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Three Ethical Pillars of Politics

By giving nobility and validity to ethics and with the belief in the oneness of ethics and politics, Imām Khomeinī (*r*) endeavored in the course of various admonitions to the employees and officials of the [Islamic] system, to present a portrayal of his ideal ethical politics, or in other words, the Islamic politics.

During the first decade of the Islamic Revolution in Iran it rarely happened that he did not emphasize, in his speeches and messages, the centrality of ethics in politics. In fact, this ethical view on politics is the continuation of the same tradition he had in his *Sharh-e Chehel Hadīth*—that is, reformation of the society is only possible through inner reformation and it is only through self-purification and constant supervision of the self that a righteous society can emerge and the foundation of authentic politics be laid down.

He used to point out to the statesmen on various occasions that every one has a 'Pharaoh' within him and there is a kind of dictatorship in one's inner self. But one should always be vigilant not to let this 'Pharaoh' acquire power and this dictator to gain in strength. All these emphases that man is always in the presence of God stem from his view on the place of ethics.

He used to enumerate innumerable moral attributes and qualities for the statesmen, and reckon them as requisites for ethical politics. Among them, we will selectively identify three features here and discuss them so as to find out the Imām's outlook on them. Of course, this choice does not imply inattention to the importance of other moral features of ethical politics; it is, rather, merely a selection among many other choices. These three features are as follows:

- Sincerity;
- Openness to criticism; and
- Simple living.

Sincerity

As a moral virtue, truthfulness [*sidqah*] has been always cherished and lauded among all the peoples throughout history. There is hardly a place where this virtue has been spoken of unfavourably.

When mentioning one of the prophets (*'a*), the Glorious Qur'an points to this same truthfulness as one of his characteristics, stating: ***"And make mention in the Scripture of Ishmael. Lo! He was a keeper of his promise* [*as-sidq al-wa'd*].***"*[494]

Similarly, the Glorious Qur'an identifies the truthful ones along with the prophets (*'a*).[495] But, what is truthfulness? Truthfulness means honesty but in reality it is beyond that. Truthfulness is the opposite of lying but it is the opposite of treachery as well. Indeed, truthfulness [*sidq*] and treachery [*khiyanah*] are diametrically in opposition to one another.[496]

In this sense, truthfulness is synonymous with trust [*amanah*]. Hence, truthfulness in politics means veracity, being honest with the people, abiding by contracts and promises, and trustworthiness. The truthful statesman is he who moves in the direction of truth and righteousness, for truthfulness [*sidq*] means concordance and harmony with the truth.[497]

The truthful statesman is true to his commitments, shows himself to the people as he really is, and refrains from any sort of deceit. Anyone who nourishes this moral quality and attribute in his self never exploits the people's confidence in him and is not afraid of acknowledging his mistakes. He views this [acknowledgment] not as a sign of weakness but as the result of self-confidence. The concept of truthfulness [*sidq*] itself embodies the meanings of uprightness, perseverance, tenacity, and power, and it is far higher than mere honesty. After a precise analysis of this term, Tuchihiko Izutsu says:

The term truthfulness [*sidq*] takes the implicit meanings of sincerity, perseverance, uprightness, and trust. As such, we encounter so many cases of the real function of the term *sidq* in the Glorious Qur'an as well as in other places all of which can never satisfactorily be substituted by the word 'truthfulness'.[498]

The broader meaning of the word, *sadiq*, in the lexicon of the Qur'an is such that at times it is used in contradistinction to the words *munafiq* [hypocrite] and *kafir* [disbeliever].[499]

Well, the truthfulness that is discussed in politics is this general meaning of the term. Therefore, the truthful politician should possess all these qualities in order to be deemed ethical. In the practical aspect this truthfulness goes to the extent of the politician regarding himself as the servant of the people—not their administrator—and wherever he commits a mistake, he fearlessly and courageously expresses it.

So, if we had committed a mistake before, then we should explicitly say that we erred. Deviation [*'udal*]

among the jurists [*fuqah*] from one edict [*fatw*] to another has exactly the same meaning… The jurists of the Council of Guardians[500] [*Sh*r*–ye Nigahb*n*] and members of the Supreme Judicial Council[501] [*Sh*r*–ye ‘*l*–ye Qaday*] should also be like this so that, in case they erred in any matter, they should say so categorically and recant their views; we are, after all, not infallible.

Before the Revolution I used to imagine that once the Revolution triumphed there were pious people who would do the works in accordance with Islam… Later I found out that it was not so; most of them were impious individuals. I realized that what I had said was not true, and so I explicitly announced that I had made a mistake.[502]

According to the Im m, therefore, confession of one's mistake, apart from not being considered a flaw, is a value and a form of the politician's truthfulness in relation to himself as well as to others.

Karl Popper[503] describes his ideal democracy in the following manner: At the time of the election campaign, instead of enumerating the list of his accomplishments the candidate for a seat in the parliament courageously announces that the previous year he has discovered thirty–one mistakes committed by him, and has tried to compensate for thirteen mistakes while his election rival has only discerned twenty–seven of his mistakes.[504]

That is, it is a value in itself that the politician, before letting others find out his mistakes, himself, steps forward, and dauntlessly and truthfully enumerates his own faults one by one. From the Im m's viewpoint dictatorship starts when man commits an error and after realizing it, instead of admitting and rectifying it he importunately sticks to it and continues with his crooked ways.

You mention an issue and in case you realize that it is a mistake, you are ready to say that you erred, you committed a mistake, or you want the same mistake to be carried out to the end. Among the corruptions that dictatorship has and with which the dictator is afflicted, is that he opens a subject and then he cannot, that is, he has no power over himself that this subject he has opened if it is against expediency… He cannot renounce his statement… This is the greatest dictatorship with which man is afflicted.[505]

From this aspect, admitting one's fault, apart from not being a sign of weakness, is a sign of power over one's self and occasions one's greatness and increase in popularity. "If you realize that you have erred in something, you must admit it. This confession of yours makes you great in the eyes of the nation; not that it humiliates you. Persisting in one's mistake greatly debases a person."[506]

Hence, confession of one's fault which is the result of truthfulness is a human virtue and excellence and is considered a manifestation of ethical politics. Thus, the Im m emphatically says:

You should know and do know that man is not free from fault and error. As soon as you commit a

mistake, turn away from it and admit it. In this lies human perfection, whereas justifying and persisting in a wrong action is a defect and the work of Satan.[507]

The point worthy of consideration is that some politicians think that if they express their faults, the people's confidence in them will diminish and the people will think them to be incapable. So, instead of admitting their faults they prefer to cover them with yet another mistake, and under the excuse of preserving the people's confidence and by relying on them they commit other errors. But the answer to this illusion is that the justification itself, in the words of the Imām, is of the guiles and tricks of Iblīs (Satan) and is considered as part of the defense mechanism of internally inept individuals in avoiding facing the truth.

On the other hand, people's confidence itself stems from truthfulness and does not exist absolutely; rather, it depends on the observance of truthfulness and sincere practices of the politicians. Once the people notice a degree of untruthfulness in them, their confidence in them diminishes twofold. Confidence is, indeed, a tree that matures and grows by means of the water of truthfulness of the rulers, and dries up by their lies and untruthfulness. So, one cannot rely too much on the withered confidence since it is fragile and, in the words of Bertolt Brecht,[508] "People's confidence wanes once it is relied upon."[509]

The confidence of the people is no excuse for the rulers to commit mistakes and take refuge in it. It is, in reality, a kind of emotional reserve which should always be augmented and not spent indiscriminately and without any backing.

A truthful politician is one who remains in the political sphere so long as he feels that he is useful. But whenever and for whatever reason he feels that he can no longer perform his duties, then, instead of continuing with his previous ways and concealing his impotency, he relinquishes his responsibility heroically. In doing so, he adds another golden page in his record and places another virtue alongside his other ones.

Anytime anybody feels that he is inadequate for whatever position he holds—be it inadequacy in management or will-power—he should, with courage and dignity, submit his resignation to the competent authorities which is, in itself, a pious and devotional act.[510]

Therefore, truthfulness is not a mere individual moral virtue. Rather, it is a social and political value and has various facets. The truthful politician presents himself to the people as he really is; he knows himself, his capabilities well and makes proper use of them. He talks to the people truthfully and fulfills his commitments. Just as he views political tasks and activities as values, in times of necessity he views resignation as a value as well. He tries not to commit a mistake. Once he commits a mistake, instead of concealing or justifying it, which is itself another mistake, he courageously admits it. He regards this as an indication of the greatness of his soul and the reason for his courage; not weakness and lethargy.

Openness to criticism

The truth of the matter is that we have dual attitudes with respect to the term ‘criticism’. We like it and regard openness to criticism a kind of perfection and value, while at the same time we are very afraid of it. So, usually we invite our friends to criticize us and our actions.

But we immediately put up a shield against the flood of criticisms and reject them one by one in various ways. For this purpose we usually first make it clear as to what type of criticism we wish to face.

Through the addition of such modifiers as ‘constructive’, ‘guidance-giving’, ‘reformative’ and the like, we specify the type of criticism we have in mind.

Finally, if the criticism leveled against us was not to our liking, we practically neutralize its effect and protect our personality through the use of such clichés as bias of the critic, weakening motive, falsity of the criticism, and others.

An anecdote of this type of facing criticism and reacting to it calls to mind the story of man who, pretending to be a champion, went to a tattooist and asked him to tattoo his shoulder with the image of a lion. As the tattooist started his work, the man became restless due to the intensity of the pain of the needles that penetrated his body. He asked the tattooist which part of the lion he was tattooing. He replied that he had started from the tail. The ‘champion’ said that there was no need for the tail and that he should start with another part. The tattooist started again from the other part, but the pain persisted. Again the question was asked and the answer was that he had started from the mane. Again the request of the ‘champion’ was to abandon the mane and to start with another part. These questions and answers, and complaints about the pain thus continued until finally the tattooist got angry over this situation, flung the needles to the ground and said:

شیر بی دمّ و سر و اشکم که دید اینچنین شیری خدا هم نافرید

Who (*ever*) *saw a lion without tail and head and belly?*
God Himself did not create a lion like this.[511]

Our attitude toward criticism is more than this. We welcome criticism and sometimes insist on it. But once we experience its sting, we evade from it and in order to cover up our evasion, we assign various labels to it. We brand it as the venting of complexes, vengeance, accusation, and injustice.

This duality in words and in deeds is so vivid to obviate the need for description. Criticism is looked upon as a gift in our religious culture, and to present an ‘offering of faults’ is deemed a value and, at times, a duty so much so that Imām as-Ṣādiq (*‘a*) says: “The most beloved of my brothers is he who presents me an offering of my faults.”[512]

However, in cultures, there is practically nothing worse than criticism and unethical than criticizing, the reason being that we try not to criticize and, in case we have no alternative, we strive to make it very mild and practically ineffective; while leveling it apologetically and reticently. Even then, instead of thanks, an immediate storm of wrath, calumny and misunderstanding confronts us in that motive, purpose, malice, envy, and the like have compelled us to make this criticism. In short, criticism is not welcome in our culture.

Nevertheless, the truth must be accepted that, in life, we cannot escape from criticism. Even supposing that we promise ourselves not to criticize anybody and to be true to our commitments, we cannot prevent the flood of criticisms of others to be cast on ourselves. So, another option must be sought and our view on criticism be changed since there is no absolute way of eliminating criticism. “The reality is that so long as you have relations with others, that is, so long as you are alive, you will hear criticism and need it.”[513]

This fact is more vivid in the political arena and political function is always subject to criticism. Therefore, anyone who enters the political arena must learn how to confront criticisms and make good use of them. Criticism, particularly in the political arena, is the most basic channel of communication between the citizens and government officials, and through which they realize the effectiveness or otherwise of their policies and their repercussions. As such, criticisms are a mirror in which the politicians see the impact of their actions and the strengths and weaknesses thereof.

In spite of this, individuals and organizations practically dodge criticism and see it as a personal attack on them. Consequently, in most cases, instead of accepting the purport of criticism they rebut it in a sense and consider it unfair. It is because criticism is undertaken on the presumption that the characteristic, attitude, action, or speech of the person being subjected to criticism is not correct. This for some means bringing into question their entire existence and the shattering of their personalities.

As if to say the critic has come to wage war against the personality of the person being criticized and he, in turn, has no alternative but to fight and protect his integrity. The reason for this is that the nature of man is such that he deems himself, his attitude and intellect as perfect and flawless. In as much as it is possible for anybody not to complain about the scarcities in his life, it has, however, not been seen for a person to whine over his own imperfection and lack of intelligence. Sa‘dī describes this mental condition in this manner:

همه‌کس را عقل‌خود به کمال‌نماید وفرزند خودبه جمال.

Everyone thinks his own wisdom perfect and his child beautiful.[514]

Then, he slyly concludes:

گر ازبسیط زمین‌عقل منعدم‌گردد به خودگمان نبردهیچ کس که‌نادانم

If wisdom were to cease throughout the world,
No one would suspect himself of ignorance.[515]

Descartes,[516] the French philosopher, describes this state in a satirical manner thus: “Among the people intellect has been divided better than anything else, although every person thinks he has such a complete portion of it that the people who are hard to please in anything, do not wish to have an intellect more than they already possess.”[517]

This is the reason why everybody, immediately upon hearing a criticism, imagines that his wisdom and intellect has been insulted, and so he tries to dispel this insult through the use of weapons and answer his critic or rival; the beginning of the fall of man from the ethical aspect being this very attitude. As was discussed before, man is a mixture of good and bad dispositions and is in need of inner nourishment and spiritual purification. Therefore, apart from not being fearful of criticism anyone yearning for perfection also seeks it earnestly.

Dodging criticism means claiming perfection and flawlessness; this is peculiar only to God. Anyone with such pretensions is claiming partnership with God and, as a result will, all at once, be expelled from His Presence. It is through this approach that the Im□m admonishes thus:

Nobody, no establishment and no individual can claim, ‘I have no defect whatsoever.’ If one claimed so, his gravest flaw then, is this very claim. No one can say, ‘I have no flaw anymore ...’ We do not have a flawless one in this world. We should always pay attention to these flaws of ours.[518]

Basically, from the viewpoint of the Im□m anyone who is in pursuit of advancement and perfection should be pessimistically and critically in search of his flaws and faults, and not see what virtues he has. In our ethics and ethical literature it is propounded that man should refrain from critical observation and should have an optimistic view of others. Hence, H□fiz says:

کمال سرّ محبت ببین نه نقصِ گناه که هر که بی هنر افتد، نظر به عیب کند

Look well with love, and not at the filth of sin.
He who is artless (*always*) *looks at the defects* (*of others*).[519]

But this issue is different from the one we are currently discussing. The first issue is that we should refrain from pessimistic and critical views on others while the other issue is that we should judiciously, critically and meticulously evaluate ourselves. This is not only ethical, but also a requisite for man's growth and perfection.

In the view of the Guardian of the Pious and Commander of the Faithful ['Al ibn Ab T&lib] (*'a*) one of the attributes of the pious is that they always indict and scrupulously call themselves to account. According to Karen Harney, a contemporary psychoanalyst,

As long a person is proud of a certain state, propensity and attribute, and considers them as virtues, it is natural for him not only to exert no efforts for their elimination, but also, because he feels himself worthy due to them, he defends it and tries to preserve them.[520]

Thus, the first condition for seeking perfection is that man should consciously strive for his exaltation, and critically assess himself.

The man who would like to work for God and reach the station of humanity should constantly be in pursuit of uncovering his own shortcomings. He should not be after identifying his virtues. As a person wants to know his faults, it might make him think of eliminating them, while being in pursuit of finding out his virtues veils his eyes by which he cannot see his faults.[521]

In this manner, offering criticisms constitutes the grounds for the growth of individuals, particularly the politicians who seek to secure the interests of the public.

Another point is that reforming the society is basically dependent on making criticisms and their assessment. So as to know whether the state organizations are functioning properly, or have had shortcomings at times, everybody should put forth whatever criticism he has to offer and, in doing so, participate in the reformation of the society.

Hence, from the Im m's viewpoint, "There should be criticism; without criticism a society cannot be reformed. This is also true with faults. Man is defective from head to foot and these defects must be stated. Criticisms must be stated so as to reform the society."[522]

It is true that the nature of man is such that he does not like being criticized. But if man goes beyond the level of instincts and nurtures himself, he welcomes criticisms with open arms no matter how acrimonious and harsh they may be. "If man builds himself, he will not dislike a peasant criticizing him. He does not dislike it at all. He does not mind being criticized."[523]

In spite of this, since most men have not yet reached this extent of perfection to welcome criticism and take advantage of it, they have an inappropriate attitude toward it and prevent it in various ways. The

totality of these reactions that the individual shows in protecting himself against the reality of criticism can be classified under the general heading of 'defense mechanisms'. "Defense mechanisms are unconscious strategies through which the person preserves himself from the more unmerciful aspects of reality."[524]

Thus, when facing the bitter reality of criticism man engages in self-deception. Through falsification of reality and ignorance in relation to it, he conceals the reality from himself. If this act happens rarely it is perhaps admissible. But if man, particularly in the political arena, makes it a habit of always adopting one of these mechanisms vis-à-vis criticisms, it is then that his relation to reality is completely severed and he will pass his days in the cocoon of his illusions.

Some of these defense mechanisms, which, unfortunately, most of the people including the politicians utilize, are the rejection of criticism, reading the critic's motive, corresponding criticism, humiliating the critic, coining justification, belittling the criticism, evasion and reversion, blaming others, and classifying criticisms as 'constructive' or 'destructive'.

Sometimes, in facing the criticism against him, the person denies the basis of criticism and deems it a calumny. At other times, instead of reflecting on the concept of criticism and its acceptance, he tries to uncover the treacherous motive of the critic, defaming him and proving that the critique stems from the malevolence and bad faith of the critic. Sometimes also, instead of answering the criticism the person reciprocally criticizes the critic and answers blow by blow.

On occasion, he humiliates the critic and does not consider him to be qualified to offer criticism. Every so often instead of sincerely acknowledging the criticism he reckons it a trivial and worthless issue, needing no investigation at all. Sometimes, he becomes furious and since his worth has remained unrecognized and his kindness has been reciprocated with criticism, he is offended and is indignant of the 'ungrateful' people. At times, he attributes to his critic whatever is in his own heart as well as his motives and ideas, and unbelievingly thinks of him based on his own religion.

Occasionally, he acknowledges the basis of criticism but instead of assuming his accountability in this context, he blames the circumstances and time, and shows himself as being entirely innocent. Finally, he sometimes classifies any criticism as constructive or destructive, true or false, justifiable or unjustifiable. These mental classifications relieve him of acknowledging the criticism and reforming himself, and he leaves the matter unsolved.

All the above mechanisms are, in reality, the promptings of the carnal self and delusions of Satan. They are the curtains that blind the truth-seeing eyes of man, prevent him from understanding himself correctly and impede his growth and perfection. Anyone wanting to enter the arena of politics and ethically practicing it should listen sincerely to all criticism, evaluate it dispassionately and utilize it for his reformation.

He should not adopt any of the aforementioned mechanisms, and instead of classifying criticism as

proper or not, should entertain every criticism and make good use of it for his development. It was with this view that Imām, in addressing Dr. ‘Alī Akbar Wilāyatī, the then Foreign Minister, said: “You and our friends in the Foreign Ministry should bear criticism, whether justified or not.”[525]

In this context, Imām goes to the extent of saying that, basically, criticism from the enemy should be heard and heeded. It is because friends are usually indifferent to our flaws, and even if they do notice, they do not mention them. So, for us friends are not good teachers; whereas our enemies who inconsiderately notice our shortcomings and mention them unsparingly—albeit with spiteful motives—can be our best teachers. Therefore, that man should not only expect criticism from friend and foe alike, but should also be prepared to receive and solicit it from everybody.

Man should come to a person who is his enemy and see what his judgment on him is so as to enable him to realize his faults. He cannot learn from his own friends; he should learn from his enemies. When he says something, he should know what the enemies say and should think that the enemies understand his faults. Although you and I might have flaws, friends…say: ‘How eloquently you delivered your speech!’… Man’s friends are his real enemies while his enemies are his real friends. Man should learn from those who find his faults. He should know that those who extol him, this tongue, the tongue that admires an affair which is supposed to be criticized, is the very tongue of Satan.[526]

Therefore, from the viewpoint of the Imām one of the fundamental values and pillars of ethical politics is the element of the politicians’ openness to criticism. As far as they can, they should make use of the enemies even for understanding their own flaws and treat them as their own teachers. This element of openness to criticism not only leads to the spiritual loftiness of the politicians but also makes them more successful in the political arena. It is because they will recognize better the strength and weakness of their own actions, and on the basis of the criticisms that have been expressed they can reform their own policy and give direction to it.

Besides, the channels of communication between them and the people will remain open. Indeed, these criticisms, however bitter they are, are the best expression and exhibition of the people’s notions on the political practices of the politicians. If a politician is responsibly in pursuit of improving his own practice and function, he should regard their existence as booty and make use of them for the reformation of the society. The existence of criticism, from the Imām’s viewpoint, makes the concerned officials perform each of their duties and no one would go beyond the ambit of their prerogatives.

In other words, the existence of the spirit of criticism and openness to criticism hinders the growth of dictatorship. “If I did something wrong, all of you would rush to say, ‘Why are you doing this?’ [Thus] I will sit in my own place (I will perform my duty properly). All of you are responsible; all of us are responsible.”[527]

It is possible for some people to imagine that criticism is incompatible with compliance and wherever

criticism is offered the pillars of compliance are weakened. Because of this, criticism must be avoided as far as possible especially in religious governance. This notion is based on the proposition that compliance implies blind allegiance and adherence, whereas criticism connotes noticing and mentioning faults and defects. In answer to this notion it should be stated that in Islamic governance there is no place for absolute compliance.

Compliance must be conscious and based on accountability. Every citizen is duty-bound to comply with the authority while at the same time he is obliged to check its deviation. The Imām's slogan, 'All of you are responsible; all of us are responsible,' refers to this point. In reality this saying is a paraphrase of the statement of the Most Noble Messenger (*s*) who said: "All of you are responsible and you will be asked about the things you have been in charge of."[528]

Thus, we cannot speak of unrestrained, unconditional and absolute compliance in the political arena and prevent criticism from being made. The consequences of whatever happens in the Islamic society involve both the citizens and rulers. So, all are equal and accountable with respect to social responsibilities. It is from this perspective that *Shahīd* Mutahharī says: "Laudable and legitimate imitation does not mean allegiance and turning a blind eye. It is opening the eyes and being watchful. Otherwise, it is accountability and participation in crime and sin."[529] He goes beyond this point and believes, "Islam does not allow for deafness and abstention from sin for anybody even for the person of the Most Noble Messenger (*s*)."[530] Then, in a bid to express his opinion he narrates the story of Hadrat Mūsā (*'a*) and a pious servant who, based on our tradition, has been identified as Prophet Khidr (*'a*), and concludes:

The story of Moses and the pious servant which has been mentioned in the Holy Qur'an is an amazing one.[531] One point of the story that can be utilized is that the follower and adherent is submissive, obedient and compliant so long as he does not break and violate the principles, bases and law. If he notices that the act of obedience is performed contrary to the principles and bases, he cannot remain silent… Why did Moses not remain patient and kept on objecting although he would promise and suggest himself not to object, and again kept on raising objections and criticizing? Moses' fault was not in objecting and criticizing. It was because he was not conscious of the absolute secret and essence of actions… Some have said that if the practice of the pious servant is repeated up to the Day of Resurrection, Moses will also not cease objections and protestations.[532]

Basically, if one day criticism and openness to criticism is to be forgotten on the excuse of obedience, the Islamic society will experience a crisis and all will become afflicted with irreparable flaws. As such, Mutahharī strongly emphasizes the necessity for criticism at all levels: "I did and do believe that every non-infallible position which is not liable to criticism is dangerous to the holder of the position as well as to Islam."[533]

Hence, obedience and compliance with the religious rule and following the authorities do not imply

indifference to their policies and non-criticism.

Of course, undoubtedly, there are individuals who use criticism as a means of settling their personal accounts, and instead of criticizing they are actually taking revenge. There are also those who, in the name of criticism give vent to their inner complexes as well as those who, again in the name of criticism, intend disgracing others. But nothing can justify improper behaviour of politicians toward these people and such criticisms. Here we are facing two separate issues. One is those who take unfair advantage of the weapon of criticism.

By way of advice, the Imۀm emphasizes to such people that the language of criticism should be polite and courteous, and it is in this context that he says, “If they have criticism, they should have a brotherly criticism; it should be prudent and sensible.”[534]

Or he stresses that the language of admonition is different from that of disgracing individuals. “The language of admonition is different from the language of disgracing and damaging the reputation [of others].”[535] From the viewpoint of the Imۀm as a neutral observer, most of the criticisms made in the political arena and encountered by politicians stem from resentment, self-love and injustice, and they cannot be doubted.

But the second issue is that none of these realities can be the grounds for the politicians to evade criticisms or to decide on determining which criticism is justified or not; in good faith or hostile. It is because his nature will persuade him in a bid to preserve his personality and prevent its destruction, to reject whatever he does not accept as done in bad faith, destructive, detrimental, unfair, and the like. Thus, in order to distinguish the honest from the spurious from among the criticisms, we need a third party, which is actually the public opinion. The politician performs his task while the critic criticizes. It is the duty of the politician to listen to criticism and to heed it as much as possible. But with regard to their correctness or otherwise, it is the public opinion that determines and classifies them.

In the final analysis, from the Imۀm’s viewpoint openness to criticism is among the human perfections. It draws man from the existential sphere of instinct and egoism to the status of the lofty and God-loving human being, and obliterates his flaws.

This is due to the fact that the God-loving man removes his weaknesses by means of these criticisms and makes good use of this effective tool. Instead of asking for the basis of criticism he pays attention to its spirit, and it is in this context that he is grateful for the criticisms of his enemies and considers them as his sympathetic teachers. This kind of attitude calls to mind a story that Mawlۀnۀ narrates: Contrary to convention, a preacher would pray for his enemies every time he ascended the pulpit. Because the people found fault with this practice—of his praying for the bad ones in place of the good ones,

گفت: نیکویی از اینها دیده ام من دعاشان زین سبب بگزیده ام

خُبث و ظلم و جور چندان ساختند که مرا از شر به خیر انداختند

He replied, "I have seen (*experienced*) *goodness from these folk:*
For this reason I have chosen to pray for them.
They wrought so much wickedness and injustice and oppression
That they cast (*drove*) *me forth from evil into good.*[536]

We will read a more explicit one in the poem of Ab Hayyn Andalus, an Arab poet, who considers himself beholden by, and debtor to, his own enemies, deems their existence as necessary, and says:

عِداي لهمفضلٌ عليّ ومنّةُ فلاذهبالرحمن منىالا عاديا

هُم بحثواعن زلّتيفاجتنبتها وهم نافسونىفاكتسبتالمعاليا

For me enemies are favour and grace.
O God, take not these enemies from me.
They are so painstakingly in search of my slip.
Thus, I evaded it.
And they are in competition with me.
As an outcome, I attained excellent qualities.[537]

Therefore, instead of wasting time in finding out the motive of the critic and adopting the unscrupulous defense mechanisms, it is better for us to consider every type of criticism as a favour, blessing and in the words of Imm as-Sdiq (*'a*) a gift, and to benefit from it in the political arena.

Simple living

Simple living in the individual's life is a moral virtue. But in the political arena and for the Islamic statesmen, it is, apart from this, a political necessity. What is meant by simple living is what has been referred to in our religious culture as *zuhd* [asceticism].

Of course, throughout history this term has been laden with negative connotations and usually the term *zhid* [ascetic] gives the impression of a disheveled man, impudent, crowd-evading, anti-social, reclusive, narrow-minded, and without activity. Even now, if one is asked to describe a *zhid* man, most

probably he will describe him in this manner: a thin and pale person, clothed in a patched garment, wearing disheveled hair, dirty body, detached from social responsibilities, indifferent toward the fate of his fellow human beings, and lurking in the corner of prosperity.

Although this notion is not much to our liking, numerous historical testimonies affirm it. The truth of the matter is that *zuhd* at the advent of Islam, and in the words of the Infallibles (*'a*) was described in a certain manner while in the our Sufi culture, it has been expressed in yet another fashion, which is actually a metamorphosis of the real meaning and function of this term.

Negative Asceticism

Here, in order to substantiate these remarks, we will first mention instances of what have been introduced as asceticism and ascetic. Then, we will deal with the correct and original conception of this term. They said to D□w□d at-T□'□ who was one of the disheveled Sufis and notable ascetics, "Comb the end part of [your] beard." He said, "Have I remained disengaged that I should do it?"[538]

Of course, the occupation of D□w□d was not of the social occupations. Rather, it was a sort of ecstasy. A part of *K□my□-ye Sa'□dat* [*The Alchemy of Happiness*] is allocated to asceticism and its etiquette such as indigence and seclusion. It is mentioned therein that there was someone who said to D□w□d at-T□'□, "Give me a piece of advice."

He said, "Keep aloof from the world of all-embracing subsistence and the people until the time of death, just as they run away from the lion."[539]

Likewise, al-Ghazz□l□ narrates, "Sa'd ibn al-Waqq□s and Sa'□d ibn az-Zayd who were among the great Companions lived near Medina. It was a place which they called 'Aq□q; they did not use to attend the Friday,[540] and they did nothing else until they died there."[541]

Similarly, the ascetics would think of marriage as one of the signs of non-asceticism and the cause for attachment to the world. So, most of them refrained from it and preferred a bachelor's life to it. According to these ascetics, seclusion and indigence was superior to social life and wealth. The dispute of Sa'd□ with a claimant on the issue of riches and mendicancy is an exquisite attempt to express the logic of those who view indigence as superior to fortune, which is very interesting.[542]

This anti-social and narrow-minded approach of the ascetics has taken an extensive form in our literature and has been subjected to severe criticism. According to these men of letters ascetics are clad in wool, hollow persons, intolerable, insensible, idle, self-indulgent, pretentious, and worthless who, wearing sackcloth and wool, seek to gain a reputation for themselves. In reality, they have portrayed

asceticism as a snare of guile. For instance, H□fiz says:

پشمینه‌پوش تندخو، از عشق نشنیده است بو

از مستاش رمزی بگو تا ترک هوشیاری کند

The wool-clad hot-tempered has not heard of love;
Talk to him of its (*love's*) *intoxication that he would abandon soberness.*[543]

Likewise, according to H□fiz these people wear patched and mended clothes as a symbol of asceticism, and keep their sleeves short as a sign of simplicity and abstinence from luxury. But all of these are tricks to deceive the people:

به زیر دلق ملمّع کمندها دارند دراز دستی این کوته آستینان بین

There are tricks under the patched-clothes;
See how deceitful the short-sleeve wearers are.[544]

Sa'd□ also narrates a wholesome story concerning this which is very interesting:

An ascetic was the guest of a king. He was invited for a dinner. He ate less than what he wanted to take, and since the time for prayer had come, he prayed more than what he used to do…As he returned to his place, he again asked for the spreadsheet of food so as to eat. He had a son… He said, 'O father, have you not eaten at the invitation of the sultan?' He said: [According to him] I have eaten nothing that would be useful. [The king said: 'Perform also the compensatory prayer as I have performed nothing that would be useful.'][545]

Mawl□n□ who was one of the great mystics and ascetics of his time also mentions, bitterly and disparagingly, the ascetics and their narrow-mindedness. In the course of the story of an ascetic who had intrusively broken the jug of wine of an emir and had then run away, Mawl□n□ narrates the story thus in the words of the ascetic's neighbors who had come to intercede on his behalf:]

اوچهداندامرِمعروفازسگی طالبِمعروفناستوشهرگی

تا بدین سالوس خود را جا کند تا به چیزی خویشتن پیدا کند

کو ندارد خود هنر الاّ همان که تسلّس میکند با این و آن

What should he know about enjoining (*others*) *to do right?*
He is currishly seeking notoriety and fame,
In order that by means of this hypocrisy he may make a position for himself
And somehow make himself conspicuous;
For in truth he has no talent save this alone,
That he plays the hypocrite[546] *to all and sundry*[547].[548]

At any rate, much has been said about asceticism and ascetic in our mystic and critical literature which we shall pass over. The only important point is that from this perspective, ascetics have not been quite popular. Nowadays, asceticism in this sense is also not acceptable. It is enough for us to imagine that one day all the people of the society decide to become ascetics. That is, family units would disintegrate, social life would be deranged; economic activity would stagnate; everyone would be heading toward the mountains and jungles, lurking in the corner of prosperity, and in pursuit of managing his own affairs.

Undoubtedly, asceticism in this sense is not only unethical at the individual level but also a defect, and in the political arena, it is baseness and a source of societal backwardness. Then, what is meant by asceticism and simple living which has been much mentioned in the speeches of the Infallible Ones (*'a*) and which Im□m Khomein□ also used to repeat so often while addressing the government officials?

Positive Asceticism

Here, in order to present a correct picture of the ideal Islamic asceticism, we will state its features and facets in the course of some questions and answers:

What is asceticism?

By citing reference in the Holy Qur'an, Im□m 'Al□ (*'a*), who was among the pioneering figures of asceticism during his time, describes asceticism in this manner:

The whole of asceticism is confined between two expressions of the Qur'an. Allah, the Glorified, says: ***That ye grieve not for the sake of that which hath escaped you, nor yet exult because of that which hath been given***.[549]

Whoever does not grieve over what he misses and does not revel over what comes to him, acquires asceticism from both its sides.[550]

As such, asceticism has no relation whatsoever to indigence and mendicancy. Asceticism is a psychological state and a sort of inner freedom. In this respect, the ascetic is one who remains so even if he is affluent and if he loses all his possessions, he will not look back on his past and fret about it.

He is such a master of himself that if he were given the whole world, he would still not lose nor forget himself. In fact, asceticism is a sort of mastery and control over oneself and regulation of one's emotions. In this sense, not only can an indigent man not be an ascetic; but, in order for one to know whether he is an ascetic or not, he should have wealth.

The indigent man has nothing to lose. We can only speak about asceticism when one has wealth and then lose it but is still able to preserve and maintain his spiritual mastery. Imām 'Alī (*'a*) who so describes asceticism, though he led an ascetic life, was a productive person, and even during the time of his caliphate and amidst all his engagements and worries, he never gave up his economic activities.

Throughout his life, he worked just like other laborers did, but not for himself, rather for pious purposes. On the very day that the people swore their allegiance to him, he took his spade and pick-axe in hand and went to finish a job he was doing. He was digging a well, digging it with his own hands. And to whom were congratulations to be extended when water sprung forth? He said that congratulations were to be given to those who would inherit this and asked that he be brought a pen and paper so that there and then he could dedicate the well to pious purposes.[551]

Therefore, asceticism has no direct bearing on indigence. Asceticism implies freedom from want, not dependency and parasitism. A beggar who desires riches is not an ascetic. But a wealthy man who has no attachment to his wealth is an ascetic. As such, asceticism means to use amenities as needed and not beyond that. Asceticism connotes enjoyment of the blessings to attain goals, and not making blessings the goals. In this sense, asceticism is the opposite of lavishness. But, "Lavishness is something that the people are in quest for, even though they may have the least need for it."[552]

Is asceticism abstention from the blessings?

Well, some have thought that asceticism means abstention from the blessings and legitimate enjoyments and imagined that the ascetic is he who refrains from eating, drinking and wearing clothes except what is needed for survival. The story of Sufyān ath-Thawrī, the ascetic who found fault with Imām as-Ṣādiq (*'a*) for wearing a beautiful garment, is expressive of this wrong view on asceticism. With this same

thinking, ‘Asim ibn Ziyād al-Hārithī abandoned his wife and child, retreated to a corner, closed his eyes to all the divine favours, and considered all these acts as values. But Imām ‘Alī (*‘a*) rescued him from his wrong conception, viewing it as the result of Satanic inculcations and said to him: “Do you believe that if you use those things which Allah has made lawful for you, He will dislike you?”[553]

In refuting this inadmissible notion, the Holy Qur’an states: *“Say: Who hath forbidden the adornment of Allah which He hath brought forth for His bondmen, and the good things of His providing? Say: Such will be only for those who believed during the life of the world.”*[554] Similarly, the Qur’an emphatically urges the believers to be pure and smart and thus commands them: *“Look to your adornment at every place of worship, and eat and drink, but be not prodigal.”*[555]

Basically, from this perspective refraining from eating and drinking cannot be considered a value. The believers are well-groomed, and they eat and drink commensurate to their vital needs. What has been forbidden to them is extravagance, and in today’s jargon, ‘wasting the favours of God,’ and not ‘depriving oneself of the favours.’ A cursory glance at the lives of the Infallible Ones (*‘a*) illustrates this approach.

The Most Noble Messenger (*s*) was so fond of applying perfume that he would skip his supper so as to procure his needed perfume. If perfume was not at his disposal, he would soak the perfumed scarf of his wife and rub his face with it so as to be perfumed. Likewise, before going out he would always look at himself in the mirror or water, and groom himself to such an extent as to always be an embodiment of adornment and dressing well. He would apply so much perfume that his beard had turned white as a result.[556]

Well, this has been the tradition and way of the true ascetics. Now, let us compare it with that of Dāwūd at-Tā’ī who used to assert that he had not enough time to comb or trim his disheveled beard, or with that of the other (person) who was pleased with the lousiness of his clothes, or that of another, that is, Mālik ibn Dīnār who claimed to have not eaten meat for twenty years, about which he was proud, saying: “I do not know the meaning of the statement that if a man does not eat meat for forty days, his intelligence is diminished. I have not eaten meat for twenty years and my intelligence increases every day.”[557] Apparently, it refers to a *hadīth* attributed to the Most Noble Messenger (*s*) which states: “Whoever would not eat meat for forty days, the call to prayer [*azān*] should be recited again near his ear.”

Another story is narrated about this Mālik which, if assumed to be true, not only does not confirm any value for him, but is also incompatible with the indisputable principles of religion. The story is as follows:

For forty years he [Mālik] lived in Basrah and never ate fresh dates. When the season of ripe dates came around he would say, ‘People of Basrah, behold, my belly has not shrunk from not eating them, and you who eat them daily—your bellies have not become any larger.’ After forty years he was assailed by a mood of restlessness. However hard he tried, he could not withstand the craving for fresh dates. Finally after some days, during which the desire daily increased while he constantly denied his appetite,

he could resist no more the importunity of his carnal soul.
‘I will not eat fresh dates,’ he protested. ‘Either kill me, or die!’
That night a heavenly voice spoke.
‘You must eat some dates. Free your carnal soul from bondage.’
At this response his carnal soul, finding the opportunity, began to shout.
‘If you want dates,’ M□lik said, ‘fast for a week without breakfasting once, and pray all night. Then I will give you some.’
This contented his carnal soul. For a whole week he prayed all night and fasted all day. Then he went to the market and bought some dates, and betook himself to the mosque to eat them. A boy shouted from the rooftop.
‘Father! A Jew has bought dates and is going to the mosque to eat them.’
‘What business has a Jew in the mosque?’ the man exclaimed. And he ran to see who the Jew might be. Beholding M□lik, he fell at his feet.
‘What were those words the boy uttered?’ M□lik demanded.
‘Excuse him, master,’ the boy’s father pleaded. ‘He is only a child, and does not understand. In our quarter many Jews live. We are constantly fasting, and our children see the Jews eating by day. So they suppose that everyone who eats anything by day is a Jew. What he said he said in ignorance. Forgive him!’
When M□lik heard this, a fire consumed his soul. He realized that the child was inspired to speak as he had.
‘Lord God,’ he cried, ‘I had not eaten any dates, and Thou didst call me a Jew by the tongue of an innocent child. If I eat the dates, Thou wilt proclaim me an unbeliever. By Thy glory, if I ever eat any dates!’[558]

Obviously, it was the hidden voice which had been making fun of him. Besides, day and night fasting for seven whole days, even though it is possible, is certainly forbidden [*har□m*] and can be considered an ‘uninterrupted fasting’ [*r□zeh–ye wis□l*], which Islam has sternly prohibited.

Anyway, we have plenty of similar stories. But no matter what we call them, we cannot regard them as asceticism that is one of the teachings of the Infallibles (*‘a*). The Messenger of God (*s*) as well as other Infallibles (*‘a*) would eat meat, dates, and other permissible foodstuffs. They did not prohibit for themselves anything which God had permitted for them. In the heat of the Battle of Jamal, Im□m ‘Al□ (*‘a*) asked for water but they brought him honey syrup. He drank it and said that the honey is that of T&□’if.[559]

This tranquility and control which such a war failed to disturb the Im□m’s (*‘a*) mind, surprised others, and ‘Abdull□h ibn Ja‘far, paternal nephew of the Im□m (*‘a*), asked him (*‘a*), “In such a situation, how could you identify the place of origin of the honey just by taste?” He (*‘a*) replied, “My son, I swear to God, none of the world’s affairs has ever satisfied your uncle.”[560]

Even if the Imām (*'a*) used to refrain from eating food or wearing (expensive) clothes, it had definitely a social philosophy and his action was not inappropriate. In fact, it was considered a lesson and education for the governors. After the Imām was informed that his governor in Basrah, Uthmān ibn al-Hunayf, had accepted the invitation of one of the affluent men of the city to a banquet, he (*'a*) in the course of a letter, admonished him, dissuaded him from repeating such actions, and reminded him that he (*'a*) who is the caliph of the Muslims has worn two garments and sufficed himself with two loaves of bread, and he urged the state officials to follow this practice. He (*'a*) emphasized that this abstinence and asceticism did not arise from indigence and mendicancy and [then, he (*'a*) said:]

If I wished I could have taken the way leading toward [worldly pleasures like] pure honey, wheat germ and silk clothes but it cannot be that my passions lead me and greed take me to choosing good meals while in the Hijāz[561] or in Yamāmah[562] there may be people who have no hope of getting bread or who do not have a full meal.[563]

This abstinence shows the height of his humanity. The Imām led an austere life because he felt that possibly others were not be able to dress and drink as they liked. This was very different from what Mālik ibn Dīnār did—a kind of self-torment.

In another instance, the Imām (*'a*) expounds the philosophy behind this self-mortification. As he (*'a*) had prohibited 'Alā ibn Ziyād from seclusion and self-mortification, the latter asked, "Why are you so austere in your own case?" He (*'a*) replied, "Woe be to you, I am not like you. Certainly, Allah, the Sublime, has made it obligatory on true leaders to live like the poor people, so that they are not tormented by their poverty."[564] And he (*'a*) deemed it endurable. Thus, as he (*'a*) himself saw that one of his companions had built a huge house, he (*'a*) told him that he did not need a house of such a vast size unless it was for entertaining visitors and establishing relations with kinsmen;[565] and would be used as a means of social interaction and helping others.

Therefore, asceticism does not mean poverty and indigence, or depriving oneself of the [divinely-endowed] favours, but a sort of independence and detachment from worldly possessions, absence of attachment, and in the words of Hāfiz, freedom from any 'color' of attachment:

غلامِ همّت آنم که زیرِ چرخ کبود ز هرچه رنگ تعلق پذیرد آزاد است

I am slave of he under the sky (*the world*)
Who is free from any color of attachment.[566]

Is asceticism a hindrance to economic activity?

Some have believed that asceticism means solitude and seclusion, and have concluded that it is discordant with any kind of economic activity, and consequently, social progress. It is because they think that asceticism summons man to eat and drink less, be indifferent to the world and to minimize desires, while the prerequisite of any type of economic activity and social development is long-term planning and active presence in the society.

So, they conclude that if all the people are supposed to be ascetic then there will be no sign of the bustle of economic activities, and expansion and progress of the society.

Of course, undoubtedly, some have taken asceticism to mean seclusion, monasticism and solitude. The point must not be overlooked that sometimes, in the different phases of the life of man, seclusion is needed and by remaining alone, man can closet and assess, himself. As such, in our religious tradition *i'tikf* [seclusion in the mosque for prayer and other devotional acts] has a special status.

The Messenger of God (*s*) would sometimes go to the cave of Hir, and sometimes seclude himself in the mosque and meditate; but it was only for a short period. In reality, seclusion is a medication and a kind of short-term relaxation; not a strategy for one's life. In the words of Will Durant,[567] "Seclusion is a medication and a sort of therapy through abstinence; but it cannot be food. As what Goethe[568] had said, once and for ever, "Human habits and disposition grow only amidst the waves and confusion of this world."[569]

So, asceticism should not be equated with mere seclusion. Consequently, apart from not being an impediment to economic activity, asceticism, with the magnanimity that it creates in man and warns him of excessive elation over his possessions can be a promoter of economic activity.

This is especially true if the economic activity is a value and a kind of religious worship and devotion [*'ibdah*]. With the notion that economic activity is discordant with devotion and reliance on God [*tawakkul*], some companions of the Infallibles (*'a*) abandoned all endeavor and stayed in their houses. But the Holy Infallibles (*'a*) dissuaded them from this act and said that the supplications of such persons will not be granted and that everybody should exert efforts to find his sustenance.

One of these persons asked Imm as-Sdiq (*'a*) to pray for him and ask God to give him sustenance without the need for him to exert any effort. He (*'a*) said, "I will not pray for you as God has commanded you to strive in pursuit of sustenance."[570] Similarly, the Messenger of God (*s*) said, "Worship has seventy parts, among which the most superior is the search for permissible [*halal*] sustenance."[571] Economic activity from the viewpoint of Imm as-Sdiq (*'a*) is so blessed that he commanded Hishm that even "If you saw a war break out and the opposing forces take up positions, you should not stop your economic activities."[572]

We have also dwelt on the story of Imām as-Ṣādiq (*'a*) busy working in extreme heat and being subjected to his companions' objection. And we have also heard his reply.[573]
On the other hand, poverty, according to Islam, is not a value; it is, rather, a matter of disgrace.

Thus, in the supplications of the Infallibles (*'a*) refuge has been sought in God from it. Imām 'Alī (*'a*) calls destitution as the greatest death.[574] He (*'a*) says to his son, Muhammad ibn Hanafiyyah: "O' my son, I fear lest destitution overtakes you. So, you should seek Allah's protection from it, because destitution is deficiency of religious belief, perplexity of intelligence, and it is conducive to hatred of obstinate people."[575]

Therefore, the very person who views asceticism as a value and invites people to it, brands destitution as loathsome and the source of defilement of religion and the intellect. As such, a connection between asceticism and destitution cannot be established except that of duality and alienation.

Well, the question is: Will the emergence of asceticism at the general level not obstruct economic activities? The answer is 'no'. Even nowadays there are countries where asceticism is embedded in the depth of their culture, but, at the same time, are enjoying the peak of economic prosperity and boom. We are referring to Japan.

In the culture of Japan, what can be approximately regarded as the equivalent of asceticism of our religion is *wabi*. *Wabi* means "not being bound to the things of this world such as wealth, power and fame and, notwithstanding all this, deeply experiencing the most precious things that are above time, place and status."[576]

These are the words expressed by one of the most notable Japanese culturologists and masters of Zen, who is himself a devotee of this way of life. "*Wabi* spells out the totality of Japanese culture."[577]

It is present in all aspects of the individual and social life of the Japanese and has left its marks on the architecture, industry and other facets of today's life in Japan. Even the wealthy Japanese, who devote their entire life to production and make investment again and again, lead mostly ascetic lives, based on the *wabi* doctrine. They work and produce wealth as they regard it as holy and blessed. At the same time, they lead ascetic and disciplined lives.

They refrain from profligacy in their lives as they believe in the doctrine of *wabi*. It is better for us to see what the chairman of the board of directors of the huge Daewoo Organization has to say about this matter. Kim Wu Chung, who is a South Korean and one of the most hard-working economic figures, reproaches the profligacy of some of his countrymen and summons them to learn from the Japanese:

Albeit the standard of living of the Japanese is far higher than ours, their life is far more moderate. Even the high-ranking directors of giant Japanese corporations live in 100-130 meter houses with very simple furniture. The chairman of the board of directors of the eminent Toshiba Company has an annual salary of approximately 100 million yen, but he lives in an 83-meter house. His monthly expenses do not also

exceed 15,000 yen, but in [South] Korea some managers of small companies have 330-meter houses with luxurious imported equipment and furniture.[578]

These words have been uttered by someone who himself has spent almost his entire life in travel, signing contracts and production of wealth. He says that he experiences joy in increasing the wealth of his country and is not so much in pursuit of personal enjoyment from his wealth and prosperity. After emphasizing the intensification of economic activity, he recommends, "Let us be hard-working and faithful."[579] According to this economic icon,

[t]he Japanese are unrivalled in saving and frugality. It is this very saving and frugality that has transformed Japan into one of the richest nations on earth today. Sometimes, things must be learned from others and we have no alternative but to be ashamed of the frugality and modest life of the Japanese.[580]

Then, he urges the people of [South] Korea:

Therefore, the more your possession is, the more you should be frugal in your living, for, through frugality and diligence you are responsible in leading your society toward what is desirable and wholesome. You should bear in mind that one of the greatest hindrances in the progress of every society is immoderation and over-consumption.[581]

Therefore, asceticism is a value, and apart from not being incompatible with other values such as work and activity, it is even a requisite for them. Now, we understand the utility and importance of asceticism. At this juncture, it is a good idea to indicate the three fundamental elements of Islamic asceticism, which the late Martyr Mutahhar has pointed out. According to him, the essential elements of asceticism are as follows:
(1) Natural and physical enjoyments are not the sole factors of obtaining happiness;

(2) Individual destiny is not separate from that of society;

(3) While the soul is in union with the body, it is loftier than the latter.[582]

With the same notion of asceticism and positive outlook on it, the Imm urges the government officials to behave ascetically in their lives, take simple living as their motto and, in this path, take Imm 'Al ('*a*) as their leader and model.

What is the political utility of asceticism?

From the political perspective, asceticism and simple living are not merely moral virtues; rather they are political necessities. One can enter the political arena and employ ethical politics provided he does not have attachment and devotion to materialism, position and power. To the extent that one becomes dependent, the possibility of his 'movement' and progress will decrease by the same degree.

Try to consider a mountaineer who wants to climb a summit which can be conquered (climbed) within one night. If this mountaineer is really well-experienced, he will only bring with him the things that he will need for one day and one night and will bring only a maximum of four meals. Now, the more this person increases the weight of his knapsack, the harder his climb will be, and traversing the route, he will become more tired. Inexperienced and neophyte mountaineers have had this bitter experience time and again of bringing along with them equipment that was more than needed and weighed heavily on their shoulders, making them wish that they had set out with a lighter load.

The same is true in the political arena. Those who have many financial, emotional, social, and economic attachments have less chance of keeping their boat on an even keel along this tumultuous river. This aside, the more one has attachment to and affection for something, the more is his chance of being deceived and of forgetting his objective. In fact, bullets do not kill the statesmen; rather, it is the sugar-coated bullets that destroy them.

A glance at history bears witness to the claim that so many statesmen were seduced by the sight of gold or the illusion of power and splendor, and betrayed their ideals and country. In contrast, history shows that the only statesmen who succeeded were those who had taken simple living as their motto and weapon. From among our religious narratives, Im□m 'Al□ (*'a*) can be mentioned the story of this great man being frequently told and retold.

From among the contemporaries, Gandhi is worth mentioning. A man with a few meters of hand-woven canvas named *khadi* covering his body, a manual spinning machine and a milking goat, succeeded in obtaining the independence of India and overawed British colonialism with his spiritual power. In the contemporary history of Iran, the late □yatull□h Sayyid Hasan Mudarris[583] can be mentioned. H

e was a person with respect to whom persons such as Rid□ Kh□n[584] stood helpless. The latter asked the former, "Sayyid, what do you want from me?" He answered, "I want you to be no more [in the position of power]." It was only due to his unflinching faith, simple living, and ascetic life that Mudarris succeeded in not being swayed by power and splendor and in not forgetting his goals. The Im□m describes the spiritual strength of Mudarris and reminisces about him with great admiration:

You have noticed and seen the history of the late Mudarris who was a very slim Sayyid [having], I say, a canvas garment (which is one of the abusive words coined by the poet for him—'clad in canvas trousers'). A person like this stood against the brutality (which was such) that whoever is aware of those times knows that the time of Rid□ Sh□h was not the same as that of Muhammad Rid□ Sh□h. At the time when there reigned tyranny, with which our history is perhaps less acquainted, he stood up to such a

person (the tyrant). In the *Majlis* (Parliament)… (Rid□ Kh□n) once asked him, ‘What do you want from me?’ He replied, ‘I wish you to be no more [in the position of power]; I wish you no more [in power]’. This person… used to come to Sepahs□l□r *Madrasah* [theology school]… to give lectures.

One day I attended his class; it appeared that he had nothing else to do; a mere theologian engaged in teaching. He had such strength of character… Even in the days when he used to attend the *Majlis* sessions, he was held in high esteem by everybody… It seemed as if the Parliament was waiting for Mudarris to come. Although they were not well disposed toward him, it was as if the Parliament felt that something was missing whenever Mudarris was not there. But once he came, it was as though something new had happened. What was the reason for this? It was owing to the fact that he was a person who paid no heed to position, possessions and the like. He paid no heed to anything; no position was able to attract him… Why was it so? It was because he was upright; he was not attached to carnal desires… And neither was he afraid of anyone… It was because he was free from carnal desires. He was honest; he was not dependent [on anything and anybody].[585]

Therefore, political courage, mental freedom, intelligence, and power of practical innovation emerge only when the politician is free and upright [*v□rasteh*] and not dependent [*v□basteh*]—this exactly is asceticism. From this perspective, asceticism does not mean not eating, drinking and wearing (beautiful) clothes. Basically, this individual level is problematic. At the highest level, asceticism is that very freedom and independence that emerges only when the person disengages himself from his diverse attachments. The Most Noble Messenger (*s*), who was able to cleanse the entire Arabian Peninsula from the pollution of polytheism, succeeded due to the very fact that, apart from divine assistance, he (*s*) was free from various attachments; he was upright and free of want; notwithstanding all his authority and in spite of the fact that

he was the vicegerent of God [*khal□fatull□h*], everybody accepted him; when he was sitting in the mosque, they were not able to recognize him; one who entered (the mosque) did not recognize him for there was no such thing as sitting in ‘superior’ or ‘inferior’ places in the mosque.[586]

Simple living from the Im□m’s viewpoint is discussed as one of the pillars of governmental politics. After indicating the simple lifestyle of Im□m ‘Al□ (*‘a*) and regarding it as the model, he says:

That which we want is this… In Iran we want it to be so that when the head of state of some country, for example, the President or Prime Minister, is among the people, there should be no such privilege for him that the people have to step aside with ‘ahs’ and ‘ohs’.[587]

In the opinion of the Im□m, the Messenger of God (*s*) who was the most authoritative individual in the Muslim society, “His (material) condition in life was lower than the common people who were then living in Medina.”[588]

From the Imām's viewpoint, not only does simple living ensures the independence of political authorities, but also secures their political future. If one day the officials abandon their simple lifestyle, they will be forsaken by the people. While addressing the clergymen, he would say:

Praise be to God that, today, there is nothing wrong in dealing with political issues; however, you should bear in mind that all are watching you; Therefore, you must preserve your image as scholars. Live modestly, exactly like the *'ulamā* [religious scholars] of the past... If one day your living standards exceed those of the common people, then, sooner or later, you will be rejected and ostracized.[589]

He staunchly opposed lavishness and would enumerate, one by one, its negative effects. Some of the consequences of lavishness are, according to him, ostracism by the people, dependency and attachment, drifting away from spiritualities, fallen reputations and, finally, spiritual debasement. Even the responsible leaders of society should not engage in lavish formalities on the excuse of their own security. "Even those who want to protect themselves should realize that sometimes a Peykan[590] (automobile) could be safer for them than any other vehicle."[591]

Some erroneously think that lavishness is a symbol of power, and the more lavish we are in life, the more powerful we are. This notion on the alleged relationship between lavishness and authority has led to the issue of lavishness, or what is called 'power symbols', being brought into administrative circles and international relations. One, who thinks of luxury from this angle, and as a political or administrative necessity, endeavors to possess all symbols of power such as costly tables and chairs, showy cars, and palatial mansions. These they use to show their personal or national power. Those who are after such excuses are, actually, deceiving and covering up their concealed desires. One thing certain is that, in the long run, all those who have been engaged in the power play (of politics) and have employed its symbols have gradually been affected and tainted by these symbols. Thus, these are facilities and symbols that are not without their (unsavory) consequences. In fact, they take firm control of the mentality and psyche of man.[592]

In essence, once the politician gets used to simple living he will not be dejected and dispirited by any failure, and will not experience a sense of emptiness or loss. "We should live in such a way that we will not rue the things that were taken from us."[593]

In the Imām's code of ethics, asceticism and simple living has such a lofty status that it is the axis and cornerstone of every kind of movement for independence and dignity. Anyone who likes to tread safely the tortuous, dreadful and horrendous path of politics should be an ascetic and accustomed to simple living. He should know that the desert tree which receives a lesser amount of water is more resilient. It seems as if, the Imām has obtained this viewpoint by reflecting on the utterance of our master 'Alī (*'a*) who says, "Remember that the tree of the forest is the best for timber, while green twigs have soft barks, and the wild bushes are quick to kindle but slow in dying off."[594]

It is with this perception that Imām Khomeinī regards simple living as the key to success and the secret of felicity and honor in both the worlds, saying:

If you want to stand fearless and intrepid against falsehood; to defend the truth; and the superpowers, their advanced weapons, the devils, and their conspiracies not to affect you mentally; and not drive you away from the scene, get yourself accustomed to simple living and refrain from having fondness for riches and position. Most of the great men who have rendered remarkable services to their nations have lived modestly and have been uninterested in the vanities of the world.

Those who were and are captives of mean carnal and bestial desires are willing to endure hardship and humiliation to preserve or obtain them (all that they long for). In front of satanic forces and powers they are humble and meek while in relation to the weak masses of people they are despotic and cruel. But the upright ones are contrary to them owing to the fact that, for them, human and Islamic values cannot be preserved through an aristocratic and consumerist lifestyle.[595]

Therefore, from the Imām's perspective, asceticism and simple living are deemed part of the triple pillars of ethical politics. The one who can tread this path is like Ya'qūb ibn Layth as-Saffār[596] who would suffice with mere bread and onion, and reckon ascetic life as his motto so as to be counted as a formidable threat to the 'Abbāsid caliphate.

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