

An Introduction to al-Tabarsi's MAKARIM AL-AKHLAQ

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Introduction

The Holy Quran introduces the Prophet (s) as the noble paradigm for mankind, and the Prophet (s) himself declared the purpose of his mission was to perfect the honorable morals. Because of this, for many years Islamic scholars have, inscribed and recorded the virtuous manners of the Prophet (s) and his noble characteristics. Among these writings, the book *Makarim al-Akhlaq*, by Shaykh Abu Nasr Hasan b. Fadl al-Tabarsi, a scholar in the sixth century A.H, is one of the most renowned works, which has also become an important source of Islamic morality and manners.

Radi al-Din Hasan b. Fadl al-Tabarsi, a jurisprudent, traditionist, and Shiite scholar was born in a scholarly household. There is no precise information available on the exact date and location of his birth. His father, Amin al-Din Fadl b. Hasan (d. 548 A.H), is the author of the famous exegesis of the Quran, *Majma' al-Bayan li 'Ulum al-Qur'an*, and the book, *Jawami' al-Jami'*, which he wrote per his son's request. There is some uncertainty regarding the exact date of al-Tabarsi's death as well. Some have mistakenly associated the information regarding a trip to Sabziwar, passing away in 548 A.H, being transported afterwards to Mashhad, and buried in *Qatlgah* to him, instead of his father. The fact that al-Tabarsi has narrated from *al-*

Masmu'at of Muhammad b. Isma'il Mashhadi in *Makarim al-Akblaq* implies that he probably resided in Mashhad in the final years of his life. However, it is also possible that Ibn Isma'il Mashhadi might have traveled to Sabziwar or met al-Tabarsi elsewhere. On the other hand, since al-Tabarsi concluded the compilation of *Makarim al-Akblaq* before his father's demise (548 A.H) and subsequently commenced writing his other book, *al-Jami'*, in the middle of which he passed away, he must not have lived too long after his father. According to Husayn Nuri Tabarsi, the author had passed the age of fifty when he composed the book.

Attribution of the Book to al-Tabarsi

The attribution of *Makarim al-Akblaq* to Hasan b. Fadl al-Tabarsi as its author is a historically undoubted fact, since the book has grasped the attention of many scholars and traditionists from the start and has been considered as one of the Shi'ie *hadith* sources. In addition, there are many manuscripts of the book which are all identical from start to finish in chapters and sections and their contents.

Sources of MAKARIM AL-AKHLAQ

Since the *hadiths* mentioned in *Makarim al-Akblaq* lack a thorough chain of transmitters, the book has been viewed by some scholars with skeptical observations. Nevertheless, this does not degrade its high status, because the author has relied on credible and well-known sources in his citations. Moreover, the author himself is considered a renowned and reliable Shiite scholar, and this also gives his work value and reliability. Omitting the transmitters from the pages of the book might have been for the sake of taking less space. Moreover, the book was intended to be a book of ethics and morality rather than jurisprudence, and such works are regarded as requiring a less strict approach.

Variety of Topics

Makarim al-Akhlaq is concerned with narrated ethics and morals, without taking any philosophical or mystical approaches. It portrays a quite comprehensive outlook of Islam's normative ethics and morals, including such detailed topics as hygienic issues.

As previously mentioned, *Makarim al-Akhlaq* can be described as a work that introduces the Islamic ethics and manners. Combining ethics with manners is a typical attribute of works that have been written on Islamic revealed or scripture-based ethics. However, since this article seeks to introduce a work on Islamic ethics, its main concern will be to focus on the ethical instructions mentioned in the book, rather than the manners discussed in it.

Before proceeding, it is necessary to become familiar with the spheres of Islamic normative ethics. It must be noted that most of the concepts mentioned within specific spheres could be included in other areas as well. For instance, concepts such as remembrance, pure intention, piety, etc. cannot be confined to a single sphere, for they are fundamentals of ethics that can be spotted in all ethical realms.

At any rate, the Islamic normative ethics has the following four spheres:

- The sphere of ethical worship, which covers the virtues and vices pertaining to God's connection with man, such as faith, fear, and reliance.
- The sphere of individual ethics, which comprises the virtues and vices relating to the personal character of human beings, regardless of one's relation with another person, such as patience, wisdom, discretion, overeating, hastiness, and foolishness.
- The sphere of social ethics, which deals with the virtues and vices human beings may bear in relation with one another, such as justice, benevolence, jealousy, boasting, equality, sacrifice, etc.

- The sphere of family ethics, which addresses ethical values belonging to the sphere of family relations. (Ahmadpoor 2007, 22-3)

Structure of the Book

Makarim al-Akblaq consists of an introduction and twelve chapters. Each chapter is comprised of several sections containing dozens of traditions regarding ethics and religious manners.

In the first volume of the book, which mostly pertains to personal manners, we witness many ethical attributes that fall within one or more than one of the four spheres mentioned above. In the second volume, the topic of supplication and related aspects, such as prayers, charms, and amulets, have been discussed along with different ethical attributes and their specific ethical domain.

After praising the Lord and sending salutations on the Prophet (s) and his chosen descendants, al-Tabarsi unveils his intention of writing the book by citing the following verse, “In the Apostle of Allah there is certainly for you a good exemplar, for those who look forward to Allah and the Last Day, and remember Allah greatly” (Quran 33:21), and he further reminds his readers that all the believers must follow the Prophet’s (s) footsteps. Al-Tabarsi then states that his main motivation for writing the book was to display the Prophet’s (s) honorable morals and his elegant manners. Given that knowledge is a prerequisite for awareness and action, he subsequently refers to a beautiful tradition from Imam Ali (a) in which the Imam (a) emphasizes the fact that the Prophet (s) is the best example for the believers and all must follow him (Tabarsi 1991, 9).

In the first chapter of the book, al-Tabarsi describes the external attributes (*khalq*) and the moral qualities (*khuluq*) of the Prophet (s). First, the author mentions the Prophet’s external attributes, such as having an illuminant and charming face, fair height, appealing white

teeth, and wide chest. The section also presents a short glimpse upon the Prophet's elegant behavior with others (Tabarsi 1991, 11-5).

Next, , the author points out several moral virtues of the Prophet (s), based on the book, *Sharaf al-Nabi*, written by Abu Sa'id Khargushi Nishaburi, a Sufi scholar from the fourth century A.H; moral virtues, such as humbleness, modesty, forgiveness, braveness, patience with people, inquiry of and sympathy for his companions, etc. The Prophet's (s) humbleness was manifest in greeting children and women, fitting in with the people such that if a stranger were to enter a gathering, he would not be able to distinct the Prophet from others. Other manifestations of the Prophet's humbleness included taking care of his chores and duties himself, and his laughter, humour, cry, etc. (Tabarsi 1991, 15-22).

The Prophet's other moral features consisted of invariably choosing the hardest of the two tasks to avoid idleness and indolence; he was never afraid of hardship. When he would shake someone's hands, he would show extreme kindness and hospitality to the point where he would never initiate in pulling his hand away. He would always have respect for others in gatherings and would never stretch his legs before them. Due to his constant application of perfume, when an appealing smell of perfume would be sensed, everybody knew that the Prophet had arrived. He would always state that the best of you is he who is the kindest. He would pay deep respect to the leaders of any race and nation and would also encourage his followers to do so as well (Tabarsi 1991, 23-32).

Now that we have mentioned the external attributes and moral qualities of the Prophet (s), we will explain some of the ethical concepts mentioned in *Makarim al-Akhlaq* and discuss each of them in its own related sphere.

1. The Morals of Servitude

Mankind serve what they devotedly love and feel attached to. Therefore, worshipping and serving God is only possible under one condition: love and affection. This is exactly why those who have gone astray and have been misled by worldly attractions serve their worldly interests; they do so because they are fond of those material pleasures. On the other hand, those who are in love with God, who is truly worthy of love, never choose anything over Him and never compare His love to anything else: “[T]he faithful have a more ardent love for Allah” (Quran 2:165).

They invariably remember their Beloved to the point where everyone assumes they are insane (Tabarsi 1991, 311). The main manifestation of their love for God is the sincere servitude to God they implement in their lives by following His Prophet:

قل إن كنتم تحبون الله فاتبعوني يحببكم الله و يغفر لكم ذنوبكم و الله
غفور رحيم

Say, ‘If you love Allah, then follow me; Allah will love you and forgive you your sins, and Allah is all-forgiving, all-merciful. (Quran 3:31).

The first step in embracing God’s love is to follow the teachings of His messengers. This is by far the most excellent relationship imagined between the creator and the created. If one truly loves God, the Quran prepares him for embracing His love. It also warns that if one fails to follow the path encouraged by the messengers, he will not be among God’s loved ones.

According to *Makarim al-Akhlaq*, servitude to God requires the following moral attributes:

1-1. 1. Remembrance

Remembrance of God is a prevailing concept in almost every domain of ethical discussion. Remembrance of God consists of being aware of our presence before the Omniscient and All-Wise. It is the base and origin of all high morals. We have been encouraged to remember God in every situation and under any circumstance by the Quran and the traditions.

The Prophet (s) would constantly remember the Almighty (Tabarsi 1991, 14) His advice to Ibn Mas'ud reads, "Never allow your tongue to rest of God's name and always recite the Four Glorifications¹; this is indeed a profitable trade ... Be with those who are in constant remembrance of God, and never rest from worship and servitude to Him." (Tabarsi 1991, 455-6) The Prophet also called the gatherings in which God is remembered "gardens of Paradise" (Tabarsi 1991, 307). He also said that nothing should make one forget the remembrance of God, for we have not been created in vain. Similarly, the Prophet (s) said, "Do not allow worldly manifestations to misguide you, for God says, 'Did you think that We had created you for a playful purpose and that you were not to return to Us' [Quran 23:115]" (Tabarsi 1991, 453). The wise Luqman encouraged his child to attend gatherings where the attendants would always remind him of the Lord: in such gatherings, one learns what one did not know or is at least informed of one's misunderstandings; moreover, there is a promising possibility that the mercy which embraces that certain group will perhaps include him as well (Tabarsi 1991, 311).

The reason there has been so much emphasis on the remembrance of God Almighty is that one who remembers God is aware of His supervision and existence; as a result, that person is alert not to disobey his Lord.

¹ i.e., saying, "*Subhan Allah wa al-Hamd li Allah wa la Ilah illa Allah wallahu akbar.*"

1-2. Invocation:

One of the most excellent examples of remembrance is invocation. The morality of a worshipper is best portrayed in the form of intimate prayer. Essentially, the reason God embraces the creation with His mercy is their invocation to Him, for God himself has said, "Say, 'What store my Lord would set by you were it not for your supplication?'" (Quran 25:77).

Regarding the importance and manners of supplication, many traditions have been narrated within al-Tabarasi's book, some of which are as follows:

Invocation is the highest level of worship. (Tabarsi 1991, 268)

Invocation changes the divine decree. (Ibid.)

Invocation is the weapon of the believer. (Ibid.)

The weakest of all people is he who is weak in prayer. (Ibid.)

Succeeding in supplication at the time of calamities is the sign of its ending. (Ibid.)

Prayer at the time of easement results in fulfilment of needs in the time of despair. (Ibid.)

Insistence upon invocation, having *wudu*, praying two *rak'at* prayers, etc., is part of the manners of invocation. (Ibid.)

If prayer is not truly done from within our heart, it will not be answered (Ibid., p. 270).

Invocation heals all afflictions (Ibid. 271).

1-3. Pure Intention:

Remembrance of God is accepted by God when it is done with pure intention (*ikhlas*). This is why the Prophet (s) said, "Whoever says, 'There is no god but Allah' with pure intention will enter paradise, and his pure intention is proven in the fact that it prevents him from committing the forbidden" (Ibid. 310).

Pure intention is regarded in Islamic ethics as essential for man's behavior to be considered ethical. God has demanded His creatures to call Him with pure intentions: "He is the Living One, there is no god except Him. So supplicate Him, putting exclusive faith in Him. All praise belongs to Allah, Lord of all the world" (Quran 40:65). The Prophet (s) told Ibn Mas'ud, "When you act, act with pure intention, for God accepts only pure actions" (Tabarsi 1991, 453). He also said, "O Son of Mas'ud! If you do a good deed for others to see, do not expect any blessings, for God says, 'On the Day of Resurrection We will not set for them any weight' [Quran 18:105]" (Tabarsi 1991, 453). Additionally, the truly faithful not only empty their intentions of worldly and material benefits, but also cleanse their intentions of fear of Hellfire and love for Paradise. They worship God only out of sheer love and attachment to Him, because He is worthy of worship. This is the highest level of worship.

Striving for the enhancement of society with pure intention is highly valuable. If someone performs to receive gratitude and admiration, he will not continue to do an efficient job when neglected. However, if pure intention governs one's actions, his conduct will never be affected by flattery or by ungratefulness of others.

1-4. Manners of Being in the Presence of God

A moral servant of God always realizes that he is standing and acting in the presence of God and therefore implements proper manners at all times by imitating the actions of the Prophet (s). Imam Sadiq (a) has described the Prophet's (s) manners in the constant presence of God as follows: "The Holy Prophet (s), out of humbleness [and respectfulness in the presence of God], would never lean to anything while eating" (Tabarsi 1991, 27). He would always sit and eat like a slave, who understands the presence of his Lord (Tabarsi 1991, 27). This is why we are also encouraged to sit this way when eating (Tabarsi 1991, 141); we need to remind ourselves constantly that the whole world with all its blessings is created by God and we are all in His presence; we have to remember our Lord and be respectful to Him especially when benefiting from His blessings.

1-5. Gratification and Asking for Forgiveness

The moral man, who believes that God has equipped him with blessings that will advance him – if correctly implemented – in his pursuit of perfection, constantly remembers God by being grateful for His blessings. If a calamity occurs, such a person understands that only he and his own actions are to blame. According to Imam Ali (a), the pious have no concern at night other than giving gratitude and no concern during the day other than constantly remembering God (Tabarsi 1991, 476).

One must be grateful for God's blessings, and demonstrate the gratitude in words and deeds, for being ungrateful reduces one's blessings in life; Imam Ali (a) has said, "Whoever is not grateful for a blessing will be punished by losing it" (Sabari-Yazdi 1978, 647). The Prophet (s) says, "Be grateful for God's blessings before they are taken away, and know that they will vanish and return on the Day of Judgment to plead against how you behaved with them" (Tabarsi 1991, 140).

If a blessing is taken away from someone, it is because of his own bad deeds. To have them back, such a person must acknowledge his action and immediately repent. Imam Sadiq (a) told Sufyan al-Thawri,

Sufyan! Whenever God grants you with a certain blessing, thank Him for it a lot, for God Almighty says, "If you are grateful, I will surely enhance you [in blessing]" [Quran 14:7]. O Sufyan! Whenever your provision decreases, insist on asking forgiveness from God, for He states, "Plead with your Lord for forgiveness, then turn to Him penitently: He will send copious rains for you from the sky, and add power to your [present] power" [Quran 11:52]. (Shaykh al-Tabarsi 2001, 148)

In addition, being grateful for divine blessings and being penitent ensure one's felicity and happiness, as Imam Ali (a) says, "Whoever pays heed to three things will become felicitous: if a blessing was bestowed upon you, praise God; if your provision decreased, ask God for forgiveness; and if you were afflicted with a difficulty, say, 'there is no power or strength save by God'" (Ashtiyani 1983, 1:328)

We must note that we have to show our gratefulness to other humans who give us the chance to benefit from God's blessings as well, because being ungrateful to God's creatures is a sign of being ungrateful to God. Imam Rida (a) said, "Whoever does not thank the created has not thanked God Almighty" (Majlisi 1982, 68:44). The Prophet (s) also said, "Whoever does not thank the people has not thanked God" (Khurramshahi and Ansari 1997, 863). Being grateful to God's servants who have done good to us is to encourage one another in doing good and helping each other.

1-6. Repentance:

Whoever believes in the magnificence of God and appreciates His blessings always remembers Him. Such a person never, not even for the slightest moment, considers disobeying His Master. However, those who forget the presence of God and lose their intellectual discretion by falling within the dark realms of carnal desire and commit sin should immediately repent, cleanse themselves of their wrongdoing, and return to their forgiving Lord. Otherwise, their power to overcome Satan gradually deteriorates, and they will reach a point where they will never be able to repent. As Imam Ali (a) says,

May God bless he who hastens his repentance and delays his pleasure (i.e., the pleasure of sin), for his distant aspirations fool him, his time of death is hidden from him, and Satan is always with him, making him delay repentance by [reminding him of] his aspirations and by constantly beautifying sin to him until he commits it. (Daylami 1991, 1:32)

1-7. Fear and Hope

One who understands God's greatness and His mercy, sees himself inundated with God's endless blessings, and is aware of the consequences of ungratefulness is, on the one hand, full of awe and fear and, on the other hand, full of hope. This is how the Prophet (s) encouraged his companion to be fearful of Allah: "O Ibn Mas'ud! Be fearful of God and obey the obligatory commandments" (Tabarsi 1991) He also stated, "Fear God as if you can see Him, for if you are not able to see Him, He is seeing you" (Tabarsi 1991). In addition, he stated, "In the Hereafter, a palace built of jewels and pearls is granted upon every single teardrop fallen in fear of God" (Tabarsi 1991). When Prophet Musa (a) asked God of the reward given to the person whose face is wet in tears of fearing God, the Almighty replied: "I will

protect his face from Hellfire and keep him safe in the midst of the horror of Resurrection” (Tabarsi 1991, 316).

However, fear and awe are only one of the two wings required for reaching perfection. The other wing is hopefulness of God, without which one cannot reach the heights of perfection. One's fear of God and his hope of attracting His mercy must equal each other and balance out. Hope revives the heart and fear slays the evil-inciting soul. Imam Sadiq (a) says, “Fear [of God] is the attentive guardian of the soul, and hope is its intercessor” (Majlisi 1982, 67:390). This explains why hopelessness of God's mercy has been extremely prohibited and is perceived as one of the major sins (Falsafi 1989, 3:439).

2. Personal Morals

As we mentioned earlier, some moral characteristics pertain to one's own personality, apart from his relations with others. We also mentioned a number of noble personal morals of the Prophet (s). . Now we will discuss the Prophet's (s) personal characteristics in more detail, focusing on what al-Tabarsi says in *Makarim al-Akhlaq* in this regard.

2-1. Humbleness:

Humbleness is one of the morals that can be studied within both the personal and social spheres of ethics. We will discuss the personal aspect of this moral attribute which will help us understand its social side as well. Humbleness holds a unique position among the righteous attributes of mankind. If this attribute is utilized in one's life, it will certainly bring along many other valuable attributes as well. In the Quran, the true believers have been described as those who walk on earth with humbleness (Quran 25:63). The Prophet (s) has also taught that the sweetness of worship will only be conceived through humbleness (Ashtiyani 1983, 1:186). One's characteristics and actions

are the reflection of his thoughts and beliefs. One can only reach the level of true servitude by seeing himself as a single drop of water in the midst of an endless ocean and perceive this world and everything within it as manifestations of its creator. This is how he can feel the true meaning of worship and servitude, for praising God Almighty is only accepted and admired through humility before Him.

However, humbleness before other fellow human beings is described as not regarding yourself better than others and this is manifested in manners and behaviours that demonstrate respect and hospitality (Naraqı n.d., 300). Some people are worried that they may be belittled if they show humbleness to others, but this is not true. In fact, humbleness brings magnanimity in the eyes of God and in the eyes of people, because it shows the greatness of one's personality and soul. We all admire humbleness and humble people, even though we may not practice this virtue ourselves. The Prophet (s) said, "Indeed, humbleness merely brings greatness to a person, so be humble; may God have mercy on you" (Falsafi 1989, 1:65). He also said, "The most loved one of you to me and the closest one of you to me on the Day of Judgment is the kindest and most humble of you; and the furthest of you from me on the Day of Judgment are the arrogant" (Majlisi 1982, 68:385).

Living a simple life, taking the lead in greeting one another, socializing with people who have a lower social class than us, showing warmth in communication, and refraining from showing off and boasting—especially before our elders and teachers—are among the examples of humbleness. The Prophet (s) was an exemplar of this noble characteristic. He would visit the sick, attend funerals, accept the invitation of slaves and servants, sit on the ground, greet children and women, sew his own clothes, cobble and patch his own shoes, etc (Tabarsi 1991, 15-6).

The Prophet's (s) high status among Muslims and his greatness in the eyes of his enemies were results of his high morals and his sincere

humbleness. He believed that “whoever is humble for God, God will grant him greatness” (Tabarsi 1991, 32). Regarding the humbleness of the Prophet (s), it has been narrated, “No one was more beloved to the people than the Prophet (s) and when they would see him they would not stand for him, because they knew he would not like to be treated that way” (Tabarsi 1991, 16). Once, a man came to the Prophet to speak with him but started trembling. The Prophet (s) told him, “Do not worry! I am the son of the woman who would eat *al-qadd* [i.e., a simple food]” (Tabarsi 1991, 16).

It is obvious that if everyone practices this attribute in his life, everyone will respect one another's rights, and this will promote justice and equality throughout the society. This is why the Prophet (s) particularly advised the people to be humble: “Be humble with each other, so that no one suppresses the other” (Warram n.d., 2:120).

2-2. Zuhd and Contentment:

Zuhd means to be indifferent to a matter and abandon it (Tarihi 1995, 3:59). This is why this word has been used for asceticism, i.e., lack of interest in material objects and worldly pleasures. Contentment (*qana'ah*), on the other hand, means to be satisfied with the least worldly possessions one could live with; it is the opposite of greed (Tarihi 1995, 4:384). The following are some traditions about these two noble characteristics:

- Whoever is content with the little God has granted him, God will be satisfied with his few deeds (Tabarsi 1991, 148).
- Imam Sadiq (a) narrates from Imam Ali (a) that “whoever is content with the essentials of his life, the least amount will be sufficient for him; otherwise, no amount will be enough for him” (Tabarsi 1991, 99).
- Midan says, “I have not seen anybody more ascetic than Ali (a). I swear to God, I never saw him wear more than two *Qatwani* garments till the day he passed away” (Tabarsi 1991, 99).

- One who longs for Paradise will surpass others in doing good; one who is afraid of Hellfire will refrain from the worldly pleasures; one who anticipates death will turn away from his desires; and whoever is ascetic in this world, difficulties will not bother him (Tabarsi 1991, 447).

Hence, we see many Quranic verses and traditions advising not to be attached to the material aspects of this world: “This (material) world and everything within it and whoever seeks it or is fond of it is cursed” (Tabarsi 1991, 453).

The moral man, who has truly forsaken this world, will not grieve when losing something, he will not envy those who achieve material possessions, and he will not become excessively happy upon obtaining worldly gains. This virtue a man to have a happy and pure life. Imam Ali (a) said, “Asceticism is between two words of the Quran [where] Allah says, ‘so that you may not grieve for what escapes you, nor exult for what comes your way’[Quran 57:23]. Whoever does not grieve over the loss and does not exult for the gain has indeed grasped the two sides of asceticism” (Majlisi 1982, 70:52).

Contentment will also grant a happy and easy life to mankind. The pure life promised to the believers (Quran 16:97) has been interpreted as contentment (Daylami 1991, 1:118) and contentment has been described as an endless treasure and a good provision (Daylami 1991, 1:118).

2-3. Piety and Abstinence

Piety and abstinence are two similar ethical concepts with the exception that abstinence is the highest level of piety. The word used in Arabic for piety is *taqwa*, meaning guarding and protecting. In Quranic use, it denotes the protection of the soul from disobeying God and instead being focused on seeking His satisfaction. On the other hand, *Wara'*, the word for abstinence in Arabic, means either protecting the soul to the highest extent while being worried about

wavering, or denotes being strict on the soul for glorifying God (Imam Khomeini 1999, 206, 474).

Piety and abstinence are two requirements of a moral lifestyle. It is important to refrain from committing certain deeds, the same way we abstain from eating certain foods in order to prevent illness. The Prophet (s) states, "I am surprised of those who do not eat lest they become sick, but commit sin with no fear of Hellfire" (Tabarsi 1991, 147). Imam Ali (a) says, "Abstain from sin, for there is no affliction worse and more fearsome than it" (Tabarsi 1991, 316). He also states, "In public and private, on land and on the sea, and in day and night be pious, for God says, 'There is no secret talk among three, but He is their fourth [companion], nor among five but He is their sixth, nor less than that, nor more, but He is with them wherever they may be' [Quran 58:7]" (Tabarsi 1991, 454).

In another tradition, we read, "O Abadharr! Pay more attention to piety than to the deeds, for the least deed is not considered insignificant when accompanied with piety; and how can an action that is accepted by God be insignificant: God Almighty says, 'Allah accepts only from the God-wary [i.e., the pious]' [Quran 5:27]" (Tabarsi 1991, 468).

It may be because of the profound role piety plays in the formation of faith that the author has concluded the book with the sermon of *Muttaqin* (the pious) from *Nahj al-Balaghah* (Tabarsi 1991, 475-7).

Abstinence has also been recommended significantly in traditions. As we said before, the Arabic word for abstinence, *wara'*, literally means the utmost level of piety and forbearance (Farahidi 1989, 2:242). Abstinence is so important that without it, one's actions are considered incomplete: the Prophet (s) says, "O Ali! Three things must be present for one's action to be complete: the piety to prevent him from committing forbidden acts, the morality for forbearing with people, and the leniency to cope with the foolishness of the

ignorant” (Tabarsi 1991, 437). Essentially, the traditions consider piety and abstinence to be the criteria of faith. The Prophet (s) told Abadhar, “Oh Abadhar! The standard of faith is piety and abstinence, and the head of religion is obedience” (Tabarsi 1991, 468).

2-4. Reliance upon God

This world is as a great ocean in which man is in motion. He must ride on the ship of faith in order to reach salvation. Luqman advises his son, “O my son! Life is a deep ocean that many have drowned in. Your saving ship is faith in God, the sails are reliance upon Him, and your provision is piety; if you are salvaged, it is by God’s mercy, and if you are not, it is because of your own deeds” (Tabarsi 1991, 254). Reliance upon God is man’s greatest support and help as the Prophet (s) says, “Oh Abadhar! If you seek to be the strongest and firmest of all people, rely upon God” (Tabarsi 1991, 468).

Some people wrongly regard caution and hard-working as against reliance upon God, while there is no inconsistency between the two. Reliance upon God is when one does everything he is responsible for, then leaves the rest to God and relies on Him for the success of his work. Pay attention to the prominent point mentioned in the following tradition: Ya‘qub b. Salim says, “I asked Imam Sadiq (a) whether I can keep *dirhams* with images carved on them in my belt while being a *muhrim*. He replied, ‘This is alright, it is your provision and—after God—your support’” (Tabarsi 1991, 267).

2-5. Modesty

Similar to faith, modesty is innately instilled in the soul of mankind, inclining him towards good and keeping him away from evil. Imam Sadiq (a) regarded modesty to be so close to faith that it is as if they are tied together with one rope; if one goes away, the other goes as well. He also said, “Modesty is related to faith; he who is not modest is not faithful” (Kulayni 1986, 2:106).

Modesty has different levels. Most people are modest and self-restrained in front of others, i.e., they are ashamed to commit sin when other people are around. There are some people, however, who feel ashamed of committing sin even when they are alone. This level, which is a higher level of modesty, is for those believers who constantly consider themselves to be in the presence of God. Such people have trained themselves to react firmly when faced with temptation to sin. They do not even allow themselves to think about it, let alone commit it. Imam Ali (a) says, "The highest and final level of modesty is when one is ashamed [to commit sins] in his own presence" (Tamimi Amudi 1987, 236). This is only possible when one has reached the highest level of faith and always sees himself standing before God: "Chastity is of faith, and faith is in Paradise" (Kulayni 1986, 2:106). God blesses such people by showing others their impeccable image. Once again, Imam Ali (a) says, "No one will see the deficiencies of he who wears the clothing of modesty" (Majlisi 1982, 68:337).

However, mankind may fall victim to certain bad deeds, after which he must immediately and regretfully repent. If he does not show such a reaction, every bad deed will gradually appear good to him. This is why Imam Ali (a) says, "One who makes a lot of mistakes is immodest, and one who is immodest is less careless about committing sin, and one who abstains less from committing sin will eradicate his soul, and one who has eradicated his soul will go to Hellfire" (Majlisi 1982, 68:286). Such a person will not be ashamed of anything, eventually showing boldness in front of his Lord. This is why Imam Ali (a) says, "Whoever is not ashamed before others will not be ashamed before God" (Tamimi Amudi 1987, 257).

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