

IN THE LIGHT OF NAHJUL BALAGHAHOW TO RAISE YOUR CHARACTER

In Islam what truly elevates the man and makes him honourable is not vast accumulation of wealth nor holding of high public posts. Neither one's shrewd ways of dealings nor his sharp tongue and oratory power. Rather it is the high level of his character and excellence of morals.

Those desiring to uplift their character and moral standard are advised by moralists in Islam to discard vices and lowly traits in one's character. And to do so, one of the essential things is to withdraw oneself from the high pleasures and tastes of life. It is to make one's body bear hardships and concentrate more on raising one's spiritual and mental status.

Should one, for example, wish to upbringing himself with the qualities of valour, high sense of justice and generosity, he is advised to undergo prolonged mental exercise by subjecting himself to a heavy load of patience, self-purification, discarding of carnal desires and avoiding physical pleasures. The more one subjects his body to controls on enjoyment of life, the higher he is able to raise his character. Conveying this advice on the subject in just two short phrases, Ali bin Abi Talib (a.s.) says:

"Take from bodies
and spend upon your souls"

تَذَرُ مِنْ أَجْسَادِكُمْ وَ تُبْذِرُ بِهَا عَلَى أَنْفُسِكُمْ

What Ali bin Abi Tali (a.s.) meant to tell those wishing to uplift their character and spirit that the right way to do so is to exert one's body and make it bear hardships in obedience and worship of Allah whilst avoiding worldly attachments and pleasures. Thus the perfection of one's soul and raising of character to high standard lies in exerting of one's body.

The similitude is described of human body and soul with the two scales of a balance. When one scale because of a heavier load goes down, the other goes up. The more exertion on the body in bearing hardships, the higher the soul rises towards perfection and upliftment of character. The more pleasures and easiness given to the body, the lower goes the soul and spiritual status, irrespective of one is religious or not.

Those who have travelled widely in India might have notices how the simply-clad hermits subject their bodies to intense physical exertion in order to raise their spiritual power. Consequently they are able to tell a stranger of his name, his family, the town and country from which he came and every secret of his life. Of course Islam does not condone such type of intense physical exertion. What Islam recognises and teaches is that sort of exercise and self-control which leads to self purification and character upliftment. Ali b.Abi Talib (a.s.) provides his guidance on this in these words:

إِنَّمَا صِيَّ نَفْسِي أَرْضُوهَا بِالتَّقْوَى

It is with (the aid of) Takwa
(guarding against sins) that I exert myself.

In Islam strict compliance of Allah's commands and discarding of those forbidden is the body exertion that has been recommended.