

Stages of Mystics and Stations of the Spiritual Journey Part II: Intention, Truthfulness, Returning, Devotion, Seclusion and Contemplation

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Third: Intention

Having appropriate intention is more than just being faithful, since there may be a faithful who does his actions without a definite intention, whereas the spirit of an action is the intention [for doing it]. Therefore, the relation between the purpose of doing an action and the action itself is like the relation between body and soul. The action without purpose is like a dead body that does not do anything. This is why the noble Prophet (s) stated: "Indeed, everyone benefits [only from] his intention!"²

About strugglers and travellers toward Allah, it is said that if one emigrates because of Allah, he will be rewarded by meeting with Allah. But one who enters a war and fights for the booty, his struggle will be valued according to his cause, since everyone's value is equal to his knowledge and his knowledge can be seen in his intention.

¹ Jawadi Amuli, Abdullah, *Tafsīr-e Tasnīm*, vol. 11: *Stages of Ethics in the Qur'an*, (excerpt from) ch. 3, (Isra Publication: Qum, 1999). Ayatollah Jawādi Amolī is a Grand Ayatollah commonly believed to be one of the best Shiite experts in Qur'anic Exegesis and a great mystic. He is the author an ongoing thematic commentary on the Qur'an called "*Tafsīr-e Tasnīm*". The title of the 11th volume of his commentary is "*Ethical stages in the Qur'an*". The third chapter of the book deals with "Positions of mystics and stations of the spiritual journey". This article is the second part of the translation of this chapter, the first part of which was published in the previous issue of the journal.

² Majlisī, Muhammad Bāqir, *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. 67, (Beirut: Mu'assisat al-Wafā', 1983), p. 186.

Therefore, an important thing for travellers [toward God] is the intention. In choosing between action and intention, it must be mentioned that having an intention without doing an action is better than doing an action without an intention. For example, if someone performs an action without having the intention of drawing close to God and his action is a *tawaṣṣulī*¹ obligation, then it would not result in abandoning an obligatory action, but if his action is a *ta'abbudī*² obligation, then the person would suffer the punishment of abandoning an obligation. Conversely, if someone intends to do a good deed, but the conditions for doing it are not provided, he would certainly receive rewards because the intention itself is considered as an act of worship from the heart.

Spiritual Sustenance

Intention is among human spiritual deeds and sustenance, even though some people do not consider many supernatural gifts as blessings or privileges. Therefore, the Imams (a) were asked: "Why are scholars and the wise poor?" And they (a) would answer: "Are not wisdom and knowledge as sustenance? God grants everyone sustenance."

Imam Ṣādiq (a) stated: "Wisdom, beauty and eloquence are three kinds of sustenance that perfect a person."³

If unwise wealthy people knew the value of wisdom, they would be affected. So the reason why they do not become affected is their lack of understanding that wisdom is a virtue that is enjoyable.

The joy of knowledge is significantly greater than the joy of material accommodations, because what is separate from the soul of a human being is not so enjoyable, and it only makes an assumption of joy. Even the joy of food and fruits that a person eats is only limited to his mouth and it is very temporary. This kind of joy will be gone as soon as the person finishes eating the food and fruits. But science and knowledge are not like that, because hearing them, having them, spreading and acting upon them, are enjoyable.

¹ An obligation that does not need the intention of closeness to God and is mostly perceived as obligatory through common sense, e.g., rescuing a drowning person.

² An obligation that needs the intention of closeness to God and is done as an act of worship, e.g., an act of prayer.

³ *Ibid.*, vol. 75, p. 234.

Thus, one must consider both types of sustenance, both physical and spiritual; and they are knowledge and wisdom. However, similar to knowledge and wisdom, the issue of intention is also a spiritual sustenance and a spiritual deed is stronger than a physical deed.

The value and complexity of intention

It is narrated from the Imams (a): “The intention of a faithful person is better than his deed.”¹ And “The most valuable deed is the most difficult one!”²

Intention is the spirit of a deed and the most difficult part of it, because many people do actions only some of whom have the true and good intention for it. The first issue is that one cannot do a wrong deed having the aim of “closeness to God”. Thus, an action must have the quality of drawing a human being close to God; i.e., the nature of the action must be good. Secondly, the action must be carried out by a good doer. In such a case, if the action has no other problems, then its intention will be better than the action itself, and surely this is difficult to observe and this is why the intention is the best action. For example, when someone writes a book, naturally one would like to have his name written on the cover. Or when someone builds a mosque or a charity institute, he would like to have his name printed on the sign of the building or mentioned in meetings. There are people who do not like their names to be mentioned anywhere, so that others find out that these people have reached such a high level, and this is a kind of eminence. Sometimes, people display hypocrisy and they are unaware of being hypocrites. This is an obscure hypocrisy which draws less attention and obviously Satan tricks everyone differently. There are other people who do not do good deeds in order that no one would say they are hypocrites; and thus, people’s talk is the cause of abandoning good deeds.

Fourth: Truthfulness

God introduces Prophets (s) as “Ṣiddīq” [very truthful] and “Ṣādiq” [truthful] and calls other people to accompany them:

¹ Kulayn, Muhammad ibn Ya‘qūb, *Uṣūl al-Kāfi*, vol. 2, (Tehran: Dār al-Kūtūb al-Islāmīyah, 1388 A.H.), p. 84.

² Majlisī, *Bihār al-Anwār*, vol. 67, p. 237.

“...be with the Truthful.” (9: 119)

The noble Qur’an first orders us to be truthful and then reports about its fruits and states that true followers of the prophets (s) are with the prophets (s), the truthful, the martyrs and the righteous in their lives and the hereafter, and they will be sorted out and resurrected with them. The Qur’an states:

“Whoever obeys Allah and the Apostle they are with those whom Allah has blessed, including the prophets and the truthful, the martyrs and the righteous...” (4: 75)

It is not necessary for one to die to accompany the prophets (s). One might accompany them even when living in this world because the pure souls of prophets (s) and close ones to God have the scope of view over others and do not neglect their followers. For example, sometimes a person yields to temptation but very soon, he is released from its darkness. So, temptation is made by Satan and the salvation from it is brought by the souls of the Imams (a), prophets (s), close ones to God and angels.

The Extension of Truthfulness

Truthfulness must not be only in speech, but also in deeds and their intentions. Therefore, faithful and pious ones have a “good standing” and the “abode of truthfulness”. The glorious Qur’an states:

﴿و بشر الذين امنوا ان لهم قدم صدق عند ربهم﴾

“...give good news to the faithful that they are in good standing with their Lord” (10: 2)

﴿ان المتقين فى جنات و نهر فى مقعد صدق عند مليك مقتدر﴾

“Indeed the God-wary will be amid gardens and streams, in the abode of truthfulness with an omnipotent King.” (54: 54 – 55)

Also, God introduces those who keep their promises as “truthful ones”:

“Among the faithful are men who fulfil what they have pledged to Allah.” (33: 23)

And surely, the best example of truthfulness is fortitude and tenacity in jihad, whether in the physical minor jihad or in the spiritual greater jihad.

There is a subtle statement from Avicenna concerning this issue. Similar statements are quoted from Khājah ‘Abdullah Anṣārī and other nobles. It is quoted from Avicenna that: “If a person is truthful in his speech, writings and generally in all his manners and behaviours, he will have true dreams. The soul of a liar is like the eyes of a cross-eyed person and cannot see the truth. In dreams, truth is shown to people, but daydreamers and prattlers who do not care about the permitted and prohibited issues during the day will have dreams called “*Adghāth Aḥlām*” which have no clear meaning and dream interpreters are unable to interpret them. However, the human’s soul is honest and truthful and it tells the truth and this shows that it sees things correctly. Thus, a person whose report is true and himself is a truthful person; i.e., he sees things correctly and his reports are based on the truth and thus, his reports illustrate that truth in reality. That is because he foresees what is going to happen and it is true. Therefore, there are ways we can find if we are truthful. One way is to review our dreams, because knowledge of the self and understanding its aspects is the best manifestation of divine blessings.

Fifth: Returning

The origin of the Arabic word “*inābab*” is [the simple past and present root forms of] “*nāba*” – “*yanūbu*” meaning “to have appointment” or “*nāba*” – “*yanību*” meaning “to separate”. Therefore, “*munīb*” [the subjective noun derived from the first root] is one who frequently makes appointments to check out when the doors of God’s mercy are open to enter; or regarding the other meaning, “*munīb*” is one who is detached from anything other than God and he is connected to God. The glorious Qur’an considers “*inābab*” as an important issue:

“Turn penitently to your Lord...” (39: 54)

And God loves a “*munīb*” person and states that such a person would take admonition of God:

“Yet no one takes admonition except him who returns penitently [to Allah].” (40: 13)

And ultimately, God gives the God-wary ones glad news of entering them to heaven:

“And paradise will be brought near for the God-wary, not distant [any more]: * ‘This is what you were promised. [It is] for every penitent and dutiful [servant] * who fears the All-beneficent in secret and comes with a penitent heart. * Enter it in peace! This is the day of immortality.” (50: 31 – 34)

Sixth: Devotion

According to the subtle interpretation of Muḥaqqiq Ṭūsī: “the meaning of *ikhhlāṣ* is ‘to devote something to someone’; i.e., one devotes his heart to God so that nothing enters his heart except “the changer of the hearts”.² And surely, if one became a lover, he would devote himself to his beloved, because he would know that the beloved would not come with the hated together in one place.

If one carries out an action for God and others, God will not accept it because religion quantitatively and qualitatively belongs to God. About the quantity, the glorious Qur’an states:

﴿و له الدين واصباً﴾

“...to Him belongs the enduring religion...” (16: 52)

“*Wāṣib*” means “full”, “complete” and “overall”. The mentioned verse means that the whole system of religion is organized by God and therefore, all its rules and regulations must be formulated through revelation and even one word must not be deleted from it or added to it. Thus, deleting anything due to it being abrogated or approving anything as a new part of religion must be carried out through revelation.

Also about quality, the glorious Qur’an states:

“Look! [Only] exclusive faith is worthy of Allah...” (39: 3)

¹ *Awṣāf al-Ashrāf*, (Tehran: Ministry of Islamic Culture and Guidance, ?), ch. VI, p. 65.

² In *Jawshan Kabir* and other supplications, referring to God.

Only in His Name one must learn the religion, act accordingly and teach it to others.

Therefore, true religious people are those who are devoted. Thus, God, the Almighty states:

“Yet they were not commanded except to worship Allah, dedicating their faith to Him as men of pure faith...” (98: 5)

People have no obligations but to carry out religious commands devotedly for Allah; i.e., they devote their understanding and deeds to God and surely the result of devotion is entering heaven. Imam Ṣādiq (a) states:

“One who says, ‘There is no god but Allah,’ devotedly will enter heaven and his devotion will surely keep him off from what Allah has prohibited.”¹

A better reward than that mentioned is “meeting with Allah”:

“...So whoever expects to meet his Lord let him act righteously, and not associate anyone with the worship of his Lord.” (18: 110)

Whoever expects to meet God and is yearning to encounter divine beauty and magnificence must be faithful and perform righteous deeds and not have polytheistic beliefs or deeds.

The meaning of “meeting with Allah” is not seeing divine beauty only after death, but one can be a beholder of divine beauty before death and receive His special blessings as well. The noble Prophet (s) refers to this issue as follows:

“One who devotes himself to God for forty days, God will make springs of wisdom flow from his heart to his tongue.”²

¹ Ṣādūq, Mohammad ibn ‘Ali, *al-Tawḥīd Ṣādūq*, (Beirut: Dār al-Ma‘rifah, 1970) Chapter Thawāb al-Muwaḥḥidīn, p. 27.

² Majlisī, *Bihār al-Anwār*, vol. 67, p. 249.

Such a person mentioned in this hadith will see divine knowledge and the manifestation of a name from among God's great names. However, he will reach higher degrees after death.

To Observe Forty Days

Leaders of religion have recommended some ways for us to benefit from the spiritual journey and the fruits of devotion, the best of which is to observe Forty Days. Such observance does not mean that a person must seclude himself from people and social matters for forty days, but it means that one becomes separate from everything except God and continues his normal life; but he does nothing except what has been ordered by God and only seeking His contentment.

According to the above-mentioned hadith by the noble Prophet (s): If one devotes himself to God for forty days, God will make springs of wisdom flow from his heart to his tongue. New and true knowledge will be acquired from him and he will have many innovations that cannot be found in anyone else's books and speeches because such springs of wisdom are not in others' hearts.

"To observe forty days" does not mean that a person makes all his efforts for forty days to reach devotion. It does not mean either that one does any action during forty days and nights devotedly for Allah. But, the primary understanding of "observing forty days" is passing forty days having devotion. If a person does all his deeds with equal devotion during forty days and nights, he will be fixed in a level of devotion. On the contrary, it means that one moves up in forty levels of devotion during this forty days and nights. Therefore, such a person's devotion is at the most primary level on his first day of observance and his devotion reaches the highest level on his fortieth day.

In any case, there are three interpretations of "observing forty days", the third of which is correct:

1. There is no devotion during the forty days and it appears after this period.
2. There is devotion during the forty days, but at a fixed level.

3. There is devotion during the forty days but being perfected day after day.

Wisdom from the spring of devotion

One, who passes forty levels of devotion during forty days and nights, will find the outburst of the permanent flowing of divine knowledge from his own heart, as stated by God (*swt*):

“Have you not seen that Allah sends down water from the sky, then He conducts it through the ground as springs?” (39: 21)

God lets the underground water stream to whatever direction He decides and the water bursts out wherever He decides. Similarly, knowledge concerning souls and selves are directed in the same way. Streams of recognition between right and wrong are running, directed by God, in the hearts of people, but if one blocks the streams with dirt and bad deeds, the mentioned natural streams of knowledge stop:

“No indeed! Rather their hearts have been sullied by what they have been earning.” (83: 14)

However, if a person tries to prevent darkness from entering his heart, then his hand and tongue will be like a spring for the mentioned natural knowledge that is God-wariness.

In this way, such a person speaks more knowledgeably and influentially and theoretical wisdom will flow from his pen and tongue. Additionally he will carry out good deeds and he will demonstrate practical wisdom.

Note: concerning the mentioned hadith from the noble Prophet (s), there are two points to notice:

1. In this hadith, the noble Prophet (s) stated: “forty mornings” and not “forty evenings” or “forty nights”. Mentioning the “morning” means that a traveller towards God must make his decision from night and begins his journey in the morning like normal journey people go on. This point is in harmony with the Qur’an concerning night and its blessings. According to the Qur’an, night is more suitable for finding a firm base and speech:

“Indeed the watch of the night is firmer in tread and more upright in respect to speech.” (73: 6)

2. Observing forty days away from prohibited and reprehensible things, carrying out obligations and recommended actions is doubtful to be considered as an act of devotion if all the observance is done in order to reach currents of wisdom. It would be like one who has worked for payment and he is hired.

Similarly, one who studies to become a scholar is not devoted and that is why “good deeds of the righteous ones are like sins of the close ones”¹.

Exemplars of the spiritual journey say that: one who studies in order to become famous and wealthy is not devoted. But later it is understood even more subtly that even if one studies in order to become a godly scholar and helps people to come out of darkness and he himself becomes resurrected among the prophets (s) on the Day of Judgment, he would not be considered as devoted! Look how far the distance [between what we expect and what the reality is]! A person must study only to find the contentment of God.

Superior to this way of thinking is that one not only does not consider acquiring knowledge as a means, but he also removes it from his thoughts. This way, the heart of such a scholar or student will be pure and devoted. Performing any action and observing the above suppositions can be considered in the same way. The meaning of devotion is that a spiritual traveller sees and considers nothing but God.

False devotedness

There are many people under the guardianship of Satan, but they think they are devoted. For example, we are performing good tasks. But, when that task is transferred to someone else, we become worried. So, what we like is for a good deed to be related to us and not the essence of such a good deed; and this is a great danger. This makes us selfish, not benevolent. Consequently, on the Day of Resurrection, we will not be rewarded by that goodness, because we did not want that goodness. We will be granted the selfishness we were seeking and that is:

¹ Ibid, vol. 25, p. 205.

“[It is] the fire of Allah, set ablaze * which will overspread the hearts.” (104: 6-7)

It will initiate the internal burning of a human being.

Seven: Seclusion

One of the conditions that a traveller toward Allah must provide for himself is “seclusion”.

Seclusion is a step on the spiritual journey and among the positions of the mystics that must be well explained so that this positive condition is not misunderstood with the negative state of isolation. Sometimes a person thinks he is on a spiritual journey, secludes himself from society, abandons social duties and only observes individual tasks. This is wrong, because the glorious Qur’an which calls itself “the cure” provides the direction for the noble Prophet (s) and states:

“...and do not be like the Man of the Fish who called out as he choked with grief. * Had it not been for a blessing that came to his rescue from his Lord, he would surely have been cast on a bare shore while he was blameworthy.” (68: 48 – 49)

And do not be like Jonah who left his people. Addresses such as the following ones means that “Mention these godly leaders and follow them!”:

“And mention in the Book Abraham,...” (19: 41)

“And mention in the Book Moses,...” (19: 51)

However, about the verse regarding Jonah, the Qur’an warns: “Do not to be like Jonah who abdicated his responsibility and called God. He would not have survived from the dark belly of the fish, if he had not received the blessing of guardianship. But, he is not blamed, since he received divine blessings and he is praised, on the contrary.” Therefore, seclusion as keeping away from society and escaping social responsibilities is criticized and not praised.

1. Muḥaqqīq Ṭūsī has dedicated the third chapter of *Awṣāf al-Asbrāf* to seclusion, thinking, fear and wariness, hope, patience and gratitude and has

called these the steps of spiritual journey and states of the traveller.¹ The issues he has mentioned in the second chapter of his book are repentance, austerity and ascetic practices which he has mentioned to be dealing with “removing obstacles of spiritual journey”. Such issues are discussed in the second part of this book.

Note: seclusion, which is among the steps of spiritual travellers, is a means of removing obstacles, but Muḥaqqīq Ṭūsī has brought it among the steps of the spiritual journey.

Seclusion and staying up all night

Allah (*swt*) advises us not to forget staying up at nights, because there are many things to do during the day and these things attract people to themselves and so they do not have any isolation or privacy:

“Indeed the watch of the night is firmer in tread and more upright in respect to speech * for indeed during the day you have drawn-out engagements.” (73: 6-7)

People are drowned in daily routines; and being immersed in social issues is not in agreement with having seclusion. Being busy with thinking is natural for one who passes through an endless ocean, takes some companions with himself and tries to rescue drowning people. The above-mentioned verses of the Qur’an mean that “you have many things to do during the day, but at night, no one bothers you so establishing a firm base and relationship is only possible at dawn.”

To understand what someone says is only possible when a person does not talk and only listens. Regarding the word of God, a good listener is one who listens to Him and nothing else from inside or outside. Therefore, the glorious Qur’an requires quietude and solitude as a step of the spiritual journey.

At night, the body sleeps better and this is a blessing of God:

“And make your sleep for rest? * and make the night a covering?” (78: 9-10)

¹ Ṭūsī, Khājeḥ Naṣīr al-Dīn, *Awṣāf al-Ashrāf*, (Tehran: Osweh, 1382 A.H.S.), p. 95, chapter III.

But sleeping is disastrous for thought. That is why Imam ‘Ali (a) states:

“We seek refuge in Allah from the sleep of thought.”¹

Therefore, night is for sleeping, relaxation of the body and awaking the mind. Thus, those whose bodies sleep and not their souls have true dreams when they sleep. They are the people who wake up before dawn and pray.

Two results can be concluded from the following verse:

“for indeed, during the day you have drawn-out engagements.”
(73: 7)

One is the necessity of participating in communities and social cooperation, and the other is being actively swimming. One might enter a swimming pool and relax at one place of it and in this way, he would enjoy himself. But if a person actively swims here and there in a swimming pool, then he would be able to rescue anyone in danger as well.

Allah (*swt*) addresses the noble Prophet (s): “You have many things to do during the day” because the noble Prophet (s) was commissioned to answer people’s questions and solve their problems as mentioned in the glorious Qur’an:

“...rehearsing unto them the signs of Allah, sanctifying them,
and instructing them in scripture and wisdom...” (3: 164)

Or elsewhere in the Qur’an:

“So, judge between people with justice...” (38: 26)

And these were daily routines of the Prophet (s); but the night, especially the end of the night is the best time to talk with God, because at that time, one can receive blessings from God directly and without any interruption.

Staying up the night is mentioned as a great opportunity:

¹ *Nahj al-Balāghah*, Sermon no. 224.

“And keep vigil for a part of the night, as a supererogatory [devotion] for you. It may be that your Lord will raise you to a praiseworthy station.” (17: 79)

A praiseworthy station is where a person can talk with God in perfect tranquillity. Thus, the fruit of staying up late which is in fact being with God, is reaching this praiseworthy station.

Having seclusion while living in the society

The glorious Qur’an explains seclusion so that a person lives with others and is busy with daily routines but neither participates in their wrong doings, nor does he become involved in social issues so much that he has a lot of memories and tons of things on his mind that bother him when he is going to pray at night. Therefore, one must always color his behaviour with a divine color, but never take the color of people’s behaviour.

There are people who are living in the society and color others’ behaviours with theirs’ as well as taking their habits and behaviours. Therefore, they will be so busy-minded that they talk with God before dawn having a lot of things in mind and even the midnight prayer of such people would be performed with a straying mind similar to the way they perform their daily prayers. But the noble Prophet (s) was commissioned to live in the society and give people’s behaviours and thoughts a godly color which is the best color:

“[We take our] color from Allah, and who is better than Allah at coloring...” (2: 138)

He would not take the color of people and he was free from any dependent beings. Although, God (*swt*) considers the prophet’s (s) daily routines and advised him to be with people, but wanted him not to take the color of their behaviour as in:

1. “...keep away from them in a graceful manner...” (73: 10)

Here the prophet (s) is wanted to keep away from their manner and behaviour.

2. "Leave alone those who take their religion for play and diversion and whom the life of this world has deceived..." (6: 70)

This is advised because the mentioned people in the verse would not be awakened and being with them is harmful; i.e. although, the noble Prophet (s) was living in the society, he would not let worldly issues enter his heart.

3. "Say, "Allah!" Then leave them to play around in their impious gossip..." (6: 91) because they will be drawn in a natural whirlpool [they have made]. This verse means that "be concerned about these people's healing and redemption until the last moment, but if they do not listen to the message from you as the savior of human being, leave them. This is the meaning of having seclusion which is to be among people, but secluded from them at the same time and also not going along with their undesirable goals.

4. "When you see those who gossip impiously about Our signs, avoid them until they engage in some other discourse ..." (6: 68)

These verses show that the noble Prophet (s), who was the leader for travellers towards God, was responsible to stay among people in the society and he should not keep away from people and serving them, but he ought to keep away from the world's vices, because it is a virtue to keep away from what turns us away from God, while serving people in order to seek the contentment of God is regarded as an act of worship.

The Secret of Seclusion

Seclusion is regarded as a praised state; but why?! To answer this question, different kinds of address to human beings must be explained:

One: God's address to human beings is different depending on the case in the Qur'an. His address to mankind is sometimes "O, Mankind!", "O, You who have faith!" or "O, children of Adam!" However, God's address to human beings is not like people's temporary addresses towards each other and it is an everlasting call. The poet says:

There is no one like Moses anymore to hear the call "I am God"

Otherwise, this call is not heard but from all trees.¹

The cases of the mentioned addresses are not at the same level. In some cases they are very general, such as: “O, Mankind!” and “O, children of Adam!” and some cases are special to the People of the Book like: “O, People of the Book!” and some of the cases are special to the faithful ones, like: “O, You who have faith!” There are other addresses which are more narrowed than the mentioned ones regarding their targets like those calls as “reminder” for those “who possess intellect” and “who have insight”. Ultimately, most narrowed addresses are addressing the prophets (s) as in: “O, apostles!”.

Second: God’s address to the angels. It is mentioned in some sources that God has appointed some angels to tell people every day: “Continue to have procreation but be aware that the end of this life is death. Do gather wealth! But be aware that it will ultimately be gone! Do build buildings! But be aware that it will ultimately be ruined, so build something which cannot be destroyed:

“Surely, God has an angel who calls [the human being] every day: have reproduction though you will die, gather wealth though it will go and build though it will be ruined”²

There are many cases of address in hadiths, which they have been addresses towards angels.

Third: God’s address to the prophets (s) and the close ones. God addresses the noble Prophet (s) to tell people:

“Come, I will recount what your Lord has forbidden you from”
(6: 151)

Or elsewhere, Moses is addressed:

“And proclaim the hajj to people: they shall come to you on foot...” (22: 27)

Or elsewhere:

¹ Mullā Hādī Sabzivārī, *Dīvān Ash‘ār*

² *Nahj al-Balaghah*, Sermon no. 132.

“[This is] an announcement from Allah and His Apostle to all the people on the day of the greater hajj: that Allah and His Apostle repudiate the polytheists...” (9: 3)

Such addresses and the addresses of the human being’s nature on the one hand and addresses of intellect on the other hand are all related to Allah directly or indirectly and they always exist. But the ear to hear them must be in a calm place where there is no commotion, because when there is disturbance and a variety of other noises, it would be difficult to hear the address of God except for those who recognize the voice of an acquaintance well. Because there is much noise during the day, it is difficult to hear the mentioned addresses; therefore people are advised to become quiet to hear these addresses. Consequently, to find seclusion means to get rid of disturbances and if there are no disturbances, God’s blessings will surely be seen.

The seclusion of the noble Prophet (s)

Before rising and becoming a prophet, the noble Prophet (s) used to seclude himself from society for some days in a year and pray in the Cave of Ḥirā located in “Jabal al-Nur”. Jabal al-Nur is amongst the highest mountains near Mecca and if there were no skyscrapers, one would fully overlook the Kaaba from the top of this mountain. The Commander of the Faithful (a) stated:

“The noble Prophet (s) would go to the Cave of Ḥirā every year and only I saw him and no others.”¹

Some people have reported that the noble Prophet (s) began going to the Cave of Hira since the year Ali (a) was born and before that the noble Prophet (s) did not go there for prayer.

After becoming the prophet, the noble Prophet (s) would seclude himself from some social services for devoting himself to prayer for some days every year at the end of Ramadan. He (s) also had the obligation to wake up at nights for prayer.

¹ Ibid, Sermon no. 192, p. 119.

Although reciting the last part of the chapter *Āle 'Imrān* is always possible for everyone, it is narrated that when getting up from bed before dawn, the noble Prophet (s) would look at the sky and recite it:

“Indeed in the creation of the heavens and the earth and the alternation of night and day, there are signs for those who possess intellects. | Those who remember Allah standing, sitting, and lying on their sides, and reflect on the creation of the heavens and the earth [and say] ,” Our Lord, You have not created this in vain! Immaculate are You! Save us from the punishment of the Fire. | Our Lord, whoever that You make enter the Fire will surely have been disgraced by You, and the wrongdoers will have no helpers. | Our Lord, we have indeed heard a summoner calling to faith, declaring, " Have faith in your Lord!" So we believed. Our Lord, forgive us our sins and absolve us of our misdeeds, and make us die with the pious. | Our Lord, give us what You have promised us through Your apostles, and do not disgrace us on the Day of Resurrection. Indeed You do not break Your promise.” (3: 190-194)

It is highly recommended that those who follow the noble Prophet (s) and wake up at night read the mentioned verses before their prayer at night. A person who wakes up at night and says:

“Our Lord, we have indeed heard a summoner calling to faith ...” (3: 193)

Such a person must be so that he hears the call of God, His angels and the Prophet (s).

Seclusion and resigning from occupations

Seclusion is resigning from occupations. There are different occupations which can be classified in four types:

The first type of occupations are those of sensory occupations like visual, aural and olfactory matters as well as softness of a carpet or clothes and deliciousness of food which attracts human beings. So, human beings are attracted to sensory experiences through taste, smell, seeing and hearing. Such sensory occupations are very few in seclusion at night.

The second type of occupations are the occupations of thoughts and imaginations which are mental representations and not intentional

thoughts. Many thoughts pass by our minds, some of which are affirmed ideas. Fantasies are a collection of mental images represented as propositions while they are not. This type of crowded proposition-like mental image leads to baseless comparisons.

The third type of occupations are that of actions based on powers of lust and anger; like when a person wants to achieve lawful things through good ways or when a person wants to achieve bad things through bad ways. The other cases are when a person who has a feeling of hatred or envy, seeks destruction of his enemy through any possible way based on his powers of lust and anger or when a person simply wants to reach higher levels in social issues:

“...so that one community may become more affluent than another community....” (16: 92)

Or it can drive the others out.

If one can free oneself from sensual occupations, not only having no sense of seeking dominance over one's rivals but also asking for their forgiveness and goodwill, then one finds a way to handle the fourth kind of occupations.

The fourth type of occupations are being involved with personal thoughts or ideas others have shared with one previously during prayer and recitation of the Qur'an, etc.

If one is released from the mentioned four types of occupations, he will find the power to think. Since God (*swt*) constantly observes His servants' hearts, He would grace them when He sees them well-disposed. The spiritual traveller towards God would benefit from this grace. He would receive what can pacify him and rescue from that which worries him. He would attach to what stays and give up what is passing; since what is passing leaves us alone and afflicts us with its separation. Thus, one had better leave such a matter before it leaves him. Accordingly, having no friend is better than having a disloyal friend who leaves us alone one day and afflicts us with his separation.

Therefore, Imam 'Ali (a) states:

“I advise you the servants of God to have God-wariness.....and I command you to reject this world which leaves you and it is passing even though you do not like to leave it”¹

Leave this world before it leaves you! If one attaches to what is passing, he will lose it and what remains is his attachment to it and it will cause him pain. Therefore, because God is “having constant grace upon the people”² and is the “Light of the heavens and the earth” (24: 35), if one wipes the dust from his heart, the light of God will light up his heart. The best of all lights is the thought that reminds one of God and leads one to thank Him.

The relation between waking up at dawn and daily works

There are strong advices for people to carry out only what is obligatory or what is recommended during the day and whenever they engage in an issue, they should say:

“My Lord! Admit me with a worthy entrance, and bring me out with a worthy departure...” (17: 80)

In this way they may be present in the society and not become engaged in different issues and find the opportunity to wake up at dawn. Whenever one is going to engage in something, he must say: “O God! I enter this issue sincerely in Your name” and when he is going to leave an issue, he must say: “God! I leave this issue in Your name devotedly” which means that “I leave it as I have obtained all the benefits and the conclusion.” It is obvious that one cannot recite the mentioned verse for committing a prohibited or reprehensible action since such an action does not have a sincere or pure departure to state the second part of the mentioned verse about it. Everything a person begins to do must be so that at the beginning he can say:

“In the name of Allah, the All-Compassionate, the most Merciful”

And that issue is obligatory or recommended. That there is an advice not to forget the name of God when beginning and engaging in everything means

¹ Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. 86, p. 237.

² Qumi, Sheikh Abbas, *Maḥāṭib al-Jinān*, (Mashhad: Hātif, 1371 A.H.S.) prayers of Thursday evening and the eve of the Fiṭr feast, p. 58.

that the name of God is the key to obligations and recommended actions because prohibited and reprehensible actions cannot be done in the name of God.

Eight: Contemplation

Because acquiring moral qualities is through the journey of the soul and the soul progresses using perception and acts of the mind and heart, contemplation is considered among the first steps of a spiritual traveller towards God. Thus, contemplation is necessary for a spiritual journey. It even could be stated that the whole realization of a spiritual traveller is by his thought and contemplation. A thoughtful person will find the answer to an unknown issue using a certain approach, i.e. he will seek what he wishes and find it unknown, and so he will seek its prerequisites first and organize them based on their natures and forms to achieve his goal. Thus, thinking is an internal process or, in other words, it is a procedure which starts from premises to conclusions and from known matters to find the unknown.

Thinking in the Qur'an and Hadiths

The glorious Qur'an calls people to think through two ways: first, through referring to thinking using the derivations of roots "فكر" [to think] and "عقل" [to reason] and second, through referring to the Qur'anic discussions mentioning "thinking". Sometimes, it does not discuss using the derivations of the mentioned roots, but justification and reasoning are indicated. Justification itself is an intentional thinking, thus it is not necessary to state exactly the following verse:

"...There are indeed signs in that for a people who reflect." (13:3)

Hadiths also call human beings in the same ways as the Qur'an to think: In the hadiths themselves when they issue "thinking" and "reasoning" as in: "Thinking for an hour is better than praying for a year"¹ or "Thinking for an hour is better than praying for sixty years."²

Moreover, sometimes different issues are mentioned in hadiths which cannot be understood without thinking.

¹ Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. 68, p. 327.

² *Ibid.*, vol. 66, p. 293.

Thinking is a kind of motion. Although motions depend on six elements, the most important elements of the spiritual process of thinking are three: the mover, the route and the goal. The thought process is in three types:

1. The first type is when the three elements are separate, e.g. when someone is thinking about the order of the world in order to understand the oneness of the Creator, his “thinking soul” is the mover, “the order of the world” is the route and “understanding the oneness of the Creator” is the goal. It means that he inspects the order of the world and reaches the goal that every movement needs a mover and the All-mover is the One God.

However, “the creation of the world” can be considered as the route that a thinking person travels rather than “the order of the world”. It means that the soul of the traveller thinks about “the creation of the world” and discovers the Creator of the world and sometimes he thinks about “the contingency of the world” i.e. the route of thinking, which is a contingent being in nature, conveys that the world is a contingent being and any contingent being needs a necessary existent. Thus, the world is in need of a creator who is the necessary existent and “...has no partner...” (6: 163). In such motions, the mover is different than the route, since neither the mover nor the route are the same as the goal.

2. The second type is when the mover and the route are one and the goal is different; like those who make efforts to know God through knowing themselves. However, they would reach this knowledge through:

“I knew Allah, Almighty through the overturning of decisions,
breaking of fixed agreements and frustration of efforts.”¹

And sometimes they would know God through clearer ways within and through self-knowledge. In such a case, the mover and the route are the self and the goal is to achieve the belief in the unity of God and this way, they would know the Creator and this is the second type of knowledge [about God].

3. The third type is that through deep investigation. The self knows the goal from the path to it, like those who find the truth of existence that is God

¹ *Nahj al-Balāghah*, Maxim no. 250.

through deliberation about the truth of existence. The Commander of the Faithful (a) refers to this in his supplication of *Ṣabāḥ* to God:

"O One whose existence is proved by His existence."¹

Elsewhere in the Supplication of *‘Arafah*, it is mentioned that:

"Is there anything manifested more than You are?!"²

In such a type of thought process, the route and the goal are one and the mover is different. This way, the moving and thinking soul reflects on God Himself and finds out about His existence from His own existence.

To make an analogy between the above-mentioned subjective issues and objective examples, we can say that a person may look at the sky and see that it is bright and find out that the sun has risen. In this example, the mover is the human's soul, the route is brightness of the sky and the goal is the knowledge of the rise of the sun. But, one might see the sun itself and in this way he finds out that the sun has risen, not through the brightness of the sky. Genuine believers in the oneness of God are those who think about the truth of the existence and understand that it is God and that He has created every definite being. In any case, progression of thought is among the most essential tasks of travellers towards God.

Inner and outer signs [of God]

An important point here is that it is said that: thinking is either about the outer signs [of God] or inner signs [of God]. The case of outer signs [of God] is clear, since they are in the sky and on the earth and they include the order which exists in the sea, plants, animals and birds, pondering about which is instrumental and makes the traveller familiar with the oneness of God.

But normally, exploring the inner signs [of God] is achieved if one knows about the human's body, e.g. through dissection and becoming familiar with the order which exists in the body, and so therefore he would find out about the Wise Regulator. This way, they would have considered the knowledge of

¹ Qumi, Sheikh Abbas, *Mafātīḥ al-Jinān, du‘a Sabāḥ*, p. 106; Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. 87, p. 239.

² *Ibid.*, du‘a ‘Arafah, p. 485.

the body and issues found through dissection as among the inner signs [of God]; while in fact, these are also among the outer signs [of God] because the reality of the human being is his soul and the body is the adaptable shadow of the soul and in any world, the human being has a body corresponding with that world. Anything which leaves the human being and is adaptable would have no role in the permanent and unique truth of the human being. Such a thing would be subsidiary and thinking about the subsidiary and the subordinate (the body) is different from thinking about the leading and principal (reality of the self).

Thus, one who knows about the creator of the body through dissection would also be exploring the outer signs [of God], not the inner signs [of God]. But exploring the inner signs [of God] is to think about one's thoughts, observations, practical and theoretical discoveries, one's attributes and soul which is an incorporeal, constant and single being. Exploring the inner signs [of God] has a more exact meaning, according to which even exploring attributes of one's self is actually exploring the outer signs [of God] not the inner signs [of God]. In any case, a thought movement is necessary for the travellers towards God.

Fossilization of Thought

In opposition to the mentioned thought movement, there is a state of heart in which it becomes atrocious and immovable. The glorious Qur'an calls an immovable heart which does not reflect on God as "fossilized" and "inattentive". The Qur'an says:

"...so they are like stones, or even harder." (2: 74)

No good word would affect such hearts and they would not be touched and they themselves have nothing to offer.

The point is that the glorious Qur'an states that some people are lower than rocks, because some rocks like those lying at the hillside are a source of blessing and springs would bubble up out of them:

"...and indeed there are some of them that split, and water issues from them..." (2: 74)

The glorious Qur'an sometimes calls those inattentive hearts "wanderers" or "rejecters". It states that they are wanderers and rejecters of the truth, and they are declining.

Also, the glorious Qur'an calls some people blind. These blind ones are the same fossilized ones and wanderers. They are blind because they do not think, and they are fossilized because they do not have movement.

Fruits of Genuine Thought

Like the sins that act like a screen and obstacle to obedience, also desisting from thinking prevents one from being mindful [of God]. It has been said that thinking is seeking and mindfulness is the conscience. First, a person must repent and he becomes "penitent" and after "returning" [to the truth], he becomes mindful of God. However, invocation only by the tongue is not so important and the important thing is being mindful. It must be mentioned that some stages of mindfulness are to be found before "returning", but because the appearance of the Qur'an says that:

“Yet no one takes admonition except he who returns penitently [to Allah].” (40: 13)

Some sources say that mindfulness appears after returning and thinking must be done before [and in order to achieve] mindfulness. That is because thinking is "seeking" and mindfulness is "achieving". A human being has to know something, and he tries to know it through thinking; when he knows that, he actually finds it and when he finds it, he becomes tranquil.

Thus, part of mindfulness is achieved before thinking; since a human being must know that he has a goal and destination he has lost and that there is a way to achieve it and he must learn that way. During his learning, thinking passes through that way and reaches a destination. He would then try to consider these partial goals also as a part of the way and not the ultimate goal. In the same way that a thinker tries to find the first cause in the chain of efficient causes, a thinker must also make efforts to reach the goal of the goals and the ultimate end in the chain of ultimate causes". This issue can be explained as the following: when one thinks about the creator of phenomena, he would first investigate the causes and then understands that they are only preparatory causes and none of them are an existence-granting cause. Then, he would investigate the efficient causes until he reaches the

first cause which is the mere existence and "He is the First" who gives existence to all the rest.

On the other hand, suppose a thinker thinks that he has done something for a certain goal. If that goal is a partial perfection, then it must have a further goal, because any high level that is absolute in relation to its lower levels is considered as the perfection and the ultimate goal of that level. When he reaches that ultimate goal, again he would think about whether that goal is absolute perfection or a partial perfection. If it is a partial perfection, he would seek a higher perfection until he reaches the infinite and ultimate perfection where he could call it: the goal by itself, i.e. he reaches whom "He is the Last".

So, just as a human being reaches whom "He is the First" through thinking about the chain of efficient causes, he also reaches the goal by itself or whom "He is the Last" through investigating the goals and the chain of final causes [the above-mentioned ultimate goal] and such a thinker will always be mindful of God, because he knows that all blessings and graces are from Him and He is the ultimate goal of all things. In this manner, a mindful thinker as mentioned would want no occupation other than God. He even would not want anything rather than God and so he would dominate over all things rather than God, except the case when obliging one is oppressing the others. Through internal witnessing, the human being would reach a point at which he would not pray [and supplicate] for himself and not pray for others with such prayers as: "May you be healthy under favour of God!" But he would pray: "May you see no one but God!"

"Reaches man where he sees but God"¹

If one reaches this position, God will grant him anything; false pleasure will abandon him and the pure beauty of God will embrace him.

In the supplication of *Saḥar*, the mentioned issues are requested from God:

"O Allah! Indeed, I ask You by the most Beautiful in Your Beauty, and Your all Beauties are beautiful; O Allah! I ask You by Your All Beauties"²

¹ Sa'dī, *Ghazels*, Advices, No. 16

² Qumi, Sheikh Abbas, *Mafātīḥ al-Jinān*, Du'ā of Saḥar, p. 323.

Thus, if one asks for all beauty, perfection and glory, he will consequently reach where he sees nothing but God, because absolute beauty and perfection is not plural and a pure thing would not be divided; i.e. it is not imaginable and it is rationally impossible for both a human being and his Creator to be the absolute beauty together.

However, those who do not understand such deeper meanings would only ask God for solutions to their daily problems. Of course, daily needs must be provided so that a human being can comfortably seek the way to internal witnessing. However, those who seek nothing but God do not consider small daily issues as problems, because when a person does not like something, its absence does not affect him, while if he really loves something, then its absence affects him relatively.

One must purify his soul and decrease his desires in order to become affected to a smaller extent. Therefore, we have been advised to make efforts not to become attached to transient things, for if we do, we would always have difficulties. It is such that neither a shaking hand is powerful enough to hold a crystal bowl, nor is a heart with irregular beats and stress able to keep the divine gift.

Therefore, genuine thought enables human beings to understand the oneness of God well and this is important because it can transform the heart. After one thinks [about God] and finds new things and intellectual knowledge which is acquired by the mind, his heart becomes tranquil and receptive. This is one of the best stages of purification of soul and travel towards Allah, because the dust of seeing others rather than God is removed and nothing remains in the heart but the Name of God.

