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Chapter 4: Correction of Belief

One of the most important problems which must be studied before our discuss of ideological principles in depth is the question of correcting belief, that is to say, whether there is a method of achieving beliefs that arc correct and in accordance with reality, and of correcting wrong beliefs. And if so, what is this method?

The answer is, yes there is. And in this connection exact guidance is to be found in Islamic texts, which has apparently hitherto not been discussed and analyzed.

This guidance includes some of the most important points that a person–regardless of what ideology or religion he may have provided only that he really approaches ideological discussions with insight and a realistic outlook–must certainly examine. Then if he follows the advice given he can be confident of the results of his research and enquiry.

Before embarking on a discussion of Islamic guidance regarding correction of belief, however, we must first mention some of the most precarious ideological disease of all, namely self- delusion of knowledgeability.

The Disease Of Self-Delusion

Self-delusion, or imagining oneself to be knowledgeable on a matter, is a psychological disorder that is widespread, difficult to detect and diagnose, and if chronic, it may be even incurable.

This disease is also known as "compound ignorance." To clarify the matter, we may note that with regard to man's understanding of the facts of existence there are four main cases: The first is when a person knows something and knows that he knows it. Such a person is really knowledgeable aware.

The second case is when a person knows something but is not aware that, he knows it. Such a person is prove to carelessness and negligence and may be termed "unaware".

The third case is when he does not know something and is aware that he does not know it, that is to say he has knowledge of his ignorance. Such a person may be termed a "simple ignoranus".-

The fourth case is when someone does not know something and is not aware that he does not know it, that is to say he has no knowledge of his ignorance. He does not know, but he thinks he knows, such a person may be termed a "compound ignoramus" 1. To summarize, with regard to understanding a person may be aware, unaware, a simple ignoramus or a compound ignoramus.

To explain matters further we may say that the difference between simple and compound ignorance is that the former consists of ignorance unadulterated by any other form of ignorance such as not knowing way in a given location, not recognizing a certain person, not understanding a certain scientific and so on; while the latter consists of two separate kinds of ignorance that are specifically related to each other. The first form of ignorance is that the person does not know something, which is simple ignorance, but the second is that he thinks his ignorance is a form of knowledge which is a different kind of ignorance, related to the first kind and known as compound ignorance.

For example, if a person does not know the direction he is going, but thinks he does, two forms of ignorance are compounded in him, the first not knowing the way, the second thinking that he does. Thinking that he knows is another form of ignorance which when compounded with the first form becomes what is termed compound ignorance.

So, if an ignorant person thinks he is knowledgeable indeed he is a compound ignorant, and compound ignorance is the same as the disease of imaginary knowledge or delusion of knowledgeability.

A Universal Psychological Disorder

It must regretfully be acknowledged that most people are afflicted by this disorder in many areas of belief, particularly in three cases, where, as Imam Sadeg says, this is a universal disorder.

These three cases are religious beliefs, political beliefs and management. The words of the Imam, as transmitted to us, are as follows;

There are three matters in which everyone considers himself to be in the right: the religion he believes in: his passion for self-advancement; management of his own affairs (i.e. His policy).3

In these three areas everyone imagines that that he says is correct and in accordance with reality, and nobody thinks that he is likely to be wrong.

The Probability Of Error In Religious Beliefs

Regardless of what faith be believes in a person rarely entertains doubts about his religious beliefs. Noone considers the possibility that his beliefs might be wrong.

If you ask anyone about whether his religious beliefs are right or wrong, he will tell you dogmatically that only his beliefs are correct and in accordance with reality, therefore anyone who says otherwise, and any belief which is contrary to his beliefs, is incorrect, not in accord with reality and unscientific.

A Christian will say his faith is correct. a Jew will say what he says is true; a Zoroastrian will say his beliefs arc right; a Buddhist will say his religion is in accord with reality; a Communist will say all the others are wrong and only his school and philosophy are scientific; and so on. And since no-one will admit to the possibility that what he considers to be correct might be incorrect, no-one permits himself to carry out an enquiry.

In the hadith just quoted Imam Sadeq considers such dogmatic thinking to be a kind of universal ideological sickness, and as long as a person remains afflicted by this disease there is no hope of him being able to correct his beliefs and choose a true religion.

The Probability of Error In Political Beliefs

After religious beliefs the second area in which nobody admits the possibility of being wrong, and dogmatically believes he is in the right, is that of political beliefs.

Every government and regime, every political organization and group, as well as every individual intent on seizing power, claims to be right, and says that only their policies should be carry out and that only they have the right to rule.

The leaders of the United States consider their political beliefs to be right and so do, the leaders of the Soviet Union and so does every other government and regime. Where wise within every government every party and group considers itself to be right and its rivals to be wrong, and within every party and group every individual so do aspires to leadership considers his political beliefs to be right and the beliefs of others to be wrong.

In a nutshell, there are as many political beliefs in the world as there are parties and groups and aspirants to political leadership and each of these considers its beliefs and policies to be correct and those of the others to be wrong.

In fact, a brief study of the conduct of all aspirants to power shows that all they are really interested in is their personal advancement, and what they put forward as their political beliefs is really nothing other than an excuse and a bridge to reach to their goal of power and control. For this reason the Imam, calls the beliefs and policies of such ambitious people the 'passion for self-advancement.

The Probability Of Error In Management

The third area in which everyone believes himself to be right is management. Nobody thinks that in the management and planning of affairs which have been entrusted to him he might be wrong. Everyone, whatever position of authorities he occupies is absolutely convinced that he is the best of all managers and planners.

From the head of a government to the head of a family everyone considers himself a prudent manager and will not tolerate criticism from any quoter.

In short, dogmatism in religious, political and managerial beliefs is a universal ideological sickness threatening the human societies.4

The Danger Of Self-Delusion

This type of self-delusion is one of the most precarious diseases affecting mankind, and its cure especially if it is Chronic-is extremely difficult or even impossible. Experience shows that those who are suffering from this disease are rarely cured, because a person who does not know, and does not know that he does not know is inherently incapable even of contemplating the need for a cure for his ignorance let alone thinking about the cure itself & so he is destined to flounder forever in the log of compound ignorance.

The person who knows (and who knows that he knows) to celestial spheres on his thoroughbred goes, The person who knows not (yet knows that he knows not) however on his lame little donkey may trot. But the person who knows not (and knows not he knows not) thread forever in ignorance, that is his lot!

The Cure For Self-Delusion

With this brief introduction in mind we must now see what guidance Islam provides to correct beliefs and prevent or cure the disease of self-delusion.

The prevention and treatment of self-delusion and the way to achieve correct beliefs depend on two fundamentals: the removal from our reason of obstacles to understanding, and the creation of condition conducive understanding: the guidance of Islam is nothing other than this. However, since in the second part of this series of discussions we shall be examining these two matters in detail we will refrain from discussing them here.

What this chapter deals with is what the Islamic texts specifically have to say regarding obstacles to the correction of belief and the conditions for such correction, although these matters are to some extent alluded to the question of obstacles to and conditions for understanding.

Obstacles To The Correction Of Belief

The question of obstacles to the correction of belief is one that can cause mistakes and mental error, in such cases the researcher cannot be sure that his judgment and belief are in accord with reality.

The first to devise ways preventing erroneous thought was Aristotle (447–384 B.C.), the founder of logic.

'The source and basis of Aristotle's achievement in discovering how to acquire knowledge, were the

ideas of Socrates and Plan, but his extremely precise mind was not satisfied with the Socratic method of argument, and he did not consider Platonic ideas on the origin of knowledge and the path to wisdom to be entirely realistic.

While rejecting the false logic and disputes of the sophists and polemicist he laid the foundations of his philosophy on discovering the correct rules for recovering and extracting the truth, and following in the footsteps of Plato and Socrates he acquired the principles of logic and the rules of analogy. The foundations Aristotle built on were so firmly laid that no-one since him has added a single thing.5

In the language of the logicians, 'logic is a tool consisting of rules and laws the use of which preserves the mind from erroneous thinking.

From the time of Bacon (1560–1625) and Descartes (1596–1650) European philosophers began to realize that Aristotelian logic was inadequate to prevent errors of thought. Descartes was convinced that: "The rules of logic' however correct and firm they may be, cannot make the unknown known, and their real use is in knowing expressions and acquiring the skills of understanding and explaining, since proof consists of deducing conclusions from preliminary data. So if the data is not known there can be no conclusions, for with the rules of logic alone knowledge cannot be acquired, and if correct data is available the conclusion will follow accordingly.

"Man's judgment by its very nature, applies the rules of logic, and does not need all the discussions and disputes of the logicians. And if the available data is wrong, the conclusion drawn must inevitably be wrong too, and instead of knowledge error will result. For this reason those who have sought knowledge, even knowing the rules of logic well, have made many errors.

In his clear explanation Descartes, and also Francis Bacon in his "new Organ" claim to have invented a new kind of logic. The French philosopher and the English scientist tried to show that

Aristotle an logic is not a means of discovering the unknown, and the importance given to this logic by the scholastics did not justify their devoting the major part of their time to its study and use.7

Bacon and Descartes were aware that reasoning could be proving to error from two sources:

- a) the raw data which the mind assumes to be self-evident and takes as the basis of its reasoning, and treats as the bricks and matter of its argument.
- b) the shape, form, order and arrangement which the mind gives to these raw materials.

Testing for errors by Aristotelian logic relates to the form of the reasoning process and for this reason this logic is called 'formal logic'. It makes no provision for testing for errors in the substance and basis on which the reasoning in question depends, whereas what really matter as far as preventing errors of thought and correcting beliefs are concerned is the validification of the substance, because man's intuitive judgment can apply the rules of logic even without knowing the technical terms for them.

The new logic which Bacon proposed for the validification of substantive matter to which reasoning is applied consisted of avoiding obstacles to the discovery of truth, which he defines as tribal, personal, commercial and showing idols:

"Man is faced with a number of difficulties in his search for knowledge, which he must try to avoid. The most serious of these are the errors which affect his judgment. Since these errors can cause a person to stray from the true path Bacon refers to them as "idols" and divide them into four categories.

The first category consists of "tribal idols", that is to say errors which emanate from the characteristics of man. Own nature since just as in a distorting mirror rays of light are refracted in an abnormal way so as to produce ugly and unnatural images. So too perceptions and rational ideas can be distorted and deformed by man's mind.

For example, when a dream and reality happen to coincide he may take this as a point of reference, but this shill not happen a hundred times. He will not remember, however, and will remain firmly attached in the most bigoted way to the beliefs he has chosen, and will tend to lose his impartiality and base his conclusion on emotions and personal whims.

Pride and conceit fear and lust will totally affect his judgment. A person's serves which are the source of his knowledge, are defective and prone to error ensuring that he will not be prepared to correct his errors through reflection and contemplation. He judges by appearances without delving fully into matters.

The second category is personal idols, in other words errors which affect people because of their individual natures, such as the fact that everyone has their pet interest in which they base their beliefs, like Aristotle who was- obsessed by logic and based his entire philosophy on it. Some people's minds are attracted towards similarities and generalizations; others see differences and particularities everywhere. Some people are by nature prone to dogma, others to doubt and uncertainty, to the extent that they may even become complete skeptics.

Bacon's third category is "commercial idols", that is to say errors which occur from transactions among people as a result of deficiencies in the words and expressions used to convey their meanings such as "luck", "chance" and "destiny".

The fourth category is "apparent idols", by which Bacon means errors caused by the erroneous teachings of philosophers...8

Descartes also proposed principles and rules to prevent erroneous thinking and guarantee that the substantive matter forming the basis of philosophic nations is correct. The first of these principles is:

'I will not hold any proposition to be true unless it is self-evident to me, and in my validification of it I will avoid hasty or preconceived judgment, and personal inclination, not accepting its truth unless it is so obvious and distinct that I have no doubt whatsoever about it."9

The Scientific Marvel of the Quran

More than a thousand years before the question arose of identifying and in valuating error in the substance of reasoning and all that, which the European scientists came to ten centuries later was encapsulated in the 23rd verse of the Surah the Star, which is an example of the scientific miracles of the Quran:

'The unbelievers follow naught but idle speculations and their sensual whims.' (53:23).

In other words, two things cause man to succumb to error in his opinions and beliefs: following idle speculations and following personal inclinations.

Other matters such as fanaticism, *Taqlid*, despotism and obstinacy are of course discussed in the Islamic traditions as causing erroneous thinking, but they all relate back to personal inclinations, and what the hadith have to say on this subject is in effect no more than further commentary on this verse.

With this introduction now completed we can proceed to a study of obstacles to the correction of belief as seen from the standpoint of the Quran and the hadith. These obstacles as already stated, consist of the following:

- a) idle speculation
- b) personal inclinations
- c) fanaticism
- d) Taqlid
- e) bigotry
- f) obstinacy

a) Idle Speculation

Idle speculation and conjecture are dangerous stumbling blocks that have caused most people in world to go astray and fall into the abyss of erroneous belief.

The first guidance that the Quran provide for the correction of belief is to avoid relying on such stumbling-blocks. The Quran stresses that believers should not base their opinions and beliefs on mere speculation and conjecture, and that until something has been conclusively proved, to them they should not adopt it as true. The Quran explicitly states:

'Do not follow what you do not have knowledge of. (17:36).

That is to say according to the Quran, a Muslim does not have the right to follow something or adopt it as a basis for action unless it has been conclusively proved to his satisfaction.

The Quran criticizes people with false opinions and beliefs for saying something which is not clearly defined and known to them:

You open your mouth to speak that which you have no knowledge or. (24:15).

The Quran criticize those who deny life after death on the grounds that they have no reason for such a denial, and their opinion is based not on scientific knowledge but purely on speculation and conjecture:

'They say, "There is this life on earth and no other. We die, and others are born. Nothing destroys us except time." But they have no knowledge. of this, and what they say is mere conjecture.' (45:24).

The objection of the Quran to those who consider creation to be purposeless and futile is that the basis of their belief is not scientific and that if they take a little trouble they will realize that they have no knowledge of what they believe, and that their beliefs are in fact the result of mere speculation and conjecture:

'We did not create the heavens and the earth and all that lies between them in vain: such is the supposition of the unbelievers.' (38:27).

If we investigate and analyze the conflicting opinions and views of people in various societies we see clearly that most of them lack any scientific basis and originate from speculation and 'conjecture. People everywhere, in older times and today, follow their fancies in questions of ideology, particularly with regard to ideological principles. This is why the Quran explicitly states that anyone who follows the majority will be led astray:

'If you follow the majority of people in the world you will astray from the path of God, because they follow nothing, but idle speculation and guess.' (6: 116).

If one day the followers of all religious and devotees of every different persuasion decide to follow nothing but scientific knowledge and not believe anything until it was completely and clearly known to them the problem of religious and ideological differences would largely be solved.

Imam Sadeq is reported as saying: 'God provided his servants with two Quranic verses, one to the effect that until they have acquired knowledge of a thing they should not accept it as true, nor should they express an opinion about something that they do not understand, the other that they should not deny something they do not understand. God's words in the first verse are: 'Is it not incumbent upon them according to... the to ascribe nothing to God except what is true?' (7:169). The second verse states: Verily they disbelieve what they cannot understand.' (10:39).10

b) Personal inclinations

The second dangerous stumbling-block to correct thought according to the Quran, consists of personal inclinations, which if not greater than the first is certainly no less.

When a person loves or is attached to a thing his feelings blind his reason and prevent him from thinking properly, so that he cannot see or understand the weak points of his beloved. Hatred has the same effect.

If someone wants to see the weak and strong points of a theory and think correctly about it he must therefore free himself from personal inclinations, for unless he does so they cannot help affecting his judgment.

There is a well–known story of Allama Hilli, 11 a learned jurisprudent, when he was preparing to issue a *fatwah* on whether a contaminated well could be purified or not First gave order that the well of his own house should be filled in. Then he sat down to study the legal precedents. The *fatwah* he finally issued was to the effect that the polluted well could he purified by following the instructions given by earlier authorities.

The learned judge realized that unless his own well was filled in it might be that any potential loss to him might subconsciously affect his judgment. It is an undeniable fact that until a person has filled in the well of his own inclinations and interests and freed his mind of all desire and fancy he cannot correctly perceive the truth as he should, or express an unbiased opinion on a matter.

This is why more the mind of a researcher is cleansed of personal inclination the closer he will approach the truth of a matter. In the words of Imam Ali: 'The wisest opinion is the one, which is the furthest from personal inclination'. 12 Or in another version: 'The best of opinions is the one furthest from personal inclination'. 13

Zeid bin Sowhan, one of the followers of the commander of the Faithful, once asked him whose opinion was the most realistic and constant. The Imam replied:

'The person who is not deceived by suggestions of the multitude nor by the vanities of this world'. 14

c) Fanaticism

Another obstacle to the attainment of correct and realistic belief is fanaticism.

Fanaticism or excess prejudice is an extreme case of following one's personal inclinations in supporting an individual or individuals, or a thing, without regard for the truth.

Supporting members of your own family, group or tribe, political party, caucus or organization, culture or customs, religion or sect race, language, in other words supporting anything or anyone is fanaticism, if it

is on the basis of personal inclinations and without regard for truth and justice.

The leader of the fanatics!

According to the commander of the faithful the model for fanatics is the Devil himself. The Imam describes the Devil thus: '(The Devil is) the leader of the fanatics and the front runner of the arrogant. It is he that laid the foundations of fanaticism'. 15

The first fanatic in the world was the Devil and racial prejudice was the form of fanaticism he adopted. He considered himself to be racially superior to man and thought that this was sufficient reason to disobey the divine order to prostrate himself before Adam. When God asked the Devil why he refused to do so he replied frankly: 'Because I am from of fire and Adam is born of earth!'

The effects of fanaticism

If this diabolical vice takes root in a person its first effect and greatest danger is to color his judgment accordingly. In other words fanaticism is in general a kind of psychological sickness which prevents a person from arriving at what is true and in accordance with reality as regards his research and analysis, or the conclusions he draws from them. The analysis and studies of a fanatic will therefore result in him forming views which are dictated by his fanaticism.

The disease of fanaticism leads the fanatic to treat the speaker and not what he says, as the criterion for his judgment. Fanaticism does not let a person think about what is said, and whether it is true or false, right or wrong, it merely prompts him to ask "Who's the speaker" If it's someone who thinks like he does then his ideas are correct, and if not then he's wrong.

The guidance given by Islam the correction of belief is that the veil of fanaticism must be removed from the eye of reason, and that the words spoken, not the person who speaks, should be the standard for judgment.

The guidance given by Islam for the correction of belief is that fanaticism and prejudice must be set aside and attention paid only to what is said and to the ideas expressed, regardless of who they might be, or of what political party or group they arc from, whether their cultural background is like ours or not, whether they are Muslims or not, and even whether they are your friends or enemies.

How beautifully and clearly the Quran expresses this:

'Give good news to those of my servants who hear to what is said and follow the best of it. They are those whom God has rightly guided, and they are those of understanding' (39:18).

In other words, people of understanding and those who follow the precepts of God and the Quran and Islam are those who listen to the words of all manner of men, arid after due analysis and study adopt only what is correct, exact and beneficial.

Inspired by this Quranic verse there is a hadith ascribed in the Kanz al-Ummal to the prophet of Islam and in the Ghurar al-Hikam to the Commander of the Faithful that explicitly states:

'Do not regard, who has spoken but what is spoken'. 16

In another beautiful expression dealing with the same subject the prophet of God Jesus says:

'Accept true words even from the unrighteous, but do not accept untruths even from the righteous. And subject all you hear to criticism.'17

In other words, fanaticism must not lead a Muslim to reject the truth if it is presented by others purely on the grounds that they are flit Muslims and their beliefs are wrong, or to accept what is wrong from people out of fanaticism because they are his co-religionists. The duty of a Muslim is to subject the words of any speaker, regardless of his overall ideological orientation, to

rigorous criticism and study, and if what he says is true to accept it, even though he may be unrighteous, and equally if what a person says is wrong not to accept it even if he is righteous. In either case the yardstick should be the truth, not the speaker, and Islam is nothing other than submission to the truth, and it is for this reason that the prophet of Islam said that fanaticism is incompatible with being a Muslim.

'A person who, practices fanaticism or allows it to be practiced, has loosed the collar of taith–Islam–from his neck'.18

d) Taqlid

Taqlid in matters of belief, that is to say, accepting the views of others without studying their reasons and proofs is one of the of effects of fanaticism and an obstacle to research and investigate which can prevent a person from arriving at correct, scientific and realistic opinions and beliefs.

Taqlid is a chain that fetters man's intellect and as long as it exists it is impossible for him to correct his belief. *Taqlid* prevents man from asking himself whether his beliefs are true or false, realistic or unrealistic, scientific or pseudoscientific, or based on true understanding or self–delusion. *Taqlid* prevents man from subjecting the thoughts, words or beliefs of others to independent criticism and study.

Taqlid imprison man by force in the confines of the beliefs and ideas of the person who is his model. Taqlid induces a person to disregard the massage and consider only the person delivering it.

The guidance of Islam as regards the correction of belief is to break this chain. What is strange is that there are so few people who are not so fettered. And even stranger is the number of scholars who imagine themselves to be independent thinkers.

e) Bigotry

The fifth obstacle to the correction of belief is bigotry. Bigotry is one of the consequences of following one's personal inclinations and of extreme self-delusion. This disease desiccates, stultifies and petrifies a person's mind and prevents him from advancing towards the truth.

As a result the bigot believes that everything he says, and every belief and custom and opinion he holds is correct, while everything his opponents say is wrong. When a person's mind stultifies he becomes incapable of even considering the opinions of others where these differ from his own, or of thinking about what others have to say, and therefore he is unable to arrive at the truth.

In the Islamic traditions bigotry is considered a dangerous stumbling-block to thought and a thinker who is subject to bigotry is certain to fall into the abyss of destruction. Imam Sadeq had this to say on the matter. `The bigot stands on the brink of a precipice'. 19

Imam 'Ali is quoted on the dangers of narrow mindedness and bigotry as follows:

`The bigot faces imminent error'.20 Bigotry will slip you and cast you into the abyss.21

The bigot is destined for destruction.'22 The person who favors only his own opinion stands in grave danger'.23 In another hadith Imam 'Ali says that a person who contents himself with his own opinion and disregards that of others lacks discommend: 'The person who relies only on his own opinion has no opinion.'24

J) Obstinacy

Another obstacle to the correction of belief is obstinacy. Obstinacy in discussion and in the matters of opinion is a dangerous stumbling–block to thought, which it secretly leads astray, resulting in incorrect opinions, without the thinker realizing that this is happening. The Commander of the Faithful uses an elegant phrase to describe this phenomenon: 'Obstinacy is a sneak–thief of opinions.25

In other words, just like a thief that secretly enters a house and without the owner realizing steals what he fancies, so fanaticism and obstinacy when they enter a person's mind unconsciously affect his thoughts and without him sensing it distort his judgment and deprive him of sound views.

It follows that in effect obstinate and stubborn people cannot be real thinkers. As the commander of the faithful puts it: 'The obstinate man is a man of no opinion. 26 Even if in one or two cases an obstinate person has a correct opinion the fanaticism and stubbornness which he displays in presenting his views deprive them of their validity.

To quote the commander of the faithful again: 'Obstinacy corrupts a man's judgment. 27 In a final word from Imam Ali: 'Obstinacy begins with, ignorance and ends with repentance. 28

Conditions For The Correction Of Beliefs

The conditions for the correction of beliefs that the researcher requires if he is to reach the truth, and without which he cannot be confident of the results of his research, consist of the following:

- 1- Avoidance of haste
- 2- Experience
- 3- Concentration
- 4- Stimulating the mind
- 5- Exchange of views
- 6- Divine assistance

These will now be discussed:

1- Avoidance of haste

This means avoiding haste in expressing one's opinions and allowing one's views to mature. When a researcher reflects on a subject at first he often arrives at a theory which is crude and unreliable. By taking his time and allowing himself the opportunity to study the matter more thoroughly and analyze it in all its dimensions and aspects, so that his theory becomes refined and reliable. In the words of the commander of the faithful: 'The Sound judgment cannot be reached in haste, and hasting judgment...29.

Hasting judgment deprives the researcher of the opportunity to carry out a full and detailed study and leads him to erroneous ideas and incorrect analysis. As the Commander of the Faithful: 'Haste causes error'. 30 There is also a hadith of the prophet in the subject: 'A person who avoids haste will reach a correct opinion, or gets close to one, while the hasting person will be wrong, or nearly so.31

The avoidance of haste will lead a researcher to a correct judgment, or one close to the truth. If the other conditions for the corrections of belief are present he will certainly arrive at the truth,

or at least he will not be for wrong. By contrast, haste will lead a researcher into error, and if he does happen to arrive at the truth it will be by chance. For this reason the Commander of the Faithful at a critical juncture shortly before his death advised his son, Imam Hasan, to avoid haste in words or deeds: 'I forbid you to act hastily in speech or action'.32

2- Experience

The opinions and analysis of people without sufficient experience and qualifications to express views are

usually unrealistic and wrong. In this regard, there is a short but profound hadith of Imam 'Ali that says: A man's judgment is commensurate with his experience."33

In other words, the greater a person's experience in matters relevant to the subject under discussion, the closer will his opinion be to reality, that is to say the more qualified and experienced a person is the more correct will his views be.

Another hadith ascribed to this Imam tells us: "The most qualified people to express an opinion are those with experience." 34 For this reason the Imam considers knowledge and science acquired through experience and testing to be more accurate than knowledge acquired in the class-room, and in his view medical knowledge gained through experience is closer to the true philosophy and science of medicine than is medical knowledge acquired through formal instruction.

Another hadith from the Imam says: The experienced practitioner does a better job than an unexperienced physician. 35 In general, in Imam 'Ali's opinion, If a person has sufficient experience in any subject, he will carry out his task in a correct and proper manner: 'The person who has stored experience when the occasion comes to use them he will do things correctly. 36

The role of experience in ensuring that one's views arc realistic and correct is so great that Imam 'Ali, although we consider him to be immune from sin or error, has some verses ascribed to him which have already been quoted.36 in which after describing himself as an expert in theoretical problems and intellectual matters, he says that relies on his experience in expounding his views: "I use analogy and knowledge vast". 'And often read the future in the past.37

In this couplet, Imam All tells us that he relies on his extensive experience to reach his judgment and emphasizes that he is not a person to accept the opinions of others unquestioningly, but rather draws on his knowledge of the past and the use of analogy to foresee what the future holds in store.

3- Concentration

Concentrating one's thoughts helps a researcher to define the parameters of the problem he is faced with, and then express his opinion in the light of every aspect of it. It follows that the more a person concentrates on his research the closer he will come to the truth, and the less he concentrates the further away he will find himself. A researcher who wants his opinion to be correct must therefore do all he can to ensure his concentration and avoid anything that may lessen it.

What are the factors affecting concentration?

Factors Affecting Concentration

In a Hadith of Imam Sadeq the main factors affecting a person's concentration are listed. The text of the hadith is as follows: 'There are five conditions the lack of any one of which will cause a person to have

an inadequate life, a mind that wastes away, and a troubled heart. The first is good physical health, the second, security, the third, sufficient sustenance, the fourth, congenial companions, the fifth-which is the compendium of all these conditions-tranquility.'38

We may note that in this tradition the Imam first mentions those conditions each of which plays a vital role in the attainment of a fulfilled life, a healthy mind and a tranquil spirit. It is these conditions that are conducive to concentration, and if they are absent a person will be unable to concentrate properly. The Imam then describes each of them.

a) Health

The first essential for tranquility of spirit and proper mental concentration and accuracy of understanding is good physical health. In this regard there are two proverbs, one Persian, one Arabic, which are probably derived from this tradition of Imam Sadeq's or a similar one.

The Persian proverb is 'A healthy mind in a healthy body<u>39</u> and the Arabic one is 'The judgment of a sick man is sick.' These proverbs contain valuable advice, which are conformed by experience.

b) Social security

The second prerequisite for tranquility of spirit and concentration mind is social security. A person who does not feel secure, and sees himself constantly beset by danger, invariably loses his ability to concentrate and as a result his judgment is unlikely to be correct or in accordance with reality.

c) Adequate sustenance

The third condition listed by the Imam for the attainment of tranquility and the proper functioning of the intellect and hence fulfillment of life is that a person should have adequate sustenance.

If he is impoverished and his mind permanently concerned with where his next meal will come from he obviously cannot be listed among the leading thinkers and his opinions and beliefs will lack scientific value. This is why Imam 'Ali is reported to have spoken the following words on the subject of poverty. "Verily poverty begets forgetfulness of the soul and anxiety of the mind, and attracts cares and griefs of every kind".40

In another tradition, Imam 'Ali tells his son Imam Hasan that a person afflicted by poverty suffers from four related factors: 'Uncertainty, diminishment of mental power, fragility religion and a lack of modesty.'41

d) Congenial Companions

The fourth condition which according to Imam Sadeq has a basic role in the attainment of peace of mind and mental health is having congenial companions.

Abu Khaled Sajestani, the realtor of this hadith, says when he asked the Imam what he meant by congenial companions the reply was: 'I meant a worthy spouse, worthy children and worthy friends.'

e) Tranquility of soul

The fifth condition facilitating mental concentration and sound judgment is tranquility of the soul, for which the Imam uses the word 'da'at'.

'Da'at is a word meaning literally 'calmness' or 'repose' and means tranquility or peace of the soul as opposed to tranquility from the social point of view, which was discussed as 'social security' as the second of these conditions.

An important aspect of the Imam's words which we must not overlook is that this condition is inclusive of the other conditions listed, that is to say tranquility of the soul can fill any voids caused by absence of the other conditions health, social security, adequate sustenance, congenial companions.

In other words the fact that plays the most important role in the fulfillment of life and a healthy mind and mental contentment is inner peace, and the four conditions mentioned are preliminaries to the attainment of tranquility of soul. Therefore if a person by training his soul can attain to a high degree of spirituality, certitude and tranquility, so that neither sickness nor insecurity poverty nor lack of congenial companionship can deprive him of such inner peace he will have acquired the key to mental concentration, sound judgment and fulfillment.

In short, the other conditions for achieving mental concentration all require tranquility of soul, but such tranquility may he achieved without them. We may therefore summarize the words of the Imam as follows: First, health, security, adequate sustenance and congenial companionship each play a fundamental role in acquiring peace of mind, mental concentration and fulfillment of life, provided they are accompanied by tranquility of soul.

Secondly, tranquility of soul in highly spiritual persons may often take the place of the other conditions. To put it in a nutshell, we may say that a basic condition for mental concentration is tranquility of soul.

Obstacles to mental concentration

In general, anything that causes one's thoughts to be distracted, and anything that preoccupies a researcher's mind other, than the matter he is researching, is an obstacle to mental concentration and a hindrance to correct judgment. This is why in a number of Islamic traditions it is recommended that a judge while deliberating and giving his opinion should not be angry, sleepy, hungry or thirsty, because all of these conditions are obstacles to mental concentration.

The Prophet of Islam is reported to have forbidden a judge to give judgment while he is angry, hungry or thirsty.42 and in another hadith he is quoted as saying that he should not decide a case between two

parties, unless he is free from hunger and thirst, 43 Imam 'Ali advised a judge named Shoraih never to sit in judgment unless he had eaten. 44

With a little thought, it becomes obvious that anyone who expresses his opinion about a matter should follow the advice contained in these traditions, if he is to achieve mental concentration and ensure that his opinion is close to reality. For in this case there is no difference between a judge and a layman, and in fact anyone who expresses an opinion about a matter has made a judgment, even if he is not a professional judge.

Imam Sadeq is reported to have said that one day a group of children who were learning to write brought what they had written to the Commander of the Faithful for him to decide who's was the best. The Imam said: But verily this is an arbitration and a wrong decision in this is like a miscarriage of justice.'45

In other words giving an opinion as to who writes best is a kind of judgment and if the rights of one child are ignored it is as if the rights of a litigant in a real court were abused.

So a person wanting to express his opinion must shun all obstacles to mental concentration if he is avoid error, and in this, there is no difference between a judge and a layman, who makes judgments.

Another point concerning the traditions quoted is that there is no difference between hunger, thirst, anger and sleepiness and other obstacles to concentration such as extreme cold or heat tight-fitting garments or footwear, pressure of the bladder or howl, or any other factor that distracts the mind and presents a person, from thinking clearly.

Ab al-As relates that Imam 'Ali was once asked a question by a man outside his house. The Imam entered his house without replying and shortly afterwards came out and asked where the man with the question was. The man was still there and said Here I am. The Imam told him to repeat his question which he did, and proceeded to answer it.

One of those present who had observed the speed with which the Imam was wanted to reply to all sorts of questions on many different occasions was surprised that this time he had not given an immediate answer. So said to the Imam: 'Commander of the faithful, as I have often seen you are like a fire brand in dealing with questions, so how is it that today you delayed answering, this man until you had gone into your house come out again?

The Imam replied: 'This time I was surprising the urge to urinate, Tree kinds of people have no worthwhile opinion: Those who are suppressing the urge to urinate and those, whose shoes are too tight. '46

4- Stimulating the mind

Stimulating the mind and preventing it from stultifying is another condition for the attainment of sound

judgment and correct belief. The guidance provided by the Commander of the Faithful in this regard is as follows: 'Agitate your ideas in the receptacle of the mind as you shake milk in a skin to [make butter] and the result will be correct views.47

If the mind stops at a given view it will petrify, and will therefore be incapable of growth and development, or of arriving at a real understanding of whether that view is right or wrong. or its arguments strong or weak.

The Imam therefore emphasizes that a researcher, if he is to reach correct beliefs and sound judgment, must prevent his mind from petrifying, stimulating thoughts intensely shake up ideas in his brain and subject every aspect of the theory he is examining to close.

5- Exchange of views

Another condition for the correction of belief is the exchange of views. I see the Commander of the Faithful gives the following advice: 'Submit your views to other people and listen to their. On this way sound opinions wilt emerge.48

The exchange of views between various people provided it is conducted in a spirit free from prejudice will naturally bring to light all their strong and weak points, truths and errors. A person

who allows himself to study and scrutinize the views and beliefs of others provided he adopts a scholarly approach will easily come to see which is correct and which false.

In the words of Imam 'Ali: 'Anyone who encounters with various aspects of the views, can tell which are right and which are false. 49 By contrast, a person who does not allow himself to consider the views of others and by relying solely on his own mind expresses a hurried opinion will, as the Imam says, he prone to horrible errors: 'He who is unfamiliar with the views of others will be tired out by mental effort'. 50

6- Divine Assistance

A factor which plays a vital role in arriving at scientific views leading to the discovery of facts and the correction of beliefs is divine assistance.

However careful and scholarly a person may be, because of the limitations of his knowledge he is usually unable to arrive at a complete understanding of the problems he is studying, or to be fully aware of every aspect of them. If he wishes to get to the truth, especially in complex scientific problems, he therefore needs divine assistance, or, to use an alternative expression, a kind of inspiration or enlightenment.

This is why Alexis Carrel, believes that scientific discoveries are not solely the product and effect of human thought. As he puts it:51 "Obviously, great discoveries are not the product of intelligence alone.

Men of genius, in addition to their powers of observation and comprehension, possess other qualities, such as intuition and creative imagination. Through intuition they learn things ignored by other men, they perceive relations between seemingly isolated phenomena they unconsciously feel the presence of the unknown treasure. All great men are endowed with intuition. They know, without analysis, without reasoning, what is important for them to know.

A true leader of men does not need psychological tests, or reference cards, when choosing his subordinates. A good judge, without going into the details of legal arguments, and even, according to Cardozo, starting from erroneous premises, is capable of rendering a just sentence. A great scientist instinctively takes the path leading to a discovery. This phenomenon, in former times, was called inspiration.

Men of science belong to two different types: the logical and the intuitive. Science owes its progress to both forms of minds. Mathematics, although a purely logical structure, nevertheless makes use of intuition. Among the mathematicians there are intuitive and logicians, analysts and geometricians. Hermitte and Weierstrass were intuitive, Riemann and Bertrand, logicians. The discoveries of intuition have always to be developed by logic.

In ordinary life, as in science; intuition is a powerful but dangerous means of acquiring knowledge. Sometimes it can hardly be distinguished from illusion. Those who rely upon it entirely are liable to mistakes. It is far from being always trustworthy. But the great man, or the simple whose heart is pure, can be led by it to the summits of mental and spiritual life. It is a strange quality. To apprehend reality without the help of intelligence appears inexplicable."

The French mathematician Jacques Hadama confirms this opinion. As he says: If we consider the conditions in which discoveries and inventions take place we cannot ignore the effects of sudden inner perceptions. Every research scientist has to some extent had the feeling that his life and his profession are formed by a series of alternating activities, in some of which his determination and intelligence are the deciding factors, while the rest are the result of a series of inspirations.52

We can therefore say that the greater the degree of divine assistance and inspiration a scientist has the more correct will his opinions and theories be and the more scientific facts will be discover, and if divine assistance to a person is total all his theories and views will be free from error.

Materialists are unable to say what the source of illumination or inspiration is, but to those who believe in divinity the source of such assistance is Almighty God, who in His infinite wisdom secures His assistance to every person according to his merits. Prayer is one of the means for obtaining such merit and this is why Imam Zein ol–Abedin, the fourth Imam, beseeches God, and instructs us to do the same to help us so that when we express our views they are in accord with reality. 'O God! I seek refuge in thee from unadmitted prayer illusory hopes negated modesty failed reasoning and wrong judgment.53

^{1.} Dehkhoda's Persian Dictionary defines a compound ignoramus thus: "One whose knowledge is not in accord with reality,

one who thinks but really does not, as distinct from a simple ignorant, whose ignorance is absolute."

- 2. Compound ignorance holding an opinion about the nature of something which is Contrary to its actual nature a firm belief at odds with reality, whether based on Uncertainly or Thus a compound ignorance firmness of belief is not valid. The reason why such a belief is termed compound ignorance is that a person holds an opinion that is contrary to the facts, which is first form of ignorance, then he believes that his opinion is correct, which is a second form of ignorance, and these two forms are compounded and hence known as compound ignorance.' (Dehkhoda)
- 3. Mizan. Hadith No. 6183
- 4. Some examples of warning to the people against this sickness could be found in Holy Quran in the following verses. 12/40, 5/103. 5/58.
- 5. Mohammad Ali Forougi' Seir Hikmah dar Orupa (The Development of Philosophy in Europe)., (Tehran, zavvar, 1344). Vol. 1, p. 31.
- 6. An unfinished work of Bacon's.
- 7. Forougi's op-cit. pp. 114. 116.
- 8. Ibid.
- 9. Ibid. p. 139. (The other principles of Cartesian logic are quoted on pp. 141-143 of Forougi's work).
- 10. Seyyed Mohammad Hossein Tabataba'l, Tafsir al-Mizan (Arabic ed₊) Vol VIII, p. 304.
- 11. Abu Mansur Hasan b. Sadid al-Din Yusef b. Ali al-Mutahhar al-Hilli (d.626/1226).
- 12. Mizan Hadith No. 6848.
- 13. Ibid. No. 6849.
- 14. Bihar al-Anwar Vol. 77. p. 378.
- 15. Persian translation and commentary by Feiz ol-Eslam of Imam'Ali's Nahjal.balagheh.
- 16. Mizan Hadith No. 13580.
- 17. Ibid. No. 13582.
- 18. Ibid. No. 12732.
- 19. Ibid, No. 6853.
- 20. Ibid, No. 6854.
- 21. Ibid, No. 6855.
- 22. Ibid, No. 6856.
- 23. Ibid, No. 6857.
- 24. Ibid, No. 6858. Further examples of hadith on the subject of bigotry are quoted in Mizan Chapters 1425 and 2514.
- 25. Ibid. 17814.
- 26. Ibid. No. 17815.
- 27. Ibid. No. 17816.
- 28. Ibid. No. 17832
- 29. Ibid. No. 6432.
- 30. Ibid. No. 11621.
- 31. Ibid. No. 11627.
- 32. Ibid. No. 21478.
- 33. Ibid. No. 2304.
- 34. Ibid. No. 10850.
- 35. Ibid. No. 10849.
- 36. Ibid. No. 2306. The present book, p. 18.
- 37. Ref. to the title of Taglid (imitation) in beliefs from the stand point of hadith.
- 38. Mizan Hadith No. 14466.
- 39. The same proverb was used in Ancient Rome under the words mens sana in corpore sano.
- 40. Ibid. No. 15693.
- 41. Ibid. No. 15694. Another similar hadith is ascribed to Imam 'Ali: 'Verily poverty weakens a person's devoutness, cause mental anxiety and...'

- 42. Ibid. No. 16544-16550.
- 43. Ibid. No. 16544-16550.
- 44. Ibid. No. 16544-16550.
- 45. Ibid, No. 16594.
- 46. Majlesi in Bihar al–Anwar Vol. 11. Pp 59–60 comments that the third category has been omitted by the copyist. By analogy with ether traditions he takes this to be,' those who are suppressing a bowel movement.
- 47. Mizan. Hadith No. 6834
- 48. Ibid. No. 6833.
- 49. Ibid. No. 6838.
- 50. Ibid. No. 6839.
- 51. Man. The Unknown. translated by Parviz Dabiri. Tehran. offset. pp. 139.140.
- 52. Quoted, without source. in Morteza Mottahari Emdadha-ye Gheibi dar Zendegi-ye

Ensan ('Divine assistance in human life') Tehran. p. 80.

53. Mizan. Hadith No. 6843

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