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32) Silence and Moderation

وَتَلافِيكَ ما فَرَطَ مِن صَمَتِكَ ايسَرُ مِن اِدراكِ مَا فَاتَ مِن مَنطِقِكَ وَحِفْظُ مَا في الوِعاءِ بِشِدِّ الوِكاءِ وحِفظُ مَا في يَدَيُ غَيرِكَ، ومَرارَةُ اليَأْسِ خَيرٌ مِن الطَلَبِ إلى النّاسِ والحِرفَةُ مَعَ العِفَّةِ خَيرٌ مِنَ الغِنَى مَعَ الفُجُورِ، والمَرَّ اَحَفَظُ لِسِرّه ورُبَّ ساعٍ فِيما يَضُرَّه، مَن اكثَر اَهجَرَ ومَن تَفكَر اَبصَر، قارِن اَهلَ الخَيرِ تَكُن منهُم وبَاين اَهلَ الشَرِّ تَبِن عَنهُم. بِئسَ الطَعامُ الحَرامُ، وظُلُمُ الضَعيفِ اَفحَشُ الظُلمِ، اِذا كانَ الرِفْقُ خَرَقاً كانَ الخَرَقُ وبَاين اَهلَ الشَرِّ تَبِن عَنهُم. بِئسَ الطَعامُ الحَرامُ، وظُلمُ الضَعيفِ اَفحَشُ الظُلمِ، اِذا كانَ الرِفْقُ خَرَقاً كانَ الخَرَقُ رِفقاً، رُبُما كانَ الدَواءُ دَاءً والدَاءُ دَواءً وَرُبُما نَصمَحَ غَيرُ الناصِحِ وغَشَّ المُستنْصَحُ. وإيّاكَ والإتِكالِ على المُنى فَإِنّها بَضائِعُ النُوكي والعَقلُ حِفظُ التَجارِبِ وخيَرُ مَا جَرَّبتَ ما وَعَظَكَ بَادِرِ الفُرصَةَ قَبلَ اَن تَكونَ غُصَّةً لَيسَ كُلُّ طَالِب يُصيبُ ولا غَائِبٌ يَئُوبُ ومِنَ الفَسادِ إضاعَةُ الزَّادِ ومَفسَدةُ المَعادِ ولِكُلِّ اَمرٍ عَاقِبَةٌ سَوفَ يَأْتِيكَ ما قُدِّرَ لَكَ، التاجِرُ مُخطِرٌ ورُبَّ يَسيرٍ اَنمي مِن كَثِيرٍ، لا خَيرَ في مُعِينٍ مُهِينِ ولا في صَديقٍ ظَنِين، سَاحِلُ الدَّهرِ ما ذلّ لَكَ قَعُودُه ولا مُخطِرٌ ورُبَّ يَسيرٍ اَنمي مِن كَثِيرٍ، لا خَيرَ في مُعِينٍ مُهِينٍ ولا في صَديقٍ ظَنِين، سَاحِلُ الدَّهرِ ما ذلّ لَكَ قَعُودُه ولا المُحارِ ورُبَّ يَسيرٍ اَنمي مِن كَثِيرٍ، لا خَيرَ في مُعِينٍ مُهِينٍ ولا في صَديقٍ ظَنِين، سَاحِلُ الدَّهرِ ما ذلّ لَكَ قَعُودُه ولا اللّهَاحِ وَلَكُلُ ورُبَّ يَسيرٍ اَنمي مِن كَثِيرٍ، لا خَيرَ في مُعِينٍ مُهِينٍ ولا في صَديقٍ ظَنِين، سَاحِلُ الدَّهرِ ما ذلّ لَكَ مَطِيّةُ اللجَاجِ الْقَالُ وَالْمَاكِرُ ورُبَّ يَسِيرٍ اَنمَى مِن كَثِيرٍ، لا خَيرَ في مُعِينٍ مُهِينٍ ولا في صَديقٍ غَنِينَ مَنهُ، وإيّاكَ اَن تَجمَحَ بِكَ مَطِيّةُ اللجَاجِ

"Your redressing what you have missed through your silence is easier than attaining what you have lost through your speech, Safeguarding the contents of the vessel through fastening its cover and safeguarding what is in your hands is dearer to me than seeking for what is the hands of others. The bitterness of cutting off hopes (in people) is better than seeking from people. An occupation (to earn one's living) accompanied by chastity is better than wealth accompanied by immorality. A person is the best keeper of his secrets.

Often one strives for what is harmful for oneself. He who speaks much speaks nonsense and he who contemplates gains insight. Associate with people of goodness and you will be of them; forsake evil people and you will be separated from them. The worst food is what is forbidden. Wronging the weak is the most evil wrongdoing.

Where gentleness is considered to be roughness, there roughness is gentleness. Sometimes the remedy is the disease and the disease is the remedy. Sometimes one who is not a sincere counselor gives sincere advice and the one considered to be a sincere counselor gives insincere advice. Beware of relying on hopes for they are the capital of fools. Intellect is the safeguarding of experiences, and the best of your experiences is that which teaches you a lesson. Hasten to avail of opportunity before it

becomes grief. Not every seeker attains (his desire) nor does every absent one return. Among the factors of corruption are to neglect taking care of one's provisions (for the Hereafter) and deeds that ruin the Hereafter.

Every affair has an outcome. What is destined for you will soon come to you. The trader takes a risk. Often the little (wealth) becomes more abundant than what is much. There is no good in a mean helper or a friend who is suspect. As long as time is in your grasp, take your share of it. Do not put anything at risk hoping for something more than it. Beware that the stubborn mount should become ungovernable".

Commentary

In this letter, Imam 'Ali (as) provides us with some significant pieces of wisdom:

1. Silence And Speech

There is no doubt that language and speech are among God's blessings to man. Language is a means for communication and for the propagation of knowledge and for guiding people. God distinguishes man from the world of beasts by language:

"The Beneficient God, taught the Qur'an; He created man, taught him the mode of expression"

But if human language is not guarded against absurdity, telling lies, arguments, abuse, ridicule, backbiting, accusation, or telling tales... it will change into disaster. Thus, the scholars of ethics advise us to speak only when necessary or else make use of silence.

From the view-points of benefits and losses, language is of four forms:

One kind of language has absolute benefits. The second type includes absolute losses. In the third type both benefits and losses are mixed. And the fourth type is neither useful nor useless.

Using silence is necessary in three stages of the above four stages. In that case where we can speak, we should take care not to contaminate language with hypocrisy, artificiality, and talkativeness. 2

It is for this reason that in Islam, emphasis is more on silence. The Prophet (S) is reported to have said:

"May God have mercy on a servant (of God) who speaks good and acquires benefit or keeps silent and remains safe".3

The great Prophet (S) is also reported to have said:

"مَن كانَ يُؤمِنُ بِاللهِ واليَومِ الآخِرِ فَليَقُل خَيراً او لِيَصمُت"

"One who believes in Allah and the Last Day, let him speak good things or remain silent"4

Imam Sadiq (as) said when talking about Prophet David, who had told his son:

"O my son, if you say that speech is of silver, then silence is of gold"5. Imam Reza (as) has said:

"Among the signs of being learned are forbearance, knowledge and silence. Silence is one of the doors of wisdom. Silence is a means of attracting love and attaining Heaven and is a guide to every good"6.

And in "Misbah al-Shari'ah" it is narrated from Imam Sadig (as):

الصَّمْتُ شِعارُ المُحَقَّقِينَ بِحَقَائِقِ ما سَبَقَ وجَفَّ القَلمُ بِهِ وهُو مِفتاحُ كُلِّ راحة مِنَ الدُّنيا وَالآخِرَةِ والصُونُ مِنَ" الخَطايَا وَالزَلَلِ وَقَد جَعَلَهُ الله سِتْراً على الجَاهِلِ وَتَزَيُّناً لِلعَالِم وفِيهِ عَزلُ الهَوى وَرِياضَةُ النَّفسِ وَحَلاوَةُ العِبادَةِ وَالخَطايَا وَالزَلَلِ وَقَد جَعَلَهُ الله سِتْراً على الجَاهِلِ وَتَزَيُّناً لِلعَالِم وفِيهِ عَزلُ الهَوى وَرِياضَةُ النَّفسِ وَحَلاوَةُ العِبادَةِ وَزُوالُ قَسَاوَةِ القَلبِ وَالعَفَافُ وَالمُروَّةُ وَالظَرَف فَاعْلِق بَابَ لِسانِكَ عَمّا لَكَ مِنهُ بَدَلاً سِيما إذا لَم تَجِد اَهلاً لِلكَلامِ وَذَوالُ قَسَاوَةِ القَلْبِ وَالعَفَافُ وَالمُروَّةُ وَالظَرَف فَاعْلِق بَابَ لِسانِكَ عَمّا لَكَ مِنهُ بَدَلاً سِيما إذا لَم تَجِد اَهلاً لِلكَلامِ وَفَى الله وَفَى الله

وكَانَ رَبِيعُ ابنُ خَثِيم يَضَعُ قِرطاساً بَينَ يَدَيهِ فَيِكتُبُ كُلَّ ما يَتَكَلَّمُ بِهِ ثُمَّ يُحاسِبُ نَفسَهُ عَشِيَّة مَا لَهُ ومَا عَليهِ وَيَقُولُ آهِ آهٍ نَجا الصامِتُونَ وبَقِينا، وَكَان بَعضُ اصحابِ رَسُولِ الله صلّى الله عليه وآله يَضَعُ الحَصَاةَ فِي فَمِهِ فإذا ارادَ اَن ...يَتَكَلَّمَ بِما عَلِمَ أَنَّه للهِ وفي الله ولِوَجِهِ الله اخرَجَها

وإنَّما سَبَبُ هَلاكِ الخَلقِ ونَجَاتِهِمِ الكَلامُ وَالصَّمتُ فَطُوبى لِمَن رُزِقَ مَعرِفَةَ عَيبِ الكَلامِ وصَوابِهِ وفَوائِدَ الصَّمتِ فإنَّ ذَلِكَ مِن اخلاقِ الانبياءِ وشِعارُ الاصفِياء ومَن عَلِمَ قَدْرَ الكَلامِ أحسَنَ صنُحبَتَهُ الصَّمت ومَن اَشرَفَ على لَطائِفِ لَطَائِفِ "الصَّمْت وأَتُمِنَ على خَزائِنهِ كان كَلامُهُ وصَمَتُهُ عِبادَة ولا يَطَّلِعُ عَلَى عِبادَتِهِ هذا الا المَلِكُ الجَبَّار

"Silence is the mark of those who confirm the realities of what came before and of which the pen has written. It is the key to every ease in this world and the Hereafter, and a preservation from errors and lapses. Allah has made it a cover for the ignorant and an embellishment for the scholar. In it is the removal of desires, the training of the soul, the sweetness of worship, the removal of hard-heartedness,

chastity, sense of honour and sagacity. Therefore close the door of your tongue to unnecessary speech, particularly when you do not find one who is worthy of being spoken to and who will assist in discussion for the sake of Allah and concerning Allah.

Rabi' b. Khuthaym would place a piece of parchment before him and write down all that he had uttered. Then, at night, he would take himself to account for what was in favour of him and what was against him (in his speech). He would say: "Ah! Ah! The silent ones have been successful and we have remained behind". One of the companions of the Messenger of Allah would place pebbles in his mouth. When he wanted to speak about what he knew was for Allah, concerning Allah and for Allah's pleasure, he would remove the pebbles (from his mouth)

The cause of the destruction and salvation of creatures is only speech and silence. Thus good fortune belongs to him who is provided with the knowledge of incorrect and correct speech and the benefits of silence, for that is among the moral traits of the Prophets and the mark of the chosen ones. He who knows the value of speech does well in the companionship of silence. The speech and the silence of one who is acquainted with the subtleties of silence and entrusted with its treasures, is worship, and none is aware of this worship of his but the All-compelling King".

Thus, silence and speech could be the definite sources of people's salvation or destruction, respectively. We envy those who know the asset of silence and the righteousness of speaking. This is among the ethics of the Prophets and is among the marks of the true believers.

As you will see, one of the principles of silence is the preservation against making errors that occur through speech and can not be compensated for. Imam 'Ali (as) has relied heavily on this principle: Redressing what you have lost due to your silence is easier than compensating for what you have lost due to your speech. This is because by putting the cover on a bottle you can safeguard its contents.

This point is depicted in the poems of our poets who are under the influence of Imam 'Ali (as) and other religious leaders.

Any moment you talk, it is pleasant,
But sometimes silence is even sweeter;
To close the mouth is to close the door of troubles,
It is because the world is pregnant with good and bad.
I have seen many who regret having spoken
But I have seen nobody who regrets having been silent
Listening is better than saying if you care,

The first will fill us; the second will make us empty,

The pearl became very precious because

It became ear from top to the toe;

Amir Khosro, the Iranian poet, says:

The sharp sword became tongue all over,

That is because it could shed people's blood.

Sa'di says:

Until you know perfectly that your speech is appropriate,

You should not open your mouth to talk.

Another poet says:

Until the time you have not uttered a thing, it is at your disposal,

But when it is said, it will dominate you;

Do not tell anybody your secrets,

Because he will disclose it everywhere;

Deposit your treasure to treasure-keepers,

Keep your secrets to yourself.

But as it is said before, both speech and silence have their own merits. Wherever you have to talk, being silent is not wise and the other way around. The poet says:

Two things spoil the wisdom,

Being silent when you are supposed to talk, and talking when you are supposed to be silent.

When Imam Zayn al-'Abidin (as) was asked which one was better: speech or silence, he answered:

لِكُلِّ وَاحد مِنهُما آفاتٌ فَإِذا سَلِما مِنَ الآفاتِ فالكَلامُ افضَلُ مِنَ السَكُوتِ قِيلَ كَيفَ ذَلِكَ يابنَ رَسُولِ الله؟ قالَ لأنَّ الله عَزَّوجَلَّ مَا بَعَثَ الاَنبِياءَ وَالأَوصِياءَ بِالسَّكُوتِ إِنَّما بَعَثَهُم بِالكَلامِ ولا استُحِقَّت الجَنَّةُ بِالسُّكُوتِ ولا استُوجِبَت الله عَزَّوجَلَّ مَا بَعَثَ الاَنبِياءَ وَالأَوصِياءَ بِالسَّكُوتِ إِنَّما ذَلِكَ كُلُهُ بِالكَلامِ مَا كُنتُ لاَعدلَ القَمَرَ بِالشَّمسِ إِنَّكَ تَصِفُ فَضلَ ولايةُ اللهِ بِالسُّكُوتِ ولا تُوقِيَتِ النارُ بالسُّكُوتِ إِنَّما ذَلِكَ كُلُهُ بِالكَلامِ مِا للهَوتِ المَلامِ ولَسْتَ تَصِفُ فَضْلَ الكَلامِ بِالسُّكوتِ السَّكُوتِ بِالكَلامِ ولَسْتَ تَصِفُ فَضْلَ الكَلامِ بِالسُّكوتِ

"Both speech and silence have their harmful aspects. If both are free from harm, then speech is more excellent than silence". It was said: "How is that, O son of the Messenger of Allah"? Imam as-Sajjad (as) answered:

"Because Allah did not send His Prophets and (their) trustees with silence, but sent them with speech. Paradise is not deserved through silence, nor is God's guardianship merited through silence, nor is the Fire guarded against through silence. All this is possible only through speech. I do not place the sun on a level equal to the moon. You describe the excellence of silence through speech; you do not describe the excellence of speech through silence."7

2. Be Moderate, Do Not Squander, Do Not Be Jealous, Do Not Dissipate

It is a fact that man could not be indifferent towards his fellow creatures in the matter of finance, because all possessions are God's and we are His creature. Sometimes God sends one's livelihood without intermediary. But most often He obliges some people to carry out this task in order to shape their characters:

"And spend out of what we have given you. "8

But the topic is now the quantity and quality of donation. Some are so generous that they will give away what they have till they remain money-less. And some people go to the other extreme and are extremely miserly.

Islam reproaches both groups severely and orders moderation.

"And do not make your hand to be shackled to your neck nor stretch it forth to the utmost limit of its stretching forth, lest you should afterwards sit down blamed, stripped off."9

And in Surah al–Furqan where the attributes of the true believers are enumerated, one of the specific characteristics of such people is considered to be moderation:

"And they who when they spend are neither extravagant nor parsimonious, and keep between these the just mean." 10

Imam 'Ali (as) talks about this principle of moderation and does not want us to be misers because by the expression "safeguard what you have in your hands" he means safeguarding it in moderation, neither parsimoniously nor extravagantly. 11

Thus, what Imam 'Ali (as) means is the following: what you have at your disposal, spend it moderately; never donate all you have and then beg others for some sustenance and humiliate yourself and become what the Holy Qur'an calls:

"..lest you should afterwards sit down blamed, stripped off."

Is There A Contrast Between Moderation And Donation?

Some assume that there is a contrast between moderation which is mentioned in the above Surahs and by Imam (as) and donation which is mentioned in different Islamic traditions as well as in the ninth verse of Hashr:

"And prefer them before themselves though poverty may afflict them" [Qur'an 59:9].

But attention to the location and timing of the descent of these Surahs and other evidences show us that there is no contrast between these two. It is because the Surahs and traditions which emphasize moderation are applicable to those situations where extravagance may destroy the life pattern of the one who spends out or weakens his family altogether. In such cases donation is prohibited and moderation is in order. Observing the principle of moderation might be a general principle which should be carried out by the mass or it may be a specific principle which should be carried out at specific times such as war, famine, unexpected events and the like. At these critical moments exalted people should do sacrifice and help others. This happened when Hashim, the great grandfather of the Prophet (S) donated all his possession at the time of famine. Another example of donation is the act of the Muslims at the dawn of Islam. They helped out the newly converted and the immigrants who had been deprived of all of their possessions. They, through their assistance, could protect Islam. Naturally these two commandments pertain to different situations and they do not contradict each other. Each one is carried out at specific occasions.

3. The Bitterness Of Cutting Short One's Hopes Is Better Than Asking People For Help

The essence of resorting to Allah and the lack of despair towards God's benevolence is that man, so far as possible, should not ask for people's help and should trust God only. Although such a position sometimes deprives people of material assets and adds to the possession of the proud ones and is sometimes accompanied with hardships, the honor and glory which are obtained in this way are not comparable to the humiliation of asking others for help.

The Qur'an interprets such a state of needlessness and resort to and reliance on God and not asking people for help as "cutting off hopes and not relying on others". This state is praised as it is shown in the following traditions:

Imam Sadiq (as) has said:

"There are three things which are a pride and an ornament for a believer here and in the Hereafter: Prayer at the end of the night, cutting off hopes of what is in the hands of people and the wilaya (guardianship) of an Imam from the Household of Mohammad (as)". 12

He has also said:

"Cutting off hopes in what people possess causes a believer's glory in his religion, sense of honour in soul, his noblity in his world, his greatness in the eyes of others, his loftiness in his tribe, and his prestige in his family. Such a person is the one most free of need in his own view and before all mankind." 13

Imam 'Ali (as) is narrated to have said:

"The greatest wealth is cutting off hopes of what is in the hands of people". 14

4. Little Fortune Plus Chastity Is Better Than Big Fortune Which Is Gained Through Dishonesty

As we know assets and children are a means for man's troubles and trials.

"Your possessions and your children are only a trial".

As a whole, the wealthy people are more prone to committing sins.

"Man is most surely inordinate. Because he sees himself free from want".

In contrast, those who enjoy a simpler life, due to the shortage of possibilities, are less prone to the sins.

But those who have less wealth but are honest are better than those who have more wealth for the following reasons:

First, the honest ones enjoy magnanimity, ease of conscience and specific human values which the people of sins are deprived of.

Second, although the middle class think the wealthy ones as lucky, the masses who possess divine nature consider them unhealthy and dirty.

Third, the criterion for good and bad acts is not the transitory physical pleasures; rather those acts are

considered valuable which may bring about Divine satisfaction and rewards in the Hereafter, which are ever-lasting.15

"And most surely hell encompasses the unbelievers".

It is for this reason that Imam 'Ali (as) states:

"An occupation (to earn one's living) accompanied by chastity is better than wealth accompanied by immorality".

Sa'di, the Iranian poet, says:

If you recognize the pleasure of the abandoning pleasures,

Never will you consider as pleasure the pleasure of soul;

Your bird of spirit will fly to Heavens,

If you free it from the cage of greed;

But you lack the patience of the phoenix,

You are like a sparrow in the claws of lusts;

You are worshipping your surface so much

That as far as you are living you will not get to the deep.

If an herb grows out of your humane nature

The flowers of the garden seems to you as if they were herbs

You would never buy the two worlds,

If you knew the value of what you have,

From the remaining part of life you will get nothing,

If you are decided to perform as you do now;

Tell me what better-than-life did you get

As you spent your life-time;

You may not buy one moment of life with a big land

Your life was given to you free of charge;

You sleep-walker walk as slowly as

I fear, you will miss your caravan;

My advice to you, brother, is

As far as you can, do not waste your time;

You should keep your tongue in your mouth like a shell

Then you could throw out pearls when time is ripe;

All his life, Sa'di underwent hardships
Till he got the fame that he enjoys now.

5. It Is Better For A Man To Keep His Secrets:

Keeping secrets is one of the ethical principles of Islam. It is emphasized in Islam. Sometimes disclosing secrets to others might lower the pain-load of the person. But for this act there are conditions: Firstly you should find trustworthy persons to disclose your secrets.

Imam 'Ali (as) says:

"Do not entrust your secret to one who is not trustworthy". 16

Secondly, we should not even tell the whole secret to the trustworthy because on the one hand, that secret might somehow get revealed and hurt us. In this regard Imam 'Ali (as) has said:

"One who conceals his secrets has the choice in his hand. Any conversation that is between more than two persons will be revealed" 17

Elsewhere Imam 'Ali (as) has said:

"Your secret is your captive. Once you reveal it, you become its captive." 18

Imam 'Ali (as) has also said:

"Your secret is your happiness as long as you conceal it. When you reveal it, it is your destruction." 19

On the other hand, people are not always the same; a friend today might turn into a foe tomorrow. He might, then, use that secret as a club on your head and hurt you. Imam Sadiq (as) has said:

"Do not disclose your secret to your friend except that much, which if you informed your enemy of it, it would not harm you. For one day your friend may become your enemy."20

Regarding this, our Iranian poet has said:

Never rely wholly on your friend,

Keep hidden your secret from your friend;

Some day your friend might turn against you,

He might turn and show you his animosity.

Naturally, nobody could be a better secret-keeper than a person himself. He is the most reliable person concerning his secret. Imam 'Ali (as) has said regarding this:

"Your chest is the widest place to keep your secret".21

Sa'di, the Persian writer and poet, says:

Do not disclose to your friend your secrets. You do not know if he will turn against you. Do not inflict any damage over your foe; he might someday become your friend. If you wish a secret to remain secret, do not reveal it, even if he is reliable. Nobody is friendlier to your secret than you yourself.

It is better for you to remain silent than,

Telling a person your secret and asking him not to disclose it;

O wise man, block the water from its headspring,

Because when the spring over-flows, you cannot stop it;

You should not utter anything in private,

That cannot be said at any association of people.

6. There Are Many Who Strive For What Is Harmful For Themselves!

Trial and perseverance are the agents for material progress and for perfection:

"And that man shall have nothing but what he strives for".

Some people struggle in the right direction and in the God's path. And some others go astray. They are deviated "Those who go astray" and are not in favor with Allah

"Not the path of those upon whom the wrath is brought down" [Qur'an 1:7]

It is clear that those who struggle for Allah may not superficially be affluent in this world; but because God will not leave any service to Him unanswered, such a person has gained a lot:

"وَمَنْ أَرَادَ الْآخِرَةَ وَسَعَى لَهَا سَعْيَهَا وَهُوَ مُؤْمِنٌ فَأُوْلَئِكَ كَانَ سَعْيُهُمْ مَشْكُورًا"

"And whoever desires the Hereafter and strives for it as he ought to strive and he is a believer; as for these, their striving shall surely be accepted."22

But those who go astray and perform evil on the earth and commit wrong-doings may seem lucky ones in the eyes of some. But they are real losers since they have spoiled their Hereafter which is made of the actions we perform here. However much they strive, they will lose more. Furthermore, such people are usually punished in this world.

"And when he turns back, he runs along in the land that he may cause mischief in it and destroy the tilth and the stock, and Allah does not love mischief-making."

And as for those who assume they are doing good when actually are committing sins, the Qur'an says:

"Say: Shall We inform you of the greatest losers in their deeds? These are they whose labor is lost in this world's life and they think that they are well versed in skill of the work of hand. These are they who disbelieve in the communications of their Lord and His meeting, so their deeds become null, and therefore We will not set up a balance for them on the day of resurrection."23

With regards to the above information, we will understand what Imam 'Ali (as) means by the expression "Often one strives for what is harmful for oneself".

7. He Who Speaks Much Speaks Nonsense

Naturally, a person, who talks a lot, does not have enough time to weigh what he says. As a result, his speech is both baseless and wrong. The listener also might get bored and the speaker may lose his vigor.

Fortunately, in the Islamic traditions all these points are made clear.

Imam 'Ali (as) says:

"Too much talking is annoying". 24

At another occasion, he has said:

"Too much talking causes a wise man to err and wearies the forbearing one. Thus, do not talk too much such that you trouble people and exceed the bounds, so you are held in little estimation." 25

Imam 'Ali (as) has also said:

"Beware of talking too much because it increases your errors and causes weariness." 26

He has also said:

"Excessive speech augments the superfluities in it and diminishes its meaning. There is no end to it and none will benefit from it.27

He says:

"Lessen your speech so that you are safe from blame."28

8. Contemplation Is The Basis Of Insight

Wisdom distinguishes man from the beasts. Man uses wisdom to recognize the facts of creation and relations among them.

Thus thinking about similar events is to concentrate on a specific case. Just as if the conditions for sight are possible and there are no obstacles, seeing will naturally take place, in the same way, if the conditions for thinking are present and the obstacles are absent, insight and the understanding of conditions will naturally occur.29

It is for this reason that in the Islamic traditions contemplation is considered as an illuminating factor for wisdom.

On the other hand, in the Islamic traditions, it is said that we discover the unknown through our wisdom.

It is also said that contemplation broadens the spirit of realism in a man and increases his insight. Finally, contemplation is considered not only as an act of worship but also one hour of it is considered equal to years of worship.

Imam 'Ali (as), in his book, points out the role of contemplation in the illumination of facts.

9. The Effects And Role Of Companionship

One of the factors which build up one's personality is companionship. Since human nature adopts other people's behaviors easily, when he accompanies the good ones, he is influenced by them. On the contrary, when he accompanies the bad ones, he becomes one of those. It is said:

Do not accompany the bad as far as you can,

Because human soul adopts other's nature;

Noah's son accompanied the bad ones,

He lost his Prophethood as a result.

The dog of the cave settlers for a few days only

Followed the good ones and became good.

Because of this characteristic of impressionability, companionship is emphasized in the Islamic traditions and the Qur'anic verses.

It is narrated from Solomon (as), the Prophet, who said,

"Do not pass judgment on a person without seeing those with whom he keeps company; for a man is only known through his likes and his companions, and is ascribed to his companions and brothers".30

Imam 'Ali (as) has said:

مُجالَسَةُ الأشرارِ تُورِثُ سُوءَ الظنَّ بالأخيار ومُجالَسَةُ الأخيارِ تُلحِقُ الأشرارَ بالأخيارِ ومُجالَسَةُ الأبرارِ لِلفُجّارِ تُلحِقُ" الأبرارَ بِالفُجّارِ، فَمَن اِشْتَبَهَ عَلَيكُم اَمرُه ولم تَعرِفُوا دِينَه فانظُروا إلى خُلَطائِهِ فإن كانُوا اَهلَ دِينِ الله فَهُوَ على دِينِ الله فَهُو على دينِ الله وإن كانُوا عَلى غَيرِ دِينِ الله فَلا حَظَّ لَهُ مِن دِينِ الله إنَّ رَسُولَ الله (ص) كان يقول: مَن كانَ يُؤمِن بالله واليَوم "الآخِر فَلا يُؤاخِينَ كافرا ولا يُخالِطَنَّ فَاجراً ومَن آخى كافِراً او خالطَ فاجراً كان كَافِراً فاجراً

"Companionship with evildoers causes an evil opionion about the good and companionship with the good links the evildoers to the good. The companionship of the virtuous with the transgressors links the virtuous to the transgressors. So those of you who are doubtful about someone and you do not know his

religion, then look at his friends. If they are adherents of the religion of Allah, then he is on the religion of Allah. If they are on other than the religion of Allah, then he has no share in the religion of Allah. This is because the Messenger of Allah (as) used to say: One who believes in God and the Day of Resurrection should not fraternize with an infidel or associate with a transgressor. One who fraternizes with an infidel or associates with a transgressor is an infidel, a transgressor.31

And the Prophet (S) has also said:

"A man is of the same religion as his friend. Then every one of you be careful with whom you associate".32

You first tell me who your friends are,

Then I'll tell you who you are.

This very feature of impressionability and companionship caused 'Uqbah b. Abi Mu'eet to be influenced by the temptations of his old friend Ubayy ibn Khalaf to become infidel to Islam and to pour the intestines of an animal over the Prophet's head and to insult him and to spit on his sacred face. The Qur'an expresses his mental status at the Day of Resurrection through the following words:

"And the day when the unjust one shall bite his hands: O would that I had taken a way with the Apostle; O woe is me! Would that I had not taken such a one for a friend! Certainly he led me astray from the reminder after it had come to me; and the Shaitan fails to aid man"33

Sa'di, concerning companionship, says:

In the bath one day I received a piece of fragrant clay from a friend,

I asked the clay if it was musk or ambergris

Because I was drunk with its odor

It said it used to be a worthless piece of clay

But it was companion to a flower

The perfect behavior of the company had influenced it

Or else it was still the same piece of clay.

It is for this reason that in the Qur'an and in traditions there is continuous persuasion over friendship with honest people and genuine God-believers. Making friends with unclean people is strictly prohibited. Two of these traditions are reported here:

Firstly: Imam 'Ali (as) has said

"Be on your guard against associating with an evil companion for he will destroy his companion and ruin his friend."34

Secondly, he said,

"Associate with people of God-fearingness and wisdom and have frequent discussions with them. If you are ignorant they will teach you, and if you are a scholar they will increase your knowledge."35

10. The Worst Food Is The Illegally Gained Food

It can not be denied that food is effective in building one's personality. It is because food changes into energy and sets our body in motion and is manifested in the form of action and work and would be permanent in the storage of the days in accordance with the principle of permanency of matter and energy. It will later manifest into an appropriate shape in the Day of Resurrection.

Thus, if food is lawful and legally-gained, it will manifest itself as a wholesome nutrient and it will bring about comfort and ease. If it is gained through illegal means it will bring about fire and will badly hurt man.

The Holy Qur'an talks about the swallowers of the property of the orphans unjustly in the following manner:

"As for those who swallow the property of the orphans unjustly, surely they only swallow fire into their bellies and they shall enter burning fire"36

And as for those who conceal the rights, the Holy Qur'an says:

"Surely those who conceal any part of the Book that Allah has revealed and take for it a small price, they eat nothing but fire in their bellies, and Allah will not speak to them on the Day of resurrection, nor will He purify them, and they shall have a painful chastisement"37

As you will observe, for both swallowers of the properties of orphans and the concealers of facts, through which they gain illegal profits, the fire of Hell is anticipated. Their actions are symbolized as fires and this hurts them in the Hereafter.

"And what they had done they shall find present there". 38
"And he who has done an atom's weight of evil shall see it"39

It is for this reason that the illegally gained property is severely reproached in the Islamic traditions, and it is supposed to be an agent against the acceptance of worship and prayers:

The great Prophet (S) has said:

"The prayers of one who takes a mouthful of forbidden food will not be accepted for forty nights and his supplications will not be accepted, either, for forty days. The Fire is worthy of every piece of flesh grown out of forbidden food, and (even) one mouthful of food is effective in the growth of flesh"40

The great Prophet (S), when answering someone who wanted his supplication to be accepted, said:

"Purify your food and do not let anything forbidden enter your stomach"41

In a tradition from Imam Sadiq (as) we read:

"One who wishes his supplication to be accepted, let his earnings be pure".42

There is another tradition saying:

"No supplication is veiled from Me, except the supplication of those who eat what is forbidden." 43

We read in another tradition:

"Heaven is incumbent on one who preserves himself from the evil of his tongue, his stomach and his sexual organs."44

Regarding the above-mentioned issues, some feeble-minded persons might think the worst kind of food is the one which hurts him physically. But such impairment is curable and its time is limited to this world alone. But the damage of the illegally gained food is related to man's soul and is not repairable most of the time and pertains to the hereafter which is eternal.

11. Injustice To The Weak Is The Worst Of Injustice

Among injustices, the injustice inflicted upon the weak people who lack the power to defend themselves, is the worst kind of tyranny. Injustice to such a person is only possible by one who has no manhood. Injustice to people who are capable enough to defend themselves is not of the same magnitude as the first one, but it is still very pernicious. This sort of injustice is reproached in the Islamic traditions:

Imam Baqir (as) has said: My Father, at his death, told me one piece of advice:

"My son! Beware of inflicting any injustice upon the one who has no helper except God to stand against you"45

Imam 'Ali (as) was once asked: Which sin is the quickest in punishment for the sinner? He answered:

"One who inflicts injustice upon a person who has no helper except God, who does not appreciate the assets; and one who oppresses the poor."46

The Prophet (S) is reported to have said:

"God's anger is severe toward a person who inflicts injustice on one who does not have any helper other than God."47

Imam Sadiq (as) is also reported to have said:

"No injustice is worse than the one whose sufferer has no helper against it but God"48

12. Sometimes Showing Severity Is Better Than Being Lenient

Sometimes it is advisable to be severe instead of kind and lenient. An example is when a child or a student take advantage of the kindness of the father or the teacher and do not take a lesson. In such a case the child or the student should be treated severely. Another example is when the mass of people take advantage of the kindness of the country officials and start weakening the government through participation of revolt. In such a case of mutiny, severity is necessary. This aggression is in fact a kind of tolerance.

When we observe that the Prophet (S) and Imam 'Ali (as), although being kind and amicable, used aggression towards the mutiny–makers, or our Imam, in struggle against trouble–makers was severe, we will notice that these actions were to keep the independence of the community.

For this reason, Imam (as) has said in his letter:

"Where gentleness is considered to be roughness, there roughness is gentleness".

13. Sometimes The Remedy Is The Disease And The Disease Is The Remedy

The above title simply means that at times something which on appearance looks hazardous might be useful or vice versa. Thus appearance should not attract our attention and should not make us happy or unhappy.

14. Be Aware Of The Intention Of Those Who Give Advice

It is assumed that those who sometimes do not give sincere advice are not sincere and the sincere advisors are benevolent. But this should not lead us to accept wholly what the advisors try to tell us or to

reject what others tell us.

This is because sometimes we behave in contrast to what we generally believe: i.e. one who is not considered to be a sincere advisor might be benevolent and a well-wisher, and a sincere counselor might deceive us. A wise man listens critically to them.

It is for this reason that Imam 'Ali (as) emphasizes:

"Sometimes one who is not a sincere counselor gives sincere advice and the one considered to be a sincere counselor gives insincere advice".

This teaching is in harmony with the instructions of the Holy Qur'an which says:

"Therefore give good news to my servants: Those who listen to the word then follow the best of it; those are they whom Allah has guided, and those it is who are the men of understanding 49

15. Reliance On Wishes Is Foolishness

As we have already seen, wishes are essentials of man's life. If he did not have these wishes, he could not survive.

But to live in the world of fantasy and to live a life of dreams will not do because the materialization of dreams needs hard work and trial. They say "Three things wear out the intellect: extensive wishes, giving quick replies (without thought) and excessive laughter"50

It seems that the topic of Abu Tammam's poem is related to this part of Imam 'Ali's (as) statement. 51
Abu Tammam says:

"A person who pastures his determination and resolution in the meadows of wishes will always be weak."

Imam 'Ali (as) says:

"Beware of relying on wishes for they are the capital of fools."

16. Intellect Is The Safeguarding Of Experiences

In the lexicon the word intellect ('aql) means understanding. Sometimes it is used as an infinitive:

"And none understand them but the learned"52

This word may sometimes be used in the nominal form. In that case it means: "The power which distinguishes good from bad, right from wrong, and truth from falsehood".53 Perhaps this second meaning is meant by the Prophet (S) when he said:

"God has not created any creature nobler than the intellect"54

The word 'aql (intellect) is sometimes used in the sense of 'iqal which is a band by which a camel is fettered. Thus, 'aql or intellect is in fact a power which hinders man from going astray. When Imam Sadiq (as) was asked what the intellect was, he answered:

"The intellect is a power through which man worships God and by which he earns paradise".

Then he was asked: What was in Mu'awiya, then? He answered:

"That was cunning. That was devilry. It resembles intellect, but it is not intellect."55

And wherever God reproaches people because they lack intellect, the first meaning is meant:

"Deaf, dumb and blind, so they do not understand"56

And wherever man, due to lack of intellect, is not considered to be obliged to carry out an action, the second sense is meant. 57 Al-Kafi mentions 'aql, (intellect) as the opposite of jahl, (ignorance), and "Kitab al-'aql wa'l jahl" (The book of the intellect and ignorance) is the title of one of the sections of the

book, where the first sense is meant and not 'aql in contrast to junun (madness).58

Man can comprehend some facts naturally; facts such as the following: whole is greater than each one of its parts; the combination of two contradictory things is impossible; justice is good, and the like. Man can also get some facts through experimentation: facts such as the following: the burning act of fire, the wetness of rain, the instability of injustice, etc.

Concerning this, Imam 'Ali (as) has said:

"There are two kinds of intellect: innate intellect and intellect through experience. Both of these lead man towards benefits." 59

Imam 'Ali (as) has also said:

"There are two kinds of intellect: innate and what is acquired through hearing. The intellect acquired through hearing is of no use when there is no innate disposition for it, just as sunlight is of no use when there is no eyesight."60

Concerning the fact that the innate, natural intellect increases with experiences, Imam 'Ali (as) has said:

"Intellect is an innate quality that increases through knowledge and experience."61

With regards to the above topics, what Imam 'Ali (as) means by 'aql in his expression is "the experimental and acquired intellect" and not theoretical intellect. And by experience he means the acquisition of partial samples in order to reach to a general conclusion; examples are: injustice is not eternal; the government of righteousness is steady; Samgunia is a laxative, etc.62

17. The Best Experiences

As it was discussed previously, experience is one of the ways to gain information in this world. Gaining knowledge and experience helps us to guide our lives in the right path.

Imam 'Ali (as) says:

"The best of your experiences is that which teaches you a lesson."

The Prophet (S) also has said: "A believer is not bitten twice from the same hole"63
It is for this reason that the Holy Qur'an, after narrating the stories of the ancient nations, wants us to take our lessons from them: "In their histories there is certainly a lesson for men of understanding"64

Imam 'Ali (as) commands people to take lessons from the previous instructive events:

"O servants of God, take warning from beneficial admonitions. Take lessons from the clear signs, restrain yourselves (from sin) through far-reaching warnings and benefit through reminder and exhortations."65

Imam 'Ali (as) has also said:

"One who learns well from experiences is safe from misfortunes; and one who does not care about experiences cannot anticipate the consequences" 66

He has also said:

"The fruit of experiences is learning lessons". 67

He has said elsewhere:

"The deeds of one who safeguards his experiences will be correct."68

But, unfortunately, as Imam 'Ali (as) says, the number of those who take lessons is few.

"How great the number of cases for taking lessons is and how small is the number of those who learn lessons!"69

18. Taking Advantage Of Opportunities

The proper conditions are not always ready for man. But once in a while there are good opportunities available to him. Later on, they might not exist any more. The Prophet (S) has said in this regard:

"In the days of your life, there are fragrant breezes (of mercy) from your Lord. Take yourselves forward to benefit from them."70

In this relation, the Prophet (S) is reported to have said,

"One to whom a door of good is opened up, let him seize the opportunity since it is not known when it will be closed to him."71

Of course the chances are as unstable as the clouds in the sky. You should seize them or else you will lose them for ever.

"Seize opportunities for good since they pass away like clouds".72

"Losing opportunities creates sorrows". 73

The Prophet (S) told Abu Dharr:

"Take advantage of five things prior to five other things: your youth prior to your age, your health prior to your sickness, your wealth prior to your poverty, your leisure prior to your occupation, and your life prior

to your death. "74

It is for this reason that Imam 'Ali (as) in his letter gives the following statement:

"Hasten to avail of opportunity before it becomes grief."

Sa'di, the Persian poet, says:

O young man obey your God today,

Because tomorrow, when you are old, you may not act as a young man;

The world stole from me days,

Each day of which was followed by a Qadr night,

Alas I did not appreciate the value of that day,

Now I start realizing, which is too late;

Due to my ignorance I lost the clear water,

Now I have to carry out Tayamum for my prayers;

When you are in the middle part of youth,

Your night is over, stop sleeping;

Now you try when the water is up to your waist,

Not at the time when flood passes over you head;

Do not waste your life using words like alas;

Because opportunity is dear and time is short.

19. Not Every Seeker Attains (His Desire) Nor Does Every Absent One Return

Sometime a man notices that he has not reached his goals in life. This makes him unhappy. He might even seclude himself from the community. He might then become a pessimist.

Imam 'Ali (as) wants to, through examples, show us that this phenomenon is very commonplace. It is not you alone who have not reached your goals: there are other people like you. Should they be sad and depressed like you? Or should they circle the difficulty and find a way out? It is clear that this is the right way. You might perhaps not have reached your objectives. But is the system of the world established in such a way that everyone should succeed? Should every traveler return home? Since this is the case, you have to be content of your God–given fate and avoid being crushed by depression and disappointment. You have to use your means to compensate for what you have lost.

Regretting the past and worrying about future are two mental disturbances which inflict many people and have put hurdles on their right ways of life. This problem will be solved through a right planning, however.

Imam as-Sadiq (as) has said:

"Life consists of three days: a day which has passed, never to return; the present day in which people are living, of which they should take advantage; and tomorrow, in which one's hopes lie."75

Concerning the avoidance of depression and worry about the past and future Imam 'Ali (as) says:

"Do not distress yourself about what has passed since it will occupy you from preparation for what is to come." 76

He has also said:

"Do not impose the anxiety about your tomorrow on your today out of grief."77

Elsewhere Imam 'Ali (as) has said:

"Do not be grieved over what has escaped you of this world."78

It is also said by Imam 'Ali (as):

"Do not impose the anxieties for the year ahead on the anxiety of today. What each day holds is sufficient for you".79

A poet has written:

Why should the earth-dwellers,

Refer to the past events, always;

Why are they sad because of the past events?

Why should they cry on the present happenings?

They have nothing to do except complaining,

They would not take lessons from their past;

One, in his heyday of youth,

Regrets over his childhood;

He is the most handsome,

But frowns and gets an angry face;

How nice the past childhood was, he says,

Be happy that that time has returned;

The other has gone through the youth,

And has found it extremely rough;

He has lost vigor, wisdom and intelligence,

And he has made it his motto to talk on youth;

Where are the days of strength?

So that I could once again engage in love;

What I have seem among people,

Nobody thinks about now, I found;

Everybody is under the influence of illusions,

Nobody had anything except sorrow;

They don't know that,

The present will become past pretty soon.

20. Destroying the Provisions For The Hereafter And The Resurrection Day Is A Great Loss

Those who envisage life only as it is in this world and do not consider the other world, see man's life and death as these pertain to the world of beasts and which are materially determined.80

The act of providing for the provisions for the next world might seem vague and at times meaningless to these people.81

But those who do not limit life span only to the life here and are of the conviction that we have transformed from material phase to the animal phase and to the human state and finally enter a phase called the Hereafter or Resurrection Day. These stages were carried out without our consent, however. In the Hereafter we have to harvest what we have planted in this world. And if such a day did not exist, first the creation would be aimless; secondly, the lack of such a day is in contradiction with God's justice; thirdly, the unstable nature of this world shows that

"Surely the hour is coming. I am about to make it manifest so that every soul may be rewarded as it strives".82

Therefore, if a person destroys the provisions of this hazardous way and thinks of life as it is here in this

world, he will not enjoy a true life even here because he has disobeyed God. 83 Since the Resurrection is inevitable and everybody should see the consequences of his actions in this world, therefore, as Imam 'Ali (as) has warned us, we should not engage in destroying the provisions for Hereafter by wrong deeds and holding wrong ideology. This would be a great loss.

21. Every Affair Has An Outcome

Definitely each act has an outcome. Therefore we should act in such a way as to get good results. This is only possible through the following ways: First, before engaging in an act, see the outcome: if it is good, do it; or else, leave it. A man came up to the Prophet (S) and asked him to offer him some pieces of advice. The Prophet (S) asked him three times if he would carry out what he advised him on. The answer was positive. The Prophet (S) then said:

"I advise you, that when you intend to do something, reflect on its outcome. If it is in the right direction, continue with it; but if it is on the path of error, leave it ".84"

Second, select the right path of action since the Holy Qur'an says:

"..It is not righteousness that you whould enter houses at their backs, but righteousness is this that one should guard against evil; and go into the houses by their doors... "85

Jabir has reported from Imam Baqir (as) his saying:

"It is advisable to enter affairs, whatever they may be, through their (right) directions."86

On the one hand, the Holy Qur'an enumerates the good things87 which await the true believers88 (those who guard against evil). On the other hand, the Qur'an commands people not to be rejecters89, guilty,90 mischief-makers91 and unjust.92

Imam Sadiq (as) says:

"If you wish to seal your acts with good in such a way that at the time of death you have a good record of good deeds, then magnify the rights of Allah such that you do not use His blessings in disobedience to Him, you do not consider yourself strong because of His forbearance towards you, and honour all those whom you find mentioning us or professing love for us."93

Third, the selection of right ways and the carrying out of good deeds should be continuous all the way through the life. There are some, like Talha, Zubayr, Hassan b. Thabit, Usama b. Zayd, and others who selected the right way at first but later disregarded their obligations and turned into the losers.

In contrast, there have been people who were wrong-doers throughout their life but suddenly, due to the right decision-making, became the fortunate ones, such as Hurr b. Yazeed ar-Riyahi, and Zuhayr Ibn Qayn.94

For this reason, the outcome is of crucial significance. Jesus Christ (as) has said in this connection:

"People say: The value of a building is determined by its foundation. But I do not say that to you". They asked him: "What do you say, Spirit of Allah?" He said: "By the truth, I say to you that the last stone which the builder puts on the building is the foundation." The narrator says "What is meant is the end-product"95

The Prophet (S) is also reported to have said:

"One who does good deeds for the remaining part of his life shall not suffer for the sins previously performed. But one who does evil in what remains of his life, will be punished both for his earlier and his later sins."96

The Prophet (S) is also reported to have said:

"The basis for the action (to be right or wrong) is its end. "97

However, it is us who determine the results of our action.

22. What Is Destined For You Will Soon Come To You

All events of this world, including the sustenance and livelihood of all creatures, are predetermined by Allah:

"And there is not a thing but with Us are the treasures of it, and We do not send it down but in a known measure".98

And Allah will determine each creature's sustenance in accordance with its capacities. Since the gaining of livelihood through prohibited ways entails mental and spiritual losses, we are not allowed to engage in greed, injustice, aggression, theft or the like to achieve our objectives.

Imam 'Ali (as) prohibits us from gaining possessions through illegal and forbidden means and warns us that the predetermined sustenance will keep a person from engaging in unlawful acts.

Thus, the traditions and the verses of the Holy Qur'an which deal with the predetermination of livelihood are a hurdle on the way of the greed of the world-mongers who do every sort of injustice to attain what they wish for. These verses and traditions warn such people not to struggle in vain. If they go through legal ways, they will receive what they need.99

And the Holy Qur'an says:

"And there is no animal in the earth but on Allah is the sustenance of it, and He knows its resting place and its depository; all things are in a manifest book"100

23. Often the Little (Wealth) Becomes More Abundant Than What Is Much

A possession gained through unlawful and incorrect means may be much but has evil consequences. Such unlawfully-gained assets are usually short-lived for one thing and are a burden over the shoulders of the possessor. But lawfully-gained assets may be small but they have pleasant consequences.

Imam al-Kadhim (as) says:

"Unlawfully-gained assets will not increase in volume and value. Even if they do, they will not last. If one gives charity from such possessions, he will not be rewarded. (This, in fact, is another crime). Whatever

one leaves behind of such illegal assets, will be provisions for one's Hell fire"101

Imam as-Sadiq (as) has said:

"A person who gains wealth through unlawful means, God will take it away from him in places of destruction." 102

Abu 'Uthman says: I knew a father who loved one of his sons, but hated the other. At the time of his death he endowed all his possession, which was more than two hundred thousand Dirhams, to his beloved son and deprived the other one of his possession. The man was an oil–seller. After the death of both the brothers we saw the children of the rich brother dependent on the children of the poor brother and being given alms by them. 103

Each one of us comes across individuals who have amassed huge amounts of wealth, but who have become wretched. On the other hand, we know individuals who started from nothing but have been successful in life. History is filled with such events.

24. There Is No Good In An Ignoble Helper Or A Friend Who Is Suspect (Whose Sincerity Is Suspect)

One of the benefits of friendship is to get help in solving problems. It is for this reason that Imam 'Ali (as) orders us:

'Strengthen your bonds of friendship with your brothers in religion, for they are a provision both here and in the Hereafter. Have you not heard that Allah in the Holy Qur'an reports from the sinners who say:

"So we have no intercessors, nor a true friend." (26: 100-101) 104

Imam 'Ali (as) describes a friend as the closest relative and the best agent for prosperity both here and in the Hereafter:

"The companionship of one who does not associate with you as a helper against your self, will have evil consequences, if you but knew"!

For this reason, the great Prophet (S) has said:

"There is no good in the companionship of one whose religion and world is not of any benefit." 105

It is for this reason that Imam 'Ali (as) in his letter has emphasized:

"There is no good in an ignoble helper or in a friend who is (whose sincerity is) suspect."

25. Patiently Benefit From Your Time

When life conditions are proper for us, we should patiently benefit from it and we should not overtax ourselves. Some of the self-satisfied individuals would go very fast when they are at the zenith of fame. We may easily find examples in history. The communist government of Russia (USSR) and the Baath party and Saddam Hussain in Iraq clearly show that exerting pressure on people lead to the poverty and wretchedness of people.

But the wise people continuously try to recognise the capacity and potentials of their time and patiently benefit from them. Regarding this, Imam 'Ali (as) has said:

"A prudent man is he who adapts to his time."

Imam 'Ali (as) emphasizes in his letter:

"As long as time is in your grasp, take your share of it".

Of course, this act of tolerance towards time, even when the conditions are not favorable, like the twenty-five-year stay of Imam 'Ali (as) at home or the ten-year stay of the second Imam (as) at home or the cease fire between Iran and Iraq by Imam Khomeini (as) is very hard to digest, but this tolerance and

prudence is necessary at times.

26. Do Not Put Anything At Risk Hoping For Something More Than It.

Man sometimes, in the hope to gain more profits, engages in some actions the results of which are not clear to him.

But it should be observed that man's actions should be based on reason and wise probability is part of man's procedure to safeguard higher benefits. It is for this reason that man should not lose his capital for the sake of assumed improbable benefits.

There are some people who do not make use of prudence and get themselves involved in hazardous actions. For instance, without considering the status of a merchandise item in business circles, he purchases those goods in the hope to gain more profits. In this way the greedy merchant easily goes bankrupt.

Imam 'Ali (as) means by an adventurer merchant the one who keeps his capital but in order to get more profits, he engages in wise transactions. But when Imam 'Ali (as) says:

"Do not put anything at risk hoping for something more than it".

he means the greed-motivated actions of the businessman which are harmful for him.

27. Do Not Be Stubborn

Being stubborn is one of the most hateful traits of human being. The Holy Qur'an talks about the disclaimers of rightfulness, who suffer from obstinacy; the Qur'an says: These people insist on their wrong ways ignoring the blessings they enjoy:

"And if We show mercy to them and remove the distress they have, they would persist in their inordinacy, blindly wandering on. And We overtook them with chastisement, but they were not submissive to their Lord, nor do they humble themselves." 106

Concerning these obstinate people, the Holy Qur'an says:

"Or who is it that will give you sustenance if He should withhold His sustenance? Nay! They persist in disdain and aversion" 107

Imam 'Ali (as) says:

"Obstinacy deprives man of correct judgment". 108

At another case, he considers obstinacy as an agent for destruction:

"Beware that the stubborn mount should run away with you" (Avoid obstinacy because it will destroy you). 109

In a letter which he has written to people in different cities explaining what took place in Siffin, Imam 'Ali (as) talks about the nastiness of obstinacy in the following words:

"One who is obstinate and persists (in straying from the right path) is one who has turned himself backwards (to disbelief), whose heart Allah has covered and he has become liable to evil calamities."110

Sometimes this state of obstinacy is so great that the stubborn person, in order not to yield to justice, asks God for the descent of divine chastisement so that he may get destroyed, but he is not ready to hear the truth. In the occasion of the descent of the holy Surah of Ma'arij we read: When the great Prophet (S) of Islam introduced Imam 'Ali (as) as his successor in al-Ghadeer, a man called Luqman Ibn Harith or Harith Ibn Nu'man or Jabir Ibn Nasr asked the Prophet (S): "Did you do this on your own or was it an order from Allah?" The Prophet (S) answered:

"I swear by Allah who is Unique, this act was done by His order."

When Nu'man heard this reply from the Prophet, he went away, saying:

"O God, if this is the truth from you, throw a stone from the sky upon us."

At this moment, a stone fell from the sky, killing him on the spot. The following Qur'anic verse was then revealed to the Prophet:

"One demanding, demanded the chastisement which must befall the unbelievers – there is none to avert it – from Allah, the Lord of the ways of Ascent." [Qur'an 70:1–3].

It is for this reason that we sometimes hear:

"May Allah curse the obstinate".

Imam 'Ali (as) has also said:

"One who rides the palfrey of obstinacy is exposed to misfortunes"111

Imam 'Ali (as) has also said:

"The fruit of obstinacy is destruction".

Imam 'Ali (as) in his letter has also said:

"Beware that the stubborn mount should become ungovernable."

- 1. Fayz Kashani, in the 5th volume of Al-Mahajjah al-Bayda', enumerates twenty faults for language.
- 2. Op. Cit. pp. 194-199.
- 3. . Op. Cit.
- 4. Op. cit.
- 5. Usul al-Kafi, vol. 2, pp. 114-131.

- 6. Usul al-Kafi, vol.2, pp. 114-131.
- 7. . Bihar, vol.71, p.274.
- 8. .Qur'an 63:9
- 9. . Qur'an 17;29.
- 10. .Qur'an 25:67
- 11. . Ibn Abi al-Hadid's Sharh Nahj al-Balaghah, vol.5, p.48.
- 12. . Safinah al-Bihar, vol.2, p.327, item Qani'.
- 13. . Safinah al-Bihar, vol.2, p.327, item Qani'.
- 14. . Nahj al-Balaghah, Hikmah 342.
- 15. Ibn Abi al-Hadid, Commentary of Nahj al-Balaghah, vol. 16, p.98.
- 16. . Ghurar al-Hikam.
- 17. . Safinah al-Bihar, vol.2, p.469.
- 18. . Loc Cit.
- 19. . Safinah al-Bihar, vol.2, p.469.
- 20. . Safinah al-Bihar, vol.2, p.469.
- 21. Bihar, vol.75, p.71.
- 22. . Qur'an 17:19.
- 23. . Qur'an 18:103-105.
- 24. . Ghurar al-Hikam.
- 25. . Op. cit.
- 26. . Op. cit.
- 27. . Ghurar al-Hikam.
- 28. . Op. cit.
- 29. Ibn Abi al-Hadid's Sharh Nahj al-Balaghah, vol. 16, p.99.
- 30. Bihar al-Anwar, vol.74, p. 188.
- 31. Bihar, vol.74, p. 197.
- 32. . Op. cit. p. 192.
- <u>33.</u> . Qur'an 25:27–29. In the commentary of Majma' al-Bayan, vol.7, p. 166, under this verse, the vicious action of these two and the way 'Uqba turned against Islam and the reason for his animosity towards Islam because of Ubayy's temptations and their miserable ends are discussed. Refer to that source.
- 34. . Ghurar al-Hikam.
- 35. . Ghurar al-Hikam.
- 36. . Qur'an 4:10.
- 37. . Qur'an 2:174.
- 38. . Qur'an 18:49.
- 39. .Qur'an 99:8.
- 40. Bihar, vol.66, p.313.
- 41. . Wasa'il, vol.4, pp. 1129- 1176.
- 42. . Op. Cit.
- 43. Op. Cit.
- 44. . Bihar, vol.66, p.315.
- 45. . Al-Kafi, vol.2, p.331.
- 46. Bihar, vol.75, p.320.
- 47. . Kanz al-'Ummal, Hadith 7605.
- 48. . Al-Kafi, vol.2, p.331.
- 49. . Qur'an 39:16-17.
- 50. . Ibn Abi al-Hadid's Commentary on Nahj al-Balaghah, vol. 16, p. 102.
- 51. . Op. cit.

- 52. . Qur'an 29:43.
- 53. . Tuba prose, vol. 2 P 172.
- 54. . Raghib's Mufradat, P 341.
- 55. . Usul al-Kafi, vol. 1, p. 11.
- 56. . Qur'an 2:171.
- 57. . Raghib's Mufradat, p.341.
- 58. . Wasa'il al-Shi'ah, vol. 11, p. 163.
- 59. . Bihar, vol.78, p.9.
- <u>60.</u> Raghib's Mufradat, p.342, but in Nahj al-Balaghah, Hikmah no.338, instead of Al-'aql 'aqlan (There are two kinds of intellect) the expression Al-'ilm 'ilman (There are two kinds of knowledge) is used.
- 61. . Ghurar al-Hikam.
- <u>62.</u> . Ibn Maytham's Commentary on Nahj al-Balaghah, vol.5, p.51; Ibn Abi Al-Hadid's Commenatary on Nahj al-Balaghah, vol.16, p.102.
- 63. . Al-Nihayah, vol.4, p.248.
- 64. . Qur'an 12:111.
- 65. . Nahj al-Balaghah, Sermon 85.
- 66. . Ghurar al-Hikam.
- 67. . Op. cit.
- 68. . Ghurar al-Hikam.
- 69. . Nahj al-Balaghah, Hikmah 297.
- 70. . Al-Mahajjah al-Bayda, vol.5, p. 15.
- 71. . Kanz al-'Ummal, vol. 15, p. 791.
- 72. . Ghurar al-Hikam.
- 73. Bihar, vol.77, p. 165.
- 74. . Al-Mahajjah al-Bayda, vol.8, p.250; Mustadrak al-Hakim, vol.4, p.306.
- 75. . Tuhaf al-'Uqul, p.324.
- 76. . Ghurar al-Hikam.
- 77. . Op. cit.
- 78. . Nahj al-Balaghah, letter No 22.
- 79. . Nahj al-Balaghah, Hikmah 379.
- <u>80.</u> . "And they say: There is nothing but our life in this world; we live and die and nothing destroys us but time". [Qur'an 45:24].
- <u>81.</u> "The unbelievers say: 'This is a wonderful thing. What when we are dead and have become dust? That is a far (from probable) return. We know indeed what the earth diminishes of them, and with Us is a writing that preserves. [Qur'an 50:2–4].
- 82. . Qur'an 20:15.
- 83. "And whoever turns away from My reminder, his shall surely be a straitened life". [Qur'an 20:124].
- 84. Bihar, vol.71, p.339.
- 85. . Qur'an 2:189.
- 86. . Majma' al-Bayan, vol.2, p.282.
- 87. . Qur'an 20:132.
- 88. . Qur'an 28:83.
- 89. . Qur'an 3:137.
- 90. . Qur'an 7:84.
- 91. . Qur'an 7:86.
- 92. . Qur'an 10:39.
- 93. . Bihar, vol. 73 P 351.
- 94. Refer to Safinah al-Bihar, the items khatm and 'aqab.

- 95. . Safinah al-Bihar, the item 'aqab.
- 96. Safinah al-Bihar, the item 'aqab.
- 97. . Bihar, vol.77, p. 133.
- 98. . Qur'an 15:20.
- 99. . Tafsir Namunah, vol.9, p.22.
- 100. . Qur'an 11:6.
- 101. . Wasa'il, vol. 12, p.53.
- 102. . Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 103, p.8.
- 103. . Ibn Abi al-Hadid's Commentary on Nahj al-Balaghah, vol. 16, p. 104.
- 104. . Mustadrak Al-Wasa'il, vol.2, p.62.
- 105. Bihar, vol.77, p.47.
- 106. . Qur'an 23:75-76.
- 107. . Qur'an 67:21.
- 108. . Safinah al-Bihar, vol.2, p.505.
- 109. . Bihar, vol.77, p.208.
- 110. . Nahj al-Balaghah , Letter No 58.
- 111. Ghurar al-Hikam.

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