

## The Collector of Felicities, Part III

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### First Station: On Treating the Diseases of the Power of Intellect

#### Section One: Slyness and Simple Ignorance

Two diseases of the Power of Intellect are slyness and simple ignorance.

- 1) **Slyness:** This disease causes the human intellect to go beyond the bounds of moderation and human mind to deviate from the right path. It might even lead an individual's mental activity to heresy and corruption of faith, and even to denying the realities, like the Sophists.

Its treatment lies in remembering that this quality leads to destruction. One should prevent his *nafs* (inner-self) from doubting what the wise people consider as proved through sound arguments, and from surpassing the beliefs of the followers of truth, who are known for honesty, proper thinking, and research. Some useful activities for achieving this are reading books, seeking knowledge, and becoming involved in learning and teaching.

- 2) **Simple Ignorance:** It is to go to the extreme of deficiency in intellectual activity and it means lacking knowledge while being aware of one's ignorance. This kind of ignorance is not unfavourable at the beginning, learning depends on it, since if one does not realize his ignorance, he will not strive to attain knowledge. However, staying in this condition is one of the greatest causes of destruction.

The way to treat this is to remember the wickedness of ignorance. One should know that a person who is entirely ignorant cannot be truly considered a human. Thus, if one has no knowledge about the realities of objects and their qualities, he is, in fact, an animal. Afterwards, one should remember what has been pointed out in Islam about ignorance. Then, he should endeavor to removing his ignorance and obtaining knowledge from knowledgeable people.

### **The value of knowledge and wisdom**

Opposite to slyness and ignorance is wisdom, which means having knowledge of the realities of objects. First we will point out some rational (*'aqli*) and traditional (*naqli*) arguments on the value of wisdom so that we may encourage the learners to endeavour in gaining wisdom and to repel ignorance from their hearts.

There is no doubt that knowledge is the noblest of virtues and qualities. It is also one of the greatest attributes of God and most beautiful signs of the divine. It is knowledge that brings a man close to God, takes him to the high position of angels, and enables him to achieve the everlasting abode of munificence. Rational demonstrations and all true religions agree that eternal prosperity and vicinity to Holy God is not possible without knowledge.

Knowledge is delightful and loveable in itself. There is a distinct pleasure and ecstasy that results from knowledge which does not

result from anything else. The secret behind this is that understanding objects and grasping them is a kind of owning and possessing them, because images of the objects and their essence dwells in the soul of the person who grasps them. Due to its persistency and because the possessed object becomes a part of the possessor, this kind of possession is stronger than material possession in which the possessed object is separate from its owner.

Being knowledgeable in this world is having respect and credit in the eyes of all people. In addition, the opinions of knowledgeable people have influence on the authorities of the society. That is because people, whether ordinary or well-known, are naturally disposed towards honoring knowledgeable people, respecting them, and following their viewpoints.

The verses of the Quran and *hadiths* that approve the value of knowledge are countless. Below, we shall mention a few of them:

From the verses of the Quranic verses:

And of humans and beasts and cattle there are likewise diverse hues. Only those of God's servants having knowledge fear Him. Indeed God is all-mighty, all-forgiving. (Quran 35:28)

Are those who know equal to those who do not know? (Quran 39:9)

And he who is given wisdom, is certainly given an abundant good. (Quran 2:269)

From the words of the Prophet Muhammad (s) to Abu Dharr:

Sitting in a learned gathering for an hour is better in the eyes of God than a thousand nights in each of which a thousand prayers are performed.

God, angels, and prophets love the person who seeks knowledge.

Only the prosperous loves knowledge.

How fortunate one who loves knowledge is.

Looking at the face of a knowledgeable person is more valuable than setting free a thousand slaves.

Whoever loves knowledge, paradise is obligatory for him and God is pleased with him day and night. (Shu‘ayri n.d., 37-8).

Imam Ali (a), also, is quoted to have said,

“The perfection of religion is seeking knowledge and acting upon it. And seeking knowledge is more necessary for you than seeking wealth. Everyone has a portion of wealth that God has guaranteed for him. The just God has distributed wealth among you, and he has taken that responsibility and will fulfil it. However, knowledge is a repository and treasure which is with its people (the knowledgeable people), thus, seek it! (Kulayni 1407 A.H, 1:30)

Imam Zayn al-‘Abidin (a) said, “If people knew what value lies in seeking knowledge, they would seek it even if it involved their blood being shed and their drowning in deep waters” (Kulayni 1407 A.H, 1:85).

Imam al-Baqir (a) said, “A learned person from whose knowledge people benefit is better than seventy thousand worshippers (*‘abid*)” (Kulayni 1407 A.H, 1:33).

Imam al-Sadiq (a) said, If people knew what value lies in knowing God, they would not look at what enemies have of the splendor of the life of this world and its blessings, and, in their eyes, this world would

be less worthy than what they step on (dirt)...” (Kulayni 1407 A.H, 8:247).

Imam al-Rida (a) reports from his fathers (a) that the Prophet (s) said,

Seeking knowledge is an obligation for every Muslim. Thus, seek knowledge everywhere you think you might find it, and learn it from its people, since learning it for the sake of God is a good deed, seeking it is worshipping [God], discussing it is [equal to] glorifying [Him], acting upon it is *jihad*, teaching it to those who do not know it is charity, and offering it to its people is getting closer to God ... Fortunate is the one whom God does not deprive of knowledge. (Tusi 1414 A.H, 487-8)

### **Manners of Learning and Teaching**

There are certain etiquettes mentioned for learning and teaching. The following are the proper manners of learning:

- 1) The student should avoid following his lustful tendencies, and should avoid the frivolous company of worldly people.
- 2) His intention for learning should only be to attain God’s pleasure, become closer to Him, and achieve felicity in the Hereafter. His intention should not be to argue with people, act arrogantly towards them, or to achieve wealth, fame, or superiority over others. Imam al-Baqir (a) has said, “Whoever seeks knowledge to show off to scholars, argue with the ignorant, or attract the attention of people let him take his place in Hellfire” (Kulayni 1407 A.H, 1:47).
- 3) He should put into action whatever he learns, because whoever puts into action what he learns, God will teach him what he does

not know. Imam al-Sadiq (a) has said “Knowledge is paired with action. Whoever knows shall act, and whoever acts shall know. Knowledge calls for action; if it receives an answer, it stays; otherwise, it goes away” (Kulayni 1407 A.H, 1:44).

The noble Prophet (s) is reported to have said, “One who acquires knowledge from the learned and acts according to it shall be saved, and one who acquires knowledge for the sake of the world shall receive just that [and shall receive no reward in the Hereafter]” (Kulayni 1407 A.H, 1:46).

- 4) The student should respect his teacher and be humble before him; he should not directly refute his teacher’s opinions; he should love his teacher by heart and not forget his rights, for one’s teacher is his spiritual father. Imam al-Sadiq (a) said, “Seek knowledge and, together with that, adorn yourselves with forbearance (*hilm*) and dignity. Be modest with your students and humble with your teachers; do not be arrogant scholars, for your falsehood will eliminate your truth” (Kulayni 1407 A.H, 1:36).

The following are manners of teaching:

- 1) The teacher should teach for the sake of God and should not have worldly intentions, such as seeking wealth, power, or fame. His only intention should be to become closer to God and achieve permanent rewards, since anyone who teaches knowledge to another person has a share in the reward of that person’s teaching to other people.
- 2) He should be kind with his students, guide them, consider the level of their understanding, and speak with them in a friendly manner, without getting irritated by their mistakes and misunderstandings.
- 3) He should be generous in teaching knowledge to the people who deserve it and should refrain from teaching it to those who do

not deserve it, since offering wisdom to undeserving fools is oppressing wisdom and knowledge, and depriving the deserving people of it is oppressing those people.

- 4) The teacher should only speak of what he knows; he should not talk about what he does not know until he researches a topic and gains information about it. He should not give false information to the students.

Imam Baqir (a) has said, “The right of God over the servants is that they say what they know and stop [speaking] when they do not know” (Kulayni 1407 A.H, 1:43).

And Imam Sadiq (a) said, “If one of you is asked about something he does not know, he should say, ‘I do not know’ ... When a person who is asked a question says he does not know, the questioner does not hold him responsible” (Kulayni 1407 A.H, 1:43).

He (a) is also reported to have said “Avoid two qualities, which caused the destruction of many people. Avoid giving rulings to people based on your own opinion, and avoid behaving according to what you do not know” (Kulayni 1407 A.H, 1:42).

### **Theology, Ethics, and Jurisprudence as the Noblest Sciences**

Although all sciences lead the human soul to perfection and prosperity, they are different in their value and beauty and in the necessity of learning them. Some of these sciences, such as medicine, geometry, prosody, and other similar sciences have worldly benefits, but felicity in the Hereafter cannot be achieved through them. Learning some of them has \*sufficient necessity (*wajib al-kefai*), but learning the others is not obligatory at all.

However, learning the sciences that are related to the Hereafter is necessary, and the best and noblest of the sciences are theology, through which the principles of religion are known; ethics, through

which the saviors and destroyers of the soul are known; and jurisprudence (*fiqh*), through which the manners of worshiping (*‘ibādāt*) and transacting (*mu‘āmilāt*) are known. Also, learning the prerequisites of these three sciences—such as logic, Arabic, and so forth—are essential, since they pave the ground for the study of these sciences.

Although learning these sciences is obligatory in general, they are different in terms of the quality of learning. Learning the science of ethics from what has been mentioned in religion and what the scholars of ethics say is obligatory for every individual. Learning Islamic rulings that may apply to one’s situation is again obligatory—either by acquiring the necessary expertise in Islamic jurisprudence to have one’s own opinion or by following the opinions of an expert (*mujtahid*). Also, learning the principles of beliefs from the teachings of religion and reason is obligatory for every individual (*wajib ‘aynī*). Reason and religion are so closely bound together that what reason guides to is the same as what religion teaches. This is because reason is God’s proof (*hujjah*), and it is necessary to obey it; it is a fair arbiter whose judgments fit with reality and cannot be denied. If reason did not exist, religion would not be understood; hence it has been said that “unless a servant understands religious obligations with his own reason, he cannot fulfil them. And worshipers [who do not use reason] do not reach the excellence of worshipping that a rational person can reach.” The apparent discrepancies that are sometimes found between reason and religion originate either from the imperfectness of reason or from attributing to religion things that are not proven to be from it, for all reason is not perfect and not all things attributed to religion are actually from it.

### **Agreed-upon Principles of Beliefs**

The principles of beliefs on which the Islamic *ummah* has consensus are the following:



Belief in the existence of God, and that He is One, absolutely simple, i.e. free from having any actual or potential parts. He is not material and does not have material limits, and His existence and attributes are exactly the same as His essence. He is alive. His existence has no beginning and no end. He is all-powerful and all-knowing. He creates whatever He wants, and does whatever He intends. Nothing is done except with His permission. He is fair in His judgment and reliable in His promise. In summary, He has all perfections, and nothing is similar to Him.

Belief that the Quran is the Word of God, that Muhammad (s) is His messenger and that whatever he has brought to us is true. It is obligatory for every Muslim to learn and accept his teachings. However, people differ in their faiths; some have reached certainty (*yaqin*), while others have tenuous beliefs which can be shaken by suspicions and questions. The *hadith* from Imam Baqir (a) points to this difference: “Believers are in different levels [of faith]...” (Kulayni 1407 A.H, 2:45).

Sadiq (a), also, says, “Faith has different qualities, degrees, and levels. Some are complete and perfect, some are obviously imperfect, and some lean towards perfectness” (Kulayni 1407 A.H, 2:34).

Without doubt, attaining certainty about religious beliefs is obligatory for every responsible (*mukallaf*) Muslim. Accepting beliefs without being certain about them is not enough for achieving prosperity in the Hereafter and attaining the levels of believers. By reaching certainty, salvation and prosperity will be achieved, even if this certainty is not reached by extensive research or by philosophical and theological reasoning. There is no doubt that the light of certainty and the confidence of heart is not only attained by theological arguments, nor is reached by following people blindly. Becoming illuminated by the light of certainty is achieved by being righteous, restraining one’s inner self (*nafs*) from lustful desires, and

purifying it from wickedness. Allah (SWT) says in the Quran, “One who purifies it is certainly felicitous” (Qur’an 91:9)

Purifying one’s inner self (*nafs*) from vices until the divine light shines on one’s heart and lifts the veil from the truth of these beliefs is the final end of the truthful people (*siddiqun*) and those who are near to God (*muqarrabun*). This position, too, has levels. People are different according to their difference in talent and effort, just as they are different in understanding various sciences and skills. The Prophet (s) said, “Everyone is made capable of doing what he is created for” (Majlisi 1403 A.H, 4:282).

Hence, after attaining these beliefs and acknowledging them, whoever undertakes to serve God, spends a part of his time performing the acts of worship, persists in reciting the Quran and reading its interpretations, studies *hadiths*, avoids associating with the adherents of false beliefs and befriending impious people, and chooses the company of pious people, especially those who have reached certainty,, and follows their example, the grace of God will embrace him and bestow upon him the light of certainty.

## Section Two: Other Diseases of the Power of Intellect

**1) Compound Ignorance:** This occurs when someone is ignorant of something and, in addition, is ignorant of his ignorance. he is afflicted with . It is one of the most destructive diseases and it is extremely difficult to cure. That is why Jesus Christ (a) is quoted as saying, “I am capable of curing the blind and the leper, but I am incapable of curing a fool.”<sup>1</sup> This is because a person who has compound ignorance is not aware of his defect, and thus does not make any move to gain knowledge. Hence, he remains forever in his ignorance and deviation.

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<sup>1</sup> No reference has been given for this in the book.

**Its treatment:** If the cause of ignorance is due to obstacles such as prejudice, blind imitation, or similar things, one should try to help the person with compound ignorance to remove the obstacles. If it is caused by weakness in thinking, the best treatment is to encourage the individual to learn mathematical sciences, which organize the mind. Since these sciences are concerned with certainty and fact related issues, they will cause him to realize the incorrectness of his belief, and as a result his compound ignorance changes into simple ignorance and he becomes motivated to seek knowledge. If the cause of ignorance lies in mistakes in reasoning, he should compare his reasoning with that of men of research and check them with rules of logic so that his mistakes are revealed.

- 2) **Perplexity and Doubt:** This disease results from inability of the mind to verify the right and refute the wrong in difficult and complex issues. This usually happens when there are contradictory pieces of evidence. There is no doubt that this disease corrupts the soul, since doubt is against certainty, and faith is not realized without certainty.

Imam Baqir (a) said, “With doubt and denial, no action is useful” (Kulayni 1407 A.H, 2:400).

And Imam Sadiq (a) said, “Whoever doubts or speculates and remains in that status, God will render his deeds worthless, [since] God’s proof is the manifest proof” (Kulayni 1407 A.H, 2:400).

It goes without saying that what is meant by doubt is that which weakens faith and takes away certainty. Mere thinking to oneself is not doubt. As we will point out, these are not against faith. Doubt causes disbelief when it leads to denial.

**The treatment** of doubt and perplexity is that the individual should first remember the obvious principle of contradiction, according to

which two contradictory statements cannot be both true and false at the same time. By considering this, he realizes that the doctrine he has doubts about is either true or false. Then he should gather the assumptions and premises related to that doctrine and examine them by principles of logic until he discovers his mistakes and can reach a conclusion about the truth or falsity of that doctrine. Moreover, the purpose of the invention of the science of logic, especially the part about fallacies, is to cure this disease. However, if one is unable to do this, the treatment for him is to persist in worshiping and reciting the Qur'an, and to associate with righteous people and the people of certainty (*ahl al-yaqin*) so that his soul gains that light and through it the darkness of doubt goes away.

### **Certainty:**

The opposite of compound ignorance, perplexity, and doubt is certainty. The first level of certainty is firm and confident conviction that is in accordance with reality and cannot be shaken by any doubts. Thus, a conviction that is not in accordance with reality is not certainty, even if the person who believes it has confidence about its accordance with reality. Therefore, certainty is the opposite of perplexity and doubt, since it involves confident belief. And it is the opposite of compound ignorance, because it is in accordance with reality.

The need for certainty is related to issues that are either requirements of faith—such as belief in the existence of a necessary being and its perfect attributes, prophethood and resurrection—or to truths without which faith would be incomplete. Certainty is the most powerful means of achieving prosperity; it is the noblest moral virtue and the highest perfection of the soul.

Imam Sadiq (a) said, “Indeed a small and continuous deed that is done with certainty is better, in the eyes of God, than a large deed done without certainty” (Kulayni 1407 A.H, 2:57).

The Imam (a) is also reported to have said, “By His justice, God has associated happiness and comfort with certainty and contentment [i.e. being pleased with God's will] and has coupled sorrow and pain with doubt and resentment [about the divine will]” (Kulayni 1407 A.H, 2:57).

### **Characteristics of People with Certainty**

A person who has achieved certainty has the following characteristics:

He does not pay attention to anyone other than God and does not put his trust in anyone other than Him. He does not see himself or others to have power over, or cause, anything and knows that whatever reaches him is from God. He fulfils his duties when he is alone and when he is in public and performs the obligatory and recommended deeds of the religion. He turns to God with all his soul and is immersed in the sea of God’s Love and intimacy.

The reason why a person who has achieved certainty is in such conditions is that he is aware of God, His greatness, and His power. He knows that God sees whatever he does and that He is aware of the private realm of his thoughts. Thus, he is always in the state of witnessing and being present before God.

He is certain about God’s mercy and kindness and is always grateful to his Lord for all His favors and blessings. Moreover, his certainty about the happiness and delight that God gives to believers in the Hereafter causes him to be always hopeful.

A person who is certain that all actions are attributed to God and that every action arises fromis. His eternal wisdom, His plan for the greater good, and His attention (*‘inayah*), is always in the state of patience, contentment, and submission to God’s decree. A person who is certain about the greatness of God and His omnipotence is

always in awe. And a person who is certain about His perfect attributes is always in the state of zeal and love.

One of the signs of a person who has achieved certainty is that his prayers are accepted and that he even possesses extraordinary powers (*karamah*). This is because the more the certainty of the soul increases the more immaterial it becomes (*tajarrud*) and thus can influence the world.

### Stages of Certainty

I. **The knowledge of certainty** (*ilm al-yaqin*) is permanent and confident belief that accords with reality, which is achieved through reasoning.

II. **The eye of certainty** (*‘ayn al-yaqin*): It is the certainty that one attains when seeing the object with the inner eye. This bright vision with the inner eye is more powerful than seeing with the outer eyes. Hence the words of Imam Ali (a): “I would never worship the god that I do not see” (Kulayni 1407 A.H, 1:98). And also: “My heart has seen my God.” This level of certainty is achieved only through piety, cleaning the heart, and attaining complete immateriality (*tajarrud*) for the soul. A material example of this kind of certainty is the certainty about the existence of fire after seeing the fire itself.

III. **The truth of certainty** (*haqq al-yaqin*): This level of certainty is the achievement of spiritual unity and a real connection between the knower and the object of knowledge in such a way that the knower sees his essence as an emanation of the object of knowledge (here the Divine Being), dependant on, and inseparable from, Him. In addition, he always sees the light of God’s grace with his inner eye. The example of this level of certainty is like having certainty about the existence of fire by going *inside* the fire. This level is only for the true believers who are immersed in the sea of His love; those who see themselves and other beings as emanations of God’s Divine grace.

Achieving this level is dependent on strict piety, struggles with the inner-self (*nafs*), leaving the common habits, removing lustful tendencies, eliminating satanic thoughts, purifying the self, and keeping away from the material glitters of this world.

Generally, the real luminous certainty that is clear from the darkness of doubt and delusion does not result from mere thinking and reasoning. Its achievement is rather dependent on piety, struggle with the inner-self, cleaning the mirror of the soul from impurities, clearing the darkness of immoralities from it, and removing the obstacles of realizing the truths. As the Prophet (s) has said, “if devils did not wander around the hearts of mankind, people would indeed see the kingdom of heaven and earth” (Majlisi 1403 A.H, 56:163).

**3) Polytheism (SHIRK:** Another disease of the power of intellect is *shirk* (“polytheism”). It is the belief that other forces besides God affect the universe. If these others (e.g. idols, stars, humans, or Satan) are worshiped, it is *shirk* in worship. If they are not worshiped but obeyed—because of the belief that they affect the affairs of the world—it is *shirk* in obedience. The first kind is also called manifest *shirk* (*shirk jali*), and the second kind hidden *shirk* (*shirk khafi*).

It should be noted that *shirk* has different levels, which will become clear when we consider its opposite, i.e. *tawhid* (monotheism) in a separate article. Although *shirk* is a kind of ignorance—in contrast to *tawhid*, which is an instance of knowledge and certainty—discussing it is not necessary here. In order to follow the outline of typical books of ethics, we will discuss *tawhid* in the next section.

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