

Published on Al-Islam.org (https://www.al-islam.org)

Home > Imam 'Ali's First Treatise On The Islamic Ethics And Education > 30) This World is only the path for the Hereafter, so remember Death frequently > Commentary > 4. The Event Narrated By Ibn Abi Al-Hadid

# 30) This World is only the path for the Hereafter, so remember Death frequently

واعلَم يا بُنَيَّ اَنَّكَ إِنَّما خُلِقتَ للآخِرةِ لا لِلدُّنيا و لِلفَناءِ لا لِلبَقَاءِ ولِلمَوتِ لا لِلحَياةِ وإنَّكَ في قَلَعَةٍ وَدَارِ بُلغَةٍ وطَريق إلى" الآخِرةِ وإنَّكَ طَرِيدُ المَوتِ الَّذِي لا يَنْجُو مِنهُ هَارِبُهُ ولا يَفُوتُهُ طَالِبُهُ ولابُدَّ اَنَّهُ مُدرِكُه فَكُن مِنهُ عَلى حَذَرٍ إِن يُدْرِكَكَ وَانتَ على حَالِ سَيَئَةٍ قَد كُنتَ تُحَدِّثُ نَفسَكَ مِنها بِالتَّوبَةِ فَيَحولَ بَينَكَ وَبَينَ ذَلِكَ فَإِذَا اَنتَ قَد اَهلَكتَ نَفسَكَ

يا بُنَيَّ اكثِر مِن ذِكِرِ المَوتِ وَذِكِرِ مَا تَهجِمُ عَليهِ وتُفضِي بَعدَ المَوتِ اِلَيهِ حَتَّى يَأْتَيكَ وَقَد اَخذْتَ مِنهُ حَذَركَ وَشَدَدتَ لَهُ اَرْرَكَ وَلا يَاتيكَ بَغتَةً فَيَبهَرَكَ واِيّاكَ اَن تَغتَرَّ بِمَا تَرى مِن اِخلادِ اَهلِ الدِّنيا اِلَيها وَتَكالُبهِم عَلَيها فَقَد نَبّاكَ الله عَنهَا وَنَعَتْ هِيَ لَكَ نَفْسَهَا وَتَكَشَّفت لَكَ عَن مَساوِيها فاِنَّما اَهلُها كِلابٌ عَاويَةٌ وَسِباعٌ ضَارِيَةٌ يَهِرُّ بَعضَهُم بَعضاً وَيَأْكُلُ مَعْقَلةٌ وَأُخرَى مُهمَلَةٌ قَدْ اَضَلَّتْ عُقُولَها وَرَكِبَت مَجهُولَها مَرَكِبَت مَجهُولَها

سُرُوحُ عَاهَةٍ بِوادٍ وَعْثَ لَيسَ لَها راعٍ يُقِيمُها وَلا مُسِيمٌ يُسِيمُها سَلَكَتْ بِهِمُ الدُّنْيا طَرِيقَ العَمَى، وَاَخَذَتْ بَاَبْصَارِهِمْ عَنْ مَنارِ الهُدى، فَتَاهُوْا فَي حَيْرَتَها وغَرِقُوا في نِعمَتِها واتَّخَذُوْها رَبًا فَلَعِبَتْ بِهِمْ وَلَعِبُوا بِها ونَسُوا مَا وَرائَها رُوَيْداً يُسْفِرُ "الظَّلامُ، كَانْ قَدْ وَرَدَت الاَظْعانُ يُوشِكُ مَن اَسْرَعَ اَنْ يَلْحَقَ

"My son! Know that you were created for the Hereafter, not for this world, for extinction (in this world), not for permanence, and for death, not for life. You are in an abode from which you must depart, in a place from which you acquire your provisions, and on a path to the Hereafter. You are being chased by death from which no fleeing one is saved, none whom it seeks escapes from it, and it will inevitably catch up with him. So be on your guard against it, lest it should overtake you while you are in a state of sin from which you were telling yourself that you would repent, and it (death) prevents you from that. In such a case you will have destroyed yourself.

My son! Remember death frequently, and the place that you will suddenly fall into and reach after death,

so that when it comes, you are on your guard against it and have prepared yourself for it. Do not let it (death) come suddenly such that it overcomes you.

Beware of being deluded by what you see of the people of the world inclining towards it (the world), and their avidity for it, for God has informed you of it and the world itself has announced to you its mortality and revealed to you its vices. Its adherents are only howling dogs and rapacious beasts snarling at one another. Their strong devour their weak and their old subjugate their young. (They are like) cattle, some confined and others left untended. They have lost their intellects and ventured into what is unknown. They are (like) diseasesd cattle left free to graze in a valley of soft sand, difficult to traverse. They have neither a shepherd to keep them in order nor a herdsman to take them to pasture.

The world has taken them them on the path of blindness, and taken their sights from the beacon of guidance, so they are wandering in its perplexities and drowned in its pleasures. They have taken it (the world) as a lord, so it plays with them and they play with it and they have forgotten what is beyond it.

Gradually the darkness will become dawn, and it is as if the caravan has arrived; soon those who hasten will meet (the caravan)".

# **Commentary**

In this letter by Imam 'Ali (as) there are some educational points concerning the philosophy of creation, man's readiness for death, a picture of the world and the world-worshippers. These points are taken up separately in the following sections:

## 1. The Philosophy Of Man's Creation:

From the viewpoint of the Holy Qur'an, the philosophy of man's creation is sometimes based on Allah's Generosity and Magnanimity:

"And if your Lord had pleased He would certainly have made people a single nation, and they shall continue to differ, except those on whom your Lord has mercy; and for this did He create them;".1

And sometimes the philosophy of man's creation is introduced as a way for man to see God's traits and magnificent powers and His domination over all creatures.

"Allah is He who created seven heavens, and of the earth the like of them; the decree continues to descend among them, that you may know that Allah has power over all things and that Allah indeed encompasses all things in His knowledge."

In another occasion, the philosophy of creation is defined as "Worship" "And I have not created the jinn and the men except that they should serve Me." 2

At another occasion, the philosophy of creation is supposed to be "Trial" "Who created death and life that He may try you-which of you is best in deeds."3

All of these interpretations, however, have one thing in common. Man possesses different skills and capabilities in differing areas of thought, ethics and rights which could be manifested only through programs. Thus, carrying out these programs is interpreted as worship; the way these plans are carried out is interpreted as "trial"; the guidance of Allah in the materialization of these aims is interpreted as God's benevolence; and the recognition of Allah and His traits which is the main factor behind all of this collection (Thought, ethics, and duties) is interpreted as God's recognition.

Thus, it is right to say that the philosophy of man's creation is a combination of worship, God's benevolence, man's trial and God's recognition. And these four factors all lead to man's perfection.4

But sometimes in the philosophy of man's creation there are some interpretations which show the direction of his perfection, and not the agent for his perfection.

This is said in 'Ali's letter.

"..you were created for the Hereafter, not for this world, for extinction (in this world), not for permanence, and for death, not for life. You are in an abode from which you must depart, in a place from which you acquire your provisions, and on a path to the Hereafter".

In such interpretations the main issue is that man is not eternal; sooner or later he will leave this world to live in his eternal shelter. He has to prepare provisions to make him at ease in the other world. But what is the nature of that provision? What is going to happen to him? These are not discussed in this letter. But one thing is clear: the aim is to be prepared for the Hereafter with the right form of provisions. This is included in the philosophy of the creation of man and shows the direction of man towards perfection.

#### 2. He Warns Us Through A Delicate Simile

Imam 'Ali (as) in this letter compares man to a game that is made to run by the hunter who is about to hunt it. And finally he is trapped. In the same way, death, like the hunter, has made man run, only to be trapped and caught a little later. This does not depend on his will to either surrender or to go free.

For this reason, man should be careful not to indulge in wrong-doings and not to lose the right of repentance. He might be willing to repent; then let him not waste his time.

The Holy Qur'an talks about the Pharaoh when getting drowned. At that critical time he said "I believe", but God said: "..indeed you disobeyed before.. "5.

#### 3. Always Remember Death And Be Prepared For It

Since one day we will inevitably taste the flavor of death and will be defeated by it, we should not destroy and annihilate one another like savage dogs and animals and be deceived by the luxuries of this world. Let us not walk like beasts which are wandering in the desert with no shepherd to guide us. Let us not be in a situation where we are deprived of Imam's obedience. In such cases we might either act like those beasts which are dominated by wrath, such as wild beasts, or we might act like those beasts which are dominated by lusts, such as game. In both cases we might go after our wishes and stay world–mongers. The world may make dolls out of us and we may forget the Hereafter. In doing so, we might be less than beasts because we have intellect and should do otherwise.

Thus, we have to:

Firstly: remember death and its consequences. The remembrance of death kills lusts and the roots of negligence, strengthens the heart to believe in God's promises and softens man's nature and breaks the flags of wishes and whims and belittles this world.

Secondly, be prepared for death and get ready for leaving. This state of affairs prohibits man from living like beasts and forces him to improve himself by practicing his religion and obeying the just Imam. It is for this reason that the Great Prophet (S) has said:

"Get ready for death before it arrives"6

Somebody asked Imam 'Ali (as) "What do you mean by being prepared for death?" He answered:

"To perform the obligations of the religion, to avoid the forbidden things, to possess the best kind of ethics. Then (such a person) will not care whether he meets death or death meets him. I swear to God that son of Abu Talib does not fear whether he comes upon death or death comes upon him."

Imam 'Ali (as), in his Nahj al-Balaghah, always addressed his followers with the following words: "Equip

yourselves, may God have mercy on you, because you have been called for departure. Lessen your desire to stay in this world. Return (to God) with the best of provisions with you, for before you is a mountain road difficult to ascend, and fearful and terrible stations which you must enter and stop at."8

Thirdly: not to be deceived by this world because only gullible people are carried away by flashy things in this world. Wise men are unaffected. They realize that in this world the flowers are not continuously fresh, neither are the lucky ones always happy. If they are happy one day, they are saddened the other day: The poet says:

Kesra and the golden orange, Parviz and the golden vegetable,

All have gone with the wind, all have been leveled to the ground;

Parviz would take golden vegetable to every party,

With gold, he made a garden of vegetables;

Parviz is lost now, do not say much of him,

Read where is the golden vegetables, go and read kam taraku.

But the feeble-minded persons, like beasts and four-legged animals, can only see the prey, stable and grass and lusts and enjoy being indulged in them without knowing that the hunter and the butcher are prone to receive them and their pleasures will soon be over.

It is for precisely this reason that The Holy Qur'an calls the world a means of deceit. It only could deceive the feeble minded souls, however.9

But the true believers of God will never be deceived by the world. 10 They are continuously at the mercy of temptations, 11 but since they are realistic, they are not deceived by the world and they provide themselves with appropriate provisions for the coming world. They try to learn from the world and its ups and downs. There are two traditions regarding this:

The first tradition: Imam 'Ali (as) heard somebody blaming this world. Imam 'Ali (as) told him:

اَيُّها الذَامُّ للدُّنيا المُغتَرِّ بِغرُورِها المَخدُوعِ بأباطِيلِها، اتَغتَرُّ بالدُّنيا ثُمَّ تَذمُّها؟ اَنتَ المُتجرِّم عَلَيها اَم هِيَ المُتَجرِّمَة" ..علَيكَ؟ مَتى استَهوَتكَ اَم مَتى غَرَّتكَ؟ اَبمصارع آبائِكَ مِنَ البَلى، اَم بمَضاجع أُمَّهاتِكَ تَحتَ التَّرى؟

وقَد مثّلَت لَكَ بِهِ الدُّنيا نَفسَكَ وبِمَصرَعِهِ مَصرَعكَ، إنَّ الدُّنيا دارُ صِدقِ لِمَن صَدَّقها ودَارُ عَافِيةٍ لِمَن فَهِمَ عَنها ودَارُ عِنها ودَارُ عَافِيةٍ لِمَن فَهِمَ عَنها ودَارُ عَنها ودَارُ مَوعِظَةٍ لِمن اتَّعَظَ بِها، مَسجِدُ اَحبّاءِ الله ومُصلّى مَلائِكَةِ الله، ومَهبِطُ وَحي الله، ومَتجَرِ غِنى لِمَن تَزَوَّدَ مِنها ودَارُ مَوعِظَةٍ لِمن اتَّعَظَ بِها، مَسجِدُ اَحبّاءِ الله ومُصلّى مَلائِكَةِ الله، ومَهبِطُ وَحي الله، ومَتجَرِ الله، اكتَسَبُوا فِيها الرَّحمَةُ، ورَبِحُوا فِيها الجَنَّة، فَمَن ذا يَذِمُّها وَقَد آذَنَت بِبَينِها ونادَت بِغُراقِها ونَعَت نَفسَها "واَهلَها

"O you who blame the world, while you are beguiled by its vanities and deceived by its falsehoods! Are you beguiled by this world, and then blame it? Do you accuse it of sin or does it accuse you? When did it seduce you and when did it deceive you? Through the places where your fore-fathers have fallen and

decayed? Or through the sleeping-places of your mothers under the earth?..... Through him (the dying man), the world has given you an example for yourself; and through his place of death (an example of) your place of death.

Indeed, this world is a house of truth for one who confirms it, a house of well-being for one who understands it, a house of riches for one who takes provisions from it, and a house of admonition for one who is admonished by it. (It is) a place of worship for the lovers of God, a place of prayer for the angels of God, the place of descent for the revelation of God and a trading place for the friends of God; in it they earn mercy and in it they gain Paradise. So who is it that blames it, when it has announced its departure, proclaimed its separation and announced the death of itself and its inhabitants"?12

The second tradition: Imam al-Baqir (as) one day saw Jabir b. Abdullah al-Ansari sighing deeply. Imam al-Baqir (as) asked him: "What are you sighing about? Are you sighing about the world"? Jabir said: "Yes". Imam al-Baqir (as) said:

.مَلاذُّ الدُّنيا سَبِعَةٌ: المأكُولُ والمَشرُوبُ والمَلبُوسُ والمَنكُوحُ والمَركُوبُ والمَشمُومُ والمَسمُوعُ"

فَأَلَدُّ المَأْكُولاتِ العَسَلُ وهُو بَصِقٌ مِن ذُبَابَةٍ، وَاحلَى المَشرُوباتِ الماءُ وَكَفى بِابَاحَتِهِ وسِياحَتِهِ على وجهِ الارض، وَاحلَى المَلْبُوساتِ الدِيباجُ وهُو مَبالٌ في مَبالٍ ومِثالٌ لمِثال، وإنَّما يُحلَى المَلْبُوساتِ الدِيباجُ وهُو مَن لُعابِ دُودَةٍ، وَاحلَى المَنكُوحَاتِ النِساءُ وهُو مَبالٌ في مَبالٍ ومِثالٌ لمِثال، وإنَّما يُرادُ اَحسَنُ ما في المَرأةِ لِأَقبَح ما فِيها، وَاحلَى المَركُوبَاتِ الخَيلُ وَهو قَواتِل، واَجَلُّ المَسْمُومَات، المِسكُ وهُو دَمٌ مِن سُرَّةٍ دَابَّة، واجَلُّ المَسمُوعَاتِ الغِناءُ والتَرنُّمُ وهُو إَثْمٌ، فَمَا هذهِ صِفْتُهُ لَم يَتَنفَّس عَلَيهِ عَاقِلٌ". قالَ جابر ابن عرب سُرَّةٍ دَابَّة، واجَلُّ المَسمُوعَاتِ الغِناءُ والتَرنُّمُ وهُو إَثْمٌ، فَمَا هذهِ صِفْتُهُ لَم يَتَنفَّس عَلَيهِ عَاقِلٌ". قالَ جابر ابن عليه ما خَطَرَت الدُّنيا بَعدَها على قلبي عليه 548

"The pleasures of the world are seven: eating, drinking, clothing, marriage, riding, smelling and hearing. The most delicious of foods is honey which is the bee's saliva. The sweetest drink is water which flows on the earth. The best clothing is silk which is from the saliva of the silk-worm. The sweetest of mates (among all creatures) to be taken in marriage are women, yet it (the act of mating) is a urethra inside a urethra, and a thing matched to another in kind (ugliness). So one desires the prettiest features in a woman for the sake of the ugliest (part) in her. The best mounts are horses and they are deadly. The most sublime of odors is musk which is blood from the navel of an animal. The best of what is heard is singing and trilling, which is a sin. If this is the quality of the world, then an intelligent man does not sigh over it". Jabir said: "I swear to God, upon hearing this speech from al-Baqir (as), I never thought of the world after this".

Fourthly, at the end of this portion of the letter, Imam 'Ali (as) warns us that soon the curtains will move to one side and this dark night of the world will change into the morning of the Day of Judgment. Now the caravans have reached their destinations. Let the true believers separate themselves from the groups of beasts and join the caravans.

Hafiz, the Iranian poet, says in this regard:

Our life passed with no aims in sight,

O boy, give me the wine bowl, because you will not arrive at the old age;

What sort of sugars are here that the royal

Falcons have belittled themselves to the position of a fly;

The caravan went away but you are asleep and the desert is ahead of you,

How come you are negligent of the beels?

Open your wings and go ahead toward the heaven trees,

It is beyond a bird like you to be cage-ridden.

### 4. The Event Narrated By Ibn Abi Al-Hadid

In describing this portion of Imam 'Ali's letter, Ibn Abi al-Hadid says: Abu al-Fath Mohammad ibn 'Ubbad, who was a cruel man, asked me to read this part of the letter. Upon hearing this last part, he shouted and fell to the ground. 13

This shows that this portion of Imam 'Ali's letter, especially its Arabic expressions, which are difficult to translate into any other language, stands at a lofty place in eloquence. You cannot find any equivalence for it in the discourses of others and even among other words of Imam 'Ali (as).

- 1. . Qur'an 11:118 119.
- 2. . Qur'an 51:56.
- 3. . Qur'an 67:2.
- 4. Refer to Man's philosophy of creation by Zayn al-'Abidin Ghorbani Lahiji and Tafsir Namunah, vol.22, pp.384-398.
- "حَتَّى إِذَا أَدْرَكُهُ الْغَرَقُ قَالَ آمَنْتُ أَنَّهُ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا الَّذي آمَنَتْ بِهِ بَنُو إِسْرَائِيلَ وَأَنَا مِنْ الْمُسْلِمِينَ. ألآن و قد عصيت من قبل و كنت من المفسدين". 5.
- "..Until when drowning overtook him (Fir'awn), he said: I believe that there is no god but He in whom the children of Israel believe and I am of those who submit. What! Now! and indeed you disobeyed before and you were of the mischief—makers.". [Qur'an 10:90].
- 6. . Kanz al-'Ummal, vol. 15, p.551.
- 7. Bihar, vol.71, p.263.
- 8. Nahj al-Balaghah, Sermon 204.
- "ذَلكُمْ بأَنَّكُمْ اتَّخَذْتُمْ آيَات اللَّه هُزُوًا وَغَرَّتْكُمْ الْحَيَاةُ الدُّنْيَا" . .9

That is because you took the communication of Allah for a jest and the life of this world deceived you.[Qur'an 45:35]

- 10. Qur'an 38:82-83.
- 11. . Qur'an 57:20-21.
- 12. Nahj al-Balaghah, Hikmah 131.
- 13. The commentary on Nahj al-Balaghah by Ibn Abi al-Hadid, vol. 16, p.91.

#### Source URL:

https://www.al-islam.org/imam-alis-first-treatise-islamic-ethics-and-education-zainol-aabideen-qorba ni-lahiji/30-world-only#comment-0