

# Diseases of the Power of Intellect and Their Treatment

## A. The Condition of Excess

**Slyness:** It is one of the vices of the Power of Intellect in its condition of excess or extremity. When afflicted with this disease, the human intellect is so immersed in meticulous examination and analysis that it loses temperance. In other words, the individual's mental activity, instead of bringing him closer to an understanding of reality, takes him farther and farther away from it, and may even lead him to deny reality –like the Sophists– and cause him to be bogged down in doubt and indecision in regard to religious laws and their application.

The way that this fatal disease is to be treated is that the individual must first become aware of its danger, meditate upon it, and then make an effort to force his mind to keep within the limits of moderation. With common sense as his guideline and the thinking and judgement of normal people as criterion, he should judge his own thinking and judgements, being constantly on his guard until he reaches the condition of moderation.

## B. The Condition of Deficiency

**Simple Ignorance:** This disease is caused by a deficiency of the Power of Intellect in the individual, and is said to exist when the individual lacks knowledge and learning, but is aware of his ignorance. This is in contrast to `compound ignorance'—a state in which one not only does not realize his ignorance but considers himself to be knowledgeable.

It is obvious that the treatment of `simple ignorance' is easier than that of `compound ignorance'. In order to cure `simple ignorance' all that is necessary is to examine the evil consequences of ignorance, and realize the fact that man's distinction over the rest of animals lies in knowledge and learning. In addition to this, he should note the importance of learning and knowledge as attested by reason and also

Revelation. The consequence of such contemplation and reflection would be an automatic desire for learning. He must pursue this desire with the greatest ardour, and not allow the smallest speck of hesitation or doubt to enter into his mind.

## C. The State of Moderation

**Knowledge and Wisdom:** This condition is situated between the two extremes of 'slyness' and 'simple ignorance'. Undoubtedly, knowledge and wisdom are two of the sublimest qualities that man can possess, just as they are the most important and noblest of Divine Attributes. In fact it is this characteristic that brings man close to God. This is so because the more a man's knowledge and learning is, the greater is his capacity for abstraction (*tajarrud*); since it has been demonstrated in study of philosophy that knowledge and abstraction are complementaries. Therefore, the greater the degree of abstraction in the mind, the closer is man to the Divine Essence, whose idea in the human mind is the highest of abstractions.

In praise of knowledge and wisdom, the Holy Qur'an says:

**....And whoso is given wisdom, has been given much good .... (2:269)**

And

**....And those similitudes-We strike them for the people, but none understands them save those who know. (29:43)**

The Prophet (S) has been quoted as saying to Abu Dharr:

جلوس ساعة عند مذاكرة العلم احب إلى الله تعالى من قيام الف ليلة يصلى في كل ليلة الف ركعة و احب اليه من الف غزوة، و من قراءة القرآن كله اثنى عشر الف مرة و خير من عبادة سنة صام نهارها و قام ليلها، و من خرج من بيته ليلتمس بابا من العلم كتب الله عز و جل له بكل قدم ثواب نبي من الانبياء، و ثواب الف شهيد من شهداء بدر، و اعطاه الله بكل حرف يسمع او يكتب مدينة في الجنة.

Sitting an hour in a learned gathering is better in the eyes of God than a thousand nights in each of which a thousand prayers are performed, and better than engaging in battle for the sake of God on thousand occasions, or better than reciting the whole of the Qur'an twelve thousand times, or better than a whole year of worship during which one fasts on all days and spends the nights in prayer. If one leaves one's house with the intention of gaining knowledge, for every step that he takes, God shall bestow upon him the reward reserved for a prophet, and the reward accorded to a thousand martyrs of [the Battle of] Badr. And for every word that he hears or writes, a city shall be set aside for him in paradise ....

In Islam certain rules of etiquette are prescribed for both teachers and students, which have been

treated in detail in other books, of which the best perhaps is the *Adab al-muta'allimin* by Zayn al-Din ibn `Ali al-`Amili (1495–1559 A.D.). Here we mention some points about the proper conduct for the student and the teacher:

1. The student must abstain from following his selfish and lustful inclinations and from the company of worldly men; because, like a veil, they prevent access to the Divine light.
2. His sole motivation for study must be to achieve God's good pleasure and to attain felicity in the Hereafter; not for the sake of gaining worldly wealth, fame, and honour.
3. The student must put into action whatever he learns and understands, so that God may increase his knowledge. The Prophet (S) has been quoted as saying:

من اخذ العلم من اهله وعمل بعلمه نجا ومن أراد به الدنيا فهي حظه.

One who acquires knowledge from the learned, and acts according to it shall be saved, and one who acquires knowledge for the sake of the world shall receive just that [and shall receive no reward in the Hereafter].

4. The pupil must honour his teacher, being humble and obedient towards him.

The proper conduct for the teacher consists of the following:

1. Teaching should be for the sake of God, and not for any worldly ends.
2. The teacher must encourage and guide his student, be kind to him, and speak to him on the level of his understanding.
3. The teacher must transfer his knowledge only to those who deserve it; not to those who do not deserve it and who may abuse it.
4. The teacher must speak only of what he knows, and abstain from topics of which he is ignorant.

Here it is necessary to explain what we mean by knowledge and learning and the kind of learning we are talking about. In other words, the question arises whether honour and respect for knowledge and scholarship, which characterize Islam, apply to all the sciences or to only some of them?

The answer is that fields of learning can be divided into two groups: firstly, the sciences which have to do with this world such as medicine, geometry, music etc.; secondly, the sciences which are concerned with man's spiritual development. It is this second kind of learning which is highly honoured by the holy teachings of Islam. However, the first group of sciences are also considered important, and their pursuit is *wajib kifa'i* for all Muslims. That is, all Muslims are obliged to pursue them to the degree necessary for

meeting the needs of the Muslim community.

Those sciences whose learning is necessary for spiritual development of man are: knowledge of the Principles of Religion (*usul al-Din* or Islamic doctrines), ethics (*akhlaq*)—which was formulated to guide man to those things that bring about his salvation, and keep him from those things that lead to perdition—and the science of jurisprudence (*fiqh*)—which concerns itself with individual and social duties of human beings from the point of view of Islamic Law.

## **Other Vices Related to the Power of Intellect**

### **1. Compound Ignorance**

Compound ignorance is, as explained before, the kind of ignorance in which one does not know and is, moreover, unaware of the fact that he doesn't. This is a fatal disease the cure of which is extremely difficult. This is because the 'compound ignorant' person does not see any shortcoming in himself, and so lacks any motivation to do anything about it.

Thus he remains ignorant to the end of his life and its disastrous effects destroy him. In order to cure this kind of ignorance, we must explore its roots. If the cause of an individual's compound ignorance is a tendency for distorted thinking, the best treatment for him is to learn some exact sciences such as geometry or arithmetic, in which case, his mind is freed from muddleheadedness and mental inertia, and led towards steadiness, clarity, and moderation.

As a result of this, compound ignorance is transformed into simple ignorance, and the afflicted individual can then be stimulated into pursuit of knowledge. If the cause of the vice lies in his method of reasoning, the individual should compare his reasoning with that of men of research and clear thought, that he may discover his mistake. If the cause of his ignorance is some other thing such as blind prejudice and imitation, he should endeavour to remove them.

### **2. Perplexity and Doubt**

Another disease which may afflict the Power of the Intellect is the vice of doubt and perplexity, which makes man incapable of distinguishing right from wrong. This disease is usually caused by appearance of numerous contradictory pieces of evidence, which confuse him, and make him incapable of reaching a definite conclusion.

In order to cure this disease, the individual must first consider the axiomatic principles of logic, such as the law of contradiction, the principle that the whole is always bigger than any one of its parts, the law of identity, etc., and base all his subsequent reasoning on them, realizing that truth is one and except the true one all other conclusions are false. In this manner he can cut through the web of contradictory thoughts that bewilder him.

The opposite of ignorance, perplexity, and doubt is certainty, which is none other than lasting, certain conviction; which being in accordance with reality, cannot be shaken by any doubts however strong. This is specially important in regard to theology and its various branches. In other words, belief in the existence of God, His affirmative and negative Attributes, prophethood, resurrection, and whatever relates to them, should be so strong as not to be shaken by any doubts. The state of certainty is one of the highest states possible for man, and is attained by very few human beings. There is a tradition attributed to the Prophet that says:

اليقين الإيمان كله.

*Certainty is complete belief.*

Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq (A) is reported to have said:

إن الله تعالى يعله وقسطه جعل الروح في اليقين والرضا, وجعل الهم والحزن في الشك والسخط.

God, the Supreme, in His supreme justice, has associated happiness and comfort with certainty and contentment [that is, resignation to God's will], and coupled sorrow and pain with doubt and resentment [with respect to Divine will].

### **Signs of Men of Conviction**

There are certain signs associated with the state of certainty against which anyone can measure himself to determine his own degree of conviction. These signs are:

1. Reliance on God in all one's affairs, and having mind only for His good pleasure. To put it succinctly, it should be one's firm belief that:

لا حول ولا قوة إلا بالله العلي العظيم

There is no power or might [in the world] except that [it is derived] from God, the Most High, and the Most Great.

2. Humility before God, both inwardly and outwardly, at all times and under all circumstances, and obedience to His commands to the smallest detail.

3. Possession of extraordinary—almost miraculous—powers through being close to God—a condition that comes about after one has realized one's insignificance and weakness before His greatness and majesty.

## Stages of Certainty

1. *ʿIlm al-Yaqin* : Which is certain and permanent conviction. It is like the conviction of a man who when he sees smoke believes with certainty that there must be a fire too.
2. *ʿAyn al-yaqin*: Which is beholding something with—either the outer or the inner—eye. Using the above example, it is like the conviction of a man who not only sees the smoke but fire itself.
3. *Haqq al-yaqin*: Which is the state of certainty acquired when a form of spiritual and actual union exists between the knower and the known thing. This would be the case, for example, if one should be himself in the midst of fire mentioned in the above example. This is called "the union of the knower and the known", and is discussed in its appropriate place. In order to attain *haqq al-yaqin* one must fulfil certain necessary conditions. These are:
  1. The individual soul must have the capacity to receive and understand these truths; the soul of a child, for example, cannot understand the reality of things.
  2. The soul should not be one defiled by corruption and sin.
  3. Complete attention must be concentrated on the object in question, and the mind must be free of pollution of worldly and base interests.
  4. One must be free of any kind of blind imitation and prejudice.
  5. In order to attain the aim, relevant and necessary preliminaries must be covered.

## 3. Shirk (Polytheism)

*Shirk* is another serious disease of the soul, and is a branch of ignorance. It lies in believing that other forces besides God have a role in directing the affairs of the world. If one worships these forces, it is called *shirk ʿibadi* (polytheism in worship), and if he obeys them, it would be *shirk itaʿi* (polytheism in obedience). The first kind is also named *shirk jali* (manifest polytheism), and the second is also called *shirk khafi* (hidden polytheism). Possibly the Qurʿanic verse:

***And most of them believe not in Allah except that they attribute partners unto Him. (12:106)***

is a reference to the second kind of *shirk*.

The opposite of *shirk* is *tawhid* (monotheism), which means that there is no power in the universe except that of the Almighty God. *Tawhid* has stages; they are:

1. Verbal admission or acceptance of *tawhid*; that is uttering the لا إله إلا الله (there is no god but God) without believing in it sentence with the heart.

2. Believing with the heart when the above statement of monotheism is made with the tongue.
3. Realization of the unity of God through epiphany and numinous experience. In other words, one discovers that the vast multiplicity of creatures derive their existence from the One God, and recognizes that no power other than God's operates in the universe.
4. One sees nothing in the world except the Divine Being and perceives all creatures as emanations and reflections of that Being.

These stages of belief in *tawhid* guide us to recognize the cause of the disease of *shirk*. The root cause of *shirk* is immersion in the material world and forgetfulness in regard to God. In order to cure it, one must meditate upon the creation of the heavens and the earth and myriads of God's creatures. That may awaken within one the appreciation of the glory of God. The deeper his meditation and contemplation on the beauty of the universe and the mystery of its creation, the greater his faith in the existence and unity of God shall become. The Qur'an says:

***Such as remember Allah, standing, sitting, and reclining, and consider the creation of the heavens and the earth, (and say): `Our Lord, Thou hast not created this in vain. Glory be to Thee! sane us from the chastisement of the Fire. (3: 191)***

Imam al-Rida (A) has been quoted as saying:

Worship does not lie in copious prayer and fasting, but in the amount of contemplation in the works of God.

ليست العبادة كثرة الصيام والصلاة, انما العبادة كثرة التفكر في أمر الله.

#### **4. Satanic Temptations and Consciousness**

Whatever enters the human consciousness is either through the agency of the angels of mercy or the devil. If it is godly, it is called inspiration (*ilham*), and if it is caused by the devil, it is called temptation (*waswasa*). The human soul is a battlefield on which the army of angels and the army of devils are locked in battle, and man has the choice to confirm either of them. If the army of the devil is reinforced, he will become subject to demonic temptations, and his outward actions will mirror his internal condition. But if the Divine forces are strengthened, the individual becomes the embodiment of Divine attributes and characteristics.

The Holy Qur'an relates how the Satan swore to misguide mankind and lead them into sin:

***He said: `Now because Thou has sent me astray , verily I shall lurk in ambush for them in Thy Straight Path. Then I shall come upon them from before them and from behind them and from***

***their right and from their left .... (7: 16–17)***

About the people who yield to the devil, the Holy Qur'an says:

***....having hearts wherewith they understand not, and having eyes wherewith they see not, and having ears wherewith they hear not. These are as the cattle–nay, but they are worse. These are the neglectful. (7: 179)***

And about those who are not influenced by the devil, the Qur'an says:

***As for those who believe in Allah, and hold fast unto Him, them He will cause to enter into His mercy and grace, and will guide them unto Him by a straight path. (4:175)***

The way to fight demonic temptations by deliberating about the Hereafter. If one contemplates the consequences of following the advice of the devil and the future such obedience holds in store for him, he will find the right path and be liberated from satanic temptations. When he finds the righteous path, God, too, will come to his aid and guide him to ultimate happiness and felicity—as has been clearly stated in the above–mentioned verse.

## **5. Trickery and Slyness**

Slyness is another vice belonging to the Power of Intellect, and appears through the agency of satanic and evil wishes of the Power of Passion and Anger. Slyness and trickery is defined as conscious plotting against others and drawing of elaborate and detailed plans to harm them. This vice is a fatal one, because the individual afflicted by it is counted one amongst the party of the devil. The Prophet (S) has said:

ليس منا من ماكر مسلما.

Whoever plots against a *Muslim* is not one of us.

The way to cure this fatal disease is that the afflicted should wake up to the dangerous consequences of this vice, and realize that one who digs a pit for others will himself fall into it, getting his punishment in this world itself. He should also ask himself, why, instead of being kind and good to others, he should plot against them.

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