

## Vices of the Power of Passion

The third of the four sections of the book deals with the diseases of the Power of Passion and their treatment. These diseases are of ten kinds, and we shall briefly discuss each of them.

### 1. Love of the World

The best definition of this vice and the "world" condemned therein is to be found in the following verse of the Holy Qur'an:

***Decked out fair to mankind is the love of lusts—women, children, stored-up heaps of gold and silver, horses of mark, cattle and tillage. That is the enjoyment of the life of the world; but God—with Him is the fairest resort. (3:14)***

It must be kept in mind that all the things mentioned in this Qur'anic verse, being Divine blessings, may not be condemned. Moreover, proper use of Divine blessings is also not an unworthy thing to do. However, what is undesirable is becoming attached to these things, and giving them a fundamental significance in one's life—an emphasis which may exceed even that given to God.

But if these things do not take the place of God and were to be used as means of attaining self-development and acquiring nearness to God, not only this is not objectionable but highly desirable. Therefore, the condemnation and praise of the world that we come across in the Qur'an or *hadith* relate to the kind of use the world and its things are put to.

If someone makes the world his idol, and is engulfed in worldly hopes to such an extent that he forgets God and the Hereafter, or sells the Hereafter for the world (2:86)—to use a Qur'anic expression—then we can say that such a man has fallen victim to the disease of the "love of the world." One Prophetic *hadith* delineates the features of the lovers of the world in these words:

من أصبح والدنيا أكبر همه فليس من الله في شيء، والزم الله قلبه أربع خصال: هما لا ينقطع عنه أبدا، وشغلا لا يتفرع منه أبدا، وفقرا لا ينال غناه أبدا، وأملا لا يبلغ منتهاه أبدا.

One who wakes up with his whole attention directed towards the world is cut off from God, and God shall make four qualities to accompany him: endless sorrow, never ending occupation, a neediness which is never relieved, and a hope which is never achieved.

In order to cure this disease one must meditate on the fact that the good things of the world are transitory, and what remains for man are spiritual attainments, nearness to God, and the efforts made in preparation for the Hereafter.

## 2. Love of Wealth and Richness

This vice is a branch of the disease of the love of the world, and whatever was said in praise and condemnation of the world could be said about riches. Some Qur'anic verses and traditions have praised wealth and riches, while others condemn it.

There is, however, no contradiction between them; because those verses and traditions that condemn it, are meant to condemn riches which alienate man from God and the Hereafter; whereas those which praise wealth and riches refer to the wealth that serves to uplift human character and brings man closer to God. In a Qur'anic verse we read:

***O believers, let not your wealth nor your children distract you from remembrance of Allah. Those who do so, they are the losers. (63:9)***

And in another verse, a nation is called to implore for God's forgiveness and the following favours are promised:

***...And will help you with wealth and sons, and will appoint for you gardens, and will appoint for you rivers. (71:12)***

And according to narrations, the Prophet (S) has been quoted as both praising and condemning wealth.

حب المال والشرف بنبتان النفاق, كما ينبت الماء البقل.

The love of wealth and position nourish Hypocrisy (*nifaq*) just as plants are nourished by water.

نعم المال الصالح للرجل الصالح.

How fair is rightly acquired wealth in the possession of an upright man.

In any case, the proper and right kind of wealth is one which has been acquired in a legitimate manner, and which is used in God's good pleasure—such as for *hajj*, *jihad*, helping the needy, and all other kinds of charities aimed at public welfare.

*Zuhd (Abstinence)*: The opposite of cherishing the world is *zuhd*, which is abstinence from worldly affairs, both inwardly and outwardly, except for such things as are necessary for the purpose of acquiring the bounties of the Hereafter, and for attaining nearness to God. The *zahid* has been highly praised in Qur'anic verses and *hadith*; *zuhd* is considered as one of the traits of Divine prophets and saints.

*Zuhd* has different degrees, which are:

1. Abstinence from sins.
2. Abstinence from things which are "*mushtabah*," that is things which are not known with certainty to be forbidden, but which are suspect.
3. Abstinence from what is more than needed.
4. Abstinence from the pursuit of selfish desires.
5. Abstinence from everything except God; i.e. confining one's attention to the Creator, being content with the minimum needed to meet one's physical needs, and giving away the rest in the way of God.

People practise *zuhd* for three different reasons:

1. In order to escape the Hellfire. This kind of *zuhd* is called "*zuhd al-Kha'ifin*," or the "abstinence of the fearful."
2. In order to gain God's good pleasure and to attain the joys of paradise. This kind of *zuhd* is called "*zuhd al-rajin*" or the "abstinence of the hopeful."
3. For obtaining Divine communion. This is the highest aim and the most worthy form of *zuhd*, practised neither out of fear of hell nor desire for the pleasures of paradise.

### **3. Affluence and Opulence**

It means being in possession of life's necessities and it has many degrees, at times leading, to great amount of wealth and hoarding of riches. The opposite of it is poverty and neediness, which means lack of life's necessities.

Both affluence and poverty may either uplift man's character or destroy him.

If affluence is acquired through legitimate means, and the surplus wealth above his needs is spent for the sake of God and in the service of His creatures, it is considered as one of the virtues. If, however, it has been obtained through illegitimate means, through injustice and exploitation, and the affluent person is heedless of the needs of the deprived and the destitute, it will lead to his certain destruction. The Qur'an says:

***No indeed; surely man waxes insolent, if he considers himself affluent. (96:6-7)***

In the same way, poverty too, if accompanied by forbearance, resignation, and contentment leads man to spiritual edification; otherwise, it will also lead him to destruction. Thus, if we see that in Qur'anic verses and traditions sometimes affluence and poverty are acclaimed and condemned at other times, it is because if these states are accompanied by proper conditions they are desirable, otherwise undesirable and abominable.

## **4. Greed (Hirs)**

Greed is a condition which makes man dissatisfied with whatever he possesses and makes him yearn for yet more. Greed is one of the worst of destructive vices, and is not limited to worldly possession, but also includes indulgence in food, sex and other things

The Prophet (S) said:

يشيب ابن آدم ونشب فيه خصلتان: الحرص, وطول الأمل.

As man grows in age, two of his characteristics become young: greed, and far fetched hopes.

Imam Abu Ja'far al-Baqir has said:

مثل الحريص على الدنيا كمثل دودة القز, كلما ازدادت على نفسها لفا كان أبعد لها من الخروج, حتى تموت غما.

The greedy man in his love of the world is like the silk-worm: the more it wraps itself in its cocoon the less chance it has of escaping from it, until finally it dies of grief.

The opposite of greed is the virtue of contentment, which enables man to control his desires and to be content with having the necessities of life. One who has this virtue always lives honourably and respectably, as a free man; he is immune from the vices of affluence in this world and the consequent punishment in the Hereafter.

In order to free oneself from the vice of greed one must meditate on its evil and harmful consequences and realize that greed is a characteristic of animals, who recognize no restrictions for gratification of their sensual desires, and use all means to attain it. It is thus necessary for the individual to free himself from this vice and bring his rebellious self under control.

## **5. Avarice (tama`)**

Caused by the love of the world, avarice is another type of moral vice, and is defined as having one's

eye on the possessions of others. The opposite of this vice is being independent of others and indifferent to what is in their hands. There are numerous traditions in praise of being independent of others and in condemnation of avarice. Here we shall quote two traditions in praise of being self-sufficient, which also condemn avarice. Imam al-Baqir has said:

بئس العبد عبد له طمع يقوده, وبئس العبد عبد له رغبة تذله.

What an evil creature is he who is led by his avarice. What an evil creature is he whose desire earns him ignominy.

Imam `Ali (A) says:

إستغن عن شئت تكن تظيره, وارغب الى من شئت تكن أسيره, واحسن الى من شئت تكن أميره.

Whomever you are able to do without, you will be able to become his peer. Whomever you are fond of, you will become his captive. Whomever you are generous to, you will be able to become his master.

## 6. Miserliness (Bukhl)

Miserliness is defined as being parsimonious where one should be generous, just as prodigality, which is its opposite, is defined as being lavish where one should practise frugality. The middle path between these two extremes is *sakhd'*; this is, being generous when generosity is called for. The Qur'an, describing the characteristics of the believers, who are also called *'ibad al-Rahman*" or "the slaves of the All-merciful," says:

***...who, when they expend, are neither prodigal nor parsimonious, but between that is a just stand. (25:67)***

Whereas miserliness (*bukhl*) is caused by the love of the world, generosity (*sakha'*) is a consequence of *zuhd*. There are numerous verses and traditions in praise and condemnation of each of these qualities, which we shall leave unmentioned for brevity's sake. The highest degree of generosity is sacrifice, i.e. readiness to give to others what one needs oneself. Describing the believers the Qur'an says:

***...and preferring others above themselves though poverty be their lot... (59:9)***

In order to cure oneself of the disease of miserliness, it is necessary to pay attention to the Qur'anic verses and traditions in which this vice is condemned, and to meditate about its harmful results. If that proves ineffective, one must force oneself to be generous and liberal, even if such generosity be completely artificial; and this must be continued until generosity becomes one's second nature.

Generosity is necessary when carrying out such obligatory duties (*wajibat*) as paying *khums* and *zakat*, providing for one's wife and children, incurring expenditures for *hajj* (pilgrimage) and so on. It is also necessary in carrying out the recommended duties (*mustahabbat*), such as helping the poor, giving presents, giving parties in order to create or solidify ties of friendship or kinship, giving loans, giving more time to debtors in financial hardship, providing clothes and housing for the needy, spending what is necessary to safeguard one's honour or to alleviate injustice, and contributing to expenditures for such public facilities as mosques, bridges, etc.

## 7. Illegitimate earning

This vice consists of amassing wealth in an illegitimate manner without caring to avoid *haram* and forbidden means of earning. This vice is caused by greed and the love of the world, and results in moral deterioration and the loss of human dignity. Several verses of the Holy Qur'an and many traditions severely warn about approaching *haram* means of income and remind of the dire consequences of it.

It must be kept in mind that wealth is of three kinds:

1. That which is purely *halal* (legitimately acquired).
2. That which is totally *haram* (illegitimately earned).
3. That which is mixed up of both *haram* and *halal* earnings.

What is *halal* is usable and what is either *haram* or of doubtful origin (*mushtabah*) must be avoided. *Haram* things are of many kinds, such as pork or dog's flesh, alcoholic drinks, all those things whose consumption may harm the body, anything gained through force, injustice, or theft, earnings made through unlawful practices, such as cheating in weight or hours of work, hoarding, bribery, usury, and all other illegitimate means which have been described in detail in the books on Islamic *fiqh* (jurisprudence).

The opposite of earning through *haram* means is abstinence from all forms of *haram* practices (*wara`an al-haram*). This virtue can gradually become a habit in the individual through the exercise of self restraint, so that he will ultimately be able to abstain from even those things which are *mushtabah* (i.e. of doubtful legitimacy). A prophetic tradition says:

من اكل الحلال اربعين يوما, نور الله قلبه, واجرى ينابيع الحكمة من قلبه على لسانه.

Whoever lives on *halal* earnings for forty days, God shall enlighten his heart and cause springs of wisdom to emanate from his heart flowing to his tongue.

## 8. Treachery (Khiyaniah)

Treachery is another type of the vices belonging to the Power of Passion. Treachery may occur in regard to money or as a violation of trust. It may occur in regard to honour, power, or position. The opposite of treachery is trustworthiness (*'amanah*), which also applies to all things mentioned about treachery; that is, one's property and possessions, which are Divine trusts; one's family, one's position, the authority and power one wields.

One must always remember that all of the things mentioned are blessings of God, accompanied by specific responsibilities, violation of which amounts to treachery. The wise Luqman has been quoted as saying:

ما بلغت الى ما بلغت اليه من الحكمة, إلا بصدق الحديث وأداء الأمانة.

I did not attain my station of wisdom except through truthfulness and fulfillment of trust.

## 9. Licentiousness and Profligacy

These include such vicious practices as adultery, fornication, sodomy, intoxication, and all other forms of extravagance—all of which arise out of the Power of Passion, and drag man down into a beastly mode of life. There are numerous Qur'anic verses, traditions and narratives in condemnation of this sort of behaviour, mentioning of which is unnecessary since they are widely known.

## 10. Delving in Obscene and Haram Matters

This vice consists of discussing unlawful and *haram* actions, relishing such talk, and exchanging obscene jokes and stories not befitting human dignity and station. Since the *haram* and obscene is of many kinds, delving in them can also be classified variously.

In order to be freed of this vice, one must control and limit his talk, and speak only of such matters as would please God. The Holy Qur'an quotes the inmates of hell as saying:

***And we used to plunge [in vain talk] with the plungers. (74:45)***

And in another verse, it warns against organizing parties for such purposes:

***...do not sit with them [who disbelieve and mock] until they plunge in some other talk ....(4: 140)***

One of the many forms this vice takes is delving in futile and frivolous matters—discussions which are of no benefit whatsoever either in this world or the next. Moreover, such talk involves waste of one's time and is an obstacle to useful contemplation and thought. This is why the virtue of silence has been upheld

in opposition to this vice. And what is meant by `silence' here is not that one should be permanently taciturn, but rather that one should protect his tongue and ears from useless and nonsensical talk. In other words, one should be careful in speech, saying only those things that are beneficial to both our worldly existence and our Hereafter. The wise have said: "Two things can destroy a man: too much wealth and garrulousness. "The Prophet (S) said:

طوبى لمن أمسك الفضل من لسانه, وانفق الفضل من ماله.

Blessed is he who is frugal in speech and generous with regard to his possessions.

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