



Disciplining the Self ¹ *Imām Ibn `Aṭā`Allāh al-Sakandarī ²*

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Released by www.marifah.net 1428 H

If you are asked: Who is a believer? Say: He who is informed about the flaws of his self; he, who cannot see flaws in others. If they ask you, who is the disgraced one? Say: He who finds flaws in others and considers himself free from fault.

Among the extreme lenience we see in the people of our age is that they are undisturbed, affable and amiable with those who sin [openly]. If they would have shown their displeasure and conveyed that they were offended, it would serve as a reprimand to the sinners.

If the door of excellence was really opened for you, you would not have repeatedly returned to despicable and odious deeds. Do you not see that someone who has been invited to a palace will not [wish to] return to the garbage dump? If the door of solace (*uns*) with Him was opened for you, you would not have asked for company and comfort [of others.] If He had chosen you, you would not be broken away from Him. If you were honored by Him, you would not be looking for honor elsewhere.

If the love of everyone in this world (*makhlūq*) fades away from your heart, be happy.

¹ Excerpted from *Tāj al-`Arūs* by Imām Ibn `Aṭā`Allāh al-Sakandarī

² Imām Tājuddīn Abūl Faḍl Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad ibn `Abdul Karīm ibn `Abdul Raḥmān ibn `Abdullāh ibn Aḥmed ibn `Īsā ibn al-Ḥusayn ibn `Aṭā`Allāh al-Sakandarī: Jidhāmī by descent, Mālikī in *fiqh*, Alexandrine by domicile and buried in Qurāfa - he was a Sūfī who followed the Shādhilī *ṭarīqa*.

Shaykh Zarrūq says that he was a master in many disciplines – tafsīr, ḥadīth, fiqh, grammar, and the science of principles. He was a great spokesman of the sufis, a great preacher whose speech was of immense benefit to a multitude, who then followed him in his path. This was foretold by his Shaykh Abūl `Abbās al-Mursī as he himself relates in *Laṭāyif al-Minan*: ‘The Shaykh told me: Be steadfast. By Allāh if you do so, you shall be a Muftī in both the *madhhabs* – that of Sharī`ah the external and *ṭarīqa* the internal.’ It is also reported from him [Shaykh Abūl `Abbās] that he said: ‘By Allāh, this young man will not pass away before being a great sermonizer who invites people towards the path of Allāh’ He is also reported to have said: ‘By Allāh, you shall reach great heights, By Allāh, you shall have a great stature.’

He passed away - Allah's mercy upon him - in the month of Jamādī al-Ākhir, in the year 709 AH.

Because this is a great boon granted to you. And do not sin, because only humiliation accompanies it – do you choose sin [and disgrace] after He has given you honor?

Never!

Certainly honor is linked with obedience and disgrace with sin. Obedience to Him is radiance and lifts the veils [between you and your Lord] and its opposite, sinning is darkness and humiliation and a great veil between you and your Lord. Nay, nothing prevents you from achieving the lofty state of witnessing your Lord, except your transgression and indulgence in this world.

If your son is disobedient, discipline him but do not disown him; just be stern with him so that he abstains from his bad ways. Among the many miseries a believer faces when he sins is that others may mock him or denigrate him. If they do so, they have surely lost their way! When a believer sins, he has fallen in a great quagmire. So you must treat him like you would do to your errant son - outwardly, you are displeased with him but you feel sorry for him and feel kindness in your heart. And you pray for him in his absence.

It is great ignorance to be jealous of people in this world upon that which they have been given [material pleasures]. And your craving for that which is not given to you is phenomenal callousness and outright stupidity. Because they are indulgent in that which they have been given, and you [poor soul!] indulge yourself in that which you have NOT been given!

If there is an inflammation in your eye, you try to cure it. This is because your eye has tasted the sweetness of this world, its beauty and you do not want to risk losing it. But your insight, your perspicacity (*baṣīra*) has been suffering for forty years and you do not care for it?

Know that an early part of your life is already spent, and a very little of it now remains. Like a woman who has ten sons and nine of them have died; does she not pour all her attention and her love to this remaining one? Most of your life has been wasted, try to salvage what is left of it – and there is not much of it, though.

By Allāh! your life did not start when you were born. It began when you recognized Allāh ﷻ.

There is a great difference between the blessed ones and the wretched. When the blessed folk see a person caught in a vice, they reject it and reproach him outwardly; but privately they pray for his amendment, for his pardon. And the wretched reproach him to satisfy their own urges, to vent their frustration. Sometimes they go as far as to flay his honor. A believer is he who advises his brother secretly, hiding his flaws from the public. And the wretched ones are the opposite. If they see a person caught in a sin or a vice, they close the doors on him and humiliate him because of his sin.

These are a people whose eyes are bereft of light, and are far away from the grace of Allāh ﷻ.

If you wish to estimate the intellect of a person, watch what he says when someone is mentioned. If he says, 'Oh, him? He is such and such and he did such and such,' so

much that he keeps talking ill of him, then know that his inside is rotten. He has no knowledge. But, if he speaks good of him and if he finds an excuse for his vice saying: 'probably he had forgotten' or 'he must have an excuse we do not know' and so forth, then know that his inside is sturdy. A believer strives hard to safeguard the honor of his brother.

