

## Second Hadith: Ostentation (Riya')

بِالسَّنَدِ الْمُتَّصِلِ إِلَى مُحَمَّدِ بْنِ يَعْقُوبَ عَنْ عَلِيِّ بْنِ إِبْرَاهِيمَ، عَنْ أَبِيهِ، عَنِ ابْنِ أَبِي عُمَيْرٍ، عَنِ أَبِي الْمَغْرَا عَنْ يَزِيدَ بْنِ خَلِيفَةَ قَالَ: قَالَ أَبُو عَبْدِ اللَّهِ عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ: كُلُّ رِيَاءٍ شِرْكٌ. إِنَّهُ مَنْ عَمِلَ لِلنَّاسِ كَانَ ثَوَابُهُ عَلَى النَّاسِ، وَمَنْ عَمِلَ لِلَّهِ كَانَ ثَوَابُهُ عَلَى اللَّهِ.

(On the authority of the above-mentioned narrators), Yazid ibn Khalifah reports from Imam al-Sadiq (A) that he said, “Riya in any of its forms amounts to shirk, (polytheism); verily, one who works for the people, his reward lies with them, and one who works for God his reward lies with God.”<sup>1</sup>

*Riya'* means to falsely make oneself appear to be virtuous, good natured or a true believer in God before the people for the sake of earning their respect and admiration, or with the purpose of gaining good reputation among them. The hypocrite feigns integrity, uprightness, virtue, honesty and piety without an authentic intention of acquiring these traits for the sake of God. It has several grades and degrees.

The first stage is comprised of two steps:

1. At the first step an individual makes a display of his religious beliefs, and shows off his knowledge of the religious teachings in order to project himself as an honest person in the eyes of people to gain their confidence and respect. Such a kind of person tries to make a display of his trust in God and His Power, saying that he does not believe in any being except Him. He also tries to present himself as a staunch believer through various means, especially by declaring that he depends on none but God. Or such a person, with his gestures and utterances, poses himself to be a staunch follower of the true faith, and this is a more common kind of *riya'* than the first one. For instance, when the trust in God or submission to His Will is discussed, he wags his head in affirmation with a sigh, and thus deceives people giving an impression that he is one of the true believers.

2. The second step on the path of *riya'* is represented by those who eradicate false belief from their hearts and, through such purification, want to attain power and respect among people; they sometimes articulate their belief overtly, sometimes make a covert display of their purity.

The second stage, too, is comprised of two steps:

1. At the first step an individual demonstrates his piety and virtuous deeds.
2. At the second step one pretends to have done away with the antitheses of piety and virtue, and behaves in such a manner as if he is free from all vices, and the aim of all this is to win the confidence of others.

The third stage of *Riya'*, which is considered to be overt by the *fuqaha'*, also consists of two steps:

1. The first step is marked by an individual's performance of the prescribed forms of piety, prayers and good deeds in front of other people with the intention of demonstrating his good qualities and praiseworthy habits, or by his posture as a person who strictly adheres to the religious commands on purely rational grounds, and thus wishing to win the hearts of people and attracting their attention towards himself. Such acts, whether performed in total or in part, with the motive of *Riya'*, to please the others, are discussed in the books of *fiqh*.
2. At the second step, one abstains from evil deeds for the purpose of *riya'* only.

## Riya' In Faith or Creed

Remember that hypocrisy in religious faith is the worst kind of hypocrisy; its retribution also is the severest and its bad effects are far greater and more dangerous than those of other forms of hypocrisy. One who is guilty of this sin, if he does not believe genuinely in those ideas which he pretends to believe in, is counted among the *munafiqun* (hypocrites), whose place is in the Fire, and he is doomed to eternal damnation and his punishment is the severest of punishments. But if he believes in them, and for the sake of winning peoples' hearts and for obtaining worldly honor and dignity he makes an ostentation of them, though he is not reckoned among *munafiqun*, this kind of hypocrisy will cause the light of faith to fade away from his heart and to make the darkness of infidelity and faithlessness to occupy the domain of his heart.

Because in the first instance this person commits polytheism (*shirk*) of the covert type; while his religious beliefs and acts should purely be meant for God and His Holy Essence, he is guilty of committing the sin of doing them for others and thus makes them to share what should absolutely belong to Him only. In this way he makes others partners to God and has given permission to the Devil to occupy his heart as if it does not belong to God. It has been mentioned earlier that faith emerges from the depths of the heart, and in this matter mere abstract knowledge does not suffice. It has been stated in the tradition that any kind of *riya'* is polytheism, but this vice, this disastrous atrocity, this hidden cruelty (to one's own self), and this vicious habit, results in nullifying the good deeds, and in surrender of the realm of the heart to other than God.

The darkness of this vice causes man to leave this world as an unbeliever in God, and the feigned faith

that he had assumed proves nothing more than a senseless and empty profession; it is a form without content, a body without soul and a skull without brain; and in no way is acceptable to God. This fact is confirmed by a tradition mentioned in *al-Kafi*, narrated by ‘Ali ibn Salim:

سَمِعْتُ أَبَا عَبْدِ اللَّهِ، عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ، يَقُولُ: قَالَ اللَّهُ، عَزَّ وَجَلَّ: أَنَا خَيْرُ شَرِيكَ؛ مَنْ أَشْرَكَ مَعِيَ غَيْرِي فِي عَمَلٍ عَمِلَهُ لَمْ أَقْبَلْهُ إِلَّا مَا كَانَ لِي خَالِصاً.

The narrator of the tradition says that he heard Imam al-Sadiq (A) saying that God Almighty said, “I am the best of friends; one who makes others My partners in any matter, his deeds are not acceptable to Me. I accept only those acts that are purely done for My sake.”<sup>2</sup>

Hence, it is clear that if the spiritual acts (of the heart) are not performed with sincerity of the heart, they will neither be the object of attention of the Almighty, nor will He acknowledge them, and they will be credited in the account of that partner—the person, for whose sake they were performed. Thus the spiritual acts performed for the sake of somebody else, not for God, will surpass the limits of polytheism, and will enter the domain of *kufr* (infidelity). It may even be said that the performer of such adulterated acts would be treated as one of the *munafiqun*.

As his polytheism is not visible, his hypocrisy also is hidden. He, the poor fellow, considers himself to be a believer, whereas in reality he is an idolater, and he is condemned to taste the chastisement prescribed for the *munafiqun*. How pitiable is the plight of one whose good deeds are to terminate in *nifaq*.

## Difference between Knowledge and Belief

Know that faith or belief is something different from the knowledge of God, the Unity of His Being, and His other Attributes—like *sifat al-kamaliyyah* (the Attributes of Perfection), the Positive Attributes, *sifat al-jalaliyyah* (the Attributes of Glory), and the Negative Attributes, etc. and the knowledge of angels, holy scriptures, and the Last Day. Anyone who possesses the knowledge of all these things is not necessarily a believer. The Devil possesses the knowledge of all these things more than I and you or any other individual, but still he is an unbeliever. The faith is a yearning of the heart—an inner experience, which if not genuine, does not become faith.

Anyone who has gained knowledge of religion through rational demonstrations and arguments, ought to submit to them whole-heartedly with the totality of his being and obey the call of his heart dutifully i.e. with complete surrender to God, with humility and fear—and accept all the responsibilities expected of him sincerely without any question. Only then he can become a perfect *mumin*. Culmination of the faith is tranquility and peace of mind. When the light of faith is stabilized, it brings with it tranquility of the heart, and this is something which does not issue from knowledge.

It is possible that reason may accept something, which is according to its dictates and logic, but the heart may not be ready to agree with it, thus making knowledge useless. For instance, you know through your reason that a dead person cannot do any harm and that all the dead in the world do not possess any power of action, even as much power as is possessed by a fly, and that all the physical and spiritual faculties depart as soon as one is dead; but since your heart has not accepted it and has not approved of the judgment of the mind, you cannot spend a dark night with a dead body. But if your heart yields to your mind and approves of its judgment, this job will no more be difficult for you. After some effort the heart resigns to the dictates of reason, then no dread of the dead remains in the heart.

Therefore, it is clear that the submission, which is the gratification and comfort of the heart, is quite a different thing from knowledge, which is the gratification of the mind. It is possible that one can logically prove the existence of the Great Intelligent Designer, the Unity of His Divine Being, the Day of Judgment and other true beliefs, but such a belief cannot be considered as faith (*iman*), and the person cannot be regarded as a mu'min, but he may be counted among the non-believers, hypocrites and polytheists.

Today my eyes and yours are closed, and we do not possess any divine vision. Our terrestrial eyes are unable to perceive, but when the hidden is revealed and the kingdom of heaven is manifested, the physical world vanishes and reality is disclosed; you will realize that you were not a believer in God, and your rational judgment was not congruous with your faith. Unless the words, (لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ) —there is no god except God— are inscribed on the tablet of the heart with the pen of reason, man is not a true believer in the Unity of God.

When this sacred and holy dictum is impressed on the heart, the domain of the heart turns by itself into the kingdom of God Almighty. Then only man does not see anyone else as efficient in the realm of truth; he does not expect any rank, any distinction or riches from anybody else; he does not seek for honor and fame with the help of others; and his heart does not become hypocritical and profane.

Therefore, if you see that *riya'* is stealing into your heart, you should realize that your heart has not really surrendered itself to reason, and faith has not illuminated your heart yet; for you consider others to be your God and see them as efficient agents in the world, and you do not trust Him, the only God; it means that you have joined the company of hypocrites, polytheists and idolaters.

## **Dangerous Effects of Riya'**

O, you given to *riya'*, who have entrusted your truthful beliefs and religious understanding to the custody of the enemy of God—the Devil, and have attributed to others what specifically belongs to God, you have exchanged those lights which would have illuminated your heart and spirit, and would have proved to be the source of your salvation and eternal bliss, which would have been responsible for being blessed with Beatific Vision and acquiring Divine nearness, with the dreadful darkness of eternal misfortunes; you have lost the other-worldly treasures, and have alienated yourself from the most sacred threshold of the Beloved, and have deprived yourself of the sight of the visage of the Most High.

Be prepared for the darkness, which is not to be followed by any ray of light; the scorn and shame from which there is no release; the diseases which have no cure; the death after which there is no life; and the fire which is ignited from within the depths of the heart to engulf the whole region of your spirit, as well as the realm of the body. It is beyond your capacity and mine to conceive or perceive the intensity of that fire, as God Almighty has mentioned in His Holy Book:

﴿نَارُ اللَّهِ الْمُوقَدَةُ الَّتِي تَطَّلِعُ عَلَى الْأَفْئِدَةِ﴾

***(It is) the fire of Allah, kindled, which leapeth up over the hearts of men. (104:6-7)***

The effect of the fire, which is kindled by God, will be that it would consume the hearts as well. No fire can consume the heart except that which is kindled in the hell. If the belief in the Unity of God, which is inherently engrained in human nature, is abandoned and is replaced with idolatry and infidelity, no intercession of any intercessor will be available to him, and man will be destined to suffer eternal damnation. What kind of chastisement will it be? It will be the effect of the Divine wrath, issuing from His sense of Honor.

Thus, my friend, do not make yourself an object of the Divine wrath for the sake of an illusion, an insignificant and trivial popularity in the eyes of weak creatures of God, and for the sake of worthless attention of hopeless human beings. Do not make a bargain of those Divine blessings, those infinite favors and benevolences with popularity among people, which is not even effective and long-lasting, from which you cannot derive any benefit except inviting ultimate shame and regret. And while your relations are severed with this world of illusion and deception and you cease to act, no regret and sorrow will be of avail.

## **An Advice for Getting Rid of the Curse of Riya'**

What I am going to mention here to you is expected to work effectively for curing this disease of the heart, your as well as others'. It shall be also according to the rational dictates as well as is in conformity with the truths of revelation and tradition of the *Ma'sumin* (the infallibles). It is as well verifiable on the basis of the teachings of the Quran and your and my reason. God Almighty, by means of His all embracing power and might, which governs the whole universe and is immanent in the realms of all possible beings, takes under His control the hearts of all His servants, as no one is outside the range of His power and the domain of His domination; and no one should occupy the hearts of human beings without His permission and His creative Will; not even the person himself has any control over his own heart without the permission of God Almighty. This fact has been revealed implicitly and explicitly in the Quran as well as the traditions of the members of the Household (*Ahl al-Bayt*) of the Prophet (S).

Hence, God Almighty is the real owner of the hearts and has sovereignty over them, and you, a helpless and weak creature of Him, you cannot claim to be the master of your heart, without His leave. His Will is

predominant over ours and other creatures' resolution. Therefore, your hypocrisy and deceit, if it is meant for attracting the attention of His servants and for earning respect and popularity among them, know that it cannot bear any fruits, for this is totally beyond your powers, and it belongs to the jurisdiction of His power.

He is the owner and the ruler of the hearts. He makes the hearts of the people a seat of love for whomsoever He likes. It is possible that your act produces a result just contrary to your wish. Pay attention to what we have seen and heard about the double-faced hypocrites, whose hearts were not pure; they were ultimately condemned to be disgraced; whatever they intended, they could not achieve, but something that they did not desire happened to them. The following tradition in *al-Kafi* points to the same fact:

عَنْ جَرَّاحِ الْمَدَائِنِيِّ، عَنْ أَبِي عَبْدِ اللَّهِ، عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ، فِي قَوْلِ اللَّهِ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ: ﴿فَمَنْ كَانَ يَرْجُو لِقَاءَ رَبِّهِ فَلْيَعْمَلْ عَمَلًا صَالِحًا وَلَا يُشْرِكْ بِعِبَادَةِ رَبِّهِ أَحَدًا﴾. قَالَ: الرَّجُلُ يَعْمَلُ شَيْئًا مِنَ الثَّوَابِ لَا يَطْلُبُ بِهِ وَجْهَ اللَّهِ إِنَّمَا يَطْلُبُ تَرْكِيَةَ النَّاسِ يَشْتَهِي أَنْ يُسْمَعَ بِهِ النَّاسُ، فَهَذَا الَّذِي أُشْرِكَ بِعِبَادَةِ رَبِّهِ. ثُمَّ قَالَ: مَا مِنْ عَبْدٍ أَسْرَّ خَيْرًا فَذَهَبَتْ الْأَيَّامُ أَبَدًا حَتَّى يُظْهَرَ اللَّهُ لَهُ خَيْرًا، وَمَا مِنْ عَبْدٍ يُسِرُّ شَرًّا فَذَهَبَتْ الْأَيَّامُ أَبَدًا حَتَّى يُظْهَرَ اللَّهُ لَهُ شَرًّا.

The narrator of the tradition, Jarrah al-Mada'ini, reports from Imam al-Sadiq (A) that he asked the Imam about the words of the Almighty that 'whosoever is desirous of meeting his Creator, he should perform virtuous deeds and should not ascribe any partner to God in his worship,' seeking an explanation. Imam al-Sadiq (A) said, 'A person who performs good deeds but not for the sake of being blessed with the vision of his God, his acts are aimed at being considered as pious by the people, and he wishes that people should know about his deeds; such a person is counted among polytheists, who have ascribed partners to God.' The Imam (A) continued: 'There is none in the world, who has concealed his good deeds and after passage of time God has not revealed them. And there is none in the world who could conceal his wicked deeds for ever, for they were exposed by God before he passed away from the world.'<sup>3</sup>

Hence, my dear friend! try to be worthy in the eyes of God. Try to win the hearts of the creatures by first pleasing the real owner of the hearts, so that He comes to your rescue. Work for the sake of God. As a consequence God Almighty, besides showering His favors and excellences upon you in the Hereafter, will bestow His honors and favors on you in this world as well, and will befriend you. He will raise your status in the eyes of people and will exalt you in both the worlds. But the only thing that you have to do is to sincerely cultivate the love of God in your heart, untainted and unspoiled, with struggle and effort.

Purify your inner self so that your actions also will be pure and untainted by the love of the world or hatred of fellow beings; your spirit should be pure and untainted and all the infirmities and corruptions of the soul should be eliminated. Of what advantage is the love or hatred of the weak creatures of God, and gaining favor and name among them? Even if it has some benefit, it is insignificant and short-lived. It is possible that this love of the world may lead you to hypocrisy, and God forbid, it may convert you

into a polytheist or a hypocrite or an unbeliever.

If you are not disgraced in this world, you will be surely disgraced in the other world, in Almighty's court of justice, in front of His truthful and worthy servants, in front of His esteemed prophets and those angels who are nearest to God, and you will have to hang down your head in shame, and you will be left in a state of utter helplessness. Can you imagine the disgrace of that day? God alone knows what sort of darkness is to follow that disgrace. It will be the day, as God Almighty has said:

﴿وَيَقُولُ الْكَافِرُ يَا لَيْتَنِي كُنْتُ تُرَابًا﴾

***And the disbeliever will cry: 'Would that I were dust'. (78:40)***

Then it will be of no good. You, poor fellow, for the sake of a trifling love, for the sake of a fame of no avail among the creatures of God, you did not care for the promised Divine favors and have failed to gain His good pleasure, and have incurred His indignation and wrath instead.

The deeds by means of which you could have gained Divine favors, could have secured a happy and blissful life in eternity, and could have attained the highest station in the highest heaven; you have replaced it with the darkness of polytheism and hypocrisy, and have procured for yourself regret, shame and the severest chastisement, and have converted yourself into a 'sijjin' (an inhabitant of the lowest or dungeon of hell) instead. It occurs in the tradition in *al-Kafi* that it has been reported from Imam al-Sadiq (A) that the Prophet (S) said: 'Indeed when the angel of God joyously takes to the higher heaven the good deeds of a man, as he carries the good deeds heavenward, God Almighty orders him to place those deeds in 'Sijjin', since they were not performed for Him alone.<sup>4</sup>

You and I cannot imagine what 'Sijjin' is, and which kind of demons are appointed there; and you cannot contemplate the horrors inflicted upon the sinners there. And once we have been made to face it, it will not be possible for us to get rid of it, as all the means of repentance shall be cut off. Wake up my friend! and cast away your negligence and carelessness, and weigh your actions in the balance of your reason, before they are weighed and measured in the other world. And cleanse the mirror of your heart of the rust of polytheism, hypocrisy, and two-facedness.

Do not allow the rust of impurity of polytheism and infidelity to gather in such a way that it cannot be cleansed with the fire of the other world. Do not allow the light of your nature to be turned into the gloom of apostasy. Do not be a traitor to yourself and do not destroy what God has entrusted to you, calling it:

﴿فِطْرَةَ اللَّهِ الَّتِي فَطَرَ النَّاسَ عَلَيْهَا﴾

***(It is) the nature (framed) of Allah in which He hath created man. (30:30)***

Therefore, burnish the mirror of the heart, so that the light of Divine magnificence may be reflected in it, and may make you forget this world and everything in it, and your heart is kindled with the fire of His love, so that all other attachments and associations may be dissolved in such a manner that you do not spurn a single moment for the sake of the worldly things; and you derive such a pleasure from His remembrance that all the animal pleasures may appear to you a gimmick. If you cannot attain this station, even then do not give up the gifts of God that are promised to be given in the next world and are mentioned in the Quran and the traditions of the Ma'sumin (A), for the sake of gaining the short-lived favor of the weak creatures of God. Do not deprive yourself of all the Divine favors and do not make a bargain of the eternal felicity with the everlasting distress.

## Sincerity in Action

Know that the real King of kings, the true Giver of real bounties, has bestowed upon us all these favors. He created all these things for us and prepared them for us even before we came into this world. He made our food a balanced diet and acceptable to our weak stomach—a patron and servant who serves us with an instinctive and natural love. He created for us suitable climes and weathers and has bestowed upon us all other seen and unseen favors here and in the other world, and after piling up all these gifts for us, He asks us to keep our hearts pure for His occupation, so that we ourselves may be benefited from His presence.

In spite of all these warnings and cautions we still do not obey Him and do not pay heed to His words and do not act according to His wish. What an act of gross transgression. With whom are we trying to wage a war, the consequences of which we will have to face? Any slightest harm cannot be caused to His Kingdom, and we cannot exclude ourselves from His reign of power either. If we are acting like the polytheists we are causing harm to ourselves, because:

﴿فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ غَنِيٌّ عَنِ الْعَالَمِينَ﴾

### ***Lo! Allah is independent of (all) creatures. (3:97)***

He does not need our worship, our service or our obedience. Any disobedience, polytheism and two-facedness on our part will not cause any harm to His Empire, but as He is (أَرْحَمُ الرَّاحِمِينَ) —the Most Merciful of the merciful—, His boundless mercy and compassion, and His perfect wisdom require of us the pursuance of the right path, and for this purpose He made clear the difference between good and evil, beautiful and ugly to us and warned us of the perils and hazards to be met on the road of human perfection and the path of true felicity.

We are indebted to God Almighty for this great guidance and we have to show, with all humility, great respect towards Him in our worships, our devotion and our supplications, whose importance we cannot comprehend unless we gain another-worldly vision. As long as we sojourn in this narrow physical world,

confined to the limits of the sequence of time and shackles of space, we cannot comprehend the infiniteness of the realm of His power, and we cannot even thank Him in our prayers and supplications for His guidance.

Never let the idea enter our mind, that by our service and devotion we are doing some favor to His prophets, His chosen servants, and the great *ulama* of the Ummah. They are our benefactors, who have taken the charge of leading the Ummah towards felicity and deliverance, and who have accepted the responsibility of our emancipation from the darkness and shadows of ignorance and misfortunes, taking us towards the realms of light and joy and greatness.

What a great responsibility they took upon themselves, and what horrible pains and troubles they underwent for the sake of our instruction, in order to deliver us from those obscurities and darkneses, that were the result of vain beliefs and compound ignorance, and the chastisements that were to befall us as a result of our bad habits and villainies. They wanted to save us from those hideous forms and dreadful figures in the other world that would be the outcome of our wicked deeds, and they helped us to reach the regions of light, joy and comfort and the spheres of serenity and composure, whose image our mind would fail to visualize.

This physical world in spite of its vastness is so limited and narrow that we cannot imagine a heavenly hour with our this-worldly vision. Our vision does not possess enough power to behold the magnificence of that world, which has been described in the speeches of the holy prophets of God, especially in the all-embracing revelations of the *Khatim al-nabiyyin* (Seal of the prophets), who perceived those truths through Divine revelations, saw them, heard them, and then asked us to acquire them.

And we, like recalcitrant children, disobey the commands of the wise, and even do not pay heed to the dictates of our own reason, always being more than ready to oppose the Divinely guided ones. And those sanctified pious souls, out of the love and kindness that they possessed for the creatures of God, did never fall short of their duty, did never appeal to our meaner and baser faculties by bribing them to attract us towards heaven and felicity; they never tried to make us yield through intimidation or force.

They did not either demand any remuneration or reward for the services they rendered. The remuneration asked by the Prophet (S) (مَوَدَّةُ ذِي الْقُرْبَى) —kindness for his kinsfolk—, which is not really a payment for his services, is also meant for our own benefit, being the brightest of our achievements in the next world. Our sense of indebtedness to them in fact serves ourselves and we are benefited more from it than they are. How are they benefited by the righteous acts of poor beings like us?

In what way will our sincerity and obedience do them any good? In what way do you and I consider our humble selves benefactors of the guides of the Ummah, from an ordinary *faqih* to the great Prophet (S) and God Almighty? All of them have in their own right fulfilled their function of guiding us and showing the right path, for which we are indebted to them and even a fraction of it we cannot pay back in this world. Nothing of this world is worthy of the repayment of their debt:

فَلِلَّهِ وَلِرَسُولِهِ وَلِأَوْلِيَائِهِ الْمِنَّةُ.

It is to God, His Prophet (S), and His saints to whom all owe gratitude.

As God Almighty has said:

﴿قُلْ لَا تَمُنُّوا عَلَيَّ إِسْلَامَكُمْ بَلِ اللَّهُ يَمُنُّ عَلَيْكُمْ أَنْ هَدَاكُمْ لِلْإِيمَانِ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ صَادِقِينَ﴾

**Say: Deem not your surrender a favor unto me; nay, but Allah does confer a favor on you, inasmuch as He hath led you to the faith, if ye are earnest. Lo. Allah knows the Unseen of the heavens and the earth. And Allah is Seer of what you do. (49: 17-18)**

Hence, if we are sincere in our faith in God, it is in itself a favor bestowed upon us by God. God Almighty is Omniscient, and has the knowledge of the hidden. He is Omniscient, knows the inner, hidden reality of all our actions, and He is fully aware of the nature of our faith and the extent and degree of our submission to His Will.

We, the helpless creatures, who do not know the reality, acquire our knowledge from the *faqih* and think that we have done favor to him. We offer congregational prayers behind an '*alim*', and we assume that we have conferred a favor on him, whereas, in fact, we are indebted to him. We do not realize this, and, therefore, this faulty outlook turns the effects of our deeds upside down and drags us into '*Sijjin*' making our actions worthless.

## The Second Stage of Riya'

At this stage, though *riya'* is of lesser intensity than it is at the first stage, but it is possible that if the hypocrite does not heed the warnings, and repeatedly behaves in the same way (the *riya'* of action) it is likely to terminate in the *riya'* of the former stage—the *riya'* of faith. We have already mentioned in the exposition of the previous tradition that in the '*Alam al-malakut* (the celestial world) man may have a different form other than the human form. Those forms will be in accordance with the state of one's soul and its traits.

If you possess good human qualities, in the other world those qualities will retain you in the human form, provided they are not deviated from the path of moderation. Good faculties will be considered as true merits only when the sensual self does not interfere with them, and the self does not play any role in their formation. Our respected teacher and Shaykh Ayatullah Shahabadi used to say that the measure of the false and invalid spiritual practice and true religious spiritual struggle is as to what extent selfishness is involved in such practices, i.e. whether all spiritual effort is for God or for selfish motives.

If the wayfarer on the heavenly journey treads a selfish path and his spiritual exercises are meant for

acquiring powers for worldly ends, his efforts are rendered invalid, and his *suluk* (progress on mystic path) will lead him to the calamity of the other world. The false claims of spirituality are usually made by such people. And if the wayfarer treads the right path, and is genuinely in search of God, his devotion is within the bounds of the *Shari'ah*, and God will help him, as promised in the following verse of the Quran:

﴿وَالَّذِينَ جَاهَدُوا فِينَا لَنَهْدِيَنَّهُمْ سُبُلَنَا﴾

***As for those who strive for Us, We surely guide them to Our paths. (29:69)***

Hence, his actions will lead him to felicity; egoism will be eliminated and self-conceit and pride will recede. This is quite clear that anyone who demonstrates his good deeds before people, his aim is a selfish aim, and he will be branded as a selfish, self-conceited, egoistic and egocentric person, and his godliness will be considered as nothing but false and pretentious, which will invalidate his good deeds. As the domain of your existence is replete with the feelings of self-love, the lust for wealth, power and fame, and the wish for ruling over the creatures of God, your good deeds and your excellences cannot be adjudged as virtuous deeds, and your moral behavior is far away from truly religious morality.

The operating force in your realm is satanic and your inner state is not a human condition. When you will open your eyes in the other world, you will perceive yourself in an inhuman form, similar to one of those of the devils. For such selves, which are dens of the Satan, it is impossible to gain religious knowledge and learn the spirit of *tawhid*. Unless the realm of your inner self is converted into a human state and your heart is purged of impurities and unholiness, you cannot be benefited from spiritual exercises, as God Almighty states in a *hadith qudsi*:

لَا تَسْعُنِي أَرْضِي وَلَا سَمَائِي، بَلْ يَسْعُنِي قَلْبُ عَبْدِي الْمُؤْمِنِ

Neither [the vastness of] My earth, nor [that of] My heaven can contain Me. Indeed it is the heart of the man of faith, which can contain Me.

There is no clearer sign in the earth and in the heavens of the elegance of the Beloved than the heart of a true believer (*mu'min*).

The believer's heart is in the occupation of God, not at the disposal of the self. The heart of the believer is not self-willed, nor is it vagrant. It is said of it:

قَلْبُ الْمُؤْمِنِ بَيْنَ إصْبَعِي الرَّحْمَانِ، يُقَلِّبُهُ كَيْفَ يَشَاءُ

The heart of the true believer (*mu'min*) lies between two fingers of God, that He may turn it whatever

way He pleases.

O you, the poor creature, who worships the self and the Devil and ignorance are the agencies operating in the realm of your heart, you yourself have prevented the hands of God from handling your heart. What sort of faith you are required to possess that your heart be the object of Divine illumination, absolute rule of the Truth may prevail there?

Make it a point that unless you change yourself, and as long as the bad habit of ostentatiousness and vanity dominates your deeds, you will be branded as an unbeliever and you will be grouped with the *munafiqun* (hypocrites), even though you imagine yourself to be a believer in God and as one who has resigned himself to the Will of God.

### The Value Of Human Existence As A Trustee Of Divine Honor

My friend! wake up from the slumber of forgetfulness and carelessness, be aware, do not let sleep overtake your senses, and know that God Almighty has created you for His own sake, as stated in one *hadith qudsi*:

يَا ابْنَ آدَمَ؛ خَلَقْتُ الْأَشْيَاءَ لَكَ وَخَلَقْتُكَ لِأَجْلِي.

O progeny of Adam, We have made everything for you and you for Our service.

He has made your heart His own habitation. You and your hearts are the abodes of Divine honor. God Almighty is intolerant regarding His Dignity and honor. Do not be careless in this regard, and do not justify any violation of the Divine principles; and be afraid of His retribution so that you may not be disgraced and made infamous in this world in such a way that despite all efforts you are not able to undo what may befall you.

You are guilty of violation of Divine honor in your heart that belongs to the celestial world, in front of the angels of God and His prophets. The moral excellences through which the saints of God (*awliya' Allah*) acquired resemblance to Him, are being surrendered by you to others than God, and you are surrendering your heart, the seat of God, to His enemy, thus committing *shirk* (polytheism) in the heart of your hearts.

Be afraid of God Almighty, Who besides bringing down your other-worldly image and degrading you in front of His angels and His prophets, will also expose and dishonor you in this world itself and you will be condemned to unmeasured indignity which shall be also irreparable, and irremediable, an infamy that cannot be redressed. God Almighty is *Sattar*, He conceals the sins, but He is jealous also. He is (أَرْحَمُ الرَّاحِمِينَ) —the Most Merciful of the merciful—, but at the same time He is —(أَشَدُّ الْمُعَاقِبِينَ) the severest of the punishers— also. He Himself says that He covers up bad deeds as long as they do not cross certain limits. God forbid, lest the gravity of your deeds should arouse His anger and should it overcome His

tolerance and willingness to conceal sins, as you have read in the *hadith*.

Hence, come to your senses, seek refuge in God and turn back to Him, for God Almighty is the Compassionate and always seeks for an excuse to shower His mercy. If you ask for His forgiveness, He will readily forgive you, and will cover up your blemishes and past deeds, so that no one will be able to know about them, and He will make you a man of great distinctions, a paragon of virtues and an image of His Attributes.

He will make your will consummate in the next world as His own Will is executed throughout the cosmos. It is narrated in a *hadith* that when the people are placed in the Paradise, a message from the Almighty will be given to them and its purport will be as follows: 'From the One who is Eternal and Immortal to him who is also eternal and immortal: Whatever I desire to bring into existence I command it to be and it comes into being; from this hour it has been decreed that you also command whatever you desire to bring into existence and your wish would be obeyed.'

Therefore, do not be egocentric, and subordinate your will to the Will of God Almighty; He will then make you an instrument and manifestation of His Will. He will give you power in the realms under His control, and bestow upon you the capacity to create in the Hereafter. (Of course, this is not the same as *tafwid*, which is a false notion, as proved elsewhere.)

Now, my friend, do as you please; either accept it or reject it. But know, that God Almighty is not in need of you or me or any other creature, and He has no need of our service and sincerity.

## Riya' In Worship

The third stage also is divided into several sections.

### Section I

The *riya'* of this kind is more common and manifest than those mentioned above. Because we ordinary human beings usually do not belong to the above-mentioned two states. For this reason, the Devil cannot get hold of us in the way he encroaches upon those who belong to the other states. But since the majority of the worshippers express their devotion to God through formal prayers, the Devil commonly intervenes at this stage more frequently. Sensual temptations are also commoner at this stage.

In other words, since such type of people tend to seek the physical pleasures of heaven through their actions, and they aspire to attain higher station by performing good deeds and abstaining from performing wicked ones, the Devil finds an access through this way; and he nurtures the roots of *riya'* and deceit with great care, so that it may bear the fruits that are desired by him. He transforms their virtues into vices, and makes them to enter hell through the path of ritual worship.

The acts by means of which they aim to secure paradise for themselves are transformed by him into the

means of their destruction and doom. The deeds, which would have led one to *'Illiyin*—the highest heaven, are so distorted that their performer is thrown into *Sijjin* by angels at the command of God. Therefore, persons who lay greater emphasis on this aspect (i.e. formalistic) and ignore other aspects, have nothing except apparently good deeds to secure salvation in the next world; they are required to be more cautious, so that this provision also may not be snatched away from their hands and they may not be consigned to the flames of hell and deprived of felicity for ever. They should watch over their acts lest the doors of heaven be closed and the doors of hell be opened to them.

### How To Combat Riya'?

Most often the sanctimonious person himself does not know that this particular vice has penetrated his deeds and his deeds have now assumed hypocritical proportions and hence become worthless. Because the temptations of the Devil and the self are so unobservably shadowy and subtle and the path of humanity is so delicate and tenuous that unless anyone is extremely discriminate, he cannot understand their inherent evil.

He imagines that his actions are meant for pleasing God, whereas they are serving the interests of the Devil. Since man is naturally created self-centered, the veil of self-love and egoism covers his flaws and vices from his own eyes. God willing, we shall also discuss this subject while commenting upon certain other *ahadith*; I ask for God's help in this regard.

For instance, the acquisition of religious knowledge, is one of the important religious duties and a kind of worship; but a man busy attaining excellence in this field is liable to fall an easy prey to the vice of *riya'*, which seizes his heart in such a way that he himself is not aware and the same thick curtain of self-love obstructs his vision.

He desires to gain an important position in the eyes of great scholars and men of distinction and honor, by solving an important problem in such a way that no other person has solved it before; he tries to project himself as a person distinguished from others by presenting the subject in a unique way, to make himself the focus of everyone's attention; with an air of self-assurance, he assumes that if anyone among the scholars and dignitaries eulogizes him in flattering terms, he will be able to receive the applause and praise of the whole gathering.

The poor fellow fails to realize that even if he earns worldly fame and honor among scholars or the elite, he will be disgraced in the eyes of the King of kings, and these actions of his will lead him to *Sijjin*. This act of *riya'* is also accompanied with some other vices, like the wish for humiliating and insulting others, or injuring the feelings of his brother in faith, or sometimes being rude to a believer; each one of these vices is enough for landing him in hell. If again your deceptive self falls in the snares of its own guiles and succeeds in convincing you that your aim has been to make known a tenet of *Shari'ah* and pronouncing the word of truth, which is one of the most meritorious acts of religious devotion, and that you do not aim at demonstrating your spiritual superiority, you ought to interrogate your self by asking

that if a friend of yours had solved the same religious issue in a better way and had defeated you in the gathering of those scholars and highly placed persons, even then would you have taken the same position?

If it is so, you were true to your own self. But if your self again is bent upon deceiving others and does not refrain from committing another treachery and contends that the utterance of truth is a meritorious act, and possesses a spiritual reward also, and that it is in your interest to attain an elevated station in the Hereafter, you are advised to ask your self: Suppose if God Almighty accords you the real glory for your defeat in case you gracefully accept it, would you still desire to prevail? If you see that your self loves to dominate others in academic discussion for gaining publicity among the scholars for your knowledge and scholarship, and the discussion that you undertake is aimed at winning others' respect and honor, then know that the intellectual discourse, which is the highest form of worship and prayer, is transformed into the sinful act of *riya'*, which, according to the narration of *al-Kafi*, will lead you to *Sijjin*, you are classed as a polytheist, and this act was performed with the motive of gaining respect in the eyes of the people.

This act of yours, according to a tradition, will cause more harm to your faith than the harm done by two wolves that attack a herd of sheep without a shepherd from both sides. Therefore, you who are a scholar and responsible for reforming the Ummah and paving the way to the Hereafter, and curing spiritual infirmities, it is necessary for you first to correct yourself and maintain a sound spiritual state, so that you do not fall under the category of the scholars who do not act upon what they profess.

Pray to God Almighty to purify our hearts of the stains of polytheism and hypocrisy, and cleanse the mirror of our hearts of the rust of the love of the world, which is the source of all vices. O God! Kindly help us and protect us helpless beings, afflicted with the disease of vanity and the lust for power and honor, and guard us in this hazardous journey along the intricacies of the labyrinthine dark path, O the Mightiest and the Most Powerful.

### [Riya' In Congregational Prayers](#)

Congregational prayer is an eminent form of Islamic worship, and the leader of this prayer holds a distinctive position of honor. For this reason, Satan also intrudes more in this worship. He is much more envious of the imam (leader) of the *jama'ah* (congregation) than anybody else. He is always busy finding the ways of keeping away the believers from receiving this Divine honor, and deprives their action of the element of sincerity and truth and drives them to *Sijjin*.

He tries to convert them into polytheists, and for this purpose he invades the hearts of the imams through various means, such as *'ujb* (self admiration), which we shall discuss later on, and *riya'*, which is a display of religiosity through this significant worship for impressing the people, gaining publicity, and earning their admiration and respect; for instance, when an imam sees that a certain pious person is attending the congregational prayer, he tries to make an ostentation of his humility and devotion in order

to capture his attention and win his admiration; he tries to find various ways of mentioning him in the gatherings of ‘people not present in the congregation; in order to show his importance, he drags the name of that pious man again and again and tries to inform the people about his presence as a follower in the congregational prayer; thus, he tries to create a false impression of a close association with him, especially if he belongs to the business class, and expresses such a great love and friendship for him which he never expressed even for a single moment for God or His favored servants.

And if, God forbid, any of the aristocrats loses his way and comes to pray with the congregation, it is a bigger disaster. The Devil is not unmindful, of the leader of a small congregation either. He approaches him and makes him aware that he is so unmindful of worldly gains that he is content to spend his time in a small local mosque of a poor neighborhood. This feeling is also similar to the first, or even worse than that; as the vice of jealousy spreads its tentacles in the hearts of such people, who do not enjoy the bounties of this world; the Devil deprives them of the glories of the other world too, and they are condemned to suffer in both the worlds. At the same time, the Devil, does not lose his grip on the collars of people like you and me, who have no access to the leadership of a congregation, and who lament the absence of proper means; he makes us doubt the utility of congregations of Muslims, and makes us scorn and flout them.

We may be led to look upon our failure to capture a congregation as otherworldly seclusion, and ourselves as free from love of station and honor. Then we become worse than both of the groups, we neither belong to the first category of people, who enjoy the good things of this life, nor do we belong to the second category, whose achievements are comparatively humbler; nor do we have any claim to the next world; nevertheless if we get an opportunity, we might prove to be more power-hungry, honor-thirsty, and greedy than either of the groups.

### **How Does Riya’ Infiltrate The Ranks Of The Congregation?**

The Satan is not content with dragging the leader of the congregation to the hell. His lust is not satiated with that. He infiltrates the ranks of the worshippers also. Since the first row is more esteemed than other rows, and its right wing superior to the left, he makes them his target more often than any other row. He attracts the pious towards the right part of the first row, and incites them to pose to be superior to others in the eyes of the people. The helpless fellow, unconscious of the Satan’s whispering, tries to demonstrate his superiority through a sanctimonious glance or gesture, which displays his inner polytheism, which is enough for sending him to *Sijjin*.

From here, the Satan then steals into other rows to allure other people on account of his awkward gestures and funny behavior a devotee becomes the target of jeer and sneer of others, who consider themselves to be free from all sort of faults. Sometimes it has been observed that a respectable person, especially a scholar of rare distinction and high intellectual caliber, is made to sit by the Devil in the last row, in order to make people realize that though his position is much higher, but since he does not care for worldly position and is free of self-esteem, he has come to sit in the last row. Some people of this

kind will never be seen sitting in the first row.

The Satan is not satisfied with influencing the imam and his followers; he sometimes catches hold of one of the loners by the beard, persuading him to leave his house or shop, and by means of his allurements he launches him into a corner of the mosque over a prayer mat. For such a man, no imam is *'adil*, or qualified to lead prayers. The Satan makes him perform a prolonged prostration and *rukū'* and an extended prayer.

In his heart of hearts, this individual wishes to make people believe that he is pious and conscientious to such a degree that he avoids the congregation, so that he may not be trapped into following an unjust imam. This person, besides being conceited and sanctimonious, is also ignorant of the laws of the *Shari'ah*. The *marji' taqlid* (legal authority) whom he follows may not have laid any condition for praying behind an imam except acceptability of his outward behavior. But the loner is not concerned with that, for his real motive is *riya'*. He merely wants to present himself as a man of piety in order to gain the favor and admiration of people.

In the same way, our other activities also are interfered with by the Satan. This damned creature, whenever he finds a murky heart, he makes it his resting place and tries to spoil our visible and invisible deeds, and transforms our good deeds into such as lead us directly to the hell.

### An Invitation to Sincerity

My friend, be judicious and careful in your actions. Demand from yourself an account of every deed. Cross-examine yourself for every detail; try to evaluate your deeds through introspection whether they were meant for the realization of virtue or motivated otherwise. What motivated you to ask questions about mid-night prayers? Was it purely for the sake of God with an intention to perform such prayers, or for projecting your image as a deeply religiously person?

Why is it that you are eager to inform others about your pilgrimage by all possible means and about the number of times you undertook it? Why are you not content with confining your charitable deeds to yourself alone, and what do you want to gain by informing the others of your acts of charity, for as soon as you find an opportunity you announce them? If it is undertaken for the sake of God, and you intend that people should imitate you, and you think in terms of *الدَّالُّ عَلَى الْخَيْرِ كَفَاعِلِهِ*. (the one who shows the path of virtue is as worthy as—the doer of it) while performing this deed, its display is justified; thank God, for He has enabled you to act with a clear conscience and pure heart. But beware of the guiles of Satan while interrogating your self, for he can project the acts adulterated with *riya'* as selfless and sacred.

If your action is not for the sake of God, then it is better to abstain from doing what you have been doing, for it amounts to *sum'ah*, i.e. advertisement of false virtues, which is a branch of the accursed tree of *riya'*; for God Almighty does not approve of it and condemns its perpetrator to *Sijjin*. We ought to seek refuge in God from the vice of deceit, whose guiles are very subtle. We have a general idea that our

deeds are not pure and sincere, because had we been His true servants, why does the Devil, despite promising not to impede the actions of His true servants, disturb our sanctity and make us an instrument of his evil designs?

In the words of my respected teacher, the Devil is the watchdog of the Almighty's court; he does not bark at the person who is near to God, and does not bother him. As the watchdog does not drive the friends of the master away from the house, in the same way, the Satan also recognizes God's friends, and does not allow any stranger to get access to Him. Therefore, whenever you realize that the Satan interferes in your affairs, you should immediately know that your actions are not performed with sincere intentions and are not meant for the Almighty. If you are a sincere believer in God, why doesn't your tongue pour forth words of wisdom, coming from the heart?

For about forty years you imagine that you have been performing virtuous deeds in order to please God, whereas it occurs in a *hadith* that whosoever remains faithful to God for forty days, springs of wisdom emanate from his heart. This is, therefore, a sign for us to comprehend that our deeds were not performed for the sake of God, though we ourselves are not conscious of it, and this is the main cause of our irremediable sickness.

Pitiable is the condition of the devotees, worshippers, leaders and followers of Friday congregations and men of high knowledge and learning! When they will open their eyes in the court of the Most High on the Day of Judgment, they will come to know that they are not only among the sinners, perpetrators of major sins, but even worse than infidels and idolaters, and their record of deeds even darker than theirs.

It is a matter of pity for a person that his prayers and other devotional acts should serve as fuel for the fires of hell. May God save us from the moment when, in spite of one's alms-giving and *zakat* and piety, one's appearance will be distorted to such hideousness that it is not even imaginable. You, a helpless creature, are branded as a *mushrik*, an idolater, and a sinner despite your belief in the Unity of God. God willing, He will forgive the sinners by His mercy, but for the *mushrik* He has said that He will not forgive him if he dies without repentance.

It is stated in the *ahadith* that one used to *Riya'*—the one who makes a display of his religiosity, devotion, high religious status, his preaching and leading of prayers, his fasting, his *namaz* and even his pious deeds for the sake of gaining respect in the hearts of people is a polytheist. His *shirk* (idolatry) is confirmed by the traditions of the Imams of the Holy Household (A) and the Quranic text, and hence his sin is unpardonable. It would have been better for you to be among the perpetrators of major sins, to be one notorious for his evil conduct and perpetration of obvious indignities, while being a monotheist, instead of becoming a polytheist.

Now, my friend, introspect seriously and find some remedy to cure your (spiritual) sickness, and realize the futility of acquiring honor in human hearts, a small piece of flesh which will not satisfy a bird's appetite. These weak creatures possess no power, and their estimation is insignificant. The real power is

to be sought in Him; He is the Absolute Cause of all causes—the Ultimate Cause. Even if all creatures make a joint effort to create a single mosquito, they will not be successful in doing so, and if the mosquito causes them a slight harm they will not be able to avert it if God does not will so.

All power belongs to the Almighty. He is the Mover of the universe. Whenever you do something and make an effort to perform something, inscribe on your heart with the pen of reason:

لَا مُؤَثَّرَ فِي الْوُجُودِ إِلَّا اللَّهُ.

No one is effective in the realm of existence except God.

By all possible means equip your heart with the principle of unity of Divine Action (*tawhid al-af'ali*), which is the first stage of the belief in the Unity of Being, and thus convert it into the heart of a true believer. Illuminate your heart with the holy dictum of: (لا إله إلا الله) —there is no god but Allah; and mould it accordingly. Lead your heart to the stage of tranquility (*itminan*), and make it realize that human beings can cause neither harm nor good, and that God alone is capable of doing any harm or good to anybody. Cure your vision, which suffers from blindness so that you are not raised blind on the Day of Judgment and complain to the Almighty:

﴿رَبِّ لِمَ حَشَرْتَنِي أَعْمَى وَقَدْ كُنْتُ بَصِيرًا﴾

### ***My Lord! wherefore have You raised me (here) blind? (20: 125)***

The Will of the Almighty prevails over the wills of other beings. If your heart surrenders to these holy words, and has faith in them, this can be hoped that your deeds will be rewarded and all the traces of polytheism, *Riya'*, infidelity and hypocrisy will be wiped out from the face of your heart. This profound faith is in accordance with reason and revelation, and there are no traces of determinism (*jabr*) present in it. It is possible that some people who do not know the meaning, the basic principles and ingredients of determinism may mistake it as such, whereas it is not *jabr* but *tawhid*. Determinism is a kind of *shirk*; whereas *tawhid* is right guidance, determinism is misguidance. This occasion is not proper for discussing determinism and freedom. But those who fully understand this issue can appreciate the import of what I say.

Moreover, the Prophet (S) has asked us not to indulge in such discourses. Anyway, ask God Almighty, through supplication and humble entreaties all the time, especially in loneliness, to guide you and to illuminate your heart with the light of *tawhid*. Ask Him to endow you with the vision of the hidden, the perception of the unity (in diversity)—the Unity of Divine Being, so that you may not attach importance to anything else and consider every other thing as insignificant and trifle. Beseech His Holy Essence to make your actions pure and sincere, and lead you to the path of sincerity and love.

And if you have reached such a spiritual station that your prayers are responded and you can do something for this helpless creature of God, who has squandered his life in meaningless pursuits, devoid of any real purpose, hankering after desires and lusts, whose sins have sickened the heart to a point where no exhortation, advice, Quranic verse, or tradition of the Prophet (S), or argument or wise saying can have any effect, do pray for him; may be your prayer shall secure his deliverance. God never turns away a believer from His court, and He grants his prayers. By ever remembering these things, which you already know and which are also not new to you, be heedful and sincere from within the heart, and, without ceasing, critically reevaluate your movements, pauses, and your behavior.

Always scrutinize your secret intentions, and strictly take account of everything in the same manner as one business partner is accountable to the other. Abstain from everything that resembles *riya'* and simulation, however virtuous it may appear to be. Even in the matter of obligatory religious duties, if you believe that you cannot perform them sincerely in public, perform them secretly, though it is preferable to perform them openly. It is rare for *riya'* to occur in obligatory duties themselves; more often it relates to their mode of performance and to acts which are *mustahabb* or supererogatory. In any case, purge your heart from the dirt of polytheism with perfect solemnness and severest self-criticism, lest, God forbid, you should pass away from this world in this state that your performance is deplorable, and there is no hope of salvation for you. Then you will invite the wrath of God, as mentioned in the tradition quoted in *Wasa'il al-Shi'ah* from *Qurb al- asnad*, and reported from Amir al-mu'minin 'Ali (A):

عَنْ أَمِيرِ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ عَلِيٍّ، عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ، عَنْ رَسُولِ اللَّهِ، صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَآلِهِ، (أَنَّهُ قَالَ) مَنْ تَزَيَّنَ لِلنَّاسِ بِمَا يُحِبُّ اللَّهُ وَبَارَزَ اللَّهَ فِي السِّرِّ بِمَا يَكْرَهُهُ اللَّهُ لَقِيَ اللَّهَ وَهُوَ عَلَيْهِ غَضَبَانِ وَلَهُ مَا قِئْتُ.

Amir al-mu'minin 'Ali (A) reports that the Prophet (S) said, "One who does some act liked by God in order to show off to people, and in secret manifests such qualities as are abominations to God, he shall encounter God's anger and wrath on the Day of Resurrection."<sup>5</sup>

There are two probable interpretations of this *hadith*. Firstly, it is about such a person who presents himself as paragon of virtue before people, while his inner self is immersed in ugly vices. Secondly, it may be about a person who performs outwardly virtuous deeds with the intention of *Riya'*. In any case, it is obvious that the *hadith* condemns *riya'*, because the performance of the obligatory acts and duties if not motivated by *riya'*, cannot be the object of Divine wrath. In all probability the second meaning is closer to the import of the *hadith*, as the open performance of wicked deeds is a greater evil.

This is a warning for us to be cautious lest, God forbid, we do something to incur the wrath of the King of kings and the Most Merciful of the merciful:

أَعُوذُ بِاللَّهِ مِنْ غَضَبِ الْحَلِيمِ.

## A Tradition of Imam ‘Ali (A)

We conclude this section with a tradition reported from the commander of the pious, Amir al-mu’minin (A), recorded in *al-Kafi*. Al-Shaykh al-Saduq has also reported the same tradition from Imam al-Sadiq (A), which forms a part of the last will and testament of the Prophet (S) to ‘Ali (A):

عَنْ أَبِي عَبْدِ اللَّهِ عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ قَالَ: قَالَ أَمِيرُ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ: ثَلَاثُ عَلَامَاتٍ لِلْمُرَائِي: يَنْشِطُ إِذَا رَأَى النَّاسَ، وَيَكْسِلُ إِذَا كَانَ وَحْدَهُ، وَيُحِبُّ أَنْ يُحْمَدَ فِي جَمِيعِ أُمُورِهِ.

Said Imam al-Sadiq (A) that Amir al-mu’minin (A) said: ‘There are three distinguishing features of one accustomed to *riya*’: he expresses joy and cheerfulness when he is greeted by people; he becomes cheerless and sullen when alone; and he wishes to be praised for everything he does.’<sup>6</sup>

Since this vice is so hidden and subtle that it remains unnoticed by the person himself, he is unaware of the fact that inwardly he is a hypocrite, and he imagines his actions to be pure and untainted. Therefore, the signs of this characteristic have been described so that men should be able to identify their hidden motives by examining their inner self in their light and be able to prevent and treat them accordingly.

An individual may introspect and know that he is not inclined to perform his religious duties when he is alone; even if with great compulsion he forces himself to perform them, or even if he performs them habitually, he does not perform with real sincerity and purity of heart, but rather as a physical exercise; but while performing his prayer in the mosque, in the congregation of the people and in the presence of others, he becomes animated, performing his prayer with utmost joy and enthusiasm. He is inclined to perform long and protracted *ruku*’s and prostrations; he performs the *mustahabb* actions properly, caring about their minutest particulars. If one pays a little attention to one’s inner state, one may come to know the reason for this vigor. Why is it so that he spreads the net of his (pretended) piety for catching the attention of people?

He may mislead himself by saying that he is more pleased with praying in the mosque, as it is more meritorious to do so, and that it brings more rewards also. He will convince himself by saying that it is preferable to say prayer in a better way in front of others, in order that they may follow his example and be attracted towards the religion. Man deceives himself by all means and never thinks of correcting himself. For a sick person who considers himself to be sound there is no hope of being cured. The ill-fated man’s innermost being not only secretly aims to parade his good deeds before people, remaining unconscious of its inner urge, but is also bent upon presenting his sin as worship and his conceit as propagation of religion, despite the fact that the performance of the *mustahabbat* prayers is *mustahabb* in seclusion.

Why is it that your self always responds in public, and why do you relish weeping out of the fear of God in the gathering of people, though in loneliness in spite of squeezing your eyes you cannot bring out a

single tear? Where is the fear of God? Does it grip you in the gatherings of people only? Does it overwhelm you only on the occasion of the Nights of Great Value (ليلة القدر) in front of several thousands of people? Such a man offers one hundred *rak'ah's* of *namaz* and recites the *Du'a-i Jawshan-i Kabir* and *Du'a-i Jawshan-i Saghir* in addition to several *surahs* of the Quran and is not bored and does not feel the slightest weariness. If man performs something purely for the sake of God or for gaining His blessings, or out of fear of hell or in the hope of heaven, why should he desire that his deeds be praised by men and admired by them?

His ears are all the time eager to listen something in his praise, and his heart is after those who observe his devotion and notice how venerable this gentleman is, for he is so punctual about the prayer and is so concerned about the supererogatory duties. If your deeds are meant for God, what does this exaggerated craving mean? If the fear of hell and the hope of heaven force you to perform these deeds, what does this love of publicity mean? You ought to realize that this desire issues from the accursed and abominable tree of *riya'*. Therefore, try as much as you can to purify yourself of these absurd inclinations (to the extent possible), and try to reform yourself.

## Variation in Grades and Degrees of Qualities among Different Individuals

At this stage it is essential to remind you that each one of the qualities of the soul, both the good ones and the bad, has numerous grades and degrees. Those who acquire virtues and give up vices are grouped with the *urafa*, saints and friends of God (*awliya' Allah*.) As for other individuals, the nature of vices and virtues is determined by the spiritual station to which they belong. It may be that the qualities, which are considered to be vices for those belonging to higher spiritual station, are not considered vices for those belonging to a lower stage. On the contrary, in a way, they may even be regarded as their accomplishments. And similarly the qualities that are regarded as virtues for the people of a lower category may be vices for men of a higher category.

*Riya'* is also one of such (relative) vices that we are discussing presently. Authenticity (*ikhlas*) is the highest stage of freedom from *riya'* and is characteristic of the saints (*awliya' Allah*); others do not share this quality. The common people generally attain a lower stage of it, and this does not harm their *iman* or *ikhlas*, because, generally, they have a natural inclination that their virtues be known to others. Though they may not have intentionally performed them for the sake of demonstrating them, but their self is instinctively inclined to make them known. This tendency does not annul their action, nor does it make them infidels, hypocrites (*munafiqun*) or polytheists either. But the same trait is considered to be a shortcoming in the case of a *wali* or *'arif bi-Allah*, as for them it amounts to *nifaq* or *shirk*.

Absolute purification from the impurity of polytheism and obtaining perfect authenticity (*ikhlas*) of devotion is essentially a primary, condition for attaining the stage reserved for *awliya' Allah*, and there are even higher stages which they can attain, but, here, it would be out of place to go into these details.

Our Imams (A) have declared that their worship was the worship of emancipated souls (*ahrar*), which was performed for the sake of love of God alone, neither due to the fear of hell nor in the hope of heaven; and they considered this stage to be the first step of their *wilayah*. To them worship is a state of ecstasy and rapture which is beyond the reach of our imagination and understanding. Apart from the above-mentioned *ahadith* narrated from the Prophet (S) and Amir al-mu'minin (A), there is another *hadith* also, reported by Zurarah from imam Abu Ja'far (A), which is as follows:

عَنْ زُرَّازَةَ عَنْ أَبِي جَعْفَرٍ عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ؛ قَالَ (زُرَّارَةُ): سَأَلْتُهُ عَنِ الرَّجُلِ يَعْمَلُ الشَّيْءَ مِنَ الْخَيْرِ فَيَرَاهُ إِنْسَانٌ فَيَسُرُّهُ ذَلِكَ. قَالَ: لَا بَأْسَ! مَا مِنْ أَحَدٍ إِلَّا وَيُحِبُّ أَنْ يَظْهَرَ لَهُ فِي النَّاسِ الْخَيْرُ إِذَا لَمْ يَكُنْ صَنَعَ ذَلِكَ لِذَلِكَ.

Zurarah reports that he questioned Imam al-Baqir (A) about the status of a person who performed good deeds, which were seen by others and it made him happy. Said the Imam (A): There is no harm in it; there is no one who does not like that his good deeds be made known to the people, in case he does not perform them [solely] for the sake of attracting their admiration.<sup>7</sup>

In one of the two *ahadith*, the tendency of performing good deeds for the sake of earning respect and admiration is considered as the sign of *riya'*, while in another *hadith* it is stated that there is no harm in the joy resulting from the demonstration of a good deed. These two different positions are taken in view of the category to which an individual belongs. There are certain other reasons also for such a view, but we shall abstain from mentioning them.

## What Is Sum'ah?

At the end, it is to be noted that *sum'ah* means to orally transmit one's good qualities to the ears of people for the purpose of attracting them and publicizing oneself, and this tendency is a branch of the vicious tree of *riya'*. For the same reason we have dealt with *sum'ah* as a part of *riya'*, not as a distinct vice, and have not elaborated its meaning separately.

<sup>1</sup>. Usul al-Kafi, vol. 2, p. 402.

<sup>2</sup>. Usul al-Kafi, vol. 2, p. 450.

<sup>3</sup>. Usul al-Kafi, vol. 2, p. 453.

<sup>4</sup>. Usul al-Kafi, vol. 2, the chapter concerning *riya'*.

<sup>5</sup>. Wasa'il al-Shi'ah.

<sup>6</sup>. Usul al-Kafi, vol. 2, p. 295.

<sup>7</sup>. Usul al-Kafi, vol. 2, p. 297.

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