



THE LANTERN OF THE PATH

Imam Ja'far Al-Sadiq



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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.

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.

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.

He is a prolific author of more than thirty books relating to the universal principles of Islam, the Qur'an, and its core purpose of enlightenment.

Acknowledgement

Zahra Publications is grateful to the sponsors of this book and to those people who arranged for the reprinting of this book in particular Dr. Hamid uz Zaman Xaigham. Muna Haeri Bilgrami for her editorial input, Dr. Ayesha Abdur Rehman at-Tarjumana for her translation. To Michael Mann for believing in the message and the project.

We are grateful to all the above individuals and those many unmentioned for bringing this important book to publication.

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.

Translator's Note and Acknowledgements

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 ‘bondsmen’ (*`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.

Chapter 7: Enjoining What is Good and Forbidding What is Evil

Whoever has not thrown off his anxieties, been purified of the evils of his self and its appetites, defeated Satan, and entered under the guardianship of God and the security of His protection, cannot properly enjoin what is good and forbid what is evil; and since he has not attained these aforementioned qualities, whatever affair he tackles in attempting to enjoin what is good and forbid what is evil will be a proof against him, and people will not benefit from it.

God said:

What! Do you enjoin men to be good and neglect your own souls? (2:44)

Anyone who does that is called upon thus: Oh traitor! Do you demand from My creation that which you have rejected for yourself and have slackened the reins [in this regard] upon yourself?

It is related that Tha`labah al-Asadi asked the Messenger of God about this verse:

O you who believe! Take care of your souls; he who errs cannot hurt you when you are on the right way. (5:105)

The Messenger of God said, 'Enjoin what is good and forbid what is evil, and be forbearing in whatever afflicts you, until such time when you see meanness obeyed and passions followed, and when everyone will have conceit about their own opinion, then you should concern yourself only with yourself, and ignore the affairs of the common people.'

A person who enjoins what is good needs to be knowledgeable about what is permissible and what is forbidden; he must be free from his personal inclinations regarding what he enjoins and forbids, give good counsel to people, be merciful and compassionate to them, and call them with gentleness in a very clear manner, while recognizing their different characters so that he can put each in his proper place.

He must see the intrigues of the self and the machinations of Satan. He must be patient in whatever befalls him, and must not seek compensation from people for that which he instructs them in, nor complain about them. He should not make use of vehemence or passion. He should not become angry for his own sake. He should make his intention purely for God, and seek His help and desire Him. But if people oppose him and are harsh to him, he must be patient; and if

they agree with him and accept his verdict, he must be thankful, entrusting his affair to God and looking to his own faults.

Chapter 8: How the Men of Knowledge are Ruined

Caution and fear are the legacy of knowledge and its measure; knowledge is the ray of gnosis and the heart of belief. Whoever is denied caution is not a man of knowledge, even if he can split hairs in dealing with obscure items of knowledge. God said:

Only those of His servants who are possessed of knowledge fear Allah.
(35:28)

Men of knowledge are ruined by eight things: greed and miserliness, showing off and partisanship, love of praise, delving into things whose reality they cannot reach, affectation by taking excessive pains to beautify their speech with superfluous expressions, lack of modesty before God, boastfulness, and not acting upon what they know.

Jesus said, 'The most wretched of all people is he who is known for his knowledge, not for his actions.'

The Prophet said, 'Do not sit with every presumptuous caller who summons you from certainty to doubt, from sincerity to showing off, from humility to pride, from good counsel to enmity, and from abstinence to desire. Draw near to the person with knowledge, who summons you from pride to humility, from showing off to sincerity, from doubt to certainty, from desire to abstinence, from enmity to good counsel.' None are fit to preach to creation except that person who has gone beyond these evils by his truthfulness. He sees the faults of speech and knows what is sound from what is unsound, the defectiveness of thoughts, and the temptations of the self and his fancies.

`Ali said, 'Be like the kind, compassionate doctor who places the remedy where it will be of benefit.'

They asked Jesus, 'With whom shall we sit, O Spirit of God?'

'With one the sight of whom reminds you of God,' he replied, 'and whose speech increases you in knowledge, and whose actions make you desire the next world.'

Chapter 9: Guarding Oneself (*ri`ayah*)

Whoever guards his heart from heedlessness, protects his self from appetites and guards his intellect from ignorance, will be admitted into the company of the vigilant. Then he who guards his knowledge from fancies, his faith from innovation, and his property from the forbidden is among the righteous.

The Messenger of God said, 'It is a duty for every Muslim, man and woman, to seek knowledge,' that is, knowledge of the self. Therefore it is necessary for the self to be in all states either expressing his gratitude or proffering his excuse for lack of gratitude. If this is acceptable to God it is a favor upon him, and if not it is justice upon him. For every self it is necessary to work that it may succeed in its acts of obedience, and for its protection in its efforts to abstain from doing harm.

The basis of all this is recognition of total need and dependence on God, caution and obedience. The key to it is in delegating your affair to God, cutting off expectation by always remembering death, and seeing that you are standing in the presence of the All-compelling. This gives you rest from confinement, rescue from the enemy, and peace for the self. The means to sincerity in obedience is harmony, and the root of that rests upon considering life as being only as long as a day.

The Messenger of God said, 'This world lasts but an hour, so spend it in obedience to God.' The door to all of this is always to withdraw from the world by means of constant reflection. The means to this withdrawal is contentment, and abandoning such existential matters as do not concern you. The means to reflection is emptiness [desirelessness], and the buttress of emptiness is abstinence. The completion of abstinence is precaution, and the door to precaution is fear. The proof of fear is glorification of God, adherence to obeying His commands with sincerity, fear and caution, and holding back from the forbidden; and the guide to this is knowledge. Almighty God said:

Those of His servants who are possessed of knowledge fear Allah.
(35:28)

Chapter 10: Thankfulness

With every breath you take, a thanksgiving is incumbent upon you – indeed, a thousand thanks or more. The lowest level of gratitude is to see that the blessing comes from God irrespective of the cause for it, and without the heart being attached to that cause. It consists of being satisfied with what is given; it means not disobeying Him with regard to His blessing, or opposing Him in any of His commands and prohibitions because of His blessing. Be a grateful bondsman to God (*abd-Allah*) in every way, and you will find that God is a generous Lord in every way. If there were a way of worshipping God for His sincerest bondsman to follow more excellent than giving thanks at every instance, He would have ascribed to them the name of this worship above the rest of creation. Since there is no form of worship better than that, He has singled out this kind of worship from other kinds of worship, and has singled out those who practice this kind of worship, saying:

Very few of my servants are grateful. (34:13)

Complete thankfulness is to sincerely repent your inability to convey the least amount of gratitude, and expressing this by means of your sincere glorification of God. This is because fitting thanks is itself a blessing bestowed upon the bondsman for which he must also give thanks; it is of greater merit and of a higher state than the original blessing which caused him to respond with thanks in the first place. Therefore, every time one gives thanks one is obliged to give yet greater thanks, and so on ad infinitum, and this while absorbed in His blessings and unable to achieve the ultimate state of gratitude. For how can the bondsman match with gratitude the blessings of God, and when will he match his own action with God's while all along the bondsman is weak and has no power whatsoever, except from God?

God is not in need of the obedience of His bondsmen, for He has the power to increase blessings forever. Therefore be a grateful bondsman to God, and in this manner you will see wonders.

Chapter 11: On Leaving Your Home

When you leave your home, do it as if you will never return. Leave only for the sake of obedience to God or for the sake of the faith. Remain tranquil and dignified in your bearing, and remember God both secretly and openly.

One of the companions of Abu Dharr asked a member of Abu Dharr's household where he was and she said, 'He has gone out.' When the man asked when Abu Dharr would return, she replied, 'When he returns is in the hands of someone else,' for he has no power on his own.

Learn from God's creation, both the pious and the deviants, wherever you go. Ask God to place you among His sincere and truthful bondsmen, and to join you to those of them who have passed on and to gather you in their company. Praise Him, and give thanks for the appetites He has made you avoid, and the ugly actions of the wrongdoers from which He has protected you. Lower your gaze from carnal appetites and forbidden things, and pursue the right course on your journey. Be vigilant, fearing God at every step, as if you were crossing the straight path. Do not be distracted. Offer a greeting to His people, both giving it first and answering with it. Give help to those who ask for it in a righteous cause, guide those who are lost and ignore the ignorant.

When you return to your home, enter it as a corpse enters the grave, its only concern being to receive the mercy and forgiveness of God.

Chapter 12: On Reciting the Qur'an

Whoever recites the Qur'an and does not humble himself before God, whose heart is not softened, nor regret and fear provoked within him, undervalues the immensity of God's affair and is in a clear state of loss.

The person who recites the Qur'an needs three things: a fearful heart, a tranquil and receptive body, and an appropriate place to recite. When his heart fears God, then the accursed Satan flees from him, As God said:

When you recite the Qur'an, seek refuge with Allah from the accursed Shaytan. (16:98)

When he frees himself of all attachments, then his heart is devoted to recitation, and nothing impedes him from obtaining the blessing of the light of the Qur'an and its benefits. When he finds an empty place and withdraws from people, having acquired the two qualities of humility of heart and tranquility of body, then his soul and his innermost being will feel communion with God, and he will discover the sweetness of how God speaks to His right-acting bondsmen, how He shows His gentleness, to them and singles them out for all the varieties of His marks of honor and wondrous signs. If he drinks a cup of this drink, he will never prefer any other state to this nor any other moment to this. He will prefer this to every act of obedience and devotion, since it contains intimate conversation with the Lord without any intermediary.

So beware of how you read the Book of your Lord, the guardian to whom you aspire, how you respond to His commands and avoid His prohibitions, and how you observe His limits, for it is a mighty Book:

Falsehood shall not come to it from before it nor from behind it, a revelation from the Wise, the Praised One. (41:42)

Therefore recite it in an orderly manner and contemplatively, and adhere to the limits of His promise and His threat. Reflect on its examples and warnings. Beware of paying undue respect to the recitation of its letters while failing to observe the legal limits contained therein.

Chapter 13: Dress

The best adornment of the believer's garment is precaution and the most blessed garment is belief. As God said:

And clothing that guards [against evil]; that is best. (7:26)

Outward dress is a blessing from God in order to preserve the modesty of the sons of Adam; it is a mark of honor which God has given to the descendants of Adam. He did not give that honor to any other creature; it is given to the believers as a means of carrying out their obligations. Your best garments are those which do not distract you from God – those garments, in fact, which bring you closer to remembrance of Him, and gratitude and obedience to Him, They do not, however, move you to pride, conceit, pretence, boastfulness or arrogance: those things are the scourge of the faith, and their legacy is hardness of heart.

When you put on your clothes, remember that God veils your wrong actions with His mercy. You should clothe your inward part as you clothe your outward part with your garment. Let your inward truth be veiled in awe of God, and let your outward truth be veiled in obedience. Take heed of the overflowing favor of God, since He created the means to make garments for covering physical immodesty and opened the gates for repentance, regret, and seeking succor, in order to veil the inward parts, and their wrong actions and bad character.

Do not expose anyone's faults when God has concealed worse things in yourself. Occupy yourself with your own faults, and overlook matters and situations which do not concern you. Beware lest you exhaust your life in other people's actions and exchange your irreplaceable endowed wealth with someone else, thereby destroying yourself. Forgetting wrong actions brings about the greatest punishments of God in this world, and is the most ample cause for punishment in the next. So long as the bondsman occupies himself with obeying God, with recognizing his own faults and leaving alone whatever might devalue faith in God, he is spared ruin and is immersed in the sea of God's mercy, attaining the gems and the benefits of wisdom and clarity. But as long as he forgets his own wrong actions, is ignorant of his own faults, and falls back on his power and strength, he will never be successful.

Chapter 14: Showing Off

Do not show off your actions to someone who neither gives life nor causes death, and who cannot take away from you your burdens. Showing off is a tree whose only fruit is hidden association of other gods with God, and its root is hypocrisy. The vain one will be told on the Day of Judgment, ‘Take what you consider to be the reward of your actions from those you took as your partners with Me. Look to those whom you worshipped and called on, from whom you entertained hopes and whom you feared. And know that you cannot conceal anything inside of you from God: you will be deceived by yourself.’

God said:

They desire to deceive Allah and those who believe, and they deceive only themselves and they do not perceive. (2:9)

Showing off most frequently occurs in the way people glance at others, speak, eat, drink, arrive somewhere, sit with others, dress, laugh, and in the way they perform prayers, pilgrimage, *jihad*³, recitation of the Qur’an, and all outward acts of devotion.

However, he who is sincere towards God, who fears Him in his heart, and who sees himself as lacking even after he has exerted himself with every effort, will find that God is contented with him as a result, and he will be among those whom one expects to be free from showing off and hypocrisy, provided he continues to be in that state.

³ The Arabic term *jihad*, usually translated into European languages as holy war, more on the basis of its juridical usage in Islam rather than on its much more universal meaning in the Qur’an and Hadith, is derived from the root *jhd* whose primary meaning is to strive or to exert oneself. *Jihad* is a means of inner purification and freedom, and an outer defense of the way of God.

Chapter 15: Truthfulness

Truthfulness is a light which radiates its reality in its own world: it is like the sun, from whose reality everything seeks light without any decrease occurring in this reality. A truthful person, in fact, is a man who believes every liar, due to the reality of his own truthfulness. It means that nothing which is opposed to truthfulness, nothing, even, which is not truthfulness, is permitted to coexist with it; just as happened with Adam, who believed Iblis when he lied because Iblis had sworn a false oath to him and there was no lying in Adam. God said:

We did not find in him any determination. (20:115)

because Iblis originated something previously unknown, both outwardly and inwardly. Iblis will be gathered with his lie, and he will never benefit from the truthfulness of Adam.

Yet it benefited Adam that he believed the lie of Iblis, as God testified for him when He said that he was not constant in what was contrary to his custom. This really means that his being chosen was not at all diminished by Satan's lies.

Truthfulness is the attribute of the truthful. The reality of truthfulness demands that God purify His bondsman, as He mentioned regarding the truthfulness of Jesus on the Day of Reckoning. He indicated it by referring to the guiltlessness of the truthful men of the community of Muhammad, saying:

This is the day when their truth shall benefit the truthful ones.
(5:119)

The Commander of the Faithful⁴ said, 'Truthfulness is the sword of God in His heaven and earth: it cuts everything it touches.' If you want to know whether you are truthful or lying, then look into the truthfulness of what you mean and the conclusion of your claim. Then gauge them both according to a scale from God, as if you were present on the Day of Resurrection. God said:

And measuring out on that day will be just. (7:8)

If there is balance and harmony in what you mean, then your claim is successful, and your truthfulness is in the fact that the tongue does not differ from the heart, nor the heart from the tongue. The truthful person with this description is like the angel who draws out his soul; if the soul is not drawn out, then what is it to do?

⁴ Imam `Ali.

Chapter 16: Sincerity

Sincerity lies in all distinguished actions; it is a notion that starts with acceptance and ends with God's pleasure. Therefore he whose actions God accepts and with whom He is content is the sincere one, even if his actions are few. Whoever does not have his actions accepted is not sincere, even if his actions are many, as we can see when we consider what happened with Adam and Iblis, may he be cursed.

The sign of acceptance is the existence of integrity and correctness, by expending all that is desirable with accurate awareness of every movement and stillness. In upholding what he has, the self of the sincere one is consumed, and his life is spent so as to put what he has in order, unifying knowledge and action, the doer and what is done by the action. For if he has attained that, he has attained all, and if he misses it he misses all; and that is brought about by purifying the meanings of disassociation (*tanzih*) in His unity. As the first Imam said, 'Those who act will perish, except for those who worship; those who worship will perish except for those who know; those who know will perish except for those who are truthful; those who are truthful will perish except for those who are sincere; those who are sincere will perish except for those who have precaution; those who have precaution will perish except for those who have certainty, and those who have certainty are of exalted character.' As God said:

And serve your Lord until there comes to you that which is certain.
(15:99)

The lowest level of sincerity is when the bondsman exerts himself as much as he can, and then does not consider his action to have any worth with God so that he does not make his Lord recompense him for his actions according to his knowledge, for if God asks him to fulfill the full duties of slavehood (*`ubudiyah*) he would be unable to do so. The lowest station of the sincere person in the world is safety from all wrong actions, to be rescued from the Fire and to win the Garden in the next world.⁵

⁵ If the slave parades his good deeds and expects acknowledgement, God could hold him to account as to whether he has fulfilled his obligations completely; and no one, therefore, can beware.

Chapter 17: Precaution

Precaution (*taqwa*) has three facets:

1. Precaution by dependence on God, which means leaving behind contradiction and going beyond any shade of doubt, and this is the precaution exercised by the highest.
2. The precaution of God, which means to abandon all doubtful matters and to leave the forbidden (*harām*) alone; this is the precaution of the elite.
3. The precaution of the Fire and Punishment, which results in leaving alone what is forbidden; this is the precaution of the general public.

Precaution is like water flowing in a river. The three levels of precaution are like trees of every color and variety planted on the bank of that river, each tree absorbing water from that river according to its essence, capacity, delicateness and thickness. Then the benefits which creatures take from these trees and fruits are according to their value and worth. God said:

Palm trees having one root and [others] having distinct roots - they are watered with one water, and We make some of them excel others in fruit. (13:4)

Precaution in acts of obedience to God is like water for the trees, and the natures of the trees and their fruits in their colors and tastes are like the measures of belief. Whoever has the highest degree in belief and the purest nature with respect to the soul has the greatest precaution. He who is precautions has the purer and more sincere worship: whoever is like that is nearer to God. But every act of devotion that is founded on something other than precaution comes to nothing.

God said:

Is he, therefore, better who laid his foundation on fear of Allah and [His] good pleasure, or he who laid his foundation on the edge of a cracking, hollowed bank, so it broke down with him into the fire of Hell? (9:109)

The explanation of precaution is to avoid entering an affair which contains no harm simply out of fear of one which does. It is, in reality, obedience without rebellion, remembrance without forgetfulness, knowledge without ignorance, and it is accepted by God and not rejected.

Chapter 18: Godfearingness

Close the gates of your limbs and senses to all that will harm your heart, remove your standing with God, and bring in its wake grief and regret on the Day of Judgment and shame about the evil actions you committed.

The scrupulous person must have three principles: he should overlook the faults of all people, he should avoid offending them, and he should balance censure with praise.

The basis of Godfearingness is constantly to take the self to account, to be truthful in one's words and pure in one's transactions, to leave every doubtful thing, to abandon every defect and doubt, to separate oneself from all which does not concern you and not to open doors which you will not know how to close. Do not sit with anyone who obscures what is clear for you, nor with someone who takes the faith lightly. Do not question knowledge which your heart has no capacity for, and which you will not understand, of whoever said it, and cut off anyone who cuts you off from God.

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