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The Fourteen Attributes of Imam 'Ali's Son

After counting seven attributes for himself, Imam 'Ali (as) mentions the following fourteen attributes for his son's self-improvement:

To a son who hopes for what is unattainable

“إلى المولود المؤمن ما لا يدرك”

God has equipped man with instincts and desires to be able to sustain life. If these instincts and desires are employed in the right situations, they will add up to our vigor and satisfaction.

Our wishes, too, are among these means:

If man lacked these wishes, life would be impossible.

Regarding this, the Great Prophet (S) has stated:

“الْأَمَلُ رَحْمَةٌ لِّأُمَّتِي وَلَوْ لَا الْأَمَلُ مَا رَضَعَتْ الْوَلَدَةَ وَلَدَهَا وَلَا غَرَسَ غَارِسٌ شَجَرًا”

"Hope is a mercy for my people. If hope did not exist no mother would ever breastfeed her child and no gardener would ever plant a tree."^{[1](#)}

In a tradition, it is stated, "Jesus Christ (as) saw an old man plowing the ground. Jesus asked God to take his desire away from him. Then, Jesus saw that the old man threw the spade on the ground and lay on the ground, resting.

Then Jesus asked God to give him back his desires. He saw the old man stand up and start working. Jesus asked the old man the secret behind this. The old man answered. "When I was working, I told myself: How long do you have to work when you are so old. Then I threw the spade down and started resting. Then I told myself: I swear to God that as long as I am alive, I need life equipments. Then I rose and started working."^{[2](#)}

These two traditions clearly show the dynamic role of wishes in our lives. But, as it was stated earlier, wishes are good if they are fulfilled with care or else they will destroy the community if they go on extremes.

Imam 'Ali (as) in the sermon 42 of Nahj al-Balaghah states:

أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنَّ أَخَوْفَ مَا أَخَافُ عَلَيْكُمْ اثْنَانِ: اتِّبَاعُ الْهَوَى وَطُولُ الْأَمَلِ فَاِمَّا اتِّبَاعُ الْهَوَى فَيَصُدُّ عَنِ الْحَقِّ وَأَمَّا طُولُ الْأَمَلِ فَيُنْسِي الْآخِرَةَ. أَلَا وَإِنَّ الدُّنْيَا قَدْ وَلَّتْ حَذَاءً فَلَمْ يَبْقَ مِنْهَا إِلَّا صَبَابَةٌ كَصَبَابَةِ الْإِنَاءِ اصْطَبَّهَا صَابَهَا إِلَّا وَإِنَّ الْآخِرَةَ قَدْ أَقْبَلَتْ وَلِكُلِّ مِنْهُمَا بَنُونَ فَكُونُوا مِنْ أَبْنَاءِ الْآخِرَةِ وَلَا تَكُونُوا مِنْ أَبْنَاءِ الدُّنْيَا فَإِنَّ كُلَّ وَلَدٍ سَيَلْحَقُ بِأُمِّهِ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ وَإِنَّ الْيَوْمَ عَمَلٌ وَلَا حِسَابٌ وَغَدًا حِسَابٌ وَلَا عَمَلٌ

"O people! The greatest things that I fear for you are two: following (your) desires and farfetched hopes. Following desires prevents the attainment of the truth, and far-fetched hopes cause forgetfulness of the Hereafter.

Indeed, the world has passed swiftly by, and only a small portion of it remains like the remnants poured out of a water vessel; and indeed, the Hereafter has approached. Each of them (the world and the Hereafter) has their children. Therefore, be of the children of the Hereafter, and do not be of the children of this world, for every child will be attached to his mother on the Day of Judgment. Today is (the day of) action and no accounting, and tomorrow is (the day of) accounting and no action."[3](#)

As you will notice, in this sermon, Imam 'Ali (as), not only mentions the hazards of far-fetched hopes, which is to forget about the Hereafter, but also shows us how to struggle against these hopes by paying attention to the Hereafter. He states that the results of our wrong-doings beget dangerous consequences in the other world, and there will be no way to compensate for them at that time. Of course, we should be aware that not all our hopes can be fulfilled.

By drawing a square on the ground and by passing a line in the middle of it the Great Prophet (S) depicted this fact.[4](#)

Imam 'Ali (as) mentions the same idea in the expression he uses "المؤمل ما لا يدرك" (hoping for what is unattainable). He warns us not to follow all of our desires; he says this is impossible.[5](#)

Thus, it is better for us to limit our hopes and only make use of them rationally, Imam 'Ali (as) has said in this regard:

مَنْ أَيْقَنَ أَنَّهُ يُفَارِقُ الْأَحْبَابَ وَيَسْكُنُ التُّرَابَ وَيُوَاجِهُ الْحِسَابَ وَيَسْتَغْنِي عَمَّا خَلْفَ وَيَفْتَقِرُ إِلَى مَا قَدَّمَ كَانَ حَرِيًّا بِقُصْرِ الْأَمَلِ وَطُولِ الْعَمَلِ

"It is appropriate for a person who is certain that he will part from loved ones, dwell within the earth, confront the reckoning, and have no need of what he has left behind while being in need of what he has sent forward, to curtail his hopes and add to his (good) deeds"[6](#)

But for the Gnostics the ultimate for their desires is Allah; they only think about God's consent.

2. The Follower of the path of those who have perished

"السالك سبيل من قد هلك"

What is meant by this expression is that the child from the day it is born is on the scale of growth and it develops: It finishes infancy and then arrives at the youth and then reaches old age and finally passes away. This process includes everybody: both our ancestors and our descendants.

Thus, my son! You, too, are going to go through this stage. Never remain ignorant of this fact, or else, the Satan will mislead you.

The above expression might convey the following concept depicted in the following piece of poetry:

These roads on the desert,

Are drawn by pen in the past by Friends;

The transcripts on the graves are unopened letters,

Which have come to us from the people of the Hereafter.

This means that the road on which you and I are walking is the road prepared by people in the past. Be aware, we too are preparing the road for future walkers!!

3. Prey to Illnesses

"غرض الاسقام"

Material life entails complexities and clashes. If one is weaker, these clashes take on a strong side.

Man is no exception to this universal rule. He is always struggling against different agents and destructive factors. He is at the mercy of all sorts of diseases, calamities, disasters and hardships. Every moment he might get disintegrated: a stroke, cancer, TB, smallpox, ulcers, and the like.

Imam 'Ali (as), in the sermon 217 of Nahj al-Balaghah, concerning this, states:

"دَارُ الْبَلَاءِ مَحْفُوفَةٌ وَبِالْغَدْرِ مَعْرُوفَةٌ لَا تَدُومُ أَحْوَالُهَا وَلَا تَسْلَمُ نَزَالُهَا، أَحْوَالٌ مُخْتَلِفَةٌ وَتَارَاتٌ مُتَصَرِّفَةٌ، الْعِيشُ فِيهَا مَذْمُومٌ وَالْأَمَانُ مِنْهَا مَعْدُومٌ وَإِنَّمَا أَهْلُهَا فِيهَا أَغْرَاضٌ مُسْتَهْدَفَةٌ تَرْمِيهِمْ بِسِهَامِهَا وَتَفْنِيهِمْ بِحِمَامِهَا"

"(The world is) a house surrounded by affliction, known for its treachery. Its states do not last and its inhabitants do not remain sound. Its states vary and its times change. Life in it is reprehensible and safety is non-existent. Its inhabitants are only targets; it strikes them with its arrows and destroys them with death".

Thus, man is subject to both diseases and disasters and misfortunes. Man struggles with these till he

passes away and gets to safety.

"لَقَدْ خَلَقْنَا الْإِنْسَانَ فِي كَبَدٍ"

“Certainly we have created man to be in distress”.⁷

The poet says:

Thus more bitter than poison the world will pass,
Once again there will be a day as sweet as sugar.

4. A pawn in the hands of time

“ورهيئة الايام”

As the property is mortgaged to the mortgagee during the mortgage time and when the time comes, it goes back to its genuine owner, man is also pawned to the world and its differing events. It seems as if man does not have any freedom whatsoever.

And it is assumed that it is the world which brings about either prosperity or misery, youth or age, power or feebleness, wealth or poverty, health or sickness, happiness or sorrow. When the time comes, his mortgage time is over and it will be turned over to his real owner.

Thus, man is extremely miserable and vulnerable. With this amount of misery and vulnerability, he should not be left ignorant and proud. The Imam (as) guides us in the following manner:

"مَا لِلْبَنِ آدَمَ وَالْفَخْرِ: أَوَّلُهُ نُطْفَةٌ، وَآخِرُهُ جِيفَةٌ، لَا يَرْزُقُ نَفْسَهُ وَلَا يَدْفَعُ حَتْفَهُ"

“What does the son of Adam have to do with pride? His beginning was a drop and his end is a corpse. He can neither provide sustenance for himself nor can he drive away his death”.⁸

5. The target of misfortunes

“ورمية المصائب”

This phrase, like the third phrase (prey to illnesses) shows that man is always subject to all sorts of diseases and hardships. The difference lies in the fact that No 5 refers to mental and spiritual afflictions, whereas No 3 refers to bodily afflictions.

6. A Slave of the world

“عبد الدنيا”

A person, who can not resist the world's transitory materialistic manifestations and easily yields to them, is a slave to the world, to dirhams and to dinars and to social positions.

Many people, when confronted with material things and justice, prefer the worldly affairs and yield to its luxuries. Imam Husayn (as), describing such people, states:

"النَّاسُ عِبِيدُ الدُّنْيَا وَالدِّينُ لَعِيقٌ عَلَى السِّنِّتِهِمْ يَحُوطُونَهُ حَيْثُ مَا دَرَّتْ مَعَايِشُهُمْ فَإِذَا مُحِّصُوا لِلْبَلَاءِ قَلَّ الدِّيانُونَ"

*"People are slaves to the world and religion is a substance on their tongues that they sample. They take care of it as long as their livelihood is abundant. When they are tested by affliction, there are few pious ones."*⁹

It has repeatedly been noted, however, that these adjectives and attributes refer to an ordinary person, and not to Imams who are infallible.

7. A Trader in vanities

“وتاجر الغرور”

As we have previously mentioned, the world is a house of trade. Most people sell their precious lives for a provision of vanity. They would sell their Hereafter for this world:

"أُولَئِكَ الَّذِينَ اشْتَرَوْا الْحَيَاةَ الدُّنْيَا بِالْآخِرَةِ فَلَا يُخَفَّفُ عَنْهُمْ الْعَذَابُ وَلَا هُمْ يُنصَرُونَ"

"These are they who buy the life of this world for the Hereafter, so their chastisement shall not be lightened nor shall they be helped".¹⁰

Although these people realize that the world is nothing more than "a provision of vanity"

"وَمَا الْحَيَاةُ الدُّنْيَا إِلَّا مَتَاعُ الْغُرُورِ"

"And the life of this world is nothing but a provision of vanities".¹¹

"كَسْرَابٍ بِقِيَعَةٍ يَحْسِبُهُ الظَّمَانُ مَاءً"

"Their deeds are like the mirage in a desert, which the thirsty man deems to be water". [12](#)

They prefer this world to the Hereafter. They give precedence to possessions, positions, children and desires before God's pleasure and the Hereafter. They buy things on the face of them whereas

"وَلَا تِجَارَةٌ كَالْعَمَلِ الصَّالِحِ"

"There is no trade like good deeds". [13](#)

"مَنْ تَاجَرَ اللَّهَ رِبْحٌ"

"Whoever trades with God, profits." [14](#)

On the other hand, there are those who offer to God what they have, including their lives, possessions, and children. What they are looking for in this transaction is God's pleasure:

"إِنَّ اللَّهَ اشْتَرَى مِنَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ أَنْفُسَهُمْ وَأَمْوَالَهُمْ بِأَنْ لَهُمُ الْجَنَّةَ يُقَاتِلُونَ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ فَيَقْتُلُونَ وَيُقْتَلُونَ وَعْدًا عَلَيْهِ حَقًّا" "فِي التَّوْرَةِ وَالْإِنْجِيلِ وَالْقُرْآنِ وَمَنْ أَوْفَى بِعَهْدِهِ مِنَ اللَّهِ فَاسْتَبْشِرُوا بِبَيْعِكُمُ الَّذِي بَايَعْتُمْ بِهِ وَذَلِكَ هُوَ الْفَوْزُ الْعَظِيمُ"

"Surely Allah has bought of the believers their persons and their property for this, that they shall have the garden; they fight in Allah's way, so they slay and are slain; a promise which is binding on Him in the Taurat and the Ingeel and the Qur'an; and who is more faithful to his covenant than Allah? Rejoice therefore in the pledge which you have made; and that is the mighty achievement". [15](#)

Thus, the most important trade is getting Allah's pleasure,

"وَمِنَ النَّاسِ مَنْ يَشْرِي نَفْسَهُ ابْتِغَاءَ مَرْضَاةِ اللَّهِ"

"And among men is he who sells himself to seek the pleasure of Allah". [16](#)

And the worst trade is selling oneself to the world and what it contains. Regarding this, Imam (as) has stated:

"وَلَيْسَ الْمَتَجَرُّ أَنْ تَرَى الدُّنْيَا لِنَفْسِكَ ثَمَنًا"

"The most wretched transaction is that you consider the world to be a price for your self!"¹⁷

8. A Debtor of Divine Decrees

“وغريم المنايا”

"Manaya" is the plural for "maniya", meaning death or decree.

The reason the plural word "manaya" is used is that there are different ways to die: one dies in accidents, the other dies by drowning, the other one through shocks and the other one by cancer, and the like.

In this sentence, the Imam (as) compares a man to a debtor who is asked to return his debts.

Divine decrees, too, are creditors who are after their credits, which is man's departure towards the Hereafter.

Elsewhere, the Imam (as) refers to this fact in the following words:

"إِنَّ هَذَا الْمَوْتَ لَطَالِبٌ حَثِيثٌ لَا يَفُوتُهُ الْمُقِيمُ وَلَا يُعْجِزُهُ مَنْ هَرَبَ"

"Indeed, this death is an eager seeker; neither does one who remains escape it, nor does one who flees frustrate it".¹⁸

"إِنَّ وَرَاءَكَ طَالِباً حَثِيثاً مِنَ الْمَوْتِ فَلَا تَغْفَلْ"

"Surely, behind you is an eager seeker from death; therefore, do not be heedless".¹⁹

9. A Captive of Death

“واسير الموت”

Because man can not escape death²⁰ wherever he stays, no matter what age he is or what position he possesses, he will taste the bitterness of death.²¹ Naturally, such a person will remain a captive in the hands of death. Thus, the Imam (as) reckons his son, Imam Hasan, like any other human being, a captive in the hands of death.

10. An Ally of anxieties

“وحليف الهموم”

11. A Companion of sorrows

“وقرين الاحزان”

12. The Aim of calamities

“ونصب الآفات”

A person is an ally of anxieties, a companion of sorrows and the aim of calamities, if he can not fulfill his objectives, if he observes all sorts of obstacles on the way of his growth, and if he is inflicted with poverty, disease, age, deprivation, lack of wife, children, shelter, food, heat and the like. There is nobody who is not subject to these sufferings: in this case, the Holy Qur'an says:

"Certainly we have created man to be in distress."(90:4)

If man feels prosperous one minute, then he has to taste a cup filled with the hemlock of disasters and calamities. Neishapuri has observed that

"اللَّذَّةُ فِي الدُّنْيَا كَالْقَطْرَةِ مِنَ الْبَحْرِ"

"If you compare the world's pleasures with the world's calamities, you will find the ratio is one drop of water to the sea at large."[22](#)

It is because of these facts that the Imam (as) considers his own son like other human beings, an ally of anxieties, a companion of sorrows and the target of calamities. He warns us that this world, with all these hardships, cannot be the final objective for man. We should make a provision for the other world:

"وَالْعَاقِبَةُ لِلْمُتَّقِينَ"

"And the end is for those who guard against evil".[23](#)

Sorrows for this world or for the Hereafter?

The source for man's sorrows is sometimes materialistic and related to this world: distresses such as poverty, the death of one's child, suffering a loss, deprivation of wife and children.

But sometimes the source for these griefs might be spiritual and related to the Hereafter, for instance, the feeling of guilt or the observation of committing guilt by others.

A wise and true believer, from the viewpoint of the principle of patience, has to make himself content and patient. He has to cope with these sufferings or else, as the Imam (as) has stated,

"الْهَمُّ يُذِيبُ الْجَسَدَ"

"Grief emaciates the body".[24](#)

Zaynab (as) in answering 'Ubaydullah b. Ziyad said: "We consider martyrdom and captivity, which are given to us by Allah, as a blessing."[25](#)

And the Great Prophet (S) has said:

"إِذَا كَثُرَتْ ذُنُوبُ الْمُؤْمِنِ وَلَمْ يَكُنْ لَهُ مِنَ الْعَمَلِ مَا يُكَفِّرُهَا ابْتَلَاهُ اللَّهُ بِالْحُزْنِ لِيَكْفِرَ بِهَا عَنْهُ"

"When the believer's sins increase and there is nothing from his deeds that can expiate it, then Allah afflicts him with sorrow in order to expiate them through it."[26](#)

As the above two statements show, sufferings will make a man improve in life.

Imam as-Sadiq (as) has said:

"أَنَّ الْهَمَّ لِيَذْهَبَ بِذُنُوبِ الْمُسْلِمِ"

"Grief removes the sins of the Muslim"[27](#)

A true believer, by lessening the weight of his sufferings, acts as if he were given the best God given blessings[28](#) or as if he were drinking his mother's milk.[29](#) In the case of spiritual sufferings, a wrong doer is in fact depressed. Regarding this, Imam as-Sadiq (as) has stated:

"الْحُزْنُ شِعَارُ الْعَارِفِينَ لِكَثْرَةِ وَارِدَاتِ الْغَيْبِ عَلَى سَرَائِرِهِمْ وَطُولِ مُبَاهَاتِهِمْ تَحْتَ سِتْرِ الْكِبَرِيَاءِ وَالْمَحْزُونُ ظَاهِرُهُ قَبْضٌ وَبَاطِنُهُ بَسْطٌ، يَعِيشُ مَعَ الْخَلْقِ عَيْشَ الْمَرْضَى وَمَعَ اللَّهِ عَيْشَ الْقَرَبَاءِ، إِلَى أَنْ قَالَ: وَيَمِينُ الْحُزْنِ الْإِبْتِلَاءُ وَشِمَالُهُ الصَّمْتُ وَالْحُزْنُ يَخْتَصُّ بِهِ الْعَارِفُونَ لِلَّهِ تَعَالَى وَالتَّفَكُّرُ مُشْتَرَكُ الْخَاصِّ وَالْعَامِّ وَلَوْ حُجِبَ الْحُزْنُ عَنْ عُيُونِ الْعَارِفِينَ سَاعَةً اسْتَغَاثُوا"

"Sorrow is the mark of the gnostics, because of the frequency of the arrivals of the unseen into their hearts and their prolonged glorification of God. The outer self of the sorrowful one is contraction and his inner self is expansion. He lives with people in listlessness, and with God in close intimacy...". He said: "To the right of sorrow is affliction and to its left is silence. Sorrow belongs exclusively to God's gnostics and contemplation is common to both the elite and the ordinary people. If sorrow is concealed from the gnostics for a moment, they will call out for help..."³⁰

He also has said:

عَنِ الصَّادِقِ عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ قَالَ: أَوْحَى إِلَيَّ اللَّهُ إِلَى عِيسَى بْنِ مَرْيَمَ هَبْ لِي مِنْ عَيْنِكَ الدُّمُوعَ وَمِنْ قَلْبِكَ الْخُشُوعَ وَاجْعَلْ
عَيْنَكَ بِمِيلِ الْحُزْنِ إِذَا ضَحِكَ الْبَاطِلُونَ وَقُمْ عَلَى قُبُورِ الْأَمْوَاتِ فَنَادِهِمْ بِالصَّوْتِ الرَّفِيعِ لَعَلَّكَ تَأْخُذُ مَوْعِظَتَكَ مِنْهُمْ
"وَقُلْ إِنِّي لَأَحَقُّ بِهِمْ فِي الْآخِرِينَ"

"God revealed to Jesus Christ, son of Mary (as): 'Give me tears from your eyes and humility from your heart, and paint your eyes with the inclination to sorrow when the vain-doers laugh. Stand over the graves of the dead and call out to them in a loud voice – perhaps you will take a lesson from them– and say: I am among those who will join them.'"³¹

A person, whose sorrows are for people going astray and distancing themselves from God, is among elite of believers. His sorrows, in fact, make him come nearer to God. Imam 'Ali (as) has stated

"مَنْ طَالَ حُزْنُهُ عَلَى نَفْسِهِ فِي الدُّنْيَا أَقَرَّ اللَّهُ عَيْنَهُ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ"

"He who prolongs his sorrow for himself in this world, Allah will make him happy on the Day of Judgment."³²

13. Prostrated by desires

”وصريع الشهوات“

Man is a unique creature whose body consists of both intellect and desires. There is always a struggle between these two. If intellect wins, man is better than angels; whereas, if desires win, he is lower than animals;³³ the strongest people are those who defeat their desires, and obey rightfulness and wisdom³⁴. Only these latter receive God's blessings³⁵; others are slaves to dirhams, dinars and their instincts.³⁶

Imam 'Ali's (as) addressing his son as being "prostrated by desires" is a symbolic statement and is, in fact, the advice of a father to his ordinary son. Satan, too, has sworn to mislead every person except the true believers.³⁷ However Imam Hasan (as) is among the Infallibles and protected against desires.³⁸

14. A Successor of the dead

“ وخليفة الاموات ”

As it was said in the phrase No 5 of the Imam's letter; if a man paid attention to the fact that other people used to live on the land that we are now occupying, then he would not be proud and would be thinking about gathering provisions for the Hereafter. By notifying his great son, the Imam (as) in fact gives us all a lesson to avoid indulging in pride. He says, on the basis of the saying:

"حُكُمُ الْأَمْثَالِ فِيمَا يَجُوزُ وَفِيمَا لَا يَجُوزُ سَوَاءٌ"

“This will happen to you all as well”.

أَمَّا بَعْدُ فَإِنَّ فِيمَا تَبَيَّنْتُ مِنْ إِدْبَارِ الدُّنْيَا عَنِّي، وَجُمُوحِ الدَّهْرِ عَلَيَّ وَإِقْبَالِ الْآخِرَةِ إِلَيَّ مَا يَزَعُنِي عَنْ ذِكْرِ مَنْ سِوَايَ
وَالِإِهْتِمَامِ بِمَا وَرَائِي، غَيْرَ أَنِّي حَيْثُ تَفَرَّدَ بِي دُونَ هُمُومِ النَّاسِ هُمْ نَفْسِي فَصَدَّقَنِي رَأْيِي وَصَرَفَنِي عَنْ هَوَائِي وَصَرَحَ
لِي مَحْضُ أَمْرِي فَافْضَى بِي إِلَى جَدٍّ لَا يَكُونُ فِيهِ لَعِبٌ وَصِدْقٌ لَا يَشُوبُهُ كَذِبٌ وَوَجَدْتُكَ بَعْضِي بَلْ وَجَدْتُكَ كُلِّي حَتَّى
كَأَنَّ شَيْئاً لَوْ أَصَابَكَ أَصَابَنِي وَكَأَنَّ الْمَوْتَ لَوْ أَنَاكَ أَتَانِي فَعَنَانِي مِنْ أَمْرِكَ مَا يُغْنِينِي مِنْ أَمْرِ نَفْسِي فَكَتَبْتُ إِلَيْكَ
"كِتَابِي مُسْتَظْهِراً بِهِ إِنْ أَنَا بَقِيتُ لَكَ أَوْ فَنَيْتُ"

“What has become evident to me from the world’s turning away from me, the wilfulness of time against me and the Hereafter advancing towards me, restrains me from remembrance of anyone other than me or concern with what is beyond me. Although concern for myself occupied me to the exclusion of concern for others, my judgment proved to be true and it turned me away from my desires and the true nature of my affair became clear to me. This led me to an earnestness devoid of diversion and truth unsullied by falsehood. I found you a part of myself; rather I found you all of myself, until it was such that if something befell you it befell me, and if death came to you it came to me; thus whatever concerned me about myself, concerned me about you. Therefore I have written a treatise for you so that it may be an aid (to you) whether I live or die”.

Commentary

There are significant points to be discussed in this letter:

1. After being aware that the world has turned its back on him, that it has overcome him and that the Hereafter is approaching him, how could Imam ‘Ali (as) have cut himself off from others and become occupied with his own affairs when we realize that the infallible Imam (as) had always been aware of these facts and had consistently been trying to improve himself?

To answer this difficult question, we may add: it is a fact that the Imam (as) has always been alert and did not have to be exposed to the overcoming of the world to appreciate the situation. But there are problems that we know, but not concretely. It is the passing of the time that gives us a full appreciation of the nature of events.

After having passed over the age of sixty and having felt the signs of old age, amassed a pack of experiences, and seen the disloyalty of people, now Imam (as) clearly feels the approaching of death and his departure from this world. Under these situations, a man has to leave the others and to concentrate on himself.

The night is dark, the waves are frightening and the whirlpool is horrifying; how could those on the shore realize our plight?

2. How is self-correction compatible with the writing of such a treatise?

To answer this question, we could say:

The conditions under which Imam (as) was living could make him think about nobody except God, but he himself has said that his son is a part of him: because his son's existence depends on his existence, or his son is the whole of him because after the father, the son will be his substitute and an heir of his knowledge and virtues:

Thus the Imam's attention to his son equals his attention to himself and damage to his son is damage to himself.

3. Concerning the above points, the significance of the present treatise becomes clear. Imam was under severe conditions at the time of writing this letter. He should have spent his time solving those problems, but he preferred to write this treatise. This shows by not writing this letter, Imam (as) would have thought he had not carried out his parental and Imamate duties. Thus, under dire situations, and prior to his arrival at the caliphate center (i.e., Kufa), Imam (as) started writing it. This makes the task of parents and leaders in constructing the family and society even harder.[39](#)

The poet says:

What are you fighting for, the contenders have all gone,
Prepare yourself for the voyage, friends have all gone,
That wandering dust in the desert,

Tells you to depart, since all the jockeys have gone.

Alas, the story tellers have all departed;

Alas, all the sorrow-filled people have gone.

We regret that the holders of spiritual treasures,

They left their treasures to friends and have gone.

The spring's eyelashes are stained with blood for the departure of friends.

They left you in front of your eyes, like the spring clouds.

Another poet says:

Each moment a breath passes by,

When I see, there is not much left of it.

You have been unaware even if you are fifty,

You have five days left; see what you can do with it.

Ashamed will be the man, who left without having done any good deeds,

The horn of departure was rung, but he prepared nothing.

The sweet sleep and the morning

Will hinder the walker from going.

Anybody who arrived on the scene built a building,

And then left, leaving his building to others,

And the other had whims of his own,

And this building was not ever-lasting.

Do not make friends with an unstable thing,

This cruel one does not deserve your friendship.

Every body, both good and bad, should die,

Blessed is he who does good deeds in the world.

Send in advance a record of good deeds to your grave,

Nobody will bring it, you send it in advance.

Life is short and like snow in the summer heat,

There is only a little left, but we are still haughty.

Diligently listen to Sa'di's advice,

The way is like this, be a man, be prepared.

فَأَنِّي أوصيكُ بِتَقْوَى الله - أَي بُنْي - وَلُزُومِ أَمْرِهِ، وَعِمَارَةِ قَلْبِكَ بِذِكْرِهِ، وَالْإِعْتِصَامِ بِحَبْلِهِ، وَأَيُّ سَبَبٍ أَوْثَقُ مِنْ سَبَبِ
بَيْتِكَ وَبَيْنَ اللهِ إِنْ أَنْتَ أَخَذْتَ بِهِ؟! أَحِبِّي قَلْبَكَ بِالْمَوْعِظَةِ، وَامْتِهِ بِالزُّهَادَةِ، وَقَوِّهِ بِالْيَقِينِ، وَتَوَرَّهِ بِالْحِكْمَةِ، وَذَلِّلْهُ بِذِكْرِ
الْمَوْتِ، وَقَرِّرْهُ بِالْفَنَاءِ، وَبَصِّرْهُ فَجَائِعَ الدُّنْيَا، وَحَذِّرْهُ صَوْلَةَ الدَّهْرِ، وَفُحْشَ تَقَلُّبِ اللَّيَالِي وَالْأَيَّامِ، وَأَعْرِضْ عَلَيْهِ أَخْبَارَ
الْمَاضِينَ، وَذَكِّرْهُ بِمَا أَصَابَ مَنْ كَانَ قَبْلَكَ مِنَ الْأَوَّلِينَ، وَسِرِّ فِي دِيَارِهِمْ وَأَثَارِهِمْ، فَانْظُرْ فِيمَا فَعَلُوا وَعَمَّا انْتَقَلُوا،
وَأَيْنَ حَلُّوا وَنَزَلُوا، فَإِنَّكَ تَجِدُهُمْ قَدْ انْتَقَلُوا عَنِ الْأَحْبَةِ، وَحَلُّوا دَارَ الْغُرْبَةِ، وَكَأَنَّكَ عَنْ قَلِيلٍ قَدْ صِرْتَ كَأَحَدِهِمْ فَاصْلِحْ
مَثْوَاكَ وَلَا تَبِعْ آخِرَتَكَ بِدُنْيَاكَ وَدَعْ الْقَوْلَ فِيمَا لَا تَعْرِفُ، وَالْخِطَابَ فِيمَا لَمْ تُكَلِّفْ، وَامْسِكْ عَنْ طَرِيقِ إِذَا خِفْتَ
ضَلَالَتَهُ، فَإِنَّ الْكَفَّ عِنْدَ حَيْرَةِ الضَّلَالَةِ خَيْرٌ مِنْ رُكُوبِ الْإِهْوَالِ وَأَمْرٌ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ تَكُنْ مِنْ أَهْلِهِ وَانْكِرِ الْمُنْكَرَ بِيَدِكَ
وَلِسَانِكَ وَبَايِنَ مَنْ فَعَلَهُ بِجُهِدِكَ وَجَاهِدْ فِي اللهِ حَقَّ جِهَادِهِ وَلَا تَأْخُذْكَ فِي اللهِ لَوْمَةٌ لِأَنَّهُمْ وَخُضِ الْغَمَرَاتِ لِلْحَقِّ حَيْثُ
كَانَ وَتَفَقَّهْ فِي الدِّينِ وَعَوِّدْ نَفْسَكَ التَّصَبُّرَ عَلَى الْمَكْرُوهِ وَنِعَمَ الْخُلُقِ التَّصَبُّرَ فِي الْحَقِّ وَالْجِيءِ نَفْسَكَ فِي الْأُمُورِ كُلِّهَا
إِلَى الْإِهْلِكَ فَإِنَّكَ تُلْجِئُهَا إِلَى كَهْفٍ حَرِيظٍ وَمَانِعٍ عَزِيزٍ وَاخْلُصْ فِي الْمُسَالَةِ لِرَبِّكَ فَإِنَّ بِيَدِهِ الْعَطَاءَ وَالْحِرْمَانَ وَكَثْرَ
الِاسْتِخَارَةِ وَتَفَقُّهُمُ وَصِيَّتِي وَلَا تَذْهَبَنَّ عَنْكَ صَفْحاً فَإِنَّ خَيْرَ الْقَوْلِ مَا نَفَعَ وَاعْلَمْ أَنَّهُ لَا خَيْرَ فِي عِلْمٍ لَا يُنْفَعُ وَلَا يُنْتَفَعُ
"بِعِلْمٍ لَا يَحِقُّ تَعَلُّمُهُ"

“I recommend to you God-wariness, my son, and the fulfillment of God's commands, inhabiting your heart with His remembrance and adherence to His cord. What cord is firmer than that between you and God, if you take hold of it?

Enliven your heart through exhortation and cause it to die through abstinence, strengthen it with certainty, illuminate it with wisdom and make it submissive with the remembrance of death. Make it acknowledge its mortality, cause it to perceive the calamities of this world, warn it of the assault of time, and the evil inconstancy of the nights and days.

Present to it the reports of the past ones, and remind it of what befell the earlier ones before you. Travel in their lands and (among) their remains, and see what they did, from what they have moved away, and where they arrived at and settled. You will find them having moved away from their loved ones and having inhabited an alien abode and (it is) as if you will soon become like one of them. Therefore, set right your place of rest and do not sell your next life for your world.

Do not talk about what you do not know or speak about what is not required of you. Keep away from a path if you fear it will lead you astray, for holding back from the perplexity of misguidance is better than encountering terrifying events. Bid others to do good and you will be one of them; reject evil with your hand and your tongue, and do your utmost to separate from one who does evil. ‘Strive in the way of God as is His due’ (ref.22:78) and do not let the reproach of any reproacher have any influence on you in the path of God.

Plunge into hardships for the sake of truth wherever it may be, and become learned in religion. Habituate yourself to patient endurance in afflictions; the best of moral traits is to constrain yourself to patience in the (path of) truth. Commit your self in all your affairs to your God, for you will thus be committing it to a secure cave and a mighty protector. Be sincere in your asking from your Lord, for in His hand is the bestowal and refusal, and ask God frequently for the best. Understand my testament and do not disregard it, for indeed the best speech is that which is beneficial. Know that there is no good in knowledge that is not beneficial, and knowledge that is not worthy of acquisition is not beneficial”.

Commentary

Imam ‘Ali (as), in this treatise, has emphasized a series of commands and methods for obeying God, and preparing piety and cleansing the heart of impurities and filling it out with virtues and taking lessons from the people in the past and selecting the best method of living. Each one of these deserves a research:

[1.](#) . Safinah al-Bihar, vol. 1, p.30, item Amal (desire).

[2.](#) . Safinah al-Bihar, vol. 1, p.30, item Amal (desire).

[3.](#) . Nahj al-Balaghah, Sermon 42.

[4.](#) .Kashkul, Shaykh al-Baha’i, p.33; Nahj al-Balaghah, Hikmah, p.336.

[5.](#) . Some of the expositors of Nahj al-Balaghah, assuming that the word “desire” is not appropriate for an innocent Imam,

relegate these words to the caliphate. But this is not necessary. Imam (as) in this treatise wants to depict the duties of one ordinary father and son and not the duties of an infallible father or an infallible son (Nahj al-Balaghah, Ibn Abi al-Hadid, Old print, vol. 4. p 27.

[6.](#) . Safinah al-Bihar, vol. 1, p 30, the term Amal (hope).

[7.](#) . Qur'an 90:4.

[8.](#) . Nahj al-Balaghah, Hikmah 454.

[9.](#) . Nafs al-Mahmum, p 106.

[10.](#) . Qur'an 2:86.

[11.](#) . Qur'an 3: 185.

[12.](#) . Qur'an 24:39.

[13.](#) . Nahj al-Balaghah, Hikmah 109.

[14.](#) Ghurar wa Durar, al-Amidi, vol.5, p. 180

[15.](#) .Qur'an 9:111.

[16.](#) .Qur'an 2:207.

[17.](#) . Nahj al-Balaghah, Sermon 32.

[18.](#) . Ghurar wa Durar, al-Amidi, vol.2, p.569.

[19.](#) . Ibid. vol. 3. p.57.

[20.](#) . Wherever you are, death will overtake you, though you are in lofty towers. [Qur'an 4: 78].

[21.](#) . Every soul shall taste of death [Qur'an 3: 185].

[22.](#) . "Farid and Jodei' Encyclopedia", vol.1. p.95.

[23.](#) .Qur'an 7: 128.

[24.](#) . Ghurar wa Durar, al-Amidi, vol. 1, p.214.

[25.](#) . Nafs al-Mahmum.

[26.](#) . Safinah al-Bihar, vol. 1, p.249.

[27.](#) . Ibid.

[28.](#) . Bihar, vol. 2, p.72.

[29.](#) . Bihar, vol.96, p.28.

[30.](#) . Safinah al-Bihar, vol. 1. p.249.

[31.](#) . Ibid.

[32.](#) . Ghurar wa Durar, al-Amidi, vol.5, p.424.

[33.](#) . Nur al-Thaqalayn, vol.3, p.188.

[34.](#) . Ghurar al-Hikam, al-Amidi, vol. 2, p.412.

[35.](#) . Qur'an 12:53.

[36.](#) . Tuhaf al-'Uqul, p. 173.

[37.](#) . Qur'an 38:82.

[38.](#) . Qur'an 2: 124.

[39.](#) . In writing these notes, I have used Ibn Abi al-Hadid's Sharh Nahj al-Balaghah, vol. 4. p.29, and Ibn Maytham, vol 5. pp5-7.

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