

Reflections on 'The Peak of Eloquence'

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1437 AH.

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## Introduction

Tens of scenarios and happenings pass by Man on a daily basis, a sane person is one who would strive to adopt the best and correct position, thus the topic of the first trial in life is arriving at the best deed, like the Almighty stated:

**“And He it is, Who created the heavens and the earth in six days and His Throne was on the water, that He might test you, which of you is the best in deeds.”<sup>1</sup>**

**“Indeed, We have made that which is on the earth an adornment for it, that We may test them [as to] which of them is best in deed.”<sup>2</sup>**

**“[He] who created death and life to test you [as to] which of you is best in deed.”<sup>3</sup>**

Attaining that requires a vision, admonishment and persistent striving to tame the self on the best of speech and action.

In the Reflections that is before you – dear reader – are brief illuminations that we have extracted from the spring of Eloquence and Fluency (the door of the City of Knowledge) Imam Ali (as), for his words, sermons and admonishments in the ‘Peak of Eloquence’ is a treasure of knowledge and awareness that lightens the path for Man and opens for him the horizons of thinking in the different facets of life. How great is our need in studying this mighty scroll and knowing the pearls of his wisdom and admonishments.

Mahdi Sulail

13<sup>th</sup> Rajab 1437AH.

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<sup>1</sup> The Holy Qur’an, Chapter 11, Hud: Verse 7.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, Chapter 18, The Cave: Verse 7.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, Chapter 67, The Sovereignty: Verse 2.

## **The Path of the Imam**

- ❖ **The Peak of Eloquence**
- ❖ **The Specialities of the Imam (as)**
- ❖ **His Method in Nurturing His Self**
- ❖ **Earnestness to Attain Consciousness of Allah**
- ❖ **Fatherly Sentiments**

## The Peak of Eloquence

A book that comprises a collection of the sermons of the Commander of the Faithful, Ali ibn Abi Talib (as), his letters, aphorisms and admonishments that Sharif al-Radi chose for its eloquence and beautiful style according to his assessment and research, if not there are many sermons of the Imam that he did not include in this book.

In spite of that he has presented to the world a monumental service that deserves praise and commendation, for this book is a gem of the immense treasures of knowledge and awareness in the different facets. The most important is the awareness of Allah and His praise, Glory unto Him, the Almighty. Imam Ali (as) states:

**“Praise is due to Allah, whose worth cannot be described by speakers, whose bounties cannot be counted by calculators and whose claim (to obedience) cannot be satisfied by those who attempt to do so, whom the height of intellectual courage cannot appreciate and the depths of understanding cannot reach; He, for whose description no limit has been laid down, no praise exists, no time is ordained and no duration is fixed. He brought forth creation through His Omnipotence, dispersed winds through His Compassion and made firm the shaking earth with rocks.”<sup>4</sup>**

The most important obligation on Man is to acknowledge the greatness of his Lord, praise Him with all-praise possible for no matter how much we praise we will never be able to fulfill the rights of Allah on us.

Glory be to you, my Lord, verily I have been of the oppressors.

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<sup>4</sup> Peak of Eloquence: Sermon 1. Imam Ali (as) speaks about the creation of Heaven and Earth.

## The Specialities of Imam Ali (as)

If any specialities were mentioned then Imam Ali (as) was its leader, head and beauty. He (as) had spoken of some of his specialities in his relationship with the great Messenger and noble Prophet Muhammad (pbuh), we mention them without comments and they are:

- The ray of the Sun
- The peak of Magnificence
- The extent of honour.

He (as) says: **“Certainly, you knew my position of close kinship and special relationship with the Messenger of Allah (pbuh). When I was only a child, he took me into his care. He used to hold me tight to his chest and put me beside him in his bed, bringing his body close to mine and letting me smell his fragrance. He used to chew something then feed me it. . . . Indeed I would follow him like a young camel following in the footprints of its mother. Every day, he would raise for me [in the form of] a banner some of his [esteemed] character and command me to follow it. Every year he would go into seclusion at the cave of Hira’, where I would see him but others would not. In those days, nobody assembled in [the name of] Islam in a house except the Messenger of Allah (pbuh), [Lady] Khadija and I was the third of them. I used to see the light of the [Divine] revelation and message, and I breathed the scent of Prophethood. .”<sup>5</sup>**

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<sup>5</sup> Peak of Eloquence: Sermon 191, known as al-Qasi’at, The Disparagement.

## **His Method in Nurturing His Self**

Imam Ali (as) states in his testament to his son Imam Hasan (as):

**“O my son! Even though I have not lived to the age of those before me, yet I looked into their actions, thought over their events and walked among their ruins until I returned like one of them. In fact, by virtue of their affairs that have ended up with me, it is as though I have lived with the first of them until the last. Thus I am able to discern the pure from the polluted and its benefit from harm.”<sup>6</sup>**

He (as) speaks about his concern in taking a lesson from history and benefitting from it in his life.

1. I looked into their actions
2. I thought over their events
3. I walked among their ruins

The esteemed status that the Imam (as) attained was not just a gift from Allah, The Almighty, but rather it was the result of effort and striving that he deserved Divine attention, thus Allah prepared for him the greatest educator and nurturer. He (as) says about his closeness to the Messenger of Allah (pbuh): **“When I was only a child, he took me into his care. He used to hold me tight to his chest and put me beside him in his bed, bringing his body close to mine and letting me smell his fragrance. He used to chew something then feed me it. He found no lie in my speech and no weakness in any deed.”**

He (as) adds: **“Indeed I would follow him like a young camel following in the footprints of its mother. Every day, he would raise for me [in the form of] a banner some of his [esteemed] character and command me to follow it.”<sup>7</sup>**

Thus great results require preliminaries that resemble it in resolve, determination and action.

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<sup>6</sup> Peak of Eloquence: Letter 31; of his testament to Hasan ibn Ali (as), wrote it to him when he was camped at al-Hadirin on his return from Siffin.

<sup>7</sup> Peak of Eloquence: Sermon 191, known as al-Qasi'at, The Disparagement.



## **Earnestness to Attain Consciousness of Allah**

**“Fear Allah like him who listened [from good advice] and bowed before it, when he committed [sin] he admitted it, when he felt fear he acted virtuously. When he apprehended he hastened [towards good deeds], when he had certainty he performed virtuous acts, when he was made to ponder [taking a lesson from the happenings of this world] he considered [it].”<sup>8</sup>**

The words of Imam Ali (as) are marked with depth and vastness and a driving force to initiate action. This emanates from the peak of truthfulness that engages with knowledge, faith and action, thus it is the highest example to follow, he is the one who said about his soul: **“however, when I confined myself to my own worries, leaving aside the worries of others, my opinion saved me and protected me from my own desires. It clarified to me my affairs and led me to seriousness wherein there was no trickery and truth which was not tarnished by falsehood.”<sup>9</sup>**

This is what we require today:

1. Observing our inner feelings.
2. Initiate action.
3. Truly engage with admonishment.

Abundant is the knowledge that we receive every day, especially with this immense amount of information and admonishments that reaches us through social media.

With a lot of knowledge and little action the heart is afflicted with harshness, we seek the refuge of Allah from that.

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<sup>8</sup> Peak of Eloquence: Sermon 83, from a sermon of his, it is the amazing sermon known as the Sermon of al-Gharra.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid; of his testament to Hasan ibn Ali (as), wrote it to him when he was camped at al-Hadirin on his return from Siffin.

## **Fatherly Sentiments**

Imam Ali (as) wrote a beautiful letter to his son Imam Hasan (as) in the prime of his life advising and directing him. It is a long and detailed letter, he says in the introduction:

**“And I found you a part of myself, rather I found you my whole, so much so that if something befell you, it was as though it befell me, and if death came to you, it was as though it came to me. Consequently, I am concerned with your affairs like I am concerned with my own, thus I have written to you my letter . . .”<sup>10</sup>**

These are fatherly sentiments towards children, every father ponders about his children, carries their concerns, desires good for them but rather desires that they would be better than him.

Indeed it is a letter that I direct to my dear sons and daughters in order that may understand the care [and attention] of their fathers and mothers for their integrity and success.

This is how a father is . . . this is how a mother is.

Verily they live a life that is intertwined with love and anxiety towards their children, their minds do not rest until their children reach a level of employment stability then married life, rather their concerns with their children continue even after they become parents.

How often I felt the concerns of my mother for me as if I was a small child.

May Allah reward parents through our behalf the best of rewards, may Allah shower my parents with His infinite mercy, may Allah have mercy on those who have passed on of your parents and may He protect those that remain.

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<sup>10</sup> Peak of Eloquence: Letter 31



## **Cultural Construction**

- ❖ **The Qur'an is the best companion**
- ❖ **The beauty of knowledge**
- ❖ **On the path of perfection**
- ❖ **Between knowledge and ethics**
- ❖ **The path of guidance**
- ❖ **Piercing foresight**
- ❖ **The reality of good**
- ❖ **The intellect**
- ❖ **The effects of awareness**
- ❖ **Thinking firstly**
- ❖ **Consultation**
- ❖ **Preserving experiences**
- ❖ **Protection from suspicion**

## **The Qur'an is the Best Companion**

**“Know that this [Holy] Qur'an is:**

- **An adviser that never deceives,**
- **A Guide that never misleads,**
- **A narrator that never lies.**

**No one sits [with] this [Holy] Quran except that he rises from it with an addition or a reduction; addition in his guidance or reduction from (spiritual) blindness.”<sup>11</sup>**

No matter what level Man reaches in his knowledge he is still in need of advice, reminding and admonishing. The Holy Qur'an is the best origin and purest of sources for it.

That however requires from the reader a few things

- 1- To sit with the Qur'an seeking the advice [and] being prepared for it.
- 2- A careful and thorough recitation.
- 3- Contemplation and thinking.

Here it is essential to remind Qur'anic institutions the necessity of [paying] attention to lessons of [Qur'anic] commentary and contemplation addressing the social reality.

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<sup>11</sup> Peak of Eloquence: Sermon 175.

## **The Beauty of Knowledge**

**“Every vessel constricts by what is put in it except the vessel of knowledge, for indeed it expands.”<sup>12</sup>**

The intellect is the vessel of knowledge, as Man increases in knowledge the horizon of his thought expands and his awareness grows.

With the increase in the mediums of acquiring knowledge and its easiness, the following is necessary:

1. Concentration
2. Selection

In order that the intellect is not distracted and time is spent without gain.

Today we live in an era of information overload and its rapid transition without verifying its authenticity, thus not every [information] that reaches us is knowledge.

3. Real engagement

**“The most humble knowledge is that which remains on the tongue and the most noble is that which manifests through [action of] the limbs and the organs of the body.”<sup>13</sup>**

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<sup>12</sup> The Peak of Eloquence: Aphorism 205

<sup>13</sup> Ibid: Aphorism 92

## **On the Ladder of Perfection**

**“The value of every Man is [measured by] that which he excels in”<sup>14</sup>**

The search for perfection and striving for betterment is instinctive that is placed in the soul of Man. It is through that he surges forth, moves and modernizes the means in his life.

Culture plays an important role in the direction that Man chooses for his perfection.

Thus the fallacious materialist culture directs Man to acquire perfection through wealth and fame. It reaffirms for Man that perfection is confined to superficial beauty and showing it off to others, however religious text directs us to choose perfection of the essence that is represented in knowledge, awareness, ethics and practical skills from the Messenger of Allah (sawa): **“The most valuable of people are those who possess the most knowledge.”<sup>15</sup>**

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<sup>14</sup> Peak of Eloquence: Aphorism 81.

<sup>15</sup> Mishkat ul Anwar wa Ghurar ul Akhbar. Page 137.

## **Between Knowledge and Ethics**

**“Do not use the sharpness of your tongue against the One Who gave you the power to speak, nor the eloquence of your speech against the One Who set you on the right path.”<sup>16</sup>**

It does not suffice for Man to possess knowledge and the ability to logically convince [others] with arguments and proofs, for that is not everything. For wisdom and ethical interaction remains the apex of logic and rules over it.

Therefore Man needs to be reminded when he speaks to his benefactors like his parents, teachers and elder brother. For indeed silence in some instances is a precursor for expressing the correct opinion.

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<sup>16</sup> Peak of Eloquence. Aphorism 421.

## **The Path of Guidance**

**“May Allah have mercy on a slave who listened to [a point of] wisdom and retained it. When he was invited to the right path he approached it. He followed a leader [by catching his waistband] and found salvation.”<sup>17</sup>**

The most important reasons for guidance and the right [way] are:

- Awareness and contemplating about wisdoms and admonishments. Just reading or memorizing does not suffice.
- Humility, accepting advice and answering invitations to righteousness.
- Acquiring righteous exemplars and leadership guiding to the truth.

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<sup>17</sup> Peak of Eloquence. Sermon 75.

## **Piercing Prudence**

**“Certainly, prudent is he who heard and pondered [over it], saw and observed and benefitted from [exemplary] lessons.”<sup>18</sup>**

Man advances in this life spending his efforts in attaining perfection in all facets, material and spiritual and strives to increase his yield of religious and cultural information. This commendable effort has to be directed into practical results on two fronts:

1. Piercing vision through contemplation.
2. Truthful interaction through initiating righteous actions and abstaining from forbidden [things].

If that is not achieved Man will be merely a storage of information.

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<sup>18</sup> Peak of Eloquence: Sermon 152

## **The Reality of Good**

**“Good is not the increasing of your wealth and offspring, but good is the increasing of your knowledge and magnifying your forbearance.”<sup>19</sup>**

Man advances and strives in this life to meet his material and spiritual needs, in that he is need of a vision and culture that directs him so that he does not lose the way.

The naming of things with its real names and granting it, its essence and real worth contributes to forming a list of priorities and attaining a balance.

The efforts of Man to acquire wealth and offspring is something beautiful, beloved and legal, however the acquiring of knowledge and forbearance (knowledge and ethics) should necessarily occupy the first rank in the concerns of Man and his efforts. The Almighty Allah similarly states: **“Wealth and children are an adornment of the worldly life; but good deeds are better in [the presence of] your Lord in reward and a better source of hope.”<sup>20</sup>**

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<sup>19</sup> Peak of Eloquence. Aphorism 94.

<sup>20</sup> The Holy Qur’an: Chapter 18, The Cave. Verse: 46.

## The Intellect

From the letter of Imam Ali (as) to Harith al-Hamdani:

**“Do not reply to people in everything they convey to you, for that suffices as ignorance.”<sup>21</sup>**

The Imam (as) puts forth a balanced vision for sound interaction for that which [reaches one] in the form of news and opinions. **“Do not speak to people about everything that you heard, for that suffices as falsehood.”<sup>22</sup>**

This means:

1. Do not convey news and spread it without verifying.
2. Do not refute everything that reaches you from others.

The inauthenticity of a report or not being convinced with a particular view should not motivate a person to engage in argumentation or confront others even though they may be wrong in his opinion for that will enter him into the realm of ignorance.

Ignorance in this regard is in contrast to the intellect and not knowledge.

The intelligent sage is quick-witted and overlooking, yes . . . you may attract the attention of your friend to the importance of validating or express your opposing opinion, however perpetual opposition is one of the forms of ignorance.

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<sup>21</sup> Peak of Eloquence. Letter 69.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

## **The Effects of Awareness**

**“People are enemies of that which they don’t know.”<sup>23</sup>**

Sentiments and feelings are motivated by many causes, one of the main causes is the lack of complete awareness regarding a position, opinion or the person.

Wrong information similarly has the same impact as that of ignorance as the intellectual receives it and conveys it to emotions after dealing with it in a specific manner. This is where the responsibility of the intellectual arises about being careful about accuracy regarding information that reaches it.

Not every [information] that reaches Man is worthy of being considered knowledge.

On the other hand, it is necessary for propagators of truth to explain their aims and clarify to people their orientations so that the community may engage with programs of development and reform.

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<sup>23</sup> Peak of Eloquence. Aphorism 172.

## Thinking Firstly

**“When you hear a tradition, understand it with a mindset of safeguarding [it and] not with a mindset of transmitting [it], for verily the transmitters of knowledge are numerous, but those who safeguard it are few.”<sup>24</sup>**

Scholars [of the Science of Traditions] have derived benefit from these brilliant words for the principles [that are applied in the understanding] of traditions. Similarly benefit maybe derived from it regarding information and messages which people presently deliberate on. Information that arrives through means, require reflection and contemplation for different reasons:

1. Confirming that it corresponds to the intellect before transmitting or accepting it.
2. Ensuring that there is no harm or insult to others.
3. Selecting what is good and beneficial to disseminate to relieve [the burden of] one who will receive it.
4. Practically implement and benefit from righteous guidelines.

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<sup>24</sup> Peak of Eloquence: Aphorism 98.

## **Consultation**

**“Consultation is the same as guidance. One who suffices with his opinion faces danger.”<sup>25</sup>**

Man strives for righteousness in his resolutions and positions, his intellect is self-motivated to search for the best, be it in the material or spiritual sphere. A rational person is one who is exhaustive in decision making. He consults with specialists and experts so that he may not fall into problems or waste good opportunities

A person maybe influenced by a psychological condition that makes him take a decision that is binding, however if he had to decide free from pressures he would resort to the assistance of an expert in that field.

Not holding on to your opinion and consulting others requires a kind of courage.

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<sup>25</sup> The Peak of Eloquence: Aphorism 211.

## Protecting Experiences

**“Protecting experiences is part of success”<sup>26</sup>**

Man passes through many experiences in his life through which he acquires expertise that helps him to succeed and avoid mistakes, however that [expertise] needs to be protected, reflected and contemplated on.

This is part of the law of Divine assistance, **“the best of what you have experienced is that which you were admonished.”**

Similarly there are general experiences that a person may benefit from the stories of others and what they have endured. **“The one who heeds the experiences of others is pleasant.”**

Through this a person may save himself time and effort.

**“Infer about what has not yet happened from what has already happened because occurrences are similar. Do not be like those whom preaching does not benefit unless you inflict excessive pain on them.”<sup>27</sup>**

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<sup>26</sup> The Peak of Eloquence: Aphorism 211.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid; Letter 31

## **Protection from Suspicion**

**“Indeed doubt is named doubt because it resembles truth. As for the friends of Allah, their conviction serves them as light and the direction of the right path (itself) serves as their guide.”<sup>28</sup>**

In the world of thought and beliefs there are three stages:

- Pure truth.
- Clear falsehood.
- Doubt between them.

The intelligent believer is one who reflects and contemplates before adopting a ruling or taking a position.

Conviction maybe acquired through:

- 1- Depending on absolute religious and intellectual [concepts].
- 2- Referring to specialist.
- 3- Reflecting on proofs.

There are times when a person is not convinced about an opinion and thus he withholds, avoiding from falling into doubt.

It is important to refer to the necessity of caution from falling into financial suspicion, especially what is widespread today of the manipulation of insurance companies in the event of accidents.

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<sup>28</sup> Peak of Eloquence: Sermon 38

## **Nurturing of the Self**

- ❖ **Reforming the Inner self**
- ❖ **Obliviousness**
- ❖ **Working for the Hereafter**
- ❖ **Administering the Essence [of the Self]**
- ❖ **The Peak of Belief**
- ❖ **The Most Beautiful of Attributes: Acquiring Attributes**
- ❖ **Avoiding Anger**
- ❖ **Steadfastness in Good**
- ❖ **Necessity of Precaution**
- ❖ **Blessings are Everlasting through Thanks**
- ❖ **A Conscious Observation**
- ❖ **Life of the Heart**
- ❖ **Brightening the Heart**
- ❖ **Provisions for the Hereafter**
- ❖ **A Form of worship**
- ❖ **Preparation for Death**

## **Reforming the Inner self**

**“O Allah! I seek Your protection from that I may be good in the eyes of the people while my inner self that I hide from You is ugly and that I may guard myself only for show before the people although You are aware of everything about me. Thus, I appear before the people in good shape although my evil acts are placed before You. This means achieving nearness to Your servants but remoteness from Your pleasure.”<sup>29</sup>**

Supplication comprises two important aspects:

- 1- The hidden aspect
- 2- Conviction and action

When a person supplicates and requests from Allah, the Almighty to actualize something that in its essence is:

Firstly: awareness and realising the importance of what he prays for and being interactive with it.

Secondly: striving actively to attain that with the means that he possesses.

Thirdly: being humble before Allah, requesting assistance from Him and not being deceived by what he owns.

In this noble supplication the Imam (as) is addressing an important topic in nurturing ie. Reforming the inner self and being sincere to Allah, the Almighty.

That which helps in this:

- 1- Avoid speaking about the self or boasting about righteous actions.
- 2- Being conscious of Allah in secrecy.
- 3- Deliberately performing some righteous actions in secrecy.

The Imam (as) was asked; what is chivalry? He answered: **“Do not do something secretly that you would be ashamed of publicly.”**

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<sup>29</sup> Peak of Eloquence: Aphorism 286.

It is narrated from him (as): **“How ugly is a person who apparently conforms, but internally is hypocritical.”**

## **Obliviousness**

**“Between you and exhortation is a veil of unawareness.”<sup>30</sup>**

There are many exhortations that reaches Man every day, be it from his daily observations or readings, especially with the availability of the modern means of communication and that which it conveys to us in [the form of] exhortations, aphorisms, signs and narrations. The direct question that a person should pose to himself is:

Was I affected with this amount of exhortations, that I changed my behaviour or improved it?

The Imam (as) connects the dots:

Indeed it is obliviousness that begins from entering into the wheel of daily events and rotating with it without administering or ruling over it

A neglectful person is shaped by events whereas a conscious one manages the days of his life with diligence

Man is in need of seriously stopping, confronting the self and requesting it with the necessity of implementation.

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<sup>30</sup> Peak of Eloquence: Aphorism 279.

## **Working for the Hereafter**

**“There are two kinds of workers in this world. One is a person who works in this world for this world and his occupation with this world [has distracted him] from the hereafter. He is afraid of destitution for those whom he will leave behind but feels safe about it. Thus, he destroys his life for the benefit of others. The other is one who works in this world for what is to come thereafter, he gets what is [entitled] to him of this world without effort. Thus, he has secured both benefits and possesses both homes. In this way, he is prestigious in the presence of Allah. Allah does not deny him a need that he has asked for.”<sup>31</sup>**

Everybody strives in this world, the difference however is in the aim and intention. Every action that Man performs, he may intend [through it] proximity to Allah even though that it may appear to be worldly, thus the saying of Imam (as): **“he gets what is [entitled] to him of this world without effort”**, without attachment and competing for worldly needs, it is spontaneous and does not require excessive effort.

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<sup>31</sup> Peak of Eloquence: Aphorism 279

## **Administering the Essence [of the self]**

From the letter of Imam Ali (as) to al-Harith al-Hamadani

**“Lure your heart into worshipping, persuade it and do not force it. Cease it when it is lenient and active, except for the obligations that are enjoined upon you.”<sup>32</sup>**

Interacting with the self requires intelligence of a specific kind, which is so because the intellect believes that it is necessary to be active and is convinced about the recompense and reward of Allah, however it finds that the self is fluctuating between conditions of laziness and activeness or being idle and enthusiastic. Which requires a kind of administration and good exploitation of opportunities and not going to extremes in coercing and forcing the self in a manner that will harm it. He (as) likewise says

**“Verily [at times] the hearts advance [towards their Creator] and [at times] they retreat. When they advance, get them to perform the optional [acts of worship] and when they retreat, confine them to what is obligatory.”<sup>33</sup>**

Of the examples of luring is when Man is prepared to accept from himself only the ablution but rejecting the performance of the optional prayer, thus he may be prepared to acquire more reward after completing the ablution.

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<sup>32</sup> Peak of Eloquence: Letter 69

<sup>33</sup> Peak of Eloquence: Aphorism 322

## **The Peak of Belief**

**“There is no belief like [having] shame and patience.”<sup>34</sup>**

Belief produces many qualities, the most important being:

- Shame
- Patience

Shame is a barrier from committing mistakes. Shame has levels, there is one who is only shameful of people and then there is the other who is shy to even commit a mistake when he is alone with his self.

Patience is a helping force in confronting difficulties as no activity is free of difficulty.

Patience may be developed through nurturing and practice, it is like the muscles which develop through physical exercises.

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<sup>34</sup> Peak of Eloquence: Aphorism 113

## **The Most Beautiful of Attributes**

**“People will not see the flaw of one who covers his apparel with shame.”<sup>35</sup>**

Attributes are of two kinds: A primary attribute and a secondary one that follows. Shame is of the first kind. It is very delicate, sublime and of the most beautiful of attributes. Man acquires through it the jewels of praiseworthy ethics that conceals his faults and weaknesses.

One who possesses shame will not raise his voice in the condition of anger and hunger will not push him to behave badly at the dinner table. He will not prefer himself over others. Shame will prevent him from vain and false speech when he is joking. Shame in youth is beautiful but more beautiful with a young lady and is the best bid for covering and modesty.

In a narration it is stated:

- **“Shame and faith are joined together in a horn, if one of it goes the other will follow.”<sup>36</sup>**
- **“There is no faith for one who has no shame.”<sup>37</sup>**

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<sup>35</sup> Peak of Eloquence: Aphorism 223

<sup>36</sup> Tuhaf al Uqool: page 297.

<sup>37</sup> Maj'muat Wiram: Volume 2, Page 33.

## Acquiring Attributes

**“If you are not forbearant then pretend, for indeed if a person resembles a people he is likely to be considered of them.”<sup>38</sup>**

When Man reflects about himself and his efforts in order to develop his attributes it makes him capable of confronting different conditions of life and its demands and adept in achieving the success that he desires.

Forbearance and controlling emotions is of the most important of attributes that a person should strive to acquire especially in this era that is full of emotional triggers due to events and instances with different individuals.

Man may acquire the attribute of forbearance through:

1. Awareness and vigilance.
2. Training and practice.
3. Proximity to people with forbearance and resembling them.
4. Preparing for provocative instances.

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<sup>38</sup> Peak of Eloquence: Aphorism 207

## Avoiding Anger

From the letter of Imam Ali (as) to al-Harith al-Hamadani:

**“Be careful of anger for it is a great soldier of the soldiers of Satan.”<sup>39</sup>**

Anger is an emotional condition that removes Man from his natural disposition and prevents the intellect from performing its role.

When Man is removed from being enlightened through his intellect he falls in to error and that is of the greatest opportunities for Satan.

The Imam (as) states: **“Rage is a form of madness, for the doer of it repents afterwards. If he does not repent his madness is confirmed.”<sup>40</sup>**

A form of madness: ie. a kind of madness

Precaution demands avoiding the preliminaries that lead to anger.

Consider what leads you to anger and avoid it, thus every man knows through his experience what causes his anger.

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<sup>39</sup> Peak of Eloquence: Letter 69

<sup>40</sup> Gurar al Hikam; Aphorism 6861.

## **Steadfastness in Good**

**“Do not be discouraged by ingratitude from doing good deeds, for you may be thanked by those who do not enjoy anything [of your good deed].”<sup>41</sup>**

People differ in the level of interaction and expression of their emotions, for there are those who reveal, those who are shy and those who negate good or ignore it.

In the face of these diverse conditions, an intelligent person holds steadfast on to what he is convinced of good deeds and righteous actions and prepares himself to confront negative conditions that are discouraging. Placing before his eyes the essence of righteousness, the beauty of good and being persistent in acquiring the pleasure of Allah, The Glorified and Almighty.

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<sup>41</sup> Peak of Eloquence: Aphorism 201.

## **Necessity of Precaution**

**“O people! What I fear the most for you are two things – following of desires and extending of hopes. The following of (personal) desires deters (you) from the truth and the extending of hope makes one forget the hereafter.”<sup>42</sup>**

No matter what level of education or social position Man reaches he continues to be in need of admonishing and reminding.

The most important thing that he should be precautionous of in this world:

1. To be unrestrained with the passions and desires of the self.
2. Procrastinating and delaying.

It is necessary to earnestly confront the passions of the self and initiate action to dispose of delaying [tactics].

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<sup>42</sup> Peak of Eloquence: Sermon 42.

## **Blessings are everlasting through Thanks**

**“If the blessings [of Allah] are beginning to reach you, do not prevent the [total] extent of it by lack of thanks.”<sup>43</sup>**

It is as if a blessing has a side ie. a beginning, then it increases and grows until completion and it reaches its end and that does not happen except by thanking Allah, The Giver and The Benefactor

Thanks is achieved through:

1. Acknowledging material and spiritual blessings and recognizing the graciousness of The Giver, for many are the blessings that are presently common that Man may be oblivious off.
2. All praise and commendation is to Allah, The Almighty, which is verbal thanks.
3. Protecting the blessing and utilizing it in a lawful manner.

**“The least that is expected of you in relation to Allah, the Almighty is not to utilize His blessing in disobedience to Him.”<sup>44</sup>**

**“Verily unto Allah is a right of gratitude in every blessing, thus whosoever fulfils it will be given more of it and whosoever is negligent is risking the chance of losing it.”<sup>45</sup>**

4. Spending it for people.

Like it is necessary to give thanks to Allah, The Almighty for blessings that are countless, it is similarly necessary to thank people and praise them for what they deserve.

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<sup>43</sup> Peak of Eloquence: Aphorism 13.

<sup>44</sup> Gurar al Hikam: Aphorism 3526.

<sup>45</sup> Uyoon al Hikam wal Mawa'iz: Aphorism 3379.

## **A Conscious Observation**

**“The heart is the book of the eye.”**

Whatever the eye sees is registered in the heart, it is a book (archive) that records everything the eyes fall upon. Which means it is necessary to protect the soundness of the heart and its purity from pictures and images that pollutes it.

This requires Man to be extremely vigilant in choosing the programs that he watches and engages with, so that he is not a prisoner of everything that is published or broadcasted. Studies therefore, have cautioned children from watching violent films for it has a negative effect on their thoughts and character.

## **Life of the Heart**

**“Awaken your heart with admonishment, kill it through abstinence, strengthen it with conviction, enlighten it with wisdom, humiliate it with the remembrance of death and make it resolute through annihilation.”<sup>46</sup>**

### **Introduction**

The existence of Man is comprised of three forces

- Body
- Intellect
- Heart (Soul)

The heart is the most important, it is the centre of the spiritual forces and the elevated attributes in the essence of Man and his existence. In spite of the importance and centrality of the heart in the life of Man, majority of people limit their attention to physical health and beauty and developing the intellectual skill and are oblivious of the heart and reforming its spiritual attributes.

Of the most important responsibilities of Man in life is protecting the soundness of his heart and removing from it any doubt that may be attached to it. That may be achieved through the recitation of the Noble Qur'an, pondering over effective admonishment, remembering death and accountability [in the Hereafter].

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<sup>46</sup> Peak of Eloquence: Letter 31.

## **Brightening the Heart**

**“Verily Allah, The Glorified and The Almighty, has made His remembrance brightness for the hearts: you hear through it after deafness, see through it after blindness and become submissive through it after stubbornness.”<sup>47</sup>**

Man passes through certain conditions with a kind of harshness that prevents him from responding to advice or interacting with admonishment or engaging in worship. This is the biggest problem that Man should haste to remedy and get rid of.

Indeed Allah, The glorified has put the remedy for that in [His remembrance] which is represented through the recitation of Qur’an, supplication and invocation, which however requires:

1. Realising the importance of a tender heart and its centrality in the life of Man.
2. Choosing [the appropriate] time and freeing the mind and heart of concerns.
3. Reading with reverence that the reader will sense moments of impact that he may pour on places of infection to remove it.

Like Imam Ali (as) says in the attributes of the Pious:

**“During the night, they are up standing on their feet reading portions of the Holy Quran and reciting it in a well-measured way, creating through it grief for themselves and seeking by it the cure for their ailments.”<sup>48</sup>**

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<sup>47</sup> Peak of Eloquence: Sermon 220

<sup>48</sup> Ibid: Sermon 192

## **Provisions for the Hereafter**

**“If you come across a needy person who can carry for you your provision until the Day of Judgement, to hand it back to you tomorrow when you will need it, cease the opportunity and get him to carry it.”<sup>49</sup>**

A change in the point of vision may alter the perception of Man in how he engages with issues that are presented.

This poor and needy person may change in the eye of a person with piercing sight to the source of happiness that he has to search for and seize the opportunity of standing with him through his difficulty.

Thus the rich are in need of the poor for sending their provisions for the Hereafter, thus he does not wait for somebody who is looking for help but rather he looks for him earnestly for verily it is an opportunity that may not be repeated.

We generally do not look for the needy, but we wait for him to seek help and then we hesitate in assisting him with many arguments.

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<sup>49</sup> Peak of Eloquence. Letter 31.

## **A Form of Worship**

The essence of the existence of Man in this life is the worship of Allah, The Almighty and it occurs through obedience (observance and abstention), supplication, love and praise.

The most beautiful praise is that which comprises depth of knowledge and expressive wording. The master of that is the Prince of the believers (as), in his praise of Allah, The Almighty; is colourful expression and the basis of reality which attracts Man and comforts him with this kind of worship.

Imam Ali (as) states:

**“Praise be to Allah Who lies inside hidden things and towards Whom all apparent things are referred too. He cannot be seen by the eye of an onlooker. The eye which does not see Him does not deny Him and nor the heart that affirms Him sees Him. He precedes in sublimity that nothing can be more sublime than Him and He is so near that no one can be nearer than Him. His sublimity does not distance Him from anything of His creation, nor does His nearness equates them in space with Him. He has not informed (human) intellects about the limits of His attributes, nor has He prevented them from the necessity of awareness of Him. He is such that all signs of existence testify for Him till the denying mind also believes in Him. Allah is sublime beyond what is described by those who liken Him to things or those who deny Him.”<sup>50</sup>**

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<sup>50</sup> Peak of Eloquence: Sermon 49

## **Preparation for death**

**“I admonish you, servants of Allah, to be conscious of Allah Who clothed you and bestowed upon you an abundance of sustenance. If there was anyone who may have found a ladder to everlasting life or a way to avoid death, it would have been Solomon; the son of David (pbut), who was given control over the domain of the Jinn and Men along with Prophethood and a great status with Allah. When he exhausted his appointed ration (of this world) and his (fixed) time expired, the bow of destruction shot him with an arrow of death. His mansion became vacant of him, habitations were suspended and it was inherited by another people.”<sup>51</sup>**

With the effort of Man and his movement to build and construct this world he must remember death and expect it at every moment.

This is the realistic and balanced culture of Islam that motivates a person to work sincerely, persistently and diligently.

An intellectual will advise his self, remind it of death and preparations for the hereafter and that will not prevent him from enjoying the life of this world and its blessings.

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<sup>51</sup> Peak of Eloquence. Sermon 181.

## **Social Construction**

- ❖ **Social Work & Divine Grace**
- ❖ **Integrated Program**
- ❖ **Social Purity is Necessary**
- ❖ **Conditions for Thought**
- ❖ **Positive Programming**
- ❖ **The Management of Feelings**
- ❖ **The Chemistry of Love**
- ❖ **The Call for Simplicity**
- ❖ **The Rights of Brotherhood**
- ❖ **Admonishing of Friends**
- ❖ **Special Rights**
- ❖ **The Responsibility of Speech**
- ❖ **The Skill of Communication**
- ❖ **The Nature of the Tongue**
- ❖ **The Path of Peace**

## **Social Work & Divine Reward**

**“O Kumail, Command your family to go out after midday to achieve noble traits and to go out [when] night [sets in] to meet the needs of those who might be sleeping, for I swear by the One Whose hearing extends to all voices, no one pleases a heart except that Allah will create for him a kindness due to that [pleasing], thus if any hardship befalls him, it will come running like flowing water and drive away the hardship as wild camels are driven away.”<sup>52</sup>**

If you have brought happiness to someone, by the grace of Allah that happiness will be transformed in to a kindness that will expel from you hardships.

The beauty in the testament of the Imam (as) to Kumail is the invitation to the family to hasten to righteous actions, assisting people and bringing happiness to them.

Encourage your family and your children to social work so that everybody is happy with the Grace of Allah and His Mercy.

We affirm here the importance of searching for people of need and assisting them and not waiting for the request of assistance, for Allah has made that a reason to expel tribulation. A sane person is one who will acquire reasons to expel a possible and real difficulty.

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<sup>52</sup> Peak of Eloquence: Aphorism 258.

## **Complementary Program**

**“To render relief to the grief-stricken and to provide comfort to those in hardship is of the atonement of great sins.”<sup>53</sup>**

This is how Islam has connected personal concerns and social needs, this is a complementary program for the development of the individual and society.

When a person feels the weightiness of sin and its concerns, he does not suffice with prayer, seeking forgiveness and retreating to himself, but religious texts directs him to strive to fulfil the needs of people and assist them whether it is material or spiritual, for Allah has made that a reason for the forgiveness of sins and disposing of its consequences which attains a feeling of psychological comfort.

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<sup>53</sup> The Peak of Eloquence: Aphorism 24

## **Social Purity is Necessary**

**“Controversy destroys an opinion”<sup>54</sup>**

We may consider the meeting of factors and reasons as an existing rule in every facet of life, thus education, work, training and health, all need the meeting of multiple forces in order to achieve the required success.

In addition to the availability of the factors of success, society needs to dispose of the causes of failure. The correct opinion alone does not suffice to arrive at the aim for you have to get rid of barriers and obstacles that prevents [one] from moving towards it.

Controversy is the worst sickness that affects society, for it denies it the opportunity to benefit from people with opinions and intellectual competences that draw the path to success.

Naturally, there is a difference between diversity and controversy, the first is something natural that must be accepted and its dynamism used, however the problem is with controversy that leads to division and rivalry.

This is something we should strive to get rid of to the extent that an atmosphere of social purity prevails that produces successful thought.

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<sup>54</sup> Peak of Eloquence. Aphorism 215

## **Conditions for Thought**

### **“Obstinacy diverts an opinion”**

Obstinacy is to persist with rivalry, it is said: to continue in opposition with your opponent.

An atmosphere of controversy and rivalry affects the soundness of thought, this is what enters in the realm of what is known as (the circumstances of the researcher).

This necessitates upon a sane person to run and flee from rivalries and to communicate with those that he has a difference of opinion with in order that it does not transform in to conflict that confuses thought and removes from it the correct.

**“Whoever exaggerates a quarrel is a sinner, one who understates it, is oppressed and one who quarrels is not able to be conscious of Allah.”<sup>55</sup>**

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<sup>55</sup> Peak of Eloquence: Aphorism 308

## **Positive Programming**

**“Mix with people in a manner that if you die they will weep over you and if you live they will yearn for you.”<sup>56</sup>**

A wonderful, elegant statement of Imam Ali (as) that sets the bar and leaves for Man the choice of manner and path.

It is important to keep that in consideration, in order that you program your mind and that is reflected in the manner of your interaction with people.

It is possible to know in detail, with a bit of reflection, that which Man loves for himself from others, like the Imam (as) says:

**“Make yourself a scale between yourself and others, thus love for others what you love for yourself and hate for them what you hate [for yourself].”<sup>57</sup>**

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<sup>56</sup> Peak of Eloquence. Aphorism 10

<sup>57</sup> Peak of Eloquence, of his testament to Hasan ibn Ali (as), wrote it to him when he was camped at al-Hadirin on his return from Siffin

## **Management of Feelings**

**Imam Ali (as) said regarding the attribute of a believer: “His happiness is in his face and his sadness is in his heart.”<sup>58</sup>**

Nobody is free of a concern, problem or hardship, for the nature of life is tribulation, for even those who have all the material needs and components available, they still have some kind of hardship.

The believer in Allah, The Almighty understands the nature of life, he is pleased with that which Allah has portioned for him, he lives optimistically, this secures him and helps him to control his emotions, thus his happiness and cheerfulness appears in the presence of his brothers that makes them glad when they meet him.

This is a level of the levels of faith and a skill that a person acquires from the sum-total of his culture, experience and self-nurturing.

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<sup>58</sup> Peak of Eloquence: Aphorism 343

## The Chemistry of Love

**“One whose stem is tender, his branches will be thick.”<sup>59</sup>**

A wonderful and beautiful expression, he portrays for us the rallying of people around a personality who interacts with tenderness and tolerance.

It is of the nature of the human self to get close to one who is easy in his interactions, forgiving of mistakes and overlooking of the errors of others.

Of its nature also is to be averse and distant from crude interaction and coarseness in speech. It is a clear social equation, whoever depends on it in his interaction will acquire the love of others and they will rally around him, like Imam Ali (as) said: **“One whose speech is tender, loving him is necessary.”<sup>60</sup>**

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<sup>59</sup> Peak of Eloquence. Aphorism 214

<sup>60</sup> Gurar al Hikam wa Durar al Kalim. Aphorism 5207

## **A Call for Simplicity**

**“The worst of brothers is the one for whom formality is observed.”<sup>61</sup>**

Through a sum of dealings, words and opinions that issues from a person, an image of his personality forms in the minds of those around him and on that basis they interact with him.

This aphorism has a general application even though some Scholars have explained the meaning of formality within the context being hospitable.

What is meant by formality is rigid observance of convention or etiquette.

There is a type of personality that forces people to interact with them with some form of formality without saying it clearly.

Then there are some you interact with ease, and you feel content when you are close to them, there are others you are wary of interacting with them for they may hold you accountable for every minor and major [thing].

Similar to this aphorism is what is narrated from the Noble Prophet (sawa):  
**“Verily the worst of my nation are those who are honoured in fear of their wretchedness.”<sup>62</sup>**

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<sup>61</sup> Peak of Eloquence. Aphorism 488.

<sup>62</sup> Al Khisal; Volume1 Page14.

## **The Rights of Brotherhood**

**“O my child! Do not encroach upon the right of your brother relying on what is between you and him, for verily he is not a brother, whose rights you have breached.”<sup>63</sup>**

Due to the continuation of relations and friendships, some people ignore the mannerisms of interaction [with others] like [showing] affection, good intermingling, attaching importance, warmly receiving and handshaking with the justification of brotherhood and thus no need for formality. The importance of mannerisms however, increases between brothers and friends, for they are more entitle to kindness, for the abandoning of it inflicts the relationship with tepidity and coldness which may lead to termination.

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<sup>63</sup> Peak of Eloquence, Letter 31; of his testament to Hasan ibn Ali (as), wrote it to him when he was camped at al-Hadirin on his return from Siffin.

## Admonishing of Friends

**“Admonish your brother with kindness and reply his evil with generosity to him.”<sup>64</sup>**

An elegant way in delivering an admonishment and a beautiful path in reformation, that is because a direct admonishment mostly leads to quarrels and distancing.

Imagine if your friend was failing [in his duty] to you or erred regarding your right and you met that by overlooking his mistake and [being] kind to him!

Most definitely he will awaken to his mistake and feel a sense of gratitude and appreciation in respect of you. This is how brotherhood endures.

Allah, The Almighty states: **“But none attains to this except those who are steadfast and none attains to this except those endowed with mighty good fortune.”<sup>65</sup>**

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<sup>64</sup> Peak of Eloquence. Aphorism 158

<sup>65</sup> The Holy Qur’an; Chapter 41. Verse 35.

## Special Rights

Imam Ali (as) states in his testament to his son:

**“Bear yourself towards your brother [in a manner] that if he severs kinship, maintain it; when he turns away, be kind and draw near to him; when he withholds, spend over him; when he distances himself, approach him; when he is harsh to you, be lenient to him; when he commits a wrong deed, excuse him as though you are a slave of his and he is a source of blessing for you. Take care that this should not be done inappropriately and that you should not behave thus with an undeserving person.”<sup>66</sup>**

It is easy for a person to meet goodness with good and to interact with sublime manners in normal conditions. The difficulty however lies when a person overcomes his self and his efforts to meet an offense with goodness or sternness with kindness. In order for this testament to be realistic the retraction appears [at the end] **“Take care that this should not be done inappropriately and that you should not behave thus with an undeserving person.”**

These mannerisms are especially [necessary] between the children and parents, siblings, husband and wife and [between] friends that have attained the level of brotherhood.

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<sup>66</sup> Peak of Eloquence, Letter 31; of his testament to Hasan ibn Ali (as), wrote it to him when he was camped at al-Hadirin on his return from Siffin.

## Responsibility of Speech

From the letter of Imam Ali (as) to al-Harith al-Hamadani

**"Do not speak to people about everything that you have heard, for that suffices as a lie."**<sup>67</sup>

Man bears the responsibility of his conduct, in speech and action, for he is an entity with intellect and choice.

Allah, the Almighty therefore states:

**"He does not utter a word except that there is an observer prepared [to record]."**<sup>68</sup>

His conveying from others does not relieve him of responsibility, for not everything that circulates amongst people is correct; thus an intelligent Man does not haste in narrating with the justification of I heard or it has reached me, thus he utters abhorred lies.

That may result in many evils, especially in this age when relaying [information] without verifying has increased.

There are those that are planning to tear society apart, there are those that are motivated by enmity and then there is the ignorant [for] whom things are confusing.

Verily negligence and hastiness in conveying messages leads to many evils, thus do not be an agent of destruction in society whilst you are not aware of it.

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<sup>67</sup> Peak of Eloquence, Letter 69.

<sup>68</sup> The Holy Qur'an; Chapter 50, Verse 18.

## **The Skill of Communication**

**Imam Ali (as) states: “If the intellect is completed, speech is decreased.”<sup>69</sup>**

Speech is considered to be of the most important fields of interaction with others and communicating with them, that requires man to properly administer and value this sensitive means.

That is so because speech that is superfluous alienates others and makes means of communication a cause for alienation.

On the other hand, restricting [oneself] to what is important gives the other side the opportunity to understand and participate [in the discussion].

It is wrong for a person to dominate the period of the conversation between himself and another person and not to avail him the opportunity to express his opinions and feelings.

Lastly, verily the ability to express a thought with the least amount of words is of the completion of the intellect.

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<sup>69</sup> Peak of Eloquence. Aphorism 71

## **The Nature of the Tongue**

**Imam Ali (as) states: "The tongue is a beast, if it is let loose, it bites."**<sup>70</sup>

A reality that is of great importance, Man needs it to nurture his self and build his relations, verily the primary nature of the tongue is bestial, it is likened to wild animals, which if left alone and not caged, will attack.

If Man realises the nature of his [body] parts and strives to refine it, he will be saved from its harms, therefore it appears in the will of Imam Sadiq (as) to Abdullah ibn Jundub:

**"lessen sleep at night and speech during the day, for there is nothing in the body that is less thankful than the eye and the tongue."**<sup>71</sup>

Thus the tongue is least thankful to Allah because of the sins it falls into and the oppression of people.

It is therefore necessary for Man to:

- lessen his speech
- distance his tongue from sharpness
- refrain from speaking in the conditions of anger
- acquaint his tongue with good speech.

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<sup>70</sup> Peak of Eloquence, Aphorism 60

<sup>71</sup> Tuhaf al Uqool, Page 302

## **The Path of Peace**

**Imam Ali (as) said when he heard some of his companions cursing the people of Sham<sup>72</sup> during the days of their war at Siffin:**

**“Verily I dislike for you to be abusive, but if you describe their deeds and recount their conditions, it will be a better mode of speech and a more convincing argument. You said instead of abusing them: “O Allah! Save our blood and theirs, reconcile between ourselves and them and guide them [out of] their misguidance so that whoever is ignorant of the truth may know it and whoever inclines towards rebellion and enmity, may turn away from it.”<sup>73</sup>**

In the turmoil of conflict and the ambience of confrontation, the general people are oblivious of the principles of Islam that invites to good, love and peace, but the Imam (as) – he is the pinnacle of faith and awareness – desires good for the enemy fighters!!

He asks Allah guidance for his enemies, [this is] in the condition of war!! What would you think of in the condition of peace?

Verily the true believer is one whom, principles overcomes his desires and the inclinations of his self.

How much are we in need of the path of the Imam that is free from the defects of desires and mistakes of thought?

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<sup>72</sup> A region that included modern day Syria, Lebanon, Jordan and Palestine.

<sup>73</sup> Peak of Eloquence, Sermon 205.