

Author's Note

Clothing that guards (against evil), that is the best. (7:26)

Imam Ali (PBUH) has said:

“Know that people have not been entrusted with anything greater than piety which is the advice of us Ahl al-Bayt.”

Wasa'il al-Shi'ah, vol. 12, p. 155

Imam Ali (PBUH) has said:

“Certainly, fear of Allah is the medicine for your hearts, sight for the blindness of your spirits, and the cure for the ailments of your bodies.”

Nahj al-Balaghah, sermon 198

Most people wish they would know “what is the factor behind prosperity and happiness and what is the key to guidance and salvation?”

Many a man tries to find out “what will free him from bondage and save him from destruction?” Many a man wishes to know “what is the cure of his disease and his blind-heartedness?”

Many a man always thinks to understand “in what lies the healing of the disease of hearts, peace of mind for his fears, the illumination of his eyes and his affairs?”

Many a man is willing to reach honorable stations and to attain ease of life and safety. There are many a man whose desire is to attain honor, to get blessings, to resolve his problems, to reject evil, to accept good deeds, to overcome enemies, to have good end, to distinguish between justice and injustice, to

acquire real knowledge, to obtain divine pleasure and a provision for the hereafter.

Nevertheless, they wonder what that factor is. Every group of people may consider an ideal for themselves but they will reach nowhere unless they come to know it through Islam. Piety is what Islam has introduced as an answer and it will be elaborated in the following discussions.

One must note that piety as presented by certain people is not against freedom rather it is immunity from bestial life as Imam Ali (AS) has said: “Observe piety so that you will be safeguarded.”¹ The Imam has also said that piety is freedom from every servitude.

Therefore, being pious does not mean to be captive or to deny one’s freedom, rather, a pious man has freed himself from what is harmful to him and is safeguarded from all harms. When a person builds a strong house for himself or when he is in warm clothes they never say he is a captive or he has denied himself freedom, but they say it is for the protection of his life and wealth against illness and dangers.

One must note that there are two types of piety or self-restraint. Firstly a pious man tries not to expose himself to deviation or sin. He does not attend a place where God’s existence, prophethood, imamate, and the Day of Judgment are denied. He will not attend a place where people backbite others, prostitutes or women without headscarf are present. He will not go to places where people gamble, drink wine, or listen to music, and on the whole where sins are committed. Secondly, piety becomes so internalized in him that when faced with moral, socio-political, and ideological deviations, he will endeavor in a way that he will not only lose his piety but he will enjoin piety too.

Beyond doubt, both conditions are good. That is to say once a sound man attempts not to enter a polluted environment in order to keep safe, and at other times vaccinate himself so as if he enters a polluted place he will not be affected by negative factors. Nevertheless, the latter is preferable, for such an individual will never get deviated whereas in the former state, the danger of deviation is possible.

Towards the end, it goes without saying that there are numerous Quranic verses and narrations on piety.

In certain cases, the very piety has been stressed, like when it is said “Piety is the best virtue”², or when it is said “Piety is the strongest foundation”³. Elsewhere, it is said “People have not been recommended to anything greater than piety”⁴.

In other cases, a specific subject has been included like when it is said “Avoid small lies when talking seriously or jokingly”⁵, or when it is said “Avoid open sins”.

In other cases, time is included like when it is said “Fear Allah day and night”. At other times, piety as it should be really observed, has been expressed like when it is said “... be careful of (your duty to) Allah with the case which is due to Him”. There are other interpretations of piety which will be elaborated later on in this book.

It is well to mention that all the forbidding rules in the holy Quran and narrations like the forbidden acts or

such words as “You only” and its likes are true examples of *Taqwa* (piety and fear of Allah). If piety means self-restraint from what is bad, it has a positive connotation and is not limited to a negative aspect. It is for this reason that the holy prophet of Islam (SAW) has said that the comprehensive meaning of *Taqwa* is found in the words of Allah:

“Surely Allah enjoins the doing of justice and the doing of good (to others) and the giving to the kindred, and He forbids indecency and evil and rebellion; he admonishes you that you may be mindful.” (16:90)

Therefore, where *Taqwa* means self-restraint against all evils, it has a specific meaning in relation to that subject. When dealing with ideology if *Taqwa* is mentioned in its aftermath, it has a meaning related to ideology, and if there is a mention of such sins as telling lies, backbiting, and slander, it means to be careful of committing sins. When *Taqwa* is mentioned in transaction and usury, it will certainly mean to be careful of usury and unjust transactions. On this basis, piety has been classified into different categories. When *Taqwa* is mentioned as a general term, it has come to mean piety and being careful of sins.

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- [1.](#) Nahj al-Balaghah, Sermon 232.
- [2.](#) Ghurar al-Hikam (piety).
- [3.](#) Ibid., (piety).
- [4.](#) Wasa'il al-Shiah, vol. 12, p. 155.
- [5.](#) Safeenat al-Bihar, vol. 2, p. 472.

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