

## The Fifteenth Talk

بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ

In the Name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ اتَّقَوْا إِذَا مَسَّهُمْ طَائِفٌ مِّنَ الشَّيْطَانِ تَذَكَّرُوا فَإِذَا هُمْ مُبْصِرُونَ

***Verily those who guard (themselves against evil) when an evil thought from Satan afflicts them, they become mindful (of God and get awakened) then lo! They see (aright). (Sura al-A'raaf, 7:201)***

Last evening our talk dwelt on the second aspect of *Isti'adha*, *Tadhakkur*. Today we shall discuss some more meanings of *Tadhakkur* in respect of the fears created by Satan.

There is a tradition of the Prophet (S), the authenticity of which is universally accepted by all the schools of thought. The tradition has also been quoted very much. The Prophet (S) has said, “*Actions are of three types: the actions of righteous guidance, the misleading actions and the actions that are mid way between the first two categories.*”

### **The Things That Are Definitely Good: The Actions of Righteous Guidance**

Whatever thoughts come to the mind of a person whether to perform an action or not, depend on the consideration of the three categories of actions mentioned above. If it is sure that the action that a person is about to perform is certainly good, and to his righteous advantage, then pure feelings will develop in his heart. He will get the urge to go ahead with the performance of the act. If you have such feelings about any act that you wish to perform, and you are sure that it is a hundred percent virtuous

deed, and you don't have the slightest doubt or fear about its veracity, then you must go ahead doing it with full determination and firmness. Such actions are deemed obligatory to be performed tacitly.

## **Actions That Are Definitely Wrong: The Misleading Actions**

If you get the thought of performing an action about which you are certain that it is satanic, and you know that its performance might cause unrest, despite the urge to go ahead with it, you must have access to *Tadhakkur* and abstain from doing it. Because of your awareness of Allah (S.w.T.)'s Commandments, if you consider doing such acts as prohibited, it will be a befitting precept in total consonance with the words "...*fa idha hum mubseroon*" (...*then lo! They see aright*) (*Sura al-A'raaf, 7:201*).

## **When There Is A Doubt About Acts: Whether Righteous Or Prohibited**

The third type of actions is about which one is not sure whether they are righteous (*Rahmani*) or wrong (*Shaitani*). There are certain lawful acts about which we have doubts in our minds. We have to arrive at a decision whether to perform them or not.

Those who are perfect in piety, are the choicest in the reckoning of Allah (S.w.T.). Their intuition tells them whether an act is really good or not. Their vision is so powerful that they have a clear understanding of what act is *Rahmani* and which is *Satanic*. But such men of high piety are few and far between.

## **Care is the Guarantee of Deliverance**

Those who are in the lower rungs of the roster of men of piety, they too draw benefit from *Tadhakkur* and don't decide to perform an act till they are sure and confident that it is righteous (*Rahmani*). They will not do it till they are doubly sure howsoever attractive it might seem to them. They are conscious that performing the act, ignorantly, might harm their faith. Therefore it is said, "*Qif indash Shubh – When you have a doubt about an act being Rahmani or Satanic, better wait!*" The morsel about which one has doubt whether it is *halal* or *Haram*, he should rather wait till he makes it sure.

## **The Touchstone**

In the *Islamic Shari'ah* there are clear-cut norms for removing doubts and fears and for arriving at the righteousness or otherwise of acts. These norms must be brought to the knowledge of people of piety that they can abide by them. The standard set by the revered and Infallible personalities is: Every act that is to satisfy the psyche of the person will be Satanic. And the act that is contrary to his desire will be righteous and *Rahmani*.

There are certain acts towards which the psyche is attracted. For example: A person has to go on a journey that is not against his liking, but he doesn't know if the action has the approval of Allah (S.w.T.) or not. Or perhaps Satan is instigating him to go on the trip. Sometimes the man is inordinately attracted to take a journey. In such a situation he should realize that the initiator of the idea is definitely some satanic thought that wishes to involve him in some *Haram* act or at least to deprive him of a legitimate act.

When you feel that your conscience is not willing to perform some act, then it is a *Rahmani* instinct, you must go ahead in performing it.

Another thing should not remain hidden that this standard is not for everyone. Because mostly people are inclined towards human desires and these realities have nothing to do with them.

## Istikhara, Or Augury, Guides in Situations of Doubt

It has been narrated that when you are at the cross-roads, and do not know which is the righteous (*Rahmani*) way and which is the wrong one (*Shaitani*), then doing *Istikhara* (augury) with Allah (S.w.T.) that the righteous path can be determined.

*Istikhara*, or augury, is *talab al-khair min Allah (S.w.T.)* (Seeking good from Allah (S.w.T.)) saying, "O Allah (S.w.T.)! I am in doubt. I don't know if there is Your approval for my doing this task or not. With Your Munificence make evident Your guidance in the matter."

This is a situation of prayer, and in *Istikhara* always there is a strong element of prayer to Allah (S.w.T.).

## Some People Misunderstand Istikhara

Muslims have adopted a bad habit that they started using *Istikhara* for matters connected with monetary benefit. This, truly, is not *istikhara*. *Istikhara*, in fact, is a prayer by virtue of which a person seeks Allah

(S.w.T.)'s wish if performance of a particular act would be in his best interest or not.

## Imam Husayn (a.s.) does Istikhara at the Mausoleum of The Prophet (S)

Imam Husayn (a.s.) went to the mausoleum of his grand father, the Prophet (S) and after much grieving entreated Allah (S.w.T.), "O my Sustainer! You know I am practicing, *amr bil ma'ruf* and *nahi 'anil munkar*, treading on the righteous path and denying the prohibited. In this matter kindly give me guidance." Then the Prophet (S), with Allah (S.w.T.)'s orders, informed Imam Husayn (a.s.) that he had to proceed towards Karbala.

It is better we quote here Imam *Zayn al-'Abidin* (a.s.). He says in one of the supplications in *Sahifa as-Sajjadiya*:

*"O Allah! Whenever my heart is confused with two thoughts. One thought for performance of an act that might be approved by You and the other, perhaps, not to Your liking and instigated by Satan. Then O Allah! Mould my determination and decision the way You approve of!"*

## Istikhara With the Sibha or Through the Holy Qur'an

If prayer dispels your doubts and confusion, it is very well. Otherwise, you are within your rights to do *Istikhara* with the *Sibha* (rosary) or from the pages of the Holy Qur'an. But there are two conditions for doing this. One is that you must be in a state of supplication while doing the augury (*Istikhara*). The other condition is that you can correctly understand the meanings of the verses of the Qur'an when doing *Istikhara* through its pages. One should also be in a position to interpret the correct purport from the meanings.

## Strange Stories About Istikhara

In Isfahan an important person suffered from measles. After treatment he was put on a strict diet regimen. He was particularly warned against over eating. During his period of convalescence he was invited at the place of a leading cleric. When the table was arranged with numerous types of mouth – watering dishes, the person's mouth started watering. But he also had the fear that if he went against the regimen and ate well, it might be harmful for him. He also thought that if he didn't eat properly, the host might feel bad. He therefore did *Istikhara* from the Qur'an. He saw the 69th verse of *Sura an Nahl* when he opened the book:

ثُمَّ كُلِّي مِن كُلِّ الثَّمَرَاتِ فَاسْلُكِي سُبُلَ رَبِّكِ ذُلُلًا

***Then eat of all the fruits and walk thou in the ways of Thy Lord submissively... (Sura an-Nahl, 16:69)***

This verse relates to the honeybees that received revelation to eat from all the fruits and manufacture lot of honey. The person interpreted from the verse that he had the permission to eat. Since he was on a strict diet for many days, he enjoyed all the sumptuous fare with great relish. The excess of eating resulted in deterioration of his condition and he had to go straight to his grave from the party!

After this event when there was a discussion about *Istikhara*, one scholar said, “The verse seen during the *Istikhara* pertains to the honeybees that pick up a little nectar from each flower. If the person had also tasted a little from each of the dishes served, and not eaten like a glutton, he would have suffered no harm.”

The purpose of relating this tale is to impress on people that doing *Istikhara* and interpreting the meaning and purport from the verses is not easy. This can be done only by the learned.

## **The Purpose of Revelation of the Holy Qur’an is not for Istikhara**

The Holy Qur’an is not revealed for the purpose of *Istikhara* but for the understanding of Allah (S.w.T.) by His creatures and for inculcating the high moral values. Its purpose is not to show to the reader whether any worldly actions are beneficial to him or not. Such reference to the Book is not *Istikhara*; but it is soothsaying.

The standards prescribed for us to judge the veracity or usefulness of acts has to be understood properly and to be acted upon implicitly. Every matter that appears burdensome on the baser instincts of a person is *Rahmani*, legitimate. Spending in the way of Allah (S.w.T.) doesn’t make a person poor, although his instinct asks him to take care while making such expense!

With the compliance of aforementioned conditions, we are not in opposition to access to *Istikhara*. After every compulsory prayer we supplicate, “O Allah (S.w.T.)! With your Munificence and Grace guide me!” This supplication should be made with the single purpose of asking for His Grace. In fact one should pray to Allah (S.w.T.) thus, “O Allah! Keep me safe from perfidy and shame! O Allah! Prevent me from the influence of evil thoughts and keep me under Your protection”.

## Doing Soothsaying from The Holy Qur'an is Not Proper

Such *Istikhara* and soothsaying from the Qur'an that is for the purpose of predicting the future are not permissible. For example: When a mother has to get her daughter wedded, gets an *Istikhara* to ascertain how the girl's future will be. For this purpose she goes to a venerable person. He predicts that the future for the marriage is not going to be good. The mother then worries. Then she goes to another person. He predicts that the match is good and augurs well for the future. She is now confused. She thinks how the same thing could get diametrically opposite result when she asked for a *Istikhara* for the same.

She must therefore seriously think about the premise on which she sought such a prediction. She should seek the answer from the sacred *Shari'ah*.

## Publications about Istikhara

Allama Majlisi has written a treatise "*Mafatih al-Ghaib*" in which he has entered a collection of traditions about *Istikhara*. Other scholars too have published essays. Even then people are ignorant about the true facts.

Allama Majlisi, in the beginning of the book, has written about the merits of *Istikhara* and the need for it. He quotes some narratives to prove that one has to seek Allah (S.w.T.)'s help in all matters.

## Types of Istikhara

For every task that you undertake, you should seek Allah (S.w.T.)'s support and pray for good end to your efforts. Whatever the end result, remain consigned to Allah (S.w.T.)'s wish.

After seeking Allah (S.w.T.)'s support, rivet your attention to your heart and act according to the signal you get from there.

After seeking Allah (S.w.T.)'s support, consult some sagacious *Mu'min* and act on the matter according to his advice.

Do *Istikhara* through the Qur'an, the rosary, through chits or marble like balls.

The Allama says that, "In several traditions there is a pointer towards the first type of *Istikhara*. Several other scholars, like Shaikh Mufid, Allama Tusi and Ibn Idris are hesitant about the fourth type of *Istikhara*. But, since there are traditions in support of all the four types of *Istikhara*, we cannot reject any of the four methods. Any way, the first three ways of doing the *Istikhara* are very appropriate, which in

our times are almost defunct.”

Several youths came during their examination times and want a *Istikhara* to be done whether they stand a chance of passing the examination or not. In brief, we want to mention about the edict of *Shari'ah* in such matters. We request you to communicate these words to others in your circle that people better shun their wrong ways and do not pollute their faith with silly habits.

## Clear Warnings about Istikhara

About *Istikhara* all schools agree that the Prophet (S) has advised that this should not be avoided for any small or big task.

Amir al-Mu'minīn (a.s.) says, “During my journey to Yemen, on which I went on the orders of the Prophet (S), besides other instructions, he said, ‘O ‘Ali! During this journey never forget to see the *Istikhara* at every stage.’ One who does *Istikhara* will never have troubles nor one who consults others will ever repent.”

Every Imam has exhorted his successor about the *Istikhara* as he has done about the recitation of the Qur'an.

This *Istikhara* about which so much has been said is not just seeing the odd and even of the beads of the rosary. But the purpose is to seek good from Allah (S.w.T.) (*Talab al-khaira min Allah*). In every task that you do, you must seek Allah (S.w.T.)'s help and pleasure!

There are several traditions about the method and prayer for *Istikhara*. One is that for routine works, one should say seven times, “*Astakhair Allah berehmate khairat fi aafiah*”.

For important matters like travel, business deals or surgeries repeat the same words a hundred and one times. If the words are said in a state of prostration, it would be better. And if the words are repeated in the prostration after a optional prayer, and better after the optional prayer following the mandatory morning prayer (*Fajr*).

In another tradition it is narrated from Imam *Zayn al-'Abidin* (a.s.) that the words of *Istikhara* should be repeated ten times for routine matters and two hundred times for important matters like journeys, *Umrah* etc.

People have been very strongly advised to seek help in their matters from Allah (S.w.T.) in a state of prostration. That is the time when one is nearest to Allah (S.w.T.). If men make this their habit and practice, and never divert from it, then all actions will be felicitous. If a person has any doubt about this, he should study in depth the methods for removing the doubts recorded in the pure *Shari'ah*.

## Suggestions for Removing Doubts

The best suggestion is that which is in according to the *Nass (categorical order)* of the Qur'an, and that is not to take advise from any person other than one falling in the four following categories:

1. Wise, shrewd and far-sighted. It goes without saying that seeking suggestions from foolish persons will be futile.
2. One who is religious and pious. Seeking suggestions from a faithless and careless person is not desirable. When a person doesn't care for Allah (S.w.T.), how one can expect that he would care for ordinary mortals?
3. One who is your friend and well-wisher. A person who is one's adversary cannot give advice in your interest.
4. A person who is your confidante and will not disclose about your matters to others.

If any person has all the four qualities, he can always be consulted on important matters. Allah (S.w.T.), from whom you have sought help in your matters, will convey to you through the advice of the person of your choice about the best course you must adopt in your matters.

## The Holy Imams (a.s.) Used to Take Advice

Allama Majlisi quotes from Imam Ridha (a.s.) that he said, "My revered father, Imam Mūsā Ibn Ja'far as-Sadiq (a.s.), despite being of the highest intellect, used to consult with his slave occasionally. For example: Whenever he embarked on some important task, he used to seek the advice of the clever slave. If performance of that task was advisable, he would go ahead with it."

"The Imam was once asked by some one, 'Although you are the Imam of the times, you are taking advice from a slave! Being the Imam you should have knowledge of everything.' He replied, 'what do you know? Is it not possible that Allah wishes to enlighten me about certain matters through his mouth?'"

Whenever one is in a doubt and confusion about matters, he should act in accordance with Allah (S.w.T.)'s injunction in the Holy Qur'an and the sayings of the Prophet and the Imams (a.s.).

## Istikhara Through Chits

At times when no advice is available or the available advice doesn't agree with that given by other equally competent persons, For example: you have taken the advice of a person keeping in mind the four established norms and he approved of your contention. The same matter, when referred to another person of the same competence was not approved by him. In such an event, to remove the doubt and confusion, you will have to follow the following procedure:

Take six equal pieces or chits of paper. On each chit write, "*Bismillahir Rahmanir Raheem. Khairum minal laahil hakeem li fulaan bin (or 'bint' instead of 'bin' for a woman) fulaan (write your and your father's names in place of the 1st and 2nd fulaan).*" Then on three of the chits write, "*If'al*" (meaning 'do!') and on the remaining three write, "*la taf'al*" (meaning 'don't do!').

Keep all the six chits under the prayer mat and offer two *rakaat* of *Istikhara* prayer. After the salutation or during the last prostration of the prayer recite a hundred times the following words, "*Asta-khiru llaahi birahmatihl khairat fi 'aafiya*" Now that the prayer is complete, retrieve the chits from under the mat and shuffle them. After this exercise pick the chits one after the other. If on three consecutive chits it is inscribed, "*If'al*", then it is very good and you can go ahead with the performance of the task you intend to. If three consecutive chits have written on them, "*La taf'al*", then you will have to abstain from doing the task. If you have picked up five chits, one after the other, alternatively with the inscription of "*If'al*" and "*la taf'al*" alternately in that order, then if three of the five chits have written "*If'al*" on them, then you must go ahead with your task. But if three of these chits have inscribed on them "*La taf'al*" then you must refrain from performing the task.

It is better if the chits are of the same paper, of the same color and of the same dimension.

If a person doesn't have time for the *Salat al-Istikhara* and the prayers mentioned above. Then, if he has good comprehension of the verses of the Holy Qur'an, and is capable of interpretation of the verses, in relation to the task for which the *Istikhara* is being performed, he can as well make access to the Qur'an for his augury.

Shaikh Tusi (r.a) has narrated in his book "*Tahdhib*" that Yasa Bin Abd Allah al-Qummi came one day to Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq (a.s.) and said, "I intend to perform a task but I am unable to arrive at a firm decision for or against doing it." The Imam (a.s.) said, "When you stand up with the intention of prayer, then think what your heart feels about the matter. Act on that; because that is the time when Satan is the farthest away from the man. Or you can open the pages of the Holy Qur'an at that time and act according to the interpretation you derive from the verse that meets your eyes."

## Doing Istikhara for Others

The practice of our times is to write *nek* (Farsi for “auspicious”) or *bud* (unfavorable) on the Holy Qur’an, or we approach a scholar for doing the *Istikhara*. Allama Majlisi says that even for the sake of example we don’t have any tradition of the Prophet (S) or the Ahl al-Bayt (a.s.) that a Shi’ah went to any Imam (a.s.) for the purpose of *Istikhara*. Therefore, there is no precedent that can be quoted in support of our practice in this matter. There are certain clerics who don’t agree to do *Istikhara* for others. But Allama Majlisi and some other scholars approve that those who cannot do the *Istikhara* themselves, can nominate another capable person as *wakīl* (representative) to open the Holy Book and do the *Istikhara* for him. The condition is that the person who opens the Book should be in proper physical condition at the time and is conversant with the meanings of the verses of the Qur’an.

Many jurists consider *istikhara* as not legitimate. They say that there is no need to do the *Istikhara* and one must act and trust his affairs to the Will of Allah (S.w.T.).

The conclusion is that we shall seek good (*khair*) from Allah (S.w.T.) in our affairs and that is the crux of *Istikhara*.

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