

43) Piety against Sins

Although the word Taqwa, which has already been used in relation to many topics, included Taqwa in relation to sins too, it takes a special meaning in relation to every particular issue. Therefore, we can say that Taqwa against sins is another kind of Taqwa.

The word “sins” has different connotations. The word “Khatee’ah”, “Thanb”, “Sayyi’ah”, “Ithm”, and “Issyan” are almost synonymous to the word “sin”. They all mean deviation from the right path and opposition to a command. Therefore, we can say that what is against human and natural law is considered as sin. Suicide, jumping down from a high place, going to a polluted atmosphere, holding oneself against the gravity of the earth, and going to an unsafe place are some examples.

Evidently, there is a great difference between the sins against the natural law and the sins against the divine law. In the natural law, what is against the regulations is considered as a sin when it entails harm for human beings. Otherwise, it is not considered as a sin. One, who jumps down from a rooftop and is sure that he will suffer no harm, commits no sin.

In Islam, what is contrary to the rules, whether or not there is harm, is considered as a sin, like keeping blasphemous books, drinking wine, and having instruments of debauchery at home.

In Islam, intention is very important. A tradition says: “The people of Fire abide in Fire, for their intention in this world was that if they continue to live, they would disobey God forever.”¹

(The harm of) the violation of the natural law occurs only in this world, whereas (the harm of) the violation of the divine law occurs both in this world and the hereafter: ***“This shall be as a disgrace for them in this world, and in the hereafter they shall have a grievous chastisement.”***²

As for the word ‘Khata’, it means deviation from the right path and it can be classified into three categories as follows:

1- Great sin is when man intends, from the beginning, to do something not good, like murder. In this relation, God says: ***“And do not kill your children for fear of poverty; We give them sustenance and yourselves (too); surely to kill them is a great sin.”***³

2- A well-known mistake is when a human being has a good intention, but he does not go in the right way. In relation to this, God says: ***“and whoever kills a believer by mistake, he should free a believing slave, and blood money should be paid to his people.”***⁴ In a famous tradition, we read: “Unintended Error and oblivion are forgiven for my Ummah.”

3- Opposite to that is that when one has an evil intention, but the result comes opposite to the evil intention. Here, both the intention and the deed are blameworthy.”⁵

The meaning of “a blameworthy mistake” both in the Holy Quran and traditions is the first category when both intention and doing are evil.

As for the word “Thanb” (fault), it, literally, means the tail of an animal. Hence, it means the doing that brings an evil end. Thus, the meaning of the verse: ***“and who forgives the faults but Allah?”***⁶ is “who forgives the consequences and punishments save God?”

As for the word “Sayyi’ah”, it means evil deed against good deed. The root of this word is “Soo” that is an act which makes man sorrowful, whether it is worldly or related to the hereafter, whether it is physical or spiritual.

Good deed and evil deed can be measured on the basis of reason and religion. In this relation, God says: ***“Whoever brings a good deed, he shall have ten like it, and whoever brings an evil deed, he shall be recompensed only with the like of it.”***⁷

Good deed and evil deed can also be measured on the basis of human nature. In this connection, God has said: ***“But when good befell them they said: this is due to us; and when evil afflicted them, they attributed it to the ill-luck of Musa and those with him.”***⁸ Here, what is meant is not sin, for they have nothing to do with sin, but something which is heavy for human nature.

As for the word “ithm”, one of its meanings is slowness. Hence, it may refer to those acts which deter man from rewards and good deeds. Drinking wine and gambling are among these sins. Thus, the meaning of this verse: ***“In both of them there is a great sin”***⁹ is that intoxicants and gambling make man sluggish to do good deeds.

As for the word “issyian”, it means disobedience.

From what we have discussed so far, it is inferred that sin and its synonyms, used in the Holy Quran and the Sunnah and especially in supplications are deeds with which the Lord of the universe and the Prophet are not pleased whether it is deviation from the right path, an evil act, an evil consequence, sluggishness in doing good or disobedience. As God is Compassionate and Benevolent to His servants and does not like them to be exposed to those sins, He has considered Taqwa against sins as something obligatory and has enjoined it repeatedly. The Verse 219 in the Quranic chapter (al-Baqarah :the Cow (2)), is an example. Allah has said: ***“And when it is said to them: guard against what is***

before you and what is behind you, that mercy may be had on you.”[10](#)

Elsewhere God has said: ***“Surely those who guard (against evil), when a visitation from Satan afflicts them, they become mindful, then lo! They see.”***[11](#)

Being asked about the meaning of the verse, Imam Sadiq (AS) said: “It is a sin that one intends to commit, but he will give it up when he remembers God.”[12](#)

There is a verse in the Holy Quran about a hypocrite called al-Akhnas ath-Thaqafi. He was a good-looking and eloquent man. One day, he came to the Messenger of Allah (SAW) to announce his allegiance, but God informed the Holy Prophet (SAW) of his hypocrisy:

“And among men is he whose speech about the life of this world causes you to wonder, and he calls on Allah to witness as to what is in his heart, yet he is the most violent of adversaries. 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 when it is said to him: guard against (the punishment of) Allah; pride carries him off to sin; therefore, hell is sufficient for him, and certainly it is an evil resting place.”[13](#)

In relation to the Hajj, God has said: ***“...and help one another in goodness and piety, and do not help one another in sin and aggression; surely Allah is severe in requiting (evil).”***[14](#)

As for usury, God says: ***“And guard yourselves against the fire which has been prepared for the unbelievers.”***[15](#) God has mentioned the word “Taqwa” wherever He has enjoined or forbidden something. As in the Quran, Taqwa has been recommended in traditions when something has been enjoined or prohibited.

Imam Ali (AS) has been reported as saying: “Be aware that sins are like untamed horses on which sinners ride; their reins have been let loose and they take the riders into fire.”

He has also said: “Be aware that Taqwa is like tamed horses on which the people of piety ride; they take the riders to paradise.”[16](#)

Haytham ibn Waqid has reported: “I heard Imam Sadiq (AS) say: ‘One whom God Almighty takes out of the humiliation of sin to the honor of piety; makes him rich without having wealth, honorable without having relatives, comforts him without having a friend...’”[17](#)

Imam Abu Ja’far al-Baqir (a.s.) (SAW) has been reported as saying: “By Allah, our Shia (followers) are but those who have Taqwa.”[18](#)

Imam Ali (AS) has been reported as saying: “Taqwa is what keeps you away from what makes you commit sin.”[19](#)

Truly, sin is a vice that makes man sick as a germ makes him sick. In the same way that when we get sick, we have to observe certain points in order to keep away from the sickness of soul, we have to observe certain things. Sin makes man badly sick in a way that it drives him toward disbelief. In this relation, God says: ***“Then evil was the end of those who did evil, because they rejected the signs of Allah and used to mock them.”***²⁰

The story of Barsisa, the pious and Balam Baoura shows how these men were driven to disbelief after years of devotion, and even knowing the Greatest name of Allah, and how Taqwa can save a sinner and drive him to salvation.

It has been related that in the city of Basra, there was a playgirl called Sha’wanah who was invited to every circle of debauchery and revelry. One day, she, along with her bondmaids, was passing by a quarter. She heard someone moaning and weeping. She sent a slave to that place to bring some news. The slave went away, but did not come back. Sha’wanah sent the second slave. She did not return either. The third one was sent. When she came back, she said:

“A preacher is giving a sermon from on the pulpit.” Sha’wanah went to see what he was speaking about. She heard him recite this verse: “But they reject the hour, and We have prepared a burning fire for him who rejects the hour. When it shall come into their sight from a distant place, they shall hear its vehement raging and roaring.”²¹

Hearing this, Sha’wanah underwent a spiritual change. She said to the preacher: “Will God forgive me if I repent?” He said: “Yes, even if your sins are as many as those of Sha’wanah.” The woman said: “I am Sha’wanah!”

The preacher talked to her and encouraged her in a way that she became a different person. Sha’wanah then set her slaves free, and she was engaged in prayer to the extent that she became lean, saying to herself: “Ah, when I am being consumed in this world like this, what will happen to me in the hereafter?”

She persisted in Taqwa to the extent that she herself became a moralist. She wept so much that people said to her: “You will go blind.” In response, she said: “To be blind in this world is better than to be blind in the Day of Reckoning.”²²

^{1.} Wasa’il al-Shiah, vol. 1, p. 68.

^{2.} Qur’an, 5:33.

^{3.} Qur’an, 17:31.

^{4.} Qur’an, 4:92.

^{5.} Mufradat ar-Raghib al-Isfahani.

^{6.} Qur’an, 3: 135.

^{7.} Qur’an, 6:160.

^{8.} Qur’an, 7:131.

^{9.} Qur’an, 2:219.

^{10.} Qur’an, 36:45.

^{11.} Qur’an, 7:201.

- [12.](#) Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 67, p. 287
- [13.](#) Qur'an, 2:204-206.
- [14.](#) Qur'an, 5:2.
- [15.](#) Qur'an, 3:131.
- [16.](#) Wasa'il al-Shiah, vol. 11, p. 191.
- [17.](#) Ibid.
- [18.](#) Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 67, p. 97.
- [19.](#) Mizan al-Hikmah.
- [20.](#) Qur'an, 30:10.
- [21.](#) Qur'an, 25:11-12.
- [22.](#) Mi'raj al-Sa'adah (chapter of repentance) ,p. 553.

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