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FROM A SUFI JOURNAL

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ALLĀH JALLA JALĀLĀHŪ

With a foreword by
Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri



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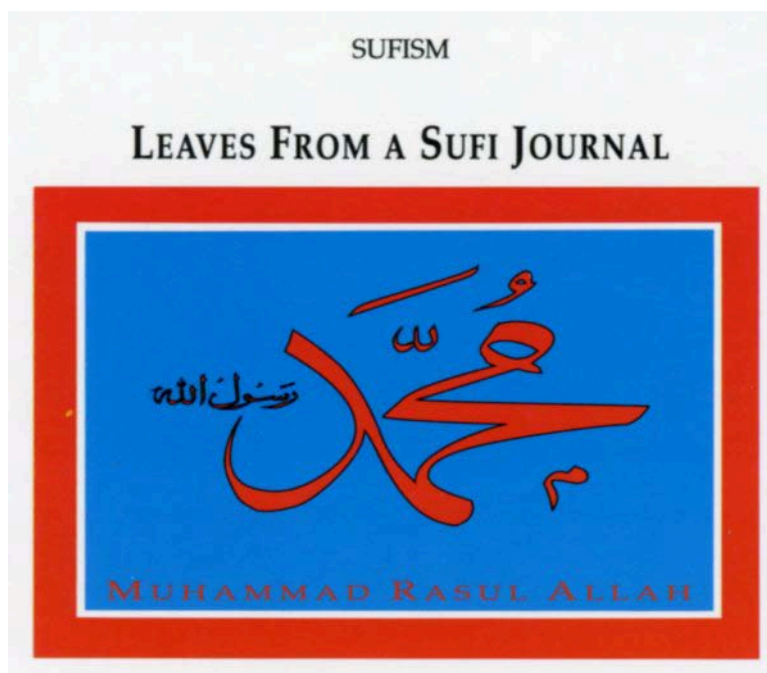
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Book Description

LEAVES FROM A SUFI JOURNAL is a unique collection of articles presenting an outstanding introduction to the areas of Sufism and original Islamic teachings.

This ageless wisdom is set against the backcloth of a changing world in which the application of this knowledge to one's own life could scarcely be more appropriate.

Written by both classical and contemporary writers, this compilation includes commentaries on the Qur'anic revelations; the mysteries of faith; inner and outer practices; the lives of prophets and saints; the individual, the family and society and the nature of unity and existence.



About Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri

Acknowledged as a master of self-knowledge and a spiritual philosopher, Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri's role as a teacher grew naturally out of his own quest for self-fulfillment.

He travelled extensively on a spiritual quest which led to his eventual rediscovery of the pure and original Islamic heritage of his birth, and the discovery of the truth that reconciles the past with the present, the East with the West, the worldly with the spiritual – a link between the ancient wisdom teachings and our present time.

A descendant of five generations of well-known and revered spiritual leaders, Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri has taught students throughout the world for over 30 years. A prolific author of more than thirty books relating to the universal principles of Islam, the Qur'an, and its core purpose of enlightenment, he is a gifted exponent of how the self relates to the soul, humankind's link with the Divine, and how consciousness can be groomed to reflect our higher nature.

The unifying scope of his perspective emphasizes practical, actionable knowledge that leads to self-transformation, and provides a natural bridge between seemingly different Eastern and Western approaches to spirituality, as well as offering a common ground of higher knowledge for various religions, sects and secular outlooks.

Foreword

Sufism is the art and the science of correct living which results in success. Mankind strives towards success, and although success is differently defined from time to time and from place to place, we all seek a way of existence that brings the minimum of trouble and the maximum of happiness and joy. The art of achieving this is the core of all spiritual endeavors and, therefore, Sufism can be considered the heart of Islam.

Since it is a comprehensive art of living, Sufism is concerned with integrity and the integration of all things and instills a full understanding of the meaning behind life. However, unless it is applied by those who have attained fulfillment and inner awakening, it is most likely to end up being of palliative use, or at best, distorted.

The Sufi is he who is constant in his equilibrium; he is analytically aware of the causal world in which he is living and is spontaneously aware of his awareness and his state of being. The Sufi is he who is in the right place at the right time doing the right thing. The Sufi is he who does not look back in time with regret and does not look forward with desires and expectations. The Sufi is he who is living the present fully – outwardly responsible and active and inwardly free and watchful. The heart of the Sufi in its purity reflects the truth behind creation and is constantly polished and purified as he journeys towards higher consciousness.

Because Sufism is concerned with life, the Sufi has to relate and connect with all aspects of life in a totally integrated fashion. Therefore the objective of Sufism is the identification and the tuning to the unific reality that underlies all known and unknown, visible and invisible creation. So it is such a wide web that there is nothing that does not come under its sovereignty or jurisdiction. Therefore the topics in this volume cover a broad spectrum, reflecting most aspects of life.

The present volume is a collection of numerous classical writings as well as contemporary discourses concerning the path of spiritual awakening which was compiled in a manner to benefit

those who desire to catch a glimpse of the meaning of Sufism. The articles have been arranged in a logical system to make it easier for the modern mind to assimilate them. They give a foretaste of that state which can be the outcome of following a true program of self-awakening. Articles covering various phases and aspects of such a program had appeared over the years in a journal called Nuradeen¹, a quarterly journal formerly published by the Zahra Trust.

I would like to express my gratitude to all those who have contributed over the years in helping to bring about this book. Special acknowledgement is to be given to Abbas H. Bilgrami for his administrative services, Batal Havri Mazandarami for editorial compilation of this volume and to Dr. Abdul Wahhab Boase for editing the text.

Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri

¹ See <http://www.nuradeen.com>

SECTION 1: MAN

Lift up your face to the [one true] faith, turning away from all that is false, in accordance with the natural disposition which Allah has instilled into man [at birth]: for, not to allow any change to corrupt what Allah has thus created – this is the purpose of the one [true] faith; but most people know it not. (30:30)

The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said:

‘Every child is born with a natural disposition to worship Allah; it is only his parents who later turn him into a Jew, a Christian or a Magian.’

The Nature of Man

By `Abd al-Haqq Sayf al-Ilm

Every baby born is an expression of absolute purity. Anyone who has been present at a birth must acknowledge this. Each new birth is a bursting out of life-itself. Every baby is a container for the re-emergence of raw life-energy – unadulterated, undifferentiated. However, each container has a definite form and each is contained in an environment. Each baby has genetic coding determining its physical shape and temperamental balance. Each is born into surroundings of a particular nature, both physical and emotional. These circumstances, together with the chain of events that make up its early life, bring about the individualization of the new child. They combine to make the child, in its own unique way, begin to feel itself separate from its surroundings. Some receive affirmation and satisfaction and so view the world as a friendly, warm, safe place. Others are negated and denied and experience the world as hostile, alien and fearful. Between these two are millions of possibilities and variations different for each child. On the other hand, the kinds of human situations confronted by the child are quite limited and predictable, just as its own specific temperament is of a given type. The end result is a being in every case unique, and at the same time falling within a clearly recognizable category, just as no two individuals are sick in the same way, and yet a particular illness can be diagnosed.

At a certain point after roughly two years, a picture built up of all the various elements mentioned above takes on a more or less definite shape, and the child says. ‘This is me!’ This ‘me’ is in fact by no means solid, changing from one minute to the next, but it is established enough as a shape to be claimed as an identity. It is vitally important to realize that this ‘identity’ has no real existence. What has happened is that the pure life energy and undifferentiated consciousness of the new born baby have, over a period of time and through exposure to a particular environment, become identified in a particular way with their body-container so that they are limited and individualized in it. Through the process of existing the child has acquired a more or less fixed image of itself which it calls ‘me’, completely losing sight of the unconstrained, undefined, pure life-energy which was its birthright. This assumed identity is

accidental, made up of contingent circumstances and passing time. Given a different environment, a child would adopt a different self-form. The reality of the child lies in the pure life energy and undifferentiated consciousness it starts with, not the limited and constricted self-picture it later develops.

This circumstantially constructed, and quite arbitrarily imposed first self-image now becomes for us the basis of all our future dealings with ourselves and with the world which surrounds us. It dictates to us the pattern of our life which is, from now on, spent preserving and perpetuating the existence of this assumed identity with which we have inextricably associated ourselves. As far as we are concerned, it is what we are. However, just look at any two year old and you will find a very unbridled raw-edged being; willful, autocratic, demanding, easily angered, often destructive, attention seeking, extremely selfish – in a word, monstrous! In its naked form this ‘self’ is obviously not acceptable. Gradually we learn, by experience, to negotiate with existence. We find out how much we can get away with, what needs to be honed down, what we can express, what we must hold back, what brings about desired reactions and so on. In other words, we try to find a balance between the raw material of our acquired self-picture to which we have given absolute reality, and the hampering social environment in which we find ourselves where total ‘self’ expression is not permissible or possible. In this way, the original self-picture becomes covered over, layer upon layer, according to the demands of different situations.

Our lives continue to be the playing-out of the first patterning, more and more refined and in an ever larger arena. In cases where a completely free rein is given to the inclinations of the primary self-image, the individual will return to his infantile form as in the recent case of the fabulously rich man who reverted absolutely to a tyrannical infant, concerned only with the gratification of his capricious whims and unbounded appetites. It also occurs to some extent in senility when the old person loses grip on the cover-up which has been so successfully maintained for so many years. This is the inevitable description of one who has given absolute reality to his acquired self-picture. If this was all there was, we would have no other option than to be slaves to our own assumed identities, our lives spent hopelessly trying to assuage the appetites and gratify the desires of a two-year old child. And this is in fact the lot of a large proportion of the human race.

If you look about you at the phenomena of existence in the universe, or inside you at the workings of your own body, you will find clearly discernible laws at work, holding everything in harmony and balance – in the vastness of the galaxies and the overwhelming beauty of the stars with their patterns and movement; in the solar system and the wonderful way the planets keep to their orbits held by an unbelievably intricate system of forces; in the Earth's atmosphere and how it provides exactly the right conditions for the life on its surface; in the climates and how they preserve the animal and vegetable life in their different zones; in the forest and the desert and how each is a delicately balanced ecological system providing everything necessary for its continued existence; in the separate organisms, each with its own inexplicable breathtaking beauty and its own perfectly balanced cycle of growth and decay; in our own bodies with their perfect co-ordination. You will find that laws govern the senses, each with its own field of perception; the digestive system and its extraction of what is beneficial and rejection of what is superfluous; the brain and its ability to store information and release it in the right situation; the way the body naturally sets right any disruption of its equilibrium. The examples are endless, but the indications are quite clear. Whether you look at the whole universe or a particular system or a single organism or the smallest subatomic particle, it is abundantly apparent that there is a universal law at work tending to order and balance in every situation.

Apart from the case of man, it is quite apparent that everything submits involuntarily and unconsciously, just by being what it is, to the universal order manifest in existence, or we could say by extension, to the divine reality which it indicates. Each thing, in its own unique way, contributes to the upholding of the balance and is itself in itself an indication of its Creator/Source – in the same way that any artifact indicates the person who made it. It is this activity of submission and participation in the unfolding of existence, this acknowledgement, even if unconscious, of the source of existence that constitutes real worship. At this point you must jettison any concept you may previously have held of worship being connected to 'religion'. Worship is organic, inevitable. It is an integral part of all existence. By fulfilling its natural function for which it is perfectly adapted, every creature is at the same time performing an act of worship by playing its own part in manifesting and indicating the one reality. All

things, in spite of the diversity of their different forms and activities, have this one thing in common. This is the common denominator in existence. This is the common purpose.

Now we come back to the human species, to ourselves. By use of the intellect, we must arrive at the conclusion that what is true for everything else in the universe must also be true for us, since we are an inseparable part of the whole structure. Just as the basic function of everything in the universe is worship, so worship must also be the keynote of our own existence. However, whereas everything else does so outwardly by its natural unconscious submission to the way things are, we have the capacity of both outward submission to, and inner awareness of, the one reality. This then is our purpose, our reason for being here, and also what defines our outward form – that we both outwardly conform to the natural boundaries imposed on us by the form which we have been given and that we inwardly realize our capacity for decoding what we see around us and accept that existence is what it is, a generous and compassionate outpouring, the self-manifestation of the essence of the One God, the Lord of the heavens and the earth and everything between them.

These boundaries delineating the natural form of man, showing what it is to be a human creature, have always been available to people, accepted by some, rejected by others, together with the knowledge of the true picture of existence. All creatures except man have their form indelibly stamped in them so that they have no need of external stimuli to bring it out of them. But in our case we have to choose to be human. We have to choose the form that is in reality our nature. It is very important to grasp this. Even though we have to learn what it is to be human, all we are doing is removing ignorance and uncovering what is in fact our organic natural pattern. Recognized morality is not something imposed on man out of social convenience, but something that is inherent in us and required by our form for the proper functioning of the human social nexus. It is a natural patterning coming from within them and appearing in a social context. Unlicensed behavior, the unrestricted giving way to the infantile appetites which is the present hallmark of the human situation is in fact unnatural. It constitutes a covering-up of the simple morality which is the true reality of human nature and leads inevitably to the total disruption of human social order.

We have noted that every creature knows its form and it is not in the evidently compassionate nature of existence that we, the human species, should alone be left with no way to know the form we should assume to truly fulfill our humanness and of course the simple fact is that we have not been neglected. At regular intervals, throughout the time that human beings have inhabited the earth, we have been reminded of the total knowledge we are capable of containing and have been shown the form which is naturally ours by men directly inspired by the Reality Itself to carry out this task. These teachings have in part survived to this day in the form of the so-called ‘religions’. And this explains the clear similarities that exist between them. But they are, for the most part, just archeological fragments of the original teaching which have been distorted, vitiated, pieced together and adapted to man’s lower nature. This has made them separate and antagonistic to each other, thus obscuring the fact that they are in reality successive manifestations of one continuously repeated teaching – men sent to men by their Creator to show them and tell them how to be human. Show and tell. The teaching has been both by example and by word. The two must go together for the necessary transformation to take place. In each case, a transmission took place from the Messengers to the human communities where they appeared, whereby communities, who had relapsed into ignorance and squalid sensual gratification, who had on a mass scale allowed their infantile self-form to take over and become the dominant influence in their society, were purified, lifted up, and transformed by the transmitted process into radiant examples of true humanity. They were communities where generosity, justice, compassion and humility were the rule rather than the exception and the people lived within clear moral limits.

It is these messengers from Reality and their followers who gave rise to what are now known as the ‘world religions’ which have in every case, in one way or another, been altered beyond recognition, so that the original purpose, to show humans how to be human, has been completely obscured. Two examples briefly illustrate how the original clear teachings have disappeared. They are what are now called Judaism and Christianity. In Judaism, the word of the Messenger has been exalted above the example so that the humanizing, transformative process brought and demonstrated by Moses to his people has become the rigidly structured hair-splitting laws of the rabbinical tradition which are inhuman and tyrannical rather than compassionate and liberating.

In Christianity, the example of Jesus was romanticized almost to the exclusion of what he said (it must be remembered that he was always a practicing Jew and nowhere renounced the Mosaic law, but came to breathe into it the humanity and compassion that had been squeezed out), but what has transpired is that his clear example was made into a mystery and the moral parameters blurred, allowing the amorphous moral chaos which now exists in the so-called ‘Christian’ countries. Examination of each one of the ‘religions’ will reveal the same thing – how an original pure teaching has been perverted and distorted leading, in most cases, to the very opposite of what was originally intended.

The final complete version of the pure human teaching was the one revealed to Muhammad in Arabia in the early seventh century of the Christian era. It was transmitted by him to some of those around him and practiced by them in Medina. It is known as Islam. This is where we must look if we desire to find the picture of the true human form and to know the knowledge that we are capable of containing since, of all the teachings, it is the only one that we know for certain to be completely intact.

The message is there, unchanged by a single word, in the form of the Qur’an, giving us directly from Reality Itself the picture of the whole of existence and telling us exactly our part in it. The example of the Messenger himself was minutely recorded showing us the perfection of the human form and how those around him took it on and therefore how we ourselves can do the same. This is not to say that the Muslims have not gone the way of previous communities and distorted and misapplied and misunderstood the original teaching. They clearly have. But the original teaching is still totally available and accessible for those who want it. The chain of transmission leading from the last of the Messengers, Muhammad, is unbroken and continues to this day.

Awareness of our predicament is an essential step but it is only the first step. To escape from the tyranny we have imposed on ourselves, the endless appeasement of our insatiable infantile self-forms, which is all that we have allowed ourselves to be, a basic transformation is necessary. What has to be transformed is the heart and there is no way to it except by embarking on action –

immediately. The action that is necessary is the taking on of the truly human form which was recorded for the last time in the revelation of the Qur'an and perfectly demonstrated in the life of the last of those sent for that purpose by the One God, the Messenger Muhammad. This will give us real inner awareness and acceptance of the true nature of the universe and what is beyond it and hidden within it. The two together, the practice and the acceptance, will lead to the liberation which we all desire; the overwhelmingly intoxicating experience of tasting the timeless spaceless presence of the One from Whom we have come and to Whom we inevitably must return. Set out and you will arrive.

SECTION 2: FAMILY AND SOCIETY

Marry those among you who are single and those who are fit . . . if they are needy, Allah will make them free from want out of His grace. (24:32)

He it is Who created you from a single being, and of the same did He make his mate that he might find comfort and solace in her. (7:189)

Hadith: 'Marriage is my tradition and whoever seeks other than my tradition is not with me.'

Hadith: 'The widow shall not be married until she is consulted, and the virgin shall not be married until her consent is obtained.'

Hadith: 'Everyone of you is a ruler and everyone of you shall be questioned about those under his rule . . . the man is a ruler in his family and he shall be questioned about those under his care; and the woman is a ruler in the house of her husband, and she shall be questioned about those under her care; and the servant is a ruler so far as the property of his master is concerned, and he shall be questioned about that which is entrusted to him?'

Marriage and Family in Islam

By Abu al-Fadhl Ezzati

Islam has been introduced by the Qur'an to be the religion of balance, a balance in the widest sense of the term covering the entire area of human thought and life. It is a balance between reality and ideals. A Muslim's notion of Allah's Oneness is or should be reflected in his own striving towards a co-ordination and unification of the ideals and realities of spiritual and physical motives and tendencies, of body and mind, of nature and man, of the cosmos and man, and of various aspects of human life. Islam teaches man, first, that the permanent worship of Allah in all the manifold actions of human life is the very meaning of life; secondly, that the achievement of this purpose remains impossible so long as we divide our life into two parts, the spiritual and the material. They must be bound together, in our consciousness and action, into one harmonious entity. The unity of Allah in Islam has influenced all of its ideals and realities. Man has not been divided into two contradictory parts, spiritual and material. If the object of our life as a whole is the worship of Allah as is suggested by the *ayah*, *I have not created the jinn and men except that they should worship Me* (51:56), then we must necessarily regard this life in its totality as one complex of religious, moral and spiritual responsibilities.

Everything which truly helps the individual, society and mankind as a whole can be regarded as worship, and is rewarded if well performed or punished if not fulfilled. On the other hand, anything which is harmful to the divine nature of the individual, society and mankind is regarded as disobedience to God, is forbidden and must be punished. Thus all our actions, even sexual ones, must fulfill a divine purpose and must be performed as acts of worship, that is, performed consciously as constituting a part of God's universal plan. Worship of Allah in the widest sense constitutes, according to Islam, the meaning of life and vice versa. The dichotomy between body and mind, religion and politics, spirit and matter, between the spiritual and the material life is completely rejected by Islam. On the basis of balance, Islam establishes absolute harmony amongst all human spiritual and physical motives, tendencies, and potentials. The natural conclusion is that Islam rejects celibacy and monastic life, and looks upon marriage as a holy

contract, a divine institution, and even an act of worship. So much so that it is reported that the Prophet, peace be upon him, has said: ‘He who marries has saved half of his faith’; and ‘Marriage is my institution, he who disregards it is not a follower of mine.’

The love of spouse and the love of members of a family for each other is required in Islam because the Prophet, peace be upon him, is reported to have said: ‘Is Islam anything other than love [love of Allah for the sake of Whom one loves others]?’ Islam is nothing but love; love of Allah for the sake of Allah, and love of spouse, parents, children, relatives, fellow human beings, love of other creatures and of the entire universe for the sake of Allah and as a means to earn the love of Allah. We can thus see that there is no contrast between the love of Allah and the love of His creatures.

The concept of the family (*ahl*) in Islam is broader and more inclusive than in western society, that is, the parents and children always remain as members of one’s family. It covers even distant relatives, so much so that the maintenance, welfare, respect and love of them is regarded as a religious responsibility. The term *ahl*, which also means people, semantically covers more than one’s immediate relatives or even near of kin. The term used in the Qur’an for near and distant relatives is *dhaw al-qurbah* and the general term used in Islamic literature for one’s duty towards them is *salat al-rahim*. There are many verses in the Qur’an making it the duty of every Muslim to provide maintenance (in the case of need), love and respect for all near and distant relatives (2:83,177; 4:36; 8:41; 16:90; 17:26; 30:38). For instance:

Surely Allah commands you to justice and good and to give to kindred [their due]. (16:90)

It is thus appropriate to conclude that the term family in western society covers only a small portion of the family suggested by Islam. Maintenance, love and respect of one’s distant relatives is as obligatory as to one’s own immediate family, though the obligation to one’s immediate family is the first in the line of priority. The Prophet, peace be upon him, is reported to have said: ‘On the Day of Judgment, one’s relatives stand at the gate of heaven to certify whether one has been good to them’ (Kulayni in *Al-Kafi*, chapter on faith and unbelief). He is also reported to have said: ‘The quickest reward is for the good done to one’s relatives (*salat al-rahim*).’

As far as love and respect of one's parents is concerned, the Qur'an states:

Your Lord has commanded that you shall not worship [any] but Him, and goodness to your parents [it comes next to serving Allah] . . . say not to them [so much as] ugh, nor chide them [and always] talk to them with respect. Make yourself submissively gentle [and humble] to them with compassion, and [pray for them] saying: 'Oh Lord, have compassion on them, as they brought me up [when I was] little . . . and give to the relatives their due'. (17:23-26)

The Prophet is reported to have said: 'The key to heaven is under the feet of the mother.' A person asked the Prophet: 'What is the best thing I can do?' He replied: 'Serve your mother,' He asked: 'And what is the second best?' He replied again: 'Serve your mother.' He asked again, and the reply was the same. He asked for the fourth time: 'Who comes next?' The Prophet replied: 'Your father, then your relatives in order of relationship.' Respecting and serving one's parents is frequently commanded by the Qur'an (46:15, 31:14). It is suggested that difference of religion (non-Muslim parents) does not release one from the religious obligation of maintenance. Even participation in *jihad* (war in the name of Allah)² is not allowed without the mother's permission. One of the cardinal sins in Islam is to be disrespectful and disobedient to one's parents.

Just as respect, obedience, and the maintenance of one's parents have been strongly commanded and enjoined upon children, so the parents also have duties towards their children which must be fulfilled. Both parents and children have rights and responsibilities over each other. Although parents' love for children is natural, the Qur'an and *Sunnah* (the traditions of the prophet) have still laid guidelines regarding children's rights (16:58-59, 43:17, 6:152, 2:233).

² eBook Editor's Note: The term Jihad in Islam has a wide spiritual significance and is not limited to warfare. Please see "The Spiritual Significance of *Jihad*" by Seyyed Hossein Nasr, at <http://www.al-islam.org/al-serat/jihad-nasr.htm>.

Islam regards marriage as a constitution in its own right, and thus rejects strongly anything challenging its constitution or the rights and responsibilities which it entails. The Qur'an suggests cornerstone of the society is two persons:

I exhort you only to one thing, that you stand and rise up for the cause of Allah in twos and singly. (34:46)

Thus, Islam recognizes the authority of the family as the constitutional genesis and fundamental basis of human society.

As far as the constitution of marriage is concerned, Islam regards it not as a sacrament but as a contract and thus subject to the conditions and stipulations concluded between the two sides of the marriage. But the marriage contract involves three parties, the first being Allah. The stipulations, therefore, should not contradict the divine law (*shari`ah*) of Allah and the holy nature of the marriage.

Men are responsible for women because Allah has given them more than the other and because they spend out of their property; the good women are therefore obedient . . . (4:34)

It is suggested that man provide for the wife (maintenance) though the wife may have financial means. Thus, a married woman is a person in her own right with a financially independent status, even after marriage. (This explains the position of women in the Islamic law of inheritance). It is in regard to women's more delicate, sensitive and emotional nature that Islam allows this financially independent status. The nature and biology of men and women are not the same, consequently they have been treated independently and have been entrusted with particular roles, functions, rights and responsibilities in Islam. The Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him and his family, is reported to have said: 'Everybody is responsible. The ruler is responsible. The husband is responsible for his home and his family. The wife is responsible for her husband, his home, family and children. And thus, you are all responsible.'

The most important role of the Muslim woman is to be a good wife and a good mother. For this she is innately suited. Islam recognizes the immense value and position of women in educating and shaping future generations.

And we have enjoined upon man concerning his parents: his mother carries him in weakness upon weakness, and his weaning is in two years. Therefore show gratitude to Me and to your parents. (31:34, 46:15)

The welfare and maintenance of the family is the religious responsibility of the husband and father – the education and moral training of the children has been made the obligation of both parents. Inside the family the principles of love, sincerity, discipline, security, respect, mutual understanding, mutual responsibility, and equality within the divine law should rule. The Prophet was an ideal and a paradigm in the matter of treatment towards family members. He used to stand up on the arrival of Fatimah and would make her sit by his side. He often carried Hasan and Husayn, his grandchildren, on his back and shoulders. The Prophet is reported to have said: ‘The best of you is he who is best to his family.’ It is also reported that he said: ‘Whoever dies while her husband is pleased with her will enter paradise.’

Love for the members of family should be looked upon as a means to the love of Allah, and they should not contradict each other. However, the main principle of marriage is mental security, solace, comfort, and relaxation:

One of His signs is that He created mates for you from yourselves that you may find solace and rest in them, and He put between you love and compassion. Surely there are signs in this for a people who reflect. (30:21)

The duties of the spouses towards each other are very important in Islam. The Qur’an devotes a chapter entitled *Al-Nisa* (The Women) to the rights and responsibilities of the spouses. The Qur’an prescribes disciplinary measures in cases of violation of rights and responsibilities, namely, admonition and separation of bed (4:16).

As for safeguarding the state of marriage and solving marital difficulties, the Qur'an asks the believers to seek reconciliation amongst the spouses themselves, but if a breach is still feared, *then appoint an arbitrator from his people and an arbitrator from her people. If they both desire peace and agreement, Allah will establish harmony and peace between them. Surely Allah is Knowing, Aware* (4:35). Thus, all necessary measures should be taken to re-establish peace and harmony between the two, both by themselves and by their relatives and people. This is because the Prophet, peace be upon him, is reported to have said: 'The most detestable thing for me and in my religion is divorce.' Thus divorce, as the last thing to do, is the most hated permissible measure to be taken. This is why, by and large, marriage in the Muslim community is more stable compared with western society. The other factors contributing to the stability of marriage in the Muslim community are: (a) the definition of the rights and responsibilities of the spouses in the *shari`ah* (the body of Islamic law); (b) the general Islamic moral and ethical values and measures which regulate differences of culture, race, color and nationality, thus putting marriage in its correct perspective; and (c) the Islamic concept of family, home, relationships of near and distant kin, as well as the Islamic relationship between human beings and marriage partners.

Man/Woman

By Umm Husayn

The purpose for which we are created is that we may come to know Allah. One much quoted Hadith or saying of the Prophet states that: ‘He who knows himself, knows his Lord.’

Seekers of self-knowledge must thus define their role in this existence and understand the boundaries within which they have to function if they are to behave correctly. If this is to happen it is crucial that men and women know the nature of the relationship that Allah has ordained between them. This is revealed in the following *ayat*:

And one of His signs is that He created mates for you from yourselves that you may find rest in them, and He put between you love and compassion; most surely there are signs in this for a people who reflect. (30:21)

O people! Be careful of [your duty to] your Lord, Who created you from a single being and created its mate of the same [kind] and spread from these two, many men and women; and be careful of [your duty to] Allah, by whom you demand one of another [your rights] and [to] the ties of relationship. (4:1)

From these *ayat* we come to know that woman is man’s pair, created like him from a single self and that their destiny is to live in harmony together. Elsewhere in the Holy Qur’an it is revealed that in his existence men are the custodians of women:

Men are the maintainers of women because Allah has made some of them to excel others and because they spend out of their property: the good women are therefore obedient, guarding the unseen as Allah has guarded; and [as to] those on whose part you fear desertion, admonish

them, leave them alone in the sleeping-places and beat them³; then if they obey you, do not seek a way against them; surely Allah is High, Great. (4:34)

Yet, while man has authority over woman in this world, her potential for reward in the next is identical:

And whoever does good deeds whether male or female and he [or she] is a believer – these shall enter the garden, and they shall not be dealt with a jot unjustly. (4:124)

Whoever does good, whether male or female and is a believer, We will most certainly make him live a happy life, and We will most certainly give them their reward for the best of what they did. (16:97)

Like man, woman is dependent on her correct transaction in this world if she is to enjoy the fruits of the next. So woman's fulfillment of her covenant with Allah is that she must obey and serve the man under whose care her Creator has entrusted her, be it husband, father, brother, son, or in the absence of any of these, a relative or righteous man in the community.

Allah's greatest gift to woman is the opportunity she has to be fulfilled spiritually through serving a man.⁴ By dedicating herself wholeheartedly to her husband, she can annihilate her lower tendencies in his service. This course of action ensures not only a correct life here and now, but also the rewards of the life to come.

The Blessed Prophet spoke of woman's station in relation to man as follows: 'Had it been permissible for a human being to prostrate in obeisance before another human being, I would have ordained that women should prostrate before their husbands.' On another occasion, he

³ eBook Editor's Note: For further elucidation of this, please see "On The Beating of Wives" by Dr. Khaled Abou El Fadl, at <http://www.scholarofthehouse.org/exbykhabelfa.html>, and <http://www.quran434.com/wife-beating-islam.html>.

⁴ eBook Editor's Note: Surely, the man has to possess certain higher spiritual qualities to qualify for such obedience and devotion. Furthermore, these injunctions will have to be interpreted and applied with proper contextualization.

described the ‘best women among you’ as being ‘those who bear children, have feelings of love, and are of pure character; in their own family they have a fair social standing, and before their husbands they are humble and submissive; they adorn themselves for their husbands and hide themselves from others; they lend careful ear to what their husbands say, obey their orders and while in privacy they comply with their wishes.’ And He considered a loving, giving wife as a man’s most valued treasure: ‘After the blessings of Islam, the most precious gift of God for a Muslim man is his having a Muslim partner, because whenever he sees her, her appearance provides a joy for him, and she obeys his orders and is the custodian of his wealth and honor.’

In return for this love and devotion man is enjoined both in the Qur’an and the Hadiths to treat women with tenderness and respect:

And treat them kindly. (4:19)

In his address at Mina, during the last year of his life, the Blessed Prophet said: ‘You should advise others to behave well towards women, because they have come to live in your houses; they are dependent on you; they are God’s trust whom you have voluntarily made your partners.’

Another Hadith states: ‘The best men among my followers are those who are not harsh upon their family but treat them with benevolence and kindness.’ `Ali, the Commander of the Faithful, in a letter written to one of his sons, recommended that, ‘Woman is like a sweet smell and is of tender nature, not hard-hearted like a tyrant, so always placate her and treat her gently, so that you may lead a peaceful life.’

While man is considered the head of the family, the running of the house and the upbringing of the children is considered the woman’s domain. Indeed her husband is as an honored guest in her home. A Hadith says: ‘Verily, man is the head of the family and woman is the head of the house.’

`Ali, the Commander of the Faithful, speaking about the importance of a woman’s contribution to her family, said: ‘An educated woman educates a family, a community, a nation.’

The Blessed Prophet divided the work between his daughter, Hazrat Fatimah Zahrah, and her husband `Ali in this way: the work of the household was assigned to her and the work outside the house to him. Hazrat Fatimah Zahrah is said to have been very satisfied with this division.

Marriage is only worthwhile if it helps the husband and wife, their earthly desires satisfied, to explore their full spiritual potential. If the relationship is not conducive to the spiritual development of both, the one helping the other, it will be a miserable affair. The most fortunate woman is she whose passion and devotion for her husband has expanded to such a point that she can use it as a springboard to dive into the eternal love of the Creator. So she can truly say to her beloved: 'We are but one, for the love of you is the love of the One.'

Woman's role must accordingly be seen as one of submission to whatever circumstances destiny has decreed for her. For some this involves a quiet life in the home, for others an arena of dynamic action. The important factor is her transaction with the man into whose care Allah has entrusted her. It is this thread of devotion that links the lives of the three great ladies of Islam, the wife, daughter and granddaughter of the Blessed Prophet – Hazrat Khadijah, Hazrat Fatimah Zahrah, and Hazrat Zaynab. Their lives were very different, but all three dedicated themselves selflessly and with unquestioning devotion to the men who were their custodians.

Hazrat Khadijah recognized her husband's shining star and willingly gave him not only her constant support, in the face of much opposition, but also all her worldly wealth. When confronted by his opponents, she replied that her wealth came from Allah, how better could it be spent than in the service of the Prophet of Allah. She was the foremost business woman of her time, having employed the service of the Blessed Prophet before their marriage. Her modesty and the correct behavior for which she was famed gives Muslim women a model of how they can transact correctly in the world of affairs.

Hazrat Fatimah Zahrah's short life was spent serving her father, husband and children quietly in the home. Her consideration for her husband was such that once when she was sick, and `Ali asked her what he might bring her, her reply was nothing. When he pressed her for a reply, she said that the Blessed Prophet had told her not to request anything from her husband in case he

could not provide it and would feel ashamed. Imam `Ali continued to beg her for an answer, and finally she asked for a pomegranate.

Hazrat Zaynab is the example of a woman forced by events into outer action, at a time when there were no men to protect her. Amid darkness and danger, she stepped forth as a tigress to protect the life of her sick nephew, Imam `Ali Zayn al-`Abidin, and the honor of her family. For Hazrat Zaynab, the strongest masculine influence in her life had been her brother, Imam Husayn. Her husband, knowing this, permitted her to accompany the Imam to Karbala, where she was to leave her mark on history.

All three were women of loyalty and passion; all three showed by their devotion and sacrifice that woman's greatest fulfillment comes from obedience and service to her man.

A Letter of Shaykh al-Darqawi

Women should leave what does not concern them and perform what Allah has made obligatory for them. They only perform what supererogatory things they are able to do. Then they will be happy, Allah willing, and not wretched or burdened because they grind flour, sieve, plait, knead, season, bandage, untie, sweep, give water, gather firewood, spin, milk, go into labor, bear their children, and raise them. These are all great deeds and well-known striving. With these deeds, they only need the prayer, fasting, and what Allah has made obligatory, like *zakat* for the one who has the minimum of property subject to *zakat*, or the *Hajj* for the one who is able to make it.

... I am only reminding you about what I have mentioned concerning women so that you can inform them. Most of them do not consider this to be action. By Allah, it is among the greatest of actions. Allah wipes out evil deeds by it and elevates degrees. Tell them about it so that they can leap up to it, and so they will not resent it. It is very great with Allah. That is absolutely definite.

From *The Darqawi Way* (The letters of Shaykh Mawlay al-`Arabi ad-Darqawi)

Raising Children

By `Allamah Baqir al-Majlisi, translated by Shaykh Abu `Ali Fattaah from *Hilyat al-Muttaqin*

Introduction

The Prophet Muhammad has indicated to us in a very clear manner that the *deen* (life transaction) of Islam is entirely based on the knowledge of proper behavior in any given situation. He said (may Allah bless him), ‘The *deen* is [the knowledge of] proper behavior, entirely.’

It is this knowledge of the proper bounds and limitations, as well as acting upon this knowledge, that will bring us goodness in this world and the next. It is through the knowledge of proper behavior that we are able to act in harmony, the natural tendency of each person being toward goodness. Each one of us knows what kindness and goodness is. Each one of us knows how we ourselves like to be treated; however, unfortunately, many of us act contrary to this innate knowledge in our dealings with others.

The Prophet Muhammad taught us that each human being is born in goodness, that is, that the natural state of humanity is goodness. Nobody is born in sin as some would have us believe. It is only at a later period in our lives that we are taught by our surroundings, i.e., family, culture, and so forth, to behave in a manner contrary to our nature.

The Prophet said that each child is born in the natural state of submission (*Islam*), and it is the parents who introduce the child to various beliefs and dogmas going against this natural tendency. Muslims today, particularly in the West, may be generally unaware of proper behavior in many living situations. This stems from the cultural environment in which they exist.

Much of the problem for the Muslim who is unaware of the proper behavior stems from the cultural and family environment in which he was raised. In spite of the fact that many of us came from homes in which there was love and respect, there may have been little knowledge. In the traditions of the Prophet and the Imams of his household, we are told that action without true knowledge brings about more corruption than good.

The materialistic (*kafir*) society which surrounds us lacks this essential knowledge, so it is not passed down through the generations from father to son and mother to daughter. Behavior is instead handled in a ‘hit or miss’ fashion, and is at best a mixture of proper and improper traditions and customs which have generally descended to the level of material considerations and survival techniques.

Those of us who have entered into the *deen* as adults must be particularly careful in our actions, scrutinizing every act to ensure that it is in accordance with the limitations and laws established for all time in the Qur’an, and explained in the traditions of the Prophet. Allah has given us guidelines by which we must live in order to find success in this world and the next. He has informed us of our responsibilities as Muslims towards those who are closest to us, that is, our families, as well as informing us of our responsibilities regarding our brother Muslims.

The Prophet said: ‘Those closest to you (in relation) are more deserving of your love.’ For this reason we must pay particular attention to the proper upbringing of our children. Being members of our families, they are the most deserving of our love and care. We must strive to instill in them behavior and values which will bring them joy in this life as well as the next. Each one of us is held responsible for their proper education and upbringing.

Allah has instructed us in the Qur’an in the following manner regarding the behavior of children:

And Luqman said to his son while he admonished him: O my son! Do not associate anything with Allah; most surely association [of others with Him] is a great wrong.

And We have enjoined man to respect his parents – his mother bears him with frailty upon frailty and his weaning takes two years – saying: Be grateful to Me and to both your parents; to Me is the eventual coming.

And if they contend with you that you should associate with Me what you have no knowledge of, do not obey them. Keep company with them in this world kindly, and follow the way of he who turns to Me; then to Me is your return; then I will inform you of what you did.

O my son! Surely if it is the very weight of the grain of a mustard seed, even though it is in [the heart of] a rock, or [high above] in the heaven or [deep down] in the earth, Allah will bring it [to light]; surely Allah is the Subtle, the Aware.

O my son! Keep up prayer and enjoin the good and forbid the evil; and bear patiently what befalls you; surely these acts require courage.

And do not turn your face away from people in contempt, nor go about in the land exulting overmuch; surely Allah does not love any self-conceited boaster.

And pursue the right course in your going about and lower your voice. Surely the most loathsome of voices is the braying of the donkey. (31:13-19)

Stemming from these general instructions came more specific instructions which have been recorded in the Hadith literature attributed to the Prophet and the Imams of his household. Following is a translation from the book *Hilyat al-Muttaqin*, by `Allamah Majlisi. The compiler of this book has gathered together many important traditions concerning the proper upbringing and care of children. The chapter quoted begins with the very early life of the child and continues through various stages of the child's growth and development.

The Period of Nursing and its *Adab*

The maximum period a child may be nursed is two years. It is not permissible to nurse a child for more than two years unless there is a valid reason for doing so. A child should not be nursed for less than twenty-one months unless it be for reasons of the mother or child's health, or for other valid reasons which make it absolutely necessary to discontinue. For example, if the mother no longer has milk and the parents do not have the means to procure a wet nurse or a wet nurse is not available, then the period of nursing may be less than the prescribed twenty-one months.

A number of scholars consider it to be obligatory for a mother to nurse her child from her own breast immediately after the birth of the child. The first three days are very important for the proper functioning of the baby's digestive system. The scholars say that if she does not nurse her own child for that period, the child may very possibly not have the strength that it should have for growing properly. The Commander of the Faithful, `Ali, peace be upon him, said: 'The best milk for a child is the milk from its own mother.' Imam Ja`far al-Sadiq saw a woman who was nursing her child and he said to her, 'O woman, do not favor one breast over the other when you are nursing (your child). Switch back and forth equally, so that the nutrition and the amount of water that the child takes in will be balanced. Do not nurse for less than twenty-one months. If you do so without a valid reason you will wrong the child.'

He says in another Hadith: 'Do not let a woman who rejects Islam nurse your child. However, a woman who is a Christian or a Jewess may do so. You should not allow them to take the child to their homes and nurse it. If they are going to nurse the child, then forbid them from drinking wine, eating pork, and all the other things *haram* (forbidden) in Islam which they consider to be *halal* (permitted).'

The Commander of the Faithful, `Ali ibn Abi Talib, said: 'Allow only a woman whose outward and inward courtesy is proper to nurse your child, because the child will take on those qualities from her.'

The Upbringing of the Child

Imam Ja`far al-Sadiq said: ‘Let your child busy himself with play until he is seven years old. After that, educate him for seven years. If those seven years have been successful, then continue to educate him, but if you were unsuccessful, then there is no hope for him. If you have not taught him good manners by the time he is fourteen, then it will be very difficult to do.’ In another Hadith, he says: ‘You should allow him to play until he is seven years old. You should teach him to read and write in the next seven years. After that you should teach him the specifics of what is *halal* (permitted) and *haram* (forbidden) by Allah.’ (This does not mean that you should not be teaching your children all of the time, but when they are fourteen you should go into a deep study of it.)

In a Hadith, `Ali (peace be upon him) said: ‘For the first seven years take care of your child and give him the proper training with regard to his physical situation (cleaning his body, etc.). Then for the next seven years teach him *adab* (proper courtesy). Then have him serve you until he is twenty-three years old. He will continue to develop his intellect (*`aql*) until he is thirty-five years old. After that he will be tested, tried, and receive more experience. Generally, one’s intellect is in the process of development until one reaches thirty-five, and from then on one gains experience which adds to it.’

In another Hadith, it says: ‘Boys who are six years old and older should not sleep under the same sheet in the same bed. Boys and girls who have reached the age of ten should not sleep in the same bed with each other.’

It is reported from the Messenger of Allah that the right of the child on his father is that the father give him a good name and teach him courtesy (*adab*). He should also teach his son a good way to earn his living.

In another Hadith, it is said that a person named Sukuni came to Imam Ja`far al-Sadiq, and said: ‘I am very sad.’ The Imam asked: ‘Why are you sad?’ He replied: ‘Because Allah gave me a daughter.’ The Imam replied: ‘O Sukuni, the earth will carry her and her daily bread is from Allah. She will live without taking anything from your life, and she will not cause your daily sustenance to diminish.’

Then he asked: ‘What name did you give her?’ Sukuni replied: ‘Fatimah.’ Then the Imam exclaimed: ‘Oh! Oh!’ and he put his hands on his forehead. He said: ‘The Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and his family, said that the right the child has upon his father, if it is a boy, is that the father has found and married a good mother for him (i.e., that the father has chosen a good woman as the son’s mother before his birth), that he give him a good name, teach him the Qur’an, make sure that he is circumcised, and that he teach him to swim. If it is a daughter, he must find a good mother for her, give her a good name, teach her *Surat al-Nur* (The Light), not teach her *Surat Yusuf* as a child, not hand her over to any kind of situation which would cause affliction to her, and he should marry her to her husband at an early age.’

Then he said: ‘Since you have named your child Fatimah, never say bad things about her nor curse her and do not strike her.’

It is related from the Commander of the Faithful, `Ali ibn Abi Talib, that the Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and his family, said: ‘Teach your children to swim and teach them to use the bow.’

Imam Musa said about the child who plays many pranks and is naughty during his childhood, that this is a sign that he will be knowledgeable and patient when he grows up.

It is also related from the Messenger of Allah that the mother and father will also bear the weight of the wrong action if the child is disobedient. He said that Allah will have mercy on the father and mother who encourage their children to goodness.

It is related from Imam Ja`far al-Sadiq that the Messenger of Allah said that Allah will have mercy on the one who helps his children in goodness. The person who related this said: ‘What do you mean by helping them?’ The Prophet said: ‘That you make things easy for them to do so that they can accomplish them, and accept from them insignificant things that they have done for you as goodness, letting them know that you see it as goodness. Do not give children tasks that will be too difficult for them to do lest they leave them and become discouraged. Do not behave cruelly or abruptly with them.’

In another Hadith, it is said that a person came to Imam Ja`far al-Sadiq and said: ‘To whom shall I show goodness?’ The Imam replied: ‘To your father and your mother.’ The man said: ‘They have died.’ Then the Imam said: ‘To your children, be merciful and kind with them, and if you make a promise to them be loyal to your promise, because they think that you are the one who gives them their daily bread, so they trust you.’

Imam Musa said: ‘Allah does not become angry with anyone in the same way as He gets angry with the one who wrongs women and children.’

In another Hadith the Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and his family, said: ‘Kiss your children and Allah will write for you a good action for each time that you have done so. The one who makes his children happy will be made happy by Allah on the Day of Resurrection.’

In another Hadith, it is said that somebody came to the Prophet, and said: ‘I have never kissed any of my children.’ When that man went away, the Prophet said: ‘This person, as far as I am concerned, is a person of the Fire.’

In another Hadith, he said that anyone who has children should play with them like a child plays.

Imam Ja`far al-Sadiq said: ‘Allah will be merciful to His slave according to the amount that he loves his children.’

In a Hadith, it is related that the Messenger of Allah saw a person who had two children. With one child he was never affectionate and he never kissed him. The other one was his favorite and he kissed and constantly showed him affection. The Prophet asked: ‘Why do you not treat both of them with the same kindness? Know that it is better not to show any favoritism towards one child over another unless one is more of a scholar or more keen in learning. Then favoritism will encourage the eagerness for knowledge.’

The Prophet also said: ‘Every parent who teaches his children the Qur’an will be called before Allah on the Day of Resurrection adorned in a garment of light, and that garment will light up the faces of the people of Paradise.’

In a Hadith, related by Imam Ja`far al-Sadiq, it is said that when a child is three years old one should say to him seven times: *La ilaha illa`llah* – there is no God but Allah. When the child becomes three years, seven months and twenty days, then say to him seven times: *Muhammadun Rasulu`llah* – Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah. When the child has reached four years exactly, you should say to him seven times: *Allahumma salli `ala Muhammadin wa ali Muhammad* – O Allah, bless Muhammad and the family of Muhammad. When he is five years old, you should make sure that he knows how to make a *sajdah* (prostration) properly. When he is six years old, you should teach him how to make *salat* (prayer) and encourage him to make it. Then, when he is seven years old, you should show him how to make *wudu`* (ablution) properly. (This does not mean that you cannot teach him these things earlier if he shows an interest in or an inclination towards them.) Command him to make *salat* when he has reached nine years of age, and make sure that he knows how to perform *wudu`* and *salat* correctly. Strike him if he refuses to perform them. When he has learned how to perform *salat*, Allah will forgive his mother and father.

It is reported from the Commander of the Faithful, `Ali, that he forbade that a weapon of war be worn by children or that they be allowed to handle them.

In another Hadith, it says to make sure that you wash any grease or dirt off your children’s hands and faces at night before they sleep, because Satan will come and smell them while they are sleeping and he will frighten them in their sleep. The angels who write good actions will be annoyed by it.

The Messenger of Allah said: ‘Everyone who goes to the marketplace and buys a gift and brings it home to his family, is like one who has given charity to a group of destitute and poor people. The first ones he should give gifts to are his daughters, for indeed, everyone who makes his daughters happy is like one who has freed one of the children of Isma`il from slavery. The one

who makes the eyes of his son bright and makes him happy is like the one who has wept through fear of Allah. Allah will cause everyone who weeps from fear of Allah to enter Paradise.’

Imam Ja`far al-Sadiq advised parents to give their children the types of food that cause the flesh in their bodies to grow and their bones to be strong. In another Hadith it is related: ‘Have them eat pomegranates and it will help them reach the potential of their youth and strength.’

In the book called *Tibb al-A`immah* (The Medicine of the Imams), it is related from the Commander of the Faithful `Ali, who said: ‘If a child cries incessantly or if a woman is fearful or if someone suffers from the affliction of insomnia, then let them read the *ayah* from *Surat al-Kahf* (The Cave) which says:

And so We prevented them from hearing in the cave for a number of years, then We raised them up that We might know which of the two parties was able to compute the time for which they remained. (18:11-12)

It is also related that a daughter or a girl of six years should not be allowed to be kissed by a man who is not *mahram* to her, i.e., one who is not a member of her family and to whom she would be eligible to be married. Also she should not be allowed to sit on his lap.

In another Hadith, it is related that a girl who has reached six years of age should not be kissed by boys, and a boy who has reached seven years of age should not be kissed by a woman.

In a Hadith which is considered to be trustworthy it says: ‘Cursed is the one who neglects his family and does not spend anything on them.’

Imam Musa said: ‘The family members of a man are like his prisoners. The person who has been given grace and blessings from Allah, and does not share it and give of it generously with those who are his prisoners, will have those blessings and grace withdrawn from him.’

Imam Ja`far al-Sadiq said: ‘Anyone who spends on two daughters or two sisters or two aunts or two women servants or takes care of them financially will be saved by Allah from the Fire.’

The Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and his family, says that there are degrees in the Garden which no one will attain except three kinds of people. One is the just Imam, another is the person who is good to his relatives, and the third is the person who has a family, spends on his family, and is patient with the annoying things they do.

From Imam Ja`far al-Sadiq, upon him be peace, it is related that there are five people on whom spending is obligatory: your children, father, mother, wife, and servant. Amongst your children are included your children’s children as far as they go. Father and mother include your grandparents and their parents as far back as they are alive.

Advice to a Son

Translated by Hajj Abbas Mubarak from *Mirat al-Rashad* by Shaykh `Abdullah al-Mamaqani.

Enjoining Obedience to Allah, the Glorified; Warning of Disobedience and Indolence; Spending Life Uselessly and Other Instructions

Know, my son, may Allah grant you the success of obedience to Him and may He preserve you from disobedience to Him, that Allah, the Glorious, loves all of His creation boundlessly. Such is the relationship of every craftsman towards that which he has made. He is the Mighty and the Majestic; establishing the obligatory, the recommended, the proper behavior, the forbidden and the *makruh* (detestable). He only did this to bring about that which is of benefit to the slaves (mankind) and to keep them safe from that which is harmful. The disobedience of the disobedient does not harm Him, nor does the obedience of the obedient benefit Him.

He did well who said: ‘If the entire creation turned against Him in denial they would be but a speck of dust on His hem.’

He, the Exalted, is absolutely without need and His only intention when He established the laws was to improve the state of the slaves (mankind), enjoining them to what is beneficial while safeguarding them from harm in this life and the next. Since this is the situation, it would be foolish to depart from obedience to His commands and prohibitions – even though the requirements of thankfulness to the One Who Bestows and the One Who is the Master is contrary to intellectual independence. It would be leaving that which would bring benefit to the self while inviting harm upon it.

My son, I warn you of disobedience. It attracts to you disappointment in this world and punishment in the next. Do you not see that by one mistake our grandfather, Adam, upon him be peace, was expelled from the garden.

I warn you, my son, about indolence and idleness and what is introduced by them. It has been said: When Satan and the commanding self are unable to make the ugly actions seem attractive or the good actions seem unattractive, they turn towards actions which lead to indolence and idleness by drawing the mind towards excess of what is considered necessary regarding eating, drinking, sleeping, comfort, collecting wealth, spending time in beholding what is beautiful, relaxing, mixing with people, discussing and other things such as that. Satan and the self (*nafs*) make each of these so attractive to the slave that he pursues them, and from them there comes to him laziness, indolence and the wasting of precious time.

Beware, my son, of expending yourself in what is not proper in this life nor of benefit to you in the next. For every moment of your life is a precious jewel, indeed more precious. The means of attaining the jewel is through earning and toiling, unlike the attainment of age. When the appointed time of death comes, it will not be delayed. Beware, my son, of wasting or losing this jewel. Seize your youth before your old age, your health before your infirmity, your strength before your weakness, your wealth before your poverty, your leisure before your preoccupation, your life before your death.

Embark upon your youth before you become senile

And the health of your body before it becomes ill.

Not everyone who has lived [in this life] will be safe in the next.

Offer [your best actions], for everyone will arrive

At that which he has sent ahead.

It is related that the people of the Garden do not regret anything of their life in the world except the time during which they did not remember Allah. There is no self whether pious or shameless who on the Day of Reckoning does not blame itself. If it has done righteous deeds, it says: ‘Would that I had done more so that I could have attained a higher station than what I have.’ If it has done evil, it says: ‘Woe unto me! Would that I had not acted so that I would not be punished.’ The Prophet, peace be upon him, said to Abu Dharr: ‘Be greedier with your life than you are with your money.’

It is related that the best of the obediences is being mindful of time. He who wastes the days of his sowing will regret the days of his reaping.

I warn you, my son, do not waste your life in anything that is not going to be of benefit to you after death. It is related that the man of intellect is he who works in his day for his tomorrow before the affair leaves his grasp. The shrewd one is he who subjugates himself and works for what is after death. The foolish one is he who follows his whims and wishfully thinks of Allah's forgiveness.

The person who has spent his life in what will not be of benefit to him in the hereafter is like someone who has left valuable jewels strewn upon the face of the earth. He is occupied in picking up [worthless] stones and digging up [useless] pottery, suffering hardship only so that children may play with them.

So, my son, the light of my eye, the delight of my heart, know the value of your life and do not absorb it in what will not save you. Do not be like the silkworm, working hard to destroy itself.

Then I advise you, my son, may Allah grant you success in performing every good deed and keep you from every ill deed, to acquire noble character and the praiseworthy attributes which are the following:

Safeguarding the Tongue

Hold your tongue from that which does not concern you because most of the mistakes of the children of Adam are from this tongue. There is no organ that has so many sins as the tongue.

Silence is one of the doors to wisdom. Guard your tongue so that you may be led to the Garden. It is related that goodness is written for the believing slave as long as he remains silent and that whoever wants safety in the two abodes should safeguard his tongue. Does man topple over on his nose in the fire except by the reaping of his tongue? When Allah wishes goodness for a slave, he helps him to safeguard his tongue and makes him occupied with his faults, instead of the

faults of others. He who decreases his speech perfects his intellect and clears his heart. The faith of a slave does not become sound until his heart becomes sound and, in turn, his heart does not become sound until his tongue becomes sound. This is because the tongue of the believer is behind his heart. If the believer wishes to speak, he considers what he is going to say. If it is good, he manifests it and if it is evil, he hides it. But the hypocrite's heart is not behind his tongue. He says whatever comes upon his tongue and does not care whether what he says is for him or against him.

Surely, silence will not cause you regret, while many a speech will cause you regret in this world and the next. A man is hidden beneath his tongue. So my son, weigh your speech before you utter it and subject it to the scrutiny of your intellect and knowledge. If it is for Allah and in Allah, then say it; otherwise, do not reply, be silent, be mute. He excelled who said: 'A tongue that speaks quickly is given to the winds. As long as a man has not spoken, his faults lie hidden.'

It is related that there is no organ of the body that does not address the tongue saying: 'I beseech you by Allah, do not cause me to be thrown into chastisement.' It is said that if we look at the nature of speech and silence we would say: 'If your speech is of silver, O self, then your silence is of gold.'

In specific situations, however, it could be that speech is as gold and silence as dust, such as when speaking about *fiqh* (Islamic law) and enjoining others to the lawful courtesies and the attributes of a pleasing character. In fact, silence could well be a deadly poison, such as remaining silent from enjoining good deeds, prohibiting the forbidden and guiding those who seek guidance. May Allah give you success in attaining whatever pleases Him and may He make your future state better than your past.

Taking Account of Oneself

Take account of the self every night. It is up to you, my son, may Allah provide you with good in the two abodes, to take account of yourself before you are asked to account. In the same way as the merchant takes account with his helper in order to know what he has done during the day,

you should call yourself to account every night before you sleep in order to know what you have embarked upon during that day. If you see in yourself shortcomings because you have committed a wrong action or been disobedient to Allah, ask His forgiveness and return to Him, imploring Him to wipe it from you. Correct that which has passed by, fulfilling it and asking forgiveness. If you see in yourself lassitude, laziness, distraction and the wasting of capital, discipline yourself with the whip of sincere advice and exhortation. Impress upon yourself the way of obedience, then watch it like a merchant so that its moments are not wasted in distraction or that its life is not sold for too small a price or for a loss. If you see from yourself good conduct and proper taste in the spending of time, thank Allah for that, and ask Him to increase the soul in success and guidance. It is related from them [the Imams], upon whom be peace: ‘He is not amongst our people who does not call himself to account every day. If he has done what is wrong, he asks for forgiveness and turns in repentance to Allah.’

It is transmitted by some of the people of knowledge that there was a man of knowledge who would keep a pencil and piece of paper near him, and would write everything that he had said and done from the beginning of the day until the time of his sleep at night. Then he would look at it and thank Allah for any of the good things and for his success with himself. As for those things which were shameful, he would ask Allah’s forgiveness.

From the tablets of Abraham, upon him be peace, there is written: ‘The man of intellect has four different times within his day, unless his intellect is overcome: a time in which he calls upon his Lord; a time in which he takes account of himself; a time in which he reflects upon what Allah has made for him; and a time in which he takes what is permissible for himself. In this period he takes help for the other times and in it there is an ease for the heart.

Observing the Self

It is upon you, my son, to notice the presence of your Lord and His awareness of you in all of your states, movements, actions, speeches, breaths, thoughts, steps and moments. So prefer that which the Lord Almighty has preferred and choose what he has chosen. The Prophet Luqman, upon him be peace, said to his son: ‘If you were to be watchful of Allah, the Exalted, you would

not have the audacity to commit any sin. Simply noticing that He sees you and is aware of you would prevent you from opposing Him.’

Reflection

I enjoin you, my son, to practice reflection, for it is one of the most important methods of awakening the self and purifying the heart. It has a great capacity to lift away turbidity, break desires, cause the withdrawal from the abode of arrogance and turn one’s attention to the abode of eternity and delight. It is at the highest of the acts of worship and at the core of obedience – rather, its spirit. It has been said that the most virtuous act of worship is contemplation or reflection upon Allah, the Exalted, and upon His Power.

Reflection is the means by which the slave is conveyed to Allah. Acts of worship connect the slave to Allah’s reward, the Glorious and Mighty, but that which joins to the Exalted Himself is better than that which joins to His reward. Reflection is an act of the heart while *‘ibadah* (worship) is an act of the limbs. The heart is the noblest of the various limbs, therefore, an act which it performs is necessarily nobler than the acts of the other limbs or faculties. It has been related that the reflection of an hour is better than the worship of a year, sixty years or seventy years, according to the different traditions, implying different degrees of reflection.

Often reflection is what can save man from the Fire, and Hurr ibn Yazid al-Riyahi [a commander of Ibn Ziyad’s army against Imam Husayn at Karbala who deserted and joined the side of Imam Husayn] was saved by means of reflection of an hour. Even if he had performed acts of worship for a year or years, it would not have been of benefit to him because of what he had embarked upon. But the reflection of an hour benefitted him and saved him. Thus, an hour’s reflection is made better than the worship of seventy years. It has been related that no worship is greater than prayer and fasting except reflection upon Allah.

First, my son, reflect at times upon the situation of those of the past. From where did they come and to where did they go? What did they take with them, what did they leave behind and with what did they busy themselves. Reflect on how he who would not touch the dust with his foot,

would sleep upon silk brocade and walk upon the earth insolently was separated from his wealth, family, offspring, palaces, homes, servants and retinue. How he took up the shroud and put his delicate cheek upon the dust; how he became companion to the maggots and vipers and dwelt in the dark grave alone.

Secondly, at other times, reflect that when death comes it comes suddenly. Death has its time, and when it comes no one puts it off by a minute. Be on guard against it at every instant! Prepare yourself for it before the affair of this world is out of your hands. Do not take lightly nor be distracted from the preparation for it through repentance and [corrective] actions. How many amongst mankind were suddenly overtaken by death, having no respite in which to remember Allah, the Glorified, and ask forgiveness: Be on guard against being like them and becoming one of the people of grief and regret who having postponed turning to Allah and delegating [their affairs to Him], say ‘My Lord, send me back in order that I may correct that which I have neglected.’

Thirdly, reflect upon this world, that it is nothing but an abode of hardship, discomfort, toil, suffering and strain, and that its purity is mixed with turbidity, its comfort is joined to hardship, and that Allah did not create ease within it, as the Exalted said in a sacred Hadith (*hadith qudsi*): ‘My slaves ask Me for something I did not create which is ease in this world. And they fail to ask for that which I created which is eternal happiness.’ Surely you, my son, when you reflect upon this, what you endure of misfortune becomes insignificant to you and you prefer the action leading to the next life and notice that if there is no way out of toil and difficulty in this world, enduring hardship for unending ease is more deserving of your efforts and easier.

Fourthly, reflect upon what you will soon meet of the world’s after death: of the grave, the interspace, the gathering, the resurrection, the dispatching of the books, the materializing of actions, the declaration of faith, the reckoning, the straight path, the balance, what Allah has prepared for those who are in *taqwa* (fearful awareness) and those who are guilty, of the Garden and its many provisions and the Fire and its divisions of punishments.

Fifthly, reflect that what you own is of no benefit unless it is presented totally in the way of Allah, the Exalted; that you own nothing but the length of your shroud; that your offspring, your dependents, your children, your beloveds, your relatives will be of no use to you except to lay you on your side in your grave to surrender you to your actions; and that what is of benefit to you is only your striving for the face of Allah, the Glorified. It accompanies you and does not separate from you. Surely, if you reflect upon the points mentioned you will increase your good actions and the sincerity in them. You will be saved from destruction and you will prepare for your tomorrow before the affair is out of your hands. It has been related that the most praiseworthy renunciation of the world is the mentioning of death, and that the most praiseworthy reflection is the reflection upon death.

Whoever is distracted from the remembrance of death spends his life in what does not concern him, while he who clings to the remembrance of death spends his life in what is of benefit to him. Surely it is the best of admonishers, the quickest of restrainers and sufficient in goodness. It makes constriction and difficulty seem easy. It ensures that the wealthy man will be generous with his wealth in order to reap the rewards of the hereafter. The slave is held back from busying himself with what is of no benefit to him. Certainly he has excelled who said: ‘It will ease tragedies and will make you desire that which is of benefit to you on the Day of Reckoning; it will make you cling to repentance before death; it will cause you to correct your way before it is too late, cutting off hopes, depriving you of the pleasures of maybe and perhaps.’

Patience

Of the kinds of patience there are: steadfastness while upon trial, thankfulness for favor and contentment with the decree.

My son, I enjoin you to practice patience; it is one of the most important methods of obtaining relief. Surely, by it the worshippers are awarded the highest degree in the two abodes. He who examines the state of those who have gone before would realize this.

Wear the robe of patience upon the vicissitudes of time. You will obtain from the goodness of patience the best of outcomes.

My son, be as good-natured when there are shocks and tribulations as when there is ease. Make whatever Allah chooses for you of health and sickness, well-being and afflictions, youth and old age, strength and weakness, wealth and poverty, and the like thereof, loved by you, because it is what the All-Wise has chosen for you. He knows all of the outcomes. He loves you and is kinder to you than your parents and self. He is the source of goodness for you.

My son, guard yourself against despondency that arises over disasters and adversities and the fear that arises from them. Be content with what the Wise, Compassionate brings forth. Leave the complaint and bad opinion of what befalls you. It has been transmitted that the Master of Prostration (ʿAli ibn al-Husayn), upon him be peace, said in one of his poems:

When you are tried by a slip, endure it.

The Most Generous is patient, so to endure what you have done is more resolute.

Do not complain to created beings for you would only be complaining of the Merciful to the merciless.

My son, make yourself as agreeable in times of distress as you make yourself agreeable in times of ease, in poverty as in wealth, in times of misfortune as in times of well-being and so on. About this the Imams, upon whom be peace, have said: ‘Patience is enduring the distaste of trial and hardship. More praiseworthy than that is to be steadfast in obedience to Allah, the Glorified. More praiseworthy still, is to preserve oneself in abstention from what Allah the Exalted has forbidden.’

It has been narrated from the Prophet (peace be upon him) that he said: ‘Whoever endures a misfortune with patience until he regains the goodness of ease, Allah writes for him three hundred degrees. What is between each degree is as that which is between the heaven and the

earth. Whoever is steadfast in obedience, Allah writes for him six hundred degrees. What is between each degree is what is between the outer boundaries of the earth and the Throne. And whoever perseveres in his abstention from disobedience, Allah writes for him nine hundred degrees. What is between each degree is as what is between the outer boundaries of the earth and the outermost limits of the Throne.'

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