

## First Rule

# RENUNCIATION OF CUSTOMS, USAGES AND SOCIAL FORMALITIES

According to scholars who have attained higher stages of spiritual perfection, the first rule involves the need to refrain oneself from all customs whose mere purpose and result is a stylish and fashionable sort of living. Unnecessary expenditures and usages should be ceased and social formalities rarely attended unless one is able to derive lessons from those gatherings. Our criterion for judging these gatherings should not concern for the pleasure or displeasure of people but Allah (SWT), The All-Merciful, and only Him. We need to learn to socialize and enjoy life the right way.

al-Khumeini (AR) considers it Polytheism/Shirk if one leaves out a compulsory act set by Allah and he or she does the opposite – for example, not praying on time because one has to watch the ending of a sports program or even be at a place where one considers Allah less important (Allah Forbid!) and the other worldly act more important.

Allamah al-Majlisi (AR) puts forward the following guidelines for a self-building and a self-purification program,

Useless talks, rather anything other than Allah (SWT)'s remembrance should be strictly avoided.

Living in luxurious, beautiful and comfortable housing as well as consumption of expensive foods, drinks and fancy clothing should be renounced.

Social mixing with other than God's most favorite believers should be strictly avoided.

Excessive sleep should be avoided and God's invocation with complete dedication should be recited continuously.

We need to weigh every deed and try not to sacrifice our obedience to Allah (SWT) by pleasing our peers or perform other worldly acts. The middle way is what has been prescribed. We should neither mix up with the people too much nor too little; it should not matter if we happen to look different from others because of our distinct and serious social behavior. As Allah (SWT) confirms in The Qur'an,

They do not fear the criticism of any critic in the way of Allah (SWT).  
**(Qur'an - Chapter 5, Verse 54)**

Human beings are susceptible to being influenced with many of the characteristics, etiquette, and behavior of other people with whom they have social association, and in reality become like them, especially their best friends. Friendship with corrupt and wicked individuals forces a person towards corruption and evil deeds, while association with righteous people with good morals invites a person towards salvation and goodness. One of the characteristics of a human being is that he makes himself like others. If, he mixes socially with corrupt and sinful people, he becomes familiar with sinning and other immoral deeds, not only he does not see the ugliness of his actions; on the contrary, regards these acts as manifestation of acts of goodness.

We all need to be very conscientious. As Allah says,

For the life of this world is but goods and chattels of deception.  
**(Qur'an - Chapter 3, Verse 85)**

What is the life of this world but play and amusement but best is the home in The Hereafter, for those who are righteous. Will ye not then understand?  
**(Qur'an - Chapter 6, Verse 32)**

Know that the life of this world is only play, and idle talk, and pageantry, and boasting among you and rivalry in respect of wealth and children: as the likeness of vegetation after rain, whereof the growth is pleasing to the husbandman, but afterward it dries up and you will see it turning yellow, then it becomes straw. In addition, in The Hereafter there is grievous punishment.  
**(Qur'an - Chapter 57, Verse 20)**

The pleasures of this world have to be taken seriously so one is not led astray and influenced by them. Imam Ali (AS) says,

So now, certainly, I frighten you from this world for it is sweet and green, surrounded by lusts, and liked for its immediate enjoyments. It excites wonder with small things, is ornamented with (false) hopes and decorated with deception. Its rejoicing does not last and its afflictions cannot be avoided. It is deceitful, harmful, changing, perishable, exhaustible, liable to destruction eating away and destructive.  
**Nahjul-Balagha, Sermon #111**

The world is a place for which destruction is ordained and for its inhabitants departure from here is destined. It is sweet and green. It hastens towards its seeker and attaches to the heart of the viewer. So depart from here with the best of provision available with you and do not ask herein more than what is enough and do not demand from it more than subsistence.  
**Nahjul-Balagha, Sermon #45**

Even if you stay up for many nights for worship, and fast for many days and make a sacrifice between the corner of The Ka'bah before The Black Stone (Hajarul-Aswad), and The Position of Ibrahim, God will resurrect you on The Resurrection Day with whomever or whatever you love extremely. If it or they are supposed to be in Heaven, you will be in Heaven, and if it or they are to be in Hell, you will be in Hell, too.  
(Imam Ali (AS))

As mentioned earlier, we need to learn to avoid extremes. With al-Zuhd, it is narrated that The Prophet (S) said,

Abstinence does not mean wearing harsh clothes or eating unpleasant foods, rather it means reducing one's aspirations.

Allah will never ask or punish us for a blessing that He grants us in this life, but we have to be moderate and respect all the infinite blessings. It is just like inviting a friend for a meal and then asking him for something in return! How would The Most Kind and Most Merciful do such a thing to His Most Beloved Creation? Therefore, abstaining from worldly acts has a great philosophy and we have to use this world to earn the next, so living is necessary – but in moderation.

The First Successor after The Prophet (S) has clearly defined such limits. Imam Ali – The Commander of all The Faithful (AS) has said,

Abstinence is a form of wealth. Piety is like armor. Abstinence is best when done in private. Abstinence will make the body slim and restrict aspirations, and speeds up death and pushes away worldly desires. Whoever attains its benefits, and whoever loses it will be burdened. Nothing is nobler than piety. No trade is better than the performance of good deeds. Nothing is a better form of piety than abstaining from what is doubtful. Nothing is a better form of abstinence than abstaining from the forbidden. In short, abstinence is expressed by God's statement:

In order that you may not despair over matters that pass you by, or exult over favors bestowed upon you.

**(Qur'an - Chapter 57, Verse 23)**

Therefore, whoever does not worry about the past, and does not get happy about the future has realized both aspects of abstinence. O' People! Abstinence implies reducing aspirations, and thanking God for the blessings, and abstaining from the forbidden. Whenever you lose these characteristics, do not let the forbidden acts overcome your patience and do not forget being grateful for the blessings that you receive. God has left no room for any excuse for you by sending clear reasons and Divine Books.

### **A Brief Note on Love of The World**

Allamah Tabai (AR) writes that,

A human being (also a materialist) is seen passing his life in the darkest valley of materialism. He is submerged in the sea of desires and is always pushed from one side to another by waves of material relations of wealth, wife, children, enjoyments and pleasures.

Hence, the foremost stage is to renounce and abandon from within ourselves all material relations, i.e. remove from our hearts and souls the love of this world. Only then, can we break the chains of this material world and commence our journey into the spiritual world, which resides people willing to sacrifice for Allah (SWT) any moment. Imam Ali (AS) says,

In great loss is the man, who abandoned The Hereafter for the sake of this world.

What is essential here is to understand The Disapproved World. According to Allamah Majlisi (AR),

All things that prevent men and women from obeying Allah (SWT) and keep them away from His Love, and from seeking The Hereafter, are defined as the (disapproved) world.

He, May Allah (SWT) have mercy on his soul, continues his remark and says,

Let it be known to you that that which can be deduced from all the verses of The Qur'an and the traditions in this regard; according to our understanding of them, is that The 'Accursed (Disapproved) World' is the sum total of all those things that prevent man from obeying Allah (SWT) and keep him (distant) from His Love and from seeking The Hereafter.

Therefore, The 'World' and The 'Hereafter' are antithetical to each other - whatever causes His Good Pleasure and one's nearness to Him belongs to The 'Hereafter', even though apparently, it should seem to be a matter of The World...

On the other hand, heretical exercises in spiritual self-discipline, sanctimonious deeds and the like, though they might be performed with great devotion and care, are meant for the world, as they cause alienation from Allah (SWT) and do not bring man near to Him. Such are the deeds of the infidels and those who oppose the right path.

Indeed, anything that earns you pleasure and joy, and provokes your lust before death, it is The 'Disapproved World' for you. However, The 'Approved World' can be an excellent abiding place for a faithful believer.

As al-Khumeini (AR) puts it,

This world is a nursery for the training of lofty souls and a school for acquiring higher spiritual stations. It is a field for cultivating The Hereafter. It is a school or a market place where higher stations and lasting spiritual merits are exchanged for transitory goods and where arrangements are made for The Hereafter.

Therefore, The 'Approved World' is,

The abode of truth for him who appreciates its truthfulness; a place of safety for him who understands it; a mine of treasures for him who collects provisions from it (for the next world), and a house of instructions for him who draws lessons from it. It is the shrine of worship for those who love Allah (SWT); the house of prayer for His Angels, the place where the revelations of Allah (SWT) descend, and the market place for those devoted to Him. Herein, they earn His Mercy and herein they acquire Paradise by way of profit.  
(Imam Ali (AS))

The Disapproved World is the world of Nafs and the animalistic desires that compel us to disobey Allah (SWT) and commit sins against Him. The Prophet (S) once said,

The (disapproved) world is like a rotten dead body and those who go after it are dogs.

al-Sadiq (AS) has also warned us from The 'Disapproved World' by reminding us that,

Love of The (Disapproved) world is the source of all sins. The example of The (Disapproved) world is that of seawater, the more a thirsty person drinks from it, the thirstier he becomes until it destroys him.

Indeed,

Harm done by two ferocious wolves, one attacking from the front and the other from the rear, to a herd without a shepherd, is less rapid than the one done by the love of The (Disapproved) world to the faith of a faithful person.  
(al-Baqir (AS))

Ayatullah Baqir al-Sadr (AR), during the final days of his last Ramadhan, gave a powerful speech to religious scholars. This speech is translated in the book 'Trends of History in The Qur'an by the same author. Some excerpts follow,

One can either love Allah (SWT) or love the world. However, both the 'love' cannot be contained in one heart. Let us submit our hearts to test. Let us examine our hearts to see whether the love of Allah (SWT) or the love of this world prevails over them. If the love of Allah (SWT) prevails over our hearts, let us make it deeper. If, Allah (SWT) forbid, the love of this world prevails, let us try to save ourselves from this dreadful malady.

Every love, which occupies the centre of the heart of a person, is of either of the two kinds. We call the perfect love the 'double grade' love and the love, which is not so perfect, the 'single grade' love. To begin with, (single grade) love becomes the basis of man's sentiments, feelings, emotions and desires. After attending to his job or immediate need, man soon returns to his object of love, because love occupies the centre of his thoughts, feelings and sentiments.

In the case of double grade love, man's entire attention is drawn by the object of his love and nothing can divert his attention from it. He is attentive to the thought of his Beloved.

Both these kinds of 'love' are found in the case of the noble 'Love of Allah?' Single grade love appears in the hearts of the pious believers whose hearts are free from the impurities of the base affairs of this world. As soon as they are free from their immediate engagements, they return to the question, which is the object of their love.

As for double grade love, it is found in the hearts of The Prophets (AS) and Imams (AS). You all know Imam Ali (AS), near whose tomb we live (i.e. Najaf). This great man has said 'I never saw a thing but I saw Allah (SWT) before it, after it and along with it.'

In fact, this was because 'Love of Allah (SWT)' occupied his great heart and conscience in such a way that it concealed everything else from him. Even when he saw human beings, he saw Allah (SWT). When he looked at Allah (SWT)'s Bounties, he remembered Him. This bond with Allah (SWT) was always present before his eyes, for it was Allah (SWT) alone whom he truly loved and to whom his hopes and aspirations were directed. He never allowed anyone to divert his attention from Allah (SWT).

Love of the world also reaches the stage where man does not see anything but the world before it, after it and along with it. Whatever he does, he does it for some worldly gain. He cannot devote himself to pious deeds for more than a few days. This is double grade love of the world. Imam al-Sadiq has said, 'This world is like seawater. The more one drinks of it, the more one gets thirst.'

It was 'Love of Allah (SWT)' that was the basis of Imam Ali's (AS) courage and bravery. His courage was not that of a ferocious beast. It was the courage produced by the faith and love of Allah (SWT). He was over 60 years when he fought against the Khwarij and in a single engagement killed 4000 of them. He was also at the height of bravery about being patient and not pressing his rightful claim. He kept quiet when he was required by Allah (SWT) to overlook his right. At that time, he was in the prime of his life. His conscience was aflame with the fire of youth. However, Islam had told him to keep quiet and be patient, despite the violation of his rights.

After all what is the world of ours? It is a collection of imaginary and fictional things. Harun al-Rashid's world was very imposing. We curse him day and night. We say that we are better, more pious and more Allah (SWT)-fearing than Harun was. Has the world of Harun al-Rashid been offered to us and have we rejected it? If not, how can we claim to be more pious than him? The world offered to us is not that of Harun. It is much less limited and comparably insignificant. It is transient and shorter and not as vast and extensive as that of Harun. For the sake of this world, he imprisoned Imam al-Kadhim (AS). Are we sure that if we get that world, we would not throw The Imam (AS) into prison (Allah (SWT) forbid!)? Have we tested ourselves and put this question to ourselves? Has the world of Harun ever been offered to us so that we know we are more pious?

In our world, there can be no truth except that of Allah (SWT)'s good pleasure. Had The Imam (AS) worked for worldly gains, he would have been the most miserable person. Yet when he worked for Allah (SWT), he said on his deathbed, 'By the Allah (SWT) of The Ka'bah, I am a successful person.' This world is not for the students of theology. A student looking for this world can get neither this world nor the next. Therefore, it is incumbent upon us, as students, to confine our efforts to seeking the next world for this world has no value to us.

We should think any moment as possible for our death. At the time of his death, my father was not as old as I was. My brother died at a younger age than I did. I have now completed the span of my lifetime.

We ask Allah (SWT) to purify our hearts, and to brighten them with faith. May He turn our minds more towards seeking His pleasure and fill our hearts with His love, His fear and belief in Him. May he help us according to the teachings of His Book, Ameen.

Allah (SWT) states,

Do not make your heart dead because of the love of this world. Indeed, this world is going to end your life very soon - love of this world makes your heart die and this world is going to be vanished very soon. - do not be like a candle, which is a light for people but burns itself out - take out the love of this world from your heart.

al-Sadiq (AS) continues,

One who passes his evenings and mornings in such a way that the world be his greatest concern, Allah (SWT) ordains poverty between his two eyes and causes his affairs to become disjointed and dissipated, while he does not attain anything except what has been apportioned for him. In addition, as for one who passes his evenings and mornings while his biggest concern and goal be The Hereafter, Allah (SWT) puts contentment in his heart and gives a wholeness and unity to his affairs.

An advice given by The Prophet (S) to his companion Abu Dhar (AR) reads as follows:

O' Abu Dhar! This world is a prison for the believer and a paradise for the unbeliever. In addition, no believer wakes up but is grieved in it. And how can he not be grieved in it when Allah (SWT) has sworn that it will take him to Hell and He didn't promise him that it will deliver him from it, and that he shall meet (in it) with sicknesses and hardships, and matters which will anger him, and he will be wronged in it and won't be helped. He seeks reward from Allah (SWT) and continues to remain in grief (in it) until he departs from it. In addition, when he departs from it, he attains to comfort and honor.

O' Abu Dhar! Surely, Allah (SWT) revealed to my brother Prophet Isa (AS), 'O Isa (AS)! Do not love the world for surely I do not love it. Love the Hereafter for surely it is The House of Return. '

O' Abu Dhar! Surely, Jibraeel (AS) came to me with the treasures of the world and said, 'O Muhammad (S)! These are the treasures of the world for you and it will not decrease of your share in The Hereafter with your Lord.' Therefore, I said, 'My beloved Jibraeel (AS)! I have no need of it. When I'm satiated I thank my Lord and when I'm hungry I ask Him.'

O' Abu Dhar! When Allah (SWT) wants good for a servant, He gives him understanding in religion and makes him abstentious in the world, and makes him see his own faults.

O' Abu Dhar! When you see your brother abstaining from worldliness (love of the disapproved world), pay attention to him for surely he is dictating wisdom.

So I said, O' Messenger of Allah (SWT)! Who is the most abstentious of mankind?' He (S) replied,

One who does not forget the graves and the deterioration (of this world), and leaves the excess of adornment of the world, and prefers what lasts over that which perishes, and he does not count tomorrow among his days and counts himself among the dead.

al-Khumeini (AR) warns us in one of his discourses,

So, O' Base Self! O' Negligent Heart! Awake from your sleep and arise to confront this enemy (Shaytan) who for years has subdued you and made a captive of you, who drags you whenever he wants and commands you to perform every ugly and destructive deed! Arise and break these bonds! Sever these chains! Seek your freedom and throw away this disgrace and indignity

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