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# 25) God Wariness And Knowledge

وَاعلَم يَا بُنَيَّ أَنَّ أَحبَّ مَا انْتَ آخِذٌ بِهِ إليَّ مِن وَصِيَّتِي تَقوَى الله وَالإقتِصار على مَا فَرَضَهُ الله عَلَيكَ، وَالاَخْذَ بِمَا عَرَفُوا مَن اَللهَ وَالْكِرُوا مَضَى عَلَيهِ الأوّلُونَ مِن آبَائِكَ وَالصَالِحُونَ مِن أَهلِ بَيتِكَ، فَإِنَّهُم لَم يَدَعُوا أَن نَظَروا لاَنفُسِهِم كَمَا أَنتَ نَاظِرٌ، وَفَكَّرُوا مَضَى عَلَيهِ الأوّلُونَ مِن آبَائِكَ وَالصَالِحُونَ مِن أَهلِ بَيتِكَ، فَإِنَّهُم لَم يُكَلَّقُوا، فَإِن أَبَت نَفسُكَ أَن تَقبَلَ ذَلِكَ إلى الآخْذ بِمَا عَرَفُوا، وَالإمساكِ عَمَّالَم يُكَلَّقُوا، فَإِن أَبَت نَفسُكَ أَن تَقبَلَ ذَلِكَ دُونَ أَن تَعبَل ذَلِكَ بِتَفَهُم وتَعلَّم لا بتوريط الشُّبُهاتِ وعُلَق (عُلُو) الخُصُومَات، وَابَدأ قبْل نَظرِكَ فِي ذَلِكَ بِالإسْتِعَانَةَ بِاللهِكَ، وَالرَّغْبَةَ اللهِ فِي تَوفِيقِكَ وَتَرْك كُلِّ شَائِبَةٍ أَولَجَتْكَ فِي شُبْهَةٍ أَو اَسلَمَتكَ اللهِ ضَلالَةٍ فَإِذَا لَيَقَنْتَ اَن قَدْ عَلَاللهُ فَي أَلُكَ اللهَ عَنْ وَلَكَ هُمَّا وَاحِداً، فَانْظُر فِيمَا فَسَّرتُ لَكَ، وَإِن اَنتَ لَم يَجْتَمِع لَكَ صَفَا قَلْبُكَ فَخَشَعَ وَتَمَّ رَأَيُكَ فَاجْتَمَعَ وَكَانَ هَمُّكَ فِي ذَلِكَ هَمَّا وَاحِداً، فَانْظُر فِيمَا فَسَّرتُ لَكَ، وَإِن اَنتَ لَم يَجْتَمِع لَكَ مَن نَفْسِكَ وَفَراغٍ نَظَرِكَ وَفِكْرِكَ فَاعْلَم اَنَّكَ إِنَّمَا تُخْبِطُ العَشْوَاءَ وَتَتَوَرَّطُ الظَّلَمَاءَ وَلَيسَ طَالِبُ الدِينِ مَنْ ذَلِكَ اَمْثُلُ مَن نَفْسِكَ وَفَراغٍ نَظَرِكَ وَفِكْرِكَ فَاعْلَم اَنَّكَ إِنَّمَا تُخْبِطُ العَشْوَاءَ وَتَتَوَرَّطُ الظَّلَمَاءَ وَلَيسَ طَالِبُ الدِينِ مَنْ ذَلْكَ اَمْثُلُ المَثْلُ وَالْكَ الْعَلْمَ الْمَلْكَ وَالْكَ الْمَلْكَ وَلَاكَ الْمَثُلُ الْمَلْكَ وَلَا الْمُ الْمُ الْمُ الْمُ الْمُ الْمُ الْمُ الْمُ الشَالُكُ عَنْ ذَلِكَ اَمْثُلُ الْمُ الْمُلُمُ الْمُ الْمُ الْمُ الْمُ الْمُ الْمُ الْمُ الْمُ الْمُ الْمُو

"Know, my son, that what I would like the most for you to take from my will is God-wariness, restricting yourself to what God has imposed on you, and adhering to the practice of your forefathers and the righteous among the people of your household. They did not cease to examine themselves just as you examine yourself, and to contemplate their affairs just as you do. That led them to act on what they knew and to hold back from what they were not required to do.

If your soul refuses to accept that without ascertaining it (for yourself) as they ascertained it, then let your search for that be with understanding and study, not through becoming entangled in doubts and ensnared in arguments. Before looking into that, begin by seeking help from your God, asking Him for your success, and abandoning the least thing that involves you in doubt or exposes you to misguidance.

Thus when you are certain that your heart has become pure and submissive, and your opinions have become perfected and gathered together, and you have a single thought on the matter, then look into what I have explained to you. But if you have not gathered yourself together as you wish and focused your sights and thoughts exclusively on the matter, then know that you will be proceeding at random and be confounded in the darkness, whereas a seeker of religion is not one who proceeds at random or is confused, in which case it is better to hold back from that".

## **Commentary**

In this section of the letter, Imam 'Ali (as) refers to the new principles of education which include the approaches of acquiring knowledge and the implementation of the pious old generations and the avoidance of blind imitations and full comprehension of the conditions of the time and finally the avoidance of getting involved in dubious cases of thought.

# The Approaches To The Acquisition Of Knowledge

As we know, man's knowledge, compared with what is unknown to him, is like a drop of water in the sea. If man wants to capture this drop of knowledge, he has to select the proper method of approach so as not to get drowned in the immense sea of what is unknown.

In his letter, Imam 'Ali (as) provides us with three such approaches:

### 1. Inspiration

As God is the Creator of existence, and is aware of every detail, definitely His book of religion is based on the facts of His book of creation. No deceit or lies appear there. Thus, a resort to God's Book and to the Prophet's tradition, which is identical with divine inspiration, can help us find our right path and block our deviation. For this reason, Imam (as) has emphasized: "What I would like the most for you to take from my will is God-wariness, restricting yourself to what God has imposed on you".

As we know, one of man's most important ways for the progress of knowledge and culture and man's civilization, has been following the guides offered by the Prophets and the Imams (as). We have dealt with this in the book called "The History of the Islamic culture and civilization."

#### 2. The Ways Of The Pious Ancestors

It is a fact that the older generations of a community, especially if they have had the guidance of Divine Prophets, through experience and inspiration, have amassed huge reservoirs of knowledge, which could be a valuable treasure for the next generations. Thus, reliance of this worthy treasure could help us attain the right knowledge. That is why in this letter, Imam 'Ali (as) orders his son to follow what his forefathers have done.

Since we know that the Prophet and the Imams are descended from sacred origins and are not afflicted with impurities of unbelief and have always followed the right religion, their ways are felicitous and their knowledge is based on rights and facts.

Do his 'forefathers' mean the Prophet (S), Abu Talib, Abd al-Muttalib, Hashim...? And do the 'righteous among the people of your household' refer to Hamza, Ja'far, Abbas, etc?3

Of course, this adherence to the practice of the pious ancestors does not clash with blind imitation,

which we will study later. This kind of adherence is the reference of an ignorant person to a scholar. This is because these pious scholars are righteous people and will not misguide us. Secondly, as it is in the text of the letter, they contemplate their daily affairs and do not get into matters they know nothing about.

### 3. Logic And Reasoning

The third way to get to truth and knowledge is through reasoning and logic. The Holy Qur'an says regarding this:

"And follow not that of which you have not the knowledge; surely the hearing and the sight and the heart, all of these, shall be questioned about that" [Qur'an 17:36]

Contrary to other religions which contend that in the matters of belief and practice, worship itself is enough, Islam is of the opinion that each idea or practice is acceptable only if it is based on logic.

"And they say: None shall enter the garden (of paradise) except he who is a Jew or a Christian.

These are their vain desires. Say: Bring your proof if you are truthful." [Qur'an 2:111]

On the basis of this, Imam 'Ali (as) mentions: if you do not wish to use the first and second approach, and if you want to use the third way, you should use good understanding and reasoning, not baseless assumptions.

If your soul refuses to accept that without ascertaining it (for yourself) as they ascertained it, then let your search for that be with understanding and study,

The conditions for the use of this third method include the following:

- a) Asking God for assistance.
- **b)** The intention should be the clarification of the truth, and not quarrel or the defeat of the foe.
- **c**) Drawing away the prejudice of defending one specific religion, the intention being only the clarification of the truth, or else it would be of the other type, which leads to misleading.
- **d**( Driving away those factors which make man doubtful, such as: megalomania, desire for fame, too much interest in one's possessions.
- e) Having a pure heart, away from any kind of doubt and depression (such as hunger, too much eating,

aggressive lust, anger...) or else he would be like an unfettered camel that walks in the dark; he would not be immune to falling.

#### The Hazards Of The Blind Imitation And Selection With No Reason

Although Islam agrees with logical imitation, i.e., the reference of the ignorant person to the scholar, on which the order of society relies, such as one's reference to physicians, engineers, tailors, carpenters, and jurisprudents knowledgeable in the science of religion. It however, will not agree with blind imitation, i.e., the reference of the ignorant person to another ignorant one. Islam completely rejects this kind of imitation. Because this act does not, firstly, lead to the right way; and secondly, it exemplifies the axiom which says: a blind person leads the way to another blind person. In Islam, this kind of imitation is rejected. Mawlawi, the Persian poet says: May two hundred curses be leveled at this kind of imitation. The Holy Qur'an, regarding this issue, says:

"And when it is said to them, follow what Allah has revealed, they say: Nay! We follow what we found our fathers upon. What! And though their fathers had no sense at all, nor did they follow the right way."4

The Prophet of Islam struggled against all unfavorable habits and unfounded imitations which had fastened man's feet and hands like chains. He tried to break these shackles, freeing man.

"And removes from them their burden and the shackles which were upon them"5

The Prophet (S), elsewhere, has also said:

"I will trample all the superstitious ideas and remnants of the pre-Islamic pagans." 6

Thus, anybody who wishes to find out the truth about religion should find the right methods or at least refrain from accepting the wrong ways. He should not resort to the blind imitation which is by itself a factor for being misled. He should not carry on with his doubts, either.

- 1. "Alif lam Mim Ra. These are the verses of the book; and that which is revealed to you from your lord is truth" [Surah al-Ra'd v.1].
- 2. Refer to Bihar, vol. 15, p. 117.
- 3. Ibn Abi al-Hadid's commentary on Nahj al-Balaghah, vol. 16, p.71.

- 4. . Qur'an 2:170.
- 5. Qur'an 7:157.
- <u>6.</u> . Ibn Hisham's Sirah, vol.3, p.412. See Islam and Human Rights for the hazards of blind imitation and Islam's struggle against it.

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