

Summary of JAMI' AL-SA'ADAT, Part IV: Thinking to Oneself, Good Thought and Contemplation

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Thinking to oneself is not subject to reprimand. All kinds of temptations are similar to one another in having the quality of creating darkness in the soul. However, mere thoughts (i.e., thinking to oneself, impressions, and imaginations that occur to the mind), and things that happen unwillingly, such as the excitement of desire, are not subject to reprimand, and no sins are written in one's record because of them. This is because they are not under man's control, and reprimanding something that is out of control is iniquity, and forbidding it is imposing an impossible task. However, the belief and the command of the mind that such a thought should be realized is subject to reprimand, since it is done freely. This is also true with intending to realize that thought, unless the person decides to do it and then forsakes it for the fear of God, in which case a reward will be written for him. However, if the person does not do the evil, not for the fear of God, but because of some obstacles that prevent him (such

that if the obstacle were not present, he would do the action), in this case, a sin will be written for him.¹

The reason for saying that mere thoughts are not subject to reprimand is the reports from the noble Prophet (s) and the Imams (a). One such report is that some people went to the Prophet (s) and complained that some temptations and thoughts occurred to them, for which they preferred being blown away by the wind to a faraway place, or their bodies being torn up. The Prophet (s) said, “Did you find such a state in yourselves?” They replied, “Yes.” The Prophet (s) then said, “I swear to the One who my life is in His hands that this is clear faith.” Also, Imam al-Sadiq (a) was asked about temptation. He (a) said, “There is nothing (no problem) in it, say, *‘la ilah illa Allah’* (There is no god but God).”

It is also narrated from the Prophet (s) that he said “[The punishment for] nine things has been removed from my community (*ummah*): making a mistake, forgetting, what they do not know, what they cannot do, what they do inevitably, what is forced on them unwillingly, evil omen, temptation in thinking about the creation, and envy if it is not revealed by words or deeds.”

In summary, the thoughts, desires, and excitements that are not under control, are certainly not subject to reprimand, since forbidding them would be imposing an impossible task; however, they bring darkness into the soul anyway.

The reason why a sin is written for believing in and intending to do an evil action, even when prevented by an obstacle and not by the fear of God, is that believing, intending, and deciding to commit a sin are free actions of the heart, and it is proven in the religion that there is

¹ This idea is not accepted by some scholars.

reward and punishment for the actions of the heart when they are done freely, as God says:

إِنَّ السَّمْعَ وَ الْبَصَرَ وَ الْفُؤَادَ كُلُّ أُولَئِكَ كَانَ عِنْدَهُ مَسْئُولا

Indeed the hearing, the eyesight, and the heart— all of these are accountable. (Qur'an 17:36)

And

لَا يُؤَاخِذُكُمُ اللَّهُ بِاللَّغْوِ فِي أَيْمَانِكُمْ وَ لَكِنْ يُؤَاخِذُكُمْ بِمَا كَسَبَتْ قُلُوبُكُمْ وَ اللَّهُ غَفُورٌ حَلِيمٌ

God shall not take you to task for what is unconsidered in your oaths, but He shall take you to task for what your hearts have incurred. (Qur'an 2:225)

The noble Prophet (s) also said, “Indeed people will be resurrected according to their intentions.”

The reason why a reward is written for a person who decides to commit a sin and then forsakes it for the fear of God is the traditions that we have received. It is narrated from the Prophet (s) that he said,

The angels say [to God], ‘This is your servant, who has intended to commit a sin.’ Then God says, ‘Watch him; if he commits the sin, write it for him as it is; if he leaves it, write a reward for him, because he leaves it for my sake.’

It is also narrated from Imam al-Baqir (or Imam al-Sadiq) (a) that

God has determined for Adam and his children that whoever decides to do a good action but does not do it, one reward be written for him; whoever decides to

do a good action and does it, ten rewards be written for him; whoever decides to do an evil action and does not do it, no sins be written for him; and whoever decides to do an evil action and does it, one sin be written for him.

Good Thought and Contemplation

The opposite of temptation is decent thought that is good from the viewpoint of religion and reason. Because the mind cannot be engaged in two activities at the same time, there is no room for temptations and discouraged thoughts when the mind is engaged in a decent thought.

If decent thoughts are together with an intention to do a certain good action, they belong to the faculty on which that action depends. Otherwise, they are rooted in remembrance (*zikr*) of God in the heart, to reflection on knowledge and sciences and contemplation of the greatness and wonders of God's creation, or to thinking about things that bring the servant closer to God or take him farther from Him.

It also should be noted that one of the ways of curing temptation is to know its opposite virtue, which is decent thought, so that it encourage the individual to persist on what repels temptations. The value of good thoughts will be mentioned in the chapter on intention.

Here, we will mention the value of contemplation, its channels and routes in the acts of God and how to think about them, and also how to think about things that bring the servant closer to God or take him away from Him. We discuss this kind of contemplation here because it is related to the faculty of intellect.

Thinking is an inner journey from premises to targets. The premises are the signs in the horizons (*afaq*) and the souls (*anfus*) (i.e., the

universe and man), and the target is achieving knowledge about their Creator, and realizing the divine power and greatness. No one is able to go from deficiency to perfection except through thinking, which is the key to secrets and the torch of light. It is the source of learning lessons and the origin of gaining insight. It is the lasso of capturing true knowledge and the tool for understanding the realities that are certain. This is why it has been praised and encouraged in the traditions and the verses of the Quran:

أَوْ لَمْ يَتَفَكَّرُوا فِي أَنْفُسِهِمْ مَا خَلَقَ اللَّهُ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ وَمَا بَيْنَهُمَا إِلَّا بِالْحَقِّ

Have they not reflected on their own souls? God did not create the heavens and the earth and whatever is between them except with the truth. (Qur'an 30:8)

أَوْ لَمْ يَنْظُرُوا فِي مَلَكُوتِ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَمَا خَلَقَ اللَّهُ مِنْ شَيْءٍ

Have they not contemplated the dominions of the heavens and the earth, and whatever things God has created? (Qur'an 7:185)

إِنَّ فِي خَلْقِ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَالاختلافِ اللَّيْلِ وَالنَّهَارِ لآيَاتٍ لِأُولِي الْأَبْصَارِ

Indeed in the creation of the heavens and the earth and the alternation of night and day, there are signs for those who possess intellects. (Qur'an 3:190)

وَفِي الْأَرْضِ آيَاتٌ لِلْمُوقِنِينَ وَفِي أَنْفُسِكُمْ أَفَلَا تُبْصِرُونَ

In the earth are signs for those who have conviction, and in your souls [as well]. Will you not then perceive? (51:20-21)

There are also many traditions in this regard:

The noble Prophet (s) reportedly has said, “Contemplation is the life of the insightful’s heart.”

He (s) also has said, “An hour of contemplation is better than a year-long worship.”

Imam Ali (a) has said, “Contemplation invites to good and acting upon it.”

It is also narrated from Imam al-Sadiq (a) that “contemplation is the mirror of rewards, the atonement (*kaffarah*) for sins, and the light of hearts. It is welfare and comfort for people. And through it, man realizes what is in the interest of the affairs of the Hereafter, and by its means the consequences of actions are understood. It increases knowledge, and it is a quality that no worship can match.”

It is narrated from Imam al-Rida (a) that “worship is not copious prayers and fasts, but contemplation in the works of God.”

Contemplating Creation

All creatures are channels of contemplation and objects of attention and reflection, because everything that exists in the world is an emanation and a sign of the grace of God’s necessary existence. All things are His creation, and there is nothing in the world except that it contains all kinds of wonders of His wisdom and greatness.

There are two kinds of creatures, those whose essence is not known and it is not possible for us to contemplate them, and those that are essentially knowable but not in detail. The later has two types:

- One type is the things that are not perceivable by sense perception and outer eyes, called *the dominion (malakut)*. This includes angles, immaterial souls, and minds.

- The other type is the things that are perceivable by sense perception. This type has three classes:
 - One is the heavens and the stationary and moving stars.
 - The other one is the earth, seas, mountains, mines, rivers, plants, trees, animals, and inanimate creatures.
 - The third one is the domain of the atmosphere and the air and whatever there is in them, including clouds, rain, snow, thunder and lightning, wind, and similar things.

None of these exists except that God has created it, and there is measureless wisdom in the existence, motion, and inertness of each one of them.

All of these are channels of contemplation for gaining knowledge and insight about their Wise Creator, who is Self-Subsisting (*qayyum*) and All-Knowing. This is because each one of them is a true witness and an obvious reason for the unity, wisdom, and the magnificent greatness of the Creator. The universe and its orderly worlds are arranged and organized in the best and most proper way by the command of their Wise Creator and the All-knowing Planner. The first created world among them is superior to the others. The order goes on to the most inferior world, which is the earthly world and the earthly creatures. However, notice this earthly life, which does not have much value compared to the world of heavens and the world of atmosphere, and notice what it contains, including animals, plants, and inanimate objects that do not have much value compared to the earth itself. Notice each one of these three kinds of creatures, which have numerous types and classes, from the weakest species of animals, which are mosquitoes and bees, to the most superior of them, which is mankind. If we understand a little of the divine wisdom and wonders that exist in them, then we will understand the greatness of the signs of God's creation. We will realize the divine wisdom and the inward

and outward wonders that exist in each one of them and will encounter surprising instances for contemplation, especially in what has been given to human existence as a trust.

It is narrated that Imam al-Sadiq (a) said,

The human form is the biggest proof (*hujjah*) of God against people. It is a book that God has written by His power, and a building that He has built according to His wisdom. The images of all creatures (from both *mulk* and *malakut*) exist in it, and it is one of the matters that are recorded in the 'preserved tablet'. It is a witness for everything that is visible and invisible, and it is a proof against every denier. It is a straight path to all good, and a path drawn between Heaven and Hell.

The result of good thought and useful contemplation

We learned that useful contemplation is limited to thinking about the attributes of God and His astonishing acts, thinking about the actions that bring the servant closer to God and getting motivated toward them as a result, and thinking about the actions that take him away from God and becoming demotivated toward them. However, contemplating the essence of God, and even some of His attributes, is not allowed. It is discouraged the religion and in transcendental philosophy (*al-Hikmat al-Muta'aliyah*), since the essence of God is too sublime to be within the reach of human understanding. Therefore, theorizing about it causes confusion and perplexity of mind, and the engrossment of thought in it leads to anxiety and unrest of the intellect. If some truthful people (*seddiqun*) who have achieved the stage of immateriality (*tajarrud*) lay their inner eyes on God's magnificence, it will not be more than a very brief moment. If they exceed this brief moment, they will burn because of the luminous

lights of His splendor. It is like looking at the sun. If the looking continues, our sight and vision become weak and faint. However, these two situations are not comparable, and this example is only for giving us a better understanding.

Therefore, because contemplating the essence of God is discouraged, useful contemplation is limited to thinking about the wonders and exquisiteness of His creation, about the moral virtues and worships that bring the servant closer to God, and about the moral vices and sins that take him away from God. These kinds of contemplation are means through which man will realize the saviors, destroyers, sins, and obedience (*ta'at*), which are mentioned in this and other books of ethics. The meaning of contemplation here is that the individual should spend an hour every day to contemplate his inward manners and outward actions, and examine the spiritual state of his heart and limbs. Then, if he finds his heart to be on the right path, following justice, adorned with moral virtues, and away from inward vices, and finds his limbs involved in their related obedience (*ta'at*), and away from their related sins, he should thank God for this great success (*tawfiq*). But if he finds vices or lack of virtues in his heart, he should take action to cure it.

No doubt that this kind of contemplation has a wide scope, and its necessary amount is that the individual should contemplate, everyday, each one of the fatal qualities, such as miserliness, vanity, self-centeredness, hypocrisy, grudge, envy, cowardice, severe anger, greed, avarice, gluttony, cupidity for lust, love of material possession, love of fame, enmity (*nifaq*), suspiciousness, negligence, pride, and so forth. He should examine his heart and be assured by the signs that testify to the purity of heart, since the inner-self (*nafs*) sometimes makes things look alike to the individual, and thus he may be mistaken. For example, if the individual thinks he is free from vanity, he should

examine himself by doing actions like carrying a water-skin on his back or carrying a stack of wood from bazaar to home. Or if he claims to be free from anger, he should examine himself when he is insulted by fools and in other similar situations, so that he will make sure that the roots of these vices are removed from his heart, and nothing remains of them. However, if he finds in his heart any of these vices, he should think about finding ways to be liberated from them by methods like curing with the opposite quality, by warning, guidance, advice, reprimand, associating with people who have virtuous manners and people of piety and righteousness, or austerity and struggle with the inner-self (*nafs*).

The individual should then contemplate each one of the virtues that save the soul, such as certainty, trust (*tawakkul*), patience in misery, contentment with fate, thankfulness for Godly gifts, having moderate fear and hope, having courage, generosity, piety, righteousness, sincere intention (*ikhlas*) in actions, being regretful about sins, having good manners with people, love of God and humbleness before him, and other similar qualities. If he finds these virtues in himself, he should examine them to make sure that they are not deceptions and falsifications of the inner-self in concealing the truth, and if he finds his heart lacking any of them, he should think about acquiring it, as was pointed out.

This mentioned amount of contemplation in everyday is necessary for every believer. It was the habit of the righteous people who lived before us, who did it in the early hours of every day or the late hours of every night. They even had a notebook in which they wrote the destroyers and the saviors of the soul, and the good and bad qualities and actions, and they would measure their own characteristics and deeds with it every day and night. When they made sure about the removal of a vice or the acquirement of a virtue, they crossed it out in

the notebook and stopped worrying about it. They then turned to the other qualities until all of them were crossed out. In summary, our righteous predecessors did not stop this kind of contemplation, and considered it a necessary part of the belief in the reckoning of the Day of Judgment. Thus, it is our duty to follow them, and not to drown in the whirlpools of negligence, because everyone who fears something runs away from it, and everyone who is hopeful and enthusiastic about something takes action to gain it. Therefore, since we claim to fear Hell and to be enthusiastic about heaven, we should forsake sins and turn to obedience.

This kind of contemplation is the contemplation of knowledgeable and righteous people. However, the contemplation of the truthful (*seddiqun*) is nobler than this, since they are immersed in the sea of God's love and intimacy, have detached themselves from everything, and have turned to God. They are so engrossed, with their hearts and their souls, in the magnificence of the Creator that they have forgotten themselves, their qualities, and their conditions. Their situation is like a lover who is astonished when seeing his beloved one. Acquiring this kind of contemplations is not possible without leaving all the fatal vices and earning all the virtues that save the soul. The condition of someone who contemplates the magnificence of God but possesses bad manners is like the condition of a lover who is alone with his beloved one and wants to enjoy watching the beauty of his love but has snakes and scorpions in his shirt that constantly sting him and prevent him from having the pleasure of watching and enjoying the company of his beloved one. In this situation, he will not achieve complete ecstasy unless he gets them out of his shirt, and there is no doubt that vices and bad dispositions cause disturbance like snakes and scorpions.

Thus, dear friend, wake up from the sleep of negligence, and worry today about tomorrow, before the claws of death reach your body and the ability of your intellect in thinking about your characteristics and conditions is lost. Know for sure that for any virtue or vice that there is in your heart, and for any obedience or any sin that you commit there is reward and punishment. Heed the words of the Master of Prophets (s), which will be enough for your awareness and awakening if you have a heart, who said,

The Holy Spirit inspired in my heart, ‘Love what you wish, for you will be separated from it; live however you wish, for you will die; and do whatever you wish, for you will be rewarded and punished for it.’

Truly, if you believe in the Origin and the Hereafter, this *hadith* will be enough for giving you warning and advice, and it will stop you from paying attention to the world and its people. Hence, a believer should spend an hour of his time every day contemplating his characteristics and deeds, and spend some time contemplating the wonders of the creation of God and His power in order to be liberated from satanic temptations and evil thoughts. May God make us succeed in achieving this purpose by His supreme grace!

Chapter Five: Trickery and Slyness

Another vice that belongs to the faculty of intellect is trickery and slyness for achieving the desires and the objects of the two faculties of anger and lust. Trickery, slyness, deceit, and cunning are synonyms, and, literally, they refer to the amount of craftiness sometimes, but as technical terms they are the opposites of intelligence and sagacity, and in common usage they mean finding secret ways for harming others, and this is what we mean by it here.

Some levels of slyness are not very hidden and one can easily discern them, but some are so hidden that even intelligent people cannot

distinguish them. Slyness sometimes provokes one to pretend to be friends with someone, and then harm that poor ignorant person. It may provoke one to pretend to be a trustworthy, honest, and religious person so that people will give their possessions and valuable objects to him as trusts, or do trade and become business partners with him, and then he will deceive them and run away. It may provoke one to pretend to be pious and just, so that people will assign him as their leader, and then he will secretly destroy their lives and their faith. And it provokes people to do other deceits of similar kind.

We should know that slyness is one of the most fatal vices, since it is the most obvious quality of Satan. Anyone who possesses this quality is among Satan's army, and the evilness of this quality is more than openly harming someone, because someone who knows that he is going to be harmed by another person takes caution and protects himself; however, someone who is unaware does not take caution because he regards the sly person to be his friend, and in this way he is harmed and deceived by the person who appears to be his friend.

In summary, this vice is more evil and hideous than any other vice, and its punishment is more severe; hence, the words of the Prophet (s): "Whoever plots against a Muslim is not one of us."

Imam Ali (a) has also said, "If the consequence of slyness and deceit was not the fire of Hell, I would be the sliest of all people."

He (a) also repeatedly used to say,

Alas, they plot against me, and they know that I understand their deceit and that I know the ways of trickery and slyness better than them. But because I know that the outcome of slyness and deceit is the fire of Hell, I stay patient with their deceit, and do not do as they do.

The treatment of slyness lies in thinking about its evil consequences and harsh future, and realizing that one who possess this quality will be in the fire of Hell together with devils and vicious people. And the afflicted by this vice should remember that the consequences of evil actions and deceits will eventually befall the person who commits them, as is pointed out by the verses of the Qur'an and traditions and is testified by our experiences and observations. The afflicted should then remember the good qualities and virtues that are opposite to slyness, that is, wishing good for the believers, and being honest in words and deeds with them. Then, if he is a reasonable person who cares for himself, he will avoid trickery and slyness.