

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

IN THE NAME OF ALLAH,
THE ALL-BENEFCENT, THE ALL-MERCIFUL

قَالَ اللَّهُ تَعَالَى:

﴿إِنَّمَا يُرِيدُ اللَّهُ لِيُذْهِبَ عَنْكُمُ الرِّجْسَ أَهْلَ الْبَيْتِ وَيُطَهِّرَكُمْ تَطْهِيرًا﴾

Indeed, Allah desires to repel all impurity from you, O People of the Household, and purify you with a thorough purification.

(Sūrat al-Ah zāb 33:33)

Prophetic traditions, mentioned in most reliable Sunnī and Shī'ite reference books of *h adīth* and *tafsīr* (Qur'anic exegesis), confirm that this holy verse was revealed to exclusively involve the five People of the Cloak; namely, Muh ammad, 'Alī, Fāt imah, al-H asan, and al-H usayn, peace be upon them, to whom the term 'Ahl al-Bayt (People of the House)' is solely dedicated.

For instance, refer to the following references:

(1) Ah mad ibn H anbal (d. 241 AH), *Al-Musnad*, 1:331; 4:107; 6:292, 304. (2) *S ah īh Muslim* (d. 261 AH), 7:130. (3) Al-Tirmidhī (d. 279 AH), *Sunan*, 5:361 et al. (4) Al-Dūlābī (d. 310 AH), *Al-Dhurriyyah al-T āhirah al-Nabawiyyah*, p. 108. (5) Al-Nassā'ī (d. 303 AH), *Al-Sunan al-Kubrā'*, 5: p. 108, 113. (6) Al-H ākim al-Naysābūrī (d. 405 AH), *Al-Mustadrak 'alā al-S ah īh ayn*, 2:416, 3:133, 146, 147. (7) Al-Zarkāshī (d. 794 AH), *Al-Burhān*, p. 197. (8) Ibn Hājar al-Asqalānī (d. 852), *Fath al-Barī Sharh S ah īh al-Bukhārī*, 7:104.

As for Shī'ite reference books of *h adīth*, refer to the following references:

(1) Al-Kulaynī (d. 328 AH), *Us ūl al-Kāfī*, 1:287. (2) Ibn Bābawayh (d. 329 AH), *Al-Imāmah wa al-Tabs irah*, p. 47, H . 29. (3) Al-Maghribī (d. 363 AH), *Da'ā'im al-Islām*, pp. 35, 37. (4) Al-S adūq (d. 381 AH), *Al-Khis āl*, pp. 403, 550. (5) Al-T ūsī (d. 460 AH), *Al-Amālī*, H . 438, 482, 783.

For more details, refer to the exegesis of the holy verse involved in the following reference books of *tafsīr*: (1) Al-T abarī (d. 310 AH), *Book of Tafsīr*. (2) Al-Jassāss (d. 370 AH), *Ah kām al-Qur'ān*. (3) Al-Wah īdī (d. 468 AH), *Asbāb al-Nuzūl*. (4) Ibn al-Jawzī (d. 597 AH), *Zād al-Mas īr*. (5) Al-Qurt ubī (d. 671 AH), *Al-Jāmi' li-Ah kām al-Qur'ān*. (6) Ibn Kathīr (d. 774 AH), *Book of Tafsīr*. (7) Al-Tha'ālibī (d. 825 AH), *Book of Tafsīr*. (8) Al-Suyūt ī (d. 911 AH), *Al-Durr al-Manthūr*. (9) Al-Shawkanī (d. 1250 AH), *Fath al-Qadīr*. (10) Al-'Ayyāshī (d. 320 AH), *Book of Tafsīr*. (11) Al-Qummī (d. 329 AH), *Book of Tafsīr*. (12) Furt al-Kūfī (d. 352 AH), *Book of Tafsīr*; in the margin of the exegesis of verse 4:59. (13) Al-T abrisī (d. 560 AH), *Majma' al-Bayān*, as well as many other reference books of *h adīth* and *tafsīr*.

JOURNEY OF LOVE
AN EXPOSITION OF THE
MI'RĀJ TRADITION

قَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ 3:

إِنِّي تَارِكٌ فِيكُمْ الثَّقَلَيْنِ: كِتَابَ اللَّهِ وَعِزَّتِي أَهْلَ بَيْتِي، مَا إِنَّ تَمَسَّكْتُمْ بِهِمَا لَنْ تَضِلُّوا بَعْدِي أَبَدًا، وَإِنَّهُمَا لَنْ يَفْتَرِقَا حَتَّى يَرِدَا عَلَيَّ الْحَوْزَ .

The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said:

“Verily, I am leaving among you two precious things [*Thaqalayn*]: The Book of Allah and my progeny [*Itrah*], the members of my Household [*Ahl al-Bayt*]. If you hold fast to them, you shall never go astray. These two will never separate from each other until they meet me at the Pond [*al-awqaf*] (of *Kawthar*).”

Some of its references:

Al-°j̄kim an-Nayshj̄b̄f̄r̄ç, *Al-Mustadrak ‘alij̄ aš-‘a’ç’ayn* (Beirut), vol. 3, pp. 109-10, 148, 533.

Muslim, *Aš-‘a’ç’ayn*, (English translation), book 31, *‘adçths* 5920-3.

At-Tirmidhç, *Aš-‘a’ç’ayn*, vol. 5, pp. 621-2, *‘adçths* 3786, 3788; vol. 2, p. 219.

An-Nassj̄’ç, *Khašj̄’iç ‘Alç ibn Abç ±j̄lib*, *‘adçth* 79.

Aj̄mad ibn °anbal, *Al-Musnad*, vol. 3, pp. 14, 17, 26; vol. 3, pp. 26, 59; vol. 4, p. 371; vol. 5, pp. 181-82, 189-90.

Ibn al-Athçr, *J̄imi‘ al-‘Uççl*, vol. 1, p. 277.

Ibn Kathçr, *Al-Bidjyah wa’n-Nihjyah*, vol. 5, p. 209.

Ibn Kathçr, *Tafsçr al-Qur’jn al-‘Açm*, vol. 6, p. 199.

Nj̄çir ad-Dçn al-Albanç, *Silsilat al-Aj̄dçth aç-ça’ç’ah* (Kuwait: *Ad-Dār as-Salafiyyah*), vol. 4, pp. 355-8.

JOURNEY OF LOVE
AN EXPOSITION OF THE MI‘RĀJ
TRADITION

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Transliteration Symbols

<u>Symbol</u>	<u>Transliteration</u>	<u>Symbol</u>	<u>Transliteration</u>
ء	'	أ	a
ب	B	ت	t
ث	th	ج	j
ح	ḥ	خ	kh
د	D	ذ	dh
ر	R	ز	z
س	S	ش	sh
ص	ṣ	ض	ḍ
ط	ṭ	ظ	ẓ
ع	'	غ	gh
ف	F	ق	q
ك	K	ل	l
م	M	ن	n
هـ	H	و	w
ي	Y	ة	ah
<u>Long Vowels</u>		<u>Short Vowels</u>	
آ	Ā	ـَ	a
ای	Ī	ـِ	i
او	Ū	ـُ	u
Persian Letters			
<u>Symbol</u>	<u>Transliteration</u>	<u>Symbol</u>	<u>Transliteration</u>
پ	P	چ	ch
ژ	Zh	گ	g

PREFACE



The preservation of the precious legacy left behind by the Holy Prophet's Household [*ahl al-bayt*] (may peace be upon them all) by their followers from the menace of extinction is exemplified by an all-encompassing school [*maktab*], which covers all the different branches of Islamic knowledge and trains sincere seekers of the truth. It has on its list of scholars many talented personalities who have benefited from this immense wealth of knowledge. This school has presented scholars to the Muslim *ummah* who, by following the Holy Prophet's Household ('*a*), have been granted the authority to remove doubts and skepticism encountered by various creeds and intellectual trends both inside and outside the Muslim society, and have throughout the past centuries, presented the firmest answers and solutions to these doubts.

Anchored in the responsibilities it is shouldering, the Ahl al-Bayt ('*a*) World Assembly has embarked upon defending the sanctity of *risālah* [apostleship] and its authentic beliefs—truths which have always been opposed by chiefs and leaders of anti-Islamic sects, religions and trends. The Assembly regards itself as a follower of the upright pupils of the *Ahl al-Bayt's* ('*a*) school—those who have always, based on the expediencies of time and space, logically refuted all accusations and been foremost in their efforts to clarify all misunderstandings and misinterpretations.

The empirical knowledge preserved in their books (of the scholars of the *Ahl al-Bayt's* ('*a*) school) is unique because it is based upon intellect and reasoning, devoid of any iota of blind prejudice, whims or caprice. It addresses experts, scholars and thinkers in a manner that is acceptable to a healthy human mind [*fiṭrah*].

In order to disseminate the truth, the Ahl al-Bayt ('*a*) World Assembly has included this valuable knowledge within the framework of research and writing of contemporary Shī'ah writers or those who, through Divine guidance, embrace this noble school.

This Assembly is also engaged in the study and publication of valuable works of pious predecessors and outstanding Shī'ah personalities so that seekers of truth can quench their thirst from this refreshing fountain of knowledge offered by the Holy Prophet's Household (‘a) as a gift to the entire world.

It is hoped that our readers do not deprive the Ahl al-Bayt (‘a) World Assembly of their valuable views and suggestions as well as constructive criticism in this arena.

We also invite scholars, translators and other institutions to assist us in propagating the pure Muḥammadan Islam.

We ask God the Exalted, to accept this trivial effort and enhance it further under the auspices of His vicegerent on earth, Ḥadīrat al-Mahdī (may Allah the Exalted, expedite his glorious advent).

We express our utmost gratitude to Professor Āyatullāh Muḥammad Taqī Miṣbāḥ Yazdī for writing the book, Mr. Sayyid Īraj Rāz for translating it, and all our honorable colleagues, especially the dear ones in the Translation Office for accomplishing this task. ?

Cultural Affairs Department

Ahl al-Bayt (‘a) World Assembly

INTRODUCTION



Nothing but Divine illumination can brighten up the mirror of man's innermost soul; nothing but the elixir of the Lord's Word can purify the heart; nothing save the pure spiritual drink can quench the burning thirst in man's primordial nature; and, nothing other than the Friend's banquet of union can provide man's restless phoenix with composure "*in the seat of honor with a most Powerful King*" (54:55).¹ The messengers of God have each been a light, illuminating man's course of progress from dust to God and from the terrestrial sphere to the celestial kingdom. God's messengers have uncovered the essence of wisdom [*h ikmah*] and the reality of knowledge [*ma'rifah*] in the pearl of revelation [*wah y*], and in their Divine books have committed to writing every single line that serves in the ascension of terrestrial man. Having recognized that man's real ascension lies in becoming a servant of God, the Exalted, they sincerely invited man to His Proximity:

"O peaceful soul! Return to your Lord; well-pleased (with Him), well-pleasing (Him)." The joy one finds as a result of having faith in God, the Exalted, is doubtless superior to all other joys. That is why God's saints [*awliyā'*] are never willing to exchange with anything else, their trust in God, their satisfaction with His decision, their asceticism, piety and detachment from the world: "*So, no soul knows what is hidden for them of that which will refresh the eyes.*" (32:17)

The present book is a collection of moral lessons that the righteous and meritorious master Āyatullāh Hāj Shaykh Muḥammad Taqī Mīr bāh Yazdī has taught in the Qum Theological Center. These lessons are eloquent expositions of the well-known *Hādīth al-Mi'rāj*, as recorded in Daylamī's *Irshād al-Qulūb* and Majlisī's *Bihār al-Anwār*. This Divine tradition

1- In this volume, the translation of Qur'anic passages is adapted from Sayyid 'Alī Qulī Qarā'ī, *The Qur'an with a Phrase-by-Phrase English Translation* (London: Islamic College for Advanced Studies Press, 2004). [Trans.]

[*h adīth-e qudsī*] offers a course in gnosticism and Islamic philosophy, with practical instructions in ethics and spirituality, unequalled by any other material available.

We hope that this book will benefit the perceiving readers, and will be accepted by God, the Exalted, and the Master of the Age (may God, the Exalted, hasten his glorious advent).

**Imām Khomeinī Educational and
Research Institute**

Discourse 1

The Stations of Satisfaction and Trust in God

روي عن امير المؤمنين عليه السّلام إنّ النَّبِيَّ صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَآلِهِ سَأَلَ رَبَّهُ فِي لَيْلَةِ
المعراج، فَقَالَ: يَا رَبِّ أَيُّ الْأَعْمَالِ أَفْضَلُ؟ فَقَالَ اللهُ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ: لَيْسَ شَيْءٌ عِنْدِي
أَفْضَلُ مِنَ التَّوَكُّلِ عَلَيَّ وَالرِّضَى بِمَا قَسَمْتُ.

“It is related from the Commander of the Faithful (‘a),¹ that he said, ‘On the night of his ascension, the Prophet (s),² asked God, ‘My Lord, which deed is the most excellent?’ Allah the All-mighty and Honorable, answered, ‘With me, nothing is more excellent than having trust in Me and being satisfied with what I have apportioned’.”³

The above quote has been taken from the *H adīth al-Mi‘rāj*, a report of the Noble Prophet’s ascension, in which the Prophet (s) asks his questions and God answers him. Many of the narrations relating the superiority of certain deeds concern what the body limbs and organs perform; that is, the physical aspect. However, the scope of performance has, in the above *Mi‘rāj* Narration, been widened to include the affairs of the heart for which the soul is somehow at work. These spiritual affairs, though totally unobservable because they occur deep within the heart, consequently effect physical behavior and thus become observable acts.

1- The abbreviation, “‘a” stands for the Arabic invocative phrase, ‘*alayhi’s-salām*, ‘*alayhim’us-salām*, or ‘*alayhā’s-salām* [may peace be upon him/them/her], which is mentioned after the names of the prophets, angels, Imāms from the Prophet’s progeny, and saints (‘a). [Trans.]

2- The abbreviation, “s ”, stands for the Arabic invocative phrase, *s allallāhu ‘alayhi wa ālihī wa sallam* [may God’s blessings and peace be upon him and his progeny], which is mentioned after the name of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (s). [Trans.]

3- Daylamī, *Irshād al-Qulūb*, vol. 1, Section [bāb] 54, p. 199; Majlisī, *Bihār al-Anwār*, vol. 77, p. 21.

The reality of trust as the Qur'an views it

Tawakkul [trust], from the root word *wikālah*, connotes taking God as a sure point of reliance and entrusting our affairs completely to Him.¹ There are many verses in the glorious Qur'an that deal with *tawakkul*, of which, a few are mentioned as an explication of its meaning and reality, leaving further research to another occasion.

God, the Glorious, considers 'trust' and 'belief' [*īmān*] as two inseparable concomitants,

*"And in Allah should the believers trust."*²

Elsewhere He says,

*"And on Allah you should rely if you are believers."*³

In another verse, He calls 'trust' and 'reliance on God' an outstanding attribute of believers, saying,

*"Those only are believers whose hearts become full of fear when Allah is mentioned, and when His revelations are recited to them they increase them in faith, and in their Lord do they trust."*⁴

Elsewhere, trust is more emphatically explained as follows,

*"The Lord of the East and the West—there is no god, but He—therefore take Him for a protector."*⁵

The phrase "*The Lord of the East and the West*" refers to His authority [*h ākimīyyah*] and Lordship [*rubūbiyyah*] over the universe, to His sovereignty over the totality of existence, and to all praise being due only to Him. How can one not have trust in Him, and not choose Him—to whom all affairs may be left—as a sure point of reliance? If we remember God, rely

1- It is related that the Holy Prophet (ﷺ) asked Gabriel the meaning of trust. Gabriel answered, "The knowledge that people cannot cause harm or bring benefit, cannot grant something or prevent it, and that one must abandon hope in people. When a servant of God has attained such a rank, he will work for the sake of no one else but for God, he will place no hope in anyone except Allah, the Almighty, he will fear no one except Allah, the Exalted, and he will not long for what others have but for what Allah, the Omnipotent, has. This is the very trust in God." *Bihār al-Anwār*, vol. 68, p. 138, *hādīth* 23.

2- *Sūrat Āl 'Imrān* 3:122.

3- *Sūrat al-Mā'idah* 5:23.

4- *Sūrat al-Anfāl* 8:2.

5- *Sūrat al-Muzzmil* 73:9.

on Him, and strengthen our soul by thinking about Him, we will surely have permanently-fresh gardens, in perpetual bloom, within us,

در دل ما لاله زار و گلشنی است
پیری و فرسودگی را راه
نیست

*Deep within us is a tulip-field and a garden,
In which senility and exhaustion find no entrance.*

It is then that one will seek no superiority for himself, and will disregard this world and the next. Hāfiz, the poet, says,

در ضمیر ما نمی‌گنجد بغیر از دوست کس
هر دو عالم را به دشمن ده
که ما را دوست بس

*We do not have it in mind to be after anything but the Friend,
Give the two worlds to the foe, for the Friend is enough for us.*

Elsewhere, he also says,

نیست در لوح دلم جز الف قامت یار
چه کنم حرف دگر یاد
نداد استادم

*There is nothing on my heart tablet but the Friend's stature,
What shall I do! My instructor taught me nothing but this.*

Just as we choose a trustee [*wakīl*] to handle our material affairs to ensure that we will gain the best results, so should a God's servant rely on God in all his affairs, and take Him as his trustee for the granting of his requests, without worrying at all.

There are three options to choose from when one desires to have his needs fulfilled:

- a) He may rely on himself.
- b) He may trust others and pin hopes on them.
- c) He may rely on God and disregard others.

The worst solution will be to take others as a sure point to depend on. Such an attitude encourages one to live as a parasite on society, which is religiously and psychologically undesirable and even irrational. Such a

tendency, if adopted, turns one into a person deprived of the sacred feeling of freedom from others

The first solution, “self-confidence”, as psychology calls it, has both affirmative and negative sides; the former denoting complete autonomy. This is highly recommended by psychology, but unacceptable in monotheistic culture, because the more one comes to know himself and God, the more he realizes his inability and helplessness.

All one's power and energy comes from God, bestowed by Allah, the Majestic. How can one depend on the faltering and instable power he has when he knows for certain that his existence and all that is put at his disposal belong to God, and that he has never been the real possessor, nor will ever be.

Man's trust and confidence in God come from his knowledge in the Divine Lordship. When one acknowledges God as the Real Possessor in whose hand lies his being, he will not see it necessary to spread his palm before others.

Adhering to the negative dimension is praiseworthy, as “being independent of others” is lauded by psychology and monotheistic culture. Also, there are many highly valuable Qur'anic verses and words of the infallible Imāms (‘a) emphasizing that dependence on any being other than God will produce despair and disappointment. In fact, the verses exemplified below refer to a certain kind of “unity in reliance on God”.

Since man has the Ever-living God as a confident point of reliance and a shelter, there is no need for him to depend on others. God, the Exalted, has said,

*“And rely on the Ever-living who dies not.”*¹

Elsewhere, God says,

*“Therefore rely on Allah; surely you are on the clear path.”*²

Why should one ever turn to other than God when God is present? Are God's favors not sufficient? As such, God says,

*“Isn't Allah Sufficient for His servants?”*³

Elsewhere, He says,

1- *Sūrat al-Furqān* 25:58.

2- *Sūrat al-Naml* 27:79.

3- *Sūrat al-Zumar* 30:36.

“Shall I take a guardian besides Allah, the Originator of the heavens and the earth?”¹

It is only He who averts all losses and afflictions; surely, all goodness comes from Him to His servant:

“And if Allah visits you with affliction, there is none to take it off but He; and if He visits you with good, then He has power over all things.”²

God will be sufficient for anyone who relies on Him and takes him as a shelter. God, the Exalted, says in the Holy Qur’an,

“And whoever trusts in Allah, He is sufficient for him; surely Allah attains His purpose; Allah indeed has appointed a measure for everything.”³

Addressing the Holy Prophet (s), God says,

“Say: Allah is sufficient for me; on Him do the reliant rely.”⁴

Trust as explained by the Infallibles (‘a)

Imām al-Baqir (‘a) says,

“Anyone who has confidence in Allah will not be dominated, and anyone who seeks the sanctuary of Allah will not be vanquished.”⁵

When asking for something, man should put his trust in God, because the ordinary means put at our disposal are effective only to the extent God has assigned them. They are not independent in their effect, as people may imagine they are, because the disposition and effect of everything is in God’s hand. Imām al-Sādiq (‘a) is reported to have said,

“If anyone of you wishes to ask his Lord to grant his request, he should abandon all hope he has in people, and should know that needs are fulfilled by no one except God.”⁶

The book *‘Iddah al-Dā’ī* reports that Imām al-Sādiq (‘a) has quoted the Holy Prophet (s) as saying that Allah inspired one of His prophets thus,

1- *Sūrat al-An‘ām* 6:14.

2- *Sūrat al-An‘ām* 6:17.

3- *Sūrat al-Tālāq* 65:3.

4- *Sūrat al-Zumar* 39:38.

5- *Mustadrak al-Wasā’il*, vol. 2, p. 288.

6- *Misbāh al-Sharī‘ah*, p. 134.

“I swear by my Might and Majesty that I will disappoint all those who have hope in other than Me, and I will clothe them in the garment of lowliness among people, and I will drive them far away from My relief and bounty. Does my servant have hope in others at the time of affliction, while afflictions are in my hand? Does he expect from others while I am the All-rich, the Generous? In My hand are the keys to the locked doors, and My door is open to the one who supplicates.”¹

Another narration from Imām al-S ādiq (‘a) repeats and further elucidates the above. H usayn ibn ‘Ulwān says,

“I was sitting in a gathering to acquire knowledge. My trip expenses had finished. A friend asked, ‘On whom do you depend (to have your problem solved)?’

“I said, ‘On such and such a person.’

“He said, ‘I swear by God that your request will not be granted. You will not achieve your desire; it will not be fulfilled.’

“‘May God embrace you in His mercy! How do you know it?’ Asked H usayn ibn ‘Ulwān, greatly surprised at hearing him swear by God.

“He said, ‘I heard Imām al-S ādiq (‘a) say, he had read the following in a certain book: God, the Almighty said, ‘I swear by My might, Majesty and Sovereignty over the Throne that I will disappoint anyone who places his hope in other than Me. I will clothe him in the garment of lowliness among people, and drive him far from My nearness and disrupt the tie he has with Me’.”

God continues:

“I fashion hardships for My servant, and only in My hand is the power to bring it about or to remove it. Then, how can he stretch his begging hand towards others and place his hope on those who have had no share in causing the affliction to appear, nor do they have the ability to remove it?”

“Does he expect (help) from other than Me in afflictions while afflictions are in my hand? Does he expect from others and in his mind knock at My door, while in My hand are the keys to the locked doors for the one who supplicates?”

1- Quoted from *Tafsīr al-Mīzān* while interpreting verse 186 of *Sūrat al-Baqarah*.

“Who is the one whom I disappointed when he came to me at the time of affliction?”

“Who is the one who expectantly has hopes in Me and I have cut off his expectation?”

“I safeguarded My servants’ desires dear to Me, but they were not satisfied with My protecting their desires (it is thus known that they were not happy taking Me as their Lord, or they did not have trust in Me, otherwise, they would not have turned to others) ...and I filled My heaven with those who do not weary of glorifying Me (i.e. the angels), and I ordered them not to lock the doors between Me and My servants. However, they (My servants) did not have confidence in My words.”

“Don’t the afflicted (who have hope in others) know that no one is able to remove the afflictions except by My permission?”

*“And if Allah should afflict you with harm, then there is none to remove it but He; and if He intends good to you there is none to repel His grace...”*¹

“Then how is it that he turns away from Me? I bestowed him out of My generosity that which he had not asked for; next, I took it from him and he did not ask Me to return it to him, but asked someone other than Me.”

Without being requested, God has freely provided man with countless bounties such as, a sound body, healthy eyes and ears, father, mother, friends, and teachers. He has even provided nourishment in the mother’s breast before a child is born. To test him, God takes some of these bounties away; but His creatures turn to someone else, not to the One who originally bestowed the bounties on them.

“When I continuously bestow without being asked, will I not answer when I am requested?”

“Am I stingy as My servant assumes Me to be?”

“Do generosity and munificence not come from Me?”

“Are forgiveness and mercy not in My hand?”

“Am I not the place of desires?”

“Then who can cut them off other than I?”

1- *Sūrat Yūnus* 10:107.

“Do those who hopefully expect other than Me not fear (if I punish them by cutting off their hope, or by driving them away from My proximity or by depriving them of My bounties)? If the inhabitants of My heavens and the inhabitants of My earth put together desire (something), and I bestow each one of them all they hope for collectively, this will not decrease My kingdom as little as an ant’s limb. How can a kingdom whose guardian is Me decrease?”

Such bestowal is certainly not difficult for God. He creates everything through His command,

*“His command, when He intends a thing, is only to say to it, ‘Be,’ and it is.”*¹

*“Woe to those who despair of My mercy, and woe to the one who disobeys Me and does not fear Me.”*²

The narration reported above strongly rebukes depending on others and pinning hope on them because these are incompatible with “the spirit of monotheism”.

“Self-confidence”, however, is much favored these days: psychology has recognized it and greatly emphasized it as a positive trend; books have been written on it, and people have been urged to establish it in themselves. The harms and disadvantages of depending on others have also been mentioned. It has been considered logically good to have confidence in one’s own ability. Such a tendency is, nevertheless, blamed from “the monotheistic” viewpoint because what we have is lent to us; God owns it all. Can we anticipate enjoying what we are trusted with when we do not know whether or not the Owner of the property will decide to take it back?

This concept (trust in and reliance on God) has been praised in many of the Qur’anic verses; those who rely on God have even been promised God’s sufficiency:

*“And whoever trusts in Allah, He is sufficient for him.”*³

*“Is not Allah sufficient for His servant?”*⁴

If we believe in “the Divine Lordship” and take Him as the Lord, the Owner, the Sovereign in whose power lies the existence He has created, it will be unworthy if we turn to someone else.

1- *Sūrat Yā-Sīn* 36:82.

2- *Us ūl al-Kāfi*, vol. 3, p. 107, *Bāb al-Tafwīdu ilā Allāh wa’t-Tawakkulu ‘alayh, h adīth* 7; *Bih ār al-Anwār*, vol. 71, p. 130.

3- *Sūrat al-T alāq* 65:3.

4- *Sūrat al-Zumar* 39:36.

One of our professors said,

“A son of our neighbor’s was sitting by their home when a beggar accosted him, ‘Ask your mother to give me some bread.’ The boy promptly replied, ‘Ask your own mother for it’, as if he knew that one should go to one’s mother for his needs to be fulfilled. If our true knowledge of God is as much as this boy’s knowledge concerning the mother who supplies her child’s needs, we will not turn to others. Why should we ever do so when God is the kindest and the most powerful?”

Trust as a requirement for belief in God

Foremost in most Prophets’ religious call is their inviting people to believe in God and rely on Him. One sign of belief in God is having trust in Him. When we acknowledge God’s lordship and believe that the world of existence is, in its totality, under His domination and that He is the only Worshipped to whom all praise is due, we will never allow ourselves to turn to someone else for assistance; rather, we will always rely on God, the Honorable, and seek His help. If we are sick or in trouble, we will merely pin our hopes on Him and expect Him to relieve us.

Frequently taking ‘trust in God’ as a peculiarity of believers, the Holy Qur’an says,

*“And in Allah should the believers trust.”*¹

Through their trust and confidence in God, the believers proceed to build up their relation with Him and traverse (the path) to ultimate perfection, because spiritual perfection can be attained only through loving the Sacred Essence of the Real and having confidence in Him. It is only by relying on God and loving Him that an insignificant speck can reach the Eternal Sun of Perfection, and a lowly worthless drop the boundless sea, and finally achieve the eternal fortune.

کتر از ذره نه ای پست مشو مهر بورز تا
بخلوتگه خورشید رسی چرخ زنان
چو ذره گرچه حقیرم ببین به دولت عشق که در
هوای رخت چون به مهر پیوستم

You are not less than a molecule; don’t be embarrassed and behave compassionately so as to reach the Sun’s private abode.

*Though I am as inferior as a molecule,
Look! How, in quest of love, I reached the Sun.*

1- *Sūrat Āl ‘Imrān* 3:121.

Trust in God, and the need for activity

Relying on God does not imply that one should wash his hands of work, retreat in a mosque, engage in praying and supplicating God day and night, expecting God to provide him with daily sustenance. Those who hold such a belief have certainly gone astray and have not understood the real meaning of trust in God, as explained in the following narration,

“The Holy Prophet (s) saw a group of people who had abandoned working on their farms. He asked them, ‘How do you survive?’ They said, ‘We are the quietists [*mutawakkilūn*].’ Then, the Prophet said, ‘You are not. You are burdens on society.’”¹

Basically, one who truly knows God is aware that all affairs are, by God’s wisdom, handled through the means given, sometimes material and natural, at other times spiritual, often unusual and extraordinary. God’s wisdom requires that every phenomenon be actualized through appropriate means; that is why knowing God and what He wishes brings knowledge of how things are done according to His wisdom, by a system of means and conditions. On this depends man’s development to perfection through trials and tribulation. Man’s development will not be perfect without it because the attainment of perfection depends on fulfilling the duties set for a servant of God. These duties present themselves in human relations and constitute the system of means and causes. If a man lives in isolation, occupies himself with praying, and abandons daily activities, he will have acted contrary to the God’s wisdom. It will then be inappropriate to expect from God his daily provision. Mawlawī, the poet, says:

گر توکل می‌کنی در کار کن کشت کن پس
تکیه بر جبار کن

If you put your trust in God, trust Him with your work!

Sow the seed, then rely upon the Almighty.

Therefore, God’s wisdom demands that man should make use of the means while searching for ways to assure his needs. If one could be provided for by merely invoking God, he would not work for the provision any more, nor anyone be tried and tested (for his belief in God). It is by being exposed to difficulties that man is tested; he will, consequently, attain perfection or fall into a lowly state. The duties at every stage of life are meant to persuade man to go in search of the means. When he is hungry, he must work. Relations between the employee and the employer, unwarranted seizure of

1- *Mustadrak al-Wasā'il*, vol. 11, p. 217.

others' possession, tyranny, the oppressor and the oppressed, the deprived, the weak, the cruel and the arrogant show up in a working condition. If it were destined it for everyone to receive heavenly food merely by reciting a two-*rak'ah* prayers, there would be no possibility of trial (to see who the real believer is). All people would be righteous; it would not be possible to distinguish the God-fearing from the evil-doers, nor would it be possible to tell who is prepared to endure hardships for the sake of God, and who parasitically feeds on the fruit of another' labor.

Above and beyond the "ordinary means and causes", extraordinary events sometimes take place because God's wisdom demands it so, as in the case of Mary ('*a*),

*"Every time Zachariah entered the shrine to (see) her, he found she had already been supplied with food."*¹

Such events occur by God's ordinance to show His grace to His meritorious servants, to be a lesson to others, and to see if the person who is tested gives thanks for such a great blessing.

Except for rare cases, God's wisdom requires that the affairs run normally—according to the usual means and causes. Now, if anyone desires to achieve his goal differently, this will be incompatible with God's wish and he will be following a path contrary to God's. If he is a righteous servant, his deeds and worship must please God. How can anyone ask God to act contrary to the established order when God Himself prefers the order of the universe? Does such a person think that he is more knowledgeable than God? When God wants to provide you through a certain channel, you refuse it, invoking God to provide you from His presence? Such expectation sprouts from laziness and clearly opposes the Divine wisdom.

When you are told to make use of the means to achieve your goals, this does not imply that it is the ground, the baker, and the work process that secure your needs; these elements themselves belong to God who regulates the affairs (of the universe), just as He supplies livelihood. But it is your duty to search after the means, because the goals that God has set will be actualized in the domain of (the world of) being. These goals lead to man's perfection.

Those who place their hope and reliance on God must remember that they need to work hard, whereas those who do not rely on God remain heedless to it. These two groups differ from each other: the former obeys God, places his trust in Him and tries his best, whereas the latter, the non-monotheistic person, who does not put his trust in God, places his hope on his own effort

1- *Sūrat Āl 'Imrān* 3:37.

or on the money given him. Those who only rely on God will not despair the least even if they are deprived of all means. It is understood from some *h adīths* that the believer pins more hope on what is with God (than on what is given him) because what he owns may be annihilated and stolen, whereas what is in God's treasury does not and will not.

Prophet Ibrāhīm ('a) and trust in God

A righteous servant of God and His true friend is Prophet Ibrāhīm ('a), in whose life there was not even one moment without constant trust in and reliance on God; he can be quoted as the best example for all servants of God. When the pagans had made up their mind to burn him alive, he put his trust only in God, and asked for His help, as the Holy Qur'an says,

*"They said: Burn him up and support your gods, if you must be doing something."*¹

The late Tabarsī says, "People began collecting firewood; if someone was sick (and unable to help in person), he would leave a testament, advising his legatees not to neglect collecting the firewood; he would even recommend them to spend part of their possession to buy the wood necessary to burn Ibrāhīm ('a). Some women whose job was to spin thread, gave part of their wages to buy the firewood to burn Ibrāhīm ('a) and acquire the pleasure of their gods. The heap of firewood was set aflame. Since it was almost impossible to get close to such a terrible fire, they put Ibrāhīm ('a) on a catapult and threw him into the fire."

Imām al-Sādiq ('a) says,

"When Ibrāhīm was placed on the catapult, ready to be thrown into the fire, angel Gabriel came to him and said,

'May God's peace and blessing be on you. Is there something you want?'

'Ibrāhīm ('a) said, 'But not of thee.'²

'Gabriel said, 'Then, ask your Lord.'

'Ibrāhīm ('a) said, 'His awareness of the situation I am in is enough for me.'³

When he was thrown into the fire, Ibrāhīm ('a) said,

1- *Sūrat al-Anbiyā'* 21:68.

2- *Majma' al-Bayān*, vol. 4, p. 55.

3- *Al-Mīzān*, vol. 14, p. 336.

“O the One, O the Only, O the Everlasting Refuge! O He who has not begotten, nor has been begotten, and equal to Him is not anyone.”¹

Soon Ibrāhīm (‘a) was in the fire, but since everything submits to God, the burning heat was made ineffective,

“*We said: O fire be a comfort and peace to Ibrāhīm.*”²

So, when one chooses God as the sure point of reliance, God will save him from afflictions, and will bestow welfare and peace on him in spite of those for whom this fact is foreign.

1- *Majma‘ al-Bayān*, vol. 4, p. 56.

2- *Sūrat al-Anbiyā’* 21:69.

Discourse 2

The Dignity of Having Trust in Divine Decree and Being Satisfied with It

ليس شيء عندي افضل من التَّوَكُّلِ عَلَيَّ والرِّضَى بما قسمت.

“There is nothing more excellent with Me than having trust in Me and being satisfied with what I have apportioned.”

In the previous discourse, a detailed discussion was conducted on the importance of (having) trust in God. In the present one we shall discuss another aspect of the *H adīth al-Mi‘rāj*.

God, the Exalted, has destinies for His servants. These sometimes make them happy, and at other times unhappy. What God wants His servants to do is to be satisfied with what He has decreed (for them), submit to His providence, and give preference to His pleasure over their own all the time. These providential destinies are sometimes related with legislative affairs, at other times with genetic matters.

As for the legislative affairs, all people are required to do their religious duty and abandon what is forbidden; this is being satisfied with Divine destiny.

Although making an endeavor to perform one’s religious obligations, abandon what is forbidden, give priority to God’s pleasure occupies the lowest level in the hierarchy of piety, there are people who abide with it unwillingly. On the other hand, there are God’s saints who have, through serving God, attained a rank so high that they worship God and abandon the unlawful acts quite willingly.

As for the genetic matters, God’s servants should be happy with what He has decided for them, be it a pleasing event or an unpleasing one, as is implied in the *h adīth* reported above, where God, the Exalted, says, “My servants should be satisfied with what I have apportioned for them.”

It goes without saying that we cannot exercise free-will over anything, even over speaking—as we imagine we can—because in order to speak, we need to have the tongue, the throat, the larynx, the vocal cords, the air, etc. (none

of which belongs to us). We will not be able to utter a word if there is a disorder in any of these.

Thus, there are causes and conditions for the simplest voluntary affairs, of which speaking is an example, an activity that we can ordinarily start, or we can remain silent when we want to, let alone those events that are totally out of our control, such as earthquakes and illnesses. These are all a part of the Divine destiny, in the occurrence of which we have no choice. (There are many cases where someone began to speak but was unable to bring it to an end: he either died while he was speaking or something happened to him).

It is true that a series of elements, of natural or human origin, play a part in the occurrence of an event; however, this does not mean that God is overcome by His creatures, and that contrary to His will, it is the natural factors that bring about an event. Within God's kingdom nothing occurs if He does not will it. Only God has systematized the universe on the basis of His wisdom, although certain unpleasant events occur within the universal order. This is the order that God has created, and He has approved it as the best, an order that philosophers refer to it as "The Best Order" [*niz ām-e ah san*].

God's will, therefore, prevails over the order of the universe. We cannot say that God has, upon His wisdom, given the causes a free hand to bring things about. Rather, there are reasons why things happen, the most important being to test the believers. Men are put to test to see how they react when there are afflictions. Some events test the primary level of faith to see if people observe God's orders, or rebel, when afflictions come upon them. This, being the primary step in the hierarchy of tests, applies to most servants of God. Still, a more severe one besets the selected servants to see whether they give thanks, or make a complaint or patiently and silently endure the difficult situations. This is where patience stands. Being satisfied with what God has destined is higher in rank than being patient, since those satisfied tolerate pain, agony, distress and afflictions and are pleased because these have all come from God. This is faith at its highest level, one in which man is heartily pleased with what God destines, and believes that Divine destiny is based on wisdom. The higher one's faith and knowledge are, the stronger one's satisfaction will be with what God destines.

God the Exalted says, "With Me nothing is more excellent than having trust in Me and being satisfied with what I have apportioned", denoting that "satisfaction" is higher in rank than "trust". "Trust" means that we must

seek God's assistance in what we do, and have confidence in Him, "*Thee do we serve and Thee do we beseech for help.*"¹

The second level is the one wherein we ought to be satisfied (at heart) with what God has done and must not make every attempt for something different to occur.

This, however, does not imply that we must give up hard work since working hard is considered among the causes of Divine destiny, but, it means that we ought to be satisfied with what has taken place, be it a consequence of our own work or of other causes. This happens when we know that Divine wisdom upholds every occurrence.

God wishes man good

Addressing Moses, God says in a Divine tradition [*h adīth-e Qudsī*],

"O Moses! To me, the most beloved of those I have created is My faithful servant. I make an affliction befall him, (because) it is good for him; I prevent him from something, (and this) is good for him, and I know what is good for My servant."

It is certain that when we love someone, we never wish him harm and trouble. God exposes His bondsmen to troubles and afflictions not out of enmity, but because troubles and hardships will do good to God's servants. When a mother prevents her sick child from certain things, or makes him take the bitter medicine, she does not do it out of enmity, but out of the affection and attachment she feels towards the child, the same goes for God. A poet says:

مادر او را گوید ای نور دو چشم
رانم و گر بینی تو خشم
این غضبها به ز مهر دیگری است خشم و تندی
من از مادری است

*So calls him his mother, saying: You are the apple of my eye;
If I am angry and you see my anger,*

*This is better than someone else' love,
For, my wrath stems from a motherly love.*

"Then, he must be patient when afflictions, I have destined, come to him and he should give thanks."

1- *Sūrat al-Fātih ah* 1:4.

(Giving thanks for blessings and being patient in tribulations are means for man to develop). God continues,

“And he should be pleased with what I have decreed; then, I place him among the righteous men when he acts as I want, and obeys Me.”¹

The late Imām Khomeinī, may Allah be pleased with him, repeatedly said,

“We must act as is our duty; what consequently happens is not our business, because the world has an administrator; we must be pleased with what He had decreed.”

Prophet Moses (‘a) is again reported to have asked God,

“O God! Which of Thy servants art Thou most pleased with?” God said, “The one who reveres Me and does not voice his objection if I take away his beloved.”

Some people complain to God and do not express their consent when a beloved of theirs dies, because they desire not to be separated from him. God does not like such people.

Then, Prophet Moses (‘a) asks God,

“Which of Thy servants art Thou displeased with?” God says, “The one who leaves it to me to determine the affair that is to his best interest, but becomes angry when I decree it.”²

When we have confidence in God, trust Him and ask Him to decide for us that in which our best interest lies, we must not complain if difficulties or illnesses befall us, for such things are circumstances that are for our benefit. Therefore, those who believe in God’s oneness rely on Him, ask for His help, remain patient at the time of hardships, and have faith that only in God’s hand is the administration of all affairs.

The Noble Prophet (s) said,

“Allah, the All-mighty and Honorable, has said, ‘(If) one is not pleased with My decree, does not give thanks for My bounties and does not remain patient when afflictions occur, he has taken a lord other than Me.’”³

Elsewhere, the Noble Prophet (s) also said,

1- *Bihār al-Anwār*, vol. 71, p. 139.

2- *Bihār al-Anwār*, vol. 82, p. 90.

3- *Bihār al-Anwār*, vol. 5, p. 95.

“Allah, the All-mighty and Honorable, has said, ‘Surely, among my faithful servants are those whose religion will not be set right without wealth, expansion and a healthy body. So, I try and test them by (giving them) wealth, expansion and a healthy body. Then, the affair of their religion will be set right.’”

Not only hardships but bounties are used to test the people. God provides people with bounties to see if they perform their duties.

“And among My faithful servants are those whose religion will not be set right except by poverty, destitution and illnesses in their bodies; so I test them through poverty, destitution and illness; then their religion will be set right, and I know better what corrects the religion of my believing servants.”

These will all work for a believer who leaves his affairs to God. It is then that God will suffice him and give him what will do him good: if he should be made wealthy, God will make him wealthy, if he should be made poor and live a hard life, he will be made so. Then, he will gain nothing however hard he tries; he will live an increasingly poor life because he has asked God to give him what is most wise for him, which is poverty and destitution. In fact, God has answered his prayer.

I should emphasize that we must not remain idle and do nothing, nor should we give up trying, and pray for what is in our best interest instead. Doing our duty is something quite different from leaving matters to God. The point is that we should be pleased with what comes and what God wills, although it is everybody’s duty to do his best to gain a living, to support his families, and to maintain his health.

Some observe rules of hygiene, but become sick; some others, however, stay healthy although they do not observe those rules; this is because God, the Exalted, has provided other means to keep them healthy, which are inaccessible to other people. It is not such that whatever we desire and pursue will come true. Certain events are contrary to our wish and will; in such cases, we must not worry nor must we complain to God.

Such a state (of resignation to God’s will) brings permanent peace of mind and removes anxiety. As a result, we always fulfill our duty, worship God and are satisfied with what occurs. But those who have not attained “the station of satisfaction” [*maqām-e rid ā*] become depressed and angry while facing hardships, and voice an objection.

The narration continues in this way,

“And among My servants are those who exert efforts to worship Me. At midnight, they leave their comfortable beds, say their prayers, and undergo trouble for My sake...”

“Out of kindness and in order for their faith to remain firm, I make slumber overtake them for a couple of nights. Then, they oversleep. When they get up, they are angry with and rebuke themselves (for having been deprived of an act of worship). If I leave them free to pray as much as they desire, they will be taken by self-conceit.”

In order for us to stay away from conceit, and realize that there are matters over which we have no control, He sometimes puts us to sleep so that we do not take pride in our trivial act of praying; for, from God comes even our success to (pray and) worship.

“Self-conceit makes him infatuated with his deeds...”

“And this invalidates his religion because he becomes satisfied with his performance and with himself...”

“To the extent that he imagines he is superior to all those who worship—and above the state of falling short in his worship... (We know, however, that even the Prophets have all confessed their shortcomings in worshipping God.)”

“At this time he moves away from Me, while imagining that he is drawing near...”

“Therefore, those who do something with the aim of being rewarded, should not count on their deeds...”

This statement means that those who take pride in their rising at dawn and performing prayers, should not count on their deeds because (this feeling of) pride destroys them. They should always hope for God's grace and mercy instead.

“However hard they strive and undergo trouble worshipping Me during their lifespan, they will still fall short in their worship; will be unable to fathom the reality of worshipping Me; will not deserve the Divine generosity and bliss of My Garden nor attain the degrees of sublimity and elevations that are near Me...”

“But in My mercy they should have trust, with My blessing they should be happy, and of My favorable opinion they should be confident...”

Only then, they will attain My mercy, My pleasure will come to them, and My forgiveness clothe them in the garment of pardon...”

“Surely, I am Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful, and named so.”¹

In sum, one should put his trust in God in life and in work. While traveling the path to perfection, he should have confidence in Divine favor and at the same time try to fulfill his duty. He should not give up hard work nor should he count on his deeds. Our acts cannot commensurate with Divine rewards and blessings. If our acts are precisely examined, we will realize that we do not deserve to receive anything. It is only God’s mercy that embraces us.

When we worship God, we do it to thank Him for His blessings, (an example of which is) our ability to speak. Therefore, we do not intend to do God a favor (when we worship Him). If we carry out the best devotional acts in the most appropriate time, we will still be in the deficit when our deeds are examined. In fact, we should not look forward to being rewarded or being raised to the high status of God’s prophets and saints because they have attained their dignities through the confidence and trust they have had in God, not merely through acts. That is, they have not counted on their deeds.

1- *Bihār al-Anwār*, vol. 72, p. 327.

Discourse 3

Love of God and [Different] Ways to Attain It

يا مُحَمَّد؛ وَجِبَتْ مَحَبَّتِي لِلْمُتَحَابِّينَ فِيَّ وَوَجِبَتْ مَحَبَّتِي لِلْمُتَقَابِطِينَ¹ فِيَّ وَوَجِبَتْ
مَحَبَّتِي لِلْمُتَوَاصِلِينَ فِيَّ وَوَجِبَتْ مَحَبَّتِي لِلْمُتَوَكِّلِينَ عَلَيَّ وَلَيْسَ لِمَحَبَّتِي عِلْمٌ وَلَا
نَهَايَةٌ وَكُلَّمَا رَفَعْتُ لَهُمْ عِلْمًا وَوَضَعْتُ لَهُمْ عِلْمًا.

“O Muhammad! My love is incumbent upon those who love each other for My sake [*al-mutah ābbīn*]; and My love is incumbent upon those who discontinue their relationship, with people I do not approve of, for My sake [*al-mutaqāt i‘īn*]; and My love is incumbent upon those who establish a relationship for My sake [*al-mutawās ilīn*]; and My love is incumbent upon those who have trust in Me [*al-mutawakkilīn*]; and there is no limit of My love. Whenever I push a way-mark down, I raise another way-mark for them.”

Addressing His Messenger, God, the Exalted, says, “O, Muhammad! My love is incumbent upon four groups of people (this is not meant to be an obligatory necessity; rather, it proves the undeniable love of God):

“The first group [*al-mutah ābbīn*]: those who love each other for My sake.

“The second group [*al-mutaqāt i‘īn*]: those who discontinue their relation with the people I do not approve of, and with my enemies, for My sake. In other words, if those in the second group have, contrary to God’s pleasure, followed their desires in making friends, they do sever their relationship, their incentive being the love they have for God.

“The third group [*al-mutawās ilīn*]: those who establish a relationship for My sake. (These people not only disregard any feeling of offense that may possibly exist among them, but fully strive for the establishment of a better and stronger relationship.

The fourth group [*al-mutawakkilīn*]: those who have trust in Me.”

1- In Daylamī’s *Irshād al-Qulūb*, this word [*al-mutaqāt i‘īn*] is recorded as *al-muta‘āt ifīn* [those who show affection to each other].

It is evident that God wants to motivate people into doing things that bring them happiness and move them closer to Himself. This will certainly work in the case of a person who has attained the love of God, not a person who is indifferent and heedless. God's love is more valuable than bread or water is to a person who has lost his way in the desert, is wandering around, is about to die, and is yearning for something to keep him alive for a few more days. Such a person intensely desires to find a way to keep alive. This desire is incomparable with the worth and significance of the love God has for His servant, which is effective, fruitful and everlasting.

It is quite evident that man endeavors to capture the hearts of others as long as he is in this world. Some people plan to find a way into the hearts of others and win their favor, but those inclined towards the hereafter do not limit themselves to such a love. They are in quest of the One whose love is of greater value than what the whole world can offer. These people sacrifice all they possess to obtain it. But alas! How few are aware of the value of the love of God.

Being aware of the importance of the love of God is itself a rank in the path of true knowledge of the Divine Essence. This much knowledge, little as it is, saves us from double ignorance. Having acquired this knowledge, we should strive for the greater and more valuable issue—the love of God—making use of all the possibilities we have at our disposal, in order for Divine Love to bloom in us in all its actuality.

“My love is incumbent upon those who love each other for My sake”, in the noble tradition, means befriending God's friends is an expression of cordiality and love for God. It is natural that when we love someone or something, we will love whatever is associated with them. When someone loves God, he will love those that are close to Him, too—this being the natural outcome of love; it is impossible to love someone but remain indifferent to what belongs to him. It thus follows that when someone loves God, he will display his love for anyone who is close to Him. The first will be the Holy Prophet (s) and the pure Imāms (‘a) from his progeny, then come the Shī‘ites who are close to them, have fared their way better than others, and translated their deeds into action better than other people.

[Different] ways to attain the love of God

Whoever loves others on the basis of his belief in God, the worship and service he renders God, and the degree of his piety, he must be hopeful, because loving God's bondsmen and friends directs one to the way of Allah and stops him from (doing the) things that keep him away from God and from His friends. Thus, through his acts, he will have acquired God's love,

and will have achieved his life-long desire, for every lover yearns to gain the favor of his beloved. This is why God, the Exalted, has said the following Qur'anic verse on ways of acquiring God's love or of becoming His beloved:

*“Say: If you love Allah, then follow me, Allah will love you.”*¹

Now, whoever strives to attain the love of God should hold fast to the Holy Prophet's (s) practice, and follow his way. In this way he will receive, out of the love God has for his beloved Prophet (s) a ray of hope. Thus, one of the most important ways to attract God's love is to establish a close relationship with the Messenger of God (s), for he is the sure beloved of God. We may even say that all other graces of God follow this particular love He has for His beloved, and this is no exaggeration since the most perfect Being is an embodiment of the totality of potential beings. It is natural that God should genuinely love and favor him from the beginning.

Thus, our friendship with others should be based on their relationship with God for the Divine love to actualize, and after identifying those who maintain a stronger link with God and His Messenger, we should strive to establish a connection with them.

On the other hand, we should, as much as possible, remove from our hearts the secular love and attraction that merely pertains to this world, because if we befriend others for the sake of secular matters, enjoyments and normative values thereof, we will have filled our hearts with worldly love and left no room for Divine love.

Man is naturally fond of things that demonstrate perfection in them. If anything more perfect attracts him, he will gradually disregard the inferior things and will empty his heart of the love he has for them. For Divine love to penetrate his heart and secular love to leave it, one ought to recognize the Perfection that transcends the world and secular matters, and understand that He is the Source and Origin of all perfections, and the One who has infinite beauty and perfection that inspires love and attachment.

Since knowledge first comes to us through material things, we feel more attached to worldly things from the onset of our life and while we proceed through it. But the inerrant [*ma's ūm*] individuals, turn towards spiritual affairs from the onset, without their true knowledge getting tainted with worldly bonds. They are of course exceptional. We are such that our attention is primarily attracted by material affairs and worldly enjoyments. In order to stay away from such a tendency and turn to spiritual matters and

1- *Sūrat Āl 'Imrān*, 3:31.

Divine values, we need to resort to the things that build up our relation with God.

It thus follows that we should consider the love of God as a basis when we develop friendship with others. We should not focus on material interests to such an extent that we disregard our original incentive and target. We should, therefore, build up our relationship with the *awliyā'* of God, to achieve Divine love, because strengthening one affects the other. The two are inseparable, because an everlasting bond that cannot be broken holds them together. That is, the further one's love for God is, the further his love will be for God's *awliyā'* and the love for God's *awliyā'* will result in further love for the Divine.

The following example illustrates our point: the love for God can be likened to a tree and its roots, the love for the *awliyā'* of God to branches and leaves. If you cut off the branches and the leaves, the tree will gradually wither because it will have no means of respiration. If the roots (means of nourishment) are cut off, the branches and the leaves will die. When branches and leaves receive warmth, light and air, they will gather strength. When roots are nourished and become stronger, the branches and leaves become stronger too. There is a similar mutual relationship between the love of God and the love for His *awliyā'*.

The love for the *awliyā'* of God is an offshoot of the love for God; if we strengthen it, the love for the *awliyā'* of God will also be made stronger. (We establish contact with the *awliyā'* through our senses, visualize them and hear their voices because they are like ourselves, human beings; we can, therefore, ponder on them. If we do so through showing love for them, we can then hope that it will be easier to achieve the love of God.)

Experiments have shown that we are more easily motivated to feel love whenever merits of the Noble Prophet (s) and the pure Imāms ('a), and their miracles and their Divine worth are reported, than the time when God's Attributes and perfections are mentioned. Certain people have, consequently, said, "The love of God is incomprehensible". Certain inexperienced people, unimpressed by God's Attributes and perfections, have come to believe that it is a true statement. This is because they have noticed that they are not readily moved to feel the joy when God's Attributes and perfections are spoken of. The reason we are more readily excited to love the *awliyā'* of God is that they are human beings like us, somehow perceivable within our framework of thought, although the lofty rank of the *awliyā'* of God cannot be compared with that of ordinary people. Thus, the best and the simplest way to express love of God is to befriend those who love God; the stronger our link and affection with them are, the

greater will be our love for God, provided that we love the *awliyā'* of God because they are God's friends, not because we desire an office, wealth or material things.

Us ūl al-Kāfī quotes Imām al-Sajjād ('a) as having said,

“On the day of resurrection, when God, the Exalted, the Honorable, gathers all people, the first and the last, a herald will call out...”

“He says: ‘Where are those who loved others for the sake of God?’”

“Then, a group of people will stand up. They will be told to ‘Enter paradise without reckoning...’”

“Then, the angels will meet them and ask, ‘Where are you going?’”

“They will answer, ‘To paradise, without being questioned.’”

“The angels ask, ‘What denomination are you?’”

“The people answer them, ‘We are those who loved others for the sake of God.’”

“They will ask, ‘How did you act?’”

“They will answer, ‘We used to love for the sake of God, and hate for the sake of God.’”

“The angels will say, ‘How excellent is the wage of one who labors!’”¹

God goes on in the *H adīth al-Mi'rāj* saying,

“There is no limit for my love.”

Also, He says,

“Whenever I push a way-mark down, I raise another way-mark for them.”

In the past, there were trails that crossed the wilderness and were dangerous to travel through. In order for travelers to find their path, landmarks were provided to guide them when sandstorms made the trails invisible. The travelers were thus in need of landmarks for their safe journey, without which they could not escape dangers. That is why God, the Glorified, says, “I am with them throughout the way, and do not deprive them of My guidance. Whenever they pass one way-mark, I place another one before them so that they benefit from My guidance, and do not go astray.”

1- *Us ūl al-Kāfī*, vol. 3, “*Bāb al-H ubb fī Allāh wa'l-Bughd fī Allāh*”, p. 191.

A special favor that God bestows upon his *awliyā'* and true friends is His comprehensive and permanent guidance, which protects them against any slip and instability.

Discourse 4

Particularities of God's *Awliyā'*

اولئك الذين نظروا الى المخلوقين بنظري اليهم ولم يرفعوا الجوائح الى الخلق. بطونهم خفيفة من اكل الحرام. نعيمهم في الدنيا ذكري ومحبي ورضائي عنهم. يا احمد: ان احببت ان تكون اروع الناس فازهد في الدنيا وارغب في الاخرة. فقال: يا الهي: كيف ازهد في الدنيا؟

فقال: خذ من الدنيا خفًا من الطعام والشراب واللباس ولا تبدخر لبعث ودم على ذكري. فقال: يا رب كيف ادوم على ذكرك؟ فقال: بالخلوة عن الناس وبغضك الحلو والحامض وفراغ بطنك وبيتك من الدنيا.

يا احمد؛ اجذر ان تكون مثل الصبي اذا نظر الى الأخضر والأصفر احبه واذا اعطي شيئاً من الحلو والحامض اغتر به...

“They are those who look at the people the way I look at them, and they do not present their needs to people. They do not have their fill of the licit food. In this world they take delight only in My remembrance, seek My love and My being pleased with them. O Ah mad, if you wish to be the most pious of mankind, then be abstemious towards this world and desire the hereafter.” The Noble Prophet (s) asked, “O My God, how can I abandon the desire for the world?”

God, the Glorified said, “From the world, opt for little and light food, simple dress and drink, and do not store things up for tomorrow, and perpetuate remembering Me.” The Prophet (s) said, “What should I do to remember Thee all the time?” God, the Exalted said, “Retire from people, shut your eyes to the sweet and sour; keep not your stomach and your house filled with things from this world.

O Ah mad, be cautious not to be like a child who, when he sees things green and yellow, he loves them, and when he is given something that is sweet and sour, he is infatuated by it.”

“These are they who look at the people the way I look at them.”

Let us elaborate. The love one feels for others is an offshoot of the love he has for God. That is, so long as one does not love God and does not adore Him, he will be unable to love others for the sake of God. Love, originally and primarily, belongs to God; it is in the light of love for God that one can be fair to anyone who is in close association with God. Such a person, therefore, looks at people the way God, the Exalted, looks at them: those who are dearer to God are dearer to him, too. In loving people, he follows the same criteria God has set for people, not a different one. That is, people are valued by the same norms.

“...and they do not present their needs to people...”

Naturally, life and various needs are blended; the more extensive one's existential capacity is, the greater one's needs will be.

*“O men! You are they who stand in need of Allah, and Allah is He who is the Self-sufficient, the Praised one.”*¹

God, the Exalted, is the only Being who has the power to supply all man's needs. All His friends, therefore, raise their begging hand before the Divine, and thus have their needs fulfilled through His infinite power. On Him only, and not in any one else, do they pin their hopes.

Supplication ensures strengthening the communion we have established with God, and, as a result, makes us present our needs only to Him. The stronger this intimate and spiritual relationship becomes, the weaker the link with others will be, to the extent that we never turn to anyone other than God for the fulfillment of our needs. When Prophet Ibrāhīm (‘a) was being thrown into the fire, Gabriel asked him, “Is there something you want?” Ibrāhīm (‘a) answered, “But not of thee.”

As a further example, imagine the case of a certain person who has confidence in you and comes exclusively to you whenever he has a problem. This will establish an inseparable bond between you, creating a feeling of intimacy and sincerity. Just as he turns to you to ask your help, so you take steps to solve his problems. This is an example of the transient relationship among men, as compared to their relationship with God—a relationship that is infinite in scope and beyond conception for humans. The

1- *Sūrat Fāt ir* (or, *al-Malā'ikah*) 35:15.

above example depicts the love and intimacy God shows to the person who chooses Him as his protector.

“...they do not (even) have their fill of the illicit food.”¹

An attribute of the friends of God is their detachment from the world and its transient and perishing enjoyments. They do not go to the extreme even as regards the lawful, merely enjoying the worldly gains and blessings not for sensuality, but for satisfying their needs, to do their service to God and to be of help to people. Taking more food than the body needs will result in diminishing vigor, and increasing sluggishness.

Believers' joy and delight

How can the believers be happy although they do not, in this world, enjoy the lawful things to the full? God the Exalted, says,

“In this world they take delight only in My remembrance, seek My love and My being pleased with them...”

a) Remembering God

Anyone who loves God, naturally, remembers Him and takes delight in it. As long as he is not in union with the Sublime, his all-out delight is to remember God. Imām al-Sajjād (‘a) says in his *Sah ar* Supplication, “by remembering Thee is my heart alive”, implying that it is through remembering God that he is alive and so is his heart, and without which his heart will die because he has none other than the Exalted God to place his hope in.

A believer's happiness and animation of heart depends upon God's remembrance, not upon ephemeral worldly joys.

The reason “in this world” is mentioned in the above *h adīth* is probably because in the hereafter, there is no need to remember God since that is the world of immanence, the world where man meets Him. It is this world that is the world of separation and disunion. So long as the believer has not attained His nearness, he is preoccupied with remembering Him.

Relationship between remembering God and Divine love

Invoking God and remembering Him stem from one's love for Him. The greater one's love for God is, the more will he remember Him, this being a relationship that can be seen in everyday matters of the world. The more

1- In *Bihār al-Anwār*, vol. 77, p. 22, the phrase *min akli'l-h arām* [of the illicit food] is recorded as *min akli'l-h alāl* [of the licit food].

you love someone, the more you will think about him: greater love yields a more thorough remembrance. If, on the contrary, you forget him, the love you have for him will weaken and gradually be forgotten. The more you think about one, the stronger your love will become. Those who take delight in remembering God find their love increase for Him.

b) Divine love

*“...and those who believe are stronger in love for Allah...”*¹

Favorite servants of God take delight in Divine love. They would rather die than having a heart empty of the love for God, if they ever feel it is so. Their heart is fresh only if they spend their lifetime loving God. That is why they strive to seek His love and pleasure to remove all impediments.

c) God's pleasure

A lover's greatest pleasure is the feeling that his beloved is pleased with him. Such is man's ordinary affection. In loving someone, he is happy to see that the one he loves the most is pleased.

A manifest peculiarity of the pure and favored servants of God is their permanent desire to obtain Divine favor and pleasure. They will be greatly tormented and worried if they feel a decrease in God's favor—something that they cannot tolerate. They, therefore, take definite and worthy steps to earn God's satisfaction in order to free themselves from such a dead, miserable state.

Ways to achieve piety and asceticism

God, the Exalted, tells His beloved:

“O Ahmad, if you wish to be the most pious of mankind, then be abstemious towards this world and desire the hereafter.”

Piety is disinclination, a heart-felt state, not a functional one, as the Holy Qur'an mentions it in referring to Prophet Joseph's ('a) case, saying,

*“And they sold him for a small price, a few pieces of silver, and they showed no desire for him.”*²

Piety is not synonymous with the renunciation of material bounties, or with poverty or with giving up the acquisition of worldly goods. But piety means abandoning of the inclination and desire that somehow make man so affiliated to the present world that he neglects the hereafter. That is why,

1- *Sūrat al-Baqarah* 2:165.

2- *Sūrat Yūsuf* 22:20.

God, the Exalted, tells His Prophet (s) to turn away from attachment to the present world and aspire more for the hereafter. A rich man may spend his wealth in the way of God. Prophet Solomon ('a), though he had the greatest kingdom, contented himself with bread made from barley flour, applied his power for and spent his wealth in accomplishing what was rightfully due, to propagate the religion of God and raise the banner of monotheism in the expanse of the world.

The Noble Prophet (s) then asked, "O God, How can I abandon the desire for the world?" God, the Glorified said,

"From the world, opt for little and light food, simple dress and drink, and do not store things up for tomorrow."

These are to be judged according to God-given human nature, and can be perceived. "Piety" which is desirable, does not denote that one should reject the bounties in the present world completely, but not be infatuated by them. In the same manner, when God, the Exalted, says "Do not store things up for tomorrow", it does not mean that storing things as a whole is censurable, but it means that accumulating things as a result of lack of confidence in God—as an example, hoarding, disagrees with asceticism. An ascetic only enjoys bounties as much as necessary. As for the future, he still maintains his confidence in God, and is pleased with what pleases Him. Keeping certain commodities, foodstuff or otherwise, agrees with piety, and is acceptable by the reason [*'aql*] and religious law [*sharī'ah*], provided it is motivated by appropriate intention. Thus, intention and motivation are the criteria.

It is reported that Prophet Solomon ('a) used to ensure his annual need of foodstuff was provided. His motivation was not to seek his daily food in bits and waste his time getting it. As an instance, he prepared as much flour as he needed for one year and stored it at home to use it as much as his daily need. He did not do it to hoard things, for he was too dignified to do such a thing, but he did it merely to save his time for his principal tasks. He did provide for his annual provision—his meals: a mouthful of dry bread made of barley flour.

This deed is flawless, because it is not done on account of the probable fears of future events and happenings. Were it so, it would reflect doubt in God's help—something totally inappropriate with having trust in God, with being His servant, and with piety.

God, who has provided our food today, can provide our sustenance tomorrow, too. He placed nourishment in our mother's breast even before we were born. Can He be unable to provide our food tomorrow?

Certain scholars and men of piety never stored anything for the morrow. They used to give out their additional food to their poor neighbors—a practice that silenced all doubt in God's help. Those who attained lofty humanistic levels, such as that of Salmān al-Fārsī, had no need for such practices, but we must strive against temptations of the devil and never suspect God. We must try not to accumulate foodstuff, but give, at least some of it, to the poor.

*“By no means shall you attain to righteousness until you spend (benevolently) out of what you love...”*¹

Anyone who keeps what he treasures, but gives as gift what is worthless, has not done an outstanding task. Such a person will not attain the rank of the righteous, because the righteous generously expend what they have in the way of God. If the *awliyā'* of God bought something, or were given a gift, and they felt they liked it, they let someone else have it so as not to incline towards the world. In the same manner, if we are unable to completely abandon the world and its enjoyments, we must, at least, endeavor to diminish our fondness, enjoying as little as possible. This, of course, does not mean that we should go to an extreme and wash our hands off the necessities of life.

Yet another recommendation that God, the Exalted, has made to the Holy Prophet (s) is:

“Perpetuate My remembrance”.

The Prophet (s) asked, “What should I do to remember Thee all the time?” God, the Exalted said, “Retire from people”, that is, from those who are impediments to your remembering God.

Our attention is naturally drawn to the sounds we hear and the scenes we see. If what we see or hear draws our attention to the present world and makes us neglect the hereafter and God, we should do all we can to keep away from it, because it produces no result other than our being heedless of recollecting God. We should therefore try to keep away from those who are worldly-wise and absorbed in it, always praising the worldly pleasures. We should associate with those who remind us of God.

It is narrated that certain apostles asked Jesus, Son of Mary (‘a), to tell them who they should choose as companions. Prophet Jesus (‘a) said,

“The one whose looks reminds you of Allah, his words increase your knowledge, and his deeds persuade you towards the hereafter.”¹

1- *Sūrat Āl ‘Imrān* 3:92.

The more we associate with such people, the more beneficial it will be for us. The phrase "Retire from people" means retiring from those whose friendship is a cause for us to neglect remembering God.

God, the Most Exalted, also tells His beloved:

"Shut your eyes to the sweet and sour; keep not your stomach and your house filled with things from this world."

God, the Exalted, then says,

"O Ahmad, be cautious not to be like a child: when he sees things, green and yellow, he loves them, and when he is given something that is sweet and sour he is infatuated by it."

Those whose attention is drawn to things that glitter and shine have a child-like tendency. Then, take care not to be attracted by such things. One should not rejoice at deceptive glitters of this world—food that others can afford, rare and costly home utensils, precious carpets, and the childish fancies that are incompatible with the love of God.

In order for one to remember God, one should keep his belly unstuffed with delicious food and his house withdrawn from luxuries. The report that has come down to us concerning the Prophet (s) is the best guide to follow: it is reported that he (s) saw a colorful curtain hanging in the house of Fāt imah al-Zahrā' (‘a) and became annoyed. He left the house without uttering a word. Fāt imah (‘a) understood, took it down immediately and expended it in the way of God.

Discourse 5

The Traits of Those Who Make Their Way into Paradise

يَا احمَد؛ وَعِزَّتِي وَجَلَالِي مَا مِنْ عِبْدٍ ضَمِنَ لِي بِأَرْبَعِ خِصَالٍ إِلَّا ادْخَلْتُهُ الْجَنَّةَ.
يَطْوِي لِسَانَهُ فَلَا يَفْتَحُهُ إِلَّا بِمِا يَعْنِيهِ وَيَحْفَظُ قَلْبَهُ مِنَ الْوَسْوَاسِ وَيَحْفَظُ عِلْمِي
وَنَظْرِي إِلَيْهِ وَتَكُونُ قَرَّةَ عَيْنِيهِ الْجُوعَ.

يَا احمَد؛ لَوْ ذُقْتَ حَلَاوَةَ الْجُوعِ وَالصَّمْتِ وَالخُلُوةِ وَمَا وَرَثُوا مِنْهَا. قَالَ: يَا رَبِّ مَا
مِيرَاثُ الْجُوعِ؟ قَالَ: الْحِكْمَةُ وَحَفْظُ الْقَلْبِ وَالتَّقَرُّبُ إِلَيَّ وَالجُزْنُ الدَّائِمُ وَخَفَّةُ
الْمُؤْنَةِ بَيْنَ النَّاسِ وَقَوْلُ الْحَقِّ وَلَا يَبَالِي عَاشَ بَيْسَرًا أَمْ بَعْسَرًا.

يَا احمَد؛ هَبْ تَدْرِي بَإَيِّ وَقْتٍ يَتَقَرَّبُ الْعِبْدُ إِلَيَّ؟ قَالَ لَا يَا رَبِّ. قَالَ: إِذَا كَانَ
جَائِعًا أَوْ سَاجِدًا.

The four traits

Addressing the Holy Prophet of Islam (s), God, the Exalted, said:

“O Ah mad! By My might and majesty, I will make him enter paradise who establishes in himself four traits”: 1) not utter what is unnecessary and inappropriate; 2) protect the heart against temptations; 3) be aware of My constant watch over him and his actions; 4) and consider remaining hungry as his delight.”

Then, God, the Exalted, told his beloved:

“O Ah mad! You knew not how sweet hunger and silence taste, and how great their heritage and effects are.” The Prophet (s) said, “O Lord, what may they be?” God, the Exalted, said: “Wisdom, protection of the heart, closeness to Me, lasting grief, simple life, truthful speech, indifference to ease and hardship.”

Then God, the Most Exalted, said,

“O Ahmad, do you know when My servant is closest to me?” The Prophet (s) said, “I do not know.” God, the Most Exalted said, “My servant draws nearer to me when he is hungry or in prostration.”

Explanation and comment

The aim of man's creation is to attain perfection and the permanent abode. This can be attained if the four conditions mentioned in the *Mi'rāj* Tradition are met. God has taken it on Himself to allow entrance into Paradise anyone who fulfills these conditions. Of these, two concern the bodily limbs (the tongue and the stomach), while two concern esoteric functions: one, protecting the heart against satanic temptations (a negative condition); two, being aware that one is in the presence of God, who watches over his actions (an affirmative condition). The first two conditions are easier to observe, whereas the latter two ones are not so simple, because they require much mortification.

Keeping the tongue from excessive talk and keeping the stomach from excessive food are among the ways to fight the devil off. How he tries to snare people is not limited only to these two—the tongue and the stomach—but these are two of the most powerful tools the Devil uses to lure people. If one is able to safeguard his stomach, he will certainly be able to control his lust. If one is able to control his tongue, he will also be able to safeguard his eyes and ears from unlawful matters.

A full stomach takes one's awareness, consciousness and perception away, thus obstructing one's presence of heart. When one has a stomach full, one cannot contemplate and study. One cannot maintain the presence of his heart while praying or doing other things. This has been proved by experience. A well-known saying compares such a person to a drunkard: “Anyone who prays after he has filled his stomach, is like a drunkard who gives others compliments.”¹ A drunkard loses the capacity of clear thinking and his compliment is worthless and invalid. We thus conclude that the prayer and humbleness of one who prays after he has had a full meal, is worthless and invalid.

1- By the same token, Imām 'Alī ('a) is quoted to have said:

a) “Intelligence and gluttony do not go together.” *Mustadrak al-Wasā'il*, vol. 16, p. 221, *h adīth* 19652.

b) “Determination and lavish feasts do not go together.” *Nahj al-Balāghah* compiled by Fayd al-Islām, p. 692, sermon 211; Ibn Abū al-H adīd's *Sharh -e Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 11, p. 142.

With a stomach full, one loses perception and awareness just like a bird that has a hard time flying when a heavy weight has been attached to its leg. The heavier the burden is, the harder the flight will be. Like a heavy weight, a full stomach impedes the soul from soaring in flight. It pushes one deeper down into earthy nature, and makes luminosity and tenderness leave the soul, thus becoming a barrier in the display of spiritual perfection.

An explanation of the praised hunger

Hunger has been praised in *ah ādīth*, not to show that it is generally desirable to starve, but to draw man's attention to the obstacles in the flight of the soul and what interferes with the spiritual activities in domains of the heart, the mind, thinking, and meditating.

Therefore, one should not go hungry and fail to work, nor eat so much and fail to do anything. The late 'Allāmah T abāt abā'ī has interpreted the purport of the narrations on hunger in this way: By hunger in these *ah ādīth* is meant eating healthily—in contrast to gluttony. It does not mean starving. It is not harmful to eat delicious food; it is even necessary for the body provided that it is done moderately.

The noble Prophet's (s) dialogue on the effects of hunger and silence do not mean that he did not know about it or did not translate it into practice. It merely meant to admonish and give the people of earth a gift from God Almighty.

Positive effects of hunger

a) The foremost effect and value of hunger and silence is “wisdom”, giving access to man to enter the realm of the undiscovered facts and realities and perceive them clearly and openly.

Even with one's limited experience, one can realize the importance of these two in understanding facts, as is felt when the month of Ramad ān comes close. You feel that your soul is ready for flight, and that freshness, joy and spiritual delight have taken hold of your entire existence. So, we should care for our body to the extent that it helps the flight, and does not impede it when it turns to spirituality and to the kingdom of the Divine. Reason—a mental faculty—can work and attain realities when the right amount of food has been consumed.

b) The second effect and value of hunger and silence is “protecting the heart” against Satanic temptations. The fasting believers have come to realize that they are more successful in preventing their mind from confusing thoughts and their heart from temptations. Those who have grown accustomed to eating a lot also know very well that they are not so capable

of holding the reins of their heart in their hand nor can they stay away from distracting thoughts and false whims.

c) The third effect of hunger and silence is entering the proximity of God—the real perfection and the greatest aim of believers and men of piety. To achieve it, the heart must be purged of carnal whims and false inclinations, material and secular. Fasting, no doubt, plays an important role in strengthening the will and directing it to achieve nearness to God.

d) The fourth effect of the two matters mentioned above is a permanent state of grief. Many *ah adīth* have praised grief and those who are in grief. This, however, does not mean that one must always be grim-faced and frowning, but it means the acquisition of a mood as opposed to intoxicated, pointless, groundless and boundless joy and happiness, which is a lowly animal characteristic. The silent and hungry person is never given to false joys, neglectful amusements and drunken laughter. His behavior is dignified and composed. One may possibly, grieve for material affairs and for having fallen behind the worldly men in their competition to amass wealth; but this is not the praised grief. It is grief versus unlimited joy and neglectful intoxication that is the praiseworthy one.

Cautioning people has been counted as one of the most important duties of the Messengers of God. It is indispensable for men to make proper use of their lifespan, to exercise control over their acts, and to make desirable use of their God-given forces. A believer grieves that he has not been able to spend a part of his life in doing worthy and essential things, or he has spent it for things that are allowable [*mubāh*], because his assets have diminished without bringing him any profit.

This is the reason that certain distinguished men gave up performing most *mubāh* deeds. A comparison between the lives of these sages and ours makes a believer sad and sorry because he finds that he has spent his life performing *mubāh* deeds and futile actions. It is then that he decides to make up for the past and make the best use of what is left of his lifespan.

e) Another effect of hunger and silence is a life, free from cares; that is, the fewer needs one has of others, the freer he will live. But a gourmand will be deprived of freedom because he is permanently concerned with more desirable food and more gratification, just like a quadruped that is always thinking about its manger, “its greatest concern is its grass”, as interpreted by the Commander of the Faithful, ‘Alī (‘a). A gourmand will face serious difficulties, such as earning a larger income to provide for a more colorful and delicious table, and possibly perform unlawful acts to fulfill his aims.

f) Yet a further effect of the above two traits is the defense of truth. Those who live a simple, modest and untainted life are frank and capable of defending the truth, no matter where they are, in contrast to the gluttons who are unable to defend the truth and are always on guard in dealing with others, lest their source of income is endangered. Those who live a simple life speak truthfully and have no fear if others are annoyed. They do not grieve when they themselves sustain a loss, because they are able to run their lives using minimum possibilities. That is why they always defend the truth with all their might against any deviations and injustice. The person who lives a simple unburdened [*khafīf al-ma'ūnah*] life tries to live in dignity whereas a glutton does what he can to live in pleasure forever. The difference between these two is great.

g) Considering the afore-mentioned matters, a further valuable effect of hunger and silence becomes clear: the God-wary believer is never worried about how time goes by, in hardship or in ease, because he is submissive to what God has decreed (for him). While in this world, he lives in contentment, opts for moderation, and shows no ambition for riches. He thus keeps out of difficulties and mental illnesses which worldly men suffer from.

God, the Exalted, then says, “Do you know when my servant is closest to me?”

The Prophet (s) replied, “I do not know.”

God, the Exalted says, “When he is hungry and in prostration.”

No doubt, it is more meritorious when these two concur. The soul of a hungry man in prostration is better prepared to take flight and draw near to God because hunger induces a sense of weakness, humility and humbleness before God, and prostration better prevents the distraction of thought; and thus a deeper concentration of mind can be achieved. χ

Discourse 6

Need to Perform Prayers with Full Attention and Perceive the Presence of God

يا احمد؛ عجبتي من ثلاثة عبيد: عبيد دخل في الصلوة وهو يعلم الي من يرفع يديه وقدّام من هو وهو ينعس وعجبت من عبد له قوت يوم من الحشيش او غيره وهو يهتّم لغد وعجبت من عبد لا يدري اني راض عنه او سآخط عليه وهو يضحك.

“O Ah mad, I am astonished at three groups of my servants: of these is the servant who comes to say his prayers and knows before whom he has raised his hands, and in front of whom he is standing; yet he is sleepy. And I am astonished at the servant who knows that his food for today is provided, yet he is concerned with tomorrow, and I am astonished at the servant who does not know whether I am pleased or angry with him, yet he laughs.”

This part of the *h adīth* points to the ailment most of us, if not all, suffer from; we do not give our ritual prayer [*s alāt*] its due. Those who have a greater degree of knowledge, however, have a deeper regard for it and a better understanding of its importance.

We are all aware that our ritual prayer is not worthy of Divine acceptance; it does not resemble the *awliyā*'s prayer either. Our prayer does not produce the effects and traces the Qur'an and *h adīth* sources have mentioned. But most of us are unable to give a detailed account of the extent of defect in our prayer. We must therefore try to find out how imperfect our prayer is. How ugly and defective our canonical prayer is when it is done sluggishly and without full concentration. We also need to know what we could have benefited from the opportunity we had for prayer if we had performed a perfect prayer, and what losses we suffer now that we say our ritual prayer without the presence of heart.

We need to consider the manner that the *awliyā* of God performed their prayer, compare it with our own and understand the deficiencies in our

prayer, since it is through a comparison between strong and weak, perfect and deficient, that we can recognize the shortcomings.

Religious scholars have, of course, written books on how to make up for the deficiencies and inattention in prayer, an example of which is *Asrār al-S alāt* by the late Mīrzā Jawād Āqā Tabrīzī, and also *Sirr al-S alāt* by Imām Khomeinī, may Allah be pleased with him. We shall point to a summary of the subjects raised about the prayer.

Reality and essence of ritual prayer [s alāt]

By performing prayers it means that the servant stands before Him, professes that he is a servant, and presents his needs to Him. The one who makes prayer should have a perception of the presence of God and of his own position, and with utmost humility perform the duty of a bond servant.

When we stand to perform our prayer, we do not give it our undivided attention, but our thought wanders in various directions and we sometimes remember things that happened many years ago. We suddenly remember that we are performing our prayer just as we reach the end and are about to say the final greeting! How ugly and inappropriate it is for us to stand before God and forget our position and words. God, the All-mighty and Honorable, has considered it a sign of the hypocrites:

*“And they do not come to prayer but while they are sluggish...”*¹

It has also been narrated that God, the Almighty and Majestic, said “When a person offers prayer but does not set his heart on it, isn't he afraid that We might transform him into a donkey?” Being heedless while one is performing his prayer is so bad that the person who is afflicted with it deserves to be transformed into a donkey. He is in fact not human. How can one possibly stand before a distinguished person but think about something else, let alone God, the Exalted—the God from whom comes the totality of existence, goodness and blessing, yet not give Him as much consideration as he gives an ordinary person?

When someone meets another person and talks to him, does he ordinarily turn his face away? Will the wise people not call him crazy if he does so? God is, of course, not corporeal substance towards whom we might turn our face. Communion and connection with God is done through the heart, because He is Sovereign over all things and it is only through the heart that it is possible to meet Him. Now, if we turn our heart away from Him and are inconsiderate while praying, we actually turn away from God.

1- *Sūrat al-Tawbah* (or, *Barā'ah*) 9:154.

When God has favored someone by giving him permission to stand before Him to speak to Him, to tell Him about his grievances and to supplicate, would it be appropriate if that person remained heedless instead of taking advantage of the opportunity and thanking God for such a great blessing? Men of eminence do not so easily admit others to visit them, but God has left the door of His house open for everyone and has given them leave to turn to him. Now, we should make the most of the opportunity and turn to him wholeheartedly and single-mindedly.

As for the infidels who do not believe that they are present before Him, it would be natural not to heed it, but those who have faith in God and know that they are standing before God, it would be ugly and inappropriate if they remained inconsiderate. That is why, the clause “I am astonished”¹ has been used in the *h adīth*. God says: “I am amazed my servant stands before Me without delight and attention.”

Importance and value of prayer

Because of the special importance of ritual prayer and the considerable effect it has in bringing man happiness, Satan strives to deprive us of the kind of prayer that will be accepted by God. That is why he whispers other thoughts into our mind to divert our attention from prayer. Satan has, of course, no authority over anyone. We, ourselves, permit him to inhabit our mind and heart. We, ourselves, associate with him and are in touch with him all the time. He naturally keeps us busy (thinking about things) while we pray.

The best way to perfection and moving close to God is the performance of prayer, an obligation God has favored man with, to make him perfect, not that He has need for it. He has made the five daily prayers a duty for us to perform under all condition. Some jurists have said that even if one is drowning in the sea, he ought to make his prayer turning to God in his heart, although other conditions—facing the *Qiblah*, etc. are then invalid. This is the fundamental role of prayer, perfecting man’s felicity. The Noble Prophet (s) has said,

“Ritual prayer is the best theme...”²

Imām ‘Alī al-Rid ā (‘a), the Eighth Imām of the Shī‘ites, has said,

“Ritual prayer draws all people of piety towards God.”¹

1- Astonishment, fear, grievance, and other feelings are characteristics of a material being. Glory be to God. He is above such associations. He has used such expressions with regard to Himself in order to be understood by us.

2- *Jāmi‘ al-Ah ādīth al-Shī‘ah*, vol. 4, p. 6; *Al-H ukm al-Zāhīrah*, p. 139.

Because of a long-standing animosity Satan bears against the children of Adam, he tries hard to deprive them of the best and most important things they have, making them neglect the elements that have been provided to lead them to development, happiness and perfection.

“He (Satan) said: ‘Then by Thy Might I shall pervert them all together.’”²

Sometimes, a two-*rak'ah* (obligatory) prayer, or even a two-*rak'ah* supererogatory (*nāfilah*) prayer, when performed properly and with full attention, becomes the means of forgiveness of sins. When one performs his prayer with full attention, and is mindful that he is standing before the Almighty God, he cannot but regret having done shameful acts, and he will decide not to turn to sins anymore.

It is narrated that the Noble Prophet (s) has said: “If a brook passes by someone’s house, and that person washes himself in it five times a day, would any filth be left on his body? Prayers are surely like the river. When one performs his prayers perfectly, all his sins are forgiven.”³

If we realize the nature of the ritual prayer and make the most of it, no more filth remains on us. But, unfortunately, we underestimate the ritual prayer and are inconsiderate towards it, so it does not avail us much. Besides, we ought to think about the great and valuable consequences of the ritual prayer to realize what profits and blessings we have been deprived of because we performed our prayer joylessly and without the presence of heart.

When the performance of a two-*rak'ah* prayer can become the means of forgiveness, one attains the highest ranks of nearness to Allah [*qurb ilā Allāh*], if he continues performing his prayers in a manner meriting Divine acceptance. A loss of the amazing benefits will fill one with regret and sorrow.

When we lose a small sum of money we lose our concentration, and at the loss of a precious ring we are completely distracted, restless and unable to sleep at night. How come we do not take it seriously when we miss the chance of performing a prayer that is more precious than the world and the joys therein!

If only we could understand the rewards the *awliyā'* of God received upon performing prayers! Based on a *ḥ adīth*, scholars in religion have said that if monarchs had known of the joy there is in praying, they would have done

1- *Us ūl al-Kāfī*, vol. 3, p. 265.

2- *Ibid.*, p. 82.

3- *Wasā'il al-Shī'ah*, vol. 3, p. 7.

away with their rule and turned to performing prayers—a sign that these scholars themselves had come to such an understanding.

We are in constant quest of some kind of pleasure: food, clothes, and the like; sometimes we work for years preparing to attain it. Now, a scholarly statement: all pleasures that monarchs enjoy is nothing in comparison with the pleasure that a believer derives from performing a two-*rak'ah* prayer. Those who take delight in material pleasures know nothing of the joy of intimate conversation with God [*munājāt*].

In order to make up for the bygone losses and enjoy the blessings of intimate conversation with God, we must follow the instructions of the *awliyā'* of God and the '*ulamā'*', and observe the recommendations moralists have given us, either of their own experience, or through *ah ādīth*. (We are inconsiderate towards them because we have received them gratis, but they are indeed invaluable, each being of much greater worth than all the riches the world contains).

A reflection upon prayer and God's grandeur

Among the things one should do to acquire presence of heart is a reflection devoted to God and His remembrance. For a few moments prior to performing prayer, and in the place where he is about to perform it, he should dissociate himself from any other being than God, forsake all unsound thoughts, vain imaginings, and this-worldly bonds and concentrate to acquiring his presence of mind. A better way will be to meditate on the benefits he has already missed, on the spiritual benefits of performing ritual prayer and on the losses he has so far incurred.

Before praying, one must control his mind, devote as much of his attention as possible to the ritual prayer, the place to perform it and the place of prostration. When in seclusion, he may sit conveniently to relieve physical strain. Having devoted his attention, he should imagine the presence of God, and make himself believe that he is standing in the presence of God, the Exalted.

We pretend that we are in the presence of God, and that the world is in the presence of God, but this is mere gibberish talk, not heart-felt conviction. When we are alone, we do certain things, but when we realize that we are being watched by someone, not to speak of a child, we act differently. Before a fellow-creature, we are careful. When a person is sure that he is in the presence of God, he will watch over his deeds, and will be careful of his thoughts. When he is convinced that God is watching him, he will certainly prevent his heart from acting irresponsibly, wandering where it ought not to. When you are before someone, you do not allow your heart to wander

about. This is particularly so when you find yourself standing before God, the Exalted, and have a better perception of His presence. When, in your prayer, you say “*Allāh-u Akbar*” and maintain the belief that God is Great, and His grandeur is infinite, you are not neglectful of His presence even for a moment.

We are, at the outset, unable to grasp God’s grandeur; we cannot describe His majesty either; we merely repeat these words: “God is Great. He is Sovereign over all things; He is the Most Exalted of all beings.” Our mind has no capacity to perceive Him. However, man can grasp God’s grandeur to a certain degree through deliberating upon signs of the Divine, by striving and traversing stages.

Imām Ja‘far al-Sādiq (‘a) has related (an event concerning) Zaynab, the perfume seller, who went to visit the Prophet (s) in his house, and asked the Prophet (s) to tell him about God’s majesty. In answer, the Prophet (s) began to describe the seven-fold heavens, the universes and the galaxies, and compare their sizes. He said: “The earth and whatever it contains, inside and outside, is like a ring cast in a vast land. Such is the case with the first heaven versus the second: a ring cast in a land.”¹

This relation is valid for each of the heavens and the worlds when it is compared with the one above it. No doubt, a comparison between the heavens and galaxies helps perceive God’s majesty.

The earth, however vast it is, is a tiny particle before the sun, which is itself nothing when contrasted with other planets afloat in space, never colliding with each other. Anyone who knows modern astronomy is aware that certain galaxies are millions of light years away from each other, and that there are other firmaments beyond, while the visible stars are mere ornaments to the first heaven. God, the Exalted, says,

*“And We adorned the lower heaven with brilliant stars.”*²

No doubt, these are all signs and portents of the wisdom and majesty of the God, who created all things by merely saying, “Be” [*kun*]. We use utterances, whereas He has no need to utter “Be” because His will is enough to create. How grand and majestic is He, through whose will the whole cosmos has come into being, which endures upon His will, and perishes when He wills it not.

Thus, after one has deliberated upon the greatness of the world of creation, and has somewhat conceived the Divine majesty, he should remind himself

1- *Bihār al-Anwār*, vol. 60, pp. 83-85.

2- *Sūrat Fus̄silat* 40:12.

of the Mighty God in whose presence he will be standing to perform his prayer. Would it be proper to think about bread, water, clothes, houses and other things? Is the entirety of existence: men, the globe, the seas and the mountains, so valuable that one detaches himself from God to think about food, dress, wife, children, and, succinctly, the world? Does a sane ever act in this way?

Among the things that bring about concentration of the mind are: meditation on God's grandeur, an awareness of His lofty presence, and recitation of supplications both before and after the ritual prayer, as recommended by the late Mīrzā Jawād Āqā Tabrīzī in his *Asrār al-S alāt*. When a person wants to say something, he naturally ponders the meanings of the words before uttering them. We, however, are used to a quick recitation of the prayer formulae, without giving ourselves time to think about the meaning.

We ought to perform the ritual prayer thoughtfully and slowly, prolong the time we spend performing it. Spending a couple of minutes more is nothing for one who desires to be with God. He will gradually master the meaning of the words just as he masters performing the prayer formally.

Imām al-Sajjād (‘a) said,

“When you perform ritual prayer, do it as if it is your last performance.”¹

When we begin our prayer we do not know whether we will perform another one. That is why the Imām (‘a) has told us to assume that we might not.

If we know that our time is limited to performing no more than a few *rak‘ahs* of prayer, we will give our undivided attention to performing it in the most appropriate manner. Now that we do not know when our time will be up, let's assume we have time enough only for our final prayer. This will give us power to resist Satan, to drive him away and to make the most of the moments and minutes we spend performing prayer. Without a doubt, such a mood is helpful in creating full concentration. One should not forget God when he has finished his prayer; he should not divert his attention and start focusing on other matters.

Do you ever hastily and without saying farewell leave the friend whom you have met after years of separation? The one who leaves soon after he has said the final greeting of prayer is a person who seems to have been detained in God's presence, and is now waiting for the prison doors to open so he might rescue himself from the cage.

1- *Bihar al-Anwār*, vol. 69, p. 408.

When one finishes his prayer, he should raise his hands in supplication, pleading for himself and for others. The Noble Prophet (s) has quoted God, the Most High, as having said,

“Anyone whose ritual ablution [*wudū*] is made invalid [*bāṭil*] but has not renewed it, has done injustice to Me. And whoever performs his ritual ablution but does not perform a two-*rak'ah* prayer, he has done injustice to Me. And whoever makes his ritual ablution and performs two *rak'ahs* of prayer, and supplicates to Me concerning matters related to religion and the world, and if I do not respond to him, I have done him injustice, but I am not the Lord who does injustice.”

Thus, among things that make us heedful of God and call for His favor is a state of continual the ritual ablution. More desirable is a two-*rak'ah* prayer performed after we have performed the ritual ablution, and supplication after we have finished our prayer, pleading to God that He should not leave us to ourselves, or turn His gaze away from us, or deprive us of His favor.

With such a short time in performing the ritual ablution and a two-*rak'ah* prayer, the words of the Almighty God, “If I do not respond to him, I have done him injustice” are utter kindness which one should do his utmost not to miss.

Those who are in a state of continual ritual ablution and perform two *rak'ahs* of prayer upon performing the ritual ablution, and plead to God after their prayer, they gain much. They are those whose prayers are surely answered, however late it might be, God sees it as the most advisable time.

God then continues in the *Mi'rāj* Tradition:

“And I am astonished at the servant who knows that his food for today is provided yet he is concerned with tomorrow, and I am astonished at the servant who does not know whether I am pleased or angry with him, yet he laughs.”

Discourse 7

Privilege of God's Awliyā'

يا احمد؛ انّ في الجنة قصرا من لؤلؤ فوق لؤلؤ ودرّة فوق درّة ليس فيها قضم ولا
وصيل. فيها الجّواص أنظر اليهم كلّ يوم سبعين مبرّة فاكلهم كلّما نظرت اليهم
وازيد في ملكهم سبعين ضبعفا واذا تلبذذ اهل الجنة بالطعام والشراب، تلبذذو
اولئك بذكري وكلامي وحديثي. قال: يا ربّ ما علامة اولئك؟ قال مسجونون قد
سجنوا السنّتهم من فضول الكلام وبطونهم من فضول الطّعام.

“O Ah mad! In paradise surely there is a palace made of pearl above pearl and white pearl above white pearl, with no cracks or joints. My choice elites live in it. I look at them seventy times a day, talk to them, and expand their property seventy times. While the people of Paradise enjoy food and drink, they take pleasure in remembering Me, My words, and My utterances.” The Noble Prophet then asked, “What are the marks of these people?” God, the Exalted, said, “They are in confinement: they have kept their tongue locked up from excessive talk, and their stomachs from excessive food.”

They do not utter what does not avail them. They keep away from eating the food that does not contribute to their growing to perfection, and does not give them power to render service to God. When they utter a word, they say it for the pleasure of God, and when they eat, they do it as it is their duty.

This part of the *Mi'rāj* Tradition describes a feature of the heavenly palaces particular to the hereafter. It is evident that we cannot have a clear and precise notion of the realities of the hereafter because they differ from the salient features of this world. Our faculties of imagination and perception are unable to grasp the realities of the hereafter and their composition. What we perceive: colors, forms and properties of something, are related with matters that come to us through our five senses in this world. This is how we understand them. But the order of the hereafter is thoroughly different

from that of this world. We cannot feel any of the realities of the next world because they are inaccessible to us and beyond the scope of our senses.

The characteristic features that *ah ādīth* delineate of the hereafter merely give us a schematic portrayal. It is through limited similarities between the transcendental world and that of our own, between the blessings therein and those in our terrestrial world that we can draw a vague picture of the unseen world. Apart from these, our senses and our faculty of perception are too weak to enable us to comprehend the realities of the next world.

One of the particularities that the *ah ādīth* have delineated, but which we are unable to fully understand, is palaces made of pearls and gems that are translucent, clear and without any joints or blemish; this being an explanation far above our ability to visualize. Some *ah ādīth* have depicted these palaces as made of gold and silver bricks. Some others have portrayed them as being inwardly visible from without. Suffice it to say that the grandest palaces so far constructed in this world, or any one that will be built in the future, is no more than an insignificant shack when compared to magnificent palaces there are in paradise. The humblest and lowest dwellings and palaces of the people of paradise are a thousand times more splendid than the best palaces of this world. There is, however, one particularly prominent palace among all others which is for the chosen elite [*khawās s*]. Those who reside in this palace are not merely satisfied with the heavenly food and drink, in spite of the fact that heavenly food and drink excel earthly counterparts. They are those who, while in this world, aspire for lofty ideals and abstain from illicit pleasures in order to get that particular heavenly food and drink. Yet, among the dwellers in paradise are people who disregard that heavenly nourishment. To quote the Qur'an:

*“...and their Lord shall make them drink a pure drink.”*¹

Elsewhere, the Holy Qur'an says,

*“...and are made to drink a pure drink that is sealed. Its sealing is of musk; and for that let the aspirers aspire.”*²

Remembering God and speaking to Him as the *awliyā*'s best delight

A group of people of paradise are not concerned with the heavenly food and drink that God has prepared for His elite:

“While the people of Paradise take delight in food and drink, they take delight in remembering Me, My words and My utterances.”

1- *Sūrat al-Insān* 74:21.

2- *Sūrat al-Mut affifīn* 83:25-6.

What is there in remembering God and speaking to Him that makes these people disregard other pleasures? An example to make things clear to the mind is a table set with various delicious foods, each more tasty than the other by degrees of 10, 20, 30, etc. Now, would any wise person take, without a reason, the less delicious food when he can eat the most delicious food evaluated 100 in taste? When there is something more pleasing than eating and drinking, something that does not require "eating" and "drinking", this person will naturally choose it.

For the same reason, it is not wise if one pushes the tastiest food aside and contents himself with the less valuable food. God's *awliyā'* are surely aware of the delight there is in heavenly food and drink. There must be a reason for them to reject it. It is the pleasure they take in remembering God and in talking to Him which is more enjoyable than heavenly food and drink. To explain why remembering God and speaking to Him is so enjoyable, we need an example. When one has had his food, he cannot enjoy delicious food anymore. He may even become sick if he takes it. This is because we enjoy food when our body needs it: hunger is a sign of body need, so is cool water when we are thirsty.

Now, a question arises: What do we need the most? Naturally, food and water—the two corporeal and animal needs, including plants. One may therefore, say that the need for food is vegetative because the plants, too, need food. But one's "humanhood" [*insāniyyah*] is not related with the stomach. It will require "humanistic needs" once its nutrients are digested. It is the need for food, as it was said, that is both "corporeal" and "animalistic": the greater the need, the greater the joy when the need is satisfied.

No need is more excellent than the need man has of God. One single bounty of God can provide all our needs, just as the whole universe came into actuality:

*"His command, when He intends anything, is only to say to it: 'Be', and it is."*¹

The existence of multiple universes is a manifestation of God's will. If His will is disconnected, the universes will be destroyed. We are in need of whatever the sun, the sky, and the earth provide. All these depend for their existence upon God's permission and will. Our need is satisfied with a piece of bread that counts to nothing in this created order, and we enjoy it. How

1- *Sūrat Yā-Sīn* 36:82.

much need do we have of the One whose single will brings the entire existence into being?!

When we need air, we actually need God to create it and to put it at our disposal. When we need food, we actually need God, as we do in other requirements, of which man is never free. These needs are too many to be counted and too extensive to be demarked. Were man able to calculate his needs using advanced scientific tools and computers, he would come up with an astonishing figure, all, of course, dependent upon the Divine will—i.e. an act of the God, being itself a finite manifestation of the Infinite Essence. However hard we rack our brain and make use of the advanced tools, we will fail to demark the scope of the need we have of God.

If we understand that need is a principle and that there is a way to satisfy it, we will realize how pleasing our communication with God will be. The greatest pleasures of this world are but a pale exposure of the Infinite Being whom we are totally in need of. If we could recognize our needs and could understand that only He provides for these needs, we would be delighted to consider all other pleasures as worthless. The people of paradise are well aware of their needs and know that only God provides for their needs.

The Qur'anic statement, "*Allah will not speak to them nor will He look upon them on the Day of Resurrection*"¹ points to the most severe punishment; the lot of the mean, hypocritical, obstinate people and those who have committed the most terrible crimes; those who do not accept the truth, and insult the Sacred Presence of the Divine.

It can thus be understood that when God does not look at people and does not speak to them, it is the greatest punishment. On the contrary, His looking at and speaking to is a great mercy; however, this is a very significant point to understand. An example can be taken from the case of children. When, for instance, a friend annoys his bosom friend, the latter decides to correct him. The most terrible punishment for the child comes at the time when his friend decides not to remain on speaking terms with him, nor to look at him when they meet, to turn his face away, and not to reply when he is spoken to. The deeper the relationship is, the more painful this punishment will be. The child has naturally recognized that his friend's considerate look is more valuable than any other pleasure. But, as man grows, unfortunately, his animal faculties of perception gain an upper hand rather than his pure perception. Because we are merely concerned with our stomach and our animal life, we cannot understand and are heedless to the pleasures that do us good. We have degraded ourselves to the same level as

1- *Sūrat Āl 'Imrān* 3:77.

that of the animals: our pleasures are limited to those of eating, drinking and sexual gratifications. Humane pleasures are more worthy, more pleasing and purer, to the extent that if we experience a part of them, we will renounce all other material and animal desires.

Unfortunately, material pleasures keep us occupied, thus preventing us from enjoying immaterial and humane pleasures; from discovering the fact that we are needful creatures, fully in need of God. Communion with God gives us the greatest pleasure. One's constant attention to animal life creates a barrier against the spiritual life, prevents progress and growth towards perfection.

What a pity! Rather than soaring high, far above the angels, drawing near the Angelic World [*malakūt*], and attaining the rank of God's *awilyā'*, we further indulge in secular matters and get stuck in mud just as an animal does. To rescue ourselves from this mean and lowly state, we must make every effort to diminish our concern for this world and our attachment to material things. It is evident that the more one endeavors and adapts oneself to it, the more he enjoys it.

Those whose round-the-clock concern is to seek after yet the more delicious food will hurry to obtain it soon after they get the wind where to go. They develop an ever-increasing urge for food and drink until it gains an upper hand over other desires beyond which they do not perceive anything else. Such a person must refrain from material pleasure if he wants to rescue himself from this condition. He will then become less fond of the secular things and more drawn to metaphysics and to spiritual enjoyment. As it was said, a group of people of paradise show no concern for the heavenly food and drink because they take pleasure in remembering God and in listening to His word. They rejoice at watching the signs of the Divine mercy, at being favored by God, and at being spoken to by Him.

Those who do not heed the heavenly food and drink and other joys are they who disregarded the same while they were in this world. If they had been fond of food and drink, they would like heavenly food and drink, too. This is because man's desires in the hereafter are of the same type as his desires in this world, so are the pleasures people are given in the hereafter similar as those in this world. The Holy Qur'an has mentioned,

*“Whenever they shall be given a portion of the fruit thereof, they shall say: this is what was given to us before; and they shall be given the like of it.”*¹

1- *Sūrat al-Baqarah* 2:25.

Thus, the blessings man is given in the hereafter are of the same type as those he had loved in this world. This is because he will not appreciate novel blessings if has not already been acquainted with them. The greatest blessing one can have is that which one loves.

*“... and therein shall be what their souls delight.”*¹

There are people who, like the prophets, delight in speaking to God in the hereafter. They are those who did not set their heart on licit blessings in this world, because they were in quest of greater pleasure. They were the people whose food of the spirit was being supplied by Divine attention even though they were not ranked among those to be spoken to by God, since only the prophets are so qualified,

*“And to Mūsā, Allah addressed His words, speaking (to him).”*²

The believers who loved to talk to God, and ardently did so, fled from entering into conversation with people and kept away from futile discourse. They will attain their desire in the hereafter although they did not merit it in this world.

There are people who upon stepping into a gathering look forward to talking. Some others, unconcerned as they are, eat greedily as soon as there is no hindrance, helping themselves to delicious food and sweets. On the contrary, there are those who take a sigh of relief once they are in solitude, and begin their devotional prayer, seeking communion with God. So long as they were in society, their social responsibilities prevented them from paying full attention to God. Now they have been given the chance to supplicate their Beloved. This is why in answer to the Prophet's (s) question: “What are the marks of these people?” God, the Exalted, said,

“They are in confinement: they have kept their tongue locked up from excessive talk, and their stomachs from excessive food.”

They speak as God likes it, and they eat not because the food is delicious, but because it pleases God: it gives them power to worship God.

1- *Sūrat al-Zukhruf* 43:71.

2- *Sūrat al-Nisā'* 4:164.

Discourse 8

Establishing Friendship, and Loving the Indigent and the Needy

يا احمد؛ انّ المحبّة لله هي المحبّة للفقراء والتّقرب اليهم. قال ومن الفقراء؟ قال
الَّذين رضوا بالقليل وصبروا على الجوع وشكروا على الرّجاء ولم يشكوا جوعهم
ولا ظمأهم ولم يكذبوا بالسنتهم ولم يغضبوا على ربّه ّم ولم يغمّوا على ما
فاتهم ولم يفرحوا بما آتاهم.

يا احمد؛ محبّتي محبّة الفقراء فإدن الفقراء وقرب مجلسهم منك وابتعد الاغنياء
وابعد مجلسهم عنك فانّ الفقراء احبائي.

“O Ah mad! Surely the love for God entails love for the poor, and keeping company with them.”

He (s) asked: “And who are the poor?” God said, “Those who are pleased with little, are patient when they are hungry, and give thanks when they are in comfort; those who do not complain of thirst and hunger, never tell lies, are never angry with their Lord, are never sad for what they have lost and are never exultant at what He has given them.”

“O Ah mad! To love me is to love the poor. So keep them in company, assemble with them in their gatherings, and keep away from the rich, and stay away from their assembly; surely the poor are My friends.”

There are two possibilities in the phrase “*inna’l-mah abbata lillāh*”, the first is that the “*lām*” letter attached to the word Allah is for embellishment [*taz’īm*]. As such, the sentence means, “to love Allah is tantamount to loving the poor”. The second is that the “*lām*” letter is not for embellishment or is not additional [*zā’id*]; rather, it is used in its very original sense. The above-mentioned sentence, therefore, means, “the love which is for God is the very love for the poor.”

Characteristics of the poor who believe in God and love Him

The salient features of the poor the love of whom is tantamount to loving God are as follows:

1) “Those who are pleased with little (in life).”

There are certain people who though they are poor, are avaricious, desiring to be wealthy and wishing to enjoy worldly gains to the full. They are those who would benefit from material bounties and not be willing to take little, if they had the chance to, but they don't. It is not desirable to make friends with such poor people as these. To establish friendship with those who are content with little from this world, are not greedy for material bounties and for what others possess, is love for God.

2) “And, they are patient when they are hungry.”

Certain poor people are used to continual nagging and grumbling. They complain to God about the hard time they have, wondering what sins may have caused their poverty. On the contrary, some people do not do so in the event that they become poor, that is, they do not complain even if they do not have enough food or sufficient means of living. They have not neglected nor fallen short of trying—they would have sinned if they had done so. Their present hard time is because of an external factor or a natural event, flood or earthquake, or the like. They do not complain, but silently endure it than publicize it. The Holy Qur'an says,

*“The ignorant man thinks them to be rich on account of abstaining (from begging).”*¹

These people remain patient; they endure, and strive not to present their needs to people. They try to make their living, just enough to sustain life.

3) “And, they give thanks when they are in comfort;”

That is, they do not forget God and thank Him whenever God, the Exalted, favors them by providing them with a comfortable life.

4) “And, they do not complain of thirst and hunger.”

This is an essential outcome of endurance; that is, when someone has set himself to being patient, he will not complain of thirst and hunger to others.

5) “And they never tell lies.”

Some beggars speak falsely and exaggerate their needs in order to move others to have pity on them. Telling lies is a dangerous mentality to which

1- *Sūrat al-Baqarah* 2:273.

beggars are naturally exposed when asking others for help. But the poor who are loved by God never tell lies.

6) “And they are never angry with their Lord.”

They endure their poverty uncomplainingly, and do not consider God as responsible for their misfortune either. They do not begin to complain when they meet people, nor do they complain against God even in their heart. They have attained such knowledge and gnosis of God’s Oneness that they are certain that a believer’s best interest lies in what God, the Exalted, has decreed for him. However, if their knowledge has not yet reached such a stage, they know that it is not befitting for a believer to complain against God.

7) “And they are never exultant when they gain something.”

Exposition

The latter two points are more important than qualities preceding them because they are an explanation of God’s words in the Qur’an,

“So that you may not grieve for what has escaped you, nor be exultant at what He has given you.”¹

Alike it is to them whether they are rich or not. They are not so attached to this world as to rejoice and swell when they are given something or to lose control over themselves if they are deprived of it. Such states are signs of incapacity and weakness of belief.

Wealth and poverty as two means of trial

A believing person should ignore this world, because when he is given it, he is given God’s bounty and a means to be tested with. When it is taken from him, it is yet another test, a calamity that he must endure. Enduring of poverty is not, of course, conterminous with lack of exertion to overcome it, but it means that one should not lament it as long as poverty has him in its grip.

In chapter two it was said that by His wisdom, God, the Exalted, has destined certain things for His servants—things He has seen to be in their best interest. This determination does not negate man’s freedom of choice, that is, people are not forced, nor are they without freedom of choice. The actualization of causes and conditions makes it possible for a portion of bounties to belong to a certain person. God, the Exalted, gives every one

1- *Sūrat al-H adīd* 57:23.

what He thinks is in the best interest of that person. No doubt, these are all to test man.

A believing person is confident that what God has destined for him is in his best interest: if God gives him the whole world, it is good for him. If God afflicts him with hardship and torments inflicted by oppressors, he finds it to be the good since he has a high opinion of God. He feels that calamities are causes for his sins to be wiped out and his rank to be raised higher. When God makes someone poor, it is not because He harbors enmity against that person. When God makes someone rich, it is not out of love for that person.

When a person, ignorant about religious sciences and deprived of Prophetic teachings, becomes poor, he may say “God has abased me. He has inflicted me with ill-fortune because I was not well-esteemed in His eyes.”

“But when He tries him, then straitens to him his means of subsistence, he says: my Lord has disgraced me.”¹

In the meantime, God says,

“And as for man, when his Lord tries him, then treats him with honor and makes him lead an easy life, he says: my Lord honors me.”²

Besides calling poverty and wealth two means of trial, the Qur’an considers them as two processes, originating from causes and factors: poverty is a reflection and a consequence of shameful acts and a punishment that many receive in this world—those who did not pity the poor, amassed wealth and took pride in their riches.

Events occur in accordance with measures, wisdom and interest. They do not happen because they are out of God’s control or because God is heedless and things go wrong; for example, a volcano suddenly erupts and demolishes a city, a heavy rain causes floods that destroy houses, and the like. A believer knows that God has power over all things. There is nothing that is outside the domain of His will, knowledge, and permission. In His hand is the regulation of all created things, big or small.

“He regulates the affair from the heavens to the earth; then shall it ascend to Him...”³

Thus events, pleasant or unpleasant, are not chance occurrences, but we are unaware, and so should we be. Occurrences test us. It will not produce the effect if we know why. Testing of the weak should go

1- *Sūrat al-Fajr* 89:16.

2- *Sūrat al-Fajr* 89:15.

3- *Sūrat al-Sajdah* 32:5.

together with a bit of ambiguity. The smart examinees may guess the content of the exam beforehand, but it is all the same to them, since they can pass it. The same is true if they already know what afflictions will befall them.

God, the Exalted, has granted His prophets and *awliyā'*, foreknowledge of the events that are bound to happen either to themselves or to others. This awareness, however, does not harm them. They do not recount their knowledge to others. If they do, they merely give certain companions of theirs a hint, provided it is not imprudent and neither harms their listeners when they learn about it.

An example is the case of a professor wishing to give his students a test. To the successful student who is well-prepared it makes no difference what questions he will be asked. Such are God's prophets and *awliyā'*, who are already aware that they will be given a test, an awareness that in practice makes no difference to them because they implement their duty in which lies God's pleasure. But others are not like this. When aware of the subject-matters of the test, they devote themselves only to those specific points and disregard other topics. It is best, therefore, that there should be some ambiguity in the administration of tests for the populace.

We do not know why God, the Exalted, has decreed that some people be poor and some rich, some become ill and suffer difficulties one after another, whereas some live a life of ease and comfort. But we know in passing that the one who has been conferred bounties is not more favored by God than the one who is afflicted with trouble and poverty. It is vice versa. When God loves someone, He exposes him to more trying situations. Imām 'Alī ('a) is reported to have said,

“Afflictions act as disciplinary chastisement for oppressors, tests for believers, ranks for prophets, and greatness for *awliyā'*.”¹

The poet also says,

هر که در این بزم مقربتر است
بلا بیشترش می دهند

*One who is dearer in this gathering,
He will be faced with more misfortunes.*

It is thus concluded that wealth and poverty are not the criteria to judge somebody's worth or disgrace in the eyes of God, for it is the doing of the duty that counts: the rich are supposed to do their duty in regard with their

1- *Bihār al-Anwār*, vol. 67, section [bāb] 12, p. 235.

money, and the poor are to be patient and give thanks. God, the Exalted, says,

*“No evil befalls on the earth nor in your own souls, but it is in a book before We bring it into existence, surely that is easy for Allah.”*¹

Prospective events are all recorded in the Divine Guarded Tablet [*lawh -e mah fūz*]. These events occur in accordance with an order and plan with full knowledge and wisdom of God. It is not difficult for God to plan the events thousands of years before and regulate their occurrences appropriately. From religious teachings we have learned that in the domain of God's action [*fi 'l*], will [*irādah*] and knowledge [*ilm*], time has no place. Time is applicable to the corporeal beings in order to measure the range of their movement, but it is inapplicable to the domain of incorporeal beings.

Yesterday, today and tomorrow are alike to God, the Exalted. To Him it makes no difference whether to pre-determine an affair or decide it at its own time. We that cannot sketch a definite program for our future because we are not sure of tomorrow: we do not know whether we will remain alive and capable of putting our plan into effect or not, and whether the conditions will be ready for us to do so or not. But for God, the Exalted, nothing is hard; the world of existence is, in its totality, present before Him. All the creatures and the events of the world of creation, whether they existed millions of years ago and whether they will exist millions of years from now, are all equally present before God.

Thus, when one is conferred a favor, he should not take pride in himself, because events are all well calculated, carefully worked out and a means to test one with. When a misfortune befalls a person, he should not lament it, because his best interest lies in what has happened. Allah, the Exalted, desires that people should attain spiritual perfection. Among signs of this perfection is remaining unperturbed at the time when he enjoys bounties and when he is deprived of them. It is, of course, not so easy to remain undisturbed in affluence or in deprivation, but we should, at least, try not to exaggerate it.

The closer we get to remaining steadfast in tribulations and not exulting when we are given blessings, the closer and dearer will we be to God and the more perfect will our soul become. God, the Exalted, wishes to perfect us and deliver us from lowly matters so that we may become virtuous. One

1- *Sūrat al-H adīd* 57:22.

way to achieve it is to know that hardships are all based on Divine wisdom, destiny and providence, and that nothing happens without a reason.

Keeping company with the poor

“O Ahmad! To love me is to love the poor. So keep them (in close) company, assemble with them in their gatherings.”

The virtuous and noble poor that pay no heed to material manifestations are loved by God. It is these people the love of whom is considered the love for God. They are people adorned with praiseworthy characteristics mentioned (at the beginning of this chapter). God, the Exalted, commands His Messenger (s) to keep them in close company, assemble with them in their gatherings, and place the poor persons close to him when such a person enters the assembly where the Prophet (s) is sitting. Besides, the Prophet (s) should not drive the beggars away, but should be kind to them as much as possible, “so that I will make you near to Me.”

“...and keep (far) away from the rich and stay away from their assembly; surely the poor are My friends.”

Why does God, the Exalted, so strongly emphasize that love is to be shown to the poor, although there certainly are unworthy people among the poor and worthy and pure ones among the rich?

The answer is that not all poor persons enjoy such a privilege. As was mentioned in the answer that God, the Exalted, gave the Prophet (s); only those specific people endowed with the above qualities are referred to as the poor, the love for whom is considered as love for God. It is evident that the same applies to a rich person who has the same qualities: one who gives thanks when he is favored with bounties, and does not lament it if he is deprived of it. Among the prophets (‘a), there were some who were well-off, but did not set their heart on their wealth; to be rich or not to be rich made no difference to them; they spent their money in proper ways. It can thus be concluded that it is not the love for any poor person that is desirable; we are not supposed to repel all the rich people either. The criteria to judge the right and the wrong, proximity to God or distance from Him are the qualities specified for the poor who love God.

There is a reason why God, the Exalted, has emphasized the poor by saying, “the love for the poor is love for Me”, and not said, love for Me is love for the righteous, the patient, those pleased with Divine destiny who put their trust in Me. It is because the rich are more exposed to corruption, deviation and rebellion; they have a greater chance of being lead away from God. God has said in the Qur’an,

“Nay! Man is most surely inordinate, because he sees himself free from want.”¹

An affluent person may rely on his wealth and pride himself, whereas a poor person has nothing to boast about. The most serious corruption, which is the origin of disbelief, obstinacy, and polytheism, is pride and haughtiness that the rich are afflicted with. Because the well-to-do are mostly entangled in the above, God, the Exalted, has said,

“Allah does not love any arrogant boaster.”²

Since God loves humble and modest people, and the rich are mostly haughty and boastful, it can be said that the majority of worthy people come from the poor. Therefore, God has ordered love for the poor, except for those who are disbelievers, rebellious and obstinate. If He had said: love the affluent except for the evil ones, it would have set the majority aside because they are mostly evil of undesirable qualities. Our love for a believing rich person, when there is one, would not be merely for the sake of God and for that person's merits, but for other considerations as well. It might be tainted with other attractions, material and worldly.

In virtue of his low, rudimentary nature and perspective, man considers wealth and material possessions valuable, and honors the well-off when he meets them. Deep within his heart, he loves wealth and considers such people important, and naturally humbles and degrades himself before them.

We should be self-disciplined and careful, making a distinction between “wealth” and “faith in God” when we meet a rich person, and love him only for his belief in God, not for his wealth and possessions. Now, if this is the case, and we love someone because of his belief in God, we should love a faithful needy person still more, although his appearance might not be appealing.

1- *Sūrat al-‘Alaq* 96:6-7.

2- *Sūrat al-H adīd* 57:23.

Discourse 9

Disobeying Sensual Desires

يا احمد؛ لا تتزين بلبين اللباس وطيب الطعام ولين الوطاء. فان النفس مأوى كل شر ورفيق كل سوء تجرّها الى طاعة الله وتجرك الى معصيته وتخالفك في طاعته وتطيعك في ما يكرهه وتطغى اذا شبعت وتشكوا اذا جاعت وتغضب اذا افتقرت وتتكبر اذا استغنت وتنسى اذا كبرت وتغفل اذا امنت وهي قرينة الشيطان. ومثل النفس كمثّل النعامة تأكل الكثير واذا حمّ ل عليها لا تطير وكمثّل الدفلى لوئبه حسن وطعمه مرّ.

God, glory be to Him, tells the Prophet (s):

“O Ah mad! Do not incline towards wearing fine clothes, eating rich food and a soft bed, because the soul is the abode of all wickedness and the friend of all mischief. You call it to obey God and it calls you to disobey Him; it opposes you in obeying God, and obeys you in what God dislikes. It exceeds all limits when it has had its full (meal) and complains when it is hungry. It is angry when it is poor and becomes arrogant when it is free from want. It becomes forgetful in senility and heedless when it is secure. It is a peer of the Devil. Their example is like that of the ostrich that eats a lot and when it is burdened, it does not fly, and like the oleander, nice in color and bitter in taste.”

Here in the *h adīth*, God the Exalted, warns the Prophet (s) against obeying the soul and submitting to it. It is clear to all that the Prophet (s) is infallible [*ma's ūm*], protected from sliding and submitting to the soul. The prophets' (s) inerrancy and Divine guidance go together. The inspirations, revelations and sciences that God, the Exalted, has bestowed upon them, bring about the inerrancy. The words in the *h adīth* are mostly to teach others, seemingly addressing the people in all times and climes, to benefit from, on their path to perfection.

This part of the *h adīth* centers on “disobeying the soul”, much emphasized by ethics and moralists who demand that one should disobey his soul and not allow it to gain an upper hand over him. A Prophetic narration says,

“Your most hostile enemy is the soul between your two sides.”¹

The word “soul” [*nafs*] is equivocal: in philosophy it means “spirit” [*rūh*], but in ethics it certainly has a different meaning. The spirit has various dispositions, of which “intellect” [*‘aql*], man’s transcendental tendencies—a Divine creation—is a part. The intellect is basically noble, and related to God, the Exalted,

“And breathed into him of My spirit.”²

Thus, this *soul* that is being blamed is not exactly *spirit*, but is something versus the *intellect*. For the same reason, books on ethics and the statements of the learned often contain references to a struggle between the *soul* and the *intellect*, a battlefield wherein man sometimes sides with the *soul* and at other times with the *intellect*, both a part of the *spirit*. When one’s *spirit* has a propensity for animal characteristics, for nature and for material things, it is called *soul*, whereas a tendency to transcend this material world and an inclination to draw near to God, the Exalted, is termed *intellect*—quite different from the *intellect* used in philosophy.

By the *soul* that is an enemy to man, it is meant a group of inclinations that bar the progress of man’s soul and its drawing near to God, the Exalted, who has assigned man’s soul a position whence he can either fall or ascend. In ethics and *ah ādīth*, the *soul* is an element that may degrade man by creating in him low qualities that counter virtues, whereas the tendencies that bring about man’s ascent originate from the *intellect*—the *intellect* that raises man’s soul, moving him close to God. According to this definition man should beware, fight against, and overcome his *soul*, the factor that drives him to decadence.

Man, who naturally desires to attain perfection, and must, according to the verdict of reason, attain the supreme levels of perfection, is religiously obliged to move towards God and draw near to Him. He must, therefore, fight anything that is a cause for his degradation and fall. If he lets the urges for dress, food, luxury, material ornaments, etc. act as they want, they will gain an ever increasing power. The more one gives his desires a positive reply, the closer they get to him, and the stronger they become—as has been proved experimentally. For example, one gets used to hunger and loses his

1- *Bih ār al-Anwār*, vol. 70, p. 64.

2- *Sūrat al-H ajar* 15:29.

appetite a few days after he has begun fasting during the month of Ramad ān. But soon after this month is over, he finds in himself an increasing desire for food and drink.

The same is true in the case of sensual appetites and gratification of sexual desires. A young, faithful, but single person that decides to suppress his desires finds it an easy task to do so, because he is already used to it. But the same person is more in danger of sinning after he has got married. The newly-wed, faithful young should therefore observe greater control over their behavior; they should not fancy that they will never commit acts of disobedience just because they are following the lawful way of life. This is exactly the point where Satan increases his temptations. This is because they have already enjoyed wholesome pleasure that increasingly intensifies their desires. Experience has proved that when they are given more freedom and more easily receive a positive “go”, other sensual impulses increase in force, too.

Spiritual matters follow the same pattern: it is hard for a person to begin rising in the middle of the night to pray even if he uses an alarm clock. He falls asleep again, or is sluggish in performing his prayer. But through continual practice he will get used to it. Mid-night praying becomes so convenient that he feels uneasy and distracted if he happens to miss it even once.

The way to the strengthen will-power and disobey the force of sensual impulses lies in refusing the illicit passions of the soul, a practice that should be well-planned in order to enable one to continue it. It should not be so hard that it makes him give it up. Constant strife against the soul, and a negative answer given to his carnal impulses will gradually establish such a strong control over his soul, that he will never surrender to his transient animal desires.

That is why, God, the Exalted, enjoins His Beloved not to give a positive answer to all desires of the soul, not to eat delicious food, not to sleep in a comfortable bed, and not to wear nice clothes because such a practice will gradually end in committing unlawful acts.

If one persistently pursues lawful [*h alāl*] enjoyments, he will first be drawn to things that are undesirable [*makrūh*], and then to unlawful [*h arām*] acts, as is indicated in the tradition,

“The one who walks along a cliff, may slip and fall down; he must, therefore, keep to the safe side.”¹

1- *Bih ār al-Anwār*, vol. 73, p. 29.

Many traditions consider the recommended [*mustah abb*] acts as a reserved area, neighboring the obligatory [*wājib*] acts. Anyone who wishes to perpetuate his obligatory acts of worship should perform some recommended ones, lest the obligatory ones are abandoned. Undesirable acts are likewise a reserved area for the forbidden [*muh arram*] acts. This means that one should keep away from those acts that are disliked to abstain from committing the forbidden ones. Undesirable acts are in fact a boundary between man and the forbidden acts. Undesirable is a boundary line God, the Exalted, has set in order to prevent his servants from committing sins. If one is obliged to avoid the acts that look undesirable, he will not commit forbidden ones. Muslims are enjoined to perform recommended acts lest their obligatory acts be abandoned. Supererogatory [*nāfilah*] prayers that come after the obligatory daily prayers serve to compensate the daily prayers if there is any deficiency in them.

People versus sensual desires

With regard to sensual desires, people can be divided into several groups:

The first group is of those who do as they wish: nothing stops them; they always seek material desires and prefer this world's life to the hereafter. The Holy Qur'an says,

*"...and woe to the unbelievers on account of the severe chastisement, those who love this world's life more than the hereafter."*¹

Persistence in seeking the material and sensual desires, and not wanting to give them up, is a source of disbelief. Religion orders man to control his desires, but he does not want to. So he does not accept religion, to easily do what he wishes to. The people in this category do not acknowledge any limits to their sensual desires. God, the Exalted, says in the Qur'an,

*"Nay! Man desires to give the lie to what is before him."*²

The second group is of those who acknowledge limits to their desires, and strive to stay away from unlawful things, but do not shun satisfying sensual desires for things that are undesirable, things whose nature is dubious [*mushtabah*], and things that are permissible [*muh allilāt*]. Those included in this group are yet divided into several branches: some shun the grave sins [*kabā'ir*], but once in a while commit minor ones. Others commit grave sins, too. Some immediately repent, whereas others do not, and persist. All these, however, struggle to give up the grave sins as much as possible.

1- *Sūrat Ibrāhīm* 14:2-3.

2- *Sūrat al-Qiyāmah* 75:5.

The third group is of those whose principle is to oppose passionate desires, except for the cases in which God is pleased with their desires, and they give it only to earn God's satisfaction, not to follow their powerful sensual impulse. For them it is a principle not to obey what their tendencies urge them to; rather, they choose God's satisfaction as a criterion. Members of this group vary in hierarchy.

The primary aim of the prophets has been to deliver mankind from the lowly state, that is, from an irresponsible life and from the bondage of the soul. (As long as individuals do not evolve from this level, they will never associate with the prophets ('a) and their message. How can one be a follower of the prophets ('a) when he is not willing to restrain his desires?) One must accept certain limits, guard against his urges, and not indulge in whatever his heart tells him. There is however a great distance between this stage and the stage where one refrains from doing anything without God's permission and without earning His satisfaction.

Depending on their belief, the believers proceed between these two extremities that cannot be measured numerically. The prophets ('a), too, are ranked in an hierarchy, whose zenith is occupied by the sacred being of the Seal of the Prophets (s), Fāt imah al-Zahrā' ('a), and the Twelve Imāms ('a) from the progeny of the Prophet, God bless him and his descendants. These Fourteen Beacons of pure light ('a) originate from a single light and occupy the highest rank of the hierarchy. The other Prophets ('a) occupy lower positions.

A believer should strive to raise himself from a lower level to a higher one—a struggle that, of course, depends on his own effort and on the success from God. No one can predict the end result of his life. There are people who ascend to higher planes. There are some, who after attaining the loftiest human planes, fall to lowly states in life. For those occupying higher positions on the ladder, hazards are more serious, destructive and sometimes annihilating, than they are for the persons at lower positions, because a fall from the first step does not make much difference.

The moral injunctions that the infallible Imāms ('a) have introduced make man recognize the sensitive stage he is occupying. If he responds positively to his sensual desires, he will slide and move further away from God. The more he opposes his caprice for the sake of God, the closer he gets to God.

There are, of course, people who oppose many of their desires in order to reach a higher plane that is worthless. For example, they pretend that they are ascetics, so they eat little, wear rags, live in shacks and disregard ranks and dignities so that they might be known as ascetics. These people may fail

to see through the tricks and deception their soul uses, perceiving themselves to be meritorious: people of piety, given to recitation and recollection of God's name [*ahl-e dhikr*], fasting most of the time, avoiding nice houses, fancying they have advanced. But it is this complacency that drives them to destruction. It is the very pride and self-conceit—imagining that they are better than others—that brings them perdition. Those who followed their desire for material enjoyments enjoyed them, however transient it might have been. But these wretched people were deprived of the enjoyments in this world and in the next, as the Holy Qur'an says,

*“Say: Shall We inform you of the greatest losers in (their) deeds? (These are) they whose labor is lost in this world's life and they think that they are well-versed in skills of work of hands.”*¹

We must seek refuge in God from being deceived by our soul, and by fancying that we have become righteous. This is the moment when we begin to follow Satan and are caught in his trap. Those who are good-doers abase themselves before God, as done by Imām 'Alī ibn al-H usayn ('a), “Is there anyone who is in a worse state than I am?”² Considering the Imām's rank, what should others say? If we take after this mentality, practice and characteristic, we will get so bewildered that we will utter the same words.

Such is man, sometimes he does not consider himself lower than others; he has his reasons: committed no blameworthy deeds, no theft, no murders, no adultery, no etc, etc. It is because of this vainglory that he is inferior to all. Such people are often a cause for deviation, division, and group orientation; that is, they consider themselves superior and make others follow them. But they are unable to perceive that it is the love for fame and leadership—a love that they treasure more than other sins, a mentality that causes them to fall.

The more knowledgeable one becomes, the more powerful and cunning his soul will grow, with tricks too many to count and snares too many to recognize. In ordinary men, the soul's power to play tricks is weaker than it is in men of knowledge. The former group's tricks are very simple. Moreover, they may readily feel sorry, and deliver themselves from the evil grip of their caprices, whereas a man of knowledge's desire may so deceive him that he will not be able to get rid of it once it has him in its grip. We must, therefore, be very careful.

We do not, however, mean that it is undesirable to begin our quest for perfection in comparison to the time we have lost and not acquired

1- *Sūrat al-Kahf* 18:103-4.

2- *Bihār al-Anwār*, vol. 98, p. 89, Imām 'Alī ibn al-H usayn's ('a) Dawn Prayer.

knowledge, the attaining of perfection would entail greater danger if we fell that dangers ensuing from our soul and from the Devil would fill the universe. All this is a trick of Satan whose final desire is to stop our inclining towards gaining perfection. However, we should show our grudge against him by seeking God's help and by proceeding to attain it, for God gives more assistance to those who come to Him, as is mentioned in the Divine Tradition [*h adīth-e qudsī*],

“I will move ten steps in the direction of the one who takes one step in My direction.”¹

When God helps someone, it will be easier for that person to oppose his desires however hard it is, an attempt that is difficult at the outset:

عشق از اول سرکش و خونی بود
گریزد هر که بیرونی بود
*Love is murderous from the first,
So that he, who is an outsider, runs away.*

If one continues fighting his desires, implores God for success and remains persistent, things will gradually become easier for him: the strife against the soul will become easier; he will feel distracted if he misses an opportunity to pray, because he has been deprived of the Divine grace.

We have mentioned a few traces, dangers and deceptions of the soul, in order for one to develop greater awareness of these dangers. However, this does not mean that the soul is an undefeatable giant confronting us. Rather, the soul means these same desires that are within us. Thus, the spirit, is called the soul because it is the origin of these desires.

“It opposes you in obeying God, and obeys you in what God dislikes.”

If you decide to do something that God does not like, the sensual soul will place itself at your service with all its power and obey you. But when you want to pray, it will not allow you to concentrate on your prayer. This is why you lose your presence of mind. The more you endeavor to concentrate, the more it will resist, making your thoughts wander in various directions.

“It exceeds all limits when it has had its full (meal) and complains when it is hungry.”

1- *Bihār al-Anwār*, vol. 87, p. 19.

It is a quality of the soul to voice complaints, to continuously lament when it is hungry, and to rebel when it has had a full meal. If you give in to what your heart desires and to what your soul demands, your soul, acting like a wild horse, will have made you follow it headlong. Then, you will be unable to hold it in check. If you wish to tame this horse, it is necessary to keep it a bit hungry, refusing some of its demands, and controlling it, so that you will be able to benefit from it in the service of God, and have it permanently subordinated to the reason and the Divine law [*sharī'ah*].

“It is angry when it is poor and becomes arrogant when it is free from want.”

Such is the soul. When it is wealthy it behaves arrogantly; when poor, becomes ill-humored and pessimistic about everything: the system, friends, and neighbors, as if he has a claim on them. To it, patience, tolerance and forbearance are meaningless words, and the whole world seems a constraining locus.

“It becomes forgetful in senility and heedless when it is secure.”

When in danger, the soul tries to focus its attention on how to get out of the jam, but it becomes heedless when it is secure. For example, when cities are being bombarded by missiles, the soul behaves warily, that is, it repents, turns to God, implores to Him, prays, resorts to God's *awliyā'* and recites *Ziyārat-e 'Āshūrā*. After peace is restored and minds are at rest, all prayer is totally abandoned, and resorting to God's *awliyā'* and reciting of *Ziyārat-e 'Āshūrā* wane. This is a quality of the soul: when it is secure, it becomes heedless, neglects God and forgets punishments and troubles.

“It is a peer of the Devil.”

The soul is a peer of the Devil that has taken an oath to lead mankind astray,

“He (Satan) said: Then by Thy might I will surely make them live an evil life, all, except Thy servants from among them, the purified ones.”¹

It is through the soul, that the Devil deceives man, pulling him into hell. It is the carnal soul that leaves the door open for Satan to enter, encouraging man to follow him. One should thus consider which is wiser: to tolerate the Devil or to fight it off.

“Their example is like the parable of the ostrich that eats a lot and when it is burdened, it does not fly.”

1- *Ibid.*, pp. 82-3.

When the soul is told to study, pray and concentrate, it disregards the command, feigns nervousness and disability to do as it is told. But when there is a comic film to watch on T.V., it is able to fully concentrate and not miss a single detail. In performing the ritual prayer, it claims not to be able to do likewise.

“And it is like the oleander, nice in color and bitter in taste.”

The carnal soul and its crafts are attractive from without, but poisonous from within; it is outwardly disguised in piety, knowledge and asceticism, but inwardly nurturing satanic stimuli, and wrong notions; attractive, impressive in style of language, but misleading in content. Where the followers of the carnal soul are bound for is unknown. They are first boast of performing acts of devotion, obeying God, and acquiring knowledge of Him, but in practice, they soon neglect the ritual prayer and the performing of worship. They do not take it seriously if they miss their prayer. They consider everything as being arbitrary and knowledge as being relativistic. As a result, their belief system weakens. They no longer feel it their duty and responsibility to perform the ritual prayer, to devote attention to God and to spiritualities.

Discourse 10

Rejecting the World and the Worldly

يا احمد؛ ابغض الدنيا واهلها واحب الآخرة واهلها. قال يا رب؛ ومن اهل الدنيا ومن اهل الآخرة؟ قال اهل الدنيا من كثر اكله وضحكه ونومه وغضبه. قليل الرضا لا يعتذر الى من اساء اليه ولا يقبل عذر من اعتذر اليه. كسلان عند الطاعة وشجاع عند المعصية؛ امله بعيد واجله قريب. لا يحاسب نفسه. قليل المنفعة، كثير الكلام، قليل الخوف، كثير الفرح عند الطعام وان اهل الدنيا لا يشكرون عند الرخاء ولا يصبرون عند البلاء. كثير الناس عند هم قليل، يحمدون انفسهم بما لا يفعلون ويدعون بما ليس لهم ويتكلمون بما يتمنون ويذكرون مساوي الناس ويخفون حسناتهم.

فقال يا رب: كل هذا العيب في اهل الدنيا؟ قال: يا احمد؛ ان عيب اهل الدنيا كثير فيهم الجهل والحبق. لا يتواضعون لمن يتعلمون منه وهم عند انفسهم عقلاء وعند العارفين حمقاء.

“O Ah mad; hate the world and its seekers; love the hereafter and its seekers.” The Prophet (s) asked, “O Lord, who is the follower of the world and who is the follower of the hereafter?” God said, “The follower of the world is the one who eats, laughs and sleeps a lot; is often angry, and seldom content; he does not apologize to the one he has done evil to, and does not accept the apology of the one who asks his pardon. He is sluggish in praying, and courageous in committing sins. He longs for more, while his death is close. He does not summon himself to accounting. He does little good to others, speaks a lot and fears little. He rejoices at gormandizing. The follower of the world does not give thanks when at ease and is not patient when afflicted. Others’ significant good works seem insignificant to him. He praises himself for what he does not do, and boasts of what he

does not possess. He voices his desires, mentions others' wrongdoings, and hides their good deeds."

The Prophet said, "Are there so many defects in the worldly man?"

God, the Exalted, said, "O Ahmad, the defects of the worldly man are many, among which are ignorance and irrationality. He is not humble before the one he learns from, and considers himself amongst the wise, whereas to the knowledgeable he is amongst the fools."

Two concepts: a desire for this world and for the hereafter

What the Qur'an and the traditions have mentioned concerning the love for the world and the hereafter is related with life in this world. In the view of the Qur'an, and the *h adīth*, *Ahl al-Dunyā*' does not refer to the people who live in this world, and *Ahl al-Akhirah* does not point to those who have entered the life in the hereafter.

The "rejection of the people of the world and its lovers thereof" is thus meant for those whose thoughts, utterances and attitudes revolve around secular matters, such as pleasures and bounties of this world, those who do not consider the hereafter, nor find any attraction in it.

Depending on the intensity of their interest and inclination, those who love the world differ from each other. One group consists of those who adore the world and deny the hereafter. These are the utterly hopeless people, because they either renounce or doubt the Day of Judgment, and make no attempt to reach certainty. God, the Almighty, says concerning them,

*"But they reject the Hour, and We have prepared a burning fire for him who rejects the Hour."*¹

The second group consists of those who believe in the life after death, but their belief produces no practical effect. Consequently, they are similar to those who deny the hereafter because ineffective belief will not last, just as a tree dies when it receives no water,

*"Then evil was the end of those who did evil, because they rejected the communications of Allah and used to mock them."*²

(When one does not act in accordance with his belief, he will gradually falter in his faith, and will finally come to be placed among the disbelievers.)

1- *Sūrat al-Furqān* 25:11.

2- *Sūrat al-Rūm* 30:10.

The third group consists of those who know about the hereafter, but either devote greater attention to this world or give this world and the hereafter an equal consideration—mingling their love for this world with their love for the next. God says,

*“And others have confessed their faults, they have mingled a good deed and an evil one.”*¹

Finally, there are the followers of the hereafter, in praise of whom there are Qur’anic verses and traditions. They are also hierarchically divided into groups headed by those for whom this world has no reality, nor attraction. They live and earn a livelihood to fulfill their material needs because such is God’s command. They observe and reflect upon the natural phenomena because these are signs and tokens of the God as well as manifestations of the Divine Attributes—in fact mirrors in which they see the visage of the Beloved, His attributes and signs. Theoretically, it may sound easy, but practically it is very hard for a person to hold such a belief and be so certain as to disregard this world, and consider it merely a Divine mirror, an instrument to attain eternal felicity.

Those who seek eternal felicity also differ: some perceive the “blessings” in paradise as being similar to those in this world. Far higher in rank are the people who are mindful only of God. For them, felicity means to be near God and gain His satisfaction. The Qur’anic verses and the traditions that praise the rank of the people of the hereafter and condemn the people of this world, concern these two groups.

The Qur’anic verses and the traditions also present a range of attributes of the followers of the world, and the hereafter. Some describe all particularities, others just a few, still others prominently depict certain qualities but hint to some others. One will be considered among “those who love the world” if he has the characteristics the Qur’anic verses and the traditions have mentioned, even if he does not have all the qualities.

This part of the *M‘irāj* tradition has named twenty particularities of those who desire the world and adore it. If we realize that some of these do not exist in us, or that some are partially applicable to us, we should not think that we are not included among those who love the world. These people and their qualities are hierarchically ranked. Similarly, when we realize that we do not possess some particularities of the followers of the hereafter, or those qualities are only partially applicable to us, we should not think that we are

1- *Sūrat al-Tawbah* (or, *Barā‘ah*) 9:102.

not included among the followers of the hereafter. The people of the hereafter and their qualities are hierarchically ranked, too.

Many Qur'anic verses equate “the love and desire for the world” with wretchedness and disbelief, the outcome of which is eternal punishment. “Desire for the hereafter” has been mentioned as synonymous with eternal felicity, with otherworldly blessings as a reward. God removes obstacles so that the people can continue their journey towards perfection in this world. Thus, those in quest of wretchedness have sufficient means at their disposal in this world, and those desirous of an auspicious outcome are provided with equal means to develop, advance and traverse their spiritual course.

*“Whoever desires this present life, We hasten to him therein what We please for whomsoever We desire, then We assign to him the hell; he shall enter it despised, driven away.”*¹

The Holy Qur'an says that there are people who approve of the life of this world and love it although it is transient, that is, it comes quickly and fades quickly away. They do not heed the life after death. But God does not provide these people with all they desire. He answers only some of their requests in accordance with the order that rules over the universe, giving them only a portion of His bounties. Thus, those who desire material things will not attain all their desires. However, some of the requests will be granted and consequently, earn hell for them, despised, driven away.

On the other hand, God says about those who desire the hereafter,

*“Anyone who wants the hereafter and makes a proper effort to achieve it while he is a believer will have his efforts gratified.”*²

Those who are desirous of the life after death and believe that there is an ever-lasting and precious existence after the life of this world, should, as much as they can, strive to attain that supreme happiness—a struggle worthy of the desire—and follow the way that ends there.

How hard the endeavor should be is the question. In order to realize the scope of the efforts that match the desire for the life after death, we should study how hard the worldly men strive to live a finite, transient life that is mingled with pain and suffering. They do not desist in their effort even if they have to live a thousand years doubling their round-the-clock effort.

In spite of his lengthy, night-long supplications and prayers, the Commander of the Faithful, Imām 'Alī ('a) has said,

1- *Sūrat al-Isrā'* (or *Banī Isrā'īl*) 17:18.

2- *Sūrat al-Isrā'* (or *Banī Isrā'īl*) 17:19.

“Alas, for the scanty provision and the length of the journey.”¹

A firm belief in God is a precondition for any effort related with the hereafter. God, the Exalted, has not said, We give them paradise. He has said, “...will have his efforts gratified”. That is, in gratitude for their effort, they will be granted mercy and rewards. There is no doubt that the rewards given to the righteous and the believers will not equal in measure to their deeds. The rewards are far greater as God, the Exalted, has said,

“Whoever brings a good deed, he shall have ten like it.”²

Elsewhere He has said,

“Whoever brings good, he shall have better than it.”³

He has also said,

“And Allah multiplies for whom He pleases; and Allah is Ample-giving, All-knowing.”⁴

Similarly, God says in the Qur’an,

“They have therein what they wish and with Us is more yet.”⁵

It is impossible for us to imagine the abundant reward God gives the people of Paradise, nor perceive the blessings they enjoy there either. God gives the good-doers more than they ask for. We ask for things we know of, not the things that are beyond the scope of our knowledge, or things that are unimaginable. But, God bestows on the people of Paradise the blessings that are beyond their imagination, too.

“So no soul knows what is hidden for them of that which will refresh the eyes; a reward for what they did.”⁶

Islam versus unbelief: the criteria of love and hostility

Certain *ah ādīth* instruct people to be hostile to the worldly. This does not mean that we ought to hate someone demonstrating certain qualities of those who adore this world, say gluttony, even if he is a Muslim and a Shī‘ah. We should not. We should not hate a believer, even if he sins. We should, instead, hate his indecent acts.

1- *Nahj al-Balāghah*, trans. Fayd al-Islām, word [*kalām*] 74, p. 1119.

2- *Sūrat al-An‘ām* 6:160.

3- *Sūrat al-Naml* 27:89.

4- *Sūrat al-Baqarah* 2:261.

5- *Sūrat Qāf* 50:35.

6- *Sūrat al-Sajdah* 32:17.

A tradition states that when God loves someone, He is never hostile to him. If that person commits something indecent, God hates only that particular act. But God is hostile to unbelievers even if they do thousands of good deeds. God is hostile to these people in person, but considers their meritorious deeds as good. Thus, in Islam, the strength of one's personality is decided by his belief and unbelief, deep-rooted in his breast. Occasional deviations on the part of a believer, or some good deeds on the part of an unbeliever, do not bring about a change in his identity and personality. God's words in the *M'irāj* Tradition "O Prophet, hate the followers of the world" should not be taken to mean enmity towards anyone who commits something indecent. Were it to mean so, we would, in the first place, be enemies to our own selves, because we all have some of the qualities of the worldly.

Twenty qualities of the worldly

God, the Exalted, mentions twenty qualities of the followers of the world, and then, enumerates the qualities of the followers of the hereafter, too:

1) They are glutton

No doubt, the desire for this world begins with a love for food and drink to fill the stomach, the root of most corruptions. In order to satisfy their love for food and drink, the gluttons strive for religiously unlawful [*h arām*] wealth, followed by gratification of other passions.

Foremost in things that attract the people is food. The first desire, that appears in a child from the outset, is for food. That is why the love for food is what the followers of the world are concerned with. But the followers of the hereafter are not gluttons and food lovers. They take only as much food as they need, not to relish, but in order to have the power to perform acts of worship.

2) They laugh too much

The followers of the world always laugh, because they do not worry about the hereafter, nor do they fear God, the Exalted. They would fear God if they ever meditated the outcome of their life. Then they would not spend a care-free life, laughing and making merry without measure.

The followers of the hereafter always meditate their life outcome. Although they always try hard for the hereafter, they are permanently anxious, lest they incur God's displeasure and be deprived of the heavenly blessings. Therefore, they do not spend their time on fruitless discussions and intoxicated laughter.

Outwardly, a believer is always smiling. He is not grim-faced. Were he so, others would distance themselves from him. He meets others with open arms, happily and joyfully. But inwardly, he is terrified and worried about the outcome of his life. While in a group, he is happy, smiling at them, but deep in his heart he is anxious, brooding over what will happen to him, wondering if he has done his duty, and whether or not his sins have been forgiven. He is never relieved of such anxiety.

3) They sleep too much

When one feels no anxiety about the hereafter, he sleeps soundly. Such a person likes much sleep. Eating too much food naturally induces heaviness and sleep. While awake, the worldly man is totally engrossed in how to benefit from the material enjoyments and fill his stomach with deliciously rich food. When he has had his full meal, he quests a soft bed to sleep in. On the other hand, the follower of the hereafter is unwilling to spend a single moment of his life in vain, asleep. His eyes are physically closed, but he is alert in heart.

4) They are often angry

The worldly are pleased with themselves and angry with all others. They lose their temper when things run contrary to their desire, and are unable to bear hardships. They are mainly concerned with worldly enjoyments, splendor and glory, and demand that all others should respect them, and submissively carry out their orders. It is not realistic to demand that things should run as one desires. Events occur whether we want them or not. For example, natural occurrences such as illness and other problems may befall anyone. It is not fair to treat others harshly and annoy them.

5) They are seldom content

Included in the qualities of the followers of the world is their constant discontentment, and a feeling that they have a claim on others.

6) They do not apologize

They do not apologize when they offend someone. Begging pardon is a sign of humbleness. It is very hard for the worldly man to humble himself before others, confess his foul deed, and apologize for the evil he has done them. The same is true of children. They do not apologize for their misbehavior, because it is very hard for them to do so. That is why those who desire to educate their children teach them to apologize when they have misbehaved. In children, refusal to apologize may not be a flaw; it may even be a sign of their independence. In adults, it is unbecoming. A believer must immediately apologize if he offends someone to repent for his sins. He

should not resort to justifying his deeds, pretending that he had been forced to behave as he did.

7) They do not forgive

They do not forgive even insignificant errors. Anyone who apologizes for his own errors accepts the apology that others make, but the person who refuses to apologize for his mistakes does not accept the apology of others.

8) They are sluggish in prayer and courageous in sin

They are sluggish when they pray, and are courageous when they commit sins. When it is time to pray, they are slack, sluggish and wavering: they postpone their ritual prayers, and do not perform the prayers on time, but waste their time until the praying time is about to expire. God, the Exalted, has considered this an attitude of the hypocrites.

“They do not come to prayer but while they are sluggish.”¹

They are lethargic in their prayer, but eager and ready to sin.

9) They have false desires and forget that death is near

The worldly men have nothing to pin their hope on other than this world—no aims or desires except of this world. They have at their disposal what they desire. So, it is natural to get engrossed in trying to fulfill the desires that are unattainable. Concerning them, God, the Exalted, says,

“Every one of them loves that he should be granted a life of a thousand years.”²

Man cherishes foolish desires in spite of the fact that his death is approaching, and that his life is too short to allow him to attain all his desires. Man, normally, lives no more than sixty to seventy years. With such a short life, he may not find time to attain his desires. How come we desire things that take hundreds of years to complete although we know that our close relatives did not live long and neither will we? The worldly are so infatuated by this world that they forget that anticipating the unattainable is folly.

10) They do not call themselves to account

What the lovers of the world are familiar with is only this world. They, therefore, do not believe in being accountable after this life, as regards their

1- *Sūrat al-Tawbah* (or *Barā'ah*) 9:54.

2- *Sūrat al-Baqarah* 2:96.

deeds. They are not sure of the Day of Reckoning, so they do not prepare themselves ahead of the time.

Those who believe in the hereafter always remember it. They monitor their behavior, and prepare themselves for the Day of Reckoning. Imām al-Sādiq (‘a) has said,

“Call yourselves to account before you are summoned to account for them.”¹

A believer ponders on how he has spent each hour of his life. At night, before he goes to sleep he reviews his day-time activities, goes over the points of flaw, tries to repent for his falling short of his religious duties, and decides to correct them and make amends for them.

11) They do not share their blessings with others, and

12) They talk a lot

Those who adore this world do not share their blessings with others because they desire everything for themselves. They talk a lot about various matters and boast a lot, but in practice, they are all talk and no action: they do not help the society when help is needed.

13) They do not fear of God, and

14) They are delighted at the sight of food

The worldly men have no fear of God or of the outcome of their deeds. As soon as they smell food they are filled with delight, joyfully preparing to gormandize.

15) They are not thankful in ease not patient in affliction

They do not give thanks when they live in ease and comfort, nor are they patient when they face affliction.

16) They do not acknowledge others’ good work

They consider people’s multitude work insignificant, that is, people’s benevolence, however considerable it may be, seems to them to be insignificant. In fact, they do not in all humility acknowledge that others can do good, too. For example, if they are asked about a particular person’s scope of knowledge, they merely say, “He has a bit of knowledge”. No act of worship, sacrifice, and dedication by anyone else appeals to them.

1- *Bihar al-Anwār*, vol. 70, p. 73.

17) They love to boast, and**18) They praise themselves for what they have not done**

They claim to possess that which they lack. They consider their own work as important and falsely boast about what they have not done. They lie and desire appreciation for what they have not done.

The followers of the hereafter keep their good deeds secret and do not publicize them.

19) Worldly people always advertise their desires, and**20) They criticize others**

At this point, the Prophet (s) was surprised and asked God, “O God, are there so many defects in the worldly man?” God, the Exalted, said,

“O Ah mad, The defects of the worldly man are many, among which are ignorance and irrationality. He is not humble to the one he learns from, and considers himself amongst the wise, whereas to the knowledgeable he is amongst the irrational (he does not recognize what sets his affairs right and what does not).”

Discourse 11

Characteristics of the Followers of the Hereafter (Part One)

يا احمد؛ انّ اهل الخير واهل الآخرة رقيقة وجوههم، كثير حيائهم، قليل حمقهم، كثير نفعهم، قليل مكروهم. الناس منهم في راحة وانفسهم منهم في تعب، كلامهم موزون. محاسبين لانفسهم، متعنين لها. تنام اعينهم ولا تنام قلوبهم. اعينهم باكية وقلوبهم ذاكرة. إذا كتب الناس من الغافلين كتبوا من الذاكرين. في اول النعمة يحمدون وفي آخرها يشكرون، دعائهم عند الله مرفوع وكلامهم مسموع. تفرح بهم الملائكة ويدور دعائهم تجت الحجب. يحب الرب ان يسمع كلامهم كما تحب الوالدة الولد.

“O Ah mad, surely those who are given to doing good have noble faces, great modesty, little irrationality, increased blessings, and little deceit. People are secure from them, and they themselves are distressed. There are very careful in their speech. They call themselves to account. They make their soul suffer the pain. Their eyes sleep, and their hearts do not. Their eyes weep and their hearts remember God while other people are negligent, they praise their Lord at the emergence of bounties and give thanks at the end. Their supplication to God ascends, their words are heard, and the angels are happy with them. Their supplication rotates under the veils; God loves to hear their words as a mother loves her child.”

In this part of the *Mi 'rāj* Tradition, salient features and characteristics of the followers of the hereafter [*ahl al-ākhirat*] are mentioned. While mentioning their characteristics, God says,

“Surely, those given to doing good deeds and (believing in) the hereafter, have noble faces and increased bashfulness.”

At the beginning, God, the Exalted, specifies that those who are desirous of the hereafter are extremely modest. The immodest and the shameless who do not care what other people think and perform indecent and improper acts.

The followers of this world naturally embark on things that religious culture considers as foul and improper. It is through their insistence on and repetition of these acts that they cease to feel ashamed. By contrast, the followers of the hereafter are wary lest they do something indecent. They, therefore, maintain their natural bashfulness.

Increased bashfulness as an outstanding trait of God's *awliyā'*

Bashfulness has always been an outstanding attribute of the eminent, the learned, and the friends of God. Among the contemporary religious scholars the late Āyatullāh 'Allāmah Tābāt al-abā'ī was so shy that he kept his gaze lowered whenever he spoke to someone for a long time. He said, "Our professor, the late Shaykh Muḥammad Ḥusayn Kumpānī was so shy that he did not even constantly look into his pupils' eyes when he taught them." The famous scholars that we know of have followed the same procedure. A tradition states that the followers of the hereafter are shy and modest. They constantly dread lest a right is violated, or an offence committed by them. They are permanently crestfallen and abashed in the presence of the Sacred Essence of God.

One of our professors narrated that a certain retired government official in Najaf used to walk seemingly unconcerned with what went on around him, like a crestfallen person although he walked erect and held his head high. This had surprised the professor. When the official sensed that his death was approaching, he invited a number of the '*ulamā'*', including our professor, in order to make his will. On his deathbed, the man said, "My God, you have witnessed my life. I have never sinned purposefully ever since I came of age." This was a peculiar utterance at the time one usually tries to repent. It was then that I recognized why he walked in that particular manner.

The followers of the hereafter are always abashed and embarrassed before God, the Exalted. In company, they are always careful not to offend anyone or violate someone's right. On the contrary, the followers of this world are reckless in their deeds, and have no feeling of shame before God or people.

"They have little irrationality, increased benefit, and little deceit."

The followers of the hereafter do not ever demonstrate irrationality. They act wisely and according to a plan.

They are very useful to the populace.

They play no tricks on people and deal with them honestly.

"People feel at ease with them, while they themselves are in distress." (They are distressed lest they violate someone's right.)

One of our professors narrated an episode concerning Āyatullāh Mīrẓā Muh ammad Taqī Shīrāzī, the famous and almost peerless religious authority whose *fatwā* for armed struggle [*jihād*] against the British is well known.

The late Muh ammad Kāẓ im Shīrāzī, a student of Mīrẓā Muh ammad Taqī Shīrāzī, related, “One evening when I left my house, I saw Mīrẓā Muh ammad Taqī Shīrāzī pacing close by my house. I greeted him and asked if he was expecting someone. He said that he was waiting for me to leave the house. In answer to my suggestion that he could have knocked, he said that he did not want to cause trouble. “I know you would normally leave your house at this time. So I chose to wait for you.” Politely, I asked him if there was something he wanted me to do. He said that he had brought my stipend. How surprising! A great religious authority takes the trouble of bringing his pupil’s stipend so that the student would not have to waste his time receiving it from the school. The Āyatullāh does not ring the bell either because he fears that he might cause trouble. So he just waits outside.

“Their words are carefully weighed.”

Before they utter a word, they meditate the ensuing gain and loss of their speech, and watch carefully so as not to say something to displease God and please people. They plan their utterance: they do not speak so briefly as to make it incomprehensible, nor do they repeat so often as to tire the listeners. They say as much as is necessary.

“They call themselves to account.”

A tradition warns people to account for their deeds every night, in the same manner that a business partner does. A business partner who has put his assets at the disposal of his friend to run a business activity constantly expects his friend to tell him about the deals and profits. Your lifespan is your stock-in-trade and your soul is your business partner. Every night call your partner to account demanding it should tell you what it has done with your asset. This will safeguard you against losses. The Prophet (s) has said,

“Call yourselves to account before you are called to account.”¹

“They make their soul suffer the pain.”

Lovers of the hereafter and wakefulness

“Their eyes sleep, but their hearts do not.”

1- *Wasā’il al-Shī’ah*, vol. 11, p. 380.

When we diligently attempt something, we concentrate on it in our waking state and in our sleep. This is because that particular question has preoccupied our soul. Some of those who are deeply concerned with their studies review their scientific questions even when they are asleep. Such was the case of a certain learned scholar who has been reported to have discovered the solutions to complicated questions in his sleep.

A friend of mine said, “In addition to my usual courses, I taught *Mut awwal*, too. To prepare myself, I had to stay awake until late at night. My mother woke up several times, and asked me if I still had to keep awake. I had not finished my job, and was worried that I may have annoyed my mother. To please her, I went to bed without finishing my study. In my sleep, I felt that I was reviewing the course, so I committed every single word of the text and the explanations to memory, and classified the topics as I normally do when I concentrate on a question. The following morning, I remembered everything accurately, and was even better prepared than the previous days.”

This was, of course, a God-given success resulting from his obeying his mother. But we remember things even in our sleep if the issues strongly appeal to us.

Because of the great love they have for God and His *awliyā'*, and because of the attention they devote to the life after death, those who are given to believing in the hereafter are not negligent of God and the hereafter even while asleep. The followers of the hereafter love God, the Exalted. It is therefore natural for their hearts to turn to God even in sleep. Slumber does not overtake their hearts. One who enjoys such a state can be said to have doubled his lifespan because even in sleep he remembers God, a fruitful sleep. Those who have attained such a rank perceive things with more clarity than they do in the waking state because their spirit does not have to attend to the body—it is free, and can have stronger spiritual perceptions.

In his book, the late Mīrzā Jawād Āqā Malikī Tabrīzī has referred to a certain person—apparently himself—who had acquired spiritual knowledge in sleep—so that he woke up astonished.

“Their eyes weep and their hearts remember (God).”

God, the Exalted, has said in the Qur'an,

“And as for him who fears to stand in the presence of his Lord and forbids the soul from low desires, then surely the garden—that is the abode.”¹

God’s *awliyā’* and their fear of the Divine might

Fear and extreme humility before God constantly control the hearts of the followers of the hereafter—a state that is quite noticeable in these people. In fact they fear the effect of their actions, their probable negligence in performing their duties, and the likelihood of committing an error that dims the outcome of their life.

That there is a feeling of humbleness before the Divine might is because anyone who observes might and splendor feels low, humble and awe-stricken in its presence. The greater the source of grandness is, the more intense such a state will be in man. For example, the late Āyatullāh Imām Khomeinī, may God be pleased with him, was a grand personage, recognized by everyone as such. He had a great spirit. Anyone who visited him privately felt himself to be thawing and falling apart when the Āyatullāh looked at him. He was so awe-inspiring. He was a servant of God. He was not like the Prophet (ﷺ) or like the infallible Imāms, but because he was obedient to God, the Almighty, He had given him such grandeur that everyone felt low, humble and broken in his presence. This was a reflection of his existential grandness.

No doubt, it is impossible to fathom the expanse of Divine might, but a state of fear and extreme humility rules over the person who has grasped a schematic portrayal of that Divine might. Thus, fear of God is the natural consequence of gaining knowledge of Him and comprehending His grandeur.

I have been told by several people that the late Ākhūnd Kāshī, who used to teach in Isfahān, experienced intuitive states. Whenever he bowed down in his prayer, he began to tremble uncontrollably. Thus fear of God is the attribute of those who believe in the hereafter.

As stated in the previous discourse, those who believe in the hereafter are hierarchically placed, that is, a certain degree of the mentioned particularities will appear in each, depending on the scope of their knowledge and belief.

“When people are considered as the negligent, these are counted as those who remember (God).”

1- *Sūrat al-Nāzi‘āt* 79:40-41.

Sometimes events that make the general populace forget other things occur. These might be frightening or rhapsodic. People then disregard all other matters and direct their full attention to those particular episodes. But even in times of heedlessness, those who are given to the hereafter turn to God:

*“Men whom neither merchandise nor selling diverts from the remembrance of Allah...”*¹

“They praise their Lord at the emergence of bounties and give thanks at the end.”

When one permanently remembers God, he will not forget Him. If he is given a bounty, he praises God inasmuch as it has come from Him. When he has enjoyed the bounty, he gives thanks to God. But the worldly men are from the very beginning heedless that blessings come from God. They imagine that what they have attained is because of their own hard work. So they do not give thanks to God.

“Their supplications (to God) ascend, their words are heard, and the angels are happy with them.”

In the language of the *sharī'ah*, the use of the phrase “ascension of the supplication” denotes God’s transcendent rank and His spiritual sublimity. God is not—I take refuge in God—corporeal to occupy space in the heavens. In other words, there is an infinite distance between God’s might, His sublimity and mankind. The Divine rank is too sublime to be accessible to human understanding and imagination. Thus, in order for man’s supplication to reach God, it needs to be raised from the low human rank to the sublime Divine rank:

*“To Him do ascend the good words; and the good deeds, He exalts.”*²

Traditions have referred to “a deed accepted by God” as “the deed that ascends”, and “a deed not accepted by God” as “the deed that does not ascend, but is turned back to the doer of the deed”. Thus, by the sentence “the words of the followers of the hereafter ascend” it means that their words ascend far beyond the plane of human creatures, and draw near the Divine Throne.

“Their supplication rotates under the veils; God loves to hear their words as a mother loves her child.”

1- *Sūrat al-Nūr* 24:37.

2- *Sūrat Fāt ir* (or, *al-Malā'ikah*) 35:10.

Religious teachings tell us that far above the Divine empyrean and Throne there are veils and tabernacles [*surādiqāt*] made of light. These expressions are mentioned in the *ah ādīth* to depict how distant our imagination and comprehension is from the Divine majesty. They also tell us what stages man should traverse if he desires to acquire true knowledge of God and what veils he should pull aside. These veils are, of course, created by God.

The love that God's servants have for Him cannot be compared with the love God has for His servants. If all love that all mothers have expressed for their children from the very beginning of the world and will express until the end of the world were put beside the love that God has for His servants, we would discover that the formers love is only a drop as compared with the expanse of the sea. God's love is infinite whereas the love of others is limited, however much it might be. That means, the love God has for every single one of His servants exceeds all love there is all over the world.

A Divine tradition [*h adīth-e qudsī*] states that when a servant of God repents, God becomes very happy. His happiness is much greater than the joy of someone who recovers his camel and food when he has lost all hope of ever finding the camel that had wandered away while the traveler had been asleep, leaving him hungry, hopeless, with no provision, and about to die. Can you imagine how happy such a person will be? God, the Exalted, becomes happier. Of course, these phrases and expressions used in the *ah ādīth* are insufficient, but they express the idea in our language for us to understand. God does not have changing and different states.

The supplications of God's believing servants rotate under the veils above the Divine empyrean because God loves to listen to their words. A tradition reports that when believers pray, God delays in answering their request so that the servants will invoke God still more—again because God loves to hear their voice. But the supplication of those who are weak in their belief and the hypocrites will be answered soon because God does not like to hear their voice.

Discourse 12

Characteristics of the Followers of the Hereafter (Part Two)

ولا يشغلهم عن الله شيءٌ طرفة عين ولا يريدون كثرة الطَّعام ولا كثرة الكلام ولا كثرة اللباس. النَّاسَ عندهم موتي والله عندهم حيٌّ كريم يدعون المدبرين كرماً ويريدون المقبلين تَلَطُّفاً. قد صارت الدُّنيا والآخرة عندهم واحدة.

“Nothing occupies (distracts) them from remembering God (even) for the twinkling of an eye. They desire not much food, much talk and much dress. To them, people are dead, and God is Living, Generous. They honorably call on those who have turned their back, and magnanimously receive those who return to them. This world and the next are as equals.”

Those who love the hereafter, and their special regard for God

Nothing distracts the followers of the hereafter from remembering God even for the twinkling of an eye.

The sacred M‘irāj Tradition has specified that the followers of the hereafter do not neglect remembering God even for the twinkling of an eye. Nothing prevents them from remembering God, the Exalted—this being a subject matter mentioned in Qur’anic verses and in *ah ādīth*, two examples of which are:

*“Men whom neither merchandise nor selling diverts from the remembrance of Allah.”*¹

*“In houses which Allah has permitted to be exalted and that His name may be remembered in them; they glorify Him therein in the mornings and the evenings.”*²

It is surprising that man can live in this world without anything diverting him from the remembrance of God, whether he is busy studying, teaching and learning, or is engaged in business, work and farming, even in low

1- *Sūrat al-Nūr* 24:37.

2- *Sūrat al-Nūr* 24:36.

animalistic states when attention is detached from everything else but his lustful desires.

Ordinarily, man is able to focus on several points simultaneously. For example, he can see a scene and hear words at the same time, or eat and study simultaneously. He loses a bit of our concentration of course. Psychologists have experimentally proved that through practice man can comprehend as many as seven to eight incidents at one time, with lower levels of comprehension. Man's faculty of comprehension can branch as many as this.

Now, if one practices remembering God all the time, and perseveres in his practice, this remembrance will gradually be established in his soul, and he will never forget remembering God, the Exalted. The late 'Allāmah T abāt abā'ī says, "A tragic incident as the loss of a dear relative may have the same effect on a person. For a long time, his memory will remain with the bereaved person, but it does not prevent him from doing his daily tasks. He works and ponders over the loss of his dear one."

We have each experienced a particular tragic event that has occupied our mind in whatever circumstance we might be, but it has not stopped us from attending to other things. The same applies to those who feel an ardent love for their beloved. In their mind they think about the beloved, but this does not prevent them from carrying out other tasks, done with lesser concentration of course.

So we should not imagine that material occupations are barriers to remembering God, especially in performing our ritual prayers when we should endeavor to devote our attention only to God and feel we are in His presence. This is a task that requires mortification and practice.

Our seventh Imām, Mūsā ibn Ja'far ('a) says, "Pray to God as if you see Him; if you do not see Him, He sees you."¹

The late 'Allāmah T abāt abā'ī, May Allah be pleased with him, has said, "This *h adīth* indicates two stages in *dhikr*: remembrance and heart-felt attention. In the first stage one should know that God sees him and is aware of his deeds, just like somebody who is locked-up in a room and knows that he is being watched through an opening, but he cannot see the observer. In the second stage one should feel that he sees God. If, by practicing, one reminds himself, saying, "Although I do not see God, He is present and is watching, and the whole universe is present before Him", God, the Mighty, the High, will help him to better comprehend His presence. It is, of course,

1- *Bih ār al-Anwār*, vol. 25, p. 204.

beyond our ability to understand how God helps, but as a hint we can say that in order to dispel a person's heedlessness and draw his attention to Himself, God, the Exalted, prepares certain means and instruments."

How often one has been heedless to God, and God has delivered him, making him aware of His presence. How delightful this reminding is when it is linked to God's love! Since our perceptions mostly come from our senses, and we are not so fully acquainted with spiritualities, a tangible example will clarify our purpose. There are two persons in an assembly. One ardently likes the other, and makes every effort to keep it secret from other people, although in his heart he is permanently thinking about his beloved. If in his forgetfulness he momentarily turns his face away, his beloved will signal to him, making him realize that he needs to pay attention only to his beloved—how delightful a feeling!

There are people who have experienced such delectable hints, and are aware of the highly pleasant help that God provides them to deliver them from negligence and bring them into a state of attention towards Him. Besides this, God always favors His friends in this way, and does not allow their attention to waver off.

God's *awliyā'* and (their) pure knowledge of God

So far, our discussion has focused on the possibility of simultaneously remembering God and attending to other tasks. For example, one can devote his attention to God and to some of His created beings such as one's wife and children, etc. But God's *awliyā'* devote their attention only to Him. God bestows on them such knowledge and recognition that enables them to perceive all the created beings as a beam of light from the Infinite Sun of existence. This means they do not put anything on par with God to give it a share of their attention, too. The existence of God is so manifest to them that in their view the created beings appear as rays of God's Infinite Being, just like the time when one sees the sunlight but the light has no reality of its own because it is the sun that is real, and the light, its radiation.

God's *awliyā'* recognize whatever they behold around them as limited and possible rays of the Infinite Essence of God. They devote their full attention to God, the Exalted. When they conceive of God, they see glimpses of His existence and the creatures that He has created. To God's *awliyā'*, it is insubstantial. Only God is real.

Of course, it is not within our limit to relate these matters and talk about them, but we need to know that there are joys in this world of existence that are far more substantial than material pleasures. Depending on the degree of their knowledge and love for God, the Exalted, people behave variously as

regards the attention they devote to remembering God. There are those who have experienced a glimpse of the love of God, and so their hearts incline towards Him. Why should not they dedicate their heart to Him and engage in His remembrance when love for Him has engulfed the totality of their existence? Can a lover forget his beloved? Can anyone who has perceived God's might and majesty come to believe in any power besides God?

Finally, man can attain a stage where he can devote the main part of his attention to the Sacred Essence of the Real, and see everything in the light of His existence. This is a theme reflected in many supplications and *ah ādīth*, as for example in Imām al-H usayn's Prayer on the Day of 'Arafah when he says,

“Does anyone other than Thee have the glory to make Thy Glory manifest?”¹

God's *awliyā'* are those who have gained pure Divine knowledge, and their hearts have been illuminated by the Divine Light. We know God by a number of concepts such as the Necessary Being [*wājib al-wujūd*], Creator [*khāliq*], Sustainer [*rāziq*], etc., referring them to the Unseen, whereas those who have gained Divine knowledge and whose hearts God, the Exalted, has illuminated, first conceive God and then perceive His attributes.

Many traditions have discussed the Divine Essence and Qualities, and we refer to them in order to make it clear that there are people who do not remain heedless of God, the Exalted, even for as short a moment as the twinkling of an eye. To attain this stage one should practice and persevere in comprehending the presence of God. Having gone through various levels of mortification and endeavor, God will make Himself known to him. From then on, he will behold the Divine Beauty and will continually remember Him.

1- The book *Tuh af al-'Uqūl* (p. 341) has reported Imām al-S ādiq ('a) as having said, “Whoever maintains that he knows God by means of the heart's imagination, is an hypocrite [*mushrik*]. Whoever maintains that he knows God only by means of names without (having understood) the meaning and reality, has confessed his own error because a mere name is engendered [*muh addath*]. Whoever maintains that he worships both the name and the meaning has associated (someone) with God. Whoever maintains that he worships God on the basis of description, not on the basis of perception, he has referred (the issue) to the Unseen. Whoever maintains that he worships the qualities and the qualified, has denied (God's) Unity, because “the quality” is different from “the qualified”. Whoever maintains that he can add the quality to the qualified, he has considered God little. “*And they do not assign to Allah the attributes due to Him.*” (6:91)

“They are not fascinated by much food, much talk and much dress.”

They do not gormandize, talk much and wear splendid clothes, for they do not care for the hollow, unreal splendor of this world.

“To them, people are dead, only God is Living, Generous.”

Those who love the world are always careful not to make people suspicious because they do not want their power and worldly status to be jeopardized. They count on public opinion and therefore hide their faults. Of course, God, the Exalted, does not like a believer’s faults to be made public. But the problem is that the worldly men are pretentious; in order to be accorded respect by others they behave as if they are those who do good all the time.

But the followers of the hereafter are detached from the people just as they are from death. They do not advertise their attitudes and views because the people want them to. They are concerned with fulfilling their duty, and do not heed what others say and what judgment they make. God is manifestly present to them. Only Him do they consider as Living and Ever-Lasting. We consider the people living and present. We take no notice that God is present,

*“He is not at all heedless of what we do.”*¹

“They honorably call on those who turn their backs to them, and magnanimously receive those who return to them”.

They do not remain indifferent to those who turn their backs, but try to please them for the sake of God, not to win support. At times, the followers of the hereafter behave in the same manner as the worldly, but with different intentions. The worldly man humbles himself before others so as to draw their attention and to win more support, but the follower of the hereafter is humble before others because God wants him to be so before his servants, viz. humble, meek.

Manifest difference between the followers of the hereafter and the lovers of this world

The followers of the hereafter consider “this world and the next as equal”. This is also graded; that is, not all those who love the hereafter treat both as equal.

Those who love this world have no belief in the hereafter. They are merely engulfed in thinking about this world. Concerning them, God, the Mighty and High, has said,

1- *Sūrat al-Baqarah* 2:74.

“And they said: ‘There is nothing but our life in this world; we live and die and nothing destroys us but time.’”¹

On the other hand, there is a group of those who love the hereafter. They verbally utter that death and Resurrection are true, but their behavior totally differs from what they assert in words; that is, it does not mirror their belief in the hereafter. Besides, most of their deeds are conducive to material gains. For example, most of us keep vigil at night, performing prayers so that our supplications might be answered, our provisions might be increased, and more popularity might be shown to us by the people. We perform this prayer because a lot of reward has been promised for spending nights in prayer: illuminated visages, greater popularity, and granted requests. Performing prayers [*s alāt*] at night becomes a means for us to satisfy our worldly needs. We employ the prayer that should be devoted to God to achieve material desires. Likewise, we attend *Laylat al-Qadr* ceremonies so that our requests might be granted: a house, a life of welfare, or a job, in spite of the great value the Night has: it is the night when our fate in the following year will be decreed.

All this points to a fact: we are desirous of the hereafter provided our secular wishes are achieved. In other words, we maintain that it is this world that is real, like cash, which we should not miss. God’s *awliyā’* consider the hereafter as “cash”, too. Whoever leaves his home to make his living should not be happy with the first small gain he makes, and should not tell himself “there is no need to work hard. I would rather take a rest.” Those who think sensibly do their utmost in order to gain satisfying results. After some time that is not important. What matters is the outcome, just like someone who enters the university and studies for some years to receive a degree. The degree itself is a means to find a job and make a living. No doubt, the wise consider it good for man to work hard for a few years in order to see the product of his own hand. Thus, it is not unwise for one to work in this world and see the outcome of his efforts in the hereafter. It is in fact a sensible dictum of logic.

God’s *awliyā’* have a stronger belief in the hereafter than we do in the uncertain outcome of our material activities in this world. As an example, when we grow crops or plant trees we are not sure whether we can reap anything because pests may attack the farm, harm the farm and delay the crop, but we do our best in spite of the great probability. If we had as much belief in the hereafter as we do in farming products, and were sure that our

1- *Sūrat al-Jāthiyah* 45:24.

activities would produce lasting results, we would never be willing to replace something permanent with something temporary and limited.

Most secular attempts produce an outcome and pleasure of short duration—no more than an hour. Even so, certain people struggle for long to attain such temporary pleasure. They do not devote as much as one tenth of their time to achieve permanent pleasures of the hereafter, because they are either frail in their belief as regards it, or simply have no faith in it.

On the other hand, those who love the hereafter consider this world and the next as equal. That is, just as they perceive this world as accessible, they have the same faith regarding the next. They carefully think about both, compare the affairs of this world with those of the next, and choose the pleasures of the hereafter, because they know that these pleasures have “cash value”, too. But in fact there are some people who steadily have fixed their eyes on the world to come; to them this world is transient, perishable.

Imām al-Sādiq (‘a) is reported to have said,

“One morning, after the Messenger of God (s) had performed the congregational prayer in the mosque, he saw a young man (said to be Zayd ibn Hārithah), who looked drowsy, his head involuntarily falling down, his complexion yellow, his eyes sunken, and his body thin and gaunt. The Prophet (s) asked him, ‘How did you spend the night, young man?’ He said, ‘I spent the night in a state of certainty.’ The Prophet wanted Zayd to tell him more about it. He said, ‘I have reached certainty.’

“The Prophet was pleasantly surprised at what he had said, and asked him, ‘There is a reality in every certainty. What is the reality of your certainty?’ Zayd said, ‘My certainty is such that has made me sorrowful, keeping me awake all night and hungry in warm days. It has made me lose interest in the world and in whatever is in it, as though I perceive God’s Throne firmly fixed to call people to account, and people having been gathered there, and I am among them.

“It seems as though I look at the people of paradise enjoying bounties in Paradise; they know each other, and are reclining on raised couches. It seems as though I look at the inmates of the fire being punished, loudly seeking help. It seems as though I actually hear the fire raging in my ears.’

“The Prophet (s) said to his companions: ‘This is the servant whose heart God has illuminated with faith.’ He then told Zayd ibn Hārithah, ‘Remain steadfast in the state you are in.’

“The young man said, ‘O Messenger of God, invoke God to grant me a martyr’s death fighting beside you’, and the Prophet (s) prayed. Before long, Zayd ibn Hārithah fought beside the Prophet, and was martyred.”¹

The young man’s words to the Prophet (s), “...as though I look at the people of Paradise...” can be likened to the time when you are sitting in a room, but are unable to see the yard. You are, however, sure that there is a yard and a garden, as though you are looking at it. Similarly, the followers of the hereafter, because of their faith, appear to be watching Paradise although they cannot see it manifestly—a curtain lies in between, but they visualize it on the basis of their inner light.

A higher stage belongs to those whose spirit has transcended the horizon and time. They really see Paradise, not as a simile—this being an affair whose reality is unknown to us. But we do know that those who attain such a level oversee this world and the hereafter and consider them as equal.

1- *Usūl al-Kāfī*, vol. 3, p. 89; *Bihār al-Anwār*, vol. 22, p. 146.

Discourse 13

Characteristics of the Followers of the Hereafter (Part Three)

يَمُوتُ النَّاسُ مَرَّةً وَيَمُوتُ أَحَدُهُمْ فِي كُلِّ يَوْمٍ سَبْعِينَ مَرَّةً مِنْ مَجَاهِدَةِ انْفُسِهِمْ وَمُخَالَفَةِ هَوَاهُمْ وَالشَّيْطَانِ الَّذِي يَجْرِي فِي عُرْوَقِهِمْ. وَلَوْ تَحَرَّكَتْ رِيحٌ لَزَعِزَّتْهُمْ وَإِنْ قَامُوا بَيْنَ يَدَيَّ كَانَتْهُمْ بِنَانٌ مَرْبُوضٌ لَا أَرَى فِي قُلُوبِهِمْ شُبُهًا لِمَ خُلِقُوا فَوْعَزَّتِي وَجَلَالِي لِأَحْسِنَهُمْ حَيَاةً طَيِّبَةً. إِذَا فَارَقَتْ أَرْوَاحُهُمْ مِنْ جَسَدِهِمْ لَا اسْبَلَطَ عَلَيْهِمْ مَلِكُ الْمَوْتِ وَلَا يَلِي قَبْضَ رُوحِهِمْ غَيْرِي وَلَا فَتَحَنَّ لِرُوحِهِمْ أَبْوَابَ السَّمَاءِ كُلَّهَا وَلَا رَفَعَنَّ الْحُجُبَ كُلَّهَا دُونِي وَلَا مَرَنَّ الْجَنَانَ فَلْتَبْزَيْنَنَّ وَالْجُورَ الْعَيْنَ فَلْتَبْزُقَنَّ وَالْمَلَائِكَةَ فَلْتَنْصَلِينَ وَالْأَشْجَارَ فَلْتَسْمُرَنَّ وَتَمَّارَ الْجَنَّةِ فَلْتُبْدِلِينَ وَلَا مَرَنَّ رِيحًا مِنْ الرِّيَّاحِ الَّتِي تَحْتَ الْعَرْشِ فَلْتَحْمِلَنَّ جِبَالَ مِنَ الْكَافُورِ وَالْمَسْبُكِ الْأَذْفَرِ فَلْتَصِيرَنَّ وَقُودًا مِنْ غَيْرِ النَّارِ فَلْتَبْدُخِلَنَّ بِهِ وَلَا يَكُونُ بَيْنِي وَبَيْنَ رُوحِهِ سِتْرٌ. فَأَقُولُ لَهُ عِنْدَ قَبْضِ رُوحِهِ: مَرْحَبًا وَاهْبِلَا بِقُدُومِكَ عَلَيَّ اصْبَعِدَا بِالْكَرَامَةِ وَالْبَشِيرَى وَالرَّحْمَةَ وَالرَّضْوَانَ وَجَنَّاتٍ لَهُمْ فِيهَا نَعِيمٌ مُقِيمٌ خَالِدِينَ فِيهَا أَبَدًا إِنَّ اللَّهَ عِنْدَهُ أَجْرٌ عَظِيمٌ. فَلَوْ رَأَيْتَ الْمَلَائِكَةَ كَيْفَ يَأْخُذُ بِهَا وَيُعْطِيهَا الْآخَرَ.

Important of struggle against the carnal soul

“People die once, but each of them dies seventy times a day striving against his soul, and opposing his caprice and the devil that flows in his veins. If a wind blows, it shakes them, and when they stand before Me, they are as if they were a firm and compact wall. Their hearts do not think about any created being even for a moment. By my might and majesty, I will bestow on them a happy life. When their spirits are to leave their bodies, I do not give the angel of death authority over them, and no one except Me takes their spirits. We will certainly open the doors of the heaven for their spirits, and veils between Me and them will be raised. I order that Gardens be

splendidly ornamented, pure *h ūrīs* prepare themselves for marriage, angels salute, trees yield fruits, and fruits bend lower down. I order a wind to blow from the Throne and carry mountains of musk and *kāfūr* to burn without a flame. Then they enter Paradise, and there will be no covering [*sitr*] between Me and their spirits. At the time of taking their spirit, I say, 'Your arrival to us is auspicious. Ascend honorably; and glad tidings, mercy and pleasure, and Gardens in which is lasting bliss. Surely, with Allah is a great reward. Would you have seen how the angels one by one take them and give them to the others.'?"

Opposing sensual desires is much more painful than death pangs. If we compare the agony resulting from opposing the sensual soul with pangs of death, we will realize that everyday the followers of the hereafter tolerate pains seventy times more acute than death pangs. This is because their motivation in obeying God and opposing their sensual desire is so strong that they resist powerful incitements, strong inclinations of the sensual soul, and satanic instigations with all their might, but do not abandon their attachment to God.

The statement "devil that flows in their veins" is an allusion meaning that Satan is so close to people and is so skillful in tempting them that he seems to be residing in man's veins, flowing throughout the body members with the blood.

***Awliyā'* and their absolute amazement at Divine Beauty**

"If a wind blows, it shakes them, and when they stand before Me praying, they are as if they were a firm and compact wall."

These people may be frail in their strength, weak in performing works of this world, and gaunt in physic, but when they rise to worship God, their vigor and high-spiritedness cannot be described. They surpass all other spirited people.

The young, spirited and energetic, feel tired when they participate in congregational prayers, and continuously shift about if the *imām* recites the prayer formulae slowly. The *imām*, though an old man of about eighty or ninety, does not feel tired being in communion with God and worshipping Him, but the energetic youth do when they perform a two-*rak'ah* ritual prayer! Thus, there is no relationship between physical strength and fortitude in praying. It is yearning and spiritual love that gives one the stamina to pray and worship God.

Enthusiasm and practice are the two basic factors man needs to progress and attain his goal even if the goal is seemingly inaccessible. The extraordinary acrobatic and gym performances are astonishing and unbelievable, but certain people have been able to achieve these aims because of their zeal, practice and perseverance. Once man begins anything enthusiastically and does not halt, he is bound to advance.

If we really intend to begin praying and worshipping God, we need to show fortitude. We will succeed. What matters most is heart-felt longing, attraction, yearning, and love, as exemplified in an instructive episode quoted from the life of the late Hāj Shaykh Hasan ‘Alī Isfahānī, who is reported to have manifested many miracles [*kirāmāt*]. He lived in Mashhad, and used to climb onto the roof of the holy Shrine of Imām al-Ridā (‘a) and pray in the direction of the Imām’s Holy Shrine. An attendant of the holy shrine is reported to have said, “One Thursday evening he asked me for the key to the door leading to the roof. I opened the door. He went up to the roof and began performing his prayers.”

It is well-known that when he prayed, the late Shaykh Hasan ‘Alī Isfahānī used to lengthen his standing position [*qiyām*] reciting long Qur’anic *sūrahs*, but on that particular night he prolonged his bowing position [*rukū*].

The attendant reported, “I climbed to the roof to tell him that we were closing the doors of the shrine, but he was in the state of *rukū*. I waited a few minutes to see if he would finish his prayers. I tarried, he was still in *rukū*. It was very cold, and it had started to snow. For the sake of precaution, I put some firewood beside him so that he could light a fire to protect himself against the cold and snow. Then, I locked the door and went home, but was constantly worried about him. Early next morning, at dawn, I quickly went to see how he had spent the night in such a heavy snowfall, and was greatly surprised to see him still in the state of *rukū*, with no less than twenty centimeters of snow on his back. A little before the Morning Prayer time, he finished his prayer. I went to him, and observed no weakness or discomfort in him. He did not notice the snow although he was very lean and gaunt in stature. Out of the love he had for God, he had spent the night in *rukū*, withstanding the cold and snow.”

When we bow down in prayer, we feel pain and discomfort, and are unable to tolerate bowing for long. But because of their ardent love of devotion and supplication to God, the friends of God follow the angels in their prayers, performing lengthy *rukū*’s and prostrations, and in time with the help of God they acquire the power for their devotional acts, as is repeatedly mentioned in the Qur’an and emphasized in supplications received from the

Imāms (‘a). These *ah ādīth* recommend that prostrations should be done unhurriedly, with a bit of time spent in their performance.

The late Āyatullāh Amīnī was once asked if he would confirm the tradition that stated that Imām ‘Alī (‘a) used to perform a thousand *rak’ahs* of prayers each night, and if such a thing was possible. ‘Allāmah Amīnī said, “I have experienced it myself.” It is said, on the authority of his friends, that during the month of Ramad ān, he used to perform a thousand *rak’ahs* of prayers every night in the Holy Shrine of Imām al-Rid ā (‘a). ‘Allāmah Amīnī would begin after he had broken his fast in the evening and would go on through the night until it was time to start fasting again, next morning.

Their exoteric ability and physical power to pray, shows that they were ready to lovingly stand before God, the Exalted, worshipping and supplicating Him. Worshipping does not depend on exoteric power only. A more important element is the heart-felt attention they give to God when they engage in lengthy prayers: nothing other than God comes to their mind even for a single moment.

“Their hearts do not get engaged in any created being even for a moment”.

When we begin a two-*rak’ah* prayer, we devote our attention to everything but God, the Exalted, whereas they do not, in their hearts, turn to any created being but devote their attention only to God, the Exalted. God, the Exalted, has praised them, giving them good news (through the *ah ādīth* of the Prophet (s)). Each of the good tidings is special, directed from God to them in person).

God’s *awliyā’* and the Divine favors

As regards the good tiding for the followers of the hereafter, God, the Exalted, says,

“By my might and majesty, I will bestow on them a happy life
[*h ayātan t ayyibah*].”

The “happy life” which the Qur’an and the *ah ādīth* have promised the believers is different from our ordinary life, which is polluted throughout and is conjoined with agony, sorrow, troubles, and afflictions. But because we are used to such a life, we do not perceive the impurity and filth, just as a person whose job is to tan the hides gets used to the smell of tannery without feeling sick.

God, the Exalted, bestows His *awliyā’* a life full of happiness. To others, this life may appear very hard. When they see that God’s *awliyā’* are

constantly weeping, are fearful, and empty-handed, mostly with no material possession, they may even feel pity for them. But they know not that one hour of their life is worth more than all pleasures the world can offer. Weeping and supplicating to God in solitude gives God's *awliyā'* a joy that others do not experience—a unique joy, not of the material kind. Although they suffer hardships in this world, God, the Exalted, gives them abundant spiritual gains, incomprehensible to others.

“When their spirits are ready to leave their bodies, I do not send the Angel of Death to them, and no one except Me takes their spirits.”

This part of the *Mi'rāj* Tradition contains a lofty rank, because according to the Qur'anic verses, it is the Angel of Death and his helpers that take the spirit of the people:

“Say: The Angel of Death who is given charge of you shall cause you to die, then to your Lord you shall be brought back.”¹

Elsewhere God says,

“... until death comes to one of you, Our messengers cause him to die.”²

Accordingly, certain *ah ādīth* on this subject say that God Himself takes the spirits of the believers—this being a lofty rank allocated to those who love God, the Exalted, and those who have spent their lives yearning to visit the Beloved, and are now ready to die in order to visit the Beloved. God, the Exalted, bestows upon them the honor of meeting Him at the time of their death. At this moment, they feel their spirits to be in the hand of God, the Exalted, and He receives their spirits, just like a lover who has for years been separated from his Beloved. They meet their Beloved and embrace the object of their love rejoicing the event. Not only do they have no fear when they are about to die, but they find indescribable pleasure: they find themselves being embraced by their Beloved.

However much we ponder over the importance and greatness of these issues, we feel that we fall short of understanding them, because this is a rank particular to the special *awliyā'* of God. Their rank is superior to 'Izrā'īl, the Archangel, who is not authorized to take his spirit.

Traditions mention that His *awliyā'* enjoy ranks that the angels cannot attain, in fact, they surpass the four *muqarrab* angels, of whom 'Izrā'īl is one. After taking his spirit, God, the Exalted, says,

1- *Sūrat al-Sajdah* 32:11.

2- *Sūrat al-An'ām* 6:61.

“We will open all the doors of heaven for their spirits.”

We do not know how God takes their spirits, what the doors of the heaven look like, and how the spirits pass through the doors of heaven. The lofty rank of “nearness to the Allah” can be likened to a very high and elevated place where only God’s *awliyā’* and His friends can enter.

As regards the wrongdoers, God the Exalted, says,

*“The doors of heaven shall not be opened for them, nor shall they enter the garden until the camel passes through the eye of the needle.”*¹

(This means their entrance into paradise is as impossible as it is for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle).

After God, takes the believing persons’ spirits, all the doors of heaven will be opened for them. Their spirits will pass through the doors, and enter the Intermediate Paradise. Because they acted according to their duties, there is nothing to debar them from entering Paradise.

“And all veils between Me and them will be raised.”

An issue quoted in many traditions and oft-repeated by the late Imām Khomeinī (may God be pleased with him) specifies that there are veils between man and God, the Exalted. Based on traditions, these veils have been divided into two groups: veils of darkness, and veils of light. Scholars in religion and ethics have discussed the matter, but the reality of these veils and how they separate man from God, the Exalted, has not been clarified for us.

It must be admitted that people like us cannot grasp the Divine presence and the resulting joy. When we pray, we think that we are worshipping an absent Being. But there are people who feel no veil and distance between themselves and God, the Exalted. They consider that God is closer to them than their jugular vein, as the holy Qur’anic verse says,

*...and We are nearer to him than his life-vein.”*²

This is an issue that requires scientific and philosophical discussion. But without attempting to go into details it should be accepted that there can be no veils between God, the Exalted, and His created beings, because all existence is in His power and dependent on His will. But, because we are distanced from God, the Exalted, we do not comprehend this relationship. Part of an invocation states,

1- *Sūrat al-A’rāf* 7:40.

2- *Sūrat Qāf* 49:16.

“Surely there is no veil between Thee and Thy creatures; but it is their evil deeds that have placed a veil between Thee and them.”¹

It is due to good deeds and drawing near to God that the veils are one by one pulled down: first the veil of darkness, and then the veil of light, until the perfected believers attain the rank where there remains no veil between them and God, the Exalted. This is what God, the Exalted, points to, saying,

“I order the Gardens to ornament, pure *h ūrīs* prepare themselves for the wedding”, angels salute the people of Paradise, trees to yield fruit, and fruits to hang low; a wind to blow from the Throne and carry mountains of musk and *kāfūr* to burn without a flame.”

We can somewhat visualize the happy celebrations in Paradise, its decoration and reception by pure *h ūrīs*, heavenly perfume, but certainly beyond the capacity of our mind to understand.

Since there is no fire in Paradise to burn the musk and *kāfūr* to give off scent, they kindle spontaneously.

“Then he is made to enter Paradise, and there is no covering [*sitr*], between Me and his spirit. At the time of taking his spirit, I say, ‘Your arrival to us is auspicious. Ascend honorably; and glad tidings, mercy and pleasure, and Gardens in which is lasting bliss. Surely, with Allah is a great reward’.”

At this point in the *Mi‘rāj* Tradition, God, the Exalted says to the Prophet (s),

“Would you have seen how the angels one by one take their spirit and give it to the others?”

All this is only a hint of how the spirit of a believer is taken, how his arrival into Paradise is celebrated, and what rank God has set for him. Although we can somewhat imagine the situation, God, the Exalted, has said in the Qur’an,

“So no soul knows what is hidden for them of that which will refresh the eyes.”²

1- *Bihār al-Anwār*, vol. 86, p. 318.

2- *Sūrat al-Sajdah* 32:17.

Discourse 14

Ascetics' Station and Knowledge

يا أحمد؛ ۱۲ وَجُوهَ الرَّاهِدِينَ مُصْفَرَّةً مِنْ تَعَبِ اللَّيْلِ وَصِيحِ النَّهَارِ وَالسَّنْتَهُمْ كَلالَ
مِنْ ذِكْرِ اللَّهِ تَعَالَى. قُلُوبُهُمْ فِي صَبْرِهِمْ مَطْعُونَةٌ مِنْ كَثْرَةِ صَبَمَتِهِمْ. قَدْ أَعْطُوا
الْمَجْهُودِ مِنْ أَنْفُسِهِمْ لَا مِنْ خَيْرِ نَارٍ وَلَا مِنْ شَيْءٍ جَنَّةٍ. وَلَكِنْ يَنْظُرُونَ فِي
مَلَكَوتِ السَّمَوَاتِ وَلا يَفْعَلُونَ إِلَّا اللَّهَ سُبْحانَهُ أَهْلٌ لِلْعِبَادَةِ.

“O Ah mad, the ascetics’ complexion turns yellow because of staying awake all night and fasting during the day. Their tongues grow weary due to constant recitation of the names of Allah, the Exalted. In their chests, their hearts become constrained due to an abundance of silence. They strive to the best of their ability, not out of fear of the Fire, and not out of yearning for Paradise, but because they recognize that only Allah is worthy of being worshipped.”

Ascetics: their devotion and servitude

According to scholars of ethics and gnosticism [*irfān*], an ascetic [*zāhid*] is a person who gives up material bounties and joys, does not go in quest of them, leaves matters related with this world aside, abandons his job, and retreats from society in order to pray and attain blessings in the hereafter. But a man of piety [*ābid*] is a person who worships God in order to receive rewards. More superior to the two groups are those who are not inclined to secular joys nor are they attached to pleasures of the hereafter and the rewards for worship and servitude. They are called gnostics [*ārif*]. The elements that distinguish a *zāhid*, an *ābid*, and an *ārif* from each other have appeared recently. According to the *Mi‘rāj* Tradition, however, the term *zāhid* includes an *ārif*, too. In other words, asceticism [*zuhd*] is graded in rank, the highest of which is occupied by an *ārif*.

This part of the *Mi‘rāj* Tradition says that because they stay awake at night worshipping, the ascetics’ complexion turns yellow. Because of night-long vigils and day-long recitation of God’s names, in addition to fasting, their tongues grow weary. The state of ascetics has, in another version, been

referred to in this manner: “it is hard for them to speak”—that is, they are unwilling to say anything—“but they do not get tired of reciting God’s name and remembering Him.”

The ascetics remain silent for so long that their chests become sore; that is, the strict control they exert over themselves wounds their hearts so that they do not utter a word. They strive against their sensual soul and subdue it in the same manner that a warrior fights an enemy in the battlefield.

“They strive to the best of their ability not out of fear of the Fire, and not out of yearning for Paradise.”

As mentioned earlier, the term ascetic includes a gnostic, too. Mystics themselves use the word gnostic as opposed to “an ascetic”. The reason why ascetics have been blamed by Ḥāfīz and other gnostics is because an ascetic disregards the blessings of this world, but sets his heart on otherworldly bliss. A gnostic, on the contrary, has not bent his heart on otherworldly bliss either. He is only in quest of earning the pleasure of the Beloved.

Many traditions contain similar words, as Imām ‘Alī’s (‘a) Supplication:

“I did not worship Thee out of fear of punishment, nor in hope of Thy paradise; but I found Thee worthy to be worshipped, so I worshipped Thee.”¹

The three divisions of devotees

Imām al-Sādīq (‘a) is reported to have divided the worshippers into three groups:

Group one: “A group worships God in fear and that is the worship of slaves.”

(Those who worship God out of fear of the punishment are similar to slaves who obey their masters because they fear being whipped.)

Group Two: “A group worships God, the Exalted, hoping to receive rewards and that is the worship of traders.”

This group is similar to those who work for wages. Just like a merchant who goes into business in order to gain profit, they perform worship in order to acquire rewards and gain pure *ḥūrīs* [*ḥūr al-‘ayn*] in the hereafter. In fact they trade with God.

1- *Bihār al-Anwār*, vol. 41, p. 14.

Group Three: "And a group worships God because of their love and devotion to Him and that is the worship of free men [*ah rār*]. That is the best form of worship."¹

It is reported that after he explained the qualities of the first two groups, Imām al-Sādiq (‘a) said,

"And I worship God because I love Him."²

We should not think that it is improper to worship God in fear of His punishment, or worship Him for reward in the hereafter, because the Holy Qur’an has praised the pious and those who avoid sins out of fear of punishment and hope for reward. These are of course lower in rank when compared to the people who worship God only because they love Him. The latter, however, do believe in the hereafter and the punishments in the next world.

Just as we make preparations to stay warm in winter and cool in summer, we should prepare ourselves for protection against the punishment and to acquire heavenly bliss, if we are certain of Paradise and Hell. But unfortunately, we are not. Thus, we must not scale down the worshipping of the first two groups.

*"Surely we fear from our Lord a stern, distressful day."*³

The highest worship is that performed by the person who has recognized that only God deserves to be worshipped. Such a person does his utmost to endure the rigors he comes across on his way to be a servant of God. He is devoted only to God and considers God’s proximity, pleasure and neighborhood the most valuable and the bliss of Paradise meager in comparison. Those, who, in this world, love someone and are always yearning to visit their beloved, bear all hardships, endure intense heat or cold, and stay awake all night in order to visit their beloved, even for one glimpse. Likewise, those who know God and have a deep love of Him in their hearts would rather enjoy a moment of visiting Him than be given to enjoy heavenly bliss for thousands of years instead. This is too hard for us to conceive.

People who are unfamiliar with the Divine sciences and their truth have said that interest in heavenly bliss or fear of punishment in Hell is something unimportant and worthless, in fact egoistic. That is, one should always be in quest of values, not his comfort and security from punishment. The noble

1- *Bihar al-Anwār*, vol. 70, p. 236.

2- *Ibid.*, p. 198.

3- *Sūrat al-Insān* 76:10.

love the values, not the bounties! It is a true statement, but wrongly used. A noble person is one who is confident of the life to come, paradise and hell, and heeds them, but these are not matters which are his greatest concern, because he has devoted all his attention to earning God's pleasure.

Those who say so, have failed to know what "the worship of free men [*ah rār*]" means what Imām 'Alī ('*a*) signifies when he says, "And I found Thee worthy to be worshipped." They have not realized that Imām 'Alī ('*a*) and other *awliyā'* of God were as sure of Paradise and Hell as they were of the day, because they could see the flames and hear hell raging and roaring. They did not heed this because they were concerned with something more important: they feared to be deprived of the favors of the Beloved.

The Holy Qur'anic verse, "*Surely we fear from our Lord a stern, distressful day.*" may mean: the day we are deprived of Divine mercy, and Divine satisfaction does not embrace us, and we feel that we have not been favored by God's grace and kindness, that day will be dull and gloomy for us, no matter where we are, in paradise, beside pure *h ūrīs*, or in the hell.

These words can be uttered by a person who pleaded to God, saying,

"And suppose O my God, my Master and my Protector, that I am able to endure the heat of Thy punishment, how can I endure separation from Thee?"¹

It is he who understands how bitter it is to be separated from one's Beloved. "Punishment" does not mean the same to him. That is why he says, "I did not worship Thee out of fear of punishment, nor in the hope of Paradise; but I found Thee worthy to be worshipped, so I worshipped Thee..."

Surely, we should not despair of God's mercy. Becoming familiar with the life of the *awliyā'* might reduce our interest in treasures and defilement of this world, establish in us a fear of Him and an increase of our belief in the life to come. We do not desire to claim the station of those whose hearts are bent only towards God, the Exalted, nor can we claim the practice of those who followed the infallible Imāms ('*a*), but we believe that God does not deprive from His favor His meritorious servants that desire to purify themselves from impurities and strive to accomplish this end.

Renunciation of this world as the first step to attain knowledge of God

For a person desiring to travel the path of pure knowledge and love of God and detach himself from other than God, the primary step will be to abandon the pleasures of this world. How can we give up the bounties in the

1- *Kumayl* Supplication, instructed by Imām 'Alī ('*a*).

hereafter without abandoning the pleasures of this world entwined with various pains and agonies?

Concerning the bounties in Paradise, God, the Exalted, says,

*“They shall not be affected with headache thereby, nor shall they get exhausted.”*¹

Elsewhere He says,

*“Toil shall not afflict them in it, nor shall they ever be ejected from it.”*²

Thus, we can renounce invaluable bounties of Paradise only if we have given up petty and inexpensive bounties of this world and decreased our attachment to this material world—this being impossible unless we close our eyes to illicit [*h arām*] bounties firsts and move forward to renouncing licit [*h alāl*] ones in this world. The more one enjoys the bounties, however lawful they are, the more he becomes fond of the world. He will, after sometime, end up in things that are forbidden. For example, he should not watch certain permissible and lawful scenes to abstain from casting forbidden looks. Boarder-line movements will bring about sudden downfall.

Although one can enjoy lawful food and drink, one must every once in a while go fasting during meritorious months such as Rajab, and thus strive against the desires of his soul. The same applies to food, lodging, etc. There is no doubt that among the best ways to oppose excessive desires of the soul and renounce certain *h alāl* bounties are giving of money in the way of God, [*s adaqah*], concerning which God, the Exalted, says,

*“By no means shall you attain to righteousness until you spend out of what you love.”*³

Elsewhere He also says,

*“Take alms out of your property, you would, thus, cleanse and purify it.”*⁴

Spending money and giving away things that one loves reduces one's attachment to this world. On the one hand, one disregards the lawful things in order to avoid unlawful matters. He decides to do without lawful enjoyments, and attains a station where he even gives up heavenly joys. This is the negative side of opposing carnal desires and abandoning

1- *Sūrat al-Wāqī'ah* 56:19.

2- *Sūrat al-H ajar* 15:48.

3- *Sūrat Āl 'Imrān* 3:92.

4- *Sūrat al-Tawbah* (or *Barā'ah*) 9:102.

pleasures. As for the positive side, what should one do to remember only God?

In doing obligatory acts [*wājibāt*] and acting according to the Divine commands, we aspire the most to be saved from punishment in hell. We might not do them if punishment had not been prescribed for abandoning them.

Now that we are sure that we will not be punished if we act according to God's command, we should do our utmost to receive more bounties in the hereafter. It is a great achievement for one to be secure from Divine punishment and enjoy heavenly bounties:

*"...shall I lead you to a merchandise which may deliver you from a painful chastisement? You shall believe in Allah and His Apostle, and struggle hard in Allah's way with your property and your lives; that is better for you, did you but know!"*¹

We are unable to renounce the heavenly bounties. We are not ready to bear the hell fire even if it is to earn God's satisfaction, because we are helpless and unable to bear the punishment, and have not yet achieved the lofty station of "servitude before God" and "sincerity to Him". A part of the *Mi'rāj* Tradition narrates the words of a believing person who has attained nearness to the Lord, as saying,

"If Thy satisfaction lies in my being cut to pieces and dying seventy times in the most severe manner that anyone has ever been killed, and Thy satisfaction lies in it, certainly I like it the most."

This is a level of knowledge that we will never attain; we would have been more prepared to give up the worldly joys if we had attained it. We must, however, strive to get close to the path that God's *awliyā'* traversed. When we do, we owe it to God's kindness, favor and assistance. To this end, we need to start with things that do not take so much time, and are not so difficult to do, telling God that we have done it for His sake; even if He casts us into Flames. We should try to perform a two-*rak'ah* supererogatory [*nāfilah*] prayer which is done like the morning prayer, and tell God, "O God, take us into Hell fire if so Thou will; but because we love Thee and because we know that Thou would like Thine servants to perform prayers, we did it for Thy sake."

We will try to spend a few minutes of our time to acquire God's pleasure in case our behavior, deeds and intention are shorn of God's satisfaction. We perform the above-mentioned prayer only for God's sake without requesting

1- *Sūrat al-S aff* 61:10-11.

any reward. Even if we say “*Allah is Great*” or “*There is no god but Allah*” only for the sake of God, this will be higher in rank than our daily service, because the worth of service does not depend on the volume and the power spent to perform it, but on the intention and stimulus behind performing it.

There is a great difference between worshipping God and a recitation of God’s name [*dhikr*] uttered only for God. If a person is certain that the hereafter is true, and utters “*Yā Allāh*” only for God’s sake, not in the hope of heavenly reward or fear of the Hell fire, it will be better than the life he has spent in trying to be saved from Hell or acquire otherworldly rewards. This is no exaggeration.

Discourse 15

Value of Fasting and Silence

يَا احمَد؛ عَلَيْكَ بِالصَّمْتِ فَإِنَّ اَعْمَرَ مَجْلِسِ قُلُوبِ الصَّالِحِينَ وَالصَّامِتِينَ وَأَنَّ
اِخْرَبَ مَجْلِسِ قُلُوبِ الْمُتَكَلِّمِينَ بِمَا لَا يَعْنِيهِمْ.

يَا احمَد؛ إِنَّ الْعِبَادَةَ عَشْرَةَ اِجْزَاءً، تِسْعَةٌ مِنْهَا طَلَبُ الْجَلَالِ. فَإِنَّ طَيِّبْتَ مَطْعَمَكَ
وَمَشْرَبَكَ فَانْتَ فِي حَفْظِي وَكُنْفِي. قَالَ: يَا رَبِّ وَمَا أَوَّلُ الْعِبَادَةِ؟ قَالَ: أَوَّلُ الْعِبَادَةِ
الصَّمْتُ وَالصُّومُ.

قَالَ يَا رَبِّ: وَمَا مِيرَاثُ الصَّوْمِ؟ قَالَ: الصَّوْمُ يُورِثُ الْحِكْمَةَ وَالْحِكْمَةُ تُبْرِثُ
الْمَعْرِفَةَ وَالْمَعْرِفَةُ تُبْرِثُ الْيَقِينَ. فَإِذَا اسْتَيْقَنَ الْعَبْدُ لَا يَبَالِي كَيْفَ اصْبَحَ بَعْسُرَ ام
بَيْسُرِ.

“O Ah mad, devolved upon thee is to fast, for surely the most flourishing assembly consists of the hearts of the righteous and those who remain silent; and surely the most desolate assembly consists of the hearts of those that say things that avail them not. O Ah mad, surely worship has ten parts, of which nine include seeking the lawful. If thou purifiest thy food and drink, thou wilt be protected and guarded by Me.”

“The Prophet asked, ‘O Lord, what is the heritage of fasting?’ God, the Exalted said, ‘Fasting leaves wisdom as heritage, and wisdom leaves knowledge as heritage, and knowledge leaves certainty as heritage. When my servant arrives at certainty, he does not mind if he lives in difficulty or ease.’”

Proximity to God and positive/negative acts

After realization has dawned on man, he must freely choose the way that leads to his perfection, and expend all his effort to traverse the way. He must realize that the principal aim of the creation of man is to draw close to

God, the Exalted—this being the highest degree of perfection he can access. He should then work out a sound and thorough plan to fare the way that moves him closer to God—a program consisting of two parts: the positive side, that is, the things that have got to be done, and the negative side, the things one has to refrain from. Both are very important. Positive works are of course causes for man to go ahead and progress, for he will not attain perfection if he stands still. There are times when self-control and forbearance may be considered positive, just as its negative side is important because it also drives one to act positively, enabling him to advance his plans. One must, therefore, ponder from the onset what he must do and what he must not do.

Books of jurisprudence and ethics abound with things that must be done and things that must be avoided. There is a causal relation between positive and negative actions. Performing a task helps you overcome a challenge. Abstaining from certain things will help refraining from harder negative actions. When you abandon certain things you can do the duties incumbent on you with greater ease.

In education, the learner is taught a method to help him conveniently deal with complicated tasks. It is the teacher's skill to show the learner to begin with simple tasks and then move on to more demanding ones. The learner must know where to begin in order to succeed in future: immense jobs, important indeed, that one has not been able to perform earlier. For instance, we know it is very good to perform a thousand *rak'ahs* of prayer every night, but we can not do it. We do not have the time and the physical ability, and the conditions do not allow us to do so either. We also know that it is very good not to neglect remembering God even for one moment, but this is not possible for everyone.

A regular program, a suitable starting point, repetition of rudimentary, simple and easy steps, and continuous exercise will enable one to do more important things. Similarly, if one begins withdrawing from sins that are easier to abandon, he will be able to abstain from those that are harder to give up. Turning away from things that are easy to avoid helps one to turn away from great sins, and avoid falling into degradation that brings perdition and wretchedness.

Silence nourishes the hearts of God's *awliyā'*

“O Ah mad, devolved upon thee is to fast, for surely the most flourishing assembly consists of the hearts of the righteous and those who remain silent; and surely the most desolate assembly consists of the hearts of those who say things that avail them not.”

Since man has complete control over his speech, it is not difficult for him to hold his tongue and avoid idle talk. One can easily speak about things that will be of use for his life in the hereafter, and remain silent in other situations. He must speak where his duty requires that he should do so, but “silence” is praiseworthy when speaking is fruitless. This silence produces desirable effects, of which some are mentioned in the *Mi‘rāj* Tradition.

Among advantages, mental energy will be stored for use in positive and fruitful acts. The talkative will have their mental energy dissipated, and their concentration reduced. An attempt to speak little and avoid useless talk will give one the chance to store his energy for contemplation and achievement of more consciousness.

One’s worth depends on his knowledge and consciousness. Without comprehension and knowledge, man is worthless in his human dimension, however much he may have physically grown. The greater consciousness, knowledge and attention are, the greater man’s development will be. The deeper his negligence, the more distanced will he be from humanity. Those who talk a lot have less comprehension, knowledge and consciousness. Therefore, they spend their time in useless matters. Sometimes they speak for hours, but do not know what they are talking about.

In contrast, there are those who, in spite of greater consciousness and knowledge, exercise a control over their activities, and speak in a manner that is studied and timely. Someone asked the late ‘Allāmah T abāt abā’ī, may God be pleased with him, to instruct him what to do so that he does not lose his concentration in praying. ‘Allāmah said, “If you want to maintain your presence of heart while you perform your prayers, you should speak little.” Psychologically, when someone speaks a lot, he remains mentally busy thinking about a variety of matters, and this causes distraction and a lack of concentration even in prayer. He will be able to concentrate if he disciplines his tongue not to wag uselessly.

Thus, based on the *Mi‘rāj* Tradition, the most flourishing assembly is that of the hearts of the believers that speak little, and make their hearts thrive by remembering God and turning to Him. By contrast, the most desolate assembly is that of the hearts of the chatterers and tattlers. They demolish their hearts through idle talk and by thinking about a variety of useless things. What they say avails them not, neither in this world nor in the hereafter.

God, the Exalted, continues:

“O Ah mad, surely worship has ten parts, of which nine include seeking the lawful. If you purify your food and drink, you will be protected and guarded by Me.”

To worship God, the food one acquires must be lawful. Were this food, the staff of life as it is, to be acquired through means that are forbidden and acts of disobedience to God, can nearness to God be sought after eating it? The Prophet (s) asked,

“O Lord, what is the first step in worship?” God the Exalted said, “Remaining silent and fasting.”

If you desire to tread the path of servitude to God, whose ultimate destination will be nearness to the Real, you need to begin with “silence” and “fasting”, the first two steps on the path of Divine worship and perfection of man. As long as one’s tongue is loose, and he has no dread of uttering things, he will not attain a lofty station. Likewise, if he gives his desire for food a free hand, he will be like a beast that considers the forage only.

Gifts of fasting: wisdom, knowledge, and certainty

The Prophet said, “O Lord, what is the heritage of fasting?” God, the Exalted said, “Fasting leaves wisdom [*h ikmah*] as heritage, and wisdom leaves knowledge [*ma’rifah*] as heritage, and knowledge leaves certainty [*yaqīn*] as heritage.”

The words of God, mentioned in this part of the tradition, show the best method of training: mention the results and advantages of an act when you want to encourage someone to attempt moral refinement and do good. Mere instructions do not produce a strong stimulus to act, but mentioning the advantages and results will.

Fasting is, in fact, a plan to make adjustments in nutritional diet—eating two times a day, early in the morning [*sah ar*] and early in the evening [*ift ār*]. Such a procedure will provide the needs of the body, and balance the activity of the stomach as well. Physically, we do not need all the food we eat. Our physical needs will be taken care of by eating a little less. We need to have a nutritional program to allow the body to make proper use of the food, but unfortunately we lack it, so the body is unable to properly benefit from the food it receives. This is the reason for permanent deficit in nutritional value. All this constitutes the material benefit from fasting. Spiritually, it is the desire to draw near to God that counts when we fast.

That fasting yields wisdom [*h ikmah*] may, at the onset, seem something like indoctrination. But upon deliberation, we find the causal relation

between the two. A decrease in food intake enables us to comprehend the reality of things as they are—this is “wisdom”. A glutton is always occupied thinking about material pleasures. He eats only because he enjoys it—this is the most bestial state for anyone. Such a person will evidently be deprived of the fine spiritual pleasures, because his entire attention is food, leaving him unable to think about other things. When one seeks the pleasure that he receives from food, he will be unable to appreciate the joy there is in thinking and discovering scientific realities. Such a person will not look for the pleasure there is in worshipping. He will not search for it either, because he has not experienced how delicious it is.

Besides strengthening of the will power, fasting prevents wasting energy by immersing into materiality. It makes one remember God all the time because it is for the sake of God that one fasts—and this produces a heart-felt attention to God throughout the day.

Besides, gluttony results in a feeling of heaviness and loss of mental concentration because one’s physical energy is used to digest the food. Thus one will be unable to concentrate for sometime. Hygienic rules have recommended that one should not undertake enormous mental efforts immediately after having food, because the blood is concentrating around the stomach. Thus, eating too much hinders mental concentration and wholehearted attention.

Eating too much has other negative effects. One’s love of food will result in his love for other material things as well. A glutton will make preparations to access delicious food, further sinking into materialistic ends and leading to deprivation of things that are spiritual.

Thus, according to this part of the *Mi‘rāj* Tradition, fasting, and eating little help acquire wisdom. Having acquired the ability to perceive realities, one will attain true knowledge and proper recognition. (A sage [*h akīm*] has the ability to comprehend realities and cognitions that are certain. It is after the establishment of such ability that one achieves true and pure cognitions.) By this important knowledge we mean “knowledge of God”, “Divine qualities” and affairs that depend on “Allah”. Once knowledge is enhanced and developed, it will add to one’s certainty because certainty results from true knowledge and cognition.

The highest degree of belief is certainty. It is divided into three levels namely, “knowledge of certainty” [*ilm al-Yaqīn*], “visual certainty” [*ayn al-Yaqīn*], and “truth of certainty” [*h aqq al-Yaqīn*] specified in *ah ādīth*. However, certainty depends on true knowledge [*ma‘rifah*], and cognition. “Faith” [*īmān*] does not come without preconditions. As long as a person

does not have true knowledge of something, he cannot have conviction in it. The stronger the cognition, the better the ground will be prepared for faith. Complete knowledge is the ground where certainty germinates.

“Certainty” and “faith” have signs by which it will be possible to decide who has arrived at the level of “certainty” [*yaqīn*], to which God, the Exalted, has referred:

“When My servant has arrived at certainty, he does not mind if he lives in difficulty or ease.”

That is, he remains undisturbed when facing the problems in the material world because his heart is put at ease through his reliance on the Real. He is thus unaffected by hardship or comfort, for these are not worth mentioning when contrasted with the believer’s heart that is like a sea in its might, undisturbed by waves. The problems of this world are too trivial to keep him worried. He does not care if he is rich or poor. A man of perfect belief leaves everything to God, the Exalted, for he is sure that God decides for him what is to the best of his interest. Once a firm belief has been established and he has entrusted his affairs to God, God, the Exalted, will become his trustee, and will administer his work in a manner in which his good and his best interests lie. So a believer is calm because God has taken it on himself to arrange his life, and what God, the Exalted, decrees is in the interest of the believers.

A believer that has achieved certainty does not attach importance to the life of this world, because he is thinking about more important and loftier matters. This world and the pleasures therein do not lure him into neglecting God, certain knowledge, signs and tokens of the Real, and names and attributes of the Real. These are all so precious to him that he disregards all other distractions. He does not mind what happens to him. He does not consider the worldly matters important. Such a person knows that his good lies in what God decrees for him. He would do the same thing if he were wise enough and knew the wisdom behind events. But he does not know the reason why he is in a certain situation. He would undertake the administration of his own affairs if he knew in what his interest lies, but he does not. He leaves everything to God, the Exalted, and is himself in peace, because he knows that his good lies in what God, the Exalted, decrees for him. He does not become impatient at the time he is afflicted by hardships.

For a believer who has achieved certainty, things of which he has knowledge are manifest and present. This knowledge plays a role in what he does. We have knowledge of such realities as God, heaven, and hell. But this knowledge leaves no effect on our behavior. We seem to forget things

when we want to act. In theory, we claim that God is Omnipresent, but in practice we become oblivious. This type of knowledge is not called “certainty”. Certainty is a stage in which man’s cognitive ability attains full development, and is actively available to him. (This is the highest degree of cognition and is praised in traditions.)

Discourse 16

The Believers Goal; Certainty and Divine Satisfaction

وإذا كان العبد في حالة الموت يقوم على راسه ملائكة بيد كل ملك كأس من ماء الكوثر وكأس من الخمر يسبقون وجهه حتى يذهب سكرته ومرارته ويبشرونه بالشارة العظمى ويقولون له طيب وطاب مثلك وياك أنك تقدم على العزيز الكريم الحبيب القريب. فتطير الروح من ايدي الملائكة فتصعد الى الله تعالى في اسرع من طرفة عين ولا يبقى حجاب ولا ستر بينها وبين الله تعالى والله عز وجل اليها مشتاق وتجلس على عين عند العرش. ثم يقال لها: كيف تركت الدنيا؟ فتقول: الهي وعزتك وجلالك، لا علم لي بالدنيا. انا منذ خلقتني خائف منك. فيقول الله: صدقت عبي كبت بحسدك في الدنيا وروحك معي فانبت بعيني سررك وعلايتك. سل اعطك وتمن علي فاكرمك هذه جنتي فتبجح فيها وهذا جوارى فاسكنه.

فتقول الروح: الهي عرفنتني نفسك فاستغنيت بها عن جميع خلقك. وعزتك وجلالك لو كان رضاك في ان اقطع اربا اربا واقتل سبعين قتله باسب ما يقبل به الناس لكان رضاك احب الي. كيف اعجب بنفسي؟ وانا ذليل ان لم تكرمني وانا مغلوب ان لم تنصبرني وانا ضعيف ان لم تقووني وانا ميت ان لم تحيني بذكرك ولو لا سترك لافتضحت اول مرة عصيتك.

الهي كيف لا اطلب رضاك وقد اكلت عقلي حتى عرفتك وعرفت الجح من الباطل والامر من النهي والعلم من الجهل والثور من الظلمة. فقال الله عز وجل: وعزتي وجلالي لا احجب بيني وبينك في وقت من الاوقات كذلك افعل باحبابي.

“When a believer is in the throes of death, there will appear at his bed angels carrying a cup of water of *kawthar* and a cup of beverage that slake the thirst of his spirit and end the throes of death. They then give him the great tidings, ‘You are pure and pure is your abode. Surely, you shall come to the Mighty, the Generous, the Beloved, the Most Near.’ Then his spirit flies away from the hands of the angels and ascends towards God, the Exalted, in less than the twinkling of an eye, and there remain no veils between his spirit and God, the Exalted. ...and God, the All-mighty and the Honorable, is desirous of meeting the believer’s soul; and the soul sits by a fountain close to the Throne. He is asked: ‘How did you leave the world?’

The spirit says, ‘By Thy might and majesty, I know nothing about the world. I have feared the standing before Thee ever since Thou created me.’ God, the Exalted, says, ‘Thou hast spoken truly, My servant. Thou wert in the world with thy body, and thy soul was with me. I know thy secret and what thou manifested. Ask Me whatever thou desirest and I will bestow it on thee; pronounce thy hope and I will give it to thee. This is My Garden; enter it; and this is My proximity, reside in it.’

Then the spirit answers, ‘My Lord, Thou made thyself known to me; thereby I became needless of Thy creatures all. By Thy might and majesty, if Thy good pleasure lies in my being cut to pieces and being killed in the most severe manner seventy times, to me Thy good-pleasure is most worthy of it. How can I become proud? I am lowly if Thou does not honor me, I would have been defeated if Thou had not helped me, I would have been weak if thou had not strengthened me, and I would have been dead if thou had not kept me alive by Thy remembrance. Were it not for Thy concealing, I would have been disgraced the first time I disobeyed Thee.

My Lord, how should I not seek Thy good pleasure whilst Thou perfected my intellect to know Thee, and differentiate truth from falsehood, command from prohibition, knowledge from ignorance, and light from darkness.’ Then God, the Exalted, says, ‘By My might and majesty, there is no veil between Me and thee. I treat My friends in this way’.”

Angels carrying the cups come to the death bed of the believer who in this world was careful to fulfill his duty, kept struggling, considered this world a place of trial, pleased no matter what happened to him. Joy and unhappiness were alike to him, because he was sure that in God’s hand lay everything,

and believed that his good and best interest lay in whatever God, the Exalted, decrees for him. It is to such a believer's bed that they come at the time of his death and offer him the drinks. Having drunk, he will forget all the difficulties, sufferings, worries and throes of death. The water and beverage that the people of Paradise are made to drink satisfy the thirst of our bodies and spirits.

“...and they give him the great tiding, and tell him, ‘You are pure and pure is your abode. Surely, you shall come to All-mighty, the Honorable, the Beloved, the Most Near.’”

He is God, the All-mighty, who is above “lowliness”, “smallness”, and “incapacitation, the universe being a sign of His boundless power. His entertaining is definitely generous, derived from His infinite generosity. In what a delectable state will the one who is about to enter His presence be? How enthusiastic will he be? No sooner does the spirit receive the good news of being admitted into the court of his Beloved than he will lose interest in this world. Hardships and involvements of this world mean nothing to him.

“Then his spirit flies away from the hands of the angels and ascends towards God, the Exalted, in less than the twinkling of an eye.”

At the time they seize the soul of the unbelievers and the hypocrites, the angels inflict punishments, torment and pain, whereas they do not do so when they take the soul of a believing person. Rather, his soul is taken so softly and gently that it flies away from the hands of the angels towards the Beloved.

“And there will remain no veils and no coverings between him and God, the Exalted.”

Books on gnosticism have made hints as to the meaning of these veils and coverings. But it can be said in passing that in that state the soul will feel no distance or barrier between himself and God.

“...and God, the All-mighty and the Honorable, is desirous of it; and the soul sits by a fountain close to the Throne.”

How prosperous is the righteous and meritorious believer who enters God's presence and meets Him when God, the Exalted, is also desirous. Sitting by a fountain beside the Throne, he will be like a traveler who has traveled a long way, has suffered tribulations and fatigue, the cold and hot weather, and is now approaching a fountain where he will deliver himself from all hardships and exhaustion.

“God, the Exalted, asks him, ‘How did you leave the world?’”

It is customary to ask a traveler how things were with him while he was on the trip. This is the point where the servant should ponder before answering because a human being has been admitted into the presence of God, the All-Mighty and the Honorable. There is no place for honeyed phrases. If he ever attempts to say something that is in the least contrary to truth, he will not be permitted to speak. It is the point where exaggeration has no place, because there is nothing that is hidden from God. Thus, what the servant speaks is only the truth,

“The day on which the spirit and the angels shall stand in ranks; they shall not speak except he whom the Beneficent God permits and who speaks the right thing.”¹

Detachment from the world as an outcome of turning to God

“By Thy might and majesty, I know nothing about the world. I have feared Thee ever since Thou created me.”

This is the point where the believer does not consider it enough to answer, but swears by God’s might and majesty, alluding that one can possibly live in this world, do his duties, and manage his life, yet be detached from the world as if he is unaware of it.

A believer, one of the people of certainty, pays the world and its problems superficial attention. The problems of this world are similar to the faint waves unhurriedly passing over a believer’s heart without penetrating into the depth of his soul, because he has dedicated himself to something else. He, therefore, will not become fully cognizant of what is going on. That is why he swears in the presence of God, and says, “I know nothing about the world.” This is different from those who love the world—those in whose hearts the love of the world is lodged, and nothing other than lust, self-indulgence and high aspirations have occupied their minds.

Then God, the Exalted, says, “Thou hast spoken truly, My servant. Thou wert in the world with thy body, and thy soul was with Me. I know thy secret and what thou manifested.”

Is it possible for one to be concerned with running his life, preparing his food, his dress and satisfying his needs, yet from the bottom of his heart be devoted to something else? If it is possible to attain such a rank, why do not we ever try not to set our heart on worldly treasures even for one moment? Why do not we try to renounce the base and worthless affairs of this world and give our hearts to God, the Exalted?

1- *Sūrat al-Naba’* 78:38.

God's pleasure: a believer's greatest desire

“Ask Me whatever you desire, I will bestow it on you; pronounce thy hope and, I will give you generously. This is My Garden; enter it, and this is My proximity, so reside in it.”

This may signify another test: a lover who throughout his life has earnestly longed and struggled to get to his Beloved and visit Him is now being asked by God, the Exalted, to voice his desire. Were we in his place, we might ask for fruits and blessings as soon as we see paradise, the heavenly blessings, foods and beverages.

“Then the spirit answers, ‘My Lord, Thou made thyself known to me, thereby I became needless of Thy creatures all.’”

The above statement can be interpreted thus: Now that I have achieved Thy proximity, what do I want paradise for?

Divine success: being honored

“By Thy might and majesty, if Thy good pleasure lies in my being cut to pieces and being killed in the most severe manner seventy times, to me Thy good-pleasure is more worthy than anything else.”

These utterances may sound to have been made by an ambitious person who makes a grandiose claim—something too grand for a weak and helpless servant to say. They may even be taken to have come from conceit. But in order to explain that it is not so, he says:

“How can I be proud, knowing that I am lowly if Thou do not honor me.”

My turning only to Thee and seeking Thy good pleasure is more worthy to me than anything else only because of Thy bestowal of honor and success. If it had not been for the honor Thou has given me and made it firm in me up to now, I would not have anything of myself to offer. I would be nothing more than a lowly creature.

“... and I would have been defeated if Thou had not helped me, and I would have been weak if thou had not strengthened me, and I would have been dead if thou had not kept me alive by Thy remembrance.”

Without Thy help I would not have had the power to struggle against the carnal soul and the devil, and I would have been overcome.

This part of the tradition is most significant: If Thou had not kept me alive by Thy remembrance, I would have been no more than a dead body. It denotes that the life of a believing servant, who has attained certainty and

the lofty degree of perfection, is not the same as the material life we know of, nor of the type that is maintained through respiration. It is the type of life that subsists through remembrance of God. The life of the heart depends on remembering God and communicating with Him. Without such a relationship and connection, one's heart and spirit are dead even if he maintains an "animal life". God, the Exalted, says in this regard,

*"So it may warn him who would have life."*¹

So long as the heart does not have life, it will not benefit from the Divine sciences and heart-felt attention. That is why the people of certainty [*ahl al-yaqīn*] feel that they have acquired their life through their communion with God, the Exalted—life of the highest degree, in the presence of God, the Exalted, and they consider it a bestowal of God.

"Were it not for Thy concealing, I would have been disgraced the first time I disobeyed Thee."

"My Lord, how should I not seek Thy good pleasure whilst Thou perfected my intellect, so that I knew Thee, and could differentiate truth from falsehood, command from prohibition, knowledge from ignorance, and light from darkness?"

My God, the most I desire to acquire is Thy good pleasure, for paradise and heavenly bliss are worthless compared to Thee. These are worthy only inasmuch as they are Thy gifts. My God, if Thou had not perfected my intellect that made me know Thee and comprehend the value of Thy proximity, I would have followed my passions as other animals do. It was due to Thy grace that my intellect grew to perfection, and I came to know Thee, and renounce the passions and pleasures of this world. What else should I have looked for if I did not make Thy good pleasure my quest? Is there anything better than Thy satisfaction?

Then God, the Exalted, says,

"By My might and majesty, there is no veil between Me and Thee. I treat My friends in this way."

1- *Sūrat Yā-Sīn* 36:70.

Discourse 17

Characteristics of a Pleasant and Lasting Life

يا احمد؛ هل تدري ايُّ عيش اهني وايُّ حياة ابقى؟

قَالَ: اللَّهُمَّ لَا. قَالَ: أَمَا الْعَيْشُ الْهَنِي فَهُوَ الَّذِي لَا يَفْتَرُ صَاحِبُهُ عَن ذِكْرِي وَلَا يَنْسَى نِعْمَتِي وَلَا يَجْهَلُ حَقِّي. يَطْلُبُ رِضَايَ لَيْلَةً وَنَهَارَةً. وَأَمَا الْحَيَاةُ الْبَاقِيَّةُ فَهِيَ الَّتِي يَعْمَلُ (صَاحِبُهَا) لِنَفْسِهِ حَتَّى تَهْوَنَ عَلَيْهِ الدُّنْيَا وَتَصْغُرَ فِي عَيْنَيْهِ وَتَعْظُمَ الْآخِرَةُ عِنْدَهُ وَيُؤَثِّرُ هَوَايَ عَلَى هَوَاهُ وَيَبْتَغِي مَرْضَاتِي وَيَعْظُمُ حَقَّ عِزَّتِي وَيَذْكُرُ عِلْمِي بِهِ وَيُرَاقِبُنِي بِاللَّيْلِ وَالنَّهَارِ عِنْدَ كُلِّ سَيِّئَةٍ وَمَعْصِيَةٍ وَيَنْتَقِي قَلْبَهُ عَن كُلِّ مَا أَكْرَهَ وَيَبْغِضُ الشَّيْطَانَ وَوَسْوَاسَهُ وَلَا يَجْعَلُ لِابْلِيسَ عَلَى قَلْبِهِ سُلْطَانًا وَسَيِّيلًا.

“O Ah mad, dost thou know which living is more pleasant and which life more lasting?”

The Prophet (s) said, “O God, I do not know.” God said, “As regards the way of living that is pleasant, it is that of a person who does not neglect remembering Me, and does not forget My blessings and is not ignorant of My right. He seeks My satisfaction day and night. As for the lasting life: it is the life of a person who acts for himself in a manner that this world remains ignominious and lowly, and the hereafter great. He gives preference to My desire over his inclination, seeks My pleasure and respects My right. He does not forget that I oversee his actions, is careful day and night not to commit any sin and evil deed; and purifies his thought of all that I dislike, and holds a grudge against Satan and his temptations. He does not provide Satan with an authority and a way to enter his heart.”

Characteristics of a pleasant life

Further, in the *Mi'rāj* Tradition, when God the Exalted, asked the Prophet (s): “O Ahmad, do you know which way of living is more pleasant and which life more lasting?” The Prophet (s) said, “O God, I do not know.”

The negative answer that the Prophet (s) gave indicates servitude; a servant knows nothing until told. The Prophet (s) is teaching others that what even the Prophet (s) and the Imām ('a) know is what God has taught them.

Man's natural disposition is to search for a way of living and a life that are pleasing, felicitous, constant and lasting. Man is, thus, in search of pleasure and happiness that are pleasant and enduring, for life without pleasure is useless. Momentary, infirm and unstable pleasures produce pain of separation that is more intense than the pleasure one enjoys.

God the Exalted, says,

“But as regards the way of living that is pleasant, it is that of a person who does not neglect remembering Me, does not forget My blessings, is not ignorant of My due right, and seeks My satisfaction, day and night.”

We do take this as an inherited belief that in God's view the life of a person, who does not forget remembering God and observes other conditions, is pleasant. But a brief explanation will clarify the relationship between the pleasant life, remembering of God and pondering over His blessings.

Owing to his primordial nature, man desires a permanent and abiding reality, one that has ontological independence—a reality on which man can rely. Through his innate nature, consciousness and immediate apprehension, he discovers that his own being is not independent of things such as food, oxygen and many other necessities of life in this world. This needful being ought to depend on a needless Being if he desires a happy life, like a brook that should necessarily be linked to the sea so as to keep running and avoid drying up.

We understand this through our primordial nature—an understanding that is graded. For certain people it is mixed with ambiguity, which gradually fades away as one ascends in his knowledge [*ma'rifah*]. This continues until the rank of the “*awliyā' Allāh*”, who openly comprehend the realities through intuition [*shuhūd*], and immediate apprehension.

Others innately and ambiguously understand that their existence is dependent and in need of a needless Being, to whom it will have to be connected if it is to remain and grow to perfection. Confidence and

tranquility come to them if they recognize the Source of life and perfection and if they establish communication with Him. When one comes to know the existent Being, through whom his needs are provided, even those he is unable to imagine, he achieves tranquility, with no worries concerning the future, for he is sure that his shortages will be taken care of by Him. Without such recognition there will be permanent dread and anxiety.

Certain schools, today, such as “Hippiism”, “Nihilism”, and some offshoots of “Existentialism” hold that life is aimless and mingled with dread and anxiety; claiming that anxiety is a sign of being alive. To some people, such as Sartre, anxiety is a component of life; without it, one is not alive.

Those, who are distanced from realities and truth, are unable to live a life free from anxiety. They imagine that anxiety is an essential part of life. They do not know that anxiety comes when one has no knowledge of God and the Being with whom our primordial nature desires to establish communication. Their belief is a deviation from man’s nature [*fit rah*]. Those who have knowledge of God and are in communion with Him have no anxiety especially when they know that God desires them good. God never desires any evil to any of the creatures. It is evident that the more one’s knowledge of God increases, the less the anxiety he feels, provided that God, the Exalted, does not forsake one. If He does, anxiety and dread will reappear.

Life will become pleasant when anxiety and dread are lessened or completely removed. The latter case takes places when one remembers God. This is a fact that cannot be denied. The Holy Qur’an says,

*“Now surely, by Allah’s remembrance are the hearts set at rest.”*¹

We must therefore understand that anxiety, dread, and lack of peace of mind, are the products of a weak relationship with the Source of being. When we establish a stronger relationship with Him and turn to Him more often, we will increase our peace of mind. Some people think that they can acquire it by merely uttering certain formulae [*dhkir*] such as “*There is no god except Allah*”, but they do not know that such formulae work when they leave an impression on one’s heart and mind, turning both unto God.

The late Imām Khomeinī (may Allah be pleased with him) said, “I swear by God that I have never feared anything in my life.” This may seem to be an astonishing claim, but he was not the kind of person to exaggerate. He swore by God’s name, too. We may want to learn how he achieved such a station. We suffer from repeated anxiety several times a day, but he was

1- *Sūrat al-Ra’d* 13:28.

never agitated and worried in the most severe events that he encountered such as the terrible catastrophe of the explosion taking place on the seventh day of the month of Tīr in which many of his most loyal devotees and friends were killed. This event shook many of those who strongly sympathized with the Islamic Revolution. It was an event that echoed throughout the world. But he did not fear, nor show anxiety.

Ordinarily when a friend of ours dies, we become agitated and restless. But in the above event, Imām Khomeinī lost seventy of his best friends; yet he was calm. Some of those who met him tried to make necessary preparations in order to prevent any probable shock. Before they could say anything, the Imām, being very intuitively aware, told them to call for the Islamic parliament to assemble. What an amazing spirit, patience and endurance he had! The secret lies in the deep and heart-felt link with God, the All-mighty and Honorable. Such are the great spirits, unperturbed and undefeatable by horrible waves of difficulties. Our spirits get reduced in their capacity and break, as soon as they meet danger.

A close associate of Imām Khomeinī has related that the Imām's daily schedule did not change after the catastrophe: he continued reciting the Qur'an on time as he did everyday, and followed the routine jobs as he used to do before, as if nothing had happened.

So without remembering God and without being mindful of Him, it is impossible to live a life that is calm and to have a mind that is peaceful. We lose a great deal not being fully mindful of God. The first condition for a pleasant life is: no lethargy and negligence in remembering God and in mentioning His favors and might.

Ordinarily, we enjoy life when we feel that our needs are provided for. But we have already been given thousands of blessings: an existence, a life, a healthy body and mind, knowledge, faith in God, belief in the Day of Judgment, (God's special favor:) the blessing of the (infallible) Imāms (from the household of Prophet of Islam (s)), the love for Islam and for the Islamic Revolution, to mention a few. Yet, we are indifferent to these. We do not enjoy them because we do not give them our due attention, just as we are indifferent to our health, a blessing we take for granted till it is too late. We enjoy it for a short time after we become ill, but then we forget it again. The second condition for a pleasant life, then, will be to keep God's blessings in mind.

Man takes God's blessings for granted, but nags and complains no sooner than he feels there is something missing in his life. Then he begins to advertise it. If men think about the blessings that God, the Merciful, has

given them, they will begin to rejoice in them so deeply that deficiencies will seem too trivial. These deficiencies, however, come about for a reason and wisdom. If we ponder the blessings that God, the Merciful, has bestowed on us, we will realize they are too many to count,

“And if you would count Allah’s favors, you will not be able to number them.”¹

Therefore, it is necessary to recount God’s favors in order to have a pleasant life. But this is not enough, because if one likes the favors but has no regard for the right that the Owner of the blessings has on him, he will become attached to the favors; and this becomes a barrier on the way to his perfection. Thus, he should think about the right that the Owner of the blessings has on him, and ask himself how he should give thanks for all these favors. Life will then become pleasant and sweet.

Characteristics of a lasting life

In the *Mi‘rāj* Tradition, God, the Exalted, mentions the particularities of a lasting life, too. These few lines, in fact, contain a course in traveling the path [*siyr wa sulūk*] and acquiring practical mysticism [*‘irfān-e ‘amalī*]. If we focus on these sentences and take them as life instructions, we will have achieved the highest ranks of perfection. God, the Exalted, has said,

“As for the lasting life: it is the life of a person who acts for himself in a manner that this world becomes ignominious and lowly, and the hereafter great.”

If a person desires to forsake the path of animality and set foot on the path leading to perfection, he ought to make a comparison between this world and the hereafter. He needs to remember the sacred revealed law of Islam that has assigned people with acts, some obligatory, such as the ritual prayers and fasting, and some recommended, all resulting in man’s perfection and bringing him rewards in the hereafter.

Man primarily desires to do things that give him pleasures instantly in this world. Therefore, he hardly does things that do not bring instant rewards nor give pleasure. Where he is assured, through experience, of the immediate pleasure, he will enthusiastically resume the task and follow it. As for things that are not enjoyable, he will feel fatigued doing them, and will gradually give them up. This is a point emphasized in the Holy Qur’an,

“... and most surely it is a hard thing except for the humble ones.”²

1- *Sūrat al-Nah* 116:18.

2- *Sūrat al-Baqarah* 2:45.

Ritual prayers are a burden to people even though it does not take long to perform them. Without applying proper methods, it will at the onset be very hard to get the young ones to perform their prayers. The reason is that when a child eats, or plays, or watches television he derives instant, spontaneous pleasure. But when he wants to make the ablution and prepare himself for the performance of the prayers he does not get any instant pleasure. (This analogy is applicable to grown-ups, too). When a person comes to believe that these acts will indeed do him good and are delectable, he will enthusiastically perform them.

It is clear that there is little distance between the acts of worship, their outcome and satisfaction. The entire life of this world when compared with the life in the hereafter is shorter than the twinkling of an eye, even if it be a lifespan of a hundred years. The real life is in fact the life in the world to come, for it is ever-lasting and unending. If we could compare the pleasures of these two lives, we would see that the former to which we are so attached and for which we struggle so hard, are trivial and worthless when compared with the pleasures in the hereafter.

There is no doubt that a great deal of distress and affliction accompanies the enjoyment of even momentary pleasures: everyone takes the trouble to earn his living however simple it might be. Everyone does his best to provide himself a comfortable life, procuring heaters to stay warm in cold winters, and air conditioners to provide comfort in hot summers. Man makes all these endeavors and invests in order to secure material pleasures and gains. The inventions that are made, the thoughts that are applied, the wars that are waged, and the struggles that are made are ways to spend a few days of a happy life. Now, if the momentary and transient pleasures of this world are so precious to justify the endurance of all these hardships, we need to ponder the worth of the inexhaustible pleasures of the hereafter, the enjoyment of which is followed by no discomfort or fatigue. Are they not worthy to make us perform our prayers properly?

After one has compared the pleasures of this world with those of the life to come, one will be able to endure the hardship of performing acts of worship and obligations. He will then struggle to do his duties. It is a difficult thing to start with, but after the comparison is made and the significance, value and permanence of the bliss in the hereafter realized, he will perceive the enormity of the hereafter versus the insignificance of this world. This is the time when he will willingly perform the duties the Real has charged him with. As for the worldly affairs: when one is assured that his efforts will produce good results, he will endure the difficulties.

Thus, the primary step is to recognize the position of this world and that of the next, to strive to eliminate the hardships in performing the acts of worship and in rendering service to God, to understand the nature of this world, and to comprehend the value of this world versus that of the hereafter. We will need to know which one is more advantageous, and choose that one. We will naturally come to the conclusion that this world is lowly and inferior whereas the world to come is great.

The sentence, “As for the lasting life: it is for a person who acts for himself...” denotes that man loves his own self much more than he loves anyone and anything else; that is, the most beloved object to man is his own self—a criterion by means of which other friendships are measured. If man loves someone, it is because he enjoys being in company of this particular person. It thus follows that it is himself that man loves, and it is this love that extends to other people and other things.

We love ourselves, but do not ponder over our own interest and good. When you love someone you provide him with what is to his interest and advantage, and debar what is harmful. Now, what do you do to your own self that is your most beloved object? Why do you not reflect on what brings you benefit and loss? Do try to realize where your advantage lies, so that you may obtain it, and do keep away from what is disadvantageous to you. If one meditates on his real benefit and loss, and if he strives to invite what is to his interest and advantage, he will arrive at a point where “this world seems lowly to him”, because he realizes that the world to come is better and more lasting,

“And the hereafter is better and more lasting.”¹

The Commander of the Faithful, Imām ‘Alī (‘a) says,

“I used to have a friend. (Our friendship) was based on the criteria God, the Exalted, had set. In my view he was great (because) he considered this world as lowly.”²

In view of the Commander of the Faithful (‘a), a great person is one who considers this world as lowly. That is, the person who has realized the fact that this world is worthless and insignificant when compared with the hereafter. Thus, if we consider our own interest, we should not neglect the hereafter because this world is impermanent and perishable. Mere meditation upon the affairs of this world and the next and comparing the two will not suffice, for we need to strive hard to get to the point where it

1- *Sūrat al-A‘lā* 87:17.

2- *Nahj al-Balāghah* (Fayd al-Islām), p. 1225, saying [*h ikmat*] 281.

will not be hard and burdensome for us to perform the Divine obligations. Finally, we must prefer the other-worldly pleasures to the pleasures of this world. If we are left free to decide between “the good” and “the better”, we must prefer that which God loves over what we desire, not what we ourselves like.

“And the person who gives preference to My desire over his inclination, and seeks My pleasure and respects My right, and does not forget that I oversee his actions, and is careful day and night not to commit any sins and evil deeds.”

The path that one labors through, striving throughout to attain the final perfection, while constantly practicing and maintaining the correct practical methods has a starting point: it is an evaluation made between this world and the life to come. This is the point where one decides to choose eternal happiness. He needs to be on constant guard distinguishing between that which will do him good in the hereafter and that which will not. He must always calculate every step and see whether God, the Exalted, likes it or not. This is the very constant meditation and watch [*murāqibah*] much emphasized by instructors of morality. This is when one should ponder over God and His might. If one is aware that God, the Exalted, has knowledge of everything one does, and if he is aware that God, the Almighty, is Omnipresent and watches all acts, he will never attempt a sin or an act of disobedience during the day or at night.

Before a child, one shuns certain indecencies. Would one sin when he knows that God, the Mighty, is present, watching his deeds? This control concerns the outer actions and the surveillance one must keep over his limbs, the hand, the feet, the eye, etc. The more important observation has to do with the inner currents of the heart and mind,

“And he purifies his heart of all that I dislike.”

In addition to a careful watch over his outer acts, and performing his religious duties, one must abandon disobeying the Real, too. He must observe a careful control over his mind, and be on guard against any ideas and thoughts that God does not like.

(The late Sayyid Murtadā is quoted to have told his brother, Sayyid Radī, “It is better if leadership of the congregational prayer is assumed by someone who has not committed any sin.” His brother answered, “It is best if the leader has not even thought about an act of disobedience to God, let alone sinning.”)

Further, in the *Mi'rāj* Tradition God, the Exalted, said,

“And he has a grudge against Satan and his temptations. He does not provide Satan with an authority and a way to enter his heart.”

Whenever he feels that satanic temptations are rushing at his heart, he fights them off, never allowing his luminously pure heart to be tainted by such distracting thoughts. The believing person considers Satan’s temptations as enemies that have attempted to take his life. Therefore, he is constantly striving against them, never allowing the Devil to penetrate his mind, let alone gain control over his limbs and over his outer acts.

Discourse 18

Success in the Divine Test and God's Special Favors

فاذا فعل ذلك اسكنت في قلبه حبًا حتى اجعل قلبه لي وفراغه واشتغاله وهمه وحديثه من النعمة التي انعمت بها على اهل محبتي من خلقي وافتح عين قلبه وبسمعه حتى يسمع بقلبه وينظر بقلبه الى جلالي وعظمتي واصبّق عليه الدنيا وابغض اليه ما فيها من اللذات واحذر من الدنيا وما فيها كما يحذر الراعي غنمه من مراتع الهلكة. فاذا كان هكذا يفر من الناس فرارا وينقل من دار الفناء الى دار البقاء ومن دار الشيطان الى دار الرحمن.

يا احمد؛ لازيننه بالهبة والعظمة فهذا هو العيش الهني والحياة الباقية وهذا مقام الراضين. فمن عمل برضائي الزمه ثلاث خصال، أعرفه شكري لا يخالطه الجهل وذكره لا يخالطه النسيان ومحبة لا يوتر على محبتي محبة المخلوقين. فاذا احبني احبته وافتح عين قلبه الى جلالي. فلا اخفي عليه خاصة خلقي فاناجيه في ظلم الليل ونور النهار حتى ينقطع حديثه من المخلوقين ومجالسته معهم.

“When he has done so, I will place in his heart a love that will make his heart Mine, and make the time of his disengagement and engagement, his effort, and his words, blessed with the favors which I have bestowed upon the people I love among My creatures. This will open the eyes of his heart and hearing so that he hears with his heart and looks with his heart at My majesty and might. I will make the world seem confined and narrow to him and his pleasures distasteful to him. And I shall warn him against the world and what is in it, just as a shepherd protects his herd from deadly pastures. When this happens, he flees from people, and moves from the perishable abode into the eternal abode, and from the house of the Devil to the house of the Merciful.

O Ah mad, I will adorn him with awe and might; this is the pleasant life and the eternal life; this is the station of the Satisfied. Then on him who has acted for My satisfaction, I will confer three qualities: I shall teach him to give thanks in a manner not confused with ignorance, and a remembrance not confused with forgetfulness, and a love that shall not prefer the love of any created being over My love. When he loves Me, I love him, and open the eye of his heart to My majesty; then I do not hide from his view My selected servants. Then I call upon him in the darkness of nights and in the brightness of days so that he discontinues speaking to others and being in assembly with them.”

The characteristics of a pleasant and lasting life were discussed in the previous chapter. It was also mentioned that to diminish the importance of this world in his eyes, one should try hard to make the hereafter prosper, and strive to obtain God’s satisfaction. After making all efforts to restructure his soul, and successfully pass the tests, comes the time to enjoy God’s special favors.

After one has made every effort, God, the Exalted, will help him attain degrees that he could not have achieved by himself. He had previously considered himself as an independent being, but now that he has not fallen short of his efforts and has traveled this stage and has done all he could, he will be favored by God the Exalted, as He favors His selected servants. From hereon, he does not walk on his own, for God, the Exalted, leads him to the extent that his heart belongs to God. Left alone, man does not have the power to overcome his carnal desires. It is through God’s kindness that he takes the first short steps. God’s general kindness is not to help take long strides. Only after one succeeds in taking the short steps, does God help him in taking long strides.

Focus of believers’ thought and attitude: God and His blessings

So long as one’s heart is occupied with others, it will be unable to soar. However, when through God’s favor the love for others has been erased from one’s heart, it facilitates the soaring of the heart.

Whenever we engage in the dealings of this world, we try to get them done as we desire. On meeting our friends too, we talk about the materialistic side of life. This is because we have dedicated ourselves to this world, and it is the love of this world that motivates our actions. When the love of God takes the place of the world, we prefer to talk only about God after we have performed our prayers and brought the daily tasks to an end. When we are

with our friends, we feel disinclined to talk about worldly gains, and devote all our attention to God, the Exalted.

In our leisure time, and in particular when we are asleep, we, subconsciously, turn to things that have their roots deep in our heart, yet we ignore them in our waking state. One should, therefore, see what he is mostly inclined to when he is detached and when he is asleep, if he desires to see what goes on in his mind, and what the real object of his real love is.

Those who love only God devote their full attention to Him and to the favors He has granted them gratis, whether they are at work or not. Those who love God enjoy special blessings of which others are unaware. The former consider the pleasures of the worldly men as worthless,

میان عاشق و معشوق رازی است چه داند
آنکه اشتر می‌چراند

*Of the secret there is between the lover and the beloved,
the camel driver knows nothing.*

“And I will open the eyes of his heart and of his hearing so that he hears with his heart and looks at My majesty and might with his heart.”

Besides our apparent eye and ear, we have an inner eye and an inner ear:

*“...for surely it is not the eyes that are blind but blind are the hearts
which are in the breasts.”¹*

He is indeed blind whose “heart’s eye” is blind, and is thus unable to perceive reality. He who loves God will have the “eye and the ear of his heart” opened by God. He will then be able to perceive the greatness of God’s might and majesty, and the lowliness of the insignificant affairs of this world. To the latter he will barely devote his attention, because he has had an open-ended universe displayed before him. The likeness of this is the example of a blind person who has recovered his eyesight, and been given a chance to view the expanse of the world to which he was blind before, visualizing his inner self only.

So long as the eye of our heart is not open, we will be unaware of the realities of the other world, and even of the inner dimension of the kingdom of this world of ours, because we cannot see them. We merely feel amazed observing the grandness of the stars and the might of the galaxies through our telescopes—all of which are parts of the lower heaven. Our perception

1- *Sūrat al-H ajj* 22:46.

and understanding is similar to a blind man's perception and understanding, since the eye of our heart has not been opened yet, and we are unable to see God's infinite might. If we do, the whole world will become a narrow confine to us:

“I will make the world seem confined and narrow to him, and I will make his pleasures distasteful to him.”

Smallness of the world apprehended by believers

Since we cannot perceive other localities, nor are aware of the life to come, the world seems large and extensive to us, although it is zero when compared with God's grandness. When the eye of one's heart opens and observes God's grandness, he realizes how insignificant this world is. He is then overwhelmed by joy and delectation, and the world becomes distressing. He becomes unmindful of the world, just like an astronomer, occupied observing unending space, the stars and their mansions, becomes oblivious to his own routine life.

If one's eye opens and observes the life to come, he will no longer enjoy devoting his time to the affairs of this world, which is too small when compared to the hereafter. He will rather consider this world a barrier preventing him from pondering the hereafter and the higher universe. He cannot appreciate the former anymore, even dislikes it, for he considers it an obstacle in his attaining a higher and greater pleasure. Those, whose vision perceives the life to come, experience such ecstasy that they disregard all material pleasures as nothing. They view them pessimistically, because to them these pleasures prevent them from attaining the real bliss. They exit this world and enter the real world.

Scholars and God's *awliyā'* do not take delight in the same things we enjoy. One, in whose heart the love of God has firmly settled, will not be attracted to material joys. He considers them as obstacles hindering his progress to perfection. So, he benefits from them merely to the extent of his need, and as an obligation that the religious law [*sharī'ah*] has charged him with.

“And I caution him against the world and what is in it, in the same way that a shepherd protects his herd from deadly pastures.”

After one has successfully finished the above-mentioned stages, God will become his teacher, help him in dangers and protect him from slipping into pitfalls. Just as a shepherd drives his sheep away from poisoned fields, so God, the Exalted, keeps him away from this world.

“When this happens, he flees from people, and is moved from the perishable abode to the eternal abode and from the house of the Devil to the house of the Merciful.”

We desire to see people, even if we are not friends. People and scenes give us joy, which, if we are deprived of for some time, we will be in a state of pain and agony like those who are jailed. But someone, whose heart is filled with the love of God, and whose eyes view the eternal universe of the hereafter, flees from this world, the people of this world and the worldly. He has no desire to see them. He wants to see only God's friends and those who love Him, and to talk only to them. He does not desire to mingle with others unless his religious duty requires him to.

Those, who pass away, are sometimes idiomatically referred to as “those who have parted from this perishable abode and hurried to the eternal abode”. But we mean a different kind of “moving”. The believer desires to meet God here, while he is alive, performing his duties.

Pointing to the characteristics of those who are inclined to the hereafter, a part of the *Mi'rāj* Tradition quoted in chapter twelve read: “This world and the next are as equals” to God's *awliyā'*. This world and the next are in fact likened to two settlements into which people move. Now, in the view of the believer who is astounded, watching God's majesty, the whole world fades away; in other words, he moves from this world to the next. According to Imām 'Alī ('a),

“The believers live in this world physically, while their spirits are hanging from a Divine place.”¹

It is such a person that is moved from the house of the Devil into the house of the Merciful. So long as man's eyes are open, gazing at the world and its manifestations, and he has set his heart on material pleasures, this world is the house of the Devil, and Satan is intending to pervert him and drive him into pitfalls. When one has flown high and is moved to “the house of the Merciful” he will be out of Satan's reach, because this is the place where Satan cannot enter.

“O Ah mad, I will adorn him with awe and might; this is the pleasant life, and the eternal life; this is the station of those satisfied.”

Those who are in communion with God, and turn to Him in their hearts, exude awe and grandness that make other people humble the moment they see them—without knowing the reason. These people might be thin and

1- *Nahj al-Balāghah* (Fayd al-Islām), p. 139, saying [*h ikmat*] 139.

frail, and without apparent reason to cause apprehension. But people bow respectfully when they see reflections of their spiritual mood.

Isn't this sort of life more pleasant than the thoroughly tainted life towards which we are inclined? We are always concerned with food and dress, cheating and deception, sleepless nights over the loss of certain property? Which is more valuable? Our life, or that of a person who does not heed this insignificant world because he is concerned with a more magnificent one? Such a person has abandoned earthly limitations, earthly poverty and earthly beggars, and has set his heart on Absolute Wealth, Absolute Honor, Absolute Beauty and Perfection.

When a believing person keeps away from earthly pleasures, unlawful matters and things that God dislikes, for the sake of God, to attract God's pleasure, he will be happy with what God determines for him, or confers on him. It is evident that there is a bilateral happiness: when a person endeavors to obtain God's pleasure, and is happy with God's decision, he will not worry over shortcomings. Then God, the Exalted, will be pleased with him, as stated in the Qur'an:

*"Return to your Lord well-pleased, well-pleasing."*¹

He also says,

*"Allah is well-pleased with them and they are well-pleased with Allah."*²

Three characteristics of those who have obtained God's pleasure

God, the Exalted, confers three qualities upon those who have attained the station of contentment,

"Then on him who has acted for My good pleasure, I will confer three qualities: I teach him to give thanks that are not confused with ignorance."

The first quality will then be to give thanks to God, in full belief and consciousness. Man is ungrateful in disposition. He is submerged by God's bounties, yet indifferent to them. No sooner is he deprived of a blessing than he lets out a cry, and makes vows and offers sacrifices. The faithful pray, invoke God and supplicate to Him, others scowl and despair,

*"If We granted man a favor, then We took it back; verily he then he is despairing, hopeless."*¹

1- *Sūrat al-Fajr* 89:28.

2- *Sūrat al-Mā'idah* 5:119.

In another verse, He says,

*"...and if evil touch him, then he is despairing, hopeless."*²

Elsewhere, He says,

*"Most surely man is very unjust, very ungrateful."*³

God, the Exalted, gives those who seek his good pleasure, "the station of expressing gratitude and giving thanks" as opposed to those in the latter group. This expression of gratitude is not mingled with ignorance, for they have recognized God's blessings and are giving thanks for them.

Because we are not fully aware of all God's favors, our thanksgiving, if ever attempted, is limited and conjoined with scores of ingratitude. Though we recognize a certain blessing and give thanks for it, we are heedless to multitudes of other blessings. Our gratitude is thus joined with negligence and ignorance as regards God's other blessings.

"...and a remembrance that is not confused with forgetfulness and a love after which, he shall not prefer the love of any created being over My love."

It is very hard to remember God, the Almighty. We perform prayers several times a day, but in our hearts we neglect Him, although we are apparently worshipping Him. The heart of a believing person whom God has favored is brimful with the love of God. Such a person cannot be oblivious to God, because God, the Almighty, has bestowed upon him the power to recollect, free from forgetfulness. That is why, he never neglects remembering God. He loves God. A lover will never forget his Beloved. This is the second quality God, the Almighty, bestows on him.

The third quality that God, the Exalted, gives the people who are contented with His decisions is "a love of Him", lodged in their hearts (so firmly) that they never choose any other love.

In this world, our love for something can be replaced with something more loving: the love for a particularly good book may be substituted with love for a better one. Our love for the house we have today may shift to a better one once we have acquired it. Our kind friend may soon be forgotten when we have found a better companion—all this is a rule of the world, routinely exemplified in various ways. But the one who has dedicated himself to God

1- *Sūrat Hūd* 11:9.

2- *Sūrat Fusilat* 41:49.

3- *Sūrat Ibrāhīm* 14:34.

will not give preference to any love over the love he has for God, because God is the best beloved.

“When he loves Me, I will love him, and I will open the eye of his heart to My majesty; then I will not hide from him My selected servants.”

It is impossible for us to explain “the station of the love a servant has for God” and “the station of the love God has for a servant”—realities that words cannot express. These are Divine gifts and lofty stations perceivable only by God’s friends and *awliyā’*. The former is dear indeed as the servant of God will acquire true knowledge [*ma’rifah*] and thence, will love only God and forsake every other friendship. This is certainly an important rank, and, yet, is surpassed by the love God, the Exalted, has for man. God, the Almighty, has said in the Qur’an,

“O you who believe, whoever from among you turns back from his religion, then Allah will bring a people, He shall love them and they shall love Him.”¹

In addition to the bilateral love between the lover and the Beloved, between the believing servant and God, God, the Exalted, will have His lover well-liked by people. This is not by itself worthy. To the servant of God it is worthy merely because it is God’s grace to be esteemed among people. A lover of God turns only to God, the Almighty, whether others love him or not, whether they are his friends or foes. God’s grace, however, brings him people’s esteem:

“Surely (as for) those who believe and do good, for them will Allah bring about love.”²

As a prominent example of the righteous and devoted believers is the late Imām Khomeinī (may Allah be pleased with him), who was deeply loved not only by his friends but also by his enemies—the enemies opposed him because they found their interests jeopardized. A companion of Imām ‘Alī (‘a) once met Mu‘āwiyah, Imām ‘Alī’s (‘a) most bitter enemy. Mu‘āwiyah asked him to describe some of Imām ‘Alī’s virtues. When he did so, Mu‘āwiyah began to shed tears, out of regret. He might have been desirous of good things, but was led astray because he was attached to this world, had followed Satan, had forgotten all about God, the All-mighty and Honorable, and had shown hostility to Imām ‘Alī and his children (peace be upon them) and to his companions, in order to attain worldly success.

1- *Sūrat al-Mā'idah* 5:54.

2- *Sūrat Maryam* 19:96.

“Then I will whisper to him in the darkness of nights and in the brightness of days so that he will discontinue speaking to others and being in assembly with them.”

The believer's love for God has so far given him an opportunity to supplicate to God. Now he has attained a station where God, the Exalted, converses with him in whispers. An enamored lover constantly seeks moments when he can establish a sincere communion with his Beloved, talking in whispers. But now, the Beloved whispers to him. This is certainly the greatest happiness, an honor indeed for the bond servant to feel that whether he is awake or asleep God, the Exalted, speaks to him.

Discourse 19

Station of Men of Piety and Messengers of God

يا أحمبُ اجعل همَّك هما واحدا. فاجعل لسانك لسانا واحدا واجعل بدنك حيا لا تغفل ابدا؛ من غفل لا ابالي بايِّ واد هلك. يا أحمبُ استعمل عقلك قبل ان يذهب. فمن استعمل عقله لا يخطى ولا يطغى.

يا أحمبُ هبلٌ تدري لايِّ شَيْءٍ فضَّلْتك على ساير الانبياء؟ قال اللهم لا. قال: باليقين وحسن الخلق وسخاوة النفس ورحمة بالخلق وكذلك اوتاد الارض لم يكونوا اوتادا الا بهذا.

يا أحمبُ انَّ العبد اذا جاع بطنه وحفظ لسانه علَّمته الحكمة وان كان كافرا تكُون حكمته حجة عليه ووبالا. وان كان مؤمنا تكون حكمته له نورا وبرهانا وشفاء ورحمة. فيعلم ما لم يكن يعلم ويبصُر ما لم يكن يبصُر. فأول ما ابصره عيوب نفسه حتى يشغل بها عن عيوب غيره وابصره دقائق العلم حتى لا يدخل عليه الشيطان.

يا أحمبُ ليس شَيْءٌ من العبادة اجبَّ اليَّ من الصَّمت والصَّوم. فمن صام ولم يحفظ لسانه كمن قام ولم يقرأ في صلاته. فاعطيه اجر القيام ولم اعطه اجر العابدين. يا أحمبُ هل تدري متى يكون (لي) العبد عابدا؟

قال لا يا ربِّ. قال اذا اجتمع فيه سبع خصال ورع يحجزه عن المحارم وصمت يكفُّه عما لا يعنيه وخوف يزداد كلَّ يوم من بكائه وحياء يستحي مني في الخلاء واكل ما لا بد منه ويبغض الدنيا لبغضي لها ويحبُّ الاخيار لحبي لهم.

“O Ah mad, make thy aspiration only one; unify thy speech; keep thy body alive; never be negligent; he who neglects, I am not

responsible in which land he perishes. O Ah mad, apply thy intellect before it is lost; the one who applies his intellect will not err nor will he exceed the limits. O Ah mad, dost thou know why I made thee excel other prophets?"

He said, "No, my Lord." God, the Almighty, then said, "For thy certitude, good temper, generosity of soul and mercy towards created beings. Such are the '*autād*' of the earth—those firmest in belief; they would not be so without these attributes.

"O Ah mad, surely when My servant keeps his stomach hungry and holds his tongue, I will teach him wisdom; and if he is a disbeliever, his wisdom will be an argument against him and a burden. If he is a believer, his wisdom will be a light and a proof, a healing and a mercy for him. He will then know the things of which he had no previous knowledge, and will have a vision of the things that he could not see before. The first thing that I show him will be his own defects so that he will be concerned with those rather than with others' faults; and I make him perceive subtleties of knowledge so that Satan will have no domination over him.

"O Ah mad, to me no worship is more dear than fasting and silence. The one who fasts, but does not hold his tongue is like the one who stands up to perform his prayers but does not recite the *al-Hamd* and *Sūrah* and other formulae in his *s alāt*. Then I will reward him for his standing up but I will not give him the reward for the men of piety [*'ābidīn*], Abideen. O Ah mad, dost thou know when My servant becomes a man of piety [*'ābid*]?"

The Prophet said, "My Lord, I do not." God, the Almighty, then said, "When these seven qualities are gathered in him: piety, that protects him from unlawful things [*mah ārim*]; silence, that prevents him from vain talk; fear, that intensifies his crying every day; modesty, that makes him ashamed of Me even when he is alone; eating, only which there is no avoiding; grudge against the world because of My animosity towards it; and, love of the chosen [*akhyār*], because I love them."

Remembrance of the Divine

In the dialogues between God, the Almighty, and the Prophet (s) in the Mi'rāj Tradition, various styles of speech can be observed which give the texts a spirit of animation and freshness, without which dialogues become monotonous.

In the present chapter, there is a shift in the manner of speech. God is addressing the Prophet (s), explaining certain points and recommending others:

“O Ah mad, make thy aspiration only one; unify thy speech, and keep thy body alive; never be negligent; the one who neglects I am not responsible in which land he perishes.”

By the phrase “make thy aspirations only one”, it means that one should direct all efforts to attain a single goal. It means that in deciding between conflicting goals one should not wander to and from by shifting priority from one goal to another. He should not waver between God and the people. He should always seek God. Although the love of God and His pleasure can be seen in a variety of areas—sometimes in personal matters, at other times in social, material and spiritual ones—one must make it his concern to seek God’s pleasure regardless of the activities. Thus, the phrase “make thy aspiration one” means that one should not be irresolute—sometimes yearning for this world, at other times desiring the hereafter, sometimes God, at other times the people. Strive the most and aspire for the greatest, only for God’s sake.

Polytheism that desires God, the Exalted, and others, reveals itself through one’s speech and acts, because one conforms his words to conditions wherein his interests lie. Such a person is in fact an opportunist: he talks in a manner that interests the audience and may deceive them. He is a double-talker. But the person whose aim is God, the Almighty, he will talk honestly. That is why, God, the Exalted, says, “Unify thy speech.”

God, the Exalted, further recommends that the Prophet (s) should maintain remembering God. One’s body will die if his heart is devoid of the remembrance of God. One’s human life is dependent upon remembering God, without which it will be taken away. What will remain will be a human corpse breathing in an animal state. Our bodies survive so long as we do not neglect remembering the Beneficent even for a single moment.

God the Almighty, then says,

“The one who neglects, I am not responsible in which land he perishes.”

This means that if one neglects God and turns away from Him, he may face any kind of destruction. God made man free in this world. Thus, the above word of God is cautioning those who neglect to remember Him, that they might face any kind of perdition. He says in the Qur’an,

*“And whoever turns himself away from the remembrance of the Beneficent God, We appoint for him a Shayt ān, so he becomes his associate.”*¹

This Qur’anic verse means that Satan associates with people when they neglect remembering God. So long as man remembers God, Satan will not gain mastery over him,

*“Mostly surely, they turn them away from the path, and they think that they are guided.”*²

Such people imagine that they are doing themselves and the society good, but in fact they are going the wrong way, because they are getting closer to perdition and destruction.

Application of the intellect

“O Ah mad, apply thy intellect before it is lost; the one who applies his intellect will not err nor will he exceed the limits.”

This means that as long as man uses his intellect, he will be able to recognize the bounds that God has set and will observe them. As a result, he will not err, nor will he disobey God in practice. But when this ability is pushed away lust and anger take an upper hand and make the person exceed limits.

Why Prophet Muh ammad (s) excels other prophets

“O Ah mad, dost thou know why I made thee excel other prophets?” He said, “No, my Lord.”

The Prophet (s) being a man, knows nothing of himself, because his knowledge comes to him through Divine instruction and grace.

“For thy certitude, excellence of temper, generosity of soul and mercy towards created beings.”

The Prophet (s) is attributed first with certitude [*yaqīn*], a trait with which all prophets (‘a) have been attributed. Certitude is graded; that is, some of it may exist in people, too, but in its highest degree it has existed in those prophets who were assigned the station of *Imāmat*. “Certitude” existed in its most perfect form in the sacred being of Prophet Muh ammad (s). This is a reason for his exaltedness over other prophets.

1- *Sūrat al-Zukhruf* 43:36.

2- *Sūrat al-Zukhruf* 43:37.

“And We made of them *Imāms* to guide by Our command when they were patient and they were certain of our communications.”¹

(There are two criteria for the station of *Imāmat* and leadership: patience in practice, and certitude as regards perception and true knowledge [*ma‘rifah*].)

Other characteristics that have exalted the Prophet (s) above other prophets include: excellence of temper [*h usn al-khulq*], generosity [*sikhāwat al-nafs*]—spending in the way of God, the Exalted—and being merciful and kind to people [*rah matin bi’l-khalq*]. God, the Exalted, describes the Prophet (s) in the Qur’an as,

“...excessively solicitous respecting you; towards the believers (he is) compassionate, merciful.”²

Thence, God says,

“Such are the *autād* of the earth; they would not be thus, without these attributes.”

The word “*autād*” used in this tradition and others shows that besides the prophets, there are men who hold things together, as do nails, holding doors, windows and structures together. Without nails things would not hold. The prominent persons are the *autād* of the earth through whom God, the Exalted, preserves the earth and removes calamities.

Speaking and eating little: conducive to knowledge and comprehension

“O Ah mad, surely when My servant keeps his stomach hungry and holds his tongue, I teach him wisdom. If he is a disbeliever, his wisdom will be an argument against him and a burden. If he is a believer, his wisdom will be a light, a proof, a healing, and a mercy for him.”

Discussions were previously made on the importance of fasting [*s awm*] and remaining silent [*s amt*], the two points that God, the Exalted, has reiterated, saying I will teach wisdom to anyone attributed with these qualities, even a disbeliever. This wisdom will pave the way for the believer to grow to perfection. Wisdom will be an argument against the disbeliever, bringing him wretchedness. The disbeliever will not gain anything from it, because he purposefully disobeys God’s commands. A believing person’s wisdom will be a light, a proof, and a spiritual healing for his ailments.

1- *Sūrat al-Tawbah* (or *Barā’ah*) 32:24.

2- *Sūrat al-Tawbah* (or *Barā’ah*) 32:128.

(This part of the *Mi'rāj* Tradition has emphasized that wisdom is conducive to man's comprehension and knowledge.)

God, the Almighty, continues in this way,

“He will then know the things of which he had no previous knowledge, and will have a vision of the things that he could not see before. The first thing that I show him will be his own defects so that he will be concerned with those than with others' faults.”

Those who eat too much and speak too much overlook their own faults, because they are preoccupied with their own stomachs, or are speaking. Rather than weighing their own words, they merely desire to amuse people, and this is what engages their mind. Such persons do not perceive their own deficiencies. By taking little food, fasting, and remaining silent, one can concentrate on one's own defects, see them in reality and desist from finding fault with others. Wisdom makes one perceptive of one's own faults and gives that “inner perception” of concepts and realities of things.

“And I make him perceive subtleties of knowledge so that Satan will have no domination over him.”

This sentence points to Satan's most important ways of infiltrating into one's mind: creating doubt and uncertainty and confusion in thought. If one acquires firm conviction and certain knowledge, Satan will not be able to tempt that person nor fill him with doubt and uncertainty. The lower the degree of knowledge and awareness, the more powerful will be the degree of perversion and satanic temptations. Thus, the first inlet for Satan is to infiltrate thought, reflection and recognition. If he succeeds in raising doubt and uncertainty, he will have other avenues open before him. One versed in the subtleties and realities of knowledge will shut the door on Satan's temptations and doubts, barring him from stepping in. “Certainty” is, thus, so important that God, the Almighty, says it is the first reason why prophets are superior to others. On the other hand, doubt and uncertainty are things that bring wretchedness and degradation.

“O Ah mad, to me no worship is more dear than fasting and silence. The one who fasts, but does not hold his tongue is like the one who stands up to perform his prayers but does not recite the obligatory and recommended formulae in his *s alāt*. Then, I will reward him for his standing up but I will not give him the reward for men of piety [*ābidīm*].”

God, the Exalted, has elsewhere said,

“The first step in worship is remaining silent and fasting.”

He now says, to me no worship is dearer than these two.

Characteristics of the men of piety [‘*ābidīm*]

God, the Almighty, previously describes the station occupied by those who are pleased with His decisions and those who love Him. In this part of the *Mi‘rāj* Tradition, He describes the station of the men of piety, their particularities and characteristics:

“O Ah mad, dost thou know when My servant becomes an ‘*ābid*?”

The Prophet said, “My Lord, I do not.”

God, the Almighty, said “When seven qualities are gathered in him: piety to protect him from unlawful things [*mah ārim*]...”

Recommendations and practical injunctions related with this *Mi‘rāj* Tradition, if grouped and explained, will make a perfect set of instructions for “a gnostic” to embark on the path. The characteristic specified here are for those who are growing to perfection. These could also be the traits of “those who travel on the path to God” [*sālikān*], and better yet the qualities of “those who have arrived at the station” [*wās ilīm ila’llāh*].

Following God’s style, the prophets and the Imāms from the Household of the Prophet (s) have not divided their teachings into sections and chapters. It would be a formal thing to do so. Since it is man’s soul that is being addressed, the employment of a variety of styles of speech leaves a more pleasant effect on the mind of the audience, and this is the manner used by God, the Almighty, and the prophets (peace be upon them). Thus, the first characteristic of a man of piety is chastity and fear of God [*wara*’].

The second characteristic is “a silence that prevents him from vain talk”. Speaking is deemed right when one has already pondered his words and has considered the benefit that might be obtained from it. Where speaking provides no benefit, and is not a cause for one to draw near to God, the Almighty, it is better to remain silent.

The third characteristic is “a fear that intensifies his crying every day”. When one is filled with fear, he will naturally begin to tremble and cry whenever he starts praying, reciting the Qur’an and giving ear to God’s warnings because he remembers his own sins and is, therefore, afraid of punishments God has warned about,

“Those only are believers whose hearts become full of fear when Allah is mentioned.”¹

The fourth characteristic is, “modesty that makes him ashamed of Me even when he is alone”. The reason people are ashamed of committing acts of sin when they are being watched is because they are ashamed of people, not of God, the Almighty. On the other hand, there are those who do not shun committing sins even in the presence of others. It is, however, more desirable to be ashamed of God, who is Omnipresent. Thus, if a person is ashamed of God when he is alone, he is genuinely modest.

The fifth characteristic is “eating only that which there is no avoiding”.

The sixth characteristic is “a grudge against the world because of My animosity towards it”.

The seventh characteristic is “loving the chosen [*akhyār*] because I love them”. This means if the men of piety desire to worship God, the Almighty, they must make their wishes correspond with God’s desire, saying “My God, I am Your servant; I will do as You desire and will.” Men of piety must also show grudge against the world once they become aware of God’s animosity to the world.

It was previously explained that animosity that God and His *awliyā*’ show to the world is not opposing terrestrial life and the blessings therein. They are against considering this world as the ultimate goal. Other than this, no one opposes the blessings of the world and the material life that are the blessings of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful. Without the life in this world, there would be no hereafter and paradise could not be actualized. Therefore, life and the blessings therein are not evil. It is “seeking after this world” that is undesirable. If this world is considered as “a means to obtain the hereafter”, this is, in fact, a “desire for the hereafter”.

While holding a grudge against this world, a man of piety loves the righteous, and befriends those who love God, the Almighty, and those who are progressively moving towards perfection. All this is a fact: man either proceeds along the path of servitude to God, or along that of self-worship.

1- *Sūrat al-Anfāl* 8:2.

Discourse 20

How ness of the Love for God

يا احمد؛ لیس کُلُّ مَنْ قَالَ احِبُّ اللهَ احَبَّنِي، حَتَّى يَأْخُذَ قُوْتًا وَيَلْبِسَ دُونًا وَيَنَامَ سَجُودًا وَيَطِيلَ قِيَامًا وَيَلْزَمَ صَمْتًا وَيَتَوَكَّلَ عَلَيَّ وَيَبْكِي كَثِيرًا وَيَقِلَّ ضِحْكًا وَيُخَالَفَ هَوَاهُ وَيَتَّخِذَ الْمَسْجِدَ بَيْتًا وَالْعِلْمَ صَاحِبًا وَالزُّهْدَ جَلِيسًا وَالْعُلَمَاءَ اَحْبَاءً وَالْفُقَرَاءَ رَفَقَاءً وَيَطْلُبُ رِضَايَ وَيَقِرُّ مِنَ الْعَاصِينَ فِرَارًا وَيَشْتَغِلُ بِذِكْرِي اشْتِغَالًا وَيَكْتُمُ التَّسْبِيحَ دَائِمًا وَيَكُونُ بِالْعَهْدِ صَادِقًا وَبِالْوَعْدِ وَاثِمًا وَيَكُونُ قَلْبُهُ طَاهِرًا وَفِي الصَّلَاةِ ذَاكِيًا وَفِي الْفَرَائِضِ مُجْتَهِدًا وَفِي مَا عِبَدِي مِنَ الثَّوَابِ رَاغِبًا وَمِنَ عِبَادِي رَاهِبًا وَلَا حِبَائِي قَرِيبًا وَجَلِيسًا.

يا احمد؛ لَوْ صَبَّلَى الْعَبْدُ صَلَاةَ أَهْلِ السَّمَاءِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَصَامَ صِيَامَ أَهْلِ السَّمَاءِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَطَوَى مِنَ الطَّعَامِ مِثْلَ الْمَلَائِكَةِ وَلَبَسَ لِبَاسَ الْعَارِي ثُمَّ أَرَى فِي قَلْبِهِ مِنْ جُبِّ الدُّنْيَا ذَرَّةً أَوْ سَمِعَتْهَا أَوْ رِيَّاسَتْهَا أَوْ حَلِيَّتَهَا أَوْ زِينَتَهَا لَا يَجْأُورُنِي فِي دَارِي وَلَا نَزَعَنَّ مِنْ قَلْبِهِ مَحَبَّتِي وَعَلَيْكَ سَلَامِي وَرَحْمَتِي وَالْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ.

“O Ah mad, not everyone who says, ‘I love God’ loves Me, until he eats little, dresses simply, prostrates till he falls asleep, lengthens his standing posture, prefers silence, relies on Me, cries much, laughs little, and opposes his passionate desires; takes the mosque as his house, knowledge as intimate company, the ascetic as companion, the learned as the most loved, and the poor as friends; seeks My good pleasure, alienates himself from the disobedient, constantly remembers Me, and constantly increases My glorification, is truthful in treaty, and in fulfilling promises. His heart is pure, is foremost in his prayers, strives hard in his duties, yearns for the reward with Me, fears My chastisement, and is a close companion of My friends.

O Ah mad, if a servant of Mine performs as many prayers as all the inhabitants of the heaven and the earth, and fasts as much as all the

inhabitants of the heaven and the earth fast, and abstains from food as the angels do, and dresses as the naked do, but there is, in his heart, love of the world, desire to seek fame, power, or its ornaments, he will not be admitted into My neighborhood, and I will draw My love out of his heart. And My peace and mercy be upon thee, and all praise belongs to the Lord of the worlds.”

The final section of the *Mi'rāj* Tradition deals with the how ness of the love for God and the deserving behavior that is demonstrated. In other words, it is God's love around which these traditions revolve: preliminaries to the acquisition of God's love, as well as the outcome and effects of love for God. It is also mentioned that the love for God and the love for the world do not go together. The subject matter of this part of the *Mi'rāj* Tradition can be divided into two parts: 1) man's mode of behavior which ultimately makes his heart worthy of receiving Divine love, including a set of instructions that help remove all obstacles that hinder the attainment of God's love; and 2) God's response, once man has attained His love, including man's ultimate end.

Asceticism [*zuhd*] and the love for God

“O Ah mad, not everyone who says ‘I love God’, loves Me, unless he eats little, dresses simply, prostrates till he falls asleep, lengthens his standing posture (of prayer) and prefers silence.”

Many are those who claim they sincerely love God, the Almighty. “The sincere love for God” has particular signs and stages of its own. These, if observed in one's conduct and mood, clearly show who loves God.

Among the signs mentioned in the *Mi'rāj* Tradition, some are clearly related to the love for God, some others, however, need to be explained. It has been recommended to eat as much as is necessary to maintain one's health and vigor, observe moderation in clothing and disregard costly dresses so that one does not spend time, money and energy to secure them. Excess in any one of these is an indication of an attachment to this world, a concern for other affairs, and an attention to other-than God, the Exalted. A desire for a dandy appearance and delicious food reveals an inclination of the heart to this-worldly joys, food and dress. A heart like this is for sure no place for the love for God.

It is quite evident that there is a relationship between “lengthy prostrations”, “lengthy standing posture” and the love for Divine worship and ritual prayers [*s alāt*] serve to develop intimacy with God, the Exalted. The more one loves God, the Almighty, the more he will strive to remain in His presence. Such a person will not become tired while performing prayers and

supplicating to Him. If one becomes tired of performing the ritual prayers and wishes to finish the prayer sooner, this shows that the love for God has not entered his heart, and he is not yet intimate with God, otherwise he would not feel tired. Does a lover feel tired of being with and talking to his beloved?

A biography of the Prophet of Islam (s) has reported that due to his lengthy standing posture [*qiyām*], his feet became swollen. He used to remain in prostrations for so long that he used to faint. It is reported that Uways Qaranī, the devoted companion of the Prophet (s) would sometimes spend the night prostrating, calling it “the night of prostration” [*laylat al-sujūd*], at other times he would spend the night bowing and called it “the night of bowing down” [*laylat al-rukūʿ*], and sometimes he would spend the night standing in prayer.

It was previously mentioned that the late Shaykh Hasan ‘Alī Isfahānī used to spend the nights close to the mausoleum of Imām al-Ridā (‘a), supplicating to God, the Almighty, unconscious of what went on around him.

Certain religious dignitaries, scholars and religious authorities [*marāji‘ al-taqlīd*] also used to spend the nights in the shrine of Imām al-Hasayn (‘a), others in the mausoleum of Imām al-Ridā (‘a), reciting the whole Qur’an in one night. Thus, exhaustion means nothing when love and yearning are great. The more intimate one is with God, the Almighty, the more he will rejoice.

Observing silence is another point that God has recommended here, in the closing section of the *Mi‘rāj* Tradition. One naturally desires to think about the object of his love. When in his presence, he will strive to give him his full attention. In his absence, it is his memory that fills the lover’s heart—this being a state requiring silence because speaking distracts the mind a lot. The late ‘Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā’ī was once asked for a way to concentrate while performing one’s prayers. He said, “Speak little.” Thus, in order to be able to concentrate on God, the Beloved, one should speak little. Much talking leads the mind astray, and does not allow one to focus his attention. The friends of God, the Almighty, are silent, because in their hearts they are constantly recollecting Him. Speaking distracts them.

Crying in the love for God

“...and relies on Me, cries a lot, laughs little, and opposes his passionate desires.”

A beginner, who desires to be put on the path to God, the Almighty, and attract His love, should cry in fear of the chastisement that God, the Almighty, has warned people against. He has not yet been purified. His heart will not be purged of filth and sins as long as he has not cried in fear of God and not repented a thorough repenting. Crying in fear of God, the Almighty, will wash away sins just as pure water. After the sins are erased and the lover has arrived at his destination, his joy will be boundless in attaining nearness to his Beloved.

It has been reported that Prophet Shu'ayb (‘a) cried for a hundred years until he became blind. God, the Exalted, asked him, “Why dost thou cry so much, O Shu'ayb? If it is for fear of My chastising thee, I have forbidden it for thee. If it is a desire for Paradise, I have put Paradise at thy disposal.” Prophet Shu'ayb said, “My Lord, Thou knowest that my crying is neither for fear of Hell nor for a yearning for Paradise, but it is because of a yearning desire to visit Thee.” God, the Almighty, said, “Thou hast spoken the truth. From now on, I will have my Interlocutor [*kalīm*] (Moses), serve thee.”

Prophet Moses (‘a) left Egypt in flight, came to Shu'ayb (‘a) and agreed to marry one of his daughters, remain with him for ten years, help him, and work for him as a shepherd.

When Prophet Shu'ayb (‘a) went blind and was unable to look after his own work, God, the Merciful, had Moses, son of ‘Imrān—not a Prophet then—attend to Shu'ayb's (‘a) affairs for ten years. It was because of Shu'ayb's (‘a) ardent love for God that he became worthy of receiving Prophet Moses' (‘a) help, who was later on appointed as the “Possessor of Determination” [*ulu'l-'azm*]. It might have been due to the services he rendered to Shu'ayb (‘a) that Moses (‘a) was chosen to the station of messengership [*maqām-e risālat*].

Those who love God sincerely have little time to laugh. If they do so, it is to make others happy. They are so earnestly thinking of visiting the Divine that they are unwilling to incline their hearts towards anything else. They appear cheerful and smiling to make others happy, but are filled with grief and sorrow so deep that nothing can overcome it, not even all the joys in the world—nothing except meeting with God, the Exalted.

He who sincerely loves God, the Almighty, opposes his passions, because the love for God and egoism are incompatible. Thus, in order to arrive in the sacred presence of God, the Exalted, one must control his sensual passions and desires. As long as one follows and submits to his sensual desires, he cannot be a sincere lover of God, the Almighty.

Friendship with scholars [*‘ulamā’*] and the poor

“...takes the mosque as his house, knowledge as intimate company, the ascetic as a companion, the learned as the most loved, and the poor as friends.”

When a person loves God, he will surely take the mosque as his house, go there and supplicate to God whenever he finds a chance. The one who sincerely loves God, the Almighty, constantly tries to learn more about his Beloved. Thus, the more he increases his knowledge of God, the Almighty, the more insatiable becomes his thirst. He will try to know more about Divine Attributes, signs and actions, contemplating whatever he observes as manifestations of Divine Names and Attributes. He observes all existence as a mirror which reflects his Beloved. That is why he strives to augment his knowledge of the signs of his God, his Beloved.

Those, who sincerely love God, the Almighty, love His friends too. Among the most prominent friends of God are the scholars of the Divine sciences [*‘ulamā’*]. They do not mingle with the people who are alienated from God, the Almighty. Similarly, the people who sincerely love God, the Almighty, live in the simplest manner and do not dedicate themselves to matters related with this world. They establish friendship with those who live a simple life, not with those infatuated by this world and seekers of the material ornaments thereof. They befriend the people who have consciously chosen to abstain from the ornaments of this world.

One may, of course, be rich and spend all his wealth in the way of God, not for his passions and pleasures. Many of the prophets (*‘a*) and some of the Imāms (*‘a*) were wealthy, but they often distributed it among the poor. They did not desire to build themselves palaces and ornament them.

“...and he seeks My good pleasure, and alienates himself from those who disobey.”

The one who sincerely loves God, the Exalted, seeks His good pleasure. Such a person does not befriend God’s enemies, but flees from them, except in order to correct and guide them, because it is an obligation on God’s *awliyā’* to educate and guide the sinners. This important duty might be fulfilled by establishing friendship, although the sinners may not naturally desire it.

“... constantly remembers Me, and constantly increases My glorification, is truthful in treaty, and fulfills his promises.”

The person who sincerely loves God, the Almighty, remembers God and glorifies Him constantly, because nothing is dearer to a person who is

passionately in love than to be thinking about the Beloved. A sincere lover of God is not one of those who cheat and resort to trickery. He is truthful in fulfilling his treaty. Those who are truthful in their love for God, treat others likewise, whereas he, who is not truthful in expressing his love, behaves in a hypocritical manner.

“... and his heart is pure, in his prayer he is focussed, and strives hard in his duties.”

A heart that belongs to God, the Exalted, will be purified, not bound to anything other than God, the Almighty, because the love for God substitutes for everything. Thus, the love for God is a sign of the heart being purified of filth.

“And he yearns for the reward with Me, and fears My chastisement, and is a close companion of My friends.”

A sincere lover of God, ought to keep away from this world, because “the love for God” and “the attachment to this world” do not go together. “Love for God” has, of course, a variety of dimensions, but it can generally be said that by the phrase “the world” it means anything that prevents one from drawing close to God, the Exalted. Anyone who sincerely loves God, the Almighty, sets his heart only on Him and on whatever belongs to Him. He associates only with those who are related with God.

As mentioned before, love for God has a variety of dimensions. At the onset one may come to love things that are religiously lawful [*h alāl*], that is, things that God, the Mighty, does not hate. This kind of love does not oppose the love for God. But there is an additional point: pure love is due only to God. The love for the prophets, the *awliyā'* of God, and the pure Imāms (*'a*), is because they are linked to God, the Almighty.

“O Ahmad, if a servant of mine performs as many prayers as the inhabitants of the heaven and earth taken together, and fasts as the inhabitants of the heaven and the earth fast, and abstains from food as the angels, and dresses as the naked, but there is, in his heart, love of the world (the weight of an atom), or the desire to seek fame, position or worldly ornaments, he will not be admitted into My neighborhood, and I will draw My love out of his heart.”

The ending of the *Mi'rāj* Tradition is shocking and instructive. We must try to draw lessons from it and apply them in our lives. God, the Almighty, has said that if an individual prays as much as the inhabitants of the heaven and the earth taken together, avoids eating as the angels, dresses as the partially naked; and yet, there is, in his heart, as much as an atom's weight of love for the world, desire to be famous among people and be praised by them, the

love of rank, position, or worldly ornaments, he will not be admitted into His proximity.

“My peace and mercy be upon thee, and all praise belongs to the Lord of the worlds.”