

LANTERN OF THE PATH



IMAM JA'FAR AL-SADIQ

TRANSLATED BY SHAYKH FADHLALLA HAERI AND MUNA BILGRAMI



Publisher: Zahra Publications

ISBN (Printed Version): 1-919897-19-4

ISBN (E-Book Version): 978-1-919826-80-6

<http://www.zahrapublications.pub>

Third Edition Published in March of 2004

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Book Description

The Lantern of The Path comprises ninety-nine chapters. Each one is a threshold to the next, guiding the reader through the broad spectrum of ageless wisdom, like a lantern along the path of reality. The author illuminates the inner meanings of outer practices which range from practical everyday acts of behavior, to the practices of worship, morals and ethics, and the pillars of religion.

Practical and profound, this concise volume is a useful guide for those who wish to cultivate their inner being.

About Imam Ja`far Al-Sadiq

The sixth Imam in the line of the Twelve Imams descended from the Prophet Muhammad, Imam Ja`far ibn Muhammad al-Sādiq (702–765 C.E. or 17th Rabi` al-Awwal 83 AH – 15th Shawwal 148 AH) was the founder of the Ja`fari School of Islamic Law and a renowned scholar of his age. His father was the Imam Muhammad al-Baqir and his mother, Farwa, was a great-granddaughter of Abu Bakr. He lived in Arabia in the eighth century. He devoted his attention to interpreting divine utterances and applied himself to such controversial subjects as *irādah* (free will) and *qadr* (the power to direct one's own actions). He is regarded as one of the greatest of the imams and is also revered by the Naqshbandi Sunni Sufi chain.

Before his imamate he lived through the last twelve years of his grandfather's and nineteen of his father's imamate. His lifetime spanned the rule of the last few caliphs of the Umayyad and the first two of the Abbasid dynasties. Whilst he did not overtly contest their secular leadership, he was, as were all the Imams to even greater or lesser degrees, persecuted by them.

Despite living at a time of tumultuous political change, the Imam was at the crest of the peak of intellectual activity that had developed by them. Much controversy and discussion had arisen over such issues as free-will and compulsion, speculative theology and philosophical enlightenment. These and other related issues in the Islamic sciences occupied the forefront of scholarly life and it was the Imam who clarified and resolved many points; for example, he identified the answer to the conflict between free-will and compulsion as falling between the two extremes. It was also he who delineated the guideline of using the Qur'an to validate prophetic traditions: if they were in agreement they could be accepted, if not, they were rejected. The depth and breadth of his knowledge of the traditions, their authentication and exposition, was unmatched by any of his contemporaries.

His profound spiritual inheritance and teachings magnetized scores of students and seekers of true knowledge: at least four thousand are known to have taken knowledge from him. Among those who considered him their master were the founders of two of the main remaining schools of Islamic Law, Abu Hanifa and Malik ibn Anas, and Jabir ibn Hayyan, founder of Arab alchemy, whose teachings greatly influenced the later physician-philosophers al-Razi (Rhazes), Avicenna and Miskawayh.

The nickname he is most often known by, al-Sadiq, meaning ‘the truthful’, reflects the love both Sunnis and Shi`ahs alike had for him. The Caliph al-Mansur, however, disliked intensely the Imam’s popularity and influence, though he paid lip-service to him. The Imam died in 148/765, naming beforehand as the successor to the imamate his son, Musa al-Kathim. The Isma`ili sect of Shi`ah Islam originated at his death by the Isma`ilis’ assumption that the imamate would automatically transfer to his dead son, Isma`il. The rest of the Shi`ah followed the Imam’s will in acknowledging Musa as their seventh Imam.

Introduction

The path of Islam contains a most comprehensive and total system of conduct for the wayfarer. The outer behavior of a true Muslim reflects what is deep in his inner consciousness.

As creation is based on unity, *tawhīd* as it is called in Arabic, every aspect of human experience reflects an aspect of unity. The Muslim is he who has submitted and surrendered in peace and knowledge to this wholesome and naturally balanced ecology. The outer courtesy of behavior emanates from an inner equilibrium. Outer certainty emanates from inner submission and contentment. Outer nobility and courage emanate from inner awareness of the immense mercy and compassion of the Creator.

The outer behavior, courtesies, practices and rituals of Islam are all manifestations of a subtler and finer inner conditioning, and the balanced fusion of the outer and the inner in the journey of this world. If there is an inner attribute there must be a corresponding, outer expression which is a symptom of an inner attribute.

In his teachings, Imam Ja`far al-Sadiq shows the way to equilibrium in a most inspired way of *tawhīd*. As a man of insight and knowledge he sees the unified hand and demonstrates it to the sincere seeker. These teachings can be of benefit to anyone who has an interest in spiritual matters and is concerned with benefitting from the path of Islam.

The Imam's explanations in '*The Lantern of The Path*' contain many levels of understanding. Much depends upon the state of the seeker and the extent of his sincerity. Although this book is small, its meanings are vast. We pray to Allah to increase our knowledge and experience of His vast compassion and mercy.

Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri

Publisher's Note

Though there can be no doubt as to the truth and authenticity of the teachings contained in this book, it should be mentioned that there is some controversy over whether this book was penned by the Imam himself. Both Allamah Majlisi and Allamah Hurr al-Amili felt that the book's division into ninety-nine chapters and its emphasis on inner meanings is a style more suited to the gnostic, or Sufi, scholars. Other scholars, however, affirm that this is the work of the Imam, among them al-Sayyid Ali ibn Tawus, Shaykh al-Kaf`ami, and al-Shahid al-Thani. In the absence of unanimity, we can only say that *'The Lantern of The Path'* is generally attributed to Imam Ja`far al-Sadiq.

Notes About This Translation

This small and simple book was most difficult and complex to translate. The translation was begun four years ago by my father, Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri, when he translated '*The Lantern of The Path*' during some discourses. Though the task then fell to me to coordinate and execute the final translation, it was not without the considerable help of several scholars that the final version was achieved. A formal translation was first done by Aisha Abdar-Rahman Al-Tarjumana. Both hers and Shaykh Fadhlalla's versions were used in translating it anew, throughout which Muhsin Muzaffar helped in unearthing the meanings of obscure words and phrases. This translation was subsequently reviewed and edited by both Asadullah adh-Dhakhir Yate and Christopher Flint. I am deeply grateful to all of them, not least for all that I learnt in the process, especially from my father. I sincerely hope that for those who read '*The Lantern of The Path*', it will open up inner delights, as it has done for me.

Muna H. Bilgrami

Chapter 1: Bondage (*`ubudiyah*)

The roots of conduct have four aspects: conduct with God, conduct with the self, conduct with creation (i.e. people), and conduct with this world. Each of these aspects is based upon seven principles, just as there are seven principles of conduct with God: giving Him His due, keeping His limits, being thankful for His gift, being content with His decree, being patient with His trials, glorifying His sanctity, and yearning for Him.

The seven principles of conduct with the self are fear, striving, enduring harm, spiritual discipline, seeking truthfulness and sincerity, withdrawing the self from what it loves, and binding it in poverty (*faqr*).

The seven principles of conduct with creation are forbearance, forgiveness, humility, generosity, compassion, good counsel, justice and fairness.

The seven principles of conduct with this world are being content with what is at hand, preferring what is available to what is not, abandoning the quest for the elusive, hating overabundance, choosing abstinence (*zuhd*), knowing the evils of this world and abandoning any desire for it, and negating its dominance.

When all these qualities are found in one person, he is then one of God's elites, one of His close bondsmen and friends (*awliya'*).

Chapter 2: More on Bondage

Bondage is an essence, the inner nature of which is lordship (*rububiyah*). Whatever is missing in bondage is found in lordship, and whatever is veiled from lordship is found in bondage. As God said:

We will soon show them Our signs in the universe and in their own souls, until it will become quite clear to them that it is the truth. Is it not sufficient as regards your Lord that He is a witness over all things? (41:53)

This means He exists both in your absence and in your presence.

Bondage means ridding oneself of everything, and the way to obtain this is to deny the self what it desires and to make it bear what it dislikes. The key to this is abandoning rest, loving seclusion and following the path of recognition of the need for God. The Prophet said, ‘Worship God as if you see Him, Even if you do not see Him, He sees you.’

The letters of the Arabic word for ‘bondsman’ (*`abd*) are three: *`ayn*, *ba*’ and *dāl*. The *`ayn* is one’s knowledge (*`ilm*) of God. The *ba*’ is one’s distance (*bawn*) from other than Him, and the *dāl* is one’s nearness (*dunuw*) to God with the restriction of neither contingent qualities nor veil.

The principles of conduct have four aspects, as we mentioned at the beginning of the first chapter.

Chapter 3: On Lowering the Gaze

There is nothing more gainful than lowering one's gaze, for the sight is not lowered from things which God has forbidden unless the witnessing of majesty and glory has already come to the heart.

The Commander of the Faithful was asked what could help in lowering one's gaze. He said, 'Submission to the power of Him Who is aware of your secret. The eye is the spy of the hearts and the messenger of the intellect; therefore lower your gaze from whatever is not appropriate to your faith, from whatever your heart dislikes and from whatever your intellect finds repugnant.'

The Prophet said, 'Lower your eyes and you will see wonders.'

God said:

Say to the believing men that they cast down their looks and guard their private parts.
(24:30)

Jesus said to the disciples, 'Beware of looking at forbidden things, for that is the seed of desire and leads to deviant behavior.'

John the Baptist said, 'I would prefer death to a glance which is unnecessary.'

`Abdallah ibn Mas`ud said to a man who had visited a woman while she was ill, 'It would have been better for you to lose your eyes than to have visited your sick person.'

Whenever the eye looks at something forbidden, a knot of desire is tied in the person's heart, and that knot will only be united by one of two conditions: either by weeping out of grief and regret in true repentance, or by taking possession of what one desired and looked at. And if a person takes possession unjustly, without repentance, then that will take him to the Fire. As for the one who repents of it with grief and regret, his abode is the Garden and his destiny is God's favor.

Chapter 4: On Walking

If you are intelligent, then you should be of firm resolution and sincere intention before you set out for any place, for surely the self's nature is to overstep the bounds and encroach on the forbidden. You should reflect when you walk, and take note of the wonders of God's work wherever you go.

Do not be mocking, or strut when you walk; God said:

Do not go about in the land exulting overmuch. (31:18)

Lower your gaze from whatever is inappropriate to faith, and remember God frequently. There is a tradition which says that those places where, and in connection with which, God is mentioned will testify to that before God on the Day of Judgment and will ask forgiveness for those people so that God will let them enter the Garden.

Do not speak excessively with people along the way, for that is bad manners. Most of the roads are the traps and markets of Satan, so do not feel safe from his tricks. Make your coming and your going in obedience to God, striving for His pleasure, for all your movements will be recorded in your book,¹ as God said:

On the day when their tongues and their hands and their feet shall bear witness against them regarding what they did. (24:24)

and

We have made every man's actions to cling to his neck. (17:13)

¹ i.e. that book in which your good and bad deeds are recorded, to be consulted on the Day of Judgment.

Chapter 5: On Knowledge

Knowledge is the basis of every sublime state and the culmination of every high station. That is why the Prophet said, ‘It is the duty of every Muslim, man and woman, to seek knowledge,’ that is, the knowledge of precaution (*taqwa*) and certainty.

Imam `Ali said, ‘Seek knowledge, though it be in China,’ meaning the knowledge of gnosis of the self – in it is contained knowledge of the Lord.

The Prophet said, ‘Whoever knows his own self knows his Lord; moreover, you should acquire that knowledge without which no action is correct, and that is sincerity... . We seek refuge with God from knowledge which has no benefit’, that is, from knowledge which is contrary to actions performed with sincerity. Know that a small amount of knowledge requires a great deal of action, because knowledge of the Hour² requires the person who has such knowledge to act accordingly during his entire life.

Jesus said, ‘I saw a stone on which was written, “Turn me over”, so I turned it over. Written on the other side was “Whoever does not act by what he knows will be doomed by seeking what he does not know, and his own knowledge will be turned against him.”’

God revealed to David, ‘The least that I shall do to someone with knowledge who does not act by his knowledge is worse than the seventy inner punishments which result in My removing from his heart the sweetness of My remembrance.’

There is no way to God except via knowledge. And knowledge is the adornment of man in this world and the next, his driver to Paradise, and by means of it he attains God’s contentment with him.

He who truly knows is the one in whom sound actions, pure supplications, truthfulness and precaution speak out; not his tongue, his debates, his comparisons, assertions or claims. In times other than these, those who sought knowledge were those who had intellect, piety, wisdom, modesty and caution; but nowadays we see that those who seek it do not have any of these qualities. The man of knowledge needs intellect, kindness, compassion, good counsel, forbearance, patience, contentment and generosity; while anyone wishing to learn needs a desire for knowledge, will, devotion (of his time and energy), piety, caution, memory and resolution.

² All will come to an end and every moment of life will be questioned.

Chapter 6: Giving Judgment

Giving judgment is not permissible for someone who has not been endowed by God with the qualities of inner purity, sincerity in both his hidden and visible actions, and a proof from his Lord in every state. This is because whoever has judged has decreed, and decree is only valid by the permission of God and by His proof. Whoever is liberal in his judgment, without having made a proper examination, is ignorant and will be taken to task for his ignorance and will be burdened with his judgment as the tradition indicates. Knowledge is a light which God casts into the heart of whomsoever He wills.

The Prophet said, 'Whoever is boldest among you in judging is also the most insolent to God'. Does not the judge know that he is the one who has come between God and His bondsmen, and that he is wavering between the Garden and the Fire? Sufyan ibn `Uyaynah said, 'How can anyone else benefit from my knowledge if I have denied myself its benefit?' It is inappropriate for anyone to judge on what is permissible (*halāl*) and what is forbidden (*harām*) among creation, except for one who causes the people of his time, his village, and his city to follow the truth through obedience to the Prophet and who recognizes what is applicable of his judgment. The Prophet said, 'It is because giving judgment is such a tremendous affair, in which there is no place for "hopefully", "perhaps" or "may be".'

The Commander of the Faithful said to a judge, 'Do you know the difference between those verses of the Qur'an which abrogate and those which are abrogated?'

'No'.

'Do you have a command of the intentions of God in the parables of the Qur'an?'

'No'.

'Then you have perished and caused others to perish,' the Commander of the Faithful replied.

A judge needs to know the various meanings of the Qur'an, the truth of the Prophetic way, the inward indications, courtesies, consensus and disagreements, and to be familiar with the bases of what they agree upon and disagree about. Then he must have acute discrimination, sound action, wisdom, and precaution. If he has these, things, then let him judge.

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Imam Ja`far Al-Sadiq

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Autobiography

Son of Karbala

Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri

The atmosphere of an Iraq in transition is brought to life and used as a backdrop for the Shaykh's own personal quest for self-discovery and spiritual truth.

Health Sciences and Islamic History

Health Sciences in Early Islam – Volumes 1 & 2

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