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Lesson 29: Devotion and Worship, the Greatest Assets for Humanity

“O Abu Dharr! Any youth who, for the sake of Allah, abstains from the world and its vanity and spends his youth in obedience to Allah until he reaches old age, Allah grants him the reward and bounty equivalent to the reward and bounty of seventy two of His most sincere and honest servants.”

The Parasitic Nature of the World

In this section of the *hadith*, the Noble Prophet (S) embarks upon expounding the importance of seeking excellence and the superiority of a person who has traversed the path of perfection, because it can be gathered from the Qur’anic verses and *hadiths* that the world, with all its expansiveness and greatness, has been created for the perfection of humanity. In reality, the main reason for the creation of this world is humanity, and the rest of the creatures are at the service of human beings. Allah, the Exalted, states:

وَهُوَ الَّذِي خَلَقَ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ فِي سِتَّةِ أَيَّامٍ وَكَانَ عَرْشُهُ عَلَى الْمَاءِ لِيَبْلُوَكُمْ أَيُّكُمْ أَحْسَنُ عَمَلًا...

“It is He who created the heavens and the earth in six periods—and His dominion (extends) upon the waters—that He may test you [to see] which of you is best in conduct.”¹

The purport of the blessed verse is that Allah, the Exalted, created the heavens, the earth and the natural world to prepare the basis for the creation of human beings, and He created human beings to test them. The meaning of this verse is wonderful and understanding it deeply can have positive effects on people’s thoughts and conduct.

This reality that Allah, the Exalted, has created the cosmos with all its greatness for the purpose of bringing man into existence so that he can attain perfection by making use of the existential capacities in the world is indicative of the degree of man’s value and the profoundness of his responsibilities.

Mentioning the aforesaid is necessary for the reason that human beings, from among the rest of the existing creatures, ought to perceive their existential value and realize that they are not simple creatures like the worm, the frog or others of these types; on the contrary, humans are esteemed and invaluable creatures and magnificent existential capital has been provided in order to bring about and facilitate the conditions of their lives.

The world has been created in its entire splendor so that the basis for the creation of an intelligent, self-willed and determined existent could be provided. Therefore, man's obligation, as an intelligent and thinking existent, is to initially perceive his existential value. However, conceiving this point is not enough in itself despite all its importance; rather, he ought to comprehend his responsibilities, too, in the created world and realize that he has not been created for vanity, futility, purposelessness and uselessness.

Among all the creatures of the world, man has characteristics which are not found in other existents; that is to say, man has been blessed with the intellect. When we say that man has superiority and prominence over the rest of the creatures this is not only in regard to the intellect; man is higher than the rest of the existents in regard to the other attributes and qualities as well.

Whatever perfection is found in the other creatures, it is found in man in the best sense of the word. This asserted meaning becomes completely clear when man is compared with the rest of the creatures and when his discoveries with regard to food, clothing, accommodation and marriage are pondered.

We see that the adaptations and discoveries which man puts to use in the order and management of his social activities are not found in any other creature. In addition to this, people employ other creatures in order to attain their goals, but the rest of the animals and the vegetables and other than these are not like this; on the contrary, they have simple effects and activities especially reserved for them: from the day that they were created up to now, they have not gone a step further than their own situations and have not had any transformations for themselves. On the other hand, man has taken great strides towards perfection in all the aspects of his life and continues to take even further steps.

In short, the progeny of Adam enjoys the benefit of a certain characteristic and it is because of that very quality, that is to say the intellect, that it has attained distinction over the rest of the creatures and distinguishes right from wrong, good from evil and beneficial from harmful.

The Pre-eminence of the Complete Human Being

وَلَقَدْ كَرَّمْنَا بَنِي آدَمَ وَحَمَلْنَاهُمْ فِي الْبَرِّ وَالْبَحْرِ وَرَزَقْنَاهُمْ مِنَ الطَّيِّبَاتِ وَفَضَّلْنَاهُمْ عَلَى كَثِيرٍ مِمَّنْ خَلَقْنَا تَفْضِيلًا

“Certainly We have honored the Children of Adam, and carried them over land and sea, and provided them with all the good things, and given them an advantage over many of those We have created with complete preference.”²

In interpretation of this verse, 'Allamah Tabataba'i, may Allah be pleased with him, states:

This verse is in the form of obligation of indebtedness for favors; of course, obligation mixed with reproof. Indeed, after Allah, the Exalted, mentions the abundance of His graces and His successive granting of blessings and virtues to man, including mounts to cross the deserts and the seas in order for him to acquire those graces and necessary subsistence in order to better manage his life, He mentions the point that man has forgotten his Lord, shunned Him, has not asked from Him and has once again returned to his previous ways after being saved from the sea even though he has always been immersed in Allah's graces.

Allah, the Exalted, lists a summary of His graces and favors in this verse so that people may understand that their Lord has provided them numerous favors and realize that it is very unfortunate that they are ungrateful for these favors and other divine graces.[3](#)

We see that there is much room for human beings to realize the value of the gem or pearl of existence and not sell it in exchange for the vain and valueless merchandise of this world.

Man needs special conditions and facilities in order to attain human perfection and the world with all its transformations and developments is placed at his disposal. We know to some extent that if the constant transformations and order of the natural world were not existent, man's volitional life would either not take place or it would take place in an incomplete form.

In brief, it is known that the world has an orderly system and its various factors are in need of one another. An example of one of those factors is the attraction that exists among planets in the heavens such that if that determined and precise attraction were to be interfered with and one of those spheres were to leave its orbit, the order of the planets would be thrown into disarray and a catastrophe would take place.

As has been indicated, the universe with all its magnificence is a prerequisite for the creation and perfection of humanity, and the perfection that humans must attain is so valuable that the universe with all its expansiveness and majesty is made to be their stepping stone. Of course, among human beings, there are few individuals who attain ultimate perfections and the rest of the people achieve certain benefits under the auspices of the existence of those few individuals and the merit of their existence is dependent on the existence of the chosen ones.

As a simile, in order to find a few diamonds in a great mine of fifty square kilometers with a great depth, miners must do a lot of exploration and searching. The aim of all this probing is to find a few precious diamonds, even if besides diamonds, coal, which does not have as much value, is dug up too, it does not matter so much. Therefore, besides diamonds, which are the main aim of opening up a mine, other substances too are found, which have secondary value, and in addition worthless stones, which do not have any value at all and thus are cast aside.

The object of creating the cosmos is the pure lights, the most prominent and outstanding of them being the lights of the Fourteen Infallibles (‘a) and after them the rest of the Prophets (‘a) and the people who join their category on account of the level of their excellence and purification. (There have been approximately one hundred and twenty four thousand Prophets (‘a) and saints [awliya] of Allah (‘a) and some of the Prophets (‘a) and saints [awliya] (‘a) are higher in status than the others but we do not know their numbers.)

The highest human ideals have been summed up in the Noble Prophet (S) and his Pure and Infallible *Ahl al-Bayt* (‘a) and the lowest levels of excellence are found in people who will enter paradise after everyone else. The rest of the human beings whose hearts are devoid of the light of faith are like the worthless stones and are burnt in the infernal fire of divine wrath:

وَلَقَدْ ذَرَأْنَا لِجَهَنَّمَ كَثِيرًا مِّنَ الْجِنِّ وَالْإِنسِ لَهُمْ قُلُوبٌ لَا يَفْقَهُونَ بِهَا وَلَهُمْ أَعْيُنٌ لَا يُبْصِرُونَ بِهَا وَلَهُمْ آذَانٌ لَا يَسْمَعُونَ بِهَا...

“Certainly We have created for hell many of the jinn and humans: they have hearts with which they do not understand, they have eyes with which they do not see, they have ears with which they do not hear...”⁴

The dwellers of hell are the wastes of this world and the main aim of creating this cosmos is the Noble Prophet (S), Fatimah al-Zahra’ (‘a) and the Infallible Imams (‘a). The whole world, despite all its expansiveness and magnificence as well as perfection and excellence, is not comparable to the existence of any one of them! On the contrary, one day of their being has more worth than this whole universe. The real owners of this cosmos are people who have attained prosperity in the eyes of Allah and have set up their abodes in His proximity:

إِنَّ الْمُتَّقِينَ فِي جَنَّاتٍ وَنَهَرٍ * فِي مَقْعَدٍ صِدْقٍ عِندَ مَلِكٍ مُّقْتَدِرٍ

“Indeed the pious will be amid gardens and rivers in the abode of truthfulness with an Omnipotent Sovereign.”⁵

Paradise, the Dwelling of the Believers and the Friends of the Ahl al-Bayt (‘a)

Muslims believe that the people who die in a state of faith and belief go to the garden of eternal bliss, namely paradise; even if they have the lowest levels of faith and on condition that at the time of death that conviction is not transformed into disbelief (they enter paradise after passing through the state of purgatory).

There is no doubt that ideal faith is procured under the auspices of loving and believing in the Pure and Infallible *Ahl al-Bayt* (‘a); as the Noble Prophet (S) states:

“Verily a person who dies loving the family of Muhammad (S) in his heart has passed away as a believer possessing complete faith; truly the angel of death gives the glad tidings of paradise to a person who dies loving the family of Muhammad (S)...”[6](#)

For this reason a Shi‘ah who is a lover of the *Ahl al-Bayt* (‘a) and is humbly submissive and obedient to the orders and wishes of Allah and His saints [*awliya*] (‘a) does not have any misgivings in regard to death because in the viewpoint of a believer death is a bridge for attaining the pleasure of Allah, the Exalted.

Addressing his companions on the day of ‘Ashura, Imam al-Husayn (‘a) says:

“O people of noble birth! Be patient because death is nothing but a bridge which delivers you from hardships and tribulations to expansive gardens and eternal bliss. Verily who among you does not like to leave the prison and go to the palace?”[7](#)

In regard to the ardent desire of the God-fearing to meet their Lord, Imam ‘Ali (‘a) says:

“If there were no appointed hour for their (i.e. the God-fearing ones’) death, their souls would not for a single moment remain in their bodies on account of their ardent desire for divine reward and their fear of divine retribution. The Creator is great in their souls; it is for this reason that everyone [and everything else] is small in their eyes.”[8](#)

A person asked Abu Dharr, “Why do we [human beings] have an aversion of death?”

Abu Dharr responded:

“Because you have cultivated and developed your material world but have devastated your hereafter. Therefore, you are not willing to leave prosperity to go to your ruin.”[9](#)

Individuals will derive benefit from paradise in relation to their faith and their deeds: some people will enter purgatory after death and thereafter find their way to heaven. However, some people who were sinners, even if faint light of faith shines from their being, will only enter paradise after being requited by divine retribution and all too often they will enter paradise after long years of torture and punishment and after being cleansed from their sins and contaminations like gold which is placed in a furnace in order to be purified from impurities to be transformed into pure gold. Without the least doubt, these are not the companions of paradise, but are guests who have been admitted into heaven on account of the intercession of the real masters of paradise and as a result of the grace and mercy of Allah, the Exalted.

The Companions of Paradise

Allah, the Exalted, thus describes the real masters of paradise in His book:

وَمَنْ يُطِعِ اللَّهَ وَالرَّسُولَ فَأُولَٰئِكَ مَعَ الَّذِينَ أَنْعَمَ اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِمْ مِنَ النَّبِيِّينَ وَالصِّدِّيقِينَ وَالشُّهَدَاءَ وَالصَّالِحِينَ وَحَسُنَ
أُولَٰئِكَ رَفِيقًا

“Whoever obeys Allah and the Apostle—they are with those whom Allah has blessed, including the prophets and the truthful, the martyrs and the righteous, and excellent companions are they!”¹⁰

In this blessed verse four groups of people have been mentioned as the true dwellers of heaven. The rest of the people will only enter paradise by means of following them and as a result of their intercession and in reality they are the hosts and owners of the house and the others are guests. The owners of paradise, that is to say the prophets (‘a), the truthful, the martyrs and the righteous are people upon whom Allah has completed His favor and He has ordered us to request in our prayers that He guide us to their way:

... إِهْدِنَا الصِّرَاطَ الْمُسْتَقِيمَ * صِرَاطَ الَّذِينَ أَنْعَمْتَ عَلَيْهِمْ

“Guide us on the straight path; the path of those upon whom You have bestowed favors.”¹¹

It is worth mentioning that the purport of ‘martyrs’ in the above verse is those who bear witness to man’s deeds on the Day of Resurrection whose status is much higher than the rest of the martyrs, such that ‘Allamah Tabataba’i states: the meaning of *shahadat* (in some Qur’anic verses) is to bear witness to the deeds of human beings. What is meant by this is to endure and see the truth of deeds which people perform in the world, whether that truth is prosperity or wretchedness. Therefore, the witness on the Day of Resurrection bears testimony on the basis of what he has seen. The Day of Resurrection is a day when Allah asks all things to bear witness, even the limbs of the body. The Day of Reckoning is the day when the Noble Prophet (S) will say:

يَا رَبِّ إِنَّ قَوْمِي اتَّخَذُوا هَذَا الْقُرْآنَ مَهْجُورًا ...

“...O my Lord! Indeed my people have treated this Qur’an as a forsaken thing.”¹²

It is quite apparent that such a noble minded spirit and generous station is not allotted to all people in the Islamic community, because this is special nobility particularly reserved and befitting of the saints [awliya] of Allah... the lowest level which these witnesses (witnesses of our deeds) possess is that they

are under the guardianship of Allah, under the auspices of His grace and followers of the straight path. [13](#)

We have concluded that the most superior servants of Allah, those in whose right He has completed His favor and has appointed them the companions of paradise, are the prophets (‘a), the truthful, the martyrs and the righteous and the rest of the worshipers of Allah attain paradise on account of following these four groups of people. Of course, the people who find their way into paradise by means of following these four groups of chosen servants of Allah are varied in regard to their levels and are not all in one station, and even those among the four groups of Allah’s chosen ones are not all on the same level and some are higher than the others.

a) The Station of the Prophets (‘a) and the Great Prophet of Islam (S)

On the basis of Allah’s statement, the Prophets (‘a) have been allotted higher positions than the rest of the people:

إِنَّ اللَّهَ اصْطَفَىٰ آدَمَ وَنُوحًا وَآلَ إِبْرَاهِيمَ وَآلَ عِمْرَانَ عَلَى الْعَالَمِينَ

“Indeed Allah chose Adam and Noah, and the progeny of Abraham and the progeny of ‘Imran above all the nations.”[14](#)

In addition to this, He has made some of the prophets (‘a) higher than the others:

...تِلْكَ الرُّسُلُ فَضَّلْنَا بَعْضَهُمْ عَلَى بَعْضٍ

“These are the apostles, some of whom We gave an advantage over others...”[15](#)

From among the hundred and twenty four thousand prophets who Allah sent for the guidance of mankind, only three hundred thirteen had an apostolic mission. Even then, not all the apostles possessed divine law. Only five of them were given divine law. Those who possessed divine law were Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus and the Noble Prophet Muhammad (S). These legislator prophets (‘a) have a higher status than the rest of the apostles (‘a) and, according to our belief, the Last Prophet (S) is distinguished above all the prophets (‘a). As he himself stated:

“O ‘Ali! Allah, the Blessed, the Exalted, has made His prophets (‘a) higher than the angels in His proximity and He has made me superior to all the prophets (‘a) and messengers (‘a) and after me superiority belongs to you and the Imams (‘a) after you; and verily the angels are our servants and they are the servants of our friends.” [16](#)

This proves that the main aim of creating humanity is the chosen ones of Allah and in the same way that ordinary people are different in ranks and perfections, there are differences too among the prophets (‘a)

and the righteous and the friends of Allah in regard to high human perfections and levels although this is not comprehensible for us and only Allah is aware of everyone's ranks.

The divine prophets (‘a) and the saints [awliya] of Allah (‘a) were not contaminated by polytheism and sin even for the time it takes for the blink of an eye. This refers to polytheism in the real sense of being preoccupied by other than Allah; thus, they could never at all have been idol-worshippers. Their object of desire and goal was Allah and they did not have any other goal except Him.

If they had any attention to other than Allah, it was out of duty for the purpose of obeying His orders that had been requested of them, in order not to be heedless the servants of Allah and in order to attain their principle aims; of course, they would make use of material means in order to attain their aims, but their goal was Allah and nothing more.

We only have a weak conception of the high level of the prophets (‘a). We cannot perceive the depth of their superior station and all too often our intellects become bewildered when we try to contemplate their rank. Only they and their Lord are aware of their station and the rest of the people are incapable of knowing their human level and that which they have attained:

فَلَا تَعْلَمُ نَفْسٌ مَّا أُخْفِيَ لَهُمْ مِنْ قُرَّةِ أَعْيُنٍ جَزَاءً بِمَا كَانُوا يَعْمَلُونَ

“So no one knows what has been kept hidden for them of that which will refresh the eyes as a reward for what they used to do.”¹⁷

b) The Station of the Righteous [Salihin]

One of the high levels of human beings that has been mentioned is the station of the righteous [salihin]. In regard to their high level and the superiority of their station, Allah quotes Prophet Moses (‘a):

رَبِّ هَبْ لِي حُكْمًا وَأَلْحِقْنِي بِالصَّالِحِينَ

“My Lord! Grant me [unerring] judgment, and unite me with the righteous.”¹⁸

Elsewhere, Allah states:

وَوَهَبْنَا لَهُ إِسْحَاقَ وَيَعْقُوبَ نَافِلَةً وَكُلًّا جَعَلْنَا صَالِحِينَ

“And We gave him Isaac, and Jacob as well for a grandson, and each of them We made righteous.”¹⁹

c) The Station of the Truthful [Siddiqin]

Another lofty human level is the station of the truthful [*siddiqin*]. The word ‘*siddiqin*’ denotes extreme truthfulness and sincerity; that is to say, people who are very truthful. What is worthy of mentioning is that truthfulness is not only confined to the tongue; one of the instances of truthfulness is the words which man utters and another is the deeds which he does. A man is truthful once his deeds conform to his words because deeds make the inner belief known and man is truthful in the relating of his inner belief once he makes known what is in his conscience in a complete manner and nothing remains hidden; such a deed is correct and truthful.

True speech too is that word which corresponds with reality and the external world and because talking too is an action, a person that is truthful in his action will inevitably not speak except what he knows to be correct and he is also aware that words must be well-timed, well-suited and correct. For this reason, such speech is indicative of the truthfulness of the report and is also expressive of the truthfulness of the speaker.

Therefore, a truthful person is one who never lies at all and does not do what he is not certain to be correct, no matter how much it suits his carnal desires. Likewise, he does not say what he is not sure about and does not do what is not compatible with devotional servitude to Allah. Describing himself, Imam ‘Ali (‘a) states:

“Certainly, I belong to the group of people who care not for the reproach of anybody in matters concerning Allah. Their countenance is the countenance of the truthful and their speech is the speech of the virtuous.”^{[20](#)}

The station of the truthful is such a superior station that when Allah, the Exalted, wants to describe the ranks of some of his prophets (‘a), He states:

وَأَذْكُرُ فِي الْكِتَابِ إِبْرَاهِيمَ إِنَّهُ كَانَ صِدِّيقًا نَبِيًّا

“And mention Abraham in the book. Indeed he was a truthful one, a Prophet.”^{[21](#)}

Or in regard to Mary, the mother of Jesus Christ (‘a), He says:

وَأُمُّهُ صِدِّيقَةٌ

“And his mother was a truthful one.”^{[22](#)}

Of course, we do not covet to attain such a lofty station as the stations of the righteous and truthful, but in any case man’s ambition does not have to be low. He ought to strive according to his aptitudes and

capacities and endeavor to arrive at the highest levels possible. Man ought to try to attain levels which fallible people are capable of attaining.

There were people among the Islamic scholars who attained high human levels and we have known and seen with our own eyes some of them and many prominent people have reached the peak of perfection which is befitting of exalted people but we are not aware. Without the least doubt, these high ranks are only attainable under the auspices of high ambition and relentless effort.

The Station of Infallibility Especially Reserved for the Chosen Ones of Allah

Allah has not placed any hindrances in humanity's way to perfection and completion; human beings can arrive at high levels like the station of the righteous if they have motivation to do so, although they cannot become one of the Infallibles. The station of the truthful and the righteous is lower than the station of the Infallibles.

Therefore, every human being can arrive at those stations; every person can manage not to commit sin in his life and in truth a person who strives to avoid the contamination of sin and abstain from the desires of the carnal soul and only do that which is pleasing to Allah is practically infallible even though the term 'infallible' cannot technically be applied to him. To explain this issue, it ought to be said:

“*Ismah*” (infallibility) literally means holding and being a hindrance, and in technical terms it means a habit of the soul, man's second nature so to speak, which prevents a person possessing it from committing sin or even mistakes and errors. Now the question is: is this second nature a hindrance and that is why they call it infallibility or is it that Allah prevents the person having this habit and second nature from committing sin, mistakes and error?

In essence, both meanings are correct: we are not mistaken whether we say the infallible individual is a person who has a second nature and hindrance which prevents him from committing sin and error or when we say that an infallible person is a man whom Allah prevents from sin and error because He protects him by means of this same second nature. Therefore, one who is infallible is a person who is immune from error and sin or one who is immune from sin.

The first kind of infallibility is related to one's works, but the second type of infallibility is broader than just deeds; that is to say, it also includes the levels of perception and distinguishing right from wrong because the infallible person in the second sense of the word is an individual who not only is practically exempted from sin but also does not make errors in perceiving and distinguishing what is right from what is wrong. In other words, he understands and explains correctly as well as practically acting flawlessly.

In regard to the infallibility of the prophets (‘a) and the Infallible Imams (‘a), ‘Allamah Tabataba'i, may Allah be pleased with him, asserts, “The Gracious Qur'an clearly states that Allah has selected and

chosen them for Himself and has purified them for Himself, as the Qur'an states:

وَمِنْ آبَائِهِمْ وَذُرِّيَّاتِهِمْ وَإِخْوَانِهِمْ وَاجْتَبَيْنَاهُمْ وَهَدَيْنَاهُمْ إِلَى صِرَاطٍ مُسْتَقِيمٍ

“And from among their fathers, their descendants and brethren, and We chose them and guided them to the straight path.”²³

Allah has granted them such a high level of knowledge that it prevents them from committing sins and offenses. As a result of having that second nature, perpetrating sin (even minor sins) is inconceivable for them. Though infallibility and justice both prevent the perpetration of sin, their difference is that infallibility, as second nature, makes the perpetuation of sin impossible whereas justice as a second nature does not make it impossible.

Even though infallibility as a second nature cannot be violated and its effects are definite and permanent, it does not alter human nature—which is self-determination in voluntary actions—and does not force a person to be infallible. How can it compel while knowledge is the foundation of free will and the strengthening of knowledge results in the strengthening of resolution. For example, if a person that desires health is certain that a particular thing is a deadly poison, his certainty does not force him to abstain from consuming the poison rather it impels him to abstain from it out of his own volition.”²⁴

According to what has been said, even people like Abu al-Fadl al-‘Abbas (‘a), ‘Ali Akbar (‘a) and a great deal of the progeny of the Imams (‘a), even though they did not commit sin in the entire course of their lives, do not have the type of infallibility which is exclusive of the prophets (‘a), the Imams (‘a) and Fatimah al-Zahra’ (‘a). Of course, there is no doubt that the rank of such prominent people is higher than that of the rest of the people and they had a kind of infallibility, but it is also certain that they did not have the infallibility exclusively guaranteed to the prophets (‘a) and the Imams (‘a).

In conclusion, human beings can have practical infallibility in regard to abstaining from sin and can attain the station of the truthful if they have high objectives and embark upon edification, repression of carnal desires of the soul and strengthen their relationship with Allah. Therefore, people have to move along the path of spiritual perfection and inspire themselves to become truthful and righteous.

There is not the least doubt that if human beings make effort and attain the necessary capacities and befitting capabilities, Allah is by no means niggardly in granting high stations. Basically, Allah Himself encourages His worshipers to arrive at lofty levels and Islam has urged the believers to have high ambitions. Allah wants the faithful to have high aspirations in this regard and not to be content with less. A believer ought to set his eyes on the station of the prophets (‘a) and endeavor to imitate them.

If we cannot attain the station of the prophets (‘a) and their infallibility, we can at least become truthful and righteous because the infallibility that is exclusively for the prophets (‘a) and the Imams (‘a) is not a condition for those two stations.

As has previously been stated, *siddiq* (sincere) denotes excessive truthfulness and honesty, that is to say a person who does not entertain lies throughout his or her life. A truthful person does not entertain lies in words, deeds or thoughts and does not harbor wrong and indecent thoughts.

The Importance of Sincere Faith and the Means of Attaining It

In regard to the value of sincerity and truthfulness, the Noble Prophet (S) states:

“Sincerity leads to righteousness and righteousness guides to paradise, and man does not say the truth save that he is recognized to be sincere in the eyes of Allah.”[25](#)

Perhaps we may imagine that attaining sincerity in speech, thoughts and conduct is not a hard undertaking and we may believe that we can manage not to tell lies, not to nurture indecent thoughts in our minds and not to behave badly; however, the truth is that being honest is a very hard thing. We all claim to have faith in Allah and conceive Him to be present and seeing at all times, but do our words and deeds validate our claims?

Sometimes we do deeds in private that would make us feel ashamed if a small child were present witnessing our actions, and we would never do those things in that case. Now, how can we believe that Allah is present and seeing us and at the same time do ugly deeds? In reality, we perceive Allah to be less than a small child and we are not sincere in our belief. The taint of falsehood is in our belief. At the same time, we believe that if human beings obey Allah in the whole course of their lives, Allah grants them rewards for every second of their lives—rewards which are greater than the universe and everything that is in it, but are we honest in this belief and conviction? Does our conduct conform to this belief?

If a person has a small bag of gold, does he aimlessly drop it in a well? Does an intelligent man ever do such a thing? Even if he only has one piece of gold, he hides it in a very secret place so as not to lose it or so that it may not become stolen. A person never easily loses material wealth and capital because he knows it is not a wise deed. Now, if we believe that the moments of our lives are more precious than jewels like diamonds, are we ready to let them easily slip out of our hands? Even supposing that we do not sin, do we not waste our lives pursuing many vain and worthless activities?

If we truly believed that a reward higher than this world existed for every moment of our lives, we would not be willing to lose it for anything in the same way that we do not lose material things of the world without something in return. When we lose a hundred *tumans*,[26](#) we become worried out of our wits and even during recitation of our prayers we become preoccupied with thinking about how to find it. (During prayer some people involuntarily begin thinking about their lost items and easily remember things they have forgotten!)

If a person acquires wealth by means of a great deal of effort and endeavor, he is not willing to easily

place that wealth at the disposal of others and he well knows its value because he has taken a lot of pains to acquire it, but it is possible for him to spend hours of his life pointlessly without feeling the least loss.

In other words, it is likely that a person is miserly in expending his material wealth, but he is not at all cautious in spending the moments of his life in spite of the fact that the value of wealth is clearly not equal to the value of a lifetime. Therefore, we are not really truthful to our claims of faith in the hereafter and heavenly reward which may be granted to us for every second of our lives because if we truly had sincere faith, we would not spend our lives pursuing vanity or, even worse, squander our lives in sin!

In truth, our lives are mixed with these false claims. If, Allah forbid, this deceitfulness infiltrates our practical ways of life and words too, we can become afflicted by even worse sin. In the Gracious Qur'an, Allah states:

وَمَا يُؤْمِنُ أَكْثَرُهُمْ بِاللَّهِ إِلَّا وَهُمْ مُشْرِكُونَ

“And most of them do not believe in Allah without ascribing partners to Him.”²⁷

Perhaps in this Qur'anic verse Allah would like to make us understand the point that the faith of most believing people is intertwined with polytheism and thus not pure. If man only has one Object of Worship and is not polytheistic, there will never be room for carnal desires, worship of power and, in short, there will be no room for love of this world in his heart. The presence of all these vain inclinations and worldly affections is a sign that that man has several objects of worship, not one.

أَفَرَأَيْتَ مَنْ اتَّخَذَ إِلَهَهُ هَوَاهُ وَأَضَلَّهُ اللَّهُ عَلَى عِلْمٍ وَخَتَمَ عَلَى سَمْعِهِ وَقَلْبِهِ وَجَعَلَ عَلَى بَصَرِهِ غِشَاوَةً فَمَنْ يَهْدِيهِ مِنْ بَعْدِ
اللَّهُ أَفَلَا تَذَكَّرُونَ

“Have you seen him who has taken his desire to be his god and whom Allah has led astray knowingly and set a seal upon his hearing and his heart and put a blindfold on his sight? So who will guide him after Allah? Will you then not take admonition?”²⁸

Yes, people who harbor carnal desires have set their sensual passions as their object of worship and are in fact polytheists. In truth, faith which is intermixed with carnal desire is not pure and is contaminated with polytheism. Of course, the faiths of different people are not intertwined with polytheism on the same level. Sometimes ninety nine percent of faith is mixed with one percent polytheism and at other times polytheism is so high that it completely destroys belief in Allah.

There is no doubt that we have all been contaminated by sin, but is it possible for a person who has spent all their lives in sin and vanity to decide to quit sin and become truly faithful and sincere in his beliefs? Beyond the shadow of doubt, this is possible and even after sixty years of living in sin and

vanity, a person can become truthful if he firmly decides to, on the condition that he repents for his past and makes up his mind to spend the rest of his life obeying Allah. He has to conduct himself in a way that is pleasing to Allah; his sleep, his wakefulness, his association with people outside and with his family at home all have to be done for the sake of pleasing Allah. This is possible, but it is not to be attained in a short period of time and a person does not become sincerely faithful quickly. Sincerity is a habit that is attainable by means of long and continuous effort.

A person who makes up his mind to become a sincere believer after many years of living in sin has to strive very hard to acquire the habit of sincerity in the same precise meaning that we have explained. It is possible that an individual may have to practice and exert constant effort for two years before he can acquire the habit of sincerity, in which case if he becomes truthful his rank will be higher than the rank of one who practiced for one year to attain this level and the reward and recompense of a person who strove for four years is as well more.

In the same manner, the rank and reward of a man who spends even more years attaining sincerity of faith would be higher than that of the one who spends less time and effort, and certainly the rank of one who decides to be obedient to Allah from the time of puberty would have a higher rank than the rest of the people. He truly decides to traverse no other path save the way of Allah and to think of nothing except divine thoughts and not even imagine committing sin.

It is hard for us to accept the point that man can arrive at a level where he does not even think or even imagine committing sin, but there have been people among our scholars who attained this station. They have narrated that the deceased Sayyid Radi and Sayyid Murtada, may Allah be pleased with them, wanted to recite congregational prayers. Sayyid Murtada—who was the elder brother of Sayyid Radi—wanted to allusively and implicitly tell his younger brother there was not the least doubt in his being a just man and thus fully qualified to lead the congregational prayers.

He addressed his younger brother, “The one between us who has not committed sin yet should lead the congregational prayers.” He wanted to implicitly tell his younger brother that he had not committed sin since the days of his puberty. Sayyid Radi responded, “The one who has not imagined [or thought about] committing sin should lead the prayers.” That is to say, Sayyid Radi had not even imagined committing sin.

Such an individual who has not contaminated himself with sin from the early years of his youth and has only set eyes on Allah and has always endeavored to discharge his divine duties is without the least doubt not far from the station of the truthful.

[1.](#) Surat Hud 11:7.

[2.](#) Surat al-Isra’ 17:70.

[3.](#) Tafsir al-Mizan, vol. 13, p. 165, third ed., Dar al-Kutub al-Islamiyyah Publications.

[4.](#) Surat al-A’raf 7:179.

[5.](#) Surat al-Qamar 54:54–55.

- [6.](#) Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 23, p. 233.
- [7.](#) Shaykh Saduq, Ma'ani al-Akhbar, p. 289.
- [8.](#) Nahj al-Balaghah, p. 612, sermon [khutbah] 184, trans. Fayd al-Islam.
- [9.](#) Fayd Kashani, Muhajjah al-Bayda', vol. 8, p. 258.
- [10.](#) Surat al-Nisa' 4:69.
- [11.](#) Surat al-Fatihah 1:6-7.
- [12.](#) Surat al-Furqan 25:30.
- [13.](#) Tafsir al-Mizan, vol. 1, pp. 324 -325, third ed., Dar al-Kutub al-Islamiyyah Publications.
- [14.](#) Surat Al 'Imran 3:33.
- [15.](#) Surat al-Baqarah 2:253.
- [16.](#) Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 18, p. 345.
- [17.](#) Surat al-Sajdah 32:17.
- [18.](#) Surat al-Shu'ara' 26:83.
- [19.](#) Surat al-Anbiya' 21:72.
- [20.](#) Nahj al-Balaghah, p. 224, sermon [khutbah] 192, trans. Shahidi.
- [21.](#) Surat Maryam 19:41.
- [22.](#) Surat al-Ma'idah 5:75.
- [23.](#) Surat al-An'am 6:87.
- [24.](#) Tafsir al-Mizan, vol. 11, pp. 177-189, third ed., Dar al-Kutub al-Islamiyyah Publications.
- [25.](#) Fayd Kashani, Muhajjah al-Bayda', vol. 8, p. 14.
- [26.](#) Iranian currency.
- [27.](#) Surat Yusuf 12:106.
- [28.](#) Surat al-Jathiyah 45:23.

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