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Lesson 33: The Need to Hold the Tongue and Censure Its Defects

“O Abu Dharr! A person who does not guard his tongue renders his good deeds useless. O Abu Dharr! Do not be a fault-finder, bootlicker, flatterer or argumentative person. Abu Dharr! Man is remote from Allah for as long as he is bad mannered.”

[The Reciprocal Effects of Deeds or Annulment \[Ihbat\] and Proscription \[Takfir\]](#)

In these explanations, the Noble Prophet (S) explains the importance of watching over the tongue in a different manner. The reason for this is that man ought not to leave his tongue free to say whatever his heart desires but he has to hold his tongue and reflect over what he says. Because talking is very easy and sometimes minor motivations become a cause for too much talking or speaking ill of other people, the prominent religious scholars have tried by the use of different expressions and various methods to advise us to take care and not let our tongues reign freely.

One of those is the Noble Prophet's (S) expression that anyone that does not guard his tongue has squandered his deeds and leaves no good works to his account. Perhaps, the point of this expression is that the tongue leaves calamitous effects in the heart and soul of man and breeds mischief as well as depravity which exterminates the rest of man's deeds because as has been recorded in the verses of the Qur'an and successively narrated *hadiths*, man's deeds affect one another: sometimes man does a certain deed but later on he does another act that changes the quality of his previous deed and leaves such an effect on it that it wipes it out.

In books of theology a discussion has been held under the title 'annulment and proscription [or excommunication of deeds]' [*ihbat wa takfir*]. Annulment [*habt*] means good deeds becoming ineffective; that is to say the bad deeds of man annul his good deeds and make them useless and ineffective while proscription [or excommunication] [*takfir*] denotes compensation of sins in such a way that good and

decent deeds make up for the breach of previous deeds. And, because the root of all our deeds is belief and disbelief, the most delicate instance of annulment and proscription [or excommunication] is faith and infidelity.

Faith and decent deeds which man acquires after sinning and perpetrating indecent deeds compensate for previous infidelity and bad deeds and like a very bright light, wipe out previous darkness, but the opposite is also true. Disbelief and indecent deeds at the end of man's life can wipe out the effects of previous faith and good deeds and darken man's record and his destiny and, like fire which falls on a harvested yield, they burn everything suddenly. In other words, faith is like a very luminous light which brightens the heart and irradiates the psyche and eliminates darkness and infidelity.

As long as the psyche of man is in this material abode—the world of changes and transformations—it is always on the verge of brightness and darkness as well as increase and decrease of the light and darkness, until it wears the garment of the transient abode and when the opportunity for the choice of belief and disbelief is closed to him there will be no chance left for him no matter how much he hopes to return to the world once again and embark upon ridding himself of the darkness:

حَتَّىٰ إِذَا جَاءَ أَحَدَهُمُ الْمَوْتُ قَالَ رَبِّ ارْجِعُونِ * لَعَلِّي أَعْمَلُ صَالِحًا فِيمَا تَرَكْتُ كَلَّا إِنَّهَا كَلِمَةٌ هُوَ قَائِلُهَا وَمِنْ وَرَائِهِمْ بَرْزَخٌ إِلَىٰ يَوْمِ يُبْعَثُونَ

“When death comes to one of them, he says, ‘My Lord! Take me back, that I may act righteously in what I have left behind.’ ‘By no means! These are mere words that he says.’ And ahead of them is a barrier until the day they will be resurrected.”¹

In the viewpoint of the Qur'an, there is no room for the least doubt in regard to the influence between faith and infidelity and there are many verses denoting this issue, amongst them:

... وَمَنْ يُؤْمِنْ بِاللَّهِ وَيَعْمَلْ صَالِحًا يُكَفِّرْ عَنْهُ سَيِّئَاتِهِ ...

“And whoever has faith in Allah and acts righteously, He shall absolve him of his misdeeds.”²

Elsewhere, it states:

وَمَنْ يَرْتَدِدْ مِنْكُمْ عَنْ دِينِهِ قُتِلَ وَهُوَ كَافِرٌ فَأُولَٰئِكَ حَبِطَتْ أَعْمَالُهُمْ فِي الدُّنْيَا وَالْآخِرَةِ وَأُولَٰئِكَ أَصْحَابُ النَّارِ هُمْ ... فِيهَا خَالِدُونَ

“And whoever of you turns away from his religion and dies faithless—they are the ones whose works have failed in this world and the hereafter. They shall be the inmates of the Fire, and they shall remain in it forever.”³

The relationship between faith and infidelity exists between good deeds and bad deeds but not in a general sense and not in such a way that whenever a good deed is recorded on man's record of deeds, a previous bad deed is erased or that whenever a bad deed is recorded, a previous good and decent deed is blotted out; however, in regard to deeds we have to believe in a detailed exposition in this sense that some good deeds—if they are done in an acceptable and worthy manner—wipe out the effects of previous bad deeds. For example, repentance causes sins to be forgiven if it is done correctly:

وَمَنْ يَعْمَلْ سُوءًا أَوْ يَظْلِمْ نَفْسَهُ ثُمَّ يَسْتَغْفِرِ اللَّهَ يَجِدِ اللَّهَ غَفُورًا رَحِيمًا

“Whoever commits evil or wrongs himself and then pleads to Allah for forgiveness, will find Allah All-forgiving, All-merciful.”⁴

Elsewhere, it also states:

وَالَّذِينَ إِذَا فَعَلُوا فَاحِشَةً أَوْ ظَلَمُوا أَنْفُسَهُمْ ذَكَرُوا اللَّهَ فَاسْتَغْفَرُوا لِذُنُوبِهِمْ وَمَنْ يَغْفِرِ اللَّهُ إِلَّاهُ وَلَمْ يُصِرُّوا عَلَىٰ مَا فَعَلُوا وَهُمْ يَعْلَمُونَ

“And those who, when they commit an indecent act or wrong themselves, remember Allah, and plead for [Allah's] forgiveness for their sins—and who forgives sins except Allah?—and who do not persist in what they have committed while they know.”⁵

Therefore, repentance is like a ray of light which shines on a dark spot and makes it bright. It is not true though that every good deed wipes out the effects of every sin. For this reason, it is possible for a believer to initially taste divine retribution before finally finding his way to eternal paradise.

The soul of man has various aspects and every group of good and bad deeds is related to one of its cases, for example the good deeds which are related to ‘case A’ do not wipe out the effects of sin related to ‘case B’ unless the good deed is so bright that it permeates the other aspects of the soul too, or the sin is so polluting that it contaminates the other aspects of the soul, too. For instance, in regard to prayer, the Qur’an states:

... وَأَقِمِ الصَّلَاةَ طَرَفَيِ النَّهَارِ وَزُلْفًا مِنَ اللَّيْلِ إِنَّ الْحَسَنَاتِ يُذْهِبْنَ السَّيِّئَاتِ

“Maintain the prayer at the two ends of the day and during the early hours of the night. Indeed good deeds efface misdeeds.”⁶

Some of the sins such as bad conduct in regard to parents and drinking alcohol are a hindrance to the admittance of worship. In regard to the ill effects of drinking alcohol, the Noble Prophet (S) states:

“My Lord swore and then stated, ‘My slave does not drink alcohol in the world save that on the Day of Resurrection I will make him drink boiling water equivalent to the amount of alcohol which he drank’.”[7](#)

It is worth mentioning that good and bad deeds sometimes have effects with regard to joys and sorrows or bestowal and negation of graces in this very world, especially good deeds done towards one’s father and mother, which can be a cause of long life and repulsion of calamities and afflictions. On the contrary, lack of respect to other people (especially teachers and mentors) can result in deprivation of graces.

Yes, sometimes good deeds make up for previous bad deeds and sometimes bad deeds wipe out prior good actions. For as long as man is in this world, these influences exist between our endeavors. Allegorically, the heart or soul of man is like a room which is sometimes dark and becomes bright once light shines in it—sometimes the room is bright and becomes dark once the light is switched off.

Therefore, for as long as man lives in this world, he is exposed to these changes and transformations and it is not true that if man does a good deed the effects thereof remain forever, but it is possible for those good deeds to go to waste as the result of doing inappropriate deeds.

Therefore, the mutual effects of deeds upon one another is a general principle on the basis of which some sins wipe out the effects of some previous good deeds or even become a hindrance for the admittance of good deeds which will be done in the future. It has been recorded in the *hadiths* that some sins prevent the acceptance and admittance of good deeds and prayers even for up to forty days:

“For up to forty days Allah does not accept the prayers and fasting of a person who gossips about a Muslim man and woman unless the person gossiped about forgives the gossiper.”[8](#)

In another *hadith*, it has been recorded that the Noble Prophet (S) stated:

“Purify your income in order for your supplication to be granted; verily the supplication of a man who eats illicit food is not granted for up to forty days.”[9](#)

In regard to drinking alcohol, the Noble Prophet (S) states:

“For forty days the prayers of a person who drinks alcohol are not accepted.”[10](#)

The purport of the Noble Prophet’s (S) sayings in this section of the *hadith* is that if a person is not careful of his tongue, does not hold it, and says whatever flows across it, no good deeds may remain for him; that is to say, the tongue is so influential that it can eliminate all the previous good deeds. This is a warning to man not to lightly perceive this small appendage in the mouth and reflect before talking in order to fathom the possible effects the words he wants to say might have and whether Allah will be pleased with those words or not. Will those words leave beneficial effects on the souls of others or not?

After this general advice and recommendation, the Noble Prophet (S) enumerates some of the specific

sins of the tongue. Of course, mentioning these sins of the tongue is due to the substantial role they play in changing the personality of a person and in causing his downfall and also for the reason that man is constantly in danger of being contaminated by them.

Censuring of Fault-Finding

One of the mean attributes which the Noble Prophet (S) enumerates is the act of looking for faults in other people. Without the least doubt fault-finding is one of the unacceptable and inappropriate qualities.

The fault-finder, on account of jealousy and enmity, is always searching for the defects and weaknesses of other people and thereafter exposing them to others deriving pleasure from doing this. This mean quality has been censured in the verses of the Qur'an and the *hadiths* and after examining them we understand that a person who is always looking for the faults of Muslims and stigmatizing them is one of the most wicked and evil of people. Allah, the Exalted, states:

... إِنَّ الَّذِينَ يُحِبُّونَ أَنْ تَشِيعَ الْفَاحِشَةُ فِي الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لَهُمْ عَذَابٌ أَلِيمٌ فِي الدُّنْيَا وَالْآخِرَةِ

“Indeed for those who want indecency to spread among the faithful, there is a painful punishment in the world and the hereafter.”¹¹

And the Noble Prophet (S) states:

“Every person who spreads and makes apparent the indecent deeds of other people is like the one who has done that same indecent deed he is spreading rumors about and every person who searches for the secret defects of a believer will not die before being afflicted by and perpetrating that same fault.”¹²

One of the inducements which impel man to be constantly looking for the faults of other people is the feeling of lowliness and inferiority. When man has deficiencies, a low and inferior personality and no assets, he cannot see the perfections of other people and it is for this reason that he embarks upon looking for blemishes and damaging the personalities of others to make their perfections less apparent. He tries to find the weak points of other people so as to publicize them. Whenever talk about someone arises, instead of talking about the bright and positive points of that person, he always talks about their defects.

In a gathering of believers once someone mentions the name of another believer, on the basis of Islamic manners, some people try only to mention the good and praiseworthy attributes of the man named but other people, on account of their weakness in faith, jealousy and inferiority complex, mention the weak and negative points which they know about that person and the misdeeds he has committed.

Sometimes, they go a step further and talk about dubious things related to him with much surety and may even accuse him falsely.

It is a bad habit for man to always endeavor at mentioning the weaknesses of other people and unfortunately there are a lot of people who are afflicted with this blight. Every person can test himself when there is talk about another believer—especially one with whom he is in competition. Does he praise him or is he pleased when mentioning his weak points? Does he try by various means to make others aware that another person has faults?

In a natural manner, a person has to see whether when the name of an individual is mentioned he loves to mention the good qualities of the individual and praise and respect him in the presence of other people or he embarks upon enumerating his weaknesses and bad qualities and makes him appear small and inferior. This is a very bad habit and its roots, as has already been said, is jealousy and a feeling of lowliness and inferiority. He feels pain because of what other people have and he cannot bear to see other people have what he does not have.

We have to bear in mind that it is very good for us to be such that whenever the name of a believer is mentioned, we enumerate his good attributes even if sometimes the conditions and stimulus call for us to mention the person's defects, like when man is advising and consulting with someone in regard to a fault which they are investigating in regard to a certain individual—which is a special case.

We should not to be bothered by the things other people have and we need to comprehend that the greatest asset of a believer is his connection with Allah. A believer does not perceive any other asset save that connection and, if man comes to possess this asset, he feels greatness in his soul such that all other great things and assets become inferior in his eyes.

He has attained a high level and has gotten drowned in the boundless ocean of greatness and he enjoys the benefits of indescribable pleasure and gratification and it does not make any difference to him whether other people respect him or not, or whether they praise him or curse him. Without the least doubt, such an individual, on whose heart the ray of faith has shone, is preoccupied with honoring and respecting the believers because this deed is pleasing to Allah and brings about proximity to Him.

In contrast to the believer whose asset is only faith and attention to Allah and who neither becomes pleased by the respect of other people nor becomes saddened by their disrespect, people who have deficiencies and do not have the asset of faith perceive the highness of their personality according to the measure of respect that other people accord to them. This is what is today termed as 'social status'.

They conceive their personality according to their social standing and the opinions of other people in regard to them and their capital is the positive opinion of other people and their high social standing. They perceive themselves as having a lofty personality when other people praise them and being rejected and lacking in personality when they are reproached and blamed, and they think that the world has come to an end when others see them in any negative way.

Unfortunately, people who have material and spiritual deficiencies—like deficiencies in knowledge, spiritual perfections, wealth and material amenities—cannot see and appreciate the superiorities of other

people, and it is for this reason that they embark upon casting doubt on the perfections of others to damage their personalities. This is the attribute of the soul of the fault-finder who is preoccupied with looking and searching for the faults of other people. Such an individual puts his worldly and heavenly prosperity in danger and becomes afflicted by the wrath of Allah as a result of divulging and narrating the defects of other people.

Regarding the prohibition of fault-finding and gossiping about other people, Imam 'Ali ('a) states:

“O servant of Allah! Do not be quick in exposing a person’s fault for he may be forgiven for it, and do not think yourself safe even for a small defect because you may be punished for it. Therefore, every one of you who comes to know the faults of others should not expose them in view of what he knows about his own faults.”¹³

Elsewhere, he states that paying attention to one’s own defects prevents man from looking for the faults of others:

“He who sees his own shortcomings abstains from looking into other people’s shortcomings.”¹⁴

With regard to what has been mentioned, it is befitting that we refrain from searching for and talking about other people’s defects as well as damaging the personality of other people and bear in mind that with the prevalence of the disease of fault-finding in the society, the spirit of unity, oneness and brotherhood loses its place to the spirit of disunity and in this case the foundations of the community shake and the structure of social affairs crumbles.

Likewise, fault-finding gives rise to suspicion, enmity and hatred in the society and also causes the personality of some individuals to be trampled underfoot by the whims and caprice of people of weak personality whose greatness lies only in destroying the personalities of other people and likewise as a result of the spread of the disease of fault-finding in the society, ethical bounds disintegrate. Also, this disease incites and strengthens a spirit of sin and depravity in people who might have refrained from a great many sins on account of social considerations.

Censuring of Flattery and Sycophancy

One of the unsuitable attributes which Imam 'Ali ('a) enumerates is flattery. The spirit of flattery and sycophancy, like fault-finding, derives from man’s weakness of character and inferiority complex. In reality, this is a quality of people with deficiencies of character who try to make up for their defects by attracting the attention of other people by flattering them, imagining that perhaps by doing so they may secure a higher position for themselves.

This is an attribute of people of weak character who do not conceive the infinite power and dominion of Allah and, as a result, set their greedy and covetous eyes on other human beings and seek their honor and greatness from them who themselves are in need of Allah. If man sets his eyes on the Absolute Self-

sufficient and seeks help from the Source of existence, he no longer has any need to flatter other people. In regard to the fact that only Allah, the Exalted, is worthy of praise, Amir al-Mu'minin 'Ali ('a) states:

“O my Allah! You deserve handsome description and the highest esteem. If wish is directed towards Thee, Thou art the best to be wished for. If hope is reposed in Thee, Thou art the Most Honored to be hoped from. O my Allah! Thou hast bestowed on me such power that I do not praise any other than Thee, and I do not eulogize anyone save Thee. I do not direct my praise towards others who are sources of disappointment and centers of misgivings. Thou hast kept my tongue away from the praises of human beings and eulogies of the created and sustained. O my Allah! Every acclamer has on whom he praises the right of reward and recompense. Certainly I have turned to Thee with my eye at the treasure of Thy mercy and stores of forgiveness...”¹⁵

Sometimes, man praises and enumerates the good qualities of a believer for the sake of pleasing Allah and honoring a believer, but sometimes he praises other people as a result of covetousness and carnal desires in order to attract their attention so that they may provide him with material help whenever he needs them.

The spirit of sycophancy and flattery is one of man's disagreeable traits and it is not compatible with faith in Allah because although he ought to perceive his destiny in the hands of Allah, he conceives his destiny to be in the hands of others and, in order for them to grant him good, he embarks upon flattery.

As has been said, the psychological and spiritual source of this attribute is an inferiority complex; that is to say, man feels empty-handed and makes himself dependent on others and to earn some good under the auspices of reliance on them he may stoop to the means of flattery.

It is worthwhile to pay attention to the repercussions of the spread of the spirit of flattery in the society and see what effects too much flattery and praise has on people: beyond the shadow of doubt excessive praise gives rise to pride and vainglory and produces pampered, self-satisfied and over-expectant people and incites the feeling of self-praise and big-headedness and in regard to oppressors. Flattery is a kind of practical approval and encouragement of their deeds.

Sycophancy and praising of others can give rise to their considering this praise as a portion of their good attributes and deeds and as a result of this forget their weak points and, from the opposite side, make the ugly and illicit deeds which they have committed appear acceptable in their point of view.

Flattery, besides being a hindrance to some kinds of ethical edification, changes the course of less capable and selfish individuals as well as making them daring in displaying their weak moral points and oppressive, illogical and evil methods. It is for this reason that the leaders of religion detested this blameworthy method and would warn their followers to strive their utmost against it. In this regard, the Noble Prophet (S) stated:

“Throw dirt in the faces of the sycophants.”^{[16](#)}

This saying is related to a person who flatters a Muslim; otherwise, the judgment of someone who flatters an infidel is even harsher. This expression is meant to prevent the spread and increase of the mentality of sycophancy in the society. We even know that a person like Imam ‘Ali (‘a), who was the perfect image of all human virtues and ideals and was higher than ordinary human beings and the manifestation of divine majesty and beauty, never used to permit anyone to praise and compliment him in his presence.

Once a group of people praised Imam ‘Ali (‘a) in his presence, the Imam stated:

“O my Allah! You know me better than myself, and I know myself more than they know me. O my Allah! Make me better than what they imagine and forgive whatever they do not know.”^{[17](#)}

Imam ‘Ali (‘a) wanted to make them know that he had no need of their praise and did not permit them to praise him so that this objectionable quality, that is to say flattery, would not spread in the Islamic community because if on that day they were permitted to praise Imam ‘Ali (‘a), on another day they would have praised another ruler and not all people are infallible so as not to be deceived by such flattery; on the contrary, some people are gradually affected by these false compliments and imagine that what other people say in regard to them is correct and this is a great blight that can mislead others into ignorance and cause people to perceive themselves as higher than who or what they actually are and bit by bit believe that which is said in regard to them. Such wrong beliefs result in people deviating from the course of equilibrium and imagining themselves as higher than what they actually are and this can become a great calamity. In addition to this, improper praise is a sign of hypocrisy and guile. As Imam ‘Ali (‘a) states:

“To praise more than what is due is sycophancy; to do it less is either because of inability to speak or envy.”^{[18](#)}

Elsewhere, he states:

“If a person falsely praises you for a virtue which you do not have, it is befitting that on another day he reproaches you for a bad attribute for which you are blameless.”^{[19](#)}

The Imam intends to make this point apparent that flattery and sycophancy never aim at telling the truth and reality, but personal interests compel man to falsely praise other human beings; for this reason, if one day things change for the worse and a person sees his benefit lying in weakening an individual whom he previously used to praise regarding a virtue that was actually absent in his personality, he will embark upon censuring and reproaching that person by attributing to him ugly qualities which are not in his character imagining that perhaps he will earn some benefit in this way.

Therefore, Islam does not permit man to be a flatterer for the reason that the spirit of sycophancy

produces ugly effects both in the spirit of the flatterer and the flattered as well as in the community. In reality, the sycophant has to bring himself low in order to pronounce those false praises and Allah, the Exalted, is not pleased to see a believer trample his own greatness and honor underfoot and conceive himself so inferior as to embark upon insincere praise of others. The effects of sycophancy on the spirit of the flattered is that he forgets himself and imagines that he possesses such a high personality and lofty character that he is entitled to the respect and praise of other people and in the end he disregards the deficiencies and weaknesses of his character and conjectures his life and conduct as filled with lofty and positive points.

The Noble Prophet (S) states:

“Whenever you praise your brother in his presence, it is as though you have stuck a thorn in his neck.”[20](#)

Besides what has been mentioned, praising wicked and corrupt people results in their becoming daring to abuse and encroach upon other people’s rights. A flattering person, besides being guilty of hypocrisy and lies, by means of his false praise and compliments, prepares a suitable ground for perversity, extravagance licentiousness and aggression of the corrupt, especially false leaders and rulers and in reality this in itself is a cause of corruption and partnership in grave and destructive crimes which are committed by oppressors against other human beings. It is for this reason that the Noble Prophet (S) stated:

“When a rich person is praised, the Throne of Allah trembles and Allah becomes wrathful.”[21](#)

The Noble Prophet (S) states that a person should not be a fault-finder who looks for and recites the weak points of other people and thus defames other human beings because Allah is not pleased at the defamation of people’s repute or even at the disclosure of their defects. He Himself has concealed the defects of people so that they may live with one another with affection and love. He does not permit the believers to divulge the defects of one another or even reveal one’s own faults because man does not even have the right to defame himself. Likewise, the Noble Prophet (S) states not to falsely attribute qualities to people that they do not have due to flattery. In reality, going to extremes in both instances [of praise and fault-finding] is harmful for the believer and a person must not abandon moderation. If one wants to mention the good qualities of other people, he must content himself with that extent that is acceptable for sake of goodness and expediency and not mention people’s good attributes for the sake of worldly gain in a way that forsakes moderation.

Censuring of Sarcasm and Verbal Abuse

One of the indecent attributes which the Noble Prophet (S) enumerates is being sarcastic and verbally abusive. Offending the believers with biting and acrimonious words is termed as taunting. Taunting is when someone endeavors to mention the defects and weaknesses of people to them and thus wound or provoke them. It is befitting for a person to endeavor at consoling other people for their failures and to try

to pronounce words which serve as salve on their wounds, not to speak as though those people deserve and are entitled to their troubles and failures. Imam 'Ali ('a) states:

“The sharpness and incisiveness of the tongue is more than that of the spear.”[22](#)

The source of spiteful words is enmity and vindictiveness which impels one who taunts to use virulent and venomous words when talking to another person. It is likely for the appearance and contents of his words to be correct, but he utters them acrimoniously and cruelly which causes pain and sadness for the other person. When discussing academic issues with another person, he could use soft words to make the other understand that he has not understood something correctly, but instead he makes him understand by means of an indirect statement, a hint and biting words.

When a person seeks to help others become aware of their faults, he should say it with words that are going to be effective and help them understand their mistakes in such a way that they will concede and not become angry and persistent in their mistakes and in addition to the first mistake, make a second mistake due to obstinacy and consequently cascade into ignorance and stubbornness because a wrong method of mentioning the fault and thereafter correction becomes more difficult.

In order to enjoin the good and forbid the evil, some people behave in such a manner that not only is the other person not corrected and not attracted to recommended things, but is prompted to more evil by means of bad methods of advising and sometimes by censuring and repeated reproaching. It is for this reason that Imam 'Ali ('a) states:

“Refrain from censuring and reproach because it makes sin appear big and renders advice ineffective.”[23](#)

Reprimanding people who repeatedly censure and reproach other people, Imam 'Ali ('a) states:

“Excessive reproach and blame flames the fire of stubbornness.”[24](#)

“Refrain from repeated censuring of people for the reason that reproaching the wrongdoer over and over again makes him audacious and stubbornly persistent in his misdeeds; in addition, it renders advice ineffective.”[25](#)

Therefore, when you want to remind someone about his weaknesses, encounter him with cheerfulness, kindness and consolation. Your tongue ought not to be as stinging as a scorpion's bite. Speak in such a way that will persuade that person to embark upon correcting and edifying their weakness.

If one says that the other person has made a mistake or that he does not understand and other expressions like this, it is natural for him not to be pleased and become angry. If we were in his position and were talked to in a stinging manner, would we not become annoyed? Every person becomes angry and reacts once he is talked to in an improper manner, affronted or treated rudely unless one is so pious that he graciously keeps quiet and does not respond.

That being the case, when we ourselves do not tolerate rude encounters, how do we hope to incite other people to edify their characters by means of our biting words? If we always intend to do good to other people, our behavior and conduct will always be the expression of good human morals with which we have been endowed.

Censuring of Obstinance [Mara'] and Insistence on One's Opinion

The fourth undesirable quality which the Noble Prophet (S) mentions is obstinacy in one's errors. Obstinate behavior denotes rejection of the another person's words and proving one's own superiority in such a way that a person is not willing to admit one's own mistake when he commits it and he justifies his own words with explanations with the intention of rectifying his own error and he does this repeatedly because every time he insists on his mistake, the other side also sees that the adamant person is trying to portray as right that which is wrong.

When the spirit of contention and bickering is aroused in man, he tries to impose his ideas on others and this attitude derives from egotism and selfishness; that is to say, man cannot easily admit his errors and say that he has made a mistake because he conceives it as demeaning to his position. Although he knows that he has made a mistake, he does not want other people to know that he has committed an error. It is for this reason that once others explain a person's mistakes to him and make him conceive his errors, he stubbornly rejects their explanations and tries to portray his ideas as right and insists that what he has said is correct!

There is no doubt that uncompromising behavior is not devoid of injury to other people and incites their anger and protest. It is for this reason that obstinacy causes stubborn people to attack one another and each one of them tries to prove that his opinion is superior. The Noble Prophet (S) states:

“Rid yourselves of obstinacy because there is no wisdom in it and no man remains safe from its evil.”^{[26](#)}

Obstinacy and stubborn insistence on one's opinion is not a desirable quality and unfortunately some educated people become corrupted by it. When they put forward a wrong opinion during academic debate, they stubbornly insist on their opinion and feel as if they have lost if they concede to the opinion of their friend.

Even worse, if there is a third person overseeing the debate, they try even harder to defend their assertion in order to protect their reputation; especially if that third person is a student and disciple! In short, all these are incentives for man not to admit the truth and to prefer untruthfulness over the truth.

With regard to the consequences of stubbornness and obstinacy which are directed at man, it is worthwhile for a person to embark upon fighting this quality. One of the calamities which stubbornness breeds in man is presenting unreal and untruthful opinions.

Imam 'Ali ('a) states:

“Stubborn insistence on one’s own opinion corrupts man.”[27](#)

One of the calamities of stubbornness mentioned in the words of Imam 'Ali ('a) is that man’s soul becomes sick and diseased:

“Stubbornness and obstinacy impairs the soul.”[28](#)

One of the calamities mentioned in the words of Imam 'Ali ('a) is the degeneration of man’s mind and the decadence of his thoughts:

“The obstinate person does not have a correct opinion.”[29](#)

The way of curing and fighting stubborn insistence on one’s incorrect opinion is for man to uproot pride which gives rise to a false manifestation of virtue and knowledge from his inner being and know that obstinacy causes enmity and hatred and destroys affection and brotherhood.

Likewise, it is befitting of students to try to get rid of obstinacy by adopting a negative stand against it and always conceding to correct opinions and speaking good and correct words so that consequently the spirit of magnanimity and conceding to the truth becomes their habit and second nature and the quality of stubbornness and obstinacy is uprooted from their hearts.

In order to get rid of stubbornness and obstinacy, man has to convince that every person, whether he likes it or not, makes mistakes and errors and it is not true that any human being is immune from error. Only the Infallibles are immune from errors and all the others are likely to make mistakes. People make mistakes either in explaining and narrating things or in understanding and conceiving them. This is not something unexpected and happens for everyone, and for this reason it should not be construed as a defect. Of course, man should strive to make fewer mistakes, especially in his lessons and academic debates by studying longer and harder. However, when one makes a mistake he ought not to construe it as a great personal defect and think that he has lost his reputation and is a failure.

Secondly, once he understands that he has made a mistake, he has to immediately admit his mistake and admit that the other person is right. Of course, it is hard to admit one’s errors the first time, but after one tastes the sweetness of admitting his mistakes and comprehends that making mistakes regarding his views and opinions is not a defect, it becomes easy for him. He tells himself that he is a human being and is not immune from error and sometimes people make mistakes and others understand, and at other times the opposite is true.

How good it is also that he should thank his friend who has made him aware of his error and has shown him the right way and the correct opinion. One should not content himself with keeping silent because if we want to be set free from the attribute of stubbornness and obstinacy, we have to try to adopt a position opposite to it and the position opposite to obstinacy is admitting one’s mistakes. Man has to tell

his friend, “You understood the matter very well and I did not comprehend it.”

As a result of this sweet and good conduct, not only does one not feel like a failure or feel deficient, but this suitable behavior brings about a sweet life full of intimacy and sincerity and man becomes more beloved and trusted by other people.

On the other hand, when a person tries to justify his erroneous words and conceal his mistakes, other people’s confidence in him is taken away and they will not pay any attention to him even when he wants to say something worthwhile and true. However, when one admits his mistakes and concedes to the correct opinion of the other person, they put their confidence in what he says because they know that he does not utter careless remarks and, as a result of this conduct, his social standing also rises.

Of course, one should not seek after and be pleased with a better social position, but conceding to the truth has such an effect and result. Both the trust that other people have in him increases and their love for him as well, and also his social rank improves. In addition to that, he is delivered from the ugly attribute of obstinate behavior. Of course, one must not fall in love with his social standing and must put his trust in Allah and that which is pleasing to Him and in every deed one’s incentive has to be winning the pleasure of Allah, the Exalted, and other good effects are subsidiary rewards of man’s conduct.

[1.](#) Surat al-Mu’minun 23:99–100.

[2.](#) Surat al-Taghabun 64:9.

[3.](#) Surat al-Baqarah 2:217.

[4.](#) Surat al-Nisa’ 4:110.

[5.](#) Surat Al ‘Imran 3:135.

[6.](#) Surat Hud 11:114.

[7.](#) Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 76, p. 126.

[8.](#) Mustadrik al-Wasa’il, vol. 9, p. 122.

[9.](#) Ibid., vol. 1, p. 166.

[10.](#) Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 76, p. 126.

[11.](#) Surat al-Nur 24:19.

[12.](#) Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 73, p. 384.

[13.](#) Nahj al-Balaghah, p. 429, sermon [khutbah] 140, trans. Fayd al-Islam.

[14.](#) Ibid., p. 1249, pithy aphorisms 341.

[15.](#) Nahj al-Balaghah, p. 269, sermon [khutbah] 91, trans. Fayd al-Islam.

[16.](#) Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 73, p. 294.

[17.](#) Nahj al-Balaghah, p. 1131, wisdom [hikmat] 96, trans. Fayd al-Islam.

[18.](#) Ibid., wisdom [hikmat] 339, trans. Fayd al-Islam.

[19.](#) Ghurar al-Hikam, p. 671.

[20.](#) Jami’ al-Sa’adat, vol. 2, p. 327.

[21.](#) Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 77, p. 152.

[22.](#) Ghurar al-Hikam, p. 382.

[23.](#) Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 77, p. 216.

[24.](#) Ibid., p. 232.

[25.](#) Ghurar al-Hikam, p. 278.

[26.](#) Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 2, p. 138.

[27.](#) Ghurar al-Hikam, p. 36.

[28.](#) Ibid., p. 17.

[29.](#) Ibid., p. 31.

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