

GNOSTICISM

According to the scholars of Islam,

An Ascetic is one who renounces all worldly goods and pleasures. A Worshiper however, is one who is strict in performing acts of worship and is careful with his duties towards Allah (SWT). A Gnostic is one who diverts his attention from everything other than Allah (SWT).

Abu Ali Sina reports that the final stage (Gnosticism) can hardly be grasped or apprehended before the first two (Asceticism & Worship). *Indeed, every Gnostic is necessarily an ascetic and a worshiper, but every ascetic or a worshiper is not necessarily a Gnostic.* The goal of every Gnostic is to please Allah (SWT) and Him alone. The worship of a Gnostic is always free from any element of fear of Hell or hope for Paradise. Undoubtedly, it is a strenuous quality to possess.

Imam Ali (AS) used to say,

O' Allah (SWT)! I do not worship You because of the fear of Hell or any hope for Paradise. But I worship You because I have found you worthy of being worshipped.

We should try and remove in ourselves everything other than Allah (SWT) and Him alone and make our appetitive soul submissive to the contented soul. We should try to soften our inner-self with a view to make it fit for receiving Divine Enlightenment. To a Gnostic,

Springs of knowledge and wisdom gush out from their hearts. What appears to be difficult to those who live in ease and luxury seems to be easy to them. They are familiar to what scares the ignorant. Their bodies are with the people but the souls are in the higher world.
(Imam Ali (AS) to Kumayl, the son of Ziyad Nikhai (AR))

However, an ascetic life does not mean worshipping Allah in the mountains and in seclusion so much that the worldly life and its responsibilities are ignored. Shaykh Rajab Ali (AR) believed that if someone really acts according to the explicit Islamic ordinances, they will achieve all perfection and spiritual stations, and there is no need to go to extremes. He was strongly opposed to all kinds of extreme asceticism and self-mortification that are contrary to the traditions and practices of religious creeds.

One of his devotees related - for a while I was engaged in self-mortification, living in seclusion away from my *Alawiyya* (descendant of Imam Ali (AS)) wife in a separate room where I did my supplications and *dhikr* and slept there too. After four or five months, a friend of mine took me to see the reverend Shaykh. At his doorstep and as soon as the Shaykh saw me, he said to me outright,

Would you like me to tell... ?

I bowed my head in shame. Then the Shaykh continued,

Why are you treating your wife like that and have abandoned her? ...Do away with these self-mortification, Adhkar, and recitals!

Go get a box of sweets and go back to your wife. Say your prayers on due time with the common *Ta'qibat* (the supererogatory supplications after each prayer).

Then the Shaykh stressed on the narrations from The Ahlul-Bayt (AS) asserting that if a person acts sincerely and purely for forty days, the fountainheads of wisdom will spring up from his heart and pointed out,

According to these traditions if a person fulfills his religious obligations, they will definitely acquire certain illumination.

Acting according to the Shaykh's recommendation, that person gave up self-mortification and returned to his normal life.

Allamah Taba Tabai (AR) says that *any spiritual traveler may be compared to that person who has built a tank of water and has not used it for a long time. The impurities and pollutions have thus settled at the bottom of the tank. The person has in his mind that the water is clear and pure, but when he gets down into the tank and tries to wash something in it, black patches appear and he finds that the water is impure. And for this reason, it is necessary for you to self-mortify and clean yourself before entering the spiritual realms of the journey.*

At this stage, one is influenced by his inner thoughts and hidden instincts that force him to disobey The Commands of Allah (SWT). However, the true seeker of Allah (SWT) should never be distressed or discouraged by these obstacles, and should boldly proceed towards his destination with the help of Divine Assistance till he gets himself out from this inner world of animalistic thoughts. We need to be careful lest some vicious thoughts remain stuck at the back of our souls and fail us in the final stages of the journey.

It has been mentioned that the first signs is the feeling that one does not exist at all. It is reported by Allamah Taba Tabai (AR) that Allamah Mirza Ali Qazi (AR) used to say that one day he came out of his room into the veranda. He suddenly saw himself (his Nafs) standing quietly beside him. When he looked carefully, he realized that there was no skin or flesh on its face!

In the further stages, the spiritual traveler is able to apprehend and reflect on His Lord and The Creation more convincingly than ever before. When this devotee completes all these stages, he then gets closer and becomes surrounded by divine impulses. He is finally seized by The Divine Beauty and Perfection of his Beloved Allah (SWT), The One who created him and assisted him in attaining this Spiritual Perfection.

Shaykh Rajab Ali (AR) says,

To my humble opinion if one seeks a way to be delivered and wishes to attain real perfection and to enjoy the meanings of Monotheism, they should resort to four things: first, perpetual presence; second, to rely on to The Ahlul-Bayt (AS); third, begging at night (i. e., whispering prayers and supererogation during night time); and fourth, benevolence to people.