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## **Wisdom - Part IV**

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### **Abstract**



There are many hadiths about wisdom, its definition and significance, things that lead to wisdom, and things that prevents one from gaining wisdom. In this part, we mention some of these hadiths and explain them according to what was mentioned before. In these hadiths, wisdom is depicted and introduced as a garden, a fruitful tree, light, something which gives precedence over the others, something better than worship, and the goal of the believers. Also a wise person is described as one who is very close to a prophet, heals the inquirer, and bestows virtues. He is noble, most patient and has experience.

### **Keywords**

wisdom, wise, Islamic Morality, spirituality.

## Introduction

In the previous parts, we talked about the views of lexicographers as well as the commentators of the Qur'an regarding the meaning of *hikma* (wisdom). Here is a summary of what we found in major Arabic lexicons:

- According to *al-ʿAyn*, wisdom comprises justice, knowledge, and forbearance.
- According to *Majmaʿ al-Bahrayn*, wisdom is a kind of knowledge that stops a person from wrongdoing. Wisdom is to understand, and it is called wisdom because it stops a person from acting ignorantly.
- According to *Mufradat*, wisdom is to be able to discover the truth with knowledge and intelligence. God's wisdom indicates the fact that He knows all things and creates them in the best way; human wisdom means knowing things and doing good actions.
- According to *Lisan al-ʿArab*, wisdom is to know the best things with the best types of knowledge.
- Wisdom is a type of judgment based on true and certain knowledge.

Based on these definitions, we can conclude that wisdom has the following components: knowledge, intelligence, understanding, refraining from wrong actions, finding the truth, decisiveness and certainty, judiciousness, and forbearance.

We also discussed the views of Allamah Tabataba'i and Ayatollah Makarem Shirazi among the commentators of the Qur'an. We said that Allamah Tabataba'i emphasizes truth and benefit as the major elements of wisdom. Accordingly, something which is true but not beneficial for our happiness in this world or the hereafter

has nothing to do with wisdom. So, studying science or philosophy does not necessarily mean acquiring wisdom. Wisdom is a true proposition that helps us in achieving happiness in this world or the hereafter. Ayatollah Makarem Shirazi's emphasis is on knowledge, based on logic and reasoning. Muhammad Reza Hakimi—a contemporary scholar who has many works on Hadith, such as the hadith collection *al-Hayat* in six volumes—says that wisdom is to have knowledge and spiritual education at the same time.

## Major Elements of Wisdom

Based on the previous discussion, the major elements of wisdom mentioned by Muslim scholars are knowledge and being beneficial for our happiness and purification.

So, now, after studying the Qur'anic verses, the views of the commentators and lexicographers, let us survey hadiths in this regard. We had many hadiths about wisdom, its definition and significance, things that lead to wisdom, and things that prevents one from gaining wisdom. The hadiths we will discuss here are taken from the book *Mizan al-Hikmah* (Scale of Wisdom), which is a hadith collection by Ayatollah Reyshahri and a summary of it has been recently translated into English and published in one volume.

The first hadith is from Imam Ali (a):

الحِكْمُ رِیاضُ النُّبَلَاءِ .

Wise ideas are gardens of the nobles. (Muhammadi Rayshahri, 2009, 1: 670, h.3)

When people who are noble and honorable want to enjoy themselves, they do not find their enjoyment just in going on picnics, for instance; rather, they also seek spiritual and mental pleasure, for

which they think, contemplate, and discuss wise ideas. If sometimes you sit with your friends and reflect on wise sayings of Imam Ali (a), you will realize how deeply this will refresh your soul and heart. In a similar hadith, Imam Ali (a) is reported to have said,

الحِكْمَةُ رَوْضَةُ الْعُقْلَاءِ.

Wisdom is the garden of the thoughtful. (*Ibid.*, h. 5)

The next hadith is very important, because it helps us understand the nature of wisdom:

الحِكْمَةُ شَجَرَةٌ تَنْبُتُ فِي الْقَلْبِ وَتُثْمِرُ عَلَى اللِّسَانِ.

Wisdom is a tree that grows in the heart and bears its fruits on the tongue. (*Ibid.*)

So, wisdom is rooted in the heart, but you see its fruits in speech. There is a well-known hadith that is quoted in many hadith sources and has become the origin of the forty-day retreat practice in Islamic spirituality. In this practice, you try to reduce your work for forty days and do everything only for the sake of God. You may do normal things, but you have to be careful about your intention. That hadith says:

مَنْ أَخْلَصَ لِلَّهِ أَرْبَعِينَ صَبَاحاً جَرَتْ يَنَابِيعُ الْحِكْمَةِ مِنْ قَلْبِهِ عَلَى لِسَانِهِ.

He who purifies [his actions, intentions, thoughts, etc.] for the sake of God forty days, the springs of wisdom will gush forth from his heart to his tongue. (*Misbah al-Shari'a*, 1360 SH, 356)

So, purifying oneself for forty days results in wisdom flowing from one's heart to one's tongue. The real place of wisdom is the heart, but it shows itself in someone's talks or acts, and the most obvious way to know whether a person is wise is to listen to his words,

because observing his actions and analyzing them may take time. So, the very first encounter that we have with a wise person is when we listen to him and we find that his sayings make sense and settle your heart and they are very convincing, peaceful, and acceptable. There are certain words that create conflict within you, make you worried, and make you confused, but, sometimes you hear peaceful words, even maybe a person is criticizing you, but, you find peace in what he says, you find it acceptable. So, it's a tree which grows in the heart and bears its fruits on the tongue.

Another hadith from Imam Ali (a) regarding wisdom is the following:

مَنْ عَرَفَ الْحِكْمَ لَمْ يَصْبِرْ عَلَى الْإِزْدِيَادِ مِنْهَا.

He who knows wise ideas wait impatiently to have more of them. (Karajaki, 1410 AH, 1: 319)

When you hear wise ideas, you want to hear more and more and will not be tired of learning them day and night. The sixth hadith is from Jesus (a):

إِنَّ الْحِكْمَةَ نَوْرٌ كُلُّ قَلْبٍ.

Wisdom is the light of every heart. (Harrani, 1404 AH, 512)

So, wisdom resides in the heart and illuminates it. In a hadith from Imam Ali (a) we read:

مِنْ خَزَائِنِ الْغَيْبِ تَظْهَرُ الْحِكْمَةُ.

Wisdom originates from the treasures of the unseen. (Tamimi Amedi, 1410 AH, 58)

Wisdom is always a gift. It is like poetry; skillful poets feel that their poems are not totally their own works; they feel inspired

when composing a poem. Sometimes they sit for hours but cannot compose even one line, and sometimes they compose many lines in a couple of minutes. Wise ideas are the same; you cannot decide to produce ten wise ideas every day, because wisdom is not really from us; it comes from God. This is why Imam Ali (a) says that wisdom is from the treasures of the unseen. (Ibid.)

Luqman, who was a wise man, gave several words of wisdom to his son, some of which are mentioned in the Qur'an in Surah Luqman and some in hadiths. Among the latter is the following:

يَا بُنَيَّ! تَعَلَّمِ الْحِكْمَةَ تَشْرَفْ فَإِنَّ الْحِكْمَةَ تَدُلُّ عَلَى الدِّينِ وَتُشَرِّفُ الْعَبْدَ  
عَلَى الْحُرِّ وَتَرْفَعُ الْمَسْكِينَ عَلَى الْغَنِيِّ وَتَقْدِّمُ الصَّغِيرَ عَلَى الْكَبِيرِ.

My dear son! Learn wisdom so that you gain honor. Wisdom indicates being religious, makes a slave more honorable than his master, makes a poor person superior to a rich one, and gives precedence to a youth over an elder. (Majlisi, 1403 AH, 1: 219; Karajaki, 1410 AH, 2: 66)

But wisdom is not like science or a subject that you can learn, so what Luqman means in this hadith is learning wise views and ideas; otherwise, as we mentioned before, wisdom is a quality that must be given by God as a gift. You can prepare and make yourself qualified for receiving it, but you cannot just learn it. Therefore, he instructs his son to learn wise ideas so as to gain honor. Then he talks about the merits of wisdom: wisdom is a sign of being religious and pious; wisdom makes a slave more honorable than his master; a poor person who has wisdom is better than a rich person who has no wisdom; and a youth who has wisdom is better than an old person without wisdom. So, wisdom gives a high rank and position to whoever has it.

Prophet Muhammad (s) is reported to have said,

كَلِمَةُ الْحِكْمَةِ يَسْمَعُهَا الْمُؤْمِنُ خَيْرٌ مِنْ عِبَادَةِ سَنَةٍ.

A word of wisdom which a believer hears is better than one year of worship. (Majlisi, 1403 AH, 74: 174)

This is very amazing. You are probably familiar with the well-known hadith according to which an hour of contemplation and thinking is better than worshipping one year or sixty years. (Ibid., 68: 327) So, in this hadith, we read that if you spend some time listening to words of wisdom, it will be better for you than worshipping for one year, because sometimes one word of wisdom can change your entire life or the life of the community. Of course, this is not to undervalue worship; rather, it is to say that, apart from worshipping, you must have this time and chance of receiving wisdom.

Now, let us survey some hadiths about people who have wisdom. According to the first hadith, the Prophet (s) said:

كَأَدَ الْحَكِيمِ أَنْ يَكُونَ نَبِيًّا.

A wise person is very close to being a prophet. (Muhammadi Reyshahri, 2009, 1: 670)

In other words, people who have wisdom are second in rank after prophets. They do not receive revelation, but they receive wisdom from God. So, if you do not have access to prophets, you can benefit from people who have wisdom.

In another hadith, Imam Ali (a) is reported to have said:

الْحَكِيمُ يَشْفِي السَّائِلَ وَيَجُودُ بِالْفَضَائِلِ.

A wise person heals the inquirer and bestows virtues. (Ibid.)

Accordingly, a wise person not only answers the questions but also heals the inquirers. A person who asks a question often needs more than just an answer—he needs someone who can heal him and give him peace, and this is what a wise person does.

In another hadith, we read,

الْحُكَمَاءُ أَشْرَفُ النَّاسِ أَنْفُسًا وَأَكْثَرُهُمْ صَبْرًا وَأَسْرَعُهُمْ عَفْوَاً وَأَوْسَعُهُمْ أَخْلَاقاً.

Wise people are the noblest, most patient, quickest in forgiveness, and most cordial of people. (Ibid.)

These hadiths are very important, because they also help us understand what wisdom is and what its fruits are. According to this hadith, those who have wisdom are the noblest people; their patience is more than anyone else; they forgive other people more quickly than anyone else does; they are friendlier than anyone else; and they can easily socialize with people and befriend them.

According to another hadith, the Prophet (s) said:

لَا حَلِيمَ إِلَّا ذُو عَثْرَةٍ وَلَا حَكِيمَ إِلَّا ذُو تَجَرِبَةٍ.

No forbearing person is without a mistake, and no wise person is without experience. (Ibid., 671)

The first part of this hadith tells us that one who is forbearing with others' mistakes sometimes himself makes mistakes, and the second part—which is important for us here—indicates that an essential characteristic of wise people is that they have experience. We have mentioned in our previous discussions that knowledge alone is never enough; for example, you cannot bring a new graduate of a medical school and make him or her the head of a hospital, even if that person is a genius. Now this hadith emphasizes that no one can have wisdom without experience. In



order to become a wise person, you need to be in different situations, meet different people, travel to many places, and see various cultures. Without this, you will never attain wisdom.

In a hadith attributed to Imam Ali (a), we read:

أَعْيَى مَا يَكُونُ الْحَكِيمُ إِذَا خَاطَبَ سَفِيهًا.

The most difficult time for a wise person is when he addresses a fool. (Ibid.)

It is really difficult to deal with a foolish person who refuses to think; it is easier to interact with animals than to deal with a fool, because you don't expect anything from an animal, but a fool listens to you and you think they have understood, but then you realize that they did not understand anything. So, for a wise person, dealing with irrational people is the most challenging task.

There are many hadiths that speak of wisdom as something belonging to believers, which they should attain wherever they find it. Imam Ali (a), for instance, is reported to have said:

الْحِكْمَةُ ضَالَّةُ الْمُؤْمِنِ، فَاطْلُبُوهَا وَلَوْ عِنْدَ الْمُشْرِكِ تَكُونُوا أَحَقَّ بِهَا وَأَهْلُهَا.

Wisdom is the goal of the believer's persistent search. Therefore, look for it, even if it is with a polytheist, so that you be more entitled to it and be its people. (Ibid.)

Wisdom is something which belongs to believers, but if you don't know where it is, look for it everywhere. If you lose something, you go to every direction, you ask people, so do the same with wisdom. Even if you find it with an atheist, a non-Muslim, go and learn it from him. It belongs to you; don't say: "I only want to learn it from my own people." Of course, some people are not adequately learned and may get confused if they seek wisdom from unreliable

people and may be misguided instead of acquiring wisdom. But those who are able to understand and make distinction between what is right and wrong should seek wisdom wherever they find it; such people should seek wisdom even if it is taught by a non-Muslim, because Islam instructs us that knowledge and wisdom are to be acquired, no matter in which part of the world or from whom. The Prophet (s) is reported to have said,

أَطْلُبُوا الْعِلْمَ وَلَوْ بِالصَّيْنِ.

Seek knowledge even if in China! (Majlisi, 1403 AH, 1: 177)

China was not a Muslim land at the time of the Prophet (s); no Muslims lived in China at that time, but the Prophet (s) said that if you need to go there to acquire knowledge, go and learn. In Islam, there are no limits for learning, neither in terms of place nor in terms of time:

أَطْلُبُوا الْعِلْمَ مِنَ الْمَهْدِ إِلَى اللَّحْدِ.

Seek knowledge from the cradle to the grave.  
(Payandeh, 218)

Muslims should be open-minded; they should learn from everyone and also share what they have learned with everyone. We don't say, "We keep knowledge for ourselves and don't teach you." Muslims have always regarded spreading knowledge as a kind of paying zakat; they have always shared their knowledge with other human beings; they never tried to have a monopoly on knowledge and keep certain things for themselves.

In another hadith, Imam Ali (a) is reported to have said:

الْحِكْمَةُ ضَالَّةُ الْمُؤْمِنِ فَخُذِ الْحِكْمَةَ وَلَوْ مِنْ أَهْلِ التَّفَاقِ.

Wisdom is the goal of the believer's persistent search. Therefore, obtain it even from the people of hypocrisy! (Muhammadi Reyshahri, 2009, 1: 671)

So, even if you find wisdom with a hypocrite, go and learn it! According to another hadith, the Imam (a) said:

حُذِرَ الْحِكْمَةُ أَيُّ كَانَتْ فَإِنَّ الْحِكْمَةَ تَكُونُ فِي صَدْرِ الْمُنَافِقِ فَتَلْجُجُ فِي صَدْرِهِ حَتَّى تَخْرُجَ فَتَسْكُنَ إِلَى صَوَاحِبِهَا فِي صَدْرِ الْمُؤْمِنِ.

Take wisdom wherever it is. Sometimes wisdom is in the breast of a hypocrite, and it moves in his breast until it comes out and settles with its companions in the heart of a believer. (Ibid.)

Jesus is also reported to have said that just like you do not discard an oil lamp in a dark night because of its bad smell, you should not refrain from getting wisdom from someone who is not interested in wisdom. (Ibid.) Along the same lines, Imam al-Sajjad (a) reportedly said that if you find a very special, expensive, rare pearl in a dirty place, you should not be disinterested in it; rather, you should keep it and clean it, because it is valuable. (Ibid.)

And, finally, according to a hadith from Prophet Muhammad (s):

كَلِمَةُ الْحِكْمَةِ ضَالَّةُ الْمُؤْمِنِ فَحَيْثُ وَجَدَهَا فَهُوَ أَحَقُّ بِهَا.

A word of wisdom is the goal of the believer's persistent search. So, wherever he finds it, he is more entitled to it. (Ibid.)

Therefore, from the hadiths we discussed above, we learn that wisdom is very valuable; it is something which elevates a person to a rank close to prophets; it is placed in the heart, but manifests

its fruit in one's words and sayings; wisdom is the light of the heart; it comes with experience; it makes a person virtuous, especially in terms of patience, forgiveness, lenience.

We will discuss more hadiths in the next part of this discussion, but I would like to conclude this part with some hadiths related to the Qur'anic verses we discussed earlier. The first hadith is related to the following verse:

﴿فَقَدْ آتَيْنَا آلَ إِبْرَاهِيمَ الْكِتَابَ وَالْحِكْمَةَ﴾

We gave the family of Ibrahim, the book and wisdom. (*Qur'an* 4: 54)

Imam al-Sadiq (a) is reported to have said that wisdom in this verse means understanding and judiciousness. (*Kulayni*, 1407AH, 1: 206) The next hadith is regarding the following verse:

﴿وَلَقَدْ آتَيْنَا لُقْمَانَ الْحِكْمَةَ أَنْ اشْكُرْ لِلَّهِ وَمَنْ يَشْكُرْ فَإِنَّمَا يَشْكُرُ لِنَفْسِهِ وَمَنْ كَفَرَ فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ غَنِيٌّ حَمِيدٌ﴾

Certainly, We gave Luqman wisdom, saying, "Give thanks to Allah; and whoever gives thanks, gives thanks only for his own sake. And whoever is ungrateful, [let him know that] Allah is indeed all-sufficient, all-laudable. (*Qur'an* 31: 12)

It is reported, as mentioned, that Imam al-Kazim (a) said that wisdom in this verse means reason and understanding (*Kulayni*, 1407 AH, 1: 16) and Imam al-Baqir (a) said that it refers to knowledge. (*Majlisi*, 1403 AH, 1: 215) Therefore, understanding, reason, knowledge, and judiciousness are all related to wisdom. There is no single word that can reveal all the aspects of wisdom, and this is why we see different interpretations and elements of wisdom in various hadiths. We have to put all these elements together and analyze

them. In the following parts, we will try to accomplish this task and put forward an accurate definition of wisdom based on Qur'anic verses and hadiths.

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