereafter) is Godwariness (2:197)**"".[32](#)

In this treatise, too, Imam 'Ali (as) says: I, as a father, am living in a place where others used to be; now they are dead. Thus my son, this too will happen to you some day.

7. Which he will leave tomorrow

"والطاعن عنها غداً"

Despite the fact that we know that nobody is eternal in this world, due to pleasure-seeking we behave as if we were going to live in this world for ever. This leads us to commit many sins.

Imam 'Ali (as), however, teaches us to study the lives of our predecessors, including the Prophets and the rich. He concludes that the only eternal being is God Himself.

"قَلَوْ أَنَّ أَحَدًا يَجِدُ إِلَى الْبَقَاءِ سُلْمًا أَوْ لِيَدْفَعَ الْمَوْتَ سَبِيلًا لَكَانَ ذَلِكَ سُلَيْمَانَ بْنَ دَاوُدَ عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ الَّذِي سُخِّرَ لَهُ مُلْكُ الْجِنِّ وَالْإِنْسِ مَعَ النُّبُوَّةِ وَعَظِيمِ الْعَرِيقَةِ فَلَمَّا اسْتَوْفَى طُعْمَتَهُ وَاسْتَكْمَلَ مُدَّتَهُ رَمَتْهُ قِسِيُّ الْقِنَاءِ بِنَبَالِ الْمَوْتِ وَاصْبَحَتِ الدِّيَارُ مِنْهُ خَالِيَةً وَالْمَسَاكِينُ مُعْطَلَةٌ وَوَرَثَهَا قَوْمٌ آخَرُونَ وَإِنَّ لَكُمْ فِي الْقُرُونِ السَّابِقَةِ لَعِبْرَةً! أَيْنَ الْعَمَالِقَةُ وَابْنَاءُ الْعَمَالِقَةِ أَيْنَ الْقَرَاعِنَةُ وَابْنَاءُ الْقَرَاعِنَةِ أَيْنَ أَصْحَابُ مَدَائِنِ الرَّسِّ الَّذِينَ قَتَلُوا النَّبِيِّينَ وَأَطْفَأُوا سُنْنَ الْمُرْسَلِينَ وَاحْتَبُوا سُنْنَ الْجَبَّارِينَ أَيْنَ الَّذِينَ سَارُوا بِالْجُيُوشِ وَهَزَمُوا بِالْأَلُوفِ وَعَسَكُرُوا الْعَسَاكِرَ وَمَدَّنُوا الْمَدَائِنَ".

"If there was one who could find a ladder to eternal life or a way to repel death, that would have been Solomon, the son of David, to whom the dominion of the jinn and mankind was made subservient, together with (his) prophethood and great nobility. But when the subsistence assigned to him was finished, and his time was complete, the bows of annihilation struck him with the arrows of death! Lands became empty of him and (his) houses were unoccupied, and another people inherited them.

Indeed there is a lesson for you in the previous generations! Where are the Amalikitites and the offspring of the Amalikitites? Where are the Pharaohs and their offspring?

Where are the dwellers of the cities of Rass who killed the Prophets and stifled the traditions of the Messengers, and who revived the practices of the tyrants?

Where are those who went with troops, defeated thousands, mobilized armies and built cities?"³³

Imam 'Ali (as) encourages people to prepare provisions and to make themselves ready for leaving this world and heading towards death.

"تَجَهَّزُوا رَحِمَكُمُ اللَّهُ فَقَدْ نُودِيَ فِيكُمْ بِالرَّجِيلِ وَاقْلُوا الْعَرَجَةَ عَلَى الدُّنْيَا وَانْقَلِبُوا بِصَالِحِ مَا يَحْضُرْتُمْ مِنَ الزَّادِ فَإِنَّ أَمَامَكُمْ عَقَبَةً كَثُودًا وَمَنَازِلَ مَخُوفَةً مَهُولَةً لَا بُدَّ مِنَ الْوَرُودِ عَلَيْهَا وَالْوُقُوفَ عِنْدَهَا وَاعْلَمُوا أَنَّ مَلَاحِظَ الْمَنِيَّةِ نَحْوَكُمْ دَانِيَةٌ وَكَانَتْكُمْ

بِمَخَالِئِهَا وَقَدْ نَشِبَتْ فِيكُمْ وَقَدْ دَهَمَتْكُمْ فِيهَا مُفْطِعَاتُ الْأُمُورِ وَمُعْضِلَاتُ الْمَحْذُورِ فَقَطِّعُوا عَلائِقَ الدُّنْيَا وَاسْتَظْهِرُوا بَرَازِدَ التَّقْوَى "

"May God have mercy on you; prepare yourselves, for you have been summoned for the departure! Lessen your desire to stay in this world and return with the good provisions that you have with you, for before you is a mountain pass, difficult to ascend, and terrifying, dreadful stations, from arriving and stopping at which there is no escape. Know that the looks of death are drawing near to you, and it is as if you are in its claws that have laid hold of you. Abominable affairs and distressing calamities have overwhelmed you in it. Therefore, sever the ties of this world and seek help with the provision of God-wariness." [34](#)

It is on the basis of the above observation that Imam 'Ali (as) tells his children about his departure to warn everybody in time.

1. . Sharh Nahj al-Balaghah by Ibn Maytham, vol. 5, p. 3; vol.4, p.27.
2. . Bihar, vol. 61, p.78.
3. . There are different ideas on the interpretation of this verse, however, For further information refer to Al-mizan, vol.16, pp.92-97.
4. . Qur'an 31:20.
5. . Qur'an 35:15.
6. . Qur'an 22:5.
7. . Safinah al-Bihar, vol.2, p.258.
8. . Ghurar al-Hikam, al-Amidi, vol. 7, p.296.
9. . Index of Ghurar al-Hikam, al-Amidi, vol. 7, p.296.
10. . Mafatih al-Jinan, p 800.
11. . Safinah al-Bihar, vol. 3, p. 257.
12. . Index of Ghurar al-Hikam, al-Amidi, p. 277.
13. . Qur'an 35:15.
14. . Qur'an 67:3.
15. . Qur'an 44:38.
16. . Qur'an 38:27.
17. . Qur'an 51:20-21.
18. . Qur'an 91:1-7.
19. . Ghurar al-Hikam, al-Amidi, vol. 3, p.395.
20. . Qur'an 30:30.
21. . Qur'an, 10:7
22. . Qur'an 9:24.
23. . Qur'an 18:46.
24. . Qur'an 53:30.
25. . Nahj al-Balaghah, sermon 32.
26. . Nahj al-Balaghah, Sermon 214.
27. . Nahj al-Balaghah, Sermon 194.
28. . For this issue refer to "The reasons behind Islam Development and Muslims' deterioration", the discussion on Muslims' pleasure-seeking, pp. 375-420.
29. . Qur'an 17:16.
30. . حبُّ الدُّنْيَا رَأْسُ كُلِّ خَطِيئَةٍ The love of this world is the beginning of every sin.
31. . Refer to Mutahhari's two erudite works: A survey of Nahj al-Balaghah and Twenty lectures.
32. . Nahj al-Balaghah, Hikmah 130.
33. . Nahj al-Balaghah, Sermon 182.
34. . Nahj al-Balaghah, Sermon 204.

The Fourteen Attributes of Imam 'Ali's Son

After counting seven attributes for himself, Imam 'Ali (as) mentions the following fourteen attributes for his son's self-improvement:

To a son who hopes for what is unattainable

“إلى المَوْلودِ المَوْمِلِ ما لا يُدْرِكُ”

God has equipped man with instincts and desires to be able to sustain life. If these instincts and desires are employed in the right situations, they will add up to our vigor and satisfaction.

Our wishes, too, are among these means:

If man lacked these wishes, life would be impossible.

Regarding this, the Great Prophet (S) has stated:

“الأملُ رَحْمَةٌ لأمَّتِي وَلَوْ لا الأملُ ما رَضَّعتْ وَالِدَةٌ وَلَدَها وَلَا
عَرَسَ عَارِسٌ شَجَرًا”

*"Hope is a mercy for my people. If hope did not exist no mother would ever breastfeed her child and no gardener would ever plant a tree."*¹

In a tradition, it is stated, "Jesus Christ (as) saw an old man plowing the ground. Jesus asked God to take his desire away from him. Then, Jesus saw that the old man threw the spade on the ground and lay on the ground, resting.

Then Jesus asked God to give him back his desires. He saw the old man stand up and start working. Jesus asked the old man the secret behind this. The old man answered. "When I was working, I told myself: How long do you have to work when you are so old. Then I threw the spade down and started resting. Then I told myself: I swear to God that as long as I am alive, I need life equipments. Then I rose and started working."²

These two traditions clearly show the dynamic role of wishes in our lives. But, as it was stated earlier, wishes are good if they are fulfilled with care or else they will destroy the community if they go on extremes.

Imam 'Ali (as) in the sermon 42 of Nahj al-Balaghah states:

“أيها الناسُ إِنَّ أخَوْفَ ما أخافُ عَلَيْكمُ اثْنانِ: اتِّباعُ الهَوَى

**وَطُولُ الْأَمَلِ فَمَا اتَّبَعُ الْهَوَىٰ فَيَصُدُّ عَنِ الْحَقِّ وَأَمَّا طُولُ الْأَمَلِ
فَيُنْسِي الْأَخْرَةَ. أَلَا وَإِنَّ الدُّنْيَا قَدْ وَلَّتْ حِذَاءً فَلَمْ يَبْقَ مِنْهَا إِلَّا
صِبَابَةٌ كَصِبَابَةِ الْإِنَاءِ اصْطَبَّتْهَا صَابُهَا إِلَّا وَإِنَّ الْأَخْرَةَ قَدْ أَقْبَلَتْ
وَلِكُلِّ مِنْهُمَا بَنُونَ فَكُونُوا مِنْ أَبْنَاءِ الْأَخْرَةِ وَلَا تَكُونُوا مِنْ أَبْنَاءِ
الدُّنْيَا فَإِنَّ كُلَّ وَلَدٍ سَيَلْحَقُ بِأُمِّهِ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ وَإِنَّ الْيَوْمَ عَمَلٌ وَلَا
حِسَابٌ وَغَدًا حِسَابٌ وَلَا عَمَلٌ"**

"O people! The greatest things that I fear for you are two: following (your) desires and farfetched hopes.

Following desires prevents the attainment of the truth, and far-fetched hopes cause forgetfulness of the Hereafter.

Indeed, the world has passed swiftly by, and only a small portion of it remains like the remnants poured out of a water vessel; and indeed, the Hereafter has approached. Each of them (the world and the Hereafter) has their children. Therefore, be of the children of the Hereafter, and do not be of the children of this world, for every child will be attached to his mother on the Day of Judgment. Today is (the day of) action and no accounting, and tomorrow is (the day of) accounting and no action."³

As you will notice, in this sermon, Imam 'Ali (as), not only mentions the hazards of far-fetched hopes, which is to forget about the Hereafter, but also shows us how to struggle against these hopes by paying attention to the Hereafter. He states that the results of our wrong-doings beget dangerous consequences in the other world, and there will be no way to compensate for them at that time.

Of course, we should be aware that not all our hopes can be fulfilled.

By drawing a square on the ground and by passing a line in the middle of it the Great Prophet (S) depicted this fact.⁴

Imam 'Ali (as) mentions the same idea in the expression he uses **"المؤمل ما لا يدرك"** (hoping for what is unattainable). He warns us not to follow all of our desires; he says this is impossible.⁵

Thus, it is better for us to limit our hopes and only make use of them rationally, Imam 'Ali (as) has said in this regard:

**"مَنْ أَيْقَنَ أَنَّهُ يُفَارِقُ الْأَحْبَابَ وَيَسْكُنُ الثُّرَابَ وَيُوَاجِهُ الْجِسَابَ
وَيَسْتَعِينِي عَمَّا خَلْفَ وَيَفْتَقِرُ إِلَىٰ مَا قَدَّمَ كَانَ حَرِيًّا بِقُصْرِ الْأَمَلِ
وَطُولِ الْعَمَلِ"**

"It is appropriate for a person who is certain that he will part from loved ones, dwell within the earth, confront the reckoning, and have no need of what he has left behind while being in need of what he has sent forward, to curtail his hopes and add to his (good) deeds"⁶

But for the Gnostics the ultimate for their desires is Allah; they only think about God's

consent.

2. The Follower of the path of those who have perished

"السالک سبیل من قد هلك"

What is meant by this expression is that the child from the day it is born is on the scale of growth and it develops: It finishes infancy and then arrives at the youth and then reaches old age and finally passes away. This process includes everybody: both our ancestors and our descendants.

Thus, my son! You, too, are going to go through this stage. Never remain ignorant of this fact, or else, the Satan will mislead you.

The above expression might convey the following concept depicted in the following piece of poetry:

These roads on the desert,

Are drawn by pen in the past by Friends;

The transcripts on the graves are unopened letters,

Which have come to us from the people of the Hereafter.

This means that the road on which you and I are walking is the road prepared by people in the past. Be aware, we too are preparing the road for future walkers!!

3. Prey to Illnesses

" غرض الاسقام "

Material life entails complexities and clashes. If one is weaker, these clashes take on a strong side.

Man is no exception to this universal rule. He is always struggling against different agents and destructive factors. He is at the mercy of all sorts of diseases, calamities, disasters and hardships. Every moment he might get disintegrated: a stroke, cancer, TB, smallpox, ulcers, and the like.

Imam 'Ali (as), in the sermon 217 of Nahj al-Balaghah, concerning this, states:

**"دَارُ بِالْبَلَاءِ مَحْفُوفَةٌ وَيَالِغَدْرِ مَعْرُوفَةٌ لَا تَدُومُ أَحْوَالُهَا وَلَا تَسْلُمُ
نُزَالُهَا، أَحْوَالُ مُخْتَلِفَةٌ وَتَارَاتُ مُتَصَرِّفَةٌ، الْعَيْشُ فِيهَا مَذْمُومٌ
وَالْأَمَانُ مِنْهَا مَعْدُومٌ وَإِنَّمَا أَهْلُهَا فِيهَا أَغْرَاضٌ مُسْتَهْدَفَةٌ تَرْمِيهِمْ
بِسَهَامِهَا وَتَفْنِيهِمْ بِجِمَامِهَا"**

"(The world is) a house surrounded by affliction, known for its treachery. Its states do not last and its inhabitants do not remain sound. Its states vary and its times change. Life in it is reprehensible and safety is non-existent. Its inhabitants are only targets; it strikes them with its arrows and destroys them with death".

Thus, man is subject to both diseases and disasters and misfortunes. Man struggles with these till he passes away and gets to safety.

"لَقَدْ خَلَقْنَا الْإِنْسَانَ فِي كَبَدٍ"

"Certainly we have created man to be in distress".⁷

The poet says:

Thus more bitter than poison the world will pass,
Once again there will be a day as sweet as sugar.

4. A pawn in the hands of time

"ورهيئة الايام"

As the property is mortgaged to the mortgagee during the mortgage time and when the time comes, it goes back to its genuine owner, man is also pawned to the world and its differing events. It seems as if man does not have any freedom whatsoever.

And it is assumed that it is the world which brings about either prosperity or misery, youth or age, power or feebleness, wealth or poverty, health or sickness, happiness or sorrow. When the time comes, his mortgage time is over and it will be turned over to his real owner.

Thus, man is extremely miserable and vulnerable. With this amount of misery and vulnerability, he should not be left ignorant and proud. The Imam (as) guides us in the following manner:

**"مَا لِابْنِ آدَمَ وَالْفَخْرِ: أَوَّلُهُ نُطْقَةٌ، وَآخِرُهُ جِيْفَةٌ، لَا يَرْزُقُ نَفْسَهُ
وَلَا يَدْفَعُ حَتْفَهُ"**

"What does the son of Adam have to do with pride? His beginning was a drop and his end is a corpse. He can neither provide sustenance for himself nor can he drive away his death".⁸

5. The target of misfortunes

“ورمية المصائب”

This phrase, like the third phrase (prey to illnesses) shows that man is always subject to all sorts of diseases and hardships. The difference lies in the fact that No 5 refers to mental and spiritual afflictions, whereas No 3 refers to bodily afflictions.

6. A Slave of the world

“عبد الدنيا”

A person, who can not resist the world's transitory materialistic manifestations and easily yields to them, is a slave to the world, to dirhams and to dinars and to social positions. Many people, when confronted with material things and justice, prefer the worldly affairs and yield to its luxuries. Imam Husayn (as), describing such people, states:

“النَّاسُ عَبِيدُ الدُّنْيَا وَالِدِّينِ لِعَقْ عُلَى السِّنْتِهِمْ يَحُوطُونَهُ حَيْثُ مَا
دَرَّتْ مَعَايِشُهُمْ فَإِذَا مُحِصُوا لِلْبَلَاءِ قَلَّ الدِّيَانُونَ”

"People are slaves to the world and religion is a substance on their tongues that they sample. They take care of it as long as their livelihood is abundant. When they are tested by affliction, there are few pious ones."[9](#)

It has repeatedly been noted, however, that these adjectives and attributes refer to an ordinary person, and not to Imams who are infallible.

7. A Trader in vanities

“وتاجر الغرور”

As we have previously mentioned, the world is a house of trade. Most people sell their precious lives for a provision of vanity. They would sell their Hereafter for this world:

“أُولَئِكَ الَّذِينَ اشْتَرُوا الْحَيَاةَ الدُّنْيَا بِالْآخِرَةِ فَلَا يُخَفُّ عَنْهُمْ
الْعَذَابُ وَلَا هُمْ يُنصَرُونَ ”

“These are they who buy the life of this world for the Hereafter, so their

chastisement shall not be lightened nor shall they be helped".[10](#)

Although these people realize that the world is nothing more than "a provision of vanity"

"وَمَا الْحَيَاةُ الدُّنْيَا إِلَّا مَتَاعُ الْغُرُورِ"

"And the life of this world is nothing but a provision of vanities".[11](#)

"كَسْرَابٍ يَاقِيعَةٍ يَحْسَبُهُ الظَّمَانُ مَاءً"

"Their deeds are like the mirage in a desert, which the thirsty man deems to be water".[12](#)

They prefer this world to the Hereafter. They give precedence to possessions, positions, children and desires before God's pleasure and the Hereafter. They buy things on the face of them whereas

"وَلَا تِجَارَةٌ كَالْعَمَلِ الصَّالِحِ"

"There is no trade like good deeds".[13](#)

"مَنْ تَاجَرَ اللَّهَ رَبِيحًا"

"Whoever trades with God, profits."[14](#)

On the other hand, there are those who offer to God what they have, including their lives, possessions, and children. What they are looking for in this transaction is God's pleasure:

"إِنَّ اللَّهَ اشْتَرَى مِنَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ أَنْفُسَهُمْ وَأَمْوَالَهُمْ بِأَنْ لَهُمُ الْجَنَّةَ يُقَاتِلُونَ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ فَيَقْتُلُونَ وَيُقْتَلُونَ وَعَدًّا عَلَيْهِ حَقًّا فِي التَّوْرَةِ وَالْإِنْجِيلِ وَالْقُرْآنِ وَمَنْ أَوْقَى بَعْدَهُ مِنَ اللَّهِ فَاسْتَبْشِرُوا بَبَيْعِكُمْ الَّذِي بَايَعْتُمْ بِهِ وَذَلِكَ هُوَ الْقَوْزُ الْعَظِيمُ"

“Surely Allah has bought of the believers their persons and their property for this, that they shall have the garden; they fight in Allah's way, so they slay and are slain; a promise which is binding on Him in the Taurat and the Ingeel and the Qur'an; and who is more faithful to his covenant than Allah? Rejoice therefore in the pledge which you have made; and that is the mighty achievement”.[15](#)

Thus, the most important trade is getting Allah's pleasure,

"وَمِنُ النَّاسِ مَنْ يَشْرِي نَفْسَهُ ابْتِغَاءَ مَرْضَاةِ اللَّهِ"

“And among men is he who sells himself to seek the pleasure of Allah”.[16](#)

And the worst trade is selling oneself to the world and what it contains. Regarding this, Imam (as) has stated:

"وَلَيْسَ الْمَتَجَرُّ أَنْ تَرَى الدُّنْيَا لِنَفْسِكَ تَمَنًا"

“The most wretched transaction is that you consider the world to be a price for your self!”[17](#)

8. A Debtor of Divine Decrees

“وغريم المنايا”

"Manaya" is the plural for "maniya", meaning death or decree.

The reason the plural word "manaya" is used is that there are different ways to die: one dies in accidents, the other dies by drowning, the other one through shocks and the other one by cancer, and the like.

In this sentence, the Imam (as) compares a man to a debtor who is asked to return his debts.

Divine decrees, too, are creditors who are after their credits, which is man's departure towards the Hereafter.

Elsewhere, the Imam (as) refers to this fact in the following words:

"إِنَّ هَذَا الْمَوْتَ لَطَالِبٌ حَيْثُ لَا يَفُوتُهُ الْمُقِيمُ وَلَا يُعْجِزُهُ مَنْ هَرَبَ"

"Indeed, this death is an eager seeker; neither does one who remains escape it, nor does one who flees frustrate it".[18](#)

"إِنَّ وِرَاءَكَ طَالِبًا حَثِيثًا مِّنَ الْمَوْتِ فَلَا تَغْفَلْ"

"Surely, behind you is an eager seeker from death; therefore, do not be heedless".[19](#)

9. A Captive of Death

"واسير الموت"

Because man can not escape death²⁰ wherever he stays, no matter what age he is or what position he possesses, he will taste the bitterness of death.²¹ Naturally, such a person will remain a captive in the hands of death. Thus, the Imam (as) reckons his son, Imam Hasan, like any other human being, a captive in the hands of death.

10. An Ally of anxieties

"وحليف الهموم"

11. A Companion of sorrows

"وقرين الاحزان"

12. The Aim of calamities

"ونصب الآفات"

A person is an ally of anxieties, a companion of sorrows and the aim of calamities, if he can not fulfill his objectives, if he observes all sorts of obstacles on the way of his growth, and if he is inflicted with poverty, disease, age, deprivation, lack of wife, children, shelter, food, heat and the like. There is nobody who is not subject to these sufferings: in this case, the Holy Qur'an says:

"Certainly we have created man to be in distress."(90:4)

If man feels prosperous one minute, then he has to taste a cup filled with the hemlock of

disasters and calamities. Neishapuri has observed that

"اللَّذَّةُ فِي الدُّنْيَا كَالْقَطْرَةِ مِنَ الْبَحْرِ"

"If you compare the world's pleasures with the world's calamities, you will find the ratio is one drop of water to the sea at large."[22](#)

It is because of these facts that the Imam (as) considers his own son like other human beings, an ally of anxieties, a companion of sorrows and the target of calamities. He warns us that this world, with all these hardships, cannot be the final objective for man. We should make a provision for the other world:

"وَالْعَاقِبَةُ لِلْمُتَّقِينَ"

"And the end is for those who guard against evil".[23](#)

Sorrows for this world or for the Hereafter?

The source for man's sorrows is sometimes materialistic and related to this world: distresses such as poverty, the death of one's child, suffering a loss, deprivation of wife and children.

But sometimes the source for these griefs might be spiritual and related to the Hereafter, for instance, the feeling of guilt or the observation of committing guilt by others.

A wise and true believer, from the viewpoint of the principle of patience, has to make himself content and patient. He has to cope with these sufferings or else, as the Imam (as) has stated,

"الْهَمُّ يُذِيبُ الْجَسَدَ"

"Grief emaciates the body".[24](#)

Zaynab (as) in answering 'Ubaydullah b. Ziyad said: "We consider martyrdom and captivity, which are given to us by Allah, as a blessing."[25](#)

And the Great Prophet (S) has said:

**"إِذَا كَثُرَتْ ذُنُوبُ الْمُؤْمِنِ وَلَمْ يَكُنْ لَهُ مِنَ الْعَمَلِ مَا يُكَفِّرُهَا
إِبْتَلَاهُ اللَّهُ بِالْحُزْنِ لِيُكَفِّرَهَا بِهِ عَنْهُ"**

"When the believer's sins increase and there is nothing from his deeds that can expiate it,

then Allah afflicts him with sorrow in order to expiate them through it."[26](#)

As the above two statements show, sufferings will make a man improve in life. Imam as-Sadiq (as) has said:

"ان الهمّ لِيذهبُ بذُنُوبِ المُسْلِمِ"

"Grief removes the sins of the Muslim"[27](#)

A true believer, by lessening the weight of his sufferings, acts as if he were given the best God given blessings[28](#) or as if he were drinking his mother's milk.[29](#) In the case of spiritual sufferings, a wrong doer is in fact depressed. Regarding this, Imam as-Sadiq (as) has stated:

**"الْحُزْنُ شِعَارُ الْعَارِفِينَ لِكَثْرَةِ وَارِدَاتِ الْغَيْبِ عَلَى سَرَائِرِهِمْ
وَطُولِ مُبَاهَاتِهِمْ تَحْتَ سِتْرِ الْكِبْرِيَاءِ وَالْمَحْزُونُ ظَاهِرُهُ قَبْضٌ
وَبَاطِنُهُ بَسْطٌ، يَعِيشُ مَعَ الْخَلْقِ عَيْشَ الْمَرْضَى وَمَعَ اللَّهِ عَيْشَ
الْقُرْبَاءِ، إِلَى أَنْ قَالَ: وَيَمِينُ الْحُزْنِ الْإِبْتِلَاءُ وَشِمَالُهُ الصَّمْتُ
وَالْحُزْنُ يَخْتَصُّ بِهِ الْعَارِفُونَ لِلَّهِ تَعَالَى وَالتَّفَكُّرُ مُشْتَرِكُ الْخَاصِّ
وَالْعَامِّ وَلَوْ حُجِبَ الْحُزْنُ عَنْ عُيُونِ الْعَارِفِينَ سَاعَةً إِسْتَعَاثُوا"**

"Sorrow is the mark of the gnostics, because of the frequency of the arrivals of the unseen into their hearts and their prolonged glorification of God. The outer self of the sorrowful one is contraction and his inner self is expansion. He lives with people in listlessness, and with God in close intimacy...". He said: "To the right of sorrow is affliction and to its left is silence. Sorrow belongs exclusively to God's gnostics and contemplation is common to both the elite and the ordinary people. If sorrow is concealed from the gnostics for a moment, they will call out for help..."[30](#)

He also has said:

**"عَنْ الصَّادِقِ عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ قَالَ: أَوْحَى إِلَيَّ اللَّهُ إِلَى عَيْسَى بْنِ مَرْيَمَ
هَبْ لِي مِنْ عَيْنَيْكَ الدَّمُوعَ وَمِنْ قَلْبِكَ الْخُشُوعَ وَاجْعَلْ عَيْنَيْكَ
بِمِيلِ الْحُزْنِ إِذَا صَنَجَكَ الْبَاطِلُونَ وَقُمْ عَلَى قُبُورِ الْأَمْوَاتِ
فَنَادِهِمْ بِالصَّوْتِ الرَّفِيعِ لَعَلَّكَ تَأْخُذُ مَوْعِظَتَكَ مِنْهُمْ وَقُلْ إِنِّي
لَاجِقٌ بِهِمْ فِي الْآخِرِينَ"**

"God revealed to Jesus Christ, son of Mary (as): 'Give me tears from your eyes and humility from your heart, and paint your eyes with the inclination to sorrow when the vain-doers laugh. Stand over the graves of the dead and call out to them in a loud voice - perhaps you will take a lesson from them- and say: I am among those who will join them.'"31

A person, whose sorrows are for people going astray and distancing themselves from God, is among elite of believers. His sorrows, in fact, make him come nearer to God. Imam 'Ali (as) has stated

**"مَنْ طَالَ حُزْنُهُ عَلَى نَفْسِهِ فِي الدُّنْيَا أَقْرَّ اللَّهُ عَيْنَيْهِ يَوْمَ
الْقِيَامَةِ"**

"He who prolongs his sorrow for himself in this world, Allah will make him happy on the Day of Judgment."32

13. Prostrated by desires

" وصرع الشهوات "

Man is a unique creature whose body consists of both intellect and desires. There is always a struggle between these two. If intellect wins, man is better than angels; whereas, if desires win, he is lower than animals;33 the strongest people are those who defeat their desires, and obey rightfulness and wisdom34. Only these latter receive God's blessings35; others are slaves to dirhams, dinars and their instincts.36

Imam 'Ali's (as) addressing his son as being "prostrated by desires" is a symbolic statement and is, in fact, the advice of a father to his ordinary son. Satan, too, has sworn to mislead every person except the true believers.37 However Imam Hasan (as) is among the Infallibles and protected against desires.38

14. A Successor of the dead

" وخليفة الاموات "

As it was said in the phrase No 5 of the Imam's letter; if a man paid attention to the fact that other people used to live on the land that we are now occupying, then he would not be proud and would be thinking about gathering provisions for the Hereafter. By notifying his great son, the Imam (as) in fact gives us all a lesson to avoid indulging in pride. He says, on the basis of the saying:

"حُكْمُ الْأَمْثَالِ فِيمَا يَجُوزُ وَفِيمَا لَا يَجُوزُ سَوَاءٌ"

“This will happen to you all as well”.

"أَمَّا بَعْدُ فَإِنَّ فِيمَا تَبَيَّنْتُ مِنْ إِدْبَارِ الدُّنْيَا عَنِّي، وَجُمُوحِ الدَّهْرِ
عَلَيَّ وَإِقْبَالَ الْآخِرَةِ إِلَيَّ مَا يَزَعُنِي عَنْ ذِكْرِ مَنْ سِوَايَ
وَالِإِهْتِمَامِ بِمَا وَرَائِي، غَيْرَ أَنِّي حَيْثُ تَقَرَّدَ بِي دُونَ هُمُومِ النَّاسِ
هَمُّ نَفْسِي فَصَدَّقَنِي رَأْيِي وَصَرَفَنِي عَنْ هَوَائِي وَصَرَّحَ لِي
مَحْضُ أَمْرِي فَافْضَى بِي إِلَى جَدِّ لَا يَكُونُ فِيهِ لِعَبٍّ وَصِدْقٌ لَا
يَشُوبُهُ كَذِبٌ وَوَجَدْتُكَ بَعْضِي بَلْ وَجَدْتُكَ كُلِّي حَتَّى كَأَنَّ شَيْئًا لَوْ
أَصَابَكَ أَصَابَنِي وَكَأَنَّ الْمَوْتَ لَوْ أَتَاكَ أَتَانِي فَعَنَانِي مِنْ أَمْرِكَ مَا
يُغْنِينِي مِنْ أَمْرِ نَفْسِي فَكَتَبْتُ إِلَيْكَ كِتَابِي مُسْتَظْهِرًا بِهِ إِنْ أَنَا
بَقَيْتُ لَكَ أَوْ قُتَيْتُ"

“What has become evident to me from the world’s turning away from me, the wilfulness of time against me and the Hereafter advancing towards me, restrains me from remembrance of anyone other than me or concern with what is beyond me. Although concern for myself occupied me to the exclusion of concern for others, my judgment proved to be true and it turned me away from my desires and the true nature of my affair became clear to me. This led me to an earnestness devoid of diversion and truth unsullied by falsehood. I found you a part of myself; rather I found you all of myself, until it was such that if something befell you it befell me, and if death came to you it came to me; thus whatever concerned me about myself, concerned me about you. Therefore I have written a treatise for you so that it may be an aid (to you) whether I live or die”.

Commentary

There are significant points to be discussed in this letter:

1. After being aware that the world has turned its back on him, that it has overcome him and that the Hereafter is approaching him, how could Imam ‘Ali (as) have cut himself off from others and become occupied with his own affairs when we realize that the infallible Imam (as) had always been aware of these facts and had consistently been trying to improve himself?

To answer this difficult question, we may add: it is a fact that the Imam (as) has always been alert and did not have to be exposed to the overcoming of the world to appreciate the situation. But there are problems that we know, but not concretely. It is the passing of the time that gives us a full appreciation of the nature of events.

After having passed over the age of sixty and having felt the signs of old age, amassed a pack of experiences, and seen the disloyalty of people, now Imam (as) clearly feels the approaching of death and his departure from this world. Under these situations, a man has to leave the others and to concentrate on himself.

The night is dark, the waves are frightening and the whirlpool is horrifying; how could those on the shore realize our plight?

2. How is self-correction compatible with the writing of such a treatise?

To answer this question, we could say:

The conditions under which Imam (as) was living could make him think about nobody except God, but he himself has said that his son is a part of him: because his son's existence depends on his existence, or his son is the whole of him because after the father, the son will be his substitute and an heir of his knowledge and virtues:

Thus the Imam's attention to his son equals his attention to himself and damage to his son is damage to himself.

3. Concerning the above points, the significance of the present treatise becomes clear. Imam was under severe conditions at the time of writing this letter. He should have spent his time solving those problems, but he preferred to write this treatise. This shows by not writing this letter, Imam (as) would have thought he had not carried out his parental and Imamate duties. Thus, under dire situations, and prior to his arrival at the caliphate center (i.e., Kufa), Imam (as) started writing it. This makes the task of parents and leaders in constructing the family and society even harder.[39](#)

The poet says:

What are you fighting for, the contenders have all gone,
Prepare yourself for the voyage, friends have all gone,
That wandering dust in the desert,

Tells you to depart, since all the jockeys have gone.
Alas, the story tellers have all departed;
Alas, all the sorrow-filled people have gone.
We regret that the holders of spiritual treasures,
They left their treasures to friends and have gone.
The spring's eyelashes are stained with blood for the departure of friends.
They left you in front of your eyes, like the spring clouds.

Another poet says:

Each moment a breath passes by,
When I see, there is not much left of it.
You have been unaware even if you are fifty,
You have five days left; see what you can do with it.
Ashamed will be the man, who left without having done any good deeds,

The horn of departure was rung, but he prepared nothing.
The sweet sleep and the morning
Will hinder the walker from going.
Anybody who arrived on the scene built a building,
And then left, leaving his building to others,
And the other had whims of his own,
And this building was not ever-lasting.

Do not make friends with an unstable thing,
This cruel one does not deserve your friendship.
Every body, both good and bad, should die,
Blessed is he who does good deeds in the world.

Send in advance a record of good deeds to your grave,
Nobody will bring it, you send it in advance.
Life is short and like snow in the summer heat,
There is only a little left, but we are still haughty.
Diligently listen to Sa'di's advice,
The way is like this, be a man, be prepared.

"قَائِي اَوْصِيكَ بِتَقْوَى اللّٰهِ - اَيُّ بُنْيِّ - وَكُلُّوْمِ اَمْرِهِ، وَعِمَارَةِ
قَلْبِكَ بِذِكْرِهِ، وَالْاِعْتِصَامَ بِحَبْلِهِ، وَايُّ سَبَبٍ اَوْثَقُ مِنْ سَبَبِ بَيْنِكَ
وَبَيْنَ اللّٰهِ اِنْ اَنْتَ اَخَذْتَ بِهِ؟! اَجِي قَلْبَكَ بِالْمَوْعِظَةِ، وَاَمْتَهُ
بِالزُّهَادَةِ، وَقُوَّهُ بِالْيَقِيْنِ، وَنُوِّرْهُ بِالْحِكْمَةِ، وَدَلِّلْهُ بِذِكْرِ الْمَوْتِ،
وَقَرِّرْهُ بِالْقَنَاءِ، وَبَصِّرْهُ فَجَائِعَ الدُّنْيَا، وَحَدِّرْهُ صَوْلَةَ الدَّهْرِ،
وَفُحْشَ تَقَلُّبِ اللَّيَالِي وَالْاَيَّامِ، وَاَعْرُضْ عَلَيْهِ اَخْبَارَ الْمَاضِيْنَ،
وَدَكِّرْهُ بِمَا اَصَابَ مَنْ كَانَ قَبْلَكَ مِنَ الْاَوَّلِيْنَ، وَسِرُّ فِي دِيَارِهِمْ
وَاَثَارِهِمْ، فَاَنْظُرْ فِيْمَا فَعَلُوْا وَعَمَّا اِنْتَقَلُوْا، وَاَيْنَ حَلُّوْا وَنَزَلُوْا،
فَاِنَّكَ تَجِدُهُمْ قَدْ اِنْتَقَلُوْا عَنِ الْاَجْبَةِ، وَحَلُّوْا دَارَ الْغُرْبَةِ، وَكَانَكَ
عَنْ قَلِيْلِ قَدْ صِرْتَ كَاَحَدِهِمْ قَاصِلِحَ مَثْوَاكَ وَلَا تَتَّبِعْ اَخْرَتَكَ بِدُنْيَاكَ
وَدَعِ الْقَوْلَ فِيْمَا لَا تَعْرِفُ، وَالْخِطَابَ فِيْمَا لَمْ تُكَلِّفْ، وَاَمْسِكْ عَنِ
طَرِيْقِ اِذَا خِفْتَ ضَلَالَتَهُ، فَاِنَّ الْكُفَّ عِنْدَ خَيْرَةِ الضَّلَالَةِ خَيْرٌ مِنْ
رُكُوْبِ الْاَهْوَالِ وَاَمْرٍ بِالْمَعْرُوْفِ تَكُنْ مِنْ اَهْلِهِ وَاَنْكِرِ الْمُنْكَرَ بِيَدِكَ
وَلِسَانِكَ وَبَايْنَ مَنْ فَعَلَهُ بِجَهْدِكَ وَجَاهِدْ فِي اللّٰهِ حَقَّ جِهَادِهِ وَلَا
تَأْخُذْ فِي اللّٰهِ لَوْمَةً لَّا تُؤْمِرُ وَخُضْ الْعَمَرَاتِ لِلْحَقِّ حَيْثُ كَانَ
وَتَقَفَّهُ فِي الدِّيْنِ وَعَوُدْ نَفْسَكَ التَّصَبُّرِ عَلَى الْمَكْرُوْهِ وَنِعْمَ
الْخُلُقُ التَّصَبُّرُ فِي الْحَقِّ وَالْجِيءِ نَفْسَكَ فِي الْاُمُوْر كُلِّهَا اِلَى
اِلَهِكَ فَاِنَّكَ تُلْجِئُهَا اِلَى كَهْفِ حَرِيْرٍ وَمَانِعِ عَزِيْرٍ وَاخْلِصْ فِي
الْمُسَالَةِ لِرَبِّكَ فَاِنَّ يَدِيْهِ الْعَطَاءِ وَالْجِرْمَانَ وَاكْثِرِ الْاِسْتِخَارَةَ
وَتَقَهَّمْ وَصِيَّتِي وَلَا تُذْهَبَنَّ عَنْكَ صَفْحًا فَاِنَّ خَيْرَ الْقَوْلِ مَا نَفَعَ
وَاَعْلَمُ اَنَّهُ لَا خَيْرَ فِي عِلْمٍ لَا يُنْفَعُ وَلَا يُنْتَفَعُ بِعِلْمٍ لَا يَحَقُّ تَعَلُّمُهُ"

"I recommend to you God-wariness, my son, and the fulfillment of God's commands,
inhabiting your heart with His remembrance and adherence to His cord. What cord is firmer
than that between you and God, if you take hold of it?

Enliven your heart through exhortation and cause it to die through abstinence, strengthen it

with certainty, illuminate it with wisdom and make it submissive with the remembrance of death. Make it acknowledge its mortality, cause it to perceive the calamities of this world, warn it of the assault of time, and the evil inconstancy of the nights and days.

Present to it the reports of the past ones, and remind it of what befell the earlier ones before you. Travel in their lands and (among) their remains, and see what they did, from what they have moved away, and where they arrived at and settled. You will find them having moved away from their loved ones and having inhabited an alien abode and (it is) as if you will soon become like one of them. Therefore, set right your place of rest and do not sell your next life for your world.

Do not talk about what you do not know or speak about what is not required of you. Keep away from a path if you fear it will lead you astray, for holding back from the perplexity of misguidance is better than encountering terrifying events. Bid others to do good and you will be one of them; reject evil with your hand and your tongue, and do your utmost to separate from one who does evil. 'Strive in the way of God as is His due' (ref.22:78) and do not let the reproach of any reproacher have any influence on you in the path of God.

Plunge into hardships for the sake of truth wherever it may be, and become learned in religion. Habituate yourself to patient endurance in afflictions; the best of moral traits is to constrain yourself to patience in the (path of) truth. Commit your self in all your affairs to your God, for you will thus be committing it to a secure cave and a mighty protector. Be sincere in your asking from your Lord, for in His hand is the bestowal and refusal, and ask God frequently for the best. Understand my testament and do not disregard it, for indeed the best speech is that which is beneficial. Know that there is no good in knowledge that is not beneficial, and knowledge that is not worthy of acquisition is not beneficial".

Commentary

Imam 'Ali (as), in this treatise, has emphasized a series of commands and methods for obeying God, and preparing piety and cleansing the heart of impurities and filling it out with virtues and taking lessons from the people in the past and selecting the best method of living. Each one of these deserves a research:

1. . Safinah al-Bihar, vol.1, p.30, item Amal (desire).
2. . Safinah al-Bihar, vol.1, p.30, item Amal (desire).
3. . Nahj al-Balaghah, Sermon 42.
4. . Kashkul, Shaykh al-Baha'i, p.33; Nahj al-Balaghah, Hikmah, p.336.
5. . Some of the expositors of Nahj al-Balaghah, assuming that the word "desire" is not appropriate for an innocent Imam, relegate these words to the caliphate. But this is not necessary. Imam (as) in this treatise wants to depict the duties of one ordinary father and son and not the duties of an infallible father or an infallible son (Nahj al-Balaghah, Ibn Abi al-Hadid, Old print, vol. 4. p 27.
6. . Safinah al-Bihar, vol.1, p 30, the term Amal (hope).
7. . Qur'an 90:4.
8. . Nahj al-Balaghah, Hikmah 454.
9. . Nafs al-Mahmum, p 106.
10. . Qur'an 2:86.
11. . Qur'an 3:185.
12. . Qur'an 24:39.
13. . Nahj al-Balaghah, Hikmah 109.
14. Ghurar wa Durar, al-Amidi, vol.5, p.180
15. .Qur'an 9:111.
16. .Qur'an 2:207.
17. . Nahj al-Balaghah, Sermon 32.
18. . Ghurar wa Durar, al-Amidi, vol.2, p.569.

19. Ibid. vol. 3. p.57.
 20. Wherever you are, death will overtake you, though you are in lofty towers. [Qur'an 4: 78].
 21. Every soul shall taste of death [Qur'an 3:185].
 22. "Farid and Jodei' Encyclopedia", vol.1. p.95.
 23. Qur'an 7:128.
 24. Ghurar wa Durar, al-Amidi, vol.1, p.214.
 25. Nafs al-Mahmum.
 26. Safinah al-Bihar, vol.1, p.249.
 27. Ibid.
 28. Bihar, vol. 2, p.72.
 29. Bihar, vol.96, p.28.
 30. Safinah al-Bihar, vol.1. p.249.
 31. Ibid.
 32. Ghurar wa Durar, al-Amidi, vol.5, p.424.
 33. Nur al-Thaqalayn, vol.3, p.188.
 34. Ghurar al-Hikam, al-Amidi, vol. 2, p.412.
 35. Qur'an 12:53.
 36. Tuhaf al-'Uqul, p.173.
 37. Qur'an 38:82.
 38. Qur'an 2:124.
 39. In writing these notes, I have used Ibn Abi al-Hadid's Sharh Nahj al-Balaghah, vol. 4. p.29, and Ibn Maytham, vol 5. pp5-7.

1) My Son, I recommend you to God-wariness

"فإني أوصيك بتقوى الله"

The word "*taqwa*" or "God-wariness" and its derivatives have been used in the Qur'an, Nahj al-Balaghah and other books on tradition, and have a special place in the sermons delivered by the Great Prophet (S) and the Infallible Ones (as) and other men of God.

This word stems from an internal power based on God's purest belief. If anybody wishes to go God's genuine ways and if he opposes showing animosity towards these principles, he should possess this worthy attribute.

Furthermore, this power is both an impetus for performing one's duties and a protection against wrong-doing. Of course, factors such as education, conscience, criminal laws, and social modesty may stop a person from doing wrong things, but these are neither general, nor reliable. The Imam (as) elsewhere has said,

"إِنَّ مَنْ فَارَقَ التَّقْوَى أَعْرِيَ بِاللَّدَاتِ وَالشَّهَوَاتِ وَوَقَعَ فِي تَيْبِ
السَّيِّئَاتِ وَلَزِمَهُ كَثِيرُ التَّبِعَاتِ"

"Indeed, a person who abandons God-wariness becomes desirous of pleasures and lusts, and enters into the wilderness of evil deeds, and will suffer many evil consequences of his actions".¹

Among the leaders of religion, perhaps Imam 'Ali (as) has spoken on God-wariness and its role more than any other leaders. In sermon 188 in Nahj al-Balaghah, Imam has enumerated more than 100 attributes for the godwary. At the end of the sermon, Hammam, who was among the listeners, lamented severely, becoming unconscious and passing away immediately.

The Imam (as) at one place calls God-wariness a fortified tower², at another occasion he has called it the best treasure of prosperity³ and at another point calls it the best provision for the Hereafter⁴ and at another occasion he calls it a panacea for every defect of the body⁵.

Besides these, God-wariness has two other important effects:

i) Anybody possessing God-wariness will have a sort of insight by which he will understand the secrets behind the creation.

"إِنْ تَتَّقُوا اللَّهَ يَجْعَلْ لَكُمْ فُرْقَانًا"

"If you are God-wary, God will grant you the power of distinction"⁶

It is also mentioned in a tradition:

**"مَنْ أَخْلَصَ لِلَّهِ أَرْبَعِينَ صَبَاحًا ظَهَرَتْ يَنَابِيعُ الْحِكْمَةِ مِنْ قَلْبِهِ
عَلَى لِسَانِهِ"**

"He who is sincere to God for forty days, springs of wisdom will arise from his heart onto his tongue."⁷

It is also narrated in al-Kafi from Imam al-Baqir (as):

**"مَا أَخْلَصَ الْعَبْدُ الْإِيمَانَ بِاللَّهِ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ أَرْبَعِينَ يَوْمًا، أَوْ قَالَ مَا
أَجْمَلَ عَبْدٌ ذَكَرَ اللَّهَ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ أَرْبَعِينَ يَوْمًا - إِلَّا زَهَّدَهُ اللَّهُ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ
فِي الدُّنْيَا وَبَصَّرَهُ دَاءَهَا وَدَوَاءَهَا فَاتَّبَتِ الْحِكْمَةُ فِي قَلْبِهِ وَانطَقَ
بِهَا لِسَانَهُ"**

"A servant does not make his faith sincere for God for forty days", or he said: "A servant

does not render beautiful the mention of God for forty days, except that God will make him undesirous of the world and give him insight into its diseases and its remedies. He will establish wisdom in his heart and make his tongue speak it".⁸

ii) With the attainment of the precious capital of virtue, problems and hardships will be solved.

**"وَمَنْ يَتَّقِ اللَّهَ يَجْعَلْ لَهُ مَخْرَجًا وَيَرْزُقْهُ مِنْ حَيْثُ لَا يَحْتَسِبُ
وَمَنْ يَتَّقِ اللَّهَ يَجْعَلْ لَهُ مِنْ أَمْرِهِ يُسْرًا"**

"And whoever is careful of (his duty to) Allah, He will make for him an outlet, and give him sustenance from whence he thinks not.."

"..And whoever is careful of (his duty to) Allah He will make easy for him his affair".⁹

Regarding all these points, it is the important role of God-wariness which Imam 'Ali (as) puts in front of the agenda of his son's life.

Of course, as it is repeatedly stated, this emphasis is not only for Imam 'Ali's son, but for all the believers who wish to possess human life and enjoy God-given insight and resolve the problems.

¹ . Ghurar al-Hikam, al-Amidi, vol.2. p.597.

² . Ghurar al-Hikam.

³ . Bihar, vol.77, p.374.

⁴ . Nahj al-Balaghah, Sermon 221.

⁵ . Nahj al-Balaghah, Sermon 198.

⁶ . Qur'an 8:29.

⁷ . Awsaf al-Ashraf, Khwaja Nasir al-Din Tusi, p.15; Refer to the Treatise of Bahr al-'Ulum's Sayr wa Suluk, pp. 22-23.

⁸ . Usul al-Kafi, vol.2, p.16.

⁹ . Qur'an 65:2-3; Qur'an 65:5.

2) Fulfilment of God's Commands

" لزوم أمره "

No doubt, God's commands are issued for the benefit of individuals and societies. A pious man, in order to gain these benefits, should always obey God's commands. It is narrated from Imam Baqir(as):

"أَحَبُّ الْأَعْمَالِ إِلَى اللَّهِ عَزَّوَجَلَّ مَا دَامَ عَلَيْهِ الْعَبْدُ وَإِنْ قَلَّتْ"

"The deeds most loved by God are those which the servant performs continually, although they may be few."¹

Of course, man, through his exercise and continuity of performing his tasks, attains growth; or else, he would remain in one condition, which is a complete loss. Regarding this, Imam Sadiq (as) has stated:

"مَنْ أَسْتَوَى يَوْمَاهُ فَهُوَ مَعْبُودٌ وَمَنْ كَانَ آخِرُ يَوْمِهِ شَرُّهُمَا فَهُوَ
مَلْعُونٌ وَمَنْ لَمْ يَعْرِفِ الزِّيَادَةَ فِي نَفْسِهِ كَانَ إِلَى النُّقْصَانِ
أَقْرَبُ وَمَنْ كَانَ إِلَى النُّقْصَانِ أَقْرَبَ فَالْمَوْتُ خَيْرٌ لَهُ مِنَ الْحَيَاةِ"

"He whose two days are the same, has suffered loss. He whose second day is the worse of the two days, is cursed. He who does not see any increase (in good) in himself is nearer to loss, and death is better than life for one who is nearer to loss."²

It is on the basis of this fact that the Imam (as) orders his son and his other spiritual sons to obey God's commands so that the spirit of development and attaining genuine benefits and the obedience of God's commands are kept alive in children.

¹ . Bihar al-Anwar, vol.71, p.219.

² . Bihar al-Anwar, vol.17, p.173.

3) Inhabit your Heart with God's Remembrance

"عمارة قلبك بذكره"

Remembering God is emphasized both in the Holy Qur'an and Islamic traditions¹ to the degree that it is considered more important than the prayer² itself. It is considered the most favorable act.³

In the Qur'an and tradition a lot of benefits are enumerated for God's remembrance. Among them are the following:

(i) God's remembrance is a comfort for hearts:

"الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَتَطْمَئِنُّ قُلُوبُهُمْ بِذِكْرِ اللَّهِ أَلَا بِذِكْرِ اللَّهِ تَطْمَئِنُّ"

الْقُلُوبُ

"Those who believe and whose hearts are set at rest by the remembrance of Allah; now surely by Allah's remembrance are the hearts set at rest."⁴

(ii) Allah's remembrance takes away any mental disturbances and forces one to perform good deeds both in the private and in public and keeps him from evil-doing and sins.

(iii) Allah's remembrance keeps man away from disunion and Satan's temptations. "God's remembrance is a believer's capital and its benefit is protection against the Satan."

On the other hand, stopping God's remembrance and forgetting Him entails the following consequences:

i. Turning away from God's remembrance results in one's life becoming straitened:

"وَمَنْ أَعْرَضَ عَن ذِكْرِي فَإِنَّ لَهُ مَعِيشَةً ضَنْكًا وَنَحْشُرُهُ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ أَعْمَى"

"And whoever turns away from my remembrance, his shall surely be a straitened life, and We will raise him on the day of resurrection, blind".⁵

ii. Anybody who forgets God's remembrance will be the Satan's companion.

"وَمَنْ يَعْشُ عَن ذِكْرِ الرَّحْمَانِ نُقَيِّضْ لَهُ شَيْطَانًا فَهُوَ لَهُ قَرِينٌ"

"And whoever turns himself away from the remembrance of the Beneficent God, We appoint for him a Shaitan, so he becomes his associate".⁶

iii. Anybody who forgets Allah's remembrance shall be subjected to forgetting his own identity. Such a person will definitely go against man's perfection:

"وَلَا تَكُونُوا كَالَّذِينَ نَسُوا اللَّهَ فَأَنْسَاهُمْ أَنْفُسَهُمْ"

"And be not like those who forsook Allah's so He made them forsake their own souls".⁷

And in Sura al-Tawbah Allah has stated:

نَسُوا اللَّهَ فَنَسِيَهُمْ

*"They have forsaken Allah, so He has forsaken them."*⁸

Factors For And Against God's Remembrance

In the Holy Qur'an and Islamic Tradition there are mention of those factors which either make God's remembrance easy or make it difficult:

a. There are some God-wary persons whose appearances make one remember God. Regarding this, the Great Prophet has stated:

"خِيَارُكُمْ مَن ذَكَرَكُمْ بِاللَّهِ رُؤْيَتْهُ وَزَادَ عِلْمَكُمْ مَنْطِقُهُ وَرَعَّبَكُمْ فِي الْآخِرَةِ عَمَلُهُ"

"The best of you are those looking at whom reminds you of God, whose speech increases your knowledge and whose actions make you desire the Hereafter".⁹

b. The Holy Qur'an and its constructive verses is a good factor to remember God:

"إِنَّ هَذِهِ تَذْكِرَةٌ فَمَنْ شَاءَ اتَّخَذَ إِلَىٰ رَبِّهِ سَبِيلًا"

"Surely this is a reminder, then let him who will, take the way to his Lord".¹⁰

c. The Prophets, too, are good reminders of Allah:

"فَذَكِّرْ إِنَّمَا أَنْتَ مُذَكِّرٌ"

*"Therefore do remind, for you are only a reminder."*¹¹

d. A Survey of the lives of the great men in the past, too, is a factor to remember Allah.

"وَكَمْ أَهْلَكْنَا قَبْلَهُمْ مِنْ قَرْنٍ هُمْ أَشَدُّ مِنْهُمْ بَطْشًا فَنَقَّبُوا فِي الْبِلَادِ هَلْ مِنْ مَّحِيصٍ إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ لَذِكْرٍ لِمَنْ كَانَ لَهُ قَلْبٌ أَوْ أَلْقَى السَّمْعَ وَهُوَ شَهِيدٌ"

"And how many a generation did we destroy before them who were mightier in prowess than they, so they went about and about in the lands. Is there a place of refuge? Most surely there is a reminder in this for him who has a heart or he gives ear and is a witness."[12](#)

e. God's prayer is also a factor to remember God.

"أَقِمِ الصَّلَاةَ لِذِكْرِي"

"Keep up prayer for My remembrance"[13](#)

But there are factors which hinder Allah's remembrance: Among them are the following:

a. A liking for the transitory appearances of the world:

"لَا تُلْهِكُمْ أَمْوَالُكُمْ وَلَا أَوْلَادُكُمْ عَنْ ذِكْرِ اللَّهِ"

"Let not your wealth or your children divert you from the remembrance of Allah".[14](#)

b. Far-fetched and unattainable hopes:

"وَيُلْهِمُ الْأَمَلُ"

"That hope may beguile them".[15](#)

c. Shaitan (Satan) is also one of the factors which make us forget God:

"اسْتَحْوَذَ عَلَيْهِمُ الشَّيْطَانُ فَأَنسَاهُمْ ذِكْرَ اللَّهِ"

"Shaitan has gained mastery over them, so he has made them forget the remembrance of Allah".[16](#)

d. Committing sins and following one's desires are also among the factors that make us forget God:

"لَيْسَ فِي الْمَعَاصِي أَشَدُّ مِنْ اتِّبَاعِ الشَّهْوَةِ وَلَا تُطِيعُوهَا"

فَتَشْغَلْكُمْ عَنْ ذِكْرِ اللَّهِ

"Among sins, there is no sin worse than following one's desires. Therefore, do not obey them since they will divert you from the remembrance of God."[17](#)

The Great Prophet, regarding this, has stated: "A person who obeys God definitely remembers God, although his prayers and fasting and his reading of Qur'an might be little. Anybody who commits sins has definitely forgotten God although his prayers and fasting and his reciting of the Qur'an might be a lot."[18](#)

The Reality Behind God's Remembrance

At the end of this discussion, it is necessary to mention the following fact: should God's remembrance, which has so many benefits and whose negligence entails so many evil consequences, including the one which the Imam has emphasized: "My son, I recommend that you inhabit your heart with remembrance of God," be taken superficially or is there some other reality behind it?

No doubt, the mere repetition of expressions such as "Glory be to Allah, praise be to Allah, there is no god but Allah and Allah is great" **سُبْحَانَ اللَّهِ وَالْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ وَلَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ وَاللَّهُ أَكْبَرُ** cannot have all those benefits we have mentioned. The purpose behind remembering God should be the realization that God is present at every location and knows every good and evil action of ours.

Man should not be negligent of God. Obviously such remembrance of God forces man to carry out his tasks and makes him avoid indulging in disobedience.

Fortunately, in our Islamic traditions, there is a lot of emphasis on this point: Some of these will follow:

a) The Great Prophet, in his will to Imam 'Ali (as), stated:

"O 'Ali, a person cannot do justice in three things:

In sharing his possessions with his brother in faith, in carrying out justice towards others, and in remembering God at all times. God's remembrance does not only include saying "glory be to Allah, praise be to Allah, there is no god but Allah and Allah is great". Rather, it simply means: "when you want to commit a sin, be afraid and stop doing it."[19](#)

b) Imam as-Sadiq (as) has said, "Anybody who really remembers Allah, is obedient to Him and anybody who is negligent of such remembrance is sinful. Thus, obedience towards God is a sign of being on the right path and sin is a sign of being misguided. Both of these stem from either God's remembrance or negligence of His remembrance."[20](#)

c) Imam 'Ali (as) has said, "Don't remember God only at leisure time, neither forget Him when you are busy.

Remember Him when your tongue and your heart are in harmony. You will remember Him truly only when you forget yourself entirely".[21](#)

Clearly, this kind of remembrance of God will stop man from committing sins and will force him to carry out prayers. Such remembrance will enlighten and construct your hearts.

[1](#) . O you believe! Remember Allah, remembering frequently, And glorify Him morning and evening [Qur'an

33:41-42].

2. . And certainly the remembrance of Allah is the greatest [Qur'an 29:45].

3. . Kanz al-Ummal.

4. . Qur'an 13:28.

5. . Qur'an 20:124.

6. . Qur'an 43:36.

7. . Qur'an 59:19.

8. . Qur'an 9:67.

9. . Mizan al-Hikmah, vol.3, p.429.

10. . Qur'an 73:19.

11. . Qur'an 88:5.

12. . Qur'an 50:36-37.

13. . Qur'an 20:14.

14. . Qur'an 63:9.

15. . Qur'an 15:3.

16. . Qur'an 58:19.

17. . Ghurar al-Hikam.

18. . Mizan al-Hikmah, vol. 3, p.425.

19. . Safinah al-Bihar, vol.1, p.484.

20. . Bihar, vol. 93, p.158.

21. . Ghurar al-Hikam.

4) Adherence to His Cord

الاعتصام بحبله

Man in his life is constantly under the pressure of love for this world, love for possessions, love for positions and love for wife, children and other desires; these factors may make him go astray. He would never have reached man's perfection if God had not prepared for him some mechanisms to protect him. God has said:

"وَأَعْتَصِمُوا بِحَبْلِ اللَّهِ جَمِيعًا وَلَا تَفَرَّقُوا"

"And hold fast by the covenant of Allah altogether and be not disunited"¹

The question which is raised here is: What is meant by "The covenant of Allah"? Is it Islam, or Qur'an, or the Prophet's kinfolks?

The fact is that by "the covenant of Allah" is meant any means which leads him to the Divine aims. On the other hand, "The covenant of Shaitan" leads him astray.²

Thus, the Qur'an, Islam and the Prophet's family could be used as covenants, as it is written in traditions.³

The tradition of Abi Sa'eed al-Khudri narrated from the Prophet confirms this fact: The Prophet said,

"إِيَّهَا النَّاسُ إِنِّي قَدْ تَرَكْتُ فِيكُمْ حَبْلَيْنِ، إِنْ اتَّخَذْتُمْ بِهِمَا لَنْ تَضِلُّوا بَعْدِي، أَحَدُهُمَا أَكْبَرُ مِنَ الْآخَرِ: كِتَابَ اللَّهِ حَبْلٌ مَمْدُودٌ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ إِلَى الْأَرْضِ وَعِثْرَتِي أَهْلَ بَيْتِي إِنَّهُمَا لَنْ يَفْتَرَقَا حَتَّى يَرِدَا عَلَيَّ الْحَوْضَ"

"O people! I have left among you two cords (covenants). If you grasp them both, you will not go astray after me. One is greater than the other: the Book of God (the Qur'an), is a cord that extends from the heavens to the earth; and my near relations, the people of my house. The two will never part until they join me at the (Kawthar) pool."⁴

As you will notice, the Prophet of Islam negates separation on condition that we grasp those two cords. Or else, it will be useless because a sick man will not cure himself if he has the prescription and the drug without acting upon them. Islam, Qur'an and Prophet's family can not cure our spiritual and mental disturbances unless we obey God's command as issued in the Qur'an and stated by the Prophet's family members.

It is for this reason that Imam 'Ali recommends that his son - and all his spiritual sons as well - connect themselves with God's rope. He has emphasized that there is no bond and covenant stronger than that between God and mankind. This is on condition that one should act as he is ordered.

1. . Qur'an 3:103.

2. . In some traditions woman, gold and wealth are described as Satan's mountains.

3. . Tafsir al-Safi, vol. 1, p.285; Tafsir al-Mizan, vol. 3, pp.378-379.

4. . Safinah al-Bihar, vol.1, p.207.

5) Enliven Your Heart with Exhortation

احيي قلبك بالموعظة"

Exhortation is a discourse which gets people emotionally involved and guides man by warning him of the consequences of his evil-doing.

By listening to preaching, one's heart softens so much that he automatically is led towards good deeds.

Ustadh Mutahhari, in his discussion of wisdom and exhortation, has defined exhortation clearly.

He writes, "As it is written in the Qur'an,¹ exhortation is one of the three ways of calling people to Islam (wisdom, exhortation, disputation):

"ادْعُ إِلَى سَبِيلِ رَبِّكَ بِالْحُكْمَةِ وَالْمَوْعِظَةِ الْحَسَنَةِ وَجَادِلْهُمْ بِالَّتِي هِيَ أَحْسَنُ إِنَّ رَبَّكَ هُوَ أَعْلَمُ بِمَنْ ضَلَّ عَنْ سَبِيلِهِ وَهُوَ أَعْلَمُ بِالْمُهْتَدِينَ"

The Best Preachers And The Most Excellent Sermons

A wise and knowledgeable man takes advice from anything in the environment for there is a piece of advice in every thing. Regarding this, Imam 'Ali (as) has stated: "There is a piece of advice in everything for any learned and wise person."²

Abalkhayr is reported to have said, "I was crossing an alley where cleaners were cleaning a toilet-well. My companions covered their noses to avoid the stench and moved away. The cleaner addressed them, saying: This excrement tells you: We are the delicious food which you made efforts to acquire. We were in your body and were altered into excrement. Why do you flee from us? We are the color and stench of your insides."

Upon hearing this, the crowd shouted and started crying.³

But some preachers and certain sermons have a more subtle impact upon audience. Among them are the following:

a) The Qur'an

Nobody can give us pieces of advice better than Allah, who is aware of every aspect of our existence:

"إِنَّ اللَّهَ نِعِمَّا يَعِظُكُمْ بِهِ" 197

"Surely Allah admonishes you with what is excellent."

The Holy Qur'an, which is Allah's discourse, in many cases talks about admonishing. For this reason, the Great Prophet (S) calls the Holy Qur'an the most straightforward discourse and the sharpest admonishment and the best kind of stories.

Imam 'Ali (as), as well, emphasizes that: "Allah has not admonished anybody with words like those that appear in the Qur'an"⁴

b) Death and a survey of the lives of the men in the past:

Death and what happened to the men in the past are good preachers.

The Prophet (S) has said

:

كَفَى بِالْمَوْتِ وَاعِظًا

"Death is sufficient as an admonisher."⁵

Regarding this, Imam 'Ali (as) emphasizes:

"I recommend that you always remember death and lessen your negligence of it. How can you be heedless of what is not heedless of you, and hope from one who will not give you respite? Those dead people you have observed would suffice for your taking advice. They were carried to their graves without riding by themselves, and they were put in the graves without being able to descend by themselves.

It was as if they had not lived in this world and as if the Hereafter had always been their abode. They made desolate what they had taken as a home and made their home in what they had found to be desolate. They had occupied themselves with that from which they separated, and they neglected that to which they were moved. Now they cannot move away from the evil (they have committed) nor can they increase their good deeds. They had become intimate with the world and it deceived them; they trusted it and it threw them down.

Race, may God have mercy on you, to your dwellings which you have been commanded to inhabit, and of which you have been made desirous and to which you have been called. Seek the completion of the blessings of God on you with perseverance in obedience to Him, and keeping away from His disobedience, for tomorrow is close to today. How swiftly fly the hours of the day, and how swift the days in the month, how swift the months of the year, and how swift the years of a life!"⁶

Imam 'Ali (as), elsewhere, has emphasized the same point: "I recommend you, O servants of God, fearful awareness of God who has clothed you well and provided you abundant livelihood. If there was one who could find a ladder to eternal life or a way to repel death, that would have been Solomon, the son of David, to whom the dominion of the jinn and mankind was made subservient, together with (his) prophethood and great nobility. But when the subsistence assigned to him was finished, and his time was complete, the bows of annihilation struck him with the arrows of death! Lands became empty of him and (his) houses were unoccupied, and another people inherited them.

Indeed there is a lesson for you in the previous generations! Where are the Amalekites and the offspring of the Amalekites? Where are the Pharaohs and their offspring?

Where are the dwellers of the cities of Rass who killed the Prophets and stifled the traditions of the Messengers, and who revived the practices of the tyrants? Where are those who went with troops, defeated thousands, mobilized armies and built cities?"⁷

C) Time

The lapse of time, which sometimes makes one nation prosperous and another miserable, could be a good source of admonition. Imam Musa Ibn Ja'far (as), giving advice to his intelligent student Hisham, says:

"Take your advice from the world and its inhabitants." This might be one of the reasons why the Holy Qur'an swears by the Time or "wa'l 'Asr".

Imam 'Ali (as), considering the time as the best advice-giver and teacher, emphasizes the point at issue:

**"ابْلَغُ نَاصِحٍ لَكَ الدُّنْيَا لَوْ اِنْتَصَحْتَ بِمَا تُرِيكَ مِنْ تَغَايِرِ الْحَالَاتِ
وَتُوذُنِكَ بِالْبَيْنِ وَالشَّتَاتِ"**

"The world is the most effective counselor for you if you accept its advice in what it shows you of the changing conditions and what it informs you of separation and dispersion."[8](#)

What is disturbing is the fact that the lessons to be taken are numerous but the number of people who take advice is few.[9](#)

It is narrated: when Imam 'Ali (as) was passing Mada'in, he observed Noushirvan's castle which was in a dilapidated state.

Imam 'Ali (as) said: "Why do you not read Surah al-Dukhan's verses 25-29 from the Qur'an which say:

**"كَمْ تَرَكُوا مِنْ جَنَّاتٍ وَعُيُونٍ وَزُرُوعٍ وَمَقَامٍ كَرِيمٍ وَنَعْمَةٍ كَانُوا
فِيهَا فَاكِهِينَ كَذَلِكَ وَأَوْرَثْنَاهَا قَوْمًا آخَرِينَ فَمَا بَكَتْ عَلَيْهِمُ
السَّمَاءُ وَالْأَرْضُ وَمَا كَانُوا مُنظَرِينَ"**

"How many of the gardens and fountains have they left? And cornfields and noble places! And goodly things wherein they rejoiced; thus it was, and We gave them a heritage to another people. So the heaven and the earth did not weep for them, nor were they respited. [Qur'an 44:25-29]

[10](#)

D) Experiences

As we know, one of the safe ways of acquiring knowledge is to use other people's experiences.

Concerning this, Imam (as) in his letter says:

"Peruse diligently and decidedly those affairs which scholars have painstakingly gathered and have freed you from further attempts."

In ethics and advice as well, our experience is the best friend and agent for adopting the right way and avoiding the improper methods. In this regard, Imam 'Ali (as) has said:

"كَفَى بِالتَّجَارِبِ مُؤَدِّبًا"

(i) Experiences are sufficient for teaching the rules of ethics;

"كَفَى عِظَةً لِدَوِي الْاَلْبَابِ مَا جَرُّوا"

(ii) Experiences are the best source of advice for the wise;

"فِي كُلِّ تَجْرِبَةٍ مَوْعِظَةٌ"

(iii) There is a lesson in every experience;

"خَيْرُ مَا جَرَّبْتَ مَا وَعَظَكَ"

(iv) The best of experiences is that which admonishes you;

"الْعَاقِلُ مَنْ وَعَظْتَهُ التَّجَارِبُ"

(v) The wise man is he who gets advice from his experiences.[11](#)

It is on the basis of such observations that the Prophet (S) has said:

"لَا يُلْدَغُ الْمُؤْمِنُ مِنْ جُحْرٍ مَرَّتَيْنِ"

"A believer is not bitten twice from the same hole."[12](#)

The Most Superior Exhortations:

Since the number of the most superior exhortations in the Qur'an, Tradition and Prophets' maxims is great, it would be impossible to include all of them here. Here it will suffice to present only fifteen of the best exhortations: one of which is from the Qur'an and the rest from the 14 infallible ones (as).

a)"Say: I exhort you only to one thing, that rise up for Allah's sake in twos and singly." [13](#)

"قُلْ إِنَّمَا أَعِظُكُمْ بِوَاحِدَةٍ أَنْ تَقُومُوا لِلَّهِ مَثْنَى وَفُرَادَى"

As you will notice, God exhorts people, in this verse, only to one thing: that is, rise up only for God's sake, not for other considerations, and it is this kind of uprising which is fruitful. Imam Khomeini, (may God bless him) 45 years ago, when a mercenary writer insulted the Islamic sanctities, wrote a letter which still exists in Yazd's Vaziri library. He has brought up the issue of uprising for God's sake:

"The exalted God has, in this honorable discourse, referred to everything from nature up to man's humanity. It is the best exhortation which the God of the worlds has adopted. This item is the only way of reformation in this world: it is uprising for God which raised the status of Ibrahim and has freed him from nature; it is this word which made Moses (as) defeat the Pharaoh and his followers with a staff, and put an end to their dynasty. It was this word which made the last of the Prophets (as) single-handedly defeat the beliefs and customs of the pagan state of the Arabs before Islam and throw out their idols from God's House, substituting piety and monotheism for them."[14](#)

It is just this exhortation which is called "a preliminary stage to Manazil Al-Sa'irin" by the gnostics and is recommended that every gnostic carry it out."[15](#)

b) Qays Ibn Aasim says:

"Some men of Bani Tameem and I went to pay a visit to the Prophet (S) and said: O God's Prophet! Since we are not always in your presence and since we live in the desert, please exhort us so that we may be on the right path.

The Prophet (S) said, "O Qays: There is always wretchedness with glory, death with life, and Hereafter with the world. Each one of us is also accountable for what we do, either good or bad.

"You are inevitably accompanied by a person who is put in grave with you: you are dead, but he is alive. If he is generous, he will endear you. If he is wretched, he will betray you. Then, you together will be present on the Day of Judgment.

They will ask you about him. Thus, choose the proper person. That is because if he is a good-doer, you will accompany him and if he is wretched, you will be afraid of him. He is your action."[16](#)

c) Fatima al-Zahra (as) in a sermon which she delivered before the Muhajirin and Ansar, after the death of the Prophet (S), emphasized the observance of piety and worship of God and obedience to the Prophet (S) saying "God, the Almighty, appointed faith to purify you from idolatry, prayer to rid you of arrogance, zakat (statutory Islamic levy on specified items to be used for Muslims' welfare) to cleanse your soul and to add to your sustenance, fasting to strengthen your sincerity, Hajj pilgrimage to fortify the structure of religion, justice to put the hearts in order, obedience to us to set the nation in order, Imamate to secure unity, Jihad to secure the dignity of Islam, patience to receive the rightful wages, the principle of enjoining the good for the welfare of the public, doing good towards parents to protect yourselves against Allah's wrath, establishing ties of kinship to lengthen your lives, retaliation to stop bloodshed, fulfillment of solemn vows to get Allah's pardon, precision in weighing articles to stop cheating, banning the drinking of wine to secure the cleanliness of souls, avoidance of accusation to stay away from God's curses, abandonment of theft and robbery in pursuance of virtuousness, and He forbade polytheism for sincere devotion to His Lordship.

"Therefore, *..be wary of God with the wariness due to him and do not die except as muslims*" (3:102).

Obey God in that which He has commanded you to do and that from which He has forbidden you. For **"..only those of God's servants having knowledge fear Him"** (35:28).[17](#)

d) Imam 'Ali (as) has stated: "I recommend to you five things in order to seek which, if you ride swift camels towards them, it would be fitting.

(i) None of you should hope from anyone except his Lord.

(ii) None should fear anything except his sins.

(iii) When asked about what you have no knowledge of, none of you should be ashamed to say 'I do not know.'

(iv) If one of you does not know something, he should not be ashamed to learn it.

(v) Adhere to patience, patience in relation to faith is like the head in relation to the body. There is no good in a body with no head; so also in faith with no patience.[18](#)

e) Imam Hasan al-Mujtaba, among his recommendations has said, "O children of Adam, avoid doing what Allah has forbidden you in order for you to be considered as His obedient subjects. Be content with what Allah has given you till you become affluent; behave kindly with your neighbors in order for you to be a true Muslim. Behave towards people as you would like to be treated. There used to be rich people among you who had amassed lots of possessions and had built fortified buildings and had far-fetched whims and desires. All of them were destroyed and their residences turned into graves.

O children of Adam! You have been trying to annihilate yourselves ever since you were born. Then save from what you have for your future. This is because a true believer prepares provisions and an infidel indulges in transitory pleasures.

Imam Hasan (as) then recited this verse from Surah al-Baqarah, verse 197:

"وَتَزَوَّدُوا فَإِنَّ خَيْرَ الزَّادِ التَّقْوَى"

"And make provision, for surely the best provision is the guarding of oneself" [Qur'an 2:197].

f) A man arrived at Imam Husayn's presence, saying: I am a guilty man; I am unable to avoid sins. Give me a piece of advice. Imam Husayn (as) replied: "Do five things, then commit any number of sins you wish:

(i) Do not make consume God's sustenance and then commit any number of wrong-doings.

(ii) Go outside God's territory, then commit whatever sins you want.

(iii) Select a place for carrying out your sins where God is not present. Then do what you wish.

(iv) When the Angel of Death comes to take away your soul, make him leave you; then do what you wish.

(v) When Malik (the Angel of Hell) wants to throw you in the Fire, do not enter the Hell; then, do as you wish.[19](#)

Of course, this tradition is attributed at the same time to the Prophet (S), Imam Hasan (as) and Imam Zayn al-'Abidin (as).

g) A man came to Imam 'Ali Ibn al-Husayn (as) and complained about his troubles. Imam (as) told him, "Adam's child is miserable because everyday he encounters three calamities, but he does not take a lesson. It would be easy for him if he took lessons from his troubles: First, every day his life becomes shorter. He becomes depressed if there is reduction in his possessions. But he should know that there is a substitute for worldly possessions, none for one's life, however.

Secondly, he makes complete use of his daily bread. If it is religiously permissive (*halal*), he will be accounted for, and if it is not permissible, then he will be punished.

Thirdly, and this is graver than the other two: when he brings a day to the end, he is in fact approaching the Hereafter, still not knowing whether he is heading for Heaven or Hell.[20](#)

h) Says Jabir Ibn Yazid al-Ju'fi, I worked for eighteen years for Imam al-Baqir (as). On getting permission to leave him, I asked him for a piece of advice. Imam asked: "Jabir, after eighteen years? You are a bottomless ocean of knowledge which is obtainable by nobody". Then Imam said: "Send my regards to my followers and tell them: There is no distance between us and God. Nobody may approach Him, but through His worship.

O Jabir, anybody who obeys God and loves us is considered as our friend; anybody who commits sins, our friendship for him is useless.

O Jabir, is there anybody who asks God for something, but is denied to receive it? Is there anybody who relies on God, but receives no protection? Is there anybody who trusts God, but is betrayed by Him?

O Jabir, consider this world as a shelter in which you will stay just for a few days and then you will leave it. Isn't the world like a horse on which you ride in your dreams but when you wake up there is no trace of the horse? This world is comparable to a used garment.

O Jabir, for wise people, this world is like a shadow.[21](#)

The expression "There is no god but Allah" is a source of magnanimity of the speaker of it. Prayer is a means to avoid arrogance, alms will increase one's daily bread; fasting and Hajj pacify the hearts. Religious punishment protects people's bloodshed and friendship with the Prophet's family strengthens the religion. May God put us among those who, in private, fear their God and are fearful of the Resurrection Day."[22](#)

i) Sufyan al-Thawri says, "I went to the presence of Imam al-Ja'far (as) and I told him: Give me a piece of advice to keep after you; Imam asked: Will you remember it, O Sufyan? I replied: Yes, O son of the Prophet's daughter. Then he said: O Sufyan: A liar lacks manliness; a liar is not at comfort.

There is no brother for kings, no friends for the arrogant, no generous person for a bad-tempered person.

Then, the Imam (as) was silent. I asked him, O son of the Prophet's daughter, please continue. He said: O Sufyan: rely on God to become knowledgeable; be content with what God has given you to feel affluent; behave with people as they behave with you to increase your faith; do not be company to wicked people since they will teach you some of their wickedness and in your affairs, consult those who are God-fearing.

Then I pleaded once again. He said: O Sufyan, one who wishes for glory without power and affluence should prefer God's glorious obedience to the wretchedness of committing sins.

O Sufyan: My father exhorted me to three things and warned me against three others: He said, My son: one who accompanies wicked people shall not remain intact; one who is not careful in his speech, will be regretful; and one who frequents nasty places will be accused. I asked: O son of God's Prophet: what are those three things which you were warned against?

He said: My father told me not to accompany one who is jealous towards one's affluence, the rejoicer at another's misfortune, and a talebearer."[23](#)

j) Imam Musa al-Kadhim (as) has said:

"إِجْتَهَدُوا فِي أَنْ يَكُونَ زَمَانُكُمْ أَرْبَعَ سَاعَاتٍ: سَاعَةٌ لِمُنَاجَاتِ
اللَّهِ وَسَاعَةٌ لِأَمْرِ الْمَعَاشِ وَسَاعَةٌ لِمُعَاشَرَةِ الْإِخْوَانِ وَالْثِقَاتِ
الَّذِينَ يُعَرِّفُونَكُمْ غُيُوبَكُمْ وَيُخْلِصُونَ لَكُمْ فِي الْبَاطِنِ، وَسَاعَةٌ
تَخْلُونَ فِيهَا لِلذَّاتِ فِي غَيْرِ مَحْرَمٍ وَبِهَذِهِ السَّاعَةِ تَقْدِرُونَ عَلَى
الثَّلَاثِ سَاعَاتٍ. لَا تُحَدِّثُوا أَنْفُسَكُمْ بِفَقْرٍ وَلَا بِطُولِ عُمُرٍ فَإِنَّهُ مَن
حَدَّثَ نَفْسَهُ بِالْفَقْرِ بَخِلَ وَمَن حَدَّثَهَا بِطُولِ الْعُمُرِ يَحْرُسُ.

اجْعَلُوا لِأَنْفُسِكُمْ حَظًّا مِنَ الدُّنْيَا بِاعْطَائِهَا مَا تَشْتَهِي مِنَ الْحَلَالِ
وَمَا لَا يَتَلَمُّ الْمُرُوءَ وَمَا لَا سَرَفَ فِيهِ وَاسْتَعِينُوا بِذَلِكَ عَلَى أُمُورِ
الدِّينِ فَإِنَّهُ رُوي: «لَيْسَ مِنَّا مَنْ تَرَكَ دُنْيَاهُ لِدِينِهِ أَوْ تَرَكَ دِينَهُ
لِدُنْيَاهُ»

"Strive to divide your time into four portions: one fourth to pray God, one fourth to earn your sustenance, one fourth to be in the company of your brethren and the trustworthy ones who acquaint you with your faults and whose hearts are sincere to you, and one fourth in private to engage in lawful pleasures. This last part will give you energy to engage in the other three portions.

Do not dwell on thoughts of poverty or long life, for he who occupies himself with thoughts of poverty becomes stingy, and he who thinks of long life becomes greedy. Give your selves a share from this world by giving them the lawful things that they desire and that which is in keeping with a sense of honor and in which there is no extravagance. Seek help through that for the affairs of religion, for it is narrated: One who abandons his world for his religion or abandons his religion for his world is not of us."[24](#)

k) Imam al-Rida (as) has said: Seven things without seven others will cause the laughter of the public:

First, one who seeks Allah's forgiveness only orally, but is not regretful deep inside, has made fun of himself.

Second, one who asks for God's help, but shows no effort of himself, has made fun of himself.

Third, one who asks God for the paradise, but is not patient enough, has also made fun of himself.

Fourth, one who asks for God's protection against Hell-fire, but will not abandon corrupting and misleading lusts and desires, has made fun of himself, as well.

Fifth, one who talks about death but has not prepared himself for it, has made fun of himself.

Sixth, one who remembers death, but is not willing to face it, has made fun of himself.

Seventh, one who desires to be cautious, but does not show caution at the proper time, has made fun of himself.[25](#)

l) A man asked the ninth Imam (as), al-Jawad: Give me some advice. Imam (as) asked: Will you accept it? He said: Yes. Imam (as) said. "Be very close to patience, embrace poverty, reject desires and oppose (your) whims; and know that you are always watched by God. Thus, be watchful over what you do."[26](#)

m) Our tenth Imam, 'Ali al-Naqi (as) has said: "One who fears God is feared by others, and one who obeys God is obeyed by others. He who obeys the Creator does not fear the anger of (His) creatures, and he who angers the Creator should be certain that he will face the anger of (His) creatures."[27](#)

n) Imam Hasan al-Askari (as) told his Shi'a followers: I recommend to you God-wariness, utmost self-vigilance (in abstaining from the unlawful) [*wara'*] in your religion, striving for God's sake, truthfulness in speech, returning deposits to those who have entrusted them to you, whether virtuous or sinful, prolonging prostrations and good treatment of your neighbors, which was always done by Muhammad (as). Observe your prayers with your neighbors, attend their funerals and visit their sick. Fulfil their dues. When anyone of you is God-fearing in his religion, truthful in his speech, discharges his trust, and treats people amicably, and it is said: 'Such a person is my Shi'ah', then that will make me happy. Fear Allah and be an ornament and not a disgrace (for us).

Attract towards us every kind of love and repel from us everything unseemly, for we are worthy of any good that is said about us, and not of any evil spoken about us. We possess a right in the Book of God and a relationship with the Messenger of God and purification from God that none other than us can claim except a liar. Be frequent in the remembrance of God, the remembrance of death, in the recitation of the Qur'an and in sending blessings on the Prophet (S), for sending blessings on the Prophet (S) is ten good deeds. Preserve what I have recommended to you. I commend you to God and send you salutations."[28](#)

o) The twelfth Imam, Imam Mahdi (as) in a letter which he wrote to Ishaq Ibn Ya'qub and sent it to him through Mohammad b. 'Uthman b. Sa'eed al-'Amri, stated: "The appearance of deliverance depends on God. Those who determine its time are liars. But concerning the occurrence of events, refer to the narrators of our hadith, since they are my proof to you and I am God's proof to them.

As for those who are involved in our wealth - those who regard some of it as lawful (for themselves) and consume (it), they are only consuming the Fire. But as for Khums (20% Islamic levy on certain things), it is paid by our Shi'a followers for their purity. They can enjoy it till we make our appearance.

As for the reason for our occultation, God in Surah al-Ma'idah, verse 101, has said, "**O you who believe! Do not put questions about things, which if declared to you, may trouble you.**"

Every one of my fathers was under some sort of allegiance to the tyrant of his age, and at my appearance I will not have given allegiance to any tyrant. The way to benefit from me during my occultation is the same way that one benefits from the sun when it is hidden behind the clouds. I am a source of protection for the earth dwellers in the same way that stars are a source of protection for the inhabitants of the skies."[29](#)

- [1.](#) . Qur'an 16:125.
 - [2.](#) . Ghurar al-Hikam, al-Amidi, vol.2, p.507.
 - [3.](#) . Asrar al-Tawhid, vol.1, p.266.
 - [4.](#) . Nahj al-Balaghah, Sermon 175.
 - [5.](#) . Bihar al-Anwar, vol.77, p.137.
 - [6.](#) . Nahj al-Balaghah, Sermon 188.
 - [7.](#) . Nahj al-Balaghah, Sermon 182.
 - [8.](#) . Mizan al-Hikmah, vol.10, p.542.
 - [9.](#) . Nahj al-Balaghah, Hikmah 297.
 - [10.](#) . Bihar, vol.78, p.48.
 - [11.](#) . Ghurar al-Hikam.
 - [12.](#) . Sunan Ibn Majah, vol.2, p.1318.
 - [13.](#) . Qur'an 34:46.
 - [14.](#) . Kayhan Newspaper, Tuesday, 13th Tir, 1368.
 - [15.](#) . Commentary on Manazil al-Sa'irin by Abd al-Razzaq Kashani, p.19.
 - [16.](#) . Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 77, p.111; Khisal, Shaykh Saduq, p.131.
- As we have explained in the book "Towards the Eternal world," pp.415-430, this hadith, like tens of other hadiths, shows that punishment and chastisement in Barzakh (interval between death and Resurrection) and the Day of Resurrection is manifested bodily and not conventionally.
- [17.](#) . Ihtijaj al-Tabarsi, vol.1, p.134; Kashf al-Ghummah, vol.1, p.484; etc.
 - [18.](#) . Nahj al-Balaghah, 79.
 - [19.](#) . Bihar al-Anwar, vol.78, p.126.
 - [20.](#) . Bihar al-Anwar, vol.78, p.160.
 - [21.](#) . Similar interpretations can be found in our poets' works, who have benefited from the knowledge of our Imams. Among them is the following poem:
From a wise man I asked about the world. He said: the world is either a dream, or a candle, or a myth. I asked him: Then, why are people so enchanted by it? He replied: They are either sleepy, or drunk or mad.
 - [22.](#) . Bihar al-Anwar, vol.78, p.183.
 - [23.](#) . Bihar al-Anwar, vol.78, p.261.
 - [24.](#) . Bihar al-Anwar, vol.78, p.321.
 - [25.](#) . Kanz al-Fawa'id, Karajaki, p.152.
 - [26.](#) . Bihar, vol.78, p.358.
 - [27.](#) . Tuhaf al-'Uqul, p.510.
 - [28.](#) . Tuhaf al-'Uqul, p.488; Bihar, vol.78, p.273.
 - [29.](#) . Bihar, vol.78, p.380.

6) Cause your heart to die through asceticism

و أمته - بالزهادة

As we have already said: in order to survive, man is equipped with certain means such as desires towards possession, food, clothing, shelter, horses, social positions, and sexual drives. If man did not have these innate drives, he would not attain perfection.

But if these desires go beyond the status of means and justice and become aims by themselves, they would, no doubt, bring about irreparable losses and lead us toward the lowest of the low.^{1*}

Although Islam considers one's beloved affairs as *hasanah*² (good) and embellishment of Allah,³ it blames too much enchantment with the world.⁴

For this reason, Islam proposes the ethical principle of God-wariness to control excessive attachment to the differing manifestations of this world. Through this policy, Islam harnesses man's exceeding demands and lusts from one hand, and tames his aggressive spirit, on the other hand to the degree that he will say, as Imam 'Ali (as) has said,

" مَا لِعَلِيٍّ وَلِنَعِيمٍ يَفْنَىٰ وَلِدُّهُ لَا تَبْقَىٰ "

"What does 'Ali have to do with transitory enjoyments and pleasures?"⁵ and he would agree with Hafiz: I am a slave to the high-mindedness of that person who is free from anything possessible.

The Essence of Asceticism In Islam

The word "zuhd" or "asceticism" means lack of desire and to abandon something. It is true that in the Qur'an and tradition the topic of asceticism and the lack of concern for this world is emphasized, and the world and its manifestations are blamed.

On the other hand, our religious leaders have had an ascetic approach, however.

The issue to be researched here is whether the essence of zuhd is the same as monastic life which exists among Christians, Buddhists, and some other nations? What is the philosophy of the Islamic asceticism?

Definitely, the Islamic asceticism does not imply monastic life. As we have said before, from the view point of the Islamic logic, all aspects of life, including wealth, women, clothing, food and social position and the like, are just a means for man's perfection.

If these are used normally, not only will the world of other people be built, but the Hereafter will also be built; this is because

" وَابْتَغِ فِيمَا آتَاكَ اللَّهُ الدَّارَ الْآخِرَةَ وَلَا تَنْسَ نَصِيبَكَ مِنَ الدُّنْيَا "

"And seek, by means of what Allah has given you, the future abode, and do not neglect your portion of this world".⁶

In fact, from the viewpoint of Islam, everything in this world is good and God has not created any bad thing. Thus, neither the world nor its manifestations are bad. The liking of this world is naturally given to man.

On the basis of these facts, we will see that the Holy Qur'an rejects monasticism, and recognizes it as one of the innovations of Christian monks, who erroneously put forward the existence of badness in the creation, and the conflict between this world and the Hereafter, and entered these issues into the religion of Jesus Christ (as).⁷ The prophet of Islam, too, has explicitly, rejected monasticism.⁸

The Prophet of Islam prohibited any kind of these deviations when he saw them among Muslims. The following two samples would suffice:

a) One day, the wife of 'Uthman Ibn Ma'dhun went to the Prophet (S), complaining about her husband. She said: O Messenger of God: My husband goes on fasting during the days and stays awake at nights in prayer. Upon hearing this, the Prophet, being irritated, went to 'Uthman; he was at prayer. Seeing the Prophet, he stopped praying. The Prophet (S) told him: God did not appoint me to indoctrinate monasticism, but He appointed me for the indoctrination of an easy and moderate religion. I go on fasting, I pray and I sleep with my wife. Anybody who loves my religion should behave as I do. Marriage is among my sunnah (customs)"⁹

b) One day three women came to see the Prophet (S). One of them complained that her husband did not eat meat; the second woman complained that her husband did not use perfumes; and the third woman said her husband did not go to bed with his wives. Upon hearing these complaints, the Prophet (S) hurried to the mosque, dragging his garment on the floor. After praising God, he said, "Why do some of my friends not eat meat, not use perfumes and not go to bed with their wives? But I eat meat, I use perfumes and I go to bed with my wives. Anybody who does not follow me does not belong to me."¹⁰

In a story which is narrated in Nahj al-Balaghah, Imam 'Ali (as) had gone to pay a visit to 'Ala' Ibn Ziyad. He had a discussion with Asim Ibn Ziyad. In this story monasticism is distinctively rejected. The story goes like this¹¹: When Imam (as) saw the huge mansion of 'Ala', he asked him: What is the use of this huge house here when you will need it in the Hereafter? If you want to have a big house like this in the other world, you have got to have guests here, meet your relatives and pay people what you owe them. In this case you will have a big house in the next world. Then 'Ala' said: "I would like to complain about my brother Asim". Imam (as) asked: What is wrong with him? He answered: He wraps up a gown around himself and has said farewell to the world. The Imam ordered him to be brought to him. Imam 'Ali (as) told him: "Satan has misled you. Do you not have mercy on your family? Do you think that God would dislike you to use the good things He has made permissible for you? You are too insignificant before God for that!"

Asim said to Imam 'Ali (as): "You (too) put on rough garments and eat coarse food". Imam (as) answered: "I am not like you. God has made it obligatory for the just leaders to make themselves like the indigent, so that the poor man's burden of poverty is not unbearable for him."

As we see from these texts: Islam opposes monasticism and the shunning of social responsibilities. Islam does not allow us to forget our social tasks; neither does it permit us to put on rough garments and abandon material pleasures altogether to engage in worship and asceticism.

Thus, by "Islamic asceticism" it is meant that man should live simply in order to carry out

his individual and social responsibilities, and not to fear the hardships of life.

It is obvious that "Islamic asceticism" only makes a man do his social duties in proper ways and it is not to be taken to mean an approach which considers this world nasty or to suppose a contrast between this world and Hereafter or to shun responsibilities as is the principle of the monasticism.

Thus, Islamic asceticism is not inconsistent with being rich or having social positions. The point that a God-wary person should consider is that he should not love this life more than God or truthfulness. He should not sacrifice Divine aims for personal interests.¹²

Some Examples Of Traditions

What we said above on Islamic asceticism is not a haphazard interpretation. It is a synopsis of different explanations given by books on tradition: Here are some of them:

a) The Prophet (S), in one of his maxims says:

"الزُّهَادَةُ فِي الدُّنْيَا لَيْسَتْ بِتَحْرِيمِ الدَّلَالِ وَلَا إِضَاعَةِ الْمَالِ وَلَكِنَّ
الزُّهَادَةَ فِي الدُّنْيَا أَنْ لَا تَكُونَ بِمَا فِي يَدِكَ أَوْثَقَ مِنْكَ بِمَا فِي يَدِ
اللَّهِ"

"Asceticism in this world is not to prohibit what is lawful or to leave wealth alone; rather, asceticism in this world is that you should not have more confidence in what is your hand than what is in the hand of God"¹³

b) In Nahj al-Balaghah, Imam 'Ali (as) describes asceticism in the following manner:

"الزُّهْدُ كُلُّهُ بَيْنَ كَلِمَتَيْنِ مِنَ الْقُرْآنِ: قَالَ اللَّهُ سُبْحَانَهُ "لِكَيْلَا
تَأْسَوْا عَلَى مَا فَاتَكُمْ وَلَا تَفْرَحُوا بِمَا آتَاكُمْ" فَمَنْ لَمْ يَأْسَ عَلَى
الْمَاضِي وَلَمْ يَفْرَحْ بِالْآتِي فَقَدْ أَخَذَ الزُّهْدَ بِطَرَفَيْهِ"

"The whole of asceticism lies within two phrases of the Holy Qur'an: God the Almighty has said: **"So that you may not grieve for what has escaped you, nor be exultant at what He has given you"** [Qur'an 57:23]

So one who does not grieve for what has passed and is not joyful over what is to come, has taken hold of both aspects of asceticism."¹⁴

c) Elsewhere in Nahj al-Balaghah, we read:

"أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ الزُّهَادَةُ فُصْرُ الْأَمَلِ وَالشُّكْرُ عِنْدَ النِّعَمِ وَالْوَرَعُ عَنِ

المَحَارِم

"O people! Asceticism is the curtailment of hope, thanking God for blessings, and the utmost self-vigilance in abstaining from what is unlawful".¹⁵

As you will notice, in each one of the three statements narrated from the Prophet (S) and Imam 'Ali (as), one of the complex meanings of asceticism is brought up. In the first sentence, after scolding the monks and hermits, who make God's lawful blessings unlawful, and in this way, waste wealth, the great Prophet (S) mentions the spirit of asceticism as not to be a slave in the hands of social positions and lusts; rather, to prefer God over anything else.

In the second sentence, it is implied that from an ascetic's point of view the world is a means and not an aim in itself. Thus, a truly ascetic man does not slit his shirt if he loses what he possesses and will not feel proud for what he has.

This lack of interest in the material life and being fond of getting God's satisfaction is not in conflict with being affluent. It happens that one has everything, but loves none of it. In contrast, one is deprived of everything, but is fond of his walking stick, for instance.

In the third and last sentence, Imam (as) refers to three signs of asceticism:

- 1)** To limit far-fetched hopes; this will lead to remember truthfulness and to forget one's transitory interests.
- 2)** To use God's blessings in the right way; this will lead to the employment of all material and spiritual forces for God.
- 3)** To avoid committing the Islamically unlawful affairs which hinder man to achieve perfection and which cause man and society to fall.

Two Interesting Historic Events

1. It is narrated that Mulla Ahmad Naraqī, the writer of the erudite book "Mustanad al-Shi'ah," and one of the great Shi'ah jurists and the teacher of Sheikh Murtaza Ansari, had a big mansion. Once a dervish went to his mansion. Looking at Mulla's big house, he started criticizing him, saying a great Shi'ah scholar should not possess such a huge house.

Based on Imam Sadiq's statement: *"It is not asceticism that you should not possess anything; rather, asceticism is that nothing should possess you,"*

"لَيْسَ الزُّهْدُ أَنْ لَا تَمْلِكَ شَيْئًا بَلِ الزُّهْدُ أَنْ لَا يَمْلِكَكَ شَيْءٌ"

and also based on the fact that for an ascetic person this world is a means and not an objective, Naraqī asked the dervish what kind of life he preferred. He replied, "I prefer my own way of life which is freedom from possessing anything and involvement in journeys and worship"

In order for the dervish to realize that to own something does not imply being a slave to it, Naraqī asked him to accompany him on a long excursion. On the way, they sat beside a brook to take some rest. They took some loaves of bread, and then continued with their

journey. Having traveled a little, Naraqī observed that the dervish was extremely upset.

Naraqī inquired about his uneasiness. The dervish said he had an ebony walking-stick, which he liked very much, but he had left it beside the brook.

Naraqī replied: "Look, I left all my possessions behind, and came on this trip with you. How do you make such a noise over a stick"? He then said: "Let us separate and each one go on his way".

Naraqī left him, heading for his house.[16](#)

Although this event might not have happened in Naraqī's life, it clearly shows one fact: it is not asceticism for a man not to possess anything, but asceticism relies in the fact that nothing in this world should own and enchant us.

2. The Advice of Sayyid Ibn Tawus to his son:

In chapter 14 of his book *Kashf al-Mahajjah*, which is written for the education of his son, Sayyid Ibn Tawus has brought out the issue that being wealthy and ascetic are not contradictory. He writes:

"Muhammad, my son: May God make you aware of what you need, and make you turn your attention towards Him. Some people believe that your grandfather Muhammad (as) and your father, Imam 'Ali (as) were poor. These people assume that these great men gave away their sustenance to others, and slept on empty stomachs. Therefore, they concluded that asceticism and poverty are the same and asceticism is in contrast to wealth.

But this assumption is far from being true: this is because the Prophets (as) were the most affluent people in the sense that they were given whatever they wished for. They were the richest of all because of their position as Prophets. These great men preferred people over themselves, however. They were content with what God had bestowed upon them.

Among your great grandfather's assets given to your mother Fatimah (as) were Fadak and Awali, the annual revenues of which were 24.000 dinars according to one tradition and 70.000 dinars according to another tradition. But we should realize that Fatimah (as) and her husband and her father were among the greatest ascetics. A small portion of this revenue would suffice them. But remember that men of God never dispute on the amount of possession given them by God. Therefore, their employment of these resources is like the dominance of God over them. They are content with God's demands.

And I have seen in a history book written in 237 AH, a tradition from your father Imam 'Ali (as), who said, 'When I married Fatimah (as) I did not have a carpet, but today I have bequeathed such an amount of endowed property that if I divide it among all Bani Hashim, they would each get a big portion'.[17](#)

And it is written in the same book: When Imam 'Ali (as) bequeathed his endowed property which had the annual income of 40.000 dinars, he wanted to sell his sword. When he was selling it, he said, 'If I had my dinner, I would not sell it.' Another day, Imam 'Ali (as) said, 'Who is going to buy that sword of mine? If I had the price of this garment, I would not sell it.'"

The writer adds: "Imam 'Ali (as) behaved like this when his income of the endowed property was 40.000 dinars. O my son Muhammad! I swore to God who is present everywhere and whose angels witness to this: In most cases, although your father Imam 'Ali Ibn Musa (as) was managing this endowed property and its revenues by dividing it among people as alms, he was most of the time left with nothing. Some people, however, erroneously thought he donated from his saved treasure of gold. Unfortunately, people have thought wrongly about

your father. This always happened when people assumed wrong things about Prophets and God's men.

If your father had the control over the entire world, he would definitely divide it among the needy. But God had decided to give him by piecemeal.

Thus, Muhammad, my son, you and your brothers and your offspring, follow the way of your fathers who have gone the right way and God, as He has said, is the greatest Giver.

In Ibrahim Ibn Mohammad Asha'ari's book, which is a reliable book, I have seen a tradition from Imam Baqir (as): When Imam 'Ali (as) passed away he owed 800.000 dirhams. Then, Imam Hassan (as) sold one of the properties of Imam 'Ali (as) for 500.000 dirhams and another piece of property for 300.000 dirhams to pay his debt. Imam 'Ali (as) had run up into this debt because he did not leave anything from khums (statutory 20% Islamic levy on things) for himself and gave it all to the needy.

And I saw in Abdullah Ibn Beker's book that he had narrated from Imam Baqir (as): Husayn (as) was martyred while he was in debt and Imam 'Ali Ibn al-Husayn (as) sold a piece of land to clear his debts.

And your ancestor Imam 'Ali (as) left some endowed properties for his children from Fatima (as) and put the superintendence among his children.¹⁸

Thus, how do some foolish people assume that Imam 'Ali (as) was poor or erroneously think that God's men can not be affluent?¹⁹

Has God created this world and Hereafter for people whom He does not love?"²⁰

The Philosophy Of Islamic Asceticism

Now that we understand the difference between asceticism and monasticism, we should recognize the philosophy of Islamic asceticism. How come Islam has allowed us to use all sorts of blessings including sustenance and livelihood and ornaments, but under the title of Islamic asceticism recommend to us not to use them excessively and advises us to have a simple life?

Definitely, Islamic asceticism is based on some valid reasons. And for these reasons it can rely on Islamic justice. Those reasons are the following:

1. To Tolerate Hardships But To Ask For Others Comfort

In a society where not many people enjoy the rudiments of life: some are rich, but the majority are poor, where some are affluent, but others suffer deprivation of all sorts, the best way to bridge this gap is for the rich to adopt not only a simple and easy life, but be ready to share what they have with the needy. They should even go so far as to let others eat when they themselves avoid eating, dress others when they don't have enough to wear, to let other have comfort when they themselves suffer.

This state of the affairs, which in books on ethics is interpreted as sacrifice, is felt to be more crucial in a society where deep gaps exist among social layers. For this reason, the Holy Qur'an praises the people of Medina (the Ansar) who gave priority to the needs of Muhajirin in the following manner:

"وَيُؤْتِرُونَ عَلَىٰ أَنفُسِهِمْ وَلَوْ كَانَ بِهِمْ خَصَاصَةٌ"

"And they prefer (them) before themselves though poverty may afflict them".²¹

Allah has revealed:

"وَيُطْعِمُونَ الطَّعَامَ عَلَىٰ حُبِّهِ مِسْكِينًا وَيَتِيمًا وَأَسِيرًا"

"And they give food out of love for Him to the poor and the orphan and the captive"²² because Imam 'Ali (as), Fatima (as), Imam Hasan (as) and Imam Husayn (as) went on fast for three consecutive days to give their food to the poor and the orphan and the captive.

Imam 'Ali (as) in his sermon Al-muttaqin (The God-wary ones) mentions "Tolerating hardships oneself for the comfort of others" as one of the attributes of the true believers:

**"نَفْسُهُ فِي عَنَاءٍ وَالنَّاسُ مِنْهُ فِي رَاحَةٍ، اتَّعَبَ نَفْسَهُ لِآخِرَتِهِ
وَأَرَاخَ النَّاسَ مِنْ نَفْسِهِ"**

"His own self is in difficulty while people are at ease from him. He wearies himself for the Hereafter, while he gives people ease."²³

2. Showing Sympathy

Another symptom of the philosophy of the Islamic asceticism is showing sympathy towards the deprived layers of society. In a society where people are practically in two differing strata: the rich and the deprived, the poor suffer in two ways: they suffer their poverty; they also feel backward.

In such a society a responsible man is obliged, first of all, not to stay away and be an on-looker. He should try to improve the society in such a way as to establish social justice. Secondly, he should bridge this gap by sacrifice and by tolerating hardships in order to provide others with comfort.

When such a responsible man observes that the number of the deprived is so great that he can do nothing to provide them with financial help, he at least can do his best by sympathizing with them. In this way he can alleviate some of their sufferings. Of course, the necessity of such an approach is more felt by the religious leaders and governors as well. That is a good reason why Imam 'Ali (as) lived simply during his caliphate.

Imam 'Ali (as) in one place states:

**"إِنَّ اللَّهَ قَرَضَ عَلَىٰ أَيْمَةِ الْعَدْلِ أَنْ يَقْدِرُوا أَنْفُسَهُمْ بِضَعْفَةِ
النَّاسِ كَيْلًا يَتَّبِعُ بِالْفَقِيرِ فَقْرُهُ"**

"God has made it obligatory for the just leaders to make themselves like the indigent, so that the poor man's burden of poverty is not unbearable for him."[24](#)

Imam 'Ali (as) has stated somewhere else:

"أَقْنَعُ مِنْ نَفْسِي بِأَنْ يُقَالَ أَمِيرُ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ وَلَا أَشَارِكُهُمْ فِي
مَكَارِهِ الدَّهْرِ أَوْ أَكُونَ أُسْوَةً لَهُمْ فِي جُشُوبَةِ الْعَيْشِ ... وَلَكِنْ
هِيَهِاتَ أَنْ يَغْلِبَنِي هَوَايَ وَيَقُودَنِي جَشَعِي إِلَى تَخْيِيرِ الْأَطْعِمَةِ
وَلَعَلَّ بِالْحِجَازِ أَوْ الْيَمَامَةِ مَنْ لَا طَمَعَ لَهُ فِي الْقُرْصِ وَلَا عَهْدَ لَهُ
بِالشَّبَعِ أَوْ آيَتٍ مِبْطَانًا وَحَوْلِي بَطُونٌ عَرْتَى وَاكْبَادٌ حَرَى"

"Should I be content to be called Amir al-Mu'minin, but not share with them (the deprived) in the adversities of time or be an example for them to follow in the difficulties of life? ...But it is impossible that my whims and desires should overcome me and my greed should lead me to select the best kinds of foods, when perhaps in Hijaz or Yamamah there is one who has no hope of getting a loaf of bread or one who has never experienced satiation. Should I sleep with a full stomach when around me there are hungry stomachs and livers dry with thirst?"[25*](#)

3. Broadmindedness And Struggle Against Splendor

As we have said, in order to live, man needs food, shelter, clothing, sex and the like. These needs are innately motivated. But sometimes we go to extremes and make use of these needs extravagantly. In this way the life objectives are compromised for luxuries in life. It is a fact that this kind of luxuries becomes a habit and build up one's secondary nature and man, compared with these needs, sees himself weak and vulnerable.

Some people fall prey to these luxuries to the extent that if they do not attain certain food, shelter, clothing, cosmetics, cars, positions, and women, life would be hell for them. Therefore, to get these luxuries, such people would not stop committing any kind of mischievous affairs. These are slaves to their luxurious lives.

They would be impatient if they do not get what they wish for. They feel defeated if their wishes are not taken care of. They feel they are not natural human beings. Thus, asceticism is to break these chains, to revolt against these whims and desires and to defeat these hurdles. Adopting a simple life, an ascetic releases himself from these shackles.

He is content with meager food and worn out clothes. He is not a slave in the hands of luxury. Hafiz [the Persian poet] says:

I am a slave to the manliness of that one who under this blue dome, is free from anything possessible.

Revolutions and constant struggles are always initiated by those who are ascetics in practice. Gandhi, for instance, broke the British spine of Imperialism with his famous struggles of non-cooperation and opposition just because he had broken the chains of luxurious life. The Viet Kong caused the biggest military and economic force of the world

i.e., USA, to withdraw from their land because of their ascetic ways of life, being content with a fistful of rice for consecutive days, taking refuge in the fields. When we see Arabs suffered a great blow from Israelis in the third Israeli war against Arabs, we will not be surprised because the Egyptian planes took ice-creams from Cairo to the battle field for the Egyptian officers! A poet says:

In this world, a nation would become miserable,
If it gets used to the pleasures of life.

Imam 'Ali (as), Broadmindedness, And Struggle Against Luxuries

One of the reasons for Imam 'Ali's ascetic approach to life was his broadmindedness. He did not wish to get used to luxurious life which gradually weakens human spirit. He used to put on rugged cotton garments, eat barley bread and drink sour milk. His caliphate position was to him less important than his patched shoes.²⁶

Once a butcher proposed to him that he had good meat for sale and asked Imam 'Ali (as) if he would buy some. Imam 'Ali (as) replied he did not have money. The butcher said that Imam 'Ali (as) could pay later. But Imam 'Ali (as) replied: It is better that I owe to my soul (self) than owe to you.

In Nahj al-Balaghah, Imam (as) emphasized the motto of leaving this world, i.e., leaving pleasure-taking a lot.

Imam 'Ali (as) says:

**"الدُّنْيَا دَارٌ مَمَرٌ لَا دَارٌ مَقَرٌّ، وَالنَّاسُ فِيهَا رَجُلَانِ: رَجُلٌ بَاعَ نَفْسَهُ
فَأَوْبَقَهَا وَرَجُلٌ إِبْتَعَ نَفْسَهُ فَأَعْتَقَهَا"**

*"This world is a place of passage, not a resting place, and people in it are of two types: one who sells his soul (through following his desires) and destroys it, and one who purchases his soul (through obedience to God) and liberates it."*²⁷

Elsewhere, declaring the secret behind his abandonment of pleasure-seeking, Imam 'Ali (as) states: "Get away from me, O world, for I left you free to go your way. I have slipped away from your clutches and escaped your snares; and I have avoided entering your slippery places...."

"Get away from me; I swear to God that I will not be humbled to you so that you may abase me. I will not become submissive to you so that you may lead me (wherever you wish). By God...I have disciplined my soul to such an extent that it is pleased with a loaf of bread with salt as its stew."²⁸

Of course, asceticism in sympathy, sacrifice, manliness, and other aspects does not merely belong to Imam 'Ali (as) alone. All Prophets, Imams, and true believers share this human trait. Through these characteristics, all of them have struggled with unjust social systems and have freed themselves from the slavery of evil habits and pernicious luxuries.

The Degrees Of Asceticism

Avoidance and the abandonment of life here in this world have different degrees. Sometimes it is possible for an ascetic person, due to the lightness of his responsibilities, or

because of his tamed self, or because of the good conditions in which people live, to live a simple life away from luxuries. But at other times, the conditions might be in such a way as to force the ascetic man show more sympathy towards people and practice more severe restrictions on himself. Under such circumstances, an ascetic should negate for himself what is allowable for others.

This variety in the life conditions of Prophets (as) and Imams (as) and pious scholars made each one of them adopt a specific approach. One was like Solomon about whose case God says "We made jinn and men subservient to him" and the other was Jesus Christ (as) about whom God has said: "Honorable and chaste".²⁹ The other one was Imam 'Ali (as) who did not satiate himself even with barley bread and his dress had so many patches that he felt ashamed.³⁰

Another Imam like Imam Sadiq (as) used better clothing. For this he was often criticized by people not very bright. It is narrated, for instance, that Ibad Ibn Kathir al-Basri, protested to Imam for wearing a new dress, asking him "Did Imam 'Ali put on this kind of dress?"

In reply, Imam (as) said, "First of all, I have bought a one-dinar dress (so it is not luxurious, but it is clean); secondly, Imam 'Ali (as) used to live at a time when the conditions were different than those of ours. Those circumstances dictated him to put on rugged dress. People might ask me, 'Are you a hypocrite like Ibad?'"³¹

On the other hand, people abandon pleasure-seeking in this world for the pleasures, houris or nymphs of paradise, and castles in the Hereafter: in fact, they are bargaining. But there are those who adopt an ascetic life just for God's sake and in this process they are "enchanted by Him" and they do not think of anything but "Allah". Sa'di, the great Persian poet says in this regard:

When I breathe my last breath I'm wishing to meet you,
I give up my life in the hope of becoming the earth of your abode;
When, on Doom's Day, I raise my head,
I rise for Your discourse, I rise to look for You;
At a location where people gather from the two worlds,
I am looking for You, I'll be Your slave;
If I sleep on the bedroom of nonexistence for a thousand years,
I'll wake up to the odor of Your hair;
I'll not describe the Garden, nor will I smell paradise flowers,
I won't go after Houris, I'll run to meet You;
I won't drink paradise wine from the hand of Heaven's cupbearer,
I won't need wine, because I'm drunk with Your face;
I'd go to a thousand deserts with You,
And if you, Sa'adi, choose the wrong path,
You will still be heading for Him, anyway.³²

Imam Sadiq (as) emphasizes this stage of asceticism in the following words:

"وَهُوَ تَرْكُ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ شَغَلَكَ عَنِ اللَّهِ مِنْ غَيْرِ تَأْسُفٍ عَلَى قَوْتِهَا"

"Asceticism means the abandonment of everything which diverts you from God without

regretting its abandonment"[33](#)

At the end of this discussion two expressions from two great philosophers of Islam will be presented here to illuminate the matter further:

Asceticism From The Viewpoint Of Khwajah Nasr Tusi:

Khwajah, may God bless him, in his erudite book "Awsaf al-Ashraf" writes on asceticism (zuhd) in Chapter two:

قال الله تعالى: "وَلَا تَمُدَّنَّ عَيْنَيْكَ إِلَىٰ مَا مَتَّعْنَا بِهِ أَزْوَاجًا مِنْهُمْ زَهْرَةَ الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا لِنَفْتِنَهُمْ فِيهِ وَرِزْقُ رَبِّكَ خَيْرٌ وَأَبْقَىٰ"

“And do not stretch your eyes after that with which we have provided different classes of them, of the splendor of this world’s life, that we may thereby try them; and the sustenance given by your Lord is better and more abiding”.[34](#)

Asceticism is the absence of desire and an ascetic (*zahid*) is one who does not take delight in what is worldly such as foods, drinks, clothing, houses, relishes, pleasures, wealth, position, company of kings, influence and attainment of anything which would part from him at his death. Asceticism should not be out of weakness or ignorance. It should not be for any reward. Anybody who possesses this trait is a genuinely ascetic person.

A truly ascetic man is one who is delighted in asceticism; he does not rely on asceticism for fear of the Hell or for Allah's reward in paradise, but solely for the sake of restraining his soul after knowing the benefits and consequences of each of these things mentioned. His asceticism is habitual and is without any trace of greed, hope or expectation, worldly or otherworldly. This quality becomes habitual by means of restraining the soul from seeking pleasures, and by making it accustomed to austerities so that indifference to desire becomes firmly established in it.

It is narrated in the story of ascetics: A man baked sheep's head and “*palude*” (sweet beverage containing starch jelly in the form of thin fibers) for thirty years without tasting either even once. People asked him the reason for this self-discipline. He replied: "When my soul desired these two things, I told it that it would never get any of them if it were to touch any of them. I did that so that it would not incline towards any pleasure whatsoever".

A person who adopts asceticism in this world in the hope of getting rewards in the next world is like a person who does not eat because of his meanness in the hope of getting food in the feast which he is invited to attend later. Or he is like a tradesman who does barter to make a profit out of his merchandise.

In wayfaring, the benefit of asceticism lies in the curtailment of preoccupations, so that the wayfarer is saved from being preoccupied with anything that would keep him from reaching his goal."[35](#)

Asceticism In The Viewpoint Of Sheikh Al-Ra’ees

Avicenna in chapter nine of his erudite book "Al-Isharat wa al-Tanbihat" which deals with

the stages is Sufism writes on the degrees of asceticism:

"المُعْرَضُ عَنِ مَتَاعِ الدُّنْيَا وَطَيْبَاتِهَا يُخَصُّ بِاسْمِ الزُّهْدِ... الزُّهْدُ
عِنْدَ غَيْرِ العَارِفِ مُعَامَلَةٌ مَا كَأَنَّهُ يُشْتَرَى بِمَتَاعِ الدُّنْيَا مَتَاعَ الآخِرَةِ
وَعِنْدَ العَارِفِ تَنْزَهُةٌ مَا عَمَّا يَشْغَلُ سِرَّهُ عَنِ الحَقِّ وَتَكَبُّرٌ عَلَى كُلِّ
شَيْءٍ غَيْرِ الحَقِّ"³⁶

"Anybody who turns away from the enjoyments of the world and its pleasures is characterized by the term asceticism... Asceticism for one who is not a gnostic is a transaction in which the pleasures of the world are sold for the pleasures of the Hereafter. For one who is a gnostic, asceticism is keeping oneself aloof from anything that diverts one's heart from the Truth and considering oneself above everything other than the Truth".³⁶

The Last and Final noticeable Point

At the end of this discussion, it is necessary to draw your attention to one important point in Imam 'Ali's discourse: In this letter, Imam 'Ali (as) said of exhortation: "Enliven your heart through exhortation", but in case of asceticism, he said: "Cause it (your heart) to die through asceticism." Does the pronoun "it" refer to the word "heart" used earlier in the text, which must be enlivened by exhortation, or does it refer to the aggressive self (soul), which is implied, and which the ascetic must mortify?

The fact is that the words "soul", "heart", "self", "breast", "*fu'ad*" (heart), "wisdom" and the like all refer to just one thing. In man there exists a truth which is neither matter nor does it have the properties of the matter. During seven years all the material molecules and particles of man completely change, but nevertheless, he carries on his duties all his life.³⁷ The same truth takes on different titles in different conditions: the words heart, breast (*sadr*) and wisdom are the titles used when this truth is taken to be abstract, not relying on matter. It is called *Nafs* (self) on the basis of the fact that to be realized it needs some means; it has different phases: commanding (*Ammarah*), blaming (*lawwamah*), satisfied (*raziyah*) and the like.³⁸

Thus, the pronoun "it" in the phrase "cause it to die" refers to the heart itself; it is because it wishes for a lot of things and should be controlled and its excesses should be hindered, or else it leads man to the lowest of the low.³⁹

1. Ustadh Allamah Tabataba'i, in verse 14 of Sura Aal-'Imran «زَيْنَ لِلنَّاسِ حُبُّ الشَّهَوَاتِ مِنَ النِّسَاءِ وَالْبَنِينَ» "The love of desires, of women and sons... is made to seem fair to men." has explained this fact in much detail.

2. "وَمِنْهُمْ مَنْ يَقُولُ رَبَّنَا آتِنَا فِي الدُّنْيَا حَسَنَةً وَفِي الآخِرَةِ حَسَنَةً وَقِنَا عَذَابَ النَّارِ أُولَئِكَ لَهُمْ نَصِيبٌ مِمَّا كَسَبُوا وَاللَّهُ سَرِيعُ الْحِسَابِ"

"And there are some among them who say: Our Lord, grant us good in this world and good in the hereafter, and save us from the chastisement of the fire. They shall have their portion of what they have earned, and Allah is swift in reckoning." [Qur'an:201-202].

3. "قُلْ مَنْ حَرَّمَ زِينَةَ اللَّهِ الَّتِي أَخْرَجَ لِعِبَادِهِ وَطَيِّبَاتٍ مِنَ الرِّزْقِ...".

"Say: Who has prohibited the embellishment of Allah which He has brought forth for His servants and the good provisions?" [Qur'an 7:32].

4. "فَاعْرِضْ عَنْ مَنْ تَوَلَّى عَنْ ذِكْرِنَا وَلَمْ يُرِدْ إِلَّا الْحَيَاةَ الدُّنْيَا ذَلِكَ مَبْلَغُهُمْ مِنَ الْعِلْمِ".

"Therefore turn aside from him who turns his back upon Our reminder and does not desire anything but this world's life. That is their goal of knowledge" [Qur'an 53:29-30].

5. . Nahj al-Balaghah, Sermon 224.
6. . Qur'an 28:77.
7. . "وَرَهْبَانِيَّةً ابْتَدَعُوهَا مَا كَتَبْنَاهَا عَلَيْهِمْ" "And as for monasticism, they innovated it - we did not prescribe it to them". [Qur'an 57:27].
8. . "There is no monasticism in Islam". (Ibn Athir's al-Nahaya, vol.2, p.280).
9. . Wasa'il al-Shi'ah, vol.3, p.68.
10. . Wasa'il al-Shi'ah, old printing, vol.3, p.68.
11. . Nahj al-Balaghah, Sermon 209.
12. . The Qur'an describes the rejected love for world in the following manner:
 . "إِنَّ الَّذِينَ لَا يَرْجُونَ لِقَاءَنَا وَرَضُوا بِالْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا وَاطْمَأَنَّنُوا بِهَا وَالَّذِينَ هُمْ عَنْ آيَاتِنَا غَافِلُونَ أُولَٰئِكَ مَا وَاهُمُ النَّارُ يَمَا كَانُوا يَكْسِبُونَ."
 "Surely those who do not hope in Our meeting and are pleased with this world's life and are content with it, and those who are heedless of our communications; those, their abode is the fire because of what they earned."
 [Qur'an 10:7-8].
13. . Nahj al-Fasahah, Hadith 1712.
14. . Nahj al-Balaghah, Hikmah 439.
15. . Nahj al-Balaghah, Sermon 80.
16. . "The causes for the development of Islam and the fall of the Muslims", page 295.
17. . Imam 'Ali (as) had prepared these pieces of endowed property by digging subterranean canals, establishing gardens and palm groves.
18. . The possession of these properties, their handling and their ample annual incomes indicates that asceticism could go hand in hand with affluence.
19. . Imam 'Ali's (as) letter 27 from Nahj al-Balaghah written to Muhammad Ibn Abu Bakr.
20. . Kashf al-Mahajjah li Thamarat il-Muhjah, pp.123-126; The schedule for prosperity, pp.155-159.
21. . Qur'an 59:9.
22. . Qur'an 76:8.
23. . Nahj al-Balaghah, Sermon 184.
24. . Nahj al-Balaghah, Sermon 200.
25. *. Nahj al-Balaghah, letter 45.
26. . Nahj al-Balaghah, Sermon 33.
27. . Nahj al-Balaghah, Hikmah 128.
28. . Nahj al-Balaghah, Letter 45.
29. . Qur'an 3:39.
30. . Nahj al-Balaghah, Sermon 159.
31. . A'yan al-Shi'ah, vol.1, p.660.
32. . Sa'di's collection of literature, lyrics, p.92.
33. . Misbah al-Shari'ah, p.191.
34. . Qur'an 20:131.
35. . Awsaf al-Ashraf, pp.22-23.
36. . Al-Isharah wa al-tanbihat, vol. 3, pp.369-370.
37. . In this regard, see Towards the Eternal life, the section on the puzzle of spirit.
38. . Refer to Asfar, Al-mizan, Manazil Al-Sa'irin, Mulla Hadi Sabzwrari's Manzumah Hikmah, and Fayd Kashani's Mahjjah al-Bayda, vol. 5.
39. . Mustadrak al-Wasa'il, vol.2, p.284.

7) Strengthen Your Heart With Certainty

“ وَقُوَّهُ بِالْيَقِينِ ”

Certainty or conviction is a decisive, stable, mental state in accordance with reality and unperishable which gives peace and quiet to the man of conviction, this conviction being related to knowledge about God or related to other matters of belief.¹

This kind of conviction which is beyond the usual belief and knowledge and in Khwaja Nasr's

understanding of the term, consists of two kinds of knowledge: the knowledge of what is known, and the knowledge that its converse is impossible. It is in fact, the source of strength in human spirit, and this is emphasized by Imam 'Ali (as).

The Importance And Value Of Certainty

Certainty or conviction is a valuable capital which is given to only few people. Anybody possessing this, enjoys great prosperity.

Imam Reza (as) has stated:

**"الإيمانُ فوقَ الإسلامِ بدرجةٍ وَالتَّقْوَى فوقَ الإيمانِ بدرجةٍ
وَاليقينُ فوقَ التقوى بدرجةٍ وَلَمْ يُقَسَّمْ بَيْنَ العِبَادِ شَيْءٌ أَقْلُ
مِنَ اليقينِ"**

*"Faith is one degree above Islam; God-wariness is one degree above faith. Certainty is one degree above God-wariness. Nothing less than certainty is divided among God's believers"*²

The narrator says: I heard Imam as-Sadiq (as) saying:

**"إِنَّ العَمَلَ الدَّائِمَ القَلِيلَ عَلَى اليقينِ أَفْضَلُ عِنْدَ اللهِ مِنَ العَمَلِ
الكثيرِ عَلَى غيرِ يقينٍ"**

*"Indeed, a small act based on certainty that is performed continually, is better before God than abundant actions not based on certainty"*³

He also said:

**"إِنَّ اللهَ بَعْدَلِهِ وَقِسْطُهُ جَعَلَ الرُّوحَ وَالرَّاحَةَ فِي اليقينِ وَالرِّضَا
وَجَعَلَ الهَمَّ وَالْحُزْنَ فِي الشكِّ وَالسَّخَطِ"**

"With his justice and fairness, God has put tranquility and ease in certainty and satisfaction, and has put sorrow and grief in doubt and displeasure".⁴

Types Of Certainty

Certainty has degrees. These degrees are referred to in the Qur'an as "certain knowledge", to see with the "eye of certainty" and "certain truth".

The verses 5 and 7 of Surah al-Takathur: **“Nay! If you had known with certain knowledge, you should most certainly have seen Hell; then you shall most certainly see it with the eye of certainty”**

"كَلَّا لَوْ تَعْلَمُونَ عِلْمَ الْيَقِينِ ... ثُمَّ لَتَرَوُنَّهَا عَيْنَ الْيَقِينِ"

refer to the first and second degrees respectively and verse 95 of Surah al-Waqi'ah:

"إِنَّ هَذَا لَهُوَ حَقُّ الْيَقِينِ"

“..Most surely this is a certain truth,” refers to the third degree of conviction.

'Ilm Al-Yaqin (Certain Knowledge)

This is reasoning-based certainty. It is reached through reasoning with majors and minors. For instance, we are convinced that fire exists when we observe the smoke, or the reasoning which takes place to prove God's existence

**"سَنُرِيهِمْ آيَاتِنَا فِي الْآفَاقِ وَفِي أَنْفُسِهِمْ حَتَّىٰ يَتَبَيَّنَ لَهُمْ أَنَّهُ
الْحَقُّ"**

"We will soon show them Our signs in the universe and in their own souls, until it will become quite clear to them that it is the truth".⁵

'Ayn Al-Yaqin [To See With The Eye Of Certainty]

This is conviction derived by observing the thing itself: for example, observing the fire itself.

Haqq Al-Yaqin [Certain Truth]

This kind of conviction is arrived by touching the thing itself, i.e., a connection to the thing and adopting its characteristics, for instance, entering the fire and feeling its heat or extinction in God, and dissipation in His love.

In the sanctified tradition we read:

**"مَا تَقَرَّبَ إِلَيَّ عَبْدِي بِشَيْءٍ أَحَبَّ إِلَيَّ وَمَا افْتَرَضْتَهُ عَلَيْهِ وَلَا
يَزَالُ الْعَبْدُ يَتَقَرَّبُ إِلَيَّ بِالنَّوَافِلِ حَتَّىٰ أَحْبَبَهُ فَإِذَا أَحْبَبْتُهُ كُنْتُ**

سَمِعَهُ الَّذِي يَسْمَعُ بِهِ وَبَصَرَهُ الَّذِي يُبْصِرُ بِهِ وَلِسَانَهُ الَّذِي يَنْطِقُ
بِهِ وَيَدَهُ الَّتِي يَبْطِشُ بِهَا، إِنْ دَعَانِي أَحَبُّهُ وَإِنْ سَأَلَنِي أَعْطَيْتُهُ"

"My servant does not approach Me with anything dearer to Me than what I have made incumbent on him. He continues to approach Me through supererogatory acts until I love him. When I love him, I become his hearing through which he hears, his sight through which he sees, his tongue through which he speaks and his hand through which he strikes. If he calls on me I answer him, and if he asks me I give him."

Fayd Kashani has told the following poem regarding this issue:

You were with me. I did not consider you as I myself,
Or perhaps you were me and I didn't know;
When I departed, I recognized you,
As far as you were me, I didn't know.
Another poet has said, regarding this:
So much I thought about you, I became entirely you,
You came gradually, and I slowly departed.

The Effects and Signs of certainty

Parallel with the degrees of certainty, there exist different effects and signs for it. Those who are at the stage of *Haqq al-Yaqin* enjoy a better degree of recognition and high temperaments. They can perform extraordinary feats. They who live at the other two degrees of certainty (i.e.) *'Ilm al-Yaqin* and *'Ayn al-yaqin*, naturally enjoy fewer advantages.

The writer of "Misbah al-Shari'ah" writes, Imam Sadiq (as) has said: "Certainty raises the status of the man to a lofty one, and the Great Prophet of Islam (S), hearing that Jesus Christ (as) had walked over water, replied: 'If Jesus enjoyed greater certainty, he would have walked on air as well'".

This statement depicts the lofty degree of certainty.

All Prophets are not on the same footing. Some who have more certainty are of higher status.

As the Prophets enjoy different degrees of certainty, so do the believers. A man who enjoys a better degree of certainty, naturally sees power and might only in the hands of Allah and insists on worshipping Him both publicly and in private. Existence or lack of it, more or less, appreciation or depreciation, glory or abjectness is equal for him...."⁶

The Young Man Of Certainty Who Knew The Secrets

In his book "The truth behind Faith and Certainty," al-Kulayni reports two traditions on the issue of the extraordinary effects of certainty. It seems both cases refer to a single person. However because of the significance of the issue, both are given here:

1. Ishaq b. 'Ammar says: I heard Imam Sadiq (as) saying: The Prophet (S) performed the Morning Prayer with people. He saw among the crowd a young man who was dozing off and his head was leaning towards his breast. His skin was yellow, his body thin, and his eyes deep in his skull.

The Prophet (S) asked him: "O young man, how did you spend last night"? He replied: "O Messenger of Allah, I spent it with certainty". The Prophet (S) was surprised at his reply. Then, he told the youth: "For each certainty, there is a truth. What is the truth behind your certainty"?

He answered: "These are the effects and consequences of my certainty: It has made me sad; it keeps me awake for night prayers; it has made me go on fasting during the day. I have become disinterested in the worldly affairs. It is as if now I saw my God in the sky. I realize He is after the affairs of people. People, it seems, are gathering in the Doom's Day, I am among them, I feel. It seems as if I saw the inhabitants of paradise enjoying the blessings and having good time. It seems as if I saw the inhabitants of Hell crying and asking for help. It is as if I heard the noise of the people of Hell".

Then the Prophet (S), hearing these statements, told his followers: "God has illuminated this man's heart with light". Then he told the youth: "Continue with this state of mind." Then the youth said, "O Messenger of Allah, ask God to make me a martyr in your holy wars. The Prophet (S) prayed for him. Some time later, he joined one of the prophet's holy wars and was the ninth martyr in that war."[7](#)

2. Abu Basir narrates from Imam Sadiq (as) who said, 'The Prophet (S) saw Harith Ibn Malik Ibn Nu'man al-Ansari, and asked him: "How are you, Harith"?

He replied: "I am a true believer". The Prophet (S) said. "For everything there is a truth. What is the truth beyond your speech"?

He answered, "O Messenger of Allah, I lack interest in this world. At night, I am awake for prayers, during the days, due to fasting and the heat, I am extremely thirsty. It is as if I saw my God in the Heaven. He is there to keep people accountable for what they do. I see the people of paradise meeting each other. It seems as if I heard the groans of the people of Hell."

The Prophet (S) said, regarding this youth: "He is God's servant whose heart has become illuminated by Him". Then, he told the youth: "You have got the insight. Be steady and firm."

The youth told the Prophet (S): "Please ask God to make me one of the martyrs among your army". The Prophet (S) asked God to provide Harith with martyrdom.

Some time later Harith was among the army dispatched for war. He killed 8 persons and then was martyred."[8](#)

Some Other Examples Of The Signs Of The Effects Of Certainty

Anybody, who gets the elixir of certainty at his disposal and employs it in his belief and practical daily affairs, will have peculiar excellent spiritual moods and will perform extraordinary works, some of which are mentioned here:

A) Godwariness

The people of certainty enjoy Godwariness about which Imam 'Ali (as) has said:

التَّقْوَى تَمَرَّةُ الدِّينِ وَأَمَارَةُ الْيَقِينِ

"Godwariness is the fruit of religion and the sign of certainty."[9](#)

The Great Prophet of Islam, too, talks about Godwariness which is one of the signs of certainty: "There are six signs for the person of certainty: He has certainty of God, thus believes in Him. He is certain that death is true, thus he is wary of it.

He is certain that the Resurrection is true; therefore, he is fears the humiliation (of that day). He is certain that Paradise is true; therefore, he yearns for it. He is certain that the Hell fire is true; therefore, he strives to save himself from it. He is certain that the accountability on the Day of Judgment is true; therefore, he is takes account of himself".[10](#)

B) He Gets Rid Of Deceiving Hopes

Imam 'Ali (as), regarding this, says: "Anybody who is sure that he will separate from friends, that he will be put under the ground, that he will be accountable on the Day of Judgment for what he has done, that what he leaves behind will not help him in the future, that he will need what he has sent in advance, should shorten his far-fetched whims and desires and add to his good deeds"[11](#)

C) He Is Patient And Disasters Seem Easy To Him

Imam 'Ali (as) has said,

الصَّبْرُ ثَمَرَةُ الْيَقِينِ

"Patience is the fruit of certainty"[12](#)

Imam 'Ali (as) has also stated:

"سِلَاحُ الْمُؤْمِنِ، الصَّبْرُ عَلَى الْبَلَاءِ وَالشُّكْرُ فِي الرَّخَاءِ"

"The weapon of a believer is patience during trials and being thankful at the time of ease."[13](#)

Imam 'Ali (as) in the same letter (No 31) advises his son Imam Hasan (as) in the following way: "With the help of patience and certainty, make sorrow flee from you."

Imam as-Sajjad (as) in his prayer invokes God: "O God! I ask you to give me conviction; in this way, you will make the hardships of the world seem easy."[14](#)

The word "treasure" in the holy verse

"وَأَمَّا الْجِدَارُ فَكَانَ لِغُلَامَيْنِ يَتِيمَيْنِ فِي الْمَدِينَةِ وَكَانَ تَحْتَهُ كَنْزٌ

لَهُمَا

"And as for the wall, it belonged to two orphan boys in the city, and there was beneath it a treasure belonging to them [Qur'an 18:82]"

is not meant literally, but it was a slate on which was written; "I am Allah. There is no god but me. Anybody who has certainty in death, does not laugh so broad as to show his teeth; One who has certainty in accountability, is not very happy; and one who has certainty in Divine destiny, does not fear anybody except God." [15](#)

Imam Sadiq (as) as well, has said, "There exists no action without certainty, and there is no certainty without greeting God with humility and respect." [16](#)

D) Ascent To Divine Fate

Imam 'Ali (as) has stated: "Anybody who is satisfied with Divine Fate, will definitely enjoy good certainty." [17](#)

He has said, as well: "Being happy with God is the result of certainty." [18](#)

Imam Sadiq (as), as well, has said, "Being satisfied with affairs which seems to be troublesome, is of the highest degree of certainty." [19](#)

E) Sincerity

One who believes and has certainty in the origin of the creation, Resurrection, and Islamic education, naturally can not perform his affairs and actions for anybody else except God. Thus, regarding this, Imam 'Ali (as) has said, "The sincerity of your intention is based on the strength of certainty and on the soundness of the intention" [20](#)

He has also said, "The reason behind sincerity is certainty." [21](#) He has also said, "The sincerity in actions is the result of the strength of certainty." [22](#) He as well has mentioned: "The people of certainty are the people of sincerity." [23](#)

F) Piety

As certainty includes a lot of advantages, the lack of interest in the world, too, is the result of certainty. This is clear from a look at Imam 'Ali's statements which follow:

"Certainty has piety as a result"

"Piety is the basis of certainty"

"One who is sure of the Doom's Day, will not be greedy for this world"

"Certainty is the best agent for lack of interest in this world" [24](#)

G) Trust and Reliance on Allah

One other result of certainty is the trust and reliance on Allah. Regarding this, Imam 'Ali (as) says: "With trust in Allah we reach certainty." He also says: "Trust in God stems from the strength of certainty."

That also has said, "The truth of belief exists in the trust in God." [25](#)

[1](#) . Jami' al-Sa'adat, vol.1, p.119.

[2](#) . Usul al-Kafi, vol. 2, pp.52-57.

[3](#) . Op cit.

4. . Usul al-Kafi, vol.2, pp.52-57.
5. . Qur'an 41:53.
6. . Mulla Abd al-Razzaq Gilani's Sharh Misbah al-Shari'ah wa Miftah al-Haqiqah, p.471; Bihar al-Anwar, vol.70, p.179.
7. . Usul al-Kafi, vol. 2, p.53.
8. . Usul al-Kafi, vol.2, p.54. Mawlana Rumi, in Volume One of the Mathnawi attributes this story to Zayd b. Harithah, and not to Harithah b. Malik. Mawlawi writes:
The prophet asked Zayd,
How did you wake up, O loyal friend?
He answered a believer subject to God, He asked again
What are the signs of faith, if they have blossomed?
He answered: I was thirsty for days,
At nights I couldn't sleep because of my love,
He asked: what gifts did you bring us?
Which could be appreciated by people here.
He answered in the same way that people see the sky.
I can see the Heaven dwellers.
All of them I can see like the Doom's Day
Clearly, I see both men and women
Now tell me, shall I continue?
Mustafa hinted to him to be silent [Mathnawi, p.92.]
9. . Ghurar al-Hikam.
10. . Tuhaf al-'Uqul, p.22.
11. . Bihar al-Anwar, vol.73, p.167.
12. . Ghurar al-Hikam.
13. . Ghurar al-Hikam.
14. . Mizan al-Hikmah, vol.10, p.788.
15. . Bihar, vol.70, p.182.
16. . Tuhaf al-'Uqul, p.223.
17. . Ghurar al-Hikam.
18. . Op.cit.
19. . Bihar al-Anwar, vol.71, p.152.
20. . Ghurar al-Hikam.
21. . Op.cit.
22. . Op.cit.
23. . Op. cit.
24. . Ghurar al-Hikam.
25. . Op.cit.

8) Illuminate your heart with Wisdom

ونوره بالحكمة"

Wisdom is a truth which is taught by all Prophets.¹ This is especially true in the case of our Prophet (S) who has put wisdom on his instructive agenda:

"وَيُزَكِّيهِمْ وَيُعَلِّمُهُمُ الْكِتَابَ وَالْحِكْمَةَ" 289

"...and teaches them the Book and the wisdom."

The holy Qur'an defines wisdom as the greatest divine asset, and emphasizes:

"وَمَنْ يُؤْتَ الْحِكْمَةَ فَقَدْ أُوتِيَ خَيْرًا كَثِيرًا 290"

"...and whoever is granted wisdom, he, in deed, is given a great good."

Finally, wisdom is introduced as the light of any wise and pious person's heart: a heart with no wisdom is deprived of divine light:

"Wisdom is the light of every heart". [2](#)

"إِنَّ الْحِكْمَةَ نُورٌ كُلُّ قَلْبٍ"

It is for this very reason that Imam 'Ali (as) orders his son to illuminate his heart with wisdom. With regards to the special role of wisdom in Islam, it is necessary to delve into the truth behind wisdom and its consequences:

What is Wisdom?

Hikmah or wisdom originally means "to arrive at righteousness by knowledge and reasoning." In the same way that a horse is made tame by giving it a bridle (*hakamah*), man, too, by acquiring wisdom and by arriving at the right through knowledge and reasoning, is saved from wrong-doing.[3](#)

Although in some traditions the word wisdom (*hikmah*) is interpreted to mean "knowledge in religion" and in some other traditions it is taken to mean "understanding," and still in others it is taken to mean "knowledge about Imams," with regards to the fact that the word "*hikmah*" in the Qur'an is used for Luqman, who was not a prophet,[4](#)

"وَلَقَدْ آتَيْنَا لُقْمَانَ الْحِكْمَةَ 294"

"...and certainly we gave wisdom to Luqman"

And because of the fact that the Prophet (S) was appointed to call people to Islam through wisdom, good exhortation, and appropriate debate,[5](#) and it was not possible to invite people to Islam only through verses of Qur'an (without using wisdom and reasoning), and also due to the fact that the Qur'an on several occasions used the word "*hikmah*" after the word *kitab* (Book), this word is taken by some to mean tradition, and by others philosophy or commandments or reasoning.[6](#) We conclude that "*hikmah*" does not mean the above interpretations singly; rather, each one of those interpretations defines only one aspect of the word. Thus *hikmah* could mean: Any kind of realistic knowledge and insight which can

lead man in the dimensions of theoretical and practical philosophy, either through inspiration, ascetism and piety, or through the justification of the philosophy of commandments or the commandments themselves, or in the dimensions of theoretical or practical philosophy.

The Consequences And Signs Of Wisdom And The Wise

As we said, "*hikmah* is the realistic insight which in the theoretical and practical philosophy is a guide for man." Naturally, a person who has such great a capital enjoys the sublime human traits and is a perfect human being.

But in the Qur'an and in the Islamic traditions some characteristics are emphasized, some of which follow:

- 1.** *Hikmah* is the source for salvation, steadiness and tranquility.[7](#)
- 2.** *Hikmah* is the light for insight, scale for piety, and the result of honesty.[8](#)
- 3.** *Hikmah* causes a man to fear God.[9](#)
- 4.** *Hikmah* is a means to take advice from the events.[10](#)
- 5.** *Hikmah* causes us not to have interest in this world.[11](#)
- 6.** *Hikmah* is to accompany righteousness and to obey the rightful person.[12](#)
- 7.** *Hikmah* is a guide to religion, it considers the slave more significant than the free one, the poor more excellent than the rich and the small more important than the elderly, and the miserable more significant than the kings.[13](#)
- 8.** *Hikmah* is a means of protecting man from committing sins; it is an agent for human salvation.
- 9.** The *hakim* (the wise man) is a person who is strong in the face of events; he is a guide to people. Regarding this the Great Prophet (S) tells Imam 'Ali (as): "If you become a means for God to lead one of His obedient believers, then it is better for you than anything on which the sun shines from east to west.[14](#)
- 10.** The *hakim* is a dignitary in the eyes of people.[15](#)
- 11.** The *hakim* cures the poor and endows virtues.[16](#)
- 12.** The *hakim* compensates bad behaviors with good ones[17](#)
- 13.** The *hakim* does not quarrel with superiors and does not belittle his inferiors; he does not give away what he does not own. His tongue is in harmony with his heart, and his speech is not in opposition with his action; he does not say anything on the issues which he does not have information about. He will not desert his responsibilities when he is in a plight.[18](#)
- 14.** The *hakim* obeys his superiors, respects his equals, and uses justice with his inferiors.[19](#)
- 15.** The *hakim* is more elegant than others in personality, more patient in forgiveness, and more speedy in pardoning and more open in ethics.[20](#)
- 16.** The *hakim* is impatient to add up to his *Hikmah*.[21](#)
- 17.** The *hakim* does not ask ungenerous people for help.[22](#)
- 18.** The *hakim* does not take delight in the praising of an ignorant person.[23](#)
- 19.** If he has to treat a person he does not like, the *hakim* will tolerate him.[24](#)
- 20.** The *hakim* knows himself.[25](#)
- 21.** The *hakim* is near to the position of prophethood.[26](#)

The Agents Of The Development Of Wisdom And Its Hindrances

Since the creation and Divine affairs are based on the principle of cause and effect, God's generosity is dependent on the capacity of the receiver. This is because God is "the most generous of the generous ones" and He is not jealous.²⁷

Thus, some people such as Luqman are given wisdom because of their existence structure and excellent morals and their humane feelings. Some others, however, are deprived of it because they lack the fundamental requirements. The following factors are significant to possess wisdom:

1. God-Wariness:

God-wariness is a kind of spiritual God-fearing state in man's soul that forces him to stay away from committing sins and to carry out his tasks. It has different characteristics, one of which is "realistic insight and wisdom".

The Holy Qur'an says:

"يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا إِن تَتَّقُوا اللَّهَ يَجْعَلْ لَكُمْ فُرْقَانًا"

"O you who believe! If you are careful of your duty to Allah, He will grant you a distinction."²⁸

As you see, the evolution of the power to distinguish right from wrong, which is called "the realistic insight and wisdom," is, according to Qur'an, the result of God-wariness.

And from the verse 282, Surah al-Baqarah **"...and be careful of your duty to Allah, Allah teaches you"** we can realize that God-wariness has a deep effect in our recognition and in the increase of our learning and knowledge.

The cause and effect relation of God-wariness and wisdom may also be understood from the Prophet's statement:

"جَاهِدُوا أَنْفُسَكُمْ عَلَى أَهْوَائِكُمْ تَحِلُّ قُلُوبَكُمْ الْحِكْمَةَ"

"Struggle against your whims and wishes so that wisdom may enter your hearts."

Abul Fath Bosti, the poet and writer of the fourth century in one of his poems emphasizes the close relation of God-wariness and wisdom in the following words:

*"There are two things which have taken milk from one breast: wisdom and God-wariness. There are also two things which live in one place, they are: wealth and aggression".*²⁹

In Bihar al-Anwar, al-Majlisi mentions: "Luqman was asked by somebody if he was a slave of

such and such a family. He answered that he was. Then he was asked what factors gave him the status he had then. He answered: "Honesty in speech, returning the deposits people had with me, leaving aside what did not concern me, lowering my gaze, controlling my tongue and not eating illegally-obtained food. One who does not do these things is below me and one who does more than this is superior to me. And one who acts on these, is like me."³⁰

2. Sincerity

By sincerity is meant "not to associate any god with Allah, and to carry out one's duties for His pleasure, and not for fear of punishment or to attain His rewards³¹, and not for fear of other people's praise or blame."³² Sincerity has numerous benefits and advantages. One of them is the evolution and growth of wisdom in the sincere believer's heart and his alertness towards affairs. In the books of traditions, there is one tradition reported from the Prophet (S) in different shapes:

"Anybody who purifies himself,³³ - or his actions,³⁴ or his faith³⁵ or his worship - for God, for 40 days, God will let him be aware of his pains and their remedies and let the springs of wisdom flow from his heart to his tongue:

"مَنْ أَخْلَصَ لِلَّهِ أَرْبَعِينَ صَبَاحًا ظَهَرَتْ - جَرَتْ - يَتَابِعُ الْحِكْمَةَ مِنْ قَلْبِهِ إِلَى لِسَانِهِ" 326

Imam 'Ali (as) has stated:

عِنْدَ تَحَقُّقِ الْإِخْلَاصِ تَسْتَبِيرُ الْبَصَائِرُ

"When sincerity is achieved, insights become clearly apparent"³⁶

The reason why God-wariness and sincerity increase realism in man and let him know the truth behind the affairs is that: A sin acts like dust and black smoke. In the same way that in a space full of dirt and smoke it is impossible to see properly, the thought space of sinners and unbelief acts in the same manner.³⁷

As long as this pollution of sins lingers above us, we may not see the truth. But when, through God-wariness and sincerity, this dust and dirt become extinct and thought space become clear, the bride of reality manifests herself and man can get the truth and the springs of wisdom will flow from his heart towards his tongue. Imam Sadiq (as) has said:

"لَوْ لَا أَنَّ الشَّيَاطِينَ يَحُومُونَ حَوْلَ قُلُوبِ بَنِي آدَمَ لَتَنظَرُوا إِلَى مَلَكُوتِ السَّمَوَاتِ"

"If the Satans did not hover above men's hearts, they would see the Heaven's kingdom"[38](#)

Regarding this, the Prophet (S) says:

**"لَوْ لَا تَكْثِيرُ فِي كَلَامِكُمْ وَتَمْرِيحُ فِي قُلُوبِكُمْ لَرَأَيْتُمْ مَا أَرَى
وَسَمِعْتُمْ مَا أَسْمَعُ"**

"If it were not for your excessive speech and the disorder in your hearts, you would see what I see and you would hear what I hear."[39](#)

In describing the traits of the devotees of God, Imam 'Ali (as) emphasizes this truth: "Such a devotee enlivened his intellect and killed (the desires of) his soul until his large body became slender and his coarseness became fine. An illuminating light shone in his existence, making the way clear for him and taking him on the (divine) path. The doors (on the path) propelled him to the door of safety and the abode of permanence. With the tranquility of his body, his feet stood firm in the station of peace and ease, because of that in which he had employed his heart and pleased His Lord".[40](#)

3. Sparing In Eating And Drinking And Piety

Among the factors of evolution of wisdom in man are the pious morals and eating little. Regarding this, the Prophet (S) sermonized Abu Dharr by saying: "Anybody in this world who adopted piety, God has implanted the tree of wisdom in his heart; and God made his tongue eloquent and made him aware of the faults of this world and remedies to its calamities and sent him from here to the Hereafter"[41](#) And God, on the night of ascension to heaven exhorting the Prophet, said, "When My obedient subject keeps his stomach empty, and keeps his tongue, I will teach him wisdom."[42](#)

On the contrary, lack of piety, lack of sincerity, too much interest in the world, gluttony, haughtiness, anger and indulging in lust, take away man's ability to enjoy wisdom. Regarding this, Imam 'Ali (as) has said, "Gluttony spoils wisdom and hinders cleverness."[43](#) Elsewhere he has also said, "Wisdom does not arrive unless man stops committing sins. Lust and wisdom do not match."[44](#) Elsewhere Imam 'Ali (as) has said, as well: "A man defeated by anger and lust will not enjoy wisdom."[45](#)

In short: When man's heart is lit with piety and is irrigated by ethical virtues, it will enjoy the sweet fruit of knowledge and wisdom. If man's heart is contaminated with sins, it will lack insight and wisdom[46](#) as Imam Hadi (as) has said.

People's Duty Towards Wisdom And The Wise

Since wisdom is the most delicate and the greatest capital of life here and in the Hereafter, it is crucial that people in acquiring it put forth lots of attempt. It might be that acquiring wisdom could be hard or the person possessing it is not descent.

Imam 'Ali (as) has said:

"خُذِ الْحِكْمَةَ أَتَى كَأَنَّ فَإِنَّ الْحِكْمَةَ ضَالَّةٌ كُلُّ مُؤْمِنٍ"

"Take wisdom from wherever it may be, for wisdom is the lost property of every believer."[47](#)

He has also said,

"الْحِكْمَةُ ضَالَّةٌ كُلُّ مُؤْمِنٍ فَخُذْهَا وَلَوْ مِنْ أَفْوَاهِ الْمُنَافِقِ"

"Wisdom is the lost property of every believer; take it, even if it be from the mouths of hypocrites."[48](#)

He has said as well,

"خُذِ الْحِكْمَةَ وَمَنْ أَتَاكَ بِهَا وَانظُرْ إِلَى مَا قَالَ وَلَا تَنْظُرْ إِلَى مَنْ قَالَ"

"Receive wisdom from anybody who offers it to you. Look at what one said, not at who said it."[49](#)

He has, as well, said,

"الْحِكْمَةُ ضَالَّةٌ الْمُؤْمِنِ فَاطْلُبُوهَا وَلَوْ عِنْدَ الْمُشْرِكِ تَكُونُوا أَحَقُّ بِهَا وَأَهْلُهَا"

"Wisdom is the lost property of every believer; so seek it, even from the polytheist, for you are more entitled to it and worthy of it."[50](#)

The Prophet (S) has said,

"الْحِكْمَةُ ضَالَّةٌ الْمُؤْمِنِ فَحَيْثُ وَجَدَهَا فَهُوَ أَحَقُّ بِهَا"

"Wisdom is the lost property of the believer. Wherever he can find it, he is more worthy of it."[51](#)

He also has said:

"الْحِكْمَةُ ضَالَّةُ الْمُؤْمِنِ يَأْخُذُهَا حَيْثُ وَجَدَهَا"

"Wisdom is the lost property of the believer. He should take it wherever he finds it."[52](#)

As we observe in the above expressions, the leaders of religion have interpreted wisdom as "the lost property of a believer." It is clear, when a man has lost something, he will look everywhere for it and even will endanger his life if that item is worthwhile. Wherever he sees it, he will take it.

In the same way, *Hikmah* (wisdom) is the reception of truth and realistic insight. Since this is the most complex issue and the dissension of the 72 sects occurs because they have not found out the truth, and because of this they are among those who have gone astray, we should ask God in each prayer to keep us on the right path and as the Prophet (S) has said: "O my Lord, make me know things as they are (i.e. the realities of things)!" And in this way we ask God to let us find our lost property.

Some Aspects Of Luqman's Personality And Wisdom

The historians are not unanimous as to the status of Luqman. Was he a Prophet? When did he live? Nobody knows for sure. Most of the historians are of the belief that Luqman was a ugly-looking man from Nubia (in the Northern part of Sudan between Ethiopia and Egypt), living at the time of the Prophet David. Because of his noble thoughts, God gave him highest degree of wisdom. It is narrated from the Prophet (S) who said, "I rightfully say Luqman was not a Prophet, but he was a thoughtful obedient servant of God. He had strong faith and certainty. He loved God and God loved him, too. That is why he received the asset of wisdom from God. Luqman was sleeping when suddenly heard: 'O Luqman, do you want to be God's representative on earth so that you may judge among people'?

Luqman replied: 'If God gives me option, I will not accept such a huge responsibility. But if He orders me to do so, I will whole-heartedly accept because I know if I accept such a task, He will help me not to go astray.'

The angels, whom he couldn't see, asked Luqman: Why?

He answered: "It is the most hazardous job to judge between people. For a judge it is a formidable job. If a person is protected by God, he is saved and if he does not go the right path, he will lose the way to paradise.

A person who is ashamed here but raises his head in the Hereafter is better than a person who keeps his head high here, but is ashamed in the Hereafter. A man who sells the Hereafter for this world will have neither here nor there".

The angels were surprised at Luqman's reasoning. Luqman said this and fell asleep. God put the light of wisdom in his heart. When he awoke, he started talking wisely. He helped David with his wisdom. David told him, "I envy you Luqman. Now you have passed your test"[53](#)

Thus, because of Luqman's obedience to God, he received the treasure of wisdom. God

named one of the Surahs of Qur'an after him. In that surah God put some of Luqman's advice to his children. One of which is the following:

"وَإِذْ قَالَ لُقْمَانُ لِابْنِهِ وَهُوَ يَعِظُهُ يَا بُنَيَّ لَا تُشْرِكْ بِاللَّهِ إِنَّ الشِّرْكَ لَظُلْمٌ عَظِيمٌ"

"And when Luqman said to his son while he admonished him: O my son! do not associate aught with Allah; most surely polytheism is a grievous iniquity" [Qur'an 31:13]

يَا بُنَيَّ إِنَّهَا إِنْ تَكُ مِثْقَالَ حَبَّةٍ مِنْ خَرْدَلٍ فَتَكُنْ فِي صَخْرَةٍ أَوْ فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ أَوْ فِي الْأَرْضِ يَأْتِ بِهَا اللَّهُ ۖ إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَطِيفٌ خَبِيرٌ. يَا بُنَيَّ أَقِمِ الصَّلَاةَ وَأْمُرْ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَانْهَ عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ وَأَصْبِرْ عَلَىٰ مَا أَصَابَكَ ۖ إِنَّ ذَٰلِكَ مِنْ عَزْمِ الْأُمُورِ. وَلَا تُصَعِّرْ خَدَّكَ لِلنَّاسِ وَلَا تَمْشِ فِي الْأَرْضِ مَرَحًا ۖ إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يُحِبُّ كُلَّ مُخْتَالٍ فَخُورٍ. وَاقْصِدْ فِي مَشْيِكَ وَاغْضُضْ مِنْ صَوْتِكَ ۖ إِنَّ أَنْكَرَ الْأَصْوَاتِ لَصَوْتُ الْحَمِيرِ

"O my son! Surely if it is the very weight of the grain of a mustard-seed, even though it is in (the heart of) rock, or (high above) in the heaven or (deep down) in the earth, Allah will bring it to light; Surely Allah is Knower of subtleties, Aware.

O my son! Keep up prayer and enjoin the good and forbid the evil, and bear patiently that which befalls you; surely these acts require courage. And do not turn your face away from people in contempt, nor go about in the land exulting overmuch; surely Allah does not love any self-conceited boaster. And pursue the right course in your going about and lower your voice; surely the most hateful of voices is braying of the asses" [Qur'an 31:16-18].

Other Aspects Of Luqman's Wisdom:

Although there are ample references to Luqman's wisdom in the books and in the poems of the past poets, we will present here some aspects of his wisdom as narrated in the books of traditions:

a) "O my son! Do not let your heart be concerned with people's pleasure, and their praise or blame. A person will attain nothing from that although he may make the utmost efforts in it." His son said, "Father, what does this mean? I would like to see some examples of it in words or deeds." Luqman replied: "Let us go out". They went out together with one animal

to ride on. Luqman rode on the animal leaving his son to walk behind him. They passed a group of people who said: "This old man is hard-hearted, with little compassion. He rides the animal although he is stronger than the boy, and he makes the boy walk behind him! This is an evil arrangement!"

Luqman told his son: "Did you hear them, and their censure of my riding and your walking"? He said: "Yes, I did".

Then Luqman told his son: "Now you ride, my son, and I will walk". So the son rode the animal and Luqman walked. They passed another group of people who said: "An evil father and an evil son! The father has not trained his son. The son rides while the father walks behind him, whereas the father is more worthy of respect and of riding the animal. As for the son, he has been disrespectful to his father because of this. Therefore, both of them are wrong-doers"!

Luqman asked his son: "Did you hear"? He replied: "Yes".

Then Luqman said: "Let us both ride on the animal". They both mounted the animal and passed by a group of people who said: "There is no mercy in the hearts of these two riders and God will not bless them. They are breaking the back of the animal by overloading it. It was better for one of them to walk and one to ride".

Luqman asked his son: "Did you hear"? He said: "Yes".

Then Luqman said: "Let us both dismount and let the animal walk without a rider". They drove the animal on before them while they walked. They passed a group of people who said: "How strange these two are! They have an animal, but they walk". They blamed these two for that, just as others had blamed them previously. Then Luqman said to his son: "Can you make people pleased with you? Thus, do not pay any attention to them; rather, occupy yourself with God's pleasure. That will be a source of prosperity both here and in the Hereafter".[54](#)

b) My son! I learned seven thousand pieces of wisdom. You memorize only four of them and you may enter the paradise with me. Strengthen your ship since the sea ahead of you is deep; lighten the load of your sins since you have a rough course ahead of you; increase your provisions since you have a long journey; have sincerity in your actions since the accountant is sharp."[55](#)

c) My son! If you doubt death, take sleep away from yourself; you will not be able to do that. If you doubt the Day of Resurrection, take wakefulness away from yourself; and you cannot do this. When you think over these issues, you will understand that your soul is in the hand of One other than you. Sleep is only in the same position as death and awakening after sleep is like resurrection after death.[56](#)

d) My son! The world is a deep sea in which an immense number of people are drowned. Use your faith in God as your ship in this sea; let trust in God be your sails; let your provision be God-wariness; if you cross this sea safely, it is because of God's Mercy, and if you are destroyed, it is because of your own sins.[57](#)

e) O my son! Be fearful of God to such an extent that if you go before Him on the Day of Judgment with all the good that jinn and men have performed, you still fear He may punish you; and hope from God to such an extent that if you come before Him on the Day of Judgment having committed the sins of all jinn and men, you still hope that He will forgive you.[58](#)

f) O my son! Everything has a sign by which it is recognized:

For religion there are three signs: knowledge, faith and acting on it.

For faith there are three signs: faith in God, His Books and His Prophets.

For a scholar there are three signs: knowledge of God, of what He has made obligatory and what He dislikes.

For one who labours (according to God's commands) there are three signs: prayer, fasting and *zakat* (statutory Islamic levy on specified items to be used for Muslims' welfare).

For a *Mutakallif* (a person who is not qualified for a job, but accepts it anyway) there are three signs: he quarrels with his superiors; he tells things he does not know; and he tries to do something he is not qualified for.

For a wrongdoer there are three signs: He wrongs his superiors through disobedience; he wrongs his inferiors through overcoming them, and he aids other wrongdoers.

For the sinner there are three signs: he is treacherous, he lies, and he acts in opposition to his words.

For a hypocrite there are three signs: his tongue contradicts his heart, his heart contradicts his actions and his outer self contradicts his inner self.

For an envious person there are three signs: He backbites in one's absence, flatters in one's presence and rejoices in the misfortunes of others.

For a squanderer there are three signs: He sells things that are not his; wears what is not his, and eats what is not his.

For a lazy person there are three signs: He procrastinates affairs so much that he is neglectful; he is neglectful until he is wasteful and he is wasteful until he sins.

For a heedless one there are three signs: negligence, diversion and forgetfulness.[59](#)

g) My son! Be aware when you stand before God tomorrow you will be asked about three things:

About your youth and in what you wore it out;

About your life, in what you spent it;

About your wealth, how you earned it and in what you spent it. So make yourself ready for such a day and prepare yourself for the answers.

Do not regret what you have lost in this world, because if you have little, it will not last, and if you have much, it is vulnerable. Therefore be vigilant and strive in your work and draw aside the curtain of negligence and perform the heavenly duties and renew repentance in your heart and get ready to depart this life before death comes to you and before there is a space between you and what you wish to do.[60](#)

h) My son! Do not postpone repentance because death will arrive unexpectedly; Do not rejoice at death; do not make fun of one afflicted, and do not refuse to do a good deed.

My son! Be trustworthy so that you may live free of need. Adopt God-wariness as a trade, profits will come to you without capital. When you sin, pay alms since it purifies the consequences of it.

My son! Exhortation is difficult for a foolish person, in the same way that mountain-climbing is difficult for the old.

My son! Do not be sorry for a person whom you have wronged; but be sorry for evil you have committed against yourself. When your power induces you to wrong others, do not forget God's power over you.

My son! Learn from the learned what you do not know and teach people what you know.[61](#)

My son! Fall on your knees in front of the scholars for the acquisition of knowledge and learning. Do not quarrel with them. Let your world be a means to gain the Hereafter for you. But do not put this world aside completely because you will then be dependent on

others. And do not care for this world to the degree that you ruin the Hereafter.

My son! If you get educated in your childhood, you will benefit from it at adulthood. And anyone who decides to learn will put forth the energy necessary. And anybody who wants education will try for it and will tolerate the hardships.[62](#)

My son! Make a thousand friends, and a thousand is little; but do not make one enemy, for one is too much.[63](#)

My son! Avoid being depressed, bad-tempered and impatient, because man can not rely on himself with these traits; be patient in your works; in helping your brethren, be strong and treat people amicably.[64](#)

i) Luqman was once asked: "Who are the worst people"? He answered: "Those who do not care that people consider them to be evil-doers". Then Luqman was told: "How ugly is your face"! He replied: "Are you finding fault with the painting or the painter"?[65](#) [By painter is meant the Creator].

j) Luqman's master told him: "Slaughter a sheep and bring me its two best parts". So he brought him the heart and the tongue (of the sheep).

Luqman' master told him another day: "Go slaughter a sheep and bring me its two worst parts. Luqman once again brought the tongue and the heart.

Luqman's master asked: How can the heart and tongue be the best and the worst parts at the same time? He answered:

"انَّهُمَا اطْيَبُ شَيْءٍ إِذَا طَابَا وَاخْبَثُ شَيْءٍ إِذَا خُبْنَا"

"They are the best if they are good, and they are the worst, if they are bad".[66](#)

k) There are three things which are only recognized at three times: a patient man is only recognized at the time of anger; a brave man is only recognized at war; and you do not recognize your brother except when you need him.[67](#)

l) There are three things the possession of which will entail a perfect faith: A person who does not neglect God's pleasure when he is satisfied and happy; he who does not disregard justice at the time of anger; and he who does not take what he does not deserve at the time of his power. When you want to make friends with anybody, make him angry at first. If he did not disregard justice at the time of anger, then take him as a friend; or else, leave him.[68](#)

m) There are four things which a person should perform personally although he is a prince or a dignitary: rising to show respect to his father, entertaining the guest, sitting on a horse, and helping the world.[69](#)

We will end this section by reporting a tradition from Imam Sadiq (as) which is an answer to Hammad's question about Luqman and his wisdom:

Imam Sadiq (as) said, "I swear by God that God gave Luqman wisdom not for his wealth, or family or strength or beauty. He was given wisdom because he was strong in worshipping God, God-fearing, silent, tranquil, with profound insight, a deep thinker, keen-sighted and in no need of admonition. He never slept during the day. Nobody saw him answering the call of nature or bathing because of his extreme modesty. He never laughed at anything for

fear of sinning. He was never angry and never joked with anyone. He did not rejoice at anything he received of this world and did not grieve over anything of this world. He married women and had many children most of whom died in their childhood, but he did not weep for any one of them.

He never passed by two people who were arguing or fighting without reconciling them, and he did not leave them until they had made peace with one another. He never heard any speech that he liked without asking for its explanation and about who said it. He would frequently sit in the company of scholars and the wise ones. He would come upon the judges and kings; he would pity the judges for what they were afflicted with and have mercy on the kings and rulers for their beguilement from God, and their being content with that. He used to learn things which made him defeat his desires and with it would guard himself from Satan. He would treat his heart with contemplation and coax his soul with admonition. He did not enter into any matter that did not concern him. It was for these reasons that God gave him wisdom..."[70](#)

1. "وَإِذْ أَخَذَ اللَّهُ مِيثَاقَ النَّبِيِّينَ لَمَا آتَيْنَاكُمْ مِنْ كِتَابٍ وَحِكْمَةٍ .

"And when Allah made a covenant through the prophets: certainly what I have give you of Book and wisdom..."[Qur'an 3:81].

2. .Bihar al-Anwar, vol.14, p.316.

3. . Majma' al-Bahrayn, Mufradat of Raghīb, Item hikam.

4. . Bihar, vol.13, p.423.

5. "ادْعُ إِلَى سَبِيلِ رَبِّكَ بِالْحُكْمَةِ وَالْمَوْعِظَةِ الْحَسَنَةِ وَجَادِلْهُمْ بِلَايَتِي هِيَ أَحْسَنُ" .

"Call to the way of your Lord with wisdom and goodly exhortation and have disputations with them in the best manner..." [Qur'an 16:125].

6. . Shaykh Tusi's Tibyan, vol..10, p.4; Tafsir Ruh al-Ma'ani, vol.9, p.514; Al-Mizan, vol.19, pp.265-272; Majma' al-Bayan, vol.10, p.284; Interpretation of Surah al-Jumu'ah, by Mulla Sadra, p.216.

7. . Bihar, vol.1, p.216; Misbah al-Shari'ah, p.535.

8. . Bihar, vol.1, p.216; Misbah ash-Shari'ah p.533.

9. . Bihar, vol.78, p.413.

10. . Ghurar al-Hikam.

11. . Ghurar al-Hikam.

12. . Ghurar al-Hikam.

13. . Bihar, vol.1, p.220.

14. . Bihar, vol.1, p.216.

15. . Ghurar al-Hikam.

16. . Ghurar al-Hikam.

17. . Op Cit.

18. . Ghurar al-Hikam.

19. . Ghurar al-Hikam.

20. . Ghurar al-Hikam.

21. . Bihar, vol.1, p.183.

22. . Ghurar al-Hikam.

23. . Bihar, vol..1, p.204.

24. . Mizan al-Hikmah, vol. 2 P 393.

25. . Bihar, vol..78, p.81.

26. . Kanz al-'Ummal, vol. 16, p.117.

27. . For this refer to Tabatabai's Principles of philosophy, Mutahhari's Divine justice and the author's Determinism.

28. . Qur'an 8:29.

29. . Rayhanah al-Adab, vol.1, pp.262-264, under the translation of 'Ali Ibn Mohammad Ibn Yusuf Ibn Mohammad Ibn Abdul Aziz; Mu'jam al-Buldan, vol.1, p.415 under the word "bost"; Guftar Mah, vol.1, p.30.

30. . Bihar al-Anwar, vol.13, p.426.

31. . Bihar, vol.70, pp.236-255; Usul al-Kafi, vol.2, p.84.

32. . In this case, refer to Bihar, vol.70, pp.234-237.

33. . Bihar, vol.70, p.249.

34. . Ihya al-'Ulum, vol.4, p.322.

35. . Usul al-Kafi, vol.2, p.16.

36. . Ghurar al-Hikam.

[37.](#) . Sa'adi says: Truth is a decorated house,
Whims and wishes are dangling dirt in the air;
When there is dust in the air, you may not see properly,
Although man is alert, he may not see.

** ** *

And Hafiz says:

The beloved's complexion does not bear a veil,
Get rid of the dust in the air, so that you may see.

[38.](#) . Guftar Mah, vol.1, p.29, from Murtaza Mutahhari's lectures.

[39.](#) . Op.cit.

[40.](#) . Nahj al-Balaghah, Sermon 220.

[41.](#) . Bihar, vol.77, p.80.

[42.](#) . Bihar, vol.77, p.29.

[43.](#) . Ghurar al-Hikam.

[44.](#) . Op.cit.

[45.](#) . Op.cit.

[46.](#) . Bihar, vol.78, p.370.

[47.](#) . Ghurar al-Hikam.

[48.](#) . Op.cit.

[49.](#) . Ghurar al-Hikam

[50.](#) . Bihar, vol.78, p.34.

[51.](#) . Altaj, vol..1, p.64.

[52.](#) . Bihar, vol.78, p.105.

[53.](#) . Tafsir Majma' al-Bayan, vol.8, pp.315-316; Bihar al-Anwar, vol.3, p.424; Tafsir Namunah, vol.17, pp.44-46;
Dekhoda Loqat Nameh, vol.36, pp.256-260.

[54.](#) . Bihar al-Anwar, vol.13, p.434.

[55.](#) . Bihar, vol.13, p.432.

[56.](#) . Bihar, vol.13, p.417.

[57.](#) . Bihar, vol.13, p.411.

[58.](#) . Bihar, vol.13, p.412.

[59.](#) . Bihar al-Anwar, vol.13, p.415.

[60.](#) . Bihar, vol.13, p.426.

[61.](#) . Bihar, vol.13 p. 426.

[62.](#) . Bihar, vol.13 p. 411-414-420.

[63.](#) . Bihar, vol.13, pp.414-414-420.

[64.](#) . Op.cit.

[65.](#) . Bihar, vol.13, p.425.

[66.](#) . Bihar, vol.13, p.424.

[67.](#) . Dekhoda Dictionary, vol.36, p.260.

[68.](#) . Op.cit.

[69.](#) . Op.cit.

[70.](#) . Bihar, vol.13, p. 410.

9) Make your heart submissive with the remembrance of Death

وَدَلِّهِ بِذِكْرِ الْمَوْتِ ""

In this phrase of his letter (section 9), Imam 'Ali (as) points out that man should not be involved in this transitory life; rather, he should have in mind that his living here is not permanent: in the near future he has to leave this house for the eternal one. And if he is

doubtful, let him study the cases of his friends and relatives and see that this world was not loyal to them. They left every thing here and were housed in a house in a strange district. He should realize that this, sooner or later, shall happen to him. He should not sell the Hereafter for the present world.

Although Imam 'Ali (as) mentioned this issue at the beginning of his letter, the principle of repetition in educational matters is useful. Imam has used this technique in his letter.

Remembrance Of Death

When a person is involved in his daily affairs and he neglects death and the eternal life, he gets ready for engaging in all sorts of sins and wrong-doing and surrenders to the temptations of Satan and to the whims and desires of his self. The most significant factor which could tame his aggressive self is the remembrance of Death and the instability of this world and the events of the next world.

In fact, if we pay attention, we will see that sooner or later death will overcome a person and he will be put in the grave and his limbs will disintegrate and turn into earth. He will cut his relations with his wealth, children, house and the world as such. He will, pretty soon, be forgotten as if he had not been living. But he is responsible now for what he had done before. Now he wishes he had never been born to take this burden of sins on his shoulders. For this very reason it is emphasized in the Islamic traditions to remember death. The Prophet of Islam has said:

**"أَفْضَلُ الزُّهْدِ فِي الدُّنْيَا ذِكْرُ الْمَوْتِ وَأَفْضَلُ الْعِبَادَةِ ذِكْرُ الْمَوْتِ
وَأَفْضَلُ التَّفَكُّرِ ذِكْرُ الْمَوْتِ، فَمَنْ أَثْقَلَهُ ذِكْرُ الْمَوْتِ وَجَدَ قَبْرَهُ
رَوْضَةً مِنْ رِيَاضِ الْجَنَّةِ"**

*"The best asceticism in this world is the remembrance of death; the best worship is the remembrance of death, and the best contemplation is the remembrance of death. One on whom the remembrance of death weighs heavily, will find his grave to be one of the gardens of Paradise."*¹

Imam 'Ali (as) has said:

**"ادْكُرُوا هَادِمَ اللَّذَاتِ وَمُنْعِصَ الشَّهَوَاتِ وَدَاعِيَ الشَّتَاتِ ادْكُرُوا
مُفَرِّقَ الْجَمَاعَاتِ وَمُبَاعِدَ الْأَمْنِيَّاتِ وَمُدْنِيَّ الْمُنْسِيَّاتِ وَالْمُؤَذِّنَ
بِالْبَيْنِ وَالشَّتَاتِ"**

*"Remember the destroyer of pleasures, the terminator of desires, the inviter to separations. Remember the disperser of groups, the remover of hopes, the one that draws near what is to be forgotten, the announcer of partings and dispersions."*²

Imam Sadiq (as) has said:

**"ذِكْرُ الْمَوْتِ يُمِيتُ الشَّهَوَاتِ فِي النَّفْسِ وَيَقْطَعُ مَنَابِتَ الْغَفْلَةِ
وَيُقَوِّي الْقَلْبَ بِمَوَاعِدِ اللَّهِ وَيُرِقُّ الطَّبْعَ وَيَكْسِرُ أَعْلَامَ الْهَوَى
وَيُطْفِئُ نَارَ الْجِرْصِ وَيُخَفِّرُ الدُّنْيَا"**

"The remembrance of death kills desires in the soul, cuts off the sources of heedlessness and strengthens the heart through God's promises; it softens the temperament, breaks the sign-posts of whims, puts out the fire of greed and makes the world appear miserable and worthless."[3](#)

It is also narrated from Imam 'Ali (as) his saying:

**"أَكْثِرُوا ذِكْرَ الْمَوْتِ وَيَوْمَ خُرُوجِكُمْ مِنَ الْقُبُورِ وَقِيَامِكُمْ بَيْنَ يَدَيِ
اللَّهِ"**

"Remember death frequently, and the day you will be resurrected from the graves and your standing before God; this remembrance will ease your disasters."[4](#)

The Prophet (S) has said:

"لَوْ تَعَلَّمَ الْبَهَائِمُ مِنَ الْمَوْتِ مَا تَعَلَّمُونَ مَا أَكَلْتُمْ مِنْهَا سَمِينًا"

"If animals knew what we know of death, you would never eat a fat animal."[5](#)

Once a man's name was mentioned in the presence of the Prophet (S) and he was praised. The Prophet (S) asked: "Did he remember death"? The attendants answered: "We don't remember him saying anything about death". The Prophet (S) said: "Then he is not to be praised".[6](#)

The Prophet was asked:

**"مَنْ أَكَيْسُ النَّاسِ وَأَكْرَمُ النَّاسِ يَا رَسُولَ اللَّهِ؟ فَقَالَ: أَكْثَرُهُمْ
ذِكْرًا لِلْمَوْتِ وَأَشَدَّهُمْ اسْتِعْدَادًا لَهُ أَوْلَيْكَ هُمْ الْاَكْيَاسُ ذَهَبُوا
بِشَرَفِ الدُّنْيَا وَكَرَامَةِ الْآخِرَةِ"**

*"O Messenger of Allah, who are the cleverest people"? He answered: "Those who are the most frequent in the remembrance of death and the firmest in readiness for it - those are clever ones who have taken the honor of this world and the favours of the Hereafter."*⁷

It is also narrated from the Prophet (S) that he said, "One who does not take a lesson from death and does not remember his misery and long stay in the grave and his bewilderment on the Day of Judgment, is not prosperous. Anybody in this world who does not care for death will be inflicted with sorrows in this world and anybody whose remembrance of death is good in this world is prosperous"⁸

There are two groups of people regarding death:

The first group severely escapes the remembrance of death and these are people who do not believe in the Hereafter and whose behavior in the world has been indecent. They know that by death they will get deprived of what they have.

Imam al-Husayn (as) was once asked: "Why are we frightened of death and are not interested in it"? Imam answered: "Because you have destroyed your Hereafter but have constructed your world. That is why you are frightened to move from flourishing condition to ruined condition".

The second group includes those who do not fear death. These are people who believe in the Hereafter and its assets, who have acted in accordance with the commands of God, who believe that by breaking the cage of the body here, they will enjoy God's blessings in the Hereafter. Thus, they not only do not fear death, but also consider it sweeter than honey.⁹ They repeat the following:

Tell death to come to me if it is a man,
Till I embrace him very closely;
I'll receive an eternal life from him,
He'll receive from me colored clothing
Kill me; kill me, O Great one,
For in your killing there is life.

Imam 'Ali (as) has said:

"أَفْضَلُ تُحَفَّةِ الْمُؤْمِنِ الْمَوْتُ"

*"The best gift for a believer is death"*¹⁰

Imam Sadiq (as) has said:

**"فِي الْمَوْتِ نَجَاةُ الْمُخْلِصِينَ وَهَلَاكُ الْمُجْرِمِينَ وَإِذَلِكَ إِشْتَاقَ مَنْ
إِشْتَاقَ إِلَى الْمَوْتِ وَكَرَهُ مَنْ كَرَهُ. قَالَ النَّبِيُّ (ص): مَنْ أَحَبَّ
لِقَاءَ اللَّهِ أَحَبَّ اللَّهُ لِقَاءَهُ وَمَنْ كَرَهُ لِقَاءَ اللَّهِ كَرَهُ اللَّهُ لِقَاءَهُ"**

"In death lies the salvation of the sincere ones and the destruction of the evildoers. For this

reason, some love death and others dislike it. The Great Prophet (S) has said: One who loves meeting God, God loves meeting him; and one who dislikes meeting God, God dislikes meeting him."[11](#)

With a concern to what we have so far said, we will appreciate the educational value of Imam 'Ali's statement that: Make you heart submissive with the remembrance of death.

- [1](#) . Bihar, vol.6, p.137.
- [2](#) . Ghurar al-Hikam, vol.2, p.270; Mizan al-Hikmah, vol.9, p.245.
- [3](#) . Misbah al-Shari'ah, p.455; Bihar, vol.6, p.133.
- [4](#) . Bihar, vol.6, p.132.
- [5](#) . Bihar, vol.6, p.133.
- [6](#) . Al-Mahajjah al-Bayda', vol.8, p.241.
- [7](#) . Al-Mahajjah al-Bayda', vol.8, p.241.
- [8](#) . Misbah al-Shari'ah, p.457.
- [9](#) . Nahj al-Balaghah, Sermon 5.
- [10](#) . Ghurar al-Hikam.
- [11](#) . Misbah al-Shari'ah, p.458.

10) Make your heart acknowledge its mortality

وَقَرِّهِ بِالْفَنَاءِ"

Although a man may get involved in the remembrance of death, he may not be serious; neither may he be convinced. In this case, this remembrance will not be instructive. This is true in the case of those corrupted people who verbally remember death, but deep inside they are not ready to embrace death.

For this reason, after his previous command concerning making the heart submissive, Imam 'Ali emphasized that we should convince our hearts that this world is not eternal. This very conviction makes man ready for the voyage towards the Hereafter.

Imam, concerning this, has said, "Anybody who believes that one day death will separate him from his friends, that he will be put in the grave, that he will have to account the Day of Judgment for what he has done, that the wealth here will not help him out; and that what he has sent in advance will be of value, should shorten his desires and lengthen the amount of his work."

This very stage of confession and conviction has made some wonder: How is it possible for a man to believe in death and the exact accounting for in the Doomsday and be happy at the same time?

"عَجِبْتُ لِمَنْ اَيَقِنُ بِالْمَوْتِ كَيْفَ يَضْحَكُ عَجِبْتُ لِمَنْ اَيَقِنُ"

بالحسابِ كيفَ يَفْرَحُ

"I wonder at one who is certain of death – how does he laugh? I wonder at one who is certain of the reckoning – how is he joyful?"

11) Cause your heart to perceive the calamities of this world

وَبَصَّرَهُ فَجَايِعَ الدُّنْيَا

Man selects a shelter for living which is safe from hazards and where the hardships will not threaten him; or else it is foolish to dwell in a place where you are not safe.

Some, however, are involved in the life here and have forgotten the statements of Imam 'Ali (as) who has said: "This world is a house engulfed in disasters; it is famous for its deceits; it is changing all the time; it is not a safe place to dwell in; security is inconceivable in it. Its dwellers are always a target for its arrows of misfortune.

Thus, my son! Always remember the disasters of this world so that you will not live there negligently and wrongly assume that it is eternal!!

12) Warn your heart of the assault of time and the evil inconstancy of the nights and days

“ وَحَدَّرَهُ صَوْلَةَ الدَّهْرِ وَفَحْشَ تَقْلِبِ اللَّيَالِي وَالْأَيَّامِ ”

Man is always confronted with unexpected and unfavorable events of the world: Sometimes disease, death, and misery of your beloved ones, and at other times, poverty, deprivation and depression, sometimes the corruption of people and at times failure, inability and disloyalty of your friends. Although most of these unpleasant events are unexpected, the hemlock is the poison which should be drunk anyhow. A wise man, being at the mercy of so many deplorable events, should make himself ready, and if possible stop their occurrence and try to face them determinedly.

O my dear friend! Think of the ups and downs of life,
Think of the ways to stay strong if deprived of the provisions;
A breeze might disturb the book of time,
Think of the turning over the pages of your life-book by Day and Night.

13) Present to your heart the reports of the past ones, and remember that you will soon become one of them

13. Present to it (your heart) the reports of the past ones, and remind it of what befell the earlier ones before you. Travel in their lands and (among) their ruins, and see what they did, from what they have moved away, and where they arrived at and settled. You will find them having moved away from their loved ones and having inhabited an alien abode and (it is) as if you will soon become like one of them.

“و اعرض عليه اخبار الماضين وذكره بما اصاب من كان قبلك
من الأولين وسير في ديارهم، فانظر فيما فعلوا وعمّا انتقلوا،
واين حلّو ونزلوا، فانك تجدهم قد انتقلوا عن الأحبة وحلّو دار
الغربة وكأنك عن قليل قد صرت كاحدهم”

The Mirror of History

The study of the history of the ancient nations and people, and an observation of their remnants and a survey of the factors of their rise and fall are among the principles of Islamic education, Our study of the past will reveal to us that the same factors of rise and fall are still with us today in the form of "the tradition of history". We are subject to this tradition and we are not excluded by it.

This study of the past will show to us that pleasures and depression, honor and misery, assets and hardships, all will pass. Neither do the world's good things deserve our deception and pride, nor should its bad things disturb the ocean of our existence and deprive us of the spirit of satisfaction or patience. You too of whatever group you are, finally you will go away and will face what your ancestors have gone through. It is better for you to learn a lesson from them and not to waste your time as they did.

It is because of this educational principle that nearly one third of the Qur'an consists of the stories and histories of the past peoples and nations. The Qur'an orders people to travel on the earth to observe the mirror of the history of the past nations.

1. "قَدْخَلْتُ مِنْ قَبْلِكُمْ سُنَنُ فَسِيرُوا فِي الْأَرْضِ فَانظُرُوا كَيْفَ
كَانَ عَاقِبَةُ الْمُكْذِبِينَ"

*"Indeed there have been examples before you; therefore, travel in the earth and see what was the end of the rejecters."*¹

2. "أَفَلَمْ يَسِيرُوا فِي الْأَرْضِ فَيَنْظُرُوا كَيْفَ كَانَ عَاقِبَةُ الَّذِينَ
مِنْ قَبْلِهِمْ كَانُوا أَكْثَرَ

مِنْهُمْ وَأَشَدَّ قُوَّةً وَأَثَارًا فِي الْأَرْضِ فَمَا أُغْنَى عَنْهُمْ مَا كَانُوا
يَكْسِبُونَ"

*"Have they not then journeyed in the land and seen how was the end of those before them? They were more in numbers than these and greater in strength and in fortifications in the land, but what they earned did not avail them."*²

3. "كَمْ تَرَكَوْا مِنْ جَنَّاتٍ وَعُيُونٍ وَزُرُوعٍ وَمَقَامٍ كَرِيمٍ وَنَعْمَةٍ كَانُوا
فِيهَا فَاكْهَيْنَ

كَذَلِكَ وَأَوْرَثْنَاهَا قَوْمًا آخَرِينَ فَمَا بَكَتْ عَلَيْهِمُ السَّمَاءُ وَالْأَرْضُ
وَمَا كَانُوا مُنظَرِينَ"

*"How many of the gardens and fountains have they left! And cornfields and noble places! And goodly things wherein they rejoiced; thus it was, and we gave them as a heritage to another people. So the heaven and the earth did not weep for them, nor were they respited"*³

It is because of this educational principle that Imam 'Ali (as) in different points of Nahj al-Balaghah and even in the present paper attracts our attention to the destiny and fate of the ancient peoples and nations and the factors which had led to their improvements or failures. He drew our attention to how these people left every thing and left this land.

The Poem of Khaqani

O heart that learns out of others' examples see through your eyes,
Use the veranda of Ctesiphon as an example;
Go once from the Tigris River towards Ctesiphon,
Once in a while call the veranda with the tears language,

Perhaps you will listen to the veranda saying:
The dent of each will give you new advice,
Listen to the end-point of the dent for advice;
It says you are from the earth, now we are earth-ridden for you;

Put two or three steps over us, weep two or three drops;
We are in trouble from the songs of the owl,
Pour out flower-water to cure our headaches;
We were court of justice, see what tyranny has gone to us,

See what will happen to the court of the tyrants;
You will laugh at me, wondering what is of fun,
They will laugh at those eyes which do not weep here;
This is the same veranda in which the colors of the people,
In the earth its doorsills were like the picture-gallery;

This is the same castle which kings frequented,
Deylam, Babylon's king, Hindu, Turkistan's king;
The earth is drunk, because instead of wine,
It has drunk Nowshirvan's blood in Hormoz's scalp as a cup,

Many pieces of advice were seen then on his crown,
A hundred new pieces of advice are hidden in his brain;
Kesra and the golden lemon, Parviz and golden vegetable,
All have gone with the wind and have been leveled out with the ground;

Parviz brought golden vegetable to every feast,
So many vegetables he made an orchard out of it;
Parviz is lost now, don't mention his name,
Where is the golden vegetable, go and read *kam taraku*⁴ from the Qur'an;

You asked where those crown-bearers are,
The belly of the earth is eternally pregnant with them;
It will take time for the earth to give birth,
Giving birth is hard, getting sperm easy;
This wine which is distributed among men by the gardener is Shirin's blood,

And the container of the wine is made out of the earth of Parviz;
The tyrants have drunk the water of their lives,
The greedy ones are not satiated yet;
The redness of the red river is the blood of the children,
Of this black-eyebrow old man, of that black-breasted woman,
Khaqani, take lessons from this castle,
Till Khaqani, later on, takes lessons from your case.

1. Qur'an 3:137.

2. Qur'an 40:82.

3. Qur'an 44:25-29.

4. "كَمْ تَرَكُوا مِنْ جَنَّاتٍ وَعُيُونٍ وَزُرُوعٍ".

"How many of the gardens and fountains have they left!" [Qur'an 44:25-26]

14) Therefore, set right your place of rest and do not sell your Hereafter for your world.

“ فاصلح مثواك ولا تبع آخرتك بدنياك ”

After the above 13 recommendations to his son, each of which is one stage of self-improvement, the Imam (as) comes to the following conclusion: My son, you should be aware that life does not include only these few days spent in this world; you will face the grave and Doomsday, every state of which is related to the affairs of this world; this world is a plantation and your Hereafter is the crop you have planted here which you will harvest in the next world. If the crop includes good deeds then **"..how excellent is the issue of the abode"**¹ and if the crop contains vicious deeds, then **"So evil is the resting-place."**²

And, since in accordance with the logic of Qur'an, the punishment in the Hereafter is just the manifestation of our affairs here in this world, and since the Qur'an says:

“ وَوَجَدُوا مَا عَمِلُوا حَاضِرًا ”

"..and what they had done they shall find present (there)"³ and

“ قَمَنْ يَعْمَلْ مِثْقَالَ ذَرَّةٍ خَيْرًا يَرَهُ وَمَنْ يَعْمَلْ مِثْقَالَ ذَرَّةٍ شَرًّا يَرَهُ ”

"So, he who has done an atom's weight of good shall see it and he who has done an atom's weight of evil shall see it,"⁴

Therefore, be aware that you will harvest what you have already planted in this world. Thus, make up the fate of your future just here and do not sell your Hereafter for this world; this is because in this world a wise man makes a lucrative bargain with God, the result of which is salvation from Hell and the entrance into the Gardens of Eden. We should not sell

those assets for the things here. Imam (as) has said, "The worst people are those who sell their Hereafter for this world and worse than them are those who sell the Hereafter for another world."

[1](#) . Qur'an 13:24.

[2](#) . Qur'an 38:60.

[3](#) . Qur'an 18:49.

[4](#) . Qur'an 99:7-8.

15) Do not talk about what you do not know or speak about what is not required of you.

”وَدَعَ الْقَوْلَ فِيمَا لَا تَعْرِفُ، وَالْخِطَابَ فِيمَا لَمْ تُكَلِّفُ”

In these sentences, Imam 'Ali (as) emphasizes two ethical principles:

1. Do not talk on anything you lack information about. This is because your statements might turn out to be false. In such cases you have both told a lie and misled people into ignorance, both of which are religiously forbidden. Such a case would lower one's social position.

The Prophet (S) told Abdallah b. 'Amr b. al-'As: "What if you are among low and mean people who are united in not keeping their promises, what would you do?"

Abdallah said, "You guide me what to do, O Messenger of Allah".

The Prophet (S) replied:[1](#) "Act on what you know, leave what you don't know and keep to yourself".

2. Do not interfere in anything not related to you and so do not speak of anything not concerning you. The Prophet (S) has said: "Among a Muslim's good deeds is to leave anything that does not concern him."[2](#)

[1](#) . Sharh Nahj al-Balaghah by Ibn Abi'l Hadid, vol.16, pp.63-64; and by Ibn Maytham, vol.5, p.10.

[2](#) . Op cit.

16) Keep away from a path if you fear it will lead you astray, for holding back from the perplexity of misguidance is

better than encountering terrifying events

17. Bid Others to do Good and Reject Evil

17. Bid others to do good and you will be one of them; reject evil with your hand and your tongue, and do your utmost to separate from one who does evil. 'Strive in the way of God as is His due' (ref.22:78) and do not let the reproach of any reproacher have any influence on you in the path of God. Plunge into hardships for the sake of truth, wherever it may be.

"وَأْمُرَ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ تَكُنْ مِنْ أَهْلِهِ وَإِنكَ الْمُنْكَرُ بِيَدِكَ وَلِسَانُكَ
وَبَيْنَ مَنْ فَعَلَهُ بِجَهْدِكَ وَجَاهِدْ فِي اللَّهِ حَقَّ جِهَادِهِ وَلَا تَأْخُذْ
فِي اللَّهِ لَوْمَةً لَائِمَةً وَخُذِ الْعَمْرَاتِ بِالْحَقِّ حَيْثُ كَانَ"

In this paragraph, Imam 'Ali (as) emphasizes several issues:

A. Enjoining The Good And Forbidding The Evil

To encourage people to do the right things is termed "enjoining the good" and prohibiting them from doing wrong is called "forbidding the evil."

The employment of this principle is a public duty which is carried out in form of *wajib kifa'i* which means it is an obligation on all Muslims but it suffices when performed by some of them. This principle makes the foundation of all Divine commandments strong. Imam Baqir (as) says in this connection:

"إِنَّ الْأَمْرَ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَالنَّهْيَ عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ سَبِيلُ الْأَنْبِيَاءِ وَمِنْهَا جُ
الْعُلَمَاءِ فَرِيضَةٌ عَظِيمَةٌ بِهَا تُقَامُ الْقَرَائِصُ وَتَأْمَنُ الْمَدَاهِبُ وَتَجَلُّ
الْمَكَاسِبُ وَتُرَدُّ الْمَظَالِمُ وَتُعْمَرُ الْأَرْضُ وَيُنْتَصَفُ مِنَ الْأَعْدَاءِ
وَيَسْتَقِيمُ الْأَمْرُ"

"The principle of enjoining the good and forbidding the evil is the way of the Prophets and path of the scholars. It is a tremendous obligation through which (other) obligatory tasks are undertaken, religious creeds are safeguarded, earnings are made lawful, restitution is

made for wrongs, the earth is in a flourishing state, justice is exacted from enemies, and affairs are in order."¹

Islam considers that the prosperity of societies is fulfilled through the implementation of this sacred principle. Islam thinks that the miseries and the deprivation of some societies of divine blessings and also their destruction and their annihilation are due to the fact that this principle is not carried out properly in those nations.² Imam 'Ali (as), regarding this, in a sermon emphasizes that:

"إِنَّمَا هَلَكَ مَنْ كَانَ قَبْلَكُمْ حَيْثُ مَا عَمَلُوا مِنَ الْمَعَاصِي وَلَمْ يَنْهَهُمُ الرَّبَّانِيُّونَ وَالْأَحْبَارُ عَنْ ذَلِكَ وَإِنَّهُمْ لَمَّا تَمَادَوْا فِي الْمَعَاصِي وَلَمْ يَنْهَهُمُ الرَّبَّانِيُّونَ وَالْأَحْبَارُ عَنْ ذَلِكَ نَزَلَتْ بِهِمُ الْعُقُوبَاتُ"

"The nations before you were only destroyed because of the sins they committed, and the priests and rabbis did not stop them from that. When they persevered in sinning and the priests and rabbis did not stop them, punishments descended on them".³

Since the implementation of this principle makes firm the foundations of Divine commandments and erases the vestiges of wrong belief, injustice and corruption, Islam considers the abandonment of this principle as war against God.⁴ Imam 'Ali (as), in his last will, considers this issue:

"لَا تَتْرُكُوا الْأَمْرَ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَالنَّهْيِ عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ فَيُوَلِّيَ عَلَيْكُمْ أَشْرَارُكُمْ ثُمَّ تَدْعُونَ فَلَا يُسْتَجَابُ لَكُمْ"

"Do not abandon the principle of enjoining the good and forbidding the evil, or else the the evil among you will have authority over you. Then you will pray but your prayers will not be answered."⁵

B. The Degrees Of The Principle Of Enjoining The Good And Forbidding The Evil

This principle has degrees, some of which apply to all individuals of a community without having related to the government; some other degrees apply to those individuals who are given some social tasks. These degrees include:

- i.** Those who are happy by nature to do good and unhappy to perform the evil.
- ii.** Those who verbally enjoin the good and forbid the evil.
- iii.** Those who by force implement the principle of enjoining the good and forbidding the evil; these may use punishments if felt necessary.

Regarding these, let us observe the following traditions:

Imam 'Ali (as) has stated:

"إِنَّمَا يَجْمَعُ النَّاسُ الرِّضَا وَالسَّخَطَ، فَمَنْ رَضِيَ أَمْرًا فَقَدْ دَخَلَ فِيهِ وَمَنْ سَخِطَهُ فَقَدْ خَرَجَ مِنْهُ"

*"Only two things gather people together: pleasure and anger. Therefore, one who is pleased with a matter has entered into it; and one who is displeased with it has left it."*⁶

Imam 'Ali (as) has also stated:

"الرَّاضِي بِفِعْلِ قَوْمٍ كَالدَّاحِلِ مَعَهُمْ فِيهِ وَعَلَى كُلِّ دَاخِلٍ فِي بَاطِلٍ إِثْمَانٌ: إِثْمُ الْعَمَلِ بِهِ وَإِثْمُ الرِّضَا بِهِ"

*"One who is satisfied with the actions of a people is like one who has participated with them in it. Every one who participates in wrong-doing has two sins: the sin of committing it and the sin of being pleased with it."*⁷

Imam 'Ali (as) said:

"الْعَامِلُ بِالظُّلْمِ وَالرَّاضِي بِهِ وَالْمُعِينُ عَلَيْهِ شُرَكَاءُ ثَلَاثَةٌ"

*"The one who does injustice, the one who is content with the injustice, and the one who helps carry out the injustice are three partners in the act."*⁸

Imam Baqir (as), concerning the principle of enjoining the good and forbidding the evil, in a tradition, has said,

"فَانْكُرُوا بِقُلُوبِكُمْ وَالْقَطِّوْا بِالسِّنِّتِكُمْ وَصُكُّوْا بِهَا جِبَاهَهُمْ وَلَا تَخَافُوا فِي اللَّهِ لَوْمَةً لَائِمَةً"

*"Then deny it with your hearts, and reject it with your tongues and slap it on their foreheads and do not fear, in the way of God, the reproach of any reproacher."*⁹

Ibn Jarir narrates in his history book from Abd al-Rahman b. Abi Layla, that when Imam 'Ali (as) was facing Mu'awiya's army he said:

"أَيُّهَا الْمُؤْمِنُونَ إِنَّهُ مَنْ رَأَى عُذْوَانًا يُعْمَلُ بِهِ وَمُنْكَرًا يُدْعَى إِلَيْهِ فَاَنْكَرَهُ بِقَلْبِهِ فَقَدْ سَلِمَ وَبَرَّئَ وَمَنْ أَنْكَرَهُ بِلِسَانِهِ فَقَدْ أُجِرَ وَهُوَ أَفْضَلُ مِنْ صَاحِبِهِ، وَمَنْ أَنْكَرَهُ بِالسَّيْفِ لِتَكُونَ كَلِمَةُ اللَّهِ الْعُلْيَا وَكَلِمَةُ الظَّالِمِينَ السُّفْلَى فَذَلِكَ الَّذِي أَصَابَ سَبِيلَ الْهُدَى وَقَامَ عَلَى الطَّرِيقِ وَنُورَ فِي قَلْبِهِ الْيَقِينُ"

*"O believers! Whoever sees an act of aggression taking place or an evil act being called to, and rejects it with his heart, he is secure and free of responsibility. Whoever rejects it with his tongue will be rewarded, and he is better than his companion. Whoever rejects it with his sword so that the word of God may be uppermost and the word of the wrongdoers lowermost, such a one has attained the path of guidance and become established on the (right) way and certainty has illuminated his heart."*¹⁰

Of course, the degrees of the principle of enjoining the good and forbidding the evil are determined by the capacity of the individual. A person, if capable, should use his hand, tongue, and heart to implement the principle. If he is not capable, he may use his tongue and heart. In the third case, a person should announce his lack of consent through his heart, at least. Imam 'Ali (as), regarding this, has said:

"قَوْمُهُمُ الْمُنْكَرُ بِقَلْبِهِ وَلِسَانِهِ وَيَدِهِ فَذَلِكَ الْمُسْتَكْمَلُ لِخِصَالِ الْخَيْرِ وَمِنْهُمْ الْمُنْكَرُ بِلِسَانِهِ وَقَلْبِهِ التَّارِكُ بِيَدِهِ فَذَلِكَ مُسْتَمْسِكٌ بِخِصْلَتَيْنِ مِنْ خِصَالِ الْخَيْرِ وَمُضَيِّعٌ خِصْلَةً وَمِنْهُمْ الْمُنْكَرُ بِقَلْبِهِ وَالتَّارِكُ بِيَدِهِ وَلِسَانِهِ فَذَلِكَ الَّذِي ضَيَّعَ أَشْرَفَ الْخِصْلَتَيْنِ مِنَ الثَّلَاثِ وَتَمَسَّكَ بِوَاحِدَةٍ وَمِنْهُمْ تَارِكٌ لِانْكَارِ الْمُنْكَرِ بِلِسَانِهِ وَقَلْبِهِ وَيَدِهِ فَذَلِكَ مَيِّتٌ الْأَحْيَاءِ"

*"Among them is one who rejects the evil action with his tongue, his hand and his heart. Such a person has perfected (the attainment of) good traits. Among them is one who rejects the evil with his tongue and his heart, but not his hand. Such a person has taken hold of two good traits and neglected one trait. Among them is one who rejects the evil with his heart, not with his hand and tongue. Such a person has neglected the two noblest traits of the three and held on to (only) one. Among them is one who neither rejects the evil deed with his tongue nor with his heart nor with his hand. Such a person is a dead person among the living".*¹¹

Regarding this issue, the Prophet (S) has said:

"مَنْ رَأَى مِنْكُمْ مُنْكَرًا فَلْيُغَيِّرْهُ بِيَدِهِ فَإِنْ لَمْ يَسْتَطِعْ فَبِلِسَانِهِ"

فَإِنْ لَمْ يَسْتَطِعْ فَبِقَلْبِهِ"

"Whosoever of you sees an evil act being committed, let him alter it (rectify) it with his hand, and if he is unable (to do so), then with his tongue; and if he is unable (to do that) then with his heart".[12](#)

Imam 'Ali (as) has said, regarding this:

**"أَمَرَنَا رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَآلِهِ أَنْ نَلْقَى أَهْلَ الْمَعَاصِي
بِوُجُوهِ مُكْفَهَّرَةٍ"**

"The Prophet (S) commanded us to confront sinners with stern faces".[13](#)

The Highest Degree Of The Principle Of Enjoining The Good And Forbidding The Evil

The highest degree of the principle of enjoining the good and forbidding the evil should be implemented when the very foundations of Islam are endangered through the wrong-doings of an obstinate ruler. In such cases the world is sold for the hereafter. The believers will defend the above principle wholeheartedly in such a way that they, like Abu Dharr, may fall prey to others' anger, or like Husayn (as) and his followers get martyred. Regarding this, Imam 'Ali (as) has said:

"وَأَفْضَلُ مِنْ ذَلِكَ كَلِمَةٌ عَدْلٍ عِنْدَ إِمَامٍ جَائِرٍ"

"The highest degree of the principle of enjoining the good and forbidding the evil is speaking a just word before an unjust leader."[14](#)

When Uthman feared Abu Dharr's disclosure of the former's wrong-doings, he told him: It is none of your business to interfere with political affairs. Abu Dharr answered:

**"وَاللَّهِ مَا وَجَدْتُ لِي عُدْرًا إِلَّا الْأَمْرَ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَالنَّهْيَ عَنِ
الْمُنْكَرِ"**

"I swear by God I do not have any excuse not to implement the principle of enjoining the good and forbidding the evil. I have to do it"[15](#)

When Imam Husayn (as) was in front of the enemy army and his sincere advisers were

advising him not to confront with the foes, he explained the philosophy of uprising in the following manner: "O people! The Prophet (S) has said: 'Anybody who witnesses an obstinate ruler who considers allowable those things which are forbidden by God, who breaks God's contract, defies the Prophet's tradition and acts with injustice towards the people, but does not rise up against such a tyrannical ruler, he will receive from God the same punishment which the aggressor receives'.

Be aware: these people (the Umayyads) have accepted Satan's commandments and have rejected God's worship, have indulged in corruption, have stopped carrying out God's commands, have robbed Muslims of their treasures, have made allowable God's forbidden affairs and have forbidden God's lawful affairs. I deserve the most to prevent this corruption."[16](#)

When he was leaving Medina, Husayn (as) in a will described the philosophy behind his uprising in the following manner:

**"إِنِّي لَمْ أَخْرُجْ أَشْرًا وَلَا بَطْرًا وَلَا ظَالِمًا وَلَا مُفْسِدًا إِنَّمَا خَرَجْتُ
لِلْإِصْلَاحِ فِي أُمَّةِ جَدِّي مُحَمَّدٍ (ص) وَأَنْ أَمُرَ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَأَنْهَى
عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ"**

"I have not come forth in insolence or self-conceit or wrongfully or to create mischief. Rather I have only come forth for the reformation of the Ummah of my grandfather, Muhammad (as), and so that I may enjoin the good and forbid the evil."[17](#)

But under the present lack of equilibrium where the results are unpredictable, should all people carry out this task, or is it the responsibility of a select group to carry out this principle? Is this task compulsory or optional? These are issues which are beyond our scope and will be found in books on jurisprudence.[18](#)

C. The Types Of Struggle In The Way Of Allah

To struggle in the way of Allah means carrying out anything that is wanted by God. To fulfill such an aim, we should try our best, either financially or verbally. Imam 'Ali (as) in his will has emphasized:

**"وَاللَّهُ اللَّهُ فِي الْجِهَادِ بِأَمْوَالِكُمْ وَأَنْفُسِكُمْ وَالسِّبْتِكُمْ فِي سَبِيلِ
اللَّهِ"**

"Fear Allah, and remember Him in striving with your wealth, your selves and your tongues in the way of Allah."[19](#)

Therefore, struggle against our very selves is also among struggles in the way of Allah. Upon the return of soldiers from the holy wars, the Prophet (S) told them:

"مَرَحَبًا يَقُومِ قَضَا الْجِهَادِ الْأَصْغَرَ وَيَقِي الْجِهَادِ الْأَكْبَرَ، قِيلَ يَا رَسُولَ اللَّهِ وَمَا الْجِهَادُ الْأَكْبَرُ؟ قَالَ: جِهَادُ النَّفْسِ"

"Welcome to a people who have performed the lesser jihad in the way of Allah, but their greater jihad is still ahead". It was said: "Messenger of Allah, what is the greater jihad?" The Prophet (S) replied: "The struggle against your self."²⁰

Imam 'Ali (as) has said in his will:

وَلَا تَأْخُذْ فِي اللَّهِ لَوْمَةً لَائِمَةً ...

In all types of struggle for God, we should strive for God only and we should not pay attention to the reproach of those who blame us. We should do everything for God because He is above everything and His worship and obedience is compulsory at all times.

D. How Does This Principle Cause Man To Become Righteous?

The Holy Qur'an considers enjoining the good to be among the traits of believers, inhabitants of paradise, pious men and the best of the nation.²¹ Therefore, anybody who indulges in this principle should be pious himself or else:

From a physician with a yellow countenance,
Do not ask for a rose-colored cheek.

Furthermore, such a person uses the approach of self-denial which is among great sins. Thus, as Imam 'Ali (as) has said, a person who carries out the principle of enjoining the good should be among the pious ones, or else such a person is like a physician who cures people but he himself is sick.

1. . Al-Kafi, vol.5, p.56; Wasa'il al-Shia'h, vol.7, p.395.

2. . "Those who disbelieved from among the children of Israel were cursed by the tongue of Dawood and Isa, son of Mariam; this was because they disobeyed and used to exceed their limit. They used not to forbid each other the hateful things which they did; certainly evil was that which they did" [Qur'an 5:78-79].

3. . Al-Kafi, vol.5, p.57.

4. . Al-Kafi, vol.5, p.59.

5. . Nahj al-Balaghah, letter no 23.

6. . Wasa'il al-Shi'ah, vol.11, p.411.

7. . Op.cit.

8. . Op. cit p.410.

9. . Al-Kafi, vol.5, p.56.

10. . Wasa'il, vol.11, p.405; Nahj al-Balaghah, Hikmah 373.

11. . Wasa'il vol.11, p.406; Nahj al-Balaghah, Hikmah 374.

12. . Mustadrak al-Wasa'il, vol.2, p.361; Ihya' al-'Ulum, vol.2, p.309.

13. . Al-Kafi, vol.5, p.54.

14. . Nahj al-Balaghah, Hikmah 374.

15. . Al-Ghadir, vol.8, p.306.

16. . Tabari History, vol.7, p.300.

17. . Nafs al-Mahmum, p.34.

18. . Concerning this refer to Fiqh al-Wilayah, Muntazari, vol. 2 and to Al-Qawa'id al-faqih, Makarem, vol. 3.

19. . Nahj al-Balaghah, Letter No 47.

20. . Bihar, vol.19, p.182.

21. . Ghurar al-Hikam.

18) Become Learned in Religion

وتفقه في الدين"

It is true that knowledge is light and ignorance is darkness; and it is also obvious that light is better than darkness, but lights are of different types. It is clear that knowledge is more important when it deals with excellent issues and when its results are beneficial to man.

Because the knowledge of religion deals with either opinions and right knowledge or with Divine commandments and individual and social laws or deals with ethical commands, and since these affairs belong to the sacred religion and are the foundations of man's prosperity both here and in the Hereafter, the Prophet (S) has considered this branch of human knowledge as knowledge and the rest of human knowledge as "Fadl" or divine grace.

"إِنَّمَا الْعِلْمُ ثَلَاثَةٌ: آيَةٌ مُحْكَمَةٌ أَوْ قَرِيضَةٌ عَادِلَةٌ أَوْ سُنَّةٌ قَائِمَةٌ وَمَا دَلَّاهُنَّ فَهُوَ فَضْلٌ" 404

*"Knowledge is only of three kinds: (knowledge of) the firm verses (of the Qur'an), (knowledge of) the equitable division of obligatory shares of inheritance, and (knowledge of) the established Sunnah (i.e. those principles which are based on clear reasoning, the commandments which are based on justice, and ethics and guidelines for life which are always constant). Whatever is other than that is surplus."*¹

Thus, "tafaqquh" or becoming learned in religion, which is the study of ideological, legal and ethical issues, has always been the pivotal question with the religion leaders. As we see, Imam (as), in the above expression, encourages his son to learn it and Imam al-Kadhim (as) too asks his followers to do the same thing:

"Become learned in the religion of God, for the acquisition of knowledge is the key to insight, the perfection of worship and the means to attaining exalted stations and sublime ranks in religion and in this world. The excellence of the religious scholar² over the worshipper is like the excellence of the sun over the stars. God does not approve of the deeds of one who does not become learned in his religion."³

And the Great Prophet (S) of Islam has said: "When God wishes good for a servant, He makes him learned in religion."⁴

Imam Sadiq (as), as well, has said, concerning this issue: "Become learned in religion, because anybody among you who does not become learned in religion is (like) a Bedouin. God has said in the Qur'an:

'Why should not then a company from every party among them go forth that they may apply themselves to obtain understanding in religion, and that they may warn their people when they come back to them that they may be cautious (9:122)?'⁵

1. . This tradition is interpreted in some other forms, as well. For further information, refer to the "History of Islamic culture and civilization", by this writer, P 55.
2. . As Majlisi and others have explained: by Faqih or jurispudent is meant one who has insight into different dimensions of religion. (Mir'at al-'Uqul, vol.1, p.100; Shafi, p.21).
3. . Bihar, vol.78, p.321.
4. . Kanz al-Ummal, vol.10, p.137, Hadith 28690.
5. .Usul al-Kafi, vol.1, p.31. .

19) Habituate yourself to patient endurance in afflictions

19. Habituate yourself to patient endurance in afflictions; the best of moral traits is to constrain yourself to patience in the (path of) truth.

وَعُودُ نَفْسِكَ التَّصَبُّرَ عَلَى الْمَكْرُوهِ وَنَعْمَ الْخُلُقِ التَّصَبُّرَ فِي الْحَقِّ

The factor which protects man in confronting hardships or against desires contrary to the religion is called perseverance. It has different shapes which are dealt with in the following tradition:

"الصَّبْرُ ثَلَاثَةٌ: صَبْرٌ عِنْدَ الْمُصِيبَةِ، وَصَبْرٌ عَلَى الطَّاعَةِ وَصَبْرٌ عَنِ الْمَعْصِيَةِ"

*"Patience is of three kinds; patience during calamities, patience in obeying Allah and patience in refraining from sins".*¹

The important point in patience is that practice in it will broaden our capacity to stand firm in the face of hardships. On the contrary, those people who lack this asset will lose their resistance in time of difficulties. For this reason, in Islam, worship and prayer are adopted as somewhat hard, such as prayers, fasting, pilgrimage, holy wars and the like with the practice of which man becomes strong. The Holy Qur'an, which mentions the word patience more than seventy times, relates a lot of good to it. The Holy Qur'an, talking about appointing an Imam for the Israelites and fulfilling God's promises of their victory over their

enemies, puts patience as the criterion for their prosperity:

"وَجَعَلْنَا مِنْهُمْ أئِمَّةً يَهْدُونَ بِأَمْرِنَا لَمَّا صَبَرُوا"

"And We made of them imams to guide by our command when they were patient"²

Elsewhere, the Qur'an says:

"وَتَمَّتْ كَلِمَةُ رَبِّكَ الْحُسْنَىٰ عَلَىٰ بَنِي إِسْرَائِيلَ بِمَا صَبَرُوا"

"And the good word of your Lord was fulfilled in the children of Israel because they bore up sufferings patiently"³

In another connection, where the Qur'an mentions divine help for the holy war fighters, the issue of patience once more is raised:

"بَلَىٰ إِنْ تَصْبِرُوا وَتَتَّقُوا وَيَأْتُوكُم مِّنْ قَوْرِهِمْ هَذَا يُمَدِّدْكُمْ رَبُّكُمْ بِخَمْسَةِ آلَافٍ مِّنَ الْمَلَائِكَةِ مُسَوِّمِينَ"

"Yea! If you remain patient and are on your guard, and they come upon you in a headlong manner, your Lord will assist you with five thousand of the havoc-making angels".⁴

The Qur'an in one occasion praises the truth-seekers and believers and mentions that these people's success is due to the fact they were patient:

"أُولَٰئِكَ يُؤْتُونَ أَجْرَهُمْ مَّرَّتَيْنِ بِمَا صَبَرُوا وَيَدْرَءُونَ بِالْحَسَنَةِ السَّيِّئَةَ وَمِمَّا رَزَقْنَاهُمْ يُنفِقُونَ"

"These shall be granted their reward twice, because they are steadfast and they repel evil with good and spend out of what we have given them".⁵

In the Surah al-Furqan, after describing the day and night schedule of the believers and after praising their behavior with God and with the people, God comes to the conclusion that

"أُولَٰئِكَ يُجْزَوْنَ الْغُرْفَةَ بِمَا صَبَرُوا"

"These shall be rewarded with high places [in the paradise] because they were patient, and shall be met therein with greetings and salutations".[6](#)

And in the Surah al-Insan [Man], the Qur'an describes many virtues for the Prophet's Household and concludes that they have got these rewards because of their patience:

**"فَوْقَاهُمْ اللَّهُ شَرَّ ذَلِكَ الْيَوْمِ وَلَقَّاهُمْ نَضْرَةً وَسُرُورًا وَجَزَاهُمْ
بِمَا صَبَرُوا جَنَّةً وَحَرِيرًا"**

"Therefore, Allah will guard them from the evil of that day and cause them to meet with ease and happiness; and reward them, because they were patient, with garden and silk".[7](#)

And in the Surah al-Ra'd [Thunder], after enumerating eight adjectives for the men of understanding [*Ulu'l albab*], the Qur'an mentions that God let them and their parents and their spouses and their children enter paradise and the angels enter upon them from every gate and send peace upon them telling them they attained this because of their patience:

**"جَنَّاتُ عَدْنٍ يَدْخُلُونَهَا وَمَنْ صَلَحَ مِنْ آبَائِهِمْ وَأَزْوَاجِهِمْ وَذُرِّيَّاتِهِمْ
وَالْمَلَائِكَةُ يَدْخُلُونَ عَلَيْهِمْ مِنْ كُلِّ بَابٍ سَلَامٌ عَلَيْكُمْ بِمَا صَبَرْتُمْ
فَنِعْمَ عُقْبَى الدَّارِ"**

"The gardens of perpetual abode which they will enter along with those who do good from among their parents and their spouses and their offspring; and the angels will enter in upon them from every gate: Peace be upon you because you were constant, how excellent, is then, the issue of the abode."[8](#)

Thus, we see that all this prosperity is due to patience. This indicates that the base for all human traits is patience. None of these traits flourishes except with patience.[9](#)

In the Islamic traditions, emphasis is put on the constructive role of patience. Some of these traditions are mentioned here:

Imam 'Ali has said:

**"إِنَّ الصَّبْرَ مِنَ الْإِيمَانِ كَالرَّأْسِ مِنَ الْجَسَدِ وَلَا خَيْرَ فِي جَسَدٍ لَا
رَأْسَ مَعَهُ وَلَا فِي إِيْمَانٍ لَا صَبْرَ مَعَهُ"**

"Patience in relation to faith is like the head to the body; there is no good in a body without

a head, or in faith without patience."[10](#)

Imam Baqir has said:

**"الْجَنَّةُ مَحْفُوفَةٌ بِالْمَكَارِهِ وَالْمَبْرُ، فَمَنْ صَبَرَ عَلَى الْمَكَارِهِ فِي
الدُّنْيَا دَخَلَ الْجَنَّةَ، وَجَهَنَّمَ مَحْفُوفَةٌ بِاللَّذَاتِ وَالشَّهَوَاتِ، فَمَنْ
أَعْطَى نَفْسَهُ لَذَّتَهَا وَشَهْوَتَهَا دَخَلَ النَّارَ"**

"Paradise is encircled with afflictions and patience; so whoever patiently endures misfortunes in this world enters paradise. Hell is encircled with pleasures and desires. Therefore, whoever grants his self its pleasures and desires enters the Fire."[11](#)

Abu Basir says that he has heard Imam as-Sadiq saying:

**"إِنَّ الْحُرَّ حُرٌّ عَلَى جَمِيعِ أَحْوَالِهِ، إِنْ نَابَتْهُ نَائِبَةٌ صَبَرَ لَهَا وَإِنْ
تَدَاكَتْ عَلَيْهِ الْمَصَائِبُ لَمْ تَكْسِرْهُ وَإِنْ أُسِرَ وَقُهِرَ وَاسْتَبَدَلَ
بِالْيُسْرِ عُسْرًا كَمَا كَانَ يُوسُفُ الصِّدِّيقُ الْأَمِينُ صَلَوَاتُ اللَّهِ عَلَيْهِ
لَمْ يُضِرَّرْ حُرِّيَّتَهُ إِنْ اسْتُعِيدَ وَقُهِرَ وَأُسِرَ وَلَمْ يُضِرَّرْهُ ظُلْمَةُ الْجُبِّ
وَوَحْشَتُهُ وَمَا نَالَ إِنْ مَنَّ اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ فَجَعَلَ الْجَبَّارَ الْعَاتِي لَهُ عَبْدًا
بَعْدَ إِذْ كَانَ لَهُ مَالِكًا قَارِسَلَهُ وَرَجِمَ بِهِ أُمَّةً وَكَذَلِكَ الصَّبْرُ يَعْقِبُ
خَيْرًا، فَاصْبِرُوا وَوَطِّنُوا أَنْفُسَكُمْ عَلَى الصَّبْرِ تُوجَرُوا"**

"A free person is free in all conditions. If an affliction befalls him, he is patient, and if misfortunes press upon him they do not break him even if he is taken captive and oppressed, and his ease is substituted with hardship - as in the case of Yusuf, the veracious and trustworthy, Allah's blessings on him. His freedom was not harmed when he was enslaved, oppressed and taken captive, and the darkness and loneliness of the well did not harm him when God favoured him and made the insolent tyrant, who had been his king, into his slave. God sent him as a Prophet and had mercy on a nation through him. Thus, patience has good results, therefore be patient, and accustom yourselves to patience and you will be rewarded."[12](#)

It is because of this constructive role of patience that Imam 'Ali orders his son "Habituate yourself to patient endurance in afflictions; the best of moral traits is to constrain yourself to patience".

The poet says:

Patience is bitter, but later

Will give you the fruit of importance.

In this nature, any nation will be miser,
Which gets used to the act of pleasure-taking.
In his letter to 'Uthman b. Hunayf, Imam 'Ali emphasizes this fact:

**"إِلاَّ وَإِنَّ الشَّجَرَةَ الْبَرِّيَّةَ أَصْلَبُ عُوداً وَالرَّوَائِعَ الْخَضِرَةَ أَرْقُ جُلُوداً
وَالنَّبَاتَاتُ الْبَدَوِيَّةُ أَقْوَى وَقُوداً وَأَبْطَأُ حُمُوداً"**

"Be aware that the trees of the desert have harder wood, and the green trees on the river have more delicate barks. Desert vegetation burns more fiercely and its embers die down more slowly".[13](#)

1. . Al-Mahjjah al-Bayda', Fayd al-Kashani, vol.7, p.126.
2. . Qur'an 32:24.
3. . Qur'an 7:137.
4. . Qur'an 3:125.
5. . Qur'an 28:54.
6. . Qur'an 25:75.
7. . Qur'an 76:11-12.
8. . Qur'an 13:23-24.
9. . Tafsir Namunah, vol.10, p.193.
10. . Nahj al-Balaghah, Hikmah 82.
11. . Usul al-Kafi, vol.2, p.89.
12. . Al-Kafi, vol..2, p.89.
13. . Nahj al-Balaghah, Letter No 45.

**20) Commit your self in all your affairs
to your God, for you will thus be
committing it to a secure Cave and a
mighty Protector.**

"

وَأَلْجِيءُ نَفْسِكَ فِي الْأُمُورِ كُلِّهَا إِلَى الْهَيْكَلِ فَانْكَ تَلْجِئُهَا إِلَى كَهْفِ حَرِيْزٍ وَ مَانِعِ عَزِيْزٍ"

There are two points of view regarding man's fate in this world. One view-point says that man is confronted in this world with a series of causes and effects which work haphazardly to make the fate of man. He has no say here and is like a football or like a broken ship in the torrential sea. Only a favourable wind can rescue this wandering ship: The poet says:

We are in the broken ship, O favourable wind rise,
So that we may meet once again, our friend.

According to the second point of view, all the means and causes for our daily affairs are set by our God who is All-knowing, Beneficent and Merciful. Without His will not a leaf moves. All these means and causes work together to make man prosper. Sa'adi, the Persian poet says:

Cloud, wind, fog, sun and the galaxy,
All work in harmony so that you may use your sustenance wisely;
Everything in Nature is obedient to you,
It is not fair to disobey God, the Almighty.

As soon as man assumes that all the causes and means in this world are controlled by a wise Creator and everything is at His disposal, he then trusts in God and will never encounter any hardship: The poet says
He will never fear the sea waves,
Whose ship is navigated by Noah.

In Islamic ethics, the principle of "*Tawakkul*" or trust and reliance in Allah is used to encourage people to accept the second view-point discussed above. Khwajah Abdallah al-Ansari, in his "Manazil Al-Sa'irin", says, the truth of the principle of trust and reliance in Allah is:

"التَّوَكَّلْ كُلُّ الْأَمْرِ إِلَىٰ مَالِكِهِ وَالتَّعْوِيلُ عَلَىٰ وَكَالَتِهِ"

"to entrust all affairs to its Master and to rely on His trusteeship".¹

This is the way believers are commanded to carry out their affairs.

"وَعَلَى اللَّهِ فَلْيَتَوَكَّلِ الْمُؤْمِنُونَ"

"And on Allah let the believers rely"²

When the Prophet (S) asked Gabriel (Jibril) about the principle of trust and reliance in Allah, the latter explained it through a tradition:

**"الْعِلْمُ بِأَنَّ الْمَخْلُوقَ لَا يَضُرُّ وَلَا يَنْفَعُ وَلَا يُعْطِي وَلَا يَمْنَعُ،
وَاسْتِعْمَالُ الْيَأْسِ مِنَ الْخَلْقِ، فَإِذَا كَانَ الْعَبْدُ كَذَلِكَ لَمْ يَعْمَلْ
لِأَحَدٍ سِوَى اللَّهِ وَلَمْ يَرْجُ وَلَمْ يَخَفْ سِوَى اللَّهِ وَلَمْ يَطْمَعْ فِي
أَحَدٍ سِوَى اللَّهِ فَهَذَا هُوَ التَّوَكُّلُ"**

"(It is) the knowledge that creatures neither harm nor benefit, neither give nor withhold;

and (it is) not resting one's hopes on creatures. When a servant is thus and acts only for Allah and does not hope from, or fear, other than Allah, and does not desire anyone other than Allah, then this is tawakkul."³

The above principle (*Tawakkul*), however, has different degrees. At one stage we will put our affairs in the hands of a lawyer. The second stage is when a child trusts its mother for protection. In these two cases we deliberately put our affairs in somebody else's hands. A Bedouin Arab had released his camel saying he had trust in Allah. The Prophet (S) told him:

"First tie it and then have trust in God". The poet says:

Said the Prophet aloud,
Bind the knees of the camel, but have trust in God;
If you rely in Allah, have it in your work,
First cultivate, then have reliance on God.

The third phase of "*Tawakkul*" (reliance on God) occurred in Ibrahim's case. It is narrated that when Nimrod [the king of Babylon who cast Ibrahim into the fire] prepared a big fire and wanted to cast Ibrahim into it with a crane, Gabriel came up to him and asked him if he needed any help. Ibrahim answered: "God bless you, God is the best agent; He will suffice".

Then Michael came, saying he has the stores of rain and water at his disposal, and asked Ibrahim if he wanted him to put the fire out. Ibrahim refused.

Then the angel of wind came, asking for the same thing, but Ibrahim refused once more.

Then Gabriel said: At least ask God to issue the appropriate order. He answered: "His knowledge about me will make my question irrelevant".⁴

This state of absolute surrender to God and to trust everything in Him is the same thing that Imam Kadhim (as) has in mind when he repeats God's statement:

"مَنْ يَتَوَكَّلْ عَلَى اللَّهِ فَهُوَ حَسْبُهُ" 427

"And whoever trusts in Allah, He is sufficient for him" [Qur'an 65:3]. And then he explains:

"التَّوَكَّلْ عَلَى اللَّهِ دَرَجَاتٌ، مِنْهَا أَنْ تَتَوَكَّلَ عَلَى اللَّهِ فِي أُمُورِكَ كُلِّهَا فَمَا فَعَلَ بِكَ كُنْتَ عَنْهُ رَاضِيًا تَعْلَمُ أَنَّهُ لَا يَأْلُوكَ خَيْرًا وَقَضَاءً وَتَعْلَمُ أَنَّ الْحُكْمَ فِي ذَلِكَ لَهُ فَتَوَكَّلْ عَلَى اللَّهِ بِتَفْوِيضِ ذَلِكَ إِلَيْهِ وَثِقْ بِهِ فِيهَا وَفِي غَيْرِهَا"

"The principle of reliance on Allah has degrees. One degree of this reliance is that you trust in God in all your affairs. You are pleased with what He does to you, and you know that He will not fail in goodness and bounty to you, and you know that the command for that

belongs to Him. Therefore trust in God by leaving that to Him and rely on Him in it and in other matters".⁵

Imam 'Ali (as), too, in his letter encourages his son to rely on this strong stronghold.

¹ . The Commentary on Manazil al-Sa'irin, p.74.

² . Qur'an 5:11.

³ . Bihar, vol.69, p.373.

⁴ . Safinah al-Bihar, vol.2, p.683; Mi'raj al-Sa'adah, p.599; Jami' al-Sa'adah, vol.3, p.223.

⁵ . Usul al-Kafi, vol.2, p.65.

21. Be sincere in your asking from your Lord, for in His hand is the bestowal and refusal, and ask God frequently for the best.

"و اخلص في المسألة لرّبك فان بيده العطاء والحرمان واكثر الاستخارة"

There are significant points in this statement, two of which will be dealt with here:

I. Being Sincere in Supplication

"Sincerity in prayer" means that a believer should ask God only for his needs and in carrying the prayer out a believer should not be in doubt, neither should he employ hypocrisy.

Regarding this, the Holy Qur'an says:

وَادْعُوهُ مُخْلِصِينَ لَهُ الدِّينَ

"...and call on Him, being sincere to Him in obedience".¹

In this regard, Imam Rida (as) narrates from Imam 'Ali (as), his saying:

"طَوْبَى لِمَنْ أَخْلَصَ لِلَّهِ الْعِبَادَةَ وَالِدُعَاءَ وَلَمْ يَشْغَلْ قَلْبَهُ بِمَا تَرَى"

عَيْنَاهُ وَلَمْ يَنْسَ ذِكْرَ اللَّهِ بِمَا تَسْمَعُ أُذُنَاهُ وَلَمْ يَحْزَنْ صَدْرُهُ بِمَا
أَعْطَى غَيْرَهُ".

"Blessed is he who is sincere to God in his worship and supplication, and does not occupy his heart with what his eyes see, nor forgets God's remembrance through what his ears hear, and does not become sorrowful at what others have been given".²

Then Imam 'Ali (as) shows the reasons of the philosophy of sincerity in the following manner: since bestowal and withholding is in the hands of God, it is absurd for man to ask or supplicate anybody else or to worship anybody else or assume any partner for God.³

II. Asking God For Abundant Goodness

"*Istikhara*" means to ask for good or to weigh the importance of an option and to select the best one.⁴ It also means to ask God to give him the best.⁵

But in the language of Shari'ah (or religion) it means to ask God for the best. We read in supplication 33 of Sahifah al-Sajjadiyah:

"اللَّهُمَّ إِنِّي أَسْتَخِيرُكَ بِعِلْمِكَ فَصَلِّ عَلَى مُحَمَّدٍ وَآلِهِ وَأَفْضَلِي
بِالْخَيْرَةِ وَالْهَمْنَا مَعْرِفَةَ الْإِخْتِيَارِ، وَاجْعَلْ ذَلِكَ ذَرْيَعَةً إِلَى الرِّضَا
بِمَا قَضَيْتَ لَنَا وَالتَّسْلِيمَ مِمَّا حَكَمْتَ فَأَرْحَ عَنَّا رَيْبَ الْإِرْتِيَابِ
وَإَيْدِنَا بِيَقِينِ الْمُخْلِصِينَ"

"O God! I ask of You the best in Your knowledge, therefore bless Muhammad and his Household, and decree for me the best. Inspire us with knowledge to choose the best and make that a means to being pleased with what You have decreed for us and submitting to what You have decided. Banish from us the doubt of misgiving and confirm us with the certainty of the sincere".⁶

And in Zurarah's tradition narrated from Imam Baqir (as) we read:

"قُلْتُ لِأَبِي جَعْفَرٍ عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ: إِذَا أَرَدْتُ أَمْرًا وَأَرَدْتُ الْإِسْتِخَارَةَ
كَيْفَ أَقُولُ؟ فَقَالَ: إِذَا أَرَدْتَ ذَلِكَ فَصُمْ الثَّلَاثَةَ وَالْأَرْبَعَةَ
وَالْخَمِيسَ ثُمَّ صَلِّ يَوْمَ الْجُمُعَةِ فِي مَكَانٍ نَظِيفٍ رَكَعَتَيْنِ، فَتَشْهَدُ
ثُمَّ قُلْ وَأَنْتَ تَنْظُرُ إِلَى السَّمَاءِ: (اللَّهُمَّ إِنِّي أَسْأَلُكَ بِأَنَّكَ عَالِمُ
الْغَيْبِ وَالشَّهَادَةِ الرَّحْمَنُ الرَّحِيمُ أَنْتَ عَالِمُ الْغَيْبِ، إِنْ كَانَ هَذَا
الْأَمْرُ خَيْرًا فِيمَا أَحَاطَ بِهِ عِلْمُكَ فَيَسِّرْهُ لِي وَبَارِكْ لِي فِيهِ،

وَأَفْتَحْ لِي بِهِ، وَإِنْ كَانَ ذَلِكَ لِي شَرًّا فِيمَا أَحَاطَ بِهِ عِلْمُكَ
قَاصِرُفَ عَنِّي بِمَا تَعْلَمُ فَإِنَّكَ تَعْلَمُ وَلَا أَعْلَمُ، وَتَقْدِيرُ وَلَا أَقْدِرُ،
وَتَقْضِي وَلَا أَقْضِي وَأَنْتَ عَالِمُ الْغُيُوبِ، تَقُولُهَا مِئَةَ مَرَّةٍ."

Zurarah said: 'I asked Imam Baqir (as): "If I intend to do something and wish to perform Istikhara, what should I do"? He said: "If you wish to do that, then fast on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday; then on Friday perform a two rak'ah (a unit of salat) prayer in a clean place; after performing the tashahud, look at the sky and say: 'O Allah, I ask You, for You are the Knower of the Unseen and the witnessed, the All-merciful, the All-compassionate - You are the Knower of the Unseen - if this matter is good in what Your Knowledge encompasses of it, then make it easy for me, bless me in it, and open it for me.

If it is bad in what Your Knowledge encompasses of it, then turn it away from me with what You know, for You know and do not, You determine and I do not, and You decree and I do not, and You are the Knower of the Unseen'. Repeat that a hundred times."⁷

Of course, there are other kinds of *Istikhara*: *Istikhara* with the Qur'an, with writing on a piece of paper, and *Istikhara* with the rosary (*tasbeeh*). It is written in the books on Prayers and traditions that a person resorts to *Istikhara* when he is caught between two seemingly good options, but he is unable to choose one option. He does not know whether it is good or evil. When he starts to carry out *Istikhara*, his doubts are eliminated and he will have faith in the option he selects.⁸

Which one is better? Your worthless idols or the One Who fulfills your needs when you are left with nothing except depression?"⁹ And God will help him if He thinks it proper. They tell us to pray (use supplication: *du'a*) abundantly, because when we knock on a door, there is hope that it will open;¹⁰ However, this work should be continuous, depending on the intention of the performer of the supplication.¹¹

¹ . Qur'an 7:29.

² . Usul al-Kafi, vol.2, p.16.

³ . Shirk, or associating partners with God, is of the following types: Shirk in the essence of God, shirk in attributes, shirk in actions, shirk in worship. A believer should avoid all of these and should not appoint any partner for God. He should obey only the Unique God and should ask Him for help.

⁴ . Abduh's commentary on Nahj al-Balaghah, vol.3, p.45.

⁵ . Ibn Maytham's Sharh Nahj al-Balaghah, vol.5, p.11.

⁶ . Sahifah al-Sajjadiyah, supplication 33.

⁷ . Wasa'il, vol.5, p.207.

⁸ . For further information concerning Istikhara and its kinds refer to the following: Bihar, vol.19, pp.222-288; Wasa'il, vol.5, pp.204-221, vol.4, p.875; Sahifah al-Sajjadiyah, (tr.) Fayz al-Islam, and (tr.) Sayyid 'Ali Khan; and Allamah Kalbasi's al-Istikhara.

⁹ . For this, see Imam Khumayni's Kashf al-Asrar, pp.89-97.

¹⁰ . Bihar, vol.93, p.298.

¹¹ . In traditions, it is said the supplication could be recited once or one hundred times depending on the importance of the topic at hand.

22) Understand my testament and do

not disregard it, for indeed the best speech is that which is beneficial.

"و تفهم وصييتي ولا تذهبن عنك صفحا فان خير القول ما نفع"

Sometimes the act of implementing a will is ceremonial; in such cases it does not make any difference whether the person for whom a will is drawn will understand it or not. At other times, implementing a will is a responsibility. The writer wishes to train the person; if he does not do this action properly, the writer will be responsible.

In such a case, the writer is concerned with the comprehension of the person. Imam 'Ali (as) is one of those who is concerned. Thus, he orders his son to understand it and will not bypass it. It is because this will contains a sea of knowledge, ethics, and educational principles. Not taking it seriously clashes with the writer's intention that he had in making this will applicable and practical. Such negligence on the part of the reader is not in keeping with the writer's intentions. Therefore, Imam 'Ali (as) emphasizes that his son should take this will seriously.

23) Know that there is no good in knowledge that is not beneficial, and knowledge that is not worthy of acquisition is not beneficial

"واعلم انه لا خير في علم لا ينفع ولا ينفع بعلم لا يحق تعلمه"

As we know, the Islamic commandments and its allowable and prohibited actions all depend on the profit and loss which these concepts have for the individual and the community as a whole. Thus, the acquisition of any knowledge, too, is not an exception to this general rule. The knowledge that deserves to be studied is that which is profitable. If it does not bear any profit, learning it is absurd, and if it hurts, it should be abandoned.

On the basis of this concept, in Islam the acquisition of some sciences is compulsory and worthwhile, such as jurisprudence, Hadith, ethics, and Islamic knowledge. Some other sciences are forbidden. Such as witchcraft, or any science which in one way or another hurts the welfare of the community. For this reason, Imam 'Ali (as) in this part of his discourse says, "If knowledge (of something) is not profitable, it will not contain any good,"

The Prophet (S) has said in this regard, "O God! I resort to you for not learning any science which is not profitable".¹

Sheikh Ansari, at the beginning of his book called "Makasib" records the famous tradition in "Tuhaf al-'Uqul" from Imam Sadiq (as) who talks of lawful and unlawful knowledge as the following:

"Any kind of skill that the believers could learn or teach are lawful and practical such as writing, accounting, trade, goldsmith's trade, saddle-making, building, weaving, laundering, tailoring, face-sculpture, except the sculpture of the clergy, and making the tools which people need and take benefit out of and their life is dependent on them. God has forbidden those industries the results of which are unlawful, such as making musical instruments (Tar and pipes), making chess, making of the cross and idol making, brewing alcoholic beverages, which lead to corruption. The teaching and learning of these affairs are forbidden".²

"أَيُّ بُنَيِّ إِبْنِي لَمَّا رَأَيْتُنِي قَدْ بَلَغْتُ سِنَّاءَ، وَرَأَيْتُنِي أَرْدَادُ وَهْنَاءَ،
بَادَرْتُ بِوَصِيَّتِي إِلَيْكَ، وَأَوْرَدْتُ خِصَالًا مِنْهَا قَبْلَ أَنْ يَعْجَلَ بِي
أَجَلِي دُونَ أَنْ أَفْضِي إِلَيْكَ بِمَا فِي نَفْسِي أَوْ أَنْ أَنْقُصَ فِي
رَأْيِي كَمَا نَقُصْتُ فِي جِسْمِي أَوْ يَسْبِقَنِي إِلَيْكَ بَعْضُ عِلْبَاتِ
الْهَوَى أَوْ فِتَنِ الدُّنْيَا فَتَكُونُ كَالصَّعْبِ النُّفُورِ، وَإِنَّمَا قَلْبُ الْحَدَثِ
كَالْأَرْضِ الْخَالِيَةِ: مَا أَلْقِيَ فِيهَا مِنْ شَيْءٍ قَبْلَتْهُ فَبَادَرْتُكَ بِالْأَدَبِ
قَبْلَ أَنْ يَقْسُو قَلْبُكَ وَيَشْتَغَلَ لُبُّكَ، لِتَسْتَفِيلَ بِجِدِّ رَأْيِكَ مِنَ الْأَمْرِ
مَا قَدْ كَفَاكَ أَهْلُ التَّجَارِبِ بُغْيَتَهُ وَتَجْرِبَتَهُ، فَتَكُونُ قَدْ كُفِّتَ مَوْتَهُ
الطَّلَبِ وَعُوفِيَتَ مِنْ عِلَاجِ التَّجْرِبَةِ قَاتَاكَ مِنْ ذَلِكَ مَا قَدْ كُنَّا نَأْتِيهِ
وَاسْتَبَانَ لَكَ مَا رُبَّمَا أَظْلَمَ عَلَيْنَا مِنْهُ"

"My son! When I saw that I had reached old age, and I saw myself increase in weakness, I hastened with my will to you. I set out in it some useful points lest death overtake me without my having acquainted you with my thoughts or (lest) my mind weaken just as my body has weakened or some mastery of desire and the temptations of the world get to you before me, so that you become like a refractory camel.

The heart of a young man is like empty land which accepts anything that is strewn on it. Thus I hastened to (instruct) you in good discipline before your heart hardens and your mind is occupied, so that you may face with sound judgment the endeavours and experiences of the people of experience which are sufficient for you. Thus you will be spared the trouble of seeking and relieved of the cultivation of experience; for you receive our experiences and what may have been unclear for us will become clear to you".

There are some significant points in the above text which deserve our scrutiny:

1. Imam 'Ali's Haste In Writing This Will

Imam 'Ali (as) was in a haste to write the will for the following reasons:

First, he was becoming old, above 60, the age in which both brain and brawn deteriorate. At times, the spirit becomes feeble, not being able to carry out important tasks. Imam 'Ali (as) here is concerned about his powers to handle this grave task.

Second, one usually at this age is vulnerable and is ready to go, as Imam Sadiq (as) says:

"إِذَا بَلَغْتَ سِتِّينَ سَنَةً فَاحْسِبْ نَفْسَكَ فِي الْمَوْتَى"

*"When you reach sixty, consider yourself among the dead"*³

And the Prophet (S) has said, regarding this:

"مَا بَيْنَ السِّتِّينَ إِلَى السَّبْعِينَ مُعْتَرِكُ الْمَنَايَا"

"Death usually comes to people between sixty and seventy".⁴

Thus, Imam 'Ali (as) is in a hurry because he is worried about his approaching death. Third, he is in a hurry because he thinks if it becomes late, whims and wishes and the deceitful manifestations of life might draw his son away from the path of piety and perfection and will destroy his capacity for improvement like an untamable palfrey.⁵

Fourth, he is in a hurry because he wants his son be ready to anticipate events as they develop and make use of others' experiences and not to fail to decide on the spot.

2. The Best Time For Education

As we have experienced, children are more capable of learning than adults. They retain what they are exposed to at this early age. It is said:

"The acquisition of knowledge at childhood is like engraving on the stone; but the acquisition of knowledge at adulthood is like drawing lines on the surface of water".⁶ And it is also said:

"A child is like soft clay; he will take shape however you mould him".⁷ But if a person advances in age, his personality and identity take form through knowledge and ethics, and he develops habits, then he is difficult to change.

Concerning this, the Persian poet Sa'di says:

A person who does not get educated while young,
Improvement is taken away from him at the old age;
You may turn a piece of wet wood, but
You cannot make it straight except with fire.

Imam 'Ali (as) recognizes the childhood as the best time for education. For this reason he does not consider it feasible to let this period pass in his child's life without necessary changes he wants to create in his life. He believes: the heart of the child is like a piece of land which is capable to grow any seed. It is at this stage of life which the child should be exposed to the seeds of education.

3. The Use of Other People's Experiences

There are many pieces of knowledge which are gained through experience and trial, either through personal experiencing or by the experiences of others, but neither through perception nor scientific analysis.

When the child draws his hand for the first time towards the fire and perceives the feeling of burning, he experiences it for the first time. He learns in this way not to come very close to fire.

When the child observes that his playmate crosses the street without attention and gets involved in an accident and loses his hands and feet as the result and even he might die, this experience teaches him to be cautious in crossing the street.

When the youth sees that, through his trials, he can pass the entrance exam to the university, this success makes him bolder. On the other hand, when he sees a youth, through his communication with addicts, may not continue his education and even gets into prison, he will gain a lot of experience and will distinguish bad from good. Imam 'Ali (as) says that the value for the correctness of people's ideas and affairs is determined by the amount of their experiences.⁸ In another place Imam 'Ali (as) says that a person who does not learn from experiences cannot be advised.⁹ In the last case, for Imam 'Ali (as) wisdom is to collect experiences and take lessons from them.¹⁰ In another place, Imam 'Ali (as) emphasizes:

"إِسْتَدَلَّ عَلَى مَا لَمْ يَكُنْ يَمَّا قَدْ كَانَ فَإِنَّ الْأُمُورَ أَشْبَاهُ"

*"Draw conclusions about what has not yet occurred on the basis of what has already occurred. This is because occurrences are similar to one another."*¹¹

Imam 'Ali (as) elsewhere teaches us:

لَا يُلْسَعُ أَوْ لَا يُلْدَعُ الْمُؤْمِنُ مِنْ جُحْرٍ مَرَّتَيْنِ

*"A believer is not bitten twice from one hole."*¹²

الايام تفيد التجارب

"The days of our lives teach us experiences".[13](#)

And experience teaches man ethics and how to select the right path and how to take lessons. A raw man is gullible.[14](#)

1. . Ibn Maytham's Commentary of Nahj al-Balaghah, vol.5, p.12.
2. . Tuhaf al-'Uqul, pp.335-336.
3. . Bihar, vol.73, p.391; vol.6, p.119.
4. . Op.cit.
5. . Op.cit.
6. . Ibn Abi al-Hadid's Commentary on Nahj al-Balaghah, vol.16, p.67. A similar sentence is reported by Imam 'Ali (as) in Bihar, vol.1, p.324.
7. . Op cit.
8. . Ghurar al-Hikam, pp.423, 719, 630.
9. . Nahj al-Balaghah, Letter No 78; Mustadrak, vol.3, p.177.
10. . Ghurar al-Hikam; Bihar al-Anwar, vol.77, p.231.
11. . Nahj al-Balaghah, Letter No 31.
12. . Ibn Athir's Al-Nihaya, vol.4, p.248.
13. .Ghurar al-Hikam
14. . Ghurar al-Hikam; Bihar, vol.77

24) Contemplation of Past Nations and Their Actions

إِذَا بَنَىٰ إِيَّايَ وَإِن لَّمْ أَكُنْ عَمَّرْتُ عُمَرَ مَن كَانَ قَبْلِي فَقَدْ
نَظَرْتُ فِي أَعْمَالِهِمْ وَقَفَّرْتُ فِي أَخْبَارِهِمْ وَسِيرْتُ فِي آثَارِهِمْ
حَتَّىٰ عُدْتُ كَأَحَدِهِمْ بَلْ كَأَيِّ بِمَا انْتَهَىٰ إِلَيَّ مِنْ أُمُورِهِمْ قَدْ
عَمَّرْتُ مَعَ أَوْلِيهِمْ إِلَىٰ آخِرِهِمْ فَعَرَفْتُ صَفْوَةَ ذَلِكَ مِنْ كَدْرِهِ وَنَفْعِهِ
مِنْ ضَرَرِهِ فَاسْتَخَلَصْتُ لَكَ مِنْ كُلِّ أَمْرٍ نَخِيلَهُ (جَلِيلَهُ) وَتَوَخَّيْتُ
لَكَ جَمِيلَهُ، وَصَرَفْتُ عَنْكَ مَجْهُولَهُ وَرَأَيْتُ حَيْثُ عَنَانِي مِنْ أَمْرِكَ
مَا يَعْنِي الْوَالِدَ الشَّفِيقَ وَاجْمَعْتُ عَلَيْهِ مِنْ أَدَبِكَ أَنْ يَكُونَ ذَلِكَ
وَأَنْتَ مُقْبِلُ الْعُمُرِ وَمُقْتَبِلُ الدَّهْرِ دُونَ نِيَّةِ سَلِيمَةٍ وَنَفْسِ صَافِيَةٍ
وَأَنْ ابْتَدَأَكَ بِتَعْلِيمِ كِتَابِ اللَّهِ وَتَأْوِيلِهِ وَشَرَائِعِ الْإِسْلَامِ وَأَحْكَامِهِ
وَدَلَالِهِ وَحَرَامِهِ وَلَا أَجَاوِزَ ذَلِكَ بِكَ إِلَىٰ غَيْرِهِ ثُمَّ أَشْفَقْتُ أَنْ
يَلْتَبِسَ عَلَيْكَ مَا اخْتَلَفَ النَّاسُ فِيهِ مِنْ أَهْوَائِهِمْ وَأَرَائِهِمْ مِثْلُ
الَّذِي التَّبَسَّ عَلَيْهِمْ فَكَانَ إِحْكَامُ ذَلِكَ عَلَىٰ مَا كَرِهْتَ مِنْ تَنْبِيهِكَ
لَهُ أَحَبُّ إِلَيَّ مِنْ إِسْلَامِكَ إِلَىٰ أَمْرٍ لَا أَمْنُ عَلَيْكَ بِهِ الْهَلَكَةُ
وَرَجَوْتُ أَنْ يُوقِّعَكَ اللَّهُ فِيهِ لِرُشْدِكَ وَأَنْ يَهْدِيكَ لِقَصْدِكَ فَعَهَدْتُ

إِلَيْكَ وَصِيَّتِي هَذِهِ

“My son! Although I have not lived the long life of my predecessors, I have looked at their actions, contemplated the reports about them, and journeyed among their ruins until (it was as if) I had become like one of them. In fact, because of the reports that have reached me of their affairs, it is as if I had lived with the first of them to the last of them. Thus I have distinguished their pure from their impure, and their benefit from their harm. I have extracted for you from every matter the purest of it, and exclusively aimed at presenting you its beautiful aspects and turned away from you its unknown things.

Since I am concerned about your affair with the concern of a compassionate father, and I have resolved on bestowing on you good discipline, I considered (it appropriate) that it should be while you are in your youth and in the prime of your life, possessing sound intention and a pure soul. I considered that I should begin by teaching you the Book of Allah and its interpretation, the laws and commandments of Islam and its lawful and unlawful matters, and that I should not take you beyond that to anything else.

Then I feared that matters in which people had conflicting desires and opinions would confuse you just as it had confused them. Thus, despite my dislike of cautioning you, it was preferable to me to firmly establish that, than to leave you to a matter in which I am not free of the fear of your destruction. I hoped that God would give you success in it through your right direction and guide you to your objective, so I entrust this will of mine to you”.

Commentary

There are several worthy points in this section of Imam ‘Ali’s letter:

1. Mentioning The History Of The Past Nations

As we have often noticed before in the same way that the creation is governed by laws and is based on a series of causes and effects, and not a single action occurs without these factors of cause and effect, the fate of nations and human communities depend on a series of causes and effects. No nation becomes prosperous or miserable, progressive or backward, strong or weak, steady or destroyed without valid reasons. There are factors which influence them greatly.

Therefore, a survey of the history of the past nations and the factors which contributed to their prosperity or misery may help us find our way in a troubled world in which we now are. This is because the same factors which were at work shaping the life of the people in the past are still active.

It is for this reason that Imam ‘Ali (as) in his letter to Harith al-Hamdani emphasizes that:

**"واعتبر بما مضى من الدنيا لما بقي منها فإن بعضها يشبه
بعضاً"**

*"Learn lessons from past events for future events, because they are similar to one another."*¹

It is exactly for this reason that one third of the Qur'an consists of the stories and histories of past nations and according to the Qur'an, this survey of the past will help everybody since

"..in their histories there is certainly a lesson for men of understanding" [Qur'an 12:111]. Then in the Holy Qur'an, Allah orders the Prophet (S) **"therefore relate the narrative that they may reflect." [Qur'an 7:176].**

In his Qasi'ah sermon, where he talks on the issues of the prosperity and misery of nations and Muslims and the factors responsible for them, Imam 'Ali (as) talks about the similarity among the fates of the nations and the identical factors of their successes and failures, He says: Avoid facing the punishments which were inflicted upon the past nations. Remember their attitudes in hardships. Try not to be like them.

After comparing their behavior when they were prosperous and at the time of their misery and depression, then adopt those actions of theirs which brought about their prosperity and providence, which made their foes flee from them, which put assets at their disposal, which made strong their social bonds, which made them avoid discord and disunity, which made their harmony feasible, and which enticed them to shun those actions which weaken their power, i.e., deceptive action and jealousy.

"Think about the conditions of the believers of the past, how they were tested by God. Did they not have to face a lot of hardships?"

"But when God, the Almighty, observed their perseverance and patience in the face of obstacles for His sake, He changed their misery into prosperity, and their fear into security. God made them governors, statesmen and leaders. They received such favors from God they had not even hoped for.

"Observe how they were moderate, their hands were in the service of one another, their swords helped each other, their eyes were piercing, and their intentions and aims were united. Did they not become leaders of the entire earth?"

Then observe the end of their lives. When they became disunited their unity was fractured, and there were disagreements among them; they divided, and started to quarrel. At this time, God changed their strength into weakness and deprived them of their assets. What remained of them is their sad stories for you today to behold and for you to take lessons. Then Imam 'Ali (as) adds:

"فَمَا أَشَدَّ اعْتِدَالَ الْأَحْوَالِ وَأَقْرَبَ اشْتِبَاهَ الْأَمْثَالِ"

*"You see how nations are similar in their states and traits."*²

This very principle of similarity in states and traits among nations, which depicts their fates, is of crucial significance for Imam 'Ali (as) in his sermon. That is why he emphasizes a survey of the lives of people of the past.

2. Every Father Should Try Educating His Child

Among the factors which build up man's personality are the family environment and parental guidance. The latter factor is of crucial importance in child's life, especially in his life manners and etiquette.

Since in Islam "adab" or "good manners" are used to evaluate one's amount of education and are recognized as the best indicator of one's personality, therefore, training one's children in this aspect is given great gravity in Islam.

In his treatise on law, Imam Zayn al-'Abidin (as) says concerning this issue:

**"وَأَمَّا حَقُّ وَلَدِكَ فَإِنَّ تَعْلَمَ أَنَّهُ مِنْكَ وَمُضَافُ إِلَيْكَ فِي عَاجِلِ
الدُّنْيَا بِخَيْرِهِ وَشَرِّهِ وَإِنَّكَ مَسْئُولٌ عَمَّا وَلِيَّتَهُ بِهِ مِنْ حُسْنِ الْآدَبِ
وَالدَّلَالَةِ عَلَى رَبِّهِ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ وَالْمَعُونَةِ لَهُ عَلَى طَاعَتِهِ فَأَعْمَلْ فِي
أَمْرِهِ عَمَلًا مَنْ يَعْلَمُ أَنَّهُ مُثَابٌ عَلَى الْإِحْسَانِ إِلَيْهِ، مُعَاقِبٌ عَلَى
الْإِسَاءَةِ إِلَيْهِ"**

*"It is your child's right on you that you should know that he is from you and will be ascribed to you through both his good and his evil in the immediate affairs of this world. You are responsible for what has been entrusted to you, such as educating him in good conduct, guiding him towards the path of his Lord, the Almighty, and helping him to obey Him. So act toward him with the action of one who knows that he will be rewarded for good doing toward him, and punished for doing evil to him."*³

In accordance with our religion leaders, other children's rights are: selecting good names for them, reading Qur'an, swimming, shooting, providing them with jobs and spouses, feeding them rightfully and housing them appropriately.⁴

As we have seen before at the adulthood, like at the time of childhood, man's spirit is malleable. Whatever changes the child is exposed to is eternal. Regarding this, Imam Musa ibn Ja'far al-Kadhim (as) has said:

**"مَنْ تَعَلَّمَ فِي شَبَابِهِ كَانَ بِمَنْزِلَةِ الرَّسْمِ فِي الْحَجَرِ وَمَنْ تَعَلَّمَ
وَهُوَ كَبِيرٌ كَانَ بِمَنْزِلَةِ الْكِتَابِ عَلَى وَجْهِ الْمَاءِ"**

*"Learning in one's youth is like writing on stone. But learning in old age is like writing on the surface of water."*⁵

3. The War among 72 Nations

In the book "The reasons behind the rise of Islam and the fall of the Muslims," one of the reasons for this fall is said to be sectarianism. Two other factors are responsible for these differences, however:

a) Lack of the recognition of the truth. Hafiz, the Persian poet, says in this regard:

The quarrel among the seventy-two nations is not valid.

For, not seeing the truth, they resorted to fantasy.

b) Selfishness and self-conceit.

We have already said if we wish to get rid of the sectarian differences among people, we should use reasoning in the light of the Book and the Prophet's kinfolds, and avoid being indoctrinated by poisoning ideas of some.

We should also avoid being carried away by selfishness and self-conceit in the recognition of facts and truth in different sects.

Imam 'Ali (as) in his letter asks his child not to be carried away by these two factors: selfishness and self-conceit.

4. Why Is Imam 'Ali Unwilling To Teach Any Book On Religion But The Qur'an And The Shari'ah?

As we saw before, Imam 'Ali (as), as a kind father, decided to teach his son, Imam Hassan (as), the Qur'an and the sacred "Shari'ah", which are the sources of all human knowledge. He decided not to teach him anything else. But he practically saw that people, due to their selfishness, started having different sects. Thus, he decided, along with Qur'an and Shari'ah, to teach other issues to his son as well: topics such as: monotheism, Prophethood, resurrection philosophy, history, education, ethical points, the recognition of the factors of corruption... and the like.

But Imam 'Ali (as) is innately dissatisfied to enter into this game because entering this scene does not have any profit whatsoever. This is because the Book of God and its interpretation is the essence of all knowledge and sciences and will make it needless for people to study other things. But consider the condition of Islam in those dark days when people separated themselves from the Prophet's kinfolk. This separation from the guidance of the Prophet's kinfolk caused people to have different understandings of the facts and truth. In this way, different sects came into being. Under such conditions, Imam saw it feasible to start giving Imam Hasan (as) new insights about religion.

Furthermore, this section of Imam 'Ali's letter neither involves unwillingness towards religious discussions, nor, does it indicate, as some have erroneously assumed, that the Qur'anic sciences and religious commandments are of lower importance. Each one of these has its special value.⁶

¹ . Nahj al-Balaghah, Letter No 69.

² . Nahj al-Balaghah, Sermon 192.

³ . Shaykh Saduq's Khisal, vol.. 2, p.350.

⁴ . Kanz al-'Ummal, Hadith 35340; Hikmah's Nahj al-Balaghah, Hikmah no.399; Bihar, vol.74, p.80; Bihar, vol.74, p.85; Kanz al-'Ummal, vol.16 Hadith 45409 - 45411.

⁵ . Safinah al-Bihar, vol.1, p.680, item "Shabab" (Youth).

⁶ . Concerning Imam 'Ali's unwillingness, the translators and interpreters of Nahj al-Balaghah have said nothing. Some refer the unwillingness to Imam Hasan (as) without mentioning the cause for it. There are some hints to Imam 'Ali's unwillingness, however, in Ibn Abi Al-Hadid's commentary, vol.16, pp.63-69, and Ibn Maytham's

25) God Wariness And Knowledge

"وَأَعْلَمُ يَا بُنَيَّ أَنَّ أَحَبَّ مَا أَنْتَ آخِذٌ بِهِ إِلَيَّ مِنْ وَصِيَّتِي تَقْوَى اللَّهِ وَالْإِقْتِصَارَ عَلَى مَا قَرَضَهُ اللَّهُ عَلَيْكَ، وَالْأَخْذَ بِمَا مَضَى عَلَيْهِ الْأَوْلُونَ مِنْ آبَائِكَ وَالصَّالِحُونَ مِنْ أَهْلِ بَيْتِكَ، فَإِنَّهُمْ لَمْ يَدْعُوا أَنْ نَنْظُرُوا لِنَفْسِهِمْ كَمَا أَنْتَ نَاطِرٌ، وَفَكَّرُوا كَمَا أَنْتَ مُفَكِّرٌ ثُمَّ رَدَّاهُمْ آخِرُ ذَلِكَ إِلَى الْآخِذِ بِمَا عَرَفُوا، وَالْإِمْسَاكِ عَمَّا لَمْ يُكَلِّفُوا، فَإِنْ أَبَتْ نَفْسُكَ أَنْ تَقْبَلَ ذَلِكَ دُونَ أَنْ تَعْلَمَ كَمَا عَلِمُوا، فَلْيَكُنْ طَلِبَكَ ذَلِكَ بِتَقَهُمْ وَتَعْلَمِ لَا يَتَوَرَّطُ الشُّبُهَاتِ وَعُلُقِ (عُلُوًّا) الْخُصُومَاتِ، وَأَبْدَأْ قَبْلَ نَظْرِكَ فِي ذَلِكَ بِالِاسْتِعَانَةِ بِالْهَيْكِ، وَالرَّغْبَةِ إِلَيْهِ فِي تَوْفِيقِكَ وَتَرْكِ كُلِّ شَائِبَةٍ أَوْلَجْتِكَ فِي شُبُهَةٍ أَوْ أَسْلَمْتِكَ إِلَى ضَلَالَةٍ فَإِذَا أَيَقَنْتَ أَنْ قَدْ صَفَا قَلْبُكَ فَخَشَعَ وَتَمَّ رَأْيُكَ فَاجْتَمَعَ وَكَانَ هَمُّكَ فِي ذَلِكَ هَمًّا وَاجِدًا، فَانْظُرْ فِيمَا فَسَّرْتُ لَكَ، وَإِنْ أَنْتَ لَمْ يَجْتَمِعْ لَكَ مَا تُحِبُّ مِنْ نَفْسِكَ وَقَرَاغَ نَظْرِكَ وَفِكْرِكَ فَأَعْلَمِ أَنَّكَ إِنَّمَا تُخَيِّطُ الْعَشْوَاءَ وَتَتَوَرَّطُ الظُّلْمَاءَ وَلَيْسَ طَالِبُ الدِّينِ مَنْ خَبَطَ أَوْ خَلَطَ وَالْإِمْسَاكُ عَنْ ذَلِكَ أَمْتَلُ"

"Know, my son, that what I would like the most for you to take from my will is God-wariness, restricting yourself to what God has imposed on you, and adhering to the practice of your forefathers and the righteous among the people of your household. They did not cease to examine themselves just as you examine yourself, and to contemplate their affairs just as you do. That led them to act on what they knew and to hold back from what they were not required to do.

If your soul refuses to accept that without ascertaining it (for yourself) as they ascertained it, then let your search for that be with understanding and study, not through becoming entangled in doubts and ensnared in arguments. Before looking into that, begin by seeking help from your God, asking Him for your success, and abandoning the least thing that involves you in doubt or exposes you to misguidance.

Thus when you are certain that your heart has become pure and submissive, and your opinions have become perfected and gathered together, and you have a single thought on the matter, then look into what I have explained to you. But if you have not gathered yourself together as you wish and focused your sights and thoughts exclusively on the

matter, then know that you will be proceeding at random and be confounded in the darkness, whereas a seeker of religion is not one who proceeds at random or is confused, in which case it is better to hold back from that”.

Commentary

In this section of the letter, Imam ‘Ali (as) refers to the new principles of education which include the approaches of acquiring knowledge and the implementation of the pious old generations and the avoidance of blind imitations and full comprehension of the conditions of the time and finally the avoidance of getting involved in dubious cases of thought.

The Approaches To The Acquisition Of Knowledge

As we know, man's knowledge, compared with what is unknown to him, is like a drop of water in the sea. If man wants to capture this drop of knowledge, he has to select the proper method of approach so as not to get drowned in the immense sea of what is unknown.

In his letter, Imam ‘Ali (as) provides us with three such approaches:

1. Inspiration

As God is the Creator of existence, and is aware of every detail, definitely His book of religion is based on the facts of His book of creation. No deceit or lies appear there. Thus, a resort to God's Book and to the Prophet's tradition, which is identical with divine inspiration, can help us find our right path¹ and block our deviation. For this reason, Imam (as) has emphasized: “What I would like the most for you to take from my will is God-wariness, restricting yourself to what God has imposed on you”.

As we know, one of man's most important ways for the progress of knowledge and culture and man's civilization, has been following the guides offered by the Prophets and the Imams (as). We have dealt with this in the book called "The History of the Islamic culture and civilization."

2. The Ways Of The Pious Ancestors

It is a fact that the older generations of a community, especially if they have had the guidance of Divine Prophets, through experience and inspiration, have amassed huge reservoirs of knowledge, which could be a valuable treasure for the next generations. Thus, reliance of this worthy treasure could help us attain the right knowledge. That is why in this letter, Imam ‘Ali (as) orders his son to follow what his forefathers have done.

Since we know that the Prophet and the Imams are descended from sacred origins and are not afflicted with impurities of unbelief and have always followed the right religion,² therefore, their ways are felicitous and their knowledge is based on rights and facts.

Do his ‘forefathers’ mean the Prophet (S), Abu Talib, Abd al-Muttalib, Hashim...? And do the ‘righteous among the people of your household’ refer to Hamza, Ja’far, Abbas, etc?³ Of course, this adherence to the practice of the pious ancestors does not clash with blind imitation, which we will study later. This kind of adherence is the reference of an ignorant person to a scholar. This is because these pious scholars are righteous people and will not misguide us. Secondly, as it is in the text of the letter, they contemplate their daily affairs

and do not get into matters they know nothing about.

3. Logic And Reasoning

The third way to get to truth and knowledge is through reasoning and logic. The Holy Qur'an says regarding this:

"وَلَا تَقْفُ مَا لَيْسَ لَكَ بِهِ عِلْمٌ إِنَّ السَّمْعَ وَالْبَصَرَ وَالْفُؤَادَ كُلُّ أُولَئِكَ كَانَ عَنْهُ مَسْئُولًا "

"And follow not that of which you have not the knowledge; surely the hearing and the sight and the heart, all of these, shall be questioned about that" [Qur'an 17:36]

Contrary to other religions which contend that in the matters of belief and practice, worship itself is enough, Islam is of the opinion that each idea or practice is acceptable only if it is based on logic.

"وَقَالُوا لَنْ يَدْخُلَ الْجَنَّةَ إِلَّا مَنْ كَانَ هُودًا أَوْ نَصَارَى تِلْكَ أَمَانِيُّهُمْ قُلْ هَاتُوا بُرْهَانَكُمْ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ صَادِقِينَ "

"And they say: None shall enter the garden (of paradise) except he who is a Jew or a Christian. These are their vain desires. Say: Bring your proof if you are truthful." [Qur'an 2:111]

On the basis of this, Imam 'Ali (as) mentions: if you do not wish to use the first and second approach, and if you want to use the third way, you should use good understanding and reasoning, not baseless assumptions.

"فَإِنْ آبَتْ نَفْسُكَ أَنْ تَقْبَلَ ذَلِكَ دُونَ أَنْ تَعْلَمَ كَمَا عَلِمُوا فَلْيَكُنْ طَلْبُكَ ذَلِكَ بِتَقَهُمْ وَتَعْلَمَ ... "

If your soul refuses to accept that without ascertaining it (for yourself) as they ascertained it, then let your search for that be with understanding and study,

The conditions for the use of this third method include the following:

- a)** Asking God for assistance.
- b)** The intention should be the clarification of the truth, and not quarrel or the defeat of the foe.
- c)** Drawing away the prejudice of defending one specific religion, the intention being only

the clarification of the truth, or else it would be of the other type, which leads to misleading.

d) Driving away those factors which make man doubtful, such as: megalomania, desire for fame, too much interest in one's possessions.

e) Having a pure heart, away from any kind of doubt and depression (such as hunger, too much eating, aggressive lust, anger...) or else he would be like an unfettered camel that walks in the dark; he would not be immune to falling.

The Hazards Of The Blind Imitation And Selection With No Reason

Although Islam agrees with logical imitation, i.e., the reference of the ignorant person to the scholar, on which the order of society relies, such as one's reference to physicians, engineers, tailors, carpenters, and jurisprudents knowledgeable in the science of religion. It however, will not agree with blind imitation, i.e., the reference of the ignorant person to another ignorant one. Islam completely rejects this kind of imitation. Because this act does not, firstly, lead to the right way; and secondly, it exemplifies the axiom which says: a blind person leads the way to another blind person. In Islam, this kind of imitation is rejected. Mawlawi, the Persian poet says: May two hundred curses be leveled at this kind of imitation. The Holy Qur'an, regarding this issue, says:

**"وَإِذَا قِيلَ لَهُمُ اتَّبِعُوا مَا أَنْزَلَ اللَّهُ قَالُوا بَلْ نَتَّبِعُ مَا أَلْفَيْنَا عَلَيْهِ
آبَاءَنَا أُولُو كَأَن آبَائِهِمْ لَّا يَعْقِلُونَ شَيْئًا وَلَا يَهْتَدُونَ"**

"And when it is said to them, follow what Allah has revealed, they say: Nay! We follow what we found our fathers upon. What! And though their fathers had no sense at all, nor did they follow the right way."⁴

The Prophet of Islam struggled against all unfavorable habits and unfounded imitations which had fastened man's feet and hands like chains. He tried to break these shackles, freeing man.

"وَيَضَعُ عَنْهُمْ إِصْرَهُمْ وَالْأَغْلَالَ الَّتِي كَانَتْ عَلَيْهِمْ"

"And removes from them their burden and the shackles which were upon them"⁵

The Prophet (S), elsewhere, has also said:

"كُلُّ مَأْثِرَةٍ فِي الْجَاهِلِيَّةِ تَحْتَ قَدَمِي"

"I will trample all the superstitious ideas and remnants of the pre-Islamic pagans."⁶

Thus, anybody who wishes to find out the truth about religion should find the right methods

or at least refrain from accepting the wrong ways. He should not resort to the blind imitation which is by itself a factor for being misled. He should not carry on with his doubts, either.

1. "Alif lam Mim Ra. These are the verses of the book; and that which is revealed to you from your lord is truth" [Surah al-Ra'd v.1].
2. Refer to Bihar, vol.15, p.117.
3. Ibn Abi al-Hadid's commentary on Nahj al-Balaghah, vol.16, p.71.
4. Qur'an 2:170.
5. Qur'an 7:157.
6. Ibn Hisham's Sirah, vol.3, p.412. See Islam and Human Rights for the hazards of blind imitation and Islam's struggle against it.

26) Everything is From Allah And Allah Will Return

"فَتَقَهُمْ يَا بُنَيَّ وَصِيَّتِي وَاعْلَمْ أَنَّ مَالِكَ الْمَوْتِ هُوَ مَالِكُ الْحَيَاةِ
وَأَنَّ الْخَالِقَ هُوَ الْمُمِيتُ وَأَنَّ الْمُغْنِيَ هُوَ الْمُعِيدُ وَأَنَّ الْمُبْتَلِيَ هُوَ
الْمُعَافِي وَأَنَّ الدُّنْيَا لَمْ تَكُنْ لِنَسْتَقِرَّ إِلَّا عَلَى مَا جَعَلَهَا اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ
مِنَ النِّعَمَاءِ وَالْإِبْتِلَاءِ وَالْجَزَاءِ فِي الْمَعَادِ أَوْ مَا شَاءَ وَمَا لَا تَعْلَمُ
فَإِنْ أَشْكَلَ عَلَيْكَ شَيْءٌ مِنْ ذَلِكَ فَاحْمِلْهُ عَلَى جَهَالَتِكَ بِهِ فَإِنَّكَ
أَوَّلُ مَا خُلِقْتَ جَاهِلًا ثُمَّ عَلِمْتَ وَمَا أَكْثَرَ مَا تَجْهَلُ مِنَ الْأَمْرِ
وَيَتَحَيَّرُ فِيهِ رَأْيُكَ وَيَضِلُّ فِيهِ بَصَرُكَ ثُمَّ تُبْصِرُهُ بَعْدَ ذَلِكَ فَاعْتَصِمِ
بِالَّذِي خَلَقَكَ وَرَزَقَكَ وَسَوَّأَكَ وَلِيَكُنْ لَهُ تَعَبُّدُكَ وَإِلَيْهِ رَعْبَتُكَ وَمِنْهُ
شَفَعَتُكَ"

"My son, understand my will. Know that the Owner of death is the Owner of life, that the Creator is the One Who causes death, that the Destroyer is (also) the Restorer (to life), and that the One Who afflicts is (also) the One Who grants soundness. (Know) that this world is only established in accordance with what God has ordained for it of blessings and trials and recompense on the Day of Resurrection, or whatever He wills which you do not know of.

If any of that is confusing for you, then attribute it to your ignorance of it, for at first you were created ignorant, then you acquired knowledge. How often it is that you are ignorant of a matter which perplexes you and your perception of it is erroneous, then after that, you perceive it! Thus, resort to the One Who created you, provided for you and proportioned you. Let your worship be for Him, your request be to Him and your fear be of Him".

Commentary

In this part of the letter, Imam 'Ali (as) draws our attentions to several constructive points, some of which are the following:

1. Monotheism and the negation of polytheism

Since early times, there were groups such as Disanieh, Manawieh, Mazdakieh, and the like who were of the opinion that there should be relatedness and relation between cause and effect. Therefore, they used to believe that there were two Gods. The reason for this assumption was that there were dichotomies in the world creatures: good-bad, for instance. The God of good things, because of the relatedness between cause and effect, could not be the God of bad things, and vice versa: the God of light, health, abundance, happy life and beautiful creatures was Yazdan or light. And the God of Darkness, death, storms, earthquakes, famine, disease and harmful and ugly creatures was Ahriman or Devil.¹

Allamah Hilli, in his commentary on "Tajrid", talks about the ideology of the magi (Plural of magus) in the following way:

"The magi believe that good stems from God and evil stems from the Satan. This is because God is the Absolute good and the doer of evil should be vicious".

But as it is proven, anything which exists in this world is either the absolute good or its goodness is more than its badness. This is because the absolute evil does not exist.

Mawlawi has said:

Thus the absolute evil does not exist,
Know that evil is relative;
There is no poison or sugar,
Which is not related to the other;
One is free, the other is fettered,
One is poison, the other one is sugar;
The snake poison is the life for the snake,
But its relation to man is that of death.²

Thus, the absolute good is in harmony with God, and God is its creator; but absolute evil does not exist.

As we saw before, Imam 'Ali (as) said, "the Owner of death is the Owner of life as well; the Creator is also the One Who causes our death; and the Destroyer is the same as the Restorer (to life), and finally the One who afflicts is the same as the One Who grants soundness." Some of these stem from good and some have roots in evil. In the erroneous ideology of dualism, good and evil stand in contrast.

The summary of Imam 'Ali's statements is the following: The dualists contend that there are two Gods: The God of good and the God of evil. But since the absolute evil does not exist, therefore, there is no need for the God of evil. Some superficial people think that the snake's poison, diseases, death, floods, tornadoes and the like are nasty and evil. But a world which lacks one of these is not perfect. Their very presence is good. The principle of the relationship between the cause and the effect forces us to believe in only one God: The Owner of life is the Owner of death as well. The One who afflicts, cures as well; and the One who destroys, restores as well...³

2. A World Composed Of Happiness And Sadness Is Beautiful And Makes Perfection Possible

Although this world is a mixture of treasure and snake, flower and thorn, sadness and happiness, asset and misery, hardships and ease, sweetness and bitterness, it is harmonious and lovely and every particle and part of it is in its proper place. And man's caravan should pass through this turmoil for the destination of meeting God.

"أَلَا إِلَى اللَّهِ تَصِيرُ الْأُمُورُ" 469

"Now surely to Allah do all affairs eventually come" [Surah al-Shura, v.53].

"يَا أَيُّهَا الْإِنْسَانُ إِنَّكَ كَادِحٌ إِلَىٰ رَبِّكَ كَدًّا فَمُلَّاقيهِ" 470

"O man! Surely you must strive to attain to your Lord, a hard striving until you meet Him." [Inshiqaq, v.6].

The beauty of this world lies in its present structure which is a mixture of contrasts such as sorrow and delight. If it were not like this, it would neither show the value of beauties nor would it make possible the perfection of man.

Whereas, according to the logic of the Qur'an, man is created to be in distress.

"لَقَدْ خَلَقْنَا الْإِنْسَانَ فِي كَبَدٍ"

"Certainly we have created man to be in distress.4

Mawlawi, in different places of Mathnawi, has explained this fact through interesting allegories. One of these parables is the story of prison and Joseph's well:

Although they ground the pearl in the mortar,
It enlightened the eyes and cured the calamity;
They put a wheat seed under the ground,
Then they harvested a lot of clusters;
Then they ground it in the mill,
Its value and its product (bread) became precious;
Then they ground the bread under the teeth,
It turned into wisdom, soul, and cognition;
The soul became enchanted in love,
Then the harvester came to harvest again.

To elaborate on this issue, Mawlawi tells of an animal which becomes fatter the more it is beaten. At the end, Mawlawi mentions the multitude of distresses of the believers and the

Prophets:

There is an animal called Osqor,
Which becomes fatter when beaten;
When you beat it, it will become fatter,
It becomes fatter through the wounds it gets;
A believer's self is like Osqor,
Which becomes fatter through the wounds;
Because of this, for the Prophets,
There are lots of sufferings and failures.
Elsewhere, Mawlawi likens the effects of sufferings in the cleansing of the soul to the effects of a drug used in tanning for cleansing the hides (skins):
The hide suffers the wounds of the drug,
Then it becomes as fresh as Adim Taefi;
But if you rub something else on it,
It would become big, ugly and bad-smelling;
Now man is like that hide,
From different moistures, it has become ugly and fat;
Now you should rub it hard,
Till it becomes clean and thin;
If you can't, let it be,
Then God will make you suffer a lot;
God's hurting is your cleansing,
His knowledge is above yours.

3. If You Do Not Know The Philosophy Of Something, Do Not Deny It

There are many people whose personal knowledge is used for the evaluation of things and events. If they assume something is true, they accept it, or else they would reject it. But we should know our scientific knowledge and means are limited.

"وَمَا أُوتِيتُمْ مِنَ الْعِلْمِ إِلَّا قَلِيلًا"

"And you are not given aught of knowledge but a little" [Qur'an, 17:85].

It is always possible that, on the one hand, our so-called knowledge might turn out to be wrong, and on the other hand, it might happen that others, through better instruments and means might have found the truth. It might happen, as well, that nobody yet has access to the right means, and such means might be found in the future. Thus, Avicenna has said: "Whatever strange thing strikes your ears, while incisive reasoning can not reject it, assume that it might materialize."⁵

It is for this reason that Imam 'Ali (as) has said that whenever you are faced with a problem regarding the events of this world, and you are not aware of the philosophy behind the so-called disastrous events such as earthquakes, storms and diseases, find the reason in your own ignorance, and do not claim that since you do not know the secrets of these phenomena, therefore, they are not assets at all.

This is because when you were born, you lacked all sorts of knowledge. Then gradually, through your senses, such as sight, hearing, touch, taste and smelling, you were connected to the outside world and you started analyzing the events through your reasoning.

**"وَاللَّهُ أَخْرَجَكُمْ مِنْ بُطُونِ أُمَّهَاتِكُمْ لَا تَعْلَمُونَ شَيْئًا وَجَعَلَ لَكُمُ
السَّمْعَ وَالْأَبْصَارَ وَالْأَفْئِدَةَ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَشْكُرُونَ"**

"And Allah has brought you forth from the wombs of your mothers -you did not know anything- and He gave you hearing and sight and hearts that you may give thanks" [Qur'an 16:78].

It is obvious that the rays of this knowledge are limited, but the affairs which are within the radius of creation are unlimited and immensely broad and widespread.

Some Interesting Confessions

Einstein has said, "The puzzle of creation is still unresolved. We may even assume that this puzzle shall always remain intricate. What we have so far learned from the book of creation has been illuminating. Through this knowledge we have come to know some of the principles of the nature, but we are well-aware that compared with the volumes of this book which we have read, there still remain an immense number of unresolved problems."[6](#)

William James says, "Our knowledge is a drop compared with our ignorance which is an ocean. The only thing which we can definitely say is that our natural knowledge is dependent on another vast world of another type the properties of which we have not grasped"[7](#)

Charles Ritchie says: "A genuine scholar is the one who is simultaneously bold and courteous. He should be courteous since our knowledge is meager, and he should be bold since the road towards mysterious world is open to us."[8](#)

Oliver Lodge says, "What we know, compared with what we suppose to know, is very little. Some say this without believing what they say; but I say it with complete conviction"[9](#)

Alexis Carrel, in the book, "Man, the unknown", writes: "Those sciences which deal with living creatures, in general, and with man, in particular, have not progressed enough and they have stuck at the descriptive level. Man is a completely complex creature who can not be easily recognized. We do not yet have at our disposal sufficient means to know man and his relations with the outside world. In fact, our ignorance about ourselves is immense. We still do not have answers to many questions concerning our selves: How do genes carry the heredity characteristics? How do cells live in groups called tissues?"[10](#)

Camille Flammarion in the book "The unknown powers of Nature" writes on the limitation of man's knowledge, "We do think, but what is the essence of thought?" Nobody can answer this question. We do walk, but what is the nature of the activity of the muscles? Nobody knows. I know that my decision consists of unmaterialistic power, and I am also aware that all my spirit is unmaterialistic. However, when I decide to raise my hand, I will notice that my decision moves my body muscles. But how does my decision move my hand. Nobody

tells me how my optical nerves transfer the outside configurations into my thought. How is the essence of this thought conceived? Where is it located? How does the mental activity take place and what is its essence? I can extend the number of such questions for ten years whereas your greatest scientists can not answer even my fundamental questions."¹¹

4. Carry Out Everything For His Sake

Since God is the Creator of everything and every creature, and He initiates creation and resurrection, and mixes sorrow with happiness, ugliness with beauty, assets with miseries and has made this principle of juxtaposition as the basis for perfection, "you have to resort only to Him and devote your worship just to Him and have your love only for Him and fear Him solely".

It is because this exclusive devotion is a sign of your gratitude and of your perfect monotheistic belief, which is not given to everybody. God in His Qur'an has trained the Prophet in this manner:

"قُلْ إِنْ صَلَاتِي وَنُسُكِي وَمَحْيَايَ وَمَمَاتِي لِلَّهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ لَلَا شَرِيكَ لَهُ وَبِذَلِكَ أُمِرْتُ وَأَنَا أَوَّلُ الْمُسْلِمِينَ قُلْ أَعَيْرَ اللَّهُ أَبْغِي رَبًّا وَهُوَ رَبُّ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ وَلَا تَكْسِبُ كُلُّ نَفْسٍ إِلَّا عَلَيْهَا وَلَا تَزِرُ وَازِرَةٌ وِزْرَ أُخْرَىٰ ثُمَّ إِلَىٰ رَبِّكُمْ مَرْجِعُكُمْ فَيُنَبِّئُكُمْ بِمَا كُنْتُمْ فِيهِ تَخْتَلِفُونَ"

"Say: Surely my prayer and my sacrifice and my life and my death are all for Allah, the Lord of the worlds. No associate has He; and this am I commanded, and I am the first of those who submit. Say: Shall I seek a lord other than Allah? And He is the Lord of all things; and no soul earns evil but against itself, and no bearer of burden shall bear the burden of another; then to your Lord is your return, so He will inform you of that in which you differed [Qur'an 6:162-164].

¹ . For this see Shahrastani's Milal and Safai's Ilm al-Kalam and Mulla Hadi Sabzwari's Manzumah.

² . Mathnawi, Part 4, p.2.

³ . For the philosophy of dualism and for the study of the fact that evil is non-existent and does not need a cause, refer to Mutahhari's valuable work called Divine justice; and also refer to al-Asfar, vol.7, item 8, pp.55-148.

⁴ . Qur'an 90:4.

⁵ . Avicenna's Shafa.

⁶ . A Philosophical Summary of Einstein's theory, pp.19-20.

⁷ . The Creator of the world, pp.282-294.

⁸ . Op. cit.

⁹ . The Creator of the world, pp.282-294.

¹⁰ . Man, the Unknown, pp.2-4.

¹¹ . 'Ala Itlal al-Mazhab al-maddi, p.138.

27) Take the Prophet as your Guide and Islam as your Religion

"وَأَعْلَمُ يَا بُنَيَّ أَنَّ أَحَدًا لَمْ يُنَبِّئْ عَنَ اللَّهِ كَمَا أَنْبَأَ عَنْهُ الرَّسُولُ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَآلِهِ، قَارِضَ بِهِ رَائِدًا وَإِلَى النَّجَاةِ قَائِدًا فَإِنِّي لَمْ أَلِكْ نَصِيحَةً وَإِنَّكَ لَنْ تَبْلُغَ فِي النَّظَرِ لِنَفْسِكَ وَإِنْ اجْتَهَدْتَ مَبْلَغَ نَظَرِي لَكَ"

"Know, my son, that no one has told us of Allah like the Prophet (S) has. Thus, be content with him as a leader and as a guide to salvation. Indeed, I have not fallen short in advice to you, and, however much you may strive, you will never attain that degree of concern for your welfare that I have for you".

Commentary

In this part of the letter, Imam 'Ali (as) emphasizes two points:

1. Muhammad's Religion Is The Best In The World

As we know that the prophets have been sent to people at different times and under different conditions. The more backward the people, the simpler was the prophets' training and educating people. Their schedules were like those of present-day schools where in elementary schools simpler books and methods are used whereas in the high schools we have more complicated programs.

Since the more ancient Prophets were sent to people who had not progressed enough, their methods of educating people were more elementary, but since the Prophet of Islam was the last of the Prophets,¹ and his religion is eternally the way of life for all men,² there it is better to be said that "nobody has told us of Allah like the Prophet (S) has", and his religion is the most comprehensive of all religions.³ Anybody adopting another way of life is rejected.⁴ It is also right to say: Only he is to be chosen as the leader⁵ since his religion is the most comprehensive, his leadership the most perfect and his commandments the most beneficial.

2. An Old One Sees In The Mud Brick What The Young One Can See In The Mirror

Every father wishes well for his child. He will not spare any advice in building his personality. He is usually more decisive, determined and experienced than the young one who usually possesses less experience. It is an old saying that an old one sees in the mud brick what the young one can see in the mirror.

Concerning the value of the ideas and thoughts of the aged, Imam as-Sadiq (as) has said: "The existence of an elderly one in his family is like the Prophet among his people".⁶

And this is a fact. On the one hand, there is a father like Imam 'Ali (as), who is the gate of knowledge for the Prophet (S), and who is well-experienced, and on the other hand, there is a child from the Prophet's Household, who is going to guide the Islamic world in the near future, and be the substitute for his father in the guidance of the Muslim world. Therefore, for these valid reasons it is necessary that, firstly, sufficient amount of advice be given him, and secondly, it was suitable for Imam 'Ali (as) to employ his own experiences in the education of his son.

"وَأَعْلَمَ يَا بُنَيَّ إِنَّهَ لَوْ كَانَ لِرَبِّكَ شَرِيكٌ لَأَتَتْكَ رُسُلُهُ وَلَرَأَيْتَ آثَارَ
 مُلْكِهِ وَسُلْطَانِهِ وَلَعَرَفْتَ أفعَالَهُ وَصِفَاتِهِ وَلَكِنَّهُ إِلَهُ وَاحِدٌ كَمَا
 وَصَفَ نَفْسَهُ لَا يُضَادُّهُ فِي مُلْكِهِ أَحَدٌ وَلَا يَزُولُ أَبَدًا وَلَمْ يَزَلْ أَوَّلُ
 قَبْلَ الْأَشْيَاءِ وَلَا أَوَّلِيَّةٍ وَأَخْرُبُ بَعْدَ الْأَشْيَاءِ بِلا نِهَايَةٍ عَظْمَ عَنَ أَنْ
 تَثْبُتَ رُبُوبِيَّتِهِ بِأَخَاطِئِ قَلْبِي أَوْ بَصَرَ فَإِذَا عَرَفْتَ ذَلِكَ فَافْعَلْ كَمَا
 يَنْبَغِي لِمِثْلِكَ أَنْ يَفْعَلَهُ فِي صِغَرِ خَطَرِهِ وَقِلَّةِ مَقْدِرَتِهِ وَكثْرَةِ
 عَجْزِهِ وَعِظْمِ حَاجَتِهِ إِلَى رَبِّهِ فِي طَلْبِ طَاعَتِهِ وَالْخَشْيَةِ مِنْ
 عُقُوبَتِهِ وَالشَّفَقَةِ مِنْ سَخَطِهِ فَإِنَّهُ لَمْ يَأْمُرْكَ إِلَّا بِحُسْنٍ وَلَمْ
 يَنْهَكَ إِلَّا عَنَ قَبِيحٍ"

"Know, my son! If there were an associate for your Lord, his Prophets would have come to you and you would have observed the signs of his dominion and his rule and you would have recognized his acts and attributes. But He is One, as He has described Himself. None opposes Him in His sovereignty. He never ceases to be and He is eternal. He is the First before all things, without any beginning, and the Last after all things, without any end. He is far greater than that His Divinity be proved through the comprehension of the heart or the eye. When you realize that, then act as it befits one such as you to act – one with his insignificance, his weakness, his incapacity and his tremendous need of his Lord in seeking His obedience, dreading His chastisement and fearing His anger, for He does not command you anything but good, and does not forbid you from anything but evil".

1. "Muhammad is not the father of any of your men, but he is the Apostle of Allah and the last of the Prophets" [Qur'an 30:40].

2. "And we have not sent you but to all the men as a bearer of good news and as a warner". [Qur'an 34:28]

3. "Surely this Qur'an guides to that which is most upright" [Qur'an 17:9].

4. "And whoever desires a religion other than Islam, it shall not be accepted from him, and in the hereafter he shall be one of the losers". [Qur'an 3:85]

5. Ra'id is the one who walks in front of the crowd to collect information. Qa'id is the leader of the crowd. Sa'iq is the one who walks at the back of the crowd guiding them in the right path.

6. La'Ali al-Akhbar, p.181.

28) The Perilous Road to Doomsday

"واعلم أنّ أمامك طريقاً دأ مساقية بعيدة ومشقة شديدة وأنه لا غنى بك فيه عن حسن الإرتياد وقدر بلاغك من الزاد مع خفة الظهر فلا تحملن على ظهرك فوق طاقتك فيكون ثقل ذلك وبالأعلى عليك، وإذا وجدت من أهل القاعة من يحمل لك زادك إلى يوم القيامة فيوافقك به عداء حيث تحتاج إليه فاعتنمه وحمله أياه وأكثر من تزويده وانت قادر عليه فلعلك تطلبه ولا تجده. واغتنم من استقرضك في حال غناك ليجعل قضاؤه لك في يوم عسرتك.

واعلم أنّ أمامك عقبة كئوداً المخيف فيها أحسن حالاً من المثل والمبطل عليها أقبح أمراً من المسرع وإن مهبطها بك لا محالة إما على جنة أو على نار فارتد لنفسك قبل نزولك ووطئ المنزل قبل حلوك فليس بعد الموت مستعتب ولا إلى الدنيا منصرفاً

"Know that there is, ahead of you, a road of great distance and severe hardship, and that in it you will need to make a proper search, collect provisions as much as you can, and have a light load (of sins). Do not burden your back beyond your strength such that the weight of that has evil consequences for you

And if you find a needy person to carry your provisions for you to the Day of Judgment, and deliver it to you tomorrow when you will be in need of it, then avail yourself of him and make him carry it. Continue to supply him with provisions (for yourself) as far as you are able, for you may seek him later and not find him. Avail yourself of one who asks you for a loan while you are in a state of affluence, so that his repayment of it to you will be on the day of your hardship.

Know that before you is a mountain road, difficult to ascend. The light-burdened one on it will be in a better condition than the heavy-burdened one, and the slow-moving one on it will be in a worse state than the fast-moving one. Its place of descent with you will undoubtedly be in Paradise or in the Fire. Thus, search (for provisions) for yourself before your descent, and prepare the station before your arrival, for after death there is no seeking of (God's) favour or any return to this world."

Commentary

In this section of the letter, Imam 'Ali (as) talks about the perilous road to Doomsday, and the hardships which exist there. He says no excuses are accepted and a return to the world

is impossible. Whatever we are able to do, we should do here. Imam 'Ali (as) has invited his son and all of his other spiritual sons to prepare provisions for Doomsday. The following points in Imam 'Ali's letter are worth considering:

A. Sufficient Provisions And Light-Load Of Possessions

In this difficult and long road two things are essential: First, enough provisions which can help us there and which includes piety and good deeds. Imam "Ali (as) has said:

خَيْرُ الزَّادِ التَّقْوَى

"The best kind of provision is God-wariness."

And secondly, the light load of possessions in this world. We would suffer a lot in that long, tedious journey of ours. We will be destroyed if the load is too heavy.

B. Be Aware Of The Significance Of Those Who Carry Your Provisions On The Way Or Pay You Back What They Owe You On Difficult Days

In emphasizing our struggles to prepare the provisions, Imam 'Ali (as) uses two beautiful similes and metaphors:

Firstly: In this long and tiring way if you can find somebody to be able to carry some of your provisions to your destination, you are lucky. Be aware that when you help the needy today, in fact you have put your provisions for the next world over their shoulders to deliver them to you in the next world. You might not be lucky enough to have a chance like this tomorrow:

Secondly: There are people who are ready to borrow from you when you are rich, to give it back to you when you are poor. Make the best of this situation. Be aware that to give away your wealth to the needy for God's sake is to lend to God.¹ This is easy for you today to perform such a good act.

However, on Doomsday, when it is the time of hardship, despair and misery, the result is of significant consequences:

C. In Hard To Cross Roads, The Light - Loaded Travelers Are More At Ease

Imam 'Ali (as) talks about hard-to-cross roads in the direction of Resurrection Day. These are mentioned in the books on traditions.² Naturally, those who are light-loaded in sins pass both speedily and easily but the heavy-loaded sinners either fall or stumble on the way.

D. The End Point For Everyone Is Either Paradise Or Hell

Imam 'Ali (as) points out that the end point for all is either Paradise or Hell. We should make every thing ready before departure. After death there is no return.

1. "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]

2. Refer to Bihar, vol.5, pp.7- 8.

29) Supplication and Its Importance

"واعلم أن الذي بيده خزائن السموات والارض قد اذن لك في الدعاء وتكفل لك بالإجابة وامرك ان تسأله ليعطيك وتسترجه ليرحمك ولم يجعل بينه وبينك من يحجبك عنه، ولم يلجئك الى من يشفع لك إليه ولم يمنعك ان اسأت من التوبة ولم يعاجلك بالنيمة و لم يعيرك بالإنباء ولم يفضحك حيث القضيحة بك أولى ولم يشدد عليك في قبول الإنابة ولم يناقشك بالجريمة ولم يؤيسك من الرحمة بل جعل نزوعك عن الذنب حسنة وحسب سيئتك واجدة وحسب حسنتك عسرا.

وقتح لك باب المتاب وباب الاستعتاب فإذا ناديته سمع نداءك وإذا ناجيته علم نجواك فأفضيت إليه بحاجتك وابتنته ذات نفسك وشكوت إليه همومك واستكشفته كربك واستعنته على أمورك وسألته من خزائن رحمته ما لا يقدر على إعطائه غيره من زيادة الأعمار وصحة الأبدان وسعة الأرزاق.

ثم جعل في يدك مفاتيح خزائنه، بما اذن لك من مسائليته، فمتى شئت استفتحت بالدعاء أبواب نعمته واستمطرت شائب رحمته فلا يقنطنك إبطاء إجابته، فإن العطيّة على قدر النيّة وربما اخرت عنك الإجابة ليكون ذلك اعظم الأجر السائل وأجزل لعطاء الأمل وربما سألت الشيء فلا تعطاه وأوتيت خيراً منه عاجلاً او آجلاً او صرف عنك لما هو خير لك فلبب أمر

قَدْ طَلَبْتَهُ فِيهِ هَلَاكَ دِينِكَ لَوْ أُوتِيْتَهُ فَلَتَكُنْ مَسْأَلُكَ فِيْمَا يَبْقَى
لَكَ جَمَالُهُ وَيُنْفَى عَنْكَ وَبَالُهُ فَالْمَالُ لَا يَبْقَى لَكَ وَلَا تَبْقَى لَهُ"

"Know that He in Whose hand are the treasures of the heavens and the earth has given you the permission for supplication and has guaranteed the acceptance of your requests. He has commanded you to ask Him so that He may grant you, and to seek His mercy so that He may have mercy on you. He has not placed anyone between you and Himself who will veil you from Him, and He has not entrusted you to one who will mediate for you before Him. He has not prevented you from repentance, if you sin, and He has not hastened with punishment to you, and He did not reproach you for repenting. He did not disgrace you when you were worthy of disgrace. He did not treat you with severity in the acceptance of (your) repentance. He did not take you to task for your sins and did not make you despair of (His) mercy. Rather, he has appointed your restraint from sin to be a good deed, and counted each of your evil deeds as one and each good deed as ten.

He has opened for you the door of repentance and the door of seeking a return to His pleasure. Thus, when you call upon Him he hears your call and when you whisper to Him, He knows your secret talk. You acquaint Him with your needs and reveal your self to Him, complain to Him of your sorrows, seek from Him the removal of your afflictions and ask for His help in your affairs. You ask Him (to grant you) from the treasuries of His Mercy an increase in lifespan, good health and the abundance of sustenance that none other than He is able to grant.

Then He placed in your hands the keys to His treasures such that He permitted you to petition Him for them. So whenever you wish, you seek to open the doors of His blessings through supplication, and ask for the downpour of His Mercy. Do not let the slowness of His response dishearten you, for the grant is in accordance with the intention; sometimes the response has only been delayed for you so that it may be a greater reward for the petitioner and a more abundant grant for the hopeful one. Sometimes you ask for a thing and you are not given it, but you are given something better than it now or later; or it is turned away from you for what is better for you, because sometimes in the fulfillment of what you ask for is the destruction of your religion. Therefore let your request be for that, the beauty of which remains for you, and the evil consequences of which pass away from you. For wealth does not remain for you, nor do you remain for it".

Commentary

In this part of the letter, Imam 'Ali (as) puts stress on two points: Supplication and repentance, both of which are used for the spiritual reconstruction of man.

Man, due to his over-engagement in current daily affairs, gets self-centered and indulges in too much of self-reliance, with little attention for Divine bases, and erroneously assumes that he is mighty enough to carry on every action. He is not aware that in this world there are a thousand agents involved in the arrangement of affairs. Man, through his supplication and his obedience to God, could benefit a lot in order to surmount complexities of life.

For this reason, in this letter, Imam (as) teaches his son to be aware of the fact that in this world the worldly affairs are not effected solely through material and physical agents. Rather, spiritual factors, such as supplication and worship are also at work. The second

point emphasized in this letter is the fact that if man, through his sins, temporarily distances himself from God, he can compensate for it through his repentance to gain, once again, God's favour.

The Role Of Supplication And The Conditions For Its Fulfillment

In order for man to come close to God, to gain spiritual peace of mind, to attain ethical values, to stay away from sins, to cleanse mental disturbances, to avoid Satan's temptations, to strengthen his intelligence and cognitive powers, and to satisfy his physical and mental needs, he needs to worship God. For this very reason, the major part of the Prophet's educational programs in general and the Prophet of Islam's program in particular consists of teaching people to carry out prayers.

But in today's world more than ninety percent of people suffer from some sort of nervous and mental disturbance. Every day we witness millions of crimes in the world. A lot of people, due to distresses and worries and because of their indecisions, resort to narcotics and drugs and tranquilizers and alcohol and pornographic films. Most of them, towards the middle part of life, give up their education, jobs and families to engage in suicides or live a parasitic life. It seems as if Alexis Carrel's prediction had come true when he said, "This is the price we pay for the industrial civilization and for the changes of life we are receiving."¹

At such a time, we even need more prayers and supplication. Dale Carnegie presents the following statistics for the American community: "In the United States, in general, every thirty five minutes one person commits suicide and every two minutes a person goes mad." He then adds: "If people went after the peace which is contained in religious supplications, most of these suicides and mental diseases could be avoided"²

Elsewhere Alexis Carrel is reported to have said, "The greatest power man can produce is through supplication and worship. Such a power acts like gravity whose existence is real and touchable. In our medical life we have come across patients who were not treated through medicines but were cured through supplication and worship. The secret behind this is the fact that man uses his meager power and strength and extends it into an immense power. When we are worshipping or are engaged in supplication we are connecting ourselves with an eternal power that is in charge of all creation. We beg that power to look for our needs. Such a pleading removes our difficulties and magnifies our power"³

It is for this reason that the Prophet (S) has described supplication as the believer's weapon, the pillar of the religion, the light of the skies and the earth:

"الدُّعَاءُ سِلَاحُ الْمُؤْمِنِ وَعَمُودُ الدِّينِ وَنُورُ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ"

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And Imam 'Ali (as) calls supplication as the key to victory and salvation:

In the Du'a Kumayl he introduces supplication as a means for the strengthening of the body and mind and as an agent to serve both God and people and a means for a journey towards Heaven.

"قُو عَلَى خِدْمَتِكَ جَوَارِحِي وَاشْدُدْ عَلَى الْعَزِيمَةِ جَوَانِحِي وَهَبْ لِي الْجِدَّ فِي خَشْيَتِكَ وَالِدَوَامَ فِي الْإِتِّصَالِ بِخِدْمَتِكَ حَتَّى أَسْرَحَ إِلَيْكَ فِي مَيَادِينِ السَّابِقِينَ وَأَسْرِعَ إِلَيْكَ فِي الْبَارِزِينَ وَاشْتَأَقَ إِلَيْكَ فِي الْمُشْتَأَقِينَ وَأَدْنُو مِنْكَ دُنُو الْمُخْلِصِينَ وَأَخَافَكَ مَخَافَةَ الْمُوقِنِينَ وَاجْتَمَعَ فِي جِوَارِكَ مَعَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ"

"Strengthen my limbs for Your service and fortify my determination. Grant me earnestness in fear of You and continuity in attachment to Your service, until I move towards You in the racing fields of the foremost ones, hasten to you among those who strive in hastening (towards You), yearn for Your nearness among the ardently desirous, draw near to you with the nearness of the sincere ones, and fear You with the fear of those possessed of certainty, and gather in Your Proximity together with the believers".⁴

Persuasion Towards Supplication And Worship

Because of the miraculous effects of supplication and worship, they have always been emphasized by God, Prophets and God's men. At one point the Holy Qur'an considers supplication as a means for the value of people:

قُلْ مَا يَعْزُبُ عَنْ رَبِّي لَوْلَا دُعَاؤُكُمْ "

"Say: My Lord would not care for you were it not for your prayer".⁵

At another place God orders people to call upon Him and He will answer them and if they refuse to do so they will go to Hell:

"وَقَالَ رَبُّكُمْ ادْعُونِي أَسْتَجِبْ لَكُمْ إِنَّ الَّذِينَ يَسْتَكْبِرُونَ عَنْ عِبَادَتِي سَيَدْخُلُونَ جَهَنَّمَ دَاخِرِينَ "

"And your Lord says: Call upon Me, I will answer you; surely those who are too proud for My service shall soon enter hell abased".⁶

The Prophet (S) considers supplication as the best weapon against the enemy and the best means to get sustenance.

"إِلَّا أَدُلُّكُمْ عَلَى سِلَاحٍ يَنْجِيكُمْ مِنْ أَعْدَائِكُمْ وَيُدْرِي أَرْزَاقَكُمْ؟ قَالُوا بَلَى يَا رَسُولَ اللَّهِ قَالَ: تَدْعُونَ رَبَّكُمْ بِاللَّيْلِ وَالنَّهَارِ فَإِنَّ سِلَاحَ

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"Should I not lead you to have a weapon which could save you from your enemies and give you abundant sustenance?" They said: "Yes, O Messenger of Allah". Then he said: "Pray to your Lord, day and night, because the weapon of a believer is supplication."⁷

Some people assume that the world is solely based on cause and effect factors. Therefore, they think, there is no room in the Divine destiny for prayer and supplication. They, however, ignore the fact that supplication is among cause and effect factors. This assumption is rejected in numerous traditions including the following. Zurarah narrated that Imam al-Sadiq (as) said:

**"ادْعُ اللَّهَ عَزَّوَجَلَّ وَلَا تَقُلْ: إِنَّ الْأَمْرَ قَدْ فُرِعَ مِنْهُ قَالَ زُرَّارَةُ:
إِنَّمَا يَعْنِي لَا يَمْنَعُكَ إِيْمَانُكَ بِالْقَضَاءِ وَالْقَدَرِ أَنْ تُبَالِغَ بِالْأَدْعَاءِ
وَتَجْتَهِدَ فِيهِ"**

"Call on God, and do not say: 'The matter has been settled'". Zurarah said: It only means that your faith in decree and destiny should not prevent you from doing your utmost to strive in supplication".⁸

Abdullah Ibn Sinan says that he heard Imam al-Sadiq (as) saying:

**"الدُّعَاءُ يَرُدُّ الْقَضَاءَ بَعْدَ مَا أُبْرِمَ إِبْرَامًا فَاكْثِرْ مِنَ الدُّعَاءِ فَإِنَّهُ
مِفْتَاحُ كُلِّ رَحْمَةٍ وَنَجَاحُ كُلِّ حَاجَةٍ وَلَا يُنَالُ مَا عِنْدَ اللَّهِ عَزَّوَجَلَّ
إِلَّا بِالْأَدْعَاءِ وَإِنَّهُ لَيْسَ بَابٌ يَكْثُرُ قَرْعُهُ إِلَّا يُوشِكُ أَنْ يُفْتَحَ
لِصَاحِبِهِ"**

"Supplication repels decree after it has been concluded. Therefore, engage yourself in supplication often, since it is the key to every mercy and the fulfillment of every need. What is with God is only attained through supplication. There is no door that a person knocks on often, but that it soon opens for him".⁹

Since the supplication is among the factors of cause and effect, therefore, you should always call on God.

The Prophet (S) has said:

"يَدْخُلُ الْجَنَّةَ رَجُلَانِ كَانَا يَعْمَلَانِ عَمَلًا وَاحِدًا فَيَرَى أَحَدَهُمَا"

**صَاحِبُهُ فَوْقَهُ، فَيَقُولُ يَا رَبِّ بِمَا أَعْطَيْتَهُ وَكَانَ عَمَلْنَا وَاحِدًا؟
فَيَقُولُ اللَّهُ تَبَارَكَ وَتَعَالَى: سَأَلَنِي وَلَمْ تَسْأَلْنِي "**

"Two men whose actions are identical enter paradise, but one of them sees his companion has a higher status. The man says: My Lord! Why did You grant him that when our actions were the same? God, the Exalted, replies: He asked and called on Me, but you did not".[10](#)

Imam Baqir (as) has said:

**"إِنَّ اللَّهَ كَرِهَ إِحْتِيَاجَ النَّاسِ بَعْضَهُمْ عَلَى بَعْضٍ فِي الْمَسْأَلَةِ
وَإِحْتِبَابٌ ذَلِكَ لِنَفْسِهِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ حَلٌّ ذِكْرُهُ يُحِبُّ أَنْ يُسْأَلَ وَيُطْلَبَ مَا
عِنْدَهُ "**

"God dislikes people beseeching one another for a request, but He likes that for Himself. God, the Exalted, likes to be asked and requested for what is with Him".[11](#)

He has also said:

**"وَاللَّهِ لَا يُلِحُّ عَبْدٌ مُؤْمِنٌ عَلَى اللَّهِ عَزَّوَجَلَّ فِي حَاجَتِهِ إِلَّا قَضَاهَا
لَهُ "**

"I swear by God, a believer does not beseech God for a need but that He fulfils it for him".[12](#)

In this regard, of course, there is no difference between big needs and small ones. Imam Baqir (as) has also said,

**"لَا تُحَقِّرُوا صَغِيرًا مِنْ حَوَائِجِكُمْ فَإِنَّ أَحَبَّ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ إِلَى اللَّهِ
أَسْأَلُهُمْ "**

"Do not belittle your small needs because the believers dearest to God are those who ask the most.[13](#)

God told Prophet Moses (as):

"سَلِّني كُلَّ ما تَحْتاجُ إِلَيْهِ حَتَّى عَلَفَ شاتِكَ وَمِلْحَ عَجِينِكَ"

"Ask Me for all that you need, even the grass for your sheep and salt for your dough".[14](#)

God Will Not Need Anything, Nor Does He Need Any Recommender

Since God dominates all creatures and is closer to them even than they themselves:

"وَنَحْنُ أَقْرَبُ إِلَيْهِ مِنْ حَبْلِ الْوَرِيدِ - أَنَّ اللَّهَ يَحُولُ بَيْنَ الْمَرْءِ
وَقَلْبِهِ " 502

"...and since We are nearer to him than his life-vein." "(And know that) Allah intervenes between man and his heart".

Therefore God hears people's supplication and prayers even if they are offered in a whisper, let alone loudly. He is aware of the intentions of all. He does not suffer from any kind of jealousy. There is no need for a servant or mediator to connect people with God. Allah says:

"وَإِذَا سَأَلَكَ عِبَادِي عَنِّي فَإِنِّي قَرِيبٌ أُجِيبُ دَعْوَةَ الدَّاعِي إِذَا
دَعَانِي فَلْيَسْتَجِيبُوا لِي وَلْيُؤْمِنُوا بِي لَعَلَّهُمْ يَرْشُدُونَ"

"And when My servants asks you concerning Me, then surely I am very near; I answer the prayer of the supplicant when he calls on Me, so they should answer My call and believe in Me that they may walk in the right way".[15](#)

Thus, if God has led us towards "**means of nearness**"[16](#) and has let the interceder¹⁷ intercede with Him, it is not because the asking of the believers will affect God, but it is a sign of the believers' attainment of perfection.[18](#)

The Conditions For The Acceptance Of Supplication And Prayers:

In accordance with God's promises, God accepts every supplication and prayers of the believers. But not every supplication is accepted under any kind of conditions. In some circumstances they are accepted, in others they are rejected.

1. The Physical And Spiritual Readiness

The first condition for the acceptance of supplication and prayers is the believer's physical

and spiritual readiness; the time and place also should be appropriately selected: midnight and at the dawn, for instance.

There is a tradition narrated from Imam al-Sadiq (as) which states that God has told Moses (as):

"يَا بَنَ عِمْرَانَ هَبْ لِي مِنْ قَلْبِكَ الْخُشُوعَ وَمِنْ بَدَنِكَ الْخُضُوعَ
وَمِنْ عَيْنِكَ الدُّمُوعَ وَاذْعُنِي فِي ظِلْمِ اللَّيْلِ فَإِنَّكَ تَجِدُنِي قَرِيبًا
مُجِيبًا"

"O son of Imran, give me from your heart humility, from your body submissiveness and from your eyes tears, and call on me in the darkness of the night. You will find Me very near and answering your supplication."[19](#)

Nawf al-Bikali says: One night I saw Imam 'Ali (as), had left his bed, and was looking at the stars. He said: 'O Nawf, are you awake or asleep'? I replied I was awake, He then said: 'O Nawf, Prophet David (as) woke up at such an hour saying: "At this time any kind of supplication and prayer will be accepted unless the performer of the supplication is a tax official for a tyrant governor, or his secret spy or his policeman, or a musical player of tambour or an entertainer"'.[20](#)

The Avoidance Of Sins

The other condition for the acceptance of the prayer and supplication is the being at a distance from sins. It is because most sins are a thick curtain in the way of the acceptance of prayers. We observe this in the Du'a Kumayl:

"اللَّهُمَّ اغْفِرْ لِي الذُّنُوبَ الَّتِي تَحِيسُ الدُّعَاءَ"

"O God! Forgive me the sins that hold back the supplication".

Ayatollah Kalbasi mentions the sins which hinder the supplication and prayers to be accepted: suspicion, quarrel with brethren, delaying the performance of prayers, the parents' dissatisfaction with children.[21](#)

He, then, reports the following poem from Mawlawi:

The smell of haughtiness, of greed, and of excessive need,
In the speech will show themselves like onions;
If you swear that you have not taken onions,
That you have stopped taking onion and garlic;
When you open you mouth to swear,
The smell of these will surely betray you;
Then your prayers will be rejected for the lies you told,
Your tongue is not in harmony with your heart;
That supplication will be rejected,
It will not find acceptance;

If your intention is straight, but your speech not straight,
This distortion of speech is accepted by God;
But if your intention is not straight but your speech is all right,
That sort of intention is worth nothing.

The Purity Of Foods

As we know our prayers and actions stem from a power which is based on foods. If these foods are gained illegally, our prayers are not clean and as a consequence they are not accepted.

The great Prophet (S) has said:

"مَنْ أَحَبَّ أَنْ يُسْتَجَابَ دُعَاؤُهُ فَلْيُطَيِّبْ مَطْعَمَهُ وَمَكْسَبَهُ"

"Whoever wishes his supplication to be answered, let his food and his earnings be lawful"[22](#).

In response to somebody who had said he wanted his prayers to be accepted, the Prophet (S) said:

"طَهِّرْ مَا أَكَلْتَ وَلَا تُدْخِلْ فِي بَطْنِكَ الْحَرَامَ"

"Purify your food (i.e. eat what is lawful) and do not let unlawful food enter your stomach."[23](#)

He said also:

"أَطِيبْ كَسْبَكَ تُسْتَجَابُ دَعْوَتُكَ فَإِنَّ الرَّجُلَ يَرْفَعُ اللَّقْمَةَ إِلَى فِيهِ حَرَامًا فَمَا تُسْتَجَابُ لَهُ أَرْبَعِينَ يَوْمًا"

"Purify your earnings and your supplication will be accepted. This is because the supplication of a person who raises a morsel of unlawful food to his mouth is not answered for forty days"[24](#)

Imam Sadiq (as) has said:

"إِذَا أَرَادَ أَحَدُكُمْ أَنْ يُسْتَجَابَ لَهُ فَلْيُطَيِّبْ كَسْبَهُ وَلِيَخْرُجْ مِنْ مَظَالِمِ النَّاسِ وَإِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يُرْفَعُ إِلَيْهِ دُعَاءُ عَبْدٍ وَفِي بَطْنِهِ حَرَامٌ"

اَوْ عِنْدَهُ مَظْلَمَةٌ لَّا حَدٍّ مِنْ خَلْقِهِ"

"If anyone of you wishes his supplication be accepted, let him purify his earnings and cease defrauding people. This is because the supplication of a believer is not raised up to Allah while there is unlawful food in his stomach and he has a due wrongfully taken from one of His creatures".²⁵

The Possibility And Contingency Of A Deed

Among the conditions set for prayers to be acceptable are the possibility of the occurrence of the actions and the contingency of the desired action. Imam 'Ali (as) has said:

"يَا صَاحِبَ الدُّعَاءِ لَا تَسْأَلْ مَا لَا يَكُونُ وَلَا يَجِلُّ"

"O performer of supplication, do not ask for anything unattainable or unlawful".²⁶

The Hindrances On The Way Of Accepting Supplication

Although God is kind towards the believers and hears their overt and covert prayers and has promised to answer their calls, there are factors which may cause the prayers not to be accepted. Among these factors are the following:

1. Sins

Indulging in sins may be a factor for the rejection of a prayer. Imam Sadiq (as) is reported to have said, "Musa b. 'Imran (as) was passing by one of his followers who was prostrating. After some time he was still prostrating. Musa told him: If I could, I would satisfy your needs.

At this moment God revealed to him,

"لَوْ سَجَدَ حَتَّى يَنْقَطِعَ عُنُقُهُ مَا قَبِلْتُهُ حَتَّى يَتَحَوَّلَ عَمَّا أَكْرَهُ إِلَى مَا أُحِبُّ"

"I will not accept his prayers even if he engages in prostrating till his neck breaks. I will accept his prayers if he stops doing what I hate and turn towards doing things which I like"²⁷

2. Injustice

One of the factors which hinder the acceptance of prayers is the injustice done to others. In the book Ihtijaj there is a tradition narrated from Imam Sadiq (as) depicting this truth:

"إِنَّهُ سُئِلَ أَلَيْسَ يَقُولُ اللَّهُ أَدْعُونِي أَسْتَجِبْ لَكُمْ؟ وَقَدْ نَرَى الْمُضْطَرَّ يَدْعُوهُ وَلَا يُجَابُ لَهُ وَالْمَظْلُومَ يَسْتَنْصِرُهُ عَلَى عَدُوهِ وَلَا يَنْصُرُهُ قَالَ وَيَحْكُ مَا يَدْعُوهُ أَحَدٌ إِلَّا اسْتَجَابَ لَهُ أَمَّا الظَّالِمُ فِدُعَاؤُهُ مَرْدُودٌ إِلَى أَنْ يَتُوبَ وَأَمَّا الْمُحَقُّ فَإِذَا دَعَا اسْتَجَابَ لَهُ وَصَرَفَ عَنْهُ الْبَلَاءَ مِنْ حَيْثُ لَا يَعْلَمُهُ أَوْ ادَّخَرَ لَهُ تَوَابًا جَزِيلًا لِيَوْمِ حَاجَتِهِ إِلَيْهِ وَإِنْ لَمْ يَكُنْ الْأَمْرُ الَّذِي سَأَلَ الْعَبْدُ خَيْرًا لَهُ إِنْ أَعْطَاهُ أَمْسِكَ عَنْهُ"

'He was asked: Doesn't God tell the believers: **"Call upon Me and I will answer you"** (40:60)? And this is while we see the distressed call upon Him and they are not answered, and the wronged seeking help against the enemy, but they do not receive any help.

Imam Sadiq (as) replied: Woe be to you! No one calls Him except that He answers Him. But a tyrant's prayer is rejected till he repents. When a rightful person prays, he is answered and affliction is turned away from him while he is unaware of it, or abundant reward is stored for him for the day of his need. But if the servant asks for something that would not be good for him if he was granted it, then God holds it back from him."[28](#)

3. When Natural Factors Are Not Considered

According to the Islamic traditions, prayers and supplication are specific to occasions when man's trials and struggles are of no use. Imam Sadiq (as) has stated:

"أَرْبَعَةٌ لَا تُسْتَجَابُ لَهُمْ دَعْوَةٌ: رَجُلٌ جَالِسٌ فِي بَيْتِهِ يَقُولُ اللَّهُمَّ ارْزُقْنِي فَيُقَالُ لَهُ: أَلَمْ أَمُرْكَ بِالطَّلَبِ، وَرَجُلٌ كَانَتْ لَهُ امْرَأَةٌ فَدَعَا عَلَيْهَا فَيُقَالُ لَهُ: أَلَمْ أَجْعَلْ أَمْرَهَا إِلَيْكَ، وَرَجُلٌ كَانَ لَهُ مَالٌ فَاسْرَفَ فَيَقُولَ اللَّهُمَّ ارْزُقْنِي فَيُقَالُ لَهُ: أَلَمْ أَمُرْكَ بِالِاقْتِسَادِ، أَلَمْ أَمُرْكَ بِالِاصْلَاحِ ...، وَرَجُلٌ كَانَ لَهُ مَالٌ فَادَّانَهُ بِغَيْرِ بَيِّنَةٍ فَيُقَالُ لَهُ: أَلَمْ أَمُرْكَ بِالشَّهَادَةِ"

"There are four groups of people whose calls are not answered:

A man who sits at home saying: 'O God, give me daily bread'. He is then told: 'Didn't I command you to seek it?'

A man who has a wife and he prays to God against her. It is said to him: 'Didn't I give you the right of divorce?'

A man who had wealth, but was extravagant, and then he says: 'O God, give me sustenance'. He is told: 'Didn't I command you to be moderate in your expenditure?'

And a man had wealth which he lent to another without any receipt. Then the owner asks

God to soften the man's heart to return to him what he owes him. It is said to him: 'Didn't I command you to have witnesses when you lend anything to anyone?'"[29](#)

Considering the fact that the world is based on the cause and effect principle, it is useless to lie under a date-tree and keep your mouth open in order for the dates to fall in your mouth. You should stand up and pick the date and chew and then swallow it till the act of digestion takes place. This is shown in the tradition about the Bani Isra'il concerning Moses who fell ill but did not take the necessary medicine. God then said:

"وَعِزَّتِي وَجَلَالِي لَا أُبْرُؤُكَ حَتَّى تَتَدَاوَى بِمَا ذَكَرُوهُ لَكَ، أَرَدْتَ أَنْ تُبْطِلَ حِكْمَتِي بِتَوَكُّلِكَ عَلَيَّ فَمَنْ أَوْدَعَ الْعَقَاقِيرَ مَنَافِعَ الْأَشْيَاءِ غَيْرِي"

"I swear by My Glory and My Majesty, I shall not cure you until you take the medicine which Bani Israel have brought for you. Do you wish to annul My Wisdom through your trust in me? Who other than Me has put these benefits in the herbs?"[30](#)

The Reasons Of Delaying Responding To Supplication

Sometimes the supplication of a person will not be answered quickly for the following reasons:

a) The qualification for the acceptance of the supplication is still absent in the person. This qualification is only obtained through the person's struggle and perseverance.

Concerning this issue, Imam 'Ali (as) in the above letter has stated:

"فَلَا يُقْنِطَنَّكَ إِبْطَاءُ إِجَابَتِهِ فَإِنَّ الْعَطِيَّةَ عَلَى قَدَرِ النِّيَّةِ"

"Do not let the slowness of His response dishearten you, for the grant is in accordance with the intention".

b) If the supplication is not answered immediately, he may try to be more qualified. In that case he will get more reward for his endeavors. God has not answered to this person's call in order that he may try to be more qualified. Imam 'Ali (as), in this regard, says:

"وَرُبَّمَا أُخِّرَتْ عَنْكَ الْإِجَابَةُ لِيَكُونَ ذَلِكَ أَعْظَمَ لِأَجْرِ السَّائِلِ
وَأَجْزَلَ لِعَطَاءِ الْأَمْلِ وَرُبَّمَا سَأَلْتَ شَيْئًا فَلَا تُعْطَاهُ وَאוْتَيْتَ خَيْرًا
مِنْهُ عَاجِلًا أَوْ آجِلًا"

"Sometimes the response has only been delayed for you so that it may be a greater reward

for the petitioner and a more abundant grant for the hopeful one. Sometimes you ask for a thing and you are not given it, but you are given something better than it now or later”.

c) Sometimes the desired object is not to the benefit of the asking person both in this world and in the other. Examples are: social position, wealth, children, and the like. In such cases God will not answer the call since He is generous towards the person. Regarding this, Imam ‘Ali (as) states in this letter:

**"أَوْ صُرِفَ عَنْكَ لِمَا هُوَ خَيْرٌ لَكَ فَالْرُبُّ أَمْرٌ قَدْ طَلَبْتَهُ فِيهِ هَلَاكُ
دِينِكَ لَوْ أُوتِيْتَهُ"**

"..or it is turned away from you for what is better for you, because sometimes in the fulfillment of what you ask for is the destruction of your religion. Therefore let your request be for that, the beauty of which remains for you, and the evil consequences of which pass away from you. For wealth does not remain for you, nor do you remain for it”.

The Access To Repentance And Its Role In Correcting The Sinner

Since one of the requirements for the acceptance of our supplication is the state of being innocent, Imam ‘Ali (as) in this letter emphasizes on repentance. He points out the following issues:

1. God Did Not Deny Your Right Of Repentance

Because of this animal/angel nature, man may commit sins in his selection of good-bad affairs. If there were not a way to repent for man, he would get completely destroyed. In that case, a guilty person might think since there is no way for him to cleanse himself of his guilts, he might continue his evil-doing and might tell himself "If I want to go to hell, let me go there like a man." This kind of attitude would hinder man to arrive at the perfection which is important in the philosophy of creation.

For this reason God has opened a door to this group of people to return to Him through the door which Imam Zayn al-‘Abidin (as) mentions in the supplication of the repentant (*munajat al-tawwabin*):

**"إِلٰهِي أَنْتَ الَّذِي فَتَحْتَ لِعِبَادِكَ بَابًا إِلَى عَفْوِكَ سَمِيَّتُهُ التَّوْبَةُ
فَقُلْتَ: تُوبُوا إِلَى اللَّهِ تَوْبَةً نَصُوحًا 519 فَمَا عُذْرُ مَنْ أَغْفَلَ
دُخُولَ الْبَابِ بَعْدَ فَتْحِهِ"**

"O My God! You have opened for Your servants a door to Your Pardon which You have

named repentance, for You have said: **“Turn to Allah with a sincere repentance” (66:8)**. Then what is the excuse of one who neglects entering this door after it is opened?"[31](#)

Thus, in Islam, a sinner can repent and there are no heavy conditions for his repentance and he also is addressed not to despair but to return to God:

"قُلْ يَا عِبَادِيَ الَّذِينَ أَسْرَفُوا عَلَىٰ أَنفُسِهِمْ لَا تَقْنَطُوا مِن رَّحْمَةِ اللَّهِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَغْفِرُ الذُّنُوبَ جَمِيعًا إِنَّهُ هُوَ الْعَفُورُ الرَّحِيمُ وَأَنِيبُوا إِلَىٰ رَبِّكُمْ وَأَسْلِمُوا لَهُ مِن قَبْلِ أَن يَأْتِيَكُمُ الْعَذَابُ ثُمَّ لَا تُنصَرُونَ وَاتَّبِعُوا أَحْسَنَ مَا أُنزِلَ إِلَيْكُم مِّن رَّبِّكُمْ مِن قَبْلِ أَن يَأْتِيَكُمُ الْعَذَابُ بَغْتَةً وَأَنتُمْ لَا تَشْعُرُونَ"

“Say: O my servants, who have acted extravagantly against their own souls, do not despair of the mercy of Allah; surely Allah forgives the faults altogether; surely He is the Forgiving, the Merciful. And return to your Lord time after time and submit to Him before there comes to you the punishment, then you shall not be helped. And follow the best that has been revealed to you from your Lord before there comes to you the punishment all of a sudden while you do not even perceive.”[32](#)

And this return is so favorable that we read in one tradition from Imam Baqir (as):

"إِنَّ اللَّهَ تَعَالَىٰ أَشَدُّ فَرَحًا بِتَوْبَةِ عَبْدِهِ مِنْ رَجُلٍ أَضَلَّ رَاجِلَتَهُ وَزَادَهُ فِي لَيْلَةٍ ظُلْمَاءَ فَوَجَدَهَا"

"God, the Exalted's rejoicing at the repentance of His servant is far greater than a person who has lost his horse and provisions in a dark night and then found them."

Even despair of being forgiven is enumerated as a major sin.

2. There Is Still Time For Repentance

Man should not put off his repentance until he suddenly opens his eyes and confronts the Angel of Death while his shoulders are weighed down with sins. His delay might be the result of his ignorance (due to instincts and untamable desires and their dominance over man's reasoning and faith) and not to the factor of aggression. In such cases, he has time to repent and God is not in a hurry to revenge the worldly wrong-doings here or in the Hereafter.[33](#) God says:

**"إِنَّمَا التَّوْبَةُ عَلَى اللَّهِ لِلَّذِينَ يَعْمَلُونَ السُّوءَ بِجَهَالَةٍ ثُمَّ يَتُوبُونَ
مِنْ قَرِيبٍ فَأُولَئِكَ يَتُوبُ اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِمْ وَكَانَ اللَّهُ عَلِيمًا حَكِيمًا"**

"Repentance with Allah is only for those who do evil in ignorance, then turn to Allah soon, so these it is to whom Allah turns mercifully, and Allah is ever knowing, Wise".[34](#)

On the other hand, God rejects repentance at the time of death:

**"وَلَيْسَتِ التَّوْبَةُ لِلَّذِينَ يَعْمَلُونَ السَّيِّئَاتِ حَتَّىٰ إِذَا حَضَرَ أَحَدَهُمُ
الْمَوْتُ قَالَ إِنِّي تُبْتُ اللَّآنَ وَلَا الَّذِينَ يَمُوتُونَ وَهُمْ كُفَّارٌ أُولَئِكَ
أَعْتَدْنَا لَهُمْ عَذَابًا أَلِيمًا"**

"And repentance is not for those who go on doing evil deeds, until when death comes to one of them, he says: Surely now I repent; nor for those who die while they are unbelievers. These are they for whom we have prepared a painful chastisement".[35](#)

In traditions, we read that the Prophet (S) has said:

"مَنْ تَابَ قَبْلَ أَنْ يُعَايِنَ قَبْلَ اللَّهِ تَوْبَتَهُ"

"Whoever repents before he confronts death, God will accept his repentance".[36](#)

The Prophet, on the other hand, has said,

**"إِذَا بَلَغَتِ النَّفْسُ هَذِهِ - وَاهْوَىٰ بِيَدِهِ إِلَىٰ حُنْجُرَتِهِ - لَمْ يَكُنْ
لِلْعَالِمِ تَوْبَةً وَكَانَتْ لِلْجَاهِلِ تَوْبَةً"**

"When the soul arrives here - and he pointed at his throat - there is no repentance for a scholar, but there is repentance for an ignorant person".[37](#)

Thus, the possibility of repentance prior to death is a sign of God's Kindness and is indicative of the fact that God wishes to save any sinner from his sin and has left the door of repentance open.

3. In Accepting Repentance, God Is Not Strict

Although God is strict towards those who aggressively indulge in wrong-doings and would not pardon them:

"وَوَجَدُوا مَا عَمِلُوا حَاضِرًا وَلَا يَظْلِمُ رَبُّكَ أَحَدًا" - "وَمَنْ يَعْمَلْ
مِثْقَالَ ذَرَّةٍ شَرًّا يَرَهُ"

"And what they had done they shall find present (there); and your Lord does not deal unjustly with any one".³⁸ "And he who has done an atom's weight of evil shall see it".³⁹

He will, however, be generous towards those who regret their wrong deeds and turn towards Him.

"إِلَّا مَنْ تَابَ وَآمَنَ وَعَمِلَ عَمَلًا صَالِحًا فَأُولَئِكَ يُبَدِّلُ اللَّهُ
سَيِّئَاتِهِمْ حَسَنَاتٍ وَكَانَ اللَّهُ غَفُورًا رَحِيمًا"

"Except him who repents and does a good deed; so these are they of whom Allah changes the evil deeds to good ones; and Allah is Forgiving, Merciful".⁴⁰

"إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يَظْلِمُ مِثْقَالَ ذَرَّةٍ وَإِنْ تَكَنْ حَسَنَةً يُضَاعِفْهَا وَيُؤْتِ
مَنْ لَدُنْهُ أَجْرًا عَظِيمًا"

"Surely Allah does not do injustice to the weight of an atom, and if it is a good deed He multiplies it and gives from Himself a great reward".⁴¹

Since repentance is a suitable action, God will carry out His promise:

"مَنْ جَاءَ بِالْحَسَنَةِ فَلَهُ عَشْرُ أَمْثَالِهَا وَمَنْ جَاءَ بِالسَّيِّئَةِ فَلَا يُجْزَى
إِلَّا بِمِثْلِهَا وَهُمْ لَا يُظْلَمُونَ"

"Whoever brings a good deed, he shall have ten like it, and whoever brings an evil deed, he shall be recompensed only with the like of it, and they shall not be dealt with unjustly".⁴²

This fact shows that God is lenient towards those who repent and rewards those who stop carrying out sins. This is another way for sinners to be absolved by God.

The Conditions For The Perfect Repentance

At the end of this discussion, it is necessary to point out one important issue: As we understand the term repentance involves a sinner's regret for what is previously done and a decision not to do it again. Such repentance erases the past record.

But in some other traditions there are some restrictions such as the payment of what a person owes others. Such a restriction is seen in Nahj al-Balaghah:

"قَالَ أَمِيرُ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ لِقَائِلٍ قَالَ بِحَضْرَتِهِ (اسْتَغْفِرُ
اللَّهِ): تَكَلَّتْكَ أُمُّكَ، أَتَدْرِي مَا الْإِسْتِغْفَارُ؟ الْإِسْتِغْفَارُ دَرَجَةٌ
الْعَالِيَيْنِ، وَهُوَ إِسْمٌ وَقِعُ عَلَى سِتَّةٍ مَعَانٍ: أَوَّلُهَا النَّدَمُ عَلَى مَا
مَضَى، وَالثَّانِي الْعَزْمُ عَلَى تَرْكِ الْعَوْدِ إِلَيْهِ أَبَدًا، وَالثَّلَاثُ أَنْ
تُؤَدِّيَ إِلَى الْمَخْلُوقِينَ حُقُوقَهُمْ حَتَّى تَلْقَى اللَّهَ أَمَلَسَ لَيْسَ
عَلَيْكَ تَبِعَةٌ، وَالرَّابِعُ أَنْ تَعْمِدَ إِلَى كُلِّ فَرِيضَةٍ عَلَيْكَ ضَيَّعْتَهَا
فَتُؤَدِّيَ حَقَّهَا، وَالخَامِسُ أَنْ تَعْمِدَ إِلَى اللَّحْمِ الَّذِي نَبَتَ عَلَى
السَّحْتِ فَتُذَيِّبُهُ الْإِحْزَانُ حَتَّى تَلصِقَ الْجِلْدَ بِالْعَظْمِ وَيَنْشَأَ بَيْنَهَا
لَحْمٌ جَدِيدٌ، وَالسَّادِسُ أَنْ تُذَيِّقَ الْجِسْمَ أَلْمَ الطَّاعَةِ كَمَا أذَقْتَهُ
حَلَاوَةَ الْمَعْصِيَةِ فَعِنْدَ ذَلِكَ تَقُولُ: اسْتَغْفِرُ اللَّهَ."

'Somebody used the expression "Astaghfirullah" (I ask Allah to forgive me) in front of Imam 'Ali (as). Imam 'Ali (as) said: "May your mother weep on you! Do you realize what Istighfar (seeking forgiveness) means? Istighfar is the station of the 'Illiyin and it includes six phases: First: remorse at deeds committed in the past; second: the determination never to return to them again; third, returning to people their dues so that you meet God free of blame, with no claim of wrongdoing against you; fourth, attending to every obligatory act that you have neglected and fulfilling its due; fifth, to attend to the flesh that you have grown through unlawful earnings and to melt it down through grief until the skin adheres to the bones and new flesh is formed in between; sixth, to make the body taste the pain of obedience just as it had tasted the sweetness of disobedience. Then say: "Astaghfirullah".⁴³

Similar statements are observed in traditions which are apparently in contrast with the ease of repentance that we have been discussing so far. Thus, our scholars have tried to set forth a kind of compromise among these apparent contradictions. One of these scholars is al-Majlisi who after mentioning the tradition from Imam 'Ali (as) said:

"ما سوى الاولين عند جمهور المتكلمين من شرائط كمال التوبة"

"For scholars, repenting from the past doings and return from evil-doings is among the perfect conditions of repentance and not among the principal conditions".⁴⁴

Allamah in his commentary on *Tajrid* says, concerning this:

"Affairs such as compensation for the lost prayers or the payment of people's rights are among the extra conditions on repentance and are not included in the essence of repentance. Later on, if the person did not carry out the lost prayers and did not pay people's rights, these will be considered as the shunning of one's tasks which entails new punishments and which is not related to the principle of repentance".⁴⁵

1. . Man, the Unknown, p.150.
2. . How to Stop Worrying and Start Living, p.227.
3. . Man, the Unknown, p.229.
4. . Mafatih al-Jinan, p.89.
5. . Qur'an 25:77.
6. . Qur'an 40:60.
7. . Usul al-Kafi, vol.2, p.468.
8. . Usul al-Kafi, vol.2, p.467.
9. . Uusl al-Kafi, vol.2, p.467.
10. . Bihar, vol.93, p.302.
11. . Bihar, vol. 77, p.173.
12. . Usul al-Kafi, vol.2, p.475.
13. . Bihar al-Anwar, vol.93, p.346.
14. . Bihar, vol. 93, p.303.
15. . Qur'an 2:186.
16. . "O you who believe; be careful of your duty to Allah and seek means of nearness to Him and strive hard in His way that you may be successful". [Qur'an 5:35].
17. . "Who is he that can intercede with Him but by His permission"? [Qur'an 2:255]
"He knows what is before them and what is behind them, and they do not intercede except for him whom He approves, and for fear of Him they tremble". [Qur'an 21:28].
18. . Ibn Maytham, commentary on Nahj al-Balaghah, vol.5, p.35; Mutahhari, Divine Justice.
19. . Wasa'il al-Shi'ah, vol.4, p.1125.
20. . Nahj al-Balaghah, Hikmah 104.
21. . Anis al-Layl, in the commentary on Du'a Kumayl, Ayatollah Haj Sheikh Mohammad Reza Kalbasi, p.137.
22. . Bihar, vol.93, p.372.
23. . Op. cit. 373.
24. . Bihar, vol.93, p.358.
25. . Bihar, vol 93, p.321.
26. . Mizan al-Hikmah, vol.3, p.268, reported from Bihar, vol.93.
27. . Bihar, vol.78, p.226.
28. . Tafsir Namunah, vol.20, p.152. Tafsir al-Safi, vol.2, p.490.
29. . Usul al-Kafi, vol.2, p.511.
30. . Jami' al-Sa'adat, vol.3, p.2276. Of course such an act will not take place from Moses, who is an infallible Prophet. But the essence of the issue is acceptable as a principle.
31. . From the 15 whispered prayers, Mafatih al-Jinan, p.161.
32. . Qur'an 39:53-55.
33. . Refer to al-Mizan, vol.4, p2-251; Refer to Tafsir Namunah, vol.3; Refer to the verses following this verse.
34. . Qur'an 4:17.
35. . Qur'an 4:18.
36. . Al-Kafi, vol.2, p.44.
37. . Op. cit.
38. . Qur'an 18:49
39. . Qur'an 99:8
40. . Qur'an 25:70.

41. ..Qur'an 4:40.

42. . Qur'an 6:160.

43. . Nahj al-Balaghah, Hikmah 417.

44. . Bihar al-Anwar, vol.6, p.37.

45. . Kashf al-Murad, p.423.

30) This World is only the path for the Hereafter, so remember Death frequently

"واعلم يا بُنَيَّ أَنَّكَ إِنَّمَا خُلِقْتَ لِلْآخِرَةِ لَا لِلدُّنْيَا وَ لِلْعَنَاءِ لَا لِلْبَقَاءِ
وَلِلْمَوْتِ لَا لِلْحَيَاةِ وَإِنَّكَ فِي قَلْعَةٍ وَدَارٍ بُلْغَةٍ وَطَرِيقٍ إِلَى الْآخِرَةِ
وَإِنَّكَ طَرِيدُ الْمَوْتِ الَّذِي لَا يَنْجُو مِنْهُ هَارِبُهُ وَلَا يَقْوَتُهُ طَالِبُهُ
وَلَا بُدَّ أَنَّهُ مُدْرِكُهُ فَكُنْ مِنْهُ عَلَى حَذَرٍ إِنْ يُدْرِكُكَ وَأَنْتَ عَلَى حَالٍ
سَيِّئَةٍ قَدْ كُنْتَ تُحَدِّثُ نَفْسَكَ مِنْهَا بِالتَّوْبَةِ فَيَحُولَ بَيْنَكَ وَبَيْنَ ذَلِكَ
فَإِذَا أَنْتَ قَدْ أَهْلَكْتَ نَفْسَكَ.

يَا بُنَيَّ أَكْثَرَ مِنْ ذِكْرِ الْمَوْتِ وَذِكْرِ مَا تَهْجِمُ عَلَيْهِ وَتُفْضِي بَعْدَ
الْمَوْتِ إِلَيْهِ حَتَّى يَأْتِيكَ وَقَدْ أَخَذْتَ مِنْهُ حَذْرَكَ وَشَدَدْتَ لَهُ أَرْكَ
وَلَا يَأْتِيكَ بَعْتَةً فَيَبْهَرَكَ وَإِيَّاكَ أَنْ تَغْتَرَّ بِمَا تَرَى مِنْ إِخْلَادِ أَهْلِ
الدُّنْيَا إِلَيْهَا وَتَكَالِبُهُمْ عَلَيْهَا فَقَدْ نَبَّأَكَ اللَّهُ عَنْهَا وَنَعَتْ هِيَ لَكَ
نَفْسَهَا وَتَكَشَّفَتْ لَكَ عَنْ مَسَاوِيهَا فَإِنَّمَا أَهْلُهَا كِلَابٌ عَاوِيَةٌ
وَسِبَاعٌ ضَارِيَةٌ يَهْرُ بَعْضُهُمْ بَعْضًا وَيَأْكُلُ عَزِيْزُهَا دَلِيلَهَا وَيَقْهَرُ
كَبِيرُهَا صَغِيرَهَا نَعَمْ مُعَقَّلَةٌ وَأُخْرَى مُهْمَلَةٌ قَدْ أَضَلَّتْ عُقُولَهَا
وَرَكِبَتْ مَجْهُولَهَا،

سُرُوحٌ عَاهَةٌ بِوَادٍ وَعُثٌّ لَيْسَ لَهَا رَاعٌ يُقِيمُهَا وَلَا مُسِيمٌ يُسِيمُهَا
سَلَكْتُ بِهِمُ الدُّنْيَا طَرِيقَ الْعَمَى، وَأَخَذْتُ بِأَبْصَارِهِمْ عَنْ مَنَارِ

الهُدَى، فَتَاهُؤَا فِي حَيْرَتَهَا وَعَرَفُوا فِي نِعْمَتِهَا وَاتَّخَذُوهَا رَبًّا
فَلِعِبَتْ بِهِمْ وَلَعِبُوا بِهَا وَنَسُوا مَا وَرَائِهَا رُوَيْدًا يُسْفِرُ الظَّلَامَ،
كَانَ قَدْ وَرَدَتْ الْأَطْعَانُ يُوشِكُ مَنْ أَسْرَعَ أَنْ يَلْحَقَ"

"My son! Know that you were created for the Hereafter, not for this world, for extinction (in this world), not for permanence, and for death, not for life. You are in an abode from which you must depart, in a place from which you acquire your provisions, and on a path to the Hereafter. You are being chased by death from which no fleeing one is saved, none whom it seeks escapes from it, and it will inevitably catch up with him. So be on your guard against it, lest it should overtake you while you are in a state of sin from which you were telling yourself that you would repent, and it (death) prevents you from that. In such a case you will have destroyed yourself.

My son! Remember death frequently, and the place that you will suddenly fall into and reach after death, so that when it comes, you are on your guard against it and have prepared yourself for it. Do not let it (death) come suddenly such that it overcomes you.

Beware of being deluded by what you see of the people of the world inclining towards it (the world), and their avidity for it, for God has informed you of it and the world itself has announced to you its mortality and revealed to you its vices. Its adherents are only howling dogs and rapacious beasts snarling at one another. Their strong devour their weak and their old subjugate their young. (They are like) cattle, some confined and others left untended. They have lost their intellects and ventured into what is unknown. They are (like) diseased cattle left free to graze in a valley of soft sand, difficult to traverse. They have neither a shepherd to keep them in order nor a herdsman to take them to pasture.

The world has taken them on the path of blindness, and taken their sights from the beacon of guidance, so they are wandering in its perplexities and drowned in its pleasures. They have taken it (the world) as a lord, so it plays with them and they play with it and they have forgotten what is beyond it. Gradually the darkness will become dawn, and it is as if the caravan has arrived; soon those who hasten will meet (the caravan)".

Commentary

In this letter by Imam 'Ali (as) there are some educational points concerning the philosophy of creation, man's readiness for death, a picture of the world and the world-worshippers. These points are taken up separately in the following sections:

1. The Philosophy Of Man's Creation:

From the viewpoint of the Holy Qur'an, the philosophy of man's creation is sometimes based on Allah's Generosity and Magnanimity:

"وَلَوْ شَاءَ رَبُّكَ لَجَعَلَ النَّاسَ أُمَّةً وَاحِدَةً وَلَا يَزَالُونَ مُخْتَلِفِينَ إِلَّا
مَنْ رَحِمَ رَبُّكَ وَلِذَلِكَ خَلَقَهُمْ"

"And if your Lord had pleased He would certainly have made people a single nation, and they shall continue to differ, except those on whom your Lord has mercy; and for this did He create them;".¹

And sometimes the philosophy of man's creation is introduced as a way for man to see God's traits and magnificent powers and His domination over all creatures.

**"اللَّهُ الَّذِي خَلَقَ سَبْعَ سَمَاوَاتٍ وَمِنَ الْأَرْضِ مِثْلَهُنَّ يَتَنَزَّلُ الْأَمْرُ
بَيْنَهُنَّ لِتَعْلَمُوا أَنَّ اللَّهَ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ وَأَنَّ اللَّهَ قَدْ أَحَاطَ
بِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ عِلْمًا" 536**

"Allah is He who created seven heavens, and of the earth the like of them; the decree continues to descend among them, that you may know that Allah has power over all things and that Allah indeed encompasses all things in His knowledge."

In another occasion, the philosophy of creation is defined as "Worship" **"And I have not created the jinn and the men except that they should serve Me."²**

At another occasion, the philosophy of creation is supposed to be "Trial" **"Who created death and life that He may try you-which of you is best in deeds."³**

All of these interpretations, however, have one thing in common. Man possesses different skills and capabilities in differing areas of thought, ethics and rights which could be manifested only through programs. Thus, carrying out these programs is interpreted as worship; the way these plans are carried out is interpreted as "trial"; the guidance of Allah in the materialization of these aims is interpreted as God's benevolence; and the recognition of Allah and His traits which is the main factor behind all of this collection (Thought, ethics, and duties) is interpreted as God's recognition. Thus, it is right to say that the philosophy of man's creation is a combination of worship, God's benevolence, man's trial and God's recognition. And these four factors all lead to man's perfection.⁴

But sometimes in the philosophy of man's creation there are some interpretations which show the direction of his perfection, and not the agent for his perfection.

This is said in 'Ali's letter.

**"خُلِفْتَ لِالْآخِرَةِ لَا لِلدُّنْيَا وَلِلْعَنَاءِ لَا لِلْبَقَاءِ وَلِلْمَوْتِ لَا لِلْحَيَاةِ وَإِنَّكَ
فِي قَلْعَةٍ وَدَارٍ بُلْعَةٍ وَطَرِيقٍ إِلَى الْآخِرَةِ"**

"..you were created for the Hereafter, not for this world, for extinction (in this world), not for permanence, and for death, not for life. You are in an abode from which you must depart, in

a place from which you acquire your provisions, and on a path to the Hereafter ".

In such interpretations the main issue is that man is not eternal; sooner or later he will leave this world to live in his eternal shelter. He has to prepare provisions to make him at ease in the other world. But what is the nature of that provision? What is going to happen to him? These are not discussed in this letter. But one thing is clear: the aim is to be prepared for the Hereafter with the right form of provisions. This is included in the philosophy of the creation of man and shows the direction of man towards perfection.

2. He Warns Us Through A Delicate Simile

Imam 'Ali (as) in this letter compares man to a game that is made to run by the hunter who is about to hunt it. And finally he is trapped. In the same way, death, like the hunter, has made man run, only to be trapped and caught a little later. This does not depend on his will to either surrender or to go free.

For this reason, man should be careful not to indulge in wrong-doings and not to lose the right of repentance. He might be willing to repent; then let him not waste his time.

The Holy Qur'an talks about the Pharaoh when getting drowned. At that critical time he said "I believe", but God said: **"..indeed you disobeyed before.."**⁵.

3. Always Remember Death And Be Prepared For It

Since one day we will inevitably taste the flavor of death and will be defeated by it, we should not destroy and annihilate one another like savage dogs and animals and be deceived by the luxuries of this world. Let us not walk like beasts which are wandering in the desert with no shepherd to guide us. Let us not be in a situation where we are deprived of Imam's obedience. In such cases we might either act like those beasts which are dominated by wrath, such as wild beasts, or we might act like those beasts which are dominated by lusts, such as game. In both cases we might go after our wishes and stay world-mongers. The world may make dolls out of us and we may forget the Hereafter. In doing so, we might be less than beasts because we have intellect and should do otherwise.

Thus, we have to:

Firstly: remember death and its consequences. The remembrance of death kills lusts and the roots of negligence, strengthens the heart to believe in God's promises and softens man's nature and breaks the flags of wishes and whims and belittles this world.

Secondly, be prepared for death and get ready for leaving. This state of affairs prohibits man from living like beasts and forces him to improve himself by practicing his religion and obeying the just Imam. It is for this reason that the Great Prophet (S) has said:

"إِسْتَعِدِّ لِلْمَوْتِ قَبْلَ نُزُولِ الْمَوْتِ"

*"Get ready for death before it arrives"*⁶

Somebody asked Imam 'Ali (as) "What do you mean by being prepared for death?" He answered:

"أداءُ القَرَائِضِ وَاجْتِنَابِ المَحَارِمِ، وَالِإشْتِمَالُ عَلَى المَكَارِمِ ثُمَّ لَا يُبَالِي أَوْقَعَ عَلَى المَوْتِ أَمْ وَقَعَ المَوْتُ عَلَيْهِ. وَاللهُ مَا يُبَالِي ابْنِ أَبِي طَالِبٍ أَوْقَعَ عَلَى المَوْتِ، أَمْ وَقَعَ المَوْتُ عَلَيْهِ

"To perform the obligations of the religion, to avoid the forbidden things, to possess the best kind of ethics. Then (such a person) will not care whether he meets death or death meets him. I swear to God that son of Abu Talib does not fear whether he comes upon death or death comes upon him."[7](#)

Imam 'Ali (as), in his Nahj al-Balaghah, always addressed his followers with the following words: "Equip yourselves, may God have mercy on you, because you have been called for departure. Lessen your desire to stay in this world. Return (to God) with the best of provisions with you, for before you is a mountain road difficult to ascend, and fearful and terrible stations which you must enter and stop at."[8](#)

Thirdly: not to be deceived by this world because only gullible people are carried away by flashy things in this world. Wise men are unaffected. They realize that in this world the flowers are not continuously fresh, neither are the lucky ones always happy. If they are happy one day, they are saddened the other day: The poet says:
Kesra and the golden orange, Parviz and the golden vegetable,
All have gone with the wind, all have been leveled to the ground;
Parviz would take golden vegetable to every party,
With gold, he made a garden of vegetables;
Parviz is lost now, do not say much of him,
Read where is the golden vegetables, go and read kam taraku.

But the feeble-minded persons, like beasts and four-legged animals, can only see the prey, stable and grass and lusts and enjoy being indulged in them without knowing that the hunter and the butcher are prone to receive them and their pleasures will soon be over.

It is for precisely this reason that The Holy Qur'an calls the world a means of deceit. It only could deceive the feeble minded souls, however.[9](#)

But the true believers of God will never be deceived by the world.[10](#) They are continuously at the mercy of temptations,[11](#) but since they are realistic, they are not deceived by the world and they provide themselves with appropriate provisions for the coming world. They try to learn from the world and its ups and downs. There are two traditions regarding this: The first tradition: Imam 'Ali (as) heard somebody blaming this world. Imam 'Ali (as) told him:

"أَيُّهَا الدَّامُ لِلدُّنْيَا المُغْتَرُّ بِغُرُورِهَا المَخْدُوعُ بِأَبَاطِيلِهَا، اتَّغَتَّرُ
بِالدُّنْيَا ثُمَّ تَذُمَّهَا؟ أَنْتَ المُتَّجِرُّمُ عَلَيْهَا أَمْ هِيَ المُتَّجِرَّمَةُ عَلَيْكَ؟
مَتَى اسْتَهْوَتْكَ أَمْ مَتَى عَرَّتْكَ؟ أَيَمَّصَّارِعَ آبَائِكَ مِنَ البَلَى، أَمْ
بِمَصَاجِعِ أُمَّهَاتِكَ تَحْتَ التَّرَى؟.."

وَقَدْ مَثَلْتَ لَكَ بِه الدُّنْيَا نَفْسَكَ وَيَمَصِّرَعِي مَصْرَعَكَ، إِنَّ الدُّنْيَا دَارُ
صِدْقٍ لِمَنْ صَدَّقَهَا وَدَارُ غَافِيَةٍ لِمَنْ فَهَمَ عَنْهَا وَدَارُ غِنَى لِمَنْ
تَزَوَّدَ مِنْهَا وَدَارُ مَوْعِظَةٍ لِمَنْ اتَّعَطَّ بِهَا، مَسْجِدُ أَحْبَاءِ اللَّهِ
وَمُصَلَّى مَلَائِكَةِ اللَّهِ، وَمَهَيْطُ وَحْيِ اللَّهِ، وَمَتَجَرُّ أَوْلِيَاءِ اللَّهِ،
اِكْتَسَبُوا فِيهَا الرَّحْمَةَ، وَرِيحُوا فِيهَا الْجَنَّةَ، فَمَنْ ذَا يَذُمَّهَا وَقَدْ
أَدَّتْ بَيْنَهَا وَنَادَتْ بِغُرَاقِهَا وَنَعَتْ نَفْسَهَا وَأَهْلِهَا"

"O you who blame the world, while you are beguiled by its vanities and deceived by its falsehoods! Are you beguiled by this world, and then blame it? Do you accuse it of sin or does it accuse you? When did it seduce you and when did it deceive you? Through the places where your fore-fathers have fallen and decayed? Or through the sleeping-places of your mothers under the earth?..... Through him (the dying man), the world has given you an example for yourself; and through his place of death (an example of) your place of death.

Indeed, this world is a house of truth for one who confirms it, a house of well-being for one who understands it, a house of riches for one who takes provisions from it, and a house of admonition for one who is admonished by it. (It is) a place of worship for the lovers of God, a place of prayer for the angels of God, the place of descent for the revelation of God and a trading place for the friends of God; in it they earn mercy and in it they gain Paradise. So who is it that blames it, when it has announced its departure, proclaimed its separation and announced the death of itself and its inhabitants?"¹²

The second tradition: Imam al-Baqir (as) one day saw Jabir b. Abdullah al-Ansari sighing deeply. Imam al-Baqir (as) asked him: "What are you sighing about? Are you sighing about the world"? Jabir said: "Yes". Imam al-Baqir (as) said:

"مَلَأُ الدُّنْيَا سَبْعَةً: الْمَأْكُولُ وَالْمَشْرُوبُ وَالْمَلْبُوسُ وَالْمَنْكُوحُ
وَالْمَرْكُوبُ وَالْمَشْمُومُ وَالْمَسْمُوعُ.

فَأَلُذُّ الْمَأْكُولَاتِ الْعَسَلُ وَهُوَ بَصِقُ مِنْ دُبَابَةٍ، وَاحِلَى الْمَشْرُوبَاتِ
الْمَاءُ وَكَفَى بِأَبَاحَتِهِ وَسِيَّاحَتِهِ عَلَى وَجْهِ الْأَرْضِ، وَاحِلَى
الْمَلْبُوسَاتِ الدِّيبَاجُ وَهُوَ مِنْ لُعَابِ دُودَةٍ، وَاحِلَى الْمَنْكُوحَاتِ
النِّسَاءُ وَهُوَ مَبَالٌ فِي مَبَالٍ وَمِثَالٌ لِمِثَالٍ، وَإِنَّمَا يُرَادُ أَحْسَنُ مَا
فِي الْمَرَأَةِ لِلْأَقْبَحِ مَا فِيهَا، وَاحِلَى الْمَرْكُوبَاتِ الْخَيْلُ وَهُوَ
قَوَاتِلٌ، وَاجِلُ الْمَشْمُومَاتِ، الْمِسْكُ وَهُوَ دَمٌ مِنْ سُرَّةِ دَابَّةٍ،

وَاجَلُّ الْمَسْمُوعَاتِ الْغِنَاءُ وَالتَّرْتُّمُ وَهُوَ إِثْمٌ، فَمَا هَذِهِ صِفَتُهُ لَمْ يَتَنَفَّسَ عَلَيْهِ عَاقِلٌ". قَالَ جَابِرُ ابْنِ عَبْدِ اللَّهِ: فَوَاللَّهِ مَا خَطَرَتْ الدُّنْيَا بَعْدَهَا عَلَى قَلْبِي " 548

"The pleasures of the world are seven: eating, drinking, clothing, marriage, riding, smelling and hearing. The most delicious of foods is honey which is the bee's saliva. The sweetest drink is water which flows on the earth. The best clothing is silk which is from the saliva of the silk-worm. The sweetest of mates (among all creatures) to be taken in marriage are women, yet it (the act of mating) is a urethra inside a urethra, and a thing matched to another in kind (ugliness). So one desires the prettiest features in a woman for the sake of the ugliest (part) in her. The best mounts are horses and they are deadly. The most sublime of odors is musk which is blood from the navel of an animal. The best of what is heard is singing and trilling, which is a sin. If this is the quality of the world, then an intelligent man does not sigh over it". Jabir said: "I swear to God, upon hearing this speech from al-Baqir (as), I never thought of the world after this".

Fourthly, at the end of this portion of the letter, Imam 'Ali (as) warns us that soon the curtains will move to one side and this dark night of the world will change into the morning of the Day of Judgment. Now the caravans have reached their destinations. Let the true believers separate themselves from the groups of beasts and join the caravans.

Hafiz, the Iranian poet, says in this regard:

Our life passed with no aims in sight,

O boy, give me the wine bowl, because you will not arrive at the old age;

What sort of sugars are here that the royal

Falcons have belittled themselves to the position of a fly;

The caravan went away but you are asleep and the desert is ahead of you,

How come you are negligent of the bees?

Open your wings and go ahead toward the heaven trees,

It is beyond a bird like you to be cage-ridden.

4. The Event Narrated By Ibn Abi Al-Hadid

In describing this portion of Imam 'Ali's letter, Ibn Abi al-Hadid says: Abu al-Fath Mohammad ibn 'Ubbad, who was a cruel man, asked me to read this part of the letter. Upon hearing this last part, he shouted and fell to the ground.¹³

This shows that this portion of Imam 'Ali's letter, especially its Arabic expressions, which are difficult to translate into any other language, stands at a lofty place in eloquence. You cannot find any equivalence for it in the discourses of others and even among other words of Imam 'Ali (as).

1. . Qur'an 11:118 - 119.

2. . Qur'an 51:56.

3. . Qur'an 67:2.

4. . Refer to Man's philosophy of creation by Zayn al-'Abidin Ghorbani Lahiji and Tafsir Namunah, vol.22, pp.384-398.

5. " حَتَّى إِذَا أُدْرِكُهُ الْعَرَقُ قَالَ آمَنْتُ أَنَّهُ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا الَّذِي آمَنْتُ بِهِ يَسُوءُ إِسْرَائِيلَ وَأَنَا مِنَ الْمُسْلِمِينَ. أَلَا نَ وَ قَدْ عَصَيْتَ مِنْ قَبْلِ وَ كُنْتَ مِنَ الْمَفْسِدِينَ "

..Until when drowning overtook him (Fir'awn), he said: I believe that there is no god but He in whom the

children of Israel believe and I am of those who submit. What! Now! and indeed you disobeyed before and you were of the mischief-makers.”. [Qur’an 10:90].

6. . Kanz al-‘Ummal, vol.15, p.551.

7. . Bihar, vol.71, p.263.

8. Nahj al-Balaghah, Sermon 204.

9. "ذَلِكُمْ يَأْتِكُمْ لِتَتَّخِذُوا آيَاتِ اللَّهِ هُزُوعًا وَعَرَّتْكُمْ الْحَيَاةُ الدُّنْيَا" .

That is because you took the communication of Allah for a jest and the life of this world deceived you.[Qur’an 45:35]

10. . Qur’an 38:82-83.

11. . Qur’an 57:20-21.

12. . Nahj al-Balaghah, Hikmah 131.

13. . The commentary on Nahj al-Balaghah by Ibn Abi al-Hadid, vol.16, p.91.

31) Preserve Yourself from the Greedness of this World and remain Free

"واعلم يا بُنَيَّ أَنَّ مَنْ كَانَتْ مَطِيلَتُهُ اللَّيْلَ وَالنَّهَارَ فَإِنَّهُ يُسَارُ بِهِ
وَإِنْ كَانَ وَقِيفًا، وَيَقْطَعُ الْمَسَافَةَ وَإِنْ كَانَ مُقِيمًا وَادْعًا. وَاعْلَمْ
يَقِينًا أَنَّكَ لَنْ تَبْلُغَ أَمْلَكَ وَلَنْ تَعُدَّوْا أَجَلَكَ وَإِنَّكَ فِي سَبِيلِ مَنْ
كَانَ قَبْلَكَ فَحَقِّضْ فِي الطَّلَبِ وَاجْمَلْ فِي الْمُكْتَسَبِ فَإِنَّهُ رُبُّ
طَلَبٍ قَدْ جَرَّ إِلَى حَرْبٍ وَليْسَ كُلُّ طَالِبٍ بِمَرْزُوقٍ وَلَا كُلُّ مُجْمَلٍ
بِمَحْرُومٍ، وَأَكْرَمَ نَفْسِكَ عَنْ كُلِّ دَنِيَّةٍ وَإِنْ سَاقَتْكَ إِلَى الرَّغَائِبِ
فَإِنَّكَ لَنْ تَعْتَاضَ بِمَا تَبْدُلُ مِنْ نَفْسِكَ عِوَضًا وَلَا تَكُنْ عَبْدَ غَيْرِكَ
وَقَدْ جَعَلَ اللَّهُ حُرًّا وَمَا خَيْرُ خَيْرٍ لَا يُنَالُ إِلَّا بِشَرٍّ وَيُسْرٌ لَا يُنَالُ
إِلَّا بِعُسْرٍ؟!

وَإِيَّاكَ أَنْ تُوجِفَ بِكَ مَطَايَا الطَّمَعِ فَتُورِدَكَ مَنَاهِلَ الْهَلَكَةِ وَإِنْ
اسْتَطَعْتَ أَنْ لَا يَكُونَ بَيْنَكَ وَبَيْنَ اللَّهِ دُوْ نِعْمَةٍ فَافْعَلْ فَإِنَّكَ
مُدْرِكٌ قِسْمِكَ، وَأَخِذْ سَهْمَكَ وَإِنَّ الْيَسِيرَ مِنَ اللَّهِ سُبْحَانَهُ أَعْظَمُ
وَإِكْرَمُ مِنَ الْكَثِيرِ مِنْ خَلْقِهِ وَإِنْ كَانَ كُلُّ مِنْهُ"

“Know, my son! One whose riding animal is the day and the night, is continuously on the

move although he is standing still, and he is travelling (long) distances although he is resident and stationary.

Know for certain that you will never attain all your wishes and or exceed your appointed time of death. You are on the same path as those before you, therefore reduce your seeking (of this world) and be moderate in earning, for sometimes seeking leads to destruction and not every seeker receives sustenance nor is every moderate one deprived.

Preserve your self from every baseness, even though it may take you to your desired objectives, for you will never be compensated in return for what you have spent of yourself (i.e. of your honour). Do not be a slave to another when Allah has created you free. There is no good in that good which is only acquired through evil, and in that ease which is only acquired through hardship.

Beware that the mount of greed should carry you and make you enter the springs of destruction. If you are able to do so, then do not let there be a benefactor between you and Allah, for you will attain your portion and acquire your share (anyway). The little (you receive) from Allah is greater and more precious than the abundance from His creatures, although everything is from Him”.

Commentary

From here to the very end of the letter, Imam ‘Ali (as) mentions one hundred pieces of wisdom, if one of which, in the words of Qutb al-Din Rawandi, were found in the will, that would have been sufficient.¹

In this portion of the letter, Imam ‘Ali (as) attracts our attention to the following points:

1. Man Is A Traveler Riding On The Palfrey Of Time

As we know, man, like natural objects and animals, is always in movement and is in a state of change, although he thinks he is motionless. The Holy Qur’an talks about his change in the following words:

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِن كُنْتُمْ فِي رَيْبٍ مِّنَ الْبَعْثِ فَإِنَّا خَلَقْنَاكُمْ مِّن
تُّرَابٍ ثُمَّ مِّن نُّطْقَةٍ ثُمَّ مِّن عَظْمٍ ثُمَّ مِّن مُّضْغَةٍ مُّخَلَّقَةٍ وَغَيْرِ
مُخَلَّقَةٍ لِّنُبَيِّنَ لَكُمْ وَنُقِرُّ فِي الْأَرْحَامِ مَا نَشَاءُ إِلَىٰ أَجَلٍ مُّسَمًّى
ثُمَّ نُخْرِجُكُمْ طِفْلًا ثُمَّ لِتَبْلُغُوا أَشُدَّكُمْ وَمِنْكُمْ مَّن يَتَّقَىٰ وَمِنْكُمْ
مَّن يَرُدُّ إِلَىٰ أُرْدَلِ الْعُمُرِ لِكَيْلَا يَعْلَمَ مَن بَعْدَ عِلْمٍ شَيْئًا ... وَأَنَّهُ
يُحْيِي الْمَوْتَىٰ وَأَنَّهُ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ وَأَنَّ السَّاعَةَ آتِيَةٌ لِلرَّيْبِ
فِيهَا وَأَنَّ اللَّهَ يَبْعَثُ مَن فِي الْقُبُورِ "

“O people! If you are in doubt about the raising, then surely we created you from a clot, then from a lump of flesh, complete in make and incomplete, that we may make clear to you; and we cause what we please to stay in the wombs till an

appointed time, then we bring you forth as babies, then that you may attain your maturity; and of you is he who is caused to die, and of you is he who is brought back to the worst part of life, so that after having knowledge he does not know anything; and you see the earth sterile land, but when we send down on it the water, it stirs and swells and brings forth of every kind a beautiful herbage.

This is because Allah is the Truth and because He gives life to the dead and because He has power over all things. And because the hour is coming, there is no doubt about it; and because Allah shall raise up those who are in the graves".²

"الإنسانُ مُسَافِرٌ وَمَنَازِلُهُ سِتَّةٌ؛ وَقَدْ قَطَعَ مِنْهَا ثَلَاثَةً وَبَقِيَ ثَلَاثَةً قَالَتِي قَطَعَهَا أَوْلَاهَا مِنْ كُتْمِ الْعَدَمِ إِلَى صُلْبِ الْأَبِ وَتَرَائِبِ الْأُمِّ كَمَا قَالَ تَعَالَى: (يَخْرُجُ مِنْ بَيْنِ الصُّلْبِ وَالتَّرَائِبِ). وَثَانِيهَا رَجِمَ الْأُمُّ قَالَ سُبْحَانَهُ: (هُوَ الَّذِي يُصَوِّرُكُمْ فِي الْأَرْحَامِ كَيْفَ يَشَاءُ لَلَّاءِ إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ الْعَزِيزُ الْحَكِيمُ)، وَثَالِثُهَا مِنَ الرَّجْمِ إِلَى فِضَاءِ الدُّنْيَا قَالَ عَزَّ مِنْ قَائِلٍ: (وَحَمَلُهُ وَفِصَالُهُ ثَلَاثُونَ شَهْرًا)، وَأَمَّا الْمَنَازِلُ الثَّلَاثُ الَّتِي لَمْ يَقْطَعْهَا فَأَوْلَاهَا الْقَبْرُ قَالَ عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ: (الْقَبْرُ أَوَّلُ مَنْزِلٍ مِنْ مَنَازِلِ الْآخِرَةِ وَأَخْرُ مَنْزِلٍ مِنْ مَنَازِلِ الدُّنْيَا وَثَانِيهَا فِضَاءُ الْمَحْشَرِ) قَالَ سُبْحَانَهُ: (وَعَرَّضُوا عَلَيَّ رَيْكَ صَفًّا)، وَثَالِثُهَا الْجَنَّةُ أَوْ النَّارُ قَالَ سُبْحَانَهُ: (فَرِيقٌ فِي الْجَنَّةِ وَفَرِيقٌ فِي السَّعِيرِ)، وَنَحْنُ الْآنَ فِي قَطْعِ مَرَحَلَةِ الْمَنْزِلِ الرَّابِعِ وَمُدَّةِ قَطْعِهَا مُدَّةُ عُمْرِنَا فَأَيَّامُنَا فَرَاسِيحُ وَسَاعَاتِنَا أَمْيَالُ وَأَنْفَاسُنَا خُطُواتٌ فَكُمْ مِنْ شَخْصٍ بَقِيَ لَهُ فَرَاسِيحُ وَأَخْرُ بَقِيَ لَهُ خُطُواتٌ"

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'Man is a traveler and has six stages (on his journey): he has passed three and three remain. The first of those that he has passed is from the concealment of non-existence to the loins of the father and the ribs of the mother. God says in this regard "**Coming from between the back and the ribs**"³

The second stage is the mother's womb. In this regard Allah says:

" هُوَ الَّذِي يُصَوِّرُكُمْ فِي الْأَرْحَامِ كَيْفَ يَشَاءُ لَلَّاءِ إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ الْعَزِيزُ الْحَكِيمُ "

"He it is who shapes you in the wombs as He likes; there is no god but He, the Mighty, the Wise".⁴

And the third stage is the passage from the mother's womb into this world. God has said in this regard:

وَحَمْلُهُ وَفِصَالُهُ ثَلَاثُونَ شَهْرًا

"And the bearing of him and the weaning of him was thirty months"⁵

The three remaining stages include the world of the graves and it is said, "The grave is the first stage of the stages of the Hereafter and the last of the stages of the world."

The second stage of the three remaining stages is "Mahshar" or the gathering place of mankind on the Resurrection Day. God says:

"وَعَرَّضُوا عَلَيَّ رِجْلَكَ صَعًا"

"And they shall be brought before your Lord, standing in ranks"⁶

And the third of the three remaining stages is either Paradise or Hell. God has said, regarding this:

"فَرِيقٌ فِي الْجَنَّةِ وَفَرِيقٌ فِي السَّعِيرِ"

"A party shall be in the garden and another party in the burning fire."⁷

And now we are passing through the fourth stage, and the duration of its passage is the duration of our lives. Our days are *farsakhs* (a measure of 3 to 4 miles) and our hours are miles, and our breaths are steps. How many people are there for whom *farsakhs* remain and how many others for whom steps remain?'

Imam 'Ali (as) has the following interpretation in this letter: Man is a traveler who is riding the palfrey of time which is manifested as day and night. This movement is continuous, but he seems as though he were motionless.

Imam 'Ali (as) in this portion of letter warns us not to be carried away in this evolutionary process by negligence so that you suddenly notice that "day and night went by but you are still asleep".

Sa'di, the great Persian poet has written two beautiful pieces:

We may not harvest dates from the thorn we have planted,

We may not weave silk from this wool;

We did not put an excuse line on the slate of our sins,

We did not write anything good beside our sins;
We are the victims to our inner selves, and we will cry,
On the Doom's Day why we did not kill our inner selves;
Alas! Our precious lives passed away,
But we did not stop our wrong-doing;
Old age and youth passed like day and night,
The night arrived, the day came and we are still asleep.
You, who can do something, do it,
Before you are unable to do it;
You who were, at one stage, a sperm in the belly,
And turned into an infant;
Then you grew till you arrived at the puberty,
You became a handsome youth;
Till you changed into a man of fame,
The rider in the court and a man of war;
What you did see did not stay long,
Neither will it stay long what you will see;
Sooner or later this handsome man,
Will change into earth and his earth into dust;
A good name for a man after his death,
Is preferable to a gold-ornamented house;
Who knows who is going to be alive next year?
Or where did the person who was our friend go?
The miserable dead are in the grave,
There is a lizard in their heads each;
The handsome appearance is nothing,
O brother bring forth a handsome conduct.⁸

2. Since Not All Wishes Are Obtainable...

As it was explained before, nobody can attain his wishes at all times. There are many wishes which remain unsatisfied. Thus, Imam (as) says: Since not all our wishes are obtainable and since nobody will exceed his life-limit, and since everybody has got to go the way of those who have passed away, therefore we should observe the following points:

- a)** We should never be greedy for what we want. We should endeavor not more than adequate.
 - b)** We should be honest in our business. We should have our incomes obtained legally and we should spend in good ways what we earn.⁹
- Sometimes it may happen that greed may cause the loss of the owner's capital altogether. And not every effort is always of benefit. Any well-wisher will benefit from his trials, however.

The Prophet (S) has said:

**إِنَّ رُوحَ الْقُدُسِ نَفَتْ فِي رُوحِي أَنَّهُ لَنْ تَمُوتَ نَفْسٌ حَتَّى
تَسْتَكْمَلَ رِزْقَهَا فَاجْمَلُوا فِي الطَّلَبِ"**

"The Holy spirit inspired into my spirit that no soul will die until its sustenance is complete. Therefore be moderate in seeking (your livelihood)".[10](#)

3. Keep Up Your Generosity Under Any Conditions

Sometimes a man could attain his desires through lies, deception, injustice and flattering and the like. But since these traits are in contrast with man's true nature, man should never humiliate himself to resort to these deceitful means. Man's soul is more honest than these means. This is because nothing in this world could be equal to man's personality. Any illegitimate act may change man's character badly. It is an old maxim which says "Do not pour into your throat the water which damages your personality". Thus, it is mentioned in many traditions that the most precious persons are those who do not give much value to this world and who do not consider equal to their personality any of the world manifestations such as women, children, wealth, possessions, positions or whatever.

Imam 'Ali (as) has said in one occasion:

"دُنْيَاكُمْ هَذِهِ أَزْهَدُ عِنْدِي مِنْ عَفْطَةِ عَنَزٍ"

"Your world to me is of less value than the mucus from the nose of a goat".[11](#)

He said in another occasion:

"مَا لِعَلِيٍّ وَنَعِيمٍ يَفْتَنِي وَلَذَّةٍ لَا تَبْقَى"

"What does 'Ali have to do with enjoyments that perish and pleasures that are transitory?"[12](#)

Somebody asked the Imam al-Baqir (as):

"Who are the most precious people?"

He answered:

"Those who do not see the world as their equal."

Sa'di, the great Persian poet says:

Our human body is honorable because of our human spirit,

Our clothes not a sign for a human being;

If eyes, tongues, ears and noses were the symbols of humanity,

Then what is the difference between man and a wall-drawing?

Eating, sleeping, anger and lusts are ignorance,

A beast knows nothing from man's world;

Be truly a man, or else a bird,

Can use human speech;

Did you see the flight of birds, now put aside lusts,

Till you see the flight of man;

Why did you make yourself a slave in the hands of a devil?

You are a man and even an angel can not fill your place.

If you kill the savage in your nature,
All life-long you will be living with human morale;
A man can reach a place where he can see nobody but God,
See how lofty is human dignity.
Sa'di elsewhere has said:
It is better for you to tell the truth and remain in jail,
Than telling a lie and getting freed.

4. Man Is Created Free And Should Remain Free

Freedom is a gift from God. Man is created free. But it is the man who makes himself a slave in the hands of others. This happens in different ways: Sometimes out of extreme love with worldly manifestations, sometimes out of getting accustomed to bad manners and at times out of being obliged to others because of their benevolence, and sometimes out of aggression towards righteousness, which entails conflict with the followers of righteousness and in this way he will become a slave in their hands.¹³ All these manifestations of slavery are caused by man himself and cause his becoming a slave.

Islam, however, will not agree with any kind of slavery. It wants everybody to live freely and be in Hafiz's words: free from anything which smells of possession. On one hand, Islam considers the excessive love towards the life manifestations as a kind of slavery and condemns it seriously.

Imam Husayn (as) tells those who have sold their religion to the world:

**"النَّاسُ عَبِيدُ الدُّنْيَا وَالدِّينِ لَعْقُ عَلَى السِّنْتِهِمْ يَحُوطُونَهُ مَا دَرَّتْ
مَعَايِشُهُمْ فَإِذَا مُجِّصُوا بِالْبَلَاءِ قَلَّ الدِّيَانُونَ"**

"People are slaves to the world and religion is only a substance to lick on their tongues. They take care of it as long as their livelihood is abundant. But when they are tested through trials, true believers are few".¹⁴

And Imam 'Ali (as) introduces the end point of those who are in love with the world in the following words:

"مَنْ عَبَدَ الدُّنْيَا وَأَثَرَهَا عَلَى الآخِرَةِ اسْتَوَحَّمَ الْعَاقِبَةَ"

"A person who worships this world and prefers it to the Hereafter, has ruined his fate."¹⁵
On the other hand, Imam 'Ali (as) considers people subject to desire as the slaves of desire.

"عَبْدُ الشَّهْوَةِ أَدَلُّ مِنْ عَبْدِ الرِّقِّ"

"The slave of desires is more abject than a slave in bondage."[16](#)

And the Holy Qur'an considers slavery to desire as a hindrance to the realization of facts:

"أَفَرَأَيْتَ مَنْ اتَّخَذَ إِلَهَهُ هَوَاهُ وَأَصْلَهُ اللَّهُ عَلَى عِلْمٍ وَخَتَمَ عَلَى سَمْعِهِ وَقَلْبِهِ وَجَعَلَ عَلَى بَصَرِهِ غِشَاوَةً فَمَنْ يَهْدِيهِ مِنْ بَعْدِ اللَّهِ أَفَلَا تَذَكَّرُونَ"

"Have you then considered him who takes his low desire for his god and Allah has made him err having knowledge and has set a seal upon his ear and his heart and put a covering upon his eye? Who can then guide him after Allah? Will you not then be mindful?"[17](#)

On the other hand, the overcoming one's (bad) habits, which are a kind of slavery, causes man to reach lofty human positions:

"Man can reach lofty places by overcoming his bad habits".[18](#)

Elsewhere, Imam 'Ali (as) mentions overcoming one's bad habits to be the best type of worshipping:

"أَفْضَلُ الْعِبَادَةِ عُلْبَةُ الْعَادَةِ"

"Overcoming (bad) habits is the most excellent worship."[19](#)

At the end, he considers struggle against righteousness as a means of failure:

"مَنْ صَارَعَ الْحَقَّ صُرِعَ" 570

"One who fights the truth, will be defeated".

And if anybody fought against righteousness and fell a slave in the hands of its followers, he should not blame anybody else except himself.

Anyway, Islam wants freedom for everybody: natural freedom, freedom of thought, political freedom, civic freedom and religious freedom. See "Islam and Human rights" for more detail.

Imam 'Ali (as) has showed this meaning clearly in his letter.[20](#) So far as possible do not accept anything from anybody which limits your freedom or causes you to thank him since man is a slave to generosity.

[5. If Happiness And Abundance Are Illegally Obtained, They Are](#)

Worthless

Imam 'Ali (as) first emphasizes the fact that man should not lose his generosity and should not belittle himself for material advantages. Then, he comes to the conclusion that if man commits wrong-doings in order to obtain social positions, the result is not happiness, nor is it abundance. This is because a position which is obtained through mischievous actions can not be good. And abundance does not make us happy if it is gained illegally. If we obtain anything by belittling we have engaged in committing sins.

This topic, however, is not in contradiction with the sayings that the good and the bad of the world are entangled or no pain, no gain. Imam 'Ali's statement here entails prosperity in life.

6. Avoid Greed

By greed is meant to expect too much of people's possessions. It is one of the most pernicious traits of human beings. Even a small amount of it humiliates people greatly. Imam 'Ali (as) has said:

لا "أَدَلُّ مِنْ طَالِعٍ"

"There is no one more abased than a greedy person".[21](#)

Regarding this topic, Sa'di says:

He added to my daily bread but caused my lack of honor,
Poverty is better than the humiliation of asking.

Imam 'Ali (as), in other positions, considers slavery as one of the vicious side effects of greed.

**"إِسْتَعْنِ عَمَّنْ شِئْتَ تَكُنْ نَظِيرَهُ وَارْعَبْ إِلَى مَنْ شِئْتَ تَكُنْ
أَسِيرَهُ وَأَحْسِنِ إِلَى مَنْ شِئْتَ تَكُنْ أَمِيرَهُ"**

"Be free of need of whomsoever you wish and you will be his equal. Make a request from whomsoever you wish and you will be his captive. Do good to whomsoever you wish and you will be his lord."[22](#)

Man's needlessness and his satisfaction with what he possesses cause his freedom from want and being greedy towards others. Possessions cause present poverty. For the first case Imam Sadiq (as) has said:

"مَنْ قَنَعَ بِمَا رَزَقَهُ اللَّهُ فَهُوَ مِنْ أَغْنَى النَّاسِ"

"The one who is content with what God has provided him is the most needless of men".[23](#)

For the second case, the Great Prophet (S) has stated:

"وَإِيَّاكَ وَالطَّمَعُ فَإِنَّهُ الْفَقْرُ الْحَاضِرُ"

"Beware of greed for it is the present poverty."[24](#)

It is for the above reasons that Imam (as) in his letter warns his faithful son to avoid greed and emphasizes that he should not let the palfrey of greed take him to the desert of destruction.

7. Do Not Ask People

It is a fact that life contains numerous hurdles which may not be resolved without other people's cooperation. But we should not ask people for help as far as possible. This is, firstly, the cause for humiliation. Secondly, it causes man to lose his bashfulness gradually. Thirdly, this causes man to lose his resort to God and, fourthly, it lowers man's dignity. Thus, there is an emphasis in the Islamic texts on the inappropriateness of asking others for help.

The Prophet (S) has told Abu Dharr:

**"إِيَّاكَ وَالسُّؤَالَ فَإِنَّهُ ذُلٌّ حَاضِرٌ وَقَفْرٌ مُتَعَجِّلٌ وَفِيهِ حِسَابٌ
طَوِيلٌ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ"**

"Beware of asking from people, for it is present humiliation and a speedy poverty and it will entail a long accounting on the Day of Judgment"[.25](#)

Imam Zayn al-'Abidin (as) has said:

**"طَلِبُ الْحَوَائِجِ إِلَى النَّاسِ مَذَلَّةٌ لِلْحَيَاةِ وَمَذْهَبَةٌ لِلْحَيَاءِ
وَاسْتِخْفَافٌ بِالْوَقَارِ وَهُوَ الْفَقْرُ الْحَاضِرُ"**

"Seeking needs from people causes humiliation in life, the departure of shame and attaching little value to one's dignity, and it is present poverty"[.26](#)

Imam 'Ali (as) has said:

"السُّؤَالُ يُضْعِفُ لِسَانَ الْمُتَكَلِّمِ وَيَكْسِرُ قَلْبَ الشُّجَاعِ الْبَطَلِ"

وَيُوقِفُ الْحُرَّ الْعَزِيزَ مَوْقِفَ الْعَبْدِ الدَّلِيلِ وَيُذْهِبُ بِهَا الْوَجْهَ وَيَمَحُّ الرِّزْقَ"

"Asking people for help weakens one's tongue, breaks the heart of the brave one, puts a free man in place of a lowly slave, causes one to lose face and deprives one of his sustenance".²⁷

That is why Imam 'Ali (as) in his letter says: "If you are able to do so, then do not let there be a benefactor between you and Allah (and do not ask a go-between for any help), for you will attain your portion and acquire your share (anyway). The little (you receive) from Allah is greater and more precious than the abundance from His creatures, although everything is from Him". The owners of such abundance, in reality, do not have anything.

¹ . Minhaj al-Bara'a fi Sharh Nahj al-Balaghah, vol.3, p.43.

² . Qur'an 22:5-7.

³ . Qur'an 86:7.

⁴ . Qur'an 3:6.

⁵ . Qur'an 46:15.

⁶ . Qur'an 18:48.

⁷ . Qur'an 42:7.

⁸ . Sa'di's Odes, p.12.

⁹ . The word "Muktasab" may either mean the obtained assets or it may mean. "To earn"; The first is objective, and the second one is an infinitive (Ibn Maytham's Commentary on Nahj al-Balaghah, vol.5, p.45).

¹⁰ . (Ibn Maytham's Commentary on Nahj al-Balaghah, vol.5, p.45).

¹¹ . Nahj al-Balaghah, Sermon 3.

¹² . Nahj al-Balaghah, Sermon 224.

¹³ Mizan al-Hikmah, vol.6, p.18).

¹⁴ . Tuhaf al-'Uqul, p.245.

¹⁵ . Bihar, vol.73, p.104.

¹⁶ . Ghurar al-Hikam, vol.4, p.352.

¹⁷ . Qur'an 45:23.

¹⁸ . The commentary of Ghurar al-Hikam, vol.3, p.229, vol.2, p.375.

There are other interpretations for these two sentences. Refer to the above commentary.

¹⁹ . Op. cit.

²⁰ . Ibn Maytham's commentary on Nahj al-Balaghah, vol.5, p.46.

Sa'di, too, has written the following poem:

The King of Khotan gave one of the bright-minded
Men a large piece of silk made into dress;
He wore it and kissed the ground,
And sent the king thousands thanks;
He became as happy as flower leaves,
Then he kissed the king's hand, saying:
How nice is the present of the king of Khotan,
And better than that is my own shabby dress
It is better for a free man to sleep on bare ground
Than to kiss the ground to obtain a carpet.

²¹ . Ghurar al-Hikam.

²² . Jami' al-Sa'adat, vol.2, p.106.

²³ . Bihar al-Anwar, vol.73, p.78.

²⁴ . Op. cit. p.168.

²⁵ . Bihar, vol.77, p.61.

²⁶ . Bihar, vol.78, p.136.

²⁷ . Ghurar al-Hikam, vol.2, p.141.

32) Silence and Moderation

"وَتَلَا فَيْكَ مَا قَرَطَ مِنْ صَمْتِكَ أَيْسَرُ مِنْ إِدْرَاكِ مَا قَاتَ مِنْ
مَنْطِقِكَ وَحِفْظُ مَا فِي الْوَعَاءِ بِشَدِّ الْوَكَاةِ وَحِفْظُ مَا فِي يَدَيْكَ
أَحَبُّ إِلَيَّ مِنْ طَلْبِ مَا فِي يَدَيْ غَيْرِكَ، وَمَرَارَةُ الْيَأْسِ خَيْرٌ مِنْ
الطَّلْبِ إِلَى النَّاسِ وَالْحِرْفَةُ مَعَ الْعِقَّةِ خَيْرٌ مِنَ الْغِنَى مَعَ
الْفُجُورِ، وَالْمَرْءُ أَحْفَظُ لِسِرِّهِ وَرُبَّ سَاعٍ فِيهَا يَضُرُّهُ، مَنْ أَكْثَرَ
أَهْجَرَ وَمَنْ تَفَكَّرَ أَبْصَرَ، قَارِنِ أَهْلَ الْخَيْرِ تَكُنْ مِنْهُمْ وَبَايِنِ أَهْلَ
الشَّرِّ تَبَيَّنْ عَنْهُمْ. يَنْسَ الطَّعَامُ الْحَرَامُ، وَظَلَمُ الضَّعِيفِ أَفْحَشُ
الظُّلْمِ، إِذَا كَانَ الرَّفْقُ حَرَقًا كَانَ الْخَرَقُ رَفَقًا، رُبَّمَا كَانَ الدَّوَاءُ
دَاءً وَالدَّاءُ دَوَاءً وَرُبَّمَا نَصَحَ غَيْرُ النَّاصِحِ وَعَشَّ الْمُسْتَنْصِحُ. وَإِيَّاكَ
وَالِإِتْكَالَ عَلَى الْمُنَى فَإِنَّهَا بَصَائِعُ التُّوكَى وَالْعَقْلُ حِفْظُ
التَّجَارِبِ وَخَيْرٌ مَا جَرَّبْتَ مَا وَعَظَلْتَ بَادِرِ الْفُرْصَةِ قَبْلَ أَنْ تَكُونَ
عُصَّةً لَيْسَ كُلُّ طَالِبٍ يُصِيبُ وَلَا غَائِبٌ يَتُوبُ وَمِنَ الْقَسَادِ إِضَاعَةُ
الزَّادِ وَمَفْسَدَةُ الْمَعَادِ وَلِكُلِّ أَمْرٍ عَاقِبَةٌ سَوْفَ يَأْتِيكَ مَا قُدِّرَ لَكَ،
التَّاجِرُ مُخَاطِرٌ وَرُبَّ يَسِيرٍ أُنْمَى مِنْ كَثِيرٍ، لَا خَيْرَ فِي مُعِينٍ
مُهِينٍ وَلَا فِي صَدِيقٍ ظَلِيمٍ، سَاجِلُ الدَّهْرِ مَا ذَلَّ لَكَ فُجُودُهُ وَلَا
تُخَاطِرُ بِشَيْءٍ رَجَاءَ أَكْثَرِ مِنْهُ، وَإِيَّاكَ أَنْ تَجْمَعَ بَكَ مَطِيئَةُ اللَّجَاجِ"

"Your redressing what you have missed through your silence is easier than attaining what you have lost through your speech, Safeguarding the contents of the vessel through fastening its cover and safeguarding what is in your hands is dearer to me than seeking for what is the hands of others. The bitterness of cutting off hopes (in people) is better than seeking from people. An occupation (to earn one's living) accompanied by chastity is better than wealth accompanied by immorality. A person is the best keeper of his secrets.

Often one strives for what is harmful for oneself. He who speaks much speaks nonsense and he who contemplates gains insight. Associate with people of goodness and you will be of them; forsake evil people and you will be separated from them. The worst food is what is forbidden. Wronging the weak is the most evil wrongdoing.

Where gentleness is considered to be roughness, there roughness is gentleness. Sometimes the remedy is the disease and the disease is the remedy. Sometimes one who is not a sincere counselor gives sincere advice and the one considered to be a sincere counselor gives insincere advice. Beware of relying on hopes for they are the capital of

fools. Intellect is the safeguarding of experiences, and the best of your experiences is that which teaches you a lesson. Hasten to avail of opportunity before it becomes grief. Not every seeker attains (his desire) nor does every absent one return. Among the factors of corruption are to neglect taking care of one's provisions (for the Hereafter) and deeds that ruin the Hereafter.

Every affair has an outcome. What is destined for you will soon come to you. The trader takes a risk. Often the little (wealth) becomes more abundant than what is much. There is no good in a mean helper or a friend who is suspect. As long as time is in your grasp, take your share of it. Do not put anything at risk hoping for something more than it. Beware that the stubborn mount should become ungovernable".

Commentary

In this letter, Imam 'Ali (as) provides us with some significant pieces of wisdom:

1. Silence And Speech

There is no doubt that language and speech are among God's blessings to man. Language is a means for communication and for the propagation of knowledge and for guiding people. God distinguishes man from the world of beasts by language:

الرَّحْمَنُ، عَلَّمَ الْقُرْآنَ، خَلَقَ الْإِنْسَانَ، عَلَّمَهُ الْبَيَانَ " 579

"The Beneficent God, taught the Qur'an; He created man, taught him the mode of expression"

But if human language is not guarded against absurdity, telling lies, arguments, abuse, ridicule, back-biting, accusation, or telling tales...¹ it will change into disaster. Thus, the scholars of ethics advise us to speak only when necessary or else make use of silence.

From the view-points of benefits and losses, language is of four forms:

One kind of language has absolute benefits. The second type includes absolute losses. In the third type both benefits and losses are mixed. And the fourth type is neither useful nor useless.

Using silence is necessary in three stages of the above four stages. In that case where we can speak, we should take care not to contaminate language with hypocrisy, artificiality, and talkativeness.²

It is for this reason that in Islam, emphasis is more on silence. The Prophet (S) is reported to have said:

رَجِمَ اللَّهُ عَبْدًا تَكَلَّمَ خَيْرًا فَعَنِمَ أَوْ سَكَتَ فَسَلِمَ"

"May God have mercy on a servant (of God) who speaks good and acquires benefit or keeps silent and remains safe".³

The great Prophet (S) is also reported to have said:

"مَنْ كَانَ يُؤْمِنُ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ فَلْيَقُلْ خَيْرًا أَوْ لِيَصْمُتْ"

"One who believes in Allah and the Last Day, let him speak good things or remain silent"[4](#)

Imam Sadiq (as) said when talking about Prophet David, who had told his son:

**"يَا بُنَيَّ إِنْ كُنْتَ زَعَمْتَ أَنَّ الْكَلَامَ مِنْ فِصَّةٍ فَإِنَّ السُّكُوتَ مِنْ
ذَهَبٍ"**

"O my son, if you say that speech is of silver, then silence is of gold"[5](#).

Imam Reza (as) has said:

**"مِنْ عِلْمَاتِ الْفِقْهِ الْجِلْمُ وَالْعِلْمُ وَالصَّمْتُ إِنَّ الصَّمْتَ بَابٌ مِنْ
أَبْوَابِ الْحِكْمَةِ، إِنَّ الصَّمْتَ يُكْسِبُ الْمَحَبَّةَ - الْجَنَّةَ - إِنَّهُ دَلِيلٌ عَلَى
كُلِّ خَيْرٍ"**

"Among the signs of being learned are forbearance, knowledge and silence. Silence is one of the doors of wisdom. Silence is a means of attracting love and attaining Heaven and is a guide to every good"[6](#).

And in "Misbah al-Shari'ah" it is narrated from Imam Sadiq (as):

**"الصَّمْتُ شِعَارُ الْمُحَقِّقِينَ بِحَقَائِقِ مَا سَبَقَ وَجَفَّ الْقَلَمُ بِهِ وَهُوَ
مِفْتَاحُ كُلِّ رَاحَةٍ مِنَ الدُّنْيَا وَالْآخِرَةِ وَالصُّونُ مِنَ الْخَطَايَا وَالزَّلَلِ
وَقَدْ جَعَلَهُ اللَّهُ سِتْرًا عَلَى الْجَاهِلِ وَتَزِينًا لِلْعَالِمِ وَفِيهِ عَزْلُ
الْهَوَى وَرِيَاضَةُ النَّفْسِ وَخِلَاوَةُ الْعِبَادَةِ وَزَوَالُ قَسَاوَةِ الْقَلْبِ
وَالْعَفَافُ وَالْمُرُوَّةُ وَالظَّرْفُ فَاعْلِقْ بَابَ لِسَانِكَ عَمَّا لَكَ مِنْهُ بَدَلًا
سِيَمَا إِذَا لَمْ تَجِدْ أَهْلًا لِلْكَلامِ وَالْمُسَاعَدَةَ فِي الْمُذَاكِرَةِ لِلَّهِ وَفِي
اللَّهِ.**

وكان ربيعُ ابنُ خثيم يضعُ قرطاساً بينَ يديه فيكتبُ كلَّ ما يتكلَّمُ به ثمَّ يحاسبُ نفسه عَشِيَّةً ما له وما عليه ويقولُ آو آو نجا الصامتونَ وبقينا، وكان بعضُ أصحابِ رسولِ الله صلى الله عليه وآله يضعُ الحَصاةَ في فمه إذا ارادَ أن يتكلَّمَ بما عَلِمَ أنَّه لله وفي الله ولوَّجِهَ الله اخرجها...

وإنما سببُ هلاكِ الخلق ونجاتهم الكلامُ والصمتُ فطوبى لمن رزقَ معرفةَ عيبِ الكلامِ وصوابه وقوائدَ الصمتِ فإنَّ ذلكَ من أخلاقِ الأنبياءِ وشعارِ الأصفياءِ ومن عَلِمَ قَدْرَ الكلامِ أحسنَ صُحْبَتَهُ الصَّمتَ ومن أشرفَ على لطائفِ الصَّمتِ وأثمنَ على خزائنه كان كلامُهُ وصمتهُ عِبَادَةً ولا يَطْلُعُ على عِبَادَتِهِ هذا إلا الْمَلِكُ الْجَبَّارُ

"Silence is the mark of those who confirm the realities of what came before and of which the pen has written. It is the key to every ease in this world and the Hereafter, and a preservation from errors and lapses. Allah has made it a cover for the ignorant and an embellishment for the scholar. In it is the removal of desires, the training of the soul, the sweetness of worship, the removal of hard-heartedness, chastity, sense of honour and sagacity. Therefore close the door of your tongue to unnecessary speech, particularly when you do not find one who is worthy of being spoken to and who will assist in discussion for the sake of Allah and concerning Allah.

Rabi' b. Khuthaym would place a piece of parchment before him and write down all that he had uttered. Then, at night, he would take himself to account for what was in favour of him and what was against him (in his speech). He would say: "Ah! Ah! The silent ones have been successful and we have remained behind". One of the companions of the Messenger of Allah would place pebbles in his mouth. When he wanted to speak about what he knew was for Allah, concerning Allah and for Allah's pleasure, he would remove the pebbles (from his mouth)

The cause of the destruction and salvation of creatures is only speech and silence. Thus good fortune belongs to him who is provided with the knowledge of incorrect and correct speech and the benefits of silence, for that is among the moral traits of the Prophets and the mark of the chosen ones. He who knows the value of speech does well in the companionship of silence. The speech and the silence of one who is acquainted with the subtleties of silence and entrusted with its treasures, is worship, and none is aware of this worship of his but the All-compelling King".

Thus, silence and speech could be the definite sources of people's salvation or destruction, respectively. We envy those who know the asset of silence and the righteousness of

speaking. This is among the ethics of the Prophets and is among the marks of the true believers.

As you will see, one of the principles of silence is the preservation against making errors that occur through speech and can not be compensated for. Imam 'Ali (as) has relied heavily on this principle: Redressing what you have lost due to your silence is easier than compensating for what you have lost due to your speech. This is because by putting the cover on a bottle you can safeguard its contents.

This point is depicted in the poems of our poets who are under the influence of Imam 'Ali (as) and other religious leaders.

Amir Khosro, the Iranian poet, says:

Any moment you talk, it is pleasant,
But sometimes silence is even sweeter;
To close the mouth is to close the door of troubles,
It is because the world is pregnant with good and bad.
I have seen many who regret having spoken
But I have seen nobody who regrets having been silent
Listening is better than saying if you care,
The first will fill us; the second will make us empty,
The pearl became very precious because
It became ear from top to the toe;
The sharp sword became tongue all over,
That is because it could shed people's blood.

Sa'di says:

Until you know perfectly that your speech is appropriate,
You should not open your mouth to talk.

Another poet says:

Until the time you have not uttered a thing, it is at your disposal,
But when it is said, it will dominate you;
Do not tell anybody your secrets,
Because he will disclose it everywhere;
Deposit your treasure to treasure-keepers,
Keep your secrets to yourself.

But as it is said before, both speech and silence have their own merits. Wherever you have to talk, being silent is not wise and the other way around. The poet says:

Two things spoil the wisdom,
Being silent when you are supposed to talk, and talking when you are supposed to be silent.

When Imam Zayn al-'Abidin (as) was asked which one was better: speech or silence, he answered:

**"لِكُلِّ وَاحِدٍ مِنْهُمَا آفَاتٌ فَإِذَا سَلِمَا مِنَ الْآفَاتِ فَالْكَلَامُ أَفْضَلُ
مِنَ السُّكُوتِ قِيلَ كَيْفَ ذَلِكَ يَا بَنَ رَسُولِ اللَّهِ؟ قَالَ لِأَنَّ اللَّهَ
عَزَّوَجَلَّ مَا بَعَثَ الْأَنْبِيَاءَ وَالْأَوْصِيَاءَ بِالسُّكُوتِ إِنَّمَا بَعَثَهُمْ بِالْكَلَامِ**

وَلَا اسْتُحِقَّتِ الْجَنَّةُ بِالسُّكُوتِ وَلَا اسْتُوجِبَتْ وَايَةٌ بِاللَّهِ بِالسُّكُوتِ
وَلَا تُوقِيَتِ النَّارُ بِالسُّكُوتِ إِنَّمَا ذَلِكَ كُلُّهُ بِالْكَلَامِ مَا كُنْتُ لِأَعْدِلَ
الْقَمَرَ بِالشَّمْسِ إِنَّكَ تَصِفُ فَضْلَ السُّكُوتِ بِالْكَلَامِ وَلَسْتَ تَصِفُ
فَضْلَ الْكَلَامِ بِالسُّكُوتِ "

"Both speech and silence have their harmful aspects. If both are free from harm, then speech is more excellent than silence". It was said: "How is that, O son of the Messenger of Allah"? Imam as-Sajjad (as) answered:

"Because Allah did not send His Prophets and (their) trustees with silence, but sent them with speech. Paradise is not deserved through silence, nor is God's guardianship merited through silence, nor is the Fire guarded against through silence. All this is possible only through speech. I do not place the sun on a level equal to the moon. You describe the excellence of silence through speech; you do not describe the excellence of speech through silence."⁷

2. Be Moderate, Do Not Squander, Do Not Be Jealous, Do Not Dissipate

It is a fact that man could not be indifferent towards his fellow creatures in the matter of finance, because all possessions are God's and we are His creature. Sometimes God sends one's livelihood without intermediary. But most often He obliges some people to carry out this task in order to shape their characters:

"وَأَنْفِقُوا مِمَّا رَزَقْنَاكُمْ"

"And spend out of what we have given you."⁸

But the topic is now the quantity and quality of donation. Some are so generous that they will give away what they have till they remain money-less. And some people go to the other extreme and are extremely miserly.

Islam reproaches both groups severely and orders moderation.

"وَلَا تَجْعَلْ يَدَكَ مَغْلُولَةً إِلَىٰ عُنُقِكَ وَلَا تَبْسُطْهَا كُلَّ الْبَسْطِ
فَتَقْعُدَ مَلُومًا مَّحْسُورًا"

"And do not make your hand to be shackled to your neck nor stretch it forth to the utmost limit of its stretching forth, lest you should afterwards sit down blamed, stripped off."⁹

And in Surah al-Furqan where the attributes of the true believers are enumerated, one of the specific characteristics of such people is considered to be moderation:

وَالَّذِينَ إِذَا أَنْعَمُوا لَمْ يُسْرِفُوا وَلَمْ يَقْتُرُوا وَكَانَ بَيْنَ ذَلِكَ قَوَامًا

"And they who when they spend are neither extravagant nor parsimonious, and keep between these the just mean."¹⁰

Imam 'Ali (as) talks about this principle of moderation and does not want us to be misers because by the expression "safeguard what you have in your hands" he means safeguarding it in moderation, neither parsimoniously nor extravagantly.¹¹

Thus, what Imam 'Ali (as) means is the following: what you have at your disposal, spend it moderately; never donate all you have and then beg others for some sustenance and humiliate yourself and become what the Holy Qur'an calls:

"..lest you should afterwards sit down blamed, stripped off."

Is There A Contrast Between Moderation And Donation?

Some assume that there is a contrast between moderation which is mentioned in the above Surahs and by Imam (as) and donation which is mentioned in different Islamic traditions as well as in the ninth verse of Hashr:

"وَيُؤْتِرُونَ عَلَىٰ أَنْفُسِهِمْ وَلَوْ كَانَ بِهِمْ خَصَاصَةٌ"

"And prefer them before themselves though poverty may afflict them" [Qur'an 59:9].

But attention to the location and timing of the descent of these Surahs and other evidences show us that there is no contrast between these two. It is because the Surahs and traditions which emphasize moderation are applicable to those situations where extravagance may destroy the life pattern of the one who spends out or weakens his family altogether. In such cases donation is prohibited and moderation is in order. Observing the principle of moderation might be a general principle which should be carried out by the mass or it may be a specific principle which should be carried out at specific times such as war, famine, unexpected events and the like. At these critical moments exalted people should do sacrifice and help others. This happened when Hashim, the great grandfather of the Prophet (S) donated all his possession at the time of famine. Another example of donation is the act of the Muslims at the dawn of Islam. They helped out the newly converted and the immigrants who had been deprived of all of their possessions. They, through their assistance, could protect Islam. Naturally these two commandments pertain to different situations and they do not contradict each other. Each one is carried out at specific occasions.

3. The Bitterness Of Cutting Short One's Hopes Is Better Than Asking People For Help

The essence of resorting to Allah and the lack of despair towards God's benevolence is that man, so far as possible, should not ask for people's help and should trust God only. Although such a position sometimes deprives people of material assets and adds to the possession of the proud ones and is sometimes accompanied with hardships, the honor and glory which are obtained in this way are not comparable to the humiliation of asking others for help.

The Qur'an interprets such a state of needlessness and resort to and reliance on God and not asking people for help as "cutting off hopes and not relying on others". This state is praised as it is shown in the following traditions:

Imam Sadiq (as) has said:

**"ثَلَاثَةٌ هِيَ فَخْرُ الْمُؤْمِنِ وَزِينَتُهُ فِي الدُّنْيَا وَالْآخِرَةِ: الصَّلَاةُ فِي
آخِرِ اللَّيْلِ وَيَأْسِهِ مِمَّا فِي أَيْدِي النَّاسِ وَوَلَايَةُ الْإِمَامِ مِنْ آلِ
مُحَمَّدٍ (ص)"**

"There are three things which are a pride and an ornament for a believer here and in the Hereafter: Prayer at the end of the night, cutting off hopes of what is in the hands of people and the wilaya (guardianship) of an Imam from the Household of Mohammad (as)".[12](#)

He has also said:

**"الْيَأْسُ مِمَّا فِي أَيْدِي النَّاسِ عِزُّ الْمُؤْمِنِ فِي دِينِهِ وَمُرُوتِهِ فِي
نَفْسِهِ وَشَرَفِهِ فِي دُنْيَاهُ وَعَظَمَتُهُ فِي أَعْيُنِ النَّاسِ وَجَلَالَتُهُ فِي
عَشِيرَتِهِ وَمَهَابَتِهِ عِنْدَ عِيَالِهِ وَهُوَ أَغْنَى النَّاسِ عِنْدَ نَفْسِهِ وَعِنْدَ
جَمِيعِ النَّاسِ"**

"Cutting off hopes in what people possess causes a believer's glory in his religion, sense of honour in soul, his nobility in his world, his greatness in the eyes of others, his loftiness in his tribe, and his prestige in his family. Such a person is the one most free of need in his own view and before all mankind."[13](#)

Imam 'Ali (as) is narrated to have said:

"الْغِنَى الْأَكْبَرُ الْيَأْسُ عَمَّا فِي أَيْدِي النَّاسِ"

"The greatest wealth is cutting off hopes of what is in the hands of people".[14](#)

4. Little Fortune Plus Chastity Is Better Than Big Fortune Which Is Gained Through Dishonesty

As we know assets and children are a means for man's troubles and trials.

"أَنْمَا أَمْوَالِكُمْ وَأَوْلَادُكُمْ فِتْنَةٌ" 594

"Your possessions and your children are only a trial".

As a whole, the wealthy people are more prone to committing sins.

"إِنَّ الْإِنْسَانَ لِرَبِّهِ لَكَنُفٍ" 595

"Man is most surely inordinate. Because he sees himself free from want".

In contrast, those who enjoy a simpler life, due to the shortage of possibilities, are less prone to the sins.

But those who have less wealth but are honest are better than those who have more wealth for the following reasons:

First, the honest ones enjoy magnanimity, ease of conscience and specific human values which the people of sins are deprived of.

Second, although the middle class think the wealthy ones as lucky, the masses who possess divine nature consider them unhealthy and dirty.

Third, the criterion for good and bad acts is not the transitory physical pleasures; rather those acts are considered valuable which may bring about Divine satisfaction and rewards in the Hereafter, which are ever-lasting.[15](#)

"وَإِنَّ جَهَنَّمَ لَمُحِيطَةٌ بِالْكَافِرِينَ" 597

"And most surely hell encompasses the unbelievers".

It is for this reason that Imam 'Ali (as) states:

"وَالْحِرْقَةُ مَعَ الْعِقَّةِ خَيْرٌ مِنَ الْغِنَى مَعَ الْفُجُورِ"

"An occupation (to earn one's living) accompanied by chastity is better than wealth accompanied by immorality".

Sa'di, the Iranian poet, says:

If you recognize the pleasure of the abandoning pleasures,
Never will you consider as pleasure the pleasure of soul;
Your bird of spirit will fly to Heavens,
If you free it from the cage of greed;
But you lack the patience of the phoenix,
You are like a sparrow in the claws of lusts;
You are worshipping your surface so much
That as far as you are living you will not get to the deep.
If an herb grows out of your humane nature
The flowers of the garden seems to you as if they were herbs
You would never buy the two worlds,
If you knew the value of what you have,
From the remaining part of life you will get nothing,
If you are decided to perform as you do now;
Tell me what better-than-life did you get
As you spent your life-time;
You may not buy one moment of life with a big land
Your life was given to you free of charge;
You sleep-walker walk as slowly as
I fear, you will miss your caravan;
My advice to you, brother, is
As far as you can, do not waste your time;
You should keep your tongue in your mouth like a shell
Then you could throw out pearls when time is ripe;
All his life, Sa'di underwent hardships
Till he got the fame that he enjoys now.

5. It Is Better For A Man To Keep His Secrets:

Keeping secrets is one of the ethical principles of Islam. It is emphasized in Islam. Sometimes disclosing secrets to others might lower the pain-load of the person. But for this act there are conditions: Firstly you should find trustworthy persons to disclose your secrets.

Imam 'Ali (as) says:

"لَا تُؤَدِّ عَن سِرِّكَ مَن لَا أَمَانَةَ لَهُ"

"Do not entrust your secret to one who is not trustworthy".[16](#)

Secondly, we should not even tell the whole secret to the trustworthy because on the one hand, that secret might somehow get revealed and hurt us. In this regard Imam 'Ali (as) has said:

"مَنْ كَتَمَ سِرَّهُ كَانَتْ الْخَيْرَةُ بِيَدِهِ وَكُلُّ حَدِيثٍ جَاوَزَ اثْنَيْنِ فَشَا"

"One who conceals his secrets has the choice in his hand. Any conversation that is between more than two persons will be revealed"[17](#)

Elsewhere Imam 'Ali (as) has said:

"سِرُّكَ أَسِيرُكَ فَإِنْ أَفْشَيْتَهُ صِرْتَ أَسِيرَهُ"

"Your secret is your captive. Once you reveal it, you become its captive."[18](#)

Imam 'Ali (as) has also said:

"سِرُّكَ سُورُوكَ إِنْ كَتَمْتَهُ وَإِنْ أَدَعَيْتَهُ كَانَ تُبُورَكَ"

"Your secret is your happiness as long as you conceal it. When you reveal it, it is your destruction."[19](#)

On the other hand, people are not always the same; a friend today might turn into a foe tomorrow. He might, then, use that secret as a club on your head and hurt you. Imam Sadiq (as) has said:

**"لَا تُطْلِعْ صَدِيقَكَ مِنْ سِرِّكَ إِلَّا عَلَى مَا لَوْ أَطْلَعْتَ عَلَيْهِ عَدُوَّكَ
لَمْ يَضُرَّكَ فَإِنَّ الصَّدِيقَ قَدْ يَكُونُ عَدُوًّا يَوْمًا مَا"**

"Do not disclose your secret to your friend except that much, which if you informed your enemy of it, it would not harm you. For one day your friend may become your enemy."[20](#)

Regarding this, our Iranian poet has said:

Never rely wholly on your friend,

Keep hidden your secret from your friend;

Some day your friend might turn against you,

He might turn and show you his animosity.

Naturally, nobody could be a better secret-keeper than a person himself. He is the most reliable person concerning his secret. Imam 'Ali (as) has said regarding this:

"صَدْرُكَ أَوْسَعُ لِسِرِّكَ"

"Your chest is the widest place to keep your secret".²¹

Sa'di, the Persian writer and poet, says:

Do not disclose to your friend your secrets. You do not know if he will turn against you. Do not inflict any damage over your foe; he might someday become your friend. If you wish a secret to remain secret, do not reveal it, even if he is reliable. Nobody is friendlier to your secret than you yourself.

It is better for you to remain silent than,
Telling a person your secret and asking him not to disclose it;
O wise man, block the water from its headspring,
Because when the spring over-flows, you cannot stop it;
You should not utter anything in private,
That cannot be said at any association of people.

6. There Are Many Who Strive For What Is Harmful For Themselves!

Trial and perseverance are the agents for material progress and for perfection:

"وَأَنْ لَيْسَ لِلْإِنْسَانِ إِلَّا مَا سَعَى" 604

"And that man shall have nothing but what he strives for".

Some people struggle in the right direction and in the God's path. And some others go astray.

They are deviated "Those who go astray" and are not in favor with Allah

"Not the path of those upon whom the wrath is brought down" [Qur'an 1:7]

It is clear that those who struggle for Allah may not superficially be affluent in this world; but because God will not leave any service to Him unanswered, such a person has gained a lot:

"وَمَنْ أَرَادَ الْآخِرَةَ وَسَعَى لَهَا سَعْيَهَا وَهُوَ مُؤْمِنٌ فَأُولَئِكَ كَانَ سَعْيُهُمْ مَشْكُورًا"

"And whoever desires the Hereafter and strives for it as he ought to strive and he is a believer; as for these, their striving shall surely be accepted."²²

But those who go astray and perform evil on the earth and commit wrong-doings may seem lucky ones in the eyes of some. But they are real losers since they have spoiled their Hereafter which is made of the actions we perform here. However much they strive, they will lose more. Furthermore, such people are usually punished in this world.

"وَإِذَا تَوَلَّى سَعَى فِي الْأَرْضِ لِيُفْسِدَ فِيهَا وَيُهْلِكَ الْحَرْثَ"

وَالنَّسْلَ وَاللَّهُ لَا يُحِبُّ الْفَسَادَ" 606

"And when he turns back, he runs along in the land that he may cause mischief in it and destroy the tilth and the stock, and Allah does not love mischief-making."

And as for those who assume they are doing good when actually are committing sins, the Qur'an says:

"قُلْ هَلْ نُنَبِّئُكُمْ بِالْأَخْسَرِينَ أَعْمَالًا الَّذِينَ ضَلَّ سَعِيَّهُمْ فِي
الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا وَهُمْ يَحْسَبُونَ أَنَّهُمْ يُحْسِنُونَ صُنْعًا أُولَئِكَ الَّذِينَ
كَفَرُوا بِآيَاتِ رَبِّهِمْ وَلِقَائِهِ فَحَبِطَتْ أَعْمَالُهُمْ فَلَا نُقِيمُ لَهُمْ يَوْمَ
الْقِيَامَةِ وَزَنًا"

"Say: Shall We inform you of the greatest losers in their deeds? These are they whose labor is lost in this world's life and they think that they are well versed in skill of the work of hand. These are they who disbelieve in the communications of their Lord and His meeting, so their deeds become null, and therefore We will not set up a balance for them on the day of resurrection."²³

With regards to the above information, we will understand what Imam 'Ali (as) means by the expression "Often one strives for what is harmful for oneself".

7. He Who Speaks Much Speaks Nonsense

Naturally, a person, who talks a lot, does not have enough time to weigh what he says. As a result, his speech is both baseless and wrong. The listener also might get bored and the speaker may lose his vigor.

Fortunately, in the Islamic traditions all these points are made clear.

Imam 'Ali (as) says:

"الإكثارُ إضجارٌ"

"Too much talking is annoying".²⁴

At another occasion, he has said:

"الإكثارُ يُزلُّ الحَكِيمَ وَيُملُّ الحَلِيمَ فَلَا تُكثِرْ فَتَضَجِرَ وَتُفِرطَ"

فَتَهْن "

"Too much talking causes a wise man to err and wearies the forbearing one. Thus, do not talk too much such that you trouble people and exceed the bounds, so you are held in little estimation."[25](#)

Imam 'Ali (as) has also said:

"إِيَّاكَ وَكَثْرَةَ الْكَلَامِ فَإِنَّهُ يُكْثِرُ الزَّلَلَ وَيُورِثُ الْمَلَلَ"

"Beware of talking too much because it increases your errors and causes weariness."[26](#)

He has also said:

"كَثْرَةُ الْكَلَامِ تُبَسِّطُ حَوَاشِيَهُ وَتَنْقُصُ مَعَانِيَهُ فَلَا يُرَى لَهُ أَمَدٌ وَلَا يَنْفَعُ بِهِ أَحَدٌ"

"Excessive speech augments the superfluities in it and diminishes its meaning. There is no end to it and none will benefit from it."[27](#)

He says:

"أَقِلِّلِ الْكَلَامَ تَأْمَنَ الْمَلَامَ"

"Lessen your speech so that you are safe from blame."[28](#)

8. Contemplation Is The Basis Of Insight

Wisdom distinguishes man from the beasts. Man uses wisdom to recognize the facts of creation and relations among them.

Thus thinking about similar events is to concentrate on a specific case. Just as if the conditions for sight are possible and there are no obstacles, seeing will naturally take place, in the same way, if the conditions for thinking are present and the obstacles are absent, insight and the understanding of conditions will naturally occur.[29](#)

It is for this reason that in the Islamic traditions contemplation is considered as an illuminating factor for wisdom.

On the other hand, in the Islamic traditions, it is said that we discover the unknown through our wisdom.

"بِالْفِكْرِ تَنْجَلِي عِيَاهِبُ الْأُمُورِ" 614

It is also said that contemplation broadens the spirit of realism in a man and increases his insight.

Finally, contemplation is considered not only as an act of worship but also one hour of it is considered equal to years of worship.

Imam 'Ali (as), in his book, points out the role of contemplation in the illumination of facts.

9. The Effects And Role Of Companionship

One of the factors which build up one's personality is companionship. Since human nature adopts other people's behaviors easily, when he accompanies the good ones, he is influenced by them. On the contrary, when he accompanies the bad ones, he becomes one of those. It is said:

Do not accompany the bad as far as you can,

Because human soul adopts other's nature;

Noah's son accompanied the bad ones,

He lost his Prophethood as a result.

The dog of the cave settlers for a few days only

Followed the good ones and became good.

Because of this characteristic of impressionability, companionship is emphasized in the Islamic traditions and the Qur'anic verses.

It is narrated from Solomon (as), the Prophet, who said,

"لَا تَحْكُمُوا عَلَى رَجُلٍ بِشَيْءٍ حَتَّى تَنْظُرُوا إِلَى مَنْ يُصَاحِبُ فَإِنَّمَا يُعْرَفُ الرَّجُلُ بِأَشْكَالِهِ وَاقْرَانِهِ وَيُنْسَبُ إِلَى أَصْحَابِهِ وَإِخْوَانِهِ"

"Do not pass judgment on a person without seeing those with whom he keeps company; for a man is only known through his likes and his companions, and is ascribed to his companions and brothers".[30](#)

Imam 'Ali (as) has said:

"مُجَالَسَةُ الْأَشْرَارِ تُورِثُ سُوءَ الظَّنِّ بِالْأَخْيَارِ وَمُجَالَسَةُ الْأَخْيَارِ تُلْحِقُ الْأَشْرَارَ بِالْأَخْيَارِ وَمُجَالَسَةُ الْأَبْرَارِ لِلْفُجَّارِ تُلْحِقُ الْأَبْرَارَ بِالْفُجَّارِ، فَمَنْ إِشْتَبَهَ عَلَيْكُمْ أَمْرُهُ وَلَمْ تَعْرِفُوا دِينَهُ فَانظُرُوا إِلَى خُلَطَائِهِ فَإِنْ كَانُوا أَهْلَ دِينِ اللَّهِ فَهُوَ عَلَى دِينِ اللَّهِ وَإِنْ كَانُوا عَلَى غَيْرِ دِينِ اللَّهِ فَلَا حَظَّ لَهُ مِنْ دِينِ اللَّهِ إِنَّ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ (ص) كَانَ يَقُولُ: مَنْ كَانَ يُؤْمِنُ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ فَلَا يُؤَاجِبُ كَافِرًا"

وَلَا يُخَالِطُنَّ فَاجِرًا وَمَنْ آخَى كَافِرًا أَوْ خَالَطَ فَاجِرًا كَانَ كَافِرًا فَاجِرًا"

"Companionship with evildoers causes an evil opinion about the good and companionship with the good links the evildoers to the good. The companionship of the virtuous with the transgressors links the virtuous to the transgressors. So those of you who are doubtful about someone and you do not know his religion, then look at his friends. If they are adherents of the religion of Allah, then he is on the religion of Allah. If they are on other than the religion of Allah, then he has no share in the religion of Allah. This is because the Messenger of Allah (as) used to say: One who believes in God and the Day of Resurrection should not fraternize with an infidel or associate with a transgressor. One who fraternizes with an infidel or associates with a transgressor is an infidel, a transgressor.³¹

And the Prophet (S) has also said:

"الْمَرْءُ عَلَى دِينِ خَلِيلِهِ فَلْيَنْظُرْ أَحَدَكُمْ مَنِ يُخَالِلُ"

"A man is of the same religion as his friend. Then every one of you be careful with whom you associate".³²

You first tell me who your friends are,
Then I'll tell you who you are.

This very feature of impressionability and companionship caused 'Uqbah b. Abi Mu'et to be influenced by the temptations of his old friend Ubayy ibn Khalaf to become infidel to Islam and to pour the intestines of an animal over the Prophet's head and to insult him and to spit on his sacred face. The Qur'an expresses his mental status at the Day of Resurrection through the following words:

"وَيَوْمَ يَعْصُ الظَّالِمُ عَلَى يَدَيْهِ يَقُولُ يَا لَيْتَنِي اتَّخَذْتُ مَعَ
الرَّسُولِ سَبِيلًا يَا وَيْلَتِي لَيْتَنِي لَمْ أَتَّخِذْ فُلَانًا خَلِيلًا لَقَدْ أَضَلَّنِي
عَنِ الذِّكْرِ بَعْدَ إِذْ جَاءَنِي وَكَانَ الشَّيْطَانُ لِلْإِنْسَانِ خَذُولًا"

"And the day when the unjust one shall bite his hands: O would that I had taken a way with the Apostle; O woe is me! Would that I had not taken such a one for a friend! Certainly he led me astray from the reminder after it had come to me; and the Shaitan fails to aid man"³³

Sa'di, concerning companionship, says:

In the bath one day I received a piece of fragrant clay from a friend,
I asked the clay if it was musk or ambergris
Because I was drunk with its odor

It said it used to be a worthless piece of clay

But it was companion to a flower

The perfect behavior of the company had influenced it

Or else it was still the same piece of clay.

It is for this reason that in the Qur'an and in traditions there is continuous persuasion over friendship with honest people and genuine God-believers. Making friends with unclean people is strictly prohibited. Two of these traditions are reported here:

Firstly: Imam 'Ali (as) has said

"إِحْدَرُ مُجَالِسَةَ قَرِينِ السُّوءِ فَإِنَّهُ يُهْلِكُ مُقَارَنَهُ وَيُرْدِي مُصَاحِبَهُ"

"Be on your guard against associating with an evil companion for he will destroy his companion and ruin his friend."[34](#)

Secondly, he said,

"جَالِسِ أَهْلَ الْوَرَعِ وَالْحِكْمَةِ وَأَكْثِرْ مُنَاقَشَتِهِمْ فَإِنَّكَ إِنْ كُنْتَ جَاهِلًا عَلِّمُوكَ وَإِنْ كُنْتَ عَالِمًا أَرْدِدْتَ عِلْمًا"

"Associate with people of God-fearingness and wisdom and have frequent discussions with them. If you are ignorant they will teach you, and if you are a scholar they will increase your knowledge."[35](#)

10. The Worst Food Is The Illegally Gained Food

It can not be denied that food is effective in building one's personality. It is because food changes into energy and sets our body in motion and is manifested in the form of action and work and would be permanent in the storage of the days in accordance with the principle of permanency of matter and energy. It will later manifest into an appropriate shape in the Day of Resurrection.

Thus, if food is lawful and legally-gained, it will manifest itself as a wholesome nutrient and it will bring about comfort and ease. If it is gained through illegal means it will bring about fire and will badly hurt man.

The Holy Qur'an talks about the swallows of the property of the orphans unjustly in the following manner:

**"إِنَّ الَّذِينَ يَأْكُلُونَ أَمْوَالَ الْيَتَامَى ظُلْمًا إِنَّمَا يَأْكُلُونَ فِي بُطُونِهِمْ
نَارًا وَسَيَصْلُونَ سَعِيرًا"**

"As for those who swallow the property of the orphans unjustly, surely they only

swallow fire into their bellies and they shall enter burning fire"[36](#)

And as for those who conceal the rights, the Holy Qur'an says:

**"إِنَّ الَّذِينَ يَكْتُمُونَ مَا أَنْزَلَ اللَّهُ مِنَ الْكِتَابِ وَيَشْتَرُونَ بِهِ ثَمَنًا
قَلِيلًا أُولَئِكَ مَا يَأْكُلُونَ فِي بُطُونِهِمْ إِلَّا النَّارَ وَلَا يُكَلِّمُهُمُ اللَّهُ
يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ وَلَا يُزَكِّيهِمْ وَلَهُمْ عَذَابٌ أَلِيمٌ"**

"Surely those who conceal any part of the Book that Allah has revealed and take for it a small price, they eat nothing but fire in their bellies, and Allah will not speak to them on the Day of resurrection, nor will He purify them, and they shall have a painful chastisement"[37](#)

As you will observe, for both swallows of the properties of orphans and the concealers of facts, through which they gain illegal profits, the fire of Hell is anticipated. Their actions are symbolized as fires and this hurts them in the Hereafter.

"وَوَجَدُوا مَا عَمِلُوا حَاضِرًا - وَمَنْ يَعْمَلْ مِثْقَالَ ذَرَّةٍ شَرًّا يَرَهُ"

"And what they had done they shall find present there".[38](#)

"And he who has done an atom's weight of evil shall see it"[39](#)

It is for this reason that the illegally gained property is severely reproached in the Islamic traditions, and it is supposed to be an agent against the acceptance of worship and prayers:

The great Prophet (S) has said:

**"مَنْ أَكَلَ لُقْمَةً حَرَامٍ لَمْ تُقْبَلْ لَهُ صَلَاةٌ أَرْبَعِينَ لَيْلَةً وَلَمْ تُسْتَجَبْ
لَهُ دَعْوَةٌ أَرْبَعِينَ صَبَاحًا وَكُلُّ لَحْمٍ يُنْبِتُهُ الْحَرَامُ فَالنَّارُ أَوْلَى بِهِ
وَإِنَّ اللَّقْمَةَ الْوَاحِدَةَ تُنْبِتُ اللَّحْمَ"**

"The prayers of one who takes a mouthful of forbidden food will not be accepted for forty nights and his supplications will not be accepted, either, for forty days. The Fire is worthy of every piece of flesh grown out of forbidden food, and (even) one mouthful of food is effective in the growth of flesh"[40](#)

The great Prophet (S), when answering someone who wanted his supplication to be accepted, said:

"طَهِّرْ مَاكَلَكَ. لَا تُدْخِلْ بَطْنَكَ الْحَرَامَ"

"Purify your food and do not let anything forbidden enter your stomach"[41](#)

In a tradition from Imam Sadiq (as) we read:

"مَنْ سَرَّهُ أَنْ تُسْتَجَابَ دَعْوَتُهُ فَلْيُطَيِّبْ مَكْسَبَهُ"

"One who wishes his supplication to be accepted, let his earnings be pure".[42](#)

There is another tradition saying:

"لَا يُحَبَّبُ عَنِّي دَعْوَةٌ إِلَّا دَعْوَةُ آكِلِ الْحَرَامِ"

"No supplication is veiled from Me, except the supplication of those who eat what is forbidden."[43](#)

We read in another tradition:

"مَنْ وَقَى شَرَّ لِقْلَقِهِ وَقَبْعِيهِ وَدَبْدَبِيهِ فَقَدِ وَجَبَتْ لَهُ الْجَنَّةُ"

"Heaven is incumbent on one who preserves himself from the evil of his tongue, his stomach and his sexual organs."[44](#)

Regarding the above-mentioned issues, some feeble-minded persons might think the worst kind of food is the one which hurts him physically. But such impairment is curable and its time is limited to this world alone. But the damage of the illegally gained food is related to man's soul and is not repairable most of the time and pertains to the hereafter which is eternal.

11. Injustice To The Weak Is The Worst Of Injustice

Among injustices, the injustice inflicted upon the weak people who lack the power to defend themselves, is the worst kind of tyranny. Injustice to such a person is only possible by one who has no manhood. Injustice to people who are capable enough to defend themselves is not of the same magnitude as the first one, but it is still very pernicious. This sort of injustice is reproached in the Islamic traditions:

Imam Baqir (as) has said: My Father, at his death, told me one piece of advice:

"يَا بُنَيَّ إِيَّاكَ وَظَلْمُ مَنْ لَا يَجِدُ عَلَيْكَ نَاصِرًا إِلَّا اللَّهَ"

"My son! Beware of inflicting any injustice upon the one who has no helper except God to stand against you"[45](#)

Imam 'Ali (as) was once asked: Which sin is the quickest in punishment for the sinner? He answered:

**"مَنْ ظَلَمَ مَنْ لَا نَاصِرَ لَهُ إِلَّا اللَّهُ وَجَاوَرَ النِّعْمَةَ بِالتَّقْصِيرِ
وَاسْتَطَالَ بِالْبَغْيِ عَلَى الْفَقِيرِ"**

"One who inflicts injustice upon a person who has no helper except God, who does not appreciate the assets; and one who oppresses the poor."[46](#)

The Prophet (S) is reported to have said:

"أَشَدُّ غَضَبُ اللَّهِ عَلَى مَنْ ظَلَمَ مَنْ لَا يَجِدُ نَاصِرًا غَيْرَ اللَّهِ"

"God's anger is severe toward a person who inflicts injustice on one who does not have any helper other than God."[47](#)

Imam Sadiq (as) is also reported to have said:

**"مَا مِنْ مَظْلَمَةٍ أَشَدُّ مِنْ مَظْلَمَةٍ لَا يَجِدُ صَاحِبَهَا عَلَيْهَا عَوْنًا إِلَّا
اللَّهُ عَزَّوَجَلَّ"**

"No injustice is worse than the one whose sufferer has no helper against it but God"[48](#)

12. Sometimes Showing Severity Is Better Than Being Lenient

Sometimes it is advisable to be severe instead of kind and lenient. An example is when a child or a student take advantage of the kindness of the father or the teacher and do not take a lesson. In such a case the child or the student should be treated severely. Another example is when the mass of people take advantage of the kindness of the country officials and start weakening the government through participation of revolt. In such a case of mutiny, severity is necessary. This aggression is in fact a kind of tolerance.

When we observe that the Prophet (S) and Imam 'Ali (as), although being kind and amicable, used aggression towards the mutiny-makers, or our Imam, in struggle against

trouble-makers was severe, we will notice that these actions were to keep the independence of the community.

For this reason, Imam (as) has said in his letter:

"إِذَا كَانَ الرَّفْقُ حَرْقًا كَانَ الْخَرَقُ رَفْقًا"

"Where gentleness is considered to be roughness, there roughness is gentleness".

13. Sometimes The Remedy Is The Disease And The Disease Is The Remedy

The above title simply means that at times something which on appearance looks hazardous might be useful or vice versa. Thus appearance should not attract our attention and should not make us happy or unhappy.

14. Be Aware Of The Intention Of Those Who Give Advice

It is assumed that those who sometimes do not give sincere advice are not sincere and the sincere advisors are benevolent. But this should not lead us to accept wholly what the advisors try to tell us or to reject what others tell us.

This is because sometimes we behave in contrast to what we generally believe: i.e. one who is not considered to be a sincere advisor might be benevolent and a well-wisher, and a sincere counselor might deceive us. A wise man listens critically to them. It is for this reason that Imam 'Ali (as) emphasizes:

"وَرُبَّمَا نَصَحَ غَيْرُ النَّاصِحِ وَعَشَّ الْمُسْتَنْصِحُ"

"Sometimes one who is not a sincere counselor gives sincere advice and the one considered to be a sincere counselor gives insincere advice".

This teaching is in harmony with the instructions of the Holy Qur'an which says:

"فَبَشِّرْ عِبَادِي الَّذِينَ يَسْتَمِعُونَ الْقَوْلَ فَيَتَّبِعُونَ أَحْسَنَهُ أُولَئِكَ الَّذِينَ هَدَاهُمُ اللَّهُ وَأُولَئِكَ هُمْ أُولُوا الْأَلْبَابِ"

"Therefore give good news to my servants: Those who listen to the word then follow the best of it; those are they whom Allah has guided, and those it is who are the men of understanding"⁴⁹

15. Reliance On Wishes Is Foolishness

As we have already seen, wishes are essentials of man's life. If he did not have these wishes, he could not survive.

But to live in the world of fantasy and to live a life of dreams will not do because the materialization of dreams needs hard work and trial. They say "Three things wear out the intellect: extensive wishes, giving quick replies (without thought) and excessive laughter"⁵⁰ It seems that the topic of Abu Tammam's poem is related to this part of Imam 'Ali's (as) statement.⁵¹ Abu Tammam says:

"مَنْ كَانَ مَرَعَى عَزْمِهِ وَهُمُومِهِ رَوْضُ الْأَمَانِي لَمْ يَزَلْ مَهْزُولًا"

"A person who pastures his determination and resolution in the meadows of wishes will always be weak."

Imam 'Ali (as) says:

"إِيَّاكَ وَالْإِتِّكَالُ عَلَى الْمُنَى فَإِنَّهَا بَضَائِعُ النُّوكَى"

"Beware of relying on wishes for they are the capital of fools."

16. Intellect Is The Safeguarding Of Experiences

In the lexicon the word intellect ('*aq*l) means understanding. Sometimes it is used as an infinitive:

وَمَا يَعْقِلُهَا إِلَّا الْعَالِمُونَ

"And none understand them but the learned"⁵²

This word may sometimes be used in the nominal form. In that case it means: "The power which distinguishes good from bad, right from wrong, and truth from falsehood".⁵³ Perhaps this second meaning is meant by the Prophet (S) when he said:

"وَمَا خَلَقَ اللَّهُ خَلْقًا أَكْرَمَ عَلَيْهِ مِنَ الْعَقْلِ"

"God has not created any creature nobler than the intellect"⁵⁴

The word 'aql (intellect) is sometimes used in the sense of 'iqal which is a band by which a camel is fettered. Thus, 'aql or intellect is in fact a power which hinders man from going astray. When Imam Sadiq (as) was asked what the intellect was, he answered:

"مَا عُيِدَ بِهِ الرَّحْمَنُ وَاکْتَسَبَ بِهِ الْجَنَانُ"

"The intellect is a power through which man worships God and by which he earns paradise".

Then he was asked: What was in Mu'awiya, then? He answered:

**"تِلْكَ التَّكْرَاءُ تِلْكَ الشَّيْطَانَةُ وَهِيَ شَبِيهَةٌ بِالْعَقْلِ وَلَيْسَتْ
بِالْعَقْلِ"**

"That was cunning. That was devilry. It resembles intellect, but it is not intellect."[55](#)

And wherever God reproaches people because they lack intellect, the first meaning is meant:

"صُمُّ بَكْمٌ عُمِيٌّ فَهْمٌ لَّا يَعْقِلُونَ"

"Deaf, dumb and blind, so they do not understand"[56](#)

And wherever man, due to lack of intellect, is not considered to be obliged to carry out an action, the second sense is meant.[57](#) Al-Kafi mentions 'aql, (intellect) as the opposite of *jahl*, (ignorance), and "Kitab al-'aql wa'l jahl" (The book of the intellect and ignorance) is the title of one of the sections of the book, where the first sense is meant and not 'aql in contrast to *junun* (madness).[58](#)

Man can comprehend some facts naturally; facts such as the following: whole is greater than each one of its parts; the combination of two contradictory things is impossible; justice is good, and the like. Man can also get some facts through experimentation: facts such as the following: the burning act of fire, the wetness of rain, the instability of injustice, etc.

Concerning this, Imam 'Ali (as) has said:

**"الْعَقْلُ عَقْلَانِ: عَقْلُ الطَّبْعِ وَعَقْلُ التَّجْرِبَةِ وَكِلَاهُمَا يُؤَدِّي إِلَى
الْمَنْفَعَةِ"**

"There are two kinds of intellect: innate intellect and intellect through experience. Both of

these lead man towards benefits."[59](#)

Imam 'Ali (as) has also said:

"العقلُ عقْلان: مَطْبُوعٌ وَمَسْمُوعٌ وَلَا يَنْفَعُ مَسْمُوعٌ إِذَا لَمْ يَكُ
مَطْبُوعٌ كَمَا لَا يَنْفَعُ ضَوْءُ الشَّمْسِ وَضَوْءُ الْعَيْنِ مَمْنُوعٌ"

"There are two kinds of intellect: innate and what is acquired through hearing. The intellect acquired through hearing is of no use when there is no innate disposition for it, just as sunlight is of no use when there is no eyesight."[60](#)

Concerning the fact that the innate, natural intellect increases with experiences, Imam 'Ali (as) has said:

"العقلُ عَرِيْزَةٌ تَزِيدُ بِالْعِلْمِ وَالتَّجَارِبِ"

"Intellect is an innate quality that increases through knowledge and experience."[61](#)

With regards to the above topics, what Imam 'Ali (as) means by 'aql in his expression is "the experimental and acquired intellect" and not theoretical intellect. And by experience he means the acquisition of partial samples in order to reach to a general conclusion; examples are: injustice is not eternal; the government of righteousness is steady; Samqunia is a laxative, etc.[62](#)

17. The Best Experiences

As it was discussed previously, experience is one of the ways to gain information in this world. Gaining knowledge and experience helps us to guide our lives in the right path. Imam 'Ali (as) says:

"وَأَخَيْرَ مَا جَرَّبْتَ مَا وَعَظَكَ"

"The best of your experiences is that which teaches you a lesson."

The Prophet (S) also has said: "A believer is not bitten twice from the same hole"[63](#)
It is for this reason that the Holy Qur'an, after narrating the stories of the ancient nations, wants us to take our lessons from them: "**In their histories there is certainly a lesson for men of understanding**"[64](#)

Imam 'Ali (as) commands people to take lessons from the previous instructive events:

**"فَاتَّعِظُوا عِبَادَ اللَّهِ بِالْعِبَرِ النَّوَافِعِ وَاعْتَبِرُوا بِالْآيِ السَّوَاطِعِ
وَازْدَجِرُوا بِالنُّذْرِ الْبَوَالِغِ وَانْتَفِعُوا بِالذِّكْرِ وَالْمَوَاعِظِ"**

"O servants of God, take warning from beneficial admonitions. Take lessons from the clear signs, restrain yourselves (from sin) through far-reaching warnings and benefit through reminder and exhortations."[65](#)

Imam 'Ali (as) has also said:

**"مَنْ أَحْكَمَ مِنَ التَّجَارِبِ سَلِمَ مِنَ الْعَوَاطِبِ, مَنْ غَنِيَ عَنِ
التَّجَارِبِ غَمِيَ عَنِ الْعَوَاقِبِ"**

"One who learns well from experiences is safe from misfortunes; and one who does not care about experiences cannot anticipate the consequences"[66](#)

He has also said:

(التَّجْرِبَةُ تُثْمِرُ الْإِعْتِبَارَ)

"The fruit of experiences is learning lessons"[67](#)

He has said elsewhere:

"مَنْ حَفِظَ التَّجَارِبَ أَصَابَتْ أَفْعَالُهُ"

"The deeds of one who safeguards his experiences will be correct."[68](#)

But, unfortunately, as Imam 'Ali (as) says, the number of those who take lessons is few.

"مَا أَكْثَرَ الْعِبَرَ وَقَلَّ الْإِعْتِبَارُ"

"How great the number of cases for taking lessons is and how small is the number of those who learn lessons!"[69](#)

18. Taking Advantage Of Opportunities

The proper conditions are not always ready for man. But once in a while there are good opportunities available to him. Later on, they might not exist any more. The Prophet (S) has said in this regard:

"إِنَّ لِرَبِّكُمْ فِي أَيَّامٍ دَهْرَكُمْ نَفَحَاتٌ أَلَا فَتَعَرَّضُوا لَهَا"

"In the days of your life, there are fragrant breezes (of mercy) from your Lord. Take yourselves forward to benefit from them."[70](#)

In this relation, the Prophet (S) is reported to have said,

**"مَنْ فُتِحَ لَهُ بَابٌ مِنَ الْخَيْرِ فَلْيَنْتَهِزْهُ فَإِنَّهُ لَا يُدْرَى مَتَى يُغْلَقُ
عَنْهُ"**

"One to whom a door of good is opened up, let him seize the opportunity since it is not known when it will be closed to him."[71](#)

Of course the chances are as unstable as the clouds in the sky. You should seize them or else you will lose them for ever.

"إِنْ تَهَزُّوا فُرْصَ الْخَيْرِ فَانْهَارَتْ مَرَّ السَّحَابِ"

"Seize opportunities for good since they pass away like clouds".[72](#)

"تَرِكُ الْفُرْصَ عُصَصٌ"

"Losing opportunities creates sorrows".[73](#)

The Prophet (S) told Abu Dharr:

**"إِغْتَنِمْ خَمْسًا قَبْلَ خَمْسٍ: شَبَابَكَ قَبْلَ هَرَمِكَ وَصِحَّتَكَ قَبْلَ
سَقَمِكَ وَغِنَاكَ قَبْلَ فَقْرِكَ وَقِرَاعَكَ قَبْلَ شُغْلِكَ وَحَيَاتَكَ قَبْلَ**

مَوْتِكَ

"Take advantage of five things prior to five other things: your youth prior to your age, your health prior to your sickness, your wealth prior to your poverty, your leisure prior to your occupation, and your life prior to your death." [74](#)

It is for this reason that Imam 'Ali (as) in his letter gives the following statement:

"بَادِرِ الْفُرْصَةَ قَبْلَ أَنْ تَكُونَ عُصَّةً"

"Hasten to avail of opportunity before it becomes grief."

Sa'di, the Persian poet, says:

O young man obey your God today,
Because tomorrow, when you are old, you may not act as a young man;
The world stole from me days,
Each day of which was followed by a Qadr night,
Alas I did not appreciate the value of that day,
Now I start realizing, which is too late;
Due to my ignorance I lost the clear water,
Now I have to carry out Tayamum for my prayers;
When you are in the middle part of youth,
Your night is over, stop sleeping;
Now you try when the water is up to your waist,
Not at the time when flood passes over you head;
Do not waste your life using words like alas;
Because opportunity is dear and time is short.

19. Not Every Seeker Attains (His Desire) Nor Does Every Absent One Return

Sometime a man notices that he has not reached his goals in life. This makes him unhappy. He might even seclude himself from the community. He might then become a pessimist. Imam 'Ali (as) wants to, through examples, show us that this phenomenon is very commonplace. It is not you alone who have not reached your goals: there are other people like you. Should they be sad and depressed like you? Or should they circle the difficulty and find a way out? It is clear that this is the right way. You might perhaps not have reached your objectives. But is the system of the world established in such a way that everyone should succeed? Should every traveler return home? Since this is the case, you have to be content of your God-given fate and avoid being crushed by depression and disappointment. You have to use your means to compensate for what you have lost.

Regretting the past and worrying about future are two mental disturbances which inflict many people and have put hurdles on their right ways of life. This problem will be solved through a right planning, however.

Imam as-Sadiq (as) has said:

**"الايامُ ثلاثة: فيومٌ لا يُدرَكُ ويومٌ الناسُ فيه فينبغي أن يغتيموه
وعداً إنما فيه أمله"**

"Life consists of three days: a day which has passed, never to return; the present day in which people are living, of which they should take advantage; and tomorrow, in which one's hopes lie."[75](#)

Concerning the avoidance of depression and worry about the past and future Imam 'Ali (as) says:

**"لا تُشعر قلبك الهم على ما فات فيشغلك عن الاستعداد بما
هو آت"**

"Do not distress yourself about what has passed since it will occupy you from preparation for what is to come."[76](#)

He has also said:

**"لا تحمل هم يومك الذي لم يأتك على يومك الذي قد أتاك
عصاة"**

"Do not impose the anxiety about your tomorrow on your today out of grief."[77](#)

Elsewhere Imam 'Ali (as) has said:

"وما فاتك منها ولا تأس عليه جزعاً"

"Do not be grieved over what has escaped you of this world."[78](#)

It is also said by Imam 'Ali (as):

"ولا تحمل هم سنيتك على هم يومك كفاك كل يوم ما فيه"

"Do not impose the anxieties for the year ahead on the anxiety of today. What each day holds is sufficient for you."[79](#)

A poet has written:
Why should the earth-dwellers,
Refer to the past events, always;
Why are they sad because of the past events?
Why should they cry on the present happenings?
They have nothing to do except complaining,
They would not take lessons from their past;
One, in his heyday of youth,
Regrets over his childhood;
He is the most handsome,
But frowns and gets an angry face;
How nice the past childhood was, he says,
Be happy that that time has returned;
The other has gone through the youth,
And has found it extremely rough;
He has lost vigor, wisdom and intelligence,
And he has made it his motto to talk on youth;
Where are the days of strength?
So that I could once again engage in love;
What I have seen among people,
Nobody thinks about now, I found;
Everybody is under the influence of illusions,
Nobody had anything except sorrow;
They don't know that,
The present will become past pretty soon.

20. Destroying the Provisions For The Hereafter And The Resurrection Day Is A Great Loss

Those who envisage life only as it is in this world and do not consider the other world, see man's life and death as these pertain to the world of beasts and which are materially determined.[80](#)

The act of providing for the provisions for the next world might seem vague and at times meaningless to these people.[81](#)

But those who do not limit life span only to the life here and are of the conviction that we have transformed from material phase to the animal phase and to the human state and finally enter a phase called the Hereafter or Resurrection Day. These stages were carried out without our consent, however. In the Hereafter we have to harvest what we have planted in this world. And if such a day did not exist, first the creation would be aimless; secondly, the lack of such a day is in contradiction with God's justice; thirdly, the unstable nature of this world shows that

"إِنَّ السَّاعَةَ آتِيَةٌ أَكَادُ أَخْفِيهَا لِتُجْزَى كُلُّ نَفْسٍ بِمَا تَسْعَى"

"Surely the hour is coming. I am about to make it manifest so that every soul may be rewarded as it strives".[82](#)

Therefore, if a person destroys the provisions of this hazardous way and thinks of life as it is here in this world, he will not enjoy a true life even here because he has disobeyed God.⁸³ Since the Resurrection is inevitable and everybody should see the consequences of his actions in this world, therefore, as Imam 'Ali (as) has warned us, we should not engage in destroying the provisions for Hereafter by wrong deeds and holding wrong ideology. This would be a great loss.

21. Every Affair Has An Outcome

Definitely each act has an outcome. Therefore we should act in such a way as to get good results. This is only possible through the following ways: First, before engaging in an act, see the outcome: if it is good, do it; or else, leave it. A man came up to the Prophet (S) and asked him to offer him some pieces of advice. The Prophet (S) asked him three times if he would carry out what he advised him on. The answer was positive. The Prophet (S) then said:

**"أَوْصِيكَ إِذَا أَنْتَ هَمَمْتَ بِأَمْرٍ فَتَدَبَّرْ عَاقِبَتَهُ فَإِنْ يَكُ رُشْدًا
فَامْضِهِ وَإِنْ يَكُ غِيًّا فَانْتِهِ عَنْهُ"**

"I advise you, that when you intend to do something, reflect on its outcome. If it is in the right direction, continue with it; but if it is on the path of error, leave it".⁸⁴

Second, select the right path of action since the Holy Qur'an says:

**"وَلَيْسَ الْبِرُّ بِأَنْ تَأْتُوا الْبُيُوتَ مِنْ ظُهُورِهَا وَلَكِنَّ الْبِرَّ مَنِ اتَّقَى
وَأْتُوا الْبُيُوتَ مِنْ أَبْوَابِهَا"**

"..It is not righteousness that you should enter houses at their backs, but righteousness is this that one should guard against evil; and go into the houses by their doors..."⁸⁵

Jabir has reported from Imam Baqir (as) his saying:

"وَيَنْبَغِي أَنْ تَأْتُوا الْأُمُورَ مِنْ جِهَاتِهَا أَيُّ الْأُمُورِ كَانَ"

"It is advisable to enter affairs, whatever they may be, through their (right) directions."⁸⁶

On the one hand, the Holy Qur'an enumerates the good things⁸⁷ which await the true believers⁸⁸ (those who guard against evil). On the other hand, the Qur'an commands people not to be rejecters⁸⁹, guilty,⁹⁰ mischief-makers⁹¹ and unjust.⁹²

Imam Sadiq (as) says:

**"إِنْ أَرَدْتَ أَنْ يُخْتَمَ بِخَيْرٍ عَمَلُكَ حَتَّى تَقْبِضَ وَأَنْتَ فِي أَفْضَلِ
الاعمالِ فَعَظِّمِ لِلَّهِ حَقَّهُ أَنْ تَبْذِلَ نِعَمَائِهِ فِي مَعْاصِيهِ وَأَنْ تَغْتَرَّ
بِحِلْمِهِ عَنكَ وَأَكْرَمِ كُلِّ مَنْ وَجَدْتَهُ يَذْكُرُنَا أَوْ يَنْتَجِلُ بِمَوَدَّتِنَا"**

"If you wish to seal your acts with good in such a way that at the time of death you have a good record of good deeds, then magnify the rights of Allah such that you do not use His blessings in disobedience to Him, you do not consider yourself strong because of His forbearance towards you, and honour all those whom you find mentioning us or professing love for us."[93](#)

Third, the selection of right ways and the carrying out of good deeds should be continuous all the way through the life. There are some, like Talha, Zubayr, Hassan b. Thabit, Usama b. Zayd, and others who selected the right way at first but later disregarded their obligations and turned into the losers.

In contrast, there have been people who were wrong-doers throughout their life but suddenly, due to the right decision-making, became the fortunate ones, such as Hurr b. Yazeed ar-Riyahi, and Zuhayr Ibn Qayn.[94](#)

For this reason, the outcome is of crucial significance. Jesus Christ (as) has said in this connection:

**"إِنَّ النَّاسَ يَقُولُونَ: إِنَّ الْبِنَاءَ بِأَسَاسِهِ وَأَنَا لَا أَقُولُ لَكُمْ كَذَلِكَ،
قَالُوا: فَمَاذَا تَقُولُ يَا رُوحَ اللَّهِ؟ قَالَ: بِحَقِّ أَقُولُ لَكُمْ إِنَّ آخِرَ
حَجَرٍ يَضَعُهُ الْعَامِلُ هُوَ الْأَسَاسُ"**

"People say: The value of a building is determined by its foundation. But I do not say that to you". They asked him: "What do you say, Spirit of Allah?" He said: "By the truth, I say to you that the last stone which the builder puts on the building is the foundation." The narrator says "What is meant is the end-product"[95](#)

The Prophet (S) is also reported to have said:

**"مَنْ أَحْسَنَ فِيمَا بَقِيَ مِنْ عُمرِهِ لَمْ يُؤَاخِذْ بِمَا مَضَى مِنْ دَنِيهِ
وَمَنْ أَسَاءَ فِيمَا بَقِيَ مِنْ عُمرِهِ أُخِذَ بِالْأَوَّلِ وَالْآخِرِ"**

"One who does good deeds for the remaining part of his life shall not suffer for the sins

previously performed. But one who does evil in what remains of his life, will be punished both for his earlier and his later sins."[96](#)

The Prophet (S) is also reported to have said:

"وَلَاكُمُ الْعَمَلُ خَوَاتِمُهُ"

"The basis for the action (to be right or wrong) is its end."[97](#)

However, it is us who determine the results of our action.

22. What Is Destined For You Will Soon Come To You

All events of this world, including the sustenance and livelihood of all creatures, are predetermined by Allah:

"وَإِنْ مِنْ شَيْءٍ إِلَّا عِنْدَنَا خَزَائِنُهُ وَمَا نُنزِّلُهُ إِلَّا بِقَدَرٍ مَعْلُومٍ"

"And there is not a thing but with Us are the treasures of it, and We do not send it down but in a known measure".[98](#)

And Allah will determine each creature's sustenance in accordance with its capacities. Since the gaining of livelihood through prohibited ways entails mental and spiritual losses, we are not allowed to engage in greed, injustice, aggression, theft or the like to achieve our objectives.

Imam 'Ali (as) prohibits us from gaining possessions through illegal and forbidden means and warns us that the predetermined sustenance will keep a person from engaging in unlawful acts.

Thus, the traditions and the verses of the Holy Qur'an which deal with the predetermination of livelihood are a hurdle on the way of the greed of the world-mongers who do every sort of injustice to attain what they wish for. These verses and traditions warn such people not to struggle in vain. If they go through legal ways, they will receive what they need.[99](#)

And the Holy Qur'an says:

"وَمَا مِنْ دَابَّةٍ فِي الْأَرْضِ إِلَّا عَلَى اللَّهِ رِزْقُهَا وَيَعْلَمُ مُسْتَقَرَّهَا
وَمُسْتَوْدَعَهَا كُلٌّ فِي كِتَابٍ مُبِينٍ"

"And there is no animal in the earth but on Allah is the sustenance of it, and He knows its resting place and its depository; all things are in a manifest book"[100](#)

23. Often the Little (Wealth) Becomes More Abundant Than What Is Much

A possession gained through unlawful and incorrect means may be much but has evil consequences. Such unlawfully-gained assets are usually short-lived for one thing and are a burden over the shoulders of the possessor. But lawfully-gained assets may be small but they have pleasant consequences.

Imam al-Kadhim (as) says:

"إِنَّ الْحَرَامَ لَا يَنْمَى وَإِنْ نَمَى لَمْ يُبَارَكْ لَهُ فِيهِ وَمَا أَنْفَقَهُ لَمْ يُؤْجَرَ عَلَيْهِ وَمَا خَلَفَهُ كَانَ زَادَهُ إِلَى النَّارِ"

"Unlawfully-gained assets will not increase in volume and value. Even if they do, they will not last. If one gives charity from such possessions, he will not be rewarded. (This, in fact, is another crime). Whatever one leaves behind of such illegal assets, will be provisions for one's Hell fire"[101](#)

Imam as-Sadiq (as) has said:

"مَنْ جَمَعَ مَالًا مِنْ مَهَاوِشِ أَذْهَبَهُ اللَّهُ فِي نَهَائِرٍ"

"A person who gains wealth through unlawful means, God will take it away from him in places of destruction."[102](#)

Abu 'Uthman says: I knew a father who loved one of his sons, but hated the other. At the time of his death he endowed all his possession, which was more than two hundred thousand Dirhams, to his beloved son and deprived the other one of his possession. The man was an oil-seller. After the death of both the brothers we saw the children of the rich brother dependent on the children of the poor brother and being given alms by them.[103](#)

Each one of us comes across individuals who have amassed huge amounts of wealth, but who have become wretched. On the other hand, we know individuals who started from nothing but have been successful in life. History is filled with such events.

24. There Is No Good In An Ignoble Helper Or A Friend Who Is Suspect (Whose Sincerity Is Suspect)

One of the benefits of friendship is to get help in solving problems. It is for this reason that Imam 'Ali (as) orders us:

"عَلَيْكُمْ بِالْإِخْوَانِ فَإِنَّهُمْ عُدَّةٌ فِي الدُّنْيَا وَالْآخِرَةِ إِلَّا تَسْتَمْعُونَ"

إِلَى قَوْلِهِ تَعَالَى: فَمَا لَنَا مِنْ شَافِعِينَ وَلَا صَدِيقٍ حَمِيمٍ"

'Strengthen your bonds of friendship with your brothers in religion, for they are a provision both here and in the Hereafter. Have you not heard that Allah in the Holy Qur'an reports from the sinners who say:

"So we have no intercessors, nor a true friend." (26:100-101)¹⁰⁴

Imam 'Ali (as) describes a friend as the closest relative and the best agent for prosperity both here and in the Hereafter:

"الصَّدِيقُ أَقْرَبُ الْأَقْرَابِ - الصَّدِيقُ أَفْضَلُ الدُّخْرَيْنِ" 690

"The companionship of one who does not associate with you as a helper against your self, will have evil consequences, if you but knew!"

**"مَنْ لَا يَصْحَبُكَ مُعِينًا عَلَى نَفْسِكَ فَصُحْبَتُهُ وَبَالٌ عَلَيْكَ إِنْ
عَلِمْتَ" 691**

For this reason, the great Prophet (S) has said:

"مَنْ لَمْ تَنْفَعْ بِدِينِهِ وَدُنْيَاهُ فَلَا خَيْرَ لَكَ فِي مُجَالَسَتِهِ"

*"There is no good in the companionship of one whose religion and world is not of any benefit."*¹⁰⁵

It is for this reason that Imam 'Ali (as) in his letter has emphasized:

"لَا خَيْرَ فِي مُعِينٍ مُهِينٍ وَلَا فِي صَدِيقٍ ظَنِينٍ"

"There is no good in an ignoble helper or in a friend who is (whose sincerity is) suspect."

25. Patiently Benefit From Your Time

When life conditions are proper for us, we should patiently benefit from it and we should not overtax ourselves. Some of the self-satisfied individuals would go very fast when they

are at the zenith of fame.

We may easily find examples in history. The communist government of Russia (USSR) and the Baath party and Saddam Hussain in Iraq clearly show that exerting pressure on people lead to the poverty and wretchedness of people.

But the wise people continuously try to recognise the capacity and potentials of their time and patiently benefit from them. Regarding this, Imam 'Ali (as) has said:

"الْحَازِمُ مَنْ دَارَى زَمَانَهُ"

"A prudent man is he who adapts to his time."

Imam 'Ali (as) emphasizes in his letter:

"سَاهِلِ الدَّهْرَ مَا دَلَّ لَكَ قُعُودُهُ"

"As long as time is in your grasp, take your share of it".

Of course, this act of tolerance towards time, even when the conditions are not favorable, like the twenty-five-year stay of Imam 'Ali (as) at home or the ten-year stay of the second Imam (as) at home or the cease fire between Iran and Iraq by Imam Khomeini (as) is very hard to digest, but this tolerance and prudence is necessary at times.

26. Do Not Put Anything At Risk Hoping For Something More Than It.

Man sometimes, in the hope to gain more profits, engages in some actions the results of which are not clear to him.

But it should be observed that man's actions should be based on reason and wise probability is part of man's procedure to safeguard higher benefits. It is for this reason that man should not lose his capital for the sake of assumed improbable benefits.

There are some people who do not make use of prudence and get themselves involved in hazardous actions. For instance, without considering the status of a merchandise item in business circles, he purchases those goods in the hope to gain more profits. In this way the greedy merchant easily goes bankrupt.

Imam 'Ali (as) means by an adventurer merchant the one who keeps his capital but in order to get more profits, he engages in wise transactions. But when Imam 'Ali (as) says:

"وَلَا تُخَاطِرِ بِشَيْءٍ رَجَاءَ أَكْثَرِ مِنْهُ"

"Do not put anything at risk hoping for something more than it".

he means the greed-motivated actions of the businessman which are harmful for him.

27. Do Not Be Stubborn

Being stubborn is one of the most hateful traits of human being. The Holy Qur'an talks about the disclaimers of rightfulness, who suffer from obstinacy; the Qur'an says: These people insist on their wrong ways ignoring the blessings they enjoy:

**"وَلَوْ رَحِمْنَاهُمْ وَكَشَفْنَا مَا بِهِمْ مِنْ ضُرٍّ لَلْجُودِ فِي طُغْيَانِهِمْ
يَعْمَهُونَ وَلَقَدْ أَخَذْنَاهُمْ بِالْعَذَابِ فَمَا اسْتَكَانُوا لِرَبِّهِمْ وَمَا
يَتَضَرَّعُونَ"**

"And if We show mercy to them and remove the distress they have, they would persist in their inordinacy, blindly wandering on. And We overtook them with chastisement, but they were not submissive to their Lord, nor do they humble themselves."[106](#)

Concerning these obstinate people, the Holy Qur'an says:

**"أَمَّنْ هَذَا الَّذِي يَرْزُقُكُمْ إِنْ أَمْسَكَ رِزْقَهُ بَلْ لَجُّوا فِي عُتُوٍّ
وَنُفُورٍ"**

"Or who is it that will give you sustenance if He should withhold His sustenance? Nay! They persist in disdain and aversion"[107](#)

Imam 'Ali (as) says:

"اللَّجَاجَةُ تَسْلِبُ الرَّأْيَ"

"Obstinacy deprives man of correct judgment".[108](#)

At another case, he considers obstinacy as an agent for destruction:

"إِيَّاكَ أَنْ تَطِيحَ بِكَ مَطِيَّةُ اللَّجَاجِ"

"Beware that the stubborn mount should run away with you" (Avoid obstinacy because it will destroy you).[109](#)

In a letter which he has written to people in different cities explaining what took place in Siffin, Imam 'Ali (as) talks about the nastiness of obstinacy in the following words:

"وَمَنْ لَجَّ وَتَمَادَى فَهُوَ الرَّكِيسُ الَّذِي رَانَ اللَّهُ عَلَى قَلْبِهِ وَصَارَتْ
دَائِرَةُ السَّوْءِ عَلَى رَأْسِهِ"

"One who is obstinate and persists (in straying from the right path) is one who has turned himself backwards (to disbelief), whose heart Allah has covered and he has become liable to evil calamities."[110](#)

Sometimes this state of obstinacy is so great that the stubborn person, in order not to yield to justice, asks God for the descent of divine chastisement so that he may get destroyed, but he is not ready to hear the truth. In the occasion of the descent of the holy Surah of Ma'arij we read: When the great Prophet (S) of Islam introduced Imam 'Ali (as) as his successor in al-Ghadeer, a man called Luqman Ibn Harith or Harith Ibn Nu'man or Jabir Ibn Nasr asked the Prophet (S): "Did you do this on your own or was it an order from Allah?" The Prophet (S) answered:

"I swear by Allah who is Unique, this act was done by His order."

When Nu'man heard this reply from the Prophet, he went away, saying:

"اللَّهُمَّ إِنْ كَانَ هَذَا هُوَ الْحَقُّ مِنْ عِنْدِكَ فَأَمْطِرْ عَلَيْنَا حِجَارَةً مِنْ
السَّمَاءِ"

"O God, if this is the truth from you, throw a stone from the sky upon us."

At this moment, a stone fell from the sky, killing him on the spot. The following Qur'anic verse was then revealed to the Prophet:

"سَأَلَ سَائِلٌ بِعَذَابٍ وَاقِعٍ لِلْكَافِرِينَ لَيْسَ لَهُ دَافِعٌ مِنَ اللَّهِ ذِي
الْمَعَارِجِ" 698

"One demanding, demanded the chastisement which must befall the unbelievers - there is none to avert it - from Allah, the Lord of the ways of Ascent." [Qur'an 70:1-3].

It is for this reason that we sometimes hear:

"لَعَنَ اللَّهُ اللَّجَّاجَ"

"May Allah curse the obstinate".

Imam 'Ali (as) has also said:

"رَاكِبُ اللَّجَّاجِ مُتَّعَرِّضٌ لِلْبَلَاءِ"

"One who rides the palfrey of obstinacy is exposed to misfortunes"¹¹¹

Imam 'Ali (as) has also said:

"تَمْرَةُ اللَّجَّاجِ الْعَطْبُ" 700

"The fruit of obstinacy is destruction".

Imam 'Ali (as) in his letter has also said:

"وَإِيَّاكَ أَنْ تَجْمَعَ بِكَ مَطِيئَةَ اللَّجَّاجِ"

"Beware that the stubborn mount should become ungovernable."

1. . Fayz Kashani, in the 5th volume of Al-Mahajjah al-Bayda', enumerates twenty faults for language.
2. . Op. Cit. pp.194-199.
3. . Op. Cit.
4. . Op. cit.
5. . Usul al-Kafi, vol. 2, pp.114-131.
6. . Usul al-Kafi, vol.2, pp.114-131.
7. . Bihar, vol.71, p.274.
8. .Qur'an 63:9
9. . Qur'an 17;29.
10. .Qur'an 25:67
11. . Ibn Abi al-Hadid's Sharh Nahj al-Balaghah, vol.5, p.48.
12. . Safinah al-Bihar, vol.2, p.327, item Qani'.
13. . Safinah al-Bihar, vol.2, p.327, item Qani'.
14. . Nahj al-Balaghah, Hikmah 342.
15. . Ibn Abi al-Hadid, Commentary of Nahj al-Balaghah, vol.16, p.98.
16. . Ghurar al-Hikam.
17. . Safinah al-Bihar, vol.2, p.469.
18. . Loc Cit.

19. . Safinah al-Bihar, vol.2, p.469.
20. . Safinah al-Bihar, vol.2, p.469.
21. . Bihar, vol.75, p.71.
22. . Qur'an 17:19.
23. . Qur'an 18:103-105.
24. . Ghurar al-Hikam.
25. . Op. cit.
26. . Op. cit.
27. . Ghurar al-Hikam.
28. . Op. cit.
29. . Ibn Abi al-Hadid's Sharh Nahj al-Balaghah, vol.16, p.99.
30. . Bihar al-Anwar, vol.74, p.188.
31. . Bihar, vol.74, p.197.
32. . Op. cit. p.192.
33. . Qur'an 25:27-29. In the commentary of Majma' al-Bayan, vol.7, p.166, under this verse, the vicious action of these two and the way 'Uqba turned against Islam and the reason for his animosity towards Islam because of Ubayy's temptations and their miserable ends are discussed. Refer to that source.
34. . Ghurar al-Hikam.
35. . Ghurar al-Hikam.
36. . Qur'an 4:10.
37. . Qur'an 2:174.
38. . Qur'an 18:49.
39. Qur'an 99:8.
40. . Bihar, vol.66, p.313.
41. . Wasa'il, vol.4, pp.1129- 1176.
42. . Op. Cit.
43. . Op. Cit.
44. . Bihar, vol.66, p.315.
45. . Al-Kafi, vol.2, p.331.
46. . Bihar, vol.75, p.320.
47. . Kanz al-'Ummal, Hadith 7605.
48. . Al-Kafi, vol.2, p.331.
49. . Qur'an 39:16-17.
50. . Ibn Abi al-Hadid's Commentary on Nahj al-Balaghah, vol.16, p.102.
51. . Op. cit.
52. . Qur'an 29:43.
53. . Tuba prose, vol. 2 P 172.
54. . Raghīb's Mufradat, P 341.
55. . Usul al-Kafi, vol.1, p.11.
56. . Qur'an 2:171.
57. . Raghīb's Mufradat, p.341.
58. . Wasa'il al-Shi'ah, vol.11, p.163.
59. . Bihar, vol.78, p.9.
60. . Raghīb's Mufradat, p.342, but in Nahj al-Balaghah, Hikmah no.338, instead of Al-'aql 'aqlan (There are two kinds of intellect) the expression Al-'ilm 'ilman (There are two kinds of knowledge) is used.
61. . Ghurar al-Hikam.
62. . Ibn Maytham's Commentary on Nahj al-Balaghah, vol.5, p.51; Ibn Abi Al-Hadid's Commenatary on Nahj al-Balaghah, vol.16, p.102.
63. . Al-Nihayah, vol.4, p.248.
64. . Qur'an 12:111.
65. . Nahj al-Balaghah, Sermon 85.
66. . Ghurar al-Hikam.
67. . Op. cit.
68. . Ghurar al-Hikam.
69. . Nahj al-Balaghah, Hikmah 297.
70. . Al-Mahajjah al-Bayda, vol.5, p.15.
71. . Kanz al-'Ummal, vol.15, p.791.
72. . Ghurar al-Hikam.
73. . Bihar, vol.77, p.165.
74. . Al-Mahajjah al-Bayda, vol.8, p.250; Mustadrak al-Hakim, vol.4, p.306.
75. . Tuhaf al-'Uqul, p.324.
76. . Ghurar al-Hikam.
77. . Op. cit.

78. . Nahj al-Balaghah, letter No 22.
79. . Nahj al-Balaghah, Hikmah 379.
80. . "And they say: There is nothing but our life in this world; we live and die and nothing destroys us but time". [Qur'an 45:24].
81. . "The unbelievers say: 'This is a wonderful thing. What when we are dead and have become dust? That is a far (from probable) return'. We know indeed what the earth diminishes of them, and with Us is a writing that preserves". [Qur'an 50:2-4].
82. . Qur'an 20:15.
83. . "And whoever turns away from My reminder, his shall surely be a straitened life". [Qur'an 20:124].
84. . Bihar, vol.71, p.339.
85. . Qur'an 2:189.
86. . Majma' al-Bayan, vol.2, p.282.
87. . Qur'an 20:132.
88. . Qur'an 28:83.
89. . Qur'an 3:137.
90. . Qur'an 7:84.
91. . Qur'an 7:86.
92. . Qur'an 10:39.
93. . Bihar, vol. 73 P 351.
94. . Refer to Safinah al-Bihar, the items khatm and 'aqab.
95. . Safinah al-Bihar, the item 'aqab.
96. . Safinah al-Bihar, the item 'aqab.
97. . Bihar, vol.77, p.133.
98. . Qur'an 15:20.
99. . Tafsir Namunah, vol.9, p.22.
100. . Qur'an 11:6.
101. . Wasa'il, vol.12, p.53.
102. . Bihar al-Anwar, vol.103, p.8.
103. . Ibn Abi al-Hadid's Commentary on Nahj al-Balaghah, vol.16, p.104.
104. . Mustadrak Al-Wasa'il, vol.2, p.62.
105. . Bihar, vol.77, p.47.
106. . Qur'an 23:75-76.
107. . Qur'an 67:21.
108. . Safinah al-Bihar, vol.2, p.505.
109. . Bihar, vol.77, p.208.
110. . Nahj al-Balaghah , Letter No 58.
111. . Ghurar al-Hikam.

33) The Delicate Tasks of a Man towards His Friend

"احمل نَفْسَكَ مِنْ أَخِيكَ عِنْدَ صَرْمِهِ عَلَى الصِّلَةِ وَعِنْدَ صُدُورِهِ
عَلَى اللَّطْفِ وَالْمُقَارَبَةِ وَعِنْدَ جُمُودِهِ عَلَى الْبَدْلِ وَعِنْدَ تَبَاعُدِهِ
عَلَى الدُّنُوِّ وَعِنْدَ شِدَّتِهِ عَلَى اللَّيْنِ وَعِنْدَ جُرْمِهِ عَلَى الْعُذْرِ حَتَّى
كَأَنَّكَ لَهُ عَبْدٌ وَكَأَنَّهُ ذُو نِعْمَةٍ عَلَيْكَ وَإِيَّاكَ أَنْ تَضَعَ ذَلِكَ فِي غَيْرِ
مَوْضِعِهِ أَوْ أَنْ تَفْعَلَهُ بِغَيْرِ أَهْلِهِ لَا تَتَّخِذَنَّ عَدُوَّ صَدِيقِكَ صَدِيقًا
فَتُعَادِي صَدِيقَكَ وَامْحِضْ أَخَاكَ النَّصِيحَةَ حَسَنَةً أَوْ قَبِيحَةً وَتَجَرَّعْ

الغَيْظُ فَإِنِّي لَمَ أَرَّ جُرْعَةً أَحْلَى مِنْهَا عَاقِبَةٌ وَلَا أَلَدُّ مَغْبَةً وَلَئِن
لِمَنْ عَالِظَكَ فَإِنَّهُ يُوشِكُ أَنْ يَلِينَنَّ لَكَ

وَحُذِّ عَلَى عَدُوِّكَ بِالْفَضْلِ فَإِنَّهُ أَحْلَى الظَّفَرَيْنِ وَإِنْ أَرَدْتَ قَطِيعَةً
أَخِيكَ فَاسْتَبِقْ لَهُ مِنْ نَفْسِكَ بَقِيَّةً يَرْجِعُ إِلَيْهَا إِنْ بَدَأَ لَهُ ذَلِكَ يَوْمًا
مَا. وَمَنْ ظَنَّ بِكَ خَيْرًا فَصَدِّقْ ظَنَّهُ وَلَا تُضَيِّعَنَّ حَقَّ أَخِيكَ إِتْكَالًا
عَلَى مَا بَيْنَكَ وَبَيْنَهُ فَإِنَّهُ لَيْسَ لَكَ بِأَخٍ مَنْ أَضَعْتَ حَقَّهُ. وَلَا يَكُنْ
أَهْلَكَ أَشَقَى الخَلْقِ بِكَ وَلَا تَرَعَّبَنَّ فِيمَنْ زَهَدَ عَنْكَ وَلَا يَكُونَنَّ
أَخُوكَ عَلَى قَطِيعَتِكَ أَقْوَى مِنْكَ عَلَى صِلَتِهِ وَلَا يَكُونَنَّ عَلَى
الإِسَاءَةِ أَقْوَى مِنْكَ عَلَى الإِحْسَانِ وَلَا يَكْبُرَنَّ عَلَيْكَ ظَلْمٌ مَنْ
ظَلَمَكَ فَإِنَّهُ يَسْعَى فِي مَضَرَّتِهِ وَتَفْعِيكَ وَلَيْسَ جَزَاءُ مَنْ سَرَّكَ أَنْ
تَسُوَّهُ

“Against the unfriendly behavior of your brother, do the following: when he severs his relationship with you, you (continue to) establish relations with him. When he turns away from you, you show kindness and draw close to him. When he is stingy, be generous towards him; when he moves away, you come near to him. When he is harsh, you be gentle towards him. When he commits an offense, forgive him. Treat him so until it is as if you are his slave and he is your benefactor. But take care not to do this where it is inappropriate or to one who is not worthy of it. Never take the enemy of your friend as your friend, for in this way you will incur the hostility of your friend. Be sincere in your advice to your brother whether this advice is good or ugly (in his opinion). Swallow your anger, for I have not seen a draught sweeter in outcome than it, or with a more pleasant result. Be gentle to one who treats you harshly: he will soon be gentle towards you.

Treat your enemy with favours, because it is the sweeter of the two victories (i.e. revenge or the bestowal of favours). If you wish to sever relations with your brother, leave some room for him to return to your friendship if he wishes to someday. If one has a good opinion of you, confirm his opinion of you. Never neglect your brother's right by relying on the friendship that is between you and him, because one whose rights you neglect is not your brother. Do not let your family be the most wretched of people because of you. Do not desire (the friendship of) one who shuns you.

Your brother should not be more powerful in severing relations with you than you are in establishing relations with him, and he should not be stronger in ill-treatment of you than you are in doing good to him. Do not consider as great the wrong-doing of one who wrongs you because he is harming himself and benefiting you. The reward of one who makes you happy is not that you should offend him”.

Commentary

Imam 'Ali (as), in this letter, mentions some of the delicate tasks of a man towards his friend. We will refer to some of these points below:

The Role Of Friendship And The Tasks Imposed By It

Although some of these points have already been dealt with sporadically in this book, a compact summary of them is in order here.

As we know, a man needs a genuine friend and companion for the following reasons:

1. Man is a sociable creature by nature. He may not carry on living without a companion. Thus, Raghīb, under the item "insan" (man) writes:

"Man is called (man) because he is created in such a way that he can not continue his life without others. Thus, it is said that man is sociable by nature. This is because he may not solve his problems without others' cooperation"¹

2. One of the ways a man's personality takes form is his association with his fellow-creatures. This is because, due to his trait of forming habits, he learns from others. It is said,

"الْمَرْءُ عَلَى دِينِ خَلِيلِهِ وَقَرِينِهِ" 702

"A person follows the religion of his intimate friend and companion".

3. A man has needs which he can not satisfy single-handedly. A friend can help him out of his difficulties. Imam 'Ali (as) has said in this respect:

"عَلَيْكُمْ بِالْإِخْوَانِ فَإِنَّهُمْ عُدَّةٌ فِي الدُّنْيَا وَالْآخِرَةِ"

"Do not forget to have brethren and good friends; they are a provision (for you) in this world and in the Hereafter."²

However, firstly in selecting friends we should take care. The person might turn out to be a thief.

Imam 'Ali (as) has said in this respect:

"لَا تَصْحَبِ الشَّرِيرَ فَإِنَّ طَبْعَكَ يَسْرِقُ مِنْ طَبْعِهِ شَرًّا وَأَنْتَ لَا تَعْلَمُ"

"Do not take a bad person as your friend because your nature steals evil from his nature while you are unaware."

In another occasion, Imam 'Ali (as) has said:

**"مَنْ اتَّخَذَ أَخًا مِنْ غَيْرِ اخْتِبَارِ الْجَاهُ الْإِضْطِرَارِ إِلَى مُرَاقَقَةِ
الْأَشْرَارِ" 704**

"A person who takes a brother (as a friend) without putting him to the test, will be compelled to be friends with evil people."

Secondly, when we purposefully select a person as a friend, we will know the limits of friendship. Finding a friend is easy, keeping him is much harder.

**"أَعَجَزُ النَّاسِ مَنْ عَجَزَ عَنِ اكْتِسَابِ الْإِخْوَانِ، وَأَعَجَزُ مِنْهُ مَنْ
ضَيَّعَ مَنْ ظَفَرَ بِهِ مِنْهُمْ"**

"The weakest person is the one who cannot find a friend and still weaker than such a person is the one who loses his friend."³

The Rights And Limits Of Friendship In Imam 'Ali's Words

In books on ethics there are discussion on the rights and limits of friendship in detail. There are even some books written on this issue.⁴ But in the following section we will describe these rights as Imam 'Ali (as) perceives them.

1. Protecting The Bond Of Friendship

One of the rights of friendship is the protection of the bond of friendship. Imam 'Ali (as) in this respect says:

**"مِنْ كَرَمِ الْمَرْءِ بُكَاءُهُ عَلَى مَا مَضَى مِنْ زَمَانِهِ وَحَيْنِهِ إِلَى
أُوطَانِهِ وَحِفْظُ قَدِيمِ إِخْوَانِهِ"**

"Among the nobilities of man is his weeping over the days of his life (that he has passed negligently), his yearning for his homeland and keeping his old friends".⁵

Imam 'Ali (as) reports from the Prophet (S) that he considered thirty rights for a Muslim's bond of friendship.⁶

Now what should one do if his partner sold this valuable item for nothing? Should he stay

indifferent towards the other person's indignation, or should he do his best to establish his friendship once again?

In books of traditions there are many cases on friendship. We will discuss two of them here:

a) The great Prophet (S) has said:

**"أَيُّمَا مُسْلِمِينَ تَهَاجَرَا فَمَكْنَا ثَلَاثًا لَا يَصْطَلِحَانِ إِلَّا كَانَا خَارِجِينَ
مِنَ الْإِسْلَامِ وَلَمْ يَكُنْ بَيْنَهُمَا وَلَايَةٌ فَأَيُّهُمَا سَبَقَ إِلَى كَلَامِ أَخِيهِ
كَانَ السَّابِقَ إِلَى الْجَنَّةِ يَوْمَ الْحِسَابِ"**

"If two Muslims cut off relations with each other and remain so for three days without reconciliation, they are both out of Islam and there is no friendship between them. Whichever of them precedes in speaking to his brother will precede him in entering Paradise on the Day of Reckoning".⁷

b) Imam Sadiq (as) has stated:

**"لَا يَفْتَرِقُ رَجُلَانِ عَلَى الْهَجْرَانِ إِلَّا اسْتَوْجَبَ أَحَدُهُمَا الْبِرَاءَةَ
وَاللَّعْنَةَ وَرُبَّمَا اسْتَحَقَّ ذَلِكَ كِلَاهُمَا فَقَالَ لَهُ مُعْتَبٌ: جَعَلَنِي اللَّهُ
فِدَاكَ هَذَا الظَّالِمُ فَمَا بَالُ الْمَظْلُومِ؟ قَالَ لِإِنَّهُ لَا يَدْعُو أَخَاهُ إِلَى
صِلَتِهِ وَلَا يَتَغَامَسُ لَهُ عَنِ كَلَامِهِ، سَمِعْتُ أَبِي يَقُولُ: إِذَا تَنَازَعَ
اِثْنَانِ فَعَازَ أَحَدُهُمَا الْآخَرَ فَلْيَرْجِعِ الْمَظْلُومُ إِلَى صَاحِبِهِ حَتَّى
يَقُولَ لِصَاحِبِهِ: أَيُّ أَخِي أَنَا الظَّالِمُ حَتَّى يَقْطَعَ الْهَجْرَانَ بَيْنَهُ
وَبَيْنَ صَاحِبِهِ فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ تَبَارَكَ وَتَعَالَى حَكَمٌ عَدْلٌ يَأْخُذُ لِلْمَظْلُومِ
مِنَ الظَّالِمِ"**

"Two people do not separate and cut off relations with each other except that one of them, and perhaps both, deserves Allah's chastisement". Mu'tab, one of Imam's companions asked him: "The one who is tyrant deserves this punishment. What about the oppressed one; what is his fault"? Imam (as) answered: "He is guilty because he did not invite his friend to establish the friendship bond once again and he did not ignore his speech. I heard from my father who said: If two persons quarrel and one is victorious, the defeated one should go to the other and tell him: "Brother, I am the oppressor". In this way, they can make peace. Allah is the just Judge. He will punish the oppressor"⁸

It is because of this point that Imam 'Ali (as), in his erudite letter, commands us to:

"احْمِلْ نَفْسَكَ مِنْ أُخِيكَ عِنْدَ صَرَمِهِ عَلَى الصِّلَةِ وَعِنْدَ صُدُودِهِ عَلَى اللَّطْفِ وَالْمُقَارَبَةِ"

"When your brother severs his relationship with you, you make yourself establish relations with him. When he turns away from you, you show kindness and draw near to him".

2. Be Generous Although He Is A Miser

One of the factors which weaken our friendship is being parsimonious and stingy. On the contrary, generosity causes people to gather around the generous person. As it is emphasized in the Islamic traditions, one of the duties of people is to show generosity towards their friend.

In order for this objective to materialize, Islam orders the believers to engage in doing good and be benevolent; some examples of these orders are presented below:

Imam 'Ali (as) at his death gave this recommendation:

"عَلَيْكُمْ بِالتَّوَّاصِلِ وَالتَّبَادُلِ وَإِيَّائِمْ وَالتَّدَابُرِ وَالتَّقَاطِعِ"

*"Strengthen the bonds of friendship and give generously to each other. Avoid turning your back and severing relations (with your brothers)."*⁹

Somebody asked Imam Sadiq (as) about a believer's tasks towards other believers. Imam Sadiq (as) enumerated seven rights:

"أَيْسَرُ حَقٍّ مِنْهَا أَنْ تُحِبَّ لَهُ مَا تُحِبُّ لِنَفْسِكَ وَتَكْرَهُ لَهُ مَا تَكْرَهُ لِنَفْسِكَ وَالْحَقُّ الثَّانِي أَنْ تَمْشِيَ فِي حَاجَتِهِ وَتَبْغِيَ رِضَاهُ وَلَا تُخَالِفَ قَوْلَهُ وَالْحَقُّ الثَّلَاثُ أَنْ تَصِلَهُ بِنَفْسِكَ وَمَالِكَ وَيَدِكَ وَرَجْلِكَ وَلِسَانِكَ..."

"The simplest right is to love for him what you love for yourself and to dislike for him what you dislike for yourself. The second right is to provide him with his needs, to seek to satisfy him and not contradict him. The third right is to strengthen your bond with him through yourself, your wealth, your hand, your foot and your tongue..".

Imam Sadiq (as) reports the Prophet (S) to have said:

"لِلْمُؤْمِنِ عَلَى الْمُؤْمِنِ سَبْعَةٌ حُقُوقٌ وَاجِبَةٌ مِنَ اللَّهِ عَزَّوَجَلَّ"

عَلَيْهِ: الْإِجْلَالُ لَهُ فِي عَيْنِهِ وَالْوَدُّ لَهُ فِي صَدْرِهِ وَالْمُؤَاسَاةُ لَهُ فِي مَالِهِ وَإِنْ يُحْرَمَ عَيْبَتَهُ وَإِنْ يَعُودَهُ فِي مَرَضِهِ وَإِنْ يُشَيِّعَ جَنَازَتَهُ وَإِنْ لَا يَقُولَ فِيهِ بَعْدَ مَوْتِهِ إِلَّا خَيْرًا"

"A believer has seven duties made incumbent on him by God towards another believer: To respect him in his presence; to love him in his heart; to help him with his possessions; to forbid speaking ill of him in his absence; to visit him when he is sick; to take part in his funeral service; and to speak only good about him after his death."[10](#)

Among the advice the Prophet (S) gave Imam 'Ali (as) on his death was:

"ثَلَاثٌ لَا تُطِيقُهَا هَذِهِ الْأُمَّةُ: الْمُوَاسَاةُ لِلْأَخِ فِي مَالِهِ وَإِنصَافُ النَّاسِ مِنْ نَفْسِهِ وَذِكْرُ اللَّهِ عَلَى كُلِّ حَالٍ"

"There are three things which this Ummah is unable to carry out: helping one's brother in faith with his wealth; doing justice to people; and remembering God in every condition."[11](#)

With regards to the above issues what should a man do when friendship is not observed by some, when others are parsimonious, when they remain miser? Should he retaliate and do the same thing or should he go to the other extreme and do benevolence?

To solve this dilemma, Imam 'Ali (as) emphasizes that we should confront such cases with benevolence and generosity:

When he is stingy, be generous towards him:

"وَعِنْدَ جُمُودِهِ عَلَى الْبَدَلِ"

Concerning this issue, Imam 'Ali (as) has said:

"عَوِّدُوا بِالْفَضْلِ عَلَى مَنْ حَرَمَكُم"

"Habituate yourself to be bountiful to those who have deprived you".[12](#)

3. When He Moves Away From You, Come Near To Him

Sometimes there are some factors which make a man offended and he tries to stay away from the offender. In such cases the oppressed one should use kindness and generosity

towards the offender and alleviate the situation.

In the Islamic traditions, the following technical terms are used to explain the situations: "Tazaver" meaning the increase of kindness, "birr", doing good things to others; "Silah", the establishment of relations, "ta'attuf", showing emotions and care for others; "Tawaddud", showing friendship. Through these techniques we can easily bridge the differences. We will refer to some of these issues here:

Kulayb al-Asadi says: I heard Imam Husayn (as) saying:

**"سَمِعْتُ أَبَا عَبْدِ اللَّهِ عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ يَقُولُ: تَوَاصَلُوا وَتَبَارَكُوا
وَتَرَاحَمُوا وَكُونُوا إِخْوَةً بَرَّةً كَمَا أَمَرَكَمُ اللَّهُ"**

"Establish relations with each other, do good to each other, have mercy on each other and be righteous brothers, as Allah has commanded you."[13](#)

Shu'ayb Aqarqui says: I heard Imam Sadiq (as) telling his followers:

**"اتَّقُوا اللَّهَ وَكُونُوا إِخْوَةً بَرَّةً مُتَحَابِّينَ فِي اللَّهِ مُتَوَاصِلِينَ
مُتَرَاجِمِينَ تَزَاوَرُوا وَتَلَاقُوا وَتَذَاكُرُوا أَمْرَنَا وَاحْيَاؤُهُ"**

"Fear Allah and be righteous brothers who love one another for the sake of Allah, establish relations with one another and have mercy on one another. Visit and meet one another and remind each other of our affair and revive it."[14](#)

The great Prophet (S) has stated:

"الزِّيَارَةُ تُنْبِتُ الْمَوَدَّةَ"

"Visiting each other causes love to grow."[15](#)

Imam Sadiq (as), enumerating the rights of others on a genuine believer, emphasizes:

**"فَإِنْ كَانَ عَلَيْكَ عَاتِبًا وَلَا تُفَارِقُهُ حَتَّى تَسْأَلَ سَمِيحَتَهُ (تَسِيلٌ
سَخِيمَتَهُ)"**

"If he is annoyed with you, do not part from him until you apologize to him (gently remove

his rancor)"[16](#)

It is for this reason that Imam 'Ali (as) writes in his letter:

"وَعِنْدَ تَبَاعُدِهِ عَلَى الدُّنُو"

"When he moves away, you come near to him."

4. When He Is Harsh, You Be Gentle Towards Him

Some people are severe by nature and some show harsh treatment when placed under certain conditions. In both cases, the most fundamental principle to observe is a mild and easy-going attitude, especially if the other person is a friend.

The Holy Qur'an in commission to call people to God's religion, orders Moses and his brother to talk calmly and use kind techniques and behaviors since this method is more effective than severe and harsh methods and will not force the listener to adopt the escape mechanism. The listener might refer to his own nature and be influenced by the preacher:

"اَذْهَبَا إِلَى فِرْعَوْنَ إِنَّهُ طَغَى فَقُولَا لَهُ قَوْلًا لَّيِّنًا لَّعَلَّهُ يَتَذَكَّرُ أَوْ يَخْشَى"

"Go both to Fir'awn, surely he has become inordinate; then speak to him a gentle word; haply he may mind or fear".[17](#)

Imam 'Ali (as) both in this letter and in Nahj al-Balaghah emphasize on this moral principle. In other Hikam of Nahj al-Balaghah where he enumerates the specific traits of the believers, he continues:

"سَهْلُ الْخَلِيقَةِ لَيِّنُ الْعَرِيكَةِ، نَفْسُهُ أَصْلَبُ مِنَ الصَّلَدِ وَهُوَ أَدَلُّ مِنَ الْعَبْدِ"

"(A believer is of) easy disposition, gentle in temperament; he is stronger than stone, but more humble than a slave."[18](#)

In the sermon about the qualities of the God-fearing ones addressed to his companion Hammam, Imam 'Ali (as) says:

"وَحَزْمًا فِي لَيِّنٍ"

"A believer is both prudent and lenient".[19](#)

Elsewhere he says:

"لِينًا قَوْلُهُ"

"A believer's speech is gentle."[20](#)

In this letter, Imam 'Ali (as) says:

"وَعِنْدَ شِدَّتِهِ عَلَى الْإِلِينِ"

"When he is harsh, you be gentle towards him".

Still in another occasion he invites people to be soft, telling them the philosophy of being cool and quiet:

"وَلِنْ لِمَنْ عَاظَكَ فَإِنَّهُ يُوشِكُ أَنْ يَلِينَ لَكَ"

"Be gentle to one who treats you harshly: he will soon be gentle towards you."

Of course, according to the first principle, treating severity with temperate manners, is ethical. However, such pacific manners are criticized by some harsh and impolite individuals. This causes their haughtiness to swell, they say. In such cases we have to perform the same harsh manners. The Great Qur'an describes the manners of believers towards infidels in the following manner,

"مُحَمَّدٌ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ وَالَّذِينَ مَعَهُ أَشِدَّاءُ عَلَى الْكُفَّارِ رُحَمَاءُ بَيْنَهُمْ"

"Muhammad is the Apostle of Allah, and those with him are firm of heart against the unbelievers, compassionate among themselves."[21](#)

5. When He Commits Sins And Offenses, Accept His Excuses

Due to his different instincts, and because of the freedoms and free choices that man has, he will go astray if God's blessings do not assist him.

After committing sins, man may become aware of the nasty nature of what he has done and may want to apologize to God and to people. Now if his excuses are not accepted, he

might get exasperated and bold and get himself involved in more crimes. Or he may get disappointed and hopeless. Thus, in Islam, Allah both accepts apologies and considers the despair from asking for pardons a great sin and orders people to follow suit.

The great Prophet (S) has stated:

"مَنْ أَقَالَ مُسْلِماً عَثْرَتَهُ أَقَالَ اللَّهُ عَثْرَتَهُ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ"

The Guidelines Of The Leaders Of Religion In This Respect

Imam Sadiq (as) has said,

"الْغَضَبُ مِفْتَاحُ كُلِّ شَرٍّ"

How To Control And Cure Anger

It was said that anger is necessary for the defense of one's life, wife, personal and social rights. But control and cure, especially when it goes beyond the rational limits, have always been the focus of the attention of the Islamic religion and faith. The techniques these scholars have suggested are:

a) Change your body posture: If you are standing, sit down; if you are sitting, lie down, splash water on your face; eat something; discuss on a new topic and the like. The great Prophet (S) says:

"إِنَّ الْغَضَبَ جَمْرَةٌ تَتَوَقَّدُ فِي الْقَلْبِ أَلَمْ تَرَ إِلَى انْتِفَاحِ أَوْدَاجِهِ
وَحُمْرَةِ عَيْنِهِ فَإِذَا وَجَدَ أَحَدُكُمْ مِنْ ذَلِكَ شَيْئاً فَإِنْ كَانَ قَائِماً
فَلْيَجْلِسْ وَإِنْ كَانَ جَالِساً فَلْيَتِمَّ فَإِنْ لَمْ يَزَلْ ذَلِكَ فَلْيَتَوَضَّأْ بِالْمَاءِ
الْبَارِدِ وَلْيَغْتَسِلْ فَإِنَّ النَّارَ لَا يُطْفِئُهَا إِلَّا الْمَاءُ"

"Anger is a piece of fire which is kindled in man's heart. Can't you see how your veins are swollen and your eyes are red? If one of you experiences something of that, then sit down if you are standing, or lie down if you are sitting. If you are still angry, then wash your face or carry out ablution with cold water, and bathe, for fire is only extinguished with water."[22](#)

b) Restrain your anger. The Holy Qur'an mentions the restraint of anger, pardoning people and spending benevolently as the traits of the believers:

"وَالْكَاطِمِينَ الْغَيْظَ وَالْعَافِينَ عَنِ النَّاسِ وَاللَّهُ يُحِبُّ الْمُحْسِنِينَ"

"[Those who spend benevolently in ease as well as in straitness], and those who restrain their anger and pardon men; and Allah loves the doers of good to others"[23](#)

As you notice, the Holy Qur'an first orders us to restrain our anger, secondly, to wash our hearts through pardoning and thirdly to engage in spending benevolently.

Imam 'Ali (as) has said:

**"احْتَرِسُوا مِنْ سُورَةِ الْعَصَبِ وَاَعِدُّوا لَهُ مَا تُجَاهِدُونَهُ بِهِ مِنْ
الكظم والجلم"**

"Guard yourselves against the outburst of anger. Prepare restraint and forbearance for it by which you struggle against it".[24](#)

Imam 'Ali (as) has also said,

"رَدُّ الْعَصَبِ بِالْجِلْمِ ثَمَرَةُ الْعِلْمِ"

"Repelling anger through forbearance is the fruit of knowledge."[25](#)

The Prophet (S) has said:

**"مَا مِنْ جُرْعَةٍ أَحَبُّ إِلَى اللَّهِ تَعَالَى مِنْ جُرْعَةٍ عَيْظٍ يَكْظِمُهَا عَبْدٌ
وَمَا كَظَمَهَا عَبْدٌ إِلَّا مَلَأَ اللَّهُ جَوْفَهُ إِيمَانًا"**

"There is no draught more loved by God than the draught of anger which the servant swallows. A servant does not restrain his anger but that Allah fills him with faith."[26](#)

Imam Baqir (as) has said:

**"مَنْ كَظَمَ عَيْظًا وَهُوَ يَقْدِرُ عَلَى امْضَائِهِ حَشَا اللَّهُ قَلْبَهُ أَمْنًا
وَإِيمَانًا يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ"**

"On the Day of Judgment, God will fill with faith and tranquility the heart of one who restrains his anger although he is able to express it."[27](#)

It is for this reason that Imam (as) in his letter commands us:

"وَتَجَرَّعَ الْغَيْظَ فَإِنِّي لَمْ أَرَ جُرْعَةً أَحْلَى مِنْهَا عَاقِبَةً وَلَا الدُّ مَغْبَةً"

"Swallow your anger, for I have not seen a draught sweeter in outcome than it, or with a more pleasant result."

10. Do Good To Your Enemy

Since doing good connects two individuals and the receiver of beneficence feels in debt to the doer of good as Imam 'Ali (as) mentions

"الْإِنْسَانُ عَبْدُ الْإِحْسَانِ"

"Man is a slave to benevolence"[28](#)

Therefore, in Islam, doing good and beneficence is emphasized as a general principle:

"إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَأْمُرُ بِالْعَدْلِ وَالْإِحْسَانِ" 731

"Surely Allah enjoins the doing of justice and the doing of good to others".

Even in case of divorce, when all emotional relations break, God orders the husband to pay all the alimony to her.

"وَلَا تَنْسُوا الْفَضْلَ بَيْنَكُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ بَصِيرٌ" 732

"And do not neglect the giving of free gifts between you; surely Allah sees what you do."

The principle of beneficence is emphasized in Islam for both friends and foes alike. Imam 'Ali (as) says in this regard:

"الْإِحْسَانُ إِلَى الْمُسِيئِ أَحْسَنُ الْفَضْلِ"

"Doing good to evildoers is the best kind of benevolence."[29](#)

Imam 'Ali (as) has also said,

"الاحسانُ الى المُسيئِ لِيُصِلِحُ المُسيءِ حتى لو كان عَدُوًّا"

"Doing good to an evildoer makes him good even if he is your enemy."[30](#)

He has also stated:

"احسن الى المُسيئِ تَمَلِكُهُ"

"Do good to one who has done wrong, and you will dominate him."[31](#)

It is for this reason that Imam 'Ali (as), in his letter, emphasizes that:

"خُذْ عَلَى عَدُوِّكَ بِالْفَضْلِ فَإِنَّهُ أَحْلَى الظَّفَرَيْنِ"

"Treat your enemy favourably, because it is the sweeter of the two victories (i.e. revenge or the bestowal of favours)

It is obvious that we could dominate our enemy through force. But this kind of victory lacks the sweetness gained through doing benevolence to our enemy."[32](#) There is an old maxim "There exists a pleasantness in pardoning which does not exist in taking revenge."

11. If You Wish To Dissociate From A Friend, Do Not Destroy All The Bridges

As the ocean water is always in fluctuation, sometimes calm and sometimes turbulent, friendship is at times warm and sometimes cool. Sometimes relations exists and at other times they are cut. We should not go to extremes either at establishing relations telling our friend all our secrets or at the time of disconnection, destroying all bridges.

Imam Reza (as) narrates from Imam 'Ali (as) that he said:

"احب حبيبك هوناً ما قعسى ان يكون بغيضك يوماً ما وابغض
بغيضك هوناً ما قعسى ان يكون حبيبك يوماً ما"

"Love your friend moderately since he might someday be your enemy. And show moderate animosity towards your enemy since one day he might turn out to be your friend"[33](#)

Imam Sadiq (as) told some of his followers:

"لَا تُطْلِعَ صَدِيقَكَ مِنْ سِرِّكَ إِلَّا عَلَى مَا لَوْ أُطْلِعَ عَلَيْهِ عَدُوُّكَ لَمْ يَضُرَّكَ فَإِنَّ الصَّدِيقَ قَدْ يَكُونُ عَدُوُّكَ يَوْمًا مَا"

"Do not tell your friend all your secrets except for those secrets which if your enemy knew, would not harm you, for your friend may someday be your enemy."[34](#)

Imam 'Ali (as) emphasizes in this letter:

**"وَإِنْ أَرَدْتَ قَطِيعَةَ أَخِيكَ فَاسْتَبِقْ لَهُ مِنْ نَفْسِكَ بَقِيَّةً يَرْجِعُ إِلَيْهَا
إِنْ بَدَأَ لَهُ ذَلِكَ يَوْمًا مَا"**

"If you wish to sever relations with your brother, leave some room for him to return to your friendship if he wishes to someday."

Sa'di, the Persian writer and poet, writes in the eighth chapter of his book Gulistan: "Do not let your friend know all your secrets because you are not aware that he might one day turn into an enemy. Do not exert any blow you can upon your enemy since he might become your friend someday."

12. Confirm People's Good Opinion Of You

If righteousness dominates a community and crimes are not experienced in such a society, it is necessary for people to have a good opinion of each another. Imam 'Ali (as) says regarding this issue:

**"ضَعِ امْرَأَةَ أَخِيكَ عَلَى أَحْسَنِهِ حَتَّى يَأْتِيكَ مَا يَغْلِبُكَ مِنْهُ وَلَا تَظُنَنَّ
بِكَلِمَةٍ خَرَجَتْ مِنْ أَخِيكَ سُوءًا وَأَنْتَ تَجِدُ لَهَا فِي الْخَيْرِ مَحْمَلًا"**

"Regard your brother's affair in the most favorable way until you hear of something that overcomes your good opinion of him. Never think evil of any word uttered by your brother when you can take it as good."[35](#)

But if corruption reigns in a community and individuals commit sins and wrong-doing, a bad opinion of others would be inevitable. Thus, Imam 'Ali (as) in his Nahj al-Balaghah, considers optimism in such conditions as self-deception:

**"إِذَا اسْتَوْلَى الصَّلَاحُ عَلَى الزَّمَانِ وَاهِلِهِ تُمَّ اسَاءَ رَجُلُ الظَّنِّ
بِرَجُلٍ لَمْ تَظْهَرِ مِنْهُ حَوْبَةٌ فَقَدْ ظَلَمَ وَإِذَا اسْتَوْلَى الفَسَادُ عَلَى
الزَّمَانِ وَاهِلِهِ وَاحْسَنَ رَجُلُ الظَّنِّ بِرَجُلٍ فَقَدْ عَرَّرَ"**

"If, at a time when goodness is prevalent among people, a person has an evil opinion of one from whom no sin has been seen, he has wronged him. And if, at a time when corruption is prevalent among people, a person has a good opinion of another, he has deluded himself."[36](#)

Thus, we should avoid performing any act which causes people to become suspicious of us: acts such as keeping company with ill-educated people; frequenting places where accusing people prevails, and doing actions which arise people's suspicion. In this respect the great Prophet (S) has stated:

"اتَّقُوا مَوَاضِعَ التُّهْمِ"

"Avoid frequenting places that are suspect."[37](#)

Imam 'Ali (as) has also said,

"مَنْ عَرَّضَ نَفْسَهُ لِلتُّهْمَةِ فَلَا يَلُومَنَّ مَنْ اسَاءَ بِهِ الظَّنِّ"

"One who exposes himself to suspicion should not blame others for having a bad opinion of him"[38](#)

The Emphasis Of Leaders Of Religion

In our Islamic traditions, fortunately all the above issues are dealt with:
The great Prophet (S) has said:

"أولى الناس بالتُّهْمَةِ مَنْ جَالَسَ أَهْلَ التُّهْمَةِ"

"The one most deserving of being an object of suspicion is one who sits in the company of people who are suspect."[39](#)

Imam 'Ali (as) has said in this respect:

"مَنْ وَقَفَ نَفْسَهُ مَوْقِفَ التُّهْمَةِ وَلَا يَلُومَنَّ مَنْ اسَاءَ بِهِ الظَّنُّ"

"He who places himself in a position that is suspect should not blame one who has a bad opinion of him."[40](#)

Imam 'Ali (as) has said as well,

"وَمَنْ دَخَلَ مَدَاخِلَ السُّوءِ اتُّهِمَ"

"One who enters places of ill-repute will be suspect."[41](#)

The great Prophet (S) one day was talking with his wife Safiyah when one of his companions passed by that place. The Prophet (S) called him saying:

"يَا فُلَانُ هَذِهِ زَوْجَتِي صَفِيَّةٌ"

"O man, this is my wife, Safiyah".

The man said, "O Messenger of Allah, do we have to think otherwise?" The Prophet (S) replied, "Satan flows in man's body like blood. I feared it might get into your mind."[42](#)

Imam as-Sadiq (as) has stated his opinion regarding this issue:

**"اتَّقُوا مَوَاضِعَ الرَّيْبِ وَلَا يَقَعَنَّ أَحَدُكُمْ مَعَ أُمِّهِ فِي الطَّرِيقِ فَإِنَّهُ
لَيْسَ كُلُّ أَحَدٍ يَعْرِفُهَا" 747**

"Avoid situations of doubt. Never stop on a way with your mother when people do not know you are her son."

The reason why Imam Zayn al-Abidin (as) in the prayer called Makarim al-Akhlaq asks God:

"وَمِنْ ظَنَّةِ أَهْلِ الصَّلَاحِ الثِّقَّةَ"

"(Replace for me) the suspicion of the people of righteousness with trust."[43](#)

The reason for this worship was that at the time of this Imam (as) suspicion and lack of

confidence reigned the time because of the prevalent corruption. At such a time it is prudent to consider the actions of others as acts of corruption unless the opposite is found to be true. Therefore Imam Zayn al-'Abidin (as) invokes God to help others to find out the truth about him.[44](#)

But Imam 'Ali (as) writes in his letter:

"وَمَنْ ظَنَّ بِكَ خَيْرًا فَصَدِّقْ ظَنَّهُ"

"If one has a good opinion of you, confirm his opinion of you".

This statement of Imam 'Ali's applies to that case when man lives in conditions where people think of him as good and he has to act in such a way not to betray them. He has, then, to continue to receive that good opinion from them. For instance, if people think he is a generous man, he should act accordingly.[45](#)

13. A Close Friendship Should Not Result In The Deprivation Of Rights Of The Friend

A close friendship should not result in a person depriving his friend of his rights. He should not lose his respect. For instance, a close friend of ours enters a gathering and everyone, except us, stands up in respect. Another example, a close friend introduces everyone to a dignitary but does not care to use the right words to introduce his friend. This act of his will leave a negative impression in his friend's mind. He will either cut his relations with him or become hostile to him. There is a maxim which says:

"إِضَاعَةُ الْحُقُوقِ دَاعِيَةُ الْعُقُوقِ"

"Neglecting rights causes the severance of relationships."[46](#)

It is for this reason that Imam 'Ali (as) writes in his letter:

**"وَلَا تُضَيِّعَنَّ حَقَّ إِخِيكَ إِتْكَالًا عَلَى مَا بَيْنَكَ وَبَيْنَهُ فَإِنَّهُ لَيْسَ بِأَخٍ
مَنْ أَضَعْتَ حَقَّهُ"**

"Never neglect your brother's right by relying on the friendship that is between you and him, because one whose rights you neglect is not your brother."

14. Do Favors To Your Household And Tribe

Sometimes due to too much engagements, or because of his confidence in family relations,

or because he has got a social status, a man might think that he no longer needs his family or relatives and might forget their rights. This act of his is hazardous both here and in the hereafter.

On the disadvantages of this breaking off ties of relationship there are some traditions to the effect that those who break off ties are deprived of paradise:

The Holy Prophet (S) has said:

"ثَلَاثَةٌ لَا يَدْخُلُونَ الْجَنَّةَ: مُدْمِنٌ خَمْرٌ وَمُؤْمِنٌ سِحْرٌ وَقَاطِعٌ رَحِمٍ"

"There are three groups who will not enter paradise: A chronic wine-drinker, a believer in witchcraft and one who severs the ties of kinship."[47](#)

The Prophet (S) has said:

"اخْبَرَنِي جَبْرَائِيلُ أَنَّ رِيحَ الْجَنَّةِ تُوجَدُ مِنْ مَسِيرَةِ الْفِ عَامٍ مَا يَجِدُهَا عَاقٌ وَلَا قَاطِعٌ رَحِمٍ وَلَا شَيْخٌ زَانَ ..."

"Gabriel has informed me that the fragrance of paradise can be experienced from the distance of a thousand years, but a person whose parents are not satisfied with him or one who breaks off ties of relationship or an old man who indulges in adultery will not experience it...."[48](#)

Ala' Ibn Fadl says he heard Imam Sadiq (as) saying:

"الرَّحِمُ مُعَلَّقَةٌ بِالْعَرْشِ تَقُولُ اللَّهُمَّ صِلْ مَنْ وَصَلَنِي وَاقْطَعْ مَنْ قَطَعَنِي وَهِيَ رَحِمُ آلِ مُحَمَّدٍ وَرَحِمُ كُلِّ مُؤْمِنٍ وَهُوَ قَوْلُ اللَّهِ (وَالَّذِينَ يَصِلُونَ مَا أَمَرَ اللَّهُ بِهِ أَنْ يُوصَلَ وَيَخْشَوْنَ رَبَّهُمْ وَيَخَافُونَ سُوءَ الْحِسَابِ) "

'The womb (i.e.ties of relationship) is fastened to the Divine Throne (in the Highest Heaven). It says: O God, establish relations with one who establishes relations with me, and sever relations with one who severs relations with me. This is the tie of relationship belonging to Aal Muhammad [Muhammad's Household] and that of every believer. It is the statement of Allah: "**And those who join that which Allah has forbidden to be joined and have awe of their Lord and fear the evil reckoning**".[49](#)'

Its worldly disadvantage is that the breaking off ties of relationship shortens one's life and might end in sudden death and deprives a person of his relative's help in time of distress. It is for this reason that Imam 'Ali (as) has said:

“يا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنَّهُ لَا يَسْتَعِينِي الرَّجُلُ وَإِنْ كَانَ ذَا مَالٍ عَنِ عِترته
وِدْفَاعِهِمْ عَنْهُ بِأَيْدِيهِمْ وَالسِّنْتِهِمْ وَهُمْ أَعْظَمُ النَّاسِ حِيْطَةً مِنْ
وَرَائِهِ وَالْمَهْمُ لِشَعَثِهِ وَاعْطَقَهُمْ عَلَيْهِ عِنْدَ نَازِلَةٍ إِذَا نَزَلَتْ بِهِ
وَلِسَانُ الصِّدْقِ يَجْعَلُهُ اللَّهُ لِلْمَرْءِ فِي النَّاسِ خَيْرٌ لَهُ مِنْ الْمَالِ
يَرْتُهُ غَيْرُهُ، إِلَّا لَا يَعْدِلَنَّ أَحَدُكُمْ عَنِ الْقَرَابَةِ يَرَى بِهَا الْخِصَاصَةَ
إِنْ يَسُدُّهَا بِالَّذِي لَا يَزِيدُهُ إِذَا امْسَكَهُ وَلَا يَنْقُصُهُ إِذَا أَهْلَكَهُ وَمَنْ
يَقْبِضُ يَدَهُ عَنِ عَشِيرَتِهِ فَإِنَّمَا تَقْبِضُ مِنْهُ عَنْهُمْ يَدٌ وَاحِدَةٌ
وَتَقْبِضُ مِنْهُمْ عَنْهُ أَيْدٍ كَثِيرَةٌ وَمَنْ تَلَّنَ حَاشِيَتَهُ يَسْتَدِيمُ مِنْ قَوْمِهِ
الْمَوَدَّةُ”

"O people! No man, however rich he may be, is free of need of his relatives and their defence of him with their hands and tongues. They are the greatest of people in protection behind him, the best ones to consolidate his affairs, and the kindest to him in any trial that befalls him.

A good name which God gives a person among people is better for him than (his) wealth which someone else will inherit.

Indeed, none of you should turn away from meeting the needs of relatives whom you see in poverty with that which will neither increase if you withhold it nor decrease if you spend it (on them). He who refrains from giving his relatives has withheld only one (helping) hand from them, while (their) many hands have been withheld from him. He who is gentle to his dependants will continually receive the love of his people".[50](#)

It is for this reason that Imam 'Ali (as) writes in this letter:

"وَلَا يَكُنْ أَهْلَكَ أَشَقَى الْخَلْقِ بِكَ ..."

"Do not let your family be the most wretched of people because of you".

You should not deprive your family of your generosity and kindness since at critical times they will come to your help. If you spare them just a little help, they will in difficult times give you much assistance since you are one, but they are many.

Imam 'Ali (as) at the end of his letter writes:

**"وَأَكْرَمُ عَشِيرَتِكَ فَإِنَّهُمْ جَنَاحَكَ الَّذِي بِهِ تَطِيرُ وَأَصْلَكَ الَّذِي إِلَيْهِ
تَصِيرُ وَيَدَكَ الَّتِي بِهَا تَصُولُ"**

"Love your kinsfolk since they are your wings with which you fly, your root to which you will return, and your hand with which you assault".

15. Do Not Show Affection To One Who Does Not Wish To Be Your Friend

Friendship, as we know, depends on mutual relations. Thus, it does not exist if one of the partners is unwilling to associate. Rather, it is humiliation on the part of the one who is eager to have a relationship with the other. Imam 'Ali (as), in Nahj al-Balaghah, has said:

"زُهْدُكَ فِي رَاغِبٍ فِيكَ نُقْصَانُ حَظِّ وَرَغْبَتِكَ فِي زَاهِدٍ فِيكَ دُلُّ نَفْسٍ"

"Your shunning one who inclines towards you is a decrease in your share, and your inclining towards one who shuns you is a cause of your humiliation."[51](#)

It is for this reason that Imam 'Ali (as) has ordered us in his letter:

"وَلَا تَرَعَبَنَّ فِيمَنْ زَهَدَ عَنكَ"

"Do not desire (the friendship of) one who shuns you".

A poet says in this connection:

It is good for love to be mutual,

Or else affection is a heck on the neck.

Of course this is when the relationship has not yet been created. Otherwise, we have to establish our relations with our relatives and friends. Imam 'Ali (as) said he had seen the following on one of the swords of the Prophet (S):

**"صِلْ مَنْ قَطَعَكَ وَقُلِ الْحَقَّ وَلَوْ عَلَى نَفْسِكَ وَاحْسِنِ إِلَى مَنْ
إِسَاءَ إِلَيْكَ"**

"Establish relations with one who has cut off his relation with you, tell the truth even if it is against yourself, and do good to one who has done you wrong."[52](#)

16. Be Stronger In Establishing Relations And Doing Good Than Others Are In Cutting Relations And Doing Wrong

In keeping the ties of relation and doing favors to those friends who do not care for friendship, Imam 'Ali (as) emphasizes the following points: If others, due to their mental

status, cut off with you and even hurt you, you should avoid retaliating. You should show that you are stronger in keeping relations than them in cutting off relations. This is because their cutting off relations is based on non-divine stimuli and this can easily be done by any non-aligned individual. But keeping up ties of relation with those who have hurt us is only done by God's sincerely obedient believers. These people both have good manners and are obedient to God. They have also controlled their self that incites to evil and desire to please God. You should also tread the same path as the true believers. The great Prophet (S), in the face of Quraysh's animosity uttered the following:

"لَا تَثْرِيْبَ عَلَيْكُمْ الْيَوْمَ فَادْهَبُوا انْتُمْ الطَّلَقَاءُ"

"You are not blamed, today. Go! You are free" and he forgave them. He even adopted Abu Sufyan's house as a "secure place". In the distribution of booties in the holy war of Hawazin, Imam 'Ali (as) gave preference to newly-converted Muslims over Muhajirin and Ansar.⁵³ You, too, in establishing ties of friendship, should be stronger than them:

"وَلَا يَكُوْنَنَّ اٰخُوْكَ عَلٰى مُقَاتَعَتِكَ اَقْوٰى مِنْكَ عَلٰى صِلٰتِهِ وَلَا يَكُوْنَنَّ عَلٰى الْاِسَاءَةِ اَقْوٰى مِنْكَ عَلٰى الْاِحْسَانِ"

"Your brother should not be more powerful in severing relations with you than you are in establishing relations with him, and he should not be stronger in ill-treatment of you than you are in doing good to him".

Abdullah Ibn Talha says: I heard from Imam Sadiq (as) who said: A man came up to the Prophet (S) and said: I have some relatives who do me wrong even if I am kind to them. I have decided to cut off relations with them. The Prophet (S) answered:

"اَدْنٰ يَرْفُضْكُمْ اللّٰهُ جَمِيْعًا قَالِ وَكَيْفَ اصْنَعُ؟ قَالِ: تُعْطِيْ مَنْ حَرَمَكَ وَتَصِلُ مَنْ قَطَعَكَ وَتَعْفُوْ عَمَّنْ ظَلَمَكَ فَاِذَا فَعَلْتَ ذٰلِكَ كَانَ اللّٰهُ عَزَّوَجَلَّ لَكَ عَلَيْهِمْ طٰهِيْرًا"

"Then Allah will forsake all of you". He said: "What should I do"? The Prophet (S) said: "Give the one who has deprived you; establish relations with the one who has cut off ties with you and forgive the one who has wronged you. If you do so, God will be your aid against them."⁵⁴

17. An Unjust Person Does Himself Wrong

A person who has been subject to injustice is naturally unhappy because of the injustice

inflicted upon him. But if he looks at the issue with the Islamic world-view, he will find that the oppressed one is more successful⁵⁵ than the oppressor; the oppressor is the loser because at the God's court: firstly; God is after oppressors and watches their activities and will not leave unpunished their behavior;⁵⁶ Secondly, one of the ways to punish the oppressors is to calculate their good acts in favor of the oppressed. Furthermore the sins of the oppressed ones will be on the list of the sins of the oppressed.⁵⁷ Furthermore, patience in the face of an injustice which is unavoidable for the oppressed ones will bring them rewards.

Thus, although the oppressors are superficially triumphant, it is in fact the oppressed ones who are the true winners. This is because the unjust ones will both suffer the punishments for what they have done wrong and give their good deeds to these sufferers. The oppressed ones, moreover, will be of a higher rank in the eyes of the Divine. Thus, the fate of an oppressor is worse than that of the oppressed.

On the basis of this issue, Imam 'Ali (as) writes in his letter:

**"وَلَا يَكْبُرَنَّ عَلَيْكَ ظَلْمٌ مِّنْ ظَلَمَكَ فَإِنَّهُ يَسْعَى فِي مَضْرَبِهِ
وَنَفْعِكَ"**

"Do not consider as great the wrong-doing of one who wrongs you because he is harming himself and benefiting you."

It is also on the basis of such observations that Imam 'Ali (as) has said:

"إِيَّاكَ وَالظُّلْمَ فَإِنَّهُ يَزُولُ عَمَّنْ تَظْلِمُهُ وَيَبْقَى عَلَيْكَ"

"Beware of injustice, because it will pass away from the one whom you have wronged, but its consequences will remain with you."⁵⁸

18. You Should Not Mistreat One Who Has Made You Happy

One general principle observed among all human communities is: "Goodness is the reward for being good." We should not answer the goodness of others with evil-doing. Regarding this, the Holy Qur'an asks:

"هَلْ جَزَاءُ الْإِحْسَانِ إِلَّا الْإِحْسَانُ" 764

"Is the reward of goodness aught but goodness?"

The Holy Qur'an asks the clean nature and faultless conscience of human beings for an

answer. The answer is definitely negative. Naturally, the reward of evil is evil. The Holy Qur'an, in Surah Yunus, says:

"وَالَّذِينَ كَسَبُوا السَّيِّئَاتِ جَزَاءُ سَيِّئَةٍ بِمِثْلِهَا " 765

"And as for those who have earned evil, the punishment of an evil is the like of it."

It is also emphasized in Surah al-Shura:

"وَجَزَاءُ سَيِّئَةٍ سَيِّئَةٌ مِثْلُهَا " 766

"And the recompense of evil is punishment like it."

Thus the reward of goodness is goodness and the punishment of badness is definitely badness. Except for those cases when, due to the principle of manhood, the reward of goodness is more goodness or the case where badness is forgiven as a whole.

Imam Sadiq (as) in this regard says:

**"آيَةٌ فِي كِتَابِ اللَّهِ مُسَجَّلَةٌ، قُلْتُ وَمَا هِيَ؟ قَالَ قَوْلُ اللَّهِ
عَزَّوَجَلَّ: "هَلْ جَزَاءُ الْإِحْسَانِ إِلَّا الْإِحْسَانُ" جَرَّتْ فِي الْكَافِرِ
وَالْمُؤْمِنِ وَالْبَرِّ وَالْقَاجِرِ، وَمَنْ صُنِعَ إِلَيْهِ مَعْرُوفٌ فَعَلَيْهِ أَنْ
يُكَافِيَ بِهِ وَلَيْسَ الْمُكَافَأَةُ أَنْ تَصْنَعَ كَمَا صَنَعَ حَتَّى تَرَبَّى فَإِنْ
صَنَعْتَ كَمَا صَنَعَ كَانَ لَهُ الْقَضْلُ بِالْإِبْتِدَاءِ"**

'There is a verse which is applicable to all'. I asked which verse it was. He answered: 'It is God's statement: **"Is the reward of goodness ought but goodness?"** It is valid for the unbeliever and the believer, the good-doer and the evil-doer. Anybody who receives kindness should recompense it; and recompense is not to be done equal to it but rather in an increased measure; because if you do as he has done to you, then he has the superiority since he initiated it.'[59](#)

The Holy Qur'an commands the reward for badness to be badness, especially in the issue of retaliation, but it emphasizes that forgiveness is better:

"فَمَنْ عَفِيَ لَهُ مِنْ أُخِيهِ شَيْءٌ فَاتَّبِعْهُ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَأَدَاءُ إِلَيْهِ"

يَا حَسَانَ "768"

"But if any remission is made to any one by his aggrieved brother, then prosecution for the bloodwit should be made according to usage, and payment should be made to him in a good manner."

Thus, Imam 'Ali (as) in his letter refers to this general principle of "Goodness is the reward for goodness" when he says:

"وَلَيْسَ جَزَاءُ مَنْ سَرَّكَ أَنْ تَسُوَّهُ"

1. . Raghīb's Mufradat, the item of "one".
2. . Mustadrak al-Wasa'il, vol.2, p.62.
3. . Bihar, vol.74, p.278.
4. . An example is the book called Masadiq al-Ikhwan by Sheikh Saduq.
5. . Bihar, vol.74, p.264.
6. . Bihar, vol.74, p.264.
7. . Usul al-Kafi, vol. 2 PP 344-345 Bab al-Hijra.
8. . Usul al-Kafi, vol. 2 PP 344-345 Bab al-Hijra.
9. . Nahj al-Balaghah.
10. . Bihar, vol.74, p.222.
11. . Bihar, vol.72, p.395.
12. . Bihar, vol.74, p.411.
13. . Bihar, vol.74, p.399.
14. . Op. cit, p.401.
15. . Op. cit, p.355.
16. . Al-Kafi, vol 2, p.170.
17. . Qur'an 20:43.
18. . Nahj al-Balaghah, Hikmah 333.
19. . Nahj al-Balaghah, Sermon 193.
20. . Op. cit.
21. . Qur'an 48:29.
22. . Al-Mahajjah al-Bayda', vol.5, p.307.
23. . Qur'an 3:134.
24. . Ghurar al-Hikam.
25. . Op. cit.
26. . Al-Mahajjah al-Bayda', vol.5, pp.301-309.
27. . Op. cit.
28. . Ghurar al-Hikam.
29. . Ghurar al-Hikam.
30. . Ghurar al-Hikam.
31. . Op.cit.
32. . Ibn Maytham's Commentary on Nahj al-Balaghah, vol.5, p.55.
33. . Bihar, vol.74, p.177.
34. . Op. cit.
35. . Usul al-Kafi, vol.2, p.362.
36. . Nahj al-Balaghah, Hikmah 114.
37. . Jami' al-Sa'adat, vol.1, p.283.
38. . Jami' al-Sa'adat, vol.1, p.283.
39. . Bihar, vol.75, p.90.
40. . Op. cit.
41. . Nahj al-Balaghah, Hikmah 249.
42. . Jami' al-Sa'adat, vol.1, p.383.
43. . Al-Sahifah al-Sajjadiyah, supplication 20: Makarim al-Akhlaq.

44. Refer to Seyyid Alikhan's commentary on Al-Sahifah al-Sajjadiyah, vol.1, pp.320-322.
45. Ibn Maytham's commentary on Nahj al-Balaghah, vol.5, p.56.
46. Ibn Abi al-Hadid's commentary on Nahj al-Balaghah, vol.16, p.110.
47. Bihar, vol.74, pp.90-96-98.
48. Op. cit.
49. Qur'an 13:21.
50. Nahj al-Balaghah, Sermon 23. Similar to this statement can be seen from Imam 'Ali (as) in the book Usul al-Kafi, vol.2, p.154.
51. Nahj al-Balaghah, Hikmah 451.
52. Bihar, vol. 74 P 157.
53. Islam's histories related to the eighth year of Islamic Era.
54. Bihar, vol.74, p.100.
55. Bihar, vol.74, p.100.
56. Nahj al-Balaghah Letter 53; Nahj al-Balaghah Hikmah 176.
57. Nihayah Ibn Athir, vol.2, p.55
58. Ghurar al-Hikam.
59. Nur al-Thaqalayn, vol.5, p.199 – Tafsir Namunah, vol.23, p.171.

34) Kinds of Sustenance

"واعلم يا بُنَيَّ أَنَّ الرِّزْقَ رِزْقَانِ: رِزْقٌ تَطْلُبُهُ وَرِزْقٌ يَطْلُبُكَ، فَإِنَّ
 أَنْتَ لَمْ تَأْتِهِ أَتَاكَ، مَا أَقْبَحَ الْخُضُوعَ عِنْدَ الْحَاجَةِ، وَالْجَفَاءَ عِنْدَ
 الْغِنَى، إِنَّمَا لَكَ مِنْ دُنْيَاكَ مَا أَصْلَحْتَ بِهِ مَثْوَاكَ، وَإِنْ كُنْتَ جَارِعًا
 عَلَى مَا تَقَلَّتْ مِنْ يَدَيْكَ، فَاجْزَعْ عَلَى كُلِّ مَا لَمْ يَصِلْ إِلَيْكَ.

اسْتَدِلْ عَلَى مَا لَمْ يَكُنْ بِمَا قَدْ كَانَ فَإِنَّ الْأُمُورَ اشْتَبَاهُ، وَلَا
 تَكُونَنَّ مِمَّنْ لَا تَنْفَعُهُ الْعِظَةُ إِلَّا إِذَا بَالِغَتْ فِي إِيْلَامِهِ، فَإِنَّ
 الْعَاقِلَ يَتَّعِظُ بِالْآدَابِ وَالْبَهَائِمُ لَا تَتَّعِظُ إِلَّا بِالضَّرْبِ.

إِطْرَحْ عَنْكَ وَارِدَاتُ الْهُمُومِ يَعْزَائِمُ الصَّبْرَ وَحُسْنَ الْيَقِينِ.

مَنْ تَرَكَ الْقَصْدَ جَارًا، وَالصَّاحِبُ مُنَاسِبٌ وَالصَّدِيقُ مَنْ صَدَقَ
 عَيْبُهُ، وَالْهَوَى شَرِيكُ الْعَمَى، وَرُبَّ بَعِيدٍ أَقْرَبُ مِنْ قَرِيبٍ وَقَرِيبٍ
 أَبْعَدُ مِنْ بَعِيدٍ، وَالْغَرِيبُ مَنْ لَمْ يَكُنْ لَهُ حَيْبٌ.

مَنْ تَعَدَّى الْحَقَّ ضَاقَ مَذْهَبُهُ، وَمَنْ اقْتَصَرَ عَلَى قَدْرِهِ كَانَ أَبْقَى
لَهُ، وَأَوْثَقُ سَبَبٍ أَخَذْتَ بِهِ سَبَبٌ بَيْنَكَ وَبَيْنَ اللَّهِ سُبْحَانَهُ، وَمَنْ لَمْ
يُبَالِكْ فَهُوَ عَدُوٌّكَ.

قَدْ يَكُونُ الْيَأْسُ إِدْرَاكًا إِذَا كَانَ الطَّمَعُ هَلَاكًا، لَيْسَ كُلُّ عَوْرَةٍ
تَظْهَرُ، وَلَا كُلُّ فُرْصَةٍ تُصَابُ، وَرُبَّمَا أَخْطَأَ الْبَصِيرُ قَصْدَهُ وَأَصَابَ
الْأَعْمَى رُشْدَهُ، أَخِرُّ الشَّرِّ قَائِكَ إِذَا شِئْتَ تَعْجَلْتَهُ وَقَطِيعَةً
الْجَاهِلِ تَعْدِلُ صِلَةَ الْعَاقِلِ، مَنْ آمَنَ الزَّمَانَ خَانَهُ وَمَنْ أَعْظَمَهُ
أَهَانَهُ، لَيْسَ كُلُّ مَنْ رَمَى أَصَابَ، إِذَا تَغَيَّرَ السُّلْطَانُ تَغَيَّرَ الزَّمَانُ،
سَلُّ عَنِ الرَّفِيقِ قَبْلَ الطَّرِيقِ، وَعَنِ الْجَارِ قَبْلَ الدَّارِ، إِيَّاكَ أَنْ
تَذُكَّرَ مِنَ الْكَلَامِ مَا كَانَ مُضْجِكَ وَإِنْ حَكَيْتَ ذَلِكَ عَنْ غَيْرِكَ "

"My son, be aware that there are two kinds of sustenance: sustenance that you seek and sustenance that seeks you - even if you do not come to it, it comes to you. How ugly it is to abase yourself for your need and to be churlish when free of need! Only that much of your world is yours by which you set right your abode in the Hereafter. If you are grieved over what has slipped out of your hands, then grieve (as well) over all that which has not come to you. Seek an indication for what has not yet occurred through that which has already occurred, for affairs are similar (to each other). Do not be of those whom advice does not benefit unless you inflict suffering on them, for the intelligent one learns through good discipline and education, while animals only learn by being beaten.

Drive away from you incoming anxieties through resolute patience and the goodness of certainty. He who abandons moderation has deviated from the right path. A companion is like a relation. A true friend is one who observes the rights of friendship in one's absence. Desire is the partner of blindness (of the heart). Often the distant one is closer than the near one, and the near one is more distant than the distant one.

A real stranger is the one who has no friend. The path of one who transgresses the truth becomes narrow. One who restricts himself to his own capacity retains it. The firmest cord that you take hold of is the cord between you and Allah, the Exalted. One who has no concern for you is your enemy. When greed is destruction, then giving up hope (of what one desires) is an attainment.

Not every hidden defect becomes apparent nor is every opportunity seized. Sometimes a person possessing sight misses his objective, while a blind person attains the right path. Put off doing evil because you can hasten to it whenever you wish. Cutting off relations with an ignorant person equals establishing relations with the wise. He who feels secure against (the deception of) time has been deceived by it, and he who attaches great importance to it has been belittled by it. Every one who shoots does not hit the target. When the ruler changes, times also change. Make enquiries about the travelling companion before

(embarking on) the journey, and about the neighbor before (purchasing) the house. Beware of uttering speech that causes laughter even though you report it from someone else.

Commentary

In this portion of the letter, Imam 'Ali (as) refers to numerous pieces of wisdom, some of which will be dealt with here:

1. All Kinds Of Sustenance:

Every creature, in order to survive, needs sustenance which is allocated by God.

"وَمَا مِنْ دَابَّةٍ فِي الْأَرْضِ إِلَّا عَلَى اللَّهِ رِزْقُهَا" 769

"And there is no animal in the earth but on Allah is the sustenance of it."

And since the physiological structure and the dietary planning of these creatures are different, God has provided them with appropriate forms of sustenance.

"عِيَالَهُ الْخَلَائِقِ، صَمِنَ أَرْزَاقَهُمْ وَقَدَّرَ اقْوَاتَهُمْ"

*"The dependants of God are His creatures. He has guaranteed their sustenance and determined their provisions."*¹

It is a fact that sustenance is predetermined, but since the world is governed by laws and for every action there are some means and agents and man's choices are among these means and agents², therefore man's struggle³ to get the sustenance is as sacred as the religious holy wars.⁴

But since the distribution of sustenance is both qualitatively and quantitatively determined by God's special reasoning, sometimes some creatures receive so much sustenance that "a hundred wise men are puzzled at the rationale behind such distribution"⁵

Imam 'Ali (as) in some sections of Nahj al-Balaghah refers to these two types of sustenance and stresses the following fact: Since this is a universal fact, an effort to earn sustenance through wrong and illegal methods is pure stupidity.

Imam (as) in the chapter on Hikam of Nahj al-Balaghah says:

"يَابْنَ آدَمَ، الرِّزْقُ رِزْقَانِ: رِزْقٌ تَطْلِبُهُ وَرِزْقٌ يَطْلُبُكَ، فَان لَمْ تَأْتِهِ أَتَاكَ، فَلَا تَحْمِلْ هَمَّ سَنَتِكَ عَلَى هَمِّ يَوْمِكَ، كِفَاكَ كُلُّ يَوْمٍ عَلَى مَا فِيهِ، فَإِنْ تَكُنَ السَّنَةُ مِنْ عُمْرِكَ فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ تَعَالَى سَيُؤْتِيكَ

فِي كُلِّ عَدِّ جَدِيدٍ مَا قَسَمَ لَكَ، وَإِنْ لَمْ تَكُنِ السَّنَةُ مِنْ عُمرِكَ
فَمَا تَصْنَعُ بِالْهَمِّ فِيمَا لَيْسَ لَكَ، وَلَنْ يَسْبِقَكَ إِلَى رِزْقِكَ طَالِبٌ،
وَلَنْ يَغْلِبَكَ عَلَيْهِ غَالِبٌ، وَلَنْ يُبْطِئَ عَنْكَ مَا قَدْ قُدِّرَ لَكَ"

"O son of Adam! There are two types of sustenance: the sustenance that you seek and the sustenance that seeks you. So do not impose the anxieties for the year ahead on the anxiety of today. What each day holds is sufficient for you. If the following year is part of your life, then Allah will give you in every new tomorrow what is apportioned for you. But if the following year is not part of your life, then what will you do with worrying about what is not yours? No seeker will precede you to your sustenance nor will anyone take it from you, and what has been destined for you will not held back from you."[6](#)

In another occasion of the same book, Imam 'Ali (as) says:

"يَابْنَ آدَمَ، لَا تَحْمِلْ هَمَّ يَوْمِكَ الَّذِي يَأْتِيكَ عَلَى يَوْمِكَ الَّذِي قَدْ
آتَاكَ فَاتَهُ إِنْ يَكُ مِنْ عُمرِكَ يَأْتِ اللهُ فِيهِ بِرِزْقِكَ"

"O son of Adam! Do not impose the anxiety for the day which is to come on the anxiety of your present day. This is because if it is to be a part of your life then Allah will give you your sustenance in it".[7](#)

And in his letter, on "the sustenance you seek" and "the sustenance that seeks you", Imam 'Ali (as) says:

"وَاعْلَمْ يَا بُنَيَّ أَنَّ الرِّزْقَ رِزْقَانِ: رِزْقٌ تَطْلِبُهُ وَرِزْقٌ يَطْلِبُكَ فَإِنَّ
أَنْتَ لَمْ تَأْتِهِ أَتَاكَ"

"My son! Know that sustenance is of two types: the sustenance that you seek, and the sustenance that seeks you -even if you do not come to it, it will come to you."

Examples:

There are many cases where sustenance has been after specific individuals. Here we will introduce the examples mentioned under this portion of Imam 'Ali's letter by Ibn Abi al-Hadid:

a) 'Imad al-Dawlah Abu al-Hassan 'Ali b.Buwayh after defeating Ibn Yaqut entered Shiraz. He was a poor man with no wealth. On the way, his horse's leg was caught in a hole. He had to dismount and his servants freed the horse's leg. They saw a large opening in the ground. He ordered his men to dig the place and they found great treasures of Ibn Yaqut's.

b) One day 'Imad al-Dawlah, was lying on his back in Ibn Yaqut's house in Shiraz when he saw a snake on the ceiling. He ordered his men to kill it but it ran away, taking refuge in the wooden planks of the church. He ordered his men to remove the planks. There, to their surprise, they found fifty thousand dinars of Ibn Yaqut's treasure.

c) 'Imad al-Dawlah, after entering Shiraz and establishing the foundations of his reign desired to have clothing for himself and for his household. His men told him the tailor of Ibn Yaqut, a truly religious and benevolent man, was available. But he was a deaf man. He ordered the tailor to his presence. When 'Imad told the tailor he wished for some clothes, the man trembled, saying: By God, My lord, I do not have more than four boxes of Yaqut's treasures. Emad was surprised and ordered his men to fetch the boxes. The boxes were filled with gold, jewelry and valuable cloth."⁸

2. How Improper It Is To Be Humble When In Need And Be Indifferent When In Free Of Need:

Humility, stubbornness, kindness and indifference should be based on self-esteem and submission to Allah and to righteousness and not on hypocrisy and financial considerations. There are a lot of people who are meek when in need and aggressive when free of need. The Holy Qur'an describes the attitudes of such people in different verses:

In Surah Yunus, God says:

"هُوَ الَّذِي يُسَيِّرُكُمْ فِي الْبَرِّ وَالْبَحْرِ حَتَّىٰ إِذَا كُنْتُمْ فِي الْفُلِ
وَجَرَيْنَ بِهِمْ بِرِيحٍ طَيِّبَةٍ وَفَرِحُوا بِهَا جَاءَتْهَا رِيحٌ عَاصِفٌ وَجَاءَهُمُ
الْمَوْجُ مِنْ كُلِّ مَكَانٍ وَظَنُّوا أَنَّهُمْ أُحِيطَ بِهِمْ دَعَوُا اللَّهَ مُخْلِصِينَ
لَهُ الدِّينَ لَئِنِ أَنْجَيْتَنَا مِنْ هَذِهِ لَنَكُونَنَّ مِنَ الشَّاكِرِينَ فَلَمَّا أَنْجَاهُمْ
إِذَا هُمْ يَبْغُونَ فِي الْأَرْضِ بِغَيْرِ الْحَقِّ..."

"He it is who makes you travel by land and sea; until when you are in the ships, and they sail on with them in a pleasant breeze, and they rejoice, a violent wind overtakes them and the billows surge in on them from all sides, and they become certain that they are encompassed about, they pray to Allah, being sincere to Him in obedience: if thou dost deliver us from this, we will most certainly be of the grateful ones. But when He delivers them, lo! They are unjustly rebellious in the earth"⁹

The same issue is brought up in Surah al-'Ankabut [Qur'an 29]:

"فَإِذَا رَكِبُوا فِي الْفُلِ دَعَوُا اللَّهَ مُخْلِصِينَ لَهُ الدِّينَ فَلَمَّا نَجَّاهُمْ
إِلَى الْبَرِّ إِذَا هُمْ يُشْرِكُونَ"

"So when they ride in the ships they call upon Allah, being sincerely obedient to Him, but when He brings them safe to the land, lo! They associate others with Him"¹⁰

And in Surah al-'Alaq [The Clot], the inordinate character of man when not in need is described as follows:

**"كَلَّا إِنَّ الْإِنْسَانَ لِرَبِّهِ لَكَنَّاظٍ
لَإِن رَّآهُ اسْتَغْنَىٰ 780"**

"Nay! Man is most surely inordinate, because he sees himself free from want."

These verses clearly show to us that some people's humility or stubbornness is not based on yielding to justice and keeping one's self-esteem in the face of humiliation; rather they are hypocrites and money-mongers. Thus, when they attain what they desire and feel no need, they will forget their beneficent God, resorting to injustice and aggression. But when they feel endangered and in need of God's assistance, they become humble in front of their creator. This group of people lacks self-esteem and obedience to Allah. A respectable human being never will approve this kind of attitude towards life.

Although these verses depict the attitude of those who become humble in front of God when in need but become stubborn when they are free from want, they are good examples for Imam 'Ali's statements. Such people are aggressive not only in front of God, but also in their dealing with people, as well. Imam 'Ali's reproach in his letter includes these people. In other words, Imam 'Ali's statement is general. It includes everybody, both high-standing people and common ones. The poet says:

**"خُلِقَان لَا أَرْضَاهُمَا لِقَتَىٰ - تَيْهُ الْغَنَىٰ وَمَدَلُّ الْفَقْرِ - فَإِذَا عَنَيْتَ
وَلَا تَكُن بَطِرًا - وَإِذَا افْتَقَرْتَ فِيهِ عَلَى الدَّهْرِ"**

"There are two traits which do not suit a true gentleman: pride in possessing wealth, and humiliation in poverty. Thus, when you are wealthy do not be haughty and when you become poor, consider this world less important than it really is."¹¹

3. What In This World Which Could Rebuild Our Hereafter Would Be Worth Of Noting:

Everything in this world including wealth, position, women, children, ornaments, residence, clothing, food and drinks will come to an end. Only that aspect of this world will remain which is divine.

The Holy Qur'an in this respect says:

"مَا عِنْدَكُمْ يَنْقَدُ وَمَا عِنْدَ اللَّهِ بَاقٍ وَلَنَجْزِيَنَّ الَّذِينَ صَبَرُوا أَجْرَهُمْ بِأَحْسَنِّ مَا كَانُوا يَعْمَلُونَ مَنْ عَمَلَ صَالِحًا مِنْ ذَكَرٍ أَوْ أَنْثَىٰ وَهُوَ مُؤْمِنٌ فَلَنُحْيِيَنَّهٗ حَيَاةً طَيِّبَةً وَلَنَجْزِيَنَّهُمْ أَجْرَهُمْ بِأَحْسَنِ مَا كَانُوا يَعْمَلُونَ"

"What is with you passes away and what is with Allah is enduring; and we will most certainly give to those who are patient their reward for the best of what they did. Whoever does good whether male or female, and he is a believer, We will most certainly make him live a happy life, and We will most certainly give them their reward for the best of what they did."[12](#)

Elsewhere the Holy Qur'an says:

"الْمَالُ وَالْبَنُونَ زِينَةُ الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا وَالْبَاقِيَاتُ الصَّالِحَاتُ خَيْرٌ عِنْدَ رَبِّكَ تَوَابًا وَخَيْرٌ أَمَلًا"

"Wealth and children are an adornment of the life of this world; and the ever-abiding, the good works, are better with your Lord in reward and better in expectation."[13](#)

Thus, that part of the world's good which is being consumed in this world and has no flavor of divinity attached to it would be a nuisance for man and its pleasure is little and worthless. But what has been used here in this world for God's sake and satisfaction will give a definite reward to man in the Hereafter.[14](#) In this regard the Prophet (S) has stated:

"يَابْنَ آدَمَ، لَيْسَ لَكَ مِنْ مَالِكَ إِلَّا مَا أَكَلْتَ فَافْتَيْتَ أَوْ لَيْسَتْ فَابْلَيْتَ، أَوْ تَصَدَّقْتَ فَابْقَيْتَ"

"O son of Adam! From your wealth nothing is left except that which you ate and consumed, or that which you wore and is now thread-bare, or that which you gave away as charity and it remains (for you)."

He has also said:

"إِذَا مَاتَ ابْنُ آدَمَ انْقَطَعَ أَمَلُهُ إِلَّا عَنِ ثَلَاثٍ: صَدَقَةٌ جَارِيَةٌ، عِلْمٌ يُنْتَفَعُ بِهِ وَوَلَدٌ صَالِحٌ يَدْعُوا لَهُ"

"When the son of Adam dies, his hopes are severed from all but three things: the charity that continues to circulate [the good works done for people, e.g. books, hospitals, roads, mosques, etc...];¹⁵ the knowledge and learning from which people benefit, and a righteous child who will pray for him".¹⁶

And Imam 'Ali (as) in this connection says in Nahj al-Balaghah:

"شَتَان مَا بَيْنَ عَمَلَيْنِ: عَمَلٌ تَذْهَبُ لِدُّنْهُ وَتَبْقَى تَبِيعَتُهُ وَعَمَلٌ
تَذْهَبُ مَوْنَتُهُ وَيَبْقَى أَجْرُهُ"

"What a difference between these two deeds: a deed whose pleasure passes away but its (evil) consequences remain: and a deed whose difficulties come to an end, but its rewards remain!"¹⁷

Imam 'Ali (as) has said in his letter:

"إِنَّمَا لَكَ مِنْ دُنْيَاكَ مَا أَصْلَحْتَ بِهِ مَثْوَاكَ"

Do Not Worry Over The Past Events:

Change is interwoven in the very structure of life in this world. One sort of change is gaining things and losing them. Sometimes we lose objects which we love extremely and at times we get things we did not anticipate. Some people become disturbed upon losing things or obtaining what which entails misery for them. On the other hand, the elite become neither overjoyed nor depressed on what they get or lose. This is because firstly, everything is fatal: only Allah is everlasting:

"كُلُّ شَيْءٍ هَالِكٌ إِلَّا وَجْهَهُ 788 - كُلُّ مَنْ عَلَيْهَا قَانٍ وَيَبْقَى وَجْهُهُ
رَبِّكَ ذُو الْجَلَالِ وَالْإِكْرَامِ" 789

"Everything is perishable but Him".

"Every one of it must pass away; and there will endure for ever the person of your Lord, the Lord of glory and honor."

Regarding this, a poet says:

Do not get hurt with the presence or absence of any goods;

Since any existing thing is perishable at the end.

Secondly, with a simple calculation, the elite calm themselves over lost or unattainable desires. They think these lost assets are like other lost ones or they are similar to thousand other desires which will never materialize. Since they do not worry over what is

unattainable, they do not bother on losing them.

Thirdly, they consider this significant principle: "Be happy with what you presently have and do not frown." They contend that showing discomfort is in contrast with the Principle of submission to God's will. Among these honored ones is the one who was 70 years of age and:

"وَلَمْ يَقُلْ شَيْئٌ كَانَ، لَيْتَهُ لَمْ يَكُنْ وَلَا شَيْئٌ لَمْ يَكُنْ، لَيْتَهُ
كَانَ" 790

"For what happened he never said: I wish it had not happened; and for what did not happen, he never said: I wish it did happen".

It is for this reason that Imam 'Ali (as), in his letter, commands us to:

"وَإِنْ كُنْتَ جَارِعاً مَا تَقَلَّتْ مِنْ يَدِكَ فَاجْزَعْ عَلَى كُلِّ مَا لَمْ يَصِلْ
إِلَيْكَ"

"If you are grieved over what has slipped out of your hands, then grieve (as well) over all that which has not come to you".

4. Base Your Reasoning For Future Actions On The Events Of The Past:

One of the ways to carry out reasoning is logical exemplification or what the jurists call "qiyas" or "deduction."

By exemplification we mean proving a case because of its similarity to or identity with other cases. An example follows: In the same way that a house needs a builder, the sky and the earth, too, need a creator. Another, example: In the same way that wine is forbidden because it causes drunkenness, any alcohol, too, is forbidden because it brings about intoxication.

In any case, we see in history that the oppressors and tyrants are ruined or pleasure seekers finally become miserable or those who do not respect their parents will not prosper, we come to the conclusion that if we carry out these acts, we too will suffer.

As we have already seen, in the books on traditions this issue is interpreted as "getting experience" or "learning your lesson". Imam 'Ali (as) refers to this topic in different occasions: Some examples are here:

a) "إِنَّ لِلْبَاقِينَ بِالْمَاضِينَ مُعْتَبَرًا، إِنَّ الْآخِرَ بِالْأَوَّلِ مُرَدَجَرًا" 791

"There are lessons from the past generations for those who remain. There are deterrents for the later people from the earlier ones."

b) "وَصَدِّقْ بِمَا سَلَفَ مِنَ الْحَقِّ وَاعْتَبِرْ بِمَا مَضَى مِنَ الدُّنْيَا لِمَا بَقِيَ مِنْهَا فَإِنَّ

بَعْضُهَا يُشْبِهُ بَعْضًا وَأَخْرُهَا لِأَجْلِ بِأَوَّلِهَا وَكُلُّهَا حَائِلٌ مُفَارِقٌ"

"Confirm what has preceded of the truth. Take lessons from what has past of this world for what remains of it, for they (events) resemble one another, their end reaches their beginning and all of it is transient and unstable".[18](#)

c) "فَاعْتَبِرُوا بِمَا أَصَابَ الْأُمَّمَ الْمُسْتَكْبِرِينَ مِنْ قَبْلِكُمْ مِنْ بَأْسِ اللَّهِ وَصَوَلَاتِهِ وَوَقَائِعِهِ

وَمَثَلَاتِهِ وَاتَّعِظُوا بِمَثَاوِي خُدُودِهِمْ وَمَصَارِعِ جُنُوبِهِمْ"

"Take lessons from the chastisement of Allah, His assaults, His onslaughts and His exemplary punishments that befell the arrogant nations before you. Pay attention to their residence in the graves".[19](#)

d) "مَنْ لَمْ يَعْتَبِرْ بِغَيْرِ الدُّنْيَا وَصُرُوفِهَا لَمْ تَنْجَعْ فِيهِ الْمَوَاعِظُ"

"One who does not take lessons from the ups and downs and the changes of the world will not benefit from any admonition, either".[20](#)

e) "Only one who has taken lessons from his past will take lessons from his remaining life span."[21](#)

It is for this reason that Imam 'Ali (as) in his honorable letter writes:

"اسْتَدِلُّ عَلَى مَا لَمْ يَكُنْ بِمَا قَدْ كَانَ فَإِنَّ الْأُمُورَ اشْبَاهُ"

"Seek an indication for what has not yet occurred through that which has already occurred, for affairs are similar (to each other)".

5. The Wise Listen To Advice Through Good Manners, But The Beasts Do So Through Punishment:

One of the advantages of man over the beast is his capacity to be advised through education. It is man who, through his being equipped with the power of wisdom and free will, can go through a path which may make him enjoy human virtues and can keep him away from committing wrong doings.²²

This state of taking advice and enjoying good manners is a criterion for man's values and is the best heritage and the most excellent garment for him.

But people are different in accepting advice: Some take advice with a small signal given them and do a lot of good deeds within a short time. Some are late and lazy in taking advice and do not adopt it unless punished or reproached. They behave like beasts that must be hit to go the right way. Imam (as), on this issue, writes in his sacred letter:

**"وَلَا تَكُونَنَّ مِمَّنْ لَا تَنْفَعُهُ الْعِظَةُ إِلَّا إِذَا بَالِغَتْ فِي إِيلَامِهِ فَإِنَّ
الْعَاقِلَ يَتَّعِظُ بِالْأَدَابِ وَالْبَهَائِمُ لَا تَتَّعِظُ إِلَّا بِالضَّرْبِ"**

"Do not be of those whom advice does not benefit unless you inflict suffering on them, for the intelligent one learns through good discipline and education, while animals learn only by being beaten".

Elsewhere, Imam 'Ali (as) has stated:

"عُقُوبَةُ الْعُقَلَاءِ التَّلْوِيحُ، عُقُوبَةُ الْجُهَّالِ التَّصْرِيحُ"

"The punishment of the wise is through a hint but that of the ignorant is through explicit speech".²³

However, there are some who will never take advice. This is not because they are not created as such; rather, this indifference of theirs toward taking advice is due to their wrong education or their getting accustomed to bad habits and performing sins so much so that they are not ready to employ their wisdom and to go the right path. If they wish, however, they could develop and change as it is said of an illegitimate child:

**"إِنَّ وِلْدَ الزَّنَا يَسْتَعْمَلُ إِنْ عَمَلَ خَيْرًا جُزِيَ بِهِ وَإِنْ عَمَلَ شَرًّا
جُزِيَ بِهِ"**

"An illegitimate child performs his deeds; if he does good, he will be rewarded for it and if he does wrong he will be punished for it".[24](#)

The Holy Qur'an talks about these people as creatures worse than beasts.[25](#) They are also likened to salty land where nothing can grow but inferior herbage.[26](#) Our poets have said:

Education to an unworthy person is like a nut on the dome.

Another poem depicts the same thing:

The rain which is unanimously believed to be delicate

In the garden it causes tulips to grow, but in the salt marsh it causes thorns to grow.

All of the above cases depend upon these people's capability for performing vice. This is not taken to mean that they lack the necessary will to adopt the right way.[27](#)

6. Avoid Worries And Sorrows Through Patience And Real Conviction:

If we believe that God performs everything based on wisdom and expedience and also contend that what He does is either pure benevolence or its goodness exceeds its badness, then we, as true believers, will anticipate all miseries willingly and will never show signs of impatience.

Of course, there are some calamities which are created due to people's mismanagement. In these cases they are to be blamed. Examples are:

One who has been careless in driving his car and has caused the death and injuries of others.

One who has lost his life through addiction; and one who has lost his wealth because of gambling or extravagance.

These people should not blame the others because they deserve the hardships they are facing.

But sometimes some events occur which are beyond our control, such as the following:

A strong earthquake might destroy his life and his building despite the fact that the building was designed in accordance with safety codes; some type of cancer might kill a friend or a relative of theirs; sometimes a flood or a tornado could bring about irreparable damages.

These extraordinary events, which are beyond our control and are among the general principles of this world are based on some valid divine wisdom. We might assume these happenings are harmful for us. But if our conviction is that God will not carry out a useless act and that these happenings are in our favor, we will suffer them with patience.

Thus, as Imam 'Ali (as) has stated in his letter

"إِطْرَحْ عَنْكَ وَآرِدَاتِ الْهُمُومِ بِعَزَائِمِ الصَّبْرِ وَحُسْنِ الْيَقِينِ"

"Drive away incoming anxieties from you through resolute patience and the goodness of certainty",

A patient believer will not allow worries and sorrows to bother him and what he sees in God is only beauty.

7. Putting Aside Moderation Is Injustice And Deviation From Rightousness:

In general, moderation in affairs is desirable and in accordance with justice and being extravagant and parsimonious are considered to be unjust. Our religious leaders have commanded us to observe the principle of moderation in livelihood, work, worship, food consumption, rest, struggle, and the like.

The Qur'an, in describing the attributes of the true believers says:

"وَالَّذِينَ إِذَا أَنْفَقُوا لَمْ يُسْرِفُوا وَلَمْ يَقْتُرُوا وَكَانَ بَيْنَ ذَلِكَ قَوَامًا"

"And they who when they spend, are neither extravagant nor parsimonious, and keep between these the just mean"[28](#)

Upon his death bed, Imam 'Ali (as) advises his son:

"اِقْتَصِدْ يَا بُنَيَّ فِي مَعِيشَتِكَ وَاقْتَصِدْ فِي عِبَادَتِكَ"

"My son! Be moderate in livelihood and worship"[29](#)

On another occasion, Imam 'Ali (as) said:

"مَنْ اِقْتَصَدَ فِي الْغِنَى وَالْفَقْرِ فَقَدْ اسْتَعَدَّ لِأَنْوَاعِ الدَّهْرِ"

"One who is moderate in the face of poverty and affluence is prepared for the hardships of the world."[30](#)

The Islamic scholars in ethics consider good manners between the two extremes of extravagance and dissipation; bravery between timidity and boldness; generosity between dissipation and avarice, economy between extravagance and severity; modesty between pride and meanness; and chastity between sensual desire and lack of sexual drive. By the right path is meant moderation; any deviation of it brings about injustice and the subsequent descent to hell. This right path is narrower than a hair and sharper than a sword.[31](#)

Our poets have written:

Do not resort to gluttony to the extent that it is poured out of your mouth,
Nor eat too little so that you lack the needed energy.

A true walker is not the one who speeds up at one moment and gets tired the other

moment;

Rather, a good walker is the one who goes slowly but steadily.

Imam 'Ali (as) in his letter emphasizes:

"مَنْ تَرَكَ الْقَمْدَ جَارًا"

"He who abandons moderation has deviated from the right path".

8. Your Companion Is Like Your Relative:

With regards to the previous discussions about the role of companions, we understood that a companion is a means of one's solace and help at the time of depression and an important factor in shaping one's character. And in this way the message of Imam 'Ali (as) in his statement:

"وَالصَّاحِبُ مُنَاسِبٌ"

"The companion is like a relative" becomes obvious. This is because where a relative has blood relation with one, a companion has spiritual relation with him.

"صُحْبَةُ الْوَلِيِّ اللَّيِّبِ حَيَاةُ الرُّوحِ"

"Association with a wise friend is a means of life for the spirit."[32](#)

It is as though they possess one soul in two bodies.

"الأَصْدِقَاءُ نَفْسٌ وَاحِدٌ فِي جُسُومٍ مُتَفَرِّقَةٍ"

"Friends are one soul in different bodies"[33](#)

The companion whom Imam Hasan (as) had in mind, has the following traits:

**"فَاصْحَابُ مَنْ إِذَا صَحِبْتَهُ زَانِكَ وَإِذَا خَدَمْتَهُ صَانِكَ وَإِذَا أَرَدْتَ مِنْهُ
مَعُونَتَهُ أَعَانِكَ وَإِنْ قُلْتَ صَدَقَ قَوْلِكَ وَإِنْ صِلْتَ شَدَّ صَوْلِكَ وَإِنْ
مَدَدْتَ يَدَكَ بِفَضْلِ مَدَّهَا وَإِنْ بَدَتَ عَنْكَ تَلَمَّهُ سَدَّهَا وَإِنْ رَأَى مِنْكَ**

حَسَنَةً عَدُّهَا وَإِنْ سَأَلْتَهُ أَعْطَاكَ وَإِنْ سَكَتَ عَنْهُ ابْتَدَاكَ وَإِنْ نَزَلَتْ
بِكَ إِحْدَى الْمُلِمَّاتِ وَاسَاكَ مَنْ لَا تَأْتِيكَ مِنْهُ الْبَوَائِقُ وَلَا تَحْتَلِفُ
عَلَيْكَ مِنْهُ الطَّرَائِقُ وَلَا يَخْذُلُكَ عِنْدَ الْحَقَائِقِ وَإِنْ تَنَازَعْتُمَا
مُنْقَسِمًا أَتَرَكَ"

"Then associate with one who, if you associate with him he adorns you, if you serve him, he protects you, if you desire help from him, he aids you, if you speak, he confirms your speech, if you attack he supports your attack, if you stretch out your hand with favour, he stretches out his hand, if a breach appears in you, he fills it, if he perceives a good deed from you, he esteems it, if you ask him he gives it, if you are silent (about it), he anticipates (your request), and if a misfortune befalls you, he assists you. Misfortunes do not come to you from him, nor does changeability befall you from him, and he does not fail to aid you in the realities (of affairs); and if the two of you are in contention, he gives preference to you over himself."[34](#)

Such an associate deserves being treated as a relative. We should carry out for him those responsibilities that we are supposed to perform for our relatives.

9. A True Friend Is The One Who Respects You In Your Absence:

A genuine friend is the one who respects you in your absence. He should not boast of his friendship in front of you nor should he act hypocritically in your absence. Imam 'Ali (as) in the Hikmah section of Nahj al-Balaghah emphasizes:

"لَا يَكُونُ الصَّدِيقُ صَدِيقًا حَتَّى يَحْفَظَ أَخَاهُ فِي ثَلَاثٍ: فِي نَكْبَتِهِ
وَعَيْبَتِهِ وَوَقَاتِهِ"

"A friend is not a friend until he safeguards his brother in three situations: in his adversity, in his absence and at his death."[35](#)

Imam Sadiq (as) gives the following advice to Muhammad ibn Muslim and his companion:

"وَإِنْ غَابَ فَاحْفَظْهُ فِي عَيْبَتِهِ"

"When he is absent, then safeguard him in his absence."[36](#)

Imam 'Ali (as), in his letter, emphasized the same principle:

"وَالصَّدِيقُ مَنْ صَدَقَ عَيْبُهُ"

"A true friend is one who observes the rights of friendship in one's absence".

10. Sensuality Is Like Blindness:

As we saw before, one of the factors which hinders man's realism is sensuality. Imam 'Ali (as) says:

"فَمَا اتَّبَعُ الْهَوَىٰ فَيَصُدُّ عَنِ الْحَقِّ"

"Following desires hinders man from the truth."[37](#)

It is also said:

"حُبُّ الشَّيْءِ يُعمُّ وَيُصِمُّ"

"(Too much) love for something makes a man both blind and deaf."

It is for this reason that Imam 'Ali (as) wrote in his letter:

"وَالهَوَىٰ شَرِيكُ العَمَىٰ"

"Desire is the partner of blindness (of the heart)."

In the same manner a sensual person is deprived of the ways to distinguish the right way. Imam 'Ali (as) has stated in this connection:

**"اوصيكم بمُجَانَبَةِ الْهَوَىٰ فَإِنَّ الْهَوَىٰ يَدْعُو إِلَى الْعَمَىٰ وَهُوَ
الضَّلَالُ فِي الْآخِرَةِ وَالدُّنْيَا"**

"I recommend that you keep away from desire because it causes blindness and it is straying from the right path both here and in the hereafter."[38](#)

Imam 'Ali (as) in this respect has said:

"إِنَّكَ إِنْ أَطَعْتَ هَوَاكَ أَصَمَّكَ وَأَعَمَّكَ وَأَفْسَدَ مُنْقَلَبَكَ وَارْدَاكَ"

"If you obey your desire, it will make you both blind and deaf and will ruin your hereafter and destroy you."[39](#)

He has also stated:

"One who follows his desire will be both blind and deaf."[40](#)

11. Close Strangers And Strange Relatives:

It can not be denied that in the school of the Prophets (as) the criterion for relationship is based on religious bonds. Otherwise mere blood relationship or belonging to a special tribe, race or family does not establish a credible relationship. For this reason God did not consider Noah's son as one of his family since his ideas were different from those of his father.

"إِنَّهُ لَيْسَ مِنْ أَهْلِكَ"

[41](#)

"He said: O Nuh! Surely he is not of your family."

Another example applies to Abu Lahab, the Prophet's uncle, who tormented the Prophet (S) and was therefore condemned by the Qur'an. Surah al-Lahab was revealed to the Prophet (S) in this case:

"تَبَّتْ يَدَا أَبِي لَهَبٍ وَتَبَّ"

"Perdition overtake both hands of Abu Lahab, and he will perish"

On the other hand, although Salman was an Iranian, the Prophet (S) considered him one of his family members. The Prophet (S) has said:

"سَلْمَانُ مِنَّا أَهْلَ الْبَيْتِ" 816

"Salman is from us, the Ahl al-Bayt (the Prophet's family)".

It is on this basis that in our Islamic traditions there are some characters that carry the titles "Shi'ah" or "Muslim" but in behavior and in practice they do not look like the Prophet (S) or his household. They are expelled from the Muslim ranks, however. Examples are the

following:

a) The Great Prophet (S) says:

"مَنْ عَشَّ مُسْلِمًا فَلَيْسَ مِنَّا"

"He who deceives a Muslim is not of us."

b) Imam Sadiq (as) says:

"لَيْسَ بِوَلِيِّ لِي مَنْ أَكَلَ مَالَ مُؤْمِنٍ حَرَامًا"

"One who unlawfully consumes a believer's property is not my friend".

c) The Great Prophet (S) has said:

"أَلَا وَمَنْ أَكْرَمَهُ النَّاسُ اتِّقَاءَ شَرِّهِ فَلَيْسَ مِنِّي"

"Indeed, one whom people respect in order to guard against his evil, is not of me".

d) Imam 'Ali (as) has said:

"لَيْسَ مِنْ شِيعَتِنَا مَنْ يَظْلِمُ النَّاسَ"

"One who does injustice to people is not one of our Shi'ah."

e) The Great Prophet (S) said:

"مَنْ سَمَعَ رَجُلًا يُنَادِي يَا لِلْمُسْلِمِينَ فَلَمْ يَجِبْهُ فَلَيْسَ بِمُسْلِمٍ"

"One who hears a person calling: 'O Muslims, help me,' and does not respond is not a Muslim."

f) Imam Baqir (as) told one of his followers named Jabir:

"واعلم يَا جَابِرَ بِأَنَّكَ لَا تَكُونُ لَنَا وَلِيًّا حَتَّىٰ لَوْ اجْتَمَعَ عَلَيْكَ أَهْلُ
مِصْرِكَ وَقَالُوا أَنْتَ رَجُلٌ سُوءٍ لَمْ يُحْزَنَكَ ذَلِكَ وَلَوْ قَالُوا إِنَّكَ رَجُلٌ
صَالِحٌ لَمْ يَسُرَّكَ ذَلِكَ وَلَكِنْ اعْرَضْ نَفْسَكَ عَلَىٰ كِتَابِ اللَّهِ"

"Know Jabir, that you will not be our friend until, if the inhabitants of your city gather against you and say: 'You are an evil man', you will not be grieved by that, and if they say: 'You are a virtuous man', you will not be made happy by that. Rather, you should judge yourself in accordance with the Book of Allah (to discover the criteria for virtue and evil)."

g) Imam Kadhim (as) said:

"لَيْسَ مِنَّا مَنْ لَمْ يُحَاسِبِ نَفْسَهُ فِي كُلِّ يَوْمٍ"

"One who does not evaluate himself every day is not of us."

h) Imam 'Ali Ibn Musa Al-Reza (as) has been reported to have asked one of his friends: How do people interpret this verse: **"O Nuh! He is not of your family..."**.⁴² One of the attendants said that people think this verse means that Noah's son was not his real son.

Imam Reza (as) answered:

"كَأَنَّكَ لَقَدْ كَانَ ابْنَهُ وَلَكِنْ لَمَّا عَصَى اللَّهُ نَقَاهُ عَنِ أَبِيهِ كَذَا مِنْ
كَانَ مِنَّا لَمْ يُطِيعِ اللَّهَ فَلَيْسَ مِنَّا"

"No, it is not the case. He was really Noah's son, but when he disobeyed God, He negated his kinship with his father. In the same way, one who is of us but does not obey God is not one of us."

Thus, it is in accordance with what Imam 'Ali (as) has written in his sacred letter:

"وَرُبُّ بَعِيدٍ أَقْرَبُ مِنْ قَرِيبٍ وَقَرِيبٌ أَبْعَدُ مِنْ بَعِيدٍ"

"Often the distant one is closer than the near one, and the near one is more remote than the distant one". There might be some strangers who are closer to us than our relatives and some relatives who are more distant from us than strangers. And the Holy Qur'an, in this concern, says:

**يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا إِنَّ مِنْ أَزْوَاجِكُمْ وَأَوْلَادِكُمْ عَدُوًّا لَكُمْ
فَاحْذَرُوهُمْ"**

"O you who believe! Surely from among your wives and your children there is an enemy to you; therefore beware of them."[43](#)

And verses 22 and 23 of Sura al-Bara'ah [Tawbah] have similar content:

**"يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لَا تَتَّخِذُوا آبَاءَكُمْ وَإِخْوَانَكُمْ أَوْلِيَاءَ إِنَّ
اسْتَحَبُّوا الْكُفْرَ عَلَى الْإِيمَانِ ..."**

"O you who believe! Do not take your fathers and brothers for guardians if they love unbelief more than belief; and whoever of you takes them for a guardian, these it is that are the unjust."

12. A Stranger Is One Who Has No Friends:

It is true that the word "stranger" is generally used for those who are away from their country; but a true stranger or lonely man is one who is deprived of friends and associates. For this reason a person who is away from his country is also called a stranger because there he lacks friends and associates.

Thus, if a person lacks friends in his own country, he can be said to be a stranger. If a man has appropriate friends in a foreign country, he is not still considered a stranger. For this reason, Imam 'Ali (as) has said:

"لَيْسَ بَلَدٌ بِأَحَقَّ بِكَ مِنْ بَلَدٍ، خَيْرُ الْبِلَادِ مَا حَمَلَكَ"

"No country is more suitable for you than another; the best country for you is the one in which you are accepted."[44](#)

In Imam 'Ali's conception, the poor and the deprived people are also considered stranger in their own homeland since they are generally deprived of people's association with them:

"وَالْمُقِلُّ غَرِيبٌ فِي بَلَدَتِهِ"

"A poor person is a stranger even in his own city"[45](#)

On the basis of this principle, Imam 'Ali (as) in his letter states:

"وَالْغَرِيبُ مَنْ لَمْ يَكُنْ لَهُ حَیْبٌ"

"A stranger is the one who has no friend."

By this statement, he wants to emphasize the significance of having friends. Imam 'Ali (as) has said: He who does not have friends is a miserable person; and even more miserable than him is the one who easily loses his friends.

13. An Aggressor To The Truth Will Meet Several Hurdles:

The truth is defined as "a constant thing which coincides with reality." And since the Creator of the world is true and genuine and not whimsical and fantasy, God's religion and his Commandments are true and not satanic and absurd concepts. Thus, if anybody goes the right path in life, all the world rise in his support and will help him and will make him prosper. On the contrary, if anybody goes the opposite direction of the flowing river he will meet obstacles and will get destroyed.

This is an issue which is confirmed by both science and experience and by the Book (Qur'an), Traditions, and the lives of the Prophets and God's men.

The Holy Qur'an, on the occasion of the victory of the rightful army over the army of falsehood says:

**"وَلَقَدْ سَبَقَتْ كَلِمَتُنَا لِعِبَادِنَا الْمُرْسَلِينَ إِنَّهُمْ لَهُمُ الْمَنْصُورُونَ
وَإِنَّ جُنَدَنَا لَهُمُ الْغَالِبُونَ"**

"And certainly Our word has already gone forth in respect of Our servants, the apostles. Most surely they shall be the assisted ones, and most surely Our host alone shall be the victorious ones."[46](#)

The Qur'an, in another connection, emphasizes:

"كَتَبَ اللَّهُ لِلْأَغْلِبِينَ أَنَا وَرُسُلِي إِنَّ اللَّهَ قَوِيٌّ عَزِيزٌ"

"Allah has written down: I will most certainly prevail, I and My apostles. Surely Allah is Strong, Mighty."[47](#)

Elsewhere, concerning the true religion of Islam, which will finally prevail over the distorted religions, the Qur'an says:

"هُوَ الَّذِي أَرْسَلَ رَسُولَهُ بِالْهُدَىٰ وَدِينِ الْحَقِّ لِيُظْهِرَهُ عَلَى الدِّينِ"

كُلِّهِ وَلَوْ كَرِهَ الْمُشْرِكُونَ

"He it is who sent his Apostle with guidance and the religion of truth, that He might cause it to prevail over all religions, though the polytheists may be averse."[48](#)

Concerning the obvious fact that truth includes such powers as falsehood cannot defeat and anybody who decides to trespass its borders will be destroyed, the Holy Qur'an states:

"بَلْ نَقْذِفُ بِالْحَقِّ عَلَى الْبَاطِلِ فَيَدْمَغُهُ فَإِذَا هُوَ زَاهِقٌ"

"Nay, We cast the truth against falsehood, so that it breaks its head, and lo! It vanishes."[49](#)

And, in this connection, Imam 'Ali (as) says:

"مَنْ أَبَدَى صَفْحَتَهُ لِلْحَقِّ هَلَكَ" 825

"He who displays his hostility to the truth will be destroyed".

Elsewhere he has stated:

مَنْ صَارَعَ الْحَقَّ صُرِعَ

"He who endeavours to overpower the truth, will be overpowered."[50](#)

Imam 'Ali (as) has also said:

**"قَلِيلُ الْحَقِّ يَدْفَعُ كَثِيرَ الْبَاطِلِ كَمَا أَنَّ الْقَلِيلَ مِنَ النَّارِ يُحْرِقُ
كَثِيرَ الْحَطَبِ"**

"Little truth will defeat much falsehood in the same way that a little fire will burn much firewood."[51](#)

In this connection, Imam Sadiq (as) has said:

"لَيْسَ مِنْ بَاطِلٍ يَفُومُ بِأَزَاءِ الْحَقِّ إِلَّا غَلَبَ الْحَقُّ الْبَاطِلَ وَذَلِكَ قَوْلُهُ: (بَلْ نَقُذِفُ بِالْحَقِّ عَلَى الْبَاطِلِ فَيَدْمَغُهُ)"

"No falsehood can rise against truth without getting smashed by the truth. God, on this issue says:

Nay, we cast the truth against the falsehood, so it breaks its head, and lo! It vanishes [Qur'an 21:18].⁵²

On the basis of this issue, Imam 'Ali (as) in his letter says:

"مَنْ تَعَدَّى الْحَقَّ ضَاقَ مَذْهَبُهُ"

"The path of one who transgresses the truth becomes narrow".

This is because this world, which is based on truth and justice, predisposes us to go the right path. Or else encountering hurdles and hardships is inevitable.

The result is one's destruction. Baba Tahir Oryan, the Iranian poet, writes:

Don't engage in a work which entails hurdles,

And because of it the world looks a place of torture;

This is because after you, the readers will read your account,

And you'll become ashamed when they read yours.

14. Appreciation And Demanding In Accordance With One's Capabilities Are Two Potent Agents Of Success And Eternity:

There are two factors which determine one's success in life and his freedom. The first one is one's evaluation to find out his real position in the community and his self-esteem.

Second, upon having evaluated himself and having found his real status, he should try to accept responsibilities based on his innate capacities and not to exceed his limits: for instance, if he is not a philosopher, he should not pretend to be able to solve the problems of creation, or if he is not qualified to accept positions dealing with judicial, political, military and economic problems he should not accept such a post in the first place, and if he gets a chance to deliver a sermon, he should not go beyond his limits. It is natural that if he failed to recognize his true status in life, and consequently, if he accepted jobs he was not qualified for, he would betray himself and would deserve all the curses which would be levelled against him.

Imam's Guidelines In This Respect:

Both in Nahj al-Balaghah and Ghurar al-Hikam, Imam 'Ali (as) has provided us with necessary guidelines. Here are some examples:

1. "رَجِمَ اللَّهُ إِمْرَةً عَرَفَ قَدْرَهُ وَلَمْ يَتَعَدَّ طَوْرَهُ"

"May God have mercy on one who knows his own capacity and does not exceed it."⁵³

2. "العَالِمُ مَنْ عَرَفَ قَدْرَهُ وَكَفَى بِالْمَرْءِ جَهْلًا أَنْ لَا يَعْرِفَ قَدْرَهُ"

"A scholar is the one who recognizes his own worth. It is sufficient ignorance for a person that he does not know his worth."

3. "هَلَكَ مَنْ لَمْ يَعْرِفْ قَدْرَهُ"

"One who is not aware of his capacity will be destroyed."

4. "مَنْ جَهَلَ قَدْرَهُ عَدَا طَوْرَهُ"

"One who is ignorant of his capability will exceed his limits."

5. "مَنْ عَرَفَ قَدْرَهُ لَمْ يَضِعْ بَيْنَ النَّاسِ"

"One who knows his capacity will not lose his self esteem among people."

6. "مَنْ وَقَفَ عِنْدَ قَدْرِهِ أَكْرَمَهُ النَّاسُ"

"One who does not go beyond his limits is respected by all."

Based on the above guidelines, Imam 'Ali (as) in his letter has indicated:

"مَنْ إِقْتَصَرَ عَلَى قَدْرِهِ كَانَ أَبْقَى لَهُ"

"One who restricts himself to his own capacity retains it."

This means his self-respect will not be lost and his life will be more fruitful.

15. The Safest Means Between God And God's Servant:

In his life, man needs means to attain his objectives. But since these objectives are physical, they do not carry much significance because they are perishable anyway. In establishing relations with God, however, more attention should be used since this kind of rapport with God ends up in one's prosperity.

Thus, we will observe that Imam 'Ali (as) in his Nahj al-Balaghah pays special attention to this issue enumerating these means in the following manner:

**"إِنَّ أَفْضَلَ مَا تَوَسَّلَ بِهِ الْمُتَوَسِّلُونَ إِلَى اللَّهِ سُبْحَانَهُ وَتَعَالَى
الإيمانُ بِهِ وَبِرَسُولِهِ وَالْجِهَادَ فِي سَبِيلِهِ فَإِنَّهُ ذُرْوَةُ الإِسْلَامِ
وَكَلِمَةُ الإِخْلَاصِ فَإِنَّهَا الْفِطْرَةُ وَإِقَامَ الصَّلَاةِ فَإِنَّهَا الْمِلَّةُ وَإِيتَاءُ
الزَّكَاةِ فَإِنَّهَا قَرِيضَةٌ وَاجِبَةٌ وَصَوْمُ شَهْرِ رَمَضَانَ فَإِنَّهُ جُنَّةٌ مِنْ
العِقَابِ وَحَجُّ الْبَيْتِ وَاعْتِمَارُهُ فَإِنَّهُمَا يَنْفِيَانِ الْفَقْرَ وَيَرْخَضَانِ
الدُّنْبَ وَصِلَةَ الرَّحِمِ فَإِنَّهَا مَثْرَاءٌ فِي الْمَالِ وَمَنْسَأَةٌ فِي الْإِجْلِ
وَصَدَقَةُ السِّرِّ فَإِنَّهَا تُكْفِرُ الْخَطِيئَةَ وَصَدَقَةُ الْعَلَانِيَةِ فَإِنَّهَا تَدْفَعُ
مِيئَةَ السُّوءِ وَصَنَائِعَ الْمَعْرُوفِ فَإِنَّهَا تَفِي مَصَارِعَ الْهَوَانِ"**

"The most excellent means by which those seeking access to Allah, the Exalted, seek access to Him is faith in Him and in His Messenger, Jihad in His way for it is the peak of Islam, the declaration of sincere belief (the unity of Allah and the prophethood of the Muhammad (as)), for it is the original nature (on which Allah has created mankind), the establishment of prayer for it is (the basis of) religion, giving the Zakat for it is an obligatory duty, fasting in the month of Ramadan for it is a shield from Allah's punishment, Hajj of the House (of Allah) and its 'Umrah, for they both repel poverty and wash away sins, establishing the ties of kinship for it increases wealth and defers death, giving charity secretly for it effaces sins, giving charity openly for it repels an evil death, and good deeds for they protect from situations of humiliation."[54](#)

In verse 256 of Surah al-Baqarah [The cow] the safest approach from the above-mentioned ways is introduced as disbelief in the Shaitan and belief in Allah

**"فَمَنْ يُكْفِرْ بِالطَّاغُوتِ وَيُؤْمِنْ بِاللَّهِ فَقَدْ اسْتَمْسَكَ بِالْعُرْوَةِ
الْوُثْقَىٰ لَأَنْفِصَامَ لَهَا"**

"Therefore, whoever disbelieves in the Shaitan and believes in Allah, he indeed has laid hold on the firmest handle, which shall not break off."

And in the Surah al-Luqman, verse 22, it is mentioned that submitting to Allah and engaging in good works are as two safest means to approach to God.

**"وَمَنْ يُسَلِّمْ وَجْهَهُ إِلَى اللَّهِ وَهُوَ مُحْسِنٌ فَقَدِ اسْتَمْسَكَ بِالْعُرْوَةِ
الْوُثْقَىٰ"**

"And whoever submits himself wholly to Allah and he is the doer of good (to others), he indeed has taken hold of the firmest thing upon which one can lay hold".

Although the above ways and approaches are among the safest ways to get near to Allah, in traditions there are some suggestions to the effect that the safest way to attain God's path is to love the Prophet's Household and to believe in the guardianship of Imam 'Ali (as) and his progeny.⁵⁵ The reason for this fact is that the comprehension of the Book (Qur'an) and the genuine religion is not possible without resort to *wilayah* (guardianship) and the guidance of the Prophet's Household. In this connection Zurarah narrates from Imam Baqir (as):

**"بُنِيَ الْإِسْلَامُ عَلَى خَمْسَةِ أَشْيَاءٍ: عَلَى الصَّلَاةِ وَالزَّكَاةِ وَالْحَجِّ
وَالصَّوْمِ وَالْوَلَايَةِ قَالَ زُرَّارَةُ فَقُلْتُ: وَأَيُّ شَيْءٍ مِنْ ذَلِكَ أَفْضَلُ؟
فَقَالَ: الْوَلَايَةُ أَفْضَلُ، لِأَنَّهَا مِفْتَاحُهُنَّ وَالْوَالِي هُوَ الدَّلِيلُ
عَلَيْهِنَّ"**

"Islam is based on five foundations: prayers, zakat, Hajj, fasting and guardianship." Zurarah then asked which one of these was the most excellent. Imam Baqir (as) replied: "Guardianship because it is the key to the other four principles and the guardian is the guide to all of them."⁵⁶

Thus Imam 'Ali's sentence means:

"وَأَوْثَقُ سَبَبٍ أَخَذْتَ بِهِ سَبَبٌ بَيْنَكَ وَبَيْنَ اللَّهِ"

"The safest resort to hold is to have relations with God."

The firmest cord that you take hold of is the cord between you and Allah, the Exalted

16. One Who Betrays You When You Are In Need Is Your Enemy

As we have already seen, a true friend is the one who participates in his friend's sorrows

and happiness. One who does not forget his friend at critical occasions and makes use of his capabilities in solving his friend's problems:

"أَنْ يَرَى زَيْنَكَ زَيْنَهُ وَشَيْنَكَ شَيْنَهُ، أَنْ لَا تُغَيِّرُهُ عَلَيْكَ وَلَايَةٌ وَلَا مَالٌ، لَا يَمْنَعُكَ شَيْئًا تَنَالَهُ مَقْدِرَتُهُ، أَنْ لَا يُسَلِّمَكَ عِنْدَ النَّكَبَاتِ"

"A true friend is the one who sees your virtue as his virtue and your dishonor as his dishonor, whose wealth and social status will not change his affections towards you, who does not spare you anything and will not betray you in misfortunes."[57](#)

Then how can a man be your friend when he does not care about your sufferings and does not put forth energy to solve them? These are an enemy's actions. For this reason Imam 'Ali (as) says:

"وَمَنْ لَمْ يُبَالِكْ فَهُوَ عَدُوٌّ"

"One who has no concern for you is your enemy."

17. Where Greed Leads To One's Destruction, It Is Better To Give Up Hope (Of What One Desires):

The desire for happiness in life is for life's continuity. But sometimes a fulfilled desire such as gaining wealth, wife, or children may lead to one's destruction. In such cases it is better for his desires to change into despair. For this reason, Imam 'Ali (as) emphasizes in his letter:

"قَدْ يَكُونُ الْيَأْسُ إِدْرَاكًا إِذَا كَانَ الطَّمَعُ هَلَاكًا"

"When greed is destruction, then giving up hope (of what one desires) is an attainment."

In this case, this is better than the attainment of the desire. The lesson from this illuminating utterance we get is that we should do without greed in the first place, and secondly be happy under such circumstances and not be full of sorrows.

18. Not Every Hidden Defect Becomes Apparent Nor Is Every Opportunity Seized:

For this sentence of Imam 'Ali's there are two interpretations:

a) Since not every hidden defect is revealed and not every opportunity is attainable, we should not be sorry for people's hidden defects not having been revealed; neither should we be sorry for not having taken the lost chances. This is because the option is not always

at our disposal.

b) Since this is the case, we should never try to reveal people's hidden defects; rather, we should always try to keep them hidden because Allah loves people's secrets not to be revealed. And we should not miss our chances because we might not get them any more.⁵⁸ Although both interpretations are possible, the second one is more inclusive.

19. Sometimes a person possessing sight misses his objective, while a blind person attains the right path.

It is assumed that reasoning and sight lead to realism and blindness and ignorance deprives one of the comprehension of the truth. But this is not always true. Sometimes a wise and seeing man might not be able to recognize the truth but an ignorant and blind person reaches his goal. It is said:

"A good trained horse sometimes trots and a sword might be blunt." It is also said: "The arrow hit the target in the darkness".

Imam 'Ali (as) wants to generalize this fact that we should not exclusively rely on wisdom and external factors; rather, we should always rely on God's specific benevolence. This is because it is He who leads means and factors towards goodness.

20. Hurry In Carrying Out Good; Do Not Hasten To Perform Evil Since There Is Plenty Of Time For That:

Since the road to salvation, which is the same as the right path, is but one, therefore we should hurry in performing good doings. We should not procrastinate doing it because we might miss the chances.

But since there are different ways to perform evil, there is no need to hasten.⁵⁹ It is for this reason that Imam 'Ali (as), in his letter, says:

"أَجْرُ الشَّرِّ فَإِنَّكَ إِذَا شِئْتَ تَعَجَّلْتَهُ"

"Put off doing evil because you can hasten to it whenever you wish" (in contrast to goodness for which you might not find time). It is for this reason that we see maxims such as:

"إِبْدَأْ بِالْحَسَنَةِ قَبْلَ السَّيِّئَةِ فَلَسْتَ بِمُسْتَطِيعٍ لِلْحَسَنَةِ فِي كُلِّ وَقْتٍ وَأَنْتَ عَلَى الْإِسَاءَةِ مَتَى شِئْتَ قَادِرٌ"

"Carry out good before getting involved in vices because you might not find another chance to do good; but for doing vices, you will always have a chance."⁶⁰

Based on this philosophy, the sacred Shari'ah commands us to be better and faster than others in doing good:

فَاسْتَيْفُوا الْخَيْرَاتِ

"..therefore hasten to do good works..", [61](#)

and among the traits of the true believers is the haste in doing good

"أُولَئِكَ يُسَارِعُونَ فِي الْخَيْرَاتِ وَهُمْ لَهَا سَابِقُونَ" 838

"These hasten to good things and they are foremost in attaining them".

21. Cutting Off Relations With An Ignorant Person Equals Establishing Relations With The Wise

Since association with people has both good and adverse effects on man's thoughts, ethics and actions, the beloved distinguished figures of Islam have always encouraged people to associate with the good ones and to avoid connections with the bad ones. Among the points these scholars have emphasized is their persuading people to sit with the scholars and the wise and to avoid association with the stupid ones.

The great Prophet (S), concerning the association with the wise and scholars says:

"لَا تَجْلِسُوا إِلَّا عِنْدَ كُلِّ عَالِمٍ يَدْعُوكُمْ مِنْ خَمْسٍ إِلَى خَمْسٍ: مِنْ الشُّكِّ إِلَى الْيَقِينِ وَمِنَ الرِّيَاءِ إِلَى الْإِخْلَاصِ، وَمِنَ الرَّعْبَةِ إِلَى الرَّهْبَةِ، وَمِنَ الْكِبَرِ إِلَى التَّوَاضُعِ وَمِنَ الْغِشِّ إِلَى النَّصِيحَةِ"

"Do not associate but with a learned man who will invite you from five affairs into five other affairs: From skepticism towards conviction; from hypocrisy towards sincerity; from inclination towards this world to its rejection; from pride towards humbleness; and from deception towards sincere counsel." [62](#)

Imam 'Ali (as) has said:

"أَكْثَرُ الصَّوَابِ وَالصَّلَاحِ فِي صُحْبَةِ أَوْلِي النُّهَى وَالْأَلْبَابِ"

"Association with the men of thought and wisdom will bring about more of what is correct and good." [63](#)

He has also said:

"صَاحِبِ الْخُلَمَاءِ وَالْعُقَلَاءِ وَجَالِسِ الْعُلَمَاءِ وَالْحُكَمَاءِ"

"Associate with the people of forbearance and intellect, and sit with the scholars and wise ones".[64](#)

Elsewhere, Imam 'Ali (as) has said:

"يَنْبَغِي لِلْعَاقِلِ أَنْ يُكْثِرَ مِنْ صُحْبَةِ الْعُلَمَاءِ وَالْأَبْرَارِ وَيَجْتَنِبَ
مُقَارَنَةَ الْأَشْرَارِ وَالْفُجَّارِ"

"It befits the person of intellect to be frequently in the company of the learned and the righteous ones, and to avoid association with the evil and sinful ones."[65](#)

In avoiding association with the ignorant and unwise ones, Imam 'Ali (as) advises us:

"إِحْذَرِ مُجَالَسَةَ الْجَاهِلِ كَمَا تَأْمَنُ مِنْ مُصَاحَبَةِ الْعَاقِلِ"

"Be wary of associating with the ignorant one just as you are safe and secure in the companionship of the wise."[66](#)

Imam 'Ali (as) has said as well:

"إِذَا أَحْبَبْتَ السَّلَامَةَ فَاجْتَنِبْ مُصَاحَبَةَ الْجَهُولِ"

"If you wish for safety and well-being, then avoid the companionship of the ignorant."[67](#)

Imam 'Ali (as) has also stated:

"صُحْبَةُ الْأَحْمَقِ عَذَابُ الرُّوحِ"

"Companionship with the foolish is the torment of the soul."[68](#)

Imam 'Ali (as) has also said:

"عَدُوٌّ عَاقِلٌ خَيْرٌ مِنْ صَدِيقٍ جَاهِلٍ"

"An intelligent enemy is better than an ignorant friend."[69](#)

Imam al-Hasan al-Askari (as) has said in this regard:

"صَدِيقُ الْجَاهِلِ فِي تَعَبٍ"

"A fool's friend is in fatigue."[70](#)

This is what Imam 'Ali (as) means when he says:

"وَقَطِيعَةُ الْجَاهِلِ تَعْدِلُ صِلَةَ الْعَاقِلِ"

"Cutting off relations with an ignorant person equals establishing relations with the wise".

It is now clear because cutting off relations with an ignorant person and establishing relations with a wise one makes a man safe from subsequent calamities.

An Iranian Poet says:

It is good to be a friend of the good,
The wise enemy is better than a foolish friend;
A wise enemy makes you flourish, but,
An unwise friend will destroy you.

22. Do Not Disregard The Deception Of Time:

Experience shows us that the world is not always in our favor.

It is time that sometimes brings about glory and sometimes misery.

The treacherous world has many tricks in store.

Thus, when the time is in our favor, we should not get proud and be indifferent to gain virtues and to gather spiritual assets and to help others. This is because our status might drastically change within a short time and our security might get into danger. Thus, at the time of prosperity we should act in such a way that if our conditions changed, we would not be sorry for not having done what we could have done.

We would like to be like that vizier's son from the Barmaki family who upon losing his ministerial position had to work in a public bath. One day he was bathing Muhammad Ibn Zayd Damishqi while the latter was reciting a poem. Upon hearing the poem, the vizier's son fell and became unconscious: The poem says:

"وَنَفَرِحُ بِالْمَوْلُودِ مِنْ آلِ بَرْمَكٍ وَلَا سِيَّمَا لَوْ كَانَ مِنْ وَلَدِ الْقَضَلِ"

"We are delighted at the birth of a son in the Barmaki family, especially if he is from the progeny of al-Fadl".

Mohammad Ibn Zayd complained to the bath-owner that he had employed an epileptic worker. He replied that this worker had not done that before. When he came to his senses he said he got unconscious because of the poem. They asked him the reason. He replied: Do you know for whom this poem is written? Zayd replied: It is about the son of Fadl Ibn Yahya al-Barmaki. When he was born the poets wrote numerous poems but Fadl did not like them. Fadl asked me to write a poem on the spot. I wrote this poem which he appreciated. He gave me a thousand dinars as a reward. The bath-worker asked Muhammad: "Do you know where the son, for whom this poem was written, is now?" He replied "No." The worker said "That son is me".

Then Muhammad Ibn Zayd made a suggestion: He said, "Since that reward changed my life and I became prosperous and since I don't have any children, I am ready to give you all my wealth." The vizier's son is reported to have said: "I should live unknown, because if they know me they might assassinate me."[71](#)

The poet says:

Since the world does not turn in anybody's favor,
Suppose the sun were yours and the moon mine;
A partridge told a nightingale that the spring is not for ever,
Why are you happy or sad, flowers be yours and the herbs be mine,
There is not trace of either Kyani's or Sassanid's crown
What are you complaining of, Afsar, let the crown be yours and the hat mine.
Parvin E'tesami, the Iranian poetess says:
Many a harvest of hopes in an instant,
May change into ash by the burning lightning;
Do not rely on the victorious star,
Don't feel secure against the conspiracy of the time.

Another poet says:

My dear! Think about the ups and downs of days,
When affluent, think about the days you lack everything;
A breeze may disturb your book of Time,
Think about the leaf of your time book being turned over.

It is on the basis of this observation that Imam 'Ali (as) in his letter writes:

"مَنْ آمَنَ الزَّمَانَ حَاتَهُ"

"He who feels secure against (the deception of) time has been deceived by it."

We should be more careful as Imam 'Ali (as) commands us to:

**"خُذُوا مِنْ مَمَرِّكُمْ لِمَقَرِّكُمْ وَلَا تَهْتِكُوا اسْتَارَكُمْ عِنْدَ مَنْ يَعْلَمُ
أَسْرَارَكُمْ ... لِلَّهِ آبَائِكُمْ فَقَدِّمُوا بَعْضًا يَكُنْ لَكُمْ وَلَا تُخَلِّفُوا كُلًّا
فَيَكُونَ عَلَيْكُمْ"**

"Take from your place of passage for your abode of permanence, and do not tear the curtain of your secrets before One Who knows your secrets.... May God bless your fathers! Send some of your wealth ahead to the other world to be saved for you. Do not leave all of it behind (for heirs) so that it will be to your loss."[72](#)

23. One Who Magnifies The Times, Will Be Humiliated By It

Sometimes a man is put in favorable conditions and starts considering his new position very significant and is carried away by such conditions. But he should be aware that such magnifying of the times is not worth while considering and it is in contrast with human virtues. Magnifying time causes a man to perform actions which would bring about God's anger. It is for this reason that in the instructions of the prophets and God's men the world and its manifestations are humiliated.

Imam 'Ali (as) says:

**"وَاللَّهِ لِدُنْيَاكُمْ هَذِهِ أَهْوَنُ فِي عَيْنِي مِنْ عُرَاقِ خِنْزِيرٍ فِي يَدٍ
مَجْدُومٍ"**

"I swear by God that this world of yours is more insignificant in my view than a pig's bone in the hand of a leper."[73](#)

Imam 'Ali (as) elsewhere considers this world more worthless than mucus from a sheep's nose.

Imam 'Ali (as) considers this world of less value than a chewed leaf in the mouth of a grasshopper:

"وَإِنَّ دُنْيَاكُمْ عِنْدِي لِأَهْوَنُ مِنْ وَرَقَةٍ فِي فَمِ جَرَادَةٍ تَقْضِمُهَا"

It is for this reason that Imam (as) in his letter emphasizes:

"وَمَنْ أَعْظَمَهُ أَهَانَهُ"

"And he who attaches great importance to it (the times) has been belittled by it".

This is because one who magnifies the world is made fearful of it. Such a person would carry out his whims and desires limitlessly and this leads to aggression and injustice and the commission of sins. At the final analysis, such a person is destroyed.

24. An Archer Does Not Always Hit The Target:

It is not the case that in our lifetime every attempt of ours will meet with good results. There are some factors which might nullify our activities. Some simple-hearted people might lose interest under such circumstances and get disappointed and at times pessimistic. But they have forgotten that such is the nature of life in this world. They should not get hopeless and should first of all continue with their trial and stick to the maxim:

Said the Prophet if you knock at a door,
Ultimately there is some one who will answer it.
Secondly, perhaps at that moment it was not to his best interest to have his desires fulfilled. It is for this reason that Imam 'Ali (as) in his book emphasizes:

"لَيْسَ كُلُّ مَنْ رَمَى أَصَابَ"

"Every one who shoots does not hit the target."

25. The Disturbances In Governments May Affect The Times:

As we have explained in the book "The factors leading to the progress of Islam and the Muslim failure", both of the government and the nation have mutual effect on each other. But the influence of the government due to its being a source of power is more than the nation.

A qualified government could within a short time make a nation which is in the worst intellectual, cultural, economic, political, ethical and social conditions move towards prosperity. An example is the attempts of the great Prophet (S) to improve the Arab nation. Another example is the success of Imam Khomeini in changing his nation from the status of being west-stricken to the status of a progressive nation to be set as a model for all Muslim nations.

On the contrary, a corrupt government can make a civilized nation suffer a lot. Examples are the government which failed through the weakness of the governors such as the Roman Empire, ancient Iran, and the failure of the Muslim governments in Spain, Turkey and the Arab countries and the failure of communism.

Thus, the change of governments has a tremendous impact on the fate of nations and the principle of Imamate and leadership in Islam indicates this impact.

And up to the time when a successor was not appointed for the Prophet (S), religion was "complete" and assets were inexhaustible. This is a good example for the deep influence of the government over a nation.

It is for this reason that Imam 'Ali (as) in his letter has emphasized:

"إِذَا تَغَيَّرَ السُّلْطَانُ تَغَيَّرَ الزَّمَانُ"

"When the ruler changes, the times also change".

We read in history that whenever corrupt and pleasure-seeking governors are in power they lead the society in the same direction. On the contrary, when an honest and honorable government is in power people are inclined to acquire knowledge and are willing to help the citizens. Naturally, these changes have effects on abundance or shortage of assets, on the prosperity and welfare, on the security of people, on the increase or decrease of crimes, on the spread of diseases, on the abundance of rain or drought, and on the longevity of people.

26. Attention To Fellow-Voyagers And Neighbors

As we have already seen, fellow-voyagers and neighbors are two factors which can affect our happiness.

Concerning friends, Imam 'Ali (as) says:

"لَيْسَ شَيْءٌ أَدْعَى لِحَيْرٍ وَانجَى مِنْ شَرٍّ مِنْ صُحْبَةِ الْأَخْيَارِ"

"There is nothing that is more conducive to good and safeguards more against evil than the companionship of good people."[74](#)

Elsewhere Imam 'Ali (as) has stated:

"صَاحِبُ السُّوءِ قِطْعَةٌ مِنَ النَّارِ"

"An evil companion is a fragment of fire"[75](#)

Since travelling entails great discomforts, a good friend can help us and make the voyage pleasant. On the other hand, traveling with a bad-tempered person would destroy the pleasures of a trip. For this reason, Imam 'Ali (as) in his letter has said:

"سَلْ عَنِ الرَّفِيقِ قَبْلَ الطَّرِيقِ"

"Make enquiries about the travelling companion before (embarking on) the journey."

Imam 'Ali (as) considers the respecting of the neighbors on the same level as paying respect to one's mother. At the end of his life, Imam 'Ali (as) wrote in his will:

**"اللّٰهُ اللّٰهُ فِي جِيرَانِكُمْ قَائِهِ وَصِيَّةُ نَبِيِّكُمْ مَا زَالَ يُوصِي بِهِمْ
حَتَّى ظَنْنَا أَنَّهُ سَيُورَثُهُمْ"**

"For God's sake, treat your neighbors kindly, since they are the subject of love and concern for your Prophet. He always recommended that we should respect them. This concern was so great that we thought he would allocate some portions of one's heritage for them."[76](#)

On the other hand, the Prophet (S) of has declared:

"لَا إِيمَانَ لِمَنْ لَمْ يَأْمَنْ جَارُهُ بَوَائِقِهِ"

"One whose neighbor is not safe from his troubles, has no faith."[77](#)

One's neighbor should be considered as one's own family. He should help them in bad times, keep their secrets and pay them full respect.[78](#)

Somebody came up to the Prophet (S) and said: I want to purchase a house. Where should the location be: in Jahnieh or Maznieh or Thaqif, or Quraysh? The Prophet (S) answered:

"الْجَارُ ثُمَّ الدَّارُ، الرَّفِيقُ ثُمَّ السَّفَرُ"

"First the neighbor, then the house; First the fellow-traveler, then the journey."[79](#)

On the basis of this issue, Imam 'Ali (as) writes in his letter:

"وَعَنِ الْجَارِ قَبْلَ الدَّارِ"

"..and (make enquiries) about the neighbor before (purchasing) the house."

Once Imam Sadiq (as) heard that one of his neighbors, due to his poverty, wished to sell his house. The man had asked for two kinds of prices. One price was higher because of the house being next to Imam Sadiq's residence. Imam Sadiq (as) asked the man to come to him and paid him the price, telling him: "Since you are satisfied with our neighborhood we do not wish to miss you."[80](#)

For this reason it is said:

"الرَّفِيقُ إِمَّا رَجِيْقٌ أَوْ حَرِيْقٌ"

"A friend is either exquisite nectar or fire."

"جَارُ السُّوءِ كَلْبٌ هَارِشٌ وَافَعَى نَاهِشٌ"

"An evil neighbor is a vicious dog and a snake that bites."[81](#)

27. Avoid Telling Jokes

Islam is not a religion of aggression or severity and a believer should have a good countenance. If a joke does not imply telling lies or disrespect to others, it is harmless because the great Prophet (S) and other Islamic leaders made use of jokes and laughter.[82](#)

But since telling jokes and involving in laughter include telling lies, ridicule and insulting others, and since they lower one's dignity, Islam generally does not approve it and recommends that the true believers avoid performing it.

Imam Sadiq (as) has said:

"إِيَّاكُمْ وَالْمَزَاحَ فَإِنَّهُ يَذْهَبُ بِمَاءِ الْوَجْهِ وَمَهَابَةِ الرَّجَالِ"

"Beware of joking since it destroys a person's self-respect and dignity"[83](#)

He has also said:

"لَا تُمَازِحَ فَيُتَجَرَّؤُ عَلَيْكَ"

"Do not jest so that people become emboldened against you."[84](#)

Imam 'Ali (as) has stated:

"دَعِ الْمِرَاحَ فَإِنَّهُ لِقَاخُ الصَّغِيَةِ"

"Avoid joking since it is creates rancour."[85](#)

He reproaches laughter, saying:

"مَنْ كَثُرَ ضِحُّهُ دَهَبَتْ هَيْبَتُهُ"

"One who laughs too much loses his dignity."[86](#)

He has also added:

"مَنْ كَثُرَ ضِحُّهُ مَاتَ قَلْبُهُ"

"One who laughs excessively, his heart dies."[87](#)

He has said as well:

"كَثْرَةُ ضِحِّكَ الرَّجُلُ تُفْسِدُ وَقَارَهُ"

"A person's excessive laughter destroys his gravity."[88](#)

On the basis of this issue, Imam 'Ali (as) in his letter emphasizes:

"إِيَّاكَ أَنْ تَذْكَرَ مِنَ الْكَلَامِ مَا كَانَ مُضْحِكًا وَإِنْ حَكَيْتَ ذَلِكَ عَنْ
غَيْرِكَ"

"Beware of uttering speech that causes laughter even though you report it from someone else".

Avoid meaningless sentences and jokes, even if you report them from the others.[89](#)

1. . Nahj al-Balaghah, Sermon 91.

2. . Qur'an 53:39.

3. . Bihar, vol.103, p.9.

4. . Bihar, vol.103, p.13; vol.78, p.339.

5. . Ghurar al-Hikam

God provides the retarded ones with sustenance,

In such a way that a hundred wise ones will wonder. [Sa'di].

6. . Nahj al-Balaghah, Hikmah 379.

7. . Nahj al-Balaghah, Hikmah 267.

8. . Ibn Abi al-Hadid's commentary on Nahj al-Balaghah, vol. 16, p.115.

9. . Qur'an 10:22-23.

10. . Qur'an 29:65.

11. . Ibn Abi al-Hadid's commentary of Nahj al-Balaghah, vol.16, p.116.

12. . Qur'an 16:96-97.

13. . Qur'an 18:46.

14. "The love of desires, of woman and sons and hoarded treasures of gold and silver and well bred horses and cattle and tilth, is made to seem fair to men; this is the provision of the life of this world; and Allah is He with Whom is the good goal of life" [Qur'an 3:14].

15. . Ibn Abi Al-Hadid's commentary, vol.16, p.116.

16. . Irshad al-Qulub, Daylami.

17. . Nahj al-Balaghah, Hikmah 121.

18. . Nahj al-Balaghah, Letter No. 69.

19. . Nahj al-Balaghah, Sermon 192.

20. . Ghurar al-Hikam.

21. . Op. Cit.

22. . From the definitions which are offered for "adab" or "good manners", we have adopted the sense: "Enjoying human virtues and good manners and adopting correct methods of life and keeping away from ethical vices" (Dehkhoda's encylopedia, vol.5, pp.1545-1551, Kashshaf Istilahat al-Funun vol.1, pp.54 - 53. Mahmud Adil's Majma' al-Bahar, vol.1, pp.51-52)

23. . Ghurar al-Hikam.

24. . Safinah al-Bihar, vol. 560.

25. . "Allah has set a seal upon their hearts and upon their hearing and there is a covering over their eyes". [Qur'an 2:6].

"They have hearts with which they do not understand and they have eyes, with which they do not see, and they have ears with which they do not hear; they are cattle, nay, they are in worse errors; these are the heedless ones". [Qur'an 7:179].

26. . "And as for the good land, its vegetation springs forth abundantly by the permission of its Lord, and as for that which is inferior (its herbage) Comes forth but scantily". [Qur'an 7:58].

27. . Sa'di, in Chapter 7 of Gulistan narrates two stories, then adds some poems:

Although the source of silver and gold is stone

We may not find silver and gold in every stone;

The sun shines over everything in the world,

Somewhere it makes a bag and somewhere else it creates fragrant leather;

When the nature of a man is good,

He will be influenced by education;

No polishing will have effect

On the iron which is a bad nature;

Do not wash a dog in the seven seas

Because when it becomes wet, it becomes nastier

If Jesus's donkey is taken to Mecca,

When it comes back, it is still a donkey.

28. . Qur'an 25:67.

29. . Bihar, vol.78, p.99.

30. . Ghurar al-Hikam.

31. . In this regard refer to the book called Towards the Eternal world, p.350.

32. . Ghurar al-Hikam.

33. . Op. cit.

34. . Bihar, vol.44, pp.139-140.

35. . Nahj al-Balaghah, Hikmah 134.

36. . Bihar, vol.74, p.225.

37. . Nahj al-Balaghah, Sermon 42.

38. . Mustadrak al-Wasa'il, vol.2, p.345.

39. . Ghurar al-Hikam.

40. . Op. cit.

41. . Qur'an 11:46.

42. Qur'an, 11:46.

43. . Qur'an 64:14.

44. . Nahj al-Balaghah, Hikmah 442.

45. . Nahj al-Balaghah, Hikmah 3.

46. . Qur'an 37:171 - 173.
47. . Qur'an 58:21.
48. . Qur'an 9:33.
49. . Qur'an 21:18.
50. . Bihar, vol.77, p.420.
51. . Ghurar al-Hikam.
52. . Bihar, vol.5, p.305.
53. . Ghurar al-Hikam.
54. . Nahj al-Balaghah, Sermon 110.
55. . Refer to the Tafsir al-Burhan, vol.3, pp.278-279.
56. . Usul al-Kafi, vol.2, p.18.
57. . Part of a tradition from vol.2, p.639 of Usul al-Kafi.
58. . Mulla Muhammad Baqir Lahijani's commentary and translation of Nahj al-Balaghah, p.281.
59. . Abduh's commentary of Nahj al-Balaghah, vol.3, p.62.
60. . Ibn Abi Al-Hadid's commentary of Nahj al-Balaghah, vol.16, p.120.
61. . Qur'an 2:148.
62. . Bihar, vol. 74 P 189.
63. . Ghurar al-Hikam.
64. . Op. cit.
65. . Op. cit.
66. . Ghurar al-Hikam.
67. . Ghurar al-Hikam.
68. . Op. cit.
69. . Bihar, vol.78, p.351.
70. . Bihar, vol.78, p.374.
71. . Bohayre History, p.138, narrated from the Advice of History, vol. 3, p. 244.
72. . From Sermon 194 of Nahj al-Balaghah.
73. . Nahj al-Balaghah, Hikmah 236.
74. . Ghurar al-Hikam.
75. . Op. cit.
76. . Nahj al-Balaghah, letter 47.
77. . Wasa'il, vol.8, p.487.
78. . On the neighbors' rights, Imam Zayn al-'Abidin (as) has stated:
 "The right of your neighbor is that you should guard him in his absence and honor him in his presence and help him when he is wronged. You do not pursue anything of his that is shameful; if you know of any evil from him, you conceal it. If you know that he will accept your counsel, you counsel him in what is between you and him. You do not forsake him in difficulty, you release him from his stumble, you forgive his sin, and you associate with him generously. And there is no strength save in God. (Trans. W. Chittick).
79. . Mustadrak al-Wasa'il, vol.2, p.80.
80. . The biography of Imam Sadiq (as).
81. . Ibn Abi Al-Hadid's commentary on Nahj al-Balaghah, vol.16, p.121.
82. . An old woman came to the great Prophet (S). The Prophet (S) told her: Old ladies will not enter the paradise. Upon hearing this, the woman began to cry. Then the Prophet (S) continued: the Old women become young when entering into paradise [Mizan al-Hikmah, vol.9, p.140].
83. . Al-Kafi, vol.2, p.665.
84. . Op. cit.
85. . Ghurar al-Hikam.
86. . Op. cit.
87. . Op. cit.
88. . Op. cit.
89. . For this refer to Al-Mahajjah, vol.5, p.231; Mizan al-Hikmah, vol.9, under the topic of jokes and laughter.

35) Beware of who you consult with

"وَأَيَّاكَ وَمُشَاوَرَةَ النِّسَاءِ فَإِنَّ رَأْيَهُنَّ إِلَى أَفْنٍ وَعَزْمُهُنَّ إِلَى

وَهُنَّ وَكَفُّنٌ عَلَيْهِنَّ مِنْ أَبْصَارِهِنَّ بِحِجَابِكُ إِيَّاهُنَّ فَإِنَّ شِدَّةَ
الْحِجَابِ أَبْقَى عَلَيْهِنَّ

وَلَيْسَ خُرُوجُهُنَّ بِأَشَدَّ مِنْ إِدْخَالِكَ مَنْ لَا يُؤْتَقُ بِهِ عَلَيْهِنَّ وَإِنْ
اسْتَطَعْتَ إِلَّا يَعْرِفَنَّ غَيْرَكَ قَافِعًا، وَلَا تُمَلِّكَ الْمَرْأَةَ مِنْ أَمْرِهَا
مَا جَاوَزَ نَفْسَهَا، فَإِنَّ الْمَرْأَةَ رِيحَانَةٌ وَلَيْسَتْ بِقَهْرْمَانَةٍ، وَلَا تَعْدُ
بِكِرَامَتِهَا نَفْسَهَا، وَلَا تُطْمَعُهَا فِي أَنْ تَشْفَعَ لِغَيْرِهَا، وَإِيَّاكَ
وَالْتَّغَايُرَ فِي غَيْرِ مَوْضِعٍ غَيْرَةٍ، فَإِنَّ ذَلِكَ يَدْعُو الصَّحِيحَةَ إِلَى
السُّقْمِ وَالْبَرِيئَةَ إِلَى الرَّيْبِ"

"Beware of consulting women, for their opinions are deficient and their resolve is feeble. Restrain their gazes by veiling them, for the severity of veiling is more protective for them. Their going out (of their houses) is not worse than your allowing the entry of one who cannot be trusted into their presence. If you can do so, then let them not know anyone other than you.

Do not put a woman in charge of affairs beyond what concerns herself, for a woman is a fragrant flower and not an administrator. Do not exceed the bounds in honoring her and do not give her hopes of interceding for others. Beware of jealousy where there is no cause for it, for that will lead a woman who is sound (in honor) to unsoundness, and a pure woman to disquieting thoughts (about committing the sin)".

Commentary

Imam 'Ali (as), in this letter, refers to one of the most disturbing issues. If you look at this issue only superficially, then you would see that the enemies of Islam use it as a club over the head of Muslims and would consider it as a weak point of Islam. On the other hand, if this issue is interpreted in the light of other Qur'anic verses and Islamic traditions, it would be a point of strength and honor for Islam. So let us first hear the explanations on this issue and then judge who is right.

The First Explanation:

Some superficial individuals still savagely assume that women are defective and are only good for reproduction and breast-feeding children and for serving men and are not allowed to take part in political and social tasks!

To reason for their views, these individuals resort to some weak traditions or to some traditions which are presented under certain conditions or to some ambiguous traditions.

One of these traditions is this part of Imam 'Ali's letter and the sermon 80 of Nahj al-Balaghah which he offered at the end of al-Jamal war to reproach women.

"مَعَاشِرَ النَّاسِ، إِنَّ النِّسَاءَ نَوَاقِصُ الإِيمَانِ، نَوَاقِصُ الحُطُوطِ،
نَوَاقِصُ العُقُولِ، قَامًا نُقْصَانُ إِيْمَانِهِنَّ قَقْعُودُهُنَّ عَن الصَّلَاةِ
وَالصِّيَامِ فِي أَيَّامِ حَيْضِهِنَّ وَأَمَّا نُقْصَانُ عُقُولِهِنَّ فَشَهَادَةُ
إِمْرَأَتَيْنِ كَشَهَادَةِ الرَّجُلِ الوَاحِدِ وَأَمَّا نُقْصَانُ حُطُوطِهِنَّ
فَمَوَارِيثُهُنَّ عَلَى الأَنْصَافِ مِن مَوَارِيثِ الرِّجَالِ فَاتَّقُوا شِرَارَ
النِّسَاءِ وَكُونُوا مِن خِيَارِهِنَّ عَلَى حَذَرٍ وَلَا تُطِيعُوهُنَّ فِي
المَعْرُوفِ حَتَّى لَا يَطْمَعَنَّ فِي المُنْكَرِ"

"O people! Women are deficient in faith, deficient in (their) shares and deficient in intellect. The deficiency in their faith is their refraining from prayer and fasting in the days of their menstruation. The deficiency in their intellect is that the testimony of two women equals the testimony of one man. The deficiency in their shares is their inheritance which is half that of men. Fear evil women and be on guard against the good ones, and do not obey them in what is good so that they may not tempt you to what is reprehensible."

These individuals also base their reasonings on the axioms which Imam 'Ali (as) has used in Hikmah Nahj al-Balaghah No 238:

"المَرَأَةُ شَرٌّ كُلُّهَا وَشَرٌّ مَا فِيهَا أَنَّهَا لِأَبَدٍ مِنْهَا"

"A woman is evil, all of her; and worse than it is that she is indispensable."

These individuals, to verify their positions, resort to historical examples. They say as well: Adam was humiliated in paradise because of a woman, Phoenix got refuge in the Qaf Mount because of a woman, Joseph got into the prison in the well because of a woman, The killing of Aal Imran was because of a woman.[1](#)

The Second Explanation:

Certain scholars contend that due to a series of events which occur at a specific juncture of time, place, individuals, conditions, and their causes become the subject of either admiration or reproach. These admiration or reproach are not innate to those events, rather they depend on the sweet or bitter events in which they occur.

The sentences which, either in this letter or sermons 13, 14 of Nahj al-Balaghah concerning the reproach of women or concerning Basrah and its people issued by Imam 'Ali (as) are

based on this basis.

When A'isha (the Prophet's wife), in contrast to God's commandment:

"

وَقَرْنَ فِي بُيُوتِكُنَّ

"

[2](#)

"And stay in your houses", and disregarding the Prophet's prohibition for the vengeance for bloodshed of Uthman, with the cooperation of Talha, Zubayr and others, went to Basrah and created the war of al-Jamal and caused the death of many thousands of Muslims and Siffeen and Nahrawan were its natural offshoots, Imam 'Ali (as) blamed women, Basrah and its people.

Neither women are defective or mean, nor is Basrah a filthy environment, nor are its population away from God's benevolence.

It was that bitter event of al-Jamal war which caused all this reproach. By passing that juncture, all these blames were forgotten since there were great women, like Khadijah, az-Zahra', Zaynab and Sakinah bint al-Husayn and more than three thousand pious and God believing women whose names appear in the book "A'lam al-Nisa'". In our own time, too, history will never forget the martyr Bint al-Huda as-Sadr.[3](#)

Thus, Imam 'Ali (as) does not wish to condemn consulting with women; neither does he want women to stay at home. He does not consider all women lacking in faith and wisdom. Rather, because of al-Jamal war, Imam 'Ali (as) blames any woman who goes beyond her limits and becomes a puppet in the hands of the others for their dirty objectives. As it is proven somewhere, except for certain managerial key-positions, other jobs are good for women. Consulting with learned women is not forbidden by Imam 'Ali (as).

"إِيَّاكَ وَمُشَاوَرَةَ النِّسَاءِ إِلَّا مَنْ جُرِّبَتْ بِكَمَالِ عَقْلِ"

"Avoid consulting with women, except with a woman whose wisdom is proved"[4](#)

The Third Explanation:

Men and women are different in their bodily make-up both physically and mentally. They are created for two different sets of tasks and responsibilities.

Dignity, firmness, strength, pride and wisdom have prepared men for struggle against nature and for providing the family with their needs and their guidance. On the contrary, women's delicacy, and emotions have prepared them for being spouses for pregnancy, breast feeding, nurturing children and managing the house, and the like.

On the basis of this philosophy, Islam considers men and women of the same kind and genre and of equal rights, but would not consider both of them to have identical rights.⁵

It is because of these characteristics that some tasks are on the men's shoulders and jobs such as judgment, society leadership and military commanding are not suggested for women. There are some tasks, however, which are women's responsibilities such as the guardianship of male children up to two years and that of female children up to seven years, the permission to use gold and silk as ornaments, becoming religiously responsible (*mukallaf* i.e. one who has reached the age of maturity) in the ninth year of age; whereas men reach this stage at sixteen years of age.⁶

Based on such issues women are not supposed to partake in holy wars, their expenditures are the responsibility of men; their share of inheritance is half of that of men's, the witness of two of them equals to one man's. Among the moral recommendations given by Imam 'Ali (as) both in this letter and elsewhere are for women to stay home, to implement the Islamic dress code (*hijab*), not to accept women's interference and not to obey them.

Murtada Mutahhari, the great Islamic scholar, talking about women's observance of hijab and their not mingling with men, writes: Imam 'Ali (as) suggests to his son, Imam Hasan al-Mujtaba (as) in the following manner:

**"وَكَفُّ عَالِيَهُنَّ مِنْ أَبْصَارِهِنَّ بِحِجَابِكَ إِيَّاهُنَّ فَإِنَّ شِدَّةَ الْحِجَابِ
أَبْقَى عَلِيَهُنَّ وَلَيْسَ خُرُوجُهُنَّ بِأَشَدَّ مِنْ إِدْخَالِكَ عَلِيَهُنَّ مَنْ لَا
يُوتَقُّ بِهِ عَلِيَهُنَّ وَإِنْ اسْتَطَعْتَ أَنْ لَا يَعْرِفَنَّ غَيْرَكَ فَافْعَلْ"**

"Restrain their gazes by veiling them, for the severity of veiling is more protective for them. Their going out (of their houses) is not worse than your allowing the entry of one who cannot be trusted into their presence. If you can do so, then let them not know anyone other than you".

This is just a moral and ethical recommendation, however.

The Islamic scholars look at it just as an ethical suggestion. If it were for the scholars we would interpret this suggestion as the confinement of women to their homes. However, the reason why the jurisprudents have not issued any fatwa or Islamic verdict on this topic is because of other precise reasoning found in the Qur'anic verses, traditions and the behaviors of the Infallible. These sentences, thus, have ethical values, and not jurisprudential significance.

What the jurisprudents understand from such sentences is that these sentences take care of spiritual and mental truth behind the relation of men and women. Undoubtedly these sentences disclose a truth that the relation of a woman and a stranger is a dangerous one. What Islam recommends is that so far as possible, the assembly of men and women should

not be mixed. Our society today witnesses the hazards of this mixing of men and women. Why should women carry out their activities shoulder by shoulder with men? The effect of this association is that one ignores the work and concentrates on the partner and sometimes the result of this shoulder by shoulder job is an arm-in-arm relation.[7](#)

The Last Explanation And The Conclusion:

As the Holy Qur'an teaches us:

"O people! Be Careful of your duty to your Lord, who created you from a single being and created its mate of the same kind". [Qur'an 4:1]

"O you men! Surely We have created you of a male and a female, and made you tribes and families that you may know each other; surely the most honorable of you with Allah is the one among you most careful of his duty" [Qur'an 49:13].

"Whoever does good whether male or female and he is a believer, We will most certainly make him live a happy life and we will most certainly give them their reward for the best of what they did." [Qur'an 16:97]

Thus, neither is the nature of a woman evil nor is a man's nature honorable. Both share divine assets; and both have the capacity to be good. It is up to them to them either to do their best in perfecting belief and action or to be the lowest of low and more astray than the beasts![8](#)

The wives of Noah and Lut betrayed them, Zuleikha sent Yusuf to prison and Ghottam helped Ibn Muljim assassinate Imam 'Ali (as). Compared to these crimes, the crimes of Nimrud, Pharaoh, Abi Lahab, Abu Jahl, Chengiz, Nero, Attila, Hajjaj, Saddam and the like were the most vicious ones in the world, more than that of women.

Thus, the first interpretation stems from the era of ignorance and is in contrast with the explicit teachings of the Qur'an and Hadith.[9](#)

The undoubted fact, however, is this: As it was already said, men and women enjoy their specific body build-up, both physically and mentally. This variation of creation separates them in carrying out their duties: strength, determination, judgement, leadership, decisiveness are of men; while, family guardianship, lactation, house management and child education are that of women. In this division of tasks priority is given to neither side. This is in harmony with the axiom that we expect lions to attack and the deer to run.

The rationale behind some of the interpretations of Imam 'Ali's and other infallible Imams' words is that women are deprived of some material rights compared with men; some of them are agents for temptation. The philosophy behind these interpretations is this: due to her delicate nature, a woman is more deceived than a man; she can express her beliefs less than men.

Because of her charm, heart-stealing nature, she may cause the corruption of her physical and mental differences with men, she has not been able to have similar rights with men: one has become the house keeper, the other one has become the family supervisor; one receives the marriage-portion, the other one becomes the payer of the marriage-portion; one has become the initiator of divorce, the other one lacks such a power.

These factors which led to the disastrous events in the Jamal war forced Imam 'Ali (as) to emphasize these weak points already referred to and warned both men and women that if these factors and philosophies are not used properly, the repetition of the events of Jamal is inevitable. Therefore, care should be taken to properly use these differences between the men's and women's physical and emotional states.

Women should not be used against their creational philosophy. People should be alert not to be slaves in the hands of the coquettishness of certain women. She is created as a sweet-smelling herb, not as a hero for political, military or social struggles.

This explanation can be a synopsis of all the views offered above. If there were not such physical and emotional differences between men and women, then Imam 'Ali (as) would never, only because of the misbehavior of certain women, initiate emphasizing on their differences with men concerning matters such as women's lesser share in wisdom or faith or their lack of capacity in becoming heroes or that their biting is as sweet as spider's biting¹⁰ or that women are the greatest conspirators, or that they should not be consulted because of their lack of capacity, and their weakness in their decision-making, or that they should remain within the home. Rather, it is clear that¹¹ Imam 'Ali (as) is not among those individuals who revenge just because of the disloyalty of one woman (namely, A'isha).

What he does is to warn women not to be puppets in the hands of others. And what he intends is to warn women not to exceed their limits:

**"وَلَا تُمَلِّكِ الْمَرْأَةَ مِنْ أَمْرِهَا مَا جَاوَزَ نَفْسَهَا فَإِنَّ الْمَرْأَةَ رِيحَانَةٌ
وَلَيْسَتْ بِقَهْرْمَانَةٍ وَلَا تَعْدُ بِكِرَامَتِهَا نَفْسَهَا وَلَا تُطْمَعُهَا فِي أَنْ
تَشْفَعَ لِغَيْرِهَا"**

"Do not put a woman in charge of affairs beyond what concerns herself, for a woman is a fragrant flower and not an administrator. Do not exceed the bounds in honoring her and do not give her hopes of interceding for others".

In that case, firstly, you have ruined her magnanimity and her hereafter; secondly, everybody is to suffer and corruption and darkness would be widespread.¹²

Avoid Being Suspicious Towards Women:

One of the factors leading to family feuds is the improper jealousy of men towards their wives. Due to their extreme love towards their wives, some men sometimes will not let their wives leave their homes; they want to imprison their wives; not to have relations even with the relatives. These men are too critical in their wives' ornamentation, clothing, and behavior.

This kind of suspicion makes women rebel. They would erroneously assume that since they are suspects of corruption, in spite of the fact that they are innocent, it is better for them to go astray: this will lead to the disintegration of the family.

That is why Imam 'Ali (as) says:

"Beware of jealousy where there is no cause for it, for that will lead a woman who is sound (in honor) to unsoundness, and a pure woman to disquieting thoughts (about committing the sin)".

1. . Al-e-Tayyib's commentary on "Ali's will, p.136; Ibn Abi al-Hadid's commentary, vol.16, pp.125-126.
2. . Qur'an 33:33.
3. . See, in this connection, Jawadi Amuli's book called Zann dar A'ineh Jalal wa Jamal, pp.339-426.
4. . Bihar, vol. 103 P 253.
5. . When a father allocated his possessions equally among all his children, giving a business firm to one child who has interest in trade, and supplying the second one who has interest in agriculture with a farmland and giving a library or publication tasks to the third child who has cultural inclinations, there is equality in his action but no identity (The System of women's rights in Islam, p.112).
6. . Refer to the system of "Women's Rights in Islam" and "Women and Elections".
7. . "The Issue of Hijab," pp.219-221.
8. . "Certainly we created man in the best make" [Surah al-Tin, v.4]; "They are as cattle, nay, they are in worse error" [7:197]
9. . Some traditions consider Eve's tempting Adam to go astray. But this is in contrast with the Holy Qur'an which says:
"But the Shaitan made an evil suggestion" [Qur'an 7:20]. For this matter, see "The system of women's rights in Islam" pp.114-120.
10. Ghurar al-Hikam.
11. . For the differences between men's and women's human values, and political and social rights see Women's Rights in Islam by Mutahhari and Jawadi Amuli's Zann dar A'ineh Jalal wa Jamal.
12. . For the differences between men's and women's human values, and political and social rights see Women's Rights in Islam by Mutahhari and Jawadi Amuli's Zann dar A'ineh Jalal wa Jamal. .

36) The Last Three Advices of Imam 'Ali's Letter

**"وَاجْعَلْ لِكُلِّ إِنْسَانٍ مِنْ خَدَمِكَ عَمَلًا تَأْخُذُهُ بِهِ، فَإِنَّهُ آخِرُ الْأَيَّامِ
يَتَوَاكَلُوا فِي خِدْمَتِكَ وَأَكْرَمَ عَشِيرَتِكَ فَإِنَّهُمْ جَنَاحَكَ الَّذِي بِهِ
تَطِيرُ وَأَصْلَكَ الَّذِي إِلَيْهِ تَصِيرُ وَيَدَكَ الَّتِي بِهَا تَصُولُ اسْتَوْدِعْ اللَّهَ
دِينَكَ وَدُنْيَاكَ وَأَسْأَلُهُ خَيْرَ الْقَضَاءِ لَكَ فِي الْعَاجِلَةِ وَالْآجِلَةِ وَالْأَخْرَى
وَالسَّلَامُ"**

"Appoint for each of your servants a specific task for which you hold them responsible, for it is more appropriate so that they do not pass on their responsibilities to one another. Respect your relatives because they are your wings through which you fly and your roots to which you return and your hands through which you attack. I entrust your religion and your world to Allah, and I ask Him the best decree for you, now and in the future, in this world and the next, and peace (be on you)."

Commentary

In this portion of Imam 'Ali's honorable letter, which is the final part, he (as) pinpoints three issues which are dealt with here:

1. Division Of Responsibilities:

Basically in any organized society, management forces us to appoint each person for a specific task. In such managements, the manager only supervises the activities of the workers to see if the tasks are carried out properly. Or else there would not be any stimulation for innovations and chaos will reign over such societies.

It is for this reason that in the sacred faith of Islam for each motion there is a task appointed to the believers and the imam is responsible to see that these tasks are carried out.

Based on this belief, Islam contends that if there were only two persons on the earth, one of them should be either a prophet or an imam so that he could establish the tasks for the other one and see that they were acted out. For this reason, the Great Prophet of Islam says:

"إِذَا كَانَ ثَلَاثَةٌ فِي سَفَرٍ فَلْيُؤَمِّرُوا أَحَدَهُمْ"

1

"If there are three persons traveling together, one should be the leader."

In the Islamic management system, it is the task of the Islamic managers to appoint the tasks and responsibilities and to supervise them. We can see a part of this system in Imam 'Ali's letter to Malik Ashtar in the letter 53 of Nahj al-Balaghah. However, for more details we should refer to the books concerned.[2](#)

On the basis of this philosophy, in this letter, Imam 'Ali (as) orders his son:

"Appoint for each of your servants a specific task for which you hold them responsible, for it is more appropriate so that they do not pass on their responsibilities to one another".

2. Respect Your Relatives:

Although in Islam there is no place for unfounded tribal and family prejudices and piety is the foundation of values and "being loved by Allah"[3](#) is the criterion for closeness to God, respecting relatives is among ethical principles. Islam believes that the relatives, if not in contrast with the truth and righteousness, and even if being ill-mannered, should be respected. Here one tradition is presented as a proof:

**"عَنْ الْجَهْمِ بْنِ حَمِيدٍ قَالَ: قُلْتُ لِأَبِي عَبْدِ اللَّهِ عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ:
يَكُونُ لِي الْقَرَابَةُ عَلَى غَيْرِ أَمْرِي أَلْهَمَ عَلَيَّ حَقٌّ؟ قَالَ: نَعَمْ، حَقٌّ
الرَّجْمِ لَا يَقْطَعُهُ شَيْءٌ وَإِذَا كَانُوا عَلَى أَمْرِكَ كَانَ لَهُمْ حَقٌّ:
حَقُّ الرَّجْمِ وَحَقُّ الْإِسْلَامِ"**

"Jahm ibn Hamid says: I told Imam Sadiq (as): I have a family who do not believe in what I believe. Do they have a right upon me? Imam Sadiq (as) replied: "Yes, nothing can demolish the right of the womb. If they believe in your faith, then they have two rights upon you; the right of the womb and the Islamic right"⁴

After reporting this tradition, al-Majlisi explains: "This implies that infidelity does not abolish the right of kinship and this meaning is not in contrast with the verse 22 of Surah al-Mujadilah [The pleading one]:

"لَا تَجِدُ قَوْمًا يُؤْمِنُونَ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ يُوَادُّونَ مَنْ حَادَّ اللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُ وَلَوْ كَانُوا آبَاءَهُمْ أَوْ أَبْنَاءَهُمْ أَوْ إِخْوَانَهُمْ أَوْ عَشِيرَتَهُمْ"

"You shall not find a people who believe in Allah and the latter day befriending those who act in opposition to Allah and His apostle, even though they were their own fathers, or their sons, or their brothers or their kinsfolk,"

because as Majlisi confirms the love referred to in this verse either refers to hearty love, which is not related to superficial associations, anyway, or to showing animosity towards faith, in which case having association with them will cause the wrong to defeat the right.⁵

Based on this ethical principle, Imam 'Ali (as) orders his son: "Respect your relatives." Then he tells us the philosophy of this act:

- (1) Relatives are your wings through which you can fly.
- (2) They are your roots to which you may return.
- (3) They are your hands and power through which you may attack your enemies.

3. I Ask God To Protect You And I Wish You A Happy Life:

It is a good custom for the writer to wish good luck for his readers at the end of his book. Imam 'Ali (as), too, based on this principle, asks God to protect his son, both here and in the Hereafter and wishes him the best of luck:

"أَسْتَوِدُّ دِينَكَ وَدُنْيَاكَ"

"I entrust your religion and your world to Allah".

Unfortunately, in some versions of Nahj al-Balaghah, this phrase is mentioned as an imperative. However, these words are used and read in the statement and in the form of a supplication.

On the basis of this wrong punctuation (vowel changing), some of Nahj al-Balaghah interpreters have erroneously interpreted this statement as an imperative, rather than as a

supplication and statement. They have written, for instance: "Entrust your faith and world to God and ask Him for better future."

Lahijan, 25th Farvardin 1371,
10th Shawwal 1412,
Zainol Abedin Qorbani

[1](#) . Kanz al-'Ummal, vol.6, p.717.

[2](#) . Concerning this, refer to Al-taratib al-Idariya by Kattani, and "A book on the Islamic Management" by Tagavi and Ayatollah Makarim Shirazi's "Management and commandment in Islam".

[3](#) . Say: if your fathers and your sons... are dearer to you than Allah and His Apostle and striving in His way, then wait till Allah brings about His command: and Allah does not guide the transgressing people [Qur'an 9:24].

[4](#) . Bihar, vol.74, p.131.

[5](#) . Bihar, vol.74, p.131.

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