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Chapter 5: Testing Belief

This chapter deals with another important question which must be examined before we embark on a discussion of ideology, namely the testing of belief.

Are there any criteria and standard by which a person can test the correctness of his views and beliefs? How can a research know whether what he or others consider being a scientific fact or nation or theory is really based on science or is just pseudo-science or self-delusion. Do the Islamic texts have any guidance on the testing of belief or not?

The answer is the both scientific and unscientific beliefs and the disease of self-delusion have signs and symptoms by which the researcher can test his opinions and those of other people and thereby discover whether they are true or false.

Imam Ali, in expounding the signs of scientific and unscientific belief, has a comprehensive and rather complex explanation, which is of great value and worthy of detailed study.

Signs Of Scientific Belief

First, let us see what the Imam has to say about the signs and indications of scientific belief, then examine and analyze them one by one. Imam 'Ali's words are as follows:

The truly wise person is he who knows that what he knows, compared with what he does not know, is slight. He therefore considers himself ignorant, and by recognizing his ignorance he exerts himself all the more to acquire knowledge. The truly wise person is thus always in search of knowledge and interested in acquiring and utilizing information. He is humble towards men of learning, considers his own view suspect, practices silence. Is on his guard against error and is ashamed of he is wrong. If a proposition is put to him about whom he has no knowledge, he does not deny it, because he knows the extent of his ignorance.1124

The Imam's comments refer in all to seven points that indicate a truly wise person, these are recognition

of one's own ignorance, an increasing thirst for knowledge, humility towards the learned, skepticism of one's own judgment, helping silent, caution against error and not denying what one does not know.

Let us examine each of these points.

Recognition Of One's Own Ignorance

Unlike those who merely think they are wise and persons suffering from self-delusion, who only consider their own knowledge and are unaware of their ignorance, that truly wise and those with scientific opinions only consider their own ignorance and in view of its infinits extent do not consider their knowledge to be of any significance.

In 'Ali's view, such people are worthy to be called wise and learned and their views and opinions in intellectual problems are likely to be valid and reliable. 'The truly wise person is he who knows that what he knows, compared with what he does not know, is slight and therefore considers himself ignorant'.

The more truly wise person knows the more he realizes that his limited knowledge is insignificant in comparison with the infinite extent of what he does not know. Thus, a person who has embarked on the quest for scientific facts and opinions will realize that his knowledge is so slight and insignificant when seen against his ignorance that it cannot be taken into account.

He therefore not only refuses to consider himself with the little knowledge he does not to be worthy of the little wise and learned, but on a detailed. Scientific and realistic evaluation of the case he numbers himself among the ignorant.

The wiser a person is the greater he feels the gap to be between what he knows and what he does not know. In other words, as the level of his knowledge increases the unknown he encounters increases proportionately.

A person who has no proper understanding of human being feels there is nothing he does not know about the subject. If you ask an illiterate person "What is a human being?' he will reply: 'That's easy. A human being is a human being, and really that's a silly question! 'And if you ask him if there's anything he does not know about human beings he will say 'No, I think it's quite clear what human beings are, and there's no need to explain them!'

But if you ask someone, who has studied anthropology, the same question the more extensive or specialized his studies have been the less he will claim to know about this astonishing, complex and mysterious creature. The deeper he dives into the subject the more uncertainties he has about his knowledge.

For ignorant people humans are an open book, but a scientific research such as Professor Carel, who spent a life-time in anthropological research, condensed his knowledge in a book entitled 'Man, the

Unknown'.

For a real scientific it is not just man that is unknown every single creature and every single atom in the universe is complex, mysterious and unknown. A French scientific named Pilisti De Lamene is reported to have said: 'If anyone can defined a grain of sand I will show him the Almighty.'

And it is not just a grain of sand but the atoms that it is composed of still remain to be properly defined. For does not science every day discover new mysterious about the atom? And does not this indicate that science is still in capable of fully understanding a particle of particles of the universe?

For the really wise person, as opposed to the person who thinks he is wise, the whole universe is therefore mysterious and complex and unknown, and the more he learns about it the more mysteries and complexities he becomes aware of, and hence the greater the number of question marks he is confronted with in his studies and the more aware he is of his own ignorance.

For this reason the greater a person's knowledge the less he finds that he knows! His knowledge is limited, but his ignorance is infinite. No number can quantify the gap, so, Imam 'Ali says the really wise person considers his knowledge to be so slight and insignificant that it is not worthy of consideration and therefore he numbers himself among the ignorant.

And this explains the meaning of the words ascribed to Socrates: 'My knowledge has reached the point that I know I know nothing.' In similar vein Avicenna describes his own intellectual achievements in the following verse: 'Always asking and asking, but answer came there none splitting many a hair, but without knowing one.'

The fact that a truly learned person considers himself relatively speaking, ignorant is not confined to the likes of Socrates and Avicenna but as Imam 'Ali states this is one of the unconditional characteristics of the truly learned. Such persons are not exceptions: true learning means simply that.

We should note what the Imam says about his knowledge and then in comparing it with his ignorance. That great Imam, who could say: 'Ask me before it is too late and I am no longer with you'2 and 'I have knowledge of the past and the future,'3 that indescribably wise man, who could say: 'I have been to the depths of the ocean of secrete knowledge and have been so merged in it that if I appear as I am you are like a rope trembling in a deep well, losing your balance and shaking in your agitation' that great Imam, with his indescribably extensive and profound knowledge, which we do not even have the patience to hear about, considers his ignorance to be so great and his knowledge, in compares his own limited knowledge with the infinite wisdom of God Almighty he calls himself an ignorant!

In the prayer known as Yastashir4, which Imam 'Ali tells us was taught to him by the Prophet of Islam with the advice that he should teach it to his successor and recite it every morning and every evening. God Almighty is addresses thus: 'Thou art All-knowing and I am ignorant, 'This is a precise scientific fact. 'Ali is not making a polite exaggerator and he is not overstating the case by a hair's breadth. What

he says is the actual truth and not a lot more or less than the truth.

The Man Of Learning Knows His True Measure

This is an another expression of Imam 'Ali's in connection with the characteristics of the truly wise person as opposed to those who appear wise, who may at first sight seen to be the same. The Imam's words are as follows: 'The man of learning is he who knows his true measure and ignorance suffers for the person who does not know his measure.'5

It is clear that by 'his true measure' the Imam means the measure of his knowledge, that is to say that the truly learned person is someone who has reached an understanding of the true measure of his wisdom by comparing his knowledge with his ignorance and is not troubled by pride or self-delusion. A person who has not reached this stage of self-knowledge and has not made the comparison between his knowledge and his ignorance is not worthy to be called learned, since despite all the knowledge he may have of various sciences his ignorance will be sufficient to lead him astray and invalidate his views and beliefs.

An Increasing Thirst For Knowledge

When a scientist has learned the exact level of what he knows in comparison with what he does not know, and realizing how little it is, his soul becomes possessed with a thirst for knowledge, and a love of science leads him to increase his efforts to understand the truth of existence. As Imam 'Ali says: 'The learned man is he who is never satiated with learning, and never claims to be satiated.'6

In another tradition he says: 'The learned man is he who is never tired of acquiring knowledge.'7

This is the exact opposite of people who only appear to be wise and are suffering from the disease of self-delusion, which prevents them from continuing their studies and does not let them investigate the thing they do not know. Instead they pretend to know everything and therefore have no need to study further.

There is a story of a new bride who did not know how to cook. Her mother-in-law wanted to teach her, but she was too proud to learn. Whatever her mother-in-law said she immediately replied, 'I know.' Her mother-in-law said,' For this quantity of rice you need this much water. 'The bride said, 'I know.' 'And you need this amount of salt, 'The bride said. 'I know.' 'And when the rice has reached such and such consistency you must drain it, 'The bride said, 'I know'. Finally the bride got angry and said, Everything you keep telling me I already know.'

Her mother-in-law was well aware that she could not cook properly, but that her pride would not let her learn. To break this pride she said 'And when you've done everything as I've said, and you've drained the rice, you must steam the rice with a sun-dried brick over the pot. 'The bride said 'I know that too.'

The bride then did everything as her mother-in-law had told her and when she came to steam the rice she put a sundried brick on top of it. A few minutes later when she came to serve the rice she found the brick had dissolved in the steam and the rice was sludge of mud.

When we hear this story of a proud bride we laughter at her ignorance and perhaps do not believe the story. But if we think back at incidents in our life and reconsider certain views we have had find many similar incidents.

We recall stories of people who considers themselves the epitome of wisdom and express their opinion on every kind of subject, ideological, political, cultural economic and social, and many of them are like the story of this new bride, and their opinions are just like the way she cooked the rice.

Humanity Towards The Learned

The third sign of the truly wise, as given by the Imam, is humility towards people of learning.

However wise a person may be, if he knows the extent of his knowledge as compared to his ignorance he will not suffer from intellectual pride and consider only his own knowledge as important. Instead, he will have a high regard for the research and knowledge of others and will show humility towards them because of their knowledge. By contrast, the illusion wise, men who consider themselves wiser that all other scholars, constantly belittle others in order to show themselves in a better light.

These self-deluded people assume that if they show humility towards a scholar their own scientific worth is somehow diminished. They think that if they pay their respects to other scholars this detracts them from their own status in people's eyes, for they claim that no-one is wiser than they are. They, therefore, find fault with every theory that any other scholars proposes, without basing their objections on valid criticism and research. Sometimes they even show their vanity for respecting knowledge and the learned- i.e. themselves.

When I was a theological student in Najaf a fellow-student suffered from this disease to such extent that he almost became insane. Things reached the stage where it was not possible to praise someone without his shouts of disapproval, coupled with lies in praise of himself, rending the atmosphere of the madrasa!8

Questioning One's Own

Continuing with the words of the Imam, the fourth sign of the truly wise is being skeptical of one's own judgment.

The truly wise person, who considers his ignorance to be infinite, never acquits his own judgment of the charger of error, but rather always regards it with suspicion, never regarding his the theories as scientific and in accord with reality until they have been conclusively prove.

How many times there have been some ideas or hypothesis which for centuries was considered as reality and the correctness of which was never doubted, until as science progressed they were found to be wrong. The Ptolemaic system is one such hypothesis, and in theoretical matters there have been many other similar cases.9

Keeping Silent

The fifth sign of the truly wise person according to Imam 'Ali, is that he keeps silent. Since he knows that his knowledge is slight and his ignorance infinite, reason prevents such a person from expressing his opinion on every topic that may arise.

Shahid Thoni relates that a man appeared before Qasim bin Muhammad bin Abu Bakr, one of the foremost juists of Medina whose rulings were and still are respected by Muslims of all sects to ask him about a problem. Qasim listened to the question and replied 'I don't know.'

The man who asked the question was most surprised at this answer because he could not believe that such a great and famous Scholar as Qasim bin Muhammad did not know the answer. He concluded that Qasim's declining to answer must have another reason and saying he did not know was just an excuse. So he implored him to give his opinion saying 'I've come to you for an answer and I don't know anyone else that can help me.

Qasim saw that the man did not believe him when he said he did not know, so he looked him straight in the eye and said, 'Do not judge by the length of my beard and the crowd of people around me! Do not think that because I look like one of the *'ulema* and have a reputation for knowledge and many followers I know everything. No, I swear to God that I don't know the answer to your question'!

One of the senior members of the Qureish claim who was present and he had heard the conversation between Qasim and the man said to the latter, 'Don't let Qasim bin Muhammad get away with it. 'Then he said to Qasim, 'I swear to God I've never seen you in such brilliant from as I've seen you here today.' Qasim replied. 'By God, I'd rather you cut my tongue out than force me to express an opinion on something I don't know.'10

Truly, a person who is not devoured by intellectual pride or afflicted by self-delusion is never prepared, to express an opinion about a matter that he is not knowledgeable about, and therefore instead of answering many of the questions put to him he keeps silent, and this is the reason for Imam 'Ali's profound remark, Saying "I don't know is half way to knowledge, '11

In his respect he differs from these who suffer from arrogance and self-delusion. Whatever you ask such people they reply without thinking twice. They are not only unscholarly, but sick, and, to use the words of Imam Sadeq, even mad: "The person who replies to every question that is put to him is mad.'12135

Caution Against Error

The sixth sign of the truly wise, according to Imam 'Ali, is their caution against error. A person who is not trapped in arrogance and knows the extent of his ignorance is always very careful when he wants to express an opinion lest he should make an error, and takes pains to bear in mind all the various aspects of the problem before presenting his opinion.

The wise person's tongue is always at the back of his reason, and never speaks in an ill-considered fashion lest what he says should prove to be wrong, unlike to person who suffers from pride and self-delusion who says the first thing that comes into his head on every subject.

Not Denying What One Does Not Know

The last sign of the truly wise who according to Imam 'Ali are worthy to be called persons of learning, is not denying matters which are unknown to them. 'If a person is put to him about whom he has no knowledge, he does not deny it because he knows the extent of his ignorance.'

If a person does not suffer from intellectual pride, but considers his knowledge to be insignificant and his ignorance infinite, he never permits himself to deny something about which he has no knowledge.

In the words of Avecinna 'Consider everything you hear to be possible until a proof is adduced that denies such possibility.'

It is an intellectual and scientific truth that a lack of knowledge about a matter does not imply that it does not exist. There are countless things about which man has no knowledge of, but they do exist.

Is it not a fact that a thousand years ago man was not aware of the circulation of the blood and the movement of atoms and hundreds of other scientific facts that are today known and proved? Does the fact that they were not know in the past imply that they did not exist or were not true he knows that most of the facts of life are matters about which man knows nothing.

The Commander of the faithful in further remarks dealing with characteristics of real men of learning as opposed to the seemingly wise is quoted as saying: 'Regarding what you do not know do not express an opinion, for verily the truth lies mainly in what you deny. 13

Although it is obvious, and every person of common sense knows that he is not entitled to deny something he has no knowledge of people who have fallen into the trap of intellectual pride and suffer from self-delusion do not seem to be aware of this, and believe the opposite to be true.

Further explanation of these points will be given in the discussion of the unscientific opinions that now follows.

Indications Of Unscientific Opinions

Unscientific opinions, just like scientific ones, can be tested and identified by reference to the characteristics of the people expressing them. In other words, the indications of unscientific opinions are the same as the characteristics of those who imagine themselves to be wise and ignorant people who pretend to be wise, which are listed in the continuation of the words of Imam 'Ali following his listing of the signs of the truly wise.

In this part of the Imam's words we shall first discuss the text of the tradition and then examine separately each of the characteristics listed. The words of the Imam on the subject of ignorant people who pretend to be wise are as follows:

'The truly ignorant person is he who considers himself knowledgeable in matters that he does not understand and confines himself to his own opinions, and thus alienates himself from the truly wise, whom he constantly criticizes, finding fault with all those to whom he is opposed and considering matters that he does not understand to be irrelevant or misleading. When matters are proposed to him that are beyond his knowledge he denies them and calls them lies, and in his ignorance he exclaims (in a tone that reveals his pride): "I don't know that! I don't think that is so!"

I don't think that will result happen, whenever did such a thing happen before?!'Such remarks are the result of his believing his own opinions, and he little realizes how great his ignorance is. As a result of the false beliefs which have conquered his mind, and because of what he does not know, he is constantly increasing his ignorance and denying the truth. In his ignorance he acts stubbornly and his pride prevents him from acquiring knowledge.

On the basis of his tradition the signs of unscientific belief and of pseudo-scholars, like the signs of scientific belief, are seven in number. They are in fact the counter points of the first set of signs.

These signs may be summarized as follows: lack of awareness of one's own ignorance, disregard for the opinions of others, alienation from person of learning, denigration one's adversaries, denying unknown facts, stubbornness in scientific discussions and false pride preventing one from acquiring knowledge.

Let us examine each of these signs.

Lack Of Awareness Of One's Own Ignorance

The first sign of people whose opinions are unscientific and whose self– delusion leads them to think themselves learned is that they are unaware of their ignorance and therefore display the scanty knowledge they have as if it were something great, so great in fact that they imagine themselves to be the epitome of wisdom, and is if nothing is hidden from them. So they think they are experts on every subject and permit themselves to give their opinion authoritatively about everything or, in today's idiom'

analyze every matter.

However much they know or are familiar with various sciences, such people, in Imam 'Ali's view, are not only unworthy of the title of scholars but may justly be called true ignoramuses. 'The truly ignorant person is he who considers himself knowledgeable in matters that he does not understand.'14 This is because not knowing the extent of his knowledge has sucked him into the black abyss of ignorance, where no science can usefully shed its light on him.

So one of the ways of testing opinions and deciding whether they are scientific or not is to examine the person holding them to see whether or not he is afflicted with intellectual pride or self-delusion, whether he expresses opinion's on things he does not know about, and finally to what extant he considers himself, wise.

'If a person considers himself to be infinitely wise he is really infinitely stupid, and thus is the exact meaning of a *hadith* which both Shi'a and Sunni narrators tell of the Prophet: 'If someone says he is learned he is ignorant.'15

The primary characteristic of the wise and perceptive is that they are free from all intellectual pride. Truly wise people realize from the first stages of learning that their knowledge is insignificant in comparison with that they do not know. It is therefore obvious that people suffering from intellectual pride and who think they are wise have not yet reached the first stage of knowledge. As the Commander of the faithful says: 'A person who claims to have reached the stages of learning is manifesting the final stages of ignorance.'16

People of limited and shallow intellects who acquire a little knowledge, however slight that knowledge may be, acquiring with it intellectual pride and confuse their ignorance with the little learning that have, and therefore consider themselves to be infinitely wise!

There is a story of young man who wanted to be a student of theology. He began to read the *Sharh Amsaleh* (the first work of Arabic literature that theological students read). A few days later he memorized the 14 forms of the Arabic verb. The poor fool was of such limited intelligence that he thought that this little learning was like a great weight in his breast! He measured his breast with his hand and conjugated the verb 'to beat' and said to himself in great surprise. 'How can my breast, only one or two spans wide, contain such vast knowledge?'

This is the story of all who are afflicted by intellectual pride. The student succumbed to the disease in the first few stage of study, while others succumb to it at other stages, sometimes years later.

A person who knows literature well and is an expert in this field imagines that he understands everything and can express his opinion on any subject. Another person might be a mathematician and think that mathematics is the epitome of knowledge and that he therefore has the right to air his views on any ideological and social matter.

Another person might be a jurisprudent, another well-versed in religions principles, another in philosophy and yet another in Quranic exegesis, and so on, and each person, whatever his specialized field of study, if he suffers from intellectual pride and is not aware how little his knowledge is in comparison with his ignorance, he may compare the two and conclude that since he is a specialist in a certain subject and his views are correct it is impossible for his views in other matters to be other than correct, and that therefore he is entitled to express his views on any subject under the sun. The captain replied he had not.

The grammarian said that in that case he had wasted half his life since someone who did not know grammar was condemned to a life of ignorance and if he wanted to make the second half of his life profitable he should certainly devote his time to the study of grammar.

The captain racked his brains, but could not think of a suitable answer to give this proud scholar. Soon after, a storm arose: the ship was pounded by mountainous waves and fling hither and thither until it was about to sink. The captain glanced at the grammarian and seeing he was in a great fright, decided the time was ripe to give him a suitable reply. So he said to him: 'Professor, do you know how to swim?'

The grammarian said he did not. The captain said, you've wasted your entire life then, since now swimming is your only hope of being saved.'

Scholars like this grammarian who are subject to intellectual pride are all too common, especially in ideology matters. Without studying or on the basis of a little superficial study they consider themselves to be expert jurisprudents, and express their views on such matters without considering what their own field of study is.

The Origins Of Ideological Differences

One of the most basic causes of the differences in matters of belief and ideology that prevail in the world is to be found right here that is, in the opinions displayed by unqualified people. An ignorant person who considers himself to be a man of learning expresses an opinion, and other ignorant people, without giving a thought to what that person's qualifications are but just considering him to be wise, adopt his op0inion. As a result contrary beliefs and ideologies become prevalent.

'In this connection there is a tradition of Imam 'Ali's which without exaggeration we can say is a miracle of thought. It goes thus: 'If the ignorant would hold their tongues, there would be no differences of opinion among people.'17

In truth, if people, who do not know about a subject refrain from expressing the opinion on it, and no scholar air his views on matters outside his field of specialization, all the differences of opinion and belief that divide society would disappear, and people's minds would converge at a common point.

If in the Bazaar, theological colleges and universities ignorant people would keep guiet: if in politics,

economics and sociology non-specialists would say nothing, if in matters of philosophy, jurisprudence, religious principles and Quranic exegesis unqualified people refrained from airing their views, and if in matters of ideology such people held their peace, the differences of opinion would be eradicated from human society.

If we look at the world as it is today and as it has been throughout history, with dozens of different schools of thought, and hundreds of different opinions and thousands of different ideas and viewpoints, we see that anyone who can gather a few supporters for his ideas considers himself and ideologue and the leader of an organization or group with its particular ideology and beliefs. If we trace the origins of all these differences we arrive at the root stated by Imam 'Ali, that is to say the expression of opinions by ignorant and unqualified people.

If experts in various fields were to make the decision not to express their opinion until such time as a particular matter were conclusively proved and not to call unproven hypotheses scientific theories, then differences of opinion would undoubtedly be eradicated from society and all ideas relating to the facts of existence would converge at a common point, since there is only one truth and there cannot be more than one. Out of all these contradictory theories, opposing ideologies and conflicting opinions inevitably one is correct and scientific and in accord with realty and the rest are incorrect, unscientific and not in accord with realty. It is not possible for you and me and a third party all to be right if our theories are at odds with each other and each of us has his own particular view.

Disregard For The Opinions Of Others

The second sign of a person whose opinions are unscientific is that he has no respect for the thoughts and research of others and disregards their opinions, or as the Imam, puts it, 'limits himself to his own opinions.'

So another way of testing opinion is to examine the person holding it to see whether he studies the views and opinions of others or whether he believes that everything he says is right and everything others say is wrong.

In another tradition the Imam says: 'Only an ignorant person admires his own opinion.' 18

Alienation From Persons Of Learning

The third sign of a person whose views and opinions are unscientific is that he alienates himself from

real scientists and scholars. Like a moth that shuns the sunlight and prefers the darkness of the crypt; these creatures in human form shun the light of knowledge and avoid the company of true scientists, never permitting themselves to emerge from their darkening places into the board daylight of science and knowledge. As the Imam says: 'The ignorant person...alienates himself from the truly wise, whom he constantly criticizes and finds fault with.'

The pseudo-wise are always finding fault from a distance with the views and opinions of scholars. They do not criticize constructively but merely cavil. A person who's afflicted with the disease of self-delusion is not prepared to sit down with a scholar and discuss matters or allow his views and opinions to be subjected to scrutiny.

He proclaims his theories about origins of life or life after death, or about economics, or politics, or social justice, or about how the country should be run or other matters, and thinks that his theories are the only correct ones, what he says or what his party or group or organization says is right, and what others say is wrong. If his views or those of his organization or group are not generally accepted, he withdraws from society and criticized and cavils from a distance, and if he can, he even imposes his unscientific theories on society by force of arms! 19

This is what the counter-revolutionary groups of our society did, and recently the leaders of the treacherous Tudeh Party have confessed to this.

Denigrating One's Adversaries

Another indication that a person is suffering from self-delusion is that he denigrates all who are opposed to his views and beliefs. In other words, a person who falsely imagines that he is wise thinks that he holds the key to correct intellectual belief and therefore supposes that others, if they want to avoid falling into error, should think as he does and hence arrive at the same conclusions as has, and if they fail to do so their views and beliefs are wrong and misleading.

Denying Unknown Facts

The fifth sign of a person whose opinions are unscientific is that he denies facts which are not known to him. As the Imam says: 'When matters are proposed to (the ignorant person) that are beyond his knowledge he denies them and calls them lies, and in his ignorance he exclaims (in a tone that reveals his pride): "I don't know that' I don't think that is so! I don't think that will happen. When ever did such a thing happen before?!'

Such remarks are the result of his believing his own opinions; he little realizes how great his ignorance is. In other tradition the Imam is reported as saying: 'Do not reject everything that people say, for such a course is sufficient to prove your ignorance.'20

For example, if a thousand years ago a person suffering from the disease of self-delusion had been told

that minute living organisms, invisible to the ordinary eye were the cause of physical illnesses, or that blood circulated in the body and if this circulation ceased, death would occur, or that if matter were split in the smallest particles, which would later be called atoms, electrons revolved at fantastic speed around protons, and that man would use atoms to make destructive weapons capable of destroying life on earth in a few seconds, that person would undoubtedly have denied such statements, and consider them superstition and fantasy.

He would probably have claimed that if such things existed he would certainly be aware of them and since this was not the case anyone claiming that such things existed must be a liar, whose views were unscientific and contrary to reality!

It so happens that history has recorded examples of such persons. More than twelve centuries ago in the time of Imam Sadeq, a person suffering from this intellectual disease by the name of Abu Shaker was discussing religious matters with the Imam. During their discussion the Imam said: 'You deny the existence of a God you cannot see. But can you see inside your own body?

Abu Shaker replied 'No'. The Imam said, 'If you could see inside your body you wouldn't say that because one can't see God. Hence, belief in His existence is a fiction!

The Imam said. 'Do you say that a thing which cannot be seen, that makes a sound that cannot be heard, and that cannot be touched or smelled or tasted does not exist, and since it does not exist it is not be worshipped? Abu Shaker said. 'Yes, that's what I say.

The Imam said. 'Do you hear the sound of your blood circulating in your body? Abu Shaker said. 'No, but does blood circulate in the body? The Imam said. 'Yes, it does. Can you smell the blood as it circulates?' Abu Shaker said. 'No'. The Imam said. 'Every few minutes your blood circulates throughout your body, and if this circulation stopped for even a few minutes you would die. Abu shaker said. 'I can't accept that the blood in my body circulates. The Imam said. 'What prevents you from accepting the fact that your blood circulates, is your ignorance, and it is this ignorance thus prevents you from accepting God.' 'Are you aware of the existence of creature which God created and put to work in your body and as a result of their activity you are alive?" Abu Shakar said, No.'

The Imam said, 'Since you only believe in what you can see you cannot be aware of the existence of these creatures. If you become a man of science you will know that in your body there are as many living creatures as there are grains of sand in the desert. They are born in your body, grow there, reproduce, and after a time die, but you don't see them or hear them and you can't touch them or smell them or taste them. They are born, grow and die so that you can live!'

'You imagine that your denial of the existence of living and knowledge, whereas this denial is really based on ignorance. Do you see the stone set at the base of this? You probably consider it to be motionless, because your eye can not see its movement, and if anyone tells you that in this stone there are movements which compared with the movements of us who are gathered together here are like

complete immobility, you wouldn't believe him. You'd say he is making up a story. You'd consider yourself to be an intelligent person, unaware of the fact that because you are ignorant you cannot perceive the movement inside this stone. But perhaps one day as a result of the progress of science people will be able to see the movements inside stone'.21

As you can see, all the characteristics of the pseudo-wise and all the symptoms of these afflicted by self-delusion are untitled in Abu Shaker.

When we read the story of the debate between Abu Shaker and Imam Sadeq, which took place more than twelve centuries ago, we are filled with amazement. Even people who are suffering from self–delusion are amazed that Abu Shaker denied the circulation of the blood, the existence of micro–organism in the body and atomic movement with such certainly, and did not consider the possibility that perhaps one day science would prove these phenomena to be true.

But we must take note that even today there are many Abu Shakers about, persons who deny the existence of angels, spirits and in general everything metaphysical without relying on any scientific proof simply because our senses are incapable of perceiving what is not material. They refuse to accept as true anything in the sphere of metaphysics. Such people are the Abu Shakers of our age, and like him are suffering from the intellectual disease of self-delusion. In the words of the Imam: "Such remarks are the result of(the ignorant person) believing own opinions, and he little realizes how great his ignorance is".

In other words, people who deny facts which are unknown to them as a result of their disease of self–delusion, if they did but know how ignorant they are, and how insignificant their knowledge is in comparison with their ignorance, would never place such faith in their now views opinions and would not deny things that they do not know.

Continuing his remarks about the serious effects of this dangerous disease, the Imam Says: As a result, of the false beliefs which have conquered his mind, and because of what he does not know, (the ignorant person) is constantly increasing his ignorance denying the truth.'

The most dangerous effect of self-delusion is that not only is the sufferer kept in a state of ignorance but his ignorance increases daily; his compound ignorance expands because as the disease becomes more severe new forms of ignorance, assail him in the guide of knowledge, thus making it progressively more difficult for him to be cured.

Stubbornness In Scientific Discussions

The six sign of a person whose views and opinions are unscientific is that in scientific discussion he is extremely stubborn. A person suffering from this disease cannot believe that the person he is confronted with may be speaking something correct. In discussions and debates he therefore tries to impose his views not with reason and proof but with arrogance and stubbornness, and to force the other party to

Pride Preventing One From Acquiring Knowledge

The seventh sign of a person whose views and opinions are unscientific is pride. As the Imam says: 'His pride him from acquiring knowledge,'

A person who considers himself so knowledgeable that the does not see his own ignorance, pays no need to the opinion of others, alienates himself from scientists and denigrates all who disagree with him and tries to proof his opinions stubbornly, cannot possibly be a real student or researcher. These characteristics create pride and arrogance in him and prevent the truth him from ever understanding the truth of existence.

- 1. Bihat Vol. 77-PP 221-2, Mizan Hadith No 13641
- 2. Mizan, Hadith No. 1705
- 3. Ibid, No. 1068.
- 4. Mafatih-ol-Jinan.
- 5. Ibid, No. 13638.
- 6. Mizan Hadith No. 13639.
- 7. Ibid No. 13640.
- 8. A madrasa is an Islamic theological college
- 9. See 'Conditions for understanding' P.
- 10. Mizan Chapter, 1706. with additional comment by the author.
- 11. Ibid, Hadith 2952
- 12. Ibid, No. 8066
- 13. Nahjal-Balagha (Feizedition) Sermon No.86.(Sobhi Saleh edition) Sermon No.87. The entire Sermons is relevant to the present discussion.
- 14. Bihar Vol.77.p,222, Mizan, Hadith No.2847.
- 15. Ibid, No. 13642.
- 16. Ibid, No. 13644.
- 17. Ibid .No, 4853.
- 18. Ibid, No. 6859.
- 19. Everybody knows that soon after the victory of the revolution, the officials of the Islamic Republic invited various specialists in ideological and social fields to take an open television discussion and person their views for the public to judge. The Monafiqin 'hypocrites as supporters of the banned Mojahedin Khalq Organization are called), Fedayin and Tudeh (communist) Party were invited. Everybody saw that when after a few sessions of such discussions, these groups realized they were being made to look foolish they refused to take further part, and decided instead to resort to force of arms to prove the correctness of their theories, as they had of course intended to resort to force of arms prove the correctness of their theories, as they had of course intended to do from the first!
- 20. Mizan Hadith No. 2866
- 21. That day has finally arrived See 'Monazareh' (The Debate)by the author, (Debate no.2).

(Debate No. 1) is also relevant to the present discussion.

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