

Sermon 82: How should I describe this house ...

About the world and its people

(ومن كلام له (عليه السلام

في صفة الدنيا

In what way shall I describe this world whose beginning is grief and whose end is destruction?¹ The lawful actions performed here have to be accounted for, while for the forbidden ones there is punishment. Whoever is rich here faces mischief and whoever is poor gets grief. One who hankers after it does not get it. If one keeps away from it then it advances towards him. If one sees through it, it would bestow him sight, but if one has his eye on it then it would blind him.

مَا أَصِفُ مِنْ دَارٍ أَوْلَاهَا عَنَاءٌ وَآخِرُهَا فَنَاءٌ! فِي حَالِهَا حِسَابٌ، وَفِي حَرَامِهَا عِقَابٌ. مَنْ اسْتَعْنَى فِيهَا فُتِنَ، وَمَنْ افْتَقَرَ فِيهَا حَزِنَ، وَمَنْ سَاعَاهَا فَاتَتْهُ، وَمَنْ قَعَدَ عَنْهَا وَاتَتْهُ، وَمَنْ أَبْصَرَ بِهَا بَصَرْتَهُ، وَمَنْ أَبْصَرَ إِلَيْهَا أَعْمَتْهُ.

As-Sayyid ar-Radi says: If a thinker thinks over this phrase of Amir al-mu'minin “*waman absara biha bassarat’hu*” (“If one sees through it, it would bestow him sight”) he would find thereunder very amazing meaning and far-reaching sense whose purpose cannot be appreciated and whose aim cannot be understood particularly when he joins it with Amir al-mu'minin’s phrase “*waman absara ilayha a’mat’hu*” (“If one, has his eye on it, them it would blind him) he would find the difference between “*absara biha*” and “*absara laha*”, clear, bright, wonderful and shining.

قال الشريف: أقول: وإذا تأمل المتأمل قوله (عليه السلام): «وَمَنْ أَبْصَرَ بِهَا بَصَرْتَهُ» وجد تحته من المعنى العجيب، والغرض البعيد، ما لا تبلغ غايته ولا يدرك غوره، لا سيما إذا قرن إليه قوله: «وَمَنْ أَبْصَرَ إِلَيْهَا أَعْمَتْهُ»، فإنه يجد الفرق بين «أبصر بها» و«أبصر إليها» واضحاً نيراً عجباً باهراً!

Alternative Sources for Sermon 82

- (1) Al-Mubarrad, *al-Kamil*, I, 88;
- (2) al-Qali, *al-'Amali*, II, 117;
- (3) Ibn Durayd, *al-Mujtana*, 31;
- (4) al-Harrani, *Tuhaf*, 138;
- (5) Ibn 'Abd Rabbih, *al-'Iqd*, III, 172;
- (6) al-Murtada, *al-'Amali*, 153;
- (7) Sibt ibn al-Jawzi, *Tadhkirah*, 136;
- (8) al-Tabarsi, *Mishkat*, 243;
- (9) al-'Amidi, *Ghurar*, 86;
- (10) al-Karajiki, *Kanz*, 160.

1. "The beginning of the world is grief and its end is destruction." This sentence contains the same truth which the Qur'an has presented in the verse: Indeed We have created man (to dwell) amidst hardship. (90:4)

It is true that right from the narrow womb of the mother upto the vastness of the firmament the changes of human life do not come to an end. When man first tastes life he finds himself closed in such a dark prison where he can neither move the limbs nor change the sides. When he gets rid of this confinement and steps in this world he has to pass through innumerable troubles. In the beginning he can neither speak with the tongue so as to describe his difficulty or pain nor possesses energy in the limbs so as to accomplish his needs himself. Only his suppressed sobs and flowing tears express his needs and translate his grief and sorrow. When after the lapse of this period he enters the stage of learning and instruction, then on every step voices of admonition and abuse welcome him. All the time he seems frightened and terrified. When he is relieved of this period of subjugation he finds himself surrounded by the worries of family life and livelihood, where sometimes, there is clash with comrades in profession, sometimes collision with enemies, sometimes confrontation with vicissitudes of time, sometimes attack of ailments and sometimes shock of children, till old age approaches him with the tidings of helplessness and weakness, and eventually he bids farewell to this world with mortification and grief in the heart.

Thereafter Amir al-mu'minin says about this world, that in its lawful actions there is the question of reckoning and in its forbidden acts there are hardships of punishment, as a result of which even pleasant joys also produce bitterness in his palate. If there is plenty of wealth and money in this world then man finds himself in such a whirlpool (of worries) that he loses his joy and peace of mind. But if there is want and poverty, he is ever crying for wealth. He who hankers after this world there is no limit for his desires. If one wish is fulfilled the desire for fulfilment of another wish crops up. This world is like the reflection. If you run after it then it will itself run forward but if you leave it and run away from it then it follows you. In the same way, if a person does not run after the world, the world runs after him. The implication is that if a person breaks the clutches of greed and avarice and keeps aloof from undesirable hankering after the world, he too gets (pleasures of) the world and he does not remain deprived of it. Therefore, he who surveys this world from above its surface and takes lesson from its chances and happenings, and through its variation, and alterations gains knowledge about Allah's Might, Wisdom and Sagacity, Mercy, Clemency and Sustaining power, his eyes will gain real brightness and sight. On the other hand the

person who is lost only in the colourfulness of the world and its decorations, he loses himself in the darkness of the world that is why Allah has forbidden to view the world thus: And strain not thine eyes unto that which We have provided (different) parties of them, (of) the splendour of the life of this world, so that We may try them in it; for the provision of thy Lord is better and more abiding. (Qur'an, 20: 131)

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