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Recommendations for the Seminaries of Religious Learning

Simultaneous with the study of scholarly matters, the seminaries of religious learning are in need of teaching and learning in morals and spirituality. It is necessary to have moral guides, trainers for the spiritual abilities, and sessions for advice and counseling. Programs in ethics and moral reform, classes in manners and refinement, instruction in divine learning, which are the principle aim of the mission of the prophets, peace be upon them, must be officially instituted in the seminaries.

Unfortunately, scant attention is paid in the centers of learning to these essential issues. Spiritual studies are declining, so that in the future the seminaries will not be able to train scholars of ethics, refined and polished counselors, or godly men. Occupation with discussion and inquiry into elementary problems does not allow the opportunity for the basic and fundamental topics which are instances of the favors of the Noble Qur'an and of the great Prophet (*s*) and the other prophets and saints (*awliya*), peace be with them.

The great jurist-consults and high-ranking professors, who are noteworthy in the scholarly community, had better try, in the course of their lessons and discussions, to train and refine people and to be more concerned with spiritual and ethical topics. For the seminary students it is also necessary that in their efforts to acquire erudition and refinement of the soul that they give sufficient weight to their important duties and momentous responsibilities.

You who today are studying in these seminaries, and who shall tomorrow take charge of the leadership and guidance of society, do not imagine that your only duty is to learn a handful of terms, for you have other duties as well. In these seminaries you must build and train yourselves so that when you go to a city or village you will be able to guide the people there and show them refinement.

It is expected that when you depart from the center for the study of religious law, you yourselves will be refined and cultivated, so that you will be able to cultivate the people and train them according to Islamic ethical manners and precepts. If, God forbid, you were not to realize spiritual ideals then, may Allah

protect us, everywhere you would go people would be perverted, and you would have given them a low opinion of Islam and of the clergy.

You have a heavy responsibility. If you do not fulfill your duty in the seminaries, if you do not plan your refinement, and if you merely pursue the learning of a few terms and issues of law and jurisprudence, then God protect us from the damage that you might cause in the future to Islam and Islamic society. It is possible, may Allah protect us, for you to pervert and mislead the people.

If due to your actions, deeds and unfair behavior, one person looses his way and leaves Islam, you would be guilty of the greatest of the major sins, and it would be difficult for your repentance to be accepted. Likewise, if one person finds guidance, then according to a narration, "It is better than all upon which the sun doth shine." 1

Your responsibility is very heavy. You have duties other than those of the laity.

How many things are permissible for the laity which are not allowed for you, and may possibly be forbidden! People do not expect you to perform many permissible deeds, to say nothing of low unlawful deeds, which if you were to perform them, God forbid, people would form a bad opinion of Islam and of the clerical community.

The trouble is here: if the people witness your actions as contrary to what is expected, they become deviated from religion. They turn away from the clergy, not from just one person, and form a low opinion of just that person! But if they see an unbecoming action contrary to decorum on the part of a single cleric, they do not examine it and analyze it.

At the same time among businessmen there are unrighteousness and perverted people, and among office workers corruption and ugly deeds may be seen, so it is possible that among the clergy there may also be one or more impious or deviant persons. Hence, if a grocer does something wrong, it is said that such and such grocer is a wrongdoer. If a druggist is guilty of an ugly deed, it is said that such a druggist is an evildoer.

However, if a preacher performs an unbecoming act, it is not said that such and such a preacher is deviant, it is said that preachers are bad. The responsibilities of the learned are very heavy, the *'ulama* have more duties than other people. If you review the chapters related to the responsibilities of the *'ulama* in *Usul al-Kafi* and *Wasa'il*, 2 you will see how they describe the heavy responsibilities and serious obligation of the learned.

It is narrated that when the soul reaches the throat, there is no longer any chance for repentance and in that state one's repentance will not be accepted, although God accepts the repentance of the ignorant until the last minute of their lives. 3

In another narration it is reported that seventy sins will be forgiven of one who is ignorant before one sin

is forgiven of an *'alim*. 4 This is because the sin of an *'alim* is very harmful to Islam and to Islamic society.

If a vulgar and ignorant person commits a sin, he only wins misfortunes for himself. However, if an *'alim* becomes deviant, if he becomes involved in ugly deeds, he perverts an entire world (*'alam*). He has injured Islam and the *'ulama* of Islam. 5 There is also a narration according to which the people of hell suffer from the stench of an *'alim* whose deeds do not accord with his knowledge6

For this very reason, in this world there is a great difference between an *'alim* and an ignorant person with regard to benefit and injury to Islam and to the Islamic community. If an *'alim* is deviant, it is possible that the community will become infected by deviation. And if an *'alim* is refined, and he observes the morality and manners of Islam, he will refine and guide the community.

In some of the towns to which I went during the summer, I saw that the people of a town were well mannered with religious morals. The point is this, that they had an *'alim* who was righteous and pious. If an *'alim* who is pious and righteous lives in a community, town or state, his very existence will raise the refinement and guidance of the people of that realm, even if he does not verbally propagate and guide. 7

We have seen people whose existence causes lessons to be learned, merely seeing them and looking at them raises one's awareness. At present in Tehran, about which I have some information, the neighborhoods differ from one another. Neighborhoods in which a pure and refined *'alim* lives have righteous people with strong faith.

In another neighborhood where a corrupt deviant person wears the turban, and has become the prayer leader, and set up shop, you will see that the people there have been misled, and have been polluted and perverted. This is the same pollution from the stench which the evil *'alim*, the *'alim* without action, the perverted *'alim* has brought in this world, and the smell of it causes the people of hell to suffer.

It is not because something is added to him there, that which occurs to this *'alim* in the next world is something which has been prepared in this world. Nothing is given to us except that which we have done. If an *'alim* is corrupt and evil, he corrupts the society, although in this world we are not able to smell the stench of it. However, in the next world stench of it will be perceived. But a vulgar person is not able to bring such corruption and pollution into the Islamic society.

A vulgar person would never allow himself to proclaim that he was an Imam or the Mahdi, to proclaim himself a prophet, or to have received revelation. It is a corrupt *'alim* who corrupt the worlds: "if an *'alim* is corrupt, a world (*'alam*) is corrupted." 8

1. The Commander of the Faithful, Imam 'Ali, peace be upon him, said: When the Messenger of Allah, may the peace and blessings of Allah be with him and his progeny, sent me to Yemen, he said: O 'Ali! Do not fight against anyone until you invite him to Islam. I swear by Allah, if by your hand the Great and Almighty Allah may guide a man, then it is better for you than all that the sun rises upon or sets upon, and you are his wali (guardian). Al-Kafi, vol. 5, p. 36, "The Book of Struggle," "Section on Invitation to Islam Prior to Fighting," hadith 2.

2. Usul al-Kafi, “Book of the Virtue of Knowledge” [Kitab Fadl al-‘Ilm], Chapters: “bab sifat al-‘ulama,” “bab badh al-‘ilm,” “bab an-nahy ‘an al-qawl bi ghayr ‘ilm,” “bab isti‘mal al-‘ilm,” “bab al-musta’kil bi ‘ilmihi wal-mubahi bihi,” “bab luzum al-hujjah ‘ala’l-‘alim,” “bab an-nawadir,” and Wasa’il ash-Shi‘ah, vol. 18, pp. 9-17, 98-129, “kitab al-qada,” Chapters: “abwab sifat al-qadi,” bab 4, 11, 12.

3. Jamil ibn Durraj says that he heard from Imam as-Sadiq, peace be with him, that he said, “When the soul reaches here (and with his hand he pointed to his neck) for the learned there remains no further chance of repentance.” Then he recited this ayah: “The repentance of Allah is only for those who do evil in ignorance” (Q 4:17). Usul al-Kafi, vol. 1, p. 59, “The Book of the Virtue of Knowledge,” “Chapter on the Requirement for an ‘Alim to Bring Proof,” hadith 3.

4. Hafs ibn Qiyyas said that Imam as-Sadiq, peace be with him, said: “O Hafs! Seventy sins will be forgiven of an ignorant person before one sin is forgiven of an ‘alim.” Usul al-Kafi, vol. 1, p. 59, “The Book of the Virtue of Knowledge,” “Chapter on the Requirement for an ‘Alim to Bring Proof.”

5. The Prophet of Allah, may the peace and blessings of Allah be with him and his progeny, said, “There are two groups from my community such that if they are righteous then the community will be righteous, and if they are corrupt, then the community will become corrupt.” It was asked, “Who are they?” He replied, “The ‘ulama and the rulers.” Khisal [by Shaykh as-Saduq], The Second Chapter, p. 37; Tuhaf al-‘Uqul, p. 50.

6. [Sulaym ibn Qays Hilali said that he heard from the Commander of the Faithful, peace be with him, that he reported from the Prophet, that he said, “There are two kinds of ‘ulama, one who acts in accordance with his knowledge, so he has been saved, and the ‘alim who does not act in accordance with his knowledge, so he will perish. And truly the people of hell will suffer from thestench of the ‘alim who does not act in accordance with his knowledge.” Usul al-Kafi, vol. 1, p. 55, The Book of the Virtue of Knowledge, Chapter on the Application of Knowledge, hadith 1.

7. Imam as-Sadiq, peace be with him, said, “Invite the people to excellence, but not by your tongue, rather let people see in you right struggle [ijtihad], truthfulness and piety.”

8. Ghurar al-Hikam, vol. 7, p. 269.

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