

Remembrance of God

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Introduction

The remembrance of God is a fundamental principle in Islamic ethics. A quick look at the teachings of the Quran and the teachings of the great Prophets shows that not only is the remembrance of God extremely essential, but also all religious obligations and acts of worship are means to enhance it. Islam teaches that the source of one's spiritual strength and the only factor that can bring about salvation and success in one's social and personal life is being mindful of the presence of God; it is a solution to the many problems of man's life and the key to achieving his lofty goals. It is also the only factor that can eradicate one's moral vices and help him resist in the face of all problems, worries, and concerns.

Man's life in this world is clearly accompanied by stresses and worries. People are always worried about the future and are looking for something that can bring tranquility to their hearts and minds. The factor of stress in people's life is so clear that some schools of thought such as Existentialism have falsely considered it a fundamental factor in man's essence.

After all, these worries that are there for every person must fade away in the face of a greater source of peace and tranquility, like small waves that surface, while deep down the ocean is stable and calm.

But what factor can truly bring calmness to the heart of man? The Quran considers the remembrance of God to be the source of peace for man's heart. In this regard, God states, "Verily in the remembrance of Allah do hearts find rest" (Quran 13:28). If belief in God and His remembrance truly find their way into one's heart, nothing can cause him to worry, as he will be connected to the source of stability and tranquility, like a mountain in the face of all storms.

The Meaning of the Term "DHIKR"

Dhikr literally means remembering something and protecting it. It is also used for what is uttered as a means of remembrance. This word is the opposite of forgetting something. (Ibn Manzur 1414AH, 4:308; Farahidi 1410AH, 5:346).

Raghib Isfahani has divided *dhikr* into inward and outward (or oral) *dhikr*. In this regard, he says that although inner and outward *dhikr* usually occur at different times, they can also be done together, when one understands and comprehends the meaning and message of the *dhikr* he pronounces (Raghib al-Isfahani 1412AH, 328).

In the Quran, the word *dhikr* is sometimes used as a title for the Quran itself. For example, the Qur'an says: "Indeed We have sent down the Reminder, and indeed We will preserve it" (Quran 15:9).

The opposite of remembrance are *ghafla* (negligence) and *nisyan* (forgetfulness). *Ghafla* means to make a mistake or to neglect something. In the Quran, those who have *ghafla* pertaining to God's presence have been criticized in many verses.

In Islamic ethics, *ghafla* is considered as an obstacle in the path of purifying the soul and *yaqza* (being awake) is an essential factor for that purpose. The Great Ayatollah Jawadi Amuli says, "The prerequisite of coming closer to God is for man to understand that he is not complete and must reach perfection. In other words, he is a traveler, in need of equipment and guidance. It is clear that if one is not aware that he is on a trip, he will always stand still" (Jawadi Amuli 1377 S.AH, 23).

"*Nesyan*" means forgetfulness which happens when knowledge fades away from one's mind and this is why it is the opposite of *dhikr*. This type of forgetfulness is not subject to criticism, due to the fact that it is not done intentionally. Taking into consideration the literal meaning of *nesyan*, one can say that *dhikr* is the opposite of *nesyan*. *Nesyan* means for the knowledge to fade away from one's mind, while *dhikr* means for it to remain therein. In the verse 28:24: "And when you forget, remember your Lord," this meaning of *nesyan* has been alluded to. "Therefore, in this usage of the word *dhikr*, like *nesyan*, it has specific results and effects that it entails. This is why sometimes, when *dhikr* or *nesyan* themselves do not exist they are used to indicate that their effects do. For example, if I see that you do not help and assist a dear friend of yours while he is in need of your assistance, I would comment: "Why have you forgotten your friend?" This does not mean that you have necessarily forgotten your friend. In fact, it may be the case that you are very much acquainted and close with him, but because your actions are a manifestation of *nesyan*, rather than remembering him, in this case, withholding from assisting him, I would comment that you have forgotten him. It seems that the reason why outward remembrance is also included in *dhikr* is for the same reason. For example, to say one is doing *dhikr* when he is pronouncing the phrase "God is exalted" is a way of saying that he is carrying out the effect of *dhikr*, not *dhikr* itself. This is because the outward remembrance of everything is an effect and entailment of remembering it by the heart."

Remembering God means to pay attention to His absolute power and All-Encompassing presence. Remembering and paying attention to such a great Being will definitely have a dramatic effect on one's character and actions.

The Remembrance of God in the Quran and Traditions

There are many Quranic verses and traditions that encourage the remembrance of God. First, we will point out a few verses that underline the importance of *dhikr*:

- Those who have faith, and whose hearts find rest in the remembrance of Allah. Look! The hearts find rest in Allah's remembrance! (Quran 13:28)

- Recite what has been revealed to you of the Book, and maintain the prayer. Indeed the prayer prevents indecencies and wrongs, and the remembrance of Allah is surely greater. And Allah knows whatever [deeds] you do. (Quran 29:45)
- Go ahead, you and your brother, with My signs and do not flag in My remembrance. (Quran 20:42)
- But whoever disregards My remembrance, his shall be a wretched life, and on the Day of Resurrection We shall raise him blind. (Quran 20:124)
- Content yourself with the company of those who supplicate their Lord morning and evening, desiring His Face, and do not lose sight of them, desiring the glitter of the life of this world. And Do not obey him whose heart We have made oblivious to Our remembrance, and who follows his own desires, and whose conduct is [mere] profligacy. (Quran 18:28)
- So avoid those who turn away from Our remembrance and desire nothing but the life of the world. (Quran 53:29)
- O you who have faith! Remember Allah with frequent remembrance, and glorify Him morning and evening. It is He who blesses you, and so do His angels, that He may bring you out from darkness into light, and He is most merciful to the faithful. (Quran 33:41-3)
- ... by men whom neither trading nor bargaining distracts from the remembrance of Allah, and the maintenance of prayer and the giving of zakat. They are fearful of a day wherein the heart and the sight will be transformed. (Quran 24:37)

In order to understand the value of *dhikr* in the eyes of the Infallibles (a), it will suffice to cite a couple of their traditions:

As Allah (SWT) says in the Quran, a believer who constantly remembers God and carries out good deeds will live a loftier life than the life of animals; a life that is referred to as “a good life” (Quran 16:97). Those who are forgetful

of God do not benefit from this lofty life and are truly no more than dead people. In a tradition narrated from the Prophet (s), we read,

One who remembers God amongst forgetful people, is like a person alive amongst the dead. (Fayd Kashani n.d., 2:267)

According to this tradition, those who do not remember God are considered dead, although they may seem to be alive; those who are truly alive are people who have spiritual, God-centered lives.

God is with those who remember Him and He helps them in the critical and difficult moments of life. In this regard, God says, “Remember Me, and I will remember you” (Quran 2:153). This is despite the fact that God's general mercy, the manifestation of His name *al-Rahman*, encompasses all people, even those who do not remember Him. The Prophet (s) says,

I am with my servant when he remembers me and his lips move in my remembrance. (Payanda 2003, 309)

In another tradition from the Prophet (s), he describes gatherings in which God is remembered as gardens of heaven. Also, the *hadith* denotes that the status of a servant in the eyes of God is that of God in the eyes of the servant.

The Prophet (s) said, “Stroll in the gardens of heaven!” They asked, “What are the gardens of heaven?” The Prophet (s) replied, “The heavenly gardens are the gatherings for God's remembrance. Remember God in the morning and at night. And one who is eager to see his status in the eyes of God, should examine God's status in his own eyes. For the status of each individual is that of God in his eyes.” (Majlisi 1403AH, 90:163)

Imam Sadiq (a) narrates that the Prophet said, “One who frequently remembers God will be loved by God; one who frequently remembers God will receive two exonerations: exoneration from hellfire and exoneration from hypocrisy” (Kulayni 1407AH, 2:500).

Also, Imam Sadiq (a) stated, “There is nothing unless it has a limit at which it ends, except for the remembrance of God... God is not pleased with a little

of it and has set no limits for it.” Then the Imam (a) recited the following verse: “O you who have faith! Remember Allah with frequent remembrance, and glorify Him morning and evening” (Kulayni 1407AH, 2:499).

It is reported from the Prophet (s) that he stated, “There is no gathering in which a group of people attend and remember God, unless the gathering is surrounded by angels and those taking part in it are covered with God's mercy. God will remember the attendees amongst the souls of the prophets, martyrs, His friends and the angels” (Warram n.d., 2:234).

There are three ways of remembering God: outward *dhikr* (by the tongue), inner *dhikr* (by the heart) and practical *dhikr* (through actions).¹

Outward *dhikr* does not carry the same value when it is not accompanied with inner *dhikr*. This is because the objective is to pay attention to the meaning of the phrases and, thus, create an effect in one's heart. Also, as mentioned earlier, *dhikr* means to remember something and this will not take place unless the heart does *dhikr* as well. It is understood from the traditions and quranic verses that the true essence of remembering God is to pay attention to Him with the heart. Moreover, remembrance is not of the nature of words. If outward *dhikr* has been considered to be a form of *dhikr*, it is because the tongue is usually a mirror of the heart.

In regard to outward and inner *dhikr* taking place at the same time and leading to actions, Imam Sadiq (a) says, “The most difficult thing that God has made obligatory on people is frequently remembering God. I do not mean saying phrases like ‘God is exalted’, ‘All praises belong to God’, ‘There is no God but Allah,’ or ‘God is greater’; rather, I mean remembering God in what He has allowed and forbidden: if it is obligatory, one does it, and if it is forbidden, he refrains from it” (Kulayni 1407AH, 2:80).

¹ Naraqī mentions four different levels for *dhikr*: (1) oral *dhikr*, (2) oral and inner *dhikr*, (3) inner *dhikr* that finds its place in the heart and takes control of it, and (4) inner *dhikr* in which nothing but the one who is being remembered remains in the heart, and the heart becomes unaware even of itself and of the *dhikr*. This level is the final goal. See Naraqī (1388 Sh, 91).

Imam Sadiq (a) also narrated a tradition from the Prophet (s) stating, “Whoever obeys God has indeed remembered Him, even if his prayer, fasting and reciting of the Quran is little” (Majlisi 1403AH, 68:177).

The Origins of God’s Remembrance

Wisdom

According to the holy Quran, the wise remember God in all times and situations:

Those who remember Allah standing, sitting, and lying on their sides, and reflect on the creation of the heavens and the earth [and say], “Our Lord, You have not created this in vain! Immaculate are You! Save us from the punishment of the Fire.” (Quran 3:190-1)

Love of God

The love of God will cause a servant to frequently remember His Lord and make his heart and tongue constantly busy with His remembrance. Imam Ali (a) has reportedly said, "Whoever loves something will remember it frequently" (Tamimi Amadi 1366 Sh, 65).

Spiritual Challenges

When believers are tempted to commit sins, they remember the presence of God and are able to discern the right path. The holy Quran says, “When those who are God-wary are touched by a visitation of Satan, they remember [Allah] and, behold, they perceive” (Quran 7:201).

DHIKR from the Viewpoint of Islamic Scholars

The Great Ayatollah Bahjat once stated,

Any good deed has its own limit that it should not exceed, and that if it does, it will only cause harm. An example is

prayer: if it is overdone, the human body will no longer be able to take the pressure and one will be deprived of the other good deeds he can do. The same is true with the other good deeds and acts of worship.

However, remembrance of God is an exception, as the traditions mention that there is no limit for it.¹ Of course, these traditions do not refer to outward (oral) *dhikr*, because even that would bring about one's fatigue; rather, these traditions refer to the general *dhikr* that encompasses outward (oral), inward and practical *dhikr*, because all acts of worship that please God are means of His remembrance. Therefore, all of these acts of worship, such as fulfilling one's needs, fulfilling obligations, performing recommended acts, refraining from the discouraged and forbidden acts are all instances of God's remembrance." (Rukhshad 1388 Sh, 3:3)

A Story about Dhikr

Fudayl b 'Ayyad (d. 187) was a famous thief. He would attack caravans and steal their goods. This dangerous thief once fell in love with a girl and decided to sneak into her house to have an intimate relationship with her. In the midst of the night, he mounted the wall and was going to jump inside the house, but before he did, he heard a sweet and calming voice coming from the neighboring house. He listened carefully as one of the believers recited the following verse from the Quran:

Is it not time yet for those who have faith that their hearts should be humbled for Allah's remembrance. (Quran 57:16)

Hearing this verse dramatically changed Fudayl. He said to himself, "It is indeed the time!" He immediately repented and left the house. Staying away from that sin resulted in Fudayl changing his life and staying away from all

¹ See for instance Kulayni (1407AH, 2:498).

other sins. What saved this young man was simply remembering God and paying attention to His presence.

How to Enhance God's Remembrance in One's Heart

God's remembrance leads to many different results in one's life. The way to enhance one's remembrance of God is to strive to deepen and maintain it. In other words, in order to reach higher levels of *dhikr*, one must pay attention to the quality along with the consistency of *dhikr* at the same time. Even though in the beginning, it will take a lot of effort to make progress, these small steps will prepare one to reach the final goal.

The Holy Quran explains the ways of enhancing one's remembrance of God. One of these ways is to carry out prayer:

And maintain the prayer for My remembrance" (Quran 20:14).

According to this verse, in order to enhance our remembrance of God we must employ prayer and the means of outward *dhikr*. Of course, in the beginning one may not be able to maintain his attention throughout all of the prayer, but if one continues to strive not to pay attention to anything else, his soul and heart will increasingly be acquainted with God's remembrance.

Along these lines, it is also necessary to understand the obstacles of God's remembrance and to eradicate them. From the quranic point of view, the obstacles of God's remembrance are the following:

- *Extravagance and paying excessive attention to this world:*

O you who have faith! Do not let your possessions and children distract you from the remembrance of Allah, and whoever does that it is they who are the losers. (Quran 63:9)

Excessive materialistic and worldly inclinations darken one's heart. If one does not pay attention to the remembrance of God, he will lose in this life and in the Hereafter.

- *Taking the Hereafter Lightly:*

They know just an outward aspect of the life of the world, but they are oblivious of the Hereafter. (Quran 30:7)

A believer sees this world as the creation of a wise creator. However, a disbeliever sees the world as an accident and death as the end of life. Therefore, he merely pays attention to this world and its pleasures, forgetting God's presence and neglecting his own fate.

- *Evil Friends:*

A day when the wrongdoer will bite his hands, saying, "I wish I had followed the Apostle's way! Woe to me! I wish I had not taken so and so as a friend! Certainly he led me astray from the Reminder after it had come to me, and Satan is a deserter of man." (Quran 25:27)

Undoubtedly, one of the factors that affect the shaping of one's character is friends. Socializing with impious people leads one to forget God.

- *Satan's Influence:*

Satan *istabwadha* (has prevailed) upon them, so he has caused them to forget the remembrance of Allah. They are Satan's confederates. Look! Indeed it is Satan's confederates who are the losers! (Quran 58:19)

The word *istabwadha* refers to the complete control of Satan over one, as if that person has no control over his acts anymore. This happens when one knowingly and intentionally continues to commit sins and has no intention of repenting.

- *Longings:*

Leave them to eat and enjoy and to be diverted by longings.
Soon they will know. (Quran 15:3)

If a yearning is logical and reasonable, not only is it beneficial, but also necessary for one's progress. However, when it exceeds its limits, it can make one go astray, ruin his future, and be an obstacle when it comes to remembering God.

- *Following Desires:*

And do not obey him whose heart We have made oblivious to Our remembrance, and who follows his own desires, and whose conduct is [mere] profligacy. (Quran 18:28)

The Signs of God's Remembrance

One can understand the signs of God's remembrance from the many quranic verses and traditions that are found in this regard. Below, we will briefly point out some of these signs:

- *Peace and Tranquility:*

Those who always remember God have an indescribable tranquility and peace. These individuals do not feel fear even in life's most critical moments. The Quran says,

Those who have faith, and whose hearts find rest in the remembrance of Allah." Look! The hearts find rest in Allah's remembrance! (Quran 13:28)

- *Humility in God's Presence:*

One who remembers God, is strong when he faces problems and obstacles, but is extremely humble and fearful before God. The Quran describes such a person as follows:

The faithful are only those whose hearts tremble [with awe] when Allah is mentioned, and when His signs are recited to them, they increase their faith, and who put their trust in their Lord. (Quran 8:2)

- *Refraining from Sin:*

Another sign of God's remembrance is staying away from sin. One who constantly remembers God does not commit sin. And if he does, the moment he remembers God, he will repent. In the Quran, prayer, on the one hand, has been considered a means of remembering God (Quran 20:14), and, on the other, a means to stay away from sin (Quran 29:45). Therefore, one who claims that he constantly remembers God, but cannot refrain from sin in practice, is not truly remembering God.

The Personal and Social Effects of God's Remembrance

Because we all have flaws and shortcomings, we are naturally inclined towards a being that has no imperfections. Therefore, everyone yearns for such a being in their heart, though they may not realize that such a being is none other than God. Remembering God is the best way to get in touch with that source of grace and mercy that has no imperfections. Remembering God can be done with worldly intentions at times, while at others, it can be done with spiritual intentions. The former is the lowest level of remembrance, but it has its value, as it is fundamentally a connection between God and his servant. The higher form of remembrance is one that stems from one's spiritual needs and yearnings, and this enables a stronger connection with God to be established.

We will now describe some of the effects of God's remembrance:

- God's remembrance purifies ones heart and readies it for divine manifestation. Pertaining to God's remembrance, which is the spirit of all acts of worship, Imam Ali (a) says,

God has made his remembrance a means of purifying hearts. Through remembrance, hearts become hearing after

being deaf, seeing after being blind and obedient after being rebellious. It has always been the case that during a period of time that no prophet lived amongst the people, God had servants that he spoke to through their heart and their intellects. (Nahj al-Balagha, Sermon 222).

- If one does *dhikr* mindfully, paying attention to the meanings that lie within the different phrases, it will surely enhance his spiritual experience. This experience is what will save man and free him from the limitations of the materialistic world.
- Performing *dhikr* is a great means of peace and tranquility. *Dhikr*, on the one hand, does not allow the problems and worries of this world to take over one's life and, on the other, prevents one from having excessive joy and happiness when pleasures come his way. In this regard, the Quran says,

... those who have faith, and whose hearts find rest in the remembrance of Allah. Look! The hearts find rest in Allah's remembrance! (Quran 13:28)

- In his supplication to God, Imam Sajjad (a) says,

O Lord! The loving hearts are in love with you. All intellects have gathered to grasp your existence. The hearts will only be calmed by your remembrance, and the minds will only be calmed by seeing you...I repent to you from any pleasure other than your remembrance, from any comfort other than your acquaintance, from any happiness other than your closeness, and from any act other than your obedience. (Majlisi 1403AH, 91:151)

- The remembrance of God is a barrier when it comes to scattered thoughts and temptations, preventing the waste of one's mental energy for worthless worries.

- God's remembrance can also organize and enhance one's mental and intellectual activities. It can bring along answers to one's questions and can make it easier to find the truth. The Quran says:

When those who are God-wary are touched by a visitation of Satan, they remember [Allah] and, behold, they perceive.
(Quran 7:201)

“Visitation of Satan” in this verse refers to the temptations of Satan circling one's mind and heart, in which situation if one truly remembers God, he will realize the negative results of following Satan and committing sin. Imam Ali (a) said, "Whoever remembers God, his heart will be revived by God and his mind and intellect will be enlightened by Him" and also “The remembrance of God is the light for intellects, the life for souls, and purity for hearts” (Tamimi Amadi 1366 Sh, 189).

- The Quran mentions that the remembrance of God is the prerequisite for repentance:

And those who, when they commit an indecent act or wrong themselves, remember Allah, and plead [Allah's] forgiveness for their sins—and who forgives sins except Allah?—and who do not persist in what they have committed while they know. (Quran 3:135)

It is understood from this verse that as long as one remembers God, he will not commit sin. Committing sin only takes place when one is forgetful of God's presence.

- God's remembrance also assists one when dealing with people. In a tradition narrated from Imam Ali (a), he states,

When you go to the bazaar, and people are busy with their commerce, remember God frequently. This will eliminate one's sins and increase his good deeds. (Harrani 1983, 104)

- The remembrance of God is the key to personal and social virtues. It is the fundamental element for all good deeds, because God possesses pure existence and all perfections, and one who constantly remembers God is constantly connected with the source of perfection. This is extremely important, because we know that one's thoughts and ideas are the main factor that shapes his actions. Therefore, if one's mind is enlightened by God's remembrance, it will become a gateway towards positive attributes and actions, thus bringing one closer and closer to God.
- On this basis, if one constantly remembers God, he will no longer commit sin, violate other's rights, or transgress the limits of justice and law. The remembrance of God is the main source of all perfections and is the key factor to stay away from sin. Any society in which God is constantly remembered will be free from sins and corruption. The remembrance of God facilitates one's peace and salvation and his freedom from the material world. This is why people who remember God live a peaceful and calm life and deal with others with utter compassion and patience. On the other hand, forgetting about God's presence misguides one and brings along the forgetfulness of one's self, and results in hard-heartedness, regret on the Day of Judgment, and the undermining of the family and the structure of the society.

The Results of Turning Away from God's Remembrance

Forgetting one's self/soul:

And do not be like those who forget Allah, so He makes them forget their own souls. It is they who are the transgressors. (Quran 59:19)

When one forgets about himself, he forgets the true essence of being a human, that he is a very small part of this world, and that he is need of God's grace in order to continue his existence in this world. One then considers himself to be independent and in no need of God and assumes that everything in the world should serve him.

Having a Difficult Life and Being Blind in the Hereafter:

But whoever disregards My remembrance, his shall be a wretched life, and on the Day of Resurrection We shall raise him blind. (Quran 20:124)

Turning away from God's remembrance causes one to forget the purpose of creation and to forget life in the next world. Such a person will always see his life confined to this world and, therefore, will pursue more and more pleasures taking away his peace and occupying his mind. However, those who remember God are able to maintain their peace in difficult times and find solutions for the challenges of life.

Being Influenced by Satan:

Whoever turns a blind eye to the remembrance of the All-Beneficent, We assign him a devil who remains his companion. (Quran 43:36)

Imam Sadiq (s) says, "Satan cannot trick one into committing sin, unless he has turned away from God's remembrance" (Majlisi 1403AH, 69:124).

Conclusion

Many of the problems that occur in one's life are due to the sins that one commits. As explained above, these sins stem from forgetting God's presence. The majority of social problems arise from turning away from God's remembrance. It is only with returning to God's obedience that these issues will be solved. Today, nothing will bring meaning to the shallow and meaningless life of man other than the remembrance of God and acknowledging His presence.

However, it is essential to realize that the remembrance of God does not, in any way, interfere with one's social or personal life and efforts. In fact, it enhances the effort one puts into his work, by asking God for his assistance and help. The beauty of it is that while man deals with the many affairs of his daily life, he is able to remember God at the same time and constantly

acknowledge His presence. An ideal person from the Islamic perspective is one who pays attention to God's presence and wants everything for His sake, while fulfilling his personal and social responsibilities.

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Dua in Islamic Teachings, Part I

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Dua is one of the very important notions in the Quran, which is very difficult to translate. Equivalents like praying, calling, or supplicating do not precisely convey the profound meaning of this word, so in this article we will just use the term *dua* and will gradually explain its meaning. We will also discuss the different types of *dua* and how we can improve our *duas* to increase the possibility of their being answered by God.

Let us first discuss the significance of *dua* according to the Quran and *hadith* and then analyze its concept.

The Quran 40:60 reads,

وَ قَالَ رَبُّكُمْ اِدْعُونِي اَسْتَجِبْ لَكُمْ

In this famous verse, the Quran has a message for us from the One who is your Lord, the One who knows what you need, what suits you, and what can develop you, says. “Call me! I will answer” (Quran 40:60)

Note that the verse mentions, “call me!” not necessarily “ask me!” We usually think that *dua* means asking, but it does not necessarily involve requesting. It is a broader concept that includes all kinds of calling.

For us as the servants of God, the most important thing is to be able to communicate and be connected to our Lord. Not only can we not survive without God, but we cannot survive without being connected to Him.

Suppose God is there, but He says, “I don’t want to talk or listen to you or have anything to do with you.” As God’s servants, we cannot survive without His mercy and grace. Think about a little child, for whom it would be a great punishment, if his father or mother said, “I won’t speak to you anymore.” In their early years, children have no sense of independence. This is why it is mentioned in *hadiths* that whenever you promise your children, keep your promise, because they look at you as their lords who give them their sustenance.¹ You are their only hope, so never disappoint your children.

So just as it is a great punishment for a small child to hear from his parents that they do not want to talk to him, for a person who realizes his total dependence on God, it would be a severe punishment if God did not pay attention to Him. This is why Imam Ali (a) in *Dua Kumayl* says,

هَبْنِي صَبْرْتُ عَلَىٰ عَذَابِكَ فَكَيْفَ أَصْبِرُ عَنِ النَّظَرِ إِلَىٰ كِرَامَتِكَ

The Imam (a) is saying, “Suppose that I can be patient, that I can tolerate your punishment, how can I be patient with being deprived of beholding your magnanimity?” If supposedly I can endure remaining in Hellfire, how can I stand being far from you and your love and attention? For the person who understands that he is totally dependent on God, the main thing is to keep the line of communication with Him open. So the fact that God says, “Call me! I will answer” (Quran 40:60) means “You can call Me during the day or night, on weekdays or weekend; any time you call Me, I am available.” Although, as the Lord, He can set different conditions and say, “If you want to call Me, you must call Me in such a time or place, with such and such conditions,” He is so kind that He just says, “Call me! No matter when or where, I will answer to you.” Of course, He also expects us to answer Him whenever He calls us:

¹ *Al-Kafi*, vol. 6, p. 50. The original text is Arabic reads as follows:

عَنْ أَبِي عَبْدِ اللَّهِ ع قَالَ قَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ ص أَحِبُّوا الصِّبْيَانَ وَارْحَمُوهُمْ وَإِذَا وَعَدْتُمُوهُمْ شَيْئاً فَفُوا لَهُمْ فَإِنَّهُمْ لَا يَدْرُونَ إِلَّا أَنَّكُمْ تَرَزُّوْنَهُمْ

There is a similar hadith which says: “Be kind to your children and do good to them, because they think that you are their sustainers” (*Mustdarak al-Wasa'il*, vol. 15, p. 171). The Arabic text is as follows:

فَفِيهِ الرِّضَا عَ أَرْوِي عَنِ الْعَالِمِ ع أَنَّهُ قَالَ لِرَجُلٍ أ لَكَ وَالِدَانِ فَقَالَ لَا فَقَالَ أ لَكَ وَلَدٌ فَقَالَ نَعَمْ قَالَ لَهُ بَرِّ وَوَلَدِكَ يُحْسَبُ لَكَ بَرٌّ وَالِدَيْكَ وَ رُوِيَ أَنَّهُ قَالَ بَرُّوا أَوْلَادَكُمْ وَ أَحْسِنُوا إِلَيْهِمْ فَإِنَّهُمْ يَظُنُّونَ أَنَّكُمْ تَرَزُّوْنَهُمْ

O you who have faith! Answer Allah and the Apostle when he summons you to that which will give you life. Know that Allah intervenes between a man and his heart and that toward Him you will be mustered. (Quran 8:24)

Unfortunately, we set different conditions for our response to God's call; we say, "I will become a practicing Muslim after I finish my university, after I marry, after I have children, or after I get a stable job. Let me now enjoy myself a little bit and then later when I get old, I'll accept."

After inviting us to call Him, God says,

Truly those who refuse to worship me they will enter hell while they are humiliated. (Quran 40:60)

One may ask, "What is the relation between worshipping God and calling Him?" The answer is that, according to above-mentioned verse, calling God is worshipping him. This idea has been stated in Islamic traditions as well:

- *Dua* is 'ibadah.¹ (Kulayni 1407AH, 2:467)
- *Dua* is the core of 'ibadah.² ('Amili 1988, 7:28)
-

When we realize what is the meaning of *dua*, we see that worshipping God is not possible without *dua*.

The above verse tells us also about the fate of those who refuse to worship God out of arrogance: "they will enter hell while they are humiliated" (Quran 40:60). Their arrogance in the Hereafter manifests itself in humiliation. This is very beautiful point, because the Hereafter is where the hidden realities become manifest, and the reality of arrogance before God is nothing but meanness and dishonor.

Hence the verse shows the significance of *dua*: the *dua* of those who really call God is answered, *dua* is 'ibadah, and we should not feel arrogant with

¹ فَإِنَّ الدُّعَاءَ هُوَ الْعِبَادَةُ

² الدُّعَاءُ مَخُّ الْعِبَادَةِ

respect to calling God, because it will lead to our dishonor and make us lose our eternal happiness.

Another verse is Quran 25:77, which is very moving:

Say, "My Lord would not care for you were it not for your prayer."

Had it not been for our *dua*, God would not pay attention to us. True that God is so kind and merciful, but this is a law, which no one can change. Two plus two equals four; Just as it is impossible to ask God to make it equal to five by his mercy, it's impossible to grow spiritually without *dua*. Although God pays attention in this world to everyone, believers and non-believers, regarding their physical needs, if one seeks the attention, support, care, and guidance of God for his spiritual growth, he has no way other than resorting to *dua*.

We have many *hadiths* about *dua*, its conditions, and etiquettes. Also, the Ahl al-Bayt (a) have taught us several *duas* to recite in different occasions. Below, we will briefly discuss these *hadiths*:

It is reported that Imam Baqir (a), commenting on Quran 40:60, said. "This [i.e. the worshiping mentioned in the verse] is *dua*, and the best type of worship is *Dua*."

In another *hadith* the Imam (a) was asked, "What type of worship is the best?" The Imam said, "There is no worshipping like asking and requesting God what He has" (Kulayni 1407AH, 2:466). Sometimes people ask if it is good to ask God for worldly things. The answer is yes! We should ask Him for anything we need. Of course, it is not good to ask Him only for worldly things; it is not good either to ask for worldly things more than the Hereafter; we have to maintain balance, but we should never be shy to ask God what we need. It is reported that God said to Prophet Moses (a) to ask Him even for the salt of his food, and along the same lines Imam Baqir (a) says that there is nothing better in the sight of God than asking Him for what He has.

In another *hadith*, Imam Sadiq (p) says to Muyassar,

O Muyassar! Pray to God, and do not say things are already decided. Verily, there is a station with God Almighty that cannot be reached except by asking. If a servant shut his mouth and did not ask, he would not be given anything. Ask so that you will be given. O Muyassar! There is no door that is knocked on except that its owner will likely open it. (Kulayni 1407AH, 2:466-7)

We should never think that it is too late to ask God and that He must have already decided things, but always take the opportunity to pray and ask. There is a station with God that one cannot reach except by *dua*, except by asking. Even if what one asks for was not given to him for some reason, what he achieves through asking is more important. Asking is not merely a means to achieving things; it is itself an end.

There is another chapter in the same section of *al-Kafi* entitled “*Dua* is the Weapon of the Believer” (Kulayni 1407AH, 2:467). But why do we need a weapon? Because we are all involved in a battle with Satan and the carnal soul, which is our worst enemy;

Your most hostile enemy is your [carnal] soul, which is between your two sides. (Majlisi 1403AH, 76:64)

This is because without the help of our carnal souls, Satan cannot do anything. Now, since we are in a battle, we need to be equipped with weapons. According to the *hadiths*, our main weapon is *dua*; *dua* is the weapon of the believer and the mosque is the best place to fight Satan, because he is very weak in the mosques; this is why we have the *mibrab* in the mosque; the *mibrab* is the place of *harb* (fight), *harb* against Satan, ignorance, and bad habits. And the imam of the mosque is the leader and commander in this battle. In that chapter of *al-Kafi*, there are several *hadiths*; one from Imam Sadiq (a) reads,

The Messenger of God (s) said, “*Dua* is the weapon of the believer, the pillar of faith, and the light of the heavens and the earth.” (Kulayni 1407AH, 2:468)

This is a weapon which is easy to get and use. One just needs to appreciate that God has given him the ability to do *dua* any time, free of charge. Do not say, “I did *dua* last year!” You need a weapon today, a modern weapon. Always keep it fresh and updated! *Dua* is the pillar of faith. Even *salat* is a kind of *dua*. *Dua* is to reflect the light of God. *Dua* is not only related to human beings; everything in this world is doing *dua*. Birds are doing *dua*; they are performing *salat*:

Have you not regarded that Allah is glorified by everyone in the heavens and the earth, and the birds spreading their wings. Each knows his prayer and glorification, and Allah knows best what they do. (Quran 24:41)

God is “the light of the heavens and the earth” (Quran 24:35), and, according to the above *hadith*, *dua* is also “the light of the heavens and the earth”. This is because, as was already mentioned, God is the source of light, and *dua* is like a mirror that reflects.

In another *hadith*, Imam Ali (a) says,

Dua provides the keys to success and the keys to happiness (salvation). The best *dua* is that which comes from a clean and pure heart. (Kulayni 1407AH, 2:468)

According to this *hadith*, *dua* is not just a key (singular) to success, but provides the “keys” to success. This means that there is more than one key to success. If one wants to be more successful, he has to increase his prayers to God. *Dua* is also the key to happiness. The best *dua* is the *dua* which comes from a clean and pure heart, because it is through the heart that one connects to God. The mind is just for theoretical knowledge. Perhaps someone knows in his mind that God exists, but he is still not a believer. The place of belief and disbelief is the heart,¹ and for *dua* we need to have a pure heart.

In another *hadith* we read,

¹ It is obvious that what is meant here by heart is not the physical heart.

The Prophet (s) said, “Shall I guide you to a weapon that saves you from your enemies and increases your sustenance?” They replied, “Yes.” The Prophet (s) said, “Pray to your Lord day and night; indeed, the weapon of the believer is praying.” (Kulayni 1407AH, 2:468)

Note that the Prophet (s) does not say, “Shall I guide you to a weapon that *destroys* your enemies”; He says “a weapon that *saves* you from your enemies.” We need a weapon to save ourselves. We do not want to harm anyone; what we want is to be protected. If you would like to receive your sustenance, if you seek protection, you need a weapon. The Prophet (s) teaches that this weapon is praying to our Lord day and night.

In another *hadith*, it is mentioned that

Imam Rida (a) used to say to his companions, “Make use of the weapon of the Prophets.” Someone asked, “What is the weapon of the Prophets?” The Imam replied, “*Dua*.” (Kulayni 1407AH, 2:468).

Imam Sadiq (a) is also reported to have said,

Dua is more effective than a steel-tipped spear.” (Kulayni 1407AH, 2:469)

Another chapter in *al-Kafi* is about the power of *dua* to change the *qada'* (divine decree). We know that when something is going to happen, certain conditions must already have been met. For instance, if we want to heat a room, we should have fire, dry wood, and oxygen. Otherwise, we cannot have fire.

Sometimes everything is ready for a tragedy to happen, but *dua* comes in the last moment and prevents that tragedy. In the beautiful story of Prophet Yunus, we read that he left his people when he was disappointed at them and saw the signs of the coming of the divine punishment:

And the Man of the Fish, when he left in a rage, thinking that We would not put him to hardship. Then he cried out

in the darkness, “There is no god except You! You are immaculate! I have indeed been among the wrongdoers.”
(Quran 21:87)

The divine punishment was coming, and he saw its signs and thus left the people. When he left, one learned person from those people said, “I am sure that the chastisement is coming. We have only one way to save ourselves, and that is doing *dua*, and asking God for forgiveness.” The people listened to him and thus the punishment was prevented. About this, the Quran says,

Why has there not been any town that might believe, so that its belief might benefit it, except the people of Jonah? When they believed, We removed from them the punishment of disgrace in the life of this world, and We provided for them for a while. (Quran 10:98)

Although the punishment was about to take place and its signs had appeared, they were saved from it because of their *duas* to God. So *dua* is so powerful that it can change the divine decree; It is so effective that, according to some *hadiths*, it can change what is decided in the *Laylat al-Qadr*. So we should never lose hope; it is never too late for doing *dua*.

The following *hadith* from Imam Sadiq (a) reads,

Dua stops the divine decree (*qada'*) after it comes down from heaven and is firmly determined. (Kulayni 1407AH, 2:469)

In a similar *hadith*, Imam Sajjad (a) said,

Indeed, the *dua* prevents a calamity after it is firmly determined. (Kulayni 1407AH, 2:269)

Prophet Ibrahim (a) very much wanted to have children; he prayed for many years and finally his *dua* was fulfilled. He was not only given two noble sons, Isaac and Ishmael, but also it was from among his descendants that the later Prophets were chosen. All of our Imams are also the progeny of Ibrahim (a).

This is the power of *dua*. If Ibrahim (a) had stopped doing *dua*, if he had lost his hope, he would have been deprived of this honor.

Prophet Zachariah (a) did not have a child either, but he kept praying and God gave him Yahya (John) (a). Zachariah himself was surprised by this:

He said, ‘My Lord! Indeed my bones have become feeble, and my head has turned white with age, yet never have I, my Lord, been disappointed in supplicating You! (Quran 19:4).

This is the power of *dua*, which makes such miracles possible.

There is another *hadith* in which Zurarah, a close companion of Imam Baqir (a) and Imam Sadiq (a), says,

Imam Baqir (a) told me, “Shall I guide you to something to which the Prophet (s) did not make any exception?”¹ I said, “Yes!” The Imam said, “*Dua* can push back the divine decree (*qada’*) after it is finally determined.” (Kulayni 1407AH, 2:470)

Therefore, *dua* should not be something marginal in our lives; rather, it should be one of our main deeds, as it is the source of our power, the core of our worship, and the way that we can connect to our Lord.

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¹ Or alternatively, “something about which the Prophet (s) did not say ‘if God will.’” Based on this reading, the *hadith* points to the absolute effectiveness of *dua*.

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Practical Steps towards Moral Purification

Part VI: Self-Knowledge

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One of the first steps towards purifying the soul is self-knowledge. In fact, one cannot attain spiritual perfection, correct his defects, and cleanse his vices, without fully knowing himself. Does anyone go to the doctor for a cure, if he does not know that he is sick? Will a lost person seek to find the way, if he does not know that he is lost? Will a person whose house is surrounded by enemies prepare to defend, if he does not know about it? Obviously, the answer to such questions is negative. Similarly, one who does not know himself and his defects will not try to correct himself and will not seek the advice of those who can cure him.

The relationship between self-knowledge and self-purification and also the relationship between knowing God and self-purification will be reviewed in this article.

The Relation between Self-knowledge and Self-purification

How could self-knowledge lead to self-purification? The answer is simple:

First, through self-knowledge, one sees the dignity and value of one's self, which is a manifestation of God. And appreciating the value of this precious gift, he will not sell it cheaply.

Second, when one knows himself, one realizes the dangers of worldly desires for his salvation, so he will adequately prepare himself for fighting them. It is evident that someone who does not know himself will remain unaware of the existence of these desires. Such a person is like someone who is surrounded by enemies but is unaware of their presence. Such a person will not prepare himself for fighting against them and as a result, will be defeated by them.

Third, if one knows himself, he will recognize the various gifts bestowed upon him by God; he will be encouraged to strengthen them, discover the hidden treasures of his soul, and develop his character.

One who does not know himself is like the one who has precious treasures buried in different parts of his house but does not know about them. Such a person may die of hunger and poverty in his house, while there are treasures under his feet that are enough to feed thousands of people.

Fourth, all vices have roots in the soul that could be recognized through self-knowledge. When vices are known, it is easier to cure them, and therefore self-purification will be more achievable.

Fifth and above all, self-knowledge is the best way to know God, and as will be discussed later knowing God and His attributes of beauty and majesty is the most important factor in developing high morals and attaining spiritual perfection.

If we consider the fact that vices ruin our individual and social life, we will realize the significance of focusing on self-knowledge, which can eradicate these vices.

In his *Man, The Unknown*, Alexis Carrel writes,

Modern civilization finds itself in a difficult position because it does not suit us. It has been erected without any knowledge of our real nature. It is not at all actuated by a desire to improve the state of human beings. The discoveries responsible for industrial civilization were brought forth at the fancy of the scientists' intuitions and

of the more or less casual circumstances of their careers. If Galileo, Newton, or Lavoisier had applied their intellectual powers to the study of body and consciousness, our world probably would be different today. (Carrel 1939, 18)

That is why God punishes sinful people by causing them to forget themselves and warns us not to “be like those who forget God, so He makes them forget their own souls. It is they who are the transgressors” (Quran, 59:19).

Self-knowledge in HADITHS

According to *hadiths* quoted from the noble Prophet (s) and the Infallible Imams (a), self-knowledge results in great benefits:

1. In a *hadith* from Imam Ali (a), we read, “One who knows himself has achieved a great success” (Tamimi Amadi 1366 Sh, 232).
2. Also, he (a) states, “One who does not know himself deviates from the way of salvation and remains in ignorance” (Tamimi Amadi 1366 Sh, 233).
3. In another *hadith* from him (a) we read, “The knowledgeable is the one who knew his self, so he set it free and purified it of whatever leads it to deviation and destruction” (Khansari 1987, 7:243). This *hadith* indicates that self-knowledge results in freedom and purification of vices.
4. The Imam (a) is also quoted as saying, “Those who know themselves best are the ones who fear God most” (Tamimi Amadi 1366 Sh, 232). It can be understood from this *hadith* that there is a close relationship between fearing God, as the root of self-purification, and self-knowledge.
5. In another *hadith* from Imam Ali (a), we read, “Whoever knows his self will struggle against it, and whoever does not know it will ignore it” (Tabataba'i 1417AH, 6:174). According to this *hadith*, the main base of *jihad* with the self, which is called the greater *jihad* in *hadiths*, is self-knowledge.

6. In *Nahj al-Balaghah*, we read, “Whoever regards his self in high esteem, his desires will be insignificant to him” (Nahj al-Balagha, Wisdom 449).
7. As self-knowledge is the main foundation of self-purification and high morals, ignorance of the self causes a sense of alienation from the truth and separation from God. Imam Hadi (a) is quoted as saying, “How disgusting is the state of a believer who has a desire that debases him!” (Harrani 1983, 489)

Therefore, self-knowledge is a major factor in promoting virtues and spirituality; one will not reach any spiritual stations, unless he passes this important stage. Because of this, great scholars of ethics strongly insist that travelers towards God should try to know their selves first.

Self-knowledge is the Means of Knowing God

The glorious Quran explicitly states, “Soon We shall show them Our signs in the horizons and in their own souls until it becomes clear to them that He is the Real” (Quran 41:53).

Elsewhere, we read, “And in your souls [are signs]. Will you not then perceive?” (Quran 51:21)

Based on the Quranic verse about the world of *dharr*, some scholars believe that “self-knowledge” is a prerequisite of “knowing God.” The Quran says,

When your Lord took from the Children of Adam, from their lions, their descendants and made them bear witness over themselves. [He said to them] “Am I not your Lord?” They said, “Yes indeed! We bear witness.” (7:172)

In his *Tafsir Al-Mizan*, ‘Allama Tabataba’i writes,

No matter how proud man may become, he cannot deny that he does not own his being and that he is not independent, for if he owned his being, he would be able to prevent death and other difficulties of life, and if he was independent, he would never be subdued by the existential

causes ... Thus, man's need for God, the Ruler and Owner, is the reality of man, and poverty and weakness are his essential characteristics ... This is a fact that can be realized by anyone who has the least human intelligence, with no difference between the knowledgeable and the ignorant or between the young and the old!

Therefore, at any level of humanity one may be, he can clearly understand that he has a Lord who owns and rules over him. How could he not understand this when he clearly realizes his essential need ... Accordingly, some believe that the above-mentioned verse reflects a fact that is realized by man throughout his life, i.e. the fact that in every aspect of his life, he is in need. So, the verse indicates that ... God informed human beings of their needs to Him, and then they bear witness to His Lordship (Tabataba'i 1417AH, 8:307).

Thus, it became clear that knowing the reality of man's soul and its characteristics will lead to knowing God.

The famous *hadith* that "whoever knows himself will know his Lord" is another example. In some sources, this *hadith* has been quoted from the noble Prophet (s), and in some other sources from Imam Ali (a) or from the scriptures of Idris (a). In *Bihar al-Anwar*, it is quoted from the fourth book of Idris (the Book of Knowledge) that "whoever knows the creation knows the Creator, and whoever knows the sustenance knows the Sustainer" (Majlisi 1403AH, 92:456). 'Allamah Tabataba'i mentions this *hadith* and writes, "Shiites and Sunnites have quoted this *hadith* from the noble Prophet (s) and this is a famous *hadith*" (Tabataba'i 1417AH, 6:169).

Seven Interpretations for This HADITH

This *hadith* could be interpreted in seven different ways:

1. It may refer to the famous argument from design and, thus, mean that one who knows the wonders of his soul and body and the secrets of

creation will believe in the existence of God, because the amazing order of creation could not be created by someone other than an all-knowing and all-powerful Designer. Thus, knowing oneself leads to knowing God.

2. The *hadith* may refer to argument of “necessity and possibility,” because if one thinks deeply about himself, he will find out that he is absolutely dependent; his knowledge, power, ability, intelligence, health—his entire being—is totally dependent and needy; he cannot survive, even for a second, without depending on a Necessary Being. We are like prepositions that need to be connected to other nouns in order to be meaningful. For example, in the sentence, “I went from home to the mosque,” the words “from” and “to” have no meaning without being connected to the nouns, “home” and “mosque.” The nouns give meaning to the prepositions. Accordingly, if one knows himself, he will know his God, for the existence of a contingent being cannot be explained without taking into account the existence of a necessary being.
3. The *hadith* may indicate the argument of “cause and effect”; for if one thinks about his existence, he will find out that his soul and body are the effects of different causes, including his parents. Those causes, in turn, are the effects of other causes. Now, this chain of causes and effects must stop at some point; otherwise, it would be an endless regress that is impossible to exist.

Therefore, this chain has to stop at a first cause, the cause of causes, which is self-existent and not dependent on anything. If one knows himself and the fact that he is dependent on such a being, he has known his God.

4. The *hadith* may refer to the argument from “disposition” (*fitra*): when one explores the depths of his soul, he finds the Divine Light embedded in his nature; thus, through self-knowledge, one will know his God, without needing further proofs.
5. The *hadith* may refer to “the attributes of God”: if one knows his own attributes as contingent and created qualities, he will learn about the

attributes of God. If one knows that he is limited, he will learn that God is unlimited: if God was limited, He would be a created being! If a person knows that he is a mortal being, he will conclude that his Creator is Immortal, for if the Creator was mortal, He would be a created being. In the same way, one could learn about God's independence through his own dependence, and about God's power through his own weakness. In the first sermon of *Nahj al-Balaghah*, Imam Ali (a) stated,

The perfection of believing in His Oneness is to regard Him Pure, and the perfection of His purity is to deny Him attributes, because every attribute is a proof that is different from that to which it is attributed and everything to which something is attributed is different from the attribute. (Nahj al-Balagha, Sermon 1)

6. 'Allamah Majlisi quotes a different commentary on this *hadith* from some scholars:

The soul of a human being is a spiritual creature with worldly attributes and it proves the Oneness of God in several ways:

- The soul is the director and mover of the body, so the universe has a Director and a Mover.
- The soul is one [and unique], so the Creator is One.
- The soul has the power to move the body, so it is an example of the power of God.
- The soul is aware of the body, so God is Knowledgeable.
- The soul has control over the limbs, so God has control over creation.
- The soul has existed before the body and it will exist after it, so God is Pre-eternal and Everlasting.
- No one can discover the true nature of the soul, so the true nature of God is undiscoverable.
- The soul has no specific location in the body, so God has no location.
- The soul is not tangible, so God is not tangible.
- The soul is not visible, so the Creator of the soul is invisible.

(Majlisi 1403AH, 58:99-100)

7. Another interpretation for this *hadith* is that just as no one is able to know his soul, no one is able to know God.

The last interpretation seems to be incorrect, but the other ones could all be true.

So, whoever knows himself will know God; self-knowledge is a way to know God, and, no doubt, knowing God is the most important means for purification of the soul, because God is the source of all virtues.

However, although self-knowledge is a very important step towards self-purification, there are numerous obstacles on the way to it. Below we will discuss some of these obstacles.

Obstacles of Self-knowledge

The first step in curing physical illnesses is diagnosing them. Today there are various methods for diagnosing different diseases, and this makes the curing process much easier. Through taking radiographs of broken bones, surgeons are able to find damaged areas and cure them. Physicians are also able to discover illnesses through different laboratory tests.

In fact, the same process should be undergone for curing vices and spiritual illnesses. If we do not discover the roots of vices in our souls with the help of spiritual physicians, how could we find the cure?

Nevertheless, some people ignore the symptoms of dangerous physical diseases because they do not want to accept that they have a serious disease. Likewise, many people justify their vices and negative characteristics, claiming moral integrity. However, escaping from the reality is not a solution and often has dangerous consequences.

Knowing the self and accepting its shortcomings requires courage, strong resolution, and firm intention, because their pride and selfishness drive human beings to deny or justify their defects.

Accordingly, the main obstacle to self-knowledge is self-centeredness. Knowing oneself is impossible unless this obstacle is removed; one cannot purify his soul unless he knows himself and becomes aware of his defects.

In Islamic tradition, many *hadiths* emphasize on the importance of knowing one's defects:

The noble Prophet (s) is quoted as saying, "When God wills the good for a servant, He makes him knowledgeable in religion, disinterested in this world, and sharp-sighted about his defects" (Majlisi 1403AH, 74:80).

Imam Ali (a) also says, "One's ignorance about his defects is among his greatest sins" (Majlisi 1403AH, 74:419).

But how could one remove the barrier of selfishness and discover his own defects?

In response to this question, the late Fayd Kashani has mentioned that one could become aware of his defects in four ways:

First, he could refer to a true spiritual teacher, who knows the disorders of the soul, and follow his guidelines. Of course, such a teacher is rarely found in our times!

Second, he could ask a faithful friend to observe his deeds carefully and remind him of his mistakes and defects; a great religious scholar has said, "May God have mercy on the one who gifts me with my defects." (Note the use of the word "gift," which shows the receptive attitude that one should have towards those who remind him of his mistakes.)

However, such faithful friends are also few nowadays; most friends either flatter each other or focus too much on their friends' defects. A great mystic was once asked, "Why have you kept aloof from people?" He answered, "What could I do with those who conceal my sins from me!?"

Religious people used to like being informed of their defects, but nowadays we hate those who advise us and remind us of our imperfections. Our reaction to those who criticize us is to say, "You yourself have such and such

defects, you yourself have done this and that”; we get offended and thus deprive ourselves of their advice.

Third, one might become aware of his defects through his enemies, because enemies always observe one’s mistakes and defects carefully, so one can benefit from his enemies in this regard more than from his smooth-tongued friend.

Fourth, one could socialize with others so that by seeing their negative characteristics he could realize his own negative attributes. Believers are mirrors of each other, and one could find his defects through observing others’ flaws. Someone asked Christ (a), “Who taught you manners?” He answered, “No one! I saw the ignorance of the ignorant and I disliked it, so I avoided it.” A similar story is narrated about Luqman that when he was asked, “Who taught you manners and disciplines?” he answered, “Ill-mannered ones! (Fayd Kashani n.d., 5:114).

Praying and Worshiping God refines the Soul

Another step towards self-purification is praying and worshiping God.

To understand the effect of praying and worshiping God in purification of the soul and developing moral virtues, it is necessary to know what is the reality of worship. A deep understanding of the reality of worship requires a detailed analysis and a comprehensive study of the contributions of great scholars of exegesis, ethics, jurisprudence, and *hadith*.

First, it is important to discuss the relation between the word ‘*ibadah*’ (worship) and the word ‘*abd*’ (servant) which is the root of ‘*ibadah*’.

‘*Abd*’ (servant) in Arabic refers to someone who is owned by another person, does not have an independent will, and obeys his master without hesitation. ‘*Ubudiyya*’ (servitude) is being an ‘*abd*’ of, and showing utmost humility to, someone; thus, only the one who has granted greatest bounties deserves to be worshiped, and that is none other than God. In other words, ‘*ubudiyya*’ means the complete submission to the true Lord and getting closest to Him; it is not merely performing certain rituals.

It is evident that worshipping is the best way to remember God Almighty, avoiding all impurities, and becoming a manifestation of His attributes.

In a *hadith* from Imam Sadiq (a), we read that “servitude is a gem whose depth is divinity” (Imam Sadiq 1400AH, 7). This *hadith* indicates that the essence of servant-hood is to acquire attributes similar to those of the Master and reflect a beam of His majesty and beauty. In addition, it indicates that through servitude one could, with the permission of God, have authority over creation.

Now let us read some quranic verses about the role of worship in developing moral virtues.

1. O mankind! Worship your Lord who created you and those who were before you, so that you may be wary. (Quran 2:21)
2. O you who have faith! Prescribed for you is fasting as it was prescribed for those who were before you, so that you may be God wary. (Quran 2:183)
3. And maintain the prayer, indeed the prayer prevents indecencies and wrongs. (Quran 29:45)
4. Indeed man has been created covetous. Anxious when an ill befalls him and grudging when good comes his way [all are such] except the prayerful, those who are preserving in their prayers and in whose wealth there is a known right. (Quran 70:19-24)
5. Take charity from their possessions to cleanse them and purify them thereby. (Quran 9:103)
6. Those who have faith, and whose hearts find rest in the remembrance of Allah. Look! The hearts find rest in Allah’s remembrance! (Quran 13:28)
7. O you who have faith! Take recourse in patience and prayer; indeed Allah is with the patient. (Quran 2:153)

Commentary

In all of the above verses, there is a correlation between worship, piety, abstaining from sins, and developing moral virtues. This indicates that those who want to purify their souls should start with servitude and worshipping God. Travelers of the path of God, who want to purify themselves, should seek help through praying and worshipping. They should purify and elevate their soul through the love of God and worshipping Him.

The first above-mentioned verse addresses all humankind and requires them to be wary of God:

“O mankind! Worship your Lord who created you and those who were before you, so that you may be wary.” (Quran 2:21)

The idolaters of the time of the Prophet justified their idol-worshipping, with the excuse that it was the tradition of their fathers. In response, this verse emphasizes that God is the Creator of both the idolaters and their fathers. He is the Creator of everyone and everything, and it is only He who deserves to be worshiped, not the idols. If one sincerely worships God, righteousness will develop in his soul. Otherwise, he will be afflicted with different moral problems.

This verse shows the close relationship between piety and worship in general; the next verse indicates the relation between fasting, as an important act of worship, and piety:

O you who have faith! Prescribed for you is fasting as it was prescribed for those who were before you, so that you may be God-wary. (Quran 2:183)

When fasting, one can feel pure happiness and spiritual joy and feel closer to goodness and farther from evil. Reliable statistics show that crime rate considerably declines in the month of Ramadan. All this shows that the more one worships God, the farther he will be from evil.

The third verse indicates the close link between performing prayers and avoiding indecencies and wrongdoings. In this verse, the holy Prophet (s) is

addressed as a model: “And maintain the prayer, indeed the prayer prevents indecencies and wrongs.” (Quran 29:45)

“Indecencies and wrongdoings” are immoral acts, and we know that all immoral acts originate from one’s negative qualities; in other words, hidden qualities affect the apparent manifestations of the soul.

Actually, that is why saying prayers prevents indecencies and wrongdoings: when one performs prayers, through God’s remembrance, he enters a superior world, i.e. the world of nearness to God, and this nearness keeps him away from main sources of indecencies and wrongdoings, i.e. carnal desires and love for this world.

Because of this, those who truly keep up prayer commit fewer sins; the better the prayer, the farther the performer will be from indecencies and wrongdoings and the more developed his spirituality and morality will become.

The fourth verse first introduces some vices, such as imbalanced anxiousness or happiness, then mentions the prayerful as an exception:

... except the prayerful, those who are preserving in their prayers and in whose wealth there is a known right. (Quran 70: 19-24)

Therefore remembering God, praying, and worshiping have a direct influence on purifying the soul from vices such as stinginess, impatience, and anxiety.

The fifth verse mentions the influence of giving alms (*zakat*) on self-purification. We know that the “obligatory alms-giving” (*zakat*) is among the important acts of worship. The glorious Quran says,

Take charity from their possessions to cleanse them and purify them thereby. (Quran 9: 103)

The phrase “purify them thereby” is a clear proof that self-purification is achieved through giving alms; giving alms eradicates vices such as stinginess,

worldliness, and greed from the soul, and cultivates philanthropy and generosity in the heart.

In the sixth verse, the importance of remembrance of God and its influence on the tranquility of the heart has been mentioned:

Those who have faith, and whose hearts find rest in the remembrance of Allah. Look! The hearts find rest in Allah's remembrance! (Quran 13:28)

The tranquility of the heart is a result of remembering and relying on God and leads to deliverance from materialism, greed, meanness, and jealousy. In other words, if we explore the roots of the soul's discomfort and distress, we realize that they originate from different vices, all of which could be uprooted by remembering God.

In the seventh and last of the above-mentioned verses, the influence of patience and prayer on strengthening the soul is mentioned:

O you who have faith! Take recourse in patience and prayer; indeed Allah is with the patient. (Quran 2:153)

In some Islamic traditions, "patience" has been interpreted as "fasting" (Majlisi 1403AH, 93:254), which is an obvious example of patience. Nevertheless, the concept of "patience" is much broader and includes any kind of resistance against carnal desires, temptations of Satan, and sad events.

It is reported that whenever Imam Ali (a) had a challenge ahead of him, he (a) would perform prayers and then recite the above verse from the Quran (Kulayni 1407AH, 3:480).

In brief, these important acts of worship help develop virtues such as reliance on God, bravery, courage, and patience and keep man away from vices such as timidity, doubt, and anxiety.

Summary

Based on what was discussed above, it can be concluded that acts of worship have a profound effect on moral purification from different aspects:

1. Remembering the origin of creation and maintaining presence of God in the life help human beings control their deeds and desires; the whole world is in the presence of God, and committing sins in His presence is a great shame.
2. Studying God's attributes of beauty and glory as mentioned in prayers and supplications reflects a beam of those attributes on the supplicant's heart and prepares him for moral elevation.
3. Bearing in mind the Day of Resurrection, when everything will be reckoned, prevents one from committing sins.
4. Worship and supplication, if done with the presence of heart, bring such inner serenity and light that darkness of vices cannot resist it. Thus, after worshipping mindfully, one feels closer to goodness.
5. Our traditional supplications contain many moral teachings that can guide us on our spiritual journey to God. Those who want to purify their souls could reach their goal by following those teachings. Supplicating and worshipping God is itself a key in this journey. Without praying and remembering God, especially in one's solitude and at dawn, no progress can be made.

The Influence of Acts of Worship on Self-Purification in Islamic Traditions

Many Islamic traditions stress the importance of worshipping God on self-purification:

1. Imam Ali (a) said, "God has obliged faith in order to purify [people] of polytheism, prayer to purify [people] from vanity, *zakat* as a cause

for sustenance, and fasting to test people's sincerity". (Nahj al-Balagha, wisdom 252)

2. In a famous *hadith* from the noble Prophet (s), daily prayer has been likened to pure water running just outside one's house in which he washes himself five times a day and thus there remains no impurity on him. ('Amili 1988, 4:12)
3. In a *hadith* from Imam Rida (a) about the effects of worship, we read,

If one asks, "Why did He [i.e. God] oblige the people to worship?" the answer is so that people do not forget His remembrance, do not abandon His guidelines, and do not neglect His commands and prohibitions, wherein are their benefit and subsistence. (Majlisi 1403AH, 6:63)

Therefore, worshiping God awakens the heart and makes the soul alert. It is an opportunity for remembering God, which results in self-purification.

4. In another *hadith* from Imam Rida (a), we read about the benefits of prayer: "[T]herein [i.e. in prayer] exists obligatory and continuous remembrance of God at night and during the day so that the servant does not forget his Master, Ruler, and Creator and does not transgress or rebel. Moreover, in remembrance of his Lord and standing up in His presence, there is prevention from sins and a barrier against various kinds of corruption." ('Amili 1988, 4:9)
5. In a *hadith* from Imam Sadiq (a) about the results of prayer and its acceptance standards, we read, "Whoever wishes to know whether his prayer has been accepted or not, he should see whether his prayer has prevented him from indecencies and wrongdoings or not; the prayer is accepted only to the extent that it prevents him". (Majlisi 1403AH, 79:198) This *hadith* clearly states that the prayer has a direct effect on moral development, and those who do not see such effects have only cared about the form of their prayers and neglected its essence. In other words, they have performed their prayers only to remove their

obligation, not to achieve the real purpose of this great act of worship.

6. In another *hadith* from the noble Prophet (s) about the philosophy of fasting we read, “Indeed, fasting kills the wish of the soul and the passion of the animal nature. It entails the refinement of the heart, the purity of the limbs, the maintenance of the appearance and the inner soul, thanksgiving for the blessings, and generosity towards the poor; it increases supplication, reverence, and crying [for God]; it causes [people] to take refuge [only] in God; it helps cutting off worldly attachments, it decreases faults and increases good deeds; and it has other innumerable benefits” (Majlisi 1403AH, 93:254).
7. We conclude this part with a *hadith* from the Commander of the Faithful, Imam Ali (a):

Continuous worship is a proof for achieving salvation.
(Tamimi Amadi 1366 Sh, 198)

Conclusion

From the above-mentioned *hadiths* and others narrated in famous *hadith* collections, we learn that there is a close relation between worship and self-purification.

The more devoutly, sincerely, and mindfully an act of worship is performed, the more its effects will be. When one performs an act of worship sincerely and mindfully, he feels illumination and refinement in his heart, he becomes increasingly inclined to goodness and disinclined to evil; he feels closer to God and finds his soul humble, modest, and obedient before the Truth.

It is remarkable that all acts of worship have both common and unique effects. Their common effect is developing humbleness, devotion, and submission to God and removing negligence.

As to their unique effects, the prayer forbids indecency and wrongdoing; fasting strengthens the will and helps the intellect control the desires; *hajj*

drives human away from all the attractions and attachments of the world; *zakat* decreases a person's greed, stinginess, and worldliness; God's remembrance causes the tranquility in the heart, and every *dhikr* attracts one's mind and soul towards one of God's attributes of beauty and glory and brings him to a better harmony with the Truth.

Thus, one who performs all acts of worship gains their common and unique benefits and thus effectively develops his spirituality. However, in order to fully benefit from these effective means of self-purification, it is important to learn the purpose behind them, and strive to achieve that purpose by performing the acts of worship in the best and most sincere way possible.

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IMAN

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Introduction

When studying the Quran and traditions, one finds terms that are less seen in the preceding human literature; such terms as *wahy* (revelation), *taqwa* (piety), *iman* (faith), *tawakkul* (trusting in God) and *ihsan* (kindness). These terms have special meanings in the words of God and the Infallibles (a); the meanings which, though not identical with their common usage, are not totally irrelevant to it either. The aim of this article is to discover the specific meanings of these terms in the Quran and traditions through a careful analysis of the texts and contexts in which they are situated.

When trying to understand the true meanings of the aforementioned terms, we must gather their characteristics and features in our main religious sources. Each of these characteristics will take on the role of explaining part of what the intended meaning is. When doing so, we must act as comprehensively as possible. In other words, we should not limit our research to only a portion of the scripture available and neglect the rest. Any interpretation or theory pertaining to a religious matter, including understanding religious terminology, must be assessed with all religious teachings in order that its true position in religion's system of thought becomes clear. If such comprehensiveness is not taken into consideration, our research will be methodologically deficient.

This paper will focus on the term *iman*, trying to discover its special meaning based on the words of Imam Ali (a) and through finding relevant Quranic verses to his words.

Section One: The Characteristics of IMAN

I.I. First characteristic: The Birthplace of IMAN

No matter what its essence, *iman* has to do with that part of the person referred to as the “heart”. The heart is where *iman* resides, and as long as the heart does not open its doors to *iman*, it will not be achieved. Imam Ali (a) narrates the Prophet (s) as saying, “The *iman* of the servant will not be sound until his heart becomes sound (Nahj al-balagha, Sermon 176). The prophet (s) has also said, “Faith emerges in the heart as a white spot; the more one’s *iman* grows, the more the white spot grows.” (Majlisi, Bihar al-anwar 1403AH, 66:196).

In the holy Quran, the link between *iman* and the heart is expressed as follows:

The Bedouins say, “We have faith.” Say, “You do not have faith yet; rather say, ‘We have embraced Islam,’ for faith has not yet entered into your hearts.” (Quran 49:14)

From the whole of what was said, several points can be concluded:

I.I.I. The Difference between ISLAM and IMAN

There is a difference between *islam* (submission) and *iman*. *Islam* is an outward submission to religion, and unlike *iman*, it has nothing to do with the heart. That which takes place in the heart is *iman*, not *islam*. This does not necessarily mean that there is a time lapse between *islam* and *iman*; rather, it is possible for the two to occur simultaneously. This can happen when one is confronted with the call of Prophets, and his heart carries out the specific action of *iman*.

I.I.2. General Faith and Specific Faith

What was said had to do with the real connection between *iman* and *islam* and man's different facets, although Islam's approach is to attribute *iman* to every Muslim individual and assume that everyone bears this quality, regardless of whether or not *iman* has really entered his heart. Hence, *islam* can also be referred to as "iman in its general sense", and *iman* can be referred to as "iman in its specific sense".

Proofs for this claim are the narrations that compare the relationship between *iman* and *islam* to that of the Ka'bah and the Masjid al-Haram. Clearly, reaching the Ka'bah means being in the Masjid al-Harām as well. The Ka'bah is like the heart of Masjid al-Haram. Now, if we take *iman* to be entering the Ka'bah and *islam* to be entering Masjid al-Harām, it will be clear that the degree of *iman* is a degree that entails passing through the degree of *islam*, and that anything that holds for one's *iman* will also hold for one's *islam*. The opposite however, is not true; it is not the case that whatever *iman* has, also holds for one's *islam* (Shaykh al-Saduq 1398 AH, 228).

Now, using the division of *iman* into general *iman* (*islam*) and specific *iman*, it can be said that not every *mu'min* in its general sense is a *mu'min* in its specific sense, while every *mu'min* in its specific sense is a *mu'min* in its general sense. Obviously, there is total contrast between *kafir* (disbeliever) and Muslim, as there is essential disparateness between *kafir* and *mu'min*, such that no *kafir* is Muslim, the same way no *mu'min* is *kafir*. In other words, *islam* and *iman* are both disparate to *kufr* (disbelief). This is while in Islamic tradition, what has been mentioned opposite to *kufr* is only *iman*; hence, the justification of the division of *iman* into general and specific.¹

1.1.3. How IMAN, ISLAM, KUFR, and NIFAQ Develop

Both types of *iman* – general and specific – are something the individual needs to achieve. General *iman* is the responsibility of faculties that precede the heart and have to do with man's outer sphere; as a matter of fact, it is possible that the heart has nothing to do with general *iman* at all. As to specific *iman* though, it is carried out by the heart, and after being attained,

¹ See (Kulayni 1407AH, 2:26-7). Please do note that the Islamic laws pertaining to the Muslims have to do with *iman* in its general sense, which is assumed through saying the *shahadatayn*, even if the heart does not believe in what the tongue is verbalizing.

can even positively impact the outer layers of one's existence. It is due to this that the fruit and outcomes of the *islam* of a *mu'min* differ from that of *islam* before *iman*.

In any event, as long as these two have not been taken care of, one stands in the realm of *kufr*. Also, since *islam* has to do with the outer sphere, it is possible for some who are actually in the realm of *kufr* to make it seem as if they have entered the realm of *islam*, in order that they may enjoy the worldly rights of Muslims. For these individuals – referred to as *munafiqs* – there is no way into the realm of *iman*, the reason being that *iman* is an internal realm that bears no place for pretension and make-believe. Due to the worldly rights of *mu'mins* and Muslims being the same, it is manifest that the *kafir* who, with his hypocritical nature, stands in the lines of the Muslims, reaches his objectives in this world.

1.1.4 The Accessibility of the Realms of IMAN, ISLAM and KUFR

The same way entering the realm of *islam* means passing through and putting behind the realm of *kufr* and entering the realm of *iman* necessitates passing through the realm of *islam*, there also exists a backward movement. What is meant is that sometimes a *mu'min* will be thrown back to the realm of *islam* and is revoked of the title of “*mu'min*” and is sometimes even expelled to the realm of *kufr*. This path will always remain a two-way one, and it is only in the end that it becomes clear in which of these one is located.¹

From all of what was said, it becomes clear that identification of the heart in man plays a pivotal role in distinguishing whether one bears *iman* or not. In explaining the realm of the heart, the following propositions can be helpful:

1.1.5. Identifying the Realm of the Heart

- a) Every person has only one heart (Quran 33:4).
- b) The heart is the most hidden and original existential realm of man; it rules over other realms and is also influenced by them. If this realm is shaken, it will be the epicenter of an earthquake whose waves will extend to

¹ In some narrations, *iman* has been divided into *mustaqarr* and *mustawda*. For example, see Kulayni (1407AH, 2:418).

the outmost layers of one's existence. At the same time, if it is given tranquility, one's entire existence will experience calmness and comfort.¹

c) The heart is involved in cognitive activities such as contemplation, certainty, and understanding:

فَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ عِبَادَ اللَّهِ تَعِيَّةَ ذِي لُبٍ شَعَلَ التَّفَكُّرُ قَلْبَهُ

Fear God like the wise one whose heart has become preoccupied with contemplation. (Nahj al-Balaghah, sermon 83)

لَا تُدْرِكُهُ الْعُيُونُ بِمُشَاهَدَةِ الْعِيَانِ وَ لَكِنْ تُدْرِكُهُ الْقُلُوبُ بِحَقَائِقِ الْإِيمَانِ

The eyes cannot see Him, but the hearts see him through the realities of *iman*. (Nahj al-Balaghah, sermon 179)

d) The heart is capable of being described as healthy, as well as being described as ill:

وَ أَشَدُّ مِنْ مَرَضِ الْبَدَنِ مَرَضُ الْقَلْبِ

And worse than the illness of the physical body is the illness of the heart. (Nahj al-Balaghah, Wisdom 388)

It is possible for one's body to be healthy and sound, but for the core of his existence to be ill; the opposite holds as well, one's physical body can be sick, while he enjoys a totally sound heart. There is no direct connection between the health of the body and the health of the heart; each can do without the other, the same way they can co-exist.

e) The heart can experience life and death; it bears the capacity to die and live. Of course, the life and death of the heart differ from that of the body. It is possible for one's body to be alive, and yet his heart to be dead. Due to

¹ The verses speaking of consolidating one's state (e.g. 18: 13-14) and of scaring the heart (e.g. 59:2) back this claim.

this, what a live heart does cannot be seen and acknowledged by one whose heart is dead. There is no contradiction between the life of the body and the death of the heart, and sometimes sickness of the heart can lead to its death:

When one loves a thing it blinds him and sickens his heart. Then he sees but with a diseased eye, hears but with unhearing ears. Desires have cut asunder his wit, and the world has made his heart dead, while his mind is all longing for it. Consequently, he is a slave of it [the world]. (Nahj al-Balaghah, Sermon 109)

f) Like the body, the heart also has parts, and these parts are similar to that of the physical body. It has eyes by which it sees, ears by which it hears, and sense of taste by which it tastes. If it happens, as was pointed to in (e), that a heart is dead, neither will its eyes see, nor will its ears hear. The eyes of the heart see the same way the eyes of the body see; the difference between the two lying in the object being seen. The live heart sees that which the dead heart is deprived of, the same way the seeing person sees that which the blind person cannot. Seeing and not seeing have no effect on the object being seen; rather, the seeing person develops a copulative existence (*al-wujud al-rabti*) between himself and the object, while the blind one cannot accomplish such, not at the physical level nor at the inner level of the heart.

g) All concepts that our religion gives importance to take place in the realm of the heart, and it is from there that they extend to other realms. Any form of *rida* (consent), *tawakkul* (reliance on God), *tafwid* (handing over management of one's affairs to God), *taslim* (submission), *ḥubb* (love), and *bughḍ* (hate) are all fruits of *iman*. In other words, the existence of such concepts is contingent upon the existence of *iman*, and it is in *iman*'s cradle, meaning the heart, that they emerge. Imam Ali (a) says, "*Iman* is constituted of four pillars: reliance on God, handing over the management of one's affairs to Him, satisfaction with His decree, and submission to His command" (Kulayni 1407AH, 2:47).

The key question here is to ask, what is the origin of the heart's life, and what is the cause of its death?

1.2. Second Characteristic: The Gradation of IMAN

The concept of *iman* is a gradational one, bearing various degrees and taking on different levels upon development. Both the common and distinguishing factors of these degrees and levels is *iman*. It is not that this reality either exists or does not; rather, if it exists, it can have various degrees of existence, to the extent that some of its degrees can be considered as relatively non-existent, while attributing total non-existence to them is definitely erroneous. For example, the second level of *iman* is simply its existence, so it is correct to say that *iman* exists at this level, nonetheless, the third level of *iman* is negated from this level. As was mentioned in the first characteristic, the *mu'mins* need to pass through the realm of *islam* in order to enter the realm of specific *iman*, nonetheless, they do not share the same proximity to its center; each *mu'min* has his own respective degree of proximity to the center of this realm.

'Abd al-'Aziz narrates that Imam Sadiq (a) said to him, "O 'Abd al-'Aziz, indeed *iman* has ten degrees; the people climb them step by step like a ladder. He who stands on the second step should not tell the one on the first that he is nothing; even the one on the tenth step should not say such a thing. Do not do away with he who is lower than you so that the one higher than you does not do away with you. When you see another who is lower than you, easily pull him up towards you without burdening him with more than he can bear so to break him, because whosoever breaks a *mu'min* is bound to compensate for the breakage (Kulayni 1407AH, 2:45).

By referring to other traditions, one finds that there is much distance between these very degrees of *iman* as well and that the degree and level of the *mu'min* who is higher, is incomprehensible to the one who stands at a lower degree of *iman*. In reference to "degree" [one's level and station], it has been said that

الدَّرَجَةُ مَا بَيْنَ السَّمَاءِ إِلَى الْأَرْضِ

The degree is between the heaven and earth. (Majlisi, Bihar al-anwar 1403AH, 66:171)

It is as if the person who stands at a higher degree somehow sees the entire contingent universe covered in light, in a way different than that which is seen at a lower degree. In some traditions it has been disclosed that, for instance, Miqdad was at the eighth degree, Abu Dharr at the ninth, and Salman al-Farsi at the tenth (Majlisi, Bihar al-anwar 1403AH, 22:351).

The same applies to the subsequent outcomes of *iman*. The outcomes and fruits of one's *iman* follow the strength and weakness of his *iman*; the difference and distance between these outcomes can sometimes be so great, rendering their comparison difficult.¹

1.3. Third Characteristic: The Strength and Decreasibility of IMAN

Iman can be strengthened and solidified, or weakened and decreased. According to the second characteristic mentioned, *iman* has various degrees and although this third characteristic depends on the second, it is not identical to it. As per this characteristic, one can put a degree behind and move towards another degree. Therefore, when it comes to the essential properties of *iman*, they should firstly have different grades and levels, and secondly passing through one level to the next should also be feasible in them. The third characteristic presumes the second to exist, although it is possible to consider the second without taking the third into consideration. Based on this, if a discourse encompasses the third characteristic, it will be directed towards the second as well.

In regard to strengthening the *iman*, the Commander of the Faithful, Imam Ali (a) says,

We would not suffer from any calamity or hardship, except that it would bring about [in us] an increase in faith, engagement in the truth, and submission to the command

¹ For further details, see Quran 6:132 and 3:163. For the descriptions of the mentioned degrees, see Majlisi (1403AH, 66:169).

of the messenger of God (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him). (Nahj al-Balagha, Sermon 122)

These words of Imam Ali (a) are pointing to quranic verses which explain this third degree:

And when His signs are recited to them, they increase their faith, and who put their trust in their Lord. (Quran 8:2)

1.4. Fourth Characteristic: IMAN is Voluntary

Iman is a reality that one voluntarily carries out and in no way can be forced and compelled. The sole responsibility of the Prophets and Infallible Imams (a) is to show the straight path and call everyone to traverse it. It is up to each person to embrace *iman* or not, and he will be held accountable for the decision he makes in this regard. What was mentioned in the first characteristic sheds light on the fourth: *iman* goes back to one's inner dimension, concealed to all except himself. It is due to this inaccessibility to others that no outside factor can compel it. This is why, if a person among the believers claims *iman*, it will be accepted from him, because there is no way to verify and learn of what is truly going on in one's heart. Of course, *islam* is also voluntary, but since it has to do with the pre-heart stage and one's outer dimension, one can be compelled to present himself as a Muslim when he really is not.¹

1.5. Fifth Characteristic: The Assessability of IMAN

Iman will definitely be put to the test. No matter what the essence of *iman*, and regardless of which realm one's *iman* is in touch with, tests and trials will be sent one's way, both so it becomes known at what degree the individual is at, and also to set the grounds for the emergence of the third characteristic. Before being tested, the degree of one's *iman* is but a claim in need of verification. It is only hardship and calamity that can either confirm the veracity of such a claim and open the doors to higher degrees or prove its falsehood and hollowness. Imam Ali (a) says,

¹ See Nahj al-Balagha, (Letter 16).

إِنَّهُ لَمَّا أَنْزَلَ اللَّهُ سُبْحَانَهُ قَوْلَهُ - الْم أَحْسَبَ النَّاسُ أَنْ يُتْرَكُوا أَنْ يَقُولُوا آمَنَّا وَهُمْ لَا يُفْتَنُونَ عَلِمْتُ أَنَّ الْفِتْنَةَ لَا تَنْزِلُ بِنَا وَرَسُولُ اللَّهِ ص بَيْنَ أَظْهَرِنَا فَقُلْتُ يَا رَسُولَ اللَّهِ مَا هَذِهِ الْفِتْنَةُ الَّتِي أَخْبَرَكَ اللَّهُ تَعَالَى بِهَا فَعَالَ يَا عَلِيُّ إِنَّ أُمَّتِي سَيُفْتَنُونَ بَعْدِي

When God Almighty revealed His words: “What! Do people imagine that they will be let off on (their) saying: ‘We believe!’ and they will not be tried?” [Quran 29:2] I knew that as long as the messenger of God (s) was amongst us, that trouble would not befall us. So I said, “O messenger of God! What is this trouble that God has informed you of? He said, “O Ali! Very soon, after me, my nation will fall into trouble and corruption.” (Nahj al-Balagha, Sermon 157)

Section Two: The Fruits and Outcomes of IMAN

Now that we have become familiar with some of the characteristics of *iman*, we will delve into some of the outcomes of *iman* in order to become more familiar with this concept. These outcomes can help us further distinguish between specific and general *iman*.

2.1 The Impenetrability of One of the Degrees of IMAN

There is a degree of *iman* which is not affected the least by any doubt, question, or storm of afflictions. At such a degree, the *mu'min* is not shaken by these misfortunes; rather, they have a reverse effect and consolidate his *iman*. It was mentioned in the third characteristic that *iman* can vary in weakness and strength. But there is a degree of *iman* that is sealed and is not prone to any weakness or deficiency. The only transition that takes place here is to higher degrees. On the weaker side of the *iman* spectrum, lies *islam*, to which one devolves as one's *iman* weakens. Also, one located in the realm of *islam* may even lose the requirements for *islam*, setting him all the way back to the realm of *kufr*. Therefore, the lower side of *iman* has an end, while the higher end of the *iman* spectrum is not bound by any limits. The point being made here is that a state of *iman* can be achieved, in which there is no decline or weakness, no matter how many afflictions or challenges there are. Such a *mu'min* can in no way be shaken or manipulated.

2.2. Experiencing Tranquility of the Heart

One of the features and fruits of *iman* is *sakinah* (tranquility). *Sakinah* derives from *sukun*, which is the opposite of movement and shakiness. When this rare feature enters the heart of man, all anxiety and suspense cease. Anxiety and distress are a state that man experiences in different forms throughout his life, that none of the contingent matters of this world can free one of, because, essentially, it is these very contingent matters that create anxiety and distress in the first place. Thus, even if all contingent matters of this world gather in order to rid one of suspense, distress, and anxiety, the problem will not be solved, if not worsened. *Sakinah* is not something attained by the individual himself, or the product of a process connected and related to him, it is rather an endowment by the Creator to the *mu'min* individual. In other words, no contingent matter plays any role in the acquisition of *sakinah*, and it is solely a divine gift and blessing to the *mu'min*'s heart. By virtue of this gift, tranquility takes over one's entire existence. The same way, if fear is thrown onto one's heart by God, none of the worldly matters will be able to relieve that heart, even if they all work hand in hand.

It seems as if this outcome is related to the previous one mentioned, in the sense that *sakinah* protects one from sinking to lower levels of *iman* and only pushes him upwards towards higher levels:

It is He who sent down composure into the hearts of the faithful that they might enhance their faith. (Quran 48:4)

2.3. Experiencing Detachment of the Heart

One of the other fruits of *iman* is that it brings about change in the conditions and states of man, breaking the chains of imprisonment, leading to freedom and liberty. In this life, the individual is perpetually living in his hopes, dreams, and ideals but also experiences failure, deprivation, and reaching dead ends. Fear of the future, not achieving one's goals, losing all belongings, etc. never leave him alone. The changes that he undergoes in this life only change the subject of his fears, with fear itself always being there. He tries to live an ideal life but very well knows that no matter how ideal and good the life, there is no guarantee of its continuation. His knowledge is subject to forgetfulness, his beauty is subject to perishing, his love may turn to disgust and hate, and his joy is threatened by anxiety and depression. Even

love of self – assuming that it is the most essential form of love – is not guaranteed survival, and this explains why sometimes people put themselves in the danger of suicide.

With the birth of *iman*, everything changes in one's different states mentioned above. At such a stage, the *mu'min* discovers the true and pure attachment that other attachments would not allow him to see. And by receiving that true attachment, he becomes free of all other attachments and settles at the shore of tranquility and stability. This attachment is the attachment of the created to the Creator; an attachment that drives one in all of his states and conditions to his Creator, and he learns that all creation share with him this attachment to the Creator. All of these intertwined links are hanging from their independent cause, and none of these links is contingent upon itself. The *mu'min* feels in harmony and solidarity with other creatures, but in the line of dependence on God. This makes health and illness, need and wealth, life and death, rough and easy times, etc. all equal in the eyes of the *mu'min*. Each of these states creates a sensational scenario for him, and the *mu'min*, through the role he plays, finds a relationship within himself with one of the names of God. By relying on his Lord, who is always with him, the *mu'min* benefits from each of these states. Imam Ali (a) says in this regard,

لَا يَكْمُلُ إِيمَانُ الْمُؤْمِنِ حَتَّىٰ يَعُدَّ الرَّخَاءَ فِتْنَةً وَ الْبَلَاءَ نِعْمَةً

The *iman* of the *mu'min* is not complete until he sees prosperity as trial and infliction as a blessing. (Tamimi Amadi 1366 Sh, 88)

2.4 Transformation of the Cognitive Mechanism and Transcendent Disclosure

With the development of *iman* in the heart, the cognitive faculty confronts the hearable, seeable, and other sensible things with more enhanced tools. Before *iman*, such tools either did not exist at all, or did, but could not be used due to obstacles. What goes on in this world is so charming and possessing that it makes the corresponding faculties very preoccupied with itself, disabling one from entering one's hidden and original dimension.

What *iman* does is that it gradually places one's hidden dimension at the entrance of the hidden and more original constructs of existence. This dimension of existence may remain neglected and unacknowledged by one's identifying faculty due to the hindrance of more visible and tangible constructs. At the onset of *iman*, many real and original matters remain unseen and hidden; however, through pushing aside the obstacles and tearing the veils of negligence and forgetfulness, the changes brought about by *iman* enable one to connect his cognitive faculties to the corresponding dimensions. When this happens, one's receptions of the real world are adjusted and corrected, and he sees the different dimensions the way they really are.

By reaching certain degrees of *iman*, the "mirror" of one's existence truly becomes such that it reflects the great as great, and the small as small:

عَظَّمَ الْخَالِقُ فِي أَنْفُسِهِمْ فَصَغُرَ مَا دُونَهُ فِي أَعْيُنِهِمْ

The greatness of the Creator is seated in their hearts, and, so, everything else appears small in their eyes. (Nahj al-Balagha, Sermon 193)

Since the Creator is great and magnificent, He is reflected in their hearts as great and magnificent; this results in the insignificance of the rest of creation in their eyes, and rightfully so too. The "mirror" of the *mu'min's* existence does not falsely blow things out of proportion; rather, one comprehends all things the way they truly are. The individual rightfully sees those events which are distant to be truly distant, and those that are imminent to be truly imminent; he does not see the distant to be imminent or vice versa. If it ever happens that something truly near is seen as distant by an individual, it shows that his identifying faculty has failed to efficiently establish a connection with that matter and see it in its true position. These types of cognition predominantly have to do with one's mental and psychological aspects. For example, Resurrection seems to be a very distant event in the eyes of the disbeliever and yet imminent in the eyes of the *mu'min*. The more one's degrees of *iman* rise, the closer he sees the Day of Resurrection, and it is the *mu'min* himself who has been able to rightfully comprehend the closeness of such a day, owing it to the existential transformation he has

undergone; as long as such a change does not take place, the Day of Resurrection will continue to seem distant.

فَإِنَّكُمْ لَوْ قَدْ عَايَنْتُمْ مَا قَدْ عَايَنَ مَنْ مَاتَ مِنْكُمْ بَجَرِعْتُمْ وَ وَهَلْتُمْ وَ
 سَمِعْتُمْ وَ أَطَعْتُمْ وَ لَكِنَّ مَحْجُوبٌ عَنْكُمْ مَا قَدْ عَايَنُوا وَ قَرِيبٌ مَا يُطْرَحُ
 الْحِجَابُ

If you could see that which has been seen by those of you who have died, you would be puzzled and troubled. Then you would have listened and obeyed; but what they have seen is yet curtained off from you, but shortly the curtain will be thrown off. (Nahj al-Balagha, Sermon 20)

It is due to this that the believer can never attend to anything in this world without considering the Hereafter as well; the Hereafter always factors into his calculations, and he deems anything the Hereafter is not part of the equation of as merely worldly and material.

2.5. Existential Transition to the Spiritual Worlds

With *iman* seated in one's heart, the path to the world of spirituality is paved and he settles in one of these worlds. Spirituality does not sum up to one world but rather, encompasses many worlds. With *iman* settling in one's heart, he moves towards the most complete world of spirituality. The dominant rules of these worlds are all moral ones.

It must be noted that every action taking place in each of these worlds has its own ruling particular to that world. If a demeanor is considered good in one world, it will not be bad in another, but it is possible for it not to be very appropriate and the best therein. Because of this, religion invites people to the best spiritual world whose moral code is the highest of all. Religion shows the way to such a world. Every good act can lead to a better deed and this can raise one to other worlds. Reaching higher and transcendent spiritual worlds only happens through change and evolution in this mechanism, and for change to happen, the necessary and sufficient condition is *iman*. Every degree of *iman* that is achieved puts one in a certain respective spiritual world. The actions of a person situated in higher spiritual worlds might seem unexplainable and unjustifiable for those in lower spiritual worlds. Such a construct cannot be explained through words and

discourse; one must enter this existential journey and experience those changes and evolutions for himself, and until then not only will words fall short of getting this experience across, they might even add to the ambiguity. As a matter of fact, sometimes the appearance of an act may be the same in different spiritual worlds, with there being great variance between them on the inside and in essence. It is these resemblances in appearance that opens the windows of different spiritual worlds to each other, allowing them to acknowledge each other to an extent. For example, patience in the face of prohibited desires is applauded in all spiritual worlds as a good act, nonetheless, if this patience originates from modesty and is out of respect for the presence of the Creator, it will be much more applauded than when it is out of fear of retribution in return for committing a sin.

By taking a look at the outcomes we listed, one can get a grasp of some of the differences between the *mu'min* and *kafir*. Dividing people into *mu'mins* and *kafirs* is the most fundamental division acknowledged in religious literatures. *Iman* and *kufr* are two characteristics that really and essentially segregate people from one another and place an existential difference between them. One's senses, feelings, emotions, behavior, and in one word, one's entire existential construct undergo such transformation upon the coming of *iman*; something that cannot be achieved through any other means. Other differences between people are not that important; variety in language, ethnicity, skin color, birthplace, intelligence, talent, gender, etc. bring about no essential or fundamental difference. These things do not come by choice so that one can be proud or upset in having the desirable or undesirable of them respectively.

It is only when one enters the realm of *iman* that he gains the ability to discern and identify true human values. It is within this realm that everyone sees each other as beautiful, helpful, in need of each other, and deserving respect. It is here that people see the one identity they all share, and it is also here that others' pains and joy are one's own pain and joy. It is *iman* that tears apart the made-up veils people have put between each other, and changes the grudges and animosities between them into friendship and love. The solidarity between the *mu'mins* is higher than that of relatives and there is nothing that can bring two people together like this. Indeed, it is *iman* that gathers those dispersed and scattered; no force can eradicate this solidarity and connection. Imam Sadiq (a) has been narrated to have said,

The *mu'min* is the brother of the *mu'min*; they are one body. If pain and hardship befall one of them, the rest of the body feels this pain. Their soul is of one soul, and indeed the soul of the *mu'min* is more attached to the soul of God than the rays of the sun to the sun itself. (Kulayni 1407AH, 2:166)

From what was mentioned, it becomes manifest that when it is said that someone is brave or kind, we are faced with a proposition containing a specific fact about that person. But when we say someone is a *mu'min*, although it is also a single proposition, it gives much information about that person: it means he is truthful, kind, trustworthy, God wary, etc., such that if after this proposition, we continue by saying he is a liar and betrayer, the addressee will sense discrepancy between the two statements (i.e. that he is a *mu'min* and at the same time a liar or betrayer).¹

Now, keeping what was said in mind, how can one explain the essence of *iman* in a way encompassing all of its characteristics and particularities? Here, we are dealing with theories that we have no choice but to assess through the mentioned characteristics. If the lack of each and every one of these characteristics does not refute the theory at hand, it will at the very least expose its deficiency.

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Islamic Manners, Part V: Social Manners¹

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Importance and Manners of Greeting

It is understood from the verses of the Quran² and *hadiths*³ that *salam* is the slogan and the special greeting of Islam. God has enjoined the noble Prophet (s) to observe this favorable custom:

When those who have faith in Our signs come to you,
say, "Peace to you!" (Quran 6:54)

Thus, the Prophet (s) spread this favorable and humanly custom. He was always the first in saying "*salam*" to whomever he met, even the children. He used to say, "There are five things I will continue to do until I pass away in order that they become conventions among my *ummah* after me; one of them is greeting children". (Majlisi 1403AH, 73:10)

¹ This is the translation of the fifth part of the first chapter and the beginning of the second chapter of *Adab-e Islami: Darsnāme-ye Akhlaq Baraye Tullab-e Payeh-e Avval*.

² See for instance Quran 15:52; 24:69.

³ See for instance Majlisi (Bihar al-Anwar 1403AH, 73:12).

Muslims should adhere to this Islamic custom, and when they see their brothers in faith, they should greet one another with *salam*, and thus strengthen their social relations; the Prophet (s) has said, “When you meet each other, say *salam*” (Majlisi 1403AH, 73:4-5).

The Arabic word *tabyyat* (greeting) is derived from *hayat* (life), and it is in fact a kind of prayer for prolongation of the other person’s life. Apparently the convention among Arabs was to say, “*hayyaka Allah*” (May Allah keep you alive) to show respect to and greet one another when they met. The word *tabyyat*, in fact, means saying the sentence *hayyaka Allah*. However, its meaning was extended later to any expression of greeting. It has even been used to refer to any *action* that is done for showing respect in greetings. In Islamic manners and culture, when people meet one another, *tabyyat* mostly refers to saying *salam*.

The Importance of SALAM

Offering *salam* has been counted as a sign of modesty in Islamic culture. The person who offers *salam* sees himself equal with other people. He does not create an untrue self-image in his mind, and does not see himself above others. He can easily relate to people and get close to them. Therefore, he does not become ensnared by vanity and pride. Imam Sadiq (a) says, “Greeting whomever you meet is part of modesty”. (Majlisi 1403AH, 73:3)

Saying *Salam* establishes a spirit of fellowship in the Islamic community. Hence, the biggest reward is for one who says *salam* first. Imam Ali (a) says, “There are seventy rewards for saying *salam*; sixty nine is the share of the one who initiates it, and one belongs to the one who returns it”. (Majlisi 1403AH, 73:11) Therefore, the person who says *salam* first is closer to God’s mercy and receives more attention from Him. The holy Prophet (s) says, “Indeed among the causes of forgiveness are offering *salam* and speaking nicely” (Majlisi 1403AH,

73:11) and “Indeed the closest of people to God and His Prophet is the one who says *salam* first”. (Majlisi 1403AH, 73:12)

Based on Islamic teachings, when Muslims see their brothers in faith, they have to say *salam* to them before saying other things. Accordingly, whoever starts talking before saying *salam*, does not deserve answering. The Prophet (s) says, “If someone starts talking before saying *salam*, do not answer him”. (Majlisi 1403AH, 73:3)

Saying *salam* is the least expression of respect and affection of a Muslim to other people. It is a very simple thing to do. Now, if one is so inconsiderate of his brothers in faith that he does not even say *salam* to them, could his behavior be called anything but stinginess? The Prophet (s) says, “Indeed the stingiest of people is the one who is stingy in [saying] *salam*” (Majlisi 1403AH, 73:4).

Manners of Saying SALAM

Saying *salam*, like any other Islamic custom, has manners that make it more fruitful. Some of these manners are as follows:

a) Who should say *salam* first?

The Prophet (s) said, “A younger person should say *salam* to an elder person, an individual should say *salam* when he meets two people, a small group of people should say *salam* to a larger group, a rider should say *salam* to a walking person, a passer-by should say *salam* to a standing person, and a person who is standing should say *salam* to a seated person.”

b) Spreading *salam*:

Since *salam* is one of the Islamic customs, and Muslims are known by it, spreading *salam* gains special importance. The Prophet (s) said, “Should I inform you of the best behavior of people of this world and the Hereafter?” The people said, “Yes, O Messenger of God.” Then the

Prophet (s) said, “Spreading *salam* in the world”. (Majlisi 1403AH, 73:12)

c) Proper response

When someone says *salam* to us, we are enjoined to give a deserving response. The holy Quran says,

When you are greeted with a salute, greet with a better one than it, or return it. (Quran 4:86)

d) Equal offering of *salam*

A Muslim should not say *salam* to the rich differently than he says *salam* to the poor. Imam Rida (a) says, “Whoever meets a poor Muslim and says *salam* to him in a different way than he says *salam* to the rich, he will meet Allah on the day of judgment while He is angry with him”. (Majlisi 1403AH, 69:38)

e) Avoiding the extremes

Another point in regard to giving *salam* is moderation. Sometimes a greeting is too much respectful, beyond what the person deserves it such that it sounds more like flattering. On the other extreme, sometimes a person who deserves great respect because of his high spirituality is not greeted in a proper manner. Both of these are improper. Everyone should be greeted according to their spiritual position, and going to extremes in giving *salam* should be avoided. Imam Ali (a) said, “Do not become hypocritical in greeting brothers in faith, and do not deprive them from what they deserve”. (Ibn Abi al-Hadid 1983, 20:315)

f) Forbidden situations for giving *salam*:

In Islamic culture, offering *salam* to some people is *makruh* (discouraged):

1. People who do not deserve the *salam* of their brothers and sisters in faith due to their evil action, such as alcoholics, gamblers, those who take interest (*riba*), and those who commit evil openly. (Majlisi 1403AH, 73:9)

2. Greeting and saying *salam* to these people might be considered as a kind of approval of their evil actions. Hence, every Muslim should avoid giving *salam* to these people and should treat them with a gloomy face and an unkind look in order to obstruct corruption and sin, and this is the least one can do in relation to offenders. The exception is if greeting and offering *salam* to such people is effective in guiding them and one's intention is to bid them to good and forbid them from evil through it.

3. Sometimes, giving *salam* to certain people might cause evil or have unfavorable effects on one's spirituality. Such as greeting the opposite gender, especially for the youth.

4. Giving *salam* when it is difficult for the other person to respond is discouraged. Such as giving *salam* to someone who is performing prayer. This is because returning *salam* is obligatory and this would disturb or distract the person who is performing prayer. This also applies to other situations, like when someone is brushing his teeth, or when he is in the bathroom, or any other situation in which returning *salam* is difficult.

g) Returning *Salam*

One of the social etiquettes in Islam is returning *salam*, which, from one aspect, is even more important than *salam* itself. The Holy Quran says,

When you are greeted with a salute, greet with a better one than it, or return it; indeed God takes account of all things. (Quran 4:86)

Thus, offering *salam* is recommended, but returning it is obligatory. Moreover, the returned greeting should be better and more complete. For instance, if someone says, “*salamun alaykum*”, we should say in return, “*salamun alaykum wa rahmatullah*”; if the first person says, “*salamun alaykum wa rahmatullah*,” our reply should be “*salamun alaykum wa rahmatullah wa barakatuh*.”

Manners of Social Relations

In dealing with people, nothing is more beautiful and attractive than politeness. It should be practiced in order that healthy and respectful relations are established between people. Below, we will mention some of the important manners in social relations.

a) *Salam* and handshaking

The Prophet (s) said, “When you meet each other, say *salam* and shake hands; when you leave each other, depart with asking [God] for forgiveness”. (Kulayni 1407AH, 2:181)

b) Being friendly

Imam Ali (a) said, “When you meet your brothers in faith ... display a friendly mien to them”. (‘Amili 1988, 12:225)

It is mentioned in the biography of the Prophet (s) that he “was always friendly, good tempered, and easy going”. (Majlisi 1403AH, 16:152)

c) Speaking kindly

One of the manners of treating people is talking thoughtfully and nicely to them. The holy Quran says,

Speak kindly to people. (Quran 2:83)

d) Having a neat appearance

It is necessary that one visits his brothers in faith with suitable clothes, a neat appearance, and a pleasant smell.

- e) Adherence to manners of associating with people
- f) Humbleness and affection
- g) Avoiding inappropriate actions
- h) Paying attention to other people's words

Imam Ali (a) said “[the Prophet (s)] never interrupted anyone's speech unless his words passed the legitimate extent, then he would stop his words either by getting up and leaving the session or prohibiting him [from going on].”

- i) Having tolerance with brothers in faith:

One of the most important manners of dealing with people is being tolerant with them. The Prophet (s) said, “Tolerance with people is half of *iman* (faith)” .(Kulayni 1407AH, 2:117)

Manners of Speaking

A person's character is revealed by his words. Therefore, great people are never willing to taint their mouths with inappropriate words, even in the worst situations.

When speaking, one should try to use polite words and also a polite way of expressing himself. Additionally, gestures, facial expressions, and the tone and quality of voice should accordingly be polite. Some of the manners of speaking are as follows:

- a) Being concise

One's talk should be short, to the point, and free of redundancies, so that it does not cause dislike in the listener. Imam Ali (a) says, “Fortunate is the one who is generous in handing out the extra of his belongings, and is stingy in saying extra words”. (Majlisi 1403AH, 68:283)

b) Speaking at the right time and the right place

It is said that it takes two years for a child to learn to talk, but that it takes thirty years for him to learn where and when to talk.

c) Not raising one's voice

Luqman (a) said to his son,

...and lower your voice. Indeed the ungainliest of voices is the donkey's voice. (Quran 31:19)

d) Speaking kindly

The Quran says:

Speak kindly to people. (Quran 2:83)

And

Tell My servants to speak in a manner which is the best. (Quran 17:53)

Imam Ali (a) has said, "Habituate your tongue to speak softly and to offer *salam*, and thus the number of those who love you will increase and the number of your despisers will decrease." Also, he has said, "Habituate your tongue to speaking pleasantly, and you will stay safe from reproach". (Khansari 1987, 4:329)

Imam Hasan Askari (a) said, "Speak kindly to people, both to believers and to opposers. As for believers, one should treat them with a happy face; as for opposers, one should speak to them with toleration to attract them. If he was disappointed from attracting them, he will at least keep away their evil from him and his believing brothers" . (Majlisi 1403AH, 68:309)

e) Being mindful of the listener

When one is talking, he should be mindful of the listener, because the listener might not be in the mood for listening to his words.

f) Speaking nicely

When God sent the Prophet Abraham (a) and his brother to the Pharaoh of their time, He said:

Speak to him in a soft manner (Quran 20:44)

g) Observing modesty in conversations with the opposite gender.

h) Being thoughtful in speech.

Imam Ali (a) said, “The tongue of a wise person is behind his mind, and the mind of a fool is behind his tongue” (Nahj al-balagha, Wisdom 40). *A wise person first thinks and then speaks, whereas a fool first speaks and then thinks.*

According to a well-known story, Harun al-Rashid, the fifth Abbasid caliph, dreamt that all of his teeth had fallen out. Someone interpreted his dream to mean that all the relatives of the caliph would die before him. Harun became irritated and ordered his death. He summoned another dream interpreter, who said in his interpretation the life of the Caliph would be longer than all of his relatives. Harun became very happy and gave him a robe.

It is obvious that both interpretations had the same meaning, but Harun became so angry with how the first interpretation was expressed that he ordered the death of the interpreter, and he became so happy with how the second one was put that he rewarded the interpreter. Manfaluti, the famous Egyptian writer, narrates that

Abu ‘Uyaynah became blind. He would regularly call upon the judge Ahmad b. Abi Dawud. This continued for years. He (Abu ‘Uyaynah) said that in all these years, when he wanted to get out of Ahmad’s house, Ahmad told his slave, “O slave, be at the service of Abu

‘Uyaynah and go out with him.’ And in all this time he never, even once, said anything such as “O slave, hold his hand.” Since a sentence like “hold his hand” implied the miserableness of blindness and therefore he refrained from saying it.

i) Speaking usefully

Imam Ali (a) said, “The best talk is what benefits.” (Majlisi 1403AH, 1:219)

j) Omitting one’s redundant phrases through practice

k) Not interrupting other people’s speech

l) In some situations, talking is *makruh* (discouraged): In *tashyi’* (the Islamic burial ritual), before someone who has been struck by misery, in graveyards, before a patient, or in a gathering for knowledge.

Manners of Listening

Speaking and listening are two fundamental means of communication and among the greatest gifts of God to people. Hence, for having healthy and useful relations, we need to keep in mind the correct way of using both our tongues and ears.

Imam Ali (a) said, “Habituate your ears to listening well” (Khansari 1987, 4:329) and “When you are in the presence of a scholar, be more eager to listen than to talk, and learn to listen well just as you learn to speak well, and do not interrupt anyone's speech”. (Tabarsi 1965, 134)

The way one uses his listening ability to listen well and attentively has great impact on his social relations. Ignoring someone who is speaking is a sign of rudeness. On the contrary, paying attention to and

expressing interest in what the speaker says indicates politeness, social discipline, and mindfulness.

The Prophet (s) used to listen to people, even to those who had sickness in their hearts and had wicked intentions. He would listen so attentively that they said, “He is an ear” to describe him as a credulous, naive, and superficial person. The Quran reports the story:

Among them are those who torment the Prophet, and say, “He is an ear.” Say, “An ear that is good for you. He has faith in Allah and trusts the faithful, and is a mercy for those of you who have faith.” (Quran 9:61)

While the above-mentioned verse of the Quran praises this great manner of the Prophet (s), it indicates that the Prophet (s) trusted only the words of the believers.

High morals require that one show an attentive mood to the speaker. If a person is talking about a subject, or narrating a story or an incident, one should listen enthusiastically; even if he knows about the subject, he should not indicate that he has heard it before. Accordingly, when a teacher is explaining a subject or answering a question, the student should show interest in listening, so that the teacher answers the question whole-heartedly. As the Persian proverb says, “The audience makes the speaker enthusiastic.”

Now, we will mention some of the manners of listening, which have been mentioned in *hadiths* with the title, *husn al-istima'* (listening well).

- a) One should listen to other people’s sayings carefully until they finish speaking. Interrupting others is an unfavorable behavior and an indication of rudeness. It is mentioned in the biography of the Prophet (s) that when someone spoke, the Prophet (s) would listen to him until the person finished speaking (H. a. Tabarsi 1416AH, 45). There is a similar narration about Imam Rida (a) that

Ibrahim b. Abbas said, "I never saw him [i.e. the Imam] interrupting another person's speech; [he would wait] until the other person stopped speaking". (Majlisi 1403AH, 49:90)

- b) The listener should not think himself to be wiser than the speaker. He should not ignore the other person thinking that he knows more and does not need to listen.
- c) Everyone who tries to give advice to another person would like to see him pay attention and listen well. He likes to see the signs of effectiveness of his words and signs of acceptance in the other person. This leads the society towards benefiting from healthy criticism and revives the practice of "enjoining the good and forbidding the evil."
- d) Many people suffer from sadness and depression and are under great mental pressure. They need someone to talk to, so that they become relieved by talking about their problems. Showing compassion and interest in listening to the complaints and griefs of a distressed person is an admirable deed. Imam Ali (a) has said, "Patience in listening to complaints of a distressed person is [a component] of nobility". (Khansari 1987, 6:46) Loving people and having a friendly character makes the life warmer, and relieves the sorrows of distressed people.

To complete this topic, we should note that one of the social etiquettes of listening is "having the permission to listen". If some people are having a private conversation, one should not try to listen and find out what they are saying. Imam Sadiq (a) said, "One who listens to a group of people while they do not like him to do so, hot lead will be poured in his ears". (Majlisi 1403AH, 58:183) Therefore, eavesdropping is an unfavorable behavior has bitter consequences.

1) Manners of criticizing

Prosperity in individual life and in society depends on healthy and constructive criticism. Constructive criticism has the following manners and conditions:

- a) Criticism should be done kindly with the purpose of giving guidance and advice; it should not be done out of envy or ill feelings.
- b) The tone of the critic should be kind.
- c) Criticism should be done in private without embarrassing the person who receives it. Imam Ali (a) said, “Your criticizing [someone] in the presence of other people is humiliating [him]” (Khansari, Sharh Ghurar al-Hikam wa Durar al-Kalim 1366 Sh, 6:172). Imam Hasan Askari (a) also said, “One who advises his brother in private adorns him, but one who advises him in public disgraces him” (Harrani 1983, 489).
- d) Only wrong action and behavior should be criticized.
- e) Criticism should be done without insulting or hurting the person who receives it.
- f) The critic should give the receiver a chance for compensating his mistake.
- g) The positive behaviors and characteristics of the targeted person should also be mentioned when criticizing him.
- h) The critic should control his feelings when criticizing.
- i) The critic’s approach should be based on protecting people’s reputation as much as possible.

2) Manners of Enjoining the Good and Forbidding the Evil

Among all the Islamic obligations, the only one that is binding based on its probability of being effective, is enjoining the good and forbidding the evil. That is, it will not become obligatory when there is no possibility of it being effective.

All the conditions and manners related to this obligation are to make it more effective. The person who enjoins the good and forbids the evil should know, like a doctor, the problem of the targeted person, and then use the appropriate treatment. He should use manners that bring him closer to success. Some of these manners are the following:

- a) Avoiding investigation in other people's private life.
- b) Politeness in behavior and use of speech which is attractive:

One's behavior and speech should captivate the other person's heart. This is when commanding and prohibiting will have their effects. It is narrated that once the great scholar Ayatollah Shaykh Muhammad Bafqi (d. 1945) was in a public bath when he saw someone shaving his beard. He said to the man, "Why do you shave your beard?" The man, who happened to be a military officer, angrily slapped the Shaykh's face. The Shaykh quickly turned his other cheek to him and said, "Slap me on this cheek too, but do not shave your beard." The officer was surprised by the Shaykh's reaction and asked the *dallak* (the person who helped people in cleaning themselves) about who the Shaykh was. When the *dallak* told him that the Shaykh was Ayatollah Bafqi, the officer became very embarrassed; he apologized to the Shaykh, repented, and became a sincere companion of the Shaykh.

- c) One can never call someone to goodness or stop him from doing evil by insulting or humiliating him. Such behaviors sometimes cause stubbornness and have the opposite effect. One should attract the other person by respecting him. The jurists have said that one is not allowed to insult someone with the purpose of prohibiting him from committing sins.
- d) One should treat the offenders in a manner that they find trust in him. He should be like a mirror which shows their imperfections honestly and without any evil intentions.
- e) In bidding and forbidding, actions must be criticized, not people; so, care must be taken that the dignity and reputation of the targeted people be preserved.

f) In order that the offenders do not become insolent, when we know that they will not listen to our bidding or forbidding, we need to pretend not to know about their wrongdoings, so that the wickedness of wrong actions is not decreased in the minds of people.

Inviting people to good is most effective when done by example. If one does not practice what he says, he cannot influence others. Imam Ali (a) says, “God cursed those who enjoin the good but do not do it and those who forbid the evil but they commit it” (Nahj al-Balagha, Sermon 129). In another *hadith*, Imam Ali (a) said, “O people! By God, I do not urge you to any good deed unless I already do it myself, and I do not forbid you from any evil action unless I already forsake it myself” (Nahj al-Balagha, Sermon 175).

And Imam Sadiq (a) says, “Invite people [to good] by means other than your tongues” (‘Amili 1988, 15:246).

3) Manners of *TABLIGH*

There are many manners with regard to *tabligh*, and a lot of useful books have been published on the subject. Here we just mention a *hadith* from the noble Prophet (s), addressed to Mu‘adh ibn Jabal when he was sent by the Prophet (s) to Yemen for *tabligh*:

O Ma‘adh! Teach them the Quran, and train them to have good manners. Carry out the command of God about them, and do not fear anyone when it comes to God’s commandments and His property, since they are not [related to] your authority or your property. Return to them their deposits, whether significant or insignificant. Be kind and merciful in everything other than what forsakes the truth. Destroy what pertains to the Era of Ignorance, except what is established by Islam.

Let all the teachings of Islam prevail, all minor and major teachings. Strive most for the prayer (salat), for,

after confessing the faith, it is the core of Islam. Remind people of God]and the Day of Judgment, and follow [it by] preaching, for it strengthens them in doing the actions that God likes. Then, send them the teachers. And worship God, to whom you will return, and do not fear the blame of any blamer in His path.

I enjoin on you piety, honesty in speech, fulfilling your promises, delivering back the deposits, forsaking betrayal, speaking kindly, offering salam, respecting your neighbors, being kind to orphans, doing good deeds, swallowing your anger, and being modest. (Harrani 1983, 25-6)

4) Manners of Writing Letters

a) It is recommended that the letter be started in the name of God. Imam Sadiq (a) said, “Do not take away ‘*bi-ism Allah*,’ even if a poem comes after it” (Kulayni 1407AH, 2:672).

b) It is narrated from Imam Sadiq (a) that one should not write the addressee’s name following the name of God, but writing it on the back of the letter (or, on the envelope instead as we do it today) is fine: “Do not write ‘*bi-ism Allah al-rahman al-rahim*, to so-and-so,’ but it is ok to write ‘to so-and-so’ on the back of the letter” (Kulayni 1407AH, 2:672). Following this instruction, our noble scholars, such as Ayatollah Burujirdi, would never write the name of the receiver after “*bi-ism Allah*” but would write it on the back of the envelope.

c) One should write the letter with good handwriting so that the receiver is able to read it correctly.

d) It is necessary that the writer of the letter be careful in his writing and review it at least once after it is finished. Imam Ali (a)

said, “The wisdom of the wise is revealed through their pens” (Khansari, Sharh Ghurar al-Hikam wa Durar al-Kalim 1366 Sh, 4:365).

e) Imam Sadiq (a) said, “Answering a letter is obligatory like the obligation to return *salam*” (Kulayni 1407AH, 2:670).

f) Murazim ibn Hakim says,

Imam Sadiq (a) ordered me to write a letter for a matter. The letter was written, and it was delivered to the Imam (a) but there was no “*insha’Allah*” in it. The Imam (a) took a look at the letter and said, “How do you hope that this would succeed while there is no *insha’Allah* in it? Look everywhere that there is no *insha’Allah*, and put *insha’Allah* in it” (Kulayni 1407AH, 2:673).

g) The letter should be short, clear, and to the point.

h) The letter should be dated. In a letter sent from the holy city of Najaf to his son, Ayatollah Khomeini writes,

I received your undated writing. I don’t know why you have become an untidy sheikh so soon! From now on, first, put the date on the top of the letter and then start writing it. (Khomeini 1378 Sh, 2:378)

i) The letter should be put in an envelope. In another letter to his son, Ayatollah Khomeini said, “Give the enclosed letter to so-and-so after putting it in an envelope!” (Khomeini 1378 Sh, 2:388).

5) Manners of Friendship

Friendship is an answer to a natural need in human beings, saving them from loneliness and helplessness. Therefore, it has a special position in Islam. Below are some of the manners related to friendship:

a) Purifying one's intention:

One who wants to befriend other people should purify his intention from temporal and worldly motivations. Because if the intention for friendship is vain and limited, after that intention is fulfilled and gone, the incentive for friendship will be gone, too, and that leads to a split. The Prophet (s) has said that “there are seven groups that will be covered under the shadow of Allah on the Day of Judgment ... [Among them are] two people who have made friends with each other for the sake of Allah, lived with that friendship, and died while still friends for the sake of Allah” (Payanda 2003, 521).

b) Choosing righteous friends:

One should not befriend people other than those who seek the truth and are concerned about the Hereafter, so that they can be his helpers in the path of God and the true benefits of friendship can be achieved.

One should avoid socializing with people who strive only for worldly gains and have turned away from God:

So avoid those who turn away from Our remembrance
and desire nothing but the life of the world. (Quran
53:29)

c) Sincerity in expressing friendliness:

One should be sincere in expressing affection to his friend; his outward friendliness should be rooted in his heart.

d) Avoiding constraint (*takalluf*):

It is mentioned in a *hadith* that the Prophet (s) said, “The pious in my community (*ummah*) and I are free of constraint (*takalluf*)” (Fayd Kashani 1406AH, 4:158). Imam Ali (a) said, “The worst friend is one who makes you tolerate him, and makes you apologize to him, or puts constraint (*takalluf*) on you” (Tamimi Amadi 1366 Sh, 418). Also, Imam Sadiq (a) said, “Among my brothers, the most bothersome to

me is the one who, when accompanying me, puts constraint [on himself] for me and I have to restrain myself for him, and the most congenial to me is the one in whose company I am as I am with myself” (Muhaddith Nuri 1408AH, 9:155).

e) Forgetting friends’ mistakes:

If one’s friend makes a mistake, one should ignore it. One should know that mistakes are a part of human life and cannot be totally avoided.

f) Revealing the good qualities of a friend and covering his imperfections.

g) Having tolerance with friends:

One should tolerate his friend; if the friend does something wrong, one should control himself and try to correct his friend. Imam Ali (a) said, “One who does not tolerate the mistakes of a friend will die alone” (Tamimi Amadi 1366 Sh, 420).

h) Informing friends about their vices:

One of the signs of affection is that we see the vices of our friends as unfavorable as ours and do not ignore them. It goes without saying that informing a friend about his vices should be done in private; otherwise, it would be disgracing him, not guiding him.

i) Listening to the advice of friends:

Refusing to listen to the advice of one’s friend is a sign that one does not have honesty in his friendship.

j) Having *ithar* (altruism) with friends.

k) Having justice with friends.

l) Keeping one’s promises:

It is narrated that the Prophet (s) said, “Do not quarrel with your brother, do not joke with him, and do not promise him then fail him” (Majlisi 1403AH, 74:152).

m) Fulfilling the rights of friends:

One of the subtle points in friendship is that having close relationship with a friend should not lead to neglecting his rights. One must be respectful of his friends, especially in the presence of others and try his best to provide for the needs of his friends. However, sometimes intimacy reaches a level in which one forgets the rights of his friends and respects them even less. One should remember that this negligence will, little by little, weaken the friendship. Imam Ali (a) said, “Do not violate the rights of your brother relying on the relationship between you and him, for indeed the one whose rights you violate is not your brother” (Harrani 1983, 82).

n) Being moderate in speaking with friends:

One should always avoid excess in being humorous or serious. That is, one should not joke so much as to become a target of abuse for unrighteous people, neither should one be so solemn to bore his friends and drive them away from him.

o) Ending the friendship with a person who has gone astray and there is no hope in his return.

p) Remembering a friend who has ended his friendship with us with good memories

q) Maintaining one’s friendship:

The noble Prophet (s) says, “Indeed God likes continuing an old friendship, so continue it” (Payanda 2003, 306). Imam Ali (a) also says, “The most incapable among people is one who is incapable of finding brothers (friends), and even more incapable than him is one who loses those he has found” (‘Amili 1988, 12:18).

r) Helping one’s friends in times of their helplessness:

The Prophet (s) says, “One who is after the need of his brother, God is after his need” (Muhaddith Nuri 1408AH, 12:415). And Imam Sadiq (a) says, “When you realize he [i.e. your friend] has a need, try to solve it, and do not wait for him to ask you for it, but rush to solve it” (Kulayni 1407AH, 2:169).

s) Observing religious rulings in friendship:

It is narrated that Ayatollah Husayn Qummi, in addition to his high level of knowledge and piety, was especially observant of religious rulings when associating with people; He would never neglect religious rulings for the sake of his friends and used to say, “I stand by a friend up to the door of Hell, but I will not enter it for his sake.”

t) Being moderate in affection and trust:

Imam Ali (a) has said, “Offer your friend your all your affection, but do offer him all your trust; share with him what you have, but do not tell him all your secrets. In this way you have observed requirement of wisdom and at the same time you have fulfilled rights of your friend.” (Majlisi 1403AH, 71:165). If a friend wants to end the friendship by inappropriate behaviors, one should try to stop him and save their friendship. Imam Ali (a) said, “Do not let them [i.e. your friends] be stronger in doing evil to you than you are in doing good to them” (Harrani 1983, 82).

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Parables and Sayings of Jesus (a)¹

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This article contains a number of parables which enlighten us about topics such as wisdom, this world, and preparing for the Hereafter.

The Parable of Scholars Who Do not Act According to Their Knowledge

355. Do not be like a sieve that lets out the soft and good flour and keeps the trash. Similar to that, you let wisdom out of your mouth, and let impurities remain in your chest (Harrani 1983, 393, 510; Ibn 'Asakir 1415AH, 47:460).

356. How long should water flow over the mountain without the mountain being softened by it? And how long do you study wisdom without your heart being softened by it? (Mufid 1404AH, 209; Ibn 'Asakir 1415AH, 47:462)

357. How many a fruit trees have, that are not edible or useful! How many a scholar that do not benefit from their knowledge! How vast the earth is and not all of it is habitable! And how many a speaker whose words are not entirely true! (Harrani 1983, 503; Ibn 'Asakir 1415AH, 47:461)

Therefore, keep yourself away from the evil of lying scholars who wear woolen clothes and look down while walking² to make their mistakes and faults look good. Like foxes they look from under their eyebrows, but their speech does not match their deeds. Is it possible to pick the grape from the

¹ This is a translation of the pages 228-251 of Muhammadi Rayshahri, Muhammad. 1391 Sh. *Hikmat Nama-i 'Isa ibn Maryam (s)*, 1391 Sh. 1st. Qom: Dar al-Hadith

² To look down and lowering the gaze normally signifies modesty.

thorn bush or the fig from the colocynth plant? In the same way, words of a lying scholar have no effect expect false-hood. Not everyone who speaks is telling the truth (Harrani 1983, 503).

358. What is the benefit of igniting light on the roof of a dark house while it is empty and dark inside? Likewise, what is the point of having the light of knowledge in your mouth while you have not benefited from and are empty of it inside? (Harrani 1983, 506)

The Parable of Evil Scholars

359. The parable of bad scholars is that of a rock in a stream which prevents water from flowing; it neither drinks the water nor lets it reach the grain field (Warram n.d., 1:84; Zamakhshari 1410AH, 1:274).

The Parable of the Heart of a Wise person

360. Honey will not always remain safe in a *ziqaq*.¹ Likewise, wisdom will not be always preserved in the hearts. A *ziqaq* can contain honey as long as it is not torn, dried, or rotted. In the same way, hearts can contain wisdom as long as desires have not torn them, greed has not made them impure, and pleasures have not hardened them (Harrani 1983, 504).

The Parable of Wisdom in Man's Heart

361. Truthfully I say to you, polishing sharpens a sword and makes it shiny; in the same manner, wisdom polishes the heart and purifies it. Wisdom in the heart of a wise person is like water in a dead field. It revives his heart as water revives the dead field. Wisdom in the heart of a wise person acts like light in darkness, and he walks among people with it (Harrani 1983, 512).

362. Indeed God revives the dead hearts by the light of wisdom, as He revives the dead fields by means of heavy rain (Harrani 1983, 393).

The Parable of Teaching Wisdom to an Unqualified Person

¹ Ziqaq in Arabic means a goatskin liquid container.

363. Jesus (a) would constantly say that “Indeed, he who leaves treating the wound of an injured person, without a doubt, is a partner to the one who has caused the injury. For the one who injured him was after his destruction, and the one who left his treatment did not want to cure him. And since he did not want his healing, therefore, he is after his destruction.

In the same way, do not teach wisdom to the one who is not worthy of it, since it is an act of ignorance. And do not withhold wisdom from the one who deserves it, since it would be a sin; rather, every one of you should be like a treating physician who cures when it is needed and, otherwise, refrains treatment (Kulayni 1407AH, 8:345).

364. There are people who deserve wisdom. If you teach it to the people who are not worthy of it, you have corrupted it, and if you withhold it from the people who are worthy of it, you have corrupted it. Be like a doctor who uses the medicine in its proper place (Abu Nu‘aym 1387 AH, 7:273).

365. O apostles! Do not give a pearl to a pig, for a pig does not do anything with it. Do not give wisdom to the one who does not want it. Wisdom is better than a pearl, and the one who does not want it is worse than a pig (Ibn Hanbal n.d., 118).

366. Do not hang jewelry to the necks of pigs (Ghazzali 1412AH, 1:85).

367. Do not throw gems under the feet of pigs (Zamakhshari 1410AH, 3:219).

368. Verily, all the people see the stars, but none will be guided by them except those who know their routes and stations. In the same way, you all study wisdom but none of you will be guided by it except those who act according to it (Harrani 1983, 507).

369. Truthfully I say to you, moving stones from the top of a mountain is better than talking to someone who does not grasp what you say. [This is] like the act of the one who puts a stone in the water so that it be softened or like the act of the one who cooks food for the people of the graves.

Happy is he who restrains the excess of his speech, which, he is worried, may bring about God’s wrath; he who does not talk unless he understands [what

he says] and does not envy anyone's speech unless his deeds become clear to him (Harrani 1983, 512).

The Parable of a Heart That is Not Softened by Remembrance of Death

370. Surely, when an animal is not ridden, used for carrying goods, or used [in any other way], it becomes disobedient. And so are hearts, when they are not softened by the remembrance of death and do not bear the pain of constant worship, they become hard and dark (Harrani 1983, 506).

The Parable of the Heart's Need for Purity

371. Truthfully I say to you, there is no rainfall without clouds; in the same way, there would be no deed done for the sake of God's pleasure, except by a purified heart (Harrani 1983, 512).

The Parable of a Self-Admiring Worshiper

372. O apostles! How many a light put out by the wind, and how many a worshiper self-admiration has corrupted (Hilli n.d., 223).

The Parable of Learning Wisdom from the One Who Does Not Benefit from it Himself

373. Truthfully I say to you, if you found a light that consumed tar oil in a dark night, you would seek its light despite its bad fragrance ; similar to that, it behooves you to take wisdom from whomever you find it with, and his evil interest in wisdom should not prevent you from taking it (Harrani 1983, 392).

The Parable of This World

374. Imam Sadiq (a): "This world was embodied before Jesus in the form of a blue eyed-woman. Then Jesus said to her, "How many times have you got married?" She said, "Many times." Jesus said, "So did all [your husbands] divorce you?" The woman said, "No, rather, I killed them." Jesus said, "So, woe to your remaining spouses! How come they do not take lesson from the ones who have passed!" (Harrani 1983, 396).

375: It has been quoted that the reality of this world became manifest to Jesus who saw it in the form of a white-haired old woman wearing all kinds of adornment. Then he told her, "How many times have you got married?" She said, "I do not have their number." He said, "Have they all died or did they divorce you?" She said, No, rather I killed them." Jesus said, "Woe to your remaining spouses! How come they do not take lesson from the ones who have passed! How come you are killing them one by one and they are not keeping away from you!" (Ibn Tawus 1413AH, 28)

376. The apostle of God: "This world was embodied before my brother Jesus in the form of a woman. Then Jesus told her, "Do you have a spouse?" She said, "Yes, many spouses." Jesus said, "Are the alive?" She said, "No, but I killed them." At that moment Jesus realized that indeed, that was this world embodied for him (Muttaqi Hindi 1397AH, 3:236).

The Parable of Servants of This World

377. Woe to you, O servants of this world! You carry a lamp in the light of the sun, while the light of the sun is sufficient for you. You do not ignite a light in darkness while it was disposed for you because of that. Similar to that, you use the light of knowledge for your worldly affairs while this world has been guaranteed for you, but you do not use the light of knowledge for the affairs of the hereafter though this is why it has been given to you.

You say that the hereafter is true, but you prepare for this world. You say that death is true, but you try to escape from it. And you say that God sees and hears, but you are not afraid that He counts your deeds. How can anyone who hears you believe you? For the one who lies without knowledge is more justified than the one who lies with knowledge, although there is no justification for any kind of lie (Harrani 1983, 506).

The Parable of Hypocrites

378. O bad servants! You are neither God-wary servants nor free honorable people. Verily, your parable is that of an oleander that impresses whoever sees it but kills whoever eats it (Mufid 1404AH, 209).

379. O servants of this world! The parable of yours is that of lofty graves whose exteriors impress the viewer, but inside them are the bones of dead people, filled with wrongdoings (Harrani 1983, 501).

The Parable of Companions of This World

380. In the same way that a person who enters water becomes wet inevitably, the companion of this world also finds rust and hardness in his heart inevitably (Hilli n.d., 104).

381. Truthfully I say to you, in the same way that a patient looks at a delicious food but does not enjoy it because of intensive pain, the owner of this world also does not enjoy worship and does not find its sweetness because of his affection for his wealth (Harrani 1983, 507).

382. Truthfully I say to you, whoever does not take out the weeds of his grain field, they will increase to the extent that they will take over his whole field and corrupt it. In the same way, whoever does not remove the love for this world from his heart, it will take over his heart to the extent that he will not feel the taste of love for the hereafter (Harrani 1983, 506).

383. The seeker of this world is like the one who drinks water from a sea; the more he drinks the thirstier he becomes till it kills him (Ghazzali 1412AH, 3:318).

384. Imam Sajjad (a) said to his companions, "Have you not received what Jesus said to the apostles? He said to them, 'Who among you would build a house on the waves of the sea? This is the story of the house of this world. Therefore, you should not consider it as a place of residence'" (Mufid 1404AH, 43).

385. Imam Sajjad (a) said to his companions, "Have not you received what Jesus said to the apostles? He said to them, 'This world is a bridge; thus, cross over it, and do not construct on it'" (Mufid 1404AH, 43).

386. Jesus (a) was asked, "O spirit of God! Shall we not build you a house?" He said, "Yes, but build it beside a sea." They said, "But water would destroy

it!” He said, “Where are you going to build it for me, on a bridge?” (Ibn ‘Asakir 1415AH, 47:419).

The Parable of This World and the Hereafter

387. The parable of this world is that of a man who has two wives; if he pleases one, the other becomes displeased (I. A. Warram n.d., 1:138).

388. No slave can have two masters; if he pleases one, he displeases the other. Similar to that, a servant cannot be the servant of this world and, at the same time, work for the hereafter (Ibn ‘Asakir 1415AH, 47:445).

The Parable of the One Who Disobeys God

389. Truthfully I say to you, if a sheep is drowned in a sea, the sea will not be abated or harmed in any way. Similar to that, you cannot abate God or harm Him in any way; rather, you harm and abate yourselves (Harrani 1983, 507).

The Parable of the One Who Does Not Forbid What Is Wrong

390. Truthfully I say to you, whoever sees a snake going towards his brother to sting him and does not warn his brother until the snake kills him, he should not consider himself blameless of his [brother’s] murder. In the same way, whoever sees his brother committing misdeeds and does not warn him of the consequences till he is besieged by his misdeeds, he is not blameless of being a partner in his sin.

And whoever is able to prevent an oppressor from doing injustice, yet does not stop him, is like the committer of the injustice. How is an oppressor supposed to fear when he is safe among you and is not forbidden or stopped? How are the oppressors supposed to stop and not become arrogant?

Is it enough that one of you says, “I will not oppress, but whoever wants to oppress, let them do so,” and he sees oppression but does not stop it? If it were as you say, you would not have been punished along with the oppressors with whom you did not cooperate when the punishment comes upon them in this world (Harrani 1983, 504).

The Parable of the One Who Looks For Others' Mistakes

391. Jesus (a) said to his companions, "When one encounters his brother and sees that his clothes are revealing his private parts, will he reveal it further or cover it?" They replied, "He will cover it." Jesus said, "No, but he will reveal it." They realized that he was telling them a parable, so they said, "O spirit of God! How is that?" Jesus said, "That is when one of you becomes aware of the misdeed of his brother but does not cover it" (Harrani 1983, 305)

The Parable of the One Who Is Born Twice

392. He who is not born twice will not find a way to the kingdom of heavens (Qaysari 1375 Sh, 316).

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