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Envy

An Enigmatic and Corrupt Desire!

Man lives in constant movement between waves of problems and miseries in this unstable life. He struggles to reduce the strain of hardships on his soul and body, so he may harvest the roses of hope, and manifest them in his life one by one. As long as man's relationship with life is not amputated by the danger of death, and he sees a path to hope, he will endeavor to achieve happiness.

In conclusion, light of hope that grants man life, and makes its bitterness sweet.

Some of us hope to become rich and to obtain wealth, and struggle to achieve them in a manner that knows no boundaries. While others seek fame and position. People's deeds are related to their wants and the degree of spiritual and psychological integrity they reach. Desires also vary just as thinking varies. But we have to realize that hope brings happiness to our lives when they conform spiritual needs, fulfill our mental requirements, develop our information level, light up the paths of our lives, and rescue us from hardships and miseries.

Instincts, such as stinginess or conceit may be the root of miseries in life. Envy is one such instincts which diverts men from the straight path and imprison the conscience to prevent men from reaching hopes. The envious cannot begin to see others in the shadow of happiness. They feel great pressure on themselves that stems from their pessimistic outlook towards others goodwill.

It is reported that Socrates said: "The envious spends his days destroying himself by feeling sorry for that which he cannot achieve but others have. He feels sorry and regretful. and desires all people to live in misery and infliction while plotting to deprive them of their happiness."

A leading writer, wrote: "Our souls are like a city located in the middle of a desert without a fort or a wall to protect it, they are the victims of the thieves of happiness. The smallest winds can send the waves of the sea of our souls clashing. and more than one enemy of the soul enters the depths of our spirits to command and forbid until the last breath. Every layman knows that he should go to a doctor if he is inflicted with a headache but he who is inflicted will envy and will deny it and will never find anyone to

treat him."

The envious make the fortunes of others their goal, they apply every method to deprive others of their fortunes. They are prey to their lowly wants without realizing it. The envious manifest their evil intentions by spreading accusations and lies about the envied ones. And if they feel that their lusts are not satisfied by doing this, they may even go as far as to encroach upon their freedom or even deprive them of the right to live, just to fulfill their endless wants.

Indeed these are the inclinations Do these inclinations conform to the real goal of human life? And are they natural?

Not only do the envious lack the title of humanitarian, but they are lower than animals. For he who does not care about the pains of others cannot be a real manifestation of humanity.

The Envious Burn in the Fire of Failure and Deprivation

One of the most effective element in advancing and developing in the arena of life is to penetrate the hearts of others hearts and influence them. Those who have the ability to control other's hearts by their maneuverability and noble traits can enjoin the support of the members of society during their advancement in life; hence obtaining the keys to success. Good people are like lights in a society they shine and lead the thoughts of its members leaving deep effects on their behavior.

On the other hand, envy causes the destruction of good traits and noble manners, and prevents the hearts of people from allowing valuable spaces for their com, or to discover the star of love shining in the skies of their lives.

Therefore, envy deprives the envious from enjoying the feelings of cooperation and help. Moreover, when the envious manifest their feelings with their tongues or actions, and display the nakedness of their filth to the public, they gain only the waves of hatred and public resentment. The apparent anxiety and deep sadness which he inflicts upon himself by being envious pressures his soul and lights a fire within himself that burns his beloved soul.

The reason that the soul of the envious burns in the flames of anxiety and restlessness is clear. Because the divine sustenance is constantly increasing despite his hopes, he constantly suffers from sadness and pain that overshadows his heart. Envy is like a destructive storm which pulls the trees of morality from their roots in a manner that the envious can find no way to stop.

When Cain saw that Abel's sacrifice was accepted rather than his own, he envied him and planned to kill him. Envy had planted its claws in Cain's heart and deprived him of the brotherly and human feelings. It lead him to crush his brother's head with a huge rock and drown the holy body with blood. Cain did this for no reason other than the fact that Abel (his brother) had pure intentions and conduct.

The quiet universe had witnessed the very first crime of envy, as a result of a despicable crime committed by the very son of Adam (a.s.). After Cain had committed this terrible crime, he felt regretful; but the sorrow that Cain experienced never helped him for he fell victim to the reprehension of his conscience for the rest of his life. If Cain had pondered on the realistic and accurate way of thinking, he would have sought the reason for his deprivation of Divine Blessings for...

"Allah only accepts from the pious. (The Holy Qur'an, 5:27)

According to Schopenhauer: "Envy is the most dangerous of human feelings. So it is necessary that man considers it his arch enemy, and works to eliminate it from the path of his happiness."

Furthermore, if envy becomes widespread in a society, many unwanted phenomena appear among people such as arguments, etc.

In a society that is full of pain and problems, every individual becomes an obstacle in the way of the happiness of others, instead of becoming an element of perfection and social integrity. When envy enters a society it prevents social salvation, hence the spirit of cooperation, comfort and confidence between the members is eradicated, a matter which leads them to destruction despite their civilization and development.

According to Dr. Carl:

"Envy is responsible for our stinginess, for it is an obstacle in the way of spreading the achievements of the industrial countries to the Third World. Envy also prevents many capable people from leading their countries."

Most violent crimes which occur these days stem from envy. This becomes apparent with a careful study of social events.

Religion Versus Envy

Allah, the Almighty, has said in the Holy Qur'an: despite the fact that it is in man's nature to love and achieve benefits for himself, he is requested to comply to the jurisprudential laws, the logic of reason, and the social welfare when he attempts to respond to his said nature.

Therefore, when Allah grants someone a benefaction, no one should encroach upon or deprive him of this gift for the one reason of fulfilling his envious lust or in order to take advantage of him. Rather man is expected to follow a reasonable and accepted path to his hopes in life. Allah, the Almighty, said:

"And do not covet that by which Allah has made some of you excel others; men shall have the benefit of what they earn and women shall have the benefit of what they earn; and ask Allah of His grace; surely Allah knows all things." (The Holy Qur'an, 4: 32)

Thus we should do our best and supplicate to Allah to grant us from His eternal treasures, to make our difficult matters easy for us, and to bring us closer to our goals and hopes. Had the envious, who spends his thoughts and feelings in other than their legitimate field, directed them towards the path of his goals and pursuing his wishes, then the rays of happiness shall inevitable light his way.

Many traditions have been narrated to us by the Imams (a.s.) that warn us about this resentful trait (envy) and call us to guard against its dangerous effects.

The following narration from Imam as–Sadiq (a.s.) shall suffice for now. He pointed out two spiritual factors which lie behind envy when he said:

"Envy originates from the blindness of the heart and the refusal of Allah's blessings (glory be to Him) which are (the two factors) two rings of infidelity. It is with envy that Adam's son fell victim to the sorrow of eternity and became afflicted with eternal damnation from which lie shall never be rescued."

One of the elements which cause envy is ill upbringing at home. If the parents love one of their children and bestow him with special love and affection while depriving the others of the same treatment, the children who were left out will establish a sense of humiliation and rebellion. The type of envy from which many people suffer generally originates at home and causes sorrow and misfortune for a large portion of the society.

Such an outcome is a natural matter when the basis of ruler ship is built upon injustice, oppression, racism, sectarianism, nationalism, etc. in any society. The members of this type of society will be overwhelmed by dissension, and the flames of hatred and envy will kindle in their hearts.

The Messenger of Allah (S) forbade Muslims from diversion of justice between children to prevent the sins of envy and other sins from polluting their lives. He said:

"Treat Your children equally when giving them presents." 1

Professor Bertrand Russell quoted the author of the book The Fairchild Family when he wrote the chapter regarding the method of avoiding concealed sins, as saving:

Lucy was given a small notebook to record any ill thoughts which may enter her heart. Her parents gave a glass to her brother and a cassette tape to her sister at the breakfast table in the morning without giving Lucy anything. Lucy wrote in her notebook that a bad thought had crossed he mind at the moment. She thought that her parents loved her less than they loved her brother and sister..."

Imam 'Ali (a.s.) pointed out the harm which envy can cause to the body when he said:

"Amazes me the ignorance of the envious about the soundness of their bodies." 2

Dr. Frank Haurk also said:

"Protect yourselves and thoughts from the pains of psychological feelings, for they are the satans of the soul which are not satisfied with destroying the system of thought in man but also cause poisoned cells to grow. These feelings cause fatal harm to the body. Such pains slow down the blood circulation, weaken the nervous system, inhibit bodily and spiritual activity, deprive one of reaching his goals and hopes in life, and downgrade man's level of thinking.

"Man must free his environment of these enemies, for they are fatal. They must be imprisoned in isolation away from human life. Those who do this will discover that their will is strengthened, and will become triumphant over any probable obstacle in life." 3

Imam 'Ali (a.s.) is quoted as saying:

"Envy inhibits the body."4

He also mentions its psychological harms as:

"Safeguard yourselves against envy for it ridicules the soul."5

According to a psychologist:

"Intense envy is one of the acute psychological pains which create many pains, unamendable mistakes, oppression and injustice to the soul. Let it be known that many of the envious actions are not done by his will but in accordance to the commands of the evil of envy."6

We should not allow lowly hopes and lusts which transform the sweetness of life to bitterness, erect an invincible dam toward noble goals and hope to achieve the highest and most excellent human traits. Such traits that are capable of guiding our thoughts to the right path, will eventually lead man to his noble goals.

Imam Ali (a.s.) said:

"Compete in desirable traits, great hopes and exalted ideas, and your rewards will become greater."7

Dr. Mardin said:

"If you concentrate your thoughts on achieving certain traits, you will eventually reach them.

"The natural entities are children of natural thoughts. Therefore, if you hope to live in harmony, happiness, and security then you shall live so. If you have gloomy outlooks and see everything negatively you can rescue yourselves from this weakness in a short time by directing your thinking to the opposite of this negative attitude by thinking about that which necessitates activeness, happiness, and felicity of life. Aim at noble traits, pursue them with decisiveness and resolution, because it is with the insistence to acquire them that you prepare your minds to accept such noble traits and consequently reach them.

"Do not hesitate to repeat your intentions to reach your goals and hopes. Let your intentions be seen on your face and see after a short period of time how your thoughts magnetically draw you towards your goals."8

Dr. Mann elaborates on this issue in his book:

"We have experienced and discovered that thinking about a certain action necessitates that action occurs slightly before. For example, if we think about clenching our fists, we find that the muscles in our hands become slightly flexed and the nerves become prepared to contract enough to appear on the declinometer. There are some people who can make their hair stand on their bodies, make their pupils enlarge or contract or narrow the veins of their hands by imagining that they are in freezing water. All this is done by concentration." 9

Realizing the facts helps our minds, wills and inclinations. It is the veil of lust which blinds our minds and creates disturbance in them. Thus, it is man's duty to safeguard the mirror of his facts and realities. He should also erase from his soul the chains of hatred which pressure the soul so that the soul become free of its pains and ills. He then should compensate his soul with goodwill for others in accordance with the rules of humanity.

Conceit

The Light of Love in the Horizon of Life

It is love that lights the horizons of life. Love plays deep and vast roles in man's material and spiritual development; it holds magnificent and astonishing power. This power was implemented in man's conscience and continues to grow until in some instances it comes like an endless sea. If we extinguish the light of love from the horizon of life, the darkness of disappointment and the horror of loneliness will prevail over–shadowing man's spirit, and the face of the world will become gloomy.

Man was created sociable, therefore, socialization is necessary for his survival. Hence, that which makes man resent the society and prefer loneliness and seclusion stems from mental imbalance. It is a clear fact that a man can not reach happiness without others. For as the bodily needs drive him to socialize with others, the soul also has demands for survival, which is socialization. The soul requires love, and man continues to search for the fulfilment of his spiritual need.

Man is in constant need of love and affection from the day he enters this world and starts his existence until the minute the gates of life are closed in his path. Man feels the results of love in himself and in his conscience. When the bearings of life overpower him, the misfortunes afflict his soul, and when filled with sorrow, the rays of hope cease to illuminate his life. At this time, man's thirst for love and affection increases greatly.

This thirst is what lights man's heart with the hope of relief and ease. It is then that he will not guarantee

tranquility and comfort for his conscience save in the shadow of love. Indeed ills true to say that there is not a cure for pains, sorrows and hardships except through love.

Man's love for his brother is a true manifestation of human affections. It can even be considered as the root of all noble morals and their praiseworthy advantages. Love is transferable and applies to everyone. The method with which we are able to gain the love of others is by being generously kind to them, and by realizing that our responsibility towards our own kind is to grant them love and affection.

Showing affection to others is very rewarding, for if an individual grants a portion of this precious feeling to others, he will receive much more of the same in return. The keys to people's hearts lie in the hands of men, he who wishes to follow a path to these precious jewels must fill his heart with the light of serenity and honesty, and eradicate all resentment.

It is the philosophers holding that the perfection of an entity is manifested in its peculiarities and affects, and man's peculiarity lies in socialization and love. Tim love and spiritual relations which exist between people are the basis of stable and peaceful living together.

According to Dr. Carl:

In order for a society to achieve happiness, it is essential that all its members live in harmony with each other, just as the bricks in a structure do. Love is the only matter that grants a society such harmony: the kind that exists between the members of the whole human family. There are two parts to man's love for other men; the first requires him to love, and the second leads him to try to gain their love on the same level Yet unless every man earnestly attempts to abandon all resentful habits, exchanges of love can not be achieved.

We cannot reach this goal save by freeing ourselves by psychological revolutions from corruption which isolates us from others. It is then that we will experience neighbors dealing generously with each other, arid employees and employers acting respectively towards each other. Love is the only element which can bring about the order that existed in societies of ants and bees for millions of years."

Conceit Leads to People's Resentment

Self-love is a basic human instinct. It is an essential factor for survival, for man's vast relationship with the universe rises from this instinct. Nevertheless, despite it being a fruitful power from which many noble traits arise, if this natural source is exaggerated, many sins and various immoralities will stem from it.

The first real threat to manners is extravagance in self-love. For it can reach a point where it leaves no place in the heart for loving others. Such extravagance is what prevents people from admitting their mistakes, or from accepting such facts that are inconsistent with their emotional conceit.

Professor Robinson said:

"It often occurs that we change our thoughts or ways of conduct without anxiety or disturbance, yet if someone discovers our errors or shortcomings we experience a spiritual revolution which makes us defensive towards him.

"We easily convert to new ideologies, but when someone attempts to convert us, we fanatically stand against him, while in fact, we do not sincerely possess such a strong feeling toward our belief. We feel that our feelings are greatly endangered if someone says to us: 'Your watch is slow or your car is old'. We then suffer much more than if it was said to us: 'Your knowledge regarding Mars or Egyptian civilization is wrong'."

The most fatal danger to happiness, and the worst enemy of mankind are conceit and exaggerated self-confidence. People's resentment of any ill trait does not match their resentment of conceit. Not only does conceit cause the ties of love and harmony between brothers to cease, but it also transforms them to feelings of enmity, and opens the gate of general resentment toward the conceited one. In the same manner that one expects other's love and respect, he should attempt to observe their honor.

It is the society that guarantees everyone his rights and responsibilities. Each individual receives as much love and respect from his society as his qualifications and abilities offer. He who is limited to loving himself, sees only what he wants and is careless about other's feelings and affairs. He insistently attempts to make himself subject to exaltation and fame, and forces his arbitrary conceit on others.

The stubborn anticipation of people's respect is inappropriate because of the severe contradiction between his anticipation of people and their resentment of his conduct. Such social reaction will only cause the conceited to suffer and bear anxiety and unrest.

Among the other evil results of conceit are suspicion and pessimism. The spirit of a conceited person burns in the flames of pessimism and suspicion; so he feels everyone intends to harm him. He also cannot but notice the continuous carelessness, resentment and humiliation which he encounters from people. He consciously or subconsciously suffers from such treatment from which arise hatred and a sense of revenge against his society with every possible chance. His soul does not rest until he seeks revenge, and then his spiritual revolution will cease.

The evil of conceit does not approach man's conscience save when man is afflicted with a sense of lowliness which causes the disorder of humility. This disorder which is painful and destructive and from which many dangers and crimes may stem is a matter that causes the conceited individual to suffer more miseries.

A brief review of the world's history reveals that it is the conceited ones who have always resisted the calls of prophets and messengers, and have refused to accept their righteous calls while preventing others from doing so. Also, most of the savage massacres which occurred during the bloody world wars

arose from the conceit and arrogance of hard-hearted leaders.

Most conceited individuals are delinquents who were brought up in unstable homes and were able to obtain position in the society. These people attempt to imagine an exalted character for themselves and endeavor to express their acquired imaginative honor by displaying conceit and arrogance. It is readily possible for all people to encounter this type of individual wherever they may be.

A distinguished person who enjoys realistic honor and dignity, does not feel the need to be arrogant with others because he realizes that neither conceit nor arrogance can offer a person real respect. He also understands that these features do not qualify any individual for an authentic character.

According to a psychologist's advice:

"Limit your hopes and wishes, reduce your expectations and anticipations, free yourselves from lusts and desires. Distant yourselves from conceit and arrogance, and avoid imaginative limitations to quarantee yourselves a safer and longer lasting peace.

Our Leaders and Modesty

One of the excellent morals which can be considered as a symbol of love and the best path of achieving it is modesty. By performing their duties towards their societies by practicing good manners, modest individuals promote their social dignity and extend the amount of their love in people's hearts.

Nevertheless, we must recognize the vast difference between modesty and self-abasement, for modesty is a manifestation of a noble trait of a great and self-confident character, while self-abasement arises from moral lowliness and loss of self-confidence.

Luqman (a.s.) as the Qur'an says, warned his son against conceit:

"And do not turn your face away from people in contempt, nor go about in the land exulting overmuch; surely Allah does not love any self-conceited boaster". (The Holy Qur'an, 18:18)

Imam 'Ali (a.s.) said:

"Had Allah permitted conceit for any of His worshippers, He would have permitted it to His nearest Prophets and Awlia; but He, Glory be to Him, made them resent conceit and accepted modesty for them. They, therefore, cast their cheeks to the ground, threw dust on their faces (in prostration), and were modest with the believers."

The Messenger of Allah (S) used to say:

"Avoid conceit, for a worshipper insists on conceit until Allah, Glory be to Him, says write My worshipper among the arrogant".10

Imam as-Sadiq (a.s.) pointed out the spiritual root of conceit in a short statement when he said:

"There is not a man who goes astray save as a result of the lowliness he finds in himself." 11

According to Dr. M. Brid:

"The arrogance of an individual or a nation over another equals the humiliation of that individual or nation. Most of the arguments and disagreements which take place today arise from the feeling of lowliness. Hence, adopting the idea of conceit is not but an attempt to fulfill the space which a conceited individual feels in his life. There is not a man, a nation, a class, a race, a people, or otherwise with clear conscience that feel distinction between themselves and others." 12

Conceited and arrogant persons always look at their words and actions with exaltation and acceptance. Furthermore, they consider their shortcomings as good deeds.

Imam Musa ibn Ja'far (a.s.) explains this:

"Conceit is on several degrees among which is the evil actions of a man are embellished to him so that he sees them as good, hence he believes that he does good." 13

Also according to a psychologist:

"Conceited individuals consider their shortcomings as virtues and their flaws as merits. For example, they consider their sudden anger with others as proof of their forceful personalities, their weakness as manifestation of their excellent and sensitive spirituality, their overweight ness as a sign of health. Actually healthy reasons lie in healthy bodies, and dependence on the weak is an idea for they are easily irritated and are unpredictable." 14

Let us now review some of the Guardian of the Faithful's (a.s.) statements in this regard:

"Avoid conceit or the number of those who resent you will increase." 15

"Conceit ruins the mind. 16

According to psychologists, conceited people suffer from weakness of the mind.

Imam 'Ali (a.s.) also said:

"He whose mind is weakened, his pride is strengthened." 17

"Modesty is the ultimate of reasoning; and conceit is the peak of ignorance." 18

He also said:

"Conceit is a concentrated illness." 19

"He who admires his condition comes short of cursing his abilities."20

Dr. H. Shakhter said:

"One of the methods of attracting people's attention to us when we are feeling disappointed or unsuccessful is to glorify and exalt ourselves, and imagine the things which we hope for as already occurring and giving ourselves by bragging about the times at which we were successful in the past or by exaggerating to others.

"Conceited people lure themselves into accepting the false embellishments of their fabrications, thus depriving themselves of any opportunity for change."21

Such people are unable trealize that there are flaws in them and perfection or a success in others.

Imam 'Ali (a.s.) said:

One who is satisfied with himself, his shortcomings are concealed from him: and had he recognized other's precedence it would suffice for his flaws and failure. 22

Islam, which calls for an exalted human civilization and that which allows man to live an honorable life, invalidated all abnormal distinctions. Islam recognizes the trait of purity and piety.

Imam 'Ali (a.s.) said:

'Seek refuge in Allah from the intoxication of wealth, for surely it has a distant solemnity."23

One day wealthy man came to visit the Messenger of' Allah (S). While the wealthy man was there, a poor man entered and sat near him; upon this the wealthy man collected his clothes and moved away from the poor man. The Prophet (S) noticed this and said: "What! Do you fear that his poverty will spread to you?"

In conclusion, if conceited persons seek happiness, they are to rid themselves of this illness and liberate themselves from such a trait which violates their realistic character; otherwise they will face an inevitable disappointment and deprivation which are matters to be avoided.

- 1. Nahj a1-Fasahah p.366
- 2. Ghurar al-Hikam. P. 494
- 3. Pirozi Fikr
- 4. Ghurar al-Hikam p. 32
- 5. Ghurar al- Hikam p. 141
- 6. Ravankavi
- 7. (Ghurar al-Hikam p.355)
- 8. Pirozi Fikr
- 9. Usule Ravanshinasi
- 10. Nahj al-Fasahah p. 12

- 11. Al-Kafi v.3, p. 461
- 12. 'Uqdae Hiqarat
- 13. Wasa'il ash-Shia v. I, p.74
- 14. Ravankavi
- 15. Ghu'rar al-Hikam p. 147
- 16. Ghurar al-Hikam p. 28
- 17. Ghurar al-Hikam, p. 651
- 18. Ghurar al-Hikam p. 102
- 19. Ghurar al-Hikam p. 678
- 20. Ghurar al-Hikam p. 678
- 21. Rushde Shakhsiyyat
- 22. Ghurar al-Hikam p. 95
- 23. Ghurar al-Hikam p. 138

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