

Guarding Oneself (Ri'ayah)

Whoever guards his heart from heedlessness, protects his self from appetites, and guards his intellect from ignorance, will be admitted into the company of the vigilant. Then he who guards his knowledge from fancies, his faith from innovation, and his property from the forbidden is among the righteous.

The Messenger of Allah said, 'It is a duty for every Muslim, man and woman, to seek knowledge,' that is, knowledge of the self. Therefore it is necessary for the self to be in all states either expressing his gratitude or proffering his excuse for lack of gratitude. If this is acceptable to Allah it is a favour upon him, and if not it is justice upon him. For every self it is necessary to work that it may succeed in its acts of obedience, and for its protection in its efforts to abstain from doing harm.

The basis of all this is recognition of total need and dependence on Allah, caution and obedience. The key to it is in delegating your affair to Allah, cutting off expectation by always remembering death, and seeing that you are standing in the presence of the All compelling. This gives you rest from confinement, rescue from the enemy, and peace for the self. The means to sincerity in obedience is harmony, and the root of that rests upon considering life as being only as long as a day.

The Messenger of Allah said, 'This world lasts but an hour, so spend it in obedience to Allah.' The door to all of this is always to withdraw from the world by means of constant reflection. The means to this withdrawal is contentment, and abandoning such existential matters as do not concern you. The means to reflection is emptiness [desirelessness], and the buttress of emptiness is abstinence. The completion of abstinence is precaution, and the door to precaution is fear. The proof of fear is glorification of Allah, adherence to obeying His commands with sincerity, fear and caution, and holding back from the forbidden; and the guide to this is knowledge. Almighty Allah said,

إِنَّمَا يَخْشَى اللَّهَ مِنْ عِبَادِهِ الْعُلَمَاءُ

Those of His servants who are possessed of knowledge fear Allah. (35:28)

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