

Value of Belief

With regard to the value of belief, the discussion should proceed in three stages:

1. Is lack of belief in the principles of religion, such as the Oneness of God, Prophecy, and resurrection – and according to the Sh`a view, these three in addition to Divine justice and Im`mate (succession) – always and necessarily cause for Divine punishment? Or is it possible for some unbelievers to be excused and not be punished for their unbelief?
2. Is belief a necessary condition for the acceptance of good deeds, such that no good deed of a non-Muslim or non-Sh`a is acceptable to God?
3. Do unbelief and rejection of the truth cause the invalidity of good deeds or not?

In the coming discussions, we will touch on each of these three stages.

Being Held Accountable For Unbelief

There is no doubt that unbelief is of two types: One is unbelief out of obstinacy and stubbornness, which is called the unbelief of repudiation; and the other is unbelief out of ignorance and unawareness of the truth.

With regard to the former, definitive rational and narrational proofs indicate that a person who deliberately and knowingly shows obstinacy towards the truth and endeavours to reject, it deserves punishment.

But with regard to the latter, it must be said that if the ignorance and unawareness do not spring from negligence, they shall be forgiven and overlooked by God.

To explain this point, it is necessary to speak a bit about submission and obstinacy. The Qur`n says:

يَوْمَ لَا يَنْفَعُ مَالٌ وَلَا بَنُونَ إِلَّا مَنْ أَتَى اللَّهَ بِقَلْبٍ سَلِيمٍ

“The day when neither wealth nor children will avail, except him who comes to God with a sound heart.”¹

Levels of Submission

The most basic condition of soundness of heart is to be submissive to the truth. Submission has three levels: submission of the body, submission of the intellect, and submission of the heart.

When two opponents face each other in combat and one of them feels likely to lose, he may surrender or submit to the other. In such a surrender, normally the losing opponent puts his hands up as a sign of defeat and desists from fighting, coming under the sway of his opponent. That is, he acts in accordance with whatever command his opponent gives.

In this type of submission, the body submits, but the mind and reason do not; instead, they are constantly thinking of rebellion, incessantly contemplating how to get a chance to overcome the opponent once again.

This is the state of his reason and thought, and as for his feelings and emotions, they too continuously denounce the enemy. This type of submission – that of the body – is the most that can be achieved by force.

The next level of submission is the submission of the intellect and reason. The power that can make the intellect submit is that of logic and reasoning. Here, physical force can't accomplish anything.

It is absolutely impossible through physical force to make a student understand that the sum of the angles of a triangle is equal to two right angles. Mathematical propositions must be proven through reasoning and not through any other way.

The intellect is forced to submit through thinking and reasoning. If sufficient proof exists and is presented to the intellect and the intellect understands it, it submits, even if all the powers of the world say not to submit.

It is well-known that when Galileo was tortured for his belief in the movement of the earth and centrality of the sun in the solar system, out of fear that they would burn him alive, he expressed repentance of his scientific view; in that condition, he wrote something on the ground.

It is said that he wrote, “Galileo’s repentance will not make the Earth stand still.”

Force can compel a person to recant his or her words, but the human intellect does not submit except when faced with logic and reasoning.

قُلْ هَاتُوا بُرْهَانَكُمْ إِن كُنْتُمْ صَادِقِينَ

أُنظِرْنِي إِلَى يَوْمِ يُبْعَثُونَ

“Grant me reprieve until the day they are resurrected.”⁶

And the evidence that he recognized the Prophets and infallibles is that he said:

قَالَ فَبِعِزَّتِكَ لَأُغْوِيَنَّهُمْ أَجْمَعِينَ إِلَّا عِبَادَكَ مِنْهُمُ الْمُخْلَصِينَ

“By Your might, I shall lead them all astray, except Your purified servants among them.”⁷

The meaning of the purified servants, who are pure not just in their actions, but whose entire existence is purified and free of all except God, are the friends of God and the infallibles; Shaḥāḥḥn recognized them, too, and believed in their infallibility.

The Qur’ān, while describing Shaḥāḥḥn as knowing all these things, calls him an unbeliever. Thus, we come to know that mere recognition and knowledge, or the submission of the intellect and mind, is not sufficient for a person to be considered a believer. Something else is necessary as well.

In the Qur’ān’s logic, why has Shaḥāḥḥn been regarded as an unbeliever in spite of all his knowledge? Obviously, it is because while his perception accepted reality, his feelings rose to battle it; his heart rose against his intellect; he showed arrogance and refused to accept the truth: he lacked submission of the heart.

True Islām and Regional Islām

Normally when we say so–and–so is Muslim or isn’t Muslim, our view isn’t toward the reality of the matter. Those who geographically live in a particular region and are Muslims through imitation and inheritance from their parents we call Muslims and those who live under different conditions and are affiliated with another religion or have no religion altogether, again out of imitation of their parents, we call non–Muslims.

It should be known that this aspect does not have much value, neither the aspect of being a Muslim nor that of being a non–Muslim and an unbeliever. Many of us are imitative or geographical Muslims we are Muslims because our mothers and fathers were Muslim and we were born and raised in a region whose people are Muslim

That which has value in reality is true Islām, and that is for a person to submit to truth in the heart, having opened the door of one’s heart to the truth to accept and act on it, and the Islām that he or she has accepted should be based on research and study on the one hand, and submission and lack of prejudice on the other.

If someone possesses the trait of submission to the truth and for whatever reason the reality of Islam has remained hidden from him or her without that person being at fault, God will most certainly refrain from punishing him or her; he or she shall achieve salvation from Hell. God says:

وَمَا كُنَّا مُعَذِّبِينَ حَتَّى نَبْعَثَ رَسُولًا

“And We do not punish until We have sent a messenger.”⁸

That is, it is impossible for God, the Wise and Munificent, to punish someone for whom the proofs (of truth) have not been completed.

The scholars of the principles of jurisprudence have termed the purport of this verse, which acts to confirm the dictate of reason, “the impropriety of punishment without prior explanation.” They say that until God has made clear a reality for a person, it is unjust for Him to punish that person.

To show the fact that it is possible to find individuals who possess the spirit of submission without being Muslims in name, Descartes, the French philosopher – according to his own words – is a good example.

In his biography, they have written that he began his philosophy from doubt; he doubted all that he knew and began from zero. He made his own thought a starting point and said, “I think, therefore I am.”

After proving his own existence, he proved the spirit, and likewise the existence of body, and God became definite for him. Gradually the issue of choosing a religion arose; he chose Christianity, which was the official religion of his country.

But he also says, “I don’t say that Christianity is definitely the best religion that exists in the entire world; what I say is that among the religions that I currently know and that are in my reach, Christianity is the best religion.

I have no conflict with the truth; perhaps there is a religion in other parts of the world that is superior to Christianity.” Incidentally, he mentions Iran as an example of a country about which he lacks information and doesn’t know the religion of; he says: “What do I know? Perhaps there is a religion in Iran that is better than Christianity.”

Such people cannot be called unbelievers, since they have no obstinacy; they are not deliberately seeking unbelief. They are not involved in concealing reality, which is the essence of unbelief. Such people are “dispositional Muslims.”

Though they cannot be called Muslim, they also cannot be termed unbelievers, since the opposition between a Muslim and an unbeliever is not like the opposition between affirmation and negation or that between the existence and non-existence of a trait in a subject capable of possessing the trait (according to the terminology of logicians and philosophers).

Instead, it is the opposition of two opposites; that is, it is the opposition of two existential things, not that of one existential and one non-existential thing.

Of course, the fact that we mentioned Descartes as an example was not to depart from the basic principle we explained earlier. We stipulated from the beginning that we were not to express opinions about individuals.

Our intent in mentioning Descartes as an example is that if we suppose that what he said is true and he is as submissive to the truth as his words indicate, and on the other hand truly did not have more ability to research, then he is a dispositional Muslim.

Sincerity, the Condition for the Acceptance of Actions

The second of the issues that we raised regarding the value of faith is what influence faith can have in the acceptance of actions.

Previously, in relating the proofs of those who say that the good deeds of unbelievers are acceptable to God, we said that they say that the goodness and badness of actions is related to their essence.

A good deed, whether of a believer or an unbeliever, is good by its essence and must inevitably be accepted by God, since good is good no matter who does it and bad is bad no matter who does it, and since God's relation to all people is the same.

Now, we would like to add that though what has been said in the above reasoning is correct, a basic point has been neglected in it. To explain this point, we must first explain another term from the subject of the principles of jurisprudence, which is that goodness and evil are of two types: action-related, and actor-related.

Every action has two aspects, and every one of the two aspects has a separate ruling with regard to goodness or badness. It is possible for an action to be good from one dimension and not be good from the other. Similarly, the reverse is possible; and it is also possible for an action to be good or bad from both dimensions.

The two dimensions consist of the action's beneficial or harmful effect in the external world and human society, and the action's association to its doer and that person's spiritual motivations which caused that action and the goal to which the doer aspired by performing it.

From the point of view of the former, one must determine the extent of the beneficial or harmful effect of the action. And from the point of view of the latter, one must determine what type of action the doer has performed in his or her mental and spiritual framework and what goal he or she has pursued.

Human actions, in terms of the trajectory of their beneficial and harmful effects, are recorded in books of

history, and history passes Judgement about them; it praises them or condemns them. But the aspect of attribution to the human soul is only recorded in the otherworldly books [of human deeds]. Books of history like great and influential actions and praise such actions; but the Divine otherworldly and celestial books, in addition to this aspect, are in search of actions that have spirit.

The Qur'^عin says:

الَّذِي خَلَقَ الْمَوْتَ وَالْحَيَاةَ لِيَبْلُوَكُمْ أَيُّكُمْ أَحْسَنُ عَمَلًا

“Who created death and life to try you as to which of you is the best in deeds.”⁹

It refers to “the best deeds,” not “the most deeds,” since the important thing is for us to know that when we perform an action under the influence of spiritual motives, aside from the outward appearance of the action – which is a series of movements and has its own social effects and value – spiritually we actually move in a certain direction and traverse a certain path.

The issue is not so simple as to say, “All that exists is the ‘action,’ the work, the muscular energy that is spent. As for the thoughts and intentions, their value lies only in preparing for the action; they are no more than a mentality and preliminary.

And whatever the preliminary may be, the main thing is the action itself.” To the contrary, the importance of the thought and the intention is not less than that of the action. Such a way of thinking, which maintains the primacy of action rather than the primacy of the intention and belief, is a materialistic thought.

Under the names “objectivity” and “subjectivity” it gives the belief and intention behind the action no more than preliminary value. Leaving aside the fact that the invalidity of this school is clear in its own right, what is certain is that the Qur'^عanic teachings cannot be interpreted on the basis of such ways of thinking.

In the view of the Qur'^عin, our true personality and self is our spirit. With every voluntary action, the spirit moves from potentiality to actuality and acquires an effect and an attribute commensurate to its own intention and aim. These effects and habits become a part of our personality and carry us to a world appropriate to themselves from among the realms of existence.

Thus, from the first dimension the goodness and evilness of actions depends on the external effect of those actions; and from the second dimension goodness and evilness depends on the manner in which that action was performed by its doer.

In the first case, our position about an action is based on its external and societal outcome; and in the second case, it is based on the internal and mental effect of the action on its doer.

If a person establishes a hospital or performs some other charitable deed with respect to the cultural, health, or economic affairs of a country, without doubt from a societal point of view and in the view of history, that action is good.

That is, it is an act that benefits God's creation. In this regard, it doesn't matter what the intention was of the person who established the hospital or other philanthropic institution.

Whether the intention is to show off and fulfil one's selfish instincts or whether the intention is altruistic and unselfish, from a societal point of view a charitable institution has come into being.

The ruling of history with regard to people's actions is always from this aspect and in view of this particular dimension. History has no concern with people's intentions. When the masterpieces of art or architecture in Isfahān are mentioned, no one is concerned with what intention or aim the maker of the Shaykh Luḡfullāh Masjid, the Shāh Masjid, or the Thirty-Three Bridge had; history sees the outward form and calls the action a "good deed."

However, in ascertaining an action's actor-related goodness, our attention doesn't go to the societal and external effect of the action. Instead, from this aspect, we are concerned with how the action relates to its doer.

In this reckoning, it is not enough for the action to be beneficial in order for it to be considered a "good deed." What counts is what the doer's intention was in performing the action, and what goal he or she wanted to attain. If the doer had a good intention and aim and performed the action with a good motive, that action is good that is, it possesses actor-related goodness.

The action itself is two-dimensional; that is, it proceeds in two dimensions: the historical and societal dimension, and the spiritual dimension. But if the doer performed the action to show off or to attract material benefit, the action is one-dimensional.

It goes forward only in time and in history, and not in the spiritual dimension; and in Islamic terminology, the action does not ascend to the higher realm. In other words, in such instances, the doer has served society and raised its level but has not benefited him or herself, and may actually have committed treachery. Instead of ascending spiritually by performing the action, the doer's soul may have descended to a lower spiritual level.

Of course, our intent is not that the action-related goodness of an action is totally separate from its actor-related goodness, and that from a spiritual point of view a person should have nothing to do with actions that are beneficial to society.

The intent is that a socially beneficial deed is only spiritually beneficial when the spirit, by performing that action, has travelled a spiritual path as well, having left the station of selfishness and pleasure-seeking and set foot on the station of sincerity and purity.

The relation between action-related goodness and actor-related goodness is the relation of the body to the spirit. A living being is a combination of spirit and body. Likewise, the second type of goodness must be breathed into the body of an action possessing the first type of goodness for that action to come alive.

Thus, the rational proof of the so-called intellectuals is fallacious. This proof states that "God's relationship with all His creatures is equal, and the goodness or evilness of actions is innate to them. Thus good deeds are equal for all people.

And the corollary of these two equalities is that in the hereafter, the recompense of believers and unbelievers shall be the same." In this reasoning, the actions and the equality of the creatures before the Creator have been given attention but the doer and his or her personality, aim, motive, and spiritual path all of which necessarily cause actions to be dissimilar and cause a difference among them similar to the difference between the living and the dead has been forgotten.

They say, "What difference does it make for God whether the doer of a good deed recognizes Him or not, or is familiar with Him or not? Whether he or she performed the action for His pleasure or with some other purpose, whether the intention be seeking nearness to God or not?"

The answer is that it makes no difference to God, but it makes a difference for that person him or herself. If the person doesn't recognize God, he or she will perform one type of spiritual action and another type if he or she is familiar with God.

If one doesn't know God, one's action will be one-dimensional; the action will have only action-related and historical goodness. But if one knows God, one's action will be two-dimensional and will have actor-related and spiritual goodness.

If one knows God, one's action and one's self will ascend towards God, and if one doesn't know God one will not ascend. In other words, it makes no difference for God, but it does make a difference for the action. In one case, the action will be a living, ascending action, and in the other case it will be a dead, descending action.

They say that God, who is Wise and Just, will certainly not nullify the good deeds of a person on account of not having a relationship of friendship with Him.

We too believe that God will not nullify them, but we must see whether a person who doesn't recognize God actually performs a good deed that is good both in its effect and its relation to its doer, good both from the aspect of the societal order as well as from the doer's spiritual aspect.

The fallacy arises because we have supposed that for an action to be beneficial to society suffices for it to be considered a "good deed." To suppose the impossible, if a person doesn't know God and yet ascends toward God through his or her action, without doubt God will not send that person back.

But reality is that a person who doesn't know God doesn't break the curtain to enter the spiritual realm, doesn't traverse any of the stations of the soul, and doesn't ascend towards God's spiritual realm in order for his or her action to acquire a spiritual aspect and a form that will be a source of pleasure, felicity, and salvation for him or her.

The acceptance of an action by God is nothing other than for the action to possess these qualities.

One of the primary differences between Divine laws and human laws is this very point; Divine laws are two-dimensional, and human laws are one-dimensional. Human laws have nothing to do with the spiritual order or spiritual advancement of the individual.

When a government legislates taxes in the interests of the country, its goal is solely to obtain money and cover the country's expenses. The government has no concern with the intention of the taxpayer.

Does he or she pay taxes freely and willingly out of love for the country and its government, or out of fear? The government's purpose is only to obtain money; even if the taxpayer curses the government under his or her breath, the government's purpose has been attained.

Similarly, when a government calls its armed forces to defend the country, it does not concern itself with the intention of the soldiers; it desires the soldiers to fight its enemies in war. It makes no difference to the government whether the soldier fights out of his free will and inclination or out of fear of the gun to his head; or whether his fighting is to show off, as a result of foolish prejudices, or in defence of truth and what is right.

However, Divine laws are not like that. In these laws, monetary dues and warriors are not wanted in absolute terms, but together with a pure intention and desire to seek nearness to God. Islam desires actions with a soul, not soulless actions.

Thus, if a Muslim pays zakat, but with an element of showing off, it is not accepted; if he performs jihad, but does it in order to show off, it is not accepted. The Divine law says that a coerced soldier is useless; I want a soldier who has the soul of a soldier, who has accepted the call:

إِنَّ اللَّهَ اشْتَرَى مِنَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ أَنْفُسَهُمْ وَأَمْوَالَهُمْ بِأَنْ لَهُمُ الْجَنَّةَ

“Verily God has purchased from the believers their souls and their belongings in return for Paradise”¹⁰

and answered it sincerely.

It has been related from the Messenger of Islam (S) in a consecutively-narrated tradition among both the Sunnis and Sh`as that he said:

إِنَّمَا الْأَعْمَالُ بِالنِّيَّاتِ

“The value of deeds is based on the intention.”

لِكُلِّ امْرِئٍ مَا نَوَى.

“Every individual shall have what he or she intended.”

لَا عَمَلَ إِلَّا بِنِيَّةٍ

*“No deed is accepted without an intention.”*¹¹

One tradition has been narrated in the following words:

إِنَّمَا الْأَعْمَالُ بِالنِّيَّةِ، وَإِنَّمَا لِامْرِئٍ مَا نَوَى، فَمَنْ كَانَتْ هِجْرَتُهُ إِلَى اللَّهِ وَرَسُولِهِ فَهَجْرَتُهُ إِلَى اللَّهِ وَرَسُولِهِ، وَمَنْ كَانَتْ هِجْرَتُهُ لِدُنْيَا يُصِيبُهَا أَوْ امْرَأَةٍ يَتَزَوَّجُهَا فَهَجْرَتُهُ إِلَى مَا هَاجَرَ إِلَيْهِ.

*“The value of actions is in their intention, and a man shall only get that which he intended. So whoever migrated for the sake of God and His Messenger, his migration is towards God and His Messenger; and whoever migrated for the sake of worldly wealth or a woman he wished to marry, his migration is towards that thing.”*¹²

Imam Ja`far Ibn Muhammad as-Sadiq (as) said, *“Perform your actions for the sake of God and not people, because whatever is for God, (ascends) towards God, and whatever is for the people, does not ascend towards God.”*

The intention is the soul of the action, and just as the body of a human being is noble because of the human soul, so too does the nobility of a human being's action depend on its soul.

What is the soul of an action? The soul of an action is sincerity. The Qur'an says:

وَمَا أُمِرُوا إِلَّا لِيَعْبُدُوا اللَّهَ مُخْلِصِينَ لَهُ الدِّينَ

*“Yet they were not commanded except to worship God, dedicating their faith to Him...”*¹³

Quality or Quantity?

From the above discussion, an interesting conclusion can be obtained which is that in the reckoning of God, the value of actions is by their quality rather than their quantity.

Inattention to this point has caused some people to make up fantastic stories regarding the extraordinarily valuable actions of holy personages when they see the societal dimension of those actions to be insignificant.

For example, with regard to the ring that Imām `Alī Ibn Abī Ḥalīb (as) bestowed on a beggar while bowing in prayer, about which a verse of the Qur'ān was revealed, they say that the value of that ring was equal to the revenue of greater Syria; and in order for people to believe that, they gave it the form of a tradition.

In the view of these people, it was hard to believe that a great verse of Qur'ān would be revealed about the bestowal of an insignificant ring. And since they were unable to believe such a thing, they created a story and raised the ring's material value.

They didn't stop to think that a ring equal in value to the revenue of all of Syria would not, in the poor and indigent city of Madīnah, be found on the finger of Imām `Alī Ibn Abī Ḥalīb (as). Supposing such a ring was in Imām `Alī's Ibn Abī Ḥalīb (as) possession, he would not give it to just one beggar; instead, with such a ring he would make Madīnah flourish and save all of the city's needy.

The intellect of these fantasy-weavers hasn't understood that for God a great deed has a reckoning different from material reckonings. It is as if they have supposed that the value of the ring caught God's attention and compelled Him to praise `Alī Ibn Abī Ḥalīb (as) for the great deed he did God be exalted from such suppositions!

I don't know what these short-sighted people have thought up regarding the pieces of bread that `Alī Ibn Abī Ḥalīb (as) and his family bestowed in charity and about which Sūrah "Hal Ata" [14](#) was revealed. Perhaps they will say that the flour of that bread was not from barley, but from gold dust!

But in fact that is not the case. The importance of `Alī Ibn Abī Ḥalīb (as) and his family's action is not in the material aspect which attracts our attention; the importance of their action is that it was pure and entirely for God's sake; it was at a level of sincerity which it is beyond us even to conceive, a sincerity which was reflected in the highest realm and elicited Divine praise and glorification.

In the words of Shaykh Farūḍ Dīn al-`Aḥḥār:

گذشته ز آنچهان وصف سه نانش, گذشته زین جهان وصف سنانش

*It is beyond [the power] this world to describe his spear;
It is beyond that world to describe his three pieces of bread.*

The importance of their action lies in what the Qur'an has quoted:

إِنَّمَا نَطْعُمُكُمْ لِرِجْهِ اللَّهِ لَا نُرِيدُ مِنْكُمْ جَزَاءً وَ لَا شُكْرًا

“We feed you only for God’s sake; we wish from you no recompense, nor any gratitude.” [15](#)

These are the words of their heart which God, the Aware, has made known; that is, with their selflessness and sacrifice, they desired from God naught but God Himself.

The fact that the Qur'an regards the actions of unbelievers to be like a mirage, hollow and devoid of reality, is because their actions have an adorned and misleading exterior, but since they are done for lowly material and individual motives and not for God, they have no spiritual aspect.

Zubayda, the wife of the Abbasid caliph Harun al-Rashid, caused a river to be dug in Makkah which has been used by visitors of God’s sanctuary from that time until today.

This action has a very righteous exterior. The resolve of Zubayda caused this river to flow to barren Makkah from the rocky land between Ta'if and Makkah, and it has been close to twelve centuries that the hot, thirsty pilgrims have been making use of it.

From a worldly perspective, it is quite a great deed; but how about from the spiritual perspective? Do the Angels reckon as we do? Is their attention, like ours, drawn to the apparent magnitude of this act?

No, their reckoning is different. Using a Divine scale, they measure the other dimensions of the action. They take account of where Zubayda obtained the money for this act.

Zubayda was the wife of an oppressive and tyrannical man who had control of the public treasury of the Muslims and would do as he pleased. Zubayda had no money of her own, and she didn't spend her own wealth in this charitable act; she spent the people's money on the people.

The difference between her and other women in her position is that others would spend the public's money on their personal desires, and she spent a portion of this money on a project for the public good. Now, what was Zubayda's purpose in this action? Did she wish for her name to remain in history? Or did she truly have God's pleasure in mind? Only God knows.

It is in this reckoning that it is said that someone saw Zubayda in a dream and asked her what God gave her for the river she caused to be made. She replied that God had given the entire reward of that action to the original owners of that money.

The Masjid of Bahlā

It has been related that once a Masjid was being constructed when Bahlā arrived and asked, “What are you doing?” They replied, “We are building a Masjid.” Bahlā asked, “What for?” They replied, “What kind of question is that? We are building it for God.”

Bahlā wanted to show the doers of that charitable work their level of sincerity. Secretly, he had a stone engraved with the words, “The Bahlā Masjid,” and at night he affixed it above the Masjid’s main gate. When the builders of the Masjid came the next day and saw the sign, they became angry.

They found Bahlā and beat him for portraying the toils of others as his own work. Bahlā retorted, “But didn’t you say you built this Masjid for God? Suppose that people mistakenly think it was I who built it; God won’t make such a mistake!”

How many great deeds there are which are great in our eyes, but are worthless in the eyes of God! Perhaps many great buildings, whether Masjid, mausoleums, hospitals, bridges, rest houses for travellers, or schools, have such an end; the account of such things is with God.

Belief in God and the Hereafter

The relation of this world to the hereafter is similar to the relation between the body and the spirit, or the relation of the outer aspect to the inner aspect. This world and the next are not two wholly and entirely separate worlds; this world and the hereafter together are one unit, just as a sheet of paper has two pages and a coin has two sides. This same Earth that exists in this world will appear in the hereafter in its otherworldly form.

The plants and objects of this world will appear in the hereafter in their otherworldly aspect. Fundamentally, the hereafter is the celestial, or malakūt, form of the present world.

The condition for an action to acquire a good otherworldly aspect is for it to be performed with attention to God and in order to ascend to God’s higher realm. If a person doesn’t believe in the hereafter and isn’t attentive to God, his or her action will not have an otherworldly aspect, and thus will not ascend to the higher realm.

The otherworldly aspect is the higher aspect, and the worldly aspect is the lower aspect. As long as an action does not acquire illumination and purity through intention, belief, and faith, it cannot attain to the highest realm; only an action that has a spirit can attain that station. And the spirit of an action is its otherworldly aspect.

How beautiful are the words of the Qur’an:

إِلَيْهِ يَصْعَدُ الْكَلِمُ الطَّيِّبُ وَالْعَمَلُ الصَّالِحُ يَرْفَعُهُ

“To Him rises the pure word, and good deeds He raises.” [16](#)

This verse can be understood in two ways, and both have been mentioned in books of exegesis of the Qurʾān. The first is that good deeds raise pure words and pure belief; the other is that pure words and pure belief raise good deeds and make them otherworldly.

The two explanations – both of which are correct and possibly both are intended – together convey the principle that faith has an effect on the acceptance of actions and their ascent to God, and actions have an effect on the perfection of faith and on increasing the degree of faith.

This principle is an accepted one in the Islamic teachings. Our reference to this verse is based on the second explanation, though as we indicated, in our view it is possible that the verse has intended both meanings at the same time.

In any case, it is a mistake for us to think that the actions of those who don't believe in God and the Day of Judgement ascend to God and acquire an otherworldly aspect.

If we are told that someone has taken the northbound highway from Tehran and continued to travel northward for several days, we will obviously not expect that person to reach Qum, Isfahān, or Shirāz (which lie south of Tehran); if someone were to entertain such a possibility, we would laugh and tell him that if that person wished to go to one of those cities, he or she would have to take the southbound highway from Tehran and travel on it.

It is impossible for someone to travel towards Turkistān, yet reach the Ka`bah.

Heaven and Hell are the two ends of a person's spiritual journey. In the next world, every person sees him or herself at his or her journey's final point; one above, and the other below; one the highest of the high, and the other the lowest of the low.

إِنَّ كِتَابَ الْأَبْرَارَ لَفِي عَلِّيِّنَ

“The record of the pious is indeed in Illiyān.” [17](#)

إِنَّ كِتَابَ الْفُجَّارَ لَفِي سَجِّيْنِ

“The record of the vicious is indeed in Sijjān.” [18](#)

How is it possible for a person not to travel towards a certain destination, or to travel in a direction

opposite to it, yet still reach that destination? Moving towards the highest heaven (ʿIlīyyūn) requires an intention and desire to reach it, and that in turn requires recognition and belief on the one hand, and facilitation and submission on the other.

If a person has no belief in such a destination, or lacks the quality of facilitation and submission, and in short has neither any desire nor takes even the smallest step to reach it, how can one expect him or her to attain that destination? Without doubt, every path leads to its own destination, and unless God is that destination, the path does not lead to God.

The Qurʿān says:

مَنْ كَانَ يُرِيدُ الْعَاجِلَةَ عَجَّلْنَا لَهُ فِيهَا مَا نَشَاءُ لِمَنْ نُرِيدُ ثُمَّ جَعَلْنَا لَهُ جَهَنَّمَ يَصْلَاهَا مَذْمُومًا مَدْحُورًا وَمَنْ أَرَادَ الْآخِرَةَ وَسَعَىٰ لَهَا سَعْيَهَا وَهُوَ مُؤْمِنٌ فَأُولَٰئِكَ كَانَ سَعْيُهُمْ مَشْكُورًا

“Whoever desires this transitory life, We expedite for him therein whatever We wish, for whomever We desire. Then We appoint hell for him, to enter it, blameful and spurned. Whoever desires the Hereafter and strives for it with an endeavour worthy of it, should he be faithful—the endeavour of such will be well-appreciated.” [19](#)

That is, if a person’s level of thinking is no higher than this world and he or she has no goal higher than this world, it is impossible for that person to attain the high target of the hereafter; but Our Divine grace and benevolence demand that We grant him or her something of the worldly goal he or she desired to achieve.

There is a subtle point here: this world is the world of nature and matter; it is the world of causes and reasons. Worldly causes are in conflict with each other, and constraints also exist in this material world. Thus, for a person whose goal is this world, there is no guarantee that he or she will definitely attain that goal. The words the Qurʿān has chosen to impart this point are as follows:

“We expedite for him therein whatever We wish, for whomever We desire.”

However, one who has a higher goal in his or her spiritual makeup has not given his or her heart to trifling goals, and who, moving forward with faith, takes steps towards a Divine object will certainly attain the goal, since God recognizes the value of good deeds; He accepts and rewards those good deeds that are presented to Him.

Here, effort and endeavour are necessary, since it is impossible for a person to move forward and attain the goal without taking a step.

Then in the next verse, the Qurʿān says:

كُلًّا تُمِدُّ هَوَالَاءَ وَهَوَالَاءَ مِنْ عَطَاءِ رَبِّكَ وَمَا كَانَ عَطَاءُ رَبِّكَ مَحْظُورًا

“Each We assist out of the bounty of your Lord, both this group and that one; and the bounty of your Lord has not been withheld from any.” [20](#)

That is, Our bounty is limitless; whoever sows a seed, We bring it to fruition; whoever moves towards a goal, We deliver him or her to that goal.

The Divine sages say that the Being who is necessarily existent by essence is necessarily existent from all aspects and dimensions. Thus, He is necessarily Bountiful (Fayyūdh). As a result, whoever wishes something, God assists him or her.

It is not the case that if someone seeks the world, God says to him or her, “You are misguided and have acted contrary to Our guidance and direction, so We will not assist you.”

That is not the case; the seeker of the world is also supported and assisted by God in seeking this world and benefits from His unhesitant bounty within the limits permitted by this world of causes, mutual exclusivity, and conflicting outcomes.

In other words, this world is a place appropriate for and given to planting, growing, increasing, and harvesting. It all depends on what seed a person chooses to grow and develop and what harvest he or she wishes to reap. Whatever seed he or she chooses is exactly what will grow and develop in the rich and fertile land of this world.

True, there is an exclusive assistance particular to the people of Truth, which is called the rahmīyah (exclusive) mercy; the seekers of this world are deprived of this mercy, since they do not seek it. But the rahmīyah (general) mercy of God applies equally to all people and all paths. In the words of Sa`d:

بر این خوان یغما چه دشمن چه دوست

ادیم زمین سفره عام اوست

*The earth’s surface is His all-encompassing table,
From this table all partake, whether friend or foe.*

From what has been said in this discussion, a portion of the issues under examination have been resolved.

We made clear that action-related goodness is not sufficient for reward in the hereafter; actor-related goodness is also necessary. Action-related goodness is similar to a body, and actor-related goodness is

similar to its spirit and life.

And we explained that belief in God and the Day of Judgement is a fundamental condition of actor-related goodness. This conditionality is not based on convention, but is instead an essential and actual conditionality, just like the conditionality of a particular path with respect to reaching a particular destination.

Here, it is necessary to clarify one point, which is that some will perhaps say that actor-related goodness does not necessarily require the intention of seeking nearness to God; if a person does a good deed because of one's conscience or out of a feeling of compassion or mercy, that is sufficient for his or her action to possess actor-related goodness.

In other words, a humanitarian motive is sufficient for actor-related goodness; as long as a person's motive is other than the "self", actor-related goodness is present, whether the motive be "God" or "humanism."

This point is worthy of consideration. While we don't affirm the view that it makes no difference whether one's motive be God or humanism, and we can't enter this discussion in depth right now, we do truly believe that whenever an action is performed with the motive of doing good, serving others, and for the sake of humanity, it is not the same as an action that is performed solely with selfish motives.

Without doubt, God will not leave such people without any reward. Several traditions indicate that on account of their good deeds, polytheists like *ṣaḥāb al-ḥaḥ* will not be punished or the punishment of such people will be reduced, even though they were polytheists.

We can understand this point from many traditions which we have before us.

1. *Allāmah Majlis* quotes from the book *Thawābul A`māl* of Shaykh *ḥadīq* that *`Alī Ibn Yaqtīn* narrated from *Imām Mūsā Ibn Ja`far al-Kādhim (as)* that he said, *"Amongst the Banī Isrā'īl (Children of Isrā'īl) there was a believer whose neighbour was an unbeliever. That unbeliever would always show kindness and good conduct towards his believing neighbour. When this unbeliever died, God made for him a house out of a type of mud which shielded him from the heat of the fire, and his sustenance would be given to him from outside his own environment, which was of fire. He was told, 'This is because of your kindness and good conduct towards your believing neighbour.'"*²¹

Allāmah Majlis, after quoting this tradition, says: "This tradition and others like it are evidence that the punishment of some unbelievers in Hell will be lifted, and the verses of Qur'ān that say the punishment of the unbelievers shall not be lightened are with regard to those who have not performed such good deeds."

2. He also narrates from *Imām Muhammad Ibn `Alī al-Baqir (as)* that he said, *"There was a believer who lived in the land of an oppressive king. That oppressor threatened the believer, and thus, the*

believer fled to a non-Islamic land, arriving at the place of a polytheist man. The polytheist sat him beside himself and hosted him well. As soon as the polytheist man died, God addressed him, 'I swear by My Honour and Glory that if there were a place in Heaven for a polytheist, I would put you in that place; but O' fire, make him fear, but don't harm him.'"

Then the Imam said, "Every morning and evening his sustenance is brought for him from outside that environment." The Imam was asked, "From Heaven?" He answered, "From where God wills."[22](#)

3. The Noble Messenger (S) said about `Abdullah Ibn Jud`n who was one of the well-known unbelievers in the Age of Ignorance and one of the chiefs of Quraysh, "The one who has the lightest punishment in Hell is Ibn Jud`n." He was asked why, to which he replied:

إِنَّهُ كَانَ يُطْعِمُ الطَّعَامَ

"He used to give people to eat."

4. In addition, the Prophet Muhammad (S) said with regard to several people who lived in the Age of Ignorance: "I saw in Hell the possessor of the tunic and the possessor of the cane who would drive the pilgrims, and also the woman who had a cat which she had tied up and which she would neither feed nor set free so it could find its own food. And I entered Heaven and I saw there the man who saved a dog from thirst and gave it water."[23](#)

Such people, who are found in more or less every age, will at least have their punishment lightened or their punishment lifted altogether.

In my view, if there are individuals who do good to other people or even to another living being whether a human being or animal without any expectation, not even because they see themselves mirrored in the existence of the deprived (i.e., fear that one day they may be in similar straits is not the moving factor in what they do).

And instead the motive of doing good and serving others is strong enough in them that even if they know that no benefit will accrue to them and not even a single person will come to know of what they did or say so much as "God bless you" to them, yet they still do good deeds, and they are not under the influence of habit and such like, one must say that in the depths of their conscience there exists the light of recognition of God.

And supposing they deny it with their tongues, they confess it in the depths of their conscience; their denial is in reality a denial of an imagined being which they have conceived in place of God, or a denial of another imagined thing which they have conceived in place of the return to God and the Day of Judgement, not a denial of the reality of God and the Resurrection.

Love of good and justice and doing good because it is good and just and worthy, without any other factor, is a sign of love of the Essence possessed of Absolute Beauty; therefore, it is not farfetched that such people actually will not be resurrected among the unbelievers, though by their tongues they are considered deniers. And God knows best.

Belief in the Prophecy and Imāmate

Now we will discuss another aspect of the issue, which is the position of those non-Muslims who are monotheists and believe in the Resurrection and perform their actions for God.

Among the People of the Book, people can be found who neither believe the Messiah (Jesus the son of Mary) nor Ezra to be the son of God; they are neither dualists nor fire-worshippers. They do not say, “The Messiah is the son of God,” or “Uzayr is the son of God,” nor that Ahrīman is the god of evil; they also believe in the Day of Judgement. What is the outcome of the actions of such people?

Right now our discussion is not about those inventors, innovators, and servants of humanity who are materialists and deny God’s existence, and whose practical motives naturally do not transcend the material realm.

From the preceding discussions, our view regarding them from the perspective of Islam was made clear. Our discussion in this section pertains to those good-doers who believe in Creation and in the Resurrection, and thus are able to have a higher motive in their actions and work towards a goal that goes beyond the material realm.

It is said that Edison and Pasteur were such people, that they were religious people and had religious motives. That is, in their actions they, just like religious Muslims, worked for God’s pleasure and with a Divine motive.

In reality, these Christians (Edison and Pasteur) are not Christians [they may be called dispositional Muslims], because if they were Christians and believed in the creeds of the existing Christianity, they would regard the Messiah as God, and naturally it would not be possible for them to be true monotheists; perhaps few of today’s Christian intellectuals believe in the superstitions of the Trinity.

In order to answer this question, one must determine in what way faith in the Prophethood and Imāmate (Divinely appointed leadership) are necessary, and why such faith is a condition for the acceptance of actions.

It appears that faith in the Prophets and friends of God is involved in the acceptance of actions for two reasons:

First, recognition of them goes back to recognition of God. In reality, recognition of God and His affairs is incomplete without recognition of His friends. In other words, recognition of God in a complete form is to

recognize the manifestations of His guidance.

Second, recognition of the station of Prophethood and Imāmate is necessary because without it, it is not possible to obtain the complete and correct program of action to achieve guidance.

The big difference between a Muslim good-doer and an unbelieving good-doer is that the unbeliever who does good deeds does not possess the proper program to achieve guidance and thus has only a negligible chance of success.

In contrast, since the Muslim has submitted to a religion that has a comprehensive and proper program for guidance, he or she is assured of success if he or she implements that program correctly.

Good deeds do not consist only of doing good to others; all obligatory, forbidden, recommended, and disliked actions also form part of the program of good deeds.

The practising Christian, who is outside the fold of Islām and who lacks the correct program is deprived of its great gifts since he or she commits actions which are prohibited. For example, alcohol is forbidden, but he or she drinks it.

We know that alcohol was prohibited because of its personal, societal, and spiritual harms and naturally one who drinks alcohol will face its harms, similar to how a person who is deprived of the guidance of a doctor may do something which makes his or her heart, liver, or nerves prematurely sick and shortens his or her life.

In the program of Islām, there are some commands which are conditional to act upon for spiritual perfection and development. It is obvious that a non-Muslim, no matter how unprejudiced and free of obstinacy, by virtue of being deprived of the complete program of human perfection, will also remain deprived of its features.

Such a person will naturally be deprived of the great acts of worship, such as the five daily prayers, fasting during the month of Ramadhān, and pilgrimage to the House of God (Ḥajj).

He or she is like someone who plants seeds without a systematic method of farming; in no way will the product such a person obtains be like that obtained by a person who sows the earth according to a comprehensive and proper program, plants at an appropriate time and weeds at the proper time, and in short performs all the necessary technical steps.

The difference between a Muslim and a non-Muslim good-doer can be explained like this: the Muslim good-doer is like a sick person who is under the care and direction of an expert doctor; his or her food and medicine are all under the direction of the doctor.

With regard to the type of medicine and food and its timing and amount, he or she acts completely as directed. However, the non-Muslim good doer is like a sick person who has no such program and acts

as he or she pleases; he or she eats whatever food or medicine that comes into his or her hand.

Such a sick person may occasionally consume a beneficial medicine and get a positive result, but it is just as likely that he or she will make use of a medicine that is harmful or even fatal. Similarly, it is possible he or she may eat a beneficial food, but by subsequent negligence or by eating the wrong food, may cancel the beneficial effect of the first food.

With this explanation, it becomes clear that the difference between a Muslim and a non-Muslim who believes in God is that the Muslim is a theist who possesses a proper program, while the non-Muslim theist performs his or her actions without a correct program. In other words, the Muslim has been guided, and the non-Muslim, though he or she believes in God, is misguided. In this very regard the Qur'an says:

فَإِنْ أَسْلَمُوا فَقَدِ اهْتَدَوْا

“So if they submit, they will have achieved guidance.”²⁴

From all that we have said in the last two sections, it has become clear that all non-Muslims are not equal in terms of being rewarded for good deeds; there is a great difference between a non-Muslim who doesn't believe in God and the Resurrection and one who believes in God and in the Day of Judgement but is deprived of the gift of faith in the Prophethood.

For the first group, it is not possible to perform an action acceptable to God, whereas for the second it is possible. It is possible for this group to go to Heaven under certain conditions, but for the first group it is not possible.

Apparently, the reason that Islam differentiates between polytheists and the People of the Book in its laws of interaction in that it doesn't tolerate the polytheist but tolerates the People of the Book, it forces the polytheist to abandon his or her belief but doesn't force the People of the Book is that the polytheist or atheist, by virtue of his or her polytheism or denial, forever closes the gate of salvation for him or herself and is in a condition of having deprived him or herself of crossing the material world and ascending to the higher world and eternal Paradise.

However, the People of the Book are in a condition in which they can perform good deeds, even if in a deficient manner, and with certain conditions can attain the results of those actions.

The Qur'an says, addressing the People of the Book:

تَعَالَوْا إِلَى كَلِمَةٍ سَوَاءٍ بَيْنَنَا وَبَيْنَكُمْ أَلَّا نَعْبُدَ إِلَّا اللَّهَ وَلَا نُشْرِكَ بِهِ شَيْئًا وَلَا يَتَّخِذَ بَعْضُنَا بَعْضًا أَرْبَابًا مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ

“Come to a common word between us and yourselves, that we worship none but God and associate none with Him, and that we take not each other as lords in place of God.” [25](#)

The Noble Qur’ān has given the People of the Book such a call, but has absolutely not given and does not give such a call to polytheists and atheists.

Affliction

The third issue that deserves attention in relation with the value of faith is the negative value of unbelief and obstinacy. That is, do unbelief and obstinacy cause a good deed to become null and void and lose its effect, making it go bad as an affliction does?

In other words, if a person performs a good deed with all the conditions of action-related and actor-related goodness, and yet on the other hand that person shows obstinacy with respect to truth, especially a truth that is one of the principles of religion, in this situation, does this deed which in and of itself is good, otherworldly, and luminous and free of defect from the Divine and celestial dimension become null and void because of this stubbornness and obstinacy or other devious spiritual condition? Here the question of affliction comes about.

It is possible for an action to have both action-related and actor-related goodness, and in other words to have both the proper body and a sound soul and spirit, to be good both from the worldly and from the otherworldly point of view, but at the same time to be destroyed and become null from the otherworldly point of view through affliction, just like a sound seed that is planted in fertile ground and even gives fruit, but which falls prey to an affliction before it can be used, and is destroyed, for example, by locusts or lightning. The Qur’ān calls this affliction *hab* or invalidation.

Such affliction is not exclusive to unbelievers; it can take place with respect to the good deeds of Muslims as well. It is possible that a believing Muslim may give alms to a deserving needy person for God’s sake and for that deed to be accepted by God, but for him or her to later destroy that good deed and make it void by laying an obligation on the other person or some other form of mental torment.

The Qur’ān says:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا لَا تُبْطِلُوا صَدَقَاتِكُمْ بِالْمَنِّ وَالْأَذَى

“O you who have faith! Do not render your charities void by reproaches and affronts.” [26](#)

Another of the afflictions of good deeds is jealousy, as has been said:

إِنَّ الْحَسَدَ لِيَأْكُلُ الْحَسَنَاتِ كَمَا تَأْكُلُ النَّارُ الْحَطَبَ

“Verily envy eats away good deeds just as fire destroys wood.”[27](#)

Another affliction is *juhūd* or denial, or a condition of fighting with the truth. Denial means that a person perceives the truth but at the same time opposes it. In other words, denial is when one’s mind has submitted through reason and logic and truth has become clear to one’s intellect and power of thinking, but the spirit and its’ selfish and arrogant feelings rebel and refuse to submit.

The essence of unbelief is opposition and resistance to truth while recognizing what it is. Previously, when we discussed the levels of submission, we gave some explanation regarding this condition. Here, we provide some further explanations relevant to the discussion of afflictions.

Imām `Alī Ibn Abī Ṭalīb (as) says, defining Islām:

الإِسْلَامُ هُوَ التَّسْلِيمُ

“Islām is submission.”[28](#)

That is, when personal interest, prejudice, or habit conflicts with truth and reality, for a person to submit to truth and turn away from all that isn’t truth is Islām.

Denial means a condition of wilful unbelief, the condition that Abū Jahl possessed. He knew that the Noble Messenger (S) was truthful in his claim of being a Prophet, but because he had a condition of wilful unbelief, he didn’t believe in him.

Sometimes people can be heard to say things like, “We’re willing to go to Hell, but not to do such-and-such a thing.” That is, even if that action is the truth, we still are not willing to accept it. Other expressions, such as to be a mule, to be intractable, and such like all describe this quality of denial.

The Qur’ān has excellently described the presence of this quality in some people where it says:

وَإِذْ قَالُوا اللَّهُمَّ إِن كَانَ هَذَا هُوَ الْحَقُّ مِنْ عِنْدِكَ فَأَمْطِرْ عَلَيْنَا حِجَارَةً مِّنَ السَّمَاءِ أَوْ ائْتِنَا بِعَذَابٍ أَلِيمٍ

“And when they said, O’ God, if this be the truth from You, rain down upon us stones from heaven, or bring us to a painful punishment.”[29](#)

What a picture the Qur’ān has painted! By narrating one sentence, it indicates the sick mentality of some people.

The obstinate person whose words have been quoted in this verse, instead of saying, “O’ God, if this be the truth from You, then make my heart ready to accept it,” says, “If this be the truth, send upon me a punishment and annihilate me, because I haven’t the strength to remain alive and face the truth.”

This condition is a very dangerous one, even if it be in small matters. And it may well be that many of us are suffering from it God forbid!

Suppose that an eminent doctor, or mujtahid, or some other specialist who has a worldwide reputation makes a determination and expresses an opinion in an issue related to his or her specialization; then, some unknown, a doctor or a young student, expresses a conflicting opinion in the same issue and even presents definitive proofs which that eminent personality him or herself affirms in his or her heart the truth of what that person is saying, but other people remain unaware as they were before, and in view of the reputation of that eminent person, accept his or her view.

In this situation, if that famous expert submits to the opinion of that young doctor or student, that is if he or she submits to reality and admits his or her own mistake, he or she is truly a “Muslim,” because “Islam is submission,” and in a way it can be said this is an example of the verse

“Rather, one who submits himself to God.”³⁰

Such a person is free of the impure trait of denial. But if he or she engages in denial and opposes the truth to save his or her standing and fame, he or she is wilfully seeking unbelief and is in a state of juhd.

If that doctor, for example, is not entirely unfair, he or she may not take back his or her words, but may change in practice; and if he or she is very unfair, he or she will not change in practice, either, and will give the same prescription and perhaps kill the patient, then say that the patient was beyond treatment and the same goes for any other eminent intellectual.

The opposite of this condition also occurs frequently. There is a tradition in Al-Kḥf that sheds light on this reality.

Muhammad Ibn Muslim narrated that he heard Imām Muhammad Ibn `Alī al-Bḥqir (as) say:

كُلُّ شَيْءٍ يَجْرُهُ الْإِقْرَارُ وَالتَّسْلِيمُ فَهُوَ الْإِيمَانُ، وَكُلُّ شَيْءٍ يَجْرُهُ الْإِنْكَارُ وَالْجُحُودُ، فَهُوَ الْكُفْرُ

“Everything that results from confession and submission is faith, and everything that results from denial and rejection is unbelief.”³¹

They say that the late ḥayyātullāh Sayyid ḥusayn Kḥkamar who was one of the students of the author of Jawāhirul Kalām and a prominent and well-known Mujtahid and recognized teacher, would go daily at an appointed time, as was his pattern, to one of the Masjids of Najaf and teach.

As we know, the post of teaching the level of “Khḥrij” of jurisprudence and its principles is the grounds for leadership and religious authority.

Leadership and religious authority for a seminary student mean to go suddenly from zero to infinity,

since a student is nothing as long as he is not a religious authority (Marji`), and his opinion and belief are not given the least importance, and usually he lives a meagre life. But as soon as he becomes a religious authority, all of a sudden his view is obeyed and no one has anything to say in the face of his opinion.

Financially as well as intellectually, he has full discretion without being held accountable to anyone. Thus, a scholar who has a chance of becoming a religious authority passes through a sensitive stage; the late Sayyid ʿUsayn Kāshkamarī was in such a stage.

One day he was returning from somewhere, perhaps from visiting someone, and no more than half an hour remained until his class. He thought to himself that if he were to return home in that short time, he wouldn't have time to accomplish anything, so it was better to go to the appointed place and wait for his students.

He went and saw that none of his students had come yet, but he saw that in a corner of the Masjid a humble-looking Shaykh was seated and lecturing to a group of students. The late Sayyid listened to his words, and with great surprise he realized that the Shaykh's discourse was very scholarly.

The next day, he was motivated to deliberately come early and listen to the words of that Shaykh. So he came and listened, and his conviction from the previous day became stronger. This was repeated for several days, and the late Sayyid ʿUsayn became sure that the Shaykh was more learned than he himself and that he could benefit from his lectures, and if his own students were to attend the Shaykh's lectures, they would benefit more.

Here it was that he saw himself as being offered a choice between submission and obstinacy, between faith and unbelief, between the hereafter and this world.

The next day when his students came and gathered, he said, "Friends, today I want to tell you something new. The Shaykh who is sitting in that corner with a few students is more deserving to teach than I am, and I myself benefit from his lectures, so let us all go together to his lecture." From that day, he joined the circle of students of that humble Shaykh who's eyes were slightly swollen and in whom the signs of poverty were visible.

This austere Shaykh was the same scholar who later became famous as Shaykh Murtadhā al-Anṣārī, earning the title "teacher of the latter-day scholars."

Shaykh Anṣārī at that time had just returned from a trip of several years to Mashhad, Isfahān and Kāshān and had acquired much knowledge from that trip, especially from the presence of the late Mullāh Ahmad Narāqī in Kāshān.

Whoever this condition is found in is an example of the verse "one who submits himself to God."

Thus, unbelief and denial mean to wilfully stand in the face of the truth and show obstinacy. Later, we

will mention that in the view of the Qur'an, the unbeliever has been called an unbeliever because he or she is in a state of denial and obstinacy while at the same time perceiving the truth; and it is this state that causes nullification and is considered an affliction of good deeds.

This is why in relation to the actions of those who disbelieve in which they have been compared to ashes which a strong wind blows upon and destroys, God tells us:

مَثَلُ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا بِرَبِّهِمْ أَعْمَالُهُمْ كَرَمَادٍ اشْتَدَّتْ بِهِ الرِّيحُ فِي يَوْمٍ عَاصِفٍ

“A parable of those who defy their Lord: their deeds are like ashes over which the wind blows hard on a tempestuous day...”³²

Suppose that Pasteur performed his intellectual research which led to the discovery of bacteria for God and that his intention was to serve humanity and seek nearness to God, that is not sufficient for him to be rewarded by God in the end.

If he possessed qualities like denial and the like and was prejudiced in favour of his own beliefs, then without doubt all his actions are null and void, since in this case he is in a state of denying the truth, and this state of opposing the truth destroys all of a person's efforts.

This would be the case if, for example, it were said to him, “Christianity is a regional and an ancestral faith for you; have you researched whether there is a better and more complete religion than Christianity or not?” and he were to reject those words and – without being ready to study and search say, “The best religion is Christianity.” A person's actions, in such a case, are like ashes subject to ruin by a swift wind.

We only mentioned Pasteur as an example; we don't mean to say that Pasteur was like this. God alone knows that. If we, too, are obstinate towards the truth, we fall into this general rule. O Lord! Protect us from the state of unbelief, obstinacy, and opposition to the truth.

Apart from what has been mentioned, there are also other afflictions that befall good deeds. Perhaps one of these afflictions is apathy and indifference in defending truth and righteousness.

One must not only avoid denial and rejection of truth, but in addition, one must also not be neutral, and instead must defend the truth. The people of Kufah (Irāq) knew that truth was with Usain Ibn `Alī (as), and they had even admitted this fact but they were neglectful in supporting and defending the truth. They didn't show resolve and perseverance. Not to support the truth is to deny the truth in practice.

Lady Zaynab bint `Alī (sa), in her famous address to the people of Kufah, rebukes them for their negligence in coming to the defence of the truth and for oppressing and sinning against it. She said:

يَا أَهْلَ الْكُوفَةِ، يَا أَهْلَ الْخَتَلِ وَالْعَدْرِ وَالْخَدَلِ، أَتَبْكُونَ؟ أَلَا فَلَا رَقَاتِ الْعَبْرَةَ، وَلَا هَدَاتِ الزَّفْرَةَ. إِنَّمَا مَتْلُكُمْ كَمَثَلِ التِّي

نَقَضَتْ غَزْلَهَا مِنْ بَعْدِ قُوَّةٍ أَنْكَاثًا

*“O’ people of Kāfah! O’ people of deception treachery and disloyalty, do you weep? So let your tears not dry, and your cries not cease! Your parable is that of the woman who undid her weaving after having made it firm.”*³³

Another of the afflictions that can befall actions is conceit and vanity. Boasting about one’s deeds, like jealousy, conceit and denial, also destroys actions.

There is a tradition that says: *“Sometimes a person performs a good and worthy deed, and his or her action finds a place in the `Illyyān, but later he or she mentions that action in public and boasts of it. This causes the action to descend. If he or she mentions it again, it descends further. When it is mentioned a third time, it is destroyed altogether, and sometimes is converted into an evil deed.”*

Imām Muhammad Ibn `Alī al-Bāqir (as) said:

الإِبْقَاءُ عَلَى الْعَمَلِ أَشَدُّ مِنَ الْعَمَلِ. قَالَ (الرَّوَايِ): وَمَا الْإِبْقَاءُ عَلَى الْعَمَلِ؟ قَالَ: يَصِلَ الرَّجُلُ بِصِلَةٍ وَيُنْفِقُ نَفَقَةً لِلَّهِ وَحَدَهُ لِأَشْرِيكَ لَهُ، فَتُكْتَبُ لَهُ سِرًّا، ثُمَّ يَذْكُرُهَا فَتُمحَى فَتُكْتَبُ لَهُ عَلَانِيَةً، ثُمَّ يَذْكُرُهَا فَتُمحَى وَتُكْتَبُ لَهُ رِيَاءً

“Preserving a deed is harder than the deed itself.” The narrator asked what preserving a deed meant. The Imām replied, *“A person does a good deed and gives something in the way of God, and it is recorded for him as an act done in secret. Then he mentions it, so it is erased and recorded as an act done in public. Then he mentions it, so it is erased and recorded as an act done to show off.”*³⁴

1. Al-Qurʿān, Sūratul Shu`arā (26), Verses 88–89
2. Al-Qurʿān, Sūratul Naml (27), Verse 64
3. Al-Qurʿān, Sūratul Baqarah (2), Verse 208
4. Ibid., Verse 34
5. Al-Qurʿān, Sūratul A`raf (7), Verse 12
6. Ibid., Verse 14
7. Al-Qurʿān, Sūratul Sād (38), Verses 82–83
8. Al-Qurʿān, Sūrat Bani Isrāʿīl (17), Verse 15
9. Al-Qurʿān, Sūratul Mulk (67), Verse 2
10. Al-Qurʿān, Sūratul Tawbah (9), Verse 111
11. This and the previous two traditions are in Wasāʿilush Shā`a, Volume 1, Page 8.
12. Sahīh al-Muslim, Volume 6, Page 48
13. Al-Qurʿān, Sūratul Bayyinah 89 Verse 5
14. Sūratul Dahr – also known as Sūratul Insān (76)
15. Al-Qurʿān, Sūratul Dahr (76), Verse 9
16. Al-Qurʿān, Sūratul Fāṭir (35), Verse 10
17. Al-Qurʿān, Sūratul Taḥfif (83), Verse 18
18. Ibid., Verse 7
19. Al-Qurʿān, Sūrat Banī Isrāʿīl (17), Verses 18–19

- [20.](#) Ibid., Verse 20
- [21.](#) Bihārul Anwār, Volume 3, Page 377 (Kumpānī print)
- [22.](#) Bihārul Anwār, Volume 3, Page 382, (Kumpānī print), from Al-Kāfī
- [23.](#) Both this and the previous tradition are in Bihārul Anwār, Volume 3, Page 382, (Kumpānī print), as recorded from Al-Kāfī.
- [24.](#) Al-Qurʿān, Sūrat ʿAlī Imrān (3), Verse 20
- [25.](#) Ibid., Verse 64
- [26.](#) Al-Qurʿān, Sūratul Baqarah (2), Verse 264
- [27.](#) Bihārul Anwār, Volume 15, Part 3, Page 132–133 (ʿakḥḥindī print)
- [28.](#) Nahjul Balāgha, Saying 125
- [29.](#) Al-Qurʿān, Sūratul Anfāl (8), Verse 32
- [30.](#) Al-Qurʿān, Sūratul Baqarah (2), Verse 112
- [31.](#) Al-Kāfī, Volume 2, Page 387
- [32.](#) Al-Qurʿān, Sūrat Ibrāhīm (14), Verse 18
- [33.](#) Nafas al-Mahmūd, Page 339
- [34.](#) Wasʿīlūsh Shāʿa, Volume 1, Page 55

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