

The Need to Cultivate Ethics

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Be informed, may Allah assist you, that the Prophet ('s) has said: 'I was sent (to mankind) in order to perfect the virtues of ethics' (Bihar al-Anwar, Vol. 68, p. 382).

There is no confusion in this statement, for anything relevant to the Hereafter and to our sustenance cannot be in order, nor can its seeker be happy, except through good manners. Much of a good deed does not help without cultivating and correcting one's conduct. Actually, a bad conduct only spoils a good deed just as vinegar spoils honey (Usul Al-Kafi, Vol. 2, p. 32).

What benefit is there in anything the outcome of which is spoilage? Do not be misled into thinking that a great deal of knowledge without correcting and cultivating one's conduct can be of any use. Never! AhlulBayt (a) have said: 'Do not be tyrannical scholars so your falsehood may wipe out your righteousness' (al-Saduq's Amali, Vol. 9, p. 294).

'Nor should you be misled into thinking that a bad mannered person can be happy^[1] in the company of a father, a son, a spouse, a friend, a companion, a family, a teacher or a student. Nay! They all are harmed by him, and they find his conduct offensive; so, how can he attain the means of perfection which are scattered among the people while those who are perfect shun and run away from him?!

And be further informed that anyone who discerns the path of AhlulBayt, peace be upon them, studying their legacy, will find how they guided mankind, attracted people to the creed, all through their good manners, ordering their followers to do likewise saying, 'Invite people [to your creed] but not with your tongues.' (Al-Kafi, Vol. 2, p. 46), meaning through good manners and beautiful deeds, so that they may be role models for those who emulate.

So, if it becomes obvious that seeking this life or the life to come can both be complete through good manners, and that complementing the code of ethics is the benefit of the Message without which life can never be good, it becomes also obvious that cultivating manners has a precedence over any other obligation and is more important than any obligation.

It is the key to everything good, the source of everything beautiful, the one which brings about every fruit, the basis of any objective. Look how even the unbelievers are rewarded on account

of their good manners, how anyone who accustomed himself to opposing the insinuations of the nafs (self) led him to belief. And see how a generous captive was held in the custody of the Prophet (s), whereupon Gabriel (a) descended from Allah, the most Exalted, the most Great,

with the message saying:

‘Do not kill him; he is generous,’

thus his life was saved from a swift termination, earning him Paradise later on (Bihar al-Anwar, Vol. 68, p 390).

If you know this much by way of introduction which, were one to choose and to test, proves to be accurate, be informed, may Allah grant you success and guidance, that AhlulBayt (a) have set the bases for the code of ethics and for the principles and restrictions which, if observed, help one earn good manners easily and conveniently, neither with a concerted effort nor with any hardship, as the scholars of ethics tell us.

The Prophet (‘s) brought us the Islamic Shari`ah which is tolerant and easy to implement, thus agreeing with what His Lord, the most Exalted and the most Great, has told us, that is, He does not want to impose any hardship on us, nor does He wish we should put ourselves under undue constriction. Rather, He has placed no compulsion in the creed.

The same applies to the knowledge of its methodology: He opened the gates of ease for us, closing those of hardship. So, Satan should not discourage you from taking your share of the science of mannerism, telling you that this is something quite difficult and relies on waging a struggle against one’s self, requiring exhausting confrontations; so, how can you do that?!

If we take a look at those who did, indeed, undertake venues of hardship and who met challenging confrontations, we will find out that these did not get them to reach anything but the achievement of worldly objectives and lowly goals; they did not delve deeply into the way of AhlulBayt (a), nor did they emulate them.^[2]

The origin of this concept and its explanation are as follows: You should keep in mind that Allah, Praised and Exalted is He, through the beauty of His wisdom and favor, has dazzled the minds, testing the mindful, requiring the beings to undertake great matters, making the keys to the latter unimportant particles.

So, if anyone deems the pathways to them as great and becomes neglectful in their regard, he misses what he is required to do. Such is the greatest of all tests to him. And anyone who seeks his objectives through these ‘partial’ matters, they will get him to attain the total demands of the soul. He did not undertake except what is small, insignificant, yet the same got him to earn a lot for himself; this is the source of the greatest happiness for him.

Consider, then, such a great wisdom and carefully look into it and you will then see how He

confronted His creation with such a momentous evidence, perfecting such a generous blessing for them. What a blessing it is! How did He help them, through such 'particles', attain such lofty stations?! And what a great evidence it is! How did they expose themselves to a perpetual perdition and painful torment while the doing of very small things could have saved them?!

Anyone who considers such wisdom and derives a light torch from the legacy of AhlulBayt (a) will find the meaning of the following hadith quite clear: 'One who regards a little sustenance as insignificant will be deprived of the plenty thereof' (Al-Kafi, Vol. 2, p. 207).

Also, the principle of goodness springs out of the meaning of this hadith; one who does not take a little sustenance lightly will not be deprived of plenty of it. If you follow this meaning, you will find its testimonies in the perfect Rope and in countless narratives such as this:

'Beware of minor sins' (Al-Kafi, Vol. 2, p. 207).

Another is:

'Do not take a form of obedience [to the Commandments of Allah] lightly,' for it may please Allah Almighty; nor should you take an act of disobedience lightly, for it may incur the Wrath of Allah. There are many such statements left for us by them, may Allah be pleased with them. It becomes clear for anyone who seeks light and guidance that the way of the glorious Shari`ah of Muhammad ('s) is built on minor things which are easy to undertake and, by the will of Allah, get one who implements them to attain the most lofty of goals and the most pleasing of desires.^[3] This idea becomes more clear to anyone who contemplates on he

Qudsi hadith wherein the Lord of Dignity, Praise to Him, says, 'If one gets closer to Me the distance of a span, I shall get closer to him the distance of a yard..., etc.' (Al-Jawahir al-Saniyyah, p. 129).

If He, the Praised One, gets closer to anyone who gets closer to him, inviting back to Himself whoever runs away from Him, what would you say about one who willingly goes to Him and knocks at His door?! Suffices you the following statement of the Master of Worshippers at sahar time:

'... and one who travels to You has a short distance to cross; You do not conceal Yourself from Your creation except when their own hopes shield them from You' or, in some copies, '... except when their own wrongdoings shield them from You.'

So, O my Brother who is seeking nearness to Allah, desiring such a lofty status! Listen to my advice which is derived from the lantern of AhlulBayt (a) because whoever seeks a way other than theirs, his way shall lead him to hell. This advice is as follows:

You have come to know that a servant of Allah is required to adorn himself with good manners which, due to their distinction, are attributed to the Lord of Dignity. AhlulBayt (a) are quoted as having said,

‘Adorn yourselves with Allah’s ethics’ (al-Sabzawari, Sharh al-Asma’ al-Husna, Vol. 2, p. 41), and they are the ethics of Muhammad (‘s), of his pure and righteous AhlulBayt (a) and of their followers.

Be further informed that the premise and system of this meaning is to sit on the carpet of straightforwardness, avoiding extravagance or exclusion. You, therefore, should seek nearness to Allah through whatever you can uphold of deeds of obedience to Him and of avoidance of whatever sins He holds in contempt.

Make up your mind not to ignore anything partial or total; everything you know to be good you should do even if it appears to you to be small, insignificant. And everything you know as wrong you should be determined to abandon and to avoid even if it seems to you to be insignificant. Do not take anything lightly with regard to what is partial or total. Rather, you must be concerned about precision and restriction. Beware of doing many deeds without observing how to perfect them.

One thing you perfect and you accomplish as it should be results in thousands of good deeds. Thousands of good deeds which are not perfected do not produce one good deed which is perfected and is done with precision. There is no way to compare this with that for the people of knowledge and wisdom.[4]

I do not tell you that you must be perfect in doing anything partial or total because you will then find it too much and say, ‘How can I do that, knowing who I am?!’ Rather, I tell you that you should not excuse yourself when you deliberately do a faulty job with regard to anything partial, forgiving yourself for it.

But if your shortcoming is due to submission to whims and desires of your own, in response to self-deception and to the insinuations of Satan, this is quite something else. Such is the doing of someone who is not infallible. Our objective is to accustom ourselves not to take things lightly, not to be neglectful and forgiving of our own shortcomings.

These are the partial things relevant to the Shari`ah which, if we get accustomed to doing them and not be deliberately negligent in their regard, will elevate us and help us reach lofty stations. Allah, Praise to Him, has made them the keys to such treasures; one who holds the keys to the treasures in his hand has enriched himself and has won a great victory.

Had it not been for the risk of being repetitive, I would have explained the above in detail, bringing numerous examples, and it is worthy of all of that, for it is the most perfected and

accomplished gate which opens a thousand other gates of Divine wisdom. Perhaps we will explain it more in the following Chapters by the Will of Allah.

References:

[1]. The author's discussion is very important for attracting those who cannot be attracted by spiritual ideologies which need spiritual maturity such as seeking the degree of pleasing the Almighty and looking forward to the Glorious Countenance, etc. No wise person refuses to seek social happiness and a stable worldly livelihood besides the desire for a commendable outcome, be it during the period of the barzakh or on Judgment Day. Thereupon, treading this path guarantees comfort for the heart as well as social stability. Both objectives are lost by those who love this world when they distance themselves from the divine order. — Editor

[2]. The compiler has pointed out here to a serious phenomenon which often hurled those who feigned treading on the path to Allah Almighty into delusion, so they confined the path to self-torture through exercises which Allah Almighty never enjoined. Thus, they lost the pleasure of this life and they did not attain the pleasure of the life to come.

The secret here is in their making the struggle against their desires a pretext to obtain some of the wares of this life, even if this won them admirers, due to their knowledge that controlling the self in its various forces makes this notion effective in some issues. The self is a force like any other in this life.

It is full of amazing secrets. Just as worldly forces do amazing things on the horizons, the energies of the self do amazing things in the realm of the self. But let us wonder and ask: Were we created for such things?! Were we required to struggle in order to earn some of the strokes of luck for our own selves?

[3]. Such an enticing method is effective with the souls that fear initiating a movement after awakening, thinking that the path to the Hereafter robs the world of its pleasures, and that the matter needs exhausting struggles such as those undertaken by the ones who make such exercises from among the followers of deviated sects, even from among the unbelievers, and that the goals are not achieved except through hardships, impossible things and other such discouragement.

The reality is that the Shari`ah never prohibited anything in the absence of something permissible besides it as its alternative. The circle of obligations, the 'do's' and 'don'ts', is much smaller than that of what is permissible, without any comparison. So, where is the hardship which a servant of Allah uses as a pretext to remain inactive and to thus resort to a life wherein one is like a brute concerned only about its animal feed, staying busy dirtying?!

[4]. These are portraits of reality and logic in the method employed by the author. He tries to raise the one who treads the path to the station of always establishing a link between the causes and the outcomes, and that a deed must not be undertaken by a servant of Allah separately from its anticipated goal which is: realizing a total worship of Allah, Lord of the Worlds. Deeds which do not achieve this goal are worthless. Their doing may be to impress others, or they may distract one from doing something more important, or they may cause him to be conceited and arrogant, or they may cause the soul to ...dislike the main Path