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# Lesson 16: The Danger of Loving Wealth and Position and Praising Contentment and Simple Living

## The World, a Goal or a Means

On the basis of the Qur'anic perception, if there were no world, there would not be a hereafter. We build our hereafter by means of our volitional works and actions in this world, as has been recorded that the world is a [preparatory] ground for the hereafter. Therefore, if there were no world, no one would go to the eternal Garden because the blessings of heaven are a reward for worldly works.

The divine graces, virtues and transcendental states of the hereafter are all produce of our efforts and works which man has discharged in the world; therefore, the world has a lot of values. Taking this reality into consideration, the question is presented as to why so much reproach and condemnation has been heaped on the world, which has such value.

In response to this question, it ought to be said that the life of this world from the point of view that it is in the category of Allah's creatures has no individual essential reality whatsoever and is basically the life system of the world and the best system that enjoys the benefits of ultimate perfection and beauty.

For this reason, the main problem has to be looked for elsewhere. With a bit of concentration on the verses of the Glorious Qur'an and the *hadiths*, we gather that the fault and flaw lies in the quality of man's relationship with the world and his way of interaction with it, because it is that very way of his interaction with the world which can either be beneficial or harmful, valuable or worthless, good or bad for his future.

From his interaction, conduct, life and future of man, save in a few instances which as a result the deterministic imbalances give rise to a chain of vices and deficiencies, what defect and fault can be

found with the world? In addition, these vices and flaws are incomparable to the countless virtues and perfections of the world.

Therefore, it has become clear that blame and fault lies in the way of man's relationship with the world; a relationship which is formed on the basis of giving primacy to the world and a materialistic perception to the world: the perception of people who imagine that beside the life of this world there is no other life but in reality this fallacy is null and void looking at the world with such a perception is an error which will give rise to more mistakes in the conduct and behavior of man.

Therefore, we ought to rectify our conception of the world and understand that living is not confined to the life of the world but there is an eternal life for man beyond this earth. In the case that man considers the world as a station and passing place, not the main destination and ultimate goal, it is natural that he will secure for himself the conveniences of life, enough wealth and riches needed for attaining the necessary perfection. In this case, food, clothing, housing, a car, money, riches and leadership are considered as preliminaries and means, not the main goal. But in the instance that they are the main goal, neither preliminaries nor means, they prevent man from attaining human perfection and his ultimate goal and it is for this reason that they have been criticized.

## The Reproached World

With regard to what has been mentioned, the Noble Prophet reproaches love of wealth and position stating:

“O Abu Dharr! The love of wealth and position harms man's religion more than two vicious wolves injure the herd of sheep which they ambush at night time so that they have all the time till morning to ravage the herd of sheep.”

In order to describe the importance of the subject and warn the Islamic community [*ummah*] about the danger of love of the world and the jeopardy of obsession with worldly position and social status, His Holiness likens love of the world and position and social rank to two vicious wolves which ambush a herd of sheep confined in a certain place at night and from night until morning embark upon devouring them. It is natural that once a wolf attacks a herd of sheep, it does not get content with one sheep but tears apart every one of them and finally gets busy with eating them. Now, if two brutal wolves assault a herd of sheep, do they leave a sheep alive?

The danger of love of the world and leadership to man's religion and ethical values is more than the jeopardy of two vicious wolves which attack a herd of sheep, because love of the world and leadership destroys the spiritual and human and religious identity of man: that to which the identity and real existence of man is attached.

(The purport of His Holiness' words in this section has been consecutively narrated by several authorities

of *hadith* and it has been narrated by different expressions. Even in the book entitled, “*Usul al-Kafi*” a section has especially been set aside for the recrimination of love of the world and leadership.)

His Holiness’ words are not idle talk but a reality which has been set forth in the form of a warning to the Muslims. This is a reality which historical experience has also confirmed. From the early days of Islam up to now, the root of all the treacheries which have been committed against Islam has been love of money and leadership, because the danger that a person who has been seduced by earthly riches and power poses on religion is more than that of any other enemy!

Diverting the course of the caliphate and forcibly usurping it and the establishment of oppressive and invalid governments and all the blows which have been inflicted on the body of Islam arise from love of wealth and position. Therefore, with regard to the jeopardy of love of riches and status to man’s religion, we ought to be vigilant, and until we are youths and the two mean qualities of love of wealth and obsession with rank have not yet become firm in us, fight them and never let them develop roots in our hearts.

If we acquire wealth, we ought to make use of only what we need for our basic needs and put the rest at the disposal of the poor, relatives and the needy friends. We ought to try to give that which we love most to others, for the reason that the Qur’an states:

...لَنْ تَنَالُوا الْبِرَّ حَتَّى تُنْفِقُوا مِمَّا تُحِبُّونَ

***“By no means shall you attain to righteousness until you spend benevolently out of what you love...”<sup>1</sup>***

(Without the least doubt, giving things which man loves prevents the establishment of love of wealth in man’s heart.)

The likeness of what we have mentioned can be explained in two aspects of fighting against the vice of love of leadership [and power]: once man attains leadership and responsibility, he ought to try not to let the feelings of superiority, arrogance and bossiness appear in him but try to serve in disguise and not seek fame, people’s love, personal renown and reputation. Of course, the danger of love of power for people who have not yet attained any position is not in question and is directed at people for whom the ground for position and rank has been prepared and puts their religion in real jeopardy.

## **Poor Believers Are Light-burdened on the Day of Resurrection**

After the Prophet (S) has warned against love of wealth and position, Abu Dharr asks:

“O Prophet of Allah, does Allah give precedence to the fearful, lowly and submissive in going to the Garden of bliss?”

After comprehending that the seekers of wealth and position are heading towards perdition, Abu Dharr imagines that Allah gives priority to the fearful and submissive; for this reason, he asks the Noble Prophet (S) in this regard and His Holiness refutes him stating:

“The indigent among the Muslims will be led to paradise with their feet placed on the shoulders of other people. Then, the treasurers of heaven will say, ‘Stay in your places until your accounts are attended to.’ They will respond, ‘Why are we going to be held to account? We swear upon Allah that we did not have power to spend in Allah’s way and embark upon discharging justice. Wealth which was granted to us was just enough to secure our needs so we could neither spend it nor be greedy with it; but we worshipped Allah and in the end accepted his divine call’.”

What is surprising is that in spite of the praise and extolment which religious sciences have heaped on values such as humility, modesty and keeping alive the praise of Allah, the Noble Prophet (S) does not mention the adorers of Allah as the leaders to the Garden of eternal bliss and instead states that the guides to paradise are people who protected their religion in spite of poverty and need and never relinquished making the *jihad*, effort and fighting and/or acquisition of knowledge.

Those ones will be led to the eternal Garden of bliss mounted on other people’s shoulders; as if they want to fly. When it shall be said to them to wait until their accounts are attended to, they will reply that they did not have any government and power so as to select of our their own volition the course of civility with the people and discharge justice; we did not have any money to spend in Allah’s way and/or be greedy with. What was expected of us was worship and obedience of Allah, which we did not neglect at performing.

Yes, they did not have any wealth to be answerable for lavish living and waste and/or negligence at helping other people. It is for this reason that their accounting does not take long, because if they had had wealth and had spent it in the way of right, even then their accounting would not last long.

With regard to the criticism which has been laid on the world and the dangers which are directed against man’s religion from the realm of love of riches and rank, the Noble Prophet’s (S) speech is comforting to the conscience for people who have no access to worldly riches and/or for the reason of discharging duties like knowledge and the *jihad* and fighting with the enemy, they did not manage to derive any benefit from the world. It is true that if man were to have possessions, he can spend it in the way of Allah by helping other people and use it at the service of Islam but a person who embarks upon acquisition of knowledge and/or being present at battlefronts and hence is encumbered in the acquisition of wealth and riches and spending it in the way of Allah still attains a higher position and status than a person who spends his possessions in the course of Allah because he sets aside as capital his wealth while the seeker of knowledge and the soldier at the battlefront expends as his capital his very being, his safety and ease in the way of Allah and values which such a person attains are higher than the produce of other people.

When man at the end of the war returns from the battlefield empty-handed and sees those unfamiliar with war and the *jihad* have acquired enormous wealth for themselves, have built magnificent buildings for themselves and consequently have brought to hand all the amenities for their feasting and drinking, it is likely that the Devil tempts him that you went to the battlefield and remained empty-handed with regard to the wealth of the world, but look at where the other people have reached! You went to the combat front and fought and got injured and/or lame and now no one values you nor is any one heedful of you and the other people have got posts and positions for themselves! This seduction of the Devil often produces effects in people of weak faith and gives rise to their regretting.

Likewise, it is likely for people who embarked upon acquisition of religious education in theological schools to get tempted to think that what a great mistake they made! The other person went to university and got a suitable career after graduation and got colossal wealth under the auspices of his job but as a seminary student after thirty years of learning and I am still incapable of acquiring bread for my dinner! These seductions always come about for believers who are empty-handed in the world. It is for this reason that His Holiness with his words sets their hearts and minds at peace that if you have remained behind the caravan of the rich but still you have attained values which others have been deprived of and on the Day of Resurrection they will envy your position.

In continuation, His Holiness states:

“O Abu Dharr! The world pre-occupies the lives and bodies of people. Allah, the Magnificent and High, will hold us accountable over permitted conveniences more so with things which have been acquired by illicit means.”

Without the least doubt, in the acquisition of riches of the world bodily and energetic capital has to be expended. People who are occupied with work and acquisition of wealth know this truth very well that sometimes man's problems are so numerous that they deprive man of the peaceful sleep of the night and he always thinks about checks and precious stones, selling and buying, inflation and deflation, debts and taxes and issues of this nature. In any case, a person who embarks upon acquisition of wealth has to strive hard whether he wants to acquire that wealth by permissible means or by illicit ways, because wealth does not easily come to hand. It is natural that individual does not find a single opportunity for worship and meditation.

He does not find the convenience to reflect about Allah, the Day of Resurrection and supplication to Allah. A person who has love of the world in the deepest recesses of his heart goes so far as to perform acts of worship as a means of attaining the world, he is never at peace from morning to night and if he wakes up at night to perform the night prayers, he requests for his daily income to be increased and his riches to get colossal.

Is there any intention more mean and infamous than that man should invoke Allah and worship Him for the sake of his stomach and material possessions? Worship which ought to be a means of attaining

heaven and higher than that the good pleasure of Allah is set as a means of getting more bread, a better house and a more luxurious car.

In contrast, riches and poverty are the same for a heart which has been liberated from the world, ashes and purified gold make no difference in his perception. If we have no access to such people, the reality is that such people do indeed exist. There are People for whom the litter in the dustbin is equivalent with a heap of bank notes and the only thing which is worth any value in their opinion is that which is employed in the way of Allah. It is likely that man does not believe what he does not see, but I believe because I have seen with my own eyes:

About forty years ago I went to buy a self-cooker from a tradesman in the bazaar in Tehran with the intention of returning to Qum after buying all the other things which I needed. The attraction of that man so much captivated me that I stayed with him up to evening time and he kept giving me pieces of advice. In between the advice and recommendations, tears kept flowing from his eyes wetting the white beards on his cheeks.

He asked me, "What is the name of the first book which you study in the seminary?" I said, "*Sharh Amthali*h." He said, "What is written in the introduction of the book?" I said, "The beginning of knowledge is awareness of the High..." He said, "You have learnt that the beginning of knowledge is awareness of Allah!" He was talking while tears were pouring from his cheeks like drops of rain. In this pandemonium, his shop-boys were busy selling and he was inattentively getting the money and throwing it in the cash box.

When it was time for afternoon prayers, he arose with tearful eyes and went to the mosque and after the prayers and eating lunch, I returned to his store and I stayed there until evening time and kept listening to his advices.

Yes, if love of the world is divested of man, heaps of money have no value to him and his heart belongs elsewhere. But if love of the world is embedded in man's heart, his heart belongs elsewhere even as he prays and his prayers too have worldly goal. Once the heart is occupied by love of position, man still plans to attain position even if he were to study mystics and he were acquainted with spiritual wayfaring and edification of character, and he incessantly thinks about attaining positions which others have not attained; in any case, he intends to gain predominance over the others. In reality, he does not intend to be Allah's slave. He is like the magicians of India who after strenuous practice and effort attain powers to perform certain miraculous works which other people are incapable of performing.

The one who has been trained by Islam only intends to adore Allah and nothing else. Islam wants man whose spiritual striving and endeavor are for the good pleasure of Allah, even the wealth which he acquires is for the good pleasure of Allah. In the same way that Imam 'Ali ('a) used to care for date-trees until they gave fruit and dug wells to supply water which he placed at the disposal of the people in the way of Allah.

Therefore, we ought to try to reduce our affection for the world. Of course, naturally the more material blessings are placed at the disposal of ordinary people, the more they get addicted to the world because once the graces of the world increase, their sweetness gradually settles on man's palate and increases man's inclination to the world. It is for this reason that people who chase after possessions and riches have heavy responsibilities and they will be held to account for every bit of their possessions, whether they acquired it legally or illegally.

In contrast to ordinary people, the saints [*awliya*] of Allah do not in the least bit fall in love with the world no matter how abundant the graces at their disposal; of course, this kind of person is scarce. In the whole course of history people like Solomon have been very few who in spite of having all those countless blessings and a great kingdom used to eat dry bread.

Therefore, in regard to the invaluable recommendation of the Noble Prophet (S), it is better for man not to be pre-occupied with thoughts of acquiring wealth and riches and cleanse his heart from the contaminations of the world by means of worship and adoration of Allah; as was Abu Dharr whom Imam 'Ali ('a) describes in this way:

"In the past I had a brother on the course of Allah whose contemptuous look on the worthless world made him look great in my eyes..."<sup>2</sup>

## **Praising Contentment and Simple Living and Reproaching Covetousness**

In continuation of the *hadith*, the Noble Prophet states:

"O Abu Dharr! I have requested Allah to grant to those who love me only what is enough for their daily subsistence and to increase the wealth and children of my enemies."

As has already been mentioned, for most people the availability of a great deal of blessings gives birth to more affection and love for the world in their hearts. Therefore, it is better not to place a lot of facilities at their disposal and only to give them enough amenities to meet their basic needs so as to prevent them from being contaminated by the world.

That is why the Noble Prophet (S), as a result of compassion for his adherents, asks Allah to grant them enough only to meet their basic needs not to the extent where they will be led to extravagance and waste. In contrast, he asks Allah to increase the wealth and progeny of his enemies.

In reality, adding to the material capital of Allah is a divine practice derived from "the law of divine deception", that is to say, Allah grants so much material and worldly blessings to the infidels that they get deceived by the world and become proud and as a result of their being drowned in the world, their disbelief and sin increases and as a result of this their punishment and requital in the hereafter multiplies

and becomes more tormenting. In addition to that, their worldly worries too multiply.

For the enemies of Allah and his saints, there is no punishment higher than that as a result of their drowning in the allurements of the world, they become deprived of divine grace and their lonesomeness, deviation and disbelief increases. In this regard, Allah states:

وَلَا يَحْسَبَنَّ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا أَنَّ مَوْلَاهُمْ خَيْرٌ لِّأَنفُسِهِمْ إِنَّمَا نُمَلِّي لَهُمْ لِيَزْدَادُوا إِثْمًا وَلَهُمْ عَذَابٌ مُّهِينٌ

***“And let not those who disbelieve that Our granting them respite is better for their souls; We grant them respite only that they may add to their sins; and they shall have a disgraceful chastisement.”<sup>3</sup>***

In another place, He states:

فَلَا تُعْجِبْكَ أَمْوَالُهُمْ وَلَا أَوْلَادُهُمْ إِنَّمَا يُرِيدُ اللَّهُ لِيُعَذِّبَهُمْ بِهَا فِي الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا وَتَزْهَقَ أَنفُسُهُمْ وَهُمْ كَافِرُونَ

***“Let not then their property and children excite your admiration; Allah only wishes to chastise them with these in the world’s life and that their souls may depart while they are unbelievers.”<sup>4</sup>***

In order for the believers not to set their eyes on the riches of the world and not to envy the enamored with the world, Allah states:

لَا تَمُدَّنَّ عَيْنَيْكَ إِلَىٰ مَا مَتَّعْنَا بِهِ أَزْوَاجًا مِنْهُمْ وَلَا تَحْزَنْ عَلَيْهِمْ وَأخْفِضْ جَنَاحَكَ لِلْمُؤْمِنِينَ

***“They would certainly say, ‘Only our eyes have been covered over, rather we are an enchanted people.’”<sup>5</sup>***

In response to a question about the meaning of ‘Good’, Imam ‘Ali (‘a) states:

“Good is not that your wealth and progeny should be much, but good is that your knowledge should be much, your forbearance should be great, and that you should vie with each other in worship of Allah. If you do good deeds you thank Allah, but if you commit evil you seek the forgiveness of Allah. In this world, good is for two persons only: the man who commits sins but rectifies it and the man who hastens towards good actions...”<sup>6</sup>

## **Recommending Detachment from the World and Disinclination**

## to It

In continuation of the *hadith*, the Noble Prophet (S) states:

“O Abu Dharr! Happy are the ascetics in the world and people who have set their hearts on the hereafter and have set the earth of Allah as their bedding and soil as their carpet and its water as their perfume. They have got attached to the Book of Allah as the undershirt gets attached to the body and supplication is like their outer shirts and they have disentangled and freed themselves from the world.”

Happy is the man who has no disposition to the world and only thinks about the afterworld, because they have knowledge of the world and where the real value lies. They are prepared to sit on the ground and sleep on the earth and for them the earth and expensive fine carpets are the same. In contrast, we, the infatuated by the world, are never ready to sit on the ground and feel ashamed when people see us sitting on the ground. We ought to give rise to this spirit in ourselves of perceiving the earth and fine carpets in the same light. If one day duty calls for it, we ought to humbly sit down beside a poor man and comfort his heart without feeling ashamed.

Ascetics never plan on certainly perfuming themselves with expensive colognes, but clean and perfume themselves with water which flows from the earth. Their relationship with Allah is so strong that when they feel as if Allah is conversing with them during recitation of the Glorious Qur'an and/or when supplicating, it seems as though they are saying the same word with Allah.

They are living among the people and their faces are exposed to everyone but their hearts are elsewhere and their derivation of benefit from the world is tantamount to turning their backs towards it and they roll it up like a scroll. They have set their hearts on that which is with Allah because the world is fast-passing and heading towards extinction.

It has repeatedly been said that these instructional expressions do not imply that we ought to completely forsake Allah's graces and/or does not mean that the people who have worldly blessings at their disposal are essentially bad people. These explications are meant to reduce our obsession with the world and see what the duty calls for.

If duty calls for us to wear good clothes, mount a fine horse and do other things like that, we ought to do it because it is duty and is desirable by Allah. But if we chase after good things as result of our heart's wishes, we have set foot on a dangerous course and, whether we like it or not, we will be drawn towards actions which are not pleasing to Allah because the wishes of the heart and the desires of Allah cannot be combined. The way of the heart and the desires of the carnal soul diverge from the course of adoration of Allah and never are they close to each other.

...أَفَرَأَيْتَ مَنْ اتَّخَذَ إِلَهَهُ هَوَاهُ وَأَضَلَّهُ اللَّهُ عَلَى عِلْمٍ وَخَتَمَ عَلَى سَمْعِهِ وَقَلْبِهِ وَجَعَلَ عَلَى بَصَرِهِ غِشَاوَةً

***“Have you then considered him who takes his low desire for his god, and Allah has made him err having knowledge and has set a seal upon his ear and his heart and put a covering over his eye...”<sup>7</sup>***

Therefore, these explanations intend to reduce our affection for the world. Encouragement that we ought to sit on the ground and not be obsessed with expensive carpets, decorations and luxurious living does not imply that we exert unnecessary hardships on ourselves and not derive any benefit from the benefits of Allah. A spiritual wayfaring Sufi asked Imam al-Sadiq (‘a), “Why are you wearing this fine cloth as if you are not ‘Ali’s (‘a) child?” His Holiness’ stated, “In the era of Imam ‘Ali the people were living in poverty and want; for this reason, it was necessary for the Imam of the Muslims to live a simple life so that the people might not get dejected and depressed as a result of their poverty. But when the people are living in prosperity and abundance, the righteous are more entitled to derive benefit from graces than the others.”

When the conditions necessitate, Muslims ought to pursue advancement in technology and change in their ways of life so as to preserve the dignity of the Muslims in the face of the infidels. In addition, if the Muslims do not pursue progress, advancement and development in arts and technology which are needed in a civilized and advanced society, they will be obliged to extend their begging hands to the unbelievers and this will be a cause of lowliness for them.

From a social point of view, if the Islamic community intends to content itself with merely using hand tools and the basic needs of transport and arm themselves with poor weapons and abstain from creativity and ingenuity with the belief that an Islamic community ought to be a simple and contented society, it will certainly fall under the dominion of the infidels and it will become a lowly, base and mean society and Allah, the Beneficent, does not approve that a divine society should be a captive and in need of the infidels, because:

وَلَنْ يَجْعَلَ اللَّهُ لِلْكَافِرِينَ عَلَى الْمُؤْمِنِينَ سَبِيلًا ...

***“And Allah will by no means give the unbelievers a way against the believers.”<sup>8</sup>***

And it is Him who has restricted honor to Allah and the Noble Prophet (S) and the believers:

...وَلِلَّهِ الْعِزَّةُ وَلِرَسُولِهِ وَلِلْمُؤْمِنِينَ ...

***“...and to Allah belongs might and to His Apostle and to the believers...”<sup>9</sup>***

Considering that technological backwardness brings with it colonization and cultural invasion, endeavor in the direction of creativity and advancement of the Islamic *umma* (community) is a divine duty which cannot be overlooked at whatever pretext.

The repeated recommendations which the Noble Prophet (S) and the rest of the Infallible Imams (‘a) have given in regard to acquisition of knowledge and arts are a true witness of this assertion; the Noble Prophet (S) states, “Seek knowledge even if it is in China.”<sup>10</sup> That is to say, the Muslims ought to learn every kind of knowledge which is needed in the Islamic community.

At the end of this section, His Holiness states:

“O Abu Dharr! The plantation of the hereafter is good works and the plantation of the world is wealth and children.”

(If a person were a seeker of the hereafter, he ought to perform good works and if he were a seeker of the world, he ought to chase after saving money.)

- <sup>1.</sup> Surat Al ‘Imran 3:92.
- <sup>2.</sup> Nahj al-Balaghah, p. 1225, short saying 281, trans. Fayd al-Islam.
- <sup>3.</sup> Surat Al ‘Imran 3:178.
- <sup>4.</sup> Surat al-Tawbah (or Bara’ah) 9:55.
- <sup>5.</sup> Surat al-Hijr 15:88.
- <sup>6.</sup> Nahj al-Balaghah, p. 1058, wisdom [hikmat] 92, trans. Fayd al-Islam.
- <sup>7.</sup> Surat al-Jathiyah 45:23.
- <sup>8.</sup> Surat al-Nisa 4: 141.
- <sup>9.</sup> Surat al-Munafiqun 63:8.
- <sup>10.</sup> Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 1, p. 177.

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