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Third Hadith: Self-Conceit ('Ujb)

بِالسَّنَدِ الْمُتَّصِلِ إِلَى مُحَمَّدِ بْنِ يَعْقُوبَ عَنْ عَلِيِّ بْنِ إِبْرَاهِيمَ، عَنْ أَبِيهِ، عَنْ عَلِيِّ بْنِ أَصْبَاطٍ، عَنْ أَحْمَدَ بْنِ عُمَرَ الْحَلَّالِ، عَنْ عَلِيِّ بْنِ سُوَيْدٍ، عَنْ أَبِي الْحَسَنِ عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ قَالَ: سَأَلْتُهُ عَنِ الْعُجْبِ الَّذِي يُفْسِدُ الْعَمَلَ، فَقَالَ: الْعُجْبُ دَرَجَاتٌ؛ مِنْهَا أَنْ يُزَيَّنَ لِلْعَبْدِ سُوءُ عَمَلِهِ فَيَرَاهُ حَسَنًا فَيُعْجِبُهُ وَيَحْسَبُ أَنَّهُ يُحْسِنُ صُنْعًا. وَمِنْهَا أَنْ يُؤْمِنَ الْعَبْدُ بِرَبِّهِ فَيَمُنُّ عَلَى اللَّهِ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ وَاللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ فِيهِ الْمَنُّ.

Muhammad ibn Ya'qub (al-Kulayni) from 'Ali ibn Ibrahim, from his father, from 'Ali ibn Asbat, from Ahmad ibn 'Umar al-Hallal, from 'Ali ibn Suwayd from Abu al-Hasan (Imam al-Rida [A]): Says 'Ali ibn Suwayd that he asked Abu al-Hasan (A) about the 'Ujb (self-conceit, vanity) that vitiates the quality of human deeds. Said the Imam (A): There are several levels of 'ujb, one of them is when one's bad qualities appear to him as good; he reckons them as good ones and congratulates himself imagining that he is performing virtues. Another level of 'ujb is represented by a person who believes in God and thinks that he has done a favor to God; whereas God Almighty has conferred a favor on him (by endowing him with faith).¹

What Is 'Ujb?

In the opinion of the *ulama* (R)² *ujb* is magnification of one's virtues and good deeds, their overestimation, and satisfaction with them accompanied with a feeling of superiority on their account, while one exonerates and exculpates himself from all failings and faults. But to feel pleasure and delight on performing virtuous deeds accompanied with a sense of humility and modesty before God and gratitude to God for His favors, and to ask Him to increase them, is not *'ujb*, but is a praiseworthy (*mamduh*) trait. The great compiler of *hadith*, al-Allamah al-Majlisi, may his grave be filled with fragrance, quotes the great scholar and thinker al-Shaykh Baha' al-Din al-Amili (R) as having said,

There is no doubt that when anyone performs good deeds, like fasting, night vigils, etc., he feels some kind of joy and pleasure within him. This pleasure and joy, if it is on account of the feeling that God Almighty has conferred on him favor and grace, which caused him to perform such acts of piety, while

he is afraid of their loss and is anxious about their disappearance, and asks God Almighty for their continuity and abundance—this kind of exultation and gladness is not *‘ujb*.

But if the exultation and pride is felt on account of the belief that he is the doer of such deeds and that it is he who possesses all such good qualities, and if he glorifies his own deeds with confidence in his goodness, considering himself to be free from all faults and vices, it reaches such a point that one believes that he is conferring some favor upon God in performing these deeds. This feeling of exultation and pride is *‘ujb*.

In my opinion, this definition of *‘ujb* is correct, but the deeds and actions referred to should be considered to include the external as well as the internal acts, and at the same time to apply both to good and bad actions. Because, while affecting the bodily or external actions *‘ujb* also affects one’s inner (mental and spiritual) actions also and corrupts them. In the same way as a virtuous person may become conceited and vain about his good deeds, so also the doer of wicked deeds may think highly of his qualities, and feel proud of himself on their account. The tradition explicitly mentions both of them, as they are frequently ignored by a majority of men. We shall discuss them in the course of our discourse.

This should also be remembered that the delight which is considered to be different from *‘ujb* and is reckoned among praiseworthy qualities, is according to its specific nature, as will be explained in the subsequent discussion.

‘Ujb has various degrees, as is also indicated by the *hadith*; the following are some of them:

First Degree: *‘Ujb* with regard to faith and belief in true doctrines; its opposite is the *‘ujb* in *kufr* (infidelity), *shirk* (polytheism), and fallacious creeds.

Second Degree: The *‘ujb* in good traits and qualities, as opposed to the *‘ujb* in moral vices and ugly qualities.

Third Degree: The *‘ujb* in pious deeds and good actions, as opposed to the *‘ujb* in abominable deeds and repulsive acts.

There are certain other degrees also, but they are not so significant as to be put in a separate class; we shall, by the help of the Almighty, discuss these three degrees of *‘ujb*, their causes, the ways of their remedy and cure.

‘Ujb of The Faithful

Among the above-mentioned states of *‘ujb*, some of them can be clearly detected if one tries to discover them and pays a little attention and is vigilant; but some others, being very subtle and concealed, cannot be detected unless one is carefully critical of oneself and minutely analyzes one’s deeds and actions. Certain stages are more dangerous and fatal than the other stages.

The first and foremost stage which is the extreme and most fatal kind of *'ujb* is a state in which the person believes to have conferred a favor on his Supreme Benefactor, the King of kings, by having faith in Him, or by performing the duties enjoined by Him. He imagines that through his belief he has caused the boundaries of the kingdom of Heaven to expand, or he has contributed to the splendor and magnificence of the Religion of Truth by having faith in Him. He thinks that by propagating and disseminating His message, preaching His *Shari'ah*, His laws or His doctrine, or by enjoining good behavior and forbidding evil conduct or by implementing the *hudud* prescribed by Him, or by his sermons from the pulpit or his prayers in the niche, he is imparting a certain splendor and glory to His religion.

Or he also may think that by joining the congregation of Muslims, or by holding the mourning ceremonies to commemorate the tragedy of Imam al-Husayn's martyrdom, he is glorifying the religion and hence doing a favor to God, to the Martyred Imam (A), and to the Prophet (S). Though he would not reveal it openly, but in his heart of hearts he may think in this manner. In the same way, while serving the creatures of God in matters prescribed or recommended by the religion—like giving of obligatory and recommended alms, helping and protecting the weak and the destitute—he thinks that he is putting them under obligation. Sometimes this feeling of doing a favor to them is so concealed that it is not known to the person himself (the subject of doing of favor to God by men and doing of favor to men by God has been discussed in detail in the second *hadith*).

At the second level is the state in which an individual is exultant in his heart taking a coquettish air before God. This attitude is different from the one of conferring a favor on God, though many people see no difference between these two states. In this state the individual considers himself as a favorite of God, and includes himself in the clan of the saintly and among those nearest to God. If he hears the names of saintly persons, of those near to God or those captivated by Divine love, he associates himself with them in his heart, although, overtly he makes a simulation of humility and tries to project an opposite image of himself.

In order to make credible his assumed role, he may act against his real belief in such a way, which appears to negate it, but in fact posits it by its very negation. If any misfortune comes to him, he blows trumpet (البلاء لِلْوَلَاءِ) of (lit. 'misfortune in exchange for friendship', which implies that the saintly are beset in hardships). Those people who claim being guides of others, *urafa*, mystics, and ascetics are susceptible to its dangers more than other people.

In the next state, the individual considers himself worthy of being rewarded by God Almighty in return for his faith, good behavior, and good deeds, and considers it obligatory on God to befriend him in this world and grant him higher stations in the Hereafter. He counts himself among the true believers and considers himself to be a pure, innocent, and pious being. Whenever a pious person is praised in his absence, he believes that even if God were to adjudge him with justice, he also would deserve to be rewarded. And sometimes, with utter shamelessness and brazenness, he dares to speak in such terms emphatically.

If a misfortune befalls him, or he faces any adversities, he complains about the ways of God in his heart and questions the justness of His actions that causes sufferings for the pious, the sincere, and the truthful, and showers His kindness and generosity upon the hypocrites (*munafiq'un*). He nurses the sentiments of resentment against God inside his heart, while apparently expressing the sense of gratification and satisfaction. He shifts the responsibility of his misfortunes to the Supreme Benefactor, and pretends to be happy and contented with His will and Judgment outwardly. And when he hears that God smites the believers in this world, he consoles his heart without knowing the fact that the *munafiq'un* are also smitten, and that every individual who is smitten is not a believer.

In the other stage of *'ujb* the individual considers himself as superior to others, and regards himself as better than other human beings. He considers himself to be more pious than others and considers his own faith to be sounder than that of other believers and immaculate. He considers himself to be more perfect and unfailing than others in the observance of the *wajibat* (compulsory duties) and the *'muhramat* (prohibited things). He thinks himself to be more regular than others in the observance of *mustahabbat* (recommended religious precepts) and more regular in joining the Friday prayer congregation and other ceremonies and rites.

He considers himself to be superior to others and treats others as imperfect and insignificant beings. He views them disdainfully in his heart, or treats them with contempt. He excludes every individual from Divine grace and mercy, and considers them a right belonging to himself or to some people like him. The person who has reached this stage comes to a point when he denies whatever virtue he perceives in others and is disposed to regard its presence in others as disputable. Somehow he suspects the sincerity of their virtues in his heart and considers his own deeds as free from any kind of fault. He underrates others' good deeds, but if he himself performs those deeds he magnifies them. He is sensitive to others' errors, but overlooks his own faults.

These are some of the signs and symptoms of *'ujb* though one may be unaware of their presence in oneself. There are certain other stages of *'ujb* also which I did not mention, and there might be some others of which I am, unavoidably, unaware.

The 'Ujb of The Faithless

The bad deeds of unbelievers, hypocrites, polytheists, atheists, villains, sinners, and transgressors occasionally reach such a point when they become proud of their evil deeds and think highly of themselves. They, on account of their vicious beliefs and deeds, consider themselves to be men of liberal thinking and open minds, free from all fetters and bonds and free from superstitions. They consider themselves as men of courage and valor, link the faith and belief in God with superstition, and consider the observance of religious precepts as a kind of narrow-mindedness. They consider good character and moral behavior as signs of weakness of the personality. They look down on the performance of good deeds and observance of religious duties and rites as the signs of a weak mind

and evidence of the lack of common sense.

They regard themselves as free-men, who, for not believing in nonsensical superstitions and indifference to religious rules, are worthy of praise. Wicked and vicious qualities having sunk down their roots within the deep layers of their hearts, and their eyes and ears having become accustomed to those acts, and they having gained great charm and grace in their eyes, they consider them as accomplishments. As pointed out in the *hadith*, at one stage bad deeds appear to be good to the evil person and he perceives them as virtues. This is all allusion to the verse of the Quran, which says:

﴿أَفَمَنْ زُيِّنَ لَهُ سُوءُ عَمَلِهِ فَرَآهُ حَسَنًا﴾

And what of him, the evil of whose deeds has been decked out fair to him, so that he thinks then good?... (35:8)

The words (وَيَحْسَبُ أَنَّهُ يُحْسِنُ صُنْعًا) ('and he considers that he is doing something good') refer to the following verse:

﴿قُلْ هَلْ نُنَبِّئُكُمْ بِالْأَخْسَرِينَ أَعْمَالًا. الَّذِينَ ضَلَّ سَعْيُهُمْ فِي الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا وَهُمْ يَحْسَبُونَ أَنَّهُمْ يُحْسِنُونَ صُنْعًا. أُولَٰئِكَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا بِآيَاتِ رَبِّهِمْ وَلِقَائِهِ فَحَبِطَتْ أَعْمَالُهُمْ فَلَا نُقِيمُ لَهُمْ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ وَزَنًا﴾

Say: Shall We inform you who will be the greatest losers in their works? Those whose striving goes astray in the life of the world, while they think that they are doing something good. Those are they who disbelieve in the signs of their Lord and in the encounter with Him. Therefore their works have failed, and on the Day of Resurrection We shall not assign to them any weight. (18: 103-5)

Such people, who are ignorant and negligent but consider themselves to be learned and aware, are the most wretched of human beings, or rather the most wretched of creatures. Spiritual doctors are incapable of curing them. No admonition or advice can have any influence on them, but can even produce opposite results. They do not listen to any argument. They do not pay any heed to the guidance of the prophets (A), the arguments of the philosophers, and the teachings of the great sages.

We should seek refuge in God from the mischief of the self, whose wiles draw men from sinfulness into infidelity and from infidelity into *'ujb*. The self and the Devil make people accustomed to a sin by diminishing the gravity of that sin. When that vice sends out its roots into the heart, it appears to be a very ordinary and trivial thing to the person, who commits another sin bigger than the one with which he has become familiar.

After committing this second sin repeatedly, it also casts away its gravity in his view and appears to be an ordinary thing, and he does not hesitate to commit a still bigger sin. In this way, step by step, all

major sins become diminutive in his eyes, and the Divine laws of the *Shari'ah*, belittled by him, recede into insignificance. His evil deeds culminate in infidelity, apostasy, and *'ujb*. We shall take up this subject later on.

Snares and Wiles of the Devil

In the same way as the victims of *'ujb* (who think highly of themselves), by advancing step by step in transgression and sinfulness, ultimately reach the stage of apostasy, in the same way those affected by *'ujb* in their devotional activities and worship also advance day by day from the lower stages of *'ujb* to its higher levels. The snares and designs of Satan and the self are not haphazard, but according to a calculated plan. It is not possible that the Devil would induce a God-fearing person of a clean character to commit a sin like murder or fornication, nor would he provoke a person possessing an honest nature and a pure soul to commit theft or a highway robbery. It is not the case that from the very first day he will ask you to consider your good deeds as a favor done to God or to include yourself in the category of the Divine saints, His favorite servants, and those nearest to Him.

In the beginning he starts at the bottom and in a low key. He steals into your heart and persuades you to be extremely careful and dedicated regarding the recommended duties (*mustahabbat*), prayers, and acts of piety. While you do this, he will turn your attention towards the sins of a certain sinner and will make you compare his deeds with your own. Then he will whisper into your ears that you have enough grounds, both on a rational as well as a religious basis, to consider yourself superior to that person.

Indeed your deeds will be the source of your redemption and that by the grace of God you are pious and pure and free from all vices. He achieves two things through these kind of insinuations: first, it inculcates a feeling of general distrusts regarding the creatures of God; second, it makes the person imbued with a feeling of self-satisfied conceit. Both of these qualities are destructive and the sources of various vices and evils.

At this juncture, you should tell your self and the Devil that it is possible that this person who is guilty of committing that sin may possess other good qualities unknown to you or might have performed certain good deeds for which God may bless him with His grace and mercy, and the light of his good deeds and good qualities may guide him and ultimately lead him to deliverance. Perhaps God Almighty has afflicted him with this sin, so as to protect him from *'ujb*, which is worse than sin. It is said in a *hadith* of *al-Kafi*:

عَنْ أَبِي عَبْدِ اللَّهِ عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ قَالَ: إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلِمَ أَنَّ الذَّنْبَ خَيْرٌ لِلْمُؤْمِنِ مِنَ الْعُجْبِ، وَلَوْلَا ذَلِكَ لَمَا ابْتُلِيَ مُؤْمِنٌ بِذَنْبٍ أَبَدًا.

Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq (A) said: Verily God Almighty knows that sin is better for a mu'min (a true believer) than *'ujb*. If it was not thus, He would not have afflicted any mu'min with sin.³

Maybe on account of the same mistrust in others, my acts will lead me to a miserable life in the Hereafter. Our great master, the accomplished ‘arif, Shahabadi- *r’uhi fidah*- used to say, ‘Do not look down on even a *kafir* (non-believer) in your heart. It is possible that the divine light of his inner nature may lead him to faith and your rebuke and disdain may lead you towards a wretched life in the Hereafter. Of course to practice *al amr bi al-ma’r-uf wa al-nahy ‘an al-munhar* (enjoining right conduct and forbidding bad behavior) is something different from the inner feeling of contempt.’

He would even say, ‘Never curse the unbelievers regarding whom it is not known that they will leave the world in the state of unbelief. If they leave the world as rightly-guided servants of God, their spiritual rectitude may prove to be an obstruction in the way of your own spiritual advancement.’ In any case, beware that the Devil and the carnal self make man enter the preliminary stages of ‘*ujb*; and from this place, step by step, they slowly take him to higher stages of ‘*ujb*, and in this way, in degrees, they lead man to the wretched state in which he thinks that he is conferring a favor on God by having faith in Him and performing virtuous deeds. This is the final stage of ‘*ujb*.

The Evil Effects of ‘Ujb

Know that ‘*ujb* in itself is a destructive and dangerous vice which spoils the faith and the deeds. In answer to the question by the narrator of the tradition about ‘*ujb* which corrupts human deeds, the Imam (A) mentions the ‘*ujb* in faith as one of its forms. We have read in the previous tradition that ‘*ujb* is considered by God Almighty to be something worse than sin, so much so that He makes a believer commit sin so that he may be saved from ‘*ujb*. The Holy Prophet (S) has reckoned ‘*ujb* as one of the greatest of spiritual dangers. In *al-‘Amali* of Al-Shaykh al-Saduq, Imam ‘Ali (A) has been reported to have said:

مَنْ دَخَلَ الْعُجْبُ هَلَكَ.

The one into whose heart ‘*ujb* permeates is destined to be destroyed.

After death and in the purgatory (*barzakh*), the possessor of this evil experiences a dreadful loneliness, which is incomparable and unimaginable; in an advice given by the Prophet (S) before his death to Imam ‘Ali (A). he says:

وَلَا وَحْدَةً أَوْحَشُ مِنَ الْعُجْبِ.

No loneliness can be compared in dreadfulness to the one, which is the result of ‘*ujb*.

Moses (A) asked Satan to tell him about the sin by means of which he infiltrates into the hearts of the progeny of Adam (A) and conquers them. Satan replied, it is the time when they feel ‘*ujb* about

themselves, overestimate their good deeds and the gravity of their sins becomes diminutive in their eyes.

God Almighty commanded David (A) to convey 'glad tidings to the sinners and to terrify the pious.' David (A) asked God as to why he should convey glad tidings to sinners and frighten the pious. Replied God Almighty, 'Give glad tidings to the sinners that verily I accept their repentance and forgive their sins, and frighten and warn the pious that they should refrain from *'ujb*. Verily there is not a single man who does not stand condemned if I bring him to account.'

I seek refuge in God from the rigors of His reckoning, which if applied would completely ruin the sincere servants of God and even those belonging to a higher station.

In his *al-Khisal*, al-Shaykh al-Saduq reports from Imam al-Sadiq (A) that he said: The Devil says: If I subdue the son of Adam in three things I do not care for whatever he may do, as his good deeds will not be accepted: (1) when he overestimates his good deeds, (2) is forgetful about his sins, and (3) when *'ujb* permeates him.

Apart from the vices which belong to this vicious tree of *'ujb*, about which you have read, there are a number of major sins and evil traits that are its products. When its roots permeate the human heart, they lead men to apostasy and *shirk*, and things even worse than these. One of those vices is the vice of belittling of one's sins. A person afflicted with *'ujb* never cares to rectify himself; rather, he considers himself as a pious and virtuous person, and never thinks of purging himself from sins. The curtain of *'ujb* and the thick veil of conceit prevents him from seeing his shortcomings.

It is a great misfortune, which not only precludes him from achieving all kinds of perfections, but also afflicts him with all sorts of vices, leading him to eternal damnation. Even the doctors of the psyche are helpless in curing them. He has so much confidence in himself and in the deeds he performs that he thinks himself as independent of God Almighty, and does not care for His grace. In his limited mind, he considers God obliged to reward him. He imagines that he is worthy of being rewarded even if God were to reckon his deeds with justice. God willing, we shall take up this matter again later.

Contempt of Others

Among other vices present in the person who is afflicted with *'ujb* is that of viewing others with contempt. He considers their deeds as insignificant, however superior they may be to his own. This is also one of the ways of human destruction, and a peril on the path of true humanness.

Temptation to Riya'

Another of the evil effects of *'ujb* is that man becomes inclined towards *riya'* (ostentation, hypocrisy). Because, when a person considers his deeds insignificant and regards himself as morally imperfect and

his faith as of no consequence, then, he would not be proud of himself, or his qualities and deeds.

Considering himself and everything that is done by him as deformed and unworthy, he will not make a display of them; soiled and ugly goods are not put up for show in a prestigious market. But, since, he perceives himself as a perfect human and his own deeds as good and worthy, he is encouraged to make a show of them, and hence behave so imprudently. The vices which have been mentioned in the second tradition about *riya* are applicable to *ujb* also.

The Factor of Pride

Another ill effect of this vice is that it manifests itself in the form of another fatal disease that is, the sin of pride (of which we shall have to say more later) and other vices, which are direct or indirect products of it. A full treatment of all of them would make our discussion lengthy it is enough to mention it that a person afflicted with *ujb* should know that this vice sows the seeds of many other vices and serves as the source of such offences, each one of which is enough for earning everlasting damnation by itself. If one tries to properly understand these vices, and studies the traditions and teachings handed down by the Prophet (S), or the Imams of his household (A), he will realize the necessity of rectifying his self, and will seek to get rid of this vice before, God forbid, he carries it with him to the next world.

If this happens, once his eyes are closed on this world and opened to world of *barzakh* and, thereafter, to the Day of Resurrection, he will see that the persons who committed major sins are better off than him. He will see that God Almighty has immersed them in the ocean of His grace and mercy 'for the remorse and penitence that they expressed, or for the sake of the trust and confidence that they had in the grace and compassion of the Almighty; whereas this poor fellow, since he had considered himself as not in need of His grace and had believed himself, in the depth of his being, to be above needing His compassion and mercy, God Almighty has dealt with him rigorously in regard to his account, and as he himself wished his account is being examined in the scales of justice.

God Almighty will show him that he not only did not perform any worship for His sake, but also that his works of devotion and piety only took him away from God and have removed him away from his goal. Not only his faith and deeds have been invalid, but they have also served as the cause of eternal damnation and painful chastisement in hell. God forbid, lest God Almighty judges anybody with the criteria of His justice, because, as mentioned previously, not a single individual, from the first to the last, will find any way of redemption.

The prayers and supplications of His chosen servants and the infallible Imams (A) are replete with the confessions of their failure to do justice to the demands of the worship and the service of Lord. While the most perfect of all creatures and the man nearest to God (i.e. the Prophet [S]) utters:

مَا عَرَفْنَاكَ حَقَّ مَعْرِفَتِكَ وَلَا عَبْدُنَاكَ حَقَّ عِبَادَتِكَ.

We did not know You as You deserve to be known. We did not worship You as You deserve to be worshipped.

What will others do? Of course, they were aware of His greatness and they knew the relation between the contingent and the Necessary Being perfectly well. They knew that if they spent their lives in His worship, service, and praise, they would not be able to thank Him for His favors, let alone paying the proper tribute due to His Essence and Attributes.

They knew that no thing does possess anything of its own. Life, power, knowledge and other accomplishments are shadows of His attributes. Every contingent being is absolutely poor in every respect, a dependent shadow not an independent 'thing'. What merits does a contingent being possess that it could seek to market them? What power does it possess to make a display of it? They (the Prophet and the Imams) possess the knowledge of God; they have the cognition of His Attributes of beauty and grandeur.

They are the people who have realized, with certainty, their own abjectness, imperfection, and weakness and the perfection of the Necessary Being, through immediate knowledge. It is we, wretched creatures, whose vision is blotted because of the thick veils of ignorance, folly, neglect, and conceit, and whose faculties of intellect, hearing, sight, and other senses are shrouded with veils of inward and outward sins, who behave with pretensions in front of the Almighty and consider ourselves as independent beings.

O you, ephemeral, contingent being! You, who are forgetful of your own self and are oblivious of the relation between you and your Creator. O you unfortunate dependent being! You have forgotten your duty towards the King of kings! This ignorance and foolishness on our part is responsible for all our misfortunes and has engulfed us in the midst of all these woes and disasters. There is a source of all these evils. The source of contamination is the fountain itself. We have lost our sense of perception and our hearts have become lifeless. This is the root cause, of all our afflictions, and yet we are not worried about the cure either.

God Almighty, grant us the capacity to realize our responsibilities. Grant us a share of the light of Your knowledge with which You filled the hearts of Your *urafa* and *awliya*' Grant us the comprehension of the realm of Thy power and Thy kingdom, and guide us to discover our weaknesses and faults. Unfold the mystery of the meaning of (الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ) —All praise belongs to Allah, the Lord of the worlds— to us, wretched beings, who ascribe all the praiseworthy attributes to the creatures. Make it known to us that none of the praiseworthy attributes belongs to any created being. Reveal to us the truth of:

﴿مَا أَصَابَكَ مِنْ حَسَنَةٍ فَمِنَ اللَّهِ وَمَا أَصَابَكَ مِنْ سَيِّئَةٍ فَمِنْ نَفْسِكَ﴾

Whatever of good befallerh thee (O man), it is from Allah, and whatever or ill befallerh thee it is from thyself. (4: 79)

Inscribe the principle of tawhid (unity of the Divine Being) on the crude tablets of our hardened heart. We are the people of dark realms who languish behind several veils, wavering between apostasy and hypocrisy. We are conceited and egoistic. Purge away the evil of self-love and the love of mundane things from our hearts and convert us into Your lovers and worshippers:

﴿إِنَّكَ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ﴾

Verily, Thou art able to do all things.

Self-Love as the Source of ‘Ujb

The vice of ‘*ujb* is the product of self-love; since the human being is plagued with the evil of self-love, it is the source of all human faults and moral vices. It is on account of this self-love that man overvalues his trivial deeds and hence includes himself in the category of the saintly and the nearest to God. Because of it, he not only considers himself applaudable and commendable on the basis of those paltry deeds, but sometimes even reckons his wicked deeds as good ones. If he perceives moral goodness and piety in others more than himself, he not only never gives any importance to them, but tries to project them in grim colors as far as possible.

He is disposed to see a kind of goodness even in his own wicked deeds, and tends to paint them in glowing colors. He scorns other creatures of God in his heart and views them cynically, while he contemplated himself with optimism, having a very high opinion of himself. It is on account of this same self-love that he hopes a trivial act of his, and that too tainted with one thousand defilements, to be worthy of being rewarded by God.

It is better if today we reflect upon our good deeds, and rationally evaluate our worships. We should try to judge them justly, and see whether we deserve to be rewarded and praised on their basis, or if we should be reproached, punished, and condemned because of them. And if God Almighty were to deliver us into the flames of His wrath on account of these deeds, which are good and virtuous in our own view, is He justified or not in doing so?

Now I make you arbiter to judge with justice the following matter after deliberation and profound thinking. My question is that if the Holy Prophet (S), whose truthfulness is confirmed, were to say to you, ‘It makes no difference in afterlife whether you worship God throughout your life, obey His commands, and resist lusts and carnal desires, or if you lead a life violating His commands and following your wishes and sensual desires. This behavior of yours will not affect your station in the Hereafter. In both cases you will attain salvation and will be sent to Paradise and saved from His chastisement.

It will not make any difference whether you offer prayers or whether you indulge in fornication and sin. However, the good pleasure of God Almighty lies in this that you should worship Him, praise Him and

thank Him, and resist your sensual desires in this world, although you will not be rewarded for it.' Were you offered this option, would you choose to be His worshipper or a sinner?

Would you resist your carnal desires and forbid yourself from indulging in lusts for the sake of His good pleasure, or not? And would you still adhere to the *mustahabbat*, the Friday and the congregational prayer, or would you become immersed in luxuries, play, amusements, and lusts? I request you to answer justly, without any self-assumption and hypocrisy. As to myself and others like me, let me tell you, we would have been among the sinners, neglecting our duties towards Him and hankering after our sensual appetites.

From this, we come to the conclusion that all our deeds serve as the means for satisfying our desires and gratifying the carnal appetites. We are the worshippers of our flesh. We give up one pleasure for the sake of a bigger one. Our desired goal, our relentless hope is to widen the scope of sensual achievements. *Salat*, which is a means of acquiring nearness to Him, we perform in the hope of the company of the houris of Paradise. Our worship is not aimed at acquiring nearness to the Almighty. It has nothing to do with the obedience of His command either, and is thousands of miles away from the good pleasure of God.

You, poor fellow, ignorant of the Divine teachings, you who cannot comprehend anything except your own bestial motives, you who take pride in your resorting to His remembrance, chanting of His Name, observance of the obligatory and recommended religious duties, avoidance of prohibited and abominable things, you who take recourse in refined morals and abstain from the unlawful and the abominable, put in the scales of justice all the acts that you have performed for obtaining sensual ends, and for the purpose of reclining on seats studded with rubies in the Paradise, in the midst of cheerful and charming rewards of Paradise, wearing silk and brocade, and occupying magnificent mansions therein and for realizing your hopes –is it just to think that all these actions, which are performed for the sake of satisfying our ego and the fulfillment of the self, are being performed for the sake of God and for His adulation alone? You, who are performing your deeds in the hope of receiving fair rewards, are you different in any respect from a laborer who toils for wages but says that he works solely for the master? Are you not a liar when you say that you perform prayers for the sake of God?

Is your *salat* meant for the sake of acquiring nearness to God, or for the sake of the company of the houris of Paradise and for sensual ends? Let me state openly without any reservations that all such prayers that we perform are considered by *urafa* and the friends of God as equivalent to major sins. You, wretched creature, you act against the good pleasure of God Almighty in the presence of the archangels, and the worships that are meant for making an ascension near to Him, you are misusing them for satisfying your carnal self; yet you do not feel any sense of shame for the lies uttered in front of the Almighty and His archangels during your prayers.

And as if this were not enough, you made several accusations, thinking as if you were obliging God, exulting in your *'ujb*, and not feeling any sense of shame or regret while doing all this! What is the

difference between this kind of worship performed by you and me, and the sinful acts of the sinners, the extreme form of which is *riya*'?

Riya' is a kind of *shirk*, and its ugliness and gravity lies in worship being not for the sake of God, not meant for God. All our worships and devotional exercises are sheer *shirk*, which does not contain a speck of sincerity. The aim of earning the good pleasure of God does not play even a partial role in it, but the only motive is gratification of lust and service of the stomach.

My friend, beware that the prayer performed for the sake of a feminine mate, whether this-worldly or other-worldly, is not the prayer performed for God. The prayer, which is performed for the attainment of worldly benefits or for acquiring the other-worldly rewards is not for God. If so, where is the room for self-pride and conceit? What right do you have for looking down upon the creatures of God and for counting yourself as someone of consequence in the court of the Almighty? Wretched man, you deserve punishment for this prayer and devotion of yours and for it you deserve to be chained by the seventy cubit chain. Why consider yourself as a person deserving a reward then?

Why procure another chastisement for yourself by continuing in this absurd expectation and by persisting in *'ujb*? Perform the duties assigned to you properly and keep in your mind that your worship is not purely for the sake of God; and if God Almighty sends you to heaven by His mercy and compassion, remember that He has given a waiver to His servants for a certain kind of *shirk* in view of their infirmity. By means of His forgiving compassion, He covers their sins with a concealing screen.

Do not let this screen to be ripped off and the curtain of His remission to be raised from the face of those vices, which we wrongfully call, worship. God forbid, if that waiver were withdrawn and our deeds are adjudged according to the standards of justice, remember this that our false worships are not less fouler than the mortal sins of the sinners. Earlier we referred to a tradition narrated by Thiqat al-Islam al-Kulayni, in his book *al-Kafi*, on the authority of Imam al Sadiq (A); here I am copying a part of it verbatim in order to draw upon its blessing (*barakah*):

عَنْ أَبِي عَبْدِ اللَّهِ عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ قَالَ: قَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَآلِهِ: قَالَ اللَّهُ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ لِدَاوُدَ عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ: يَا دَاوُدُ
بَشِّرِ الْمُذْنِبِينَ وَأَنْذِرِ الصَّادِقِينَ. قَالَ: كَيْفَ أَبَشِّرُ الْمُذْنِبِينَ وَأَنْذِرُ الصَّادِقِينَ؟ قَالَ: يَا دَاوُدُ بَشِّرِ الْمُذْنِبِينَ بِأَنِّي أَقْبَلُ
التَّوْبَةَ وَأَعْفُو عَنِ الذَّنْبِ، وَأَنْذِرِ الصَّادِقِينَ أَنْ لَا يُعْجَبُوا بِأَعْمَالِهِمْ، فَإِنَّهُ لَيْسَ عَبْدٌ يَتَعَجَّبُ بِالْحَسَنَاتِ إِلَّا هَلَكَ

Imam Ja'far al Sadiq (A) reports from the Prophet (S) that he said: God Almighty-said to David (A), "O David give good news unto the sinners and warn the righteous." Said David (A), "How should I give good news unto the sinners and warn the righteous?" Said the Almighty, "O David, give good news to – the sinners that I accept their repentance, and warn the righteous that they should not have *'ujb* (self admiration) for their acts, for there is no servant who does not stand doomed when I take an account of his deeds (and deserve chastisement, since, according to the requirements of justice, a man with all his worship cannot thank God properly even for one of His favors).

While the righteous, who are free from sins, deserve to be condemned after a fair trial, what will be the fate of people like you and me? And that too if our deeds be pure and free from worldly *riya'*; a verboten quality, of which there is very little chance. Now be proud if there is an occasion for being proud and feeling *'ujb*; but if you realize that it is an occasion for being ashamed and hanging the head in shame and making confession of our sin after every worship, then repent before the Almighty for uttering those solemn lies, and for falsely assigning those virtues to ourselves. Does it not call for repentance when you make this declaration in front of God. While standing for prayer:

وَجَّهْتُ وَجْهِيَ لِلَّذِي فَطَرَ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ حَنِيفًا وَمَا أَنَا مِنَ الْمُشْرِكِينَ. إِنَّ صَلَاتِي وَنُسُكِي وَمَحْيَايَ وَمَمَاتِي ﴿١﴾ لِلَّهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ ﴿٢﴾

I have turned my face, in sincerity and submission, towards Him who created the heavens and earth, and I am not of the mushrikun (those who include others while worshipping God, i.e., polytheists). Verily, my prayer and my worship, my living and my dying, are for Allah, the Lord of the Worlds.

Is your face really turned towards the Creator of the heaven and earth? Are you really a '*Muslim*' and free from the dirt of *shirk*? Is your prayer and worship, your living and dying really for God? Shouldn't we feel some shame while uttering; this sentence in our prayer:

الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ ﴿١﴾

All praise be to Allah, the Lord of the Worlds.

Do you sincerely consider all laudable qualities to be derived from God, while you pay tribute not only to His creatures but also to His enemies? Is it not a lie to apparently admit that God is رَبُّ الْعَالَمِينَ (The Lord of the Worlds), while practically you subscribe to the authority and lordship of the other-than-God?

Is there any inkling of shame and repentance in your heart, while you utter:

إِيَّاكَ نَعْبُدُ وَإِيَّاكَ نَسْتَعِينُ ﴿١﴾

Thee alone we worship; Thee alone we ask for help?

Do you truly worship God, or worship your own flesh? Do you actually seek God, or aspire for the hours? Do you seek help from God alone? In your deeds, do you consider God alone? When you go to perform Hajj of the *Bayt Allah* (the Holy Ka'bah) is God the only goal and end? And is the Master of the House your only pursuit, as the poet says:

وَمَا حُبُّ الدِّيَارِ شَغَفَنَ قَلْبِي وَلَكِنْ حُبُّ مَنْ سَكَنَ الدِّيَارَا

*It is not the dwelling that attracts my heart,
But he who dwells in it draws my heart.*

Are you in search of God, and desire for His beatific vision? Do you hold the *majalis* (mourning ceremonies for Imam al-Husayn [A]) and beat your head and breast for his sake, or for the sake of the fulfillment of your wishes and desires? Is it not your selfish desires, which motivate you to hold *majalis*, to join congregational prayers, and to perform devotional rituals?

My brother, be cautious regarding the guiles of the self and Satan, who do not want your pieties to be taintless, and if they might be accepted by God by His grace, despite their taint, the Devil and the carnal self do not desire them to reach their final destination. Through misplaced *'ujb* and improper pride they bring all your deeds to nothing, and the little benefit that you aimed at is also not obtained. Having lost His good pleasure, even the hopes of houris will come to nothing.

Now having lost everything eternal damnation in the flames of hell does not seem distant. By means of your faulty, rotten actions tainted with *riya'*, *sum'ah*, and a thousand other vices, each one of which is enough for preventing our deeds from being accepted, you imagined to have done God a favor, having become His beloved servant. Poor fellow, you, who cannot comprehend the state of His beloved servants and the fire that is kindled in their hearts, you unlucky wretch with your little knowledge of their heartfelt sincerity and the bright radiance emanating from their glorious deeds, do you think that their deeds are similar to yours and mine?

Do you think that the *salat* of Amir al-Mu'minin 'Ali (A) differed from ours only in the manner of uttering (وَلَا الضَّالِّينَ) in the correct pronunciation of some words, or in the prolongation of prostrations and profusion of raka'at, prayers, and supplication? Do you imagine that my prayer differs from his only in the number of rak'ah's—a few hundred every night? Are the prayers and the supplications of Imam Sayyid al-Sajidin (A) (the Fourth Imam) are similar to the mutterings of yours and mine? Do you think he moaned and sobbed for the sake of houris or pomegranates or pears of Paradise like us?

I swear by him—and indeed it is a great oath—that even if all of us come together and try to say one (لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ) —There is no god except God— in the manner of Amir al-Mu'minin (A), we will not be able to do so. Dust be upon my head, I and my little knowledge of the high station of Imam 'Ali (A)! I swear by the station of 'Ali ibn Abi Talib (A) that even if all the archangels and all the prophets of God, except the Seal of the Prophets (S), who is the lord of 'Ali (A) and all others, if they try to utter a single *takbir* (i.e. Allahu Akbar, 'God is very great') of 'Ali's, they will not be able to do it. The inner state of their hearts is known only to themselves and is unknown to others .

My friend! do not babble so much about God. Do not exaggerate your love for God. O *'arif!* O Sufi! O philosopher! O *mujahid!* O ascetic! O *faqih!* O believer! O sage! you poor ensnared wretches! You

unfortunate creatures entangled in the snares of the self and its desires! You helpless creatures bewildered in the perplexities of false hopes, aspirations and self-love! You, who are all wretched, being thousands of miles removed from true godliness and love of God. Do not have such a good opinion of yourselves. Do not be so boastful and proud of yourselves. Ask your heart whether it is in search of God or whether it is in love with itself. Is it a monotheist (*muwahhid*) and devotee of the One, or a *mushrik* (polytheist) or a dualist?

What for this *'ujb*, then? What does this exultation mean? Even if, supposedly, these acts of yours fulfill all the conditions and requirements, and are free from *riya'*, *shirk*, *'ujb* and other vices, isn't their goal acquirement of sensual ends? What merit do they possess that you consider them to be worthy of being presented before the angels? These acts are to be concealed from the sights of people. These acts, which are exercises in impudence and vulgarity, shouldn't we be shameful of them and think of doing something to cover up these abominable performances?

God! We seek refuge in Thee from the mischief of Satan and the guiles of *al-nafs al-'ammarah* (the carnal self). You Yourself protect us from their wiles for the sake of Muhammad (S) and his Progeny (A).

[1.](#) Usul al-Kafi, vol. II, p. 313.

[2.](#) For maintaining readability, (R) which is an acronym for "Radhiya allahu anhu(m)" is used throughout the book to denote "May God have mercy upon him/them."

[3.](#) Al-Kafi, vol. II, p. 313.

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