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10. Precautious Piety

Precautious Piety (وَدْعُ)

[Observing traditions of the Imams \(a.s.\) by the Shias in occultation](#)

Those who feel themselves in Imam's (a.t.f. .s.) presence at all times, to the extent that they possess his true recognition, abstain from all acts that incur Imam's (a.t.f.s.) wrath and displeasure. At the same time they do not leave any action that will earn his pleasure and satisfaction. In fact, this is one of the most evident signs of Imam's (a.t.f.s.) true recognition in his occultation. Ameerul Mo'mineen (a.s.):

'O Allah, You always have Your Hujjat (proof) on the earth for the creatures. The Hujjat guides them towards Your religion and teaches them Your knowledge, so that Your servants are not scattered (in misguidance). At times Your Hujjat is manifest, but is not obeyed, and at times they are concealed due to fear and their reappearance is awaited. The Hujjat maybe in occultation even in peace due to an unjust government, but his knowledge does not remain concealed from the people. His teachings are etched in the hearts of the believers and they act upon it.¹

Two critical points are highlighted in this tradition with a lot of emphasis. One is referring to knowledge and teachings of Imams (a.s.) and the other point is about the Shias acting upon their exhortations and their way in all walks of our life. And both these tasks are possible in occultation, although not to the same extent as in the presence of Allah's Hujjat. Therefore just because Imam (a.t.f.s.) is in occultation it does not mean in any way that these two critical tasks are ignored. As regards the necessity of referring to the teachings and traditions of Ahlul Bayt (a.s.) in all walks of life, we have already discussed this in the preceding chapters. The following discussion shall cover the other point.

آداب is plural of آدب and means 'affairs' and 'habit' (according to Firozabadi) and we have translated as morals, and by this we mean attributes, habits and morals, which have reached us from our Imams (a.s.). We are not meant to simply believe in these teachings but to actually act upon it. Believing in

these teachings and acknowledging them with the heart constitutes the first stage and implementing these in our lives marks the second stage, which is as important as the first one. That is the reason why so much importance has been placed on implementing the teachings of the Imams (a.s.) under the topic of **إِجْتِهَاد** and **وَرَعٌ** so much so that these teachings should be deemed as the fundamentals (أَرْكَان) of religion.

A blind person approached Imam Mohammad Baqir (a.s.) and asked: 'O son of Allah's messenger, are you aware of my love, my submissive heart and my Mastership towards you?' Imam (a.s.) replied, 'Yes.'

The blind man remarked, 'I have a question to ask you. Please answer it keeping in mind that I am blind and cannot travel too often (to meet you). Imam (a.s.) said, 'You may ask.'

He said, 'Please tell me the religion by which you and your Ahlul Bayt (a.s.) worship Allah, so that I worship Allah with the same religion.'

'You have stated a small thing, but have propounded a big question. I swear by Allah, I reveal to you, my religion and the religion of my forefathers by which we worship Allah, i.e. testifying to Allah's Unity, Messengership of the prophet of Islam (s.a.w.s.), accepting everything that was revealed upon him from Allah's side, friendship with our friends, distancing oneself from our enemies, submitting to our orders, awaiting our Qaim's (a.t.f.s.) reappearance, seeking and striving to observe the obligatory, and refraining from the prohibited acts and assuming piety.'²

Acknowledging everything that has been revealed upon the Prophet (s.a.w.s.) from Allah's side and submitting to it with one's heart, is a spiritual condition, and is among the cornerstones of the belief in Imamate and Mastership of the Imams (a.s.). **أَجْتِهَاد** and **وَرَعٌ** also have their origin in the hearts and therefore implies a spiritual condition. However these two traits are also manifested externally and their signs cannot be ignored.

إِجْتِهَاد (ijtehad) is derived from the word **جَهَد** (jahada) which means to search, to try. In other words, it implies to put in effort in observing/refraining from halaal/haraam (حلال/حرام) of the Islamic shariat and not to take its laws lightly. Carelessness in observing matters of the shariat will never make one completely obedient which is a necessary condition for submission and accepting Mastership of Allah, His Prophet (s.a.w.s.) and the Imams (a.s.). Therefore, the more one is particular in respecting the laws of the shariat and complying with its articles, the more perfect will be his obedience and submission towards Allah and His Prophet (s.a.w.s.). Conversely, when one is careless with regards to religious duties, his submission and Mastership will be weak and flawed.

Good end through Precautious Piety

Safe guarding and protecting one's religion is called as Precautious Piety. Man should give the highest

priority to protecting his own religion. For instance, when a valuable object is handed over to someone and he accepts responsibility for it, then what is that person's approach in safeguarding the object? Certainly he will preserve it so that no calamity reaches it and no danger threatens it. If the object is put in a place where there exists even a remote possibility of danger, the person will never place the object there. Then when one observes this for his religion, which is his most prized and valuable possession, it is called ورع (Precautious piety).

Therefore مُتَوَرِّع is that person who not only abstains from prohibited actions, but even doubtful ones. He is worried that if he performs even doubtful actions, his religion may come to some harm. He chooses to act in a manner that gives him satisfaction about the safety and security of his religion. Such a person is always careful about venturing in to doubtful places and takes utmost precaution under such circumstances. This is comparable to a person who passes by a steep cliff and keeps away from it, because he knows that every step towards the cliff is an invitation towards danger and peril. So he distances himself from the cliff until he is satisfied that he will not fall into it.

Therefore, Precautious Piety is like the string of a rosary (tasbeeh) which connects all the beads and prevents them from being scattered. So long as the thread is safe and secure, all the beads will be cohesive and interconnected. However, once the string breaks down, the beads will scatter instantly in all directions and the rosary will lose its very existence. Imam Zainul Abedeen (a.s.) reveals

الورع نظامُ العِبَادَةِ. فإذا انقطع الورع، ذهبَت الديانة. كما انه اذا انقطع السلك اتبعه النظام

Precautious Piety is the like the string that unites all the acts of worship. If Precautious Piety is severed, religion will vanish, just like all the objects attached to a string get scattered, if the string is severed.³

Therefore observing the obligatory acts and refraining from the prohibited acts, which becomes possible with اجتهاد, should be glued together with the cohesiveness of ورع, so that it protects one's religion. Therefore traditions underline the futility of اجتهاد without ورع. In this regard Imam Sadiq (a.s.) asserts:

إِعْلَمْ أَنَّهُ لَا يَنْفَعُ اجْتِهَادٌ لَا وَرَعَ فِيهِ

'Know that struggle without precautionary piety is not beneficial.'⁴

The 'benefit' mentioned in the above tradition refers to the protection of religion which is not possible only with اجتهاد unless ورع is accompanied with it. A person asked Imam Sadiq (a.s.) – Which action stabilises a person's faith?'

Imam (a.s.) replied,

الَّذِي يُثَبِّتُهُ فِيهِ الْوَرَعُ

'ورع keeps a person's faith steadfast.'⁵

Thus it is evident from the traditions highlighted above, that اجتهاد and ورع are two distinct traits and a person needs to combine both these traits in himself if he has to safeguard his religion. Another point underlined by traditions is that ورع is superior to اجتهاد . اجتهاد at the highest level is abandoning sins, while the highest form of ورع is abandoning even the doubtful matters (that even hint at sins). Imam Sadiq (a.s.) narrates:

اورعُ النَّاسِ مَنْ وَقَفَ عِنْدَ الشُّبْهَةِ.... أَشَدُّ النَّاسِ اجْتِهَاداً مَنْ تَرَكَ الذُّنُوبَ؟

'The person with maximum ورع desists from committing even doubtful acts. And the person with maximum اجتهاد leaves all sins.'⁶

At the end of the discussion we would like to remind readers about a point stressed earlier, i.e. foundation of religion is belief in Imamate and Mastership of Ahlul Bayt (a.s.) and submission to their traditions and that this is reality of Islam and faith. What protects this foundation from being destroyed is observing Allah's laws. And ورع is man's best companion in protecting religion. It is due to this reason that the Imams (a.s.), who have announced themselves to be the helpers in Allah's affairs and a means of salvation for their friends, have strongly recommended ورع for their Shias. As declared by traditions, Shias help their Imams (a.s.) by adopting ورع

وَاللَّهِ إِنكُمْ لَعَلَى دِينِ اللَّهِ وَ مَلَائِكَتِهِ. فَأَعِينُونَا عَلَى ذَلِكَ بِوَرَعٍ وَ اجْتِهَادٍ

'I swear by Allah, you are on the religion of Allah and the religion of angels. Then help us through ورع and اجتهاد'⁷

Imams (a.s.) exhort us to adopt ورع so that by doing this we can help them in protecting our religion. Protecting religion is our concern and not that of the Imams (a.s.). However, as the Imams (a.s.) are inclined towards the Shias and consider themselves as our guardians and masters, they cannot be indifferent to the condition of our religion.

Their grace and bounty helps their friends, who are attached to them and possess their Mastership, with which their religion remains free from blemishes and flaws and their faith remains protected from errors and lapses. Our duty over here is to adopt ورع and اجتهاد so that we may assist ourselves in our own salvation. We must avoid sinning as this will preserve our religion and save our Imams (a.s.) a lot of embarrassment from seeing their Shias sinning constantly. Imam Sadiq (a.s.) exhorts:

'It is necessary for you to observe Precautious Piety. Certainly Precautious Piety is that religion to which we are bound and through which Allah is worshipped. And we expect the same from those who possess our Mastership. Do not put us in difficulty, while interceding for you (on the Day of Judgment).'⁸

Ultimately the cause of our salvation and good fortune in the hereafter is certainly the intercession of the Ahlul Bayt (a.s.). When Allah's close angels, His prophets (a.s.) and the examined believers are in need of intercession in the hereafter, then what can we say about sinners like ourselves. Imam Moosa Kazim (a.s.) advises:

'When you want something from Allah, then say: 'O Allah, I ask you by the right of Muhammad and Ali. Surely on the Day of Resurrection none among the close angels, the prophets sent by Allah and believers will remain, but they will all be in need of both of them.'⁹

Of course, the infallibles, be it angels or prophets (a.s.), will be in need of the Ahlul Bayt (a.s.), not for salvation from Allah's chastisement, but for an elevated status near Allah, which can be guaranteed to them only with the intercession of the Prophet (s.a.w.s.) and Ali (a.s.) In short, no creature is needless of the intercession of the Prophet (s.a.w.s.) and Ali (a.s.) in the hereafter. In this regard Imam Sadiq (a.s.) reveals:

'No one from first to last will be there except that he will be in need of intercession of the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.s.)'¹⁰

Of course intercession of Ahlul Bayt (a.s.) is not distinct from the intercession of the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.s.) and the intercession from any member of the Prophet's (s.a.w.s.) household is like the Prophet's (s.a.w.s.) personal intercession. All our hopes and aspirations in a providential end in this world and good fortune in the hereafter hinges on the assistance and intercession of the Ahlul Bait (a.s.).

Then we should abstain from doing actions that will embarrass them while interceding for us in the hereafter. This is the reason the Ahlul Bayt (a.s.) have recommended **ورع** for us, so that by adopting it, we make ourselves eligible for their intercession, rather than distressing them with our sins and transgression.

Summary of the Shias' most important duties during the period of occultation

In the end of this section we summarise the discussion covered in the preceding chapters, by recapitulating the important duties, so that this can serve as a timely reminder to the readers.

1. Possessing correct belief in line with the Quran and traditions
2. Complete submission to whatever has reached us from Imams (a.s.) (in traditions)
3. Love and attachment towards the Ahlul Bayt (a.s.)
4. Friendship with the believers and fulfilling their needs

5. Enmity with the opponents of the Ahlul Bayt (a.s.)
6. Living with the remembrance of Imam-e –Asr (a.t.f.s.)
7. Acquiring knowledge of Imams (a.s.) and teaching it
8. Awaiting for Imam's (a.t.f.s.) reappearance
9. Considering the reappearance as proximate without affixing a time for it
10. Firm intention to assist Imam (a.t.f.s.) at the time of reappearance
11. Renewing the allegiance with Imam (a.t.f.s.) at frequent intervals.
12. Praying intensely for the earliest reappearance of Imam (a.t.f.s.)
13. Helping Ahlul Bayt (a.s.) in every possible way
14. Feeling the presence of Imam (a.t.f.s.) at all times in occultation
15. Adopting piety and اجتهاد in religion

These are the most important traits that a person, with recognition of Imam (a.t.f.s.) and Mastership of Imams (a.s.) must possess in the period of occultation. By observing these duties, a person will be secure from the death of disbelief and even if he does not get the reappearance of Imam (a.t.f.s.) his faith will be safe.

For more details regarding duties and responsibilities in occultation, readers can refer to the 8th chapter of 'Mikyalul Makarim fi favaide dua lil Qaim' by Sayed Muhammad Taqi Musavi Isfahani (may Allah's mercy be on him).

- [1.](#) (Ghaibat al-No'mani, Chap. 8, Tradition 2)
- [2.](#) (Usul al-Kafi, Kitabul Iman wal Kufr, Chap. of Da'ae mul Islam, Tradition 10)
- [3.](#) Bihar al-Anwar, Vol. 70, Pg. 308
- [4.](#) Bihar al-Anwar, Vol. 70, Pg. 296
- [5.](#) Bihar al-Anwar, Vol. 70, Pg. 304
- [6.](#) Bihar al-Anwar, Vol. 70, Pg. 305
- [7.](#) Bihar al-Anwar, Vol. 70, Pg. 306, Tradition 27
- [8.](#) Behar ul Anwar, Vol. 70, Pg. 306, Tradition 29
- [9.](#) Bihar al-Anwar, Vol. 8, Pg. 59
- [10.](#) Bihar al-Anwar, Vol. 8, Pg. 62, Tradition 31