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# 23) Know that there is no good in knowledge that is not beneficial, and knowledge that is not worthy of acquisition is not beneficial

"و اعلم انّه لا خير في علم لاينفع ولا ينفع بعلم لا يحق تعلمه"

As we know, the Islamic commandments and its allowable and prohibited actions all depend on the profit and loss which these concepts have for the individual and the community as a whole. Thus, the acquisition of any knowledge, too, is not an exception to this general rule. The knowledge that deserves to be studied is that which is profitable. If it does not bear any profit, learning it is absurd, and if it hurts, it should be abandoned.

On the basis of this concept, in Islam the acquisition of some sciences is compulsory and worthwhile, such as jurisprudence, Hadith, ethics, and Islamic knowledge. Some other sciences are forbidden. Such as witchcraft, or any science which in one way or another hurts the welfare of the community. For this reason, Imam 'Ali (as) in this part of his discourse says, "If knowledge (of something) is not profitable, it will not contain any good," The Prophet (S) has said in this regard, "O God! I resort to you for not learning any science which is not profitable". 1

Sheikh Ansari, at the beginning of his book called "Makasib" records the famous tradition in "Tuhaf al-'Uqul" from Imam Sadiq (as) who talks of lawful and unlawful knowledge as the following:

"Any kind of skill that the believers could learn or teach are lawful and practical such as writing, accounting, trade, goldsmith's trade, saddle-making, building, weaving, laundering, tailoring, face-sculpture, except the sculpture of the clergy, and making the tools which people need and take benefit out of and their life is dependent on them. God has forbidden those industries the results of which are

unlawful, such as making musical instruments (Tar and pipes), making chess, making of the cross and idol making, brewing alcoholic beverages, which lead to corruption. The teaching and learning of these affairs are forbidden".2

آي بُنَي اِنِّي لَمَّا رَأَيتُني قد بَلَغتُ سِنَّا، وَرَأْيتُني اَزدَادُ وَهْناً، بَادَرتُ بِوَصِيتِي اِلَيكَ، وَاورَدتُ خِصَالاً مِنهَا قَبلَ اَن يَعجَل" بِي اَجَلِي دُونَ اَن أُفضِي اِلَيكَ بِمَا فِي نَفْسِي اَو اَن اَنقُصَ في رَأْيي كَمَا نَقَصْتُ فِي جِسْمِي اَو يَسبِقَنِي اِلَيكَ بَعضُ غَلَبَاتِ الهَوى اَو فِتَنِ الدُّنيا فَتَكُونَ كَالصَعْبِ النَّفُورِ، وَإِنَّما قَلبُ الحَدَثِ كَالارْضِ الخَالِيَةِ: مَا أُلقِيَ فِيهَا مِن شَيْ قَبلَتهُ غَلَبَاتِ الهَوى اَو فِتَنِ الدُّنيا فَتَكُونَ كَالصَعْبِ النَّفُورِ، وَإِنَّما قلبُ الحَدَثِ كَالارْضِ الخَالِيَةِ: مَا أُلقِيَ فِيهَا مِن شَيْ قَبلَتهُ فَبَادَدُ تُك بِالأَدَبِ قَبلُ اَن يَقسُو قَلبُكَ وَيَشْتَغِلَ لُبُّكَ، لِتَستَقْبِلَ بِجَدِّ رَأَيكَ مِنَ الأَمرِ مَا قَد كَفَاكَ اَهلُ التَجَارِبِ بُغَيْتَهُ وَلَيْتَ مَؤُنَةَ الطَّلَبِ وَعُوفِيتَ مِن عِلاجِ التَجْرِبَةِ فَاتَاكَ مِن ذَلِكَ مَا قَد كُنًا نَأْتِيهِ وَاستَبَانَ لَكَ مَا وَتَجْرِبَتَه، فَتَكُونَ قَدْ كُفَيْتَ مَؤُنَّةَ الطَّلَبِ وَعُوفِيتَ مِن عِلاجِ التَجْرِبَةِ فَاتَاكَ مِن ذَلِكَ مَا قَد كُنًا نَأْتِيهِ وَاستَبَانَ لَكَ مَا وَتُعْفِيتَ مِنْ عِلاجِ التَجْرِبَةِ فَاتَاكَ مِن ذَلِكَ مَا قَد كُنًا نَأْتِيهِ وَاستَبَانَ لَكَ مَا وَنُ مُنْهُ اللَّمَ عَلَيْنَا مِنْهُ اللَّمَ عَلَيْنَا مِنْهُ الْمَا مَعْلَيْتُ مِنْهُ الْمَا مَعْلِيَا مِنْهُ الْمَعَلِيْتَ مَوْلُولَةً الطَّلُمَ عَلَيْنَا مِنْهُ الْمَالَمَ عَلَيْنَا مِنْهُ الْمَا مَا غَلْمَا مَ عَلَيْنَا مِنْهُ الْمَا مَا الْقَيْمَ عَلَيْنَا مِنْهُ اللَّهُ الْمَالِمُ عَلَيْنَا مِنْهُ الْمَالِمُ عَلَيْنَا مِنْهُ النَّهُ مِنْ الْمَالَةُ عَلْمَا مَا عَلَيْهَ الْمَالِي الْمَالَامِ عَلَيْنَا مِنْهُ الْمَالَةُ عَلَيْهُ الْمَالَةُ عَلَيْهُ الْمَالَةُ عَلْمَالِكُ مَا عَلْمَالَهُ عَلَى الْمَالَةِ عَلَيْهُ الْمَالَةُ عَلَيْهَ عَلَيْهُ الْمَالَةُ عَلْمَا مَا الْمَلْمَ عَلَيْنَا مِنْهُ الْمَالِمُ الْمَالَةُ عَلَى الْمِلْمِ الْتُعْلِقِ الْمَالَةُ عَلَيْكُ الْمَلْمُ عَلَيْنَا مِنْهُ السَبُهَا الْمَالَةُ عَلَيْهُ الْمُنْهُ الْمَلْمُ عَلْمَا الْمُلْمَ عَلَيْنَا مِنْهُ الْمَالَةُ عَلَيْلُهُ الْمَالَةُ عَلَيْهُ الْمُلْمَ عَلَيْنَا مِنْهُ الْمُلْمَالَةُ الْمُلْمَالَةُ الْمَالِمُ ال

"My son! When I saw that I had reached old age, and I saw myself increase in weakness, I hastened with my will to you. I set out in it some useful points lest death overtake me without my having acquainted you with my thoughts or (lest) my mind weaken just as my body has weakened or some mastery of desire and the temptations of the world get to you before me, so that you become like a refractory camel.

The heart of a young man is like empty land which accepts anything that is strewn on it. Thus I hastened to (instruct) you in good discipline before your heart hardens and your mind is occupied, so that you may face with sound judgment the endeavours and experiences of the people of experience which are sufficient for you. Thus you will be spared the trouble of seeking and relieved of the cultivation of experience; for you receive our experiences and what may have been unclear for us will become clear to you".

There are some significant points in the above text which deserve our scrutiny:

# 1. Imam 'Ali's Haste In Writing This Will

Imam 'Ali (as) was in a haste to write the will for the following reasons:

First, he was becoming old, above 60, the age in which both brain and brawn deteriorate. At times, the spirit becomes feeble, not being able to carry out important tasks. Imam 'Ali (as) here is concerned about his powers to handle this grave task.

Second, one usually at this age is vulnerable and is ready to go, as Imam Sadiq (as) says:

"When you reach sixty, consider yourself among the dead"3

And the Prophet (S) has said, regarding this:

"Death usually comes to people between sixty and seventy".4

Thus, Imam 'Ali (as) is in a hurry because he is worried about his approaching death.

Third, he is in a hurry because he thinks if it becomes late, whims and wishes and the deceitful manifestations of life might draw his son away from the path of piety and perfection and will destroy his capacity for improvement like an untamable palfrey.5

Fourth, he is in a hurry because he wants his son be ready to anticipate events as they develop and make use of others' experiences and not to fail to decide on the spot.

### 2. The Best Time For Education

As we have experienced, children are more capable of learning than adults. They retain what they are exposed to at this early age. It is said:

"The acquisition of knowledge at childhood is like engraving on the stone; but the acquisition of knowledge at adulthood is like drawing lines on the surface of water".6 And it is also said:

"A child is like soft clay; he will take shape however you mould him". 7 But if a person advances in age, his personality and identity take form through knowledge and ethics, and he develops habits, then he is difficult to change.

Concerning this, the Persian poet Sa'di says:

A person who does not get educated while young,

Improvement is taken away from him at the old age;

You may turn a piece of wet wood, but

You cannot make it straight except with fire.

Imam 'Ali (as) recognizes the childhood as the best time for education. For this reason he does not consider it feasible to let this period pass in his child's life without necessary changes he wants to create in his life. He believes: the heart of the child is like a piece of land which is capable to grow any seed. It is at this stage of life which the child should be exposed to the seeds of education.

# 3. The Use of Other People's Experiences

There are many pieces of knowledge which are gained through experience and trial, either through personal experiencing or by the experiences of others, but neither through perception nor scientific

analysis.

When the child draws his hand for the first time towards the fire and perceives the feeling of burning, he experiences it for the first time. He learns in this way not to come very close to fire.

When the child observes that his playmate crosses the street without attention and gets involved in an accident and loses his hands and feet as the result and even he might die, this experience teaches him to be cautious in crossing the street.

When the youth sees that, through his trials, he can pass the entrance exam to the university, this success makes him bolder. On the other hand, when he sees a youth, through his communication with addicts, may not continue his education and even gets into prison, he will gain a lot of experience and will distinguish bad from good. Imam 'Ali (as) says that the value for the correctness of people's ideas and affairs is determined by the amount of their experiences. In another place Imam 'Ali (as) says that a person who does not learn from experiences cannot be advised. In the last case, for Imam 'Ali (as) wisdom is to collect experiences and take lessons from them. 10 In another place, Imam 'Ali (as) emphasizes:

"Draw conclusions about what has not yet occurred on the basis of what has already occurred. This is because occurrences are similar to one another. 11

Imam 'Ali (as) elsewhere teaches us:

"A believer is not bitten twice from one hole." 12

"The days of our lives teach us experiences". 13

And experience teaches man ethics and how to select the right path and how to take lessons. A raw man is gullible. 14

- 1. Ibn Maytham's Commentary of Nahj al-Balaghah, vol.5, p. 12.
- 2. Tuhaf al-'Uqul, pp.335-336.

- 3. Bihar, vol.73, p.391; vol.6, p.119.
- 4. Op.cit.
- 5. Op.cit.
- <u>6.</u> . Ibn Abi al-Hadid's Commentary on Nahj al-Balaghah, vol. 16, p.67. A similar sentence is reported by Imam 'Ali (as) in Bihar, vol. 1, p.324.
- 7. . Op cit.
- 8. . Ghurar al-Hikam, pp.423, 719, 630.
- 9. Nahj al-Balaghah, Letter No 78; Mustadrak, vol.3, p. 177.
- 10. Ghurar al-Hikam; Bihar al-Anwar, vol.77, p.231.
- 11. . Nahj al-Balaghah, Letter No 31.
- 12. Ibn Athir's Al-Nihaya, vol.4, p.248.
- 13. .Ghurar al-Hikam
- 14. . Ghurar al-Hikam; Bihar, vol.77

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