



Center for Cultural  
and Ethical Studies

## Spiritual Quest

A Biannual Journal of  
Ethics and Spirituality

Vol. 10 | No. 1 | Winter & Spring 2020

# Wisdom - Part V

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## Abstract



In this part, conceptual relations of wisdom with some other moral virtues are explained. According to Ahadith, tolerance, moderation, refraining from worldly pleasures, avoiding deception, renunciation, silence, refraining from excessive eating and talking, focusing on one's own defects and faults are among the factors that present wisdom to man. The person has to be concerned with the hereafter in a pious and rational way, and then both his worldly and otherworldly affairs will be sorted out.

## Keywords

Moral virtues, wisdom, tolerance, moderation, silence, renunciation

In the previous article of this series, some hadiths about the significance of wisdom were studied, and the present part continues with more hadiths.

The first hadith is about the relation between wisdom and tolerance. It was previously mentioned that a wise person is tolerant and forbearing. Tolerance is needed all the time with one's family or friends, but sometimes there are people who are not part of one's family, close friends, or community, and still one has to be in touch with them, such as people who meet in the workplace or travel together. A wise person is one who is able to have good relations even with those who he does not share a lot with. The Prophet (a) said:

He who does not mix with people in a good way,  
with people he has to be in touch with—till God  
provides him with a way out—is not wise.  
(Mohammadi Reyshahri, 1386 SH, 1: 671, no. 14)

In another hadith, which is very similar to the first one, Imam Ali (a) is reported to have said:

لَيْسَ الْحَكِيمُ مَنْ لَمْ يُدَارِ مَنْ لَا يَجِدُ بُدًّا مِنْ مُدَارَاتِهِ.

A wise person is not the one who does not keep  
good relations with those with whom he has to  
have good relations. (Ibid., 1:672, no. 2)

If one has to have a relationship with some people, he has to be able to make it peaceful and nice. This is part of wisdom. So, a wise person knows how to keep his relations with the people who may disagree with him. This aspect of wisdom is more important in the relationship between the people of the same family and community.

According to another hadith, Imam Ali (a) said:

أَوَّلُ الْحِكْمَةِ تَرْكُ اللَّذَاتِ وَآخِرُهَا مَقْتُ الْفَانِيَاتِ.

The beginning of wisdom is to refrain from worldly pleasures, and its last stage is to dislike transitory things. (Ibid., hadith no. 1)

The first requirement and stage of wisdom is to refrain from worldly pleasure. If someone is always after worldly pleasure, he will not taste wisdom. There are many hadiths about this. One of the things you need for having wisdom is to reduce worldly attachments and worldly pleasure, and the last stage is to dislike the things that perish and end. So, one should try to reduce worldly pleasure gradually, and then end his attachment to them. For example, one should first try not to eat too much and stay away from eating very delicious food and various dishes at the same time. Gradually, one reaches the stage where he does not like to eat too much, though sometimes he may eat more than usual, because, for instance, he does not want his guests to be shy to eat.

Imam Ali (a) also said:

حَدُّ الْحِكْمَةِ الْإِعْرَاضُ عَنِ دَارِ الْفَنَاءِ وَالتَّوَلُّهُ بِدَارِ الْبَقَاءِ.

The definition of wisdom is turning away from the abode of annihilation and being passionate about the world of permanence. (Ibid. 1:673, hadith no. 2)

The definition of wisdom is that a person diverts his attention from this temporally world and no longer pursues it. Although he works hard and provides for himself and his family and lives honorably, he is not attached to this world and his attention is focused on the hereafter and eternal life.

In another hadith, Imam Ali (a) said that part of wisdom is that “your tongue must not contradict your heart.” (Ibid., hadith no. 3) If

one is a wise person, he does not say something which is not in his heart. There must be a harmony between one's heart and tongue, between one's words and beliefs. If one says something against what is in his heart, he is not wise; he has not achieved harmony within himself. A person who has achieved wisdom is always honest and truthful; why should he say something that he does not believe? Why should he say something just to please people and lose his integrity? A person who has respect for himself is always honest. If one really has respect for himself, why should he hide what is in his heart? Those who try to hide are those who have either bad things in their hearts or are afraid of people. If a person has something good in his heart, he does not try to hide it; rather, he wants everyone to know about it.

وَلَا تَتَكَلَّمْ فِيمَا لَا تَعْلَمُ.

You must not speak about things you don't know. (Ibid.)

Sometimes, people speak about things they do not have enough information about, and this indicates lack of wisdom. A wise person does not speak about things he does not know. Sometime, people who have not adequately studied about Islam speak about Islam as if they are the spokesman of the religion, as if talking about Islam does not need any expertise, knowledge, or qualifications; this is not right; it is against wisdom.

According to another hadith from Imam Ali (a), when the people of knowledge and wisdom advised each other, they used to say three things, one of which is the following:

مَنْ كَانَتْ الْآخِرَةُ هَمَّهُ كَفَاهُ اللَّهُ هَمَّهُ مِنَ الدُّنْيَا.

He who is concerned with his life in the hereafter,  
God will look after his worldly life. (Ibid., hadith no. 7)

If a person is concerned with his life in the hereafter, if a person does his best for happiness in the hereafter, God will look after his worldly life. Looking after one's hereafter *wisely* means refraining from going to extremes; going to the desert to work for one's hereafter, for instance, is not wise. Rather, one has to be concerned with the hereafter in a pious and rational way, and then both his worldly and otherworldly affairs will be sorted out.

وَمَنْ أَصْلَحَ سِرِّيَّتَهُ أَصْلَحَ اللَّهُ عَلاَمَتَهُ.

He who repairs his interior, God will repair his exterior. (Ibid.)

If a person makes sure that his inward aspect is pure and there are no problems between him and God, he does not need to worry about his relationship with people, since God will sort out that for him. So, if the relationship between a person and God is good, then people will respect him, even in a non-religious society; people appreciate and respect a person who is faithful and pious and who does not have bad intentions, does not harm anyone, and does not want anything more than he deserves. So, if one looks after his internal personality, God will sort out his public appearance. If one looks after his relation with God, God will look after his relation with the people.

Imam Ali (a) also said:

رَأْسُ الْحِكْمَةِ تَجَنُّبُ الْخُدَعِ.

The head of wisdom is to avoid deception. (Ibid.,  
hadith no. 9)

A wise person never deceives people; rather, such a person always helps people find the truth, because the truth is with God, and if he deceives them and leave them in darkness, he keeps them away

from God. A wise person is always honest and truthful and tries to help people understand the truth.

In another hadith, Imam Ali (a) said:

رَأْسُ الْحِكْمَةِ مَخَافَةُ اللَّهِ.

The head of wisdom is to fear God. (Ibid., hadith no. 10)

A wise person –not just a person who has some wise sayings –fears God. To have the quality of wisdom as a part of one's personality is important, and this cannot be without fearing God, without piety.

According to another hadith related to the issue of tolerance, Imam Ali (a) said,

إِنَّ الرَّفْقَ رَأْسُ الْحِكْمَةِ.

Moderation is the head of wisdom. (Ibid., hadith no. 14)

A wise person is never an extremist or a fanatic; he is moderate and balanced. Moderation is very important in Islam:

خَيْرُ الْأُمُورِ أَوْسَطُهَا.

The best things are the most moderate ones.  
(Mohammadi Rayshahri, 1386 SH, 1: 846; Majlisi, 1403 AH., 74:166 & 75:11; Amini, 1376 SH, 6:6; Ibn Abi al-Hadid, 1404 AH., 16:17)

Then, there is a set of hadiths about those things which can help us in achieving wisdom. For instance, Imam al-Sadiq (a) said:

مَنْ زَهَدَ فِي الدُّنْيَا أَثْبَتَ اللَّهُ الْحِكْمَةَ فِي قَلْبِهِ وَأَنْطَقَ بِهَا لِسَانَهُ.

One who renounces the world, God will establish

wisdom in his heart and make his tongue speak it.  
(Mohammadi Rayshahri, 1386 SH, 1:673, hadith no. 15)

Wisdom is located in the heart, but shows itself in one's words.<sup>1</sup>

During the Prophet's journey to heaven (mi'raj), there was a conversation between him and God, which is reported in Hadith al-Mi'raj. In one part of this beautiful hadith, we read:

يَا أَحْمَدُ إِنَّ الْعَبْدَ إِذَا أَجَاعَ بَطْنَهُ وَحَفِظَ لِسَانَهُ عَلَّمَتْهُ الْحِكْمَةَ.

O Ahmad! When a servant keeps his stomach hungry and controls his tongue, I teach him wisdom. (Majlisi, 1403 AH., 74:29)

An important point, which is emphasized in several hadiths, is that wisdom essentially is not accompanied with excessive eating or talking; so, if one eats or talks too much, he will not be able to acquire wisdom. This is why many people lack wisdom in this age. Eating and talking too much keeps one's soul busy. When a person eats too much, his soul becomes busy for a long time with the digestion of food, because it is the soul that manages the body. Likewise, when a person talks too much, his soul becomes busy. Silence is very much needed for our spiritual progress. If a person can experience silence such that he does not talk and no one else around him talks, this is very good. If this is not possible, he should at least try not to talk when someone else is talking. Of course, it is part of human nature to talk. Indeed, logicians define the human being as the "speaking animal," so talking is an essential human characteristic, but this does not mean that we should talk all the time; one has to know when and where to speak and when and where to keep silent. One of the important qualities of the Prophet

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١. «الْحِكْمَةُ شَجَرَةٌ تَنْبُتُ فِي الْقَلْبِ وَ تُثْمِرُ عَلَى اللِّسَانِ» (Ibid., hadith no. 5).

Muhammad (s) was that he was more willing to listen than to talk. Normally, when a person is more knowledgeable than others and wants to teach and guide them, he speak, but the Prophet (s) still was more willing to listen than to speak, so much so that some people who were shortsighted criticize him:

وَمِنْهُمْ الَّذِينَ يُؤْذُونَ النَّبِيَّ وَيَقُولُونَ هُوَ أُذُنٌ.

Among them are those who torment the Prophet,  
and say, “He is an ear.” (Quran 9:61)

They did not say, “He listens too much”; they said, “He is an ear.” This is a hyperbolic expression, indicating that the Prophet (s) would listen most of the time. In response, God said,

فُلْ أُذُنٌ خَيْرٌ لَّكُمْ.

An ear that is good for you. (Quran 9:61)

He listens to you, because he wants to respect you and give you the opportunity to say what you want; instead of appreciating, are you criticizing him? The Prophet (s) never said to people: “Sorry! Your time is finished”; he never said: “Sorry! I have too many things to do”; he never rushed people and never interrupted them. I think this is itself a miracle: a person to whom Gabriel speaks is willing to listen to the ordinary talk and sometimes the non-sense of the people around him with patience. They used to go to him and call him loudly by his first name, instead of knocking and politely asking for an appointment. They expected him to come out and be ready to listen to them. We read in the Quran:

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ يُنَادُونَكَ مِنْ وَرَاءِ الْحُجُرَاتِ أَكْثَرُهُمْ لَا يَعْقِلُونَ.

Indeed, those who call you from behind the



apartments, most of them do not use their reason.  
(Quran 49:4)

They used to go inside the Prophet's house without asking for permission, and this man was so kind that he (a) did not stop them, so God intervened and said:

لَا تَدْخُلُوا بُيُوتَ النَّبِيِّ إِلَّا أَنْ يُؤْذَنَ لَكُمْ.

Do not enter the Prophet's houses ... until you are granted permission. (Quran 33:53)

When they went inside, they used to remain until the Prophet (s) brings them food. So, if they visited the Prophet (s) at 10 a.m., they would sit till noon to have their lunch there. These were things that annoyed the Prophet (a), but he did not tell them anything, because he did not want to break their hearts. Therefore, scholars and leaders need to be able to listen; it is a great sign of wisdom and progress to be able to listen.

So, according to Hadith al-Mi'raj, less eating and less talking result in more wisdom, even if one is not a believer. If an unbeliever refrains from excessive eating and vain talk, God will teach him some wisdom. This is the reward of his struggle. It is reported that in the time of Imam al-Sadiq (a), a person appeared who could inform people of hidden things, while he was an unbeliever. This made some people doubt their faith; they thought, "If a person without faith can know hidden things, why should we have faith?" So, Imam al-Sadiq (a) went to this person and said: "How have you achieved this power?" The man said: "Whenever I desired something, I did not go after it." So, by resisting his desires, he had gained that power. The Imam (a) told him: "Do you desire to become a Muslim?" He (a) said: "No." The Imam (a) said: "According to your principle, you have to become a Muslim now." The man admitted that the Imam (a) was right, so

he converted to Islam. Then suddenly he lost his special powers and knowledge of the hidden. The Imam (a) told him that this was because previously you had no chance to go to Paradise, because you had no faith in God, so the reward of your struggle and spiritual exercise was to have that power in this world; now that you have faith, your reward is reserved for the hereafter. Unfortunately, many people do not know this. They think if a person has the ability to read people's minds or inform them about hidden matters, he is a very good person. This is not necessarily the case. There may be many people who are much better than that person, and they do not have such a power.

So, even if an unbeliever refrains from excessive eating and talking, he will acquire wisdom, but it will be a burden for him; he will be asked on the Day of Judgment what he did with it. But for a believer, this wisdom will be beneficial; it becomes a light and mercy for him. He will be able to know things that he was not able to know and see things that he was not able to see (Majlisi, 1403 AH., 74:29). The first thing he will be able to see is his own defects:

فَأَوَّلُ مَا أَبْصَرَهُ غُيُوبُ نَفْسِهِ حَتَّى يَشْتَغَلَ عَنْ غُيُوبِ غَيْرِهِ.

The first thing I will make him see is his own defects so that he gets distracted from the defects of others. (Ibid.)

Unfortunately, some people only see the faults of other people, instead of seeing their own problems. This is a sign of going to the wrong direction. Those who are given wisdom focus on their own faults and defects; they do not have time to think about the defects of other people. So, if you ask a wise person about other people, he finds everyone good, not because he cannot find other people's imperfections, but because he does not want to waste his time with investigating about people's lives.

وَأُبَصِّرُهُ دَقَائِقَ الْعِلْمِ.

I will also enable him to understand the subtle points of knowledge. (Ibid.)

So, he will start to understand things that people normally do not understand. He will receive inspirations and become insightful.

حَتَّى لَا يَدْخُلَ عَلَيْهِ الشَّيْطَانُ.

So much so that Satan will not deceive him. (Ibid.)

Satan is very efficient; he does not invest where he knows he cannot succeed. If there is a person who has control over himself, a person who has been able to focus on his own faults and defects, Satan cannot lead such a person astray, so he goes to people who are confident about themselves and think they are very good. These people are the best prey for Satan.

When Satan was expelled from Heaven, he still had the chance to repent, but instead of repenting and asking for forgiveness, he insisted on his transgression; he even said in an impolite manner:

رَبِّ بِمَا أَغْوَيْتَنِي لَأُزَيِّنَنَّ لَهُمْ فِي الْأَرْضِ وَلَأُغْوِيَنَّهُمْ أَجْمَعِينَ.

My Lord! As You have consigned me to perversity, I will surely glamorize [evil] for them on the earth, and I will surely pervert them, all. (Quran 15:39)

He basically said, “Because you misguided me, I will misguide them.” So, he attributed his misdeed to God. In another verse, we read,

قَالَ فَبِعِزَّتِكَ لَأُغْوِيَنَّهُمْ أَجْمَعِينَ إِلَّا عِبَادَكَ مِنْهُمْ الْمُخْلِصِينَ.

He said, “By Your might, I will surely pervert them,

except those servants of you among them that are sincere.” (Quran 38:82)

He cannot deceive those who are sincere, but what about pious people who are not that at the high level of God’s sincere servants? God says in the Qur’an that when Satan and his allies try to deceive the pious, they quickly remember God:

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ اتَّقَوْا إِذَا مَسَّهُمْ طَائِفٌ مِّنَ الشَّيْطَانِ تَذَكَّرُوا فَإِذَا هُمْ مُبْصِرُونَ.

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

When Satan tries to deceive pious and Godwary people, they immediately realize that this is a Satanic temptation; it may come from the mouth of a friend, but it is still Satanic. So, they immediately become alert and see the reality. So, the pious may get very close to being deceived, but they manage to get rid of Satanic temptations.

Imam Ali (a) said:

أَغْلِبِ الشَّهْوَةَ تَكْمُلْ لَكَ الْحِكْمَةُ.

Overcome your lower desires and your wisdom becomes complete. (Mohammadi Rayshahri, 1386 SH, 1:674, hadith no. 2)

In another hadith, Imam Ali (a) said:

كَسْبُ الْحِكْمَةِ إِجْمَالُ النَّطْقِ وَاسْتِعْمَالُ الرَّفْقِ.

Acquiring wisdom is by speaking beautifully or briefly and using moderation. (Ibid., hadith no. 3)

## Conclusion

Ijmaal may mean to beautify or to make it brief. Based on what was mentioned, If a person wants to acquire wisdom, he has to speak beautifully, watch and reduce his words, and be moderate. So, beautiful words and moderation in action are two important requirements of wisdom.

So, according to what we learned so far, wisdom is closely linked to the following virtues: tolerance, moderation, renunciation of worldly pleasure, refraining from excessive eating and talking, and focusing on one's own defects and faults rather than on those of other people.

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