

Lesson 15: Wisdom, Foresight and an Angle of the Prophet's (S) Way of Life

The Noble Prophet (S) reminds us about the defects of the world and materialism [or worldliness] and in contrast gives the good news of the superiority of asceticism and disinclination to the world. It is something of a miracle that the Noble Prophet (S) mentions issues of edification of character in one specific field by means of different expressions and various ways, the result of which is that everyone benefits from his sayings according to his own understanding and natural capacity.

Issues are so many and have been expressed in different ethical and instructional forms that every person can derive benefit from them according to his own taste and disposition and select the best provisions of edification of character which suit them. One of the ways which the Noble Prophet (S) has selected is recommending asceticism and encouraging people to undertake it and citing the invaluable effects which result from disinclination to the world.

Wisdom and Foresight Are the Products of Asceticism

“O Abu Dharr! A slave of Allah does not live ascetically save that Allah stabilizes wisdom in his heart and his tongue overflows with it, and makes it aware of the defects, pains and quarrels of the world and leads him to the eternal Garden of bliss in a sound state.”

In this section, the emphasis of the Noble Prophet (S) is that asceticism and disinclination makes man's heart ready to accept wisdom and after that he perceives truths. People who are obsessed about the world cannot conceive the realities of the world because love of the world makes man heedless and negligent. In contrast, people who are disinclined to the world perceive realities because they are superior over the world and choose the best way after comparing it with the hereafter.

Asceticism denotes disinclination or lack of desire, as has been narrated with regard to the brothers of Yusuf (‘a):

وَشَرُّهُ بِتَمَنِّ بَخْسٍ دَرَاهِمٍ مَعْدُودَةٍ وَكَانُوا فِيهِ مِنَ الزَّاهِدِينَ

“And they sold him for a small price, a few pieces of silver, showing no desire for him.”¹

Asceticism in the world means that man ought not to be inclined to the world; if he has some wealth and certain facilities at his disposal, he thinks about how to use them for the good pleasure of Allah and is not obsessed with acquisition of possessions. (People like prophet Solomon (‘a) had such a state that they used to eat dry bread in spite of having so much wealth and a great kingdom and lived in contentment and frugality.)

In explanation of the sentence, “Allah stabilizes wisdom in his heart” it is necessary to mention a few points:

1. There is a close relationship between disinclination to the world and perception of divine knowledge; that is to say, it is impossible to find a person who in spite of his heart being obsessed with the world, his soul at the same time is overflowing with divine knowledge and awareness.
2. Wisdom, which is a product of disinclination to the world, stabilizes man’s knowledge and awareness and defends against instability of belief and wavering of the mind. It is possible for man to attain knowledge and perceive the truth but still his awareness is shaky and unstable because he has not attained certitude or certainty, which stabilizes and steadies knowledge in the heart.

Among the basic principles of religion, in addition to the fundamental principle of belief, the stability of knowledge also has special value and it is for this reason that seasonal and periodical faith not only has no value, but also has negative consequences and has been reproached in various instances in the Qur’an:

فَإِذَا رَكِبُوا فِي الْفُلِكِ دَعَوْا اللَّهَ مُخْلِصِينَ لَهُ الدِّينَ فَلَمَّا نَجَّاهُمْ إِلَى الْبَرِّ إِذَا هُمْ يُشْرِكُونَ

“So when they ride in the ships they call upon Allah, being sincerely obedient to Him, but when He brings them safe to the land, lo! They associate others (with Him).”²

3. Once wisdom has become steady, it does not remain confined to the heart but its effects become apparent in speech and works and conduct too. The words of a person in whose heart wisdom has become stable will also be wise: he abstains from vain and futile talk and counsels in such a philosophical and thoughtful way that his words deserve praise and extolment.

Yes, the tongue is passage for man’s heart and, in other words, the exudations of a man’s heart are carried out on the tongue because it is the oozing external part of the jar which is inside him, of course this oozing out not only appears on the tongue but with the rest of man’s conduct too.

The other effect of aversion of the world is that the defects of the world become apparent to man; that is to say, man can witness the deficiencies, lowliness and inferiority of the world in the case that he liberates himself from attachment to it, otherwise it is not expected of the lovers of the world to see the defects of their beloved and darling (the world), because infatuation with the world blinds man's eyes from seeing its defects and deafens man's ears from hearing its deficiencies, on the contrary he perceives as beautiful its vileness and supposes his discreditable conduct which has appeared as a result of excessive fondness with the world to be fair. This interpretation has been explained by different expressions in the Glorious Qur'an, amongst them:

...زَيَّنَّا لَهُمْ أَعْمَالَهُمْ...

"... We have made their deeds fair-seeming to them..."³

...بَلْ سَوَّلَتْ لَكُمْ أَنْفُسُكُمْ أَمْراً...

"... your souls have made the matter light for you..."⁴

...وَزَيَّنَ لَهُمُ الشَّيْطَانُ أَعْمَالَهُمْ...

"... and the Satan has made their deeds fair-seeming to them..."⁵

The various interpretations are indicative of this truth that falling in love with the world causes the world and the worldly behavior of man to manifest themselves as fair-seeming in his perception and the more this fondness increases, the more beautiful the world and its defects appear in man's perception for the reason that the lover does not see the defects and deficiencies of their beloved. Without doubt, such an individual only sees the outward deceptive world and is incapable of perceiving and comprehending its inner side and seeing beyond it:

يَعْلَمُونَ ظَاهِرًا مِنَ الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا وَهُمْ عَنِ الْآخِرَةِ هُمْ غَافِلُونَ

"They know the outward of this world's life, but of the hereafter they are absolutely heedless."⁶

In contrast, clear-sighted and pragmatic people with regard to the world see both its good and its bad. This group, in contrast to the first group which only sees the beautiful appearance and fair-seeming lines and spots from this venomous snake, also perceives its deadly poison and fatal fang:

"The example of the world is like a serpent. It is soft to the touch but its inside is full of venom. An ignorant person who has fallen into deceit is attracted towards it but a wise and intelligent man keeps on

his guard against it.”⁷

Yes, the spiritual insight and far-sightedness of divine people is a hurdle against their getting deceived by the superficial manifestations of the world and their profound perception of horizons further than material horizons is their basic difference with materialistic superficial perceptions of hedonists; in the words of Imam ‘Ali (‘a):

“The lovers of Allah are those who look at the inward side of the world while the other people look at its outward side. They busy themselves with the remoter benefits while the other people busy themselves with in the immediate benefits. Therefore, they kill in their hearts those things which they feared would have killed them and leave here in this world what they think would leave them.”⁸

In continuation, the Noble Prophet (S) states:

“O Abu Dharr! If you see a brother of yours living ascetically in the world, give heed to his words because wisdom is given to him.”

This talk is a continuation of His Holiness’ that Allah establishes wisdom in the heart of whoever lives ascetically. Therefore, if man were disinclined to the world, he has attained wisdom and his speech will be wise when he speaks for the reason that the speech which flows from the heart of a person who is detached from the world undoubtedly settles in the heart. An ascetic person has proved by means of his conduct that he believes in what he says; therefore, expectation of wise talk from him has to be had. In contrast, a person who is seduced by the world and is drowned in its gratifications is deprived of wisdom and knowledge and the depravations of this world have closed his eyes against truths and consequently his word is unavailing and far from wisdom.

Signs of the Most Ascetic People

When the discussion reaches here, Abu Dharr gets enamored by ascetics, for this reason he requests the Prophet (S) to explain the attributes of an ascetic so that he may embark upon making plans of friendship and learning wisdom from the ascetic once he identifies him. In response, the Noble Prophet (S) acquaints the most ascetic person by citing five characteristics:

1. Whoever does not Forget Graves And Decomposed Corpses

The first characteristic of the most ascetic person is that he does not forget graves and decomposed corpses. The lovers of the world always have their eyes set on the world and its attractions and mourn over things which they do not themselves have; but a person who does not pay heed to the world always sets his sight on graves and the ruins of the world, because they are the signs of the destructibility and extinction of the world.

An ascetic is a person who does not forget graves, desolate places, and ancient and obliterated places.

Of course, not in that sense that man ought to spent their entire time from morning to evening at grave sites but to go visiting the dwellers of tombs from time to time and take lesson from them.

People seduced by the world turn their faces away and flee when they pass by graves fearing lest their feasting and drinking gets overturned. They get upset when they hear death being mentioned and know it to be a fault; in contrast, those who have set their attention on the hereafter always remember the Day of Resurrection and never forget death.

2. And Renounces The Adornments Of The World

The second attribute of the most ascetic person is that he renounces excess adornments in the world. Without the least doubt, man has need of the facilities of the world and derives benefit from comforts which are necessary for the continuation of life; amenities such as clothing, housing, food and embellishments and all too often they play a role in the perfection of man and for this reason the divine law not only has permitted but exhorted them too.

... قُلْ مَنْ حَرَّمَ زِينَةَ اللَّهِ الَّتِي أَخْرَجَ لِعِبَادِهِ وَالطَّيِّبَاتِ مِنَ الرِّزْقِ

“Say: Who has prohibited the embellishment of Allah which He has brought forth for His servants and the good provisions?”⁹

What ought to be done is to benefit from worldly facilities and adornments to the extent of need and forsake excessive and extravagant adornments and give the rest to others, because if he does not content himself with only what is needed and knows no limits and bounds, he will not get contented no matter how much he derives benefit from worldly embellishments and gratifications and no matter how much he adds to the decoration, luster and beautification [of his house] and continually changes curtains with more expensive and exorbitant ones and acquires for himself a modern car because man’s nature is such that it seeks variety and is never satiated not recognizing any limitations.

With all certainty, such an individual is not an ascetic; an abstinent person is one who derives benefit from the world to the extent of need. He contents himself with a protecting roof and does not intend to acquire a grand building. Or, if he has need of a car, he gets a car which suits his needs of going to and fro, he does not insist on the car being definitely modern and luxurious.

In this sentence, His Holiness’ emphasis is on forsaking superfluous adornments, otherwise embellishments which are a necessity of life and/or are necessary in the maintenance of individual and family life are not only not blameworthy but have also been recommended; like man’s adorning himself for his wife and a woman’s beautifying herself for her husband, wearing clean clothes, cleaning the hair and face, combing the hair and perfuming the body. Basically, the status of a believing person necessitates that he abstains from outward and inward contaminations and bad smells which cause the

aversion of others.

For this reason, Islam emphasizes keeping the body and clothes clean and beautifying the face and hair. It has been recommended a lot that when man wants to go to the mosque and/or enter a group of people, he ought to spray perfume so that the others may enjoy his sweet smell, not a despicable and abhorrent smell which offends them.

Or, it has been advised that at the time of prayer man should spray perfume and two *rak'ats* of a man who has perfumed themselves has more reward than seventy *rak'ats* of prayer. What is necessary is for man to forsake additional adornments which are not rationally wise and are not beneficial in the direction of man's perfection and are signs of hedonism and mammonism and adoration of pleasures of the flesh.

It has been recorded in description of the Noble Prophet's (S) characteristics that:

“The Prophet's (S) habit was to look himself in the mirror and clean his face and comb his hair. Often times, he used to do so with the help of water placed in front of him and beside the people of the house, he used to beautify himself for his companions and used to state, ‘Allah loves his slave who prepares and beautifies himself when going out of the house to visit his brothers’.”¹⁰

3. He Prefers What Is Eternal Over What Is Ephemeral

The third quality of the most ascetic person is that he prefers what is eternal over what is ephemeral.

If a comparison is made between the short-lived and vanishing pleasures of the world and the constant and everlasting pleasures of the hereafter, he wisely opts for the eternal pleasures of the Garden of bliss overlooking the ephemeral pleasures of this world. He also would rather bear the hardships and difficulties of responsibilities and duties than the ease and comfort of the world, because his far-sighted eyes are set on the future of the world; when moving, he only perceives the destination and he does not recognize the world save as a bridge for passage.

وَالْآخِرَةُ خَيْرٌ وَأَبْقَى

*“While the hereafter is better and more lasting.”*¹¹

4. And He Does Not Look Forward To Tomorrow

5. And Considers Himself Among The Dead

The fourth and fifth characteristics of the most ascetic person are that he does not count tomorrow as part of his life and considers himself as living among the dead.

Man has to always perform his duties and never stop striving and activity. Without the least doubt, a

person who has embarked upon discharging responsibilities cannot be in comfort and luxury and a pleasure-seeker, because endeavor and activity are not compatible with luxurious and lazy living.

A person who is obsessed with the world is always after acquiring facilities for pleasure and ease; when time comes for activity and endeavor, sometimes lessons and discussion and personal study and the rest of the duties, his love of comfort dissuades him from activity and postpones duties to tomorrow and he is not prepared to hurt his comfort and pleasure-seeking. In truth, procrastination and postponing duties to the other day is a result of man's long-term planning for himself and his hope of attaining them in the future of his life and for this reason he puts off today's responsibilities in the hope of tomorrow.

It is natural that attaining those protracted hopes calls for a long lifespan and it is for this reason that the mammon hopes for a longer and more protracted life and this results in procrastination and postponement of works and/or as a result of fear of failure, causes dejection and stress.

An ascetic person and one who is disinclined to the world discharges his daily duties [on time] and contrary to a hedonist, he does not count tomorrow as part of his life so as to put his duties off until then, because he is not sure of his being alive the following day. He believes that even if he still had a tomorrow, he will have other responsibilities to discharge.

Protracted Hopes and Procrastination of Obligations Is a Sign of Weakness of Faith and Weakness of Confidence in Allah

As has been mentioned, a lot of people have protracted hopes and have expectations of living long years in this world and their work and endeavor is for the future and they are always worried about the future and that which must come to pass. They are distressed that if they do not go to university, they might not have a job and not have an income for their daily living. They are anxious about whether their future lives will be easy or not.

Of course, this nervousness is a result of not having a spirit of faith and trust in Allah; otherwise, a person who completely relies on Allah and perceives his graces and blessings has no apprehensions about tomorrow because Allah, the Exalted, is the Possessor and Owner of everything. In addition, from where is a person who is nervous about his future certainly sure that he has a tomorrow?

Islam and religious sciences commend that man has to be engaged in discharging today's duties and not to be thinking about tomorrow because it is not clear whether he will be alive up to the next hour or not. Of course, apprehending being deprived of the world and future pleasures of the earth is blameworthy, otherwise if man discharges today's duties and makes plans and decisions for possible future responsibilities, this is not only praiseworthy but is considered a part of religious duties.

Every duty and responsibility is incumbent on a particular day and time assigned to it: today my prayers are incumbent and I have no responsibility over tomorrow's prayers, but if I remain alive until tomorrow, it

becomes incumbent that I recite prayers tomorrow too; it is the same with rest of the duties every one of which is incumbent in its own occasion and we do not have any more duties [other than that].

Therefore, being anxious about the future and the end of his worldly life is irrelevant but apprehension of the definite future and last day is proper because there is no escaping from tomorrow's resurrection and hereafter, even if it were pleasing to some people if there was escaping from the hereafter.

Allah, the Exalted, states:

...يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا اتَّقُوا اللَّهَ وَلْتَنْظُرْ نَفْسٌ مَّا قَدَّمَتْ لِغَدٍ

“O you who believe! Be careful (of your duty to) Allah, and let every soul consider what it has sent on for the morrow...”¹²

In continuation of the *hadith*, with regard to Allah's recommendations to him about forsaking the collection of wealth, the Noble Prophet (S) states:

“O Abu Dharr! Allah has not sent revelation to me [recommending] so that I may engage in the acquisition of wealth and has on the contrary inspired me to thank, praise and adore the Lord for His graces and to be one of the prostrating slaves and when your death draws nigh, worship Him.”

If the collection of wealth and saving of money was desirable and would cause the perfection of man, Allah would have advised the Noble Prophet (S) to embark upon acquisition and preservation of possessions and riches. But Allah never at all made such recommendations but to be engaged in praising, worshiping and supplicating to Allah to the moment of his death.

Of course, adoration and servitude of Allah has various manifestations: sometimes worship denotes discharging personal duties and early rising [for the purpose of worship] and at other times it connotes carrying out social duties, acquisition of knowledge, teaching, preaching and propagation of Islamic culture and finally every duty which is incumbent upon man.

An Angle of the Prophet's (S) Way of Life

People who have selected the Noble Prophet as the best model and example ought to try to their best ability to harmonize their lifestyles with his; it is for this reason that His Holiness explains a niche of practical way of life and conduct:

“O Abu Dharr! I wear coarse clothes and sit on the ground, wash my hands after food and whoever does not follow my way and conduct is not from me.”

The standard of deriving benefit from the material benefits for the Prophet (S), who has the power of

dominion over creation [and] can have the world at his free disposal, is to the measure of securing his basic needs. Previously, His Holiness stated that Gabriel [Jibra'il] set the treasures of the world at the Noble Prophet's (S) free disposal but His Holiness abstained from consenting. In this section, he clearly states his contentment, simple living and social conduct:

On account of the way of life of Allah's Prophet (S), as the most eminent creature and bringer of revelation, being the object of attention of the Muslims and even the non-Muslims, all the practical conduct and states and even the minute details of his way of life and social manners were under the close scrutiny of his companions.

It is for this reason that a lot of the details of his way of life have been narrated by word of the *Ahl al-Bayt* ('a), his companions, the generation which followed the companions but never met the Noble Prophet (S) himself and many other people. In addition to that, His Holiness himself in certain instances has stated a section of his way of conduct in the same way that in this section he hints at an angle of his personal conduct so that the followers of His Holiness, by knowing his natural temperament and conduct, may select him as their role model and example.

His Holiness states that he wears coarse clothes and does not wear soft clothes so as to be at ease, he sits on the floor not on fine and expensive carpets. He was bound to eat with his fingers at the time of eating food; in addition to that, he used to clean his hands after food. He used to mount a bare and undecorated donkey and used to carry another man at the back. From this explanation the humility and peak of servitude of His Holiness becomes apparent. It is amazing that His Holiness was this humble and down-to-earth, to the extent that he used to mount an undecorated donkey and as a result of the extremity of his humility used to carry another man with him, in an environment where pomp, arrogance and haughtiness used to reign with injustice.

In contrast, we, the claimers of being his followers, are preoccupied with wearing good clothes and eating delicious food and finally securing a comfortable and easy life for ourselves. We covet buying a modern and luxurious car and desire to derive as much pleasure from the world as possible.

It is worth mentioning that in this era it is not possible to expect the people's ways of life to conform with the time of the Noble Prophet (S) because the standards of life and the economic conditions of every era differs to that of another age and the equivalence of scientific and technological advancements have brought about great leaps in the living conditions of mankind. What is incumbent is to follow the inviolable Islamic laws and fundamental postulates and in every time the social position of [the majority of the] people has to be taken into consideration and to abstain from pomp, acquisitiveness and pride.

- [1.](#) Surat Yusuf 12:20.
- [2.](#) Surat al-'Ankabut 29:65.
- [3.](#) Surat al-Naml 27:4.
- [4.](#) Surat Yusuf 12:18.
- [5.](#) Surat al-Naml 27:24.

- [6.](#) Surat al-Rum 30:7.
- [7.](#) Nahj al-Balaghah, p. 1141, short saying 115, trans. Fayd al-Islam.
- [8.](#) Ibid., p. 1287, short saying 422.
- [9.](#) Surat al-A'raf 7:32.
- [10.](#) Tafsir al-Mizan, vol. 6, p. 330.
- [11.](#) Surat al-A'la 87: 17.
- [12.](#) Surat al-Hashr 59: 18.

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