

xkp

Remembrance of Allah

Sincerity

Justice

faith

Patience

Generosity

Repentance

Piety

Part 1

Anecdotes for Reflection

The World Federation of KSIMC

Anecdotes for Reflection Part 1

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Chapter 1

Foreword

The concept of morality has existed since the creation of mankind. In the old days, there was a clear distinction between 'good' morals and 'bad' morals although people did not always follow the former. During modern times, the distinction between good and bad has become blurred and morality has been significantly diluted. As a result, there is a danger that immorality will prevail over morality throughout the world.

There is no excuse for a Muslim to get caught in this quagmire. There is clear guidance from God through Holy Qur'an and the Prophets and Ma'soomeen. Prophet Muhammad himself said, "*I have been sent as a Prophet for the purpose of perfecting the morals.*" One of the best ways of understanding morality is by studying practical examples from the lives of Prophets and Ma'soomeen.

A few books have been written on moral stories emanating from the Islamic world, one of them being 'Pearls of Wisdom', published by the Islamic Education Board of World Federation in March 1993. Bearing in mind the importance of the subject of Akhlaaqiyat, IEB-WF is publishing 'Anecdotes for Reflection' in 5 parts. The source of this publication is the book 'Yaksad Mawzu' wa 500 Dastan' by Sayyid Ali Akber Sadaaqat. The translation from Farsi to English was carried out by Shaykh Shahnawaz Mahdavi. IEB – WF would like to thank Sayyid Ali Akber Sadaaqat and Shaykh Shahnawaz Mahdavi for their efforts and we pray to Allah s.w.t. to reward them amply.

May Allah s.w.t. accept this work as a further attempt by IEB – WF to propagate Islam.
Islamic Education Board

The World Federation of K S I Muslim Communities

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Chapter 2

Introduction

In The Name Of Allah, The Most Beneficent, The Most Compassionate

There are numerous ways for man to achieve guidance and emerge from darkness and move toward light. God, for the prosperity of man and perfection of his morals, has created proofs, evidences and vestiges,[1] so great in number that they are beyond reckoning and computation. For the guidance of mankind, He sent the Prophets with Clear Proofs,[2] Books, Miracles and Signs so that, perhaps, the people might perceive the right path and attain prosperity and success.

During the entire period of his prophethood, the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.), with regards to refinement of souls and perfection of morals, was an exemplar in speech and deed, and had (even) said, “*I have been sent (as a Prophet) for (the purpose of) perfecting the morals*”[3]

Man’s problem lies in his disregard for virtues, acquisition of vices, inclination towards lust and disobedience to the Shaytan. Some men stoop so low that they even lead their lives akin to animals. For the purpose of refinement and treatment of human morals, abatement of rebelliousness and controlling the natural disposition, the Holy Prophet spared no effort and mentioned all that was necessary in this regard.

Attainment of prosperity in this world and the hereafter is only accomplished under the auspices of a teacher and, at the same time, not every person can completely identify the two extremes of moral behaviour in order to demonstrate the moderate and balanced path. God, Who is the Absolute Wise, introduced all the Prophets, especially the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.), as the ‘teacher and trainer’ of morals so that the people, by following in his footsteps, distance themselves from vices and acquire the honour of the two worlds.

In the Qur’an, there exists a chapter by the name of **الْقَصَص** (*The Narratives*), which itself is proof that man is in need of stories and narratives.

In many places in the Qur’an, stories of Prophets, kings and nations have been mentioned. In addition, God has presented issues pertaining to wars, peace, family, religion, society and other similar topics, in the form of stories and narratives. By reading these accounts, the people can comprehend and distinguish the paths of progress and regress, and ascent and descent in every field, especially morals.

The entire chapter Yusuf has been devoted to the story of Yusuf, Ya’qub, Zulaikha and the brothers. In the beginning of the Chapter, God says:

We narrate to you (O’ Prophet) the most excellent of the narratives by (means of) what We have revealed to you this Qur’an[4]

While, in the concluding verse of this very chapter, He says:

Indeed (there) in the histories of theirs, is a lesson for men of understanding[5]

Indeed, one of the distinguished feats of the Qur’an is this very story of Yusuf (a.s.), which it refers to as the ‘*best of the narratives*’, and at the end of which, it says: *In these stories there is a lesson for those, who desire to take a moral and adopt the path of the Perfect Men.*

In this regard, Amirul Mu’mineen (a.s.), in Nahjul Balaghah, says to his son Imam Hasan (a.s.):

Even though I have not reached the age, which those before me have, yet I have looked into the

behaviour and reflected over the events of their lives. I walked amongst their ruins till I was as one of them. In fact, by virtue of those of their affairs that have become known to me, it is as though I had lived with them from the first to the last. I have therefore been able to discern the impure from the clean and the benefit from the harm. I have selected for you the choicest of those matters and collected for you their good points while keeping away from you the useless ones.

Years ago, I had written a book on ethics (for the treatment of vices), by the name of *Ihya' al-Quloob*. Ever since, I had been reflecting over the idea of compiling a book on moral stories. It happened that, divinely, an opportunity came up before me and with it the motivation for undertaking this assignment. In spite of the lack of necessary books, I contented myself with those that were available and commenced the compilation of this book, recording four to five stories for every topic.

I have certainly not come across any book which has been compiled in this fashion. Books like *Namunah-e-Ma'arif-e-Islam* and *Pand-e-Taareekh* have been present for around 30 years and I have made use of them too (in the course of this collection), but in those books, Qur'anic verses, traditions, poems and analogies have all been accumulated together; whereas, I have sought to satisfy myself by mentioning only the stories, while abstaining from presenting considerations relating to Qur'anic verses, traditions, poems and analogies, which would not only have increased the size of the book but would also have made it difficult to understand for many of the readers. This collection caters for the general public, young and old alike, who are acquainted with basic reading and writing. As far as possible, I have endeavoured to omit scientific issues and those aspects, pertaining to traditions, whose comprehension would be demanding and exacting for the general masses.

Although some of the stories may not possibly possess any aspect of reality and actuality, what I have focused on is the admonition and 'taking-a-lesson' aspect contained in them, which hopefully the honourable readers would perceive and comprehend.

As far as the issue of associating a story to a particular topic is concerned, I do not claim that the stories allude to just one topic or that particular one which has been specified here; rather, there are stories which can be associated with several other topics too, in addition to the topic under which they have been mentioned here.

When narrating a text or presenting a translation, I have not restricted myself to the literal meaning but, for a better comprehension, have resorted to paraphrasing, allusion and conceptual explanation too.

To avoid interference of topics with one another and prolongation of discussion, I have refrained from bringing forth topics which are related to those already presented. For example, *Ithaaq* (altruism) has been presented as one of the topics but *Infaaq* (spending in the path of God) has been excluded.

To prevent the reader from experiencing exhaustion and boredom, and for the sake of variety, I have desisted from presenting stories of a monotonous kind, like those of philosophers and poets, but have strived to make the collection varied. In this way, the readers will, hopefully, derive a greater pleasure from the narratives.

In view of the fact that trustworthiness ought to be adhered to, I have referred every narrative presented here, to the book from which it has been extracted, also mentioning the volume and page. It is only with the objective of achieving a greater fluency of work that I have endeavoured to correct, polish or alter some of the words or sentences of the original text.

It is hoped that the readers, after going through the stories and narratives, reflect upon and take lessons from them so that they are able to create within themselves, a new impetus towards perfection of morals; and God Willing, those who are endowed with laudable morals, should relate them to others, for rectification and remedy of the weaker souls.

Sayyid Ali Akbar Sadaaqat

And our final prayer (is): All Praise is due to Allah, the Lord of the Worlds.

Mordad, 1378.

[1] [2] [3] [4] [5]

Chapter 3

Morals

Allah, the Wise, has said:

إِنَّكَ لَعَلَىٰ خُلُقٍ عَظِيمٍ

(And certainly, you stand on sublime morality.)[1]

The Holy Prophet (s.a.w.) said:

بُعِثْتُ لِأَتَمِّمَ مَكَارِمَ الْأَخْلَاقِ

I have been sent (as a Prophet) to perfect the morals.[2]

Short Explanation

For man, good morals bring grace and elegance in this world, and relief and happiness in the hereafter. They elevate a person's status in proximity to God and aid him in the perfection of his religion. All the Prophets, *auliya*, and the chosen ones of God possessed exemplary morals and every believer ought to adorn himself with such morals, in order that his Scales of deeds become weighty on the Day of Judgement. The Holy Prophet (s.a.w.) has said: *The Haatim of our time is one, who possesses good morals. Bad morals cause a person to suffer the squeezing of the grave and the (punishment of) hell (in the hereafter), and a lack of friends in this world.*

Man should not be measured according to his knowledge, wealth or position, but rather, according to his commendable attributes, which make him acceptable in the eyes of God and distinguished and praised in the eyes of people.[3]

The Holy Prophet (s.a.w.) and Noa'imaan

Noa'imaan Ibn A'mr Ansaari was one of the early companions of the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.) and had a jovial and jocose nature. It has been reported that a tribal Bedouin once arrived in Madinah and resting his camel behind the mosque, entered inside to be in the presence of the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.)

Some of the Prophet's companions incited Noa'imaan by saying, "If you kill this camel, we could distribute its meat amongst ourselves, and the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.) would have to pay its price to the owner."

Following their advice, Noa'imaan killed the animal. When the owner came out of the mosque and discovered his dead camel, he was furious and decided to bring the matter to the attention of the Holy Prophet. Noa'imaan, in the meantime, had taken flight.

The Holy Prophet (s.a.w.) came out of the mosque, saw the dead camel and inquired, "Who is responsible for this act?"

Those around him accused Noa'imaan so the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.) despatched someone to bring Noa'imaan before him. Word spread around that Noa'imaan was hiding in the house of Dhubaa'h Bin Zubair,[4] which was near the mosque. He had climbed into a pit and covered himself with fresh grass. The Holy Prophet (s.a.w.) was told about Noa'imaan's hideout and he and his companions set out towards Dhubaa'h's house. Once there, the envoy revealed Noa'imaan's hideaway to the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.), who ordered him to uncover the pit. When it was done, Noa'imaan emerged, his cheeks and forehead covered with fresh grass. On seeing him, the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.) asked:

"O' Noa'imaan! What is this that you have done?"

He replied, "O' Prophet of Allah! By Allah! Those people who have led you to my hiding place, were the same ones who persuaded me to kill the camel."

The Holy Prophet (s.a.w.) smiled and brushed away the grass from Noa'imaan's cheeks and forehead with his holy hands. He then paid the price of the camel to the Bedouin[5] on Noa'imaan's behalf.

Khuzaimah and the Roman Emperor

Khuzaimah Abrash, the Arabian king, never embarked upon any task without first conferring with the Roman Emperor who was one of his closest friends. Once, with the intention of seeking the Emperor's opinion regarding his children's fortune, he sent a letter to him with his herald. In the letter, he wrote

"I feel I should set aside great riches for each of my sons and daughters in order that they do not fall into bad times after me. What is your opinion in this affair?"

The Roman Emperor replied: "Wealth is a sweetener - unfaithful and impermanent! The best service for your children would be to embellish them with good morals and laudable attributes, which will lead to permanent leadership in the world and forgiveness (of sins) in the hereafter."^[6]¹¹

The Conduct of Imam Sajjad

Once, a relative of Imam Sajjad (a.s.) approached the Imam (a.s.) and began to revile and insult him. The Imam (a.s.) did not utter a word in reply but, after the man had left the gathering, he turned to the people around him and said:

“You heard what this man said. Now I want you to accompany me and hear what I have to say in response to his abuses and insults.”

The companions complied, “We shall surely accompany you; in fact we had hoped that you would reply to him at that very moment.”

The Imam (a.s.) set off towards the person’s house and was heard reciting the following Qur’anic verse:

And who restrain (their) anger, and forgive (the faults of) men; for God loves those who do good (to others).[7]

The narrator says: “When we heard the recitation of this verse, we realized that the Imam (a.s.) intended to exhibit goodness towards the person who had just insulted him.”

When he reached the person’s house, the Imam (a.s.) called out to him and announced his arrival.

On seeing the Imam, the person immediately assumed that he had come to respond to his abuses.

However, as soon as the Imam (a.s.) saw the man, he said, “O’ Brother! You came to me and uttered things which were appalling and unpleasant. If what you have attributed to me is true, I seek forgiveness for myself from God, but if it is not so, then I pray that God forgives you.”

The man was shocked to hear these words and repented. He kissed Imam Sajjad (a.s.) between the eyes and apologised, saying:

“My insults and abuse were unfounded and cannot be attributed to your character. In fact, those insults befit me more than you.”[8]13

Imam 'Ali and the Discourteous Trader

Imam Ali (a.s.), during his Caliphate, would often undertake tours to survey the markets and advise and guide the traders there.

One day, while passing through the date market, he noticed that a small girl was weeping. Imam Ali asked her the reason for her tears at which she explained:

“My master had given me a dirham to purchase some dates. I purchased them from this trader here but when I returned home, my master did not approve of them. Now I wish to return them but the trader refuses to take them back.”

Imam 'Ali (a.s.), turned to the trader and said to him, “This child is a slave-girl and has no authority of her own. Take back the dates and return her money to her.”

The trader stepped forward and, in full view of the other traders and onlookers, struck the Imam (a.s.) on the chest in an attempt to shove him away from the front of his shop.

The people who were witnessing the incident, rushed forward and said to the man:

“What do you think you are doing? This is Ali Ibn Abi Talib (a.s.)!”

The trader's face went pale as he stood flabbergasted. He immediately took the dates from the girl and handed back the money to her.

Then, turning to the Imam (a.s.), he implored, “O' Amirul Mu'mineen! Be pleased with me and forgive me.”

The Imam replied, “I shall only be pleased with you when you change your behaviour for the better and pay close attention to morals and courtesy.”[9]

Once, Maalik Ashtar was passing through the market of Kufah looking very indigent. He was dressed in coarse canvas apparel and had placed canvas on his head instead of a turban. One of the traders was sitting in his shop when his eyes fell upon Maalik. He looked at him with contempt and scornfully hurled a lump of earth towards him.

Maalik disregarded him and proceeded on his way. However, a person who had recognized Maalik and had witnessed the incident, reprimanded the trader:

“Shame on you! Do you know who you have just humiliated?”

“No,” replied the trader.

“He was Maalik Ashtar, the companion of 'Ali (a.s.).”

A shiver ran through the body of the trader at the thought of the evil deed he had committed. He immediately set off after Maalik in order to offer his apologies. He noticed that Maalik had entered a mosque where he was engaged in prayers and decided to wait for him. As soon as Maalik had finished praying, the trader fell at his feet and began kissing them. Maalik raised him and asked him what he was doing.

“ I am apologizing for the sin I have committed,” answered the trader.

Maalik explained, “There is no sin upon you. By God, I came to the mosque especially to seek forgiveness for you.”^[10]

[6] [7] [8] [9] [10] [11] [12] [13] [14] [15]

Chapter 4

Beneficence

Allah, the Wise, has said:

إِنَّ اللَّهَ مَعَ الَّذِينَ اتَّقَوْا وَ الَّذِينَ هُمْ مُحْسِنُونَ

(Surely Allah is with those who guard (against evil) and those who do good (to others)).[1]

Imam 'Ali (a.s.) has stated:

عَاتِبْ أَخَاكَ بِالْإِحْسَانِ إِلَيْهِ

(Admonish your brother (in faith) by exhibiting kindness towards him.)[2]

Short Explanation

Allah loves the person who possesses the attribute of beneficence. Just as Allah has exhibited kindness towards us, it is essential for us to exhibit a greater beneficence towards others.

Even if a person has wronged us, we should respond with kindness and not repay evil with evil, this would only add fuel to the fire and cause an increase in malice and enmity.

The conduct of Divine personalities was such that if they were greeted, they would return the greeting in a better and more complete manner and if goodness was done to them, they would repay it augmented and amplified.

Those who do goodness and exhibit beneficence towards others, attract the hearts of the people while their deeds hurt Shaytan.

It should be noted that those who do good do not devalue or spoil their kind deeds by placing any kind of obligation (upon the person towards whom kindness is exhibited).

Imam Husain's Kindness to the Camel-Driver

Imam Sadiq (a.s.) said:

“A man was trailing a woman when she was busy circling the Ka’bah. The woman was raising her hands in prayer when the man placed his hand upon her arm; at that moment God glued his hand to the woman’s arm.

People thronged to witness this strange happening in such great numbers that all movement was hindered. A person was sent to the Emir of Makkah to inform him of the incident. He gathered all the scholars around him and together they tried to settle on a suitable resolution to the problem. Many ordinary people also assembled, interested to know the sentence that would be pronounced for the crime.

As they all stood perplexed over the issue, the Emir finally said, “Is there anyone from the family of the Holy Prophet (s.a.w) here?”

Those around him said, “Yes! Husain Ibn 'Ali (a.s.) is here.”

That night, the Emir ordered the Imam (a.s.) to be brought before him. He sought to know the ruling for this incident from the Imam (a.s.).

First, the Imam (a.s.) turned towards the Ka’bah and raised his hands. He stood in this position for some time, after which he supplicated. Then, approaching the man the Imam separated his glued hand from the arm of the woman by the power of his Imamate.

The Emir asked the Imam (a.s.), “O’ Husain (a.s.)! Should I not punish him?”

“No,” replied the Imam (a.s.).

The author says: This was the kindness which the Imam (a.s.) had exhibited towards the camel-driver, but it was the same person who repaid this act of kindness by cutting off the Imam’s hands in order to snatch his (a.s.) belt, in the darkness of the night of 11th Muharram.[3]

Abu Ayyub Ansaari

Abu Ayyub Ansaari was one of the distinguished companions of the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.). When the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.) migrated from Makkah to Madinah, all the tribes of Madinah requested him to stay with them, but he said:

“The place where I stay shall depend on where my camel sits down.”

When the procession reached a place near the houses of Bani Maalik Ibn Najjar, which later came to be the house of the Prophet's mosque, the camel sat down to rest. But a short while later it stood up again and began to walk, only to return and rest at the place where it had previously rested.

The people began approaching the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.), and inviting him to be their guest. Seeing this, Abu Ayyub immediately lifted the Holy Prophet's (s.a.w.) saddlebag from the camel's back and carried it into his own house.

When the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.) noticed that the saddlebag was missing, he inquired, “What happened to the saddle-bag?”

Those around him informed him that Abu Ayyub had taken it into his own house.

The Holy Prophet (s.a.w.) remarked: “A person should always accompany his luggage,” and then proceeded into Abu Ayyub's house and stayed there till the time when the houses around the mosque were constructed.

Initially, the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.) was accommodated in a room on the ground floor, whereas Abu Ayyub occupied the top storey, but later, he requested:

“O' Messenger of Allah! It is unbecoming that you stay below, while we occupy the top storey; it would be more appropriate if you were to move to the top.”

The Holy Prophet (s.a.w.) agreed and asked for his things to be moved to the top.

Abu Ayyub was in the ranks of Holy Prophet (s.a.w.) and participated in battles like Badr and Uhud, fighting against the enemies of Islam and putting on a scintillating exhibition of valour and courage.

One night, on the way back home after victory in the battle of Khaibar, Abu Ayyub stayed awake the entire night, guarding the tent of the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.).

When morning dawned, the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.) inquired: “Who is out there?”

“It's me, Abu Ayyub,” came the reply.

The Holy Prophet (s.a.w.) twice said, “May Allah exhibit mercy upon you!”

Thus, Abu Ayyub, through the kindness he showed to the Prophet, both with his money and his soul, became the beneficiary of this supplication of the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.).[\[4\]](#)

Recompense for the Poems

One *Nawroz* day, Mansur Dawaaniqui, the Abbasid Caliph who took over the caliphate after his brother Abu al-A'bbas Saffaah, ordered Imam Musa Kadhim (a.s.) to present himself in the gathering of the Eid of *Nawroz*. This was so that the people could come and greet him and offer their gifts to him, which he should accept.

The Imam (a.s.) told Mansur, "Nawroz is the customary Eid of the Iranians and nothing has been said about it in Islam."

To which Mansur replied, "This act is politically motivated and is intended to keep my soldiers happy. I place you under the oath of the Great God that you accept my request and present yourself at that gathering."

The Imam (a.s.) agreed and arrived at the assembly. The army generals, nobles and the common masses arrived in his august presence, greeted him, and presented their gifts to him.

In the meantime, Mansur had ordered one of his slaves to position himself near the Imam (a.s.) and maintain a record of the money and gifts presented to him. The last person who had come to meet the Imam (a.s.) was an old man, who said to him:

"O' Son of the Messenger of Allah! I am an impoverished person and lack the money to present you with gifts, but my gift for you today are three verses of elegy, which my grandfather had composed for your grandfather, Husain Ibn Ali(a.s.)."

Having said this, he then recited the verses.[5]

The Imam (a.s.) responded appreciatively, saying, "I have accepted your gift," after which he prayed for the man.

Then, turning to the slave, he instructed, "Go to Mansur, inform him of these gifts and ask him what has to be done about them?"

The slave did as he was told and upon returning, said to the Imam (a.s.):

"The Caliph has said: I have given them to you (Imam Musa Kadhim) as gifts. Spend them as you desire."

The Imam (a.s.) told the old man, "Take these riches and gifts, for I am giving them all to you as gifts." [6]

Prophet Yusuf and his Brothers

Years after the incident when the brothers of Yusuf (a.s.) had deceptively taken him outside the city, beaten him and flung him into the well thereby forcing their father into perpetual weeping and anguish over his loss, the brothers heard that Yusuf had become the king of Misr. They and the father went to meet him.

The very first sentence which Yusuf uttered upon seeing them, was: *And He was indeed kind to me when He took me out of the prison.*^[7]

Apparently, it was out of courtesy that Yusuf desisted from mentioning the troubles he had experienced; first being flung into the well, then his subsequent slavery and then unpleasant incidents which he had to endure due to the acts of his brothers. He did not wish to revive those bitter memories which would cause them to experience mortification and embarrassment.

He then added, “It was Shaitan who incited my brothers to commit those inappropriate deeds towards me, hurling me into the well and separating me from my father; however, the Glorious God exhibited kindness towards me in that he made those very acts a means for granting eminence and reverence to our family!”

Attributing the unjust acts of his brothers to Shaytan and regarding him as the prime culprit for the crimes of his brothers, was another example of Yusuf’s (a.s.) magnanimity. He thus shielded them from embarrassment and left them with an opportunity to apologize for their deeds.

He said:

“There shall be no reproof against you, (from) this day [8] You can rest assured with respect to me for I have forgiven you and chosen to disregard all that has happened previously, and on behalf of God too, I can give you this good news and seek from Him that Allah may forgive you and He is the Most Merciful of the merciful[9].

“Surely he who guards (against evil) and is patient (is rewarded [10]) for surely Allah does not waste the reward of those who do good.”[11]

Author’s note: The lesson, which Hadhrat Yusuf (a.s.) taught everyone, was that of exhibiting kindness and beneficence in response to evil behaviour, and hopefully, we too can conduct ourselves in the same manner with respect to our brethren-in-faith, Inshaallah.

[16] [17] [18] [19] [20] [21] [22] [23] [24] [25] [26]

Chapter 5

Sincerity

Allah, the Wise, has said:

فَاعْبُدِ اللَّهَ مُخْلِصاً لَهُ الدِّينَ

(So worship God (alone), being sincere to Him in religion)[1]

Imam Ali (a.s.) said:

أَخْلِصِ الْعَمَلَ يُجْزِكَ مِنْهُ الْقَلِيلُ

Perform your deeds with sincerity, for (then, even) a slight of it shall be sufficient for you.[2]

Short Explanation

Sincerity is the key to the acceptance of all deeds. A person whose deeds are accepted by Allah, however trivial they may be, is a sincere person and one whose deeds, in spite of being plentiful and rejected by Allah, is not of the sincere ones.

A sincere person strives to purify his soul from vices and exerts himself to perform (good) deeds and maintain (sincerity of) intention so that Allah accepts his deeds.

The level of intention, knowledge and deeds is related to spiritual purification and refinement, and if a sincere person were to pay due attention to his inner self, he would come to perceive the true concept of Unity of God. The lowest degree of sincerity is when a person exerts himself to the best of his ability, neither anticipating rewards for his deeds nor attaching any importance to them.[3]

Three Persons in a Cave

The Holy Prophet (s.a.w.) has related:

“Three persons from the tribe of Bani Israel got together and started out on a journey. On the way clouds gathered above them and it started to pour with rain and so they sought shelter in a nearby cave.

Suddenly, a large boulder slipped and blocked the entrance to the cave, trapping the three inside and transforming the day into a dark night for them. They had no other alternative except to turn to God for help.

“Let us use our sincere deeds as a means to obtain deliverance from this predicament,” suggested one of them.

All the others agreed with the suggestion.

One of them said, “O’ Lord! You are aware that I have an extremely attractive cousin and that I was infatuated and obsessed with her. One day, finding her alone, I took hold of her and wanted to satisfy my carnal desires, when she spoke out to me saying: O’ My cousin! Fear God and do not harm my chastity’. Hearing this, I crushed my lustful tendencies and decided against the evil act. O’ Lord! That deed of mine had been out of absolute sincerity and only for the purpose of acquiring Your pleasure, deliver us from grief and perdition.” Suddenly they witnessed that the huge boulder had moved away a little, faintly brightening up the interior of the cave.

The second person spoke out, “O’ Lord! You know that I had a father and a mother, so old that their bodies had bent over due to their excessive age, and that I used to tend to them regularly. One night having brought them their food, I observed that both of them were asleep. I passed the entire night near them, the food in hand, without waking them up for fear of disturbing them. O’ Lord! If this deed of mine had been only for the sake of Your pleasure and happiness, open up a way for us and grant us salvation.”

As he completed his speech, the group noticed that the boulder had moved aside a little more.

The third person supplicated, “O’ Knower of every hidden and manifest! You know Yourself that I had a worker who used to work for me. When his term had reached its termination, I handed over to him his wages, but he was not pleased and desired more and, in a state of dissatisfaction and displeasure, he went away. I used his wage to purchase a goat, which I looked after separately and very soon I had a flock in my possession. After a period of time, the worker again approached me for his wage and I pointed towards the flock of sheep. Initially, he thought I was ridiculing him, but later realizing my seriousness, took the entire flock and left.[4] O’ Lord! If this act had been prompted by sincerity and had only been for Your pleasure, deliver us from this quandary.”

At this point the entire boulder moved aside from the mouth of the cave and all three emerged from it, joyous and ecstatic, and continued their journey.[5]

Ali on the Chest of Amr

A'mr Ibn A'bd Wudd was a warrior who, in battle, was a match for a thousand soldiers. In the battle of Ahzaab, he challenged the Muslim soldiers to fight him but none possessed the courage to stand up before him till Imam Ali (a.s.) presented himself before the Holy Prophet (sa.w) and sought permission to fight him.

The Holy Prophet (s.a.w.) said to Ali, "Do realize that this is A'mr Ibn A'bd Wudd."

Imam Ali (a.s.) humbly stated, "(And) I am Ali Ibn Abi Talib," and then proceeded towards the battle-field and stood before A'mr.

After a fierce encounter, Imam Ali (a.s.) eventually knocked him down and sat on his chest.[6]

Witnessing this, the entire Muslim army importuned the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.): "O' Messenger of Allah, order Ali (a.s.) to kill A'mr immediately."

"Leave him alone for he is more aware of his deeds than anyone else," replied the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.)

When Ali (a.s.) had severed the head of A'mr, he brought it to the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.), who questioned him (peace be upon him), "O' Ali! What caused you to hesitate before killing A'mr?"

He said, "O' Messenger of Allah! When I had floored him, he abused me, as a result of which I was overcome by rage. I feared that if I were to kill him in that state of anger, it would be for consolidating myself and pacifying my soul. So I stepped away from him till my fury subsided when I returned and severed his head from his body only for the happiness of Allah and in obedience to Him."

It was because of this sincerity and invaluable combat on the part of Imam Ali that the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.) said:

"The strike of the sword of Ali on the day of the battle of Khandaq is superior to the worship of a hundred men and jinn.[7][8]

Shaitan and the Pious Worshipper

In the tribe of Bani Israel, there once lived a pious worshipper. One day, the people informed him that at a certain location, there existed a tree that was being worshipped by a tribe. When he heard this, the man flew into a rage, picked up his axe and set out to cut down the tree.

Iblees, appearing before him in the form of an old man, asked, "Where are you headed for?" He replied, "I intend to cut down the tree, which is being worshipped so that the *people* worship Allah instead."^[9]

"Hold yourself till you hear what I have to say," said Iblees to him.

The worshipper urged him to carry on.

Iblees continued, "God has His own Prophets and if it had been essential to cut down the tree, He would have sent them to perform the task."

However, the worshipper did not agree with Iblees and continued on his way.

"There is no way I shall let you do it," said Iblees angrily, and he began to wrestle with the man. In the ensuing contest, the pious worshipper hurled Iblees onto the ground.

"Wait! I have something else to say to you", pleaded Iblees. "Listen! You are a poor man. If you could possess some wealth by means of which you could give alms to the other worshippers it would be much better than cutting the tree. If you refrain from cutting the tree, I shall place two dinars beneath your pillow everyday."

The pious person said thoughtfully, "If you speak the truth, I shall give one dinar in charity while the other dinar I shall put to my use. This is better than cutting down the tree; in any case, I have neither been ordered to perform this task nor am I a Prophet to burden myself with unnecessary grief and anxiety."

Thus, he acceded to the request of Shaitan who left him alone.

For two days, he received the two dinars and utilized them, but on the third day, there was no sign of the money. Upset and distressed, he picked up his axe and set out to cut down the tree.

On the way, he encountered Shaitan, who asked him: "Where are you headed for?"

"I am going to cut that tree."

"There is no way you are going to do it," said Shaitan.

Once again they began to contest, but this time Iblees overcame him and hurling him to the ground ordered, "Turn back or I shall sever your head from your body."

The pious man said, "Leave me alone and I shall return, but tell me, how was it that I had managed to overcome you on the previous occasion?"

Iblees answered, "On that occasion, you had set out only for Allah and you were sincere in your intention as a result of which, Allah subjugated me for you, but this time you were angry for your own self and for your dinars and so I could overpower you."^[10]

The Secret of a Sincere Slave

Sa'eed Ibn Musayyab narrates:

“One year, there was a severe famine and so the people gathered together to pray for the rains. I looked around and my eyes fell upon a black slave, who had separated himself from the crowd and emerged on top of a small hill. I advanced in his direction and when I came near him, I noticed that his lips were moving in prayer. Hardly had he completed his prayers, when a cloud appeared in the sky.

Seeing the cloud, the black slave praised Allah and moved away. Very soon, rains lashed us so heavily that we thought we might perish.

I ran after the slave and observed that he entered the house of Imam Sajjad (a.s.). I arrived before the Imam (a.s.) and said:

“O’ My Master! In your house there is a black slave; oblige me by selling him to me.”

He (a.s.) replied, “O’ Sa’eed! Why should I not gift him to you, instead,” and ordered the head of his slaves to bring all the servants before me. When they had assembled, I noticed that the black slave was not amongst them.

I said, “The one whom I desire, is not amongst them.”

The Imam (a.s.) said, “There remains no other slave except one.”

He then ordered him to be brought forth. When the slave was brought before me, I saw that he was the very person whom I had sought and so I said, “He is the one I need.”

“O’ Slave! Henceforth, Sa’eed is your master so go with him,” instructed the Imam (a.s.).

The slave turned to me and asked, “What prompted you to separate me from my master?”^[11]

I replied, “When I witnessed your prayers for the rains being accepted, I wished that I could own you.”

When he heard this, the slave stretched out his hands in supplication and, turning his face towards the skies, beseeched:

“O’ My Lord! This was a secret between You and me. Now that You have divulged it, grant me death and take me towards Yourself.”

The Imam (a.s.) and all those present, wept over the position of the slave, while I, shedding tears, came out of the house. No sooner had I reached my own house, than the Imam’s (a.s.) messenger arrived and said, “Come along if you wish to take part in the funeral procession of your companion.”

I returned to the Imam’s (a.s.) house along with the messenger only to find that the slave had passed away.^[12]

Prophet Musa's Request

Prophet Musa (a.s.) once requested to God:

“O’ Lord! It is my wish to see that creature of Yours who has purified himself for your worship and who is unpolluted in his obedience towards You.”

He was addressed, “O’ Musa! Go near the shores of such-and-such sea in order that I may show you what you desire to see.”

Prophet Musa proceeded till he reached near the sea. Looking around, he observed that on a branch of a tree that drooped over the water, sat a bird, engrossed in the *dhikr* of Allah. When Musa questioned the bird about itself, the bird said:

“From the time Allah has created me, I have been on this branch, engaged in His worship and dhikr. From every dhikr of mine, there branch out a thousand other dhikr, and the pleasure which I derive from the dhikr of Allah, provides me with nourishment.”

“Do you crave anything from this world?” asked Musa (a.s.).

“Yes. I yearn to taste one drop of water from this sea,” replied the bird.

Musa (a.s.) exclaimed, “But there does not exist a great distance between your beak and the water. Why don’t you dip your beak into it and drink it?”

The bird answered, “Out of fear lest the enjoyment derived from the water should make me heedless of the pleasure of the dhikr of my Lord.”

Hearing this, Prophet Musa (a.s.) clasped his head in intense astonishment.[13]

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