

## Chapter 2: Ethical Aspect

In the process of structuring a human community, moral standards represent the second basis on which it stands. These moral standards express the sentimental and cerebral aspects of human behavior and ties linked to justice and injustice, goodness and evil, spiritual/mental perfection and depravity in the progress of humanity. To sum up, philosophers describe *moral standards as practical reason and doctrinal and intellectual values as dependent upon hypothetical reason.*

### The Role of Ethics in the Formation of Religious Laws

The Holy Imams of the Ahl al-Bayt (‘a) presented the features of this aspect through the following two points:

- (1) The role played by moral standards in the formation of religious laws and a system for human society.
- (2) The responsibility of man regarding moral standards defined through the desire to achieve perfection through them.

These two points became the sharpest points of disagreement in Islamic ideology. A large number of Islamic intellectuals adopted the notion of fatalism (*jabr*), which argues that man actually has no control over his ethical and behavioral deviations since they are independent of his free will; hence, man is controlled by the Divine will throughout his existence, and his deeds are only made and created by God.

This, however, makes no sense. It implies that God’s punishment of man for violations of religious laws is opposed to Divine justice or inappropriate because man lacks any independent ethical perceptions by which he may deem things good or hideous. On the contrary, man is obligated to obey religious laws representing God’s commandment and Will. In this case, humans are under the absolute authority of God in all affairs and, as is declared in the following Qur’anic verse, God cannot be questioned about any of His affairs:

(لَا يُسْأَلُ عَمَّا يَفْعَلُ وَهُمْ يُسْأَلُونَ (21:23)

***He cannot be questioned concerning what He does and they shall be questioned. (21:23)***

Moreover, religious laws, under such circumstances, become devoid of any ethical or human background because these laws are exclusive expressions of the Divine legislative Will.

Conversely, the Ahl al-Bayt ('a) School has laid stress on two conceptions of this notion:

**First:** Just as man is ethically capable of perceiving the goodness and evilness of things on the whole, so also can he perceive the evilness of punishing people for deeds that they are compelled to do and the evilness of forcing people to perform some acts and avoid others while they lack any willpower to act. It is this ethical perception that can guide man to many divine facts.

**Second:** Religious law has come to reveal and define the details of the total awareness with which Almighty Allah has created man. Thus, Divine religious law is not only an obligation through which Almighty Allah practices His absolute authority over man but also represents Divine justice, wisdom, and Almighty Allah's absolute dispensation of man's acts. In other words, religious law corresponds to benefits and detriments of existence and progress of man towards perfection in this world. Hence, it holds an ethical aspect.

We can now understand the significance of the theological battle that the Ahl al-Bayt ('a) fought to define the ethical aspects of religious laws by raising the issue of the goodness and evilness of things understood by the human will and the relationship between human will and Divine will:

لَا جَبْرٌ وَلَا تَفْوِيضٌ؛ بَلْ أَمْرٌ بَيْنَ أَمْرَيْنِ

There is neither compulsion (by Almighty Allah to do things), nor is there absolute delegation of power to man; rather, it is a course in the middle of these two courses.

People's deeds, which are the objects of religious laws, are the result of a person's will, thus making the person responsible for them. At the same time, humans are the creatures of Almighty Allah Who has created them with a will, and humans—in their existence, survival and power—are subject to Divine will and power and cannot act without Divine provision of existence and power.

The Ahl al-Bayt ('a) have extracted this role of moral standards from the Holy Qur'an. Confirming freedom of human will, the Holy Qur'an sets forth the following example:

ضَرَبَ اللَّهُ مَثَلًا عَبْدًا مَمْلُوكًا لَا يَقْدِرُ عَلَى شَيْءٍ وَمَنْ رَزَقْنَاهُ مِنَّْا رِزْقًا حَسَنًا فَهُوَ يُنْفِقُ مِنْهُ سِرًّا وَجَهْرًا ۖ هَلْ يَسْتَوُونَ ۗ ۚ الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ ۚ ۚ بَلْ أَكْثَرُهُمْ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ (16:75)

**Allah sets forth a parable: consider a slave, the property of another, who has no power over anything, and one whom We have granted from Ourselves a goodly sustenance; so, he spends from it secretly and openly. Are the two alike? All praise is due to Allah! Nay, most of them do not know. (16:75)**

It also provides humans the desire to ponder this issue, such as in the following holy verse:

(قُلْ هَلْ يَسْتَوِي الَّذِينَ يَعْلَمُونَ وَالَّذِينَ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ 39:9)

**Say: Are those who know and those who do not know alike? (39:9)**

It also provides the concepts of good and evil, justice and inequity, honesty and lying, and miserliness and altruism as well as other concepts:

وَلَا تَسْتَوِي الْحَسَنَةُ وَلَا السَّيِّئَةُ

**Not alike are the good and the evil. (41:34)**

By discussing such concepts, the Holy Qur'an aims at arousing man's natural and sentimental perceptions, because these perceptions represent the foundations of ethical behavior, which is defined and depicted by the Holy Qur'an in detail and which we call *rational good and evil*.

When the Ahl al-Bayt ('a) directed their followers to adhere to this doctrine of Divine justice, which has become one of the fundamentals of their sect, they intended to establish an ethical basis in the spiritual and mental structure of their followers. They instituted a sort of psychological and spiritual immunity to protect their followers against supporting or keeping silent with regard to grave ethical deviations, like the ascription of inequity and aggression to Almighty Allah.

## **Distinction between Islam and Faith**

The Holy Imams ('a) distinguished a Muslim from a believer on ethical grounds, as is mentioned in the Holy Qur'an:

قَالَتِ الْأَعْرَابُ آمَنَّا ۖ قُلْ لَمْ تُؤْمِنُوا وَلَكِنْ قُولُوا أَسْلَمْنَا وَلَمَّا يَدْخُلِ الْإِيمَانُ فِي قُلُوبِكُمْ ۖ وَإِنْ تُطِيعُوا اللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُ لَا يَلِتْكُمْ مِنْ أَعْمَالِكُمْ شَيْئًا ۖ إِنَّ اللَّهَ غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ ۖ إِنَّمَا الْمُؤْمِنُونَ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا بِاللَّهِ وَرَسُولِهِ ثُمَّ لَمْ يَرْتَابُوا وَجَاهَدُوا بِأَمْوَالِهِمْ وَأَنْفُسِهِمْ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ ۖ أُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الصَّادِقُونَ

**The dwellers of the desert say, "We believe." Say, "You do not believe but say, 'We submit' and faith has not yet entered into your hearts. And, if you obey Allah and His Messenger, He will not**

***diminish aught of your deeds. Surely, Allah is Forgiving, Merciful. The (true) believers are only those who believe in Allah and His Messenger then they doubt not and struggle hard with their wealth and their lives in the way of Allah. They are the truthful ones. (49: 14–15)***

Accordingly, declaration of Islam in utterance of the two statements of belief (i.e. *shahadah*), belief in the Last Day, performing obligatory prayers, observance of fasting, performance of the ritual pilgrimage (to the Holy House of Allah in Mecca), and payment of the poor-rate (*zakat*)—all stand as the first step of Islamic doctrine. By declaring and performing such, one's blood is protected from being shed, property and honor maintained, and the general Islamic social laws applied. From an ethical aspect, however, all these differ in reality from the actual commitment to Islam and that which stems from such commitment.

As for faith (i.e. *iman*), it represents a high rank of firm belief in the doctrine and also steadfastness in whatever it requires and whatever results from it.

The following text—reported by al-Kulayni, in his book of *al-Kafi*, through a valid chain of authority, from Hamran ibn A'yun—is the best depiction of this conviction and clarifies the difference between being Muslim and being faithful:

Imam Muhammad al-Baqir ('a) has said:

الإِيمَانُ مَا اسْتَقَرَّ فِي الْقَلْبِ وَأَفْضَى بِهِ إِلَى اللَّهِ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ وَصَدَقَهُ الْعَمَلُ بِالطَّاعَةِ لِلَّهِ وَالتَّسْلِيمِ لِأَمْرِهِ. وَالْإِسْلَامُ مَا ظَهَرَ مِنْ قَوْلٍ أَوْ فِعْلٍ، وَهُوَ الَّذِي عَلَيْهِ جَمَاعَةٌ مِنَ النَّاسِ مِنَ الْفُرْقِ كُلِّهَا. وَيَه حُقِنَتْ الدَّمَاءُ وَعَلَيْهِ جَرَتِ الْمَوَارِيثُ وَجَارَ النِّكَاحُ وَاجْتَمَعُوا عَلَى الصَّلَاةِ وَالزَّكَاةِ وَالصَّوْمِ وَالْحَجِّ فَخَرَجُوا بِذَلِكَ مِنَ الْكُفْرِ وَأُضِيفُوا إِلَى الْإِيمَانِ. وَالْإِسْلَامُ لَا يُشْرِكُ الْإِيمَانَ وَالْإِيمَانُ يُشْرِكُ الْإِسْلَامَ وَهُمَا فِي الْقَوْلِ وَالْفِعْلِ يَجْتَمِعَانِ، كَمَا صَارَتِ الْكُعْبَةُ فِي الْمَسْجِدِ وَالْمَسْجِدُ لَيْسَ فِي الْكُعْبَةِ. وَكَذَلِكَ الْإِيمَانُ يُشْرِكُ الْإِسْلَامَ وَالْإِسْلَامُ لَا يُشْرِكُ الْإِيمَانَ. وَقَدْ قَالَ اللَّهُ تَعَالَى: { قَالَتْ الْأَعْرَابُ آمَنَّا. قُلْ لَمْ تُؤْمِنُوا، وَلَكِنْ قُولُوا: أَسْلَمْنَا، وَلَمَّا يَدْخُلِ الْإِيمَانُ فِي قُلُوبِكُمْ. } فَقَوْلُ اللَّهِ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ أَصْدَقُ الْأَقْوَالِ.

*Faith (iman) is what settles in hearts, revealed to Almighty Allah, and is verified by practicing acts of obedience to Him and submission to His decrees. Islam, on the other hand, stands for the words and deeds that one says or does publicly. Accordingly, Islam is that which is adopted by groups of people of all sects. Due to declaration of the creed of Islam, one's blood is spared, laws of inheritance are applied to him, and marriage is permitted. Both Muslims and faithful are equal in performing the obligatory prayers, paying the poor-rate, observing the (obligatory) fasting, and undertaking the ritual pilgrimage (hajj). By doing these acts, they depart atheism and attach themselves to faith. Islam does not necessarily beget faith while faith always accompanies Islam, even though both Islam and faith meet in words and deeds. Just as the Ka'bah lies in the Sacred Mosque while the Sacred Mosque is not situated in the Ka'bah, so also does faith accompany Islam while Islam does not necessarily beget faith. Almighty Allah has said, "The dwellers of the desert say, 'We believe.' Say, 'You do not believe but say, we submit; and faith has not yet entered into your hearts.'" Verily, the saying of Almighty Allah is the most*

truthful of all sayings.

The reporter of this saying asked, “Does a faithful believer enjoy a preference in virtues, laws, provisions, or any other things over a Muslim?”

The Imam (‘a) answered:

لَا. هُمْ يَجْرِيَانِ فِي ذَلِكَ مَجْرَىٰ وَاحِدًا. وَلَكِنَّ لِلْمُؤْمِنِ فَضْلًا عَلَى الْمُسْلِمِ فِي أَعْمَالِهِمَا وَمَا يَتَقَرَّبَانِ بِهِ إِلَى اللَّهِ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ.

“No, the same laws and rulings are applied to both Muslims and faithful believers. However, a faithful believer enjoys preference over a Muslim in deeds and acts of seeking nearness to Allah, the Almighty and Majestic.”

The reporter asked, “Almighty Allah says, ‘Whoever brings a good deed, shall have ten like it (6: 160),’ while you have just said that Muslims and faithful believers both perform the prayers, pay the poor-rate, observe fasting, and go on the ritual pilgrimage! How do you explain this preference?”

The Imam (‘a) answered:

أَلَيْسَ قَدْ قَالَ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ: {فَبِضَاعِفِهِ لَهُ أَضْعَافًا كَثِيرَةً}؛ فَالْمُؤْمِنُونَ هُمُ الَّذِينَ يُضَاعِفُ اللَّهُ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ لَهُمْ حَسَنَاتِهِمْ لِكُلِّ حَسَنَةٍ سَبْعِينَ ضِعْفًا. فَهَذَا فَضْلُ الْمُؤْمِنِ، وَيَزِيدُهُ اللَّهُ عَلَى قَدْرِ صِحَّةِ إِيمَانِهِ أَضْعَافًا كَثِيرَةً. وَيَفْعَلُ اللَّهُ بِالْمُؤْمِنِينَ مَا يَشَاءُ مِنَ الْخَيْرِ.

“Almighty Allah has also said, ‘Who is it that will offer Allah a goodly gift, so He will multiply it for him manifold. (2:245)’ Those who receive multiplication of their acts by Almighty Allah are the faithful believers. Each good act of theirs will increase seventyfold. This is the preference for the faithful believers. Their acts Almighty Allah will multiply manifoldly according to the degrees of their faith. Moreover, Almighty Allah imbues faithful believers with uncountable virtues as He wills.”

The reporter asked, “If one converts to Islam, does this mean that he has become a faithful believer?”

The Imam (‘a) answered:

لَا. وَلَكِنَّهُ قَدْ أُضِيفَ إِلَى الْإِيمَانِ وَخَرَجَ مِنَ الْكُفْرِ. وَسَأَضْرِبُ لَكَ مَثَلًا تَعْقِلُ بِهِ فَضْلَ الْإِيمَانِ عَلَى الْإِسْلَامِ: أَرَأَيْتَ لَوْ بَصُرْتَ رَجُلًا فِي الْمَسْجِدِ، أَكُنْتَ تَشْهَدُ أَنَّكَ رَأَيْتَهُ فِي الْكَعْبَةِ؟

“No, it does not. Such conversion only attaches him to belief and takes him out of disbelief. Let me cite for you an example that will make you understand the preference of faith over (profession of) Islam. If

*you see a man in the Sacred Mosque, can you testify that you saw him in the Ka'bah?"*

*The reporter answered, "No, I cannot."*

The Imam ('a) asked:

لَوْ بَصُرْتَ رَجُلًا فِي الْكَعْبَةِ، أَكُنْتَ شَاهِدًا أَنَّهُ قَدْ دَخَلَ الْمَسْجِدَ الْحَرَامَ؟

*"If you see a man in the Ka'bah; can you testify that you have seen him in the Holy Mosque?"*

*The reporter answered, "Yes, I can."*

*The Imam ('a) asked, "How is that?"*

*The reporter answered, "This man cannot arrive at the Ka'bah before he enters the Sacred Mosque."*

*The Imam ('a) said:*

قَدْ أَصَبْتَ وَأَحْسَنْتَ. كَذَلِكَ الْإِيمَانُ وَالْإِسْلَامُ.

*"You are right and you have done well! Such are faith and Islam." [1](#)*

## **Faith and Deed**

The Holy Imams ('a) presented the practical aspect of belief in Almighty Allah, which signifies man's most important ethical characteristic. They also taught their followers how to take this faith out of its abstract doctrinal state and sheer mental commitment to its behavioral, practical, and applied form by interpreting faith as a reality, essentially composed of different ranks and classes capable of being attained when put into practice.

It seems that this topic was quite controversial during the ages of the Holy Imams ('a). Some scholars argued that there is no difference between the faith of the prophets and the faith of Satan, because faith is an unchangeable fact in the sense that it stands for no more than commitment to believing in the existence of Almighty Allah. This fact can be either present or absent. The only difference between the prophets and Satan in this ideology lies in their behavior and deeds not in the original existence of their commitment to belief.

On the other hand, the instructions of the Ahl al-Bayt ('a) entailed that belief in Almighty Allah is of various ranks that vary from one believer to another, because it depends upon practical actions to a great extent. Hence, the more a servant (of Almighty Allah) commits himself and gives his commitment a material form in his behavior, the more his degree of faith increases and stands firm in his heart and

sentiment.

In his book of *al-Kafi*, Shaykh al-Kulayni, through a valid chain of authority, has reported Jamil ibn Darraj as saying:

I, once, asked Imam al-Sadiq (‘a) to define faith.

He (‘a) answered:

شَهَادَةٌ أَنْ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ وَأَنَّ مُحَمَّدًا رَسُولُهُ.

*“It is to profess that there is no deity save Allah and Muhammad is His messenger.”*

*I further asked, “This is an act; is it not?”*

*The Imam (‘a) answered, “Yes, it is.”*

*I added, “So, action is part of faith.”*

The Imam (‘a) clarified:

لَا يَنْبُتُ لَهُ الْإِيمَانُ إِلَّا بِالْعَمَلِ، وَالْعَمَلُ مِنْهُ.

*“One’s faith is not substantiated without action, which is part of faith.”<sup>2</sup>*

This concept has been explained by some texts in various ways, such as in the following tradition:

In *al-Kafi*, Shaykh al-Kulayni has reported that Hammad ibn ‘Amr al-Nusaybi said that someone once asked the knowledgeable Imam (‘a) the following question:

*“O Knowledgeable, inform me of the best of all deeds in the view of Almighty Allah.”*

The Imam (‘a) answered:

مَا لَا يُقْبَلُ عَمَلٌ إِلَّا بِهِ.

*“It is verily the deed without which no other deed will be accepted.”*

*“What is that?” asked the man.*

The Imam (‘a) explained:

الإيمانُ بالله، الَّذِي هُوَ أَعْلَى الْأَعْمَالِ دَرَجَةً وَأَسْنَاهَا حِزْبًا وَأَشْرَفُهَا مَنْزِلَةً.

*“It is belief in Almighty Allah (i.e. faith), which is the highest of all deeds in rank, the most sublime in measurement, and the most honorable in standing.”*

*“Please, tell me whether faith is both word and deed or only word without deed,” asked the reporter.*

The Imam (‘a) answered:

الإِيمَانُ عَمَلٌ كُلُّهُ، وَالْقَوْلُ بَعْضُ ذَلِكَ الْعَمَلِ بِفَرْضِ مِنَ اللَّهِ بَيْنَهُ فِي كِتَابِهِ، وَاضِحٌ نُورُهُ، ثَابِتَةٌ حُجَّتُهُ، يَشْهَدُ بِهِ الْكِتَابُ وَيَدْعُو إِلَيْهِ.

*“Faith is deed all in all. Word (i.e. utterance of the creed of faith) is only part of that deed according to a decree of Almighty Allah that He has shown in His Book with obvious light and firm argument to which the Book (i.e. Qur’an) testifies and upon which it calls.”*

*“Please, describe this to me so that I can understand it,” requested the reporter.*

The Imam (‘a) said:

إِنَّ الْإِيمَانَ حَالَاتٌ وَدَرَجَاتٌ وَطَبَقَاتٌ وَمَنَازِلٌ فَمِنْهُ التَّامُّ الْمُنتَهِي تَمَامُهُ وَمِنْهُ النَّاقِصُ الْمُنتَهِي نُقْصَانُهُ وَمِنْهُ الزَّائِدُ الرَّاجِحُ زِيَادَتُهُ.

*“Faith is of various states, ranks, classes, and standings. Some people hold the most perfect degree of faith, others an extremely deficient degree, and others a ponderously abundant degree.”*

*The reporter asked, “Can faith be perfect, increasable, and deficient?”*

*The Imam (‘a) answered, “Yes, it can.”*

*The reporter asked, “How is that?”*

The Imam (‘a) said:

إِنَّ اللَّهَ تَبَارَكَ وَتَعَالَى فَرَضَ الْإِيمَانَ عَلَى جَوَارِحِ بَنِي آدَمَ وَقَسَمَهُ عَلَيْهَا وَفَرَّقَهُ عَلَيْهَا؛ فَلَيْسَ مِنْ جَوَارِحِهِمْ جَارِحَةٌ إِلَّا وَهِيَ مُوَكَّلَةٌ مِنَ الْإِيمَانِ بِغَيْرِ مَا وُكِّلَتْ بِهِ أُخْتُهَا، فَمِنْهَا قَلْبُهُ الَّذِي بِهِ يَعْقِلُ وَيَفْقَهُ وَيَفْهَمُ، وَهُوَ أَمِيرُ بَدَنِهِ الَّذِي لَا تُوَرِّدُ الْجَوَارِحُ وَلَا تَصْدُرُ إِلَّا عَنْ رَأْيِهِ وَأَمْرِهِ، وَمِنْهَا يَدَاهُ اللَّتَانِ يَبْطِشُ بِهِمَا وَرِجْلَاهُ اللَّتَانِ يَمْشِي بِهِمَا وَفَرْجُهُ الَّذِي الْبَاهُ مِنْ قَبْلِهِ وَلِسَانُهُ الَّذِي يَنْطِقُ بِهِ الْكِتَابُ وَيَشْهَدُ بِهِ عَلَيْهَا، وَعَيْنَاهُ اللَّتَانِ يُبْصِرُ بِهِمَا، وَأُذُنَاهُ اللَّتَانِ يَسْمَعُ بِهِمَا. وَفُرِضَ عَلَى الْقَلْبِ غَيْرُ مَا فُرِضَ عَلَى اللِّسَانِ، وَفُرِضَ عَلَى اللِّسَانِ غَيْرُ مَا فُرِضَ عَلَى الْعَيْنَيْنِ، وَفُرِضَ عَلَى الْعَيْنَيْنِ غَيْرُ مَا فُرِضَ عَلَى السَّمْعِ، وَفُرِضَ عَلَى السَّمْعِ غَيْرُ مَا فُرِضَ عَلَى الْيَدَيْنِ، وَفُرِضَ عَلَى الْيَدَيْنِ غَيْرُ مَا فُرِضَ عَلَى الرَّجْلَيْنِ،

وَفُرِضَ عَلَى الرَّجُلَيْنِ غَيْرُ مَا فُرِضَ عَلَى الْفَرْجِ، وَفُرِضَ عَلَى الْفَرْجِ غَيْرُ مَا فُرِضَ عَلَى الْوَجْهِ. فَأَمَّا مَا فُرِضَ عَلَى الْقَلْبِ مِنَ الْإِيمَانِ فَالْإِقْرَارُ وَالْمَعْرِفَةُ وَالتَّصَدِيقُ وَالتَّسْلِيمُ وَالْعَقْدُ وَالرِّضَا بِأَنَّ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ وَحْدَهُ لَا شَرِيكَ لَهُ، أَحَدًا صَمَدًا لَمْ يَتَّخِذْ صَاحِبَةً وَلَا وُلَدًا، وَأَنَّ مُحَمَّدًا، صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَآلِهِ، عَبْدُهُ وَرَسُولُهُ.

*“Verily, Allah, the Blessed and Exalted, has imposed faith on the organs of human beings, spread it out and distributed it among them. Therefore, every organ in the human body is ordained with a sort of faith that is completely different from other sorts imposed upon other organs. One of these organs is one’s heart with which he can realize, comprehend, and understand things. It is the chief of the body and all other organs cannot do or stop doing anything except by its command. Other organs are his hands with which he can hold things, his feet with which he can walk, private parts that receive commands from the heart, the tongue with which he can utter (the texts of) the Book and testify to it, the eyes with which he can see, and ears with which he can hear.*

*The faith that Almighty Allah has imposed on man’s heart is different from that which He has imposed upon the tongue; the faith imposed upon the tongue is different from that imposed upon the eyes; the faith imposed upon the eyes is different from that imposed upon the hearing; the faith imposed upon the hearing is different from that imposed upon the hands; the faith imposed upon the hands is different from that imposed upon the feet; the faith imposed upon the feet is different from that imposed upon the private parts; and the faith imposed upon the private parts is different from that imposed on the face. The part of faith that is imposed upon man’s heart is to profess, recognize, testify, submit, avow and accept that there is no deity but Allah. Also, that He is the One and Only, without any partner, Singular, eternally besought of all, has taken neither consort nor son, and that Muhammad—may He bless him and his Household—is His servant and messenger.”<sup>3</sup>*

The Holy Imams of the Ahl al-Bayt (‘a) said one’s faith is decided on the above grounds. They also believed that Almighty Allah’s commissioning with a duty must be in the scope of man’s ability and power.

It has been narrated on the authority of ‘Ammar ibn al-Ahwas that Imam al-Sadiq (‘a) said:

إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ وَضَعَ الْإِيمَانَ عَلَى سَبْعَةِ أَسْهُمٍ: عَلَى الْبِرِّ وَالصِّدْقِ وَالْيَقِينِ وَالرِّضَا وَالْوَفَاءَ وَالْعِلْمَ وَالْحِلْمَ. ثُمَّ قَسَمَ ذَلِكَ بَيْنَ النَّاسِ. فَمَنْ جُعِلَ فِيهِ هَذِهِ السَّبْعَةُ الْأَسْهُمُ فَهُوَ كَامِلٌ مُحْتَمِلٌ. وَقَسَمَ لِبَعْضِ النَّاسِ السَّهْمَ وَلِبَعْضِ السَّهْمَيْنِ وَلِبَعْضِ الثَّلَاثَةِ حَتَّى انْتَهَوْا إِلَى السَّبْعَةِ... لَا تَحْمِلُوا عَلَى صَاحِبِ السَّهْمِ سَهْمَيْنِ وَلَا عَلَى صَاحِبِ السَّهْمَيْنِ ثَلَاثَةَ فَتَبْهَضُوهُمْ.

*Verily, Allah, the Almighty and Majestic, has placed faith on seven qualities: piety, honesty, certitude, contentedness, loyalty, knowledge, and forbearance. Next, He distributed these qualities among people. He who won all these seven qualities is definitely perfect (in faith) and capable (of deserving all these seven qualities). He then granted some people one quality, two qualities, and three qualities up to*

seven...Do not impose two qualities of faith upon him who has been granted one only and three qualities upon him who has been granted two only and so on up to all seven, lest you overburden them.[4](#)

In a validly reported tradition, Sadir has reported that Imam al-Baqir ('a) addressed him as follows:

إِنَّ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ عَلَى مَنَازِلٍ؛ مِنْهُمْ عَلَى وَاحِدَةٍ، وَمِنْهُمْ عَلَى اثْنَتَيْنِ، وَمِنْهُمْ عَلَى ثَلَاثٍ، وَمِنْهُمْ عَلَى أَرْبَعٍ، وَمِنْهُمْ عَلَى خَمْسٍ، وَمِنْهُمْ عَلَى سِتٍّ، وَمِنْهُمْ عَلَى سَبْعٍ. فَلَوْ ذَهَبْتَ تَحْمِلُ عَلَى صَاحِبِ الْوَاحِدَةِ ثِنْتَيْنِ لَمْ يَقْوِ، وَعَلَى صَاحِبِ الثَّنَتَيْنِ ثَلَاثًا لَمْ يَقْوِ، وَعَلَى صَاحِبِ الثَّلَاثِ أَرْبَعًا لَمْ يَقْوِ، وَعَلَى صَاحِبِ الْأَرْبَعِ خَمْسًا لَمْ يَقْوِ، وَعَلَى صَاحِبِ الْخَمْسِ سِتًّا لَمْ يَقْوِ، وَعَلَى صَاحِبِ السِّتِّ سَبْعًا لَمْ يَقْوِ، وَعَلَى هَذِهِ الدَّرَجَاتِ

*Verily, the believers are of various ranks. Some of them hold one rank only, others two, some others three, some others four, some five, some others six, and some others seven. If you impose (an act that cannot be done except by those who enjoy) two ranks upon one who has one rank only, he will certainly fail to undertake it. If you impose three ranks upon one who has two only, he will fail to undertake it. If you impose four ranks upon one who has three only, he will fail to undertake it. If you impose five ranks upon one who has four only, he will fail to undertake it. If you impose six ranks upon one who has five only, he will fail to undertake it. If you impose seven ranks upon one who has six only, he will fail to undertake it. So also are the other ranks[5](#) of faith.[6](#)*

In view of this, one's faith is threatened when one deviates from practical behavior and abandons ethical conduct. Likewise, one's faith is increased and perfected when one abides by the highest moral standards of behavior.

This also reveals to us a method of education and management. The more perfect one's faith is, the more authorized to hold higher grades of duties and responsibilities. Similarly, whenever entrusting some responsibilities with some people, it is necessary to take into consideration their level of faith in order to restrict to them the duties that are rendered to those of lower ranks of faith, as is instructed in the aforementioned tradition.

Beyond doubt, such a method of understanding faith and the role that moral standards play in the composition of this faith has great positive effects on behavioral and moral commitments and on the undertaking of responsibilities and tasks.

## **Pattern of Conduct and Morality**

The Holy Imams ('a) firmly instructed their companions and followers to play the role of excellent exemplars and models of trust and reliance for the Muslim community.

Presenting the philosophy of history, the Holy Qur'an refers to two kinds of exemplars:

**The first kind** is the 'Excellent Exemplar' (*al-uswah al-hasanah*) that is perfect in ideals, values and

moral commitments, such as the exemplary role played by Prophet Abraham ('a), his companions, and Prophet Muhammad (S) as well as other Prophets and Messengers of Almighty Allah. In this respect, the Holy Qur'an reads:

لَقَدْ كَانَ لَكُمْ فِي رَسُولِ اللَّهِ أُسْوَةٌ حَسَنَةٌ لِمَنْ كَانَ يَرْجُو اللَّهَ وَالْيَوْمَ الْآخِرَ وَذَكَرَ اللَّهَ كَثِيرًا

***Certainly, you have in the Messenger of Allah an excellent example for him whose hope is Allah and the latter day and remembers Allah much. (33:21)***

قَدْ كَانَتْ لَكُمْ أُسْوَةٌ حَسَنَةٌ فِي إِبْرَاهِيمَ وَالَّذِينَ مَعَهُ إِذْ قَالُوا لِقَوْمِهِمْ إِنَّا بُرَاءُ مِنْكُمْ وَمِمَّا تَعْبُدُونَ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ

***Indeed, there is for you a good example in Abraham and those with him when they said to their people: Surely, we are clear of you and of what you serve besides Allah. (60:4)***

لَقَدْ كَانَ لَكُمْ فِيهِمْ أُسْوَةٌ حَسَنَةٌ لِمَنْ كَانَ يَرْجُو اللَّهَ وَالْيَوْمَ الْآخِرَ

***Certainly, there is for you in them a good example, for him who fears Allah and the last day. (60:6)***

أُولَئِكَ الَّذِينَ آتَيْنَاهُمُ الْكِتَابَ وَالْحُكْمَ وَالنَّبُوءَةَ ۖ فَإِنْ يُكْفَرْ بِهَا هُوَلاءُ فَقَدْ وَكَلْنَا بِهَا قَوْمًا لَيْسُوا بِهَا بِكَافِرِينَ ۗ أُولَئِكَ الَّذِينَ هَدَى اللَّهُ ۖ فَبِهَادِهِمْ اقْتَدِهْ

***These are they to whom We gave the Book and the Wisdom and the prophecy; therefore, if these disbelieve in it, We have already entrusted it to a people who are not disbelievers in it. These are the ones whom Allah has guided; therefore, follow their guidance. (6:89-90)***

**The second kind** is the wicked exemplar (*al-uswah al-sayyi'ah*) which relies upon power, authority, and external domination. This is specifically the pattern of oppressors, tyrants, leaders of evil, ruling authorities, and the rich. Referring to these wicked exemplars, the Holy Qur'an states:

بَلْ قَالُوا إِنَّا وَجَدْنَا آبَاءَنَا عَلَىٰ أُمَّةٍ وَإِنَّا عَلَىٰ آثَارِهِمْ مُهْتَدُونَ

***Nay! They say: We found our fathers on a course and surely, we are guided by their footsteps. (43:22)***

وَقَالُوا رَبَّنَا إِنَّا أَطَعْنَا سَادَتَنَا وَكُبْرَاءَنَا فَأَضَلُّونَا السَّبِيلًا

***They shall say: O our Lord! Surely, we obeyed our leaders and our great men, so they led us astray from the path. (33:67)***

Usually, man acts upon one of the following two basic factors in the issue of exemplar:

**First**, sound human nature and the effects of righteousness, decency, and sentiment within man's inner self.

**Second**, whims, lusts, fear, craving, and the points of weakness and defect in man's inner self.

The Holy Imams of the Ahl al-Bayt ('a) urged their followers to mobilize and utilize the first factor in order to attain this social and human position.

'Abdullah ibn Abi-Ya'fur has reported Imam al-Sadiq ('a) as saying:

كُونُوا دُعَاةً لِلنَّاسِ بِالْخَيْرِ بِغَيْرِ أَلْسِنَتِكُمْ، لِيَرَوْا مِنْكُمْ الْإِجْتِهَادَ وَالصِّدْقَ وَالْوَرَعَ

*Act as heralds to goodness in the milieus of people by other means than your tongues (i.e. speech) so that they can become aware of your diligence, honesty, and piety.* [7](#)

Ibn 'Abbas has reported that the Holy Prophet (S) was asked about the best of associates. He answered,

خَيْرُ الْجُلَسَاءِ مَنْ تَذَكَّرْتُمْ اللَّهَ رُؤْيَتُهُ، وَزَيْدٌ فِي عِلْمِكُمْ مَنْطِقُهُ، وَيُرَغِّبُكُمْ فِي الْآخِرَةِ عَمَلُهُ.

*(The best associate) is he who reminds you of Almighty Allah when you see him, increases your knowledge when he speaks, and awakens your desires for the Hereafter when he acts.* [8](#)

Imam Zayn al-'Abidin ('a) is reported to have said:

إِنَّ أَبْغَضَ النَّاسِ إِلَى اللَّهِ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ مَنْ يَفْتَدِي بِسُنَّةِ إِمَامٍ وَلَا يَفْتَدِي بِأَعْمَالِهِ

*Verily, the most hated of all people by Allah—the Almighty and Majestic—is one who follows the beliefs of a leader but does not imitate his conduct.* [9](#)

## **Decency and Good Manners**

The Holy Imams of the Ahl al-Bayt ('a) conferred a vital role upon decency<sup>10</sup> in practical social life. According to the Ahl al-Bayt ('a) School, decency is essential in people who hold such offices, positions, and acts like rulership, judicature, governmental offices, issuance of religious laws, leading

congregational prayers, testifying in litigations, divorces, and other offices listed in books on the practical laws of Islam. This is clear-cut evidence regarding the fact that decency, as a quality, is of great importance, since it plays a vital role in social life.

Decency is so important that it is preferred to knowledge and experience. Hence, knowledge of a person who lacks decency and piety is worthless. Moreover, knowledge without piety denotes mischief. Therefore, the Holy Imams (‘a) have intensely warned against wicked scholars (i.e. knowledgeable persons who lack decency).

Thus, decency has occupied a special position in the mentality and psychological and spiritual conditions of the followers of the Ahl al-Bayt (‘a). It has also had a profound impact on the attitudes of jurists, judges, politicians, and managers of public activities.

Such understanding of decency is missing in other Muslim sects or the religious milieus to which these sects belong. For instance, other Muslim sects admit, yet with discrepancy, that a decadent person (*fasiq*) may lead a congregational prayer and rule over the Muslim community. They also show lenience regarding the capacity of witnesses.

Without a doubt, decency holds a connotation wider than trustworthiness and reliability; therefore, it engrosses a wide-ranging moral aspect.

Naturally, decency that is essential in witnesses differs in degree from decency essential in rulers, governors, judges, and issuers of verdicts (*mufti*). In the latter, decency must be of a higher degree in order to be compatible with the significance of these offices and enable such people to handle their psychological and social pressures easily.

## Method of Self-Purification

The Holy Imams (‘a) have instituted certain methods for the virtuous community to attain self-purification and the required degree of high morality. One of these is struggle with the carnal self.

## Struggle With The Carnal Self: Proposition And Approach

### Proposition

We need to understand the Islamic approach and proposition of struggle with the carnal self as a topic. Briefly, we can allude to the following aspects:

**First:** Human life is extensively long in the sense that it is not restricted to existence in this world, which is in fact short and limited when compared to the eternal life of human beings. This worldly existence is a period of test and tribulation but, because of its short term, it is treated as a period of “play, idle talk, pageantry, and boasting.” On the other hand, the other eternal life is the Hereafter in which the reality of

all actions and their just consequences materialize.

**Second:** The basis of perfection of human life is the human soul, or *self*, not the physical aspect—the body—because that which survives and continues to exist and develop is the *self* not the body, which eventually perishes, reverses in nature, changes, and transforms.

Thus, struggle with the carnal self is an element of perfection of the human self.

**Third:** Almighty Allah created man and gave him reason, recognition of Him, a general inclination towards true guidance, and recognition of truths and causes of advantages and disadvantages, yet in a general manner. Almighty Allah also placed in man fancies and lusts that can allure him towards worldly life in order to test and try him on the one hand and to make these fancies act as a motivating power on the other. Hence, these are two factors, both parallel and opposite, that create human activity.

Besides, Almighty Allah has granted man the capability of creating personal activities, notions about the future, and arriving at generalizations. As a result, human volition has been the decisive factor in man's movement and choice of certain acts.

Whenever man applies his reason to direct his will and choice and prevail over them, he will advance on the path of perfection. On the other hand, if man allows his fancy and lusts to prevail over his will and direct his actions, he will slip onto the path of deterioration and regression.

In the earlier hypothesis, the passions—directed by reason and knowledge—become energy that propel towards perfection, while in the latter, they become destructive and detrimental energy.

**Fourth:** Out of His kindness, mercy, magnanimity, wisdom and infinite knowledge, Almighty Allah sent the prophets with books, missions and guidance through Divine revelation in order to lead humanity towards the truth especially when facts are confused and the truth resembles falsehood or when man fails to realize and appreciate the truth or his benefit and loss.

The average person fails to recognize these truths and advantages; therefore, the prophets and messengers of Almighty Allah undertake the missions of conveying His messages, leading humanity to righteousness, teaching the Holy Book and wisdom, judging with justice between people in matters wherein they differ and witnessing their conduct and activity.

**Fifth:** If human will coincides with the Divine Legislative Will represented by Divine edicts, laws, and provisions, the human self will attain perfection because it will be compatible with the truth and its advantages. To achieve this, man is required to strive against his fancies and control his lusts in order to make them fall in line with the religious laws.

Moreover, struggle with the self—against fancies and lusts—intrinsically leads to self-perfection, which is the groundwork of human perfection, just as physical self-perfection can be attained through physical exertion and sports.

Islam has set up a definite course to overcome psychological strife of the self and attain self-perfection. Of course, this course has certain pillars, foundations, and practical forms. The following is a summary of these pillars and foundations in addition to other general aspects that relate to the practical forms and methods. Details are postponed for another occasion. [11](#)

## The Way

The pillars of the Ahl al-Bayt's Islamic method of struggle with the carnal self are as follows. The detailed features can be obtained from discussions published on the topic of struggle with the carnal self or self-purification. [12](#)

**First:** One of the foundations of struggle with the carnal self, according to Islam and the Ahl al-Bayt's instructions, is to strengthen one's ties with Almighty Allah through:

- (1) Strong faith in Him
- (2) Full trust in Him
- (3) A good concept of Allah
- (4) Sincerity in deed and intention
- (5) Love for Him
- (6) Fear of Him
- (7) Hope in Him

**Second:** *The second foundation of struggle with the carnal self is to comply with reason that guides towards the truth.* One of the features of complying with reason is to depend upon knowledge and erudition to face ignorance and fancies and avoid falling under their influence. In view of this fact, *Divine punishment and reward will be in accordance with one's reason.* It is strongly recommended to consult one's reason and then give preference to it over fancy in all matters that one may face in life.

**Third:** The other foundation of struggle with the carnal self includes the avoidance of disobedience to Almighty Allah, sins, and wrongdoing and the practice of piety, chastity and restraint when the self inclines towards evil and lusts. The next stage is identifying one's development in the struggle against the carnal self, control over tendencies, and use of faculties of the self within legal restrictions. The positive and negative psychological and spiritual consequences on life are connected to such commitment to contend with the self.

**Fourth:** The fourth foundation of struggle with the carnal self can be summarized in the following points:

- (1) Be steadfast in obeying Almighty Allah

- (2) Be committed to religious duties
- (3) Forsake acts of disobedience
- (4) Avoid committing forbidden acts
- (5) Withstand psychological and external pressures by means of refraining from surrendering, accepting, or submitting to them
- (6) Persist in the path of obedience
- (7) Shun all acts of disobedience
- (8) Strengthen factors of patience
- (9) Develop willpower and capability for endurance
- (10) Control one's emotions and passivity by strengthening one's willpower

**Fifth:** Another foundation of struggle with the carnal self is the practice of calling oneself to account and monitoring one's deeds and activities as well as emotions, feelings, and senses. By doing this one can figure out the scope of compatibility of one's acts, behavior, emotions and feelings with religious laws, Islamic morals, perfective features and noble goals that Almighty Allah has put before man along his progress towards self-perfection.

**Sixth:** The other foundation is to repent and frequently turn to Almighty Allah whenever one feels that he has deviated from the path of truth and the straight course of justice, and whenever one falls into sin and wrongdoing or unwittingly commits offences. As soon as man finds himself performing such wrong deeds, he must hurry to repent by feeling sorry, confessing that he has committed a sin, determining to commit himself to religious duties, and compensating for the financial or moral wrongdoings that he may have committed against others.

**Seventh:** The seventh foundation is to detect sources of lustful drives, such as egoism and pursuance of desires like "women, sons, and hoarded treasures of gold and silver." It also requires detecting psychological tendencies in one's personality, such as rage, envy, hunger for power, arrogance, cavorting about, avarice, laziness, tribal or national fanaticism, ignorance-based zealotry, wronging others, inclination to transgression, violation of others' rights, and so on. The stage following detection must be to remedy these drives and be watchful of them.

**Eighth:** Creation of immunity, resistance, impregnability, and refuge against fancies inside the human self can play a major role in the establishment of the high level of struggle against the carnal self that guides man in his progress towards self-perfection. To achieve such strength in the inner self, one needs to commit oneself to performing recommended acts and avoiding forbidden acts. Such

commitment builds a defensive fence around the self to prevent it from falling under the influences of fancies. When this is done, the *self* climbs more steps towards self-perfection.

## More Methods for Struggle with the Carnal Self

In addition to the above, other methods of struggle with the carnal self can be derived from general Islamic teachings, as follows:

### **(1) Supplicatory prayers (pl. *ad'iyah*/sing. *du'a'*) and remembrance of Almighty Allah (i.e. *dhikr*):**

The Holy Imams of the Ahl al-Bayt ('a) set a course of supplicatory prayers and words and statements of *dhikr* that cover all the hours of days and nights. They also invited attention to the importance of devotional acts practiced on nights such as:

The Qadr Nights (the 19th, 21st, and 23rd of Ramadhan); Thursday nights (i.e. the nights before Fridays);

The nights preceding the Feast Days (i.e. 'Id—the 1st of Shawwal and 10th of Dhu'l-Hijjah);

The eves of Islamic occasions such as the eves of the Holy Prophet's birth, the Divine Mission, 'Id al-Ghadir, the 15th of Sha'ban...etc.

In addition to these nights, certain days of the year are of special significance with regard to acts of worship, such as:

The first nine days of Dhu'l-Hijjah;

The Tashriq Days (the 11th, 12th, and 13th of Dhu'l-Hijjah);

The 'Id Days, including the day of 'Id Ghadir;

The Holy Prophet's birthday;

The anniversary of the Divine Mission;

The day of 'Ashura', and other special days.

**(2) Special Recommended Prayers:** The Holy Imams of the Ahl al-Bayt ('a) prescribed a number of voluntary prayers to be performed at any time. These are prayers ascribed to the Fourteen Infallibles, Ja'far al-Tayyar's Prayer, and other prayers, as well as other general prayers to be voluntarily offered on particular nights that have special devotional acts, such as the nights of Ramadhan and Islamic anniversaries.

**(3) Other Acts of Worship:** The Holy Imams ('a) have also recommended other devotional, yet voluntary, acts such as fasting, confinement to mosques (*i'tikaf*), 'Umrah, visitations to the tombs of the

Holy Prophet (S), the Holy Imams ('a) and the righteous servants of Almighty Allah. Statements of glorification of Almighty Allah (*dhikr*), giving alms from one's wealth for the sake of Allah, and visiting one's relatives, neighbors, brethren-in-faith and even Muslims in general are included.

The minute details of all these devotional acts can be found in reference books of *hadith* on chapters dedicated to certain subjects like struggle with the carnal self, self-perfection, skill in social relationships, affiliation with one's brethren-in-faith and excellent moral behavior. Practicing such devotional acts escalates the moral aspects and behavioral commitments and strengthens the personality at both individual and social levels.

Details of these acts are discussed in the coming book on Rituals and Acts of the Worship System.

[1.](#) – Shaykh al-Kulayni, al-Kafi 2:26-27, H.5.

[2.](#) – Shaykh al-Kulayni, al-Kafi 2:38, H.6.

[3.](#) – Shaykh al-Kulayni, al-Kafi 2:38, H.7.

[4.](#) – Shaykh al-Kulayni, al-Kafi 2:42, H. 1.

To impose two qualities of faith upon one who has been granted only one...etc. —this means to charge one who has only one quality of faith with an act that cannot be done except by one who enjoys two qualities or more is unacceptable because he will not be able to undertake such.

[5.](#) – This may be an indication of the grades mentioned by Almighty Allah in the holy verse that reads, “They are of varying grades in the sight of Allah. (3:163)

[6.](#) – Shaykh al-Kulayni, al-Kafi 2:45, H. 3.

[7.](#) – Al-Hurr al-'Amili, Wasa'il al-Shi'ah 8:513, H. 1.

[8.](#) – Al-Hurr al-'Amili, Wasa'il al-Shi'ah 8:412, H. 4.

[9.](#) – Shaykh al-Sadur, al-Khisal 1:21, H. 62; 'Allamah al-Majlisi, Bihar al-Anwar 71:178, H. 25.

[10.](#) – Decency ('adalah) is a supreme rank of straightness and righteousness on the path of the religion, or mental disposition that prevents man from falling prey to prohibitions and abandoning obligatory acts or repenting after committing a sin.

[11.](#) – In my exegesis of Surah al-Jumu'ah (No. 62) I have thrashed out the course of purification and education in Islam. In the discussions of the 'Social Relations System' and 'Rituals and Acts of Worship System', I will introduce an aspect of this topic.

[12.](#) – I have dealt with this topic, in some details, in my lectures of Ramadhan, 1413-1414. Traditions in this respect are overlooked on account of brevity. However, these traditions can be seen in al-Hurr al-'Amili's Wasa'il al-Shi'ah, Vol. 11, Section: Self-Strife/Struggle with the Carnal Self, Section: Enjoining the Right and Forbidding the Evil, and other sections.

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