

## Eighth Hadith: Prejudice ('Asabiyyah)

بِالسَّنَدِ الْمُتَّصِلِ إِلَى مُحَمَّدِ بْنِ يَعْقُوبَ عَنْ عَلِيِّ بْنِ إِبْرَاهِيمَ، عَنْ أَبِيهِ، عَنِ النَّوْفَلِيِّ، عَنِ السَّكُونِيِّ، عَنْ أَبِي عَبْدِ اللَّهِ عَلَيْهِ  
السَّلَامُ قَالَ: قَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَآلِهِ: مَنْ كَانَ فِي قَلْبِهِ حَبَّةٌ مِنْ خَرْدَلٍ مِنْ عَصَبِيَّةٍ بَعَثَهُ اللَّهُ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ  
مَعَ أَعْرَابِ الْجَاهِلِيَّةِ.

Muhammad ibn Ya'qub (al-Kulayni), from 'Ali ibn Ibrahim, from his father, from al-Nawfali, from al-Sakuni, who reports on the authority of Abu 'Abd Allah (Imam al-Sadiq ) (A) that the Prophet (S) said, "Whosoever possesses in his heart 'asabiyyah (prejudice in any of its forms such as tribalism, racism, nationalism) even to the extent of a mustard seed, God will raise him on the Day of Resurrection with the (pagan) Bedouins of the Jahiliyyah (the pre-Islamic era)."<sup>1</sup>

### Exposition

Although now *khardal* is current in modern Persian for the mustard seed, the word for it in old Persian was *espan dan*. It is said that the mustard seed has many medicinal uses and is also used for making candles. As to the word 'asabiyyah it is the characteristic of the person who supports his kinsmen and relatives even for a wrong and unjust cause.

'*Usbah* refers to paternal relatives, as they are more likely to be those among whom one is surrounded ('*asaba*: to wrap around) and those from whom one derives strength ('*asaba* means, also, to bind).

'*Asabiyyah* and *ta'assub* in general give the sense of favoring and defending. So much for the lexical meaning.

As to its nature, I believe that 'asabiyyah is an inner psychic quality which is manifested in patronizing and defending one's kindred and those with whom one has some kind of affinity or relation, whether it be religious creed or ideology, or whether it be soil or home. The affinity may also be similarity of profession or the relationship of teacher and pupil, or something else. It is a moral vice and an abominable trait which itself begets many more moral and behavioral deviations and vices as well. In itself a

condemnable quality, it may take the form of defense of truth or religion, but in reality it is not aimed to defend a just and truthful cause but for extending one's own influence or that of one's co-religionists and allies.

As to the defense of truth, the efforts to disseminate it and to posit something which is true, are either not *'asabiyyah*, or, if they are, represent a commendable kind of it. The criterion lies in the distinct aims and purposes, and to the extent to which it involves selfish and diabolical ends or serves just and godly purposes.

In other words, when a man supports his kinsmen and friends, if he does so purely for the sake of upholding justice and defeating injustice, this kind of *'asabiyyah* is commendable and praiseworthy; because supporting justice and truth is among the sublimest of human qualities, being one of the attributes of the prophets of God (A) and His *awliya'*. Its sign is that one should support the party which is on the side of truth and justice, even though it may consist of one's enemies.

Such a person is a defender and lover of truth; he will be counted among the champions of human sublimity, a rightful citizen of the ideal human society, and a wholesome member of society whose presence exerts a reforming influence on the evils of the public. And if one's selfish and tribal instincts arouse him to defend and patronize the vices and wrongs of his kinsmen and associates, he is inflicted with the vice of *'asabiyyah*; he is a corrupt member of society, who corrupts it by confusing vice with virtue, and stands with the Bedouins of the *Jahiliyyah*, who were a group of nomadic Arabs who inhabited the desert before the advent of Islam, in an era of prevalence of darkness and ignorance.

This vice had taken hold of them to the highest degree, and among Arabs in general, who are guided by the light of guidance (through Islam) this vice is more than in any other nation. According to a tradition reported from Imam 'Ali (A), God Almighty will punish six groups of people for six kinds of sins: He will punish the Arabs for *'asabiyyah*, the peasants for pride, the rulers for oppression, the jurisprudents for jealousy, the merchants for dishonesty, and the villagers for ignorance.

## The Evils of 'Asabiyyah

From traditions narrated from the Household of the Prophet (S) it may be inferred that the vice of *'asabiyyah* is one of the fatal sins, which results in an evil life in the Hereafter and drives man out from the precincts of faith, being one of the abominable traits of the Devil:

عَنْ أَبِي عَبْدِ اللَّهِ عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ قَالَ: مَنْ تَعَصَّبَ أَوْ تُعَصَّبَ لَهُ فَقَدْ خَلَعَ رِبْقَةَ الْإِيمَانِ مِنْ عُنُقِهِ.

[In al-Kafi, through a chain of authentic narrators], it is reported from Abu 'Abd Allah (Imam al-Sadiq (A) that the Prophet (S) said, "The one who exerts *'asabiyyah* or the one on whose behalf it is exerted, the tie of faith is taken off his neck."<sup>2</sup>

That is, such a man is deprived of faith and abandoned. As to the person in whose interest *'asabiyyah* is exerted, perhaps he is also included in the *hadith* due to his compliance to the behavior of the one exerting *'asabiyyah* and hence made to share his lot jointly. And it is stated in *hadith* that whosoever approves of the action of a certain group is counted amongst it. However, if he does not approve of it and detests it, this tradition would not apply to him.

And:

عَنْ أَبِي عَبْدِ اللَّهِ عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ قَالَ: مَنْ تَعَصَّبَ عَصَبَهُ اللَّهُ بِعِصَابَةٍ مِنْ نَارٍ

Imam al-Sadiq (A) is reported to have said, “Whosoever practices *'asabiyyah* (against someone), God shall wrap around him (*'asabahu*) a fold (*'isabah*) of Fire.”<sup>3</sup>

عَنْ عَلِيِّ بْنِ الْحُسَيْنِ عَلَيْهِمَا السَّلَامُ قَالَ: لَمْ يَدْخُلِ الْجَنَّةَ حَمِيَّةٌ غَيْرَ حَمِيَّةِ حَمْزَةَ بْنِ عَبْدِ الْمُطَّلِبِ - وَذَلِكَ حِينَ أُسْلِمَ  
- غَضِبًا لِلنَّبِيِّ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَآلِهِ

Imam 'Ali ibn al-Husayn (A) is reported to have said: No *hamiyyah* shall ever enter Paradise, except the *hamiyyah* of Hamzah ibn 'Abd al-Muttalib, which was (expressed) at the time when he became a Muslim on account of his anger in support of the Prophet (S).<sup>4</sup>

The episode of Hamzah's conversion to Islam has been reported variously, and is not relevant to our discussion. In any case, it is obvious that faith—which is the invisible holy gift of God to His special servants, the sincere devotees of His Court, and the champions of His love—is contrary to a quality that disregards truth and reality and tramples truthfulness and uprightness under its feet.

Of course, if the mirror of the heart be covered with the dust of self-love and the love of the kindred and improper and blind *'asabiyyah*, the light of faith will not shine in it; it will not be fit to be the hidden abode of the Most High.

The person whose heart has been the mirror for the light of faith and gnosis, the one whose neck has been tied in the firm and unbreakable rope of faith, the one who is the hostage of reality and Divine knowledge, the one who remains wedded to the religious precepts and confined to rational principles and laws, the one who derives all his impulses from reason and Divine Law—no force of customs, ways, or familiar things can cause him to quiver or deviate from the right path.

One can profess Islam and claim *iman* only when he is submissive to truth and humble in front of it, and when he deems his own aims and purposes, no matter however great they may be, as trivial and transitory, before the aims and purposes of his Lord and Provider; he annihilates his own will in the Will of his real Lord. Of necessity, such a person will be free from all traces of ignorant *'asabiyyah*; his face will be turned towards reality, and thick curtains of ignorance and *'asabiyyah* would not obstruct his

vision.

When called to administer justice and utter the word of truth, he puts a firm foot on the head of all associations and ties, sacrificing all ties of kinship and customary affinities at the altar of the aims and objectives of his Lord. If there is a clash between the Islamic *'asabiyyah* and the *'asabiyyah* of the *Jahiliyyah*, he gives precedence to his Islamic *'asabiyyah* and his *'asabiyyah* for truth.

An enlightened human being knows that all the *'asabiyyahs* and all associations and relationships are merely transitory accidents and are perishable. The only relationship that is permanent and lasting and the only *'asabiyyah* that is true, is the relationship between the Creator and the created being, and is essential and unbreakable; it is firmer, higher, and prior to all the ties of lineage and alliance.

## A Prophetic Tradition

The Prophet of God (S) is reported to have said:

كُلُّ حَسَبٍ وَنَسَبٍ مُنْقَطِعٌ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ إِلَّا حَسَبِي وَنَسَبِي.

All the ties of lineage and affinity will be broken on the Day of Resurrection except the ties of my lineage and affinity.

It is obvious that the ties of lineage and affinity of that holy personage are spiritual and lasting, and free from all pre-Islamic biases and *'asabiyyahs*. In fact the spiritual ties of lineage will be more vivid in that world and its merits more conspicuous. On the other hand, the physical and terrestrial relationships that are rooted in human habits and customs are very weak and fragile and are broken easily.

None of them have any worth and value whatsoever in the next world, except those relationships that are established according to the Divine celestial system and under the auspices of the precepts of the Law and dictates of reason: only they are unbreakable and unseverable.

## The Otherworldly Form of 'Asabiyyah

It was mentioned in some of the *ahadith* discussed previously that the criteria of the otherworldly forms, which human traits will acquire in the *Barzakh* and on the Day of Resurrection, are the habits and qualities and their strength. That world is the domain of the dominance of the spirit and the subservience of the body. It is possible that men should be raised in the forms of animals or Satans.

The present tradition which we are expounding, and which maintains that 'the person who possesses in his heart *'asabiyyah* even to the extent of a mustard seed, God Almighty will resurrect him on the Day of Judgment with the Bedouins of the pre-Islamic era', may also refer to the above-mentioned point. The man possessing this vice, after being transferred to the other world may behold himself as one of the pre

Islamic heathen Bedouins, who neither had faith in God Almighty nor believed in prophets and prophethood.

Whatever the inner and outer form of that tribe had been, he will find himself when resurrected as one of them. Perhaps he will himself not understand as to why such a thing would happen to him, while in the world he professed the true religion of God and claimed to be an adherent of the faith of the Holy Prophet (S). It is mentioned in a tradition that the inhabitants of Hell will not be able to remember the name of the Prophet (S), and, as such, would not be able to introduce themselves as his followers, unless God Almighty resolves on their deliverance.

And since, according to some of the traditions, the trait of *'asabiyyah* is one of the attributes of Satan, may be the heathen Bedouins of the pre-Islamic era, as well as the individuals possessing the primitive habit of *'asabiyyah* would be resurrected in the form of Satan:

وَعَنْ أَبِي عَبْدِ اللَّهِ عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ قَالَ: إِنَّ الْمَلَائِكَةَ كَانُوا يَحْسُبُونَ أَنَّ إِبْلِيسَ مِنْهُمْ وَكَانَ فِي عِلْمِ اللَّهِ أَنَّهُ لَيْسَ مِنْهُمْ، فَاسْتَخْرَجَ مَا فِي نَفْسِهِ بِالْحَمِيَّةِ وَالْغَضَبِ فَقَالَ: خَلَقْتَنِي مِنْ نَارٍ وَخَلَقْتَهُ مِنْ طِينٍ.

(According to a reliable hadith of al-Kafi), Abu 'Abd Allah (Imam al Sadiq) (A) is reported to have said, "Verily, the angels counted Satan as one of themselves, and it was in the knowledge of God that he was not of them; then he spoke out whatever was inside him, out of hamiyyah and anger, and said (to God): 'Thou createdst me of fire, and him (Adam) Thou didst create of clay.'" [5](#)

Thus my dear, you should know that this vice belongs to Satan and is a fallacy inspired in you by that accursed being based on false analogical inference. He committed the mistake because of the dense veils of *'asabiyyah*. This veil conceals all realities from the sight, or rather shows all one's vices as virtues and the virtues of others as vices. And it is obvious as to where the deeds of the person who beholds things in a contrary perspective would lead him. Besides being itself a source of human ruin and doom, it gives rise to a number of moral, spiritual and behavioral villainies, the description of which would be cumbersome.

As such, a wise person, who understands these villainies as the products of this vice and confirms the testimony of the truthful Holy Prophet (S)–whose truthfulness has been confirmed by God–and the Members of his Household (A), who all state that this trait leads man to destruction and makes him an inhabitant of the Fire, should seriously consider about curing himself, and if, God forbid, there is the slightest speck of this vice in his heart, equal to the size of a mustard seed, he should purge it, so that he may be thoroughly purified before leaving this world and being transferred to the next.

He should be free from this vice at the hour of his death, so as to put his feet into the other world with a pure soul. He should keep in his mind that he has fiery little time and very limited opportunity; for he does not know as to when he will have to depart from this world.

## A Colloquy with the Self

O my vicious self! Perhaps your death may approach while you are still busy in writing these pages, and transfer you with all your moral vices to the next world from where there is no return. And O you dear reader of these pages, draw a lesson from the life of this writer who may be today under the ground and in the other world, a victim of his ugly acts and wicked behavior. As long as he was given opportunity, he spent the precious days of his life in vain pursuit of lusts and desires and squandered that gift of God with vain profligacy. Yet you must be careful as you too shall be in a condition similar to his, and you don't know when.

Perhaps as you are reading these pages, the opportunity may slip if you go on procrastinating. O brother! Do not put off these matters; they are not to be postponed. Remember, how many hail and hearty people have suddenly been snatched away by the claws of death, and we have no knowledge about what awaited them in the Hereafter.

Therefore, do not let the chance slip and consider every second as precious; for the matter matters a lot and the journey is a perilous one. If you lose the opportunity of doing something in this world, which is the field whose harvest is the Hereafter, you will not be able to do anything any more and you will not be able to straighten your crookedness. There will be nothing left except regret, perplexity, chastisement, and degradation.

The men of God were never at ease even for a little while; they were never oblivious of the perilous and hazardous journey ahead. The condition of the fourth Imam 'Ali ibn al-Husayn (A) was amazing. The laments of Amir al-Mu'minin Imam 'Ali (A) are stunning.

What is the matter with us that we are so negligent? Who has given us assurance except the Devil, who makes us put off our actions for tomorrow and wants to bulge the number of his followers and companions by making us share his attributes? Doesn't he, in this way, want to include us in his company so that we may be resurrected in his retinue?

The accursed creature always diminishes the importance and seriousness of the matters of the Hereafter in our eyes, and makes us oblivious of the remembrance of God and obedience to His commands by means of the promises of His mercy and the intercession of the intercessors. But, alas, such temptations have no truth and belong to the deceitful paraphernalia of the snares of that accursed creature.

Of course, even at present, you are immersed in the mercy and compassion of God, rejoicing in the gifts of sound health and well-being, life and safety, guidance and reason, opportunity and directions for the reformation of the soul and other such myriad favors. Yet you are not drawing benefit from these favors in this world by complacently following the Devil. Beware if you fail to draw any benefit from God's mercy in this world, in the next world also you will not be able to benefit from the infinite mercy of God and the

intercession of the intercessors. The guidance provided by them is this-worldly reflection of the intercession of the intercessors in the next world and the otherworldly reflection of the guidance provided by them here is intercession.

But if you cannot benefit from the guidance, remember that you will not be able to receive the benefit of intercession either; it depends on the guidance you utilize here. The intercession of the Holy Prophet (S) is general and universal; however, like the blessings of God, the receiver must have capacity to receive it. If, God forbid, Satan robs you of the faculty of faith, you will be incapable and unworthy of receiving Divine mercy and the intercession of the intercessors. Yes, God's bounties in the two worlds are plenty and His mercy unlimited; but if you really seek His mercy, then why do you neglect His unceasing bounties in this world that are like seeds of His favors in the other?

All the prophets of God and the *awliya'* have invited you to the Divine feast, yet you turn away and you do not accept it on account of the evil insinuations of the Devil. You sacrificed the *muhkamat* (the firm verses) of the Book of God, the *mutawatirat* of the prophets and *awliya'*, the compelling rational arguments of the wise, and the definite proofs of the *hukama'* for the fiendish fantasies and fancies of your own. Woe to you and me for our state of neglectfulness, blindness, deafness, and ignorance.

## On The 'Asabiyyahs of the Intellectuals

One of the types of *'asabiyyahs* is stubbornness in intellectual matters and the habit of supporting the statements and ideas of one's own or that of one's teacher or spiritual master not for the sake of defending truth and refuting falsehood. It is obvious that such a kind of *'asabiyyah* is worse and more improper in some ways than other types of *'asabiyyah*. This, because a scholar and an intellectual ought to be an instructor of mankind, scholarship being a branch of the tree of prophethood and *wilayah* itself.

He should be aware of the evil effects and bad consequences of moral vices. If, God forbid, he himself possesses the vice of *'asabiyyah* and attaches to himself the mean attributes of Satan, he will have scarcely anything to offer in self-defense and will be taken to task severely.

The person who poses himself as a guiding beacon of light, a source of enlightenment in the assembly of mankind, as a guide to the path of felicity, and as one who is charged with the duty of guiding men on the path of Hereafter, if, God forbid, he does not remain faithful to his words and his inner being contradicts his outward appearance, he will be grouped with the hypocrites and the pretentious. He will be branded as an evil scholar, a man of knowledge devoid of good deeds, whose retribution is a painful chastisement, as described by God Almighty in the Holy Quran:

﴿بِسْمِ مَثَلُ الْقَوْمِ الَّذِينَ كَذَبُوا بِاللَّهِ وَاللَّهُ لَا يَهْدِي الْقَوْمَ الظَّالِمِينَ﴾

***Wretched is the likeness of those who deny the revelations of Allah. And Allah guideth not***

### **wrongdoing folk. (62:5)**

Hence it is essential for scholars to retain their integrity and to keep themselves free from such vices, so that having corrected themselves they may be able to reform their society through a truly effective preaching and exhortations that can penetrate the hearts and minds. The corruption of a scholar can lead to the corruption of a nation. And it is obvious that the vice which generates multiple vices and the transgression which begets other transgressions is worse and greater than an isolated, non-contagious vice in the eyes of the Almighty.

Another hideous aspect of this vice in intellectuals is the atrocity done to knowledge itself; as this *'asabiyyah* on the part of intellectual amounts to the abuse of knowledge and disrespect to it. The one who is entrusted with this valuable trust and enrobed in its precious robes, it is his duty to preserve its sanctity and deliver it safely to its owner. And if one is guilty of the *'asabiyyah* of pagan Bedouins with regard to it, he is of course guilty of the sin of breach of trust, an injustice and a major sin and offense.

The other ugly side of this vice is the wrong done to the other side. Because, the other side that participates in intellectual discourses also comprises of scholars. He too enjoys a sanctity which it is obligatory to observe and to safeguard his honor. Insulting him will be synonymous with violating Divine sanctities, and it is a great sin. Sometimes, senseless *'asabiyyahs* make one insult scholars. I seek refuge in God from this major offense.

Yet another aspect of *'asabiyyah* relates to the person in whose favor *'asabiyyah* is exercised, who may be one's instructor and tutor. He may be forced to disown his pupil, because all the great masters and saints—*karram Allah wujuhahum* are naturally attracted towards truth and justice and are abhorrent to untruth and injustice. They detest him who violates justice and gives currency to falsehood through his acts of *'asabiyyah*.

Of course, the harms of spiritual disownment are greater than the harms of parental disownment, for spiritual fatherhood is above physical parenthood. Thus, it is incumbent upon scholars—may God increase their station and honor—to protect themselves from all moral and behavioral vices, to adorn themselves with the ornaments of good deeds and moral virtues, and not to be unmindful of the duties of the holy office which the Most High has bestowed on them, the failure to do which may bring ruin whose extent is not known to any one except God Almighty alone. Wassalam.

[1.](#) Al-Kulayni, *Usul al-Kafi* (Intisharat 'Ilmiyyah Islamiyyah, Tehran), vol. III (Arabic text with Persian translation by Sayyid Jawad Mustafawi), p. 419.

[2.](#) Al-Kulayni, *Usul al-Kafi* (Intisharat 'Ilmiyyah Islamiyyah, Tehran), vol. III (Arabic text with Persian translation by Sayyid Jawad Mustafawi), p. 419.

[3.](#) Al-Kulayni, *Usul al-Kafi* (Intisharat 'Ilmiyyah Islamiyyah, Tehran), vol. III (Arabic text with Persian translation by Sayyid Jawad Mustafawi), p. 419.

[4.](#) Al-Kulayni, *Usul al-Kafi* (Intisharat 'Ilmiyyah Islamiyyah, Tehran), vol. III (Arabic text with Persian translation by Sayyid Jawad Mustafawi), p. 419.

[5.](#) Al-Kulayni, *Usul al-Kafi* (Intisharat 'Ilmiyyah Islamiyyah, Tehran), vol. III (Arabic text with Persian translation by Sayyid

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