

Twenty-Third Hadith: The Seekers Of Knowledge

بِالسَّنَدِ الْمُتَّصِلِ إِلَى حُجَّةِ الْفِرْقَةِ وَتَقْتَبَهَا مُحَمَّدُ بْنُ يَعْقُوبَ الْكُلَيْنِي رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ عَنْ عَلِيِّ بْنِ إِبْرَاهِيمَ رَفَعَهُ إِلَى أَبِي عَبْدِ اللَّهِ عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ قَالَ: طَلَبَةُ الْعِلْمِ ثَلَاثَةٌ فَأَعْرِفُهُمْ بِأَعْيَانِهِمْ وَصِفَاتِهِمْ: صِنْفٌ يَطْلُبُهُ لِلْجَهْلِ وَالْمِرَاءِ، وَصِنْفٌ يَطْلُبُهُ لِلْإِسْتِطَالَةِ وَالْخِتْلِ، وَصِنْفٌ يَطْلُبُهُ لِلْفَقْهِ وَالْعَقْلِ. فَصَاحِبُ الْجَهْلِ وَالْمِرَاءِ مُؤَذِّمٌ مُمَارٍ مُتَعَرِّضٌ لِلْمَقَالِ فِي أُنْدِيَةِ الرِّجَالِ بِنْدَاكُرِ الْعِلْمِ وَصِفَةِ الْحِلْمِ، قَدْ تَسَرَّبَلْ بِالْخُشُوعِ وَتَخَلَّى مِنَ الْوَرَعِ فَدَقَّ اللَّهُ مِنْ هَذَا خَيْشُومَهُ وَقَطَعَ مِنْهُ حَيْرُومَهُ. وَصَاحِبُ الْإِسْتِطَالَةِ وَالْخِتْلِ ذُو خَبِّ وَمَلَقٍ وَيَسْتَطِيلُ عَلَى مِثْلِهِ مِنْ أَشْبَاهِهِ وَيَتَوَاضَعُ لِلْأَغْنِيَاءِ مِنْ دُونِهِ، فَهُوَ لِحُلُوتِهِمْ هَاضِمٌ وَلِدِينِهِ حَاطِمٌ، فَأَعْمَى اللَّهُ عَلَى هَذَا خَبْرَهُ وَقَطَعَ مِنْ أَثَارِ الْعُلَمَاءِ أَثْرَهُ. وَصَاحِبُ الْفَقْهِ وَالْعَقْلِ ذُو كَابِيَةٍ وَحُزْنٍ وَسَهْرٍ؛ قَدْ تَحَنَّنَكَ فِي بُرْنُسِهِ وَقَامَ اللَّيْلَ فِي حِنْدِسِهِ يَعْمَلُ وَيَخْشَى وَجِلًّا دَاعِيًّا مُشْفِقًا مُقْبِلًا عَلَى شَأْنِهِ عَارِفًا بِأَهْلِ زَمَانِهِ مُسْتَوْحِشًا مِنْ أَوْثَقِ إِخْوَانِهِ، فَشَدَّ اللَّهُ مِنْ هَذَا أَرْكَانَهُ وَأَعْطَاهُ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ أَمَانَهُ. وَحَدَّثَنِي بِهِ مُحَمَّدُ بْنُ مُحَمَّدٍ أَبُو عَبْدِ اللَّهِ الْقَزْوِينِي عَنْ عِدَّةٍ مِنْ أَصْحَابِنَا مِنْهُمْ جَعْفَرُ بْنُ مُحَمَّدٍ الصَّيْقَلِيُّ بِقَزْوِينَ عَنْ أَحْمَدَ بْنِ عَيْسَى الْعَلَوِيِّ عَنْ عِبَادِ بْنِ صَهَيْبِ الْبَصْرِيِّ عَنْ أَبِي عَبْدِ اللَّهِ عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ.

With my chain of transmission reaching up to the proof of the sect and its authority, Muhammad ibn Ya'qub al-Kulayni (R) from 'Ali ibn Ibrahim, who reports in a marfu' (i.e. without mentioning intermediary authorities) tradition from Abu 'Abd Allah (A) that he said, "The seekers of (sacred) knowledge are of three kinds, so recognize them by their specific qualities and characteristics. One kind of them seeks it for the sake of ignorance and dispute. Another kind seeks it for the sake of domination and deceit. Yet another kind seeks it for the sake of (improving) understanding and intellect.

The one who seeks it for ignorance and dispute's sake is injurious and quarrelsome. He contests opinions in the gatherings of men, speaking of knowledge and describing forbearance. He puts on the garb of humility, though he is devoid of piety. As a result, God crushes his nose and severs his waist.

The one who seeks knowledge for domination and deception is an imposter and a sycophant. He is domineering with those who are his likes but is humble in front of the rich, whose sweetmeats he ingests while he demolishes his own faith. As a result, God blinds his vision and wipes out his traces from the

legacy of the learned.

As to him who seeks knowledge for the sake of understanding and intellection, he is grief-stricken and awake at nights. Having tied his cap with the loose end of his turban, he stands up in the dark of nights. He acts and is in trepidation. A caller overawed, engaged in his work, and acquainted with the people of his times, he is apprehensive of his most trusted brother. As a result of it God strengthens his supports and grants him amnesty on the Day of Resurrection.”

Al-Kulayni (M) says: This tradition was also narrated to me by Muhammad ibn Mahmud Abu ‘Abd Allah al-Qazwini from several of our companions, among them Ja’far ibn Muhammad al-Sayqal at Qazwin, from Ahmad ibn ‘Isa al-Alawi, from ‘Abbad ibn Suhayb al-Basri, from Abu ‘Abd Allah (A).¹

Exposition

بِأَعْيَانِهِمْ is for stress on the pronoun of فَاعْرِفُوهُمْ so what is meant is: “Know them *themselves*, so that they become determined and specified and are not mistaken with others.” Similarly, it is said رَأَيْتُهُ بِعَيْنِهِ I saw him himself and:

كُلُّ شَيْءٍ فِيهِ حَلَالٌ وَحَرَامٌ فَهُوَ لَكَ حَلَالٌ حَتَّى تَعْرِفَ الْحَرَامَ بِعَيْنِهِ.

Everything that contains halal and haram is halal for you so far as you know that which is haram itself.

The authoritative traditionist al-Majlisi (R) has mentioned various possible meaning here (i.e. of بِأَعْيَانِهِمْ) which are extremely far-fetched and do not include this evident and apparent possibility. He says:

بِأَعْيَانِهِمْ means ‘their kinds and the understanding of their categories’ or ‘such of their actions are visible and observable...’ Also it has been said, ‘The meaning of بِأَعْيَانِهِمْ means, ‘their kinds and the understanding if their categories. Also, it has been said, “The meaning of بِأَعْيَانِهِمْ is their look, appearance and postures, such as their putting on the garb of humility.’

Then he suggests other and as remote possibilities. وَصِفَاتِهِمْ means ‘their characteristics’, that is, those conditions which are subject to the personal traits and purposes of these three categories, such as injuriousness, disputatiousness and so on. Hence, these characteristics depict their condition by which they are specifically recognized.

Jahl (ignorance) is the opposite of *‘ilm* (knowledge), and here it probably means concealing the truth or pretending not to know it or absence of its acceptance. Later on, we will discuss it in further detail. Al-Majlisi says in this regard:

الْجَهْلُ: السَّفَاهَةُ وَتَرْكُ الْجِلْمِ. وَقِيلَ: ضِدُّ الْعِلْمِ.

Jahl means foolishness and imprudence. It is also said to be the opposite of reason.

Mira' means *jidal* (controversy) in doctrine and theology (*kalam*) and is derived from the same verbal root as *jadal* (dialectic) which is one of the Five Topics (*al-sina'at al-khams*) in logic. Al-Jawhari, in *al-Sihah*, says:

يُقَالُ: مَا رَيْتُ الرَّجُلَ أَمَارِيهِ مِرَاءً إِذَا جَادَلْتُهُ.

Although here *kalam* means speech in general but the intended meaning is apparently that which has been mentioned. There is another possible meaning involved here which we shall mention in one of the following sections.

Istitalah means seeking loftiness and eminence. *Khatl*, with *fathah* on *kha'* and *sukun* on *ta'*, means deception and imposture. Al-Jawhari says:

خَتَلَهُ وَخَاتَلَهُ أَيِ خَدَعَهُ. وَالتَّخَاتُلُ التَّخَادُعُ.

As to the word *mumar*, we will explain later on why one who indulges in *mira'* is defined as *mumar*, (which being a verbal tautology does not seem to be a valid definition) and the one who indulges in *istitalah* and *khatl* as one who seeks to dominate his likes and one who resorts to *khubb*, for *khubb* (like *khatl*) also means deception.

As to the phrase *مُتَعَرِّضٌ لِمَقَالٍ* it means expressing opinions. A lexicographer gives the following instance of usage:

يُقَالُ: عَرَضْتُ لَهُ الشَّيْءَ؛ إِذَا أَظْهَرْتَهُ لَهُ. وَعَرَضَ لَهُ أَمْرٌ كَذَا وَيَعْرِضُ: أَيِ ظَهَرَ.

Andiyah is plural of *nadi*, meaning a circle or club where people assemble for meeting and discussion. From it is derived *dar al-nadwah*, which was a place in Makkah, which was built for assembly and consultation. *Nadiyy*, *nadwah*, *muntada*, and *mutanadda* have the same meaning, as pointed out by al-Jawhari.

The phrase *bi tadhdkur al-'ilm* refers to *maqal* or is its appositional substantive (*badal*), and to it is conjoined *wa sifat al-hilm*. What is meant is that 'they hold scholarly discourses in order to be reckoned among the learned, and they describe and extol forbearance to be counted among the forbearing, whereas they are neither among the learned nor the forbearing. His learning is a kind of ignorance that resembles knowledge and his forbearance is devoid of the excellent qualities of forbearance.' Later on we will have occasion to discuss this sort.

Tasarbala pertains to the derivative formation *tafa'lul*, meaning putting on a *sirbal*– a garment. According to the lexicographer:

يُقَالُ: سَرَبَلْتُهُ فَتَسْرَبَلُ. أَيُ الْبَسْتُهُ السَّرْبَالَ.

Tasarbala bi al-khushu' means, 'he has put on the garment of humility,' appearing to be associated with it in the way a garment adheres to and is associated with the body, though he is devoid of it, since the garment he has put on is a borrowed one.

Wara' with a *fathah* on *ra'*, means complete abstinence from that which is *haram* or suspect.

The sentence *fa-daqqah Allah...* and those resembling it in the following two sentences, may either imply a curse or may be taken to be indicative of their condition in the world or the hereafter, or in both. *Daqq* means knocking, or is a noun denoting sound.

The words *min hadha* mean 'as a result of this quality.' *Khayshum* is the upper part of the nose and that which is connoted by 'crushing the nose' is disgracing and humiliating. That is, God Almighty disgraces and humiliates them on account of those characteristics, and we will have occasion to discuss it further later on.

Hayzum, with a *fathah* on *ha'* and *dammah* on *za'*, means 'the place where the waist band is tied', or 'the middle of the breast', or 'a circumscribing bone like the one encircling the neck.' The first meaning, which suits the idea of severance, fits here.

Khibb means deception, wickedness, and imposture. As al-Jawhari says, رَجُلٌ خَبٌّ means a deceitful man. *Malaq* means flattery and sycophancy, and implies what al-Jawhari says in *al-Sihah* يُعْطِي بِلِسَانِهِ مَا لَيْسَ فِي قَلْبِهِ i.e. one who expresses with his tongue that which is not in his heart. This interpretation is rather general, for *malaq* or *tamalluq* means an expression of love and attachment mixed with a show of humility while these are not in one's heart.

As to لَخْلَوَائِهِم al-Majlisi points out that there is *nun* (instead of *hamzah*) in some manuscripts. In that case, it means a middleman's tip or a soothsayer's fee paid him as a bribe, and it means the presents of money made by the rich to the impostor in return for his services, which he performs at the cost of his faith.

Al-hatm means breaking, and al-Majlisi says that breaking (of faith) here implies corruption and decadence (*fasad*). *Khubrahu* here is probably with a *dammah* on *kha'* and *sukun* on *ba'*, in which case it means the capacity to cognize and discern. Though it is also probable that the word is *khavarahu*, with *fathah* on *kha'* and *ba'*, in view of its consistency with the verb. The first meaning is more fitting, though the second one is not without relevance.

Al-Ka'abah means one's bad and shattered condition as a result of intense grief and sadness.

Tahannaka fi burnusih means 'he put the *taht al-hanak* in his *burnus*. *Burnus* is a tall cap, which the devout used to wear during the early Islamic era, as mentioned by al-Jawhari in *Sihah al-lughah*. Al-Majlisi says, 'This phrase suggests that *tahannuk* is *mustahabb* in *salat*. Such an inference is questionable, because given the kind of dress that was worn by the devout it suggests only the *istihbab* of *tahannuk* in general, not particularly during *salat*. Yes, had *burnus* been part of a dress- specified for *salat* such an inference would have been correct.

Hindis means an intensely dark night, as pointed out by al-Jawhari. *Hindis* here is substitute for night (*layl*) and that which is probably implied here is the dark of the night.

In *fa-shadda Allah arkanahu*, *shadd* means providing strength and power: *شَدَّ عَضُدَهُ: أَي قَوَّاهُ* *Rukn* means something on which a thing stands and by which it is sustained. Al-Jawhari says, *رُكْنُ الشَّيْءِ جَانِبُهُ الْأَقْوَى*, i.e. the *rukhn* of a thing is its strongest side.

Now, with our trust in God, we shall explain that which is essential and fitting in the course of a few sections.

Section 1

You should know that the premises of a syllogism in relation to its conclusion, or the arguments and theoretical proofs in any discipline in relation to the proved result and inferred conclusion, have the position of preparatory preliminaries. They are neither totally independent of the conclusions nor totally unrelated to them. In this regard both the followers of predestination (*jabr*) as well as the adherents of freedom (*tafwid*) have gone astray and departed from the path of moderation, each of them adopting an approach consistent with their doctrine.

One of them (i.e. those who believe in *tafwid*) says that the preliminaries are independent and if the door of the World of the Hidden (*alam al ghayb*) were to close and the emanations of the world of *malakut* to be shut off, man can derive conclusions unaided from the preliminaries themselves. The other (i.e. the believers in *jabr*) claims that the preliminaries are totally unrelated to the conclusions and the Divine tradition has been established to inspire the human mind with the conclusions. The preliminaries are only superficially connected to the conclusions and are absolutely unconnected in reality. Both of the views of these groups, like their basic doctrines, are false in the view of those who are acquainted with the true teaching and real knowledge.

The truth, in conformity with the view of those who know it, is that the preliminaries have a preparatory relation with the conclusions and they prepare the soul for receiving knowledge through inspiration from its higher hidden sources (*mabadi-ye 'aliyeh-yeghaybiyyeh*). Here we don't intend to expound or refute these doctrines of these two groups, for that lies beyond the scope of our aim, and the purpose of

mentioning them is only subsidiary to the exposition of another issue, which is as follows.

Having known that the knowledge and teachings are inspired by the invisible spheres and that inspiration is subject to the soul's connection (with these spheres), you should know that, as pointed out by the *hadith*:

لَيْسَ الْعِلْمُ بِكَثْرَةِ التَّعْلِيمِ، بَلْ هُوَ نُورٌ يَقْدِفُهُ بِقَلْبٍ مَنْ يَشَاءُ.

Knowledge is not extensive learning. Rather, it is a light that God casts in the heart of whomever He wills.²

Every soul that establishes a connection with the higher realm of *malakut* and the angelic sphere, receives such inspirations as are angelic in character and the knowledge that is cast into it is true knowledge from the angelic realm. Also, every soul that establishes a connection with the lower *malakuti* realm, the realm of the *jinn*, Satan, and evil spirits, receives inspirations that are satanic in character of the order of compound ignorance and obscuring veils.

This is why the *urafa* and the people of true knowledge consider spiritual purification, the purgation of intentions and motives and the rectification of one's goals to be the first step in the path of acquisition of sciences, especially the Divine teachings and the sciences of the *Shari'ah*. Accordingly, they give the relevant advice and warnings to the students, for the link with the higher sources is strengthened through the purification of the soul. And that which the holy Lord, Exalted and Glorious, says in the noble verse:

﴿وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ وَيُعَلِّمُكُمُ اللَّهُ﴾

And fear God, and God shall teach you. (2:282)

linking the Divine teaching to *taqwa* (God-fearing) is for this reason that *taqwa* purifies the soul and connects it to the invisible sacred realm. This is followed by Divine teaching and the *rahmani* inspirations, for there is no niggardliness in the higher realms, which are bounteous by necessity, in the same way as the Necessary-Being-by-Essence is Necessary in all aspects.

However, if the soul engages in acquiring the sciences due to attention to selfish motives, for better food and drink and for egoistic reasons, its goal becomes non-divine and the inspirations it receives are satanic in character. This is one of the foolproof criteria, which I think has not been mentioned by the *urafa*, for differentiating between *rahmani* and *shaytani* inspirations and most of the times one is aware of this fact.

The inspirations received by the impious soul full of impurities and obfuscations belong to the category of compound ignorance (i.e. to be ignorant and be ignorant of one's ignorance), which is the incurable

malady of the souls and the main impediment on their path. That is because the criterion in knowledge is not acquaintance with general concepts and scientific terms. Rather, the criterion is the removal of veils from the soul's eye and opening of the door of the knowledge of God. The real knowledge is the guiding spiritual lamp that shows the straight path of nearness to God and to the abode of His bliss.

Everything other than this is vanity, though in the world of *mulk* and prior to the removal of the veils of carnal nature those conversant with it should be reckoned as scholars, gnostics and jurists by those used to learned controversies and disputes. But once the blinds are removed from the eyes of the heart, once the curtains of the world of *malakut* are raised and once one wakes up from the heavy slumber of *mulk* and corporeal nature that (which once appeared to be knowledge and learning) will be found to be the darkest of veils. It will be found that all those branches of formal learning were all in all thick spiritual curtains each of them separated from the other by vast distances and we were ignorant of this fact.

النَّاسُ نِيَامٌ، فَإِذَا مَاتُوا انْتَبَهُوا

The people are asleep and they wake up on death.[3](#)

It is then that the real nature of our learned preoccupations is revealed to us. But that which is shameful and scandalous is that even after fifty years, or more or less, of learning and study we remain mistaken about ourselves, at times imagining that our studies are for the sake of God.

We remain unaware of the ruses of Satan and the self, for self-love is a thick veil that conceals our defects from ourselves. Hence the chaste *awliya'* and the noble Imams (A) have mentioned certain signs and marks of identification so that we may know and evaluate ourselves by their means without entertaining a baseless good opinion about ourselves. Later on in this exposition, we will refer to the signs and marks mentioned in this noble tradition.

We came to know that in a primary classification the seekers of knowledge fall into two groups: those who have a divine aim and those who have a mundane one. It may be said that the ultimate goal of the latter group is ignorance (*jahl*), for the seeming knowledge that they acquire is compound ignorance in reality and a spiritual veil. The two groups mentioned by Imam al-Sadiq (A) in the tradition that we are expounding both belong to this class, for the seekers of domination as well as the impostors dwell in ignorance and misguidance.

Hence, it may be said that the ignorance mentioned by the Imam as a sign of the first group is something different from the ordinary meaning of ignorance. Rather, it either means muddling up issues and keeping people ignorant or it means the ignorance of one who pretends to be ignorant of the truth or is not ready to accept it. Both of these characteristics are also present in the group afflicted with *mira'* and *jidal*. They deny facts and well-established truths and adhere to ignorance for the sake of promoting

their own opinions and marketing their spurious and little in demand merchandise.

Although in one classification the seekers of knowledge do not constitute more than two groups– that is, on the basis of a preliminary classification based on an affirmation or negation of the divine goal of knowledge – a further classification will show them to be more than three groups. As to their division into three groups by the Imam, it may be said that he wished to mention two major groups consisting of most of the victims of ignorance and misguidance. Thus in another tradition, we find that he considers the seekers of knowledge as constituting two groups:

الكَافِي بِإِسْنَادِهِ عَنْ أَبِي عَبْدِ اللَّهِ عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ قَالَ: مَنْ أَرَادَ الْحَدِيثَ لِمَنْفَعَةِ الدُّنْيَا لَمْ يَكُنْ لَهُ فِي الْآخِرَةِ نَصِيبٌ، وَمَنْ أَرَادَ بِهِ خَيْرَ الْآخِرَةِ أَعْطَاهُ اللَّهُ خَيْرَ الدُّنْيَا وَالْآخِرَةِ.

In al-Kafi, al-Kulayni reports with his isnad from Abu ‘Abd Allah (A) that he said, “He who seeks (to learn) hadith for worldly benefit has no share in the Hereafter, and he who seeks it for a benefit in the Hereafter, God grants him benefit both in the world and the Hereafter.”⁴

Section 2

We have mentioned the evils of *mira’* and *jidal* earlier in the exposition of one of the holy traditions. However, it is also proper here that we mention some relevant traditions and describe a little of their evil effects. In the noble *al-Kafi*, al-Kulayni reports with his *isnad* the following tradition on the authority of Imam al-Sadiq (A):

قَالَ أَمِيرُ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ: إِيَّاكُمْ وَالْمِرَاءَ وَالْخُصُومَةَ فَإِنَّهُمَا يُمْرِضَانِ الْقُلُوبَ عَلَى الْإِخْوَانِ وَيَنْبُتُ عَلَيْهِمَا النِّفَاقُ.

Amir al-Mu’minin (A) said, “Beware of dispute and controversy, for they infect with enmity the hearts of brethren. They are the roots of hypocrisy (nifaq), out of which hypocrisy grows.”⁵

There are other traditions in *al-Kafi* narrated from Imam al-Sadiq (A):

عَنْ أَبِي عَبْدِ اللَّهِ عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ قَالَ: إِيَّاكُمْ وَالْخُصُومَةَ فَإِنَّهَا تُشْغِلُ الْقَلْبَ وَتُورِثُ النِّفَاقَ وَتُكْسِبُ الضَّغَائِنَ.

Abu ‘Abd Allah (A) said, “Beware of controversy, because it discomfits the heart, gives rise to hypocrisy, and creates ill will within the heart.”⁶

عَنْ أَبِي عَبْدِ اللَّهِ عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ قَالَ: قَالَ جِبْرِئِيلُ لِلنَّبِيِّ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَآلِهِ: إِيَّاكَ وَمُلاحَاةَ الرَّجَالِ

Abu 'Abd Allah (A) said: Gabriel said to the Prophet (S): "Beware of getting entangled in dispute and acrimonious debate with people."⁷

Now let us take up the explanation of the fact that dispute and acrimony in talk sicken the heart, create ill feeling between friends, and make hypocrisy grow within the heart. It was mentioned earlier that outward actions leave certain effects on the inner self and the heart that are in accordance with their character.

Here we must say that vicious actions have a more immediate and stronger impact on the heart. That is so because man is the offspring of the world of nature and the faculties of lust (*shahwah*), anger (*ghadhab*) and diabolism (*shaytanah*) accompany him and are active in him, as has been mentioned in a tradition:

إِنَّ الشَّيْطَانَ يَجْرِي مَجْرَى الدَّمِّ مِنْ بَنِي آدَمَ.

Satan circulates in mankind like the blood in veins.⁸

Hence, the heart is directly confronted with corrupting elements and matters acclimatized to physical nature. Even a slight external assistance, either from one of the bodily organs or in the shape of an immoral and vicious companion, produces a strong effect on the heart. Therefore, there are warnings in the noble traditions against keeping company with such persons:

الكَافِي: عَنْ أَبِي عَبْدِ اللَّهِ عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ قَالَ: قَالَ أَمِيرُ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ: لَا يَنْبَغِي لِلْمَرْءِ الْمُسْلِمِ أَنْ يُوَاجِيَ الْفَاجِرَ فَإِنَّهُ يُزِينُ لَهُ فِعْلَهُ وَيُحِبُّ أَنْ يَكُونَ مِثْلَهُ وَلَا يُعِينُهُ عَلَى أَمْرِ دُنْيَاهُ وَلَا أَمْرِ مَعَادِهِ، وَمَدْخَلُهُ إِلَيْهِ وَمَخْرَجُهُ مِنْ عِنْدِهِ شَيْنٌ عَلَيْهِ.

Al-Kafi reports on the authority of Imam al-Sadiq (A) from Amir al-Mu'minin (A) that he said, "It does not behoove a Muslim to be on fraternal terms with an immoral person, for he makes his own acts appear fair to one and likes one to become like himself. He is of no assistance to one either in the matters of the world or the Hereafter and it is a matter of disgrace for one to have social intercourse with such a person."⁹

عَنْ أَبِي عَبْدِ اللَّهِ عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ: لَا يَنْبَغِي لِلْمَرْءِ الْمُسْلِمِ أَنْ يُوَاجِيَ الْفَاجِرَ وَلَا الْأَحْمَقَ وَلَا الْكَذَّابَ

Imam al-Sadiq (A) said, "It is not proper for a Muslim to fraternize with an immoral person, a fool, or a liar."¹⁰

An important point behind the prohibition on keeping company with sinful persons, or on presence in a gathering where God is sinned against, or on befriending and mixing with the enemies of God, is the influence of their morals, states and acts on a person. More important from the viewpoint of such

influence are one's own acts and their effect upon the heart, so that the perpetration of vicious acts even for a brief period produces a strong influence on the heart, freedom and relief from which is not possible or attainable even after many long years.

This indicates that should one indulge in dispute and hostile debate, not much time would pass before a terrible darkness and obfuscation appears in the heart, the outward verbal hostility soon leading to an inward hostility that is itself the greatest cause of hypocrisy, two-facedness and duplicity. Hence the evils of hypocrisy may be recognized through a recognition of the evils of *mira'* and *jidal*. Earlier, in the course of exposition of one of the traditions, we have described the evils of hypocrisy and two-facedness and there is no need to repeat that here.

Imam al-Sadiq (A) mentions certain signs and symptoms of the victims of ignorance and disputatiousness, one of which is causing harm to the people and being a vicious presence, which by itself is a vice and evil that is sufficient as an independent cause of one's destruction. It is mentioned in a noble tradition of *al-Kafi*:

مَنْ آذَى لِي وَلِيًّا فَقَدْ بَارَزَنِي بِالْمُحَارَبَةِ.

(God Almighty says) Whoever torments a friend of Mine has challenged Me to battle. [11](#)

The causing of harm and tormenting of the faithful has here been equated to declaration of war against God and hostility against His Sacred Being. The traditions relating to this topic are too many to be included in this brief exposition.

Another of the signs of this group has been mentioned to be *mira'*, contesting of opinions and engagement in learned debates for the sake of domination and proving one's merit. As to making *mira'* the consequence of *mira'* in the tradition, it is possible that the first *mira'* is an inner quality and a vicious trait of the heart and the *mira'* that has been mentioned as its consequence is its outward manifestation and symptom.

Another of the symptoms of this group is its pretence of being forbearing while it is devoid of this quality. This is itself hypocrisy and two-facedness and involves *riya'* and *shirk*. Similarly, the pretence of humility (*khushu'*) while being devoid of piety (*wara'*) is also another clear manifestation of *shirk*, *riya'*, hypocrisy and two-facedness.

This shows that this characteristic is possessed of great vices each of which is fatal and destructive. It is necessary that we undertake any kind of effort and hardship to deliver ourselves from this shameful, faith-killing and destructive malady of the heart and purge it of its darkness and filth, purifying it and burnishing it with the sincerity of intention and inner truthfulness. In this regard there is a point here which is enough to shatter one when one reflects upon it for a while. It is that which Imam al-Sadiq (A) mentions after describing the signs of this group. The Imam (A) says:

فَدَقَّ اللَّهُ مِنْ هَذَا خَيْشُومَهُ وَقَطَعَ مِنْهُ حَيْزُومَهُ.

As a result, God crushes his nose and severs his waist (it may also be translated to mean: Hence, may God crush his nose and sever his waist.)

This is either a *du'a* (prayer or curse) or an indicative sentence (*ikhbar*). Whatever it should be, it is bound to take place. For should it be an indicative sentence, the reporter is a truthful speaker of attested veracity (*sadiq al-musaddaq*). Should it be a *du'a'*, it is the *du'a'* of a *Ma'sum* and a *wali* of Allah and is certain to be granted.

Hence it is indicative of the certain humiliation and disgrace to befall such a man, and perhaps in both the worlds: in this world in front of those whose respect he wished to earn through ostentation and pretence of merit and which produce an opposite result by bringing him disgrace, reducing his worth, and earning him the contempt of those whom he sought to dominate and impress; and in the next world were he shall be humiliated and brought to shame in the presence of the archangels, prophets, apostles, the infallible *awliya'* and God's righteous servants.

So, woe to us: the victims of *mira'* and *jidal*, of carnal desires and hostilities! How great is our affliction at the hands of this vicious, heartless self which would not leave us alone unless it has brought us damnation in all the stages of life and existence, and yet we never bother to reform it! Our ears are closed with the stoppers of neglect!

We refuse to awake from the heavy sleep of nature! O God, Thou art the reformer of Thy servants and the Master of their hearts. The being of all the existents lies in Thy power and the hearts of Thy creatures lie under the total influence of Thy will. We are not our own masters and have no power over our own benefit or harm, life or death. Do illuminate our dark hearts with the light of Thy grace and correct our vices with Thy magnanimity and mercy and help these powerless and weak creatures of Thine!

Section 3

We said concerning the mention of *mira'* in the first part of the noble *hadith* that *mira'* has an inner spiritual being as well as is an outward phenomenon that is the product, sign and symptom of the first kind of *mira'*. Similarly, we may say concerning the second part of the description given by the Imam (A) that *istitalah* and *khatl* have an inner existence as a spiritual habit and quality, as well as an outward manifestation, which is the result of that habit.

Similarly, in most of the activities of the heart there are various levels: the level of enduring trait (*malakah*), the level of state (*hal*), and the level of outward behavior, which is the product of the inner trait. Thus those who have in them the trait of *istitalah*, the urge for domination and ambition, as well as that for deception and imposture, they also carry its outward signs and symptoms, some of which have

been mentioned in the tradition by Imam al-Sadiq (A).

One of them is deceit and imposture which make one present himself as pious and righteous while he is not such inwardly. This group of people are wolves in the garb of sheep and devils in the form of men. They are the worst of God's creatures and their harm to the people's faith is more than that of armies of opponents.

Another of the characteristics of this group is that they behave with humility and in a sycophantic manner with those who are the object of their greed. They spread their nets of imposture, sycophancy, and false humility to trap poor, weak people, to benefit from the sweetmeats of their love, admiration, and worldly respect.

For this purpose, they exploit their own religion, sell their faith, and make use of the mundane benefits that are available. This is the group of people about whom a tradition says that when some people in paradise see them they will say, "How is it that we came to paradise as a result of your teaching while you yourselves have been confined to hell?" They will answer, "We did not act according to what we spoke."¹²

Another of their signs is that they behave haughtily with their likes who do not attract their greed and whom they consider as impediments in the way of their own advancement. They treat them with vanity and try as far as they can to humiliate them through words and deeds, for they are afraid that anyone of them can cause him trouble, which can lead to a slump in their credibility.

One should know that it is a most difficult thing to remain pious when one is in the formal dress of learning, *zuhd*, and *taqwa* and to preserve the purity of one's heart in the clerical profession. That is why if someone from this class should act according to his duties and go through its phases with sincerity, correct himself, and after reforming himself engage in reforming others, and protect the orphans in the descent of the Messenger (S), such a man is reckoned among the Outstrippers and the Near Ones (*muqarrabun wa sabiqun*). Such a thing has been said of four disciples of Imam al-Baqir (A) by Imam al-Sadiq (A). The following tradition is reported in *al-Wasa'il* from *Rijal al-Kashshi* with an isnad reaching up to Abu 'Ubaydah al-Hadhaha':

قَالَ: سَمِعْتُ أَبَا عَبْدِ اللَّهِ، عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ، يَقُولُ: زُرَّارَةُ وَمُحَمَّدُ بْنُ مُسْلِمٍ وَأَبُو بَصِيرٍ وَبُرَيْدٌ مِنَ الَّذِينَ قَالَ اللَّهُ تَعَالَى فِيهِمْ: ﴿وَالسَّابِقُونَ السَّابِقُونَ. أُولَئِكَ الْمُقَرَّبُونَ﴾

Abu 'Ubaydah says: I heard Abu 'Abd Allah (A) say: Zurarah, Muhammad ibn Muslim, Abu Basir, and Burayd (ibn Mu'awiyah) are amongst those concerning whom God, the Exalted, said: "The Outstrippers, the Outstrippers- they are the Near Ones."¹³

There are many traditions relating to this topic and the excellences of the learned (*ahl al-'ilm*) are more than can be expressed. It suffices to cite the following tradition of the Noble Prophet (S) about them:

مَنْ جَاءَهُ الْمَوْتُ وَهُوَ يَطْلُبُ الْعِلْمَ لِيُحْيِيَ بِهِ الْإِسْلَامَ كَانَ بَيْنَهُ وَبَيْنَ الْأَنْبِيَاءِ دَرَجَةٌ وَاحِدَةٌ فِي الْجَنَّةِ

When death comes to one who is seeking knowledge to revive thereby Islam, there will be only one degree between him and the prophets in Paradise. [14](#)

Later on, insha' Allah, there will be occasion to describe their excellence. However, if, God forbid, should the seeker of knowledge depart from the path of sincerity and take the road of unrighteousness, he will be reckoned among the worst of God's creatures about whom there are strong and strange (condemning) expressions in the traditions. –

The first thing that the learned in religious sciences and the seekers of this perilous road must take into consideration is self-reform during the period of studies, counting it as far as possible to be the foremost of their duties, for this is harder and more obligatory than all the duties and obligations dictated by *Shari'ah* and reason.

O seekers of knowledge and spiritual excellences and teachings! Rise from your sleep and know that you have lesser room for excuse before God, and God Almighty shall call you to a tougher account. The level of your knowledge and works is very different from that of other people.

Your path (*Sirat*) is sharper and narrower and there will be a great scrutiny of the record of your life. Woe to the student and seeker of knowledge in whose heart learning creates darkness and obscurity! And we see in ourselves that if we have learnt some inadequate concepts and some futile terms, it has kept us from treading the divine path. Satan and the self have dominated our being and turned us away from the path of humanity and guidance. These absurd and senseless concepts became our biggest hindrance and there is no remedy except to seek refuge in the Sacred Being of God Almighty.

O God, we confess to our shortcomings and plead guilty to our sins! We did not take even a single step in the path of Thy good-pleasure nor did we perform a single act of worship and obedience with sincerity. Yet treat us with Thine all-inclusive mercy and Thine unbounded grace. In the same way as Thou concealed our inadequacies in this world, do cover them with Thy forgiveness and covering grace in the other world, where we need it more!

Here, too, it is essential to remember the point that we mentioned while expounding the earlier part of the noble tradition. That point concerns this utterance of the Imam (A):

فَأَعْمَى اللَّهُ عَلَى هَذَا خَبْرَهُ وَقَطَعَ مِنْ آثَارِ الْعُلَمَاءِ أَثْرَهُ

As a result, God blinds his vision and wipes out his traces from the record of the learned.

That which is denoted by this statement, whether it be *du'a'* or *ikhbar*, is certain to happen. One must be very fearful of this inner blindness of vision which is the main source of all kinds of darkness and

wretchedness. The blindness of the heart is the source of all misfortunes. Similarly, to be purged from the effects of the learned and to be deprived of their merits and gifts, apart from this deprivation itself, will be followed by an unimaginable humiliation and disgrace in the presence of God's elect on the Day of Resurrection.

Section 4

As to the men of understanding and intellect—that is those for whom the goal of seeking knowledge is to become learned in *Din* and to know its truths—there are certain signs of which the main ones have been mentioned in the tradition. One of them is that knowledge creates grief, pain, and dejection. To be sure, this grief and dejection is not for the sake of the base and transitory worldly matters, but from the fear of the Return and the terror of falling short in the performance of duties and service.

This grief and dejection, besides illuminating the heart, gives it a purity and burnish. It becomes the original impulse for self-reform and commitment to the duties of servitude and creaturehood. The light of knowledge takes away quiet from the heart of the devotee introducing him to God and the abode of His bounties. He derives great pleasure from praying to God Almighty and spends his nights in wakefulness and in performing the duties of devotion. Hence, the Imam (A) says:

قَدْ تَحَنَّنَكَ فِي بُرْنُسِهِ وَقَامَ اللَّيْلَ فِي حُنْدُسِهِ

The first sentence apparently indicates engagement in worship. Another sign of this divine man of knowledge is that though fully attentive to the duties of servitude he is still in a state of trepidation. The light of knowledge reveals this to him that however much he may attend to his duties his efforts are still inadequate and wanting, that he cannot entirely fulfill the requirements of gratitude and true worship. This realization fills his heart with terror and it is about such people that God has said:

﴿إِنَّمَا يَخْشَى اللَّهَ مِنْ عِبَادِهِ الْعُلَمَاءُ﴾

Even so only those of His servants fear God who have knowledge. (35:28)

The light of knowledge brings trepidation and grief, and though such a person is cognizant of his commitment to self-reform, the fear of the Return does not let him rest. He beseeches God to reform him and is afraid of becoming preoccupied with other-than-God. He shuns the people, fearing lest they should keep him from the path of God and the journey towards the world of the Hereafter, by making the world and its pleasures appear alluring to him. Thereupon God confirms such a person and strengthens the supports that sustain his being, and grants him amnesty on the Day of Resurrection.

فَيَا لَيْتَنَا كُنَّا مَعَكُمْ فَتَفُوزَ فَوْزاً عَظِيماً.

Oh, would that we had been with them, then should we have achieved a great success!

And all praise is ultimately God's, at the beginning and the end, and may God's benedictions be upon Muhammad and the Pure Ones of his progeny.

- [1.](#) Al-Kafi, "kitab fadl al-'ilm", "bab al-nawadir", hadith 5.
- [2.](#) Bihar al-'anwar, i, 225.
- [3.](#) Ibn Maytham al-Bahrani, Sharh al-sad kalimeh-ye qisar, 54.
- [4.](#) Al-Kafi, i, "kitab fadl al-ilm", "bab al-musta'kil bi-ilmih", hadith 2.
- [5.](#) Al-Kafi, ii, "kitab al-'iman wa al-kufr", "bab al-mira' wa al-khusumah", hadith 1.
- [6.](#) Al-Kafi, ii, "kitab al-'iman wa al-kufr", "bab al-mira' wa al-khusumah", hadith 8.
- [7.](#) Al-Kafi, ii, "kitab al-'iman wa al-kufr", "bab al-mira' wa al-khusumah", hadith 6.
- [8.](#) Sunan al-Darimi, ii, 320.
- [9.](#) Al-Kafi, "kitab al-'ishrah", "bab man tukrahu mujalasaduh", hadith 2.
- [10.](#) Al-Kafi, "kitab al-'ishrah", "bab man tukrahu mujalasaduh", hadith 3.
- [11.](#) Al-Kafi, "kitab al-imnan wa al-kufr", "bab man adha al-Muslimin", hadith 8.
- [12.](#) Wasa'il al-Shi'ah, xi, 420.
- [13.](#) Wasa'il al-Shi'ah, xviii, 105.
- [14.](#) Sunan al-Darimi, i, 100.

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