

## Lesson 7: The Vigilance and Alertness of a Believer

### [Companionship with the Pious and Religious Scholars, and the Difference of Sin in the Perception of a Believer and an Infidel](#)

“O Abu Dharr! The pious are honorable and the religious scholars are the guides. Companionship with them results in the increase of knowledge and virtue. A believer perceives his sin as a frightful cliff which he fears will come down crumbling upon him while the infidel conceives his sin as a fly which passes across his nose.”

In the previous statements, the Prophet (S) has informed man about his sensitive circumstances, the value of his life and the importance of the moments of his life and has cautioned him against laziness, idleness and indifference and [counseled him] to consider the issues of life with a sense of responsibility. It has been emphasized that man ought to make use of opportunities and not put off today’s work until tomorrow. Now the question arises as to what is the best way of utilizing our lives and what is the first step on the spiritual journey towards Allah?

Incontrovertibly, the first step towards appreciating life and spiritual way-faring is abstinence from sin, for the reason that man who is contaminated by sin cannot attain any success and the value of man’s life lies in his not being tainted by sin.

For this reason sin, no matter how small it is, is a cause of destruction, even if man performs a lot of worship alongside it. A person who sins alongside his acts of worship is similar to a person who has a torn bag and no matter how much money he puts in it, it comes out falling through the hole. Or, he is like a person who harvests his produce and then afterwards sets it on fire!? Because sins are like fire that is tossed on our works.

Therefore, the first stride to take is to know sins and to avoid them and to repent once we commit

transgressions and seek Allah's help and that of His saints [*awliya*] so as to be successful at not being contaminated by sin.

## The Need For Choosing A Worthy Friend And Perceiving Sin As Great

In the Prophet's (S) point of view, a man trudging the course towards perfection needs two things: one is a worthy friend and the other is conceiving sin as great and keeping himself aloof from it. Perhaps the medium between these two implies that selecting a good friend is a prerequisite for perceiving sin as big and finally escaping from sin; and choosing a bad friend is a requisite for getting even more polluted by sin, because a good friend can be a source of a lot of graces and favors in the same way that a bad friend is a cause of a great deal of aberrations and deviations.

A good friend motivates man to conceive sin as great and to always consider himself as ashamed and remorseful in the sight of Allah. Similarly, an immoral friend perpetually encourages man to perceive transgression as small; to such an extent that he does not feel ashamed of any sin.

In this section, the Prophet (S) presents two criteria for selecting an associate:

1. Having piety.
2. Awareness of the divine permissible things and the forbidden ones, in other words, knowledge of the religion.

Companionship with an impious friend makes man perceive sin as light and as a result of which he earns eternal perdition and loss; as the Qur'an quotes some of the inmates of hell saying:

يَا وَيْلَتَنِي لَيْتَنِي لَمْ أَتَّخِذْ فُلَانًا خَلِيلًا \* لَقَدْ أَضَلَّنِي عَنِ الذِّكْرِ بَعْدَ إِذْ جَاءَنِي وَكَانَ الشَّيْطَانُ لِلْإِنْسَانِ خَذُولًا

***“O woe is me! Would that I had not taken such a one for a friend! Certainly he led me astray from the reminder after it had come to me; and Satan fails to aid man.”<sup>1</sup>***

In the same way that an impious friend is not worthy of making friendship with, no plans for friendship have to be made with an ignorant person. Even if he intends to perform a good deed, he falls into error and deviation as a result of ignorance.

Therefore, in the same way that awareness and piety are two wings for traversing the course of spiritual perfection and growth along the path of right, they are also two good standards for selecting a companion. It is for this reason that in his recommendation to Abu Dharr, the Noble Prophet (S) presents piety and religious scholarship as two criteria for choosing an associate. Of course, it is proper that these two qualities are combined in man, because man who intends to perform his duties without being aware

of his religion gets deceived by the Devil and the people, no matter how holy he might be.

## The Danger Of Unrestrained Scholars And Unwise And Foolish Ignorant People

In a well-known *hadith*, the Prophet (S) states:

“Two groups broke my back; a religious scholar who is unrestrained in performing indecent deeds and a devoted worshiper who is ignorant and uninformed.”<sup>2</sup>

Imam Khomeini (‘a) used to state that sanctimonious people succeed at discharging their devotional obligations but ignore their original duty, which is acquiring knowledge. They travel the course with those same aberrant inclinations of theirs and even insist and persist on it. The damage inflicted upon Islam by these people is more than the damage inflicted by libertine people. This category of people neither succeeds at anything nor lets other people make progress, as Imam al-Sadiq states:

“A person who discharges his obligations without knowledge produces more corruption and aberration than what he corrects.”<sup>3</sup>

Likewise, the unrestrained religious scholar who does not do as he says deceives people as they respect him because of his knowledge while they inflict blows on Islam as a result of impiety; blows which the ignorant can never succeed at inflicting. It is for this reason that wherever piety has been defined and praised, the idea has been righteousness which is accompanied by knowledge, or else if these two get separated from each other, not only will it not be profitable but detrimental as well. Also, if religious expertise and knowledge have been praised, the purport has been religious expertise and knowledge accompanied by works, because the religious scholar who does not put his knowledge into practice is a robber.

Allah, the Exalted, addresses Prophet David (‘a) thus:

“O David! Do not place as an intermediary between you and I a religious scholar who has fallen in love with the world, because he will prevent you from traversing the course of love of Me. Verily, they are robbers on the highway ambushing Allah-seeking slaves. The least punishment I inflict upon them is that I drive out of their hearts the sweetness of supplication of Me.”<sup>4</sup>

A scholar without works is like a thief who robs a caravan in broad daylight. He knows better how to outwit people because he has knowledge. Such an academic is of no benefit to the religion; therefore, we ought to guard against being fed with deception. Therefore, piety and religious expertise will be effective and will result in the prosperity of the individual and society once they co-occur.

Companionship is permissible with people who, on the one hand, have strengthened their piety, bondage to Allah, servitude and obedience, and on the other hand, have succeeded at attaining religious

expertise and sciences. Rapport with this kind of divine scholars adds to man's virtues and perfection.

Even if the *faqih* in technical terms denotes learned people who have the ability of inference of Islamic law and inversion of the branches of the religion to the fundamental principles of religion, the *faqih* in the terminology of the Qur'an and *hadiths* means theologian; ranging from knowledge of the branches of religion, beliefs and ethics. But a scholar of beliefs and ethics is more suitable for companionship.

The Prophet (S) states that now that you have made the intention to undertake the journey and have selected a suitable friend for yourself, guard against being contaminated by iniquity in that once you get polluted by sin, your movement and progression will be futile and your efforts and acts of worship will bear no fruit.

Man does not pursue sin purposelessly; transgression necessarily has sweetness, attraction and gravitation by which man gets contaminated. Even if these attractions are imaginative and are temptations of the Devil and lack reality, but man still conceives in sin attraction and sweetness which he pursues. So, what ought man to do in order to have the grace of not being contaminated by sin and resisting it?

The best way of abstaining from sin is to perceive its danger and harm; losses and dangers which go with this transient pleasure and also know the permanent mal-effects of sin both in this world and the hereafter.

The attribute of a believer is that he has a special perception in regard to sin and it is this very perceptiveness which prevents him from committing sin. For a believer sin is a big stone which is about to fall on his head. He gets bothered once he commits sin and error. That perception has such an effect on the thought and contemplation that his conscience always instigates him against sin and he repents and seeks forgiveness when he perpetrates sin. He is like a person who sees a big stone on top of his head and is always worried that it will fall on his head. That is to say, the soul of this man is so pure and untainted that he shows a reaction against every sin and always engages in reproaching and reprimanding his soul to the extent that he loses his sleep and tranquility too.

Conversely, an infidel and a person who has contaminated his innate disposition with evil does not feel troubled and sin in his perception is like a fly which passes in front of his nose. (The meaning of infidel is not only a person who denies the existence of Allah and the hereafter, but a person who denies one of the primary principles of religion is an infidel too.)

Besides the *hadiths* and Qur'anic verses, it is a psychological truth that repeating indecent actions divests them of their ugliness and as a result they manifest themselves as pleasurable and shame is no longer felt when committing them. Sin too is the same. If a particular sin is repeatedly committed, its villainy is removed from it and the result of this is that no shame is felt when committing it.

Right here a criterion can be presented and that is that every person who wants to know whether he is

on the boundary of belief or of infidelity ought to observe how his reaction is with regard to sin. If he notices that sin is nothing for him and pays no heed to it, then he should know that he is trudging the course of disbelief because feeling regret at committing sin indicates a pure soul and heedlessness of sin points to an unbelieving soul. The exigency of faith is that if anger and passion overcome man, as a result of which he commits wrongdoing, he immediately gets sorry and remorseful for his actions. In the event that such kind of a condition is absent in us, we ought to be worried for ourselves that we are trudging a dangerous course.

## **Paying Heed To Sin And Conceiving It As Great Is A Result Of Allah's Grace And Favor**

“O Abu Dharr! Allah, the Exalted and Blessed, embodies His slave's sins in front of him once He desires his good and makes sin heavy and unbearable for him and He erases sin from the memory of a slave whom He intends bad for.”

Allah, the Exalted, loves all human beings; if He did not love an individual He would not have created him. But Allah has exclusive grace and favor for his slaves. If this section [of humanity] commits sin, he embodies sin in their view because the first step in the direction of drowning in corruption and submerging in sin is forgetting sin, losing sight of sin and its requital. With regard to [the point] that Allah has attention and favor for His special slaves and does not leave them alone, He conversely pays no heed to some of them and has left them alone. Every person can manage to assess for himself whether he is an object of Allah's mercy and grace or not.

If he has not forgotten his past sins, and sin is heavy and unbearable for him, he ought to know that he is an object of Allah's mercy.

It is clear that keeping the remembrance of sin is only practicable once it prevents the further perpetration of sin or otherwise if man remembers his wrongdoings but does not conceive them as unbearable on his shoulders, he has no qualms about committing sin.

Imam al-Sajjad (‘a) in the *Du‘a’* [he taught to one of his followers by the name] *Abu Hamzah al-Thumali* states:

“I am the one whom You gave respite so as to give up committing sins and repent; while I did not give up sins. You covered my sins but I did not feel ashamed and perpetrated sins again. I trespassed the limits so that You overlooked me.”

Therefore, once Allah intends good for any person, he always embodies sin for him, to the extent that he sees it as a heavy and unbearable load. When Allah has no favor for someone and intends bad for him, he leaves him alone and thereafter sin looks light and unimportant to him.

Of course, in the beginning Allah does not drive anyone away from his mercy and does not intend bad for anyone, but after man has perpetrated ugly works and has stubbornly insisted upon committing sin, Allah makes him afflicted by such requital.

A person who is beloved by Allah is one who has succeeded at attaining the status of servitude and nearness to Allah and man who is low in the sight of Allah is one who is far from Allah and has forgotten him. Once he forgets Allah, Allah too forgets him:

...وَلَا تَكُونُوا كَالَّذِينَ نَسُوا اللَّهَ فَأَنْسَاهُمْ أَنْفُسَهُمْ

***“And be not like those who forsook Allah, so He made them forsake their own souls...”<sup>5</sup>***

## **The Need For Paying Heed To The Greatness Of The One Who Is Being Disobeyed Not The Smallness Of Sin**

“O Abu Dharr! Do not look at the smallness of sin, but look at the greatness of the One you are disobeying.”

Sin can be looked at from three points of view:

1. Looking at the essence of sin, as regards its greatness and smallness.
2. Looking at sin in respect of the doer [or agent] of the sin.
3. Looking at sin with reference to the One who is being disobeyed.

In the Book and Sunnah, sins have been divided into two sections, every one of which has a different injunction and a separate punishment. The Qur'an states that once the list of works is given to some of the people, they will say:

...يَا وَيْلَتَنَا مَا لِهَذَا الْكِتَابِ لَا يُغَادِرُ صَغِيرَةً وَلَا كَبِيرَةً إِلَّا أَحْصَاهَا ...

***“...Ah! Woe to us! What a book this is! It does not omit a small one nor a great one, but numbers them all...”<sup>6</sup>***

Perhaps, the difference between these two kinds is that promise of requital has been given for the greater sins while promise of punishment has not been given for the minor sins. Likewise, no limits have been placed over the small sins and a specific limit has been placed over the greater sins.

It is worth saying that it is possible for a person to commit an action which seems to him a small sin and

[hence] forgivable, but be heedless of this fact that firstly repeating small sins is itself a great sin and persistence at it makes man an insolent perpetrator of sin. Secondly, he forgets Who is being sinned against and Whose bounds he is trespassing.

This section of the *hadith* hints at the second point of not just looking at the smallness of sin, but at Who is being disobeyed. Sometimes, one issue is in itself small but is [considered] great because it is connected with a great man.

Imagine that you are in the presence of an Infallible Imam (‘a) and His Holiness orders you to do something, no matter how small: for instance, he orders you to bring him a blue plate, but you imagine that this order is very small and refrain from carrying it out because of this very reason. Is such an imagination logical? Is this the exigency of proper conduct? Is this disobedience acceptable?

It certainly is not so, because in spite of the smallness of the order, the commander is very great and the small order acquires greatness because of the one who orders. Now, apply this same example on the Divine Essence, despite that disobedience of Allah is not comparable to the disobedience of an Infallible Imam. Therefore, the criterion for the ugliness of sin has to be the greatness of the Commander and the forbidding.

Such a perception of sin can bring about a strong incentive in the direction of opposing the Devil and remove every kind of excuse-seeking from his carnal soul. Sometimes, a friend asks for a favor from someone within the limits of humanity, it is possible to reject his request and say that you do not have any right to give me orders. But sometimes father, mother and/or teacher give orders disobeying of which is very ugly and sometimes the order is made by a religious jurisprudent and sometimes by an Infallible Imam and sometimes by Allah himself. In this instance, the higher the level of the commander or forbidding, the uglier the disobedience and the more worthy of remonstrance it will be.

When the Devil entices you that one look at a strange woman is nothing, one minute of listening to prohibited music is nothing, you ought to pay attention to Who you are disobeying. It is for this reason that the Prophet (S) states to Abu Dharr that do not look at the smallness of sin but look at the greatness of the One who is being disobeyed.

“O Abu Dharr! The anxiety and worry of a man with faith with regard to his sin is more than the fear of a sparrow which has been trapped in a net.”

Here, the Prophet (S) states another example of the reaction of a believer with regard to his sin, that if they set a trap to catch a sparrow and this very active and mobile creature gets trapped, it reacts forcefully and never becomes tranquil and calm but tries to free itself from the trap and sometimes its striving results in its death and perdition; it hits itself on the sides so much that it dies in the end. This is a result of its anxiety and worry for falling into the trap. The reaction of a believer with regard to his sin is like this too. When he feels that he has fallen into the Devil’s trap, anxiety and worry encompasses his entire being, to the extent that he loses his peace and tranquility and he always tries to free himself from

the Devil's trap.

We are not infallible and are always on the verge of error and sin, and there is not expectation either that we will not sin. It is likely that sometimes we fall in the Devil's trap (of course the meaning of being fallible is not that we must sin, because it is possible for people who are fallible not to sin, and the difference between them is that the Infallible has a natural disposition which prevents him from committing sin, ordinary people also can manage not to get afflicted by sin despite not having an infallible natural disposition.) In any case, if we get afflicted by sin, our faith necessitates that we always worry and make effort to repent, cry and return to Allah and free ourselves from the consequences of sin.

Lesson 8: The Correspondence of Words with Actions and Guarding the Tongue

## **The Effects of the Correspondence and Lack of Correspondence of Words with Actions**

“O Abu Dharr! Every person whose words are in accordance with his actions has received his of prosperity and every person whose works do not match with his actions has reprimanded himself on the Day of Recompense.”

The majority of people mention good works when they talk and emphasize the importance and value of those works and that they have to be discharged and that they have an effect on the perfection of man; but practically their words are not in accordance with their actions. There are very few people who match their words with their actions.

If we believe that the correspondence of words and actions is connected with the levels of faith, we will deduce that the people whose faith is more perfect are more truthful and their words correspond more with their actions; in reality, their conduct is witness to their words.

While elucidating the verse, “...**these are they who are true to themselves and these are they who guard against evil,**”<sup>7</sup> ‘Allamah Tabataba’i, may Allah be pleased with him, states, “Honesty is an attribute which encompasses all the virtues existent in knowledge and works, because truthfulness is a disposition which accompanies all the ethical virtues, amongst them chastity, courage, wisdom and justice; because man cannot be separated from his belief, words and actions. Man’s honesty denotes that his belief, word and works match with one another; that is to say, he acts according to what he believes in and says.

The natural disposition of man has been formed with the inherency of acknowledging the truth and inward submission to it, even if he may pretend otherwise. Therefore, once he has acknowledged the truth and is honest in his confession, he says what he believes in and acts in accordance with his words, it is in this instance that his faith becomes pure and his morals and works reach the stage of

perfection.”<sup>8</sup>

He used to state, “Allah has called some people excessively honest, because the conduct of the truthful people is an example of their words.”

A person whose words are in accordance with his actions is honest too. But the excessively honest are at a higher level and this is said about a person who not only matches his words with his actions, but is in accordance with his actions too in all instances.

The Noble Prophet (S) states that a person whose actions are in accordance with his words has attained bliss. If such a person strives to harmonize his words and actions, he will attain the rank of the truthful. In contrast, man who does not do what he says is a hypocrite and liar, as the Qur’an calls the hypocrites who acknowledge the Prophet’s (S) mission by their tongues but do not believe it in their hearts liars:

إِذَا جَاءَكَ الْمُنَافِقُونَ قَالُوا نَشْهَدُ إِنَّكَ لَرَسُولُ اللَّهِ وَاللَّهُ يَعْلَمُ إِنَّكَ لَرَسُولُهُ وَاللَّهُ يَشْهَدُ إِنَّ الْمُنَافِقِينَ لَكَاذِبُونَ

***“When the hypocrites come to you, they say, ‘We bear witness that you are most surely Allah’s Apostle; and Allah knows that you are most surely His Apostle; and Allah bears witness that the hypocrites are surely liars.’”<sup>9</sup>***

The untruthfulness of the words of the unbelievers is because:

يَقُولُونَ بِأَفْوَاهِهِمْ مَا لَيْسَ فِي قُلُوبِهِمْ وَاللَّهُ أَعْلَمُ بِمَا يَكْتُمُونَ ...

***“... They say with their mouths what is not in their hearts; and Allah best knows what is in their hearts.”<sup>10</sup>***

The Prophet (S) states that a person who does not match his words with his actions only castigates himself because his words are indicative of the fact that he knows the truth and his obligations, denoting that proof has been made complete for him. It is natural that such an individual knows the truth and [even] recommends others to it, but he is negligent in his own actions, he only has to castigate himself.

This word of the Prophet (S) is directed at the preachers and sermonizers that they should be bound to their words and their actions ought to be a reflex of their beliefs and words.

Allah, the Exalted, castigates this section of people in the Glorious Qur’an when it states:

أَتَأْمُرُونَ النَّاسَ بِالْبِرِّ وَتَنْسَوْنَ أَنْفُسَكُمْ وَأَنْتُمْ تَتْلُونَ الْكِتَابَ أَفَلَا تَعْقِلُونَ

***“What! Do you enjoin men to be good and neglect your own souls while you read the Book, have***

***you then no sense?”<sup>11</sup>***

(Forgetting does not imply erasing from the memory, but denotes not practically putting your words into action because it is likely that man remembers his words but does not put them into action.)

When he advises others compassionately and says do this work, and quit a certain work, how can he himself forget to discharge that act? Does his heart break more for the others than for himself? Does he love other people more than he loves himself? Such a thing is not acceptable.

Imam ‘Ali (‘a) states:

“O creatures of Allah! Fear Allah! Fear Allah in regard to your own selves and those you love the most.”<sup>12</sup>

His Holiness’ intention is that you [obviously] love yourselves more than the others, and if you love other people, it is for the reason that they are of service to you, they make the means of pleasure, ease and prosperity ready for you and you derive gratification from companionship, conversation and association with them, therefore you are the origin and you want others for yourself. Now how do you compassionately advise others while you forget and do not feel sorry for yourselves and do not put what you say into action?

Allah states:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لِمَ تَقُولُونَ مَا لَا تَفْعَلُونَ \* كَبُرَ مَقْتًا عِنْدَ اللَّهِ أَنْ تَقُولُوا مَا لَا تَفْعَلُونَ

***“O you who believe! Why do you say that which you do not do? It is most hateful to Allah that you should say that which you do not do.”<sup>13</sup>***

## **The Role of Sin in Being Deprived of Subsistence**

“O Abu Dharr! All too often an individual gets deprived of the sustenance which has been pre-ordained for him because of the sin which he commits.”

This is another explanation intended to draw man’s attention to the bad effects which go with sin in this world for man and the deprivations that result from sin.

On the basis of the differences in [the levels of] knowledge, every person is spoken to in one tongue or another. If an individual has attained the station of love, it is said to him, “What kind of a lover are you who opposes your beloved?” A lover is one who always tries to find out what his beloved wants from him so as to fulfill it, and to discover what his beloved does not like so as to refrain from it, how possible is it for a lover to oppose his beloved who says do so and so and abstain from so and so. For those who

have the love of Allah and His saints [*awliya*], this is the best way of stopping them from committing sin.

It has to be brought to the attention of the lovers of the *Ahl al-Bayt* (‘a) that sin is detested by their beloved. The most abhorred works in the perception of the Imams (‘a) is sin. Sin is like a rotten corpse and people who have perceiving eyes and a strong inward intuition conceive its foul smell at a long distance. Now, how can a lover of the *Ahl al-Bayt* (‘a), who wants to get close to them, contaminate himself with something which causes their disgust?

If a person intends to go and see his friend, he gets rid of the bad smell of his mouth and body, and cleans and perfumes himself, so that his friend may not be bothered by him. Sin causes bad smell and contamination of our selves. If we love the *Ahl al-Bayt* (‘a) and would like to have a connection with them, we ought to cleanse our souls of contaminations so that they may take pleasure in having relationship with us. Therefore, the way of preventing individuals who have attained love of Allah and the *Ahl al-bayt* (‘a) from sinning is to incite their feelings of affection.

It goes without saying that all those who discharge the obligatory acts of worship quit the forbidden actions, but based on the levels of their knowledge, this love differs [from one man to another]. Sometimes, this love reaches such an extent that man, along the way of union with the Beloved, overlooks everything, even the eternal Garden of bliss:

“O my Lord! I can bear the fire of hell, but how can I bear being separated from you?”<sup>14</sup>

In “*Munajat-i Muhibban*” (lovers’ litany), the ninth litany of the “*Munajat-e Khamsa ‘Asharah*”, we read:

“O my Lord! Is there anyone who has tasted the sweetness of Your love and chosen other than You?”

If people have not attained that level of love of Allah and the Infallible Imams (‘a) enough to withhold them from committing sin, they have to be warned about the repercussions and consequences of sin. The tortures, being deprived of prosperity and paradise, the ominous effects of sin in the world and the hereafter have to be counted. That which motivates man to discharge his duties and to abstain from certain actions is fear and hope, fear of being driven away from bliss and hope of attaining benefit.

Therefore, the best and most practicable way of guiding man is drawing his attention to the ill consequences of sin in this world and the hereafter. This is the same method which the Noble Prophet (S) has employed in this section, because some people perceive the Day of Resurrection as far, despite that in accordance with the Islamic point of view, the hereafter is near and at hand, as Allah states:

إِنَّهُمْ يَرَوْنَهُ بَعِيدًا \* وَنَرَاهَا قَرِيبًا

**“Surely, they think it to be far off and we see it nigh.”<sup>15</sup>**

One of the worldly losses resulting from sin is being deprived of sustenance. Among the instances of

sustenance are daily food and clothing.

It has been narrated in a lot of *hadiths* that Allah, the Exalted, has pre-ordained the sustenance of every living creature and this pre-destination is sometimes definite [or fixed] and sometimes conditional [or suspended]; that is to say, it gets increased or decreased as a result of our works. Some of the good works result in the increase of sustenance and some evil deeds result in the decrease of sustenance.

Once we know that this sustenance which we sometimes earn by our own efforts and sometimes reaches us freely from Allah will be taken away from us as a result of our committing sin, we would commit sin less frequently.

## Sin in the Chain of Causes

Sin changes formulae and renders the physical causes ineffective. The Qur'an states to us that in addition to the apparent repercussions of wrongdoing, sin has other consequences too, whose connection with their causes is not discernable by the physical senses. The Qur'an states:

...وَمَا أَصَابَكُمْ مِنْ مُصِيبَةٍ فِيمَا كَسَبَتْ أَيْدِيكُمْ

***“And whatever affliction befalls you, it is on account of what your hands have wrought...”***<sup>16</sup>

In reality, in a world governed by the order of cause and effect, no phenomena can be considered as having no cause and on the other hand afflictions cannot be attributed to Allah who is the ultimate good; therefore, it is man who directs afflictions towards himself.

Elsewhere, the Qur'an states:

فَلْيَحْذَرِ الَّذِينَ يُخَالِفُونَ عَنْ أَمْرِهِ أَنْ تُصِيبَهُمْ فِتْنَةٌ أَوْ يُصِيبَهُمْ عَذَابٌ أَلِيمٌ ...

***“...Therefore, let those beware who go against His order lest a trial afflict them or there befall them a painful chastisement.”***<sup>17</sup>

Therefore, the verses of the Qur'an clarify this truth that a great deal of ordeals and deprivations result from sin, in the same way that good works and piety cause the downpour of graces and blessings.

...وَلَوْ أَنَّ أَهْلَ الْقُرَى آمَنُوا وَاتَّقَوْا لَفَتَحْنَا عَلَيْهِم بَرَكَاتٍ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ وَالْأَرْضِ

***“And if the people of the towns had believed and guarded (against evil), We would certainly have opened up for them blessings from the heaven and the earth...”***<sup>18</sup>

In some instances the relationship which exists between sin and the affliction resulting therefrom is more or less discernable, like sins which cause certain illnesses, but this relationship is not perceptible in all instances. Sometimes, certain consequences arising from wrongdoing are not perceivable to man, like when man prepares food and [unfortunately or fortunately] something dirty and contaminating falls into it at the time of consumption, sustenance that was ready but is suddenly lost by man.

Now, extend this sustenance to other foods and things as well; because all the graces are sustenance. A house is sustenance, a car is sustenance, and everything else which man makes use of is sustenance. In many instances being deprived of them is a result of committing sin.

Sustenance ought to be extended to spiritual sustenance too, because whatever brings about the perfection of our souls is sustenance too. Knowledge and faith are provisions as well; the favor of worship too is sustenance.

Sometimes, committing sin causes man to be deprived of the opportunity to worship. It has been narrated in a *hadith* that it is likely that man is unsuccessful at waking up at night to fulfill the recommendable prayers as a result of sin, even if he makes himself ready and tries to wake up on time, but either he does not wake up from sleep altogether or indolence stops him from fulfilling that recommendable duty. Therefore, depriving man of the grace to worship is one of the mal-effects of sin.

For every reason paying attention to the bad effects of sin is one of the causes which can prevent man from committing sin: that he ought to think that sin makes his economic endeavors ineffective and deprives him of sustenance.

Because of the relationship which exists between sin and deprivations and afflictions, when some great ethical personalities got afflicted by affliction, they used to think about what sin they have committed to be afflicted by this ordeal. They narrate that one of the great ethical mentors in Tehran was passing in an alley when an animal [suddenly] scared him, he sat down [at once] and sunk deep into thought as to what sin he had committed so as to deserve the bother of the animal!

## **Guarding the Tongue and Keeping Aloof from Vain Pursuits**

“O Abu Dharr! Abstain from whatever is not for your benefit and not to utter what has no reward for you and protect your tongue in the same way that you safeguard your money.”

What has been mentioned in this section is complementary to the previous explanations about preventing an individual from sin. A person who wants to abstain from sin has to put limits on himself, as has been said that whoever is moving along a precipice ought to fear lest he falls into it. A person who wants to abstain from sin has to keep aloof from its prerequisites, and quit some of the things that are permissible. For instance, if one wants to abstain from looking at strange people, they ought to avoid looking at some of their close relatives.

If someone wants to stop listening to *haram* (forbidden) music, he ought to stop listening to *halal* (permissible) music first. If one wants to avoid being contaminated by lies and gossip, he ought to avoid conversations which are likely to include lies. Of course, it is difficult for man to abstain from all the permissible things which are likely to propel him towards sin, especially a person who is at the beginning of the journey, but people who intend to attain spiritual perfection of the soul have to trudge this course, whether they like it or not.

The Noble Prophet (S) advises Abu Dharr to abstain from vain activities, in the same way that the Qur'an believes prosperity and bliss as embedded in abstinence from vain pursuits:

قَدْ أَفْلَحَ الْمُؤْمِنُونَ \* الَّذِينَ هُمْ فِي صَلَاتِهِمْ خَاشِعُونَ \* وَالَّذِينَ هُمْ عَنِ اللَّغْوِ مُعْرِضُونَ

***“Successful indeed are the believers, who are humble in their prayers, and who keep aloof from what is vain.”<sup>19</sup>***

A person who wants to attain prosperity and bliss has to keep aloof from actions which have no benefit for him, even if those words are permissible, and utilize his time doing profitable and fruitful work.

The Noble Prophet's (S) other advice to Abu Dharr is that he ought to abstain from words that are not beneficial to him.

Man ought to be very sensitive with regard to his tongue. One must try to abstain from uttering even permissible words because sometimes one word is uttered from one's mouth which results in bad worldly and heavenly effects. The reason why it has repeatedly been said in the *hadiths* to withhold your tongues and do not utter useless words is because sometimes man cannot manage to control his tongue and gets affected by lies, gossip and making fun of others and the rest of the diseases of the tongue. It is for this reason that some of the great men preferred to stay as quiet as possible.

The Noble Prophet (S) states that you ought to strive to guard your tongue in the same way that you make effort to safeguard money and gold coins. Look at the way you protect your money, you put it in a safe and close its door strongly and put it in a safe place, guard your tongue, whose value is more than that of money, in the same way too. Allah has provided you with barriers for your mouth, and for those barriers He has provided teeth and lips which limit the tongue within those barriers.

Therefore, try not to free it. Abstain from even permissible words because you expend your energy and strength in vain and in this same way you will be propelled towards sin and errors bit by bit until finally you will be pulled towards sin and forbidden actions [*muharramat*]. How much difference is there between talking about other people and gossiping [*ghaybah*]? Talking about other people along with gossip is a great sin which is seventy times greater than committing fornication in the Ka'bah! This is not a difference we can hope to reduce bit by bit once we get afflicted by it.

- [1.](#) Surat al-Furqan 25:28–29.
- [2.](#) Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 2, p. 111, hadith 25.
- [3.](#) Ibid., vol. 1, p. 208.
- [4.](#) Usul al-Kafi, vol. 1, p. 46.
- [5.](#) Surat al-Hashr 59:19.
- [6.](#) Surat al-Kahf 18:49.
- [7.](#) Surat al-Baqarah 2:177.
- [8.](#) Tafsir al-Mizan, vol. 1, p. 43.
- [9.](#) Surat al-Munafiqun 63:1.
- [10.](#) Surat Al 'Imran 3:167.
- [11.](#) Surat Baqarah 2:44.
- [12.](#) Nahj al-Balaghah, p. 494, sermon [khutbah] 156, trans. Fayd al-Islam.
- [13.](#) Surat al-Saff 61:2–3.
- [14.](#) Du'a' al-Kumayl.
- [15.](#) Surat al-Ma'arij 70:6–7.
- [16.](#) Surat al-Shawra 42:30.
- [17.](#) Surat al-Nur 24:63.
- [18.](#) Surat al-A'raf 7:96.
- [19.](#) Surat al-Mu'minun 23:1–3.

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