

SOME DISCIPLINES OF ISTI`ADHAH

Al-Khumeini (AR)

Allah, the Exalted, says: *"And when you recite the Qur'an take refuge in Allah from the outcast Satan. He has no authority over those who believe and on their Lord rely. His authority is only over those who befriend him and those who associate partner with Him."* [361]

- Among the important disciplines of recitation, especially the recitation in the salat, which is a spiritual journey to Allah, the real ascension and the ladder to reach the people of Allah, is the isti`adhah - *seeking refuge in Allah, from the outcast Satan, who is the thorn of the road to knowledge, and blocks the way of the salik's travel to Allah.*
- As Allah, the Exalted, says through him, in the blessed surah of al-`Araf: "He said: `As You have led me astray, I shall lurk in ambush for them on Your straight path." [362]
- He has sworn to lurk for the sons of Adam on the straight path to prevent them from entering it.
- So, the salat, which is the straight path of humanity and the ascension for reaching Allah, cannot take place without isti`adhah from this brig and, without taking refuge in the fortified fort of Divinity from his evil, there can be no security.
- This isti'adhah, this taking of refuge, cannot be implemented with empty utterances, a lifeless form or a world with no Hereafter.

It is observed that there were people who did utter these words for forty or fifty years, yet they were not saved from the evil of this bandit, and, actually, in their conducts and acts, and even in their beliefs they followed Satan and imitated him.

- Had we really taken refuge from the evils of this wicked one, the Sacred Essence of Allah, the Exalted, Who is the Absolute Gracious, the Omnipotent, the All-Merciful, the All-knowing and Generous, would have granted us His protection, and our faith, moralities and deeds would have been amended.
- So, we must know that our being left behind the travelers on the road to Allah is due to Satan's temptations and because we have fallen under his control owing to our own shortcomings and inefficiency in applying the spiritual disciplines and acquiring the required conditions of the heart.

- So, it is because of this that we get nothing of the spiritual results and the external and internal effects of our invocations , supplications and worships. From the noble ayahs of the Qur'an and the noble hadiths of the infallible Imams (SA) many disciplines can be discovered. But to count them all would need a complete scrutinizing research, which prolongs the discussion. It suffices us to mention only a few of them.
- One of the important disciplines of isti`adhah is "sincerity", as Allah the Exalted, quotes Satan to have said: "By your Might I will tempt them all, except Your sincere servants from among them" [363]
- This "sincerity", as is clear from this noble ayah, is something higher than the practical sincerity, whether by the heart or by the limbs, because, it is in the objective case [in its Arabic form = mukhlasin].
- Had it been for sincerity in action, it should have been in the nominative case.
- Therefore, this sincerity is intended to denote the purification of the human personality with all the visible and invisible affairs, of whose emissions is the practical sincerity. Although, at the beginning of the suluk, this fact and divine grace would not easily take place except by difficult practical austerities, especially the cordial ones, which are its origin, as is referred to in the well-known hadith:
- " The one who keeps being sincere to Allah for forty mornings, fountains of wisdom will flow from his heart to his tongue." [364]

So, whoever could sincerely devote himself to Allah for forty mornings-which is the period of fermenting [takhmir] the clay [tinat] of which Adam was created,

the connection between these two is well-known to the people of knowledge and of heart-

and dedicate his cordial and formal acts sincerely to Allah, his heart will become godly, and the godly heart produces nothing other than fountains of wisdom.

Then, his tongue, which is the greatest interpreter of the heart, will speak wisdom.

- So, at the beginning, sincerity of the act leads to the purification of the heart, and when the heart becomes purified, the lights of Majesty and Beauty-which are deposited by divine fermentation [takhmir] in the human clay-are reflected in the mirror of the heart and become manifest there, and from the inmost of the heart they appear on the external body.
- In short, the sincerity, which frees one from the Satanic authority is devoting the identity of the soul [ruh] and the innermost of the heart to Allah, the Exalted.
- It is a reference to this that Imam Ali (AS), in his Sha`baniyah Supplication, says: "*O Allah, grant me complete devotion to you.*" [365]
- When the heart reaches this stage of sincerity and it is cut off other than Allah, and in the kingdom of his existence there is no admission to other than Allah, Satan-who approaches man by other than Allah's way-will have no power over him.
- Allah will admit him into His shelter, and he will be placed in the fortified fortress of divinity, as He says: "The word of `there is no god but Allah' is My fort, so whoever enters My fort is safe from My torture". [366]
- Entering the fort of "there is no god but Allah" is of several degrees. Likewise, being safe from the torture is also of several degrees.
- So, the one who, externally, internally, cordially and formally, is admitted to Allah's fortress and under His protection, will be safe from all degrees of torture, including being veiled off Allah's Beauty and being separated from meeting the Beloved, the Most High and Almighty-which veiledness and separation are at the top of the tortures.
- Imam Ali (AS), in the "Kumail Invocation", says: "Suppose that I can patiently bear Your torment, how can I patiently bear separation from You?"
- Our hand is short of that. The one who could reach that stage would be a real servant of Allah, under the vaults [domes] of divinity, and Allah, the Exalted, would manage his kingdom, getting him out of the Taghut's patronage.
- This is the dearest state for the men of Allah and the most special degree for the pure, and the others have no share of it.
- It is most likely that the owners of hard hearts among the deniers and of stiff souls among the obstinate, who are far away from such a state, deny it altogether and regard any talk about it to be false and in vain.

Or they rather take such affairs, which are the delight of the holy men [auliya'], and which are frequently mentioned by the Book and the Sunnah, to be - God forbid! - of the fabrications of the sufists and false rumours of the literalists.

- We, by referring to these states, which are, in fact, the states of the perfect ones, do not claim to have a share of them or look at them covetously. But, we do so because to deny them is not agreeable to us. We also believe that mentioning the holy men [auliya'] and their positions is effective in purging, saving and reforming the hearts, because good mention of the people of guardianship and knowledge causes affection, familiarity and close connection.
- Such connection leads to mutual attraction [tajadhub], which, in its turn leads to co-intercession [tashafu] , whose outward is getting out of the darkness of ignorance to the lights of guidance and knowledge.
- Its inward is the intercession in the Hereafter, because the intercession of the intercessors would not happen without close connection and inward co-attraction [tajadhub], since it would not be based on guess and batil [falsehood].

However, despite the fact that this stage is not but for the perfect ones among the holy men [auliya] and the chosen ones [asfiya'] (AS), and that the perfect state of this stage is, in the origin [bil'isalah], exclusively for the Seal of the Prophets (SA), the luminous and pure Ahmadian single [ahadi-i ahmadi], Muhammadan collective [jam -i muhammadi] heart, and subordinatively [bittaba iyah], it is for the perfect and pure ones of the Ahul Bayt -

- Yet the believers and the sincere ones are not to give up hoping for some of its degrees, and to be satisfied with formal and practical sincerity, and the external and juristic purity.
- Because, stopping in the stations, is one of the masterpieces of Iblis who is sitting at the entrance of the path of man and humanity, trying every possible means to prevent him from ascending to perfections and reaching higher stages.
- So, one has to double his vigilance and strengthen his will, so that this divine light and grace may move from the outside to the inside, and from the visible to the invisible.

- The more stages of sincerity one passes, the better he will be stationed under Allah's protection, and the truth of isti'adhah will be implemented, and the hands of the devilish Satan will be short of reaching him.

Hence,

if you have devoted the visible human form exclusively to Allah, and if you placed the external mundane armies of the soul, which are the powers dispersed in the kingdom of the body, under the shelter of Allah, and if you purified the seven earthly realms, which are: the eye, the ear, the tongue, the stomach, the sex, the hand and the leg, from the impurities of disobedience and placed them at the disposal of Allah's angels, who are the divine armies, these realms would gradually become divine and under the command of Allah, until they also become Allah's angels, or get like Allah's angels "Who do not disobey Allah in what He commands them, and do as they are commanded." [367]

- Hence, the first degree of isti'adhah takes place, and Satan and his soldiers leave the external kingdom and turn to the inside, assaulting the invisible powers of the soul.
- Thus, the salik's task becomes harder and his suluk stricter. So, his steps should be stronger, and his watchfulness more perfect. He is to take refuge in Allah, the Exalted, from the spiritual destructions, such as self-conceit, hypocrisy, arrogance, pride and the like, and to gradually start purifying his inside from the moral opacities and internal impurities.

In this stage, or rather in all stages, he is to be attentive to Allah's Unity of Acts, and to remind his heart of this divine grace and heavenly table [ma'idah], which are of the important matters of suluk and of the pillars of `uruj. He is also to make his heart taste the fact that Allah, the Exalted, is the owner of the heavens, the earth, the inside, the outside, the visible and the invisible, so that the heart may get accustomed to His Unity in diety and deny any association in management [tasarruf] and be divinely concocted and theistically educated.

- In this state the heart will find no asylum, refuge, sanctuary and help except with Allah alone, and, consequently and actually, he will seek refuge with Allah, the Sanctified State of Divinity.
- Unless he cuts off his heart from the others' management, and closes his eye of greed to other creatures, he cannot truthfully turn to get his refuge with Allah, and his claim will be a false one, and according to the method of he people of knowledge he will be regarded among the hypocrites, and ascribed to deceit and treason.

- In this fearful valley [wadi] and dangerous deep ocean, if one takes advantage of the sayings of a godly wiseman or a luminous gnostic, whose string of knowledge is connected to the perfect friends of Allah, concerning the Three Unities, it will be a good help to the inner heart.
- But the condition for taking that advantage is that he should do it regarding it as an ayah, a sign and suluk to Allah, for otherwise it would become a thorn on the road and a veil covering the face of the Beloved.
- The Messenger of Allah (SA), as it is stated in the noble al-Kafi, calls this knowledge an " indisputable ayah" [ayat-imuhkam]. [368]
- Generally speaking, when the root of Allah's Unity of Acts is strongly implanted in the heart, and irrigated with the water of knowledge accompanied with nice deeds, which knock at the heart's door, its fruit will be remembering the state of divinity, and the heart will gradually become pure and ready for receiving actual manifestation.
- When the house is free from the traitor, and the nest from the alien, the Owner of the house controls it and Allah's guarding hand brings the invisible and visible powers of the kingdom of the inside and the heart and of the outside kingdom of the body under its rule and authority.
- And the Satans are completely expelled from this stage, too, and the internal kingdom returns to its independence, which is being under Allah's shelter. This is the second degree of the divine grace, the isti'adhah.

After this stage come other stages, such as, the isti`adhah of the spirit and the isti'adhah of the secret, which are out of the scope of these pages. Even what was said was of the overflowing of this servant's pen, or it was written at the command of the pen of the Lord, Most High and Almighty, and to Him is the refuge.

- Another discipline and condition of isti'adhah is that which is referred to in the ayah stated at the beginning of this chapter, i.e. "faith" [iman], which is other than knowledge, even though it is proved by means of philosophic proofs: "The legs of the argumentatives are of wood". [369]
- Faith is a matter of the heart, and happens through intense remembrance, contemplation, intimacy and privacy with Allah.
- Despite the fact that Satan had knowledge about the Beginning and the Return, as the Qur'an says, he is counted with the disbelievers.

- If faith was this argumentative knowledge, those who possess this knowledge must be away from the intrusion of Satan, and the light of guidance of the Qur'an would illuminate their inside, whereas we notice that, despite such marks, there is no sign of faith.
- So, if we want to be out of Satan's control, and be under the protection of Allah, the Exalted, we must, by intense cordial austerity and continual, or frequent, proximity and privacy, bring the facts of faith to the heart in order to let it be divine.
- Then, having been so, it will be free from Satan's control, as Allah, the Exalted, says: "Allah is the Guardian of those who believe. He brings them out of darkness into the light." [370]
- So, the believers, whom Allah, the Exalted is the manager, the guardian of their inside and outside, their secret and their publicity, are free from Satan's control and enter into the Beneficent's kingdom.

He brings them out of all degrees of darkness to the absolute light: from the darkness of disobedience and insolence, the darkness of the dirty moral impurities, the darkness of ignorance, disbelief, polytheism, self-deceit, selfishness and self-admiration,

to the light of obedience and worship, the light of virtuous characters, the light of knowledge, perfection, faith, monotheism, godliness, piety and friendship with Allah.

- Another one of its disciplines is "reliance" [tawakkul] on Allah, which is also part of faith and of the real lights of the grace of faith.

It means entrusting the affairs to Allah, which results from the heart's belief in the Unity of Acts, whose details are out of the capacity of this book.

When the salik servant finds no refuge and no shelter other than Allah, and believes that the management of the affairs is exclusively confined to His Sacred Essence, a certain condition of devotion, refuge and trust show up in his heart, and his istiadhah becomes real.

- So, as he truthfully takes refuge in the strong fortress of the Lordship and divinity, He shall certainly protect him with His most spacious and generous mercy, for He is the possessor of great favour!

Completion and Conclusion

- We noted in this chapter that the truth of the isti'adhah is a mood or state of mind which is created by a complete evident knowledge of Allah's Unity of Acts, and by believing in that Unity.
- That is, after he understood, by way of explicit and strong intellectual proofs and traditional evidences, quoted from the Qur'anic texts, and through the signs and the wonders of the Divine Book and noble hadiths, that the Power of Creation and independence of effectiveness, or rather, the very origin of effect, is exclusively confined to the Sacred Divine Essence.
- Other beings have no share of it, as is proved in its stance, he should convince his heart of it, and, with the pen of intellect, he should write on the page of his heart the truth of "There is no god but Allah, and there is no effecter [mu'aththir] in the [world of] existence except Allah".
- When the heart takes in this grace of faith and proved fact, there appears in it a state of devotion and exclusivity [to Allah].
- Believing that Satan is the highway robber of humanity and its strong enemy, there appears in his heart an apprehensiveness, which is the reality of the isti'adhah.
- And, as the tongue is the spokesman of the heart, it translates that state of apprehensiveness, with complete need and necessity in words: "I take refuge in Allah from the accursed Satan," which it utters truthfully.
- If there were no effects of these facts in the heart, and it was under the control of Satan, as well as the other parts of one's existing kingdom, the isti'adhah also takes place, but with the management of Satan.
- And verbally he does say "I take refuge in Allah from Satan", but in fact, as it is an act of Satan himself, it is actually taking refuge in Satan from Allah, and the isti'adhah performs its counter function, and Satan mocks at the one who utters the isti'adhah - a mockery whose result is known only after removing the cover and pushing aside the curtain of nature.
- Such a person, whose isti'adhah is merely verbal, is like the one who wants to take refuge from an endless hostile army in a strong fortress, but instead, he heads to the enemy turning away from the fortress, while he continues saying: "I take refuge in this fortress from the evil of the enemy."
- Such a person, besides being inflicted with the evil of the enemy, becomes subject to the enemy's mockery, too.

Notes:

[361]. Surah an-Nahl: 98-100.

[362]. Surah al-A'raf: 16.

[363]. Surah Sad: 82-83.

[364]. Biharul Anwar, vol. 67, p. 242, "Book of Faith and Disbelief", ch. on "Sincerity", hadith 10, quoted from Uyunu Akhbarir-Ridha, vol. 2, p. 69 (with a slight difference). The same subject is referred to in the latter book, p. 249, hadith 25.

[365]. Biharul Anwar, vol. 91, p. 99.

[366]. At-Tauhid p. 25. Biharul Anwar, vol. 3, p. 13, and vol. 90, p. 192.

[367]. Surah at-Tahrim: 6.

[368]. "Knowledge is of three kinds: an indisputable ayah, a fair obligation and a current tradition." Usulul Kafi, vol. 1, p. 37, "Book of the Merit of Knowledge", ch. on "The Description of Knowledge and its Merits", hadith 1.

[369]. The legs of the argumentatives are of wood, Wooden legs are quite shaky. (By Maulawi)

[370]. Surah al-Baqarah: 257.