

# Turning to God

Lesson 2: Practical Instructions for  
the Wayfarer

# Practical Instructions

اعقلوا الخبر إذا سمعتموه عقل رعاية لا عقل رواية ؛ فإن رواة العلم  
كثير ورعاته قليل

“When you hear a narration, think of putting it into practice and not just narrating it, for verily the narrators of knowledge are many but those who practice are few.” - Imam Ali (a.s)

# Practical Instructions

- The first stage of spiritual development is to perform the religious obligations and refrain from what God has prohibited.

اجْتِنَابُ السَّيِّئَاتِ أَوْلَى مِنْ اِكْتِسَابِ الْحَسَنَاتِ

“Refraining from committing sins is better than performing [non-obligatory] good deeds.”-  
Imam Ali (a.s)

# Practical Instructions

- There are five instructions given by all Muslim mystics which are rooted in the Quran and Sunnah.
- These practical instructions are intended to allow us to attain higher levels of spirituality and God consciousness

# Practical Instructions

- **1. Don't speak too much**
- The angel Gabriel's advice to Adam (a.s)
- Speaking excessively is a sign of spiritual immaturity
- Many, if not most, of the sins we commit are related to the tongue
- Once a person requested the Holy Prophet to give him some advice:

# Practical Instructions

وقال له رجل : أوصني فقال له : احفظ لسانك ، ثم قال له : يا رسول الله أوصني ، قال : احفظ لسانك ثم قال : يا رسول الله أوصني ، فقال : ويحك وهل يكب الناس على مناخرهم في النار إلا حصائد ألسنتهم

“The Prophet (saw) said: ‘Guard your tongue!’ Again the man requested advice. The Prophet (saw) said: ‘Guard your tongue!’ The man requested advice a third time to which the Prophet replied, ‘Woe be to you, is there anything that causes people to collapse on their faces into the hellfire except that which their tongues harvest?!’”

# Practical Instructions

- Prohibited speech vs unnecessary speech
- Unnecessary speech is harmful to one's spirituality because it is a misuse of one's time
- From a spiritual point of view, there is not a single act or word, except that it either brings light or darkness into the heart

# Practical Instructions

- The instruction to reduce your speech is not intended to discourage sociability
- It is an invitation to be mindful of what you say and connect your words to God's pleasure.
- Even the use of humor can be a means of attaining nearness to God



# Practical Instructions

إن أحب الاعمال إلى الله عزوجل إدخال السرور على المؤمن

“Indeed one of the most beloved acts [in the sight of] God is to bring joy to the heart of a believer.”- Imam Muhammad al-Baqir (a.s)

# Practical Instructions

لولا تكثير في كلامكم وتمريج في قلوبكم لرأيتم ما أرى ولسمعتم ما  
أسمع

“If it were not for your excessive speech and your distracted hearts, you would have been able to see what I see and hear what I hear.”-

The Holy Prophet (saw)

# Practical Instructions

- This hadith indicates that one of the greatest impediments to our spiritual growth is allowing the tongue and the heart to be preoccupied with things that are of no value
- Reflect on how God has concealed the tongue behind many barriers.

# Practical Instructions

- **2. Don't eat too much**
- Quality and quantity of food impact our spirituality
- Eating excessively even if the food is halal can have adverse effects on the soul
- Fasting is nourishment for the soul and food is nourishment for the body

# Practical Instructions

وَكُلُوا وَاشْرَبُوا وَلَا تُسْرِفُوا إِنَّهُ لَا يُحِبُّ الْمُسْرِفِينَ

“...and eat and drink but do not waste for He does not love the wasteful.” Quran 7:31

# Practical Instructions

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ كُلُوا مِمَّا فِي الْأَرْضِ حَلَالًا طَيِّبًا

“O mankind, eat of what is lawful and good from the earth...” Quran 2:168

# Practical Instructions

- How do we reduce our food intake to what is necessary to maintain good health?
- There are many hadith on the merits of fasting and reducing food intake. One example cited by many mystics is the following narration where Imam al-Sadiq offers advice to Unwan al-Basri

# Practical Instructions

أما اللواتي في الرياضة فإياك أن تأكل ما لا تشتهيهِ، فإنه يورث الحماسة والبله، ولا تأكل إلا عند الجوع، وإذا اكلت فكل حلالاً وسم الله

“As for the three pieces of advice on self-discipline: firstly, do not eat that which you have no appetite, for this brings about idiocy and stupidity. Secondly, do not eat unless you are hungry. And thirdly, when you do eat, eat only that which is lawful and mention the name of God.”



# Practical Instructions

واذكر حديث الرسول صلى الله عليه وآله "ما ملأ آدمي وعاء شراً من بطنه"

“...and remember the tradition of the Messenger: ‘Man has never filled any vessel worse than his own stomach.’”

# Practical Instructions

- The Imam continues:

فاذا كان ولا بدّ فثلث لطعامه ، وثلث لشرابه ، وثلث لنفسه

“So if you must fill, then allow one-third of it for food, another third for drink, and keep the last third for air.”

# Practical Instructions

لَيْسَ شَيْءٌ أَضَرَّ عَلَى قَلْبِ الْمُؤْمِنِ مِنْ كَثْرَةِ الْأَكْلِ ، وَهِيَ مُورِثَةٌ لِشَيْئَيْنِ :  
قَسْوَةَ الْقَلْبِ ، وَهَيْجَانَ الشَّهْوَةِ

“Nothing is more harmful to the heart of a believer than excess food. It leaves him with two traits: hard-heartedness and burning lust.” -  
Imam al-Sadiq (a.s)

# Practical Instructions

- **3. Don't sleep too much**
- Excessive comfort is detrimental to the soul.
- We need just the right amount of food and rest to be healthy in order for our bodies to serve us.
- Those who sleep too much squander the opportunity to participate in the nocturnal prayers

# Practical Instructions

إِنَّ الْمُتَّقِينَ فِي جَنَّاتٍ وَعُيُونٍ آخِذِينَ مَا آتَاهُمْ رَبُّهُمْ إِنَّهُمْ كَانُوا قَبْلَ ذَلِكَ  
مُحْسِنِينَ كَانُوا قَلِيلًا مِّنَ اللَّيْلِ مَا يَهْجَعُونَ وَبِالْأَسْحَارِ هُمْ يَسْتَغْفِرُونَ

“Truly the pious shall be amidst gardens and springs, partaking of that which their Lord has given them. Truly they were virtuous aforetime. Little of the night did they slumber, and (before) dawn would seek forgiveness.” Quran 51:15-18

# Practical Instructions

أجيبوا داعي الله ، واطلبوا الرزق فيما بين طلوع الفجر إلى طلوع الشمس ، فإنه أسرع في طلب الرزق من الضرب في الأرض ، وهي الساعة التي يقسم فيها الرزق بين عباده

“Respond to the call of God and seek sustenance between dawn and sunrise for verily it is more effective in acquiring sustenance than traveling the earth and it is the time where sustenance is distributed among the servants [of God].” – Imam Ali (a.s)

# Practical Instructions

- The advice of Ayatollah Sayid Ali Qadi to his student Allamah Tabatabaie:
- “If you want the dunya, perform tahajjud. If you want the akhira, perform tahajjud.”

# Practical Instructions

- **4. Designate private time to contemplate**
- Allot 10-15 minutes everyday to be alone and reflect
- Temporary solitude is a prophetic tradition
- In ancient times, solitude was seen as a path towards self-refinement
- Unfortunately, in modern times, solitude is considered a torture technique.



# Practical Instructions

- Even the Holy Prophet needed to disconnect from his society to develop his soul.
- Where is your “Cave of Hira”?
- Ralph Waldo Emerson, a 19<sup>th</sup> century American philosopher once said, “If the stars should appear but one night every thousand years how man would marvel and stare...”

# Practical Instructions

- “Ralph Waldo Emerson once asked what we would do if the stars only came out once every thousand years. No one would sleep that night, of course. The world would become religious overnight. We would be ecstatic, delirious, made rapturous by the glory of God. Instead the stars come out every night, and we watch television.”- Paul Hawken

# Practical Instructions

- During these private times, you can set a plan for your daily development:
  - Stipulation مشارطة
  - Self-monitoring مراقبة
  - Accounting محاسبة

# Practical Instructions

لو ماتَ مَنْ بَيْنَ الْمَشْرِقِ وَالْمَغْرِبِ لَمَا اسْتَوْحِشْتُ بَعْدَ أَنْ يَكُونَ الْقُرْآنُ  
مَعِي

“If everyone from the east to the west was to die, I would not feel lonely if I have the Quran with me.” - Imam al-Sajjad (a.s)

# Practical Instructions

- **5. Frequent remembrance of God**
- Forgetfulness of God known as الغفلة is the source of all spiritual ailments.
- Conversely, the cure for all of the diseases of the heart can be found in the remembrance of God.

# Practical Instructions

وَمَنْ أَعْرَضَ عَن ذِكْرِي فَإِنَّ لَهُ مَعِيشَةً ضَنْكًا

“And whosoever turns away from My remembrance, truly his shall be a miserable life...” Quran 20:124

# Practical Instructions

الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَتَطْمَئِنُّ قُلُوبُهُمْ بِذِكْرِ اللَّهِ أَلَا بِذِكْرِ اللَّهِ تَطْمَئِنُّ الْقُلُوبُ

“Those who believe and whose hearts are at peace in the remembrance of God. Verily in the remembrance of are the hearts at peace.”

Quran 13:28

# Practical Instructions

- In the famous supplication of Dua Kumayl we read:

اللَّهُمَّ إِنِّي أَتَقَرَّبُ إِلَيْكَ بِذِكْرِكَ

“My Lord, I seek nearness to You through your remembrance...”



# Practical Instructions

وَاذْكُرْ رَبَّكَ كَثِيرًا وَسَبِّحْ بِالْعَشِيِّ وَالْإِبْكَارِ

“Remember your Lord frequently and glorify in the evening and the morning.” Quran 3:41

# Practical Instructions

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا اذْكُرُوا اللَّهَ ذِكْرًا كَثِيرًا

“O you who believe, remember God with a frequent remembrance.” Quran 33:41

# Practical Instructions

- In Islam, every ritual has a prescribed limit with the exception of the remembrance of God.
- Make it a habit to remember God even outside the five daily prayers

# Practical Instructions

إِنَّ اللَّهَ سُبْحَانَهُ وَتَعَالَى جَعَلَ الذِّكْرَ جِلَاءً لِلْقُلُوبِ

“Truly God, Exalted and Most High, has made His remembrance a polishing for the hearts.”-  
Imam Ali (as.)

# Practical Instructions

- Islamic mystics contend that whenever human beings are in a state of forgetfulness of God, the mirror of the heart becomes rusty and is therefore in need of polishing.
- Constant remembrance of God thus burnishes the mirror of the heart so that it is no longer covered by the rust of forgetfulness of Him.

# Practical Instructions

- When a heart becomes totally polished, the Reality that stands before it, namely, God, is reflected in it without the barrier of the human ego.
- It is this kind of purified heart to whom the allusion is made in the famous hadith qudsi:

# Practical Instructions

لا يسعني أرضي ولا سمائي ولكن يسعني قلب عبدي المؤمن

“The heavens and the earth cannot contain Me,  
but the heart of My faithful servant can contain  
Me.”

# Practical Instructions

- A polished heart, also known in Islamic mysticism as the “eye of the heart” when it has opened, thus reflects God as He is to Himself, since He looks at Himself through the polished mirror and only sees Himself.
- Such a heart is at peace because it is in a state of perpetually witnessing God.