

Justice as a Virtue of the Soul

Marzieh Sadeqi¹

Translated by Mahboobeh Morshedian

ABSTRACT: This article explains the idea of justice as a virtue of the soul and as the supreme virtue in ethics, as opposed to justice as a mere social action. Individual justice takes precedence over social justice since, through training man, the society will naturally include trained individuals; as a result, society will have a healthy political structure. This is discussed in virtue ethics in which virtues are held to have inherent value. Virtue ethics also discusses the ethical characteristics and habits, emphasizing the intrinsic characteristics of the agent of the action. According to the individual justice, justice as a virtue guides us to living a proper life. This paper investigates, explains and compares the theories of Plato, Aristotle and Muslim philosophers including Khajeh Nasir-ul-Din Tusi, Ibn Miskawayh, and the late Naraqj.

¹ Assistant Professor at the University of Qum.

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Virtue ethics consists of justice as a virtue of soul and it dates back to the ancient Greece and the writings of Plato and Aristotle. The answer to the following questions ought to be sought in virtue ethics: What is the good life? What role does virtue play in it? How are ethical requirements binding? Are ethical rationales independent of the factors, particularly of the interests?

The adherents of the modern virtue ethics often consider Aristotle their forefather, who adopted his plan from Plato and Socrates. The main question of Socrates on Greek ethics related to how man must live. All three above-mentioned philosophers contended that man must live an ethical life; thus, they undertook the task of demonstrating how an ethical life is better for mankind.

Platonic and Aristotelian conceptions of ethics dealt with fostering the habits and characteristics of conduct. They spoke mainly based on virtues. Accordingly, in response to Trasymachus and in his own book, Plato maintained that wise men seek to attain the pleasure of respect and power. He argued that in a broad sense, justice must integrate with some kind of rational order. When man sees that he is integrated with his reason, he finds out that being just is, in fact, better for him.

Also, Aristotle held that man's happiness in action is the virtue, and not merely enjoying them. His main argument was to raise the idea that the nature of man is perfected through virtue. He brought up many issues in his book *Nicomachean Ethics* and presented the virtuous man as aspiring to make others' lives similar to his own.

Among the propagators of the virtue ethics in the Middle Ages, we can name Augustine and Aquinas. Adding religious virtues such as faith, affection and hope, Aquinas emphasized on the divinity of ethics. In 1985, the article *Modern Moral Philosophy* by Anscombe revived virtue ethics in the second half of the 20th century after a long decline. He maintained that it is absolutely wrong to search for

a foundation for ethics in such legal concepts as commitment or duty, when one does not believe in a divine legislator as a source of such commitment. According to him, the terms *right*, *wrong*, and *ethical obligation* do not have any meaning per se. Thus, with the decline of religious belief, the ethical force relying on responsibility and duty could not survive. Later in 1981, McIntyre made great efforts to explain the virtue ethics in his book *After Virtue*.

It is worth noting that ethical theories are understood not on the basis of the actions they require, but on the basis of the rationales they provide for action. The question that arises here is, According to virtue ethics, what characteristics drive us to take action? Virtue ethics emphasizes on an agent and his ethical conduct in such a way that ethical action is the one taken by the virtuous agent. According to this viewpoint, virtuousness of ethics rests on the internal transformations of man.

In this paper, the author provides explanations for justice developed in various systems but are not dissimilar to one another. The views of Plato, Aristotle, and Muslim philosophers are compared using a set of relatively similar criteria for comparison.

Platonic View on Justice

In Plato's view, justice does not mean a virtue which influences the individual, for instance, self-esteem and farsightedness. In *Republic*, Plato gave a definition of "justice in one's soul", which is compared to and assessed by social justice. Similar to a man's soul, in society, justice consists of a permanent order of different human classes (Plato: 229). The Platonic conception of "justice in one's soul" is pictured as similar to that of social justice and is related to some kind of order, namely a harmonious order in various parts of soul. Similarly, to Plato, social justice is the very harmonious order in various social classes.

Dealing with the nature of justice in *Republic*, Plato presented various forms of it such as the idea of justice as settling the debts or

interests of the powerful. After rejecting these definitions of justice, he concluded that justice means order and harmony; in other words, the equilibrium of parts. After explaining social justice as an outcome of three groups of tradesmen, soldiers, and statesmen working in harmony with one another, he also generalized this division as the parts of the soul (Plato: 300). Moreover, Plato considered social justice a means of explaining individual justice.

Thus, it can be said that Plato posed and answered two questions at the same time: What kind of person is the just man? How can a just government come into existence? Furthermore, when he addressed the corruption of a country and the soul, he deemed them connected. In addition, he held that the just man could seldom be found except in a just country. However, the just country cannot be realized except in places where just men live.

Nonetheless, it must be said that Plato really limited the content of this virtue, since he viewed justice merely as the harmony of social classes. He considered it an image and reflection of the harmony of the individual soul. He proved that personal interests of the just one necessitate justice. Indeed, his motto was, "O' man! Act justly or else your peace of mind and inner serenity will be at risk."

Can Plato's comparison of the individual and society corroborate his reference to an aristocratic government? If so, is the Platonic view on justice an aristocratic one? Also, can it be concluded that to Plato, there is no such thing as individual justice? When the concept of justice is connected to the individual, his relations with other individuals or with a group, including government, are explained. In other words, individual rights, which include justice, are others' rights as well (Raphael: 117). But to Plato, the benchmark of man's just action is knowledge about the images i.e., knowledge of eternal ideas, which is provided through the thinking of a good idea and toward which every virtuous person is moving. Unfortunately, only a few people can recognize the images (Becker, 1992: 44). Therefore, few are able to justify justice.

Moreover, this justification is comprehensible only to them. Of course, in the first place it must be proved that images exist.

Taking account of the faculties and parts of soul, Plato investigated four main virtues, namely wisdom, bravery, moderation, and justice in *Republic*. According to him, the soul has three faculties: reasoning faculty, faculty of will, and faculty of appetites. Whenever the faculties of will and appetites perform their tasks under the reasoning faculty, the virtues of bravery and self-control are obtained, respectively. Using the balance of the reasoning faculty, there emerges the virtue of wisdom. The virtue of justice is developed when all three faculties perform their tasks in harmony with one another. Hence, justice means harmony of parts of the soul. In the Platonic system, bravery and virtue are included in one's willpower, and wisdom is a virtue included in the reasoning part of the soul. Also, self-control is related to the faculty of desire. However, justice is a general virtue, that is, all parts of the soul should carry out their specific tasks appropriately.

It seems that Plato took this point into account that although each individual part might carry out its task well by itself, the outcome may not be desirable. Therefore, we need another virtue, namely, harmony of the parts of soul. Based on the Platonic view, the function of each individual part is the necessary but not the sufficient condition for the desired function of the whole. Rather, they must be in cooperation with one another.

According to Plato, compared to the rest of virtues, justice is the whole goodness, like the art of an architect compared to that of his subordinates in such a way that his work does not only belong to himself; it is his duty to guide others. Thus, justice is the condition for the existence of all other virtues because it causes other virtues to emerge in the society.

Aristotle's View of Justice

In the 5th book of *Nicomachean Ethics*, the virtue of ethics and the following issues are discussed: What kind of mean (or middle)

justice is? or Which two extremes does justice stand in between as a mean? Unlike Plato, Aristotle did not speak based on the faculties of the soul. Instead, he believed in the mean. In other words, in each case he deemed the two extremes as vices though the mean is desired. Of course, what is meant by mean is that any natural desire of man should be neither unrestrained nor suppressed. By mean, he did not intend mean per se but mean as related to man. In fact, it is the duty of reason to determine mean regarding the man (Ross, 1980: 397). Of course, there are two main problems with the issue of mean. First, for some things such as telling the truth, we cannot determine two extremes in order to find the mean. Second, in some ethical issues such as servitude to God, if one does it to excess, it is still desirable; however much we worship God, it is not excessive. About the virtue of justice, Aristotle said, "In a general sense, justice means moral virtue and injustice means moral vice." Of course, it does not mean that these terms are synonymous. Instead, he meant that when he addressed the issue of agent, he talked using the language of moral vice and virtue. Likewise, when he dealt with the way an agent's actions influenced people, he talked using the language of justice and injustice. Of course, it is worthy to note that most of Aristotelian discussions were about justice in a particular sense, namely the just distribution of individuals' shares to them. In other words, they came under the heading of social justice. However, in Greece, only if scholars of ethics were able to relate an action - becoming a habit due to its durability and stability - to a characteristic of agent, they took interest in that action. Hence, as long as Greek thought lasted, the issues of vice and virtue were the priorities in ethics. But Aristotle discussed justice differently from other virtues not only in that justice was oddly detailed but also in that justice represented a turning point in Greek ethics. Here, altruism appeared for the first time. Aristotle considered justice a virtue, whose end is the well-being of others, since it is related to others and its effect benefits them. He specified that there is a virtue whose end is not merely the happiness of its agent (Aristotle: 378).

In Aristotelian discussion of justice, insufficiency of the mean theory is the most noticeable. Here, it is expected that he explained justice the same way he talked about other particular virtues; in other words, he demonstrated the two extremes in which justice lies in between. Unlike other virtues, Aristotle, however, did not believe in mean as regards justice. Instead, he believed in a mean between the two extremes as the subject of the just action. That is, he viewed justice as the mean between just action and suffering from injustice. In this form of thought, justice can be considered the mean, but not like other virtues; rather, in a way that justice aims at the mean and injustice aims for the two extremes. Thus, justice does not resemble other virtues in this respect, since both extremes of justice are oppression and injustice, while in no other virtue both extremes are vices (Tusi, 1373: 147).

Nonetheless, sometimes Aristotle discussed justice in such a way that its difference still remains hidden. Perhaps, his words in this regard can be deemed meaningless, since when he said that justice is the mean between committing and suffering from injustice, that is justice is the mean between unjust action (oppression) and being treated unjustly (being oppressed), it can be understood that this definition is given only to make justice accord with other virtues. Looking at it carefully, we can see that his definition means the just transactional conduct is the mean between deceiving and being deceived; something which is absolutely rare. However, it must be said that the right basis for the mean theory is that there are desires in human nature which should be satisfied, although man should stop them from entering the realm of other desires. That is why moderation is recommended.

To Aristotle, in a general sense justice - defined as the entirety of virtue - means respecting the law and obeying it. Thus, all actions in conformity with law are just in a general sense. Aristotle considered the general virtue of justice the perfect virtue. That is, justice is a perfect virtue that includes all virtues. It is called “the mother of all virtues” (ibid: 370), since practicing justice requires using all virtues. Moreover, the one having this trait can use his

virtue (ibid: 378) not only for himself but also for others insofar as all of his actions are directly for the benefit of the public and in their interests. Therefore, among all virtues, justice is the only virtue which is good for others. It justice implies a social characteristic which includes all virtues, while justice in particular sense (distributive justice) is merely a part of moral virtue and only a particular virtue.

Another difference between justice and other virtues is that brave and chaste actions are taken only by the adventurous or moderate man, respectively. On the other hand, the just action can be taken by both the just man and the unjust one the same way.

Justice from Muslim Philosophers' Perspectives

Taking the faculties of soul into account, Muslim philosophers defined justice as the virtue of soul (individual justice). Khajeh Nasir-ul-Din Tusi and Ibn Miskawayh (Ibn Miskawayh: 37) regarded justice as a virtue that came into existence through integration of the three faculties of soul and the harmony of virtues of wisdom, bravery, and chastity:

Justice consists in the integration of all faculties and their unanimity to obey reason so that virtue specific to each can be attained.¹

According to this definition, the actions of the faculties of soul, namely reasoning faculty, acting faculty, and the faculties of appetite and anger reach equilibrium. The last three faculties are obedient to the first one. This way, the virtues of wisdom, bravery, and chastity are obtained. Also, through the existence of these virtues, as a result of obeying reason, there appears a state which is called justice, which is the perfection of all four faculties. In addition, according to this definition, the integration of faculties is not a single form occurring to three habits. Hence, justice is not

¹ Naraq, p. 52.

considered an independent virtue; rather, it is the essence of the very habits.

After defining justice, the late Muhammad Mahdi Naraqi pointed out that practical reason follows theatrical reason:

Rational soul has two faculties; faculty of perception and faculty of stimulation. Every faculty is also of two kinds; the first kind of faculty of perception is the theoretical reason, which receives scientific images from the transcendent principle. The second kind is the practical reason, which is the root of bodily movement in insignificant actions. Likewise, the first kind of faculty of stimulation is the faculty of anger, which is the source of repulsing the unpleasant, and the second is the faculty of desire, which is the source of attracting the pleasant. Hence, if the faculty of perception dominates other faculties and they are subject to it, action of each faculty will be taken moderately and as a result, man's faculties and forces will be in harmony with one another.¹

Thus, man will enjoy the required virtue. This means that justice results from purification of the acting faculty, and science or wisdom comes from purification of the reasoning faculty. Furthermore, purification of the faculty of anger leads to forbearance and bravery; likewise, purification of faculty of appetite results in chastity and self-control. Accordingly, justice is the perfection of faculty of practical reason. Based on the late Naraqi's view, justice requires that faculties of soul work in harmony, since their harmony follows from the surrender of practical reason to theoretical reason (*ibid*). Put another way, we can say that justice is the cause and the three habits are the effects.

¹ *Ibid*.

In response to the question as to why is justice is the noblest virtue, the late Naraqı answered:

Because justice includes all virtues or is inseparable from them. In addition, a quality of justice is that it is the closest trait to unity. It is to draw unity from plurality, to integrate and harmonize the heterogeneous things, to make the different things cooperate, and to alter things from deficiency and excess to the mean, which is the very unity. Also, it somehow unites the opposite things at this level. However, without justice there will be a multitude of the two extremes and no doubt unity is nobler than plurality.¹

Indeed, this means that justice is some state of soul which results in adjusting all traits and actions as well as changing excess to moderation. Moreover, justice harmonizes all faculties; the corollary to this is that a single virtue is developed in the soul.

Therefore, according to the late Naraqı, the truth of justice is only the surrender of the acting faculty to the reasoning faculty and this surrender entails keeping the two faculties of anger and appetite under the control of reason. Thus, control is indispensable to it; that is, other virtues are prerequisites for justice.

Here, there are three relations: When just action is attributed to its agent, it is called virtue. When it is assessed in connection with the one who is treated justly, it is justice. If it is considered by itself and independently, it is called a habit of soul.

Conclusion

Platonic view (division of faculties of soul) is different from Aristotelian idea (the mean theory). However, perspectives of such

¹ *Ibid.* p. 124.

people as the late Naraqī, Ibn Miskawayh, and Khajeh Nasir are more consistent with that of Plato, who explained justice based on faculties of soul. Of course, Muslim philosophers interpreted moral concepts in light of the Shariah. As the late Naraqī said after defining justice, “The virtue of justice enables man to take his actions divinely. Thus, the one adhering to Shariah is considered just. Hence, justice is the epithet of the one adhering to Shariah” (ibid: 119). Nevertheless, the two explanations in Muslim philosophers’ judgments tell us that wisdom, chastity, and bravery all have the same meaning. According to the first explanation, justice means all faculties obey the reasoning faculty and work in harmony. Based on the second explanation, justice means that practical reason follows the reasoning faculty (innate reasoning) and takes control of anger and desire.

Additionally, on the basis of the first explanation, which views justice as the integration of all three virtues of wisdom, bravery, and chastity, realizing justice is dependent on these three virtues because if all virtues are integrated and developed and if reason is obeyed, the result is a quality called justice. Hence, achieving justice depends on the existence of other virtues and their integration. In fact, they are parts of justice and also prerequisites to it. However, according to the second explanation, justice is the cause and the three habits are the effects. Moreover, in the words of Muslim philosophers, justice is presented as the most important moral virtue.

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Understanding God's Mercy

Part IV

Mohammad Ali Shomali¹

ABSTRACT: In the previous part of this series, the qualities of God, such as His kindness, forgiveness, knowledge and richness were explained in addition to the assured All-embracing mercy He has made incumbent on Himself, especially for those who qualify to receive it in their spiritual path. In this part, we will study the role of God's mercy as seen in the Qur'an in making various arrangements for our survival and convenience on Earth, such as creating the stars, maintaining the sky, and delivering us from misfortunes. God's mercy also plays a part in human guidance as He sent humankind messengers with the impeccable qualities of empathy and gentleness. Indeed, God has provided humanity with infinite blessings in all aspects of their lives; it is our duty to

¹ Associate Professor of the Imam Khomeini Education & Research Institute, Qum.

appreciate and use them wisely in order to gain His pleasure and ultimately emerge as His vicegerents.

The Role of God's Mercy in Our Worldly Life

In the Qur'an, God refers to the different arrangements He has made in this world for our convenience or for our survival. Some of those arrangements are simply to make life easier for us while others are essential. In what follows, we will refer to some of those blessings of God.

Maintenance of the sky and creation of the stars: Emphasizing on God's mercy, the Qur'an tells us that God preserves the sky to protect the earth:

Have you not regarded that God has disposed for you[r benefit] whatever there is in the earth, and [that] the ships sail at sea by His command, and He sustains the sky lest it should fall on the earth, excepting [when it does so] by His leave? Indeed God is most kind and merciful to mankind. (22:65)

By saying "Have you not regarded that God has disposed for you[r] benefit..." God asks us to take heed of all that He has made manageable for us. He has given us ability to control what is on the earth and make use of the ships that move in the oceans. Moreover, God retains the sky in its place, preventing it from hitting the earth except with His permission (perhaps this refers to

the incidents that take place prior to the Day of Judgement when the earth and the sky will crumble.) At the end of the verse, God reminds us of his utmost kindness and mercy. He has also created the stars to serve for orientation by night:

It is He who has made the stars for you, so that you may be guided by them in the darkness of land and sea. We have certainly elaborated the signs for a people who have knowledge. (6:97)¹

Alterations of days and nights: If there were no alterations and we always had the day or the night, then it would have badly affected our physical, psychological, and spiritual life. This alteration is necessary for our peace of mind and spirit. God has created the night time primarily for our rest. The Qur'an says:

Out of His mercy He has made for you the night and the day, that you may rest therein and that you may seek from His grace and so that you may give thanks. (28:73)

Daytime and nighttime are two blessings of God and we should be more thankful with each day and night that comes. This verse implies that people are recommended not to choose a type of work or job that occupies the whole night. Of course, there are those who work only during the night for the benefit of society or because of their needs and there is nothing wrong, since they have no alternative. However, if it is an option it is preferable to

¹ See also the verse 16:16.

choose work that allows for you to spend time with your family, to worship, or to rest at the end of the day. Nighttime is undoubtedly the best time for rest. During the day, even if you attempt to simulate a nighttime setting by switching off the lights and placing a curtain to darken a room, you will still not experience the same rest experienced during the night. It is not just a matter of light or darkness; the entire atmosphere is different. We normally take this for granted as we do not count this as one of our possessions though in reality these are assets God has given us and we are to be thankful.

Winds and rain: Without wind the air remains still and that would be cause problems. Allah created wind to improve the quality of the air we breathe through the movement of the earth and the existence of wind. In some places when a city is built next to high mountains that prevent the movement of wind, people face obstacles such as being unable to leave their houses for several days. Thus, this current of wind provides benefits such as fresh air and helps disperse seeds for the fertilization of the plants:

And it is He who sends the winds as harbingers of His mercy, and We send down from the sky purifying water, with which We revive a dead country and provide water to many of the cattle and humans We have created. Certainly We distribute it among them so that they may take admonition. But most people are only intent on ingratitude. (25:48-50)

By sending this wind, He also gives you the good tidings of the possibility of rain that purifies you.

Animals: Out of His mercy, God has created animals, some of which help us transport our goods. Had He not created animals such as horses, camels, donkeys, and mules then we would find it difficult to carry our goods, especially before the invention of the automobile. Perhaps if there were no such animals to transport goods, the idea of inventing automobiles would not have occurred, for we normally model what exists in nature, such as the invention of the airplane modeled after birds. This has been termed by biophysicists as *biomimetics*. In any case, the Qur'an says:

And they bear your burdens to towns which you could not reach except by straining yourselves. Indeed your Lord is most kind and merciful. And horses, mules, and asses for you to ride them, and for adornment, and He creates what you do not know. (16:7&8)

Thus, the creation of animals is partly meant for our convenience. Of course, Islam provides recommendations and instructions as to how to treat these animals. Even narrations recommend that, for example, if a person is seated on a horse or a donkey and then meets a friend, he or she must not begin speaking until coming down from it, because doing so is painful to the animal. Or Imam Ali (a) tells us not to curse animals; otherwise you yourself will

be cursed. Also, animals should be fed properly and be provided with shelter and even medicine.¹

Transport in the seas and oceans: Out of His mercy, God has enabled us to build ships and boats to carry our goods in the seas and oceans. If it were not for the ability of water to be a container for carrying goods as well as having the quality of allowing objects to float on its surface, we would not have been able to carry them:

Your Lord is He who drives for you the ships in the sea, that you may seek His grace. Indeed, He is most merciful to you. (17:66)

Protection from catastrophes: Though we see the disasters that occur, we do not see the many from which we are saved. For example, the Qur'an says:

And if We like We drown them, whereat they have no one to call for help, nor are they rescued except by a mercy from Us and for an enjoyment until sometime. (36:43-44)

If God had wanted He would have made us all drown in floods. It is because of His mercy that He saves us and gives us this ability to survive.

¹ For further information, please refer to Shomali, M.A., "Aspects of Environmental Ethics" in *Life*, London: 2011, Institute of Islamic Studies.

When we think carefully about the probabilities we have for death and survival since childhood and take into account all the risks and threats we faced since birth, we realize that our chance of survival is actually very little. For example, to a newborn, numerous threats and dangers can happen every day. Just imagine your child playing with a knife, a fork, with the toys and instruments in the house, or simply touching hot objects. Many things may happen to him in which you may not always have full control. Or when we cross the street, and many cross it on a regular basis, if one of the many drivers is not cautious for even a moment, we are bound to face the inevitable. On motorways, if only one of the many drivers for a moment goes unconscious there will be fatal crashes. There must be some mercy of God that saves us; otherwise we could not have continued our life, or at least remain healthy. To determine that mercy, God states this provision in the Qur'an:

He has guardian angels, to his front and his rear,
who guard him by God's command... (13:11)

God appoints angels mainly for our protection. There are angels whose responsibility is to protect us from the ongoing risks and dangers we face on a daily basis. Imam Baqir (a) describes this 'divine decree':

يحفظ بأمر الله من ان يقع فى ركى او يقع عليه حائط او يصيبه
شئ حتى اذ جاء القدر خلوا بينه و بينه يدفعونه الى المقادير و
هما ملكان يحفظانه بالليل و ملكان من نهار يتعاقباناه

By an instruction from God, man is saved from falling in a well or collapse of a wall on him or calamities happening to him until a divine decree comes. So when it comes he would be left with that decree and will be pushed towards it. There are two angels that protect him during night and two day angels succeed them.¹

Imam Sadiq (a) has also said:

ما من عبد الا و معه ملكان يحفظانه فاذا جاء الامر من عند الله
خليا بينه و بين امر الله

There is no servant of God except that there are two angels with him for protection. When God's decree comes they will leave him to that decree.²

The same idea can be found in *Nahj al-Balāghah* where Imam Ali (a) says:

ان مع كل انسان ملكين يحفظانه فاذا جاء القدر خليا بينه و بينه

Truly there are two angels with every person who protect him. When the decree comes they leave him to that decree.³

¹ *Tafsir Nemuneh*, vol. 10, p. 144.

² *Ibid.* cited from *Al-Burhān*, vol. 2, p. 283.

³ *Ibid.* cited from *Nahj al-Balāghah*, Wise sayings no. 201.

More generally, Imam Ali (a) says that there are angels whose task is to protect God's servants (و منهم الحفظة لعباده).¹

Help and protection in particular cases: There are also many particular cases in the Qur'an where God helped and protected specific people through His mercy. For example, in the story of Prophet Khidr (a) and Musa (a), while Prophet Khidr was restoring a wall, Musa was unable to understand why. Prophet Khidr later explained that underneath that wall was some treasure for two orphans, and God out of His mercy wanted that treasure to remain buried until they grow up and find it themselves:

As for the wall, it belonged to two boy orphans in the city. Under it there was a treasure belonging to them. Their father had been a righteous man. So your Lord desired that they should come of age and take out their treasure —as a mercy from your Lord. I did not do that out of my own accord. This is the interpretation of that over which you could not maintain patience. (18:82)

So God is so merciful that He asked His Prophet to act as a simple labourer to make this wall free of charge so that these two orphans later would easily find it.

Another example regards Prophet Zechariah (a) who was given a son, John, out of God's mercy:

¹ *Ibid.* cited from *Nahj al-Balāghah*, Sermon One.

[This is] an account of your Lord's mercy on His servant, Zechariah, when he called out to his Lord with a secret cry. He said, 'My Lord! Indeed my bones have become feeble, and my head has turned white with age, yet never have I, my Lord, been disappointed in supplicating You! Indeed I fear my kinsmen, after me, and my wife is barren. So grant me from Yourself an heir 19:6 who may inherit from me and inherit from the House of Jacob, and make him, my Lord, pleasing [to You]!' 'O Zechariah! Indeed We give you the good news of a son, whose name is 'John.' Never before have We made anyone his namesake.' (19:2-7)

God also gave Prophet Musa (a) his brother, the Prophet Aaron, who aided Musa in his accomplishments:

And We gave him out of Our mercy his brother Aaron, a prophet. (19:53)

Moreover, out of His mercy, God favoured Prophet Job (a) in his distresses and difficulties by returning to him his family members and others like them:

And We gave [back] his family to him along with others like them, as a mercy from Us and an admonition for those who possess intellect. (38:43)

So We answered his prayer and removed his distress, and We gave him [back] his family along

with others like them, as a mercy from Us, and an admonition for the devout. (21:84)

Thus, for all human beings out of His mercy God has made arrangements for everyone's convenience, survival, and protection as well as in particular cases, as God confirms this in the Qur'an.

The Role of God's Mercy in Human Guidance

Not only has God created the world including us and has made life convenient for us, but He has also bestowed His mercy by providing us with guidance. This is likened to inviting people to our place, providing them with food and comfort, in addition to planning an activity of some sort because not doing so would be a waste of their time and energy. Or imagine constructing a school, with all its facilities including a library and lab devoid of a curriculum, syllabus, or teacher. God has made this world as a school with its necessary facilities, and has also provided us with a syllabus and outstanding teachers. In doing so, He examines us, and in the end, He gives records of performance to those who have passed or failed.

Sending Prophet Muhammad as a mercy

According to the Qur'an, God has sent His Messengers to mankind because of His mercy. God also emphasizes on the Prophet Muhammad (s) as being sent to deliver His message of mercy:

We did not send you but as a mercy to all the nations. (21:107)

There are two ways of interpreting this: 1) God has sent him to be a mercy, or 2) He has sent him out of His mercy. One is to take *rahmah* (mercy) as the reason for sending the Prophet (*maf'ūl li-ajlih*); the other is take it as an explanation of what the Prophet was supposed to do (*hāl* or *maf'ūl thāni*). The result does not differ much. In any case, God has done this out of His mercy and the Prophet was also the Messenger of mercy, though technically there are different ways to come to this conclusion.

Thus, the prophet was sent not only for Meccans and Middle-Easterners. He was not even sent for Muslims all over the world. He was sent for being a source of mercy for all people of the world, including human beings and *jinn*s.¹ Any being possessing reason and understanding can benefit from him, even angels. According to a hadith, Prophet Muhammad (s) asked angel Gabriel:

هل اصابك من هذه الرحمه شىء؟

Has anything from this mercy reached you?

Gabriel replied:

¹ Jinn is a supernatural creature, lower than the angels, who could appear in animal or human form. Together, jinn, humans, and angels make up the three sentient creations of Allah. Like human beings, the Jinn can also be good, evil, or neutrally benevolent.

نعم انى كنت اخشى عاقبه الامر فامنت بك لما اتنى الله على
بقوله: «ذِي قُوَّةٍ عِنْدَ ذِي الْعَرْشِ مَكِينٍ»

Yes. I was always worried about what is going to happen to me at the end. This continued until God praised me after you [in the Qur'an] by saying, 'powerful and eminent with the Lord of the Throne' (81:20).¹

Regarding Prophet Muhammad's mercifulness, the Qur'an says:

There has certainly come to you an apostle from among yourselves. Grievous to him is your distress; he has deep concern for you, and is most kind and merciful to the faithful. (9:128)

An apostle has come to you from yourselves. He is not a stranger. He is not someone from another planet or another world. He is a human being from among yourselves. When you are in trouble, he is in trouble. He empathizes with your suffering. This is how much he loves and cares for you. He is like a parent who suffers when his or her child is in difficulty. He is very concerned about you. He desperately wants the best for you. And he possesses exclusive kindness and mercy towards the believers.

An Excellent Listener: Elsewhere, the Qur'an refers to another aspect of the merciful character of the Prophet (s):

¹ *Bihār al-Anwār*, vol. 16, p. 306.

Among them are those who torment the Prophet,
and say, 'He is an ear.' Say, 'An ear that is good
for you. He has faith in God and trusts the faithful,
and is a mercy for those of you who have faith.'
(9:61)

One of the things that some people in Medina used to do was to annoy the Prophet by calling him "an ear" (أُذُنٌ). It meant that the Prophet had the habit of listening to the people. To be a person like a prophet who listens to Allah and Gabriel and then listen to the people and give them utmost respect is a miracle. Instead of appreciating this trait, some people criticized him, saying, "Why does he constantly listen to us? He has nothing else to do!" "He should not listen so much" "He is an ear!" Instead of the Prophet defending himself, Allah (swt) defended him by saying the Prophet is "an ear that is good for you." It is to our benefit.

Listening is a difficult task. It is much easier to speak. On the other hand, listening requires patience. Sometimes we do not even have the ability to listen for five minutes without interrupting the other person, especially if the listener is an important and busy person whom everyone asks for advice; listening may make you think you are wasting your time and energy. The Prophet did not think like this. He gave people time and attention, and he did so by looking at them. One of the things we learn about the Prophet was that he always looked at people with his full attention so as to give them full respect. Sometimes you speak to people who instead of looking at you, they turn away, but the Prophet looked with his face turned to the receiver.

Soft and gentle: Allah also says that out of His mercy He made Prophet Muhammad (s) very soft and kind to people:

It is by God's mercy that you are gentle to them; and had you been harsh and hardhearted, surely they would have scattered from around you. So excuse them, and plead for forgiveness for them, and consult them in the affairs, and once you are resolved, put your trust in God. Indeed God loves those who trust in Him. (3:159)

The mercy of God makes people soft. It is like water. If lots of rain pours into a container it cannot preserve it and the water will overflow. If one really receives mercy like knowledge, wisdom, and light from Allah (swt) it will overflow and certainly reach and affect other people as well. God says to the Prophet (s) that He has given so much of mercy to him that he became soft for everyone at his reach. Of course, this was extended finally to "all nations."

Many people at that time were not very soft. Many of them, if not most of them, were arrogant as a result of their culture during the Age of Ignorance (the era before Islam). They used to bury their daughters alive. They would easily kill hundreds of people. They used to treat human beings as slaves and treated them like animals without any respect. They treated their wives like their property. It was a sign of weakness to show love and mercy to people, including one's own children and wife. Once, a man was shocked to see the Prophet kissing a child, and admitted that he

had never kissed any of his children. The Prophet replied: “ من لا يرحم لا يرحم ” (“One who does not show mercy will not be shown mercy”). Moreover, when they had wars they used to commit *muthlah*, that is, they amputated the parts of one’s face, like the nose and ears. The so-called “Noblemen of Mecca” used to take advantage of their position and force people who used to go to Mecca for trade or for pilgrimage to leave aside their own dress and buy their dress from them; otherwise they had to go around Ka’bah unclothed. Sometimes if a stranger entrusted them with his money and valuables they used to keep them for themselves without returning them. So these people had no mercy for strangers or for vulnerable insiders. They were merely interested in money and worldly pleasures. On the other hand, the Prophet was so patient with them and showed them so much love and mercy that in a matter of few years he transformed them. He made them people who were ready to give all their possessions to their brothers and sisters, and to sacrifice their lives for each other.

It was because of the mercy of Allah that not only was the Prophet Muhammad’s speech soft, but his entire personality was extremely gentle. God said to Moses and Aaron to go to the Pharaoh and “speak to him softly,” but when it comes to the Prophet Muhammad (s) God affirms that he has already become a soft person. So his entire personality was soft and not just his speech. Then God adds that if he were harsh and hardhearted, people would have scattered from him and left him alone, because these people could only be handled with genuine love and mercy. Then God asks the Prophet to pardon them when they

do something wrong. God also tells the Prophet to ask forgiveness for them from God. This means that God is willing to forgive them and therefore tells the Prophet, "Pardon them and ask me also to forgive them." This illustrates another aspect of God's mercy.

Sending Prophet Jesus as a Mercy

The Qur'an also affirms that Prophet Jesus (a) was sent because of God's mercy:

He said, "So shall it be. Your Lord says, 'It is simple for Me.'" And so that We may make him a sign for mankind and a mercy from Us, and it is a matter [already] decided. (19:21)

Gabriel told Lady Mary that God wanted to give her a son to make him a sign and also as a mercy from Him.

Conclusion

Apart from making His all-embracing mercy known through His attributes as seen in the Qur'an, God reminds of the worldly benefits we receive from it. And in addition to the creation of material assets such as the sky, stars, winds, rain, and animals for our protection and/or convenience, He has also ensured that we are guided by the noblest examples, those who possess mercy, empathy, and gentleness. These provisions of all types demonstrate that we have been given the necessary facilities and guidelines to lead us to a prosperous life and success in the

Hereafter. In the next part, we will see how God introduces His revelations and messages to be for mercy and then we move on to study the legislations that He has made in His religion out of His mercy.

The Islamic Understanding of Prayer

Fatemeh Nazari¹

ABSTRACT: *Du'a*, the Arabic word for prayer or supplication, is the calling of a servant to His Deity. Summoning to God is highly encouraged in Islam, as prayer is considered to be the essence of worship. But what exactly is sincere supplication, and what do we achieve from it? How do we ensure a response from God, and what prevents a prayer from being accepted? This article explores the stages of a sincere prayer, as well as explaining its importance, etiquette, and conditions to enable one to acquire moral virtues, improve one's self-discipline and intellect, add brightness to the heart, and above all, achieve nearness to God.

¹ PhD student of the Jami'at al-Zahra (a), Qum.

Introduction

One of the most enduring manifestations of the human soul and one of the most fundamental aspects of human existence is the act and longing to supplicate and worship. While examining the remnants of mankind throughout history, we can determine that worship and prayer have always existed alongside mankind. Any differences in this worship lie in its method and the deity invoked.

In terms of the method of worship, there have been various approaches and forms. This has ranged from dancing rituals and rhythmical group movements, together with verbal expressions of admiration and reverence to the most humble submissions to the deity. In terms of deities worshipped, there have been several, both material and immaterial. Idols of stone and wood have been worshipped throughout time, as has the eternal All-sustainer, who is not bound or limited by time and space.

Worship was not innovated by the prophets. Rather, they taught mankind the best form of worship. They clarified its finest method which includes the actions to be carried out and the manner in which they should be done. In addition, they opposed the worship of deities (*shirk*, polytheism) other than the One God. Indeed, the Prophet Adam was a monotheist, verifying that mankind was originally monotheistic; only later did they deviate to the worship of idols.

Supplication, a form of worship, can be defined as a spiritual condition that creates a bond of attraction and intimacy between a man and his deity. It is one of the most sublime and noblest of spiritual actions that can bring a person closer to God. Manifested with a true supplication is recognizing God and being humble towards Him, while simultaneously realizing one's insignificance. For this sincere supplication to occur, there are three stages and prerequisites briefly mentioned in the following:

The first stage is to have true belief and faith in God. The reason for this is quite obvious: if one does not believe in God, communication with Him and attempts to attain nearness to him is futile and meaningless. It is important to note here that while believing in God is necessary, this belief can have many different levels and qualities.

The second stage is that the individual should believe that he, a needy person, has the ability to communicate with an immaculate being that is absolute, needless, and entirely self-sufficient. This ability can be better understood if we take into account the fact that soul does not belong to the material world: it is essentially immaterial. Thus, for the soul to truly communicate and build a relationship with God is possible.

The third prerequisite is invoking God and having hope in Him. This happens in its true form when a person ceases to trust or hope in anything except God. The individuals and beings involved in this person's affairs become irrelevant, and one begins to view God as the sole and absolute cause of everything.

In fact, a person views all circumstances and situations to occur because of Him and as a part of His plan. It is in this state of mind that supplication is realized in its full potential. Even if a person's tongue is not engaged in physical prayer, the heart continues to be occupied with worship and supplication to God. To clarify, I will expand on the concept of *du'a*, Arabic for 'supplication', which has been described as the gem and spirit of all worship. Furthermore, from the viewpoint of verses from the Qur'an and narrations, I will discuss: (a) the quality of a true *du'a*, (b) the etiquette and conditions of a *du'a* required for a response from God (*istijābah*), (c) the obstacles of *istijābah*, (d) the effects of *du'a*, (e) the qualities and importance of *du'a*, and finally, (f) its spiritual effects.

The importance of prayer

In order to attain spiritual peace, acquire moral virtues, improve our willpower and intellectual capabilities, and above all, achieve nearness to God, praying to Him is vital. Prayer is also imperative so as to refrain from sins and to rid ourselves of moral defects and satanic temptations. Additionally, it is essential to request for material and spiritual support from God.

During the prayer, a person calls on God and speaks to Him in a manner and wording of their choice in order to gradually receive and realize His response. It is essential to discover the response of God through His hints. There are many forms of communication beyond the conventional use of language, and these are discovered solely through empathy and intimacy. Whilst speaking

to people, God begins by speaking to a person's consciousness. Imam Ali (a) has said, "In various eras, God has spoken to His servants in the depths of their conscience, and following this consistent conversation, the light of awareness emerges in their eyes, ears, and hearts." But du'a is not simply calling upon God; it is also an opportunity to *know* him. Communication necessitates at least two parties, and it is in these conversations that the intimacy and knowledge of God can be achieved. Through these exchanges, one's soul can be purified and one's faith can be strengthened. Furthermore, one's heart and intellect will find peace and serenity. It is for this reason that people should go with all of their integrity before God, and forget everything else.

When God becomes more than the First Cause (of the creation of the world) in the eyes of a person, and a conversation ensues with the intimacy of a friend and beloved one, a person can finally be considered a true supplicant. It is in this moment that one is able to truly benefit from and enjoy serving God, choosing the best and most pure way to live in this world.

A du'a in its essence speaks of a lover's needs and hopes. It speaks of love, fear, and knowledge (*ma'rifah*). It speaks of repentance and regret, benevolence, and a response (*ijābah*). It speaks of both worldly necessities and noble, heavenly ideals. It speaks of submission (*taslim*) and learning. In fact, it could be said that nothing other than du'a contains such a vast amount of divine blessings, with so much relief and countless merciful advantages.

Communication with God is so valuable and advantageous that it is even attractive for those who desire the temporary and perishable necessities of this world. Perhaps such necessities become a tool to call upon God, and can thus be a means for return to God. In fact, they may elevate a person from inferior spiritual levels to superior ones, even if this intention does not initially exist. Thus, it is not problematic to begin du‘a with these requests in mind; however, it is problematic if one remains in this condition for an extended period of time. Du‘a may initially be a path with a certain purpose or goal in mind, and a person may seek du‘a simply desiring something else. However, a fortunate person is someone who supersedes this basic level to the point where du‘a itself becomes the goal, as opposed to the means. Invoking God and speaking with Him becomes a person’s most substantial wish, as other desires consequently become insignificant. A real du‘a is a du‘a in which the world is deemed insignificant. This is the mystical side to supplication that gives a concrete meaning and a worthy purpose to life. Without a concrete purpose to one’s life, a person can only lead it aimlessly.

The meaning of *Du‘a*

Da‘ā (Arabic past tense verb for the third person masculine singular) means “he attracted someone”, “he asked for help”, or “he called (someone) towards himself”. *Da‘ā-hu* (دعا له) means “he called him to eat”. *Da‘ā lahu* (دعا له) means to pray for someone, and *da‘ā ‘alayhi* (دعا عليه) means to pray against someone.¹

¹ *Majma‘ al-Bahrayn*, pp. 138-141

In *Minhāj al-Sādiqin*, it is mentioned that the meaning of *du‘ā* is to become detached from everything except God and to only move towards Him. It is shedding tears and asking for help that is the most sublime form of worship. Indeed, according to a *hadith*, “*Du‘ā* is worship.”¹

To summarize, *du‘a*, in a religious context, is the calling of a servant to his God. It is the communication between the servant of God and God Himself, both through one’s heart and one’s tongue, and it is the most basic part of true servitude.

In his commentary on the Qur’an *Al-Mizan fi Tafsir al-Qur’an*, ‘Allamah Tabataba’i states:

Du‘a is turning oneself to the Deity and calling upon God with honesty and sincerity. This occurs when the hopes of a supplicant are alienated from all other apparent causes and tools. It is when the supplicant realizes and truly believes that nobody other than God is able to solve his problems. Consequently, his hands, heart, and tongue turn together to God, and it is in this state that his *du‘a* is sincere and unlikely not to be answered.

God has mentioned absolutely no conditions or prerequisites for *du‘a*, simply that one must “call Me in *du‘a*”, as mentioned in the verse:²

¹ *Minhāj al-Sādiqin*, vol. 1, p.425: الدعاء عبادة

² *Tarjume-ye Tafsir al-Mizan*, vol. 15, p. 595

وَإِذَا سَأَلَكَ عِبَادِي عَنِّي فَإِنِّي قَرِيبٌ أُجِيبُ دَعْوَةَ الدَّاعِ إِذَا دَعَانِ

When My servants ask you about Me, [tell them that] I am indeed nearest. I answer the supplicant's call when he calls Me. (Qur'an 2:186)

In the book *Kashf al-Asrār*, it is mentioned that du'a is of two types. One is the type that contains the praise of God:

يا حي يا قيوم يا ذا الجلال و الاكرام، يا ربّ، يا الله، ربنا لك الحمد
لا اله الا انت

Oh the living, oh the self-subsistent, oh the possessor of glory and generosity, oh my Lord, oh Allah, oh our Lord. All praise is due to You. There is no god but You.

The other type of du'a is one that requests something from God:

اللهم افعل بي كذا و كذا

Oh my Lord, grant me so and so.

The word *du'a* and its derivatives have been used approximately two hundred and twelve times in the Holy Qur'an.¹

The Etiquette of Du'a

It is highly recommended for every supplicant to adhere to certain etiquette. In what follows, we will refer to some of them.

¹ *Kashf al-Asrār wa 'Uddat al-Abrār*, vol. 1, p. 498

a) **Knowledge (*ma'rifah*)**

The following verse from the Holy Qur'an was recited in the presence of Imam al-Sadiq (a):

أَمَّنْ يُجِيبُ الْمُضْطَرَّ إِذَا دَعَاهُ وَيَكْشِفُ السُّوءَ

Is He who answers the call of the distressed [person] when he invokes Him and removes his distress? (Qur'an 27:62)

Someone then asked the Imam, "Why is it that God does not respond to our du'a?" The Imam (a) replied by saying that "Your du'a is not responded because you do not know the God that you call in your du'a, nor do you [fully] understand what you are requesting from Him."

The feeling of yearning and dependence of a servant toward his Lord is actually fundamental to our faith. Supplicating extensively without any real knowledge of God is a sign of weakness. Someone who does not realize with certainty that his heart and his consciousness are subservient to His power is actually ordering God with his du'a. Although a person may believe that it is simply a supplication, this kind of du'a in its real essence is ordering and commanding God and shows one's insolence and arrogance towards Him.¹ God says in the Holy Qur'an:

فَادْعُوا اللَّهَ مُخْلِصِينَ لَهُ الدِّينَ

¹ *Al-Sāfi fi Tafsiṛ al-Qur'an*, vol. 1, p. 204

So supplicate God, putting exclusive faith in Him.
(Qur'an 40:14)

b) Internal and external purity (*tahārah*)

A very important condition for the effectiveness of worship (like *dhikr* and *du'a*) is to have internal purity in addition to external purity. Merely moving one's tongue is not useful, nor effective, and may even cause the hardness of one's heart. God says:

إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُحِبُّ التَّوَّابِينَ وَيُحِبُّ الْمُنْطَهِّرِينَ

Indeed Allah loves the penitent and He loves those who keep clean. (Qur'an 2:222)

Certainly, God will respond to the *du'a* of someone whom He is fond of.

Another item that must be purified is one's property and wealth. Imam al-Sadiq (a) has said, "Whoever wishes for his *du'a* to be accepted should purify his earnings and eat *halal* food."¹ Imam al-Rida (a) has said:

Do not be tired of praying to God (*du'a*) as it has a high position in the eyes of God. Be patient, earn a *halal* living, establish bonds of kinship (*silah rahim*) and do not quarrel with people. Indeed we, the progeny of the Prophet Muhammad (s), keep binds of kinship with

¹ *Wasā'il al-Shi'ah*, vol. 4, p. 1129: من سرّه ان يستجاب دعوته فليطيب مكسبه

anyone who breaks contact with us, and we do good to those who do evil to us. By God, I see a good future in this.¹

The Prophet (s) has said, “Whoever wants *his du‘a* to be accepted should purify his food and his income.”² A divine narration (*hadith qudsi*) says:

When you supplicate to me and make requests, I will respond and answer. No supplication will be hidden from Me except the supplication of someone who eats *haram* food.

The requirement of prayer

In order to examine the qualities by which one should supplicate to God, we will look at verses from the Holy Qur’an. It is narrated that the companions of the Prophet (s) asked him, “How should we pray to God? Is God near us so that we should whisper to him? Or is He far from us so that we should call Him loudly?” The following verse was subsequently revealed:

وَإِذَا سَأَلَكَ عِبَادِي عَنِّي فَإِنِّي قَرِيبٌ أُجِيبُ دَعْوَةَ الدَّاعِ إِذَا دَعَانِ
فَلْيَسْتَجِيبُوا لِي وَلْيُؤْمِنُوا بِي لَعَلَّهُمْ يَرْشُدُونَ

¹ *Wasā’il al-Shi‘ah*, vol. 4, p. 1129:

قال لا تمل من الدعا فانه من الله بمكان و عليك بالصبر و طلب الحلال و صلته الرحم و اياك و مكاشفه الناس فاتا اهل بيت تصل من قطعنا ونحسن الي من اساء الينا فنرى و الله اليينا فنرى والله في ذلك العاقبه الحسنه

² *Che Bāyad Kard: Tarjome va Tanzimi Vizhe az Al-Murāqibāt*, vol. 2, p. 150

When My servants ask you about Me, [tell them that] I am indeed nearest. I answer the supplicant's call when he calls Me. So let them respond to Me, and let them have faith in Me, so that they may fare rightly. (Qur'an 2:186)

This verse explains the concept of du'a in its most pleasant manner, its most delicate structure, and its most beautiful form. There are some subtle points in this verse, which denote the importance of the matter.

- a) The words of God are in the first person narrator form, not the third person. This indicates that a great amount of attention is paid to the subject.
- b) Instead of saying something like "when people ask you...", the word "عِبَادِي" has been used, which means "when My servants ask you..." This shows the greatness of His kindness, and that again, attention is given to the subject.
- c) The expected response for "When My servants ask you about Me" would be "tell them that He is indeed nearest." However, in this verse the intermediary [i.e. tell them] has been removed, and the verse says "فَإِنِّي قَرِيبٌ" "I am indeed nearest".
- d) The sentence has been emphasized with "إِنَّ" meaning "indeed."

- e) In the original, Arabic, God's state of proximity is mentioned with a modifier (قَرِيبٌ), and not a verb. Thus, the more permanent quality of the relationship is emphasized.
- f) The action of answering is mentioned in the present tense (أُجِيبُ), which indicates the repetition and continuity of God's response.
- g) The response of du'a is mentioned with the condition of "إِذَا دَعَا" (when he calls Me). This condition is not truly an additional condition as the action of supplicating to God requires that someone is doing this. What this implies is that a response is not limited by any condition, and the du'a of a supplicant will be answered unconditionally, as is mentioned in the verse: "Call Me, and I will hear you (40:60)." This verse indicates that "supplicating" is the only condition to receive a response.

Each of these points in its own right indicates that intimate care and attention have been paid to the issue of du'a. Another characteristic of this verse is that the first person pronoun is used seven times, and it is the only verse in the Holy Qur'an in which this occurs.

In addition to mentioning the issue of a du'a's response, the verse has also mentioned the reasons for it. For instance, the reason that God is near is because they are His servants, and therefore, they are completely dependent on Him. Moreover, because He is so close to them, He answers their du'as. Since there is no condition for a du'a to be answered, God will answer the supplication of

anyone who supplicates. The only condition for His response is that the supplicant should call to God. Although this condition is not an addendum, it indicates that a supplicant should be sincere in his supplication, and should only desire it from God. A true prayer entails the presence of one's heart and soul and not merely with the presence of one's tongue.

The Outcomes of Du'a

a) Nearness to God

In Islamic philosophy, it has been accepted and proven that existence has several levels. The lowest level of this existence is the material, physical world. At the other end of the spectrum, at the highest level of existence, is the Divine Existence. As a person advances to the higher levels of existence whilst acquiring virtues, he also becomes closer to God at the same rate, and enjoys its infinite benefits.

Through performing the recommended prayers, one is able to reach a position of closeness to God. This fact has also been mentioned in the following divine narration (*hadith qudsi*):

My faithful servant is always becoming nearer to me.¹

And:

¹ *Akhlāq-e Islami*, p. 55: لا يزال ليتقرب عبدى المؤمن بى.

Indeed, he [a faithful servant] becomes near to Me through the recommended prayers (*nawāfil*).¹

In another authentic divine narration, God says:

Of the actions that bring my servants closer to me, there is nothing dearer to me than the completion of the obligations that I have assigned to him. And indeed he gradually draws nearer to Me through supererogatory acts until I love him. When I love him, I become the ear with which he hears, the eye with which he sees, the tongue with which he speaks, and the hand with which he holds. If he calls upon Me, I answer him, and if he asks from Me, I grant his request.²

b) The brightness and insightfulness of the heart

When one turns towards God, a light from within shines onto one's soul and illuminates one's heart. Thus, in Islamic teachings, both the remembrance of God and supplication to Him are described as "the light of the hearts" and "the refinement of the hearts." This spiritual light liberates the heart from every darkness and impurity that has resulted from paying attention to things other than God.

¹ *Al-Kāfi*, kitab al-Imān wa al-Kufr, vol. 4 , p. 41: **وَأَنَّهُ لِيَتَقَرَّبَ إِلَيَّ بِالنَّوَافِلِ**.

² *Risāle-ye Liqā Allah*, p. 30

Thus, remembrance and supplication can cause many great spiritual effects:

I Revival of the heart: In Islam, it is believed that the biological life is not the only life available to us. Rather, higher life requires a second birth, which is only possible through knowing God and turning to Him, as said in the holy Qur'an:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا اسْتَجِيبُوا لِلَّهِ وَلِلرَّسُولِ إِذَا دَعَاكُمْ لِمَا يُحْيِيكُمْ

O you who have faith! Answer God and the Apostle when he summons you to that which will give you life. (Qur'an 8:24)

Thus, the condition to attain the real life, or “the goodly life”, is to pay attention to God. Similarly, the death of one’s heart is a result of neglecting Him. The Holy Prophet (s) says:

Through the remembrance of God, hearts are given life, and their death lies in neglecting Him.¹

When the heart neglects God, it becomes distressed, and consequently one becomes afflicted with various mental diseases. The only cure for this grueling spiritual disease that has brought humanity to its knees is to become acquainted with God, and to direct one’s heart towards Him.

II Unique energy and freshness to the heart: This solves the problem of inaction and/or lack of motivation that one may feel

¹ Tunbih al-khawat, p. 360: بذكر الله تحيي القلوب وينسيانها موتها.

in different ways throughout life. By attaining this spiritual freshness and happiness, one also becomes more spiritual. Imam Ali (a) has said:

Persistence in remembering God empowers one's soul.¹

III Insightfulness: Remembrance of God brightens the heart and the mind with the light of insight. It is because of this insight that pious people are saved from Satan's temptations and assaults. Regarding this, the Holy Qur'an says:

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ اتَّقَوْا إِذَا مَسَّهُمْ طَائِفٌ مِّنَ الشَّيْطَانِ تَذَكَّرُوا فَإِذَا هُمْ مُبْصِرُونَ

When those who are Godfearing are touched by a visitation of Satan, they remember [Allah] and, behold, they perceive. (Qur'an 7:201)

The acceptance of prayer

a) The conditions of acceptance

Presence of the heart: One of the most crucial conditions in supplication is the presence of one's heart. To merely move one's tongue is futile, and may possibly lead to the hardness of the heart as one's words lack thought. An absent heart is similar to a lamp without light: it is pointless. Without this light, a person will be unable to understand the true realities of existence. A person

¹ *Ghurar al-Hikam: قوه الذكر، قوه الارواح*

who utters *dhikr* without the presence of heart is similar to a blind man who carries a torch in his hand, unable to benefit from its light. Hence, one should focus on God whilst in supplication. In fact, if one's heart is occupied with other than God during supplication, it would be considered an act of rudeness towards Him. Such a supplication would not bring about nearness to God; instead, it would take a person further away from Him.¹

Being completely detached from everything other than God:

One of the ways in which a person's supplications may be answered is by completely detaching oneself from everything other than God. More importantly, it is to put a special trust in the Lord of the universe, and to pay special attention to Him. The Cause of all causes (*'illat al-'ilal*) is God. All other causes and actors serve as channels of His grace to us to change our lives. These are all divine agents that execute His orders and divine will. The only true actor in this universe is the Almighty God. Imam al-Sadiq (a) quoted the Prophet (s) as narrating from God:

If a person requests something from Me while truly realizing that all benefits and losses lie in My hands, I will grant them their request.²

Being certain that one's du'a will be answered: The Holy Prophet (s) has said:

¹ *Risāle-ye Nūr-e 'alā Nūr dar Dhike wa Dhākir wa Madhkūr*, pp. 62 & 79.

² *Al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, p. 273: قال رسول الله: من سألني و هو يعلم اني اضر و انفع استجب له.

Call upon God while being certain that your call will be answered.¹

To explain this hadith, ‘Allamah Tabatabai says:

The truth behind this fact is that supplicating with doubt and hopelessness indicates that one does not know what one seriously wants. Hence, it has been discouraged for a person to ask for something that is seemingly impossible.²

Imam Ali (a) says, “One who has been granted [the blessing of] supplication will not be deprived from its answer.”³

b) The obstacles of acceptance

Sin: According to many narrations, one of the most dangerous factors that can prevent acceptance of our prayers is committing sins. Further, it can cut off the root of our relationship with God and prevent us from paying attention to Him. Imam Ali (a) says, “Committing sins prevents the acceptance of prayer.”⁴ Imam Sajjad has said, “One of the sins that causes du‘a to be rejected, and also darkens the air, is to disobey and hurt one’s parents.”⁵ Imam Sajjad (a) also says, “The sins that cause one’s du‘a to be

¹ *Bihār al-Anwār*, vol. 93, p. 305: ادعوا لله و انتم موقنون بالاجابه.

² *Al-Mizan*, vol. 2, p. 47

³ *Wasā’il al-Shi‘ah*, Kitāb al-Salāh, Abwāab al-Du‘ā, Bāb 2, no 3: من اعطى الدعاء لم يحرم الاجابه.

⁴ المعصيه تمنع الاجابه

⁵ *Ma‘āni al-Akhbār*, p. 270.

rejected are: bad temper, hypocrisy (*nifāq*) with brothers in faith, disbelieving in *istijābah*, supplicating whilst delaying one's obligatory prayers (*salāt*) until their due time passes, and being rude and obscene in one's speech."¹

Although all sins have negative effect on the acceptance of one's prayers, there are some sins that have been specifically mentioned as an impediment to acceptance of prayer like: a *harām* earning, committing any injustice (*ẓulm*) and abandoning the action of enjoining the good and forbidding the evil.

Supplicating without action: If God has given someone the keys to fulfilling this goal, and this person, being ungrateful, refuses to use these keys, then such a du'a cannot be answered. This person wants God to open the door for him - a door to which he has been given the key, and to remain motionless, making no effort. This type of supplication is against the laws of nature. The purpose of du'a is to acquire an ability or competence in one's troubling situation. In the case where God has already given this capability to someone, asking for it would be asking for something that has already been given.

c) Factors that increase the likeliness of acceptance

Time: The time in which one supplicates has an important role in the success of a du'a, as does the state and emotions of a supplicant. Nighttime specifically has an exceptional status for personal supplication, invocation and thought. The night has a

¹ *Ma'āni al-Akhhār*, p. 271

mysterious character and draws one to contemplate the inner-self and the mysteries of one's soul. The Almighty has said:

إِنَّ نَاشِئَةَ اللَّيْلِ هِيَ أَشَدُّ وَطْئًا وَأَقْوَمُ قِيَلًا إِنَّ لَكَ فِي النَّهَارِ سَبْحًا
طَوِيلًا

Indeed the watch of the night is firmer in tread and more upright in respect to speech. For indeed during the day you have drawn-out engagements. (Qur'an 73:6-7)

In many ways, rising in the night for du'a increases the unity between one's heart and tongue and what is said is firmer and more focused. This is because there are many obligations and responsibilities during the day. Finding extra time during the day is difficult with the constant engagements of life and sustenance. Except for those who can always remember God and "whom neither trading nor bargaining distracts from the remembrance of God" (24:37), the night has a vital role in the purity of one's soul and one's spiritual ascension.¹

وَمِنَ اللَّيْلِ فَتَهَجَّدْ بِهِ نَافِلَةً لَّكَ عَسَىٰ أَنْ يَبْعَثَكَ رَبُّكَ مَقَامًا مَّحْمُودًا

And keep vigil for a part of the night, as a supererogatory [devotion] for you. It may be that your Lord will raise you to a praiseworthy station. (Qur'an 17:79)

¹ *Risāle-ye Nūr-e 'alā Nūr dar Dhike wa Dhākir wa Madhkūr*

There are many Qur'anic verses and narrations regarding the importance of praying and supplicating at night, and seeking forgiveness (*istighfar*) before dawn. Imam al-Sadiq (a) has said:

The Holy Prophet (s) has said: 'The best time to supplicate to God is during the early hours of the morning before dawn (*sahar*).' He (s) then recited this verse quoting Prophet Jacob (a) when his children requested his prayers: 'I shall plead with my Lord to forgive you.' The Prophet (s) then he said that 'Jacob (a) delayed the prayer until the time of dawn (*sahar*).'

On the day of 'Arafah, Imam al-Sajjad (a) saw that a beggar was asking others for money. The Imam (a) then said to him, 'Woe to you! Are you requesting from someone other than God on a day in which there is even hope in the fetuses that lie in their mothers' wombs, that the grace of God will extend to them and that they will become prosperous?'

Another crucial time for supplication is during the days and nights of the holy month of Ramadan and as well as the night of *Eid al-Fitr*.¹ Imam Ali (a) has narrated that he was shocked at a person who did not pray on these nights. Other key times for prayer and supplication include the night of *Eid al-Aḏḥā*,² the

¹ The Muslim holiday that marks the end of the Month of Ramadan. This is an occasion to celebrate completion of one month of fasting and obedience.

² The "Festive of Sacrifice," one of the important Islamic holidays, in which Muslims celebrate the arrival of another season of hajj and their ability of offer some sacrifice to God in a way similar to the sacrifice made by Abraham.

night of middle of *Sha‘bān*¹ and the first night of *Rajab*.² Further, the times between the daily prayers and on Fridays are significant in this matter.

Place: Some of the privileged places of worship and supplication are: mosques, Masjid al-Haram,³ Masjid al-Nabi,⁴ Karbala⁵ and the shrines of the Holy Imams (a).

The etiquette of serving God:

One of the most excellent manifestations of *tawhid* (monotheism) is du‘a and supplication. However the etiquette of true servitude demands that one does not request anything from the Almighty, but instead, simply calls upon Him and praises Him. This being said however, there are narrations where believers are told to specifically request for their desires. Requesting something is

1 The eighth month of the Islamic calendar, considered one of the four sacred months in Islam. In the middle of this month in the year 255 A.H., the twelfth Imam was born. There are many supplications and acts of worship recommended for this day and night.

2 The seventh month of the Islamic calendar, considered one of the four sacred months in Islam. On the 27th of this month the Prophet Muhammad (s) was appointed by God as His messenger and on the 13th of this month Imam Ali (a) was born. There are many supplications and acts of worship recommended for this month, such as staying in the Grand Mosque of the town for three days in fasting and worshipping. This is called “i‘tikāf.”

3 “The Sacred Mosque” surrounding the Ka‘bah located in Mecca and is considered the holiest site in Islam.

4 “Mosque of the Prophet” located in Medina and known as the second holiest site in Islam.

5 A city in Iraq known as the location of the Battle of Karbala and is one of the holiest cities for Shi‘a Muslims where Imam Husayn (a) and 72 of his family members and companions who were martyred on the Day of Ashura are buried.

different than calling upon God. Those who have achieved the position of *taslim* (submission) always call upon God without requesting anything from Him. The narrations that speak of making specific requests are for ordinary people, not a true *muwahhid* (monotheist). Even if a *muwahhid* makes a specific request, it is because the nature of *du'a* is related to worship. Essentially, asking for something from God is in itself a type of servitude. Other than this, a *muwahhid* is not requesting anything from God as they have reached a point of absolute submission.

Nevertheless, this position is for a person who is truly acquainted with their Lord, and prefers being present in front of Him over anything and everything else.

من ذا الذى ذاق حلاوه محبتك فابتغى عنك بدلا...

Who has tasted the sweetness of Your love and
then taken an objective other than You?¹

Thus, the etiquette of true servitude demands that one does not desire anything other than God Himself. This is the class of worship that the true friends of God, the noble and the free-spirited people have, resulting from the high ambitions of a servant.

In any case, supplication is a requirement of servitude, as are the appropriate etiquette in the presence God. However, it is important to note that the feeling of helplessness that is followed

¹ *Maḥāṭih al-Jinān*, Munajāt al-Muhibbin, p. 252

by turning to God is a blessing given to us by Him. Such a supplication does not require *istijabah*, because the *du'a* itself is God's response. When one calls upon God due to a burning love, this *du'a* itself is the *istijabah* and the way in which God has turned towards the individual. This is a case where an individual does not want anything specific: he simply wants to call upon God. Here, a relationship with God is what is desired, and this is precisely what true servitude is.

Thus, the most delightful phenomenon in the world of humanity is the satisfaction and sweetness of having a true relationship with God that consists of both companionship and conversation. The most beautiful scene in this world is that of servants calling upon God. The finest of drops are those teardrops that fall to the ground from the eyes of a loving supplicant in the depths of the night, due to the fear and love of God.

و آخر دعوانا ان الحمد لله رب العالمين

And our concluding call is 'All praise belongs to God, the Lord of all the worlds'

Conclusion

Having true faith in God, awareness of one's neediness, while invoking and hoping in God are some of the fundamentals of a sincere supplication. It is important to beseech God for a variety of reasons: to attain high morality, improve ourselves in every aspect, and to refrain from satanic temptations that lead us to sins. A person is to know God and possess internal and external purity

when invoking Him. He or she should also call to Him with the presence of his heart and soul, while being detached from everything other than God. Refraining from both sinning and supplicating without putting for the effort is also important when asking God for blessings. It is until then that a person can have a bright and insightful heart and achieve nearness to Him.

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**History of the Shi‘a in the Time of Imam
Sajjad (a)¹**

Part I

Sayyid Ahmad Reza Khizri et al.²

Translated by Hannaneh Fathollahi

ABSTRACT: Imam Ali ibn al-Husayn was a living embodiment of ‘Ashura as he witnessed his father, brothers, and companions cruelly massacred on the plains of Karbala. While having to live in such sorrow, the Imam lived through a difficult era as he strove to mend the socio-political conditions of his society. Throughout these events, Imam Sajjad tried to prevent corruption, as the rulers inhibited the spread of Islam through crowd manipulation. He also accomplished his role as a guide and benefactor by teaching Islamic

¹ This paper is a translation of Chapter Seven of *The History of Shi‘ism*, vol. 1: The Period of Shi‘a Imam’s Presence, Qum: 2005, Hawzah wa Dāneshgāh and Samt Publishers.

² M. Heidari Aqae, Q. Khanjani, H. Fallah Zadeh and R. Mohammadi under the supervision of Dr. Sayyid Ahmad Reza Khizri.

principles, emphasizing the concept of Imamate, resisting moral corruption, looking after the needy, and setting slaves free. His role as a spiritual guide through his practice of continuous prayers gained him the title Imam Sajjad (The Prostrating Imam) and resulted in a collection titled *Al-Sahifah al-Sajjādiyyah (The Psalms of Islam)*. This article offers a brief biography of the Imam, a brief history of the events after ‘Ashura, and the Imam’s accomplishments in reviving the Muslim community.

A brief biography of Imam Sajjād (a)

Imam Ali ibn Husayn, the fourth Shi‘ite Imam, was one of the grandsons of Prophet Muhammad (s). He is most known for his presence in Karbala on the 10th of Muharram when his father, Imam Husayn, was martyred along with his family and companions. Imam Ali ibn Husayn’s extreme illness on that day resulted in his inability to participate in the battle, leaving him unharmed by the enemy. This enabled him to be a living history of Karbala and uphold the role of Imamate after his father. In addition to his impeccable qualities, the Imam spent much of his life supplicating to God (du‘a) and prostrating to Him, giving him the titles *Zayn al-‘Abidin* (“Beauty/Best of the Worshipers”) and Imam *al-Sajjād*. It is likely that his mother passed away when he (a) was born and the Imam (a) was brought up under the care of

his father.¹ There is not enough information about the Imam's childhood and youth; however, he (a) lived during the last two years of the reign of his grandfather, Imam Ali (a), ten years of the Imamate of his uncle, Imam Ḥasan (a), and ten years of his father's Imamate.

According to historical sources, Imam Ali ibn Ḥusayn (a) is quoted as saying:

In the eve of Ashura, I was lying down [in my tent] and my aunt, Zaynab (a) was taking care of me [since I was ill]. At that time, my father came and recited some poems about the unreliability of this world. I understood what he meant. At that moment, I was choked with tears, but did not cry. I knew the calamity was soon to happen. When my Aunt Zaynab (a) heard my father's words, involuntarily and with an uncovered head, she stood and said, "Woe to me! I will miss my brother. I wish death had taken my life. Now I am once again losing my mother, Fātimah, my father, Ali, and my brother, Ḥasan." My father looked at her, repressing his grief, and said, "My sister! Be pious, for death is destined." But she went unconscious. Imam Husayn (a) splashed some water on her face and said, "My sister! Be patient

¹ For more information, cf. *Imam as-Sajjād (a) Jamāl Nīyāyishgarān*, p. 22.

for the sake of God. Every Muslim and I must join the Prophet (s).”¹

Imam Sajjād’s illness started before Ashūrā and continued to some days after when the female relatives and companions of the Ahlul Bayt were taken captive and forced to walk from Karbala, Iraq, to the palace of Yazid in Damascus. His illness was so intense that he was unable to ride the camel, and so the enemies tied his hands, legs, and neck with chains underneath it.² However, his illness either did not last long or at least did not prevent Imam’s brave response to ‘Ubaydullah ibn Zīyād in Kūfah. This reached the point that ‘Ubaydullah decided to kill Imam (a). Despite this threat, never did Lady Zaynab ask for mercy on his behalf, she was prepared to sacrifice herself for him. It was then that Imam (a) said, “Dispatch trusted men along with these women and children to Medina.” Then Ibn Zīyād shamefacedly gave up on the idea of killing the Imam (a).³

A few days after the meeting with Ibn Ziyad, Imam (a) and other captives were taken from the prison of Kūfa to Damascus while

¹ Abū Makhnaf, Lūṭ ibn Yaḥyā, *Nuṣūṣ min Tārīkh Abī Makhnaf*, vol. 1, p. 457; *Tārīkh al-Ya'qūbī*, vol.2, p.244; *Tārīkh al-Ṭabarī*, vol.5, p. 420, Ṭabarī has also quoted this tradition from Abū Makhnaf with a little difference. Imam Ḥusayn (a) stated:

يا دهرُ اف لك من خليل....

"O world! Fie on you! People are seeking and loving you in the night and day but in return, you kill them and do not change their death, but this affair [death] is in the hand of God and any living creature follows me."

² It should be noted that Imam’s illness was temporary and lasted for few days before and after the tragedy.

³ *Tārīkh al- Ṭabarī*, vol.5,p. 231.

being harassed on the way. This journey included some of the most important events in his life: being present in Yazīd's meeting, delivering his historic sermon in Umayyad mosque as he condemned Yazīd's crime of massacring the progeny of the Prophet (s), and finally, returning home to Medina with a grieved caravan.¹

Another significant event in his life was the Ḥirrah uprising in Medina resulting in a brutal war where many of the companions of the Prophet (s) and their descendants were killed; however, due to God's mercy and Imam's insight and correct position no one complained against him.²

Imam al-Sajjād lived in Medina until the end of his life when he was poisoned by the order of Walīd ibn 'Abd al-Malik in 94 A.H.³ He passed away after a few days and was buried in Baqī' cemetery in Medina. He lived for 57 years, his Imamate lasting 34 years.⁴

¹ More explanation will be given in the part political activities of Imam Sajjād (a).

² It will be discussed in the part uprisings.

³ Shibrāwī, *Al-Ithāf biḥub al-Ashraf*, p. 143.

⁴ The time of his martyrdom had been narrated in 92, 93, 94, 99 and 100 AH and thus there are contradictory views about during of his life and also his Imamate; cf. *Imam Sajjād(a) Jamāl Nīyāyishgarān*, p. 27-28.

Socio-political circumstances

The events after Ashura include the decline of the Umayyad rule, the end of the Sufyani¹ rule, and the rise of the Marwanis. The next phase of the period of Imam al-Sajjad deals with the governorship of Hajjāj ibn Yusuf² and the overthrow of ‘Abdullah ibn Zubayr³ in Mecca until the beginning of the ‘Abbasid movement.

Imam Sajjād (a) was appointed the Imam when the community was experiencing a momentous time where deviousness, injustice, and worldliness were rampant. The oppressive rule of the Umayyads took significant advantage of these conditions in order to spread its political authority. Thus, the *'period strangulation'* is the best description for the period in which Imam Sajjād (a) was living. People observed how Yazid, in order to preserve his power, did not hesitate to commit any crime: he plundered the possession of the people of Medina, destroyed the Ka‘bah, and was determined to kill even the son of the holy Prophet (s). The intense fear created by the Umayyads led to a period when people lost all hope in gaining victory through armed movements.⁴

¹ Sufyani: descendants of Abu Sufyan; Marwanis: descendants of Marwan ibn al-Hakam)

² A cruel governor of Iraq sent by Abdul Malik ibn Marwan in 75 AH/694 AD.

³ After the death of Imam Husayn, Ibn Zubayr returned to Hijaz where he declared himself the righteous caliph. Benefitting from the dissatisfaction among the society with the Umayyad rule, Ibn Zubayr established his power in Iraq, southern Arabia, and in the greater part of Syria.

⁴ Pīshwāee, Mahdī, *Sīriyah Pīshwāyān*, p. 238.

The assemblages of the Shi‘a in Iraq and Ḥijāz weakened as they lost cohesiveness and production. Imam Sajjād (a) spoke of the people’s depravity: “There are not so much as twenty men in Medina and Mecca who love us.”¹

One of the important differences between the period of Imam Sajjād (a) and the period of other Imams was that the caliphs of his time fearlessly neglected all Islamic principles by destroying the holiness of Islamic teachings. Moreover, no one dared to protest. Cruel people like Ḥajjāj ruled in that period. Slaughtering 120 thousand Muslims and imprisoning 80 thousand of them in terrible conditions are facts that confirm this statement.²

Regarding the cultural conditions in the period of Imam Sajjād (a), the Umayyad rulers were particularly interested in Ḥijāz³ for various reasons. Mecca and Medina, especially Medina, was the centre of religion and piety and where the lights of Islam radiated from there to the faraway lands across the world. The people of Mecca and Medina had closely observed the Prophet (s), his companions, the Imams (a). They were also familiar with the conduct of the first Caliphs. Ḥijāz would be dangerous for the

¹ Majlisī, Muḥammad Bāqir, *Bahār al-Anwār*, vol.46, p.143, *Sharh-e Nahj al-Balaghah* (Explanation on Nahj al-Balaghah), vol.4, p. 104. The original text is as follows:

رَوَى أَبُو عَمْرٍو النَّهْدِيُّ قَالَ سَمِعْتُ عَلِيَّ بْنَ الْحُسَيْنِ ع يَقُولُ مَا بِمَكَّةَ وَ الْمَدِينَةَ عَشْرُونَ رَجُلًا يُحِبُّنَا.

² For more information on the crimes of Abd al-Malak and his agents;cf. *Tārīkh-e Khulafā*, p.218, Ibn Athīr, Alī ibn Abī al-Karam, *Al-Kāmil fī Tārīkh*, vol.4,p. 522.

³ A region in the west of present-day Saudi Arabia, better known for the Islamic holy cities of Mecca and Medina.

Umayyad rulers since uprisings could take place in Mecca and Medina.

It was the Umayyads' policy to stop Mecca and Medina from being the centre of religion and holiness. They found the only effective way was distracting people through prohibited entertainment to turn cities into centres of corruption and immorality. The prevalence of entertainment in the community was achieved through creating and spreading pleasure by including dance clubs that included music and singing.¹ Men and women participated in courses for dancing and singing. Gambling and prostitution were also prevalent.

The large number of these entertainers sent by the order of the Umayyad caliphs to these cities prevented people from revolting against the system, and this resulted in refraining from politics. Yazid ibn Mu'āwīyah was the forerunner of the corruption in Islamic history and after him Yazīd ibn 'Abd al-Malik and Walīd ibn Yazīd also played a role in the failure of the Muslims.

The Umayyad rulers also encouraged poets with luxurious gifts in order to modify their poetry and encourage them to deliver eulogies about the rulers and courtiers' merits. Of course, there were some Shi'a poets who protested against the government and defended the Ahlul Bayt (a) through their poetry and writing, though they were exposed to disfavour and rage.

¹ There were famous singers among them such as Ma'bad, Mālik ibn Abi al-Samḥ, Ibn 'Āyishah, Daḥmān, Jamīlah, Ibn Sharīj, Gharīdī, 'Izzah al-Mīlā and also many other of dancers and minstrels were making such assemblages in Medina.

Furthermore, the issue of prohibition of narrating hadiths can be counted as another cultural and ideological issue in the period of Imam Sajjād (a). The severity of rulers in prohibiting narrating and writing hadiths was to the extent that the entire Prophetic Sunnah had been forgotten.

Another factor causing alterations in Islam and Prophetic Sunnah was the presence of officially appointed storytellers who spread false ideas in their stories.¹

In such condition, which was one of the crucial stages in the history of Islam, Imam Sajjād (a) considered it his duty to rescue the people from the moral decline that had corrupted the society.

The Umayyad caliphate laid down indecent innovations (*bid'ah*) and traditions through non-acceptable practices by corrupt rulers. The outcomes of these innovations drove people to experience difficulties which finally led to the caliphate's demise. A few examples of these innovations and traditions are mentioned in the following:

Lawlessness

A prominent feature of the oppressors' authority was that they lacked a fair judicial system as they set laws and reigned the society in favour of their own benefits. Such actions included 1) terrorizing their subjects, 2) exerting severe punishments for

¹ They possessed governmental office and ruler himself appointed and deposed them. They were well-known as Qāṣṣ al-Jamā'ah and direct people's attention to themselves.

oppositions, 3) issuing orders to cut pension and salary, 4) destroying homes, capitals, and properties of Imam Ali's followers, 5) limiting freedom of thought and expression, especially with respect to the leadership of the Ahlul Bayt (a), 6) the execution of great scholars and Islamic thinkers who were Imam Ali's supporters in Kufah's squares, 7) inciting disputes, 8) inciting disputes between the tribes Muḍir and Rabī'ah and 9) employing poets to speak against those who opposed the ruling party.

Illustrating his disregard for social justice, Mu'awīyah told some of his agents, "Because the non-Arabs (Iranians and slaves) are increasing, I have decided to kill some of them and to dispatch some of them for revamping the roads between the cities so as to banish them from the city and the society overall."¹

Preventing the spread of Islam

The ruling power crossed many of the divine limits. One way in which they did so was to eliminate Islamic socio-political rulings (*aḥkām*). The Umayyads distorted and denied Islamic orders, creating innovation and fabricating traditions by rejection of Islamic laws (*sharī'ah*) in order to reach their ominous governmental goals.

¹ Al-Ḥāj Ḥasan, Ḥusayn, *Al-Imam as-Sajjād (a) Jihād and Amjād*, p. 12.

Fabricating hadiths

Mu'āwīyah encouraged some people to fabricate hadiths against Imam Ali (a). Abu Hurayrah, 'Amr 'Ās and Mughayrah were among them. Forged hadiths were created to sanctify certain personalities and to distort the prestigious position of the Ahlul Bayt (a).¹

Forged hadiths were an excuse to justify the oppression of the Umayyad rulers. The following hadith is an instance:

Anyone who observes an indecent act of an agent must remain patient. And if he does not remain patient and puts a distance between himself and the people only for a period and dies in that condition, he has died in the state of *Jāhiliyyah* [pre-Islamic ignorance].

Determinism

One of the distinctive innovations of Mu'āwīyah was to promote and spread the idea of '*determinism*' so that they could legally justify their massacres. This idea could give some kind of legitimacy to Umayyad rule and repress the opposition to them.

¹ There is an example from fabricated hadith that Abū Hurayrah had quoted from the holy Prophet (s) that: "God trusted three person about His revelation: I (the Prophet), Jibra'īl and Mu'āwīyah." He says that the holy Prophet (s) gave a part of revelation to Mu'āwīyah and stated: "Keep this by yourself until you meet me in paradise on the day of Resurrection." *Al-Imam al-Sajjād (a): Jihād and Amjād*, p. 14.

Mu'āwīyah and his son, Yazīd, took advantage of this belief to hide their own crimes.

Social Manipulation

The ruling class kept people in a mental, ideological, and political vacuum while spreading propaganda through activities such as 1) preventing the spread of knowledge, both academic and Islamic, 2) limiting and canalizing scholars, 3) fabricating hadiths and offering them to the people, 4) preventing people from meeting the Ahlul Bayt (a), and 5) exiling moral intellectuals from the realm of knowledge, and replacing them with the People of the Book, thus introducing them as the people of knowledge, wisdom, and culture. The imamate of Imam Sajjād (a) began in such dreadful conditions.

Moreover, the Umayyads' policy on lowering the status of Imam Ali (a) and other Imams of the Ahlul Bayt (a) were fulfilled through the following procedures:

1- Frightening the Shi'ites so that they would only think about rescuing themselves and avoid propagating the virtues of Ahlul Bayt (a). These threats continued until the martyrdom of Imam Ḥasan (a). Afterwards the calamities and seditions increased so much so that everyone could face exile and destitution.¹ After the martyrdom of Imam Ḥusayn (a), these problems reached its peak especially in the time of Ḥajjāj Thaqaḫī whose reign coincided the imamate of Imam Sajjād (a).

¹ Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd, *Sharh-e Nahj al-Balaghah* , vol.11, p. 46.

2- Concealing the virtues of Imam Ali (a) and punishing those who narrated them.

3- Creating a gap between the people and the Imam.

4- Setting an economic policy for weakening the Ālawids and the followers of Ahlul Bayt (a).

Imam Sajjād (a) observed the period of Imam Ḥasan (a) and Imam Ḥusayn (a) and witnessed the time in which some people sometimes took the side of Ahlul Bayt (a) and some other times they sided with their enemies. The Imam also observed the increasing mental and political decline of the people. If we add the intense strangulation to those conditions, then we will understand why the Imam did not rise against the Umayyads.

Indicators of deviation in the society

- Ban on narrating and writing hadiths;
- Spread of false stories and politically motivated poems;
- Inattentiveness to the Qur'an and abandoning it;
- The belief in superiority of hadiths over the Qur'an;
- The belief in authority of Companions and giving them the right of legislation and changing Islam laws;
- Promoting certain people as chief judges or chief jurists in order to suppress independent scholars;
- Spreading the idea of determinism and justifying acts of rulers, which were contrary to the Islamic law;
- Giving the absolute right of obedience to the rulers, even the oppressive ones;

- Spread of corruptions in community such as drinking alcohol, singing, music, and dancing.

As a result of the deviation in the society, many people did not follow religion, and if some did, they used to refer to the incompetent authorities and royal jurists who had been introduced as high level scholars and jurists. Their rulings, judgments, and judicial opinions were sometimes against the scriptures and sometimes they were heretics.

To sum up the people lived in severe cultural, scientific, religious, and moral poverty. This is similar to what Imam Ali (a) said describing the political, social and cultural circumstances of Islamic society in the year 40 A.H.:

لَمْ يَبْقَ مِنَ الْإِسْلَامِ إِلَّا اسْمُهُ وَ مِنَ الدِّينِ إِلَّا رِسْمُهُ

Nothing is remaining from Islam except its name
and from religion except its customs.¹

This was said 30 years after the demise of the holy Prophet (s) when many of Imam Ali's companions were alive. However, in the time of Imam Sajjād (a), more than 50 years after the demise of the holy Prophet (s), many of the companions had passed away and many of the Shi'a were martyred, making the conditions even worse. One of the economic policies of the Umayyads was to weaken the Alawids and the Shi'a by cutting off their pension

¹ *Al-Ṣaḥīḥ min Sīrah an-Nabī al-A'ẓam*, vol. 1, p. 142; Amīnī, 'Abd al-Ḥusayn, *Al-Ghadīr*, vol, 8, p.166; Mas'ūdī, 'Alī ibn al-Ḥusayn, *Murūj az-Zahab*....,vol.3, p.85.

and salary, and seize and occupy their properties, putting many of them into poverty.

4. Imam Sajjād's activities

Imam Sajjād (a) became Imam after the martyrdom of his father and this continued for 34 years. In order to understand the events during the lives of the Imams (a) it is necessary to analyse the political, social and cultural events that occurred. Without such recognition, the analysis of their position and policy cannot be accurate. Those who are not able to establish a strong and logical relationship between peace and war, uprising and silence, and criticism and dissimulation (*taqiyyah*) of the Imams (a) risk being defeated due to their inattention to the truths and objectivities that have a significant role in the political and social policies of leaders. There was no contradiction in the teachings or conduct of infallible Imams (a). The position of the Imams (a) are divided into four parts:

1. Some of them clearly fought;
2. Some secretly fought and applied various tactics;¹
3. Some were imprisoned for many years of their life;

¹ It is essential to say that political position and political measures do not mean armed struggles and serious dispute for seizing rule. In the teachings of Ahlul Bayt (a) political measure is sometimes just a kind of spiritual or intellectual leadership or the spread of familiarity with the social and individual rulings of Islam.

4. Some were asked to get involved in political issues like becoming the deputy Caliph, but they did not actually get involved.

Imam Sajjād (a) was confronted by problems. Through his policy, he (a) strived to continuously revive Imam Ḥusayn's movement and uncover the plot of those who were distorting. Furthermore, he was determined to restore the 'Alawid and Shi'ite organizations which had been damaged, and strove to strengthen and explain the roots of Islam, especially Shi'i thought. In the following, the measures Imam Sajjād (a) took to re-establish political, social and cultural sphere will be provided.

4.1. Cultural activities

In Shi'i Islam, an Imam (a) possesses superiority over all others in intelligence, knowledge, faith, and morals. His knowledge, like the prophets' knowledge, is given by God and is not through conventional methods of teaching and learning.¹ To explain

¹ **يَبْحِي خُذِ الْكِتَابَ بِقُوَّةٍ وَءَاتَيْنَاهُ الْحُكْمَ صَبِيًّا**
"O John!" [We said,] "Hold on with power to the Book!" And We gave him judgment while still a child. (19:12)

...يَرْفَعُ اللَّهُ الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا مِنْكُمْ وَالَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْعِلْمَ دَرَجَاتٍ.
... Allah will raise those of you who have faith and those who have been given knowledge in rank, and Allah is well aware of what you do.(58:11)

فَأَشَارَتْ إِلَيْهِ قَالُوا كَيْفَ نُكَلِّمُ مَنْ كَانَ فِي الْمَهْدِ صَبِيًّا
Thereat she pointed to him. They said, "How can we speak to one who is yet a baby in the cradle?" (19:29)

There is a hadith of Imam Sajjād (a) about divine knowledge of the Imams (a) and its wide area as: "Indeed, Muḥammad (s) was Confidant of God on the

Imam Sajjād’s knowledge and its advantage over the scholars, jurists, and narrators of hadith of his time, his awareness of the hidden mysteries of the world and the relationship of people to the sheer source of divine wisdom is beyond the constraints of this article.

In any case, Imam Sajjād (a) used every opportunity to spread his knowledge. Like other infallible Imams (a), he did not cease to continue teaching under most difficult conditions. Like the rain of mercy, they irrigated the thirsty lips of the people with refreshing water from the spring of knowledge.

Imam Sajjād (a) selected the holy Prophet's (s) mosque as his school and held discussions on scientific subjects such as exegesis of the Qur'an, hadith, jurisprudence (*fiqh*), philosophy, theology (*kalām*), mysticism (*'irfān*) and morality (*akhlāq*). On Fridays, Imam (a) delivered a public speech and advised the people to be pious in this world and be mindful of the hereafter. Ābd Allāh Maḥḍ says, “My mother Faṭimah would encourage me to participate in the sessions of my uncle, Imam Sajjād (a) and these gatherings increased my knowledge and God-wariness.”¹

earth and when he passed away, his Ahlul Bayt (a) became his heir and also Confidant of God on the earth. The knowledge on fate and destinies of people, Arab's genealogy, the purity of their birth, the names of Shī'a and their fathers' name is by us. We are elected by God and are the Successors of the holy Prophet (S). We are more worthy to Qur'an and religion than anybody else. We are in the high level of knowledge and the knowledge of all prophets are with us. Şaffār Qumī, *Başā'ir ad-Darajāt*, p.120.

¹ Shaīf Qurishī, Bāqir, *Ḥayāt al-Imam Zayn al-'Ābidīn (a)*, vol.2, p.264. Quoted from *A'yān ash-Shī'a*.

Scholars revered the Imam (a) and benefitted from the vast ocean of his knowledge. They enjoyed his presence so much that they would reluctantly leave his company. When he went for the pilgrimage (*hajj*), about one thousand learned people accompanied him to benefit from his knowledge.¹

Imam trained many students, some of whom later became very great scholars. Bāqir Shaif Qurashi has quoted the names of 164 of them who had considerable merits. They were either experts in various sciences and authors of important books or political and social figures. Moreover, some were active against the tyrants and many of them were martyred.²

Imam (a) taught subjects such as:

The concept of Imamate: The Imam defined Imamate and explained the position and the status of the infallible Imams while rejecting the wilāyah (guardianship) of non-infallibles. Some of the points that can be understood from Imam's teachings in this regard are as follows:

- a. Imam is informed of the lawful (ḥalāl) and the prohibited (ḥaram) and is responsible for presenting God's religion. Anyone who accepts his wilayah [guardianship] will be guided.

¹ *Ibid.*

² *Ibid*, p.257-331.

- b. It is rationally and religiously necessary to obey and follow the infallible Imams (a).
- c. The obedience to Imams (a) is one of the requirements of taqwa (piety) and taqwa is the requirement for acceptance of prayers.

Necessoty of resisting moral corruption: the spread of corruption among different classes and groups of society, including some jurists, motivated the Imam (a), to fight at the same time both injustice and corruption with the means of supplications.

Remembrance of God: In his teachings, Imam Sajjād (a) stressed on the obedience to the Qur'an and the Sunnah of the Prophet and encouraged people to enforcement their faith.

Enriching the culture of prayer and supplication: The Imam (a) taught deep mystical and monotheistic ideas in the form of supplications. To understand this better it is enough to refer to *Al-Sahifat al-Sajjādiyyah*.

Unfortunately there were attempts to revive the pre-Islamic culture of ignorance (*jāhiliyyah*) and polytheism and reintroduce some of the pagan customs again. The Imam (a) directed people's attention to the unity of Divine Attributes so that they would know that sustenance and livelihood, death and life, and fate and destiny are only in the hands of God and that they should not put their trust in the rules.

The Imam (a) continued his scientific and cultural movement in starting a tafsīr (exegesis of the Qur'an), hadith, and jurisprudence (fiqh) school up until the time of Imam Bāqir (a), who took this task over and made this school very established.

Theological issues: The Imam (a) held discussion with the chiefs of different sects and schools of Islam and demonstrated the true understanding of Islam.¹

Al-Sahīfah al-Sajjādiyyah: This is a collection of some of the supplications of the Imam (a) that covers all that is needed for a spiritual life. It has been described as *the Psalms (Zabūr)* of the Ahlul Bayt (a).

¹ *Al-Imam Zayn al-Ābidīn (a)*, p. 260, *Al-Ḥayāt al-Sīyāsīyah lil-Imam aṣ-Ṣajjād (a)*, p. 41. For example, with respect to the usage of analogical argument (*qiyās*) in fiqh, Imam (a) said:

انّ دين الله تعالى لا يُصابُ بالعقول الناقصة، و الاراء الباطلة، والمقاييس
الفاسدة، ولا يُصابُ الا بالتسليم، فمن سلم لنا سلم ومن اقتدى بنا هدى، ومن
كان يعمل بالقياس والرأى هلك، و من وجد في نفسه شيئا مما نقوله ، أو
نقض به خرجا كفر بالذى أنزل السبع المثاني و القرآن العظيم و هو لا يعلم.

"By imperfect intellects, false thoughts and void analogies, no one can access God's religion. God's religion cannot be accessed except by submission (to God's will). Anyone who accepts us will be saved and anyone who follows us will be guided. And anyone who follows analogy and his personal opinions will perish and anyone who doubts what we say or rejects us has unknowingly disbelieved in God who has sent down the holy Qur'an and Seven Repeated Verses."

With respect to true understanding of God, Imam (a) says:

...و عجزت العقول عن إدراك كنه جمالك، وانحسرت الأبصار دون النظر إلى
وجهك، ولم تجعل للخلق طريقا إلى معرفتك إلا بالعجز عن معرفتك.

...intellects are incapable of grasping the core of Thy beauty, eyes fail before gazing upon the glories of Thy face, and Thou hast assigned to Thy creatures no way to know Thee save incapacity to know Thee!
(Qummī, Sheikh Abbās, *Mafātīḥ al-Jinān*, Supplication 12, p. 229)

Risālat al-Ḥuqūq: This is another important book of the Imam (a) concerning rights, known as *Treatise of Rights*. This book defines rights in all positions, relationships and interactions of a person towards himself, God, other people and environment.

The age of jurists

As mentioned before, the Umayyads thrived on people's ignorance. That meant that any effort to increase people's awareness would threaten their rule. The Imam (a) strived to promote education in the society as he considered it a significant and necessary measure. Imam (a) was the forerunner in cultural struggle and managed to establish the school of Ahlul Bayt (a) for training jurists. Then, the school of Tābi'īn (first generation after the holy Prophet who had not seen the Prophet himself but had seen his companions) was set up in Medina.¹ Some of its scholars were among the students of the Imam (a).²

The school of Tābi'īn was established to promote Islamic rulings, but the rules were hoping to use it against the school of Ahlul Bayt (a) and therefore financially and politically supported it. They strove to challenge Imam Sajjād (a)'s indisputable knowledge and right of leadership. This period was named the Age of Jurists and Jurisprudents. The Umayyads took advantage of poets and gave them money to praise those jurists who stood

¹ Some of its administrators were Sa'īd ibn Musayyib, 'Urwah ibn Zubayr, Qāsim ibn Muḥammad ibn Abi-Bakr, Abū Bakr ibn Abd ar-Raḥmān ibn Ḥārith, Sulaymān ibn Yasār, 'Ubadullah ibn 'Utbah ibn Mas'ūd and Khārijah ibn Zayd who were well-known as fuqahāyah sib'ah (seven jurists).

² *Ḥayāt al-Imam Zayn al-'Ābidīn (a)*, vol.2, p. 414.

against the Ahlul Bayt (a).¹ The divine grace and wisdom reflected in the speeches and behaviours of Imam Sajjād (a) and his devout followers defeated all opponents and proved Imam Sajjād's outstanding knowledge. They named Imam (a): “سَيِّدُ ٱلْفُقَهَاءِ وَٱلْفُقَهَاءُ ٱلْفَقَّهَ”² (Master of Jurists and Best of Jurists). Many of jurists respected the Imam's knowledge and wisdom and declared: “مَا رَأَيْنَا أَفْقَهُ مِن عَلِيِّ بْنِ ٱلْحُسَيْنِ (ع)”³ (We have not seen any one better than Ali ibn Ḥusayn (a) in knowledge and understanding.

Some jurists of that time were: Abū Ḥāzim, Muḥammad ibn Zuhārī, Sufyān ‘Uyaynah, Nāfi‘ ibn Jubayr, Sālim ibn ‘Abdullāh et al. Surprisingly many of them consecutively died and the year 95 A.H. was named “the Year of the Jurist.”⁴

4.2. Social activities

During his Imamate, the Imam (a) made considerable efforts to rescue the society from corruption, such as immorality, poverty, discrimination and various deprivations exerted by the Umayyad rulers on people, particularly the Shi‘ites.

Imam Sajjad (a) tried to guide people and solve their personal and social problems. He also reinforced faith and piety in order to

¹ If, it is asked you: who are the ocean of knowledge? Say: they are 'Ubadullah, 'Urwah, Qāsim, Sa'īd, Abū Bakr, Sulaymān and Khārijah. Ibid., p. 415.

² *Imam Sajjād (a) Jamāl Nīyāyishgarān*, p.196.

³ Ibn Jūzī, Abd ar-Raḥmān, *Tadhkirah al-Khawāṣ*, p. 241.

⁴ *Tārīkh-e Ṭabarī*, vol. 5, p. 262.

minimize people's temptation to sin. In doing so, he emphasized on acts of worship to God such as supplication, the daily prayers, God-wariness and purifying one's eyes and heart from contamination with sinful acts. He was very kind and respectful with respect to children and teenagers and used to say to them, "You will be great personalities of the future." The Imam's conduct sufficed as a role model for people and whoever met him was fascinated with his conduct and manners and immediately felt attached to him.¹

Imam (a) was very kind with people. He easily forgave those who wronged him, as they did so under the influence of the Umayyad propagations. However, upon witnessing his mildness, patience, and friendly behaviour, they would feel ashamed by their own behaviour.²

Many of the indigent families in Medina benefitted from the favour and munificence of the unknown man in the darkness of night. They never knew who it was until Imam (a) was martyred.

¹ Farzdaq says in his ode: "He is a clement person that no one fear him and two things are his ornament: good behavior and excellent ethics." *Zindigānī-e Alī ibn al-Husayn (a)*, p.113; *Imam Sajjād (a) Jamāl Nīyāyishgarān*, p.83.

² c.f, *Imam Sajjād(a) Jamāl Nīyāyishgarān*, p. 72. Hishām ibn Ismā'īl oppressed Imam Sajjād (a) during his ruling on Medina. When he was deposed, Walīd's agents proclaimed, "Everyone who has been oppressed in the time of Hishām, tell us." Hishām feared Imam Sajjād (a) more than any other person because he knew how he treated the Imam (a). However, contrary to his assumptions, when the Imam (a) faced him, he saluted him and said to his companions, "Do not complain about Hishām because he is now weak." *Al-Irshād...*, vol. 2, p. 146; *Tadhkirah al-Khawāṣ*, p. 295.

Afterwards, seeing that their needs were unattended, it was then that they understood the unknown man to be Imam Sajjād (a).¹

Imam Sajjād (a) made remarkable efforts to free slaves. As mentioned in hadiths, the Imam (a) set a thousand slaves free.² He (a) would buy slaves and educate them. The slaves in turn were familiar with the Imam and were educated by his behaviour and speeches. When they were set free they were in fact noble and knowledgeable people who loved Islam and the Ah al-Bayt (a). The Imam (a) captured their hearts to an extent that some slaves preferred to serve him than to enjoy their freedom. Imam (a) not only attempted to buy slaves and free them after a time, but he also encouraged others to execute this act as well:

No faithful will ever free a faithful slave unless in return for every organ of the slave, God saves a similar organ of him safe from the fire of Hell.³

Conclusion

After patiently bearing the calamities on the plains of Karbala, Imam Sajjād (a) continued to persevere in a society faced with absolute turmoil as the people suffered under the rule of the Umayyads and later under the governorship of Hajjāj ibn Yusuf. Out of their fear of the Imam's right to leadership, the rulers struggled hard to prevent the spread of Islam by eradicating

¹ *Kashf al-Ghumah...*, vol. 2, p. 266.

² *Ibid.*, p. 279.

³ *Da'ā'im al-Islām*, vol.2, p. 301.

people's economic, political, and social rights. Their oppressive measures included cutting pensions and salary, exerting severe punishment, executing great scholars, and limiting freedom of thought and expression on the authority of the Ahlul Bayt (a). They also fabricated hadiths in the favor of their rule and contributed to the spread of prohibited amusements to pacify people and keep them unaware of the truth. Imam Sajjād (a) stood strongly against these policies through educating the people on Islamic principles, leading them towards spirituality, particularly in the daily prayers and supplications, caring for the deprived, and setting slaves free. Indeed, those who knew the Imam were deeply fond of him and took joy in benefiting from his presence, knowledge, wisdom, and piety.

Mourning for Imam Husayn (a) and its Outcomes

Mahnaz Heydarpoor¹

ABSTRACT: Mourning is grief of the loss of a loved one and the expression of this grief varies from culture to culture. One who loves the Ahl ul-Bayt and holds sincere sympathy for any oppressed victim mourns over the loss of Imam Husayn and the 72 members who accompanied him during the tragedy of Karbala. Various hadiths emphasize on the value of mourning for the martyrs, both publicly and privately. One way is to express extreme grief over this tragedy as well as acknowledge Imam Husayn's virtues and strive to emulate him as he proved to be the perfect exemplar. Consequently, the mourner receives bounteous rewards, both in this world and the next. In this article, I offer the outcomes of mourning for Imam Husayn (a) using evidence from Qur'anic verses and passages from Ziyarat 'Ashura. Acknowledging the valiance and sacrifice of Imam Husayn and his companions and

¹ PhD student and lecturer of the Jami'at al-Zahra (a), Qum.

displaying inner and outward sorrow for the tragedy helps one attain divine mercy, divine forgiveness, and companionship with the Ahlul Bayt in this world and the next.

Introduction

Imam Husayn (a), the son of Imam Ali and grandson of the holy Prophet Muhammad (s), refused to pledge allegiance against the tyranny of Yazid I, the Umayyad caliph. As a result, Imam Husayn and his 72 family members and companions were brutally massacred on the sands of Karbala as they rose up against the oppressive and religiously misguided regime. For this reason, the Shi'a honor Imam Husayn, the Chief of Martyrs, and commemorate the event every year during the holy month of Muharram. Questions still arise as to why the Shi'a fervently honor and mourn for the martyrs and have never failed to miss a year in publicly and privately commemorating the tragedy. Honoring exemplars that hold impeccable characteristics of true empathy, sincerity, and unwavering courage against oppression is a reminder for people to follow their lead. In what follows, the true meaning of mourning in general and mourning for the martyrs in particular will be defined, in addition to describing the divine blessings granted to those who display inner and outward grief for them.

The meaning of mourning

The essence of mourning is to grieve the loss of a dear one. People may have different ways of expressing this grief such as wearing black (or white clothing in some cultures), having processions, holding ceremonies, visiting the graves of the deceased, beating their chests, and so forth. What is important is to distinguish between the essence of mourning and its forms. It looks as if what constitutes mourning is the grief itself. Usually, grief is also openly expressed, since its strong feeling of sorrow is difficult to hide. Of course, it is possible to think of cases in which one may need to hide his or her mourning from others for personal reasons. Therefore, mourning is one's expression of grief for the loss of a dear one or dear ones. There are also various ways of expressing and exhibiting this grief based on cultural and religious contexts.

True meaning of mourning for Imam Husayn (a)

Thus, the true essence of mourning for Imam Husayn (a) is to grieve over the tragic event: the martyrdom of him and 72 members of his family and companions, and the abduction of the women and children of the Ahlul Bayt (a) alongside Imam Ali ibn Husayn (a) who was severely ill. This mourning is a result of love for the Ahlul Bayt (a). It is also an expected sympathy with the oppressed victims of the brutality of tyrants and mischief-makers. Whether a Muslim or not, those who are informed of at least some of the events of Karbala cannot help but display

respect and sympathy for Imam Husayn (a) and his family and companions.

Islamic hadiths emphasize the merits of mourning for the martyrs of Karbala, both privately and publicly, and the great reward that is promised as a result. Of course, exceptional situations in which public mourning may lead to unnecessary risks and endanger innocent lives are excluded. Mourning for Imam Husayn (a) is to commemorate the event in which virtue stood against vice and the blood of the oppressed overwhelmed the swords and spears of the oppressors. Therefore, mourning for the martyrs of Karbala in addition to expressing our grief over their loss, especially in such a brutal manner, and showing respect for their bravery and sacrifice, is to attain insight and motivation to follow their path by taking them as our role models. Therefore, a union is to be shaped and strengthened between those who mourn and those who are mourned for.

The emotional essence of this unity is sadness and grief. This would reach its climax when one's tears overflow for the martyrdom of Imam Husayn (a) and his companions. The prerequisite for this sadness is to understand the tragic incidents of the event of Karbala and its aftermath. This event affects any person who comes to know about these incidents. However, this sadness can strengthen with further recognition of the exemplary status of Imam Husayn (a) and his companions in their position with Allah (swt). For this reason, for centuries the followers of the Ahlul Bayt (a) continue to find the events of Karbala to be the

most painful tragedy of their own and their grief is renewed, instead of forgotten, year after year.

The intellectual essence of this unity is to acknowledge the manifested virtues and values that Imam Husayn (a) and his party demonstrated and to resemble them in the best way possible. To truly mourn and feel sad over a teacher who spent and gave his life making an effort to teach those in need of knowledge is to appreciate his accomplishments and to safeguard and continue his unfinished tasks. We are to truly mourn for a doctor who took risks by travelling to remote and unsafe places to treat the ill and consequently gets killed for a number of reasons. Such a person deserves our respect. We are to emulate him and continue his job. To merely look sad or cry is not enough; it does not fully demonstrate one's loyalty and unity with the lost ones.

Essence of mourning versus forms of mourning

In addition to the emotional and intellectual constituents of true mourning, what matters is how to practice or illustrate it. People should be able to use any form that suits their culture and customs, provided that it does not conflict with the rulings of Islam. Thus, the essence of mourning is religious and sacred and must be preserved, but its forms and expressions may change from culture to culture or from age to age.

Outcomes of true mourning for Imam Husayn (a)

The main achievement of the sincere mourners for Imam Husayn (a) and his companions is to resemble them in experiencing their

virtuous lives and in their honourable deaths. This attitude or condition can bring about other achievements as well. In other words, true mourning is by itself an achievement that can lead to future accomplishments.

In a passage of Ziyārat¹ ‘Ashurā, we read:

اللهم اجعلني في مقامي هذا ممن تناله منك صلوه و رحمته و
مغفره

Oh Allah! Please include me right now among those who receive from you salutation and mercy and forgiveness.

Receiving salutation, mercy, and forgiveness can be achieved in this world as said in the phrase “...include me right now among...”. It does not only refer to its occurrence in the hereafter.

1. Divine salutations

By reflecting on some verses of the Holy Qur’an we can understand the meaning of God’s salutation:

هُوَ الَّذِي يُصَلِّي عَلَيْكُمْ وَمَلَائِكَتُهُ لِيُخْرِجَكُم مِّنَ الظُّلُمَاتِ إِلَى النُّورِ

¹ Arabic term literally meaning “visit” used to refer to a pilgrimage to sites associated with Prophet Muhammad, his family members, and his descendants. Ziyārat can also refer to a form of supplication in which people send salutations and greetings to Prophet Muhammad and his family.

It is He who sends salutations to you, and so do His angels, that He may bring you out from darkneses into light... (33:34)

This means that if Allah blesses us and sends us salutation, we will go out from darkneses into light. This movement from darkness to light marks a process of receiving a new life i.e. the spiritual life or the goodly life (*al-hayāt al-tayyibah*):

أَوْ مَنْ كَانَ مَيِّتًا فَأَحْيَيْنَاهُ وَجَعَلْنَا لَهُ نُورًا يَمْشِي بِهِ فِي النَّاسِ كَمَنْ
مَثَلَهُ فِي الظُّلُمَاتِ لَيْسَ بِخَارِجٍ مِّنْهَا

Is he who was lifeless, then We gave him life and provided him with a light by which he walks among the people, like the one who dwells in a manifold darkneses which he cannot leave?
(6:221)

Life which is mentioned in this verse refers to the spiritual or goodly life:

مَنْ عَمِلْ صَالِحًا مِنْ ذَكَرٍ أَوْ أُنْثَىٰ وَهُوَ مُؤْمِنٌ فَلَنُحْيِيَنَّاهُ حَيَاةً طَيِّبَةً
وَلَنَجْزِيَنَّهُمْ أَجْرَهُمْ بِأَحْسَنِ مَا كَانُوا يَعْمَلُونَ

Whoever acts righteously, [whether] male or female, should he be faithful, We shall revive him with a good life and pay them their reward by the best of what they used to do. (16: 9)

In this verse, Allah (swt) speaks of the goodly life (*al-hayāt al-tayyibah*), a high spiritual position that comes with light. This can be achieved after being a true believer and performing good acts.

Reflecting on these verses we understand that when Allah gives us salutation we will be bestowed with light and a kind of new life. In addition to in the phrase read in Ziyārat ‘Ashurā, we come to the conclusion that those who truly mourn for Imam Husayn (a) receive salutations from God and through that they can gain light and the goodly life.

2. Divine mercy

Significance of divine mercy in the Qur’an: Divine mercy occupies a central position in Islam. For example, in the chapter Al-Hamd, the Opening of the Qur’an, and the only chapter without which no prayer can be said,¹ Allah emphasizes His mercy four times in it. Its repetition is because of necessity; moreover, it means that if we want to know Allah in Islam, then we must first know that He is *Al-Rahmān* (the All-Merciful) and *Al-Rahīm* (the Most-Merciful).

Now a question arises: What happens to us when we receive divine mercy? To answer this question, we should study the significance and functions of God’s mercy.

¹ For example, see *Mustadrak al-Wasā’il*, vol. 4, p. 159. The text of hadith is as follows:

عَوَالِي اللَّائِي، قَالَ النَّبِيُّ ص لَا صَلَاةَ إِلَّا بِفَاتِحَةِ الْكِتَابِ.

Divine mercy as the aim of creation: The entire creation depends on mercy. Fundamentally, the creation of the universe is bound up with Allah’s mercy. The Qur’an says:

وَلَوْ شَاءَ رَبُّكَ لَجَعَلَ النَّاسَ أُمَّةً وَاحِدَةً وَ لَا يَزَالُونَ مُخْتَلِفِينَ إِلَّا
مَنْ رَحِمَ رَبُّكَ وَلِذَلِكَ خَلَقَهُمْ...

Had your Lord wished, He would have made mankind one community; but they continue to differ, except those on whom your Lord has mercy —and that is why He created them... (11:118-119)

According to the preferred interpretation of this verse, “that is why” means that mercy is the aim of the creation and God has created mankind to give them His mercy. Imam Sadiq (a) was asked about this verse and he replied, “He created them so that they do something by which they deserve His mercy, and then He provides mercy.”¹

Divine mercy protects us: The fact that God protects us from many dangers has been stressed on in several verses of the Qur’an. For example, the Qur’an asserts that God’s mercy and grace helps us to avoid Satan:

وَلَوْ لَا فَضْلُ اللَّهِ عَلَيْكُمْ وَ رَحْمَتُهُ لَاتَّبَعْتُمُ الشَّيْطَانَ إِلَّا قَلِيلًا

¹ *Wasā’il al-Shi’ah*, vol. 1, no. 85. The text of hadith is as follows:

سَأَلْتُهُ عَنْ قَوْلِ اللَّهِ عَزَّ وَ جَلَّ وَ لَا يَزَالُونَ مُخْتَلِفِينَ إِلَّا مَنْ رَحِمَ رَبُّكَ وَ لِذَلِكَ خَلَقَهُمْ قَالَ خَلَقَهُمْ لِيَفْعَلُوا مَا يَسْتَوْجِبُونَ بِهِ رَحْمَتَهُ فَيَرْحَمَهُمْ .

...And were it not for God's grace upon you and His mercy, you would have surely followed Satan, [all] except a few. (4:83)

The Qur'an also refers to God's mercy as an aid to believers by halting their enemies devising of plots against them. Were it not for God's mercy, more plots were to be devised by the enemies:

وَلَوْ لَا فَضْلُ اللَّهِ عَلَيْكَ وَرَحْمَتُهُ لَهَمَّتْ طَائِفَةٌ مِنْهُمْ أَنْ يُضِلُّوكَ

Were it not for God's grace and His mercy on you, a group of them were bent on leading you astray; but they do not mislead anyone except themselves, and they cannot do you any harm. God has sent down to you the Book and wisdom, and He has taught you what you did not know, and great is God's grace upon you. (4:113)

Divine mercy also protects us from our own carnal soul:

وَمَا أُبْرِيئُ نَفْسِي إِنَّ النَّفْسَ لَأَمَّارَةٌ بِالسُّوءِ إِلَّا مَا رَحِمَ رَبِّي إِنَّ رَبِّي غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ

Yet I do not absolve my [own carnal] soul, for the [carnal] soul indeed prompts [men] to evil, except inasmuch as my Lord has mercy. Indeed my Lord is All-forgiving, All-merciful. (12:53)

We can also understand from the Qur'an that when someone insists on performing immoral actions and maintains his vicious qualities, he distances himself from divine mercy. Being far from

God's mercy is introduced in the Qur'an as "*la'n*" (curse). Those who are far from God's mercy will become hard-hearted, or their hearts will be sealed, and therefore, they would not be able to realize or acknowledge the truth and are bound to go astray:

Then, because of their breaking their covenant We cursed them and made their hearts hard... (5:13)

Among those whom Allah cursed are the People of Sabbath:

O you who were given the Book! Believe in what We have sent down confirming what is with you, before We blot out the faces and turn them backwards, or curse them as We cursed the People of the Sabbath, and God's command is bound to be fulfilled. (4:47)

Say, 'Shall I inform you concerning something worse than that as a requital from God? Those whom God has cursed and with whom He is wrathful, and turned some of whom into apes and swine, and worshippers of the Rebel! Such are in a worse situation, and more astray from the right way.' (5:60)

Those who disregarded the divine rulings like the People of Sabbath who insistently committed immoral acts were cursed and transformed into apes as a result.

This can explain some of the brutal acts which were committed by the enemies of Imam Husayn (a) on the Day of ‘Ashurā. Those who went to Karbala to fight unjustifiably against Imam Husayn (a) and his family and companions were deprived of divine mercy and were cursed; consequently, their inner beings resembled wild animals. Indeed, it was because mercy was withdrawn from that they did what they did. Therefore, we are not the ones who curse the killers of Imam Husayn (a). When we ask Allah (swt) to curse them, it is more of an acknowledgement of what has already happened and accepting that it should continue as before. The merciless enemies of the Imam have not repented, nor did they attempt to restore the damage they caused. As a result of what they did, humanity continues to suffer. About those who annoy the Prophet (s), during or after his physical life, the Qur’an says:

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ يُؤْذُونَ اللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُ لَعَنَهُمُ اللَّهُ فِي الدُّنْيَا وَالْآخِرَةِ

Indeed those who torment Allah and His Apostle
are cursed by Allah in the world and the Hereafter.
(33:57)

Those who are said to be cursed and are consequently distant from Allah’s mercy in this world are apt to commit any immoral act, since they do not have any protection from Allah.

Thus, reflecting on the above mentioned passage of Ziyārat ‘Ashūrā, we understand that a true mourner for Imam Husayn (a) who receives God’s mercy can be protected from various dangers and threats.

3. Divine forgiveness

If we truly mourn for Imam Husayn (a) we will achieve Allah's forgiveness. We implore Allah to forgive us and wipe away our past sins.

4. Being with the Ahl ul-Bayt (a) in this world and the Hereafter

After we discussed that which we can achieve in this world by mourning for Imam Husayn, we now refer to another passage of Ziyārat 'Ashurā. This section of the ziyara refers to what we can achieve merely in this world, or both this world and the Hereafter. In this passage, the very first thing we ask for is recognition of the Infallibles (a):

فَأَسْأَلُ اللَّهَ الَّذِي أَكْرَمَنِي بِمَعْرِفَتِكُمْ وَ مَعْرِفَةِ أَوْلِيَاءِكُمْ وَ رِزْقِنِي
الْبِرَاءَةَ مِنْ أَعْدَائِكُمْ أَنْ يَجْعَلَ لِي مَعَكُمْ فِي الدُّنْيَا وَ الْآخِرَةِ وَ أَنْ
يُثَبِّتَ لِي عِنْدَكُمْ قَدَمَ صِدْقٍ فِي الدُّنْيَا وَ الْآخِرَةِ وَ أَسْأَلُهُ أَنْ يَبْلُغَنِي
الْمَقَامَ الْمَحْمُودَ لَكُمْ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ وَ أَنْ يَرْزُقَنِي طَلِبَ تَارِي (كَمْ) مَعَ إِمَامٍ
هَدَى ظَاهِرًا نَاطِقًا بِالْحَقِّ مِنْكُمْ

So then I ask Allah, who has honored me with recognition of all of you and recognition of your followers (*walis*) and has also granted me the opportunity to denounce your enemies, that He places me with you, both in this world and the Hereafter, and that He makes firm my honest and truthful stance in your presence both in this world and in the Hereafter. And I ask Him (Allah) that

He enables me to reach the most praised station that you have with Allah and that He grants me the ability to seek justice for those who shed your blood with the rightly guided Imam, who shall surely reappear and speak the truth.

To be with the Prophet (s) and his household in this world means to remain in their faction and work for their causes; to be with them in the Hereafter means to join them on the Day of Resurrection when every assemblage are asked to join their leaders:

يوم ندعو كلّ اناس بامامهم فمن اوتي كتابه بيمينه فاولئك
يقراون كتابهم و لا يظلمون فتبلا

The day We shall summon every group of people with their imam, then whoever is given his book in his right hand they will read it, and they will not be wronged so much as a single date-thread. (17: 71)

After joining the Prophet (s) and his household, the believer hopes to reach the praised position (*al-maqām al-mahmūd*) that belongs to them. That is the high position for which the Prophet (s) earned through much effort:

وَ مِنَ اللَّيْلِ فَتَهَجَّدْ بِهِ نَافِلَةً لَكَ عَسَىٰ أَنْ يَبْعَثَكَ رَبُّكَ مَقَامًا مَّحْمُودًا

And stay awake for some part of the night as a devotion for you. It may be that your Lord will

raise you to a praiseworthy station to (a position of Great Glory). (17:79)

In the Hereafter, the Prophet and his Household hold a position in which all the Prophets and Saints (*Awliyā*) will envy. The one who truly mourns for Imam Husayn (a) asks Allah (swt) to give him the ability to reach the same position, because he is not going to separate from his masters; therefore, we are to follow their lead. And this is a great achievement. We achieve closeness and companionship of the Prophet and his Household without having performed outstanding actions or holding highly-esteemed virtues. Of course, we are expected to have faith, perform the daily prayers, fast, and try to observe Islamic rulings, but considering the long spiritual journey we have ahead, our good deeds are not sufficient, because they are very limited and very few. Here, we are still encouraged to aspire for something very high: to ask Allah (swt) to give us the opportunity to enjoy their praised position. That is one reason why the Prophet (s) called Imam Husayn (a) as “the ship of salvation” (*safinat al-najāt*).

Conclusion

If we truly mourn for Imam Husayn (a), we should feel like we are coming out of darkness, a feeling of becoming radiant. We should feel that we have been released from the burden of our sins and that resisting our desires, performing prayers, helping others with kindness and compassion have become easier. We can reach the Praised Position and the Goodly life through sharing in Imam Husayn’s (a) hardship. This is one way to

explain why the Prophet (s) called Imam Husayn (a) as “the ship of salvation.”

Reflections on Ashura-oriented Literature

Muhammad-Reza Fakh-Rohani¹

ABSTRACT: The Battle of Karbala is one of the most significant events in Shi'a history. Since the purpose of literature is to allow one to empathize with the lives of exemplary people and perceive significant historic events, there have been countless poets who strove to illustrate the persona of Imam Husayn and the battle of Karbala. This paper seeks to describe genera within Shi'a poetry pertaining to the tragic experience of Imam Husayn and his family members and companions on the plains of Karbala. The specific genres include Husayni, Karbalai, Ashurai, and Ashura-oriented literature.

Within the Shi'a literary history and traditions, there have been several epoch-making events, the Ashura Battle of Karbala (61AH/680) being one of the most prominent. The significance of

¹ Assistant Professor, the University of Qum.

the Ashura Battle of Karbala lies in the fact that it showed, among other things, the true, hypocritical face of Umayyad caliph Yazid son of Mu`awiyah and the righteousness of the Chief of Martyrs, Imam Husayn (a), who was martyred triumphantly along with over 70 of his thirsty companions in a battle imposed on him alongside the Euphrates on the plain of Karbala, Iraq. With the occurrence of this tragic event in early Islamic history, a plethora of poets composed numerous poems in commemoration of the martyrdom of Imam Husayn and his family members and companions. More importantly, the devotees of Imam Husayn who have expressed their sincere feelings and reflections in this regard are by no means limited to Shi'a Muslims. Several Sunni Muslims and Christian and Hindu poets expressed their thoughts on the event of Ashura. Thus, Ashura poetry is not limited to written pieces in the Arabic language:¹ there are countless poems on Imam Husayn and his martyred companions in Persian, Urdu, Turkish, English, etc.²

The present paper seeks to delineate specific genres of Shi'a poetry pertaining to the tragic event of Ashura. It is meant to fill a

¹ Granted that the earliest pieces of Ashura poetry were composed on Ashura by the survivors of the Ashura Battle of Karbala in Arabic, the 6th Infallible Imam Ja`far al-Sadiq played a decisive role in encouraging Arab poets to compose poems, especially elegies, to mourn Imam Husayn's tragic martyrdom. Therefore, he must be regarded as a pioneer of Husayni and/or Ashura literature in Arabic.

² For a collection of Ashura poems in English, see Fakh-Rohani, ed., *Ashura Poems in English, Explained and Annotated* (2 vols., Karbala: Imam Husayn's Sacred Sanctuary; and Qom: Al-Mustafa International University, 2011).

serious research lacuna in Shi'a religio-historical literature.¹ To begin with, Shi'a literature cannot be restricted to any language; it is free from linguistic boundaries in that it can be produced in virtually any language on the condition that it is conceptually in harmony with Shi'a Islamic articles of faith and doctrines.² Viewed from this perspective, the scope of Shi'a literature covers a vast array of subject matters and themes reflecting its history, doctrines, and the struggle to survive throughout history.

Husayni literature, deals with that which pertains to the life and times of Imam Husayn. As such, it covers both joyful and tragic events. On the one hand, Imam Husayn's promising birth and its anniversary is commemorated by his devotees. As for the tragic events in the life and times of Imam Husayn, one may focus mainly on the horrible and heart-rending scenes of Ashura. Although the Ashura Battle of Karbala lasted less than a day, its tremendous effects have been stamped in Shi'a history.³ It is in

¹ In the same vein, the Iranian scholar Mr. Muhammad-Reza Hakimi echoed this shortcoming in that nobody had ever embarked on developing a literary history of the Shi'a. See his seminal article in Persian in *Kheyneh*, No. 62 (Esfand 1388 Sh [March 2010]), p. 32.

² In this paper, the focus is on Twelver Shi'a; however, other sub-denominations of Shi'a Islam, although not dealt with in this paper, may have their own literatures that generally pertain to Ashura and Imam Husayn.

³ It is timely to point to the efforts of the Infallible Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq to eternalize the memory of the Ashura tragedy in the historical memory of the Shi'a by recommending one of his followers by the name of Dawud b. Kathir al-Riqqi who paid a salaam unto Imam Husayn after each instance of drinking water. Hence, so long as the mankind needs water for survival, the memory of Imam Husayn will be reinforced in the collective and historical memory of the Shi'as.

the latter category that a greater portion of Husayni literature finds its place.

Karbala literature pertains to anything relevant to the sanctity of Karbala and the scenes witnessed. As such, Karbala literature is expected to deal with the sanctity of the city of Karbala due mainly to two sacred sanctuaries of Imam Husayn and his step-brother `Abbas b. `Ali.¹ It may also relate to the sacred soil of Karbala (again due mainly to the sacred shrines) of which it is highly recommended in Shi'a Islam to make special clay tablets for prostration while performing the daily prayer (*salat*).² Yet, personified in literary texts, it may recount a report of the horrific events that occurred on the plains of Karbala.³

¹ The sacred sanctuary of al-`Abbas b. `Ali lies around 350 meters away from that of Imam Husayn to the east. Facing the direction of Qiblah, that is, toward Mecca, the sanctuary of al-`Abbas b. `Ali is located a bit behind that of Imam Husayn on the latter's left hand. Metaphorically, this implies that even after martyrdom al-`Abbas b. `Ali's body has proven to observe religious politeness toward Imam Husayn as the Infallible Imam of the time.

² There are several good books that deal with prostration upon the soil of Karbala, e.g., Sayyid Muhammad-Mahdi al-Musawi al-Khirsan, *Al-Sujud 'alā al-Turbah al-Husayniyyah* (Karbala: Imam Husayn's Sacred Sanctuary's Library, 1426 AH/2005); Sayyid `Abd al-Rida al-Shahrestani, *Al-Sujud 'alā al-Turbah al-Husayniyyah*, ed. Haydar al-Jid (Karbala: Imam Husayn's Sacred Sanctuary, 1431 AH/ 2010); and Amin Habib Aal Darwish, *Turbah Husayn* (Beirut: Dar al-Mahajjah al-Bayda', 1430 AH/ 2009). That prostration on the soil of Karbala is highly recommended is another effort to eternalize the memory of the oppression Imam Husayn endured for safeguarding Islam.

³ The contemporary Iraqi scholar, Sayyid Salman Aal Tu`mah, uses the term "Karbala'i poetry" for the poems composed by those Iraqi-cum-Arabic-speaking poets who are regarded as citizens of Karbala; see his book *Husayn fi al-Shi'r al-Karbala'i* ([Beirut: Mu'assisah al-Fikr al-Islami, 1422 AH/2001], p. 6). This usage stands in opposition to what is termed here as "Karbala poetry", for the latter concerns the poems that have something to do with

Ashura literature, can be applied to whatever focuses on the events of the eve and day of Ashura. However, the term may be applied to material that relates to the events that preceded that imposed Ashura Battle of Karbala and its tragic consequences, such as the Umayyad forces' dragging the survivors of the battle from Karbala to Kufa, then to Damascus, and finally returning them back to Medina. Ashura literature, in this sense, must be kept separate from *Arba'in literature*, which is for the fortieth day after Imam Husayn's martyrdom, and it receives commemoration on par with that of Ashura.¹

Ashura-oriented literature broadly deals with the sorrowful episodes in the life and times of Imam Husayn, Karbala, and the tragic events of Ashura. It reflects a sequence of the events as they took place, portraying all the major events in a long poem, starting from the graceful birth of Imam Husayn through his tragic but triumphant martyrdom.² Moreover, any poem whose focus may have something to do with the entire movement of Imam Husayn can be regarded as a piece of Ashura-oriented poetry.

Karbala, its events, and/or its glories whether or not they are composed by citizens of Karbala, irrespective of the language used.

¹ The number 40 is regarded as a sacred number in Islam. The Arabic word *Arba'in* means 40, hence it signifies this association. Furthermore, there is a special Ziarat-text to be read out on such a day to express one's veneration toward Imam Husayn.

² One such poet who succeeded to render a full portrait of Imam al-Husayn's life and times was the renowned Urdu-speaking poet Mir Babr Ali, better known as "Mir Anis". Although a prolific poet in Urdu, some of his elegies in favor of Imam Husayn are available in English translation.

Literature fulfills our yearning for non-material goals. It paves the way for us to perceive those who held honorable lives. It teaches us virtues of compassion and bravery, and deepens our knowledge of past events. It is no surprise that various poetic genres have been used to illustrate the great personalities and events surrounding the tragedy on the plains of Karbala. These poems and prose take a number of forms: 1) Husayni literature, which pertains to the Imam's life, 2) Karbala literature, relating to the sanctity and scenes of the tragic event, 3) Ashura literature, the events surrounding the eve and day of Ashura, and 4) Ashura-oriented literature, an extended sequential account of Imam Husayn, from his birth until his martyrdom.

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Imamate and Wilayah¹

Part II

Mohammad Ali Shomali²

ABSTRACT: In Part I of this series, the concept of Imamate as one of the five principles of Shi‘i Islam was discussed, as well as the characteristics that qualify a person for the role of an Imam. Indeed, Prophet Muhammad (s) emphasized on the necessity of holding fast to the Qur’an and the Ahlul Bayt after his departure from this world. The first part ended with a discussion about the meaning of the “Ahlul Bayt.” In this part, more narrations are cited to provide a description of the Ahlul Bayt. Narrations from Sunni texts will also be

¹ This paper is based on first part of lecture four and whole lecture six of a series of lectures delivered by Dr Mohammad Ali Shomali in summer 2004 in Qum. Lecture five and the remaining part of lecture four relate to the ban by the first three Caliphs on narrating hadiths of the Prophet Muhammad (a) and will be published separately in future.

² Associate Professor of the Imam Khomeini Education & research Institute, Qum.

used to reveal the authenticity of the twelve successors and their role of upholding the religion of Islam after the Prophet's death. The differences between Sunnis and Shi'as with regards to whom these twelve successors are will be explained. These hadiths and explanations will be offered to further clarify the term *Imam* -according to the Shi'a- as a person who is a divinely appointed leader, one who displays infallibility and is unsurpassable in both knowledge and piety.

Who are the Ahlul Bayt?

Muslims unanimously agree that some of the Prophet's relatives are excluded from the Ahlul Bayt, such as those who were disbelievers. However, current debates concern those who are left under the title. The Shi'a agree that the Ahlul Bayt, because of their high status of being alongside the Qur'an, must be infallible, and that this group is a select group of the Prophet's relatives. The Prophet himself clarified who the Ahlul Bayt are in many narrations (*hadith*). In one narration, Ahmad ibn Hanbal, the Imam of the Hanbali school of thought, narrates from 'Umar ibn Maymun:

We were sitting with Ibn Abbas. A group of nine people came.¹ These people told Ibn Abbas, “We would like to discuss a confidential matter– either you tell these people to leave so that only you and us remain, or you come with us and we will go somewhere and discuss it.” Ibn Abbas went with them, afterwards returned, angry at those nine people who disparaged Imam Ali.

This narrator says that after his return, Ibn Abbas described the position of Imam Ali according to the Prophet. Ibn Abbas mentioned the conquest of Khaybar by Ali and the announcement of the revelation of the Chapter *al-Tawbah* (*The Repentance*) to the polytheists by Imam Ali. Then he mentioned another event in which the Prophet addressed his cousins and asked, “Who among you is prepared to believe in me and follow me in this world and the hereafter?” All the cousins of the Prophet refused to give a positive response; there was only one positive answer, and that was from Imam Ali. This question was repeated once more in the same session and again no one said “Yes” except Imam Ali. The Prophet asked them one last time, “Who is prepared to follow me and to believe in me?” and again only Imam Ali gave a positive response. Finally, the Prophet said, addressing Imam Ali that, “You are my *walī* (guardian/successor) in this world and the

¹ Ibn Abbas was the cousin of the Prophet (s) and Imam Ali (a), the son of Abbas the uncle of the Prophet. He was very knowledgeable and was respected by all Muslims. His commentaries on the Qur’an have been recently published in two volumes. When the Prophet (s) passed away he was very young and therefore he received most of his knowledge from Imam Ali.

hereafter.” Then Ibn Abbas said that Imam Ali was the first person to embrace Islam.

He mentioned all these merits of Imam Ali because he was angered with their spitefulness of the Imam. The other event that Ibn Abbas mentions is:

The Prophet once took his cloak and covered Fatimah, Ali, Hasan, and Husayn with it and recited the verse: “...Allah only desires to keep away the uncleanness from you, O people of the House! and to purify you a (thorough) purifying. (33:33)”

This hadith narrated by Ahmad ibn Hanbal mentions that this verse as well as the title Ahlul Bayt is only relevant to four unique people: Lady Fatimah, Imam Ali, Imam Hasan, and Imam Husayn.

Tirmidhi in his *Sunan*¹ narrates from a person called ‘Umar ibn Abi Salamah,² the stepson of the Prophet, who reports from his mother:

The Prophet asked Ali, Fatimah, Hasan, and Husayn to go under his cloak. He then said, ‘O God these are my household, remove all uncleanness from them, and purify them a

¹ One of the six *Sihah*

² Um Salama: One of the wives of the Prophet who bore Umar from her first husband, Abi Salama.

thorough purification.’ Then God revealed verse 33:33¹ to the Prophet

Thus, it seems that the Prophet first prayed and then his request was granted. Umm Salamah said, “I was present and I asked the Prophet, ‘Am I one of you household?’ The Prophet said, ‘You have your own place, but you are not among the Ahlul Bayt.’”

Umm Salamah was a very pious lady, but she was not included among the Ahlul Bayt. Imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal also narrates this in his *Musnad*.

This, it seems very clear who the Ahlul Bayt are. Sometimes instead of the term Ahlul Bayt other terms have been used such as ‘*itrah* and *qurbā* which both mean ‘near relatives.’ For example, Zamakhshari a Sunni scholar and author of a well-known commentary of the Qur’an called *Al-Kashshāf* says:

When the verse 23 of chapter *al-Mu’minun* (*The Believers*) was revealed² the Prophet was asked what is meant by *qurbā* (near relatives), and the Prophet replied: “Ali, Fatimah, and their two sons.”

¹ Allah only desires to keep away the uncleanness from you, O people of the House! and to purify you a (thorough) purifying.

² “That is the good news Allah gives to His servants who have faith and do righteous deeds! Say, ‘I do not ask you any reward for it except love of [my] relatives. Whoever performs a good deed, We shall enhance for him its goodness. Indeed Allah is all-forgiving, all-appreciative’.”

The result is that all Muslims must feel compelled to refer to the Ahlul Bayt to be able to understand Islam as it is, as it was revealed to the Prophet, and as was taught by him, and as it was left for them by the Prophet. The Shi'a felt compelled to do this right from the beginning. As it is believed, Shi'i Islam began with the Prophet himself, rather than being a belief that was founded after the Prophet. The Prophet himself asked people to believe in and love the Ahlul Bayt as those who will be responsible for presenting Islam after him. There are many hadiths in which the Prophet himself used the term *Shi'a* for the followers of Ali, and sometimes instead of saying 'your Shi'a' the Prophet said 'our Shi'a,' because followers of Ali are indeed followers of the Prophet and it is because of his instructions that they follow Ali.

In addition to the hadith in which the expressions like "Ahlul Bayt" and "qurbā" are applied to Imam Ali (a), Lady Fatimah (a), Imam Hasan (a) and Imam Husayn (a), there are also hadiths that refer to twelve Imams and leaders and prove their authority. This set of hadiths can also shed light on who are meant by the "Ahlul Bayt."

Who are the 'Twelve Imams'?

A set of hadiths narrated by our Sunni brothers about twelve successors of the Prophet will be presented. There are different versions of these hadiths; sometimes the term *amir*, or ruler/leader is used for the twelve Imams and sometimes the term

caliph, or successor, is used. It is interesting to note that in these sets of hadiths, the number twelve is always used.

In a hadith in Bukhari, the narrator quotes the Prophet (s):

‘There will be twelve leaders after me.’ The narrator then remarks that the Prophet said something that he could not hear. And he asked his father, who was present, to tell him what the Prophet said. His father replied, ‘The Prophet said that all these twelve leaders (*ithnā ‘ashar-a amir-an*) will be from Quraysh.’¹

In another version of the hadiths, Muslim in his *Sahih* narrates that the narrator went to his father who claimed the Prophet Muhammad (s) said, “This religion will not perish until there will have been twelve successors.”² The continuation of the hadith is similar to the first version in that the narrator asked his father to restate the hadith. His father then repeated the Prophet’s words: “All the successors are from Quraysh.” In this hadith, instead of *amir*, the term ‘successor’ is used. Muslim says that this person heard from his father that the Prophet said that the religion of Islam will not perish and it must be accomplished. Thus, it is

¹ The actual term here was *amir*, or leader. The Prophet said there will be twelve leaders after me and all are from Quraysh, the same tribe of the Prophet (s). This is in *Sahih* of Bukhāri, Kitāb al-Ahkām according to Sakhr serial no. 6682. The same hadith is narrated by Tirmidhi in *Sunan*, Kitāb al-Fitan no. 2149 and *Musnad* of Ahmad no. 19920. This is in *Sahih* of Muslim, *Kitāb al-Imārah*, (Leadership), no. 3393.

² *Sahih of Muslim*, no. 3393

assured that before this world ends, there must be twelve successors.

In another hadith, Muslim reports that the Prophet said, “The people’s affairs will be properly conducted as long as twelve men lead them.”¹ Again, we have the number twelve, but the sentence is different: it refers to everything turning out well so long as these twelve people lead the people, and that the people follow their leadership.

In yet another tradition, the Prophet is quoted as saying, “This religion will be exalted as long as there are twelve successors.”² So Islam will have a very high position if these twelve people are leading.

It should be noted that one of the implications of these hadiths is that you cannot find any period in which none of these twelve exist. For example, the Prophet said, “This religion will remain as long as there exists twelve successors from Quraysh.”³ The previous hadith indicated that there must always be one of these twelve people living on earth. This means that one cannot find any period in which none of these twelve exist.

In another set of hadiths located in Sunni sources it has been narrated, “Even if two people live in the earth, one of them must

¹ *Sahih of Muslim*, the following hadith, no. 3394.

² *Sahih of Muslim* no. 3395-7. *Sunan* of Abu Dawood, another major *Sihah fi kitabil Mahdi* no. 3732. *Musnad* of Ahmad, no. 19936, 20019, and 20032.

³ *Sunan* of Abu Dawood, no. 3731 and *Musnad* of Ahmad, no. 19875 and 19901.

be from Quraysh.” They narrate from the Prophet that “So long as there remains two people on earth, there will be one from Quraysh to lead them.”¹ So there must be always one Imam, or leader, from Quraysh on earth.

When we collect the hadiths narrated by Sunni scholars in their most prominent and authentic books,² several questions arise. Who are these twelve people? Who are the successors of the Prophet, as the Prophet said that there will be twelve successors. How is it possible that the lifespans of twelve people extend to the end of the time? They are twelve people, but they cover the history of mankind after the Prophet. How lengthy is their life or how long must the life of some of them be?

Another question arises: How are these people sources of pride and honor for Islam, given that the Prophet said, “This religion will be exalted as long as there are twelve successors”?³ Who are these twelve in the history of Islam who all are from Quraysh and exaltation of Islam depends on them?

Our Sunni brothers have done their best to identify these twelve. But unfortunately, they could not find any set of twelve to fit in with this set of hadiths. For example, they managed to start with the immediate caliphs, that is, 1) Abu Bakr, 2) Umar, 3) ‘Uthman,

¹ In Bukhari, *Kitabul Ahkam* in *Sakhr*, no. 3240, 6607. *Sahih* of Muslim, no. 3392. *Musnad* of Ahmad: 4600, 5419, 5847.

² *Sahih Bukhari*, *Sahih Muslim*, and *al-Sihah*

³ *Sahih of Muslim* no. 3395-7. *Sunan* of Abu Dawood, another major *Sihah fi kitabil Mahdi* no. 3732. *Musnad* of Ahmad, no. 19936, 20019, and 20032.

4) Ali, 5) Hasan and 6) Mu'awiya; however, when they reach Yazid, they cannot accept him as one of these twelve. Thus, they were required to choose good caliphs. They may not be twelve successive caliphs, but they can be chosen from the Umayyads and Abbasids. But the problem is that it means that there must be some gap. But the above mentioned hadiths indicate that there must be a kind of continuity among these twelve.

Another issue that arises is that our Sunni brothers themselves have narrated from the Prophet that caliphate ended by the arrival of the Umayyads. According to a hadith, the Prophet Muhammad (s) said, "In my nation there will be caliphate for thirty years. And then there will be a kingdom."¹ Thirty years after the demise of the Prophet (s) marks end of the Caliphate of Imam Ali (a). Therefore, Mu'awiya was not a caliph; he acted as a king.

In Tirmidhi there is some continuation for this hadith. The narrator, Safinah, said that the caliphate of Abu Bakr, 'Umar, 'Uthman, and Ali lasted thirty years. This is in addition to ten years because the Prophet died after ten years after immigration, equaling forty years. One of those present asked the narrator, "What about the Umayyads? They were also caliphs." Safinah replied that that the Umayyads were "liars and kings of the worst type: they were not caliphs, nor were they successors of the Prophet." They came after the Prophet and some believe that whoever came after the Prophet is a to be considered as a

¹ *Sunan* of Tirmidhi, no. 2152. *Musnad* of Ahmad, no. 20910.

successor, but 'successor' actually refers to someone who legitimately ruled after the Prophet.

Thus, this hadith stopped our Sunni brothers from referring to the caliphs of Umayyads and Abbasids as a few of those twelve. This resulted in not having solid solution, and they consequently disagreed about these twelve.

The Shi'a believe that it is very clear that these must be twelve Imams of the Ahlul Bayt (a), out of whom the last one will have such a long life that would allow him to be alive till end of this world. So life of these twelve will be equal to the life of Islam after the Prophet. So as long as Islam is alive, that is, until end of the time, one of these twelve must be there. Especially if you also bear in mind the set of hadiths which says that even if there are two people on the earth, there is one from Quraysh to lead them. This set of hadiths is enough if someone wants to know who the Imam will be, who the successor will be, and who will be qualified to lead the Islamic society to maintain the honor and dignity the Prophet gave to it.

We have about twelve hadiths in addition to hadiths in which all the names of the twelve Imams are mentioned. For example, we have a hadith from the Prophet Muhammad (s) addressing Jabir ibn 'Abdullah al-Ansāri, who was a companion of the Prophet and also a companion of all the Imams up until Imam Baqir (a). So the Prophet mentioned the name of all the Imams, and when he reached the name of Imam Baqir, he told Jabir to convey his

salam to him. And this is exactly what he did.¹ More interestingly, similar hadith can be cited in Sunni sources.²

Imamate in Shi'i Islam

Having an Imam is necessary for both Shi'as and Sunnis. The understanding and concept of Imamate according to Sunnis is different. As illustrated in these series, Imamate is a very high position, and it is only Allah who can decide who is qualified for it. And if the Prophet Muhammad (s) announced to the people that these twelve are the leaders, or that this Ahlul Bayt are the people that we must refer to, or in other words which indicate his appointment of Imam Ali, it was only because he was asked by Allah to do so. The Prophet did not intend to give special privilege to his family for the mere reason of being his family.

In the early years of Islam, once the Prophet (s) invited the leader of an Arab tribe to embrace Islam. And that was when the Prophet was gravely in need of support. There were only very few Muslims in the early years in Mecca. That person said, "We will believe in Islam, we will support you, but there is one

¹ *Bihār al-Anwār*, vol. 46, pp. 223 & 224.

² For example, Jabir is quoted as saying that the Prophet (s) referring to Husayn ibn Ali said:

أنه يولد لابني هذا ابن يقال له علي بن الحسين، وهو سيد العابدين، إذا كان يوم
القيامة ينادى مناد: ليقم سيد العابدين فيقوم علي بن الحسين، و يولد لعلي بن
الحسين ابن يقال له: محمد، إذا رأيتاه يا جابر فافرنه مني السلام، يا جابر، اعلم
أن المهدي من ولده، و اعلم يا جابر أن بقاءك بعده قليل.

[*Majma' al-Zawā'id*, vol. 10, p. 22; *Mu'jam al-Awsat*, vol. 6, p. 304; *Tirikh-u Dimashq*, vol. 57, p. 215; *Al-Wāfi bi'l-Wafayāt*, vol. 4, p. 103.]

condition: when you are going to die, you must ask the people to follow us; your successor must be one of us.” This was the condition. The Prophet refused, saying that it is up to Allah to choose who will succeed him. It was not the Prophet’s decision. It was Allah’s decision. Appointment of an Imam is equivalent to appointment of a Prophet. We cannot select or elect our Prophet because we do not know who is qualified or who pleases Allah. The Qur’an says, “God knows best where to place His apostleship” (6:124). Similarly, *Imam* is also the one chosen by Allah (swt) and announced by the Prophet. This is why we say Imamate means ‘divinely appointed leadership.’ It is a sort of leadership which is divinely appointed. And it is interesting that *Imam* in the Qur’anic concept not only included legitimate successors of the Prophet, but he also includes some of the Prophets who were qualified to lead. So Imamate was even there before Islam, although for specified Prophets, not for all of them. For example, the Qur’an says about Prophet Abraham (a):

And when his Lord tested Abraham with certain words, and he fulfilled them, He said, “I am making you the Imam of mankind.’ Said he, ‘And from among my descendants?’ He said, ‘My pledge does not extend to the unjust.’ (2:124)

Prophet Abraham was able to accomplish these tests and successfully pass them. Among the discussions of various scholars on this verse, two of them will be referred to. First, Imamate, or divinely appointed leadership, is a general concept according to the Qur’an. It is not only for the period after the

Prophet Muhammad (s). Even some of the Prophets in the past were able to act as an Imam, they were chosen by Allah after fulfilling all the requirements. Not just to become a prophet means to become an Imam. Sometimes there were tens of Prophets living at the same time in the same region, but only one of them was able to act as an Imam.

Secondly, Allah (swt) told Prophet Abraham that no one can expect to be an Imam even if it is from his offspring if he is unjust. 'Allamah Tabataba'i explains this in his *Al-Mizān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'an*, where people are described as being one of four groups: a) those who constantly commit sins, b) those who are good and eventually become corrupt, c) those who have sinned and with repentance, embraced Islam afterwards, and d) those who have never committed any sins.

Prophet Abraham could not have asked God about the first two groups; he asked God about the last two groups, those who have sinned and then repented, and those who have never committed sins. As mentioned in the Qur'an, those who have been unjust to themselves and others and have committed sins cannot become the Imam. Thus, one group remains: those who have constantly been good. And this is the idea of infallibility, or being immaculate.

Whoever believes in Imamate according to the Shi'ite perspective believes that an Imam is a leader who is appointed by Allah and that he is necessarily infallible. He is not just deemed pious or the most pious. He must be infallible. Our Sunni brothers believe the

Imam to be a political leader and he does not need to be chosen by God or to be the most pious, let alone infallible. They believe piety to be an unnecessary quality, let alone believing in the infallibility of the Imams. They believe that there may be people who are more pious than the Imam. Interestingly, many Sunnis, especially Sufi Sunnis, believe that Imam Ali was the most qualified person, in both spirituality and knowledge, although they believe the first successor to the Prophet was Abu Bakr, and then 'Umar, 'Uthman and Ali. And they distinguish between being the most knowledgeable and pious with being a caliph. Many Sunni scholars, especially the Sufis and mystics, believe in *wilāyah* or guardianship (further discussed in the upcoming articles). They even believe in the *wilāyah* of the Imams of the Ahlul Bayt, but at the same time, they believe in the successorship of the first, second and third caliphs.

For the Shi'a, it is necessary for an Imam to be most pious and knowledgeable. If someone possesses these qualities, how can we accept the leadership of a less pious person? Of course, we human beings may make mistakes and follow the wrong person. But people are to know that Allah will never be mistaken in ordering us to follow the most qualified leader.

Thus, for the Shi'a, Imamate is a special kind of leadership. It is not a mere leadership or a matter of government. As mentioned in the previous part, to govern society and to discuss the legitimacy of person to rule Islamic society after the prophet is important, although it is not too important for us today. We discuss this issue

because we want to understand what to do at present. We want to know from whom we should learn Islam.

For this reason, we first discuss the knowledge and authority of the Ahlul Bayt in spreading and presenting Islam. We then discuss the importance of political leadership which comes after upholding infallibility as one who is infallible can then undertake political leadership. This is an overview about Imamate.

Imamate in a narrower sense refers to the Imams the Prophet Muhammad (s), that is, the twelve Imams, but if we use it in a broader sense it will be more than twelve, it will also include Prophets like Abraham, David and Moses.

The definition of *Imam*

So here, what does *Imam* mean? In addition to the requirements of being a) appointed by God, b) the most knowledgeable, c) the most pious, and d) infallible, what does *Imam* mean here? It means that these people's leadership must be declared or announced by the Prophet Muhammad (s). We believe in the importance of *nass*, or explicit declaration by the Prophet. We believe that Imam must be appointed by God and declared by the Prophet, and indeed, these twelve are all declared by the Prophet.

Abu al-Hasan al-Ash'ari, a prominent Sunni theologian who wrote about different sects and Islamic schools of thought called *Maqālāt al-Islāmiyyīn wa Ikhtilāf al-Musallīn* says that the Shi'a were called *Shi'a* only because they followed Ali and believed that he was more privileged than other companions of the

Prophet. He was one of the early Sunni scholars who died in 330 A.H. Afterwards, Shahrestani, another Sunni scholar who died in 548 A.H., in his *Al-Milal wa al-Nihal*, deemed the *Shi'a* as those who follow Ali and believed in his Imamate and caliphate according to the explicit instruction of the Prophet Muhammad (s).¹

Thus, the *Shi'a* are those who believe in Imamate in general and then they identify their Imam after the Prophet with Ali because of the explicit teachings and testament of the Prophet. They follow Ali as a result of the command of the Prophet, not because they have personal relationship with Ali, or for trivial reasons such as his race or colour. It was because the Prophet instructed them to do so.

In some hadiths from the Prophet Muhammad (s) we have the expression “our *Shi'a*” and in other hadiths we have “your *Shi'a*” addressing Ali. In one narration, Ibn Asakir narrates the Prophet:

Surely there is a spring in paradise that smells better than musk, is sweeter than nectar, smoother than butter, and cooler than ice. In that spring is the clay from which we were created and *our Shi'a* are made from the same clay.

In another narration, a well-known Sunni scholar, Ibn Athir, narrates that Imam Ali was addressed by the Prophet, and the Prophet said, “Oh Ali, you and *your Shi'a* will meet God being

¹ *Al-Milal wa al-Nihal*, Dār al-Ma'ārif, Beirut, vol. I, p. 169.

pleased with Him and well-pleasing Him. And your enemies will meet Him while they are angry and they will be seized by their necks.” The Prophet then demonstrated with his hands how these people will be taken by their necks.

Both hadiths confirm the authenticity of the term Shi‘a as a person who follows Imam Ali and his successors as divinely appointed leaders.

Conclusion

Upon reading the hadiths, we see that the Ahlul Bayt are none other than the Prophet, Ali, Fatimah, Hasan and Husayn. The Prophet emphasized on following the Qur’an as well as these four immaculate beings after his death. In addition to following the Ahlul Bayt, hadiths in both Sunni and Shi‘a sources refer to the importance of following twelve successive leaders after the Prophet. Sunni scholars disagree among themselves as to who these twelve are, whereas the Shi‘a believe them to be the descendants of Imam Ali (a). The hadiths evidently state that there will be twelve successive leaders who will uphold the religion of Islam because of their matchless qualifications of infallibility, piety and knowledge. On the other hand, Sunnis deem knowledge and piety as unnecessary traits when holding political leadership. The two sects differ also on the necessity of designation and appointment, as the Shi‘a are those who follow the twelve Imams because of their appointment by Allah (swt), as the Prophet explicitly stated that they are to be followed.

Exemplary Women: Umm ul-Banin

Abdulkarim Paknia¹

Translated by Mahboobeh Morshedian

ABSTRACT: Fatima bint Hazam, or Umm ul-Banin, was known for her noble lineage, upright morals, and enduring devotion toward the Ahlul Bayt. After having been wed to Imam Ali (a) and raising his children after the death of his first wife, Lady Fatima (a), she displayed excellence in her responsibilities as a wife and mother of the orphaned children. She favoured the Imam's children over her own, and this was especially seen as she was more grieved upon the news of Imam Husein's martyrdom than of the death of her own four sons who were martyred with him. It was after the tragedy of Karbala that Umm ul-Banin undertook the role of publicizing the event, conveying the message of the noble martyrs, and perpetuating the path of Imamate through her sermons, elegies, and lamentation.

¹ A religious scholar in the Islamic Seminaries of Qum.

A Descendant of the Brave

Fatima bint Hazam al-Kilabiyya notably known as Hazrat Umm ul-Banin or “mother of several sons” was a descendant of a valiant family. Her father, Hazam, was the son of Khalid ibn Rabi'ah ibn Kilab. His respected mother, called Leila or Shamamah, came from the family of Sahl ibn Amir ibn Malik ibn Jafar ibn Kilab, all brave Arab forefathers well-known in the region of Hijaz. Also, Hazrat Umm ul-Banin was a descendant of Prophet Muhammad's great-grandfather, Abd Manaf, through some generations.¹

In his book *Maqatil-a-Talibin*, Abul-Faraj Isfahani spoke of her.² According to historical accounts, Umm ul-Banin's paternal and maternal uncles were both among the valiant Arabs in the pre-Islamic era. Historians praise them for their courageousness in the battlefields. Besides heroism, they were the chiefs and leaders of their tribe so much that the former Sultans succumbed to them.

Thus, the family of Hazrat Umm ul-Banin was pre-eminent among the noblemen of their time in terms of honor, valor, nobility, and hospitality. Umm ul-Banin inherited these lofty

¹ Umda-tul-Matalib, Ibn Anbah, Najaf, Al-Matba'ah al-Haydariyyah Publications, 1380 A.H., P.356.

² Maqatil-a-Talibin, Abul-Faraj Isfahani, Najaf, al-Haidariyyah Publications, 1385 A.H., P.53.

characteristics from her ancestors, integrated them with what she learned from the family of revelation, and passed them on to her children.

Her Marriage to the Commander of the Faithful (a)

After the Master of the Pious, Imam Ali, (a) had lost Hazrat Zahra (a); that is, after the wretched of the time had martyred her, his young children needed a mother who would be affectionate towards them while simultaneously being his comforting wife. Hence, Imam Ali (a) approached his brother, Aqil, a genealogist in the Arab world, and asked, “From among the Arabs, choose a lady as my wife, someone who is a descendant of the brave Arabs and can bear me a magnanimous and valiant son.” After giving it some consideration, Aqil suggested that the Imam marry Umm ul-Banin Kilabiyah because no Arab was found braver than her forefathers. Imam Ali (a) liked his brother’s idea and sent him to propose to her on his behalf.¹

The Importance of a Noble Family

Taking into account the noble blood of the bride, the Imam taught his followers a moral lesson: “Good manners demonstrate a pure lineage and excellent family origin.”²

There is no doubt that taking familial nobility into account in marriage is necessary as the characteristics of forefathers and

¹ Umda-tul- Matalib, Ibn Anbah, p.357.

² Oyun-al-Hikam wal Mawa’iz, Ali ibn Muhammad Laithi, Dar-al-Hadith Publications, p. 228.

parents are very likely (and of course, not necessarily) to influence the children's behavior. Of course, to the Imam, noble blood was not only essential for marriage, it is an essential quality in a ruler in order to run a state and government, which is no less important than family. He emphasized on associating with noble people in his letter to Malik Ashtar:

You should associate with decent [and virtuous] people who have been [raised] in noble families, have a good record, and live with a good reputation. It is also so with people who are of valor, munificence, and magnanimity because such people are the center of bounty and the branch of the tree of beneficence and virtue.¹

The Auspicious Marriage

When Aqil proposed to Umm ul-Banin on Imam Ali's behalf, the Hizam family was overjoyed; they welcomed him with open arms, taking great pride in this proposal.² However, the father politely asked Aqil for some time to seek the opinions of both Umm ul-Banin and her mother, Shamamah, daughter of Suheil.

The Joyful Dream

¹ Mustadrak-ul-Wasail, Mirza Hussain Nuri, Qum. Alal-Bait Institute, 1408 A.H., vol. 13, p. 164.

² Al-Aqilah wal Fawatim, Hussein Shakiri, Qum. Setareh Publications., 1421 A.H., P. 17.

When Umm ul-Banin's father went to his wife and daughter to ask for their opinion, he listened to his daughter describing her last night's dream to her mother:

Oh mother! I dreamed that I was in a green luxuriant garden. There were flowing brooks and many fruits. The moon and stars were shining. I was staring at them, thinking about the greatness of creation, Allah's creatures and the sky lying above without any pillar as well as the light of the moon and stars...I was lost in these thoughts when the moon came down from the sky and lay on my lap. It was glowing so brightly that I was dazzled. Completely stunned, I saw four other bright stars descend on my lap, too.

Upon hearing the true dream of his daughter, Hizam ibn Khalid was delighted and gave her the glad tidings, saying, "Surely Allah, the Blessed, the Almighty, has turned your dream into a reality. I give you the good news of felicity in both this world and the hereafter!" Then, he told his wife, "Do you find our daughter, Fatimah, qualified enough to be Imam Ali's wife? Know that his house is the house of revelation, prophethood, knowledge, wisdom, courtesy, and good manners. If you find your daughter deserving of this house, let's agree with this blessed marriage!"

"Oh Hizam! By Allah, I trained her well and I have requested the Almighty Allah to make her extremely happy. You can give Imam Ali her hand in marriage," Shamamah said.

Consequently, they gave Aqil a positive response, their heart swelled with great pride. Thereby, the ties of marriage united Umm ul-Banin and Imam Ali forever. From the very beginning of the marriage, Imam Ali found Fatimah Kilabiyyah, who was still young, a woman of complete wisdom, deep, firm faith, and lofty manners of high characteristics. He esteemed her and wholeheartedly strove to revere her.

Hazrat Umm ul-Banin was also a truly dutiful wife. In addition to training righteous children, she showed maximum loyalty to the Imam. After the martyrdom of Imam Ali (a), although she maintained her youth and extreme beauty, she did not remarry in respect to her great husband.¹

Devotion to the Prophet's Household

Without doubt, Umm ul-Banin was a devoted lady, all too aware of the rights of the Prophet's Household. She loved them sincerely and dedicated herself to their friendship. They also considered her of lofty status and worthy position.

Her devotion was especially witnessed during the Battle of Karbala. Upon the return of the caravan of Karbala to Medina, Umm ul-Banin asked Bashir, "Oh Bashir! What news do you have about Aba Abdellah al-Husayn (a)?" Bashir instead told her of the martyrdom of her four sons. She said, "Oh Bashir! With such a bad news, you shocked and scared me to death. Tell me

¹ Bihar-ul-Anwar, Allameh Majlisi, Beirut, al-Wafa Institute, 1403 A.H., vol.42, p. 74.

about Husayn (a). May my offspring and all what is under the blue sky be sacrificed for Aba Abdellah al-Husayn (a).” Bashir replied, “May Allah grant you a great reward for the tragedy that happened to our master, Imam Husayn (a).”¹

These words of Umm ul-Banin demonstrate the power of her faith as well as her great adherence to Imam Husayn (a). Her statement, ‘If Imam Husayn is alive, the martyrdom of all my four sons does not matter,’ reveals the elevated level of her faith.²

Umm ul-Banin’s unaffected love for the Prophet’s offspring and sacrifices of her children for Imam Husayn (a) produced an effect in this world as well. The Prophet’s Household did their best to respect and esteem Umm ul-Banin and her sons, not failing to express gratitude to them.

A Loving Mother to Hazrat Zahra’s Children

Umm ul-Banin tried to fill the gap left by the loss of a mother for the children of Hazrat Zahra, particularly for the Prophet’s two sons – Imam Hasan and Imam Husayn (a).

The Holy Prophet’s offspring found their mother in this pious lady and felt the pain of loss of a mother reduce. Umm ul-Banin preferred the children of the Prophet’s daughter, who were the very epitome of perfection, to her own and showed them more care and affection.

¹ *Tanqih-ul-Maqal*, Sheikh Abdullah Mamaqani, old edition, vol. 2, p. 128.

² *Ibid*, p. 128.

Knowing their greatness, Umm ul-Banin sought to be at their service; she did not deny them anything. The very day she moved in with Imam Ali's household, both Imam Hasan and Imam Husayn (a) were sick and confined to bed. But as soon as the bride of Abu Talib's Household entered the house, she soothed and nurtured them like a kind mother.

It is written that when Umm ul-Banin married Imam Ali (a), she suggested that he call her 'Umm ul-Banin,' her nickname,¹ instead of Fatimah – her name at birth – so that Imam Hasan and Imam Husayn (a) might not recall their mother by hearing the name 'Fatimah'. This prevented their bitter past from being stirred up and feeling the pain of being motherless.²

Raising Righteous Children

Umm ul-Banin gave birth to four sons: Abbas, Abdullah, Uthman, and Ja'far.³ The prominent one was Hazrat Abbas, who was born on the 4th of Shaaban, 26 A.H. in Medina.⁴

All these four young men trained by Umm ul-Banin were influenced by the lofty traits of their holy father in the first place; they also learned good manners, especially altruism from their

¹ *Kunya*; An honorific widely used in place of given names through the Arab world and in the medieval Muslim world, typically deriving from the name of the bearer's first-born son.

² *Al-Aqila wal Fawatim*, Husayn Shakiri, p. 118.

³ *Bihār-al-Anwār*, Allameh Majlisi, Section 120, About His Offspring and Wives, vol. 42, p. 92.

⁴ *Al-Aqilah wal Fawātim*, Hussain Shakiri, p. 119.

virtuous mother. Each was an embodiment of virtues such as valor, decency, nobleness, and magnanimity.

When Imam Ali (a) was martyred, Umm ul-Banin's oldest son – Abbas ibn Ali – was about 14 years old, with his other brothers younger than him. After the martyrdom of their holy father, their mother's sacrifices and Imam Hasan and Imam Husayn's guidance showed them the right way.

This self-sacrificing lady wholeheartedly devoted her youth and energy to training and raising the offspring of Imam Ali (a). As a loving and concerned mother, she was at their service. All Umm ul-Banin's children were trained most appropriately. Finally, following the rightful Imam and with complete willingness, they sacrificed their lives for the exaltation of the truth.

Matchless Forbearance

The following are two instances of this angelic lady's patience in hardships:

1. According to historians, once Commander of the Faithful, Imam Ali (a), put Abbas on his lap, folded up his sleeves, and started kissing his arms, weeping bitterly. Astounded by the scene, Umm ul-Banin asked the Imam, "Why do you weep?"

Softly and sadly the Imam answered, "I am looking at these two arms because they remind me of what will happen to them."

"What will happen to them?" Umm ul-Banin asked fearfully and hastily.

Imam Ali (a) sadly replied, “They will be cut off from the forearm.”

These words hit her like a lightning and her heart sank. Then, she anxiously asked, “Why?” The Imam informed her that the arms of her son will be cut off while defending his brother, protecting the Divine Shari‘ah, and the Prophet’s daughter. Umm ul-Banin wept bitterly along with women around her.¹

At this moment, Umm ul-Banin showed her great profound faith and forbearance. She also expressed gratitude to Allah that her son would display utmost loyalty and be sacrificed for the Prophet’s son and daughter.

2. Likewise, her well-known words on hearing the news of martyrdom of all her four sons revealed her patience and tolerance and adorned the history of Karbala. While Bashir told the news of martyrdom of 34-year-old Abbas, 24-year-old Abdullah, 21-year-old Uthman, and 19-year-old Ja’far to the mother, she showed patience and only asked about Imam Husayn.² She said, “Tell me about Husayn” and when she received the news of Imam Husayn’s martyrdom she said, “All of the arteries of my heart are torn. May all of my children and whatever that exist under this azure heaven be sacrificed for the sake of Imam Husayn.”

¹ *Qamar of Bani Hashim* (The Hashimite Moon), Abdu-Razzaq Muqarram, Heidariyyah Publications, Najaf, 1369 A.H., P.19.

² Ibid.

Umm al-Banin and Ashura'i Poems

Sayyid Muhsen Amin said about Umm al-Banin, "She was an eloquent poet, from a noble and brave family."¹

When women addressed her as Umm ul-Banin and expressed condolences to her, she composed the following lines:

Oh women of Medina! Do not call me Umm ul-Banin and do not know me as the mother of the hunting lions anymore.

I had some sons, because of whom I was called Umm al-Banin. But now there is no son left for me and I have lost all of them.

Yes, I had four hawks [sons], which were shot and whose jugular veins were cut.

The enemies slashed their pure bodies with their spears. My sons ended the day while they were on the ground with severed bodies.

If only I could know if it is true that they cut off the arms of my son, Abbas?²

Another poem of hers reads as follows:

¹ *A'yan al-Shiah*, Sayyid Muhsen Amin, Beirut, Dar-a-Ta'arif Publications, vol. 3, p. 475.

² *Al-Aqila wal Fawatim*, Husayn Shakiri, p. 124.

Oh the one who saw [my dear son] Abbas [the son of Haidar al-Karrar] attacking like his father fighting with cowardly enemies! Oh the one who saw Ali's other sons, each of which was like a hunting lion – fighting around him!

I was informed that my son Abbas was hit with a metal stick on his head while his arms had been already cut off. Woe to my lion cub [Abbas], who was hit with a metal stick on his head!

Oh my son, Abbas! If [your arms were not cut off] and you had a sword in your hand, no one would dare to approach you.¹

According to Imam Baqir (a), “After the event of Karbala, whenever Umm ul-Banin heard of the martyrdom of her sons, particularly the martyrdom of Imam Husayn (a), she used to go to Baqi‘ cemetery in Medina, where she resided, and commemorated them while in deep grief for those godly men. The people of Medina joined her to listen to her words besides merely mourning their martyrdom. This was so touching that even Marwan – an enemy of the Prophet’s Household – was moved to tears by Umm ul-Banin’s elegies and lamentation.

A main feature of Umm ul-Banin’s poems was her awareness of the then political events and relevant affairs. After the event of

¹ *Absar al-Ain fi Ansar al-Husayn* (a.s.), Sheikh Muhammad Samawi, Zamzam of Guidance Publications, 1384 solar, p.63.

Karbala, she was able to convey the message of the oppressed and truth-seeking martyrs of Ashura to the future generations; she also could awaken the unaware people to the truth through her art of reciting elegies of the martyrs of Karbala.

Her extraordinary acts and spiritual status

Umm ul-Banin was also known for her spiritual status and extraordinary. The following refers to one of this mystic's numerous miracles:

A Sterile Hanafi Couple become Fertile

In the city of Kut, Iraq, there was a mourning session held for Hazrat Umm ul-Banin in the house of Hajiyyah Um Abd-ul-Amir in Muharram 11th- 20th.

While these mourning sessions were being held, a Hanafi family moved to this neighborhood. Vazirah – an infertile woman– was a member of this family, who could not have a baby after 10 years of marriage and had lost all her hopes. Her neighbors told her, “Why don't you invoke Umm al-Banin?” Vazirah answered, “It's no use doing it since medicine could not do anything for me. I even used traditional medicines and fasted on the birthday of Zakariyya, but it was no use.”

“Whoever eats the ritual meal which is offered to commemorate the personality of Umm ul-Banin and considers her an intermediary between him and Allah, his prayer will be granted. Why don't you do so? Allah may grant you a daughter and you

can name her ‘Fatimah’ after the blessed Umm ul-Banin,” they said.

Looking at them silently and anxiously, Vazirah suddenly started to speak and anxiously told them, “Ok, but provided this is between you and me. My husband and family must not know anything about it.” They replied, “Alright, tomorrow or the day after tomorrow come to Hajjiyah’s house, where a mourning session is held, ending with Marthiya (an elegiac poem recited to commemorate the martyrdom or suffering) of Umm ul-Banin.”

Filled with both fear and hope, Vazirah left home to Hajjiyah Um Abd-ul-Amir’s, veiling her face. She was distraught, sweating with shame. The nearer she got to the mourning session, the faster her heart beat. To her, the voice of the Marsiya reciter had a pleasant tune and pinned her hopes on getting rid of psychological pain. She entered the house, and took part in the mourning session.

When the Marsiya reciter finished with the elegies that triggered lamentation for Umm ul-Banin, he prayed that the sick would be healed. Then a ritual meal was offered to commemorate the personality of Umm ul-Banin and the women present there asked for blessings by eating the food served. They were sitting around the table on which the ritual meal was served, praying that the sick would be healed and their requests granted. With her trembling hands, Vazirah took some food, got up, and left the house in tears. Hoping that they would be healed, her husband and Vazirah ate that food at night.

After about one month, Vazirah began to feel different; she suffered from dizziness and chest pain and she lost her appetite. She slept a lot and had difficulty going to the crowded places. She also struggled with housework and was especially feeling anxious.

Her husband noticed these changes and was concerned. They went to a doctor who assured them that those were symptoms of pregnancy. In order to ensure that it was true, the doctor recommended they undergo a laboratory test the next day. Upon hearing the news, they were delighted.

The next day, the couple found the test result positive. They went back home and performed prostration in gratitude to Allah. The news of her pregnancy spread among their relatives and their home was replete with joy. But she continued to hide the vow she made.

Months passed quickly and finally the ninth month came. In the early spring and just before the call to the Morning Prayer, she gave birth to a girl, delighting everybody. Vazirah said, "In order to be blessed, let's name the baby Fatimah," but her in-laws disagreed and said, "Name her Ayishah." To resolve any disagreement, they named her Boshra.¹

¹ *The Splendid Personality of the Hashimite Moon*, Abol-Fazl al-Abbas (a.s.), Ali Rabbani Khalkahali, vol. 2, abridged.

Demise

Eventually, the godly life of Umm ul-Banin, which was replete with affection and struggle, came to an end about ten years after the event of Karbala. During her blessed life, she conveyed the message of the martyrs and perpetuated the path of Imamate; in other words, she completed her mission.

After the heartrending event of Karbala, she accomplished her political and social mission, namely keeping the eternal heroic event of Ashura alive in the best way possible. Umm ul-Banin passed away in 69 A.H. and was buried in Baqi' cemetery next to the Prophet's aunts Safiyyah and 'Ātikah, the four Shi'a Infallible Imams,¹ and other luminaries of Islam.²

In his praise of Umm ul-Banin, Sheikh Ahmad Dajili, a well-known Arab poet wrote:

Oh Umm al-Banin! What sublime characteristics
you enjoy! Due to the sorrow that came upon you
[because of] your faith, you will be remembered
forever.

¹ I.e. Imam Hasan, Imam Sajjād, Imam Muhammad al-Bāqir and Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq.

² *Kalimat-u-Taqwa*, Muhammad Amin Zain-u-Din, Qum, Ismailian Publications, 1413 A.H., vol.2, P.511.

A contemporary researcher does not agree with the current burial place of Um al-Banin in Baqi cemetery. He believes Hazrat Abbas's mother was buried somewhere else. *The History of the Holy Shrine of Imams in Baqi'*, Muhammad Sadiq Najmi, Sher Publications, 1385 solar. Tehran, pp. 275-276.

Conclusion

The dream Umm ul-Banin saw prior to Imam Ali's proposal to her proved to be true. Indeed, she spent her life luxuriously in terms of reaping abundant blessings in this world that would guarantee her a successful afterlife. Best known for her deep love for Allah and the Ahlul Bayt, she adopted the role of being a faithful wife and an affectionate mother. In raising her own four sons, she passed her adoration for the Household (a) to them, ensuring that they display loyalty to the Chief of the Martyrs, Imam Husayn (a). After the tragedy of Karbala, through her undying grief and her talent in elegies, she persevered in keeping the message of Karbala alive.

