

Chapter 4: His Psychological Qualities

All the noble virtues and gifts which Allah created to distinguish man were found in the character of Imam Zayn al-‘Abidin, peace be on him. No one matched him in his inclinations and his psychological qualities such as sublime manners, high moral standards, and adherence to religion. When someone reads his noble behavior, he bows down in respect and admiration for him. The great Muslim figures from among his contemporaries belittled themselves because of the manifold of the Imam’s virtues and abilities. Sa‘id b. al-Musayyab, one of the great religious scholars of Medina, said: “I have never seen a person more meritorious than ‘Ali b. al-Husayn, and when I see him, I hate myself.¹” His ideals raised him to the summit of honor and glory which were ascended by his grandfathers, who sacrificed their lives for social reform. Now, we will talk briefly about some of his psychological qualities.

Clemency

As for clemency, it was among the qualities of the prophets and the messengers and is among the greatest and the most distinguished qualities of man, for it means that man controls himself and does not yield to the inclinations of anger and revenge. Al-Jahiz defined clemency, saying: “Clemency means that you leave revenge during intense anger while you are able to do that.²” Imam Zayn al-‘Abidin, peace be on him, was the greatest of all the people in clemency and the best of them in restraining anger. The narrators and the historians mentioned many examples of his clemency, the following are some of them:

1. A maid-servant of ‘Ali b. al-Husayn began to pour water for him so that he might perform the ritual ablutions for prayer. The maid-servant became faint and the jug dropped from her hand and struck him. He raised his head towards her and the maid-servant said: “Allah, the Most High, says: *Those who restrain from anger.*”

“I have restrained my anger,” he said.

“*And those who forgive the people,*” she went on.

“My Allah forgive you,” he said.

“Allah loves those who do good,” she said.

“Go, you are a free woman before the face of Allah, the Almighty and High,³” he answered.

2. A mean person received the Imam by abusing and cursing him, nevertheless the Imam treated him kindly, saying: “Boy, there will be an invincible obstacle before us. If I cross it I will pay no attention to what you are saying. If I am perplexed with it, I will be more wicked than what you are saying.⁴”

The Imam was busy thinking of his sentiments and feelings toward Allah and fear of the terrors of the hereafter from which no one will be safe except the pious, and he was not annoyed by this nonsense, which issued from a person void of morals and manners.

3. When the Imam went out of the mosque, a person abused him, so the people hurried to punish the man, but the Imam prevented them from doing that, saying: “What Allah has concealed from you is more than (this). Shall I help you with your need?”

The person was ashamed of himself and wished that the earth would swallow him up. When the Imam looked at him, he had mercy on him and gave him a black shirt and a thousand dirhams. With that the Imam was able to uproot from the man the evil inclination of aggression against the people without any right and showed him the path of truth and guidance, so when the person saw the Imam, he said to him: “Surely you are among the children of the prophets.⁵”

4. An ignoble person aggressed against the Imam and cursed him, but the Imam turned his face away from him, so the ignoble person became angry and said to him: “I mean you!” However, the Imam said to him: “Still, I will forgive you!” Then the Imam left the ignoble person and went away. He did not return the insult, thus the ignoble person burst into anger⁶

5. A mean person slandered the Imam and went too far in cursing him; nevertheless the Imam said to him: “If I have what you say, I will ask Allah to forgive me. If I do not have what you say, I will ask Allah to forgive you.” The mean person became ashamed of himself and apologized to the Imam for that, saying: “You do not have what I said, so pardon me!” The Imam received him with smiles of satisfaction and forgiveness, saying: “May Allah forgive you!” The mean person admired the Imam and said: “Allah knows better where to place his message.⁷”

6. A person was aggressive against a member of the family of al-Zubayr and cursed him, but the latter did not return in degree. When the person went away, al-Zubayri stood up and began cursing the Imam, but the latter kept silent and did not answer him, so the former asked: “What prevents you from answering me?” “What prevented you from answering the man,” the Imam answered with kindness.⁸

These are some of the examples the historians mentioned of the clemency of the Imam, peace be on him. They show an endless ability of outstanding merits which manifested themselves in the Imam and raised him to the highest level of the human perfection.

Patience

Among the psychological qualities of Imam Zayn al-‘Abidin, peace be on him was patience during ordeals and tribulations. It is certain that no one in this world has been afflicted by such ordeals and tribulations as this great Imam was afflicted by them; he was liable to events and misfortunes from the beginning of his life to his death, for he suffered the loss of his mother when he was in the first stage of his childhood, so he did not feel her pure affection and kindness. He witnessed in his bloom of youth the sorrow of his family because of the loss of his grandfather Imam ‘Ali, the Commander of the faithful, peace be on him, whom ‘Abd al-Rahman b. Muljim killed.

He witnessed those days when his uncle, the pure Imam, al-Hasan, peace be on him, was forced to make peace with Mu‘awiya b. Abu’ Sufyan, the Umayyad ruler of Syria. It is worth mentioning that Mu‘awiya brought disgrace on the Arab and Islamic world because of his pre-Islamic inclinations and his malice against Islam and Muslims. When he took the reins of authority, he used all the organs of his government to erase Islam from the map of existence, and took the severest measures against the members of the House (ahl al-Bayt), peace be on them. For example, he ordered the people to curse them on the pulpits and the minarets (of the mosques), meanwhile he ordered their followers to be killed everywhere.

When Imam Zayn al-‘Abidin, peace be on him, became a young man, he suffered the loss of his uncle Imam al-Hasan, the plant of sweet basil of Allah’s Apostle, may Allah bless him and his family, whom the Kasra of the Arabs (i.e., Mu‘awiya b. Hind) [9](#) killed with poison. This event saddened the Imam and the Prophet’s Household very much.

Imam Zayn al-‘Abidin, peace be on him, was afflicted by the most sorrowful event when he saw sinful swords cut off the heads of the choice from among the members of the family of the Prophet, may Allah bless him and his family, in a tragic way which the history of nations and people had never seen. After the murder of that group from among the supporters of justice and truth, the criminal Kufans surrounded Imam Zayn al-‘Abidin, peace be on him, and then they burnt his tent and the tents of the womenfolk of the Prophet, may Allah bless him and his family. After that they took the Imam as prisoner to the tyrannical governor, b. Marjana, who received the Imam by cursing and abusing him, while the Imam was patient and entrusted his affair to Allah. After that, the Imam was taken to the tyrannical Caliph, Yazid b. Mu‘awiya. There the Imam suffered from various kinds of ordeals and tribulations but he was patient toward them showing satisfaction with Allah’s decree. Therefore, what a great soul was his soul! What a pure conscience was his conscience! As for his soul, it resorted to the Creator of the world and Giver of life during all those terrible events. As for his conscience, it was purer and stronger than everything.

Patient in the face of ordeals and tribulations was among the psychological qualities of the Imam, peace be on him. It was reported on his authority that he said: “Patience is the source of obedience to Allah. [10](#)”

Another example of his patience was that he heard a woman wailing in his house, and there was a group of people with him, so he stood up to see what happened. He was told that one of his children had died, but he returned to his assembly and told his companions about the death of his child and they admired his patience, so he said to them: “We, the members of the House, obey Allah in what we like and praise Him in what we dislike.¹¹” He thought that patience was among bounties and impatience was an act of weakness.¹²

As Imam Zayn al-‘Abidin, peace be on him, had a strong character and did not collapse before the terrible events, he is regarded as among the rarest figures throughout history.

Glory and Self-esteem

Among the qualities of Imam Zayn al-‘Abidin, peace be on him, were glory and self-esteem. He inherited these qualities from his father, the Lord of martyrs, peace be on him, who walked toward death with longing and desire for his glory and self-esteem. That was when the mean people made him choose between death and abasement, so he chose death and addressed them, saying: “By Allah, I will never give you my hand like a man who has been humiliated; nor will I flee like a slave.” This noble quality appeared in Imam Zayn al-‘Abidin when he said: “I do not prefer excellent bounties to myself.¹³” Concerning self-esteem, he said: “Whoever feels that he is respectable, the world is easy for him.¹⁴” When he was taken prisoner to Syria, he did not speak to any of those who guarded him to make them feel that he disdained and belittled them.

The historians said: “One of his uncles took some of his rights illegally. He, peace be on him, was in Mecca. Meanwhile al-Walid, the king, was there to perform the ritual hajj, so it was said to him: ‘Ask al-Walid to take you your rights.’ So he said to them with these words which are immortal in the world of glory and self-esteem: ‘Shall I ask in the House of Allah, the Great and Almighty, other than Allah, Great and Almighty? Indeed, I refuse to ask the Creator of the world for the world, then how shall I ask a creature similar to me for the world?’¹⁵” Another example of his self-esteem was that he did not take even a dirham through his nearness to Allah’s Apostle, may Allah bless him and his family.¹⁶ The historians reported many examples of his glory and self-esteem, which showed that he refused all kinds of abasement and oppression.

Bravery

Among his psychological qualities was bravery and courage; he was the bravest of all the people, for he was the son of al-Husayn, who was the most courageous of all the children of Adam. An example of his outstanding bravery was when he was taken prisoner and taken to the tyrannical governor, ‘Ubayd Allah b. Marjana, the latter received him with words of glee at his misfortune. So the Imam answered him with burning words whose effect on him was stronger than the clashing of swords and the lashing of whips. Imam Zayn al-‘Abidin, peace be on him, paid no attention to ‘Ubayd Allah’s power and invincibility, so b.

Marjana (i.e., ‘Ubayd Allah) became so angry that he ordered the Imam to be killed. However, the Imam was not afraid of death, rather he said to him calmly: “Killing is a custom for us, and our miracle from Allah is martyrdom.”

When Imam Zayn al-‘Abidin, peace be on him, was taken to Yazid b. Mu‘awiya, he met him with boldness and reproached him for his great crime and gave him no way to defend himself and to justify his crime.

The Imam inherited bravery from his grandfather ‘Ali and his father al-Husayn, who were the bravest of all the creatures of Allah. There is no one in the world of Islam similar to them in bravery, strong determination, and firmness in defending the truth.

His Unselfish Nature

Among his prominent qualities was his lack of all kinds of selfishness which had no power over him. The historians mentioned many examples of his lack of selfishness. Such as when he wanted to travel to a certain place, he traveled with people who did not know him, so that he would serve them and rather than they serve him. One day he traveled with some people who did not know him, but one of them looked at him and recognized him and shouted at the people, asking: “Woe unto you! Do you know that man?”

“No, we don’t,” answered the people.

“That is ‘Ali b. al-Husayn,” explained the man.

The people hurried toward the Imam and began kissing his hands and feet, asking: “Do you want Allah to make us enter the fire of Hell? What made you do that?”

The Imam answered gently: “I traveled with some people who knew me and they, because of Allah’s Apostle, rendered services for me which I was unworthy of. I was afraid that you would render me the same services, so I preferred concealing my affair to making it public. [17](#)”

Another example of his lack of selfishness was that when he walked in a street and saw the passers-by being harmed by things such as stones and clods of mud, he dismounted his mount and took them away from the street with his holy hand. [18](#) When he mounted his mule and walked in the street, he did not say to anyone: “Make room.” Moreover, he said: “The street is for all people, and I have no right to push anyone away from it. [19](#)” All the qualities of the Prophet, may Allah bless him and his family, such as high moral standards were embodied in this great soul.

Kindness to People

Another quality of Imam Zayn al-‘Abidin, peace be on him, was kindness to people; his holy heart overflowed with mercy and kindness toward them. The historians said: “When he knew that someone was in debt and loved him, he paid his debt.²⁰ He hurried to meet the needs of the people lest someone should meet them before him and he would be deprived of reward.

In this respect he said: ‘My enemy sometimes came to me (and ask me) to satisfy his need, so I hasten to satisfy it for fear that someone should satisfy it before me or my enemy should be in no need of it; therefore I would be deprived of the reward for it.²¹’ Al-Zuhri reported the following concerning the kindness of the Imam to the people: “I was with ‘Ali b. al-Husayn when a person came and said him: ‘I owe four hundred dinars and am unable to pay them and have a family. At that time the Imam had no money on him to pay the person’s debt, so he wept and said: ‘It is difficult for a free and believing person to be unable to satisfy the need of his believing brother.’²²”

Generosity

As for generosity, it was among the qualities of Imam Zayn al-‘Abidin, peace be on him. The historians unanimously agreed that the Imam was the most generous of all the people and the kindest of them to the poor and the weak. They mentioned many examples of his generosity. The following are some of them:

Muhammad b. Usama

Muhammad b. Usama became ill, so the Imam visited him. When the Imam sat down, Muhammad burst into tears, so the Imam asked him: “What makes you weep?”

“What makes me weep,” answered Muhammad, “is the fact that I owe fifteen thousand dinars and I have nothing left to fulfill the debt for them.”

“Do not weep,” the Imam told him, “they are my debts now and you are free of them.” So he paid them for him.²³

His giving Food to the People

An example of his abundant generosity was that he gave food to those people who came to his house in Medina at noon every day.²⁴

His Maintaining a Hundred Families

The Imam was very generous that he secretly maintained a hundred families in Medina,²⁵ and each

family had a group of people.[26](#)

The generosity of the Imam showed that he had a soul free from miserliness, that he had mercy on the people, and that he was grateful to Allah for His giving.

His Kindness to the Poor

Among his qualities was kindness to the poor, the deprived, and the miserable. We shall mention some examples of his kindness to them:

A. His Honoring the Poor

Imam Zayn al-‘Abidin, peace be on him, looked after the poor and took care of their feelings and sentiments. When he gave a beggar alms, he kissed him lest he should see the mark of abasement and need on his face.[27](#) He greeted the beggars who came to him and said to them: “Welcome to him who carries my provisions to the hereafter.[28](#)”

Honoring the poor in this kind and merciful manner strengthens society and spreads love and friendship among its members.

B. His Kindness to the Poor

The Imam, peace be on him, was very kind and affectionate to the poor and the needy. He asked the orphans, the blind, and the needy to eat with him. He gave them food with his hand[29](#) as well as he carried food on his back and took it to their houses.[30](#) He took great care of the poor and was so kind to them that he prevented the people from harvesting dates at night lest they should deprive the poor of them. So he said to Qahramana, who reaped dates at night: “Do not do that. Don’t you know that Allah’s Apostle, may Allah bless him and his family, prevented (the people) from reaping at night, and he used to say: ‘You should give a share to those who ask you for it on the day of harvest.[31](#)’”

His Preventing the People from Reproaching Beggars

The Imam, peace be on him, prevented the people from reproaching beggars, for that would bring about bad results such as loss of bounties and sudden adversities. In this respect Sa‘id b. al-Musayyab reported: “One day I went to ‘Ali b. al-Husayn. After he had finished performing the noon prayer, there was a beggar at the door, so he, peace be on him, said: ‘Give to the beggar and do not reproach him.[32](#)’”

The Imam, peace be on him, stressed the importance of this duty in many of his traditions. In this connection, Abu’ Hamza al-Thumali reported: “I performed the morning prayer with ‘Ali b. al-Husayn in Medina on Friday. After he had finished performing his prayer, he went to his house. I accompanied him. When he reached his house, he called his maid-servant Sukayna and said to her: ‘When a beggar

passes by the door of my house, give him food, for today is Friday.’ So I (i.e., Abu’ Hamza) said to him: ‘Not all beggars are worthy of being given food.’ He, peace be on him said: ‘I am afraid that some of those who beg us are worthy of being given food. If we do not give them food and reproach them, what had befallen Ya’qu’b and his family will befall us, the members of the House. Give the beggars food! Give them food! Ya’qu’b sacrificed a ram every day. He gave some of its meat to the poor as alms. He and the members of his family ate the rest of its meat.

At the time of breaking the fast, on Friday, a believing and fasting beggar whose rank was high with Allah and who was worthy of being given food passed by the door of Ya’qu’b’s house and called out: ‘Give food from the rest of your food to the strange and hungry beggar!’ Ya’qu’b and his family heard him but they neglected his right and did not believe his words. When the beggar despaired of them and the night overtook him, he went away and spent that night hungry complaining his hunger to Allah, while Ya’qu’b and his family spent that night full and with extra food. In the morning of that night, Allah revealed to Ya’qu’b, saying: ‘You have abased my servant to the extent that you and your children are worthy of my wrath and my punishment. Ya’qu’b, the most lovable of my prophets for Me and the most honorable with Me are those who have mercy on the poor from among my servants, draw them near to Me, give them food, and protect them. Ya’qu’b, why did you not have mercy on my servant, who has devoted his life to worshipping and is secretly content with that which is beyond this material world? Ya’qu’b, by my might, I will impose my tribulation upon you and make you and your sons a target for misfortunes.’

“I (i.e., Abu’ Hamza) asked: May I be ransom for you, when did Yousif saw the vision?³³ The Imam, peace be on him, replied: ‘When Ya’qu’b and his family spent that night full and the poor beggar spent it hungry.’³⁴”

Indeed, depriving the needy and poor person of his right results in the loss of bounties and brings down Allah’s wrath. In this respect many traditions were successively reported on the authority of the Imams of guidance, so those who want Allah’s blessing to continue should not reproach the poor and deprive them of their rights.

His Alms

Imam Zayn al-‘Abidin, peace be on him, did his best throughout his life to give alms to the poor in order to remove poverty from them. In the meantime he urged the people to help them in order that they might get a great reward from Allah, the Glorified. So he said: “If a person gives alms to a poor person, the poor person will supplicated for him at that hour and he will be answered.³⁵” Now, we will mention some of his alms:

A. He gave his Garments as Alms

The Imam, peace be on him, wore the most luxurious garment. In winter he wore silk-like garments.

When summer came, he gave them as alms or sold them and gave their price as alms. In summer he wore two Egyptian garments. When winter came, he gave them as alms.³⁶ Thus, he said: “I feel shame before my Lord when I take the price of the garment in which I worship Him.³⁷”

B. He gave as Alms what He loved

Imam Zayn al-‘Abidin, peace be on him, gave as alms what he loved. The narrators said: “Ali b. al-Husayn gave almonds and sugar as alms. He was asked about that, and he recited the words of Him, the Exalted: ‘By no means shall you attain to righteousness until you spend (benevolently) out of what you love.³⁸’” The historians reported: “Ali b. al-Husayn liked eating grapes. One day he was fast, so his maid-servant gave him a bunch of grapes. At the time of breaking fasting, a beggar came to him, and he ordered the bunch of grapes to be given to the beggar. The maid-servant sent someone to buy a bunch of grapes for the Imam, another beggar knocked on the door, and the Imam ordered the bunch of grapes to be given to the beggar.

Again, the maid-servant sent someone to buy a bunch of grapes for the Imam. When she offered the bunch of grapes to the Imam, another beggar came, and the Imam ordered the bunch of grapes to be given to the beggar.³⁹” In this manner the Imam followed the example of his grandfathers, who gave their food for three days to a poor, an orphan, and a captive, so Allah sent down concerning them the Su’ra of Hal Ata, which will exist as a legion of honor for them throughout time till Allah inherits the earth and what is on it.

C. Dividing his Properties

The Imam divided his properties into two shares. He took one share and gave the other as alms to the poor.⁴⁰ In this manner the Imam followed the example of his uncle, Imam al-Hasan, the plant of sweet basil of Allah’s Apostle, may Allah bless him and his family, who divided his properties into two or three shares.

His Giving Charity in Secret

The most lovable thing for the Imam, peace be on him, was giving charity in secret. He did not want anyone to recognize him because he wanted to make close relationships with the poor people he helped in order to seek Allah’s good pleasure as well as urged the Muslims to adopt giving charity secretly, so he said: “Giving charity secretly removes the wrath of Allah.⁴¹”

He went out veiled in the darkness and carried gifts to the poor who stood at the doors of their house waiting for him. When they saw him, they gave good news to each other and said to one another: “The owner of the bag has just come.⁴²” The Imam went to his cousin at night and gave him some dinars, but his cousin said to him: “Ali b. al-Husayn does not give me anything.”

Moreover, his cousin invoked Allah against him. The Imam, peace be on him, heard that and pardoned his cousin and did not let his cousin recognize him. When the Imam, peace be on him, died, his cousin lost those gifts and knew that it was the Imam who had brought them to him, so he went to the Imam's grave and wept over him and apologized to him for slandering him.[43](#)"

Ibn 'A'isha said: [I heard the people of Medina say:] "When 'Ali b. al-Husayn died, we were deprived of being given charity secretly.[44](#)" The historians reported that a group of the people of Medina lived and did not know the person who brought them their livelihood. When 'Ali b. al-Husayn died, they lost what they were given at night.[45](#) The Imam, peace be on him, was very serious with hiding his alms, to the extent that he covered his face when he gave some alms.[46](#) Al-Dhahabi said: "'Ali b. al-Husayn gave a lot of secret charity.[47](#)"

Imam Zayn al-'Abidin, peace be on him, put food in a bag; he carried the bag on his back and divided the food among the poor. The bag made some calluses on his back. Al-Ya'qu'bi reported: "When the Imam, peace be on him, died, the members of his family washed him and they found on his back calluses similar to those of a camel. They people asked the members of his family about those calluses and they answered: 'They were made by the bag which he carried on his back at night to divide food among the poor.'[48](#)"

Anyhow, the Imam's secret charity was among the greatest deeds and the most rewarded by Allah.

[His Seeking Allah's Pleasure](#)

From his kindness to the poor, the Imam, peace be on him, wanted nothing except Allah's pleasure and the hereafter. He was the most prominent of those whom Allah concerned with these words of His: " (As for) those who spend their property in the way of Allah, then do not follow up what they have spent with reproach or injury, they shall have their reward from their Lord, and shall have no fear nor shall they grieve.[49](#)"

The gifts and alms of the Imam were for Allah's pleasure only. They were not mixed with any worldly purposes which would turn into earth sooner or later. Al-Zuhri narrated: "During a cold night, I saw 'Ali b. al-Husayn carrying flour on his back, so I asked him: 'Son of Allah's Apostle, what is that on your back?'"

The Imam hurried and said with a faint voice: "I am making preparations for a journey. I am preparing provisions for it and carrying them to a secure place."

"Let this boy of mine carry the flour instead of you," explained al-Zuhri.

The Imam did not answer him. Al-Zuhri begged the Imam to let him carry the flour in stead of him, but the Imam insisted on carrying it and said: " But I do not disdain what will save me during my journey and makes good my going to Whom I will go. I ask you before Allah to go to your need."

So al-Zuhri left the Imam and went away. After some days he met him. He did not understand what the Imam meant. He thought that the Imam would go on a regular journey, so he asked him: “Son of Allah’s Apostle, I do not see any mark of that journey which you ended?”

The Imam, peace be on him, told him about that journey for which he made preparations: “Zuhri, I think that you did not understand what I meant. I meant death. I made preparations for it through refraining from the prohibited and doing good.[50](#)”

The Imam, peace be on him, spent on the poor to seek Allah’s pleasure and forgiveness.

Renouncing Worldly Pleasures

Among the qualities of the Imam was renouncing worldly pleasures. He did not care for worldly vanities. He clung to asceticism and completely renounced the world. The world did not tempt him nor did it deceive him, for he knew its reality and essence. He knew that man would leave the world no matter what he enjoyed in it, and that he would find nothing before him except his good deeds. The Imam was the most ascetic of the people of his time. This was underlined by al-Zuhri when he was asked about the most ascetic of all the people and he answered: “The most ascetic of all the people is ‘Ali b. al-Husayn.[51](#)”

The Imam, peace be on him, saw a beggar weeping, so he had mercy on him and said: “If the world was in the hand of this person and then it dropped from it, he had not to weep for it.[52](#)” The Imam, peace be on him renounced worldly pleasures, but this does not mean that he yielded to poverty and feebleness, rather he was pious with what Allah prohibited, so he was similar to his father and grandfather, who divorced the world and did not care for its affairs except truth and virtue.

With the Sufis

As the Imam, peace be on him, was ascetic and completely turned away from the world, the Sufis regarded him as one of their figures and wrote a full biography about him.[53](#) Al-Kalabazi regarded him as one of those who talked about their sciences, spread their essays, and described their conditions in word and action after the Companions of the Prophet.[54](#) I (i.e., the author) think that this view is not objective, rather it is very shallow, for the Sufis completely renounced the world, lived in dark caves, wore coarse garments, ate rough food, and other matters which disagree with the reality of the religion and which did not legislate any rule in which there was uneasiness or limitations for men.

As for Imam Zayn al-‘Abidin, peace be on him, he led a life completely different from that of the Sufis because he wore the most luxurious garments. The narrators said: “‘Ali b. al-Husayn wore a silk-like long outer garment, a silk-like cloak, and a silk-like turban.” A researcher in Sufism refuted the view which said that the Imam was among the Sufis, saying: “As for the asceticism of ‘Ali b. al-Husayn, it was psychological, rational, and internal. Such asceticism is more useful than that based on hunger and

wearing wool, for perception accepts the first kind of asceticism and it is that which deep innate nature of life establishes; as for garment, it is pretense.[55](#)”

The behavior of the Imams of the members of the House (*ahl al-Bayt*), peace be on them, clearly refuted the Sufi methods. The historians said: “When Imam al-Rida, peace be on him, was appointed a successor (to authority), a Sufi said to him: ‘The Imam should eat rough food and wear coarse garments.’ The Imam was resting on his elbow, so he sat down and refuted this cheap view, saying: ‘Yousif b. Ya‘qub was a prophet; nevertheless he wore silk-like garments embroidered with gold. Allah did not prohibit clothing nor did he prohibit food. However, He wanted the Imam to be fair and just.’ Then he recited these words of Him, the Exalted: *‘Say: Who has prohibited the embellishment and the good provisions which Allah has brought forth for His creatures.*[56](#)”

This noble behavior disagrees in all conditions with Sufism which has no Islamic aspects.

He Hated Playing

Another quality of the Imam was that he hated playing. Throughout his life no one saw him playing or laughing, so he, peace be on him, said: “Whenever a man laughs one time he loses a bit of knowledge.” In Medina there was an unemployed person at whom the people laughed. The unemployed person said: “It is difficult for me to make this man (i.e., Imam Zayn al-‘Abidin) laugh.” One day the Imam, followed by two retainers, passed by the unemployed person and he took his cloak and ran away. The Imam did not turn to him, but the two retainers chased the unemployed person and took the cloak from him and brought it to the Imam, who asked them: “Who is this person?” “He is an unemployed person at whom the people of Medina laugh,” replied one of the two retainers. So the Imam, peace be on him, said: “Say to him: Indeed Allah has a day in which the liars will be losers.[57](#)”

His Turning to Allah in Repentance

Among the most prominent qualities of Imam Zayn al-‘Abidin was his turning in repentance to Allah and his devotion to Him. This appeared in the Imam’s whispered prayers, supplications, and words which showed his strong dedication to Allah, the Creator of the world and Giver of life.

The Imam dedicated himself to Allah and entrusted all his affairs and tasks to Him, the Exalted. When he faced a certain matter, he rushed to Allah, for he thought that depending on other than Allah would bring about disappointment and loss. The historians reported that the Imam passed by a person sitting at the door of a rich person and asked him: “What has made you sit at the door of this rich, tyrannical person?”

“Poverty and misery,” replied the person.

“Stand up,” ordered the Imam, “I will lead you to a door better than his door and a Lord better for you than him.”

The person rose and went with the Imam till they reached the Mosque of Allah’s Apostle, may Allah

bless him and his family. There the Imam said to the person: “Turn your face to the *qibla*, perform two *ruk'as*, raise your hands and supplicate Allah, the Glorified, (to help you). Ask Him to bless His Prophet, recite the last verses of Surat al-Hashr, six verses from the beginning of Surat al-Haddid, and the first two verses of Surat Al 'Umran, and then ask Allah, the Glorified, to meet your need. If you ask Allah for a certain thing, He will give it to you. Whoever seeks refuge in Allah seeks refuge in a strong fort. As for seeking refuge in other than Allah, it is useless.⁵⁸”

Wonderful Examples of his Turning

in Repentance to Allah

Al-Sahifa al-Sajjadiya, the Gospel of the Household of Muhammad, may Allah bless him and his family, is full of the supplications which show that Imam Zayn al-'Abidin, peace be on him, turned to Allah in repentance and was sincere to Him, and that he clung to Allah and dedicated himself to Him. The following are some examples of his turning to Allah in repentance:

1. His Seeking Asylum with Allah

The Imam, peace be on him, sought asylum with Allah through his heart and feelings toward Him. He entrusted to Him all his small and big affairs. He has mentioned that in the following supplication: “O Allah, if You will, You will pardon us through Your bounty, and if You will, You will chastise us through Your justice. So make our ways smooth to Your pardon through Your kindness and grant us sanctuary from Your chastisement through Your forbearance, for none of us has the endurance for Your justice and none of us can reach deliverance without Your pardon! O Richest of the Rich, here we are, Your servants, before You. I am the neediest of the needy toward You, so redress our neediness through Your abundance and cut us not off from our hopes through Your withholding, lest You make wretched him who seeks felicity through You and deprive him who seeks help from Your bounty! Then to whom would we return after You? Where would we go from Your gate? Glory be to You! We are the distressed, the response to whom You have made incumbent, the people from whom You have promised to remove the evil. That thing most resembling Your will and that affair most worthy for You in Your mightiness is showing mercy to him who asks You for mercy and helping him who seeks help from You. So show mercy upon our pleading with You and free us from need when we throw ourselves before You! O Allah, Satan will gloat over us if we follow him in disobeying You, so bless Muhammad and his Household and let him not gloat over us after we have renounced him for You and beseeched You against him!⁵⁹”

In this holy supplication we feel that the Imam, peace be on him, sought asylum with Allah and clung to Him. He, peace be on him, showed that he was poor and in need of Allah's pardon and bounty. He asked Allah not to deprive him of His bounty and not to cut him off from his hopes through His withholding, lest he (the Imam) should be wretched after his felicity through Him. Besides, the Imam, peace be on him, showed abasement and pleading before the Almighty Creator to the extent that he became among the lords of the pious and those who turned in repentance to Allah, the Glorified.

2. His Fleeing to Allah

The Imam, peace be on him, completely devoted himself to Allah. He thought that Allah was the source of benefit and strength, and that seeking asylum in other than Him was useless. Now let's listen to his supplication in this respect: "O Allah, I showed sincerity by cutting myself off from everything but You. I approached You with my whole self. I averted my face from everyone who needs Your support. I ceased to ask from anyone who cannot do without Your bounty. I saw that the needy who seeks from the needy is foolish in his opinion, and misguided in his intellect. How many people have I seen, my Allah, who sought exaltation through other than You and were abased, who wanted wealth from someone else and became poor, who tried to rise high and fell down low! Observing the likes of them corrects a prudent man; his taking heed gives him success; his choosing the best guides him to the path of right. So You, my Master, are the object of my asking to the exclusion of all those who are asked and the patron of my need to the exclusion of all those from whom requests are made. You are singled out for my call before all who are called; none is associated with You in my hope, none comes along with You in my supplication, nor does any join with You within it, for to You is my appeal. To You, my Allah, belongs the Unity of number, the property of eternal power, the excellence of force and strength, the degree of sublimity and elevation. Everyone other than You is the object of compassion in his lifetime, overcome in his affair, overwhelmed in his situation, diverse in states, constantly changing in attributes. So You are high exalted above likeness and opposites, proudly magnified beyond similitudes and rivals! Glory be to You! There is no Allah but You.[60](#)"

In this masterpiece, we feel that the Imam completely dedicated himself to Allah, the Glorified. He approached Him with his feelings and sentiments. He averted his face and heart from other creatures who need Allah's support, for regarding them in hope and expectation is foolishness in opinion and misguidance in intellect. The Imam, peace be on him, attributed all sources of benefit and strength to Allah, the Glorified. He criticized those who sought glory, wealth and exaltation from other than Allah. He showed that they became poor and fell down low. So those who seek good, exaltation, and dignity should devote themselves to Allah, Who has power over everything. As for those other than Allah, they are the object of compassion in their lifetime, overcome in their affair, overwhelmed in their situation, diverse in states, constantly changing in attributes. This supplication shows pure faith and the essence of the Oneness of Allah.

3. His Seeking Needs from Allah

Another aspect of his turning to Allah in repentance was that he limited seeking needs from Allah, the Almighty, for He is the source of bounty and the fountain of mercy and kindness. The Imam, peace be on him, turned his face to Allah and supplicated to Him with this holy supplication: "O Allah, O ultimate object of my needs! O He through whom requests are attained! O He whose favors are not bought by prices! O He who does not stain His gifts by the imposition of obligations! O He along with whom nothing is needed and without whom nothing can be done! O He toward whom desire is ever directed and never

turned away! O He whose treasuries cannot be exhausted by demands! O He whose wisdom cannot be altered by any means! O He from whom the needs of the needy are never cut off! O He who is not distressed by the supplications of the supplicants! You have lauded Yourself for having no need for Your creatures, and it suits You to have no need for them, and You have attributed to them poverty, and it suits to them to be poor toward You. So he who strives to remedy his lack through what is with You and wishes to turn poverty away from himself through You has sought his need in the most likely place and come to his request from the right quarter. However, he who turns in his need toward one of Your creatures or assigns the cause of its being granted to other than You, has exposed himself to deprivation and deserves to miss Your beneficence.

“ O Allah, I have a need of You: My exertion has fallen short of it and my stratagems have been cut back before reaching it. My soul induced me to present it to him who presents his need to You and can do nothing without You in his requests, but this is one of the slips of the offenders, one of the stumbles of the sinners! Then through Your reminding me I was aroused from my heedlessness, through Your giving success, I stood up from my slip, and through Your pointing the way, I returned and withdrew from my stumble. I said: Glory to my Lord! How can the needy ask from the needy? How can the destitute beseech the destitute? So I went straight to You, my Lord in beseeching, and I sent You my hope with trust in You. I came to know that the many I request from You are few before Your wealth, the weighty I ask from You is vile before your plenty; Your generosity is not constrained by anyone’s asking. Your hand is higher in bestowing gifts than every hand!

“O Allah, so bless Muhammad and his Household, take me through Your generosity to Your gratuitous bounty and take me not through Your justice to what I deserve! I am not the first beseecher to beseech You and You bestowed upon him while he deserved withholding, nor I am the first to ask from You and You were bounteous toward him while he merited deprivation.

“O Allah, bless Muhammad and his Household, respond to my supplication, come near my call, have mercy on my pleading, listen to my voice, cut not short my hope for You, severe not my thread to You, turn not my face in this my need, and other needs, away from You, attend for my sake to the fulfillment of my request, the granting of my need, and the attainment of what I have asked before I leave this place through Your making easy for me the difficult and Your excellent ordainment for me in all affairs! Bless Muhammad and his Household with a permanent, ever-growing blessing, whose perpetuity has no cutting off and whose term knows no limit, and make that a help to me and a cause for the granting of my request! You are boundless, Generous![61](#)”

After this supplication, the Imam, peace be on him, stated his need, prostrated himself, and said in his supplication: “Your bounty has comforted me and Your beneficence has shown me the way, so I ask You by You and by Muhammad and his Household (Your blessing be upon them) that You send me not back in disappointment!”

This holy supplication shows the firm clinging of the Imam, peace be on him, to Allah and his great belief

in Him. The Imam firmly believed that Allah, the Glorified, was the only ultimate object whom servants asked for their needs, that He bestowed on them His blessings and favors, and that He did not sell these favors to them by prices, nor did He stain them by the imposition of obligations. Man has no need of others through Allah's gifts. All the creatures are in need of Allah's generosity while He, the Exalted, is in no need of them. Indeed, the clever and knowledgeable one is he who turns in his need to Allah only. As for the one who turns in his need to other than Allah, he exposes himself to deprivation and is worthy of missing beneficence. The Imam, peace be on him, asked Allah, the Glorified, for forgiveness and good pleasure, and then he came to know that the many favors he requested from Allah were few before Him, the Exalted. Besides he came to know that Allah had bounteous gifts and His hand was higher in bestowing gifts than every hand.

Indeed this Imam is the lord of those who have knowledge of Allah and Imam of the pious. His supplications and whispered prayers contain many lessons which are necessary for purifying souls of disobedience and wickedness.

4. His Pleading and Humbleness to Allah

The Imam also turned to Allah in repentance in such away that he constantly pleaded and was humble before Him, the Exalted. He supplicated with this holy supplication: "O Allah, I praise You and You are worthy of praise for Your benefaction toward me, the lavishness of Your favors toward me, Your plentiful bestowal upon me, and for showing bounty toward me through Your mercy and lavishing Your favor upon me. You have done well toward me and I am incapable of thanking You. Were it not for Your beneficence toward me and the lavishness of Your favors upon me, I would not have reached the taking of my share nor would my soul have been set right, but You began with beneficence toward me, provided me sufficiency in all my affairs, turned me away from the toil of affliction, and held back from me the feared decree.

"My Allah, how many a toilsome affliction which You have turned away from me! How many a lavish favor with which You gladdened my eye! How many a generous benefaction of Yours which is present with me! It is You who responded to my supplication at the time of distress, released me from my slip in stumbling, and took my enemies to task for doing wrong to me. My Allah, I did not find You a miser when I asked of You nor a withholder when I desired from You. No, I found You a hearer of my supplication and a bestower of my requests; I found Your favors toward me lavish in my every situation and in my every time. So You are praised by me and Your benefaction honored. My soul, my tongue, and my intelligence praise You, a praise that reaches fulfillment and the reality of thanksgiving, a praise that attains to Your good pleasure with me – so deliver me from Your displeasure! O my cave when the ways thwart me! O He who releases me from my stumble! Were it not for Your covering my shameful defects, I would be one of the disgraced. O my confirmer through help! Were it not for Your helping me, I would be one of the overcome! O He before whom kings place the yoke of lowliness around their necks, fearing his penalties! O worthy of reverential fear! O He *to whom belong the names most beautiful!* I ask

You to pardon me and to forgive me, for I am not innocent that I should offer excuse, nor a possessor of strength that I should gain victory, nor have I any place of flight that I should flee! I ask You to release me from my stumbles, and before You I disavow my sins, which have laid me waste, encompassed me, and destroyed me! I flee from them to You, my Lord, turning repentantly, so turn toward me, seeking refuge, so grant me refuge, asking sanctuary, so abandon me not, requesting, so deprive me not, holding fast, so leave me not, supplicating, so send me not back disappointed! I have supplicated You, my Lord, as one miserable, abased, apprehensive, fearful, quaking, poor, driven to have recourse to You! I complain to You, my Lord, of my soul– which is too weak to hurry to that which You have promised Your friends or to avoid that against which You have cautioned Your enemies– and of the multitude of my concerns, and of my soul’s confusing thoughts.

“My Allah, You have not disgraced me through my secret thoughts or destroyed me because of my misdeeds! I call upon You, and You respond even if I am slow when You call upon me. I ask You everything I want of my needs, and I deposit with You my secret wherever I may be. I supplicate to no one besides You, and I hope for no one other than You. At Your service! At Your service! You hear him who complains to You! You receive him who has confidence in You! You save him who holds fast to You! You give relief to him who seeks shelter in You.

“My Allah, so deprive me not of the good of the last world and the first because of the paucity of my thanksgiving and forgive me the sins of mine which You know! If You chastise, I am the wrongdoer, the neglecter, the derelict, the sluggard, the heedless of the share of my soul! And If You forgive– You are the Most merciful of the merciful![62](#)”

This holy supplication is full of pleading, humbleness, and submission to the Almighty Creator. The Imam, peace be on him, praised Allah with the praise that resulted from belief, knowledge, and sincerity. He acknowledged his falling short of thanking Allah for His lavish blessings and favors. After that he asked Allah for pardon and forgiveness, seeking refuge in Him. He, peace be on him, showed great fear and apprehension to the extent that the souls and hearts quiver.

5. His Humbling himself before Allah

The Imam, peace be on him, melted in love for Allah. He was very loyal to Him and showed pleading, humbleness, and submission to Him. Among the aspects of his humbleness before Allah was that he supplicated with this supplication: “My Lord, my sins have silenced me, and my words have been cut off. I have no argument, for I am the prisoner of my own affliction, the hostage to my works, the frequenter of my own offense, the confused in my intended way, the thwarted. I have brought myself in a halt in the halting place of the abased sinners, the halting place of the wretched and insolent, those who think lightly of Your promise. Glory be to You! What insolence I have insolently shown toward You! What delusion with which I have deluded myself! My Master, have mercy on my falling flat on my face, the slipping of my foot, grant me my ignorance through Your clemency, and my evildoing through Your beneficence, for I admit my sin and I confess my offense: Here are my hand and my forelock! I am

resigned to retaliation against my soul! Have mercy on my white hair, the depletion of my days, the nearing of my term, my frailty, my misery, and the paucity of my stratagems! My Master, and have mercy upon me when my trace is cut off from this world, my name is effaced among the creatures, and I join the forgotten, like the forgotten ones! My Master, and have mercy upon me at the change of my form and state when my body decays, my limbs are scattered, and my joints are dismembered! O my heedlessness toward what was wanted from me! My Master, have mercy upon me at my mustering and uprising and on that day, appoint my standing place with Your friends, my place of emergence with Your beloved ones, and my dwelling in Your neighborhood! O Lord of the worlds![63](#)”

Faith in Allah embraced the Imam’s heart, natural inclinations, bodily movements, limbs, and behavior. With this tremendous amount of faith, he was appropriate for the Imamate of the pious and mastership over those who turned to Allah in repentance. With this, we will end our talk about some of Imam Zayn al-‘Abidin’s noble qualities.

- [1.](#) Al-Ya‘qu‘bi, Tarikh, vol. 3, p.46.
- [2.](#) Tahdhib al-Akhlaq, p.19.
- [3.](#) Tarikh Dimashq, vol. 36, vol. 155. Nihayat al-Irab, vol. 21, p.326.
- [4.](#) Al-Majlisi, Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 46, p.96.
- [5.](#) Al-Bidaya wa al-Nihaya, vol. 9, p. 105.
- [6.](#) Ibid.
- [7.](#) Safwat al-Safwa, vol. 2, p.54.
- [8.](#) Al-Mubarrad, al-Kamil, vol. 3, p.805
- [9.](#) The Second Caliph gave him this surname.
- [10.](#) Al-Muqrim, Al-Imam Zayn ‘al-Abidin, p.19.
- [11.](#) Hulyat al-Awliya’, vol. 3, p. 138.
- [12.](#) Al-Durr al-Nazim, p.173.
- [13.](#) Al-Khisal, p.24.
- [14.](#) Al-Bihar, vol. 78, 135.
- [15.](#) Ibid, vol. 46, p.64.
- [16.](#) Tha‘lab, al-Majalis, vol. 2, p.462.
- [17.](#) ‘Uyyu‘n Akhbar al-Rida, vol. 2, p.145. A similar report to this has been mention in al-Kamil by al-Mubarrad, vol. 2, p.482.
- [18.](#) Al-Imam Zayn ‘al-Abidin, p.70.
- [19.](#) Siyar ‘Alam al-Nubala’, vol. 4, p.240. Tarikh Dimashq, vol. 36, p.161.
- [20.](#) Abu` Zahra, al-Imam Zayd, p.24.
- [21.](#) Nasikh al-Tawarikh, vol., p.13.
- [22.](#) Al-Sadu`q, al-Amali.
- [23.](#) Al-Bidaya wa al-Nihaya, vol. 9, p.105. Siyar A‘lam al-Nubala’, vol. 4, p.239. Tarikh al-Islam, vol. 2, p.266. Hulyat al-Awliya’, vol. 3, p.141.
- [24.](#) Al-Ya‘qu‘bi, Tarikh, vol. 3, p.6.
- [25.](#) Tahdhib al-Lughat wa al-Asma’, 343.
- [26.](#) Al-Majlisi, Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 46, p.88.
- [27.](#) Hulyat al-Awliya’, vol. 3, p.137.
- [28.](#) Safwat al-Safwa, vol. 2, p.53.
- [29.](#) Al-Majlisi, Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 46, p.62.
- [30.](#) Ibid. A similar narration has been mentioned in Da‘irat al-Ma‘arif by al-Bustani, vol. 9, p.355.

- [31.](#) Wasa'il al-Shi'a, vol. 6, p. 15.
- [32.](#) Al-Kafi, vol. 4, p. 15.
- [33.](#) It was the night when he saw eleven stars, the sun, and the moon prostrating themselves to him.
- [34.](#) Al-Nu'ri, Dar al-Salam, vol. 2, p. 141.
- [35.](#) Wasa'il al-Shi'a, vol. 6, p.296.
- [36.](#) Tarikh Dimashq, vol. 36, p. 161.
- [37.](#) Nasikh al-Tawarikh, vol. 1, p.89.
- [38.](#) Al-Majlisi, Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 46, p.89.
- [39.](#) Al-Barqi, al-Mahasin, p.547. Furu' al-Kafi, vol. 6, p.350.
- [40.](#) Khulasat Tahdhib al-Kamal, p.231. Hulyat al-Awliya', vol. 3, p. 140. Jamharat al-Awliya', vol. 2, p.72. Al-Bidaya wa al-Nihaya, vol. 9, p. 105. Ibn Sa'd, al-Tabaqat, vol. 5, p. 19.
- [41.](#) Tadhkirat al-Huffaz, vol. 1, p.75. Akhbar al-Diwal, p. 110. Nihayat al-Irab, vol. 21, p.326.
- [42.](#) Al-Majlisi, Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 46, p.89.
- [43.](#) Al-Majlisi, Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 46, p. 100.
- [44.](#) Safwat al-Safwa, vol. 2, p.54. Al-Ithaf bi Hub al-Ashraf, p.49.
- [45.](#) Abu' al-Faraj al-Asfahani, al-Aghani, vol. 15, p. 326.
- [46.](#) Al-Majlisi, Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 46, p. 62.
- [47.](#) Tadhkirat al-Huffaz, vol. 1, p.75.
- [48.](#) Al-Ya'qu'bi, Tarikh, vol. 3, p.45.
- [49.](#) Qur'an, 2, 262.
- [50.](#) 'Ilal al-Sharai', p. 88. Al-Majlisi, Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 46, pp. 65-66.
- [51.](#) Al-Majlisi, Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 46, p.62.
- [52.](#) Al-Fusu'l al-Muhimma, p. 192.
- [53.](#) Jamharat al-Awliya', vol. 2, p.71. Hulyat al-Awliya, vol. 3, p. 133.
- [54.](#) Al-Ta'arruf, p. 11.
- [55.](#) Al-Sila bayna al-Tashayyi' wa al-Tasawuif, vol. 1, p. 169.
- [56.](#) 'Uyyu'n Akhbar al-Rida.
- [57.](#) Al-Sadu`q, al-Amali, p.220.
- [58.](#) Al-Kaf'ami, al-Junna al-Waqiya wa al-Junna al-Baqiya, p. 190.
- [59.](#) Al-Sahifa al-Sajjadiya, Supplication no. 10.
- [60.](#) Ibid, Supplication no. 28.
- [61.](#) Ibid, Supplication no. 13.
- [62.](#) Ibid, Supplication no. 51.
- [63.](#) Ibid, Supplication no. 54.

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