Interaction With A True Believer Is Pleasant

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In our previous discussions, we had narrated a tradition from the Noble Prophet (S) which he spoke to 'Ali (as) in which he listed the characteristics of a true believer. Twenty-two of these characteristics have been explained, and now we go through four more of the one hundred and three characteristics.

أَحْلى مِنَ الشَّهَدِ وَ أَصْلَدَ مِنَ الصَّلَدِ، لاَ يَكْشِفُ سِرّاً ولاَ يَهْتِكُ سِتْراً...

The complete true believer is one who) is sweeter than honey; and is stronger than the)" outside of a rock; and who does not expose the secrets that people confide in him; and if he himself finds out something about other people, he does not expose this information."

The twenty-third characteristic of a true believer is that he is sweeter than honey, meaning that interaction with him is something pleasant.

Looking at the lives of the A`immah, especially the life of 'Ali (as), it is commonly known that sitting in his presence and any sort of interaction that others had with him was always something pleasant, as he was a person who had a sense of humor and always spoke with grace.

Some people believe that the more holy or pious a person is, the more stern and harsh he must be, whereas we see that the things which actualyl make a person progress in various areas such as politics, society, culture, etc… and which also play a very important role in his life, is his pleasant interaction and demeanor with others.

Sometimes, the most difficult of tasks can be solved through pleasant interaction which is full of love and tenderness and carried through with a cheerful face. It is through such interaction that the knots of enmity can be loosened and in which displeasures are removed. In addition, the fire of anger can be put out and chaos and confusion between individuals can be controlled.

The Prophet (S) has stated:

أَكْثَرُ مَا تَلِجُ بِهِ أُمَّتِي الْجَنَّةَ تَقْوى اللّٰهِ وَ حُسْنُ الْخَلْقِ

The most (important) of things which will bring my Ummah closer to Paradise are Taqwa of" Allah and having a good disposition."[1]

The twenty-fourth characteristic is that he is stronger than the outside covering of a rock.

Seeing as how sometimes people go to one extreme and think that to be of good character means that a person must give up his rights in the face of his enemy, the Prophet (S) continued his speech by saying that although interaction with a true believer and indeed his character is sweeter than honey (very kind and loving), but at the same time he is not a push over. Rather, in the face of his enemies, he is harsher and harder than a rock (meaning that he does not give in).

It has been mentioned in the Noble Qur`an that a true believer is merciful amongst his friends and fellow believers while he is harsh against the enemies and that he is even stronger and more powerful than iron and even a mountain:

أَشَدُّ مِنْ زُبُرِ الْحَدِيدِ وَ أَشَدُّ مِنَ الْجَبَلِ

The true believer) is firmer and stronger than iron and more powerful than a mountain.")"

As we know, a mountain and even iron can be molded and cut through however a true believer can never be cut through, molded or changed. The true believer must be just as 'Ali (as) was. However there are some people who bring up the excuse that since by nature, Imam 'Ali (as) was a very joking person, thus, he was not able to be the leader of a society - however at the same time, we see that he was also powerful and harsh with others. Of course in those areas where the Islamic laws give permission, a person must not be harsh and unsympathetic and it has been mentioned that the person who is harsh with others in this world will be judged with harshness by Allah (SwT) on the Day of Judgement.

The twenty-fifth characteristic of a true believer is that he does not expose the secrets which others confide in him.

What does it truly mean that one does not expose the secrets of others?? We know that during the course of one's life, all of us have secrets which we do not like others to know, because if they were to be known, then this would make life very difficult. Thus, if a person was to relate thess secrets to other people and tell them that, "Whatever has been mentioned in this gathering is a trust that you must keep and no one else must know these secrets", then this must be obeyed.

It has even been mentioned in the traditions that if a person was to tell you something and while telling you, kept looking around him to the left and right to make sure that no one else was listening to what he was telling you, then this is also a sign that what he is telling you is a secret, even though he may not have expressly told you that it was such.

A secret that another believer confides is sacred and must be respected just as the blood of a true believer is sacred. Therefore, the secrets that he keeps with you must be kept hidden from

others.

The twenty-sixth characteristic of a true believer is that he does not expose thath which is hidden about another person. Exposing this is only possible when the person does not tell you the secret directly - rather, you yourself find out something about him and thus, you keep this thing to yourself and it is this thing which you must not expose to other people.

One of the forms of backbiting is when someone exposes the secrets of another person and spreads hidden information (about others) - things which have become common place in today's day and age. However we must be very careful that even if there is no danger to anyone else and the issue is only related to us but here too, we do not indulge in spreading hidden information.

However if a person has some knowledge of the government, general society, close family members, the youth, the faith of other people, etc… then in these issues, spreading hidden information (about others) is not a problem at all. This issue shares the same ruling of backbiting such that if backbiting a person is more important than the protection of the secrets of the people (backbiting would serve a higher and nobler goal), then it is not a problem. In addition, in the issue of covering the secrets of other people that you yourself are made aware of, this principle too must be put into practice (that sometimes it may be more important to expose such secrets as it would help in serving a higher and nobler goal).

!We hope that Allah (SwT) gives us all the opportunity to act according to these guidelines

Note:

[1] Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 68, pg. 375, Section: Having a Good Disposition