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Last Advice

Imam Musa al-Kazim's ('a) mother and Imam Jafar al-Sadiq's ('a) wife, Umme Hameeda was sitting in her home, bereaved by the passing away of her beloved husband and Imam. She noticed a very close friend of her husband, Abu Basir, among those who had come to condole with the family of the Imam ('a). They both wept silently. Umme Hameeda then addressed Abu Basir. "During the last moments of his life, the Imam ('a) suddenly opened his eyes and insisted upon seeing all his relatives, friends and close associates as soon as possible. We were much concerned as the manner of demanding their presence was almost a command. All those who could, arrived immediately. On seeing them, the Imam said, 'Our intercession will certainly not reach those who disregard prayer.' These were his last words of advice to all who loved him".

The Greater Worship

Imam Jafar al-Sadiq ('a) one day noticed that a constant visitor had not attended his discourse for many days. He asked his friends if they had any knowledge about his whereabouts.

'Ya ibne Rasool Allah, he is going through a great financial crisis and is on the verge of poverty.'

'What is he doing about it?' the Imam ('a) asked.

'Nothing, he is seen constantly praying in a corner of the house.'

'How does he make both ends meet?'

'One of his friends is providing for him and his family.'

'.'By Allah, his friend's act is far, far greater in worship than his'

Solving Problems

Sufwan was present in the company of Imam Jafar al-Sadiq ('a) when a citizen of Mecca arrived, extremely distressed about something. He sat beside the Imam ('a) and described his problem in detail. It was a financial problem gone awry due to mismanagement by both parties. The Imam ('a) immediately ordered Sufwan to go with the believer and help him solve his problem. Sufwan did as he was asked, and solved the problem with the wisdom and resources Allah had blessed him with.

When he returned, the Imam asked him, ‘What happened?’

‘The Almighty solved the problem.’

The Imam said, ‘Remember, solving a minor problem that demands a little bit of your time is worth more in Allah’s sight than circumambulating the K’aaba seven times. Let me relate an incident from the life of my grandfather, Imam Hasan (‘a). One day a man came to him, seeking his aid in a problem. Imam Hasan (‘a) didn’t stop to think. He put his feet into his slippers and got up to accompany him. On the way they passed by the mosque and saw Imam Husain (‘a) offering his prayers.

‘How come you saw Husain ibn e Ali (‘a) and did not go to him?’ asked the Imam (‘a).

‘I was informed that he was in a state of ‘a’iteka’f’, ‘worship in isolation’.

‘But if Husain (‘a) had got the opportunity of solving your problem, it would have been worth more than a whole month of “worship in isolation”.’

The Strongest Act of Faith

One day the Holy Prophet (s) asked all the Muslims present: ‘According to Islam, which act of a believer denotes the strongest faith?’

‘Prayer,’ said one. ‘No,’ was the answer.

‘Zakaat,’ said another. ‘No,’ was the answer.

‘Fasting,’ proffered a third. ‘No’ was the answer.

‘Hajj,’ volunteered a fourth. ‘No,’ was the answer.

‘Jihad,’ said a fifth. ‘No,’ was the answer.

The Holy Prophet (s) then said, ‘All the things that you have mentioned are great and important essentials of faith, but not the answer to my question. The correct answer is: “Befriending for the pleasure of Allah and sundering relations for the approval of Allah”.

Special Treatment

The rules of life instituted by Islam were gradually being erased by the continuous rule of the Umayyad and Abbasid kings who loved splendour and glory, and expected undue respect and special treatment from other human beings. The noble, fraternal and simple interactive lifestyle of the Holy Prophet (s) and his noble companions was a thing of the past, except for glimpses found in his noble Household (‘a). The most sorrowful part was that the people had become so used to the despotic attitude of the kings that they had begun to accept it as the rightful conduct of rulers.

One day, Imam Jafar al-Sadiq (‘a) wished to bathe in the public bath. He sent a messenger to enquire when it would be convenient for the owner of the bath system.

He replied with utmost respect, as he was accustomed to show all respectable citizens, ‘Should I forbid anyone else from entering the entire bath system while you occupy one bathroom?’

‘Certainly not!’ was the astonished reply.

‘Why not?’ asked the bewildered owner.

‘Remember, the lifestyle of a believer is simple, accommodating, and free from decorum. The true believer does not demand special treatment. He believes in treating human beings as equals, not masters or slaves’.

Live in the World or Renounce it

After the Battle of Jamal, Imam Ali (‘a) entered the town of Basra. During his stay, he went to enquire after the health of a friend, Rabi ibn e Ziad Harisi, who was unwell. On reaching his house, he found it was no less than a palace. Commenting on its splendour, he said, ‘Of what use can such a palatial house be in this world, when you long for such a one in the hereafter. However, you can make this house a means of earning one in the hereafter.

For that you must be very hospitable towards guests and visitors; be courteous and affectionate towards people; make sure your duties towards your brethren- in-faith are fulfilled in this house; help people obtain their rights so that people come to equate this house with a place where truth and justice reign. In short, besides personal advantage, use this house for public benefit, too. Thus, you will be saved from egoistic satisfaction.’

Rabi listened intently. He then complained against his brother Asim.

‘What is your complaint?’ asked Ameer-ul Momineen (‘a).

‘He has renounced the world. He has donned rags and alienated himself from the world and all the people in it.’

‘Let me talk to him.’

When Asim came, Imam Ali (‘a) greeted him thus, ‘O enemy of thy own self! It seems Satan has depleted you of all common sense. How could you be insensitive towards the needs of your wife and children? Do you believe that Almighty Allah will be annoyed with you for enjoying the lawful pleasures and blessings He has bestowed on you in this life? You have become more insignificant in the eyes of your Creator.’

‘O Ameer-ul-Momineen (‘a), you are also like me. You also bear trials and difficulties patiently, and live a life of extreme adversity. You never clothe yourself in soft expensive materials, nor

eat delicious food. I am trying to emulate you and follow your lifestyle,' explained Asim. Imam Ali ('a) explained, 'You are treading the wrong path, Asim. There is a difference between us. You are not in my position. I am the leader, ruler and guide of the Ummah. The duties and responsibilities of rulers and leaders are very different from those of a common citizen. The common citizen does not have the same obligations as the ruler. The Creator of this universe has ordained it compulsory for just rulers to live their lives with an eye on the poorest class of people in their states.

According to His command, a just ruler should experience and observe the adverse conditions borne by the poverty-ridden class under his rule, so that the poor do not suffer from an inferiority complex, which makes them unhappy and affects their performance. Thus, my responsibilities being totally different from yours, there can be nothing common between your conduct and mine.'

Self-Negation versus Lawful Pleasures

Sufyan Suri belonged to a group of Muslims called Zahids and Sufis, which emerged in the beginning of 200 AH. They rejected the world, considering its blessings and advantages as temptations to beguile human beings away from the worship of God. They advocated simplicity, bordering on the bare level of survival.

One day he came to visit Imam Jafar al-Sadiq ('a) and found him dressed in a graceful white robe of expensive material. He immediately criticized it, saying, 'You should not be dressed in such rich robes. They are not for you to adorn yourself. The pleasures and splendor of the world should not contaminate pious people like you. I mean, you should exercise restraint in terms of good food and splendid clothes.'

Imam Jafar al-Sadiq ('a) smiled and said, 'I would like to explain something that will benefit you both in this life and the hereafter. Besides, if you wish to gain more knowledge about Islam so that you can communicate it to others, it will be most useful; but, if your purpose is to create disharmony among Muslims, you will disregard whatever I say, as done by all mischief mongers. Listen carefully.

You are clinging to the state of early Islam. Your mind carries the image of the simple lifestyle of the Holy Prophet (s) and his companions. You think that that lifestyle has become obligatory upon all Muslims until the Day of Judgment. Actually, it is otherwise. The Holy Prophet (s) and his faithful companions lived at a time when the Muslims were surviving on the bare minimum. Accordingly, their lives were no different from the rest of the believers. However, whenever a nation becomes resourceful and attains the blessings created for mankind, then those closest

to Allah (SWT) deserve those blessings more than anyone else; the pious and God fearing more than the wicked and oppressive, the believers much more than the non believers. You consider it sinful for me to enjoy Almighty Allah's blessings. Let me tell you something. Since I attained maturity, I have made sure the portion that Allah (SWT) has decided for the close of kin, the poor, the needy, the wayfarer, the captive, and whoever may have a right over me, reaches them before the sun sets. Not for a moment each day, have I disregarded or delayed performing my duties towards my fellowmen.'

Sufyan was nonplussed. He had no answer, so he got up and went to his companions, shared his conversation with the Imam ('a). They decided to prepare a strong argument against the Imam's ('a) case, with supporting evidence from the Holy Quran and the Sunnah.

After some days, the group visited the Imam ('a) and said, ' Our friend could not present his case concerning a simple lifestyle convincingly, so we have come prepared to defeat your argument with ours on the basis of undeniable evidence.'

'You are most welcome to present your evidence-supported reasoning,' the Imam ('a) replied.

'Our evidence is based on the Quran itself,' they began confidently.

'Which evidence can outsmart the verses of the Holy Quran. Go ahead. I'm more than eager to hear,' he replied.

'Two verses of the Quran will suffice to prove our case and belief system. Allah Almighty has praised some of the companions of the Holy Prophet (s) thus: "Though poverty did not allow them to fulfill their own needs, they regarded the needs of others above their own and helped them. Those will indeed be successful who are free of miserliness and niggardliness."

and

"Though hungry themselves, they fed the poor, the orphan and the captive."

As soon as their group leader stopped talking, a person from the audience spoke up.

'As far as I understand, you people are yourself doubtful and unsure about your own beliefs. You wish to kill all personal interest in ones property and belongings, so that people should distribute all they have among beggars like you, while you live off their hard-earned living. Besides, I have never seen you practice what you preach. You never resist taking good food yourself but want to prevent other Muslims from that pleasure.'

The Imam ('a) silenced his companions saying, 'Such impulsive outbursts never achieve anything.'

He then addressed the Sufis and asked, 'You are quoting the Holy Quran, but do you know which verses have been abrogated and which revealed in their place; which are obvious and which obscure? Many people in the Ummah are being led astray because of a lack of

information about the Quran.'

'We have to admit that we are informed to some extent, but definitely not enough.'

'Your problem is, therefore, the same as that of the others who are going astray. You need to be equally aware of the Ahadith, before creating a set of beliefs that separate you from those who know them. Let us discuss the two verses that you quoted. In both, the Almighty is not declaring the enjoyment of His blessings as prohibited (haram).

He is eulogizing humility, generosity, and sacrifice. He is praising those people who, at a certain time gave precedence to the needs of others over their own, and instead of using their lawful earnings themselves, offered them to others in need. They would not be sinning if they did not do so, because the Almighty had not commanded them to do so, nor stopped them from it. Thus, perfecting large-heartedness and generosity, they gave away what they needed and suffered difficulties themselves. Their reward certainly lies with Allah Almighty.

The verses you cited do not prove your case, because you condemn those people who use their own hard-earned money to enjoy the blessings of Allah (SWT), which the Quran does not allow you to do.

Those pious people demonstrated the height of generosity and charity, but soon Allah (SWT) revealed laws determining the extent of spending on others. The new laws became obligatory on all Muslims, abrogating the earlier demonstration of generosity. Allah (SWT) restricted believers from distributing their earnings among others without satisfying the needs of their own family members, because the weak, the old, the children in the family find it difficult to endure the hardships forced upon them.

For e.g., I have a loaf of bread. I give it away. My family starves, whereas, providing them with food is obligatory upon me. Some might fall ill or even die. The Holy Prophet (s) clearly enunciated the rules of charity, thus: If a person has some loaves of bread, dates, or money, which he wants to distribute, he must first share them with his parents, then his wife, children and himself, then relatives in descending order in the blood chain, and then, in fourth place, on others as charity.

Charity thus comes last of all. When the Holy Prophet (s) heard that a Medinite had distributed his entire fortune in charity before dying, leaving his own family penniless, so that they would have to beg to survive, he (s) was extremely annoyed. He said that he would never have allowed him burial in the Muslim's graveyard had he known this.

My father Imam Muhammad Baqir ('a) dictated to me the following words of the Holy Prophet (s): "Place your children first in the list of spending. Follow up with whoever is next in the blood chain."

The Holy Quran clearly states: “The pious and God-fearing are those who are neither niggardly and miserly, nor over generous and extravagant in charity, but always moderate and balanced.” Wherever Allah (SWT) condemns miserliness, He also condemns extravagance in charitable causes. Moderation is the rule. It is unreasonable to distribute ones entire wealth in charity and then pray to God for sustenance. Remember, God does not accept the prayers of such people.

The Holy Prophet (s) classified the persons whose prayers are not accepted. They are:

o Persons who wish their parents ill

o Persons who lend their money to another without any witness or written pledge/ testifying document, thus wilfully endangering their right

o Persons who pray for deliverance from their wives, foregoing their right to divorce, or being cowardly and not using that right

o Persons who sit idle at home and pray for sustenance, demonstrating greed and ignorance; being blessed with the capacity to move and be active by their Lord; given strong limbs and muscles, hands, feet, eyes, ears and reason, to see, hear, think, and devise methods to use these blessings in order to earn a living. The purpose of creating these organs was that man should work hard and use them to achieve everything needed to sustain life; to progress; and dutifully obey the Divine commands as a sign of gratitude; and not become a burden on others. If man struggles and tries as commanded, sustenance is bound to follow. If he tries and does not succeed, he will still have the satisfaction that he did as was expected of him. He will not feel guilty if he tries and is destined to lose.

o Persons granted abundant wealth waste it through abundant generosity, and then pray for more. Allah (SWT) responds to such persons by asking them:

- “Why did you not exercise moderation?”
- “Did I not command moderation in generosity?”
- “Did I not warn you from being extravagant in charity?”

o Persons praying for something that involves cruelty towards someone

Allah (SWT) has explained the limits of generous and charitable spending, especially after an incident that took place in the life of the Holy Prophet (s).

It so happened that the Holy Prophet (s) had some gold coins, which he wished to spend in charity. He did not want to hold on to them overnight. All day he kept distributing the coins until he had none left. Next morning, a needy person stood outside his door begging for charity, for alms, for help. He had nothing to offer the poor man. Verse 29 of Surah Asra’ revealed the following: “Do not shut your palm tight, nor open it so wide that nothing is left to give a seeker of alms, leaving you embarrassed and regretful.”

The Ahadith of the Holy Prophet (s) support the ruling provided by the Quran. Those who believe in the Quran also believe in the Ahadith.

Hazrat Salman i Farsi and Hazrat Abu Dharr are two famous pious and God fearing believers that you all have heard about. Their way of life was as described above.

Hazrat Salman I Farsi used to set aside an amount that would cover his annual expenditure, in order to avoid any kind of inconvenience, as soon as he received his annual income from the Bait ul Maal. People questioned his act, saying, 'You are such a pious person, yet you provide for yourself for a whole year. Supposing you die within a week, what good will those provisions serve you?'

'I may not die. Why do you suppose that I will die and not suppose that I might live for the whole year? If I survive the year, I will need the essentials of life. You do not realize that a person suffering from financial problems cannot worship or obey his Lord as peacefully and easily as one whose needs have been taken care of,' was his wise answer.

On the other hand, Abu Dharr had a few camels, and some heads of sheep. He survived on the milk of the ewes and slaughtered a sheep to satisfy his own desire for meat, feed his guests, or fulfill the needs of some one. However, he always retained his share while distributing the meat.

Can you name any other person more pious than them? You have all read how the Holy Prophet (s) praised their levels of faith and piety. These people never neglected their own needs in the name of piety and obedience. Today, you people are preaching a lifestyle that disregards the needs of family, advises self-negation, detachment from the world, and distribution of all possessions in charity. No honorable companion of the Holy Prophet (s) ever adopted this lifestyle.

I seriously warn you with a tradition quoted by my father and ancestors about what the Holy Prophet (s) said: "A faithful believer (Momin) is an amalgamation of strange attributes. Whether his body is cut into pieces, or all the countries in the east and west become his dominion he will be the same; thankful and obedient to Almighty Allah, because, both conditions- adversity and abundant prosperity-are equally good and honorable for him."

Do you think adversity is an essential state for a Momin to demonstrate his goodness and nobility? You are mistaken. The worth of a Momin lies in his soul, his faith and belief. Be it adversity or prosperity, he is always fully aware of his responsibilities and duties, and he performs them to perfection. This is why external circumstances do not determine his nobility; his immaculate conduct and behavior in ease and comfort, trial and tribulation, determine it.

I would like to know whether my discourse until now has satisfied you or not. Do you still need

further exposition of this topic?'

They did not know what to say.

He felt they needed some more guidance, so he went on, 'Let me explain it from another angle. In the early days of Islam, every Muslim had to fight ten non-believers. If he failed to do so, he was sinful, disobedient and guilty of neglecting his duty. When the number of Muslims increased, Almighty Allah mercifully changed the law, and one Muslim had to fight only two non-believers.

Another perspective would be the Islamic system of justice. I'd like to ask you what laws Islam has ordained to ensure justice for the oppressed and punishment for the criminal?

Let us suppose there is a petition against one of you, in court, by your wife. It complains of neglect in providing the basic essentials of life. The judge orders you to provide your wife with her rightful demands. How will you respond to that sentence, and how will you pay for her expenses? Will you declare that you have detached yourself from monetarily beneficial worldly activities and spend your time in the worship of God?

Will your excuse be valid and reasonable? Will the verdict of the judge be just and fair, or unjust and unfair? If you declare the verdict as unfair, you will be openly denying the truth, besides deceiving the entire Ummah with your hypocrisy. If you agree that the verdict is fair, your excuse will become invalid. This totally falsifies your system of belief, proving it irrational, unreasonable, and impracticable.

Let us now view the obligatory and non-obligatory expenditure, which, as a Muslim, one is bound to incur. For instance, sometimes the Zakat has to be paid, at other times penalties for some acts of disobedience. If the entire Ummah adopts your lifestyle of piety and self-negation, what will become of the essential financial system? Zakat is obligatory on gold, silver, sheep, camel, cow, and other domestic animals; dates, raisins and their fellow species. What will be the condition of the Zakat funds? Has not it been ordained compulsory to improve the lives of the poor and needy, and the owner to benefit from life's blessings?

The purpose of these laws is to motivate man to achieve as much as his potential allows him and enjoy the benefits of those blessings. If the purpose of religion was to negate the blessings of life and lead a life of imminent poverty, then the poor must have achieved the heights of perfection as purposed by the Creator. Thus, no one should extend financial help to them; they should be left on their own in the condition they are, so that they do not fall below that level of perfection. On the other hand, the poor should also refuse all assistance, because they do not want to lose those heights of perfection.

What you are suggesting is that whoever owns any property should give it all away, distribute it

among others, thus invalidating Zakat, the divine law of distribution of wealth.

Let me warn you, you are treading an extremely dangerous and misguided path that is the result of ignorance, unfamiliarity with Quranic studies, and unawareness of the Sunnah and Ahadith of the Holy Prophet (s). Besides this, you refuse to accept the authenticity of those Ahadith, which do not support, propose or encourage, rather denounce your way of life, inspite of the fact that, the Holy Quran also supports the recommendations in these Ahadith.

You refuse to give up your self-created version of religion, which you have foolishly adopted; a misguided way of life, which has nothing to do with Islam. Besides, you force others to adopt it! You, sadly, cannot distinguish between the abrogated verses and ordained verses; the obvious and the obscure; the obligations and prohibitions, nor decipher the fine nuances and strange aspects hidden in them, yet proudly proclaim a view of life based on the Quran.

Let me question you about the prayer of Sulaiman ibn e Daud (‘a). It reads in the Quran, thus:

“O my Creator! Grant me a kingdom, the like of which no other can attain.”

God granted him such a kingdom. There is no doubt that a prophet cannot pray or ask for anything that is either not right or good. Neither the Quran, nor any believer, has ever declared this desire as impious, nor questioned the reason behind the desire for such a huge kingdom, unparalleled in splendor and glory. Similar is his father, Daud’s (‘a) case.

Similarly, before him, came Yusuf (‘a). Yusuf (‘a) officially demanded from the ruling king, ‘Make me Exchequer of the State Treasury, because I am both honest and trustworthy.’ Gradually, he became the Administrator of the entire kingdom, ranging from Egypt to Yemen. The famine had badly affected surrounding areas. Caravans of people would come to buy grains from them and return home. There is not one incident showing that Yusuf (‘a) ever did anything wrong. He performed his duties with absolute honesty and integrity.

The Quran also mentions the incident of Zulqarnain (‘a). He loved God and was loved by Him, therefore He provided him with all essential knowledge and power in the twinkling of an eye and made him ruler of all the countries in the east and west of the earth.

Gentlemen!

· Give up your dangerously misguided way of life and adopt the true principles of Islam.

· Accept whatever God has declared as do’s and dont’s, and stop coining your own laws.

· Do not interfere in matters you do not understand.

· Learn from those who know.

· Persevere to gain knowledge of the abrogated verses and ordained verses, the obvious and the obscure, the obligations and prohibitions. Not only will you find this knowledge beneficial, it will free you from this folly and deviation.

· Distance yourself from ignorance, because it espouses the majority.

Sadly, only a minority uses reason and seeks wisdom. Almighty Allah states in the Quran: ”“Wisdom is much, much higher than any person considered wise”.