

Imam Reza's Morals and Counsels

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The value of wisdom and moral is when it sets out of its leading springs to make its way in life to plant goodness, beauty, and love, and to uproot evil, corruption, and hatred. The individual who wishes to spiritually build his inner self wholly has to search for the wisdom whereby he discovers his shortcomings which distance him from virtuous humanity, and he has to look for the moral which brings him closer to his Lord and which deepens the roots of iman within him. This is the value of wisdom and of moral, and this is their plentiful product. It is the dividing line between the man of righteousness, and the man of evil. Good wisdom is the one which sows within the depths of the individual the seed of light in order to grow therefrom a plant blossoming with goodness, love, and beauty.

So let us read the pure wisdom and the magnificent moral in the words of Imam Reza(A.S.), then let us open up our souls in order to plant therein the seed of light. After that, let us look after that plant that will come out of that seed so that we may harvest from it the fruit of iman, the belief in God, the belief in the principles and morals which God has legislated for us in order to be able to build ourselves from within, and to be able to rise thereby above the level of wishes and desires to the level whereby the individual becomes a true human being in his pure link with his Lord, in his honest dealing with his brother man, and in his own emancipation from worshipping his own ego.

The first moral we meet as we read the words of the Imam (A.S.) is his statement: "It is not adoration to perform the fast or the prayers a great deal; adoration is to contemplate upon God a great deal." What the Imam (A.S.) meant from such a definition of what adoration in its deep context is all about is his correction of the general attitude towards a rite such as the fast or the daily prayers, saying that prayers are not merely the prescribed movements accompanying quotations relevant particularly to prayers, nor is the fast merely the abstention from eating and drinking and such things.

These particular movements and this performance are nothing more than the outer frame of the picture, while the adoration is the context which lies beyond the picture. What the Imam (A.S.) aims at by making this statement is making us aware of the reality from which we have to set out in performing the rite we are supposed to perform, and to distance us from the stagnation of the empty routine which causes us to lose the greatly spiritual meanings the rites we perform are intended to help us live. So, what is adoration, after all?

The Imam (A.S.) says that it is a great deal of contemplation upon the Almighty. It is not a great deal of fasting or prayers which do not go beyond the particular movements and timings as a routine action an individual has become accustomed to be doing during certain times away from the deep context of belief. Such is not adoration, for how many are those who perform their prayers and uphold their fast and at the same time commit the greatest of sins

and perform various kinds of immoralities, yielding to wishes and desires, without being able towards them to take control of themselves, without trying to give authority over them to the deterring power of iman in order to avoid slipping into the paths of misguidance? The prayers of such individuals and their fast are nothing more than movements and performances which have lost their sense of wisdom and spiritual integrity.

Abundant contemplation upon the Will of God is by itself a form of worship and, at the same time, a starting point of every adoration and ritual. When someone feels harmony while contemplating upon the cosmos and its Creator, and the particles of life and their secrets filling the general existence of the cosmos, he cannot avoid feeling how small he is before this great

Power which created this system in such perfection, determined its rules with such precision and exactness; and when he, through his power of reason, feels that the Power of the Great Creator surrounds this cosmos, that everything in existence is overwhelmed by its Authority and Might, without any avenue through which one may escape from the center of the Power controlling it..., then he cannot help feeling a deep belief in the perfecting Creator, and a genuine awe before the manifestations of such Greatness.

When man considers the bounties God has bestowed upon him which can never be exhausted while satisfying his continuous needs, and His absolute ability to deprive him of them any moment He wishes, without the existence of any power that would forbid Him from doing so, he would surely then thank Him sincerely and be grateful to Him, distancing himself from the hated elements of disbelief.

When man realizes the wisdom behind his own creation and the end awaiting him that will take him to another life so that the doers of good will be rewarded for their good deeds and the doers of evil will be punished for their evil, he cannot help considering what secures his salvation while doing what he does, and feeling angry at whatever displeases God. The feeling one develops of all of this and the comprehension of all of this is by itself a form of adoration because this feeling is the conscientious path which takes man to knowledge, and knowledge is the foundation of belief. At the same time, such comprehension gives adoration the vast spiritual meaning for which it was decreed.

A man asked him once about the meaning of the verse, "Whoever relies on God, He suffices him." He said: "Reliance on God is in various degrees one of which is that you rely on Him in everything related to you, and when He does something to you which you know will not bring you anything good, you rely on His wisdom in doing it, so you nevertheless put your trust in Him willingly. Another is to believe in the Unseen regarding God of which you have no knowledge,

so you relied on Him and on His custodians, trusting in Him in their regard, and in others."

He was asked once about the extent of such reliance. He said, "It is that you fear none save God." What the Imam here means is that you submit to the Will of God and accept His decree.

Ahmed ibn Najm asked him about the pride which spoils one's deeds. He said: "Pride is degrees; among them is that one sees his bad deed as good, so he likes it and feels proud of it; another is that one believes in God and feels he is doing Him a favour by believing in Him, whereas He is the One who enabled that person to believe in Him." He, peace be upon him, said once, "If one lacks five attributes, do not expect to gain anything good out of him for your life in this world or in the life to come: if his lineage is known to be untrustworthy, if his nature lacks generosity, if his temper lacks balance, if he lacks a noble conduct, and if he lacks fear of his Lord."

He was asked once who a lowly person is. He said, "Anyone who has something to distract him from God." Among his wise sayings are the following:

"God abhors hearsay, the loss of one's funds (through foolishness), and excessive questioning." "To be courteous to people is to cross half the way to achieving wisdom."

"The mind of a Muslim is not complete except after he acquires ten merits: God accepts his good deeds, he is trustworthy, he sees as plentiful what little good others do for him, while seeing his own abundant good as little; he does not fret from being asked for favours, nor does he feel tired of constantly seeking knowledge; poverty reached in order to please God is better for him than wealth accumulated otherwise; to be subjected to power while trying to serve God is better in his regard than achieving power over his foe, and obscurity he prefers over fame.

" Then he said, "And the third one..., do you know what the third one is?" It was said to him, "What is it?" He said, "Whenever he meets someone, he says, 'He is better than me and more pious.' People are two types: a person better than him and more pious, and one who is more evil than him and more lowly. If he meets the one who is more evil than him and more lowly, he would say to himself 'Maybe the goodness of this (statement) is implied, and it is better that he hears such a compliment, while my own goodness is apparent and it is detrimental to me.' And when he sees someone better than him and more pious, he would humble himself before him trying to raise himself to his level. So if he does that, his glory will be higher, his reputation

will be better, and he will become distinguished above his contemporaries."

"Silence is one of the gates of wisdom. Silence wins the love of others. It is an indication of everything good." "Everyone's friend is his reason; his enemy is his ignorance." "Among the habits of Prophets is cleanliness."

"One who is blessed with plenty must spend generously on his family."

"If you mention someone who is present, use a kunya (surname) for him, and if he is absent, mention his full name."

"Time will come when one's safety lies in ten things nine of which are in staying aloof from people, and the tenth in staying silent."

"Whoever scrutinizes his behaviour wins; whoever does not loses. Whoever fears consequences will live safely. Whoever learns a moral from others achieves insight, and whoever achieves insight achieves wisdom, and whoever achieves wisdom achieves knowledge. One who befriends the ignorant will be worn out. The best of wealth is that which safeguards one's honour. The best of reason is one's knowledge of his own self. If a true believer becomes angry, his anger does not cause him to abandon righteousness; when he is pleased, his pleasure will not tempt him into wrong-doing, and when he achieves power, he does not take more than what rightfully is his." "If one's attributes become plentiful, they will relieve him from having to win praise by mentioning them."

"Do not pay attention to the view of someone who does not follow your advice for his own good. Whoever seeks guidance from the appropriate source will never slip, and if he slips, he will find a way to correct himself."

"People's hearts are sometimes coming towards you, sometimes keeping away from you; sometimes they are active, sometimes they are relaxed. If they come along, they will achieve wisdom and understanding, and if they stay away, they will be exhausted and worn out; so, take them when they come to you and when they are active, and shun them when they stay away or are relaxed."

"Accompany with caution the person who has authority over you; be humble when in the company of a friend; stay alert when facing an enemy, and mingle with the public with a smile on your face."

"Postponement is detrimental to the fulfillment of desires. Fulfillment is the gain of the strict. Wastefulness is the calamity of one who can afford it. Miserliness tears up honour. Passion invites trouble. The best and most honourable of virtues is to do others favours, to aid the one who calls for help, to bring the hope of the hopeful to reality, not to disappoint the optimist, to have an ever increase of the number of friends when you are alive, and the number of those

who will cry when you die."

"The miser one is never restful. The envious is never pleased. The grumbling is never loyal. The liar has no conscience." "One who struggles to satisfy the needs of his family shall have more rewards than those who make jihad in the Way of God."

He (A.S.) was asked once who the best of believers are; he said, "They are the ones who are excited with expectation when they do a good deed, who pray for God's forgiveness when they commit a bad one, who show gratitude when they are granted something, who are patient when they are tried, who forgive those who anger them." He (A.S.) was asked once, "How did you start your day?" He answered, "With a shorter life-span, with our deeds being recorded, with death round our necks, with Fire behind our backs, and we do not know what will be done to us."

He (A.S.) said, "Wealth is not accumulated except by five means: extreme miserliness, a long-standing optimism, an overwhelming care, a boycott of the relatives, and a preference of this life over the life to come."

Ali ibn Shu'ayb said that he once visited Abul-Hassan Ali Reza(A.S.) who asked him, "O Ali! Do you know whose subsistence is the best?" He answered, "You, master, know better than me." He said, "It is that of the one whose others' subsistence is improved through his own. Do you know who has the worst subsistence?" Ali answered, "You know better than me!" The Imam (A.S.) answered saying, "It is that of the one who does not include others in it." Then he added, "O Ali! Be thoughtful to the boons for they are wild: if they leave people, they never come back to them. O Ali! The worst of people is someone who stops his contributions to charity, eats by himself, and whips his slave."

He (A.S.) also said the following:

"Your assistance of the weak is better than your act of charity." "No servant of God achieves true belief except when he acquires three attributes: He derives juristic deductions of the creed; he is wise regarding his livelihood, and he is patient when faced with calamities."

"Beware of one who wants to offer you advice by speaking behind others' backs; he does not realize how bad his own end shall be."

He (A.S.), upon the death of al-Hassan ibn Sahl, said, "To congratulate one for a reward in store for him is better than to console him on a quick calamity." This is a magnificent bouquet of shining statements of Imam a-Rida (A.S.) which emanate with wisdom, overflow with iman, and overbrim with good fruits. In them, the Imam (A.S.) defines glorious ethical and educational manners, the upright conduct of true belief, offering some glimpses of humanity for social cooperation and coexistence a Muslim is supposed to implement if he wants to be in

harmony with the principles of Islam which are the turning point of social change from an oppressive ignorant society to an advanced civilized society built upon virtue and love, justice and equity.

We have to translate these statements and their peers into actions in our daily life and be in harmony with their ethical and humane practical implications if we wish to direct our individual and social conduct to the right direction which safeguards its principles and precepts in order to create a nation based on virtues and humanity, and build it from within in a firm spiritual structure. Such a structure is reflects its practical reality and affects its intellectual and social objectives so that it would be "the best nation that ever was."

Finally, this has been, we believe, an honest and clear picture of the biography of Imam Reza(A.S.) in both its historical and intellectual aspects in which we tried to go beyond the style of narrating the facts as the books of history and biography have recorded for us, which are not always free from contradictions, and to employ the scholarly critical method with honesty and sincerity without having any objective in mind other than to arrive at the facts which are free of falsehood, and to define the realistic boundaries of the concept which lies behind the background of events.

We have also tried in it to provide a quick glimpse of the intellectual life of the Imam in its various aspects, and to provide the reader with a brief picture of the magnificent intellectual output presented by the Imam (A.S.) to mankind.

I do not claim that I have, in what I have written about the Imam (A.S.) here, covered all the aspects of the greatness of his personality; rather, it is a quick research necessitated by certain circumstances. The initial objective was to research his selection by al-Mamoon, in response to transient political circumstances dictated by the nature of the then government, to be his heir to the throne. But the absence of an inclusive and independent study of this great Imam forced me to expand the scope of the research and present the various aspects of his personality in a research which I hope has proven to be a successful experience and a starting point for a more inclusive study and a more vast presentation.

I hope I have, with whatever effort and energy available to me, been faithful to this study in its presentation, research and style, and from God Alone do I derive aid and assistance; He !suffices me, and what a Great Support He is