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Chapter 6: What Path Should God's Servants Take to Reach Their Lord

Be informed that anything big dwarves when compared to something bigger. Anything hard dwarves when compared with something harder. It diminishes and disappears, becoming nothing. One who is pricked by a thorn then bitten by a scorpion sees the thorn as nothing compared with the sting of the scorpion, something not worth mentioning at all. The Creator, Praise and Exaltation belong to Him, has subdued everything by creating something else higher than it.

Take a look at the greatness of the Commander of the Faithful ('a), his might and prowess, his attainment of the extreme limit of perfection, and how he humbles himself when the name of Muhammad ('s) is mentioned, admitting that he is his slave. Says the Imam ('a),

'I am one of the slaves of Muhammad ('s)' (Al-Kafi, Vol. 1, p. 89).

Such is the tangible principle about everything possible or in existence. So, if you want to think less of the life of this world and its hardships, take a look at what is harder. Imagine if you add to your hardship another hardship much harder for you; what would you then do? It is then that everything becomes easy when compared to what is harder. And it is then that you will count your blessings and say, 'Praise be to Allah Who did not expose me to a hardship! Had He so willed, He would have done just that.'

Likewise, if you wish to appreciate a good deed which you have done so as to rid yourself of the elation, which is the substance of conceit and bragging, compare this good deed with others undertaken by those who are higher in status, those who are better than you. Or suppose you are elevated in your status; you will then see such a good deed as wrong and as indicative of your shortcoming, so you need to apologize for it. You will feel ashamed of being associated with it, let alone being proud of and elated

about it.

If you become accustomed to such a habit, by the will of Allah, the most Gracious, the most Exalted One, you should incessantly keep seeking Allah, for there is no goal nor an end greater than loving Him: Whenever you ascend the ladder of being sincere in serving Him, you will see a higher, a more magnificent, a more bright and a more sublime station. So, if you wish to reach the end, there is none to reach, none to stop at.

But if you want to stop without any obstacle in your way to continue your ascendance, this is something which does not suit you. It is so because the most Glorious One, Praise is all due to Him, invites you with His munificence and generosity to get even closer to Him. Who else would you prefer over Him?! For what gain would you turn away from Him?! Lord! Whoever seeks anyone but You shall meet disappointment, and whoever wants to turn away from You shall be a loser!

Since it has become rationally accurate that there is no alternative for seeking a path to Allah through incessant obedience to Him, be then informed that you can achieve this by seeking another facet of obedience to Him if you stop observing another facet: Allah, the Praised One, loves to be asked for permission just as He loves those who uphold His commandments. One who seeks to win the love of Allah, the most Praised and Exalted One, Allah shall open this gate for him and make its undertaking sound and hopeful adoration as means to attain His love, the most Exalted and the most Great that He is, for it is just so.

Also, the same takes place if he abandons them at a station where he fears lest boredom and lack of attachment should hinder him from such an obedience, as is the human nature. He will then be excused by Allah Who loves to be sought to grant permission. His abandonment of such a station will then earn him the love of the most Exalted and the most Great One even if one does not thus expect. A servant of Allah will then be subject to His love, the most Exalted and the most Great that He is, in whatever he does or does not do. Such is the great success, and for this should the doers of good strive.

A testimonial to such a meaning is a narrative variably reported from the Commander of the Faithful ('a) and from our master, al-Hasan son of Ali ('a). The Commander of the Faithful ('a) is quoted as having said,

'When two options, both pleasing Allah, are offered to a person, he [the good believer] should opt to undertake the one which is harder for him.'

Imam al-Hasan ('a), however, says that such a believer will opt for the one easier to undertake.

The second view is interpreted by arguing that Allah loves to be sought for permission just as He loves His servants to observe His commandments, and He loves moderation in one's form of adoration. It also falls under the category of those who say that

'The creed is strong; so, you should delve into it gently, and do not force Allah's servants to obey Allah' (*Al-Kafi*, Vol. 2, p. 70)

and under the category of self-deception by attracting the soul to obey Allah. The first, too, gives the impression that it falls under the category of resisting one's temptation which is the key to all blessings2. Both admonish the servants of Allah and guide His creation. Hence, their status in the hearts cannot be realized by the minds or by the dreams, and they know it best.

Also, one must take the time to contemplate upon his actions so that he may perform them in the best way. This will be prompted by sincerity. This often requires some time, although anything you postpone is subject to Satan's coveting, and postponement incorporates detriments including missing an opportunity.

So, if you see both these issues as contradicting each other, since through postponement you are apprehensive of missing the opportunity, while with haste you are apprehensive of spoiling the task which needs taking the time to contemplate on and to perform. Add to this the deception of Satan the Accused who tries to present it to you as an act of obedience while it is in reality for the satisfaction of one's own desire, and to please Satan, so it will be a form of transgression.

The way to get rid of such a contradiction is that you ought to know whether the postponement will be an opportunity for Satan. If so, such a postponement is indicative of one's ineffectiveness and laziness. It is out of love for wealth. It should remain in your hand: you will not spend it, for then it will get out of your hand. Such a postponement is the one that is detrimental to the scholar, and there is no doubt about its ugliness. The self (*nafs*) must be fought and outsmarted so that the soul may save itself.

As regarding postponing the doing of something for the sake of taking the time to achieve its perfection, it is desired, liked and mandated by the Lord of Dignity. It is not to be followed by regret, nor does it cause missing an opportunity to do something good because you are thus a man of righteousness when you assess the issues properly: 'There can be no grounds (for complaint) against those who do what is right...' (Qur'an, 9:91).3

Nevertheless, if you wish to do something with precision and perfection, accompany your postponement of doing it with reliance on Allah, praying He will enable you to accomplish doing it when you actually undertake it. When you are dragged by laziness and the desire to postpone doing it, make advancing it accompanied by reliance on Allah to assist you to be sincere in such an undertaking and to accomplish it in a way that pleases Him and earns His Pleasure.

If you accompany the matter with reliance on Allah whether you postpone or advance its doing, exerting an effort to identify the motive in each case, if your concern is prompted by a selfish reason or by laziness, desiring to keep what is already in your hand, you will not be deputed [by the Almighty] for such a bad undertaking.

But if the motive for either advancement or postponement is a sound one which it requires, you will be doing what is right whether you advanced or postponed doing it, and you are not to blame; you will earn the love of Allah in either advancement or postponement case, just as we have already told you that you will earn the love of Allah if you did or did not do it. If a servant of Allah earns the love of Allah when he does or does not do something, or when he advances or postpones doing it, he will have accomplished his march towards Allah by continuously treading the path of obeying Him. Far, far away it is from Him to shun one who seeks Him and who knocks at His door.4

Do not ever be misled into thinking that the hearts' path to Allah is confined to prayers, fasting, the recitation of the Qur'an, learning, educating, the recitation of supplications, the performing of ziyaras, and the like, so much so that they consider anything other than such pronouncements as 'idle talk' and 'a waste of time' as thought by our 'righteous' brothers. This is nothing but short-sightedness and some people being confused.5

Be informed that the essential requirement of the legislator with regard to mature people is to be strong in foresight so that they may obey their Lord with their full foresight and ample knowledge. Anything that has anything to do with strengthening foresight and increasing awareness is included in the legislator's objective and is expected of him. Actually, he more than anyone else seeks and underscores this.

Anyone who restricts himself to the rituals mentioned above, eying them in such a limited way, stagnation will make the most of him. His awareness of the subjects of the *Shari`ah*, of the Qiblah, of time, etc., will decrease. Anyone who wishes to deceive him with regard to his creed, be he a human or a jinn, can do so. This is the opposite of what is sought by the person responsible for the *Shari`ah*, and it runs contrarily to his goal.

This is the opposite of one who buys and sells, learns ethics, debates, the commendable manners relevant to making a question or answering one, in addition to his own manifestations of adoration, supplications, knowledge and teaching..., such a man is truly a man, a very good man; one's conscience is the best testimony for all of that.

Just as you carefully looked into learning some tangible crafts, Allah opened gates for you on the knowledge of what makes sense. The essence in this is that Allah, the Praised One, connected what is tangible to what is rational, the matters of the Hereafter with those of this life.

So, one who seeks what is in the Hereafter without employing what is available in the life of this world

will never achieve his objective: Allah has made the Hereafter issues attainable only with what is available in this life, making the life that is intended to attain the Hereafter as part of the Hereafter, something which is not to be condemned among the things relevant to this life. One hadith states the following:

'Condemned is one who abandons his Hereafter for the sake of his life in this world, and condemned is one who abandons his life in this world for the sake of the Hereafter.'

The life the abandonment of which for the sake of the Hreafter is condemned is actually the one that leads one to the good things in the Hereafter, and it is the one that does not stand in the way of anything good. The first type of 'dunya' cannot be avoided to reach the goal, and it is mandatory. Discussing it, therefore, is considered useful for one's awareness. Such a discussion strengthens one's understanding and foresight, a meaning embedded in the traditions relevant to trade. (Most references state that it contributes to reason as stated on p. 148, Vol. 5, of *Al–Kafi*.)

It has also been reported in hadith that adoration is comprised of ten parts: nine about trade and one about all acts of obedience (to Allah). What supports this argument is the fact that the Prophet ('s), prior to the inception of his mission, took to trade, and so did other prophets and messengers. The divine wisdom decreed that such perfections be scattered worldwide and that many of them are currently being discussed by people so that everyone may get his share thereof. This is why He has commanded that the wise word must be accepted no matter who articulates it, so much so that Ahl al-Bayt ('a) have said,

'Take wisdom even from the people of hypocrisy'

according to Bihar al-Anwar, Vol. 2, p. 99. They ('a) have also said,

'Learn from the mouths of men'

as we read on p. 105, Vol. 2, of *Bihar al–Anwar*. When the Wise Legislator wanted His servant to earn an ample share of pieces of wisdom and branches of knowledge, He disseminated them throughout the world so that they could be accessible to them, ordering them to accept such pieces of wisdom from whoever brought them. Ahl al–Bayt ('a) required their Shi`ah to get to know people through their righteousness rather than righteousness through people. Their Imams ('a) have said,

'Look into what one says, and do not look into who said what' (Bihar al-Anwar, Vol. 1, p. 355).

They ('a) have also said,

'Two things are unusual: a word of wisdom coming from a shallow-minded person, a word which you have to accept, and shallow-mindedness from a wise person which you have to forgive'

according to Bihar al-Anwar, Vol. 2, p. 44.

Perfection, then, all perfection, is absorbing statements and actions, or they may be dealings, experiences, etc. Ahl al-Bayt ('a) are cited as having said,

'Reason is the storehouse of experiences, and the best experience is that which teaches you a lesson'

according to *Bihar al–Anwar*, Vol. 74, p. 208, and that an experience is knowledge earned, according to *Ghurar al–Hikam*. Anything sparked inside a number of brethren, so they restricted themselves to following the well known rituals, limiting their outlook only to them, is something which we have put to the test. We looked into the past conditions of previous generations, those whose tales reached us, and we found the above to be an indication of a limited mentality, a lack in awareness, something which does not elevate anyone, nor does it help one reach lofty stations.

We, therefore, would like to attract one's attention to the fact that it is one of the deceptions of Satan the Accursed which the latter uses to confine one from moving to lofty stations and coveted plateaus. What makes a thing easier compared with something else is to look at life in this world and at its affairs to see how insignificant these are compared with the matters of the Hereafter, circumstances and development stages.

One who seeks Allah has to get the worries relevant to this life out of his mind, so he is not excited about anything which he achieves, nor is he grieved by anything which he loses. He simply contemplates on these issues, looking into how fast they will disappear, how swiftly they will alter, how they will never remain the same. A wise person ought not be too concerned about something which is so unstable, something which in fact is... nothing!

Secondly, if we look at life in this world as 'something' this is what Satan the Accursed insinuates, Satan who has deceived this creation, making people believe that life by itself is something good. But there is no doubt, and by way of necessity, it cannot be compared with the pleasures of the Hereafter which are much better than its pleasures and which Allah has in store for His obedient servants, selecting them from among all others.

If we suppose that life has something good, this 'something good' diminishes when compared to the good things of the Hereafter. If you prolong your look and carefully contemplate, it will become quite clear to you that one who pays his full attention to the issues of this life as it is, not in order to thereby reach the good things of the Hereafter, will be paying attention to mere nothingness, to a vanishing falsehood?

So, our dear Brother! Be informed that the way of Ahl al-Bayt ('a) is not 'a thing' by itself. If you look at it as a 'thing', wishing to leave it for something better, you are not guided at all to the way of Ahl al-Bayt ('a)..., period. Gather your thoughts, then, and supplicate to your Lord to help you get to know what life is according to Ahl al-Bayt ('a) so that you may be among those who follow in their footsteps and adhere to their method; otherwise, we will be in a valley while our critics will be in another.

If some sound vision, a fixed and commendable way of thinking that life is not to be sought for what it is, nor should it be one's ultimate objective..., becomes available to you, you will then have no choice except to confine your objective and inclination to what is rendered to Allah, to what Allah is sought for.

If it so happens that you will after that do something not for the sake of Allah, praise to Him, but to go along with your own nature, out of your own inclination, or because of the deception of Satan the Accursed, this is something which you did not intend to do in the first place, nor does it fall under your own will and determination. Rather, it is much like an unintentional slip of the tongue. You will still, despite this, have the right to state the following in the 'inclusive ziyarah':

'... obedient to you [to Ahl al-Bayt ('a)].'

This is so because in the case of intention to do or not to do something, you obey none but them ('a). You see none others from among their foes as being worthy of your obedience except when you are deceived, or when you flee away or become unmindful. You will only then make a mistake and do something unintentionally, something contrary to your objective. You will then sincerely repent, truly seek forgiveness, for you always are determined not to fall into sinning again but to continue on your course of obedience8. Do not include yourself among those to whom the following tradition hints:

'One who keeps committing the same sin while still seeking forgiveness is like one who ridicules his Lord' (*Bihar al–Anwar*, Vol. 90, p. 281).

You will then be excluded from those thus labelled. It is as though this same meaning was hinted at by the Master of Martyrs ('a) in his `Arafa supplication thus:

'Lord! You know that although my obedience to You has not been continuously positive, yet it

has continued in the form of love for You and determination to seek You' (*Iqbal al-A`mal*, p. 348).

All of this hinges on the love for the life in this world exiting from one's heart even in the meaning which we have just stated, that is, your decision and determination are bound on not doing any worldly deed in order to thereby seek this dunya as your ultimate goal. Such is not sought by any wise person, so much so that if you do so, you will look at yourself as having joined the company of the unwise and left the wise behind you.

If you master this to the extent that you start with it whenever you contemplate upon doing something, yours will be the objective which we have stated as well as others similar to its gist; so, take advantage of it, and do not be among the unmindful.

- 1. Feeling aware of the Divine manifestations, which are the most significant boons in existence, boons which help one along his march, a servant increases in his passion to what is greater and more beautiful whenever the veil is removed from his eyes, for there is no repetition in such a process of manifestation. Eeach manifestation from the One Who knows the unknown has its specific magnificence and attraction which make it different from its precedent. This is why the friends of Allah who enjoy the pleasure of manifestations can hardly encounter any hardship in life despite its bitterness: the pleasure of reaching their station makes them forget the pain of any separation even when all the people of the earth consider such separation as something quite grave.
- 2. The compiler's expression 'going against one's inclinations is the key to all blessings' is not exaggerated. One of the principles of the path to Allah Almighty, a principle which never falters, is the impossibility of undertaking such a journey without self-control, for how can anyone other than the animal's owner control the animal's path? The first step in the movement, therefore, is to accustom one's human existence, in all its parts and senses, to one's will. It is well known that this stage can be regarded as crossing half the distance: Inclination, desire and fantasy are all among the doors which drag a servant of Allah to the bottomless pit no matter how serious such a servant is in making the entire distance. The matter is not accomplished through belief, conviction in addition to hopes. Imam al-Kazim ('a), hence, says the following:
- 'I have come to know that the best of provisions of one who seeks You is a determined will whereby he prefers You; it is through the strength of will that my heart has addressed You.' (Al-Iqbal, Vol. 3, p. 277).
- <u>3.</u> Getting to know the right timing for proceeding to do something or withholding doing it needs, in reality, a foresight and assistance from Allah Almighty. Quite often, we lose the opportunity to earn great benefits because we do not watch for the opportunity which passes away like a summer cloud. Harvesting fruits on time is the concern of anyone who treads the path. What a loss it is when the farmer wakes up after the harvest season or when what is to be harvested has already withered?!
- 4. This statement, though brief, is very precise. He combines earning the love of Allah, the basis of the divine attraction to the servant of Allah, with the practical conduct while doing what is obligatory and avoiding what is prohibitive. Some people erroneously think that demonstrating such love without actions earns a servant of Allah degrees of nearness to Allah. So you find them aimlessly soaring spiritually, employing poetry once and once prose just to return from their soaring to their living reality which contains what brings about the wrath of the Lord on account of their individual, social or family dealings.
- 5. This is one gate that opens many gates of knowledge and insight in seeking a way to please Allah Almighty. We find some people summarizing such a path in a number of thikrs and certain sections of the Qur'an (wirds), forgetting that a creed is not merely talk. A creed, rather, is based on knowledge and treatment which prompt the saying of what agrees with the Shari'ah. Quite often, being occupied with wirds (in a way not followed by Ahl al–Bayt ['a]) causes the intoxication of one's subconsciousness, so he thinks he is doing great while he is not doing anything. Add to this the fact that the reality of

a supplication is the movement which stems from the heart and which is prompted by the meanings of what is articulated. The articulated supplication is nothing but the manifestation of its hidden meanings. If a pronouncement is empty of prompting the meanings suitable for them, what is revealed ought not be revealed... And what is the value of a structure which has no content?

- 6. Such is the condition of incorporating all fields in the requirements of worship. Inclusion of acting upon the Shari`ah is one of the characteristics of one who truly seeks a path to his Lord, unlike one who wishes to fly with one wing, let alone one who wishes to fly with one single feather! What is tested by reason is that the defect caused by falling short of one's effort to secure livelihood is the result of one's distraction to many things rather than the concentration on one. A path seeker, more than anyone else, needs to shun such a distraction and any multitude of burdens in his life. Anything vacant is like a rope heavily tying a servant of Allah down to earth. All this excludes what such a servant may have to undergo of pure fate and destiny. He will be rewarded for it, even if it forces him to be distracted. Allah, the most Exalted, the most Great One, helps His servant achieve that from which he is distracted and compensates him [for his loss] with what such a servant can never imagine.
- 7. Paying attention to the fact that life is temporal and will terminate is one of the important reasons why one should not set his heart on it. What is contemptible is loving its pleasures; otherwise, life itself cannot be described as beautiful or ugly. Since Allah Almighty is the One Who beautifies it, nobody has the right to speak ill of it. How can one do so since Allah Almighty rebukes anyone who prohibits the enjoyment of its good things? But if the one who beautifies it is Satan, mankind then ought to be cautious in its regard just as he may be of a snake: It is soft when touched, while inside her is the deadly venom. It is necessary to overcome one's deception in this regard. Nurture your soul with the hope for a much greater reward and a much lasting one so that you may not be distracted by what is little and vanishing. Imam Ali ('a) is quoted as having said,

'Had life in this world been filled with gold while the Hereafter is filled with baked clay, I would have opted for the baked clay of the Hereafter in preference over the gold of this life because such a clay lasts forever, whereas life's gold is temporal.' So, what if the gold of the Hereafter is everlasting while the clay of this life vanishes? (Shajarat Tuba, Vol. 2, p. 422).

8. This is one of the realistic portraits painted by the author as he outlines his ethical path. A slippage resulting from unmindfulness or unawareness ought not instill despondency in the heart of one who seeks Allah. By nature, one's heart quite often fluctuates, and Allah Almighty loves those who often return to Him just as He loves those who seek to purify themselves. Some traditions have made a similitude between a believer (mu'min) and an ear of grain which keeps falling then straightening itself. People of knowledge are fully aware of the fact that the complementing movement of a servant of Allah, following each time he returns to Allah and repents, may intensify in order to make a reason for being compensated for the stages during which he lost on account of unmindfulness or submission to desire.

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