

Mohammad Hussain Fadhlullah

# Contemplations On Reason In ISLAM



Translated by  
S.As-Samarra'i

ALMALAK EDITIONS

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*Contemplations*  
*On Reason In Islam*

*The Religious Authority*

*Sayyed Muhammad Hussein Fadlullah*

Translated by

**S. As-Samarra'i**

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بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

*In the name of God  
the Compassionate, the Merciful*

## Translator's Preface

Reason is a crucial subject, unfortunately not dealt with often – it is even ignored as the cornerstone of differentiating between all things, conceptual as well as physical. This has led to tragic consequences, which is not surprising if emotions then take control, especially on the level of the masses and given the way they are often taught and led. It seems that even educational institutions fail to place reason in its proper place, as they go about teaching their subjects – any subjects – in an empirical way, as if not dealing with a general framework of knowledge, and often failing to utilise to the full this incredible tool, the mind.

### **The author's endeavour**

In his continuous effort to provide enlightenment for Muslims, his eminence Sayyid Mohammed Hosain Fadlollah tirelessly attempts to tackle the different issues that concern Islam, as a religion, a doctrine and a code of ethics, with a rational approach, based on the teachings of the sacred Scriptures: the Qur'an and the Sunnah that is narrated from the Prophet (sawa) and the Imams of Ahlul Bayt (as). In his analysis of the Scriptures – looking into their different levels of meaning, metaphor and engagement, and comparing them with each other and with other theories or words, including modern science and discoveries – he attempts to come up with theories that are not only as comprehensive as possible, but that are applicable in our time and at all levels: individual, social, political, economic etc. Being a scholar who himself has made a complete commentary of the Holy Qur'an, and

being a scholar who adopts what he preaches to various fields of religious activities, all this make his lectures all the more important as they encompass knowledge, experience and truthfulness.

### **Source of the book**

The book is a compilation of 38 weekly lectures that his eminence gave over the period 26<sup>th</sup> July 2003 to 16<sup>th</sup> October 2004. His lectures started with reason in the Qur'an, followed by reason in the Prophetic Sunnah, then reason in the narrations of Imam Ali (as), and finally in the teachings of Imam Musa al-Kadhim (as) to his companion Hisham bin al-Hakam. However, narrations of the Prophet (sawa) and the Imams (as) are spread across the lectures.

### **The translator's work**

Although my main effort was translating the lectures, the other aspects of my work have been as follows:

- (1) To produce a book, rather than a succession of lectures, I had to re-organise the lectures according to topics that seemed to best fit the aims of the author. This will, hopefully, highlight the elements of the theory that his eminence formulated from the Scriptures.
- (2) I had to divide these re-organised lectures into chapters, the last two of which are regarded as applications of the topic.
- (3) I had to tackle various general issues regarding translation (see notes below.)
- (4) Although any translation will almost certainly involve an expansion in the volume of words (something which is inevitable when translating any Scripture and conceptual text that is not at all

easy), a little reduction (around 10%) of the original was made during translation, so as to avoid unnecessary repetition.

(4) Footnotes have been added so as to give an idea about the persons, the scriptural sources, books and historical records that are mentioned in the text. But they are also used to explain some of the terms that, especially for non-Muslims, may not be clear (Imam, (sawa) etc). It is important to note that apart from a few footnotes that are the author's (denoted by *(The author.)* at the end of each), all footnotes have been inserted by the translator.

### Notes on the translation

Any translation involving text of a certain type, such as religious or poetic, is not easy or straightforward. The task will certainly be made more difficult when the material involves ideology, psychology, argument and theorisation. Sacred texts add to the complexity of the task as the translator has to be more careful when trying to transmit the meaning, which in the case of the Qur'an largely involves subtle meanings and detail. A book that is a compilation of lectures of this sort, presented by a distinguished scholar and grand authority like Sayyid Mohammed Hosain Fadlollah, though extremely interesting and enjoyable, can in no way be easy!

Although some translations opt for an almost completely meaning-dependent translation, one does not feel it necessary to do this when the aims of the original text are achieved without adopting an over-fastidious approach in this regard. In other words, when a more literal translation produced an adequate English version of a given piece of text, it was followed. This will help not only in conveying the author's text, but will also help in preserving those subtle

meanings, especially in Qur'anic verses, as well as many *hadith* narrations.

In attempting this task, I have followed a certain method, and the following gives some idea of the language used and the translation of the terminology involved.

(1) The word '*ʿaql*', the central subject of the book: This – along with its adjective or other forms – was translated as 'reason', 'mind', 'mental faculty' 'mental powers', 'mental capabilities', 'mentality', 'reasoning' and 'thinking'; a mixture of more than one of these has sometimes been used.

(2) Alternatives: Context dictated the use of more than one translation for a given word.

(3) The Qur'anic verses: These were translated using four translations:

(a) *The Meaning of the Holy Qur'an with Commentary*, Abdullah Yusuf Ali, Amana Corporation, Maryland, USA, 1992.

(b) *The Holy Qur'an with English Translation and Commentary*, S.V. Mir Ahmed Ali, Tahrike Tarsile Qur'an Inc., New York, USA, 1988.

(c) *The Meaning of the Glorious Qur'an*, (Mohammad) Marmaduke William Pickthall.

(d) *The Qur'an*, M.A.S. Abdel Haleem, Oxford University Press, Oxford, UK, 1<sup>st</sup> edition 2005.

The numbers of the chapters (*suras*) and verses (*ayahs*) have been inserted immediately after the verse as two numbers separated by a colon.

In attempting to provide the best translation for any Qur'anic verse, I always went for the meaning-based translation that is nearest to the literary translation; i.e. using the literal translation for words, and



structure, as long as it conveys the correct meaning. However, I found myself forced, on most occasions, to mix more than one of the above four translations, and to introduce changes or corrections. With the help of the editor, I have tended:

- to avoid literal translation (which is followed sometimes), if it fails to give the exact meaning, or the nearest possible meaning;
- to change archaic, alternative words that are no longer used (such as 'ye', 'thou' etc);
- to avoid unnecessary words that seem to have been used by the translators – especially the first three, and the first two more especially – to give the translation a Biblical-language feel, but which do not add anything to the translation;
- to choose the best amongst the alternatives provided by the translations;
- to choose words that are better than those used in the translations to provide the meaning;
- to correct obvious mistakes in translation – meaning by 'obvious' a complete misunderstanding of the words used. (For instance, the word '*dabba*' in the verse 8:22 means anything that walks on the earth, i.e. any creature; unfortunately, perhaps following common usage, A.Y. Ali and Pickthall translated it as 'beasts', while S. V. Mir Ali translated it as 'animals'! It is only the fourth, M.A.S. A. Haleem that gives 'creatures'.) This is to be expected, since no matter how knowledgeable a translator is in Arabic, it seems that if he is not a native Arab speaker and totally versed in

the language, he is bound to commit mistakes in addition to opting for many inferior alternatives in translation. Abdullah Yusuf Ali described his translation when it first appeared as *'the best expression I can give to the fullest meaning which I can understand from the Arabic Text.'*

(4) Scripture: Qur'anic verses and the words of the infallibles in *hadiths* are printed in bold. They are all enclosed within single quotation marks. Quotations within these are enclosed within double quotation marks.

(5) Text in general: When there was a choice between two translations, I opted for the one that uses words that are understood by all people rather than words that might be a little difficult or not widely used.

(6) Gender: To make things easier, I have used masculine throughout; this should in no way be seen as sexism.

### **Finally...**

No translation of any text is perfect, nor can it be described as the best possible, but I hope that I have been successful in conveying the ideas, concepts and arguments in their most accurate and clear English equivalents, and pray that any mistakes, shortcomings or any inferior alternatives that I might have opted for in my translation will be forgiven by God and be accepted by the readers as inescapable in such endeavour.

S. As-Samarra'i

## Introduction

God wanted man to become a 'mind' that thinks, plans, innovates and reasons. From reason, science develops and science develops life. From reason, the meaning of the spirit in man comes to light, as reason opens man's horizons towards God, to shine, by this means, light over the whole of his being, since opening up to the meanings of belief and the spirit makes a person open up to the absolute, bringing his limitations as a human being to some of the features of the absolute, and elevating him to new realms.

It was narrated by the Imam of Ahlul Bayt (as) that: **'God, the Most High, when He created reason said to it: "Come" and it came, then said: "Turn and go back" and it did"'** – reason, of course, is not a physical entity, and the speech is metaphorical, but it shows that God wanted to highlight reason's depth, characteristics and the areas of its effect that give growth and development to life and a high status to man – **'then He said: "I swear by My power and Majesty, that I have not created anything that is more dear to Me than you: it is you that I command and you that I forbid"'** – for when God commands a person or forbids him, it is his mind that He commands and

forbids, because it is his mind that understands the meanings of do's and don'ts – **“and through you I punish and I reward.”**<sup>1</sup>

It is also narrated that God rewards man according to his power of reasoning and punishes him according to it; i.e. it is the circumstances of his reasoning in his awareness of obedience or disobedience to God that determines the level of reward and punishment.

### **The standpoint of the Qur'an**

The Qur'an talks about all of God's signs in the universe that say to man: read the book of the universe and, using your mind, study all God's signs in the universe and all the circumstances and phenomena it contains to know their secrets; in this way you will open up, through the mind, to God, the Most High.

Therefore, the believer – through what the Qur'an implies – does not live in seclusion from the universe, does not look lightly upon its features and does not stand uninterested in front its phenomena, but he thinks about every universal phenomenon which God has installed in the universal system, and every historic circumstance which God has installed in the human systems and laws, saying to man: read the book of your Lord and see the secret of the glory of the creation, and in this way you will support science and innovation. Why even bother to disagree with those who say that science leads towards to atheism? This is

only the case if science is superficial, in which case it cannot lead to belief. This is because the more man understands about the secrets of the universe, the more he will know God; as we read in the *hadith*<sup>2</sup>: ‘Who knows his self knows his Lord.’<sup>3</sup>

The mission of Islam was to help man’s mind to proceed towards God, and to achieve nearness to Him through knowing life. God revealed the Qur’an to develop reason, for all that is contained in the Holy Qur’an founded upon dynamic and valuable concepts which man must think closely about, so that his reasoning grows and develops.

Based on this, we emphasise – as we did in our dialogue with the Christians who were saying that belief supersedes reason, and belief usually comes through feelings and a sense of the unknown and unknowable – that Islam believes that reason is what confirms belief, that belief is established through knowledge, and the more knowledge a man acquires the stronger his belief will be.

### The decisive role of reason

Thought is the result of the reasoning of the mind. This helps us come up with an Islamic rule according to Qur’anic concepts that reason is the basis of all that God the Most High wants for man to be involved with in the fields of belief, deeds and all areas in life. We can try to stop at each verse to see what it implies on the issue of reason, since the Qur’an – according to Imam al-

Baqir (as) – ‘If a (given) verse is revealed regarding a certain people and they die so the Qur’an (i.e. the verse) dies (is no longer correct), rather it stays applicable to those who come later as it was applicable to those who have departed’<sup>4</sup>; and as Imam as-Sadiq (as) said: ‘The Qur’an is alive and has not died, it is similar to the succession of day and night and of the sun and moon’<sup>5</sup>; the names mentioned in the Qur’an, whether those of the Prophets (as) or their foes, were examples either of high regard or very lowly. Therefore, we should make the Qur’an our leader in all the areas in life.

### **Reason is the proving ground**

The Holy Qur’an talks about reason as the proof between God and people, as He wanted them to make it the proving ground between them. This is in contrast to all those, in early centuries and those who came later, who deny this role of reason (as the proving ground of faith) and who reject the thinking of those who regard reason as the light which illuminates belief and explains life.

It is reason that asserts the existence of God and His oneness, asserts prophethood through its foundation on proof and the evidence that the Prophet has laid down; and it is reason that opens the window to the belief in the Hereafter, and reason that places man in a state of philosophical crisis in which he activates his mind to do everything he wants to do, and

questions why he wants to do it, and what he wants to reject and why he wants to reject it. With reason, a man activates his mental faculty in every situation he engages in, positively or negatively, in any intellectual, political, economic or other issue, so that he asks his mind about what it can perceive, and asks the minds of others so as to integrate his with theirs.

God the Most High wants each person to study the minds and reason of those to whom He wants him to submit, whether this submission relates to the intellectual areas they are active in, or to religious matters when he will follow what they say, or when they are regarded as the medium between him and God, who wants to convey the message to him; He wants each man to study their reasoning and evidence when he wants to abide by their thought or politics, or when he wants to get their advice. He must see whether or not they have the foundation from which they can be capable of advising others on the right line of conduct and the right opinion. Do they have the minds through which they open up to the right thinking and right stance? The point is that you should activate your mind to sharpen what you produce through it, and open up to others according to their capacity for reasoning.

### **In the Prophet's narrations**

We shall also discuss reason according to the *hadith* (narrations) of the Messenger (sawa) and the Imams (as), because these

narrations widen the horizon which the Qur'an opens, emphasise the special elements of reason and its dynamic feature in the life of man, and conclude through all this in a decisive result: that reason is the basis for the whole of Islam. Man is reason, since reason, in its essence, represents the meaning of the human being, and Islam is reason, since God, the Most High, highlighted it in His Books and revealed it to His Prophet (sawa) in all concepts and rulings, according to his reasoning, which He wants people to understand.

The Messenger of God (sawa) is the mind of the Message, the mind of the nation and the mind of life; he utilised his capabilities to convey the Message, in all its aspects, and gave the nation the benefits of his broadmindedness, spiritual purity and elevated thinking. He explained the verses and signs of God which relate to reason, placing it in high position, to say to people: I have come to make life a matter of reasoning, which the mind of man grows with so as to acquire the power that enables him to be in the position of God's vicegerent on earth, because God made man His vicegerent through the reasoning that He produced as an extension of His knowledge and depth. The Messenger (sawa) talks to people about reason so as to place them on a believing level at which they become aware of their responsibility to enrich and develop it, and to activate it in their practical life, in addition to their thinking life.



### **In the narration of Ali (as)**

We shall also benefit from the narrations of Imam Ali (as), who was his cousin and successor, and who got the knowledge from him, and who took on his spirituality through the Prophet's spirituality and morals; he was similar to the Messenger of God (sawa), not forgetting the difference of the Message and the difference between the teacher and his student.

Imam Ali (as) lived with the mind of the Messenger (sawa) and his spirituality from early childhood, until his mentality became bonded with his, his spirits with his, and his life engaged in all his life's activities. We like to make the world open up to Imam Ali (as), as Ali (as) is for all times. Imam Ali (as) is not exclusively linked to his time, since when we study him and his words, we see him dealing with our problems in all their many facets, just as he was dealing with the problems of his time, since some of life's problems are similar in every era because they do not derive from features that are peculiar to that time, but from the common features of life itself, and Ali (as) was the Imam of life.

### **In the narrations of the seventh Imam (as)**

Imam Musa bin Ja'far al-Kadhim (as) has a distinguished narration, called *wasiyyeh* (lit. will)<sup>6</sup>, to one of his companions called Hisham bin al-Hakam<sup>7</sup>, who enjoyed the respect of the Imams (as) whom he accompanied, through the vast knowledge he had in *kelam*<sup>8</sup>, which enabled him to engage in logical

scientific dialogue in defence of the true Islamic line that the Imams of Ahlul Bayt (as) represent.

Imam al-Kadhim (as) emphasised that God made proofs of reason that He presented in His Book as the proof of belief; and that man must confirm the fundamental principles of his belief through reason, starting from the existence of God, to prophethood, and to the Hereafter, since it is reason that does that for belief, as it does in life when showing man what protects him.

I would like to use this opportunity to highlight one point: we have to understand our Imams through the heritage of knowledge that they left for us, and not to limit them so as to make our relationship with them a question of the unknown and unknowable (*ghaib*) only, although there is some of that, as well as on the side of tragedy, which our relationship with them features. The line of Imamate is the line of civilised Islam which we would like to present to the world and say: the Imam of Ahlul Bayt (as) came to build a spiritual and scientific civilisation for all people within the line of true Islam. In this way, we can make our relationship with the Imam (as) one of thought, knowledge and spirituality, so that to bring people to them and to bring our minds to them.

### **Reason in all horizons**

We believe that God, the Most High, gave reason its freedom to open up to all horizons that it can reach in the universe, life,

man and Him, because He created reason free, not involving any barrier that prevents it from being free to reach scientific and cultural results through the tools it has and through the methods it acquires.

This reason we ignored in favour of instinct, and the result was that our politics, as our relationships, became instinctive, making reason live like a stranger in our societies because we accepted myths and rejected truth, accepted backwardness and rejected advancement, accepted ignorance and rejected knowledge. This made it easier for enemies and opponents to accuse Islam of being devoid of reason.

### **Our responsibility**

We always stress that those who are engaged in Islamic cultural matters should emphasise the role of reason in Islam, because there are many enemies of Islam, who do not understand the foundation on which it is based, and imagine that Islam is not based on a foundation of reason, and imagine that everything in it stems from devotional worship. We do deny that Islam emphasises man's devotion to God, the Most High, since He says: **'It is not fitting for a Believer, man or woman, when a matter has been decided by God and His Messenger, to have any option about their decision: if anyone disobeys God and His Messenger, he is indeed on a clearly wrong path.'** 33:36, however, God made reason a part of man's devotion to Him –

reason witnessed in man's development in life, in the progress of science through perception and experiment, for reason is always active within man's consciousness so that, through innovation, life becomes better and richer.

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<sup>1</sup> *Al-Kafi*, Mohammed bin Yaqub al-Kulaini, vol.1, p.26

<sup>2</sup> The word *hadith* is literally speech or talk, but used here, as in Islamic books, it refers to that part of Islamic scripture which is narrated from the Prophet (sawa) and of Ahlul Bayt (as), i.e. the twelve Imams (i.e. leaders) from the household of the Prophet (sawa). This book also uses the term 'narration'. (*The translator.*)

<sup>3</sup> *One Hundred Words of the Commander of the Faithful*, Ibn Maithem al-Bahrani, p.57; also *Awali al-Le'ali*, Ibn Abi Jomhoo al-Ihsa'i, vol.4, p. 102

<sup>4</sup> *Tefsir al-Ayyashi* (Qur'an commentary), vol.2, p.203-4.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> *Al-Kafi*, vol.1, p.13; *Tuhaf al-Uqool*, al-Harrani, p.383.

<sup>7</sup> Hisham bin al-Hakam (d. 198H/812AD), one of the famous companions of Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq (as) and his son Imam Musa al-Kadhim (as). He is believed to have been most distinguished in scholastic theology (*kelam*), so much so that it is narrated that Imam as-Sadiq (as) gave him permission to enter into dialogue with scholars of other schools since he was in his early youth.

<sup>8</sup> The science of (*scholastic*) *theology*, literally the science of speech, is the field of knowledge that relates to philosophical type of appraisal of values and beliefs and dialogue (the exchanging of opposing arguments) with others in these areas. (*The translator.*)

## Chapter 1

### The Terminology

#### 'Aql (Reason)

##### Usage of the word '*aql*'

Let us give a clear idea about the term or word '*aql*', since it may be used in different ways. Moralists say that this word means the instinct inside the human being. If we want to find another term to explain it, we might say: it is the energy stored in the essence of the human being, from which a person can derive – through his contemplations and in all that surrounds him – a dynamic meaning that produces an idea and explains it. This is the difference between human beings and animals, as a human being has this holy power – as some call it – through which he can become aware of life, reality and the universe in a process of inspiration and production.

The '*aql*' can be inspired by what it sees, hears and senses, and at the same time it produces ideas from all this, while the animals cannot do that, although images may get imprinted in their mind. They can be trained to do things, but cannot produce abstract ideas or inspirations derived from thought, as, for

animals, this is a static instinct in itself, although it can become dynamic through the action of others upon it and in a limited way. This is the original meaning of the word *'aql*.

However, the word *'aql* may be also used to describe axioms, common sense or essential thoughts that even a child can draw from, such as the idea that the word 'whole' is greater than the word 'part', or that the one thing is different from two things, or that the same thing cannot be present in two different places at the same time. So the issue extends to the things recognised by reason that are regarded as the foundation of thought, such as: 'two opposites cannot exist as one' or 'two opposites cannot agree over one subject at the same time' and other such things which scholars of logic and philosophy have placed in the area of essential thoughts. Thus, *'aql* might be used to describe this branch of knowledge, which the human being can recognise at the very beginning of his relationship with the reality around him. This is the second usage of the word.

The third is using it to describe experiments, and the information that man has acquired from them. We know that experiments are one of the sources of knowledge; this is what man has discovered, and Muslim scholars and scientists conveyed the concept to the west, then the west adopted it and succeeded in developing the science movement there. This used to depend entirely on past observational philosophies, but by reinforcing observation with practical experiment, it could

draw from it and become inspired by it, and by this means uncovered the secrets of things, of life and of man.

The advancement that the west achieved was perhaps the fruit of using experiment combined with perception, which may be described as 'the experimental mind' (*al-'aql at-Tejribi*), since the more man experiments, the more he becomes aware of things and the more he understands things, since experiment gives man ideas as much as it gives him sound foundation for them. There is a folklore proverb: 'Ask someone with experience: do not ask a philosopher': this is based on the fact that the person who has experience is one who takes his ideas from what he himself has observed and experienced, whilst the philosopher is an intellectual or learned person who acquires ideas through the experiences of others. We can show this through an example: we might imagine a person recently graduated from a college of engineering, and another who has been a builder for twenty years; the builder is likely to be far more knowledgeable regarding the land, building practices etc than this engineer, who has learned his knowledge from people like the builder; the builder has had direct, practical experience, and so can enrich the knowledge of the person who has studied architecture etc. The same goes for agriculture, for example, where a farmer for thirty or forty years is more experienced than a recent graduate from a college of agriculture. The mind of the human being is an experimental mind; this is why the

narrations said that experiments are a positive asset of a developing mind, or an ‘additional’ mind.

The fourth usage of the word *'aql* refers to the practical mind. When a human being applies his mind, through contemplation and experiment, he is able to know right and wrong, good and bad; then the practical side is utilised to guide the self to apply what it recognises in this situation. A reasonable person (*'aaqil*) is one who, when he knows that something is wrong, will avoid the situation; and when knows that something is good he will engage in it. Such a person is regarded as *'aaqil*, i.e. reasonable or rational. But if a person knows that something is wrong but, nonetheless, engages in it because his self-interest and desires get the upper hand, or if he knows that something is good but he rejects it, this person is not regarded as reasonable, even if he is able to recognise these things in his mind – because he does not act reasonably in his deeds and acts. The main basis for this division is perhaps that God created man according to what He instilled in him in terms of powers that are open to growth, development, production and potential; so when these powers are activated, or engaged in deeds, they do so through the ideas of others or the thoughts that others have established, or through their experiences, or through that automatic, instinctive will that guides and activates the mind of a human being throughout his life.

### **Reason is a life-force**

All such action starts from the energy of reason, an energy that is not a static, open to new observation and experiment, and



practical experience as well. Reason represents a dynamic energy that impacts on the whole of man's experience. In light of this, I regard reason as the proof between God and people, as He made them accountable to Him through the mental power that He instilled in their existence.

Some people say that there are a lot of people whom the Message to God has not reached, such as those who live in the primitive parts of the world; no culture, religions or message have reached them, so how will they be made accountable to God? God will not hold them to account because they did not abide by Islam, as long as the means of education and propagation of the Message do not exist – they are called the 'unaware ignorant' – but God will judge them on the Day of Judgement according to what their minds could recognise. There is something in the mind that will shine and light up for all mankind, a certain idea that corresponds to some elements of the faith, such as the oneness of God (*tawhid*), in that it – the oneness of God – is '**...upright nature - the nature (framed) by God, in which He has created man**' 30:30; so God rewards or punishes man according to what his mind can perceive of things when he does not have the means to acquire the knowledge that is available to people in other areas. Reason is the basis, to the extent that – as we shall show from the scripture – God rewards man according to his mental capabilities and punishes him according to them, so that the level of reward or retribution is not according to the extent of the deed, but according to the extent of the awareness of this deed.

### Reason is the basis of knowledge and *tawhid*

Based on this, we say: Reason is the deciding factor in all issues, as through reason we prove the existence of God, recognise the Prophet's prophethood through the evidence is presented to us to think about, even the issue of imamate in the nature of its necessity that reason recognises, even though determining the individual(s) (who are the imams) is a matter that may need the scripture. Also, we recognise the realms of the unknown and unknowable (*ghaib*) through reason, since reason does not point out things according to their perceptible attributes, but it talks about their possibility or impossibility and analyses matters to arrive at the results according to that – and so it ends up affirming that atheism is false since the evidence and proof leads to that conclusion. Likewise, if a question is raised: is there paradise and hell? Or, is there a Hereafter or not? First, reason says that the Hereafter is possible, then it studies the evidence to end up saying that the Hereafter is what justifies responsibility in the human system that God created; perhaps the Qur'anic verse 'Did you then think that We had created you in jest, and that you would not be brought back to Us (for account)?' 23:115 points to this on the basis that purposelessness on the part of God is impossible.

We also notice that the tendency of contemporary scientists is that they do not – in general – say that something is impossible, but that it is possible but we have to study the matter to find out if this possibility is real or not; this is how they have advanced.

Avicenna said: ‘Anything that you hear, regard it as possible until you are dissuaded from by clear proof’; so everything is possible, but when undeniable evidence proves that it is impossible then we say it is impossible. However, in our societies in the east we say that such-and-such a thing may be reasonable or not, even if some intellectuals say this is unreasonable. For example, when you talk with them about the *jin*<sup>1</sup>, they may say this is unreasonable, or about the Hereafter, they may say it is unreasonable, regarding such things as myth, for any human being may consider something unreasonable simply because he is not used to it (there is a difference between something being unreasonable and being strange). Therefore, we say: yes, in our lives we are not used to encountering *jinnies*, but it is reasonably possible that there exist creatures called *jin*, as there are others; after all, man only recently discovered microbes that cannot be seen with the naked eye and has discovered a lot of things we could not sense before.

### **The approach of reason is the way to advancement**

This approach of thinking is what develops thought and elevates the mind, since the mind takes man to the highest levels. When you think about an issue and go about that through contemplation or experiment, then you are doing so in order to reach results that you expect or do not expect. However, if you proceed from a previous decision that such a thing is unreasonable, it is natural that you do not move forward, and will fail to develop your life; this can reflect not only on the practical side, but on all social and political sides of

your personality. You may have certain ambitions; you talk about them and someone tells you that this is not possible, when you still have not experimented to see whether it is possible or not; the same goes for political issues in a lot of situations, when nations stand still as a result of this kind of thinking that says that reality cannot be changed – obviously, man will not move towards the impossible. This can also be said about social issues where a lot of things have caused the backwardness of our societies, such as the tribal mentality and some mythical social traditions, mythical religious traditions, and so on. This state of affairs has continued due to the preconceptions that there is no point doing anything and that no one will respond. Therefore, due to the preconceptions that this or that is impossible, minds have been left at a standstill in a lot of areas in the east, and in Islamic areas. Therefore, we say: we have to develop the issue of reason, and our culture must be one that depends on reason, in the home and at school, in the economy, in politics and in practical areas – we have to strive to make reason the culture.

### **A mentality shackled to the unknown**

In this regard, we find some people who think that there is no value in reason where the Shari'ah is concerned, and that reason has no religious or Islamic value, as if they think that with reason, by definition, you deny all that is unknown and unknowable (*ghaib*) – or the very basis of religion. But this shows a lack of awareness of the issue of reason in Islam: as to the issue of the unknown, reason says that what religions suggest is that there is a

world other than ours; on the matters of paradise, hell, retribution, reward and so on, all of that is possible, so reason confirms the possibility of the unknown. Consciousness of the actual existence of these unknown things, however, requires experience, either personal or through the witness of someone who knows the nature of the experience, and who conveys this to us – and provided that we have evidence on his reliability.

There is another matter: there is now a mentality that is shackled exclusively to the unknown, and it has become active and influential. It tries to explain everything according to the unknown, responding to every question by saying: we believe in the unknown. However, although we believe in the unknown, God, the Most High, has not made the system of universe and the human system on the basis of the unknown, as for every phenomenon in the universe there are laws that man can discover, and every human phenomenon is ruled by laws that man can discover. God creates life or existence that is based on the unknown, as there is that unknown realm that God keeps to Himself, even from His Prophets (as), as in the verse: **‘I say not unto you: “I have the treasures of God” nor “I have knowledge of what is unknown and unknowable”’** 11:31, as there is that part of the unknown such as miracles, that God gives to His Prophets (as) according to their needs in their responsibilities to the message, as in the verse: **‘This is of the stories relating to the unknown and unknowable (which) We reveal to you’** 12:102.

But explaining everything according to the unknown is wrong. If someone gets struck with epilepsy, we must not explain it according to the unknown; the same goes for a lot of issues relating to war, and to victory or defeat, when we read that someone riding a white horse came and did this and that. Yes, in the battle of Badr between Muslims and the polytheists, God gave that power of the unknown on the basis that if the polytheists were the victors, Islam would end. However, in the battle of Ohod, the battle was advancing according to military rules, and the Muslims defeated the polytheists when they observed the military principles of protecting the hills at the beginning, but then they abandoned these principles, and were defeated; God revealed many verses in the chapter of Al 'Imran criticising their experience when they were defeated. We say that the unknown is a fact, and belief in the unknown is part of our beliefs, but our belief in the unknown is based on reason that places it on the side of possibility, and on the truthful scripture of the prophetic revelation that belongs on the side of reality.

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<sup>1</sup> *Jin* (sl. *jinnie*) are creatures which, according to the Qur'an and the previous Books, are concealed from our senses, but who can sense us. According to Islamic scripture, they, like us, are divided into believers and non-believers and some of them did believe in Islam after listening to Prophet Mohammed (sawa) reciting the Qur'an in his way back to Mecca from Ta'if, when we went to try to achieve a breakthrough (before that eventually happened with the people of another town, Yethrib, later Medina); this is mentioned in the Qur'an in a chapter entitled the Chapter of the Jin. (*The translator.*)

## Chapter 2

### The Role of Reason

In his teachings to his companion Hisham bin al-Hakam<sup>1</sup>, Imam Musa al-Kadhim (as) says: **‘O Hisham! God, the Most High and Gracious completed the proof to people with reason.’** Here, the Imam (as) wants to show the methods of man’s guidance, how God sets the test of the proof on him, and what mechanism God has installed in man that produces what is the justification of his position before God. God created the mental capabilities for people to act, to attain the proofs and justification of their position before God, the Most High, and their position between them and other human beings. So, reason is God’s proving ground for people, and the basis for God’s judgement of people.

**‘And supported the Prophets with the clear explanation...’**, and in another version **‘and conveyed to them the clear explanation’**: so, the Prophets’ role is to convey the message and explain it to people in detail. God teaches them the Book and wisdom through explaining to them the secrets of the Book with all its meanings and implications and wisdom, placing it in

the world of recognition of the Book in life, with all its dynamic nature; for wisdom was defined as: ‘Putting a thing in its place’. From this, it can be said that: the Book is the theory while the wisdom is the application. The role of the Prophets (as) is, therefore, explanation – God said: ‘Therefore do remind (others), for you are one who reminds. You are not a watcher over them’ 88:21-2, and said: ‘Therefore remind in case the reminder profits (the hearer)’ 87:9, and said: ‘And remind, for surely the reminder profits the believers’ 51:55, and said: ‘Those who deliver the Messages of God and fear Him, and do not fear any one but God’ 33:39, and said: ‘This is a clear message for mankind in order that they may be warned thereby, and that they may know that He is the only One God, and that those who think may take heed’ 14:52, and other verses in which the Holy Qur’an talks about the power of speech.

The Prophets (as) explain the facts of the revelation to people, in all things which God wanted people to understand and recognise and act upon that basis, and this prophetic explanation gets through to their hearts and minds; in this way the Prophets (as) achieve victory, because explanation represents the means by which God wants people to adopt and reach the facts of the faith, Shari’ah and life itself, through the Messages that He conveyed to them in the Books that He revealed to His Messengers and in the teachings inspired by Him.



## From reason to belief

‘... And proved His divinity to them with evidence..’ He proved his divinity in all its meanings of creating, providing etc, with evidence that He wanted their minds to think about, as God talked in the Holy Qur’an about the phenomena of the universe that prove His glory in His creation and that open the path to all the secrets of creativity, and He wanted their minds to think about them; this is what Imam al-Kadhim (as) presented through examples when he recited the verses: ‘And your God is one, Allah! There is no god but He; He is the Beneficent, the Merciful. Surely in the creation of the heavens and the earth and the alternation of the night and the day, and the ships that run in the sea with that which profits people, and the water that God sends down from the clouds, then gives life with it to the earth after its death and spreads upon it all (kinds of) animals, and the changing of the winds and the clouds that they drive between the heaven and the earth – these are signs for a people who understand’ 2:163-4.

These aspects that God, the Most High, has installed in the universe and its system and phenomena, which He wants people to understand and recognise through studying their secrets and knowing the benefits they can bring to them and the elements of power He placed in them, these phenomena must be studied by man through his mental faculties. And

when the mind studies all these phenomena – think about the movement of time and diversity of the day and night succession, study the skies with all their orbiting planets and galaxies, and consider how man is still crawling in his ignorance of these things, as he tries to put together his understanding piece by piece; the same applies to the earth and all the aspects of energy within it, the system that God has designed for the ships to sail in the sea for the benefit of people, the rain system that blesses dry land with life, and the clouds, laden with goodness, travelling between the earth and the sky. When the mind tries to open up to these phenomena and study them, it is natural that such exercise will not be merely a question of observation, but it must be a study based on experiment so as to get through to the explanation. This is one of the sources of knowledge, in the quest to know the nature of the laws that rule all these phenomena, to know them by discovering their secrets, through sensing them on some occasions, or through the formulae, which are used to understand the secrets of these things on other occasions.

From this, we can conclude that: belief is established through knowledge, in contrast to those who believe that the more a person become knowledgeable, the weaker his belief will become and that the more ignorant he becomes the stronger his belief will be; in contrast also to some people who say: my belief that of the elderly, to point out that the belief of the

elderly is purer. We say that the matter is not like that, as the more knowledgeable the person becomes, the stronger his belief will become, since the more knowledgeable he is, the more knowledge he will acquire of God, the Most High, though the knowledge of the secrets of His glory in his creation and His bounties in this life etc. Therefore, God has linked these matters and made them signs and evidence to the people who think and who act dynamically in their observation of these phenomena and their research into their secrets, with the means of knowledge that help them know the laws that God has installed in the universe, so that man knows that this universe was not created without purpose. God said: **'Did you then think that We had created you in jest, and that you would not be brought back to Us (for account)?'** 23:115; He did not start this by chance, but through a precise system that shows the glory of God Almighty. As the poet says:

In everything He has a sign  
That proves that He is One.

### Divine order

Imam al-Kadhim (as) continues: **'O Hisham! God has provided that evidence so that they might know that they have an organiser'**; this is found in the phenomena of the universe that God wanted people to think about, to

investigate their details and discover their secrets, so that this would serve as a proof of the Divine order for man and the universe. This makes them realise that they do not live in a world devoid of system, but in a world in which God organises their affairs so that they can achieve stability and prosperity. Hence the Imam (as) says: **‘So He said: “And He has made subservient for you the night and the day and the sun and the moon, and the stars are made subservient by His commandment” 16:12.’** The Imam (as) means by this verse that God, the Most High, created a system that takes care of your needs and benefits, so in this system lies the secret of glory and the secret of His bounties, as it holds within it the facts of the existence in the universe, extending to the life of people and the way that can acquire the benefits. We note that the Qur’an repeatedly mentions these phenomena because God wants us always to be aware of His glory and bounties through the phenomena that coexist with us throughout time. The phenomena of the universe are of two types: some that have been easily observable by man throughout time, and others that can be discovered by man only with effort.

We follow the day and the night and find uses for the night, which God made as a time of rest, relaxation and pleasure, and for the day, which He made as a time for earning our living; we follow the continuous motion of the night and the day, and see how God inserts one in the other, shortening the

night for the benefit of the day and vice versa; how could this system continue for million of years without failing?

The same goes for the sun and moon, coexisting with us when the sun rises to make the day, giving us light, warmth and life. Without this sun our world would have frozen over, and if it had come just a little nearer to us a, the earth would have burned. The same goes for the moon and its effects on the rise and fall of the tides, while its cool light gives us a lot of happiness, joy and relaxation.

What about the stars in the sky, these vast worlds scattered across the universe, which God made, romantically, as points of light, implying that darkness will never be total. Metaphorically, we can say that these stars, these points of light, give us the idea that we should never despair of our crises in the darkness of our practical, social, political and economic life, as there will always be points of light from which we can open our hearts to God, the Omnipotent, to find that He encourages us to see hope, He says: 'And despair not of the Spirit of God; none despair of the Spirit of God save disbelieving folk' 12:87.

As for His words 'made subservient by His commandment', this does not mean that He gives His direct command to the night, day, sun, moon and stars, but that He devised for them laws that govern them within the universal system, but under the control of God, since all the universe is within his complete

control through the order that He appointed for it: ‘God indeed has appointed a measure for everything’ 65:3.

The Imam (as) continues God’s words: ‘most surely there are signs in this for thinking people’, that is those who follow these phenomena with research and thought and draw ideas from them by using the facilities of their minds: whether this be through observation or the senses, or through deduction, all these point to God. And this part of the verse means: if you want to know your Lord, open your mind, make your mind see with the eye of insight and encourage it to discover God through all of this. As for those who do not discover God, they are those who do not activate their minds.

### **The creation of man**

The Imam (as) continues his presentation of the Qur’anic verses in this way: ‘It is He Who has created you from dust’ 40:67, as God wants to introduce Himself to us through the manner in which He had brought us to existence. Here, there are two theories in the issue of our creation from ‘dust’: one says that this points to Adam (as), as God says: ‘When your Lord said to the angels; Surely I am going to create a mortal from clay. And when I have fashioned him (in due proportion) and breathed into him of My Spirit, then fall down before him prostrate’ 38:71-2, so the start of creation was from clay (or earth or dust), then God breathed into it

His Spirit and it turned to a human being; after that, the human being continued through reproduction from minute sperm.

The second theory says that God created us from dust since He created us from a sperm and this sperm starts from nutrition and nutrition starts from meat or plants and all this comes from earth or dust; when we eat these, their origin is dust.

**'It is He Who has created you from dust then from a sperm-drop'** 40:67. We have to think about this sperm: it is not what a whole human being comes from, of course, but this sperm is one of millions of parts, and it contains the hereditary features of the fathers and forefathers, while the features of a mother supersedes that of the father in some instances, or the features of a second grandfather supersedes the others and so on. In addition, this sperm cannot produce a human being on its own, but it must combine with an egg, with the sperm and egg each providing 23 chromosomes, i.e. half of the 46 chromosomes that make the principle picture of the cell of a human being.

When the controversy regarding cloning started, we said that cloning does not represent creation, in that here man turns into a creator; but man succeeded in discovering the Divine law, bringing a mature cell of the animal and taking from it the hereditary features, then emptying the egg of the chromosomes and entering these features into it, making this egg a mature cell that life can start from: so all that happens is

a change of pattern. Therefore, the cloning issue is not different from artificial insemination, except in pattern: the Divine law is the same, and they did not make a new law.<sup>2</sup>

When man studies the world that exists inside the sperm, he will know that cannot have come to exist by chance, but that it was God who had installed in the sperm the secrets of growth, so that when the egg gets inseminated with the sperm, it starts to grow into 'a leech-like clot', then to a piece of flesh, then a child: 'It is He Who has created you from dust then from a sperm-drop, then from a leech-like clot; then does He get you out (into the light) as a child'. Then, he reaches youth through natural growth, which depends on what God installed in the body and nutrition etc '...then lets you (grow and) reach your age of full strength; then lets you become old...', which is when he reaches sixty or seventy, '- though of you there are some who die before - and lets you reach a Term appointed;' i.e. die before reaching old age or stays alive for longer, '... in order that you may contemplate (and understand' 40:67, i.e. uses his mind to study the start of his existence and his development in this human universe in which he grows, one way or another.

### The secret of life

And God says: 'and the fact that God sends down Sustenance from the sky, and revives therewith the earth



**after its death**'. Naturally, the dynamics of rain falls under a system that God installed in the sky through a complexity of events, and made the value of this rain the fact that it gives life to dead land, since it provides part of the secret of life to the mechanisms inside the seed, which interact with the earth in the same way that the sperm egg does with the egg. Moreover, we can draw from this that the earth here is the land and all that is living on it, i.e. man, animals and plants, since God created every living thing from water. '**... and in the change of the winds**' whether the system of wind motion gives – in some cases – life, for it also brings death through the harsh circumstances that may take place. '**... are Signs for those who understand**' 45:5, if they think and do research., they will be able to know God, the Most High, through all these phenomena.

We also read in this teaching of Imam al-Kadhim (as) his reference to the verse: '**Know that God gives life to the earth after its death; indeed, We have made the signs clear to you that you may contemplate (and understand)**' 57:17. This tells people to use their minds so that these verses become the means to develop their thinking when they know the facts of things and discover their secrets in a deep manner. And so we read in his teaching the verse: '**and gardens of grapes and plants and palm trees having one root and (others) having distinct roots: they are watered with one**

**water**’, where he talks about plants, which includes fruit-producing farms in which grapes and dates grow, some of which are similar and some not – although all of them are irrigated from the same water, producing fruits from the same species but different in their features of taste, smell, benefits etc; **‘and (yet) We make some of them excel others to eat; most surely there are signs in this for people who contemplate (and understand)’ 13:4.**

And he recites the verse: **‘And among His Signs, He shows you lightning, by way both of fear and of hope,’** since frightful lightening may result from that electrical reaction in the sky, just as beneficial rain may also result; **‘and He sends down rain from the sky and with it gives life to the earth after it is dead: verily in that are Signs for those who contemplate (and understand)’ 30:23.**

Imam al-Kadhim (as) emphasises, in his teachings, that man should know his Lord through these phenomena of the universe that he experiences daily or on a seasonal basis. From this, we know that reason and thinking are the means to know God, the Most High.

### **The Message-bearers and deliverers**

Imam al-Kadhim (as) says: **‘O Hisham! God has two proofs on people: an apparent proof and a non-apparent proof; the apparent proof are the Messengers, Prophets and**

Imams, and the non-apparent proof is reason.’ In this paragraph, we understand that the Prophets and Messengers (as) are conduits of God’s basis for judgement of people, since they are the bearers and deliverers of all what God wants for people to believe in and to practise in life to the benefit of organising their affairs so that they achieve balance in their individual and social lives and all horizons they open up to. This is because God the Almighty created the universe according to the laws which He laid down: ‘Surely We have created everything according to a measure’ 54:49, and: ‘God indeed has appointed a measure (due proportion) for everything’ 65:3; so God made the universe on the basis of balance ‘you see no incongruity in the creation of the Beneficent God; then look again, can you see any disorder? Then turn back the eye again and again; your vision will come back to you confused and fatigued’ 67:3-4. And He wanted this universal balance based on laws to go hand in hand with the voluntary dynamic balance through the revelation to man that is conveyed by the Messengers (as), so that life is established on this basis. So, who are the proponents of this revelation?

It is the Prophets and Messengers (as) whom God entrusted with this responsibility of conveying awareness to people ‘Those who deliver the Messages of God and fear Him, and do not fear anyone but Allah’ 33:39. And so on, the march

continues from the Messengers (as) to the Imams (as) to complete the movement, but without a further prophetic revelation, as the Prophet (sawa) said to Ali (as): 'O Ali! You are to me as Aaron was to Moses; however there is no Prophet (to come) after me.'<sup>3</sup>

And if we study the apparent proof, we know that these Prophets and Messengers (as) are not a mere messengers who takes a message in a literal manner; rather they teach the Message to people in all its theoretical and practical aspects: 'He it is Who has sent among the inhabitants of Mecca (or, the illiterate) a Messenger from among themselves, who recites to them His revelations and purifies them, and teaches them the Book and the Wisdom' 62:2. The role of the Messenger, then, is to recite the Qur'an so as to convey to people the verses revealed to him from God, and to elevate them, i.e. to develop their thinking, and their spiritual and dynamic powers.

God also says: 'Surely We have sent you as a witness, and as a bearer of good news and as a warner. And as one who invites to God by His permission, and as a torch that spreads light' 33:45-6, highlighting the role of the Prophets (as), which is to take people out of darkness to light. This is why we had said that the best proof on the infallibility of the Prophet is from the Qur'an: since his role is to take people out of darkness to light, it is imperative that whoever takes up this role must be completely enlightened, in his mind, heart and

practice. And since the Imamate is the succession of Prophethood, then it has the same goal, i.e. to take people out of darkness and to teach them according to the knowledge they have acquired and according to what God blesses them with in their hearts and minds.

It was narrated that Imam Ali (as) said that when the Messenger (sawa) used to worship, before the start of the revelation, God appointed one of his great angels to provide him with a particular piece of moral teaching every day; the Prophet (sawa) said: **'My Lord raised me and he did raise me well.'**<sup>4</sup> The role of the Prophet (sawa) was not, therefore, to recite the Qur'an only, but to elevate people in all the aspects of their personalities and conduct in life, through his own human nature, words and morals and through the Book and wisdom. The end result is guidance from the hand of the Prophet making people well-equipped to perform their responsibilities in life, **'although they were before certainly in clear error,'** 62:2. This is the apparent proof and tomorrow, on the Day of Judgement, we shall hear the angels asking: **'Did there not come to you a warner?'** 67:8.

### **The power of reason**

The second proof, the non-apparent one, is reason. God will judge man according to what man can recognise with his mind, and the question of the oneness of God is one of the issues that

can be recognised through reason; this is why all people are accountable to God, even if no Message has been revealed to them, since ‘every person is born under the (God-linked) nature, however it is his parents who (later) make him a Jew, Christian or Zoroastrian.’<sup>5</sup> According to this, the ruling regarding these people to whom no Message conveyed by a Prophet had come, and who had no means of knowing a Message, as in the primitive areas of the world, is that they are accountable to God according to their reasoning capabilities because reason is the proof that God has installed in the depth of each human being; as in Imam Ali’s saying: ‘Reason is a *shari’ah* in the inside and the Shari’ah is reason on the outside.’<sup>6</sup>

On the basis of this, we have to utilise our minds to know the facts of things because we will be accountable according to our mental capabilities, as according to the Divine Messages.

### Asking your mind

Imam Ali (as) emphasised the role of reason and that it is man’s guarantee in life. He said: ‘Sufficient from your mind is what distinguishes for you the paths of guidance from paths of deviation.’<sup>7</sup> We can deduce from these words that if man employs reason in his life and uses it to know all aspects of life, especially the contradictory aspects of belief, Shari’ah, relationships, viewpoints or personal issues, then he shall be

guided to the true path. There is truth and falsehood, and there is deviation that makes us go astray in darkness so that we fail to achieve positive results, while there is the right path that opens many windows and horizons on the path of safety. There are justice and injustice, but a man might get confused and so thinks that injustice is justice and vice versa. It is reason in all its facets that helps man to think in a calm way and to analyse things so as to discover the depths of this path, thought or stance, to see what truth or falsehood it holds.

The Imam (as) is saying that you should not ignore your mind, rather you should ask it, sit with it, as if you are two separate entities – your mind is part of you and you speak through it, but you talk to it and it talks to you, as if there is a preacher and an audience, an adviser and one who receives the advice. The narration of the Prophet (sawa) may be pointing to this: **‘Reason is the light in the heart that distinguishes truth from falsehood’**<sup>8</sup>, so if your mind is not utilised in your consciousness and life, you are in darkness, because you have no one to guide you to the truth and are walking in dark alleys. So, reason is the light which you should take with you and use. Those who give their minds a holiday are giving their existence a holiday, since their existence will fall and stumble in chaos if it loses this compass.

In another narration, Ali (as) says: **‘God did not endow a human being with a mind if it would not save him one day’**;

in another version: ‘... unless to save him with it one day.’<sup>9</sup> A human being may act according to his basic instincts, or in the light of the circumstances around him, and thereby enter into confusion, imagining darkness as light and vice versa, and leading him to deviation and loss. However, God did not abandon man to his basic instincts to act without control, or abandon him to the negative circumstances around him, that might lead him to surrender what he believes in, abides by, or knows, or what decides his fate, but He made reason his saviour from all this confusion. A man may continue in his deviant conduct for a long time, but he must at some stage, or in some place, encounter the opportunity of awakening that opens horizons for him and make him see the truth, and it will strike him with a shock that helps him to return to righteousness and repentance.

According to this narration, God created the mind and its ability to reason for the purpose of rescuing man from darkness, or the mind and its ability to reason is capable of rescuing him anyway, regardless of the aim of creating it. In this regard, Malik bin Anas narrated a *hadith* from the Prophet (saw) saying: ‘**The Messenger of God (saw) was asked about a person who is reasonable**’ that is in managing his affairs and life and in his relationships with people, ‘(but) has a lot of sins’, so his desires make him deviate from the right path, and ‘he said: “There is no human being without sins and bad



deeds that he commits” because the soul usually pushes one to bad deeds and because Satan insinuates in his soul such deeds and the desires that Satan uses to push him towards that, “so if his nature is reason and his instinct is deep belief” so that this person in question is, as you claim, reasonable, he is bound to awaken in other areas, since when he utilises his mind to rescue him from such bad deeds, and naturally he wants to save himself, and so if he is like this “.. his sins will not harm him.” So they asked: How come, O Messenger of God? since the mere existence of the mind as a part of nature is not sufficient; sins live with the mind and what has the mind to do with the cancellation of sins, since the mind and reason are not a type of repentance? So how come he will not be harmed by his sins when they are an acts of disobedience to God, which makes this sinner open to God’s wrath? ‘He (sawa) said: “Each time he sins, he follows that with repentance and regrets what he did,” and so as long as the mind is there at the moment his awareness is awakened when he sees the negative results of his wasteful conduct, it must lead him in the end to feeling the danger of these sins, pushing him to the door of repentance that God opened for him, “and He cancels his sins, leaving a surplus (of reward) that makes him enter Paradise.”’<sup>10</sup>

There is a word of wisdom in this regard: it says: ‘The decisive, rational person’, that is one who has the reason that

acts and reinforces the will – this is the meaning of ‘decisive’, since there are those rational people who stay in the conceptual realm without acting on these concepts practically – ‘if he gets confused and fails to reach the right opinion, is similar to a person who has lost a pearl, so he isolates all the area around the point where it fell, then searches in this until he finds it.’ This is a metaphor for the situation where a person fails to see the truth, so he gathers all the probabilities inside of which truth is lost, and the illusions that surround it, then discusses them and engages in a process of elimination, in order to see the truth clearly in front of him.

### **Searching for the truth**

This gives us the idea that one must not falter when the ideas that people disagree on complicate the situation, and one should not allow oneself to be exposed to doubt, like those who we hear saying: we do not know what to take and what to leave; this person has a certain opinion or ruling and that has another, and we are puzzled what to do. Do not leave yourself in such dilemma and complexities, but try to discuss it, either on your own if you have the ability to do so, or with others who have the capability of discussion: discuss opinions, probabilities and standpoints until you reach the truth.

This approach is not limited to thoughts and ideas, but extends to psychological issues. I meet a lot of young men and

women who have faced problems that left them in a dilemma that affects the serenity of the soul and might turn into a complex. They ask: what can we do? The answer is: when you fall into depression or become the victim of a complex, you have to study the problem: why am I depressed? So start a search for the probable reasons behind that depression, and each time you decide that the probable cause under scrutiny is not the cause, you move to the other and so on until you reach the point where you can put your finger on the cause.

This is the right approach; do not let yourself drown in the flood of problems. We know how floods are dealt with: by digging openings to reduce the pressure and then water will flow away calmly. Likewise with psychological problems: open one opening here and another there, the pressure reduces and the main culprit is found.

In all of this, reason can lead people to safety. However, we have a problem with those who, on the one hand, are addicted to the idea of reason, yet they stone it and stone everyone who uses it! Until now, we have seen a lot of people who say the reason is one thing and religion is another, ignorant of the fact that religion is wholly reason.

### Reason is at the forefront

Ali (as) says: 'Let the guide (*ra'id*) be truthful to his folk and let him activate his mind'; *ra'id* - in the Arab

terminology – is the person who walks in front of his people to search for land suitable for grazing for their sheep, and by extension a *ra'id* is one who is at the forefront and so may discover what they need for their stability and to achieve their goals. A famous Arab proverb goes: 'The guide does not lie to his folk', meaning that the guide will not be entrusted with responsibility for his people unless he is trustworthy, truthful and experienced in the first place; therefore they have effectively made an absolute ruling that the guide will not lie to his folk.

And when the Imam (as) says: '**Let the guide be truthful to his folk**', he is not talking about that narrow relationship only, rather he is talking about the guide who seeks goodness for himself first and for others second, so as to discover for them the horizons of life and advancements in all that concerns people; he is the person who has the knowledge that enables him to pinpoint the locations in which people can find stability. Therefore, the guide must not restrict himself to his eyes only, as those who seek grazing lands, but has to combine what he sees with his mind's sight ('**and let him activate his mind**') when he proceeds to discover the new horizon, land, thought, and future.

We can understand from this that one should always try to open up to what goes beyond one's place and arena – one must always activate one's mind to discover the locations of goodness

and production. This is what we can understand from the detail that the Imam (as) provides after this...

### From the Hereafter, and towards it

Ali (as) says: ‘... and let him be from the people of the Hereafter’, since reason says to him: the question of the Hereafter is the question of fate, the final eternal state in comparison with this transient life, which can give you a ‘healthy’ Hereafter, just as it can produce an ‘sick’ Hereafter.

‘... as he came from it’<sup>11</sup>, i.e. through the other realm that is representative of God’s unknown realm, and through his creation that started from this unknown realm. In this regard, some people may think that linking man to natural causes is a matter of the empirical world, not the unknown, but when we study the creation of man, we find that this creation expressed the power of God, the Omnipotent, in three points:

First: of the creation of Adam (as), God says: ‘...your Lord said to the angels: Surely I am going to create a mortal from clay; and when I have fashioned him (in due proportion) and breathed into him of My Spirit, then fall down before him prostrate’ 38:71-2: a handful of clay and a breath from God’s Spirit and the first man was born.

Second: of the creation of man through the mechanism that man is still using, God says: ‘Was he not a drop of sperm which gushed forth?’ 75:37 – a sperm, a leech-like clot, a piece

of flesh etc. Here, some may say: this is a matter of the empirical world not the unknown realm, because – while the creation of Adam was outside the empirical world – this second expression of God’s power can be confirmed by observation. But the question is: who has given the sperm and the egg the secrets of growth? Who has given this microscopic sperm – which is only a minute part of the semen that man ejaculates in the process – some of the features of the fathers and forefathers in what we know as the heredity laws? Some children might look like the seventh grandfather, how come this happens? All is part of His unknown realm, just as nature and its laws are part of it. Yes, we observe nature, but the laws and norms that God bestowed upon it and upon the whole of the universe and human system come from Him; He is the one who provided the secrets of movement and growth to all creation, living or not; the poet said:

In every thing He has a sign  
That shows that He is One.

Third: of the creation of Jesus (as), God says: **‘And Mary, the daughter of ’Imran, guarded her chastity; and We breathed into (her body) of Our spirit’ 66:12.** This is why we say that the knowledge of this is part of God’s unknown realm; while part of this can be understood by man through what he can observe, others, as in the creation of Adam (as) and Jesus (as), cannot.

Hence, anyone must feel that he came from the Hereafter as part of God's unknown realm. And '**... to it he returns**': that is he will be resurrected.

### **Planning for life**

Then the Imam (as) emphasises the way of facilitating the mind and its work, and how can one think about everything in oneself and, through that, to open up to others. He says: '**as the one who looks through the heart**', and the 'heart' in the Holy Qur'an is that area of internal awareness that includes the mind, as it includes the areas of feelings; so '**the one who looks through the heart**' is an indication of the attentiveness that he recognises in the internal area of his personality, '**... and who acts through his sight, the beginning of his act must be to know: whether this will be for him or against him**', since he might have started an act the result of which, either at the outset or at the end, is against him, just as it can be for him; this is why he has to determine if this act will bring a negative or positive outcome. This calls for studying the act in all its facets and circumstances, and all the possible outcomes, so as to see if it is beneficial for his life, in the present, in the future, and for the whole of his fate. '**... if it will be for him, let him proceed with it, but if it will be against him, let him abandon it.**'

Then the Imam (as) explains the kind of planning to be adopted at the outset: one must not enter any project, adopt any stance,

or choose any place until one acquires an intellectual knowledge of it. So you should not enter into any political, social, economic or religious act unless you know it, and know from where to start and to where you will end up. What is the nature of the project, its implications, its strong points, weak points, negative sides, positive sides? You have to study all this, so that you prove yourself to be someone who has the knowledge to do what you do, and naturally this is the result of utilising reason.

He (as) says: ‘... because the one who acts without knowledge...’ pointing to the person who acts blindly, such as those who say: we follow that person like the blind, i.e. without guidance! This is unacceptable, even with those whom you trust; it is to the infallibles alone that we can close our eyes and follow, on the basis that our belief in them (based on proofs of reason) calls for that. Even they wanted us to ask them about the secrets of their acts, the meanings of their speech, so that we can acquire clarity in our relationship with their school and our belief in their Islamic leadership. As for the non-infallible, we have to look closely at those whom we trust, since we may be following them without guidance.

Imam Ja’far as-Sadiq (as) teaches how to deal with this common idea. He says: ‘**Do not trust your brother completely..**’ i.e. do not give him a 100% of your trust, but allow, say, 70% of trust in him and keep 30% for yourself; ‘..



as the fall as a result of (total) submission cannot be remedied.’<sup>12</sup> If you follow someone in total submission, without caution, this will lead you to disaster, since you have no awareness of his approach, and if you fall, due to his deviation or wrongdoing – as he is not infallible – you will not know what to do. Even in the realms of love and hatred, the Imam (as) does not accept the 100% situation; he says: ‘Love the object of your love in part only, because he might become the object of your hatred one day’; so beware of blind love, ‘... and hate the object of your hatred in part only because he might become the object of your love one day’<sup>13</sup>, so do not blow all bridges between the two of you, just as you should not link all bridges to the one you love. Leave one bridge for yourself to use to run away if you need to, and likewise leave one bridge with the one you hate for the possibility that you are reconciled in the future, i.e. leave the opportunity open.

So, the Imam (as) emphasises that the person who is engaging in a project must know all that surrounds it and all things that may face him in that arena, ‘... as the one who acts without knowledge is like the one who is walking on the wrong road, his distance from the true road will only make him more distant from his goal.’ When he does not determine his way clearly, naturally he will find himself in mazes and will stumble on his path, and this will lead him to becoming ever

more distant from his goal. ‘...and the one who acts with knowledge is like the one who is walking on a clear road.’ Then the Imam (as) provides a rule: ‘So, let one think: is he walking towards his goal or going away from it?’ When you establish projects, or commit yourself to certain standpoints, are you in the process of advancing towards the positive results, or the reverse? The Imam (as) is talking here about the whole of life: whether we want to establish a cultural, social or political project, we have to know first whether this project, constitution, or relationship with the others – social, local or international – represents advancement or backwardness.

We know that we were ahead of other nations in the world at the time of the Islamic Civilisation, which Nehru described as ‘The mother of modern civilisations’, since it provided the basis that modern civilisation proceeded from in the world of production, innovation and discovery. Today, however, we see how the others took the approach and the example and put themselves on the road of advancement, because they activated their minds and respected and rewarded rational people, then went on to invest in the minds of others, so much so that if we carry out a survey of the scientists in America and Europe, we find that a lot of them are Arabs or Muslims.

Islam wants us to apply a high degree of awareness and planning for life: ‘And pursue not that of which you have

not the knowledge;’ which is in all aspects of life, not, as explained by some, relating to the field of Shari’ah only (such people live in their own circle and therefore their commentary is not correct); the verse continues: ‘surely one’s hearing and sight and heart, all of these, shall be questioned about that’ 17:36, and the heart here means mind and reason. And when God talks about knowledge and thought in the Holy Qur’an, He talks about knowledge that enables us to know Him: ‘and contemplate the (wonders of) creation in the heavens and the earth, (with the thought): “Our Lord! Not for naught have You created (all) this!”’ 3:191, and: ‘Consider what is it that is in the heavens and the earth’ 10:101. Knowledge here is all that relates to the responsibility of man on earth, whether this relates to Shari’ah rulings or public matters; this is why our scholars say: ‘Part of the obligations under the conditions of sufficiency (*wajibat kifa’iyyeh*) are sciences that man needs in his life’; some even went further to say: ‘The nation must meet the expenses of students who study so as to prepare them for the studies of sciences that relate to provision of all things.’

### The value of human beings

In another of Imam Ali’s words, a lengthy word that talks about Mohammed, Jesus and Moses and the necessity of using reason, he describes how the Messenger of God (sawa) lived in

severe poverty in terms of his food, clothes and home: ‘And in (the life of) the Messenger of God (sawa) you can observe the shortcomings of this life, when he was hungry with those very close to him, and all luxury was kept away from him in spite of his great nearness (to God)... So, let one look into his mind: had God elevated Mohammed with that, or belittled him?’ So, was the state that God desired for his chosen Prophet (sawa) to be regarded as positive or negative? ‘... If anyone says: He had belittled him, then he, I swear by the Magnificent, is lying! But if he says: He elevated him, then let him know that God had (then) belittled the others’ i.e. had not elevated them ‘when He gave them a lot of this life while he kept it away from the nearest of people to Him.’<sup>14</sup>

We can derive from this an approach in studying personalities: when we see any person, great or otherwise, we must not jump to conclusions merely from their poverty or otherwise; if they are poor we should not place them at the lowest end of the social scale, and if they are rich we should not place them at the highest; we have to study personalities with our minds, not feelings, especially those who are in the position of role models. This is Ali (as) when giving reason the upper hand in the life of human beings, as with reason we know God, the Most High, and His Messenger (sawa) and his successors. This is what was narrated from Imam Ali al-Hadi (as) when Ibn as-Sikkeet asked him about the reason why God had sent Moses (as) with the

stick, Jesus (as) with the power to bring people from the dead, and Mohammed (sawa) with eloquence. The Imam (as) explained that in each era the Prophet (as) is sent equipped with the miracle that conforms with that era, as each prophethood needs a miracle to prove it. Then Ibn as-Sikkeet asked him: 'Then what is the means of proof for people today?' The Imam (as) wanted to give me the approach rather than the names, so he replied: 'Reason: (it) detects the one who is telling the truth regarding God and it agrees with him, and detects the liar regarding God and it rejects him.'<sup>15</sup> This means that reason is what is to be used to evaluate people through their truthfulness or lying regarding God; therefore, by using reason, you should try to know those who are truthful and follow them, and to know the liars and avoid them.

### Self-confidence

In Imam al-Kadhim's teaching to Hisham bin al-Hakam, he says: 'O Hisham! If you have a walnut in your hand and the people say it is a pearl, no benefit will come to you when you know it is a walnut. And if you have a pearl in your hand and the people say it is a walnut, no harm will befall you when you know it is a pearl.' The Imam (as) wants to emphasise that a person must not lose his self-confidence or ignore his experience and become overwhelmed with what people say about him, to the extent that his knowledge of

himself becomes based on what others say, not on his own convictions. He is saying: study the matter, without developing an inflated personality, nor suffering lack of confidence. Study things in their reality, and study your mental powers and moral merits, and if you find out that you have a weak point, you should try to repair that and transform it to a strong point; and if you fail to do so, you should admit that you have only a certain level of knowledge, and so, for example, if you have no leadership qualities, live with this situation even if people say that you are the leader, the most knowledgeable, the strongest etc.

Imam Ali (as) said: **‘Do not be fooled by what the majority of people say about you.’**<sup>16</sup> Do not be fooled when they commend and praise you for merits that you lack or to extents that do not exist, because you are the one who is going to reap the results at the end; people will say these things and go, but the matter will continue to react within you, leading you to negative results that you are not worthy of, simply because others said so. It was narrated that someone came to Imam Ali (as) and praised him a great deal, but in a hypocritical way, since Ali (as) was in the position of leadership; so Ali (as) said to him: **‘I am less than what you are saying and more than what you believe within yourself!’**<sup>17</sup>

He also used to say (repeating one of the Prophet’s teachings to him) when people praised him: **‘O God, make me better than**

what they think, and forgive me for what they do not know'<sup>18</sup> when he was in the highest level of infallibility, yet with this humble stance towards God. The same goes for the asking of repentance by the Prophets (as) and the Imams (as) – it is the repentance of humble individuals who truly knew their Lord, not repentance of their sins (as they are infallible.)

We read in the supplication of Mekarim al-Akhlaq (the best of morals) what one should say when one attains some power or position: 'O God, do not elevate me amongst people one level without bringing me down within myself similarly, and do not affect for me an apparent power without affecting a concealed humility within myself similarly.' That is: when people praise me, do not let me forget the weak points within myself, but help me try to engage in a comparison process between what they say and how they treat me and the reality within myself.

Imam al-Kadhim (as) is saying to Hisham that if people say, when you have a worthless thing such as a walnut, that you have a pearl, you cannot benefit from it, because if you went to the pearl market, no one would buy it from you. The opposite also goes. The idea is that you will not be able to sell your weak qualities even if people said they are otherwise; likewise, when you know that you have a good level of knowledge, experience, leadership qualities or the like, which is related to scientific and practical aspects of life, and your opponents tried to belittle your

value (as people do when they envy those who are better than them), then they will not be able to do so.

In any case, you should be realistic by studying what people say and benefit from criticism, as this is the way reasonable people behave. The Imam (as) in his teaching is concentrating on the merits of reason and those who respect the role of reason in life.

In the third paragraph, the Imam (as) says to Hisham: **‘He will not be God-fearing who has not acquired his knowledge of God and from Him’**, which means that one must acquire knowledge of God on the level that makes one God-fearing in the light of the dangers of disobedience to Him and the consequences of His wrath. So, whoever fails to become knowledgeable of God and of what relates to Him, through studying, thinking, drawing conclusions from such horizons, he will not feel His greatness and therefore not to be God-fearing, since fear follows the feeling of greatness, something which comes from deep knowledge of God, the Almighty. **‘And he who has not acquired knowledge of God and from Him, has not tied his heart to a solid knowledge’** because he is not living in that deep knowledge that his self has in all of his thinking and feeling, ‘which he sees and finds its true meaning in his heart’, and this is when one acquires the knowledge that lights up the horizons that help him open up to God.

**‘And no one will be likewise’**, that is living the truth in his heart and announcing it through his internal insight, **‘unless**



his speech conforms with his acts', i.e. he does not live a dual status saying one thing and acting differently, 'and his inside conforms with his appearance; because God, the Most High, did not point, with proof, to the concealed inside of the mind except with an apparent feature from it', since we cannot recognise the concealed inside of the mind, that proves the existence of God, except through its manifestations that appear in one's speech or good acts, in which words conform with deeds and the apparent with the concealed; in this way such a person will be of one personality where words integrate with acts and the inside with the outside.

### How to recognise a rational person

The Imam (as) says: 'O Hisham! The Commander of the Faithful (as) (i.e. Imam Ali) used to say: "A rational person has three merits: he answers when he is asked, speaks when others fail to speak and provides the opinion that is beneficial to whoever needs it; whoever has not got any of these three merits is an idiot!"'

These words narrated from Ali (as) emphasise that the rational person is not content with the power of reasoning which his personality has, but feels that he has to activate these bounties to acquire the wide knowledge that enables him to know the needs of people in their questions and

searches, whether these are related to cultural or practical matters, so that he attains a level of knowledge that enables him to answer every question. This is the first merit.

The second merit is **'speaks when others fail to speak'**, which means that he has attained a level of knowledge that places him, as far as is possible, above those around him who have a position or scientific status, so that if they are asked by people and fail to provide answers, then these people will turn to this rational person who can talk when the others cannot. It was narrated that some of the Imams (as) used to sit in the mosque, when other scholars also sat, and whenever someone came and asked a question of these other scholars and they failed to reply or solve his problem, they will turn him to the Imam (as) as he was the only one who had the answer, owing to the fact that he was head and shoulders above them, through the vast knowledge he had attained, something which implies that the Imams (as) established themselves in their time through their vast knowledge and deep knowledge of God and Islam, so much so that when historians used to describe any of them, they would say: he was the most knowledgeable of his time.

The third merit **'provides the opinion that is beneficial to whoever needs it'**, so he has true experience that makes him the councillor of people to whom they turn for advice in their affairs, both private and public, and in whatever relates to

everyday life or to political, economic, social and security issues.

To summarise: a rational person must be a person whose mind is full of knowledge of the level such that people resort to in all their affairs, so that he answers when asked, speaks when others fail to provide solutions, and offers his advice when needed.

Naturally, not all rational people have these qualities, but one can perhaps draw from Imam Ali's words that a rational person should be like this, and should utilise his mind to acquire knowledge, to the level that enables him to provide answers and advice.

Then the Imam (as) says: **'whoever has not got any of these three merits'** if not even one of these merits, then he **'is an idiot'**. And what idiocy, given that all opportunities for scientific development have been placed within such a person's reach so that he might become an authority for people, yet laziness fails him and he fails to benefit from such opportunities! A rational person is one who, through his mind, sees the light to reach with knowledge to attain all that he needs and all that people need from him.

### Distinguished positions

Then Imam al-Kadhim (as) says: **'The Commander of Faithful (as) said: "No one should sit in the distinguished position in a gathering except a man who has these three**

merits.” So, if one is not capable of answering questions or offering advice, one should not seek a distinguished position in a gathering as this is reserved for the distinguished person who has knowledge and the right opinions, and who can be the one to whom the people in that gathering turn for advice. From this, we can say that reason makes it imperative that one has to seek knowledge in all its particulars and aspects.

Then Imam al-Kadhim (as) says: **‘And al-Hasan bin Ali (as) said: “If you ask for something, ask it from those who can respond”**, that is from the people who are capable of providing these needs, whether cultural, economic, social or in any other field. If you want to ask something from someone, try to see if he can respond favourably to your needs. Can he provide what you want on the basis of his mental, spiritual and realistic capabilities? Does he have the morals that will make him respect what you ask for and respect your sacrifice in your ego in the process? Study all that before asking him what you need. **“... then they said: ‘O the son of the Messenger of God, who are those who can respond?’ He said: “Those whom God described in His Book when He said: ‘But only men of understanding will pay heed’ 39:9.”** He replies that they are the ‘rational people’; which means: ask for your needs from people who reason and think, because reason leads one to perfection and respect of others, making them respond to meet the needs of others, or at least to help them to get them.

And he narrates the words of Imam Ali bin al-Husain (as): **‘Sitting with the righteous leads to righteousness.’** If you want to sit in the company of people, choose righteous people because they have opened up to God and faced life from their righteous position and avoided corruption in the areas of evil and pain; when you do that, this will help you to become righteous, as the poet said:

Keep company with the trustworthy and you will benefit from their friendship,

As merits are gained from everyone whose company you keep.

The wind takes from whatever it passes over,

Bad smells from smelly things, or a nice smell from the perfume.

### **The rational diary**

Imam al-Kadhim (as) continues in his teaching to his companion Hisham bin al-Hakam: **‘The manners and conduct of knowledgeable people add to your mental capabilities’;** you have to follow the manners and conduct of knowledgeable individuals, live their lives and absorb the benefits of their knowledge and conduct, because this will strengthen your mental awareness of things; as the mind produces knowledge through perception, it can also grow and get stronger through the knowledge it is introduced to.

**‘And obedience to just authorities brings complete respect and dignity’**; if the society you live in is ruled by just rulers, who are legally in this position as God has appointed them for it, you have to strengthen your relationship with them and obey them, as this will raise your position and you will acquire more respect and dignity since they do not command people except through justice.

**‘And investing in possessions represents complete human merit’**; when you invest your money or possessions, you are strengthening your human merits as you meet your needs so that you do not need others, and also use that to support those around you.

**‘And offering advice to whoever seeks it represents payment due for the bounties’**; when someone seeks your advice on a certain matter and you give what you can offer, as God has given you the bounty of acquiring good opinion to solve other people’s problems, then this represents a payment of the duty towards these bounties.

It is narrated that Imam as-Sadiq (as) said: **‘He who fails to offer advice when his brother seeks it, God will take away his reason from him.’**<sup>19</sup> This is also implied in a narration ascribed to Ali (as): **‘Through gratitude (to God), bounties continue’**<sup>20</sup>, and the Qur’anic verse: ‘If you are grateful, I would certainly give to you more’ 14:7. But gratitude for each bounty should according to its nature, as Imam as-Sadiq (as)

says: ‘God did not give anyone a bounty without in addition to making obligatory on him a duty: whom God made strong, his duty is to carry out what He orders him to do and to support those who are weaker than him; whom he made well-off, his duty is towards his wealth and then to help the poor with what is left over; whom he made noble among his folk and of good appearance, his duty is to thank God for this and not to boast to others, and not to deny the weak their rights because he is noble and handsome.’<sup>21</sup>

‘And abstaining from harm is part of having completeness of the mind’; as the person who harms others will see this harm rebounding to him through the problems he stirs up as people react. Harming others might end up causing the one who harmed them to live in a psychologically complex state, and God might make him live with problems far worse than those which he caused others. This is why abstention from harming others represents good mental conduct, since reason says to you: if you abstain from harming others and live in peace and love with them, this will raise their regard towards you and make them love you, and that will bring all goodness to your life.

‘And in it comes the comfort of the body sooner or later’; since he who keeps his harm away from people will see his own body comfortable and unharmed, as no one will respond in kind to him.

**‘O Hisham! The rational person does not talk to others whomight not believe him.’** If you want to talk to someone, you need to ascertain the truthfulness of your speech and the ability of those to whom you talk, so that they do not rush to disbelieve you, because they are either backward, stubborn or partisan, as God said: **‘Allah has set a seal upon their hearts and upon their hearing and there is a covering over their eyes’** 2:7. If you know that – regardless of what you do – these people are not ready to believe you, or to engage in fruitful dialogue with you, then leave them and do not talk to them.

**‘And does not ask others who might not give to him’;** do not to ask for your needs from anyone who you are not sure will give them to you, or who you know, or expect, from the outset will not give them to you; why this effort, and why humiliate yourself?

**‘And does not promise what he cannot meet’;** your should not promise someone – whether a member of your family, a friend or any other person – a thing, a date, help etc unless you are sure you can meet your promise, otherwise you will look like a liar, or will have let them down.

**‘And does not hope from someone who would rebuke him’;** i.e. the other person who might rebuke you, or shock you.

**‘And does not embark on something that would cause him lossdue to his lack of ability’;** if that thing is something which you are afraid will cause you loss because you are not



capable of doing it, then do not embark on it, whether this lack of ability is in yourself or in the circumstances surrounding you, as you will never succeed.

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<sup>1</sup> *Al-Kafi*, al-Kulaini, vol.1, p.13; *Tuhaf al-Uqool*, al-Harrani, p.383.

<sup>2</sup> On the basis of this, our ruling regarding the question ‘who is the mother’, when a woman gives an egg to be implanted in another woman’s womb then is inseminated with sperm from the first woman’s husband, is that the born baby is the husband’s child without any doubt since the sperm was his, and the mother is the wife who gave the egg since the child’s biological link to the egg and the sperm is the same. However, there is the question of the unmarriageable situation that exists between the born child and the woman who gives birth to it: we can draw on the breastfeeding rulings to conclude that they are not marriageable to each other, but the details of this are beyond the scope of this book. (*The author.*)

<sup>3</sup> *Al-Kafi*, vol.8, p.106; *Sahih al-Bukhari*, Mohammed bin Isma’il al-Bukhari, vol.5, section 59, narration 700.

<sup>4</sup> *Tefsir Mejma’ al-Beyan* (Qur’an commentary), at-Tibrisi, vol.10, p.86; *Tefsir atb-Tha’lebi* (Qur’an commentary), vol.10, p.10; *Kenz al-Ummal*, al-Motteqi al-Hindi, vol.7, p.214.

<sup>5</sup> *Awali al-Le’ali*, Ibn Abi Jomhoor al-Ihsa’i, vol.1, p.35; also *Musned Ahmed*, Ahmed bin Hanbal, vol.2, p.233.

<sup>6</sup> *Mejma’ al-Bahrain*, at-Toraihi, vol.3, p.224.

<sup>7</sup> *Nahj al-Balaghah*, Mohammed Abdoh commentary, vol.4, p.99.

<sup>8</sup> *Nahj al-Balaghah*, Ibn Abi al-Hadid commentary, vol.20, p.40.

<sup>9</sup> *Nahj al-Balaghah*, Mohammed Abdoh commentary, vol.4, p.95.

<sup>10</sup> *Nahj al-Balaghah*, Ibn Abi al-Hadid commentary, vol.20, p.40.

<sup>11</sup> *Nahj al-Balaghah*, Mohammed Abdoh commentary, vol.2, p.44.

<sup>12</sup> *Tuhaf al-Uqool*, p.357.

<sup>13</sup> *Nahj al-Balaghah*, Mohammed Abdoh commentary, vol.4, p.64.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, vol.2, p.60

<sup>15</sup> *Al-Kafi*, vol.1, p.25.

<sup>16</sup> *Nahj al-Balaghah*, Mohammed Abdoh commentary, vol.2, p.15.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, vol.4, p.19.

<sup>18</sup> *Tuhaf al-Uqool*, p.12.

<sup>19</sup> *Wesa'il ash-Shi'ah*, al-Amili, vol.17, p.208.

<sup>20</sup> *Uyoon al-Hikem wal-Mewa'id*, Ali bin Mohammed al-Wasiti al-Laithi, p.186; *Jewahir al-Metalib fi Menaqib al-Imam Ali (as)*, Ibn ad-Dimeshqi, p.150.

<sup>21</sup> *Al-Kafi*, vol.1, p.163.

## Chapter 3

# Wisdom and the Wise God and Creation

### The book of the universe

First, let us read how the Qur'an gives reason the highest value and how it wants us to reflect and understand it so as to enrich our mind and soul through a scientific approach.

The first verse is: **'Most surely in the creation of the heavens and the earth'** in all the secrets and details that this creation represents, in the riches found in the earth and the skies; **'... and the alternation of the night and the day'** which God has designed to organise the movement of time, so as to organise man's life, a system that has never failed to stay on the same course for millions of years; **'... and the ships that run in the sea with that which profits men, and the water that God sends down from the clouds,'** rainfall that is a natural system installed in the skies, so that beneficial rain is produced; **'... then gives life with it to the earth after its death and spreads in it all (kinds of) animals,'** nourishing this incalculable diversity of animals; **'... and the changing of the winds and the clouds made**

subservient between the heaven and the earth,' the function of clouds in different weather conditions; '... there are signs for a people who understand' 2:164, so you should activate your mind in a correct logical way so as to enrich your mental powers, widen your knowledge and innovate in your production and scientific activities through understanding the secrets of creation and nature. All the discoveries that man has managed to achieve has not been through coming up with new laws, but through discovering the laws that already exist in the universe, and he reached conclusions from these.

The second verse is: 'It is He who sends down rain from the sky: from it you drink, and out of it (grows) the vegetation on which you feed your cattle' 16:10, hence you eat from it; 'With it He produces for you vegetation, olives, date-palms, grapes and every kind of fruit: verily in this is a sign for those who reflect' 16:11. Thought is the result of the mind thinking, the action of the mind to produce thought, therefore God, the Most High, is saying: do not look upon these phenomena superficially, but rather you should engage in a deep and thoughtful analysis, something which the Holy Qur'an calls '*tedabbor*' (reflection or contemplation).

The third verse is: 'And He has made subservient for you the night and the day,' talking about the magnificence of creation and God's bounties as the night and day are made subservient to organise man's life; '... and the sun and the moon,' and their

effect on the life of man, animals and plants; ‘... and the stars are made subservient by His Command; most surely in this are signs for people who reflect’ 16:12, so those who think and understand are the ones who are capable of understanding the phenomena of the universe.

### Wisdom and the wise

In the last chapter, we said that God has made reason the proving ground between Him and people, which is the capability that God installed in man to know Him and the facts of belief (which stands as proof – in the Day of Judgement – that God had not left man without guidance and therefore man is obliged to meet his responsibilities.) In this chapter, we will talk about whom the Qur’an calls ‘*ulul-Albab*’. The word ‘*albab*’ is plural of ‘*lobb*’, which is the mind, or the elevated feature of the mind, on the basis that it is similar to the ‘*lobb*’ in things as opposed to the ‘*qisbr*’, the skin (of fruits or otherwise); and ‘*lobb*’ represents the essence and true identity of things, on the basis that all the elements of that thing are combined in it. Hence, the Qur’anic expression ‘*ulul-Albab*’ is used to point out that the mind represents the essence of human elements in them, so that the matter of man’s acquiring his mental capabilities is determined; this is because man, in the depth of his human nature, grows and develops through the utilisation of his mind in all aspects of life that he engages in.

### The wise, and reading the book of the universe

In the Qur'an, God talks to us about the wise, who, through their thinking and practical activities that represent their thoughtful obedience to God, the Most High, open up to the whole of the universe to discover its secrets and elements, then they open up to God when knowledge of Him concentrates in their minds, then they worship and pray to Him to accept them and bring them nearer to Him. This is what the last part of the Chapter of Al 'Imran is concerned with: 'Most surely in the creation of the heavens and the earth and the alternation of the night and the day there are signs for the wise' 3:190, that man should open up to knowledge through his mental faculty, that he should not behave in an uninterested or superficial way to the system of the universe, but should study the laws that govern the universe, since God arranged a precise system in which no deviation can take place: 'Surely We have created everything according to a measure' 54:49, and: 'God indeed has appointed a measure (due proportion) for everything' 65:3, and: 'you see no incongruity in the creation of the Beneficent God' 67:3. God created the universal system on the basis of precise laws that cannot change even over millions of years, as He placed in the creation of man historical norms that govern man in his successes and failures, so that people may be different in details, but not in the general plan: '(Such was) the course of God with respect to those

who lived aforetime; and you shall not find any change in the course of God' 33:62.

Therefore, God wants human beings to utilise their minds and to read the book of the universe to note its systems and secrets in all the phenomena they live with: 'Most surely in the creation of the heavens and the earth and the alternation of the night and the day there are signs for the wise' 3:190. So, when man studies the sky, he must be in a never-ending process of searching for its nature through his intellectual faculties; when man engaged in this in the past, we can see that the theories to explain the phenomena were diverse, until we come to the contemporary human being, who started to discover some planets while trying to unravel more of the earth's mysteries in all its aspects, its geography and the active laws that produce earthquakes, volcanoes, floods, storms etc, which may in turn produce seas, rivers, mountains etc.

This is when man uses his activated mind; he may start from scientific theory, on the basis that a given thing probably exists in light of his projections; then he starts to look for it, and may or may not discover a new thing. Whatever the case, his mind, now in a mobilised state, pushes him to pursue his search. And even if he fails to reach any result, this failure helps him to develop the means and serves the course of science through analysing what his predecessors achieved.

## **The day and the night, and the diversity of time**

Then God presents more food for thought to reflect on in appearance and secrets of the universe: that is the interchanging night and day: **'the alternation of the night and the day'**. We have the night to get rest and the day for work, but we also witness the change of seasons when the night gets longer to make the day shorter and vice versa – why is that? Why this diversity? Why does this system continue to govern the universe, with all its climate differences? Is this accidental? Is this – as some used to say – like someone taking an ink container and throwing it against the wall and producing a marvellous painting?! However, the difference is that this painting cannot be repeated, while the painting of time, represented by the night and the day, continues to produce time in exactly the same way.

When the Holy Qur'an concentrates on these pieces, it concentrates on the model, as there is a sign that points to God the Almighty in everything that is in the universe, and man must discover it with study, reflection and experiment.

## **Science does not contradict belief**

We must point to the fact that some people mistakenly think that science contradicts belief and that the more man becomes knowledgeable, the more his belief will diminish, and the more ignorant he is the stronger his belief will be. On the contrary, God is known through the greatness of the secrets in His



creation, which say – in the logic of science – that this universe must have a God, who is Omnipotent and Omniscient, and who controls the whole thing; as the poet says:

How surprising that God is disobeyed, and how surprising that those who deny, deny Him,

When in everything He has a sign that is proof that He is One.

### **Who are the wise?**

The wise are those who think, understand and reason; they are those whose hearts and minds shine with the light of God in the true love of Him and people, and their life moves and shines through the straight line that starts from God and ends up at Him. Therefore, when they pursue the knowledge of the universe and open up to some of its secrets, they submit to the Creator of the universe and see that only He is the original existence and everything else apart from Him is like an echo or shadow of His existence. This is why the wise go on in God's worship with prayer and praise of God because their hearts and minds have become full of God's love.

God talks to us about relationship of love that the believers have for God and for other people: **'And there are some among mankind who take for themselves objects of worship besides God, whom they love as they love God, and those who believe have greater love for God'** 2:165; true believers do not love anyone as they love God, in fact, their love of

people stems from their love of God, as Imam al-Baqir (as) said: ‘He who is obedient to God is one of our supporters, and he who is disobedient to God is one of our enemies; and becoming one of our supporters cannot be achieved except with (good) deeds and piety.’<sup>1</sup> God even wants the Prophet (sawa) to talk to the believers: ‘Say: If you love God, then follow me; God will love you and forgive your sins, and God is Forgiving, Merciful’ 3:31; your love of God is represented by following the course that God wants, in this way you will be worthy of God’s love and forgiveness. Therefore, the wise are those who succeeded in discovering the greatness of God through His creation; they are those who remember God all the time, be they standing, sitting and lying down; they are those who always feel the presence of God so that they only see Him; as in the saying ascribed to Ali (as) ‘I have not seen anything but with God behind it’, which means when he looked at people and at anything around them, he would see that everything was a manifestation of God and His greatness.

### **From contemplation to responsibility**

In these verses, the Qur’an explains the results that are bestowed upon the wise as a result of their contemplation of the book of the universe and its reflections on their relationship to God; God says: ‘Those who remember God standing and

sitting and lying on their sides and reflect on the creation of the heavens and the earth: “Our Lord! You have not created this in vain! Glory to You, save us then from the penalty of the Fire” 3:191. They contemplate and see the seriousness, depth, wisdom and goal that man must attain in life: ‘Did you then think that We had created you in jest?’ 23:115, as there is wisdom behind the creation of all this. After they have contemplated and thought, they realise the greatness of God, so they submit to Him and talk with Him in thoughtful speech: ‘Our Lord! You have not created this in vain! Glory to You’; the words ‘Glory to You’ express glorification and belief in His exalted, faultless nature ‘save us then from the penalty of the Fire.’ From this, we know that the reasoning leads to the aspect of belief that relates to the question of responsibility in showing that, through our devotion to God and abiding by His commands, He saves us from Hell and takes us to Paradise. Then the wise will start to talk – in their supplication – about those who deny God: such people deserve shame and Hell, which is the highest degree of humiliation, in addition to living under the wrath of God. This is expressed by Imam Ali (as) in the supplication of Kumail: ‘And this does not come but as a result of your anger, revenge and wrath, something which heaven and earth cannot withstand; O my Master! Then how can I (withstand it) and I am your humble, insignificant, poor and submissive servant...’ The Qur’an

describes this state: **‘Our Lord! Surely whomsoever You make enter the Fire, him You have indeed brought to disgrace, and there shall be no helpers for the wrongdoers’ 3:192**, and asks how those who have inflicted such injustice on themselves with their polytheism, atheism and aggression, and who have cause themselves to fall into humiliation, punishment, spiritual failure and dark fate, how can they have supporters? If someone has lost God’s mercy, who can make him safe? **‘O You who can protect from everything, but nothing can protect from Him.’**

Then the wise try to express their position regarding their adherence to the course of belief, the circumstances of this, and those who opened the door for them: **‘Our Lord! We have heard the call of one calling (us) to Faith, “Believe you in your Lord,’ and we have believed”**”, which points to the Prophet (sawa) and whoever follows his Message or who propagates it, and to those who have responded positively to it and who believe in the Messenger and the Message through the belief in God. These people thought using their minds, and did not follow their basic instincts, which would have led them to a dead end by virtue of what they had inherited from their forefathers, or traditions and habits.

Their belief becomes greater when they return to their Lord after becoming distant from Him as a result of their sins. So they start repenting, saying: we are adherent believers, but if we

committed mistakes because of our weakness, You Our Lord have promised us forgiveness: ‘... Our Lord! Forgive us our sins, and remit from us our evil deeds, and make us die with the righteous’ 3:193, i.e. those who are on the right course, who worshipped you and were faithful to you, will get what you had promised the righteous when we die. “Our Lord! Grant us what You did promise unto us through Your messengers,” the Paradise and the kinds of bounties You promised believers, ‘... and save us from shame on the Day of Resurrection; surely You never break Your promise’ 3:194. The result would be their happiness through God’s acceptance of their prayers and stance: ‘And their Lord accepted of them: “I never waste the work of any of you, whether male or female”’, everyone, male or female, regardless of the kind of good deed, God will reward; “... the one of you being from the other”’ in this existence.

This ends with God’s description of those who withstood suffering and tragedy as a result of their belief and struggle: “... Those who have left their homes (migrated), or have been driven out therefrom, or persecuted in My Cause, or fought or been slain, verily, I will remit from them their evil deeds, and admit them into Gardens with rivers flowing beneath; a reward from God, and with God is the best of rewards” 3:195; this applies to those who migrated as a result of pressure of non-believers, because they declared that their Lord is God

and withstood harm from that direction and struggled and fought in the battle of truth against falsehood, and likewise to those who were martyred in that struggle.

### **No value to knowledge without deeds**

From this we can reach a conclusion: the meaning that man is thoughtful or rational is that he pursues knowledge to open up to knowing God and to his responsibility, so that knowledge leads him to deeds, as there is no value to knowledge without acting accordingly, since deeds are the fruit of knowledge. This is why when the wise pursue their thinking and research, they open up to God, submit to Him and pray to Him and He gives them all that they ask.

### **Not just mental theorisation**

In His speech about the wise, God emphasises that the issue of the mind and reason is not merely abstract thinking and perception, but it is a question of man's balance in life, because life has a system, balance and human consequences. When the mind opens up to life through its responsibility, it tries to study each human phenomenon in negative and positive terms, especially in matters relating to the problems and challenge that face man's psychological balance, or the interactions, relationships and cooperation that man pursues in order to set life on a firm foundation.

The problem with a lot of people is that they move through life haphazardly, not on a basis that plans for details. This is why we find that the Holy Qur'an emphasises that the meaning of a person being rational or mindful is that he does not lead his thinking into labyrinths when trying to deal with complicated matters, but rather he protects life from the soul, and does not allow life to fall to the aggression of the soul that results from desires and individual particularities, and he protects life from the deviation that it faces in society. We have a responsibility towards life around us through our obligations of being God's appointed vicegerents on earth, and He has given us a healthy earth with no enmity, war, hatred or violence, and He wants us to hand over this earth, when we depart from it, in the same state in which He has given it to us, and to give to it more beauty and importance through our energy, thought and effort.

### **Strong encouragement to think**

In our effort to understand these principles, we ask the Qur'an – which is our leader, guide and the foundation in all the aspects of belief and the general basis of the Shari'ah. We also ask the Prophetic Sunnah, which opens up to the Qur'an to integrate with it in all this.

God says: 'Is he who knows that what is revealed unto you from your Lord is the truth like one who is blind? But it is only the wise who pay heed' 13:19. The first part of the verse

precedes the speech about the wise (i.e. those who think, understand and reason), and serves as a first glimpse of the horizon that the speech relates to and emphasises. This part emphasises the matter of the truth in mans' consciousness, which is the question of the awareness that shines through his thinking and the insights that make him aware of the facts inside him. There is one kind of person who recites the revelation to the Messenger of God (sawa), studies it and pursues it deeper to look into its detail and the miraculous elements in it, so that he comes up with the decisive result: this is the truth where there is no doubt and which falsehood cannot tarnish. On the other hand, there is another kind of person who has closed his heart and mind and has a mental and intellectual blindness because he has closed the eyes to that internal area in his consciousness that looks closely at the facts of things – he is not blind in his sight, but in his insight; God says: **'For indeed it is not the eyes that grow blind, but it is the hearts, which are within the chests, that grow blind'** 22:46.

Then, the Qur'an emphasises the role of reason in the process of comparison between these two types of people: **'... but it is only the wise who pay heed.'** We know that the role of the mind is to think and reason, utilising the mind in all perceptions and human experiences so that it fail to recognise the truth, or forget it and deviate from the natural course. The



person who lives in a state of awareness of what is and who is around him can stay aware of all facts.

### **The human vanguard**

Talking about the wise (those who think, understand and reason), Imam al-Kadhimi (as) says (in his teachings to his companion Hisham bin al-Hakam<sup>2</sup>): ‘O Hisham! God mentioned the wise in the best of words and ‘beautified’ (honoured) them with the best of ‘decoration’ (description).’ This is because they represent the human vanguard and have the power to build life on healthy basis, ‘so He said: “He grants wisdom to whom He pleases, and whoever is granted wisdom, he indeed is given abundant good; and none pay heed to this but the wise” 2:269’; the verse starts with the ‘wisdom’ that God gave to man, and wisdom represents balance and it means putting things in the right place so that nothing in the nature of their existence may deviate. And if some commentators explain wisdom as knowledge, or the Qur’an, this also implies wisdom as we can identify in some verses on the basis that the Qur’an plans for people and makes them live with a mentality and conduct of straightforwardness, and wisdom is that power that God instilled in the believer to help him ask his mind so as to ascertain that he goes about his affairs, private or public, in a state of balance and integrity, and not to deviate away from the right path.

‘...and none pay heed but the wise’ means that those who think, understand and reason (the wise) have the mental ability to keep themselves away from blindness and lack of awareness, because the mind lights up their paths and opens up their horizons.

In light of this, the wise person must be one who reflects on all that is around him and his obligations in that, and on all that he is engaged in in the struggle of life; he must have an ever alert and reflective mind, aware of things and realising the nature of what is around him, not to live in passiveness and with lack of awareness, like those who become like this as a result of their indulgence in desires and self-gratification. ‘And God said: “and those who are firmly rooted in knowledge say: ‘We believe in it, it is all from our Lord;’ and none pay heed except the wise” 3:7’; the Qur’an talks about those who are deeply knowledgeable, and who have attained a deep command of knowledge and opened up to all its details so that they have acquired clarity in what is around them, and they differentiate between verses with clear established meaning and the allegorical verses, setting the former as the principle framework for the latter, so that they do not feel that there is any contradiction in the Qur’an through the latter, which some people abuse ‘seeking to cause discord (by misleading) and seeking to give it (their own) interpretation’ 3:7.

Imam al-Kadhimi (as) also used the verse: ‘Most surely in the creation of the heavens and the earth and the alternation of the night and the day there are signs for the wise’ 3:190, which we have covered earlier in this chapter.

Then he came to another verse: ‘And He said: “Is he who knows that what is revealed unto you from your Lord is the truth like one who is blind? But it is only the wise who pay heed” 13:19.’” Here, it explains that the difference between the person who believes in the revelation to the Messenger of God (sawa) and the person who does not is that the former is insightful, since he has the insight of his mind, feeling and experience through which he can see the facts of things that underline the fact that this revelation cannot be manmade, but has to be from God.

The person who does not believe the revelation is actually blind since, although he has the ability to see the things perceived externally, he fails to see the facts of things, as described by God: ‘and they have eyes with which they do not see’ 7:179, because they keep their eyes and insight inactive in pursuing research in this matters.

‘...it is only the wise who pay heed’ since they are the ones who are aware of the facts of things, something which helps them travel with insight deep into these facts.

‘And God said: “Is one who worships devoutly during the hours of the night, prostrate and standing, cautious (ever

mindful) of the Hereafter and hoping for the mercy of his Lord (to be counted equal to a disbeliever)?”]; worshipping devoutly is obedience to God, the Most High. He distinguishes between the person who does not live in the belief of Him, and does not see the Divine light but lives in darkness, and the person who believes in God and implements his belief practically in worshipping God and submitting to Him. This is what prostration implies, as it represents the highest degree of submission; while standing represents the state of readiness to God and the Hereafter. ‘...and hoping for the mercy of his Lord’ means waiting for and expecting God’s mercy, not like those who rebel against God, ignore Him, and abstain from worshipping Him and from submission to Him, thus cutting themselves off from the floods of mercy that come from the nearness to God.

“...Say: ‘Are those who know and those who do not know alike?’” As in the Qur’an, the question of straightforwardness and deviation is a scientific one: those who have the knowledge will proceed with it to the fact of absolute Divinity and the fact of the responsibility that man must take up in his worship, obedience and love of God. This is in contrast to those who are ignorant, as they lurk in darkness, since they fail to see the Divine light that shines in the mind of those who abide by belief and the knowledge that lights up the contemplative and practical path “‘... it is only the wise who pay heed’ 39:9.’

## The evidence of truth

‘And the Most High said: “(It is) a Book which We have sent down unto you, full of blessings, that they may contemplate on Signs, and so that the wise may pay heed” 38:29’ which is similar: God tells people that they should contemplate and think about the Qur’an as revealed to the Prophet (sawa) and sent to them, to understand its verses and, through them, their life, in the present and the future, ‘Do they not then contemplate the Qur’an? And if it had been from any other than God, they would have found in it much discrepancy’ 4:82 and ‘Do they not then reflect on the Qur’an, or are there locks on their hearts?’ 47:24, as well as other verses encouraging people to try to acquire knowledge through the Qur’anic verses, since the role of the Holy Qur’an is to educate the mind about things that it cannot reach, whether in the realms of the unknown and unknowable, or the Shari’ah.

In light of this, we understand that Muslims should recite the Qur’an in a reflective and perceptive way, to educate their minds and feelings in the whole of their internal consciousness, and to make the Qur’an part and parcel of their life.

And: “And certainly We gave Moses the guidance, and We made the children of Israel inherit the Book. A guide and a reminder to the wise” 40:53-4’ which emphasises that the Torah revealed to Moses (as) was revealed for the guidance of people. The same applies to the Bible, which shows that all the

Books revealed by God to people were designed to educate them; to enrich their minds through the Divine revelation that provides for the mind what it could not discover; to activate the mind to interact with the facts that it has the means to deal with; and to enter into the insight of man so as to distinguish between truth and falsehood, positive and negative, the useful and the harmful, and good and evil.

‘And God, the Most High, said: “And (continue to) remind (them), for surely the reminder benefits the believers.” 51:55. Reminding is the means that give man awareness in all his affairs, which will benefit the believers, to help them to be in a state of continuous alertness towards their responsibilities and reality, and to make them open up to all fields of knowledge.

Al-Kadhim (as) continues to recite the verse of the Qur’an relating to the subject: ‘God says in His Book: “Most surely there is a reminder in this for him who has a heart or he gives ear and is a witness.” 50:37.’ In the first part, this talks about the ‘heart’ which means the mind, as the word ‘heart’ is used for the organ that gives man the power of life – the heart represents the mind as in the verse: ‘they have hearts with which they do not understand’ 7:179; so that whoever has a mind has the power of remembering and this represents awareness in action. The second part means that if someone is

aware and has understanding of what he listens to, this makes him a witness to what he has heard.

‘And the Most High said: “And certainly We bestowed wisdom to Loqman” 31:12’ where the word ‘wisdom’ means understanding and reasoning; it means that the wise understand what is around them and think and understand the secrets of things and their interactions in life. God did not send Loqman as a prophet, but He gave him the awareness of the Prophets (as) and the gifts of thinking and reasoning through which he could direct people. We can derive from the speech of Loqman to his son – as told by the Qur’an – that fathers who have acquired knowledge and mature experience in life should not fail to educate their children, but should offer them advice and education and should discuss and enter into dialogue with them, so as to activate their thinking and to provide them with knowledge, just as they provide them with food for their bodies; fathers should meet their obligations towards their children depending on the knowledge and experience they have, so that their children develop and enrich their knowledge. The Imam (as) said: ‘O Hisham! Loqman said to his son: “Be humble to the truth and you shall be the most rational of people.”’ When you research things, whether they be matters that call for reflection or experience on your part, or that of others, and discover the truth and become convinced by it because it represents the facts, then you should bow to it and to

accept it even if it contradicts the legacy and tradition of your fathers and forefathers, and even if it contradicts the society you live in, because the reason that goes hand in hand with the truth would make itself obligatory to you, just as perceived elements of reality, such as the sun at noon, would do. Therefore, when you see the truth, you should bow to it and not let yourself become arrogant as those who deny it would do, nor should you reject it in spite of being convinced, as a result of their personal complexes.

‘... And wise people when it comes to truth are few’; the wise are the rational people who think and arrive, through thinking, at decisive results; this is the best means to reach knowledge and belief.

‘O my son! Life is a deep sea, in which a lot of people have drowned’ in its desires and pleasures, in the way that leads to destruction, because they did not live up to their responsibilities in life and on path to the Hereafter; ‘so let your ship, O my son, be God-fearing’ because God-fearing represents the means to rescue in life, since it means that you observe God’s ‘do’s and don’ts’; ‘... and its filling is belief, and its sail is reliance (on God)’ so that the ship of life sails on its course depending on God; ‘... and its captain is reason, and its guide knowledge’ so that you know the direction and the map that you draw to determine your course in life; ‘... and the ship’s wheel is patience’ because you have to be patient when



you face dangers at sea, and likewise when you face problems in life. So, let things develop under your wisdom, knowledge and patience, so that you reach your destiny safely.

### **The revelation of reason**

Al-Kadhim (as) concentrates on reason as the means to rid oneself of all negative elements that transform in bad characteristics, as opposed to the positive elements that transform to merits; he said: ‘O Hisham! God talked about some good people who said: “Our Lord! Let not our hearts deviate (now) after You have guided us aright, and bestow upon us mercy from You(r Presence); surely You are the Bestower” 3:8, when they knew that a heart can deviate and return to its blindness and lowliness.’ This means that confusing questions may befall hearts, and some situations may challenge one’s belief and adherence to one’s obligations, something that may lead a man to descend from a state of enlightenment and internal insight to a lowly state in this regard. This implies that the rational person –although he might be a believer, but negative situations may make him deviate from the straight path – must be vigilant to fend off all negative situations around him that raise confusing questions, for these may cause his belief to falter and may lead him away from straightforwardness and religious adherence. This supplication, that God taught us in His Book and through His Apostles, is for use when man feels weakness and needs to resort to His Lord to

solve his problem and rescue him from his weakness; God says: ‘And when My servants ask you concerning Me, then surely I am close (to them); I answer the prayer of the supplicant when he calls on Me; so they should answer My call and believe in Me, that they may walk in the right way’ 2:186. When they feel a faltering (in their beliefs) that might push them towards deviation, they pray God ‘Our Lord! Let not our hearts deviate (now) after You have guided us aright’ – You have blessed us with guidance that led us to knowledge of Your Oneness, of Your attributes, how to worship You, Your Messengers and Your revelation to them, therefore, we ask You – O Lord – to help us walk in the course of guidance, without deviation befalling us, in any situation, since guidance is the most valuable bounty: ‘Praise be to God, who guided us to this; we could not have been guided had it not been that God guided us’ 7:43.

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<sup>1</sup> *Al-Kafi*, al-Kulaini, vol.2, p.74.

<sup>2</sup> *Al-Kafi*, vol.1, p.13; *Tuhaf al-Uqool*, al-Harrani, p.383.

## Chapter 4

# Wisdom and the Wise Life and People

Who are the wise – those who think, understand and reason? What do they do in life? What is their conduct in their relationships? How do they react to challenges? In this chapter, we shall describe the merits and features of such people in their interaction with life in all its aspects.

### Listening, distinguishing and following

In his teaching to his companion Hisham bin al-Hakam<sup>1</sup>, Imam Musa al-Kadhim (as) says: ‘O Hisham! God, the Most High, gave good news to those who have reason and understanding in His Book: “So give good news to My servants: those who listen to the word, then follow the best of it, those are they whom God has guided, and those it is who are wise” 39:17-8’. These words relate to the matter of listening to the words presented to them, whether these are Qur’anic verses, narrations from the Prophet (sawa) and the Imams (as) (who absorbed the thoughts and knowledge of the

Prophet (sawa) so that it cannot be said that they were mere narrators, but individuals who lived Islam on the basis of truth), or from anyone who has some knowledge in any speciality. There is a difference between hearing (*sema*ʿ) and listening (*istima*ʿ), as in the former the word gets into your ear without choice, as when one is passing by in the street or in a gathering and people are talking; in this case one does not concentrate on what they are saying. However, in the latter, you are listening through your own will, making up your mind to concentrate on what is entering your ears. We can draw from the above that the Imam (as) derives from the verse that God wants people to listen to the speech, think about it, study it, determine which is right and which is wrong, the good and the better, in a scientific process, so that to choose the best in thought, the best in plan, the best in action and so on.

But why does God give good news to such people? Because they acquire knowledge from what they listen to, then scrutinise it to develop the facts that they have learnt, so they can differentiate between one speech and another and choose the best and more useful. These are the people who benefit life as a result of their existence, because society – any society – when it is a thinking society that compares and weighs thought, then chooses the best to apply in its life, will naturally be a society that is advancing, and both intellectual and attentive, not accepting anything except what is of the highest level of knowledge and best for life.

This is why they had the good news from God, for they are the people who choose the best. God says: ‘as for the scum, it passes away as a worthless thing; and as for that which benefits mankind, it remains on the earth’ 13:17, and what benefits people is what has the elements that can provide life with strength, distinction and action.

Then the verse describes them: ‘those are they whom God has guided,’ when He helped them to open their minds to the truth, ‘and those it is who are wise’ – those who are thoughtful and rational.

This is what the Imam (as) wanted Hisham to infer from it. He is saying to him: make your mind up on the level that can produce the best of thought, and activate your life in the direction that follows this best of thought. This is the issue of reason: it is not a mere theorisation in the mind that has no relationship to the rest of life, as witnessed in a lot of people who indulge in thinking about things that have no implication for the faith or for practical life. The mind should be a leader for life and naturally a leadership like this must be through the thoughts that direct and serve life.

### **The practical mind**

Then the Imam (as) starts talking about the question of ‘conduct through the practical mind’ – how God, the Most High, gives man advice and teachings that can make him

broadminded in a way that can achieve balance and straightforwardness in what he believes, and in his relationships with others, near and distant. **‘Then He said: “Say: Come I will recite what your Lord has forbidden to you:”** as forbidden things represent the lines of conduct of man in life, as they make him distance himself from them to live a balanced and straightforward life; **‘...that you do not associate anything as partner with Him,’** since God created our nature on the basis of His Oneness and placed His Oneness in the depth of man’s personality, so that he can realise it through his instinctive nature; **‘...and be good to your parents,’** taking care not to ignore the need to act with kindness towards your parents; we know that the question of ‘kindness to the parents’ is linked to the feeling of the value of their efforts in bringing us up, something which the verse: **‘and say: “O my Lord! have mercy on them, as they brought me up (when I was) little”** 17:24 points to, as we remember their efforts and suffering, and are encouraged to make the effort to be good to them as they were good to us, on the basis of: **‘Is the reward of goodness aught but goodness?’** 55:60.<sup>2</sup>

**‘... and do not slay your children for (fear of) poverty – (for) We provide sustenance for you and for them. This killing may be direct or indirect: it is quite possible that a man has many children and when his wife gets pregnant yet again, they resort to abortion, since their financial circumstances cannot**

stretch to more children. In all cases, God is saying: why kill them? You are not the one who is providing for them, but it is God who is doing that, because as it was God Who has provided for you when you were born; the same goes for your child. This means that it is not allowable to kill life under any circumstances, and this applies to women, who are not allowed to resort to abortion, even if on the first day of pregnancy.<sup>3</sup> Some people say: we cannot bring up four children, and here is yet another one that has come without planning – we cannot bring him up or educate him; but this is not an acceptable excuse, because the sperm and egg combination has already started the journey of life, and certainly it is not allowed to kill it after it has entered the uterus and stabilised there.

‘... and do not draw nigh to indecencies, those of them which are apparent and those which are concealed,’ whether done in the open or secretly.

‘...and do not kill the soul which God has forbidden except for the requirements of justice;’ as life is respected and God does not allow ending it unless for the right reasons, such as capital punishment, self defence, legitimate war and so on.

‘...this He has enjoined you with that you may understand’  
6:151.

We understand from this that these programmes of conduct that God the Almighty wants us to adopt (and also to address the negative side of them), represent the action of the mind

upon the practical side of life. In other words, your mental and reasoning faculty is telling you: if you commit forbidden acts, you shall face a lot of harm, so you must abstain from that. Since your mind can distinguish between good and bad, it also tells you that not committing what God prohibited, because it brings harm, represents the right line of conduct, while committing such things represents the bad line of conduct, therefore: you should take the good and reject the bad.

### **Fulfilment of promise is a human merit**

God says: **‘Those who fulfil the covenant of God and break not the covenant’ 13:20.** This is one of the merits that straightforwardness in life depends on because the question of covenant represents the person’s internal adherence to his belief that transforms from a mere concept to an external observation of his duties, or to a realistic act. This applies for both: the covenant with God in any matter the person wishes to abide by in His religion, Shari’ah and revelations; or the covenant with people since a covenant with people is also a covenant with God. This why the form of covenant is that the person says: *‘Lillah ‘alayye ‘ahdon an af’ala* such and such’ (I am making it obligatory on me to God to do such and such), or *‘Lillah ‘alayee ‘ahdon an adkhole fi hathihee ash-sherikeh* or *fi hatha al-‘amel’* (I am making it obligatory on me to God to form this company or this job with



you). This represents a covenant with God through your abidance by the guidelines that link you with people.

A covenant may be one that is agreed by society, even if it is not announced with words. Rational people in society may agree to a certain system of ethics which is a kind of covenant that all members of society should observe, and deviation from which is rejected by the people, who will condemn those concerned, and they may even punish them. The issue here is that one has to observe one's covenant to others, as this shows one's respect of oneself and others.

The Prophetic wisdom **'Like for your brethren what you like for yourself'**<sup>4</sup> and Imam Ali's words **'God loves the Muslim who likes for his brethren what he likes for himself and dislikes for him what he dislikes for himself'**<sup>5</sup> are relevant to this concept of covenant. Just as you like it that others observe their covenant with you, you – according to this rule – should do the same for them.

The covenant in the above verse, **'and break not the covenant'**, is a covenant as well, and this leads us to talk about one of the areas covered by this type of covenant, which is in the marriage relationship. We notice that when God talks about the fulfilment of a husband's pledge to his wife in his obligations towards her, He describes marriage as a **'strong covenant'**, not simply **'a covenant'**: so it is a strong, firm covenant; He says, when talking about those husbands who take the dowries of their wives: **'and**

they have taken a strong covenant from you?’ 4:21. The marriage contract does not make marriage a relationship of slavery, in which the husband imposes on his wife, denying her personality and preventing her from having control of her possessions and life (apart from what she has promised as a marital right for the husband), and does not permit him to take her dowry under pressure or force. When the Holy Qur’an emphasises that the wise (those who think, understand and reason) are those ‘**who fulfil the covenant of God and break not the covenant,**’ it wants to underline this matter, since it covers life in all its aspects; people should live together on the basis that each respects the other through keeping promises, whether on the personal, social or state levels, even on the international level when treaties are signed – all this is on the basis that for every person, society or state there are both rights and obligations, and just as they have the right to ask for their rights, they also have to meet their obligations towards others. If man, in whatever status and position, ignores the need to fulfil his covenants, life would turn into chaos, something which we witness in some international areas when the strong eats the weak and the arrogant powers bring about the downfall of others.

### Care for relatives

The second merit of the wise (those who think, understand and reason) is ‘**And those who join (keep ties in kinship**

relationships) that which God has bidden to be joined' 13:21, which is the spirit of care and right-thinking that tie people to each other, making each group observe what should be done for the care of others in their happy, sad and painful days and circumstances.

God, the Most High, talks about the kinship relationship even if those concerned have severed their ties, as He talks about the special status of the parents as having an even higher position in comparison to the other kin; the obligations towards parents extends even to polytheist parents: 'And if they strive with you to make you associate, as partner, with Me what you have no knowledge of, (in this case) do not obey them, but keep company with them in this world kindly,' 31:15. We also have many narrations on the link between believers making the tie of brotherhood between believers, and how this affects duties to one another, such as to help and support each other, and not to cheat, wrong or accuse each other.

This can be extended, in the general meaning of keeping up ties, to the impoverished sections of society, such as the poor, orphans and the disabled, who are not able to live in dignity. God, the Most High, wants us to care for them, through individual or collective initiatives and charities that work to care for them and try to create normal circumstances for them for dignified living.

### **From consciousness to vigilance**

The verse goes on to describe the wise: **‘and fear their Lord, and dread a woeful reckoning’ 13:21**. It is the fear of failing when brought to account on the Day of Judgement that gives one the feeling of dire need to abide closely by these two principles, because one knows that God, the Most High, will bring you to account then (**‘On the Day when every soul will come pleading for itself’ 16:111**), but there will be no opportunity to retract any deed or words of his speech.

The issue here is the negative deeds committed, when weighed up in the accountable situation before God. The person who pays attention to what he says and what he does, in all relationships he engages in, when he sees God in his heart and mind, will follow a conduct of straightforwardness and stay away from deviation. The problem – as we notice in a lot of us – is that our relationship with God has become a static, traditional one, with no pulse in the heart or action in the mind, similar to all habits that we have become accustomed to. We act according to habit, thinking that this habit is belief, but when we enter the experience, we feel that the belief is distant from us. Al-Mutanabbi expresses this idea when he compares the actor with the person who really experiences the situation in reality:

When tears get mixed with cheeks,

(Then) they who cry will be distinguished from those who pretend to cry!

When a person faces a matter that relates to his desires, then if he stays on the right path, he knows that he is truthful in his belief. The contrary to that is when he fails to abide by the obligations of the true path; then he will feel his distance from his belief.

### **Patience as a high value**

The other merit of the wise (those who think, understand and reason) is patience: “Those who patiently persevere, seeking the countenance of their Lord” 13:22. In certain circumstances, patience may come from an external situation when one is hoping for people’s praise; in another, it may come from an individual status of disability. But in both cases, this patience that has not come from the person’s awareness of his duties in life towards God, or instances in which he faces challenges and problems calling for patience in himself or in others.

Patience is the value that represents one’s balance in telling times. There is – as noted in the Qur’an and the Sunnah – a patience required by the religious ‘do’s and don’ts’, since these call for effort and may challenge one’s circumstances or own needs, which may exert pressure on one to deviate from the correct path to meet these needs. This is what we witness when

a lot of people abstain from some duties, such as prayers, fasting, pilgrimage or facing the oppressors and justify this by saying that they do not have time to perform the daily prayers, or that their own interests prevent them from facing the oppressor and siding by the just. Thus, abiding by the religious duties can make the person who carries them out feel deprived of rest or gains. Some may live in societies that prevent believers from abiding by their duties, and as a result they become lazy, or worry that others would ridicule or criticise him. Thus patience is needed so that one meets one's religious obligations and stands firm against all pressures and temptations.

The same applies to sins, which, through their sensual or profit-bearing content, can raise a man's desires and motivate his greed, making him, in many cases, feel impoverished if he abstains from doing them. He may see other people taking bribes when he does not, or others following the oppressors when he does not, or others engaging in acts that cause destruction when he does not; in such cases he might feel a deep sense of impoverishment through the things that God prohibited, whether desires, pleasures, gains or satisfying human greed. Thus, he needs patience so as to control such feelings lest they destroy his balance.

The third type of patience is patience when hardship strikes. Life – as we know – is not strewn with roses, and nor is it an

outing in which one can rest. Iff you want to get some roses, you must risk pricking you hand with the thorns that protect the roses; you cannot collect honey without the risk of getting stung; nor can you achieve your scientific, political or social ambitions unless you make the effort of spending long nights awake, travel long distances and withstanding setbacks. The poet says:

Life is thorns, in the midst of which are roses,  
So destroy the thorns so that you can reach the roses.

Naturally, destroying the thorns will cause bleeding.

In this regard, the Qur'an says: 'And We will most certainly test you with somewhat of fear and hunger and loss of property and lives and fruits; and give good news to the patient,' 2:155 and: 'You shall certainly be tested respecting your possessions and your souls, and you shall certainly hear much hurtful talk from those who have been given the Book before you and from those who are polytheists; but if you are patient and God-fearing, surely this is one of the affairs (which should be) determined upon.' 3:186.

Therefore, having patience in times of hardship is imperative if one does not want to collapse under pressure and give up one's principles or deviate from the right path. We know that people who call others to God and good, and act to improve the conditions of their society or to liberate their country will face imprisonment, persecution and the many losses that will be

inflicted on their family and possessions – in such cases they must have patience to face such hardships.

### **Patience regarding bounties**

Scholars list the patience regarding God's bounties as another type of patience. God wants man to be thankful for His bounties and to treat them as a gentle and discreet expression of God's mercy; it does not entail elevating him so that he becomes arrogant, for bounties can make some people like that, as we witness sometimes in the attitude of the rich towards the poor or the old towards the young. Therefore, one must show patience and should understand that this bounty, in addition of being an expression of God's mercy and care, is a test, to see if one is grateful or not, as in the verse: **'to test me whether I am grateful or ungrateful'** 27:40. Also, this is because this bounty calls for the person to live up to the principles that represent practical gratitude, as expressed by Moses (as) when God saved him from Pharaoh, in his first journey in which he escaped from the latter when someone came and warned him that they were after him; then when he ran away and reached the well in Midian, he rested against a tree and said: **'He said: "O my Lord! For the favour you have bestowed on me, I shall never be a supporter of the guilty"'** 28:17. What Moses (as) did was that he turned the bounty into a way of thanking God (practically) through his struggle, saying that he would never be



a supporter of wrong-doers, even if this meant leaving his homeland. This implies that when man is put to the test by God, but still supports wrong-doers, in this case he is regarded as one who has denied God's bounty.

### **Patience regarding thought**

There is also patience regarding the right framework of thought in the question of adherence to belief, as opposed to the traditional legacies of the fathers and forefathers, which may be mired in the myths associated with a backward mentality. This issue must be faced by correct thought that is based on a rational scientific foundation, according to the Islamic systematic approach, so as to achieve the correct results, and then to show patience towards those ignorant, backward people who agitate uninformed people and stir up their backward, emotional reactions against the bearers of that pure original thought, using the accusatory approach of deviation and atheism for which they lack any proof or argument except the heritage of tradition.

One must not lose one's balance when faced with such challenges to patience, be internal (regarding bounties) or external (regarding challenging thoughts); rather, one must activate one's mind to see the negative results if one fails to face up to them, and the positive results if one does. It is preserving one's humanity, in all its elements, that is at stake here.

## Patience and freedom

Another area where patience is put to the test is freedom; Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq (as) says: 'A free man is free at all times: if a calamity befalls him, he shows patience, and if calamities and hardships flood upon him, they cannot break him even if he is taken captive, subjugated and sees comfort replaced with hardship.' As long as you are patient, you are free, for freedom does not come from the outside, rather it emerges from the inside when you have the will for freedom within yourself and the will for the rejection of injustice. Therefore, one may be free inside a prison cell but a slave in the open desert! This is because slavery comes from inside the soul when it loses the feeling of humanity before whoever wants to defeat it, while you feel freedom when you rebel against whoever wants to defeat your freedom. Imam as-Sadiq (as) continues with a role model in this regard, a Prophet who lived under persistent temptation, but he rebelled against this and showed patience; it is the Prophet Joseph (as) who said according to the Qur'an: 'O my Lord! The prison is more to my liking than that to which they invite me; and unless You turn away their snare from me, I will yearn for them and become (one) of the ignorant' 12:33, taking refuge in God to give him extra strength; Imam as-Sadiq (as) continues: 'as was Joseph, the man of truth, the trustworthy (as), his freedom was not harmed that he was enslaved, subjugated and taken captive and was

not harmed by the darkness and loneliness of the prison and all that befell him; and God made that tyrant a slave for him (Joseph) after he became his master; so He sent him and made him a mercy to a nation;’ then Imam as-Sadiq (as) says: ‘this is patience: it is followed by good, so be patient and you shall be rewarded.’<sup>6</sup>

In the same area, it was narrated that Imam Ali (as) had said: ‘Do not be a slave to others when God created you free.’<sup>7</sup> The Imam (as) wants you to stir your freedom from inside yourself: you must be free within yourself and you must have the will for freedom to fend off others who want to force you into submission and enslave you to make you follow their decisions and abandon your principles. We regard these words from Ali (as) more far-reaching in expressing freedom than the words narrated from Omar bin al-Khattab (the second caliph), who said to one of his governors: ‘When has it become permissible for you to enslave people when they have been born free?’, since these words are addressed to governors so that they do not treat people like slaves, while Ali’s words are addressed to all so that we do not accept being treated as slaves by others. So, be free in yourself, for this freedom is the secret of your existence in life. Just as God created your mind and body, He created you free, but you are not free to deviate from this freedom.

We can also say that patience is the secret of life, since any person – from the start of his life until he grows up, gets married, has a family and faces the challenges of his home, neighbourhood and society at large – cannot do anything without patience. This is why Ali (as) said: ‘**Adopt patience, as patience in relation to belief is as the head to the body: as there is no good in a body without head, there is no good in belief without patience**’<sup>8</sup> because belief is not a state of thought, but an action in reality. Imam Mohammed al-Jawad (as) says: ‘**All good deeds are (done) with patience.**’<sup>9</sup> And God says: ‘**Verily those who patiently persevere will receive their reward of an incalculable amount**’ 39:10, that is, without limit – in other words: I will give you all you could wish for!

### Patience and reason

The Qur’an says: ‘**Those who patiently persevere, seeking the countenance of their Lord**’ 13:22, highlighting that the patience of the wise is one that is connected to their belief in God, and their obligations and relationship with their Lord – they show patience so as to attain God’s satisfaction with them and his reward, not to win other people’s praise, nor is this a matter of a temporary state.

Since God made this merit one of the virtues of the wise, it follows that he who lacks patience is not rational, because reason is what leads a person to face life so as to achieve good and

positive results, in the forefront of which is happiness in both this life and the Hereafter, all through the values that he adheres to and makes part and parcel of his life, as also through the deeds made obligatory on us.

And (the daily) prayer in all its meanings – as God linked it to patience in the verse: “Those who patiently persevere, seeking the countenance of their Lord and keep up prayer (regularly)’ 13:22 – represents the spirit of all the deeds that Islam made obligatory on us, but we see some people do not give proper importance to prayer; this is a misunderstanding of its meaning in Islamic concept, as narrated in the *hadith*: ‘The (daily) prayer is the pillar of religion’<sup>10</sup> and, according to Imam al-Baqir (as), ‘The first thing that a person is brought to judgment about is prayer – if it is accepted, everything else will be accepted.’<sup>11</sup>

We understand from this is that the essence of religion is the relationship with God and the feeling of His presence in the consciousness and life of the person, and the value of (the daily) prayers is that it – in its variety of acts and times – allow you to talk to God and ask him for his support in your pain, problems and needs, as is the case with the supplications narrated from Ahlul Bayt (as) when they teach people to talk to God without mediation, as if God is deep in everybody’s being.

In light of this, whoever does not pray is not experiencing the meaning of Islam, especially as the true meaning of Islam is

manifested in what the acts of the prayers imply. The Qur'an says: 'Say: "Surely my prayer and my sacrifice (religious ritual) and my life and my death are (all) for God, the Lord of the worlds. No partner has He; this am I commanded, and I am the first of those who bow to His will"' 7:162-3, so everything is from God and when man keeps this in mind and feels it, he will be near to God, and will see this extending to all that God made obligatory on him and all that God loves, for 'submission to God' means that. Therefore, prayer is the essence of Islam, not a minor thing; even though some did turn it into a minor thing, while others turned it into a kind of sport: it is not a physical sport, but a spiritual sport that can elevate man to His Lord.

### Giving alms and giving to charity

Giving for the needy is one of the merits of the wise, who think, in their practical life, on the basis of reason that encourages the person to act in whatever direction he benefits from and distance himself from whatever harms him. God, the Most High, says: '... and spend (benevolently) secretly and openly out of what We have given them' 13:22, so they give from what God has given them discreetly on some occasions and in publicview on others. In this part of the verse we can see several points:

First: If a person wants to give to the needy or for charity, there are two approaches:

The first is to do that discreetly and this (usually) applies to cases of the needy whose need is not (publicly) known – God describes them: ‘the one about whom others have no idea (regarding their need) and think him to be rich on account of (his) abstaining (from begging)’ 2:273. Such people – owing to their psychological make-up or social circumstances – may feel weak and humiliated if they are given help in public, therefore God wants whoever chooses to help them to do so in a way that preserves their dignity whilst also covering their needs.

The second is giving in public, which is desirable when it is aimed at encouraging others to give as well. Some people are encouraged to give when they see others take the initiative, and in these cases it is better to make it public. This is something we see in charity projects when the aim is to collect people’s donations and alms, or when the aim is to help orphans, the poor and so on.

Hence, giving discreetly is better when preserving the dignity of the recipient is desired, while giving in public is better when encouraging other people to give and donate is desired.

### **Giving for charity and liberating one’s soul**

Second: How God links the issue of giving to the needy, and the question of reason. There is a relation between the mind as

a guide to the person and giving to the needy. Giving to the needy has many features, some related to the soul in the way that the person feels his humanistic nature and his striving to elevate his soul, some related to the social situation, and some related to the satisfaction of God in relation to His commands to give to the needy as a means to alleviate social problems and to achieve social solidarity and integration.

As for the relation to one's effort to elevate and educate the soul, giving to the needy breaks all the ice that may overwhelm the soul, as occurs with mean people who emphasise their separation from society while they devote themselves entirely to themselves and their own lives. This is why God says: **'and whoever is saved from his own avarice, these it is that are the successful ones'** 59:9; so the person who is saved from the meanness of his soul is on the road to success.

In fact, being mean to others entails being mean to oneself as well: **'and whoever is niggardly is niggardly against his own soul'** 47:38 because if you abstain from helping the needy, you will find many others who will also do that, but it is you yourself who have missed the opportunity for the spiritual enlightenment that occurs when you open up to others instead of keeping everything for yourself. Being a human being means you exhibit your human nature through that of the others, otherwise you are not living in the true spirit of your faith as the Prophet (sawa) says: **'God loves the Muslim who likes for**



his brethren what he likes for himself and dislikes for him what he dislikes for himself.’<sup>12</sup>

### **Giving to the needy and social belonging**

Third: The question of the person’s feeling that he belongs to society when he gives to the needy. Each one of us has two personalities: the individual personality that is related to his own personal needs (desires, pleasures, playing or otherwise, something which concerns him alone); and the social personality which relates to the fact that he is part of a family, a society, a country and the whole of humanity. Therefore, he must give to each one the obligations incumbent on him, so that the necessary elements of each are established within him.

In light of this, giving to the needy – in essence – prevents the person from completely indulging in his individual personality, and pushes him into manifesting his respect for his social personality. It is this feeling of social personality that makes him recognise and feel the thirst and hunger of those around him, in all the categories as defined in the Shari’ah: the poor, the needy, the debtors, stranded travellers and so on.

The problem of many societies is that it is common that people are generally more attached to their individual personalities than their social personality, while Islam wants a balance between the two. This is because if individuals fail to meet their obligations to themselves, they will fail to benefit society, and if

they fail to meet their obligations towards society, society breaks down, since the needs of society originate from the needs of individuals, and it is the individuals who constitute the power of society.

### Giving to the needy within the Shari'ah framework

Fourth: The relationship between the issues of giving to the needy and reason from the Islamic Shari'ah standpoint derives from the principle of social solidarity, making it obligatory, as in the narration: 'God, the Most High, allocated for the poor a portion of the money of the rich which is sufficient to them (the poor), otherwise He would have increased it (their portion); they are subjected to this (poverty) as a result of the stopping (of their portion) by those who stop it.'<sup>13</sup> It is failing to meet these obligations that causes poverty, as Imam Ali (as) said: 'No one has become poor but by the extra wealth of the rich.'<sup>14</sup>

In light of this, social solidarity was to be established through the different rulings: the obligatory types such as the tax (*zekat*) and 20% levy (*khoms*), and the voluntary types such as alms. In this way, society will accumulate a reserve for the needs of its members that are in need of help due to different reasons. So, the person who gives to the needy emphasises his Islamic character in both its conceptual and practical aspects: he

believes that it is God Who has given him these bounties, so he has to thank Him through making others benefit from them.

From this, we understand that the issue of giving to the needy that God made as one of the merits of the wise (those who think, understand and reason) is that the practical mind calls for it in its quest to push the person into good deeds, one of which being giving without return, or through contributing to society being part of it, since he understands that this is one of the ways to achieve God's satisfaction with him.

### **Encouraging reacting with favours**

Another merit of the wise is what we read in the Qur'an: **'and they repel evil with good'** 28:54. If they are faced with aggression, whether verbal, physical or economic, they do not react with agitation (i.e. panic) that will complicate the situation instead of solving it, because an agitated reaction does not permit a proper study of the consequences; rather, they remain rational, studying the consequences and results of any act. So, if such a person is faced with a bad act from another person, he stops to think and tries, if he can, to solve the problem in a way that attracts the other to him and transforms him to a friend, as in the verse: **'And not alike are the good deed and the evil deed; repel (evil) with what is the best of ways, so that he between whom and you there was enmity would be as if he were a close friend'** 41:34. In this way, he

wins over the opponent by making him see his wrongdoing in a thoughtful way, i.e. defeating him thoughtfully not physically, turning enmity into friendship and hatred into love. This is the Qur'anic approach, emphasised by Imam Ali (as) who said: 'Gently reproach your brother by doing a favour to him, and turn away his evil by giving to him.'<sup>15</sup>

That said, repelling bad deeds with good deeds often concerns problems among individuals; however, in major issues, or in cases where doing that encourages the wrongdoer to continue his bad approach, the matter is different. When a tyrant oppresses his people, or when a terrorist group attacks social peace, or when someone wrongs you and regards your pardoning him as weakness and this encourages him to do more to you or to others, in this case you have to face the wrongdoer through a detailed study that determines the nature of your attitude towards him. And if it is an Islamic or national matter or the like, relating to the public peace and order of society, in this case you have to work towards quelling those who terrorise society and cause economic and social havoc. These two approaches are summarised by Imam Ali bin al-Hosain (as) in his Code of Ethics (*Risalet al-Huqooq*): 'As for the right of the one who has wronged you, it is to pardon him; but if you see that pardoning him harms him, (in this case) you may resort to vengeance.'

These are the wise, for they repel bad deeds with good deeds, and **‘they shall have the final attainment of the (heavenly) Home’** 13:22, which is the good end (in the Hereafter). It is rational thinking that makes one say and act in the way that achieves such good end, because it is the rational, thoughtful person who thinks about the positive results in all his acts in this life so that to achieve God’s satisfaction with him. This is what the following verse details: **‘The Gardens of Eden which they will enter along with the righteous from among their parents and their spouses and their offspring; and the angels will enter in upon them from every gate’** 13:23; the good end that these wise people attain will not be for themselves alone, but also for their family whom they have raised well, as a response to God’s words: **‘O you who believe! Save yourselves and your families from the Fire’** 66:6 and: **‘And enjoin prayer on your family, and steadily adhere to it’** 20:132. So, if the rational, thoughtful person succeeds in his teaching and in the upbringing of his family, God will gather them on the Day of Judgement.

We understand from this verse that if a person has one or two deviant parents, if he really loves them, he has to do his best, directly and indirectly, to change them so that they follow the right path; the same goes for his wife and children. They may be gathered on the Day of Judgement in a sort of angelical celebration: **‘(Saying): “Peace be unto you because you patiently persevered; how excellent is the final (heavenly)**

Home” 13:24. It has to be noted that, in this verse, God uses the word ‘patiently’, as it is part of everyone’s responsibility, calling for patience to meet life’s obligations and face its challenges. (This is explained earlier as one of the virtues of the wise.)

However, this is in contrast to those who are not rational, who do not think about the consequences but succumb to their desires and greed; they face a completely different end: **‘And those who break the covenant of God after its confirmation and sever that (kinship ties) which God has ordered to be joined (kept) and make mischief in the land; (as for) those, theirs is the curse and theirs the ill abode’ 13:25.** Such people have negative attributes that are in contradiction to the merits of the others: not observing their covenant, severing their relationships with their kinship or the believers, cause corruption and mischief – they are going to lose God’s mercy and meet a bad end.

### **A rational attitude**

Imam Ali (as) says: **‘Being nice amounts to half of reason (half a reasonable attitude).’<sup>16</sup>** Treating people nicely, by opening your heart to them, talking nicely to them, showing them love, pardoning them and so on, is something that stands to reason, since it attracts good reactions and benefits from others. As for being equal to half of reason (or a rational

attitude), this is perhaps because it covers the practical mind, which is the natural end of rational thinking, since it is the thoughtful person who links thought with practice, for otherwise there is no use for thought without application.

In one of his words when talking about what God has made obligatory on people, Imam Ali (as) says: ‘... **and abstention from drinking alcohol to give immunity to the mind.**’

Alcohol, when it starts its effect, causes weakening of the mental powers, which causes imbalance in thinking, movements, attitude and relations with others, and this may make a person wrong others, even his unmarriageable counterparts, and commit murder, because the mind is no longer in the area that enables the person to concentrate and distinguish between the good and the bad, the useful and the harmful and the straight and the deviant – the mental area that prevents him from committing anything that causes corruption, and which encourages him to do things that brings benefit.

When a group of people invited a wise man to drink with them, he said: ‘I do not drink what drinks my mind’, i.e. if I drink alcohol it will go through my blood to the mind and confuse it. In a story, a man was given the choice of having sexual intercourse with his mother, to kill another believer, or to drink alcohol to drunkenness; the man thought that drinking alcohol is the least harmful, so he drank it, but then he became

so drunk that he raped his mother and killed the believer. The moral is obvious: when the mind loses its powers of concentration and discernment, the person might do anything, however bad and normally inconceivable.

Then Imam Ali (as) said: **‘Alcohol is the accumulator of sins; alcohol is the mother of sins!’**<sup>17</sup> This is why it has been prohibited in all Divine religions. Imam as-Sadiq (as) says: **‘God never sent a Prophet but with His knowledge that when He completes his religion, drinking alcohol will have been made forbidden; alcohol has always been forbidden – religions are usually changed (i.e. deviate) gradually.’**<sup>18</sup> One can derive from this narration – since it is not normal that any prophet, in any message, would allow alcohol as a decisive ruling – that it is inconceivable that God, Who has sent the Messengers (as) to strengthen thinking, understanding and reason, straightforwardness and awareness, would allow something that would oppose all that, but He may go about it (prohibition) gradually so that to make abiding by it easier.

The Prophet (sawa) says: **‘Evil was brought together in one house and the house’s key was made drinking alcohol.’**<sup>19</sup>

Imam Ali ar-Rida (as) says: **‘God prohibited alcohol for its corruption and its ability to change the minds of its drinkers, pushing them to deny the existence of God, the Most High, telling lies regarding Him and His Messengers,**



and to the corruption and murder that come as a result of (drinking) it.<sup>20</sup>

Imam al-Kadhim (as) says: ‘God did not prohibit alcohol for its name, but for its consequences; therefore, what has the same consequences as alcohol is alcohol.’<sup>21</sup> In light of this, the ruling is that it is forbidden to take any substance, solid or fluid, that causes what drinking alcohol causes, even if it cannot be called alcohol, such as drugs of all kinds, that have the effect of alcohol in causing what is similar to drunkenness.

To summarise: God wants people to strengthen their mental power and abstain from what harms it or affects any of its capabilities because He wants them to be aware and attentive to all their responsibilities in all situations, including eating or drinking or whatever weakens their mental power or places them in an atmosphere that may lead to that; in this regard, the narration says: ‘Do not sit at a table where alcohol is being consumed.’<sup>22</sup>

### A lifetime programme

Ali (as) says: ‘The wise person should not be doing anything other than these three: working to earn a living, a deed to get reward in the Hereafter, or an unforbidden pleasure.’<sup>23</sup>

In a similar narration, Ali (as) says: ‘A believer has (his time is divided into) three hours: one hour for intimate prayer to God, one hour to earn his living; and one hour to leave

himself to acceptable, unforbidden pleasure'<sup>24</sup>; another narration completes this: '... or an unforbidden pleasure, and this helps him (to carry out) the other two (i.e. work and worship).'<sup>25</sup>

First, it must be noted that the 'hour' in these words denotes time, not necessarily sixty minutes. So, it is a question of dividing your day, week, month and life properly.

What Ali (as) wants to say is that one should organise oneself through a programme that covers all responsibilities towards oneself and the Lord, since the central issue of one's life is these responsibilities. God gave us this life so as to act to meet our responsibilities under the guidance of our belief in Him that the revelation to His Messengers (as) proves, as reason shows.

What we understand from Ali's words '**... for intimate prayer to God**' is not its literal meaning, which is praying and supplication etc, but all that is involved in one's relationship with the Lord, covering all beliefs, deeds and words. Thus carrying out one's obligations is a process of intimate prayer since it is being performed internally and externally and when one strives to carry out any obligatory or recommended act, be it worship, teaching, helping others, or defending one's homeland or building or whatever else, one is in a state of intimate prayer.

The second part should be for work: '**...to earn his living.**' This time is allocated for work so as to earn a living for oneself,

one's family and whoever one is responsible for in terms of their living expenses, so that one does not become a burden to the society. This may include the needs of society in this regard, i.e. when such needs are not met unless members of society do their bit.

The third part is: '**... to leave himself to acceptable, unforbidden pleasure.**' The physical and non-physical needs that are related to pleasure demand that some time is allocated to them, but this should be within the area of allowable acts, whether sports, leisure, sex, outings etc. God does not want a person to suppress his own needs, nor to ignore them, for these needs renew his vigour and zeal and help him perform his duties towards God, himself and people. If we imagine someone engaged in acts of worship, such as prayers, from morning to night, we can appreciate that he will not be able to earn a living; or the opposite where he engages in activities to the point that he is too exhausted to carry out his worship duties. And even with a good balance between these, he may find himself in need of time for leisure so as to renew his energy, to the benefit of these activities, i.e. work and worship. The narration '**Rest your hearts one hour after another**'<sup>26</sup> advises people not to force the heart and mind (the heart is used for both as explained before), otherwise they get tired: '**... for if the heart is forced, it becomes blind**'<sup>27</sup> – it becomes unable to think or renew its thoughts.

We can also deduce from this time-dividing process that one should organise one's life by organising one's time, especially if one's responsibilities diversify, so as not to let one single thing affect the rest, otherwise this will lead to failure to perform it properly. Pointing to those who fail to observe their duties, Imam Ali (as) says: **'Who fails to do his duty properly will see distress befall him'**<sup>28</sup>, which is the distress of that duty.

In this regard, we have to see it that we do not postpone the duties of today to tomorrow, lest we find ourselves tomorrow failing to carry out tomorrow's duties properly, because the effort we need to apply to both is limited. This is a vital matter for people on both individual and social levels, otherwise things will not be done properly and in time.

Also in this regard, if duties seem too much to be carried out by one person, it is rational that that they are divided among many individuals, so as not to overburden anyone with more than he can take, and so as not to let one duty affects others. We can deduce this from the way God, the Almighty, created the universe when He set out everything properly: **'Surely We have created everything according to a measure'** 54:49.

### Getting along with people rationally

As we said earlier, a practical mind is what proceeds from the theoretical mind, or from thoughts directed at discerning the good from the bad then guiding the person to transform these

thoughts into practice in his behaviour and conduct. Here is an issue that everyone can think about: how to achieve the love of society? How to get through to it? How to achieve the spouse's love? How to achieve your children's love or parents' love? In all these areas, it is quite natural that you keep a degree of caution, whether covertly or overtly, because you do not know what that other person holds towards you in that internal area of his. A person is always cautious regarding the concealed things that the other thinks about, which is a matter that these short words of Imam Ali (as) dealt with: **'The hearts of men are not naturally approachable; whoever (works to) make them friendly will see them warming to him.'**<sup>29</sup> The heart – which is the internal area of feeling and thinking – is constantly cautious of what will come from others, but he who knows how to make friendly the hearts of other people, and make them trust and love him through nice words, a nice approach and treatment, will find that they will warm to him. This is because every person, of whatever status, acts through his human nature, and words are the messengers that proceed from his heart to that of the other; the same applies to the approach, atmosphere, look, touch etc, to the extent that in some narrations if someone enters a dispute with one of his kin it is recommended that he touches him since **'the kinship link, if touched, calms down.'**<sup>30</sup>

Such approaches involve some of the teachings that we mentioned and explained earlier, such as **'Being nice amounts**

to half of reason (half a reasonable attitude)’ and ‘Gently reproach your brother by doing a favour to him, and turn away his evil by giving to him.’<sup>31</sup> Another of Ali’s words in this regard is: ‘Dislodge evil from the chest of others by dislodging it from your chest’<sup>32</sup>, so open your heart to those who have wronged you and naturally if you rid yourself from the evil in your heart, this will be reflected in your behaviour and attitude with them, which will have the positive effect of you entering his heart.

### Less speech, better speech

A very important point is the relation between how rational and mindful a person is, and the amount and kind of speech that he engages in. Imam Ali (as) says: ‘**If the mind is complete, speech becomes less**’<sup>33</sup>, which means that if a person can be said to have a ‘complete’ mind or be reasonable and rational, then this will leave its effect on his words. But how do we understand that?

If this person collected all the elements of a given matter from all aspects, then when he wants to deal with any thought, his mind will tell him: do not utter a word until after you study all its consequences, positive and negative. Naturally, this takes time and causes him to be careful in his speech, avoiding useless chatter, meaningless talk or any words that produce negative outcomes in his relationship to God and his responsibilities in

life. Anyone who goes about his affairs on the basis of carefulness and reflection before talking will see his speech diminish in quantity.

Contrary to that, a person who is (not clinically) 'deficient' in his mind will find himself looking into some, not all, aspects, therefore not getting the full picture, and will be rushing into talking, often uselessly. We notice this in a lot of people who love talking for the sake of it, so they talk and err and fill the minds of other people with useless speech, something which will reflect negatively on how others think and also on how they see him.

### **Ignorant anger and thoughtful anger**

Anger is closely related to how rational a person is, or how he reacts to words or deeds. Imam Ali (as) says: **'The anger of the ignorant is in his speech, and the anger of the thoughtful is in his deeds.'**<sup>34</sup> The reaction of an ignorant person represents his negative internal excitement that puts him out of balance and causes him to rush into saying anything, including harsh words and slander, in a way that causes a lot of problems for him and for those around him. This will have a bad effect on feelings and emotions; matters may worsen and things might even lead to fighting. All this is because the ignorant person does not weight up matters properly and examine the consequences, but rushes into venting his feelings without control.

The wise person, however, does not rush into an excited reaction, but starts to study the situation by observing the background of the problem, the people involved, the circumstances and the benefit or loss that may result as a result of any possible solution or confrontation. This makes him decide on an approach of gentleness or harshness in dealing with the situation, taking in how it relates to the people around him and to God and His satisfaction; he may possibly end up deciding that it is better to confront the situation violently as this represents the best way to stop the wrongdoer from doing a similar act in the future, as Imam Ali bin al-Hosain (as) said: **‘As for the right of the one who has wronged you, it is to pardon him; but if you see that pardoning him harms him, (in this case) you may resort to vengeance.’**

However, he may decide otherwise, i.e. a gentle approach: **‘Gently reproach your brother by doing a favour to him, and turn away his evil by giving to him.’** This represents an educational approach that should embarrass the wrongdoer and make him feel guilty, in the hope that he will not do it again. This is because such a moral attitude sheds light on the social, moral value that directs him not to answer bad with bad or evil with evil, but with doing favours and giving, which should make him feel humiliated and belittled, especially that the other person did not respond like this from weakness.



Another approach he may adopt is one that looks for the reward from God and nothing else. This is effected through controlling the anger and not venting it in words or acts, which might be expected in order to deal with the problem that the wrongdoer created for himself. God said: ‘and those who restrain (their) anger and pardon men; and God loves the doers of good (to others).’ 3:134. One narration says: ‘Who controls his grudge and keeps it within himself when he could vent it, (will see) God filling his heart with security and belief on the Day of Judgement’<sup>35</sup>; this is in addition to what this attitude shows in terms of strong will, wisdom and avoiding evil, something that is bound to elevate the person in the eyes of people who know the value of such attitudes, especially when they read what Imam Ja’far as-Sadiq (as) said: ‘The Messenger of God (sawa) saw a group of people lifting a stone, so he asked: “What is this?” They replied: “See who is stronger and tougher amongst us’ so he said: “Would you like me to tell you who is the stronger and tougher amongst you?” They said: “Yes, O Messenger of God”. He said: “The stronger and tougher amongst you is the one who, if he is satisfied, his satisfaction does not engage him in sin or falsehood; and if he gets dissatisfied, his dissatisfaction does not stop him from saying the truth;”<sup>36</sup> or what the Prophet (sawa) said: ‘The strong person is not the one who wins in wrestling; the strong person is the one who can control his anger.’<sup>37</sup>

### The elements of judgement

One of Imam Ali's statements that shows a person's level of rationality and understanding is: 'A person's suspicion is part of his mind;<sup>38</sup> in another he says: 'A person's suspicion (shows) his state of mind, and his deed is the best pointer to his origin;<sup>39</sup> in yet another one he says: 'The suspicion of the thoughtful is more correct than the belief of the ignorant.'<sup>40</sup>

Suspicion is the combination of the thoughts in one's mind, one's judgements and one's feelings and impressions towards others that are mostly negative, through some psychological factors or external appearances; but perhaps it may go towards the positive side through the firm foundation on which one's judgement, thinking and impressions are based.

Suspicion represents a degree lower than belief because it leaves open the chance of an opposing probability. As for the relation between suspicion and reason, it is because that which relates to suspicion often relates to reason and thinking, since things that activate it proceed from one's thinking in the appraisal of things, judgements and impressions, as reason is what stands in the way of all this if it finds a weakness in the proof or appraisal. It may even take a person to the other side of things, on the basis of the probability that can turn suspicion from bad to good, through searching for the factors that can turn the matter in that other direction, because fairness implies – rationally – that a fair person has to look into the matter from

all sides and with open eyes. This is how the ruler and the thinker should do it: accumulate all the elements of judgement and thoughts, especially what relates to others that may affect them in a positive or negative way.

This is perhaps what the verse: ‘O you who believe! Avoid most of suspicion, for surely suspicion in some cases is a sin’ 49:12 points to – not automatically to follow suspicion as if it is a firm belief, but to search for the basis that has led to it to find if there has been an error in notices or conclusions, or if there has been a psychological complex – which is quick to accuse others – that has led to this. This verse directs people to scrutinise their suspicions and they will find that some of them fail the tests of truth and justice. This is offered in one of Imam Ali’s narrations: ‘Judge the stance of your brother to the best probability until something comes from him tells you otherwise, and do not resort to negative suspicion regarding any word that comes from your brother when you can find a good explanation for it’<sup>41</sup>, i.e. to raise the probability of the good as opposed to the bad, through looking into the positive elements that it has, the circumstances and the person involved in his conduct and morals, as truth may lie on the positive side, so it must be given a responsible study so that we do not be unfair to that person.

In light of this, we understand that suspicion is part of a person’s reasoning and thinking, since it shows the level of thinking in looking into things, though the value of thinking, mentality and

fairness in noticing and judgement. A person's suspicion may be a reflection of his own experience in dealing with others and his appraisal of them, Imam Ali (as) says: **'A bad person does not have good suspicions of anyone because he does not see him but through his own self;'**<sup>42</sup> and in another narration he says: **'The evil person does not have good suspicion of anyone because he does not see it but through his own nature;'**<sup>43</sup> and in a third: **'He whose (level of) suspicion worsens will believe betrayal in those who do not betray him!'**<sup>44</sup>

Finally, the words mentioned earlier: **'A person's suspicion (shows) his state of mind'**<sup>45</sup> point to the level of the mind in thinking, how weak or strong.

And the words: **'Suspicion harboured by the wise person is more valid than the belief of the ignorant'**<sup>46</sup> because the wise person establishes his suspicion on the precise and firm basis of his thinking and reasoning, while the ignorant person rushes into his belief, but may be mistaken, because it is not based on a firm foundation.

We have to point out that good suspicion does not mean that one judges others as good on the basis of a probability; likewise one should not fall prey to bad suspicion when one judges others as bad without taking practical steps, but one must always scrutinise the matter in a scientific way that looks at all probabilities.

<sup>1</sup> *Al-Kafi*, Al-Kulaini, vol.1, p.13; *Tuhaf al-Uqool*, Al-Harrani, p.383.

<sup>2</sup> We have said more than once that Islam does not call for obedience to the parents, since they may not be on a level that enables them to offer advice or orders that are suitable for their children. They may base their stance on personal issues such as: do not marry this person, or do not go to this particular college, or do not take up this profession, and so on; in this case, the child is not obliged to obey them. But in all times, he or she must be good to them, and up to the point where they order him or her to adopt polytheism, he or she must abide by God's command: 'And if they strive with you to make you associate, as partner, with Me what you have no knowledge of, (in this case) do not obey them, but keep company with them in this world kindly' 31:15, i.e. being good to them even when he or she must disobey them. (*The author.*)

<sup>3</sup> We say this because some people believe that abortion is allowed if it is at the beginning of pregnancy. Yes, if the matter involves considerable harm that is near to being dangerous, or even if later (when the spirit has already been breathed into the foetus), but only when danger becomes imminent so that the mother or the baby are facing death; in such cases some scholars, including my teacher the late Sayyid al-Kho'i and ourselves, rule that abortion is allowed. (*The author.*)

<sup>4</sup> *Wesa'il ash-Shi'ah*, al-Amili, vol.16, p.26.

<sup>5</sup> *Al-Mehasin*, al-Barqi, vol.1, p.10.

<sup>6</sup> *Al-Kafi*, vol.2, p.89. In this regard, when some people used to talk about Jean-Paul Sartre, the French thinker who said that freedom comes from the inside not the outside, i.e. to be free means that you have the will for freedom, I said to them that the Imam (as) talked in more detail about this, that even if one is inside a prison cell one can be free, and that freedom does not come from a decision to pardon etc. The problem is that some of us – including some of our intellectuals – do not read our true tradition. We do not object to knowing what the others offer, but we must not ignore our Islamic culture and thought. (*The author.*)

<sup>7</sup> *Nahj al-Balaghah*, Mohammed Abdoh commentary, vol.3, p.51.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, vol.4, p.18.

<sup>9</sup> *Al-Kafi*, vol.3, p.408.

<sup>10</sup> *De'a'im al-Islam*, an-Nu'man al-Maghribi, p.133.

<sup>11</sup> *Al-Kafi*, vol.3, p.268.

<sup>12</sup> *Al-Mehasin*, vol.1, p.10.

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- <sup>13</sup> *Al-Kafi*, vol.3, p.498.
- <sup>14</sup> *Nahj al-Balaghah*, Mohammed Abdoh commentary, vol.4, p.78.
- <sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p.41.
- <sup>16</sup> *Khesa'is al-A'immeh*, ash-Sherif ar-Radi, p.104.
- <sup>17</sup> *Nahj al-Balaghah*, Ibn Abi al-Hadid commentary, vol.19, p.88.
- <sup>18</sup> *Al-Kafi*, vol.6, p.395.
- <sup>19</sup> *Mustadrek al-Wesa'il*, An-Noori, vol.17, p.54.
- <sup>20</sup> *Uyoon Akhbar ar-Rida*, Sheikh as-Sedooq, vol.1, p.105.
- <sup>21</sup> *Al-Kafi*, vol.6, p.412.
- <sup>22</sup> *Al-Khisal*, as-Sedooq, p. 619; also p.164.
- <sup>23</sup> *Nahj al-Balaghah*, Mohammed Abdoh commentary, vol.4, p.93.
- <sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, vol.4, p.93.
- <sup>25</sup> *Al-Kafi*, vol.5, p.87.
- <sup>26</sup> *Al-Jami' as-Saghir*, as-Suyooti, vol.2, p.19.
- <sup>27</sup> *Nahj al-Balaghah*, Mohammed Abdoh commentary, vol.4, p.44.
- <sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p.30.
- <sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p.14.
- <sup>30</sup> *Al-Kafi*, vol.2, p.302.
- <sup>31</sup> *Nahj al-Balaghah*, Mohammed Abdoh commentary, vol.4, p.41.
- <sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p.42.
- <sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p.15.
- <sup>34</sup> *Kenz al-Fewa'id*, al-Kerachki, p.88.
- <sup>35</sup> *Al-Kafi*, vol.2, p.110.
- <sup>36</sup> *Me'ani al-Akhbar*, as-Sedooq, p.366.
- <sup>37</sup> *Tuhaf al-Uqool*, p.47.
- <sup>38</sup> *Kenz al-Fewa'id*, p.88.
- <sup>39</sup> *Uyoon al-Hikem wel-Mewa'id*, Ali bin Mohammed al-Wasiti al-Laiti, p.323.
- <sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>41</sup> *Al-Kafi*, vol.2, p.362.
- <sup>42</sup> *Mizan al-Hikmah*, ar-Raishahri, vol.2, p.1786.
- <sup>43</sup> *Uyoon al-Hikem wel-Mewa'id*, p.57.
- <sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p.436.
- <sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p.323.
- <sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

## Chapter 5

# The Value of Reason

Reason is the best vehicle in which man worships God and, owing to its effect on man's personality and relationships, we can say that the question of reason is not one of theory and thought alone, or questions of what is possible or impossible and the like, but one that relates to the practical side in life, shapes man's entity in a way that enables him to become a dynamic element in his relationship to God, himself and others. Reason emphasises the secret of truth and shapes man's approach in life.

In this chapter, we study the consequences of using one's mental powers, of thinking, evaluating, understanding and reasoning, as they represent essential elements of the safest approach people can adopt in going about their daily life, relationships, problems and the rest. In doing so, they can discover the value of these powers that God has blessed them with, in contrast to other living things.

### Senses versus reason

Imam Ali (as) says: 'Seeing is not like insight, for one's eyes may fool you, but the mind never cheats whoever turns to it

for advice.’<sup>1</sup> These words emphasise that one must rely on reason and thinking and seek advice from it, and not blindly follow the senses because the senses may be wrong as, through some external effects that make one judge things in a way that is not guaranteed correct, one might be seeing things not as they really are. An eye might fool the person that he saw something, but in reality he saw something that looked like it, or he started from an illusion and when he looked into the thing, his illusion interfered to give him the wrong idea. Sight does not tell on its own what the person is seeing: it is like the camera that needs information and awareness in order that what it sees is understood. This is why when a person is struck with brain paralysis, he opens his eyes and sees things, but cannot tell what they are. This applies to the senses other than sight.

Reason and reasonable judgement, however, let us know things as they really are (**‘never cheats who turn to it for advice’**), regardless whether this is achieved through basic recognition of axiomatic knowledge, or through close thinking and analysis.

The difference between the two is highlighted in the Qur’anic verse: **‘For indeed it is not the eyes that grow blind, but it is the hearts, which are within the chests, that grow blind’ 22:46**. This describes those in whom seeing and blindness are the same, since even if they recognise what they see, they remain in the dark, since they lack insight, i.e. the ‘seeing’ of



the mind and the 'seeing' of the heart. This is why it is said that true seeing that enriches man, develops his thoughts and expresses reality is mental insight, not physical eyesight.

Some commentaries of *Nahj al-Balagha*<sup>2</sup> quote words of wisdom: **'Definite things are reasoned things, not sensed things.'** This means that what gives one clarity, so that there is no doubt, is definite, while the senses – hearing, sight, smell, taste and touch – can be wrong, in that the senses can be wrong in expressing what they perceive, giving us beliefs; and when we formulate our beliefs on the basis of what we have sensed, our beliefs can be wrong, and will be wrong if the senses were wrong. One can see a small object big and big object small and a moving object at rest and so on; if the mind and its reasoning powers, however, proceed from fundamental facts that no one denies, then no error can result from it.

On this basis, one has to proceed from the instinctive mind that relates to things through fundamental facts about which there is no doubt whatsoever, because what stirs argument are theoretical things, not fundamental facts. This is why scholars say: 'There is no basis for correct judgement if the theory does not end (in its foundation) in fundamental facts.' Therefore, we must study any given theory: if we arrive at axiomatic things, then it is correct, but if we cannot arrive at axiomatic things, in this case it remains disputable.

## Utilisation of the mind

Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq (as) narrated that Imam Ali (as) said: 'With the mind I can reach the depths of wisdom, and with wisdom I can reach the depths of the mind.'<sup>3</sup> We know that the Holy Qur'an linked wisdom with the Book and made them part of the Message: 'and teaches them the Book and the Wisdom' 62:2 and: 'and God has revealed to you the Book and the wisdom' 4:113. The meaning of wisdom is: putting the thing in its proper place. It is a word that extends to all aspects of life, since putting a thing in its place must come from thinking and the latter must operate through reason and proof, so that when such thoughts are offered, people see the truth in them.

The same applies to any area in life. When we enter into any project, or pursue any endeavour, we meet a lot of situations, circumstances and people involved in this project or endeavour, and if you are wise, you have to study the situation to see how congruent your project is with these factors around it; then you proceed to put everything in its place, i.e. to organise the steps of your project so as to come up with a productive outcome suitable to your aspirations to your major goals in life. This applies to both: personal (individual, marital, familial etc) and public (social, political etc) life.

In any project, we meet aspects that open for us horizons of optimism, just as we will also face horizons of pessimism; some events push us towards hope and others towards despair. In

whatever situation, we must not fall prey to absolute optimism nor absolute pessimism, for there are no absolute things in any aspect in life, because life is the world of limited things and therefore must range between optimism and pessimism, so that you proceed in your endeavour with a dosage of optimism that fights despair and a dosage of pessimism that equips you with caution.

God, the Most High, Who is our Lord, describes Himself as the All-Wise and All-Knowing because He put everything in its proper place, whether in the system of the Universe or human beings, all according to wisdom, including what man might, wrongly, think as negative. He says: 'Surely We have created everything according to a measure' 54:49 and: 'God indeed has appointed a measure (due proportion) for everything' 65:3; all conform with the same wise laws that govern all phenomena: 'you see no incongruity in the creation of the Beneficent God' 67:3.

### From reason to wisdom

Imam Ali's words 'With the mind I can reach the depth of wisdom' mean that this mind, which represents the power that produces thought, distinguishes between good and bad, and studies things in their depth, and provides the facilities with which to reach the full depth of wisdom, which is putting things in their proper places. When a person attends to his affairs in life,

he weighs the positive and negative so that he can put everything in its proper place and achieve success in his endeavours; using his mind and reason achieves that.

And his words '**and with wisdom I can reach the depth of the mind**' means that if you have wisdom, this wisdom talks to you and leads you to what his mind can reach; it does not permit you to give your mind a holiday, nor to lend it to others, but makes it listen to wisdom that tells you that '**the mind never cheats those who turn to it for advice.**'

### **The mind and insight**

Ali (as) continues: '**... and with good attitude lies good morals.**' This means that when you live in any society, you need to know how to deal with others, to see what kind of mentality they have, as well as what circumstances, what psychological situations (some of which may be open to ideas while others not), what traditions and habits they inherited from their forefathers, what upbringing and education etc. You have to study all this so that you know how to treat them better, respect them, understand them and feel for them, so that you attract them and you are attracted to them – this is good moral behaviour, representing both moral values and spiritual values, which together make up human values.

There is another of Ali's words narrated by Imam as-Sadiq (as): '**Contemplation is the life of the heart of the insightful**'<sup>4</sup>,

which talks about the kind of contemplation that gives life to the heart – which is, as we explained before, also the mind, or the internal area of awareness that combines the mind, emotion and the senses. He (as) is saying that you have to be insightful in your mind, i.e. to open your mind's eyes, as God says: **'For indeed it is not the eyes that grow blind, but it is the hearts, which are within the chests, that grow blind' 22:46.** If you want your mind to live, it must grow and develop, and it is free to do so as God gave it the kind of freedom that He did not give to any other organ in the body: in His Shari'ah, God commanded 'do's and don'ts' for the tongue, hands, eyes etc, but he left the mind free, with no limits or obstacles to stop it from thinking in the areas that it can think and understand (such as the issues relating to the realms of the unknown and unknowable). God says to the mind: think freely and shoulder the responsibility of your thinking, as He will ask you, when your mind produces a thought that controls your life, how did you think? What were the mechanisms? Did you do your best in that or not?

Commentaries of the verse: **'Say: For God's is the final argument' 6:149** say that the person is brought in on the Day of Judgement and asked: Why did you not do (carry out) your duties etc? He will answer: I did not know; he will then be asked: Why did not you learn? In other words, he failed to think and search when he had the mental powers that enabled him to do that freely.

The mind thrives with use, yet we see some people who say that they don't have to time to think, or that they ask others to think on their behalf! This is wrong, as others will think according to the elements of thought they have; the correct formula is to say: Think with us and we think with you. This is why the prophetic narration 'Who seeks the advice of (other) men, shares in their minds'<sup>5</sup> shows high regard for consultation (*shoora*), or sharing in the powers of reason of others.

Then Imam Ali (as) offers a simile for the relationship between reason and wisdom and the right attitude: '... like the person who is walking in darkness with a (torch/flashlight) light, avoiding mishaps and without waiting (delay).'<sup>6</sup> Whoever walks in darkness with a torch/flashlight in his hand can arrive at his destiny quickly and with no problems, able to avoid all stumbling points and obstacles in his way; with the light in his hand, he does not have to wait, since the road is open in front of him. This is the mind working, when it shines with thought, making you walk in the light of this thought full of open horizons, and opening new horizons.

In his teachings to Hisham bin al-Hakam<sup>7</sup>, Imam al-Kadhim (as) says: 'O Hisham! The wise person is content with a humble life with wisdom, but is not content with little wisdom with (a more comfortable) life; this is why his trade is profitable.' Here, the Imam (as) tries to engage in a comparison between having more capabilities in life than in wisdom and knowledge,

and having enrichment from wisdom. Wisdom proceeds from knowledge that leads to awareness and so leads man to put things in their proper places; this achieves good results in both this life and the Hereafter. This is because wisdom goes deep into things, not superficially, to help the person in all his needs, aspirations and duties to achieve these good results. Therefore, if the choice is between having wisdom at its highest level so that one acquires richness through it, even if this entails a shortfall in life's pleasures and desires, or having more general capabilities in life than wisdom so that one has money but no wisdom to manage it properly, and faces pleasures and desires with no wisdom to properly choose and indulge in them – when the wise person is faced with these two choices, he will choose a shortfall in life instead of shortfall in wisdom, because the shortfall in life does not represent a catastrophe in the vital elements of his life – food, drink and basic needs – as all the excess will not fill his life. The poet says:

Whatever is in excess of his basic needs,

Let him be sure that it will be inheritance!

Having the wisdom that can organise and plan life, albeit with fewer capabilities than one desires, must be the rational choice, since wisdom enriches one's humanity and elevates its facets so that one can be open to facts and to the nearness of God.

This is why the Imam (as) says: **'this is why his trade is profitable'** because trading is not a mere exchange of money,

rather it extends to the realms of value, fate and achieving satisfaction and grace in the Hereafter. God, the Most High, describes those who lose in their trade and those who profit: ‘Shall I lead you to a merchandise which may deliver you from a painful chastisement?’ 61:10 and: ‘These are they who have bartered Guidance for error; so their bargain shall bring no gain, neither are they guided’ 2:16, along with others. Imam Ali (as) says: ‘If this life is made of gold and the Hereafter is made of pottery, the wise person will choose the immortal pottery over the mortal gold;’ since what is the value of gold that you get but lose after one hour, a wealth that will not be yours forever; while pottery- regardless of its value - is better if it lasts and stays with you. In any case, this is only hypothesis, because, as he says: ‘... with all the more reason when the matter is the opposite!’ The Hereafter is the gold because it represents the final fate of eternity for man, in God’s satisfaction: ‘But the greatest bliss is the good pleasure of God’ 9:72.

### The choices of wise people

Imam al-Kadhim (as) continues: ‘O Hisham! Wise people abstained from life’s unnecessary things, so the more reason the sins! Abstention from life (the unnecessary things of life) is optional, while abstention from sins is obligatory.’ This discusses how wise people behave towards worldly pleasures



through what their minds lead them to; if a person wants to follow his mind's logic, not his basic instinct, what would he choose?

The Imam (as) explains that when we study our needs in life, we find three categories:

First: Necessary things that man cannot survive without, as they are regarded as the elements on which his life depends and continues. These are part of his duties that he must attend to so that to preserve his life, something which his human nature imposes on him in this life.

Second: Allowable pleasures such as allowable food and drink, clothes, shelter, sex and the other things that God made allowable: **'Say: Who has prohibited the embellishment of God which He has brought forth for His servants and the good provisions? Say: These are for the believers in the life of this world, and purely (theirs) on the day of resurrection; thus do we detail Our revelations for people who have knowledge.'** 7:32 and: **'This day are (all) good things made allowable to you'** 5:5. These can be indulged in according to man's duty in carrying out his obligations and abstention from the prohibitions. Although these pleasures do not lead man to sin, because they are allowed, or prevent him from deeds that lead to Paradise, they may lead to unawareness that hinders knowledge that leads to God, even though it does not take him away from Him completely. In other words, these are allowed

pleasures that do not prevent one from observing one's duties, but they can make light of some of the vital elements in them and may even prepare some atmosphere for sin. This is why the narration said: 'Sins are God Almighty's protected area; who lurks around it gets quite near to entering into it,'<sup>8</sup> or the other narration: 'Stopping at obscurities is better than succumbing to whatever causes (absolute) loss.'<sup>9</sup>

Third: What affects the soul and darkens the heart and results in loss in the Hereafter, which is what God prohibited because it makes the person ignore his awareness and indulge in forbidden acts until he forgets God and submits to his pleasures and desires without any of the restrictions that keep him within the allowable and stop him from descending into the forbidden. The narration says: 'If the person sins, a dark stain discolours his heart - if he repents, this stain disappears, then if he sins again, this stain widens until it overwhelms the heart, and he shall never win after that.'<sup>10</sup>

Therefore, this part of the Imam's teachings means that the wise person is the one who indulges in the necessary things in life and what he needs for survival and continuation. As for the extras, it is up to him to indulge or not in them: extra speech is unnecessary speech that he may or may not engage in because it does not represent a vital need, while the wise person deals with things through the vital elements that relate to the development of his personality, following a straightforward course regarding

his obligations towards God. Now, if the spiritual state of the wise person makes him abstain from life's extras, one expects him to do even more when it comes to avoiding the sins that might lead him to the wrath of God.

Imam al-Kadhim (as) sets a rule here: 'Abstention from life (the unnecessary things of life) is optional (an extra undertaking),' meaning overindulging in its allowable pleasures and desires, 'while abstention from sins is obligatory,' meaning what God, the Most High, has made it obligatory to abstain from sin, since committing sins represents deviation from straight path that God wants for people: 'And Hell-fire shall be places in full view for (all) to see. Then, for such as had transgressed all bounds. And had preferred the life of this world. Surely the abode will be Hell-Fire. But as for him who feared to stand before his Lord and restrained his soul from lust. Surely the abode will be the Garden.' 79:36-41. The Imam (as) emphasises the choice of the wise people in this regard: they choose what elevates them, not what belittles them.

### What life's experience tells

The Imam (as) continues: 'O Hisham! The wise person looked into life and its people' as such a person does not observe life and all its details and situations in a marginal or uninterested way without looking deeply into things and thinking about them, and dealing with them only according to his obligations, but to

study them and analyse all that is around him that he sees, hears, smells, tastes or touches – it is a study of the universe and its secrets in a way that enriches his mind and experience.

**‘... and he knew that it cannot be acquired except with great effort’** and this is a basic fact that can be easily recognised if we look into a man’s life in his needs and ambitions – we see that it is difficult to get any of these without great effort – even his birth, when he starts his journey in life, cannot be done without great effort. The same goes for acquiring knowledge, possessions, strength, food and drink, clothing, including pleasures that a man may want to indulge in: he cannot do that easily. His human relationships, such as marriage, bring certain conditions that represent ties and burdens on himself and his freedom.

**‘... and he looked into the Hereafter and knew that it cannot be achieved except with great effort,’** because the Hereafter needs effort – the effort of worship, obedience, and the discipline that makes a person strive to control himself, and causes him lose some of his freedom.

Therefore, if you want this life, you have to put in effort to the point of tiredness, and if you want the Hereafter, you have to put in effort to the point of tiredness – effort is fundamental in all that you do, whether it is towards this life or the Hereafter; so, which kind of effort do you choose?

When a wise person tries to balance things, study the positive and negative points and study the gains and losses, he must come

to the conclusion that the Imam (as) expresses: ‘... so he strove with great effort after the one that lasts longer.’ This is what the Qur’an emphasises: ‘and what is with God is better and more lasting’ 42:36 and: ‘While the Hereafter is better and more lasting.’ 87:17 and: ‘And the life of the world is but a matter of illusion’ 57:20.

When a wise person looks into things, he looks into their consequences and results, not their beginnings. In life, we may find things that appeal to us in the beginning, encouraging us to submit to them, but the results might be negative. The opposite may be for the Hereafter: it may cause effort and hardship, but the results will be positive. A man asked the Prophet (sawa) to advise him, but the Prophet (sawa) repeated three times the question ‘Are you going to heed the advice that I give you?’; each time the man said ‘yes’, then the Prophet (sawa) said: ‘If you decide to do something, think about its consequence – if it is good, go on and do it, and if it is deviant, abstain from it.’<sup>11</sup> Something that tastes sweet at the beginning might be harbouring poison that later takes you to the graveyard!

‘O Hisham! Wise people abstained from (things) in this life and wanted the Hereafter, because they knew that this life needs and is needed and the Hereafter needs and is needed; so whoever chases after the Hereafter will find this life chases after him until he has exhausted all the providence allocated for him, and whoever chases after this life will find the

Hereafter chases after him and death arrives at him and upsets both his life and Hereafter!’ This life is needed because man chases after it and it chases after him, in its special ways, until all the providence allocated for him in this life is exhausted – since this is not limited to his own work and effort, but it is God who Has allocated it: ‘**And in the heaven is your providence and that which you are promised;**’ 51:22.

And the a person chases after the Hereafter he will find this life coming to him so that he exhausts all providence, and when he chases after this life, the Hereafter chases after him at the end with death. And a person can attain the Hereafter only if he wants it and works towards it through the things that lead him to it: ‘**And that man shall have nothing but what he strives for. And that his striving shall soon be seen. Then shall he be rewarded for it with the fullest reward**’ 53:39-41 and: ‘**O man! Surely you are ever striving towards your Lord, a hard striving until you meet Him**’ 84:6.

The Imam (as) goes on to say: ‘So he whose goal in the Hereafter is through one way instead of the other, then every one of them is after him, but the Hereafter is needed in a certain (one) way.’ Therefore, a person has to open up to the Hereafter because his providence in this life will definitely come to him when this life chases after him so that he exhausts the providence allocated to him. The Hereafter, however, will chase after him even if he went after this life, and that is through death,

which is the bridge to the Hereafter. In other words: if he chases after the Hereafter, he gets both this life and the Hereafter, but if he chases after this life and ignores the Hereafter, in this case, the latter will arrive and his life will end with death, then his life will have caused him to lose both.

### **The most valuable asset**

So as not to limit it to the materialistic arena, the Prophet (sawa) gives the question of poverty and richness another dimension: ‘**O Ali! There is no poverty worse than ignorance, and no asset more beneficial than reason.**’<sup>12</sup> When you embrace your humanity, your richness is linked to the human meaning within you, which is the powers you possess, and when you lack these powers, this means you lack thought, awareness or knowledge – you are poor even if the whole world is around you. This is why he (sawa) regards ignorance as poverty because it keeps you idle in your place, producing nothing of substance, also because poverty leaves you prey to being fooled or cheated. Reason, in contrast, pushes you to read, search and improve all the time, and then you can acquire money and other material assets, because reason plans for you in the direction that elevates your life as it helps you differentiate between good and bad, so, although you may initially lack assets, you have the power that teaches you how to produce these assets and how to use this power in the right places.

### **Rational sleep!**

In another narration, the Prophet (sawa) differentiates between the sleeping and action of the two contrasting personalities: ‘God did not provide people with anything better than reason; so the sleep of the wise is more valuable than the waking hours (at night) of the ignorant; and if the wise person stays at home, it is better than the ignorant person being active outside the home.’<sup>13</sup> Why is that? Is this possible, when sleeping is a state in which the person becomes unaware of sensing, as if leaving for another world in which he does not feel what he feels when he is awake, but rather experiences dreams and the like?

We can say that when the wise person tries to sleep, he does so after filling himself with the products of his mind, so that his sleep will not be an empty unconsciousness, but a means of resting the mind and the body so as to renew his mental activities afterwards; so it is a sleep by a being who is full of thought and awareness and preparing for thought and awareness after it. (While whatever the ignorant person does instead of sleeping, is unlikely to be of value, as it is done out of a lack of awareness or without actively involving reason and mental capabilities.)

As for the wise person, staying inside, i.e. not being active outdoors, being indoors is nonetheless a time for thinking, research and reflection that is expected to be productive, while the ignorant person is not expected to produce anything useful



from his actions when out in society. This is why it is said that when the wise person is silent it is still better than when the ignorant person speaks.

### **Real riches**

Ali (as) says: **‘The richest of riches is reason, and the worst poverty is stupidity.’**<sup>14</sup> We can understand from these words that poverty is of two types: materialistic poverty, which is the opposite of materialistic riches, and relates to one’s materialistic wealth, such as money or property, and all that touches one’s senses and answers to one’s sensual needs, or social needs, since social status for many is determined by how much materialistic wealth they have.

And there is non-materialistic poverty, the opposite to non-materialistic riches, and relates to one’s human aspects that determine how much a person can give to life, whether for himself or for others, in areas that can develop one’s life, and in stances in vital and decisive issues.

What Imam Ali (as) is saying is that: when we look into the human mind, we see that it can produce thought in all issues, including materialistic issues – planning, utilisation and execution, on the basis that man’s needs may depend on spending money for education, or to advance in certain fields, or to execute projects; it is the mind and its powers that plans all this, and determines the tools and the steps of any endeavour.

Therefore **'The richest of riches is reason'** because it is reason that achieves for you materialistic and non-materialistic richness, in all ways of knowledge, experience and proper conduct. However, if a person lacks such mental powers of thinking, understanding and reasoning, he will have a confused personality, with no clear method of weighing things: he may see the bad as good and vice versa, leading him to follow a course that he thought would bring profit when it will later bring loss as a result of no planning or awareness of what to do; he may engage in a battle over a certain matter thinking that victory is on the horizon, but ends up losing. This is because the foolish person lacks the means to weigh things, while the wise person weighs things to come out with a balanced view and correct decisions. Therefore, the person who has reason is the richest person, since reason produces all valuable things in life for him – balance, the truth of the matter and depth, and shows him the consequences, not just the beginning.

### **The lust for speech!**

In another saying, Imam Ali (as) differentiates between the wise person and the foolish person: **'The tongue of the wise person is behind his heart, (while) the heart of the foolish person is behind his tongue.'**<sup>15</sup> Here again, the meaning of the heart is the mind and reason – a term used in the Qur'an: **'They have hearts with which they do not understand'** 7:179 and: **'For indeed it**

is not the eyes that grow blind, but it is the hearts, which are within the chests, that grow blind' 22:46. Ash-Sherif ar-Radi said (in *Nahj al-Balaghah*): 'What is meant is that the wise person does not give freedom to his tongue, i.e. he speaks only after conferring with a patient attitude and seeking advice from thought;' when a word may jump into his mind, as a result of a certain situation he finds himself in, such as an emotional situation that induces one to speak in an emotional way, or in confrontational situations when people resort to bombast in response to their emotions, in such cases the wise person will think before speaking. This matter relates to social and political situations, and in relationships with people in general.

We find that some people engage in certain relationships in a way that results from some emotional input that pushes them into that, such as in marriage where the girl or the boy is placed in an emotional atmosphere by their father or mother, or by sad or happy circumstances in which others pressurise them to accept a certain proposal.

The same is true regarding joining an association or party through a relative, a friend or someone you respect who asks you and encourages you to join a certain party, or to abandon your affiliation to another party and join their party. In this case, if you are a wise person, you should try to study the matter, and not to say any favourable word even when confronted by positive persuasion, or the opposite when confronted by negative

criticism – you ask for time to think and look closely into the matter, the ‘patient attitude’ according to ar-Radi, which is to deal with patience with that internal sphere in which thought mixes with senses and feelings; this provides the opportunity to plan the matter in a cool, calm way. You should seek advice from your thought, as ar-Radi explains, which means conferring with your thought, asking your thinking and reasoning powers to study the points of strength and weakness of that proposal, and all the possible positive and negative results of that project or even just that word in question.

The foolish person, in ar-Radi’s commentary on Imam Ali’s saying, however, ‘finds his tongue’s hurriedly uttered words and his uncontrollable speech coming out before conferring with his thoughts and shaking his opinion (i.e. like milk that is shaken until its butter develops; in other words: to scrutinise the matter.)’ He rushes into speaking without patiently thinking about it, in the lust for speech, just as we see some people who like to talk and talk, in any place and any time, regardless of the nature of their speech and whether it is useful or harmful, good or bad. Such a person gets enthusiastic and talks in an uncontrollable way before thinking or before looking closely into the matter to scrutinise it and detect the negative or bad elements in it in order to get rid of them first.

Ar-Radi continues: ‘... as if the tongue of wise person is a follower of his heart’ which means that the mind is behind the

steering wheel and therefore everything that the person does using any of his (controllable) organs is an execution of the mind's orders. The mind, with its reasoning powers, is the commander and all the organs of the body are his soldiers – the mind thinks and scrutinises the matter then gives its commands to the tongue. The foolish person, on the other hand, has the command in his tongue, which forces the matter on the mind when it rushes into speech, and gets the person into trouble, and then it is the mind which has to deal with the problem and how to solve it, or how to rescue the person from a situation that may even prove fatal.

### Keeping secrets

According to Imam Ali (as) '**The chest of the wise person is his secret box**'<sup>16</sup>, perhaps because one keeps important and precious things in a box. Also, the chest points to the area of internal awareness, including mental and sensual powers.

This saying advises people to keep their secrets to themselves, and not to make them known to others, because secrets cover all areas of one's life: relationships, projects, stances, words and whatever one wants to do, and in all fields – social, economic, political etc. The Imam (as) is advising you to keep your secrets as you do the things that are precious and valuable to you, because a lot of secrets relate to vital matters of your life, and if they are uncovered and spread among people, this may cause problems for

you, even danger. And if you cannot keep your secrets to yourself, how can you expect others to do so?

The approach in this matter is, therefore, to keep your secrets to yourself, unless there is someone whom you can trust, absolutely or almost absolutely, with your secret, or if this person has something to do with it, such as if he is involved in a project etc. We know that a lot of people come to know the secrets of others then fell out with them; they then broadcast the secrets and cause them quite dangerous problems. This is why the poet says:

Beware your enemy once and beware your friend a thousand times,  
For the friend may turn (into a foe), and he knows where it hurts you.  
Today, we live in a world where new equipment is developed all the time to uncover people's hidden secrets so as to use them for political, economic or security purposes, and to use them to execute harmful plans against others. We also know the role of espionage in the world, even amongst the allies, one against the other, friends one against the other. A lot of people volunteer to bring their personal secrets out into the open, simply because they love talking; others may volunteer to uncover their country's secrets, or to sell them to whoever will pay for them, or do so under pressure.

Therefore, Imam Ali (as) points to the value of secrets that relate to you individually, socially or nationally; you must preserve all these secrets and not to allow others to know them, for secrets represent trust, and since they are trust, you must not reveal the

secrets of others that you have come to know; the narration says: ‘Gatherings are bound by trust, and no one has the right to talk about any matter that his friend is concealing except upon his permission, unless if he is trustworthy or it is to mention him favourably.’<sup>17</sup> So, as taking money from someone represents betrayal, broadcasting secrets is also betrayal because a secret is held in trust, like money.

In this regard, many pieces of advice are narrated, such as: ‘Help achieve what you want with secrecy, as every one blessed with a bounty is envied.’<sup>18</sup>

In another, talking about the consequence of bringing your secret into the open, Imam Ali (as) says: ‘Your secret is your captive, (but) when you reveal it you become its captive.’<sup>19</sup> This is the consequence of one who is described in another narration: ‘He is complacent whose chest fails to contain his secret.’<sup>20</sup>

Another narration gives a general rule: ‘The more people who know the secret, the more it is likely to be revealed.’<sup>21</sup>

Other narrations emphasise the advice of keeping secrets to oneself: ‘Your secret is part of your blood, so do not let it flow in veins other than yours’<sup>22</sup>; or among friends who are not a potential threat: ‘Do not tell your friend your secret, for if your enemy comes to know it, it will not harm you, and a friend can become an enemy one day.’<sup>23</sup>

In light of this, we can say that, since we suffer in our world from irresponsible and uncontrolled speech, and since there are

those who would like to draw things out from us even without our awareness (as we notice in the media when they play on words and questions to make you say things you do not want to say), we have to be responsible towards our nation, homeland and society and beware of the consequences of revealing secrets.

### **A cover for shortcomings**

The role of reason and good thinking extends to an important area: that of one's own shortcomings – something which everyone suffers from. Imam Ali (as) says: **'(Good) thinking is a potent cover'** and this is through directing a person away from imbalance or what stirs up his bad sides, both in his thinking and practice; this may be effected either through preventing the bad element from coming out to the open, or through exterminating it altogether from the self so that it has no chance of coming out.

**'... And favourable qualities constitute a recognisable beauty.'** Favourable qualities are all good elements in the personality: good morals, balanced conduct and straightforwardness in terms of means and goals – this gives a person a recognisable beauty in his position of integrity and respect among people, exactly like attractive visible beauty.

**'... So, cover the shortcoming of your manners with your favourable qualities and fight your desires with your rationality.'** In this arena, good advice sheds light on the negative elements in one's personality on the moral side, so that



its psychological and practical shortcomings are revealed and one tries to cover these shortcomings with the positive elements that one possesses, and the good side comes out and the dark side disappears. Reason, on the other hand, is always locked in a struggle with the desire that comes from Satan's machinations and one's own soul, so one must not succumb to Satan's pressures, and to the soul in its drive towards desire. You must treat desire with the power of thought and that element of balance that you have, by looking into your desires and controlling your weak points with the strong points of your personality, empowering yourself in all this through the depth of thought and wisdom, and the scrutiny of unclear feelings.

This will lead him to the new position '**... and untarnished affection shall be yours, and love shall appear to you**'<sup>24</sup> because people give their love to the person whose rationality overcomes his desires, and whose thinking always tries to beat the control that lust exerts, on the basis that humanity love those who offer it all good, and abstain from any harm.

### From reason to forbearance

A similar saying was also narrated from Imam Ali (as), but related to forbearance: '**Forbearance is a potent cover.**' Forbearance is controlling one's self and nature from raging anger through patience, which is one of the fruits of reason that weigh deeds – good and bad – according to their positive and

negative results, pushing the person towards the positive and away from the negative. In the light of this, forbearance turns into a **'potent cover'** as it covers intense feelings and the drive towards evil that the soul has in times of anger, keeping them inside and replacing them with calm feelings and a drive towards the good, something that leads to rapprochement and lays the ground for conciliation and reconciliation.

**'... And reason is a cutting sword'**, i.e. the sword that kills false thought, cuts the roots of desire and confronts the deviant courses and evil situations. **'... So, cover the shortcomings of your manners with your forbearance'**, for this forbearance represents the cover that conceals every bad feature. **'... And fight your desire with your rationality'**<sup>25</sup>, for reason has the power needed to beat all deviant desire that leads one towards destruction.

Then Imam Ali (as) warns against pressures on the mind, through being unaware of the effects of the soul's evil machinations and drive, so that desire controls the person and drives him away from the call of reason, replacing it with the call of his hot desires. He says: **'How many a mind is captive in the hands of a commanding desire'**<sup>26</sup>, because when the mind is caught unaware and in confusion and becomes paralysed to move in the direction of accountability and scrutiny of the situation, the windows of light which it has are closed and desire comes, with all the body's feelings and greed and complexities of the

situation, to attain the position of strength that takes the command, leaving the mind in the position of the captive. This is what the Imam (as) is warning against in his statement: **‘fight your desire with your rationality’**, so that one stands always in the position of the alert fighter who is facing up to the challenges of his weaknesses.

From this, we understand that reason is the human power that God, the Most High, installed in human beings so as to be the force that protects them from every evil and deviation; therefore, they must not leave it inactive in any case and under any circumstances.

### **Responding to the needs of society**

Some people say that a scholar is like a tree: you cannot eat from it unless you shake it. It means that scholars wait for people to turn to them for answers or advice, otherwise they do not take the initiative, in contrast to how Imam Ali (as) defines wise people: the wise do not respond with passivity and silence when they see society’s intellectual, spiritual, social or political needs that they can fulfil with their input, because they are responsible for addressing the ignorance of society.

Imam Ali (as) says: **‘A wise person must possess three merits: answers when he is asked’**, when people turn to him in any matter in which he has knowledge, and there is no problem in talking about it (as would be the case if it relates to private or

public secrets), his responsibility is to answer people. We can deduce from this that he should educate himself with knowledge that enables him to answer people, especially if he has placed himself in a position of responsibility – intellectual, political, social or religious.

**‘... And he speaks when others fail to speak.’** In any society, there are matters that must be discussed and dealt with as they represent issues of the present and future, but when people cannot discuss these vital matters and provide solutions to them, in this case the wise person has to take the initiative to deal with them and solve them. He must not say: since others did not speak, why should I?

A contemporary fact here: there are great challenges that face the Arab world, the Islamic world and the world in general, and people may become puzzled because they do not know what to do. Anyone may find himself facing taking a decision to side with this or that group, this or that stance, or facing a matter involving political analysis, international or regional, that calls for close look into its background and those involved. In all this, people may be puzzled, and possibly looking at one side while ignoring others. In all of these cases, we have to bear in mind that these problems may be accompanied by others that you are not taking into account – it is a fact of life nowadays that there is nothing standing on its own: the local is linked to the regional and the regional to the international, politics with economy, and

security issues with both of these. This is why we always say that along with Islamic knowledge and awareness, we have to have political knowledge and awareness because people get fooled with a lot of words that are no more than hot air. Ahmed as-Safi an-Najafi, one of Iraq's most brilliant poets, who translated Omar al-Khayyam's quatrain verse, when he looked into Imam Ali's word 'Accept wisdom from whoever brings it to you and look into what is said not to who said it'<sup>27</sup>, he turned it upside down and said:

Deception has become widespread in our speech,  
So look into who said it, not what was said!

This is because speech no longer represents truth, so ask: who said it? Does he believe in it? Is he faithful? Is he truthful?

Ali (as) continues: '**... and offers opinion that is useful to the people involved.**' If you are one of those who have expertise and good opinion, your responsibility is to offer your opinion, taking the initiative in that, not waiting for others to turn to you; for the opinion which you have represents God's trust and you must benefit those involved with this trust.

Then Ali (as) concludes: '**So, whoever lacks any of these merits**' that is he does not answer when asked, does not speak when others fail to speak, and does not offer opinion to those involved, '**... is an idiot!**'<sup>28</sup> Such a person does not possess any of the merits of the wise, as he lives without responsibility, balance or planning, which leads him to seeing things upside down or to

moving in a deviant course thinking it otherwise, all blindly, at random.

### **Evidence of things**

In his teaching to Hisham bin al-Hakam, Imam Musa al-Kadhim (as) talks about several important issues, including reason: ‘**O Hisham! For everything there is evidence.**’ If we want to know all human and universal phenomena, their features and elements, perhaps their origins, we have to have evidence through what we can see in them – this is dictated by the very nature of life.

‘**The evidence of reason is perception.**’ Reason in the person is known through what it produces, for its mission is to recognise the facts and secrets of things, how to differentiate between their elements and natures, how to see their benefits and harm, how to distinguish good from bad, and truth from falsehood, so naturally it is thinking that proves that there is mind and reason. So, to distinguish between the existence and absence of reason, we find that the person who has reason produces thought, while the person who has not produces nothing.

‘**And the evidence of reflection is silence,**’ for the person who gives a free hand to his tongue and occupies himself with talking to others in every matter, cannot think, because thinking needs calmness, and the ability to open up to wide horizons and to look into the surroundings of things and people. Silence, then,

represents an important, vital element to foster thought; if you want to think and reflect, you have to give yourself the opportunity for serene silence, so that your mind can indulge in thinking, investigation and research.

**‘And for everything there is a vehicle; the vehicle of the wise person is humility.’** To attain your goals, you must have a vehicle, be it your legs or a mechanised tool. However, when it comes to the wise person, his vehicle to acquire his knowledge goals is humility, in that a humble person will be in a state of accepting truth as he is not preoccupied with aggrandising himself; rather he accepts from others and acknowledges their positions as he does his, acknowledges the other’s thought, studies its details, reflects on it and discusses it – and this may lead him to become convinced by the thought of others.

In contrast, the proud person has an inflated personality, and this is why the Qur’an describes those who deny and reject the truth as proud and arrogant. Arrogance and humility are not limited to one’s relationship with others in the area of the self, but they extend to such relationships in thought, belief and affiliations, so that dialogue is the basis on which one respects the other’s thinking and opinions, leading to understanding or to conviction with the thoughts of others. Therefore, the person who does not have humility, but is arrogant, is moving towards ignorance and rushes into decisions then insists on such decisions, even if it becomes quite clear that they are wrong.

In another part, the Imam (as) describes the opposite outcomes of these two opposites: humbleness and arrogance: ‘O Hisham! There is no one without an angel holding him at his forehead, so that he never behaves humbly but to find God elevating him,’ only when he behaves humbly towards truth will this elevate his position to God. ‘... and never behaves arrogantly but to find God bringing him down.’ So, with humility, man becomes bigger, but with arrogance, he becomes smaller.

### Prohibitions and ignorance

Then the Imam (as) says: ‘It is sufficient ignorance on your side to commit what you were prohibited from doing’ as if he is saying: ignorance is not merely a state in the imagination, but is dynamic in conduct and behaviour, because the value of knowledge is not in its thoughts and what can be imagined, but extends to reality. The Holy Qur’an, the Sunnah and wise men said that the value of knowledge is related to how much it extends to practice, since knowledge without application is like a tree with no fruits – Islam is conviction in the heart and practice of the obligations. This is why the Imam (as) emphasises in his teachings that one of the highest degrees of ignorance is to do what you were prohibited from doing, because prohibitions exist on account of the negative outcome they bring. So what great



ignorance it is that makes you indulge in what harms you and leads you to absolute loss!

### Always in control

In this part, the Imam (as) highlights two positive attitudes that wise people have regarding both allowed and prohibited things. He says: **‘O Hisham! Allowed things do not prevent a wise person from thanking,’** that is thanking God for His bounties and sustenance. This is the person who lives within what God has allowed: **‘Say: Who has prohibited the beautiful (gifts) of God which He has brought forth for His servants and the good provisions?’ 7:32;** He has allowed a lot of good things in life, but some people get overwhelmed by these allowed things and indulge in desires and pleasures to the extent that they forget their Lord, and that all these allowed things come from God and so he must thank Him. It must be said that acknowledging God’s bounties requires awareness in the way that one is not overindulgent in them, and understands their meaning; **‘And if you wanted to count God’s blessings, you would not be able to number them’ 16:18, ‘And whatever blessing is (bestowed) on you, it is from God’ 16:53.** Therefore, the wise person is one who realises that the bounties in his hand come from God, Who is the Provider, so he should not fail to thank Him for that.

**‘... and forbidden things do not defeat his patience’:** when the wise person stands up to whatever attracts him to forbidden

things, due to needs and desires, he stays firm, steadfast and patient, conscious of his impoverishment from them.

The Imam (as) linked the issue of thanking, and patience towards prohibitions, with rationality, since when you indulge in desires and pleasures within the allowable arena, reason will tell you that thanking the Provider Who has given these will take you nearer to Him and He will give you more: **'If you are grateful, I would certainly give to you more (blessings)' 14:7.** It is also reason that encourages a person to be patient and not to indulge in forbidden things, lest it brings him face to face with God's wrath and retribution; this is in addition to the other negative aspects that cause a lot of losses both in this life and the Hereafter.

### **Beware of these three!**

Imam al-Kadhim (as) continues: **'O Hisham! Who throws three (negative attributes) against three (positive merits) as if he is helping his desire to demolish his reason.'** The issue at hand here is that every person, due to his nature on one hand and the surrounding environment on the other, has both reason and desire and there is a struggle between the two, because the former shapes conduct on the basis of profit and loss, and it shows where the good and benefit lie and where the bad and harm lie, while the latter is led by enflamed desire that pulls a man towards pleasures without looking into any possible

negative outcome, like a moth that rushes to a flame then burns in it. Here, the Imam (as) wants to say that a person must control his desire and not to let it prevent his mind from thinking, i.e. from preserving his balance and whole existence.

So, what are these three?

First: **‘Who darkens the light of his thinking with exaggerated hope.’** Many narrations warn against this; the Prophet (sawa) says: **‘The worst of what I fear for you is two (things): following desire and exaggerated hope; as for the desire, it prevents truth, and as for the exaggerated hope, it makes (you) forget the Hereafter.’** When a person has exaggerated hope (in his ambitions, aspirations and things he plans for), he forgets the Hereafter, and when he does that, he submits to his pleasure, lust and desire and this stops him from benefiting from his mind’s capabilities, because desires draw a cover over reason to the extent that it can no longer see the fact of things.

Second: **‘And erased the good words of his wisdom with his unnecessary speech.’** This is the speech of an unwise person, a speech void of wisdom or knowledge, and naturally if a person occupies himself with such words and speech, he will see any possible words of wisdom run a way from him, because he has not given himself the chance to think according to knowledge and experience.

Third: **‘And extinguished the light of his lesson-taking with his self lusts.’** God wants man to illuminate his way with the light of the lessons he takes from the things he sees and the situations he finds himself in, but if he occupies himself with desires, he loses the ability that makes him derive lessons for this life and the Hereafter; in this way, it is as if he is helping to demolish his reason. It is like those who become addicted to drugs or alcohol, letting their minds fall into a coma in which it is not possible to attend to responsibilities and one’s proper role in life and society, and in producing the thoughts that guide man in the right course. Hence, whoever demolishes his thinking and reasoning powers is demolishing his religion, because he fails to see what these mental powers imply in relation to observing religious concepts and duties, or in relation to what they lead to in terms of knowledge of good and bad, benefit and harm and so on.

### **Deeds that count**

The question of deeds committed by man and whether or not they count is touched on in this part of Imam al-Kadhimi’s teaching: **‘O Hisham! How come your deeds become accepted by God when you have occupied your mind away from your Lord and obeyed your desire to let it have the upper hand over your mind?!’** The Imam (as) is saying – in an rhetorical way – that one must purify one’s deeds of all that tarnishes them,

in their background and nature, and to develop them to become productive deeds on the level of one's relationship to his Lord, something which achieves good in life and the Hereafter. Therefore, when a person wants to do anything, whether it is worship or something that relates to society and people, in their personal or public lives, in social and charitable projects and other pursuits, he must look at his endeavour through his thinking and reason and ask: how can you produce this work so that it is bound to be positive rather than negative?

Naturally, when anyone is asking his mind, his mind must be clear, proceeding from its fundamental principles so that no desires occupy him or basic instincts overwhelm him. If man is occupied with his lusts and basic instincts, he cannot have a mind that is open to facts; instead of being open to God, he moves towards Satan, who occupies him with his lusts and desires.

These words from the Imam (as) are intended to stop the person from occupying himself with his desires, as this will make him lose the purity of his deeds through losing concentration and mental direction. We know that deeds are evaluated according to their value and background: **'Deeds are only evaluated according to intentions, and everyone will have (his reward) according to (how he has set) his intention'**: deeds are not evaluated according to their form, but the intention behind them, the spirit around it, since every endeavour has both body and spirit. If a person loses his mind's freedom to rid itself from

all that burdens it and obscures the image, in this case it cannot offer a pure deed that is near to God, the Most High. This is what the Imam (as) wants: pure deeds that achieve God's love and satisfaction. But if a person has occupied his mind outside the pale of his Lord's commandments, and obeyed his desires that take him right and left away from straightforwardness that is based on faithfulness to God, this represents the secret of failure and loss, as the secret of success is in the mind and reason having the upper hand over desire. God says: **'Then, for such as had transgressed all bounds. And had preferred the life of this world. Surely the abode will be Hell-Fire. But as for him who feared to stand before his Lord and restrained his soul from lust. Surely the abode will be the Garden'** 79:37-41.

### Living in seclusion?

An important issue is treated in this part of Imam al-Kadhim's teaching, that is whether living in seclusion stands to reason or not. He says: **'O Hisham! Steadfastness in living alone is a sign of a powerful mind; so, anyone who has understood God, the Most High, and lived in seclusion ,apart from from people who are caught up exclusively in this life, he sets his desire for what is with his Lord.'** Here we have to ask: is what is needed for man in his life to live as a recluse, away from society and all what people engage in in their struggle, or should man engage fully in society? Man is civilisation-bound by nature

and God made him part of a small family and the larger family of his society, so as to satisfy his needs of social relationships and the needs of others to him, because God created people in tribes and races so that they know each other, and this makes it imperative that individuals engage in society so that each one offers his experience to the other.

In fact, the teaching is not suggesting seclusion in all cases and at all times, nor with the opposite, in all cases, but each course has its role and benefit.

So, when do we need seclusion?

We need seclusion when we are in need of reflection, thinking and sitting with God, because it is through being alone that one can give freedom to one's mind and thoughts and live in a state of psychological serenity so as to think. This is why the Messenger of God (sawa) stayed for a period – before the start of the revelations – thinking and reflecting, in the cave of Hira', on his own, opening up to God in his close prayer and worship. God, the Almighty, might have wanted for him to live like that during that period so as to elevate his mind and spirit to Him, to the system of the universe that would show him the Greatness of God, and to the human reality that points to the bounties of God. That period – the forty years before the Message – was a reflective, spiritual, educational period, a period of spiritual meditation. Therefore, seclusion has its role in helping one develop the elements of one's personality: mind, heart, senses

and feelings, so as to acquire experience from all this and to be able to integrate one's experience of knowledge with mental reflection.

There is another side of seclusion that relates to one's relationship with the bad individuals in society. There are some individuals that live within the circle of desires and lust in the wrong way and it is all too normal that a relationship with such people drives one away from clarity and being with God and obeying His commandments, and turns one into a person that is submissive to a corrupt social atmosphere, and weakened in one's resolve for good.

It is this type of seclusion that the Imam's teaching is trying to deal with, so that the person distances himself from this corrupt society and achieves clarity and purity, and elevates himself in his contemplation and meditation, living in a relationship of absolute obedience to God, a relationship of love and feeling of strength with Him – but only after he frees himself from all pressures towards weakness. In this way, he becomes bigger through God, Who will be his companion in his seclusion; in fact, the person whose mind and heart is full of God and His love is not a reclusive person and will not feel lonely. The absence of other people is a small price to pay when one is living with God!

The same applies when his responsibilities increase with his family, then at times of crises he feels he is living with God,



similar to the Prophet (sawa) when God said to him: ‘Did He not find you an orphan and give (you) shelter? Did He not find you wandering and direct (you)? And find you in want and make (you to be) free from want?’ 93:6-8. He will feel that God is the Provider and is the supporter, not other people, as in the narration: ‘If you want a strong position without a tribe and prestige without rule, move from the humiliation of disobedience to God to the strength of obedience to God, the Almighty.’<sup>29</sup> These are the positive aspects of seclusion.

For social life, however, God likes a person to meet with good people, with the scholars who add to his knowledge, with wise people who help develop his mental abilities and with people in general, to cooperate with them in good endeavours and services to humanity at large. The poet says:

One’s loneliness is better,  
Than sitting with a bad person,  
And sitting with a good person is better,  
Than sitting alone.

So, we understand that loneliness and seclusion is not an absolute good, and that being with people is bad; rather, in each of these there is some good and some bad. The issue here is that a person should look into each one – seclusion and mixing with people – in relation with their effect on developing himself, his reasoning and understanding, knowledge and thought, and his relationship with his Lord.

**'Steadfastness in living alone is a sign of a powerful mind'** because a human being feels lonely on his own, so he feels the need to mingle in society to satisfy the need for company; deprivation in this respect calls for patience and steadfastness, and this, when present, shows strength in a person's mental understanding and resolve, as he is not submitting to his self-gratification but to what benefits him, in seclusion or otherwise.

**'... So, anyone who has understood God, the Most High,'** i.e. has opened up to the knowledge coming from God in His revelations to His Messengers and Books and what His blessings have placed in man's mind; **'... and lived in seclusion, apart from people who are caught up exclusively in this life,'** i.e. those who submit to this life, not who live in this life, but who succumb to this life's desires, regarding this life as everything and forgetting the Hereafter; their ambitions, aspirations and socialising are with the rich, the wealthy, desire-bound people and the like, without having God in their mind; **'he sets his desire for what is with his Lord,'** through his reflection and contemplation in his seclusion and discovering knowledge of His Lord.

**'... And He becomes his solace in his loneliness and his companion in his seclusion,'** hence, when one feels that one is living with God, one does feel that God is one's companion. In some supplications<sup>30</sup> we say: **'What has he found, he who has lost You; and what has he lost, he who has found You?!**

Whoever finds You with him does not lose anything, even if no one in the world is with him, but if You are not with him, all the world will not fill his self and life.

**‘and his wealth in want’** or poverty and need, because He is the Provider of every bounty and it is He who provides for every need and answers every call.

**‘... and his strength with no tribe,’** for all strength and power is God’s, therefore nearness to Him will make the person attain the highest degree of strength.

**‘O Hisham! Truth was established for God’s obedience’** since opening up to the truth is knowing God; **‘This is because God is the Truth, and whatever they invoke beside Him is falsehood, and God is the Most High, the Most Great.’** 31:30. Truth combines all good values and merits for man, and it brings him nearer to God, the Most High, and to all good; so if you recognise truth, truth tells you: you have to obey God in his obligations and prohibitions, for truth was established for this.

**‘... And there is no safety but with obedience’** because to be saved in the Hereafter is based on God’s satisfaction, reward, mercy and love, and this is only achieved through obedience.

**‘... And obedience is through knowledge,’** since the ignorant cannot tell where obedience lies or perceive its details; so one must know the do’s and don’ts to abide by them, and one must know the value of obedience and its consequences as opposed to disobedience

and its negative outcome, all this cannot be acquired without knowledge.

‘... And knowledge is through learning; and learning is established through thinking and reason,’ because one may acquire knowledge through perception, but a lot of knowledge – especially what is revealed from God to His Messenger, which He wants people to adopt – must be learnt and absorbed through understanding, thinking, reflection and reasoning, so that it is firmly established in one's mind.

‘... And there is no knowledge except from a scholar in touch with the divine,’ i.e. the scholar whose knowledge has been established on what God has revealed and on what leads to knowledge.

‘... And acquiring knowledge is through the mind,’ because it is the mind that makes one think about the knowledge that one has acquired from that scholar and from one's own experiences, so as to confer one's knowledge on the whole of one's personality.

### Quality is what matters

‘O Hisham! A few of the deeds of the wise person are accepted and multiplied, and a lot of deeds of people of desires and ignorance are rejected.’ Here, Imam al-Kadhim (as) explains that the value is not quantity, but quality. When the knowledgeable person does something, this deed is based on the

elements of knowledge that he has acquire and added to the deed itself, so he does not rely on appearances and quantity, but on quality. However, when the ignorant person does something, even if in sizeable quantity, his deed is rejected because it lacks the spirit of the well-made deed, and lacks the value of the well-made deed. The narration says: **‘Two rak’abs<sup>31</sup> performed by the knowledgeable person is better than a year’s worship by the (ignorant) worshipper,’** because the knowledgeable person performs this short piece of worship with all the meanings that lead him to God, on the basis of his knowledge of Him, His Majesty, His blessings and the humble submission with which he does it; while the ignorant worshipper carries out the deed in numbers, but with no spirit.

### Pray for completeness in mental powers

Imam al-Kadhim’s advises Hisham bin al-Hakam to pray to God (for one thing, which, if he gets, will make him feel as if his prayers for all other things have been answered); he says: ‘O Hisham! He who wants freedom from want without money, the heart’s freedom from envy, and correctness of religion, let him pray earnestly to God, the Most High, to complete his mind (i.e. in thinking, understanding, reasoning etc), since he who understands and reasons becomes content with what is sufficient for him, and he who becomes content with what is sufficient for him becomes free from want; (but) he

**who is not content with what is sufficient for him will never achieve freedom from want.'**

In this section, the Imam (as) makes links between several concepts:

First: 'freedom from want without money', which may seem strange since freedom from want or wealth means owning a lot of money;

Second: 'the heart's freedom from envy,' as envy represents a psychological illness that burdens one's heart and may lead to failure in life and in relationships with people;

Third: 'preserving the correctness of religion;' a person who starts following a religion, either inherited or through new conviction, may deviate due to some situations befalling him or circumstances that put pressure on him.

### Contentment and wealth

The Imam (as) links all these with the question of 'contentment'. Contentment means that one is satisfied with what is sufficient for one's needs so that one feels internally wealthy when one reaches the level of sufficiency, i.e. what meets one's needs and no more. The reason that this represents an internal feeling of wealth is that if the person thinks about getting more than what he needs and strives to achieve it, he will be in an everlasting state of poverty, since every time he moves from a stage that is more than his needs to a higher stage, he finds himself still wanting more, so he moves to the third stage, then the fourth

and the fifth and so on, always retaining a feeling of poverty, psychologically and practically.

### Contentment and envy

The same applies to envy, which is when someone wishes that someone else loses what he has got and that he gets it. This comes from a state of psychological poverty, because if that person thinks realistically about what he has and what other people have, he will see that they have what they have through efforts that he did not contribute to, and have lived in circumstances different to his. Also, if he does think about this, he will try to see how he can go about acquiring what meets his needs and any extras he may want to get what they have, or even more. Moreover, there is a fundamental matter that relates to belief: that what the other people have got is the result of their efforts on one hand and God's discrete blessings on the other. This means that in feeling envious, he is rebelling against God, in addition to treating the matter unrealistically, since when God gave the other people these bounties, He does not want them to lose them, as He is the Omnipotent one who gives as He sees fit. However, if one does not want other people to lose what they have got but wants to have the same, this is not envy, but healthy ambition – this person does not have a complex about the others like the envious person who can become obsessed with this problem to destructive and evil ends, which the Qur'an teaches people to pray to protect themselves from: 'And from

**the evil of the envious one when he practises envy'** 113:5, the person resorting to practical steps against the object of his envy. This is what the narration: **'If you envy someone, do not transgress'**<sup>32</sup> tries to deal with, as envy is not that you can use your eyes to destroy the other person, but that you can live in a state of aggression with all the negative consequences.

### Contentment and preserving the correctness of religion

Greed leads to many forbidden things, such as aggression against people, or committing forbidden acts, especially given that a lot of people cannot wait to become rich so they pursue forbidden rather allowed activities. By contrast, contentment represents a psychological state that encourages the person to protect (by observing) his religion (religious duties).

### Talking about contentment...

In this regard, let us mention some examples of what the Scriptures provide, with very short comments.

Imam Ali (as) says: **'Contentment suffices for possessions;**<sup>33</sup> he who feels contented feels he has enough possessions and nothing more is needed, in contrast to the person who is constantly running after possessions and never feels he has got enough.

Imam Ali (as) also says: **'He whose soul becomes contented, this will help him towards honesty and virtuousness,**<sup>34</sup> which is in contrast to greed for forbidden possessions.



Another famous narration: 'Contentment is an inexhaustible treasure'<sup>35</sup> and 'Contentment is an everlasting wealth.'<sup>36</sup>

Imam Ali (as) highlights the merit of contentment being true wealth: 'I searched for wealth and could not find it except (in) contentment,'<sup>37</sup> since feeling wealthy is true wealth.

Another narration says: 'Be free from want in comparison to to others and you become their equal,'<sup>38</sup> since feeling inequality is when you feel others are better than you, or that you need them.

Imam al-Baqir (as) says: 'He who is content with what God has given him is one of the wealthiest people,'<sup>39</sup> because he does not feel in need of anyone, unlike a rich person who continues to strive for more, never feeling wealthy.

Imam al-Hosain (as) says: 'Contentment is rest for the body.'<sup>40</sup>

Imam Ali (as) says: 'No one takes the road of contentment except two men: a worshipper who is after the reward of the Hereafter,' who does not think about life except in terms of the natural needs (so he is like what God describes: 'And seek by means of what God has given you the Home of the Hereafter, and do not neglect your portion of this world, and do good (to others) as God has done good to you, and do not seek to make mischief in the earth' 28:77); '... or a dignified man who elevates himself above mean people,'<sup>41</sup> who may impose upon him – due to his need of them – things that do not conform with his convictions, values or goals.

Imam as-Sadiq (as) says: 'Be contented with what God has allocated for you and do not wish for what others have and do not wish for what you will not get,'<sup>42</sup> because you lack the means to get it.

Some narrations treat the matter of balance between the amount of wealth and the amount of deeds, such as Imam as-Sadiq's: 'If a person is satisfied with little (bounties) from God, God will be satisfied with little (amounts of good) deeds from him,'<sup>43</sup> that is, God rewards his contentment with His satisfaction with less effort; in other words, he will see the reward of his deeds multiplied (in real terms).

And what Imam Ali (as) says: 'O son of Adam! If you want from the world what is sufficient for you, then the least from it will do; and if you want what is not sufficient (i.e. more) for you, then all what is in it will not do!'<sup>44</sup> Someone who is not content with what he gets will never cease striving to get more, endlessly.

### And talking about envy...

Similarly, let us mention some examples of what the Scriptures provide with very short comments.

Imam Ali (as) says: 'How fair is envy! It started with its culprit (the envious person) and killed him!'<sup>45</sup> The envious person is suffering from a psychological complex that places him in endless grief, and each time he sees the envied person enjoying

what he has, he gets torn apart by pain and sadness, something that may lead to health crises of grave consequences.

He also says: **‘The fruit of envy is suffering in this life and the Hereafter.’**<sup>46</sup>

It is a kind of illness: **‘The envious person cannot be cured except with the (envied person’s) loss of the bounty.’**<sup>47</sup>

Such person has two faces: **‘The envious person shows love in his words and hides his hatred in his deeds.’**<sup>48</sup>

Imam Ali (as) describes the envious in yet a different way: **‘I have not seen a wrongdoer that is similar to a wronged person like the envious!’** He wrongs the other person, but if you look closely into the state he is in, you will find that he is wronging (himself) due to the state he is in, with **‘... continuous breath and wandering heart and sticking sorrow’**<sup>49</sup>, never feeling any psychological stability.

This is similar to Imam as-Sadiq’s: **‘There is no rest for the envious.’**<sup>50</sup>

The matter does not stop at the ill effects of envy upon the envious, but it extends to a more dangerous area, that of the religion. The Prophet (sawa) says: **‘The disease of the nations before you has crept into you, which is envy; it does not shave the hair, but it “shaves” religion;’**<sup>51</sup> just as shaving removes hair, envy removes the whole of religion.

Another narration emphasises this: **‘Envy “eats” belief as fire does the firewood,’**<sup>52</sup> because part of belief is satisfaction with

what God has given to others, which means that the envious person is not satisfied and has not accepted it, and he may even go as far as harming the object of his envy in one way or another.

And as we mentioned in distinguishing between envy and healthy ambitions, Imam as-Sadiq (as) attributes each one to a different person with regard to their belief: **‘The believer can display healthy ambition but does not envy, while the hypocrite envies and does not have healthy ambitions,’**<sup>53</sup> since he lives in a state of aggression towards others, not accepting God’s plan in allocating His bounties to people.

All this relates to one’s understanding, and this is why Imam al-Kadhimi (as) said to Hisham: **‘O Hisham! He who wants freedom from want without money, the heart’s freedom from envy and correctness of religion, let him pray earnestly to God, the Most High, to complete his mind (i.e. in thinking, understanding, reasoning etc),’** for the role of reason is to make the person feel contented and have healthy ambitions, not envy, and protect his religion by not indulging in any forbidden acts to satisfy any desires that may come from discontent.

**‘... since he who understands and reasons becomes content with what is sufficient for him,’** as anything beyond his needs is not required, **‘and he who becomes content with what is sufficient for him becomes free from want,’** as he will never

need a lot of money, feeling self-sufficient and wealthy with whatever God has given him; **'(but) he who is not content with what is sufficient for him will never achieve freedom from want,'** living in never-ending poverty.

### The worship of reason

Imam al-Kadhim (as) puts reason, along with any mental power, at the highest possible level when he links it to worshipping God, the Most High, as follows: **'O Hisham! The Commander of the Faithful (i.e. Imam Ali) (as) used to say: "There is nothing through which God has been worshipped like reason."**' This is because pursuing knowledge of God – His attributes, Greatness and bounties represents a worship of the thought that is higher than any other form of worship, for the deeper one goes into the horizons of knowledge the more of the secret of one's obedience and the secret of God's absolute divinity are established. The narration says: **'An hour's contemplation is better than a year's worship,'**<sup>54</sup> regarding thinking about God as a kind of worship that is better than the physical worship. Therefore, using the mind, through its deep thinking and reasoning, is the best form of worship, with the mind itself experiencing worship; in fact, the forms of physical worship that one experiences in prayer, fasting, pilgrimage etc are a result of the worship of knowledge.

On the basis of this, the more one knows God, the more he submits to Him and obeys Him. This is why the Imam (as) regards worship through reason as the best kind of worship. And from this we understand why ‘Two *rak’abs* performed by the knowledgeable person is better than a year’s worship by the (ignorant) worshipper’<sup>55</sup> as these two *rak’abs* encompass the meaning of worship and so are more valuable than a thousand *rak’abs* offered by a worshipper who lacks such knowledge.

Imam Ali’s words narrated by his great great great great grandson al-Kadhim (as) continue: ‘And the mind of a person is not complete unless it has several merits:’ as if he is answering the question: how do you know if someone has a complete mind, and what are the features that give it such a description?

### **Atheism and evil**

‘Atheism and evil from him (a wise person) are not possible’ because a wise person looks into the question of the existence of God and His Oneness through thinking and reason and can never fall into atheism, which cannot survive any reasonable challenge as it is something like a myth and absurdity, since all of what some people follow that is not God – or what they believe to be equal to Him in divinity or worth or worship – cannot touch real thought even superficially, let alone in depth. Looking into the universe and what it contains provides a reasonable proof that atheism is impossible: duality in gods would have resulted in

dispute as with any duality of authority, but since there has not been a dispute at all we cannot have had two gods: if the hypothetical two had been in dispute, which leads to one wanting something and the other opposing it, this would have led to imbalance and the destruction in the universe: 'If there had been in them (the heavens and the earth) any gods except Allah, they would both have certainly been in a state of disorder' 21:22 and: 'Never did Allah take to Himself a son, and never was there with him any (other) god - in that case each god would have certainly taken away what he created, and one of them would certainly have overpowered the other' 23:91; instead we see the beautiful, rather incredible, system that does not leave any place for imbalance: 'Surely We have created everything according to a measure' 54:49 and 'you see no incongruity in the creation of the Beneficent God' 67:3.

The same applies to evil, in that all forms of evil in life lead to destruction or imbalance in human or universal systems. When the wise person consults his mind, it will advise him and plan for him to choose the best for his affairs and that for people. He will not choose to go the opposite way when that will lead to loss and confusion in his life and relationships.

## Rationality

'... And rationality and good are expected from him.' Reason takes the person to rationality; rationality is the course that

makes the person aware of his acts, words, relationships and stances, because he does not pursue any matter unless it brings good and benefit, in this life and the Hereafter. So, he avoids error in his words, abstains from useless speech and avoids error in his acts, relationships and stances, choosing in all that what is rational on the mental, spiritual, sensual and dynamic levels.

The same goes for good: a wise person will choose good instead of evil, since it stands to reason to go along the road of good – truthfulness, honesty, trustworthiness etc – as this will bring balance, benefits and high regard.

So, you expect the wise person to abstain from any wrong behaviour and to keep on the right path. In other words, you expect to find him adopting all positive attitudes and to develop and improve to avoid imbalance and confusion in his personal and public affairs.

### Generosity

‘... What is extra of his money is offered to others’: what he has in excess of his needs, he gives to the needy since, through his rationality, he behaves in the way that brings all good to himself in this life and the Hereafter. He responds to the revelation: ‘and spend (in charity) out of what He has passed down to you’ 57:7 and ‘And in their wealth is a portion due to the beggar and to him who is denied (good)’ 51:19, expressing the human feeling towards other human



beings, their pain, sorrow and need, knowing that if they behave meanly, they are the ones who are going to lose: **‘and whoever is niggardly is niggardly against his own soul’ 47:38**, as God may make him suffer like those whom he is not trying to help. One of the bright moments that Ahlul Bayt (as) experienced was when they gave away all that they had, leaving themselves hungry for three consecutive days, something which the Qur’an mentioned, both the act and the hidden intention: **‘And they give food out of love for Him to the poor and the orphan and the captive. We only feed you for God's sake; we desire from you neither reward nor thanks. Surely we fear from our Lord a stern, distressful day. Therefore God will deliver them from the evil of that day and shed over them a brightness and joy’ 76:8-11.**

### Unnecessary speech

**‘... And what is unnecessary of his speech is under control.’** Reason tells him: God gave you the power of speech in your tongue to use it for your needs towards yourself and in your relationships with others – to direct them to good, advise them, helping them in their needs, supporting and defending them, defending truth and so on, all as a means of achieving happiness in this life and the Hereafter. Apart from that, any speech that is not words of wisdom, advice or to do with lawful needs is superfluous, which neither you nor they need. A wise person

does not waste his speaking energy and effort in nonsense or pointless chatter.

### **Sufficiency not excess**

‘... His portion of this life is sufficiency.’ Wise people plan according to their natural needs, materialistic or spiritual, on individual or social levels, and do not overindulge. They have a central goal: to achieve sufficiency so that they do not need others, and anything more than that is an unnecessary extra, and they would have to overburden themselves to get what is not vital anyway, while they could direct these efforts and energy towards what is more important in the areas of grand issues that relate to their existence and fate and that of those for whom they are responsible.

### **Knowledge forever!**

‘... And he is never satisfied with the knowledge he has.’ Wise people are for ever learning because knowledge knows no limits, especially if it is at the horizons of the Divine, whether it is acquired through reflection and thinking or experience. Their minds tell them that knowledge is what elevates one’s position in front of God and people: ‘Say: Are those who know and those who do not know alike?’ 39:9 and: ‘God will elevate those of you who believe, and those who are given knowledge, in high degrees’ 58:11; and the narration: ‘The value of everyone is

(according to) what he is good at.’<sup>56</sup> It is with knowledge that your mental capabilities strengthen, your role grows, your responsibilities are met and the good in this life and the Hereafter is acquired.

The Qur’an sets the target for knowledge in the verse: ‘Say: O my Lord! Give me more knowledge’ 20:114, which is endless. In other words, it encourages people to be in continuous pursuit of knowledge, and each time they attain a higher level they start looking forward to a higher one. The narration says: ‘Two persons are in a state of gluttony: one who pursues knowledge and one who pursues worldly things!’<sup>57</sup> This is seen in all fields of knowledge – philosophy, biology, physics etc: they never stop at a given point, but to move forward to discover more and more. This is what reason commands man to do.

### Humility is better

‘...Humility with God is more agreeable to him than an exalted position with others.’ This section tries to deal with a spiritual moral idea that some people may think that a high position of strength attains its benefits through people and therefore they try to attain this by striving to form relationships with individuals who have social, political, military or economic power, crushing themselves in the process under the power of these people so as to get hold of some strength and power. The

Qur'an discusses this: 'Announce to the hypocrites that they shall have a painful chastisement. Those who take the unbelievers for friends rather than believers, do they seek power from them? No, surely all power is with God.' 4:138-9 since it is only God who has absolute strength since He is the owner of absolute power: 'the power is wholly God's' 2:165. Therefore, everyone has some power and strength, but it is acquired from Him, and, therefore, the more one brings himself nearer to the Lord, the stronger one becomes. In one of his supplications, Imam Ali bin al-Hosain (as) says: 'Protect me from imagining any meanness in someone who is (in fact) destitute or imagining any superiority in someone who possesses wealth, for the noble is he whom obedience to You has ennobled and the exalted is he whom worship of You has exalted!'

### Modesty and nobility

'... And modesty is more agreeable to him than nobility' i.e. nobility among the masses or in society. This means that a person has to be modest in his behaviour, as this represents his knowledge of himself and of others, since he knows the points of strength and weakness he has, and that of others, but he does not belittle others on the basis of his points of strength, rather respects them for their points of strength in comparison to his weaknesses. Arrogance and pride stem from one's ignorance of

one's self and its limits; this is why Imam Ali bin al-Hosain (as) wants to teach us to balance ourselves in this regard: 'Raise me not a single degree before the people without lowering me its like in myself, and bring about no outward elevation for me without an inward abasement in myself to the same measure!' It is a question of trying to balance what one attains from social position and nobility and outward strength amongst people by comparing it with the humble points inside oneself. A wise person does not feel nobility with a proud and arrogant attitude, rather he looks upon himself realistically.

### Fairness and beyond

'... He regards any small favour from others as big;' so if someone gives him something, he does not regard it small or insignificant, but when he thinks, his mind will tell him that this person is not obliged to give anything to him, so he is doing him a favour, so even if it is small in amount, it is big in the meaning of kindness and favour – naturally, this leads to thanking them for their gesture. The Qur'an and the *hadith* draw the same picture of God's merciful and gracious way with people: 'The parable of those who spend their wealth in the way of God is like the parable of a grain growing seven ears (with) a hundred grains in every ear; and God multiplies for whom He pleases; and God is Ample-giving, All-Knowing' 2:261, so we pray to him saying: 'O You who are satisfied with the little

(amount of good deeds) and pardons a lot (of bad deeds)! Accept from me the little (amount of good deeds) and pardon me a lot (of bad deeds).' One has to appreciate what others give to one, because some people might not be able to give any more and this makes it an even bigger gift.

'... and regards the big favour from himself as small.' If he gives, he does not feel that, in relation to the other person's need, he has done a lot, for this might not meet his need; however, this is what he is capable of, but in any case he does not feel he has given a lot even if it was indeed a lot.

### Himself and the others

'... And he regards all people as better than him,' always seeing the positive points in others, which may not be present in him; so regarding them as better than him, even if only in the merits that distinguish them from him.

'... and that he is the worse within himself,' in view of the points of weakness in himself, in humility, of the sense of the human moral values regarding his appraisal of himself.

### Finally...

'... And this is the completeness of the matter!' Through the words of Imam Ali (as), narrated from Imam al-Kadhim (as) in his teachings to his companion Hisham, we understand that the role of reason is to make the person open up to all the aspects of

good, to make him a distinguished person in his attitude and conduct in life, and to make him someone who knows all sides of truth in his life and that of others, and behaves accordingly.

### The obligations of the knowledgeable

Although we explained earlier that some of the features of wise people are that they offer advice, teach others and try to guide people in the right direction, it is worth emphasising here at the end of this chapter that it is obligatory on scholars, in any science and field of knowledge, to teach people – they are not free not to teach or to be mean with regard to offering their knowledge. This is because, first, how would the ignorant learn if not from the knowledgeable; the narration says: ‘God did not make it obligatory on the ignorant to learn, but makes it obligatory on the knowledgeable to teach.’<sup>58</sup> Second, people are living in a state of confusion due to deviation and innovations of all kinds, it is the obligation of the wise person to try to correct and develop the thinking of others, as he is accountable – the Prophet (sawa) says: ‘If innovations become widespread in my nation (Muslims), the knowledgeable person is obliged to offer his knowledge, but if he fails to do so, then may God’s curse befall him!’<sup>59</sup>

Therefore, we have to meet our obligations, starting with ourselves, by giving reason its ‘life’ through thinking and reflection, otherwise it dies! Reflection, thinking, understanding

and reasoning are what develops our mind and helps its creative powers; those who do not use their mind are living in a state of mental death, even though they are quite alive, physically.

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<sup>1</sup> *Nahj al-Balaghah*, Mohammed Abdoh commentary, vol.4, p.68.

<sup>2</sup> *Nahj al-Balaghah* (Peak of Eloquence) is a book compiled by Mohammed bin al-Hosain, known as ash-Sherif ar-Radi (970-1016AD), a famous scholar and poet, and contains the sermons, letters and sayings of Imam Ali bin Abi Talib (as). This book has attracted great interest over the centuries as it contains what is regarded as treasures of knowledge, wisdom, historic appraisal and eloquence. It has been the subject of many published commentaries. (*The translator.*)

<sup>3</sup> *Al-Kafi*, al-Kulaini, vol.1, p.28.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> *Nahj al-Balaghah*, Mohammed Abdoh commentary, vol.4, p.41.

<sup>6</sup> *Al-Kafi*, vol.1, p.28.

<sup>7</sup> *Al-Kafi*, vol.1, p.13; *Tuhaf al-Uqool*, al-Harrani, p.383.

<sup>8</sup> *Men La Yabduruhul-Faqih*, as-Sedooq, vol.4, p.75.

<sup>9</sup> *Al-Kafi*, vol.1, p.50.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, vol.2, p.271.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, vol.8, p.150.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, vol.1, p.26.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p.13.

<sup>14</sup> *Nahj al-Balaghah*, Mohammed Abdoh commentary, vol.4, p.11.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p.4.

<sup>17</sup> *Al-Kafi*, vol.2, p.660.

<sup>18</sup> *Nahj al-Balaghah*, Ibn Abi al-Hadid, vol.1, p.316.



- <sup>19</sup> *Uyoon al-Hikem wel-Mewa'id*, Ali bin Mohammed al-Wasiti al-Laithi, p.285.
- <sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p.396.
- <sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p.538.
- <sup>22</sup> *Mizan al-Hikmah*, ar-Raishahri, vol.2, p.1283.
- <sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>24</sup> *Al-Kafi*, vol.1, p.20.
- <sup>25</sup> *Nahj al-Balaghah*, Mohammed Abdoh commentary, vol.4, p.99.
- <sup>26</sup> *Uyoon al-Hikem wel-Mewa'id*, p.383.
- <sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p.241.
- <sup>28</sup> *Al-Kafi*, vol.1, p.19.
- <sup>29</sup> *Kifayet al-Ather*, al-Khezzaz al-Qommi, p.228.
- <sup>30</sup> This is part of Imam al-Hosain's famous and extensive supplication is narrated as part of the prayers and supplications in the 9<sup>th</sup> of Dhil-Hijjah, the day of pilgrimage, when pilgrims spend all day in the area of the Mount Arafat, outside Mecca. (*The translator.*)
- <sup>31</sup> A *rak'ah* is one part of a prayer and consists of one set of the act of standing, reciting (verses of the Qur'an), bowing and prostrating. (*The translator.*)
- <sup>32</sup> *Tuhaf al-Uqool*, p.50.
- <sup>33</sup> *Nahj al-Balaghah*, Mohammed Abdoh commentary, vol.4, p.51.
- <sup>34</sup> *Mizan al-Hikmah*, vol.3, p.2008.
- <sup>35</sup> *Rawdet al-Wa'ideen*, al-Fettal an- Naisabouri, p.456.
- <sup>36</sup> *Nahj al-Balaghah*, Mohammed Abdoh commentary, vol.4, p.14.
- <sup>37</sup> *Mizan al-Hikmah*, vol.3, p.2637.
- <sup>38</sup> *Uyoon al-Hikem wel-Mewa'id*, p.75.
- <sup>39</sup> *Mizan al-Hikmah*, p.2637.
- <sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p.2638.
- <sup>41</sup> *Mustedrek al-Wesa'il*, an-Noori, vol.15, p.227.
- <sup>42</sup> *Al-Kafi*, vol.8, p.243.
- <sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, vol.2, p.138.
- <sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>45</sup> *Nahj al-Balaghah*, Ibn Abi al-Hadid, vol.1, p.316.
- <sup>46</sup> *Uyoon al-Hikem wel-Mewa'id*, p.208.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p.28.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p.64.

<sup>49</sup> *Mustedrek al-Wesa'il*, vol.12, p.17.

<sup>50</sup> *Uyoon al-Hikem wal-Mewa'id*, p.531.

<sup>51</sup> *Nahj al-Balaghah*, Mohammed Abdoh commentary, vol.1, p.151; also *Al-Kafi*, vol.2, p.306.

<sup>52</sup> *Mizan al-Hikmah*, vol.1, p.630.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, p.631.

<sup>54</sup> *Tefsir al-Ayyashi* (Qur'an commentary), vol.2, p.208.

<sup>55</sup> *Mizan al-Hikmah*, vol.3, p.2069.

<sup>56</sup> *Nahj al-Balaghah*, Mohammed Abdoh commentary, vol.4, p.18.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p.105.

<sup>58</sup> *Awali al-Le'ali*, Ibn Abi Jomhoor al-Ihsa'i, vol.4, p.71.

<sup>59</sup> *Al-Kafi*, vol.1, p.54.

## Chapter 6

# Developing Reason

### Understanding parables

The Qur'an is full of parables; however, it explains that understanding a given parable in its far-reaching applications, outside the narrow circle that it seems to be confined to, needs knowledge and reason. The Qur'an says: 'The parable of those who take allies besides God is as the parable of the spider that makes for itself a house; and most surely the frailest of the houses is the spider's house, if they but know. Surely God knows whatever thing they call upon besides Him; and He is the Mighty, the Wise. And such are the parables We set forth for mankind, and none understand them but the learned' 29:41-3; those who have scientific depth are the ones who are able to fully understand this parable, how to apply it, and who will understand its applications in all fields of life.

The Qur'an talks about life experience: when one lives, moves and travels on this earth, even if for tourism, one should not respond to the beautiful scenery in an empty-headed way, but study it and its features so as to make your tourism educational.

When you see the ruins and remains of those before us, fortresses and castles and all that fills museums and expresses human art and creativeness, you can educate yourself and make the most from your leisure time.

### **Experiments as the source of knowledge**

This takes us to the question of experiments being one of the sources of knowledge. In Greek philosophy – which owes its achievements to Aristotle, Plato and some others – the only source of knowledge was perception. Islamic culture, however – which a lot of people benefited from, and later it transferred to the West – regarded experiments as a second source of knowledge. The massive advancement that the West achieved has been through what the Muslim thinkers, such as Averroes (Ibn Roshd)<sup>1</sup> laid down, when they turned to experimenting for knowledge, unlike many today who still stick to abstraction without application or interaction with real experience. God says: **‘Have they not travelled in the land so that they should have hearts with which to understand?’** 22:46, the word ‘heart’ in the Qur’an often means mind and reason; . **‘Verily in this is a reminder for any who has a heart or who gives ear and earnestly witnesses’** 50:37, i.e. the heart utilises the mind to understand everything it is subjected to, not to look superficially at things; **‘thus does God make clear to you**

His revelations that you may understand' 24:61, and 'Surely We have revealed it as an Arabic Qur'an that you may understand'12:2, which is quite clear in saying that the revelation of the Holy Qur'an has been for the formulation of man's mind and developing it in all aspects of life.

This is why the Holy Qur'an emphasises the need to reflect and think deeply and on having an open mind, condemning those who read the Qur'an without reflection as if their minds are locked: 'Do they not then reflect on the Qur'an, or are there locks on the hearts?' 47:24; instead of letting the Qur'an help formulate their minds they, through the way they recite it, lock it up, and risk failing to understand God's revelation and the secrets of this universe.

### The value of experience

Imam Ali (as) says: 'Mind (powers) are (result from) two sources: from nature and from experience,' trying to delve into the makeup of the mental powers that man has, which through a basic instinct develop to the fundamental facts of human thought, then proceed to become a mind that opens up to life so as to formulate thought from it. There is the internal mind that contains some axiomatic facts such as 'two opposites cannot exist simultaneously' and the instinct that identifies with the Oneness of God and so on – this is the mind of instinct or nature that has command of these fundamental facts,

and which are the pre-requisites of logical and experimental thought.

The second mind is the one that comes from experimenting, which is your dynamic interaction with life: profit and loss, success and failure, triumph and defeat, what raises you up and what brings you down, these distinctions are forged by your interaction with others who have minds like yours, an interaction of thoughts – since one must not refuse to listen to any thought because, whether they are relevant or not, they must have some elements that serve your thought or life. Listen, understand and engage in dialogue and you may end up convinced that their thoughts are correct and yours are wrong, or vice versa. You will not be enriched in this experiment in thought by merely staring at it, but you have to look into all thoughts to penetrate them, and to see the strengths and weaknesses in them in comparison with what you have.

The same applies to experiencing the social experiments of others, when your needs meet theirs, your positive and negative aspects mesh with theirs, to come out with a kind of experience that gives you thought that stems from reality, something that will enrich you and have considerable bearing on your life.

Then there is your experimenting with life as a whole, life that opens up the horizons of the whole of the universe to uncover its secrets, and opens up the horizons of the whole of humanity

through its experiments in all aspects: social, economic, political etc. It means studying these experiments and combining them with yours so as to come out with a mind in which reality is manifested, like the manifestation of instinctive thought in your natural mind that God bestowed upon you. This is why the Imam (as) continues by saying: ‘... **And both of them lead to benefit.**’<sup>2</sup>

### **Reason is life’s supplier**

In another saying, Imam Ali (as) uses the word ‘instinct’ to describe reason – he says: ‘**Reason is an instinct that is developed by knowledge and experiments.**’<sup>3</sup> We understand that instinct means the power that preserves your life in its different elements and vital needs, because all our instincts, whether in the realm of our sensual life or those manifested in our human or intellectual life, supply life and a lack of any of them strikes life with imbalance or shortfall. However, these instincts represent an energy that opens all its receiving channels to receive all movers and the nutrition that it needs to grow and develop within the person. That reason ‘**is developed by knowledge and experiments**’ means that your mind is a clean sheet, but is suitable for cultivation, accepting seeds and water to produce fruitful trees.

It is worth noting that the Imam (as) does not limit this to particular fields of knowledge, for the matter is a question of

human enrichment: there are no limits in front of thinking and reason as God, the Most High, made the mind free and told man to practise his freedom, but along with his responsibilities, or to think as he likes, but to shoulder the responsibility of his thinking. Knowledge in all its colours, means, fields and sources represents the element that develops your mind and its powers, so that this instinct develops and this power increases.

Experimenting is a practice that produces thought and may interact with knowledge, so that experiments produce knowledge, and knowledge inspires experimenting to deal with a question mark here and a gap in knowledge there.

Thus, the Imam (as) wants to say: if you want to be a strong nation, active and effective, be wise, use your mind and reason, use knowledge and experiment. It is a great merit of Islam that it explains that the source of knowledge proceeds from two circles: theoretical reflection and experimenting, with the latter stretching and extending through the former, and the former developing through the question marks that the latter presents.

### **From reflection to experimenting**

On the central role of experimenting in life, Imam Ali (as) says: **‘Matters are (dealt with and found) through experimenting;’** all matters, whether private or social. It is as if the Imam (as) is trying to say: life is an experiment, so be the person who utilises the means of experimenting and do not try to judge in an abstract



way, saying this is impossible or difficult; you have to try it first. Do not say that you are incapable of doing it because trial is what gives you a realistic picture of possibility or impossibility. Everything is possible from an abstract point of view, as Avicenna (Ibn Sina)<sup>4</sup> said: 'Regard everything that you hear about the possible until you are driven away from it by clear evidence', but when you try to discover that this theoretically possible thing has elements of practical possibility, in this case you have to engage in experimenting. There are a lot of people who rush into saying 'I cannot', when you suggest a project or duty or the like. But who can say that you cannot, if you have not tried, generally and in detail? Such a trial will give you a true picture that completes all elements through which you can decide.

**'... and endeavours are (attended to) through experience;**<sup>5</sup> when you want to start something, you have to have experience for that, otherwise you will attend to it with ignorance or lack of awareness. Make that endeavour like a school from which you will acquire new experience.

Ali (as) says: **'Every (mission of) rescue needs a mind.'** When you want to go to the rescue of someone or to his support, you have to think about the nature of that mission: Is it necessary or not? Does it serve your principles or not? Does not enrich your sense of humanity or not? You have to have a mind that thinks in such a rescue mission – be it rescuing people, the homeland, a project etc; you must not rush in an emotional

way, but in a rational way so that your mind studies how realistic is this mission

‘... and every kind of help needs experiments.’<sup>6</sup> When you want to help someone in any matter, you must have the necessary expertise through which you can engage in such help or support.

### **Experimenting forever!**

In another of his enlightening sayings, Ali (as) states: ‘Experiments represent acquired knowledge,’<sup>7</sup> i.e. experiments are a source for science and knowledge. We know that all that man has discovered in outer space science, medicine, engineering, chemistry, physics, biological sciences and the rest has been through experiments. Experiments may lead you to the result by chance, but this should not make us despair of experimenting, for the failure of one experiment does not mean the failure of the idea – after the thousandth time, let us try once more! In relation to disease and medicine, we know that scientists spend long years in trial and error until they succeed at the end, either through the intentional, planned steps or through coincidence.

‘**And days offer experiments**’<sup>8</sup>: these days of your life are full of experiments, which means – as we understand it – that you have to experiment in your methods, at home in managing your familial affairs, in society with people, and in your job and

projects. In all these, you have to be always aware of the experiment involved; some people engage in experiments without even thinking about it and fail to get results from them because they do so with a lack of awareness, losing a beneficial opportunity. The Imam (as) is telling you that your days are laden with the possibility of useful experiments, and you have to take them in, in your awareness and mind, as you carry them out practically.

And he says: **‘Never attend to (do) any matter until you have the expertise for it.’** If you want to engage in a given matter, any project or any situation, you have to have the expertise for it, for whoever engages in any matter for which he lacks expertise, either through experimenting or through thought, is bound to stumble and fall into confusion and blunders.

In his teaching to his son al-Hasan (as), Imam Ali (as) encourages people to benefit from the experience of others as they do from theirs: **‘I am (starting early) to teach you before your heart becomes stiffer and your mind becomes occupied,’** that is, before you grow older and it becomes more difficult for your mind to accept new things; **‘... so that you attend to matters with your own opinion using what people with expertise relieved you from having to pursue and experiment for,’** i.e. dealing with matters in your own way having benefited from the experiments of those before you, who put the effort in and left the results for you, so you do not need to start from square one;

‘so that you are relieved from the effort of research and from the requirements of experimenting’<sup>10</sup> through the knowledge that the expertise of others conveys to you.

Regarding good choice, Ali (as) says: ‘The fruit of experiments is good choice.’<sup>11</sup> When you experiment so that you know the facts, the fruit and result of that will be evident when you want to choose a position or project or any other matter – you will know how to choose.

But what if experience is lacking? ‘He whose experience is meagre will be fooled,’<sup>12</sup> as Ali (as) says, as such a person is bound to be fooled by others because his view of life and the people around him is naïve, and without depth. In contrast, ‘For him whose experience is considerable, being fooled will be unlikely.’<sup>13</sup>

The value of experiment and experience is so high that Ali (as) describes them as follows: ‘Experiments suffice for a teacher.’<sup>14</sup>

### The basis for developing reason

How do you develop your mind, i.e. your thinking, understanding and reasoning powers? This exalted power that God bestowed upon you is not merely a form of energy that accepts all that is thrown at it then develops on its own through the different elements and details, or the raw materials; rather it is the mind that is the factory of thought that presents the raw

materials which the factory needs to produce new thought. Here as well, we are in the realms of experimenting as one of the most important elements for such production.

Imam Ali (as) says: **‘Reason is preserving experiments, and the best of experiments is that which enlightens and teaches you.’**<sup>15</sup> This pioneering saying emphasises the importance of the element of experimenting, the element that one engages in through what one sees, hears, touches, smells and tastes, whether simple (such as things like the sunrise and the movement of the moon), or complex when the senses start with an experimental process that leads to a conclusion.

Experimenting means you go about a given affair – any of your life’s affairs – to arrive at new ideas that shed light on this affair: is it profitable or not? This applies to relationships, transactions and everything. It is your experiment that proceeds through all these complex practices so that you acquire a thought, as experimenting is one of the sources of thought.

### **Perception and experimenting**

Early philosophers regarded thinking and perception as the only source of knowledge. Muslims, however, through the teachings of the Holy Qur’an, regarded experimenting as a source of knowledge and said that it can interact with perception, because an experiment on its own gives you the idea in its specialised circle, while perception inside this

experiment, and studying all its particularities, provide you with an idea that extends to all fields of life of similar circumstances; this is why thinkers say that experiments on their own do not produce laws, because they are bound by particular limits. If you try one remedy, you cannot, through this particular trial, say that this remedy is useful for all situations similar to this one, unless through a philosophical basis, which is 'the rule covering similar things in what can be and what cannot be is one' – meaning that only when we have studied this given experiment and noticed its features, relating to both the disease and remedy, and found that other experiments contain the same features, only then we can say that this same remedy can heal the other situations. So, the experiment produces an idea or law through its interactions with the basis of thought that proceeds from perception; hence, experiments cannot be separated from thought, as the perception that the thought uses may come through experimenting.

This is what gave the Islamic civilisation its strength throughout history, when Muslims succeeded in producing new thoughts and laws in medicine, chemistry, optics and other fields of science and knowledge. Western civilisation benefited from the works of Avicenna (Ibn Sina), Ibn an-Nefis<sup>16</sup>, Geber (Jabir bin Hayyan)<sup>17</sup> and many others that were transferred to it (mainly through Spain and Italy), and it

adopted experimenting as a foundation for knowledge; it then proceeded from this basis to all its new discoveries and horizons; scientists did not despair when some experiments failed, since they knew that that did not necessarily mean that the idea was wrong. In an article, published more than forty years ago, entitled ‘Experimenting Forever’, we emphasised this by saying that the failure of a thousand experiments does not mean the failure of the idea.

Islam does not confine the issue of experimenting to one’s own personal experiments, but wants one to look into the experiments of others and to benefit from them; this is what we see in the Qur’an when it encourages people to take lessons from the nations in history and from people everywhere, in both their positive and negative features – a close look into these will benefit the person as much as his own experience will. This is the meaning of Imam Ali’s words **‘Reason is preserving experiments’**: he wants you to strive to develop and enrich your mind and reason through preserving the experience that you have been accumulating throughout your life, not to forget or ignore it, and at the same time to do the same with the experience of others; in this way you can come up with new knowledge and thought, and that develops your mind and its powers.

Then the Imam (as) adds: **‘and the best of experiments is that which enlightens and teaches you;’** when you are aware of any

life experiment that involves you, you should know not only that the value of such practice is the thought it produces, but also that its value stems from its effect in changing your life from bad to good, and this is by letting it be your preacher that directs you to what to do or not to do. In this way, your mind is developing to give you freedom in your thought and ethics, witnessed when you succeed in avoiding any bad features or acts that each newly acquired experience uncovers and advises on.

Then the Imam (as) describes those who fail to benefit from these two vital factors, reason and experience: **‘(The loser) is the one who was impoverished by neglecting the reason and mental powers and experience that he was given;’**<sup>18</sup> it is as if the question of loss is not to be hungry, thirsty or needy in any other way, but that loss and harming oneself and walking far from the road of happiness is when you fail to benefit from your mind in its perceptions and in your experience of its dynamic effects, should you fail to take the opportunity and allow yourself to live in a spiritual and mental void, which will lead you to confusion and blunders, and to being incapable of building the elements of a balanced personality – what loss is greater than that!

### **Reason and violent treatment**

In the question of being open or not to the enlightenment of experience in life, Imam Ali (as) differentiates between the



response of human beings and that of animals to preaching and advice. He says, in his teaching to his son al-Hasan (as): ‘O my son! **The wise person heeds the advice of teaching, while animals do not.**’<sup>19</sup> If you want to build the mind and reason of someone, you need to present the thoughts which open him up to human morals that raise his awareness and benefit his life, without violence or harsh treatment, as this is what conforms to his humanistic nature in its deep meaning. This is different to animals that do not obey and are treated – when they refuse to walk, stop or the like – with rough commands and acts that would be regarded as violent or harsh if used on human beings. Violence, although it may establish submission, cannot establish conviction, something which we notice in the family, society and politics.

In addition, we can also derive from Ali’s words that the person who fails to heed advice or to benefit from the fruits of thinking and experience is, in this regard, like an animal, since he fails to utilise his natural human capabilities to better himself and his life through the experience and thought of others.

### **The mind and knowledge**

In his teaching to his companion Hisham bin al-Hakam<sup>20</sup>, Imam Musa al-Kadhim (as) says: ‘O Hisham! **The mind (its thinking, understanding and reasoning powers) goes along with knowledge**’ since the mind represents the dynamic power

that absorbs knowledge, whether through reflection or experiment. It is quite natural that the knowledge which the mind stores will develop and increase the mind's power and make it more productive so that it facilitates a better understanding of facts. Therefore, the more knowledge one acquires the more powerful one's mind will be, since this comes as a result of the natural powers of the mind and also the use of knowledge from others – the narration says: **'He who consults (other) men, shares in their minds.'**

This idea can perhaps be derived from the Qur'an when it says: **'And such are the parables We set forth for mankind, and none understand them but the learned'** 29:43. We know that using parables is a common method in all civilisations and all nations, for when someone wants to present an idea, he will sometimes do so through discussion and explanation and at other times through a similar story, so that he moves from what is acquired by the senses to what is acquired by reason and understanding. The Qur'an used parables extensively, such as: **'Have you not considered how God sets forth a parable of a good word (being) like a good tree, whose root is firm and whose branches are in heaven. Yielding its fruit at all times by the permission of its Lord? And God sets forth parables for men that they may reflect. And the parable of an evil word is as an evil tree pulled up from the earth's surface; it has no stability.'** 14:24-6 thus taking the matter from the realm

of the senses to derive thoughts. Truth is like a good tree that has firm foundation, and it produces fruits that are blessing to life just as the tree does, while falsehood is like a bad tree that has no depth within the soil, so any wind can shake it, unlike the good tree that stays firm against wind. In other words, truth stays deeply fixed, while falsehood vanishes: **‘then as for the scum, it passes away as a worthless thing’ 13:17.**

**‘and none understand them but the learned’** or wise people who are capable of benefiting from these parables, including those found in the folklore, to derive useful ideas.

### The role of consultation

Back to Imam Ali’s important words: **‘He who consults (other) men, shares in their minds,’<sup>21</sup>** which presents more than one point. The first is about the difference between each person and any other in the way their minds develop, as this takes place through each person’s own perceptions, the effects of his environment and what he reads, hears or sees, something which will make his mind distinguished by some merits in comparison with the others’. We know that the minds of people are different because God, the All-Knowing, varied human capabilities in their nature and powers – their speed of knowledge acquisition, depth of perception and also the different intellectual attributes that man learns. Therefore, it stands to reason that a person tries to benefit from the minds of

others, as if adding them to his own and developing his mind from the different elements of theirs. This is especially so when this attitude of consultation turns into a state of dialogue, so that there is an exchange of knowledge between all those involved.

The second important point relates to the role of consultation (*shoora*) in Islam, so that the whole of society engages in such an approach in all projects and plans, integrating all its elements, distancing the mind from its closed orbit of the self to become the mind of society. Islam extended the role of consultation to level in which the Prophet (sawa) himself was commanded by his Lord to practise it, in any matter of war or peace, any project he wanted to start and at all social levels, when He said: **‘and consult them in affairs (of moment),’** i.e. listen to the ideas of others on the matters you want to pursue, or the project you want to establish; **‘...and when you have reached a firm decision,’** having got the ideas from more than one viewpoint and studied all them and chosen, through this diversity, and become convinced of a certain opinion, then **‘...then place your trust in God’ 3:159.**

Here, we should take note of a certain point: that the leadership, although consulting its followers, it, nonetheless, retains in the leadership position that decides, albeit not deciding or starting any project before having collected the thoughts and opinions of others, so as to decide according to

research. This is one of the fundamental issues in public life, because the decisions taken by officials holding important positions may have dire consequences, positive or negative, on the life of the nation, present and future. Therefore, a person is not free to set about his responsibilities through his personal experience alone, but must try to get the opinion of the specialists or people of expertise who can clarify things, solve problems and correct the course taken. And while we believe that God made His Prophet (sawa) infallible and absolutely free from committing errors, and that God blessed him with enlightenment for every matter, the verse will then imply that the point is to make the Prophet (sawa), in this consultative approach, an example to all leadership that will succeed him, so that no one should ever think that he does not need the minds of others, and he who fails to recognise this only fools himself with an inflated personality of his own imagination.

### The circle of consultation

The Qur'an went further when it made the consultative approach a feature of the nation, that is, it made the Muslim nation a nation of consultation, when it describes it as follows: **'who (conduct) their affairs by mutual consultation'** 42:38; this is on the basis that everyone is individual in his thinking and reason, which is nourished by perception and experience and by what he learns from others. Thus, each one must not

deny the importance of the mind of any other person, even if he is inferior mentally, has less experience or is less developed intellectually, but we must try to listen to him because it is quite likely that the experience he has, the intellect he enjoys or the mind he utilises has a different perspective which you have ignored. You might have 70% and he 30%, but your 70% might not contain his 30%, so if you add your mind to his, you will benefit from what he has. One funny man said: 'I learn from my young child's experience;' to which others responded: 'How?' He said: 'When he wants me to take him out or to buy something for him and I refuse, so he goes to his mother crying or hits his head on the wall and I submit! Then I say that this is the experience of a child, but I benefit from it in a manly manner that contains the same elements as this childish approach, one way or the other!'

This matter extends to all aspects of life, including the home. However, we find that a lot of men do not respect women's opinion even in the home affairs, because the man regards himself the main decision maker, or as some people in other religions say: 'The man is the woman's head', so she can have no opinion according to their thinking. This is why you may find that it is common in the East that the man does not consult his wife because he believes that she cannot give a respectable opinion, although she might have a particular experience of her own. Now, let us assume that you are

superior mentally, with more experience and intellect than her, but she may have some experience or intellect that you do not have. But it seems that some men try to assert their manhood in this, even if that woman is an educated person. Some rely on what is narrated about women, to **'consult them, but disobey them'**, with some people understanding from this that if you want to know anything that relates to trade, society etc, you only need to consult a woman and when she gives you her opinion, you do the opposite! This is not the meaning of the narration; the meaning is not to make her used to you submitting to her, as Imam Ali (as) said: **'Do not obey them in the good so that they do not hope (for your obedience) in the bad'**<sup>22</sup> because the relationship between a man and a woman is controlled by emotion and instinct, so a lot of men submit completely and obey their wives in everything. The meaning of the narration is, therefore, to get women used to your not doing what they suggest, but not to do opposite to whatever they say; otherwise, if a man does not pray and he consults a woman and she advises him to pray, is the right thing for him to disobey her?!

Yes, advice or opinion derived from consultation is not obligatory, as you may consult three or four people and have different opinions, but the consultation itself enriches thought and offers more than one viewpoint, providing you with a basis for comparison and for drawing conclusions. A

society that facilitates consultation in all issues, big or small, inside the home and outside it, is a society in which errors are scarce if not non-existent. Therefore, do not be the person who feels that his mind is the prime mind and others come no way near to yours; rather develop your mind by benefiting from others and pursue this mental partnership to be in a better position in your conclusions and decisions, so that others will benefit from what your mind can offer.

### **The consequence of closing one's mind**

In another of his wonderful sayings, Imam Ali (as) warns against keeping to oneself with regards to the mental issue; he says: **'If a person abandons listening to wise people, his mind will die.'**<sup>23</sup> This is the basis of thought, to develop the mind and preserve its life, since the mind is an energy that can draw from all elements of perception and experience to develop its powers of analysis, conclusion, scrutinising and innovation; however, this process cannot elevate the mind to high positions unless one takes account of the perceptions and experiences of wise people in their successes and failures, and this will encourage adding these thoughts and experiences and engaging in a process of comparison between them and what one already possesses. A foolish person will ignore this, and will fool himself that he has an ingenious mind, which has no meaning, especially if he continues to insist on relying on his own mind, which will



produce mental rot and scientific weakness, and lead to the death of the mind as a result of lack of its nutrition.

### The negative effect of desire

Finally, in contrast to perception and experimenting that develop the mind and its thinking, understanding and reasoning powers, desire weakens the mind as it pushes one to pursue it through instinctive elements in a way that harms mental analysis, appraisal and consideration of the consequences, and the ability to determine which is the road to benefit and which leads to harm. This is bound to affect every part of a person's being, but foremost his mind, that will see confusion and imbalance creep into its mechanism. This is why Imam Ali (as) says: 'If a person disobeys his desire, his mind will stay healthy.'<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Abo al-Walid, Mohammed Ibn Roshd (1126-1198AD), an Arab philosopher, born in Cordoba, Andalus (present-day Spain) and died in Marrakech, Morocco; a learned scholar in philosophy, medicine, mathematics, jurisprudence and poetry. He defended philosophy and tried to solve many issues in dispute between philosophers and scholars of religion, something that had a profound effect on Christian scholasticism. He left numerous commentaries on Aristotle's works. *Al-Monjid, Dar al-Mashriq, Beirut and Collins concise dictionary, 21<sup>st</sup> Century edition.*

<sup>2</sup> *Mizan al-Hikmah*, ar-Raishahri, vol.3, p.2042.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p.2050.

<sup>4</sup> Abu Ali Ibn Sina (980-1037AD), born near Bukhara, Uzbekistan, and died in Hamadan, Iran, one of Islam's greatest philosophers and physicians. His philosophical writings, which combined Aristotelianism with neo-Platonist

ideas, greatly influenced scholasticism; he showed deep Sufi tendencies in his work *al-Hikmah al-Mesbrikiyyeh* (The Eastern Wisdom). He left many very important books in medicine, such as *ash-Shifa'* (Healing), but his medical work *Qanun* (The Law in Medicine) was the greatest single influence on medieval medicine. *Al-Monjid, Dar al-Mashriq, Beirut and Collins concise dictionary, 21<sup>st</sup> Century edition.*

<sup>5</sup> *Mizan al-Hikmah*, vol.1, p.376.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> *Nahj al-Balaghah*, Mohammed Abdoh commentary, vol.3, p.40.

<sup>11</sup> *Mizan al-Hikmah*, vol.1, p.376.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> *Nahj al-Balaghah*, Mohammed Abdoh commentary, vol.3, p.52.

<sup>16</sup> Ali Ibn an-Nafis (1210-1288AD), born in Damascus, Syria and died in Cairo, Egypt; philosopher and physician. His many works included a Commentary on the *Qanun* of Ibn Sina and an abridged version of the *Qanun*. *Al-Monjid, Dar al-Mashriq, Beirut.*

<sup>17</sup> Jabir bin Hayyan (died 815AD), famous Arab chemist, a follower of Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq (as) who is believed to have encouraged him to follow an experimental approach in his work. His works, which included *Asrar al-Kimia'* (Secrets of Chemistry) and *Usool al-Kimia'* (Foundations of Chemistry), were later translated into Latin and influenced Western chemists. *Al-Monjid, Dar al-Mashriq, Beirut.*

<sup>18</sup> *Nahj al-Balaghah*, Mohammed Abdoh commentary, vol.3, p.137.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p.55.

<sup>20</sup> *Al-Kafi*, al-Kulaini, vol.1, p.13; *Tuhaf al-Uqool*, al-Harrani, p.383.

<sup>21</sup> *Nahj al-Balaghah*, Mohammed Abdoh commentary, vol.4, p.41.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, vol.1, p.129.

<sup>23</sup> *Mizan al-Hikmah*, vol.3, p.2053.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p.2055.

## Chapter 7

# Preaching with Reason, and the Enemies of Reason

In this chapter, we shall deal with the proper approach for preaching, discussion and dialogue that the Qur'an and the Prophets (as) adopted, in contrast to the attitude of those who stood in opposition. There are also some explanations of the elements of personality and mentality that stand in the way of understanding and reasoning.

### **The Qur'anic approach in arguments**

When the Qur'an describes those who were following other people, whom they might even worship as intercessors to God – as some of the polytheists used to say – or submitting to them because they believed that they had sacred secrets that impose submission on them, we find it treats the matter in a rational way. This is the approach that the Qur'an follows all the time: to present the idea to people for the purposes of persuasion, not to try to attack them with slander and the like; this is the role of the Divine Messages, which is to develop man's personality.

The Qur'an emphasises this approach in trying to help people see the light, and this was the role of the Prophet (sawa): to bring them out of ignorance and backwardness to knowledge, advancement, straightforwardness etc.

Commanding His Messenger (sawa) to engage in a rational dialogue with them, God says: **'Or have they taken intercessors besides God? Say: What! Even though they did not ever have control over anything, and have no intelligence'** 39:43, i.e. to tell them that if someone makes someone else his intercessor, then this intercession must be the means through which he can achieve his goal, so the intercessor must have the qualities that can be relied on, and the understanding that puts him on a level that enables him to do that. It is saying that these idols - which they used to make from stone, wood etc then worship them - lack the awareness necessary for knowing the secrets of things, so to utilise them for any matter they are asked to do will be completely useless, as they cannot respond to such requests; therefore, affiliation to them will be absolutely futile.

### **When individuals stand for leadership**

We can deduce from this that we have to study any leader, or any person standing for leadership, to see what leadership qualities he has. Does he have a responsible mentality? Does he have depth in his thinking? We say this as we notice that people

affiliate with individuals who have strong social, political, economic or any other positions, and obey them and go along with them in their plans without looking closely into these individuals' mentality or leadership qualities; yet they respond to emotional and rhetorical slogans, or follow custom, such as when a deceased leader's son is appointed after his father to a given leadership position.

This is vital since leadership, whether religious, political, social or otherwise, is one of the most crucial positions in the life of societies and nations, because the person who is going to sit in that leadership position will try to push the masses in the direction of his planning, so it follows that if he is not up to the responsibilities of that position, he is very likely going to lead them into confusion, chaos and disaster.

Also, we need to look into his experience of reality in the way that it relates to the local affairs of people, or extends to the regional and international situation. The world has become like a village and it is extremely difficult to analyse any local political issue without looking into the regional circumstances that affect this local issue, or without understanding the relation between regional circumstances and this local matter - unless we know that the international situation has a lot of leverage on both local and regional issues.

In the past, the leadership question perhaps took place within a small circle of one's life and so only needed a limited knowledge;

today, however, it has become a necessity that anyone standing for leadership should be someone who is aware of what is going on in the whole world, on the basis of the thought that he believes in. The problem of leadership in society of today is that no leader will be able to lead the society in an individual manner – he has to seek council from those with the necessary expertise around him. As we said before, the Prophet (sawa) who was not in need of consultation, but was commanded to do so: **‘and consult them in affairs (of moment),’** 3:159; Muslim society is described as having a consultative spirit **‘who (conduct) their affairs by mutual consultation’** 42:38. Therefore, no leadership can go it alone in planning, decision-making and executing decisions, but must make consultation part of every step, so as to arrive at the correct decisions.

Therefore, relying on individuals as intercessors, but who do not have the necessary understanding, thinking and reasoning is bound to place the nation in crises. Perhaps many of our problems are a result of leadership that lack the necessary qualities, and who came to the fore through the social, political and religious chaos we suffer from, and this is what is causing the suffering and confusion we witness today.

### **Speech that is understandable**

The Prophet (sawa) dealt with a very important point with regard to the approach adopted in preaching and calling people

to the truth – how should he, and all the Prophets (as) for that matter, talk to people when they try to lead them to God and truth? Would he deal with the matter through his mind that can absorb the concepts and facts of heaven and earth, something that may lead to people not understanding him and not being attracted to his knowledge, thought and preaching? This is what is noticed when some scholars talk to people using a language full of specialist terminology that people do not know, or of a depth that people cannot grasp. Here, the Prophet (sawa) explained how this matter should be treated; he said: **‘We, the Prophets, were commanded to talk to people at the level of their thinking.’**<sup>1</sup> We are commanded by God to study the mental capabilities of people whom we are calling to the faith: what is their mentality, what is the level of their intellect, what are the strong and weak points of their personalities, what are the circumstances that they are in and what are their effect on their the way of thinking, dialogue and following others, and we study the development of their minds, so that we know how to go about our mission and how to make our words capable of opening their hearts and minds.

We can draw from this the following: all those who are calling people to the way of God, whether scholars, intellectuals, thinkers or activists, must study the societies they live in, the positive and negative effects they have acquired from history, or from their thoughts and experiences, and the circumstances

that are putting pressure on this society, or that which may cause it to close its ears and minds from accepting the call. When crises overwhelm any society, they take it away from the course of thought, dialogue, perception, awareness and listening to good preaching; therefore we always say that the callers to the way of God should read from the (printed) books 25%, and from the book of life 75%, because those who wrote the books did so on the basis of their own experience, which might have been limited to its own special circumstances, and life changes, circumstances diversify and their effects work in positive and negative ways.

The question of calling people to the way of God is one of the most complicated matters, something not quite appreciated by a lot of people in this field, who always try to blame people that they do not want to learn or understand, but fail to blame themselves if they fail to make people understand because they did not know what are their aspirations, needs, weaknesses and strengths. We also say that those who engage in this endeavour in our era, which is developing on a daily basis, that they must open up to this day and age and feel modernity; the problem of those who read in the ancient books is that they talk to people in this third millennium using a language of the first millennium, which is why they fail to get through to people.



One must not stick to what one has read, but must live with reality – read the people, read every person so that you can forecast the results. One person, who had not been to any university but used to speak like the best of university graduates, was asked about this, and he replied: ‘I read 800 pages every day.’ They asked: ‘But we have not seen you open any book at all?!’ He said: ‘Each time I meet someone, I study him, his thinking, experience, circumstances, aspirations, needs and ways of persuasion, in other words, I carry out a field study of the person in society, and am enriched through his intellect.’ What this man was saying is that he was learning from each person who had a particular experience different to that of others. In contrast, there are some people who boast that their mind can be divided among the minds of everyone – but such a person will soon start to go downhill, since if he does not believe that others have minds different to his, and powers different to his, he will keep on ruminating and not taking in nutrition from outside, and will end up in emptiness.

It is all too reasonable that anyone who is about to engage in the responsibility of leading people, whether conceptually when he is preaching them and calling them to his beliefs, or practically in the fields of society, politics etc, must have the intellect to know people, something which needs a great effort, and to have awareness in all areas of his actions. This is the course to be taken so that one succeeds in one’s preaching or in any endeavour.

## Proof as well

In addition, we can derive from the Qur'an and the narrations that to educate and teach people, those in charge should not offer pieces of knowledge – of whatever nature – without proof, as this will not aid peoples' thinking and reasoning. Rather, they should provide the proof and evidence of the idea or ruling being discussed, so that the nation adopts the means of knowledge, on the basis that knowledge is the value and the mind is the proof. This conforms with the teachings of the Qur'an: 'Had it been from other Than God, they would surely have found therein much discrepancy' 4:82 and: 'Do they not then reflect on the Qur'an, or are there locks on their hearts?' 47:24.

## Encouraging questions

Moreover, the matter is not limited to providing answers, or even answers with their proof, but extends to encouraging people to take the initiative and ask questions. When we study the legacy of the Imams of Ahlul Bayt (as) we find that, in their efforts to teach the nation, they did not shy away from any question. Imam al-Baqir (as) used to ask his companions, when he narrated any *hadith*, to ask him about its basis in the Qur'an, so he explained to them how to arrive at conclusions from the Qur'an, and encouraged them to engage in discussions with the scholars – asking them about what they knew through the power of learning that they had.

## Encouraging rationality

In the dialogue between the Prophets (as) and their people, we find that they concentrate on a fundamental point: that their people (the part of them which is rejecting the Prophets' call) are following an irrational approach and that if they had dealt with the call with thinking and reason, they would have not opposed it. This is what we notice in the mission of Abraham (as) when he was talking with his people after he broke down their idols—they asked, as in the Qur'an, on the reason for this, but he accused the big idol of the act, talking with them rationally and logically: 'He said: Surely the chief of them has done this, therefore ask them, if they can speak' 21:63; they obviously were astonished with this answer, so they said to him: 'Certainly you know that they do not speak' 21:65, objecting to his request that they ask the idols, since they knew that they could not talk, hear or move; here Abraham (as) said in rebuke: 'What! Do you then worship besides God what can neither be of any good to you nor do you harm? Fie on you and on what you worship besides God; do you not then understand?' 21:66-7.

This is the basis which he wanted them to follow, because people – especially adults – hold dear their minds and their ability to think; therefore what Abraham (as) did was – to use the contemporary expression – hit the ball into their court when he said to them that their worship of idols that brought neither

benefit nor harm was irrational and that they should turn to their minds to know the meaning of Divinity and Who is worthy of it: to be Omnipotent and having full control on the universe **'And He is the Supreme, above His servants'** 6:61.

Abraham (as) wanted to waken up the power of reason in his folk. However, the backward myths that they were used to could not let them accept his logic or even to discuss it with him, let alone become convinced by it, so their response was: **'Burn him and stand by your gods, if you do anything at all'** 21:68, i.e. use force in response to the reason that he used.

The experience of Abraham (as) with his people regarding worshipping idols can also be seen in what we witness all the time when the righteous present their ideas objectively and discuss the other thoughts logically: they are faced with the force of intense pressurising that threatens the caller and preacher with defamation, imprisonment and even death.

### **Two contrasting approaches**

In another dialogue between callers to God and those worshipping falsehood, we find that when Moses (as) called the Pharaoh to the worship of 'the Lord of the Worlds' (*Rabb al-'Alemeen*), it seems that the Pharaoh had never heard of such a term ('the Lord of the Worlds'), either because the society in which he lived had not known the meaning of the Oneness of God in the sense that the Divine Messages called for, or because

he was so entrenched in his claim of divinity for himself that he did not want even to imagine the existence of another god. So he said to Moses (as): **‘And what is the Lord of the Worlds?’ 26:23**, i.e. what is this new term that we do not know? Moses (as) replied: **‘The Lord of the heavens and the earth and what is between them, if you had but sure belief’ 26:24**, so as to encourage looking into the heavens and earth and what is in between them and at all the creatures, and thinking about who created them and created their laws; in this way he would know that the Lord of the Worlds is the Lord of all this universe. But the Pharaoh resorted to trying to stir up his people (whose submission to him was absolute, in the way that some people submit to tyrants in their thoughts and commands) against Moses (as), saying: **‘Do you not listen?’ 26:25**, you and your fathers have a lord, so what is this new innovation? Then he continued: **‘Most surely your Messenger who is sent to you is insane’ 26:27**.

This was the beginning of the process by which the Pharaoh cast doubt on the Message of Moses (as), since he did not discuss who had created the heavens and the earth and did not engage in a rational dialogue with Moses (as), similar to many people who, when they want to stir up the masses against enlightening thoughts, bring out some ignorant people and say to them: look what this man is saying on this matter, as if he is denying a cherished fact, all without letting people discuss

the issue at hand objectively. This is the norm with tyrants everywhere and all the time, whether political, religious or any other tyrants, as for every position there are tyrants. In any case, Moses (as) did not respond to the Pharaoh's slander, but talked, with reason, to continue describing the Lord of the Worlds: **'He said: The Lord of the east and the west and what is between them, if you understand.'** 26:28, trying to convey to them that he was using the speech of minds to minds, trying to activate their minds so that they did not let their minds become enslaved to others, and did not submit to partisanship, and did not fall to plotting, and did not think with their ears, but with their minds and reason, as reason is the secret of man's dignity and is the power that shows man all that is related to his life and the Hereafter.

From this prophetic mission, we understand that when we are faced with attitudes in which people behave negatively using accusations of atheism and deviation and slander and defamation, stirring the masses emotionally, we have to remind the people of reason. This is what God, the Most High, advised in his teaching to the Prophet Mohammed (sawa), when his folk in Mecca were stirring up the ignorant masses against him; someone would shout in Mecca that he was insane and the others repeated this without thinking; here, God taught the Prophet (sawa) the rational way that would try to inspire thinking in a calm manner. There is a

central matter here that represents the approach of understanding things, the approach through which people think independently, objectively and scientifically, so he said to them: ‘Say: I exhort you only to one thing, that you rise up before God in pairs and singly, then ponder: your companion is not insane; he is only a warner to you before a severe chastisement’ 34:46. He wanted them to go their separate ways, singly and in pairs, to distance themselves from that fervour and frenzied atmosphere that stems from blind partisanship, so as to think that he did not suffer from insanity, but that he was the prophet who was striving to lead them to guidance and good.

This is the approach that we need in our political, social and economic situation. There is what is called in psychology the ‘collective mind’ and they say that when the individual finds himself within a group, he behaves in a way different than if he is alone, so that he is affected by the group which takes control, and it makes the person become attracted instinctively to what it says, losing his independence of thought in the process, and he becomes part of the fervour of the masses. On the basis of this, we notice that if someone shouts in a demonstration, for example, the others follow suit without knowing the meaning of his words; if you are in a gathering where poetry is being recited or some slogan is presented, you find people applaud, but a lot of them applaud just because others are doing so; you may find

yourself – in some cases – crying when you are in a gathering that is crying without knowing the reason. And although there are some people who dispute this phenomenon and its effects, it is nonetheless something that we witness in real life.

Thus, God taught His Messenger (sawa) to say to them: you cannot think independently, whether you say that I am insane or not, as long as you are in this aggressive partisan fervour that has taken control of you through some individuals, so you say as they say, and shout as they shout; return to your thinking **‘that you rise up before God’** to look for the truth of God outside any stirred-up, emotional fervour; **‘in pairs’** and **‘singly’**, each one on his own, **‘then ponder: your companion is not insane’**, because the difference between the sane and the insane is that the former talks in a rational way that is based on thought and balance and according to the circumstances and issues of society, to choose what benefits society; so, look into my words and the way I treat things to know **‘your companion is not insane’**, as all that I have done is to warn you away from your atheism, polytheism, rebellion against God and your worshipping of idols, **‘he is only a warner to you before a severe chastisement.’**

### **The right approach is central**

This is one of the most wonderful ways in which the Qur’an teaches with regard to the Islamic call, the approach that is



based on calm thought, because it is not enough to have the truth, but it must be accompanied by the approach in which ideas are presented through wisdom, so as to enter into the minds of people by the shortest route. We notice that God, the Al-mighty, talks about the approach of dialogue with others in many verses: **‘And say to My servants (that) they speak that which is best’** 17:53, **‘And reason with them in the best manner’** 16:125 and **‘Repel (evil) with what is best’** 41:34 – it is not enough simply to present the idea, but you must provide the atmosphere, approach and words through which you can talk to the hearts and minds of people. This is the approach that we have to adopt because a lot of what we face is similar to what the Messenger (sawa) faced, one way or the other.

The Prophet (sawa) faced the same attitude from the polytheists, who were using point-scoring instead of relying on a basis of thought, or even respecting the other party: **‘And when Our clear revelations are recited to them’** 10:15, when he used to recite the verses that expressed that truth, they would respond, without even looking into the verses at hand but to shout out with dumb words, saying: **‘Bring a Qur’an other than this or change it!’** 10:15. They were only trying to set a challenge that was irrational, since it was not something of his own creation: **‘Say: It is not for me to change it of my accord’** as he did not claim that it was his like an author so that he could replace it with another, ‘... I

follow naught but what is revealed to me' 10:15, as he was commanded by His Lord, Who had honoured him by choosing him to be the conveyor of His revelations, so he would follow them as they came down to him, but they were asking him something he did not claim to control.

Here, the Prophet (sawa), the infallible at the highest possible degree of infallibility, when he stands in front of God, stands in the position of God-fearing, humble in front of his Lord and announcing that any person, in any position, if he commits something that subjects him to punishment, he will be liable for that: '(This) shall not be in accordance with your (vain) desires nor in accordance with the (vain) desires of the followers of the Book; whoever does evil, he shall be requited with it' 4:123, so anyone – Muslim, Christian or Jew – if he disobeys his Lord, is subjecting himself to retribution.

The Prophet (sawa) wanted to emphasise this so that people do not fool themselves with unfounded wishes '... surely I fear, if I disobey my Lord, the punishment of a mighty day' 10:15. The Prophet (sawa) wanted – through the Qur'an – to present the idea, even though it was improbable owing to his infallibility, in order to present the crucial nature of the idea. God said to them: 'And if the messenger were to invent any sayings in Our name, we would certainly have seized him by the right hand. Then We would certainly have cut off his aorta. And not one of you could have withheld Us from

him' 69:44-7, so if the Prophet (sawa) wanted – for the sake of the argument – to introduce changes to the revelations and would be punished, so what about you?

Then, the Prophet (sawa) continues with his rational arguments: 'Say: If God had willed, I would not have recited it to you', i.e. had it not been for God's wish to reveal his word to His Prophet at that time, the Prophet (sawa) would have not been able to do so, since he did not have the capability to produce such miraculous book, '... nor would He have made it known to you; indeed I have lived a lifetime among you before it', for forty years before it nothing came from the Prophet (sawa) to suggest that he was capable of something even near to that, this is when he was living amongst them, not in separation, so they would have known; '...do you not then understand?' 10:16: use your minds to face up to the truth in discussions and dialogue with him, in a calm and rational way.

### **Atheism is irrational**

The Qur'an explains that atheism means the existence of an irrational situation, and that whoever does not believe in God is not turning to his mind (for answers) but is relying on what he has inherited from his society, or, as in some cases, from his personal desires. When dealing with all the non-intelligent stances which the Prophets (as) faced when they came with a

new idea, they had to address the argument that they had always lived on the basis that their old beliefs could not change; in addition, they were not ready to defend this old belief that they adhered to on the basis of reason, or to engage in dialogue with those offering them new ideas on the basis of reason – the argument through which they justified their rejection of the new ideas that the Prophets (as) offered was: ‘Surely we found our fathers on a course (religion), and surely we follow in their footsteps’ 43:23. As far as they are concerned, the matter is related to the social continuation of history, as if time can stand still in thoughts on that history that may stretch back thousands of years, thoughts of backwardness, myths or the like.

At the same time, we find the Qur’an raises this issue with them in a logical way: ‘And when it is said to them: Follow what God has revealed, they say: Nay! We follow what we found our fathers following’, you are saying that you follow what you have found your fathers doing so you reject anything that does not conform to what you have inherited; the question, however is: what was the intellectual and rational level of your fathers? Did they have the mind that could discover the truth? Did they have the intellect that would produce mature thought? The Qur’an says to them: ‘What! Even though their fathers had no understanding, nor did they have guidance?’ 2:170; in another verse: ‘What! Even though their fathers had no knowledge,

nor guidance?’ 5:104. Your fathers, whom you adhere to in their beliefs and thoughts, did not understand or reason therefore they did not base their thoughts on a society that relies on reason to accept or reject ideas; so, these people as well will not (in following their fathers) accept guidance but they reject its arguments, while wise people are not expected to follow people who do not understand, nor will those who seek guidance follow those who lack it.

So, do not stay living in history, followers of your fathers and forefathers, on the basis of emotions, because the question of thought is different to the question of emotion: emotion relates to the senses and feeling while thought relates to reason and thinking.

The issue – in its depth – is one of irrationality, and this is what paralyzes societies and brings about the fall of civilisations. We can derive from the Qur’an’s discussion of those who wanted to stay firm in what they had inherited from their forefathers without change through thought or dialogue that such is the state of affairs at any time when reformers start to confront backwardness, myths or ignorance: they find backward people standing against them saying: this is our tradition and habits and we want to stay with what we have inherited from our fathers. The Holy Qur’an is saying: God created reason and made it the test for man who shall be brought to judgement according to

what reason produces, therefore you, the human being, should not reject the new merely because it is different to the old, but you should also not accept the new until you have mobilised your mind and intellect to look into it through dialogue and discussion, to arrive at the correct results either way (rejection or acceptance).

### **Loyalty does not mean correctness**

This is what enriches societies and elevates their intellectual level, both in beliefs and the Shari'ah, because the issue here is that those who produced thought in the past may have been loyal to their thought, but loyalty does not mean correctness, since one may be loyal in one's thinking but lack the means that can bring it to the level of correctness; also, loyal people may err, not intentionally, but due to a lack of means through which they can achieve correctness. Therefore, we have to abstain from rejecting any new thought, but must study it, scrutinise it and discuss it; in this way we can enrich Islam with the thought that builds civilisations, which continue to produce knowledge and thought and innovative ideas.

### **Faith rejectionists - Qur'anic parables**

In the same regard, the Qur'an uses parables to describe atheists: 'And the parable of those who disbelieve is as if someone were to shout to things that listen to nothing,

but he calls and cries; deaf, dumb (and) blind, they do not understand' 2:171. Atheists cling to what they adhere to, similar to the person who will shout when he hears shouts start around him, without him understanding the nature of these voices and the ideas expressed by them; therefore, they are 'deaf' and do not try to really listen to what others are saying, and 'blind' because they do not open up to the truth through their minds' insight, rather they live like the blind – God says: 'For surely it is not the eyes that grow blind, but blind are the hearts which are in the chests' 22:46. Also, they do not benefit from the evidence of greatness in God's secrets that their eyes can show them, and which could make them believe in His Oneness and His Divinity. Also, they are 'dumb' – incapable of speech, because they behave on the basis of the thoughts that they inherited or imagined without engaging in dialogue, arguments or discussion around them, or comparing what the others have found. So: '...they do not understand' 2:171 as a result, since they lack the understanding and reason that offers hearing and seeing the fruits of their actions, exactly like the person who suffers a bad stroke: his eyes may stay perfect in appearance, and peoples' images may get through to his eyes, but he does not know them, since the seeing faculty is a means of knowledge only when physical seeing integrates with mental and spiritual seeing. The same goes for hearing and speaking.

In another verse, the Qur'an describes those who do not listen to what can elevate them, and do not speak in situations that can provide them with intellectual stimulations because they do not ask for or engage in dialogue or discussion in this way: **'Surely the worst of creatures, in God's sight, are the deaf, the dumb, who do not understand'** 8:22. They are the most unfortunate of all since they cannot benefit from the means through which they can understand, think and reason – this shows how the Qur'an places reason at the highest level of what man has in his being.

### Following desire, not reason

The Qur'an also deals with those whose course in life is dictated by their desires, abandoning their mind and making their desires the compass that directs them on both individual and social levels. It says: **'Have you seen him who takes his desires for his god? Will you then be his guardian?'** 25:43, which does not mean that such people actually say that their god is their desire, but that they treat desire like a person treats his God, with obedience and absolute submission. **'Or do you think that most of them do hear'** the revelations that you recite to them, **'...or understand?'**; rather they ignore their minds and all the balance in their personalities; **'...They are but like cattle; nay, they are straying farther off the path'** 25:44, because animals do not have the mind which they can utilise to effect change in their



lives or to face events, therefore, those to whom God has given thinking, understanding and reasoning powers but, nonetheless, fail to use them in the right direction are worse than animals in this regard – animals are not equipped with these powers, while these are but fail to use them.

Imam Ali (as) says: ‘Reason and lust are opposites – knowledge supports reason, while desire makes lust alluring to them so that it seems attractive; the soul struggles in between, so whichever one of them beats the other, the soul follows.’<sup>2</sup> This saying portrays a picture of the psychological struggle between reason and lust in things in which the mind can recognise the good or bad nature in their balance, which is at one’s disposal, in comparison to the lust that is instigated by instinct and stirred by the senses. The struggle ensues in the person’s resolve, which may get stronger and so take the side of reason, or get weaker and so take the side of lust.

This saying points to the fact that the intellect which the person has attained through perception, experience, reading and listening, which lead to knowledge, can support reason in choosing, because it shows it where good and evil and benefit and harm lie, so the choice of the will wins and heads in the way of reason. Desire that lurks in the soul and stirs its instinctive sense and the drive to sensual pleasure, however, supports lust and pushes it towards pressurising the person towards what leads him to ignorance of the consequences. Therefore, one must mobilise one’s knowledge

so as to have command of one's mind and inject it with the strength needed to beat one's lust, or keep it under control in balanced conduct. In this way, the actions of the mind, body and spirit balance out to achieve balance in one's course in life.

In another narration, he says: 'He who loves something passionately, blurs his sight and makes his heart ill, so he looks with an unhealthy eye and hears with a deaf ear; lusts have penetrated his mind and life has brought death to his heart, and his soul has become fascinated with them (lusts), with him becoming a slave for them, while he has nothing of them in his hands – as they leave, he goes after them, and as they come, he comes to them.'<sup>3</sup> Ali (as) is talking about lusts when they have penetrated the mind and have control over it, preventing it from clarity in seeing facts and attracting the victim like a lover to his loved one – he does not see anyone else in front of him in his blind engrossment; so he is struck with illness of thought, blindness of insight and deafness to what he hears. He becomes lost, imagining that he has something when he has not, goes towards things or abandons them without will, utterly attracted to lust in all cases. This is the control that lust has over the mind, and it leads it to labyrinths that end up nowhere.

### Self-conceit paralyses the mind

Dealing with another negative aspect of human life, Imam Ali (as) says: 'One's self-conceit is one of those that envy his

mind!"<sup>4</sup> A similar saying by him is: 'One's self-conceit is proof of his mind's weakness.'<sup>5</sup> Self-conceit paralyses the mental ability to develop and to engage in close and continuous reflection on the different issues of man's private and public life, his relationships with others and the continuation of his dynamic experimenting that renews and changes all the time, revealing where he has been correct and where he was wrong, something which adds to his knowledge, strengthens his mental faculty and adds to his experience. This cannot be achieved unless he knows the shortcomings in his knowledge and the weaknesses in his mind, and this cannot happen in a self-conceited state, because he imagines that he has reached perfection and has attained the highest levels, to the extent that – due to his absolute confidence in himself – he sees good as bad and vice versa and denies what others have or are distinguished in their knowledge, reason and realistic assessments; this is perhaps what can be derived from the verse: 'What about those whose evil deeds are made alluring to them so that they think they are good?' 35:8 and: 'Say: Shall We inform you of the greatest losers in (their) deeds? Those whose efforts have been wasted in this life, and yet they reckon that they do good work' 18:103-4.

The envious envy you for any good that comes to you, and they wish and may also try to make you lose it. Self-conceit paralyses the mind and prevents it from development in the

direction of any good it can acquire, and it hold it back from discovering new ideas and from creativity, so it is similar to the envious person in his problem with the person who is the object of his envy.

This is what makes self-conceit evidence of weakness of the mind, because a strong mind is the one that leads the person to development and continuous striving for higher achievements, and pushes him to try to acquire more through his own experience of knowledge and work, and through the thought and experience of others. In contrast, self-conceit stops all that and limits the mind's achievement as a result of the failure to strive for perfection.

### **Self-conceit leads to loss of knowledge**

Ali (as) also says: 'Self-conceit prevents acquiring more'<sup>6</sup> because the person believes that he has reached a level where no more knowledge, whether on his part or from the others, is needed. He thinks that what he has reached has no superior level to it, so fails to feel the need, unlike the person who strives for more when he feels his neglect and failure to do better.

Ali (as) also says: 'He who becomes pleased with himself, fails in strategy (and planning)'<sup>7</sup>; Imam Ali al-Hadi (as) says: 'Self-conceit deters from seeking knowledge and causes little achievement.'<sup>8</sup> The problem of self-conceit in people is,

perhaps, their belief that they deserve a position that they actually do not deserve.

### ... And to a weakness of mental faculty

Similar to a narration above, Ali (as) warns against self-conceit and its effect on one's mind: 'Self-conceit corrupts the mind'<sup>9</sup> and: 'Your satisfaction of yourself stems from corruption of your mind.'<sup>10</sup> This is not limited to the results, but also to the mind and its powers, if one becomes over-confident in them, Ali (as) says: 'Accuse your minds (with incorrect thinking, understanding, conclusions or the like; i.e. do not be absolutely confident in them) for error comes from being confident in them.'<sup>11</sup>

### How to remedy this shortcoming

Islam does not hesitate to point to shortcomings or weaknesses that one may suffer from, but provides the way to deal with them so as to remedy the situation – to rescue the person from them and offer alternatives or correct opposites. Imam Ali (as) says: 'If your self-conceit intensifies regarding your power, so that you feel pride and loftiness, then see the greatness of God's Dominion and His power that you cannot beat yourself, and this will reduce your fervour, stop your wandering away and return to you what of your mind has abandoned you.'<sup>12</sup> In another, well-known narration, he tries

to make human beings see exactly their limitations: **‘I wonder why the son of Adam (i.e. human beings) has self-conceit: his beginning is a sperm, his end is a dirty corpse and in between he carries stools (i.e. in his intestine)!’**<sup>13</sup> This is the body; but knowing the soul is also useful here, as Imam Mohammed al-Baqir (as) says: **‘Preventing self-conceit is by knowing the self.’**<sup>14</sup>

Thus, we see how the negative psychological drives affect the mind and its actions through the wrong image to the self and others, just as the strong mind treats one’s points of weakness in one’s view of oneself and how one analyses it, through a process of rectification that puts things in their proper places and helps a person to discover the places where he can sense his weakness so as to direct him to strive for an ever-elevating course. This cannot be achieved without knowing one’s self, which is described as the best in the mental faculty – Ali (as) says: **‘The best in the mental faculty is man’s knowledge of his self – so he who knows his self becomes wise, and he who does not know it will go astray.’**<sup>15</sup> There are wide horizons on the road to the recognition of facts and knowledge of things, but knowing the self will always be the main element of awareness of the self to its facts and features that are active in the whole of the being and produce the powers of thinking, sensing, feeling and action, so as to achieve one’s goals in life. In the forefront of this is the mind and its reasoning, thinking,

analysing and deductive powers. However, knowing the self provides light that shows the person which practical steps to take in his relationships with others – dealing with them, treating them, holding dialogue with them and taking stances, for the relationships of the self with the outside are related to the elements within it, as the outside (of the person) represents an image of the inside. If the person has clarity through the active elements he has in his self and in his view of reality, in this case he will act in the right direction, because he will show himself the good as good and direct himself to follow it and the bad as bad and forbid himself from pursuing it, leading him to put things in the right shape, balanced and with the endings connect to the beginnings, ending up in a better knowledge of God, to find God at his doorstep, and to be with him in his depth of knowledge of Him in His Greatness, secrets of the creation and His Grace in life. This is perhaps what the well-know saying ‘Who knows himself knows his Lord’<sup>16</sup> implies, and also the Qur’anic verse expressing the interconnection between the area of internal sense and the external deed: ‘This is because God never changes a grace which He has bestowed on any people until they change what is in their souls’ 8:53, which is what the following words reflect: ‘Change yourself and you change reality, change yourself and you change history.’

### **Intellectual foundations**

Back to the teachings of Imam Musa al-Kadhim (as) to his companion Hisham bin al-Hakam<sup>17</sup>, this time, and in this part of it, describing those who stand on the opposite side of reason. But before that, I would like you to draw attention to the approach of the Imams of Ahlul Bayt (as) with regard to the knowledge that they present to people. They did not limit their teachings to the idea itself, separate from the foundation it is based on, but used to teach the idea along with the Qur'anic verses that show people the Qur'anic approach in proof and arguments in the topics related to the faith and life. We can draw from this that those in charge of Islamic intellectual endeavours, whether scholars or otherwise, should follow in footsteps of their Imams (as) in presenting Islamic thought through its foundations, in this way those taught, through the knowledge and deep intellect that they acquire, can become capable of preaching for Islam and in engaging in fruitful dialogue with those who raise obscurities and doubts (about the faith).

### **Those who do not understand, think or reason**

As in other parts of his teaching, Imam al-Kadhim (as) recites the Qur'anic verses in connection with the issue he is treating. Earlier, he described the wise (those who understand, think and reason), now he describes those who fail to use these mental



capabilities that all human beings are blessed with: **‘O Hisham! Then He criticised those who do not understand, think and reason,’** reciting to Hisham many verses that describe these people, the first group of which talks about their insistence on following their fathers and forefathers and refusing even to think about what the Prophet (sawa) was trying to convey to them (covered earlier in this chapter). The second group describes their approach of following what they have been used to and compares them, in ignoring their mind and its functions in this regard, to animals which behave similarly but only because they are not mentally equipped like these people (also commented on earlier in this chapter).

Then he describes another negative feature of these people: their cowardice when fighting the enemy and their infighting amongst themselves. He recites the verse: **‘They will not fight you (even) together, except in fortified townships, or from behind walls,’** so they do not go out and face their enemies like the brave do. But when it comes to the problems and disputes amongst themselves then: **‘...strong is their fighting (spirit) amongst themselves,’** fiercely fighting each other. Their enemy may not know that: **‘...you would think they were united, but their hearts are divided,’** when in reality they are in mental and psychological disarray, nothing unites them, and even what appears to be unity is no more than superficial. Now, the reason behind that is: **‘...that is**

because they are a people devoid of understanding' 59:14, since it is the wise are the ones who rely on God, the Almighty, to defend themselves and on the strategy of unity and cooperation through the one set of values they defend and their common fate.

### The question of the majority

The Imam (as) then deals with another important issue: the majority and the way that a lot of people tend to think that it – the majority – is always right. He recites the verses: 'And if you obey most of those on the earth, they will lead you astray from God's way' 6:116, 'And if you ask them who created the heavens and the earth, they will certainly say: God; say: (All) praise is due to God; nay! most of them do not know that.' 31:25 and 'And if you ask them who is it that sends down water from the clouds, then gives life to the earth with it after it has died, they will certainly say, God; say: All praise is due to God; nay, most of them do not understand 29:63. When the Qur'an talks about the majority, it does not say that the majority equals falsehood, but it implies that the majority does not represent the truth all the time, with many people feel safer when following the majority, as in the folk saying 'Being gathered with the people is a feast!' No, we find when it comes to believing in God or atheism, the majority is with falsehood not with truth. Therefore, to

discover facts, one should study the matter according to its elements of thought to judge if it represents truth or falsehood, and not rely on the majority, but on rational objective research. He also recites: **‘and very few of My servants are grateful’** 34:13 which explains that those who take the course of believing in God and thanking Him are few in number. Also, it was only one believer amongst the Pharaoh’s folk who tried to face up to the large numbers of deviant people: **‘And a believing man from among the people of the Pharaoh, who hid his faith, said: What! Will you slay a man because he says: My Lord is God?’** 40:28. The same went for Lot (as) and Noah (as), the followers of each of whom God describes: **‘but only a few believed with him’** 11:40 – the majority were against their course of belief, while the believers were always the steadfast minority confronting the corrupt majority.

Therefore, our reference should not be the majority and where it lies, since: **‘but most of them hate the Truth’** 23:70. The same applies to the minority, as both – majority and minority – cannot be relied upon for decisions and conclusions until one has looked closely into the elements of their thought to distinguish the truth from falsehood. In his ground-breaking words, Imam Ali (as) teaches us: **‘Know the truth and you shall know its followers,’**<sup>18</sup> and as the wisdom says: ‘Truth is not to be known through men, but it is men who are to be known through the truth’; in other words, no matter how a

given person is regarded by people, he does not necessarily represents the truth, but when the truth is known, in this case, this person, or any other, can be judged accordingly to know whether or not they represent that truth. In this way, one will not fall in the trap of following false legacies or role models that were not established according to the right set of values.

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<sup>1</sup> *Al-Kafi*, al-Kulaini, vol.1, p.23.

<sup>2</sup> *Mizan al-Hikmah*, ar-Raishahri, vol.3, p.2038.

<sup>3</sup> *Nahj al-Balaghah*, Mohammed Abdoh commentary, vol.1, p.211.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, vol.4, p.49.

<sup>5</sup> *Al-Kafi*, vol.1, p.27.

<sup>6</sup> *Uyoon al-Hikem wel-Mewa'id*, Ali bin Mohammed al-Wasiti al-Laiti, p.40.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p.462.

<sup>8</sup> *Mizan al-Hikmah*, vol.3, p.1816.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p.1815.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> *Uyoon al-Hikem wel-Mewa'id*, p.91.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p.137.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p.479.

<sup>14</sup> *Mizan al-Hikmah*, vol.3, p.1819.

<sup>15</sup> *Uyoon al-Hikem wel-Mewa'id*, p.115.

<sup>16</sup> *One Hundred Words of the Commander of the Faithful*, Ibn Maithem al-Bahrani, p.57; also *Awali al-Le'ali*, Ibn Abi Jomhoo al-Ihsa'i, vol.4, p. 102.

<sup>17</sup> *Al-Kafi*, vol.1, p.13; *Tuhaf al-Uqool*, p.383.

<sup>18</sup> *Mizan al-Hikmah*, vol.1, p.658.

## Chapter 8

# Applications I

- Knowledge of God
- The mind of the Prophets, Imams and leaders
- Evaluating narrations
- Evaluating deeds
- The minds of women
- The good and the bad

(1)

### Knowledge of God

As we said previously, God blessed the mind with capabilities that enable it to interact with all horizons that it can reach, in the universe, life, man and the soul, because He created the mind free with no obstacle inside it that stops it from carrying on all sorts of inquiring, thinking, reasoning, analysing and concluding to reach knowledge and intellectual results, through the tools it has and the means that it can acquire.

Even when it comes to the realm of God, the Most High, we find that human beings have always been thinking about God, nature and its attributes, with some asking – as when that man asked Imam Ali (as) - for a specific description as if one is looking at Him! This is saying that we want our thoughts on God to reach, through that precise description, to a level of clarity that is almost sensual. Obviously, in his reply and description, the Imam (as) explained that there were limits to the mind: ‘Do not think about the Greatness of God, the Most High, according to the level (that) your mind (can reach), lest you end up in utter loss’ (this is part of the sermon is known as al-Ashbah<sup>1</sup>.)

### Knowledge of God

In that famous sermon, Imam Ali (as) says: ‘So look, O enquirer, ...’ as if trying to explain the approach that one should follow to first know the means through which to seek knowledge of God; ‘... to the attributes that the Qur’an showed you and follow them, and seek enlightenment from the light of its guidance.’ The Holy Qur’an outlined the approach for man in his strife to know God, the Most High, which is through thinking about God’s creation: ‘Our Lord! You have not created this in vain!’ 3:191 and: ‘Consider what is it that is in the heavens and the earth’ 10:101 and try to look into the universe through discovery of its secrets,

acquire more knowledge of the universal system and the elements of greatness it encompasses and study history to benefit from its lessons: ‘Have you not considered how your Lord dealt with (the tribe of) ‘Ad’ 89:6 or: ‘Have you not considered how your Lord dealt with the army of the elephant?’ 105:1. And so, man looks into the inside of himself that God promised to keep on revealing (‘We will show them Our signs in the horizons and in their own souls, until it will become quite clear to them that it is the truth’ 41:53), or inside the whole of human life, in history, the present and future aspirations.

The same applies to God’s attributes, so that He provides the proper knowledge of Him that is possible to acquire through the powers of the mind- Imam Ali bin al-Hosain (as), in reply to a question on the oneness of God, said: ‘God, the Most High, knew that there would be, at the end of time, people who look deeply (into things),’ who try to look closely, not superficially, into words and reflect on the meanings that can be derived from words: ‘... so God, the Most High, revealed: “Say: He, God, is One”’. That small chapter, if examined closely, tells us that one would know God in His oneness, and the simplicity of the nature of that oneness, so that he avoids complicating matters. Also, that chapter enables even those with no intellect to know the oneness, just as it enables the intellectual to indulge in the deep meanings of these attributes

in the way that would allow him to know the oneness, His Being the Master (or, the Eternal; or, the Self-sufficient; or, sought by all), His Being the First (when nothing was before Him or with Him) and His exalted position that is above all creation. God says: ‘Say: He, God, is One. God, the Master (or, Eternal; or, Self-sufficient; or, sought by all). He begets not, nor is He begotten. And there is none comparable unto Him’ 112:1-4: think about it to try to answer the questions of the basis of this oneness, its depth, the mental proof for it and against polytheism; ‘God, the Master (or, Eternal; or, Self-sufficient; or, sought by all)’ whose creations – alive or otherwise – turn to Him, as they are in need of Him in their actual existence, as they need Him to continue their existence. We imagine God, not like living creations that are begotten and born, but that He is eternal and nothing of His creation is similar to Him.

And God provided us – according to Imam Ali bin al-Hosain (as) – with some of His attributes in the Chapter of Hadid (Iron) by which we can try to know Him – as God introduces Himself, and we do not have any other direct knowledge to do so apart from this: ‘Whatever is in the heavens and the earth glorifies God, and He is the Mighty, the Wise. To Him belongs the dominion of the heavens and the earth; it is He Who gives life and causes death; and He is able to do (or, has power over) all things. He is the First and the Last, the Evident and



the Immanent; and He is Knower of all things. He it is who created the heavens and the earth in six Days, then He established Himself on the Throne (of Authority); He knows that which enters into the earth and that which comes out of it, and that which comes down from the heaven and that which ascends into it, and He is with you wherever you are; and God sees what you do. To Him belongs the Dominion of the heavens and the earth; and to God all affairs are referred back. He causes the night to enter in upon the day, and causes the day to enter in upon the night, and He is Knower of what is in the hearts.’ 57:1-6; the verses talk about God’s control of the day and the night through His Dominion.

Then, the Imam (as) warns: ‘... So, whoever strives for what is beyond that will face utter loss’<sup>2</sup> and the reason is: when man wants to know about something, whether Divine or one of God’s creations, he must have the powers of his senses, experience or material means that enable him to know the nature and features of that thing, and since God, in His Self, is unknown and unknowable as far as the means that man has are concerned, then we cannot uncover God’s Self directly so that we sense Him as we do all things around us. So where do we turn to for such knowledge? It must be the mind and reason, through the senses, as we study and adopt the Qur’anic approach in this matter, to know our Lord through thinking about His

creation to arrive at knowledge of His greatness in creation and as the source of bounties and grace that He effects all the time.

### Complete knowledge of God is impossible

It is narrated that Imam as-Sadiq (as), in his commentary on this Chapter, said: 'God to His creation is One, Master (or, Eternal; or, Self-sufficient; or, sought by all), eternal; no shadow holds to Him, while He hold things with their shadows; Knowing the unknown, whilst He is known to every ignorant person; unique, neither His creation is part of Him nor He in His creation; can neither be sensed or touched; vision cannot comprehend Him; He is elevated to become near and comes near to become distant; was disobeyed, (yet) He pardoned, and was obeyed and He thanked; His earth cannot contain Him and His heavens cannot carry Him; He is the carrier of things with His Power; Continuous and Eternal; does not forget, seek leisure, err or play; His will is indisputable; His judgement is (either) reward or retribution and His command is (definitely) carried out; He did not beget so as to be inherited, nor was begotten so that He would have had partners, and there is none comparable unto Him.'<sup>3</sup>

Imam al-Baqir (as) said: '(You can) talk about the creation of God, but do not talk about God,' since the creation of God has the sort of reality which you have the means to know, as

you live with it and can sense it. God's Self, however, is beyond the means that you have; '... for the speech on God will not make the person but more puzzled.'<sup>4</sup> Indeed, a lot of philosophers veered left and right in their confusion and unfounded speech on the God's Self, lacking any means that could help them achieve knowledge.

### The labyrinths of delusion

Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq (as) teaches what to say when discussing this Divine matter – he says to his companion Mohammed bin Muslim<sup>5</sup>: 'O Mohammed! People will keep on engaging in speech on logic until they discuss God; when you hear that, say: 'There is no God but Allah, there is nothing like Him.'<sup>6</sup> It is as if he is saying: let people engage in discussions of a scholastic and logical nature on God within the limits in which they can discover some of God's attributes, as in the signs of His Greatness or Power, but when they start to talk about God's Self, in this case they will talk without any guidance and succumb to delusions, because this is not within their capacity, nor can it be part of their experience; the mind can only work where there is basis for such effort to gain knowledge.

In another narration, Imam al-Baqir (as) gives the same warning: 'Never indulge in thinking about God (God's Self), but if you want to see His Greatness, look into the greatness of His creation.'<sup>7</sup> All this is perhaps because God is not

limited, but our limited minds cannot succeed in knowing His Self; Imam Ali bin al-Hosain (as) says: **‘God is not to be described as having any limitation...’**, as He is absolute in His knowledge, power and greatness.

I recall, in this regard, that in the 1950s, one atheist or doubter raised, in the Lebanese press, a question that proved controversial then, which was: Is God capable of creating something that is greater than Him or bigger than Him or not? If you say: He can, this means that there is something bigger than Him, even if hypothetically, while you say that ‘God is Greater (than anything)’; and if you say: He cannot, this means that he is not capable of doing everything! I was questioned on that then and said: the question itself is wrong, since the matter of bigger or smaller relates to limited things, but the thing that is limitless is not subject to a question of being bigger or smaller. This is what Imam Ali bin al-Hosain’s narration above was saying – he continued: **‘... our Lord is greater than description, as how else can He be He Who cannot have limits or boundaries, and Who cannot be comprehended by vision and yet He comprehends (all) vision; and He is the Knower and Cause of all subtle things, He is Aware and acquainted with all things?’**<sup>8</sup>

This uniqueness and beyond-limitation description is given another treatment by Imam Ali (as) when he was asked: How did you know your Lord? He said: **‘The way He introduced**

**Himself to me!** They asked: How? He replied: **‘No image is like Him;’** that is, anything that can come to the imagination; **‘not sensed by the senses,’** as He lives in the World of the unknown and unknowable, the sacred exalted World of which the elements of its nature cannot be known; **‘... and cannot be compared to people,’** as far as His knowledge and power are concerned; **‘... near in His distance,’** as He is distant from everything in His Self and attributes; **‘... distant in His nearness,’** i.e. distant from being known by our minds or imaginations when He is near because He is the cause of everything and everything is need of Him; **‘... above everything’** in power, **‘and nothing is said to be above Him; in front of everything, but is not said to have a front,’** because He is not a matter for the senses; **‘... inside things unlike a thing that is entering another thing,’** i.e. He does not make a perceptible or materialistic entrance into things; **‘... and outside things unlike a thing that is coming out of a thing,’** like something inside another and which came out of it; **‘... exalted is He Who is like this, and nothing like this is found in anything else.’<sup>9</sup>**

### Specifying the authority

As mentioned earlier, Imam Ali (as) treated this matter in what is known as al-Ashbah sermon when he said: **‘So look, O enquirer, to the attributes that the Qur’an showed you and follow it, and seek enlightenment from the light of its**

guidance,' since the Qur'an is the light: 'there has come to you light and a clear Book from God' 5:15, as it lights the way for people; '... and what Satan tried to make you seek knowledge of,' what people went right and left for in delusion, as a result of Satan's machinations, '... which is not made obligatory in the Book,' its approach has not been shown in the Book, nor the details that relate to the attributes of God, '... nor is it narrated in the Sunnah of the Prophet of the Imams of guidance,' where nothing of the sort was narrated from those who had the knowledge that God blessed them with – the Prophet (sawa) whose heart and mind God Has opened for the knowledge of Him, and the Imams (as) whom the Prophet (sawa) and the Qur'an taught– to the extent that Ali (as) said: 'If the matter is uncovered, I will not be more knowledgeable,'<sup>10</sup> which means that he has reached the highest level of knowledge so that if what covers the secrets in the earth and the heavens is removed, he would not acquire any more knowledge – '... leave its knowledge to God, the Most High, as this is the most of your obligation towards God,' leave it to Him because He did not give you the means to acquire its knowledge; 'and know that those who are firmly rooted in knowledge are those whom God saved from penetrating the shields around the unknown and unknowable, and they admit their belief in all that they do not know of the unknown and unknowable' as God describes their stance: 'but none knows its interpretation

except God, and those who are firmly rooted in knowledge say: We believe in it, it is all from our Lord' 3:7, which means that when they cannot know the things that are behind the covers and inside the unknown and unknowable, and there is no means for them to that knowledge, this does not stop them from believing in God through what they know, and they submit to Him in the things that they do not know; '... so God commended their admission of failure to indulge in what they lack of its knowledge, and called 'being firmly-rooted in knowledge (*rosookhb*)' their abandoning getting deep into looking into its nature, which He had not made obligatory,' as the person who abides by what he knows, and does not indulge in what he cannot know, is one of those firmly rooted in knowledge; '... So, keep to that, and do not try to think of the Greatness of God, the Most High, according to their minds, lest you will face utter loss.'

The Imam (as) is discussing this issue of knowledge of God, and is doing so to ensure safety from deviation for people: his words imply that when a person engages in learning, discussions and dialogue, he should do so within the means he has for it, and not to go beyond what he lacks in terms of the intellect or the means for it; let him leave it to those who know it or know the means towards its knowledge. This is vital when it comes to those who stand for leadership – be it intellectual, religious, political or social: they must either have the

knowledge and the means of that knowledge in what relates to their leadership field, or stay away from leadership or any responsibility that calls for such knowledge. This should also be conveyed to the people, so as not to let the ignorant lead them as they will lead them to failure and chaos.

### **Arousing interest in the Hereafter**

According to the Qur'an, it is expected of those who are wise to opt for the Hereafter when they compare it to this limited life – this is what Imam al-Kadhim (as) draws attention to: ‘O Hisham! God then exhorted the wise and aroused their interest in the Hereafter. He said: “What is the life of this world but play and amusement; the abode of the Hereafter is best for those who are righteous and God-fearing; will you not then understand?” 6:32.’ One has to look into the nature of this life to see that people of all types find that it contains all the elements to divert a person from becoming aware of the truth, including diverse activities play, and some that are beneficial, but in any case, these do not represent continuity and eternity, but rather moments that one lives then all this playing and leisure disappears, along with the disappearance of the things involved; there is no continuity but disappearance as time passes. In this regard, we notice that people use some terms, such as the ‘political game’ or ‘economic game’, in a way that points to this limited nature.



‘...the abode of the Hereafter is best for those who are righteous and God-fearing’ suggests that those who are righteous and God-fearing will be rewarded with the eternal Hereafter.

The verse is trying to emphasise that, in order that man achieves the Hereafter, he must observe his obligations towards God, according to the guidance of the other verse: ‘**And seek by means of what God has given you the Abode of the Hereafter**’, to make the Hereafter your goal, programme and horizon in all that you act upon in this life, accepting to indulge in only such acts of leisure that do not detract from the main effort that leads to the satisfaction of God and Paradise in the Hereafter.

This life is of two kinds: (1) the life of playing and amusement, which ends with death and this playing and amusement disappears, (2) the life of righteousness and God-fearing, which stays and achieves for man the Hereafter with its eternity and grace.

‘...and do not neglect your portion of this world, and do good (to others) as God has done good to you, and do not seek to make mischief on the earth; surely God does not love the mischief-makers’ 28:77; any person should try to reason when looking into what remains and what perishes – it is natural that reason will prefer the life of righteousness/ and God-fearing over a life of playing and amusement.

‘**And whatever things you have been given, they are only provisions for this world's life and its adornment;**’ *meta*’

(provision) is the thing that man uses for a while, then it disappears or perishes, ‘... and whatever is with God is better and more lasting; do you not then understand?’ 28:60: the wise person stays with what remains. Through this exhortation, God wants people to use their minds, as those who do not reason or think follow their lusts and fancies without thinking of the negative consequences, but only of the moments of pleasure, even if these are like a poison in honey.

Then the Imam (as) says: ‘O Hisham! Then He alarmed those who do not think or reason with His punishment; He said: “Then We destroy the others. And most surely you pass by (the ruin of) them in the morning. And at night. Do you not then understand?” 37:136-8’ – which was a speech to the Meccans, saying that when you go to Syria you will see, on your way, that corrupt town that God destroyed and whose people He punished so that you take warning and guard yourselves against God’s punishment, if you do what they were doing. ‘And He said: “Surely We will cause to come down upon the people of this town a punishment from heaven, because they transgressed” 29:34, which can come in different ways. ‘And He said: “And certainly We have left a clear sign of it for people who understand” 29:35, so that people see what happened through the ruins left behind and take warning to avoid facing the same fate as a result of their acts.

(2)

## The Mind of Prophets, Imams and Leaders

### The Prophets (as) and reason

We mentioned previously that the ability to think, understand, reason, analyse, conclude, plan and all other capabilities of the mind are the most important of all creation. As the narrations says: ‘

‘God, the Most High, when He created reason said to it: “Come” and it came, then said: “Turn and go back” and it did... then He said: “I swear by My power and Majesty, that I have not created anything that is more dear to Me than you: it is you that I command and you that I forbid, and through you I punish and I reward.”’<sup>11</sup> This means that God, the Most High, gave the mind the highest position of responsibility so that reward follows the kind of mind that affects on’s deeds, all according to the level attained by its capabilities.

On this basis, we can reach a decisive conclusion, that reason is the foundation of existence, and since man is the only existing creature that has reason, then it is he who is the central thing of existence, and the secret of its development comes through his mind. People, everywhere and of all backgrounds, should draw from this the true stance – for it is always repeated by secular tendencies that accuse religion of being devoid of reason, since

it is based on the unknown and unknowable, that it is irrational, or derived from feelings that are not based on any foundation, or through some delusion, seeing religion as being the cause of backwardness among the religious societies, whether Muslim or otherwise; however, we notice in our Islamic heritage, whether the Holy Qur'an or the Sunnah, that it is religion which is saying to man that reason is the foundation, and that if you try to be a 'mind' you can attend to your responsibilities in life.

### **Messages begin with mental maturity**

Then the Prophet (sawa) continues: 'And God did not start the mission of any Prophet or Messenger until after he had achieved the completeness of his mind..., ' which implies that the Prophet or Messenger was being sent so as to provide people with a complete mind, complete in its powers; so if a person has not attained that level of complete and mature mind, it is expected that he will not be able to fulfil his mission as 'he who lacks something cannot provide it'; therefore God, the Most High, uses more than one method to make His Messengers reach that level. We read in Nahj al-Balaghah how Imam Ali (as) describes the Prophet's life before the start of his mission, when he (sawa) used to spend days and nights in the cave of Hira', and God appointed one of His great angels to be with the Prophet (sawa) to provide him with the particulars of

knowledge and morals every day; the Prophet (sawa) himself said: 'My Lord raised me (with good morals) and He did raise me well.'<sup>12</sup>

In this regard, the Qur'an explains God's teaching of His Prophet (sawa): 'You did not know what the Book was, nor (what) the faith (was), but We made it a light' 42:52, taking him to the highest level of mental powers, and doing that gradually: 'And those who disbelieve say: Why has not the Qur'an been revealed to him all at once? Thus (it is revealed), that We may strengthen your heart by it and We have revealed it in gradual revelation.' 25:32, so the Qur'an was revealed in instalments so that the Prophet's awareness and experience strengthened, as he would need these in his mission and endeavour of leading the people.

'... and (until) his mind becomes better than all the minds of his nation', because the leadership position in which he strove to elevate the nation and its mentality, to open it up to all fields of knowledge, made it imperative that the mind of the leader should be better than that of his followers whom he was leading. This is because any leader must be distinguished in the qualities that relate to the responsibilities of his leadership. We can derive from this that those who stand in the position of the Prophet, not the Imamate only, but in the Islamic leadership generally, i.e. providing people with intellect and developing the people's mind, must be in possession of high mental

qualities and capabilities, including all leadership skills and particulars. The problem with leadership in the Islamic world is perhaps the lack of the necessary mind through which the leaders can be better than those they lead – in fact, we see some people are better than their leaders as far as reason and intellect are concerned; this is the problem of the ignorant when they lead the wise people.

The Prophet (sawa) continues: ‘... And what the prophet keeps within himself (i.e. within his mind) is better than the effort of the striving worshippers,’ because worship benefits the worshipper himself, while the thought that the prophet has is for all people.

‘... And no one should carry out any act made obligatory by God until he knows (about it) from Him.’ Any person who wants to perform obligatory worship must know from God the nature of this obligation in all its details, conditions, implications and outcome on the moral level, both for himself and for society.

‘... And all worshippers cannot reach, in the value of their worship, what the wise person has’ because the wise person himself produces knowledge of God for people and knowledge about how to strive for His nearness, while the worshippers act within what the wise individuals show and explain to them.

Then he says: ‘And the wise are those whom God describes: “and none but men of understanding mind”2:269.’<sup>13</sup>

## The goal of prophethood

The description of the Prophets (as) above makes it logical that the goal of their missions revolves around reason – Imam al-Kadhimi (as) says to Hisham bin al-Hakam: ‘O Hisham! God did not send His Prophets and Messengers to people but to make them understand (what was revealed) from God’, which is to explain to people that God, the Most High, does not communicate with people directly, whether in what relates to the unknown and unknowable of His Self or what relates to the belief in His Oneness or what relates to worshipping Him and obeying His commands, or in any dimension that people cannot discover. It is the Prophets and Messengers’ duty to convey to people that part of His unknown and unknowable entity that God reveals to them and which relates to their mission; the Qur’an teaches the Prophet (sawa) to explain this fact: ‘Say: I do not say to you, I have with me the treasures of God, nor do I know the unknown and unknowable, nor do I say to you that I am an angel; I but follow what is revealed to me’ 6:50, and: ‘and had I known the unknown and unknowable I would have had abundance of good and no evil would have touched me’ 7:188.

So, God arms His Prophets (as) with knowledge and miracles that they need in their mission, otherwise it is reason that is central. The Prophet Abraham (as), for instance, was engaging in rational dialogue with his people, but when he was thrown

in the fire, God intervened and changed its nature in a miraculous way. Prophets' miracles, according to Imam Ali al-Hadi (as), come to challenge society that was distinguished in medicine or witchcraft etc, but the main approach was conveying the revelations. And even when their people asked them specific things as a challenge to them, such as their request: 'We will never believe in you until you cause a fountain to gush forth from the earth for us. Or (until) you have a garden of date-palms and grapes in the midst of which you should cause rivers to flow forth, gushing out.' 17:90-1, the Prophet (sawa) would reply: 'Say: Glory be to my Lord; am I aught but a mortal messenger?' 17:93, confirming that he was not doing what they liked but what God wanted.

Imam al-Kadhim (as) was saying that the goal of prophethood was to help people know the power of God and His Dominion and to convey His Shari'ah so as to follow it as He wanted, because people cannot attain that knowledge and cannot know their responsibilities except through prophethood.

Now, the dynamics of the mind, i.e. utilising mental powers to acquire this knowledge, are to be taken from the Prophets (as) on different levels: the Imam (as) continues: '... so, the best of them in positive response is the most knowledgeable in God' since he has taken as the Prophets (as) those who are the most knowledgeable. '... and the most knowledgeable in God is the best of them, the most rational of them and attains the



highest level both in this life and the Hereafter.’ This is because it is reason which can achieve nearness to God for a person and which elevates him, as the narration says: ‘God rewards man according to the level of his mind.’

### The obligations of the knowledgeable

But this is not a privilege without obligation, otherwise how would the ignorant gain knowledge if the knowledgeable fail to teach them? The narration links both together: ‘God has not made it obligatory on the ignorant to learn until He has made it obligatory on the knowledgeable to teach;’ in other words, the knowledgeable – in all fields of knowledge – are not free not to teach others, and the powers they possess are not for them alone, but for the whole of society. Unfortunately, we see some of those who have knowledge abstain from teaching people, something which is condemned, especially in crucial times: ‘If innovations come to the fore, the knowledgeable person must come forward with his knowledge, and whoever fails to do so then, let him be cursed by God!’

### The rationalisation of thought

The obligation stretches to all people, since God calls all people to what betters their lives: ‘O you who believe! Answer (the call of) God and His Messenger when he calls you to that which gives you life’ 8:24, therefore, we must utilise reason and

adopt a rational approach in understanding Islam, in its fundamentals of belief as in its methods and dynamics, a rational approach that faces up to intellectual, economic and political challenges. Also, a rational attitude that helps every Muslim know that, regardless of any sectarian differences, it is forbidden to transgress on anyone's life, family or possessions. They must understand that any ruling that allows a Muslim to kill another without any justification that is dictated in the Book of God or the Sunnah of His Prophet (sawa) is a wrong ruling, and that God will bring to account whoever has issued it for not doing his best to understand the basis on which such rulings are issues.

We would like to use this opportunity, to call upon all Muslims and all the oppressed of the world to avoid getting overly involved within narrow circles, or even superficially involved in the issues that concern them, but they should look into what the others are planning to try to dominate you and marginalise your economy, politics and all affairs. Do not let yourself be fooled by fanaticism, whichever sect it belongs to and in whatever area – this fanaticism has nothing to do with Islam if it is causing destruction and fragmentation and death.

Even though the situation is tragic, and even though the oppressors work constantly to push us from one frenzied reaction to another, you must let your minds lead you to all good, and through planning with a cool mind, so that we can think and plan correctly for the good of everyone.

## (3)

## Evaluating Narrations

(This very short section of this chapter brings to attention a matter of utmost importance: how to evaluate the *hadiths* narrated from the Prophet (sawa) and the Imam (as) according to reason, in the centre of which is the narrations' conformity to the Qur'an.)

The Imams (as) warned us against accepting any narration before ensuring its conformity to the Holy Qur'an and that it does not contradict its verses in any way. Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq (as) said: 'When we speak/narrate, our speech conforms to the Qur'an.'<sup>14</sup> In another narration: "If you come across a *hadith* ascribed to me then scrutinize it against the Book of God: if it conforms to the Book of God, in this case accept it, and (but) if it contradicts it, in this case throw it against the wall!"<sup>15</sup> In yet another: 'Do not accept any *hadith* ascribed to us unless it conforms to the Book of God and the Sunnah of His Prophet (sawa).'<sup>16</sup>

Imam Ali (as) differentiates between two approaches in learning the narrations. He says: 'Handle (any) narration – in the way that you hear it – in a protective (reflective) way, not in a mere hearing-and-narrating way,' to understand the facts and nature of religion, and not merely to narrate words that do not

establish thought. Then he explains: ‘... for the narrators of knowledge are many, but its guardians are few.’<sup>17</sup> (In another narration, he described the Imams of Ahlul Bayt (as) as being those who followed that desired approach.) This is because people may memorise narrations, but they consume them without getting deep into the thought and opinions they imply. In this, the Imam (as) highlights the role of Ahlul Bayt (as) that is not just conveying the narrations of the Prophet (sawa), like others do, but they do this through studying the narration and its content, ensuring that it conforms to the Qur’an and the Sunnah and to reason, and any narration that failed these conditions was a fabrication – for fabrication did take place, something which made the Prophet (sawa) warn: ‘Whoever intentionally fabricates a speech and ascribes it to me guarantees his place in Hell.’<sup>18</sup>

In the above narration, Imam Ali (as) wants us to check each narration: is it reasonable or not? Does it conform to the two main authorities: the Qur’an and the Sunnah, or not? Does the narrated *hadith* conform to the nature of things and reality or not? All this is to ensure that the idea to be taken from the *hadith* is taken in an objective, scientific way that is based on study and analysis. Scholars say that if a given *hadith* contradicts what is absolutely established by reason, in this case the *hadith* must be either ignored or interpreted in a way that conforms to reason.

This matter covers the *hadiths* narrated from the Prophet (sawa) and the Imam (as), also the Divine *hadiths* and the like. You find some people – a lot these days – narrate *hadiths* without looking into their contents, and convey them to people, and these people then take the *hadiths* without ensuring the correctness of the content. For instance, some people accept anything from Bihar al-Anwar<sup>19</sup> without any scrutiny, neither in the narration chain nor in the content, although the author himself did not guarantee the correctness of what is in it – it is like the sea (*bahr*, pl. *bihar*), which has both pearls and stones. Moreover, the *hadiths* in the four books<sup>20</sup>: *al-Kafi*<sup>21</sup>, *Men La Yahduruhul-Faqih*<sup>22</sup>, *Tehthib al-Abkam*<sup>23</sup> and *al-Istibsar*<sup>24</sup>, are not considered correct in their entirety, but should be subjected to scrutiny of the narrators and the content.

Therefore, it is not enough to say that this *hadith* is narrated from so and so who was trustworthy; instead, but you have to scrutinise the nature and content of the *hadith* and whether it conforms to the absolutely established Qur'anic fact, and what is known for certain of the Sunnah, and check that it does not contradict what has been absolutely established by reason.

(4)

## Evaluating Deeds

(People are used to evaluating any deed – speech, act or gesture – according to their appearance, which is how they are done and the outcome. But those who believe in the Hereafter believe that the intention is part and parcel of the deed, as it determines whether the person in question did what he did for worldly benefits or to achieve God’s satisfaction with him, or both, and that is directly related to his reward in the Hereafter. In this short section of this chapter, we are introduced by the Prophet (sawa) to another dimension of the deed: the weight of reason in that deed.)

With regard to evaluating any deed by a person, be it in terms of its quantity or amount or the extent of rationality he has shown, the Prophet (sawa) emphasises that the value of deeds, or the value of the doer of good deeds, relates to his mental aptitude, for any deed requires two kinds of efforts: physical, involving your body and material expenditure, and mental, involving your awareness and your interaction with the values that the deed represents, such as that of good, justice, truth etc. According to your mental effort, in your private and public responsibilities, you, the doer, can attain a higher position.

The Prophet (sawa) says: **‘If you heard that a man is good,’** a good person, or one who strives to carry out useful things or projects for people, **‘then look into how good his mind is, for he shall be rewarded (in the Hereafter) according to his mind.’**<sup>25</sup> This means that you should not evaluate anyone through what he does only, but try to study the background of that deed and his awareness of that deed. Some people have limited awareness so that they become overwhelmed by the particulars of the deed itself, while others are quite aware of the different dimensions of the deed in its connection to people and life, and in its connection to the worship of God and the faithful adherence to His commands. God does not look into the form or appearance of the deed when He rewards the doer, but to the nature of what this deed has in relation to God, and to what it has in relation to people. Thus this evaluation covers both: the value of the deed in itself and also the effect it has on the lives of people and the development of life in general.

In another narration, although it mentions some deeds in particular, it is similar to the first; he (sawa) says: **‘If you see the man prays a lot and fast a lot, do not boast about (i.e. commend) by him until you have looked into his mind.’**<sup>26</sup> Do not give him a (high) evaluation based only on the external appearance of piety and belief, but study the internal activity before the external part of his act: how is his mind as far as

thought is concerned, how is his mind in terms of awareness of all the points that may feature in this deed, and how is his awareness of God, the Most High, in (intentionally) relating the deed to Him.

This implies that when Islam tries to build the social Islamic personality, it wants this personality to live in the internal area, i.e. to live in the intellect, spirit, and meaning of the deed, and in whichever dimension it stretches, so as to give the deed its form and value through its positive effect on life as a whole. This implies also that the person, if he wants his deed to expand in the hope of achieving big reward, must strive to shape his mental, spiritual and practical awareness of the deed, and on a level that can enable him to achieve nearness to God, and a level at which one can achieve development in thought, life and awareness.



(5)

## The minds of women

### Women's mind

One of the areas that we have to treat in our study of reason is the issue of the minds of women; has God created the woman with a mind that is inferior to that of men, or does she have the same mind as far as the ability to think, develop and indulge deeply in knowledge are concerned?

There is a common idea among people that the mind of the woman is inferior to the mind of the man; some have even reduced it further to make her mind less than one half of that of the man! In some narrations, the expression 'short in mind and religion' does appear, such as the narration that the Prophet (sawa) says, when addressing some women: 'I have not known anyone, apart from you, who is short in mind and religion and that has a negative effect on the decisive man! They asked: How is our religion and mind short, O Messenger of God? He replied: 'Is it not that the witness given by a woman is half the witness given by a man? They said: Yes. He said: 'This is being short of mind. Is it not that when she sees the menses, she abstains from praying and fasting?' They said: Yes. He said: 'This is being short of religion.'<sup>27</sup>

Also, it is narrated in *Nahj al-Balaghah* that Imam Ali (as) described women as short in mind, short in their share in inheritance, and

short in religion, and he explained that the fact that a witness account given by two women (in courts or the like) equals a witness account given by one man points to their shortfall in mind; and the fact that the share in inheritance of the male is double that of the female points to their shortfall in their share; and the fact that they abstain from praying and fasting at the time of the monthly period points to their shortfall in religion.<sup>28</sup>

Now, we want to study these narrations and ask: Does the explanation given mean that a woman has a mind that is inferior to the man's mind, or not?

#### Two women witnesses

When we look into the matter, especially the explanation that being short in mind is proven by the fact that two women giving witness equals one man giving witness, we find that the Qur'an – which says: 'so that if one of the two errs (through forgetfulness), the second of the two may remind the other' 2:282 in connection with this explanation – makes it obligatory that first the witness must be just, regardless of being a man or a woman, since 'error' comes either from forgetfulness or unawareness, and being a witness is a question of the senses, not the mind: did he or she witness that given incident or not? A person may forget, such as if he or she had witnessed a given incident then forgot it, and when comes to give his or her witness, he or she cannot remember. This has nothing to do with one's mind, male or female: God talked about Adam (as)

that he forgot: ‘We had already, beforehand, taken the covenant of Adam, but he forgot: and We did find in him firm resolve’ 20:115; also about some men: ‘Thus what you did when Our signs came unto you: you forgot them, so you will, this day, be forgotten (i.e. be forsaken)’ 20:126; some have even said that the human being (*insan*) was named likewise from forgetfulness (*nisian*).

So, forgetfulness is a natural state that happens to both men and women and stems from the elements within each of them that make them forget this and become unaware of that. Therefore, the Qur’anic verse is not talking about the mind of women, but it took the precaution for justice because witnesses represent a major element in court rulings; this is why witnesses must be just, but also they must be strong in their memory or eyesight; some specialists talked about women being less precise in this than men, so it deemed necessary that a second woman should attend so that if one forgets the other can remind her – this is not a question of shortfall in mind because adding one short mind to another does not produce a complete one.

Therefore, we say that: if one of the two women forgets, it is not that normal that the other forgets as well and we can draw from this that asking for two women as a replacement for one man does not stem from a shortfall in mind, but from a precaution for justice. This is supported by the fact that giving witness requires two just men, i.e. adding one man to another witness, which

means that one man is not enough; so it cannot be said that this is because he is short in mind. In other words, just as it is required to have two women to give witness, so it is required that, for the witness process to be complete, two men are required.

### The inheritance share

As for being short in the inheritance share, this relates to the verse: ‘the male shall have the like of the portion of two females’ 4:176; it was explained by Imam Ja’far as-Sadiq (as) (in *Wesa’il ash-Shi’ah* and other books) who was asked, in an objection to this edict: Ibn Abi al-‘awja<sup>29</sup> asked: How come a poor, weak woman takes one share, while the man takes two shares? So, some of the companions conveyed this to the Imam (as), who explained: ‘The woman has no obligation of fighting, family expenses or compensation (for killing etc); all that is for men. This is why He gave the woman one share and the man two shares.’<sup>30</sup> In another narration, Imam ar-Rida (as) replied on this particular question: ‘The reason why women were given, in inheritance, half what was given to men is that when she gets married the woman takes (a dowry) while the man gives; this is why God introduced this arrangement for men. Another reason for giving the male double what the female is given is that the female is part of the male’s dependants if she becomes in need, and he has to meet her expenses, and her alimony is also his responsibility, while the woman is not obliged to meet the expenses of the man, nor to give to him when he is in need; so

He introduced that arrangement for men.<sup>31</sup> The dowry features again in the explanations of the Imam (as); when as-Sadiq (as) asked why the male's inheritance is twice the female's, he said: 'Because of the dowry that God made for her.'<sup>32</sup>

To summarise: when God takes from the woman this share (from equality to the man's), He made obligatory on men things that He did not make obligatory on women – the woman provides no dowry, and no expenses, neither hers nor her husband's nor their children's, nor does she have to pay compensation, for it is the men amongst the relatives who have to pay that. In fact, the woman has a larger share than the man! To show it mathematically, say if someone dies and leaves one son and one daughter and £3000 as inheritance for them, the share of the son would be £2000 and the daughter £1000. If the latter puts it in the bank, then got married and took a dowry, she can add that to what she already has, while her brother, if he gets married, has to pay a dowry, rent a house and start to pay rent and meet the expenses of his wife, then those of the children that are born – including paying for their breastfeeding to their own mother, if she breastfeeds them and asks for payment, and including paying for the domestic chores (unless this was stipulated otherwise in the marriage contract, or if she volunteers to do these for free.) In this case: who is the one who has the greater share? I always say – as a joke – that men should demand equality with women!

Women's religious obligations

The third point is being short in religion, because women abstain from praying and fasting during the monthly period. This is true in the sense that they lose something by abstention from worship; however, this it is abiding by God's commands, which points to perfection in religion (not the contrary). We notice that a lot of women, when they go for pilgrimage or in the month of Ramadan, take 'the pill' that stops the menses so that they do not have to abstain from fasting, praying, circumambulation around the Ka'bah etc, and they may suffer a lot from that. So, this is a question of religious duty, and had it not been for God's prohibition from fasting and praying, they would have fasted and prayed.

Therefore, we say that the expression 'short in' these three things is to be left as a matter known to those who first used it, or that it is an expression of that era, just as some expressions may be used in a certain society as a result of certain situations, when other societies do not find them understandable. We can conclude from these explanations that the shortfall is in the form or the amount, not the content, which conforms, in all these matters, to the mind, to the proper share and to religion.

### **Common obligations and same mind**

Moreover, if women are mentally inferior to men God would have had less duties assigned to women than to men, since duties are related to the mental level that the person has; in this case, if

women had inferior minds or a mental shortfall, it would have been an injustice to make their obligations the same as men's, since God says: **'God does not impose upon any soul a duty but to the extent of its ability'** 2:286, as this involves asking them to do more than their capabilities permit – we see no difference between men and women in all religious obligations, both in duties and prohibitions, with the difference limited to things that relate to the menses and the like. And it cannot be said that the fact that the man, not the woman, is the one who has to meet the expenses of the family shows that women are inferior mentally, since this is because they are burdened with the menses, pregnancy, breastfeeding and the like, things that make their physical ability to shoulder the responsibility of the household less robust than men in this aspect, since this is more related to the physical side, not to the mental or emotional sides of the personality.

This is why we find that God, the Most High, talks about men and women in the same way, in both positive and negative situations and does not differentiate between them when they deviate from the right path. This is the same when we recite the instructions to men and woman: **'And it is not fitting for a believing man and a believing woman that they should have any option in their decision when God and His Messenger have decided a matter; and whoever disobeys God and His Messenger, he surely strays off a manifest straying (on the wrong path).'** 33:36; also when the reward is concerned: **'I will**

not waste the work of a any among you, be he male or female' 3:195 – just as the man gets his reward in the Hereafter, so will the woman, without any difference.

In some verses, we find the Qur'an talks in equal terms about men and women, each time listing them in both feminine and masculine expressions: 'Surely for men and women who are devoted to God (or, for Muslim men and Muslim women), and the believing men and the believing women, and the obeying men and the obeying women, and the truthful men and the truthful women, and the patient men and the patient women, and the humble men and the humble women, and the almsgiving men and the almsgiving women, and the fasting men and the fasting women, and the men who guard their private parts and the women who guard theirs, and the men who remember God much and the women who remember – God has prepared for them forgiveness and a mighty reward' 33:35. If women were less valued than men, they would not have been given equal reward – in the narrations of the Prophet (sawa) and the Imams (as), it is emphasised that God rewards the person according to his mental ability, therefore, if women are mentally inferior to men, they would not be rewarded equally.

### Women as a human example

We also notice that God sets women as examples of believers and of non-believers, on the basis that it is a human example



that manifests the idea, both positive and negative. On the negative side, He says: 'God sets forth as an example to those who disbelieve the wife of Noah and the wife of Lot: they were both under two of Our righteous servants, but they acted treacherously towards them so they profited nothing before God on their account, and it was said: Enter both the fire with those who enter' 66:10, giving these two non-believing women as examples for non-believers, without differentiating between men and women.

On the positive side, He says: 'And God sets forth an example to those who believe the wife of Pharaoh when she said: My Lord! Build for me a house, in nearness to You, in Paradise, and deliver me from Pharaoh and his doing, and deliver me from the wrong-doers among people' 66:11, telling believing men and women that this is an example of a believer who had the strength and will to reject worldly things for God and the Hereafter; so let her be a role model for both sexes. This woman rejected all wealth, all power and all luxury because she did not want to live with a non-believer, and so that God would accept her and let her enter Paradise – is there any mind greater than this! Then He gives another example: 'And Mary, the daughter of 'Imran, who guarded her chastity, so We breathed therein of Our inspiration and she accepted the truth of the words of her Lord and His Books, and she was of the devout ones' 66:12, talking about the Virgin Mary (as)

to represent the highest model; therefore He chose her and made her the Doyenne of the women of the world – this woman, who was subject to one of the most difficult experiences and succeeded to endure it steadfastly. God is calling on believing men and women to follow her example, as she was a role model for chasteness, obedience and submission to God and belief in His Books.

I mentioned in some of my lectures the Queen of Sheba, who was a non-believer, and her folk used to worship the sun: ‘I found her and her people prostrating (worshipping) to the sun instead of God, and Satan has made their deeds fair-seeming to them, and thus turned them from the (right) way, so they do not go aright’ 27:24; this queen has great capabilities and power, and a great throne, but this did not stop her from using her mind when Solomon (as) sent her his letter: ‘He said: We will see whether you have told the truth or whether you are of the liars. Go with this letter of mine, throw (deliver) it down to them, then turn away from them and (let us) see what (answer) they return’ 27:27-8. She gathered the elders of her people and consulted with them: ‘She said: O chieftains! I surely have had an honourable letter thrown unto me’ 27:29, as this was a sensitive matter and she felt that the man who sent the letter was a distinguished person: ‘It is from Solomon, and it is in the name of God, the Beneficent, the Merciful. Exalt not

yourselves against me, but come unto me in submission (to the true religion)' 27:30-1; he was saying to them that he had the power and they would not be able to resist it and he wanted them to submit to the rule of truth and belief. 'She said: O chieftains! Give me advice for my case: I decide no case unless you are in my presence' 27:32; i.e. you must participate in the decision as you are the elite of my people. It seems that those were not the kind of people who think, but regarded their role as one of power and defence against aggressors; she wanted them to utilise their minds, but they used their muscle: 'They said: We are possessors of strength and possessors of mighty prowess, and the command is yours, therefore (you) see what you will command' 27:33. So, she had to take the decision herself. 'She said: Surely the kings, when they enter a town, ruin it and humiliate the noblest of its people; and thus they (always) do. But I am sending them a present, and shall wait to see what (answer) the messengers bring back' 27:34-5. She waited to see what this man would do – thinking he is either a king or a prophet; if the former, then he will accept the present regarding it as a kind of peace offering or sign of submission, and with this we could evade the problem; and if the latter, in this case he is not after our country and rule but our thinking, so that we submit to God instead of the sun. The present arrived: 'So when he (the envoy) came to Solomon, he said: What! Will you help

me with wealth? But what God has given me is better than what He has given you; nay, you are exultant because of your present. Go back to them, so we will most certainly come to them with hosts which they shall have no power to oppose, and we will most certainly expel them therefrom in abasement, and they shall be in a state of ignominy' 27:36-7. She felt that the threat was serious, so she went to Solomon (as), discussed the matter with him and he called her to God, explaining the error of prostrating to the sun, and in the end 'She said: My Lord! Surely I have been unjust to myself, and I submit with Solomon to God, the Lord of the worlds' 27:44, retreating from her false beliefs, though keeping in her respected status – from start to finish she was using her mind, which led her to the truth.

This example gives the idea that there is amongst women those who are wiser than men: she invited the men of her folk to participate with her in thought so as to solve the new problem that befell them and which embodied threat, but they failed to offer thought; rather she provided it, she planned the response and she ended up convinced by what Solomon (as) was offering. The question here then is: if women are that short in mind, why does God, the Most High, present this example of a woman who had a mind that was better than that of men?

In light of this, we express our reservation on the standpoint of the Islamic jurisprudence that has been relying on the prophetic

narration ‘No people who have made a woman their leader will succeed’<sup>33</sup> to rule that women are not suitable for leadership.

### The question of *qewameh*

There is a claim that the *qewameh* of men over women gives the impression that women are short of mind, on the basis of the verse: ‘Men have *qewameh* over women (i.e. are in charge (or, the maintainers) of women) because God has made some of them excel others, and because they spend out of their property’ 4:34. Some may understand from *qewameh* the idea of superiority in authority or leadership, to the extent that some Qur’an commentators – in the forefront of whom is the renowned scholar and author of the *al-Mizan* Qur’an commentary Sayyid Mohammed Hosain at-Tebateba’i<sup>34</sup> (may God bless his soul) – regarded that the *qewameh* of the man over the woman is in everything. We, in our *Min Wahi al-Qur’an* commentary<sup>35</sup>, discussed this and said that this *qewameh* is exclusive to marital life only, and that *qewameh* is in the meaning of management, i.e. who is shouldering the responsibility on the physical side or the circumstances that make the man more capable than the woman in meeting the financial responsibility of their marital life, on the one hand, and that he is the one who is spending from his money, on the other. We also said that there is no situation other than marriage in which it is obligatory on the man to meet the expenses of the woman. In addition, we said that the guardianship

of the Prophet (sawa) and the Imam (as) over all people, is without differentiation between men and women; likewise the guardianship of the scholar – over those who give scholars that guardianship. The guardianship of the father as well: he is guardian of his children, both male and female.

Therefore, the *qewameh* of the man over the woman on the basis of her womanhood is non-existent, except in that she is a wife, because the husband meets her expenses and plays the management role – therefore, the *qewameh* is not comprehensive, as some rule, but is exclusive to marital life. And within marriage, the only difference is the man's obligation to meet the expenses and his right of divorce; the Qur'an says: **'and they have rights similar to those (of men) over them in a just manner, and the men are a degree above them' 2:228**, which is in the matters of expenditure and divorce – apart from that, scholars do not rule that there is anything that attains that level of importance.

### Women and gentleness

Some may base their argument on what the Qur'an describes: **'Is then one brought up among trinkets, and whom in contention is unable to be clear (in putting forward his or her argument)' 43:18**, i.e. the woman is raised wearing nice clothes and jewellery, making her inclined towards make-up and the like. But this does not make her inferior to the man as this – as can be

understood from the verse – is not related to the nature of women or the nature of her approach to Islam; it is, rather, a traditional social environment that has made women like this.

Moreover, the point that we have to look into, when we study the matter, is that women were generally outside the world of education, living as insignificant beings, or a human being of the second or third rank. This is why we find that when women started later to acquire knowledge and experience and started taking on responsibilities, they became more successful and realised themselves and their potential. We found women becoming heads of states and heads of a lot of important departments. All this means that the woman can develop and put things in their proper places. The human experience in all fields has given women the circumstances and opportunities to advance and develop in knowledge and management, this means that the woman is like the man in her ability to develop in thought, management and leadership, and may even beat the man in his speciality – the man may beat her, or they may come out equal.

To summarise: there is no proof up to this moment that the woman's mind is inferior to the man's; as for women's weakness, God does not talk about her weakness, but about the weakness of the human being: **'and man was created weak'** 4:28, but one should not accept the human being's submission to this weakness, but should strengthen the elements that can bring all human beings, men and women, out of this weakness.

## (6)

**The Good and The Bad****The good and the bad**

Among the verses through which God linked the positive and negative aspects of things to reason are these which talk about the good and the bad, both as an absolute concept and in their manifestations. In the verse: ‘Say: The bad (*kheebith*) and the good (*tayyib*) are not equal, though the abundance of the bad may attract you; so be God-fearing (or, righteous, guarding against evil), O you wise people, so that you may be successful.’ 5:100. The Qur’an presents the question of the good and the bad in life and tries to find a basis for differentiation between them, and shows how they cannot be equal. The word *kheebith* (bad) covers all that one finds dirty, whether in food and drink or in what does not conform to the fundamental elements of man’s life: ‘while as for that which is bad, only the useless comes forth (from it)’ 7:58.

In light of this, the term ‘*kheebith*’ is one of the words that relates to all elements that corrupt man’s life in all fields, while the term ‘*tayyib*’ (good) is its opposite, referring to whatever one finds good in taste as well as in all that is good in life. This also covers thought – there is good thought that leads one to advancement, development and good planning for life and the Hereafter, and bad thought that leads one to destruction and loss.



There is also the good person and bad person – this is mentioned in relation to marriage: ‘**Bad (or, corrupt, vile) women are for bad (or, corrupt, vile) men, and bad men are for bad women; good women are for good men and good men are for good women**’ 24:26. The bad is one that suffers from complexes towards people and life, and does not strive for good things in his attitude, behaviour and course in life; while the good is one whose heart is full of love of people through his love of God, goodness, justice and truth, so he strives for every good thing, both for himself and for others.

The issue extends to having a good economy and bad economy, good politics and bad politics, good society and bad society and so on, as the two concepts represent a wide concept that finds its application in most aspects of life.

When God, the Most High, addresses wise people saying ‘**Say: The bad (*khebiṭh*) and the good (*tayyib*) are not equal, though the abundance of the bad may attract you**’ 5:100, He wants to concentrate on a matter that is perhaps common amongst people, which is that people may follow the majority as a result of the psychological nature that tries to find security with the majority, because going with the minority makes them feel isolated, insecure and frightened, even though they have not looked into the content of each of the two groups. This is why we find that a lot of people who have succumbed to corrupt acts and who disobey God, use the excuse that society is like this –

people accept bribes, betrayal and disloyalty are common, lying and dishonesty are rife, so they say: We cannot live in isolation, all people are like this – do you want us to live in seclusion?! This argument is common amongst a lot of people. However, the verse implies that the abundance of the bad prevents any possibility of correction in society, as the elements of badness are the elements of corruption and as those who go that way increase, the circle of corruption becomes larger.

The point here is that God, the Almighty, is saying to you: when you want to take any stance, look into the nature and content of it to see whether it is good for you or not; that the people are doing or not doing it has no bearing on the moral value that it represents, as what is important here is quality not quantity. The matter here is that of the positive or negative outcome that relates to the life of the individual and of the society around him through its effects on its members. This is what Imam Ali (as) pointed to when he encouraged people to stay with the truth, so that the truth becomes their comforting companion – which is when you feel that your thought is that of the truth, and your attitude is that of the truth, even if other people fail to adopt this; the riches are in the value that you store in your being and existence, and imitating other people in what contradicts this value is not acceptable. After all, do these people realise the truth more than you – this is assuming that

you have, through close study of the matter, achieved truth? Do these people represent infallibility?

This is why in Islam responsibility is individual, and this is why it is you who have to ensure fulfilment of all aspects of your responsibility, regardless of how many people are with you in your course. Imam Ali (as) says: ‘Do not feel lonely on the path of guidance because those who are taking it are few, for people have gathered around a banquet at which achieving fullness is short-lived, and hunger is long-lived’<sup>36</sup>; a similar word from him is: ‘Do not feel comforted except by the truth and do not feel lonely except by falsehood.’<sup>37</sup> He (as) also talked regarding this point in personal terms: ‘The gathering of a lot of people around me does not make me mightier, nor their abandoning me (does make me feeling) more lonely,’<sup>38</sup> i.e. I feel powerful even if I am on my own because I trust the elements of power that have gathered in my personality through my conviction and through my relationship with God, the Most High, and if we assume that people would gather around me, this would not increase my self-confidence since these people are merely other people who are not infallible and also lack understanding of the values I have in my convictions.

Therefore, Islam emphasises that the majority does not always follow the right direction, just as the minority is not always in the wrong direction; and as one stands at the crossroads, one must study the elements of each direction, thoughtfully and

realistically, not just how they appear externally, but what they entail.

### Giving (good) alms

Since the Islamic Shari'ah made good things allowed and bad things forbidden, it commanded people that when they want to help the needed, their almsgiving should not be through giving forbidden bad things: 'and seek not the bad (with intent) to spend thereof (in alms) when you would not take it for yourselves save with disdain' 2:267. In other words, give to the needy from the good things that God has made allowable for you to own.

### Good words, bad words

In another area, the Qur'an talks about good speech and bad speech – good words extends to all that benefits people and betters their lives, while bad words do nothing for the needs of people, either in the present or in the future. It says: 'Have you not considered how God sets forth a parable of a good word (being) like a good tree, whose root is firm and whose branches are in heaven. Yielding its fruit at all times by the permission of its Lord? And God sets forth parables for men that they may reflect. And the parable of an evil word is as an evil tree pulled up from the earth's surface; it has no stability' 14:24-6.

### *Taqwa* (righteousness) is the best provision

*Taqwa* (righteousness, piety, guarding against evil or God-fearing) is defined in these terms: ‘That God does not find you where (in situations from which) He prohibited you, and does not miss you where (in situations to which) He commanded you’<sup>39</sup>; it is the deed in which this life and the Hereafter meet: good deeds meeting their good consequences, and responsibilities meeting their final outcome. It is therefore expected that righteousness (or piety, God-fearing, guarding against evil) is regarded as the best of your provisions in this world, as the Qur’an says: ‘So make provision for yourselves, for the best provision is God-fearing (or, righteousness, guarding against evil)’ 2:197, your provisions for the Hereafter are obtained from this life through your actions and deeds, all with awareness of God’s commands and prohibitions. This is expected from people who shape their mental capabilities for their ultimate success, as is expected from wise people – God links *taqwa* with reason as the verse continues: ‘...and be fearful of Me (or, guard against disobeying Me), O you wise people 2:197, i.e. sense My presence in your life, I know what you think just as I know what you do, both in secrecy and out in the open. This Divine call implies, in a wonderful link, that all issues are of the mind: ‘and be fearful of Me (or, guard against disobeying Me)’ means that when I call you to righteousness and piety, I am calling upon you to

turn to your mind and study the issue of goodness and badness in righteousness and its opposites, in benefits and loss; God wants man to resort to his mind when he embarks on any action, since the mind will only lead to goodness and success in both this life and the Hereafter.

### Encompassing positive as well as negative elements

The idea is that the verse ‘Say: The bad (*kheebith*) and the good (*tayyib*) are not equal, though the abundance of the bad may attract you; so be God-fearing (i.e. righteous), O you wise people, so that you may be successful.’ 5:100 wants man to observe inside his mind, in that he should study things in all the elements they encompass, for God, when He created the universe, He, in His Wisdom, installed in every phenomenon both positive and negative elements. However, some might think that there are some things that are absolutely negative, but when they study their effects and repercussions, they will find positive elements in addition to the negative aspects, something which we notice in people’s general impressions on earthquakes, volcanoes, storms, floods and the like, that leave negative effects on people, buildings and other things, but when we study these phenomena, we find that life needs them in other ways, as they may tip some situations into activity or bring beneficial outcomes or prepare the earth for new beginnings.

And since every person has, in his personality and attitude, both negative and positive elements, he must look at these phenomena and others according to their own elements, so as to judge whether they are good or bad. He must do this in isolation from what other people feel or say, as they base their judgement – in a lot of situations – on personal circumstances, or on a superficial mentality, or on certain criticisms or sensitivities or the like, not on close scrutiny and deep study of the nature of elements that are active in this or that direction.

In the verse **‘Say: The bad (*kheebith*) and the good (*tayyib*) are not equal, though the abundance of the bad may attract you’** the words ‘attract you’ imply that you should not abide by all that attracts you, because this can mean a superficial inclination on the level of the senses and feelings. What is needed here is to try to form a marriage between reason and emotions, so that reason takes from emotions some gentleness that clears away any stiffness in approach, while reason gives emotions some rationality, so that the emotions balance and act in the depth, not the surface.

### **The question of democracy**

This takes us to what people have become used to regarding the question of democracy – the political doctrine that is subject to the principle of the majority, and which has been adopted in a lot of political, social, partisan and economic situations, so that

adopting the rule of the majority has become the law that is followed by people today, and so that when they talk about democracy it is as if they are talking about a human axiom of thought, as if man has two choices: dictatorship or democracy. Naturally, no one chooses dictatorship. But, is the matter so? We have to discuss this matter, in isolation from all agitations or fervour, through the approach that we derive from the Qur'anic verse.

There are several points to consider:

First: when we study the foundations of thought about democracy, we find that the democratic system emphasises that the legitimacy in everything comes from the majority, or from their votes; everything that the majority gives its votes to represents legitimacy and, in contrast, everything that the majority rejects is illegitimate. This philosophical foundation of the democratic system extends to legislation, politics, economy, war, peace etc. Now we come to the Islamic approach to thought and – according to the democratic viewpoint – if the majority did not vote for Islam, Islam should lose its legal and political legitimacy. So, Islam will not attain its legitimacy unless the majority vote for it, in other words, Islam is not taken as a fact, the elements of which are found inside man in terms of his relationship with God, other human beings and life, in keeping with the universal system and the human system.



This stance is rejected by Islam as a religion, because Islam regards what was revealed by God and conveyed by His Messenger (sawa) is the truth, regardless of the different viewpoints and people's opinions; the main thing is the Divine revelation as it represents the infallible truth. Opinions – even after proper study – however, are not infallible. If any un-infallible scholar or specialist produces a commentary of the Qur'an, we discuss his commentary like we do the chain of narration of a *hadith*. But the religion itself has a truth: **'Surely the (true) religion before God is Islam (or, submission to His Will)' 3:19**, and Islam covers, in its general meaning, all Divine Messages, as every Message had its Islam (i.e. submission to God) until the matter ended up in the final Message.

Second: On the level of details, in a democratic system, if the majority votes for allowing Islamically-prohibited things or for the prohibition of Islamically-allowed things – as is the case in some Muslim and Western states which prohibit women's Islamic veil (*hijab*) or other things –, this will be sufficient for allowing or prohibition. Islam, however, rejects this course that leads to violation of its do's and don'ts, regardless of people's acceptance. This is a big differentiating feature between Islam and democracy on the level of details.

Third: In politics, we can apply the principle of majority within the *shoora* (consultation) principle, especially when the choice is between dictatorship and *shoora*, since dictatorship is rejected in

Islam. That said, this must be done within certain restraints, amongst which are the Islamic matters on which all Muslims agree. This includes that when the majority accepts to cast its votes, whether to elect the supreme leadership of the country, elect people's representatives in the legislature, to vote on laws that relate to public interests or otherwise, the general framework must encompass respect for Islam.

### **And leadership in Islam**

In this regard, we do not find – as far as Islam is concerned – that the leadership in the Muslim society is above the law. While we believe that the Prophet (sawa) is the supreme example of human beings, we, nonetheless, find him during his final days, in his last illness before death, saying to people: **'You cannot hold me (for failing) in a single thing: I have not ruled on the allowable except what God made allowable, and have not prohibited except what God prohibited'**<sup>40</sup> as if saying to them: I have called you to Islam in its do's and don'ts and in my conduct I did just that. That said, there does exist a guardianship at executive level that is subject to the general interest of the people.

Therefore, as we live in this era where the infallible is not present, there is a political need for a leader, and since there is a dispute between those who believe in the guardianship of the scholars and those who do not believe in this, but believe in

*shoora*, we say: we have to respect others and seek their opinion through their conviction, because even those who believe in the guardianship of scholars mix the two together and, so, invite the people for election. The idea is: it is quite possible, whether on political level, a social level in association etc, on an economic level in companies etc, or in any other fields, if achieving absolute consensus proves impossible, accepting the majority principle may become decisive, or the rule in the fields that relate to the details or execution of laws. The matter is perhaps – as the supporters of democracy say –: ‘Democracy may not be the best system, but it is the least bad!’<sup>1</sup>

God, the Most High, emphasises that the majority is not always on the side of falsehood, just as they are not always on the side of the truth; the same applies to the minority. Therefore, search for the principle elements of the thing before decision.

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<sup>1</sup> *Nahj al-Balaghah*, sermon no. 91.

<sup>2</sup> *Al-Kafi*, al-Kulaini, vol.1, p.91.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> *Al-Hidayeh*, as-Sedooq, p.14.

<sup>5</sup> Abu Ja’far, Mohammed bin Muslim al-Kufi, a famous companion of Imam Mohammed al-Baqir (as) and his son Imam Ja’far as-Sadiq (as). He narrated

more than two thousand and two hundred of the *hadiths* of the two Imams. A scholar to whom people used to turn to for Islamic rulings, he wrote a book on Islamic jurisprudence entitled *al-Arba'mi'eh* (The Four Hundred). (*The translator.*)

<sup>6</sup> *At-Tawhid*, as-Sedooq, p.456.

<sup>7</sup> *Al-Kafi*, vol.1, p.93.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p.100.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p.86.

<sup>10</sup> *Uyoon al-Hikem wel-Mewa'id*, Ali bin Mohammed al-Wasiti al-Laithi, p.416.

<sup>11</sup> *Al-Kafi*, vol.1, p.26.

<sup>12</sup> *Tefsir Mejma' al-Beyan* (Qur'an commentary), at-Tibrisi, vol.10, p.86; *Tefsir ath-Tha'labi* (Qur'an commentary), vol.10, p.10; *Kenz al-Ommal*, al-Motteqi al-Hindi, vol.7, p.214.

<sup>13</sup> *Al-Kafi*, vol.1, p.13.

<sup>14</sup> *Bihar al-Anwar*, al-Majlisi, vol.2, p.250.

<sup>15</sup> *At-Tibyan*, vol.1, p.5.

<sup>16</sup> *Wesa'il ash-Shi'ah*, al-Amili, vol.18, p.89.

<sup>17</sup> *Nahj al-Balaghah*, Mohammed Abdoh commentary, vol.4, p.22.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, vol.2, p.182.

<sup>19</sup> *Bihar al-Anwar* (The Seas of Lights), by Mohammed Baqir al-Majlisi, (1616-89 AD) is considered, in its 110 volumes, to be the largest collection of *hadith* narrated from the Prophet (sawa) and Ahlul Bayt (as).

<sup>20</sup> These four books are the main books of *hadith* in the school of Ahlul Bayt (as), i.e. the Shi'ite school. However, unlike how similar books in the other schools are considered, none of them is considered to contain only correct narrations; therefore, every narration should be subjected to scrutiny and study to see if it qualifies as correct or not. (*The translator.*)

<sup>21</sup> *Al-Kafi* (The Sufficient), by Abu Ja'far Mohammed bin Yaqub bin Ishaq al-Kulaini ar-Razi, (died 939 or 940 AD); this book is considered the most important amongst the four books; it contains around 16,000 narrations. (*The translator.*)

<sup>22</sup> *Men La Yahduruhul-Faqih* (Whom the Scholar is not at His Disposal), by Abu Ja'far Mohammed bin Ali bin Babawaih al-Qommi, (died 911 AD), known as Sheikh as-Sedouq (truthful); he is considered one of the most

important tradition scholars; his works are said to exceed 300. (*The translator.*)

<sup>23</sup> *Tehthib al-Ahkam* (The Refinement of the Laws), by Abu Ja'far Mohammed bin al-Hasan al-Tusi (died 1070 AD); the founder of the school of Najaf, which is considered to be the main focal point of Shi'ite scholarship to the present day. (*The translator.*)

<sup>24</sup> *Al-Istibsar* (The Enlightenment), by Abu Ja'far Mohammed bin al-Hasan al-Tusi (died 1071 AD). (*The translator.*)

<sup>25</sup> *Al-Kafi*, vol.1, p.12.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p.26.

<sup>27</sup> *Sahih al-Bukhari*, Mohammed bin Isma'il al-Bukhari, vol.1, p.78.

<sup>28</sup> *Nahj al-Balaghah*, Mohammed Abdoh commentary, vol.1, p.129.

<sup>29</sup> Abdul Karim ibn Abi al-'Awja', was one of those who were called *zenadiqeh*, i.e. doubters amongst Muslims who openly declared their doubts, even ridicule, of the Shari'ah. Imam as-Sadiq (as) did not see any problem in engaging in dialogue with him and others, even at the Sacred Mosque in Mecca; each time the Imam (as) tried to show them the divinity of the Shari'ah and its correctness, without resorting to violence or the imposition of beliefs on them, like that which has been witnessed throughout the centuries throughout the world, something which both Muslims and non-Muslims should learn to do. (*The translator.*)

<sup>30</sup> *Wesa'il ash-Shi'ah*, vol.26, p.93.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p.95.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> *Al-Khilaf*, Sheikh At-Tusi, vol.6, p.213.

<sup>34</sup> Mohammed Hosain at-Tebateba'i (1892-1992), famous Iranian scholar, philosopher and poet. He left many works including the 20-volume Qur'an commentary, *al-Mizan fi Tefsir al-Qur'an* (Balance in Interpreting the Qur'an), which is one of the most famous and widely used commentaries on the Holy Book in the school of Ahlul Bayt (as). (*The translator.*)

<sup>35</sup> *Min Wabi al-Qur'an* (What is Implied and What can be Derived from the Qur'an), a 24-volume commentary of the Holy Qur'an by Sayyid Mohammed Hosain Fadlollah (1935- ), the famous Islamic scholar, reformer, preacher, and a prolific author of Islamic books on fundamental principles, Qur'anic jurisprudence, supplication, and books on historic, social and political subjects. (*The translator.*)

<sup>36</sup> *Nahj al-Balaghah*, Mohammed Abdoh commentary, vol.2, p.181. (*The translator.*)

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p.13.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, vol.3, p.62.

<sup>39</sup> Such was the advice offered by Imam as-Sadiq (as) – see *Tuhaf al-Uqool*, p.359 and *Wesa'il ash-Shi'ah*, vol.15, p.239.

<sup>40</sup> *At-Tabaqat al-Kobra*, Ibn Sa'd, vol.2, p.256.

<sup>41</sup> Democracy may produce rulers whom the people elect according to their declared manifesto, but who, when they gain power, turn back on their promises. Worse still, democracy may result in dictatorships, one of the worst known examples of which is the Nazis who came to power through a democratic election in 1933, but in a matter of six years they had started a war that claimed more than fifty million lives, more by far than any other war in history. (*The translator.*)

## Chapter 9

### Applications II

- Capital Punishment

#### Awareness of the obligations' dimensions

Belonging to Islam means that one has to have awareness of the faith so that one lives with the idea of this ruling or that concept, and also to be able to confront the questions raised by opponents or sceptics against certain rulings. We admit that we may not have full knowledge of some particulars or arguments of some Islamic edicts, such as regarding the number of daily prayers and their details, however God has given us knowledge of the spiritual and practical benefits of praying: **'surely prayer keeps (one) away from indecency and unjust deeds'** '29:45, i.e. He wants us to be aware of what we say in prayer so as to achieve insight when we complete the prayer. The same goes for fasting, God explains the wisdom behind it: **'O you who believe! Fasting is prescribed for you, as it was prescribed for those before you, so that you may guard (against evil.'**

**2:183**, i.e. that fasting should create a spiritual and practical immunity in both mind and body.

In light of this, we have to engage in a thinking process regarding the do's and don'ts of the Shari'ah; this is not new, as we find a lot of narrations responding to questions raised by the companions of the Prophet (sawa) and the Imams (as), in which we also find that they did not respond with rebuke or insist that the enquirer should follow the ruling without questioning it, as is the case with a lot of scholars nowadays. When we read books like *'ilele ash-Shera'i'* in which Sheikh as-Sedouq compiled the narrations relating to the wisdom behind the rulings, especially those narrated from Imam Ali ar-Rida (as), we realise that God wants man to pursue knowledge in the Shari'ah to the highest possible degree so that he can present Islam to the world with rulings and the concepts they encompass and also the general concepts of the Islamic approach in thinking. This is what enables us to convey Islam to the new generations, especially now that university graduates raise a lot of questions about anything presented to them, and so we have to do our best to answer their queries, otherwise these may continue to lurk inside the person and may result in more questions and even doubts about the edicts of the Shari'ah, or about the Islamic concepts and approach.

In addition, the intellectual accumulation of the world today produces a lot of questions, especially when it is used in



political campaigns through which the enemies of Islam try to utilise intellectual issues to weakening the political stance, saying, implicitly, that Islam is a religion that cannot produce civilisation or develop human beings. This is why the bearers of the Islamic Message must mobilise their intellectual powers as if facing an emergency, reading all the time, thinking all the time, and asking about everything, so that they become capable of conveying Islam to people. Leadership that is knowledgeable of the era it is living in and of the changes taking place all the time will, then, be the only kind of leadership that can live up to the challenges and needs of today.

### **Punishment gives life**

The Qur'an says: 'And there is life for you in fair retribution, O wise people, that you may guard yourselves (against evil' 2:179, emphasising the role of reason in understanding the wisdom behind punishment as an Islamic ruling. God, the Almighty, wants people to think about the foundation on which any ruling is based and the results that it can effect on man and life, so that our treatment of the rulings is not mere worship and devotion without thinking, notwithstanding the fact that abiding by the ruling is in the first instance submission to God and His Messenger (sawa) in all that God commanded: 'And it is not fitting for a believing man and a believing woman that they should have any

option about a decision when God and His Messenger have decided a matter' 33:36, which means that believing men and women have to execute God's command if it is proven that He has commanded it. However, this kind of submission and surrender to God does not mean that God does not want people to think about the theoretical side of the ruling.

In this chapter, we shall discuss the question of punishment, and capital punishment for murderers in particular, an issue that has been causing a lot of dispute, both within the Islamic circle and beyond, as the world is still divided into those who believe in keeping this punishment and those who believe that this kind of punishment is inhumane, to the extent that some international bodies, such as the European Union, regard capital punishment as a violation of human rights, and this is why they take negative stance towards the countries that execute killers. Turkey is a living example of this: the European Union has made it conditional for Turkey to join the Union to remove capital punishment from its penal legislation. In other instances, we find the same country experiencing differences in this issue, such as the United States, where certain states have capital punishment while others do not. The question marks over this issue are raised on various levels: in some cases those who reject capital punishment – as a punishment for murder – present their argument on a general level, while for others, the argument is on an Islamic or religious level.

## Religions integrate in leading society

We see criticism of Islam because it adopts the execution of killers, with some perhaps regarding Islam as the only religion that has that stance. But this is not the case, for when we read the Qur'anic verses that relate to this issue, we find that the ruling is not unique – the Qur'an says that the Jews have this ruling in the Torah: 'And We prescribed to them in it (the Torah) that (the punishment should be) a life for a life, and an eye for an eye, and a nose for a nose, and an ear for an ear, and a tooth for a tooth, and (that there is) fair retribution in wounds; but for him who remits the retaliation by way of charity, it shall be an atonement for him' 5:45; also telling the story of Cain and Abel, the Qur'an explains that God wanted that incident to produce the ruling that stays for all times on the basis that the matter was not related to Cain and Abel in particular, but that it was the principle of the question of aggression on life itself: 'For this reason did We ordain it for the children of Israel that whoever slays a soul, unless it be by manslaughter or on account of mischief in the land, it is as though he slew all mankind; and whoever saves a life, it is as though he saves all mankind' 5:32.

The matter is not a question of numbers or quantity, since whoever transgresses on one innocent human being is someone who does not respect life and, therefore, he has within him the

desire to finish people's lives. This was the first ruling, written in the Torah in the Message of Moses (as), as before him there was no comprehensive collection of rulings, either in Noah's Message or Abraham's Message – the term 'the Book' often means the three Books: the Torah, the Bible and the Qur'an. The matter here is the principle of respecting life, which makes man strive to protect it, for himself and for the others.

When we look into the Christians' stance in this matter, we cannot find a clear ruling, but the continuation of the Message of Moses (as) with Jesus (as) shows that there is no difference between them: **'And when Jesus, son of Mary, said: O children of Israel! Surely I am the Messenger of God to you, verifying that which is before me of the Torah and giving the good news of a Messenger who will come after me, his name being Ahmed. But when he came to them with clear signs they said: This is evident sorcery' 61:6**, which means the Torah is the Book which he (as) fully approved of and he adopted all that is in it, apart from some of the rulings that he (as) changed, as the Qur'an, repeating his words, puts it: **'and that I may allow you some of that which was forbidden to you' 3:50**. These two verses are the Qur'anic evidence in this regard and we believe that the Qur'an is correct throughout.

In light of this, we can object to what some Islamic writers do, in differentiating between the religions of Moses (as) and Jesus (as): they suggest that the former leans more towards the

materialistic outlook and the latter more towards the spiritual. But their claim is baseless and meaningless, because the overall framework of the Messages is that God sends His Messengers to direct people towards a state of justice and balance, while protecting public order, and founding their relationships on human basis, in addition to the spiritual values that link them to their Lord and open their hearts, feelings and minds to Him, activating all their positions and choices to win His satisfaction and nearness, all based on the foundation of God's Oneness that is the central point in all religions. This is why the issue of religious rulings takes note of the development of society in the diversifying nature of its needs, challenges and circumstances, something which is a necessity for any Message: 'Certainly We sent Our Messengers with clear signs, and sent down with them the Book and the balance so that mankind may uphold justice' 57:25; all Messages and all Messengers (as) were sent by God so that people uphold justice.

### **Religion is for the earth not the heavens!**

The question is, then: how can the people uphold justice and how can they ensure that chaos does not arise? We used to say, in some discussions, to those who claimed that religion has nothing to do with life: religion, as described in the Qur'an, emphasises that it (religion) is at the heart of life and that there exists no place in life where religion plays no role, because

everything in this world, whether in the relationship with God or with others, or in political, social, economic or any other relationships, in all this there is either justice or injustice taking place, and the role of religion is to fight injustice of any sort.

It may be, therefore, useful to attract attention to the fact that God did not create His religious commands for the heavens; rather they were for this earth and man: **‘O you who believe! Answer (the call of) God and His Messenger when he calls you to that which gives you life’ 8:24**; He wanted man to build in this life – materialistic, spiritual and cultural building. So, saying that religion has nothing to do with life or law or politics is a joke, or just talk without scientific basis. And we can say that the question of capital punishment for the murderer who has intentionally killed an innocent man is a religious stance, not only Islamic, but one that all religions abide by.

### **And religion is for all human beings**

Moreover, the Islamic Shari’ah was not made for the angels, but for human beings with all the elements of their personality – weaknesses as well as strengths, and internal as well as external issues. Also, although obvious, it is perhaps useful to point out that the Shari’ah is for application in real life and the more realistic a given ruling is, so that it harmonises with the elements of human personality, the more it is possible for it to

be adopted and obeyed. Any legislation that is too idealistic to be implemented in practice will fail to step beyond its theoretical ambit.

And if some people say that the Islamic direction is the idealistic one, not a materialistic one, we have to establish first what is meant by an idealistic direction. Sometimes, what is meant by the idealistic direction is that a person looks forward only to the summit, like someone who is watching a wonderful piece of art without gaining anything from it apart from that feeling of beauty – this stays within the arena of feeling without passing into reality. But the idealism that Islam is linked to is one of values: the spiritual, straightforwardness, chastity and the protection of life's values. These values can be activated in reality so that they become phenomena in a man's life, as they are facilitated and adopted by a realistic mechanism within man's power, will and capabilities, and have external and internal effects on the personality.

In light of this, we have to understand that the Shari'ah is for the earth, and people's life on earth, not for heavens, and if it was revealed down from heaven we can liken this to the rain that comes down from the skies to the earth to benefit the earth, and like the light that comes out of the sun and falls on the earth; however, both rain and light continue to be phenomena of the earth. The Shari'ah, although Divine in source, is utilised through the earthly elements of man.

### **Is retribution life or death?!**

The verse ‘**And there is life for you in fair retribution, O wise people, that you may guard yourselves (against evil)**’ 2:179 wants us to think: does fair retribution represent a law that life needs and in the interest of human beings? Does it conform to human developments in the issue of dealing with crime after the development of penal law in the world? How come the Holy Qur’an describes retribution as life when it annihilates it?

On the basis of this: how can we present the retribution ruling as legislation that is in the interest of man?

### **Deterrence to protect society**

First, let us imagine a society with no punishment whatsoever, in which people do whatever they like and follow their tastes and desire and any other negative human characteristics or complexes – what would that society be like? It would be a society of chaos, in which criminals are free to murder others without any deterrent. The matter extends beyond killing one person to killing society, or a lot of its members, something which we see in those who commit wholesale crimes using what man has recently produced, such as atomic weapons, missiles, explosives and similar means of destruction and annihilation. How would peoples’ lives be in a society such as that? Such a society would fail to secure a safe and secure life



for the individual, as he would be living with continuous worry for his life, whether in his home or at work or anywhere, since there is nothing to deter the criminal or deviant person from doing anything that victimises that person.

In many places in the world, we know that some people do not leave home at night or walk any distance for fear of criminals or gangs that kill people and steal their possession, because there is no deterrent, either because of the location of the place or the abnormal circumstances that the country finds itself in.

This is why we say that capital punishment serves as a deterrent to prevent murder from becoming normal in the society, and to reduce the motive in whoever is intending to commit murder, it is thus preserving his life as well. That said, capital punishment will not end this crime completely, but it will reduce it a great deal. This is noticed when comparing countries that adopt capital punishment and countries that do not, although some of the former are backward and primitive while some of the latter are civilised. When we look at the case of the United States, which some people – rightly or wrongly – regard as being at the top of the advanced, civilised and developed countries, in those states that abolished capital punishment and replaced it with life imprisonment, we find that there are some streets that security officers cannot enter at night as criminals have taken charge; this is why crime increases, making the United States suffer from more crimes – according to statistics –

than what is called the Third World. This is because execution of murderers represents a law of deterrence, even if it may be implemented wrongly, while other countries have no sufficient deterrent, even if murderers are sent to life imprisonment. This is what appears when looking into the matter on the ground, or in reality.

### **Education and upbringing**

When looking into the matter from a theoretical viewpoint, some people may think that education, preaching and good upbringing can become the alternative to this harsh punishment, on the basis that when man becomes civilised he will abstain from crime or harm to others, as he will become a law abiding citizen, respectful of values. In this way – according to such belief – through intellectual means we can prevent crime, especially murder, from being committed in society. However, we note on this opinion that when we study man in his points of strength and weakness, in all his familial, social, economic, political affairs, in both war and peace, we find that he needs two elements in his personality so that his course to achieve his goals stays straight and acceptable:

The first element is reason, which plans for thought, studies its details, and its negative and positive aspects, so as to judge whether it is something to abstain from, or the opposite, i.e.

that is something positive and life needs it. In all human affairs, since the beginning of human life and until now, any project – private or public – begins with an idea, then this idea finds its way into implementation so that the project becomes realistic. However, the idea is not enough on its own to execute and fulfil the project without the second element.

The second element is will, as transforming the idea into reality calls for will that can bear all the negative results of the idea during implementation. The project may place you in psychological, financial or social impoverishment etc, and this feeling of impoverishment can affect the person, weakening his resolve when faced with many external factors that may push him to commit what is not lawful for him to do, wrongdoing others and transgressing on their rights. The matter can also be subject to some psychological complexes and internal factors that make him experience the desire to commit crime or to commit murder, pushing his will towards that criminal act, to find himself about to commit crime without any obstacle because he is unaware of observing his obligations towards God or towards others. Here the role of punitive legislation comes in, to be the external element that puts pressure on the person to strengthen his will to abstain from crime, knowing that if he does commits such acts, he will be imprisoned or executed. It is man's attraction to crime that made the penal code – in all its diversity – necessary, so as to strengthen motivation towards

the good within him and weaken motivation towards evil, persuading his will to act in the direction of good and away from evil.

This is why we find penal codes in primitive nations just as we find them in advanced civilised nations, because man realises that if no penal code exists, life will cease to have stability and order and man will cease to feel stability, security and safety. In light of this, the legislation of capital punishment comes as an external legal element that exerts pressure on the will of people so as to prevent them falling into crime.

### **Question marks over capital punishment**

Three question marks can be raised over capital punishment, two of which are general while the third relates to the Islamic Shari'ah and its dimensions in particular.

#### The first question mark

The legislation of execution of convicted murderers represents treating one crime with a similar punishment, on the basis that the killer's behaviour resulted in taking the life of the victim; so if the gravity of the crime relates to the gravity of ending life, then this applies to the execution of the killer as well. In other words, if life is sacred, it must be preserved wherever it exists, so what is the difference between the sacredness of this life and that life? This argument is still presented by many people in the world.

The second question mark

When we study the personality of the criminal and his motives, we see that these motives do not necessarily stem from his particular nature, but may stem from the influence of external factors; he is a person whose surrounding circumstances and environmental context can be seen to impose a mentality of crime on him. So, crime comes from a complex of circumstances that imposes itself on him, exactly like any psychological illness that takes place as a result of some negative factors in the family or the environment, or some shocks in life leading to unsettling of his personality.

Those upholding this opinion conclude that we have to treat the murderous criminal with psychological therapies, and admit him into mental institutes and hospitals to look into the factors which have been affecting his behaviour, so as to prevent their effects on his personality or society – rather than just hanging him or putting him in the electric chair or using any other execution method.

This viewpoint, as a whole, looks upon the criminal as a psychologically deranged or diseased person, like any one suffering from psychological illness, or physical illness for that matter, in both the need to study the causes of the illness and the way treatment with suitable methods should follow.

### The third question mark

This relates to the human aspect in Islam, or in all religions that are based on a merciful stance. The Qur'an emphasises mercy in many verses such as: 'And We have not sent you but as a mercy to all creatures' 21:107, 'Certainly a Messenger has come to you from among yourselves; grievous to him is your falling into distress, and he is full of concern for you; to the believers (he is) kind and merciful' 9:128 and 'exhort one another to patience and exhort one another to (show) compassion' 90:17. Islam, in its depth and in all its aspects of values and legislation, proceeds from a stance of mercy and the Message is the door that opens to mercy in all its colours. Therefore – according to some – this mercy does not conform to the adoption of capital punishment for murderers; rather it is more appropriate to open the door of repentance and pardon. These are the three question marks raised by a lot of people in both the Islamic circle and in the world at large.

### The first question mark – retribution is another crime

When we look into the roots of these question marks we find that those who raise such objections come from the individualistic standpoint that regards the individual as everything; they state that we have to give the individual all value and to provide him with all care and protection, so as to give him peace; the individual is the one on whom mercy should

be targeted, and since transgressing against life is the issue at hand, in this case we have to protect the life of the killer as well, or to treat him as someone who is ill and needs treatment. Society, on the other hand, does not enjoy that same concern for its peace and safety from the people taking that stand.

Islam, in its treatment of man's issues, however, proceeds from a realistic viewpoint that aims at protecting the individual in addition to protecting others, so that anything that harms his body and mind is prohibited, i.e. God does not give man freedom to harm his life, and He wants him to seek protection from any others who want to harm him; this is on the individualistic side of things.

But God also wants to protect society, as Islam represents balance –it balances between one's duties towards this life and one's duties towards the Hereafter; the same applies to the balance that Islam wants to strike between the individual and society, so that the individual's freedom ends when society's freedom starts. It is, then, to be expected that Islam wants to strike a balance between the safety of the individual and that of society – but neither for society to persecute the individual through its establishments, nor for the individual to harm society. In light of this, Islam's respect of the individual is in the fields where society's safety is not threatened, since the safety of society is more important than that of the individual.

But even when it comes to the individuals themselves, when murder is committed, there is a difference between the life of the killer and that of his victim. This is because when the murderer committed his crime, he did so against an innocent person, whoever he killed, his wife, his brother, neighbour or someone weak, and he committed a crime against humanity since the victim did no crime for which he deserved killing. When the killer is executed, i.e. annihilated, he is being annihilated on the basis that he has annihilated the life of another human being with whom there existed no legitimacy for annihilating him – the Qur’an says: ‘whoever slays a soul, unless it be by manslaughter or on account of mischief in the land, it is as though he slew all mankind’ 5:32.

The execution of convicted murderers is the two-pronged treatment of a murder incident: on the one hand it deals with the matter in its private circle, the circle of the killer and the victim, so as to stop it taking a more serious turn when it creates for society a problem bigger than the one at hand. This may occur when one person kills another, and the matter is not restricted to the crime that befell the victim, but is connected to all that is related to the victim – relatives, friends and all of his other relationships. This is something that we notice in murder cases where we see anger, group instincts, tribal spirit and the like escalate to create a big problem for society, making those related to both the killer and his victim



live in a dangerous state of tension. The execution of the murderer himself is bound to fuel this psychological tension and may cause an outbreak of killings in the ensuing chaos. This is what the Qur'an deals with: 'and whoever is slain unjustly, We have indeed given to his heir authority (to demand retribution or to forgive), so let him not exceed the just limits in slaying; surely he will be aided' 17:33 – the right that God Has given to the heirs is to kill the murderer, but it is not allowed to kill anyone from amongst his relations. This punishment aims, therefore, to deal with the agitation and anger that, if left to escalate, may cause further loss of life, and by this means aims to keep the matter within the private circle.

The second element of this treatment is the deterrent such punishment creates when someone thinking of committing murder knows that he will be killed in retribution when the authorities or the victim's heirs capture him, so he will think twice. Although this may not stop such crime altogether, there is no doubt that it is bound to reduce a lot of it. This is on the one hand.

On the other, we have to think about the matter from the standpoint of principle, that God, the Almighty wants us to take a decisive position towards injustice, and there is no doubt that the person who kills another intentionally and without any justification, as opposed to cases of self-defence or in

defence of the homeland or the like, has inflicted injustice against the victim. The matter relates, therefore, to confronting injustice through making it known to the wrongdoer that he will face retribution, so as to discourage him from committing injustice. This is what all religions, which are concerned with enjoining good and forbidding evil, want to do: a process of stopping evil before it takes place, or preventing man from committing evil.

### The second question mark – crime and psychological illness

As we mentioned, there is a widely-held idea nowadays that murderers are mentally ill or deranged people and it is, therefore, appropriate to treat them as such in mental institutes or hospitals, so that we can analyse their personalities and see why they did what they did and try to treat them accordingly. If we followed this notion that every criminal is a psychologically ill person, we would have to close all prisons, or abolish the penal law and fill the world with mental hospitals! We comment on this widespread argument as follows:

First, this idea is not quite correct since regarding every crime as a psychological problem cannot be comprehensive, for not everyone who commits a crime is psychologically ill or deranged, as there are a lot of cases of people killing as a result of agitation or a temporary state of emotion, when they do not

have a criminal mentality in their normal life – this is why you find them killing then regretting what they have done; a lot of crimes are committed as a result of such temporary states or situations.

There are also crimes committed within tribal traditions, as when a person from a certain tribe is killed, then all the members of the killer's tribe become target for the victim's tribe, especially if the victim was one of their dignitaries or elders. Such killings are not because of mental illness, but because the killer is under tribal pressure that makes him unable to resist, or he may resort to revenge to satisfy his tribe. So, the matter does not stem from psychological problems, but from external factors, either temporary, or rooted in traditions that extend beyond one's personal circle to the social circle.

This type of killing is not exclusive to tribalism, but extends to a lot of partisan situations, and some local or even international political bodies may resort to revenge for someone killed from among their people, by killing the killer, or even other people if the killer is not caught.

We want to conclude that crimes that are a result of psychological or mental stress do exist, but only in some cases; they do not represent the bulk of crimes, and certainly not all crimes everywhere and of all kinds. From the standpoint of legislation, Islam views things on a general and comprehensive level, but in application, each case is studied according to its

merits as some particulars may have certain elements that prevent going ahead with this ruling or that. So, the aggressor will be studied to see if he does have a psychological complex that prevents him from choosing, so that he goes ahead with the crime through a state of abnormal insensitivity or lack of willpower, and to check that he is not suffering from schizophrenia or some sort of mental derangement, or was in a situation in which he did not mean to kill but only threatened to do so, but then he did commit murder due to all circumstances around him; in all such cases he is not to be executed.

A murderer is to be executed if he chose to kill and did so intentionally, meaning that he did have a choice to go ahead with his crime or not. Islam says that if the criminal is suffering from psychological illness that prevents him from choosing in a matter, and that he did what he did through a lack of awareness or a lack of mental capacity, in this case he is not responsible. However, if he is not like that, but has proceeded with his crime through his own decision, in this case, he is regarded a criminal because he has had the choice not to go ahead with his crime.

Second, this idea does not suggest abandoning capital punishment as part of the legislation to deal decisively with crimes, especially crimes that target people's life; since if we assume that the matter is like they claim it to be, how can we solve the problem of the psychological illness that was behind crime?

## The social dimension of capital punishment

There is individual-bound thinking and there is society-bound thinking. The former looks to the individual as a case that calls for medical treatment so that he continues to be an effective element in life, while the latter gives precedence to society, and its security and stability. We have, here, to look into the opinion that there are cases that call for psychological treatment in mental institutes; however the available statistics fail to provide proof that this is the answer. Let us look into the prisons in the world today, not our world that is called backward, developing or third, but in America and Europe in which prisoners benefit from the best tools and means in the field of psychology, psychiatry and sociology. We notice that the prisoners, when they leave the prisons, return to crime; perhaps the 'education' provided by other inmates beats the efforts of psychologists and sociologists – this is what the statistics suggest. So, even if we say that this idea could succeed in solving the problem theoretically, it cannot deal with the problem if other elements of crime prevention or crime escalation are not included; in fact, the 'education' of prisons can nurture in the psychology of the prisoner a drive against people and their security. Therefore, we can see that prisons fail to solve the problem because there are many external and internal factors that play on points of weakness in the people involved, such as the nature of social complications in relationships that can have a range of impacts,

something which makes the process of appropriate education less efficient in these contexts, and this is why these supposed alternatives to capital punishment fail to stop crime.

### Several alternatives

We have to stress an important fact that is part of the ruling of capital punishment: that the execution of the convicted murderer is not inevitable because God, the Most High, has placed the decision over the execution of the killer within the circle of the victim's heirs: **'and whoever is slain unjustly, We have indeed given to his heir authority (to demand retribution or to forgive)' 17:33** – this is an Islamic ruling which says that this heir, as he has the right of retribution, has the right of pardon with or without payment of compensation (*diyeh*). So, it has not left the matter in a narrow area without alternatives, but is saying to the victim's heir: this is your right, and as you have the right to fair retribution, you have the right to pardon the killer: **'to forgo (i.e. pardon) is nearer to righteousness' 2:237**, or to request a *diyeh*, that represents a financial compensation for the victim. So, Islam did not close the door against other alternatives.

But some may say that the alternative to capital punishment is life imprisonment, as is common in some countries, especially in Europe and some American states, on the basis that life imprisonment retains the life of the killer and punishes him at

the same time, so achieving both the preservation of life and the deterrent against crime. However, if we want to compare between the execution of a convicted murderer and putting him in prison for the rest of his life, which can be 30, 40 or 50 years or until he dies, the difference is not that big, and the latter can be much worse! This is because the murderer who is imprisoned for life dies twenty times each day as he has no hope in life because the life that he is living is devoid of the vital and human elements that any living person needs to feel his humanity – life imprisonment makes the prisoner feel he is living an everlasting spiritual and emotional death, perhaps like the poet said:

He is not dead who has died and gone to rest,

The really dead is the living dead!

The really dead is he who lives depressed,

Dejected, with little hope!

The person who lives with no hope or goal is like a useless thing thrown either in a cell on his own, if he deserves such a cell, or with other inmates who may harm him. We believe that the tragic aspects of life imprisonment are worse than those of capital punishment.<sup>2</sup>

### **The negative effect of prisons**

And this is another point to consider in this regard: that life imprisonment may lead to the negative effects from such

inmates influencing any person who is living in these prisons, so, instead of having just one crime on his file, he ends up learning a diversity of crimes from other prisoners,.

### **The psychological-not-criminal notion extends to all crimes**

If we to adopt the idea that a murderer is mentally ill, we have to let this idea extend to other crimes, since as long as crime is a mental illness, it is fair to treat those who commit crimes other than murder likewise; in this case a burglar, for instance, he might be considered psychologically ill as he violates public order when he commits his crimes. The same might apply to those who commit rape, drug trafficking, money laundering etc. Going in that direction means we would have to open mental institutes, close all prisons and abolish all punishment legislation. If it is not possible to have such punishment for such criminals because they are in fact ill, in this case the proponents of this idea, in the West and elsewhere, should think about the practical results of this proposal, which would include abolishing all the penal codes regardless of what the criminal did, even if he betrayed his homeland, his country and his nation, or committed genocide, as all of these should be regarded as the result of him being mentally ill or deranged. However, this is something that they do not uphold, as we see that the penal code exists at all levels.



## The issue of judges' errors

Some may say that there is difference between capital punishment and other punishments, as it is noticed that, since the judge who decides is not infallible and can err in his verdict, he may sentence a person to death when he is innocent. So if he is executed there will not be any opportunity to remedy the error, but if he is sentenced to life imprisonment, for instance, any error can be remedied when it is discovered later. But the idea of the judge's error may stretch in a way that cannot be remedied, as we know that a person may die in prison some 20 or 30 years later, and then be found innocent. We read that in some cases, 100 years after the verdict, if detectives reopen the case and take the matter to court again, they discover the error of the judge and that the person was in fact innocent.

It is quite natural that judges commit mistakes, in small and big cases, since they are not infallible and since they deal with the case at hand through the facts and evidence available. Even in Islam, in a narration, the Prophet (sawa) said: **'I only judge in the disputes between you according to evidence and oath, but one of you may be better in his argument'**; i.e. by defending himself better than the other, I become convinced because I – that is the Prophet (sawa) – do not rule according to the unknown and unknowable, nor according to revelations, but according to the evidence and facts, as this is the way people should follow, but one of you may present evidence that

makes me believe that he has the right of the claim when this evidence is not correct, not because I – the Prophet (sawa) – committed a mistake in my prophetic capacity, but because of the evidence presented. This is why he (sawa) continued: ‘... so to whoever I took out for him something that was his brother’s, it is (let him consider it as) a firebrand from Hell,’<sup>3</sup> so do not say that the Prophet (sawa) gave his ruling and the matter is closed, because my verdict was not from my prophetic capacity but as a judge that decides according to evidence and oath.

Therefore, the question of the error committed by the judges is something that is imposed by the nature of the process that relies on facts, evidence and oath. On the basis of this, the matter rests between abolishing the judiciary altogether because judges commit mistakes, and accepting it regarding these mistakes as negative points that are outweighed its positive points.

### **The third question mark – capital punishment and mercy**

Some people have been objecting to capital punishment as part of Islam’s penal code, regarding this as contradictory to the mercy which Islam adopts, in the personality of his Messenger (sawa) and how he dealt with the staunchest of his opponents when he got the upper hand, and in the elements of his Message and his approach in the propagation of his Message – the

Qur'an summed up his Message by saying: '**And We have not sent you but as a mercy to all creatures**' 21:107. Also, the nature of the Muslim society is mercy, as mercy, kindness, compassion are important features of the Muslim society, or that is how it should be. God, the Compassionate the Merciful, regards believers being merciful to each other as a kind of advice amongst them: '**and exhort one another to patience and exhort one another to (show) compassion**' 90:17. So, if Islam is a religion of mercy, is it not that killing a human being, even if he is a murderer, contradicts mercy, as mercy means forgiving and pardon.

In light of this, it is expected – according to these people – that in the Islamic penal code a criminal is to be pardoned: either the victim's heir pardons the killer, or that the penal code includes legislation that is based on mercy not cruelty, and this is – according to them – what conforms to Islam's general picture.

### **Mercy properly adopted**

When we look into the question of mercy in its realistic application to man's life at both individual and social levels, we find that it is a humanistic state in which Islam wants the person to live, so as to enrich his spirituality; when the victim pardons the aggressor and gives up his right when he is capable of retribution, this represents the highest level of human attitude. However, this level of moral attitude is not always

realistic, as although it represents a moral merit for spiritual development, it cannot become something that people look forward to in their life, and in the psychological and mental situations they face, because life cannot move on like this. It cannot be made obligatory on all people to pardon criminals and murderers so that they are not allowed to punish them or to seek fair retribution for what they did to them.

Such legislation that makes pardoning the principle of dealing with criminals, murderers and other mischief-doers, if made universal, will lead to the destruction of life, as it will make human beings live in an atmosphere of social, economic and political chaos – if criminals and murderers and other violators of human rights are left free to do what they like, and people, in contrast, are not given the chance, in legislation, to stop them or punish them, life will become an arena for criminals, and this can never produce a balanced system in the interest of mankind.

Therefore, when we look into the issue of mercy, we must not do so on the basis of the individual importance of this or that criminal, rather we have to compare between preserving the life of the murderer and the life of the nation or society, and public order, so as to establish which is more important. Naturally, reason emphasises that society is more important in this regard. This is what scholars say when something important competes

with something more important; in this case, it stands to reason that the more important has precedent.

God, the Most High, says in His Holy Book: ‘**And there is life for you in fair retribution, O you wise, that you may guard yourselves (against evil)**’ 2:179, meaning: think, use your mental powers and ask whether in retribution there is life for all mankind and it is more important than the life of the killer, or it is the opposite? The expression ‘**O you wise people**’ adds an element of reflection to the question of legislation and the question of public order, in fact in all issues that relate to behaviour in society. In Islam, mercy is not a heartbeat or a throb of feeling, but it is a practice aiming to help the person live according to what is good for him and his affairs and to help him distance himself from what is bad for him and his affairs; it is perhaps appropriate to say that it is a path and a system, not an emotional state.

Let us give an example, in the question of mercy. It is natural that when a person’s leg or arm or one of his organs is severed to regard this as cruel misfortune. However, if there is a certain disease in that leg, arm or organ so that if it is not severed the person will die, in this case we find that severing that organ is not considered cruel, but a mercy, and cruelty is to keep it in its place. So, it cannot be said that it is merciful to keep that organ, since when there is a competition of interests between an organ of the body and the whole body, reason rules that your mercy

towards that person is to sever that diseased organ. This is why we find that all the civilised world approves surgical operations in which arms, legs and other organs are severed when they become dangerous to the life of human beings, regarding the person who refuses to undergo such an operation as someone who is throwing himself into grave danger and death.

So, the question of mercy is relative – when the matter relates to the general right of the whole, i.e. the society or the nation, this takes precedent over mercy towards the part, the private or the individual. This is something noticed in all civilisations in the issue of war, where all rational people believe that if the war has goals that relate to the future of the nation, it is regarded legitimate, even though it results in tragedies, with innocent people getting killed, including children, and houses being destroyed etc. People of all civilisations encourage going to war – on the level of human values, not on the level of psychological cruelty (although they may have that) – regardless of whether its goals are acceptable or not; this is why we find that Islam engaged into a lot of wars, although it knows that those wars are going to result in many tragedies at the personal or individual level.

In light of this, we say: the notion that says that fair retribution contradicts mercy is supported by those who do not understand the meaning of mercy in Islam – it is not kindness, rather it is interest. Therefore, the whole of the Islamic Shari'ah, including

punishments, hardships and trouble, has been mercy for all creatures.

On the basis of this, we find the legislation of retribution a legislation in the interest of all humanity, and it is what preserves the life of society from the aggression of the individual; and that mercy has been made available by God to those who have mercy on people, but those who do not have mercy on people, including mischief-doers, criminals and murderers, do not deserve mercy, except under certain conditions that conform to the interest of society in certain circumstances.

### **A note on some punishment ethics**

Although an extensive topic, we would like to shed some light on the ethics that relate to carrying out the punishment. A convicted murderer who is sentenced to death should not be beaten, tortured, verbally abused, transgressed in his honour (via family members), have his house burned, or see his relatives harmed or his body maimed.

Islam showed us the way through Imam Ali's treatment of a murder crime, not any one, but that which took place on him personally. Abdul Rahman bin Moljim struck him with a sword to the head in the Kufa Mosque while leading the dawn congregational prayer; after the doctor told him that it was fatal, Imam Ali (as) gathered the offspring of Abdul Mottalib

(the Prophet's grandfather) amongst his relatives and said to them: 'O Sons of Abdul Mottalib<sup>4</sup>, I do not want to have you sinking in the blood of Muslims, with (you) saying: "The Commander of the Faithful (i.e. Ali (as)) is killed, the Commander of the Faithful is killed!"' This is the case with a lot of people who we hear saying: we will not be satisfied except with death of the grandest person in their family: we want to make blood flow like rivers because so and so (the victim) is incomparable to anyone!

This is found in tribal contexts and the like. However, we find Ali (as) saying: 'There shall be no one else killed (as a reprisal) for me, except my killer' as he (as) had to see the Shari'ah implemented on everyone including himself, for there is no class difference or question of position in retribution. In Ali's case, the worst of people killed the greatest of them, nonetheless the rule of retribution states that the killer is killed and that is it, regardless of the religious or social status of the victim, which is represented here by the Imam (as). Then he (as) continued: 'See if I die as a result of his blow then strike with him one blow for one' because he struck me with only one blow, therefore you must not strike him twice, '... and the man is not to be maimed', so do not sever his arms or legs, '... as I have heard the Messenger of God (sawa) saying: "Beware of maiming even with a rapacious dog."' <sup>5</sup>



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<sup>1</sup> *Ilel ash-Shera'i'* (Wisdom behind Rulings), by Abu Ja'far Mohammed bin Ali bin Babawaih al-Qommi, (died 911 AD), known as Sheikh as-Sedouq, sheds light on the wisdom behind many Islamic rulings, based on the narrations of the Prophet (sawa) and the Imams (as). (*The translator.*)

<sup>2</sup> In June 2007 figures showed a big increase in suicide amongst inmates in British prisons. Whilst around 70 inmates took their own lives over the whole of 2006, the first half of 2007 witnessed 50 such incidents. No doubt that both depression and hopelessness as well as abuses between prisoners are major causes of this tragic situation. There is also no doubt that many of these prisoners were serving sentences for crimes other than murder – this should be a not-so-comfortable irony for those who oppose capital punishment when the circumstances in prison lead to a delayed, self-administered capital punishment for crimes not subject to such penalty. But what might be even more tragic is the culprit as claimed by the officials – overcrowded prisons! (*The translator.*)

<sup>3</sup> *Al-Kafi*, al-Kulaini, vol.7, p.414.

<sup>4</sup> Abdul Mottalib bin Hashim (died 578 AD) was the Prophet's grandfather (on his father's side) who supervised his upbringing from his birth and after he was orphaned, through his mother's death, when he was only six, until his death when the Prophet (sawa) was only eight. (*The translator.*)

<sup>5</sup> *Nahj al-Balaghah*, Mohammed Abdoh commentary, vol.3, p.77.



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