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Chapter 1: On the Intellect

[Discourse 1: On the Nobility of the Intellect](#)

[Introduction](#)

It has been narrated on the authority of Abi Ja'far al-Baqir (a.s.), God – Exalted is His Praise – created the Intellect. Then God ordered it to come forward, and it did. He then ordered it to go back, and it did. Then God stated, “I swear by My Majesty and Honor and I have not created any creatures dearer to me than you (referring to the Intellect), and would not perfect anyone's intellect unless I like him. I shall enjoin others to do good and admonish others against evil due to the Intellect. Reward and punishment is given by means of the Intellect.”

The Intellect is the most important thing which is the source of man's honor and virtue. Also it is the most significant blessing which God the Blessed the Sublime has favoured man with, so that he may distinguish the good from the evil, and the ugly from the beautiful by using it.

From the above tradition one can also conclude that all of the following are due to man having an Intellect: enjoining (people) to the good and forbidding them from doing the evil; spiritual rewards and Divine Punishments as well as the issue of being responsible for our deeds.

[The Intellect makes one pay attention to his duties](#)

It is also stated in the following Honorable Quranic verse:

“We did indeed offer the Trust to the Heavens and the Earth and the Mountains; but they refused to undertake it, being afraid thereof: but man undertook it; He was indeed unjust and foolish.”

The Holy Quran: Al-Ahzab 33:72

What is the meant by the phrase 'but man undertook it' in the above verse? What honor and virtue did

man have that enabled him to undertake such a heavy and burdensome responsibility? It can be stated that the answer to the above question is man's nobility and honor which are due to his Intellect. Man could undertake this Divine Offer of the Trust because of the existence of his Intellect.

God the Exalted says:

“We have honored the sons of Adam; provided them with transport on land and sea; given them for sustenance things good and pure; and conferred on them special favours, above a great part of our creation.” The Holy Quran: Isra 17:70

Therefore, all this honor and virtues are due to the Intellect. Also the Munificent Quran stresses that one must think and use his Intellect and find the solution to his problems. This has been stressed many times in the Holy Quran such as,

“Perchance ye may understand.” The Holy Quran: Al-Baqara 2:73¹

The honor of man who is the best creature in the world is due to the fact that everything in the world is gathered together in him. This means he has the attributes of the angels as well as the attributes of animals, the plants and the solid objects. It is exactly for this reason that he has the potential and worthiness of being a symbol of Divine Names and Attributes.

The Reason why Angels prostrate before man

The angels prostrate to man exactly due to the existence of the Intellect in him. Man is the only creature from amongst all the creatures that has acquired this honor. Of course, this is an honor for some people and not every man is endowed with such an honor. One who carries out his Divine duties and acts according to the purely Divine Laws has this honor.

Man can reach the state of being the symbol of Divine Attributes. He can attain such a high position as to assume the position of Prophethood or Trusteeship (Divine Leadership). In fact, the purpose of the creation of the world is bringing about the perfect man. This means that God has created all creatures for mankind and He has created mankind for the sake of the perfect man referring to the Prophets and their Testamentary Trustees.

Therefore, the Intellect which is the source of man's honor is a precious jewel that God the Exalted has placed in man. Man can attain high ranks and get near to God's Threshold by using this precious jewel, i.e. the Intellect.

Moreover, all goodness, perfection and praise-worthy behaviors are rooted in the Intellect.

The intellect invites one to seek Knowledge

Knowledge is the first thing which the Intellect directs man to seek. Man is promoted to a higher position

when knowledge appears in man. This is similar to the case of the Prophets and saints whose rank is higher and better than the angels, since they have real knowledge. However, the Intellect must be in line with religious jurisprudence, so that the Intellect may invite others to knowledge.

The first decree which the Islamic Shariah (law) prescribes is seeking knowledge. God's Prophet (S) has stated the following in this regard,

'Seeking knowledge is incumbent upon every Muslim man and woman.' He (a.s.) has stated, 'Seek knowledge even if it is in China as seeking knowledge is incumbent upon every Muslim.' Muhammad (S) has also stated, 'If people only knew what a great gain there is in seeking knowledge, they would seek it every moment – even if their blood may be shed or they may get drowned at sea in this way.'

For this very reason, acquiring knowledge is of such great importance that if an individual faces problems while seeking knowledge, he must struggle against them. He must be serious and try as hard as he can to attain high ranks.

It is also stated in the following Quranic verses:

“Then, for such as had transgressed all bounds, and had preferred the life of this world, their Abode will be Hell-Fire; And for such as had entertained the fear of standing before their Lord's (tribunal) and had restrained (their) soul from lower desires, their abode will be the Garden.”The Holy Quran: An-Naziat 79:37-41

This means that they have gotten to know God which is the first thing that the Intellect invites one to. And knowledge is the recognition of God. Once one gets to know God, he discovers the Divine Majesty. Thus, the fear of God will be established in his heart. He would then restrain himself and control his lust. Therefore, he may attain his true abode in Paradise.

Discourse 2: Signs of the Perfection of the Intellect

Virtues of the Intellect

There are many honorable verses and traditions about the virtues of the Intellect. As an example, I state a tradition from Imam Musa Ibn Ja'far al-Kazim (a.s.) here. In some of Imam Musa Ibn Ja'far al-Kazim's (a.s.) recommendations to Hisham Ibn Hakam – may God be pleased with him – it has been stated, "O Hisham! If anyone wants to be self-sufficient without riches, be free of jealousy and have a healthy religion, he should really cry hard before the Honorable God the Exalted, so that God may perfect his Intellect. Once his Intellect is perfected he would be content with the minimum necessities of life. Whoever is content with the minimum necessities of life will become self-sufficient. However, if one is not content with the minimum necessities of life, he will never become self-sufficient."

This means that if one is not content but is greedy, he will never attain self-sufficiency.

Contentment is a sign of the Perfection of the Intellect

In another tradition it has been narrated that the Commander of the Faithful Ali (a.s.) stated, "Whoever is content is honorable, and whoever is greedy is debased." In another tradition it has been narrated that the Commander of the Faithful Ali (a.s.) stated, "Contentment is a form of wealth that never ends."

Attributes which Indicate the Perfection of the Intellect

In another tradition it has been narrated that Imam Musa Ibn Ja'far al-Kazim (a.s.) told Hisham – may God be pleased with him – "O Hisham! The Commander of the Faithful Ali (a.s.) always stated, 'God has never been worshipped any better than when He has been worshipped with the Intellect. No one's intellect is perfected unless he acquires good characteristics.'" The first sentence in this tradition is similar to the decree of Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq (a.s.) which stated, "Intellect is that ability by which the Merciful God is worshipped, and by which Heaven is attained."²

However, the attributes of a wise individual as stated in the words of Imam Musa Ibn Ja'far al-Kazim (a.s.) are as follows, "Amongst the attributes of a wise individual one can mention that he is always safe from unbelief and wickedness. He is also expected to always make progress and be good."³ He avoids being talkative. He never says more than what is necessary.⁴ The extra money he has is donated to others.⁵ What he benefits from in this world is the minimum that is absolutely necessary for him. He never demands more than that.⁶

Acquiring Knowledge as a Sign of the Perfection of the Intellect

A sensible and wise individual never becomes tired of learning since his Intellect forces him to seek knowledge. He seriously endeavours to study, gain knowledge and virtues around the clock, and he tries to attain a high position in this world.

Of course, it is obvious that the knowledge-seeker's goal must be the Holy Attributes of Allah and attaining His Satisfaction. A knowledge-seeker must not strive to achieve worldly pomp and short-lasting worldly positions. We read the following in the Holy Quran in this regard,

***'... Those truly fear Allah, among His Servants, who have knowledge: for Allah is Exalted in Might, Oft-Forgiving.'* The Holy Quran: Fatir 35:28**

Therefore, true wisdom is truly-fearing Allah and being afraid of disobeying Him. Imam al-Baqir (a.s.) has stated the following in this regard, "The perfection and completeness of perfection is to understand and to become wise in religion meaning to try to understand the religion. And perfection is having patience in dealing with calamities and life's difficulties as well as being economical in life's affairs."⁷

A similar narration has been reported on the authority of Imam al-Ridha (a.s.), "The servants (i.e. the people) will not attain the reality of faith before they enjoy three characters: knowledge of religion,

moderation of livelihood, and steadfastness against misfortunes. All power belongs to God the Exalted the Great."⁸

This is also stressed in another tradition which has been quoted on the authority of God's Prophet (S) in which he (S) also considers man's prosperity to be found in three things. He (S) states, "Whenever God intends to grant a blessing to His servant, He makes him an ascetic; a jurisprudent in religion; and aware of his own shortcomings. Whoever has such attributes, surely the blessings of this world and the Hereafter are bestowed upon him."⁹

That is to say that all of an individual's attention is concentrated upon his own faults. And he never intends to pry into others affairs so as to reveal them.

Acquiring Knowledge of the Religion is a Sign of the Perfection of the Intellect

Now let us see what sort of knowledge is the knowledge that has had so much importance placed on it and been encouraged to gain. What knowledge has so much reward?

In answer to this question it must be stated that even though every form science is appreciable, there are three sciences which have been encouraged to attain more than others, being:

- 1- The principles of religion
- 2- The branches of religion
- 3- Ethics

There is a tradition on the authority of God's Prophet (S) which says, "Indeed knowledge is three things: strong verses, ethics and established traditions."¹⁰

Here strong verses can either be interpreted to refer to the Holy Quranic verses or the principles of religion. Established traditions could also be interpreted to refer to the obligatory and the recommendable deeds, or knowledge thereof. Ethics could also refer to either ethics itself or the knowledge of ethics. Therefore a sensible and wise individual never becomes tired of getting educated.

It has been quoted on the authority of God's Prophet (S), "On the Resurrection Day, an individual will not make a move unless four things are asked from him:

- 1- He will be asked how he has spent his priceless life.
- 2- He will be asked how his youth was spent.
- 3- He will be asked how his wealth was earned and how it was spent.
- 4- He will be asked whether he expressed love for the members of the Prophet Muhammad's Household

or not."¹¹

The last question is because the love for the members of the Household of God's Prophet (S) is just the reward for the Prophet's mission as we read in the following verse of the Holy Quran,

"... Say: 'No reward do I ask of you for this except the love of those near of kin.'..." The Holy Quran: Ash-Shura 42:23.

Now let's return to the sayings of the Commander of the Faithful Ali (a.s.). He (a.s.) stated, "To be belittled but be with God is better than to be honored in the company of other than God." He (a.s.) also stated, "Being humble is better than being honored for the one who is intelligent."

The Prophet (S) stated the following in this regard, "God will raise the rank of anyone who is humble before God. God will debase anyone who is haughty."¹² The Prophet (S) also stated, "He (an intelligent person) would consider any little bit of goodness from others to be a lot. He (an intelligent person) would consider any goodness done by himself to be very little, even if it is great. He (an intelligent person) would consider everyone else to be better than himself. He (an intelligent person) would consider himself to be worse than everyone else."¹³

The last sentence can have two meanings:

1- These attributes are actually the perfection of the attributes and he (the intelligent person) has all of them.

3- The perfection of that individual just depends on this, meaning that the best attribute to be found in man is that he never takes himself into consideration, and he always considers himself to be lower in rank than others.

Discourse 3: The Intellect Moderates Lust and Anger and Fosters

Wisdom

The Apparent Proof and the Hidden Proof

The Blessed Imam Musa Ibn Ja'far Al-Kazim (a.s.) stated the following about the Intellect, "O Hisham! God has two Proofs for the people: One being apparent and the other being hidden. God's apparent Proof is God's Prophets (a.s.), Messengers (a.s.) and the Imams (a.s.). God's Hidden Proof is the Intellect."¹⁴

Therefore, God has established two Proofs for men – one which is apparent being the Prophets of God. Also the other Proof is Hidden being the Intellect that is similar to an angel for guiding man which God has placed within him as an ability.

The Need for the Prophets along with the Intellect

Here a question comes to mind. Why is there the need for the Apparent Proofs being the Prophets when there is a Prophet within us called the Intellect? It invites man to the belief in the oneness of God, virtues and perfection. The Intellect makes an individual stay away from vices.

The answer to this question is that the Intellect has a limited ability to understand matters. Should there be a veil in front of it, it must be guided so that this cover is removed. It is with the help of that guider being a Prophet that the Intellect can discover and understand the truth.

For example, man has eyes which enable him to see. This ability to see is always with him. However, when man is surrounded by darkness, he cannot see at all. However, when light comes the veil of darkness is removed and man can see everything. The same also holds true for the ability of the Intellect or wisdom which is a limited ability for understanding that exists in mankind. However, it needs a guide so that the various issues are explained for him in detail. In other words, the Intellect is an inner light. However, there must also be an apparent light so that the Intellect may be helped in understanding the truth.

That is why if one does not have the faculty of the Intellect, he bears no responsibility at all. And also he has no need for the Prophets. However, if one possesses intellectual abilities he would become the reflection of God's Beauty and Majesty with the aid of the Prophets and approach the Threshold of God's Throne. Upon understanding the position and status of the Intellect, we must pray to God to increase this ability within us.

The Significance of the Intellect and its Relationship to Lust and Anger

It was stated that the Intellect is similar to an angel that has been sent by God the Exalted to guide mankind. However, it must be noted that lust and anger also exist in man just like the Intellect. Even so, sometimes lust and anger rebel and are not satisfied within prescribed limits.

Lust and anger want to rule over the soul which is the master of the body and force it to obey them, so that whatever they desire is done by the soul. The Intellect opposes our lust and anger. The powers of lust and anger even try to destroy the Intellect. However, the Intellect does not aim to destroy these powers. Rather, the Intellect struggles to reform them, since lust and anger must exist in man as stated before. It is by means of lust which man may obtain his own interests. And it is by means of anger which he may fend off damages from himself. Although the two powers of lust and anger are beneficial for man's life, sometimes they rebel.

The goal of the Intellect is to reform and moderate them so that they may be prevented from rebelling. There is a real conflict going on between the Intellect and these two; and as a result the realm of an individual's being is a battlefield for the fight between the Intellect, lust and anger. God has given man the Intellect to help him overcome lust and anger and not let them rule over his soul.

The Intellect can cause lust and anger to be suppressed, and not succeed. This is just that struggle with the spirit of lewdness. The spirit of lewdness is the spirit which is dominated by lust and anger. Once these two powers dominate man's soul, it is man's own responsibility to rid himself of them. God the Exalted has granted him the Intellect to assist him in overcoming these powers by moderating and controlling them. Should the Intellect attain authority and moderate lust, the attribute of modesty appears. Moreover, should the Intellect attain authority and moderate anger, the attribute of bravery appears.

When anger is moderated many pleasing attributes spring from it. Modesty appears as a result of the moderation of the power of lust. There are many virtues and much perfection which appear as a result of modesty.

The reason we say that these two powers must be moderated is that each of the powers of lust and anger have two extreme sides. One extreme side of the power of lust is overindulgence in sex, while the other extreme is rigidity and that is putting lust completely aside. Bravery is also the moderate form of the power of anger. Bravery should be moderated so that if bravery is in the excess, dangers result and a fool-hardy person is one who gets himself involved in dangerous and frightening situations. On the other hand, if an individual goes to the other extreme he would become too scared. However, when anger is moderated by the Intellect, this could be called bravery.

However, the Intellect itself may get deviated and go to extremes. One extreme side of the deviation of the Intellect is ignorance, while the other extreme is thinking too much in such a way that man gradually forgets the truth, and thinks about futile matters. For instance, it is possible that things will get to a point where an individual imagines that God does not exist at all and that nothing else exists except tangible matters.

Even it is possible that the Intellect imagines that nothing else exists in this world except for the imagination like a group of Sufi philosophers who wrote, "There were some people who followed a man called Birhun – The Wise. He believed that whatever you see in this world is not real. He even believed that the people themselves did not exist in reality. He believed that it was all just imagined. He maintained that pain does not exist. He believed in this so much that even if he ran into an animal or obstacle in the market place, he did not protect himself. However, his students would take hold of him and direct him over to a corner, so that he would not run into anything else."

This was an example of extravagance of the Intellect. However, if the Intellect goes to the other extreme, ignorance results. Ignorance may be simple in which case it may be cured. It may be compounded, which would be extremely difficult to cure.

The one who does not know and knows that he knows not shall succeed in life, since he will try to overcome his ignorance and carry out his responsibilities. This refers to the case of simple ignorance in which case the ignorant individual knows he is ignorant. Therefore, he slowly tries to learn and would

ultimately be able to manage his affairs.

The one who knows not and does not know that he knows not shall remain forever in the state of compounded ignorance. This refers to a person who is ignorant, but is unaware of his ignorance forever. However, he who knows and knows that he knows shall succeed in the world.

Therefore, we can conclude that there is a constant conflict between the Intellect, lust and anger in one's body. The forces of lust and anger are trying to subdue the spirit and the Intellect; and pull them towards the rank of an animal. They even try to destroy the Intellect.

On the other hand, the Intellect does not want to destroy lust and anger. Rather, it attempts to moderate them. Moreover, the Intellect tries to make the spirit obey it, so that the spirit can attain the rank of Divine Proximity by obeying the religious rules. Should the spirit obey the Intellect, its rank will be raised and it will attain Divine Proximity. However, if the spirit follows lust and anger and indulges in them, it will be lowered to the rank of an animal.

His Holiness the Commander of the Faithful Ali (a.s.) stated, "Patience is a covering curtain. The Intellect is a sharp sword. You may cover up your shortcomings and behavioral disorders with the aid of your patience, and fight with and kill the soul's desires with the aid of your Intellect."¹⁵

The Holy War against the Self and its Relationship to the Intellect and the Soul

Now the importance of waging a Holy War against the soul will be clarified. And it will become evident why an individual must wage a Holy War against the soul and not let it obey lust and anger, but rather force his soul to obey his Intellect's orders. Of course, waging war against the soul is an exceedingly difficult task, and struggling against the soul's desires requires a serious effort.

There is always a fight going on between the Intellect on one side, and lust and anger on the other side. If the Intellect overcomes the other two, then an individual is led to obey religious rules and use knowledge. He then attains the rank of Divine Proximity. However, if lust and anger overcome the Intellect, he is pulled toward the rank of an animal and joins the devils. This is what Imam as-Sadiq (a.s.) stated when asked about the Intellect, "The Intellect is that ability by which the Merciful God is worshipped, and by which Heaven is attained."¹⁶

Then they asked the Imam (a.s.), "Was it not the Intellect which existed in Muaviyah?" The Imam (a.s.) replied, "No. What he had was not the Intellect, but rather it was trickery and naughtiness which resemble the Intellect, while they are not actually the Intellect."

How can Justice be Attained?

Some have stated there are four powers which exist in an individual and are somewhat superior in comparison to other powers:

(1) Intellect

(2) Lust

(3) Anger

(4) Imagination

The task of the power of imagination is to perceive the details, while the task of the intellectual ability is to understand the whole. If the intellectual ability is moderated and there is no extravagance, then wisdom would appear. Wisdom means knowledge of the reality of things to the extent of man's ability to bear such concepts as the concept of monotheism or other things. Moreover when lust is moderated, modesty is gained, and when anger is moderated bravery appears.

Also some moralists say that the three powers are (1) bravery, (2) modesty, and (3) wisdom. Bravery results from the moderation of anger; modesty results from the moderation of lust; and wisdom results from the moderation of the Intellect. These three powers are the basis for more perfection and virtues. If one possesses these three powers, he possesses justice. However, those who say the power of the imagination can be moderated are of the opinion that justice will appear as a result of the moderation of the power of imagination.

Motivating the Intellect as the Goal of the Prophets' Mission

Therefore, the appointment of the Messengers and the Prophets to their posts is to awaken the Intellect and put it into motion. The Commander of the Faithful Ali (a.s.) stated, "God sent the Prophets from amongst the descendants of Adam (a.s.), so that they would demand mankind to be faithful to the covenant between God and man's innate disposition. And God sent the Prophets to remind mankind of the forgotten Divine Blessings, and to bring out the hidden treasure called the Intellect. This is so that with this intellectual talent, mankind would obey the decrees issued by the Prophets."¹⁷

One of the tasks of the Intellect is to invite human beings to knowledge. Man's Intellect forces him to seek knowledge and get to know monotheism (Towheed), the Prophethood (Nabuwat) and other religious beliefs. The Intellect invites man to seek knowledge. Knowledge is the most supreme virtue and perfection which could be imagined for mankind to possess. If man does not possess knowledge, he cannot make use of the Intellect and Divine Laws. Therefore, knowledge is of extreme importance and one must seriously try to acquire it.

^{1.} and several other verses.

^{2.} Kafi, 1/11.

^{3.} The most supreme form of which is faith.

^{4.} He never gossips, lies or makes fun of people. He never says anything which is meaningless.

^{5.} This means that he always pays for the necessary expenses for which he is responsible and gives charity, too.

^{6.} This means that he is content with what he has.

- [7.](#) Kafi, 1/32.
- [8.](#) Tuhuful – Uqool, 471.
- [9.](#) Bihar ul–Anwar
- [10.](#) Kafi, 1/32.
- [11.](#) Bihar ul–Anwar, 71/180.
- [12.](#) Bihar ul–Anwar, 75/122.
- [13.](#) Kafi, 1/18–19.
- [14.](#) Kafi, 1/16.
- [15.](#) Nahjul Balaghah, Words of Wisdom 424.
- [16.](#) Kafi, 1/11.
- [17.](#) Nahjul Balaghah, Sermon 1.

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