



# Semantic Analysis of the Word "Wisdom" with an Emphasis on Narrative Sources

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**Abstract:** *In prophetic traditions, wisdom has been widely noticed and it covers numerous extensions. Then we need to study this frequently used term in prophetic traditions too. Given the definitions that have been offered in the domain of mysticism, traditions and exegeses of wisdom, one can conclude that all these definitions have considered three features to be necessary for wisdom: first, judgment, second, assurance and third, knowledge of the truth of things. To make the semantic aspect of this term clear, we need to recognize the term "wisdom" relying on the prophetic content. Accordingly, the aim of the present research is knowledge and assessment of original Islamic wisdom along with the narrative explanation. Therefore, in this study we first assay wisdom from lexical point of view and then we consider the fundamental and basic meaning of it in the light of exegeses and prophetic traditions.*

**Keywords:** *Wisdom, Prophetic Traditions, Semantics of Wisdom in Prophetic Traditions*

## INTRODUCTION

Wisdom is a word of wider semantic scope in the sense that it can refer to numerous notions and extensions but it is important to note that we have to be familiar with most of these cases. In this domain, we can mention a number of these extensions which have been highlighted in most of the exegetical and traditional works. For example, Baha al- din Khoramshahi contends that wisdom can include prophecy, science of Quran, understanding of religion, tradition, codes of Islam, knowledge, reason and acting according the two (Khoramshahi, 1998: 955). Of course, one can find countless traditions in this regard which have informed us of the value of wisdom insofar as the Holy Prophet of Islam (peace be upon him) argues: "It is very likely that a man of wisdom to become a prophet" (Fazil Miqdad, 2006: 117). Likewise, when Imam Ali (peace be upon him) was asked to describe the features of a believer, he referred to wisdom as the key characteristic of the believer in a way that true believer is thoughtful and clever and his silence is thinking and his word is wisdom (Koleini, 1995: 22). Wisdom in Islam has been used in numerous contexts. If we refer to Holy Quran, we can see that there are more than 210 variations of this root word and this is an expression of the high importance of wisdom to which a considerable attention has been paid by Quran. In prophetic traditions, the situation is the same. Numerous traditions have been devoted to the delineation of various types of wisdom and this explicates the superior status of wisdom. Ibn Manzur in *Lisan al-Arab* defines wisdom as the

knowledge of things in the best possible way (Ibn Manzur, 1988: 140). In *Kitab al-Ayn*, wisdom has been described in the following words: "Wisdom is a derivation of justice, knowledge and patience" (Farahidi, 1981). Iranian authors have provided detailed explanations of this word. The author of *Kitab al-Tahqiq fi Kalimat al-Quran al-Karim* believes that wisdom is what we attribute to the subject and attach to it; insofar as by it promotion and inhibition are possible when it is assured and away from doubt. For this reason, the latter concept refers to judgment (Mostafavi, 1995: 264). Motahari in his *Theodicy* argues that a wise man is the one who sets an intelligible end for his works and pursues in each action the noblest and most righteous objectives. Moreover, according to Motahari, we describe God as "All Wise" because He has endowed every creature with the appropriate perfection through which it can reach its secondary perfection (Motahari, 2013: 169). Qarashi in his work describes wisdom as follows: "Wisdom is a mode and feature of understanding and discretion by which one can fathom the truth and reality. He can avoid corruption and secure his action. Thus conceived, wisdom is a mental state and a spiritual feature and not an external object rather the objects in the outside world are the results of wisdom" (Qarashi Babaei, 1973: 163). Wisdom is like a lamp and gem that guides human beings. The man who searches for wisdom, if it is reached, he will have a virtue that has been described in prophetic traditions. Imam Ali (peace be upon him) in a tradition states: "The one who knows the wisdoms, loses his patience for acquisition of more of them". It is needless to say that the endowment of wisdom by God has its own particular conditions that are not easily acquired rather in this path one can undergo through numerous hardships. The man of wisdom should take care of it as much as his toils for its acquisition. Then, since this issue has been widely discussed in prophetic traditions and includes numerous extensions, we have conducted a study of the semantics of wisdom in traditions in order to provide a picture of it in these sources.

## Literature Review

### Semantics of Wisdom from the Point of View of Prophetic Traditions

In prophetic traditions, numerous allusions have been made to countless extensions of wisdom. In the present study, this numerously used word is studied from the perspective of prophetic traditions:

#### 1- Understanding and Reason:

In a number of prophetic traditions, wisdom has been construed as knowledge and intellection. Here, we provide some of these traditions.

Imam Kazim (peace be upon him): "When God speaks of "endowment of wisdom", He is referring indeed to understanding and reason" (Koleini, 1995: 16).

The Prophet Mohammad (peace be upon him): "Wisdom has led the poor to the position of men of knowledge" (Ibn Kathir, 1984: 127).

Imam Ali (peace be upon him): "Wise words are the garden of the learned men and sciences are the rose garden of literati" (Ibn Kathir, 1984: 48).

Moreover, in Wisdom 31 of Nahjulbalaghah, Imam states that *wisely understanding of realities is one of the pillars of certainty. If someone approaches the reality out of intelligence, he can vividly see the wisdom and the one who sees wisdom with clarity, he will take his lessons and when he takes his lessons, this is as if he has lived with past people.*

#### 2- Immaculacy:

In some prophetic traditions, wisdom has been construed as immaculacy and the Commander of Believers (peace be upon him) has stated: "Wisdom is immaculacy and the latter is the former" (Ibn Kathir, 1984: 48).

#### 3- Luminosity of Hearts:

In some other prophetic traditions, wisdom has been described as the luminosity of the heart in the light of which the wise man can reach the inner purity. Jesus Christ is quoted to have said: "Wisdom kindles the light in every heart" (Harrani, 1985: 381). Imam Kazim (peace be upon him): "God has created the hearts of

believers in sealed form then whenever He decides to enlighten them He would spray the water of wisdom and sows knowledge and guards it" (Koleini, 1995: 421).

#### **4- Self-Knowledge:**

Self-knowledge is another expression of wisdom that needs to be taken into account because self-knowledge is a premise for knowledge of God. Now, wisdom can be tantamount to self-knowledge. Imam Ali (peace be upon him) states: "The noblest wisdom is one's knowledge of himself and his boundaries" (Amadi, 2012: 411). Imam Ali (peace be upon him) in other place has stated: "Self-knowledge is part of one's wisdom" (Majlesi, 1985: 66).

#### **5- Lost of Believer:**

Wisdom is like a gem that glows at night and the one who is in search of it, should pick it wherever he finds it. Now this glowing gem can be wisdom which is sought by the believer:

Imam Ali (peace be upon him): "Wisdom is the lost of believer and he will search after it no matter if he finds it by the pagan because he deserves to have it more than anyone else". In the sermon 181 of Nahjulbalaghah, Imam states of Imam al-Mahdi (May God expedite his reappearance): Imam Mahdi wears clothes of knowledge and he has learned it with all etiquettes and mindfulness and wisdom is his lost and he is searching after it and he asks several questions in order to reach it".

Imam Zayn al-Abidin (peace be upon him): "Don't underestimate taking precious pearls out of the dirty garbages; because my father said: I heard once Imam Ali (peace be upon him) saying: words of wisdom are uneasy inside the chest of the hypocrites until the moment that they become revealed and the believer deserves more to have them and he immediately owns them" (Majlesi, 1985: 307).

Jesus Christ is quoted to have said: "When you see a light burning at the heart of dark night with tar and its stinky smell does not distance you from taking advantage of the light. Likewise, you must learn the wisdom wherever you would find it by anyone" (Majlesi, 1985: 97).

#### **6- Keeping Oneself Away from Carnal Desires and Disinterest in Material World:**

Wisdom is endowed to those who are not attached to the mortal world and have purified themselves from the carnal desires. Wisdom and godwariness feed from the same breast the way that attachment to corporeal objects and revolt live in same land. Wisdom is not from this world like the wealth and carnal desires belong to this world. This has been expressed by the words of great men of ideas:

Imam Ali (peace be upon him): "First step of wisdom is leaving the pleasures and the last step is what becomes mortal" (Amadi, 2012: 406).

#### **7- Servitude of God:**

Imam Ali (peace be upon him): "Making oneself obedient to the Truth and following the orders of the one who is the owner of Truth constitutes the foundation of wisdom" (Amadi, 2012: 715). Again in the sermon 159 of Nahjulbalaghah, Imam states: "The order of God is necessary and out of wisdom and His satisfaction is peace and mercy and He judges based on knowledge".

Holy Prophet (peace be upon him): "God-wariness is the head of wisdom" (Majlesi, 1985: 453).

Imam Ali (peace be upon him): "The best word is the invocation of God and the top of wisdom is obedience and servitude" (Tusi, 2009: 394).

Those who have understood wisdom can easily identify the signs of Revolution of Imam Mahdi and this is indeed a result of wisdom to which Imam Ali (peace be upon him) has referred in the sermon 150 of Nahjulbalaghah: "You people! Know that those followers of us who can identify the hypocrisies of future, he would contemplate on them with all luminosity and he will act like the Holy Prophet and Imams. He will liberate the nations and slaves. He will overcome the oppressors and help the oppressed. His Highness Mahdi has lived anonymously in occultation and no one knows his footprint though numerous efforts are made for knowing the signs of his epiphany".

#### **8- Virtue of Man of Wisdom:**

Imam Ali (peace be upon him): "Man of wisdom can quench the thirst of the questioner and endows him with virtue" (Amadi, 2012: 1525). This great Imam in another tradition states: "The word of a man of wisdom if is correct can cure and if is incorrect can be a pain" (ibid: 3513).

In another tradition Imam Ali (peace be upon him) states: "The most boring thing for the man of wisdom is that his audience is naïve" (ibid: 3194). Or in other place he is quoted to have said: "Men of wisdom are the noblest, most patient, most forgiving and most pleasant people" (ibid: 2107).

#### **9- Things Go Against Wisdom:**

Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) describes the things that a man of wisdom should avoid them as follows: "He is not a man of wisdom who does not treat well the one with whom he is forced to communicate until the time that God frees himself from this contact" (Motaqi Hindi, 1994).

The following traditions are quoted from Imam Ali (peace be upon him): "He is not a man of wisdom who does not avoid having fun with those who are not friends or relatives" (Amadi, 2012: 7498).

"He is not a man of wisdom who does not tolerate the one with whom he is obliged to communicate out of tolerance" (Harrani, 1985: 218); or in another tradition it is said: "He is not a man of wisdom who takes his need to an ungenerous and mean man" (Amadi, 2012: 7499). Moreover, in another tradition it is stated: "He is not a wise man who becomes annoyed by the incorrect words of himself, and he is not a man of wisdom who is pleased by the praise of the ignorant" (Majlesi, 1985: 204).

#### **10- Virtue of Wisdom:**

Wisdom is like a light and gem that leads the men. The man who is searching after wisdom if manages to acquire it this will have a virtue for him as is mentioned by the following tradition: Imam Ali (peace be upon him) is quoted to have said: "The one who knows the wisdom he will lose his patience for acquiring them" (Karajaki, 1990: 319). In another tradition it is stated: "If wisdom is endowed to the mountains it would make them move" (Majlesi, 1985: 78).

In another tradition from the First Imam of Shia Muslims it is quoted: "Anyone who is known as a man of wisdom the eyes will see him as noble and magnificent man" (Harrani, 1985: 97); moreover, another tradition reads as follows: "Wisdom is a tree that grows at the heart and bears fruit in tongue" (Amadi, 2012: 1992).

#### **11- Anti-Stupidity:**

Prophet of Islam (peace be upon him) has stated: "The one who allows strangers to control knowledge is like the one who decorates the neck of the swines with gem, pearl and gold" (Ibn Majeh, 1984: 81).

Imam Ali (peace be upon him) has stated in this regard: "Men of wisdom spoiled the wisdom when they allowed the men who are not competent to have access to it" (Jazayeri, 2001: 160). Imam Kazim (peace be upon him) has stated the same point in other words: "Don't let the ignorant to have access to wisdom otherwise you have done an injustice to it and spared it from those who deserve it" (Majlesi, 1985: 303).

#### **12- Sweetness:**

Another feature of wisdom is its sweetness and freshness insofar as whenever the men of wisdom hear new point their hearts are refreshed. This gives them the sense of discovering a new thing. Holy Prophet (peace be upon him) has alluded to the same point when he has stated: "These hearts become exhausted like the bodies; then provide them with the wise words in order to refresh them" (Nahjulbalaghah, 2008, Wisdom 91). As to the freshness and sweetness of wisdom Imam Ali (peace be upon him) has stated: "Everything becomes boring but the sweet words of wisdom" (Amadi, 2012: 6896).

#### **13- Anti-Lust:**

Wisdom is associated with certain effects from which the man of wisdom can take advantage. Some of these effects have been expressed in the treasury of prophetic traditions to which we refer as follows:

Imam Ali (peace be upon him) states: "The more powerful is the wisdom the weaker become the carnal desires and lusts" (Amadi, 2012: 7205); again in the same context in another tradition Imam states: "The one who is not assisted by wisdom how would he defeat his enemies?" (Amadi, 2012: 6991).

Furthermore, in another tradition from Imam Sadeq (peace be upon him) we read: "Continuous thinking of wisdom fertilizes the reason". Once again in another tradition Imam states: "The one who has a wisdom at his heart he takes lessons" (Majlesi, 1985: 255).

#### **14- Wisdom Bearing Actions:**

In the tradition of Prophet's ascension to the Heavens it is stated: "O' Ahmad! Whenever a servant stops eating and takes care of his tongue We teach him wisdom. If he is a pagan wisdom will serve you as a burden while if he is a believer this wisdom will be light, proof, cure and beneficence. Then, he will know what he didn't know before and he will see the thing he couldn't see before. The first things that We will show him is his own deficiencies so that in this way he stops criticizing others and We will inform him of the epistemic nuances and in this way Satan will have no way into his being".

Imam Ali (peace be upon him): "Wisdom can be acquired via shorter speaking and adopting the path of tolerance" (Amadi, 2012: 959).

#### **Discussion and Conclusion:**

It is needless to say that in the path of wisdom there are numerous impediments and dams and only by means of noticing them one can take advantage of the benefits of wisdom. First damage is that people would suffice to theoretical wisdom and think that by having theoretical wisdom they have acquired abundant good and touched happiness and as a result they would be arrogant and see themselves sufficient while this abundant good is related to the true wisdom and what is beneficial for the individual. Action joins theoretical wisdom in order to enable the man to fly into the heights of nobility and provide the path for true wisdom. In prophetic traditions it has been noted that for reaching the wisdom one must neglect some cases in order to avoid their negative effects. Our Imams have alluded to them; Imam Sadeq (peace be upon him) states in this regard: "Rage destroys the heart of the man of wisdom and the one who cannot possess his own rage he is not able to control his own reason too". The holy Prophet states: "When stomach is empty the heart accepts the wisdom; when the stomach is full the heart drops out the wisdom". Greed is one of those things that lead human heart to worldly carnal affairs. As a result, man is deprived of the noblest things, i.e. wisdom. Holy Prophet (peace be upon him) states: "Greed snatches wisdom from the hearts of scholars". In other words, even if someone has access to theoretical wisdom it will have no effect in his heart and it will remain in his mind; because greed is one of those cases that defeat the reason. As Imam Ali (peace be upon him) states: "Most of failures of reason take place due to the greed". Overeating causes the body cells to be concentrated on digestion and as a result the body becomes bored and lazy and the heart dies and this is not consistent with wisdom. This is why Prophet Mohammad (peace be upon him) states: "Divine wisdom does not enter the heart of the one who is continuously eating". Imam Ali (peace be upon him) has also stated: "Full stomach kills wisdom". Overeating kills the light of knowledge in man and deprives man from acuity insofar as Holy Prophet (peace be upon him) has stated: "Don't eat to fullness because the light of knowledge is killed in your hearts". Imam Ali (peace be upon him) is quoted to have said: "Overeating kills wisdom; serving one's stomach is the enemy of intelligence". Imam Kazim (peace be upon him) argues that wisdom cannot be associated with arrogance: "Seed grows in the plain and not on the mountain. This is also the case with wisdom it becomes flourished in the humble hearts while it does not thrive in the arrogant hearts because humbleness is the tool through which one can use his reason under the providence of God". Thus, one can conclude that from the point of view of prophetic traditions, we need to study such issues as greed, overeating and more importantly sufficing to the theoretical wisdom because without paying attention to them one may not be benefited from wisdom.

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