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Lecture 11: Envy Destroys One's Health

We must understand what creates envy and refrain from it. This sickness is worse than cancer for one's spirit. From the beginning, one must control himself so that he does not become afflicted with this disease that can destroy one's family. Envy starts from becoming angry at the wrong times or becoming excessively angry. Examples of these have been mentioned earlier.

For example, suppose there are two workmates. One of them gets a promotion and the other one does not. The one who did not get promoted gets angry at the fact that his workmate got promoted but he did not. This anger will result in envy. His envy will grow and he will wish that his former workmate gets demoted. This form of envy is harmful for one's body and soul. The Commander of the faithful (a) said in the *Nahj al-Balaghah*: "It is strange that an envious person does not pay attention to his health."¹ It is true that envy destroys one's physical health.

He (a) also said: "Health comes from a lack of envy."²

A man's spirit has many duties including taking care of his body and protecting his abilities. When one becomes envious his spirit only thinks about what he is envious about. His spirit becomes upset because it feels that it has less than what he is envious about. This even has an effect on one's appetite.

Envy Does Not Allow Faith To Remain In One's Heart

Envy also destroys one's soul. The following tradition has been narrated from *Usul al-Kafi* and other books: the Messenger of Allah (S) said: "Envy consumes one's faith just like fire consumes firewood." Have you seen what fire does to firewood? He (S) said that envy does the same thing to one's faith. One will die without faith if envy grows inside of him, because envy does not allow faith to remain in his heart.

In another tradition, the Messenger of Allah (S) said to his companions: "Beware, a sickness that was in previous nations has been found amongst you. Know that this is a terminal disease; it is a disease that destroys your religion."³

This was a warning sign that the Prophet gave to his companions at the end of his life. Envy is what took the followers of the previous prophets off the path of religion and we saw what envy did to the Muslims after the Prophet (S) passed away. Envy was the reason for the death of thousands of people in the battles of *Jamal* and *Siffin*. Review the history of Islam; you will see that envy was behind every social catastrophe that befell Muslims.

Envy Kills Scholars

The late Shaykh Jawāhirī wrote in his book *Jawāhir al-Kalām*, in the chapter of giving testimony, about the conditions of a witness: “A witness must not be envious. In Islam, a witness's testimony is not accepted if he is envious. He is not just. In other words, envy is one of the greater sins.” Shaykh Jawāhirī used a tradition from the Messenger of Allah (S) to prove that envy is one of the greater sins. The tradition described the sins that would force different segments of society into Hell. One of the things that he (S) said was: “The religious scholars [will be sent into Hell] because of their envy.” Envy will make those who learn about religion go to Hell if they are not careful and if they do not purify themselves.

It is better if I relate something while we are talking about this tradition. Tomorrow is the birthday of the ninth Imām, Imām Jawād (a). Before I read a tradition from him I would like to say that the envy that destroys scholars is not exclusive to scholars who study Islamic jurisprudence, instead it encompasses university students and scholars of other fields as well. As a principle, knowledge brings about envy, be it religious knowledge or any other knowledge. This is a warning to anyone who has become knowledgeable in any field. Because of this Imām Khomeini (r) said that a student in the religious seminary or a student in the university will be dangerous for the society if he has not purified his self. His harm would be more than his benefit.

The Envious Judge Tries To Give The Imām The Death Penalty

Have you heard about the story of Abū Lāḥiqā, who was a judge during the time of Imām Jawād? Abū Lāḥiqā was a judge in the Abbasid *khalifa*, Mutawakkil's so called Islamic government. He was the head judge and in charge all of the courthouses in the country. A store owner lived close to his house by the name of Zaraq'. The judge and the store owner were friends. One day the judge went to see Zaraq' while he was very distressed. The store owner asked: “Your honor, why are you so upset today?”

The judge responded: “If you only knew what happened to me in front of the *khalifa* today. They brought a thief in front of me. They asked me how much of his hand should be cut and I said that the Qur'an said that a person's hand up to his elbow must be washed in *wudū*.⁴ So, I said that his hand must be cut from the elbow.

“The *khalifa* asked other judges who were present in the courtroom about their opinion and they said that the hand must be cut from the wrist because all considered that to be the hand in regards to

tayammum.

“The *Khalifa* then turned to the Imam of the Sh‘a, Imam Jawad (a).

Imam Jawad (a) said: “They said what the ruling is”

The *Khalifa* said: “You tell me the ruling as well.”

Imam again said: “They already said what the ruling is.”

The *Khalifa* insisted that the Imam tell him his opinion and the Imam said: “His fingers must be cut off because Allah said that the *masajid* belong to Allah.⁵ *Masajid* is the plural form of *masjid* which means parts of one's body that are on the floor when he prostrates. This thief will want to pray and he must put the seven parts of his body on the ground when he prostrates. He must put his two palms on the ground and for this reason they should not be cut. Instead, only his fingers should be cut.

When the Imam said this, the *Khalifa* said; “Excellent!” and immediately ordered the thief to be punished in the way that the Imam said.

At this time it was like the world fell on my head. How was a 25 year old man ahead of me in knowledge? I'm upset and I will not get over it until I do what I have to do, even though I know that whoever helps in the murder of this young man will go to Hell.

Zaraq' tried to advice him against it but he did not accept. The next day he went to the *khalifa* and asked him: “Do you know what happened yesterday? Instead of suppressing the person whom a large number of Muslims consider as their Imam and as the rightful *khalifa* of the Prophet (S), who consider you to be unjust, you put him forward and strengthened him. Those who thought he was the rightful *khalifa* are now saying; 'Didn't you see, even the *khalifa* understands that he is higher.' They are saying that he is better than others. What a big political mistake you made!” He kept making statements like this to the *khalifa* until the latter was convinced about killing the Imam (a). Finally, they poisoned him (a).

Understanding Reality Will Not Come From Reading Books Alone

Look and see how many scholars are in danger of this. Mujtahids, doctors, engineers and scientists, they are all in danger of this.

But, the knowledge that has been praised in the Qur'an and traditions is a light that shines in one's heart. An example of this is: “The scholars are the inheritors of the Prophets.”⁶ This knowledge, the knowledge of reality, the knowledge of the mortality of this world and the immortality of the next, is not achieved by reading alone. It is a light that is given by Allah to a person who has prepared himself to receive it.

- [1.](#) Imām 'Alī, Nahj al-Balīghah Fayd al-Islām, volume 2, page 1186, saying number 216.
- [2.](#) Imām 'Alī, Nahj al-Balīghah Fayd al-Islām, volume 2, page 1200, saying number 248.
- [3.](#) Shaykh 'Alī Namāzī, Mustadrak Safīnat al-Bihār, volume 1, page 251.
- [4.](#) Refer to 5:6.
- [5.](#) Refer to 72:18.
- [6.](#) Shaykh Kulaynī, Usūl al-Kāfī, volume 1, page 24.

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