

## Sixth Rule

# **CONTEMPLATION, REFLECTION AND MEDITATION**

As a spiritual traveler, we should refrain from being oblivious of our duties and must always abide by the decision we have firmly decided to undertake. Scholars have cautioned that without meditation, remembrance and recollection of spiritual thoughts, we are unlikely to produce favorable results from this sacred journey towards The One. Allamah Taba Tabai (AR) has said,

For spiritual travelers, meditation is as important as for a patient the prescribed course of diet, without which the medicines may be ineffective or may even produce counter effects.

Indicating the importance and virtue of reflection, Imam al-Sadiq (AS) once said,

A moment's reflection and pondering over is better than one year's worship.

Prophet Isa, the son of Maryam (AS) said,

Blessed be on the one who thinks when he is quiet; is admonished when he looks; invokes The Name of God when he talks; cries over his own sins; and the people are safe from his hands and tongue.

Hence, meditation should be regarded as a foundation stone for spiritual journalists. According to al-Khumeini (AR),

Meditation can also mean introspection and self-reflection. Here introspection is used in the sense of devoting some time, however insignificant it is, contemplating about our duties towards our Master and Creator, Who has brought us into this world; and Who has bestowed upon us all the means of pleasure and joys of life; Who has equipped us with a sound body and faultless faculties and senses, each of whom serves a specific purpose of its own, and whose functioning bewilders human intellect. If we reflect in a rational manner for a moment, we shall realize that the aim of imparting to us all these graces and endowments is something superior to and higher than what is visible. This world is a stage of action and its aim is a higher and more sublime sphere of existence.

Meditation and contemplation is very vast in its meaning and its sense differs according to the degrees and stages of the spiritual journey. In the beginning, it means refraining from all acts not useful in this world or The Hereafter and abstaining from saying or doing anything disliked by Allah (SWT). Any negligence or lethargy in this respect is not permissible.

You should then intensify your meditation and try to do all that you do purely for the sake of gaining good pleasure of Allah (SWT). You should believe and acknowledge that Allah (SWT) is Omniscient, Omnipresent, and that Allah (SWT) Who supervises all His Creation is looking at you. This meditation should be observed at all times and in all circumstances. The Prophet (S) hinted at the above-mentioned stage by advising Abu Dhar Ghaffari (AR) as follows,

Worship Allah (SWT) as if you were looking at Him. For if you do not see Him, He sees you.

Allamah Taba Tabai (AR) writes,

Gradually this meditation becomes stiffer and higher, and may sometimes mean concentration on one's silence, or on one's self or on a higher truth, i.e. The Names and The Attributes of Allah (SWT). The veils may then be lifted through the intercession of Imam al-Husayn (AS), who is particularly concerned with the lifting of veils and removing the barriers obstructing the devotees.

### **A Brief Note on Meditation**

An important aspect of spiritual journey is meditation and contemplation. Verily, a short span of time spent in deep reflection of Allah (SWT) and the way His creation works is worth years of worship. Allamah Taba Tabai (AR) says that it is essential for all travelers to adhere and give due importance to meditation throughout the different levels and stages of spiritual journey. Allamah (AR) informs us that meditation has numerous grades and if one of the later stages were undertaken by a beginner, then he would give it up for good or would go confused and shaky.

At this stage, Allamah (AR) says,

(To a person who is nearing The Almighty and spiritual perfection)  
Things, which were lawful to him in the beginning become forbidden and does not attempt in performing the act.

This stage of spiritual journey is considered the highest stage of piety by Imam Ali (AS) in Nahjul-Balagha. This is where one is extremely careful of his duties towards Allah (SWT) that he refrains from performing lawful acts in fear that he might be lured to the evil side of it. The veils of ignorance gradually weaken and are ultimately lifted.

Sayyid al-Khumeini (AR) reports a tradition that there exists 70,000 Veils of Darkness and 70,000 Veils of Divine Light, all in the human soul. We need to struggle and get through the 70,000 Veils of Darkness before we even approach the first few levels of Divine Light.

Scholars narrate that at certain stages of spiritual journey The Divine Lights have been reported to be visible to persons with high spiritual status. In the beginning, these lights flash like lightening and appear for a moment only. In this limited span of time, the person receives divine satisfaction that one has never ever experienced. Gradually, The lights grow stronger and appear like stars.

As soon as a spiritual journalist is able to succeed in the above stages, he feels as if The Heavens and The Earth were both illuminated from The East to The West. This light has been given the name 'Light of the Self.'

Imam al-Sadiq (AS) has said,

If you are intelligent, then you should be of firm resolution and sincere intention before you set out for any place, for surely the self's nature is to overstep the bounds and encroach on the forbidden. You should reflect when you walk, and take note of the wonders of God's work wherever you go.

Do not be mocking, or strut when you walk. Allah (SWT) has said,

Do not go about in the land exulting overmuch.  
**(Qur'an - Chapter 31, Verse 18)**

Lower your gaze from whatever is inappropriate to faith, and remember Allah (SWT) frequently. Those places where, and in connection with which, Allah (SWT) is mentioned will testify to that before Allah (SWT) on The Day of Judgment and will ask forgiveness for those people so that Allah (SWT) will let them enter The Garden.

Do not speak excessively with people along the way, for that is bad manners. Most of the roads are the traps and markets of Shaytan, so do not feel safe from his tricks. Make your coming and your going in obedience to Allah (SWT), striving for His Pleasure, for all your movements will be recorded in your Book, as Allah (SWT) has said,

On The Day when their tongues and their hands and their feet shall bear witness against them regarding what they did...  
**(Qur'an - Chapter 24, Verse 24)**

We have made every man's actions to cling to his neck.  
**(Qur'an - Chapter 17, Verse 13)**

In al-Kafi,

The best form of worship is to contemplate about God and His Power. In another tradition, it is stated that an hour's contemplation is better than a night's worship. In addition, according to a Prophetic tradition, the contemplation of an hour is better than a year's worship. In another tradition, it is stated that an hour's contemplation is better than sixty years of worship (according to another hadith, seventy years). Moreover, some Traditionists and Fuqaha have even mentioned it as being better than a thousand years of worship.

### **Levels of Contemplation**

al-Khumeini (AR) writes that the first kind of contemplation is about God, His Names, Attributes and His Perfections, the result of which is the knowledge of His Existence and His Irradiations. Contemplating on His SELF and His ATTRIBUTES is the first stage of meditation – what may be termed as thoughtful meditation. One has to seriously compare his life on this earth and how it compares to The Divine Names of The Almighty – for example, is he or she merciful to the creatures; is he or she able to restrain anger when required to, and so forth. According to him,

In addition, this is the most superior level of contemplation, which yields the most sublime of the kinds of knowledge, and the firmest of the arguments; for thinking about the essence of The Cause, and meditating on The Absolute Cause imparts knowledge about Him and the understanding of the effects.

Another level of contemplation is reflecting on the subtleties of creation, its perfection and refinement. Such contemplation leads to the intellection of its Perfect Source, its Wise Maker. It has been said that learning is good for the soul even if the learning will not assist the person in his or her daily activities, but will bring him one closer step towards understanding The Workings of The Almighty. Therefore, reading, watching programs, going to seminars and visiting gatherings in which scholars discuss The Creations and The Workings of Allah, are all necessities towards this kind of meditation.

A final state is meditation on the states of the soul - knowledge of The Day of Resurrection, and knowledge of (the necessity of) Prophethood and Aimmah, revealed scriptures, systems of Divine Law, etc. According to al-Khumeini (AR), one can reap benefits in this world and the next if he or she were to constantly visualize the role of The Prophets and The Aimmah (AS) and his role in this transient world. We need to repeatedly remind ourselves of our role in this existence and that these Infallible and Divine Scriptures were sent here for a reason. Contemplating on the lifestyle of these great personalities, on the verses of The Qur'an, on the traditions from these Infallible, and so forth, is what we have to do on a daily basis – and the goal is to refine ourselves even further so every day is different.

Allamah Tabai (AS), one of the great spiritual preceptors, remarks that if we happen to be successful in our endeavors, four worlds will gradually reveal themselves to us.

**First World - UNITY OF ACTIONS**

In the earlier stages, we must feel that we are the origin of all that our tongue says, our ears hear and our hands, feet and other limbs do. Later, one may feel that he or she is the source of all that transpires in the world. At the next stage, one should feel that his or her existence is closely connected with Allah (SWT) and through this relationship the favors and the bounties of Allah (SWT), reach the world.

Ultimately, the goal is to perceive that Allah (SWT) alone is The Source of all actions and occurrences. Indeed! Allah (SWT) and only Allah (SWT) is The Origin of all good.

**Second World - UNITY OF ATTRIBUTES**

This world emerges after the first world. At this stage when the spiritual traveler hears or sees anything, he or she feels that Allah (SWT) is The Source of his hearing and seeing. Later he perceives that Allah (SWT) is The Source of all knowledge, power, life, hearing and sight found anywhere and in any form.

**Third World - UNITY OF NAMES**

At this stage, Divine Attributes are and originate from The Divine Essence, and Allah appears to one as The Knower. Similarly, we may think that the power that we have, our sight and hearing are all Allah (SWT) having that power and control.

It is His sight and His hearing that you possess.

The principle is that there is only One Being in the whole universe and its contents Who is having The Absolute Power. It is His Power, His Sight and His Hearing that are reflected and indicated by everything existing according to its capacity.

**Fourth World - UNITY OF BEING**

This world is revealed to the spiritual traveler in consequence to the revelation of The Glory of Divine Essence. He or she at this stage perceives that there is only One Being Who is The Source of all actions and attributes. At this stage, his attention remains concentrated on The One Being. He attains to this stage only when he has annihilated his transient existence completely and has passed away in Allah (SWT). Allamah Tabai (AR) writes that,

It is only he who has annihilated his self and ego completely, that he will recognize neither himself nor anyone else. He will recognize Allah (SWT) alone.

In short, the spiritual traveler should say good-bye to all those habits and traditions, customs and usages, which obstruct his advancement towards Allah. The Gnostics call this attitude 'madness', because mad people also take little interest in and pay little attention to the popular habits and traditions and do not care what the other people would say. A mad man sticks to his own ways and does not fear any opposition.

If we find any devotee flitting away his time in amusements, we can easily conclude that he is not fully devoted to Allah and that his heart is not free from the hypocrisy which is called in this context greater hypocrisy and which is the opposite of greater faith. As a result of this hypocrisy, man does not act according to his inner incitement, but is guided by reason, expediency or apprehensions. The following verse refers to this kind of hypocrisy: When they stand up to offer prayers, they perform it languidly. (Surah an-Nisa, 4:142)