

BOOK ON
ETHICS

THE TREATMENT OF WHAT
CONCERNS APPETITION

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**IMAM RAZI'S
ILM-AL-AKHLAQ**

ENGLISH TRANSLATION OF
THE TREATMENT OF WHAT CONCERNS APPETITION

From his book
KITAB AL-NAFS WA'L-RUH WA SHARH QUWAHUMA

Translated by M SAGHIR HASAN MASUMI

ON THE TREATMENT OF WHAT CONCERNS APPETITION

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INTRODUCTION

In the name of Allah, the Most Merciful, the Most Compassionate.

All praise belongs to Allah Whose Greatness is free from the contention of figures and opposites, Whose grace is purified of combat likes and partners; Whose unity and individuality is free from spouse and children; Whose existence is shorn of the nature of potency¹ and aptitude. He is above the elevated high heavens without pillars, and buttress, Who has spread the earth which has been stretched without having any support and assistance concerning the warren of reality of Whose eternity pulsating hearts are puzzled, and in the light of Whose Divine heity, the thoughts of the seekers of truth and the visions of the people of guidance remain distracted travelling in the absence of absence, the ungeneration of the ungenerated, the eternity of eternity, never returning except to the absolute confession that He is Indivisible unlike individuals, an Entity unlike entities. If you say, "when did He come into being?" Surely, He was in existence even when there was no 'time to be indicated' before the genesis. If you say, "wherein (i.e., wherein did He exist?)" Surely, He is too sublime to be incarnated, transmigrated, and dependency. Therefore, He is Allah; there is no God but He. All praise belongs to Him in this world and in the Hereafter praises which never come to an end and never exhausted. I praise Him with a praise which springs from the sincerity or belief, and thank Him for the assistance (bounties) He has bestowed on us. I bear witness to the fact that there is no God but Allah alone, Who has no associate for Himself—an evidence free from falsehood and enmity, a preparation which may be instrumental in obtaining salvation on the Day of Resurrection. And, I bear witness that Muhammad (S) is His servant and His Messenger whom He has sent to all His servants (mankind), and whom He has made the most eloquent of all those who speak Arabic. May the blessings of Allah be upon him and upon his family as long as the days, months and festivals come in succession, and may He send to them peace and prosperity in abundance.

Now, this is a book on the science of Ethics² (moral teachings), arranged according to the convincing demonstrative method and not the dialectic method which forcibly imposes accusations (upon the opponents).

We ask Allah to render it unto a cause for great profit in both the worlds, for happiness in both Abodes. Verily He is the best of Guides and Helpers.

ON THE LOVE OF WEALTH

You must know that there are many verses in the Qur'an which praise wealth and some others which condemn it.

The verses of praise are Allah's expressions:

"Say: That which ye spend for good (must go) to parents and near kindred (The Cow: 255); O ye who believe! Spend of that wherewith We have provided you . . . (The Cow: 254);.....and seek of Allah's bounty . . . " (The Congregation: 10).

As for the verses that condemn wealth, they are as follows: "O ye who believe! Let not your wealth nor your children distract you from remembrance of Allah. Those who do so, they are the losers.

"(And know that) your possessions and your children are a test. Rivalry in worldly increase distracteth you"

Since these verses apparently contradict each other it is necessary to explain their agreement. The only possible way of harmonizing them for man is to explain the ascending degrees of excellence and these are three:

(1) those belonging to human soul such as sciences, excellent manners,

(2) those belonging to the body such as health and beauty,

(3) those that are external, some of which are proximate such as food and drink which serve the body, and the body serves the soul, and the soul perfects itself with sciences and excellent manners, body and soul being the two masters in general. (Some are remote like wealth) which serves in general. For, if wealth is spent in the acquisition of sciences and excellent manners, it is praiseworthy, and if it is spent for sensuous pleasures which have already been known as condemnable, it is condemnable. So, this is the way to find agreement between these texts, because through the first the eternal bliss is secured and through the second eternal misfortune befalls man.

ON THE METHOD OF USING WEALTH FOR ATTAINING SPIRITUAL BLISS

Wealth is either spent by a man to profit himself or to profit somebody other than himself. As for the first, man has been created in such a manner that he is in need of food, clothing, dwelling and marriage. If he does not fulfil these needs he would not be able to secure perfections in his speculative and active faculties. But these needs cannot be met and fulfilled except by means of wealth. In this respect wealth assists man in securing spiritual bliss.

In the second case, when man spends his wealth for the good of somebody else, this somebody is either specified or not specified.

In the first case, when the wealth is spent for a particular person, it is spent either for removing some trouble, when, for example, an amount is handed over to some tyrant in order to enable a person to escape from his oppression, or to a poet whom he fears lest he may compose a satire, if he does not give him some amount.

Or, the wealth is spent for securing some gain which may be either worldly or other-worldly.

The first is of two kinds. Either he is engaged always in earning psychological excellences—sciences and morals—and is never free to look after his worldly affairs, and is therefore in need of someone to serve him in respect of these affairs and therefore spends a portion of his wealth as wages for such service. Or, he would, secondly, spend a portion of his wealth for the sake of manliness and for showing respect to guests. All this is good and praiseworthy.

As for the expenditure which is for the benefit of the other world, it is like zakat and sadaqat (alms).

The other case, in which wealth is handed over to an unspecified person, is like building mosques, bridges, caravanserais, hospitals, digging wells, establishing factories, fixing water-jars in streets, all these are good and explain how one can benefit from one's wealth.

As for the explanation of the misery wealth causes, it is for more than one reason:

1. The bodily desires dominate temperaments. When the ability of attaining these pleasures is available the action occurs in the absence of an obstacle and the presence of ability with the motive.
2. When the wealth is available, man enjoys the obviously permissible objects. Since the motive is there and the obstacle is absent, the action will therefore occur. Then when he becomes fond of the enjoyment, his wealth becomes scarce while it is not possible for him to have patience so that he may defer his enjoyment. As a result he falls, due to this habit, on unlawful earning, and there open up before him the doors of all sorts of condemnable moral habits.
3. To preserve wealth is very difficult and unless man puts forth his best efforts wealth cannot be preserved. The attention of his heart to this enterprise prevents him from engaging himself in the remembrance of Allah the exalted, since "Allah hath not assigned unto any man two hearts within his body"

ON GREED AND MISERLINESS

Greed lies in making full effort to secure wealth in its absence or scarcity.

Miserliness lies in making full effort to keep wealth when it is available. Love of wealth is, thus, obtained in both cases, the only difference lies in the fact that the love of collecting and obtaining (wealth) is greed and the love of keeping (wealth) is miserliness.

When you have realized this we say: The love of wealth is caused by two reasons? Firstly, wealth is the cause of power which is a perfection; and perfection is loved per se; and that which leads to the beloved is loved, wealth is therefore loved.

Secondly, wealth demands the removal of want, and the removal of want is desired, and whatever leads to the desired object is also desired, the difference between the two is manifest. For, an old patient who is nearing death and who possesses huge wealth beyond limitation, feels excessive pain on hearing even in this critical state that his wealth has been stolen or looted in spite of his knowledge that his wealth was of no use to him. The pain that he suffers from is not because he needs the wealth, since he is aware that he will die next day. This indicates that he feels pain because he is niggardly. Surely his power is removed on account of the fact that value has disappeared from his wealth, the disappearance of power being the disappearance of perfection which last is a defect that is abhorred per se

Having realized this, let us look into the treatment of niggardliness which has a number of reasons :

1. First, a man should endeavour to lessen his needs. For when his needs are scarce his trouble and inclination towards the achievement of that which will meet his needs are scarce. (This is also) because to cause the absence of something before it is obtained is not intelligible. This need is undoubtedly either that of the agent himself who is benefited by wealth, or it is the need of his descendants.

(a) The need of the first kind can be treated by increasing hope and expectation through frequent remembrance of death, consideration into the death of the friends and associates, and by turning his thoughts to the fact that it is not possible to be benefitted by wealth except in the present moment. Then, he should be contented with the least of food, clothing and dwelling that he needs, and should close to himself the means of seeking pleasures—this would lessen his greed for securing wealth for the sake of his own self.

(b) The need of the second kind can be treated by not attending to his children in view of the fact that Allah has created the child and has simultaneously created his sustenance. Besides, how many children there are who inherited naught from their fathers but became richer than him or the richest of the creation; and many a child inherited huge wealth but became most needy of mankind.

2. Second, he should ponder over the relevant verses and traditions of the Prophet (s) which condemn miserliness and commend excessive generosity, promising great reward in case of generosity, and giving warning of severe chastisement in case of miserliness

3. Third, the frequent consideration into the conditions of niggardly people, the dislike shown by the excellent people towards the misers, and the agreement of the people of the world on condemning them. For, a miser is sure to condemn miserliness in others. He can know how others feel about him, by looking to his own feelings about the miserly people.

4. Fourth, he should consider the nature of wealth and should know that he has no way of deriving benefit from wealth except by parting with it. The gains are either bodily, which are mean and scarce and in the obtaining of which huge wealth is not needed or the benefits are spiritual, in which case

he is sure and certain that wealth is of no use to him in securing these spiritual profits and useful purposes. Therefore, to strive after wealth is as though one severs one's ties from the desired objective, which is ignorance.

5. Fifth, he should think that though he goes to excess in the keeping of wealth, sometimes there occurs something which causes wastage of wealth leaving behind no praise and reward. But when he turns to the means of attaining virtues, the praise and reward shall remain with Allah, the Exalted, just as He says: "That which ye have wasteth away, and that which Allah hath remaineth".

6. Sixth, when man is unable to spend wealth, he remains like a prisoner in the dominating hand of the love of wealth, and when he is able to spend he becomes dominant and powerful over it; and it is better for man to be dominating than to be dominated by something else, since the first is the attribute of truth and the second is the attribute of matter, as has been said by Allah: "And Allah is the Rich and ye are the poor"

7. Seventh, when a man keeps wealth and does not spend it, his wealth inevitably remains after his death and is possessed by somebody who boasts and says: "This wealth was only hoarded by the miser, the cursed". He, then, spends it for the welfare of his own self, and only mentions the dead man with a curse. Thus, no trace of his (owner's) right survives in his wealth except condemnation in this world and evil consequence in the next world.

But, when a man spends his wealth in virtuous deeds glorious eulogy remains for him in this world and ample reward awaits him in the next world.

8. Eighth, the co-sharers of the miser in his miserly qualifications are all wretched misers, who are condemned and debased. A generous philanthropist shares his glory with the Prophets, the Friends of Allah, the eminent philosophers and great people.

9. Ninth, experience shows that Allah, the Exalted, opens the doors of sustenance, comfort, and mercy to the generous. But the misers are always excessively in trouble, miserable and are gloomy of heart. Mostly it so happens that they are forced to spend most of their wealth all at once beside their disgrace and dishonour, the reason being that all universal means turn to do good to the needy. Now, whoever adopts this profession of doing good, these universal means strengthen him, and whoever opposes this is pitted against the universal means.

10. Tenth, the generous man is praised and commended by all, and the miser is abhorred and looked down with contempt. The generous man spends the wealth and finds his honour in the possession of spirits, and the miser keeps his wealth and remains deprived of the possession of spirits. Since the human spirits are from the substance of angels and gold and silver from the genus of inorganic matter, the difference between the two is great.

Again, there is another reason here. That is, since generosity is loved by all people they assist the generous in his enterprises; and the miser is abhorred, so he remains deprived of this assistance.

People assist him in attaining his demands for the explicit reason—the abundance of his wealth. And, though generosity apparently causes loss of wealth it increases it in respect of what we have mentioned. Miserliness is useful apparently for protecting wealth but it necessarily causes the loss of wealth in respect of what has been mentioned.

Again, there is another reason, namely since people are sure that the particular man is generous, their ambitions help him in achieving huge wealth in the expectation that he would hand it over to them; and when they know that he is a miser their ambitions help in keeping him deprived of wealth. It is, of course, recognized that the ambitions of the people are extremely effective.

11. Eleventh, wherever a generous man is present, hearts surely feel pleased with his presence and spirits rejoice when he proceeds towards them. The case is quite opposite with the miser. That is why, it is said the best soul is like the illuminating sun.

12. Twelfth, surely the miser inevitably desires, as he approaches death to spend and do good to the people, since his lust is an expression of his strong desire to keep his wealth for himself, so when he is sure that he is facing death he realizes that it is not possible for him to preserve the wealth in the worldly life, and knows that there is no way of carrying it with himself. It becomes easy for him, then, to spend it in various items of welfare at the time when death approaches him. It mostly so happens that in such a critical moment he does not find a legible tongue or a guiding intelligence and remains troubled by the pang of death while his kith and kin pay no heed to his words—this causes him to feel great distress at heart, to which Allah has referred by saying:

"And spend of that wherewith We have provided you before death cometh unto one of you and he saith : "My Lord ! If only thou wouldst relieve me for a little while, then I would give alms and be among the righteous. But Allah relieveth no soul when its term cometh".

It is therefore confirmed that the lust of a greedy person and the miserliness of a miser only drag him to grief, and sorrow before death and at the time of death. And as for his plight after death, we seek refuge from it with Allah!

13. Thirteenth, it is necessarily known to the intelligent that there is no limit to the wealth which a man can enjoy. For example, the possession of one hundred thousand gold coins is pleasant but the possession of a thousand of thousand gold coins is more pleasant.

Having confirmed this, we say: "the soul does not reach a particular stage out of these stages but its pleasure grows stronger by attaining the high stage while it is aware that a still higher stage lies ahead and the pleasure of attaining this stage is much greater.

It is therefore confirmed that hoarding of wealth does not cure the disease of lust; rather, it strengthens it and increases its power.

But when the soul is prohibited from reaching the stage, the subject becomes like a lover who is barred from enjoying his beloved. Then, the love decreases and the disease disappears.

14. Fourteenth, it is not possible for a man to try to obtain wealth except when he is assisted by others and his need for wealth is expressed to them. This need and the disgrace it contains are persistent, whereas the achievement of the wealth and achieving the benefit from it is imaginary and surely it does not behove an intelligent man to bear the harm which is involved in obtaining a debased and imaginary gain.

Again, when he needs assistance from others he becomes like a slave to his assistant, doing what they intend and giving up what they dislike. But a contented man keeps himself away from them and does not attend to them, while the object of desire is forbidden. And, mostly it so happens that they serve and incline to meet him who pays no heed to them and they behave like slaves to him. The greedy is thus a slave and the contented man is free and noble. It has therefore been said, "Be in need of anybody you like and become his captive, pay no attention to the great whom you consider so and become equal to him and do good to anybody you like and you become his leader".

15. Fifteenth, when seeking pleasure from abundance of wealth becomes habitual, the seeker may have a cause that necessitates the destruction of wealth. He, then, feels pain by losing the habits of enjoying pleasures, and puts all his efforts to earning and hoarding in his old age and decaying health and so suffers from excessive misery.

16. Sixteenth, it is necessary for him to realize his responsibility in so far as wealth is never used but as a means for attaining bodily pleasures. Then, he should ponder over what we have mentioned about the treatment of bodily pleasures.

17. Seventeenth, it may be that he finds it troublesome to earn wealth at present, then he dies before deriving any benefit from it. Thus, the trouble will be his and the gain will accrue to others. But when he spends it for general welfare the actual gain comes back to him even though he undergoes troubles, since he becomes an alien after the death of the body.

18. Eighteenth, to prefer contentment continuously leads to the habit of being free from need, and to enjoy the pleasant objects of the world and its pleasures leads to the habit of becoming rich with something and being in continuous need of it. To be free from something is more perfect than becoming rich with an object, as the first is the attribute of God and the second that of the created, and because the first is pure richness and the second is richness mixed with need.

19. Nineteenth, if his sustenance is determined for him there does not arise the occasion of seeking it, if it is not determined then effort or lust would not do him any good.

One may say: If the sustenance is determined, then this would necessitate that he should make no effort for attaining knowledge and earning excellences. Nor would there be any need of obtaining food and drink and removal of harm. For, if it is determined, it would be available without effort and if not determined it would not be available even with effort.

The answer is that research and inductive effort lead us to understand that sometimes sustenance is available all of a sudden without any endeavour and demand and sometimes we find that it misses one who wants it earnestly and suffers from trouble. But sciences and excellences are scarcely obtained immediately without any endeavour, learning or some other means.

20. Twentieth, a wealthy man needs to make the utmost endeavour for retaining his wealth and protecting it from calamities and destruction. But he is afflicted with severe grief if it is wasted and remains full of fear and bears all sorts of trouble.

As for one who is free from wealth and is occupied with earning perfections of the soul, he is free from this fear and trouble.

21. Twenty-first, worldly wealth and articles are enemies of Allah the Exalted and His Friends, because they keep a man much too occupied in worldly affairs to attain Paradise. They are enemies of the enemies of Allah, since they drag them to the Hell Fire. They are even enemies of themselves, since some of them consume some others. The possessor of wealth surely needs, for treasuring and retaining them, treasure-houses, locks, and fortification. He also needs treasures, assistants, armies, troops. All these require him to take trouble and incur expenses. It is, therefore, established that wealth destroys itself and consumes a portion of its own self.

22. Twenty-second, whoever is fond of wealth is fond of every part of it and feels pain in case of calamity, defect and loss of that which he loves. Now, whoever possesses more wealth, has more friends, troubles and calamities. Hence, it is inevitable that his troubles will be enormous, his troupes of friends will continue persistently or would get together.

This is the discourse on the treatment of niggardliness, and excessive love of wealth in a theoretical way..

ON THE TREATMENT OF GREED AND NIGGARDLINESS

As for its treatment, in a practical way, it can be treated in several ways:

1. To keep the company of the needy and to keep oneself away from the rich and the people in enjoyment of worldly wealth. For, by nature man inclines to it and afflicts the heart either by achieving it or by losing it. Sitting with the needy and those who exclusively devote themselves to Allah favours the heart with happiness, pleases it and lightens the burden. The holy Prophet (s) said: "O my Allah! Keep me alive as a needy man, let me die as a needy man, raise me up in the company of the needy."

Richness is likely to keep a man away from Allah just as need is likely to draw a man towards Allah and to turn him away from all that is other than Allah.

2. If a miser considers all that we have mentioned and maintained in condemning miserliness and commending generosity, he will necessarily incline to choose excellences and praise. He should therefore hasten to spend and show generosity before he is overtaken by the devil with a doubt to turn and prevent him from fruitful expenditure, which is the wont of the devil.

It has been related that a certain savant entered latrine, took off his ring or some of his clothes and called out a student of his, handed it over to him and asked him to offer it to a particular person. He said, "Why did you not have patience till you came out?" He said, "I feared that my intention might change or my heart might become niggardly with it. So, I acted with haste."

3. Niggardliness expresses excessive fondness for wealth. When love takes possession of the heart, it is a severe disease and the best medicine for it is to be away from the object of love and to travel away from the town of the beloved in order to have consolation. Similarly, by spending wealth the miser can keep himself away from it. This will remove its love from his heart, and then will vanish the condemnable niggardliness.

4. It is the best design in this matter that the miser should deceive himself by good name and try to gain a reputation among the people for generosity and grace. His soul would then turn away from this disease which would vanish from him. Similarly, he who intends to treat niggardliness should engage himself in spending wealth in any agreeable manner without saying that this particular expenditure is permissible and the other particular expenditure is not permissible. For, the aim and object is to remove the love of wealth from his heart; which can be done only by increasing its disgrace and by distinguishing some ways of expenditure from some others in respect of grace and honour, and not in respect of disgrace. That is why they have said: If the miser throws his wealth into the ocean or into fire to burn it, it would have been better than keeping it. When he realizes that his self is deceived by the name of generosity and grace, he should not have this by way of pride, as pride is another disease which is severer than the previous one. In short, the doctor who treats these evil propensities tries to suppress one by means of another. For example, he causes appetite to dominate anger in order to break its fermentation and vice versa. Similar is the case here.

Niggardliness shows that a man wants to possess wealth while pride shows that he wants to possess the spirits of other men, and to unite them together is not possible. Now, whoever takes either of the two in his heart should treat the other by imposing the first on it on the condition that the first

does not exceed the second in strength, lest he become like one who contracts one serious disease in place of another serious disease.

5. If a man fortunately studies under an affectionate teacher, the teacher tries to drive away from him everything that is dear to his heart after keeping it out of his reach, explaining all the time its uselessness and speaking against it till he finds that he is no longer fond of it.

In short, just as a multitude of actions gives rise to a strong and persistent habit, constant separation from it necessitates the weakness of the habit.

ON THE NATURE OF MISERLINESS AND GENEROSITY

Wealth has been made available to be spent in important affairs. To keep wealth on an occasion when it is necessary to spend it is niggardliness, and to spend where it is necessary to keep it is extravagance, and it is praiseworthy to be moderate.

To this Allah's expression refers: "And let not thy hand be chained to thy neck nor open it with a complete opening." Allah has said: "And those who, when they spend, are neither prodigal nor grudging: and there is ever a firm station between the two."

The substance of the discourse is that if wealth is not spent, where it is necessary to spend it, this is miserliness. Now, that which necessitates expenditure is of two kinds : (1) necessary by religion, and (2) necessary by manliness. In either case when the subject refrains from his (necessary function), he is called miserly, by one who refrains from the spending of that which is religiously necessary is more niggardly (than the other). For example, to withhold Zakat, and sustenance from one's family and near relations. Whoever spends wealth in a vicious object, he does not willingly spend his wealth for the sake of virtuous deeds. Such a man is also niggardly.

That which is necessary due to manliness is to prevent the exercise of virtue and to cause narrowness.

To use that which causes narrowness concerning the debased objects is condemnable. The condemnation, however, varies with the variation of conditions and considerations.

First, the condemnation on account of the agent, as what is considered evil coming from those who possess wealth in abundance is not considered as such from one who has very little wealth. Again, what is considered evil from an intelligent man is not considered evil from a boy and a woman, and what is considered evil from the free man is not considered evil from the slave.

Second, condemnation on account of the relations, as it is considered evil to narrow down the expenses on wife and children, but it is not considered so in relation to strangers.

Third, that which causes narrowness in food is considered evil but that which causes narrowness in something else is not considered evil.

Fourth, condemnation on account of time. For example, to cause hardship, is considered evil at a certain time, and is not considered so at other times.

In short, the above-mentioned conditions cannot be brought under fixed rules; and they only concern the external phase. It is possible to record them and say: It has been established that wealth serves, and drinks and foods serve the body which itself serves the soul, and the soul serves the moral and scientific excellences. Thus, wealth is the last servant, and these objects are served by wealth.

Now, wealth which is spent in attaining a position out of the positions of those objects which we have called Makhdumah is generosity and to refrain from it is miserliness; the wealth which is spent for something other than these positions is spent in extravagance.