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5. To Avoid Worldly Pitfalls

● Worldly Desires, Mixing Right with Wrong

● Charity, Misplaced Generosity, Miserliness

● About Hypocrisy, Backbiting

Worldly Desires, mixing Right with Wrong

Introduction

One's heart can be filled with love for worldly things or love for God. It cannot bear both loves at the same time. We are told to enjoy the things of the world but not to covet them. Imam Ali (p) has beautifully stated in the last paragraph of this presentation, "When someone loves a thing, it blinds him and afflicts his heart." Therefore, it is easy to understand that love of this world and its pursuits and pleasures will lead to distancing from God. This will result in corruption of the soul.

Mixing Right with Wrong

The basic cause of evil is due to pursuit of (worldly) desires. The (vain or excessive) desires and the act of pursuing them are prohibited in the Book of God. If wrong had remained pure, it would not remain hidden, and if right had stayed pure, without admixture with wrong, then those who oppose it would be singled out. However, usually right and wrong are mixed in a manner that people become confused. This is a powerful and effective tool of Satan. Only those who are virtuous and (protected) by God Almighty escape (the clutches of Satan).
(**Sermon 50**)

Practicing Austerity Will Lighten the Burden in the Hereafter

Your goal (of reward in the Hereafter) is before you, and the Hour (of Resurrection) is following you.

Keep (yourself) light (free of sinful and blameworthy deeds). Those (who have departed earlier) are waiting for you.
(**Sermon 21**)

About Heart's Desires and High Hopes

O people, the two things in you that I fear the most are the desires upon which you act and the building of high hopes. Acting upon the desires prevents you from truthfulness, and building of hopes makes you forget the next world (your final destination). Know that this world is advancing rapidly (towards its destruction), and the next world is approaching ever closer. You should pursue the next, not this world, because on the Day of Judgment everyone will be with what he/she pursued. Therefore, this is the time to act, because on the Day of Reckoning it will be too late to repent and get redress.
(**Sermon 42**)

Love of This World and Its Effects on the Soul

When someone loves a thing, it blinds him and afflicts the heart. Then he sees, but with afflicted eyes, and hears, but with deaf ears. The desires compromise his intellect, and the (love of the) world makes his heart "dead" (neglectful of remembering God). Consequently, he/she becomes the slave (of the worldly desires) and becomes subservient to anyone who caters those things to him/her and does not take counsel from the preacher, nor pays heed to admonition from God.
(**Sermon 108**)

Charity, Misplaced Generosity, Miserliness

Introduction

The Qur'an has placed great emphasis on charity and generosity. In regards to man's attitude towards amassing wealth, the Qur'an says: "And most surely he is violent in the love of wealth" (100:8). Giving charity both openly and secretly for the good pleasure of God brings one closer to Him. In the following passages, Imam Ali (p) has explained both the benefits and the etiquette of giving charity.

About Charity

The Islamic charity (*Zakat* or purification) has been laid down (as an obligation). Whoever pays it by way of purifying his spirit, it serves as a purifier for him and a protection and shield against fire (of Hell). No one, therefore, (who pays it) should feel attached to it afterwards, nor should he feel grieved over it. Whoever pays it without the intention of purifying his heart does not receive due rewards. He is certainly ignorant of the teachings of the religion.
(**Sermon 198**)

About Miserliness

You do not spend your wealth in God's service, though it is He Who gave you the wealth, nor do you risk (devote) your lives for His sake, though it is He Who created you (and brought you to life). You enjoy honor bestowed upon you by God, the exalted, but you do not honor Him among His creatures. You should derive lessons from your brothers in faith who have departed earlier (from this world).
(Sermon 116)

Misplaced Generosity

He who shows generosity to those who have no claim to it, or who are undeserving, will not earn anything except the praise of the ignoble and appreciation by the undeserving people, and in the sight of God, the giver might be (considered) a miser.

Therefore, to whomever God gives wealth, he should use it in promoting goodness among his relatives; in entertaining, in helping prisoners and the afflicted; in giving to the poor and to those in debt. He should strive in fulfilling the due rights (of others), endure hardships in the process (if necessary), and thereby expect reward (from God). Certainly, the achievement of these qualities is the height of greatness in this world and the achievement of distinction in the next world (by the Mercy of God).
(Sermon 141)

About Hypocrisy, Backbiting

Introduction

In this chapter, Imam Ali (p) deals with some very important social ills, like hypocrisy and backbiting, which are very detrimental to faith and society. The word "hypocrite" is used in the Qur'an for those individuals who were outwardly Muslim but had hidden enmity toward Islam.[1] They were a liability to the nascent religion of Islam, though people did not know it. On occasions, God would reveal their identities to the Prophet (s), but the Prophet would keep the information to himself and would not expose their hypocrisy. This not only showed the nobility of the Prophet, but also helped keep peace and unity in the community. Backbiting is a major sin in Islam, as is rumor mongering and exposing the sins and shortcomings of others.

Description of Hypocrites

We praise God for the succor He has given us in carrying out His obedience and in preventing us from disobedience, and we ask Him to complete His favors (on us), and to make us hold on to His rope (support). We stand witness that Muhammad (s) is His servant and His Messenger. He endured every hardship and grief to achieve God's pleasure. His family members and close relatives suffered with him, while the distant relations turned against him. The elders of the community and the population at large

declared war against him. People from distant towns and communities united in opposing him.

I advise you, O creatures of God, to be God-conscious. I warn you of the hypocrites, because they are themselves misguided, and they in turn misguide others. They (pretend to) support you, but they lie in wait to ambush you. Outwardly, they appear friendly and sincere, while their hearts are diseased. They walk stealthily and tread like the approach of sickness (over the body). Their speech is soothing and comforting to the ears, but their intentions and actions are the opposite. Their unsuspecting victims are many. They get your sympathy through cunning and (false) tears.

When they want something, they insist on having it; if they reprove (someone), they disgrace (him); and if they pass a verdict against someone, they commit excess. They find a way to deny or distort every truth. Their speech creates doubts in the mind of the listener. They exaggerate when they describe something. At first, they offer easy solutions, but (later on) they make things difficult. They are the party of Satan.

God says this about hypocrites:

"Satan has gained hold on them, so he makes them forget the remembrance of God; they are Satan's party; beware! Verily, the party of Satan is the loser" (***Qur'an 58:19***).
(**Sermon 193**)

About Treason

O people! Surely, fulfillment of a pledge is the twin of truth. I do not know a better shield (against sin). One who accepts the reality of the return (to God) never betrays. We are in a period when the people regard betrayal as being smart and wise. The ignorant call it cleverness. What is the matter with them? They will face God's wrath and retribution.
(**Sermon 41**)

About Backbiting and Badmouthing

Those who do not commit sins and have been safe (from sins) should take pity on the sinners. They keep busy in thanking God and they do not have time for (finding faults of) others. What is the excuse of the backbiter who blames his brother (behind his back) and finds fault with him? Does he not remember that God has concealed his (the backbiter's) own sins, which were greater than his brother's sins? How can he vilify him (his brother) about his sins when he himself had committed similar sins? Even if he has not committed a similar sin, he may have committed other greater sins. By God, even if he did not commit big sins but committed only small ones, his exposing the sins of others is itself a big sin.

O creature of God, do not be quick in exposing anyone's sin (or faults), for God may already have forgiven him, and do not feel safe in committing even a small sin, because God might punish you for it. Therefore, every one of you who comes to know the faults of others should not expose them, and should

keep busy in thanking God that He has saved you from what others have been indulging in.
(**Sermon 139**)

About Hearsay

O people! If a person knows his brother to be steadfast in faith and on the right path, he should not lend his ear to what people may say about him. Rumors and loose talk can be far wide of the mark, whereas God is the Hearer and He is the Witness.

“There is nothing between truth and falsehood except four fingers.”

Imam Ali was asked the meaning of this statement, whereupon he brought together his four fingers and put them between his ear and eye and said: “It is falsehood when you say, ‘I have heard so and so,’ while it is the truth when you say, ‘I have seen it’ (i.e., with one’s own eyes).”
(**Sermon 140**)

1. “Among people are some who say: ‘we believe in God and the Last Day,’ (while in fact) they are not believers at all. They intend to deceive God and those who believe, while they (in reality) deceive their own Self (soul), but they do not perceive it” (Qur’an 2:8–9).

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