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Islamic Lifestyle - Part II

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Abstract



In this part, we proceed to make other points about relationship with oneself (the first section). In the section on thinking and contemplation we previously discussed the need for planning and managing our affairs with contemplation and said we need to consider the future outcomes of our actions. Now, in this part, we continue to explain some *Ahadith* about avoiding *takalluf*. What I mean by it is to put oneself into an uncomfortable situation to do something which is not necessary. Then, in the second section, certain ideas about the importance of seeking knowledge are explained.

Keywords

Islamic morality, seeking knowledge, *takalluf*, learning and teaching merits.

Introduction

The first section was about our relationship with ourselves and the first chapter in this section was about thinking and contemplation. We previously discussed about the need for planning and managing our affairs with contemplation and considering their future outcomes.

According to a well-known report in *Tuhuf al-‘uqul*, Salman al-Farsi had an interesting habit: when he received his share from the public treasury, one of the things that he used to do was leaving aside something for the rest of the year so that throughout the year he did not need to worry or be concerned about his expenses. (Harrani, 1404 AH., 351)

It is very good to plan things in a way that you do not need to worry too much and focus on your worship, spirituality, and service to people. So, this is an aspect of planning.

Another aspect of planning is mentioned in a hadith from Imam al-Jawad (a):

إِظْهَارُ الشَّيْءِ قَبْلَ أَنْ يُسْتَحْكَمَ مَفْسَدَةٌ لَهُ.

To disclose something before it becomes established is its destruction. (Ibid., 457)

Sometimes, one wants to do something but has not yet started, or he has started but has not completed it. If he discloses his plan to other people, they may create problems for him out of jealousy. Therefore, although a believer should not be secretive all the time, he should not disclose his plans to everyone either.

Avoiding *Takalluf*

The last topic in this chapter is about avoiding *takalluf* (strains).

Takalluf is derived from “*kulfa*,” which is also the root for *taklif* (duty, task). “*Kulfa*” means trouble, burden, or a difficult task. So, *takalluf* means to put oneself into an uncomfortable situation, such as undertaking something which is too difficult or going out of one’s way to do something. For example, when a person invites someone to his home for lunch, he should prepare good food. However, he should not go too much out of his way and make it difficult for himself and his family. Such excessive struggles are called *takalluf*, which means undertaking something beyond one’s capacity. *Takalluf* not only puts the host to trouble but also makes the guests uncomfortable.

According to a hadith, the Prophet (s) said,

إِنِّي لَا أُحِبُّ الْمُتَكَلِّفِينَ.

I do not like those who do *takalluf*. (Kulayni, 1365 SH, 6: 276)

It is reported that the Prophet (s) prohibited people from doing *takalluf* for their guests.

In another hadith from the Prophet (s), we read,

مِنْ تَكْرِمَةِ الرَّجُلِ لِأَخِيهِ الْمُسْلِمِ أَنْ يَقْبَلَ تُحَفَّتَهُ، وَيُتَحِفَّهُ بِمَا عِنْدَهُ، وَلَا يَتَكَلَّفَ لَهُ شَيْئًا.

Among different ways that one can honor his Muslim brother is to accept his gift and gift him with what he has and does not do any *takalluf* for him. (Ibid.)

If a believer, about whose sincerity you have no doubt, gives you a gift, accept it. However, you should also gift him with what you have. You do not need to borrow money to buy a gift, for instance.

It should be something that you have or is easily affordable for you; if you want to buy it, you should be able to buy it easily. Another way of honoring your brother, according to this hadith, is not to undertake something beyond your capacity for their sake. So, you honor them if you do not put yourself to trouble. If he sees that you are exhausted, troubled, and burdened, he will not enjoy being with you, eating from your food, or receiving your gift.

According to another hadith, Imam al-Sadiq (a) said,

أَثْقَلُ إِخْوَانِي عَلَى مَنْ يَتَكَلَّفُ لِي وَأَتَحَفَّظُ مِنْهُ وَأَخَفُّهُمْ عَلَى قَلْبِي مَنْ
أَكُونُ مَعَهُمْ كَمَا أَكُونُ وَحْدِي.

The most burdensome brothers for me are those who put themselves to trouble for me and I keep aloof from them, and the least burdensome brothers for me are those whom I treat with like when I am alone with myself. (Nuri,1987, 9:155)

According to this hadith, the most burdensome brothers for Imam al-Sadiq (a) were those who put themselves to trouble for him. Perhaps, there are people who enjoy being entertained in an extraordinarily special way, but a believer does not want to be treated this way. He never wants his host to go through difficulties for him.

If a guest goes to someone's house and the host entertains him in a normal way and without putting himself to trouble, then the guest also will feel comfortable with inviting the host to his house. Otherwise, the guest will find it difficult to invite the host and treat him the same way. So, if he invites the host, he will have a problem, and if he does not return the favour by inviting the host, he will feel embarrassed.

In another hadith, Imam al-Sadiq (a) said,

إِذَا أَتَاكَ أَخُوكَ فَأْتِهِ بِمَا عِنْدَكَ وَإِذَا دَعَاكَ فَتَكَلَّفْ لَهُ.

If your brother comes to you, give him what you have; if you invite him, do *takalluf* for him. (Barghi, 1371 SH, 410)

This hadith should not be considered contradictory to the previous hadiths. It just states that when someone comes to your house, he does not expect to be given a special meal, for instance. You can share with him your own meal, instead of asking him to wait for a long time to prepare another meal for him. However, if you invite people, you should not ignore the fact that you have invited them; therefore, you have to do a little more to show that you expected them. You can do something extra by changing your dress or cleaning your house, but not by making things too difficult for yourself or your family.

Then, there is a very beautiful hadith about *takalluf* in the sense of taking a task, a position, or a role that one cannot handle. For example, if a student is able to give a talk for a small community, he should not put pressure on himself by giving lectures for large communities. According to this hadiths, Imam Ali (a) said,

رَحِمَ اللَّهُ امْرَأً عَرَفَ قَدْرَهُ وَلَمْ يَتَعَدَّ طَوْرَهُ.

May Allah's mercy be upon one who knows his limit and does not go beyond his limits. (Tamimi Amidi, 1366 SH, 1:373)

If a person is a medical student, he cannot give prescriptions. So, every person should know his limits. If a person can work in an office, it does not mean that he can be the director of that office.

According to a hadith, Imam al-Sadiq (a) said, "A believer should not humiliate himself." Then, those who were present asked,

“How could he humiliate himself?” The Imam (a) answered, “When he exposes himself to something that he cannot cope with” (Kulayni, 1365 SH, 5:64); this is when he humiliates himself. If, for instance, one cannot carry a weight, why should he say in front of everyone that he can carry that weight and then embarrass himself?

Assessing Rationality

Finally, the last hadith in this chapter is about how one can assess people’s rationality and wisdom. According to this hadith, Imam Ali (a) gave six criteria for this purpose:

1. *Musahaba*, which means “to accompany others.” Evaluating how good a person is in his social relations is an important criterion in assessing his rationality. If someone is rational and wise, he knows how to deal with different types of people, whether difficult or easy-going people.
2. *Mu‘amala*, which means transaction or dealing with people. One can observe their rationality when they work, buy, sell, borrow, or lend. How they behave in these situations indicate their level of wisdom.
3. *Wilaya*. When they have a leadership position, how do they behave? When someone has no leadership roles, his or her rationality is not that much tested.
4. *‘Azl*, which means loneliness. When he has no power, position, fame, or contacts, how does he behave? Some people do well only when they are surrounded by many people, but they fail when they are alone.
5. *Ghina*, which refers to how they behave when they are rich. Some people, as soon as they earn some money, begin to change their houses, cars, and furniture, but wise people

consider priorities. Perhaps, they do some investment, start a new project, or help some people. So, it is important to see how one deals with money. Will he forget his friends and become arrogant and proud? Will he stay the same or become even more humble than before?

6. *Faqr*, which refers to how people behave when they are poor. If they are poor, do they start begging others or doing wrong, illegal, and forbidden actions? Do they become hopeless and depressed? Do their family relations and friendships break down? Or on the contrary, even though they might be poor, they are still resilient, honorable, and happy. They do not appear miserable before other people.

Therefore, with these six criteria, people's rationality and wisdom can be tested.

The Importance of Seeking Knowledge

Islam places great emphasis on learning and then sharing knowledge. It is for this reason that in a very short period of time, Islam managed to change the society which had no regard for knowledge into a society that pioneered different sciences, such as maths, chemistry, physics, medicine, and philosophy.

The Prophet (s) said,

أَعِدْ عَالِماً أَوْ مُتَعَلِّماً وَإِيَّاكَ أَنْ تَكُونَ لَاهِياً مُتَلَدِّداً.

Be either a knowledgeable person or one who is learning, and beware of being a vane, hedonistic person. (Barghi, 1371 sh, 227)

One has no excuse to say, "I don't know, and I don't want to know." There is nothing more important than learning.

Therefore, one must either be a scholar or a student. Of course, good scholars are also always students, because, they always want to learn more.

Unfortunately, although reading and learning are not physically difficult, many people find them mentally and psychologically difficult. They prefer to watch a movie, a game, or a play for two or three hours, but they are not willing to read a book for fifteen minutes.

Hadiths emphasise that if it is necessary, one can even learn from those whose beliefs are false; for instance, if a person has to learn medicine but he cannot find a pious teacher, he should still go and learn. One should acquire wisdom even from polytheists or hypocrites.

Imam Ali (a) states,

خُذُوا الْحِكْمَةَ وَلَوْ مِنَ الْمُشْرِكِينَ.

Take wisdom even though from polytheists. (Tabrisi, 1385 AH., 134)

Sometimes polytheists have wise ideas, which they have learnt from other people. This does not necessarily mean that they are wise, as there is a difference between having wisdom as a quality and having wise ideas. Although one can learn from anyone who has something wise, he should be careful not to be affected by the unwise things that they also offer. A person can go and learn from different people, but he should not do so if he cannot distinguish between what is true and what is false.

A hadith from Imam Ali (a) states,

خُذِ الْحِكْمَةَ مِنْ أَفْوَاهِ الْمَجَانِينِ.

Take wisdom [even] from the mouths of insane

people. (Misbah al-Shari'a, 1400AH, 160)

A person who is insane may sometimes say good things. Such people actually sometimes say very wise things, because they do not have ordinary reservations that normal people have.

In another hadith, we read,

الْحِكْمَةُ ضَالَّةُ الْمُؤْمِنِ؛ أَيْنَمَا وَجَدَهَا أَخَذَهَا.

Wisdom is a believer's missing asset; wherever he finds it, he takes it. (Majlisi, 1403AH., 2:99)

If one is looking everywhere for his missing jewel, he takes it wherever he finds, whether in the hand of a righteous scholar or an insane person, and for a believer, wisdom is like that missing jewel.

The Importance of Good Manners

In another hadith, Imam Ali (a) said,

عَلَيْكُمْ بِالْعِلْمِ وَالْأَدَبِ.

You must have knowledge and decorum (*adab*). (Ibn Abi al-Hadid, 1404AH., 20:332)

Adab (decorum) is more practical; it is about the manners of doing things. For example, one can learn what is permissible and what is forbidden, but the *adab* of eating is something else. A person can learn the rulings of fasting, such as when fasting should start and end and what must be avoided while fasting, but there are also manners for fasting. For example, one should feel that he is the guest of God in the month of Ramadan and should avoid sins and evil thoughts, even if from a *fiqhi* perspective, this

may not be a requirement for the validity of fasting. These manners can be requirements for the acceptance of one's fast.

In continue, we read,

فَإِنَّ الْعَالِمَ يُكْرَمُ وَإِنْ لَمْ يُنْتَسَبْ.

A scholar is honored even if he does not belong to a noble family. (Ibid.)

People do not ask a knowledgeable person, “Who was your father or grandfather?” They ask him, “Who was your teacher? Which school did you go to?” This is the genealogy for a scholar. The hadith continues:

وَيُكْرَمُ وَإِنْ كَانَ فَقِيرًا وَيُكْرَمُ وَإِنْ كَانَ حَدَثًا.

[A scholar] is honored even if he is poor and even if he is young. (Ibid.)

The Merits of Learning and Teaching

Then, the book quotes many beautiful hadiths about the merits of learning and teaching, one of which we mention.

فَإِنَّ تَعْلِيمَهُ لِلَّهِ سُبْحَانَهُ حَسَنَةٌ وَطَلَبُهُ عِبَادَةٌ وَالْمُذَاكِرَةُ بِهِ تَسْبِيحٌ وَالْعَمَلُ بِهِ جِهَادٌ وَتَعْلِيمُهُ مَنْ لَا يَعْلَمُهُ صَدَقَةٌ وَبَذْلُهُ لِأَهْلِهِ قُرْبَةٌ إِلَى اللَّهِ تَبَارَكَ وَتَعَالَى لِأَنَّهُ مِنْ مَعَالِمِ الْحَلَالِ وَالْحَرَامِ وَمَنَازِلِ سَبِيلِ الْجَنَّةِ وَالْمُؤْنَسِ فِي الْوَحْشَةِ.

It is considered to be a good deed to share knowledge for the sake of God, an act of worship to

acquire it, a way of glorifying God to discuss it, a way of waging *jihād* to apply it, a sort of charitable donation to teach it to those who do not know, and a means of proximity to God to grant it to those who deserve, since knowledge shows what is permissible and impermissible, it guides people through the path to paradise, and it provides some close companionship with those who feel lonely. (Saduq, 1377 Sh, 2: 522)

According to this inspiring hadith, the Prophet (s) states that teaching for the sake of God is a righteous deed. Teaching someone how to read a verse of the Qur'an, how to pray, or how to fast is a good deed if it is for the sake of God. Seeking knowledge is also an act of worship. If someone leaves his home to go to teach another person, the learner is also leaving his home for seeking knowledge; so, both of them are worshipping God since they leave their home till they return. Discussing about knowledge is considered glorification of God. Then, acting upon what one learns is jihad. Moreover, teaching someone who does not know is an act of charity and giving it to those who deserve it is a way to seek nearness to God. Knowledge shows the way to Paradise, so that people do not go astray, and it is the best companion. (Majlisi, 1403, 1:171)

The way the Prophet (s) and the Ahl al-Bayt (a) talk about knowledge is different from the way they talk about other topics. Imagine that someone has travelled to tens of countries and when he is relating his good memories about them, one particular place really makes him passionate and excited. It seems that when the Prophet (s) and the Ahl al-Bayt (a) speak about knowledge, they are like that. In their traditions, they have not emphasised anything more than knowledge, albeit the knowledge that is connected to faith, piety.

Thus, the Prophet (s) said,

مَنْ أَحَبَّ أَنْ يَنْظُرَ إِلَى عُتَقَاءِ اللَّهِ مِنَ النَّارِ فَلْيَنْظُرْ إِلَى الْمُتَعَلِّمِينَ، فَوَالَّذِي
نَفْسِي بِيَدِهِ، مَا مِنْ مُتَعَلِّمٍ يَخْتَلِفُ إِلَى بَابِ الْعَالِمِ الْمُعَلِّمِ إِلَّا كَتَبَ اللَّهُ لَهُ
بِكُلِّ قَدَمٍ عِبَادَةَ سَنَةٍ، وَبَنَى اللَّهُ لَهُ بِكُلِّ قَدَمٍ مَدِينَةً فِي الْجَنَّةِ، وَيَمْشِي
عَلَى الْأَرْضِ وَهِيَ تَسْتَغْفِرُ لَهُ، وَيُمْسِي وَيُصْبِحُ مَغْفُورًا لَهُ، وَشَهِدَتْ
الْمَلَائِكَةُ أَنَّهُمْ عُتَقَاءُ اللَّهِ مِنَ النَّارِ.

If one likes to look at those who are delivered from Fire by God, then he needs to look at the learners. I swear, God will give them the reward of one year of worship, and build them cities in paradise, for every step taken by them to reach their teachers' houses. When the seekers of knowledge walk on the earth, it asks God's forgiveness for them. They are constantly day and night receiving God's forgiveness and the angels testify that they have been delivered from Fire by God. (Shahid Thani, 1409 AH. 100)

In the month of Ramadan, one of the main things that we want is to be freed from Fire, and likewise on the eve of Eid; it is very important. This hadith states that if you want to look at those whom God has surely freed from Fire, look at the seekers of knowledge. Look at any believer who is learning. Of course, in order to be called a learner, one's study should be serious. If a person reads a few pages or listens to a lecture once a week, he cannot be considered a learner. A learner refers to one who has considerable engagement with learning.

The Prophet (s) says, "By the One in whose Hand my life lies"; Of course, the Prophet (s) does not need to swear, but to leave no doubt for anyone, even someone who is always doubting, he swears to God that a seeker of knowledge who continuously visits a scholar will receive the reward of one year of worship for every step he takes, and God builds for him a town in Heaven for every step. He walks on the earth, and the earth asks God to forgive him. There are people who

walk on the earth, but the earth curses them; there are people who walk on the earth, and the earth does not care. Yet, there are people who walk on the earth, and the earth rejoices that a believer, a seeker of knowledge puts his feet on it. A seeker of knowledge is constantly being forgiven; he starts his day with forgiveness and ends with forgiveness, and he is constantly being looked after. The angels also testify that he is freed by God from Fire.

Seeking Knowledge Compared to Attending Funerals

In another hadith, the Prophet (s) said,

فَإِنَّ حُضُورَ مَجْلِسِ عَالِمٍ أَفْضَلُ مِنْ حُضُورِ أَلْفِ جَنَازَةٍ....

Attending the session of a scholar is better than attending a thousand funerals. (Tabrisi, 1385 AH., 135)

Islam highly commends attending funerals and carrying those who have passed away to their place of burial, even if they are not friends or relatives. It is recommended to attend, to show respect, to accompany the body, and to ask for forgiveness. However, when you have a choice to go for learning and taking a lesson from a godly scholar or go to a funeral, while there are other people to attend the funeral and you just want to go for the reward, the Prophet (s) says that attending the session of a scholar is better than attending one thousand funerals.

... وَمِنْ عِبَادَةِ أَلْفِ مَرِيضٍ.

... and [better] than visiting one thousand ill people. (Ibid.)

Again, it is highly recommended to visit someone who is ill. One

of the places where one's prayer is very likely to be answered is when one visits an ill person, but nothing is comparable to being in the presence of a godly scholar. I think one way to understand this is to look at Satan. Which one upsets Satan more: going to a funeral or to a scholar? I think Satan says, "Go to one million funerals. As long as you do not learn anything and do not improve your behaviour, I don't mind." However, Satan becomes very worried when someone goes to scholar: "Maybe he will learn something, maybe he will change, maybe he will become a sincere person. What can I do with him later?"

The Place of Mosque in Learning

Another important aspect is that since in Islam the mosque is also the place of learning, we fight two things. *Mihrab* is the place of war, *harb*; thus, what are we fighting in the mosque? We fight with Satan, but Satan has two major ways of attacking us. One is through ignorance, whereas another is through oppression and injustice. God says,

وَحَمَلَهَا الْإِنْسَانُ إِنَّهُ كَانَ ظَلُومًا جَهُولًا.

But man undertook it; indeed, he is most unjust
and ignorant. (33:72)

Injustice and ignorance are major problems. In the mosque, we go and work on ourselves, how to first stop injustice and ignorance in ourselves and then in society. So, the mosque is also supposed to be a place of learning.

This is why we always say that everything we do must have a major element of knowledge; for example every meeting must either refresh your knowledge or add to it. Otherwise, it is not good.

Hence, the Prophet (s) said,

مَنْ غَدَا إِلَى الْمَسْجِدِ لَا يُرِيدُ إِلَّا لِيَتَعَلَّمَ خَيْرًا أَوْ لِيُعَلِّمَهُ كَانَ لَهُ أَجْرُ مُعْتَمِرٍ
تَامَ الْعُمْرَةَ وَمَنْ رَاحَ إِلَى الْمَسْجِدِ لَا يُرِيدُ إِلَّا لِيَتَعَلَّمَ خَيْرًا أَوْ لِيُعَلِّمَهُ فَلَهُ
أَجْرُ حَاجٍّ تَامَ الْحِجَّةِ.

One who goes to the mosque seeking to learn something good or useful or to teach has the reward of a person who performs a very proper umrah. If a person goes to the mosque to learn something, he has the reward of a person who has done hajj.

It is interesting that, the tradition continues and says the reward would be more than umrah; it is equal to a proper hajj. What can be more generous than one hajj and one *umrah*? So, it is very important to always be involved in learning. (Shahid Thani, 1409 AH., 106)

Two Groups in the Masjid

Although there are numerous beautiful hadiths here, there is a famous report from the life of the Prophet (s).

وَخَرَجَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ ﷺ وَسَلَّمَ فَإِذَا فِي الْمَسْجِدِ مَجْلِسَانِ: مَجْلِسٌ يَتَفَقَّهُونَ، وَمَجْلِسٌ يَدْعُونَ اللَّهَ تَعَالَى وَيَسْأَلُونَهُ، فَقَالَ: «كِلَا الْمَجْلِسَيْنِ إِلَى خَيْرٍ، أَمَّا هَؤُلَاءِ فَيَدْعُونَ اللَّهَ، وَأَمَّا هَؤُلَاءِ فَيَتَعَلَّمُونَ وَيُفَقِّهُونَ الْجَاهِلَ، هَؤُلَاءِ أَفْضَلُ، بِالتَّعْلِيمِ أُزِيلَتْ». ثُمَّ قَعَدَ مَعَهُمْ.

According to this report, the Prophet (s) went to the mosque. In the mosque, there were two gatherings: there was a circle of people who were trying to acquire knowledge and understanding and a group of people who were praying and calling God. When the Prophet (s) saw the two groups, he said, "Both of these gatherings are aiming at

something good,” but he stated that the ones who were learning and teaching were better, so he joined them and said, “For teaching, I have been sent [by God].” (Ibid.)

This is very interesting, because one would expect that a prophet considers the most appropriate thing to do in the mosque to be praying, but our Prophet (s) states that the most important thing to do in the mosque is learning and teaching. Of course, with teaching come supplication, prayer, and fasting.

Summary

From the above hadiths, we learn that a believer is expected to be rational and contemplative. He should take the time to think and not just do or say things that occurs to him. He should consider his relation with God, his talents and skills and also his shortcomings, his relations with other people, the opportunities that he has, and the challenges he may face. One should think about these issues before he begins a course of action and try to foresee future outcomes as much as he can, consult people, and plan for things.

Also, he should be careful about his expenditure. He should not spend excessively when he earns some money and then suffer from poverty later. He should do everything properly, because God loves people who do things properly. In addition, one should not undertake something beyond his capacity or go too much out of his way in order to make someone happy. Those who observe these points will be included among those who are rational, and whose wisdom radiates through their words and actions.

The importance of seeking knowledge is so that Islam places great emphasis on learning and then sharing knowledge and says if it is necessary, one can even learn from those whose beliefs are false; for instance, from polytheists or hypocrites.

Seeking knowledge is preferred in Islamic traditions over many

other good deeds such as attending a thousand funerals or visiting a thousand ill people. Therefore a Muslim should seek knowledge in all times and all places including the mosque that is a very proper place for learning or teaching, because seeking knowledge in mosque is accompanied with more rewards.

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