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11) Piety And Knowledge (Science)

One of the other issues about which a human should exercise piety, that is to say, he must be careful not to be deviated and misguided is the acquisition of knowledge, for the word 'knowledge' can be as deceitful (how much knowledge one has) as the word 'scholar' (how much knowledge that scholar has) is.

Apparently those who go after what is called knowledge or science are usually known as scholars or scientists whether in mathematics, physics, chemistry, astronomy, geography, natural sciences, medicine, and industry or in the science of distinguished men, ancestry and lineage, history, Hadith, insight, morphology and syntax, rhetoric, beliefs, theology, philosophy, wisdom, prosody, literature, mysticism, ethics and behaviors, whether they have taken a right or wrong path. Sheikh Tusi, Khajeh Nasseeruddeen, Majlesi, Allahmah Helli and Boroojerdi are called scholars while Abu Hanifah, Malik, ash–Shafi'ee, Ahmad ibn Hanbal, al–Ghazali, al–Fakhr ar–Razi, Seyed Qutb, Shaltut, Ibn Abil Hadeed and Ibn Hajar are called scholars too.

However, we must exercise piety in this area too by making sound knowledge distinct from the wrong knowledge, by making justice distinct from injustice. What is of significance to Islam is clear for all. Imam Musa ibn Ja'far (AS) has been reported as saying: "One day, the Messenger of Allah (SAW) entered the mosque. He saw a group of people gathering around a man. He asked who the man was, and it was said that he was a scholar. The Messenger of Allah (SAW) said: 'What is he expert in?'

They said: 'He is the most knowledgeable in the lineages of the Arabs, the events of the pre-Islamic era, poetry as well as Arabism.' The Holy Prophet (SAW) said: 'His knowledge does not harm one who does not know it nor does not benefit the one who knows it.' The Messenger of Allah (SAW) said: 'Knowledge or science is of three types; a clear sign that is the principles of faith, a just obligation that is ethics which is the middle course between the two extremes, and a well known norm (Sunnah) that is religious orders as well as issues related to lawful and unlawful things." 1

It is said that the principles of faith are related to human mind, ethics to his soul and heart, and lawful and unlawful things to his body.

Imam Sadiq (AS) has been reported as saying: "I have found all knowledge in four things; to get to know your Lord, to know what He has given to you, to know what He wants from you, and to know what takes you out of your religion." 2

Commenting on this narration, Allamah Majlisi says: "First, you should get to know your Lord through attributes of perfection, Divine act, and essence of God. Secondly, you should realize His glory through intellect, senses, His Grace of revealing the Book and other blessings. Thirdly, you should get to know His will by self-restraint, obedience and acknowledgment of Him through intellect and narration. Fourthly, you should know that following the leaders of misguidance and sin will take you out of your faith." 3

Sadr al-Mota'aliheen Molla Sadra, has reported how the Imam has classified knowledge or science into three groups while rejecting the rest, though knowing everything is better than not knowing it. Then he says: "If knowledge, like that of sorcery, is reproached, it is because of its result which is aimed at creating separation between wife and husband. It seems that the Imam wishes to bring up a kind of knowledge which can save human beings in the hereafter. Hence, if astronomy is related to faith, ethics and religious orders, it is considered as part of them. Imam Ali (AS) has been reported as having said: "knowledge is for religion, medicine for body, syntax for language and astrology for knowing the time." 4

The Holy Prophet (SAW) has been reported as having said: "Science is of two categories: science in the heart which is beneficial and science on the tongue which is a proof for God's servants." 5 Nevertheless, if they (two kinds of science) are used solely for worldly gain or if they are detrimental to human beings, they are blameworthy. Hence, the story of the man around whom people had gathered and he was blamed by the Holy Prophet might be of a political nature. So the Holy Prophet (SAW) did not really mean to condemn knowledge of lineage. God knows it better.

One of the branches of knowledge, about which human beings should be careful, is theology, that is the rectification and perfection of faith, for thoughts run into different directions and there are different viewpoints and books in that area. Hence, many individuals have gone astray in this path and are entangled with amazement and bewilderment.

For this reason, God has mentioned the word 'Taqwa' by saying: "Most surely in the variation of the night and the day, and what Allah has created in the heavens and the earth, there are signs for a people who guard (against evil)".6

Those who have studied the states of theologians, philosophers and those who have worked in this field know how God has mentioned the word 'Taqwa'. Hence, it is incumbent upon all human beings to rectify their belief and faith. It is faith which benefits or harms a human being. If he has a good faith, he will achieve success, but if he has no faith, he will suffer loss. Knowledge and science can serve as a great factor in correcting one's belief. On the contrary, ignorance makes human belief corrupt. In this relation, God says: "Are those who know and those who do not know alike? Only the men of

understanding are mindful."7

Elsewhere God says: "Is he then who knows that what has been revealed to you from your Lord is the truth like him who is blind? Only those possessed of understanding will mind."8

The use of 'men of understanding' and 'those possessed of understanding' are meaningful.

The Holy prophet's companions have related that a man from the Ansar came to the Holy prophet (SAW) asking: "O Messenger of Allah! Which one do you like better; to attend a funeral or to meet a scholar?"

The Messenger of Allah (SAW) said: "If there is anyone to attend the funeral, to go to the presence of a scholar is better than attending a funeral, visiting a thousand patients, rising up at night for prayer, fasting for a thousand days, giving a charity of a thousand Dirhams to the poor, performing the minor hajj a thousand times, and a thousand non-obligatory wars against the enemy in the way of Allah with your life and property. Do you not you know that God has been obeyed with knowledge and worshipped with knowledge and all the good of the world and the hereafter is with knowledge and all the evil of the world and the hereafter is with ignorance?" 9

Imam Ali (AS) has been reported as saying: "Sitting in the presence of scholars for an hour is better to God than a thousand years of worshipping. Looking at a scholar is better than seclusion of one year in the House of God. Visiting scholars is better than seventy circumambulations around the Ka'ba and is better than seventy minor Hajj. God will count seventy rewards for that one, will send blessings for him, and angels will testify that he will deserve Paradise." 10

Imam Sadiq (AS) has been reported as saying: "A prayer by a scholar is better than seventy thousand prayers by an ascetic." 11

It is with the right knowledge that human beings will never go astray or deviate from the right path.

A scholar always works thoughtfully and mindfully; his prayer is mindful and his steps are taken thoughtfully. He writes thoughtfully. His rising up and sitting down is thoughtful; he speaks thoughtfully; his silence is thoughtful; his eating, sleeping, praying, his state in associating with others, in sickness and health, are mindful. A layman, however, is not such. He may sometimes do his job out of ignorance. He may offer his prayer incorrectly and he may act in a way a simpleton might act.

It is for this reason that God uses the word 'Taqwa' in relation to every subject.

- 1. Al-Kafi, Feature of Knowledge (Sifat al-Ilm).
- 2. Al-Kafi, Bab al-Nawadir...
- 3. Mir'at al-Oghool, vol. 1, p. 35.
- 4. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 1, p. 218
- 5. Ibid., vol. 2, P. 37
- 6. Qur'an, 10:6.

- 7. Qur'an, 39:9.
- 8. Qur'an, 13:19.
- 9. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 1, P. 204.
- 10. lbid., p. 205.
- 11. Ibid., p. 19.

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