

‘ALĪ BIN AL-ḤUSAYN’S VIEW ON ASCETICISM: ANALYSIS AND REVIEW WITH A MYSTICAL APPROACH

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Abstract: Asceticism as a lifestyle is highly esteemed by leaders, scholars, and mystics due to its prominent position in Islam. A survey into the lifestyle of the most significant historical religious figures of the Islamic world shows their detachment from the world and luxurious living. The main question of the research is around this issue in the thought of one of the descendant of Prophet Muhammad whether his noble behavior is the same as asceticism in mystical texts and to know whether asceticism is wearing old clothes, poverty, and abstaining from the lawful blessings. This article intends to explore the concept of asceticism based on content analysis and by referring to main Islamic mysticism texts as well as ‘Alī bin al-Ḥusayn. Asceticism has effects and signs that are mentioned in some words of ‘Alī b. al-Ḥusayn, such as avoiding the apparent, yearning for death and eternal reward of the Hereafter, and striving to obey God. We have discovered and analyzed these words and compared them with its mystical concept. The result of the study indicates the main approach of ‘Alī b. al-Ḥusayn towards the world and emphasizes that Muslim mystics follow the Prophet and his lineage in their ascetic method.

Keywords: ‘Alī bin al-Ḥusayn; Asceticism; Mysticism; Sufism.

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Introduction

Asceticism is literally against the desire and being greedy about this world; it means lack of desire toward the world,¹ it is also not willing to consider something heartily (disinclination).² In Islamic mysticism, the term “asceticism” has many definitions; broadly defined, it can ultimately refer to one meaning that is to give up the world and its ornaments as Abū Saʿīd al-Kharrāz considers asceticism as disengagement of the heart from engaging in worldly affairs and strive fully in obedience to God,³ Abdullah Ansari defined it as giving up desire altogether.⁴

Some scholars believe that the history of ascetic life goes back to Arabia—its neighboring regions—and the Jews.⁵ Some believe that the tendency of Muslims to asceticism was influenced by Christianity and due to the presence and influence of Christian monks in the Arabia and lands (Syria, Iraq, Palestine, and Egypt) that were later conquered by Muslims.⁶

Phemion was a Syrian ascetic and the first Christian missionary in the land, but his character is probably legendary. Thus, the Christian monks known as ascetics made a significant contribution in the spread of Christianity in Arabia. Christianity had a significant influence on Arabia as well as in all Muslim-dominated lands, and Christian monks and ascetics had great social status in those lands. After the rise of Islam, Christians remained in the Arabia and were respected by the Holy Prophet (PBUH); The Qurʾān also mentions Christian monks with reverence.⁷ Although the second caliph, ‘Umar

¹ Abū Bakr Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan b. Durayd al-Azdī, *Jamharat al-Lughā*, Vol. 2 (Beirut: Dār al-‘Ilm li al-Malāyīn, n.d.), 643; Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-‘Arab*, Vol. 3 (Beirut: Dār al-‘Ilm li al-Malāyīn, n.d.), 196.

² Fakhr al-Dīn al-Ṭurayḥī, *Majma‘ al-Baḥrayn wa Matla‘ al-Nayyirayn*, Vol. 3 (Tehran: Mortazavi, 1996), 59.

³ Abū Saʿīd Kharrāz, *Kitāb al-Ṣiḍq* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 1421 A.H), 30.

⁴ ‘Abd Allah al-Anṣārī al-Harawī, *Manāẓil al-Sā’irin*, 2nd (Tehran: Mola Publication, 2008), 53.

⁵ Tor Andrae, *In the Garden of Myrtles: Studies in Early Islamic Mysticism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987), 33-34.

⁶ Reynolds A. Nicholson, *The Idea of Personality in Sufism* (London: The University Press, Cambridge, 1923), 7-8.

⁷ Strongest among men in enmity to the believers wilt thou find the Jews and Pagans; and nearest among them in love to the believers wilt thou find those who say, “We are Christians”: because amongst these are men devoted to learning and

b. al-Khattab, exiled them from Najd to Syria, eastern Jordan, and Iraq, he gave them other lands there in exchange for their lost lands. However, the Christian influence in Arabia did not end completely.

Christian monks were also revered among Muslims, who gave gifts to their churches and monasteries according to historical accounts.⁸ Although asceticism in Islam cannot be considered completely influenced by Christian asceticism, the influence of Christian monks on Muslims should not be overlooked. Some consider asceticism in Islam as a reaction to the worldliness of some Muslims who have gained a lot of wealth in this way following the conquests.⁹

Despite these views, Muslim mystics consider the source of asceticism to be the Qur'ān, the prophetic biography (*al-Sīra al-Nabawīyya*), and religious leaders, which encourages Muslims to give up the luxuries and turn to the hereafter and often relied on the verse "In order that ye may not despair over matters that pass you by, nor exult over favours bestowed upon you" (al-Ḥadīd: 23). This prophetic narration is a valid means of proof for the preceding claims: "Whenever you see that a man has turned to asceticism, learn wisdom from him because wisdom has been inculcated in him".¹⁰ From the perspective of the Holy Prophet (PBUH), the ascetic is one of the sages, so the status of the ascetics is such that they deserve companionship. To clarify this statement, the Prophet (PBUH) said: "When a servant in the world turns to asceticism, God will appoint an angel as a guardian on his heart to grow wisdom in it".¹¹ Moreover, other reasons for the asceticism of Muslims is the fear of a Mighty,¹² Avenger,¹³ and Recompensor¹⁴ God.

men who have renounced the world, and they are not arrogant (Q.S. al-Mā'idah: 82).

⁸ Margaret Smith, *Studies in Early Mysticism in the Near and Middle East* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 1995), 103-124.

⁹ Qasim Ghani, *History of Sufism in Islam* (Tehran: Zavvār, 2001), 29-30.

¹⁰ Fattāl al-Naysābūrī, *Rawdat al-Wā'izīn wa Baṣīrat al-Mutta'izīn*, Vol. 2 (Qom: Razi Publications, 1375 SH), 437; Abū al-Qāsim al-Qushayrī, *al-Risāla al-Qushayrīyya* (Tehran: Scientific and Cultural Publications "Elmi O Farhangi Publications", 1374), 174.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 180.

¹² The day when they come forth, nothing of them being hidden from Allah. Whose is the Sovereignty this day? It is Allah's, the One, the Almighty (Q.S. al-Ghāfir:16).

¹³ And who is more unjust than he who is reminded of the communications of his Lord, then he turns away from them? Surely, We will give punishment to the guilty

Love is also one of the principles of asceticism. The concept of asceticism, which had evolved from its simplicity to a Sufi meaning over time, was no longer a way to save from the torment of the Hereafter, but a way to purify the soul in order to gain more ability to know, love and connect with God.¹⁵

However, the Companions of the Prophet (PBUH) are among the first ascetics whose way of life were in accordance with the Prophetic tradition and considered asceticism and poverty as their honour. Suffa fraternity were a prominent example of this ascetics, which according to historical accounts numbered more than three hundred people, and they gave up from family and worldly pleasures. Among the companions, some such as Abū Dharr al-Ghifārī, Salmān al-Fārisī, Bilāl b. Rabbah, Va'il b. Isqa were from the Suffa fraternity.¹⁶

Ḥasan al-Baṣrī is the most prominent representative of Sufism in the era of successors (*ṭabi'ūn*), who can be regarded as the main axis of the relation between the early ascetics and Sufism, as well as the head of the connection of Sufis with the Companions. Abū Nu'aym al-Isfahānī considered him as one of the eight ascetics (*al-Zubbād al-Thamāniya*) said that asceticism ended with eight of successors, one of whom was Ḥasan al-Baṣrī.¹⁷ As mentioned, he has a book on asceticism.

According to the history of spirituality in Islam, asceticism was known as the first symbol of spirituality and mysticism among Muslims and was considered as an acceptable and respectable lifestyle. The Holy Prophet and his *Ahl al-Bayt* were the first to explain it along with living ascetically. Moreover, jurists (*faqīh*), ḥadīth scholars (*muhaddithūn*) and mystics, due to the importance of asceticism in Islam, have written many treatises in this regard with special approaches, including *Kitāb al-Zuhd* by Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, *al-Zuhd* by

(Sajdah: 22). Therefore, do not think Allah (to be one) failing in His promise to His apostles; surely Allah is Mighty, the Lord of Retribution (Q.S. Ibrāhīm: 47).

¹⁴ Whoever brings a good deed, he shall have ten like it, and whoever brings an evil deed, he shall be recompensed only with the like of it, and they shall not be dealt with unjustly (al-An'ām:167). That Allah may requite each soul (according to) what it has earned; surely Allah is swift in reckoning (Ibrāhīm: 51).

¹⁵ Nicholson, *The Idea of Personality*, 8-9.

¹⁶ Abū Naṣr al-Sarrāj, *Kitāb al-Luma' fī al-Taṣawwuf* (Leiden: Braille Press, 1914), 134-141.

¹⁷ M. Shams, "Sufism", in *The Great Islamic Encyclopedia*, Vol. 15 (Tehran: Center for the Great Islamic Encyclopedia, 2008), 407.

Wahb b. 'Abd Allāh b. Maslama, *al-Zuhd* by Wakī' b. al-Jarrāh, *al-Zuhd Hannad b. al-Sirrī al-Kufī, Kitāb al-Zuhd wa al-Raqā'iq* by Abū Ja'far Muḥammad b. al-Ḥusayn al-Burjālanī, *al-Zuhd* by Ḥusayn b. Sa'īd al-Ahwāzī, *Kitāb al-Zuhd* by Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, *Treatise on Ascetic* by 'Utbah b. Aban Baṣrī known as 'Utbah b. Qulam, *al-Zuhd* by Mālik b. Dinar, *al-Masā'il fī al-Zuhd* by Ḥārith al-Muḥāsibī.

Asceticism has a special status among mystics and people of knowledge (*ahl al-ma'rifa*) and is considered one of the fundamentals of Islamic mysticism.¹⁸ Therefore, the traveller on the path (*sālik*) always needs it and must be committed to it in all stages of the pathway (*suluk*). Muslim mystics have also considered asceticism as a mystical state (*maqam*). Given the importance of recognizing the background of asceticism in the Islamic world, it is necessary to address this issue from the perspective of religious leaders. Therefore, in this article, we chose 'Alī bin al-Ḥusayn to investigate his views on asceticism.

The Imam after al-Ḥusayn b. 'Alī, was his son, Abū Muḥammad 'Alī b. al-Ḥusayn Zayn al-'Ābidīn. He also had the *kunya* Abū al-Ḥasan. He was born in Madina Sometimes between the years 33 and 38 of Hijra. His mother's identity, perhaps due to her general obscurity and irrelevance. Some said to be Sindi slave girl named Sulafa and some believed she was Shahr Bano, the daughter of Yazdjurd II, the last of the Persian Kings before Islam.¹⁹

He spent the first two years of his infancy in the lap of his grandfather 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib and then, for twelve years, he had the gracious patronage of his uncle, the second Holy Imam Ḥasan b. 'Alī.²⁰ In 61 H.A. he was present in Karbala, at the time of the gruesome tragedy of the wholesale massacre of his father, his uncles, his brothers, his cousins and all the godly comrades of his father; and

¹⁸ Meis Al-Kaisi, "Sufi Apologia in the Guise of Biography: The Case of Abū Nu'aym al-Iṣfahānī's *Ḥīyat al-Awliyā' wa-Ṭabaqāt al-Aṣfiyā'*", *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* Volume 43, no. 1 (2016), 115-134. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13530194.2015.1075378>; 'Abd al-Hakeem Carney, "Imamate and Love: The Discourse of the Divine in Islamic Mysticism," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 73, no. 3 (2005): 705-30. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4139917>.

¹⁹ Abdullah al-Rabbat, *Alī ibn al-Husayn: a Critical Biography* (United States: Kindle Direct Publishing, 2021), 3-5.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 7-9.

suffered a heartless captivity and imprisonment at the hands of the devilish forces of Yezid.²¹

‘Alī b. al-Ḥusayn lived for about 34 years after his father and all his life he passed in prayers and supplication to God and in remembrance of his martyred father. For his ever being in prayers to God, Mostly lying in prayerful prostration, this Holy Man was popularly called “Sajjād” and Zayn al-‘Ābidīn.²²

He had fifteen children, eleven boys and four girls. the names of his children were: Muḥammad al-Bāqir, Zayd, Ḥasan, Ḥusayn al-Akbar, Ḥusayn al-Aṣghar, ‘Abd Allah al-Baḥār, ‘Abd al-Raḥmān, Sulaymān, Muḥammad al-Aṣghar, ‘Umar al-Ashraf, ‘Alī, Umm Kulthum, Khadīja, Fāṭimah, and ‘Aliyya.²³

He was martyred by poisoning Sometimes between the years 92 and 95 of A.H. at Madina and is buried at Baqī near his uncle Ḥasan b. ‘Alī.²⁴

The reasons for addressing ‘Alī b. al-Ḥusayn’s view on asceticism by examining his words are as follows:

First, the reputation of ‘Alī b. al-Ḥusayn for asceticism; so that he had no concerns but praying and avoiding the world, regardless of engaging in social affairs. It has been narrated that he had built a room for himself outside Medina, where he prayed to God. It is quoted of Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq saying that the reason for the isolation and abandonment of social activities by ‘Alī b. al-Ḥusayn had been the divine command and unseen agenda in which after the martyrdom of his father, ‘Alī b. Ḥusayn opened the fourth seal of the will sent down by God; It was written: “Be silent and pray God to bring you to the state of certitude.”²⁵ Therefore, Ibn Ḥammād, a famous Shi‘a poet, called him as the monk of the *Ahl al-Bayt*:

*He was the monk of Ahl al-Bayt
And is still given the nickname of al-Sajjād because of his worship.
He spent his days fasting,
To turn to Allah in repentance,*

²¹ Ibid., 17-27.

²² Ibid., 47-48.

²³ Muḥammad b. Muḥammad Mufid, *al-Irsbād fi Ma‘rifat Ḥujaj Allāh ‘alā al-‘Ibād*, Vol. 2 (Qom: Sheikh Mofid Congress, 1413 A.H), 155.

²⁴ al-Rabbat, *Alī ibn al-Husayn*, 95-100.

²⁵ Muḥammad b. Ya‘qūb al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfi*, Vol. 2 (Tehran: Dār al-Kutub al-Islāmiyya, 1407 A.H), 281-282.

*And he passed his night with night prayer.*²⁶

Second, his sayings about asceticism in the form of ahādith, prayers, and letters.²⁷

Third, the special position of ‘Alī b. al-Ḥusayn among the Sufis and the people of knowledge is to the extent that some Sufi orders transfer their lineage (*silsila*) to ‘Alī b. al-Ḥusayn through Ibrāhīm Adham.²⁸

There are types of research on asceticism in which the perspectives and sayings of the prominent Muslim mystics have been studied; however, a study that specifically deals with asceticism in the sayings of ‘Alī b. al-Ḥusayn was not found, or if it exists, the authors have not encountered it in databases; for example, Hatami Kankabud, Habib et al. in Definition of Asceticism²⁹, refers to its state and pillars from the point of view of the Infallibles and Sufis, in which only the words of the Holy Prophet (PBUH), Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, Ḥasan b. ‘Alī and Ja‘far b. Muḥammad al-Ṣādiq on asceticism are considered, however, among the infallible, ‘Alī b. al-Ḥusayn says the most about this. *Practical Mysticism in al-Sabīfa al-Sajjadiyya* by Fatimah Rokni Yazdi, in a few pages, deals with asceticism from the point of view of ‘Alī b. al-Ḥusayn, which is good but not enough because in addition to not having a specific analysis and classification, they have not used all the authentic sayings (*al-Ma‘thūrāt*) of ‘Alī b. al-Ḥusayn.³⁰

Scholars on asceticism have done numerous studies, but to our knowledge, no studies so far have investigated asceticism independently from ‘Alī b. al-Ḥusayn’s point of view.

‘Alī b. al-Ḥusayn’s View on Asceticism

‘Alī b. al-Ḥusayn’s ascetic practical commitment is evident in his words and deeds, and there are many narrations in biographies

²⁶ Abū Ja‘far Muḥammad b. ‘Alī b. Shahr Ashūb al-Sarwī al-Mazandarānī, *Manāqib Al Abī Ṭālib*, Vol. 4 (Qom: Allamah Publications Institute, 1379 A.H), 152.

²⁷ Letter known as *al-Sabīfa al-Zuhd* to Muḥammad b. Muslim b. al-Zuhrī.

²⁸ See: Shams al-Din Parvizi, *Nouriyab Rīsalab* (treatise) (Tabriz: lithography, 1967), 28; Zayn al-‘Ābidīn b. Iskandar Shirwānī, *Riyāḍ al-Siyāḥa*, Vol. 1 (Tehran: Saadi, 1982), 38.

²⁹ Rahman Bolhasani and others, “Asceticism in Sufism and the Shiite Imams’ Narrations”, *Journal of Islamic Denominations* 3, No. 6 (2016), 74-55.

³⁰ Fatimah Rokni Yazdi, *Practical Mysticism in al-Sabīfa al-Sajjadiyya* (Mashhad: Islamic Research Foundation of Astane Quds Razavi, 2012), 136-124.

(*Sīra*) and ḥadīth collections (*Jāmi‘ aḥādīth*). ‘Alī b. al-Ḥusayn chose simple living despite his wealth and refrained from luxuries.³¹ It is quoted that he lived like ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib and in this respect, he was the most similar to him among the *Ahl al-Bayt*.³² Moreover, he gave all his property to the poor time and again.³³

Another prominent feature of ‘Alī b. al-Ḥusayn’s asceticism is fasting and night prayer. His maid quotes that she never provided food for him during the day and a bed for sleeping at night. It has been said that fasting is the key to asceticism in the world and the door to pray to God, because it causes the soul to avoid lusts and pleasures and to strive for servitude.³⁴

Regarding the asceticism of ‘Alī b. al-Ḥusayn, in some books of Hadith, metaphysical events have been attributed to him: “once, in the middle of the night, I heard a voice saying: Where are those who avoid this world and seek the Hereafter? After a moment, a voice was heard from somewhere else saying: The person you want is Ali b. al-Hussein, and none of the two-sided was seen.” Zurārah b. A‘yun narrates.³⁵ In the practical course as well as words, ‘Alī b. al-Ḥusayn has emphasized asceticism a lot and explained it.

Asceticism and Related Metaphors

‘Alī b. al-Ḥusayn reminded the Muslims about the worthlessness of the world and the futility of belonging to it in the form of stories and allegories. One of the most influential is the story of John the Baptist (Yaḥyā b. Zakariyyā), whose head was sent to a prostitute in a bowl of gold, and this is the consolation of every free and virtuous man who sees that an inferior like that woman gains great benefits of the world.³⁶

³¹ Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Khālid al-Barqī, *al-Maḥāsīn*, Vol. 2 (Qom: Dār al-Kutub al-Islāmiyya, 1371 A.H), 396.

³² Abū Ḥanīfa al-Nu‘mān b. Muḥammad al-Tamīmī al-Maghribī, *Sharḥ al-Akḥbār fi Faḍāil al-A‘immah al-Aṭḥar*, Vol. 3 (Qom: The Society of Seminary Teachers, 1409 A.H), 272-273.

³³ al-Mazandarānī, *Manāqib*, Vol. 4, 14.

³⁴ Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī, *Qūt al-Qulūb fi Mu‘āmalat al-Maḥbūb*, Vol. 1 (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 1417 A.H), 137.

³⁵ al-Maghribī, *Sharḥ al-Akḥbār*, 257; Mufid, *al-Irshād*, Vol. 2, 144; al-Naysābūrī, *Rawdat al-Wā‘iẓīn*, 199.

³⁶ Abū al-Ḥusayn Warrām b. Abī Firās b. Ḥamdān al-Mālikī al-Ashtarī, *Tanbīh al-Khawāṭir wa Nuḥbat al-Nawāṣir*, Vol. 1 (Qom: Maktab al-Faqīh, 1410 A.H), 76.

Among the allegories he uses about the world are the place of migration, the passage, the place for deeds,³⁷ an abode that has dug for man pits of deception and fastened him by the hands of death in the snares of that abode's treachery (The Whispered Prayer of the Abstainers),³⁸ the abode of mortality and nihility,³⁹ if the scales weigh, the hereafter of man is in loss, the abode of sufferings, a bridge to cross and not build,⁴⁰ the wave of the sea on which a wise man does not build a house.⁴¹

In all these metaphors, he ends up reminding of the lowness of the world and emphasizes asceticism in it. He thusly determined hostility with the world as the most virtuous act after knowing God and His Messenger (PBUH) and considers belonging to it as a sin that is the origin of all other sins and negative qualities.⁴²

Now, after condemning worldliness and belonging, it should be noted that 'Alī b. al-Ḥusayn invited Muslims to asceticism and called them to it with different statements. He sometimes warned:

*The world will migrate and go and the Hereafter will come in the form of migration, and each of them will have children. So be the children of the Hereafter, not the children of this world. Behold! Flee from this world and seek the Hereafter.*⁴³

In promoting an ascetic lifestyle and quoting the verses of the Holy Quran, he advises people:

"Be pious about the impermanent life of the world that God wants you to be reluctant to it."

In his view, belonging to the world is oppression:

³⁷ al-Ḥasan b. 'Alī Ḥarrānī, *Tuḥaf al-'Uqūl 'an Āl al-Rasūl* (Qom: The Society of Seminary Teachers, 1404 A.H), 252.

³⁸ Muḥammad Bāqir al-Muwahḥhid Abṭāḥī, *al-Ṣaḥīfa al-Sajjādiyya al-Jāmi'a li Ad'iyat al-Imām Zayn al-'Ābidīn 'Alī b. al-Ḥusayn 'alayh al-Salām ma'a Sharḥ al-Mufradāt* (Qom: Imam al-Mahdi Foundation, n.d.), 421.

³⁹ It is amazing how some people strive for the abode of mortality and have abandoned the abode of immortality.

⁴⁰ Have you not heard what Jesus said to the disciples? He said: "The world is a bridge; then cross it and do not build it." Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan al-Ṭūsī, *Tabdhīb al-Uṣūl* (Tehran: Dār al-Kutub al-Islāmiyya, 1407 A.H), 663.

⁴¹ Have you not heard what Jesus said to the disciples? He said: "Who builds a house on the wave? This world is a wave of the sea, do not belong to it." Mufīd, *al-Irshād*, 43.

⁴² al-Kulaynī, *al-Kaḥfī*, Vol. 2, 130.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 131.

“The world is a place to migrate, so do not trust it and seek for your provisions for the Hereafter.”

Finally, he prays for himself and the people:

*“I ask God to help me and you in the provisions for the Hereafter, piety and asceticism in the world, May God make me and you among the ascetics in the impermanent life of this world and eager for the reward of the Hereafter.”*⁴⁴

‘Alī b. al-Ḥusayn sometimes considered asceticism as the main solution to get rid of seditions (*fitna*), oppression, innovations (*bid‘a*) and worldliness. In explaining this issue, it is necessary to refer to the events of the life of ‘Alī b. al-Ḥusayn, which coincides with the rule and oppression of the Umayyads; the bitter events such as Ashura and the martyrdom of his father and companions (61 A.H), the battle of al-Harra (63 A.H) and Uprising of al-Mukhtār (66 A.H) are among the most tragic Islamic times in which many innocent people were killed. Thus, at the beginning of *al-Ṣaḥīfa al-Sajjādiyya*, he points out the unfortunate times, the oppression of the rulers, the worldliness of the people and innovations. Through this, he protests against the political and social conditions and addresses the Muslims and says:

*“Anyone who have an admonishing glance to passage of times, will realize that the world is mortal and impermanent, and therefore will turn to asceticism, and those who practice asceticism in the world are closer to salvation.”*⁴⁵

In the whispered prayer of the abstainers (*munājāt al-ẓāhidīn*), in addition to describing the worthlessness of the impermanent world, he talks about its deceptions and explains the reason for turning to asceticism as follows:

*“Lest we be deluded by the glitter of its ornaments! It destroys its pursuers. It is stuffed with blights, and loaded with calamities, turning to asceticism is the best way to get rid of it. Therefore, he asks God for asceticism, which strips from the robes of opposing God.”*⁴⁶

He has composed a poetry about asceticism:

The Sovereign and The Mighty God whose pre-destination does not change,

The Omniscient and The Wise God whose command is current and dominant.

⁴⁴ Ḥarrānī, *Tuḥaf al-Uqūl*, 252.

⁴⁵ Ibid., Vol. 8, 15-17.

⁴⁶ Abṭahī, *al-Ṣaḥīfa al-Sajjādiyya*, 421.

*Every mighty one bows before His Honor
And every protector is despicable before God Almighty.
Indeed, the rebellious kings are humble, submissive and despicable
To the honour of the owner of the throne.
Because of the sufferings of the world that you see,
God has commanded to renunciation and asceticism.
So, try and know that yours is passing
And you are on your way to the house of death.
Do not seek the world, because even if you get what you are looking for,
The end is your loss.⁴⁷*

The Value of Humanity

'Alī b. al-Ḥusayn considers asceticism, which is the renunciation of the world and its luxuries, to be so important that he determines it as a measure of human dignity. "Whoever has the self-respect, the world will be humiliated for him," he says. He was asked: "Who is the most valuable person?" He said: "One for whom the world is not valuable".⁴⁸ Moreover, from the final expressions of the Whispered Prayer of the Abstainers (*munājāt al-ṣāhidīn*), it is understood that the departure of the love for the world (*ḥubb al-dunyā*) from the heart leads man to the status of the righteous and the virtuous.⁴⁹ Sa'ī al-Saqāfī (d. 253 AH) also refers to exactly the same thing: "God took the world from His saints and removed its friendship from their hearts because He does not like such a thing for them".⁵⁰ Therefore, ascetics have high human dignity and value and are among righteous, pious and saints. He briefly defines asceticism in giving up the apparent and transient pleasures of the world, not seeking what is disobedient to God, yearning for death and the eternal reward of the Hereafter and striving to obey God. He also considered the opportunity to achieve success of asceticism and its continuation as divine grace.⁵¹ Mystics have also emphasized the importance of this issue; for example, Yusuf Isbat (d. 176 AH) says: "One of the signs of asceticism is to

⁴⁷ al-Naysābūrī, *Rawdat al-Wā'iḥīn*, Vol. 2, 453.

⁴⁸ Ḥarrānī, *Tuḥaf al-'Uqūl*, 278.

⁴⁹ Abṭahī, *al-Ṣaḥīfa al-Sajjādiyya*, 422; Joseph E. B. Lumbard, "From 'Ḥubb' to 'Ishq': The Development of Love in Early Sufism," *Journal of Islamic Studies* 18, no. 3 (2007): 345-385. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/26200249>.

⁵⁰ al-Qushayrī, *al-Risāla*, 176.

⁵¹ Abṭahī, *al-Ṣaḥīfa al-Sajjādiyya*, 421.

know that a servant cannot practice asceticism unless he fears God”.⁵² ‘Alī b. al-Ḥusayn has also said in the signs of asceticism: simple living and contentment to the least; separation from the world and its ornaments; abstinence from lusts and prohibitions; easing of calamities and sufferings; sadness in heart; chastity; low needs; prayer; fear (from God) and clemency.⁵³

‘Alī b. al-Ḥusayn has both pointed out the characteristics of asceticism and ascetics and introduced the claimants of asceticism in order to distinguish true ascetic from pseudo-ascetics:

“Whenever you see someone whose appearance and manner are good, he talks a lot and is humble, then be careful that he does not deceive you, because there are many people who are unable to access the world and commit its prohibitions due to weakness, humiliation, weakness of will and fear, but they choose the path of religiosity and deceive people with their appearance, and if they have access to the prohibitions, they are not ashamed, and if you see that they are avoiding the prohibitions, then be careful that they do not deceive you because the desires of people are different; there many people who avoid the prohibitions, even though it is abundant, but force themselves to do hard and unlawful deeds and thus commit the prohibited act. When you see such people, then beware lest they deceive you so that you may know how much they adhere to reason. There are many of those who have avoided all these and yet do not have a sound reason, and the corruption they commit ignorantly is more than the good deed they do wisely. Therefore, whenever you find the reason of such a person sound, be careful not to be deceived unless you know whether he stands against reason with the whims or is accompanied by reason and stands against passion? And know what his piety and interest in the false presidency is? And know what his piety and interest in the false presidency is? Because there are those among the people who are loser in this world and the hereafter, they leave the world for the sake of worldliness. They consider the pleasure of false presidency superior to dominating the permitted (*mubāḥ*) blessings (*ni‘ma*). They leave all this for the sake of the presidency, so that if they are told: Fear God, a sinful honour will overtake them, in which case hell is enough for them and a bad place. So, they go

⁵² al-Qushayrī, *al-Risāla*, 177.

⁵³ al-Kulaynī, *al-Kaḥfī*, Vol. 2, 131-132.

on blindly; the very first steps they take in transgression lead them to the ultimate level of loss, consequently, they consider the unlawful (*ḥarām*) of God lawful (*ḥalāl*) and the lawful of God unlawful. They are not afraid of losing anything of their religion in exchange for retaining their presidency, for which they have made themselves miserable. Such are those who are subject to the wrath and curse of God, and God has prepared a painful punishment for them. But the perfect man is one who has made his whims subject to the command of God and spends all his energy in the way of divine predestination (*al-qada' wa al-qadar*), and considers humiliation in the way of God closer to eternal honour and no honour in the way of falsehood and he knows that the little suffering he endures in the world will lead him to eternal blessing in a house that does not decay. Indeed, if most of his pleasures are in following the whims, it will lead to a perpetual and endless torment, so seek means to him in the world and follow his way, and seek his intercession in the presence of your Lord, because God does not reject any prayer because of him and does not disappoint any seeker.”⁵⁴

He considers asceticism as a sign of identification with true Shiites.⁵⁵

The Impacts of Asceticism

Reluctance to the World and its Adornments. The first sign of asceticism is a reluctance to the world and inattention to it. As mentioned, asceticism is turning away from something low to something transcendent, and since the Hereafter has survival and is also superior to the world, 'Alī b. al-Ḥusayn has considered turning to the adornments of the world as negligence and forbidding human beings from it and says: “*And do not be among the negligent who are inclined to the splendour of this world's life*”⁵⁶ which means neglect of God; it has been narrated from Abū Sulaymān al-Dārānī: “*Asceticism, in our opinion, is the abandonment of anything that causes man to neglect God*”.⁵⁷ Moreover, he cites the verse “*And incline not toward those who do wrong lest the Fire*

⁵⁴ al-Ashtarī, *Tanbih al-Khawāṭir*, Vol. 2, 99-100.

⁵⁵ Muḥammad Bāqir al-Majlisī, *Zād al-Ma'ād wa Yalibi Kitāb Miftāḥ al-Jīnān*, Vol. 65 (Beirut: al-'Alami Institute for Press, 1423 A.H), 169.

⁵⁶ Ḥarrānī, *Tuḥaf al-'Uqūl*, 251.

⁵⁷ al-Qushayrī, *al-Risāla*, 178; Abū Ḥamid al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*, Vol. 4 (Tehran: Scientific and Cultural Publications, 2007), 390.

touch you” (Hūd: 113). He considers trust in the world as a sign of oppression because belonging to the impermanent world, which is only for migration, is an obvious unjust to own souls.⁵⁸ ‘Alī b. al-Ḥusayn states the signs of reluctance towards the world:

Regarding Death and Hereafter. ‘Alī b. al-Ḥusayn says that whoever carefully contemplates the vicissitudes of fortune, its seditions (*fitnah*) and deceptions becomes reluctant to the transient desires of the world, ignores its pleasures, yearns for the lasting blessings of the Hereafter and strives for it. It has been narrated by Ibn Jala’ (d. 360 A.H) that “an ascetic is one who looks at the world as if it is declining in order to be despised in his eyes and thus it is easy for him to turn away from it”.⁵⁹

Reluctance to the world, as he points out, draws attention to death. In another Ḥadīth, he says: “*Remember death because the remembrance of death eliminates sins and causes piety in the world*”.⁶⁰ He says about the connection between asceticism and inclination to the Hereafter: “*He who strives for the reward of the Hereafter is reluctant to the transient desires of the world.*” Therefore, asceticism means the desire for the Hereafter and blessings in exchange for turning away from the world. Al-Ghazālī also calls turning away from the world and longing for the Hereafter as asceticism, even though it is with the intention of greed for Houris, palaces, fruits and the reward of Paradise, but he considers its level lower than absolute asceticism without greed for God’s reward. He called this level the asceticism of the hopefuls (*al-rājīn*); for the world is not for them to be satisfied with nothingness and to get rid of suffering but to be greedy for endless blessings.⁶¹

The Hereafter and eternal life is the main goal of ‘Alī b. al-Ḥusayn, who constantly emphasizes it. Finally, he asks God for asceticism to protect him from all that is a burden in the Hereafter.⁶²

Avoid of ornaments and contentment to a minimum. Among the signs of reluctance to the world will be ignoring its ornaments and contentment to a minimum. “*Indeed, the ascetics in the life of the world made the earth as their bed, the soil as their carpet and the water as their pleasant*

⁵⁸ Ḥarrānī, *Tuḥaf al-Uqūl*, 252.

⁵⁹ al-Qushayrī, *al-Risāla*, 176.

⁶⁰ al-Ashtarī, *Tanbih al-Khawāṭir*, Vol. 1, 269.

⁶¹ al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā’*, Vol. 4, 371, 386.

⁶² al-Ṭūsī, *Tabdhīb al-Uṣūl*, Vol. 3, 82, al-Naysābūrī, *Rawdat al-Wā’izīn*, Vol. 2, 453.

fragrance and turned away from the world," he says.⁶³ Therefore, asceticism in the world is a contentment that is related to wealth.⁶⁴ The ascetic will benefit from the glamors of the world to the least of them and only to the extent that his need is met and he does not consider it.⁶⁵

In explaining the above statement, it has been said that the most important human needs include food, clothing, housing, home appliances, family and property. The ascetic should suffice with the least amount of food that is for pray and not for pleasure. Clothing should be enough to protect from heat and cold and cover the intimate parts (*'awrah*), and the material of clothes should be made of coarse wool.

Asceticism in housing also has three degrees: the higher is that the ascetic does not look for a specific house for himself and is satisfied with the mosque's corners like the Suffa fraternity. The middle is looking for a specific place, but it is like a house made of date palms or something like that, and the least of which is looking for houses that are ready to be bought or rented. So, if its extent is as much as it is necessary and there is no adornment in it, it will not take him out of the last degree of asceticism so much. So, if the house area is large enough and lacks decoration, this amount will not take him out of the last degrees of asceticism.

The fourth is home appliances, the highest degree of which is possessed by Jesus, who had nothing but a comb and a jar. One day he saw a person combing his beards with his fingers, he threw his comb, and he saw another person who drank water from the ditch with the palm of his hand, he also threw the jar. The middle is to get enough home appliances and use a tool for various tasks, such as someone who eats both water and food in a bowl and keeps things in it. This is why the predecessors used a tool for different tasks for their being disburdened. The lowest degree is that he has a tool for any task, but of low price and poor quality, and if he increases the number or price of goods, he will leave all the stages of asceticism and has been inclined to acquisitiveness.

The fifth is marriage. Some, such as Sahl al-Tustarī, believe that an ascetic does not need to get married, and some, following the prophetic tradition, consider it permissible. But sometimes the family

⁶³ al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, Vol. 2, 132.

⁶⁴ al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'*, Vol. 4, 389.

⁶⁵ Farīd al-Dīn 'Aṭṭār al-Naysābūrī, *Tadhkirat al-Awliyā'* (Tehran: Zavvār, 2007), 295.

causes man to neglect God, in which case the celibate life is better. Sometimes marriage is better to quench lust as long as one does not forget God. Because the increase in the population of the Muslim Ummah is the cause of closeness (*qurb*) to God and enjoyment, which is part of human nature, is not harmful if it is not a goal. Therefore, since not marrying causes the discontinuance of the generation, one should not leave the marriage for the purpose of asceticism in enjoyment.

The sixth is wealth and greed for honours or social climbing. Social climbing ultimately leads to destruction. Therefore, the ascetic should not try to gain popular and social status and should avoid it's more or less. But property is essential in livelihood. So, if he is a businessman, one of the conditions of asceticism is that when he acquires his daily needs, he must leave the business; If he does not do so and his wealth becomes enough for him for more than a year, he will no longer be a poor or wealthy ascetic. Therefore, whoever uses worldly possessions as much as necessary will not leave the circle of asceticism rather this is a condition of religiosity, and if his property is more than that, it will be a burden for him in the Hereafter.⁶⁶

Avoid of all friendship but God. 'Alī b. al-Ḥusayn says: "Indeed, the sign of ascetics in this world and beseechers in the Hereafter is to leave every friend and send away any companion who does not seek what they seek".⁶⁷ Mystics have also considered leaving the love of the world's people as the principles of leaving the world.⁶⁸ Therefore, they chose the Creator over His creatures and their souls, and they prefer any divine command in which God is pleased, and they undertake altruism in His way.⁶⁹ It is quoted: "Asceticism is to give up what is in it and turn to whom is in it".⁷⁰ Al-Ghazālī has interpreted such asceticism as an absolute, which is turning away from all, even

⁶⁶ al-Ghazālī, *Ihyā'*, Vol. 4, 393-408.

⁶⁷ Ḥarrānī, *Tuḥaf al-'Uqūl*, 272.

⁶⁸ Abd al-Malik b. Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm al-Naysābūrī al-Kharkūshī, *Taḥdhib al-Asrār fī Uṣūl al-Taṣawwuf* (Beirut: Dār al-'Ilm li al-Malāyīn, 1427 A.H), 484.

⁶⁹ Muḥy al-Dīn b. 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkīyya*, Vol. 2 (Beirut: Dār al-Ṣadr, n.d.), 18.

⁷⁰ al-Qushayrī, *al-Risāla*, 179.

Paradise but God, and that he loves nothing and no one but Him, which is the highest degree of asceticism.⁷¹

Avoid lusts and prohibitions. According to 'Alī b. al-Ḥusayn, since the ascetics are eager for paradise and are afraid of the fire of hell, avoid lusts and prohibitions;⁷² it has been said that since asceticism is the limitation of desires (shortening wishes), it destroys all lusts; And he who limits his desires will give up all lusts.⁷³

Ease of calamities and sufferings. 'Alī b. al-Ḥusayn says: "Whoever is reluctant to the world, calamities will be easy for him."⁷⁴ Because ascetics have absolute trust in God, calamity, comfort, praise, and condemnation are the same for them.⁷⁵ Hence, they do not grieve upon what is lost and do not delight in what is gained.⁷⁶

Sadness in the heart. According to 'Alī b. al-Ḥusayn, the heart of an ascetic is always sad because he sees the heavenly people as eternal in Paradise and hellish people as tormented in Hell.⁷⁷ Mystics also believe that the permanence of asceticism causes sadness in the heart and weakness in the body.⁷⁸

Chastity. 'Alī b. al-Ḥusayn considers ascetics to be chaste and says, "The ascetics are chaste."⁷⁹ Chastity (*'afāf*) is refraining from committing forbidden (*ḥaram*); therefore, the ascetic and devout (*'ābid*) is called chaste.⁸⁰

Prayer. Another attribute of the ascetics is prayer (*'ibāda*): "They get up at night to worship, their tears are running down their faces." 'Alī b. al-Ḥusayn says.⁸¹ It is said that the ascetic spends all his time in prayer.⁸²

⁷¹ al-Ghazālī, *Ihya'*, Vol. 4, 371-372. Joseph E. B. Lumbard, "From 'Ḥubb' to 'Ishq': The Development of Love in Early Sufism," *Journal of Islamic Studies* 18, No. 3 (2007), 345-385. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/26200249>.

⁷² al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfi*, Vol. 2, 132.

⁷³ al-Ghazālī, *Ihya'*, Vol. 4, 389.

⁷⁴ al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfi*, Vol. 2, 132.

⁷⁵ al-Makkī, *Qūt al-Qulūb*, Vol. 1, 470.

⁷⁶ Muḥammad Mahdī al-Narāqī, *Jāmi' al-Sa'ādāt*, Vol. 2 (Beirut: al-A'lamī Foundation for Pub, n.d.), 62.

⁷⁷ al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfi*.

⁷⁸ 'Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī, *al-Fath al-Rabbāni wa al-Fayḍ al-Raḥmāni* (Cairo: al-Thaqāfa al-Dīniyya, 1426 A.H.), 219.

⁷⁹ al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfi*.

⁸⁰ Mohammad Sudi Bosnevi, *Sufi Commentary on Hafẓ*, Vol. 2 (Urmia: Anzali, 1978), 108.

⁸¹ al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfi*.

It is also quoted from Salman al-Farsi: “Whenever a servant lives in the world ascetically, his heart is enlightened with wisdom, and his body parts will help him in prayer.”⁸³ It is also said that when the ascetic becomes acquainted with God, the sweetness of worship overwhelms his heart.⁸⁴

Fear (from God). ‘Alī b. al-Ḥusayn says about the fear in ascetics: “The ascetics suffer from a kind of fear due to worship, which causes their body to become thin.”⁸⁵ Mystics believe that fear is a straight path (*sirāṭ al-mustaqīm*) for the ascetic.⁸⁶ Also, it has been said that fear and poverty are two constant companions of the ascetic.⁸⁷

Clemency. The clemency (*ḥilm*) is for the soul to be reassured (soul in complete rest and satisfaction) in such a way that anger and rage do not easily provoke it and do not weaken when confronted with reprehensible (*makrūb*).⁸⁸ ‘Alī b. al-Ḥusayn considers clemency (forbearing) as one of the attributes of ascetics in the day and reminds them of tolerant forbearing, virtuous and God-fearing scientists.⁸⁹ Some have interpreted the clemency as a friend of ascetic (*Khalīle Zabīd*);⁹⁰ hence, it has been said that the clemency of ascetic increases.⁹¹

Concluding Remarks

The confirmation of asceticism by the saints of Islam, with its history before the advent of Islam in Islamic lands, indicated their main approach to the world, so they expanded it and explained its points and practices. Among the great and famous people of the Islamic world, people like ‘Alī b. al-Ḥusayn used asceticism in the world as their way of life. So that in the existing ḥadīths, ‘Alī b. al-

⁸² Yahyā b. Mu‘adh Rāzī, *Jawābir al-Taṣawwuf* (Cairo: Maktab al-Adab, 1423 A.H), 150.

⁸³ Ibid., 28.

⁸⁴ al-Ghazālī, *Ihyā’*, Vol. 4, 411.

⁸⁵ al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*.

⁸⁶ al-Ḥusayn b. Naṣr b. Khamīs, *Manāqib al-Abrār wa Maḥāsīn al-Akhyār*, Vol. 1 (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 1427 A.H), 114.

⁸⁷ ‘Abd al-Razzāq Kāshānī, *Sharḥ Manāẓil al-Sā’irīn* (Qom: Bidar, 2006), 836.

⁸⁸ Seyed Sadigh Goharin, *Explanation of Sufi Terms*, Vol. 4 (Tehran: Zavvār, 1989), 284.

⁸⁹ al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*.

⁹⁰ Khamīs, *Manāqib al-Abrār*, Vol. 1, 114.

⁹¹ al-Ḥārith al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Masā’il* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 1421 A.H), 11.

Ḥusayn, who is famous for his asceticism, is the most similar person to 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib in asceticism. In addition, he explained asceticism in his sayings and prayers, stating that it was the only real way to escape from the traps and tricks of the mortal world. He believed that true ascetic life and adherence to asceticism, which is far from hypocrisy and attracting people's attention, has excellent spiritual and spiritual effects and results for human beings.

All these results in Sufism are considered as stations (*maqāmāt*) and states (*ahwāl*) and morals that the seeker to God achieves in his/her spiritual path. Therefore, asceticism can be considered one of the behavioural tools and methods that is very effective for purifying the seeker's soul from moral vices. According to what was said and analyzed by 'Alī b. al-Ḥusayn about asceticism in this article, another implicit conclusion can be drawn: that the Muslim mystics and the Sufi Orders, whom convey their line of devotion to the Ahl al-Bayt, and considered them as the pioneers of their creed. In addition, they follow their manners in the teachings of practical conduct such as asceticism. Therefore, we have seen that the words of mystics about asceticism are very similar to the words of 'Alī b. al-Ḥusayn.

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