

An underwater scene with sunlight rays filtering through the water, illuminating a patch of green seaweed and coral on the ocean floor. The text is overlaid on this scene.

Simple Advice From an Ocean of Knowledge

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Chapter 1

Simple Advice From an Ocean of Knowledge

Religion, at its core, revolves around one vital tenet. In it lies the understanding of God through His endless Mercy and Kindness from which His Oneness can be realized. That tenet is the 'noble character traits.' This can be evidenced by the Hadith (Tradition) of the Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessing upon him and his progeny, "Verily I was sent to complete the noble character traits." I have always pondered this Tradition and wondered what those noble character traits would resemble. How would one embody them without truly experiencing them from another? Since the Prophets and the Ahlulbayt, peace and blessings upon them all (pbua), manifest these traits, what was it like interacting with them? This question lingered in my mind for years until I had the opportunity to sit with the closest followers of the Prophets and Ahlulbayt (pbua). I recently had the blessing of sitting with the top four Grand Ayatollahs (Maraji) of Najaf, where I experienced such noble character traits that I have never and may never experience without them.

Entering their modest homes with plain carpets and bare walls was an initial sign of their modesty. Stepping into their greeting rooms with their simple homemade floor cushions and backrests underscored their humility. The level of positive energy emanating from the corner in which they sat can not be described with words. Their beaming smiles and soft eyes greeted me as if I were coming home after a long absence. The love they project through their language and body movements gave me the sense that they have known me my entire life. Shaking their hand felt like a loving warmth that I only felt when holding the hand of a relative. When they spoke their

eyes looked at me in full attention with a gentleness of a parent who is lovingly advising his close kin. I could not help but want to remain by their side, losing track of time, and heartbroken in having to depart. These gentle individuals embody the noble character traits that have been taught by the Prophets and the Ahlulbayt (pbua). Sitting next to them gave me a slight glimpse into the world of the Companions of all the Prophets (pbua) and how they must have felt by their side.

My quest in meeting them was one simple request: "Please give me advice that has benefited you in your life." I was not there to ask them a question relating to jurisprudence. There are a plethora of sources to get those types of questions answered and not to mention the vast amount of archives that contain all the information that is needed. I wanted a small jewel from these individuals who have dedicated their lives to God and to servicing humanity, by taking on the responsibility of issuing edicts according to the traditions of the Prophet and the Ahlulbayt (pbua). I wanted a lesson from the life of each of these men who have spent over half a century delving into the logic and reasoning of the Qur'an and the Traditions of the Prophet and the Ahlulbayt (pbua).

The Qur'an and the Traditions of the Prophet and Ahlulbayt (pbua) have already provided us with all the advice that exists for mankind. But what the Maraji represent, through their long lives of dedication and worship, is evidence that what is contained in the Holy Books and Traditions can truly benefit and raise you not just in the hereafter, but in this life as well. As simple as their advice may seem, I understood that these blessed individuals are living proof of that advice which elevates them in the eyes of the people and in the pleasure of the Almighty. Amazingly, I found each of their advice came from a different perspective but interrelated to one another. The following is the advice each one of them gave to me:

Ayatullah Sayyid Mohammad Saeed Al-Hakeem

●Be steadfast on the true and proper criteria (based on the divine teachings) when making decisions and judgement.

●Do not sway from your proper mindset (based on the divine criteria) because of what people say. Rely on your own judgement.

●Remain resilient in your judgement despite any negative news or information. Do not allow yourself to be tricked and trapped in the gossip of others.

Ayatullah Sheikh Mohammad Ishaq Al-Fayadh

●Do not ever lie, even if the truth is difficult, and always be trustworthy in all your affairs. One lie can bring down all your deeds whether they be social or religious and erase all trust in you completely.

●Treat people with fairness, kindness and a pleasant temperament because Islam is the religion of high moral constitution and noble traits.

●Always look for ways to help the weak, the needy, and the poor in your daily actions.

Ayatullah Sheikh Bashir Hussain Al-Najafy

●Do not ever oppress or follow suspicions and remember the verse, “Those who believe and do not obscure their belief with oppression, they are those who shall have safety and they are rightly guided” (6:82)

●Read the Qur’an with contemplation after Salat Al-Fajr (dawn prayer) even if just two verses

●When a question was asked: How does one deal with those who don’t have knowledge in matters but act as if they are experts, and lead others or issue statements/decrees, thereby misleading people?

Ayatullah Al-Najafi answered in the following analogy:

Those people draw a line with their hand and claim that it is a straight line without curves. You must use the proper “ruler” (divine criteria, knowledge, and experience) to draw a straight line next to their hand-drawn line. The presence of your straight line using the “ruler” will shout its superiority over the other line without you needing to prove or argue that their line is not straight. Therefore, do not spend your time trying to prove their lack of knowledge, concentrate on making sure you draw your line with the “ruler” (i.e. perform your actions with the proper divine criteria, knowledge, and experience).

Sayyid Ali al-Husaini Al-Sistani

●Do not rely on others and rely on yourself with the help of God.

●Do not fear people even if they are more knowledgeable than you or higher in status and only remain conscious of God.

●Do not be concerned for or saddened by the affairs of this life and work for the sake of God towards your religion and afterlife. Ayatullah Al-Sistani gave an example where he worked on a charity mission for ten years and someone else claimed the prestige. He was not saddened or affected. Since he dedicated all of his work as service to God, he was easily able to continue with the same degree of ambition and energy.

Contemplating their words and how they delivered them, I am beginning to understand the noble character traits that I was striving to learn. I pray these simple advice from these blessed individuals helps you in your life as it did in their lives by elevating your moral character to reach the tenet of noble character traits.

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*"Wisdom is the lost property of the Believer,
let him claim it wherever he finds it"*

Imam Ali (as)