

Indicators of Piety, Part 5

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This paper is based on the fourth and fifth parts of a series of seven lessons by the author in London, at the Islamic Centre of England in July 2011. This course was an attempt to explore the essence of faith, religiosity, and moral values on which they are based.

Abstract

This series – *Indicators of Piety* – focuses on the advantages of piety (*taqwa*) in Islam. Piety is one of the most vital merits a person can have since it is related to the intention behind all actions and is required to reach salvation.

While parts 1 and 2 probed into the merits of piety and explored its definition and the factors that contribute to its formation, parts 3 and 4 demonstrated the characteristics of the pious and defined the faithful as those who will achieve true success in this world and the next.

This part delves into the qualities of loving God and loving others for His sake, our duties towards the entire community of the Ahlul Bayt, and the importance of truthfulness, justice, and keeping promises.

In the previous discussions we considered faith as one of the pillars of piety, and studied the external signs that help decipher a faithless person. We then assessed a number of external practices of a faithful person: how they handle household expenses, how they are able to withstand calamities, and how deeply they understand their religion.

We now turn our attention towards the internal signs of faith, and a quality that is arguably the most important part of a person's faithfulness but is often sadly neglected, namely, the strong link between a person's love for God and their love for other people, both for the sake of God and for Godly reasons. Its basic premise is that if one sincerely loves God, then he or she will be able to love or dislike others for the His sake, rather than for any personal or selfish reasons.

Loving God and Loving Others for the Sake of God

Imam Muhammad al-Jawad has narrated that God said to some of the prophets:

"You practiced abstinence from the world but this was not for Me – it was so that you could be laid back and not have to be concerned with a worldly life. You detached yourself from it to gain honour and fame. But have you disliked someone or befriended someone for my sake?"^{[1](#)}

A faithful person is someone who forges his relationships for the sake of God. Prophet Muhammad sheds further light on this when he quotes an incident from the life of Prophet Musa:

"God asked Prophet Musa: "Have you ever performed an action for Me only?" Musa replied: "I have prayed for You, fasted for You, and given charity for You!" God stated: "As for your prayer it is a proof for you on the Day of Judgement [to support you], your fasting is a shelter for you, your charity is a shade and your alms-giving is light. This was all for you. So what have you done for Me?" Musa asked: "Then tell me, what action is just for You?" God replied: "Have you loved someone because of Me?" Upon hearing this Musa realised that the best of deeds is to love for the sake of God and to dislike for the sake of God."^{[2](#)}

In another narration Imam al-Baqir narrates from Prophet Muhammad:

"O people! That which I have made lawful will remain lawful until the Day of Judgement. Indeed one of the greatest factors that leads to faith is to love another faithful person. When the believers love each other for the sake of God, they become like one body; when one part of the body suffers pain the rest of the parts will not find rest; they will work harder to support the injured part."

In this regard Sa'di, the famous Iranian poet, states:

*"The children of Adam are parts of one body,
created from one essence;
when one part becomes afflicted the other parts cannot remain at ease."*^{[3](#)}

The faithful are parts of one body, each playing an integral role for the health and survival of that body. It is only when all the parts unite and work together that the body can survive and thrive.

Prophet Muhammad once asked his companions: *"Which handle of faith is the strongest?"* The companions gave different answers – some said prayer, others said alms. Finally they conceded and asked him to tell them the answer. He declared:

To love for God's sake and to dislike for God's sake.^{[4](#)}

Once a person embodies this characteristic, other noble qualities follow. It is our nature as humans to follow what we love and refrain from what we dislike. Thus, if the fundamental issue of loving and

disliking things according to God's preferences is engrained in a person, then all their other loves and dislikes will fall into line.

In *Misbah al-Shari'ah*,^{[5](#)} Imam al-Sadiq is quoted to have said:

"A person who loves for the sake of God is a lover of God. And a person that is loved by others for the sake of God is the beloved of God".^{[6](#)}

A person who can lead his life in a way that other faithful people love him will ultimately be loved by God. This is because other faithful ones will love him for the sake of God and they love him because they see him as a person close to God. Imam al-Sadiq then quotes Prophet Muhammad again as saying: *"A person will be raised with the one that he loves."*

In other words, if people truly love the holy personalities, they will be raised with them. In yet another narration, Prophet Muhammad states:

"The best of people in this world and the Hereafter – apart from the Prophets – are those that love God and love one another for the sake of God. Any other type of love will become enmity on the Day of Judgement".^{[7](#)}

Once a person sincerely loves God, he will also love that which is associated with God. In a common-place example, when a loved one dies, people often hold onto certain belongings of the deceased, such as clothing, and look at these belongings to remember the deceased. According to Prophet Muhammad all non-Godly love will become enmity on the Day of Judgement.

Manifestation on the Day of Judgement

The Qur'an states:

"On that day, friends will be one another's enemies, except for the God-wary." (43:67)

The pious remain friends even in the Hereafter and do not forget one another. But the love that is mixed with desire and selfishness will become enmity; in fact, this can also be seen in this world as well. Imam Ali has said:

"The most pleasant thing in heaven is to love God and to love for the sake of God."^{[8](#)}

When a person reaches heaven he will be able to enjoy those bounties that he was able to carry along with him to heaven that were earned by him in his worldly life. If someone arrives in the arena of the Hereafter with enmity and selfishness then those cannot exist in the bliss of Paradise.

Prophet Muhammad has said, *"I swear by He in whose hands my life lies, you will not enter heaven until you believe; and you will not believe until you love one another."*^{[9](#)}

Those who love each other for the sake of God will have radiant faces on the Day of Judgement, and they will be on pulpits of light; they will not fear when people around them will be terrified, and they will not grieve when others will be grieving.

"Look! The friends of Allah will indeed have no fear nor will they grieve" (10:62). [10](#)

These 'friends' of God are those very ones that love God and love others for His sake.

Broader Implication of Loving Others

Imam Ali has said, *"Whoever desires that his faith becomes complete, his love must be for God, and his hatred, his pleasure, and his displeasure must all be for God."* [11](#)

When a faithful person loves someone else it should not be for any selfish reason such as a familial relationship or friendship, but should be for that person's position and closeness with God. Theoretically this means that we may end up loving another child more than our own children. A good example of this is the love we hold for the children of Imam al-Husayn, whom the faithful would certainly claim are dearer to them than their own children due to the closeness of Imam al-Husayn's children to God.

Thus, if a child other than a person's own child shows a higher potential for spiritual greatness than one's own child but lacks some means to reach that potential, then a faithful person should be inclined to facilitate for that child to grow and develop, through financial or other means.

Prophet Muhammad has also said: *"God's love is necessary for people who love each other for the sake of God, for people who become friends for the sake of God, for people who visit each other for the sake of God, and for people who give to each other for the sake of God"*. [12](#)

Imam Ali also describes the importance of loving others in the following way:

"Our Shi'as are those who help each other for our sake, who love each other for our sake, who visit each other and see how they can revive our message. They are they who when they become angry they do not commit any injustice, and when they are happy they are not extravagant. They are a source of blessing for those around them, and a source of peace for those they interact with". [13](#)

A good Shi'a, in the words of Imam Ali, can be judged by what he is prepared to do for his fellow believers. Furthermore, a good Shi'a, when loving someone will not ignore their mistakes and sins, and when disliking someone will not disregard their good acts and noble deeds. Rather, they will assess and judge everything from the point of view of God's wishes and commandments.

A Foundation of Islam

In one narration Imam al-Baqir has said:

“Islam is founded upon five things: prayer, alms, fasting, Hajj, and wilayah. And nothing has been emphasised in the way wilayah has been emphasised. People have accepted the first four but have abandoned this last one”. [14](#)

When Imam al-Baqir mentions those who have abandoned *wilayah*, he refers to two groups of people:

1. Those who do not follow the leadership and authority of the Ahlul Bayt; for example, some sects of Muslims.
2. Those Muslims who, whilst they are apparent followers of the Ahlul Bayt, do not realise that *wilayah* is a duty towards the whole community of the Ahlul Bayt.

The same idea is alluded to in the famous visitation prayer Ziyarah 'Ashura in which it states:

Indeed I am at peace with whosoever is at peace with you and I am at war with whosoever is at war with you; I am an enemy to whosoever shows enmity to you and I am a friend to whosoever shows friendship to you.

O Aba Abdillah! Indeed I seek nearness to God, and to Prophet Muhammad, and to Imam Ali, and to Lady Fatimah, and to Imam al-Hasan, and to you, through your love and through the love of your friends.

If we are truly lovers of Imam al-Husayn, then we should not be in conflict with any of his followers.

Wilayah, a Concept and a Practice

It is interesting to note that Imam al-Baqir has mentioned the concept of *wilayah* alongside four practical acts. This is because *wilayah* is not merely a concept, but rather has a strong practical application. Similarly, *tawalli* (loving the infallibles and all that is associated with them) and *tabarri* (disliking the enemies of the infallibles and all that is associated with them) are both mentioned along with eight other acts of Islam as the 'branches of religion'.

It is therefore not enough to merely love the Ahlul Bayt and their followers, but it requires an extra step for it to manifest into action. If someone wants to perform a service for a member of the Ahlul Bayt then it would be proper to perform that service to one of the followers of the Ahlul Bayt and the community of the Ahlul Bayt.

Qualities of a Faithful

We now turn our attention to some of the most important qualities of a faithful that would lead to closeness with God and success in this world. Imam Zayn al-Abidin was asked by his companion Abi Malik: *"Tell me about all the laws of religion."* The Imam replied: *"To speak the truth, to judge with justice,*

and to keep promises."

Human beings make decisions and pass judgements all the time, on a daily basis. According to this saying of Imam Zayn al-Abidin, any such decision must be based on justice, and not on any selfish whims or personal inclinations. If a Muslim and non-Muslim have a dispute, then one must always side with the party that is correct, regardless of faith. The qualities of truth and justice are more important than anything else:

O you who have faith! Be maintainers, as witnesses for the sake of Allah, of justice, and ill feeling for a people should never lead you to be unfair. Be fair; that is nearer to God- wariness, and be wary of Allah. Allah is indeed well aware of what you do. (5:8)

In the same way, the keeping of promises is another vital quality of a faithful person. Promises, whether verbal or written, and whether in our favour or against us, must always be upheld. Islam states that if society does not adhere to this principle, it should not follow that a faithful person also abandons it. Whosoever can embody these qualities would surely become a point of reference for people of all faiths.

The Best of Deeds

Imam al-Sadiq has reported: *"The master of all actions is three: to treat others with fairness, to share your wealth with your brother [in faith], and to remember God in every situation."*¹⁵

When dealing justly with their own selves, the faithful do not assume they are always right and do not look for weak arguments to prove their case. The faithful are also those who seek out opportunities to share their wealth with others. They remember God at all times and in all situations, whether in ease or in difficulty.

The remembrance of God is not necessarily a verbal remembrance by chanting His name or religious invocations; rather, it means to accept and implement whatever He has commanded and to abandon whatever He has forbidden, because to remember God is to act according to His will. Such habits are more difficult to master than saying even the night prayers (*salat al-layl*) because these habits may be required in a range of difficult situations.

The Role of Intellect

Prophet Muhammad is quoted as saying, *"The master of all actions in both worlds [this world and the Hereafter] is the intellect. And everything has a pillar and the pillar of a faithful person is his intellect. Proportionate to his intellect is his worship of his lord."*¹⁶

A faithful person will ensure that his actions are in conformity with reason, and not just emotions. God provides each human being with two proofs: an external one, i.e. the Prophets and Imams, and an internal one, i.e. the intellect.

The prominence of the intellect is a key feature of the Shi'a school of thought within Islam. The Shi'a school of thought has a proud tradition of intellectual sciences, including subjects such as philosophy, whereas some other schools of Islamic do not give the intellect the prominence it deserves. The Ahlul Bayt encouraged their followers to be rational and logical, and to make their judgements according to the requirements of reason.

In al-Kafi, there is a divine saying (*al-hadith al-qudsi*), in which, addressing the intellect (*al-'aql*) God says: "I command you and forbid you. I reward you and punish you."¹⁷ The intellect is thus the fundamental factor in regulating the life of a faithful person.

False Worship

Imam al-Sadiq warns his followers on how to discern a true believer:

*"Do not be deceived by their prayers and their fasts, for surely a person often may pray and fast but if it is taken away from him then he feels very bad. Rather, test them with two things: truth in speech and discharging their trusts".*¹⁸

Religious people are sometimes attached to their acts of worship merely through habit. For example, a person who fasts regularly is told that due to ill health he cannot fast, and thus may feel depressed even though it is the commandment of God that one's health takes precedence over fasting. Such a person must consider whether he genuinely fasted for God or for some feeling of personal satisfaction.

The faithful person will perform acts of worship, but for the right reasons, i.e. in submission to God and His commands, whatever they may be. Furthermore, the faithful person will have the quality of honesty in all situations and discharge trusts with utmost loyalty.

Similarly, we sometimes find that some religious people rely on inner feelings and emotions rather than what Islam has commanded. At times of sin they may say they feel especially spiritually exalted. Or, for example, they prefer to pray alone rather than in congregation as they claim it gives them a better sense of concentration. This could be the wares of Satan. Islam would advise them to follow the teachings of the religion rather than any inner feelings that may be easily misinterpreted.

On the importance of perfecting the character before indulging into any deep religious science, Amr bin Abi al-Miqdam reports from Imam al-Baqir: "*Learn truth before learning any hadith.*"¹⁹

Abu Kahmas narrates that he met Imam al-Sadiq and conveyed the greetings (salam) of Abdullah ibn Abi Ya'fur.²⁰ The Imam said:

"May peace be upon you and upon him. When you next see Abdullah then pass my salam to him and tell him: 'Indeed Ja'far son of Muhammad says to you: 'Observe that which Ali did to make him so close to the Prophet, and you do the same. For surely Ali reached such a stage with the Prophet of God

through truthful speech and discharging of trusts." [21](#)

Imam Ali was extremely close to Prophet Muhammad through these two qualities. In fact, truth and honesty affect worship in bringing it a step higher. Furthermore, the God being worshipped is known as *al-Haqq* (the Truth); therefore, for a person to consider his worship as effective whilst remaining dishonest would not make sense. Again, Imam al-Sadiq states:

"Do not pay attention to the lengthy bowing (ruku) and prostration (sujud) of a person, for these things may be just out of habit and were he to abandon these things he would feel bad about it. Instead pay attention to the truth of his speech and how he discharges trusts." [22](#)

A person's lengthy prayers do not necessarily be a true sign of goodness. The Prophet explains this further:

"Should I tell you about the best traits of this world and the Hereafter? They are: to forgive someone that has wronged you, to reach out to someone that has cut off ties with you, and to do good to one who has done bad to you". [23](#)

Such amazing character traits are known as *makarim al-akhlaq* (the most sublime characteristics) and the Prophet has said that his mission was to perfect such traits. A person that is able to recognise their own mistakes and shortcomings is indeed in a very special position and should be praised, because that is the first step to self-reform.

We can be sure that a person who is honest, humble, suppresses anger, avoids emotions, and is kind to the people who have done bad to him is very close to Allah. At the time of the Prophet there were a number of companions that were clearly the friends of God. One of them is Salman al-Farsi, who left his family, possessions, and status to find the truth. Salman first became a Christian and then heard that there would be a Prophet at end of time in the Arabian Peninsula. When he then took it upon himself to travel there and look for him, Salman accepted Islam after meeting the Prophet, and from the onset it seems he possessed an immense level of faith as he was searching for the truth, even though he merely required the presence of the Prophet and the Qur'an to link himself properly to God.

Similarly, the famous companion Abu Dharr, about whom the Prophet said that the sky had not provided shade over anyone more honest than Abu Dharr [2425](#).

One of the beauties of those who revert to Islam is that they have demonstrated their concern and search for truth, regardless of their upbringing, family, and environment.

The revert brothers and sisters have passed a test that born Muslims may not have not experienced.

We ask God to grant us success in acquiring these characteristics and ethics, and to inspire us with sincerity, repentance, and guidance. We ask God to help us in being always seeking the truth and then committing ourselves to the truth which has been discovered.

1. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 66, p. 238. The hadith reads as follows:

عن أبي جعفر الثاني قال أوحى الله إلى بعض الأنبياء أمّا زهدك في الدنيا فتعجّل الرّاحة و أمّا انقطاعك إلى فتعزّك بي و لكن هل عادت لي عدوّا أو واليت لي وليّا

2. Mustadrak al-Wasa'il, vol. 12, p. 220. The hadith reads as follows:

و روي أنّ الله قال لموسى هل عملت لي عملا قط قال صليت لك و صمت و تصدقت قال الله تبارك و تعالى له أمّا الصلّاة فلك برهان و الصوم جنة و الصدقة ظلّ و الزكاة نور فأَيّ عمل عملت لي قال موسى دلّني على العمل الذي ها لك قال يا موسى هل واليت لي وليّا فعلم موسى أنّ أفضل الاعمال الحب في الله و البغض في الله

3. This poem also appears on one of the walls of the United Nations building in New York.

4. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 66, p. 243. The hadith reads as follows:

عن العدة عن البرقي عن محمد بن عيسى عن حريز عن أبي الحسن علي الحسن بن يحيى فيما اعلم عن عمرو بن مدرك الطائ عن عبد الله قال قال رسول الله لأصحابه أيّ عرى الايمان اوثق فقالوا الله و رسوله اعلم و قال بعضهم الصلاة و قال بعضهم الزكاة و قال بعضهم الصيام و قال بعضهم الحج و العمرة و و قال بعضهم الجهاد فقال رسول الله لكل ما قلتم فضل و ليس به و لكن اوثق عرى الايمان الحب في الله و توالي اولياء الله و التبّري من اعداء الله

5. This is a well-known book in Arabic on ethics and spirituality which has also been translated into English under the name The Lantern of the Path.

6. Mustadrak al-Wasa'il, vol. 12, p. 220. The hadith reads as follows:

قال الصادق المحب في الله محب الله و المحبوب في الله حبيب الله لانهما لا يتحابان الا في الله قال رسول الله المرء مي من احب فمن احب في الله فإنما احب الله و لا يحب عبد الله الا احبه الله

7. Mustadrak al-Wasa'il, vol. 12, pp. 220 & 221. The hadith reads as follows:

قال رسول الله افضل الناس بعد النبيين و الآخرة المتحابون فيه و كل حب معلول يورث بعدا فيه عداوة الآ هذين و هما عين واحدة يزيدان ابدا و لا ينقصان قال الله عزّ و جلّ الاخلاء يومئذ بعضهم لبعض عدو الا المتقين اصل الحب التبرّ عن سوى المحبوب

8. Mustadrak al-Wasa'il, vol. 12, p. 221. The hadith reads as follows:

اطيب شيء في الجنة و الذه حب الله و الحب في الله و الحمد لله رب العالمين

9. Ibid., p. 222. The hadith reads as follows:

و الذي نفسي بيده لا تدخلون الجنة حتى تؤمنوا و لا تؤمنون حتى تحابوا

10. Ibid., p. 225. The complete hadith reads as follows:

عن النبي قال ان من عباد الله لانا ساء هم بأنبياء و لاشهداء لمكانهم من الله فقليل من هم يا رسول الله قال الذين يتحابون بروح الله من غير ارحام بينهم و لا اموال يتعاطون بينهم و انّ على وجوههم لنور و انهم لعلّى منابر من نور لا يخافون اذا خاف الناس و لا يحزنون اذا حزنوا ثمّ تلا هذه الآية الا إنّ اولياء الله لا خوف عليهم بجلالي اليوم اظلمهم بظلي يوم لا ظل الا ظلي

11. Ibid., p. 228. The hadith reads as follows:

و قال من احب ان يكمل ايمانه فليكن حبه لله و بعضه و رضاه و سخطه لله

12. Ibid., p. 225. Hadith reads as follows:

قال يقول الا و حقّت محبتي للذين يتحاجون من اجلي و قد حقّت محبتي للذين يتصادقون من اجلي و قد حقّت محبتي للذين يتزاورون من اجلي و قد حقّت محبتي للذين يتبازلون من اجلي

13. Al-Kulayni, Usul al-Kafi, v.2, pp. 236-237.

عن ابي جعفر قال قال امير المؤمنين شيعتنا المتبازلون في ولايتنا المتحابون في مودتنا المتزاورون في إحياء امرنا الذين ان غضبوا لم يظلموا و ان يسرفوا بركة على من جاوروا سلم لمن خالطوا

[14.](#) Al-Kafi, vol. 2, p. 18. Hadith reads as follows:

عن ابي جعفر قال بني الاسلام على خمس على الصلاة و الزكاة والصوم و الحج و الولاية و لم يناد بشيء كما نودي بالولاية فاخذ الناس باربع و تركوا هذه يعني الولاية

[15.](#) Al-Kulayni, Usul al-Kafi, v.2, p. 144.

[16.](#) Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 1, p. 96.

[17.](#) Al-Kafi, vol. 1, p. 10.

[18.](#) Ibid., vol. 2, p. 104. Hadith reads as follows:

لا تغتروا بصلاتهم و لا بصيامهم فان الرجل لهج بالصلاة و الصوم حتى لو تركه استوحش و لكن اختبرواهم عند صدق الحديث و اداء الامانة

[19.](#) Ibid., Hadith reads as follows:

في أوّل دخلة دخلت عليه تعلموا الصدق قبل الحديث

[20.](#) One of the great companions of Imam al-Sadiq and an important narrator of hadith.

[21.](#) Al-Kafi, vol. 2, p. 104. Hadith reads as follows:

قلت لأبي عبد الله عليه السلام قال علي بن أبي يعفور يقرئك السلام قال عليه السلام اذا اتيت عبد الله فأقرئه السلام و قل له ان جعفر من محمد يقول لك انظر ما بلغ به علي عند رسول الله فالزمه فان عليا انما بلغ ما بلغ به عند رسول الله بصدق الحديث و اداء امانته

[22.](#) Al-Kafi, vol. 2, p. 105. Hadith reads as follows:

قال ابو عبد الله لا تنظروا إلى طول ركوع الرجل و سجوده فان ذلك شيء اعتاده فلو تركه استوحش لذلك و لكن انظروا إلى صدق حديثه و ادا امانته

[23.](#) Ibid., p. 107. Hadith reads as follows:

الا ادلكم على خير اخلاق الدنيا و الآخرة تصل من قطعك و تعطي من حرمك و تعفو عمّن ظلمك

[24.](#) Bihar al-Anwar.vol. 10, p. 123. Hadith reads as follows:

قال يا امير المؤمنين اخبرني عن ابي ذر الغفاري قال سمعت رسول الله يقول ما اظلت الخضراء و لا اقلت الغبراء ذا لهجة اصدق من ابي ذر

[25.](#) History tells us that the night in which Abu Dharr assisted the Prophet to escape from Mecca, he hid the Prophet under a blanket as his enemies were searching for him. When the enemies of the Prophet approached Abu Dharr and asked him who was under the blanket, such was his honesty that he replied it was the Prophet. The enemies did not believe him and did not investigate any further.

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