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5) Enliven Your Heart with Exhortation

""احيي قلبك بالموعظة

Exhortation is a discourse which gets people emotionally involved and guides man by warning him of the consequences of his evil–doing.
By listening to preaching, one's heart softens so much that he automatically is led towards good deeds.

Ustadh Mutahhari, in his discussion of wisdom and exhortation, has defined exhortation clearly.
He writes, "As it is written in the Qur’an,[1] exhortation is one of the three ways of calling people to Islam (wisdom, exhortation, disputation):

"ادْعُ إِلَى سَبِيلِ رَبِّكَ بِالْحِكْمَةِ وَالْمَوْعِظَةِ الْحَسَنَةِ وَجَادِلْهُمْ بِالَّتِي هِيَ أَحْسَنُ إِنَّ رَبَّكَ هُوَ أَعْلَمُ بِمَنْ ضَلَّ عَنْ سَبِيلِهِ وَهُوَ أَعْلَمُ بِالْمُهْتَدِينَ"

The Best Preachers And The Most Excellent Sermons

A wise and knowledgeable man takes advice from anything in the environment for there is a piece of advice in every thing. Regarding this, Imam ‘Ali (as) has stated: "There is a piece of advice in everything for any learned and wise person."[2]

Abalkhayr is reported to have said, "I was crossing an alley where cleaners were cleaning a toilet–well. My companions covered their noses to avoid the stench and moved away. The cleaner addressed them, saying: This excrement tells you: We are the delicious food which you made efforts to acquire. We were in your body and were altered into excrement. Why do you flee from us? We are the color and stench of your insides."

Upon hearing this, the crowd shouted and started crying.[3]

But some preachers and certain sermons have a more subtle impact upon audience. Among them are the following:

a) The Qur'an

Nobody can give us pieces of advice better than Allah, who is aware of every aspect of our existence:

إِنَّ اللَّهَ نِعِمَّا يَعِظُكُمْ بِهِ"197"

"Surely Allah admonishes you with what is excellent."

The Holy Qur'an, which is Allah's discourse, in many cases talks about admonishing.
For this reason, the Great Prophet (S) calls the Holy Qur'an the most straightforward discourse and the sharpest admonishment and the best kind of stories.

Imam 'Ali (as), as well, emphasizes that: "Allah has not admonished anybody with words like those that appear in the Qur'an"[4]

b) Death and a survey of the lives of the men in the past:

Death and what happened to the men in the past are good preachers.

The Prophet (S) has said

:

كَفَى بِالمَوتِ وَاعِظا

"Death is sufficient as an admonisher."[5]

Regarding this, Imam 'Ali (as) emphasizes:
"I recommend that you always remember death and lessen your negligence of it. How can you be heedless of what is not heedless of you, and hope from one who will not give you respite? Those dead people you have observed would suffice for your taking advice. They were carried to their graves without riding by themselves, and they were put in the graves without being able to descend by themselves.

It was as if they had not lived in this world and as if the Hereafter had always been their abode. They made desolate what they had taken as a home and made their home in what they had found to be desolate. They had occupied themselves with that from which they separated, and they neglected that to

which they were moved. Now they cannot move away from the evil (they have committed) nor can they increase their good deeds. They had become intimate with the world and it deceived them; they trusted it and it threw them down.

Race, may God have mercy on you, to your dwellings which you have been commanded to inhabit, and of which you have been made desirous and to which you have been called. Seek the completion of the blessings of God on you with perseverance in obedience to Him, and keeping away from His disobedience, for tomorrow is close to today. How swiftly fly the hours of the day, and how swift the days in the month, how swift the months of the year, and how swift the years of a life!"[6]

Imam ‘Ali (as), elsewhere, has emphasized the same point: "I recommend you, O servants of God, fearful awareness of God who has clothed you well and provided you abundant livelihood. If there was one who could find a ladder to eternal life or a way to repel death, that would have been Solomon, the son of David, to whom the dominion of the jinn and mankind was made subservient, together with (his) prophethood and great nobility. But when the subsistence assigned to him was finished, and his time was complete, the bows of annihilation struck him with the arrows of death! Lands became empty of him and (his) houses were unoccupied, and another people inherited them.
Indeed there is a lesson for you in the previous generations! Where are the Amalekites and the offspring of the Amalekites? Where are the Pharaohs and their offspring?

Where are the dwellers of the cities of Rass who killed the Prophets and stifled the traditions of the Messengers, and who revived the practices of the tyrants?
Where are those who went with troops, defeated thousands, mobilized armies and built cities?”[7]

C) Time

The lapse of time, which sometimes makes one nation prosperous and another miserable, could be a good source of admonition. Imam Musa Ibn Ja’far (as), giving advice to his intelligent student Hisham, says:

"Take your advice from the world and its inhabitants." This might be one of the reasons why the Holy Qur’an swears by the Time or “*wa’l ‘Asr*”.

Imam ‘Ali (as), considering the time as the best advice-giver and teacher, emphasizes the point at issue:

"اَبلَغُ نَاصِحٍ لَكَ الدُّنيا لَو اِنتَصحْتَ بِمَا تُرِيكَ مِن تَغايُرِ الحَالاتِ وَتُؤذِنُكَ بِالبَينِ وَالشَتَاتِ"

"The world is the most effective counselor for you if you accept its advice in what it shows you of the changing conditions and what it informs you of separation and dispersion."[8]

What is disturbing is the fact that the lessons to be taken are numerous but the number of people who

take advice is few.9

It is narrated: when Imam ‘Ali (as) was passing Mada’in, he observed Noushirvan's castle which was in a dilapidated state.

Imam ‘Ali (as) said: “Why do you not read Surah al-Dukhan's verses 25-29 from the Qur’an which say:

"كَمْ تَرَكُوا مِنْ جَنَّاتٍ وَعُيُونٍ وَزُرُوعٍ وَمَقَامٍ كَرِيمٍ وَنَعْمَةٍ كَانُوا فِيهَا فَاكِهِينَ كَذَلِكَ وَأَوْرَثْنَاهَا قَوْمًا آخَرِينَ فَمَا بَكَتْ عَلَيْهِمْ السَّمَاءُ وَالْأَرْضُ وَمَا كَانُوا مُنظَرِينَ"

"How many of the gardens and fountains have they left? And cornfields and noble places! And goodly things wherein they rejoiced; thus it was, and We gave them a heritage to another people. So the heaven and the earth did not weep for them, nor were they respited. [***Qur’an 44:25-29***] 10

D) Experiences

As we know, one of the safe ways of acquiring knowledge is to use other people's experiences. Concerning this, Imam (as) in his letter says:
"Peruse diligently and decidedly those affairs which scholars have painstakingly gathered and have freed you from further attempts."

In ethics and advice as well, our experience is the best friend and agent for adopting the right way and avoiding the improper methods. In this regard, Imam ‘Ali (as) has said:

"كَفَى بِالتَجَارِبِ مُؤدِّباً"

(i) *Experiences are sufficient for teaching the rules of ethics*;

"كَفَى عِظَةً لِذَوِي الاَلبَابِ مَا جَرَّبُوا"

(ii) *Experiences are the best source of advice for the wise*;

"في كُلِّ تَجرِبَةٍ مَوعِظَةٌ"

(iii) *There is a lesson in every experience*;

"خَيرُ مَا جَرَّبتَ مَا وَعَظَكَ"

(iv) *The best of experiences is that which admonishes you*;

"العَاقِلُ مَن وَعَظَتهُ التَجَارِبُ"

(v) *The wise man is he who gets advice from his experiences.*[11]

It is on the basis of such observations that the Prophet (S) has said:

"لا يُلدَغُ المُؤمِنُ مِن جُحْرٍ مَرَّتَينِ"

"A believer is not bitten twice from the same hole."[12]

The Most Superior Exhortations:

Since the number of the most superior exhortations in the Qur'an, Tradition and Prophets' maxims is great, it would be impossible to include all of them here. Here it will suffice to present only fifteen of the best exhortations: one of which is from the Qur'an and the rest from the 14 infallible ones (as).

a)"Say: I exhort you only to one thing, that rise up for Allah's sake in twos and singly." [13]

"قُلْ إِنَّمَا أَعِظُكُمْ بِوَاحِدَةٍ أَنْ تَقُومُوا لِلَّهِ مَثْنَى وَفُرَادَى

As you will notice, God exhorts people, in this verse, only to one thing: that is, rise up only for God's sake, not for other considerations, and it is this kind of uprising which is fruitful.
Imam Khomeini, (may God bless him) 45 years ago, when a mercenary writer insulted the Islamic sanctities, wrote a letter which still exists in Yazd's Vaziri library. He has brought up the issue of uprising for God's sake:

"The exalted God has, in this honorable discourse, referred to everything from nature up to man's humanity. It is the best exhortation which the God of the worlds has adopted. This item is the only way of reformation in this world: it is uprising for God which raised the status of Ibrahim and has freed him from nature; it is this word which made Moses (as) defeat the Pharaoh and his followers with a staff, and put an end to their dynasty. It was this word which made the last of the Prophets (as) single-handedly defeat the beliefs and customs of the pagan state of the Arabs before Islam and throw out their idols from God's House, substituting piety and monotheism for them."[14]

It is just this exhortation which is called "a preliminary stage to Manazil Al-Sa'irin" by the gnostics and is recommended that every gnostic carry it out."[15]

b) Qays Ibn Aasim says:

“Some men of Bani Tameem and I went to pay a visit to the Prophet (S) and said: O God's Prophet! Since we are not always in your presence and since we live in the desert, please exhort us so that we may be on the right path.

The Prophet (S) said, "O Qays: There is always wretchedness with glory, death with life, and Hereafter with the world. Each one of us is also accountable for what we do, either good or bad.
"You are inevitably accompanied by a person who is put in grave with you: you are dead, but he is alive. If he is generous, he will endear you. If he is wretched, he will betray you.
Then, you together will be present on the Day of Judgment.

They will ask you about him. Thus, choose the proper person. That is because if he is a good-doer, you will accompany him and if he is wretched, you will be afraid of him. He is your action.”[16]

c) Fatima al-Zahra (as) in a sermon which she delivered before the Muhajirin and Ansar, after the death of the Prophet (S), emphasized the observance of piety and worship of God and obedience to the Prophet (S) saying "God, the Almighty, appointed faith to purify you from idolatry, prayer to rid you of arrogance, zakat (statutory Islamic levy on specified items to be used for Muslims’ welfare) to cleanse your soul and to add to your sustenance, fasting to strengthen your sincerity, Hajj pilgrimage to fortify the structure of religion, justice to put the hearts in order, obedience to us to set the nation in order, Imamate to secure unity, Jihad to secure the dignity of Islam, patience to receive the rightful wages, the principle of enjoining the good for the welfare of the public, doing good towards parents to protect yourselves against Allah’s wrath, establishing ties of kinship to lengthen your lives, retaliation to stop bloodshed, fulfillment of solemn vows to get Allah’s pardon, precision in weighing articles to stop cheating, banning the drinking of wine to secure the cleanliness of souls, avoidance of accusation to stay away from God’s curses, abandonment of theft and robbery in pursuance of virtuousness, and He forbad polytheism for sincere devotion to His Lordship.

“Therefore, ***“..be wary of God with the wariness due to him and do not die except as muslims”*** (***3:102***).

Obey God in that which He has commanded you to do and that from which He has forbidden you. For ***“..only those of God’s servants having knowledge fear Him”*** (***35:28***).[17]

d) Imam ‘Ali (as) has stated: “I recommend to you five things in order to seek which, if you ride swift camels towards them, it would be fitting.

(i) None of you should hope from anyone except his Lord.

(ii) None should fear anything except his sins.

(iii) When asked about what you have no knowledge of, none of you should be ashamed to say ‘I do not know.’

(**iv**) If one of you does not know something, he should not be ashamed to learn it.

(**v**) Adhere to patience, patience in relation to faith is like the head in relation to the body. There is no good in a body with no head; so also in faith with no patience.[18]

e) Imam Hasan al-Mujtaba, among his recommendations has said, "O children of Adam, avoid doing what Allah has forbidden you in order for you to be considered as His obedient subjects. Be content with what Allah has given you till you become affluent; behave kindly with your neighbors in order for you to be a true Muslim. Behave towards people as you would like to be treated. There used to be rich people among you who had amassed lots of possessions and had built fortified buildings and had far-fetched whims and desires. All of them were destroyed and their residences turned into graves.

O children of Adam! You have been trying to annihilate yourselves ever since you were born. Then save from what you have for your future. This is because a true believer prepares provisions and an infidel indulges in transitory pleasures.
Imam Hasan (as) then recited this verse from Surah al-Baqarah, verse 197:

"وَتَزَوَّدُوا فَإِنَّ خَيْرَ الزَّادِ التَّقْوَى"

"And make provision, for surely the best provision is the guarding of oneself" [***Qur'an 2: 197***].

f) A man arrived at Imam Husayn's presence, saying: I am a guilty man; I am unable to avoid sins. Give me a piece of advice. Imam Husayn (as) replied: "Do five things, then commit any number of sins you wish:

(**i**) Do not make consume God's sustenance and then commit any number of wrong-doings.

(**ii**) Go outside God's territory, then commit whatever sins you want.

(**iii**) Select a place for carrying out your sins where God is not present. Then do what you wish.

(**iv**) When the Angel of Death comes to take away your soul, make him leave you; then do what you wish.

(**v**) When Malik (the Angel of Hell) wants to throw you in the Fire, do not enter the Hell; then, do as you wish.[19]
Of course, this tradition is attributed at the same time to the Prophet (S), Imam Hasan (as) and Imam Zayn al-'Abidin (as).

g) A man came to Imam 'Ali Ibn al-Husayn (as) and complained about his troubles. Imam (as) told him, "Adam's child is miserable because everyday he encounters three calamities, but he does not take a lesson. It would be easy for him if he took lessons from his troubles:

First, every day his life becomes shorter. He becomes depressed if there is reduction in his possessions. But he should know that there is a substitute for worldly possessions, none for one's life, however.

Secondly, he makes complete use of his daily bread. If it is religiously permissive (*halal*), he will be accounted for, and if it is not permissible, then he will be punished.
Thirdly, and this is graver than the other two: when he brings a day to the end, he is in fact approaching the Hereafter, still not knowing whether he is heading for Heaven or Hell.[20]

h) Says Jabir Ibn Yazid al-Ju'fi, I worked for eighteen years for Imam al-Baqir (as). On getting permission to leave him, I asked him for a piece of advice. Imam asked: "Jabir, after eighteen years? You are a bottomless ocean of knowledge which is obtainable by nobody". Then Imam said: "Send my regards to my followers and tell them: There is no distance between us and God. Nobody may approach Him, but through His worship.
O Jabir, anybody who obeys God and loves us is considered as our friend; anybody who commits sins, our friendship for him is useless.
O Jabir, is there anybody who asks God for something, but is denied to receive it? Is there anybody who relies on God, but receives no protection? Is there anybody who trusts God, but is betrayed by Him?
O Jabir, consider this world as a shelter in which you will stay just for a few days and then you will leave it. Isn't the world like a horse on which you ride in your dreams but when you wake up there is no trace of the horse? This world is comparable to a used garment.
O Jabir, for wise people, this world is like a shadow.[21]

The expression "There is no god but Allah" is a source of magnanimity of the speaker of it. Prayer is a means to avoid arrogance, alms will increase one's daily bread; fasting and Hajj pacify the hearts. Religious punishment protects people's bloodshed and friendship with the Prophet's family strengthens the religion. May God put us among those who, in private, fear their God and are fearful of the Resurrection Day."[22]

i) Sufyan al-Thawri says, "I went to the presence of Imam al-Ja'far (as) and I told him: Give me a piece of advice to keep after you; Imam asked: Will you remember it, O Sufyan? I replied: Yes, O son of the Prophet's daughter. Then he said: O Sufyan: A liar lacks manliness; a liar is not at comfort.
There is no brother for kings, no friends for the arrogant, no generous person for a bad-tempered person.
Then, the Imam (as) was silent. I asked him, O son of the Prophet's daughter, please continue. He said: O Sufyan: rely on God to become knowledgeable; be content with what God has given you to feel affluent; behave with people as they behave with you to increase your faith; do not be company to wicked people since they will teach you some of their wickedness and in your affairs, consult those who are God-fearing.

Then I pleaded once again. He said: O Sufyan, one who wishes for glory without power and affluence should prefer God's glorious obedience to the wretchedness of committing sins.

O Sufyan: My father exhorted me to three things and warned me against three others: He said, My son: one who accompanies wicked people shall not remain intact; one who is not careful in his speech, will be regretful; and one who frequents nasty places will be accused.
I asked: O son of God's Prophet: what are those three things which you were warned against?
He said: My father told me not to accompany one who is jealous towards one's affluence, the rejoicer at another's misfortune, and a talebearer."[23]

j) Imam Musa al-Kadhim (as) has said:

"إجتَهِدُوا في اَن يَكُونَ زَمَانُكُم اَربَعَ سَاعَات: سَاعَةٌ لِمُنَاجَاتِ الله وَسَاعَةٌ لاَمرِ المَعاشِ وَسَاعَةٌ لِمُعَاشَرَةِ الاخوَانِ وَالثُقاتِ الَّذِينَ يُعَرِّفُونَكُم عُيوبَكُم وَيُخلِصُونَ لَكُم في البَاطِنِ، وَسَاعَةٌ تخلونَ فِيهَا لِلذَّاتِكُم في غَيرِ مَحَرَّم وَبِهذِهِ السَّاعَةِ تَقدِرُونَ على الثَلاثِ سَاعات. لا تُحَدِّثُوا اَنفُسَكُم بِفَقرٍ وَلا بِطُولِ عُمرٍ فَاِنَّه مَن حَدَّثَ نَفسَهُ بِالفَقرِ بَخِلَ وَمَن حَدَّثَها بِطُولِ العُمُرِ يَحرِص.

اِجعَلُوا لاَنفُسِكُم حَظّاً مِنَ الدُّنيا بِاعطَائِها مَا تَشتَهِي مِنَ الحَلالِ وَمَا لا يَثْلِم المُروَّةِ وَمَا لا سَرَفَ فِيهِ وَاستَعِينُوا بِذَلِكَ عَلى اُمورِ الدِّينِ فاِنَّه رُوِيَ: «لَيسَ مِنّا مَن تَرَكَ دُنيَاهُ لِدِينِهِ او تَرَكَ دِينَهُ لِدُنيَاهُ»"

"Strive to divide your time into four portions: one fourth to pray God, one fourth to earn your sustenance, one fourth to be in the company of your brethren and the trustworthy ones who acquaint you with your faults and whose hearts are sincere to you, and one fourth in private to engage in lawful pleasures. This last part will give you energy to engage in the other three portions.
Do not dwell on thoughts of poverty or long life, for he who occupies himself with throughts of poverty becomes stingy, and he who thinks of long life becomes greedy. Give your selves a share from this world by giving them the lawful things that they desire and that which is in keeping with a sense of honor and in which there is no extravangance. Seek help through that for the affairs of religion, for it is narrated: One who abandons his world for his religion or abandons his religion for his world is not of us."[24]

k) Imam al-Rida (as) has said: Seven things without seven others will cause the laughter of the public: First, one who seeks Allah's forgiveness only orally, but is not regretful deep inside, has made fun of himself.

Second, one who asks for God's help, but shows no effort of himself, has made fun of himself.

Third, one who asks God for the paradise, but is not patient enough, has also made fun of himself.
Fourth, one who asks for God's protection against Hell-fire, but will not abandon corrupting and misleading lusts and desires, has made fun of himself, as well.

Fifth, one who talks about death but has not prepared himself for it, has made fun of himself.

Sixth, one who remembers death, but is not willing to face it, has made fun of himself.
Seventh, one who desires to be cautious, but does not show caution at the proper time, has made fun of himself.25

l) A man asked the ninth Imam (as), al-Jawad: Give me some advice. Imam (as) asked: Will you accept it? He said: Yes. Imam (as) said. "Be very close to patience, embrace poverty, reject desires and oppose (your) whims; and know that you are always watched by God. Thus, be watchful over what you do."26

m) Our tenth Imam, 'Ali al-Naqi (as) has said: "One who fears God is feared by others, and one who obeys God is obeyed by others. He who obeys the Creator does not fear the anger of (His) creatures, and he who angers the Creator should be certain that he will face the anger of (His) creatures."27

n) Imam Hasan al-Askari (as) told his Shi'a followers: I recommend to you God-wariness, utmost self-vigilance (in abstaining from the unlawful) [*wara'*] in your religion, striving for God's sake, truthfulness in speech, returning deposits to those who have entrusted them to you, whether virtuous or sinful, prolonging prostrations and good treatment of your neighbors, which was always done by Muhammad (as). Observe your prayers with your neighbors, attend their funerals and visit their sick. Fulfil their dues. When anyone of you is God-fearing in his religion, truthful in his speech, discharges his trust, and treats people amicably, and it is said: 'Such a person is my Shi'ah', then that will make me happy. Fear Allah and be an ornament and not a disgrace (for us).

Attract towards us every kind of love and repel from us everything unseemly, for we are worthy of any good that is said about us, and not of any evil spoken about us. We possess a right in the Book of God and a relationship with the Messenger of God and purification from God that none other than us can claim except a liar. Be frequent in the remembrance of God, the remembrance of death, in the recitation of the Qur'an and in sending blessings on the Prophet (S), for sending blessings on the Prophet (S) is ten good deeds. Preserve what I have recommended to you. I commend you to God and send you salutations."28

o) The twelfth Imam, Imam Mahdi (as) in a letter which he wrote to Ishaq Ibn Ya'qub and sent it to him through Mohammad b. 'Uthman b. Sa'eed al-'Amri, stated: "The appearance of deliverance depends on God. Those who determine its time are liars. But concerning the occurence of events, refer to the narrators of our hadith, since they are my proof to you and I am God's proof to them.
As for those who are involved in our wealth – those who regard some of it as lawful (for themselves) and consume (it), they are only consuming the Fire. But as for Khums (20% Islamic levy on certain things), it is paid by our Shi'a followers for their purity. They can enjoy it till we make our appearance.

As for the reason for our occultation, God in Surah al-Ma'idah, verse 101, has said, ***"O you who believe! Do not put questions about things, which if declared to you, may trouble you."***

Every one of my fathers was under some sort of allegiance to the tyrant of his age, and at my appearance I will not have given allegiance to any tyrant. The way to benefit from me during my

occultation is the same way that one benefits from the sun when it is hidden behind the clouds. I am a source of protection for the earth dwellers in the same way that stars are a source of protection for the inhabitants of the skies."29

1. . Qur'an 16:125.
2. . Ghurar al-Hikam, al-Amidi, vol.2, p.507.
3. . Asrar al-Tawhid, vol.1, p.266.
4. . Nahj al-Balaghah, Sermon 175.
5. . Bihar al-Anwar, vol.77, p.137.
6. . Nahj al-Balaghah, Sermon 188.
7. . Nahj al-Balaghah, Sermon 182.
8. . Mizan al-Hikmah, vol.10, p.542.
9. . Nahj al-Balaghah, Hikmah 297.
10. . Bihar, vol.78, p.48.
11. . Ghurar al-Hikam.
12. . Sunan Ibn Majah, vol.2, p,1318.
13. .Qur'an 34:46.
14. . Kayhan Newspaper, Tuesday, 13th Tir, 1368.
15. . Commentary on Manazil al-Sa'irin by Abd al-Razzaq Kashani, p.19.
16. . Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 77, p.111; Khisal, Shaykh Saduq, p.131.
As we have explained in the book "Towards the Eternal world," pp.415-430, this hadith, like tens of other hadiths, shows that punishment and chastisement in Barzakh (interval between death and Resurrection) and the Day of Resurrection is manifested bodily and not conventionally.
17. . Ihtijaj al-Tabarsi, vol.1, p.134; Kashf al-Ghummah, vol.1, p.484; etc.
18. . Nahj al-Balaghah, 79.
19. . Bihar al-Anwar, vol.78, p.126.
20. . Bihar al-Anwar, vol.78, p.160.
21. . Similar interpretations can be found in our poets' works, who have benefited from the knowledge of our Imams. Among them is the following poem:
From a wise man I asked about the world. He said: the world is either a dream, or a candle, or a myth. I asked him: Then, why are people so enchanted by it? He replied: They are either sleepy, or drunk or mad.
22. . Bihar al-Anwar, vol.78, p.183.
23. . Bihar al-Anwar, vol.78, p.261.
24. . Bihar al-Anwar, vol.78, p.321.
25. . Kanz al-Fawa'id, Karajaki, p.152.
26. . Bihar, vol.78, p.358.
27. . Tuhaf al-'Uqul, p.510.
28. . Tuhaf al-'Uqul, p.488; Bihar, vol.78, p.273.
29. . Bihar, vol.78, p.380.

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