

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

IN THE NAME OF ALLAH,
THE ALL-BENEFICENT, THE ALL-MERCIFUL

قَالَ اللَّهُ تَعَالَى:

﴿إِنَّمَا يُرِيدُ اللَّهُ لِيُذْهِبَ عَنْكُمُ الرِّجْسَ أَهْلَ الْبَيْتِ وَيُطَهِّرَكُمْ تَطْهِيرًا﴾

Indeed, Allah desires to repel all impurity from you, O People of the Household, and purify you with a thorough purification.

(Sūrat al-Ah zāb 33:33)

Prophetic traditions, mentioned in most reliable Sunnī and Shī'ite reference books of *h adīth* and *tafsīr* (Qur'anic exegesis), confirm that this holy verse was revealed to exclusively involve the five People of the Cloak; namely, Muh ammad, 'Alī, Fāt imah, al-H asan, and al-H usayn, peace be upon them, to whom the term 'Ahl al-Bayt (People of the House)' is solely dedicated.

For instance, refer to the following references:

(1) Ah mad ibn H anbal (d. 241 AH), *Al-Musnad*, 1:331; 4:107; 6:292, 304. (2) *S ah īh Muslim* (d. 261 AH), 7:130. (3) Al-Tirmidhī (d. 279 AH), *Sunan*, 5:361 et al. (4) Al-Dūlābī (d. 310 AH), *Al-Dhurriyyah al-T āhirah al-Nabawiyyah*, p. 108. (5) Al-Nassā'ī (d. 303 AH), *Al-Sunan al-Kubrā'*, 5: p. 108, 113. (6) Al-H ākim al-Naysābūrī (d. 405 AH), *Al-Mustadrak 'alā al-S ah īh ayn*, 2:416, 3:133, 146, 147. (7) Al-Zarkāshī (d. 794 AH), *Al-Burhān*, p. 197. (8) Ibn Hājar al-Asqalānī (d. 852), *Fath al-Barī Sharh S ah īh al-Bukhārī*, 7:104.

As for Shī'ite reference books of *h adīth*, refer to the following references:

(1) Al-Kulaynī (d. 328 AH), *Us ūl al-Kāfī*, 1:287. (2) Ibn Bābawayh (d. 329 AH), *Al-Imāmah wa al-Tabs irah*, p. 47, H . 29. (3) Al-Maghribī (d. 363 AH), *Da'ā'im al-Islām*, pp. 35, 37. (4) Al-S adūq (d. 381 AH), *Al-Khis āl*, pp. 403, 550. (5) Al-T ūsī (d. 460 AH), *Al-Amālī*, H . 438, 482, 783.

For more details, refer to the exegesis of the holy verse involved in the following reference books of *tafsīr*: (1) Al-T abarī (d. 310 AH), *Book of Tafsīr*. (2) Al-Jassāss (d. 370 AH), *Ah kām al-Qur'ān*. (3) Al-Wah īdī (d. 468 AH), *Asbāb al-Nuzūl*. (4) Ibn al-Jawzī (d. 597 AH), *Zād al-Mas īr*. (5) Al-Qurt ubī (d. 671 AH), *Al-Jāmi' li-Ah kām al-Qur'ān*. (6) Ibn Kathīr (d. 774 AH), *Book of Tafsīr*. (7) Al-Tha'ālibī (d. 825 AH), *Book of Tafsīr*. (8) Al-Suyūt ī (d. 911 AH), *Al-Durr al-Manthūr*. (9) Al-Shawkanī (d. 1250 AH), *Fath al-Qadīr*. (10) Al-'Ayyāshī (d. 320 AH), *Book of Tafsīr*. (11) Al-Qummī (d. 329 AH), *Book of Tafsīr*. (12) Furt āl-Kūfī (d. 352 AH), *Book of Tafsīr*; in the margin of the exegesis of verse 4:59. (13) Al-T abrisī (d. 560 AH), *Majma' al-Bayān*, as well as many other reference books of *h adīth* and *tafsīr*.

**IN THE PRESENCE
OF
THE BELOVED**

قَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ:
إِنِّي تَبَلُّرٌ فِيكُمْ الثَّقَلَيْنِ: كِتَابَ اللَّهِ وَعَشْرَتِي أَهْلَ بَيْتِي، مَا إِنْ
تَمَسَّكْتُمْ بِهِمَا لَنْ تَضِلُّوا بَعْدِي أَبَدًا، وَإِنَّهُمَا لَنْ يَفْتَرَقَا حَتَّى يَرِدَا
عَلَيَّ الْحَوْزَ .

The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said:

“Verily, I am leaving among you two weighty things [*thaqalayn*]: The Book of Allah and my progeny [*‘itrat*], the members of my Household [*Ahl al-Bayt*]. If you hold fast to them, you shall never go astray. These two will never separate from each other until they meet me at the Pond [*hawḍ*] (of *Kawthar*).”

Some references:

- q Al-Hākim al-Nayshābūrī, *Al-Mustadrak ‘alā al-Ṣaḥīḥayn* (Beirut), vol. 3, pp. 109-110, 148, 533
- q Muslim, *Al-Ṣaḥīḥ*, (English translation), book 31, *h adīths* 5920-3
- q Al-Tirmidhī, *Al-Ṣaḥīḥ*, vol. 5, pp. 621-2, *h adīths* 3786, 3788; vol. 2, p. 219
- q Al-Nassā’ī, *Khaṣā’iṣ ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib*, *h adīth* 79
- q Aḥmad ibn Hanbal, *Al-Musnad*, vol. 3, pp. 14, 17, 26; vol. 3, pp. 26, 59; vol. 4, p. 371; vol. 5, pp. 181-182, 189-190
- q Ibn al-Athīr, *Jāmi‘ al-Uṣūl*, vol. 1, p. 277
- q Ibn Kathīr, *Al-Bidāyah wa al-Nihāyah*, vol. 5, p. 209
- q Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qur’ān al-‘Aẓīm*, vol. 6, p. 199
- q Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Albānī, *Silsilat al-Aḥādīth al-Ṣaḥīḥah* (Kuwait: Al-Dār al-Salafiyyah), vol. 4, pp. 355-358

In the Presence of the Beloved

Commentaries on
Du ‘ā’ al-Iftitāḥ,
Du ‘ā’ Abū Ḥamzah al-Thumālī
and
Du ‘ā’ Makārim al-Akhlāq

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Transliteration Symbols

<u>Symbol</u>	<u>Transliteration</u>	<u>Symbol</u>	<u>Transliteration</u>
ء	'	أ	a
ب	B	ت	t
ث	Th	ج	j
ح	ḥ	خ	kh
د	D	ذ	dh
ر	R	ز	z
س	S	ش	sh
ص	ṣ	ض	ḍ
ط	ṭ	ظ	ẓ
ع	'	غ	gh
ف	F	ق	q
ك	K	ل	l
م	M	ن	n
ه	H	و	w
ي	Y	ة	ah
<u>Long Vowels</u>		<u>Short Vowels</u>	
آ	Ā	ـَ	a
ای	Ī	ـِ	i
او	Ū	ـُ	u
Persian Letters			
<u>Symbol</u>	<u>Transliteration</u>	<u>Symbol</u>	<u>Transliteration</u>
پ	P	چ	ch
ژ	Zh	گ	g

FOREWORD



The legacy of the *Ahl al-Bayt* ('a), preserved by their followers, is in the custody of their school of thought, which forms a complete system that covers the various branches of Islamic learning. This school has been able to train minds that were favorably disposed to drink from this spring and present the Islamic nation with great scholars who emulated the missionary life of the *Ahl al-Bayt* ('a). For centuries, these scholars provided convincing answers in response to questions that were posed by people from different schools of thought and intellectual tendencies, both from within and outside the Muslim nation.

In line with its responsibilities, the *Ahl al-Bayt* ('a) World Assembly has undertaken to defend the sacred message of Islam and reveal its true nature, which unfortunately has been adulterated by followers of other sects and proponents of ideologies that are in opposition with Islam. This organization, following in the footsteps of the *Ahl al-Bayt* ('a) and their followers, strives to respond to constant challenges and remain in the forefront of the struggle.

The intellectual experiences of the scholars of the *Ahl al-Bayt* ('a) school in this regard are unparalleled, as they contain scientific investigation, which depends on rational proof and shuns personal opinion and chauvinism, thus, accepted by all people possessing an unimpaired natural disposition.

The *Ahl al-Bayt* ('a) World Assembly endeavors to present, to the seekers of truth, a new round of these rich experiences by publishing a series of works written by contemporary writers who are followers of the *Ahl al-Bayt* ('a) school of thought, including those who received divine grace and embraced this noble school. In addition, this organization undertakes the edition and publication of beneficial works of past Shī'ah scholars, to ensure sufficient resource material for the seekers of truth. The purpose of this effort is to put the facts possessed by the *Ahl al-Bayt* ('a) school at the disposal of the whole world, at a time when minds are globally moving towards perfection and speedily correlating.

It is hoped that readers will not deprive the Ahl al-Bayt (‘a) World Assembly of their valuable views and suggestions as well as constructive criticism in this area.

We also invite scholars, translators and other institutions to assist us in propagating the pure Muḥammadan (ṣ) Islam.

We ask God, the Exalted, to accept this trivial effort and enhance it further under the auspices of His vicegerent on earth, Ḥādīrat al-Mahdī (may Allah, the Exalted, expedite his glorious advent). It is appropriate here to express our utmost gratitude to Professor Āyatullāh Muḥammad Taqī Miṣbāḥ Yazdī for writing the book¹ and to Mr. Mansoor Limba for translating it, as well as to all our honorable colleagues in accomplishing this task, especially the dear ones in the Translation Office for performing their responsibility.

Cultural Affairs Department

Ahl al-Bayt (‘a) World Assembly

1– Muḥammad Taqī Miṣbāḥ Yazdī, *Bar Dargāh-e Dūst*, compiled and edited by ‘Abbās Qāsimiyān (Qum: Imam Khomeini Educational and Research Institute, Winter 1382 AHS/ 2003), 335 pages.

PREFACE



اَلْحَمْدُ لِلّٰهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِيْنَ

وَصَلَّى اللّٰهُ عَلٰى سَيِّدِنَا وَنَبِيِّنَا مُحَمَّدٍ وَآلِهِ الطَّاهِرِيْنَ وَلَعْنَةُ اللّٰهِ عَلٰى اَعْدَائِهِمْ اَجْمَعِيْنَ .

All praise is due to Allah, the Lord of the worlds, and may the blessings of Allah be upon our Master and Prophet, Muḥammad, and his pure progeny, and may the curse of Allah be upon all their enemies.

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

“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 have faith in Me, so that they may fare rightly.”¹

In the ups and downs of life and the bitter and sweet experiences, man sometimes feels such a spiritual emptiness that cannot be filled by any material thing. Even if the power of all the powerful, the wealth of all the wealthy, and all the means of enjoyment and merrymaking in the world are at his disposal, none of them can fill this spiritual vacuum.

In such a state, he confides in his best friend, the nearest of kin or the dearest one. Sometimes, he finds no one to trust and confide in and prefers to seclude himself. The only means of achieving peace of mind is being close to one’s confidant and opening one’s heart to one’s beloved.

If man feels sad after being contaminated by sins and offenses and abhors himself and experiences self-alienation and the deadening of his heart, in whom should he confide or seek refuge? It is here that he must seek refuge in his Creator, the Source of all good and pure, the Initiator of love and

1– *Sūrat al-Baqarah* 2:186. In this volume, the translation of Qur’anic passages is adapted from Sayyid ‘Alī Qulī Qarā’ī, *The Qur’an with a Phrase-by-Phrase English Translation* (London: Islamic College for Advanced Studies Press, 2004). [Trans.]

sincerity, and find solace in His remembrance and love by prostrating on His threshold.

Which tranquility and pleasure can be greater for the humble servant than being in the presence of the Esteemed Deity, purifying his impure self with the limpid water of conversation with Him, and soothing his stormy soul with the remembrance of the One and Only. This is the best, most excellent and sweetest fruit of supplication [*du‘ā*].

Dū‘ā is commonly interpreted as “petition and imploration”, but its true meaning is “the lover’s call to his Beloved, their private communion, and their companionship and togetherness in the ecstasy of truth-seeking mystics.”

When the meek and humble servant realises that the sinful abode of his heart is away from the Manifestation of purity and good, he searches for the way to be close to the Friend and join the assembly of the Beloved, and look for the place where he could have private audience with his Lord and hear the voice saying, ﴿فَأَنِّي قَرِيبٌ﴾ “*I am indeed near [all My servants]*.”¹

In the company of the Friend, distance has no meaning at all:

﴿وَنَحْنُ أَقْرَبُ إِلَيْهِ مِنْ حَبْلِ الْوَيْدِ﴾

“*And We are nearer to him than his jugular vein.*”²

When the servant attains such a state, experiences nearness or proximity to the Truth (God), and comes a step closer to His assembly, then the Worshipped Being [*ma‘būd*] becomes his Lover [*muhibb*], and it is this servant who becomes the Truth’s beloved [*ma‘būd*] and hears the voice:

﴿فَلْيَسْتَجِيبُوا لِي وَلْيُؤْمِنُوا بِي﴾

“*I answer the supplicant’s call when he calls Me. So let them have faith in Me.*”³

We hope that we can also join the mystics in their assembly of supplication and ask nothing from Him but His Sacred Essence, for the acquisition of His

1– *Sūrat al-Baqarah* 2:186. In this volume, the translation of Qur’anic passages is adapted from Sayyid ‘Alī Qulī Qarā’ī, *The Qur’an with a Phrase-by-Phrase English Translation* (London: Islamic College for Advanced Studies Press, 2004). [Trans.]

2– *Sūrat Qāf* 50:16.

3– *Sūrat al-Baqarah* 2:186.

gnosis [*ma'rifah*] is the highest form of acceptance of a servant's supplication.

The present book which is the transcript of some lectures about supplication by His Eminence Prof. Āyatullāh Muḥammad Taqī Miṣbāḥ Yazdī consists of four parts. The first part deals with the general subjects of supplication.

The other three parts consist of the slightly modified transcription of a series of 15 lectures by His Eminence at Mahdiyyah of Qum in Ramaḍān 1398 AH (August 6 – September 4, 1978).

Since the audience comprised of various strata of people, the quality of the lectures was commensurate with its level of understanding, yet containing very useful and valuable points. It is known to all that a lecturer is incapable of explaining verbally what he can explain in writing.

These parts deal with commentaries of *Du'ā' al-Iftitāh*, *Du'ā' Abū H amzah al-Thumālī* and *Du'ā' Makārim al-Akhlāq*, respectively.

It is hoped that the faithful will find the book beneficial and worth reading.

‘Abbās Qāsimiyān

Sha'bān 21, 1418 AH

1/Dey/1376 AHS – 22/December/1997

Part One

Introduction

Discussions about Supplication

﴿ قُلْ مَا يَعْزُبُ عَنْ رَبِّي لَوْلَا دُعَاؤُكُمْ ﴾

“Say, ‘Why should my Lord care for you, were it not for your supplication?’”¹

The simplest and most natural relationship of man with God is to remember Him. This affects his heart and soul. Occasionally, the effect of this remembrance is manifested by the tongue.

Supplication [*du‘ā*] is a weapon of the faithful [*mu‘minīn*], a means of proximity to God, the essence of worship [*‘ibādah*], remembrance of the Truth, and communion with the Lord of the worlds. Asking for a request is an excuse to stand before the Doorstep of the Beloved and appeal to the Self-sufficient Being. Supplication is a source of spiritual vitality and the key to divine bestowals. Supplication means being enthralled by divine mercy.

Supplication has greatly been emphasized and is of immense value in Islamic culture. So, it is important to clearly define its essence.

What is the essence of supplication? Is supplication an independent reason for the acceptance of requests, or similar to other natural or common reasons? In case it is an independent reason, can it not be an exception to the cosmic precedents [*sunan-e takwīnī*] of God? Does supplication not contribute to one’s laziness? What and to what extent are the effects of supplication? What is the use of supplication? What educational role can it play in the life of man? Does the effect of supplication lie only in its content, as claimed by some people, in the sense that it has an inspirational dimension which prompts a person to move towards his goal? Or, does it have other effects? God has promised in the Qur’an to hear the supplication of His servants, then why are most of our prayers not granted? Does supplication have some etiquettes and conditions? If yes, what then are those conditions? What is meant by “arrogance in supplication”, which has been prohibited by the Qur’an?

These are the various dimensions examined in this chapter.

1– *Sūrat al-Furqān* 25:77.

What is the essence of supplication [*du‘ā‘*’?]

Life in the world is such that consciously or unconsciously man’s attention is drawn to material things. But the truth is that man is created to have proximity to God [*taqarrub*], and he must utilize everything he has to attain this goal. One of the best ways is to allocate a specific time everyday to the sincere remembrance of God. This remembrance is illustriously manifested in prayer. In the ritual prayer [*s alāh*], there are supplications in the state of *qunūt*¹ and other positions, besides those to be recited before and after the daily obligatory prayers as mentioned in the traditions [*ah ādīth*]. In fact, the ritual prayer itself can be considered a “supplication”. As stated, *s alāh* literally means supplication.

The essence of supplication is attention [*tawajjuh*] to the Worshipped Being and it is considered spiritual ascension [*mi‘rāj*] for the faithful. Supplication does not mean mere recitation of some words and observance of certain acts. The essence or spirit of supplication is man’s soulful attention to the Lord and Cherisher of the worlds. The extent of this attention is commensurate to the degree of one’s gnosis [*ma‘rifah*] and love of God. As such, one must pay attention to the Attributes of God before and during prayer.

The essence of supplication is nothing but worship and because of the attention to God at the time of its performance, it is perhaps even preferred to other forms of worship. In the noble traditions, the Apostle (s) is reported to have said:

أَلدُّعَاءُ مُخُّ الْعِبَادَةِ .

“Supplication is the brain of worship.”²

In the Holy Qur’an, while dealing with the issue of arrogance in supplication God also says:

﴿وَقَالَ رَبُّكُمْ ادْعُونِي أَسْتَجِبْ لَكُمْ إِنَّ الَّذِينَ يَسْتَكْبِرُونَ عَنْ عِبَادَتِي سَيَدْخُلُونَ جَهَنَّمَ مِنْ حَرِينٍ﴾

“Your Lord has said, ‘Call Me, and I will hear you!’ Indeed those who are disdainful of My worship will enter hell in utter humility.”³

In this verse, God has not said “those who are disdainful of supplication to Me,” but described supplication as “worship,” introducing it as a requisite

1– *Qunūt*: supplication recited in the *s alāt* after the second *rak‘ah*, in the standing position, with the palms of the hands raised upward. [Trans.]

2– Muh ammad Bāqir Majlisī, *Bihār al-Anwār*, vol. 93, bāb 14, p. 300, h adīth 37.

3– *Sūrat Ghāfir* (or *al-Mu‘min*) 40:60.

of servitude; for the threat of hellfire is intended for those who refuse to worship and not to those who refuse to make supplication.¹

This might raise the question: How should man worship God whenever he needs something from Him? To answer this question, the essence of worship must be clarified.

The essence of worship is for man to regard himself as the servant [*abd*] and subject [*mamlūk*] of God, not to allocate any sovereignty to himself as well as an independent will vis-à-vis that of God. Rather, he must consider himself and his possessions as belonging to God. He must totally submit to the will of God, acknowledge his servanthood before his Lord and voluntarily express his ontological servitude to Him. In other words, he must express himself to God, thus:

إِلَهِي أَنْتَ الْخَالِقُ وَأَنَا الْمَخْلُوقُ ° وَأَنْتَ الْمَالِكُ وَأَنَا الْمَمْلُوكُ ° وَأَنْتَ الرَّبُّ وَأَنَا الْعَبْدُ... وَأَنْتَ
الْقَوِيُّ وَأَنَا الضَّعِيفُ.

“O Lord! You are the Creator and I am a creature. You are the Master and I am a subject. You are the Lord and I am a servant... You are the Mighty and I am weak.”²

In reality, worship is an expression of the same; sometimes, through the heart's attention and at times by verbal expression or bodily gestures and signs. If ever bowing down [*rukū'*] and prostration [*sujūd*] are considered acts of worship, it is because they express humbleness before the infinite majesty of God.

Supplication is an actual indication of belief in the Mastership, Lordship, Greatness, and Power of God.

One who stretches his hands above, bows down and prostrates on the ground, sheds tears, and implores God to grant his requests, demonstrates his utmost humbleness and abjectness before the Greatness of God. He regards himself as poor, weak, abject, and helpless, and God as rich, powerful, great and mighty. Through his physical state, he expresses this truth.

It is true that supplication apparently means petition to meet material and spiritual needs, but in reality, it is a confession of one's poverty and impotence. It is true that a supplication is always in verbal form but words

1– Sayyid Muhammad Husayn Tabataba'i, *Tafsīr al-Mīzān*, vol. 2, p. 33.

2– An extract from the litanies [*munājāt*] of Husayn ibn Ali ('a), *Bihar al-Anwār*, vol. 95, p. 391, *hadīth* 31.

express inner state and have no substance of their own. Neither the type of words nor the manner of expressing them has any effect on events in the world. Supplication must emanate from the heart and soul. Utterance of some words by the tongue without any attention of the heart cannot be deemed as supplication. The essence of supplication is nothing but the highest form of worship.

The independent effect of supplication

Can supplication independently cause the granting of a prayer and can a phenomenon come into being as the result of supplication without inevitable causes?

From the perspective of the Qur'an, the answer to this question is affirmative. Instances have been mentioned in the Qur'an in which without the agency of apparent causes, supplication has brought a thing into existence. For example, by answering the supplication of Prophet Zakariyyā (Zechariah) ('a), God gave him a son (Yaḥyā ('a)) in his old age. Other cases have also been mentioned. So, according to the Qur'an, this point is undeniable.

Is this not an exception to the precedent set by Allah? The Divine will is for things to happen through their own causes, as mentioned in this tradition:

أَبَى اللَّهُ أَنْ يَجْهِيَ الْأَشْيَاءَ إِلَّا بِالسَّبَابِ.

“Allah refuses to bring things into existence except through their causes.”¹

Does it not violate the law of causation? In reply, it must be stated that this issue is similar to that of miracles performed by prophets [*i'jāz*] and non-prophets [*kirāmah*]. Just as it is said concerning miracles of the prophets ('a), that they are a precedent [*sunnah*] prevailing over natural and common precedents, the grant of prayer is also a divine precedent prevailing over other precedents. Just as citing the verse, “Yet you will not find any change in Allah's precedent, and you will never find any revision in Allah's precedent”,² to deny miracles is not correct, the same verse and tradition, quoted above, cannot also be cited to negate the effect of supplication. In any case, denial of extraordinary events is incompatible with the Qur'an.

One of the principles of the religious or divine outlook is to believe in *i'jāz*, *kirāmah* and the like. This belief does not exist in materialist schools of thought, and those who believe in it are accused of denying the law of cause

1—Muh ammad Bāqir Majlisī, *Bihār al-Anwār*, vol. 2, bāb 14, p. 90, h adīths 14-15.

2—*Sūrat Fāt ir* (or, *al-Malā'ikah*) 35:43.

and effect. It is argued that acceptance of such things is a violation of the law of causation. If the law of causation is accepted, all things must come into being through their respective causes and conditions; otherwise, it is impossible for them to have existence. How can one believe that without the agency of natural causes, a thing can come into being? Thus, this belief is repugnant to the law of causation.

Is supplication in conflict with the law of causation?

Does belief in miracles or extraordinary affairs mean denial of the law of causation? Is the law of causation a general law whose acceptance necessitates the denial of miracles and any effect of supplication?

The question is: If the law of causation is a general and unalterable law, how can miracles and the effects of supplication be accepted? To answer this question, it is necessary to make some preliminary remarks.

Acceptance of the law of causation is different from acceptance of specific causes in every case and confining causes to only the known ones. These two are erroneously treated as identical.

In philosophy, there is an axiomatic and indisputable principle of causation¹ whose propositions are as follows:

Some creatures in the world are in need of the existence of other creatures or beings, and without the latter the former cannot exist. The example is will, [*irādah*] which is an effect [*ma'lūl*] and depends on a person [*nafs*] (having that will). The philosophical rule of this discussion states that an indigent being [*mawjūd-e faqīr*] or contingent effect [*ma'lūl-e mumkin al-wujūd*] is in need of the being that would provide its needs. That is, if we see that the needs of a needy being are met, it is obvious that the cause [*'illah*] of its existence has provided its needs. Therefore, the phenomena and anything which has no existence of its own must come into being on account of the effects of other factors.

As this rule is self-evident and indubitable, scientists in all fields of science are looking for the cause of the existence of phenomena. The efforts of scientists in discovering the causes of phenomena throughout history have been anchored in the principle that the effect cannot be without any cause. What mankind has so far discovered has been due to the blessing of this principle.

1– For a concise treatment of this philosophical principle, see Sayyid Muhammad Husayn Tabataba'i, *The Elements of Islamic Metaphysics*, trans. Sayyid 'Alī Qūlī Qarā'i (London: Islamic College for Advanced Studies Press, 2003), chap. 7 "The Cause and the Effect," pp. 68-80. [Trans.]

The error committed in this regard pertains to the identification of specific causes. That is, after accepting the principle that the effect cannot be without a cause, specific causes for specific effects must be determined. To determine the specific cause of every phenomenon is beyond the ambit of philosophy as it is within the domain of science.

As such, the philosophical law of causation is that every effect is in need of a cause for which philosophy uses general descriptions. But philosophy does not present a specific cause for certain effects as it is part of the responsibility of science to identify the causes through experimentation. As a rational law, the law of causation states that besides the creatures which are limited, restricted and needy, there must be something on account of which they come into being. But its characteristics and effects cannot be established by the law of causation. In other words, knowledge of the specific causes of a phenomenon cannot be attained through the law of causation. As stated earlier, knowledge of the specific causes is the business of experience and science, while the law of causation is a rational law which does not depend on experience.

For instance, let us assume that while a scientist in a laboratory tries to discover the cause of a phenomenon, another phenomenon comes into being; let us say, a light emits, or a sound is heard, etc. As soon as he sees or hears it, he is informed of its existence and understands that the said phenomenon is not without a cause. He understands it according to the rational law of causation and there is no need for experience. However, the intellect alone cannot identify the cause behind the existence of a phenomenon. If it could identify it, there would be no need for experience. The fact is that to find out the cause of a phenomenon requires experience or experiment. So, to know certain causes is the business of experience and science, and not that of the intellect.

Whenever they do not know the cause of a phenomenon or they cannot find, in the domain of their experience, that which indicates the mechanism of the emergence of that phenomenon, some people admit that the law of causation has some exceptions.

Nowadays, as some physicists have not been able to discover the cause of some hidden phenomena (for example, how a certain electron goes out of its axis), they have claimed that these phenomena have no causes, believing that in such cases, the law of causation is defective! How do they then believe that the law of causation is flawless? What they are supposed to know is the specific cause of phenomena, the failure to discover which is due to a defect in their experiment.

Therefore, to know the specific cause lies in experience, but the more important question (second error) is this: Can the sole cause of a phenomenon be known through experience? If under certain conditions we perform an experiment and find out that the emergence of a thing depends on another and the relationship between the two is established—for example, through experiment we find out that whenever A is present, B is also present and whenever A is absent, B is also absent—could this experience prove that B cannot exist except through the existence of A?

For many years, mankind has been using specific means to produce fire. Can it be said that except through these means one can in no way produce fire? As we always use fire to generate heat, do we have the right to say that heat cannot be generated except by means of fire? Can it be claimed that at any time and in any part of the world heat can be produced only through fire? Does experience advance such a conclusion? Does it produce the result that under certain conditions, heat is caused by fire? We only have the right to say that, as far as we know, heat is caused by fire, but we have no right to assert that heat is caused by no other thing. This claim shows ignorance, and it does not behoove a researcher to negate the effect of an unknown or intangible factor.

Thus, experiment and experience (science) cannot point to man the particular cause of a thing. Experience can only prove what is within the domain of human perception and it has no right to deny what is beyond that. So, the claim that science negates the things mentioned by the prophets (‘a) or the effects of supplication is baseless. Science states that as far as experience shows, every person comes from his or her father and mother. But it has no right to assert that other than the agency of his or her parents, no person can come into this world.

In principle, experience can never prove what is impossible. Impossibility is not an empirical concept. It is rather a philosophical concept which can only be proved through reasoning. What can be proved through experience is the absence of occurrence but impossibility is beyond the scope of experience. No matter how advanced a field of science is, it cannot negate miracles, the effects of supplication and the like, claiming that such things do not exist. Given these preliminary remarks, the following points become clear:

The acceptance of miracles or extraordinary things does not mean denial of the law of causation or acknowledgment of exceptions to the law of causation, for these things are existentially caused by God. That is, the acceptance of these affairs is tantamount to the acceptance of God as the Cause. Concerning natural causes, however, if an effect emerges without a known natural cause, does it mean violation of the law of causation?

In view of the stated preliminary points, it cannot be claimed that for an effect to exist, the natural cause is confined only to what we know and there is nothing else, for it is possible in some cases that an extraordinary thing happen whose cause is unknown to us.

In addition, in the law of causation a supernatural cause for a natural affair cannot be denied. No field of science can deny the effect of a supernatural thing in the emergence of a natural thing. In fact, such an effect is even confirmed by a field of science. The spiritualists who have strong inner powers can exercise control over some material phenomena and perform acts which cannot be done through natural means. This is a thing which cannot be denied nowadays.

Hence, the occurrence of supernatural things does not mean contravention of the law of causation or the philosophical principle of cause and effect. So, the argument of those who cite verses such as the noble verse, “*Yet you will not find any change in Allah’s precedent, and you will never find any revision in Allah’s precedent*”¹ is incorrect, because the occurrence of an extraordinary event does not necessarily mean revision in Allah’s precedent [*sunnah*].

In addition, the abovementioned noble verse pertains to human beings and informs them that whenever a people rebel against God, belie and negate the divine signs, corruption will spread in their society and the way for reform and truth will be hampered, others will be led into error and they will not be able to find the way of truth. The precedent of Allah is for Him not to give respite to these people but to destroy them with a heavenly or earthly chastisement. This verse relates to those cases and has nothing to do with natural laws, and it does not intend to suggest that Allah’s precedent is that every material phenomenon is caused by a material cause; for example, heat is always caused by fire.

Even assuming that the said verse can be applied to all the laws governing the world, are the divine laws only those laws that we know? If there are laws which we do not know, are they also laws of God?

One of the precedents of Allah is that whenever expediency dictates, an act is performed unnaturally. How does science or philosophy prove that Allah’s precedence holds that every natural phenomenon must come into being only through a material and natural cause?

1— *Sūrat Fāt ir* (or, *al-Malā’ikah*) 35:43.

As such, to prove a miracle or the effect of prayers does not mean negation of the cause of the emergent phenomenon but rather means to prove a cause presently unknown.

Thus, the law of causation as a necessary and general law can be reconciled with miracles and extraordinary affairs, and does not conflict with them.¹

Does supplication make people lazy and lax?

One of the issues raised about supplication has something to do with its socio-psychological dimension. Some people raise the objection that people's faith in the effect of supplication makes them lax in their life activity—in their personal as well as social affairs. Accordingly, this laxity willy-nilly brings about social backwardness and becomes an effective instrument in the hands of tyrants, who keep the people engaged in supplication and devotional acts, while they plunder their resources.

The fact of the matter, however, is that every truth can be misused in one way or another. If a truth is misused, one should not reject the essence of that truth. Supplication does not mean that we should not struggle nor make any effort to fulfill individual or social needs. Supplication means that the faithful [*mu'min*] considers God as the Real Effector. Whenever he feels the need to solve his problem, he turns to God besides employing the materials means at his disposal to solve his problem, for God has enjoined and willed so. However, he does not consider these factors to have independent results. As a result, even if the material factors are not available, he will not be dejected, for he regards God as All-powerful to meet his needs through non-material means. In view of this, belief in the power of prayer induces him to struggle and be hopeful.

If a person relies only on material factors, he will only work if he is hopeful of their availability. But the faithful is not hopeless even when he knows that the conventional factors are not available.

During the Battle of Badr, when the Muslims were in utmost difficulty and their soldiers and military equipment were far inferior to that of the enemies, they resorted to supplication and God also answered their supplication. He sent three thousand angels to their rescue and they emerged victorious.² If the Muslims had no belief in supplication or had a low morale, they would have withdrawn and eventually been defeated.

1— See *Ma'ārif-e Qur'ān [Qur'anic Studies]* by the author.

2— See *Sūrat Al 'Imrān* 3:123-124. [Trans.]

So, belief in supplication does not end up in withdrawal and defeat. On the contrary, sometimes the absence of belief in supplication gives way to defeat. This objection actually results from the lack of proper knowledge of supplication. The notion that man must only pray and not work does not represent the true meaning of supplication. Once we ask something from God, we have to regard Him as the Real Effector and whatever we possess as belonging to Him, and not that we have to regard whatever we possess to be our own and seek the help of God through other means. Does the existence of man and whatever he possesses not belong to God?

Supplication does not mean that man should ask God to do something through other than the conventional means. This is actually determining what God must do. It is like the one who has bread on his table but still asks: "O Lord! Give me provision through other means." This is not a valid supplication.

If a person really wants something from God and recognizes Him as the All-efficient and All-wise, he must use whatever is at his disposal, and if he feels anything lacking, he must ask it from God. Hence, to the person whom God has bestowed sight but does not open his eyes and only says, "O Lord! Let me walk with closed eyes and reach my destination," it must be said: "Has God not bestowed sight for you to use?!"

Supplication does not mean that we have to discard the blessings God has bestowed upon us out of His infinite wisdom and say, "O Lord! Give the same thing through other means." This is actually like saying, "O Lord! I do not accept Your scheme. You told me to see with my eyes but I want to see with my ears!" It is narrated that Prophet Mūsā (Moses) (‘a) got sick and the Israelites prescribed a certain herbal medicine, but he said, "I refuse any medical treatment as I am waiting for God to cure me." After sometime, his awaited recovery was nowhere in sight. God revealed to him: "By My Power and Glory! I shall not cure you unless you use the same herb for your treatment. O Mūsā! Do you want to discredit My wisdom by your reliance [tawakkul]? Except Me, is there anyone who has the power to cure you through the roots of this herb?"

Naturally, God's wise design is not consistent with our whims and caprice:

﴿ وَلَوْ اتَّبَعَ الْحَقُّ أَهْوَاءَهُمْ لَفَسَدَتِ السَّمَاوَاتُ وَالْأَرْضُ وَمَنْ فِيهِنَّ ﴾

“Had the Truth followed their desires, the heavens and the earth would have surely fallen apart [along] with those who are in them.”¹

So, we must use, in the best possible manner, whatever is at our disposal and accept God’s scheme and wisdom. The causes and factors He has provided in the world are based upon the dictates of His wisdom. Everything is beneficial to us and contributes to solving our problems. Thus, we must not set them aside and ask for provision through other means. If we use whatever is bestowed upon us, we will realize that God has already provided the means to solve our problems. The only thing lacking is our failure to use them.

Of course, God is not incapable of providing those things through other means, but not to use the means placed at our disposal does not represent supplication and reliance on Him [*tawakkul*]. It is rather an act of abuse or misinterpretation of Islamic concepts that some people hold. *Tawakkul* does not mean belief in God without using the material means He has provided.

Therefore, those who truly rely on God [*mutawakkilīn*] are far more active than other people. The struggle of the Islamic combatants [*mujāhidīn*] who go to the battlefield by relying on God and fight with the enemy considering victory as coming only from God is far greater than that of those who do nothing and only pray.

﴿وَمَا النَّصْرُ إِلَّا مِنْ عِنْدِ اللَّهِ الْعَزِيزِ الْحَكِيمِ﴾

“And victory comes only from Allah, the All-mighty, the All-wise.”²

The true *mujāhid* asks for victory and help from God without ignoring, rather, using whatever God has given him. So, true supplication is practiced by one who uses all the means and factors God has provided, not discarding them and asking for the realization of his needs through other means. According to the traditions [*riwāyāt*], the supplication of such people will not be accepted. In some narrations, it is reported that a certain man had an impious wife and prayed to God to save him from her evil but his prayer was not accepted because God had given him the right to divorce her whenever he wished to.³ If she was indeed impious and living with her was against his felicity in this world and the hereafter, he should have divorced her. So, his supplication had no sense. Of course, if his intention in his supplication was for God to give him more endurance to deal with such a

1– *Sūrat al-Mu’minūn* 23:71.

2– *Sūrat Āl ‘Imrān* 3:126.

3– Muh ammad Bāqir Majlisī, *Biḥ ār al-Anwār*, vol. 93, p. 256, *h adīth* 10.

woman so as to attain spiritual perfection or for Him to reform her character, his supplication was ideal; otherwise, it was useless, because the means to be relieved from her mischief was at his disposal and he was not using it. If this person was really serious in what he was praying for, he should have used the means God had provided him.

The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) is reported to have said:

الدَّاعِي بِلا عَمَلٍ كَالرَّامِي بِلا وَتَرٍ .

“The supplicant who is devoid of action is like the arrow without any bow.”¹

In another *h adīth*, he (ﷺ) said: “The supplication of one who stays at home and asks for sustenance from God will not be accepted.”²

So, Islam does not replace means and factors at the disposal of man with supplication. It rather wants him to realize that causes are not independent of God. The effect of all causes emanates from Him. Thus, even with the existence of causes, man must focus his attention towards God. He must ask God for all his needs even if all the common means to acquire them are accessible. Even if his daily bread is provided, the faithful person turns to God and asks Him to remove his hunger. In his view, all things are means and the ultimate effect emanates from God. So, supplication is desirable under all conditions—whether man has access or no access to the common means. When common means are accessible, supplication shows that he does not consider these means as independent, and believes in God as Self-sufficient and in his own need for divine blessings. When common means are not accessible, supplication shows that he does not consider the Power of God as limited to common means, and believes that He can meet his needs through other than common means. Hence, supplication is desirable under all conditions.

If a person with strong faith feels hungry, he will ask God to satiate him and then go to the kitchen and eat. In this case, his eating does not contradict his supplication. That is, he only regards God as the Real Agent in meeting his needs, believing that as God wills and gives this effect, food removes one’s hunger and as such, he consumes it; otherwise, the presence or absence of food makes no difference to him, because he believes that God could satiate him in whatever way He likes.

1—*Ibid.*, vol. 93, p. 312, *h adīth* 17.

2—*Ibid.*, vol. 71, p. 344, *h adīth* 1.

God thus revealed to Prophet Mūsā (‘a): “*O Mūsā! Ask Me for whatever you need, including your food’s salt.*”

The essence of supplication is for man to understand and acknowledge that he has nothing of his own and whatever he possesses comes from Him. The power to move and act comes from Him. God has provided the means and instruments, as well as the power to think and reflect. These are all divine blessings that must be utilized in meeting one’s needs. Asking God actually means that man must acknowledge that all means belongs to God. This is the essence of servitude, which requires obedience.

Therefore, belief in the power of prayer does not make one lazy. On the contrary, it serves as a stimulant for man to strive and make more efforts.

Effects of supplication

Educational effects

What is the educational role of supplication? Does supplication have a fundamental role in the life of man?

Some people argue that the educational effect of supplication is limited to its inculcation in a person. That is, once a person utters something good, he inculcates it in his mind. For example, by reciting *Du‘ā’ Makārim al-Akhlāq*, it is inculcated in one’s mind that he must reform his moral conduct [*akhlāq*], acquire good attributes and abandon bad habits. These people consider the educational effect of supplication as confined to these things, and those supplications which lack these features as ‘imperialist supplications’!

This notion is a product of shortsightedness and lack of understanding of Islamic teachings. The greatest effect of supplication is no other than the essence of servitude embedded in it that propels man’s spiritual perfection and humanity. Of course, it is possible that in some supplications these inculcations and the like also exist but these effects are similar to the movement of the jaw at the time of eating. While chewing the food, it is also engaged in physical exercise. This exercise cannot be considered the true benefit of eating food; the true benefit of eating is to procure the elements needed by the body.

Similarly, the true benefit of supplication is to pay attention to God and serve Him. The benefits sometimes derived from some supplications are insignificant compared to the essential benefits. The perfection of man lies in the realization of his poverty in relation to God and his acknowledgment

of this truth.¹ As long as man refuses to acknowledge this fact, he will not properly understand his poverty and not attain spiritual perfection.

Supplication perfects man's knowledge. Supplication in itself is a form of worship and worship, in turn, is the only means of attaining perfection. Therefore, supplication is one way of attaining perfection.

In a noble verse, God says:

﴿ وَقَالَ رَبُّكُمْ ادْعُونِي أَسْتَجِبْ لَكُمْ إِنَّ الَّذِينَ يَسْتَكْبِرُونَ عَنْ عِبَادَتِي سَيَدْخُلُونَ جَهَنَّمَ مِنْ حَرِيرٍ ﴾

“Your Lord has said, ‘Call Me, and I will hear your [supplications]!’ Indeed those who are disdainful of My worship will enter hell in utter humility.”²

That is to say: “Verily, in utter humiliation and abjectness those, who arrogantly refuse to worship Me and consider it unfitting to be humble before Me, will enter hell.” The two statements in the noble verse quoted above serve as the main and secondary statements. Supplication is a form of worship, and whoever refuses to worship Him shall taste painful and humiliating punishment.

After the main benefit of supplication, some secondary and other benefits are also derived, which are as follows:

Other effects

1. Knowledge of God. The main reason behind supplication and imploration is to know God. This knowledge is the source of all felicity and improvement.

Some people came to Imām al-Sādiq (‘a) and asked him: “Why are our prayers not answered?” The Imām (‘a) said: “It is because you pray to Him whom you do not know.”³

The Blessed Names of God which we recite⁴ and praise are all replete with numerous meanings and reciting them has abundant blessings. One of these blessings is the attention paid to their meanings and attributes, thus, increasing man's knowledge about God.

1— *Sūrat Fātir* (or *al-Malā’ikah*) 35:15: “O mankind! You are the ones who stand in need of Allah, and Allah—He is the All-sufficient, the All-laudable.”

2— *Sūrat Ghāfir* (or *al-Mu’min*) 40:60.

3— *Muhammad Bāqir Majlisī, Bihār al-Anwār*, vol. 93, section 24, p. 368, hadīth 4.

4— *Sūrat al-A’rāf* 7:180: “To Allah belong the Best Names, so supplicate Him by them.”

Once we mention the Names of God such as *Al-Rah mān*, *Al-Rah īm*, *Al-Samī‘*, *Al-Bas īr*, *Al-Mun ‘im*, *Al-Ghafūr*, and others, we are reminded that our Lord is All-beneficent, All-merciful, All-hearing, All-seeing, Affluent, and All-forgiving, and as such, we tend to become hopeful of His mercy and forgiveness. By pondering or reflecting on these Attributes, the supplicant sees himself in communion with God whose Power encompasses everything. In essence, ‘easy’ or ‘difficult’ are meaningless to Him. This point gives new hope and enthusiasm to him who does not pin his hope on anything but God.

In this short treatise, there is no need to mention the effect of hope, enthusiasm, struggle, and the enduring of difficulties. Also, attention to the fact that God sees and hears what we do and say encourages the person to do good deeds and avoid evil utterances and thoughts. Moreover, some supplications constitute a complete course on monotheism and theology on an extremely high level. Imām al-H usayn’s (‘a) *Du‘ā’ ‘Arafah*, Imam ‘Alī’s (‘a) *Du‘ā’ al-S abāh*, Imam al-Sajjād’s (‘a) *Du‘ā’ Abū H amzah al-Thumālī*, and many other supplications, especially those included in *Al-Sahīfah al-Sajjādiyyah*¹ are some of these supplications.

2. *Acquisition of excellent morality.* As mentioned in noble *aḥādīth*, acquisition of excellent morality is highly enjoined in religion:

تَخَلَّفُوا بِأَخْلَاقِ اللَّهِ.

“Behave according to the conduct of Allah.”²

Through his supplication, the supplicant endeavors to emulate those divine attributes. Just as God possesses such Attributes as All-beneficent and All-forgiving, he also tries to be kind and forgiving to others.

3. *Purity and cleanliness.* Cleanliness of clothing and lawfulness of the food taken by the supplicant, as well as the lawfulness of the place of supplication are among the disciplines of supplication. The Holy Prophet (ṣ) said: “Anyone who wants his supplication to be accepted must purify his food and occupation.”³

1– The book of fifty-seven prayers known as *al-Sahīfah (al-Kāmilah) al-Sajjādiyyah*, which is one of the major Islamic manuals of supplications, was transmitted from Imām Zayn al-‘Abidīn al-Sajjād (‘a), the fourth of the Twelve Imāms and the only son of Imām al-H usayn to survive the massacre at Karbalā‘. See *al-Sahīfah al-Kāmilah*, <http://www.al-islam.org/sahifa>. [Trans.]

2– Muḥ ammad Bāqir Majlisī, *Bihār al-Anwār*, vol. 61, section 42, p. 129.

3– *Ibid.*, vol. 93, p. 320, *ahādīth* 30.

Once the supplicant is bound not to obtain his daily bread through unlawful means and not to indulge in unjust works or activities, he will attain spiritual perfection. The society whose members have such orientation will be a prosperous community with an illustrious abode!

4. *Suppression of the self.* The most fundamental benefit of supplication, nay all forms of worship, is the prevention of the rebellion of the self [*nafs*]. In *Khutbah al-Qāsi'ah*, Imām 'Alī ('a) has mentioned detailed points while talking against arrogance. In a certain part of this sermon, he ('a) says: "This filthy disposition is the greatest trap of Satan and his most powerful instrument of deception."¹

Elimination of selfishness is like uprooting all moral vices and preparing oneself for the acquisition of all virtues. God thus says in the Qur'an:

﴿ قَدْ أَفْلَحَ مَنْ زَكَّاهَا ﴾

"One who purifies it is felicitous."²

By standing before God and paying attention to His Greatness and Majesty and at the same time taking into account his own insignificance and helplessness, the supplicant expresses his absolute poverty to God. In so doing, he sees himself not in need of any creature but Him. So, supplication means humbleness accompanied by contentment and high spirit.

Conditions for the acceptance of supplications

Although God promises in the Holy Qur'an that He answers the supplications, saying "Call Me and I will hear,"³ why are supplications usually not answered? What are the conditions for the acceptance of supplications?

This question is posed by all those who are engaged in supplication.

Scholars of scholastic theology [*'ilm al-kalām*] argue that it is possible to not fulfill a threat [*wa'id*] and such an act is rationally not bad. However, not to fulfill a promise [*wa'dah*] is rationally bad and it is impossible for God to do something bad. So, not to fulfill the promise of answering the supplications as stated in the abovementioned verse is rationally bad provided that there is also no rational reason behind this non-fulfillment of promise. The Qur'an itself states:

1– *Nahj al-Balāghah* (S ubh al-S ālih), Sermon 192 (*Khut bah al-Qās i'ah*). [Trans.]

2– *Sūrat al-Shams* 91:9.

3– *Sūrat Ghāfir* (or *al-Mu'min*) 40:60.

﴿بِإِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يُخْلِفُ الْمِيعَادَ﴾

“Indeed Allah does not break His promise.”¹

This verse is sufficient proof for us to expect that all our prayers would be accepted by God. In view of the need to be truthful to one’s promise and God’s emphasis on this point, what is the reason behind the non-acceptance of our supplications?

This question was repeatedly posed to the pure Imāms (‘a) who gave different answers commensurate to the diverse levels of understanding of individuals. In some traditions, certain conditions have been set for the supplicants, or certain disciplines or times have been stipulated for the supplication.

Does it mean that these points are generally applied to the verses? In other words, is our supplication acceptable provided that it is made at a certain place, time and condition? If it is made in other than the specified times and conditions, will the promise of God not be fulfilled? Or, do these traditions have other meanings?

What we can deduce from the outer dimension of the verse is that it is generally applied, and the probability of its being limited is very weak. To explain this point, let us cite an example. If a generous person makes a promise to invite his guests to a party and amid their presence he does not entertain most of them, will they not question him as to why he is not fulfilling his promise? If he answers that it is because of their untidy clothes and their being late for a few minutes, his excuse will be unacceptable, because his invitation was a general one and those conditions (tidiness and punctuality) were not mentioned in the invitation. So, he must fulfill his promise and entertain all of them or have indisputable justification for doing otherwise.

To understand this verse better, it is necessary to examine it closer:

1. What does it mean by “call” [*ud‘ū*]? Does supplication [*du‘ā*] mean mentioning our request even without necessarily understanding it? Or, does it mean without paying attention to it even though we understand it? Or does it mean so, even if it is against our inner liking, assuming that we pay attention to it?

It is true that verbal utterance associated with request is called ‘supplication’—for example, as we call someone and need something from him—but words indicate what is in the mind and cannot be treated

1– *Sūrat al-Ra‘d* 13:31.

absolutely. It does not mean that the form of expression affects world events and that every word in any language is effective. As stated earlier, supplication is a matter of the heart and the tongue only tells what is in the heart. So, supplication must originate from the heart and soul of man and he must truly be asking for something. If he only utters some words without any sincerity, he is not truly asking for something and, indeed, is not engaged in his supplication.

2. Supplication must truly represent “Call Me” [*ud‘ūnī*]. That is, the request must be addressed solely to God. If a person observes the abovementioned conditions but his heart is not focused on God, he has actually not supplicated. For example, we pray for knowledge; we truly like knowledge; and we are serious in our request; yet, we think that to be learned has nothing to do with God as it depends only on our own efforts and endeavors. We say:

اَللّٰهُمَّ اِنِّيْ اَسْأَلُكَ عِلْمًا نَافِعًا وَعَمَلًا صَالِحًا.

“O Allah! Grant us beneficial knowledge and righteous conduct.”

Yet, deep in our hearts we do not believe that God bestows knowledge on man. In other words, we are only after the inspirational aspect of supplication that knowledge is something good which must be acquired. By “O Allah” [*Allāhumma*] we actually mean “God willing” [*inshā’ Allāh*] which we only ceremoniously recite in many of our activities. It is not actually suspension of the will of God. Similarly, at the beginning of many works, we recite “In the Name of Allah, the All-beneficent, the All-merciful” merely as words of compliment. Yet, only rarely do we really remember God and sincerely begin our activity with His Name. The same is true in the case of most of our supplications. It is true that outwardly, we are asking something from God but in reality, we do not have firm conviction that God must grant our request. In this case also, we must not expect the acceptance of our supplication.

Such ‘supplications’, which are mere utterance of some words and are not really requesting something from God will never be accepted because our true request is not addressed to God. Rather, we rely upon material means and our own power. Even if those who are engaged in such ‘supplications’ are asked whether or not God really endows knowledge to man, they will answer and argue that acquisition of knowledge has nothing to do with God!

The reason behind the non-acceptance of such ‘supplications’ is the fact that they do not have faith in the power of God and in reality, they are not asking God for anything. Therefore, true supplication is the request which is addressed to God and which we truly believe that only He can grant. If it is

not so, it is sheer words of compliment. But as to what extent these words of compliment are beneficial is a different story, which requires a separate discussion. We must ask for forgiveness of God for such manner of supplicating for with this kind of supplicating and frame of mind, we have treated God as weak and impotent and we believe in things about Him which are beyond His Station.

The verse “*Call Me and I will hear*” is a condition expressed in command. It is actually, “If you call, I will answer you.” This condition will be realized if first of all, we are serious in our request, and secondly, our request is addressed to God whom we regard as the only One who can grant our request. In this manner, the conditions for the acceptance of supplication will materialize. Can it be said that such a supplication might still not be accepted?

It is narrated that the Israelites were afflicted with drought for a long period. Prophet Mūsā (‘a), along with a group, went out of the town to pray for rain [*ṣalāt al-istisqā’*] and the following was revealed:

كَيْفَ أَسْتَجِيبُ لَهُمْ وَقَدْ أَظْلَمَتْ عَلَيْهِمْ ذُنُوبُهُمْ... يَدْعُونَنِي عَلَىٰ غَيْرِ يَقِينٍ.

“How can I answer them (their supplication) when they are engrossed in sins... They call on Me yet they do not have certainty [*yaqīn*]?”¹

Another point worth mentioning here relates to the conditions necessary for the acceptability of supplication. Sometimes, we ask God for something, thinking it is good for us and can contribute to our spiritual perfection. But in reality, we are wrong. We do not know whether the grant of our request is ultimately good for us or not. If we knew the repercussions of the grant of our request, we would definitely make a different request. Such requests are like those of a child who does not know its harmful effects, which if he did, he would never ask for it.

In cases when we ask for our general welfare but we are wrong in identifying what is exactly good for us, it is possible that our supplication is granted, but according to our general welfare. In such instances, God, the Exalted, may overlook our mistake and grant our request according to the general welfare that we ask from Him. He grants us something else, which is what we would ask Him for if we only saw the whole picture. In this case, God has not deprived us of His grace and at the same time, He has corrected our mistake.

1– That is, they do not have faith that God could grant their requests.

Keeping in view of the three points—serious request, request addressed to God, and what is really good for us—which can be inferred from the abovementioned verse, it can be said that the verse has general application.

There are also cases when instead of granting a request in this world, God gives a person a distinct station in the hereafter. This is related to the third point that can be inferred from the verse in question. That is, if a person who has faith in the hereafter, realizes that his request in relation to a worldly affair is insignificant in comparison to the otherworldly reward, he will definitely prefer his perfection and felicity. If the truth is made manifest to him, he will certainly request them for the hereafter.

As God, the Exalted, is aware that the faithful are more interested in the affairs of the hereafter, He sometimes reserves their worldly requests for the hereafter. When they find out what station they will occupy in the next world, they will thank God and be pleased with the arrangement set by the Lord. This point has been mentioned in *Du‘ā’ al-Iftitāh*:

وَلَعَلَّ الَّذِي أَبْطَأَ عَنِّي هُوَ خَيْرٌ لِي لِعَلِّمِكَ بِعَاقِبَةِ الْأُمُورِ.

“Perhaps slowing down [in the grant of my requests] may be a blessing in disguise because You alone know the consequences of all affairs.”

The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) is reported to have said:

مَا مِنْ مُسْلِمٍ يَدْعُو بِدَعْوَى لَيْسَ فِيهَا إِثْمٌ وَلَا قَطِيعَةٌ رَحِمَ إِلَّا أَعْطَاهُ اللَّهُ بِهَا إِحْدَى ثَلَاثٍ : إِمَانًا يُعَجِّلُ دَعْوَتَهُ وَإِمَانًا يُدَخِّرُهَا لَهُ فِي الْآخِرِ وَإِمَانًا يَكُفُّ عَنْهُ مِنَ الشَّرِّ مِثْلَهَا.

“No Muslim who supplicates—unless it is for committing sins and severing kinship ties—is given by Allah one of these three things: He grants his request; He reserves it for him in the hereafter; or in lieu of it, He repels calamity to befall him.”¹

In addition to the abovementioned points, other reasons for the non-acceptance of supplications are also mentioned in traditions. For example, it is mentioned in some traditions that those who abandon the duty of “enjoining what is good and forbidding what is evil” shall be afflicted with two calamities. Firstly, their supplications will not be accepted and secondly, the vilest and most corrupt of people will rule over them.

1—Muh ammad Bāqir Majlisī, *Bih ār al-Anwār*, vol. 93, p. 366, *h adīth* 16.

Some people complained to the Commander of the Faithful (‘a) that their supplications were not being accepted. The Imām (‘a) stated the reason behind it:

لَبَّ قُلُوبِكُمْ خَانَتْ بِقَمَانِ خِصَالٍ: وَأَلَّهَا إِنَّكُمْ عَرَفْتُمْ اللَّهَ فَلَمْ تُؤُوا حَقَّهُ كَمَا وَجَبَ عَلَيْكُمْ فَمَا
أَغْنَتْ عَنْكُمْ مَعْرِفَتِكُمْ. الثَّانِيَةَ...

“Your hearts have committed treachery in eight things (and for this reason, your supplications are not being accepted).

- (1) You recognize God but you do not give His due right.
- (2) You believe in His Messenger, yet you violate his *Sunnah*.
- (3) You read His Book but you do not act upon it.
- (4) You say that you are afraid of God’s punishment or wrath but you commit acts which draw you closer to it.
- (5) You say that you yearn for His reward, yet you do things which keep you away from it.
- (6) You enjoy His blessings but you do not express your gratitude.
- (7) You are commanded to be enemies of Satan but you befriend him.
- (8) You place the defects of people before your eyes but are negligent of your own defects.

Given this, how can you expect your supplications to be accepted when you have closed their doors? Be wary of God; reform your actions; purify your intentions; enjoin what is good; and forbid what is evil so that your supplications might be accepted.”¹

In addition, we do not consider what we can usually get through common means as an acceptance of our supplication and as coming from God. This is while the Qur’an attributes to God all things and affairs. Moreover, unconditional acceptance of supplication is not incumbent upon Allah, as explicitly stated in the Qur’an. If the supplication of every person is supposed to be accepted, there would be sets of contradictions and the system of the universe would be in disarray. God says, thus:

﴿وَلَوْ اتَّبَعَ الْحَقُّ أَهْوَاءَهُمْ لَفَسَدَتِ السَّمَاوَاتُ وَالْأَرْضُ وَمَنْ فِيهِنَّ﴾

1– *Ibid.*, vol. 93, p. 376.

“Had the Truth followed their desires, the heavens and the earth would have surely fallen apart [along] with those who are in them.”¹

God not only turned down the supplication of His prophet Ḥaḍrat Nūḥ (Noah) (‘a) to save his son, but also reproached him for it:

﴿ قَالَ يَا نُوحُ إِنَّهُ لَيْسَ مِنْ أَهْلِكَ إِنَّهُ عَمَلٌ غَيْرُ صَالِحٍ فَلَا تَسْأَلْنِي مَا لَيْسَ لَكَ بِهِ عِلْمٌ إِنِّي أَعْظُكَ نَافِعًا
تَكُونُ مِنَ الْجَاهِلِينَ ﴾

“Said He, ‘O Noah! Indeed he is [a personification] of unrighteous conduct. So do not ask Me [for something] of which you have no knowledge. I advise you, lest you should be among the ignorant.”²

In addition to these points, even assuming that apparently the noble verse “I will answer you” means unconditional acceptance of supplication, the moments for the acceptance of supplication are specified by God. After Ḥaḍrat Ya‘qūb (Jacob) (‘a) who was a prophet prayed to God for the return of Ḥaḍrat Yūsuf (Joseph) (‘a), in spite of his prayer being accepted, it took around forty years before Yūsuf (‘a) was able to return to him.

It is mentioned in some traditions that sometimes a faithful person would supplicate to God but God would tell the angels: “His supplication is accepted, but delay its materialization because I want to hear his voice (praying to Me).”³

This proves that purification of the soul is attained through a connection with God and supplication. The acceptance of supplication is sometimes delayed because the true perfection of man lies in his connection with God and not in the acceptance of his supplication. For example, the supplication of one who is sick, seeks refuge in God from the pain he is suffering and prays to Him for his recovery, contributes to his spiritual perfection and proximity to God. If he recovers on the very first day, he will no longer pray or pay attention to God, and his attention towards God will decrease.

Another example is of a person who prays for wealth to be spent in the way of Allah and thus attains spiritual reward. Since God knows that once he becomes wealthy he will forget his Lord, He will not let him attain his ambition. However, God will provide his sustenance through other means and, thereby, he will obtain the same spiritual reward.

1– *Sūrat al-Mu‘minūn* 23:71.

2– *Sūrat Hūd* 11:46.

3– Muh ammad Bāqir Majlisī, *Bih ār al-Anwār*, vol. 93, p. 374, h adīth 16.

God exercises such an authority [*wilāyah*] over His faithful servants. This is one of the forms of His *wilāyah* over the faithful.

God's Mastership [*wilāyah*] over the faithful

God's authority, guardianship or mastership [*wilāyah*] over man has many forms, among which are the following:

1. His general *wilāyah* over entire creation.
2. His special *wilāyah* over the faithful [*mu'minūn*]. The Qur'an points to this kind of His *wilāyah*, thus:

﴿اللَّهُ وَلِيُّ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا﴾

“Allah is the Master of the faithful.”¹

This *wilāyah* is limited to the faithful. Similarly, the guidance of God is of two kinds. One is the general guidance which encompasses all mankind by endowing them with the intellect and other faculties. God has also specific ‘guidance’ for the faithful. That is, those who wholeheartedly accept the invitation of the prophets (‘a) and the divine message will find the right path and be encompassed by divine guidance. God will bestow upon them more light, proper understanding, and profound knowledge. This guidance is limited to those who have faith in God and entrust everything to Him. In *Du‘ā’ ‘Arafah*, we read:

إِلٰهِي اٰغْنِنِي بِتَدْبِيْرِكَ عَنْ تَدْبِيْرِيْ وَيَاخْتِيَارِكَ عَنْ اِخْتِيَارِيْ .

“O Lord! By Your Design and Decision, make me needless of my design and decision.”²

Those who have attained this station are also encompassed by the special *wilāyah* of Allah. He exercises *wilāyah* in all aspects of their lives, managing their life affairs and making them needless of their own plans. As such, instead of health He chooses sickness for His faithful servant, or poverty instead of wealth. On account of his prayer for recovery, the health condition of a sick person may sometimes get even worse! This worsening of the health condition is a blessing of God so that he should acquire more preparedness and endurance and, consequently, attain further perfection. For this reason, instead of being accepted, some of our supplications will be reserved for us in the hereafter, or granted in another form according to the demand of our worldly welfare.

1– *Sūrat al-Baqarah* 2:257.

2– Shaykh ‘Abbās Qummī, *Mafāth al-Jinān*, “Du‘ā’ ‘Arafah of Imām al-H usayn (‘a)”.

Of course, these cases are beyond the comprehension of everybody. Only those who have these stations can understand these words.

God exercises this kind of *wilāyah* only on His special servants and not on all people. Of course, God is immune from bias but since others do not like it, He does not exercise such a *wilāyah* over them, for man must act according to his freewill and entrust himself to God out of his own volition so that God can do whatever He deems good for him. But to those who do not want it, God does not exercise by compulsion His special *wilāyah* over them.

The essential desirability of supplication

That which is more important than the acceptance of supplication is the supplication itself or earnest imploration and petition to God. Usually, we supplicate for the fulfillment of our needs. That is, whenever we face a problem in our life and we feel something lacking, we extend our hands above and pray to God.

Of course, apart from the fact that this practice is a requisite of belief in the Divine Lordship and expression of servitude, it can play a constructive role in man. It must be noted, however, that the philosophy of supplication, and fervent prayers and litanies, in general, is not only the fulfillment of needs—especially worldly needs. Rather, as can be inferred from most of the supplications transmitted from the Infallibles (*‘a*), supplication itself or fervent prayer to God—regardless of the acceptance or non-acceptance of supplication—is particularly significant. The act of requesting [*t alab*] itself is more important than the requested thing [*matlūb*].

Fervent prayer to God and communion with Him is so valuable and pleasing that if a person could comprehend it, he would never pay attention to mundane and worldly matters, let alone asking for them. Therefore, that which is of immense importance in supplication is the act of fervently praying to God. Its value is far greater than the grant of the request. The mere fact that the servant finds opportunity to have a private meeting with his Master and amorous talk with Him is far valuable for him than the grant of his requests. He has not only been granted permission to talk with God who is the Lord of the worlds but has also been invited by God by the words “*Call Me*”.¹ What a sublime felicity for such a servant!

Faith and certainty in supplication molds the personality and nurtures the feelings of man. In his inner world, the supplicant has pleasures and

1— *Sūrat Ghāfir* (or *al-Mu’min*) 40:60.

fortunes which are impossible for a non-suppliant to obtain and grasp. This state is indicative of the personality and spiritual growth of the faithful.

Etiquettes of supplication

Imām al-Ṣādiq (‘a) said:

إِحْفَظْ آمَ بَ الدُّعَاءِ وَاَنْظُرْ مَنْ تَدْعُو وَكَيْفَ تَدْعُو.

“Observe the etiquettes of supplication, and consider to Whom you supplicate and how you supplicate.”¹

How must we supplicate? Does supplication have its own etiquettes and requisites? Is it in need of a particular time and place?

It can be learned from the traditions of the pure and infallible *Ahl al-Bayt* (‘a) and the Qur’an that there is no specific time and place for supplication. The door of divine mercy is always open to all those who are in need, and whenever a person turns his heart to God, God will answer him.

Of course, there is no doubt that some periods such as the Night of Ordainment [*Laylat al-Qadr*] and the night preceding Friday, and some places such as Masjid al-Ḥarām and the sites of martyrdom of Imām al-Ḥusayn (‘a) and the other Imāms of guidance have special importance. However, the Qur’an and traditions have also mentioned other etiquettes of supplication, the most important of which is to pay attention to the Greatness of God before and during the supplication.

In one verse, God says:

﴿ اَدْعُوا رَبَّكُمْ تَضَرُّعًا وَخُفْيَةً ﴾

“Supplicate your Lord, beseechingly and secretly.”²

From this verse, two points can be deduced: to supplicate in a low voice and humble manner.

1. God is close to His servants and can hear their supplications. So, there is no need to shout. The Muslims had been prohibited from raising their voice in the presence of the Apostle (s).³ How much more if the addressee is God? One who feels that he is in the presence of God is ashamed of raising his voice.

1– Muh Bāqir Majlisī, *Bihār al-Anwār*, vol. 93, p. 322, *h adīth* 16.

2– *Sūrat al-A‘rāf* 7:55.

3 *Sūrat al-Hujurat* 49:2: “O you who have faith! Do not raise your voices above the voice of the Prophet, and do not speak aloud to him as you shout to one another, lest your works should fail without your being aware.” [Trans.]

2. The word *taḍarru*‘ [humble entreating or beseeching] is mentioned many times in the Holy Qur’an and whose existence shows that contrary to the notion of some people, supplication is not mere ‘conditioning of the mind’. Rather, other things exist in supplication; otherwise, perhaps ‘conditioning of the mind’ could possibly be better in forms other than *taḍarru*‘.

In two verses of the Holy Qur’an, a similar concept about *taḍarru*‘ is mentioned. In one verse, God says:

﴿وَلَقَدْ أَرْسَلْنَا إِلَىٰ أُمَمٍ مِّن قَبْلِكَ فَأَخَذْنَاهُم بِالْبِأْسَاءِ وَالضَّرَّاءِ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَتَضَرَّعُونَ﴾

“We have certainly sent [apostles] to nations before you, then We seized them with stress and distress so that they might entreat [Us].”¹

In another verse, He says:

﴿وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَا فِي قَرْيَةٍ مِّن نَّبِيٍّ إِلَّا أَخَذْنَا أَهْلَهَا بِالْبِأْسَاءِ وَالضَّرَّاءِ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَضُرَّعُونَ﴾

“We did not send a prophet to any town without visiting its people with stress and distress so that they might entreat [Allah for forgiveness].”²

What is emphasized in these two verses is the implicit invitation to the people to entreat or beseech [*taḍarru*] God.

Why *taḍarru*‘? What benefit can *taḍarru*‘ give us? Why does God emphasize it?

The psychological makeup of man is such that if he does not humbly entreat God, he will gradually succumb to moral vices. *Taḍarru*‘ suppresses his egoism and selfishness, and makes him see his position in relation to God, the Exalted, because it is attained through humbling oneself. A person cries and weeps once he humbles himself and feels helpless. This is the best condition for worship and expression of servitude to God.

It is narrated in a *ḥadīth qudsī*³ that God said to Ḥaḍrat ‘Īsā (Jesus) (‘a):

يَا عِيسَى لَا تَدْعُنِي إِلَّا مُتَضَرَّعًا.

“O ‘Īsā! Supplicate Me not but beseechingly.”¹

1– *Sūrat al-An‘ām* 6:42-4.

2– *Sūrat al-A‘rāf* 7:94.

3– *H adīth Qudsī* (or Sacred *H adīth*): a sub-category of *h adīth*, which are sayings of God but differ from the Qur’an as they are expressed in the words of Prophet Muhammad. [Trans.]

In another *ḥadīth*, He said:

يَا عَيْسَى ذَلَّلْ قَلْبَكَ.

“O ‘Īsā! Make your heart humble.”²

The ability to be in a state of *taḍarru‘* is also realized by the will of God. It is not true that whenever we like, we can cry or be in a state of *taḍarru‘*.

Our expression of humility, meekness, helplessness, and abasement does not benefit God. Through His creative power and out of His mercy and grace, He gives us certain stations or states on account of which our faith, guidance and knowledge are augmented. He gives us a chance to become aware of our sins and acknowledge them. This is one of the graces of God. What become a barrier between Him and us are our egotism and arrogance. If man lifts these veils, he will see himself abased, despicable and helpless before God, thereafter, he will be enveloped by His vast divine mercy. Like waterfall, Divine mercy is always flowing. By confessing our sins while lamenting and beseeching Him, we can be enveloped by it. By breaking the idol of our egoism, we can attain such a station and be able to benefit more from it; otherwise, our actions alone cannot win the mercy of God.

As stated earlier, the kernel of supplication is the expression of abjectness and servitude to God. The more man feels this abjectness, the more he becomes nearer to God. This does not imply that God is like an egotistic and arrogant dictator who wants everybody to be humble before him and thus humiliates his subjects. On the contrary, He is pleased and glad with our worship because it contributes to our spiritual perfection. The peak of perfection for man is to identify his dependence on God. Through this understanding and knowledge, he will achieve a union with God and experience the beatific vision [*liqā‘ Allāh*].

Another condition of supplication is to have a feeling of fear and hope [*khawf wa rajā*]. In this relationship, on one side is God, the Exalted, and on the other side is the sinful servant. Once a person pays attention to his sins, he will feel ashamed and once he turns his attention towards Divine mercy, he will become hopeful. Man must, on one hand, be afraid of Divine wrath, and on the other hand, bear in mind that God might forgive all his sins. This point has particularly been highlighted in *Du‘ā‘ Abū Ḥamzah al-Thumālī*.

Other etiquettes of supplication have been mentioned in a tradition reported from Imām al-Ṣādiq (‘a):

1– Muḥammad Bāqir Majlisī, *Bihār al-Anwār*, vol. 14, p. 290, *ḥadīth* 14.

2– *Ibid.*, vol. 14, p. 298, *ḥadīth* 14.

“You begin supplicating by praising and eulogizing God and then enumerating His blessings. Thereafter, recount and confess your sins, ask forgiveness of God and invoke blessings on Muḥammad and his progeny.”¹

The following acts cultivate man’s relationship with God at the time of supplication:

Being in a state of ablution;

Observing inner and outer purity;

Purging of the heart from rancor against the faithful;

Giving in charity before supplicating;

Forgiving the mistakes of others;

Giving priority to others in supplication;

Invoking blessings on Muḥammad and his progeny (s) at the beginning and end of the supplication.

Types of supplicants

People can be divided into four groups in terms of their attention to God:

1. The first group consists of those who in all conditions—both in prosperity and adversity—remember God morning and evening and their supplications are not only limited to the time of afflictions and difficulties.² Perhaps the reason behind it is that they know that in spite of all the blessings God has bestowed upon them, they are still in need of Him. For this group, blessing and calamity makes no difference. They are meritorious servants of God who always remember Him and He also always remember them:

﴿إِنَّهُمْ كَانُوا يُسَارِعُونَ فِي الْخَيْرَاتِ وَيَدْعُونَنَا رَغَبًا وَرَهَبًا وَكَانُوا لَنَا خَاشِعِينَ﴾

“Indeed they were active in [performing] good works, and they would supplicate to Us with eagerness and awe, and were humble before Us.”³

2. The second group includes a majority of the faithful who in prosperity and comfort feel a sense of pride and negligence. But once they are in difficulty, they will be reminded of their need and express their need to God. This group also consists of relatively good servants of God but He has complained about them for forgetting Him when they are in prosperity, and when they are in difficulty they resort to prayer:

1—*Ibid.*, vol. 93, p. 317, h *adīth* 21.

2—*Sūrat al-A‘rāf* 7:205; *Sūrat al-Ra‘d* 13:141; *Sūrat al-Nūr* 24:36.

3—*Sūrat al-Anbiyā’* 21:90.

﴿إِذَا أَنْعَمْنَا عَلَى الْإِنْسَانِ أَعْرَضَ وَهَانَ بَجَانِبِهِ وَإِذَا مَسَّهُ الشَّرُّ فَذَا دَعَاءٍ عَرِيضٍ﴾

“When We bless man, he is disregarding and turns aside; but when an ill befalls him, he makes protracted supplications.”¹

Most of those who believe in God are like that. Only a few do not forget and are not negligent of God when prosperous.

3. The third group consists of those who consider some calamities as coming from God. So, once they are afflicted with such calamities, they immediately resort to prayer because they believe that they are caused by unnatural causes and due to Divine wrath and anger. For example, when the people of Prophet Yūnus (Jonah) (‘a) saw the signs of Divine wrath, they came to their senses before being afflicted, and repented. God saved them. This group does not pay attention to calamities which they do not consider coming from God. Only when they are totally hopeless and no one can help them, they call upon God.

4. The fourth group is composed of those who do not remember God even if calamities befall them and they are in difficulty. God condemns the attitude of this group and considers it more deserving of Divine wrath compared to the third group. Concerning this group, the Holy Qur’an states:

﴿فَلَوْلَا فِي جَاءِهِمْ بِأَسْنَا تَضَرَّعُوا وَلَكِنْ قَسَتْ قُلُوبُهُمْ وَبَيْنَ لَهُمُ الشَّيْطَانُ مَا كَانُوا يَعْمَلُونَ﴾

“Why did they not entreat when Our punishment overtook them! But their hearts were hardened, and Satan had made, what they had been doing, to seem decorous to them.”²

In another place, it states:

﴿ثُمَّ قَسَتْ قُلُوبُكُمْ مِنْ بَعْدِ ذَلِكَ فَهِيَ كَالْحِجَارِ وَأَشَدُّ قَسْوَةً مِنْهَا لَمَّا يَتَفَجَّرُ مِنْهُ الْأَنْهَارُ مِنْهَا لَمَّا يَنْشَقُّ فَيَخْرُجُ مِنْهُ الْمَاءُ مِنْهَا لَمَّا يَنْهَيْطُ مِنْ خَشْيَةِ اللَّهِ وَمَا اللَّهُ بِغَافِلٍ عَمَّا تَعْمَلُونَ﴾

“Then your hearts hardened after that; so they are like stones, or even harder. For indeed there are some stones from which streams gush forth, and indeed there are some of them that split, and water issues from them, and indeed there are some of them that fall for the fear of Allah. And Allah is not oblivious of what you do.”³

1– Sūrat Fus s ilat 41:51.

2– Sūrat al-An ‘ām 6:41.

3– Sūrat al-Baqarah 2:74.

Now, we have to see to which group we belong. God forbid that we belong to the third or fourth group. God has endowed man with ample blessings but sometimes these blessings are taken away and difficulties beyond expectation ensue. Can they be considered accidental? Have they nothing to do with God?

The magnitude of considering them as related to God depends on the level of our knowledge. For the faithful, none is outside the will and design of God. Even if he has a headache, he first asks relief from God and then resorts to a doctor and his prescribed medicine. It is true that he takes the prescribed medicine but he regards its effect as depending on the decree of God, for without His decree, it will not become effective. In sum, according to him, the origin of all actions is God and no one has an independent authority in the world or the entire dominion of God. For him, the entire universe is God's dominion and in His dominion no one has the right to exercise authority except by His leave.

Usually, in our ideological conversations and discussions, we say that the will and design of God are all-encompassing; everything is included and nothing is beyond the jurisdiction of His power and authority.

In philosophy, we are also very familiar with the issue of the Unity of Actions [*tawḥīd-e af'ālī*]. Perhaps, like other concepts this topic is very familiar to us but in practice most of us, like many other believers in God, forget this fact. We say that God is Omnipresent and All-seeing but in practice we tend to forget this truth. We prove the Unity of Actions by rational arguments and Qur'anic verses and traditions. Yet, we tend to forget it in practice. Therefore, whenever we encounter problems, they cannot be treated as nothing to do with God. As to what extent these problems originated from God, at least we believe that if He wished, He could have prevented them from happening.

According to a view, all afflictions of man, in the words of the Qur'an, are "Our punishment" [*ba'sunā*].¹ It is wrong to think that some calamities are from God while others are not because everything is within His authority. The ontological decree of God is a calamity to befall upon a person and thus it comes from Him. Anyone who has more knowledge and understands the concept of the Unity of Actions can grasp this point which is elaborately examined in philosophy. Of course, the calamities that God sends down on man are all products of his undesirable actions.

1— *Sūrat al-An'ām* 6:43, 148; *Sūrat al-A'rāf* 7:4-5, 97-98; *Sūrat Yūsuf* 12:110; *Sūrat al-Anbiyā'* 21:12; *Sūrat al-Ghāfir* 40:84-85.

There are many Qur'anic verses and traditions in this regard. In the Qur'an, God says:

﴿ذَلِكَ بِأَنَّ اللَّهَ لَمْ يَكُ مُغَيِّرًا نِعْمَةً أَنْعَمَهَا عَلَىٰ قَوْمٍ حَتَّىٰ يُغَيِّرُوا مَا بِأَنفُسِهِمْ ۗ إِنَّ اللَّهَ سَمِيعٌ عَلِيمٌ﴾

*“That is because Allah never changes a blessing that He has bestowed on a people unless they change what is in their own souls, and Allah is All-hearing, All-knowing.”*¹

It is possible that for the sake of the man of God, a calamity is withheld from a community although the community had no hand in this withholding of calamity. Or, just as He sends down a calamity out of His mercy, God also withholds it out of a divine scheme or purpose. Yet, He never takes back a blessing He has bestowed on a people unless they do something evil that causes this taking away of a blessing.

In another verse, God says:

﴿لَا يَغَيِّرُ اللَّهُ مَا يَفْعُو حَتَّىٰ يُغَيِّرُوا مَا بِأَنفُسِهِمْ﴾

*“Indeed Allah does not change a people's lot, unless they change what is in their souls.”*²

The meaning of this verse is the same as that of the previous verse, but it is more emphatic. According to this noble verse, we must acknowledge that the changing of some blessings into calamities is the result of our own actions. If we manage our affairs in a different way, the blessing [*ni'mah*] will not turn into vengeance [*niqmah*]. As the saying goes,

از ماست که بر ماست.

It is from us what is upon us.

﴿وَمَا أَصَابَكُمْ مِنْ مُصِيبَةٍ فِيمَا كَسَبَتْ أَيْدِيكُمْ وَيَعْفُو عَنْ كَثِيرٍ﴾

*“Whatever affliction that may visit you is because of what your hands have earned, and He excuses many [an offense].”*³

If only Allah wishes to punish all the people for their actions, no living creature will be left on the surface of the earth:

﴿وَلَوْ يُؤَخِّدُ اللَّهُ النَّاسَ بِظُلْمِهِمْ مَا بُرِّحَ عَلَيْهِمُ مِنَ اللَّهِ بَشَرٌ﴾

1– Sūrat al-Anfāl 8:53.

2– Sūrat al-Ra'd 13:11.

3– Sūrat al-Shawrā 42:30.

“Were Allah to take mankind to task for their wrongdoing, He would not leave any living being upon it.”¹

﴿ وَلَوْ يُؤَخِّدُ اللَّهُ النَّاسَ بِمَا كَسَبُوا مَا تَرَ عَلَى ظَهْرِهَا مِنْ دَابَّةٍ ﴾

“Were Allah to take mankind to task because of what they had earned, He would not leave any living being on its back.”²

By sending down worldly calamities on people, God’s aim is to warn and not punish them, so that they turn to Him and realize that they are living under the dominion of God:

﴿ ظَهَرَ الْفَسَادُ فِي الْبَرِّ وَالْبَحْرِ بِمَا كَسَبَتْ أَيْدِي النَّاسِ لِيُذِيقَهُمْ بَعْضَ الَّذِي عَمِلُوا لَعَلَّهُمْ يَرْجِعُونَ ﴾

“Corruption has appeared in land and sea because of the doings of the people’s hands, that He may make them taste something of what they have done, so that they may come back.”³

Usually, when there is calamity, everybody is afflicted. As the saying goes,

تر و خشک با هم می سوزد.

The wet as well as the dry catch fire.

In this case, for those who are not sinful, the calamity is a trial while it is requital for those who are sinful.

Motives behind supplication

Supplication is a voluntary act and requires motivation. The motives of supplicants are so diverse and the value of their supplications depends on the value of their motives.

1. Sometimes, the motive of man in supplicating is the fulfillment of material needs. For example, he asks for money, house, offspring, health, and the like from God. Therefore, his motive is his desire for these things.

It is true that this kind of request is an inferior sign of man’s aspiration but it is good in itself, for it is an indication of the supplicant’s belief in God as the Ultimate Cause. So, such a person is not equal to another person who is also interested in those things but does not pray to God to achieve them.

Since the first person recognizes God and regards Him as the Ultimate Cause in the world, he supplicates to God for the fulfillment of his needs but the second person has no belief in these things. He pursues the realization of

1– Sūrat an-Nah 1 16:61.

2– Sūrat Fāt ir 35:45.

3– Sūrat al-Rūm 30:41.

his requests only through material means. In comparing these two persons, because of calling upon God and expressing servitude and poverty before God, the first person will attain a certain stage of perfection but his aspiration is not high as it is only limited to the confinement of this world. The second person, however, is totally outside the race and he will achieve no perfection. Thus, this is one of the degrees of supplication which in itself is valuable and desirable.

2. A higher degree or stage is that man's motive is higher and loftier in which he requests spiritual success in worship. For such a person, the value of spiritual and otherworldly matters is more than that of mundane and worldly matters. Therefore, material things are insignificant for him. If only man knew that God grants whatever he requests—provided that he really believes in the hereafter—he will not ask for worldly matters unless they are intended for otherworldly purposes or for another motive, which will be mentioned later.

For this reason, the recorded supplications of the saints of God [*awliyā'*] are so sublime and can never be compared to our supplications. It is true that our supplications are desirable and a form of worship as they are based on faith and can contribute to our spiritual perfection, but their contribution to our perfection is weak. If, instead of supplicating for material requests, man supplicates for spiritual requests and success in worship, God will increase his gnosis [*ma'rifah*] and faith [*īmān*] and grant him success in doing meritorious works. As such, he can move fast along the path of perfection. The value of such supplication is more than that of supplication for material needs because it is a sign of man's strong faith in God and the hereafter. According to such a person, the hereafter is much better and abiding:

﴿وَالْآخِرُ خَيْرٌ مِنَ الْبَقِيَّةِ﴾

“*And the Hereafter is better and more lasting.*”¹

3. Sometimes, the motive behind supplication is loftier than that which has been mentioned. In this degree or stage, the motive of the supplicant is merely to talk to God and obey His command. The essence of supplication is his aim. Asking for something is a mere excuse to knock at the Door of the Friend. He supplicates because God commands him to supplicate. In this degree or stage, what is requested is not important. Whether it is spiritual or material makes no difference, although supplication for spiritual matters is better. At this juncture, however, supplication for anything is desirable.

1— *Sūrat al-A'īlā* 87:17.

Such a person sees himself in the midst of the vast ocean of Divine mercy. So, for the minutest details of his affairs, he supplicates to God.

If a person has such a motive, his supplication is of lofty value even though it concerns secondary or trivial affairs. Such supplication is valuable not on account of its being material or spiritual but because he considers God the Ultimate Cause, believing that all things are within His power. Such a supplication is valuable because the supplicant is not interested in what is requested in supplication but since God loves His servant who supplicates, he thus supplicates.

Had only God not obligated supplication—“*Call Me, and I will hear you!*”¹ and “*And ask Allah for His grace*”²—he would never ask those things from God, but since God has said that He likes His servant raising his hands towards Him, he thus supplicates. Such a supplication cannot be compared with the rest of supplications. It is only done by the one whose heart is attached to none but God.

As long as man is attached to worldly and even otherworldly matters, consciously or unconsciously, he is in pursuit of obtaining them. Of course, if a person has faith in God and asks from Him whatever he needs, there is nothing wrong. Evidently, everyone asks God for something, depending on one’s degree of gnosis and faith. But for those who have attained high levels of faith and gnosis, there is nothing wrong to pray to God for trivial matters for the reason that He wants His servant to ask Him. Therefore, he also prays to God for his secondary worldly affairs.

Thus, sometimes, elaboration in supplication and requesting for secondary matters is desirable because it enhances the spirit of servitude, humility and helplessness before God. Such a supplication shows the depth of belief of the faithful who does not rely on other than God even in insignificant matters.

At this point, two points are worthy of mention:

1. Man must always pay attention to his needs and ask for them only from God, the Exalted. He must bear in mind, however, that his needs are not limited to mundane and worldly needs. In fact, his main needs are spiritual in nature. Among our greatest and most important needs are the blessings of Islam, *wilāyah* and guidance [*hidāyah*]. They must also be sought from God.

1— *Sūrat Ghāfir* (or *al-Mu’min*) 40:60.

2— *Sūrat al-Nisā’* 4:32.

It is reported in traditions that saints of Allah were praying to God for martyrdom:

وَقَاتِلَا فِي سَبِيلِكَ فَوْقَ لَنَا.

“And make us succeed in attaining martyrdom in Your way.”¹

Such a request shows the extent of their desire to be in the company of their Lord. We must also learn from them. We must also ask God to grant us sincere intention so that we can talk to Him sincerely, truthfully and mystically.

2. Another point which is encouraged in the Islamic culture of people is to supplicate for others—both for their material and spiritual affairs. Apart from enhancing man’s attention to God, praying for others also increases the believers’ love and affection for one another. Even in supplication, the spirit of sacrifice, love and compassion which the faithful must have towards others must be manifested.

The following is a famous narration [*riwāyah*] from Imām Ḥasan al-Mujtabā (‘a): “One night I woke up and heard my mother (Ḥaḍrat Fāṭimah al-Zahrā (‘a)) supplicating only for others up to the end. I asked her, ‘Mother, why do you not supplicate for yourself?’ She answered, ‘Neighbors first, then family’ [*al-jāru thumma’d-dār*].”²

So, supplication for others is loftier than supplication for oneself especially if it is for the spiritual affairs of the faithful.

The meaning of arrogance in supplication

In verse 60 of *Sūrat al-Mu’min*, God says:

﴿قَالَ رَبُّكُمْ ادْعُونِي أَسْتَجِبْ لَكُمْ إِنَّ الَّذِينَ يَسْتَكْبِرُونَ عَنْ عِبَادَتِي سَيَدْخُلُونَ جَهَنَّمَ مَخْرِبِينَ﴾

“Your Lord has said, ‘Call Me, and I will hear you!’ Indeed those who are disdainful of My worship will enter hell in utter humility.”³

Now, we want to know the meaning of arrogance in supplication. Three forms of arrogance in supplication can be identified:

1. Sometimes, a person does not supplicate due to negligence. Weakness of faith makes him negligent of knocking at the Door of Allah. Therefore, in facing problems he first goes to the material means and is heedless of the Cause of causes. For example, whenever he is sick, instead of turning to

1– Part of a supplication recited in the nights of Ramad ān.

2– *Bihar al-Anwār*, vol. 43, section 4, p. 81, *hadīth* 3.

3– *Sūrat Ghāfir* (or *al-Mu’min*) 40:60.

God, he refers to a doctor and his prescribed medicine. In many cases, if another person would remind him of his negligence, he will acknowledge it. This lack of attention to God does not stem from arrogance. It is rather due to the weakness of his faith.

2. At times, because of a wrong notion a person refuses to supplicate. For example, he has heard that Allah has inalterable precedents [*sunan*] which must be followed. He believes that God has provided a solution to every problem. So, he asks himself, “What is the use then of supplication? Headache must be relieved by taking some medicine, and not by supplicating.” This notion does not originate from one’s arrogance. It derives from the defect of his faith. He does not know God correctly and has not grasped the relationship between God and the universe. His knowledge of *tawhīd* and the true effects of supplication is weak.

3. There are also times when a person says to himself: “I will solve every problem I have and provide my own needs. Why should I turn to God? Why should I wake up at midnight and express humility to God?” This is arrogance in supplication for he disdains from asking anything from God, regarding it as a sort of defect for him.

Some “religious reformers” claim that Islam does not want man to be humble even before God. They even consider recitations in prayer such as *Allāhu akbar* [Allah is the great] and *Bismillāhi’r-rahmāni’r-rahīm* [In the Name of Allah, the All-merciful, the All-compassionate] as political slogans. According to them, man should not bow down and express humility in front of anyone. They assert, “Crying is the practice of kids and old women! If a person returns to his primordial self and recognizes himself as strong and powerful he will never cry. He must never cry even before God.”

Unfortunately, these individuals attribute this notion to Islam, labeling it as “Islamology” [*Islāmshināsī*!] They should be asked, “If this is Islamology, what then is *kufreshināsī*?!”

The truth and essence of worship is the expression of humility. We read in the Qur’an thus:

﴿وَعَنَتِ الْوُجُوهُ لِلْحَيِّ الْقَيُّومِ﴾

“All faces shall be humbled before the Living One, the All-sustainer.”¹

1— *Sūrat T ā Hā* 20:111.

﴿وَلَهُ أَسْلَمَ مَنْ فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ طَوْعًا وَكَرْهًا وَإِلَيْهِ يُرْجَعُونَ﴾

“While to Him submit whosoever there is in the heavens and the earth, willingly or unwillingly, and to Him they will be brought back.”¹

The pride of man is for him to comprehend the greatness of God and express humility and meekness before Him. The Commander of the Faithful (‘a) who knew God well said:

إِلَهِي كَفَى بِي عِزًّا أَكُوْ لَكَ عَبْدًا وَكَفَى بِي فَخْرًا تَكُوْ لِي رَبًّا.

“O Lord! It is enough honor for me that I am Your servant and it is enough pride for me that You are my Lord.”²

Expression of servitude to God is the highest degree of servitude and man’s acknowledgment of his being God’s servant is the highest form of human dignity. The more one’s servanthood is expressed to God, the more man attains spiritual perfection and becomes nearer to God. Of course, it is evident that God does not need these things. Rather, as stated earlier, it is desirable to God for the reason that this act contributes to man’s perfection.

Transmitted supplications

It is true that supplication in any language, expression and intonation anytime anywhere, that is based on sincere intention, is wholesome, useful and effective, but the best supplications are those transmitted to us from the *awliyā*’ of Allah, such as the supplications quoted from Prophets (‘a) and the meritorious servants of God as mentioned in the Holy Qur’an or recorded in the noble traditions of the Holy Prophet (s) and the pure Imāms (‘a). These supplications are superior to other supplications for two reasons:

1. These supplications are transmitted from those who knew the etiquettes of worship better than us. Their knowledge of God was more than that of others and they were also more acquainted with the ways and manners of supplication compared to the rest of people. In addition, because of their more perfect gnosis [*ma‘rifah*], whatever they requested is more desirable and better than our requests. Therefore, we must learn from them how to supplicate and what to ask for.

It can be said that the supplications transmitted to us from the Imāms (‘a) in general are different in every aspect with our frame of mind and requests in

1– *Sūrat Āl ‘Imrān* 3:83.

2– *Bihār al-Anwār*, vol. 77, p. 402, *h adīth* 23.

supplication. In most cases, their supplications begin with the praise and eulogy of Allah [*ḥamd*] and glorification [*tasbīḥ*] by citing “There is no god but Allah” [*tahlīl*] and “Allah is the great” [*takbīr*]. Instead of complaint and petition, their supplications contain appeals for forgiveness. Instead of denying blessings or complaining against deficiencies and deprivations, the infinite blessings and graces of God are mentioned. What they rarely mention are requests for material and worldly possessions, while nearness to God and His pleasure, as well as, human perfections are always highlighted.

Meanwhile, much of the lofty and sublime knowledge about God which could not be stated through narrations [*riwāyāt*] have been transmitted through supplications, especially the supplications of Imām al-Sajjād (‘a). While supplicating, the Imāms of guidance (‘a) were fervently praying to Him, the Divine Essence. So, they used to express by tongue what was in their hearts and talk to Him the way they knew Him, glorifying and hymning His praises. In narrations, however, since most of their addressees were various people, it was impossible for them to express all their knowledge about God. Instead, they were supposed to express the truths according to their levels of understanding:

كَلِّمِ النَّاسَ عَلَى قَدْرِ عَقُولِهِمْ.

“Talk to the people according to the levels of their intellect.”

The Messenger of Allah (ṣ) said:

إِنَّا مَعَاشِرَ الْأَنْبِيَاءِ أُمِرْنَا أَنْ نَكَلِّمَ النَّاسَ عَلَى قَدْرِ عَقُولِهِمْ.

“Verily, we prophets have been commanded to talk to the people according to the levels of their intellect.”¹

2. By reading the supplications transmitted from the prophets and the Imāms of guidance (‘a), we are actually following them and are included in the tradition which encourages us to imitate the Messenger of Allah (ṣ) and His *awliyā’*. So, by reading the supplications of the Imāms (‘a), apart from reciting the best of supplications through the best of etiquettes, we are actually acting upon the conduct of the *awliyā’* of Allah, which in itself is another virtue added to the act of supplicating itself.

Of course, following the holy personages has enormous benefits. The greatest of its benefits, which is relevant to the present discussion, is that man will not be afflicted with arrogance and feel that there are individuals superior and better than him and that he is far behind them. This point has great importance in the purification of the self. Many of those who were

1– *Bihār al-Anwār*, vol. 1, p. 85, *ḥ adīth* 7.

purifying their souls—after purging themselves of the moral impurities and reaching some stages of perfection—when they compared themselves with others, saw themselves superior to them and succumbed to arrogance. This itself is one of the moral impurities of man. But once a person realizes that the caravan of the servants of Allah and wayfarers along His path is the caravan ahead of all others, he will feel humble before God. This realization will prevent man from becoming arrogant.

The efforts of those, who have been deprived of the blessing of the *wilāyah* of the *Ahl al-Bayt* (‘a)—even if they have sincere intentions and undergone self-mortifications—in self-purification, have become useless because they committed mistakes mostly derived from their arrogance. Since they do not know the station of the pure Imāms (‘a) who have been leading the caravan of humanity, they sometimes imagine that they have attained the station of *qutbiyyah* [polarity] and *wilāyah*. Thus, they sometimes issue statements which never behoove a servant of God. This is while the Holy Apostle (ṣ) who is the best of creation used to recite till the last moment of his life: “I bear witness that Muḥammad is His Messenger.” Such notions can never be held by those who truly follow the *Ahl al-Bayt* (‘a). This in itself is the greatest blessing of their *wilāyah*.

The supplications transmitted by tradition [*ad‘iyyah ma’thūrah*] have such virtues. It must be noted, however, that those who have traversed the high stages of humanity and reached lofty stations of proximity to God sometimes say things in their litanies which are unbecoming for us to say because they are inconsistent with our conditions and dispositions; for us to express them will not be based on sincerity. For example, in *Du‘ā’ Kumayl* which is a noble and valuable supplication, Ḥaḍrat ‘Alī (‘a) said while addressing God:

فَهَبْنِي يَا إِلَهِي وَسَيِّدِي وَمَوْلَايَ وَرَبِّي صَبْرْتُ عَلَى عَذَابِكَ، فَكَيْفَ أَصْبِرُ عَلَى فِرَاقِكَ، وَهَبْنِي
صَبْرٌ عَلَى حَرِّ نَارِكَ، فَكَيْفَ أَصْبِرُ عَنِ النَّظَرِ إِلَى كَرَامَتِكَ.

“Then suppose, my Allah, my Master, my Protector and my Lord, that I am able to endure Your chastisement, how can I endure separation from You? And suppose that I am able to endure the heat of Your fire, how can I endure not gazing upon Your Generosity?”

These statements are only suitable to the accomplished *awliyā’* of Allah, and everyone cannot claim them. Only he who knows what a mystical union [*waṣl*] and separation [*firāq*] is can express such feelings. But he who is ignorant of a union has no right to say that he is suffering from separation from God. Only he who knows what union is and for whom it is desirable suffers from separation. So long as we do not know God nor grasp His

perfection, we will never feel pain on being separated from Him. So, we cannot say that we can endure His punishment but not separation from Him?

How can he who cries loudly, (that borders on *kufṛ*) for suffering from a common headache or toothache, which is not even one-millionth of the pain of the chastisement in the hereafter, ever claim that he can endure the torment of the hellfire but not separation from God?! What do we know of the mystical union with God that we can endure the hellish punishment?

Expression of such points is suitable only to personalities such as the Commander of the Faithful (‘*a*). For us to express them is so far from reality. Yet, such points can be noticed in many transmitted supplications. If we want to utter these statements with the intention of showing our inner state and condition, it is a lie and telling a lie to God is far worse than lying to His creatures. Therefore, in such supplications we must have the intention of narrating [*ḥikāyah*]. For instance, with the intention of narrating, we have to quote what Ḥaḍrat ‘Alī (‘*a*) uttered in supplication, and not with the intention of expressing it by ourselves because it is unbecoming of us. We should also have the intention of praying to God to grant us the necessary gnosis by which we deserve to utter such statements.

Need to reflect on religious laws and repercussions of disrespectful acts

Supplication means asking God for something and talking to Him. Man knows the thing he wants and understands what he talks about. Some people have this wrong notion that reading the transmitted supplications brings no benefit to those who cannot understand them because they do not understand what they are reciting and asking God for; they are just uttering some words. It is better for them not to read them, but talk to God in their respective languages according to their cognition of Him. This view has also been raised against the recital of the Qur’an. They assert that reading the Qur’an brings no benefit to those who cannot understand its meaning and wastes their precious time!

Of course, it is true that there is much difference between an understood supplication and a supplication which is merely a verbal exercise. So is it with the reading of the Qur’an. Further, there is great difference between reading it without the presence of heart and with the presence of heart. Thus, those who do not understand the meaning of the supplications or verses of the Qur’an must learn to understand what they are telling God and what He is telling them. Not to know the meaning of supplications or verses of the Qur’an, however, cannot be a *carte blanche* to abandon their recitation or recite them in another language.

If this notion gains currency, it will reach the point of claiming that it is better for the ritual prayers to be translated into other languages as well, and for every nation to pray according to their own language.¹ Thereafter, it will gradually be asserted that there is essentially no need for the movements and pauses in prayer, to bend and bow down! Is God a dictator who obliges us to bow down in front of Him? Finally, the spirit of obedience [*ta'abbud*] to the commandments of God and the Apostle (s) will be undermined and uprooted altogether.

The point of deviation of some political groups claiming to be Islamic and whose many members were truly Muslims started from pseudo-intellectual interpretation of religious matters. We must deal with religious issues with extra care. The limits of devotional matters should not be trespassed; otherwise we will meet the same ignominious fate.

Like other revealed religions, Islam has also devotional matters which are not based on our personal understanding, knowledge and philosophy. Basically, the spirit of Islam is this very submission and obedience to God.² The servant of God is he who submits to Him, obeys Him whether he can comprehend the wisdom behind the command or not, tries to know what his Master wants and do it. If he only acts on a thing which he understands, it is actually self-worship and not servitude to God. If we only abide by the orders which we know to be obviously beneficial to us, it is actually self-worship and not the worship of God. The essence of worship of God is for man to abide by the commandment of God whether it is ostensibly beneficial or harmful to him.

When Ḥaḍrat Ibrāhīm (Abraham) (‘a) was commanded by God to sacrifice his son, he never asked himself whether this act was beneficial to himself, his son, the society or not, or even if it was lawful or not. As soon as he received the revelation, he decided to sacrifice his son as he was commanded. This act of Prophet Ibrāhīm (‘a) shows the spirit of his obedience.

In essence, the philosophy of religious legislation is to enhance the spirit of unconditional submission to God’s Will by servitude and worship.

Of course, we know that the laws of Islam ensure the welfare of individuals and society, but our motive in obeying the commands of God must not be individual or social interests. Instead, we must worship God with the motive of serving Him [*‘ubūdiyyah*]. We worship Him because He is the Master

1– It is said that this point has been raised in Turkey.

2– Imām ‘Alī (‘a) said: “Islam means submission.” [*Al-Islām wa huwa ‘t-taslīm*]. *Bihār al-Anwār*, vol. 68, p. 309, section 35, *h adīth* 1.

[*mawlā*] and we are His servants. It is evidently clear that the All-wise Master does not command anything silly. But our motive should not be to ensure personal or social interests.

In most cases, many religious laws and decrees are ordained with the purpose of strengthening our spirit of servitude. Most of the *H ajj* ritual and acts constitute such laws; for example, stationing in certain places at specific periods of time; avoidance of perfume; cutting of hair and the like; circumambulating the *Ka'bah* [*tawāf*]; brisk walking or jogging [*sa'y*] between the mounts of *Şafā* and *Marwah* in a certain manner at specific times; and other acts. According to a preacher, such acts serve as a sort of “training for servitude”.¹

By observing the conditions and holding the obligatory ceremonies and rituals, one who goes to Mecca to perform *Hajj* is actually saying, “O God! Since you have commanded me, I am going to *Hajj*. According to your commandments, I stand, run, cut my hair, and apply no perfume.”² In performing the Islamic devotional and religious acts, it has been emphasized that the people must obey the commandments of God and the spirit of obedience must be enhanced in man. Instead of entertaining self-worship and false pretexts in his mind, he must think of obeying the commands of God.

So, we must not look for the reasons and wisdom behind all the laws and decrees of Islam. According to the Islamic law, by referring to the Book and the *Sunnah*, we must act upon whatever is commanded therein, and not try to find a reason. We must examine the source of reference of religious decrees and act upon them after their authenticity is proved.

Of course, the pioneers of religion have stated the wisdom behind religious laws in many cases but it does not suggest that whenever we do not know the wisdom behind a religious decree, we will not accept it or cast doubt upon it. Religious obligations must be observed unconditionally exactly in the way they are ordained. We must accept anything whose wisdom is explained by the pioneers in religion or proved by science and experiment,

1– It alludes to the late *H ajj* Shaykh ‘Alī Akbar Turbatī (may his soul be sanctified).

2– It is worth-mentioning that while in the state of *ih rām*, certain things are prohibited for the pilgrim; for example, applying perfume, using a mirror, staying under a shade, removing hair from the body, etc. One of the rituals of *H ajj* and ‘*Umrah* [optional pilgrimage] is *h alq* or *taqs īr* which means shaving of head or trimming of hair and cutting nails. The two must not be confused. *H alq* or *taqs īr* is performed at a specific stage of *H ajj* and by doing so, the pilgrim is no longer in the state of *ih rām*.

and also not reject anything whose wisdom is not explained by the pioneers of religion or proved by science and experiment. However, our knowledge must be improved so as to better understand the positive and negative points of the religious laws.

Therefore, reading of the Qur'an, performance of the ritual prayers and recital of transmitted supplications must be done in exactly the same way as ordained. The movements and pauses in prayer must be observed in the same manner and order. It cannot be asserted that it is better if we perform the dawn [*ṣubḥ* or *fajr*] prayer after sunrise as we are more mirthful then, and things like that. These statements are repugnant to the spirit of obedience and a kind of interference in God's work. Inside the prison cells of the Shāh's regime, there were pseudo-intellectuals who spent hours reading the Qur'an or long *sūrahs* of the Qur'an such as the *Sūrat al-Baqarah* (which consists of 286 verses) in ritual prayers but they used to perform the dawn prayer after its ordained time and did not worry about it. Tresspassing the limits of obedience [*ta'abbud*] ends up in such things.

Sometimes, some of them would talk about the issue of discipline. They used to say: "Every person must be well-disciplined and perform every prayer at its appointed time. For example, he must perform the dawn prayer at exactly six o'clock in the morning and the noon [*ẓuhr*] prayer at exactly 12 o'clock noon!"

It is clear, however, that because of the changing religious [*shar'ī*] times for every ritual prayer, the times for prayers cannot be organized in that way because sometimes, the religious noontime is 12 o'clock while at other times it is a few minutes before or after that. If, in the name of discipline and order, we decide to perform our prayers before or after their religiously appointed times, it is equivalent to disobedience.

Even if performance of religious acts in exactly the way they are ordained has no outward benefit, it, at least, enhances the spirit of obedience in man. This reason alone is enough for man, and the greatest benefit of performing religious acts. Even in cases where the decree of God is outwardly harmful to a person or society, the embedded spirit of obedience compensates for it. This is the spirit of protecting the religion, its traditions and laws. One who is committed to observing religious obligations will never allow the divine law to be violated. For example, when socialist or capitalist economy is suggested instead of the Islamic economy, even if he thinks that it is outwardly more beneficial to society the obedient faithful person will do whatever God has ordered him.

After trespassing the limits of obedience and the sanctity of divine laws, critics will say that the social laws of Islam are meant for a particular period

of time in the past and now we have a better code of laws. The ordainment of *khums*¹ and *zakāt*² accordingly was meant to lessen the class gaps, but nowadays the issue of “public equality” is raised while private ownership has been undermined. As such, *khums* and *zakāt* are no more applicable.

Many of those who raise these issues are outwardly not against Islam. Instead, they imagine that such laws of Islam were meant for 14 centuries ago. Today, man can formulate laws for himself as the human intellect has developed and is no longer in need of following revealed instructions!

Thus, the objection based on the benefit of using non-Arabic languages in supplications on the ground of not understanding Arabic, finally ends up in treating the revelation and heavenly laws as antiquated. The religion is revealed by God and has given none of His servants the right to interfere in it:

﴿نُ الْحُكْمِ إِلَّا لِلَّهِ﴾

“Judgment belongs only to Allah.”³

﴿وَمَنْ لَمْ يُحْكَمْ بِمَا أَنْزَلَ اللَّهُ فَأُولَئِكَ هُمُ الْكَافِرُونَ﴾

“Those who do not judge by what Allah has sent down—it is they who are the faithless.”⁴

The Sabbathians who were among the Israelites were living by the seaside and their main occupation was fishing. A commandment from God was

1— *Khums*: literally means *one-fifth*. According to the Shī‘ah school of jurisprudence [*fiqh*], this one-fifth tax is obligatorily levied on every adult Muslim who is financially secure and has surplus in his income out of annual savings, net commercial profits, and all movable and immovable properties which are not commensurable with the needs and social standing of the person. *Khums* is divided into two equal parts: the Share of the Imām [*sahm al-Imām*] and the Share of the Sayyids/Sādāt (descendants of the Prophet (s)) [*sahm al-Sādāt*]. Accordingly, the Share of the Imām is to be paid to the living Imām, and in the period of occultation [*‘as r al-ghaybah*], to the most learned living *mujtahid* who is the giver’s *marja’ al-taqlīd* [source of emulation]. The other half of the *khums*, the Share of the Sayyids/Sādāt, is to be given to needy pious Sayyids who lack the resources for one’s year respectable living in consonance with their various statuses. For more information, see Sayyid Muhammad Rizvi, *Khums: An Islamic Tax* (Toronto: Islamic Education and Information Center, 1992), <http://www.al-islam.org/beliefs/practices/khums.html>. [Trans.]

2— *Zakāt*: the tax levied on various categories of wealth and spent on the purposes specified in *Sūrat al-Tawbah* (or, *Barā’ah*) 9:60. [Trans.]

3— *Sūrat al-An‘ām* 6:57.

4— *Sūrat al-Mā’idah* 5:44.

revealed for them not to go fishing on Saturdays and devote it only to the worship of God. God wished to test them. Fish used to increase on Saturdays as compared to the rest of the week. In a bid to catch more fish and not inflict harm to their economy, they invented crafty methods through which the fish got trapped. They made ponds near the seashore. On Saturdays they would connect these ponds to the sea so that the fish would rush towards them, and then close the connections. The following day, they would catch the fish stranded in the ponds. Outwardly, there was nothing wrong with this practice and it had no conflict with the religious law for they were forbidden to catch fish on the Sabbath and not to fill ponds with fish. It was a trick to circumvent the religious injunctions as our tricks to circumvent God's decrees with our false justifications for the practice of usury [*ribā*']. Most probably, if we were with them, we would have accepted the same practice, but because of this act of violation God transformed those people into apes and annihilated them shortly afterwards.

This is neither fiction nor part of the distorted [*taḥrīf*] parts of the Torah [*tawrāt*] and the Evangel [*injīl*], but mentioned in the Qur'an.¹

Those who are God-wary must take lessons from these stories. They must not play with the religion of God and His laws and practice "religious fraud". The religion is that which God has commanded and its laws are exactly those mentioned by the Apostle (ṣ) and the Imāms (‘a).

Approaching religious laws with fraud will invite calamities to descend upon us. Playing with the religion of God will lead to the annihilation of the players. In any case, it is necessary to perform the prayers, read the Qur'an and make supplications. Praying in Arabic is obligatory [*wājib*] but reading the Qur'an and making supplications in Arabic are recommended [*muṣtaḥabb*]. Again, in spite of the great difference between the supplication whose meaning is understood and whose meaning is not understood by the supplicant, it cannot be asserted that the supplication or reading of the Qur'an by one who cannot understand what he is reciting is useless. Even if it has no benefit except the strengthening of the spirit of obedience to God, it is better than all acts of one who understands their meanings but introduces innovation in religion [*bid‘ah*]. A small act of obedience has preference over hundreds of years of self-formulated acts of devotion. The former is servitude to God while the latter is self-worship.

So are the transmitted supplications. They contain the basis of enhancing the spirit of obedience in addition to other benefits they might have. Can it be

1– *Sūrat al-Baqarah* 2:65-66; *Sūrat al-A‘rāf* 7:166.

said that an illiterate person who sits facing the *qiblah*¹ and recites the *Du‘ā‘ Kumayl*² while in a state of ablution [*wuḍū*] pays no attention to God? Does he not want to be encompassed by the noble content of supplication which Ḥaḍrat ‘Alī (‘a) asked from God? So, remembrance and attention to God is among the benefits of reading the Qur’an and supplicating in Arabic, which is also very valuable.

Reading of the Qur’an by the faithful during the month of Ramaḍān preserves the religion. Similarly, mourning for the Doyen of the Martyrs and other Imāms (‘a) has so far ensured the survival of Islam and Shī‘ism. The way it is performed in some cases is not ideal but a sublime spirit is embedded in them—submission to God, honoring the religion and *awliyā‘* of religion, etc. Of course, we must also strive to improve the way mourning ceremonies are conducted while, at the same time, preserve the spirit of obedience to God. However, until the more ideal way is not yet achieved, these traditions must be preserved.

Evidently, devotional acts cannot be changed, but things, like mourning ceremonies, which are accidental [*‘araḍī*] (and not essential [*jawharī*]), they can be held in better ways. In such cases, the best way is that which emanates from the pure nature of human beings and affirms the religious sentiments of people without being taught by outsiders to do so.

The notion that it is better when mourning ceremonies are held in an organized and peaceful manner like the way demonstrations are held in Western countries is wrong, simply because religious demonstrations must stem from religious enthusiasm, and calmness is incompatible with religious enthusiasm. This can be the case with respect to customs, but those practices whose form and manner of performance have been defined by religion should not be changed in the least. They must be done the way God has commanded even if we imagine that there is a better way of doing the same.

It is reported in a tradition that Imām al-Ṣādiq (‘a) was teaching someone a supplication, saying to him: “Say, ‘O Transformer of hearts! Make my heart

1– *Qiblah*: the direction which the Muslims face at times of prayers and other acts, which is the *Ka‘bah* in Mecca. [Trans.]

2– *Du‘ā‘ Kumayl* [Supplication of Kumayl]: The supplication taught by Imām ‘Alī (‘a) to one of his loyal companions and staunch supporters of Islam, Kumayl ibn Ziyād. Usually offered on every night preceding Friday [*Laylat‘ul-Jum‘ah*] individually or in congregation after *‘Ishā‘* prayers, this supplication envisages divine teachings and solid foundations of religion in order to enable everyone to follow the right path to become a worthy Muslim. The Arabic text, English translation and commentary of this famous supplication are available online at <http://www.al-islam.org/kumayl>. [Trans.]

steadfast in Your religion'. He said: 'O Transformer of hearts and the All-seeing! Make my heart steadfast in Your religion.' The Imām ('a) said: 'Recite it as I am teaching you.' The person asked: 'Is God not All-seeing as well?' The Imām replied: 'Yes, He is, but you have to recite it as I have told you'.¹

If a person changes what an infallible Imām ('a) tells him or what religion has enjoined, it means he wants to say, "I understand things better than the Imām or the sacred religion." This mentality originates from egoism and arrogance, and is repugnant to worship and servitude. Humility, meekness, helplessness, submissiveness are requisites of worship. Imām al-Ṣādiq ('a) said:

"Satan said to God: 'O Lord! I swear by Your Might that if You would excuse me from prostrating before Ādam (Adam), in exchange for it I will worship You in such a way that no one in the world will exceed me.' God said: 'Verily, I want you to obey what I ask of you'.²

If we want to obey God as we wish, it is actually obeying the dictates of our hearts and not obedience to God. In sum, we have to follow exactly what has been ordained by the religion. We must be obedient in obligatory [*wājib*] and recommended [*mustahabb*] matters and not exceed their limits in the least. Exceeding the limits of religion is tantamount to the annihilation of religion.

This is not in conflict with our endeavor to know the rationality behind religious laws. Many of them have been mentioned in traditions and even the Qur'an. Some may also possibly be proven through science and experience. This in itself is desirable.

Likewise, we must bear in mind that even if one of the rationalities behind religious laws becomes known to us through a saying of the Apostle (ṣ) or an infallible Imām ('a) or through science and experience, it must not be imagined to be the totality of the religious laws' rationalities. There might be other rationalities which are unknown to us.

Therefore, the ritual prayers must be performed and the Qur'an and supplications be read or recited in exactly the same way they are ordained by religion. At the same time, we must strive more to understand their meanings and have the presence of the heart, and bear in mind that the value of the spirit of obedience is far greater than our own innovated forms of worship.

1– *Bihār al-Anwār*, vol. 52, p. 148, section 22, *h adīth* 3.

2– *Ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 262, section 32, *h adīth* 5.

Part Two

Commentary on

Du‘ā’ al-Iftitāḥ

First Discourse

Ramad ān

اللَّهُمَّ إِنِّي أَفْتَحُ الشَّاءَ بِحَمْدِكَ، وَأَنْتَ مُسَدِّدٌ لِلصَّوَابِ بِمَنِّكَ، وَأَيَقُنْتُ أَنَّكَ أَنْتَ أَرْحَمُ الرَّاحِمِينَ فِي مَوْضِعِ الْعَفْوِ وَالرَّحْمَةِ، وَأَشَدُّ الْمُعَاقِبِينَ فِي مَوْضِعِ النَّكَالِ وَالنَّقْمَةِ، وَأَعْظَمُ الْمُتَجَبِّرِينَ فِي مَوْضِعِ الْكِبْرِيَاءِ وَالْعِظْمَةِ، اللَّهُمَّ أذْنُتَ لِي فِي دُعَائِكَ وَمَسْأَلَتِكَ فَاسْمَعْ يَا سَمِيعَ مَدْحَتِي، وَأَجِبْ يَا رَحِيمَ دَعْوَتِي، وَأَقِلْ يَا غَفُورَ عَثْرَتِي.

“O Allah! I begin the ‘song of glorification’ with Your praise: You, give truth and salvation freely from Your bounties. I know for certain that You are the Most Merciful in disposing forgiveness and mercy, (but) very severe in punishing and chastising the wrongdoers, the Omnipotent in the domain of absolute power and might. O Allah! You have given me permission to invoke You and beseech You, so listen, O Hearer of my words of praise, and favorably reply to my supplication, and minimize my falling into misery, O Oft-forgiving.”

Ramad ān as a golden opportunity

Life is passing by swiftly and man is heedless of what capital he accumulates. When he sometimes succeeds in reminiscing his past, he realises that he has spent a lot of energy and strove hard, but acquired nothing substantial.

Throughout the year, we are always looking for an opportunity to think about life, its beginning and end and choose the way that leads to everlasting life. Yet, we rarely find that opportunity. Perhaps the best opportunity to be spent for such a purpose is the blessed month of Ramaḍān. Once the month of Ramaḍān arrives, we always pledge to engage more in worship than usual, to abandon the world and its glitters to some extent, to turn to God, and to think who we are, where we have come from, where we are heading for, and what we must do in this transient abode.

Finally, our waiting comes to an end and the month of Ramaḍān arrives, but Satan strives hard that man should not make use of this blessed period and acquire divine blessings. Satan’s open and hidden hands are at work everywhere so as to corrupt man’s intention with worldly and carnal desires, associate his supplications, litanies and worship with illness and

sluggishness, and deprive him of his desirable spiritual state. In this conflict or struggle between the divine and satanic forces, man has to ask for success [*tawfīq*] from God, take advantage of every opportunity, and not set aside supplications and other forms of worship for other times. He must strive hard to take a positive step towards his perfection and be closer to God. One of the acts which have highly been recommended for the blessed month of Ramaḍān is supplication and litany. Ramaḍān and supplication are inextricably interwoven with each other.

How to make the most of Ramad ān

To make the most of this month, initially we must implore God to grant us the opportunity to engage in supplication. Of course, we must also try our best to acquire the conditions necessary to engage in supplication, by lessening our normal daily activities and give more time to supplication and worship. We must be heedful of our sleeping and eating activities. Our sleeping and eating should not make us sluggish in our worship. We must organize our eating activity in such a manner that we can fast and perform our duties and devotion properly. Consuming the necessary amount of food is different from overeating. We must also organize our sleeping time in such a way that we feel enthusiastic at the time of worship, and not continue the daily activities as before and expect to have the energy and enthusiasm to perform night vigils and devotional acts.

Attention to supplication

Before reciting the supplication, it is but proper to think for a while who we are, whom we want to face, what supplication is, etc. It is indeed a sublime station for man to be able to intimately talk with His Creator! It is necessary for us to have a general idea of what we are reciting and not merely read Arabic sentences without understanding them. The supplications transmitted from the *Ahl al-Bayt* (‘a) contain lofty and sublime subjects, such that studying them is valuable. Therefore, before reciting the supplications, especially those mentioned for the month of Ramaḍān, those who do not know Arabic are supposed to read their translation, know their contents and thus benefit from it.

Different people benefit from supplications in diverse ways which are beyond our comprehension. Supplicating by a mere utterance of words with utmost observance of proper Arabic pronunciation is so different from supplicating with a presence of heart, and it is beyond explanation. In many cases, two persons are supplicating by observing the outward etiquettes of supplication such as supplicating in a state of ablution, sitting while facing the *qiblah* with great humility, but the benefits they acquire from

supplicating might be entirely different. To benefit from supplication depends on man’s spiritual state and the attention of his heart towards God, the Exalted and His Attributes, especially those mentioned in the supplication.

Ramad ān and iftitāh

Many supplications for the month of Ramaḍān have been recorded. In *Maḥāṣin al-Jinān*¹ alone which is a compendium of supplications transmitted from the Infallibles (‘a), there are so many supplications that perhaps we would not be able to read all of them even once in our lives, let alone other supplications recorded in treatises on supplication like *Al-Iqbāl* of Sayyid Ibn Ṭāwūs and other books of supplication. For example, there are transmitted long supplications to be read in the optional prayers [*nawāfil*] between the noon [*ẓuhr*] and afternoon [*‘aṣr*] prayers in the month of Ramaḍān. We can hardly perform the optional prayers, let alone reading the supplications associated with them. Sometimes, even if we have the opportunity to recite these supplications, the spirit of supplication, i.e. the presence of the heart which we are supposed to have at the time of supplication is absent.

One of the most appropriate and substantial transmitted supplications supposed to be read during the nights of Ramaḍān is the *Du‘ā’ al-Iftitāh*.²

1— *Maḥāṣin al-Jinān* [Keys to the Gardens of Paradise]: a standard manual of Shī‘ī devotion containing supplications and prayers of the infallible Imāms (‘a) as well as formulae for recitation at particular times or during visits to the shrines of the Imāms (‘a), compiled from *Bihār al-Anwār* [Oceans of Lights] and other sources by Shaykh ‘Abbās al-Qummī, a scholar of vast learning who died in Najaf in 1940. [Trans.]

2— ‘Allāmah Majlisī thus writes in *Zād al-Ma‘ād*: “Based on an authentic chain of transmission, it is reported that Ḥadīth al-Amr (‘atf) instructed his Shī‘ah to recite this supplication (*Du‘ā’ al-Iftitāh*) every night during the month of Ramaḍān for every supplication recited in the said month is recorded by angels who pray for forgiveness of the sins of the supplicant.” The late Ḥāj Shaykh ‘Abbās Qummī has also mentioned it in *Hadiyyat al-Zā‘irīn*.

While stating the chain of transmission of the supplications for the month of Ramaḍān, Sayyid Ibn Ṭāwūs in *Al-Iqbāl* mentioned the famous chain of transmission of this supplication by quoting Nasīr al-Sukūnī who said: “I asked Abū Bakr Ahmad ibn Muḥammad ibn Uthmān al-Baghdādī (may Allah have mercy on him) to teach me the supplications of the month of Ramaḍān which Abū Ja‘far Muḥammad ibn Uthmān (may Allah be pleased with him), one of the four special deputies [*nawwāb*] of the Imām of the Time (‘atf), used to recite. He then showed me a red-covered notebook from which I copied *Du‘ā’ al-Iftitāh* which was recommended for recitation every night of the month of Ramaḍān. It was also

This supplication teaches the supplicant how to behave and what to be attentive to at the time of supplication.

Praising God as the beginning of supplication

This noble supplication begins with the praise of God:

اللَّهُمَّ إِنِّي أَفْتَحُ النَّاءَ بِحَمْدِكَ .

“O Allah! I begin the ‘song of glorification’ with Your praise.”

In this turbulent world, many impediments prevent man from paying attention to God. The way to man’s happiness lies in servitude and worship of God, yet it is lamentable that most people are unaware of this reality. They pay attention to everything, except God and whatever guarantees their true perfection and felicity.

With the arrival of Ramaḍān, some impediments are removed and the necessary ground for supplication and worship are provided. In this spring of supplication and worship, those who are eager to remember their Beloved, sing His praise, implore and beseech Him. How should we begin our supplication? The best statement with which one can begin his supplication is by praising God: “O God, to whom all things belong! Whatever a person has is given by You. Whatever stage of perfection a person attains is granted by You. An opportunity [*tawfīq*] to supplicate must also be bestowed by You. O God! Give us the opportunity to supplicate. So many of Your servants throughout the world are negligent of Your remembrance! O Lord! Had You not held our hands, we would have been amongst the negligent. Whatever exists emanates from Your blessings.”

﴿بِيَدِكَ الْخَيْرُ إِنَّكَ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ﴾

“All good is in Your hand. Indeed You have power over all things.”¹

So, supplication must begin by praising and extolling God who has granted us the opportunity to pay attention to Him.

Choosing the correct path and divine approval

وَأَنْتَ مُسَدِّدٌ لِلصَّوَابِ بِمَنْكَ .

“You, give truth and salvation freely from Your Bounties.”

stated: “Verily, angels listen to this supplication and ask for forgiveness of the sins of its reciter.”

1– *Sūrat Āl ‘Imrān* 3:26.

If ever a person succeeds in treading the path of truth and salvation, it is actually a blessing bestowed by God, who has helped him along this way. This part of the supplication points to the fact that although man has been created free to choose the path of goodness or evil, God will help him if he chooses the right path. It is narrated in a *ḥadīth qudsī*, thus:

مَنْ تَقَرَّبَ إِلَيَّ شِبْرًا تَقَرَّرْتُ إِلَيْهِ ذِرَاعًا.

“Whoever gets closer to Me by a span [*wajab*], I will get closer to him by a cubit [*dharā*].”

It is an additional grace from God to help whoever chooses His path.

God’s mercy and wrath a blessing in disguise

If God is the source of all good and perfection and nothing comes from Him but good and beauty, why are some calamities, difficulties and even eternal punishments inflicted upon some of His servants?

The truth of the matter is that we assess the Acts of God according to our limited standards or criteria, expecting God to behave towards us according to our thinking, whereas our intellect and knowledge are limited and deficient:

﴿ وَمَا أُوتِيتُمْ مِنَ الْعِلْمِ إِلَّا قَلِيلًا ﴾

“And you have not been given of the knowledge except a few [of you].”¹

All Acts of God are anchored in wisdom and the best order of being, and we are unaware of their nature and mechanism. In places where God must be kind and compassionate to His servants, He is so kind and compassionate that its extent is beyond our comprehension. Yet, there are also times when there is no room for kindness and compassion. Instead, His Might, Power and Greatness are manifested. In such cases, chastisements and wrath are witnessed and the expression of His Might toward those who deserve His punishment is perfected. So, the supplication continues thus:

وَأَيَّقَنْتُ أَنَّكَ أَنْتَ أَرْحَمُ الرَّاحِمِينَ فِي مَوْضِعِ الْعَفْوِ وَالرَّحْمَةِ، وَأَشَدُّ الْمُعَاقِبِينَ فِي مَوْضِعِ التَّكَالُفِ وَالنَّقْمَةِ، وَأَعْظَمُ الْمُتَجَبِّرِينَ فِي مَوْضِعِ الْكِبْرِيَاءِ وَالْعِظْمَةِ، اللَّهُمَّ أذْنُتْ لِي فِي دُعَائِكَ وَمَسْأَلَتِكَ فَاسْمَعْ يَا سَمِيعُ مِدْحَتِي، وَأَجِبْ يَا رَحِيمُ دَعْوَتِي، وَأَقِلْ يَا غَفُورُ عَثْرَتِي.

“I know for certain that You are the Most Merciful in disposing forgiveness and mercy, (but) very severe in punishing and

1– *Sūrat al-Isrā’* (or *Banī Isrā’īl*) 17:85.

chastising the wrongdoers; the Omnipotent in the domain of absolute power and might.”

The need for fear and hope

The realization that he is a helpless servant who has nothing of his own before God and His Might, brings about the happiness of man. All good belongs to Allah. Every difficulty and misery he is in is a product of his own making. He must understand that he has chosen the wrong himself, and it is actually a declaration of war against God who will subject him to hardship. Man must always stand between fear [*khawf*] and hope [*rajā'*] and think that in spite of engaging much in the worship of God, it is possible that because of a wrongdoing, he will succumb to the severest wrath of God and leave this world in ignominy, or notwithstanding many sins he has committed, God will save him and grant him a pleasant fate.

To feel safe from the divine wrath is itself one of the cardinal sins. Even if a person spends his entire life in worship, he must not be contented with it, become arrogant and be certain of the fruit of his labor. To be arrogant and self-conceited is a major sin in the sight of God, the Exalted. Instead, one must always have fear, for if God leaves him alone for just a moment, he will fall into the lowest ebb.

As such, those who are nearer to God [*muqarrabīn*] like the apostles and *awliyā'* are more fearful of Allah. They comprehend His Might more, and notwithstanding the station He has granted them, they are afraid lest they should become arrogant for even a moment.

Meanwhile, God has considered hopelessness of His mercy as one of the gravest sins. No matter how sinful a person becomes, he must not be hopeless of divine mercy. Divine mercy is so all-encompassing that if a person really repents and turns to God, he will be forgiven. When His servant expresses his utmost humility before Him and his state of fear [*khawf*] and hope [*rajā'*] is at its peak, he has actually taken a step towards perfection:

إِنَّهُ لَيْسَ مِنْ عَبْدٍ مُؤْمِنٍ إِلَّا [و] فِي قَلْبِهِ نُورَانِ: نُورٌ خَفِيفَةٌ وَنُورٌ رَجَاءٍ، لَوْ وُزِنَ هَذَا لَمْ يَزِدْ عَلَى هَذَا وَلَوْ وُزِنَ هَذَا لَمْ يَزِدْ عَلَى هَذَا.

“There is no believer who does not have two lights in his heart: the light of fear and the light of hope. Were one of these to be measured

it would not exceed the other, and were the other one to be measured, it would not exceed this one.”¹

The ability to worship as a favor of God

After mentioning the Divine Attributes and praising God for the opportunities He has granted man, the supplication continues, thus:

اللَّهُمَّ إِنِّي لِي فِي دُعَائِكَ وَمَسْأَلَتِكَ.

“O Allah! You have given me permission to invoke You and beseech You.”

The point highlighted in this part of the supplication is so elegant, yet we are usually negligent of it. We imagine that by our supplications and litanies, we have done a great thing for which God is indebted to us. In this part of the supplication, however, the Imām (‘a) said: “O God! What a great blessing You bestowed on me by permitting me to knock at Your Door to supplicate and express my needs.” Perhaps, we are unaware of God’s enormous grace of allowing us to talk to Him, considering the innumerable sins we have committed throughout our life. As such, Imām al-Sajjād (‘a) said to God:

وَمِنْ أَعْظَمِ النِّعَمِ عَلَيْنَا جَزَاءُ ذِكْرِكَ عَلَيَّ أَلْسِنَتِنَا، وَإِذْنُكَ لَنَا بِدُعَائِكَ، وَتَنْزِيهِكَ وَتَسْبِيحِكَ.

“Among Your greatest favors to us is the recurrence of Your remembrance across our tongues, and Your permission to supplicate to You, declare You exalted, and call You holy!”²

To clarify this subtle point—although it must be acknowledged that the truth of the matter cannot be perfectly conveyed in this manner—let us take for example a person who has not failed in the least in loving and helping a friend. Now, his friend not only refuses to respond with gratitude, but opposes and becomes hostile to him. If his friend behaves in such a manner, it is possible that he will be tolerated many times, but finally human patience will end and he will abandon his friend. Yet, notwithstanding all the blessings God endowed us with, if the same servant goes against the will of God, not only will He not abandon him but will also give him the opportunity to worship and supplicate to Him.

1– *Bihār al-Anwār*, vol. 70, p. 352, *h adīth* 1.

This tradition is also recorded in Al-Kulaynī, *Al-Kāfī*, ed. ‘Alī Akbar al-Ghifārī, 4th edition, Dār Mus‘ab Dār at-Ta‘āraf, Beirut, 1401 AH, vol. 67, *h adīth* 1. [Trans.] 2– *Mafātīh al-Jinān*, The 15 Whispered Prayers, “The Whispered Prayer of the Rememberers”.

His servant's sin and the perpetuity of God's grace

After mentioning God's grace of permission to be in His Presence, the penitent servant of God asks for forgiveness and enumerates the Divine Attributes and states his requests:

فَاسْمَعْ يَا سَمِيعَ مِدْحَتِي، وَأَجِبْ يَا رَحِيمَ دَعْوَتِي، وَأَقِلْ يَا غَفُورَ عَثْرَتِي.

“So listen, O Hearer of my words of praise, and favorably reply to my supplication, and minimize my falling into misery, O Oft-forgiving.”

All his bodily limbs—his eyes, ears and other limbs, plus his heart—commit offences against God. In spite of all the blessings God has endowed, he wages war against Him, commits sins in His presence. Now, this servant wants to reconcile with God and expresses his requests, hoping that they will be granted! Such expectation of man from God is inconsistent with his attitude and sins. God is supposed to abandon such a servant and forget him. But not only does God not abandon him but also declines to reject him. Instead, God calls on him to get closer. It is recorded in a *ḥadīth qudsī*, thus:

لَوْ عَلِمَ الْمُدْبِينُ عَنِّي كَيْفَ إِشْتِيَاقِي بِهِمْ لَمَاتُوا شَوْقًا.

“Had the wretched known how fond I am of them, they would die out of fondness (of Me).”

Yes, if man reflects seriously, he will realize that it is the greatest grace of God to permit His sinful servant to supplicate to Him and grant his requests.

Second Discourse

The Essence of Supplication

فَكَمْ يَا إِلَهِي مِنْ كُرْبَةٍ قَدْ فَرَجْتَهَا وَهُمُومٍ قَدْ كَشَفْتَهَا، وَعَشْرَةٍ قَدْ أَقَلْتَهَا، وَرَحْمَةٍ قَدْ نَشَرْتَهَا،
وَحَلَقَةٍ بَلَاءٍ قَدْ فَكَّكْتَهَا.

“O my Allah many a trouble You have removed, many a sorrow You have dispelled, many a misery You have mitigated, and at all times Your Mercy was encompassing and You cut the tightening cords of the misfortunes.”

Recounting the blessings of God

After mentioning the innumerable blessings given by God and the permission to talk to Him, *Du‘ā’ al-Iftitāh* enumerates the various blessings of God which man is usually negligent of.

One of the blessings man is usually negligent of is the blessing of repelling and dispelling calamities and misfortunes—whether man was afflicted with them and then God relieved him of them, or dispelled them beforehand.

Unless man is beset with problems and difficulties, he will not realize the importance of the blessings God has bestowed on him. All of us, more or less, have experienced troubles and predicaments in our life and been relieved of them sooner or later. Yet, we easily forget them without pondering or reflecting on them. Reflecting on the circumstances surrounding those events awakens man and strengthens his relationship with his Creator.

Let us assume that a person or one of the members of his family is suffering from a serious illness and cannot afford to consult a doctor and follow his prescription but if he does not immediately undergo medical treatment, his life will be in danger. In such a situation, he resorts to any means available to relieve him and always fails. In such a time when he has no access to anything or any way out and is about to lose hope, he is suddenly provided with means that totally solve his problem.

Everyone more or less experiences such events in his life. However, we usually consider them ‘accidental’ and ‘coincidental’, and not God’s scheme. When our problems are solved, we do not realize that Divine grace has included us. Even if we attribute them to God, it is only lip service

because we do not actually believe that it was His grace that encompassed us and solved our problems.

In the system of creation, whatever happens—positive or negative—essentially happens by the will of God. Nothing will ever happen except by His leave. If a person receives a blessing, it is His will and permission. Also, if a calamity is removed from him, it is by God’s command. He has provided the natural and supernatural means and conditions for an act, some of which we know while of others we do not. But if our problems are solved in an unexpected way, we call it ‘chance’.

It is God who constantly nourishes man either through natural means such as trade, business and the like, or supernatural means such as the heavenly table [*al-mā’idah*]¹ and the like. In any case, sustenance comes from Him and He is the Sustainer. Repelling and dispelling of difficulties also lie in His hand. Illness comes from Him; so does the cure, through medical treatment and intake of medicine, or other ways. The Glorious Qur’an quotes Ḥaḍrat Ibrāhīm (Abraham) (‘a) saying:

﴿ اَللّٰهُ خَلَقَنِيْ فَهُوَ يَهْدِينِ * وَكَذٰلِكَ هُوَ يُطْعَمُنِيْ وَيَسْقِيْنِيْ * وَاِذَا مَرِضْتُ فَهُوَ يَشْفِينِ * وَكَذٰلِكَ يُمِيتُنِيْ ثُمَّ يُحْيِيْنِيْ ﴾

“(It is God) who created me, and it is He who guides me, and provides me with food and drink, and when I get sick, it is He who cures me; who will make me die, then He will bring me to life.”²

It is necessary to ponder on events that have not happened to us but happened to others. If we go out in the morning and return home safely at night, it is God’s will to remove hundreds of calamities and difficulties along our way. Just as He has endowed us with eyes, He has also repelled hundreds of threats to our eyes to maintain our sight. Just as He has given us physical bodies, He has also deterred hundreds of dangers to keep us healthy.

Most important of all are the spiritual blessings of God. He has given us the blessing of faith and intellect. Many people leave their homes in the morning having faith but return back in the evening with weak or no faith at all. They fast during Ramaḍān this year but cannot do so next year. Many people had been on the straight path at the beginning but gone astray after sometime and succumbed to deviant and eclectic schools and currents. Don’t we all know of people who have lost their way?

1— See *Sūrat al-Mā’idah* 5:112-115. [Trans.]

2— *Sūrat al-Shu‘arā’* 26:78-81.

Perpetuity of blessings lies in the hand of God

The blessings of guidance, knowledge of God, His Apostle (s) and the infallible Imāms (‘a) also come from God. Preserving them also lies in His hand. Our prayer, “*Guide us on the straight path.*”¹ is a request for the perpetuity and continuity of the blessing of guidance. By the will of Allah, we have identified the straight path and follow it, but without the help of God there is no guarantee that we will continue treading this path. So, we must always ask God to guide us and keep us on the straight path.

Many people are on the straight path but given to sins. Initially, they commit only one sin, then two or three and gradually get accustomed to sinful acts and finally deviate from the path. It is only God who keeps man (on the straight path) and keeps him away from sins. Sometimes, a person decides to commit a sin, strives to commit it and even makes the necessary preparation for it, but God out of His mercy prevents His servants from committing it. All these cases are among the blessings and grace of God. If man is grateful for these blessings, God will maintain them for him and not leave him alone. Therefore, if the ground for the commission of sins is open, yet we do not commit them, we must not consider God to be indebted to us but we must instead be grateful and indebted to Him for keeping us away from them.

Thus, during supplication it is necessary for us to be mindful of Whom we are facing—He who engulfs us with His spiritual and material blessings every moment. We have been given thousands of opportunities to make use of the blessings in the right way and if we did not, at least we did not commit any sin. Man, however, is ungrateful and overlooks all these blessings.

If at the time of difficulty a friend helps us, we never forget him and are always thankful to him, although his extended help in solving our problem is actually part of God’s scheme, and he only serves as God’s instrument. Yet, we tend to forget the innumerable blessings of God and we do not thank Him even verbally.

The need to reflect on the blessings of God

Given the innumerable blessings of God, the Exalted, is it not appropriate to think about these blessings for a few minutes everyday? We have nothing to offer Him in exchange for these blessings. At least we can appreciate and acknowledge their being bestowed by God. So, in this part of the supplication the supplicant embarks on mentioning some of these blessings:

1– *Sūrat al-Fātih* ah 1:6.

فَكَمْ يَا إِلَهِي مِنْ كُرْبَةٍ قَدْ فَرَجْتَهَا.

“O Allah, many a trouble You have removed.”

وَهُمُومٍ قَدْ كَشَفْتَهَا.

“Many a sorrow You have dispelled.”

وَعَثْرَةٌ قَدْ أَقَلَّتْهَا، وَرَحْمَةٌ قَدْ نَشَرْتَهَا، وَحَلَقَةٌ بَلَاءٍ قَدْ فَكَّكْتُهَا.

“Many a misery You have mitigated, and at all times Your Mercy encompassed us, and You cut the tightening cords of misfortunes.”

If a person reflects on the supplication up to this point and on the troubles and difficulties he experienced and how God relieved him, he will readily supplicate and recite these parts of the supplication.

Once a person acknowledges all blessings as coming from God, his heart will incline to God and he will become eager to have intimacy with Him. But if a person does not recognize God as the origin of these blessings, and treats God as a being who hinders his indulgence in licentiousness and merrymaking by threatening him with hellfire, how can he talk to such a God? Given the fact that he does not appreciate the blessings God has given him that could nurture the love of God in his heart, how can he become intimate with God?

1. Fear of punishment as a divine blessing

Fear of God is also one of the divine blessings, but our ignorance hinders us from understanding this blessing. When God threatens us and shows us some dangers, He actually shows us the ill effects of wicked acts—effects which will impinge on us before anybody else. These requitals and undesirable events which are the result of wicked acts serve as a warning so that we avoid engaging in evil works. It is similar to the case of a father who scares his small child not to play with fire. His warning is not meant to annoy his child but to prevent an undesirable event from happening. Therefore, to warn in this context is a kind of grace.

2. Religious duties as divine blessings

The institution of obligations and prohibitions is nothing but a means to repel harm from man. Thus, divine duties are all part of His grace. For example, by enduring hunger and thirst by fasting, which may seem difficult to us, is one of the greatest graces of God. It has many benefits which contribute to our eternal felicity. Had God only mentioned its benefits and utilities, it would not ensure our desire to earn those benefits. As such, He

has obliged us to fast so that we definitely earn its benefits and merits and be recipients of Divine mercy and spiritual virtues and become felicitous. So are other obligations and prohibitions all blessings.

فَإِنْ أَيْبَأْتُ عَنِّي عَتَبْتُ بِجَهْلِي عَلَيْكَ، وَلَعَلَّ الَّذِي أَيْبَأْتُ عَنِّي هُوَ خَيْرٌ لِي لِعِلْمِكَ بِعَاقِبَةِ الْأُمُورِ،
فَلَمْ يَلَمْ مَوْلَا كَرِيمَا أَصْبَرَ عَلَيَّ عَبْدٌ لَيْمٍ مِنْكَ عَلَيَّ.

“A temporary setback, and I, out of ignorance, begin to despair, although perhaps slowing down may be a blessing in disguise, because You alone know [all] the consequences. I know no generous master who is more accommodating of unsatisfied servants, than You are to me.”

Wisdom behind the delay in the acceptance of supplications

The existence of deficiencies in life should not make a servant of God nurse an ill feeling toward Him for He knows best what is good for His servant. In many instances, the delay in the grant of his requests is good for a person. In some cases, it is even good for him that his supplications in this world are not granted but are reserved for him in the next world. So, there is no ground for us to nurse ill feeling toward God.

Unfortunately, we do not pay attention to the wisdom of God and in reality we do not have strong faith in His Attributes. We do not believe that He is the All-compassionate [*al-raʿūf*], the All-merciful [*al-rahīm*]. We imagine that it is out of His stinginess—God forbid—that He does not grant our requests. Yet, as mentioned earlier, whoever knocks at His Door and implores Him, God, out of His grace, takes his real welfare under consideration and pays attention to his petitions according to His infinite wisdom.

Third Discourse

Sincerity

يَا رَبِّ، إِنَّكَ تَدْعُونِي فَأُولِي عَنكَ، وَتَتَحَبَّبُ إِلَيَّ فَاتَبَعُضُ إِلَيْكَ، وَتَتَوَدَّدُ إِلَيَّ فَلَا أَقْبَلُ مِنْكَ، كَأَنَّ لِي التَّطَوُّلَ عَلَيْكَ، فَلَمْ يَمْنَعْكَ ذَلِكَ مِنَ الرَّحْمَةِ لِي، وَالْإِحْسَانَ إِلَيَّ، وَالتَّفَضُّلَ عَلَيَّ بِجُودِكَ وَكَرَمِكَ، فَارْحَمْ عَبْدَكَ الْجَاهِلَ وَجُدْ عَلَيْهِ بِفَضْلِ إِحْسَانِكَ إِنَّكَ جَوَادٌ كَرِيمٌ.

“O Lord! You invite me but I turn away; You offer affection while I respond with disinterest in You; You love me but I do not respond, thinking You are overreaching me, yet You do not abstain from bestowing favors and blessings on me from Your mercy and generosity; so, have mercy on Your ignorant servant and keep him in good favor. Verily, You are Generous and Kind.”

Man’s arrogance and indifference to God

In this part of the supplication, the supplicant deals with the status of man vis-à-vis God so that he can know his position in relation to God. On one hand, he must consider God’s grace on him, and on the other, he must realize his meanness and ingratitude to God. So, he says:

يَا رَبِّ، إِنَّكَ تَدْعُونِي فَأُولِي عَنكَ.

“O Lord! You invite me but I turn away.”

That God has permitted us to talk to Him and supplicate to Him shows His greatest grace and magnanimity to us. Without His permission, we have no merit to talk to Him. He has not only permitted us to supplicate to Him but also calls us, notwithstanding all our failings, and asks us to turn to Him. Yet, in exchange for this magnificent grace of God, what do we do? Instead of accepting this cordial invitation, we turn our backs to Him.

وَتَتَحَبَّبُ إِلَيَّ فَاتَبَعُضُ إِلَيْكَ.

“You offer affection but I respond with disinterest in You.”

We are in need of Him and we must be humble in His presence to win His pleasure, but on the contrary it is He who shows love and compassion to us while we express hostility to Him!

وَتَتَوَدَّ إِلَيَّ فَلَا أَقْبَلُ مِنْكَ.

“You love me but I do not respond to it.”

Has it ever happened that when we express interest and love to a person, yet he does not pay attention to us? Will we not regret expressing interest and love because of his inattention and indifference? Perhaps one’s expression of interest to another involves worldly or sensual motives, but are there such motives in God’s love toward His servants? We erroneously interpret God’s expression of love.

كَأَنَّ لِي التَّطَوُّلَ عَلَيْكَ.

“As if You are overreaching me.”

Instead of expressing our need to earn His pleasure, we do not care for Him and think that we have a right over Him or that He should be indebted to us for supplicating to Him.

What an unworthy pride and arrogance we have in return for His infinite mercy! What do we have which we are proud of? Whenever He calls us, we entertain ourselves with something else. In spite of our bad conduct, the perpetuity of God’s mercy and goodness remains.

فَلَمْ يَمْنَعْكَ ذَلِكَ مِنَ الرَّحْمَةِ لِي، وَالْأَخْسَانِ إِلَيَّ، وَالتَّقْضِيلِ عَلَيَّ بِجُودِكَ وَكَرَمِكَ.

“Yet, You do not abstain from bestowing favors and blessings on me out of Your mercy and generosity.”

فَارْحَمْ عَبْدَ الْجَاهِلِ وَجُدْ عَلَيْهِ بِفَضْلِ إِحْسَانِكَ إِنَّكَ جَوَادٌ كَرِيمٌ.

“So have mercy on Your ignorant servant and keep him in good favor. Verily, You are Generous and Kind.”

The value of getting closer and fervently praying to God

Fervently praying to God and having intimacy with Him has such an effect on the human soul that if a person really establishes connection with God, at the time of supplication, he cannot give attention to mundane and worldly matters and request them from God. It is true that the grace of God dictates that whenever man calls Him for whatever reason He answers him, but the expanse of God’s kindness is one thing while man’s high aspiration is another. It does not mean that man should not knock at God’s Door for the fulfillment of his worldly needs. Rather, the point is that those who have experienced the sweetness of fervently praying to Him will never exchange it for material motives. In addition, the servant who sees himself lacking all these things must ask for each of his needs from Him although the material means for them are available. It is even appropriate that as soon as he feels

the need for them, he asks God for them and considers all things as means only. But the most important thing is to talk to and beseechingly supplicate to God. This is far more valuable than asking Him for mundane things.

One of the ‘*ulamā*’ said: “It is undesirable for a servant to ask his master to provide his material needs—wholesome food, descent clothing and pleasant abode. The wise servant is he who is always preoccupied with acting upon the order of his master. His master knows the set of rules of mastership as well as the needs of his servant. There is no need for the servant to remind his master of his needs.” Asking for such things is below lofty purpose. The servant must be heedful of his master’s order and execute it, and not think for himself. We must ask God for the opportunity to serve Him. We must ask God for an opportunity to become what is pleasing to Him.

The ever-open doors of God’s mercy

What is most important for the servant is to acquire merit to talk to his Master. To privately talk to the Worshipped Being [*ma‘būd*] is more valuable than anything else. If the servant is important in the sight of his Master, He will allow him to beseech and fervently pray to Him. The Master will also listen to him. Among people, such opportunities and chances rarely occur especially if the master is always busy. He hardly finds time to talk and listen to his servants. Even if the servant is extremely fond of his master and eager to talk to him, he will not find any opportunity.

But God is such a Master that notwithstanding His immense and indescribable Might, He still accepts His servants no matter how wicked and ungrateful they are and listens to their supplications. Whenever His servant calls Him, He answers and welcomes him. In *ḥadīth qudsī*, God said to one of the Israelite prophets: “*I am very fond of My servants and wait for them to turn to Me. They have turned their backs and kept aloof from Me. In spite of that, I am waiting for their return.*”

الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ الَّذِي لَا يُهْتَكُ حِجَابُهُ، وَلَا يُغْلَقُ بَابُهُ، وَلَا يُرَدُّ سَأَلُهُ.

“Praise be to Allah! None can disclose anything hidden by Him; none can shut the doors kept open by Him; no one who makes a request is sent away disappointed by Him.”

It is only in certain periods that the kindness of a philanthropic person benefits others. Even the rulers known for their justice and magnanimity opened their courts to the public only on certain days of the year. They did not entertain everybody, everyday, every moment and everywhere. Yet, the doors of Divine mercy are always open to those who ask for His grace. He answers whenever you call Him.

In one of his litanies, Imām al-Sajjād (‘a) said:

نَامَتِ الْعُيُودُ وَعَلَتِ النُّجُومُ وَأَنْتَ الْمَلِكُ الْحَيُّ الْقَيُّومُ عَلَّقَتِ الْمُلُوكُ أَبْوَابَهَا وَأَقَامَتِ عَلَيْهَا حُرَاسَهَا وَبَابُكَ مَفْتُوحٌ لِلسَّائِلِينَ جَنَّتِكَ لِنَنْظُرَ إِلَيْكَ بِرَحْمَتِكَ يَا رَأْحِمَ الرَّاحِمِينَ.

“Eyes sleep and stars fall, yet You are the Ever-living and Self-existent King. Kings keep their castles’ gates closed and assign guards on them, yet Your door is open to all those who knock. I come to You that You may look at me with Your mercy, O Most Merciful of the merciful!”¹

In some supplications, we read: “O Lord! Now is the time when every lover is alone with his partner, talking intimately. And those who are not lovers, as well as the animals, are sleeping. All doors are closed, yet the doors of Your forgiveness and munificence are wide open. No guard hinders anyone from entering Your court of bounty. Whoever wants to call You calls You and You answer him. Moreover, You Yourself call Your servants and Your invitation is always open: *‘Is there anyone who regrets committing wicked acts and intends to return to Me so that I may admit him?’* What mercy and compassion towards sinners who pay no attention to You and commit evil acts with impunity! Instead of the servant entreatingly and earnestly asking for Your acceptance, it is You who invite Your servant: *“Come, come that I may accept you.”*”

We must see who our Master is. We must know Him. We must acquire more knowledge about Him. He admits everybody without any discrimination. Imām al-Sajjād (‘a) said:

لَا يَشْغَلُهُ شَيْءٌ عَنِ شَيْءٍ .

“No action hinders Him from engaging in another (work).”²

While the prophets, nearest angels and *awliyā’* are busy supplicating Him, He is not negligent of others. If a common person in a certain part of the world calls Him, He will answer him. Is there such an outstanding Master who remembers His servant even after months or years of no contact? Is it then proper to pay attention to everything except Him at the time of prayer and supplication? Is it not impolite to worship Him sluggishly, heedlessly and despondently, or even think that He is indebted to us because of our worship?

1— *Bih ār al-Anwār*, vol. 46, section 5, p. 78, *h adīth* 75.

2— *Bih ār al-Anwār*, vol. 90, p. 154, section 9, *h adīth* 111.

Presence of heart needed in worship

If we reflect, we will realize that our prayers and supplications are nothing but commissions of sin. Let us assume that after a long time of separation, we meet a friend and we are supposed to have an hour of tête-à-tête. But during our meeting we turn our back and are busy with other work. Such a behavior is obviously offensive! If we are supposed to meet a prominent figure and do the same, it is more offensive and unpleasant. Our lack of attention to God or presence of heart during prayer is most offensive and shameful. If, after God has given us the opportunity to be in His presence and talk to Him, we do not pay attention to Him, we deserve severe punishment which is worthy even if it kills us. In spite of all these, God does not reject us. In fact, He always invites us to partake in His banquet.

God’s forgiveness and compassion should not make us arrogant. Commensurate to our knowledge we are bound to discharge our duty in the best possible manner. Prayers and supplications which are mere recitation of some words without the spirit of worship are devoid of grace. We must struggle to make our prayers, supplications and other devotional acts acquire the spirit of worship, understand their meanings and have presence of heart.

To delay the performance of acts of worship especially the obligatory ritual prayers is equally wrong. We should not imagine that if the saying of prayer is somehow delayed, we will become more enthusiastic in performing it. In many cases, the delay itself is a satanic insinuation [*waswasah*] under the guise of tiredness, work and the like. Prayer which is performed after its prescribed time is deficient and spiritless.

No matter how low the level of our acts of worship be they should not be abandoned. Instead, we must strive to perform them better, and be more polite and humble in the presence of God. To abandon them is a sin and sign of ingratitude. The solution is not to abandon a devotional act but to improve it.

Some narrow-minded people think that prayer or supplication devoid of understanding is useless. This is not true. Besides the outer expressions of worship, we must beseech God to give us presence of heart and the opportunity to increase our understanding and love of Him.

Love and affection as a product of gnosis [*ma‘rifah*]

Many subjects mentioned in supplications and prayers are about the knowledge of God. If the love of God is deeply rooted in the heart of man, he will himself be concerned with the performance of worship. As such, whenever the loving servants of Allah have the opportunity, be it a short

period of time, they think of prayer, supplication and remembrance of God. However, it is inappropriate to imagine that since we always worship God in the form of prayer and supplication, we are His meritorious servants. We are fooling ourselves with such assumptions. If a person really loves another, he does not want to separate from her even for a moment. Hadrat Imām al-Husayn ('a) said:

إِلَهِي أَمْرٌ بِالرُّجُوعِ إِلَى الْآثَارِ.

“O Allah! [In order to know You,] You commanded us to refer to the effects [of Your Power].”¹

It is true that God has commanded it, but His loving servants' desire is to be always close to Him. They want to be always in His presence even if they are obliged to pay attention to material means, and outwardly, their hearts seem to be detached from His remembrance.

Does the one who does not want to spend an hour in litany and supplication have any love for God? Can it be said that all our love and hate, struggle [*jihād*] and other feelings are for the sake of God, without really loving Him? If our actions are indeed for His sake, it is never possible not to love Him and consider something more desirable than prayer. The *awliyā'* of Allah were always waiting for the slightest opportunity to supplicate in a corner. After performing their social responsibilities they would seclude themselves in order to hear the Divine invitation in their supplications and litanies which would give them more energy and enthusiasm.

إِلَهِي كَمْ تَتَحَبَّبُ إِلَيْنَا بِالنَّعْمِ وَنَتَّعِبُ غَيْبِي وَنَتَّبَعُضُ إِلَيْكَ بِالْمَعَاصِي وَإِنَّا إِلَيْكَ مُحْتَاجُونَ!

1— *Mafātīh al-Jinān*, “Imām al-Husayn's ('a) Supplication on the Day of 'Arafah.”

Fourth Discourse

Hope

أَلْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ الَّذِي لَا يُهْتَكُ حِجَابُهُ، وَلَا يُغْلَقُ بَابُهُ، وَلَا يُرَدُّ سَائِلُهُ، وَلَا يُخَيَّبُ آمِلُهُ.

“Praise be to Allah! None can disclose anything hidden by Him; none can shut the doors kept open by Him; no one who makes a request is sent away disappointed by Him; and no one who looks long and attentively is deluded in his hopes.”

Hope and reliance on God

Among the points highlighted in *Du‘ā’ al-Iftitāh* is that God never rejects His servant, closes His door of mercy on him, or allows him to lose hope, provided that he turns, relies and pins his hopes on God.

It is possible that out of personal motives, we do something for a person and remind him of this favor: “I did it for your sake.” But we cannot do this to God for He is aware of our intention and motive. The expression “By the will of God”, is good but we must be sincere in our words and deeds. Usually, out of the hundred times that we make this expression, only once we truly mean it. As stated in the supplication, if a person really pins his hopes on God, “no one who looks long and attentively is deluded in his hopes”.

If we become hopeless, it is because we have not actually pinned our hope on God and done something with reliance on Him. If we like an activity we do it with great enthusiasm. But if do not like it or it requires a lot of effort and patience, either we do not do it or do it sluggishly. For example, in doing something, if the means to do so is accessible to us, we tend to do it, otherwise we consider it impossible to be done. If we do something with the hope that someone will come to rescue or assist us but he does not come, we tend to be discouraged in continuing it. Even in simple worldly matters, we tend to look for a friend or acquaintance to assist us. This only shows that we do not actually pin our hope to God. God has not guaranteed the realization of such hope.

Imām ‘Alī’s (‘a) saying about pinning one’s hope on God

Ḥaḍrat ‘Alī (‘a) said:

يَدَّعِي بِرُغْمِهِ أَنَّهُ يَرْجُو اللَّهَ، كَذَّبَ وَالْعَظِيمِ! مَا بَالَهُ لَا يَتَّبِعَنَّ رَجَاؤُهُ فِي عَمَلِهِ فَكُلُّ مَنْ رَجَا
هُوَ رَجَاؤُهُ فِي عَمَلِهِ... يَرْجُو اللَّهَ فِي الْكَبِيرِ، وَيَرْجُو الْعِبَادَ فِي الصَّغِيرِ، فَيُعْطِي الْعَبْدَ مَا لَا
يُعْطِي الرَّبَّ!

“He claims, according to his own assumptions, he hopes from Allah. By Allah, the Great, he lies. Do not one’s hopes become visible through one’s action? The hope of every one who hopes is known through his action... He hopes big things from Allah and small things from men but he gives to man (such consideration as) he does not give to Allah. What is the matter with Allah, glorified be His praise? He is accorded less (consideration) than what is given to His creatures.”¹

Imām ‘Alī (‘a) said that if a person is hopeful of something, he strives to achieve it. Hope urges man to toil and sweat. A youngster who hopes that by obtaining a degree he will find a suitable job and good social standing will strive hard for years. Day and night, he will endure being away from home and everything else. Why? It is because he hopes that by obtaining a certain degree he will acquire a suitable job. So, hope produces movement, not laziness and inertia.

Under the pretext of relying on God, some people refuse to discharge any duty. They strive neither to perform the recommended acts [*mustahabbāt*] nor to avoid the dubious [*mushtabahāt*]. If they are asked, they say: “God’s mercy is infinite and He will treat us mercifully. One must not despair of God’s favor!” Is their hope greater than that of the *awliyā’* and prophets? Notwithstanding their total reliance and trust in God, these holy personages would not abandon even the least of duties and responsibilities. Is our hope for God’s favor greater than theirs, such that without action we hope that God will admit us into the highest heaven?!

We usually imagine that we have strong trust in God. But the Commander of the Faithful (‘a) exposed the truth by saying: “You have neither fear [*khawf*] nor hope [*rajā’*]”. If you are really hopeful of God’s favor, its effect must be manifested through your action. If you pin your hope on a person and expect him to do something for you, how will you behave with him? You are careful in your action lest you annoy or irritate him; you always show respect; etc. Would you ever dare reviling him or displaying a hostile attitude toward him? But how about your attitude toward your Creator?

1– *Nahj al-Balāghah*, Sermon 160.

Imām ‘Alī (‘a) said: “You rely on this person concerning insignificant and trivial matters but you are not as humble and polite to God as you are to him although your reliance on God involves far more serious and sublime matters.”

Concerning which matters do you rely on a person? Trivial matters. He solves your problem or serves as your mediator. At most, he protects your honor in times of need or saves your life in times of danger so that you can live longer. In any case, all of these are limited. How valuable is the degree obtained by a young student who has spent the prime of his youth in studies? Is it 10 million, 1 billion, or 1 trillion? No matter how much, it is limited and finite. What we are expecting from God is an unlimited eternal life. Do our deeds measure up to this expectation or wish? If we are really hoping for it, why is it not manifested in our action? It is better to be truthful to God and not deceive ourselves. God cannot be deceived although unfortunately some people intend to deceive Him:

﴿يُخَادِعُونَ اللَّهَ وَكَذِبِينَ آمَنُوا وَمَا يُخَادِعُونَ إِلَّا أَنْفُسَهُمْ وَمَا يَشْعُرُونَ﴾

“They seek to deceive Allah and those who have faith, yet they deceive no one but themselves, but they are not aware.”¹

We must be truthful to God. The wise man is one who purifies his intentions and is truthful in supplicating to Him.

What we do pretentiously for God may possibly deceive people but God cannot be deceived. If we want to change our condition, we must change ourselves. We must rely on God alone or else He will leave us alone and we will reach nowhere. We must bear in mind that only He can be truly relied upon and no one else.

It is reported from Imām al-Šādiq (‘a) that God, the Blessed and Exalted, says:

“By My Honor, Glory, Greatness and Exaltedness over the Throne! I shall turn into despair the hope of one who pins his hope on other than Me and cover him with the garment of contempt in the eyes of people. I shall keep him away from Me and not allow him to meet Me. Has he pinned his hope on other than Me to solve his problems while [the solution to] problems lies in My hand? Has he attached himself to other than Me and knocks at another’s door while the keys of all closed doors are with Me, and My door is open to those who call Me? Is there anyone who in time of difficulties

1– Sūrat al-Baqarah 2:9.

pinned his hope on Me but I frustrated him? Is there anyone who relied on Me on an important affair but I deprived him?”¹

So, one must rely on God alone. Relying on God means to consider all powers to be from Him and to use them while bearing in mind that with His permission nothing can be done. One must consult the doctor and abide by his medical prescription but at the same time he must bear in mind that the healing power lies with God. Without the will of God, a doctor’s correct diagnosis could be useless and thus, he would give the wrong prescription. Or, in spite of correct diagnosis and prescription, the sick would not be cured. This does not mean that there is no need to consult the doctor. While relying on God, we must also abide by the doctor’s prescription for it is one of the means and manifestations of God’s favor. In any case, cure comes from Him.

Reliance on God means believing that affairs and their elements are in the hand of God. He must believe in the reality that God manages all affairs and provides all means. In cases where no means are in sight, it is not beyond His power to create new means. He can also do something without any means. Therefore, in no way does the faithful one cease his reliance on God, irrespective of the existence or absence of natural means. He will not be frustrated if he fails through a certain means or way—be it money, doctor, medicine, etc. But, we should not expect that God will always definitely solve our problems through supernatural ways. It is self-worship to disregard natural means and ask God to solve our problems by supernatural means because in certain instances, it is the will of God to solve our problems through a natural way. In this regard, God says:

أَبَى اللَّهُ أَنْ يُجَيِّدَ الْأَشْيَاءَ إِلَّا بِالْأَسْبَابِ.

“Allah does not want things to be materialized through other than their [natural] means.”²

Yes, if there are no available natural means, God acts through supernatural means. For example, He sent down a heavenly table-cloth full of food and drink to a group of Israelites,³ kept Ḥaḍrat Ibrāhīm (‘a) alive and safe in the fire,⁴ and many other cases.

1— *Bihār al-Anwār*, vol. 71, p. 130, section 63, *h adīth* 7.

2— *Bihār al-Anwār*, vol. 2, p. 90, section 14, *h adīth* 14.

3— See *Sūrat al-Mā’idah* 5:112-115. [Trans.]

4— See *Sūrat al-Anbiyā’* 21:61. [Trans.]

Fifth Discourse

Waiting for the Advent of Imām al-Mahdī ('atfs)

اللَّهُمَّ إِنَّا نَرْغِبُ إِلَيْكَ فِي دَوْلَةٍ كَرِيمَةٍ تُعْرَفُ بِهَا الْأَسْلَامُ وَأَهْلُهُ، وَتُذِلُّ بِهَا التَّفَاقُ وَأَهْلُهُ، وَتَجْعَلُنَا فِيهَا مِنَ الدُّعَاةِ إِلَى طَاعَتِكَ، وَالْقَادَةِ إِلَى سَبِيلِكَ، وَتَرْزُقُنَا بِهَا كِرَامَةَ الدُّنْيَا وَالْآخِرَةِ.

“O Allah we ardently desire that in the kind, just and fair government, You give honor to Islam and its followers, and humble and humiliate hypocrisy and the hypocrites, and include us among those who invite people unto Your obedience and lead them to Your approved path, and give us the good of this world and the world to come.”

Waiting for the advent of Imām al-Mahdī ('atfs)

One of the points highlighted in *Du‘ā’ al-Ifitāh* is the desire for the Islamic state to be established with the reappearance of Hādī rat Walī al-‘Asr ('atfs).¹ In this supplication, the mission of the Islamic government and our duty in relation to it are also mentioned. Fortunately, we are all encompassed by God’s great favor of the knowledge about Hādī rat Walī al-‘Asr ('atfs) and waiting for his advent.

Belief in the advent of Hādī rat al-Mahdī ('atfs) is common to all Muslim schools of thought [*madhāhib*]*—*Sunnī or Shī‘ah. Non-Muslims also believe in a sort of waiting for relief with the coming of a savior [*masīh*]. We have a difference of opinion with our Sunnī brothers concerning some issues of Imamate, but few differences concerning the belief in the coming of Hādī rat al-Mahdī ('atfs).

Many Sunnī scholars have written books about Hādī rat al-Mahdī ('atfs) and acknowledged that their recorded traditions [*ahādīth*] about Imām al-Mahdī ('atfs) are *mutawātir*.² However, there are differences of opinion

1– The abbreviation, “atfs” stands for the Arabic invocative phrase, ‘*ajjalallāhu ta‘ālā farajahu a-sharīf* [may Allah, the Exalted, expedite his glorious advent], which is invoked after mentioning the name of Imām al-Mahdī (atfs).

2– A *mutawātir hādīth* is one which has been reported by so many different chains of transmission that such a number of narrators in every generation would normally not be able to agree on fabricating a tradition without the fact of its fabrication becoming known. [Trans.]

about his personal features. Some Sunnīs believe that at the end of time a descendant of the Apostle (s) named Mahdī will come but they differ with us on the identity of his parents and whether he has been born or yet to be born. Some of them believe that the Mahdī (‘atfs) will be born in future.

Of course, some Sunnīs exactly share our beliefs regarding the Last Imām (‘atfs). That is, they believe that he is an eleventh direct descendant of Imām ‘Alī and Hādī rat Fātimah (‘a). Some of them have even explained that the Imām of the Time (‘atfs) has already been born and is alive and that some people have been privileged to meet the Imām (‘atfs). In this regard, the names of some of those who were able to meet him have been mentioned.

Therefore, not only the Shī‘ah believe in Imām al-Mahdī (‘atfs). Some do not believe in him as an Imām and successor [*khalīfah*] of the Messenger of Allah (s) with cosmic or ontological guardianship [*wilāyat-e takwīnī*]¹ and divine knowledge and power. For example, some Sunnīs especially the Shāfi‘īs have special devotion to the infallible Imāms (‘a), recognizing them as jurists [*fuqahā*] and descendants of the Messenger of Allah (s), but do not believe in their infallibility [*‘is mah*] and guardianship [*wilāyah*]. In this regard, their knowledge is deficient.

Yet, notwithstanding all these beliefs, the Ahl al-Sunnah have somehow forgotten his advent, and one cannot include them among those who are waiting [*muntaz irīn*] for the government of al-Mahdī (‘atfs). So, only the Shī‘ah are waiting every moment for his reappearance. It is we who ponder on these questions:

Firstly, what is our motive in waiting for the Imām of the Age (‘atfs) and his government of truth? What incites your desire to be present during his advent?

Secondly, what is our duty during this period of waiting [*intiz ār*] and occultation [*ghaybah*]? What must we do so as to be included among those who are truly waiting for him (‘atfs)?

1– For further information about the idea of guardianship [*wilāyah*] and the guardian [*walī*], see Murtadā Mutahharī, *Walīhā wa Wilāyathā* (Qum, 1355 AH/1975) which was translated into English by Mustajab Ansārī under the title *Master and Mastership* (Karachi: Islamic Seminary Publication, 1980) available online at <http://www.al-islam.org/mastership> and by Yahyā Cooper as *Wilāyah: The Station of the Master* (Tehran: World Organization for Islamic Services, 1982) available online at <http://www.wofis.com/asset/Books/046.pdf>. [Trans.]

The motive behind “waiting”

The carnal state of man is so complex that sometimes he himself is unaware of its intricacies. Sometimes, a person wants something without knowing the reason behind his inclination to it. Similarly, regarding the issue of waiting for the advent of Ḥaḍrat al-Mahdī (‘atfs) and the establishment of his government, people have also diverse motives. For instance, it is popular among laymen that during the advent of the Imām (‘atfs), the daily needs of man will be provided gratuitously or what is called *ṣalawātī*. In other words, the needs which require efforts to be met will be met by only invoking blessings upon Muḥammad and his progeny (‘a) [*ṣalawāt*]. As such, it is possible that for this or similar reasons some people are eager to wait for the reappearance of the Imām of the Age (‘atfs), and basically, for this reason, they are waiting for it.

Others are waiting for his coming to set right their affairs and remove the burden of problems from their shoulders. The fact is that it is not easy to perform some religious duties especially social responsibilities such as enjoining what is good and forbidding what is evil [*amr bi’l-ma‘rūf wa nahyi ‘an’il-munkar*] and campaigning against injustice and corruption. Thinking that with the coming of the Mahdī (‘atfs) these burdens will be removed from their shoulders, some people are waiting for his reappearance.

Perhaps on account of suffering from tyranny and oppression, others are waiting for the establishment of the government that will eliminate the tyrants and everyone will enjoy his right (advocates of justice, equality and fairness).

Meanwhile, there are also those who are waiting for the advent of Ḥaḍrat al-Mahdī (‘atfs) for the victory of the religion of truth, implementation of the divine laws which are yet to be implemented, revival of the Prophet’s (ṣ) *Sunnah*, and annihilation of the traces of disbelief [*kufr*] and polytheism [*shirk*].

We must ask ourselves as to our motive in waiting for the advent of the Imām of the Age (‘atfs). Are we after the gratuitous [*ṣalawātī*] bread, or are we fed up of the tyrants and oppressors? Is it because the burden of religious responsibility is heavy on us, or is it because Islam and the Muslims are in danger, that we are waiting for that day? We must reflect and identify which of them is our real motive in waiting for it.

If our motive is one of the first three mentioned reasons, then we are actually only concerned with ourselves and not others! In reality, we are

waiting for our own relief and comfort, and not for the advent of Ḥaḍrat al-Ḥujjah (‘atfs)!

If a person other than the Imām of the Age (‘atfs) grants our requests, we will follow and incline to him. Therefore, the Imām of the Time (‘atfs) and his advent do not concern us. Our main goal is our own comfort and nothing else. What is the value of waiting [*intizār*] which is motivated by laziness and the pursuit of comfort?

If we are waiting for the day of the advent of the Imām of the Age (‘atfs) for him to remove the burden of responsibilities from our shoulders, wage a campaign against disbelief and hypocrisy [*nifāq*], enjoin the good and forbid the evil, set right our affairs, and finally make us the inheritors of the fruits of his labor so that we can enjoy without difficulty the wealth and other amenities to be provided by his government, such an act of waiting has no value and merit.

The true and valuable waiting is for one to wait for the relief [*faraj*] with the advent of Ḥaḍrat al-Mahdī (‘atfs) for the victory and exaltation of Islam and its spread. This is the true and valuable waiting, and many narrations [*riwāyāt*] speak of its lofty value. It is true that under the aegis of the global revolution and government of Ḥaḍrat al-Ḥujjah (‘atfs), there will be peace, security, abundance of blessings, annihilation of oppression and the oppressors, and uprooting of poverty and misery, but they must not be the principal motive of the faithful in waiting for the Mahdī (‘atfs).

In this part of the supplication, the motive of man in waiting for the *faraj* and the mission of the Imām (‘atfs) in establishing his government are also mentioned:

اللَّهُمَّ إِنَّا نَرْغِبُ إِلَيْكَ فِي دَوْلَةٍ كَرِيمَةٍ نَعْرُ بِهَا الْأِسْلَامَ وَأَهْلَهُ، وَتُذِلُّ بِهَا التَّفَاقُ وَأَهْلَهُ.

“O Allah we ardently desire that in (his) kind, just and fair government, You give honor to Islam and its followers, and humble and humiliate hypocrisy and the hypocrites.”

وَتَجْعَلْنَا فِيهَا مِنَ الدُّعَاةِ إِلَى طَاعَتِكَ، وَالْقَادَةِ إِلَى سَبِيلِكَ.

“And include us among those who invite people unto Your obedience and lead them onto Your approved path.”

During the advent of the Imām (‘atfs), we are not also supposed to abandon our duties. It is not true that after his advent, without propagation [*tablīgh*] people will embrace Islam and do righteous deeds. In fact, there will be need for propagation, training and education at that time. At that time, we

hope to be the forerunners and pioneers in materializing the goals of the Mahdī (‘atfs) by inviting the people toward him:

وَتَرْتَفْنَا بِهَا كَرَامَةَ الدُّنْيَا وَالْآخِرَةِ .

“And give us the good of this world and the world to come.”

What are our duties as the true *muntaẓirīn*? What must we do, so that during his reappearance we can rightfully play our role?

The most important duty of a true *muntaẓir* is for him to know the truth and act upon it as far as he can so that he can easily solve problems. It is such a person who can lead people during the time of the advent of Ḥaḍrat al-Mahdī (‘atfs). How can one who procrastinates in knowing the truth and acting upon it lead others? Prior to his advent, therefore, we must prepare ourselves by increasing our knowledge and improving our actions.

Learning from previous communities (the fate of those who are waiting [muntaẓirīn])

Throughout history, the government of truth has always been promised to the believing communities and they have always been waiting for it. Yet, after the coming of the expected government, it became clear that they were not sincere in their claims. For example, the glad tidings of the birth and coming of Ḥaḍrat Mūsā (Moses) (‘a) were given to the Children of Israel during the Pharaoh’s reign, as repeatedly mentioned in the Qur’an. The Pharaoh so persecuted the Children of Israel that perhaps no other nation had experienced their ordeal. They were persecuted to such an extent that their religious leaders gathered together and asked their people to pray for the coming of Ḥaḍrat Mūsā (‘a). According to pertinent traditions, it was because of the profuse cry and lamentation of the Israelites that the coming of Ḥaḍrat Mūsā (‘a) was expedited. He was born and grew up. After sometime, he rose up against Pharaoh and finally the Israelites were able to cross the sea and were thus delivered from his yoke. They saw with their own eyes that Pharaoh and his legion pursued them but in spite of their military might Pharaoh and his forces were not able to cross the sea and drowned.

Those, who one day had asked God to expedite the coming of Ḥaḍrat Mūsā (‘a) to be delivered from the clutches of Pharaoh and worship God freely, committed the most unscrupulous acts after being delivered from Pharaoh till the passing away of Ḥaḍrat Mūsā (‘a)! Instead of gratitude and thankfulness to God, the Exalted, for deliverance, and obediently following the orders of Ḥaḍrat Mūsā (‘a), they engaged in committing devious acts and making awkward demands of him. Along their way to

Palestine from Egypt, they passed by a city whose inhabitants were idol-worshippers, and they said to him: “We cannot see the God whom you believe and ask us to worship. We want God who is like the deity of these idol-worshippers”:

﴿اجْعَلْ لَنَا إِلَهًا كَمَا لَهُمْ آلِهَةٌ﴾

“Make for us a god like the gods that they have.”¹

They were the same people who had suffered from Pharaoh and beseeched God to hasten the coming of Ḥaḍrat Mūsā (‘a).

After this happening, Ḥaḍrat Mūsā (‘a) went to Mount Tūr to engage in worship. He was supposed to stay there for thirty days and it was extended to another ten days. While he was engrossed in worship and supplications, the Israelites went to Sāmirī and told him, “Make a god for us!” So, Sāmirī made a golden calf and said:

﴿هَذَا إِلَهُكُمْ وَإِلَهُ مُوسَىٰ فَنَسِي﴾

“This is your god and the god of Moses!”²

That is to say, “This is the same god Moses is referring to.” And the Israelites prostrated before it. Finally, those who had been eagerly waiting for Ḥaḍrat Mūsā (‘a) did so.

There is also a similar account regarding Prophet Muḥammad (s). Many of the People of the Book³ in the Arabian Peninsula particularly in Medina had been waiting for the coming of the Apostle (s). They resided in Medina and its suburbs so that with the coming of the expected prophet, they could pay their allegiance to him sooner than others. In this regard, the Holy Qur’an states:

﴿يَعْرِفُونَهُ كَمَا يَعْرِفُونَ أَبْنَاءَهُمْ﴾

“[They] recognize him just as they recognize their sons.”⁴

However, when the Apostle (s) invited them to embrace the religion of Islam, they considered his objectives repugnant to their desires. So, they declined his invitation and did not submit to him.

1— Sūrat al-A‘rāf 7:138.

2— Sūrat T ā Hā 20:88.

3— People of the Book [ahl al-kitāb]: the respectful title given to the Jews and Christians in the Qur’an. [Trans.]

4— Sūrat al-Baqarah 2:146; Sūrat al-An‘ām 6:20.

These historical events serve as a lesson for us to avoid meeting the same fate—God forbid—in waiting for the advent of Ḥaḍrat al-Mahdī (*‘atfs*). This does not suggest that our good fate is ensured. It is recorded in some traditions that after the advent of Ḥaḍrat al-Mahdī (*‘atfs*), some people will write a letter to him, saying, “We do not need you!”

Therefore, we must mould ourselves according to Islam. We must suppress our carnal desires and prepare ourselves to recognize him as well as his uprising and revolution. If we are fond of him and shed tears whenever we hear his name, we must not become arrogant and be negligent of our fate.

As such, waiting is valuable provided that we are really inclined to meet the Imām of the Age (*‘atfs*), feel sorry to see some divine injunctions yet to be implemented and yearn for his advent so that he can restore the glory of Islam and the Muslims and implement the divine laws. We must prepare ourselves to be able to recognize his government and follow his orders, and we must ask God, the Exalted, to grant us this opportunity [*tawfīq*].

Sixth Discourse

The Imām of the Age ('atfs)

اللَّهُمَّ إِنَّا نَشْكُو إِلَيْكَ فَقَدْ نَبَّيْنَا صَلَوَاتِكَ عَلَيْهِ وَآلِهِ، وَغَيْبَةَ وَلِيِّنَا، وَكَثْرَةَ عَدُوِّنَا، وَقِلَّةَ عَدَدِنَا،
وَشِدَّةَ الْفِتَنِ بِنَا، وَتَظَاهَرَ الزَّمَانِ عَلَيْنَا.

“O Allah, we feel uneasy and are disturbed over the departure of our Prophet (s), absence of our guardian-friend, too many enemies, our numerical scarcity, widespread disorder, and vicissitudes of time.”

The Apostle (s) and the Imāms ('a) with the most valuable blessings

From the points stated earlier, it is clear that man must always pay attention to his needs and seek only the help of God, the Exalted, to provide them. As stated earlier, his needs are not only limited to material and worldly needs. One of our greatest needs is our need for the Holy Prophet (s) and his successor. Even if all worldly blessings are available to man but he is deprived of the guidance of the Holy Prophet (s), all those blessings compared to this guidance are insignificant and immaterial.

We can understand this need only if we grasp the blessing of the presence of the Holy Prophet (s) and the Imām of the Time ('atfs) and we really know who they are and which of the blessings of these holy personages are bestowed upon the Muslim *ummah*. It is impossible for us to comprehend the greatness and station of the Imāms ('a). We can only say that the entire universe has been created as the blessings of their existence.

لَوْلَا لَمَّا خَلَقْتَ الْأَفْلاَ .

“Had it not been for you, I would not have created the universe.”¹

The same is true in the case of the Imāms ('a). Whether we can grasp or comprehend this tenet or not, depends on the extent of our knowledge about these personages. It is sufficient to say that were it not for the Imāms ('a), the foundation could not survive. The deviations that took place immediately after the demise of the Messenger of Allah (s) prove this claim. Were it not for the 250 years of effort and struggle of the

1– *Bihār al-Anwār*, vol. 16, p. 406, *hadīth* 1.

infallible Imāms (‘*a*), today we would not witness the truths of Islam. Even the truths of Islam that survive among the Ahl al-Sunnah are part of the blessings of the Imāms of guidance (‘*a*). The caliphs and rulers who used to hold the Friday congregational prayers on Wednesdays and lead the dawn prayer while drunk could have been the protectors and preservers of Islam. The blood of the Doyen of the Martyrs (‘*a*) and the struggle of other Imāms of guidance (‘*a*) were responsible for the survival of Islam.

Of course, the blessings of the Imāms of guidance (‘*a*) were and are not limited to their respective lifetimes. In fact, even after their demise they remained a source of blessing. They would solve the problems of not only their followers and lovers but often even those of non-Muslims. If all miracles reported about each of the Infallibles [*ma‘aṣ ṭmān*] (‘*a*) throughout history were compiled, they would constitute a huge book. Nevertheless, the most important and perpetual blessing of the Imāms (‘*a*) consists of their sayings and traditions [*sunan*]. These radiant traditions are responsible for the preservation and spread of Islam as well as the felicity of man. That which plays a crucial role in the felicity of man can be found in the Qur’an and the *Sunnah*. Are we not created to attain perfection and eternal felicity? What can significantly assist us in this regard are the recorded traditions of the Messenger of Allah (s) and the Imāms (‘*a*). Hence, anyone who pays attention to the main purpose of creation will realize that the blessing of the Imāms (‘*a*) is incomparable, and an acknowledgment of this blessing must commensurate with the blessing itself.

Unfortunately, however, the present state of affairs is such that only a few pay attention to this matter. A majority of the world population is non-Muslim. Most of the Muslims do not believe the Imām of the Time (‘*atfs*) has already been born and is alive. Only the minority Shī‘ah believe in his being alive, and many of them are only Shī‘ah in name and not in practice. As such, they also do not give much attention to the Imām of the Age (‘*atfs*), and rarely remember him. Only very few of the Muslims enjoy the opportunity to remember him occasionally and resort to his mediation [*tawassul*] when they are in trouble. We must recall how many times we remember him every year, month and week. What is the effect of his holy presence on our lives? What affliction are we faced with for not paying homage [*ziyārah*] to him?

Heedlessness of the Imām of the Age (‘*atfs*)

Usually, since the Imām of the Time is in occultation [*ghaybah*] and we are deprived of paying homage to him, we do not feel any deficiency. Our sustenance is provided. We consult the ‘*ulamā*’ and *mujtahidīn* regarding

religious issues. In view of this, what is our need for the Imām of the Age (‘atfs)?! Why do we not feel any deficiency? Why we are not worried about his occultation? The reason is our negligence and weak faith. It is not because we do not really need him (‘atfs). We do, but we cannot comprehend it. We are not aware what tribulation we are suffering from—tribulation which is a product of our own making. The people’s unpleasant attitude and their ingratitude in relation to the existence of the pure Imāms (‘a) has been the reason behind the Imām of the Time’s (‘atfs) occultation. Is the discord among the different parts of the Muslim society not a tribulation?¹

The Noble Qur’an states that one of the severest tribulations God will inflict upon a people is the existence of discord and difference among them:

﴿ قُلْ هُوَ الْقَادِرُ عَلَىٰ أَنْ يَبْعَثَ عَلَيْكُمْ عَذَابًا مِّن فَوْقِكُمْ أَوْ مِّن تَحْتَ رِجَالِكُمْ أَوْ يَلْبِسَكُمْ شِيْعًا وَيُدْرِيقَ بَعْضَكُم مِّن بَعْضٍ ﴾

“Say, ‘He is able to send upon you a punishment from above you or from under your feet, or confound you as [hostile] factions, and make you taste one another’s violence.’”²

Nowadays, it is obvious that hearts are separated from one another, heading in different directions. It is evident that these disputes and dissensions are because of the occultation of the Imām of the Time (‘atfs).

During the blessed month of Ramaḍān when we want to supplicate and fervently pray to God, we must read this part of *Du‘ā’ al-Ifitāh* and since we are living in the period of his (‘atfs) occultation and are deprived of paying homage to him (‘atfs), we must express worry and concern. It is but proper to sincerely read this part of the supplication and reflect on the great blessing of his existence, and how our deprivation of this blessing is making us suffer from afflictions and predicaments.

The fact, that we do not know how to please God, the Exalted, and the Imām of the Age (‘atfs), is a serious problem. By revealing the Book (the Qur’an), commissioning the Apostle (s) and the infallible Imāms (‘a), and endowing us with the faculty of reasoning, He has shown us the way. If we observe carefully, we will find out that in all cases of disputes and differences, we can somehow identify the correct path and choose that which is pleasant to God and the Imām of the Time (‘atfs). However, at this

1– It is worthy of note that this series of speeches was delivered prior to the victory of the Islamic Revolution in Iran.

2– *Sūrat al-An‘ām* 6:65.

time, we are experiencing internal and external problems. On one hand, we have internal disputes, and on the other hand, the East and the West oppose us. No sect or school of thought is as alienated as Shī‘ism. All sects or schools of thought are inclined either to the East or the West. Only the Shī‘ah are attached to their leader and master and are hoping for his coming. We must identify what action the Imām of the Time (‘*atfs*) wants from us.

One of our beliefs is that the Imām of the Age (‘*atfs*) is aware of the deeds of his *ummah* especially his Shī‘ah. In our books on traditions, there is a section [*bāb*] called “presentation of actions” [*‘arḍ al-a‘māl*]. Many traditions belonging to this section, suggest that the weekly (and in some traditions, daily) actions of the faithful are reported to the Imām of the Time (‘*atfs*) and during the Night of Ordainment [*Laylat al-Qadr*] all people’s destinies are presented to him. The Imām (‘*atfs*) is the medium of favor between God and the people and the divine favors are extended to the people through him. Will he not be offended upon knowing our actions? We must ensure that our deeds please him (‘*atfs*), and that he will not say—God forbid—that he does not have such followers.

We know that the Imām (‘*atfs*) will be pleased if we obey God’s commands, but they are repugnant to our carnal desires so we are heedless of them.

No one doubts that the Holy Prophet (ṣ) and the Imāms (‘*a*) are sent for the preservation of the religion and laws of God. No one doubts that any action that contributes to the preservation of the religion and laws of God is pleasant to the Imām of the Time (‘*atfs*) and whatever keeps people away from the religion of God and distorts the religion, Islamic beliefs and divine laws displeases and annoys him. Do we doubt that whatever contributes to the abandonment of the Apostle’s (ṣ) *Sunnah* and the Qur’anic injunctions irritates him? Do we doubt that those who undermine the religion and weaken the faith of people are abhorred by him? Don’t we know that it is a sin to say that a certain law must be changed as it belongs to the past and is not applicable today, and thereby weakens the faith of people in the inalterability of divine laws?

Our duty during this period of occultation

If we want to sincerely read this part of the supplication and express worry over the absence of the Prophet (ṣ) and the occultation of the Imām of the Time (‘*atfs*), we must strive as much as we can in preserving the religion. Our spiritual condition must be such that if the Imām of the Time (‘*atfs*) comes, we will unconditionally obey his orders. We must be ready to offer him our life, wealth and family. Do we have such readiness?

In one of the supplications for the nights of Ramaḍān, we read:

وَقْتَلَا فِي سَبِيلِكَ فَوْقَ لَنَا.

“Make us succeed in being martyred in Your way!”

We must mould ourselves in such a way that we will not be afraid to be slain in the way of Allah but even yearn for it. We must ask God to give us pure intention, and sincerely and truthfully talk to Him. We must really ask Him to mould us in such a way that our life and death are pleasing to Him and the Imām of the Time (*‘atfs*). We must pray to God for us to be included among the companions of the Mahdī (*‘atfs*) and have the opportunity to do whatever pleases him and inform us of whatever we do not know.

We want the Imām of the Time (*‘atfs*) to lead us and teach us everything we are ignorant of. There are among us who wish to meet the Imām of the Time (*‘atfs*) even if only in a dream. Another thing to be done is to desire to meet him so as to acquire as much blessing as possible from his presence, and acquire the merit needed to meet him. Even now, the existence of the Imām of the Age (*‘atfs*) is a blessing which can be enjoyed by anyone who deserves it:

هل إليك يا بن أحمد سبيل فتلقى، هل يتصل يومنا منك بعده فنحظى، متى نرد مناهلك
الرؤية فنروى، متى ننتفع من عذب مائك فقد طال الصدى، متى نغاديك ونراوحك فنقر
عيننا، متى ترانا ونراك؟

“Do you, O son of Aḥmad, have means and ways to arrange our meeting? Can you once cleverly guide the course of time, so that we may obtain our wish? When shall we bridge the gap that separates us so that we may refer to the authority? How long shall we keep waiting for your pleasing and satisfying essence and quality? The period of expectation has already lasted long! When shall we receive our share from you and have our minds set at rest? For we have fixed our eyes upon you and strive with perseverance. When shall we be happy, and see your beautiful countenance and fine aspect?”¹

May God give us the opportunity to recognize and accept the Imām of the Age (*‘atfs*), to love him and to really wait for the establishment of his government. May He also acquaint us with our duties at this period of occultation and give us the opportunity to benefit from his presence during his occultation as well as reappearance.

1– *Mafāṭīḥ al-Jinān*, part of *Du‘ā’ Nudbah*.

اللَّهُمَّ صَلِّ عَلَى مُحَمَّدٍ وَآلِهِ وَنَجِّزْ لَوْلِيكَ مَا وَعَدْتَهُ، اللَّهُمَّ أَظْهِرْ كَلِمَتَهُ وَأَعْلِ دَعْوَتَهُ وَانصُرْهُ
عَلَى عَدُوِّهِ وَعَدُوِّكَ، اللَّهُمَّ انْفَعْنَا بِحُبِّهِ وَاحْشُرْنَا فِي زُمْرَتِهِ، آمِينَ يَا رَبَّ الْعَالَمِينَ!

“O Allah! Bless Muḥammad and his progeny, and grant what You have promised to Your *walī*. O Allah! Manifest his word [of truth] and honor his call. Help him against his enemy and Your enemy. O Allah! Convey to him our greetings and salutations and favor us with his pleasure. Grant us his benevolence and mercy. O Allah! Benefit us with his love and include us among his company under his banner. So be it, O Lord of the worlds!”¹

1— *Ibid.*, part of *Ziyārat S āh ib al-Amr* (‘atfs).

Part Three

Commentary on
Du‘ā’ Abū Ḥamzah al-Thumālī

First Discourse

The Supplication of Abū Ḥamzah al-Thumālī

الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ الَّذِي لَا أَدْعُو غَيْرَهُ وَلَا دَعَوْتُ غَيْرَهُ لَمْ يَسْتَجِبْ لِي دُعَائِي، وَالْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ الَّذِي لَا
رَأْجُو غَيْرَهُ وَلَا رَجُوَ غَيْرَهُ لَا خَلْفَ رَجَائِي.

“(All) praise be to Allah (alone) other than whom I turn to no one, and if I invoke anyone other than Him my supplications will remain unfulfilled. (All) praise be to Allah (alone) other than whom I do not ask for any thing, and had I asked from any one other than Him my hopes and expectations would be lost.”

The Supplication of Abū Ḥamzah al-Thumālī

The supplication known as *Du‘ā’ Abū Ḥamzah al-Thumālī* which is recited before dawn, during the month of Ramadān, is one of the noble and substantial supplications transmitted from Imām ‘Alī ibn al-Ḥusayn (‘a).

Abū Ḥamzah al-Thumālī, a companion of Imām al-Bāqir (‘a) and Imām al-Sādiq (‘a) recorded this supplication from Imām al-Sajjād (‘a). Abū Ḥamzah was called “the Salmān of his time”.¹ This great supplication in itself bespeaks of his knowledge and personality.²

1– Salmān refers to Salmān al-Fārsī who was one of the great companions of Prophet Muḥammad (s). See Sayed Ali Asgher Razwy, *Salman al-Farsi: Friend of the Prophet Muḥammad* (Karachi: Islamic Seminary Publication, n.d.). [Trans.]

2– In *Bihar al-Anwār*, vol. 98, p. 82, *ḥadīth* 2, the late ‘Allāmah Majlisī has mentioned the chain of transmission [*sanad*] of this supplication as follows:

Abū Muḥammad Ḥārūn ibn Mūsā Tal‘akbarī narrated from Ḥamzah as an ibn Mahbūb (who were both prominent narrators) from Abū Ḥamzah al-Thumālī that Ḥadīrat ‘Alī ibn al-Ḥusayn (‘a) used to pray all night during the month of Ramadān and recite this supplication before dawn.

This supplication is named *Du‘ā’ Abū Ḥamzah al-Thumālī* either because it has been transmitted by Abū Ḥamzah or taught to him by Imām al-Sajjād.

Who was Abū Ḥamzah? Abū Ḥamzah Thābit ibn Dīnār belonged to the tribe of Thumālah in Kūfah. Some claimed that he belonged to the tribe of Banī Tha‘l but since lived with the tribe of Thumālah, he was known as al-Thumālī. He lived during the time of Imām al-Sajjād, Imām al-Bāqir and Imām al-Sādiq (‘a) and narrated traditions from them. Some claimed that he also lived during

Ontological relationship between God and His creatures

the Imamate of Imām al-Kāz im (‘a). It is reported that he was one of the close companions and reliable narrators of those Imāms (‘a). Also, Imām al-S ādiq (‘a) is reported to have said: “Abū H amzah is the Salmān of his time.” Najjāshī, *Rijāl* (Beirut), pp. 289-290.

Shaykh Abū ‘Amrū Kashshī Muh ammad ibn ‘Umar ibn ‘Abd al-‘Azīz who was a distinguished scholar of *rijāl* and writer of the accounts of the companions of the Imāms (‘a) mentioned in his book of *rijāl* that he saw Abū ‘Abd Allāh Muh ammad ibn al-Na‘īm al-Shādhānī writing that he heard from Fad l ibn Shādhān saying that he heard from a reliable companion that H ad rat al-Rid ā (‘a) said:

أَبُو حَمْزٍ فِي زَمَانِهِ كَلْفَمَانَ فِي زَمَانِهِ وَ لَكَ أَنَّهُ خَدِمَ رَابِعَةَ مِنَّا: عَلِيَّ بْنَ الْحُسَيْنِ وَمُحَمَّدَ بْنَ عَلِيٍّ وَجَعْفَرَ بْنَ مُحَمَّدٍ وَبُرْهَةَ مِنْ عَصْرِ مُوسَى بْنِ جَعْفَرٍ .

“Abū H amzah is the Luqmān of his time and he served four of us, namely, ‘Alī ibn al-H usayn, Muh ammad ibn ‘Alī and Ja‘far ibn Muh ammad and he lived up to the time of Mūsā ibn Ja‘far.”

In the book on *rijāl* by Mamqānī, Dāwūd Raqqī from Khurāsān who went to visit [*ziyārah*] the shrine of the Commander of the Faithful (‘a) (in Najaf) is reported to have said: “After visiting the shrine of the Commander of the Faithful (‘a), I went to Kūfah where I saw a group of people sitting around an old man, listening to him. As I got closer, I understood that they were followers of the *Ahl al-Bayt* (‘a). I asked who the man was. They said that he was Abū H amzah. I also sat with them. During his talk, an Arab came and said: ‘I have come from Medina and I saw that Ja‘far al-S ādiq (‘a) passed away.’ On hearing this news, Abū H amzah cried and lamented. He then asked the man: ‘Did he make a will?’ The man said: ‘He made a will about his sons ‘Abd Allāh and Mūsā as well as Mans ūr (the then ruling ‘Abbāsīd caliph).’ Abū H amzah said: ‘Thanks to Allah for not misguiding us. He guided us to the ‘small’, uncovered the ‘big’ and managed the great affair.’ Thereafter, he went to the shrine of the Commander of the Faithful (‘a) and prayed.” I approached and asked him about the meaning of his statement. He answered: ‘The ‘big’ (‘Abd Allāh, the elder son) has a physical defect (so he cannot be the next Imām) and the ‘small’ (Mūsā, the younger son) is mentioned as he is the true successor (and next Imām)...’ Thereafter, I went to Medina and asked Imām al-Kāz im (‘a) about the issue. The Imām (‘a) replied: ‘Did Abū H amzah not tell you about it near the shrine of the Commander of the Faithful (‘a)? The faithful whose heart is illuminated by the light of Allah has unblemished knowledge’.”

These *ah ādīth* show the high station of Abū H amzah. Moreover, whenever the Imāms (‘a) would give orders to some of their companions, these orders were generally consistent with the merit and quality of those companions. Whoever comprehends the importance and greatness of this supplication will become acquainted with Abū H amzah’s high station and excellence.

We narrate this supplication from *Mafātīh al-Jinān* of the late H āj Shaykh ‘Abbās Qummī from his *Misbāh* .

Although the supplications transmitted from the Imāms (‘a) are sometimes expressed in simple terms, they contain sublime points, and everyone is supposed to reflect on and benefit from them. The higher a person’s spiritual state is, the more he will benefit from these supplications. It is true that the subjects of some supplications, like some Qur’anic verses, can be considered, so to speak, as ‘allegorical’ [*mutashābih*] and are hard for us to comprehend, but sometimes reflecting on them could also be beneficial to a person. For example, we read in *Du‘ā’ al-Iffitāḥ*, thus:

أَلْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ الَّذِي مِنْ خَشْيَتِهِ تَرَعَدُ السَّمَاوُتُ وَسُكَّانُهَا، وَتَرْجُفُ الْأَرْضُ وَعُمَّارُهَا، وَتَمُوجُ الْبِحَارُ
وَمَنْ يَسْبِحُ فِي عَمْرَاتِهَا.

“Praise be to Allah! In His awe-inspiring fear the heavens and its dwellers tremble and shiver, the earth and its inhabitants shake and quiver, the oceans and all that which float and swim in its waters flow together in excitement and tumult.”

It is also said in the Qur’an, thus:

﴿وَيُسَبِّحُ الرَّعْدُ بِحَمْدِهِ وَلَمَّا نَكَهَ مِنْ خَيْفَتِهِ﴾

“The Thunder celebrates His praise, and the angels [too], in awe of Him.”¹

It also states elsewhere:

﴿يُسَبِّحُ لِلَّهِ مَا فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَمَا فِي الْأَرْضِ﴾

“Whatever there is in the heavens glorifies Allah and whatever there is in the earth.”²

God also says:

﴿وَإِنْ مِنْ شَيْءٍ إِلَّا يُسَبِّحُ بِحَمْدِهِ وَلَكِنْ لَا تَفْقَهُونَ تَسْبِيحَهُمْ﴾

“There is not a thing but celebrates His praise, but you do not understand their glorification.”³

These are subjects which are beyond our comprehension. Also, the exegetes of the Qur’an [*mufasssirin*] usually believe that these verses and supplications are allegorical [*mutashābihāt*]. Some, nonetheless, sometimes try to explain them. In any case, they speak about an aspect of the relationship between God and His creatures. This relationship can be

1– *Sūrat al-Ra‘d* 13:13.

2– *Sūrat al-Jum‘ah* 62:1; *Sūrat al-Taghābun* 64:1.

3– *Sūrat al-Isrā’* (or *Banī Isrā’īl*) 17:44.

likened to a very strong magnet. Ontologically, God draws His servants towards Him and every creature intrinsically comprehends the relationship between itself and God according to its existential radiance [*shu‘ā-e wujūdī*], knowledge and understanding. Among His creatures, God has endowed man with special faculties with which he can best grasp this ontological relationship. He can strengthen this relationship, if he wishes, and move towards God.

Occupations as a hindrance to grasping the ontological relationship

Usually, because of mundane or worldly occupations, people are heedless of this ontological relationship which is embedded in the depth of their existence. In most cases, because of individual and social occupations and engagements, we hardly find time throughout the year to think about this relationship. The month of Ramaḍān, however, in which there are more chances to engage in supplications and worship, is a good opportunity for one to somehow get rid of his worldly affairs and focus his attention on God, look at the manifestation of Divine Greatness, and comprehend the Names and Attributes of His Beauty and Perfection.

Comprehending the Divine Attributes of Beauty and Perfection has distinctive attraction. For example, man finds such intimacy with God that he does not want to be deprived of it. He comprehends God’s Magnificence and joyfully prostrates before God. By attaining this state—commensurate to one’s level of gnosis [*ma‘rifah*—man enjoys such joy and ecstasy that cannot be compared to any material or worldly enjoyment and happiness. In the past, many people experienced this bliss. There are also many today.

When man abandons materiality and focuses his attention on God, he can feel a sort of attraction between himself and God which cannot be explained. In that state, he sees himself closer to God. God reveals in the Qur’an:

﴿وَنَحْنُ أَقْرَبُ إِلَيْهِ مِنْ حَبْلِ الْوَيْدِ﴾

“*And We are nearer to him than his jugular vein.*”¹

But because of our reprehensible deeds, we move away from Him. If man abandons his wicked acts and carnal desires, he will get closer to Him.

In this *Du‘ā’ Abū Ḥamzah al-Thumālī*, Imām al-Sajjād (‘a) says:

﴿وَنَّا لَا نَحْتَجِبُ عَنْ خَلْقِكَ إِلَّا أَنْ تَحْتَجِبَهُمُ الْأَعْمَالُ بِوُجْهِكَ﴾

1— *Sūrat Qāf* 50:16.

“Verily, You do not conceal Yourself from Your creation unless they shut You off while carrying out their daily functions.”

Paying attention to His kindness increases one’s love for God

The supplicant ought to reflect on the contents of this supplication and imagine how Imām al-Sajjād (‘a) would raise his hands in supplication at midnight during Ramaḍān, supplicating and imploring God.

الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ الَّذِي لَا دُعَاؤَ غَيْرَهُ وَلَا دَعْوَةَ غَيْرِهِ لَمْ يَسْتَجِبْ لِي دُعَائِي.

“(All) praise be to Allah (alone) other than whom I turn to no one, and if I invoke anyone other than Him my supplications will remain unfulfilled.”

If we are sometimes frustrated, it is because we have relied on other than God. So, Imām al-Sajjād (‘a) says:

وَلِحَمْدِ اللَّهِ الَّذِي لَا رَجَاؤَ غَيْرَهُ وَلَا رَجْوَةَ غَيْرِهِ لَا خَلْفَ رَجَائِي.

“(All) praise be to Allah (alone) other than whom I do not ask for anything, and if I ask from one other than Him, my hopes and expectations will be lost.”

In another place, the Imām (‘a) said to God:

كَيْفَ رَأَيْتُكَ غَيْرَ وَ لَخَيْرٌ كُلُّهُ بِيَدِكَ؟

“How should I have hope in other than You, when the good—all of it—is in Your hand?”¹

These words must be uttered the way Imām al-Sajjād (‘a) uttered them. Only someone like him could talk to God in such a manner and make such a supplication. We have not yet reached the stage where we supplicate in this way:

الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ الَّذِي يَحْلُمُ عَلَيَّ حَتَّى كَأَنِّي لَا ذَنْبَ لِي.

“(All) praise be to Allah (alone) Who is so gentle and considerate towards me as if I had not sinned.”

Of course, it must be noted that all this forgiveness and compassion of God is meant for this world, by delaying the consequences of man’s evil deeds lest he repents and feels sorry for his evil deeds. So, He shows His mercy and compassion to His sinful servant so that this servant returns to Him, as a

1– *Mafātīḥ al-Jinān*, The 15 Whispered Prayers, “The Whispered Prayer of the Hopeful.”

friend. God does not say, “*You rebelled against Me many times and committed many offenses.*” Not only does He refuse to abandon His sinful servant but also treats him as if he had not committed any sin at all.

Once a person gives attention to these realities, the attraction between him and God will be strengthened and his love for God will increase. So, he loves to talk longer to God, have intimacy with Him and be prepared to abandon his mischievous deeds and get rid of his inclinations to materiality or worldly matters. He knows that no one else but God has a true and lasting relationship with him. Only God can turn his hopes into reality and only He can fulfill his wishes. Paying heed to these subtle points will gradually lift the veils between man and God, and according to his station, he will feel that God is near. God listens to him and is willing to grant his requests. In *Du‘ā’ al-Ifitāh*, God is described in this manner:

الْبَاسِطُ بِالْجُودِ يَدَهُ.

“His distinct overflowing generosity is freely available through His unlimited bestowals.”

The extent of God’s favors is vast. We, out of freewill, must create such an inner condition that we can benefit from those Divine favors. God is not negligent of His servants. Because of problems, engagements and blemishes which we create within ourselves, we hardly find time to think about these favors, while God is ready always, everywhere, to answer our call. In fact, it is recorded in a *ḥadīth qudsī* that God says:

أُنَاجِيهِ فِي ظُلْمِ اللَّيْلِ وَنُورِ النَّهَارِ.

“I whisper to him in the darkness of the night as well as the brightness of the day.”¹

That is, God talks to His servant whenever He wants to. Once a servant becomes a beloved of God, whenever he is negligent, God Himself reminds him. The open and hidden favors of God are so abundant that they are beyond explanation. We have become acquainted with these favors and stations by the blessing of the pure Imāms (‘a). In order to reap some of these Divine favors, we supplicate and express our feelings with the hope that He will grant His grace and purge us of our impurities. Our hands and feet are so tied up that without the hope in God and His *awliyā’*, we cannot redeem ourselves. Once man acquires such spiritual states and tastes their sweetness, he will no more pay attention to anything else. The *awliyā’* of Allah who have savored this sweetness say as such:

1– *Bih ār al-Anwār*, vol. 77, p. 24, *h adīth* 6.

إِلَهِي مَا أَلَدَّ خَوَاطِرَ الْإِلْهَامِ بِذِكْرِكَ عَلَى الْقُلُوبِ، وَمَا أَخْلَى الْمَسِيرَ إِلَيْكَ بِالْأَوْهَامِ فِي مَسَالِكِ
الْغُيُوبِ، وَمَا أَطْيَبَ طَعْمَ حُبِّكَ، وَمَا أَعْدَبَ شَرِبَ قُرْبِكَ.

“My God, how agreeable for hearts are the thoughts inspiring Your remembrance, how sweet traveling to You through the imagination upon the roads of unseen worlds, how pleasant the taste of Your love, how delightful the drink of Your nearness!”¹

Therefore, we must fervently supplicate, and if we cannot, as indeed we cannot, at least try to be among the true supplicants, i.e. those who sincerely supplicate. Perhaps, God will also grant us His favor. Sometimes, God is pleased with those who behave like His true servants. It is stated in a *ḥadīth* that there was a hermit who used to impersonate Ḥaḍrat Mūsā (‘a) to entertain Pharaoh in his court. He would clad himself in wool, walk with a staff, stand in front of Pharaoh, and say: “I am a prophet sent by God. Believe in me...” When God drowned Pharaoh and his legion, He did not drown the hermit. He said: “He lovingly impersonated My servant and beloved. For this reason, I did not drown him.”

So, we also imitate the *awliyā’* of Allah, repeating what they recited so that by imitating His *awliyā’*,² God may grant us His grace and favor.

إِلَهِي إِنْ كَانَ قَلَّ زَادِي فِي الْمَسِيرِ إِلَيْكَ، فَلَقَدْ حَسَنَ ظَنِّي بِالتَّوَكُّلِ عَلَيْكَ، وَإِنْ كَانَ جُرْمِي قَدْ
أَخَافُنِي مِنْ عُقُوبَتِكَ، فَإِنَّ رَجَائِي قَدْ أَشْعَرَنِي بِالْأَمْنِ مِنْ نِقْمَتِكَ.

“My God, though my provisions for traveling to You are few, my confidence in You has given me security. Though my sin has made me fear Your punishment, my hope has let me feel safe from Your vengeance.”³

1– *Mafātīh al-Jinān*, The 15 Whispered Prayers, “The Whispered Prayer of the Knowers.”

2– “Whoever imitates a community is one of them.” *Bihār al-Anwār*, vol.11, p.174, *ḥadīth* 19. Imām ‘Alī (‘a) also said: “Whoever imitates a community unless he is doubtful of it is one of them.” *Sharḥ Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 19, p.27.

3– *Mafātīh al-Jinān*, The 15 Whispered Prayers, “The Whispered Prayer of the Beseechers.”

Second Discourse

Paying Attention to the Attributes of Allah

أَدْعُوكَ يَا سَيِّدِي بِلِسَانٍ قَدْ أَخْرَسَهُ ذَنْبُهُ، رَبِّ أَنْاجِيكَ بِقَلْبٍ قَدْ أَوْبَقَهُ جُرْمُهُ، أَدْعُوكَ يَا رَبِّ
رَاهِباً رَاعِباً، رَاجِئاً خَائِئِفاً، إِذَا رَأَيْتُ مَوْلَايَ ذُنُوبِي فَرَعْتُ، وَإِذَا رَأَيْتُ كَرَمَكَ طَمِعْتُ، فَإِنْ عَفَوْتَ
فَخَيْرٌ رَاجِمٍ، وَإِنْ عَذَّبْتَ فَغَيْرُ ظَالِمٍ.

“I invoke You, O my Chief, confessing that I have drunk from the casket of sins. O Lord! I lay open my heart before You to show that I have transgressed Your boundaries many times. O Lord! Terrified, eager, hopeful, afraid, I invoke You. O my Master, when I look into my record of sins it frightens me, when I look up to Your kind generosity I long for it greedily. Therefore, if You forgive me, it will be the height of mercy, and if I am punished, it will not be unjust.”

Paying attention to the Attributes of Allah at the time of supplication

Supplication is actually man’s attention to God and strengthening of the relationship of servitude [*‘ubūdiyyah*]. In this relationship, on one side is God, the Exalted, and the other side is His sinful servant. The supplicant always sees himself between fear and hope. On one hand, when he remembers his sins, he is dumb and regretful. On the other hand, when he thinks of the infinite mercy of God, he becomes hopeful, experiences a state of rapture, opens his mouth, and beseeches God’s mercy.

The Imām (‘a) also expressed these points in his 15 whispered prayers [*munājāt khamsah ‘asharah*]:

إِلَهِي ارْحَمْ عَبْدَكَ الدَّلِيلَ، ذَا اللِّسَانِ الْكَلِيلِ.

“O God, have mercy upon Your lowly slave of silent tongue and few good deeds.”¹

Imām al-H usayn (‘a) also expressed similar points in *Du‘ā’ ‘Arafah*:

1– *Mafātīh al-Jinān*, The 15 Whispered Prayers, “The Whispered Prayer of the Utterly Poor.”

إِلَهِي كُلَّمَا أَخْرَسَنِي لُؤْمِي أَنْطَقَنِي كَرَمُكَ وَكُلَّمَا آيَسَّتْنِي وَأَصَافِي أَطْمَعْتَنِي مِنْكَ.

“O my God, my abjectness makes me dumb but Your magnanimity makes me expressive: my (miserable) conditions disappoint me but Your favors give me hope!”

Manifestations of the Most Beautiful Names of Allah

In general, the states of the *awliyā*’ with their Beloved are of two types. Sometimes, their attention is focused on the Divine Attributes and Names of Glory and they are frightened by the Divine Power, and fear of Divine wrath envelops their entire being. In this state which is technically called ‘seizure’ [*qabḍ*], the tongue of the servant is tied up and he is heavy-hearted as if covered by a veil. But, sometimes, they give attention to the Beautiful Names of Allah and are enthralled by witnessing them. As they experience a state of ‘exhilaration’ [*inbisāt*], they want to talk and open their hearts to God. In this state, the servant’s tongue is untied and enjoys conversing with the Beloved. This state is technically called “*dalāl*”; that is, a sort of coquetry and amorous gesture. In the same *Du‘ā*’ *Abū Ḥamzah al-Thumālī*, Imām al-Sajjād (‘a) says to God:

وَلَيْنِ دَخَلْتَنِي النَّارَ لِأَخِيرٍ أَهْلَ النَّارِ بِحَبِي (إِيَّاكَ) لَكَ.

“[O Allah!] If You make me enter hellfire, I shall tell its dwellers that I love you!”

The Imām (‘a) says elsewhere:

إِلَهِي إِنْ أَدْخَلْتَنِي النَّارَ فِي ذَلِكَ سُورُ عَدُوِّكَ، وَإِنْ أَدْخَلْتَنِي الْجَنَّةَ فِي ذَلِكَ سُورُ نَبِيِّكَ، وَمَنَا
وَلِلَّهِ أَعْلَمُ أَنَّ سُورَ نَبِيِّكَ أَحَبُّ إِلَيْكَ مِنْ سُورِ عَدُوِّكَ.

“O Allah! If You admit me into paradise, Your Prophet will be glad but if You send me to hell, Your enemy (Satan) will be happy, and By Allah! I know that for You the pleasure of Your Prophet is more pleasing than the delight of Your enemy.”

In this state, those who have perfect gnosis [*ma‘rifah*] sometimes even faint and swoon. Many instances, in the life of Ḥaḍrat ‘Alī and Imām al-Sajjād (‘a), have been narrated. In the supplications transmitted from these holy personages, one can find traces of these two states of ‘seizure’ and ‘exhilaration’. Especially in *Du‘ā*’ *Abū Ḥamzah al-Thumālī*, *Du‘ā*’ *Kumayl*, *Du‘ā*’ *al-Sabāḥ*, *Du‘ā*’ ‘*Arafah* of Imām al-Ḥusayn (‘a), *Munājāt Khamsah ‘Asharah* [Fifteen Whispered Prayers], and many other supplications in *al-Ṣaḥīfah al-Sajjādiyyah* and other books on supplication.

In *Du‘ā’ Abū Ḥamzah al-Thumālī*, Imām al-Sajjād (‘a) says:

فَمَنْ يَكُونُ أَسْوَأَ حَالًا مِنِّي إِنْ أَنَا نُقِلْتُ عَلَى مِثْلِ حَالِي إِلَى قَبْرِي.

“If You send me to the grave while I am in this state, is there anyone who could be in a worse state?”

Confession of sin brings nearness to God

God wants His servant to confess his sins. Whether His servant confesses his sins or not, nothing is added to or taken away from God’s dominion and sovereignty. But God likes His servant to confess his sins because he will become conscious of his abjectness, meanness and sins, and feel God’s forgiveness more intensely.

In reality, unless man realizes his meanness, he cannot savor the taste of God’s forgiveness because the more he becomes heedful of his sins and meanness, God’s forgiveness becomes more pleasant to him and he realizes His mercy more profoundly.

In some supplications, there are various expressions and wordings that make man reach a station that makes him deserve Divine mercy. For example, it is said in one supplication: “O God! How will You punish this servant of Yours on whom You bestowed all these blessings? On the very moment when You created him, nay even prior to his creation, You provided everything he needed. You nurtured him with Your diverse blessings. While he was committing sins, You gave him the glad tidings of forgiveness, pardon and compassion, and invited him to repent and feel sorrow and be hopeful of Your grace and mercy. You invited him and instilled Your love in his heart so that he would hasten to worship You. He expected Your mercy and cried in fear of Your wrath.”

Indeed, these supplications make man’s heart heedful of God and instill in him the faculty of comprehending Divine mercy. In other words, they ‘stimulate’ God’s mercy.

Therefore, it is indeed commendable for man to recall his sins and be heedful of God’s infinite mercy. By doing so, we will realize how many sins he committed and went against God’s order—sins, the commission of any of which is enough for one to deserve years of punishment. Yet, God disregarded all of them and incessantly extended His mercy upon him.

The more man realizes his poverty and helplessness vis-à-vis God, he becomes more humble and deserving of Divine grace or favor.

إِلَهِي أَتَوَسَّلُ إِلَيْكَ بِفَقْرِي إِلَيْكَ.

“O Allah! I seek Your help through my poverty (in relation to You).”¹

Our arrogance and I-ness or egoism [*anāniyyah*] stands between us and God. If man sees himself as he is and realizes his helplessness and abjectness, he will be encompassed by God’s infinite mercy and obtain greater blessings.

The Qur’an states that when Ḥaḍrat Yūnus (Jonah) (‘a) confessed his mistake, he received the help and mercy of God:

﴿وَإِذَا التُّونُ مِنْ دَهَبٍ مُغَاصِبًا فَظَنَّ أَنْ لَنْ نَقْدِرَ عَلَيْهِ فَنَادَى فِي الظُّلُمَاتِ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا أَنْتَ سُبْحَانَكَ إِنِّي كُنْتُ مِنَ الظَّالِمِينَ﴾

“And when the Man of the Fish, left in a rage, thinking that We would not put him into hardship. Then he cried out in the darkness, ‘There is no god except You! You are immaculate! I have indeed been among the wrongdoers!’”²

Then, God answered his prayer:

﴿فَاسْتَجَبْنَا لَهُ وَنَجَّيْنَاهُ مِنَ الْغَمِّ وَكَذَلِكَ نُنَجِّي الْمُؤْمِنِينَ﴾

“So We answered his prayer and delivered him from the agony; and thus do We deliver the faithful.”³

In *Du‘ā’ ‘Arafah*, Imām al-Ḥusayn (‘a) says to God:

إِلَهِي تَقَدَّسَ رِضَاكَ أَنْ يَكُونَ لَكَ عِلَّةٌ مِنْكَ فَكَيْفَ يَكُونُ لَكَ عِلَّةٌ مِنِّي.

“O Allah! It is beyond Your station to have created a means that will earn Your pleasure, let alone my action earning Your pleasure!”

God is too great to be influenced by the actions of His servants. God’s way of doing things is fixed. By doing wholesome works, repenting, entreating and supplicating, we must create from within ourselves the merit to comprehend God’s mercy. Commensurate to our inherent constitution, we must generate the capability to receive God’s mercy, and this cannot be realized except by realizing one’s bondage and abjectness in relation to God.

1– *Mafāṭih al-Jinān*, Supplication of Imām al-Ḥusayn (‘a) in ‘Arafah.

2– *Sūrat al-Anbiyā’* 21:87.

3– *Sūrat al-Anbiyā’* 21:88.

One who recognizes himself as rich does not turn to God to ask for something. Thus, he will not be encompassed by God’s mercy. As such, a confession of abjectness in relation to God is actually an improvement of our capability to receive His mercy. For this reason, God says in the Qur’an:

﴿ وَمَا خَلَقْتُ الْجِنَّ وَالْإِنْسَ إِلَّا لِيَعْبُدُونِ ﴾

“I did not create the jinn and humans except that they may worship Me.”¹

God is not in need of the worship of His servants. But servitude [*‘ubūdiyyah*] is realized through the same expression of poverty, need and bondage which leads to our perfection. Through servitude and devotion to God, we can receive more of His grace. Just as we pray to God in relation to material affairs, we must also pray to God in relation to spiritual affairs, for this and the next world as whatever is in them belongs to Him who is the Lord of the worlds.

In order to comprehend our abjectness and helplessness, God has commanded us to take His saints [*awliyā’*] as our mediators. (They are means [*wasā’it*] for the descent of Divine favor upon creatures including human beings.) As such, nearness to the *awliyā’* of Allah is in reality nearness to Him:

لَا يُذَكِّرُنَا مِنْ ذِكْرِ اللَّهِ.

“Indeed, remembering us is part of remembering Allah.”

By servitude to God, they have attained such stations. Once we see what stations they have, we will realize the value of servitude to God and understand which stations can be attained under the aegis of servitude to Him.

In identifying our duties, God must help us know which acts are pleasing to Him and liked by His *awliyā’*. God must also provide us the means to understand them. Moreover, opportunity [*tawfīq*] must also be granted by Him so that we can discharge our responsibilities. If we ever succeed in doing good deeds, it is God’s grace that encompasses us. The ideal result lies in the will of God. The Qur’an points to these truths in numerous verses. In a certain verse, after saying, “We sent angels to help you fight the unbelievers,” God states:

1– *Sūrat al-Dhāriyāt* 51:56.

﴿وَمَا جَعَلَهُ اللَّهُ إِلَّا بُشْرًا وَلِنَطْمِئِنَّ بِهِ قُلُوبُنَا وَمَا النَّصْرُ إِلَّا مِنْ عِنْدِ اللَّهِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَزِيزٌ حَكِيمٌ﴾

“Allah did not send it but as good news, to reassure your hearts. Victory (or help) comes only from Allah. Indeed Allah is All-mighty, All-wise.”¹

Even angels cannot do anything by themselves. The coming down of angels that led to the victory of Muslims was based on God’s will and permission. It should not be imagined that contrary of the will of God or irrespective of it, one can do anything. If ever we experience an affliction, it is a result or consequence of our wicked acts. Meanwhile, we must be hopeful of God’s grace to remove our afflictions. But God will remove our afflictions provided that we feel remorse for our wicked acts and stop denying His blessings.

In any case, we must be hopeful of God’s grace and not be arrogant of ourselves and our deeds. As long as the early Muslims relied on God, they were recipients of His mercy and defeated the enemies in battles, but when they became arrogant, they were defeated, notwithstanding their greater number and equipment. The Qur’an states:

﴿وَلَقَدْ نَصَرَكُمُ اللَّهُ بِبَدْرٍ وَأَنْتُمْ كُنْتُمْ كَاذِبِينَ﴾

“Certainly Allah helped you at Badr, when you were abased [in the enemy’s eyes].”²

But elsewhere it says:

﴿وَيَوْمَ حُنَيْنٍ إِذْ أَعْجَبَتْكُمْ كَثْرَتُكُمْ فَلَمْ تُغْنِ عَنْكُمْ شَيْئًا﴾

“And on the day of Hunayn, your great number impressed you, but did not avail you in any way.”³

The purpose of these passages is that we must only rely on Allah, and neither on material causes nor our works. God has left the faithless with material causes but not the faithful [*mu’min*]. He Himself ensures the victory of the faithful provided that he keeps his faith in Him:

﴿وَلَا تَهِنُوا وَلَا تَحْزَنُوا وَأَنْتُمُ الْأَعْلَىٰ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ مُؤْمِنِينَ﴾

“Do not weaken or grieve: you shall have the upper hand, should you be faithful.”⁴

1— Sūrat al-Anfāl 8:10.

2— Sūrat Āl ‘Imrān 3:123.

3— Sūrat al-Tawbah (or, Barā’ah) 9:25.

4— Sūrat Āl ‘Imrān 3:139.

Therefore, we must think of strengthening our faith. We must be hopeful of God’s grace and mercy and never be arrogant because of our trivial works. We must not be afraid, no matter how bad the conditions are, because we believe that one must only discharge his duty and God has ensured victory [for the faithful].

Third Discourse

The Divine Presence

اللَّهُمَّ إِنِّي كُلَّمَا قُلْتُ قَدْ تَهَيَّأْتُ وَتَعَبَّأْتُ وَقُمْتُ لِلصَّلَاةِ بَيْنَ يَدَيْكَ وَنَاجَيْتُكَ أَلْقَيْتَ عَلَيَّ نُعَاسًا إِذَا أَنَا صَلَّيْتُ، وَسَلَّيْتَنِي مُنَاجَاةَكَ إِذَا أَنَا نَاجَيْتُكَ، مَا لِي كُلَّمَا قُلْتُ قَدْ صَلَّحْتُ سَرِيرَتِي، وَقَرَّبْتُ مِنْ مَجَالِسِ التَّوَابِينَ مَجْلِسِي، عَرَضْتَ لِي بَلِيَّةً أَزَالَتْ قَدَمِي، وَحَالَتْ بَيْنِي وَبَيْنَ خِدْمَتِكَ سَيِّدِي لَعَلَّكَ عَنْ بَابِكَ طَرَدْتَنِي، وَعَنْ خِدْمَتِكَ نَحَيْتَنِي.

“O Allah! Each time I got ready to speak, took pains and stood up to perform prayer before You, and enter into familiar conversation with You, You overwhelmed me with slumber at the time of prayer, and restricted my supplication as soon as I began to entreat You. Why is it thus for me? Each time I spoke, in my secret thoughts, and decided to be good, and sat in the company of those who turn repentant to You, You gave me over to sorrow and grief, unsettled me, and created a gap between me and my desire to serve You. O my Master, perhaps I have been pushed away from Your door and removed or dismissed from Your services.”

Being in the Divine Presence as higher than worship of the common man

Man’s occupations in the world are such that they make him unmindful of God, the Exalted, and the unseen worlds. Whenever man wants to step out of the mundane world and pay attention to the celestial world, worldly thoughts and engagements distract and deprive him of the state of supplication and litanies. But in spite of many wasted moments, there are times when man succeeds in heartily engaging in litanies, prayer and supplication. These moments become extremely precious for him.

Sometimes, by observing human societies and millions of people who are thinking of everything except God, man thinks that Divine Dominion is so alien! The majority of Muslims are unmindful of God and the next world, let alone those who do not believe in God at all or follow deviant religions.

It is known that when one of the mystics woke up for a night vigil and supererogatory prayers he saw people sleeping, and it came to his mind that Divine Dominion was so empty! Later on, he learned through inspiration [*ilhām*], however, that it is so lofty that not everybody can enter it.

Therefore, in spite of many problems and afflictions, if sometimes God gives an opportunity to a person to be able to engage in prayer and supplication, he must be grateful to Him for it. At the same time, someone who has these opportunities must not become arrogant thinking of his importance in the sight of God. These opportunities are part of the immense blessings of God which must duly be appreciated and acknowledged:

وَمِنْ أَعْظَمِ النِّعَمِ عَلَيْنَا جَرِيَانُ ذِكْرِكَ عَلَيَّ أَلْسِنَتِنَا، وَإِذْنُكَ لَنَا بِدُعَائِكَ.

“Among Your greatest favors to us is the running of Your remembrance across our tongues and the permission to supplicate to You!”¹

These blessings are granted to us not because we are dear to God but to test the extent of our gratitude. Every blessing which is not appreciated by man will be taken away from him. Thus, a person must be conscious of God and bear in mind that the value of spiritual and otherworldly blessings cannot be compared to mundane and worldly blessings.

In the *ziyārah* to Ḥaḍrat Ma‘šūmah (‘a),² we say to God:

فَلَا تَسْلُبْ مِنِّي مَا أَنَا فِيهِ.

“So, do not take away from me that which is with me.”

Although most of our prayers and supplications are nothing but imitations of the *awliyā’* of Allah, the mere opportunity to do so is so valuable a blessing that it must be appreciated, and we must ask God not to take it away but increase it. There are many who have been deprived of divine blessings because of their ingratitude.

Reasons behind man’s failure

In a certain part of *Du‘ā’ Abū Ḥamzah al-Thumālī*, Imām al-Sajjād (‘a) says to God:

اللَّهُمَّ إِنِّي... نَحَيْتُنِي وَإِلَيْكَ رَأَيْتُنِي مُسْتَحْفَافًا بِحَقِّكَ فَأَقْصَيْتُنِي، أَوْ لَعَلَّكَ رَأَيْتُنِي مُعْرَضًا عَنْكَ فَقَلَيْتُنِي، أَوْ لَعَلَّكَ وَجَدْتُنِي فِي مَقَامِ الْكَاذِبِينَ فَرَفَضْتُنِي، أَوْ لَعَلَّكَ رَأَيْتُنِي غَيْرَ شَاكِرٍ لِنِعْمَائِكَ فَحَرَمْتُنِي، أَوْ لَعَلَّكَ فَقَدْتُنِي مِنْ مَجَالِسِ الْعُلَمَاءِ فَخَدَلْتُنِي، أَوْ لَعَلَّكَ رَأَيْتُنِي فِي الْأَعْفَالِينَ فَمِنْ رُحْمَتِكَ آيَسْتُنِي، أَوْ لَعَلَّكَ رَأَيْتُنِي أَلْفَ مَجَالِسِ الْبَطَالِينَ فَيَبَيْتُنِي وَيَبِينُهُمْ خَلَيْتُنِي، أَوْ لَعَلَّكَ لَمْ

1– *Mafātīh al-Jinān*, The 15 Whispered Prayers, “The Whispered Prayer of the Rememberers”.

2 Fātimah al-Ma‘šūmah (‘a): the sister of Imām al-Ridā (‘a) who was buried in Qum. [Trans.]

تُحِبُّ نَا تَسْمَعُ دُعَائِي فَبَاعَدْتَنِي، أَوْ لَعَلَّكَ بِجُرْمِي وَجَرِيرَتِي كَافَيْتَنِي، أَوْ لَعَلَّكَ بِقِلَّةِ حَيَاتِي مِنْكَ جَارَيْتَنِي.

O my Master, perhaps I thought that Your claim was of no importance and consequence, so You kept me at a distance; or perhaps I looked the other way avoiding You, so You held me in contempt; or perhaps I tried to find what was lost in the company of liars, so You left me in the lurch; or perhaps I showed ungratefulness for the bounties I received from You, so You expelled and banished me; or perhaps I stopped visiting the gatherings of scholars, so You forsook me; or perhaps I sat in the company of the forgetful careless, so You withdrew Your mercy; or perhaps I enjoyed the conversation of vain jesters, so You kept up my friendship with them; or perhaps I did not crave for what I asked for, so You sent me away; or perhaps because of my offences I was chased away; or perhaps it was my lack of conscience that made You cut me off.”

By closely examining this part of the supplication, we find out that it is true that whenever we want, we can have the inner state of supplication, litanies and devotion to God. Experience has also proved that this state is not totally at the disposal of man. Many times, although a person wants to seriously engage in supplication and prayer, when the time for it comes he realizes that he has been in another state, forgetting that he is in the state of supplication or prayer. It can be deduced from this part of the supplication that our past actions contribute to the emergence and deprivation of opportunities for worship.

A person who spends day and night in vain activities cannot totally concentrate in his prayer and supplications and prevent futile ideas from entering his mind. Mingling with people engaged in unwholesome work or vain talk affects one’s inner state and behavior and deprives him of the state of supplication and litany. Like commission of sins, keeping aloof from the ‘*ulamā*’ and upright servants of Allah results in one’s deprivation of opportunities to worship God. It is mentioned in some narrations [*riwāyāt*] that sometimes God deprives His servant of the opportunity to engage in the night vigil and supererogatory prayers [*tahajjud*] because of his commission of sins during the day.

Therefore, if a person wants to succeed in sincere supplications, prayers and reading of the Qur’an, he must provide the preliminaries beforehand. Without preconditioning the heart, one cannot find the desired state in prayer and supplication.

This part of *Du‘ā’ Abū Ḥamzah al-Thumālī* urges us to be very careful of our actions lest the presence of heart in worship is taken away from us. Those who want to have the opportunity to engage in the night vigil and supererogatory prayers must be careful of their thoughts and actions during the day. They must keep their eyes and ears from whatever they are not supposed to see and hear. Their hearts must not give attention to futile affairs. They must not entertain worthless ideas in their minds. It is because these things stand in the way of presence of heart. As such, it can be said that all afflictions of man are products of his actions. It is he who, because of his actions, keeps spiritual blessings away from himself. The solution to all these problems can also be found in him.

The consequence of actions

Volitional actions done by man in this world have two outcomes. One outcome manifests itself in this world and the other outcome will surface in the next world. The mundane outcome of good actions done by a person is an opportunity to perform more good deeds. Conversely, the repercussion of wicked actions being committed leads to the deprivation of the opportunity to do good deeds, on one hand, and stronger inclination to commit more sins, on the other. For these two reasons, therefore, one must avoid doing wicked actions. Paying attention to these consequences prompts man to be watchful of his actions and always be wary of God [*taqwā*]*—*not to eat prohibited food, not talk about anything without forethought, nor do every thing thoughtlessly. In fact, he must always take the pleasure of God into consideration. Not everyone is admitted to an intimate meeting. There are many Muslims who do not have the opportunity to have intimacy with God. Only those who are truly wary of their actions, behavior and interaction with others and always remember God are admitted to an intimate meeting with God.

Those who are tainted with some shortcomings and deviations throughout their life must strive to purge themselves of these pollutions during the month of Ramaḍān, when they are invited to the divine banquet and an intimate meeting with Allah. In this blessed month, they must try to get accustomed to being wary of God so as to maintain piety even after Ramaḍān.

One of the best blessings of this month is the opportunity for man to perform the most sublime forms of worship. During this month, he is more careful of his actions. He does not eat every food, tries not to utter anything that comes to his mind, controls his eyes and ears, etc. As such, the more he trains himself in controlling these things, the more will he benefit from the blessings of this month. After this month, he must also strive to keep

everything he achieved from the spiritual training throughout the month, so that he can succeed henceforth, in his spiritual journey of love.

There are many people who are devoted and pious but they die impious and sinful. There are also many people who are sinners but they leave this world felicitous. So, one must not even look down upon the sinners. Arrogance or self-admiration is most detestable to God; therefore, He does not give some people the opportunity to perform night supererogatory prayers [*tahajjud*].¹ It is because arrogance [*ghurūr*] is so harmful to man that it cannot even be compensated by supererogatory prayers.

اللَّهُمَّ احْمِلْنَا فِي سُفُنِ نَجَاتِكَ، وَمَتِّعْنَا بِلَذِيذِ مُنَاجَاتِكَ، وَأُورِدْنَا حِيَاضَ حُبِّكَ، وَأَذِقْنَا حَلَاوَةَ
وُدِّكَ وَقُرْبِكَ، وَاجْعَلْ جِهَادَنَا فِيكَ، وَهَمَّنَّا فِي طَاعَتِكَ.

“O God, carry us in the ships of Your deliverance, give us to enjoy the pleasure of the whispered prayer to You, make us drink from the pools of Your love, let us taste the sweetness of Your affection and nearness, allow us to struggle towards You, [and] preoccupy us with obeying You.”²

1– Al-Kulaynī: *Us ūl al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, *bāb al-rid ā bi’l-qad ā’, h adīth 4*.

2– *Mafātīh al-Jinān*: The 15 Whispered Prayers, “The Whispered Prayer of the Obedient towards God”.

Fourth Discourse

Fear and Hope

إلهي لَوْ قَرَنْتَنِي بِالْأَصْفَادِ، وَمَنْعَتَنِي سَيْبِكَ مِنْ بَيْنِ الْأَشْهَادِ، وَذَلَّلْتَ عَلَيَّ فَضَايِحِي عُيُونَ الْعِبَادِ، وَأَمَرْتَ بِي إِلَى النَّارِ، وَحُلَّتْ بَيْنِي وَبَيْنَ الْأَبْرَارِ، مَا قَطَعْتَ رَجَائِي مِنْكَ وَمَا صَرَفْتَ تَأْمِيلِي لِلْعَفْوِ عَنكَ، وَلَا خَرَجَ حُبُّكَ مِنْ قَلْبِي، أَنَا لَا أَنْسَى أَبَادَتَكَ عِنْدِي، وَسِتْرَكَ عَلَيَّ فِي دَارِ الدُّنْيَا.

“O Allah! If I had been yoked to and tied with chains and cut off from the flowing stream of Your bounties in the presence of witnessing people, and they were all eyes to see how I was exposed to infamy and disgrace, and I was ordered to proceed to Hell, and a barrier was put between me and the blessed pious, even then I would not cease to have hope and it would not stop me from expecting Your pardon, and would not take away Your love from my heart. I have not forgotten the bounties and the protection You made available for me in this world.”

Fear and hope as a requisite of faith

One of the subjects emphasized in various ways in the noble supplications related to the blessed month of Ramad ān is the issue of fear and hope [*khawf wa rajā*] and the striking of a balance between them.

Perfect expression of the state of fear and hope in Imām al-Sajjād (‘a)

The prayer of Imām al-Sajjād (‘a) is a perfect expression of the needed state of fear and hope. Naturally, when a person comprehends the greatness of Allah, he will feel abjectness and express humility. So, one who truly comprehends the greatness of Allah cannot remain fearless of Him. The holy saints [*awliyā*] were so fearful that sometimes their faces would turn pale. At times, their trembling would be beyond description! Could we faithfully describe Hād rat ‘Alī, Imām al-Sajjād and the other infallible Imāms (‘a) without considering their states of fear?

Of course, while having such fear, the faithful [*mu’min*] must be as hopeful of God’s mercy as if he has not committed any sin.

Imām al-Sādiq (‘a) said one of the admonitions of Luqmān the Wise (‘a) to his son was as follows:

خَفِ اللَّهَ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ خَيْفَةً لَوْ جِئْتَهُ بِبِرِّ الثَّقَلَيْنِ لَعَذَّبَكَ. وَجِ اللَّهَ رَجَاءً لَوْ جِئْتَهُ بِذُنُوبِ الثَّقَلَيْنِ لَرَحِمَكَ.

“Have such a fear of God Almighty that were you to come to Him with the virtues of the two worlds [*thaqalayn*] He would still chastise you, and pin such a hope on God that were you to come to Him with the sins of the two worlds He would still have compassion for you.”¹

The Imām (‘a) also said in another *h adīth*:

نَجْوَى الْعَارِفِينَ تَدْرُ عَلَى ثَلَاثَةِ أَصُولٍ: الْخَوْفُ وَالرَّجَاءُ وَالْحُبُّ؛ فَالْخَوْفُ فَحْمُ الْعِلْمِ وَالرَّجَاءُ فَحْمُ الْيَقِينِ وَالْحُبُّ فَحْمُ الْمَعْرِفَةِ.

“The whisper (prayer) of the mystics is based on three principles: fear, hope and love. Fear is the outcome of [perfect] knowledge [of God and His Attributes]. Hope is the fruit of certainty [*yaqīn*] [to God]. Love is the offshoot of gnosis [of Allah].”²

There are many similar passages in other supplications and litanies transmitted from the infallible Imāms (‘a). In a poem attributed to him, Imām ‘Alī (‘a) said:

إِلَهِي لَنْنَ عَذَّبْتَنِي أَلْفَ حِجَّةٍ فَحَبْلِ رَجَائِي مِنْكَ لَا يَتَقَطَّعُ

O God, even if You chastise me for a thousand years,

*The rope of my hope in You[r mercy] will never be cut.*³

In *Du‘ā’ Kumayl*, Imām ‘Alī (‘a) says:

يَا مَوْلَايَ فَكَيْفَ يَبْقَى فِي الْعَذَابِ وَهُوَ يَرْجُو مَا سَلَفَ مِنْ جَلَمِكَ، أَمْ كَيْفَ تُؤْلِمُهُ النَّارَ وَهُوَ يَأْمَلُ فَضْلَكَ وَحَمَمَتَكَ.

“My Protector, how should he (Your servant) remain in chastisement while he has hope of Your previous clemency? Or how can the Fire cause him pain while he expects Your Bounty and Mercy?”

1– Al-Kulaynī, *Usūl al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, p. 67, *h adīth* 1.

2– *Bihār al-Anwār*, vol. 70, p. 22, *h adīth* 22.

3– *Mafātih al-Jinān*, p. 238.

While reading these lines, we must reflect a bit on ourselves and ask, “Can we really make such a supplication? Can we talk to God with such sincerity? Is it really true that on the Day of Judgment if God exposes our sins before His creatures, enchains us and sends us to hell, we will still hope for His mercy, and more than this, can we supplicate in such a way that our love for Him is not removed from our hearts and we still love Him?”

Such a supplication is hard to make. And we cannot sincerely make such a claim. The way we behave and think in this world bears testimony to this fact. If we encounter a problem which is not easily solved, we complain to God. Not only that love of Him has not remained in our hearts but we also nurture an ill feeling toward Him—God forbid! We are so attached to the world that separation from it is unimaginable.

It can be said, therefore, that our spiritual state is not attuned to such supplication. We cannot utter by ourselves this part of the supplication as with so many other parts of such supplications. Only the likes of Ḥaḍrat Amīr (‘a) and Imām al-Sajjād (‘a) can talk to God in such a manner and make such a claim. We must utter these statements as a way of quoting them. Nevertheless, we must endeavor to create states close to them.

Way of nurturing love for God

A. Paying attention to the blessings of Allah: Nurturing the love of God keeps a person away from disobeying Him and violating His orders. What shall we do to keep this love of God in our heart so that we remain near to Him even if we experience affliction and adversity? What shall we do to be so hopeful that even if we are thrown into hellfire, the hope of God’s mercy is not removed from our hearts?

What is the way of nurturing love of God and hope in Him? In this part of *Du‘ā’ Abū Ḥamzah al-Thumālī* quoted earlier, Imām al-Sajjād (‘a) said that “If ever my love for You is not removed from my heart, it is because I do not forget Your blessings. Neither do I forget Your concealment of my sins and lapses.” It can be inferred from these statements that if man wants the love of God to remain in his heart, he must constantly remember God and His ample blessings.

The Holy Prophet (ṣ) said:

أَحِبُّوا اللَّهَ لِمَا يَغْذِيكُمْ بِهِ نِعَمِهِ.

“Love Allah as He nourishes you with His blessings.”¹

1– *Bihār al-Anwār*, vol. 70, p. 16, *h adīth* 7.

It is mentioned in a *ḥadīth qudsī* that God, the Exalted, said to Mūsā ibn ‘Imrān (‘a): “O Mūsā! Express your love for Me in the presence of people.” Ḥaḍrat Mūsā (‘a) asked: “What should I do?” God said: “Mention My blessings to them.”¹

Therefore, in order to nurture the love of Allah in our hearts, we must remember each of His blessings and favors. God’s blessings are so abundant and we are so enveloped by them that we cannot comprehend their existence and are unaware of their value, except when we encounter problems and are deprived of a blessing or blessings. We then realize its or their value.

Du‘ā’ Jawshan Ṣaghīr mentions the afflictions experienced by people—and possibly us. At the outset, it points to the hostilities of the ill-wishers and enemies—and how God has protected us from them:

الهي كُفْمٌ مِنْ عَدُوِّ انْتَضَى عَلَيَّ سَيْفَ عداوَتِهِ وَشَحَدَ لِي ظَبَّةَ مُدْبِيَتِهِ، وَأَرْهَفَ لِي شَبَا حَدِّهِ،
وَأَفَ لِي قَوَاتِلَ سُمُومِهِ، وَسَدَّدَ إِلَيَّ (نَحْوِي) صَوَائِبَ سِهَامِهِ وَلَمْ تَنْمَ عَنِّي عَيْنُ جِرَاسَتِهِ،
وَضَمَّرْنَا يَسُومَنِي الْمَكْرُوهَ وَيُجَرِّعُنِي دُعَافَ مَرَارَتِهِ نَظْرًا (فَنَظْرًا) إِلَى ضَعْفِي عَنِ احْتِمَالِ
الْفَوْقِ .

“My God, many an enemy drew up the sword of hostility against me, honed the dagger’s edge, sharpened the arrows’ points, prepared deadly poisons, leveled his bow at me, and keeping an eye on me, planned to force me to swallow, against my will, the deadly bitter poison. You knew that I was too weak to bear hardships.”

It continues, thus:

وَجَعَلَنِي لِنِعْمَاتِكَ مِنَ الشَّاكِرِينَ وَلَا لَانِكَ مِنَ اللَّاكِرِينَ .

“And let me be among those who thank Thee for Thy bounties and remember Thee for Thy favors.”

Thus, it is necessary to set a certain time during the day or night to think about and remember God’s blessings and His concealment of our lapses. Let us remember His blessings and Him for these blessings although, as stated by Imām al-Ḥusayn (‘a), even if a person spends his entire life thanking God for His blessings, he will not be able to duly thank Him for even a single blessing except through His permission.² To express gratitude and

1— *Bih ār al-Anwār*, vol. 2, p. 4, *bāb* 8, *h adīth* 6.

2— In *Du‘ā’ ‘Arafah*, Imām al-Ḥusayn (‘a) said:

لَوْ عَمَّرْتُنَّهَا لَأُدِّيَ شُكْرُ وَجْهِكَ مِنْ أَنْعَمِكَ مَا اسْتَطَعْتَ ذَلِكَ إِلَّا بِمَنْكَ الْمَوْجِبَ عَلَيَّ بِهِ شُكْرُ أَبَدًا جَدِيدًا .

attain the station of the grateful [*shākirīn*] is a status given by God to His faithful servants, otherwise who could be able to duly express gratitude for His blessings? Imām al-Sajjād (‘a) says:

فَلَاؤُكَ جَمَّةٌ ضَعْفَ لِسَانِي عَنْ إِحْصَائِهَا، وَنِعْمَاؤُكَ كَثِيرَةٌ قَصَرَ فَهْمِي عَنْ إِدْرِكِهَا فَضْلاً عَنْ
اسْتِقْصَائِهَا، فَكَيْفَ لِي بِتَخْصِيلِ الشُّكْرِ، وَشُكْرِي إِيَّاكَ يَفْتَقِرُ إِلَى شُكْرٍ، فَكُلَّمَا قُلْتُ: لَكَ
الْحَمْدُ، وَجَبَ عَلَيَّ لِذَلِكَ أَنْ أَقُولَ: لَكَ الْحَمْدُ.

“Your boons are abundant—my tongue is too weak to count them! Your favors are many—my understanding falls short of grasping them, not to speak of exhausting them! So how can I achieve thanksgiving? For, my thanking You requires thanksgiving. Whenever I say, ‘To You belongs praise!’ it becomes thereby incumbent upon me to say, ‘To You belongs praise!’”¹

از دست و زبان که برآید کر عهده شکرش به در آید

Whose hand and tongue is able To duly thank Him for His blessings?

One of the ways through which we can better realize the blessings of God is to compare ourselves with those who are deprived of those blessings. By doing so, we will find out what great blessings God, the Exalted, has endowed us with, which others are deprived of. Paying heed to these blessings engenders love of God and a sense of gratitude and hope in our hearts.

In another part of *Du‘ā’ Abū Ḥamzah al-Thumālī*, Imām al-Sajjād (‘a) mentions the blessings of God, thus:

أَنَا الصَّغِيرُ الَّذِي رَبَّيْتَهُ، وَأَنَا الْجَاهِلُ الَّذِي عَلَّمْتَهُ، وَأَنَا الضَّالُّ الَّذِي هَدَيْتَهُ، وَأَنَا الْوَضِيعُ الَّذِي
رَفَعْتَهُ، وَأَنَا الْخَائِفُ الَّذِي آمَنْتَهُ، وَالْجَائِعُ الَّذِي أَشْبَعْتَهُ، وَالْعَطْشَانُ الَّذِي أَرَوَيْتَهُ، وَالْعَارِي الَّذِي
كَسَوْتَهُ، وَالْفَقِيرُ الَّذِي أَعْنَيْتَهُ، وَالضَّعِيفُ الَّذِي قَوَّيْتَهُ، وَالذَّلِيلُ الَّذِي أَعَزَّزْتَهُ، وَالسَّقِيمُ الَّذِي
شَفَيْتَهُ.

“O Master! I am the young one whom You raised, and I am the ignorant one whom You educated, and I am the misled one whom You guided, and I am the humiliated one whom You elevated, And

¹“Were my life to be extended through them to deliver thanks for one of Your blessings, I would not have been able to do so, except by Your grace, which alone makes incumbent upon me never-ending and ever renewed gratitude for You.”

1– *Maḥāṭib al-Jinān*: The 15 Whispered Prayers, “The Whispered Prayer of the Thankful”.

I am the frightened one whom You safeguarded, and the hungry one whom You fed, and the thirsty one whose thirst You quenched, and the naked one whom You dressed, and the poor one whom You made wealthy, and the weak one whom You strengthened, and the insignificant one whom You honored, and the afflicted one whom You cured.”

Apart from increasing one’s love for the Beneficent [*mun‘im*], paying heed to these blessings also kindles hope in his heart. The God who has endowed all these blessings does not want to send him to hell for no reason at all. He opens the way of felicity to man, but the ingratitude and disobedience of His servants demands that God the All-wise must make a distinction between them and His righteous servants. As such, those who are disobedient shall be punished.

B. Paying heed to God’s concealment of our sins: Concerning the sins we commit in private, God has provided the ground for other people not to become aware of them. This is also one of the great blessings that God has given man. Sometimes, when he is alone, a person commits a wicked act, but God, the Exalted, conceals his sin from public view. Had it not been for this blessing, he could not afford to be present in public. For this reason, Imām al-Sajjād (‘a) says:

أَنَا لَا أَنْسَى أَيَادِيكَ عِنْدِي، وَسِتْرَكَ عَلَيَّ فِي دَارِ الدُّنْيَا.

“I do not forget Your helping Hand upon me, and Your protection of my secrets in life.”

If during the holy month of Ramaḍān we do not prepare ourselves for such a program, we will not find any time more suitable than this. If we do not benefit from these opportunities, a time will come when we will regret and be at a loss. Suddenly, we will come to our senses and realize that another month of Ramaḍān has passed but we did not repent for our sins, are not relieved of the afflictions we got ourselves into, and we did not put off the fire we ignited in ourselves. We did not fulfill the rights of people, nor give up backbiting, lying, and other sins we committed daily.

أَفَلَيْسَانِي هَذَا الْكَلَّ أَشْكُرُكَ، أَمْ بِغَايَةِ جُهْدِي فِي عَمَلِي أَرْضِيكَ، وَمَا قَدْرُ لِسَانِي يَا رَبِّ فِي جَنْبِ شُكْرِكَ، وَمَا قَدْرُ عَمَلِي فِي جَنْبِ نِعْمِكَ وَإِحْسَانِكَ.

“Can I, with this heavy tongue of mine, thank You, or with my utmost effort satisfy You? And what is the value of my tongue, O

Lord, when it comes to thanking You? And what is the value of my good deeds compared to Your gifts and patience with me?”¹

1– A part of *Du‘ā’ Abū Ḥamzah al-Thumālī*.

Fifth Discourse

Remembrance of Allah

يَا مُؤَلَّيْ بِذِكْرِكَ عَاشَ قَلْبِي، وَبِمُنَاجَاتِكَ بَيَّعَ أَلَمَ الْخَوْفِ عَنِّي.

“O my Master! In Your remembrance my heart takes delight; through prayers I hold communion with You; this eases the pain of fear that torments me.”

Remembrance of Allah

The main purpose behind all religious obligations, especially different forms of worship, is to establish and strengthen the relationship between God and man, and the spirit of all these is to “remember” and be heedful of God, while performing them. Regarding ritual prayer [*s ālah*] which is the highest form of worship and highly enjoined, the Qur’an states:

﴿ وَاقِمِ الصَّلَاةَ لِذِكْرِي ﴾

“And maintain the prayer for My remembrance.”¹

Concerning other acts of worship, *fuqahā* [jurists] are of the opinion that if they are done without the remembrance of and attention to God, His commandments are not discharged.

The essence of Allah’s remembrance

What does *dhikr* mean? In Arabic, *dhikr* is applied to many cases. It can be said that the root of all these cases is identical with what we call *yād* [remembrance] in Persian. Of course, *dhikr* is sometimes applied to the heavenly books and prophets. Regarding the Torah [*tawrāt*], for example, the Qur’an states:

﴿ وَلَقَدْ كَتَبْنَا فِي الزَّبُورِ مِنْ بَعْدِ الذِّكْرِ أَنَّ الْأَرْضَ يَرِثُهَا عِبَادِيَ الصَّالِحُونَ ﴾

“Certainly We wrote in the Psalms, after the *dhikr* [Torah]: ‘Indeed My righteous servants shall inherit the earth’.”²

1– *Sūrat T ā Hā* 20:14.

2– *Sūrat al-Anbiyā*’ 21:105.

In many verses, the Qur'an itself is also referred to as *dhikr*. For example, it says:

﴿ إِنَّا نَحْنُ نَزَّلْنَا الذِّكْرَ وَإِنَّا لَهُ لَحَافِظُونَ ﴾

*“Indeed We have sent down the Reminder and indeed We will preserve it.”*¹

Perhaps the reason why heavenly scriptures and prophets are sometimes referred to as *dhikr* is that they make the people aware of God. People tend to remember God by reading these books and seeing these holy personages.

Hence, the main lexical meaning of *dhikr* is remembrance and attention. To remember someone or something is sometimes only a matter of the heart. At times, it is also expressed by the tongue. When you say, “I remember my friend,” this remembering is a matter of the heart that flashed in your mind. Sometimes, this remembrance flows from the heart to the tongue. For example, when you tell your friend, “We mentioned you favorably,” it means talking about him in addition to remembering him. Remembrance by the tongue follows remembrance by the heart. Unless something is in one's mind, he cannot mention or talk about it. Thus, to mention something shows remembrance of it by the heart which is the essence of *dhikr*.

It is worth-mentioning that remembrance of the tongue is always accompanied by attention of the heart. It is regrettable, however, that in remembering Allah, our acts of remembrance [*adhkār*] lack the presence of heart. We sometimes pray or read the Qur'an but that which is absent in our mind is the “remembrance” of Allah. This is while the essence and philosophy of prayer is nothing but attention to God. While supplicating and asking God for something, we are not even mindful of Him. If a man with spiritual insight observes many of us while praying, he will see that we are thinking of our spouses, children, occupations, houses, car, positions, etc. We are entangled with them. That which is totally absent is the remembrance of Allah.

In any case, the essence of *dhikr* is the attention of the heart. In this regard, the Qur'an states:

﴿ وَذَكِّرْ رَبِّكَ فِي نَفْسِكَ تَضَرُّعًا وَخِيفَةً وَهُوَ مِنَ الْجَهْرِ مِنَ الْقَوْلِ ﴾

*“And remember your Lord within your heart beseechingly and reverentially, without being loud.”*²

1— *Sūrat al-H ijr* 15:9.

2— *Sūrat al-A 'rāf* 7:205.

It is not proper for a person to shout while mentioning the Name of Allah. This verse enjoins us to remember Allah silently or whisperingly. Of course, in cases where “remembrance of Allah” [*dhikr Allāh*] is considered a slogan, such as in the call to prayer [*adhān*] and reciting *Allāhu akbar* [*takbīr*] in the battlefield, it must be loud to serve its intended purpose.

Peace of mind lies only in the remembrance of Allah

The life of man in this world is accompanied by anxieties. Some anthropological schools of thought even consider anxiety as the appraiser of man’s life and existence, or his deciding factor, maintaining that, “Man’s being human lies in the fact that he must be agitated and anxious.” Of course, this view is extreme but partially true. Because of various factors, human beings usually experience different forms of agitation and anxiety. They are always anxious about the future. It seems that this condition is useful for some reasons and can have positive effects, but it is basically an undesirable state. Man is inherently in pursuit of peace of mind. Whenever he is anxious, he needs peace of mind. The depth of the human heart must also be tranquil and serene, and anxieties must be like short and momentary waves, otherwise the life of man becomes gloomy.

What factor can give tranquility and peace of mind to a person? The Qur’an states that only remembrance of Allah can calm agitated and anxious hearts:

﴿أَلَا يَذْكُرُ اللَّهُ تَطْمَئِنُّ الْقُلُوبُ﴾

*“Look! The hearts find rest in Allah’s remembrance!”*¹

Those who truly remember Allah and in whose souls this remembrance is deeply rooted are so calm and tranquil that no event can make them anxious and agitated. In our time, Imām Khomeinī is an example of such personalities. Great events would happen—events that shake mountains—but this holy personage would not lose his calm and sobriety, as if nothing happened. What kind of a heart was his? What was the source of its strength? The East and the West were at logger heads with him but he was steadfastly and firmly pursuing his objective. The stronger the remembrance of and attention to God is, the more a person has tranquility of heart.

Traditions have likened the believer to a mountain and described him as stronger than it. It is because storms may make stones on top of the mountain roll down, but the hurricane of events can never weaken the faith of the believer.

1– *Sūrat al-Ra‘d* 13:28.

الْمُؤْمِن كَالْجَبَلِ الرَّاسِخِ لَا تَحْرُكُهُ الْعُورِصِف.

“The believer is like a mountain that cannot be shaken by winds.”¹

Why? It is because his heart is connected to something that cannot be shaken, transformed and extinguished. Therefore, in addition to eternal felicity, remembrance of Allah gives peace of mind in this world, which in itself is a blessing beyond description.

Allah’s special attention to His *awliyā*’

In the Qur’an, God uses an excellent expression which is worthy of reflection. He says:

﴿ فَادْكُرْ نِي ذِكْرِكُمْ وَشْكُرْ لِي وَلَا تَكْفُرْ ۚ ﴾

“Remember Me, and I will remember you.”²

This expression can be analyzed in different ways according to various views and levels of understanding. Of course, God is aware of everyone and everything at every moment.

﴿ وَمَا رَبُّكَ بِغَافِلٍ عَمَّا تَعْمَلُونَ ﴾

“Your Lord is not oblivious of what you do.”³

﴿ وَمَا كَانَ رَبُّكَ نَسِيًّا ﴾

“And Your Lord is not forgetful.”⁴

Allah has perfect knowledge of the past, the present and the future, and nothing is hidden from Him.

﴿ وَمَا يَعْزُبُ عَنْ رَبِّكَ مِنْ مِثْقَالِ ذُرَّةٍ فِي الْأَرْضِ وَلَا فِي السَّمَاءِ ﴾

“Not an atom’s weight escapes your Lord in the earth or in the sky.”⁵

Now, it is clear that when God says, “Remember Me, and I will remember you,” this ‘remembrance’ is something else. It is a special remembrance of God towards His friends [*awliyā*’]. It does not refer to His general attention towards all creation.

1– *Bih ār al-Anwār*, vol. 24, p. 104, *h adīth* 5 with a slight variation.

2– *Sūrat al-Baqarah* 2:152.

3– *Sūrat Hūd* 11:123.

4– *Sūrat Maryam* 19:64.

5– *Sūrat Yūnus* 10:61.

In interpreting this verse, some exegetes of the Qur’an have opined that God wants to say, “Remember Me by doing good deeds so that I remember you through My mercy and wholesome reward.” This expresses a portion of the truth, but it is possible that this verse points to a deeper and more profound subject. Those who have tasted the sweetness of love always like their beloved [*maḥbūb*] to pay attention to them. For example, in a gathering where they and their beloved are present, they wish their beloved glances at them sometimes. The true lover [*muḥibb*] is truly delighted by this attention and it is more valuable to him than all material enjoyments. God, the Exalted, has many such friends.

As such, God says: “*If you want Me to pay special attention to you (and so to speak, to take an occasional glance at you), then remember Me.*”

گرت هواست که معشوق نگسلد پیوند نگاهدار سر رشته تا نگهدارد

*If you want the beloved not to sever the bond (of love),
You must keep the union so that she will do so, too.*

So, those who have somehow tasted the sweetness of divine love do not forget God for even a moment. Even in sleep, they are heedful of Him. As they wake up, the first thing they utter is a remembrance [*dhikr*] of Allah. Some ‘*ulamā*’ said that as the effect of constant practice, a person will reach a stage where not only when he is alone will he remember Allah. In fact, while working for others, attending to daily affairs and interacting with others, attention to God will persist in his heart. Possibly, this state of attention to God remains in his heart or becomes even stronger while in sleep. Perhaps, it is for this reason that the sleep of a believer is said to be a form of worship [*‘ibādah*].

Therefore, remembrance of God leads to His special attention towards His remembering servant [*dhākir*]. During the latter part of the blessed life of the late ‘Allāmah (Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn Ṭabāṭabā’ī), he was often requested for advice. Such a request was repeated many times in which he would always recite the same noble verse:

﴿فَاذْكُرْنِي بِذِكْرِكُمْ وَشْكُرْ إِلَيَّ وَلَا تُكْفُرْنِي﴾

“*Remember Me, and I will remember you.*”¹

We can fully comprehend the importance and value of God’s attention towards His servant when we realize that the greatest loss of the faithless [*kuffār*] on the Day of Judgment will be God’s inattention to them. In

1– *Sūrat al-Baqarah* 2:152.

expressing the severity of the loss and chastisement of the faithless on the Day of Judgment, God says:

﴿ وَلَا يُكَلِّمُهُمُ اللَّهُ وَلَا يَنْظُرُ إِلَيْهِمْ ﴾

“And Allah will not speak to them nor will He [so much as] look at them.”¹

This is the severest and most painful chastisement for them. Presently, we cannot comprehend how painful God’s inattention is, but in the hereafter when the veils will be lifted, the importance of this issue will be clarified in such a manner that even the faithless will comprehend it.

Remembrance of Allah under all conditions

We shall end this section with traditions stating that remembrance of Allah in all conditions is good. Since man has physical and animalistic dimension, he has no option but to do certain things that are related to this dimension. Initially, he thinks that remembrance of Allah in such conditions is unpleasant, but God enjoins us to remember Him even in such conditions. As such, in some of these conditions, we are commanded not to face the *qiblah*.

Numerous supplications for most or perhaps all conditions have been transmitted from the Infallibles (‘a). In most cases, the holy personages themselves recited those supplications. As such, the servant of God must never forget Him.

Regarding the Holy Prophet (s), it has been reported, thus:

وَكَانَ لَا يَجْلِسُ وَلَا يَقُومُ إِلَّا عَلَى ذِكْرِ اللَّهِ جَلَّ إِسْمُهُ.

“He would neither sit nor rise up without remembering Allah, may His Name be glorified.”²

Whenever he would wear a new garment, he would recite a specific *dhikr*. At the time of sleeping, he would recite a certain *dhikr* or the Verse of the Throne [*āyat al-kursī*]³ according to some traditions. At the time of waking up, he would first perform prostration and praise Allah. Imām al-Bāqir (‘a) said:

1– *Sūrat Āl ‘Imrān* 3:77.

2– T abarsī, *Makārim al-Akhlāq*, p. 14.

3– *Sūrat al-Baqarah* 2:255.

مَا اسْتَيْقَظَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ مِنْ نَوْمٍ إِلَّا خَرَّ لِلَّهِ سَاجِدًا.

“The Messenger of Allah would not wake up without having prostrated to Allah.”¹

After waking up, Prophet Muḥammad (ṣ) would say:

أَلْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ الَّذِي أَحْيَانِي بَعْدَ مَوْتِي.

“All praise is due to Allah who revived me after being dead.”

Many other *adhkār* transmitted from the Imāms of guidance (‘a) all indicate that the believer must remember Allah in all conditions and begin every work with the remembrance of Allah.

God said to Mūsā ibn ‘Imrān (‘a): “Forget Me not in any condition and be not heedless in remembering Me.” Mūsā (‘a) said: “O God! In some conditions, I am ashamed to be aware of Your presence.” God said to him:

إِنَّ دَيْمِي حَسَنٌ عَلَى كُلِّ حَالٍ.

“Indeed remembrance of Me is good in all conditions.”²

Moreover, according to the Qur’an, nothing should obstruct the believer from remembering Allah. In describing the true believer, it states:

﴿رَجَالٌ لَا تُلْهِهِمْ تِجَارَةٌ وَلَا بَيْعٌ عَنْ ذِكْرِ اللَّهِ وَإِقَامِ الصَّلَاةِ﴾

“...men whom neither trading nor bargaining distracts from the remembrance of Allah, and the maintenance of prayer.”³

Outwardly, they are engaged in trading, business and interactions with people but God is always present in their minds. Nothing makes them neglectful of Him. In describing such believers, God said to His Apostle (ṣ) during the night of ascension [*mi‘rāj*]:

ثُمَّ يُقَالُ لَهَا: كَيْفَ تَرَكْتِ الدُّنْيَا؟ فَتَقُولُ: إِلَهِي وَعِزَّتِكَ وَجَلَالِكَ لَا عِلْمَ لِي بِالدُّنْيَا، أَنَا مُنْذُ خَلَقْتَنِي خَائِفٌ مِنْكَ. فَيَقُولُ اللَّهُ صَدَقْتَ عَبْدِي، كُنْتُ بِجِسْمِكَ فِي الدُّنْيَا وَوَحْدَكَ مَعِي.

“When the believer departs from this world, he will be asked: ‘How did you leave the world?’⁴ He will answer: ‘O Allah, by Your might and glory! I have no knowledge of it. Since You created me, I have

1– *Makārim al-Akhlāq*, p. 39.

2– *Bihār al-Anwār*, vol. 13, p. 343, *h adūth* 21.

3– *Sūrat al-Nūr* 24:37.

4– That is, “How’s the world when you left it?”

been conscious of You.’ Allah will say: ‘You speak the truth, My servant. Your body was in this world but your spirit was with Me.’¹

Intimacy with Allah as [source of] the joy of the *awliyā*’

Yes, if ever the true believer pays attention to the world, it is a superficial attention paid for lack of an alternative, but the heart is heedful of God. If ever he pays attention to the blessings of this world, it is because they are a gift of his Beloved to him.

The *awliyā*’ of Allah are not only heedless of the material enjoyments in this world but also in the hereafter where, while the average believers enjoy the divine blessings, they are in intimacy with their Lord.

In a *ḥadīth qudsī* on the Prophet’s night ascension [*mi’rāj*], it is thus stated:

وَدَا تَلَذُّذُ أَهْلِ الْجَنَّةِ بِالطَّعَامِ وَالشَّرَابِ، تَلَذُّذُ أَوْلِيَاكَ بِدِينِي وَكَلَامِي وَحَدِيثِي.

“While the dwellers of paradise enjoy heavenly food and drink, they enjoy My remembrance, My words and My narration.”²

The heavenly food and drink are far superior to their worldly counterparts and those who have a strong determination disregard the unlawful enjoyments of this world so as to enjoy them. Yet, those who have savored the sweetness of attention to God and intimacy with Him do not pay attention even to that heavenly food and drink.

دوست ما را و همه نعمت فردوس شما را

Let the Friend be for us, and all the blessings of paradise for you.

Even if sometimes these believers enjoy something other than intimacy with God, they seek His forgiveness. In his litanies, Imām al-Sajjād (‘a) says to God:

وَاسْتَغْفِرُ مِنْ كُلِّ لَذَّةٍ بَعْدَ ذِكْرِكَ، وَمِنْ كُلِّ رَاحَةٍ بَعْدَ أَنْسِكَ، وَمِنْ كُلِّ سُرُورٍ بَعْدَ قُرْبِكَ.

“I pray forgiveness from You for every pleasure but remembering You, every ease but intimacy with You, every happiness but nearness to You, every occupation but obeying You!”³

1– *Bih ār al-Anwār*, vol. 77, p. 21.

2– *Bih ār al-Anwār*, vol. 77, p. 23, *h adīth* 6.

3– *Mafātīh al-Jinān: The 15 Whispered Prayers*, “The Whispered Prayer of the Rememberers”.

What have they found in His remembrance that they do not pay attention to other pleasures? The answer to this question can be sought from the verse, “Remember Me, and I will remember you” and it is expressed in clearer terms in a *ḥadīth qudsī* on the Prophet’s night ascension [*mi‘rāj*]:

أَنْظُرُ إِلَيْهِمْ كُلَّ يَوْمٍ سَبْعِينَ مَرَّةً.

“I look at them seven times a day.”

This is actually the very thing they have found in the remembrance of God: their Beloved’s attention towards them. May Allah provide us and you with it by His will!

أَللَّهُمَّ اجْعَلْ لِسَانَنَا بِذِكْرِكَ لَهْجًا وَقَلْبَنَا بِحُبِّكَ مُتَمِيمًا وَمَنْ عَلَيْنَا بِحُسْنِ إِجَابَتِكَ.

“O Allah! Make my tongue remember You constantly and make Your love enthrall my heart! Be gracious to me by answering me favorably.”¹

1– Adapted from *Du‘ā’ Kumayl*.

Sixth Discourse

The Heart

يَا مُؤَلَّيْ بِذِكْرِكَ عَاشَ قَلْبِي، وَيُمُنَاجَاتِكَ يَبَّعَ أَلَمَ الْخَوْفِ عَنِّي.

“O my Master! In Your remembrance my heart takes delight, with prayers I hold communion with You; it benumbs the pain of fear that torments me.”

Some features of the heart

Remembrance of Allah or *dhikr Allāh* has been emphasized in noble verses of the Qur’an and sayings of the purified Imāms (‘a). It has been mentioned as an elixir that gives infinite value to man’s temporary and short life and enlightens his heart in accepting the truths.

One of the features of a pure and sound heart is its being a perfect reflection of the truth. The human heart is in a pure state of nature and if it is not stained by sins and excessive attention to the world, it will reflect the truth. If it is no longer in its state of nature it will no more reflect the truth and exemplify a ‘remembering’ heart. In this regard, Hādīrat ‘Alī (‘a) said:

نُبِّأَ اللهُ سُبْحَانَهُ جَعَلَ الذِّكْرَ جَلَاءً لِلْقُلُوبِ، تَسْمَعُ بِهِ بَعْدَ الْوَقْفَةِ، وَتُبْصِرُ بِهِ بَعْدَ الْعَشْوَةِ.

“Certainly, Allah, the Glorified, the Sublime, has made His remembrance the light for hearts which hear with its help, despite deafness, and see with its help, despite blindness.”¹

“Polish” [*jalā*] is applied to something to remove its rust or stains. As a result, its metallic lustre is revived. The human heart also rusts. The Messenger of Allah (s) is reported to have said:

نُبِّأَ الْقَلْبُ تَصَبُّهُ كَمَا يَصَبُّ الْحَدِيدُ قِيلَ يَا رَسُولَ اللهِ وَمَا جَالِي هَذَا قَالَ قِرَاءَةُ الْقُرْآنِ وَكَرُّ الْمَوْتِ.

“Verily the heart rusts like iron.” It was asked, “O Messenger of Allah! What is its polish?” He (s) said: “It is reading of the Qur’an and remembrance of death.”¹

1– *Nahj al-Balāghah*: Sermon 222 (S ubh ī S ālih).

Hadrat ‘Alī (‘a) said that the heart has eyes and ears. It rusts and cannot grasp the truth. With the remembrance of Allah the heart regains its sight and hearing. Then,

يَتَسَمُّونَ بِدُعَائِهِ بِحَيِّ التَّجَاوُزِ .

“They call Him and breathe in the air of forgiveness.”²

So, those who remember God can smell the fragrance of Divine mercy.

It becomes clear that our hearts malfunction as they do not perceive many things perceivable to the *awliyā’* of Allah. If ever they could perceive a little, they would feel the burden of their sins. The *awliyā’* of Allah know the consequences of sin and its weight makes them very anxious and agitated.

When sins are multiplied—one, two up to one thousand—they will realize that they shoulder a truck of gravel or even more. Once they feel this, they will involuntarily shout because they cannot endure it. If ever our shout is not loud, it is because we do not understand. Our hearts do not function properly. The sense of smell of our hearts is suspended as it cannot smell the stench of sin; otherwise it would smell a corpse. We eat corpses without sensing their smell!

﴿أَيُّجِبُ أَحَدُكُمْ أَنْ يَأْكُلَ لَحْمَ أَخِيهِ مَيْتًا﴾

“Will any of you love to eat the flesh of his dead brother?”³

Not only we do not abhor backbiting but in fact enjoy indulging in it. It is evident that our hearts’ sense of smell is weak. Remembrance of Allah does not mean mere tongue twisting. In fact, the criterion and axis is related to the remembrance that is rooted in the heart and enlightened by it.

Of course, the essence of *dhikr* is the attention of the heart but verbal *adhkār* are not without effect and use and are better than vain or useless talk. Except at the time of talking to their companions or answering their questions, the Imāms of guidance (‘a) used to perform *dhikr*. Imām al-Sādiq (‘a) said: “The tongue of my father (Imām al-Bāqir (‘a)) was stuck to his palate.”⁴ It alludes to his constant recital of *Lā ilāha illāllāh* [There is no god but Allah].

The heart is like a sea in which *dhikr* exerts influence. Sometimes, this *dhikr* is like the sand on the seashore that creates normal waves and footprints that

1– *Mustadrak al-Wasā’il*, vol. 2, p. 104, *h adīth* 1548.

2– *Nahj al-Balāghah*, Sermon 222 (S ubh ī S ālih).

3– *Sūrat al-H ujurāt* 49:12.

4– *Bih ār al-Anwār*, vol. 46, p. 297, *h adīth* 29.

easily disappear. Many *adhkār* and acts of worship we perform are like normal waves and the depth of our hearts is elsewhere. Sometimes, however, *dhikr* is like a strong wind that turns the heart upside down and exerts a lasting effect. So, one of the features of the heart is that it can correctly grasp the truth.

The other feature of the human heart is that it can become the temporary abode of anything or anyone, and turn into a fair which is unknown to man. If he only reflects for a few minutes and take note of whatever enters his heart, he will see the tumult taking place in his heart! Sometimes, in a short devotional act, for example a two-cycle [*rak‘ah*] prayer, the mind is preoccupied with many things. Man is astonished as soon as he comes to his senses. This is not only in wakefulness as it is also present in sleep, and in sleep it is reflected as a dream.

The value of the heart

The value of the heart depends on that which enters it. As such, it sometimes falls and becomes as valueless as garbage! At other times, it so ascends that it becomes the “throne of the All-beneficent” [*‘arsh al-raḥmān*]:

قلب المؤمن عرش الرحمن.

“The believer’s heart is the throne of the All-beneficent.”

Is the heart of a person who always thinks of wealth, livestock and farm something other than garbage? Is the heart of a person who always thinks of this estate, that property, so-and-so mansion, trade, fraud, etc. something other than a real estate agency? If we describe the heart of a person who is preoccupied with this car and that car as a parking lot, are we exaggerating?

Meanwhile, the heart can also become the “throne of the All-beneficent”. In the words of Imam ‘Alī (‘a), if God has a place in the hearts of some, “They pass their life in it (remembrance of Allah),”¹ such hearts have a divine status.

Therefore, if the heart is left alone, it will become a doorless abode (caravanserai). Caravans from different directions and regions come and go, and it is possible the person himself is unaware of what is going on. But if the person controls his heart, he will realize how valuable it is and what capability it has for growth and evolution. It is a precious diamond hidden under the flesh and a brilliant mineralogist wants to dig it out and know its value.

1– *Nahj al-Balāghah*, Sermon 222 (S ubh ī S ālih).

The mineralogists of this desert are the prophets and infallible Imāms (‘a). Ḥaḍrat ‘Alī (‘a) said: “Polish the heart with the remembrance of Allah so that its truth be revealed.” Imām al-Sajjād (‘a) said: “The life of the heart lies in the remembrance of Allah.” If the remembrance of Allah is not present in the heart, its value is equivalent to that which is the focus of its attention. One of its most important effects pointed out by Imām al-Sajjād (‘a) is the “life of the heart”.

The spiritual life of man

Life exists on various levels. One level is plantlife. Accordingly, we classify plants into “living” and “dead” (dry). A plant is living and some indications of this life are growth, development and reproduction. Other characteristics of life are movement and perception. Man has both the “flora” and “fauna” levels of life. He grows and develops as well as moves, perceives and senses. Therefore, he is similar to the plants and animals. This is what we call “life”. Whenever we find movement and perception in a person, we say that he is alive.

As can be deduced from the Noble Qur’an and traditions of the *Ahl al-Bayt* (‘a), man can have a life higher than that of the plants and animals—“spiritual” life. This superior life has some signs and if a person does not possess them, he cannot truly be called “human”, although he is alive from the perspective of animal life. We usually take animal life as “human life”. Reproducing, breathing, eating and drinking, perceiving, moving and the like, are conditions of plant and animal life, but human life is something else. In this regard, the Qur’an states:

﴿وَمَنْ كَانَ مَيِّتًا فَأَخْيَيْنَاهُ وَجَعَلْنَا لَهُ نُورًا يَمْشِي بِهِ فِي النَّاسِ كَمَنْ مَثَلُهُ فِي الظُّلُمَاتِ لَيْسَ بِخَارِجٍ مِنْهَا﴾

“Is he who was lifeless, then We gave him life and provided him with a light by which he walks among the people, like one who dwells in a manifold darkness which he cannot leave?”¹

It can be inferred from this verse that man can have a kind of life whose requisite is luminosity [*nūrāniyyah*]. Thus, if man possesses this luminosity, he is alive otherwise he is “dead”, even if he possesses plant and animal life.

1— *Sūrat al-An‘ām* 6:122.

فَالصُّورَ صُورَ إِنْسَانٍ، وَالْقَلْبَ قَلْبَ حَيَوَانَ، لَا يَعْرِفُ بَابَ الْهُدَى فَيَتَّبِعُهُ، وَلَا بَابَ الْعَمَى
فَيَصُدُّ عَنْهُ، فَذَلِكَ مَيِّتٌ الْأَحْيَاءِ!

His shape is that of a man, but his heart is that of a beast. He does not know the door of guidance to follow or the door of misguidance to avoid. These are living dead bodies.”¹

In this line of *Du‘ā’ Abū Ḥamzah al-Thumālī*—“In Your remembrance my heart takes delight”—Imām al-Sajjād (‘a) also points to this superior life—the life whose essential element is the remembrance of Allah. Just as man will die within a short span if oxygen is not available, the heart of the believer will also die if it ceases to remember Allah and becomes immersed in materiality.

One of the levels of life is the “life of faith”, and perhaps it can be said that it is the true life of man. According to transmitted traditions, the “spirit of faith” [*rūḥ al-īmān*] is the source of life in the believer. Given this spirit, so long as he has not committed a sin, he possesses a different life, but as he commits a sin this spirit separates from him. As he repents and returns to God, this spirit returns to him.

Apart from the spirit of faith, there are other types of spirits exclusive for the prophets and *awliyā’* of Allah, such as the “holy spirit” [*rūḥ al-quḍus*] possessed by the Holy Prophet (s) and the pure Imāms (‘a).

Apart from what we can see and perceive with our animal perception, there are other things known to God, His Apostle (s) and the pure Imāms (‘a). Since we believe in God and His Apostle (s) we must also believe in those things. The value of such levels of life can be known only to those who possess them.

The difference in the levels of life

When we compare a living plant—that is, a plant that breathes, grows and develops—with a dead plant, i.e. dry, we can see that they do not differ much. But if we compare a living animal with a dead one, we can observe the considerable difference.

This difference is far greater between a living and dead person. The physical life of man is so valuable (at least to the person himself) that if he is wealthy he is willing to spend his wealth to extend his life. He is even ready to spend huge amounts of money to keep his bodily limbs such as eyes, ears and physical life, healthy and sound.

1— *Nahj al-Balāghah*: Sermon 87 (S ubh ī S ālih).

The same difference, nay even more than this, also exists between his physical and spiritual life. His spiritual life is far more valuable than his physical life. Those who have grasped the value of spiritual life and tasted its savor are willing to sacrifice the entire world for a moment of remembrance of Allah. How can we find out this value? We have to exert efforts to prepare ourselves to spend a few minutes daily remembering the Lord, performing our prayers and complaining to Him how far we are away from these people!

Many people are deprived of this “human life”. To comprehend this fact is even difficult for them. How can heedless persons who know nothing but whims and caprice understand that the life of man is not limited to plant and animal life? How can they understand that the humanity of man is not confined to eating, sleeping and physical and animalistic enjoyments? In describing this type of people, God says:

وَأُنثِيكَ كَالِإِنْعَامِ بَلْ هُمْ أَضَلُّ.

“They are like cattle, nay more misguided.”¹

Just as the plants are unaware of the life of animals and their perceptions, animals are ignorant of the dynamics of human life. We also suffer the same condition in relation to a higher and loftier life of man, which the *awliyā'* say is so pleasant that it cannot be equaled by any material pleasure. The essence of human existence is other than eating, sleeping and passion. In comparison to the spiritual enjoyment and higher sphere of life, these are like toys with which a child plays. One who is alien to these subjects cannot comprehend them. He may even consider them ridiculous!

Since God has guided us and we know that these things are true, we must not be indifferent to them. We must bear in mind that the pure Imāms (‘a) and pioneers in religion have conveyed these things to us to draw our attention to them and urge us to strive to acquire them. We must remind ourselves that these things also exist and not imagine that enjoyment is confined to materiality, eating and sleeping. His human perfection is far higher than animal enjoyments. It is hoped that as we pray to always follow God, Islam, the Apostle (s), and the Imāms (‘a), we can also enjoy a spiritual life.

1— A part of *Du‘ā’ Abū H amzah al-Thumālī*.

اللَّهُمَّ اشْغَلْنَا بِذِكْرِكَ، وَأَعِدْنَا مِنْ سَخَطِكَ، وَأَجِرْنَا مِنْ عَذَابِكَ، وَارْزُقْنَا مِنْ مَوَاهِبِكَ، وَأَنْعِمْ عَلَيْنَا
مِنْ فَضْلِكَ.

“O Lord! Occupy our time with Your remembrance, and guard us from Your wrath, and protect us from Your punishment, and grant us from Your rewards, and award us from Your bounties.”

Seventh Discourse

Degrees of Remembrance of Allah

يَا مُؤَلَّيْ بِذِكْرِكَ عَاشَ قَلْبِي، وَيُمَنَّا جَاتِكَ بَرَّدَتْ أَلَمَ الْخَوْفِ عَنِّي.

“O my Master! In Your remembrance my heart takes delight, with prayers I hold communion with You; it benumbs the pain of fear that torments me.”

The discussion is about *dhikr* and some of its effects. One of its effects pointed by Imām al-Sajjād (‘a) is the “spiritual life” of man. The spiritual life of man needs specific nourishment, which is the “remembrance of Allah”.

Different degrees of the remembrance of Allah

Concerning *dhikr* and attention to God, people are of various types and can be classified accordingly. There is a group of people who not only fail to earn pleasure in remembering Allah but it even engenders displeasure and aversion in their hearts. Regarding them, the Holy Qur’an states:

﴿ ذُكِرَ اللَّهُ وَحْدَهُ اشْمَأَزَّتْ قُلُوبُ الَّذِينَ لَا يُؤْمِنُونَ بِالْآخِرَةِ ﴾

“When Allah is mentioned alone, [thereat] shrink away the hearts of those who do not believe in the Hereafter.”¹

As to the second group of people, they remember Allah whenever they feel in need of Him to solve their serious problems that cannot be solved through usual means or cannot be solved at all:

﴿ إِذَا رَكِبُوا فِي الْفُلِكِ دَعَوْا اللَّهَ مُخْلِصِينَ لَهُ الدِّينَ فَلَمَّا نَجَّاهُمْ إِلَى الْبَرِّ فِيهِمْ أَشْرِكُونَ ﴾

“When they board the ship, they invoke Allah putting exclusive faith in Him, but when He delivers them to land, behold, they ascribe partners [to Him], being ungrateful for what We have given them!”²

The third group of people is concerned with their fate on the Day of Resurrection. They want their sins to be forgiven. So, they turn their

1– Sūrat al-Zumar 39:45.

2– Sūrat al-‘Ankabūt 29:65.

attention to God to forgive their sins and grant them blessings and rewards in the hereafter. They focus their attention to God as they aspire for paradise, damsels and heavenly palaces. In reality, they remember Allah to escape punishment and attain otherworldly blessings. This kind of attention to God is desirable in its own right as it shows the existence of their faith in God. However, this kind of remembrance to God is actually attention of man, first and foremost, to his own needs and then attention to God. If through other than God, his needs can be met, he will have nothing to do with God as well as attention to and remembrance of Him.

The fourth group of people consists of those who feel that they need to remember Allah not to meet the abovementioned personal needs. They rather feel that without the remembrance of Allah, they are lost and only through remembering Him do they find tranquility. In other words, to breathe the remembrance of Allah is indispensable for them but not as a means to meet needs. In the words of Imām al-Sajjād (‘a), they feel that by remembering Him, their hearts are enlivened and without it, they feel they have dead hearts.

The edifice of their life is built on the remembrance of God. When a person’s respiration is obstructed, he will experience tension and be exasperated, and his life will be threatened. Similarly, without the remembrance of Allah, they worry and are agitated. But if the remembrance of Allah finds its way into their hearts, they experience a strange tranquility and peace of mind. In this regard, the Qur’an states:

﴿الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَتَطْمَئِنُّ قُلُوبُهُمْ بِذِكْرِ اللَّهِ أَلَا بِذِكْرِ اللَّهِ تَطْمَئِنُّ الْقُلُوبُ﴾

“...Those who have faith, and whose hearts find rest in the remembrance of Allah. Look! Their hearts find rest in Allah’s remembrance!”¹

This state is a high stage of *dhikr* and far more valuable than the previous stage, but “I” is still the focus of attention. That is, in this state man wants to remember Allah and enjoys doing it. In reality, by remembering God, his heart finds rest. In other words, even in this state man turns his attention to God in order to meet certain needs although they are of a higher level than the previous ones. He pays attention to God to meet certain needs and finds solace. So, there is still a speck of self-love.

But if man moves forward in knowing God, he will reach a point where he is not even aware of his own existence and needs. All his attention will be focused on God, and totally heedless of himself and his desires, self-love

1– *Sūrat al-Ra‘d* 13:28.

loses all meaning. For him, everything is love of God. At this stage, instead of paying attention to God for oneself, man sees nothing but Him.

During the Night of Ascension [*mi‘rāj*], God said to His Apostle (ﷺ): “My servants can reach stages where My remembrance and gratefulness for My favors are their occupation and they do not care for anything else.” God then said:

وَلَا سَتَعْرِقَنَّ عَقْلَهُ بِمَعْرِفَتِي وَلَا قَوْمٌ لَهُ مَقَامَ عَقْلِهِ.

“I shall fill his intellect with My gnosis and I shall settle in place of his intellect.”¹

These are truths mentioned in traditions, and for many of us it is hard to perfectly comprehend these states. It is hoped that out of His grace God increases our gnosis [*ma‘rifah*] and makes us attain such states.

Attachment to the world as a hindrance to the remembrance of Allah

That which hinders man from thinking of his spiritual perfection is attachment to the world and worldly pleasures. So long as these attachments exist, we cannot expect such perfection. In a *ḥadīth* on the Prophet’s (ﷺ) ascension [*mi‘rāj*], God said to His Apostle (ﷺ):

يَا أَحْمَدُ لَوْ صَلَّى الْعَبْدُ صَالِحًا أَهْلَ السَّمَاءِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَيَصُومُ صِيَامَ أَهْلِ السَّمَاءِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَيَطْوِي عَنِ الطَّعَامِ مِثْلَ الْمَلَائِكَةِ وَلَبَسَ لِبَاسَ الْعَابِدِينَ ثُمَّ رَأَى فِي قَلْبِهِ مِنْ حُبِّ الدُّنْيَا ذَرَّةً وَاسْمَعْتَهَا وَأَرَأَيْتَ رَأْسَهَا وَصَيْتَهَا وَزِينَتَهَا لَا يُجَاوِزِي فِي دَرْيٍّ وَلَا نَزْعَةٍ مِنْ قَلْبِهِ مَحَبَّتِي وَلَا تُظْلَمَنَّ قَلْبَهُ حَتَّى يَنْسَانِي وَلَا أُذِيقَهُ حَالَةَ مَحَبَّتِي.

“O Ahmad! If a servant prays as the dwellers of the heaven and the earth pray, and fasts as the dwellers of the heaven and the earth fast, treats foods the way the angels treat them, and wears the garment of the worshippers, but has a speck of love of the world in his heart, carnal desire, position, merriment or adornment of the world, he will find no place in My neighborhood. I shall take love of Me out of his heart and make his heart dark such that he will forget Me and not let him taste the sweetness of loving Me.”²

The *awliyā’* of Allah have such loftiness of purpose that they are heedless of what we are attached to, even the otherworldly blessings and pleasures, as these are valueless for them. Their loftiness of purpose is such that they say

1– *Mustadrak al-Wasā’il*, vol. 12, section 61, p. 36, *ḥ adīth* 13446, as quoted in Daylamī, *Irshād al-Qulūb*.

2– *Ibid*.

to God: “O Allah! If You throw us into hell while love of You is still in our hearts and You are pleased with us, we prefer it to paradise if it is devoid of Your pleasure.” Unless the love of God is nurtured in the heart of man, one cannot make such a claim.

In order to nurture the love of God in the heart, one must keep aloof from worldly attachments and affections and think of earning Divine pleasure. On waking up in the morning, the believer must think of serving Allah by knowing what He wants from him. When he takes food, studies a lesson, engages in a transaction, and does the usual chores of life, it must be to obey the commandments of God and to seek His pleasure. It is possible to do so but it requires a strong will and purpose. If a person lives in this manner, worldly enjoyments and blessings as well as his comfort and welfare will not decrease. Even his pain and suffering will not be less than that of others. Such a person will no longer be attached to position, wealth and the like and not worry if he loses or does not attain them. His only concern is God and His remembrance.

The believer considers himself a servant of Allah. He believes that whatever he has belongs to Him, and he has nothing of his own—wealth, offspring, position, status, or anything else. Everything belongs to Him. So, he is in pursuit of earning the pleasure of Allah. Such a person is a true servant of God. He wholeheartedly accepts whatever He commands. He avoids the forbidden and acts upon His commands. Hence he attains a higher level of life, or rather, finds the real life.

Man’s attitude toward material and spiritual deficiencies and needs

By nature, man is in pursuit of his perfection and felicity. As much as possible, he wants to remove his defects and shortcomings. In essence, God has created man in such a way that he is innately in pursuit of perfection and avoids whatever is obstructive to his attainment of perfection and felicity. This is called “love of oneself”. That is, every living creature loves itself, its life, and perfection.

More or less, we all find deficiencies in ourselves. We can see defects and shortcomings in ourselves and we want to remove them as much as we can. But there are two problems here. Firstly, we do not properly comprehend our defects and shortcomings and we do not exactly know our basic needs. Secondly, when there is contradiction in meeting these needs, we commit errors in identifying our priorities. Usually, we give preference to material needs over spiritual ones for they are more tangible to us.

Conversely, in trying to remove a material or spiritual defect, our minds and efforts are focused on material defects and deficiencies because we

understand them better. We suffer more from physical pain and are more familiar with material and worldly enjoyments and pleasures. If ever we become heedful of some of our spiritual defects and otherworldly needs, we do not express an inclination to address them nor have much interest in dealing with them.

As such, God commissioned the prophets (‘*a*) firstly, to inform the people of their true needs and defects; let them know that there are greater and more important defects apart from the animalistic, material or worldly defects they are acquainted with, and let them understand that they must strive harder to remove spiritual defects and meet otherworldly needs. Secondly, the prophets (‘*a*) were commissioned to make people aware of the spiritual affairs and the insignificance of material affairs.

The prophets (‘*a*) informed man that compared to animals, he has more potential for development and perfection and more deficiencies and needs. There is a great distance between us and the highest point God has considered for us and the potential to reach it. Therefore, they made man aware of this point and urged him to strive hard to attain this ultimate perfection and remove his own defects and shortcomings.

So, we must realize that our defects and shortcomings are not limited to material and worldly affairs. Worldly shortcomings—whether they are individual or collective—are all trivial and insignificant as compared to spiritual affairs and shortcomings which threaten our eternal felicity.

If we really believe in God and the prophets (‘*a*) and consider truly whatever they said; if we really accept that there is another life apart from animal life—life which is associated with the humanity of man—our actions must attest to this belief. There must be difference between the action of one who believes in such a life and that of one who considers life limited to the animal life. We believe in such a human life but because of weakness of faith and will, we fail in our practice. Our faith is weak and, as a result, this faith has an insignificant effect on our actions and behavior. However, there have been individuals who have strong faith and attained certain stations of perfection and felicity.

Worldly allurements as a hindrance in the attainment of spiritual life

We, ourselves, decrease the degrees of our perfection, shoulder burdens that bend our backs, enchain our hands and feet and become immobile. Perhaps the Commander of the Faithful (‘*a*) wants us to tell God in *Du‘ā’ Kumayl*, thus:

اللَّهُمَّ عَظُمَ بِلَاتِي، وَأَفْرَطَ بِي سُوءُ حَالِي، وَقَصُرَتْ بِي أَعْمَالِي، وَقَعَدَتْ بِي أَغْلَالِي، وَخَبَسَنِي
عَنْ نَفْعِي بَعْدَ آمَالِي، وَخَدَعْتَنِي الدُّنْيَا بِغُرُورِهَا، وَنَفَسِي بِخِيَانَتِهَا، وَمِطَالِي.

“O Allah! My sufferings have increased and my evil condition has worsened, my good deeds have diminished and my yokes (of misdeeds) have become firm, and remote hopes restrain me from profiting (by good deeds) and the world has deceived me with its allurements and my own self has been treacherous and procrastinating.”

Are we sincere in reciting these lines? Do we really realize that our backs are bent on account of the burden of our sins? Do we know that we enchained our hands and feet by our evil deeds and that the world and its allurements have deceived us?

In this regard, the Qur’an states:

﴿ وَمَا الْحَيَاةُ الدُّنْيَا إِلَّا مَتَاعُ الْغُرُورِ ﴾

“The life of this world is nothing but the wares of delusion.”¹

It also states elsewhere:

﴿ فَلَا تَغُرَّنَّكُمُ الْحَيَاةُ الدُّنْيَا وَلَا يَغُرَّنَّكُم بِاللَّهِ الْغُرُورُ ﴾

“So do not let the life of this world deceive you, nor let the Deceiver² deceive you concerning Allah.”³

How does the deception of the life of this world deceive man? When adults want to dupe a child, they distract him with a chocolate bar, or anything else, in lieu of a valuable thing he seeks. We have interests which we must obtain and safeguard. However, as the world and its pleasures seem attractive and valuable to us, they deceive us and hinder us from obtaining real pleasures and true interests. Regrettably, not only do the world and its allurements deceive us, but we dupe ourselves by suggesting that what the prophets (‘a) said is what our hearts dictate, or what Satan says is what God has said!

If what the prophets and Imāms (‘a) have said is true, and it is, then we are very far from the truth. We are in gross error and misguidance. If *Du‘ā’ Kumayl* is transmitted from Ḥaḍrat ‘Alī (‘a), and it is, and if *Du‘ā’ Abū Ḥamzah al-Thumālī* and the supplications in *Al-Ṣaḥīfah al-Sajjādiyyah* are

1– *Sūrat Āl ‘Imrān* 3:185.

2– That is, Satan, or anything that diverts a human being from the path of Allah. [Q. Trans.]

3– *Sūrat Luqmān* 31:33.

transmitted from Imām al-Sajjād (‘a), and they are, then how do we follow them as we have no commonality with them? Do we believe in the contents of these supplications? Are they true or not? Is the world that is deceiving us and its outward adornments that hinder us from getting our true interests nothing but transient pleasures with which we are attached? Everyday we want to taste more delicious food compared to what we have tasted so far, don’t we? Everyday we want to change our lifestyle and the outward forms of our homes—carpet, car model and other amenities in life—don’t we?

Is the deception or trick of the world other than these things? We must reflect on what they have taken from us in exchange for other things. We have the potential to get more valuable things but we are negligent of them and are attracted to fleeting things. In reality, we are deprived of human life or “life of faith”, and we have been heedless of a higher sphere of life whose foundation is the remembrance of Allah.

Eighth Discourse

Provisions for the Hereafter

وَارْحَمْنِي صَرِيحاً عَلَى الْفِرَاشِ تُقَلِّبُنِي أَيْدِي أَحِبِّي، وَتَفَضَّلْ عَلَيَّ مَمْدُوداً عَلَى الْمُغْتَسَلِ يُقَلِّبُنِي
صَالِحِ جِيرَتِي، وَتَحَنَّنْ عَلَيَّ مَحْمُولاً قَدْ تَنَاوَلَ الْأَقْرَبَاءُ أَطْرَافَ حِوَارَتِي، وَجُدْ عَلَيَّ مَنْقُولاً قَدْ
نَزَلْتُ بِكَ وَحِيداً فِي حُفْرَتِي، وَارْحَمْ فِي ذَلِكَ الْبَيْتِ الْأَجْدِيدِ عُزْبَتِي، حَتَّى لَا أَسْتَأْنِسَ بِغَيْرِكَ.

“Have mercy on me when I am thrown on the deathbed, my friends trying to calm down my restlessness; do a favor to me when I am laid stretched on the naked floor for the religious washing, my neighbors performing the necessary functions; move with compassion when I am carried to the graveyard, my kith and kin accompanying my funeral; be with me when I am put into the grave, alone and abandoned; take pity on me in that new abode where I will be a forsaken miserable, because I did not cultivate consistent friendship with any one other than You.”

The reason behind man’s negligence of the hereafter

Because of the instincts God has endowed in him, man knows his material needs and resorts to material ways and physical means to meet them and seeks the help of his fellow human beings. Instinctively, man knows hunger, thirst, sexual urge, housing need, and his other material or worldly needs and endeavors to address them. As such, he will be attached to the means that meet such needs, as well as, those who help him in this regard and lessen his pain and suffering. Usually, it is also the reason behind a person’s fondness and affection for his spouse, offspring, friends, and relatives, and in general to all who in one or another way share his life. However, man’s attachment to material or worldly affairs distracts his attention from spiritual matters and makes him heedless of them. On one hand, he supposes that his needs are limited to these material or worldly needs, and on the other, he assumes that his needs can be met through the same means and individuals he is attached with. Yet, he is unaware of the fact that the needs he is usually acquainted with is but a small portion of his total needs—needs which are related only to the temporary life in this world. He does not know that his primordial needs are something else—needs which are related to the eternal domain of the hereafter. He imagines that the individuals he is familiar with in this world will always be with him.

However, he must bear in mind that a time will certainly come when all of them will leave him alone.

A time will come when we have to leave this transient abode. Now, we must think of the eternal abode and know which needs we shall have in that world, and through which ways they can be met? Are our needs in that world the same as ours in this world? When man leaves this world, will he need food, clothing and other material needs, just as there was a time when some people used to bury their dead ones with food and other amenities of life, with the notion that they will need these amenities in the next world?

It is clear that the next world is different from this world. The prophets (‘a) came to inform man that his needs in that world are different from worldly needs. Worldly things will be of no benefit to him and he will not even take them there. At that moment, his bodily limbs and faculties will cease to function one after the other and finally his soul will separate from his body. The soul will witness events after death. Then he will be left alone in the grave—grave which is described by Imām al-Sajjād (‘a) in this manner:

فَمَنْ يَكُونُ أَسْوَأَ حَالاً مِنِّي إِنْ أَنَا نَقِلْتُ عَلَى مِثْلِ حَالِي إِلَى قَبْرِي، لَمْ أُمَهِّدْهُ لِرَفْدَتِي، وَلَمْ
أَفْرُشْهُ بِالْعَمَلِ الصَّالِحِ لِصَجْعَتِي، وَمَالِي لَا أَبْكِي وَلَا أَذْرِي إِلَى مَا يَكُونُ مَصِيرِي، وَأَرَى نَفْسِي
تُحَادِثُنِي، وَأَيَّامِي تُحَاتِلُنِي، وَقَدْ حَفَقَتْ عِنْدَ رَأْسِي أَجْنِحَةُ الْمَوْتِ، فَمَالِي لَا أَبْكِي، أَبْكِي،
لِحُورِجِ نَفْسِي، أَبْكِي لِظُلْمَةِ قَبْرِي، أَبْكِي لِصِيقِ لِحْدِي.

“[Woe unto me] if now I am passed on in my present state to a grave that I have not prepared for my repose, and I did not line with good deeds for my sleep. And why should I not weep, for I have no knowledge of my fate and I observe my self deceiving itself, and my days fading away, and the wings of death flapping close by; so why shouldn’t I cry? I cry for giving up life, I cry because of the darkness of my grave, I cry because of the narrowness of my hole [lah ad].”

A whole life of sweat and toil, to accumulate wealth, build mansions, provide amenities of life, and attachment with others, will come to an end. He will be totally alone. How long will this state last? It is very long and can never be compared to the frame of time in this world. In this long period, which he must spend in purgatory [*barzakh*] and then the Resurrection and hereafter, his assets will be of no avail to him. What must he do? What can he do?

Nearness to God as the best provisions for the hereafter

If man does not want to experience the grief of loneliness after leaving this world and not depart from this world empty-handed, he must think of the day while he is still in this world, prior to death, and collect suitable provisions:

تَوَدَّوْا فَيَا خَيْرَ الزَّادِ التَّقْوَى.

“Prepare for [your] provisions for verily the best of provisions is God-wariness [*taqwā*].”

He must not focus all his efforts on this world and its pleasures. From now on, he must know to whom he must be attached, who will not leave him at the moment of loneliness. He must be intimate with the One who can address his primary need, just as by providing the means and ways in this world, He paved the ground to meet his material and spiritual needs. Elsewhere in *Du‘ā’ Abū Ḥamzah al-Thumālī*, Imām Zayn al-‘Ābidīn (‘a) dwells on these truths and says to God:

وَرَحْمَنِي صَرِيحاً عَلَى الْفِرَاشِ تُقَلِّبُنِي أَيْدِي أَحِبَّتِي، وَتَفَضَّلْ عَلَيَّ مَمْدُوداً عَلَى الْمُغْتَسَلِ يُقَلِّبُنِي صَالِحَ جِيرَتِي، وَتَخَنَّ عَلَيَّ مَحْمُولاً قَدْ تَنَاوَلَ الْأَقْرَبَاءُ أَطْرَافَ حِجِّ نَارَتِي، وَجُدْ عَلَيَّ مِنْقُولاً قَدْ نَزَلْتُ بِكَ وَحِيداً فِي حُفْرَتِي، وَارْحَمْ فِي ذَلِكَ الْبَيْتِ الْجَدِيدِ غُرْبَتِي، حَتَّى لَا أَسْتَأْنِسَ بِغَيْرِكَ.

“And confer Your benevolence on me when I am (lying) motionless on the (death) bed so that those beloved of my relatives surround me, and grant me Your bountifulness when I am stretched on the funeral bath so that the good-deeded of my community may wash me, and bestow Your kindred tenderness upon me when I am carried while my relatives hand over the extremities of my coffin, and award me Your generosity when I am transported and finally delivered and left alone in my hole, and have mercy on my solitary confinement in this new residence so that I may not be comforted by anyone but You.”

The most important point in this part of the supplication is when the supplicant says: “[O God!] Have mercy on my solitary confinement in this new residence so that I may not be comforted by anyone but You.” Is it possible for a person who has tasted the sweetness of intimacy with God in this world to be intimate with other than God when he is in the grave? Is it possible for a person who has been intimate with other than God to be intimate with God when he enters the grave?

God said to Prophet Dāwūd (David) (‘a):

يَا دَاوُدُ أُنَبِّئِ أَهْلَ الْأَرْضِ إِنِّي حَبِيبٌ مِّنْ أَحِبِّي وَجَلِيسٌ مِّنْ جَالِسِي وَمُؤْنِسٌ لِّمَنْ أُنْسَ بِذِكْرِي
وَصَاحِبٌ لِّمَنْ صَاحَبَنِي.

“O Dāwud! Convey to the dwellers of the earth that, indeed, I love him who loves Me; I accompany him who accompanies Me; I am intimate with him who has intimacy with My remembrance; and I go along with him who goes along with Me.”¹

The heart of man is inclined towards whoever he is intimate with in this world, and with whom he will also be gathered on the Day of Resurrection:

أَنْتَ مَعَ مَنْ أَحَبَّيْتَ وَلكَ مَا كَتَسَبْتِ.

“You shall be with him whom you love and it shall be for you whatever you earn.”²

If one of our friends or relatives is separated from us for a long time, we will miss him, but have we ever missed our prayers? Have we ever waited for an opportunity to engage in supplication and litany and sit in a corner to beseech and implore God?

Usually, if we are alone we feel lonely and frightened. We look for somebody to talk to. If we fail to find anyone, we talk to ourselves in the world of imagination and make ourselves busy in whatever way. We who are naturally like that cannot easily forget everything once we are buried and have intimacy with God.

Therefore, if we do not want to grieve and be sorrowful in that world, we must take the initial steps to have intimacy with God so that He will be with us in that world and not leave us alone. We must set a program for ourselves. We must have time for retreat in which we do not pay attention to anything other than God; we forget the world and all its contents—wealth and property, occupation, offspring, friends, relatives, and all things and we remember and pay attention to Him alone. If we do not do so, we will be in great loss in the purgatorial world. Alienation and loneliness as well as grief and sorrow will engulf us for which no one and nothing can compensate.

In her testament to the Commander of the Faithful (‘a), Ḥaḍrat Fāṭimah (‘a) is reported to have said:

1— *Bih ār al-Anwār*, vol. 70, p. 26, *h adīth* 28.

2— *Bih ār al-Anwār*, vol. 27, p. 105, *h adīth* 75.

فَإِنَّا أَنَا مِتُّ فَهَوِّ أَنْتَ عُسْلِي وَجَهْزِي... وَجَلِسْ عِنْدَ رُؤْسِي قِبَالَةَ وَجْهِي فَأَكْثِرْ مِنْ تِلَاوَةِ الْقُرْآنِ وَالِدُعَاءِ.

“When I die, wash and bury me yourself... And [after you bury me] sit beside my head facing me and supplicate and read the Qur’an aloud.”¹

Ḥaḍrat Fāṭimah’s (‘a) ears had attachment to the Word of Allah as her heart was also intimate with Him.

There are those who wait for a moment, however short it may be, to read the Qur’an. They enjoy reading the Qur’an and listening to it. They engage in prayer and worship with zeal and enthusiasm. Is there any lover who is tired of talking to his beloved? But our hearts are somewhere else at the time of praying, just as a bird inside a cage is waiting for it to be opened. We are also eager to finish our prayers as fast as we can or to see the month of Ramaḍān come to an end. Even while praying, our attention is here and there, trying to know who comes and who goes. All these testify that we have no intimacy with God and His remembrance.

How can we have intimacy with God?

One simple way is to set a program and allocate a certain period everyday to turn our attention away from anything other than God. This can be done by engaging in supplication, prayers, litany, reading the Qur’an, and the like. What is important is for us not to forget that God is Omnipresent and All-seeing. He can see us all the time and is beneficent to us. We must sincerely ask His forgiveness for all our sins. As much as we can, we must continue this program so that we can be hopeful of His favors in the next world.

When a person departs from this world, he will see the fruit of his deeds, and then he will say:

﴿يُرِّدُ ارْجِعُونِ لَعَلِّي أَعْمَلُ صَالِحًا فِيمَا تَرَكْتُ﴾

“My Lord! Take me back, that I may act righteously in what I have left behind.”²

He will be told in reply, “By no means! Your time has already passed.” Therefore, we must treasure every moment in our life. Amid thousands of worldly engagements, at least we must engage in work which is for the hereafter. Among thousands of objects of our love and affection, we must

1– ‘Azīz Allāh ‘At ārudī, *Musnad Fāṭimah al-Zahrā’* (Intishārāt-e ‘At ārud, first edition), p. 401.

2– *Sūrat al-Mu’minūn* 23:99-100.

allocate a place in our heart for God and His remembrance. If we do not give all our heart to Him for intimacy with Him, at least we can give a portion to God in our activities.

It is known that one day, the late Shaykh Ja‘far Shūshtarī mounted the pulpit and said: “O people! Today I want to say something which is contrary to all that the prophets and *awliyā’* have said.” The people were astonished. He continued: “All the prophets invited the people to believe in the Unity of God [*tawhīd*], but I want to invite you to *shirk* [association of partners to God]. All the prophets and *awliyā’* said that any action must be done solely for God but I want to say: “Let God also be a partner in your works!” That is to say, “You are not true monotheists as your hearts are not solely with God (that is, filled not only by His remembrance). At least, designate to God a certain place in your hearts. Don’t give the key to your hearts to anyone other than God as you will regret it one day.”

[إلهي] وَاغْرِسْ فِي أَفْئِدَتِنَا أَشْجَارَ مَحَبَّتِكَ، وَأَتِمِّمْ لَنَا أَنْوَارَ مَعْرِفَتِكَ، وَأَذِقْنَا حَلَاوَةَ عَفْوِكَ، وَكَلِّدْنَا
مَغْفِرَتِكَ، وَأَقْرِزْ أَعْيُنَنَا يَوْمَ لِقَائِكَ بِرُؤْيَيْكَ.

“O Allah! Plant in our hearts the trees of Your love, complete for us the lights of Your knowledge, give us to taste the sweetness of Your pardon and the pleasure of Your forgiveness, gladden our eyes on the day of meeting You with the vision of You.”¹

1– *Maḥāṭib al-Jinān*, The 15 Whispered Prayers, “The Whispered Prayer of the Abstainers”.

Ninth Discourse

Faith

اللَّهُمَّ إِنِّي أَسْأَلُكَ إِيمَانًا تُبَاشِرُ بِهِ قَلْبِي وَبِقِينَا حَتَّى أَعْلَمَ أَنَّهُ لَنْ يُصِيبَنِي مَا كَتَبْتَ لِي وَوَضَعْتَ لِي مِنَ الْعَيْشِ بِمَا قَسَمْتَ لِي يَا رَاحِمَ الرَّحِمِينَ.

“O my Lord! I ask You to grant me a faith that You make my heart endure on, and a true certainty in believing, so that I may ascertain that indeed nothing will happen to me except for what You have destined for me, and award me contentment in my present living (and circumstances) with whatever You have apportioned for me, O the Most Merciful of the merciful.”

These are the last lines of the noble *Du‘ā’ Abū H amzah al-Thumālī*. After supplicating and entreating God, it is as if Imām al-Sajjād (‘a) summed up his last and primary request in two sentences. He asked for “firm faith” and “submission to divine decree.”

The value of faith

The importance of faith can be inferred from the fact that after this long litany, Imām al-Sajjād (‘a) asked God to grant him “faith”. Similarly, since faith is always under threat, he asked God to give him faith that will endure in his heart. If ever man acquires faith, he must not become arrogant and think that faith will always remain in his heart.

Human language is incapable of describing the value of faith. Faith is a precious gem which is the source of man’s tranquility of heart. It is man’s refuge in times of adversity and affliction. Most important of all, it leads to his eternal felicity and salvation from punishment in the hereafter.

Faith—however weak it may be—is the greatest blessing God, the Exalted, grants a person. Although the effect of such a faith is so weak and little, it is so valuable and important for his felicity in this world and the hereafter. The similitude of man in relation to faith is like that of fish to water. So long as it is in water, it does not know the value of water but once it is taken out of water, it will realize its value. Thanks to God, we also enjoy this great divine blessing. It is weak but nevertheless our life depends on it. If the same weak faith is taken from us, God forbid, and a state of doubt and

skepticism comes into being, we will realize the great blessing we had and are now deprived of.

Someone narrated in a travelogue that he became acquainted with a person whose actions were mostly common except the fact that on Thursday nights, it was his practice to engage in night vigil till dawn. He asked the reason behind it. He was told: “Once I had a problem and when it was solved, I made it incumbent upon myself to engage in this night vigil for the rest of my life.” He inquired about the problem. (Perhaps some of us may think that his problem had something to do with poverty, ailment and the like.) He was told: “There was a time when I had a doubt or skepticism in my belief and my faith was shaken. I tried my best to be relieved from such a state but to no avail. I consulted many people. Each of them referred to certain books. I engaged in many discussions but none of these solved my problem. In fact, my skepticism intensified until such time that I heard that in the holy city of Mashhad there was a scholar [‘*ālim*] named Shaykh Ḥasan ‘Alī Isfahānī (*r*)¹ who enjoyed a lofty spiritual station and solved the problems of people. I wrote a letter to him narrating my condition. As I was then living in Ahwāz,² he wrote in reply: “On so-and-so day and time, go near Kārūn River and take your seat somewhere in the palm-grove. Perhaps God will show you the solution to your problem.” So, on the specified day and time I went there and hesitantly sat in a corner. While I was busy looking at the river, I saw a buffalo in the river taking a dip. It gradually surfaced and moved in my direction. For a few minutes it stayed in the palm-grove and gave birth to an offspring. It cleaned it and then fed it with milk! On witnessing this scene, all my skepticism was dispelled and I found peace of mind. In gratitude for my requisition of faith, I made it incumbent upon myself to engage in a night vigil every Thursday night.”

People who have been deprived of faith for sometime but regain it afterwards by the grace of God know the value of this blessing. Those who experience the adverse effect, the pain of faithlessness and doubt, treasure it. But since faith is never taken away from us, we do not know how valuable the faith we have is—no matter how weak it may be. To put it in another way, “I have not experienced faithlessness to understand what blessing faith in God is!” We must strive to keep our faith firm and strong and depart from

1– The abbreviation, “*r*” stands for the Arabic invocative phrase, *rah matullāh ‘alayh*, *rah matullāh ‘alayhā*, or *rah matullāh ‘alayhim* [may peace be upon him/her/them], which is mentioned after the names of pious people. [Trans.]

2– Ahwāz: city in southwestern Iran, the administrative center of Khūzestān (Khūzistān) Province. Ahwāz is one of Iran’s largest cities and the center of the region’s oil industry. It is located at the confluence of the Kārūn and Shatt al-‘Arab rivers on the lowland plain of Khūzestān. [Trans.]

this world while having faith, God willing. If one day man’s relationship with God is severed, he loses the way and tries to find it but he cannot, he will then realize what calamity he has succumbed to.

Sin and its danger to faith

We must not imagine that we will always have faith, given its value. In fact, like other blessings, it can also be lost. We must seek refuge in God from the day when this blessing is taken away from us. Many people have faith and perform good deeds but after sometime their faith weakens due to certain factors or they totally lose faith and depart from this world without faith. God has never guaranteed anyone, once granted with a blessing, that it will never be taken away from him. In fact, God has stated:

﴿لَئِن شَكَرْتُمْ لَأَزِيدَنَّكُمْ وَلَئِن كَفَرْتُمْ إِنَّ عَذَابِي لَشَدِيدٌ﴾

*“If you are grateful, I will surely enhance you [in blessing], but if you are ungrateful, My punishment is indeed severe.”*¹

Therefore, it must be noted that the faith of man is always subject to attack and extinction. On one hand, skepticism and satanic insinuations, and on the other, wicked or evil deeds seriously pose a threat to his faith. It is mentioned in traditions that when a person commits a sin, a black spot emerges in his heart. If many sins are committed, black spots will engulf his entire heart and he will not be saved anymore.²

We must pray to God to strengthen our faith and keep it safe from the enticements of devils from among the jinn and men. If ever we commit a sin, God forbid, we must repent and compensate for it as soon as possible, so that black spots will not spread over our hearts. Blackening of the heart has an effect on man which he is unaware of while he thinks that everything is fine. Sin hardens the heart. Consequently, the person will not earn pleasure in supplicating and entreating God, reading the Qur’an, and seeking the mediation [*tawassul*] of the pure Imāms (‘a), and will be inclined to indulge in sins, sexual gratification and debauchery. Companionship of the sinful replaces companionship of the righteous and upright servants of Allah, and the person is inclined to be in the company of those who are more or less like him. This is a sign of the blackening and hardening of the heart.

The heart which is luminous and has a connection with God is hurt by things that keep it away from God and His remembrance. If the owner of

1– *Sūrat Ibrāhīm* 14:7.

2– *Bihār al-Anwār*, vol. 73, p. 327, *h adīth* 10.

such a heart happens to be in the company of debauchees and mammonists, he is as if a prisoner longing for his release.

غنیمت شمارد خلاص از قفس

چو طوطی کلاغش بود هم نفس

*Like a parrot in a cage with a crow,
He considers freedom from the cage a blessing.*

Therefore, we must bear in mind that firstly, faith—however weak it may be—is a very precious gift endowed by God upon us. Secondly, we must not forget the fact that it is always under threat. So, we must consistently endeavor to strengthen it. We must engage in strengthening our beliefs and keep aloof from skepticism and whatever causes it. If a certain doubt arises, we must strive to address it immediately and not allow our heart to become a hippodrome of satanic insinuations.

Similarly, we must avoid sin and whatever leads to it. If, God forbid, we commit a sin we must immediately seek forgiveness for it. Most important of all, with all humility and sincerity, we must pray to God to protect and strengthen our faith, and for this purpose, we must also seek the intermediation of the pure Imāms (‘a).

Some effects of faith

1. Certainty

1. *Certainty [yaqīn]*: When faith is well established in the heart, it bears fruit. Imām al-Sajjād (‘a) has mentioned two of its fruits:

- (1) certainty in what God has destined for a person, and
- (2) contentment with divine decree:

...حَتَّىٰ أَعْلَمَ أَنَّهُ لَنْ يُصِيبَنِي مَا كَتَبْتَ لِي وَصَّيْتَنِي مِنَ الْعَيْشِ بِمَا قَسَمْتَ لِي.

“...so that I may ascertain that indeed nothing will happen to me except for what You have destined for me, and award me contentment in my present living (and circumstances) with whatever You have apportioned for me.”

Certainty [yaqīn] is the highest and most perfect form of faith [īmān]. Faith is based upon gnosis [*ma‘rifah*] and perfect gnosis leads to the emergence of a sign of certainty in a person. For one who attains the stage of certainty, it makes no difference if he is in a state of prosperity or adversity. The believer entrusts his works to God knowing that his interest lies in what God apportions for him. In a *ḥadīth* on the ascension [*mi‘rāj*] of the Prophet (s), God says:

فَإِ اسْتَيْقَنَ الْعَبْدَ لَا يُبَالِي كَيْفَ أَصْبَحَ بَعْسَرُ مِ بَيْسَرِ .

“So, when the servant attains certainty it does not matter to him whether he is in ease or hardship.”¹

Imām al-Riḍā (‘a) was once asked about the meaning of ‘certainty’ [*yaqīn*] and he said: Imām al-Bāqir (‘a) described it in this manner:

أَلْتَوَكَّلَ عَلَى اللَّهِ وَتَسَلَّمَ لِيهِ وَلَرَضَا بِقَضَاءِ اللَّهِ وَتَقَوَّضَ إِلَى اللَّهِ .

“[Certainty means] trust in Allah, submission to Allah, contention in the decree of Allah, and delegation [of the affairs] to Allah.”²

As such, the first effect of faith on a person is to be certain that he will get whatever is apportioned for him and he will not get whatever is not apportioned for him.

Imām ‘Alī (‘a) is reported by Imām al-Ṣādiq (‘a) to have said:

لَا يَجِدُ عَبْدٌ طَعْمَ الْإِيمَانِ حَتَّى يَعْلَمَ أَنَّ مَا أَصَابَهُ لَمْ يَكُنْ لِيُخْطئه فِيَّ مَا أَخْطَاهُ لَمْ يَكُنْ لِيُصِيبِهِ فِيَّ الصَّارَّ النَّافِعَ هُوَ اللَّهُ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ .

“No servant will attain faith unless he has certainty that whatever reaches him is impossible not to reach him and whatever does not reach him is impossible to reach him.”³

And only Allah, the Honorable and Glorious, can give benefit and harm.”⁴

The notion that whatever we acquire by our efforts comes from us is polytheistic.

The monotheistic person must bear in mind that his existence comes from God. His physical strength and intellectual power also come from Him as well as the elements involved in them. In addition to all this, his use of them also depends on the will of God. One who accumulates wealth and property cannot spend them without the permission of God. There were many who accumulated wealth through lawful and unlawful means but they were

1– *Bihār al-Anwār*, vol. 77, p. 27, *h adīth* 6.

2– *Ibid.*, vol. 70, p. 138, *h adīth* 4.

3– That is, whatever is supposed to reach him has reached him or will reach him and whatever is supposed not to reach him has not reached him and will never reach him.

4– *Bihār al-Anwār*, vol. 70, p. 154, *h adīth* 12.

unable to enjoy them. Thus, even to enjoy one's wealth depends on God's leave.

Of course, it must be noted that the attainment of the station of certainty does not mean belief in predetermination [*jabr*]. That is, it does not mean that a person will not work anymore and promote laziness and then take religious beliefs as his excuse saying that he will get whatever is apportioned for him whether he will work or not. Here, it is impossible to deal lengthily with the issue of predestination and freewill [*jabr wa ikhtiyār*], but it suffices to say: "Effects come into being by means of causes." In apportioning things, God has taken factors and ways into consideration. One of these causes and factors is the determination and efforts of man.

For example, if a person is supposed to live for fifty years, it means that God knows what he will do and not do during his lifetime that will lengthen or shorten his lifespan such as observation of the bonds of relationship [*ṣilat al-raḥim*] or severance of the same [*qaṭ' al-raḥim*], observance of the rights of parents, observance of health rules, and the like.

Therefore, based on His absolute knowledge of the attitude and character of the person in question, God has decreed that he will live for fifty years, for instance. But this does not warrant the claim that since it is decreed that he will live for fifty years, his actions have no impact at all. What God has decreed is based on the same voluntary actions of the concerned person.

Attributing the voluntary actions of man to God, the Exalted, is not contradictory because both attributions are parallel and do not intersect with each other. In other words, attributing an action [*fi 'l*] to the human agent or doer [*fā 'il*] is at a certain level, and attributing the same to God, the Exalted, is on a higher level in which the existence of the agent himself, the object of action and the means through the action is done is attributed as a whole to God. So, the effect of man's will as "another part of the Ultimate Cause" in his action does not contradict attributing the existence of all parts of the Ultimate Cause to God, the Exalted. It is God in whose Hand are the existence of the world, man and all aspects of his existence, and He perpetually gives existence to them. No being is independent of Him. Thus, voluntary actions of man are also dependent on God and not beyond the domain of His will. It is wrong to argue that an action must be attributed to either will of man or the will of God because these two wills are not of the same level and thus can be combined together. Instead, the will of man, like his very existence, depends on Divine will, and the will of God, the Exalted, is needed for its materialization:

﴿وَمَا تَشَاءُونَ إِلَّا أَنْ يَشَاءَ اللَّهُ ۗ الْعَالَمِينَ﴾

“But you do not wish unless it is wished by Allah, the Lord of the worlds.”¹

The Glorious Qur’an also states:

﴿مَا أَصَابَ مِنْ مُصِيبَةٍ فِي الْأَرْضِ وَلَا فِي أَنْفُسِكُمْ إِلَّا فِي كِتَابٍ مِنْ قَبْلِ أَنْ نَبْرِهَافَ ذَلِكَ عَلَى اللَّهِ يَسِيرٌ﴾

“No affliction visits the earth or yourselves but it is in a Book before We bring it about—that is indeed easy for Allah.”²

It then continues:

﴿لِكَيْلَا تَأْسَوْا عَلَىٰ مَا فَاتَكُمْ وَلَا تَفْرَحُوا بِمَا آتَاكُمْ﴾

“So that you may not grieve for what escapes you, nor exult for what comes your way.”³

If in this world a blessing is taken from us, for example we lose one of our nearest of kin or are subjected to poverty, illness and the like, we must bear in mind that these are ordained by God and thus, we should not be adversely affected or blame ourselves. We must know that it is a blessing granted by God and then taken away from us according to a higher purpose.

God said to Prophet Mūsā (‘a): “My most beloved servant is he who submits and does not complain to Me when I take one of his beloved persons.”⁴

Hence, the believing person must not be attached to the blessings of the world and grieve on account of losing them. Rather, he must focus on worship and the performance of his religious obligations, and not on what he must get and what he has lost.

2. Contentment with God’s decree

The second effect of faith is contentment with Divine decree:

﴿وَصَّيْنِي مِنَ الْعَيْشِ بِمَا قَسَمْتَ لِي يَا رَحِيمَ الرَّحِيمِينَ﴾

“And award me contentment in my present living (and circumstances) with whatever You have apportioned for me, O the Most Merciful of the merciful.”

1– Sūrat al-Takwīr 81:29.

2– Sūrat al-H adīd 57:22.

3– Sūrat al-H adīd 57:23.

4– Bihār al-Anwār, vol. 82, p. 90.

God, the Exalted, has apportioned certain things to His servants and these are sometimes consistent with their desires. There are also instances when they are not satisfied with them. What God wants is for them to be contented with whatever He apportions and submit to His decree. This decree pertains to both legislative [*tashrī‘ī*] and ontological [*takwīnī*] affairs.

In the legislative affairs, this decree refers to the religious obligations—what is commanded [*wājibāt*] and what is prohibited [*muḥarramāt*]. Contentment [*rid āyah*] here means performance of what is commanded and shunning of what is prohibited.

In the ontological affairs, one must be contented with whatever transpires—whether it is desirable or undesirable. In facing undesirable events, people are put on trial with the aim of knowing their reaction. Some trials are related to the first stage of faith to see whether a person observes the divine laws or not in the face of pressing circumstances. A higher level is exclusive for the outstanding servants of Allah with the aim of knowing whether they will endure difficulties or complain about them. This is the station of “patience” [*ṣabr*]. The station higher than the station of patience is that of “contentment” [*riḍā’*]. That is, the people of contentment endure pain, suffering and affliction and are contented with them at the same time. Their hearts do not have any complaint or grudge because these events emanate from God. This is the highest stage of faith in which man is completely contented with the decrees of God, firmly believing that these decrees are based on Divine wisdom. Thus, during the Night of Ascension, God said to His Apostle (ṣ): “The most beloved acts for Me are trust (in God) [*tawakkal*] and (then) ‘contentment’ [*riḍāyah*] with what I have decreed.”¹

Of course, this does not mean that man must not work anymore. In fact, his endeavor is considered one of the elements of Divine decree. It means that we must be contented with whatever happens and bear in mind that there is wisdom behind it.

God addressed Prophet Mūsā, thus:

يَا مُوسَىٰ مَا خَلَقْتُ خَلْفًا أَحَبَّ إِلَيَّ مِنْ عِبْدِي الْمُؤْمِنِينَ وَإِنَّمَا ابْتَلَيْتَهُ لِمَا هُوَ خَيْرٌ لَهُ.

“O Mūsā! No creature is more beloved to Me than My faithful servant. Verily, if I send him an affliction it is good for him.”²

1— *Ibid.*, vol. 77, p. 21.

2— *Ibid.*, vol. 13, h *adīth* 36.

The mother who gives unpleasant and bitter medicines to her sick child evidently loves her child, and she does so not on account of animosity or hostility but out of love and affection. The same is true in the case of God.

We have many traditions [*riwāyāt*] where it is mentioned that sometimes God sees in poverty what is good for His servant and that religious affair will not be set right except through poverty and indigence. Out of His love for this servant, God makes him poor. Sometimes, the faith of a servant will not be preserved except through prosperity. So God makes him rich. There are also instances when poverty and prosperity are means of testing His servants.¹

It must be emphasized again that man must not surrender and give up working, but say: “O God, give to me whatever is good for me!” In fact, to perform one’s obligations is one story and to entrust the affairs to God and be contented with His decree is another.

In any case, man must be contented with what God has apportioned for him—be it little or plenty. This contentment has good effects both in this world and in the hereafter. In this world, he will find peace of mind and tranquility of the heart. In the hereafter, he will attain the station of the people of contentment.

Regrettably, because of the weakness of faith, most people are not contented with what God has given them and complain about it. As such, they do not enjoy peace of mind and are always unhappy. The faithful person, however, is aware of the fact that many things wished and striven for by people are not good for them and will even cause them trouble and problems.

In *Du‘ā’ al-Ifitāh* we read:

وَلَعَلَّ الَّذِي أَبْطَأَ عَنِّي هُوَ خَيْرٌ لِي لِعَلِمِكَ بِعَاقِبَةِ الْأُمُورِ.

“Perhaps slowing down [in the grant of my requests] may be a blessing in disguise because You alone know [all] the consequences.”

The Holy Qur’an also states:

﴿وَعَسَىٰ أَنْ تَكْرَهُوا شَيْئًا وَهُوَ خَيْرٌ لَّكُمْ وَعَسَىٰ أَنْ تُحِبُّوا شَيْئًا وَهُوَ شَرٌّ لَّكُمْ﴾

“Yet it may be that you dislike something while it is good for you, and it may be that you love something while it is bad for you.”²

1– *Ibid.*, vol. 72, p. 327, h *adīth* 12.

2– *Sūrat al-Baqarah* 2:216.

This happens frequently. Sometimes, a person himself realizes later that if he had been given the things he liked so much and strove to get, it would not have been good for him. On the contrary, one might dislike certain things and express displeasure at them but when he acquires them, he realizes that they were beneficial for him.

Regarding spouses, the Glorious Qur'an states:

﴿فَإِ كَرِهْتُمُوهُنَّ فَعَسَىٰ أَنْ تَكْرَهُوا شَيْئًا وَبِجَعَلَ اللَّهُ فِيهِ خَيْرٌ كَثِيرٌ﴾

*“And should you dislike them, maybe you dislike something while Allah invests it with an abundant good.”*¹

At any rate, man must entrust his works to God and be contented with whatever is apportioned for him. As such, one of the fruits of perfect faith is certainty [*yaqīn*] and contentment and satisfaction with the decree of God.

1– *Sūrat al-Nisā* ' 4:19.

Part Four

***Commentary on
Du‘ā’ Makārim al-Akhlāq***

First Discourse
Invoking Blessings on the Apostle (ﷺ)

اللَّهُمَّ صَلِّ عَلَى مُحَمَّدٍ وَآلِهِ.

“O Allah, bless Muḥammad and his Household.”

Supplication of the righteous

The supplications transmitted from the pure Imāms (‘a) are all precious means for one to attain nearness to God, the Exalted, but some of these supplications have other peculiarities. Treasures of knowledge and gnosis of the *Ahl al-Bayt* (‘a) are embedded in them. By carefully reciting them, one can acquire lofty and sublime knowledge from them, according to his capability, understanding, knowledge and assiduousness. *Du‘ā’ Makārim al-Akhlāq* is one of such supplications.¹ Every line of this noble supplication is full of important messages and moral lessons for man.

The name of this supplication reminds us that in requesting something from God, the Exalted, one must not only pay attention to material or worldly affairs. Perhaps, most of those who supplicate pay more attention to their material, physical, social and similar needs. Only a few are aware that acquisition of moral virtues also needs to be supplicated from God. In fact, just as moral virtues are superior to material things, we must engage in supplication more sincerely and fervently to acquire them.

Usually, we supplicate and seek the help of God when we feel that the material means to solve our problem are not at our disposal.

﴿ قَالُوا فِي الْفُلِّ دَعُوا اللَّهَ مُخْلِصِينَ لَهُ الدِّينَ ﴾

“When they board the ship, they invoke Allah putting exclusive faith in Him.”²

When a person is in the middle of a raging sea and about to be drowned, he will resort to prayer. When he faces a big problem which he cannot solve, he will seek the help of God. We ask God for everything we want and the preservation of whatever we have because the universe is under His control.

1– *Al-S ah ḥfah al-Sajjādiyyah*, Supplication 20.

2– *Sūrat al-‘Ankabūt* 29:65.

He is the Source of all causes and effects. Whatever God gives us cannot guarantee its own perpetuity and it is in His hand. In this sense, there is no difference between the physical and fundamental spiritual needs of man.

A worker who leaves home in the morning to earn a lawful living must bear in mind that his hands, feet, eyes, mind, life, and many other blessings come from God. If there will be a problem with any one of them, he will not be able to work properly or work at all. So, along with sweat and toil, he must ask God for his needs.

A student who is busy studying must strive hard but he must remember that the teachers, lessons, books, ears to listen, mind to understand, health, and the like are all from God. Without the existence of any of them, he cannot pursue his studies. So he must ask God to provide the means for the acquisition of knowledge.

One of the fundamental needs of man is the acquisition of noble moral traits and excellent human qualities. It is true that one must strive to remove bad traits and replace them with noble ones, but since the control over all causes and effects lies in God, they must be sought from Him. These causes and means that exist are all channels of Divine bounty.

Invoking blessings on the Apostle (s) for the acceptance of supplication

Invoking of blessings [*ṣalawāt*] on Muḥammad (s) and his progeny (‘a) is a sign of respect towards the Holy Prophet (s) and contributes towards the acceptance of a supplication. It is recommended in some traditions that for a supplication to be accepted, it must begin with the invocation of blessings upon Muḥammad (s) and his progeny (‘a) because *ṣalawāt* is always accepted and God, the Generous, would certainly not reject the second after accepting the first supplication (i.e. *ṣalawāt*).¹ It is mentioned in other traditions, thus: “Begin and end your supplication with *ṣalawāt* so that your supplication in between be accepted because God is more generous than that

1— The Commander of the Faithful (‘a) is reported to have said:

فَإِ كَانَتْ لَكَ إِلَى اللَّهِ سُبْحَانَهُ حَاجَةٌ فَأَبِئْ بِمَسْأَلَةِ الصَّلَاةِ عَلَى النَّبِيِّ (صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَآلِهِ)، ثُمَّ سَلْ حَاجَتَكَ، فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ أَكْرَمَ مَنْ نَأَى يُسْأَلُ حَاجَتَيْنِ، فَيَقْضِي إِحْدَاهُمَا وَيَمْنَعُ الْأُخْرَى.

“If you have a need toward Allah, the Glorified, then begin by seeking Allah’s blessing on His Prophet (s) then ask your need, because Allah is too generous to accept one of the two requests made to Him and deny the other.” *Nahj al-Balāghah*, Saying 361.

He would accept the beginning and end of a supplication but not its middle.”¹

At the beginning and end of this noble supplication, as well as in between, Allah’s blessing on Muḥammad (s) and his progeny (‘a) has been invoked.

Way of attaining the most perfect faith and highest decree of certainty

After invoking Allah’s blessing on Muḥammad (s) and his progeny (‘a), Imām Zayn al-‘Ābidīn (‘a) says:

وَبَلِّغْ بِإِيمَانِي أَكْمَلَ الْإِيمَانِ وَجَعَلْ يَقِينِي أَفْضَلَ الْيَقِينِ.

“Cause my faith to reach the most perfect faith and make my certainty the most excellent certainty.”

When a person asks for something spiritual from God, he must ask for its best and most excellent form. Concerning our material or worldly needs, we usually look for the best and ask for it from God but for acquiring excellent human qualities, we are contented with their average forms or levels. If we have high aspirations, we will strive to perform all our religious obligations and avoid what is unlawful so as to avoid being thrown into hellfire. But in this supplication, Imām ‘Alī ibn al-Ḥusayn (‘a) teaches us not to be of low aspirations and ask God in our supplications for faith [īmān] like that of the prophets (‘a), and certainty [yaqīn] like that of the truthful [ṣiddīqīn], so that in case we do not deserve the highest form, God will grant it to us according to our merit.

Great material blessings are always accompanied by some hassles. The greater a material blessing is, the greater are its associated difficulties, troubles and grief. But that is not the case with spiritual blessings. The loftier they are, the more will be their associated pleasure, felicity and perfection. Therefore, in the realm of spiritual affairs we must aim at the

1– Abū ‘Abd Allāh (Imām al-Ḥusayn) (‘a) is reported to have said:

من كانت له إلى الله عز وجل حاجة، فليبدأ بالصلوة على محمد وآله، ثم يسأل حاجته، ثم يختم بالصلوة على محمد وآل محمد؛ فإن الله عز وجل أكرم من أن يقبل الطرفين ويدع الوسط، إذا كانت الصلوة على محمد وآل محمد لا تحجب عنه.

“Whoever has a need toward Allah, the Honorable and Glorious, then he must begin by seeking Allah’s blessing on Muḥammad (s) and his progeny (‘a) then ask his need and then end by seeking Allah’s blessing on Muḥammad (s) and his progeny (‘a), because Allah, the Honorable and Glorious, is too generous to accept the two ends and not the middle. Whenever there is invocation of Allah’s blessing on Muḥammad (s) and his progeny (‘a), it is acceptable.” *Wasā’il al-Shī‘ah*, vol. 4, *ḥ adīth* 1137.

highest form of faith and certainty and seek the help of Allah in attaining them.

Faith has many levels and can be increased or decreased. In this regard, the Holy Qur'an states:

﴿وَدَا تَلَيْتَ عَلَيْهِمْ آيَاتِهِ زِدْتُهُمْ إِيمَانًا﴾

“And when His signs are recited to them, they (Allah’s signs) increase their faith.”¹

In this supplication, Imām Zayn al-‘Ābidīn (‘a) prays for the impeccable and highest form of faith. The reason why the Imām (‘a) used the term “best” [*afḍal*] with respect to certainty is that its essence is perfect and absolute belief without any blemish. As such, it cannot be said that certainty has different levels but different types can be mentioned. The quality of certainty has some differences. One type of certainty is that which is acquired through logical reasoning and argumentation and it is called “informational certainty” [*ilm al-yaqīn*]. The second type of certainty is that which is acquired through intuition and mystical witnessing [*kashf wa shuhūd*] and it is called “visual certainty” [*‘ayn al-yaqīn*]. The third type of certainty is that which is acquired through the discovery of the truth and acceptance of it and it is called “true certainty” [*ḥaqq al-yaqīn*].

For the sake of clarity, one can compare it to a wholesome sherbet in a glass. The first person has not seen it but through a reliable source he knows that it exists. The second person can see it in a glass and the third person has not only seen it but even tasted it. In this case, all the three persons are certain that it exists, but the type of certainty each of them has is different from one another. Perhaps what is meant by “best” in this supplication is the most excellent type of certainty which is usually called “true certainty” by the teachers of ethics.

The difference between faith and belief

Knowledge, perception and belief are not voluntary. It is possible that their preliminaries are voluntary but their availability is possible even without a person seeking them. A person sees another person in front of him and he is certain that the other person is present, or he involuntarily places his hand on fire and it burns and thus he realizes that fire burns. A person may possibly know something though he does not want to know it. It is even possible that he is annoyed by its knowledge. But for faith, be it certain or conjectural, the heart must also be inclined and attracted by it. The element of freewill is involved. A person may possibly not like and accept

1– *Sūrat al-Anfāl* 8:2.

something in spite of being certain of it. Regarding the people of Pharaoh, the Holy Qur’an states:

﴿ وَجَحَدُوا بِهَا وَاسْتَيْقَنَتْهَا أَنفُسُهُمْ ظُلْمًا وَعُلُوًّا ﴾

“They impugned them—though they were convinced in their hearts—wrongfully and defiantly.”¹

After the divine signs and great miracles were shown by Prophet Mūsā (‘a), the people of Pharaoh were certain that he was a prophet of God and that the shown miracles came from God, but they denied these signs and called the prophet of God “sorcerer” [sāḥir] and “spellbound” [mashūr] because of their desire for power and tyrannical practices. They had certainty in their hearts but they did not have faith so they denied what they saw. Addressing Pharaoh, Prophet Mūsā (‘a) said:

﴿ لَقَدْ عَلِمْتَ مَا أَنْزَلَ إِلَهُ الْإِبْرَةِ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ ﴾

“You certainly know that no one has sent these [signs] except the Lord of the heavens and the earth.”²

In this verse, two signs of emphasis are used, viz. *lām wa qad* [laqad]. That is, they truly and certainly know that no one has sent these signs except the Lord of the universe. Yet, Pharaoh said:

﴿ أَلَهُمْ آلِهَةٌ مِمَّا دَعَاكُمْ مِنْ دُونِي ﴾

“I do not know of any god that you may have other than me.”³

And he refused to believe but when he was about to be drowned in the sea, he exclaimed:

﴿ قَالَ آمَنْتُ أَنَّهُ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ آمَنْتُ بِهِ بَنُو إِسْرَائِيلَ وَ أَنَا مِنَ الْمُسْلِمِينَ ﴾

“He called out, ‘I believe that there is no god except Him in whom the Children of Israel believe, and I am one of those who submit [to Him]!’”⁴

But since this declaration was made out of compulsion, it was not accepted. So, no faith will emanate from compulsion, as the element of freewill plays an important role in its emergence.

1– Sūrat al-Naml 27:14.

2– Sūrat al-Isrā’ (or Banī Isrā’īl) 17:102.

3– Sūrat al-Qas as 28:38.

4– Sūrat Yūnus 10:90.

Perfect certainty is not needed to have faith. Without knowledge, however, one cannot have faith. During the early period of Islam, many people believed in Prophet Muḥammad (s). At the beginning, they had no perfect certainty in Islam. For this reason as well as the emergence of some doubts, some of them became apostates and went outside the pale of Islam.

Faith does not arise out of belief and inclination toward a certain thing or idea. Belief has its highest and lowest levels. From mere guesswork to the most perfect form of certainty, it can be improved. Similarly, inclination can be changed from outward desire to the highest level of love. These two elements have an impact on the strength of faith. If the belief or enthusiasm of a person on a thing or idea increases, on the same magnitude his faith on it will become stronger. Conversely, as his belief and inclination decrease, his faith also weakens. As such, in order to have perfect faith, we must strengthen our belief, bring about more convincing proofs for our faith, and remove the obstacles in the way of faith.

Reasons behind the peoples' opposition to their respective prophets

One of the reasons why most peoples opposed their respective prophets at the beginning of their prophetic mission was the prophets' invitation to the people to believe in the Resurrection, and to accept this invitation was too difficult for some people. They made gods for themselves and worshipped them but they did not have faith in the One True God. It is because the requisite of accepting monotheism [*tawḥīd*] meant the acceptance of the Resurrection and life after death, and since they assumed that the power of God is limited, they could not believe that their Creator could revive them after death and they would see the fruit of their deeds in the other world. Belief in the Resurrection means that one day all deeds of all human beings will be reckoned, and they will be rewarded or punished accordingly. The faithless imagined that by denying it at the outset, they would be at ease and could continue indulging in their sensualities.

Belief in the Resurrection comes if one reflects profoundly on the power of God. Just as He created human beings from nothing, He can also give life to them again. In this regard, the Holy Qur'an states:

﴿ أَيَحْسَبُ الْإِنْسَانُ أَلَّنْ نَجْمَعُ عِظَامَهُ * بَلَىٰ قَدِ يَنصُرُنَا ﴾

﴿ لِيُفْجَرُ أَمَامَهُ ﴾

“Does man suppose that We shall not put together his bones? Yes indeed, We are able to proportion [even] his fingertips! Rather man desires to go on living viciously.”¹

Signs of certainty

In a tradition, Imām al-Ṣādiq (‘a) is reported to have narrated:

“One day the Messenger of Allah (ṣ), after praying in the mosque with people, noticed a pale and thin youth taking a nap with his head down and sunken eyes. The Messenger of Allah (ṣ) asked him: ‘How are you?’ He replied: ‘I have attained certainty.’ The Messenger of Allah (ṣ) was elated by his answer and said: ‘Every certainty has a sign and what is the sign of your certainty?’ He replied: ‘O Messenger of Allah! The sign of my certainty is that it makes me sad and keeps me awake all night and thirsty on hot days. I have become uninterested in the world and its contents. It is as if I can see the Throne of Allah being established to reckon the people and the people gathered for the Reckoning. I am also with them. I can see the dwellers of paradise enjoying, reclining on cushions and introducing one another. I can see the denizens of the Fire under chastisement and asking for help. Even now the sound of the blazing Fire is ringing in my ears.’ The Messenger of Allah (ṣ) said: ‘This youth is a servant [of Allah] whose heart God has illuminated with the light of faith’.”²

The same Imām (a) is also reported to have said:

من صِحَّةِ يَقِينِ الْمَرْءِ الْمُسْلِمِ أَنْ لَا يَرْضَى النَّاسَ بِسَخَطِ اللَّهِ وَلَا يَلُومُهُمْ عَلَى مَا لَمْ يُؤْتِهِ اللَّهُ.

“Among the signs of the authenticity of certainty of a Muslim is that he would not seek the satisfaction of people at the expense of God’s pleasure and he would not reproach them for what God has given them.”³

It can be deduced from Qur’anic verses that those who can benefit from the Qur’an are only those who have faith in the unseen world and are certain of the hereafter:

﴿الَّذِينَ يُؤْمِنُونَ بِالْغَيْبِ وَيُقِيمُونَ الصَّلَاةَ وَمِمَّا رَزَقْنَاهُمْ يُنْفِقُونَ... وَبِالْآخِرَةِ هُمْ يُوقِنُونَ﴾

1– Sūrat al-Qiyāmah 75:3-5.

2– *Us ūl al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, p. 53.

3– *Bihār al-Anwār*, vol. 70, p. 143, *h adīth* 7.

“...who believe in the Unseen, and maintain the prayer, and spend out of what We have provided for them...and are certain of the Hereafter.”¹

In order to acquire *‘ilm al-yaqīn*, one must resort to convincing proofs on the existence of God and the unseen world. Substantiating certainty with righteous deeds removes the obstacles in the way of man and makes him ready to acquire *‘ayn al-yaqīn* and *ḥaqq al-yaqīn*.

The best of intentions and deeds

وَنَتَّه بِنِيَّتِي إِلَى أَحْسَنَ النِّيَّاتِ وَبِعَمَلِي إِلَى أَحْسَنَ الْأَعْمَالِ.

“And make my intention the best of intentions and my works the best of works!”

It can be inferred from this line that intention, like action, has degrees of excellence, and the perfection or imperfection of actions depends on the perfection or imperfection of intention. Pure intention is not to entertain other than the truth in the heart and to do so is very difficult. Abū ‘Abd Allāh al-Ḥusayn (‘a) is reported to have said:

النِّيَّةُ أَفْضَلُ مِنَ الْعَمَلِ، أَلَا وَإِنَّ النِّيَّةَ هِيَ الْعَمَلُ.

“Intention is superior to action, nay verily intention is the very [essence of] action.”²

“Intention” means quality not quantity; in fact, what is important is the quality. As the Holy Qur’an states,

﴿الَّذِي خَلَقَ الْمَوْتَ وَلِحَيَاةٍ لِيَبْلُوَكُمْ أَيُّكُمْ أَحْسَنُ عَمَلًا﴾

“He, who created death and life that He may test you [to see] which of you is best in conduct.”³

In the above noble verse, it is not stated “that He may test you [to see] which of you has done the most” [*liyabluwakum ayyukum aktharu ‘amalan*].

The best worship

In a tradition, Imām al-Sādiq (‘a) is reported to have said:

1– *Sūrat al-Baqarah* 2:2-5.

2– *Usūl al-Kāfī*, “*Kitāb al-Īmān wa’l-Kufr*,” *bāb al-ikhlās* [section on sincerity], *hādīth* 4.

3– *Sūrat al-Mulk* 67:2.

أَلْعِبَادَ ثَلَاثَةً: قَوْمٌ عِبَادُ اللَّهِ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ وَجَلَّ خَوْفًا فِتْلِكَ عِبَادَ الْعَبِيدِ. وَقَوْمٌ عِبَادُ اللَّهِ تَبَارَكَ وَتَعَالَى
 طَلَبَ الثَّوَابِ فِتْلِكَ عِبَادَ الْأَجْرَاءِ. قَوْمٌ عِبَادُ اللَّهِ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ حُبًّا لَهُ؛ فِتْلِكَ عِبَادَةُ الْأَحْرَارِ وَهِيَ
 أَفْضَلُ الْعِبَادَةِ.

“Worship is of three types. There is a group that worships Allah, the Honorable and Glorious, out of fear; that is the worship of the slave. And there is a group that worships Allah, the Blessed and Exalted, for seeking reward; that is the worship of the trader. And there is a group that worships Allah, the Honorable and Glorious, out of love for Him; that is the worship of the free, and it is the best of worship.”¹

With weak faith and insufficient gnosis, one cannot expect to have pure intention. What urges a person to work is his motive which, in turn, depends on his faith and gnosis, which, in turn, constitute intention. So, in order to have pure intention, it is necessary to strengthen one’s faith and gnosis. Pure intention automatically brings about good deeds because the best of deeds is that which is based upon the best of intentions. Hence, the key to all perfections is the acquisition of gnosis and the strengthening of faith.

Man can assess himself to some extent and reflect on the intention or motive behind his actions. If paradise and hell do not exist, will he still be willing to leave his soft bed in the middle of the night and perform supererogatory prayers [*tahajjud*], or to endure hunger during the days of the month of Ramaḍān and deprive himself of material pleasures just to win the pleasure of God? Will he refrain from committing sins out of his love for God and gratitude for His blessings?

The gnosis [*ma‘rifah*] of some people is so great that even if hell does not exist, they will worship God out of their desire for paradise and abundant blessings therein. There are also those who worship God not out of fear of hell or craving for paradise but because God is worthy of worship. In order to be near to God, he loves Him and is grateful for all His favors.

One must start making incessant efforts to acquire sublime intention. By doing good deeds and reflecting on the secret of creation and the fact that everything belongs to God and that He is the only one worthy to be worshipped, and sought for help, one strengthens his faith and certainty and acquires pure intention.

1– *Us ūl al-Kāfī*, vol. 3, “Kitāb al-Īmān wa’l-Kufr,” *bāb al-‘ibādah* [section on worship], p. 131, *h adīth* 5.

Of course, the warning of Divine Wrath and the glad tidings of Divine Pleasure is one of the great favors of God on His servants because most people cannot attain the sublime gnosis of worshipping God solely out of love for Him, but worship Him out of fear of hell or desire for paradise. Had it not been for hell and paradise, these people would not benefit from the fruit of worship and avoid sins, and neither would they attain perfection.

اللَّهُمَّ وَفِّرْ بِالطُّفِكَ نِيَّتِي وَصَحِّحْ بِمَا عِنْدَكَ يَقِينِي وَسَوِّصِلِحْ بِقُدْرَتِكَ مَا فَسَدَ مِنِّي.

“O God, complete my intention through Your gentleness, rectify my certainty through what is with You, and set right what is corrupt in me through Your power!”

O Allah! Given my weakness, I cannot acquire sublime intention, so help me acquire it. “Your gentleness” [*lutfika*] means the special favors of God. In other words, “Through Your kindness and mercy, You must help me acquire correct and wholesome intention.” Wholesome intention means to worship God solely to express gratitude and discharge one’s obligations as a servant of God. To worship God to gain reward or out of fear of punishment in the hereafter is a correct intention but cannot be considered wholesome intention.

At the beginning of this supplication, Imām Zayn al-‘Ābidīn (‘a) specified a section as an introduction to the overall contents of the supplication. The criterion of value in Islam is faith and righteous deeds. To express in action whatever we believe in requires some preliminaries. The requisite of perfect faith is certain belief and that which connects faith to action is intention. Eating, laborious work, abstaining from food, lending and borrowing, etc. are not always related to faith. Anybody may do them. The action of a person will be considered the best of actions and be related to faith when its medium is pure intention. The best of intentions breeds the best of deeds.

Perfect faith, highest type of certainty, purest intention, and best deeds are the main themes of *Du‘ā’ Makārim al-Akhlāq*. All lead to “nearness to Allah” [*qurb ilallāh*].

Second Discourse

Human Responsibility

Since the natural disposition [*fit rah*] of man inclines toward his welfare and felicity, once his attention is drawn to the purpose behind his creation, he will do his best to reach the peak of felicity and perfection.

The first thing for man to do then is to exert all efforts to achieve the purpose of creation, i.e. that which will lead him to perfection and felicity. Along this line, daily activities—studies, earning a living, interaction with others, etc.—must not distract him from moving toward Allah [*sayr illallāh*]. In this section, Imām al-Sajjād (‘a) prays to God to make him succeed in exerting all efforts to attain proximity to Him and remove the obstacles that stop or slow down his movement.

اللَّهُمَّ صَلِّ عَلَى مُحَمَّدٍ وَآلِ مُحَمَّدٍ وَكُفِّنِي مَا يَشْغَلُنِي الْإِهْتِمَامَ بِهِ وَاسْتَعْمِلْنِي بِمَا تَسْأَلُنِي غَدًا
عَنْهُ.

“O God, bless Muhammad and his Household, spare me the concerns which distract me, employ me in that about which You will ask me tomorrow!”

Intellectual and psychological obstacles dissuade man from thinking of his responsibilities towards God. Seeking the amenities of life, articles of luxury, facing problems, and the like divert man’s attention from thinking of his responsibilities.

Meeting the essential needs of man is a religious obligation and to discharge a duty for the sake of God is worship, and worship contributes to man’s attainment of perfection. In earning a living, however, is everybody only discharging an obligation with the intention of obedience to God? Does a person marry and honor this bond of wedlock solely for the sake of God, or is personal desire also involved? Will these matters not preoccupy his mind and hinder his attention and devotion to God? Are all the sociopolitical activities of a believer for the sake of God? If the sociopolitical affairs will preoccupy the minds of those who enter the sociopolitical arena, they will not find spare time to entreat God and be heedful of Him, let alone invest all their energy in worship. So, in order to solve this problem, we must pray to God to attend to our needs and give us opportunity to easily meet these

needs in such a manner that they do not hinder us from discharging our religious obligations and worshipping Him.

Human responsibility

Man is solely responsible to God. Only God has the right to question man because everything comes from Him. He determines the responsibilities of man—responsibilities toward parents, spouse/s, children, neighbors, people, animals, etc. These responsibilities are in essence man’s responsibilities toward God, concerning which he will be held to account by God. This world is a place of trial for man, and the Day of Resurrection is the time when man will be asked about the things placed at his disposal. So we must try our best to discharge these responsibilities and seek help from God so that even the essentials of life do not fill our hearts and make us negligent of remembering God and our responsibilities.

وَسْتَغْفِرْ أَيَّامِي فِيَمَا خَلَقْتَنِي لَهُ.

“And let me pass my days in that for which You have created me!”

While discharging responsibilities, it is necessary to limit the objects of attention, and even necessary affairs must not make man negligent of his responsibilities. By discharging his responsibilities dutifully, man tends to become nearer to the purpose of creation.

Purpose of creation according to the Qur’an

In the Holy Qur’an, different expressions are used to describe the purpose behind the creation of man. In a certain verse, it is stated that he is created for test and trial:

﴿ اَللّٰهُ خَلَقَ الْمَوْتَ وَ الْحَيَاةَ لِيَبْلُوَكُمْ اَيُّكُمْ اَحْسَنَ عَمَلًا ﴾

“He created death and life that He may test you [to see] which of you is best in conduct.”¹

In another verse, worship of God is mentioned as the purpose behind his creation:

﴿ وَمَا خَلَقْتُ الْجِنَّ وَالْاِنْسَ اِلَّا لِيَعْبُدُنِي ﴾

“I did not create the jinn and humans except that they may worship Me.”²

1— Sūrat al-Mulk 67:2.

2— Sūrat al-Dhāriyāt 51:56.

In yet another verse, it is stated that man is created so that he may enjoy the divine favor and attain nearness to God:

﴿إِلَّا مَنْ رَحِمَ رَبُّكَ وَلِذَلِكَ خَلَقَهُمْ﴾

“Except those on whom your Lord has mercy—and that is why He created them.”¹

Outwardly, these verses are inconsistent with one another but in reality each of them refers to a certain level of a single truth. In other words, they allude to the short-term, middle-term and ultimate objectives. The ultimate objective is proximity to God. Man has been given freedom and freewill to worship and serve God and attain nearness to Him. If man is compelled to tread the right path, his movement cannot be treated as a movement for perfection. In this regard, the Holy Qur’an states:

﴿وَعَلَى اللَّهِ فَصَدَّ السَّبِيلَ وَأَمَّا جَانِبُهَا فَيُضَلُّ بِهَا كَثِيرٌ مِمَّنْ أَتَى اللَّهَ فَأَنْتَ أَعْلَمُ الْغَافِلِينَ﴾

“With Allah rests guidance to the straight path, and some of them are devious, and had He wished, He would have guided you all.”²

God has shown many paths to man so that he can freely choose and tread his path to perfection. By successfully passing this test of choosing the right path, one stage in his way to perfection is passed. In order to be accepted by God, he must take a step towards the next stages to perfection and strive to make his life totally dedicated to God. Everything belongs to Him and we are His servants and a servant is not worthy of anything but servitude. Worldly needs and material pleasures are not the ultimate objective of man. He must deal with them only to the extent necessary and all his attention must focus on his servitude to God. Through his worship and servitude to God, he will attain nearness to God.

Worship [*‘ibādah*] is a general concept which is not confined to prayers and fasting. Every good work done for the sake of God is considered an act of worship. Even the sleep of a fasting person during the month of Ramaḍān is an act of worship because it gives him an opportunity to rest so that he can engage in the night vigil and supererogatory prayers.

﴿رَبِّ اجْنُبْنِي وَبَنِيَّ مِنْ مَغْرَبٍ وَعَشٍّ عَالِيٍّ فِي رِزْقِكَ وَلَا تَجْعَلْنِي مِنَ الْغَافِلِينَ﴾

“Free me from need, expand Your provision toward me, and tempt me not with ingratitude!”

1– Sūrat Hūd 11:119.

2– Sūrat al-Nah 1 16:9.

In order for the life of man to be filled with obedience to Allah, the material needs—food, clothing, housing, social security net, and the like—must not hinder the movement of man towards perfection.

Striving for a lawful earning is an act of worship but there is a considerable difference between it and the worship in which the heart's attention is solely towards God. If his efforts towards a lawful earning do not draw his attention to other than God and he is not negligent of his Lord, he can more sincerely worship God and attain true perfection.

The nature of riches or possession of vast wealth usually makes man proud and negligent of God, often urging him to rebel against Him. So we must work hard and pray to God that our efforts for a lawful earning make us not forget or be negligent of our responsibilities.

﴿عَزَّنِي وَلَا تَبْتَئِنِي بِالْكَبِيرِ﴾

“Exalt me and afflict me not with pride!”

Just as man has physical needs, he has numerous psychological needs, one of which is the need to be respected. Of course, those who attain a high stage of gnosis do not pay attention to other than God and are not in need of others' respect. Sometimes, meeting this need makes a person arrogant and thus slows down his progress.

Arrogance [*takabbur*] has many evil effects and engenders other vices. Its cure is possible by reflecting on the essence of man's being. If a person realizes that he has nothing of his own and his being belongs to the Creator of the universe, how can he consider himself greater than others?

﴿وَعَبَّدَنِي لَكَ وَلَا تُفْسِدْ عِبَادَتِي بِالْعُجْبِ﴾

“Make me worship You and corrupt not my worship with self-admiration!”

To have the opportunity to worship is not enough. It is possible that Satan makes insinuations while a person is worshipping and afflicts him with self-admiration [*‘ujb*].¹ *‘Ujb* means to consider one's good deeds great and plenty and to think of oneself worthy of reward for doing them.

‘Ujb has different levels and forms:

1— For a lengthy treatment of *‘ujb*, see Imām Khomeinī, *Forty H adīths: An Exposition of Ethical and Mystical Traditions*, trans. Sayyid ‘Alī Qulī Qarā’ī and Mahliqah Qarā’ī (Tehran: The Institute for Compilation and Publication of Imām Khomeinī's Works, 2003), pp. 8-100. [Trans.]

1. To think God is beholden to one for his good deeds (This is the spiritually most menacing level and form of ‘*ujb*’);
2. To be glad of one’s good deeds before God;
3. To consider oneself worthy of reward; and
4. To regard oneself superior to others.

This mean quality has many evil effects. In this regard, Imām ‘Alī (‘*a*) said:

مَنْ دَخَلَهُ الْعُجْبُ هَلَكَ.

“Whoever is afflicted with ‘*ujb*’ is wretched.”¹

وَجَرُّ النَّاسِ عَلَى يَدَيَّ الْخَيْرُ وَلَا تَمْحَقْهُ بِالْمَنْ.

“Let good flow out from my hands upon the people and efface it not by my making them feel obliged!”

It is possible for a person to find an opportunity to help a needy, cure a patient, feed an indigent or give charity for the sake of God, but after sometime he makes them feel obliged through a statement or gesture by saying, for example: “Had I not helped you, you would not have been relieved of that affliction.” Such a statement renders void all those services. In this regard, the Holy Qur’an states:

﴿ يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لَا تُبْطِلُوا صَدَقَاتِكُمْ بِالْمَنْ وَلاَ تُؤْتُوا بِهَا بَرَائِفَ ﴾

“O you who have faith! Do not render your charities void by reproaches and affronts.”²

وَهَبْ لِي مَعَالِيَ الْأَخْلَاقِ وَ عَصِمْنِي مِنَ الْفَخْرِ.

“Give me the highest moral traits and preserve me from vainglory!”

The important and fine point that must be given attention to is that pretension or showing off [*riyā*] in worship and reproaches for good works done are not vices that always openly lead a person to perdition. It is rather possible that he is careful not to do the above, but in his heart he nurtures a sense of superiority to others. To remove this defect also requires incessant efforts and the help of God.

اللَّهُمَّ صَلِّ عَلَى مُحَمَّدٍ وَآلِهِ وَلا تَرْفَعْنِي فِي النَّاسِ دَرَجَةً إِلا حَطَّطْتَنِي عِنْدَ نَفْسِي مِثْلَهَا.

“O God, bless Muḥammad and his Household! Raise me not a single degree before the people without lowering me its like in myself.”

1– *Wasā’il al-Shī’ah*, vol. 1, p. 321.

2– *Sūrat al-Baqarah* 2:264.

Whatever is added to the knowledge of a scholar makes him more aware of his ignorance. If a common person with average knowledge is asked about the number of scientific facts he is unaware of, he may say ten or twenty but whatever is added to his knowledge will make him more aware of his ignorance. The scholar perpetually realizes his own ignorance of many things.

Gnostically, the more a person knows God, the more he will realize his nothingness, ignorance, impotence, and helplessness. If he would acknowledge his defects, he will be relieved from arrogance, otherwise his self will rebel and afflict him with many vices. In *Du‘ā’ Abū Ḥamzah al-Thumālī*, Imām al-Sajjād (‘a) considers himself the most sinful before God, saying:

فَمَنْ يَكُونُ أَسْوَأَ حَالًا مِنِّي.

“Is there anyone who is in a worse state than me?”

وَلَا تُخَيِّرْ لِي عِوَضًا ظَاهِرًا إِلَّا أَخَذْتُ لِي ذِلَّةً بَاطِنَةً عِنْدَ نَفْسِي بِقَدْرِهَا.

“And bring about no outward exaltation for me without an inward abasement in myself of the same measure!”

As they are nearer to God, His Friends [*awliyā’ Allāh*] become more humble. On the contrary, if ignorant and mean people learn something or perform a certain good work, they think that they become superior to the angels and they have done all good things in the world.

As the gnosis of the meritorious servants of Allah increases, they see themselves more abject before God and become truly more humble. True humility means to sincerely consider one insignificant, and not only pretend before the people that one is humble, as this is hypocrisy [*nifāq*]. True humility is impossible except by the grace of Allah because man is rebellious and becomes arrogant on account of a very small thing.

Perpetual guidance

اللَّهُمَّ صَلِّ عَلَى مُحَمَّدٍ وَآلِ مُحَمَّدٍ وَمَتَّعْنِي بِهُدَى صَالِحٍ لَا أَسْتَبَدُّ بِهِ.

“O God, bless Muhammad and his Household! Let me enjoy such sound guidance which I do not seek to replace.”

In this part of the supplication, Imām Zayn al-‘Ābidīn (‘a) prays for the perpetuity and preservation of perfection throughout his life, without any deviation.

In the commentary of Sayyid ‘Alī Khān on this noble supplication, it is mentioned that in an old manuscript instead of *bihudan ṣāliḥ*, *bihadin ṣāliḥ* is written. *Hadā* means mode, method and approach. Based on this version, therefore, this part of the supplication is as follows: “Let me enjoy a sound method which I seek not to replace.” If it is really *bihudan ṣāliḥ*, then it means “Let me enjoy sound guidance which I seek not to replace” and if it is really “guidance” it is also proper. But it seems that *bihadin* is more proper in view of the fact that the same expression—*al-hadyu as - s āliḥ*—also exists in a *ḥadīth*.

وَطَرِيقَةً حَقًّا لَا زَايِعَ عَنْهَا.

“...a path of truth from which I swerve not...”

وَيَتِيَّةَ رَشْدٍ لَا أَشْكُ فِيهَا.

“...and an intention of righteous conduct in which I have no doubt!”

Probably, “doubt” here refers to its literal sense, i.e. hesitation. That is, intention in which there is no loophole. It is possible for a person to have doubt in intention but usually the intention itself is endowed with neither doubt nor certainty.

In this part of the supplication, Imām ‘Alī ibn al-Ḥusayn (‘a) has three requests from God:

- Wholesome and constant attitude;
- A path towards God in which there is no deviation;
- A firm and permanent resolve to do good deeds or pious acts.

These three requests show us that the permanence or perpetuity of what we ask from God or what He gives us, also lies in His power and we must ask Him for it.

The station of this part of the supplication is like this noble supplication:

﴿رَبَّنَا لَا تُفِضْ قُلُوبَنَا بَعْدَ إِهْدَائِنَا﴾

“Our Lord! Do not make our hearts swerve after You have guided us.”¹

After guiding us, God has to keep us along the straight and right path. God says in the Qur’an, thus:

1– Sūrat Āl ‘Imrān 3:8.

﴿ وَكَأَيِّن مِّن نَّبِيٍّ قَاتَلَ مَعَهُ رِثِيُونَ كَثِيرٌ... * وَمَا كَانَ قَوْلُهُمْ إِلَّا أَن قَالُوا رَبَّنَا اغْفِرْ لَنَا ذُنُوبَنَا
وَسِّرْ فَنَّا فِي أَمْرِنَا وَثَبِّتْ أَقْدَامَنَا وَنَصُرْنَا عَلَى الْكَافِرِينَ ﴾

“How many a prophet there has been with whom a multitude of godly men fought... All that they said was, ‘O Lord, forgive us our sins, and our excesses in our affairs, and make our feet steady, and help us against the faithless lot’.”¹

One of the supplications of those who have offered their lives and properties in the way of Allah by following the prophets was this: “O God, make our feet steady in the right path!”

Man is always subject to commit error and be misguided every moment. Ibn Muljim² was a person who used to perform night supererogatory prayers, yet he thrust his poisoned sword onto the blessed head of the Commander of the Faithful (‘a). Zubayr³ was a paternal cousin of Prophet Muḥammad (s) and Imām ‘Alī (‘a). For many years he fought in battles on the side of the Apostle (s) who prayed for his sword and arm. He was one of the great combatants and companions who pledged allegiance under the tree [*bay‘at ar-riḍwān*].⁴ After the passing away of the Holy Prophet (s), however, ambition for power dragged him to the extent of wielding his sword against Imām ‘Alī (‘a) during the Battle of Jamal.

The late Hāj Mīrzā ‘Abd al-‘Alī Tehrānī (may Allah, the Exalted, be pleased with him) said: “When I was young, I used to ask for high levels of gnosis from God without giving importance to its lower levels. I used to ask God to let me attain His proximity and pleasure, but now that I am old, I only pray to God to make me die as a Muslim.” To die as a Muslim is not easy. The ideas, beliefs, attitude, and actions of man are ever-changing. It is possible for a person to lose his faith on account of a simple doubt. So it is only proper to pray to God, that after having guided us and shown us the straight path, to keep us firm and steady along this path. If on the verge of death, a

1– *Sūrat Āl ‘Imrān* 3:146-147.

2– ‘Abd al-Rahmān ibn Muljim: the assassin of Imām ‘Alī (‘a). [Trans.]

3– Zubayr: one of the companions of the Prophet (s) who, along with Talhah and ‘Ā’ishah, led the Battle of Jamal against Imām ‘Alī (‘a). [Trans.]

4– See exegesis [*tafsīr*] of *Sūrat al-Fath* 48:18:

﴿ لَقَدْ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنِ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ إِذْ يُبَايِعُونَكَ تَحْتَ الشَّجَرِ فَعَلِمَ مَا فِي قُلُوبِهِمْ فَأَنْزَلَ السَّكِينَةَ عَلَيْهِمْ وَأَثَابَهُمْ فَتْحًا قَرِيبًا ﴾

“Allah was certainly pleased with the faithful when they swore allegiance to you under the tree. He knew what was in their hearts, so He sent down composure on them, and requited them with a victory near at hand.”

person is overwhelmed by doubts and skepticism, all his good deeds will be rendered useless. In this regard, the Holy Qur’an states:

﴿ وَمَنْ يَرْتَدِدْ مِنْكُمْ عَنْ دِينِهِ فَيَمُتْ وَهُوَ كَافِرٌ فَأُولَٰئِكَ حَبِطَتْ أَعْمَالُهُمْ فِي الدُّنْيَا وَالْآخِرَةِ
 وَهُمْ لِكُلِّ أَصْحَابِ النَّارِ هُمْ فِيهَا خَالِدُونَ ﴾

“And whoever of you turns away from his religion and dies faithless—they are the ones whose works have failed in this world and the Hereafter. They shall be the inmates of the Fire, and they shall remain in it [forever].”¹

وَعَمَّرْنِي مَا كَانَ عُمِّي بِذَلَّةٍ فِي طَاعَتِكَ فَإِذَا كَانَ عُمِّي مَرْتَعًا لِلشَّيْطَانِ فَأَقْبِضْنِي إِلَيْكَ قَبْلَ أَنْ
 يَسْبِقَ مَقْتُكَ إِلَيَّ وَأَيُّسِّرْ لِي غَضَبَكَ عَلَيَّ.

“Let me live as long as my life is a free gift in obeying You, but if my life should become a pasture for Satan, seize me to Yourself before Your hatred overtakes me or Your wrath against me becomes firm!”

We do not have the capability to comprehend Imām al-Sajjād (‘a), whether such assumption is applicable to the Imām (‘a) or something meant to be a lesson for others. We are not infallible and our life can be a pasture for Satan. Our life, souls and hearts are like a piece of land that can be occupied by Satan, and if every moment of our life is to be filled with sins and offences and trampling upon the stages of perfection we have attained, it is better for it to end as soon as possible.

If a person believes that he is meant for the hereafter, he must sincerely pray for this to God. It is possible that a time will come for him when he indulges in sins and is overwhelmed by sensuality, anger or craving for power, and the veil of negligence covers his heart and blinds his eyes and then he sees and hears nothing but carnal desires. At that time, there is no more chance for return, but after succumbing to this state of affairs, he must pray to God that if that day is supposed to come to him, He must put an end to his life before the arrival of that day.

This supplication helps reform man’s actions because it urges him to think about it, not to allow Satan to dominate his heart, and guard it against doubts and skepticism. In this regard, the Holy Qur’an states:

1– Sūrat al-Baqarah 2:217.

﴿ وَإِذَا رَأَيْتَ الَّذِينَ يَخُوضُونَ فِي آيَاتِنَا فَأَعْرِضْ عَنْهُمْ حَتَّى يَخُوضُوا فِي حَدِيثٍ غَيْرِهِ وَمِمَّا يُنْسِيَنَّكَ الشَّيْطَانُ فَلَا تَقْعُدْ بَعْدَ الذِّكْرِ مَعَ الْقَوْمِ الظَّالِمِينَ ﴾

“When you see those who gossip impiously about Our signs, avoid them until they engage in some other discourse; but if Satan makes you forget, then, after remembering, do not sit with the wrongdoing lot.”¹

The Qur’an wants to convey that a person like the Apostle (s) must also be admonished in this regard because the words of Satan may also exert a sort of influence on him.

The statement is not inconsistent with freedom. If a young weightlifter is advised not to lift 200 kilos as it will break his back but undergo extensive training first so that he can make it later, this in no way conflicts with freedom.

As we have now identified the path of truth, we must not be in pursuit of the words of Satan as they bring nothing to us except agitation, doubt and skepticism. In this supplication, Imām ‘Alī ibn al-Ḥusayn (‘a) prays to God for the termination of his life before Divine wrath overtakes him, if his life is supposed to become a pasture for Satan, and if ever He is angry with him, he asks for help so that he is able to repent and make compensations for his lapses. God says in the Qur’an, thus:

﴿ وَمَنْ يَخْلِلْ عَلَيْهِ غَضَبِي فَقَدْ هَوِيَ ﴾

“And he on whom My wrath descends certainly perishes.”²

اللَّهُمَّ لَا تَدَعْ خِصْلَةَ نِعَابِ مَيِّ إِلَّا أَصْلَحْتَهَا.

“O God, deposit in me no quality for which I will be faulted, unless You settle it right.”

وَلَا عَائِبَةَ رَأُوبِهَا إِلَّا أَحْسَنْتَهَا.

“...and no flaw for which I will be blamed, unless You make it beautiful.”

وَلَا أَكْرَمَةَ فِي نَاقِصَةٍ إِلَّا أَتَمَمْتَهَا.

“...and no deficient noble trait, unless You complete it!”

The qualities and flaws to be condemned and reproached by others refer to the attributes not acceptable by the righteous, and not to those good qualities condemned by the spiteful and wicked.

1— Sūrat al-An‘ām 6:68.

2— Sūrat T ā Hā 20:81.

Third Discourse

Good and Evil

According to Islam, man is a social being. He will not attain real perfection by mere personal acts of worship. Instead, he must live with people to attain all dimensions of perfection. He must be in touch with society and all facets of social life—relationship with his spouse, children, friends, and neighbors; transactions, *jihād* and defense; relationship with the government and people; etc. He must worship God according to His command. By doing so, he will attain nearness to God.

Sometimes, these relationships cause annoyances, disturbances of the mind and conflicts. Some of these conflicts are with those who are hostile to the person. This hostility may be caused by worldly or religious matters, and sometimes these conflicts and grudges are caused by the jealousy of others for blessings given by God to a person. This jealousy breeds animosity towards him and tries to harm his reputation. At times, a person has no animosity towards another person who in turn is not jealous of him, but they have a difference of views and do not exactly understand each other. This difference of views leads to misunderstanding and a sort of conflict between them.

So, some matters pertaining to the heart such as animosity, grudge, jealousy, suspicion, misgiving, pessimism, misunderstanding, and difference of views undermines a person's wholesome, amicable and sincere relations with others. This state of affairs brings about indignation, anxiety and bitterness to him and these feelings may lessen the presence of his heart in worship. In this part of the supplication, Imām Zayn al-‘Ābidīn (‘a) pays attention to these things.

Turning evil and defects into good and merits

اللَّهُمَّ صَلِّ عَلَى مُحَمَّدٍ وَآلِ مُحَمَّدٍ وَبَدِّلْ لِي مِنْ بُغْضَةِ أَهْلِ الشُّنَّانِ الْمَحَبَّةَ.

“O God, bless Muhammad and Muhammad's Household and replace for me the animosity of the people of hatred with love.”

وَمِنْ حَسَدِ أَهْلِ الْبَغْيِ الْمَوَدَّةَ.

“...the envy of the people of insolence with affection.”

وَمِنْ ظَنَّةِ أَهْلِ الصَّلَاحِ الثَّقَةِ.

“...the suspicion of the people of righteousness with trust.”

وَمِنْ عَدَاوَةِ الَّذِينَ الْوَلَايَةَ.

“...the enmity of those who are close with friendship.”

“Those who are close” [*adnayn*] refers to the nearest of kin. A person has different levels of relationship with various people—relationship with near relatives, distant relatives, neighbors, etc. Each of them requires a particular nature of relationship.

وَمِنْ عُقُوقِ هِيَ الْإِحَامِ الْمَرَّةِ.

“...the disrespect of womb relatives with devotion.”

Near relatives must have a close relationship which should not be severed. They must be kind and not mistreat one another.

وَمِنْ خَدْلَانِ الْأَقْرَبِينَ النَّصْرِ.

“...the abandonment of relatives with help.”

Sometimes a person needs the help of his relatives who do not want to assist him.

وَمِنْ حُبِّ الْمُدَارِينِ تَصْحِيحِ الْمَقَّةِ.

“...the attachment of flatterers with love set right.”

وَمِنْ رِيَاءِ الْمَلَابِسِينَ كَمِ الْعِشْرِ.

“...the rejection of fellows with generous friendliness.”

وَمِنْ مَرَاهِ وَتَوَّعُّوْهُ الظَّالِمِينَ خَلَاوِ الْأَمَنَةِ.

“...the bitterness of fear of wrongdoers with the sweetness of security!”

In other words, “O God! The threat of tyrants and oppressors is sometimes not actualized but it creates fear and dread in our hearts. Turn this fear and dread into a sense of security!”

Seeking help to repel evil and attract good

This part of the supplication is related to the time when the oppressor, the envious, and their like intend to do evil.

اللَّهُمَّ صَلِّ عَلَى مُحَمَّدٍ وَآلِهِ وَجْعَلْ لِي يَدًا عَلَى مَنْ ظَلَمَنِي.

“O God, bless Muḥammad and his Household! Appoint for me a hand against him who wrongs me.”

وَلِسَانًا عَلَى مَنْ خَاصَمَنِي.

“...a tongue against him who disputes with me.”

وَوَظْفَرًا بِمَنْ عَانَدَنِي.

“...victory over him who stubbornly resists me!”

وَهَبْ لِي مَكْرًا عَلَى مَنْ كَايَدَنِي.

“Give me guile against him who schemes against me.”

وَقُدْرَةً عَلَى مَنْ اضْطَهَدَنِي.

“...power over him who oppresses me.”

وَتَكْذِيبًا لِمَنْ قَصَبَنِي.

“...refutation of him who reviles me.”

وَسَلَامَةً مِمَّنْ تَوَعَّدَنِي.

“...safety from him who threatens me!”

وَوَفْقَنِي لِعَاطَاةِ مَنْ سَدَّدَنِي وَمُتَابَعَةِ مَنْ رَأَشَدَنِي.

“Grant me success in obeying him who points me straight and following him who guides me right!”

Goodness in exchange for the badness of others

This part of the supplication is related to the time when something iniquitous is done to us. What must we do then? Shall we take revenge from them and treat them in kind? Shall we forgive them for what they have done? In this regard, the Holy Qur’an states:

﴿ وَلَا تَسْخَرِ الْحَسَنَةَ وَلَا السَّيِّئَةَ ادْفَعْ بِالَّتِي هِيَ أَحْسَنُ فَإِذَا كَانَا بَيْنَكَ وَبَيْنَهُ عَدَاوَةٌ وَكَانَ هُوَ وَلِيُّكَ حَمِيمٌ ﴾

“Good and evil [conduct] are not equal. Repel [evil] with what is best. [If you do so,] behold, he between whom and you was enmity, will be as though he were a sympathetic friend.”¹

اللَّهُمَّ صَلِّ عَلَى مُحَمَّدٍ وَآلِهِ وَسَدِّدْ لِي لِأَنْ أَهْلُوهُ مِنْ غَشِّي بِالنُّصْحِ.

“O God, bless Muḥammad and his Household and point me straight to resist him who is dishonest toward me with good counsel.

﴿ وَحِجْرٍ مَنْ هَجَرَنِي بِالْبِرِّ. ﴾

“...repay him who separates from me with gentle devotion.

﴿ وَثِيْبٍ مَنْ حَرَمَنِي بِاللِّدِّ. ﴾

“...reward him who deprives me with free giving.”

﴿ وَكَافِيٍّ مَنْ قَطَعَنِي بِالصَّلَاةِ. ﴾

“...recompense him who cuts me off with joining.”

﴿ وَخَالَفٍ مَنْ اغْتَابَنِي إِلَى حُسْنِ الذِّكْرِ. ﴾

“...oppose him who slanders me with excellent mention.”

﴿ فِي أَشْكُرِ الْحَسَنَةَ وَغَضِي عَنْ السَّيِّئَةَ. ﴾

“...give thanks for good, and shut my eyes to evil!”

Keeping one’s honor

اللَّهُمَّ صَلِّ عَلَى مُحَمَّدٍ وَآلِهِ وَصُنْ وَجْهِي بِالْيَسَارِ وَلَا تَبْتُلْهُ جَاهِي بِالْأَفْئَاتِ فَاسْتَقِرْ أَهْلَ زَوْفِكَ.

“O God, bless Muḥammad and his Household! Save my face through ease, and demean not my dignity through neediness, lest I seek provision from those whom You have provided.”

In *Nahj al-Balāghah* there is an expression which is very similar to the initial part of this line. All the Infallibles (‘a) are of the same light [*nūr*] and it is not suprising if a supplication can be traced to more than one of them.

1— Sūrat *Fuṣṣilat* 41:34.

So, Imām al-Sajjād (‘a) might have learned this supplication from the Commander of the Faithful (‘a) through Imām al-Ḥusayn (‘a).

Every person wants to be respected in society. That is, he must be treated with honor and not with contempt. If the visage, clothing, behavior, attitude, and valuable works of a person are praised by others, he is respected in society, otherwise he is held in contempt and no one respects him.

Some Sufis believe that their outward appearance must not be good. Accordingly, they must avoid grooming themselves and cleaning their clothes so that their bad odor and ungroomed faces make them despicable. In their own narrow thinking, they are struggling against their carnal selves in a bid to attain spiritual perfection. This way of thinking and attitude establishes a sort of relationship with Satan. Sometimes, Satan helps them in some affairs and to their delight they think that this assistance is a sign of their truthfulness.

As can be deduced from the Qur’an and traditions of the infallible Imāms (‘a), this practice is extremely despicable and condemnable. In the Qur’an even the indigent who do not show their indigence is praised:

﴿يَحْسِبُهُمُ الْجَاهِلُ أَغْنِيَاءَ مِنَ التَّعَفُّفِ تَعْرِفُهُمْ بِسِيمَاهُمْ لَا يَسْأَلُونَ النَّاسَ إِحْزَافًا﴾

“The unaware suppose them to be well-off because of their reserve. You recognize them by their mark; they do not ask the people importunately.”¹

According to Islam, in wearing clothes, dealing with others—members of the family and the society in large—a person must behave in such a way that he maintains his self-respect. Traditions have not reproached people who have two types of clothes—one for days of festivities, Fridays and social gatherings and another for work—and neither considered their practice “worldly”. In fact, they have been praised and appreciated. Moreover, in Islamic society, people must have extensive and cordial relations with one another. This practice paves the way for their material progress and spiritual perfection. The believers [mu’minīn] are recommended in traditions to shake hands whenever they meet each other and be affectionate to one another. In this regard, Imām al-Bāqir (‘a) said:

1– Sūrat al-Baqarah 2:273.

نِ الْـمُؤْمِنِينَ إِذَا التَّقِيَا فَنَتَصَافَحَا ذُ خَلَّ اللهُ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ يَدَهُ بَيْنَ أَيْدِيهِمَا وَأَقْبَلَ بِوَجْهِهِ عَلَيَّ أَشَدَّهُمَا حُبًّا لِّصَاحِبِهِ.

“When two believers meet each other and shake their hands, God, the Honorable and Glorious, puts His hand in between their hands and gives special attention to the one who loves the other one more.”¹

All these recommendations are made for the believers to forge cordial relations with one another. For this cordiality, amity and connection one must avoid things that are contemptible. No person wants to shake hands or even look at someone untidy and disheveled, with a bad odor. Hence, cleanliness is a prerequisite of friendship and affection.

Whenever he was supposed to meet his companions, the Holy Prophet (s) combed his hair, applied perfume, brushed his teeth, and fixed his clothes. He looked at himself in the mirror to be sure that everything was fine. In the absence of a mirror, he would look at himself in a container filled with water. This emphasis on personal hygiene is mentioned so that members of society can love each other more and benefit from one another. One of the differences between the believer and the unbeliever is that the former is in pursuit of self-respect so that he can discharge his social responsibilities prescribed by religion, but the latter is after self-respect for the good of his ego.

Usually, people do not pay attention to a poor person. For such a person, it is difficult to acquire a good social standing in society even among Muslims. Wealth and property are of no value for Imām Zayn al-‘Ābidīn (‘a), but he asks God to preserve his honor. By acquiring a good social standing, he can discharge his religious obligations in a better way. A person who is in need of others is forced to extend his hands towards them. In this case, if he is helped by them he is humiliated, and if he is refused, he endures worse humiliation. This is while the treasures of the heavens and earth are in the hand of God who can meet the needs of man out of His infinite mercy and bounty and thereby preserve his honor.

وَ سَتَعَطِي شَرَّارِ خَلْقِكَ فَافْتِنِ بِحَمْدِ مَنْ أَعْطَانِي وَبُتْلِي بِمَنْ مَنَعَنِي وَنْتَ وَلِيَّ الْإِعْطَاءِ وَكَمْنَعِ.

“...and asks for bestowal from the worst of Your creatures! Then I would be tried by praising him who gave to me and afflicted with

1— *Us ūl al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, p. 179.

blaming him who held back from me, while You—not they—are the patron of giving and holding back.”

One must pray to God Himself to provide all his needs, so that one is not forced to seek it from mean and wicked individuals. In this regard, the Noble Qur’an states:

﴿ إِنَّا يَمَسُّنَكَ اللَّهُ بِضُرٍّ فَلَا كَاشِفَ لَهُ إِلَّا هُوَ إِنَّا نُؤْتِيهِ بِخَيْرٍ فَلَا رَدَّ لِفَضْلِهِ يُصِيبُ بِهِ مَن يَشَاءُ مِنْ عِبَادِهِ وَهُوَ الْغَفُورُ الرَّحِيمُ ﴾

“Should Allah visit you with some distress, there is no one to remove it except Him; and should He desire any good for you, none can stand in the way of His grace: He grants it to whomever He wishes of His servants, and He is the All-forgiving, the All-merciful.”¹

اللَّهُمَّ صَلِّ عَلَى مُحَمَّدٍ وَآلِهِ وَرَقِّنِي صِحَّةً فِي عِبَادِهِ وَفَرَاغًا فِي زَهَابِهِ .

“O God, bless Muhammad and his Household and provide me with soundness in worship and detachment in renunciation...”

The Imām (‘a) prays for relief from pressures to worship with total dedication.

وَعَلِّمًا فِي اسْتِعْمَالِ وَرَعَا فِي إِجْمَالِ .

“...knowledge put into action and abstinence in measure!”

Individuals, who want to be pious and devoted to God, sometimes abstain from things which are wholesome and hinder them from doing the obligatory. They must know the scope and limitation of asceticism and piety before practicing them.

اللَّهُمَّ اخْتِمْ بَعْتَلُوِي أَجَلِي

“O God, seal my term with Your pardon...”

وَحَقِّقْ فِي رَجَاءِ رَحْمَتِكَ أَمَلِي

“...verify my expectation in hoping for Your mercy.”

When a person reflects on his sins, he becomes hopeless of God’s forgiveness and in this state expects God’s mercy.

وَسَهِّلْ إِلَى بُلُوغِ رِضَاكَ سُبُلِي

“...smooth my paths to reach Your good pleasure.”

1– Sūrat Yūnus 10:107.

وَحَسِّنْ فِي جَمِيعِ أَحْوَالِي عَمَلِي.

“...and make my works good in all my states!”

اللَّهُمَّ صَلِّ عَلَى مُحَمَّدٍ وَآلِهِ وَنَبِّهْنِي لِذِكْرِكَ فِي وَأَقَاتِ الْغَفْلَةِ

“O God, bless Muḥammad and his Household and incite me to remember You in times of heedlessness.”

Man is always prone to forget and be negligent. Moreover, sometimes something happens that makes him totally forget God. We must pray to God to extend His hand in such a situation, inspire His remembrance and awaken our hearts.

وَسْتَعْمِلْنِي بِطَاعَتِكَ فِي أَيَّامِ الْمُهْمَلَةِ

“...employ me in Your obedience in days of disregard.”

وَنَهِّجْ لِي إِلَى مَحَبَّتِكَ سَبِيلًا سَهْلَةً أَكْمِلْ لِي بِهَا خَيْرَ الدُّنْيَا وَالْآخِرَةِ .

“...open a smooth road for me to Your love, and complete for me, thereby, the good of this world and the next!”

That is to say, “My aim is to obtain Your love. To obtain this love has long and winding roads. Set for me the shortest one. By granting these requests and finding the shortest way to Your love, You will completely grant to me the good in this world as well as in the hereafter.”

اللَّهُمَّ صَلِّ عَلَى مُحَمَّدٍ وَآلِهِ كَأَفْضَلِ مَا صَلَّيْتَ عَلَى أَحَدٍ مِنْ خَلْقِكَ قَبْلَهُ وَنَتِّ مُصَلِّ عَلَى أَحَدٍ بَعْدَهُ وَتَنَا فِي الدُّنْيَا حَسَنَةً وَفِي الْآخِرَةِ حَسَنَةً وَقِنِي بِرُحْمَتِكَ عَذَابَ النَّارِ .

“O God, bless Muḥammad and his Household the best You have blessed any of Your creatures before him and will bless any of them after him, and give to us in this world good, and in the next world good, and protect me through Your mercy from the chastisement of the Fire!”

Fourth Discourse

The Night of Ordainment

The holiness of certain places and periods in the Qur'an

God, the Exalted, has granted more honor and nobility to certain creatures as compared to the rest. They are endowed with a certain status, honor, nobility, and dignity which others do not possess. It can be inferred from the Holy Qur'an and the traditions of the Holy Prophet (s) and pure Imāms ('a) that apart from visible creatures, some places and periods have special features. The first and foremost of these places is the Holy Ka'bah:

﴿إِنَّا وَوَلَّ بَيْتَ وَضِعَ لِلنَّاسِ لَلَّذِي بِبَكَّةَ مُبَارَكًا وَهُدًى لِّلْعَالَمِينَ﴾

“Indeed the first house to be set up for mankind is the one at Bakkah,¹ blessed and a guidance for all nations.”²

The second holy place is Masjid al-Aqsā. In the Glorious Qur'an, Masjid al-Harām and Masjid al-Aqsā are mentioned together:

﴿سُبْحَانَ اللَّهِ أَن سُبْحَانَ اللَّهِ لَيْلًا مِّنَ الْمَسْجِدِ الْحَرَامِ إِلَى الْمَسْجِدِ الْأَقْصَى اللَّهُ بَارَكْنَا حَوْلَهُ﴾

“Immaculate is He who carried His servant on a journey by night from the Sacred Mosque to the Farthest Mosque whose environs We have blessed.”³

God says that He blesses them as well as their environs, and in another verse He says:

﴿يَا قَوْمِ ادْخُلُوا الْأَرْضَ الْمُقَدَّسَةَ الَّتِي كَتَبَ اللَّهُ لَكُمْ﴾

“O my people, enter the Holy Land which Allah has ordained for you.”⁴

The third holy place mentioned in the Qur'an is the Mount Sinai which is described therein as *tūrī sīnīn*:

1– Bakkah: the Holy Mosque or the city of Mecca, or the territory where they stand. [Q Trans.]

2– Sūrat *Āl 'Imrān* 3:96.

3– Sūrat *al-Isrā'* (or *Banī Isrā'īl*) 17:1.

4– Sūrat *al-Mā'idah* 5:21.

﴿ وَطُورِ سَيْنِينَ ﴾

“By Mount Sinai.”¹

Mount Sinai is the place where Prophet Mūsā (‘a) used to pray and received for the first time the divine revelation. It is possible that these places have intrinsic peculiarities and their holiness is inherent. In this case, a time will come when mankind will discover their special status. It is equally possible that their holiness is due to certain events that took place there. In any case, these places have special sanctity and nobility.

Some periods are mentioned in the Qur’an as having special significance. It can be inferred from verses of the Qur’an that the arrangement of days according to the Islamic lunar calendar has divinely been ordained.

﴿ نَبِّئْ عِدَّةَ الشُّهُورِ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ اثْنَا عَشَرَ شَهْرًا فِي كِتَابِ اللَّهِ يَوْمَ خَلَقَ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ مِنْهَا
رَأْبَعَةً حُمُ ﴿﴾

“Indeed the number of the months with Allah is twelve months in Allah’s Book, the day when He created the heavens and the earth. Of these, four are sacred.”²

Among these twelve months, God declared four months as “forbidden months” [*ash-shuhūr al-h arām*], viz. Muh arram, Rajab, Dhū’l-Qa‘dah, and Dhū’l-H ijjah. It is obligatory to honor these four months and it is forbidden to initiate war during this period even to the Holy Prophet (s) and pure Imāms (‘a), except if it is initiated by the faithless or polytheists and the Muslims need to defend themselves. The reason for this prohibition is the sanctity given by God to these months.

In the Holy Qur’an, the month of Dhū al-H ijjah as well as its two preceding months, viz. Shawwāl and Dhū’l-Qa‘dah, when the pilgrims [*h ujjāj*] were getting ready for the pilgrimage [*H ajj*], have been mentioned as months of pilgrimage. In addition, different rituals of *H ajj* are mentioned in other chapters of the Qur’an. Yet, nowhere are the names of these months ever mentioned.

The virtue of the month of Ramad ān and the Night of Ordainment

Among the twelve months only the name of the month of Ramadān is explicitly mentioned in verses of the Glorious Qur’an. This month is among neither the “forbidden months” nor the “months of pilgrimage” but it is mentioned in the Qur’an with special respect:

1– Sūrat *al-Tīn* 95:2.

2– Sūrat *al-Tawbah* (or, *Barā’ah*) 9:36.

﴿ شَهْرَ رَمَضَانَ أَكْبَرُ أَلْوِ فِيهِ الْقُرْآنُ ﴾

“The month of Ramaḍān is one in which the Qur’an was sent down.”¹

The night when the Qur’an was revealed to the Holy Prophet (s) in the month of Ramaḍān is also called a blessed night:

﴿ إِنَّا أَنْزَلْنَاهُ فِي لَيْلَةٍ مُبَارَكَةٍ ﴾

“Indeed We sent it down on a blessed night.”²

This sacred month has an intrinsic peculiarity because divine ordinances are not without consideration of good and bad. So there are certain reasons why God has preferred it over other months. The Night of Ordainment [*Laylat al-Qadr*] is in this sacred month in which fasting is divinely ordained. In this regard, the Holy Qur’an states:

﴿ يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا كُتِبَ عَلَيْكُمُ الصِّيَامُ كَمَا كُتِبَ عَلَى الَّذِينَ مِنْ قَبْلِكُمْ ﴾

“O you, who have faith! Prescribed for you is fasting, as it was prescribed for those who were before you.”³

It is also stated, thus:

﴿ شَهْرَ رَمَضَانَ أَكْبَرُ أَلْوِ فِيهِ الْقُرْآنُ ﴾

“The month of Ramaḍān is one in which the Qur’an was sent down.”⁴

It can be deduced from these two verses that fasting is ordained on mankind in the month of revelation of the Qur’an. Perhaps it can be inferred from this form of expression of the Qur’an that God has made fasting obligatory to mankind in recognition of the revelation of the Qur’an. Even if it cannot be claimed that the reason behind the injunction of fasting in this sacred month is the revelation of the Qur’an, it certainly plays some role in this injunction.

In the first verse, the Qur’an states, “The Qur’an is revealed in the month of Ramaḍān” and in the other verse it declares, “The Qur’an is revealed in a blessed night.” Thus, the Qur’an is revealed in a certain night of the month

1– Sūrat *al-Baqarah* 2:185.

2– Sūrat *al-Dukhān* 44:3.

3– Sūrat *al-Baqarah* 2:183.

4– Sūrat *al-Baqarah* 2:185.

of Ramaḍān and that is the Night of Ordainment. In this regard, the Holy Qur'an states:

﴿حَمِّمٌ وَلَكِنَّا نَمُيِّنُ * إِنَّا أَنْزَلْنَاهُ فِي لَيْلَةِ مُبَارَكَةٍ إِنَّا كُنَّا مُنذِرِينَ * فِيهَا يُفْرَقُ كُلُّ أَمْرٍ حَكِيمٍ﴾

“*Hā Mīm. By the Manifest Book! Indeed We sent it down on a blessed night, and indeed We have been warning [mankind]. Every definitive matter is resolved in it.*”¹

Yufraqu in the last verse means “to separate” and to separate necessitates distinction, which in turn requires appointment [*ta‘ayyun*] and estimation [*taqdīr*] which both mean “measurement”. In Qur’anic parlance, *taqdīr* is used to mean “measurement”. Whenever the measurement of a thing is determined, its limit [*ḥudūd*] can be established. Once it is separated from others, it will become free of its ambiguity. The verse “*Every definitive matter is resolved in it*” indicates that the night of revelation of the Qur’an is the Night of Ordainment. In *Sūrat al-Qadr* this night is also considered majestic:

﴿إِنَّا أَنْزَلْنَاهُ فِي لَيْلَةِ الْقَدْرِ﴾

“*Indeed We sent it down on the Night of Ordainment.*”²

The word *qadr* means *taqdīr*. The Qur’an continues:

﴿وَمَا هُوَ إِلَّا مَا لَيْلَةَ الْقَدْرِ﴾

“*What will show you what is the Night of Ordainment?*”³

Perhaps this question is not addressed to the Holy Prophet (ﷺ) and even if it is so, it is indicative of this night’s majesty. In a bid to show the importance of the Night of Ordainment, in this three short verses the term “Night of Ordainment” is repeated three times. The Qur’an does not state: “Indeed, We sent it down on the Night of Ordainment. What will show you what it is? It is a night...” This expression of the Qur’an cannot emphasise more the greatness and majesty of this night. In order to make the greatness of this night more discernible to the people, the Qur’an poses this question: “*What will show you what is the Night of Ordainment?*” This shows that the Night of Ordainment is a fact beyond the understanding of common people. The Qur’an continues, thus:

﴿لَيْلَةَ الْقَدْرِ خَيْرٌ مِنْ أَلْفِ شَهْرٍ﴾

1– *Sūrat al-Dukhān* 44:1-4.

2– *Sūrat al-Qadr* 97:1.

3– *Sūrat al-Qadr* 97:2.

“The Night of Ordainment is better than a thousand months.”¹

One thousand months are equivalent to more than 70 years. That is, the whole lifespan of a person without counting the Nights of Ordainment every year in it. This superiority is based on two reasons. Firstly, on this night the mercy of God on His servants is greater than His regular mercy in more than 70 years, with the exception of the Nights of Ordainment every year. Secondly, the deeds of people on this night have more virtue compared to their deeds in more than 70 years, with the exception of the Nights of Ordainment every year. This is the explicit statement of the Qur’an and there is no dispute concerning it although it is not known to us which night of the month is the Night of Ordainment.

In understanding the importance of a thing, the human mind is more perceptible to quantities than qualities. To show the importance of this night, God states that it is better than a thousand months, but the truth behind this night is beyond that which we are familiar with. Nevertheless, we are obliged to believe in these truths. In this regard, the Holy Qur’an states:

﴿لَيْسَ الْبِرَّ أَنْ تُوَلُّوا وُجُوهَكُمْ قِبَلَ الْمَشْرِقِ وَالْمَغْرِبِ وَلَكِنَّ الْبِرَّ مَنْ آمَنَ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ
وَلَمَّا نَكَهَ وَكَتَابَ وَلِتَيْبِينَ﴾

“Piety is not to turn your faces to the east or the west; rather, piety is [personified by] those who have faith in Allah and the Last Day, the angels, the Book, and the prophets.”²

Since God says so, we must have faith in the Last Day, angels, the Holy Book and prophets; otherwise our intellect is incapable of discerning creatures called “angels” who have a role in creation. Had it not been for the revelation and sayings of the *awliyā’* of Allah, we could not have knowledge of any of them. In this regard, the Holy Qur’an states:

﴿وَمَا يَعْلَمُ قَوْلَهُ إِلَّا اللَّهُ وَلَرَّاسِخُونَ فِي الْعِلْمِ يَقُولُونَ آمَنَّا بِهِ كُلٌّ مِّنْ عِنْدِ رَبِّنَا﴾

“But no one knows its interpretation except Allah and those firmly grounded in knowledge; they say, ‘We believe in it; all of it is from our Lord.’”³

Hence, since God has said it, we believe in it. Some information about the angels can be learned from verses of the Qur’an and traditions of the pure

1– Sūrat *al-Qadr* 97:3.

2– Sūrat *al-Baqarah* 2:177.

3– Sūrat *Āl ‘Imrān* 3:7.

Imāms (‘a) but the truth behind it is beyond our comprehension. The truth behind the angels, their station, their roles in the universe, the meaning of their coming down and others, are all unknown to us. In our conception, the word *nuzūl* is applied to the coming down of a thing from above, but it is unknown to us how the angels “come down”, and we are even incapable of imagining it. We only know that angels are creatures with very high stations that administer the affairs of the universe with the permission of God. They are mediums in the distribution of sustenance, taking the soul out of the human body, writing down of the deeds of the people, etc. In this connection, the Noble Qur’an states:

﴿وَلَنَزَعَاتٍ غَرَفًا ۖ وَلَنَاشِطَاتٍ نَّشِطًا ۖ وَلسَائِحَاتٍ سَبِيحًا ۖ فَالْمُدَبَّرَاتِ أَمْرًا﴾

“By those [angels] who wrest [the soul] violently, by those who draw [it] out gently, by those who swim smoothly, by those who take the lead racing, by those who direct the affairs [of creatures].”¹

﴿الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ فَاطِرِ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ ۖ جَاعِلِ الْمَلَائِكَةِ رُسُلًا وَأُولِي أجنِحَةٍ مثنى وثلاث ورباع ۖ يُرِيدُ فِي الْخَلْقِ مَا يَشَاءُ﴾

“All praise belongs to Allah, originator of the heavens and the earth, maker of the angels [His] messengers, possessing wings, two, three or four [of them]. He adds to the creation whatever He wishes.”²

Notwithstanding this, the whole truth behind the existence of the angels is unknown to us. In this connection, the Glorious Qur’an states:

﴿وَمَا أُوتِيتُمْ مِنَ الْعِلْمِ إِلَّا قَلِيلًا﴾

“And you have not been given of the knowledge, except a few [of you].”³

Today, thanks to the advancement in space science, it is proven that this physical universe is so complex that it is beyond understanding and description. In order for the light of some stars to reach the planet Earth, they require billions of years to travel while the light of the sun reaches the earth in only eight minutes. Some scientists believe that some light that has reached the earth from other heavenly bodies is from stars whose lifespan has ended and they have been extinguished. In spite of the complexity of this universe—that everyday a portion of its expanse and greatness is

1— Sūrat *al-Nāzi‘āt* 79:1-5.

2— Sūrat *Fātir* (or *al-Malā‘ikah*) 35:1.

3— Sūrat *al-Isrā’* (or *Banī Isrā’īl*) 17:85.

discovered—it is like a ring in a vast desert in comparison to the elements that are beyond human comprehension. The Holy Prophet (ﷺ) is reported to have said:

يَا أَبَا ذَرٍّ مَا السَّمَاوَاتُ السَّبْعُ فِي الْكُرْسِيِّ إِلَّا كَحَلْقَةِ مُلْقَاةٍ فِي مِطْلٍ ۚ فَلَا ۚ

“O Abū Dharr! In comparison with the Throne, the seven heavens are nothing but like a ring that fell in a desert.”¹

Human beings are incapable of comprehending the majesty of the physical universe, except the prophets, the infallible Imāms (‘a), and perhaps some *awliyā’* of Allah, who have been granted mystical knowledge [*ilm al-ladunnī*] by Him. How can they, then, understand spiritual concepts which cannot be understood by the physical senses and are far more complex and intricate than the physical universe? The descent [*nuzūl*] of the angels from a higher world on the heart of the Holy Prophet (ﷺ) is beyond the comprehension of common people. Yet, we must declare:

﴿ آمَنَّا بِهِ كُلٌّ مِّنْ عِندِ رَبِّنَا ﴾

“We believe in it; all of it is from our Lord.”²

Our greatest honor is that God, the Exalted, has guided us and we have accepted His guidance, completely believing in what He has said—that there are angels who have descended on the heart of the Holy Prophet (ﷺ) on the Night of Ordainment, the night which is superior to one thousand nights and in which one *rak’ah* of prayer is superior to thirty thousand common *rak’ahs*. God has given this sanctity to this night and a window is open for His servants to get the maximum benefit within this short period.

Refuting the alleged improbability of the revelation of the Qur’an in one night

Perhaps we think that the Qur’an consists of 30 parts [*juz’*] and wonder how they were revealed to the Holy Prophet (ﷺ) in only a single night. Is it possible? How could it be reconciled with the revelation of the Qur’an in 23 years?

One of the objections of the enemies of Islam against the Apostle (ﷺ) is this: Why was the Qur’an not revealed all at once? In this regard, the Qur’an states:

1– *Bihār al-Anwār*, vol. 73.

2– *Sūrat Al ‘Imrān* 3:7.

﴿كَذَلِكَ لِنُثَبِّتَ بِهِ فُؤَادَكَ وَرَتَّلْنَاهُ تَرْتِيلًا﴾

“So it is, that We may strengthen your heart with it, and We have recited it [to you] in a measured tone.”¹

The other objection is that the Holy Qur’an consists of more than six thousand verses, and it cannot be imagined that Archangel Jibra’īl (‘a) could have normally recited them to the Apostle (s) in one night.

In reply to such objections, one of the methods employed by the Holy Qur’an is the “elimination of improbability” [*raf’ istib’ād*]. For example, the polytheists were saying, “How could the human body and its bones be connected together again and be given life again?” The Noble Qur’an replies to this question in many ways, one of which is the “elimination of improbability”. The Qur’an states, thus:

﴿وَيُحْيِي الْأَرْضَ بَعْدَ مَوْتِهَا وَكَذَلِكَ نُخْرِجُونَ﴾

“And He revives the earth after its death. Likewise you [too] shall be raised [from the dead].”²

God who can make plants grow in a dead earth can also revive dead and rotten human bodies. This way of expression is elimination of improbability which is considered a way of argumentation or reasoning. In this regard, the Glorious Qur’an shows many other cases such as the birds killed by Prophet Ibrāhīm (‘a) and then made alive again and the cow of the Children of Israel which lived again after being slaughtered. These instances show that it is possible for God to give life again to the creatures in this or the next world.

At this juncture, elimination of improbability can also be used. It must be noted that our judgments are based upon comparisons with what we are familiar with. We understand “reading” and “listening” in the way we use these concepts in our common everyday life. We think that if a person wants to talk, he must face another person and this talk takes as much time as we talk. This is while there are examples when we can know of so many things in a very short time. One of these cases is dreaming. Sometimes, a person sleeps and has a dream in a short period and if the event that he sees in the dream happens in actual life, it would take many days. A long event happens in our dream in a few minutes and we can hear many and long conversations in only a short period. If we want to make those conversations in actual life, we need many hours. Another point is that the sending down of the Qur’an in one night does not mean that it had been revealed to the Apostle (s) in the form of words through sound waves. In this regard, the Noble Qur’an states:

1– Sūrat *al-Furqān* 25:32.

2– Sūrat *al-Rūm* 30:19.

﴿ نَزَّ بِهِ الرُّوحُ الْأَمِينُ * عَلَى قَلْبِكَ لِتَكُونَ مِنَ الْمُنذِرِينَ ﴾

“[It (Qur’an) was] brought down by the Trustworthy Spirit, upon your heart, so that you may be one of the warners.”¹

And the Qur’an does not state, “...upon your ears.”

In order to eliminate this improbability, we can cite the computer as an example. The entries of voluminous encyclopedia can be stored in a single compact disc. By having this compact disc, all entries of the said encyclopedia are at our disposal. By using a personal computer, we can benefit from any of its information whenever we want. And this does not mean that all words of the encyclopedia are recited to us one by one. So, in the physical world there are things which can compress a set of textual and audio data. Since in this world which is a world of dispersion, such things are possible, it follows that in the metaphysical world which is more akin to the attribute of unity, a set of information can more probably be compressed.

Of course, it is not known to us how this thing happens but we know for certain that the same is not impossible and an example of which exists in this world. Hence, it is possible for the whole Qur’an to be revealed in the Night of Ordainment within a very short period—perhaps a few minutes or even shorter—to the Apostle (ṣ) who impeccably received it.

Concerning the manner of revelation of the Noble Qur’an, the late ‘Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā’ī (may Allah be pleased with him) says in *Tafsīr al-Mīzān*, that the Qur’an was revealed to the Messenger of Allah (ṣ) in two ways: (1) in an all-at-once revelation [*nuzūl daf’ī*] and (2) revelation-in installments [*nuzūl tadrijī*]. The all-at-once revelation of the Qur’an which is described in traditions as “revelation to the Inhabited House” [*nuzūl ilā bayt al-ma’mūr*], “revelation to the heaven of the world” [*nuzūl ilā ‘s-samā’ ad-dunyā*] and “revelation to the heart of the Prophet (ṣ)” [*nuzūl ‘alā qalb an-nabī*] is different from the revelation of the verses to the Holy Prophet (ṣ) on different occasions. The relationship between the two is like that of “addition” [*jam’*] and “subtraction” [*tafrīq*]. The revelation of the Qur’an within the span of 23 years to the Apostle (ṣ) is the revelation-in-installments, and the revelation of the Qur’an on the Night of Ordainment is the all-at-once revelation, which is beyond our comprehension:

﴿ وَمَا أُوتِئْتُمْ مِنَ الْعِلْمِ إِلَّا قَلِيلًا ﴾

“And you have not been given of the knowledge, except a few [of you].”¹

1– Sūrat *al-Shu‘arā’* 26:193-194.

During the night of the revelation of the Qur'an, the angels came down. The said night is so blessed and a source of hope for human beings. Those who pay attention to the sayings of the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) and the pure Imāms (‘a) prepare themselves throughout the year to comprehend the Night of Ordainment. If something can be done to make one night more valuable than thirty thousand days and nights, one year of effort to comprehend such a night is valuable.

Among the acts effective in understanding the Night of Ordainment is to read *Sūrat al-Qadr* throughout the year, reading the *sūrat* during the blessed nights of Ramaḍān one thousand times, or reading of *Sūrat al-Dukhān* a hundred times during those nights.

1— *Sūrat al-Isrā'* (or *Banī Isrā'īl*) 17:85.

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