

Diseases of the Soul: Inordinate Desire and Endless Hope

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Article

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But you prefer the life of the world. (The Qur'an, 87: 16)

Although the Hereafter is better and more lasting. (The Qur'an, 87: 17)

It is reported that Amir al-Mu'minin `Ali (a) said, "I am apprehensive for you on account of two things: submission to desire and cherishing of inordinate hope. As to desire, it prevents one from haqq (Truth, righteousness, God); and as to inordinate hope, it makes human being oblivious of the Hereafter."

[Al-Kulayni, al-Kafi, vol. 2, p. 336.]

The Prophet (s) said, "God Almighty said: `By My Honour, My Glory, My Greatness, My Light, My Loftiness, and by the Highness of My Station! When My slave gives preference to his desire over My wish, I put his affairs into confusion, make his life baffling in this world and his heart preoccupied with the world, although I do not give him anything of it except what I have preordained for him. And by My Honour, My Glory, My Greatness, My Light, My Loftiness and by the Highness of My Station! If My slave prefers My wish to his desire, My angels protect him, the heavens and the earth guarantee his sustenance, and I look after his trade and bring the world to him though it should be reluctant and recalcitrant."

[Al-Kulayni, *Usul al-Kafi*, vol. 2, p. 335]

Definition Of Inordinate Desires

- Inordinate desire (*hawa*) means 'love', 'desire' and 'attraction and inclination something' towards something as a result of natural urge which stops and prevents a person from following his reason, truth and God. The carnal self (*nafs al-ammarah*) is inclined towards lust and desire, if it is not bridled by reason.

Dangers of following one's inordinate desires

- *'And follow not desire lest it leads you astray from the way of God.'* (38:26).

'Have you seen him who has taken his desire to be his god?' (25:43).

- Imam al-Sadiq (a) said: **"Be apprehensive of your desires in the same way as you are apprehensive of your enemies. For there is no greater enemy for human beings than their own desires and what their tongues reap."** [Al-Kulayni, *al-Kafi*, vol. 2, p. 336]
- Human soul inherently believes in *tawhid*, however, since birth it also starts growing and developing his natural urges and animal desires. After passing through certain stages, human being is no better than a weak animal but has distinction over other animals for his potential of becoming a human being.
- In initial stages of his life in world, law of animal nature, which governs through faculties of desire (*shahwah*) and anger (*ghadhab*) and imagination (*wahm*) rule over him. He develops with these three powers, that are roots of all vices and fatal sins, and they too flourish within him with maturity and age.
- Without training of an instructor, after reaching maturity, he can become a devilish beast of uncommon rarity and if he retains same attributes, he will not do anything except obeying his desires and three faculties. No sign of divine knowledge or awareness, moral excellence or righteous deed can be found in him, and innate light of nature, faith and reason gets stifled within his personality.

Second birth of Human Being

- Human being experiences second birth which is the birth of real human being if he wakes up from the darkness of desires and gradually submits to his reason, follows teachings of

prophets and guidelines of wise scholars and *awliya'* (a). Then, perfect humanness, which is inherent in his nature, may become reality, and with that, all modes of his inner being acquire a human dimension and inner devil of carnal self is transformed to faithful, helped by inherent faculty of intellect.

- The bestial self then surrenders itself to the human self in such a way that it carries its rider like a docile and subdued spiritual mount on journey towards the skies of perfection, becoming a horse (*buraq*) carrying its rider swiftly towards the horizons of the Hereafter, never turning wild again if strict watch is observed.
- Powers of desire, anger and imagination having been subdued by forces of justice, intellect, and law, spiritual peace and balance rule over entire domain of his internal being, establishing the Kingdom of God and rule of righteousness and Divine Law in it. Nothing that is opposed to justice and truth can occur in it, and whole kingdom is absolutely freed from all sorts of untruth, evil and injustice.

Definition and Dangers of endless hopes

- Long endless hopes (*tool al 'amal*) are the ones that make a person indulge too much in the life of this material world, become neglectful of transient nature of the worldly life and his own existence, forget death, resurrection and hereafter.
- Such a state of extended and outstretched hope, together with a false personal assurance of unlimited life and unbounded availability of time, make a person oblivious of his ultimate goal and destiny, the Hereafter, and prevent him from preparing for the unavoidable journey and securing provisions for it, ultimately leading him to completely forget the Hereafter and his goal.

Getting rid of endless hopes – Awakening (Yaqzah)

- The first and foremost step to get rid of endless hopes and acquire genuine humanness is

awakening (*yaqzah*). According to great Shaykh Shahabadi (r), unless a human being wakes up and realizes that he is a traveller in this transient world with an unavoidable journey lying ahead and a destination towards which he must move, he will not muster the resolution necessary to achieve his goal.

- The biggest obstacles in the way of awakening that leads one to forget his destination and neglect his journey and deadens his will and resolution is feeling that there is plenty of time for journey, that if one does not set out today, he may do it tomorrow, if not this month, then next and so on. Thus, one must remember that his time in this world may end anytime and opportunity will be lost forever.

Few hadiths on inordinate desires and endless hopes

- Prophet of God (s) said: **“What a wretched servant, whose desires lead him astray and whose soul humiliates him.”** [*Mizan al-Hikmah*, hadith # 29139]
- Imam Ali (a) said: **“Inordinate desire is deadly companion.”** [*Ghurar al-Hikam wa Durar al-Kalim*, hadith # 957]
- Imam Ali (a) said: **“Inordinate desire is calamity for intellect.”** [*Ghurar al-Hikam wa Durar al-Kalim*, hadith # 3925]
- Prophet of God (s) said: **“Whoever hopes that he will live tomorrow has in fact hoped to live forever.”** [*Bihar al-Anwar*, vol.31, p.167, hadith # 73]
- Imam Ali (a) said: **“Beware of trap of endless hopes, for it may be that a person hoped for a sustenance but did not get it, and that he built a house but could not live in it, and that he amassed wealth and could not benefit from it.”** [*Ghurar al-Hikam wa Durar al-Kalim*, hadith # 2563]
- Imam Ali (a) said: **“Endless hope is like mirage; it deceives viewer and disappoints**

one's expectation.” [*Ghurar al-Hikam...*, hadith # 1896]

- Imam Ali (a) said: **“Fruit of long hopes is corruption of deeds.”** [*Ghurar al-Hikam...*, hadith # 4641]
- Imam al-Sadiq (a) said: **“Many times it happens that God bestows His servant blessing without him hoping for it and many times one hoped for something but got contrary to it.”** [*Bihar al-Anwar*, vol.55, p. 152, hadith # 71]

Advice to control inordinate desires and endless hopes

- Desires and hopes are integral part of a human being's mind and without these two, healthy psychological and mental life is not possible. Desires show strong interest in something attractive and pleasurable while hope motivates a person to pursue various aims and objectives of life. These two are blessings of God.
- Interests and inclinations of a person change with age, maturity, knowledge and experience, environment and financial status. A child may strongly desire to have a toy for playing while a student may desire to have an expensive book or computer to study. A young person may desire to have a good-looking graceful wife and family life. Similarly, a teacher may desire to educate his students.
- Every human being hopes to have best opportunities and facilities in his life. Hopes are associated with returns of efforts, personal capabilities, good financial status, influential individuals, healthy life, security, supportive followers, family and relatives and good friends. Life becomes satisfied if all hopes are fulfilled.
- An intelligent human being must ponder over the fact that all the desires may not be in his interest and all the hopes may not be fulfilled. Keeping a check of rational thought and use of his sharp intellect over his desires can help him to make better decision as what to pursue and what to avoid.

- Similarly hope to achieve everything one after the other in life imagining that one will always remain healthy, secure, wealthy and powerful is an unrealistic thinking as health may turn into a serious illness, security may be lost by a disaster, death may approach anytime, wealth may be lost leading him bankrupt and power may be lost when a post or status is taken away by enemies.
- Thus, a rational, realistic and beneficial life is only possible when a person keeps his desires under scrutiny of power of God-given intellect and reasoning. He should avoid those that are motivated only by physical, pleasure-seeking and material aims and prefer those that are ultimately beneficial for himself and creatures of God and those that he can defend himself in front of God in Hereafter.
- Similarly, while pursuing aims of life and having hope to achieve different aims, one must always keep death, disease, unexpected loss and unforeseen disasters in his mind. One must always weigh pros and cons before putting his hope and practically pursue desired aim and wisely decide whether to have hope in creatures or Creator? Those who are temporary, subject to change with time, relatively untrustworthy and are dependent on other such factors like themselves Or the One is Absolute, Powerful, Trustworthy, Independent and Permanent? Definitely an intelligent, wise and rational person will put his trust in God and attach fulfilment all his hopes to Him and remember his ultimate return to Him.

Conclusion

Imam Ali (a) said: **“Obedience to one’s carnal self and its inordinate desires is the foundation of every suffering and the source of every misguidance.”** [*Ghurar al-Hikam wa Durar al-Kalim*, hadith # 3486]

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