



SPIRITUAL JOURNEY

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INTRODUCTION

The Religion al-Islam emphasizes all Muslims, men and women, to embark on a sacrificial journey towards The Merciful Allah (SWT). Most certainly, there is within all of us an inherent desire to attend to some spiritual matters and near The Absolute Truth. In this way we would intensify our relationship with The Almighty and gain proximity.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

No doubt, the intention and initiation of this spiritual journey was implanted into our souls by none other than The All-Merciful Allah (SWT). Remembering Allah (SWT), cherishing the intimacy of solitude with The Absolute Perfection and Greatness is the ultimate end of the hopes of the mystics and the final destination of the journey of the spiritual travelers.

This course was developed to help Muslims prepare, embark and make progress in this journey towards Perfection and the materials are designed to be read through repeatedly in order to achieve maximum benefit.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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Together with the above, a number of books that have collected traditions of The Aimmah (AS) and The Prophet (S) on this journey were also helpful as these sacred 14 are The Masters of Spiritual Perfection and Allah (SWT) blessed these Perfect Souls with the highest possible understanding of this sacred journey towards The Unity of Allah.

The Spiritual Journey

Self-Building and Self-Purification Program

INTRODUCTION

The advice to all Muslims is to embark on a sacrificial journey towards The Merciful Allah (SWT). Undoubtedly, there is within us an inherent desire to attend to some spiritual matters and near The Absolute Truth. In this way we would intensify our relationship with The Almighty and gain proximity. According to scholars, the intention and initiation of this spiritual journey was implanted into our souls by none other than The All-Merciful Allah (SWT). Apparently, *remembering Allah (SWT), cherishing the intimacy of solitude with The Absolute Perfection and Greatness* is the ultimate end of the hopes of the mystics and the final destination of the journey of the spiritual travelers.

The Prophet of Islam - Muhammad (S) is the best physician of the souls, and it is also strongly evident that all Prophets (AS) and The Infallible Imams (AS) are teachers and physicians of human souls. However, the responsibility for treatment, refinement, and purification of our souls has been assigned upon our own shoulders. Although, The Prophets and The Infallible Aimmah (AS) have lectured and explained to us in detail about the diseases of the soul and their symptoms, issued relevant prescriptions for their treatments, so that one becomes familiar with these techniques and practice them on a daily basis.

Islam demands from its followers, simultaneous to living and fulfilling our social obligations, we should be aware about our spiritual requirements and therefore, should focus ourselves on self-building and self-refinement and achieve higher status in The Eyes of Allah.

Therefore, it is now apparent as to the reasons why God, The Almighty sent Divine Messengers especially for this purpose. The individual's outcome of this World and Hereafter therefore depends upon how much effort he or she makes for self-building and self-purification. According to al-Amini, *it is from this consideration that self-building is regarded something of such vital importance because it determines ones eventual destiny*. Further, Allah, in His Most Sublime Nature, gifted such personalities with highest moral characteristics so they are able to train us in a very effective manner.

The Prophet (S) has said,

I emphasize the importance of good morals for you because God - The Almighty has sent me especially for this purpose.

Bihar al-Anwar vol. 69, page 375

He further said,

I was appointed for The Prophethood so that I may accomplish the important task of moral perfection within human souls.

al-Mustadarak, vol. 2, page 282

al-Sadiq (AS) said,

God, The Almighty appointed Prophets with good morals; therefore, whoever discovers these virtues within himself should be thankful to God for this bounty; whoever lacks these virtues must pray, cry, and shed tears before God Almighty asking for such blessing.

al-Mustadarak, vol. 2, page 283

The Commander of All The Faithful, Imam Ali (AS) said,

Supposedly, if neither there was any desire for Paradise nor there was any fear of Hell, and also there would have not been any belief about the reward and punishment in The Next World; even then it would have been befitting to strive for moral perfection, because, good morals are the path towards prosperity and victory.

al-Mustadarak, vol. 2, page 283

al-Baqir (AS) continues,

The most perfect believers from the point of view of faith are the ones who excel in moral conduct.

al-Kafi, vol. 2, page 99

The Prophet (S) has further said in this regard,

There is nothing better than good moral conduct, which could be written on The "Letter of Deeds" on The Day of Resurrection.

al-Kafi, vol. 2, page 99

And,

My community will enter into Paradise mostly on the basis of piety and excellence in moral conduct.

al-Kafi, vol. 2, page 100

From the above narrations, we can safely say that he whose two days are the same (making no spiritual progress) is at loss. al-Hasan (AS) wonders about *the person who contemplates about his nutrition but he does not consider the food of his intellect. Thus, he avoids of what hurts him in his stomach, but he lets his mind to be filled with what destroys him.*

Allah, Most Sublime says,

He is indeed successful who causes (his self) to grow, and he is indeed a failure who stuns its growth.

(Qur'an- Chapter 91, Verse 9 - 10)

The most famous mystic poet of Iran, Hafiz-e-Shirazi has so beautifully summarized the wayfarer's (spiritual traveler) endeavors in his following statement,

I remained vigilant guarding the heart's premises every night, so that no alien thought (except my beloveds') could make its entry.

al-Husayn (AS) has said,

The one who lacked and missed You, what did he find? And what is it that he lacks, the one who finds You? Certainly, the one who got pleased & inclined towards other than You, came to nothingness (and is a failure).

This person who has attained such 'Spiritual Perfection' will then acknowledge Allah (SWT)'s presence wherever he turns.

As Allah (SWT) puts it,

In addition, wherever you turn your face, you will find The Face (His Presence) of Allah (SWT).

(Qur'an- Chapter 2, Verse 115)

Allah (SWT) further states in Hadith al-Qudsi,

Neither (the vastness of) My Earth, nor (that of) My Heaven can contain Me. Indeed, it is the heart of the man of faith which can contain Me.

According to The Scholars of Mysticism, such richness and contentment will then pervade our hearts and souls that everything else (other than pleasing The Almighty) will become worthless in our eyes and we will become so spiritually accustomed to this new life.

Further, one can only maintain this spiritual journey towards his Lord through annihilation of the Self. Scholars have narrated and this tradition is quoted by Ayatullah Mutahhari (AR) that once a person was asked as to what he desired in this world. In reply he exclaimed,

I wish not to wish!

Ayatullah Mutahhari (AR) reports a tradition in al-Kafi that one day, The Prophet (S) saw a weak and lean young man whose color had turned pale, whose eyes were sunken and who could hardly balance himself and only with difficulty. When asked about his situation, the person replied,

It is my conviction that has grieved me, that keeps me awake during the night and that keeps me thirsty during the day (on account of fasting). It has made me oblivious of everything in the world. I see as if The Throne of Allah (SWT) was set up for the purpose of reckoning the deeds of the people who assembled in The Assembly square, and I being one of them. I see the dwellers of Paradise enjoying themselves and the dwellers of Hell undergoing punishment. It appears as if even now I was hearing the blasts of The Fire of Hell with my own ears.

Abdullah Ansari says,

You (humans) are immature in childhood, intoxicated in youth and weak in old age. Then when will you adore Allah (SWT)?

It would be paramount to quote here the famous sermon of Hammam from Nahjul-Balagha (Peak of Eloquence) explaining the qualities of pious and God-fearing persons. In this sermon The Commander of The Faithful, Imam Ali (AS) has explained what piety really means and what sort of human beings pious people are, describing the graphic details of their ways of living, thinking, praying, and dealing with other men. This narration is also an excellent summary of the 25 Rules and some exercises set forth by The Aimmah (AS) for a Self-Building and Self-Purification Program.

Hammam was one of the companions of Imam Ali (AS), a very pious and God-fearing man. He once asked Imam to explain at length the qualities of a pious person. He wanted the explanation to be so graphic and so vivid that he could get the picture of a pious man in his mind's eyes. Imam knew that Hammam had a very tender heart and was disinclined to explain piety in the way that Hammam had requested and evading the subject he replied,

Hammam! Fear God and do good deeds. Remember that God is always a companion of pious and good people!

But Hammam was not satisfied with this reply and wanted to hear something more. He pressed so much and others joined him and seconded his request that Imam reluctantly delivered the following sermon. After praising The Lord and praying Him to bless The Prophet (S), Imam Ali (AS) continued the sermon as follows,

When God created mankind He was not in need of their obedience and prayers, neither was He nervous of their disobedience. Because, disobedience or insubordination of men cannot harm Him, similar obedience of obedient people cannot do Him any good. He is beyond the reach of harm and benefit. After creating man He decided for him the variety of food which his body could absorb and assimilate, and the places which were congenial for him to live and to propagate. Among these human beings, excellent are those who are pious and who fear God.

They possess pre-eminence and excellence because they always speak truthfully, lightly and to the point, their way of living is based upon moderation, and their mode of dealing with other men is founded on their good will, fellow feeling and courtesy towards them. They deny themselves the things prohibited by God. They concentrate their minds upon knowledge of things which will bring them eternal bliss. They bear hardships and sufferings as happily as they enjoy comforts and pleasures. If God had not fixed the span of life for each one of them, their souls in desire of attaining His Heaven and out of fear of falling into His displeasure would not have stayed in their bodies for long.

They have visualized mentally The Glory of God in such a way that beyond him nothing in this world alarms, frightens or awes them. Everything other than His Might appears to them as insignificant and humble. They believe in The Heaven and its blessings like a person who has been there and has actually seen everything of The Heaven with his own eyes. Similarly, their faith in The Hell and its torments is as strong as that of a person who had passed through its

sufferings. They feel that the tortures of The Hell are around them and very near to them.

The ways of worldly people make them sorry. They harm nobody. They do not indulge in excessive eating and pleasure seeking. Their wants are limited. Their wishes are few. They have accepted patiently sufferings and adversities in this mortal and transitory life for the sake of eternal bliss, which by The Grace of God proved for them a very profitable transaction. The vicious world desired their fellowship but they turned their faces away from it. It wanted to snare them, but they willingly accepted every trouble and discomfort to free themselves from its clutches.

Their nights they spend in carefully studying The Qur'an, because, of their weaknesses and short-comings, and try to find ways from this Holy Book for improvements of their minds. In the study of The Qur'an when they came across a passage describing The Heaven they feel highly attracted towards it and develop such a keen desire to reach it; that The Heaven with all its blessings is visualized by their minds, while a passage about The Hell frightens them and makes them feel as if they are seeing and hearing the raging fire and the groans and lamentations of those who are suffering the tortures of The Hell.

They spend the nights in praying before The Lord and requesting and beseeching Him to deliver them from The Hell. Days find them occupied with such works that clearly indicate their wisdom, depth of knowledge, virtuousness, and piety. Constant fasting, simple diet, avoidance of every aspect of luxury and regular hard work make them look lean and haggard, but they possess very sound and robust health.

When people hear them discussing various problems of life they often take them to be whimsical fanatic or even half-witted. But it is not so, they are not satisfied with the quality and quantity of the work done by them in the cause of religion and humanity. The more they work the less they feel satisfied. Having set up a very high standard of efficiency for their work they fell nervous that indolence may not make it impossible for them to attain those heights.

If anyone of them is praised for piety, virtuousness and the good deeds done by him, he does not like to be so complimented; he is afraid that such praise may not allure him towards vanity, self flattery, and self glorification. He says, I know my mind and my work more than others, and God knows much more than me. O Lord! Please do not hold me responsible for what they have said about me. You know very well that I did not instigate them for such praises. Please Lord! Grant me excellence far greater than what they complimented me for. And Lord! Please forgive those of my short-comings which they do not know.

You will find every pious person possessing the following attributes. He is resolute though tender-hearted and kind. He is unwavering in his convictions and beliefs. He is thirsty for knowledge. He forgives those who harmed him, fully knowing that they have wronged him. Even when owning wealth his ways of life are based upon moderation. His prayers are models of humility and submissiveness to God. Even when starving he will maintain his self-respect. He will bear sufferings patiently.

He will resort only to honest means of living. Leading others towards truth and justice, will give him pleasure. He disdains avarice and greed. Though he does good deeds all the time, yet he feels nervous of his short-comings. Every night, he thanks God for having passed one more day under His Grace and Mercy. Every morning finds him starting the day with the prayers of The Lord. During nights he is cautious that he may not carelessly waste those hours in comfort and ease. He starts his days happy with the thought The Lord has given him another day to do his duty.

If his mind wishes for something unholy and impious he refuses to obey its dictates. He desires to achieve eternal bliss. Worldly pleasures do not interest him. His wisdom is mixed with patience. His deeds reciprocate his words (he does what he says). Inordinate desires do not trouble him. He has few defects in him. He is courteous to others. He possesses a contended mind. He eats little, he does not harm anybody. He is easy to be pleased. He is strong in his faith. His passions are dead. His temper is controlled.

People expect good out of him and consider themselves immune from his harm. Even if he is found among godless people his name will be written in the list of Godly persons. If he is in company of those who always remember God, naturally his name will not be included amongst those who forget Him. He forgives those who harm him. He helps those who have forsaken him and have refused to help him. He is kind to those who have been cruel to him. He does good to those who do evil to him. He never indulges in loose talks.

He has no vice in him, and his good qualities are outstanding, noticeable, and prominent, when facing dangers and disasters he is calm and undisturbed. In sufferings and calamities he is patient and hopeful. In prosperity he is thankful to God. He would not harm his worst enemy. He will never commit a sin even for the sake of his best friend.

Before anybody has to bear testimony to his fault he accepts and owns it. He never misappropriates anything entrusted to him. He never forgets what he has been told. He does not slander anybody. He does not harm his neighbors. When misfortunes befall any person he does not blame him, neither is he happy at the losses of others. He neither goes astray from the right path nor follows a wrong one. His silence does not indicate his moroseness nor his laughter is loud and boisterous. He bears persecution patiently and God punishes his oppressor. He is hard to himself and very lenient to others. He bears hardships in this life to attain eternal comfort and peace. He never wrongs a fellow being. If he avoids anybody it is to retain his piety and uprightness. If he forms contract with anybody it is on account of his kindness and clemency. He does not avoid anybody because of his pride and vanity, and he does not mix with others with ulterior motives of hypocrisy, pretense, and vile.

Nahjul-Balagha, Sermon 19

The narrator says that Hammam was hearing the sermon very attentively, and when Imam reached the above passage, Hammam fainted and died during the faint. Seeing this Imam said,

By God, I was hesitating to all this to Hammam because of this very reason. Effective advises on minds ready to receive them often bring almost similar result.

A Brief Note on Sincerity

Evidently, this Journey has to be made ONLY for the sake of Allah, and sincerity (Ikhlaas) is the main goal of every Spiritual Journalist.

According to The Aimmah (AS),

To persevere in an action until it becomes sincere is more difficult than (performing) the action itself, and sincerity of action lies in this that you should not desire anyone to praise you for it except God Almighty, and intention supersedes action. Lo, verily, intention is action itself.

Say, everyone acts in accordance with his intention.

(Qur'an- Chapter 17, Verse 84)

al-Baqir (AS) has said,

Perseverance in an action is more difficult than the act itself.

He was asked as to what is meant by perseverance in action? He replied,

A man does some kindness to a relative or expends something for the sake of God, Who is One and has no partner. Thereupon the reward of a good deed performed secretly is written for him. Later, he mentions it to someone and that which was written earlier is wiped out and instead the reward of a good deed performed openly is written for him. Later, when he makes a mention of it again, the vice of Riya is written for him (instead of the reward written earlier).

al-Sadiq (AS) has remarked,

Pure heart is one that meets its Lord in a state in which there is none in it except Him. Then he added every heart in which there is shirk or doubt shall fail. Indeed, He has meant by it (the purity of heart) nothing except abstinence concerning the world so that their hearts may be made ready for The Hereafter.

The honorable Gnostic and the wise wayfarer, Khwajah Abdullah al-Ansari (AR) says,

Ikhlaas means purging action of all impurities.

And the impurity mentioned here is a general one, including both that which arises from the desire to please one and other creatures. It is narrated from the great Sheikh Bahai that the people of the heart have offered various definitions for it. It has been said,

(Ikhlaas means) keeping action free from other-than-God having a role in it; that the performer of an action should not desire any reward for it in The World and The Hereafter.

The following tradition is a conversation between al-Kadhim (AS), and one of his faithful disciples, Hisham, son of al-Hakam (AR) and is another wonderful summary of the 25 stages that are going to be discussed later. Apparently, Hisham was popular for his exceptional ability in debate with the polytheists and the members of the heretical groups.

Hisham, son of al-Hakam (AR) narrates that al-Kadhim (AS) (The 7th Imam (AS)) addressed him saying,

O' Hisham! Almighty Allah has given glad tidings to the people of reason and understanding to this effect,

Glad tidings unto My servants! Those who hear the sayings and follow the best of it. Those are whom Allah has guided and those who are the possessors of understanding minds.

(Qur'an- Chapter 39, Verse 17-18)

O' Hisham! It is through reason and understanding that Allah (SWT) has completed evidence of proof (in respect of Himself and His religion) for mankind. He has helped His Prophets and His Messengers by endowing them with the gift of eloquence and guided them to comprehend His over-lordship through reason and understanding. As He says,

And your Lord is one Allah. There is no Allah but Him, The All-Merciful, The Compassionate. Surely in the creation of The Heavens and The Earth, and the alteration of night and day and the ship that runs in sea with profit to men, and the water Allah sends down from Heaven by which He revives the earth after its death, and His scattering abroad in it all kinds of crawling creatures, and the turning about of the winds and the clouds suspended between The Heaven and The Earth - Surely there are signs for the people of understanding.

(Qur'an- Chapter 2, Verse 163-164)

O' Hisham! Remember that reason is in alliance with knowledge. As Allah (SWT) has said,

And those examples we strike for people, but none comprehends them except those who have knowledge.

(Qur'an- Chapter 29, verse 43)

O' Hisham! Almighty Allah has said in His Book,

Surely in that there is a reminder to him who has a heart.

(Qur'an- Chapter 50, Verse 37)

'Heart' means reason. And Allah (SWT) has further said,

Indeed we gave Wisdom to Luqman.

(Qur'an- Chapter 31, Verse 12)

Wisdom means (the capacity of) understanding and reasoning.

O' Hisham! Luqman (AS) The Sage, counseled his son, 'If you bow before The Truth and The Inevitable, you will be the most wise among people, since a wise man treats himself as little before The Truth and The Inevitable. O' My Son! This world is like an unfathomable ocean in which many people have drowned. Make, therefore, the fear of Allah (SWT) as your boat in this ocean, your faith as the main plank of the boat, the reliance of Allah (SWT) as its

sails, the reason as its power, the knowledge as its captain, and patience as its anchor.

O' Hisham! Everything has its indicator. Man's thoughtfulness is the hallmark of his reason. The symbol of thoughtfulness is silence. Everything has its climax and the climax of reason is humility (before Allah (SWT)'s commands). It is enough to prove you are ignorant and unwise if you do what Allah (SWT) has prohibited.

O' Hisham! Almighty Allah (SWT) has mentioned about the people of reason in high terms, and has adorned them with the finest ornaments as per His own words,

He gives wisdom to whomsoever He wills, and whoever is given the wisdom, has been given much good; yet none will grasp the message but the possessors of understanding minds.

(Qur'an- Chapter 2, Verse 269)

And those who rooted firmly in knowledge say, 'We believe in it. All is from our Lord.' Yet none remembers, but the men who possess minds.

(Qur'an- Chapter 3, Verse 7)

What? Is he who knows what has been sent down to you from your Lord is The Truth, like him who is blind (void of knowledge)? Only the possessors of understanding minds will remember.

(Qur'an- Chapter 13, Verse 19)

(O Muhammad (S) A book We have sent down to you, blessed, that the people of understanding may ponder its signs and so remember.

(Qur'an- Chapter 38, Verse 29)

al-Kadhim (AS) continued by saying,

O' Hisham! Allah (SWT) has appointed His Prophets and Messengers (peace be upon them) to make people wise and mindful of Allah (SWT). The more they accept and believe in these messengers, the greater is their Allah (SWT)s' consciousness. The wisest among men is he who knows about Allah (SWT) most. He who is perfect in his reasoning enjoys the highest status among people in this life and the life of Hereafter.

O' Hisham! Allah (SWT) has given two proofs for the guidance of mankind - the explicit/external, and the implicit/internal. The explicit/external proof is in the form of Prophets, Messengers, and The Imams (divinely appointed guides, peace be on all of them). And the implicit/internal proof is in the form of reasoning and understanding.

O' Hisham! A man of reason does not let his lawful occupations prevent him from thanking Allah (SWT), nor does the attraction of unlawful acts wear out his patience.

O' Hisham! One who allows three things to be dominated by another set of three things, has actually destroyed his reason. The first thing is to allow the reason to be dominated by excessive hopes and expectations. The second thing is to allow the highest of wisdom to be dominated by excessive utterances. The third thing is

to allow his admonition light to be extinguished/dominated by carnal desires. And the one who destroys his reason (by doing the above three) also destroys both his worldly life and his faith.

O' Hisham! Truth is a sign of obeying Allah (i.e. truth leads to obedience to Allah (SWT)). And there is no salvation except through obedience to Allah (SWT). Obedience to Him can only be performed by means of knowledge. And knowledge is a matter of acquisition, and this acquisition is only through reason and intellect. And there can be no knowledge except through the learned in divinity. And the consciousness of knowledge is through reason and intellect.

O' Hisham! Virtuous conduct of a learned man, though limited, is acceptable (to Allah (SWT) at many times of its value. On the contrary, virtuous conduct of a greedy, lustful, and ignorant person is totally rejected.

O' Hisham! Limited material possessions for a man with sound wisdom are perfectly acceptable to him. Whereas unlimited wealth for a man with little wisdom is not at all accepted to him; and this is why such people have actually earned profit of the trade of their life in this world. i.e. they will have no share of profit in hereafter.

O' Hisham! Lo! A man of reason pondered over the world and its people. He realized that he could not get the success in worldly life without hard struggle. Then he pondered over the life of Hereafter and again realized that the success in the life of Hereafter would not also be secured without hard struggle. Thereupon, the man of reason decided in favor of the struggle which brought eternal success, as compared with the temporary one of the worldly life.

O' Hisham! The wise people remain detached from the worldly possessions and its attractions, and they remain attached to the life of Hereafter. It is because they have realized that the world attracts/lures and is lured; and the life of Hereafter lures and is lured. However, the world itself runs after the man who struggles for the life of Hereafter to the extent that he receives in full the share, which has been allotted to him for this worldly life.

On the contrary, the one who spends his life and struggles for the worldly gains will continue until the life of Hereafter demands its own share in the form of death. It is then that he realizes that he is the loser of both, this life and The Hereafter.

O' Hisham! Whoever seeks comfort without wealth, and relief free from jealousy, and security for his faith, must implore Allah (SWT) from the bottom of his heart for making his reason perfect.

O' Hisham! The Almighty Allah (SWT) has related about a group of virtuous people who used to pray,

Our Lord! Let not our hearts deviate after You have guided us, and grant us mercy from Your Own Presence. For surely You are The Provider of Bounties without measure.

(Qur'an- Chapter 3, Verse 8)

In offering this prayer, they realized that human hearts could be deflected and could lend towards blindness and lowness. Secondly, they also understood that those who do not seek guidance and reason from Allah (SWT) are the people who are not afraid of God's punishments at all. And whoever is deprived of reason by Allah (SWT), can never be firm and steady in Allah (SWT), in a way as to enable him to realize The Truth of Allah (SWT) in his own heart. No one can reach this stage unless his deeds corroborate his words. Allah, The Almighty, never guides the inside of reason, except what comes out of it through deeds and the words.

O' Hisham! The Commander of Believers, Ali (AS) used to say, 'Of signs of a man of reason, one is that he has got three qualities, He replies only when he is questioned, he speaks when all others fail, and advises what is suitable for the good of the person (who is talking to).'

One who has none of these three qualities is stupid. The Commander of Believers (AS) further added, 'No one should preside over a meeting except when he possesses either all the three or at least one of the above qualities. If a person presides over a meeting without having all or (at least) one of the above three qualities, he is just stupid.'

O' Hisham! The Commander of Believers (Imam Ali (AS), used to say, 'Of all the observance and devotions offered to Allah (SWT), the best one is of and by (the people of) reason. Reason of a person does not reach perfection unless it possesses some specific characteristics. The characteristics (of a perfect reason) is that,

- (1) It gives immunity against disbelief and evil.
- (2) Virtue and true guidance is expected to follow from such a man (of reason).
- (3) He exhausts his excessive wealth in good deeds.
- (4) He protects himself from irresponsible gossips.
- (5) His share in the worldly life amounts to what is needed for his existence.
- (6) He is never fed up with knowledge throughout his life.
- (7) Humiliation in pursuit of (belief, obedience and favor of) Allah (SWT) is dearer to him than any honor in pursuit of things other than Allah (SWT).
- (8) Humbleness is dearer to him than dignity.
- (9) He regards the little good of others to him as much, and regards any good from him to others as little.
- 10) He regards people better than himself, and regards himself in his heart as of little consequence.

And this is the climax!

O' Hisham! He who has no generosity, has no religion; and he who has no reason has no generosity. The greatest man is he who never deems himself equal in value to the worldly life. Verily! There is no lower price for your bodies except to be sold in exchange for Paradise. Hence do not sell it for anything less than that.

O' Hisham! Allah (SWT) has condemned majority as criterion of truth with the words,

And if you obey the majority of those on earth, they will lead you astray from the path of Allah.

(Qur'an- Chapter 6, Verse 116)

And if you ask them, 'Who created The Heavens and The Earth?' Certainly, they will say, 'Allah.' Say, 'All praise belongs to Allah,' No! But the majority of them have no knowledge.

(Qur'an- Chapter 31, Verse 25)

And if you ask them, 'Who sends down water from Heaven thereby revives The Earth after its death?' Certainly, they will say, 'Allah.' Say, 'All praise be to Allah,' No! But most of them have no understanding.

(Qur'an- Chapter 29, Verse 63)

and He said,

But most of them do not know.

(Qur'an- Chapter 6, Verse 37)

and He said,

And most of them have no understanding.

(Qur'an- Chapter 5, Verse 103)

and He said,

But most of them are not thankful.

(Qur'an- Chapter 10, Verse 60)

O' Hisham! On the contrary, Allah (SWT) has praised the minority, by saying,

Few of My servants are thankful.

(Qur'an- Chapter 34, Verse 13)

and He also said,

And how few they are!

(Qur'an- Chapter 38, Verse 24)

and He said,

And those who believed, and they did not believe in him (Nuh (AS) but a few.

(Qur'an- Chapter 11, Verse 40)

GENERAL RULES

According to Spiritual Journalist – **Shaykh Najm al-Din Kubra**, this journey towards Allah requires observance of certain rules, some of which are related to the outward and certain others to the inward.

The OUTWARD rules are ten and as follows:-

The FIRST principle is that the journalist should give up material possessions and means and detach himself from worldly engagements. He should serve Allah alone.

The SECOND principle consists of seclusion and detachment from people, especially from everyone who hinders one from approaching God.

The THIRD principle is that the wayfarer should protect his bodily organs from what is abominable to his Lord, Master and Creator, Allah. Some Scholars have said to an extent,

One's speech should be in remembrance of God, one's silence should be an effort to contemplate, and one's looking at things should be for deriving a lesson.

The wayfarer should also protect his stomach from unlawful and suspect foods and drinks; and in the case of lawful things, he should not consume greedily, lustfully in a state of being oblivious of God; rather, while eating food he should be awake and aware of God's presence. In the same way, he should protect his feet and hands as well as his sexual organs from what is unlawful and abominable.

The FOURTH principle is to fight against one's urges in desiring good food, good drink, good clothing, and sensuous acts.

The FIFTH principle is to seek out a wise leader so one can guide himself or herself on the path of attaining perfection. The wayfarer would be unaware of so many things – thoughts and actions, which might hinder progress towards spiritual perfection, and even if he were aware, he would not know how to cure these problems.

The SIXTH principle is to make certain that all obligatory acts in Islam, and as set by Allah are done and on its time, and one hardly focuses on the recommended and leaves out the obligatory. It is said that *remembrance of Allah is the key to the hidden world and the lamp of the inner world. Without this key, one cannot enter a house and without a lamp, a dark house is not illuminated. Hence, we remember God in the way a lover remembers his beloved, and the remembrance must never leave him.*

The SEVENTH principle is to keep constant fast, for this act signifies opposition to and suppression of the carnal self, which is the root cause of all evil.

The EIGHTH principle is cleanliness, and taking care of bodily cleanness. Cleanness is the weapon of a believer and it evokes inner enlightenment. The Prophet (S) said,

Wudhu (ablution) performed on Wudhu shall be as light upon light on The Judgment Day.

The NINTH principle is to stay awake, keep vigil in nights, and perform the nightly prayer and supplications.

The TENTH and last principle for the journalist is that he should work hard and struggle to get lawful means of livelihood and earn in a lawful manner.

The scholar (al-Amini) who has reached such higher stages of Spiritual Perfection says,

Moreover, The Prophet (S) said, "After the obligatory duties, it is obligatory to seek lawful livelihood"; that is, after the duty of faith it is the most obligatory of one's obligations. The lawful earning makes the inner being illuminated and unlawful earning darkens the heart.

The 'Urafa (people of higher level of understanding) have said, whoever is nourished by lawfully earned things for forty days, God will illuminate his heart. In case the lawful is not available due to the prevailing dubious character of that which is earned, he should eat that which is less susceptible to doubt, and that too is to be taken according to one's minimum necessity and not to one's need and satiation. If the seeker acts with negligence in this regard, he will not be in a position to benefit from the fruits of the tree of Gnosticism.

The author of the treatise (may God have mercy upon him) says, a disciple should not, even in the days of hardship and need, take even a grain of sesame that is doubtful, to say nothing of taking such a thing during normal and easier circumstances. The root cause of corruption of the world's people is their carelessness regarding this matter, as well as their lack of abstinence from unlawful and doubtful food. The Messenger of God (S) said, "The criteria of religion are piety and fear of God, and faith is corrupted because of greediness."

The INWARD ten rules are as follows:-

FIRST is keeping watch over the self (Nafs). That is, the wayfarer should always keep vigil over his heart. He should not neglect it even for a moment, for otherwise he would succumb to his carnal desires and satanic temptations. He should consider himself as being watched by God, as He has said,

...Surely, Allah has been a watcher over you.
(Qur'an – Chapter 4, Verse 1)

The Prophet (S) said,

God watches your heart and acts, not your apparent behavior and worldly belongings.

SECOND is the expression of humility, poverty and abasement before The Lord of The World. Ba Yazid (may Allah hallow his mighty soul) said that a voice called me from within and said,

"O' Ba Yazid! There are many servants in Our Service. So if you seek Us, bring humility and neediness."

Ba Yazid further said,

"You know for certain that you are in a crying need of your Lord at every hour on many counts; so you are needful of His Guiding Light as well as His Merciful Glance, Guidance and His Sustenance at every moment. Moreover, you are in need of Him at the time of death so that The Light of Islam and its knowledge are intact in your heart.

In the grave, too, you are in need of Him so that you successfully answer the questions asked by Nakir and Munkar. It is He Who will be your friend in the terrors of the grave. The greatest of all of your needs is your dependence on Him in The Day of Judgement, The Day of Regret and Remorse. This is so that God, The Exalted, may make your face luminous, conceal your blemishes (with His Mercy) and enhance the weight and worth of your good works in His Balance (Mizan). This is also because He may facilitate the clearance of your account and put the book of your deeds in your right hand, that He may keep you firm on The Path and save you from Hell-Fire and lead you towards paradise. His highest generosity and the most excellent favor is to bless you with His beatific vision."

These are your essential needs with regard to your Master in this world and the other world. Hence, your expression of poverty and humility before God should be according to your real poverty and need.

The THIRD principle is repentance and penitence before God, in all conditions of hardship and affluence, comfort and calamity. Referring to The Prophet Suleiman (AS), God said, "He was a good servant, because he was penitent." God said the same thing about the Prophet Ayub (AS). Prophet Suleiman (AS) saw his Benefactor in His bounties and Prophet Ayub (AS) saw The One who tries in His Trials. Neither did the bounties enjoyed by the former blur his vision of The Provider, nor the hardship or tribulations of the latter veil his sight from seeing The Hand of their Sender. In both the cases, they attributed all that happened to The Lord.

The FOURTH principle is surrender to The Command of God, The Exalted. Taslim means to surrender to God both with the heart and the body, both of which are under His ownership. To surrender a property to its owner is an essential condition (of submission). The owner has the right to control his property and dispose it in any way He deems proper. It is up to Him whether He honors or disgraces His slave, breathes life in him or kills him, causes sickness or bestows health on him, makes him rich or poor. Hence, it is required of a wayfarer not to raise any objection against His Will. He should not complain overtly or covertly, for the protest against the real owner is absurd and in violation of all norms. Complaint against The Lord by someone who claims to be his slave and lover is a shortcoming in one's love, servitude and devotion.

The FIFTH principle is Ridha (Acquiescence), i.e. accepting Divine Dispensations without questioning though they be bitter. The common believers take recourse in patience when a calamity befalls. However, the state of the elect in a similar situation is that of Ridha.

The difference between Sabr and Ridha is that the patient person, by virtue of his faith, faces calamity with forbearance; his faith remains unshaken and he does not get disturbed in times of calamity; he will not deviate from the path of servitude, howsoever great and unbearable the calamity should be but his heart resents the calamity. However, the acquiescent person (Radhi) is the one whose heart is always in the state of acquiescence and happiness. Calamity and affluence do not affect him, for whatever he receives (from God); he considers it as a gift from a friend. He enjoys hardships inflicted upon him by his Beloved and Friend with the same pleasure as others enjoy favors.

The SIXTH principle is permanent grief (Huzn). The Prophet (S) said, "God loves every grieving heart." Regarding The Prophet's attributes, he was always in the state of contemplation and grief. According to the people of higher understanding, every heart, which is devoid of grief, is nothing but clay. How can a believer manage to be cheerful while he does not know what was written by the pen of pre-eternity about his fate, whether it is felicity or wretchedness.

In addition, he is unaware of his end, for he does not know what he will earn tomorrow (in the way of virtue or vice). He does not know whether God will accept his obedience or not, and whether his sins pardoned or not.

Shaykh Abul-Hasan al-Kharqani was among the people of grief. One day he was asked the reason of the grief of the great mystics. He replied that the reason is that they want to know God, as He deserves to be known. That is impossible. No one can know God, as He deserves to be known.

The SEVENTH principle is to have good faith in God, The Exalted. In addition, He said in a sacred tradition (Hadith al-Qudsi)

I treat My servant in accordance with his opinion of Me, so let him have whatever opinion he has.

Therefore, it is necessary for a servant of God to have good faith in God or a favorable opinion of Him. One reaches this sacred state because of discerning The Attributes of Beauty of God, comprising Generosity, Mercifulness, Magnanimity, and the vastness of His Forgiveness. Whoever mistrusts God or has an unfavorable opinion of his Lord and loses hope in His Mercy, he considers his vices and sins bigger than the capacity of God's Generosity and Mercy, these amounts to ascribing defect and shortcoming to God.

The EIGHTH rule is that one should not consider himself of herself out of reach of God's Devising. As God has said,

Are they then secure from Allah's scheme? None deem himself secure from Allah's scheme save the losers.
(Qur'an – Chapter 7, Verse 99)

Further, He has said,

The erudite among His bondmen only fear Allah....
(Qur'an – Chapter 35, Verse 28)

This fear and awe is produced in one who contemplates God's attributes of Magnificence and Wrath. For, in the same way as God is attributed with the qualities of Generosity and Mercifulness, He is attributed with Wrathfulness and Power as well. God, The Exalted, has said,

Surely, I shall fill The Hell with the Jinn and Humankind together.
(Qur'an – Chapter 11, Verse 119)

It is said in a tradition that God, The Exalted, will say to Adam (A): "Arise and throw them into The Hell-Fire!" Adam will ask, "How many?" The reply would be, "Nine-hundred-and-ninety out of every thousand". Then how can a slave with his burden of sins avoid being fearsome of Divine Wrath and Might after having been aware of it?

The NINTH principle is love. In this regard, God has said,

...He loves them, and they love Him...
(Qur'an – Chapter 5, Verse 54)

Love is the essence of all stations and by means of which the slave of God progresses toward The Lord of The Heaven and The Earth, and by virtue of which he will attain to the higher degrees of the journey. Love is the fruit of the knowledge of The Beautiful Names of God. No one possesses beauty (which is his own) in the world except God. Whatever beauty and perfection is seen in the creatures is, in fact, a particle of the sun of His Beauty, a drop from the oceans of His Perfection.

If you consider beauty and perfection confined to material forms and worldly things, know that you are imprisoned within the world of (corporeal) form and deprived of observing the reality. For, the real beauty and rational perfection are found in the essence of a being that possesses power and life, has the attributes of generosity, benevolence, forbearance, and is devoid of any shortcoming and defect. It is due to this reason that all love the generous, the noble, and the wise.

Similarly, the warrior and the courageous are loved due to their might, and the learned and the pious are respected due to their honesty and purity. You know that each one of these attributes of glory and beauty are inherent in The Divine Essence, which possesses them infinitely and eternally. However, beings other than God possess a beauty and perfection that is limited, reckonable, accidental, finite and mortal. Even such attributes are borrowed from The Divine Ocean of Bounty and Beneficence. Hence, none except God deserves to be loved in the real sense, for every form of beauty is derived from Him. Therefore, everyone who loves something other than God is surely blind to The Beauty of God.

The TENTH principle is to give up reliance on one's will and freedom and to take up trust in The Omnipotent Lord of The World. God has said,

Allah coins a similitude: (on the one hand) a slave who has control of nothing, and (on the other hand) one on whom We have bestowed a fair provision from Us, and he spends them secretly and openly. Are they equal?
(Qur'an – Chapter 16, Verse 75)

Therefore, a slave has nothing to do with freedom, for freedom suits those who are free. In addition, the 'Urafa have said, if a seeker has a single desire, it means that his vision is obstructed by veils. They have also said that this (desire) is the greatest of veils. Hence, even the desire of union with God is the darkest of all veils. So when even the desire of proximity to God is considered the greatest veil, what is to be said about the condition of one who is plunged in sensual desires and mundane enticements? Thus, it is essential for a seeker to be like the corpse in the hands of the bathers, so that he may attain communion with The Truth. Every desire takes one away from God.

The above-mentioned principles are most important for inner perfection with which a Salik (spiritual traveler) should adorn his self (Nafs) in order to be admitted-into the proximity of God. Otherwise, his sincerity and aspiration will be deemed false; his love will be merely a false claim, though he may consider himself as a wayfarer towards God, in reality he is plunged in the dungeons of sensuality.

GNOSTICISM

According to the scholars of Islam,

An Ascetic is one who renounces all worldly goods and pleasures. A Worshiper however, is one who is strict in performing acts of worship and is careful with his duties towards Allah (SWT). A Gnostic is one who diverts his attention from everything other than Allah (SWT).

Abu Ali Sina reports that the final stage (Gnosticism) can hardly be grasped or apprehended before the first two (Asceticism & Worship). *Indeed, every Gnostic is necessarily an ascetic and a worshiper, but every ascetic or a worshiper is not necessarily a Gnostic.* The goal of every Gnostic is to please Allah (SWT) and Him alone. The worship of a Gnostic is always free from any element of fear of Hell or hope for Paradise. Undoubtedly, it is a strenuous quality to possess.

Imam Ali (AS) used to say,

O' Allah (SWT)! I do not worship You because of the fear of Hell or any hope for Paradise. But I worship You because I have found you worthy of being worshipped.

We should try and remove in ourselves everything other than Allah (SWT) and Him alone and make our appetitive soul submissive to the contented soul. We should try to soften our inner-self with a view to make it fit for receiving Divine Enlightenment. To a Gnostic,

Springs of knowledge and wisdom gush out from their hearts. What appears to be difficult to those who live in ease and luxury seems to be easy to them. They are familiar to what scares the ignorant. Their bodies are with the people but the souls are in the higher world.

(Imam Ali (AS) to Kumayl, the son of Ziyad Nikhai (AR))

However, an ascetic life does not mean worshiping Allah in the mountains and in seclusion so much that the worldly life and its responsibilities are ignored. Shaykh Rajab Ali (AR) believed that if someone really acts according to the explicit Islamic ordinances, they will achieve all perfection and spiritual stations, and there is no need to go to extremes. He was strongly opposed to all kinds of extreme asceticism and self-mortification that are contrary to the traditions and practices of religious creeds.

One of his devotees related - for a while I was engaged in self-mortification, living in seclusion away from my *Alawiyya* (descendant of Imam Ali (AS)) wife in a separate room where I did my supplications and *dhikr* and slept there too. After four or five months, a friend of mine took me to see the reverend Shaykh. At his doorstep and as soon as the Shaykh saw me, he said to me outright,

Would you like me to tell... ?

I bowed my head in shame. Then the Shaykh continued,

Why are you treating your wife like that and have abandoned her? ...Do away with these self-mortification, Adhkar, and recitals!

Go get a box of sweets and go back to your wife. Say your prayers on due time with the common *Ta'qibat* (the supererogatory supplications after each prayer).

Then the Shaykh stressed on the narrations from The Ahlul-Bayt (AS) asserting that if a person acts sincerely and purely for forty days, the fountainheads of wisdom will spring up from his heart and pointed out,

According to these traditions if a person fulfills his religious obligations, they will definitely acquire certain illumination.

Acting according to the Shaykh's recommendation, that person gave up self-mortification and returned to his normal life.

Allamah Taba Tabai (AR) says that *any spiritual traveler may be compared to that person who has built a tank of water and has not used it for a long time. The impurities and pollutions have thus settled at the bottom of the tank. The person has in his mind that the water is clear and pure, but when he gets down into the tank and tries to wash something in it, black patches appear and he finds that the water is impure. And for this reason, it is necessary for you to self-mortify and clean yourself before entering the spiritual realms of the journey.*

At this stage, one is influenced by his inner thoughts and hidden instincts that force him to disobey The Commands of Allah (SWT). However, the true seeker of Allah (SWT) should never be distressed or discouraged by these obstacles, and should boldly proceed towards his destination with the help of Divine Assistance till he gets himself out from this inner world of animalistic thoughts. We need to be careful lest some vicious thoughts remain stuck at the back of our souls and fail us in the final stages of the journey.

It has been mentioned that the first signs is the feeling that one does not exist at all. It is reported by Allamah Taba Tabai (AR) that Allamah Mirza Ali Qazi (AR) used to say that one day he came out of his room into the veranda. He suddenly saw himself (his Nafs) standing quietly beside him. When he looked carefully, he realized that there was no skin or flesh on its face!

In the further stages, the spiritual traveler is able to apprehend and reflect on His Lord and The Creation more convincingly than ever before. When this devotee completes all these stages, he then gets closer and becomes surrounded by divine impulses. He is finally seized by The Divine Beauty and Perfection of his Beloved Allah (SWT), The One who created him and assisted him in attaining this Spiritual Perfection.

Shaykh Rajab Ali (AR) says,

To my humble opinion if one seeks a way to be delivered and wishes to attain real perfection and to enjoy the meanings of Monotheism, they should resort to four things: first, perpetual presence; second, to rely on to The Ahlul-Bayt (AS); third, begging at night (i. e., whispering prayers and supererogation during night time); and fourth, benevolence to people.

MONOTHEISM

Shaykh Rajab Ali says,

Monotheism is the basis of self-building. Anyone who wants to construct a building, they must first lay the foundation firm enough, otherwise that building will not be well grounded. The spiritual seeker must begin his journey from Monotheism, as the first utterance of all The Prophets has been *La Ilaha Illallah*. Man will fail attaining human perfection, unless he appreciates the truth of Monotheism and believe that there is nothing in existence except God's Pure Essence. Having grasped the reality of Monotheism, man will whole-heartedly attend The Creator.

It is further said,

Man is the tree of Monotheism, the fruit of which is the emergence of Divine Attributes; it (the tree) will not be perfect until it yields such fruit. Man's peak of perfection is reaching (nearness to) Allah, that is, to become a manifestation of God's Attributes. Try to bring to life Divine Attributes in you. He is Gracious; you be gracious too. He is Merciful; you be merciful too. He is Concealer (of defects); you be concealer too.

According to al-Khumeini (AR),

If you are engrossed in Monotheism, you will enjoy The Exalted God's special bounties at any moment that you had not enjoyed prior to that moment. God's bounties and blessings are novel at any moment.

In addition, one of the definitions of Polytheism is agreeing and obeying ones evil desires,

The mother of all idols is the idol of your own nafs (carnal desires); unless this grand idol and powerful Satan is not shattered, there will be no way to Him-The High and The Most Exalted. Lo and behold! This idol can hardly be shattered and this Satan can barely be tamed! If you want to find your way to the truth of Monotheism, do good to people. The burden of Monotheism is heavy and hazardous, and not everyone is able to tolerate that burden. However, benevolence to the people makes its tolerance easy.

The sentence '**Allah IS ONE**' may be interpreted in four ways. Two of them are not permissible for Allah (SWT) and two are allowed. The two meanings which are not permissible for Allah (SWT) are,

1) The saying of a person who says '*one*' when he uses it as a number is not permissible, because that which has no second (i.e. is unique) does not come under the domain of a number. Do you not see that Allah (SWT) has declared him an unbeliever who said that Allah (SWT) was the third of the three?

2) And the saying of a person who says that '*He is one of the people*' in the same sense as a specie is one of its genes. This, also, is not allowed because it likens Allah (SWT) to other things, and our Lord is too great for, and far above of, this likening.

And as for the two meanings which are applicable to Him, they are,

1) The saying of a person who says, '*He is One, there is nothing like unto Him.*' Such indeed is our Lord.

2) And the saying of a person who says that, He, The Mighty, The Great, is unique in significance. That is, He is not divisible, neither in existence nor in thought or imagination. Such indeed is our Lord.
(Imam Ali (AS))

Says the learned divine Abu Ja'fer, the son of Babawayh al-Qummi (AR),

Know that our belief concerning Tawhid is that Allah (SWT), exalted is He, is One and Absolutely Unique. There is no one like Him, He is prior, He never was, and never will be, but The Hearing and The Seeing One. The Omniscient; The Wise; The Living; The Everlasting; The Mighty; The Holy; The Knowing One; The Powerful; The Self-sufficient.

He cannot be described by His Essence, His Body, His Form, or by His Accidental Qualities. Nor in terms of length, breadth, surface, weight, lightness, quiescence, motion, place or time. He, Exalted is He, transcends all the attributes of His creatures. He is beyond both the limitations of transcendence and of immanence.

He is a Thing, but not like other things. He is Unique, Eternal Refuge; He begets not lest He may be inherited, nor is He begotten lest He may be associated with others. There is no one like Him. He has no equal or opponent, compeer or consort. Nothing can be compared with Him. He has no rival, no partner. Human eyes cannot behold Him, while He discerns the power of eyes. The thoughts of men cannot compass Him, while He is aware of them. Slumbers overtakes Him not nor sleep.

He is The Gracious and The Knowing One, The Creator of all things. There is no deity other than Him. To Him alone belongs The Power of Creation and Authority. Blessed is Allah, The Lord of The Worlds.

al-Mawdudi (AR) explains the following effects of Tawhid, which the belief in '**La Ilaha Illallah**' (There is no God but Allah) has on the life of a man, and exactly why when one denies it fails in this life and the next.

It is said that a believer in this Tawhid can never be narrow in outlook. He believes in Allah (SWT) Who is The Creator of The Heavens and The Earth, The Master of The East and The West, and Sustainer of the entire Universe. After this belief he does not regard anything in the world as a stranger to himself. He looks on everything in the universe as belonging to the same Lord he himself belongs to. His sympathy, love and service are not confined to any particular sphere or group. His vision is enlarged, his intellectual horizon widens, and his outlook becomes as liberal and as boundless as is The Kingdom of Allah (SWT). *How can this width of vision and breadth of mind be achieved by an atheist, a polytheist or one who believes in a deity supposed to possess limited and defective powers like a man?*

This belief produces in man the highest degree of self-respect and self esteem. The believer knows that Allah (SWT) alone is The Possessor of all power, and that none besides Him can benefit or harm a person, provide for his needs, give and take away life, or yield authority or influence. This conviction makes him indifferent to, and independent and fearless of all powers other than those of Allah (SWT). He never bows his head in homage to any of God's creatures, nor does he stretch out his hand before anyone else. He is not overawed by anybody's greatness. This attitude of mind cannot be produced by any other belief. For it is necessary that those who associate other beings with Allah (SWT), or who deny Allah (SWT), should bow in homage to some creatures, regard them able to benefit or harm them, fear them and place their hopes in them.

Along with self-respect this belief also generates in man a sense of modesty and humbleness. It makes him unostentatious and unpretending. A believer never becomes proud, haughty or arrogant. The boisterous pride of power, wealth and worth can have no room in his heart, because he knows that whatever he possesses has been given to him by Allah (SWT), and that Allah (SWT) can take away just as He can give.

In contrast to this, an unbeliever, when he achieves some worldly merit, becomes proud and conceited because he believes that his merit is due to his own worth. In the same way pride and self-conceit are a necessary outcome and concomitant of *'association of others with Allah (SWT) in His Divinity,'* because a non-believer believes that he has a particular relation with the deities which does not exist between them and other people.

This belief (in Tawhid) makes man virtuous and upright. He has the conviction that there is no other means of success and salvation for him except purity of soul and righteousness of behavior. He has perfect faith in Allah (SWT) Who is above all need, is related to none and is absolutely just. This belief creates in him the consciousness that, unless he lives rightly and acts justly, he cannot succeed. No influence or underhand activity can save him from ruin.

As against this, the non-believers always live on false hopes. Some of them believe that God's son has atoned for their sins; some think that they are God's favorites, and will not be punished, while others make offerings to their deities and believe that by so bribing the deities they acquire a license to do whatever they like. Such false beliefs keep them enmeshed in sin and evil deeds; depending on their deities, they do not bother about their souls and living pure and good lives. As to atheists, they do not believe that there is any being having power over them, to whom they should be responsible for their good or bad actions; therefore, they consider themselves independent to act in whatever way they like. Their own fancies become their gods and they live like slaves of their wishes and desires.

The believer, on the other hand, never becomes despondent. He has a firm faith in Allah (SWT) Who is Master of all The Treasures of The Earth and The Heavens, Whose Grace and Bounty have no limit, and Whose Powers are infinite. This faith imparts to his heart extraordinary consolation, fills it with satisfaction and keeps it filled with hope. Although he may meet with rejection from all sides in this world, faith in and dependence on Allah (SWT) never leave him, and on their strength he goes on struggling. Such profound confidence can result from no other belief than belief in One Allah (SWT). Non-believers and atheists have small hearts; they depend on limited powers; therefore, in times of trouble they are soon overwhelmed by despair and, frequently, they commit suicide.

This belief produces in man a very strong degree of determination, patience, perseverance, and trust in Allah (SWT). When he makes up his mind and devotes his resources to fulfilling The Divine Commands in order to secure God's Pleasure, he is sure that he has the support and backing of The Lord of The Universe. This certainty makes him firm and strong like a mountain and no amount of difficulties, impediments and opposition can make him give up his resolution. Disbelieving and atheism have no such effect.

This declaration inspires bravery in man. There are two things which make a man cowardly; Fear of death and love of safety, and the idea that there is someone else besides Allah (SWT) who can take away life and that man, by adopting certain devices, can ward off death. *Belief in 'La Ilaha Illallah' purges the mind of both these ideas.*

The first idea goes out of his mind because he knows that his life and his property and everything else really belong to Allah (SWT), and he becomes ready to sacrifice everything for His Pleasure. He gets rid of the second idea because he knows that no weapon, no man or animal has the power of taking away his life; Allah (SWT) alone has the power to do so. A time has been ordained for him, and all the forces of the world combined cannot take away anyone's life before that time. It is for this reason that no one is braver than the one who has faith in Allah (SWT). Nothing can daunt him, not even the strongest tempest of adversity and the mightiest of armies. Where can the non-believers and the atheists get such great determination, force and power from? They hold life the dearest thing in the world; they believe that death is brought about by the enemy and can be warded off by running away from him!

The belief in '**La Ilaha Illallah**' creates an attitude of peace and contentment, purges the mind of jealousy, envy and greed and keeps away the temptations of resorting to base and unfair means for achieving success. The believer understands that wealth is in God's Hands, and He apportions it out as He likes; that honor, power, reputation and authority - everything - is subjected to His Will, and He bestows them as He wills; and that man's duty is only to endeavor and to struggle fairly. He knows that success and failure depend on God's grace; if He wills to give, no power in the world can prevent Him from so doing; and if He does not will it, no power can force Him to.

On the other hand, the non-believers and the atheists consider success and failure as dependent on their own efforts and the help or opposition of earthly powers. Therefore, they always remain slaves to cupidity and envy. They never hesitate to turn to bribery, flattery, conspiracy and other kinds of base and unfair means to achieve their ends. Jealousy and envy of others success eat them away, and they will stop at nothing to bring about the downfall of a successful rival.

The most important effect of '**La Ilaha Illallah**' is that it makes man obey and observe God's Laws. One who has belief in it is sure that Allah (SWT) knows everything hidden or open and is nearer to him than his own jugular vein. If he commits a sin in a secluded corner and in the darkness of night, He knows it; He even knows our thoughts and intentions, bad or good. We can hide from everyone, but we cannot hide anything from Allah (SWT); we can evade everyone, but it is impossible to evade God's grip.

The firmer a man's belief in this respect, the more observant will he be of God's Commands; he will shun what Allah (SWT) has forbidden and he will carry out His behests even in solitude and in darkness, because he knows that God's presence never leaves him alone, and he dreads The Court whose warrant he can never avoid. It is for this reason that the first and the most important conditions for being a Muslim is to have faith in '**La Ilaha Illallah.**' Muslims, as you have already been told, means one 'obedient to God' and obedience to Allah (SWT) is impossible unless one firmly believes in '**La Ilaha Illallah.**'

VOLUNTARY AND INVOLUNTARY JOURNEYS

We all should appreciate the fact that we are on our way to seek our Lord and that one day we will meet Him, and this meeting will happen to all of us, either in a positive note, or a negative one. Understandably, Allah (SWT), The Exalted, by His Perfect Might and Wisdom has destined two journeys for Prophet Adam (AS) and his children. The first is INVOLUNTARY and the other is VOLUNTARY.

The Involuntary Journey

As regards to the involuntary journey, it can be summarized into six stages. The starting point was your father's loins; the second stage was your mother's womb; the third stage is this physical world; the fourth stage will be your grave; the fifth stage will be The Resurrection Day; and the final stage will either be a Garden from The Gardens in Paradise or an Abode of Eternal Fire and Torture.

The Details and Wonders of Conception and Birth of a Child

Concerning the involuntary journey that we all had to undertake, it is narrated in al-Kafi from Imam al-Baqir (AS) that he said,

When Allah (SWT) wants to create a semen - and it is among that from which covenant was taken from The Loin of Adam (AS) - (or as He may decide later); and wants to put it in the womb, He excites the man for sexual intercourse and reveals to the womb, 'Open your door so that My Creature and My Firm Decree may enter upon you.' Therefore, it opens its door. The sperm reaches the womb and moves therein for forty days: then it becomes a clot for forty days; then it becomes a lump of flesh for forty days, then flow in it interlaced veins.

Then Allah (SWT) sends two 'Creator' Angels who make in the wombs what Allah (SWT) wishes; they enter into the belly of the woman, from the woman's mouth; so they reach the womb, and in it is the ancient spirit that was transferred into loins of men and wombs of women. Then they blow in it the spirit of life and eternity, and they create openings for his hearing and sight, and make his limbs and all that is in the stomach, by permission of Allah (SWT).

Then Allah (SWT) reveals to the two Angels: 'Write on him My Decree and My Destiny and Firm Order; and write down that I may change that which you write.' They say, 'O' Lord! What are we to write?' Thereupon Allah (SWT) reveals to them to raise their heads towards the head of the mother. They raise their heads, and lo! There is a tablet striking the mother's forehead. They look into it and find in it his features, his embellishment, his death time, his covenant - whether he shall be a fortunate or an unfortunate one, and all his affairs.

Thereupon, one of them dictates to the other; thus, they write down all that is in the tablet, and make it conditional on the final decision (of Allah (SWT)). Then they seal the writing and place it between his eyes. Then they make him stand upright in the womb of his mother. Sometimes he disobeys and turns upside down, and this does not happen except in the case of an arrogant and rebellious one. In addition, when the time comes for the fetus to come out, developed or undeveloped, Allah (SWT) reveals to the womb: 'Open your door so that My Creature may go out to My Earth and My Order may be enforced about him, because now time has come for him to go out.'

Then the womb opens the door for the child; so he turns upside down, his feet go over his head, his head reaches the lower part of the (mother's) stomach. It is done so that delivery may be easier for the woman and the child. Then Allah (SWT) sends to him an Angel named 'The Admonisher', who sternly tells him to go out; the child becomes frightened; when it delays some more, The Angel tells him once again to get out; the child becomes even more frightened and falls on the earth crying, terrified because of that rebuke.

The Voluntary Journey

The voluntary journey is of two kinds, the journey of the souls and the heart towards The Almighty, and the physical journey in this Earth. Regarding the spiritual journey towards our loving Lord, scholars have advised us to keep in mind that we have been created in order to enable our heart to make this kind of sacred journey towards Him, attain communion with Him, and to observe His Glory, Beauty, Mightiness, Power, and so forth. Indeed, all of us have been created to know and understand Him. According to a sacred tradition from Hadith al-Qudsi, Allah (SWT) has said,

I was a hidden treasure. I wished to become known. Therefore, I created the creation...

The Veils

It has been repeatedly said that in this life my heart, yours and everyone else's is confronted with veils and obstacles that separates us from our Lord. There are also degrees and stations of proximity to Allah (SWT). We have to overcome all these obstacles to achieve the pleasure of Allah (SWT). Only then can we achieve the pleasure of Allah (SWT). We need to understand that The Sacred Lord will not be revealed to us unless all the veils present in us are torn away.

According to Islamic Scholars, the first veil is ignorance regarding Him and is considered the main cause of our separation from The Almighty. It is very essential for us to convert the darkness of ignorance into illumination by means of pondering over His Unity, Power, Creation, Kingdom, and so forth.

We need to think and contemplate over His Being and Creation for it is considered one of the best forms of worship. Otherwise, one's body and soul will remain in eternal darkness and damnation in the lowest levels of Hell.

The next stage on the path of attaining proximity to our Lord is through obedience and servitude. The Prophet (S) narrates from The Exalted Authority that He has said,

Those who seek nearness to Me do not succeed in attaining their goal except in proportion to their fulfillment of all that I have made obligatory for them. My servant always seeks nearness to me by means of supererogatory acts of worship (the recommended acts) until he attains to My love for him.

The third of the stages is good conduct. The advice is to hasten to perform good deeds and build up our moral strong enough to act as a barrier opposing Satanic Forces.

The Principles of The Voluntary Journey

This journey of the heart towards our Lord requires acceptance and observance of certain rules. The most important principles are hereby summarized.

The first principle concerns seclusion and detachment from people especially those who hinder you from learning the true Islam and from approaching Allah (SWT). The Prophet (S) has said,

Keep away from them and avoid those who call upon everything other than Allah (SWT). When death comes to one who is seeking knowledge to revive thereby Islam, there will only be one degree between him and The Prophets (AS) in Paradise.

Next, try to protect the organs of your body from disobedient acts, as they would invite Allah (SWT)'s displeasure. Shut your eyes from prohibited looks, keep your ears away from slander and obscene words. Protect your tongue from similar kind of errors and seal your lips from speaking what would invite the pleasure of Shaytan. The scholars have said,

One's speech should always be in remembrance of Allah (SWT), one's silence should be an effort to think and contemplate, and one's looking should be for deriving a lesson.

Always oppose your carnal self (Nafs). Try to observe compulsory acts first and then only perform the recommended acts. It should never happen that you concentrate too much on the recommended acts and give less importance to the compulsory ones.

Take care of your cleanliness, for cleanliness is a weapon of a believer and is capable to evoke inner enlightenment. The Prophet (S) has said,

Ablution (Wudhu) performed on ablution shall be as light upon light on The Day of Judgment.

Sacrifice your sleep and keep vigil during the nights. Fast as many days as you can. Certainly, Allah (SWT) has said in Hadith al-Qudsi,

Fast is for Me and I shall reward it.

Fast has been declared only for Allah (SWT) because it is the only act of worship, which consists of a negative aspect. For example, not eating, not drinking, and so forth, while other acts of worship, like prayer and pilgrimage, etc., consist of positive actions or are made up of positive and negative aspects. According to Allamah Tabai (AR),

The positive acts of worship cannot be pure in showing the worshipper's spirit of servitude or The Lordship of Almighty Allah (SWT). It cannot be free of materialistic imperfections and limitations, and sometimes it may be done to please someone other than Allah (SWT). However, the fast is an act of worship in which one has just to abstain from lust and desire, and restrain oneself from worldly matters. This negative aspect is a thing, which nobody can know except Allah (SWT). It is dealing entirely between the servant and The Lord, and therefore this worship is purely for Allah (SWT) and others can have no share in it.

By saying, 'I shall reward it,' it means that Allah (SWT) Himself will give its reward directly and will not make anyone a link between Himself and His Servant. The servant worshipped Him in a way that nobody knew but Allah (SWT), so he will be given its reward in a way nobody will know it except Allah (SWT).

Imam al-Sadiq (AS) once said to his companions,

The Messenger of Allah, in the early days of his Prophethood, used to fast continuously so that people would think that he would not leave a single day's fast, and then leave the fast continuously so that they would say he would not fast again.. Then he changed this regime and began fasting on alternate days, and this was the fast of Daud (AS). Then he changed it and started fasting three bright days (i.e. 13th, 14th and 15th of the lunar month when the moonlight was the brightest). Then again, he divided the three days - one day each in every ten days, the first and last Thursdays and the Wednesday in the middle. He continued with this regime until he left this world.

Further advice is to,

Avoid planting seeds of greediness into your soul. Be pleased of whatsoever has been given to you. Desire nothing in this world except the pleasure of Allah (SWT). Never be proud of your good actions. Instead, thank Allah (SWT) for giving you a chance to perform that good act. Whenever you stand in front of Allah (SWT) express humility, poverty and abasement. Understand that it is up to Him whether He honors or disgraces His Slave. You should never complain, for complaint of someone who claims to be His Slave and Lover is a shortcoming in one's obedience.

History narrates as observing Prophet Suleiman (AS) who saw Allah (SWT) as his Benefactor through His Bounties, whereas Prophet Ayub (AS) saw The One who tries in His Trials. It is to Him whatever He does. We should be pleased at whatever He does. As Imam al-Sajjad (AS) has said,

Pleased are we with His Actions.

Try to create as much grief in your heart as possible for Allah (SWT) loves a grieving heart. According to The Prophet (S), Allah (SWT) watches your heart and acts, not your apparent behavior and worldly belongings. Indeed, scholars have exclaimed as to how a believer can manage to be cheerful while he does not know what has been written by The Pen of Pre-Eternity about his fate, whether it is felicity or wretchedness. In addition, he is unaware of his end, for he does not know what he will earn tomorrow (in the way of virtue or vice). He does not know whether his obedience will be accepted by Allah (SWT) or not, and whether his sins will be pardoned or not.

The advice is to make haste in performing good deeds. It is reported that once Imam al-Baqir (AS) said to his son Imam al-Sadiq (AS) that,

When you resolve on a good deed, make haste, for you do not know something might happen that may hinder you from performing it.

When a believer does well in his deed, Allah (SWT) multiplies his deed, every good deed seven hundred times ... Therefore, make good your deeds which you do to obtain the pleasure of Allah (SWT).

First Rule

RENUNCIATION OF CUSTOMS, USAGES AND SOCIAL FORMALITIES

According to scholars who have attained higher stages of spiritual perfection, the first rule involves the need to refrain oneself from all customs whose mere purpose and result is a stylish and fashionable sort of living. Unnecessary expenditures and usages should be ceased and social formalities rarely attended unless one is able to derive lessons from those gatherings. Our criterion for judging these gatherings should not concern for the pleasure or displeasure of people but Allah (SWT), The All-Merciful, and only Him. We need to learn to socialize and enjoy life the right way.

al-Khumeini (AR) considers it Polytheism/Shirk if one leaves out a compulsory act set by Allah and he or she does the opposite – for example, not praying on time because one has to watch the ending of a sports program or even be at a place where one considers Allah less important (Allah Forbid!) and the other worldly act more important.

Allamah al-Majlisi (AR) puts forward the following guidelines for a self-building and a self-purification program,

Useless talks, rather anything other than Allah (SWT)'s remembrance should be strictly avoided.

Living in luxurious, beautiful and comfortable housing as well as consumption of expensive foods, drinks and fancy clothing should be renounced.

Social mixing with other than God's most favorite believers should be strictly avoided.

Excessive sleep should be avoided and God's invocation with complete dedication should be recited continuously.

We need to weigh every deed and try not to sacrifice our obedience to Allah (SWT) by pleasing our peers or perform other worldly acts. The middle way is what has been prescribed. We should neither mix up with the people too much nor too little; it should not matter if we happen to look different from others because of our distinct and serious social behavior. As Allah (SWT) confirms in The Qur'an,

They do not fear the criticism of any critic in the way of Allah (SWT).
(Qur'an - Chapter 5, Verse 54)

Human beings are susceptible to being influenced with many of the characteristics, etiquette, and behavior of other people with whom they have social association, and in reality become like them, especially their best friends. Friendship with corrupt and wicked individuals forces a person towards corruption and evil deeds, while association with righteous people with good morals invites a person towards salvation and goodness. One of the characteristics of a human being is that he makes himself like others. If, he mixes socially with corrupt and sinful people, he becomes familiar with sinning and other immoral deeds, not only he does not see the ugliness of his actions; on the contrary, regards these acts as manifestation of acts of goodness.

We all need to be very conscientious. As Allah says,

For the life of this world is but goods and chattels of deception.
(Qur'an - Chapter 3, Verse 85)

What is the life of this world but play and amusement but best is the home in The Hereafter, for those who are righteous. Will ye not then understand?
(Qur'an - Chapter 6, Verse 32)

Know that the life of this world is only play, and idle talk, and pageantry, and boasting among you and rivalry in respect of wealth and children: as the likeness of vegetation after rain, whereof the growth is pleasing to the husbandman, but afterward it dries up and you will see it turning yellow, then it becomes straw. In addition, in The Hereafter there is grievous punishment.
(Qur'an - Chapter 57, Verse 20)

The pleasures of this world have to be taken seriously so one is not led astray and influenced by them. Imam Ali (AS) says,

So now, certainly, I frighten you from this world for it is sweet and green, surrounded by lusts, and liked for its immediate enjoyments. It excites wonder with small things, is ornamented with (false) hopes and decorated with deception. Its rejoicing does not last and its afflictions cannot be avoided. It is deceitful, harmful, changing, perishable, exhaustible, liable to destruction eating away and destructive.
Nahjul-Balagha, Sermon #111

The world is a place for which destruction is ordained and for its inhabitants departure from here is destined. It is sweet and green. It hastens towards its seeker and attaches to the heart of the viewer. So depart from here with the best of provision available with you and do not ask herein more than what is enough and do not demand from it more than subsistence.
Nahjul-Balagha, Sermon #45

Even if you stay up for many nights for worship, and fast for many days and make a sacrifice between the corner of The Ka'bah before The Black Stone (Hajarul-Aswad), and The Position of Ibrahim, God will resurrect you on The Resurrection Day with whomever or whatever you love extremely. If it or they are supposed to be in Heaven, you will be in Heaven, and if it or they are to be in Hell, you will be in Hell, too.
(Imam Ali (AS))

As mentioned earlier, we need to learn to avoid extremes. With al-Zuhd, it is narrated that The Prophet (S) said,

Abstinence does not mean wearing harsh clothes or eating unpleasant foods, rather it means reducing one's aspirations.

Allah will never ask or punish us for a blessing that He grants us in this life, but we have to be moderate and respect all the infinite blessings. It is just like inviting a friend for a meal and then asking him for something in return! How would The Most Kind and Most Merciful do such a thing to His Most Beloved Creation? Therefore, abstaining from worldly acts has a great philosophy and we have to use this world to earn the next, so living is necessary – but in moderation.

The First Successor after The Prophet (S) has clearly defined such limits. Imam Ali – The Commander of all The Faithful (AS) has said,

Abstinence is a form of wealth. Piety is like armor. Abstinence is best when done in private. Abstinence will make the body slim and restrict aspirations, and speeds up death and pushes away worldly desires. Whoever attains its benefits, and whoever loses it will be burdened. Nothing is nobler than piety. No trade is better than the performance of good deeds. Nothing is a better form of piety than abstaining from what is doubtful. Nothing is a better form of abstinence than abstaining from the forbidden. In short, abstinence is expressed by God's statement:

In order that you may not despair over matters that pass you by, or exult over favors bestowed upon you.

(Qur'an - Chapter 57, Verse 23)

Therefore, whoever does not worry about the past, and does not get happy about the future has realized both aspects of abstinence. O' People! Abstinence implies reducing aspirations, and thanking God for the blessings, and abstaining from the forbidden. Whenever you lose these characteristics, do not let the forbidden acts overcome your patience and do not forget being grateful for the blessings that you receive. God has left no room for any excuse for you by sending clear reasons and Divine Books.

ABrief Note on Love of The World

Allamah Tabai (AR) writes that,

A human being (also a materialist) is seen passing his life in the darkest valley of materialism. He is submerged in the sea of desires and is always pushed from one side to another by waves of material relations of wealth, wife, children, enjoyments and pleasures.

Hence, the foremost stage is to renounce and abandon from within ourselves all material relations, i.e. remove from our hearts and souls the love of this world. Only then, can we break the chains of this material world and commence our journey into the spiritual world, which resides people willing to sacrifice for Allah (SWT) any moment. Imam Ali (AS) says,

In great loss is the man, who abandoned The Hereafter for the sake of this world.

What is essential here is to understand The Disapproved World. According to Allamah Majlisi (AR),

All things that prevent men and women from obeying Allah (SWT) and keep them away from His Love, and from seeking The Hereafter, are defined as the (disapproved) world.

He, May Allah (SWT) have mercy on his soul, continues his remark and says,

Let it be known to you that that which can be deduced from all the verses of The Qur'an and the traditions in this regard; according to our understanding of them, is that The 'Accursed (Disapproved) World' is the sum total of all those things that prevent man from obeying Allah (SWT) and keep him (distant) from His Love and from seeking The Hereafter.

Therefore, The 'World' and The 'Hereafter' are antithetical to each other - whatever causes His Good Pleasure and one's nearness to Him belongs to The 'Hereafter', even though apparently, it should seem to be a matter of The World..

On the other hand, heretical exercises in spiritual self-discipline, sanctimonious deeds and the like, though they might be performed with great devotion and care, are meant for the world, as they cause alienation from Allah (SWT) and do not bring man near to Him. Such are the deeds of the infidels and those who oppose the right path.

Indeed, anything that earns you pleasure and joy, and provokes your lust before death, it is The 'Disapproved World' for you. However, The 'Approved World' can be an excellent abiding place for a faithful believer.

As al-Khumeini (AR) puts it,

This world is a nursery for the training of lofty souls and a school for acquiring higher spiritual stations. It is a field for cultivating The Hereafter. It is a school or a market place where higher stations and lasting spiritual merits are exchanged for transitory goods and where arrangements are made for The Hereafter.

Therefore, The 'Approved World' is,

The abode of truth for him who appreciates its truthfulness; a place of safety for him who understands it; a mine of treasures for him who collects provisions from it (for the next world), and a house of instructions for him who draws lessons from it. It is the shrine of worship for those who love Allah (SWT); the house of prayer for His Angels, the place where the revelations of Allah (SWT) descend, and the market place for those devoted to Him. Herein, they earn His Mercy and herein they acquire Paradise by way of profit.

(Imam Ali (AS))

The Disapproved World is the world of Nafs and the animalistic desires that compel us to disobey Allah (SWT) and commit sins against Him. The Prophet (S) once said,

The (disapproved) world is like a rotten dead body and those who go after it are dogs.

al-Sadiq (AS) has also warned us from The 'Disapproved World' by reminding us that,

Love of The (Disapproved) world is the source of all sins. The example of The (Disapproved) world is that of seawater, the more a thirsty person drinks from it, the thirstier he becomes until it destroys him.

Indeed,

Harm done by two ferocious wolves, one attacking from the front and the other from the rear, to a herd without a shepherd, is less rapid than the one done by the love of The (Disapproved) world to the faith of a faithful person.

(al-Baqir (AS))

Ayatullah Baqir al-Sadr (AR), during the final days of his last Ramadhan, gave a powerful speech to religious scholars. This speech is translated in the book 'Trends of History in The Qur'an by the same author. Some excerpts follow,

One can either love Allah (SWT) or love the world. However, both the 'love' cannot be contained in one heart. Let us submit our hearts to test. Let us examine our hearts to see whether the love of Allah (SWT) or the love of this world prevails over them. If the love of Allah (SWT) prevails over our hearts, let us make it deeper. If, Allah (SWT) forbid, the love of this world prevails, let us try to save ourselves from this dreadful malady.

Every love, which occupies the centre of the heart of a person, is of either of the two kinds. We call the perfect love the 'double grade' love and the love, which is not so perfect, the 'single grade' love. To begin with, (single grade) love becomes the basis of man's sentiments, feelings, emotions and desires. After attending to his job or immediate need, man soon returns to his object of love, because love occupies the centre of his thoughts, feelings and sentiments.

In the case of double grade love, man's entire attention is drawn by the object of his love and nothing can divert his attention from it. He is attentive to the thought of his Beloved.

Both these kinds of 'love' are found in the case of the noble 'Love of Allah?' Single grade love appears in the hearts of the pious believers whose hearts are free from the impurities of the base affairs of this world. As soon as they are free from their immediate engagements, they return to the question, which is the object of their love.

As for double grade love, it is found in the hearts of The Prophets (AS) and Imams (AS). You all know Imam Ali (AS), near whose tomb we live (i.e. Najaf). This great man has said 'I never saw a thing but I saw Allah (SWT) before it, after it and along with it.'

In fact, this was because 'Love of Allah (SWT)' occupied his great heart and conscience in such a way that it concealed everything else from him. Even when he saw human beings, he saw Allah (SWT). When he looked at Allah (SWT)'s Bounties, he remembered Him. This bond with Allah (SWT) was always present before his eyes, for it was Allah (SWT) alone whom he truly loved and to whom his hopes and aspirations were directed. He never allowed anyone to divert his attention from Allah (SWT).

Love of the world also reaches the stage where man does not see anything but the world before it, after it and along with it. Whatever he does, he does it for some worldly gain. He cannot devote himself to pious deeds for more than a few days. This is double grade love of the world. Imam al-Sadiq has said, 'This world is like seawater. The more one drinks of it, the more one gets thirst.'

It was 'Love of Allah (SWT)' that was the basis of Imam Ali's (AS) courage and bravery. His courage was not that of a ferocious beast. It was the courage produced by the faith and love of Allah (SWT). He was over 60 years when he fought against the Khwarij and in a single engagement killed 4000 of them. He was also at the height of bravery about being patient and not pressing his rightful claim. He kept quiet when he was required by Allah (SWT) to overlook his right. At that time, he was in the prime of his life. His conscience was aflame with the fire of youth. However, Islam had told him to keep quiet and be patient, despite the violation of his rights.

After all what is the world of ours? It is a collection of imaginary and fictional things. Harun al-Rashid's world was very imposing. We curse him day and night. We say that we are better, more pious and more Allah (SWT)-fearing than Harun was. Has the world of Harun al-Rashid been offered to us and have we rejected it? If not, how can we claim to be more pious than him? The world offered to us is not that of Harun. It is much less limited and comparably insignificant. It is transient and shorter and not as vast and extensive as that of Harun. For the sake of this world, he imprisoned Imam al-Kadhim (AS). Are we sure that if we get that world, we would not throw The Imam (AS) into prison (Allah (SWT) forbid!)? Have we tested ourselves and put this question to ourselves? Has the world of Harun ever been offered to us so that we know we are more pious?

In our world, there can be no truth except that of Allah (SWT)'s good pleasure. Had The Imam (AS) worked for worldly gains, he would have been the most miserable person. Yet when he worked for Allah (SWT), he said on his deathbed, 'By the Allah (SWT) of The Ka'bah, I am a successful person.' This world is not for the students of theology. A student looking for this world can get neither this world nor the next. Therefore, it is incumbent upon us, as students, to confine our efforts to seeking the next world for this world has no value to us.

We should think any moment as possible for our death. At the time of his death, my father was not as old as I was. My brother died at a younger age than I did. I have now completed the span of my lifetime.

We ask Allah (SWT) to purify our hearts, and to brighten them with faith. May He turn our minds more towards seeking His pleasure and fill our hearts with His love, His fear and belief in Him. May he help us according to the teachings of His Book, Ameen.

Allah (SWT) states,

Do not make your heart dead because of the love of this world. Indeed, this world is going to end your life very soon - love of this world makes your heart die and this world is going to be vanished very soon. - do not be like a candle, which is a light for people but burns itself out - take out the love of this world from your heart.

al-Sadiq (AS) continues,

One who passes his evenings and mornings in such a way that the world be his greatest concern, Allah (SWT) ordains poverty between his two eyes and causes his affairs to become disjointed and dissipated, while he does not attain anything except what has been apportioned for him. In addition, as for one who passes his evenings and mornings while his biggest concern and goal be The Hereafter, Allah (SWT) puts contentment in his heart and gives a wholeness and unity to his affairs.

An advice given by The Prophet (S) to his companion Abu Dhar (AR) reads as follows:

O' Abu Dhar! This world is a prison for the believer and a paradise for the unbeliever. In addition, no believer wakes up but is grieved in it. And how can he not be grieved in it when Allah (SWT) has sworn that it will take him to Hell and He didn't promise him that it will deliver him from it, and that he shall meet (in it) with sicknesses and hardships, and matters which will anger him, and he will be wronged in it and won't be helped. He seeks reward from Allah (SWT) and continues to remain in grief (in it) until he departs from it. In addition, when he departs from it, he attains to comfort and honor.

O' Abu Dhar! Surely, Allah (SWT) revealed to my brother Prophet Isa (AS), 'O Isa (AS)! Do not love the world for surely I do not love it. Love the Hereafter for surely it is The House of Return. '

O' Abu Dhar! Surely, Jibraeel (AS) came to me with the treasures of the world and said, 'O Muhammad (S)! These are the treasures of the world for you and it will not decrease of your share in The Hereafter with your Lord.' Therefore, I said, 'My beloved Jibraeel (AS)! I have no need of it. When I'm satiated I thank my Lord and when I'm hungry I ask Him.'

O' Abu Dhar! When Allah (SWT) wants good for a servant, He gives him understanding in religion and makes him abstentious in the world, and makes him see his own faults.

O' Abu Dhar! When you see your brother abstaining from worldliness (love of the disapproved world), pay attention to him for surely he is dictating wisdom.

So I said, O' Messenger of Allah (SWT)! Who is the most abstentious of mankind?' He (S) replied,

One who does not forget the graves and the deterioration (of this world), and leaves the excess of adornment of the world, and prefers what lasts over that which perishes, and he does not count tomorrow among his days and counts himself among the dead.

Spiritual Journey – Self-Building, Self-Purification

Program 9

al-Khumeini (AR) warns us in one of his discourses,

So, O' Base Self! O' Negligent Heart! Awake from your sleep and arise to confront this enemy (Shaytan) who for years has subdued you and made a captive of you, who drags you whenever he wants and commands you to perform every ugly and destructive deed! Arise and break these bonds! Sever these chains! Seek your freedom and throw away this disgrace and indignity ...

Second Rule

DETERMINATION, WILL AND RESOLUTION

The next rule concerns the stage of resolution and determination. The resolution which is required is synonymous with laying the foundation of a good life, a resolution to purge life from sin, and to perform all obligatory acts; and a resolution to compensate for the days lost (in sinfulness), and finally resolve to behave as a rational and devoted person ought to. That is, we should adopt a behavior that is in accordance with the codes of religious law, which would acknowledge us as a rational being.

At first, the learned have warned us that we are bound to face many unpleasant events. Friends and acquaintances who are interested only in their selfish desires and current social customs may constantly criticize us. Thus, we will have to encounter difficulties at every stage of this journey, which we can resolve only by means of our determination, perseverance, will power and trust in Allah (SWT).

al-Khumeini (AR) invites us to acknowledge that no path for the realization of divine existence can be undertaken unless one familiarizes himself with the apparent form of Islamic laws. Unless a person fully acquaints himself with the knowledge of the Shariah laws and follows them faithfully, he cannot attain the higher values of morality. Without adhering to the apparent teachings of Islam it is not possible that the Divine Knowledge could descend upon his heart, and the wisdom of the invisible, and the mysteries of the revered law be revealed to him.

Sayyid al-Khumeini (AR) further advises us that if we hear anything, which has been reported from any thinker or scholar, we should not refute it or consider it invalid just because it is not in accordance with our taste, or does not fit in our mode of thinking. This idea may have its origin from a higher source, from even The Qur'an and Hadith. How strange it will be that a Mujtahid issues a ruling (fatwa) regarding a certain aspect in Islam, and we reject it without examining the relevant evidences.

Third Rule

MODERATION AND RESTRAINT

Allamah Taba Tabai (AR) says,

(Moderation) It is one of those important principles, which the spiritual traveler must follow, for a little negligence in this respect not only hampers his progress, but often because of lack of attention to this aspect, he may get tired of the spiritual journey itself.

It is inherent that we may show much zeal and enthusiasm in our deeds in the beginning. Half-way through, we may encounter wonderful manifestations of The Divine Light, and later on we may strongly resolve to spend most of our time in prayers and sacrifice our lives in The Way of Allah (SWT).

However, under too much pressure we may be fed up, leave the work incomplete and cease to take interest in commendable tasks. *We are cautioned that there is no compulsion in religion and one should not try to force oneself into worship.* Indeed,

Allah (SWT) has not ordained any hardship for you in the religion.
(Qur'an - Chapter 22, Verse 78)

We need to constantly remind ourselves that Allah (SWT) is All-Merciful and accepts as little as possible from His Beloved Creation. However, it is mainly our intentions that always count in the end. We should not be misled by momentary zeal and energy that would only be temporary.

This principle of moderation is derived from this tradition also according to which Imam al-Sadiq (AS) said to Abdul Aziz Qaratisi (AR),

Abdul Aziz! Faith has ten degrees like the steps of a ladder, which are climbed one by one. If you find anyone below you by one-step, pull him up to you gently and do not burden him with what he cannot bear, or else you will break him.

He (AS) also advised his followers the following about worship,

Do not force yourselves into worship.

Moderation is the basis of all teachings of Islam and going to extremes has been prohibited in all its orders and regulations. Moderation has been recommended in the matter of worship, acquisition of knowledge, food, dress, friendship, and so forth. Allamah Taba Tabai (AR) writes in his Tafsir al-Mizan,

Islam recommends the golden mean and the path of moderation in this sense that a Muslim should pay attention to the strengthening of his body as well as his soul, because man does not consist of a body only just as he does not possess soul only, but he is the combination of both and in order to attain real prosperity one must protect and strengthen this combination.

Moderation in Worship

Even though we have observed intense forms of worship in The Prophet (S), The Aimmah (AS) and some of The Great Scholars of Islam, The Prophet (S) has enjoined us to worship Allah (SWT) and fulfill our desires only to an extent, with The Sole Purpose – Allah (SWT) – at all times.

Islam is a firm and sound religion. Take firm steps in carrying out its orders and do not make the worship of Allah (SWT) wearisome and annoying for His creatures. If you do so, you will be like a hasty camel-rider who does not reach his destination and also makes the camel collapse.

Therefore, it is vital that we attend to our desires satisfactorily (keeping Allah (SWT) in mind and that He is the origin of all good) and worship Allah (SWT) accordingly. Islam does not desire any difficulty for us. The Prophet (S) himself always preached moderation and campaigned against all sorts of extreme actions, as we see in several Sufi practices today and many of them are un-Islamic. We need to learn to fulfill our desires in a lawful manner and take care of our relatives and their needs. Truly, excessiveness is harmful for the person who practices them as well as for those who watch such practices and may also be eluded. Imam al-Sadiq (AS) says,

Do not make yourself reluctant in the matter of Divine Worship. That is, do not over-burden yourself with 'recommended' articles of worship and thus tire yourself because as a result thereof you will become reluctant in the matter of worship.

Imam Ali (AS), in connection with his guidelines to his son at the time of his death, said,

My son! Be moderate in the affairs of life and also practice moderation in the matter of worship of Allah (SWT) in such a way that you may always be able to continue it.

Moreover, this is the main purpose of all worship - so that we are able to continue the act until our last breath. To an extent, The Divine Leaders (AS) have considered stepping beyond the limit of moderation to be the consequence of ignorance.

Imam Ali (AS) says,

It is seen that the ignorant persons are either extravagant or fatigued in all matters and moderation is never observed in them.

However, on the other hand, prolonged worship has been divinely prescribed. Mirza Jawaad Agha Maliki Tabrizi (AR) writes that The Prophet (S) through his repeated recommendations had emphasized the importance of prolonged prostration. About Imam al-Kadhim (AS), it is reported that some times he prolonged his prostration from morning until noon.

During Agha Mirza's stay in Najaf al-Ashraf, he once asked a Marja' as to what special act had he tried in his own life time which was effective for a spiritual journalist in his journey? The Marja' replied,

To prolong the prostration during a period of 24 hours and reciting of invocation, 'There is no Allah (SWT), save You! Glory is to You! Lo! I have been a wrong doer.'

Moderation in Expenditure

To make necessary assessment and to exercise moderation in expenditure is one of the inevitable duties of every Muslim. Imam al-Baqir (AS) says that three things ensure the deliverance of man,

Fearing Allah (SWT) openly and secretly.

Moderation in expenditure at the time of affluence as well as indigence.

To say the right thing at the right time of happiness as well as anger.

As we have observed and will in the coming pages, the scholars who have attained such higher stages of spiritual perfection have advised us to refrain from expensive things – houses, furniture, etc. and that this avoidance is one of the ways to kill the appetitive and carnal self within us.

Adam, son of Uaynah, son of Abi Imran al-Hilali al-Kufi said, I heard Abu Abdillah, Ja'far, son of Muhammad (AS) say,

How often a moment's constraint and patience can bring about long lasting pleasure and satisfaction, and how often a moment's indulgence can result in a prolonged grief and sorrow.

In the book, Elixir of Love, the life and experiences of Sheikh Rajab Ali (AR), the author writes that whenever it rained, the ceiling began to drip. One day, an army general, along with some other governmental officials, came to our house. We had placed some basins and bowls under the rain dripping from the ceiling. Having seen our condition of living, he bought two pieces of land and showed them to my father, and said he had bought one for himself and one for him. My father replied, what we have is sufficient for us.

Another of his sons said: 'When my life condition changed for the better, I said to my father, 'Dear father! I have four Tumans and this brick house can be sold for sixteen Tumans. So let me buy a new house on Shahbaz Avenue.'

The Shaykh said,

Whenever you wish go and buy one for you; for me, this one is good enough!

Imam al-Sadiq (AS) narrated that someone went to visit Imam al-Baqir (AS) and said, "May God maintain your health. We travel in the mountains for business and go to snowy places where we cannot pray anywhere except on the snow." Imam al-Baqir (AS) pointed to another man who was there and said,

Do you not want to be like this man who is content with less income and does not have to go on a business trip where he has to pray on the snow.

Imam al-Sadiq (AS) quoted on the authority of God's Prophet (S),

Time passes by and you will get what is due to reach you from this world no matter how weak you are, and you will suffer any losses in this world that you are doomed to suffer, and you cannot prevent this no matter how strong you are. Whoever forgets about what he loses will attain peace of mind, and whomever is content with his divinely allocated daily bread will get happy.

Imam al-Baqir (AS) narrated that Sa'd who was one of the people of Suffah was a poor, religious, and abstinent believer. He was really needy. He always accompanied God's Prophet (S) at times of praying, and did not leave him. The Prophet of God (S) who noticed his need and self-respect felt sorry, and once told him that he would help him if he could. Then Jibraeel (AS) descended and gave The Prophet two Dirham and asked The Prophet to give the poor man the money and instruct him to do business with it and live with his God-given daily bread.

Sa'd accepted the money. After The Prophet (S) finished the afternoon prayer, he told him to go after his business since he felt bad for him. Sa'd got up and left. He made a lot of profit from doing business and soon he got really wealthy. He bought a store near The Prophet's mosque and started to collect the profit of his doing business there. Whenever Bilal announced the call to prayer, The Prophet of God (S) went to the mosque but Sa'd did not do his ablution and prepare to pray. He was busy with his world.

The Prophet (S) told him: "O' Sa'd! This world has hindered you from praying." Sa'd said, "What can I do? I will lose my wealth. I have to stay here and attend to the deals I make when the customers come in and go out. Then Jibraeel descended and said,

O' Muhammad! The wealth of this world makes one distant from The Hereafter. Ask him to return the two Dirham I gave you.

The Prophet (S) said: "O' Sa'd! Will you not return the two Dirham to us?" Sa'd said, "Yes. I will even give you two hundred Dirham!" The Prophet (S) said, "No. I just want the two Dirham that I gave you." Sa'd gave him two Dirham." Then suddenly the tables turned around and Sa'd lost all the wealth he had collected and returned to his previous state."

Imam al-Kadhim (AS) said: God, The Almighty said,

I did not make the rich ones rich for their honor near Me, and I did not make the poor ones poor for their humiliation near Me. Rather this is how I test the rich by the poor people. If there were no poor people, none of the rich people could be certified to go to Heaven.

Moderation of Food

Eating and drinking is also one of those matters with regard to which people go to extremes and, of course, mostly towards the side of excessiveness. No doubt, we need food to live and it is necessary that food should reach the cells of our body so that they may continue their life. However, the important question is as to how much food is the body needs and whether excessive food is good or harmful for us.

Imam al-Ridha (AS) says,

You should know that human body is like a fertile land. If moderation is exercised in the matter of its development, i.e. if necessary quantity of water is provided to it, which should neither be so excessive that the land should drown in the water and change into swamp and bog, nor so scanty that it should remain thirsty and dry. Such land is developed and yields much produce. However, if that land is not properly looked after it becomes barren.

Human body too, is like this. Indeed, The Prophet (S) has cautioned us that,

The stomach is the seat of all ailments and restricting oneself and eating less is the best of all medicines.

Imam al-Sadiq (AS) has this to say to a wayfarer and spiritual journalist,

Be careful! Do not eat anything until and unless you feel an appetite for it, because otherwise, it would be a matter of foolishness and ignorance.

Do not eat anything until and unless you feel absolutely hungry.

When you eat, always recite the phrase 'In the Name of Allah (SWT),' and eat only lawful foods.

The famous scholar Victor Dean says,

We eat much and as a result of gluttony, we lose the vital energy, which should work to ward off waste matter. Consequently, we are faced with the dilatation of the stomach and the liver and weakness of the kidney. The uric acid is scattered in the body and makes us suffer from rheumatism and swelling of the joints. Fat accumulates on the heart. The flow of blood is retarded. The digestive organ is weakened due to excessive activity...

The famous physician Dr. Alexis Carell says,

Gluttony, besides creating much disorder in one's physical constitution, weakens the nerves, especially the nerves of the brain, and brings about a sort of nervous and mental disorder the effects whereof appear in the shape of indisposition, gloominess, laziness, indifference, conditions of consternation and sleep, grief, domination of thinking, dreadful dreams and groundless fears.

Imam Ali (AS) has said,

Do not extend your hand to food unless you are perfectly hungry and stop eating before you are fully satiated. Chew the food completely and soften it in your mouth and under your teeth and off-load your bowels before you go to sleep. If you follow these four rules, you will not need the services of a physician.

The Prophet (S) warns us further that,

Do not kill your hearts with overindulgence in the matter of eating and drinking, because human heart is like a sown field, which decays and dies if one waters it in excess.

Luqman Hakim once said to his beloved son,

Dear son! When the stomach is full, your faculty of thinking goes to sleep and your tongue of wisdom becomes dumb and your limbs fail to worship Allah (SWT).

Let it be known that Islam strongly condemns everything which human nature desires in excess. So be careful and exercise patience whenever in problems.

A Brief Note on Worship

Worship is a vital element of this journey and we all need to master this aspect before age and weakness overtake us, and much before we begin working on the other rules and exercises. Worship is a strong weapon to destroy our animal instincts and carnal desires.

al-Khumeini (AR) has said,

Man has within himself an idol temple. It is not easy for him to get out of it. He needs Divine Assistance, a hidden hand that may take him out of this dungeon ... Our base desires are The Devil's manifestations. The greatest devil being our own appetitive soul (Nafs) ... The Devil holds influence over us and we are dictated by the emigration is essential for anyone who aspires to attain perfection.

al-Khumeini (AR) reports a tradition that,

For ten years The Messenger of Allah (S) stood on his toes (in his prayers) until his blessed feet became swollen and his face turned pale. In addition, he would stand erect all the night, until a time came when he was consoled by his Lord.

We have not sent down The Qur'an upon thee to cause thee distress.
(Qur'an - Chapter 20, Verse 2)

A similar narration reports that,

Prophet Shuayb (AS) cried so much during his lifetime that he lost his eyesight three times and three times he was blessed with eyesight by Allah (SWT), The All-Merciful. One day Allah (SWT) said to him,

Till when is this going to happen? I have given you Paradise, and Hell has been kept far away from you...! On hearing this remark Prophet Shuayb (AS) replied,

O Allah (SWT)! I cry not for the hope of Your Paradise or fear of Your Hell. I lament because I love you!

Therefore, we have to understand the value and reasons of worship and we should have a sacred time, a few extra minutes or hours -everyday- specifically reserved for Allah and Him only.

When The Messenger of Allah (S) went on his noble ascent (Me'raj), he saw certain Angels in Paradise who would engage in constructing buildings and for some time stopped their work. The Prophet (S) asked Jibraeel (AS), "What is the reason behind this?" Jibraeel (A) replied,

The material for this building is made up of the remembrance of the individuals of the community. Whenever they engage in remembrance, the material becomes available for building and The Angels too resume their building work. However, when they cease in their remembrance, these Angels too stop their work.

The physical form of heaven and hell is made up of the forms of the good and evil works and deeds of the Children of Adam, which return to them in that world. This has also been referred to in the noble verses of the Qur'an, as in the following utterance of God Almighty,

In addition, they shall find all they wrought present.
(Qur'an - Chapter 18, Verse 49)

Fourth Rule

STEADINESS AND LOYALTY

The scholars have defined this stage, as after feeling remorse about a sin and asking forgiveness for it, we must endeavor not to commit that vice repeatedly. It is vital that we are patient over these matters and avoid stepping or falling into the traps laid down by Shaytan, The Accursed.

Allah (SWT) has stated,

Indeed! Repentance acceptable with Allah (SWT) is only for those who do evil ignorantly and then turn unto Allah (SWT) soon after.

(Qur'an - Chapter 4, Verse 17)

We need to learn to be loyal to our Creator and put all our trust in His Mighty. As per Allamah Taba Tabai's suggestion,

It is possible that if our powers (of imagination, passion, anger, lust and sensuality) are subjected to the dictates of reason and good sense and the teachings of The Prophets (AS) and Imams (AS), they may bring about felicity and good luck in you. None of The Messengers of Allah (S) has ever demanded to eradicate sensuality and desire, or to extinguish the fire of passion or anger and ignore the inventions of imagination. Nevertheless, they have rather advocated for controlling and bridling them and making them function under the command of reason and Divine Laws. Apparently, these powers are vital in one's life.

A Brief Note on Patience

As long as we are balanced and steady and avoid being impatient, we stand to achieve success in this journey. One of the most strenuous aspects in Islam and what we must struggle to possess as one of our main weapons to overpower the Nafs is patience, the head of faith. Endless bounties are stored in it. Allah (SWT) promises a great reward in this world and the next for patience.

The following is a tradition of al-Sadiq (AS) from the dignified al-Kafi, in which The Imam says,

Verily, patience is to faith what the head is to the body. The body perishes without the head, and so when patience goes faith disappears.

In a similar vein, al-Sajjad (AS) says,

Indeed! Patience is to faith what the head is to the body. One who has no patience has no faith.

al-Khumeini (AR) writes the following on Patience (Sabr),

Patience is the key to the gates of felicity and the main means of deliverance from mortal perils. Sabr makes man bear calamities with ease and face difficulties with composure. It strengthens the will and the power of resolution. It brings independence to the dominion of the soul. Anguish and anxiety on the other hand, aside from their shameful character, are symptoms of the soul's weakness. They deprive one's being of stability, weaken the determination, and enfeeble the intellect.

Degrees of Patience

We are obliged to be patient on three occasions, the first being the time of affliction and calamities - keeping in mind that afflictions are not always a result of our sins and disobedience to Allah (SWT), but can sometimes be a test to examine the level of our obedience and perseverance to The Almighty.

Sayyid al-Khumeini (AR) quotes Imam al-Sadiq (AS) in one of his noble sayings that Prophet Ayub (AS) had suffered so many afflictions that his entire body (with the exception of his eyes and intellect) had decomposed and worms had made the entire body a place for their living and sustenance. However, he never swerved in his faith and always asked Allah (SWT) for deliverance and guidance. In several cases, therefore, we may have to encounter adversity simply because Allah (SWT) has reserved a higher place for us in Paradise and to attain that level we must be tested to the extreme limit. He has said,

A person who is not happy with My Orders, not patient with My Afflictions, not thankful for My Bounties, not content with My Gifts, then he should look for another lord other than Me and he should get out of My Universe.

A person, who does not get what he wants in this world and becomes sad by it, it is as if he is angry with Me. A person who complains of calamities to another, which has befallen him, it is as if he has complained about Me.

Imam al-Sadiq (AS) has said,

The greatness of a man's rewards goes with the greatness of suffering, and Allah (SWT) did not love people but that He subjected them to suffering.

Imam al-Baqir (AS) says,

No doubt, Allah (SWT) Almighty treats a believer with tribulations in the same manner as a man treats his family with gifts after an absence (upon a journey). Moreover, He restrains him from the world in the same way as a physician prescribes restraints for a sick man.

Affliction is an adornment for the believer and a mark of honor for the man of intellect, because facing it directly needs steadfastness and firm-footedness, both of which confirm belief. The Prophet (S) said,

We, the company of The Prophets, are the people who have the hardest trials, then after us come the believers, then the others like them. He who loves this world will affect his state in The Hereafter; and he who loves The Hereafter will affect his worldly existence. So prefer that which remain forever to that which will pass.

It has been said that there is no peace on earth for the faithful believers, and neither has peace been created (for them). There exists no short cut to Paradise. Whoever tastes the food of affliction while under God's protection enjoys it more than he enjoys God's Blessing. He yearns for it when it is not there. Allah (SWT) praised none of His Bondsmen, from Adam (AS) up to Muhammad (S), until He had tested him and seen how he fulfilled the duty of worship while in affliction. God's marks of honor come, in fact, at the last stage, but the afflictions themselves come in the beginning.

Undoubtedly, there is no good in a slave who complains of a single trial preceded by thousands of blessings and followed by thousands of comforts, in this world or the next.

Prophet Ayub (AS) used to say thus in his supplication,

O' Allah (SWT)! Verily seventy comforts and ease did not come to me until You sent me seventy afflictions.

Imam Ali (AS) says,

Steadfastness in relation to belief is like the head to the body. The head of steadfastness is affliction, but only those who act righteously understand.

Imam Ali (AS), in a tradition regarding nature of what is decreed, quotes The Qur'an,

No evil befalls The Earth or your own souls, but it is in a Book (decreed) before We bring it into existence; surely, that is easy for Allah (SWT). So that you may not grieve for what you have missed, nor be exultant at what He has given you; and Allah (SWT) does not love any arrogant boaster.

(Qur'an - Chapter 57, Verse 22-23)

Ayatullah Fadhlullah Haaeri (AR) writes,

Whatever afflicts us, in the earth or in ourselves, it is already in The Book, in The Eternal Book, The Book of Reality. It was there in The Absolute, total decree before it was created. It was decreed in the sense that laws that govern this cosmos eventually will result in what you and I will experience, not decree in a superstitious sense. We are both free and chained. We are chained to the laws that govern existence and we are free to act within these constraints. The interaction of the two is what results in the dynamism of life.

The Imam said this affliction was already there, it was already in The Book and we should not be sorry for what has happened. This world is a theatre, a facade. The test in this world is not to look back. Thus, the man of faith has all of his energies preserved. He is not sorry for what has happened for he has done his best.

The Prophet (S) in response to being told about an occurrence, regardless of how distorted it was would say not to look back upon it, do not feel sorry about it. Clean your heart and live in the present. That is the only contact point you have with Allah (SWT) who is beyond time: now, now, now. The smaller that now is, the less it is in time. Ignorance of how Allah (SWT)'s decree works is well explained in the following Qur'anic Verse:

And among men is he who says: We believe in Allah (SWT); but when he is persecuted in the way of Allah (SWT) he thinks the persecution of men to be as the chastisement of Allah (SWT); and if there comes assistance from your Lord, they would most certainly say: 'Surely we were with you.' What! Is not Allah (SWT) the best Knower of what is in the breasts of humanity?

(Qur'an - Chapter 29, Verse 10)

Affliction is from the injustice of humankind. Man has the option as Allah (SWT)'s deputy on earth to handle or mishandle his representation so that he brings about justice or injustice. Therefore, if we are afflicted by injustice it is our own doing. We have abused our authority, and we have not recognized that authority of Allah (SWT). We have not kept within the bounds of Allah (SWT), nor have we been in fearful awareness. The Prophet was asked on

one occasion, 'Who are the people of the (Prophet's) house?' He responded, 'He who is in fearful awareness embraces that part.'

The affliction of Karbala was the injustice of man upon man all over the world. People are constantly remembering events that help us to move more and more towards Tawhid (Unity), and one of the most remarkable of them all is the reactivation of Islam by the blood of The Master Imam al-Husayn (AS).

Entry into his magnificent companionship can only be obtained by unifying the outer law of Islam with the inner reality. One must be a man of Allah (SWT) inwardly and the most kind, gentle, understanding, compassionate, patient, and courageous man outwardly, willing to lay down one's life at any moment. When a person's will unifies with The Will of Allah (SWT), then he enters into fighting in the way of Allah (SWT), the path of Imam al-Husayn (AS). Then he is with The Imam at all times.

His love of The Imam transforms into the love of Allah (SWT), an uncompromising, absolute love born of total surrender.

The second occasion for us to be patient is when we are about to commit a sin. This world is a transient place for all of us and that we will have to defend all our actions on The Day of Judgment. You and I should look for ways that will most effectively guard us from committing sins. For example, we may want to keep our friends to a minimum, visit only certain places, read only certain specified literature, talk only what is relevant, and so forth.

The final occasion where we have to practice patience is when we have to perform obedient acts for The Love of Allah (SWT), The Great. As He has said,

Indeed, you will not get what I possess, but by being patient with those things which you do not like (but you still do) in order to seek My Pleasure. Patience on My obedience is easier for you than patience in The Fire of Hell.

Whenever we intend to perform a good deed, Shaytan is there instantly to persuade us not to do it. He may practice tricks on us and convince us not to do the deed, but we have to be careful. We should be able to identify these trickeries and discard them. Making a diagnosis and identifying his entrance into our soul is an effective way to solve this issue. And if Shaytan is not successful in convincing us not to do a particular obedient act then he will try his level best to make us do it quickly and with the least of concentration. For example, he may convince us to pray quickly and complete our prayers as fast as possible, or wear hijab in a fashionable manner and spoil its purpose, and so forth.

Allah (SWT) never entrusts His Creatures with heavy tasks, which are beyond their powers, but it is Shaytan and his allies who magnify them in our view. As Allah (SWT) states in The Qur'an,

Allah (SWT) does not impose any soul, but to its ability.

(Qur'an - Chapter 2, Verse 286)

al-Sadiq (AS) has said,

Verily, The Book of Ali mentions that of all humanity, The Prophets undergo the severest of trials, and after them The Awsiya, and after them The Elect to the extent of their nobility. Indeed, the believer undergoes trial in proportion to his good deeds. So one whose faith is sound and whose deeds are good, his trials are also more severe. That is indeed, because God Almighty did not make this world a place for rewarding the believer and punishing the unbeliever. In addition, one whose faith is feeble and whose (good) deeds are few faces fewer tribulations. Verily, tribulations hasten towards the believer with greater speed than rainwater towards the earth's depths.

We have to realize the importance of worship and abstaining from vice and act without inward anguish. The righteous servant of Allah (SWT) understands his duties towards his Master and never complains about his status. The famous Khwajah Abdullah al-Ansari (AR) writes in **Manazil al-Sairin**,

Patience means restraining the self from complaint about hidden anguish.

What a difference between us and those obedient servants of Allah (SWT) who welcome responsibility, attend to them with pleasure and fulfill them efficiently. We think that Allah (SWT) Almighty has burdened us with duties, consider them troublesome and view them as botheration. We attempt to offer prayers as fast as possible; fast during the month of Ramadhan with anguish and difficulty; perform recommended acts only few times a year, and so forth. Indeed, all our misfortunes are due to ignorance and on account of the lack or absence of faith.

It has been said that patience is concealed anguish, i.e. one never complains about a misfortune. Moreover, that which has been said about The Great Prophets (AS) and The Righteous Imams (AS), who have been characterized with patience, which could mean forbearance concerning physical sufferings or about separation from The Beloved, which is one of the great stations of the lovers.

Nevertheless, the intent of the Sheikh Ansari when he says that patience means abstinence from complaint is complaining to creatures. Otherwise, complaining to Allah (SWT), The Almighty and beseeching Him for relief is not opposed to patience. Prophet Ayub (AS) complained to Allah (SWT) and said,

Behold! Shaytan has visited me with weariness and chastisement.
(Qur'an - Chapter 38, Verse 41)

Moreover, Allah (SWT) yet praises him, saying,

Surely, We found him, a steadfast man. How excellent a servant he was. He was penitent.
(Qur'an - Chapter 38, verse 44)

Moreover, Prophet Ya'qub (AS) said,

I make complaint of my anguish and my sorrow unto Allah (SWT).
(Qur'an - Chapter 12, Verse 86)

al-Khumeini (AR) writes,

Dear servant of Allah (SWT), an impatient person complains of his troubles to everyone, and this, aside from causing disrepute among people who look down upon him as a weakling of instable character, makes him lose his standing in The Court of Allah (SWT) and in front of His Angels.

What faith in Allah (SWT) has that servant who cannot bear an adversity that visits him from his Beloved, The Absolute, and after having received thousands upon thousands of His Bounties and while being immersed in the sea of His Favor, opens his mouth in front of people to complain as soon as adversity strikes him?

If you have faith in your Lord and believe all the affairs to lie in Him and none other, if you believe none else to have any say in the matters, of course you will not complain of the hardships of life and the adversities that strike you before Allah (SWT) Almighty. Rather, you will accept them willingly and thank Him gratefully for His Bounties. Hence that inner agitation, those plaintive utterances, those unbecoming bodily movements, all these bear testimony to our lack of faith. Gradually, those complaints assume the form of enmity towards Allah (SWT) and things go out of one's control. Finally, he departs from this world to face eternal wretchedness and gloom, with a spirit infused with the enmity and hatred of The Lord of Bounties

Khwajah Naqir al-Din al-Tusi (AR) states,

Sabr restrains the inner being from anguish, the tongue from complaint and the bodily members from untoward movements.

In a noble tradition of al-Kafi, Abu Hamzah al-Thumali (AR) reports Imam al-Sadiq (AS) as having said,

Whoever of the believers that bears patiently with a tribulation that befalls him, has a reward of a thousand martyrs.

When the believer enters his grave, prayers is on his right, zakat (alms to the poor) on his left, virtue faces him, with patience taking him under its shelter. When The Two Angels charged with questioning enter upon him, patience says to zakat, prayers and virtue, 'Take care of your companion, and if you fail to assist him I will take care of him myself.'

No words can better offer solace & comfort than those of The Infallibles (AS), which are noted below:

al-Baqir (AS) said,

A wakeful night due to illness is greater in reward and better than worship of a whole year.

The Prophet (S) has also said,

If a believer suffers a bout of fever, his sins fall off him like the (dead) leaves of a tree. If he becomes bed-ridden, then his groans are Tasbih (Glorifications of Allah (SWT)) and his cries are Tahlil (Declarations of God's Unity - perhaps by experiencing his own weakness/pain he realizes The Almighty's Unique strength).

In addition, his tossing & turning on his sickbed are like the one who brandishes his sword in the way of God (perhaps due to his great efforts to resist the onslaught of wherever that may distance him from God). So if he returns to his brethren and friends, worshipping God, then He forgives him, so congratulations to him if he repents and woe on him if he returns to a sinful life ...'

Imam al-Ridha (AS) says,

Sickness is for a believer a means of purification (from sins) and mercy (to gain higher stations) and for a disbeliever a means of punishment and curse; and the sickness continues with a believer until all his sins are washed away.

Imam al-Sadiq (AS) continues in the same vein to say,

A splitting headache for a night washes away all sins except the major ones.

The Prophet (S) once exclaimed that a sick person enjoys four features: *no sins are recorded; God, The Almighty orders The Angel to record for him all the good acts that he would have otherwise performed in his health; the sickness spreads to the parts of his body and cleanses his sins from them, and hence if he dies, he departs as a forgiven man and if he survives, he lives as a forgiven man.*

al-Sadiq (AS) says that Imam Ali (AS) once visited Salman, The Persian (AR) when the latter was sick. He explained to him,

'O' Salman! None of our Shia (sincere followers) suffers pain but due to his previous sins, and the pain is a means for his purification.' Salman said, 'So we have no other reward in it save the purification.' Imam clarified, 'O' Salman! You all (Shia) will be rewarded for the forbearance, for beseeching and supplicating to The Lord, virtues will be recorded for you all, and your stations will be elevated, but the pain is specifically for redemption and purification.'

al-Sadiq (AS) narrates a similar incident when The Prophet (S) himself visited Salman on his sickbed and explained to him,

O' Salman! In your illness, you enjoy three features: you are being remembered (with special attention of extra mercy) by God; your prayers are granted and, the illness washes away all your sins.

Furthermore, al-Sadiq (AS) *advises us to visit our sick ones, and ask them to pray for us, because their prayers are equivalent to the prayers of The Angels.*

It is now clear that there are various degrees and levels of patience, and its reward and merit vary accordingly. Imam Ali (AS) quotes The Prophet (S) as having said,

Patience is of three kinds. Patience at the time of affliction, patience concerning obedience and patience concerning disobedience. One who bears patiently with affliction, resisting it with a fair consolation, Allah (SWT) writes for him 300 degrees (of sublimity), the elevation of one degree over another being like the distance between Earth and Heavens. In addition, one who is patient about obedience, Allah (SWT) writes for him 600 degrees (of sublimity), the elevation of one degree over another being like the distance between the earth's depths and The Throne.

And one who is patient in regard to disobedience, Allah (SWT) writes for him 900 degrees (of sublimity), the elevation of one degree over another being like the distance between the earth's depths and the furthest frontiers of The Throne.

In another discourse, Imam al-Sadiq (AS) quotes The Prophet (S) having said to his followers,

A time will come upon the people wherein political authority will not be attainable without bloodshed and tyranny, nor wealth without usurpation and stinginess, nor affection without discarding religion and pursuing lust and desire. Whoever lives in such times and bears patiently with poverty despite possessing the capacity to become rich (illegitimately), and bears up with hostility despite being capable of acquiring favor and affection, and bears with humiliation despite possessing the capacity to acquire honor, Allah (SWT) will give him the reward of 50 truthful ones, of those who confirmed me.

An astonishing tradition on patience concerns the following narration from al-Shibli, which concerns a youth from among the Lovers exclaiming at al-Shibli that, *patience from Allah (SWT) is the patience of most difficult quality.*

al-Shibli cried and swooned. The kind of patience Allah (SWT) practices is on our sins and disobedience and is the hardest of patience. Indeed, a statement from the Invocation of Adeelah states, *Allah (SWT)'s Mercy (always) overpowers His Anger.*

Imam al-Sadiq (AS), in a noble tradition of al-Kafi with a continuous chain of transmission going up to him, states,

Verily, the servant has certain stations near God that cannot be realized without one of these two attributes: either the loss of his wealth or affliction in his body.

And,

The greatness of man's reward goes with the greatness of suffering, and God did not love a people but that He subjected them to suffering.

In al-Mahasin it is narrated that Imam al-Baqir (AS) said,

Whenever God The Almighty loves someone, He will throw him into trouble and storm him with calamities. When he prays to God for help, God will say,

O' My Servants! I hear your prayer and have the power to immediately fulfill your requests if I so wish, but I will save it for you; and what I save for you is better.

A Metaphor

It is said that one day a man exclaimed to Allah (SWT) that whenever he is receiving good tidings and in good times, he can see two pairs of feet on the desert walking with him. However, this very person gets extremely sad and disappointed that when he is experiencing affliction and is in deep problems, he finds only his one pair of feet walking on the desert and making marks on the sand. Therefore, he complained to Allah (SWT) convincingly and remarked, *'Where are you, O' Allah (SWT), when I'm in despair and feeling lonely?'* So Allah (SWT) replies, *'I am with you - only that when you are in deep trouble I carry you in my arms and walk together with you.'*

Fifth Rule

CONTINUANCE AND PERSISTENCE

We should all acknowledge that this journey is to continue until death overtakes us and takes us back to our Lord for reckoning. We need to struggle and employ spiritual exercises to seek the purification of the soul and intellect from all impurities throughout our lives. There is no limit set by any scholar, some of who have attained significantly higher stages of perfection of the soul. We should also appreciate the fact that we cannot catch the divine aspects of a deed unless we continue to perform for quite a long time so that its impression in our minds may become permanent. Undoubtedly, Islam encompasses all aspects of our life, not just prayers and worship.

The Prophet (S) once said to Qays (AR), the son of Asim,

Pride follows humiliation, life follows death, and The Hereafter follows this world. Everything that exists is without doubt subject to an accounting, and there is One Who watches over all things. There is a reward for every good deed and a punishment for every evil deed. There is a set period for everything.

O' Qays! You have a friend and companion who one day will be buried with you. When you are buried, he will still be alive although you are dead. If your companion is noble and a man of honor, he will honor you. If he is lowly and vile, he will torment and trouble you. He will be resurrected together with you and you will be resurrected together with him. No questions will be put to you, but all will be directed to him. Choose then a worthy and righteous companion, for if your companion is righteous he will comfort you, but if he is wicked, you will wish to flee him in terror.

That everlasting companion and friend is none other than your deeds.

Continuance and Persistence in actions (that ultimately please only Allah) are vital ingredients in preparing and taking this spiritual journey. One needs to be vigilant at all times that, positive and negative events may or may not happen to him, but one has to continue his or her journey without falling into traps laid down by The Accursed. Many a times, these experiences are set by Allah to see the person's loyalty and ability to persist, continue, and become a better, much more God-fearing person.

Imam al-Sadiq (AS) said,

"One day Prophet Musa (AS) was walking along the shore. A fisherman came suddenly, prostrated to the sun, and said some polytheistic things and words. Then he cast his net in the sea and pulled it out filled with fish, and did the same thing again twice and got many fish like the first time.

Next someone else came. He made ablution and stood to pray. He praised The Lord and cast his net into the sea, but got no fish when he pulled it out. He did it repeatedly, but only caught a small fish the third time. He thanked God and left.

Then Prophet Musa (AS) said, "O' Lord! The atheist servant came, and cast his net three times and pulled it out full of fish. Then, Your believing servant made ablution and said his prayers and praised you and cast his net three times but only managed to catch one fish. Then he praised you and left!"

God told Prophet Musa (AS), "Look to the right." Prophet Musa (AS) looked to the right. The curtain to The Unseen was pushed aside and he saw the position that God had prepared for the believer (in Paradise). Then God said, "O' Prophet Musa (AS)! Look to the left." He turned around and looked to the left. The curtain to The Unseen was pushed aside and he saw the position that God had prepared for the atheist. Then God said, "O' Prophet Musa (AS)! What I did for the believer did not harm him, and what I did for the atheist one did not benefit him." Then Prophet Musa (AS) said, "O' Lord! It is right that whoever recognizes You is content with Your deeds."

Throughout the journey, we should expect hurdles (set by us and by The Accursed), but these should not hinder us from our eventual goal. Allah, Himself causes many events to happen just to test our steadiness and persistence.

Imam al-Sadiq (AS) has said,

A believer always has one or more of the following troubles. Either a person with whom he lives in the same house will close the door and not let him in, or there is a neighbor who will bother him, or someone will bother him on his way to work. Even if a believer lives on the top of a mountain, God will appoint a Satan to disturb him. God will establish a companion out of his own faith for him not to fear anyone.

If a believer is at sea on just a piece of wood, God will send a Satan to bother him.

A very important tradition follows,

Imam al-Baqir (AS) has said, "Two angels who were descending from The Heavens to the earth met each other. One asked the other about his mission. He said, "God gave me the mission to go to sea to force a fish to go to one of the oppressors so he, who had wished to catch it, would be able to do so. So I must go and force that fish in the sea towards him so that the oppressor can catch it, and achieve his last goal." The other Angel said,

My divine mission is even stranger than yours is. God gave me the mission to go to a believer who is fasting and stays up at night to worship God, and is such a good worshipper that he is famous in The Heavens. I am supposed to turn over the pan of food that he has just prepared for breaking his fast since God wants to test his faith this way.

Imam al-Baqir (AS) has said,

A believer is so honored by God that God will even grant him Heaven with everything in it if he asks for it, without anything being reduced from God's Dominion; but God will not grant him even one foot of this world if he asks for it. An infidel is so despised by God that God will even grant him this world with everything in it if he asks for it without anything being reduced from God's Dominion; but God will not grant him even one foot of Heaven if he asks for it. God will attend to His believing servants through calamities, and instruct them to abstain from this world just as a doctor instructs his patients to abstain from things.

Imam al-Sadiq (AS) quoted on the authority of God's Prophet (S) that God The Almighty said,

I will make ill whomever I wish to send to Heaven. If it is enough penalties for his sins, it is fine. Nevertheless, if not, I will make life difficult for him. If it is enough of penalty for his sins, it is fine. Nevertheless, if it is not, I will make his death hard for him so that he comes to Me free of sin, and I let him enter Heaven. I will make perfectly healthy whomever I wish to send to Hell. If what he asks Me is completely fulfilled this way, then it is fine. However, if it is not, I will free him from the fear of the oppressors. If what he asks Me is completely fulfilled this way, it is fine. However, if it is not, I will make his death an easy one so that when he comes to meet Me, none of his good deeds have remained un-rewarded. Then I will send him to Hell.

Imam al-Baqir (AS) said,

One has a very high noble position near God. God will make him suffer many calamities to reach that position. Many people will rush in to express their condolence to him and express their sympathy. If the people only knew what position God has granted him, they would have never sympathized with him, or expressed their condolence. God sends down some worldly things to some people to seize their Hereafter, and the people rush in to express congratulations. If the people only knew what is awaiting him in The Hereafter, they would have never become happy or congratulated him.

Salman, son of Ghanem narrated that Imam al-Sadiq (AS) asked him,

"How did you find the Shiites?" He said, "I found them needy, while difficulties came towards them faster than rain water flows towards the drain." Imam al-Sadiq (AS) said, "God is The Helper. Are you pleased with your belief or do you prefer to be paid 100,000 Dirham instead?" He said: I swear by God that I do not want it even if it is as much gold as the mountains of Makkah." Who is more self-sufficient than you and your companions? None of you have anything to lose, even if you wander about and eat the leaves of the trees and plants until your death approaches."

Finally, we need to always ask for Allah's Help and Assistance, for without His Help, we cannot even near the earlier stages of this journey. Imam al-Baqir (AS) quoted on the authority of Imam al-Sajjad (AS) that God's Prophet (S) said,

A believer will go after business and trade. When he finds what he is after, God will send down an Angel and will instruct The Angel to prevent him from that work, since if he continues doing that he will go to Hell. An Angel will descend and prevent him from doing what he wanted to do, by God's Favor. The next morning he says, "Something prevented me from doing that." Of course it was God who prevented him. He does not know that God The Glorious, The High was witness to his deeds and knew that if he succeeds in doing that act, He will send him to Hell.

Imam al- Sadiq (AS) said,

"There was a man in the past, who was content with whatever hurt him in this world, and so many good deeds were recorded for him that was not recorded for anyone else on The Earth, and he never committed any sins. One of The Angels who liked him asked God for permission to descend down to earth and visit him. He was standing in prayer and The Angel sat down near him. Suddenly a lion jumped on the man and tore him into four pieces and threw each piece on a side. The Angel stood up, collected the parts of his body and buried him. Then he went to the seashore and saw a polytheist there for whom the people brought a variety of foods in golden and silver dishes. The man was uttering polytheistic sayings and was the king of India.

The Angel ascended to The Heavens. He was summoned and asked what he had seen. He said, "The most amazing thing that I saw was that You let a lion tear into pieces the man for whom You recorded the best good deeds, and I saw that you gave perfect health to a polytheist to whom You gave a Kingdom, and for whom the people brought a variety of foods in golden and silver dishes." God The Almighty said, "Do not be surprised about My first servant. He had asked Me for a high rank in Heaven which he could not attain any other way. I fed him to a lion to let him reach that rank. However, I did not do anything for the other man, since he will get My Torture in The Hereafter."

Sixth Rule

CONTEMPLATION, REFLECTION AND MEDITATION

As a spiritual traveler, we should refrain from being oblivious of our duties and must always abide by the decision we have firmly decided to undertake. Scholars have cautioned that without meditation, remembrance and recollection of spiritual thoughts, we are unlikely to produce favorable results from this sacred journey towards The One. Allamah Taba Tabai (AR) has said,

For spiritual travelers, meditation is as important as for a patient the prescribed course of diet, without which the medicines may be ineffective or may even produce counter effects.

Indicating the importance and virtue of reflection, Imam al-Sadiq (AS) once said,

A moment's reflection and pondering over is better than one year's worship.

Prophet Isa, the son of Maryam (AS) said,

Blessed be on the one who thinks when he is quiet; is admonished when he looks; invokes The Name of God when he talks; cries over his own sins; and the people are safe from his hands and tongue.

Hence, meditation should be regarded as a foundation stone for spiritual journalists. According to al-Khumeini (AR),

Meditation can also mean introspection and self-reflection. Here introspection is used in the sense of devoting some time, however insignificant it is, contemplating about our duties towards our Master and Creator, Who has brought us into this world; and Who has bestowed upon us all the means of pleasure and joys of life; Who has equipped us with a sound body and faultless faculties and senses, each of whom serves a specific purpose of its own, and whose functioning bewilders human intellect. If we reflect in a rational manner for a moment, we shall realize that the aim of imparting to us all these graces and endowments is something superior to and higher than what is visible. This world is a stage of action and its aim is a higher and more sublime sphere of existence.

Meditation and contemplation is very vast in its meaning and its sense differs according to the degrees and stages of the spiritual journey. In the beginning, it means refraining from all acts not useful in this world or The Hereafter and abstaining from saying or doing anything disliked by Allah (SWT). Any negligence or lethargy in this respect is not permissible.

You should then intensify your meditation and try to do all that you do purely for the sake of gaining good pleasure of Allah (SWT). You should believe and acknowledge that Allah (SWT) is Omniscient, Omnipresent, and that Allah (SWT) Who supervises all His Creation is looking at you. This meditation should be observed at all times and in all circumstances. The Prophet (S) hinted at the above-mentioned stage by advising Abu Dhar Ghaffari (AR) as follows,

Worship Allah (SWT) as if you were looking at Him. For if you do not see Him, He sees you.

Allamah Taba Tabai (AR) writes,

Gradually this meditation becomes stiffer and higher, and may sometimes mean concentration on one's silence, or on one's self or on a higher truth, i.e. The Names and The Attributes of Allah (SWT). The veils may then be lifted through the intercession of Imam al-Husayn (AS), who is particularly concerned with the lifting of veils and removing the barriers obstructing the devotees.

A Brief Note on Meditation

An important aspect of spiritual journey is meditation and contemplation. Verily, a short span of time spent in deep reflection of Allah (SWT) and the way His creation works is worth years of worship. Allamah Taba Tabai (AR) says that it is essential for all travelers to adhere and give due importance to meditation throughout the different levels and stages of spiritual journey. Allamah (AR) informs us that meditation has numerous grades and if one of the later stages were undertaken by a beginner, then he would give it up for good or would go confused and shaky.

At this stage, Allamah (AR) says,

(To a person who is nearing The Almighty and spiritual perfection) Things, which were lawful to him in the beginning become forbidden and does not attempt in performing the act.

This stage of spiritual journey is considered the highest stage of piety by Imam Ali (AS) in Nahjul-Balagha. This is where one is extremely careful of his duties towards Allah (SWT) that he refrains from performing lawful acts in fear that he might be lured to the evil side of it. The veils of ignorance gradually weaken and are ultimately lifted.

Sayyid al-Khumeini (AR) reports a tradition that there exists 70,000 Veils of Darkness and 70,000 Veils of Divine Light, all in the human soul. We need to struggle and get through the 70,000 Veils of Darkness before we even approach the first few levels of Divine Light.

Scholars narrate that at certain stages of spiritual journey The Divine Lights have been reported to be visible to persons with high spiritual status. In the beginning, these lights flash like lightening and appear for a moment only. In this limited span of time, the person receives divine satisfaction that one has never ever experienced. Gradually, The lights grow stronger and appear like stars.

As soon as a spiritual journalist is able to succeed in the above stages, he feels as if The Heavens and The Earth were both illuminated from The East to The West. This light has been given the name 'Light of the Self.'

Imam al-Sadiq (AS) has said,

If you are intelligent, then you should be of firm resolution and sincere intention before you set out for any place, for surely the self's nature is to overstep the bounds and encroach on the forbidden. You should reflect when you walk, and take note of the wonders of God's work wherever you go.

Do not be mocking, or strut when you walk. Allah (SWT) has said,

Do not go about in the land exulting overmuch.

(Qur'an - Chapter 31, Verse 18)

Lower your gaze from whatever is inappropriate to faith, and remember Allah (SWT) frequently. Those places where, and in connection with which, Allah (SWT) is mentioned will testify to that before Allah (SWT) on The Day of Judgment and will ask forgiveness for those people so that Allah (SWT) will let them enter The Garden.

Do not speak excessively with people along the way, for that is bad manners. Most of the roads are the traps and markets of Shaytan, so do not feel safe from his tricks. Make your coming and your going in obedience to Allah (SWT), striving for His Pleasure, for all your movements will be recorded in your Book, as Allah (SWT) has said,

On The Day when their tongues and their hands and their feet shall bear witness against them regarding what they did...

(Qur'an - Chapter 24, Verse 24)

We have made every man's actions to cling to his neck.

(Qur'an - Chapter 17, Verse 13)

In al-Kafi,

The best form of worship is to contemplate about God and His Power. In another tradition, it is stated that an hour's contemplation is better than a night's worship. In addition, according to a Prophetic tradition, the contemplation of an hour is better than a year's worship. In another tradition, it is stated that an hour's contemplation is better than sixty years of worship (according to another hadith, seventy years). Moreover, some Traditionists and Fuqaha have even mentioned it as being better than a thousand years of worship.

Levels of Contemplation

al-Khumeini (AR) writes that the first kind of contemplation is about God, His Names, Attributes and His Perfections, the result of which is the knowledge of His Existence and His Irradiations. Contemplating on His SELF and His ATTRIBUTES is the first stage of meditation – what may be termed as thoughtful meditation. One has to seriously compare his life on this earth and how it compares to The Divine Names of The Almighty – for example, is he or she merciful to the creatures; is he or she able to restrain anger when required to, and so forth. According to him,

In addition, this is the most superior level of contemplation, which yields the most sublime of the kinds of knowledge, and the firmest of the arguments; for thinking about the essence of The Cause, and meditating on The Absolute Cause imparts knowledge about Him and the understanding of the effects.

Another level of contemplation is reflecting on the subtleties of creation, its perfection and refinement. Such contemplation leads to the intellection of its Perfect Source, its Wise Maker. It has been said that learning is good for the soul even if the learning will not assist the person in his or her daily activities, but will bring him one closer step towards understanding The Workings of The Almighty. Therefore, reading, watching programs, going to seminars and visiting gatherings in which scholars discuss The Creations and The Workings of Allah, are all necessities towards this kind of meditation.

A final state is meditation on the states of the soul - knowledge of The Day of Resurrection, and knowledge of (the necessity of) Prophethood and Aimmah, revealed scriptures, systems of Divine Law, etc. According to al-Khumeini (AR), one can reap benefits in this world and the next if he or she were to constantly visualize the role of The Prophets and The Aimmah (AS) and his role in this transient world. We need to repeatedly remind ourselves of our role in this existence and that these Infallible and Divine Scriptures were sent here for a reason. Contemplating on the lifestyle of these great personalities, on the verses of The Qur'an, on the traditions from these Infallible, and so forth, is what we have to do on a daily basis – and the goal is to refine ourselves even further so every day is different.

Allamah Taba Tabai (AS), one of the great spiritual preceptors, remarks that if we happen to be successful in our endeavors, four worlds will gradually reveal themselves to us.

First World - **UNITY OF ACTIONS**

In the earlier stages, we must feel that we are the origin of all that our tongue says, our ears hear and our hands, feet and other limbs do. Later, one may feel that he or she is the source of all that transpires in the world. At the next stage, one should feel that his or her existence is closely connected with Allah (SWT) and through this relationship the favors and the bounties of Allah (SWT), reach the world.

Ultimately, the goal is to perceive that Allah (SWT) alone is The Source of all actions and occurrences. Indeed! Allah (SWT) and only Allah (SWT) is The Origin of all good.

Second World - **UNITY OF ATTRIBUTES**

This world emerges after the first world. At this stage when the spiritual traveler hears or sees anything, he or she feels that Allah (SWT) is The Source of his hearing and seeing. Later he perceives that Allah (SWT) is The Source of all knowledge, power, life, hearing and sight found anywhere and in any form.

Third World - **UNITY OF NAMES**

At this stage, Divine Attributes are and originate from The Divine Essence, and Allah appears to one as The Knower. Similarly, we may think that the power that we have, our sight and hearing are all Allah (SWT) having that power and control.

It is His sight and His hearing that you possess.

The principle is that there is only One Being in the whole universe and its contents Who is having The Absolute Power. It is His Power, His Sight and His Hearing that are reflected and indicated by everything existing according to its capacity.

Fourth World - **UNITY OF BEING**

This world is revealed to the spiritual traveler in consequence to the revelation of The Glory of Divine Essence. He or she at this stage perceives that there is only One Being Who is The Source of all actions and attributes. At this stage, his attention remains concentrated on The One Being. He attains to this stage only when he has annihilated his transient existence completely and has passed away in Allah (SWT). Allamah Taba Tabai (AR) writes that,

It is only he who has annihilated his self and ego completely, that he will recognize neither himself nor anyone else. He will recognize Allah (SWT) alone.

In short, the spiritual traveler should say good-bye to all those habits and traditions, customs and usages, which obstruct his advancement towards Allah. The Gnostics call this attitude 'madness', because mad people also take little interest in and pay little attention to the popular habits and traditions and do not care what the other people would say. A mad man sticks to his own ways and does not fear any opposition.

If we find any devotee flitting away his time in amusements, we can easily conclude that he is not fully devoted to Allah and that his heart is not free from the hypocrisy which is called in this context greater hypocrisy and which is the opposite of greater faith. As a result of this hypocrisy, man does not act according to his inner incitement, but is guided by reason, expediency or apprehensions. The following verse refers to this kind of hypocrisy: When they stand up to offer prayers, they perform it languidly. (Surah an-Nisa, 4:142)

Sixth Rule **CONTEMPLATION, REFLECTION AND** **MEDITATION**

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Sayyid al-Khumeini (AR) reports a tradition that there exists 70,000 Veils of Darkness and 70,000 Veils of Divine Light, all in the human soul. We need to struggle and get through the 70,000 Veils of Darkness before we even approach the first few levels of Divine Light.

Scholars narrate that at certain stages of spiritual journey The Divine Lights have been reported to be visible to persons with high spiritual status. In the beginning, these lights flash like lightening and appear for a moment only. In this limited span of time, the person receives divine satisfaction that one has never ever experienced. Gradually, The lights grow stronger and appear like stars.

As soon as a spiritual journalist is able to succeed in the above stages, he feels as if The Heavens and The Earth were both illuminated from The East to The West. This light has been given the name 'Light of the Self.'

Imam al-Sadiq (AS) has said,

If you are intelligent, then you should be of firm resolution and sincere intention before you set out for any place, for surely the self's nature is to overstep the bounds and encroach on the forbidden. You should reflect when you walk, and take note of the wonders of God's work wherever you go.

Do not be mocking, or strut when you walk. Allah (SWT) has said,

Do not go about in the land exulting overmuch.
(Qur'an - Chapter 31, Verse 18)

Lower your gaze from whatever is inappropriate to faith, and remember Allah (SWT) frequently. Those places where, and in connection with which, Allah (SWT) is mentioned will testify to that before Allah (SWT) on The Day of Judgment and will ask forgiveness for those people so that Allah (SWT) will let them enter The Garden.

Do not speak excessively with people along the way, for that is bad manners. Most of the roads are the traps and markets of Shaytan, so do not feel safe from his tricks. Make your coming and your going in obedience to Allah (SWT), striving for His Pleasure, for all your movements will be recorded in your Book, as Allah (SWT) has said,

On The Day when their tongues and their hands and their feet shall bear witness against them regarding what they did...
(Qur'an - Chapter 24, Verse 24)

We have made every man's actions to cling to his neck.
(Qur'an - Chapter 17, Verse 13)

In al-Kafi,

The best form of worship is to contemplate about God and His Power. In another tradition, it is stated that an hour's contemplation is better than a night's worship. In addition, according to a Prophetic tradition, the contemplation of an hour is better than a year's worship. In another tradition, it is stated that an hour's contemplation is better than sixty years of worship (according to another hadith, seventy years). Moreover, some Traditionists and Fuqaha have even mentioned it as being better than a thousand years of worship.

Levels of Contemplation

al-Khumeini (AR) writes that the first kind of contemplation is about God, His Names, Attributes and His Perfections, the result of which is the knowledge of His Existence and His Irradiations. Contemplating on His SELF and His ATTRIBUTES is the first stage of meditation – what may be termed as thoughtful meditation. One has to seriously compare his life on this earth and how it compares to The Divine Names of The Almighty – for example, is he or she merciful to the creatures; is he or she able to restrain anger when required to, and so forth. According to him,

In addition, this is the most superior level of contemplation, which yields the most sublime of the kinds of knowledge, and the firmest of the arguments; for thinking about the essence of The Cause, and meditating on The Absolute Cause imparts knowledge about Him and the understanding of the effects.

Another level of contemplation is reflecting on the subtleties of creation, its perfection and refinement. Such contemplation leads to the intellection of its Perfect Source, its Wise Maker. It has been said that learning is good for the soul even if the learning will not assist the person in his or her daily activities, but will bring him one closer step towards understanding The Workings of The Almighty. Therefore, reading, watching programs, going to seminars and visiting gatherings in which scholars discuss The Creations and The Workings of Allah, are all necessities towards this kind of meditation.

A final state is meditation on the states of the soul - knowledge of The Day of Resurrection, and knowledge of (the necessity of) Prophethood and Aimmah, revealed scriptures, systems of Divine Law, etc. According to al-Khumeini (AR), one can reap benefits in this world and the next if he or she were to constantly visualize the role of The Prophets and The Aimmah (AS) and his role in this transient world. We need to repeatedly remind ourselves of our role in this existence and that these Infallible and Divine Scriptures were sent here for a reason. Contemplating on the lifestyle of these great personalities, on the verses of The Qur'an, on the traditions from these Infallible, and so forth, is what we have to do on a daily basis – and the goal is to refine ourselves even further so every day is different.

Allamah Tabatabai (AS), one of the great spiritual preceptors, remarks that if we happen to be successful in our endeavors, four worlds will gradually reveal themselves to us.

First World - **UNITY OF ACTIONS**

In the earlier stages, we must feel that we are the origin of all that our tongue says, our ears hear and our hands, feet and other limbs do. Later, one may feel that he or she is the source of all that transpires in the world. At the next stage, one should feel that his or her existence is closely connected with Allah (SWT) and through this relationship the favors and the bounties of Allah (SWT), reach the world.

Ultimately, the goal is to perceive that Allah (SWT) alone is The Source of all actions and occurrences. Indeed! Allah (SWT) and only Allah (SWT) is The Origin of all good.

Second World - **UNITY OF ATTRIBUTES**

This world emerges after the first world. At this stage when the spiritual traveler hears or sees anything, he or she feels that Allah (SWT) is The Source of his hearing and seeing. Later he perceives that Allah (SWT) is The Source of all knowledge, power, life, hearing and sight found anywhere and in any form.

Third World - **UNITY OF NAMES**

At this stage, Divine Attributes are and originate from The Divine Essence, and Allah appears to one as The Knower. Similarly, we may think that the power that we have, our sight and hearing are all Allah (SWT) having that power and control.

It is His sight and His hearing that you possess.

The principle is that there is only One Being in the whole universe and its contents Who is having The Absolute Power. It is His Power, His Sight and His Hearing that are reflected and indicated by everything existing according to its capacity.

Fourth World - **UNITY OF BEING**

This world is revealed to the spiritual traveler in consequence to the revelation of The Glory of Divine Essence. He or she at this stage perceives that there is only One Being Who is The Source of all actions and attributes. At this stage, his attention remains concentrated on The One Being. He attains to this stage only when he has annihilated his transient existence completely and has passed away in Allah (SWT). Allamah Tabataba'i (AR) writes that,

It is only he who has annihilated his self and ego completely, that he will recognize neither himself nor anyone else. He will recognize Allah (SWT) alone.

In short, the spiritual traveler should say good-bye to all those habits and traditions, customs and usages, which obstruct his advancement towards Allah. The Gnostics call this attitude 'madness', because mad people also take little interest in and pay little attention to the popular habits and traditions and do not care what the other people would say. A mad man sticks to his own ways and does not fear any opposition.

If we find any devotee flitting away his time in amusements, we can easily conclude that he is not fully devoted to Allah and that his heart is not free from the hypocrisy which is called in this context greater hypocrisy and which is the opposite of greater faith. As a result of this hypocrisy, man does not act according to his inner incitement, but is guided by reason, expediency or apprehensions. The following verse refers to this kind of hypocrisy: When they stand up to offer prayers, they perform it languidly. (Surah an-Nisa, 4:142)

Seventh Rule

CHECKING AND INSPECTION

Self-conditioning and self-examination are essential pre-requisites for a wayfarer who is battling with his self. Self-conditioning means binding oneself with the resolve not to do anything against God's Commands. Shaytan and his accursed legions may magnify the volume of the task in our eyes, but these are the guiles played by The Accursed. al-Khumeini (AR) advises us

To remain in this state of mind till night, the time for introspection and inner deliberation, and evaluate our deeds of the whole day. This is the time to see whether you have been honest to The Giver of all, to whom everybody is accountable. If you have been faithful to Him, you should be thankful to Him that He has made you successful in your intentions. Indeed, Imam al-Kadhim (AS) has said,

He who does not take account of himself once everyday is not one of us.

We have to remind ourselves that Shaytan is always there to misguide us but his powers are nonetheless much less convincing if we are good and obedient servants of Allah, and seek His Divine Assistance.

Imam Musa al-Kadhim (AS) had said,

One who does not examine and evaluate himself every day is not one of us (i.e. he is not a follower of The Prophet and The Ahlul-Bayt). (A person who examines himself every day), if he does a good deed, he beseeches God to increase him (in virtues) and if he has perpetrated a vice, he seeks God's forgiveness for it and is penitent before Him.

Taking account and being watchful are two main ingredients in this part of the journey. It means taking account of one's acts of obedience and sinfulness to see which one exceeds the other. If the acts of obedience are more, we should thank Allah for all the blessings and opportunities; and if our sins exceed or even one sin is committed, we need to ask forgiveness from Allah and pray that we do not stumble once again. One has to do this with the sincerest of intentions, for it is easy to sin repeatedly and very difficult to repeat a good act, unless we are blessed with The Almighty. Allah is indeed worthy of remembrance and constant asking for forgiveness. The following two traditions just explain how much.

The Prince of Believers – Imam Ali (AS) has said,

Whenever one repents and God The Almighty accepts his repentance, God will employ his body parts to cover up his sins. God will employ the places where the sins were committed to hide the sins, and will make the guardian angels who record the sins forget them.

Imam al-Sadiq (AS), says on the authority of God's Prophet (S),

"God shall accept the repentance of whoever repents one year before he dies." Then he said, "One year is too long. God shall accept the repentance of whoever repents one month before he dies." Then he added, "One month is too long. God shall accept the repentance of whoever repents one week before he dies." Then he said, "One week is too long. God shall accept the repentance of whoever repents one day before he dies." Then he said, "One day is too long. God will accept the repentance of whoever repents before he faces death."

al-Amini writes,

As the early hour of the day before starting daily routine activities some time must be allocated for this purpose. For example, after offering morning prayer one may sit alone in an isolated place and should address to his self in the following manner,

Right now, I am alive but do not know how long it may last, may be for next one hour or may be little bit more. The time of life already spent has all been wasted, and the remaining time left might be counted as capital still at my disposal. For each hour spent out of this remaining life, I could arrange some provisions for The Hereafter. If right now The Israel – The Angel of Death (AS) would have arrived for receiving my soul I would have desired for living one more day or even one extra hour.

O' helpless poor self! Just imagine that you are in such a condition and your desire for this living a little longer has been granted and you have been allowed to return to this world. Oh self! Be kind to me as well as to yourself and do not waste these precious hours for indulgence into nonsense amusements. Do not be negligent now, otherwise you will be ashamed tomorrow on The Judgment Day -The Day when being regretful will not be of any help. O' self! For each hour spent during this life, God-Almighty has created a treasure box in which good and evil deeds will be deposited, and to be opened on The Judgment Day. O' self! Try to fill this treasure with righteous deeds. Be careful not to fill this treasure with sins and transgressions.

Likewise, all the parts of the body should be addressed individually to comment themselves not to commit sins. For example, the tongue should be asked that lying, backbiting, tell-bearing, fault-finding, abusing, babbling, insulting, self-praising, disputing, and false testimony are moral abjectness and divinely forbidden, which destroy eternal life of human beings. Therefore, I will not allow it to indulge in these acts. O' tongue! Be kind to yourself and Me and do not commit immoral acts because everything said will be taped and deposited into the treasure box containing the deeds and I will be accountable on The Day of Judgment.

In this manner, the tongue should be required to commit itself not to indulge into sinning. After that, the righteous deeds, which could be performed by it, should be reminded and their performance should be made obligatory during each day. For example, it could be said to the tongue: you may recite such and such invocation (dhikr), such and such supplication, may fill up the treasure box of deeds with joy and illumination and may receive a good result in The Hereafter. Therefore, do not be negligent otherwise, you will feel terribly sorry later on. Similarly, all other parts of the body should be required to commit themselves to perform only righteous deeds and strictly guard them against sins and transgressions.

Imam al-Sadiq (AS) narrated a tradition from his father as follows,

When night approaches, it makes an announcement, which is heard by all the creation except human being and jinns as follows,

O' sons of Adams! I am a new creation and will testify about all the deeds performed during my tenure. Utilize my existence to the best of your advantage, because, after the sunrise you will never see me again. After that, you would not be able to increase your righteous deeds and offer repentance for your sins and transgressions. After the night departs, each coming day repeats the same announcement.

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It is quite possible that Satan and imperious-self will tell us: You cannot live a life with such program. Is it possible to live a life with such limitations and restrictions? How could you allocate a certain hour for auditing program every day? With these whispers The Satan and imperious-self want to deceive, thus, preventing us from taking the important decision. We must offer resistance against these Satanic plots and must neutralize these plots by telling them,

This program is feasible and does not have any contradiction with life's daily routine activities, and since it is necessary for attaining self-refinement and self-purification as well as for accomplishing the eternal salvation, I must undertake this program. It is not so difficult either, and once you have decided firmly it would become easier. Even if it is a little bit difficult in the beginning, would become easier gradually.

Rights

This is precisely where the question of 'Rights' comes into one's mind and we cannot ignore it. We have a large number of sayings that warn and advise us to remind ourselves of God's, the people's rights and ours. Concerning the 'Rights' in general, Imam al-Sajjad (AS) says,

KNOW, Allah (SWT) has mercy upon you, that Allah (SWT) has rights against you and that these encompass you in every movement through which you move, every rest through which you rest, every way station in which you reside, every limb which you employ, and every instrument which you put to work. Some of these rights are greater and some less.

[1] The greatest of God's rights against you is the right, which He has made incumbent upon you for Himself and which is the root of all rights, then [2] those, which He has made incumbent upon you in yourself, from your crown to your foot, in keeping with the diversity of your organs. He has given [3] your tongue a right against you, [4] your hearing a right against you, [5] your sight a right against you, [6] your hand a right against you, [7] your leg a right against you, [8] your stomach a right against you, [9] and your private parts a right against you. Acts take place through these seven organs.

Then He gave your acts rights against you, He gave [10] your ritual prayer a right against you, [12] your fasting a right against you, [13] your charity a right against you, [14] your offering a right against you, and your acts a right against you.

Then these rights extend out from you to others who have rights against you. The most incumbent of them against you are the rights toward your leaders, then the rights toward your subjects, then the rights toward your womb (relatives).

From these rights branch out other rights. The rights of your leaders are three. Incumbent upon you is [15] the right of him who trains you through authority, then [16] of him who trains you through knowledge, then [17] of him who trains you through property.

The rights of your subjects are three. The most incumbent upon you is [18] the right of those who are your subjects through authority, then [19] the right of those who are your subjects through knowledge for the man of ignorance is the subject of the man of knowledge then the right of those who are your subjects through property, such as [20] wives and [21] what is owned by the right hand.

The rights of your womb relatives are many. They are connected to you in the measure of the connection of the womb relationship. The most incumbent upon you is [22] the right of your mother, then [23] the right of your father, then [24] the right of your child, then [25] the right of your brother, then the next nearest, then the next person most worthy, then the next most worthy.

Then there is [26] the right of your Master Who favors you (by freeing you from slavery), then [27] the right of the slave whose favors reach you (by the fact that you free him), then [28] the right of him who does a kindly act toward you, then [29] the right of The Caller who calls you to the ritual prayer, then [30] the right of The Leader who leads the prayer, then [31] the right of your sitting companion, then [32] the right of your neighbor, then [33] the right of your companion, then [34] the right of your partner, then [35] the right of your property, then the right of him who has a debt he must pay back to you, then [36] the right of him to whom you owe a debt, then [37] the right of your associate, then [38] the right of your adversary who has a claim against you, then [39] the right of your adversary against whom you have a claim, then [40] the right of him who asks you for advice, then [41] the right of him whom you ask for advice, then [42] the right of him who asks your counsel, then [43] the right of him who counsels you, then [44] the right of him who is older than you, then [45] the right of him who is younger than you, then [46] the right of him who asks from you, then [47] the right of him from whom you ask, then the right of [48] him who does something evil to you through word or deed, or [48] him who makes you happy through word or deed, intentionally or unintentionally, then [50] the right of the people of your creed, then [51] the right of the people under your protection, then all rights in the measure of the causes of the states and the occurrence of events.

Therefore happy is he whom Allah (SWT) aids in the rights which He has made incumbent upon him and whom He gives success therein and points in the proper direction.

Rights of Allah (SWT) against Oneself

The greatest right of Allah (SWT) against you is that you worship Him without associating anything with Him and worship Him with sincerity. He has made it binding upon Himself to give you sufficiency in the affair of this world and the next.

Imam Ali (AS) says,

Blessed is he who sincerely devotes the entirety of his actions, knowledge, love, hatred, receiving, relinquishing, speech, silence, deeds, and statements absolutely for Allah (SWT).

The right of your self against you is that you employ it in obeying Allah (SWT), then you deliver to your tongue its right, to your hearing its right, to your sight its right, to your hand its right, to your leg its right, to your stomach its right, to your private part its right, and you seek help from Allah (SWT) in all that.

The right of the tongue is that you consider it too noble for obscenity, accustom it to good, refrain from any meddling in which there is nothing to be gained, express kindness to the people, and speak well concerning them.

A Brief Note on The Tongue

The Aimmah (AS) have reported that,

Everyday early in the morning, all the organs of the human body address themselves to the tongue and exclaim, 'if you are safe today then we all are safe.

Allah (SWT) states further,

One who reduces his talk increases his wisdom

O' Son of Adam (AS)! Your religion is not going to correct you until you straighten your tongue and your heart. In addition, your heart is not going to be straightened unless you straighten your tongue. In addition, your tongue is not going to be straightened unless you are humble towards your Lord.

O' Son of Adam (AS)! If your tongue is (like) a lion and if you leave it alone, it will destroy you - your destruction is because of your tongue.

Imam Ali (AS), The Prince of Believers once exclaimed to an individual who was talking at random and informed him that,

O' Man! You are dictating to your Angel a letter to Allah (SWT), so speak what concerns you and omit that which does not concern you.

The Prophet (S) says,

I recommend you to practice silence, because it would keep Shaytan away from you. It helps a lot for the protection of your religion.

Avoid speaking too much except while reciting invocations for Allah (SWT), because, utterance of too many words other than God's remembrance causes hard-heartedness, and the most distant apart people from The Allah Almighty are the people with darkened heart.

Control your tongue because it is the best gift, which you may present to the self. A person never tastes the reality of belief but to control his tongue.

Imam al-Ridha (AS) remarks,

There are three things, which indicate symptoms of intelligence and religious knowledge of jurisprudence - patience, learning, and silence. Moreover, among them, silence is the gate of wisdom, causes love, and is responsible for each blessing.

Imam al-Sadiq (AS) says,

There is no worship superior to silence...

As mentioned before, the most celebrated mystic of our time, the great Allamah Tabai Tabai (AR) concludes the following after years of struggle in his quest for attaining spiritual perfection,

I have witnessed the most precious effects of silence. Practice silence for forty days and nights, speaking only when it is required, remaining engaged in meditation and invocation until attaining purity and enlightenment.

Imam al-Sajjad (AS) continues,

The right of hearing is to keep it pure from listening to backbiting and listening to that to which it is unlawful to listen. The right of sight is that you lower it before everything, which is unlawful to you and that you take heed whenever you look at anything. The right of your hand is that you stretch it not toward that which is unlawful to you. The right of your two legs is that you walk not with them toward that which is unlawful to you. You have no escape from standing upon the narrow bridge over Hell, so you should see to it that your legs do not slip and cause you to fall into The Fire. The right of your stomach is that you make it not into a container for that which is unlawful to you and you eat no more than your fill. The right of your private parts is that you protect it from fornication and guard it against being looked upon.

Right of Acts

The right of your daily ritual prayer is that you know that it is an arrival before Allah (SWT) and that through it you are standing before Him. When you know that, then you will stand in the station of him who is lowly, vile, beseeching, trembling, hopeful, fearful, and abased, and you will magnify Him who is before you through stillness and dignity. You will approach the prayer with your heart and you will perform it according to its bounds and its rights.

The right of The Hajj is that you know it is an arrival before your Lord and a flight to Him from your sins. Through it, your repentance is accepted and you perform an obligation made incumbent upon you by Allah (SWT).

The right of fasting is that you know it is a veil, which Allah (SWT) has set up over your tongue, your hearing, your sight, your stomach, and your private part to protect you from The Fire. If you abandon the fast, you will have torn God's protective covering away from yourself.

The right of charity is that you know it is a storing away with your Lord and a deposit for which you will have no need for witnesses. If you deposit it in secret, you will be more confident of it than if you deposit it in public. You should know that it repels afflictions and illnesses from you in this world and it will repel The Fire from you in the next world.

There is a tradition in al-Tafseer of al-Ayyashi from Imam al-Baqir (AS) that Allah (SWT) once remarked,

I have given (some) authority to others (i.e. Angels, etc.) about things, except charity, because I take hold of it with My (own) Hand. So much so that a man or a woman gives half a date in alms, and I nurture it for him as one of you nurtures his calf and colt, until I shall leave (i.e. return) it on The Day of Resurrection (and it shall be) bigger than (the mountain of) Uhud. In addition, he who spent a property in the way of Allah (SWT) and he stayed in the house shall get for every dirham, seven hundred dirham.

(Prophet (S))

Imam al-Sajjad (AS) continues,

The right of the offering is that through it, you desire Allah (SWT) and you not desire His Creation. Through it, you desire only the exposure of your soul to God's Mercy and the deliverance of your spirit on The Day you encounter Him.

Rights of Leaders

The right of The Possessor of Authority is that you know that Allah (SWT) has made you a trial for him. Allah (SWT) is testing him through The Authority He has given him over you. You should not expose yourself to his displeasure, for thereby you cast yourself by your own hands into destruction and become his partner in his sin when he brings evil down upon you.

The right of the one who trains you through knowledge is magnifying him, respecting his sessions, listening well to him, and attending to him with devotion. You should not raise your voice toward him. You should never answer anyone who asks him about something, in order that he may be the one who answers. You should not speak to anyone in his session nor speak ill of anyone with him. If anyone ever speaks ill of him in your presence, you should defend him. You should conceal his faults and make manifest his virtues. You should not sit with him in enmity or show hostility toward him in friendship. If you do all of this, God's Angels will give witness for you that you went straight to him and learned his knowledge for God's sake, not for the sake of the people.

The right of him who trains you through property is that you should obey him and not disobey him, unless obeying him would displease Allah (SWT), for there can be no obedience to a creature when it is disobedience to Allah (SWT).

Rights of Subjects

The right of your subjects through authority is that you should know that they have been made subjects through their weakness and your strength. Hence, it is incumbent upon you to act with justice toward them and to be like a compassionate father toward them. You should forgive them their ignorance and not hurry them to punishment and you should thank Allah (SWT) for the power over them, which He has given to you.

The right of your subjects through knowledge is that you should know that Allah (SWT) made you a caretaker over them only through the knowledge He has given you and His storehouses which He has opened up to you. If you do well in teaching the people, not treating them roughly or annoying them, then Allah (SWT) will increase His bounty toward you. However, if you withhold your knowledge from people or treat them roughly when they seek knowledge from you, then it will be God's right to deprive you of knowledge and its splendor and to make you fall from your place in people's hearts.

The right of your wife is that you know that Allah (SWT) has made her repose and a comfort for you. You should know that she is God's favor toward you, so you should honor her and treat her gently. Though her right toward you is incumbent, you must treat her with compassion, since she is your prisoner whom you feed and clothe. If she is ignorant, you should pardon her.

The right of your slave is that you should know that he is the creature of your Lord, the son of your father and mother, and your flesh and blood. You own him, but you did not make him. Allah (SWT) made him. You did not create any one of his limbs, nor do you provide him with his sustenance. On the contrary, Allah (SWT) gives you the sufficiency for that. Then He subjugated him to you, entrusted him to you, and deposited him with you so that you may be safeguarded by the good you give to him. So act well toward him, just as Allah (SWT) has acted well toward you. If you dislike him, replace him, but do not torment a creature of Allah (SWT). Moreover, there is no strength save in Allah.

Rights of Womb Relatives

The right of your mother is that you know that she carried you where no one carries anyone, she gave to you of the fruit of her heart that which no one gives to anyone, and she protected you with all her organs. She did not care if she went hungry as long as you ate, if she was thirsty as long as you drank, if she was naked as long as you were clothed, if she was in the sun as long as you were in the shade. She gave up sleep for your sake; she protected you from heat and cold, all in order that you might belong to her. You will not be able to show her gratitude, unless through God's help and giving success.

The right of your father is that you know that he is your root. Without him, you would not be. Whenever you see anything in yourself, which pleases you, know that your father is the root of its blessing upon you. So praise Allah (SWT) and thank Him in that measure. In addition, there is no strength save in Allah (SWT).

The right of your child is that you should know that he is from you and will be ascribed to you, through both his good and his evil, in the immediate affairs of this world. You are responsible for what has been entrusted to you, such as educating him in good conduct pointing him in the direction of his Lord, and helping him to obey Him. So act toward him with the action of one who knows that he will be rewarded for good doing toward him and punished for evil doing.

The right of your brother is that you know that he is your hand, your might, and your strength. Take him not as a weapon with which to disobey Allah (SWT), nor as equipment with which to wrong God's Creatures. Do not neglect to help him against his enemy or to give him good counsel. If he obeys Allah (SWT), well and good, but if not, you should honor Allah (SWT) more than him. Moreover, there is no strength save in Allah (SWT).

Rights of Others

The right of your master who has favored you (by freeing you from slavery) is that you know that he has spent his property for you and brought you out of the abasement and estrangement of bondage to the exaltation and comfort of freedom. He has freed you from the captivity of possession and loosened the bonds of slavery from you. He has brought you out of prison, given you ownership of yourself, and given you leisure to worship your Lord. You should know that he is the closest of God's creatures to you in your life and your death and that aiding him with your life and what he needs from you is incumbent upon you. Moreover, there is no strength save in Allah (SWT).

The right of the slave whom you have favored (by freeing him) is that you know that Allah (SWT) has made your freeing him a means of access to Him and a veil against The Fire. Your immediate reward is to inherit from him if he does not have any maternal relatives as a compensation for the property you have spent for him, and your ultimate reward is The Garden.

The right of him who does a kindly act toward you is that you thank him and mention his kindness. You reward him with beautiful words and you supplicate for him sincerely in that which is between you and Allah (SWT). If you do that, you have thanked him secretly and openly. Then, if you are able to repay him one day, you repay him.

The right of The Caller (for daily prayer) is that you know that he is reminding you of your Lord, calling you to your good fortune, and helping you to accomplish what Allah (SWT) has made obligatory upon you. So thank Him for that just as you thank one who does well to you.

The right of your Leader in your ritual prayer is that you know that he has taken on the role of mediator between you and your Lord. He speaks for you, but you do not speak for him. He supplicates for you, but you do not supplicate for him. He has spared you the terror of standing before Allah (SWT). If he performs the prayer imperfectly, that belongs to him and not to you. Nevertheless, if he performs it perfectly, you are his partner, and he has no excellence over you. So protect yourself through him, protect your prayer through his prayer, and thank him in that measure.

The right of your sitting companion is that you treat him mildly, show fairness toward him while vying with him in discourse, and do not stand up from sitting with him without his permission. However, it is permissible for him who sits with you to leave without asking your permission. You should forget his slips and remember his good qualities, and you should tell nothing about him but good.

The right of your neighbor is that you guard him when he is absent, honor him when he is present, and aid him when he is wronged. You do not pursue anything of his that is shameful. If you know of any evil from him, you conceal it. If you know that he will accept your counsel, you counsel him in that which is between him and you. You do not forsake him in difficulty, you release him from his stumble, you forgive his sin, and you associate with him generously. In addition, there is no strength save in Allah (SWT).

The right of the companion is that you act as his companion with bounty and in fairness. You honor him as he honors you and you do not let him be the first to act with generosity. If he is the first, you repay him. You wish for him as he wishes for you and you restrain him from any act of disobedience he might attempt. Be a mercy for him, not a chastisement. In addition, there is no strength save in Allah (SWT).

The right of the partner is that if he should be absent, you suffice him in his affairs, and if he should be present, you show regard for him. You make no decision without his decision and you do nothing based on your own opinion, but you exchange views with him. You guard his property for him, and you do not betray him in that of his affair, which is difficult, or of little importance, for God's Hand is above the hands of two partners as long as they do not betray each other. Moreover, there is no strength save in Allah (SWT).

The right of your property is that you take it only from what is lawful and you spend it only in what is proper. Through it, you should not prefer above yourself those who will not praise you. You should act with it in obedience to your Lord and not be miserly with it, lest you fall back into regret and remorse while suffering the ill consequence. Moreover, there is no strength save in Allah (SWT).

The right of him to whom you owe a debt is that, if you have the means you pay him back, and if you are in straitened circumstances, you satisfy him with good words and you send him away with gentleness.

The right of the associate is that you neither mislead him, nor act dishonestly toward him, nor deceive him, and you fear Allah (SWT) in His affair.

The right of the one who has a claim against you is that if what he claims against you is true, you give witness to it against yourself. You do not wrong him and you give him his full due. If what he claims against you is false, you act with kindness toward him and you show nothing in his affair other than kindness. You do not displease your Lord in His affair. In addition, there is no strength save in Allah (SWT).

The right of the adversary against whom you have a claim is that, if your claim against him is true, you maintain polite moderation in speaking to him and you do not deny his right. If your claim is false, you fear Allah (SWT), repent to Him, and abandon your claim.

The right of him who asks you for advice is that, if you consider that he has a correct opinion you advise him to follow it, and if you do not consider it so you direct him to someone who does consider it so.

The right of him whom you ask for advice is that you do not make accusations against him for an opinion, which does not conform to your own opinion. If it conforms to it, you praise Allah (SWT).

The right of him who asks your counsel is that you give him your counsel, but you conduct yourself toward him with compassion and kindness.

The right of your counselor is that you act gently toward him and give ear to him. If he presents you with the right course, you praise Allah (SWT), but if he does not agree with you show compassion toward him and make no accusations against him. You consider him to have made a mistake and you do not take him to task for that, unless he should be deserving of accusation. Then attach no more importance to his affair. Moreover, there is no strength save in Allah (SWT).

The right of him who is older than you is that you show reverence toward him because of his age and you honor him because he entered Islam before you. You leave off confronting him in a dispute, you do not precede him in a path, you do not go ahead of him, and you do not consider him foolish. If he should act foolishly toward you, you put up with him and you honor him because of the right of Islam and the respect due to it.

The right of him who is younger is that you show compassion toward him through teaching him, pardoning him, covering his faults, kindness toward him, and helping him.

The right of him who asks from you is that you give to him in the measure of his need.

The right of him from whom you ask is that you accept from him with gratitude and recognition of his bounty if he gives, and you accept his excuse if he withholds.

The right of him through whom Allah (SWT) makes you happy is that you first praise Allah (SWT), and then you thank the person.

The right of him who does evil to you is that you pardon him. However, if you know that your pardon will harm him, you defend yourself. Allah (SWT) says,

Whosoever defends himself after he has been wronged against them there is no way.
(Qur'an - Chapter 42, Verse 41)

The right of the people of your creed is harboring safety for them, compassion toward them, kindness toward their evildoer, treating them with friendliness, seeking their well-being, thanking their good-doer, and keeping harm away from them. You should love for them what you love for yourself and dislike for them what you dislike for yourself. Their old men stand in the place of your father, their youths in the place of your brothers, their old women in the place of your mother, and their young ones in the place of your children.

The right of the people under the protection (of Islam) is that you accept from them what Allah (SWT) has accepted from them and you do no wrong to them as long as they fulfill God's covenant.

Eighth Rule

CENSURING AND ADMONITION

We need to remind ourselves that we are the best judge of our actions. We should criticize ourselves whenever Shaytan lures us into a vice. We need to lay all the cards on the table by analyzing why we committed the sin in the first place, ponder over the future, develop weapons and be vigilant. With the help and assistance from Allah (SWT), we will be successful.

al-Khumeini (AR) writes the following for those of us, who are heedless of their actions and accept Shaytan as their friend,

O' Callous Self! You have wasted precious years of your life in pursuance of hedonistic and sensuous propensities. Moreover, nothing is gained except regret and sense of loss. You should be regretful before Allah (SWT) for your past deeds, and commence a new journey in the direction of His prescribed goal, the journey that leads to the life of eternity and perpetual bliss. You should not bargain short-lived transitory joys, which are hard to obtain for eternal bliss and felicity.

Fearing Allah is one way to achieve success in this stage. Allah (SWT), The Most High, The Most Sublime, has clearly stated,

I give you whatever you ask Me, but still you go on sinning. I hide these sins, one after another, one evil deed after another. I am ashamed of you but you are not ashamed of Me!

O' Son of Adam (AS)! Obey Me to the extent of your needs towards Me; disobey Me to the extent of your ability to tolerate The Fire of Hell; collect wealth in this world according to the length of your stay here; collect for your hereafter according to the length of your stay there; do not think that your death is far and your bounties are available, or your sins are hidden.

The best wisdom is fear of Almighty Allah (SWT); the best of wealth is contentment; the best of belongings is piety, the worst of your weapons is lies, and the worst of your advice is gossip.

O' Son of Adam (AS)! Collect provisions (by doing good deeds) in abundance - indeed, the way is long, very long. Purify your deeds, because, indeed, The Examiner is All Seeing! Lighten your weight, because, indeed, the path is thin, very thin! Delay your sleep for the grave and your pride towards The Scale! In addition, delay your enjoyment until Heaven! And delay your rest until Hereafter! And delay your pleasures until you meet Heavenly Ladies with big eyes! Be for Me and I will be for You! Seek nearness towards Me by despising this world! Keep away from The Fire of Hell by forsaking the wicked people and loving the pious! Indeed, Allah (SWT) will not waste the reward of the benevolent people!

al-Harith, son of al-Mughirah or his father, reports from as-Sadiq (AS). I asked him (AS),

'What was mentioned in The Testament of Luqman (AS)?' 'There were marvelous things in it,' he said, 'and the most wonderful of that which he said to his son was this - have such a fear of Allah (SWT) Almighty that were you to come to Him with the virtues of the two worlds, He would still chastise you. And, put such a hope in Allah (SWT) that were you to come to Him with the sins of the two worlds, He would still have compassion for you.'

al-Sadiq (AS) added, my father al-Baqir (AS) used to say,

There is no believer who does not have two lights in his heart - the light of fear and the light of hope. Were one of these to be measured it would not exceed the other and were the other one to be measured, it would not exceed this one.

al-Kulayni (AR) reports in al-Kafi with his chain of narrators from al-Baqir (AS), who quotes The Messenger of Allah (S) having said, Allah (SWT), The Sublime and The Blessed, said,

The workers (of deeds) for My sake should not, for My reward, trust the works they have done. For verily, should they labor and toil for all their lives in My service and worship, they would fall short in their worship and will not attain to the reality of My service in what they seek with Me of My Magnanimity and Bounty, My Paradise and the high stations in My Proximity. Rather, they should rely upon My Mercy, put hope in My Favor, and be contented of their good opinion of Me, for verily, therein My Mercy will reach them, My Good Pleasure will go forth to them, and My Forgiveness shall envelop them. For, indeed, I am Allah (SWT), The Beneficent and The Merciful, and I have been named so on that account.

In al-Kafi, al-Kulayni (AS), with his chain of narrators, reports from al-Sadiq (AS) on the authority of an unnamed narrator who narrated it to Ibn Abi Najran, that he said to The Imam (AS); *'There are some people who commit sins and say we are hopeful. They remain in this condition until death comes to them.'* The Imam (AS) said,

They are a people who have been swept away by false hopes. They lie, they are not the hopeful; for verily, one who has hope of something pursues it, and one who fears something flees from it. Be apprehensive of your desires in the same way as you are apprehensive of your enemies. For there is no greater enemy for human beings than their own desires and what their tongues reap.

The first and foremost advice is to develop Fear of Allah (SWT), The Almighty and The Master on The Day of Judgment. Most certainly, fear of Allah (SWT) repels evil in the same way as the insecticides repel insects. Fear Allah (SWT) for He deserves to be feared. How sincere is al-Sajjad (AS) in saying,

Glory is to You, O Allah (SWT)! I wonder how anyone who knows You does not have fear in You.

Undoubtedly, The Accursed Shaytan has many ways to enter our souls and persuade us to do evil. We need to be careful of his tricks and ways of seducing us from obeying our Loving Allah (SWT). For once, let us ask the dead as to what is the best provision to accompany a dead person in his grave; a similar question was asked by Imam Ali (AS) at a cemetery and he replied,

The people inside the graves exclaim, *'Surely the best provision to accompany you inside your grave is Fear of Allah (SWT).'*

Ninth Rule

HASTENING AND PROMPTNESS

The scholars have advised us to make haste in performing good deeds. We should try to be of strong will-power and resolution, so that we may not go from this world as a person without resolution.

One's audacity to commit sins converts him little by little into a man devoid of will-power and takes away the noble essence of humanity from him. Our respected teacher (AR) used to say that more than anything else, giving the ears to the sounds of music and songs, steal from men their will-power and the power of resolution ... May Allah (SWT) bestow His Graces and Favors upon you. May he escort you in the coming dangers, since the path of life is full of great risks and hazards.

(al-Khumeini (AR))

Opposite is the case with performing disobedient acts and we should be courageous enough to question every thought lest it be from The Accursed, for these thoughts then turn into actions. We also have to learn to be patient enough on each thought; and if positive and is an act that is liked by The Almighty, then we should perform the act without hesitation if there is time and allowance for it. Shaytan is always there to convince us otherwise.

Here is an easy exercise that should be performed on a daily basis for it to be effective.

1. When experiencing a recurring thought that causes you to be forgetful of Allah, you should first say "Stop" and make sure it is from The Accursed. This introduces the idea to you to stop having these thoughts. You can say it aloud or to yourself but this is a necessary first step.

2. Negate the thought that you are having on a recurrent basis. "I will not ..." or "I can not .." is how this statement usually starts.

3. Make a positive self statement about a feeling, which instills confidence, should be made. "I will ..." or "I can ..." is how this statement usually starts.

4. Take a cleansing, relaxing breath. It is important to note that thought stopping will work best if you have mastered the breathing technique since this is a key in pairing the provoking thought with relaxation.

5. In order to achieve maximum benefit from this technique in the shortest time possible, you should do steps 1 to 4 EVERY time you have the recurrent thought. Failure to do this is likely to result in thought stopping not being effective.

Besides the STOP method, these might work.

Thought Replacement

When an unwanted thought enters, immediately replace the thought with a positive, rational one.

Substituting a Healthy Thought Pattern

If you have a tendency to think of sinning and disobeying The Almighty, you can develop a positive pattern of thinking by challenging every thought that comes to mind, asking, is this a thought from Shaytan, The Accursed? If not, what is sinful about it? What would be a positive replacement for this thought?

Replacement Visual Image

If you have a tendency to visualize negative images that lead one to sinning, replace these negative images by positive images that lead one to obedience of The Almighty.

Aversive Replacements

If you have a tendency to think of a sinful behavior, immediately replace these images with more positive "what will happen" images, i.e., thoughts of different kinds of sinful acts can be replaced by the words "God is displeased," "I will be accountable for this," "God is watching over me."

A Brief Note on Breathing

- 1) Empty the lungs entirely by breathing out all the air in your lungs.
- 2) Slowly lower the diaphragm allowing air into the lungs. The abdomen swells filling the bottom of the lungs with air.
- 3) Expand the ribs without straining.
- 4) Allow the lungs to fill by raising the collarbone.

Throughout this procedure, the air should enter in a continuous flow, without gasping. It is essential to breathe silently! It is of great importance to concentrate the mind entirely upon the action of breathing in the first few minutes.

Inhalation, like exhalation, must be silent, slow, continuous and easy. Do not blow yourself up like a balloon! Breathe easily without straining. Remember that the ideal respiration is deep, slow, silent, and easy. As we all know, Oxygen plays a vital role in the circulatory and respiratory systems. As you breathe, oxygen that is inhaled purifies your blood by removing poisonous waste products circulating throughout your blood. Irregular breathing will hamper this purification process and cause waste products to remain in circulation. Digestion will then become irregular, leaving tissues and organs undernourished. Improper oxygen consumption will thus ultimately lead to fatigue and heightened anxiety states.

Irregular breathing elicited during stressful situations not only makes it hard to cope with them but also contributes to a general deterioration of health. By careful control of your breathing pattern, you not only rejuvenate your system, but you also counter the unhealthy effects of stress. Although one can practice this exercise in a variety of postures, the following is recommended for beginners, at night before sleeping,

Lie down on a blanket or rug on the floor. Bend your knees and move your feet about eight inches apart, with your toes turned outward slightly. Make sure your back is

straight. Place one hand on your abdomen and one hand on your chest. Inhale slowly and deeply through your nose into your abdomen to push up your hand as much as feels comfortable. Your chest should move only a little and only with your abdomen.

Continue until your breathing becomes rhythmic and comfortable. Now, inhale through your nose and exhale through your mouth, making a quiet, breezy sound as you gently breathe out. Your mouth, tongue and jaw will be relaxed. Take long, slow, deep breaths raising and lowering your abdomen. Hear the sound and feel the texture of breathing as you become more and more relaxed.

When you first begin this technique, do it for five minutes. When you become more comfortable with it, you may extend it up to 20 minutes. Upon ending a session, stay still for a few minutes and try to keep the entire body relaxed.

Spiritual Journey – Self-Building, Self-Purification

Tenth Rule

FAITH AND RELIANCE

Faith in Allah, The Aimmah (AS) is extremely vital, and an important aspect of this journey. When we remember Allah (SWT), we need to make sure we put all our trust in Him; entrust all our affairs to Him; be pleased with whatever He gives us, and submit ourselves to The Will of Allah (SWT). These are the four parts of 'Faith' as described by Aimmah (AS). In addition, we must have love and implicit faith in The Prophet (S) and his Twelve Rightful Successors (AS). Complete reliance and trust are especially necessary at this stage. According to Allamah Taba Tabai (AR),

The more the reliance, the more the lasting effects of good deeds.

As all the existing things are The Creation of Allah (SWT), and we must love and cherish all of them. A lover of Allah (SWT) shows kindness to all humans, animals and plants – and this may even be taking an insect out of the house instead of killing it. According to Aimmah (AS),

Affection for the creation is part of faith in Allah (SWT).

When Imam Ali (AS) was asked about 'Faith in Religion', he replied that the structure of faith is supported by four pillars namely Endurance, Conviction, Justice and Jihad (war with one's enemy inside and outside).

Endurance is composed of four attributes. Eagerness, fear, piety and anticipation (of death). Therefore, whoever is eager for Paradise will ignore temptations; whoever fears The Fire of Hell will abstain from sins. Whoever practices piety will easily bear the difficulties of life and whoever anticipates death will hasten towards performing good deeds.

Conviction has also four aspects to guard oneself against infatuations of sin, to search for explanation of truth through knowledge, to gain lessons from instructive things and to follow the precedent of the past people. As such whoever wants to guard himself against vices and sins will have to search for the true causes of infatuation and the true ways of combating them out and to find those true ways one has to search them with the help of knowledge. Whoever gets fully acquainted with various branches of knowledge will take lessons from life and whoever tries to take lessons from life is actually engaged in the study of the causes of rise and fall of previous civilizations.

Justice also has four aspects, depth of understanding, profoundness of knowledge, fairness of judgment and dearness of mind. As such, whoever tries his best to understand a problem will have to study it, whoever has the practice of studying the subject he is to deal with, will develop a clear mind and will always come to correct decisions. Whoever tries to achieve all this will have to develop ample patience and forbearance and whoever has done this has done justice to the cause of religion and has led a life of good repute and fame.

Jihad is divided into four branches. To persuade people to be obedient to Allah (SWT), to prohibit them from sin and vice, to struggle (in the cause of Allah (SWT)) sincerely and firmly on all occasions and to detest the vicious. Whoever persuades people to obey The Orders of Allah (SWT) provides strength to the believers. Whoever dissuades them from vices and sins humiliates the unbelievers. Whoever struggles on all occasions discharges all his obligations and whoever detests the vicious only for the sake of Allah (SWT), then Allah (SWT) will take revenge on his enemies and will be pleased with Him on The Day of Judgment.

One of The Infallible Imam (AS) has said,

There are various degrees of trust in God. Of them one is that you should put your trust in God in all your affairs, being well-pleased with whatever God does to you, knowing for certain that he does not cease in His Goodness and Grace towards you, and that the command therein rests with Him. So put your trust in God, leaving that to Him and relying upon Him about that and everything other than that.

At this point, al-Khumeini (AR) writes that we need to understand the difference between the station of Ridha from the station of Tawakkul, the later being higher and more luminous.

This is because whereas the Mutawakkil seeks his own good, benefit, and entrust his affairs to God considering Him The Provider of Good, The Radhi (one who has attained the station of Ridha) is one who has annihilated his will in The Divine Will, having no more a separate will of his own. When a mystic was asked, "What is your wish", he replied, *My wish is not to wish at all*. What he meant is the station of Ridha.

Imam al-Kadhim (AS) said the following regarding God's statement: And if anyone puts his trust in God, sufficient is (God) for him." (Qur'an – Chapter 65, Verse 3)

Reliance on God has several stages. One of them is relying on Him in all that you do; and being pleased with whatever He does to you; knowing that He only wishes you prosperity and success; and knowing that He has full authority over all these affairs; and also having complete trust in Him in these and all other affairs.

Shaykh Rajab Ali (AR) once said to Sardar Kabuli,

What should I say to the one whose trust in his own learning and acquired knowledge is more than his trust in God's Grace.

Imam al-Sadiq (AS) has said,

Among the things pertaining to the soundness of a Muslim's certitude (in faith) is that he would not please people while displeasing God, nor blame them for something that God has not given him. For, verily, (God's) Rizq (provision, sustenance) is not brought about by anybody's greed, nor is it withheld by anyone's disapproval, and were anyone of you to flee from his Rizq like lie flees death, his Rizq would overtake him in the way he is overtaken by death.

Then he added,

Indeed God, with His justice and Fairness, has put joy and comfort in certainty (Yaqin) and satisfaction (Ridha) and He has put sorrow and grief in doubt and dissatisfaction.

Imam al-Sadiq (AS) continues,

God The Almighty, The Blessed revealed the following to Prophet Daud (AS): “Whoever from among My servants gets disappointed with My creatures and takes refuge in Me, I shall realize his intentions. Then even if The Heavens and The Earth and whatever they contain plot against him, I shall provide means for him to be saved from them. In addition, I shall know the intentions of whomever from among My servants who take refuge in others. Then I will take away from him all the means in The Heavens and The Earth, and leave him alone. I will not be concerned about where he will die.”

Eleventh Rule

OBSERVING THE RULES OF VENERATION AND DEDICATION

According to Allamah Taba Tabai (AR), this stage involves,

An absolutely dutiful devotee who always considers himself to be present before Allah (SWT) and observes all the rules of property and deference while doing anything such as talking, keeping quiet, eating, drinking, sleeping, and so forth.

What needs to be religiously followed here is the estimation and evaluation (of vices and virtues). We should carefully scrutinize the effects and demerits of each one of moral vices and bad deeds under the control of Shaytan, The Accursed. We must also compare them with the benefits and blessings of good deeds, moral and spiritual excellences, which are under the guidance of reason and religious laws set by Allah.

The scholars have warned us that despite most of our wishes being fulfilled, we will still nurture countless new desires that are yet to be fulfilled. It is just not possible in this world that all the desires and ambitions that we cherish be fulfilled here, since this world is the abode of obstacles and struggle, and not comfort and luxury.

Anyhow, even if man attains his goals and his desires fulfilled, for how long could he or she be benefited from them? How long his or her youthful years are to continue? This world is transient and all in it are transient. We need to be careful of what we ask for. al-Taba Tabai (AR) makes this suggestion,

When the spring of youth fades, ability to get pleasure declines. Then hosts of ailments make him an easy prey. Nothing but deep sighs, displeasure, regret and remorse are left to accompany him. What would be in store for this man in the next world? What will you present on The Day of Judgment, and how would you face Allah (SWT), His Angels, and His Chosen Servants and Prophets (AS)?

Everything that you have heard about The Judgment Day and thereafter, you measured them with the worldly fire and worldly pains. What a gross error you committed! Fire and horrors of this world are easy to bear. Your estimation of the other world based on this one is imperfect and faulty. According to some traditions, even if the fire burning throughout the world is accumulated at one place, it will not be hot enough to burn the human soul. In the next world, besides burning and roasting the body, it will burn the soul and incinerate the heart.

Imam Ali's (AS) last will to his sons Imam al-Hasan (AS) and Imam al-Husayn (AS) after the attempt on his life by a stab from Ibn Muljam (Allah's Curse be on him forever),

My advice to you is to be conscious of Allah (SWT) and steadfast in your religion. Do not yearn for the world, and do not be seduced by it. Do not resent anything you have missed in it. Proclaim the truth, work for the next world. Oppose the oppressor and support the oppressed.

I advise you, and all my children, my relatives, and whosoever receives this message, to be conscious of Allah (SWT), to remove your differences, and to strengthen your ties. I heard your grandfather (S) say, 'Reconciliation of your differences is more worthy than all prayers and all fasting.'

Fear Allah (SWT) in matters concerning orphans. Attend to their nutrition and do not forget their interests in the middle of yours.

Fear Allah (SWT) in your relations with your neighbors. Your Prophet (S) often recommended them to you; so much, so that we thought he would give them a share in inheritance.

Remain attached to The Qur'an. Nobody should surpass you in being intent on it, or more sincere in implementing it.

Fear Allah (SWT) in relation to your prayers. It is the pillar of your religion.

Fear Allah (SWT) in relation to His House. Do not abandon it as long as you live. If you should do that, you would abandon your dignity.

Persist in jihad in the cause of Allah (SWT), with your money, your souls, and your tongue.

Maintain communication and exchange of opinion among yourselves. Beware of disunity and enmity. Do not desist from promoting good deeds and cautioning against bad ones. Should you do that, the worst among you would be your leaders, and you will call upon Allah (SWT) without response.

O' Children of Abdul Mattalib! Do not shed the blood of Muslims under the banner. The Imam has been assassinated! Only the assassin should be condemned to death.

If I die of a stab of his, kill him with one similar stroke. Do not mutilate him! I have heard The Prophet (S) say, 'Mutilate not even a rabid do.'

Twelfth Rule

INTENTION AND SINCERITY IN ACTIONS

In Rauzat al-Waezeen it is narrated that Imam al-Sadiq (AS) reports that God The Almighty said,

I am the best partner. I do not accept any act in which you take partners besides Me. I only accept deeds, which are sincerely done for Me.

Ikhlas in Persian means *vizheh kardan* (to make exclusive), that is, to purge a thing of everything else that has mingled with it. That which is meant here is that all of one's speech and action should be for the sake of seeking nearness to God, The Exalted, and exclusively for His sake, without being adulterated with any worldly or otherworldly purpose.

According to the guideline given by The Prophet (S) to Abu Dhar,

O' Abu Dhar! You should have pure intention in all your deeds, even in (lawful) eating and drinking.

The Shaykh Rajab Ali (AR) would frequently assert to his disciples,

All your tasks must be for God's sake, even your eating and sleeping. Once you drink this cup of tea while remembering God, your heart will be radiated with Divine Light. Nevertheless, if you drink it for the sake of satiating your desire, it will turn to what you had wanted (other than God)!

The Aimmah (AS) have informed us that,

Allah (SWT) nullified Shaytan's good deeds and extensive efforts because of vanity on just one occasion, even though he had worshipped Allah (SWT) for 6000 years.

Most certainly, sincere intentions are actions themselves and all deeds depend on our intentions. Imam al-Baqir (AS) once exclaimed that the preservation of a righteous deed is more difficult than performing that deed in the first place. When he was asked as to what constituted the 'preservation of a deed', he replied,

Let us suppose that someone makes a gift of charity in order to earn God's pleasure and to have it recorded in his register of deeds as an act of charity unknown to men. Then he tells someone about what he has done. The reward for hidden charity is annulled for his act will have become public. He then tells someone else of what he has done, and this time the sincerity with which he had performed the act will be completely annulled, and the register of his deeds will record that his act was hypocritical.

However, it should be made clear that the effect of a virtuous deed disappears and the reward for it becomes annulled only when the reason for making it public is hypocritical and self-display, not a motive of higher order such as encouraging emulation by others.

Imam Ali (AS) once said,

Verily, the granting of Prayer is according to the measure of the intention...

The suggestion is, therefore, to be sincere and not a hypocrite who acts for other than Allah (SWT), or even one who says one thing and does another. Allah (SWT) has to say the following regarding hypocrisy and the hypocrites,

In addition, of the people (are some) who say, 'We believe in Allah (SWT) and in The Last Day', (while in fact) they are not believers. They (intend to) deceive Allah (SWT) and those

who believe, when in reality they deceive not but themselves. They just cannot perceive it. In their heart is a disease and Allah (SWT) increases their disease. For them is a painful chastisement because they would be liars. Moreover, when it is said unto them, 'Do not make mischief on earth', they reply, 'Verily, we are among those who do well.' Beware! Verily, they are the mischief-mongers but they perceive it not.

When it is said unto them (the hypocrites), 'Believe (in Allah (SWT)) as others before you did', they say, 'Shall we believe what fool believed?' Beware! Verily, they (the hypocrites) are the fools but they are unaware of it.

And when they meet with those who believe, they say, 'We believe!', but when they return to their mischief, they say, 'Verily, we are with you (i.e. mischief and Shaytan) and we had just mocked! Allah (SWT) mocks at them and He only allows them to continue bewildered (because of consistent disobedience) in their rebellion. These are then who purchase error for guidance. Hence, their transaction does not profit them, neither are they guided aright. The likeness of them is like unto one who kindles a fire, and when it lights all around him, Allah (SWT) takes away the light and leaves them in darkness and they are unable to see. (Indeed, they are) deaf, dumb and blind. Hence, there shall be no return from their darkness.

Or like a rainstorm from heaven fraught with darkness, thunder and lightening, they place their fingers in their ears against the thunderclaps for fear of death! And verily, Allah (SWT) encompasses the disbelievers. The lightening well nigh snatched away their sight (from them), as often as it gleams for them. They walk therein and when it gets dark for them, they halt! If Allah (SWT) willed, He could take away their hearing and their sight. Verily, Allah (SWT) has power over all things.

(Qur'an - Chapter 2, Verse 8 – 20)

Imam al-Sadiq (AS) reports The Prophet (S) as having said,

Indeed when The Angel of Allah (SWT) joyously takes to the higher Heaven the good deeds of a man, as he carries the good deeds Heavenward, Allah (SWT) Almighty orders him (The Angel) to place those deeds in 'Sijjin', since they were not performed for him alone.

al-Khumeini (AR) says,

You and I cannot imagine what 'Sijjin' is, and which kinds of demons are appointed there; and you cannot contemplate the horrors inflicted upon the sinners there. And once we have been made to face it, it will not be possible for us to get rid of it, as all the means of repentance shall be cut off.

Wake up my friend! And cast away your negligence and carelessness, and weigh your actions in the balance of your reason before they are weighed and measured in the other world. And cleanse the mirror of your heart of the rust of polytheism, hypocrisy, and two-facedness. Do not allow the rust of impurity of polytheism and infidelity to gather in such a way that it cannot be cleansed with the fire of the other world. Do not allow the light of your nature to be turned into the gloom of apostasy.

Imam Ali (AS) reports The Prophet (S) as having remarked the following,

One who does some act liked by Allah (SWT) in order to show off to people, and in secret manifests such qualities such as are abominations to Allah (SWT), he shall encounter God's anger and wrath (on The Day of Resurrection).

As He, The Almighty puts it,

There is no clearer sign in the earth and in the heavens of the elegance of The Beloved than the heart of a true believer.

(Hadith al-Qudsi)

It is well known that the believer's heart is in the occupation of Allah (SWT), and not at the disposal of the self. The heart of the true believer is not self-willed, nor is it vagrant. It is said of it,

The heart of the true believer lies between two fingers of Allah (SWT), that He may turn it whatever way He pleases.

We should remind ourselves that we are not here to worship The Devil or ourselves. And that ignorance is the cause of all this evil that prevents The Hand of Allah (SWT) from handling our hearts and soul.

Stages

Allamah Tabai (AR) summarizes several stages of Unity in Worship and its importance to any spiritual traveler. We need to

worship Allah (SWT) keeping worship purely for Him. Never be motivated by self-interest while you worship Allah (SWT). This may not only be considered as a deviation from the path of devotion to Allah (SWT), being a self-seeker may also reflect you as that person not fully acquainted with monotheism, The Unity of Allah (SWT) in His actions and attributes. But worship Him because He deserves to be worshipped. He is fit and worthy of being worshipped because of His attributes. In other words, He is to be worshipped because He is Allah (SWT).

Imam Ali (AS) used to constantly exclaim,

My Lord! I do not worship You because I am afraid of Your Hell, nor because I want Your Paradise. I worship You because I have found You fit for being worshipped. You Yourself have guided me to You and have called me to You. Had You not been I would not have known what You are.

The Stage of 'Burning' – Each and everything for Allah ONLY

Ba Yazid Bistami has have said,

First I renounced the world. Next day I renounced The Hereafter. The third day I renounced everything other than Allah (SWT). The fourth day I was asked what I wanted. I said, 'I want that I do not want!'

One day, Allamah Taba Tabai (AR) asked his teacher and spiritual adviser, Mirza Ali Agha Qazi (AR) about this question and a solution to the above problem. He said that it could be resolved by adopting the method of 'Burning.' The spiritual traveler should realize that

Allah (SWT) has created him in such a way that he must always have some desires and ambitions. That is a part of his inborn nature. Howsoever he may try, he cannot eliminate all desires. Therefore he should realize his powerlessness and give up all efforts to that effect. In that case he will entrust his case to Allah (SWT). The feeling of powerlessness will not only purify him, but will also burn the roots of all desire. Anyhow, it must be kept in mind that only theoretical knowledge of this point is not enough. The spiritual traveler must develop a real taste for it. If such a taste is developed, it can be more pleasure giving than anything else in the world.

This method is called 'Burning' for it burns out the very existence of will and intention and uproots them completely. One instance in The Qur'an is the use of the Divine expression,

When gathered with calamity, they say, 'We belong to Allah (SWT) and to Him shall we return?'

(Qur'an - Chapter 2, Verse 156)

Worship, Part of Our Living – A Brief Note on Riya and Ujb

Let it be known that we can most certainly translate all our actions into worship be it in school or at a playground. With sincere intention one can be continuously rewarded for his or her deeds. However, this needs courage and devotion for we need to have Allah (SWT) in our mind at all times. All actions should be for His sake and in this way we would not welcome evil acts. Truly, how can one commit a sin for pleasing his Lord?

Allamah Taba Tabai (AR) in his book al-Mizan, quotes a tradition saying that,

If intentions were pure then even the mountains would move if they were ordered to.

We need to also constantly remind ourselves that it is easier to perform a good and obedient act but extremely difficult to preserve that action. One can always spoil his worship by telling others, or by advertising his actions. Of course, one is permitted to disclose the information when the other party is considered a learner so that he performs the acts too.

Sincerity should always form the main part of our worship. Pleasing Allah (SWT) and Him only should be our goal. It is reported by our respected Aimmah (AS) that on The Day of Judgment three groups of people (martyrs, scholars, and the rich) will be brought forward for reckoning. These people will have performed many good and obedient acts in their life. For example, to acquire martyrdom is considered one of the highest goals in Islam. Similarly, scholars are highly respected in the Islamic world. However, these very people will have to encounter a tough reckoning on that Day and for many, their actions will have been rejected simply because they performed the actions to show others, and please others besides Allah (SWT).

According to al-Khumeini (AR),

Riya means to falsely make oneself appear to be virtuous, good natured or a true believer in God before the people for the sake of earning their respect and admiration, or with the

purpose of gaining good reputation among them. The hypocrite feigns integrity, uprightness, virtue, honesty and piety without an authentic intention of acquiring these traits for the sake of God. It has several grades and degrees.

At the first step, an individual makes a display of his religious beliefs, and shows off his knowledge of the religious teachings in order to project himself as an honest person in the eyes of people to gain their confidence and respect.

The second step on the path of Riya is represented by those who eradicate false belief from their hearts and, through such purification, want to attain power and respect among people.

The third stage of Riya, which is considered overt by The Fuqaha, also consists of two steps:

1. The first step is marked by an individual's performance of the prescribed forms of piety, prayers and good deeds in front of other people with the intention of demonstrating his good qualities and praiseworthy habits, or by his posture as a person who strictly adheres to the religious commands on purely rational grounds, and thus wishing to win the hearts of people and attracting their attention towards himself. Such acts, whether performed in total or in part, with the motive of Riya, to please the others, are discussed in the books of fiqh.

2. At the second step, one abstains from evil deeds for the purpose of Riya only.

Riya should be avoided in all circumstances and The Aimmah (AS) have cautioned us significantly on this matter. There are three distinguishing features of one accustomed to such a disease of the soul – Riya,

- 1) He expresses joy and cheerfulness when he is greeted by people.

- 2) He becomes cheerless and sullen when alone.

- 3) He wishes to be praised for everything he does.

(Imam Ali (AS))

We, as Spiritual travelers, should be at all times single-minded and well intentioned. Our objective should be to please Allah (SWT) and Him only. He alone deserves to be worshipped.

Riya (to falsely make oneself appear virtuous and good natured before the people for the sake of earning their respect and attention) in any of its forms amounts to polytheism. Indeed, one who works for the people, his reward lies with them, and one who works for Allah (SWT), his reward lies with Allah (SWT).

(Imam al-Sadiq (AS))

Further, this disease and sin makes a person abstain from evil deeds for the purpose of Riya only. In this way he makes others partners to Allah (SWT) and has given permission to The Devil to occupy his heart as if it does not belong to Allah (SWT). Imam al-Sadiq (AS) quotes Allah (SWT) as having said,

I am the best of friends. One who makes others My partners in any matter; his deeds are not acceptable to Me. I accept only those acts that are purely done for My sake.

Yazid ibn Khalifah reports from al-Imam al-Sadiq (A) that,

Riya in any of its form amounts to shirk, (polytheism); verily, one who works for the people, his reward lies with them, and one who works for God his reward lies with God.

Usul al-Kafi, vol. 2, p. 402

al-Khumeini (AR) writes,

Anyhow, if you see that Riya is stealing into your heart, you should realize that your heart has not really surrendered itself to reason and faith has yet to illuminate your heart. For you consider others to be your Allah (SWT) and see them as efficient agents in the world, and you do not trust Him, the only Allah (SWT). Even though Shaytan may struggle strenuously to pollute your good acts with Riya by injecting into your mind evil thoughts and ideas, you really do not have to think for a second of bargaining divine blessings, those infinite favors and benevolence with popularity among people, which is neither effective nor long lasting.

It is related in authentic sources that Allah (SWT) will command certain persons to be put into Hell, and then He will say to The Master of Hell, 'Order the Fire not to burn their feet, for they used to walk towards mosques; nor their hands, for they used to raise them towards Me in prayer; nor their tongues, for they frequently used to recite The Qur'an; nor their faces, for they used to perform the ablutions completely and without deficiency?.' Therefore, The Master of Hell will say, 'O you miserable ones! What used to be your plight?' Moreover, they (the people) will reply, 'We used to act according to the commands of being other than Allah.' The people will then be told, 'Take your reward from him for whom you acted!'

Ujb is another obstacle in this step, besides Riya. Abul-Hasan (AS) has this to say about the Ujb (self-conceit, vanity) that vitiates the quality of human deeds.

There are several levels of Ujb, one of them is when one's bad qualities appear to him as good; he reckons them as good ones and congratulates himself imagining that he is performing virtues. Another level of Ujb is represented by a person who believes in God and thinks that he has done a favor to God; whereas God Almighty has conferred a favor on him (by endowing him with faith).

(Usul al-Kafi, vol. II, p. 313)

Scholars have defined Ujb as the magnification of one's virtues and good deeds, their overestimation, and satisfaction with them accompanied with a feeling of superiority on their account, while one exonerates and exculpates himself from all failings and faults. Nevertheless, to feel pleasure and delight on performing virtuous deeds accompanied with a sense of humility and modesty before God and gratitude to God for His favors, and to ask Him to increase them, is not Ujb, but is a praiseworthy trait.

Allamah al-Majlisi (AR) quotes the great scholar and thinker al-Shaykh Baha al-Din al-Amili (AR) as having said,

There is no doubt that when anyone performs good deeds, like fasting, night vigils, etc., he feels some kind of joy and pleasure within him. This pleasure and joy, if it is on account of the feeling that God Almighty has conferred on him favor and grace, which caused him to perform such acts of piety, while he is afraid of their loss and is anxious about their disappearance, and asks God Almighty for their continuity and abundance-this kind of exultation and gladness is not Ujb. But if the exultation and pride is felt on account of the belief that he is the doer of such deeds and that it is he who possesses all such good qualities, and if he glorifies his own deeds with confidence in his goodness, considering himself to be free from all faults and vices, it reaches such a point that one believes that he is conferring some favor upon God in performing these deeds. This feeling of exultation and pride is Ujb.

Allah (SWT) Almighty once commanded Prophet Daud (AS) to convey glad tidings to the sinners and to terrify the pious. Prophet Daud (AS) asked Allah (SWT) as to why he should convey glad tidings to the sinner and frighten the pious. Replied Allah (SWT) Almighty,

O' Daud (AS)! Give good news to the sinners that I accept their repentance, and warn the righteous that they should not have Ujb (self-admiration) for their acts, for there is no servant who does not stand doomed when I take an account of his deeds (and deserve chastisement, since, according to the requirements of justice, a man with all his worship cannot thank Allah (SWT) properly even for one of His favors).

In his al-Khisal, Sheikh Saduq (AR) reports from Imam al-Sadiq (AS) that he said,

The Devil says,

If I subdue the son of Adam (AS) in three things I do not care for whatever he may do, as his good deeds will not be accepted:

- 1) When he overestimates his good deeds.
- 2) When he is forgetful of his sins.
- 3) When Ujb permeates him.

It is reported in al-Kafi that Imam Ali (AS) was once asked about Ujb (self-conceit and/or vanity) and he replied the following,

There are several levels of Ujb. One of them is when one's bad qualities appear to him as good; he reckons them as good ones and congratulates himself in imagining that he is performing virtues. Another level of Ujb is represented by a person who believes in Allah (SWT) and thinks that he has done a favor to Allah (SWT), whereas Allah (SWT) Almighty has conferred a favor on him (by endowing him with faith).

We should at least try to have an iota of sincerity in all our actions compared to The Prince of Believers, Imam Ali (AS). We should not be boastful of our deeds and proud of ourselves. Let us ask our hearts whether it is in search of Allah (SWT) or it is in love with itself. Indeed, the one into whose heart Ujb permeates is destined to be destroyed. *No loneliness can be compared in dreadfulness to the one, which is the result of Ujb.* (Imam Ali (AS))

Prophet Musa (AS) asked Shaytan to inform him about the sin by means of which he infiltrates into the hearts of the progeny of Prophet Adam (AS). Shaytan replied ***it is the time when they feel Ujb about themselves, overestimate their good deeds and the gravity of their sins becomes diminutive in their eyes.***

A Brief Note on The Sincerity of Ali (AS)

al-Khumeini (AR) writes the following confirming Imam Ali's Sincerity in every second of his life, that even one strike of his sword on The Day of Khaybar was, is and continues to be weightier in The Eyes of Allah than the worship of the entire creation, including the Non-Living, The Angels and The Jinn.

I swear by the station of Ali ibn Abi Talib (AS) that even if all the Archangels (AS), and all The Prophets of Allah (SWT) (AS), except The Seal of Prophets (S), who is The Lord of Ali (AS) and all others; if they try to utter a single Takbir (i.e. Allah-u-Akbar - Allah (SWT) is Great) of Ali's, they will not be able to do it!

al-Baqir (AS) said,

O' Abu Hamza, do not place Ali (A.S.) below the level to which Allah has raised him, and do not elevate him above the level where Allah has kept him. It is enough (excellence) for Ali that he is the one who fought the apostates and he is the one who will pair off the inmates of Paradise.

Thirteenth Rule

OBSERVING SILENCE

Silence is part of wisdom. It is a sign of every virtue. It is the way of the lovers of Allah (SWT) because Allah likes it. It is the style of The Prophets (AS), and the habit of the chosen people.

Imam al-Sadiq (AS)

We need to learn to refrain from talking in excess to what is required. Imam al-Sadiq (AS) referred to this kind of silence when he said,

Our partisans (followers, i.e. Shia) are dumb.

Authentic reports state that the tongue will be the one largely responsible for forcing people into eternal suffering. Most certainly, it is the tongue than can devour people without even touching them, or even tearing them in their absence. It is within human nature to capture attention by employing his or her tongue.

Therefore, the suggestion is to use our tongue effectively and do not let Shaytan take control over us through our tongue. Undoubtedly, all the organs of one's body are safeguarded when the tongue is safe and taking care of itself. In many cases, silence is strenuous to practice but very fruitful in the end. By maintaining silence, we will never criticize ourselves for speculating, backbiting, or even announcing our pride, because we will have never committed these acts in the first place.

The Prophet (S) said to Abu Dhar,

I recommend you to practice silence, because it would keep Satan away from you. It helps a lot for the protection of your religion.

Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 71, page 279

Allamah Taba Tabai (AR) says, I have witnessed the most precious effects of silence. *Practice silence for forty days and nights, speaking only when it is required, remaining engaged in meditations and invocations until attaining purity and enlightenment.*

The Prophet (S) further said,

When you see a person not engaging in a purposeless chatter, then that is the sign of his excellent (understanding of) Islam.

The Aimmah (AS) and The Prophet (S) have beautifully summarized the responsibilities one has over his or her tongue, and that

Silence is golden but talking is like silver.

Watch your tongue, since this is like giving charity to yourself. You will not experience true faith unless you watch your tongue.

O' seekers of knowledge! Know that the tongue is the key to goodness and wickedness. Therefore, lock up your tongue as you lock up your gold and silver.

Silence is one of the gates of wisdom and it brings affection, and it is the guide to any good affair.

Fear God and be quiet.

How beautiful is silence in the absence of weakness. Talkative people make many slips.

In fact, we the Shiites talk a little.

All good is summarized in looking, silence, and talking. Any looking without learning is an error. Any silence without pondering is out of ignorance, and any talking, which does not remind you of God, is in vain.

Fourteenth Rule

ABSTAINING FROM FOOD

Scholars have clearly indicated that to fast for the sake of Allah (SWT) is one of the very strong weapons to fight the evil nature within us. Out of the acts of worship, fasting has been lauded a great deal. During Ascension (Me'raj), The Prophet (S) was outlined the beneficial points of starvation, especially its wonderful effect in connection with spiritual journey. Imam al-Sadiq (AS) has said,

The believer enjoys hunger. For him, hunger is the food of the heart and the soul.

Allamah Taba Tabai (AR) states,

Hunger illuminates the soul and makes it lighter whereas overeating makes it dull and tired and hampers its soaring to the heaven of Gnosis.

The Prophet has narrated,

Engage yourself in self-struggle (Jihad-e-Nafs) through the means of hunger and thirst, whose reward is equivalent to the reward of those who participated in the armed struggle for Allah's sake. There is nothing more superior before Allah's sight than tolerating hunger and thirst during fasting.

He also said,

The one, who tolerates more hunger as well as ponders deeply about Allah as compared to others, will be assigned higher exalted positions before their Lord on The Day of Judgment.

In addition, he said to Asma,

O' Asma! If you may act in a manner that when The Angel of Death approaches you, he should find you hungry and thirsty. If you do it, you will attain the most exalted spiritual position, will join the ranks of Prophets, will make the Angels happy, and will earn the divine salutations for yourself.

Moreover, he said,

Keep your stomachs hungry and thirsty, and make your bodies used to hardships, perhaps your hearts will then have a chance of seeing Allah's Glory.

In addition, in the narration of Prophet's Heavenly Journey (Me'raj) the following account took place between The Prophet (S) and Allah (SWT),

O' Ahmad! Do you comprehend the outcome of fasting? No. The Prophet (S) replied. The outcome of fasting is less eating and less talking, replied Allah, and then explained the outcome of silence and less speaking as follows,

The result of silence is wisdom; the result of wisdom is enlightenment; the result of enlightenment is certainty; and when a person attains the exalted spiritual position of certainty, then he does not care how he starts his day, whether with ease or hardship, and tragedy or comfort. Such is the state of those who have attained the position of content, and whoever attains this position acquires three inseparable characteristics: thanks not contaminated with ignorance, invocation not mixed with forgetfulness and love not mixed with the love of others.

Whoever loves Me in this manner does not intermingle the love of others with My friendship. I too love him and make others to love him. I would make his heart's eyes opened, so that he could witness My Splendor and Majesty. I would not deprive him from the knowledge and enlightenment bestowed by Me upon others; in the midst of night's darkness as well as during the brightness of the day would whisper and communicate with him, so that he becomes disgusted with other's company. I would have him listen to My speech as well as the speech of My Angels; My secrets, which I keep hidden from others, would become manifested upon him.

I would saturate his wisdom with My Enlightenment and would sit Myself in place of his wisdom; would make the pang of death and its hardships easier for him so that he would enter Paradise with ease and comfort. When The Angel of Death would descend upon him would speak to him: Welcome! Welcome! Welcome! Allah is anxiously waiting for you.

The narration continues - at this point Allah would speak to him,

This is My Paradise, make yourself at home, and this is My Neighborhood in which you would be dwelling forever.

Then the soul would say,

O' my Lord! You have introduced Yourself to me and after identifying You, I became detached with Your entire creation. By Your Splendor and Majesty I swear that in order to earn Your pleasure if I have to be slaughtered seventy times with extreme suffering and torture, even then Your consent would have been the most dearest and desirable thing for me.

At this point Allah would speak to him,

I swear with My Splendor and Majesty that from now on there will never be any veil between you and Me that you may see Me whenever you desire so. That is the way I treat my friends.

According to Haj Mirza Javad Agha Maliki Tabrizi (AR), the effects of less eating is,

Purity of heart and insight, because, over-eating and fullness creates a state similar to drunkenness within a human being which slows down his sense of perception, reducing his power of quick grasping, thus, ultimately resulting in his heart's blindness.

Humility, hospitality, self-breaking, earthiness, and freedom from arrogance, egotism, and haughtiness, because these are the by-products of transgression, rebellion, and ill servitude towards Allah (The Glorious, The Exalted).

Lowering of intensity of sensual passions and other such motivations, which invite a human being towards sinning and other deviations.

Less sleeping - we know that oversleeping is one of the most important factors of wasting of our age, which is the precious sum at our disposal for the affairs of Hereafter. But hunger reduces sleep, thus, providing opportunities for night vigil, the source of all blessings and bounties, and helps a human being in worshipping and supplications which is the ladder for his attaining the most desirable spiritual station.

Ease of worshipping rather servitude, because, the one who is used to less eating will save a lot of time which otherwise must have been spent for making arrangements, purchasing, cooking, consuming, and relieving, as well as time spent for medical treatment, since in many cases the sickness is the cause of over-eating.

Financial ability of a person to spend for charity, benevolence, pilgrimage, and other acts of worship which require expenses, because, a lot of expenses spent only for providing unnecessary food items or for medical treatment as a result of over-eating, could be utilized for the above-mentioned worships.

One of Shaykh Rajab Ali's devotees relates about him that the Shaykh was once holding a session in a house of his friend. Before starting his talk, he felt somehow weak due to hunger and asked for some bread. The householder brought him half a loaf of bread for him to eat, and then he started the meeting. The following night he said,

Last night I made salutations to The Holy Imams (AS) but I did not see them. I pleaded to find the reason. I was told intuitively: You had half of that food and the hunger alleviated. Why then did you eat the other half?

Having some food, enough for body's need is all right, but extra to that would cause veil and darkness.

There was once a person who was in great misfortune. He had nothing to eat and neither did someone invite him on that difficult day. He thus decided to visit one of the houses of Allah (SWT) (i.e. a mosque) and declare his poverty in front of his Lord. It is reported that he passed the whole night in hunger and his invocation was never answered.

The next day The Prophet (S) was informed of the situation. He (S), at that very moment, was blessed with a revelation from The Almighty that,

Tell Our guest that We were his Host last night and wanted to provide him with sumptuous food but found no better food than hunger!

Imam al-Sadiq (AS) was true in saying,

The believer enjoys hunger. For him hunger is the food of the heart and the soul.

There is a tradition by Imam Ali (AS) that on The Night of Me'raj, Allah (SWT) said to The Prophet (S),

'O' Ahmad (S)! How sweet and beautiful are the hunger, silence and seclusion. Wisdom, heart's tranquility, nearness to Me, continuous grief, righteous talks, thriftiness, and indifference at the time of ease, and hardships, are the characteristics acquired by My servant because of hunger, silence, and seclusion.

It is clear that fasting has in itself a great many benefits, and one of the most important is Self-control. We learn how to regulate ourselves with our life so that we may be able to exert control and not let ourselves be lured into disobedience by Shaytan. It also makes us humble and makes us completely surrender to The Will of The Almighty Allah (SWT). It is considered as the best form of exercise and diet for our body. Truly, when we fast for Allah (SWT) the whole day and abstain from everything that one consumes on other days, Allah (SWT) prepares Himself to listen to our complaints and invocations when we open our fasts. However, we need to fast with our eyes and ears in order to reap the fruits set by The Almighty for only those who fast for Him and Him only. However, it is recommended on the condition that it should not disturb mental peace and composure.

Regarding fasting, and the conditions Imam al-Sadiq (AS) considers essential for the authenticity of fasting, some of them would be described here as follows,

The fast observer should consider himself as Hereafter's traveler, should remain in the state of humility, fear, self-degradation, and like a servant fearing his master, and should remain afraid of Allah. His heart should remain pure from defects and contamination, and his inner-self should be free from everything except Allah. He must sacrifice his entire friendship and intentions for Him and must purify his heart from all other friendships except that of Allah. He must surrender his eyes and soul to Him; must commit his soul for His remembrance; must utilize his body in Allah's path and must keep it distant apart especially the tongue from all sorts of sins and indecencies. Whoever has observed these limitations had indeed discharged his obligations of fasting properly, and whoever has shown negligence to discharge these obligations has wasted his fast and would not benefit from its reward.

In Islam, the spiritual, social, economic, political and psychological benefits of fast are interrelated, each affecting the other. Rituals regulate The Muslims' social and individual life and bring them closer to their Creator. A combination of fast, prayers, and meditation may be the very best dose for any and all psychological, financial, and spiritual ills from which one may be suffering. They purify the soul, cleanse the intention, and bring about an abundance of good from The Almighty Who is Ever-Watching over us and Who desires nothing but good for His sincere servants.

Scholars have said,

Specifically during The Month of Ramadan, we learn to curb our desires and check them against transgression, extravagance, and the yielding to the lower desires, all of which degenerate man and bring him to the pit of self-destruction and annihilation. Fast fosters a strong will, teaches patience and self-discipline, the ability to bear hardship and tolerate hunger and thirst. In short, it brings about a clear victory over one's illicit desires and selfish impulses. It regulates and systemizes the energies of instincts. It trains the body to submit to lofty spiritual impulses. It safeguards the body's health by protecting it against extravagance. It grants its organs a respite so that they may be ready to resume their activities.

As medical science has proved, fasting is medicine for many bodily and nervous ailments. It is a moral education, a nourishment of supreme virtues. It teaches the believer to abandon vices, to control emotions and instincts, to curb the tongue against saying what is wrong or inappropriate and the conscience against contemplating upon wrongdoing or subversion. It promotes the spirit of unity among members of the fasting community; it teaches them humility and humbleness and instills within them the feeling of equality before Allah (SWT), the Almighty.

The rich have to observe it as well as the poor, the women as well as the men, the influential and powerful as well as the weak and downtrodden; they all have to observe the fast. It promotes the spirit of charity and compassion towards the poor and the needy, and it reminds each believer of the needs of other believers. Muslims share with each other Allah (SWT)'s blessings unto them. The believers strengthen their ties with The Almighty, since they express through fast a continuous desire to obey His Will and carry out His Commandments. They also strengthen their ties with one another, since The Month of Ramadan is the month of giving. It is the month for productive social interactivity. Islam places a great deal of emphasis on moral excellence during this holy month. The Prophet of Islam (S) has said,

One who, while fasting, neither guards his tongue from telling lies nor refrains from doing bad deeds does not respect his fast, while Allah (SWT) does not approve of mere abstention from food ... When you fast, you should not speak ill of anybody, nor should you be boisterous or noisy. If anybody speaks ill of you or tries to pick a quarrel with you, do not respond to him in the same manner; rather, simply tell him that you are fasting. The institute of fast is one of the signs of The Almighty's Mercy on those who adhere to His Divine Creed, and it is never meant to put a hardship on anybody. The Almighty does not gain any benefit from putting hardship on anyone. On the contrary, He always tries to pave the way of happiness for His servants in this life and the life to come, and sometimes He even 'pushes' them to do what is good for them, as is the case with making the fast of the month of Ramadan obligatory on every believing man and woman. Nevertheless, if you afford this great month a sincere and profound welcome, you will receive your rewards in many, many ways both in the short life of this fleeting world and in the eternal abode, Insha-Allah (SWT).

Allah (SWT) has said,

For all righteous deeds of servants there is a reward from ten times to seven hundred times, but since fasting is specifically reserved for me, I will bestow its reward.

Fasting in the month of Ramadhan deserves some more attention. On page 64, vol. 2, of Safeenat al-Bihar, The Messenger of Allah (S) says that Allah (SWT) Almighty has charged a group of His Angels with the task of supplicating for those who observe the fast. On the same page of the same reference, Imam al-Sadiq (AS) says that if a person fasts during a hot day, and he suffers from thirst, Allah (SWT) will assign a thousand Angels to wipe his face and convey to him glad tidings. Moreover, when he breaks his fast, Allah (SWT), The Most Exalted, The Most Glorified, addresses him with these words,

How sweet your smell and soul are! O' My Angels! Bear witness that I have forgiven him.

On page 96 of Thawab al-A'mal Wa Iqab al- A'mal, and also on page 48 of his book al-Amali (or page 29-32 of old editions), Shaykh Abu Ja'far Muhammad ibn Ali ibn al-Husayn ibn Babawayh al-Qummi al-Saduq (306-381 A.H.) quotes Muhammad Ibn Ibrahim al-Ma'athi saying that Ahmed ibn Jaylawayh al-Jurjani al- Muthakkar quotes Abu Ishaq Ibrahim ibn Bilal quoting Abu Muhammad quoting Abu Abdullah Muhammad ibn Kiram quoting Ahmed ibn Abdullah quoting Sufyan ibn 'Ayeenah quoting Mu'awiya ibn Abu Ishaq quoting Sa'eed ibn Jubayr saying,

I asked Ibn Abbas once about the reward of one who fasts during The Month of Ramadan knowing its greatness. He said,

O' Son of Jubayr! Get ready to listen to what your ears have never heard before, nor your heart has ever experienced, nor has your soul ever reckoned regarding that about which you have inquired! What you are seeking is the knowledge of the first generations and the last!

Therefore, I left him and prepared myself to meet him again. I returned to him at early daybreak. Having said the morning prayers (together), I reminded him of the tradition, which I had sought, so he turned his face to me and said, listen carefully to what I am going to tell you. I have heard The Messenger of Allah (S) saying,

Had you ever come to know about your rewards during The Month of Ramadan, you would surely have thanked The Almighty a great deal more (than you usually do). When the first night is over, Allah (SWT), The Almighty and The Exalted One, forgives the sins committed by all members of my nation, the ones committed in secrecy and the ones committed in public, and He elevates your status two thousand degrees and builds you fifty towns in Paradise.

On the next day, He rewards you for every step you take during that day with the rewards of one who adored Him for a full year and the reward of one of His Prophets, and He will reward you as though you had performed the fast for a full year.

On the third day, The Exalted and Dear One grants you a Dome in Paradise for each hair on your body, a Dome of a white pearl on top of which are twelve thousand light houses and at the bottom of which are twelve thousand houses in each one of which there are one thousand beds and on each bed of which there is a Heavenly Lady with large lovely eyes, each served by one thousand servants the head-covering of each one of them is better than this world and everything in it.

On the fifth day, He builds you in Paradise a million cities in each one of which there are seventy thousand houses, inside each one of which there are seventy thousand tables, and on each table there are seventy thousand bowls, and in each bowl there are sixty thousand types of food each one of which is different from the other.

On the sixth day, He will grant you in The Abode of Peace a hundred thousand towns in each one of which there are a hundred thousand rooms, in each room there are a hundred thousand beds of gold the length of each is a thousand yards, and on each bed is a Heavenly Lady with large lovely eyes whose hair has thirty thousand locks braided with pearls and sapphires, and each lock is carried by a hundred concubines.

On the seventh day, The Almighty grants you in The Garden of Bliss the rewards of forty thousand martyrs and forty thousand pious men (amongst the truthful).

On the eighth day, Allah Almighty grants you the rewards of the good deeds of sixty thousand worshippers and sixty thousand ascetics.

On the ninth day, Allah, The Exalted One, gives you what is equal to what He gives a thousand scholars and a thousand devotees and a thousand warriors fighting for Allah in a foreign land.

On the tenth day, He gives you the fulfillment of seventy thousand of your worldly wishes and orders the sun, the moon, the stars, the animals, the birds, the beasts, every rock and every rain-drop, everything wet and everything dry, all fish in the oceans and all leaves on the trees, to pray for your forgiveness.

On the eleventh day, The Exalted and Mighty One grants you the rewards whereby He rewards one who performs the pilgrimage and umrah four times and one who performs the pilgrimage with His Prophets and the umrah with every Truthful or Martyr.

On the twelfth day, He takes upon Himself to replace your sins with good deeds, and then He multiplies your good deeds many times and gives you the rewards of each of your good deeds a million times.

On the thirteenth day, Allah (SWT) Almighty grants you what He grants the devotees of Makkah and Madinah and bestows upon you an intercession for each stone and raindrop between Makkah and Madinah.

On the fourteenth day, He treats you as though you had met and followed in the footsteps of Prophet Adam, Nuh, Ibrahim, Musa, Daud and Prophet Suleiman (peace be on all of them), and as though you had worshipped The Almighty Allah (SWT) in the company of His Prophets for two hundred years.

On the fifteenth day, He fulfills ten of your worldly wishes and those of The Hereafter and grants you what He granted Prophet Ayub (AS). Then He orders The Angels who bear The 'Throne' to pray for your forgiveness and grants you on the Day of Resurrection 40 lights: ten on your right, ten on your left, ten before you and ten behind you.

On the sixteenth day, The Almighty grants you sixty outfits to wear as soon as you abandon your grave and a she-camel to ride, and He will send a cloud to overshadow you to protect you from the heat of that Day.

On the seventeenth day, The Almighty Allah (SWT) says, 'I have forgiven them and their parents and exempted them from having to undergo the hardships of The Day of Resurrection.'

On the eighteenth day, The Praised and Exalted One orders Archangel Jibraeel, Mikaeel and Israfeel (Peace be on all of them) as well as The Angels who bear The 'Throne' and all Archangels to seek forgiveness for the nation of Prophet Muhammad (S) till the next year, and He will also grant you on The Day of Resurrection whatever rewards He grants to those who participated in the Battle of Badr.

On the nineteenth day, all Angels in The Heavens and on Earth will have already sought permission of their Lord to visit your graves and to bring you every day a present and a drink (as long as you remain in the Barzakh).

Therefore, if you complete your fast for twenty full days, Te Almighty Allah (SWT) sends you seventy thousand angels to protect you from every accursed devil. He will have granted you for each day of your fast your rewards as though you fasted a hundred years.

He will set a ditch between you and Hell and grant you the rewards of all those who recited The Torah, The Gospel, The Psalms and The Holy Qur'an, and will write for you for each feather on Jibraeel the reward of a full year and will grant you the rewards of those who glorify Him at The 'Throne' and 'Chair' and will marry you to a thousand nymphs for each of the verses of The Qur'an.

On the twenty-first day, The Almighty expands your grave a thousand parasangs and lifts the darkness and loneliness of your graves and makes your graves look like the graves of the martyrs and your faces like the face of Prophet Yusuf (AS) son of Prophet Ya'qub (AS).

On the twenty-second day, The Almighty dispatches The Angel of Death as He dispatches him to His Prophets to remove your worldly worries and the torment of The Hereafter.

On the twenty-third day, you will pass on The Straight Path in the company of The Prophets, the first to follow The Prophets, and the martyrs, as if you had fed each orphan and clothed everyone who needed to be clothed.

On the twenty-fourth day, you will not leave this life before each one of you sees the place reserved for him or her in Paradise and is given the rewards of a thousand sick and a thousand who go back to their creed and will grant you the rewards of one who freed a thousand captives from the descendants of Prophet Ismael (AS).

On the twenty-fifth day, Allah (SWT) will have built you under His 'Throne' a thousand green domes on top of each one of which is a tent of light. The Almighty and Exalted One will then say,

'O' Followers of Muhammad! I am your Lord and you are My servants! Enjoy the shade of My Throne in these domes, eat, and drink with enjoyment, for there will be no fear on you, nor will you grieve. O' Nation of Muhammad! By My Dignity and Greatness! I shall dispatch you to Paradise in a way, which will amaze the first generations and the last. I shall crown each one of you with a thousand light crowns. I shall provide for each one of you a she camel whose reins are made of light, and in it are a thousand gold rings, in each is an Angel looking after it, in the hand of each Angel is a light rod so that he may enter Paradise without a reckoning.'

In addition, on the twenty-sixth day, Allah (SWT) will look at you with compassion and will forgive all your sins except those of shedding innocent blood or robbing people's wealth, and He will grant you every day a thousand barriers against backbiting, lying and slandering.

On the twenty-seventh day, He will consider you as though you had aided every believing man and woman and clothed seventy thousand naked persons and equipped a thousand soldiers to camp in a foreign land to defend Islam, and as if you have recited every book, Allah (SWT) has revealed to His prophets.

On the twenty-eighth day, Allah (SWT) will have built you in Paradise a hundred thousand light cities and granted you in the garden of bliss a hundred thousand silver mansions and a hundred thousand cities in each one of which there are a thousand rooms, and granted you in the garden of greatness a hundred thousand pulpits of musk inside each one of which there is a thousand saffron houses in each one of which there are a thousand beds of pearls and sapphires and on each bed a wife of the Heavenly Ladies with large lovely eyes.

So if you complete your fast till the twenty-ninth day, The Almighty Allah (SWT) will grant you a million quarters, inside each quarter is a white dome underneath which is a white camphor bed on which there are a thousand mattresses of green silk on each one of which there is a Heavenly Lady decorated with seventy thousand ornaments and crowned with eighty thousand locks each one of which is decorated with diamonds and sapphires.

So if you finish thirty complete days of fast, The Almighty will have granted you for each day the rewards of a thousand martyrs and a thousand foremost believers in His Prophets, and He will have assigned for you the rewards of fifty years of adoration, and He will have decreed a clearance for you from Hell and a passage on The Straight Path and a security against the torment. One of The Gates of Paradise is al-Rayyan, and it shall never be opened before The Day of Resurrection. It will be opened for those among the nation of Prophet Muhammad (S) who performed the fast. Ridhwan, custodian of Paradise, will call out saying:

'O Followers of Muhammad! Come to The al-Rayyan Gate!'

Therefore, he will let my nation enter Paradise through that gate. Therefore, if one is not forgiven during The Month of Ramadan, in which month can he be forgiven? There is neither will nor strength except from Allah (SWT); Allah (SWT) suffices us, and what a great Helper He is!

This lengthy tradition is also recorded on pp. 183-185, Vol. 8, of Bihar al-Anwar.

Why all this related to fasting? Imam Sadiq (AS) explains, as fasting related to spiritual growth,

Fasting does not mean only renunciation of eating and drinking, rather it has conditions, which must be followed strictly in order to have a complete and perfect fast, which means internal silence. Did you not hear the reply of Janab Maryam (AS), daughter of Imran, who said to her people, 'I have vowed a fast for Allah (SWT), therefore, today I will speak to none, i.e. I am fasting, therefore I must be quiet.'

So when you observe fast protect your tongue from lying; don't be angry; don't curse; don't be rude; don't argue and dispute; don't reject or be indecent to each other due to ignorance; don't be negligent from Allah (SWT)'s remembrance; continually practice silence, intellection, patience and keep distance from the wicked people.

Assign importance to The Hereafter; must look forward for The Day when God's Promise will be fulfilled, and collect some provisions for God's countenance.

One should practice poise, dignity, humbleness, humility, and fear like a servant who is afraid of his Master; he should remain in the state of hope and fear...

In the same vein, with regards to our attention towards The Almighty, Imam al-Sadiq (AS) says,

When you leave your home, do it as if you will never return. Leave only for the sake of obedience to Allah (SWT) or for the sake of the faith. Remain tranquil and dignified in your bearing, and remember Allah (SWT) both secretly and openly.

Fifteenth Rule

SOLITUDE

There exist two kinds of solitude - 'General Solitude', which means not to mix with people known for ill behavior, in particular the ignorant. Allah (SWT) has advised us and says,

In addition, forsake those who take their religion for a pastime and a jest, and whom the life of the world beguiles.

(Qur'an - Chapter 6, Verse 70)

'Particular Solitude' means to abstain oneself from company from all others. Such seclusion is necessary at times only when we are to reflect on a particular act we have done, or a creation of Allah (SWT), or anything that deserves and requires seclusion. A spiritual traveler should always try to keep himself away from such gatherings and disturbing noises. For example, the advice is to say our prayers in those places where we are certain to have no disturbances of any kind. In one way, one can remind himself of his grave which he will most certainly visit one day.

The advice is also not to associate with persons belonging to five categories, to not also converse with them and not accompany them in any case:

Shun the liars because they are like a mirage. With their baseless words, they depict matters different from what they actually are. With their lies, they show a distant thing, to be near and a thing, which is near to be far off and thus deviate you from the right path.

Avoid the licentious and the sinners because their friendship is not dependable and they will sell you for a morsel or even lesser than that.

Avoid stingy persons because at the time of need and difficulty these people will make you suffer humiliation.

Keep away from foolish persons because they may be desirous of doing you good but will involve you in hardship due to their ignorance and folly.

Shun those persons who have dissociated from their kith and kin and misbehave with them because Allah (SWT) in The Qur'an has cursed these people.

The suggestion is that it is better to remain in solitude and alone than with a bad company. In addition, if we befriend a person, we should

Find out before everything else what the standard of his intelligence is, what is his opinion about good and evil? What importance does he attach to honor and insult? What constitutes good luck and adversity in his eyes? This is necessary so that you may not get surprised later because of what you hear from him or what he tells you because you will see that all his actions are compatible with what he said and according to his line of thinking. (Mark Orwell)

Truly, friendship has certain limits and conditions. One who does not fulfill some of these conditions is not a perfect companion and one who does not fulfill anyone of them cannot be termed a friend at all. His exterior and interior should be alike and whatever he professes about you by his tongue should come from his heart as well. He should consider your good things to be his own good things and your bad things to be his own bad things. Similarly, he should consider your honor to be his honor and your disgrace to be his disgrace. If his financial condition improves and he amasses wealth or acquires a higher position, he should not change his attitudes towards you. He should not fail to assist you to the extent of his capability and competence. He should not abandon you and leave you alone when you are involved in adversity.

A Brief Note on Death

Whenever we are alone, we need to and should think about Death, which is certainly to overtake us one fine day. Solitude should bring to us awareness of such an event that will overpower every one of us, and we will have no spare time to make amends, for we have been given enough time already. Insha Allah, if one truly understands and appreciates the happenings of this event, then only are we going to make alterations in our lives and make the goal of reaching the goal of spiritual perfection a little easier.

Allah (SWT) says in Hadith al-Qudsi,

I am surprised at that person who is sure of death and yet laughs (unnecessarily)!

O' Son of Adam (AS)! Everyday your life is getting shorter but still you do not understand! Each day I send down to you My Bounties but you are not thankful to Me about them. Neither are you satisfied with My little provision nor are you satisfied with a lot of it.

From the time, you get out of your mother's womb you are getting nearer to your grave. So, do not be like wood, which burns itself in fire for the sake of others.

One should appreciate the fact that we can only fear death if we have knowledge of what is to happen to us before, during and after death. Indeed, The Pure and Infallible Aimmah (AS) have advised us to constantly think and fear death. ***'Frequent remembrance of death decreases one's desires.'*** (Imam Ali (AS))

Unlike some people's belief that the remembrance of death and The Resurrection Day makes one negligent about worldly affairs and material gains, our belief is that the remembrance of death prevents one from heedlessness and indiscipline. He, who is cautious about his performances, big or small, will not commit any wrong act. Apparently, this is one of the most efficient ways to scrutinize our behavior and lead a good and decent life.

al-Sadiq (AS) says the following about the effects of remembering death and The Day of Judgment:

Remembering of death suppresses the inordinate desires; it uproots the very foundation of negligence and apathy; with the reminding of Allah (SWT)'s promise, it strengthens a man's heart; it softens the hard mentality of a man; it demolishes the banners of inordinate desires and transgression, and it suppresses the evil of greediness and makes the world humble before one's eyes.

The report in authentic narrations is that, *the most wise and thoughtful are those who keep remembering death at all times.*

The Prophet (S) once cautioned his followers that a man's heart can rust like the way iron rusts. The followers then asked as to what would clean this dirt. The Prophet (S) then replied,

By remembering death and reciting The Qur'an.

Another advice from The Prophet (S) is to remember death frequently for it has four effects,

It washes off your sins; it reduces your keen fondness for the world; it checks your indulgence in bad practices and improper use of wealth during the period of affluence, and finally, it makes a man content with whatever little quantity of wealth he has. As during poverty his remembrance of death makes him realize how he will account before Allah (SWT) for the wealth he has spent and the deprivation of the people, because he sees that when he has a small quantity of wealth his accountability would also be less.

Imam Ali (AS) says,

He who remembers death frequently will remain content with whatever little quantity of wealth he has. He never craves for more and he neither becomes greedy nor miser.

Actually, this world deceives its own lovers and anyone who after having the thought of death and the Resurrection Day diverts his heart to the next world. Further,

Anyone who remembers death frequently saves himself from the hypocrisies of the world.

In another tradition, we read that,

Anyone who sees death in front of him and awaits it, he will not be laid behind in his daily performances because he knows that the time at his disposal is short and death can overtake him any moment. He gets busy in doing the noble deeds as much as is humanly possible.

The Final Destination

Human being has been created for eternity not oblivion.
(Prophet (S))

Scholars have written that movement is the very essence of living. Movement in time from past into the present, towards the future, and movement in space, horizontally and vertically, both represent a progression towards a destination. There is a starting point and a halting point. But, the halting point in this movement is called 'Mortal Life' which is the beginning of the final journey, a transition towards the final destination which is the 'Eternal Life' hence, The Prophet's (S) tradition is that man has been created not for annihilation but for preservation.

The movement from the 'Mortal' to the 'Eternal' world is through Death and Resurrection. We therefore need to ponder over death, which Allah (SWT) has destined for every creature, as revealed in this verse of The Qur'an,

Every soul shall taste death.
(Qur'an - Chapter 21, Verse 35)

What is Death?

Death is not the end of life, for when a person dies that is not the end of him. His body decays and disintegrates because it has lost its preservative element, the soul. This is the 'Spirit', for which Allah (SWT) says,

Moreover, breathed into him My Spirit.
(Qur'an - Chapter 15, Verse 29)

Apparently, death is a transition between physical and spiritual life, and in other words, the transference stage of soul from this life on earth to life in The Hereafter. Death is inevitable and a must, and both it and life have a definite purpose.

He who created death and life, that He may try which of you is the best in deeds.
(Qur'an - Chapter 67, Verse, 2)

It follows that if we excel in our actions in this brief physical life, we will pass the test and be judged as successful and enjoy eternity. To fail the test would mean eternal affliction.

It is for the sake of helping us pass the test that The Prophet (S) and Aimmah (AS) have exhorted us towards good deeds and eschewing bad deeds. This is because God bestowed them with Divine Knowledge of the pains and torments of death and the afflictions of Hell. Our guides want us to get to our destination in comfort and joy and enjoy eternity in Paradise.

Warning us against the transitory nature of worldly enjoyments, The Commander of Faithful, Imam Ali (AS) has said,

World is a prison for a believer, death is his offspring and Paradise his destination.

Continuing in the same vein, he asked his followers the following question:

How can you enjoy a life that grows shorter every hour?
In another narration, when Imam al-Hasan (AS) was asked about death, he said,

It is the greatest joy that comes to a believer when he goes from the house of affliction to eternal bliss. In addition, it is the greatest tribulation, which comes upon an infidel when he goes from (his) Paradise on earth to a Fire, which abates not nor is it extinguished. Death is but a bridge by which one crosses over from misfortunes and afflictions to spacious gardens and eternal favors.

Imam al-Husayn (AS) once exclaimed to his followers:

Patience, O' Scions of Nobility! For what is death, but a bridge by which you cross over from misfortune and harm to spacious gardens and eternal favors. Now which of you would dislike proceeding from a prison to a palace?

Moreover, as for those, your enemies, they are like people who go from a palace to a prison and to a painful torment. Verily, concerning this, my father (Imam Ali (AS) related to me from my grandfather, The Messenger of Allah (SWT) (S), *'Behold! The world is a prison for the believer and a paradise for the unbeliever, and death is the bridge for the former to their gardens, and for the latter to their Hell-Fire. And he did not lie nor do I.'*

When Imam al-Sajjad (AS) was asked concerning death, he replied,

For a believer, it is like taking off clothes which are dirty and lousy, or breaking heavy shackles and fetters, and changing into the most gorgeous and perfumed of apparel, and riding on well-trained mounts, and alighting in familiar resting places. In addition, for the unbeliever, it is the pulling of gorgeous apparel and changing into the most filthy and coarse clothing, and the transformation from familiar places to the wildest resting places and the greatest torment.

Imam al-Baqir (AS) considered death as,

A sleep, which comes to you every night, except that it is of long duration. The sleeper does not awake from it except on The Day of Resurrection. Some see in their sleep certain kinds of joy the worth whereof cannot be estimated. Others experience certain kinds of terrors, which are beyond the pale of estimation. How then can his condition (be described) who may be happy or fearful in death. This is then death, so be prepared for it.

When asked to describe death, Imam Sadiq (AS) replied,

To the believer it is like the most perfumed breeze, which he inhales and then doses off because of the perfume, and his weariness and pain disappear from him. To the unbeliever, it is like the biting of vipers and the stinging of scorpions. No! It is even more painful.

Imam Sadiq (AS) was then told, *'There are some people who say that it is more painful than being sawed (with a saw), or being cut by scissors, or being crushed to death by stones, or the circular motion by the pivots of hand-mills in the pupils of the eye.'* He (AS) replied,

Such is the travail of death on some of the unbelievers and sinners. Do you not see that among them are those who have witnessed such calamities? Now that death is more painful than this and is more painful than all the worldly torments.

Imam al-Sadiq (AS) was further asked, *'Why is it that we see occasionally an unbeliever, who at the moment of death is not in pain, and who dies while he is relating stories, laughing or talking? In addition, the same is the case with some believers. Again both among the believers and unbelievers, there are some who endure hardships during the pangs of death'* He (AS) replied,

Whatever happiness the believer enjoys is part of his early reward, and whatever pain he suffers is the forgiveness of his sins, so that he may arrive in the next world in a state of cleanliness, purity and spotlessness, fit for the reward of Allah (SWT), and without there being anything to keep him from it.

Moreover, whatever of ease is to be found in the case of some unbeliever is the compensation of his good actions in this world, so that when he arrives in the next world,

nothing remains of him save that which brings torment on him. In addition, whatever of distress comes upon an unbeliever (at the moment of death) there is the commencement of the punishment of Allah (SWT), in as much as the reward of his good actions is at the end. That is because Allah (SWT), The Mighty and Glorious, is Just and does not act erroneously.

Imam al-Kadhim (AS) had this to comment on death,

Verily death is a purifier. It purifies the believers from sins. It is the last pain, which afflicts them and the atonement of the last sin (or burden) upon them. Whereas death separates the unbelievers from their good actions, and is the last delight, favor or comfort which reaches them. It is the last reward in respect of their good deeds.

It is clear that those who are prepared for the journey after death, nothing could be simpler, but those who heed it not beforehand are tormented by it. According to Sheikh Saduq (AR), Imam al-Ridha (AS) describes those who dislike death as having no faith and should renew their faith in Allah (SWT), in The Prophethood of Muhammad (S), and The Leadership of Imam Ali (AS).

Imam al-Taqi (AS) was asked, *'What is the matter with these Muslims that they dislike death?'* He (AS) said,

They are ignorant of it and therefore dislike it. If they had possessed knowledge of it, and were true friends of Allah (SWT), they would love it and surely, they would have accepted the world of Hereafter better than this one.

O' Slave of Allah (SWT)! Why does the child or the mad man refuse to take the medicine, which cleans his body and gets rid of his pain.

The person who asked the question in the first place replied, *'Because they are ignorant of the benefits of that medicine.'* He (Imam al-Taqi (AS) then said,

I swear by Him who sent Muhammad (S) as a Prophet of Truth, verily as for those who prepare themselves for death as they really should, death will be more beneficial to them for curing themselves than this medicine. Lo! If only they knew what blessings death would bring them, they would call out for it and desire it even more than the wise and the resolute man desires his medicine for the removal of his calamities and the recovery of his well-being.

Imam al-Naqi (AS) once visited one of his companions who was weeping and wailing for fear of death. Thereupon he (AS) said,

O' Slave of Allah (SWT)! You fear death because you do not possess any knowledge about it. What say you! When you find your clothes filthy and loathsome, and you suffer from excess of filth and dirt, and are full of wounds and scabs and you know that a bath in a public bath-place will remove all these from you, would you not wish to enter it and bathe so that all that filth may disappear? Moreover, would you not like to enter the bath so that the wounds and scabs should disappear from you?

The man said, *'Yes', O son of the Messenger of Allah (SWT) (S).'* The Imam (AS) said, This death is the bath-place, and it is the last portion of what remains against you of the forgiveness of your sins and the purification from your evil actions. For when you will enter upon it (i.e. death) and cross over it, you will be saved from all grief, anxiety and injury, and you will have attained complete joy and gladness.

Once a man went to Abu Dhar (AR), a respected companion of The Prophet (S), and asked him as to why some people disliked death. He replied,

Some of us have staked everything for this world and ruined our prospects for the next, and naturally, we would not like to shift from a settled habitation to ruin.

When Abu Dhar (AR) was asked as to what he thought about our return to Allah (SWT), who is Exalted above all, he replied,

As for the virtuous, he will be like one who after being absent returns to his own people. And as for the wicked, he will be like a runaway slave returning to his master in fear and dread.

Imam Ali (AS) says in one of his sermons,

Death will come and take you away from your life. You will be placed in a dark and narrow grave, bound-hand and foot, and alone. There, the insects and reptiles will eat their way through your skin and flesh. Gradually, normal decay will destroy your body and passage of life will obliterate your memory. What will happen to you?

Your strong and robust body will decay; even the bones will turn into dust. Your soul will be your first-hand knowledge, but this knowledge will not be of any use to you. There will be no time for you to increase the stock of your good deeds or to repent for your sins.

O' Creature of Allah (SWT)! Can you tell me where are those people who were given long lives but wasted them in ease and comfort, and in vice? Where are those people who were provided with good mind and equally good opportunities to acquire wisdom and to know the truth, but who, even after realizing and understanding, did not make good use of it? They were conferred with long life and plenty of good things, they were warned of the consequences of bad deeds, and they were promised of the heavenly rewards. However, nothing kept them away from vice and wickedness.

O' you who have been created by Allah (SWT)! Keep in mind the purpose of which you have been created and fear Allah (SWT). Be afraid of Him as much as He wants you to be afraid. If you believe that He will bring His Promises to fulfillment and if you fear the terrors of The Day of Judgment, then try to deserve all the blessings He has reserved for you

Explaining the torment of death, Imam Ali (AS) once said; *dying from one thousand strokes of a sword is simpler than dying on bed.*

Imam al-Taqi (AS) went to visit one of his companions who had fallen sick. The fear of death had robbed him of all tranquility and calm, so The Imam (AS) addressed him as follows:

O' Servant of Allah (SWT)! You fear death because you do not understand it correctly. Tell me, if your body were soiled with dirt so that you were pained and discomforted and afflicted with running sores, and you knew that a washing in the bath-place would rid you of all that filth and pain, would you not wish to avail yourself of the bath-place to cleanse yourself of the dirt? Or would you be reluctant to do so and prefer to remain in your polluted state?

Know, then, that death is exactly like the bath-place. It represents your last chance to rid yourself of your sins and to purify yourself of evil. If death embraces you now, there can

be no doubt that you will be freed of all sorrow and pain and attain everlasting happiness and joy.

Dear servant of Allah (SWT), anyone who decides to go on a journey must collect all the necessary provisions before travelling. The journey towards eternity is long and should be prepared for with care. It is reported that Imam Ali (AS) used to warn people in the thick of night in his loud holy voice to prepare for the journey after death. We all know that the time and date of our departure from this world is unknown to us and this is one valid reason why we should be prepared at all times during our life.

Rousseau says,

I know that I am destined to die. Why, then, should I create attachments for myself in this world? In a world where all things are changing and passing, where I myself will soon become non-existent, of what use to me are attachments? I must, nonetheless, prepare myself for such an intolerable eventuality, because no one can assure me that I will die before you.

So if you wish to live happily and rationally, attach your heart only to beauties that are imperishable. Try to limit your desires and hold duty in higher esteem than all else. Seek only those things that do not violate the law of morality, and accustom you to losing things without distress. Accept nothing, unless your conscience permits you. If you do all of this, you will surely be happy, and not become over-attached to anything on earth.

Imam Ali (AS) was true in saying, *today is the day of work (actions), not the day of accounting. Tomorrow is the day of accounting, not the day of work.*

Stages of Death

The following sections describe some of the stages that we all may have to encounter before and after death, and the strategies that might help ease our passage through this torment.

It is reported that the first stages of a dying person who was a faithful believer involves *perspiration on his forehead, dilation of his nose and wetness in his eyes*. If he was unfaithful to Allah (SWT), then he would *snarl like a camel, the color of his skin would change to red and the corner of his mouth would change color to brown*.

It is also reported in authentic traditions that while dying, a person is confronted with Shaytan, The Accursed. The person would be very thirsty and yearn for water, hence the importance of giving water to a dying person. At this time, Shaytan will try his level best to make the dying person prostrate with his eyes and bestow water upon him. If a person was unfaithful then he would prostrate and loose his belief instantly. A faithful person however, would never prostrate and reject him there and then.

The Four Blessed Angels

Imam al-Sajjad (AS) informs us that Allah (SWT), The Exalted has said,

I do not hesitate in any order, except a death of a believer, he dislikes death and I do not like displeasing him.

Imam (AS) continues,

Allah (SWT) sends two Angels to him, one called Mushkiyyah (one who makes him generous with his family and wealth) and the other called Munsiiyyah (one who makes him forget all worldly affairs). After Mushkiyyah and Munsiiyyah have done their work, The Angel of Death arrives and informs the dying person not to worry and tells him that 'By Allah (SWT)! I am kinder to you than your father is. Now open your eyes and look.'

It is clear that the work of Munsiiyyah will be to make one forget all worldly affairs that will be difficult to part with. Angel Mushkiyyah will bestow everlasting hopes upon us and will convince us of the bounties in store. We will then be pleased to leave this mortal world.

However, before The Angel of Death arrives, Angels Ateed and Raqeeb will appear in front of the dying person. These two Angels are the ones that never separated from us for even a second during our lifetime, The Angels on top of our shoulders. Raqeeb will be there to give the person his record of good deeds, which on reading he will become very pleased. Ateed will then present the record of bad deeds to the dying person, which on reading he will become very displeased. Unfortunately, the time will have ended for corrections and repentance.

A person at the time of death becomes tongue-tied, and loses bodily strength on the one hand, while on the other he hears the cries of his family. According to Aimmah (AS), three things appear as friends in the presence of that dying person (wealth, children and actions), but only one (actions) will assist him throughout his journey in The Hereafter.

The Angel of Death

It is reported that The Angel of Death Malikul-Maut, appears very frightening in front of an unfaithful dying person. He approaches the person with a towering personality, his eyes like lightning and writes on earth with his teeth! With a fiery club he would then, by force, take the soul through the nostrils! However, he looks very smart and handsome in front of a faithful person and removes the soul with mercy.

It is true that when a person is about to die, the relatives beside him cry and lament like babies. It is reported that The Angel of Death addresses them and informs them that he is doing nothing wrong and that he will come to them when their time of death arrives.

Imam Ali (AS) says in one of his sermons,

If you could see what has befallen those of you who have died, you would be puzzled and troubled. Then you would have listened and obeyed. But what they have seen is yet curtained off from you. Shortly the curtain will be thrown off. You will see what you have never seen before.

It is reported that the dying person will see The Prophet (S) and his pure Progeny (AS). The Angels of Mercy and The Angels of Vengeance will be present too to deal with the dying man. The Devil will also be present to distract the attention of that person so that he dies an

unbeliever. The dying person will be worried about The Angel of Death, the shape he will appear therein and the manner he will extract the soul.

Imam Ali (AS) once forgot the pain in his eyes when The Prophet (S) informed him that The Angel of Death would bring an iron instrument with which he would extract the soul of an unbeliever. Imam (AS) asked The Prophet (S) if this would happen to his followers, The Prophet (S) replied,

A person who cheats orphans of their wealth and gives false evidence will receive such treatments.

Imam al-Sadiq (AS) once exclaimed to the son of Zubyan and said,

Glory is to Allah (SWT)! The believer is honorable near Allah (SWT) than this (their souls being placed in the claws of green birds!). When it happens (i.e. when the believer dies), there come to him The Messenger of Allah (SWT) (S), Ali, Fatima, Hasan and Husayn (AS), and with them come The Angels of The Mighty and Glorious Allah (SWT) (who are near to him). So, if Allah (SWT) lets his tongue speak the witness of His Oneness, The Prophethood of The Prophet (S), and the love and obedience of The Ahlul-Bayt (AS), then The Messenger of Allah (SWT) (S), Ali, Fatima, Hasan and Husayn (AS) and with them the near Angels become his witness for it.

And if his tongue is tied, Allah (SWT) confers on His Prophet (S) the knowledge of what is in his (that believer's) heart of that (belief), so he (i.e. The Prophet (S) becomes his witness, and then bear testimony of Ali, Fatima, Hasan and Husayn (AS) because of the testimony of The Prophet (S), on their group be the best of Allah (SWT)! And (so do) those Angels who are present with them.

When Allah (SWT) takes him to Himself, He sends that soul to the garden, in a shape similar to his (worldly) shape. They eat (there) and drink. When a newcomer comes to them, he recognizes them by that shape which they had in the world.

Salman Farsi (AR) Talks with a Dead Person

Asbagh, the son of Nubata, a trusted companion of The Prophet (S), who went to see Salman Farsi at the time of his death says I found him very sick near his death. He told me,

O' Asbagh! The Messenger of Allah (S) had informed me that at the time of my death a dead person would talk to me. Now, put me on a wooden plank and take me to the cemetery.

Salman on reaching the cemetery faced towards Makkah and in a loud voice saluted the dead. Nobody replied. After saluting them several times without getting any reply Salman said,

O' Inhabitants of the Graves! I am Salman, a slave of The Messenger of Allah (S). The Prophet (S) told me that at the time of my death a dead person would converse with me. Now, if the time has arrived, then for the sake of Allah (SWT) and His Messenger (S) please converse with me.

Suddenly someone responded to him and said,

O' people who build and plant and ultimately the buildings turn into ruins and gardens decay! Ask me what you desire and I will reply.

Salman asked,

Are you from the people of Paradise or Hell?

The dead person replied that he was from the people of Paradise. Salman then requested him to describe how he died and what agonies he had to undergo to that time. He instantly replied,

O' Salman! Please do not ask this. By Allah (SWT)! If someone has snipped my flesh (by scissors) in little bits and removed the flesh from bones, it would have been easier than the agony of death. O Salman! I always did good deeds in your world, I always prayed on time, I used to recite The Qur'an, and I was good to my parents and lived on lawful earnings. I then fell ill and my life came to its end. At that time, a very tall person with a frightening countenance stood in air before me. He pointed to my eyes and they lost sight; to my ears and they became dumb; to my tongue and it lost its speech. I asked him who he was and why he was doing this to me. He said, 'I am The Angel of Death. Your life has ended in this world. You have to go from here to another world.'

Then two persons came to me, one of them sat on my right and the other on my left. They informed me that they were the two Angels who had written all my deeds in the worldly life. One, whose name was Raqeeb, gave me my record of good deeds, which on reading I was much pleased. Then the other Angel whose name was Ateed gave me the other record, a complete record of my sins, which on reading I was sad.

Then The Angel of Death came nearer and removed my soul through my nose and I have not forgotten its agony yet. Seeing me dead, my relatives and family members started crying. The Angel of Death said, 'Why are you crying? I have not done any injustice that you are complaining. When his life came to an end, I removed his soul on The Command of Allah (SWT). And I will come to you so many times.'

Then another Angel took my soul and I was brought to Heaven where I was asked about my deeds (i.e. prayers, fast, zakat, khums, pilgrimage, jihad, recitation of Qur'an, obedience to parents, and so forth). Likewise, I was asked whether I murdered anyone or taken someone's property without any right or been unjust to other people and so forth.

Then The Angel brought my soul back to earth. At that time, a person wanted to wash my body. He removed my clothes and started the ritual washing. My soul cried out, 'O' Servant of Allah (SWT)! Have mercy on this weak and broken body. By Allah (SWT)! All its veins since I have come out have been broken and its limbs are like they have been minced.' My soul was imploring him in such a touching way that if the people washing me were to hear it, they would have left washing the dead bodies together.

Then they covered me with a shroud, gave me Hunoot, and prayed upon me. When they laid me on the grave, I was so much frightened that words cannot describe it.

When they closed my grave, my soul entered my body again. An Angel Munabbih (one who awakens and reminds) by name came to me and made me sit. He ordered me to write all the deeds, which I had done in the world. I said that I did not remember. He said, 'I will go on reminding you, you go on writing.' I said, 'Where is the paper?' He said, 'This shroud of yours will do for paper.' I said, 'Where can I find a pen?' He said, 'Your finger

will be your pen. I asked about ink and The Angel told me that my saliva will work like ink.

When I had written all my deeds, The Angel put my writings around my neck like a band. It is as Allah (SWT) says in The Qur'an,

And the Bird (deeds done by you) of every man have we bound about his neck, and We shall produce unto him on The Day of Resurrection, a Book (in which his actions will have been recorded) which he will find open. (It will be said to him) Read your book. You yourself will be a sufficient reckoner against your actions.

(Qur'an - Chapter 17, Verse, 13-14)

Then an Angel, very frightening and Munkar by name came to me with a fiery club and asked me, 'Who is your Lord? Who is your Prophet and who are your Imams? What is your Religion?'

I was so afraid that I became very confused, my limbs were trembling and I could not understand what to reply. In that confusion, The Mercy of Allah (SWT) supported me and my heart was at peace. I replied, 'Allah (SWT) is my Lord; Muhammad (S) is my Prophet; Ali the son of Abu Talib (AS) is my Imam; Islam is my religion; The Qur'an is my Book, and The Ka'bah is my Qiblah.'

Then another Angel called Nakeer interrogated me in the same manner about my beliefs. By The Grace of Allah (SWT) I replied the questions and said, 'I bear witness that there is no Allah (SWT) but Allah (SWT); Muhammad (S) is His Messenger; Ali (AS) and his infallible progeny (AS) are The Proofs of Allah (SWT); Paradise is a fact; The Fire of Hell is a Truth; the Questioning of Munkar and Nakeer in the grave is a truth; The Balance of Deeds (Mizan) is a truth; Resurrection is a truth; raising of the dead is a truth; flying of the books (in which deeds of a person are recorded) is a truth, and that The Hour (Day of Judgment) is sure to come, there is no doubts in it and Allah (SWT) will raise all the dead who are in the graves.

Hearing these true answers, The Angel said to me, 'Sleep as a bride sleeps.' They opened a door of Paradise towards my head and the Breeze of Paradise came to me. My grave (which previously looked like a prison) became a vast place extending beyond my vision and the whole place became a garden.

O' Salman! A man must remember his Lord at all times and must spend his life in His obedience, because death is a sure thing and everyone will have to face all those experiences that I have informed you.

The Grave

The Prophet (S) says,

None passes a graveyard that the dead call out to him: 'O' you neglectful person! Were you aware of what we have been made aware of, it would make your blood run cold!

Allah (SWT) states in Hadith al-Qudsi,

O' Son of Adam (AS)! The earth always says, 'You walk on me, but in the end you will be within my bowls. I am a dwelling where you will have to stay alone. I am a dwelling, which is full of ferocious things as well as serpents and scorpions. So, O' Son of Adam (AS)! Do good deeds and thereafter enter me; only then would you be happy and without hardships.'

Indeed! The Grave says everyday,

I am the House of Loneliness! I am the House of Wilderness! I am the House of Ants and the grave can be one of the gardens from The Gardens in Paradise or a ditch from one of The Ditches in Hell.

Surely, He (Allah (SWT)) will over-power the unbelievers in his grave with enormous snakes that will chew his flesh and break his bones, and will continue doing so until The Day of Resurrection. If only one of these enormous snakes were to blow on earth, no vegetation could ever grow. O' servants of Allah (SWT)! Surely, your weak souls and your delicate pleasure loving bodies, which enjoy comfort, will not be able to withstand it.
(Imam Ali (AS))

The Questioning in the Grave

Says the Sheikh Abu Ja'far (AR),

Our belief concerning the questioning in the grave is that it is true and that there is no escape from it. He who answers in the proper manner will obtain rest and perfume in his grave and The Garden of Delight in the life to come. And he who does not answer in the proper manner, for him there will be the feast of boiling water in his grave, and the roasting in The Hell-Fire in the next world.

Most of the torment of the grave takes place on account of backbiting, rudeness and making light of the impurity of urine. The severest form of torment that is inflicted in the grave on the rightful believer is like the involuntary trepidation of the eyelid or scarification. These torments are in expiation of sins for which his anxieties, grief, diseases and the excess of pain at the moment of death did not atone.

Barzakh

Barzakh is a name given to the period of life after death and just before The Judgment Day. As Allah (SWT) states in The Qur'an,

In addition, behind them is the Barzakh until The Day they will be resurrected.
(Qur'an - Chapter 23, Verse 100)

The life of Barzakh is indeed a difficult life for all of us alike. Imam al-Sadiq (AS) has said,

Whoever is subject to the questioning in The Grave is also squeezed by The Grave therein and the one who is exempted from questioning in the grave is also exempted from the squeeze.

The very Imam (AS) has said that The Prophet (S) went to attend the funeral of Sa'd while seventy thousand Angels accompanied the ceremonies (indicating how pious Sa'd was). The Prophet (S) of Allah (SWT) raised his head towards The Heavens and said,

Does anyone face the squeeze (inside the grave) as Sa'd faced?

The Prophet (S) asked this question in relation to the severity of the squeeze in one's grave and the level of difficulty to bear the squeeze. Imam al-Sadiq (AS) then exclaimed and remarked that Sa'd's only fault was that he was harsh in his treatment of the people of his household.

According to some traditions, the squeeze in The Grave for the believers and the faithful will be like two friends embracing each other, but for some other believers who have not been forgiven the squeezing will be severe enough to break the ribs into bits.

Traditions report that Ma'az, the son of Jabal, a trusted companion of The Prophet (S) who received all the services for his funeral by The Prophet (S) himself, still had to suffer from the afflictions of The Grave. It is reported that even Angels descended down on earth to say funeral prayers for him, The Prophet (S) walked bare-foot to the cemetery, and the companion was lowered down the grave by The Merciful Hands of The Prophet (S), but still suffered from the squeeze in his grave. To an extent that he screamed and the wailing was heard by The Prophet (S) as he was leaving his companion's grave.

Further, Sawaid, the son of Ghaflah (AR) narrates from The Commander of Faithful Imam Ali (AS) having reported the following tradition,

Indeed! When the son Adam (AS) comes to his last day on this world and the first of the next, his property, his children and his actions are portrayed before him so he turns to his property and says, 'By Allah (SWT)! I was covetous of you and avaricious. What have you got for me?' Then he turns to his children and says, 'By Allah (SWT)! Surely, I was your love and I was your protector. What have you in store for me?' They will say, 'We shall convey you to your grave and bury you in it?'

Then he turns to his actions and says, 'By Allah (SWT)! I was indifferent to you and you were distasteful to me. What do you have for me?' Therefore, it says, 'I am your companion in your grave as well as on The Day of Gathering when I am presented with you before your Lord.'

After his death, if he is a friend of Allah (SWT) there comes to him a visitor, the most sweet-scented of all people, of most beautiful appearance and wearing the most adorned apparel, and says to him, 'Rejoice with refreshments from Allah (SWT) and flowers from The Garden of Bounties. You made a good arrival.' Thereupon he says, 'Who are you?' The visitor then replies, 'I am your good actions. Proceed from the world to The Garden?' And he recognizes the one who washes his body and earnestly appeals to his carrier to hasten him to the grave.

Then when he enters his grave, two Angels come to him and they are the interrogators in the grave, with elegantly dressed hair, writing on earth with their teeth, their voice like roaring thunder and their eyes like streaking lightening. They ask him, 'Who is your Lord? And who is your Prophet? And what is your Religion?' And he says, 'Allah (SWT) is my Lord, Muhammad (S) is my Prophet and Islam is my Religion?' They exclaim, 'May Allah (SWT) confirm you in what you like and are pleased with.' In addition, this is the meaning of the Word of Allah (SWT),

Allah (SWT) confirms those who believe with the sure word in this worldly life and The Hereafter.

(Qur'an - Chapter 14, Verse 27)

They make his grave spacious for him as far as his eyes can see and they open for him a gate to Heaven and say, 'Sleep with joy, the sleep of a fine looking youth.'

And it is the Word of Allah (SWT),

On that Day, the dwellers of The Garden shall be in a better abiding place and a better resting place.

(Qur'an - Chapter 25, Verse 24)

And if he is an enemy of his Lord, then comes to him a (visitor), the ugliest of the creatures of Allah (SWT) in attires and the foulest-smelling. And he tells him, 'Welcome to the entertainment of boiling water and roasting in Hell.' Moreover, he (the dead person) recognizes the one who washes his body and earnestly appeals to his carrier (the bier-bearer) to hold him back.

And when he is buried in his grave, the examiners of the grave come to him and remove his shroud from him. Then they ask him, 'Who is your Lord? What is your religion? And who is your Prophet?' He says, 'I do not know.' Therefore, they say to him, 'You did not know, nor were you on the right path.' Then they hit him with an iron-rod, a hitting that frightens every creature of Allah (SWT), except the Jinn and the men! Thereafter they open for him a door to The Hell and tell him, 'Sleep in the worst condition.' Therefore, he is squeezed in a narrow space like a shaft in an arrowhead, until his brain comes out from between his nails and flesh. In addition, Allah (SWT) sets on him the serpents of the earth and its scorpions and insects, which go on biting him until Allah (SWT) will raise him from his grave, and he will long for the advent of The Hour, because of the trouble in which he finds himself.

It is related on the authority of Imam al-Ridha (AS) that he once told his companions that on The Day of Resurrection,

The true believers (Shia) will not be (or hardly be) questioned, because the sinful ones among them will be sufficiently punished during Barzakh (the period between death and resurrection), so that when they rise, they will not be answerable to any sin.

Imam Ali (AS) says in one of his sermons in Nahjul-Balagha,

Know that the delicate skin of your body cannot tolerate or bear The Fire of Hell. So pity yourselves. You who have experienced the discomforts of this world, who know your own capabilities, who have seen how when a thorn enters your foot and makes it septic, the warm stones on the ground burn it and you cannot bear the pain. So how will it be when you are between two wells of fire, when you lie on stones and your companion is Shaytan?

O' those who are slaves of Allah (SWT)! Remember Allah (SWT), remember Allah (SWT)! While you are well before you are ill and while you have the opportunity before you become constrained. Strive to be free of The Fire of Hell before the way of salvation becomes impossible for you. Give yourself to the way of Allah (SWT), with clear of sleep and your stomach empty (due to fasting). Walk in His Path; give your possessions in His Path...

The Judgment Day

Allah (SWT) would take them out from the corners of the graves, the nests of birds, the dens of beasts and the centers of earth. They will hasten towards His Command and run towards the place fixed for their final return, group-by-group, quiet, and standing and arrayed in rows. They will be within Allah (SWT)'s sight and will hear everyone who would call Him.

They would possess the dress of helplessness and coverings of submission and indignity. (At this moment) Contrivances would disappear, desires would be cut, hearts would sink

quietly, voices would be curbed down, sweat would choke the throat, fear would increase and ears would rebound with the thundering voice of The Announcer calling towards The Final Judgment, award of recompense, striking of punishment and paying of reward.

Imam Ali (AS) continues in another sermon as follows,

Allah (SWT) knows hidden matters and is aware of inner feelings. He encompasses everything. He has control over everything. Every one of you should do whatever he has to do during his days of life before approach of death; in his leisure before his occupation, and during the breathing of his breath before it is overtaken by suffocation, should provide for himself and his journey, and should collect provision from his place of halt to his place of stay.

1) Evidence from The Qur'an

A man extracted a piece of bone from underneath a wall and after pulverizing it brought to The Prophet (S) and putting on air insolently said, 'Who can bring this decayed and powdered bone to life?' Allah (SWT) says in The Qur'an,

He has said, 'Who will give life to the bones which have become ashes?' (Muhammad) Tell him, 'He Who gave them life in the first place will bring them back to life again. He has the best knowledge of all creatures.

(Qur'an - Chapter 36, Verse 78-79)

Once Prophet Uzayr (AS), while on a journey, passed through a deserted place, and there he thought to himself (not by way of disbelief but out of inquisitiveness) as to how Allah (SWT) will bring them back to life after they have been dead for so many years.

History and The Qur'an narrates that Allah (SWT) kept him dead for 100 years. He (Prophet Uzayr (AS) thought he slept for half an hour only. His donkey had perished but his food, which should have decayed, remained fresh in front of his eyes. Allah (SWT) then revived the donkey in Prophet Uzair's (AS) presence. **(Qur'an - Chapter 2, Verse 259)**

Once Prophet Ibrahim (AS) encountered a similar incident after having observed a corpse, one portion of which was in water and the other on the ground. He was then asked to take four different kinds of birds, slaughter them, mix up their flesh together and put them on different mountains. Thereafter he called each one of them (a chicken, a pigeon, a peacock, and a crow) and gradually each one appeared in front of The Prophet (AS) from ten different mountains.

(Qur'an - Chapter 2, Verse 260)

2) Evidence from the Life in this World

Coming of the dead to life is not impossible, even the world attests to it. Allah (SWT) cites several examples in The Qur'an for us to apprehend this concept.

Do you not see that Allah (SWT) sends down water from the cloud, then We bring forth therewith fruits of various colors, and in the mountains are streaks, white and red, of various hues and (others) intensely black.

(Qur'an - Chapter 35, Verse 27)

Sustenance for the creatures and We give life thereby to a dead land; thus will be the resurrection.

(Qur'an - Chapter 50, Verse 11)

3) Evidence from The Religions

History is evident that the majority of people with different religions, in the past and at present, confirmed and attested to the belief in Resurrection.

People in the past (until present) kept morsels of food, ornaments, and even clothes inside the grave of a dead person close to their family. The belief, although an ignorant one, was that the dead would come to life as soon as after burial and enjoy the food.

In the past whenever a king died, ten women fought until one died and was buried with the king. This was a highly respected practice among various religions and a woman sacrificed her life only to be resurrected with the king.

Every man out of his natural disposition has some conception of The Day of Resurrection because there is no one who would not like to know the ultimate future of man and of this world.

The materialistic view considers that this world and the men will be ultimately annihilated. This is indeed a very dangerous and disappointing view. Allah (SWT) says in The Qur'an,

They say, 'the only life is this worldly life and here we shall live and die. It is only time which annihilates us.' They have no knowledge about this. It is only their speculations.
(Qur'an - Chapter 45, Verse 24)

Do you think We created you for nothing, and that you will not return to us?
(Qur'an - Chapter 23, Verse 115)

Therefore, this whole universe and its contents and the complex human being have not been created in vain. There is a purpose of creation. It is natural to believe that a Day will come when JUSTICE will be served at last. Or is it that every human being is free to do whatever evil he desires and gets away for it!

4) Resurrection, Evidence for Allah (SWT)'s Justice, Wisdom and Power

Since Allah (SWT) is Just, resurrection must take place. If there is no resurrection, The Justice of Allah (SWT) will be in question. The good and the evil cannot and will never be the same. In addition, neither can a believer be compared to a non-believer.

And what about reward and punishment? If there is no accounting for our deeds then people would go to extremes and the good and virtuous would always suffer. This is one reason why rational laws are set in Islam to deter sexual relations outside marriage, or stop thieves from stealing, and so forth. Otherwise, this world would become a bitter place to live!

With all this in practice (including the belief in resurrection), the world becomes a much better place to reside in and people are not scared of what others do because of The Final Day when all shall be asked, including The Qur'an, the feet, etc. People would also yearn to perform virtuous

acts and help people in their endeavors. The best examples can be cited in the lives of The Prophets and Imams (Peace be upon all of them).

Shall We treat those who believe and do well like the mischief-makers on the earth? On the other hand, shall We make those who guard against evil like the wicked?
(Qur'an - Chapter 38, Verse 28)

Allah (SWT) is indeed Powerful and history is self-evident and self-explanatory on this fact.

5) Evidence from Science

The three common questions often raised are,

How can a cremated/buried and decayed body be resurrected?
How can good deeds be weighed on a scale?
How can good deeds assume a shape of a person inside the grave?

Lavoisier, the celebrated French scientist and the founder of modern chemistry provides an answer to the above three questions. The law concerns the fact that matter is anything that occupies space and weight; matter cannot be destroyed; transformation of matter into energy and energy to matter is indeed a scientific fact. Therefore, nothing is ever lost. This includes a drop of water that falls and is absorbed, the smoke of a cigarette that rises in the air, and so forth, and the reason why the walls and trees - besides other objects - will also testify on The Final Day.

Therefore, the decayed body parts are never lost in the ground and one day, Allah (SWT) will gather all these parts with His Power and transform them to living beings again.

We created you from earth and will return you to earth, and then bring you forth from it once more.
(Qur'an - Chapter 20, verse 55)

Whenever a person performs good deeds, energy is released. One day this energy will convert to matter and can assume shape and weight.

It is our belief that all deeds of men have a profound effect on their beings. All of our words and deeds are stored in the vast and mysterious archive of our body and soul, and they will be brought forth in the tribunal of resurrection. The totality of our acts, good and bad are stored up within us and will ultimately take shape to confront us.

The advise is to fear Allah (SWT) before The Day of Judgment: *The Great Event, The Day of Calamity, The Day which measures 50,000 years, The Day on which no one can talk, The Day when excuses won't be accepted, The Day of predominating calamity, The Day when the deafening cry comes forth, The Day of stern and distress, The Day when no soul shall control anything for another soul, The Day of Destruction, The Day of Earthquake, The Day of terrible calamity.*

Thus, fear Allah (SWT) for The Day when the mountains will perish because of the earthquake, The Day of horror that turns children into old people. Do not become one of those people who will say we heard and we disobeyed.

The 10 Groups of People on The Final Day

After Angel Israfeel (AS) blows the huge Trumpet, we will emerge from our graves by The Order of The Almighty in groups. As Allah (SWT) says in The Qur'an,

The Day when The Trumpet shall be blown, you shall come forth in huge groups.
(Qur'an - Chapter 78, Verse 18)

It is reported by Aimmah (AS) that once The Prophet (S) informed Fatima, the daughter of Asad and the mother of Imam Ali (AS) that after The Trumpet is blown, everyone will emerge from their graves naked with the exception of some fortunate believers who will be covered with light and be resurrected fully clothed.

Imam al-Sadiq (AS) has summarized the groups as follows,

One group will emerge from their graves in the form of monkeys.
These will include those people who engaged in backbiting and slandering others.

One group will emerge from their graves and soon after will be placed in small and narrow chamber lit with fire, which will burn their skin inside out.

Those women who never observed hijab and insulted it will face this kind of punishment.

One group will be ordered to sleep sideways as soon as they emerge out from their graves. They will then have tiny, sharp and horny objects forcefully inserted into their ears, which will result in tremendous painful experience.

These will include those people who used their ears for forbidden matters.

One group will experience sharp and horny objects inserted into their eyes.

This group will be concern those who employed their eyes in forbidden matters.

It is reported by Imam al-Baqir (AS) that on The Day of Resurrection, all eyes will be crying except the following three kinds,

The eyes of someone who spent his nights awake in worshipping for the pleasure of Allah (SWT); the eyes of someone who shed tears, because of fear from Allah (SWT), and the eyes of someone who prevented them from looking at forbidden things for the pleasure of Allah (SWT).

One group who after being raised out from their graves will be transformed into tiny little forms and will be trampled by all those present in the mass and endless congregation.

This group will include people who practiced pride in their life. As Allah (SWT) confirms this ordeal by saying to Prophet Musa (AS),

'O' Musa (AS)! Listen to Me what I say, and what I say is The Truth. Indeed, one who has pride and does not associate himself with the poor, I will raise him on The Day of Judgment with the size of an atom under people's feet.

Imam al-Sadiq (AS) says,

Do not show off your actions to someone who neither gives life nor causes death, and who cannot take away from you your burdens. Showing off is a tree whose only fruit is hidden association of other gods with Allah (SWT), and its root is hypocrisy. The vain one will be told on The Day of Judgment, *'Take what you consider to be the reward of your actions from those you took as your partners with Me. Look to those whom you worshipped and*

called on, from whom you entertained hopes and whom you feared. Moreover, know that you cannot conceal anything inside of you from Allah (SWT; you will be deceived by yourself.'

The final group will be forced to stand on a particular platform and whose bodies will be crushed by huge falling stones.

These people will be the ones who never said their morning prayers or purposely performed the prayers late.

Ayatullah al-Khumeini (AR) says, Allah (SWT) has made man superior to other living beings by endowing him a superb constitution and a beautiful appearance. Yet there is another form and a different face of him, which is determined by the qualities of his soul and his inner nature. If fiendish forces govern the power of imagination and invention and his inner self is made vicious, governed by vices like deceit, dishonesty, slandering, which are the attributes of Shaytan, he may undergo a metamorphosis and assume one of the forms of Shaytan on The Day of Judgment.

Sometimes it is also possible that he would have an appearance that symbolizes two or several vices. In that case, a form which does not resemble any of the brutes, but an unusual and queer form, with which cannot be compared the most terrible and ugliest monster in the world, will be acquired by him.

It has been recorded from The Prophet of Allah (SWT) that some persons will be raised on The Last Day in such a manner that even monkeys and dog flies will appear better looking than that, because that world is not like this world, where one individual cannot acquire more than one form.

According to Ayatullah al-Khumeini (AR), this account itself is logical as well as self-evident. Because, the criterion of those different forms (of which human form is one) would be the state of soul at the time of death, the state in which the soul departs from the body. It is in this very state and form that man's soul enters the realm of Barzakh. At the time of entering the other world, that is, the domain of The Hereafter, the first stage of which is Barzakh, in whichever state one's soul departs from the body, it assumes a form suited to it in the next world also. Because, it is not necessary that man may enter the next world in the same physical state as he had in this world. Allah (SWT) Himself says,

He will say, O Allah (SWT)! Why have you raised me blind when I had sight before?
(Qur'an - Chapter 4, Verse 76)

Sheikh Abbas Qummi (AR) says that no one shall escape The Fire (on that Day), and no one shall enter The Garden (merely) by virtue of his actions, except by The Mercy of Allah (SWT), The Exalted. May Allah (SWT) forgive us and absolve us from sins on behalf of The Prophet (S), Ali, Fatima, Hasan & Husayn, and The Nine Purified Leaders after al-Husayn (AS).

The Book

Says the Sheikh Abu Ja'far (AR) that Allah (SWT) will confront each person with a Book which will be found to be wide open, informing him of all his actions, omitting neither a minor nor a major sin.

In this fashion will Allah (SWT) constitute each person his own reckoner and judge, for he will be informed,

Read your book! Your soul is a sufficient reckoner against yourself this Day.
(Qur'an - Chapter 17, verse 14)

Allah (SWT) will put a seal upon the mouth of certain people, and their hands and feet and all their limbs will testify to things to which they are hiding. Because these materials vibrate with energy, science has proven these living to store information and therefore, these limbs and other non-living materials in this world will testify.

In addition, they say unto their skins, 'Why do you testify against us?' They reply, 'Allah (SWT), who gives speech to all things, has given speech to us, and it is He Who created you at the first and to Him shall you return. You did not hide yourselves lest your ears, your eyes and your skins should testify against you. You deemed that Allah (SWT) was ignorant (Allah (SWT) forbid!) of your action?'
(Qur'an - Chapter 41, Verse 21)

The Balance

Allah (SWT) says in The Qur'an,

And the measuring out on that Day will be just. Then as for him, whose measure (of good deeds) is heavy shall be successful, and as for him whose measure is light, they are those who will have made their souls suffer a loss because they disbelieved in Our Communications.

(Qur'an - Chapter 7, Verse 8-9)

In addition, We shall set a Just Balance on that Day of Resurrection, so no soul shall be dealt with unjustly in the least. An act whose weight of a grain of mustard seed will even be brought forward! Moreover, sufficient are We to take account.

(Qur'an - Chapter 21, Verse 47)

Mizan is a Divine Instrument that will weigh our good and bad deeds. It is at this stage where we are going to understand the value and weight a good deed carries in the eyes of Allah (SWT), The Great.

Sheikh Abbas Qummi (AR), an eminent Shia scholar writes in his book 'Manazil al-Akherat' that *Salawat* will be of great help to that person in need of extra weight in his Mizan, The Balance on The final Day.

During The Ascension, The Prophet (S) saw an Angel with a towering appearance possessing a thousand hands and in every hand a thousand fingers. The Angel was observed counting something. When asked as to what he was counting The Angel replied that he has been endowed with great mathematical powers and could calculate the number of raindrops that have fallen in any forest, city, and so forth. However, he confessed that he did not possess the power to count the rewards people achieve when they recite Salawaat when in groups.

According to traditions that have reached us, Shaytan is equipped with three main weapons to fight us. First, he tries to make one feel inferior so that he or she loses all the respect Allah (SWT) has gifted him. Once under this satanic spell, we always rate ourselves lower than others equal to us and we become discouraged at all times. Second, he makes us feel proud of our good actions. Verily,

Allah (SWT) does not accept good deeds infected with pride.

Never can the person who possesses a speck of pride inside his heart enter Paradise.
(Prophet (S))

Imam al-Sadiq (AS) has warned us as follows:

Refrain from pride and self-glorification, since pride is Allah (SWT) Almighty's Mantle, and one who contests with Allah (SWT) regarding His cloak, Allah (SWT) will shatter him and disgrace him on The Day of Resurrection.

Verily there is a valley in Hell for the proud called *Saqa*. Once it complained to The Almighty about the intensity of its heat, and requested Him to relieve it for some time so that it may take a breath. As soon as it breathed, its breath filled the entire Hell with fire.

Finally, the advice is to avoid feeling whatever evil you have done as small and insignificant. Small sins always multiply to bigger and major sins. So take care of yourself and never consider any disobedient act as small and negligible. Allah (SWT) deserves as much obedience as possible.

Just reflect for a moment the universe and its contents, the food, water, the beautiful sceneries, everything created for us because of His Mercy. We enjoy every second of our life because of His Benevolence and Love. He loves us so much. He takes care of us and looks after us every part of our life. He never lets us down. He always answers our prayers and there is none who can respond to our invocations except Him. We commit sins throughout our life and He is ever prepared to hide them and forgive us with His Mercy. Indeed! How merciful is our Lord!

The Bridge

All of you will pass over it (Sirat). This is a firm decree of your Lord. Then We shall save those who guarded themselves against evil and shall leave the wrongdoers therein (brought down) to their knees.

(Qur'an - Chapter 19, verse 71-72)

'Sirat' is reported by Aimmah (AS) to be thinner than hair, sharper than a sword and hotter than fire. You will have to pass this Bridge with all the difficulties involved in it. However, authentic traditions from our Aimmah (AS) report that faithful believers will be able to pass this Bridge at a lightening speed and overcoming all the hurdles.

On The Bridge, it is reported that our belief in The Imamate of Imam Ali (AS) and the rest of The Infallible (AS) will be of utmost assistance. Even if a person lives for 2500 years performing good actions, gives alms to the poor and the needy large amount of gold equivalent to the size of Mount Ohad and is martyred unjustly in a battlefield, that person will not even smell the fragrance of Paradise if he does not store in his heart the love of Ali (AS).

O' Ali (AS)! On the Day of Qiyamat shall sit I, You and Jibraeel (AS) on The Sirat, and no one shall pass over The Sirat except he who would have a petition of release from Hell based on your love and obedience.

The Prophet (S) once exclaimed,

No one will be able to enter The Garden except he who recognizes them (The Prophet (S) himself and The Imams (AS) and him whom they recognize. And no one will enter The Fire except he who denies them (their rights), and him whom they deny (as not belonging to their party).

Ibn Abbas (AR) narrates that once a person asked The Prophet (S) if The Love of Ali (AS) would benefit him on The Day of Judgment! So The Prophet (S) said to that person that,

When The Day of Judgment shall arrive, Allah (SWT) will order an Angel to set The Fire ablaze, and He will order an Angel by the name of Ridhwan (AS) to bring Paradise near. Then He will extend The Bridge and establish The Scale under The Throne and a caller shall call out to Muhammad (S) and bring his followers for the Accounting.

Then He will extend on The Bridge 7 archways; and after every archway will be (the distance of) 7 thousand years, and on every archway shall be Angels who shall sweep away humankind. (By Allah!) No soul shall pass these archways but one who befriended Imam Ali (AS) and his Ahlul-Bayt (Peace be on all of them); and the one who knew them and they knew him.

And whoever didn't know them (the Ahlul-Bayt (AS) will fall into The Fire on the top of his head, even if he had with him the worship of 70,000 servants, because, all the worship will not bear weight on The Gathering Day on The Scale and no foot of a human shall be firm on The Bridge except by The Love of Imam Ali (AS). In addition, to this is the indication with His, Allah (SWT)'s Word,

In addition, Allah shall make firm those who believe, with the firm word in this world and in the hereafter.

(Qur'an - Chapter 14, Verse 27)

Ibn Abbas (AR) further narrates that the Messenger of Allah (S) also said to Ali (AS),

O' Ali! Love of you has not become firm in the heart of any believer but his foot will be firm on The Bridge, until he enters heaven.

Paradise

Jabir ibn Abdullah Ansari (AS) narrates that I once said to Imam al-Baqir (AS),

'May I be your sacrifice, son of Allah's Messenger (S), narrate to me a hadith in regards to the traits of your grandmother, Lady Fatima (AS), so that if I report it to your Shiites, they would rejoice at hearing it.'

Abu Ja'far (AS) said,

My Grandfather, The Prophet (S) has said that on The Day of Rising, Pulpits of (Divine) Light shall be the highest (from amongst the things visible) on that Day. Allah (SWT) will then say, 'Deliver a sermon', so I will deliver a sermon that none of The Prophets (AS) or The Messengers (AS) have ever heard before.

Then for the successors (of Prophets (AS) shall be erected Pulpits of Light, and in the middle of these Pulpits one shall be erected for my successor, Ali ibn Abi Talib (AS),

which will be higher than all other Pulpits. Allah (SWT) will then say, 'Ali! Deliver a sermon.' So he will deliver a sermon like the one no successor has ever heard before.

Then for the children of The Prophets (AS) and Messengers (AS) shall be erected Pulpits of Light, and among them shall be a Pulpit of Light for my two sons, grandsons and the two flowers of my life, Hasan ibn Ali (AS) and Husayn ibn Ali ibn Abi Talib (AS). Then it shall be said to them, 'Deliver a sermon.' So they will deliver two sermons like those that none of the children of The Prophets (AS) have ever heard before.

A caller (by the name) Jibraeel (AS) shall then call, 'Where is Fatima binte Muhammad (S)?' She will then rise.

Allah (SWT), Blessed and Exalted is His Name, shall say, 'O' People of The Gathering! To Whom does Honor belong Today?' So, Muhammad (S), Ali, Hasan, Husayn (Peace be on all of them) will say, 'To Allah (SWT), The One, The Almighty.' Allah (SWT) The Exalted will then say, 'O' People of The Gathering! Lower your heads and cast your eyes down, for this is Fatima proceeding towards Paradise.'

Jibraeel (AS) shall then bring her a female camel from the female camels of Paradise. Its sides shall be embellished, and its muzzles with fresh pearls and it shall have a saddle of coral. It shall kneel down in her presence, so she will ride it. Allah (SWT) will then send 100,000 Angels to accompany her on her right side, and 100,000 Angels to accompany her on her left side, and 100,000 Angels to lift her onto wings until they bring her to The Gate of Paradise. When she is near The Gate of Paradise, she will look to her side.

Allah (SWT) will then say, 'Daughter of My Beloved! Why did you look to your side after I gave the command that you enter My Paradise?'

She will say, 'My Lord! I wish that my position be realized on such a Day.'

Allah (SWT) will say, 'Daughter of My Beloved! Go back and look for everyone in whose heart was love (and obedience) for you or for any of your progeny. Take their hands and lead them to Paradise.'

Abu Ja'far (AS) says,

By Allah (SWT), Jabir (AR), she will pick her Shiites (i.e. obedient followers) and those who loved her just like a bird picks good seeds from bad seed.' However, when her Shiites are near The Gate of Paradise, Allah (SWT) will inspire their hearts to look to their sides. And when they do so, Allah (SWT) The Almighty will say, 'My beloved ones, why did you look around when Fatima, The Daughter of My Beloved interceded for you?'

The people will answer, 'Our Lord! We hoped that our position would (also) be known on such a Day.'

Allah (SWT) will then say (to the selected people), 'My beloved ones, go back and look for everyone who loved you for your love of Fatima. Look for everyone who fed you for the love of Fatima; Look for every one who clothed you for the love of Fatima; Look for every one who gave you a drink for the love of Fatima; Look for everyone who prevented

backbiting from being done against the love of Fatima. Take their hands and lead them into Paradise.'

Indeed, there are various degrees of serving Allah (SWT), but affection (and cordial inclination) for us, Ahlul-Bayt (AS), is the highest one.
Imam al-Sadiq (AS)

Says the Sheikh Abu Ja'far (AR),

Our belief concerning Paradise is that it is a permanent abode and an abode of safety. There is in it neither death, nor old age, nor disease, nor calamity, nor decline, nor palsy, nor care, nor sorrow, nor need, nor poverty. It is an abode of plenty, of happiness, of quiet and of nobility. Affliction shall not touch its inmates, or weariness. In it, there will be things for which the souls of men yearn and which give delight to their eyes, and they shall reside therein forever.

It is an abode the inmates whereof are neighbors of Allah (SWT), and His friends (Imams (AS) and loved ones, and the recipient of His Generosity. And they are of different kinds and ranks.

Among them will be some who, like Angels, will receive their favors by sanctifying and glorifying Allah (SWT) and declaring His Greatness. And there will be others who will find pleasure in different kinds of food, drink, fruit, comfortable couches, and fair women with beautiful big black eyes, and in being served by young pages endowed with perpetual youth, and in sitting on cushions and rich carpets and in dresses of silk brocade. All of them will be able to enjoy what they like and desire, in accordance with their own aspirations, which shall be granted to them by Allah.

Paradise is of Allah (SWT), The Almighty and he will be our Host once we are in Heaven. The pleasures of Paradise cannot be described and it is indeed beyond the capacity of human imagination. Everything there will be different and to our liking. Heaven will be the world of pleasures, which no ear has ever heard of, and no human heart has ever experienced.

One would enjoy for eternity the hospitality and reception of Allah (SWT) Himself, The Creator. The highest stage in Paradise will include people enjoying Nearness to Allah (SWT), The Almighty with everything just a command away. The following narration is enough for us to get preoccupied in our thoughts. It describes Paradise in a way that one will never ever be able to comprehend.

Sheikh Abbas Qummi (AR) narrates in his book 'Manazil al-Akherat' the following tradition from Aimmah (AS),

Angel Jibraeel (AS) once decided to fly with his powerful wings and estimate the length and vastness of Paradise. The permission was granted by Allah (SWT) and he was away on his project. Angel Jibraeel (AS) flew for 30,000 years and became exhausted. He prayed for more strength and was granted. He then flew for another 30,000 years and in each year 30,000 times. He finally completed his project and lay down to rest for a while to gain strength which he had lost for years and years. While resting, he came across a Heavenly Woman who asked Angel Jibraeel (AS) as to what his endeavors were and why he was so tired and worn out. Once she was given a reply, the Lady in Paradise who was reserved for just one faithful believer exclaimed, 'O' Jibraeel (AS)! You have not been able to traverse even one mansion reserved for a faithful believer when he enters Paradise!

Indeed, only a pale and inevitable deficient portrayal of The Blessings of Paradise can be given for the inhabitants of this finite world. The fruits of The Hereafter are not tied to any season or subject to blight. They are constantly within reach of the blessed. Allah (SWT) confirms in The Qur'an that,

None can perceive what blessings are hidden for man in that realm which will delight his eye.

(Qur'an - Chapter 32, verse 17)

Whatever the hear desires and delights the eye will be brought into being.

(Qur'an - Chapter 43, Verse 71)

Hell

Sheikh Saduq (AR) exclaims,

And our belief concerning Hell is that it is a place of degradation or that of revenge on unbelievers and sinners. None but the polytheists will reside therein permanently. As for those monotheists (who believe in Allah (SWT)) who are sinners, The Mercy of Allah (SWT) and The Intercession, which they obtain, will take them out of it.

It is related that no pain shall afflict a single one among the monotheists in hell when they enter it. They will only be inflicted with pain at the time of their exit from it. And these ills will be the requital of their own actions and,

Allah (SWT) is not unjust towards His slaves.

(Qur'an - Chapter 41, verse 46)

And the residents of Hell will be miserable indeed. It is not decreed for them that they shall die, nor shall the torment of Hell abate for them.

Therein they shall taste neither coolness nor any drink, save boiling water and pus. This is a reward proportioned to their evil deeds.

(Qur'an - Chapter 78, verse 24-26)

If they ask for food, they will be fed on Zaqqum (a fruit of bad taste and foul smell). And if they ask for showers, they will be showered with water like unto molten lead, which burns the faces.

Calamitous the drink and ill the resting place!

(Qur'an - Chapter 18, verse 29)

And from a distant place shall they cry out and say,

O' Our Lord! Remove us from here. If we return (to evil) then we shall indeed be wrong doers.

(Qur'an - Chapter 23, Verse 107)

It is reported by Aimmah (AS) that there exists 8 grades in Hell, namely Jaheem, where people will stand on stones which have been severely heated; Ladha, which hosts huge fire that sucks anyone entering its valley; Saqar, a valley where one changes color due to its severe heat; Hutamah, where people will be crushed into pieces and death shall never be a solution for these sufferings; Hawiyah, an endless pit of fire.

During Ascension (Me'raj), The Prophet (S) heard a loud sound at one stage and was quite overtaken by the severity of the nature of that sound. On explaining this event he says,

Once upon a time, two Angels had a desire to estimate the length of one of the pits in Hell. They decided to throw a stone and wait for it to reach the bottom. It took 70 years for that rock to reach the bottom of that particular pit!

Saeer, which consists of 300 curtains of fire. In each curtain there are 300 abodes of fire and in each abode there are 300 different types of punishments. Finally Jahannam, which consists of wells of fire (Falaq), mountains of fire (Sa'ud) and valleys of molten brass (Atham).

After waking up from his sleep, The Prophet (S) once narrated a tradition that was revealed unto him while asleep by Angel Jibraeel (AS). He informed his daughter, The Honorable Lady Fatima (AS) that,

There exist 70 mountains in Hell. In every mountain, there exists 70 valleys; in every valley, there are 70 pits; in each pit, there are 70 stations, and in each station, there exists 70 different types of punishments.

This abode has been mainly reserved for those who ignore the importance of daily prayers, besides many others. Fearing Hell should be part of our life. It is true that by fearing the punishments in Hell we improve our lifestyles and there is no shame in that. Of course, obedience to Allah (SWT) without fear of Hell or want for Paradise is better and comprises the highest quality of worship.

Hell and its Attributes

Allah (SWT) has clearly stated,

O' Son of Adam (AS)! How could you disobey Me while you can't resist the hot sun and hot desert? And indeed, for Hell there are seven levels in which there are fires which eat each other; in each level of Hell, there are seventy thousand valleys of fires; in each valley of fire, seventy thousand sections of fires; in each section of fire, seventy thousand cities of fires; in each city of fire, seventy thousand castles of fires; in each castle of fire, seventy thousand houses of fires; in each house of fire, seventy thousand rooms of fires; in each room of fire, seventy thousand wells of fires; in each well of fire, seventy thousand chests of fires and in each chest of fire, seventy thousand trees of 'Zaqqum.'

Under each tree of Zaqqum, seventy thousand nails of fires - with each nail, seventy thousand chains of fires, and in each chain, seventy thousand serpents of fires.

And the length of each serpent is seventy thousand yards; and in the stomach of each serpent there is one ocean of black poison, in which there are seventy thousand scorpions of fires; and each scorpion has seventy thousand tails of fires; and the length of each tail is seventy thousand vertebrae (each segment of back-bone), and in each vertebra, seventy thousand, (approximately) 450 grams of red poison.

I swear by Myself, by Mount Sinai, by The Written Book, by an Outstretched Fine Parchment, by The House that is visited, by The Elevated Canopy, by The Swollen Sea!

O' Son of Adam (AS)! I have not created this Hell Fire but for all the unbelievers; for the miser; for the gossip; for those disinherited by their family; for the people who do not pay Zakaat (alms to poor); for the eater of usury, for the adulterer; for the collector of unlawful (elements); for the one who forgets The Qur'an; for the bad neighbor.

Sheikh Saduq (AR) reports, one day The Prophet (S) of Allah was seated when Angel Jibraeel (AS) came into His presence, with a sad face and changed complexion. The Prophet (S) asked as to why he was looking so sad and grieved. Jibraeel answered, 'O' Muhammad (S)! Why should I be not grieved, while today I saw the bellows of hell being set.'

The Prophet (S) asked him what the bellows of Hell were. Jibraeel told him that,

It referred to the Hell-Fire, which according to The Commandments of Allah (SWT) Almighty was ablaze for one thousand years. After it became red hot, He ordered it to burn for another one thousand years until it was white-hot. Then He commanded it to burn for one thousand years more until it turned black. Now that it was black and dark, if a slice of seventy cubits of it was to drop on this world, verily its heat would be sufficient to melt the whole world into fluid.

If a single drop of its Zaqqum (an infernal tree, mentioned in The Qur'an proverbial for its extreme bitterness) and Dhari' (something in Hell more bitter than aloe, more fetid than carrion, and hotter than fire, which will be the food of the condemned) trickles down in the water reservoirs of the earth everybody therein would die due to its stench.

Thereupon The Prophet (S) wept and Jibraeel (AS) also wept with him. On seeing this, Allah (SWT) sent His Angel, who came to them and said that Allah (SWT) sent peace and greetings to them along with the message that He exempted them both from the committing of sins and the consequent punishments.

This will be The Hell of one's actions, which is comparatively milder, cooler and tolerable, and is reserved for those who committed sins in the world. But for those who have acquired the viciousness of character and villainy of conduct like, greed, lust, hoarding, avarice, and so forth, The Hell will be their place, a place beyond human apprehension, a state and form which can never be anticipated by any stretch of imagination, and emanates from within the soul itself.

The inhabitants of that Hell will be so distressed that they will try to escape from it, (but in vain). In some of the authentic traditions, al-Khumeini (AR) reports that there is a valley in Hell, which is reserved for the proud, and which is named 'Saqa.' Once it complained to Allah (SWT) about the intensity of its heat and asked The Almighty for relief, so that it might take a breath. After the relief was granted, when it breathed, its breath filled the Hell with fire.

Advise from the Leader of The Islamic Revolution in Iran

My friend, the higher knowledge has proved that the grades of intensity are infinite. The punishment is severer than what you imagine or what others imagine. If you do not believe in the arguments advanced by philosophers, or the revelations made to mystics, thanks to Allah (SWT), being a true believer you have faith in the teachings of The Prophets of Allah (AS), and you consider all the reports recorded in the authentic books of the traditions which are accepted by all the Imamiyyah scholars as true and authentic.

I hope that you believe in the prayers of Infallible Imams (AS), and have read the prayers and sermons uttered by Imam Ali (AS), and the invocation by Imam Sayyid al-Sajideen (AS) uttered in the prayer of 'Abu Hamza al-Thimal.' My friend, reflect a little upon their subject matter and think for a while on their wordings. It is nowhere required to make a rapid reading of the lengthy prayer in a hurry without pondering over its meaning. You and I are not blessed with the spiritual state of Imam al-Sayyid al-Sajjad (AS) to recite that lengthy prayer in a state of sustained ecstasy at one time. Try to read one-third or one-fourth of it every night with feeling, and meditate upon its words. You may feel ecstatic while reading it. Apart from this, pay a little more attention to the meaning of Qur'anic Verses, and see what punishment has been prescribed for the inhabitants of Hell, to escape which they will pray to The Lord for death, and alas, death will not help.

Ayatullah al-Khumeini (AR) continues and warns us as follows,

... Existence of Hell and its horrible chastisements are among the essentials of all the religions of the world, which bring forward many arguments in favor of their necessity ... What is the reason for our complacency and ignorance? Have The Angels of Allah (SWT) given us the tidings of being exempted from this punishment as they had given one to The Prophet (S) and Jibraeel (AS)? ... What is wrong with us that we do not feel ashamed?

Even in our supplications to Allah (SWT), we so much violate and insult Divine principles, that a thousand pities on our thoughtlessness! Have pity on yourself and the extremity of the pangs of death. Again a thousand pities on our condition in Barzakh, the agonies of The Hereafter, and The Doomsday and its darkness! How pitiable are we who have to face the horrors of Hell and its chastisement!

Ba Yazid (AR) was correct in saying,

You know that you are in a crying need of your Lord at every hour and on many counts. You are needful of His Guiding Light as well as His Merciful Glance, Guidance and Sustenance at every moment. You are also in need of Him at the time of death so that The Light of Islam and its knowledge is kept intact in your heart. In the grave, too, you are in need of Him so that you successfully answer the questions of Munkar and Nakeer. He will be your friend in the terrors of the grave.

The greatest of all your needs is your dependence on Him in Judgment Day, the day of regret and remorse, so that Allah (SWT), The Exalted may make your face luminous, conceal your blemishes and enhance the weight and worth of your good works in His Balance. All this because He may facilitate the clearance of your account and place the book of your deeds in your right hand, that He may keep you firm on the path and save you from Hell Fire and lead you towards Paradise. His highest Generosity and the excellent favor are to bless you with His Beatific Vision.

Sixteenth Rule

VIGIL AND ALERTNESS

By vigil, we mean to remain awake in the midst of nights and pray to our Lord for deliverance and forgiveness. Indeed, one of the most efficient and productive ways to reach The Almighty and gain His attention is by keeping vigil during the nights. This is what we learn from our Infallible (AS) and The Prophet (S). Denouncing the sleeping at dawn and praising the keeping awake at that time, Allah (SWT) says,

They used to sleep only a little, while at night and at dawn used to seek forgiveness.
(Qur'an - Chapter 51, verse 18)

By vigil, we also mean to guard our actions from The Accursed Shaytan and never let him destroy the actions we are blessed to commit and wish their acceptance. The advice is to recite supplications for an hour every night; even if we are not in the right mood for it, do not give up seclusion with God.

The Aimmah (AS) have said,

There are amazing blessings in waking up at dawn and the last one third of the night. Whatever you want from God can be obtained through begging at dawns. Do not be negligent of begging at dawns; whatever blessings you achieve can be gained by that. A lover hardly goes to sleep and yearns nothing but union with The Beloved. Dawn is the time of meeting and union with Him.

In many verses of The Qur'an, Allah enjoins the rising by the night for glorification and worship of Allah. He says:

In addition, in the night, give Him glory too, and at the setting of the stars.
(Qur'an – Chapter 52, Verse 49)

Moreover, during part of the night adore Him, and give glory to Him (for a) long (part of the) night.
(Qur'an – Chapter 76, Verse 26)

They used to sleep but little in the night. In addition, in the early part of the morning they asked forgiveness.
(Qur'an – Chapter 51, Verse 16-17)

Their sides draw away from (their) beds, they call upon their Lord in fear and in hope, and they spend (benevolently) out of what We have given them So no soul knows what is hidden for them of that which will refresh the eyes, a reward for what they did.
(Qur'an – Chapter 32, Verse 16-17)

The reward for those who rise by night to glorify Allah cannot be described. As The Prophet (S) has said,

There is no good deed except that its reward has been outlined in The Qur'an, except Salatul-Layl. Almighty Allah has not specified its reward due to its greatness with Him.

In addition, during a part of the night, pray Tahajjud beyond what is incumbent on you; maybe your Lord will raise you to a position of great glory.
(Qur'an – Chapter 17, Verse 79)

In this verse, Almighty Allah describes the extraordinary spiritual effects of reciting Salat-Layl. It raises the human being to *Maqame Mahmood*, a position of glory and praise. It is an elevated position with Allah, one that few people can attain. Salat-Layl is thus one of the most effective ways of achieving closeness to Allah.

Surely, the rising by night is the firmest way to tread and the best corrective of speech.
(Qur'an – Chapter 73, Verse 6)

H & T Kassamali report 14 traditions (from The Infallible (AS) in favor of Salat-Layl.

1. Three things bring happiness to the heart of a believer:

a) Meeting brethren in faith

b) Breaking the fast

c) Waking up in the later part of the night for Salat-Layl

2. Jibraeel continued to advise me about staying up at night until I thought that the virtuous ones of my Ummah do not sleep.

3. The honor and greatness of a believer lies in his praying at night.

4. I detest that a man who has recited The Qur'an, wakes up at night but does not rise until the morning when he wakes up for Salaat of Subh.

5. Allah says; Wealth and children are an ornament of the life of this world. (Qur'an – Chapter 18, Verse 46), but the eight units recited by a servant at the end of the night are an ornament of The Hereafter.

6. Two units of prayer recited in the darkness of the night are more beloved to me than the world and all that is in it.

7. The rising by night is healthy for the bodies.

8. Salat-Layl brightens the faces, makes the night pleasant, and attracts sustenance.

9. When the servant of Allah turns to his Lord in the middle of the dark night, and whispers to Him, Allah establishes His light in his heart . . . then He tells The Angels: O my Angels, look at my servant. He has turned to Me in the middle of the dark night while the false ones are playing, and the heedless ones are sleeping; bear witness that I have forgiven him.

10. Whoever has been granted the chance to recite Salat-Layl, a male servant or a female one, and he (or she) rises for Allah sincerely, does proper wudhu , prays for Allah with a true intention, a sound heart, a humble body and a tearful eye, Allah will place behind him nine rows of Angels. The number of Angels in each row cannot be counted except by Allah. One side of each row is in the East, and the other is in the West. Then when he completes his prayer, he gets the reward of all of The Angels in the rows.

11. There is no good deed except that its reward has been outlined in The Qur'an, except the Salat-Layl. Almighty Allah has not specified its reward due to its greatness with Him. He says (about the reward of those who recite Salat-Layl): So no soul knows what is hidden for them of that which will refresh the eyes, a reward for what they did. (Qur'an – Chapter 32, Verse 17)

12. A man came to Imam Ali (AS) and said, I have been denied the chance to recite Salat-ul-Layl. The Imam replied that your sins have prevented you.
13. Whoever tells himself he will wake up for Salat-ul-Layl but sleeps through the time, his sleep will be charity and the reward of what he intended will be written for him.
14. Do not disregard the reciting of Salat-ul-Layl, for the one who is denied Salat-ul-Layl is in a great loss

Seventeenth Rule

CONTINUED CLEANLINESS

One of the most important and attractive aspects of Islamic teachings is related to cleanliness. It means to be ritually pure at all times by performing ablution (wudhu) and ghusl whenever necessary. The major ablution (ghusl) on Friday for example, has been much stressed and cleans us from many sins and mis-endavours. By keeping ourselves clean and pure, we make it difficult for Shaytan to enter our soul. Cleanliness acts like a barrier preventing one's lustful ideas from entering his or her mind.

Imam Ali (AS) encouraged people to remain clean and said,

The bath-place is a good place. Its heat reminds man of The Fire of The Wrath of Allah (SWT) and it removes the dirt of the body.

One of the traditions of The Prophet (S), which has come down in the form of an everlasting and beautiful slogan, is that, cleanliness is part of faith and faith leads a person to Paradise.

Islam is one religion that emphasizes cleanliness to its limit and considers purity as part of faith. al-Qudah (2000) in his article, Supremacy of Preventive Medicine in Islam, which appears in the book **Islamic Medicine**, says,

Ablution cleans those parts of the body that are most exposed to microbes. Microbiologists proved that on each cubic centimeter (of the exposed parts), there are around 1-5 million microbes. To remove them, continuous washing of the skin is required and this is achieved through performing ablution, which is constantly repeated during the day.

In his book on **Microbes of the Skin**, Dr. Kelgman visualized the skin with all the bacteria, viruses, fungi, and parasites on its surface, as the earth with its existing living creatures and their differences. Professor Vaindov proved in his study that bathing removes more than 200 million microbes from the skin. These microbes do not stop multiplying, so they must be removed continuously, in order to decrease their number, so that the body can resist them. One of the secrets of preventive medicine in Islam is that it made cleanliness an act of worship. This gives it spiritual essence and a kind of continuity that no other law can provide. The Prophet (S) legislated for us more than 17 different total ablutions (an action of washing the whole body), to be performed after sexual discharge, end of menses, end of post childbirth confinement, on feast day, and others.

The mouth contains no less than 100 kinds of bacteria that vary between 500-5000 million microbes in one millimeter of saliva. These microbes are nourished by food remnants between the teeth, and on the teeth themselves. Their growth and multiplication results in the production of several acids and secretions that affect both the smell of the mouth and the color of the teeth. If these microbes are not removed several times a day, they cause tooth decay and other gum diseases. Modern science proved that the Miswak (a branch of a tree used as a toothbrush) Muslims use following the tradition of Prophet (S), has the effect of protecting the teeth, as it removes the microbes on its fibers, and even kills some of them chemically. Therefore, it prevents accumulation of food and microbes on the teeth.

Quoting al-Sadiq (AS) in **Misbah al-Shari'ah**, Chapter 9, it is narrated,

The washing closet where one relieves oneself, the toilet, is called so because people are relieved from the weights of the filths, and they clear out their dirt and impurities. The believer learns from this that the pure of the ephemeral things of this world (i.e. food) will finally have such an (impure) end. Then, abandoning this world and turning away from it will relieve him.

He empties his soul and his heart from being engaged with it, and disdains collecting and possessing it, as he disdains the impurities, the feces and filth. He thinks, of himself, how he is honored in an instance and feels humiliated in another. He then realizes that adhering to satisfaction and fear of God gives him relief in both worlds, that comfort is in neglecting this world, in refraining from enjoying it and in removing the impurity of (wanting) the unlawful and the doubtful. Therefore, he closes the door of arrogance to himself after knowing it, runs away from sins, opens the door of modesty, remorse and shyness, strives to carry out His Commands and to refrain from the forbidden, hoping for a good return and a delightful proximity.

He imprisons himself in the prison of fear, patience and abstinence from (satisfying) the desires until he arrives, with Allah (SWT)'s custody, in the eternal abode, and tastes His Pleasure, as this is what is reliable (counted), and everything else is nothing.

Besides physical cleanliness and revolution from every visit a Muslim experiences when visiting the washing closet, Islam has laid much more emphasis on the ways to safeguard oneself. Further, it would only be complacent for any person to replace the damage done by the microbes and parasites with clean water. The many times this happens, the better – and that is why The Prophet (S) recommended being clean and in ablution at all times. Muslims males also perform Istabra after urinating – a procedure where the penile organ is squeezed to get rid of the remaining urine in the organ. Silent coughing and a push in the groin area are also recommended after urinating.

As Muslims, one cannot pray or perform acts of worship in an unclean state. Men and women have to take a shower (in a prescribed manner, as per the rulings) after sexual intercourse; women have to do the same after monthly bleeding; women also wait for ten days after giving child-birth and then take the ceremonial shower, and so forth. Washing away blood in wounds is also an obligation before prayers.

Muslims are further obliged to perform *major ablution* (ghusl) after having sexual intercourse. This individual, who is ceremonially unclean, is neither permitted to enter a mosque, unless passing through it without stopping for a single second. Furthermore, unclean individuals (Muslims or not) are not allowed to even enter or pass through the mosque of The Prophet (S) and Masjid al-Haram, The Sacred Mosque in Makkah that holds The Ka'bah. Apparently, for similar reasons, atheists and infidels are prohibited to visit these sacred mosques,

**O Believers! The idol worshipers are unclean; they shall not be permitted to approach The Sacred Mosque after this year. If you fear loss of income, God will shower you with His provisions, in accordance with His will. God is Omniscient, Most Wise.
(al-Qur'an, Chapter 9, Verse 28)**

al-Majlisi (1627) writes that *the whole City of Makkah is sacred and should be held in purity at all times. The whole city is a place of prayer and can be considered as a mosque.*

O you who believe! Do not violate the sanctity of The Monuments of Allah, or the sacred month, or the offering (during Hajj), nor the symbolic garlands, nor those repairing The Sacred House (The Ka'bah)....

(al-Qur'an, Chapter 5, Verse 02)

Water, is therefore one of the most pure elements in this universe and even The Prophet compared a faithful believer to water. The Qur'an also considers water as a source of Allah's Mercy.

From **The Disciplines of The Prayer** by al-Khumeini, it is stated in **Misbah al-Shari'ah** that al-Sadiq said,

When you intend purification and *wudhu* (ritual ablution), proceed to the water as you proceed to Allah's mercy, because Allah has made water the key to his proximity and supplication, and a guide to the court of His service. In addition, as Allah's mercy purifies the sins of the servants, similarly the outer filths are purified by water and by nothing else.

Allah, The Exalted, says, *And He it is Who sends the winds as good news heralding His Mercy, and We send down purifying water from the sky.*

(al-Qur'an – Chapter al-Furqan, Verse 48).

Minor ablution (*wudhu*) is therefore highly recommended, repeatedly, as per The Infallible (AS) - *light upon light*. In fact, the origin of the word *wudhu* means light or energy. Moreover, as we have observed before, this act has a strong ability to strengthen one's energy and information within the energy to increase productivity during worship.

Surely, Allah Loves those who turn unto Him constantly and Loves those who continually purify themselves.

(al-Qur'an – Chapter 02, Verse 222)

The Infallible have further said,

If you can always be in the state of *wudhu* (minor ablution), than do so for verily if The Angel of Death were to take the soul of a servant of God while the latter is in the state of *wudhu*, martyrdom is written for him. *Wudhu upon wudhu is light upon light.*

Burujardi, al-Khumeini's son-in-law narrates,

On several occasions I have seen al-Khumeini performing *wudhu*, and noticed that he closes the water tap between the acts of *wudhu*, and re-opens it (only) when it is necessary, to avoid any extra water to flow from the tap. This is while most of us do not have the smallest degree of attention toward the matter of wastage. For example, from the time we intend to perform *wudhu*, the tap is open until when our ablution is completed.

Whenever al-Khumeini wanted to perform wudhu, he was very careful in using less water. This vigilance was witnessed in the most minor of his movements. He always performed ghusl (the Friday major ablution) before the call of prayers at Friday noon, and his Friday ghusl was never left. Whenever the Imam performed wudhu, he would perform all the parts of it facing the direction of The Ka'bah in Makkah. Even if the basin was not in the direction of The Ka'bah, at every instance, after taking a handful of water, he closed the tap, and facing The Ka'bah, washed his face or hand. Al-Khumeini, in accordance with his self-commitment and Islamic belief, tried to practice whatever he preached.

Islam is one religion that has specific rulings on pure and impure items. The religion also has rulings on ways to purify an impure element and whether with water, earth or stones. Even though some of these rulings are now applied in the modern-day society, man has had to wait for decades until science gained crucial knowledge over the different types of dirt and cleansing agents.

Islam for example, considers urine, fecal matter, semen, as impure elements and you have to purify yourself after you get into contact with these elements. Alcohol is also forbidden. It is an impure element, and the internal and external electrical faults that occur after drinking alcohol is only now being appreciated and the West is spending a fortune to educate the young to abstain from alcohol.

Muslims are further advised to wash their hands before they prepare food and eat, and to wash their private parts with water after urinating or passing out fecal matter. Stones may be used for some cleaning after passing out fecal matter, but several different stones have to be used. Even though tissue paper may remove the dirt physically, these paper towels hardly do the job of proper cleansing. Similar is the case with a dog licking any given material, blood squirting out from one's wound, intoxicants or any other forbidden drink getting into contact with a person, and so forth – different types of cleansing methods have been prescribed.

Quoting al-Sadiq, al-Khumeini writes the following narration in his book **The Disciplines of The Prayer**,

The servant has been commanded to perform the *wudhu* (ritual ablution) to be pure when standing before The All-Powerful and supplicating, and by obeying Him, to be purged from filth and impurity, beside his removing laziness, expelling sleep and purifying the heart to stand in the Presence of The All-Powerful. Confining it (The *wudhu*) only to the face, the two hands, the head and the two feet, was because when the servant stands before The All-Powerful, the parts which are exposed are those which are ordered to be washed in the ablution - as with his face he performs the prostration, with his hands he requests, desires, dreads and supplicates, with his head he inclines to Him in his bowing down and his prostration, and with his legs he stands and sits..

When The Prophet was asked as to how one can achieve good concentration, fear of Allah and presence of heart in prayer, he replied that the person should take seriously the performance of Wudhu – the minor ablution, washing before prayer, and perform it well. Clearly, The Prophet meant a direct relationship between the wash and increased vibration in ones energy resulting in increased attention in prayer or other kinds of worship.

An advice from The Prophet (S) to Abu Dhar (AR):

O Abu Dhar! Performing wudhu during difficulties is among the things that wipe out sins, and frequent visits to the mosques, that is establishing (a pious) relationship with Allah (SWT).

Ablution is, therefore, one of the most divine and productive suggestions we have in Islam, and to perform this act for Allah (SWT) before any worship or even before any job may increase our attention and concentration drastically. Apparently, this electrical concept is not only related to Islam, but numerous mediaeval books of etiquette insist upon the washing of hands, face and teeth every morning. According to al-Qur'an,

Truly, Allah (SWT) loves those who often turn to him, and He loves those who cleanse themselves.

(al-Qur'an - Chapter 2, Verse 222)

In addition, to all the rulings we have in Islam, Allah (SWT) has only this to say: Allah (SWT) does not desire to make any impediment for you; but He desires to cleanse you, and that He may complete His blessings upon you; haply you may be grateful.

(al-Qur'an - Chapter 5, Verse 6)

The tradition is from **The Disciplines of The Prayer** by al-Khumeini,

A group of Jews came to The Messenger of Allah and asked him questions. Among their questions was why the four organs were given the *wudhu* (ablution), while they are the cleanest parts of the body?

The Messenger of Allah (SA) said,

When Satan whispered to Prophet Adam and he came near the tree and looked at it, he lost face. He stood up and walked to it - the first step taken towards leaving a better course of action as prescribed by The Almighty (although a sin was never committed as all Prophets of Allah are sinless). He took with his hand some of what was of it and ate it. Off his body flew what were on him of jewelry and apparel. He put his hand on the top of his head and wept.

Allah accepted his repentance, but made it incumbent upon him and his offspring to purify those four organs. Therefore, Allah ordered the face to be washed, because it looked at the tree. He ordered the hands to be washed with the elbows, because he took with them (the fruit of the tree). He ordered the head to be anointed (with the hand wet with water), as he put his hand on the top of his head, and He ordered the feet to be anointed because with them he walked to this act.

Islam Prefers White Clothing

al-Majlisi (1627) reports that The Prophet (S) preferred white clothing and that most of his garments were of white color. According to the *Science of Colorology*, white is the color of purity. It will purify the body on the highest levels. It is the highest charging field to bring peace and comfort at the highest level. Apparently, Islam has much emphasized white clothing, in particular when praying to Allah (SWT). For centuries, Muslims have been wearing white clothes during prayer and employed white shrouds for their dead, and now we have the advantage of knowing its merits.

Color is light and light is energy, so color is energy. Recent research into the effect of color on people has shown that people who are blind from birth can learn to differentiate colors through their fingertips by noticing the color's rate of vibration. Surprisingly why most fast food companies use red and orange as their colors. Red and orange both stimulate the appetite, which makes you feel hungrier, which means you buy more.

Today, most recent discoveries confirm the validity of using colors for healing and harmonizing the balance of body and mind. Innumerable experiments and tests have scientifically proven the influence of color on the human psyche. The color white in many cultures equals purity and it is the color of integrity. It is made up of all colors and therefore is complete. It is the highest charging field to bring peace and comfort at the maximal level. Therefore, the recommended white clothing is supposed to increase our attention and concentration in prayer, as we become more productive and energetic.

The Prophet (S) was correct when he said,

White is the best and purest of all colors, and should be worn when praying.

In Energy Field Soma,

The White pomander has the distinctive quality of containing the entire rainbow and may be used for protecting the complete electrical field, (chakras or energy centers) and bringing them into balance. It has cleansing and protecting essences.
(Bonkosky, 1999)

Medical doctors and nurses have been wearing white clothing for centuries, and besides cleanliness, the specific color clothing does have a protective effect and shields away the energy released by the sick people.

There are five recommendations about the head, and five others related to the body. The first five concerning the head are, washing the mouth, trimming the mustache, combing the hair, and drawing up water through the mouth and nostrils. The second five concerning the body are; circumcision, shaving the pubic hair, shaving off the hair in the armpits, clipping the nails, and cleansing the private parts.
(al-Khisaal, by Sheikh Saduq (AR), Page 125)

Continued cleanliness is considered one of the basic rules for attaining *spiritual perfection* (Taba Tabai, 1991). Islam recommends brushing teeth before performance of rituals, and especially at the time we perform wudhu and before prayer. As The Prophet (S) has advised,

If I were not hard upon my followers, I would enjoin them to brush their teeth before every prayer.

(Bihar al-Anwar; volume 76, page 126. al-Majlisi, 1627 (AR))

The Prophet (S), in particular, brushed his teeth before taking his ablution for prayer, upon waking up for his supererogatory night prayer, and before the dawn prayer. Apparently, The Prophet (S) also brushed his teeth before retiring and on his deathbed (al-Akili, 1993).

Eighteenth Rule

PRACTICING MODESTY AND HUMILITY

al-Khumeini (AR) writes the following about The Prophet (S),

The Prophet (S), whose knowledge was derived from The Divine Revelation, and whose soul was so great that it could predominate over the spirits of millions upon millions of human beings; who rejected all the practices and customs of the pagan Arabs; who shattered under his feet all the false creeds; abrogated all the scriptures and The Circle of Prophethood achieved its completion in his noble existence; who was the ruler of the world and The Hereafter, and who was the master of all the worlds, with the permission of Allah (SWT) Almighty - yet his humility towards the creatures of Allah (SWT) was more than of any other human being.

He hated to see his companions stand up in his respect; whenever he entered a gathering, he used to sit in the lowest place; he used to dine on the floor and used to sit on the floor and say, *'I am a slave of Allah (SWT). I dine like a slave and sit in the manner proper for a slave.'* Such, and better than what we have described, was the character and the modesty of this great personage.

A man who repeatedly exposes himself or herself in this world to the danger of sin should then always be careful not to approach the forbidden zone. This is what is explained as 'expressing humility' before The Almighty Allah (SWT). Truly,

O' servants of Allah (SWT)! You are like the sick, and The Creator of The World is like a Physician. The interest and welfare of the sick lie in those things that The Physician does in accordance with His Knowledge, not in those things that the sick crave. Surrender to God's Commands in order to join the ranks of the saved.

(Prophet (S))

We need to compensate our sins by lamenting and shedding tears in the court of The Almighty. Indeed, how many sins have been forgiven? How many have been converted to virtuous deeds? How many have been kept far away from the people? Allah (SWT) has been so merciful to us and we seldom show any remorse. The advice is to,

Restrain your soul from what harms it before death overtakes you. Strive to keep your soul free just the same way you earn to strive to earn your livelihood. For your soul is hostage to your deeds and only your efforts can set it free.

Imam al-Sadiq (AS) similarly said,

The life of man does not amount to more than an instant. What is past is now non-existent; you do not feel its (actual) pleasure or pain. As for what is yet to come, you do not know what it is.

The true and precious capitals of your life are those few instants you presently enjoy. Master, then, your soul, and strive to redeem yourself and attain salvation. Be steadfast in enduring the rigor of worshipping Allah (SWT) and obeying His commandments, and preserve yourself from the pollution of sin and disobedience to Allah (SWT).

Whoever guards his heart from heedlessness, protects his self from appetites, and guards his intellect from ignorance, will be admitted into the company of the vigilant. Then he who guards his knowledge from fancies, his faith from innovation, and his property from the forbidden is among the righteous.

Imam al-Sadiq (AS) continues,

Therefore it is necessary for the self to be in all states either expressing his gratitude or proffering his excuse for lack of gratitude. If this is acceptable to Allah (SWT) it is a favor upon him, and if not it is justice upon him. For every self it is necessary to work that it may succeed in its acts of obedience, and for its protection in its efforts to abstain from doing harm.

The basis of all this is recognition of total need and dependence on Allah (SWT), caution and obedience. The key to it is in delegating your affair to Allah (SWT), cutting off expectation by always remembering death, and seeing that you are standing in the presence of The All Compelling. This gives you rest from confinement, rescue from the enemy, and peace for the self. The means to sincerity in obedience is harmony, and the root of that rests upon considering life as being only as long as a day.

The Messenger of Allah (SWT) (S) said,

This world lasts but an hour, so spend it in obedience to Allah (SWT).

The door to all of this is always to withdraw from the world by means of constant reflection. The means to this withdrawal is contentment, and abandoning such existential matters as does not concern you. The means to reflection is emptiness (desire less), and the buttress of emptiness is abstinence. The completion of abstinence is precaution, and the door to precaution is fear. The proof of fear is glorification of Allah (SWT), adherence to obeying His Commands with sincerity, fear and caution, and holding back from the forbidden; and the guide to this is knowledge. Almighty Allah (SWT) said, Those of His servants who are possessed of knowledge fear Allah (SWT). **(Qur'an - Chapter 35, Verse 28)**

Another form of humility is in prayer and that one should stand before Allah (The Glorious, The Exalted), with a humble heart and in a state of meekness; as much as possible in a pleasing and soft manner of tongue, considering himself as destitute and nothing; and in this manner should present his needs and wants in prayer. It has been narrated that Allah (SWT), said to Prophet Isa (AS),

O' Isa! Beseech me like a poor and destitute who does not have any shelter except Me; beseech Me with a broken heart; in isolation and privacy remember me a lot; I love a servant who uses his tongue in a soft and pleasing manner, in a state of earthiness, but, of course with an alive and awakened heart and not with a sleepy and negligent heart; I like and appreciate My servant's endeavors in sending his heart broken sad voice and melody of his grief to My Ears.

Also, it has been narrated that Allah (SWT), said to Prophet Musa (AS),

Whenever you beseech Me, you must be in a state of trembling with fear, being afraid of My Wrath put your face upon dirt by offering prostration; tell your mysteries with a broken heart and trembling with fear; let your heart die because of My Wrath; look towards Me in a state of frenzy (in My Love), like someone who runs away from the fear of enemy and cries for help and support. You too should cry because of fear of sins and seek My Help, because, I am the Best Helper for My Servants.

Imam al-Baqir (AS) narrated that *once an Angel riding al-Buraq and wearing a silk dress descended down to Earth for the first time and told The Prophet (S): "God The Almighty has given you the choice between being a servant and a Prophet, or a king and a Prophet, or humble." The Prophet noticed that Jibraeel (AS) was pointing to being humble. He said, "I choose being a humble Prophet." The Angel said, "Your rank near God will not be lowered as a result of this choice." Imam al-Baqir (AS) said, "This Angel carried the keys to the treasures on Earth."*

The Prophet of God (S) said - God The Almighty revealed to Prophet Daud (AS),

O' Daud, The closest people to Me in The Hereafter are those who are humble. The most distant people to Me in The Hereafter are those who are haughty.

Imam al-Sadiq (AS) said,

"God The Almighty revealed to Prophet Daud (AS) - why are you so quiet?" Prophet Daud said, "Your awe has silenced me." God asked, "Why are you so slim?" He said, "Your love made me slim." God The Almighty said, "Why are you so poor?" He said, "Standing up for your right has made me poor." God The Almighty said, "O' Daud! Why have you humiliated yourself?" He said, "Your indescribable Majesty and Grandeur has humiliated me."

God The Almighty said, "O' Daud! Now I give you the glad tidings that you will receive what you love The Day you meet Me. Associate with the people according to their own ways, but be separate from them in your religious issues. You will attain whatever you want from Me on The Resurrection Day."

ABrief Note on Kibr – an Important Sign of Modesty
Al-Sadiq (AS) has said,

Verily Kibr (pride) is its lowest degree.

Kibr is the name of a psychic state in which a person feels a sense of superiority and behaves the same with others. Its signs are discernible in his or her actions and its symptoms are clearly noticed by others by which they know that he is proud. According to al-Khumeini (AR), Kibr is something different from Ujb, and, as this vice is the offspring and fruit of the tree of Ujb. Ujb consists of self-love and conceit, and the meaning of Kibr is to consider oneself superior to others.

al-Khumeini (AR) further lists down six kinds of such a great sin,

1. Kibr because of possessing true faith and belief,
2. As opposed to it is the pride in invalid faith and false belief.
3. Pride because of good qualities and praiseworthy attributes.
4. Pride in moral vices and undesirable qualities.
5. Pride in one's righteous deeds and devotional exercises.
6. Pride in sinful and wicked deeds.

The Prophet (S) has said,

Never can the person who possesses a speck of pride inside his heart enter Paradise.

Al-Imam al-Baqir (AS and al-Imam al-Sadiq (AS) have also said something almost similar to this statement. In al-Kafi al-Imam al-Baqir (A) is reported to have said,

Honor is God's Robe and Pride is His Mantle; God Almighty will throw one who wants to acquire it into Hell.

Moreover, that too, what kind of Hell! The Hell, which is prepared for the proud, is different from the Hell into which other sinners will go. In a highly trustworthy tradition, Ibn Bukayr reports from al Imam al-Sadiq (AS) that he said,

Verily there is a valley in Hell for the proud called 'Saqar'. Once it complained to The Almighty about the intensity of its heat, and requested Him to relieve it for some time so that it may take a breath. As soon as it breathed, its breath filled the entire hell with fire.

ABrief Note on Hijab – The MODEST Dress for Muslim Women

Say to the believing men that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty: that will make for greater purity for them: And Allah is well acquainted with all that they do.

And say to the believing women that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty; that they should not display their beauty and ornaments except what (must ordinarily) appear thereof; that they should draw their veils over their bosoms and not display their beauty except to their husbands, their fathers, their husband's fathers, their sons, their husbands' sons, their brothers or their brothers' sons, or their sisters' sons, or their women, or the slaves whom their right hands possess, or male servants free of physical needs, or small children who have no sense of the shame of sex; and that they should not strike their feet in order to draw attention to their hidden ornaments. In addition, O' You Believers! turn ye all together towards Allah, that ye may attain Bliss.

(Qur'an – Chapter 24, Verses 30-31)

Curse! Curse be on that woman who walks and reveals her beauty to men.
(Holy Prophet (S))

Hijab (veil, female covering; lowering down one's eyes) is yet another weapon for a believing male and female, although more relevant to females. It is a weapon, that when employed efficiently it will most surely over-power our enemy in much less of a time than other weapons that we may possess. It is very delicate in nature but can fight a great deal on our behalf and even sacrifice itself for us.

The Philosophy

Know that a woman has a strong desire to show off and display her beauty in presence of men. She always wishes to capture the hearts of men. However, this has to be avoided - for in Islam, a woman holds esteem respect of herself. Islam does allow one to do everything but not anytime. Depending on the situations, one is allowed to enjoy what she desires. This is because Islam aims at keeping everyone safe from committing an illicit act. In addition, beauty is one such element that can destroy the sincerity and piety of many people. For this reason, Islam has made it compulsory for a woman to cover herself and not reveal her beauty in the presence of men outside the family circle (na-mahram men).

In this world, it is natural for a human being to respond to stimulation, for any stimulus is bound to produce a certain response even if not desired. A beautiful woman is one of the most powerful stimulants in the eyes of men. A woman with her beauty revealed is a danger to any community for she lets men play with her in their dreams. As a result, these men start living in an imaginary world controlled by Shaytan, The Accursed.

al-Mutahhari (AR) wants us to understand that a man's attention to a woman is not based on bread and butter as one is satiated and satisfied after eating. To a man, a woman with her beauty revealed for everyone to admire and devour is a continuous stimulant with no satisfaction or satiation point. It is like adding fuel to fire, the result is increase in the intensity and severity of fire.

Imam al-Baqir (AS) once said that Shaytan everyday morning exclaims,

Today, the weapon of great benefit and success to me will be 'women'.

Imagine, a society that members naked and half-dressed women attending schools; women barely dressed in conversation with men; women with adornments covering their entire body trying to lure men into evil! This is where the women loose their respect and become the slaves of men.

Women should therefore, be careful not to include themselves among the army of Shaytan out to destroy the believing community. Muslim women should never advertise their beauty and always abide by the rules and regulations of the hijab. In this present world, hijab has certainly lost its purpose. Unfortunately, hijab itself has become a fashion and a woman wears it to enhance her beauty and appearance. In general, a Muslim woman should not include herself in this group with no faith.

Hijab and the Sacrifices in Karbala

The advise is to not play around with the scarf which you observe in presence of men. Remember, this scarf is not a piece of cloth but a result of great many 'bloody' sacrifices made by the respected women of Islam in Karbala. This scarf represents Lady Fatima (AS) and you walk with her flag whenever you put it on. Do give it as much respect possible and take care of yourself.

When Imam al-Sajjad (AS) was asked as to which experience hurt him most during The Tragedy of Karbala, his reply was 'al-Sham' in Damascus where the respected ladies were forced to parade in front of men without hijab.

Hijab and Judgment Day

The Prophet (S) once exclaimed that nearing the end of the world,

Women will be observing hijab, but will appear naked in the eyes of Allah (SWT)!

This because, she will be covered in adornments, deviates from her religion and indulges in illicit acts. She will fulfill her evil desires and turn unlawful acts into lawful ones.

The Ideal Woman

Concerning the best and most pious woman, Lady Fatima (AS) once said,

She neither looks at men. She also keeps herself far from men so that men do not see her.

When Allah (SWT) created 'shyness' together with its ten parts, it is reported by Aimmah (AS) that nine parts of that 'shyness' was given to women and only one part to men.

Further, it is reported that on The Day of Judgment, Lady Maryam (AS) will be brought forward in the presence of those women who were proud of their beauty and advertised it to men by either not observing the hijab or by observing the hijab with adornments thereby destroying the whole purpose of the hijab. All the women present will be surprised at the beauty of Lady Maryam (AS).

At this stage, Allah (SWT) will exclaim to the women present that Lady Maryam (AS) had the most 'beauty' in herself and she still preserved it. The women will have no reply and will have to face the consequences.

The Clothing of Hijab

The advise to a Muslim Woman is to *keep in mind that the hijab we have been talking about represents a cloth that covers your entire body and is not of different colors that may stimulate the attention of men. It should be as loose as possible and even the smallest part of your dress should be covered, lest some men get attracted to that small part of your dress.*

There is also a hijab for your voice, the way you walk, and the places you visit. Apparently, the great grand daughters of The Prophet (S) used to place fingers into the mouth near the tongue whenever they were confronted with men they had to converse with. This was because they did not have a desire to reveal their beautiful voices and reserved the whole beauty for their husbands. In addition, when you walk do not strike your feet on the ground to attract attention.

Observers report that Imam Ali (AS) never said salaams to young women or avoided greeting them. When asked about this, he replied that the reason was to try and refrain himself from hearing the reply of a young woman's beautiful voice – though Imam Ali (AS) was infallible and Shaytan could not even approach him. This is a lesson to all of us that there is a hijab of a woman's voice as well.

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Lowering One's Gaze

When Prophet Musa (AS) was commanded to leave Egypt because of the fear head of striking a person to his death, he came across two women lifting buckets of water from a well. He asked to help the two women and in return for his favor, the two women asked Prophet Musa (AS) to accompany them to their place of residence so that their father can personally return his favor. However, when they were about to leave, Prophet Musa (AS) requested the two women to remain behind and throw stones to the left or right until they reached home. This is how Prophets (AS) practiced abstinence and piety, and thus we have a lesson to all humankind.

There is nothing profitable than lowering one's gaze, for the sight is not lowered from things, which Allah (SWT) has forbidden unless the witnessing of majesty and glory has already come to the heart.

The Commander of the Faithful (AS) was asked what could help in lowering one's gaze. He said,

Submission to the power of Him Who is aware of your secret. The eye is the spy of the hearts and the messenger of the intellect; therefore lower your gaze from whatever is not appropriate to your faith, from whatever your heart dislikes and from whatever your intellect finds repugnant.

The Prophet (S) said,

Lower your eyes and you will see wonders.

Prophet Isa (AS) once said to the disciples,

Beware of looking at forbidden things, for that is the seed of desire and leads to deviant behavior. John the Baptist said, *I would prefer death to a glance, which is unnecessary.*

Abdullah (SWT) ibn Mas'ud (AR) said to a man who had visited a woman (who happened to be na-mahram to him) while she was ill,

It would have been better for you to loose your eyes than to have visited your sick person.

It is said that whenever the eye looks at something forbidden, a knot of desire is tied in the person's heart, and that knot will only be untied by one of two conditions: either by weeping out of grief and regret in true repentance, or by taking possession of what one desired and looked at. Moreover, if a person takes possession unjustly, without repentance, then that will take him to The Fire. As for the one who repents of it with grief and egret, his abode is The Garden and his destiny is God's Favor

Nineteenth Rule

ABSTAINING FROM TASTY FOOD

We need to learn to be content with what The Almighty gives us as sustenance and never demand more. Food should be consumed with the intention of sustaining life and energy. Of course, one can always enjoy but we should never forget Allah (SWT). By forgetting Him and His presence, we would overeat, talk nonsense while eating, and not thank The One who brought us food in the first place.

Scholars who have reached these higher stages of Spiritual Perfection have strongly advised us to keep away from the pleasures of this world, even though many of them have been permitted by Allah (SWT). This is because refusing something you like is a great blow to one's Nafs, Soul and Desire and it is one way to tame one's desires and bring them under control, instead of the opposite.

Once, Amirul Mu'mineen, Ali, son of Abu Talib peace be upon him, was offered a sweet dish called *Khubais* (mixture of dates, raisins and ghee), but he refused to eat it. They said, "Do you consider it forbidden?" He said,

No, but I fear that my heart may become so desirous of it, that I am forced to come out in its quest.

As defined, *Zuhd* is the absence of desire and the *Zahid* is someone who is not fond of such mundane things as food and drink, dress and housing, other objects of appetite and pleasure, property and status, good name, proximity to rulers and influence, and every other thing that would depart from him at the time of death. This absence of love for mundane matters is because of neither incapacity nor ignorance about them, nor for any purpose or reward. Someone who has this quality is a *Zahid* in the above-mentioned sense.

However, a real *Zahid* is one whose *Zuhd*, as described, is not accompanied even with the hope of deliverance from the chastisement of Hell or the reward of Paradise, but solely for the sake of restraining his soul after knowing the benefits and consequences of each of these things mentioned. His *Zuhd* is habitual and is without any trace of greed, hope or expectation, worldly or otherworldly. This quality becomes habitual by means of restraining the soul from seeking pleasures, and by making it accustomed to austerities so that indifference to desire becomes firmly established in it.

In one of the anecdotes of the ascetics, it is related that there was a man who had been selling the stew of sheep's head and paludah (a sweet beverage made of starch jelly) for thirty years without ever tasting any of them. Asked the reason for this austerity, he replied,

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When my soul desired these two things, I told it that it would never get any of them if it were to touch any of them. I did that so that it would not incline towards any pleasure whatsoever.

It is reported that his reverence, Shaykh Rajab Ali never cared for delicious meals. Most often, he used such simple foods as potatoes and puddings. At the tablecloth, he would kneel down facing The Qiblah and kind of bending over the food. Sometimes he would also hold up the plate in his hands while eating. He would always eat with full appetite. Sometimes he would put some of his food in the plate of a friend that he could reach out (as a sign of respect). While eating, he would not talk, and the others would keep silent out of respect for him. If someone invited him to a feast, he would accept or reject it with some deliberation. Nevertheless, he would most often accept his friends' invitations.

A similar incident with al-Khumeini (AR) when he asked for a watermelon and his followers brought him a very nice and tasty watermelon. It is reported that al-Khumeini (AR) refused to partake such a watermelon because it was so red and delicious. He – *may Allah fill his grave and the graves of all believers with flowers and fragrances from Paradise* - said that *he would prefer to have full control over his desires; and that if he partakes of the fruit, he will have lost control over his desires.*

Twentieth Rule

SECRECY

It is one of the most important points for a spiritual traveler to observe. Spiritual journalists and scholars have laid great importance to secrecy and should be observed as part of our lifestyle. We should always maintain secrecy and make it a protector of our virtuous deeds. Unfortunately, we are always at risk by contaminating our virtuous acts with pride within ourselves after (or even before) we perform a particular act of pleasing Allah (SWT). This is where we begin to slowly announce and proclaim to the world around us the virtuous act that we performed on a certain day.

Imam Ali (AS) has advised and informed us that,

One secret prayer of a servant is equal to seventy open prayers.

This teaches you and me to keep our sufferings, prayers and invocations secret and confidential because it helps in keeping them pure, as with many other acts done for the sake of Allah only. Scholars have also advised us that,

The story of a believer is like that of a branch of a tree, which the winds move. The believer gets pushed around by pains and illnesses. The story of a hypocrite is like that of a straight cane, which is never bent or harmed until death approaches, and it bends down.

One also needs to be quiet and secretive about the trials and tribulations he or she goes through. Imam al-Sadiq (AS) said:

Visit the ill, and ask them to pray for you, since their prayer is equal to the prayers of the angels. Whenever one gets ill at night and accepts it with pleasure, God will record the reward of sixty years of worship for him.

He was asked, What do you mean by accepting it with pleasure?

He said, It means that he does not complain to anyone about his illness.

Imam al-Baqir (AS) said,

Go to visit the ill and ask them to pray for you since their prayer equals the prayers of The Angels. Whoever gets ill at night and accepts it with pleasure and is grateful for it, gets the reward of sixty years of worship.

They asked him, What do you mean by its acceptance? He said,

To be patient, and inform no one else about his problem. When the night passes and the morning arrives, he should thank God for what he suffered.

Twenty-First Rule

PRECEPTOR AND SPIRITUAL GUIDE

The late Ayatullah Mirza Ali Qazi (AR) has said,

The most important requirement in this path is having a knowledgeable, selfless perfected preceptor. When a person is a seeker on The Path to Allah, if they spend half of their lives looking for a preceptor, it is worth it. The one who has found a preceptor, they have traversed half the way.

A preceptor/spiritual guide is necessary for any spiritual traveler and adhering to his or her commands is a requirement of the journey itself. The preceptors are of two types, General and Special. A *general preceptor* is a highly experienced scholar who can answer questions whenever possible and assist us in our journey towards practicing The Unity of Allah (SWT) in its totality. To know whether a general preceptor is fit to be so, it is necessary to watch him or her closely and have contact for a considerable time. Remember, no one can be a preceptor in the true sense unless and until he or she receives The Light of The Glory of Divine Essence.

Scholars have cautioned us that the further stages of this journey require a special kind of preceptor. Only The Prophet (S) and his Rightful Successors (AS) hold this extremely high position. Their guidance and company are vital and crucial throughout the journey. The nature of this company is esoteric and not physical, *for the real nature of The Imam (AS) is his luminosity, the authority of which extends to everyone and everything in this world* (al-Taba Tabai in **Light Within Me**)

Allamah Taba Tabai (AR) further writes that,

Whatever stages the spiritual traveler traverses, he covers them in The Light of The Imam (AS), and The Imam (AS) controls every position to which he advances, that position. Throughout his journey, the spiritual traveler enjoys the company of The Imam (AS) and remains associated with him. Even after reaching his destination, he needs the company of The Imam (AS), for it is The Imam (AS) who teaches him the rules that are observed in The World of Divinity.

Imam Ali (AS) cautions us the importance of a leader and remarks,

He who proceeds independently in his opinion is destroyed, and he who seeks advice of men becomes partner in their wisdom. To seek advice is the guidance itself, and he who proceeds independently with his opinion incurs the danger.

The Prophet (S) further states,

There is no solitude drearier than pride, and no support stronger than consultation.

Therefore, only after we have firmly kept The Prophet (S) and his progeny (AS) as our spiritual guides, in particular Imam al-Mahdi (AS) - may Allah (SWT) hasten his reappearance - then we can have access to their assistance. They all were indeed great and we can spend hundreds of years trying to learn and appreciate the devout and pure lives they lived.

Shaykh Rajab Ali (AR) has said,

Try to set your heart for God; when your heart is for God, He will be there; when He is there all that relates to Him will be present and evident there; whenever you will all will be with you, for God is there, the spirits of the Prophets and Awliya will be there; if you will, even Makkah and Madinah will be with you So try that your heart be just for God so that whatever is created by God be present to you!

Besides the esoteric relationship with The Infallible (AS), and in particular The living al-Mahdi (AS), which involves mostly intention, prayer and the need for his assistance, he is there for us any second we seek his help, in any way. He has even promised to help us when a knife is near one's throat and he is about to be killed, but calls The Imam (AS) for help.

The physical relationship involves the reading and familiarizing ourselves with the workings they left for us – Nahj al-Balagha, Sahifa al-Alawiyya, Sahifa al-Sajjadiyya, and the rest. We also need to contemplate on each of their traditions that we have from them. This way, we have answers about this sacred journey from their writings and there is no need for assistance from people who have not been blessed to embark on even the earlier stages of this journey. The second part of this physical journey is, therefore, to seek assistance from the leaders and highly revered scholars who have undertaken this journey and attain higher states of perfection.

It is reported by Sayyid Lavasani that, Imam al-Khui (AR), one of the greatest Shiite Mujtahid (Jurist) of his time, use to communicate with the Spiritual Community (in particular The Jinnat Community) and they often came to him so that he can answer the questions from The Jinn.

A Brief Note on Respecting The Preceptor's Opinions

About respecting the opinions and suggestions from such leaders, and what they inform us in regards to this sacred journey, Allamah Taba Tabai (AR) says,

Philosophers say that the chances of being saved in a ship without a captain from the stormy waves of ocean are brighter than those of a man being saved in an outburst of wild passion.

Allah Forbid! That we should ever become aggressive during academic discussions, in particular with our spiritual leader, the general preceptor. If you see that the other party is justified in its argument, you are expected to admit your fault and confirm what opponents say. Try not to dispute what you are advised to do unless you are right in your argument. In one long narration,

The Prophet cautions his followers not to wrangle over a religious issue (although academic discussions are favored). The Prophet (S) further asked them to stop wrangling and that he would not be an intercessor to any wrangler. Unless a believer refrains from wrangling and altercation, he cannot know the truth.

Also, whatever is unknown to you ask from the learned ones, but be careful not to question them with the intention of examining their knowledge or giving them hard time, is an advice from Imam al-Sadiq (AS).

Understanding the nature of The Aimmah (AS) is what is vital on this stage. Writing about this particular stage of The Spiritual Journey, al-Taba Tabai (AR) writes in detail about The Virtues of Ali (AS) as he wants us to take this stage very seriously and learn from The Most Perfect Creation after The Prophet Muhammad (S). There is NO mistake ever when one learns from The Perfect of The Creations, including the esoteric and/or energy/spiritual relationship with The Perfect Living al-Mahdi (AS) and other Aimmah (AS).

al-Khumeini (AR) invites us to acknowledge that no path for the realization of divine existence can be undertaken unless one familiarizes himself with the apparent form of Islamic laws. Unless a person fully acquaints himself with the knowledge of the Shariah laws and follows them faithfully, he cannot attain the higher values of morality. Without adhering to the apparent teachings of Islam it is not possible that the Divine Knowledge could descend upon his heart, and the wisdom of the invisible, and the mysteries of the revered law be revealed to him.

al-Khumeini (AR) further advises us that if we hear anything, which has been reported from any thinker or scholar, we should not refute it or consider it invalid just because it is not in accordance with our taste, or does not fit in our mode of thinking. This idea may have its origin from a higher source, from even The Qur'an and Hadith. How strange it will be that a Mujtahid (jurist) issues a ruling (fatwa) regarding a certain aspect in Islam, and we reject it without examining the relevant evidences.

Virtues of The Prince of The Believers, Imam Ali (AS)

It is narrated by Allamah Majlisi (AR) that Imam Zayn al-Aabideen (AS), who relates on the authority of his father Muhammad al-Baqir (AS), reported that The Prophet (S) had once refused to say funeral prayers at the funeral of Barau, till Ali (AS), who happened to be absent at that hour, returned and prayed with The Prophet (S) the funeral prayers.

After the funeral, The Prophet (S) congratulated the family members of Barau on his happy entrance into Paradise, and The Heavenly Ladies welcoming him with pleasure. In addition, The Prophet (S) continued,

EVEN IF BARAU'S SINS HAD EXCEEDED IN NUMBER OF THE SANDS, PARTICLES OF DUST, DROPS OF RAIN, LEAVES OF TREES, HAIRS OF ANIMALS, GLANCES OF THEIR EYES, THEIR BREATHINGS, MOTIONS AND STOPS, ALL WOULD HAVE BEEN FORGIVEN AND PARDONED AT THE PRAYER OF ALI.

SEEK THE PRAYERS OF ALI (AS) AND BEWARE OF HIS CURSE, FOR EVERYONE HE CURSES WILL CERTAINLY BE DESTROYED, ALTHOUGH HIS GOOD DEEDS EQUAL IN NUMBER OF THE CREATURES OF ALLAH (SWT)!

In Uyoon al-Akhbaar from Imam al-Ridha (AS) concerning this verse,

The Trust (in Chapter 33, Verse 72) is The Wilaayat. Whoever claims it without a right has disbelieved.

Also from the same book from Imam al-Sadiq (AS),

Surely Allah (SWT), The Blessed and High, created the spirits before the bodies by two thousand years, and He made the most high and noble of them Muhammad (S) and Ali, Hasan and Husayn (AS) and the (remaining) Imams (AS).

Then he presented it (The Trust) to The Skies, The Earth and The Mountains so their light faded. So Allah (SWT), The Blessed and High said,

These are My beloved ones, My near ones, My proofs over My Creation and The Leaders of My Creation. I have not created any creation more beloved to me than them - for them and for those who are near to them. I have created My Paradise (for them and their loved and near ones, the followers), and for those who oppose them and be inimical towards them I have created My Hell. So whoever claims their position with Me and their place in My Greatness I will punish them with such a chastisement that I will not punish anyone with a punishment the like of these persons in all the worlds, and I will place him with the hypocrites in the lowest grade in My Hell.

Whoever affirms their Mastership and does not claim their position and place with My Greatness, I will place these persons with them in the meadows of My Paradise, and they will have whatever they want from Me. I will shower unto them My Mercy and I will make them My neighbors. I will cause them to be intercessors for the sinners among My servants, male and female. Therefore, their Successorship is a Trust from Me to My creation...

From the book al-Amaali, from At-Taliqaani (AR) with his chain of narrators, from Imam al-Sadiq (AS) - The Messenger of Allah (S) said,

Surely Allah (SWT) has made for my brother, Imam Ali, son of Abu Talib (AS) virtues that none can count but He. Therefore, whoever mentions only one of his many virtues with full conviction concerning it, Allah (SWT) forgives him of his sins that which has passed and that which is to come, even if he came on The Day of Judgment with the sins of all men & jinn.

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Moreover, whoever writes a virtue of the many virtues of Imam Ali, son of Abu Talib (AS) The Angels will not seize in seeking forgiveness for him as long as a trace of that writing remains. And whoever listens to a virtue of his many virtues, Allah (SWT) forgives him the sins that he committed by listening; and whoever looks to the writing of his virtues, Allah (SWT) forgives him those sins that he committed by looking.

Then the Messenger of Allah (SWT) (S) said,

To look at Ali, son of Abu Talib (AS) is worship, to remember him is worship and the faith of a servant is not accepted except by (rectification of) his mastership and being clear of his enemies.

Also from the book al-Amaali from Muhammad, son of al-Qasam al-Astarabaadi with his chain of narrators, The Prophet (S) was once asked,

Surely, this person (pointing towards a faithful servant) has climbed this day in elevation in good deeds and obedience, so much that if it was divided among the people of The Heavens and Earth, the share of the least of them would be the forgiveness of his sins and mandatory (entrance into) Heaven for him.

Therefore, the people gathered around that faithful servant and asked him as to what he did today that The Prophet (S) himself is praising the act so much. The man replied, 'I don't know whether I did anything other than that I came out from my house seeking the fulfillment of a need which its fulfillment I found being delayed, so I feared that the opportunity passed me. Therefore, I said to myself that I would replace it with a look at the face Imam Ali, son of Abu Talib (AS) for I heard The Messenger of Allah (S) say,

A look at the face of Imam Ali (AS) is worship.

So The Messenger of Allah (S) said,

Yes, by Allah! (Looking at the face of Ali (AS) is worship. In addition, which (kind of) worship. You, O' Servant of Allah (SWT), came seeking to earn some coins by which you could nourish your family and the opportunity passed you so you replaced it by looking at the face of Imam Ali (AS), and you love him and believe in his superiority. (Indeed) That is better for you than if you were in the possession of the weight of the whole world in red gold and you spent it in charity in the way of Allah (SWT). You will (thus) intercede for every breath you took in your journeying toward him 1000 necks. Allah (SWT) will free (people) from The Fire by your intercession.

From the book ar-Rawdha, it is reported that The Messenger of Allah (SWT) once exclaimed,

No people gather and mention a virtue of Imam Ali, son of Abu Talib (AS) but descend upon them The Angels of the sky until they encircle them. So when they (the people) disperse, The Angels ascend to the sky and the (other) Angels say, 'surely we smell of your fragrance that which we do not smell in other Angels. We have never sensed a fragrance more beautiful than this.' Therefore, The Angels reply, 'We were with a (group of) people who were mentioning Muhammad (S) and his Ahlul-Bayt (AS), thus do we smell of their fragrance, (and) so we became perfumed.' Therefore, the other Angels say, 'Take us to those people (on earth).' Therefore, The Angels with fragrance reply, 'They dispersed, and every one of them has gone to his place of residence.' Therefore, they say, 'Take us down so that we can at least get perfumed by that place.'

Ibn Abbas (AR) narrates that once a person asked The Prophet (S) if The Love of Ali (AS) would benefit him on The Day of Judgment! So The Prophet (S) said to that person that,

When The Day of Judgment shall arrive, Allah (SWT) will order an Angel to set The Fire ablaze, and He will order an Angel by the name of Ridhwan (AS) to bring Paradise near. Then He will extend The Bridge and establish The Scale under The Throne and a caller shall call out to Muhammad (S) and bring his followers for the Accounting.

Then He will extend on The Bridge 7 archways; and after every archway will be (the distance of) 7 thousand years, and on every archway shall be Angels who shall sweep away humankind. (By Allah!) No soul shall pass these archways but one who befriended Imam Ali (AS) and his Ahlul-Bayt (Peace be on all of them); and the one who knew them and they knew him.

And whoever didn't know them (the Ahlul-Bayt (AS) will fall into The Fire on the top of his head, even if he had with him the worship of 70,000 servants, because, all the worship will not bear weight on The Gathering Day on The Scale and no foot of a human shall be firm on The Bridge except by The Love of Imam Ali (AS). Moreover, to this is the indication with His, Allah (SWT)'s word,

In addition, Allah shall make firm those who believe, with the firm word in this world and in the hereafter.

(Qur'an - Chapter 14, Verse 27)

Ibn Abbas (AR) further narrates that the Messenger of Allah (S) also said to Ali (AS),

O' Ali! Love of you has not become firm in the heart of any believer but his foot will be firm on The Bridge, until he enters heaven.

The author of Uyun al-Akhbar narrates,

Once Imam Ali (AS) was travelling with a Jew (who had not recognized The Imam (AS) and passed on a path crossing across over the water. Then the Jew called out to Amir al-Mu'mineen (AS) and remarked, 'Hey you! If you had my knowledge, you would be able to cross (the water with your horse) as I have crossed.'

So Amir al-Mu'mineen (AS) said to the Jew to remain firm where he was. Then he (Imam Ali (AS) pointed to the water so it solidified, and he passed over on it. When the Jew saw this act, he fell on his feet and said, 'O' Youth! What did you say so as to change the water to stone?'

Amir al-Mu'mineen (AS) said to him, 'So what did you yourself say so as to cross over the water?' The Jew replied, 'I called Allah (SWT) by His Greatest Name.' So Amir al-Mu'mineen (AS) asked as to what was The Great Name of Allah (SWT). The Jew replied, 'I asked Him by The Name of The Successor of Muhammad (S).' So Amir al-Mu'mineen (AS) said to him, 'I am the successor of Muhammad (S).' Then the Jew said, 'Surely it's the truth', and then he submitted (and became a Muslim).

Moreover, of that is what Ammar Yasir (AR) narrated. He said,

'I came to my Master (Ali AS) one day and he recognized feelings of sadness in me.' Therefore, he said, 'What's Wrong?' I said, 'A debt, which the debtor came to claim.' Therefore, he pointed to a rock and said, 'Take this and pay your debt off from it.' So Ammar said, 'But it's a rock.' So Amir al-Mu'mineen (AS) said, 'Call upon Allah (SWT) by my name, He will turn it (the rock) into gold for you.'

Therefore, Ammar said, 'I called upon Allah (SWT) by his name and the rock became gold (instantly).' Therefore, he said, 'Take from it your need.' Therefore, I said, 'How can I soften it?' He (AS) said, 'O' One Weak in Certainty! Ask Allah (SWT) by my name to soften the rock, for it was by my name that Allah (SWT) enabled the metal to become soft for Prophet Daud (AS).' Ammar (AR) said, 'So I called upon Allah (SWT) by his name and it became soft, and I took what I needed from it.' Then he said, 'Call upon Allah (SWT) by my name to make the rest of the rock as it was.'

Advise to The Lovers of Ali (AS)

Love of Ali comes with following his commands, The Commands set by Allah, and there is no other way to achieve higher stages in Paradise.

Muhammad ibn Marid that he said,

"I said to Imam al-Sadiq may peace be upon him, "A hadith has been narrated to us from you that you said: 'When you have acquired the ma'rifah (i.e. of the rights of The Imam's, may peace be upon them), then do whatever you want:

He replied, 'I have indeed said that.' I said to him, 'Even if one were to commit adultery and theft and drink wine?' He said, 'Inna Lillahi Wa Inna Ilayhi Raji'un! By God, they (i.e. those who have interpreted our statements in such a manner) have not been just to us.

(Is it fair for them to believe that) they would get away with whatever they do whereas we ourselves will be answerable for our acts! What I said was that when you have acquired ma'rifah perform any works you want, whether its good be great or small, for they will be accepted of you."

al-Sadiq (AS) has said,

Beware of these base people (who claim to be Shias). Verily, the Shiah of Ali (AS) is none except one who is chaste in his manner of earning his livelihood and sexual conduct. (It is one) whose diligence is intense, who works for his Creator, hoping for His reward and fearing His punishment. When you see, such people know that they are the followers (Shiah) of Ja'far.

Imam al-Baqir (AS) said,

O Jabir, do not let false doctrines and opinions deceive you into imagining that the love of Ali, may peace be upon him, is sufficient for you. Can it be sufficient for a man to declare, "I befriend Ali, may peace be upon him, I and am an adherent of his wilayah," without being diligent and without working much (good) works? Truly, were he to say that I love The Messenger of Allah (and The Messenger of Allah was better than Ali) while neglecting to follow him in his conduct (sirah) and failing to act in accordance with his sunnah, his love would not be of any avail to him .

Twenty-Second Rule

DAILY VERBAL RECITATION OF **LITURGIES**

Scholars have said that liturgies can be of much importance as water is to our living cells. The factors, that would fully assist us in our war with the Nafs is constant remembrance of Allah (SWT), and remembering the graces bestowed by Him. For example, the air we breathe day and night, upon which our existence as well as that of other living beings is dependent; nothing, can remain alive without it. Apparently, this applies to the other gifts that we are gifted without any hesitation from The Lord (e.g. sight, hearing, taste, and so forth). Each carries unlimited benefits.

Moreover, He fulfils our needs in this world and The Hereafter on a daily basis, without having any need of our adoration. Being obedient to His Commands, or disobeying them and committing sinful acts do not make any difference to Him. Whilst keeping in mind all of these blessings, do we not see that respecting and obeying such a Benefactor is essential for us? He is The Creator and King of this vast cosmos, whose infiniteness cannot be measured or even conceived by human intellect. Allamah Taba Tabai (AR) cautions us that we,

Human beings, a creature crawling on one of the smallest planets miserably fails to grasp the extent of his own small world, whose sun cannot be compared with far greater suns of innumerable galaxies. Our solar system is nothing as compared to lesser other solar systems, which still elude the keen eyes of great explorers and investigators of the world.

al-Sadiq (AS) reminds us that,

With every breath you take, a thanksgiving is incumbent upon you, indeed, a thousand thanks or more. The lowest level of gratitude is to see that the blessing comes from Allah (SWT) irrespective of the cause for it, and without the heart being attached to that cause. It consists of being satisfied with what is given; it means obeying Him with regard to His blessing, or opposing Him in any of His commands and prohibitions because of His blessing.

Scholars have reminded us that every time one gives thanks to Allah, he or she is obliged to give yet greater thanks, so on and for infinitum, and this while absorbed in His Blessings and unable to achieve the ultimate state of gratitude. For how can the bondsman match with gratitude the countless and infinite blessings of Allah (SWT).

al-Khumeini (AR) reminds us not to have any hope or expectations from anyone but Allah (SWT). Except Him, The Almighty, nobody else can help us. With all humility and with all the tears our eyes can offer, we need to pray to Allah (SWT) and seek His assistance to emerge victorious in this critical battle. In addition, we need to keep in mind that mere repetition of liturgies without paying attention and contemplating to their meaning is hardly of any use.

Therefore, it makes sense that we should only hope in Allah and that only He has the power and ability to answer our prayers and increase our blessings in this world and the next.

A Brief Note on Hope in Allah

In the famous book of al-Kafi as well as in many authentic books the following tradition has been narrated from Imam al-Sadiq (AS) who has quoted from his father who quoted from The Prophet (S) that Allah has said to some of The Prophets,

I swear by My Majesty and Splendor that: whoever puts his hope in someone other than Me, I will cut off his hope, will dress him in the robe of disgrace and wretchedness, will deprive him from My Nearness, will cut off communication with him and will hide his memory. Woe is upon him, who takes shelter in other than Me during difficulties, while the solution of difficulties rest with Me. Does he hope in others while I remain living and eternal? Does he go to the homes of human beings for solution of his problems while the gates of their houses remain closed? Does he leave the door of My House while its gate remains always open?

Was there anyone who trusted Me and was betrayed? The hopes of My servants are tied to Me, and I take care of their hopes. I have filled the sky with those who never get tired of My Praise, and have ordered The Angels never to close the door between my servants and Me. Does not, the one who faces the problem know that no one can solve it except with My Permission? Why does not the servant approach Me for his needs, while I had already blessed him with favors without his asking for them?

Why does he not ask me instead of asking others? Does he imagine that in the beginning I bestow My favors upon the servant and will now deprive him after his request? Am I miser that My servants regard me as miserly? Do not the world and Hereafter belong to me? Are not mercy and benevolence My characteristics? Do not all the desires end with Me? Who has the power to terminate them?

I swear with My Majesty and Splendor that if all the needs of all of the world's habitants are summed up, and if I bestow upon them in accordance to their wants, not even the equivalent to the weight of a tiny particle will be decreased from My Kingdom. Whatever do I bestow how could it be susceptible to loss or reduction? How destitute and wretched is the one who is hopeless of My Blessings? How helpless is the one who disobeys me, indulges into forbidden deeds, disregards My limits and transgresses.

In another divine tradition it has been narrated,

Whatever my servant imagines about Me, I am exactly like his imagination, therefore, lest my servant imagine anything except good about Me.

In a tradition it has been narrated that Pharaoh (Firaun) was being drowned he pleaded for help from Prophet Musa (AS) and since he turned down his request, Allah (The Glorious, The Exalted), revealed to him,

O' Musa! You did not help Pharaoh because you were not his creator, but if he would have called Me for help, without doubt, I would have helped him, and after all I happen to be his Creator.

Twenty-Third Rule

REMEMBRANCE, RECOLLECTION **AND EVIL THOUGHTS**

Imam al-Sadiq (AS) has said,

Remembering God often is one of the most important acts that God has made incumbent upon His servants.

Beware that by this I do not mean just reciting the praises of God The Almighty. Rather I mean remembering what God has allowed, what He has forbidden, obeying God and abandoning sins.

Unus ibn Abdul Rahman narrated that Luqman said to his son

O' my dear son! Be careful when you enter a gathering to sit with those who are remembering God. This way your knowledge will increase if you are knowledgeable, and you will become knowledgeable if you are ignorant. There is hope that God will spread the shade of His Mercy upon them, and you may benefit from His Mercy, too. Nevertheless, if you see some people who do not remember God, do not sit with them since you will not gain any knowledge if you are knowledgeable, and you will be more misguided if you are ignorant, and God may encompass them with the shadow of His Chastisement in which case you will be chastised too.

al-Khumeini (AR) quotes Imam al-Baqir (AS), who quotes The Prophet (S) who then quotes Allah (SWT), The Almighty as having said,

By My Honor, My Glory, My Greatness, My Light, My Loftiness, and By The Highness of My Station! When My slave gives preference to his desire over My wish, I put his affairs into confusion; make his life baffling in this world and his heart preoccupied with the world, although I do not give him anything of it except what I have preordained for him.

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In addition,

by My Honor, My Glory, My Greatness, My Light, My Loftiness, and By The Highness of My Station! If My slave prefers My wish to his desire, My Angels protect him, The Heavens and the earth guarantee his sustenance, and I look after his trade and bring the world to him though it should be reluctant and recalcitrant.

One vital condition for a spiritual traveler in his divine struggle to attain The Pleasure of The Almighty is to control the flight of his or her imagination, so that The Devil and his armies can be over-powered and taken control.

It has been said that,

If you are determined on self-rectification and have made your mind to purify your inner self and banish satanic forces, you need to prevent your mind from nursing corrupt and sinful thoughts, and always divert it to high and noble ideas.

In the beginning, it may appear difficult since Shaytan and his forces glorify bad things in your eyes. However, with little concentration and attention everything becomes easy. In addition, if you have been successful in your attempts, thank Allah (SWT) Almighty for His help, and pursue these matters further. Dear servant of Allah (SWT) seeks for God's help at every moment. Pray and beg humbly in the court of your Lord. As Allah (SWT) states in The Qur'an,

Whenever those who practice piety are troubled by an evil thought from Shaytan, they remember Allah (SWT) and then they forthwith see the light.

(Qur'an - Chapter 7, Verse 201)

Allah, in His Infinite Mercy is very much forgiving and we should take heed of this kind of treatment from The Almighty. So much that

Al-Sadiq (AS) says,

'When a servant turns to God with sincere repentance (tawbatan nasuhan), God loves him and covers him (i.e. his sins) in the world and The Hereafter.' I said, 'And how does He cover him?'

'The Imam (AS) replied, "He makes the two Angels (assigned to write his deeds) forget that which they have written of his sins. Then He inspires his bodily members (saying), "Do conceal his sins," and He inspires the earth's places (saying), "Conceal the sins that he used to commit over you." Then he meets God, at the time that he meets Him, in such a manner that there is nothing to give witness against him regarding any sin."

Twenty-Fourth Rule

EXERCISES

The following instructions have been highly recommended for a wayfarer before, during and after his or her spiritual journey. These steps should help one establish a stronger base for the journey and make certain that the future steps that require more attention and energy does not let one down and stop the journey.

These steps mentioned here exactly as the Scholars who undertook this journey and are enjoying its benefits have written them.

First: Before every thing else a devotee must purify his self from sins and moral abjectness by means of repentance. In the beginning with the intention of repentance, take a bath (ghusl) and during bathing, think about your past sins and esoteric contamination and then with a feeling of shame, present your self before The Most Merciful and Most Compassionate Lord saying, *Oh Lord! I have repented and have returned to you. I have taken a firm decision never to sin again. As I cleaned my body with water, I have also cleaned my heart from sins and moral abjectness.*

Second: Consider yourself all the time under the presence of God-Almighty. Try your best to remember God in all circumstances and if occasionally negligence overtakes you try to return to the previous state immediately.

Third: One must be strict in guarding his self against contamination with sins. During a period of twenty-four hours, he must fix a time for self-scrutiny, with extreme accuracy should review his daily deeds, and should seriously demonstrate his self.

Fourth: One should remain silent and should speak whenever it is necessary to speak.

Fifth: One should eat moderately to meet his physical needs and should strictly avoid over-eating and becoming a slave of belly.

Sixth: One should maintain his ablution all the times i.e. whenever he terminates ablution he should perform it again. The Holy Prophet (S) narrated a tradition,

The God-Almighty said: Whoever after termination of ablution does not perform it again has been unfaithful to me; whoever after performance of ablution does not offer two units of prayer has done oppression, and whoever after performance of ablution offers prayer and requests for his worldly and spiritual needs, if I don't grant them, I have oppressed him. However, I am not the oppressor God.

Wasail al-Shi'a, vol. 1, page 268

Seventh: One should fix a time during 24 hours preferably during night before dawn for practicing concentration and presence of heart, by sitting alone in an isolated place, lowering his head upon knees, concentrating all the senses towards face and strictly avoiding entry of all external thoughts and memories. One should remain in this state for a while. May be this action would result in some spiritual contemplation for the wayfarer.

Eight: Invocation: "Oh Self-Existent, Eternal, there is no god save Thee," (Ya Hayyu Ya Qayyum Ya Man La Ilaha Illa Ant), should be recited continuously by tongue together with heart's presence i.e. whatever is being chanted by tongue is also comprehended by the heart.

Ninth: During a period of 24 hours, one must perform a prolonged prostration with concentration and presence of heart in proportion to one's strength and should repeat the invocation: "There is no god save Thee. You are glorified. Lo! I have been a wrong Doer." (La Ilaha Illalla Anta Subhanaka Inni Kuntu Minadh Dhalimin). The prolongation of prostration has proven as very effective and produces good spiritual revelations. Some of the devoted wayfarers have repeated this invocation as much as four thousand times during a single prolonged prostration.

Tenth: One should fix a certain time during 24 hours and with presence of heart should repeat the invocation, "O' You Who are free from needs and O' You Who is The Granter of Our needs." (Ya Ghani Ya Mughni!)

Eleventh: One should recite The Qur'an with presence of mind daily, preferably in the standing position and should ponder over the meanings of its verses.

Twelfth: One should awake a little before the call of Adhan for the morning prayer, after performing required ablutions should offer Night Prayer (Namaz-e-Shab or Salat-ul-Lail), and after finishing it should recite the following verses of Chapter of Heights (al-A'raf) with heart's presence, which is useful for attaining certainty and negation of external thoughts.

"Lo Your Lord is God who created the heavens and the earth in six days, then mounted He The Throne. He covers the night with the day, which in haste to follow it, and hath made the sun, the moon and the stars subservient by His command. His verily is all creation and commandment Blessed is God, The Lord of the worlds."

"(O' mankind!) call upon your Lord humbly and in secret. Lo! He loves not the aggressors. Work not confusion in the earth after the fair ordering (thereof, and call on Him in fear and hope). Lo! the mercy of God is nigh unto the good." (**Qur'an - Chapter 7, Verse 54-56**)

al-Kafi, vol. 1, page 344

In order to achieve the desired result the above-mentioned instructions are practiced for a period of 40 days. It is possible that the wayfarer may succeed in receiving God's attention and might be blessed with spiritual contemplation. However, if after passing forty days one is not fortunate enough to receive such blessings, instead of becoming disappointed, the program should be repeated again and again till the desired results are accomplished. Without giving up seriousness, action, and struggle the wayfarer should remain seriously committed towards his spiritual migration and seek favor from The Most Merciful Lord. When ever, he develops the required decency and competency to receive God's special blessing -it will be bestowed upon him.

In case a wayfarer in the beginning does not have the strength to perform all of the above-mentioned guidelines, he may begin with few gradually adding others. However, most important among these deeds are pondering, self-control, heart's presence, and attention towards God-Almighty. It is crucial that a wayfarer should thoroughly negate all sort of external thoughts and should pay absolute attention towards God- Almighty, which is a difficult task indeed.

The negation of other than God could be achieved gradually in three steps:

First: During first stage while reciting invocation, try your best to concentrate all your thoughts towards the invocation while strictly preventing the entries of all external thoughts.

Second: During this stage one should recite invocation exactly like the first stage with the exception that, while reciting complete attention should be paid towards its meanings and contents, in a manner that mind should become clearly aware of this occurrence. At the same time, efforts should be made to strictly prevent the attack of all sorts of external thoughts and memories. This program should be exercised until one is able to prevent the attacks of all external thoughts during the entire period of invocation, while being remained attentive to their meanings and contents.

Third: During third stage, try your best first to memorize the meanings of invocation inside the heart, and since it has accepted their meanings and believes in them, orders the tongue to recite them. In this case, the tongue actually follows the heart.

Fourth: At this stage try your best to negate all the meanings, contents, interpretations, and even the imaginations of invocations from the heart, thus, making it readied for receiving Divine blessings and illuminations. Try to pay absolute attention towards God-Almighty with your entire existence cleansing your hearts thoroughly from all sorts of external existence, opening its gate for the entrance of God's-Celestial Light. At this stage it is quite possible that one might succeed in receiving God's special attention, may utilize His grace and illuminations, and submerged with His attraction may ascent further higher and higher upon the ladder of perfection in his spiritual migration towards God-Almighty.

At this station of his Gnostic journey, the wayfarer might become so much absorbed that he would be seeing nothing except God-Almighty even forgetting his own self and actions. It is better for me to leave the description of these most sublime realities for the God's favorite saints who had seen the end of journey and have tasted the most delicious taste of the stages of desire, affection, and countenance.

Instructions of The Commander of The Faithful Imam Ali (AS)

Nouf had narrated,

"I saw The Commander of The Faithful Imam Ali (AS) while passing by with speed, I asked him, 'Oh my master! Where are you heading for?' 'Nouf, leave me alone, my desire is forcing me towards my beloved. 'Replied the Imam. 'O' my Master! What is your desire?' I asked him. 'the one who is supposed to know about it -already knows, and there is no need to describe it to some body else. The decency demands that a servant of God should not include others (as partner) as for as the blessings and wants are concerned.'" Replied the Imam.

"'O' Commander of The Faithful! I am afraid of being dominated by selfish whims and greed in my worldly affairs. 'I said. 'Why are you negligent towards the Saver of fearful ones and Protector of pious ones?' Said The Imam.

"'Introduce Him to me.'" I requested. 'He is The God-Almighty The Magnanimous through whose special benevolence your wishes are granted. Pay attention towards Him with your full strength and do not allow Satanic whispers to enter inside your heart, and if you find it difficult then consider me as your guarantor. Return to God and pay absolute attention towards Him. The glorious God has said,

"I swear to My Majesty and Splendor that: Whoever puts his hope in some one other than Me, I will cut off his hope, will dress him in the robe of disgrace and wretchedness, will deprive him from My Nearness, will cut off communication with him and will hide his memory. Woe be upon him, who takes shelter in other than Me during difficulties, while the solution of difficulties rests with Me. Does he hope in others while I remain Living and Eternal? Does he go to the homes of human beings for solution of his problems while the gates of their houses are closed? Does he leave the door of My house while its gate remains always open?

"'Was there anyone who trusted Me and was betrayed? The hopes of My servants are tied to Me, and I take care of their hopes. 'I have filled the sky with those who never get tired of My praise, and have ordered The Angels never to close the door between Me and My servants. Does not, the one who face the problem, know that no one can solve it except with My permission? Why does not the servant approach Me for his needs, while I had already blessed him with favors without his being asked for them?"

"Why does not he ask me instead of asking others? Does he imagine that in the beginning I bestow My favors upon the servant and will now deprive him after his request? Am I miser that My servants regard me as miserly? Do not the world and Hereafter belong to me? Do not the merry and benevolence are my characteristics? Do not the blessings and favors rest in My hand? Do not all the desires end with Me? Who has the power to terminate them?"

"I swear with My majesty and splendor that if all the needs of all of the world's habitants are summed up, and if I bestow upon them in accordance to their wants, not equivalent even to the weight of a tiny particle will be decreased from My Kingdom. Whatever is bestowed by Me how could be it susceptible to loss or reduction? How destitute and wretched is the one who is hopeless of My Blessings? How helpless is the one who disobeys me, indulges into forbidden deeds, disregards My limits and transgresses?"

The Commander of the Faithful, after narrating this narration said, 'O' Nouf! recite the following prayer:

"O' God! If I adore you -it is because of Your Mercy and Compassion, if I glorify You -it is because of Your Commandments, if I sanctify and attribute inviolability to you -it is because of your energy, if I chant the world of Monotheism with my tongue -it is because of Your Power. If I raise my eyes -I see Your Blessings all over, if I practice thriftiness, it is because to save Your Bounties, O' Lord! Whoever, You do not engage in Your invocation, and bestow upon him the grace of journeying towards Your countenance -life becomes for him like death, and death becomes for him a regret and disaster.

"O' Lord! Those who are able to see -look towards You with their esoteric eyes, mysteries of their hearts became manifested and their wants are granted, the veils of ignorance have been removed between You and them,. your Divine illumination has enlightened their hearts, they breath the breeze of Your Blessings, Your Majesty and Splendor has overwhelmed their hearts, they witness the signs of Your Absolute Power every where, there souls have reached near Your Sacred Throne and with dignity, tranquility, and humility engage themselves in Your invocations. Like a friend, You pay attention towards them, listen to their words, grant their, wants, and communicate with them.

"Please bestow upon me similar positions as attained by them, let the veils of ignorance be uplifted so that my soul could see the Divine illumination of Your Celestial Kingdom, and may receive an exalted position therein. Indeed, You have the absolute power over all things. 'O' God! How fearsome and terrible is journeying on the road which does not terminate in you. Whoever, chooses a shelter of other than you -would certainly be disappointed. Whoever puts his trust in other than you is like sitting upon an unstable base."

"O' God! who had induced hope within the hearts of all the hopeless ones and have removed their pains and sufferings, please do not deprive me from the grace of performing righteous deeds and preserve me -the shelter less and destitute- in Your Shelter. How come those, who put their trust in Your Mercy, could be inflicted with deprivation? While you remain absolutely free from the need of inflicting loss upon sinners."

"O' God! All sweetness and pleasures eventually are terminated except the pleasure of faith, which increases every day. O' God! My heart is looking towards You with plenty of desires; please let my heart taste the sweetness of seeing those desires granted. Indeed You have absolute power over all things."

"O' God! As some one who has reached near the enlightenment of Your Essence, I beg You, to bestow upon me all the blessings which are worthy of a believer. In addition, protect me from all sorts of evils and calamities the way You protect all Your favorite servants. In deed You have absolute power over all things."

"O' God! My request to You is as if the request of a confused beggar who does not have any shelter or support and except from you does not seek the help of any other helper. I request by The Name, which became manifested for Your favorite saints, thus, enabling them to become enlightened about Your Holy Essence, comprehended You as One, and worshipped You with sincerity indeed. Please bestow upon me too the learning to comprehend Your Holy Essence, so that I may admit the reality of Your Divinity and Godhood, and do not include me among them who worship Your Name only without paying attention to its meanings."

In addition, allocate at least a certain moments (among various moments) to pay attention towards me thus, enlightening my heart about Your Sacred Essence as well as the essence of your favorite saints. Indeed, you have absolute power over all things.

Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 94, page 94

Instructions of Imam al-Sadiq (AS)

Unwan Basari, an old man of ninety-four years has narrated as follows,

"For the sake of acquiring knowledge I used to visit Malik bin Anas. When Ja'far bin Muhammad (AS) came to our city, I went to visit him, because I wanted to acquire knowledge from his distinguished and eminent personality. One day he said to me:

"I am a person who had received God's special favor and attention and have incantation and invocations for every hour during day and night, therefore, you should not prevent me from their recital and like before continue to visit Malik bin Anas for learning knowledge."

"Hearing these words I become sad and disappointed and left his company. I said to myself. 'If Imam had discovered some goodness within me, certainly he would not have deprived me from his company. Then I left for The Prophet's mosque and offered salutation to him. Next day, I went to The Prophet's tomb and after offering two units of prayer raised my hands up and said,

"O' God! O' God! Make Ja'far's heart soft for me so that I could utilize his knowledge, and guide me towards straight path."

After that with a heavy broken heart returned home as well as visited Malik bin Anas, because love and affection for Ja'far bin Muhammad had penetrated far deeper inside my heart. For a long time I confined myself within the four walls of my home and did not come out except for offering mandatory daily prayers till my patience was exhausted one day I went to Imam's house and after knocking the door asked permission to enter inside. A servant came out and asked me."

"What do you want?' 'I would like to see the Imam and offer a salutation. 'I replied. 'My master is offering his prayer, replied the servant and returned inside the home, while I kept waiting outside the door. After a little while the servant returned and said: 'You may come in."

"I entered inside the house and offered salutation to Imam. He replied my salutation and said: 'Please be seated, may God-Almighty bestow upon you forgiveness. "Then he lowered his head and after a prolonged silence rose his head and said: 'What is your name? 'Abu Abdullah,' I replied. 'May God-Almighty bless you with His Special Grace and bestow upon you firmness. What do you want?'

"In this meeting there is no any other advantage for me except this prayer - even this much is going to be extremely precious for me. ' I said to myself Then I said: 'I asked God-Almighty to soften your heart for me so that I may utilize your knowledge. I hope my prayer would have been granted by him.

"Oh Abu Abdullah! Knowledge cannot be acquired by learning rather real knowledge is the light, which illuminates a person's heart that is blessed with His Guidance. Therefore, you are seeker of the knowledge; first make your heart comprehend the reality of (God's) servanthood, then request knowledge by means of deeds, and ask God-Almighty for comprehension so that he could make you understand. 'said The Imam.

"I said. 'O'! Honorable one!' 'Abu Abdullah!" "Please continue.' said the Imam. 'O' Imam! What is the reality of servanthood?' I asked.

The Imam replied. "The reality of servanthood consists in three things as follows:

First: A servant should not consider himself the owner of things, which have been bestowed upon him by God-Almighty, because servants never become owner of things rather consider all the wealth as God's property and spent it exactly in the same manner as prescribed by him.

Second: A servant should regard him as helpless in managing his own affairs.

Third: A servant should engage himself continuously in performance of deeds recommended by God-Almighty and avoidance of His forbidden deeds.

"Therefore, if a servant does not consider himself as the owner of the wealth, spending it for the sake of God's way would become easier for him. If he trusted God-Almighty as a competent manager for managing his affairs then tolerance of worldly hardships would become easier for him. If he kept himself engaged in performing Divine commands and sustained himself from committing forbidden deeds his precious time would not be wasted in nonsense amusements.

"And if God-Almighty honored a servant with these three characteristics then dealing with world, people, and Satan would become easier for him. In that case, he would not endeavor for increase of wealth for self-glorification, and would not wish for things whose possession is considered as means of prestige and superiority among the people and would not waste his precious hours in false pleasures. This is the first rank of piety, which have been described by God-Almighty as follows:

As for that abode of The Hereafter, we assign it unto those who seek not oppression in the earth, nor yet corruption, the sequel is for those who ward off evil.

(Qur'an - Chapter 28, Verse 83)

"O! Abu Abdullah! Please bestow upon me practical instructions. 'I said. The Imam said,

'I recommend you to follow the, following nine items. These are my recommendations and instructions for all those wayfarers who are journeying towards God-Almighty, and I pray that may God-Almighty bestow upon you His Special Grace.

The following are the guidelines: 'There are three guidelines for practicing self-asceticism, three guidelines for forbearance, and the last three guidelines are for education. Preserve them and, be careful not to act negligently in their practice'. Unwan Basari said: 'I was listening to Imam's instruction with my entire existence, then the Imam continued '.

The three instructions recommended by me for self-asceticism consist of:

1. Be careful, do not eat any thing until and unless you feel an appetite for it, because otherwise, it would be a matter of foolishness and ignorance.
2. Do not eat any thing until and unless you feel hungry.
3. When you eat always recite phrase in the Name of God (Bismillah) and eat only lawful foods.

The three instructions recommended by me for forbearance consist of:

1. Whoever tells you: 'For each sentence you speak to me, I will speak ten sentences in response. 'You should say in reply: 'If you speak ten sentences to me, in reply you will not hear even one sentence from me.
2. Whoever threatens you with abusive language, you should promise him good wishes and advice.
3. Whoever accuses you, you must say in reply: 'If you said it right may God forgive me and if you lied then may God forgive you.

The three guidelines recommended by me for education consist of:

1. Whatever is unknown to you ask from the learned ones, but be careful not to question them with the intention of examining their knowledge or giving them hard time.
2. Strictly avoid following your whims and as much as possible act prudently.
3. Strictly avoid issuance of religious decrees (fatwa) without religious documents. As much as you would like to run away while encountering a wild beast, similarly be careful not to offer your neck as a bridge for people's crossing.

"Then he said: 'O' Abu Abdullah! You may leave now. I have given you sufficient advice. Do not disrupt me from continuation of my incantations and invocations, because, I believe in the dignity of my own self: Salutations be upon those who are obedient to guidance."

Kashkul, Shaykh Bahai, vol. 2, p-184 - Biharul-Anwar, vol. 1, pp 224

Instructions of Allamah al-Majlisi (AR)

One of the most eminent wayfarers of Gnostic journey -the great learned Divine Scholar Mulla Muhammad Taqi Majlisi writes,

"Whatever this servant has discovered during his period of self-building and Gnosticism is related to the period when I was busy in studying commentary of The Holy Qur'an. One night, while I was in a state of partly sleep and partly awakened I saw The Holy Prophet Mohammad (S) in a dream. I said to my self that it is a good opportunity to take a profound look about the perfection and moral ethics of The Holy Prophet (S) The more I paid attention towards him I found his splendor and illumination spreading till it brightened the entire space around me."

"At this moment it was revealed to me that The Holy Qur'an is The Perfect Manifestation of The Holy Prophet's moral ethics. Therefore, to know more about Holy Prophet's moral ethics I must ponder deeply about The Holy Qur'an. The more I paid attention upon the verses of Holy Qur'an the more I discovered the sublime realities till at one instant I felt that a lot of realities and learning have been descended upon my heart."

"After that whenever I pondered about a Qur'anic verse, I felt that a special talent for its comprehension has been bestowed upon me. Of course, appreciation of this incident by some one who has not been blessed with such a grace is naturally difficult rather impossible, but my aim was to advice and guide the fellow brothers for the sake of God-Almighty.

The guidelines for asceticism and self-building consist of:

Useless talks, rather any thing other than God's Remembrance should be strictly avoided.

Living in luxurious, beautiful and comfortable housing as well as consumption of expensive foods, drinks and fancy clothing should be renounced. (one should limit himself to the extent of fulfilling his genuine needs).

Social mixing with other than God's most favorite saints should be strictly avoided.

Excessive sleep should be avoided and God's invocation with complete dedication should be recited continuously.

"One should become God's favorite saint by continuous recital of invocations namely: "O! Self-existent O! Eternal " (Ya Hayyu Ya Qayyum!) in addition "There is no god but God" (Ya Man La Ilaha Illa Ant), were able to obtain good results. I too have practiced the same invocation but perhaps my favorite invocation is

"O'! God"! (Ya Allah), with thorough cleansing of heart from all existence other than God, together with absolute concentration towards Him.

Of course, what is important is that God's Remembrance should be accompanied with absolute concentration and heart's presence.

Also, all other deeds do not come close to the importance assigned to invocation."

"If this is done for a period of forty days and nights continuously then certainly the doors of wisdom, learning, and love will be opened for the wayfarer enabling him to ascent towards the most exalted Gnostic positions of annihilation in God, or achieving permanence with God-Almighty.

Rozatehal-Mutaqin, vol. 13, p-128

Letter of Akhund-Mulla Hussein Quli Hamdani

The most eminent learned Divine scholar and Gnostic (late) Akhund Mulla Hussein-Quli Hamadani (AR) in his letter to one of the scholar in Tabriz writes,

"In The Name of God, The Beneficent, The Merciful"

"Praise be upon God of The Worlds, salutations be upon The Muhammad and his Holy Progeny and may be the curse of God be upon their enemies."

"It should not remain hidden for religious brothers that there is no way to achieve the nearness of The Lord of Splendor and Majesty except strictly following the sacred religious law of Islam (Sharia) in all movements, pauses, conversations, and instances etc. Superstitious methods practiced by some pseudo mystics and ignorant ones in accordance to their intellectual taste do not produce any desired result except their taking farther distance from God-Almighty."

"Even a person who forbids upon himself meat and leaves the hairs of his mustache untrimmed is blessed with the blessing of faith, (i.e. belief about the immunity from sin for The infallible Imams of The Prophet's Progeny) must understand, that unless and until he strictly practices their instructions and traditions for invocations, he would become farther away from God-Almighty."

"It is therefore, necessary that he must regard the sacred Divine Law (Sharia) with special reverence and should attach utmost importance for its execution. Whatever have been emphasized in the sacred religious law as well as whatever have been comprehended by this poor servant by using intellect and deliberating traditions may be concluded: "The fulfillment of the heartiest desire of all creatures -God's Nearness depends upon their making serious efforts and endeavors to quit sinning."

"So, if this is not done, recital of invocations and pondering over Qur'anic verses would not produce any useful result for heart, because the services rendered by some one who is in direct rebellion against The King would be useless. I do not know, what sort of King? The exaltedness belong to that king of Splendor and Majesty, and which enmity could be more worst then enmity with such a King?"

"You must better understand that your efforts and endeavor for achieving God's Nearness -while still sinning and being contaminated is a serious mistake. How come this matter has remained hidden from your eyes that it is the sin of a sinner that causes The King to feel hatred towards him, and this hatred can never be summed up with His Love."

"Since you know it with certainty that avoidance of sins is the beginning, end, apparent, and hidden of faith, therefore the sooner you engage yourself in self-struggle the better it would be. With absolute dedication from the moment you awake, all along the day till the time of sleep you must monitor your self strictly. Be careful to remain respectful because you are continuously in the presence of The Lord of Majesty and Splendor and know that all your body parts and members, including the finest particles of your existence are the prisoners of His Power Therefore, do not forget to observe the rules of etiquette. Worship him in a manner as though you are actually seeing Him, and if you do not see Him, any way He sees you."

"Be conscious about His Majesty and your humility, His Eminence and your lowness, His Magnanimity and your abjectness and His Freedom from needs and your neediness. Be aware that if you act negligently in remembering The Lord of Glory and Magnanimity but He does remember you, and in his presence stood like a helpless, wretched servant. Like a bony dog put your chin upon din before His feet. If this distinction and honor is not sufficient for you that He has permitted you to utter His Holy Exalted Name by your filthy tongue ? The tongue that had become unclean due to pollution of sinning."

"O' dear! Since The Most Compassionate and Most Merciful Lord has made the tongue as the reservoir of the mountain of light, to be commissioned only for His Holy invocation it is indeed shamelessness that The King' s reservoir be polluted by refuse and filth of lying, backbiting, cursing, teasing, and sinning. It should be a place full of perfume and rose water instead of being filled with filth and refuse. Beyond any doubt since you acted negligently in supervising your self strictly, you don't know what some of horrible sins and transgression have been committed by your body parts namely: ears, tongue, eyes, hands feet, belly, and sexual organs."

"What sorts of devastating fires have you ignited ? How much corruption have you induced in your religion? How much prohibited wounds have you inflicted upon your heart through the tongue's swords and arrows ? It will be surprising if it has not already been killed. If I want to comment about the details of these deviations even this entire book would not be enough, what can I do with one page? You, who have yet not cleaned your body parts from the filth, how do you expect someone to write for you about the heart' s condition ? Therefore, make haste, hurry up to perform a true repentance and seriously guard your self."

"In summary, after making his best endeavors for strictly guarding the self a wayfarer striving for God's Nearness should not be negligent about night vigil awakening before dawn and offering the night prayer (Namaz-e-Shab) with concentration and heart's presence. If time permits, he should engage himself in hymns and invocations but at least a part of night should be spent in invocation with heart's presence. In all these situations the wayfarer should not be without grief and sorrow and if he is -he should acquire its causes."

"In the end recite the following,

1. The rosary of Hazrat Fatima al-Zahra (AS)
2. Qur'anic Chapter of al-Ikhlās 12 times,
3. "There is no god but God. There is no partner, there is no kingdom except yours." (La Ilaha Illa Hu Wahdahu La Sharika Lah, Lahul Mulk) -10 times,
4. "There is no god but God" (la Ilaha Illa Hu) -100 times,
5. I Beseech God's forgiveness and offer repentance" (Astaghfirullah Rabbi Wa Atubu Ilaihi) -70 times,
6. A portion of Holy Qur'an and the famous prayer named Dua Sabah of The Commander of The Faithful Imam Ali (AS).

"One should remain in the state of ablution continuously and it is preferred to offer two units of prayer after performing each ablution. Be careful not to inflict the least damage or hurt the feeling of fellow human beings and you must strive sincerely in meeting the needs of fellow Muslims especially the scholars and pious ones. He should not attend any meeting where there is a possibility of sinning, even socialization with the negligent ones is harmful. Also, excessive involvement in world affairs –although permitted religiously, too much humor, nonsense talking, and listening to false rumors are injurious for the hearts condition ultimately making it a dead heart."

"Without practicing strict self-control simply engaging in invocation and deliberations would be fruitless and would not produce the results even though if one succeeds in achieving ecstasy, because it won't be durable and one should not be fooled with ecstasy achieved without self-surveillance. I do not have lot of strength and I beseech you to pray a lot for me and do not forget this humble wretched sinner full of guilt. Do recite Qur'anic Chapter of The Power (Qadr), one hundred times on Thursday night and Friday afternoon."

Tazkirateh al-Muttaqin, p-207

Instructions of Mirza Javad Agha Malaki Tabrizi (AR)

The most celebrated perfect Gnostic Mirza Javad Agha Malaki Tabrizi writes,

"The Holy prophet (S) through his repeated recommendations has emphasized the importance of prolonged prostration, which indeed is an extremely important matter. Prolonged prostration is the most nearest aspect of servanthood, and it is because of this consideration that two prostrations have been incorporated in each unit of prayer. About the prolonged prostration of Infallible Imams (AS) of The Prophets Progeny and their Shiite's, a lot of traditions have been narrated."

In the one of his prolonged prostration Imam al-Sajjad has repeated the following invocation one thousand times:

(La Ilaha Illa Hu Haqqan Haqqa, la Ilaha Illa Hu Tauban Wa Riqqa, La Ilaha Illa Hu Imanan Wa Sadqa)

"There is no god but God-truly and Justly." "There is no god but God I bow in humility in front of him." "There is no god but God is the truth indeed and is my faith."

About Imam al-Kadhim (AS) it has been reported that some times he prolonged his prostration from morning till noon, and similar incidents have been narrated about his companions namely: Ibne abi Amir, Jamil, and Kharbouz.

"During my stay in Najaf al-Ashraf, I had a learned pious scholar who was a Marja' Taqlid for religious students. I once asked him, 'What special act have you tried in your own life which is effective for a wayfarer in his spiritual Gnostic journey?' He replied,

To prolong the prostration during a period of twenty four hours and reciting of invocation: (La Ilaha Illa Ant Subhnaka Inni Kuntu Minadh Dhalimin). "There is no God save Thee. Be Thou Glorified. Lo! I have been a wrong doer." While reciting this invocation he must pay attention to the fact that God-Almighty is for inviolable to oppress me rather I am the one who have oppressed my own self and have blamed Him for that."

"My teacher recommended this prostration to those who were interested in Gnostic journey, and those who performed it obtained good results especially, those who prolonged it more. Some of them repeated this invocation in prostration one thousand times, some of them a little more or less and about some of them I heard that they repeated it three thousands times in their prostration."

al-Moraqebat, p-122

Instructions of Sheikh Najmuddin (AR)

"Know that engaging in invocations without paying due regards to recital manners and relevant etiquettes will not produce useful results. First a devoted wayfarer should prepare himself thoroughly to meet all the requirements of moral etiquette. When a true devotee is inflicted with the pain of desire for undertaking the spiritual journey, its symptoms are that he develops intense affection with invocations and feels frightened with the people until reaching to a point whereby he turns his face away from the people and takes shelter in invocation, as The Holy Qur'an says,

"Say God! Then leave them in the play of caviling."
(Qur'an - Chapter 6, Verse 91)

"As he continues to guard his invocations he should not be negligent towards its basis which is true repentance and should not commit sins. While, engaging in invocations it is preferable to take a bath (ghusl) and in case it is not possible one must make ablutions, because invocation is tantamount of waging wars against enemies in the battlefield, which cannot be done without armaments, and this is why the ablution has been called as the armaments of believers.

The clothing of devotee should be clean and should meet the following four requirements:

First: Cleanliness from impurities such as blood, urine, excrement etc.

Second: Cleanliness from oppression i.e. the clothing should not have been obtained through oppression.

Third: Cleanliness from sanctity i.e. it should not consist of forbidden (haram) material such as silk (for men).

Fourth: Cleanliness from vanity i.e. its length should be short in accordance with Islamic traditions and should not be dress of vanity.

The place of invocation should be dark, clean, and isolated and it is preferred to make it perfumed by burning some incenses. He should sit in the direction of Mecca, sitting in a squared position, a position, which is forbidden all times except for recital of invocation because Khuwaja (AR) after offering morning prayer used to sit in squared position until sun-rise. He would place his hands upon his thighs, making his heart and eyes readied with all due respect would start reciting the invocation (La Ilaha Illa Hu). "There is no god but God" - with his entire existence in a rhythmic cycle in a whistling manner without raising his voice.

"He would recite the invocation firmly and continuously pondering about its meanings within his heart as well as negating all the external thoughts. Like the meanings of "There is no God" (La Ilaha) he should negate whatever thoughts that enter inside his heart, meaning that he would no longer desire any thing else and would not like to have any other beloved except God-Almighty. In totality he should negate other gods and should affirm The God-Almighty as the beloved and ultimate desired object."

"While chanting each phrase of invocation the heart should accompany the tongue from the beginning till end negating and affirming, and in this process whenever he looks inside his heart and if discovers his heart attached to something else – he should discard it, returning the heart to God-Almighty. By negating -"There is no god" –he must nullify heart's attachment towards other than God, thus, destroying the roots of his attachment to other objects and replacing it with God's love."

"In this manner the devotee should chant invocation continuously, so that gradually the heart becomes cleaned and purified from all sorts of usual desirable objects achieving a state of heart's absolute domination with invocation. When it occurs the devotee becomes totally annihilated by the invocation's illumination turning him as singular, purifying his essence with all sort of attractions and obstacles, and enabling him to pass through the material and spiritual worlds swiftly."

"As it is said: that the heart of a believer is the place especially reserved for the union with The God-Almighty. Nevertheless, so far as the heart's domain is occupied by the alien elements, God's Majesty and Exaltedness does not consider it befitting for His entry. However, once the herald of "There is no God" announces the cleanliness of heart's domain from alien elements, one may then expect the entry of the Lord of the Majesty and Splendor. As The Holy Qur'an says,

So when thou art relieved still toil and strive to please thy Lord.
(Qur'an - Chapter 94, Verse 7-8)

Marsad al-ebad, page 150

Twenty-Fifth Rule

OBSTACLES

According to scholars who have attained the higher levels of Spiritual Perfection, a devotee has to encounter plenty of obstacles in his path and must struggle to remove them; otherwise, he would never be able to reach his desired destination. In addition, Shaytan, The Accursed is our main obstacle.

Haji Imam Quli Nakhjawani was the teacher in Gnosis of Agha Sayyid Husayn Agha Qazi, the father of the late Agha Mirza Ali Qazi. He completed his training in morality and gnosis at the hands of Sayyid Quraysh Qazwini. He says that when he got aged, one day he saw that he and Satan were standing on the top of a hill. He passed his hand on his beard and said to Satan,

"Now I am an old man please spare me if you can." Satan said: "Look this side." Sayyid Qazwini says that when he looked that side, he saw a ditch so deep that it sent a cold wave into his spine. Pointing to that ditch Satan said: "I have no sympathy or mercy for anybody. If I could lay my hands on you once, you would fall into the bottom of this ditch from which you would never have an escape."

Incompetence

According to al-Amini, The greatest obstacle in this journey and the end-result of attaining God's Nearness is the incompetence of his self. He says that *a heart contaminated and darkened by sinning cannot become a center for the illumination of Divine light. The heart of a sinner is an inverted heart, which forces him to move in the wrong direction. Then how could he move in the direction of God's Nearness and could accept God's blessings and favors?*

Worldly Attachments

Another obstacle is the attachment and love to worldly allurements such as desire of wealth and property, love of wife and children, which would prevent us from migration towards God-Almighty.

The Prophet (S) has said,

The first thing through which transgression against God-Almighty was done consisted of six characteristics: Love of world, love of position, love of women, love of eating, love of sleeping, and love of comforts.

Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 73, page 94

Obedience of Passions

The Third obstacle is surrender to selfish whims, passions and carnal desire for they continuously pull the heart from one direction to another one, thus, never allowing a person the opportunity to have a union with God-Almighty.

The Commander of the Faithful Imam Ali (As) said:

The most brave person is the one who could dominate over the passions of his self. **Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 70, page 76**

Overeating

Being a slave of the stomach and what one ingests is yet another obstacle. al-Amini says,

A person who strives day and night to arrange good and delicious food and fills his belly with different sorts of tasty foods, how could such a person have union with God-Almighty, develop affection, and establish secret communications with Him? With a stomach full of food how one could have a mood for worshipping and supplication? Some one who considers pleasure simply in eating and drinking, when would he taste the sweetness of supplication with God-Almighty? It is because of these considerations that overeating has been condemned in Islam.

Imam al-Sadiq (AS) said to Abu-Basir:

Stomach transgresses under the influence of over-eating. The most nearest situation between The God-Almighty and his servant is, when the stomach is empty and the worst situation is, when his stomach is full.

Wasail al-Shi'a, vol. 16, page 405

For the heart of a believer there is nothing worse than over-eating, because it will cause hard-heartedness and seduction, while hunger happens to be the most delicious disk for a believer's soul and heart, and health for his body.

al-Mustadarak, vol. 3, page 80

The Commander of The Faithful Imam Ali (AS) has said,

When God-Almighty intends to reform the believer's affair, He bestows upon him three blessings: less sleep, less appetite, and less speech.

al-Mustadarak, vol. 3 page 81

Hunger is the best help for controlling self and breaking up chronic habits.

al-Mustadarak, vol. 3 page 81

Unnecessary Talks

Unnecessary conversations is another obstacle, which makes it difficult to move towards the desired goal of spiritual perfection. God-Almighty has bestowed upon him the power of speech in order to fulfill his genuine needs. Excessive talking has the ability to produce – in the person – scattered and disturbed, and therefore cannot pay attention towards God-Almighty. The Prophet (S) had said,

Avoid speaking too much except while reciting invocations for God-Almighty, because, utterance of too many words other than God's Remembrance causes hard-heartedness and the most distant apart people from the God-Almighty are the people with darkened heart.

Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 71, page 281

The Prophet (S) said to Abu Dhar,

I recommend you to practice silence, because it would keep Satan away from you. It helps a lot for the protection of your religion.

Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 71, page 279

Allamah Taba Tabai (AR) says, *I have witnessed the most precious effects of silence. Practice silence for forty days and nights speaking only when it is required, remaining engaged in meditations and invocations until attaining purity and enlightenment.*

Love for Self

Love for self is another huge obstacle that requires constant attention – because Love for Allah has to supercede our love for ourselves. Pride, Riya and Ujb are all the result of loving ourselves and committing acts of worship to attract the attention of other humans.

Indecisiveness

Indecisiveness and lack of determination is an obstacle, which prevents a person from starting his deeds. As we know, Satan and the carnal self in the beginning try their best to show and prove to one that such perfection is insignificant and unnecessary.

I forgot all that is fair and foul in the world and thought the sweet and bitter events equal. I withdrew from social contact with any except scholars; I cut back food and sleep and life's other necessities to the bare minimum and devoted the rest of my time and resources to scholarship and research. I would often spend the night in study until sunrise (especially in spring and summer), and I would always research the next day's lesson in advance, making whatever exertions were called for to solve any problem that arose so that by class time I would already have a clear understanding of the Professor's topic.

Allamah S.M. H. Taba Tabai, Islamic Teachings, page 14

Some Words on Awaiting Deliverance through the Appearance of THE 12TH IMAM (AS) May Allah (SWT) Hasten His Reappearance

Dr. Jalali: What are the Muslims supposed to do during the period of occultation? In other words, what are their obligations during this period?

Mr. Hoshyar: Our scholars have identified and written in their books certain things Muslims ought to do during the occultation: to pray for The Twelfth Imam (AS); to do charitable works for him; to perform Hajj and to appoint someone to do that on his behalf; to seek his help and assistance in times of difficulty, and so on. There is no doubt that all these suggestions are praiseworthy and there is no need to enter into any discussion about them.

However, the most important obligation mentioned in the sources and that which needs further elaboration is awaiting deliverance through him (Intidhar al-Faraj). To some extent, this obligation is neglected and no detailed discussion about it has been undertaken. There are many traditions from The Imams, both recommending the awaiting and enumerating its merits and excellences, during the occultation. Let us cite some examples,

Imam al-Sadiq (AS) says,

Any one who dies with the love (and accepting the successorship) of The Ahlul-Bayt while awaiting deliverance through the appearance of The al-Qaim, resembles the one who will be in The al-Qaim's tent.

Imam al-Ridha (AS) reporting from his ancestors and from The Prophet (S) relates the tradition from the latter, who said,

The best deed of my community is to wait for the 'Deliverance'.

Imam Ali (AS) says,

Any one, who awaits our government, resembles the one who, in the way of Allah (SWT), has rolled in his own blood.

In another tradition Imam al-Ridha (AS) praises the one who awaits the deliverance, and says,

How praiseworthy are patience and waiting for deliverance! Have you not heard that Allah (SWT) says in The Qur'an, 'You wait, and We too are waiting.' So be patient because deliverance will come after despair. Those who were before you were even more patient than you.

There are numerous traditions on a similar theme. The Imams (AS) always used to advise their followers to await deliverance. They reminded them that the mere act of waiting for deliverance is a kind of emancipation. The one who waits is like the one who fights against the disbelievers on the battlefield and has rolled in his own blood. As such, there is no doubt that the weightiest obligation for Muslims during the occultation is to anticipate deliverance. Let us now consider the meaning of this awaiting or anticipating deliverance.

How can a person who anticipates deliverance acquire the greatest reward that accrues to the one who does well? Is it sufficient for the one awaiting the deliverance to materialize to say with their tongue that they are awaiting the appearance of The Imam of The Age? Or, perhaps, from time to time, he should cry out and pray: 'O' Allah (SWT), send the deliverance through The Imam of The Age.'

On the other hand, after the daily prayers or in The Holy Shrines he should beseech Allah (SWT) to hasten the deliverance! Alternatively, following the blessing on The Prophet and his family he should add, 'Allahumma 'Ajjil Farajahu Sharif', meaning, 'O' Allah (SWT), hasten the deliverance through this noble (Imam)! Alternatively, maybe he should read the special Prayer of Nudbah (Lamentation) on Friday mornings with a loud lament and sob.

All these recommendations are in their own place fitting. However, I do not think that by merely saying some things a person can attain the true benefit of awaiting the deliverance, whose excellences are enumerated in several traditions on the subject. Especially the comparison of the one awaiting the deliverance with the one dying on the battlefield fighting against the enemy of Allah (SWT), as related in one of the tradition above, cannot be just an exaggeration, since it is coming from The Imam to whom no false statement can be ascribed.

Imagine a person or persons who escape from every kind of social responsibility, from the moral responsibility of commanding the good and forbidding the evil, from taking a stance against corrupt and sinful behavior, from doing anything to stop injustices, by simply saying: 'O' Allah (SWT), let the deliverance through The Imam of The Age be imminent so that he can prevent this corrupt behavior.' Can your conscience accept that this person's status is comparable to the status of the one who is killed defending his religion? Can he be equal to the one who has sacrificed all his wealth, his family, and his comfort and security in the way of Allah (SWT) and attained the status of a martyr?

To be sure, there is a deeper meaning and significance to the act of awaiting the appearance of The Imam. In order to understand that let me preface the discussion with two general observations:

First, in the light of the traditions dealing with the function of al-Mahdi, it is possible to suggest that the program that The Imam intends to implement is ideal, comprehensive and, of course, difficult. It has as its target the reform of the entire world, the defeat of the forces of tyranny and wickedness in their entirety, the raising of Islam as the official religion of all the inhabitants of this world, the removal of prejudices and wrong attitudes from the minds of the people so that they can all live in peace and harmony under the government of Allah (SWT).

In addition, The Mahdi's revolution aspires to find a global community under one Allah (SWT), one religion, and one ideal system of law, and to bring all other communities under the united flag of Islam. Obviously, such a goal is not easy to accomplish. This program is practicable only when the human mind is prepared to accept those goals and to go beyond the narrow confines of materialistic ideologies to realize the value of God's guidance for humanity. The need for the revolution and the desire to promulgate the divine blueprint for an ideal human society have to come from the people who have actively participated in preparing the way for The Twelfth Imam (AS) to launch his program for the new world order.

Second, in view of several traditions reported from The Imams (AS), it appears that The Imam of The Age and his supporters will overcome the forces of disbelief and godless materialism by undertaking war. It will be with the power of just warfare that the forces of God's enemy and the supporters of disbelief and injustices will be exterminated. There are numerous traditions that speak about the impending use of force to achieve the goal.

For example, Imam al-Baqir (AS) said,

The Mahdi resembles his grandfather Muhammad (peace be upon him and his progeny) in the way in which the latter began his struggle with the sword. He will kill the enemies of Allah (SWT), and those who have oppressed the people and have led them astray. He will gain victory through sword and creating fear (in the enemy). None of his army will face defeat.

A companion of Imam al-Baqir (AS) by the name of Bashir (AR) told the Imam,

'People say that when The Mahdi launches his revolution his tasks will become easy for him and there will be no bloodshed even to the smallest measure of a wound made for the purpose of cupping.' The Imam (AS) said,

By Allah (SWT), that is not the case. If such a thing were possible, it would have taken place for The Prophet (S). On the contrary, his teeth were wounded and his forehead injured on the battlefield. I solemnly declare that the revolution of The Master of The Command will not take place without our endeavors on the battlefield and without our blood being spilt.

The traditions suggest that the victory of the al-Mahdi's revolution will not simply be the result of God's endorsement and endowment of some hidden power to The Imam. It is not expected to succeed without manifest forces like a miracle that brings to fruit on its program of reform and revival; victory does not depend on the ordinary course of events. Besides this divine endorsement of the revolution will rest upon a well-equipped army that is capable of handling the most advanced weaponry in the contemporary arsenals.

With these observations derived from different traditions about the final revolution under al-Mahdi, we can begin to understand the preconditions for the advent of The Imam. This will also help us in grasping the responsibilities Muslims have towards this revolution, and then in judging whether Muslims today are ready to actively support this difficult task, and whether their awaiting for the establishment of the ideal rule under the al-Qaim has any merit.

My own understanding, which is based on the traditions from The Ahlul-Bayt (AS), indicates that the most important duty of The Muslims during this period when The Twelfth Imam (AS) lives a life of invisible existence (Ghaybah) is, first of all, to work diligently at reforming ourselves from within and with all the necessary seriousness. Muslims should adorn themselves with Islamic virtues, perform all the duties that are made obligatory on them, and apply the directives provided by The Qur'an in their daily lives.

Second, they should extract the social teachings of Islam from the teachings of The Qur'an, The Prophet and The Ahlul-Bayt, in order to execute those perfectly in their societies. By implementing the Islamic economic programs, they should resolve their economic problems and fight against poverty, unemployment, and concentration of illicit wealth. By adopting the divinely ordained laws, they should rid themselves of injustices and corruption. In short, they should commit themselves to set in motion the realization of an Islamic political, social, economic, and legal system, and present this to the world as a viable alternative.

More importantly, Muslims should learn modern sciences with extreme seriousness in order to not only benefit themselves but also other societies around the world. They should seek to be the leaders in all fields of human knowledge. Through their own religious and scientific progress they should demonstrate to the entire world that Islamic laws and ethics can serve as the ideal global system that strikes the balance between this and the next world. Moreover, by combining the concerns of a complete legal codex with the spiritual and moral concerns of the Islamic system, Muslims can become the source of emulation for a humane political, social and economic system.

In other words, Muslims have the obligation of excelling in every possible field related to the betterment of human society in order to provide each discipline with the moral and spiritual dimensions that Islam seeks from its followers. It is only then that they can expect to lead and to establish an ideal Islamic system under the leadership of al-Mahdi. Those who are engaged in these endeavors to make the revolution of al-Mahdi possible and successful are the ones who are truly waiting for deliverance through the appearance of The Twelfth Imam (peace be upon him). These hard-working, self-sacrificing individuals are the soldiers of The Twelfth Imam and can be compared with those who are actually on the field of battle fighting the forces of evil and wickedness.

As for those people who expect their problems to be solved by the political, social, and economic system created by those who have no commitment to the faith or to its moral and spiritual components, have so far created systems which give rise to inequalities, immoderation in spending, injustices in distribution of resources, and the many other evils with which humanity is confounded today. The situation is so desperate that it is hard to imagine the level of exploitation, corruption, and conflict that is generated by the new wealth and power, the byproducts of scientific and technological advancements.

The rich countries intend to dominate; the poor countries have shamelessly submitted to the overbearing compromises negotiated by their own rulers, the majority of whom are corrupt and morally bankrupt. In order to remain in power, they have sold out their own people and countries to their powerful masters, who make for them their decisions through a remote control of providing destructive military hardware for use against their own citizens. Now, individual Muslims who sit around and do not even think about some matters that face their fellow Muslims cannot be said to anticipate the appearance of The Twelfth Imam! These people do not have the necessary preparation to institute Islamic world government, even if they repeat a hundred times: Allahumma 'Ajjil Farajahu-Sharif', meaning, 'O Allah (SWT), hasten the deliverance through this noble (Imam).'

This is what I have understood from the traditions that speak about the merits of anticipating the appearance of The Twelfth Imam (peace be upon him). The entire philosophy of Intidhar (awaiting, anticipation) is summed up by Imam al-Sadiq (AS) who said,

Prepare yourselves for the revolution of our al-Qa'im, even if it means to gather an arrow for fighting God's enemies.

Abd al-Hamid Wasiti mentioned to Imam al-Baqir, 'In anticipation of the occurrence (of The al-Qaim's revolution) we have even withdrawn from engaging in trade.' The Imam (AS) said,

O' 'Abd al-Hamid, do you think that the one who has given up his life in the way of Allah (SWT), Allah does not make deliverance guaranteed for him? By Allah (SWT)! Allah will certainly deliver him. May Allah have mercy on the one who keeps our mission alive.

'Abd al-Hamid asked, 'What happens if I die before the deliverance comes?' The Imam replied,

Any of those who say, 'If I meet al-Qa'im I will help him,' then such a person will share the status of the one who will have fought near The Imam (defending him). Indeed, he will share the status of the one who will have been killed (defending him).

According to Abu Basir (AR), one of most prominent companions of The Sixth Imam, one-day Imam al-Sadiq told his companions, 'Should I inform you about a deed without which Allah (SWT) does not accept people's achievements?' Abu Basir told the Imam to do so. The Imam (AS) said,

To bear witness about God's Unity and Muhammad's Prophethood; to acknowledge God's commands and prohibitions; to love us and disassociate from our enemies; to accept the authority of The Imams, and to act with piety and seriousness; to adopt gentleness and to await the deliverance through the appearance of The al-Qa'im.

He, then, went on to say,

We will have the authority, which Allah (SWT) will establish at the proper time. Whoever wishes to be a companion and close associate of our al-Qa'im should await deliverance through him. Moreover, such a person should adopt piety and virtuous life and continue to anticipate our al-Qa'im in that state. If they live like that and if they die before the advent of The al-Qa'im, then they will reap the reward of someone who has actually been with The al-Qa'im.

O' my followers, be serious and work hard while awaiting al-Qaim's emergence. O' you who are blessed with God's mercy, may you taste the sweetness of the final victory.