

## ALI 435 - Readings #3

### Spiritual and Moral Advice

Moral counsel, according to the Qur'an, is one of the three ways of invitation towards God (hikmah, maw'izah, al jidal al-hasan, i.e. wisdom, good admonition, and honourable debate, as mentioned in 16: 125).

The difference between hikmah (wisdom, philosophy) and maw'izah (spiritual and moral advice and admonition) lies in this that hikmah is for instruction and imparting knowledge, while maw'izah is meant for reminding. Hikmah is struggle against ignorance and maw'izah is struggle against negligence and indifference.

Hikmah deals with the intellect and maw'izah appeals to the heart. Hikmah educates, while maw'izah prepares the intellect for employment of its reserves. Hikmah is a lamp and maw'izah is an eye-opener.

Hikmah is for ratiocination, while maw'izah is for self-awakening. Hikmah is the language of the intellect, while maw'izah is the message for the spirit. Accordingly, the personality of the speaker plays an essential role in maw'izah, which is not the case with hikmah. In hikmah, two minds communicate in an impersonal manner. But in maw'izah the situation is like the passage of an electric charge that flows from the speaker, who is at a higher potential, to the listener.

Maw'izah also differs from khitabah (oratory, rhetoric). Although oratory also deals with emotions, but it seeks to stir and agitate them. Maw'izah on the other hand is intended to pacify emotions and it seeks to bring them under control. Oratory is effective when emotions are inert and stagnant; maw'izah is required when lusts and passions become unmanageable.

Rhetoric and counsel are both necessary and essential, and the Nahj al-balaghah makes use of both of them. The main thing is to judge the right time for the use of each of them.

The impassioned speeches of Amir al-Mu'minin ('a) were delivered at a time when it was necessary to stir up passions and to build up a tempest to destroy an unjust and oppressive structure, such as at the time of the Battle of Siffin when 'Ali ('a) delivered a fiery speech before the engagement with Mu'awiyah's forces. However, 'Ali's mawaiz were delivered in different conditions. During the days of the first three caliphs, and

particularly during 'Uthman's rule, immeasurable amounts of wealth and booty won through consecutive victories flowed into Muslim hands.

Due to the absence of any careful programmes for correct utilization of that wealth, particularly due to the aristocratic, or rather tribal, rule during the reign of 'Uthman, moral corruption, worldliness, and love of comfort and luxury found their way into the Muslim society. Tribal rivalries were revived, and racial prejudice between Arabs and non-Arabs was added to it. In that clamour for worldliness and mounting prejudices, rivalries, and greed for greater share of the war booty, the only cry of protest charged with spiritual exhortation was that of 'Ali ('a).

Out of the 241 fragments collected under the title 'Khutab' by al-Sayyid al-Radi about 86 can be classed as mawa'iz or at least contain a series of spiritual advices. Some of them, however, are elaborate and lengthy, like the khutbah 176, the khutbah named 'al-Qasi'ah; (which is the longest of the sermons of the Nahj al-balaghah), and the khutbah 93 (called khutbat al-muttaqin, the 'Sermon of the Pious').

Out of some seventy-nine passages that are classed as 'kutub' letters, about twenty-five, either completely or partially, consist of spiritual and moral teachings. Some of them are quite lengthy and elaborate-like letter 31, which constitutes 'Ali's advice to his son al-Imam al-Hasan al-Mujtaba ('a), and the lengthiest of all, except the famous directive sent to Malik al-'Ashtar. Another one is letter 45, the well-known epistle of 'Ali ('a) to Uthman ibn Hunayf, his governor in Basrah.

In order to understand this aspect of the Nahj al-balaghah, or, in other words, to understand 'Ali ('a) when he speaks as a moral and spiritual counsellor and to understand his didactic outlook, so as to draw benefit from that ever flowing source, it is not enough to enumerate the various themes and topics dealt with by 'Ali ('a) in his discourses.

It is not sufficient merely to remark that 'Ali ('a) has spoken about taqwa, tawakkul or zuhd; rather, we must see what significance did he attribute to these words. We must uncover his didactic philosophy regarding the development of the human character and his perception of the human aspiration for piety, purity, freedom, and deliverance from spiritual servitude and thralldom. It is essential to elaborate somewhat the specific meanings of these terms in 'Ali's vocabulary

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