

# THE GLOBE BEFORE AND AFTER THE ADVENT OF IMAM MAHDI, PART IV<sup>1</sup>

MOHAMMAD ALI SHOMALI

**ABSTRACT:** Islamic sources hold a rich account of the 'End of Times' - the world's state of affairs before and after the coming of Imam Mahdi to establish worldwide justice and peace. Earlier articles in this series offered an overview from the viewpoint of the dominant world religions, as well as the Islamic perspective using the Qur'an and hadith as sources to visualise the future and increase our knowledge on the advent of Imam Mahdi with the purpose of establishing a positive relationship with him and preparing for his return. The previous part expanded on the qualities of the people of this time, including their intellectual condition, and scientific and technological advancements. This part further delves into the signs of the moral, cultural, and religious state of affairs before the advent of Imam Mahdi as well some events after the his return.

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<sup>1</sup> This series of papers is based on parts seven and eigght of a series of lectures delivered by the author in Muharram 1428/January 2007 in London.

### **False claimants**

In continuation of the discussion regarding the moral, cultural, and religious situation of the world in the time before the advent of Imam Mahdi (aj), I would like to refer to the fact that at that time many false claimants will appear – those who will falsely claim to be either Imam Mahdi (aj) or even one of the prophets. Many have already appeared and are known. And more of this type is expected to surface.<sup>2</sup>

In fact, it is apparent that the enemies of Islam today are all too well-aware about Imam Mahdi (aj) and his significant role in forming the mind-set of Muslims, and of Shi'as in particular. Therefore, they may have plans to fabricate a pseudo Imam Mahdi (aj), or they may plan to support the assertions of false claimants to cause division and confusion within the Muslim community, or *Ummah*. Prophet Muhammad says:

لا تقوم الساعة حتى يخرج المهدي من ولدي، ولا يخرج المهدي حتى  
يخرج ستون كذابا كلهم يقول: أنا نبي

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<sup>2</sup> It is worth noting that some to whom these claims have been attributed to were not immoral, nor were they responsible for the claim; rather, the claims have been made for them by others who were perhaps genuinely confused by their good qualities. Impressed with their good qualities, some people thought that they must be the awaited Mahdi. This is especially true for some of the descendants of Imam Ali and Sayyidah Fatima, some of whom were distinguished for their piety. False claims were made that they were Imam Mahdi (aj) as they seemed to be very pious and charismatic. However, other qualities and facts were overlooked. For example, Imam Mahdi (aj) will be the direct son of Imam Hasan al-Askari. Unfortunately, some people did not have the maturity to properly discern this, thus rendering it unfair to consider all those that were attributed as being the Mahdi as immoral people, and nor were they all responsible for the claims.

The Day of Judgement will not happen until Mahdi from my progeny arises. And Mahdi will not rise until sixty liars who claim to be prophets will have come.<sup>3</sup>

History reveals some of these false claimants. For example, Musaylimah al-Kadhdhab, a woman, whose claim to prophethood was based on the argument that the Prophet had said: “There will be no [male] prophet (*nabi*) after me” and not “There will be no [female] prophet (*nabiyyah*) after me.”

### Feeling of despair (*ya's*)

One sign of the end of time is the feeling of despair apparent amidst the masses. This is very dangerous, because when a person does not have hope, they cease to strive and make efforts. One of the greatest sins is to feel hopeless in the mercy of God and this has been considered in Islamic narrations as a major sin. Even a murderer of prophets must not lose his hope in divine forgiveness and mercy. A despaired person is an easy victim in the hands of Satan. Imam Sadiq says:

ان هذا الامر لا ياتيكم الا بعد اياس لا والله حتى يميزوا

Surely this affair [i.e. the establishment of Imam Mahdi's (aj) just government] will not happen until there will occur a sense of despair in all places. And by God this will not happen unless people are separated and made distinct from one another.<sup>4</sup>

Another hadith from Imam Baqir states:

<sup>3</sup> *Al-Irshad*, vol. 2, p. 371

<sup>4</sup> *Kamal ud-Din wa Tamam un-Ni'mat*, vol. 2, p. 333

فخروجه إذا خرج يكون عند اليأس و القنوط من أن يروا فرجا

His uprising will happen when people have despaired,  
and they do not imagine there will be any rescue  
(*fara*).<sup>5</sup>

The Qur'an describes this as a general pattern that afflicted previous nations as well:

أَمْ حَسِبْتُمْ أَنْ تُدْخِلُوا الْجَنَّةَ وَلَمَّا يَأْتِكُمْ مَثَلُ الَّذِينَ خَلَوْا مِنْ قَبْلِكُمْ مَسَّتْهُمُ  
الْبَأْسَاءُ وَالضَّرَاءُ وَزُلُّوا حَتَّى يَقُولَ الرَّسُولُ وَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا مَعَهُ مَتَى نَصْرُ  
اللَّهِ أَلَا إِنَّ نَصْرَ اللَّهِ قَرِيبٌ

*Do you suppose that you shall enter paradise though there has not yet come to you the like of [what befell] those who went before you? Stress and distress befell them and they were convulsed until the apostle and the faithful who were with him said, 'When will God's help [come]?' Look! God's help is indeed near! (2:214)*

There must be a test and trial, after which only the true believers and the faithful will remain, and it is they who will be firm and motivated in making efforts for the advent of Imam Mahdi (aj).

### Injustice and oppression

At the end of time, injustice will have filled the earth and oppression will be widespread. We already see signs of this. In one of the most detailed single accounts of the end of time, in which 120 facets of the end of time are mentioned, Imam Sadiq says:

<sup>5</sup> *Bihar ul-Anwar*, vol. 52, p. 231

رأيت الحق قد مات وذهب أهله ، ورأيت الجور قد شمل البلاد ...  
 ورأيت النساء يتزوجن النساء ... ورأيت المؤمن صامتا لا يقبل قوله...  
 ورأيت الفاسق يكذب ولا يرد عليه كذبه ... ورأيت الخمر تشرب  
 علانية ويجمع عليها من لا يخاف الله عزوجل ... ورأيت بيت الله قد  
 عطل ويؤمر بتركه

You will see the truth has disappeared and those that follow the truth are not many; injustice has covered all the lands ... you will see women marrying women ... lots of heresies ... a believer in the end of time will have to remain silent and if he speaks no one will listen to him. You will see those who do not have moral principles, they will tell lies and no one will stop them ... wine and alcohol will be drunk in public even in Muslim countries ... The house of God will be deserted and not many people will go to it and people will be asked not to go for hajj.<sup>6</sup>

From this hadith, we can extract the following:

1. People will be so distorted in their understanding that they will mock wisdom, and the wise will prefer to remain silent as a result of being mocked.
2. Moral principles will be a source of disagreement.<sup>7</sup> However, this does not mean that we should be apologetic and shy

<sup>6</sup> *Bihar ul-Anwar*, vol. 52, page 256

<sup>7</sup> We observe debates in the media and in mainstream society today where people disagree on simple matters such as child abuse in the church, or the treatment of homosexuals. In many of these discussions people have taken for granted fundamental issues, such as the definition of family. A hundred years ago it would have been unthinkable for gay marriages to be

away from such debates, but that we should speak wisely and carefully while clarifying our stance.

3. People in power – leaders, politicians, and media corporates – will be able to lie without being held accountable.
4. The consumption of alcohol on Muslim airlines and in Muslim lands is now commonplace, although it was unimaginable by past generations.
5. The Kaaba in Mecca is a symbol of Islam, and religion becomes attached to it in some way. This ominous warning regarding the desertion of the Kaaba has also been echoed by Imam Ali, who says in his will: “Be wary of [your duty to] God in the matter of the house of your Lord – it should not be left unattended and without a crowd, for it is the power and dignity of Islam.”<sup>8</sup>

### **Collapse of moral values**

The end of time will see a collapse of moral values. According to a hadith from Imam Sadiq, in the end of time if a day passes and a person has not been able to do some great sin such as misusing others’ money, or cheating, or doing some kind of unlawful (*haram*) transaction or drinking alcoholic drinks, then this person, at night, will feel that he has not achieved anything, and he will feel sorry for himself.<sup>9</sup>

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sanctioned. It makes us think about where the boundaries will be drawn on what is and is not acceptable. Perhaps a day will come where some will desire marriage with animals.

<sup>8</sup> For more information on this detailed hadith by Imam Sadiq, please refer to volume 11 of the commentary on *Usul al-Kafi* by the late Muhammad Salih Mazandarani.

<sup>9</sup> *Bihar ul-Anwar*, vol. 52, page 256:

According to Imam Ali, during this time, many people will be fully devoted to their wealth. Their appetites to earn and consume will blind them from seeking moral development. They will also be devoted to immoral women, rather than faithful women. They will obey such women at the cost of disobeying God and annoying their parents. The Prophet said:

يَأْتِي عَلَى النَّاسِ زَمَانٌ يُطَوِّقُهُمُ الْهَتَمُ وَ يَسَاوُهُمْ قِبَلَتُهُمْ وَ دَنَائِرُهُمْ دِينُهُمْ وَ  
شَرَفُهُمْ مَتَاعُهُمْ

Some people will worship gold and silver coins [i.e. money] and would only have ambitions to fill their stomachs. Their *qibla* [i.e. the focus of their attention] will be their women and their honour will be their belongings.

The role of a pious and faithful woman in a family and household cannot be underestimated. Where there is a pious wife and mother in a household, it has a great effect on the husband and children; such women are able to change the direction of the family.

Furthermore, people's status and honour at the end of time will be decided by the amount of wealth they have. People will be impressed by materialism, such as the amount of money someone has, or the size or location of their house.

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ورأيت الرجل إذا مر به يوم ولم يكسب فيه الذنب العظيم من فجور أو بخس مكيال أو  
ميزان أو غشيان حرام أو شرب مسكر كثيرا حزينا يحسب أن ذلك اليوم عليه وضیعة  
من عمره

### Comparison with the age of ignorance (*jahiliyyah*)

In some hadiths, the end of time is compared to the Time of *Jahiliyyah*, i.e. the period before the establishment of Islam by the Prophet.

The term Time of *Jahiliyyah* refers to the situation of the Arabian Peninsula before Islam. The situation then was extremely harsh in almost every aspect. Ignorance was manifest through ignorance and immoral acts such as illiteracy, superstition, idol worship, nudity, prostitution, and the killing of baby girls. The Prophet said:

بعثت بين جاهليتين ، لأخرهما شر من أولاهما

I have been raised between two *jahiliyyahs*. One before me and one to come after me, and the latter is more evil than the former.

At the end of time, the type and intensity of the features of *jahiliyyah* will be worse than the *jahiliyyah* before Islam, because people will possess the skills and resources to expand this new *jahiliyyah* and export it to other places, whereas in the past people were unable to spread corruption to other parts of the world. Abu Sufyan, an arch opponent of the Prophet, was a rich trader although he was an uncivilised man. Today, however, the situation is more complex. Corrupted people are more cunning in their evil actions under the pretence of protecting people's rights such as anti-discrimination and freedom of expression.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Interestingly, Sayyid Qutb of Egypt has a book *Jahiliyyah in the Twentieth Century*.



A companion of Imam Baqir asked him: “How will Mahdi conduct himself when he comes?” The Imam replied:

بسيرة ما سار به رسول الله

He will act in the manner that the Prophet acted.

The person enquired: “And what was the manner of the Prophet? Can you tell me in a few words?” Imam replied:

ابطل ما كان في الجاهلية، واستقبل الناس بالعدل، وكذلك القائم إذا قام يبطل ما كان في الهدنة مما كان في أيدي الناس، ويستقبل بهم العدل

He stopped the practices of *jahiliyyah* and spread justice among the people [i.e. *jahiliyyah* lacks a sense of justice] and in this same way the Qa'im [Imam Mahdi] will halt *jahiliyyah*; he will act with complete justice, and establish it on the earth.<sup>11</sup>

From this we can conclude that there will be some people who will not want to accept the Imam's approach, and will resist his attempts in establishing justice.

Imam Sadiq has said:

إن قائمنا إذا قام استقبل من جهل الناس أشد مما استقبله رسول الله من جهل الجاهلية

When our Qa'im will rise up, what he will receive from the ignorant ones of his time will be worse than what the Prophet received from ignorant ones in the time of *jahiliyyah*.

<sup>11</sup> *Ithbat ul-Hudat*, vol. 3, p. 455

In other words, what the Prophet's opponents such as Abu Sufyan, Abu Lahab, and Abu Jahl did to him will be not as severe when compared with what the ignorant ones will try to do to Imam Mahdi (aj). The task of establishing justice will not be an easy one.

Before the advent of Imam Mahdi (aj), the groups of the good people and corrupt people will each reach a peak in their behaviours and attributes. There will be a group so good that the world has not seen its like, and there will be a group so corrupt humanity has not witnessed such evil. Imam Sadiq states:

لا والله لا يكون ما تمدون اليه أعينكم حتي يشقي من شقي ، ويسعد من  
سعد

No, by God, your eyes will not witness him [Imam Mahdi (aj)] until the people who are wicked will reach the level of wickedness they are after, and the good and pious will flourish in piety and goodness.<sup>12</sup>

In another hadith from Imam Sadiq we read:

This [i.e. the advent of Imam Mahdi (aj)] will not happen until you will be tested very severely and people will be made distinct as a result of this test.

Through the difficult tests that lie ahead, people's reality and nature will be apparent.

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<sup>12</sup> *Bihar ul-Anwar*, vol. 52, p. 112

### Events after the advent of Imam Mahdi (aj)

The first thing we find in the hadiths with regards to the events after the advent of Imam Mahdi (aj) is that he will establish justice – a vital part of his mission.

As justice is one of the key characteristics of Shi'a Islam, the priority of Imam Mahdi (aj) to establish justice is deliberate. The concept of justice is a very far-reaching concept, which begins with divine justice but is not confined to Him; rather, it affects our understanding of the world, our relationship with God, with one another, and with ourselves.

Ignoring the genuine desires God has placed in us is being unjust with ourselves. If a person desires knowledge, and does not pursue it, he or she has not been just to himself. By extension, we all have a natural urge to become closer to God, and if we fail to satisfy this, we are being unjust to ourselves. The Qur'an says:

مَنْ يَتَعَدَّ حُدُودَ اللَّهِ فَقَدْ ظَلَمَ نَفْسَهُ

*Whoever transgresses the bounds of God certainly  
wrongs himself. (65:1)*

Hence, justice is not only to have fairness in a few limited relationships. In Islam, when we say that the imam of the congregational prayer should be just (*adil*), this means he should not sin publicly, and even in private as it is limiting his self in achieving his potential.

According to Muslim scholars of ethics, justice is always good (and perhaps it is unique in this regard) whereas acting upon other virtues may not be always necessarily good. Take honesty for

example, it could be that honesty is not wise in a situation leading to endangering an innocent person. Justice, however, is good and desirable in any given state, and injustice is evil and undesirable at all times.

At this juncture, a question may arise: If justice is always good and desirable, why do Muslims supplicate to God to treat them with His grace and mercy, and not His justice?<sup>13</sup> 'Justice' is used in a specific and narrow sense to mean 'giving people exactly what they deserve and nothing more nor less' in such supplications. When someone is owed money, justice requires the debtor to pay the money back. However, if more is returned, then this does not violate justice; it is more than justice (when justice is taken in this narrow sense). So when the debtor pays back more than his debt, without it being interest, this would be desirable (*mustahabb*) and does not violate justice in its wider sense. As seen in various supplications, on the Day of Judgement, there is a fear that God will give us exactly what we deserve and nothing more, without any addition from His mercy, forgiveness, and grace. This would be a frightening prospect as we are imperfect beings.

In one story, there were two believers in which one had loaned an amount of money to the other. When the creditor demanded the debtor to repay the full amount, the debtor was in genuine trouble and could not afford to do so. They both decided to go to Imam al-Sadiq, who asked the creditor why he pressured his believing brother whilst knowing he did not have the means to repay it. The creditor

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<sup>13</sup> الهی عاملنا بفضلک و لا تعاملنا بعدلک

argued that he was not doing any injustice by asking for the amount. Imam al-Sadiq said, “Have you not recited this verse”<sup>14</sup>:

وَالَّذِينَ يَصِلُونَ مَا أَمَرَ اللَّهُ بِهِ أَنْ يُوصَلَ وَيَخْشَوْنَ رَبَّهُمْ وَيَخَافُونَ سُوءَ  
الْحِسَابِ

*And those who join what God has commanded to be joined, and fear their Lord, and are afraid of an adverse reckoning?(13:21)*

‘Adverse reckoning’ does not mean – God forbid – that God will treat them unjustly in any way. Rather, it refers to the feeling that people have – that God will ask them to account thoroughly for every duty they failed to perform. Hence, when we ask for God’s mercy, it is not that we are scared He will be unjust; rather, we beseech Him to give us better than what we deserve.

Regarding Imam Mahdi (aj), the most important thing mentioned in hadiths is that he will fill the earth with justice after it has been previously filled with injustice (*dhulm*) and oppression (*jawr*). According to Ayatullah Nasir Makarim Shirazi, when these two terms are mentioned together they mean different things:

- *dhulm* refers to withholding something from someone who deserves it, and taking it for one’s self, i.e. the misuse of someone’s right
- *jawr* means giving the belonging of a specific person to someone else. This is usually practised by people in power through unequal distribution of resources to gain favour.

<sup>14</sup> *Tafseer Ayyashi*, p. 210

Imam Mahdi (aj) will put a halt to this as everything will return to its proper place. This is the true meaning of justice (*adl*). On justice, Rumi says:

What is *adl*? To put something in its proper place  
 What is *dhulm*? To put something in its improper place  
*Adl* is to water trees and plants  
*Dhulm* is to water thorns<sup>15</sup>

Imam Baqir says:

إذا قام قائم أهل البيت قسم بالسوية وعدل في الرعية

When Mahdi comes he will distribute resources amongst the people in a just and fair manner.<sup>16</sup>

و يُسوى بين الناس حتى لا ترى محتاجاً إلى الزكاة

And he will distribute everything amongst people in such a way that there will be no need for zakat (alms tax).<sup>17</sup>

### Attempting to challenge Imam Mahdi (aj)

Hadiths also report that when Imam Mahdi (aj) acts according to the principles of justice, this will irritate some people who will then use the Qur'an to challenge him.

For Muslims, it is rather sad to witness people disputing against the implementation of justice. Nonetheless, this occurred in the past: at the time of Imam Ali, some people such as Talhah and Zubayr

<sup>15</sup> *Mathnawi Ma'nawi*, Book 6, Chapter 84

<sup>16</sup> *Bihar ul-Anwar*, vol. 52, p. 351

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 51, p. 88

opposed the just rule of Imam Ali, as they were not personally benefitting as they thought they would.

True justice is accepting what one deserves without expecting more. There are 130 hadiths on justice during the time of Imam Mahdi (aj). Justice is what humanity will need, as it is the solution and medicine for all problems. Everyone should be working from now on implementing justice, starting from one's self, home, and workplace. There is no reason to wait for the advent of Imam Mahdi (aj) for this. Furthermore, even in the larger international problems, so many of the problems could be solved with applying true justice.

### **Spirituality and worship**

After the advent of the Imam, there will be an increase in peoples' piety and spirituality, as they will worship God to a greater extent. This will occur to even those who formally committed great sins; those who were not faithful will begin to change and become obedient to God. The Holy Prophet says that one of the things that Imam Mahdi (aj) does after establishing justice is that he:

يَمَلَأُ قُلُوبَ الْعِبَادِ عِبَادَةً

Fills the hearts of people with the worship of God.<sup>18</sup>

Not only will people perform good acts of worship, but they will love doing so. They will love to worship God, perform *salah*, and supplicate; and there will exist no distractions or obstacles for them. Imam Ali declares:

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., vol. 51, p. 75

يبعث المهدي (ع) الى امرائه بسائر الامصار بالعدل بين الناس ... و  
 يذهب الربا و الزنا و شرب الخمر و الريا و تقبل الناس علي العبادة و  
 المشروع و الديانة و الصلاة في الجماعات و تطول الاعمار و تؤدي الأمانة  
 و تحل الأشجار و تتضاعف البركات

Mahdi will send his governors to different parts of the world to establish justice... Usury, fornication, drinking alcohol, and showing off (*riya*) will all stop. People will start to enjoy legal actions and worship (*ibadah*), religiosity, and congregational prayers; lives will become long, trusts will be returned, trees will bear fruits, and blessings will multiply.<sup>19</sup>

Hence, from this hadith we understanding that 1) Loving worship is natural once obstacles are removed and one's sustenance becomes lawful, and 2) Our lives do not necessarily have to be as short as they are. Our organs are not limited, as they are capable of supporting longer lives. However, due to bad habits, pollution, unwholesome food, stress, etc., we are not living to the fullest term possible.

Ibn Abbas narrates the following hadith from the Prophet regarding his night ascension and journey (*mi'raj*):

لما عرج بي الى السماء السابعة و منها الى صدره المنتهي و من السدره الي  
 حجب النور ناداني ربي جل جلاله يا محمد انت عبدي و انا ربك فلي  
 فاضع و... بالقائم منكم اعمر ارضي بتسبيحي و تقديسي و تكبري و  
 تمجدي

<sup>19</sup> *Uqad ud-Durar*, Yusuf Muqaddasi Shafe'i, p. 239



During *mi'raj*, when I reached the *sidrat al-muntaha*,<sup>20</sup> my Lord told me “O Muhammad! You are my servant and I am your Master. You must be humble to Me, worship Me and trust Me ... [with Mahdi] I will improve and restore My earth with my glorification, praise, declaring My unity, and mentioning My greatness.”<sup>21</sup>

Therefore, Imam Mahdi (aj) will be an instrument for God, and will inspire people to invoke, praise, and glorify God; this is what will advance the state of affairs throughout the world. The hadith continues:

و به اظهر الارض من اعدائي و اورثها اوليائي و به اجعل كلمه الذين كفروا به السفلي و كلمتي العليا و به احيي عبادي و بلادي بعلمي و له اظهر الكنوز و الذخائر بمشييتي و اياه اظهر على الاسرار و الضائر بارادتي و ايده بملائكتي لتؤيده على انفاذ امرى و اعلان ديني

I will cleanse the earth from My enemies and make My friends inherit it. And I will lower the word (rank) of disbelievers, and raise the rank of My word. I will revive My servants and lands by him and with My knowledge. I will uncover and unveil the treasures of the earth with Mahdi, I will disclose My secrets to him, and I will support him with My angels so that he can

<sup>20</sup> The Qur'an mentions this sacred place as the place reached by the Prophet when he was closest to God. The angel Jibrail could not travel beyond this point but the Prophet was able to.

<sup>21</sup> *Al-Amali*, Shaykh Saduq, pp. 504-5

implement what I ask of him, and so that he can declare My religion.<sup>22</sup>

Moreover, as said in the Qur'an:

الَّذِينَ إِن مَّكَّنَّاهُمْ فِي الْأَرْضِ أَقَامُوا الصَّلَاةَ

*[The believers] who, if We granted them power in the land, maintain the prayer. (22:41)*

The most important action to perform when power is granted to someone is for them to establish prayer (*salah*). And Imam Mahdi (aj) will do this. He will remove the obstacles to worship and people will welcome it joyfully.

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., Shaykh Saduq, pp. 504-5

## QURANIC STRATEGY IN ITS OWN PRESERVATION, PART II

FATEMAH MEGHJI

**ABSTRACT:** For Muslims, the Qur'an is the unchallengeable word of God. Its inimitability, eloquence, outstanding use of the Arabic language, and scientific accuracies has been the subject of many discussions among Muslims and non-Muslim scholars alike. And given the issue of alteration in other divine scriptures, the discussion of *tahrif* (alteration) has also been examined. Has the Qur'an been changed like other divine books? Moreover, how is God a preserver over the Qur'an? As God challenges human beings to bring forth a text that resembles the Qur'an, is this due to its magnificent nature, or that humans are incapable due to God's divine intervention at every endeavour? The previous part explored the practical measures taken to ensure the Qur'an's survival as an unadulterated text, exploring the following areas to display these strategic stylistic methods, namely 1. The odd placement of controversial verses, and 2. The omission of names of contemporaries of the Prophet Muhammad. This part explores the Qur'an's easy and accurate memorization, omission of details, and scientific ambiguity.

### 3. Easy and Accurate Memorization

One of the features of the Qur'an that has been discussed in detail in scholarly texts is its exquisite rhyme, structure, and internal melody. This is usually discussed to prove its inimitability – that none is capable of bringing forth a text as magnificent as the Qur'an in this regard. However, beyond this, the very fact that it rhymes and flows in many places is a characteristic that makes it easier to remember. The relative ease by which human beings can memorize the Qur'an can also be seen as strategic; the very nature of the Qur'an allows its readers to memorize it with ease and recall its details and intricacies with precision. This is a technique that has been used in several oral traditions and the Qur'an – although it exists now in the form of a book – was originally an oral tradition meant to be spoken, recited, and memorized. One of the oft-repeated verses of the Qur'an which seems to allude to this ease of remembrance reads as follows:

وَلَقَدْ يَسَّرْنَا الْقُرْآنَ لِلذِّكْرِ فَهَلْ مِنْ مُدَكِّرٍ

*Certainly We have made the Qur'an simple for the sake of admonishment. So is there anyone who will be admonished?* [54:17]

This verse has been repeated four times in Surah al-Qamar (verses 17, 22, 32, and 40). The translation used here for the Arabic word *dhikr* is 'admonishment,' although, the term is often translated as 'remembrance' (as an example, this is the Arabic term used when one remembers God, one does His *dhikr*). As such, the verse points

out that the Qur'an has been made easy for remembrance.<sup>1</sup> In his exegesis entitled, *Majma' al-Bayan*, Allamah Tabarsi quotes Sa'eed ibn Jubayr as saying that the verse means that the Qur'an was "made easy for memorization and recitation by heart so that all of it can be recited by heart- and no other book, amongst the other divine books, is such that it is entirely apparently recited."<sup>2</sup> The Qur'an is indeed easy to remember and memorize due to its literary structure, melody, rhythm, and rhyme. These are features that increase the human capacity to memorize and preserve oral tradition. In this way, the beautiful rhyming schematic of the Qur'an can be seen as a strategy to ensure its own preservation.

#### 4. Omission of Details

Another interesting feature of the Qur'an is that unlike its predecessors, it does not mention dates, times, and ages in detail. In fact, its general pattern is to avoid mentioning insignificant details like, how long individuals lived, when they were born, and when they passed away. It does mention various durations, but this is rather rare. For example, it mentions that Noah preached for 950 years, but does not mention how long he or any of the other prophets lived. On the other hand, the Old Testament notes how

<sup>1</sup> It is important to note here that the context of the verse seems to be suggesting that the Qur'an has been made simple/easy for understanding in order to act as an admonishment. The verses in-between and surrounding are describing past nations that have been destroyed. However, this does not negate the possibility that the verse is also alluding to the Qur'an as being easy to remember and memorize, something which the commentary we have cited articulates.

<sup>2</sup> Allamah Tabarsi, *Majma al-Bayan fi Tafsir al-Qur'an*, Volume 9, p.28, [Accessed with Noor Software, *Jami' al-Tafasir*].

وَلَقَدْ يَسَّرْنَا الْقُرْآنَ لِلذِّكْرِ « أَي سَهَّلْنَاهُ لِلْحِفْظِ وَ الْقِرَاءَةِ حَتَّى يَقْرَأَهُ ظَاهِرًا وَ لَيْسَ مِنْ كُتُبِ  
اللَّهِ الْمَنْزِلَةِ كِتَابَ يَقْرَأُ كُلَّهُ ظَاهِرًا إِلَّا الْقُرْآنَ عَنْ سَعِيدِ بْنِ جَبْرِ

long it took for him to build the Ark and even mentions the Ark's dimensions in addition to the precise ages of various prophets and how long they spent in different places. As oral traditions, it only makes sense that the more precise and numerous the details were, the more likely that narrators would confuse, misattribute, change, or delete them. It could be argued that this lack of detail also aids in the preservation of the Qur'an, simply based on the decreased probability of the alteration of details. In fact, the Qur'an is more concise than the Old Testament; it is approximately four-fifths its size.<sup>3</sup> The Qur'an also explicitly mentions that details, like numbers, are unimportant for its goal in providing lessons and guidance. It does this in the story of the Sleepers of the Cave:

سَيَقُولُونَ ثَلَاثَةٌ رَّابِعُهُمْ كَلْبُهُمْ وَيَقُولُونَ خَمْسَةٌ سَادِسُهُمْ كَلْبُهُمْ رَجْمًا بِالْغَيْبِ  
وَيَقُولُونَ سَبْعَةٌ وَثَامِنُهُمْ كَلْبُهُمْ قُلْ رَبِّي أَعْلَمُ بِعَدَّتِهِمْ مَّا يَعْلَمُهُمْ إِلَّا قَلِيلٌ  
فَلَا تُمَارِ فِيهِمْ إِلَّا مِرَاءً ظَاهِرًا وَلَا تَسْتَنَفِثَ فِيهِمْ مِّنْهُمْ أَحَدًا

*They will say, '[They are] three; their dog is the fourth of them,' and say, '[They are] five, their dog is the sixth of them,' taking a shot at the invisible. They will say, '[They are] seven, their dog is the eighth of them.' Say, 'My Lord knows best their number, and none knows them except a few.' So do not dispute concerning them, except for a seeming dispute, and do not question about them any of them. [Q18:22]*

Thus, the Qur'an has not brought forth these seemingly unimportant details because they were in fact unimportant. In

<sup>3</sup> "The Battle of the Books" *The Economist*, modified December 19<sup>th</sup>, 2007, <http://www.economist.com/node/10311317>.

reality, this verse is one of the few verses where numbers are mentioned. Logically, the more details it had, the more difficult it would be to preserve. Therefore, this strategy worked in the Qur'an's favour in terms of protecting it from alteration and mankind's forgetful nature.

This brevity and simplicity, in addition to being an aid in its preservation, has also helped the Qur'an maintain its status as the ultimate truth for Muslims - something the Old Testament has not been as successful in achieving. A prime example of this is again, in the story of Noah. Because of the precise dating method used in the Old Testament, it is said that the flood would have taken place in approximately 2350 B.C.<sup>4</sup> However, this precise dating has led to much scepticism as there is considerable debate about the lack of evidence in the fossil record suggesting that a global flood occurred in this time frame. This has caused much debate, controversy and scepticism over the Bible's accuracy. However, due to the Qur'an's silence on the matter, and the fact that it does not provide an exact timeline or details on whether the flood was global or local, Muslims have comfortably been able to bypass the question – as there is no contradiction with modern findings. As Shaykh Rizwan Arastu notes in *God's Emissaries: Adam to Jesus*, "Unlike the Bible, the Qur'an places no timeline on Noah's flood, neither does it indicate that the flood covered the entire earth, so we need not limit our search for geological evidence of the flood to the last 5-7 millennia, and we

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<sup>4</sup> David Wright, "Timeline for the Flood", *Answering Genesis*, modified March 9, 2012, <https://answersingenesis.org/bible-timeline/timeline-for-the-flood/>.

need not search for a global flood.”<sup>5</sup> This lack of detail is strategic in the sense that it saves the Qur’an from scrutiny in light of archaeological or other discoveries which may bring scrutiny to certain details, had they been mentioned. Further, when the Qur’an made predictions, it never noted the timeline or date in which something would occur, leaving it open for the future (e.g. victory and defeat of the Romans in Surah al-Rūm).

In this way, even if someone was well-intentioned and wanted to omit details from the Qur’an so that it could be in accordance with supposed fact, they would not need to, as the Qur’an had no contradictions with reality to begin with. Perhaps a clearer articulation of this point can be understood in the example of the *Isrā’iliyyāt*, or “traditions fabricated and inserted into Islamic literature from Biblical origins.”<sup>6</sup> Had the Qur’an explored these Biblical stories in more depth and detail and contradicted the Bible more, perhaps the Qur’an, like the *ahadith* literature, would have been in more danger to be exposed to insertions and omissions so as to make it in accordance with Biblical thought and facts. The general vague tendency of the Qur’an when discussing Biblical stories was to omit details and stories that were perhaps inaccurate, as opposed to verbally negating them. For example, it does not mention explicitly that Eve was created from Adam’s rib, how the children of Adam procreated, or a wide range of stories mentioned in the Bible about the various prophets. The times where it openly and directly

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<sup>5</sup> Shaykh Rizwan Arastu, *God’s Emissaries: From Adam to Jesus*, (Dearborn: Imam Mahdi Association of Marjaeyea, 2014), 107-108.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*, 38.



contradicts the Biblical tradition is when it comes to beliefs like the misattribution of Jesus as the son of God. As such, it could be argued that its brevity in most stories and omission of others served a strategic purpose on many levels. Inserting details into a text that was otherwise vague in its story-telling would have been obvious to anybody reading it, and there was no reason to delete anything as it did not seem to be explicitly in contradiction with the Bible. The ahadith literature which are not so vague do not share the same fate as the Qur'an, and include several fabricated traditions and insertions (as we can see from the *Isrā'illiyyāt*).

### **5. Scientific Ambiguity**

The last stylistic feature that we would like to explore which seems to have pragmatically aided the Qur'an in its preservation is its scientific ambiguity. Taking God as the author of the Qur'an, who is omniscient of His creation, there should be no scientific contradictions in the Qur'ān. However, while God has always known what the reality of His creation is, His creation is too far behind science continues to progress and make new discoveries every day. This progress and advancement has meant that until science reaches a certain point of certainty, many realities are misunderstood. What was once accepted as fact is dismissed with scientific progress and new observations. For instance, the discovery that the earth revolves around the sun was ground-breaking and caused uproar in the church due to its explicit contradiction to the Bible, condemning the now-famed Galileo Galilei. It could be hypothesized that these contradictions only existed in the Old Testament because of man-made alterations that had gone

unnoticed. Had these propositions been made by God Himself, they would have been accurate and in accordance with reality. The Qur'an however, using the strength of the Arabic language, discussed scientific realities like the movement of the earth in a somewhat ambiguous manner, such that it could be read in multiple ways. Ayatullah Khu'i points this out in one of his works:

[It is God] who has appointed the earth as a cradle (Q. 20:53). Note the subtle way that this verse alludes to the movement of the earth, which did not become clear until many centuries later. It describes the earth figuratively as a cradle, in which an infant is rocked gently in order for it to go to sleep comfortably and peacefully. In the same way, the earth is the cradle for human beings, suited to them in its rotational and revolutionary motions. And just as the movement of the cradle is intended for the growth of the infant and its repose, so are the earth's daily and yearly motions intended for nurturing mankind, or, rather, all animals, plants, and minerals. The verse alludes to the earth's motion in an implicit, rather than an explicit, way because it was revealed at a time when the consensus of human opinion was that it was motionless, to the degree that this was regarded as an imperative that was not open to doubt.<sup>7</sup>

Before Galileo's discovery, commentators of the Qur'an were very comfortable reading the verses to justify a reading that indicated that the sun was revolving around the earth. Upon further scientific discovery, these readings changed while the text of the Qur'an did not. The ambiguity in the text of the Qur'an on this matter proved to work in the Qur'an's favour as it did not tie Muslims down to a

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<sup>7</sup> Al-Khu'i, 63.

single reading and understanding of science. As science has progressed, so did people's understanding of the Qur'an. In some ways, this could also be seen as a pragmatic strategy to preserve it from alteration. Had someone felt that the Qur'an was in direct contradiction with what was 'fact', and that it might weaken the faith of the Muslims in Islam, they may have attempted to alter or omit certain verses. With various Muslim empires spanning across the continent over centuries, this would have also served a political purpose as the faith of Muslims in Islam was crucial to their rule and legitimacy as an empire in the eyes of Muslims. However, the Qur'an's vagueness allowed for various interpretations without the need to change the text itself, and as such, provided a stylistic feature that could have been what protected it. This obscurity removed one of the many reasons that individuals may have been tempted to change the text.

### **Remarks**

From the five features that we have explored, we have attempted to show the tangible strategy that the Qur'an has implemented and how this may have aided in its own preservation. There is no doubt that the Qur'an is a remarkable text that is perfect in every way. Linguistic experts continue to study it, and there are no bounds to its exquisite beauty and style. The aspect of the Qur'an that we have explored here is not one that has been explored in detail before (to our knowledge). Its political and stylistic strategy in its own preservation is something that we have postulated from our knowledge that God perfectly measures and is the best of planners. Knowing that these are His qualities, we have applied them to His

literary masterpiece and tried to make educated guesses as to how these stylistic features have helped create a book that none would want to alter. What we have brought forth are simply observations and guesses into the wisdom behind the style of the Qur'an, and we have compared its success in preservation to other divine scriptures like the Old Testament. Nevertheless, we realize that we are incapable of understanding the wonders of God and the depth of His strategy in such a divine book. We pray that we are forgiven for where we have fallen short.

## THE CORE OF ACTION: SINCERITY OF INTENTION

TAWUS RAJA

**ABSTRACT:** According to Islamic traditions, actions are only by intentions; the intention of a believer is better than his action; and one's eternal abode is determined by one's intention. These can only be understood by a proper understanding of what is meant by intention. Intention is neither a verbal utterance nor a mental concept. Rather, intention is one's inner disposition and realisation from which one's actions stem. As one practices to act sincerely for God, his whole being will gradually transform, to the point that he is only motivated by God's cause. That is the highest manifestation of monotheism, which is called sincerity. Part of being motivated by God is to respond to His promises and warnings. Therefore, acting in order to qualify for God's reward or to avoid His punishment is an application of sincere action for the sake of God.

## Intention

The Qur'an has repeatedly emphasised that any good deed that we do – such as prayer, charity, offering, migration and jihad – should be done in God's way (*fi sabīl Allāh*) and sincerely for God's sake. This condition is also stressed in the narrations. The first tradition in *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* is: 'Acts are only by intentions, and for each person is only what he intends. Thus, whoever migrated toward God and His Messenger, then his migration is toward God and His Messenger; and whoever migrated to obtain this world or marry a woman, then his migration is toward what he migrated to.'<sup>1</sup> According to another famous hadith, one who does good deeds for show will be called on the Day of Resurrection, 'O disbeliever! O evil-doer! O traitor! O loser! Your act is lost and your reward is cancelled. You have no share today. Go and seek your reward from whom you acted for!'<sup>2</sup> In a sacred tradition (*al-ḥadīth al-qudsī*) God says, 'I am the best of partners: whoever associates a partner with Me in his act, I will leave my share for my partner! I do not accept except what is done purely for Me.'<sup>3</sup>

Indeed intention (*niyyah*) is what gives value to one's action. A robot could be made to do much service, but what it does is only

<sup>1</sup> Bukhārī, 1/2, 3/119 and 7:231. Narrated with slight variations in Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, 1/25. Muslim, 6/48. Nasa'ī, *Sunan al-Nasa'ī*, 1/58-60, 6/158-159 and 7/13. Tirmidhī, 3/100, ḥ 1698. Ibn Mājah, 2/1413, ḥ 4227. The narration – especially the first part of it – is also reported in the main Shia books of hadith, sometimes with slight differences: Tahdhīb, 1/83, ḥ 67, and 4/186, ḥ 519. Amālī.Ṭ, 618, ḥ 1274. Nu'mān ibn Muḥammad, *Da'ā'im al-Islām*, 1/156. Also see Mizān, 2/390 and 6:187.

<sup>2</sup> 'Ayyāshī, 1/283, ḥ 295. Thawāb, 255. Rawḍat al-Wā'izīn, 2/361. Suyūṭī, 1/30.

<sup>3</sup> Barqī, 1/252, ḥ 270-271. 'Ayyāshī, 2/353, ḥ 94-95. Kāfī, 2/295, ḥ 9. Ṭabarānī, *al-Mu'jam al-Kabīr*, 7/291. Warrām, 2/234. Haythamī, 10/221.

mechanical. Value, praise and reward are concepts that apply to when there is a pure and good intention behind an action. The same act by two individuals can have two completely opposite religious values due to their intentions, even though their acts are exactly the same outwardly.<sup>4</sup> For example, when a believer enters a room, a person may stand up as an expression of honour, while another person may stand up as an expression of derision.

About eternal reward and punishment in the Hereafter, we read in hadith: 'The inhabitants of the Fire will stay there forever because their intention was to disobey God if they were to live forever; and the inhabitants of the Garden will stay there forever because their intention was to obey God if they were to live forever. Hence, both groups will stay in their abodes eternally because of their intentions.'<sup>5</sup> 'Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā'ī explains, 'This hadith refers to the rooting of traits and the strengthening of characteristics in the soul, to the point that the soul's capacity for opposite traits is abolished.'<sup>6</sup> Intention here means one's inner inclination or disinclination toward embracing and submitting to the truth. If one's whole being is transformed, such that his soul becomes congruent with Hell and inharmonious to Paradise, then his fitting abode will be Hell, to reside there for ages. Therefore, intention should be interpreted not as a mental concept or thought, but as an inner realisation and state of being.

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<sup>4</sup> Tasnīm, 13/707-709.

<sup>5</sup> 'Ayyāshī, 2/316, ḥ 158. Kāfi, 2/85, ḥ 5. 'Ilal, 2/523, ḥ 1.

<sup>6</sup> Mizān, 13/212.

Imam Ali referred to the same idea when he said, ‘O people! Indeed what gathers people [in the same group and class] is their satisfaction and dissatisfaction. Indeed only one person killed the she-camel of Thamūd, but God included all of them in His punishment because they included themselves by their satisfaction.’<sup>7</sup> Satisfaction to the sin of others is itself a sin, but what makes it equal to the sinner’s act in terms of degree, intensity and the deserved punishment, is if this satisfaction is indicative of the same inner realisation and inclination in the two individuals. There are many hadiths that identify satisfaction as the reason for why future generations may be blamed or punished because of the acts of their forefathers, as seen in the Qur’an.<sup>8</sup> Imam al-Ṣādiq said, ‘On the Day of Resurrection, God will raise the people based on their intentions.’<sup>9</sup>

### Sincerity

Sincerity (*ikhhlās*) is the pinnacle of monotheism and the highest stage of faith, especially when it advances from being the quality of one’s *action* to being the quality of one’s *essence and being*. Sincerity is the state of not being motivated by anything other than God. It is based on the realisation – not just a mental realisation but a spiritual and existential one – that nothing other than God can benefit, harm, pay or take away. It is when one reaches a state of certainty about God’s prevailing decree and His sure promises. Thus, sincerity is the combination of God-reliance (*tawakkuḥ*) and

<sup>7</sup> Thaqafī, *al-Ghārāt*, 2/398. Nu‘mānī, *al-Ghaybah*, 27. Nahj, Sermon 201.

<sup>8</sup> Maḥasin, 1/262. Wasāil, 16/138ff.

<sup>9</sup> Maḥasin, 1/262, ḥ 325.



certitude (*yaqīn*). That is what makes one not fear or hope anything or anyone other than God, and not act for the pleasure or satisfaction of anyone other than the One. ‘*So whoever expects to encounter his Lord – let him act righteously, and not associate anyone with the worship of his Lord*’ (18:110). However, as much as it is lofty and laudable, it is difficult and scarce: “*But most of them do not believe in Allah without ascribing partners to Him*” (12:106).

We sought everyone else, except our friend; / We  
failed to reach our journey’s end.  
We’ve lost our capital and we are in debt; / All we  
have bought is sorrow and regret.<sup>10</sup>

There is a narration: ‘[All people are doomed except those who know;] and those who know are all doomed except for those who act; and those who act are all doomed except those who are sincere; and the sincere are of a lofty rank.’<sup>11</sup> It is at this stage that Satan will not have the ability to deceive and mislead the person (15:39-40, 38:82-83) because there are no grounds in the person’s soul for Satan to appeal to. This is where the springs of wisdom gush forth from one’s heart and flow on his tongue,<sup>12</sup> for God becomes the tongue with which one speaks.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Ali Akbar Nūghānī.

<sup>11</sup> Sulamī, *Ḥaqā’iq al-Tafsīr*, 1/355. Warrām, 2/118. ‘Ajlūnī, *Kashf al-Khifā*, 2/312, ḥ 2796.

<sup>12</sup> Kāfī, 2/16, ḥ 6. ‘Uyūn, 2/69, ḥ 321. ‘Uddat, 232. Suyūṭī, *al-Jāmi’ al-Ṣaḡhīr*, 2/56, ḥ 8361. Kanz, 3/24, ḥ 5271.

<sup>13</sup> Bukhārī, 7/190. Barqī, 1/291, ḥ 443. Kāfī, 2/352, ḥ 7-8. Bayhaqī, *al-Sunan al-Kubrā*, 3/346 and 10/219. Kanz, 7/770, ḥ 21327.

### Three Classes of Worshippers

There are several narrations that classify the worshippers into three groups: (a) the ‘merchants’, who serve God in temptation for His rewards and Paradise; (b) the ‘slaves’, who serve God in fear of His punishment and Hell; (c) the ‘free spirits’, who serve God out of their sense of gratitude and love for Him, because He deserves to be worshipped. These narrations implicitly or explicitly identify the third group as the loftiest in rank.<sup>14</sup> It is common among many Muslims, including the scholars, to look down upon the worship of God in hope of Paradise or in fear of Hell, as low levels of worship. Some even deem such worship totally void, unacceptable and against the condition of sincere intention. However, these very narrations identify all three groups *as worshippers of God*, not as *polytheists*!

Of course, it is a very exalted rank if one acts for God only because He is worthy of it and out of love for Him, but this by no means diminishes the significance of hope and fear. God has recognised hope and fear as legitimate motivations for His worship and righteousness by revealing many verses that describe the rewards and punishments of the Hereafter. The reason why such acts of worship do not contradict sincerity is that these rewards and punishments *are also set by God*. This can be deductively posited as follows: (a) These threats and promises derive their validity from God, Who has set and declared them. (b) Acting upon these threats and promises indicates that the person has accepted and recognised their validity. (c) Hence, one who acts upon them is essentially acting for God, since he is following God’s threats and promises.

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<sup>14</sup> Kāfi, 2/84, ḥ 5. Tuḥaf, 246. Nahj, Saying 237.

Moreover, the worship of the lovers is not an *alternative* to the worship of the ‘merchants’ or the ‘slaves’. Love is not a motivation comparable and parallel to the other motivations. Rather, worship out of love is a stage *above and beyond* worship out of hope and fear, not contrary or opposite to them.

The lovers’ religion is different from all; / God  
Himself is the one whom they call.<sup>15</sup>

In other words, in order to achieve the stage where one worships God only because of Himself, one should start with taking these verses seriously and acting in accordance to these rewards and punishments. This will gradually open new horizons to the worshipper, whereby he experiences such beauty and magnificence that will transform his motivation and elevate his ambition.

Thinking of Thy nearness made me forget / Paradise and its  
houris: blond and brunette.<sup>16</sup>

Do not send me off / To Paradise from Thy door;  
To stay at Thy door / Is all that I look for.<sup>17</sup>

Those who respond to God’s promises or threats – more than to the fact that He *deserves* to be worshipped – should not be considered as polytheists. Their objective in worship stems from their level of religious experience, realisation and cognition. If they get to experience and taste the beauty and truth of God Himself, then they will surely modify their aim and objective. Otherwise, the fact that they are responding to *God’s* promises and threats – instead of the

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<sup>15</sup> Rūmī, *Mathnawī*, vol. 2, line 1774.

<sup>16</sup> Ḥāfīz, *ghazal* 317.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., *ghazal* 268.

promises and threats of others, such as the pleasures and pains of this world – is an indication of their sincerity to God. In fact, God has Himself invited His servants to trade and deal with *Him* (2:245, 9:111, 57:11, 61:10-13), for that is the most lucrative trade, as opposed to the transient gains in dealing with others or chasing this world.

They worship the kings, their armies and squads, /  
Because they refused to worship their God.

They seek the dogs because they're low; / A lion is  
higher for them to follow.

A mouse fears a cat; that is its foe; / Would a mouse  
fear a lion? The answer is no.

A lion is feared by a musk deer; / A mouse is not  
there to have that fear.<sup>18</sup>

Being motivated by an unseen promised reward or an unseen warned punishment is a truly exalted rank and an essential quality of a true believer. That is why one should not downgrade the worship of God out of either fear or temptation. No one has the right to belittle those who seek Paradise and those who are apprehensive of Hell, because God has praised them with the loftiest of extolments in His Book. These derogatory remarks are especially detrimental for the majority of the people who have not reached that level of faith and spiritual realisation to worship God only for Himself and without any eye on any gain or pain. When the hope and fear of Hereafter are diminished and presented as lesser stages of religious service, they are simply dismissed and not taken

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<sup>18</sup> Rūmī, *Mathnawī*, vol. 3, lines 3001, 3004-3005 and 3008.

seriously – but only to be replaced by the trivial hopes and fears of worldly matters. The most accurate and effective way of presenting the different degrees of worshippers is what is observed in the Qur'an: to emphasise the importance of hope and fear as opposed to dismissing them.

The Buyer with the funds is One and only One; / But  
people are in doubt: everywhere they run.  
Seeking buyers that are bankrupt themselves, / They  
lost the deal with the Buyer of their selves.  
Seek a Buyer Who is searching for you; / In the past  
and future He is always with you.  
Don't grab every buyer that you see in the street; /  
Against your Beloved why should you cheat?  
Even if they buy, you'll not have a gain; / They don't  
have enough to pay for your brain.  
You're blind and deaf due to your greed; / The path of  
Satan you seek and proceed.  
The patients were the ones who found the Buyer; /  
They avoided the others, and fought their desires.<sup>19</sup>

It is narrated from Imams Ali, al-Sajjād and al-Kāzīm – with slight variation – that 'Indeed there is no price for you except Paradise, so do not sell yourselves except for that.'<sup>20</sup> We also see that the supplications of the Infallibles demonstrate all three levels of worship, because their beings encompassed all levels of perfection. They were the most fearful people of God's punishment, the most hopeful in His mercy, and the most enamoured with His beauty.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., vol. 5, lines 1463-1464, 1466-1468 and 1470-1471.

<sup>20</sup> Kāfi, 1/19. Tuḥaf, 389 and 391. Nahj, Saying 456. Ghurar, ḥ 4633 and 4626.

This shows that these three motivations are not mutually exclusive, but they can be combined and incorporated together. It is narrated from the Prophet: 'He who knows God the most among you, would be the most fearful of God among you; and I am the most fearful of Him among you.'<sup>21</sup>

Hence, when the Qur'an and hadith emphasise sincerity, what is meant is acting for God as opposed to acting for other gods, not as opposed to being motivated by Paradise and Hell, because Paradise and Hell are God's rewards and punishments; they are not separable from Him. Responding to the incentives that God has set is an extension and application of glorifying God and acting for His sake. At the same time, there are different modes and levels of serving God, according to one's knowledge and experience.

In a long narration, the Prophet described those whom he is eager to see for Abū Dharr as follows:

...They gather in one of the houses of God as if they are strangers. They are anxious due to fear of the Fire and love of Paradise. Who would know their status with God?... Ah! So eager I am toward them! They free themselves from the hardship and pleasure of this world in order to save themselves from eternal punishment and to enter Paradise, for God's pleasure. O Abū Dharr! Each of them has the reward of seventy martyrs of Badr. O Abū Dharr! Each of them is more precious to God than everything that God has created on the face of earth... If one of them dies it is as if

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<sup>21</sup> Razi, 32/252.

everyone in the sky above this world has died – due to  
his honour before God...

He prayed for them and called them God's friends (*awliyā'*), and then added, 'If it were not for the appointed lifespan that God has written for them, their souls would not settle in their bodies due to fear of punishment and yearning for reward.'<sup>22</sup>

### Summary

Intention is the *orientation* of one's whole being. It is not separable from one's views and values, and that is why it is the source of one's actions and what gives value to one's deeds. Sincerity is the state of not being motivated by anything other than God's sake, pleasure, orders, rewards and punishments. Imam Ali is quoted as saying: 'All action is scattered dust (*habā'*) except for what is done purely for God.'<sup>23</sup> Finally, there is no duality between God and His promise of reward or punishment. Rather, acting in fear of Hell or in hope of Paradise is a ladder to gain higher levels of spiritual realisation and consciousness, such that one's aim and ambition goes even beyond that.

To Your lover and knower, / Life would be a pain;  
And his house and household / Will only be a strain.  
You'll give him both worlds, / And You'll drive him insane;  
But both worlds are vain / For the is insane in Your chain.<sup>24</sup>  
I examined everyone: like you there's no one; / Having your  
love I feel that I've won.

<sup>22</sup> Ibn Fahd al-Hilli, *al-Taḥsīn fī Ṣifāt al-ʿĀrifīn*, 23-26.

<sup>23</sup> Ghurar, 2896.

<sup>24</sup> Khwājah ʿAbdullāh Anṣārī.

I dived in the sea but how could there be: / A pearl like you? I  
couldn't find or see.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Rūmī, *Divān-i Kabīr*, *ghazal* 770.



## ALLAMAH AL-HILLI ON IMAMATE IN HIS *KASHFUL MURAD*, PART III

TRANSLATED BY KARIM AGHILI

**ABSTRACT:** This series is a list of responses to objections raised against Imamate from prominent scholar Allamah Hilli's *Kashf ul-Murād*, expanded on from Nasir al-Din al-Tusi's *Tajrid al-I'tiqād* – the first treatise on Shi'i theology. *Kashful Murad* is one of the most widely read of Allamah al-Hilli's publications as it is the first commentary written on Allamah al-Tusi's work. The concept of Imamate in Shi'i Islam refers to the necessity of having a divinely-appointed leader who will lead the Islamic nation after the Prophet's death. An Imam who exceeds all people in every virtue whether it be piety, knowledge, or bravery, and who justly leads the people and guides them towards morality is a grace of God. The previous parts included discussions such as on the proofs for the Imamate of Ali, the rules concerning those opposed to his leadership, and the proofs for his authority over the companions that qualify him for leadership such as his courage, insight, asceticism and devotion, and patience. This part expands on Imam Ali's close relationship to the Prophet, expounds on well-known hadiths on the Imam's faith and merits, and his immeasurable services to Islam.

### The Seventh Issue Continued

**Allamah al-Tusi:** Imam Ali had the distinction of being the closest relative of the Prophet.

**Allamah al-Hilli:** Imam Ali was the closest relative of the Messenger of God, therefore he is superior to all others; and as he is a Hashemite (a descendant of Hashim)<sup>1</sup>, he is superior. The Prophet said, "God chose the Quraysh, the twelfth ancestor of the Prophet, from the children of Ishmael, and He chose Hashim (the second ancestor of the Prophet) from the children of the Quraysh.

**Allamah al-Tusi:** And because of the brotherhood of Ali.<sup>2</sup>

**Allamah al-Hilli:** The Prophet saw that Ali seemed troubled and asked him about the reason. Ali replied, "You have established brotherhood amongst your companions, but you have left me alone [i.e., but have not made me the brother of anyone"]. The Messenger of God responded:

I postponed the question of your brotherhood for the reason that I desired to become your brother when brotherhood among all others had been completed. Will you not be pleased to be my brother, executor and the successor after me? He said, 'Yes, O Messenger of God.'

<sup>1</sup> *Dhakha'ir al-'uqba* of Muhibb al-Din al-Tabari, p. 10; *al-Mustadrak 'ala Sahihain*, vol. 4, p. 73; *Sharh Nahj al-balaghah* of Ibn Ab'il-Hadid, vol. 1, p. 30; *Fada'il-al-khamsah min al-sihah al-sittah*, vol. 1, pp. 11-13; *al-Riyaz al-nazrah* of Muhibb al-Din al-Tabari, vol. 2, p. 119.

<sup>2</sup> *al-Mustadrak 'ala Sahihain*, vol. 3, p. 14; *al-Riyaz al-Nazrah*, vol. 2, pp. 124-138; *Sharh Nahj al-balaghah* of Ibn Ab'il-Hadid, vol. 4, p. 96; *al-Ghadir*, vol. 3, pp. 111-125.

The Prophet fraternized between Ali and himself and not between the Companions and himself; therefore, Ali is superior to all others.

**Allamah al-Tusi:** The Necessity of Love for Ali.<sup>3</sup>

**Allamah al-Hilli:** It is mandatory to have love for Ali only, and not for any of the other Companions, therefore he is definitely superior to them... To have affection for him is obligatory as God says: “*Say: I do not ask of you any reward for it except for the affection for [my] relatives*” (42:23).<sup>4</sup>

**Allamah al-Tusi:** Ali helped and supported the Prophet.<sup>5</sup>

**Allamah al-Hilli:** None of the Companions other than Ali had the distinction of supporting and assisting Prophet Muhammad, qualifying him as superior to all others.

The first premise can be stated as follows: God says: “...*then [know that] Allah is indeed his master, and Gabriel, the righteous among the faithful...*” (66:4).<sup>6</sup> The Qur’anic commentators agree that what is intended by ‘the righteous among the faithful’ is Ali. The word ‘Mawla’ (Master) in this context means ‘supporter’, because it is this very meaning that is the common element<sup>7</sup> between God and Gabriel. God specified Ali as the third of the three supporters and restricted ‘Mawla’ to the three supporters with the pronoun ‘He’ (*huwa*) in the Qur’anic verse: “Allah is indeed his master”.

<sup>3</sup> *Dhakha'ir al-'uqba* of Muhibb al-Din al-Tabari, p. 25, *Shawahid al-tanzil* of al-Hakim al-Haaskani, vol. 2, pp. 189-211; nos. 822-844; *al-Ghadir*, vol. 2, pp. 306-311.

<sup>4</sup> the Quran, 42: 23.

<sup>5</sup> *Shawahid al-tanzil*, vol. 2, pp. 341-352; *al-Durr al-Manthur*, vol. 8, p. 224, Dar al-fikr, Beirut; *Tarikh* of Ibn 'Asakir, *tarjam al-imam 'Ali* (the biography of Imam 'Ali), vol. 2, p. 425.

<sup>6</sup> The Quran, 66:4.

<sup>7</sup> *al-qadr al-mushtarak*

**Allamah al-Tusi:** Because he is equal to the preceding Prophets.

**Allamah al-Hilli:** Ali is superior to all other companions because he is equal to the preceding Prophets; being equal to a superior also means being superior.

This premise is based on the narration recounted by al-Bayhaqi from the Prophet who said, “Whoever wishes to see Adam in his knowledge, Noah in his piety, Abraham in his forbearance, Moses in his awe, and Jesus in his worship and devotion should look at Ali ibn Abi Talib.”<sup>8</sup>

**Allamah al-Tusi:** Because of traditions such as Ta’ir, al-Manzilah, and al-Ghadir.

**Allamah al-Hilli:** The Prophet clearly stated Imam Ali’s merits and excellences over all others on many occasions, and he explicitly designated him as the Imam [i.e., as his successor].

For instance, it has been narrated in the Tradition of Ta’ir (the Tradition of the Roasted Bird) that the Prophet said, “O God, bring me the most beloved of your creation to eat this roasted bird with me.” Then Ali came and ate the roasted bird with him.<sup>9</sup>

Another tradition reads: “O God, bring the most beloved of you on earth.” This tradition has been narrated by Anas, Sa’d ibn Abi Waqqas and Abu Rafi’, the freed slave of the Prophet, Ibn ‘Abbas.

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<sup>8</sup> *Tarikh* of Ibn ‘Asakir, vol. 2, p. 280, no. 804, as cited from al-Bayhaqi in the marginal note (*hamish*), and *al-Ghadir*, vol. 3, p. 355 as quoted from al-Bayhaqi on the virtues of the Companions (*fi fada’il al-sahabah*); *Fara’id al-simtayn* of al-Juwayni, vol. 1, p. 170, no. 131; *Shawahid al-tanzil* of al-Hakim al-Haskani, vol. 1, p. 100, no. 116.

<sup>9</sup> *Tarikh* of Ibn ‘Asakir, *tarjamt al-imam ‘Ali* (the biography of Imam ‘Ali), vol. 2, pp. 110-158, no. 613-642; *Fara’id al-simtayn* of al-Juwayni, vol. 1, pp. 209-215, nos. 165, 166 and 167.

Abu Ja'far al-Iskafi and Abu 'Abd Allah al-Basri relied on this hadith as proof of the superiority of Ali over all others. Abu 'Abd Allah claimed that this hadith is well-known among the Companions, and none of them denied it; therefore, it is a widely-transmitted hadith (al-mutawatir).

The Hadith of the Rank (Manzilah): The Prophet said to Ali: "Your relation to me shall be like that of Aaron (Harun) to Moses (Musa) except that there shall be no prophet after me."<sup>10</sup> Aaron was the most praiseworthy of the people of his time to his brother Moses and so was Ali to Muhammad.

The Tradition of al-Ghadir: When the Prophet returned from the Farewell Pilgrimage, he delivered a public address to the people at Ghadir Khumm (The Pond of Khumm)<sup>11</sup> and said, "O people, do I not have a greater authority over you than you have over yourselves?" They said, "Yes, O Messenger of God." Then he took Ali's hand and said:

For Whomsoever I am his master, Ali is his master. O God, love whomsoever loves Ali and be the enemy of whoever is Ali's enemy. O God, aid whoever aids Ali and forsake whoever forsakes him. O God, make the truth [the right path] turn with Ali wherever he turns [i.e., O God, make him the pivot of truth].<sup>12</sup>

<sup>10</sup> *Fara'id al-simtayn*, vol. 1, pp. 122-127, nos. 85-89; *Tarikh* of Ibn 'Asakir, *tarjam al-imam 'Ali* (the biography of Imam 'Ali), vol. 1, pp. 281-364, nos. 336-456.

<sup>11</sup> Ghadir Khumm is a location some miles from Makkah on the road to Madinah.

<sup>12</sup> I do not think that anyone will deny the hadith of al-Ghadir and its tawatur (the multiplicity of sources and narrators that verify the authenticity of Hadith al-Ghadir). 110 from among the distinguished companions (*al-sahabah*) and 84 from among their successors (*al-tab'i* in) have

As said before, 'master' (mawla) in this hadith refers to a person who is entitled to exercise full authority (awla bi'l-tasarruf). As Ali is more entitled to have an authority over anyone else than a person has over him/herself; therefore, he is definitely superior to them all...

Prophet Muhammad said regarding Dhul-Thadya – a man one of whose limbs appeared like a woman's breast or a disfigured lump of flesh: "The best of creation and of the successors [to the prophets] will kill him," and in another narration, he said, "The best of this Community will kill him."<sup>13</sup>

He said to Lady Fatimah:

Indeed, God looked most thoroughly over the people on earth and chose your father from among them and singled him out as His Prophet. Then He looked over them a second time and chose your husband and God commanded me to marry you to him and to choose him as a trustee (wasi).<sup>14</sup>

'A'ishah said, "I was in the presence of the Prophet and Ali came. He then said pointing to Ali, 'This is the master of the Arabs.' She said, 'I said to the Prophet, 'May my father and mother be sacrificed for you, are you not the master of the Arabs?' He said, 'I am the master of creation and he is the master of the Arabs.'<sup>15</sup>

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narrated it, and the chains of transmission have continued up to the present day. See *al-Ghadir*, the whole vol. 1.

<sup>13</sup> *al-Manaqib of al-Maghazali*, p. 56, no. 79; *al-Tafdil* of al-Karajaki, p. 20, Tehran, Mu' assisah Bi'that, 1403 A. H. *Majma' al-zawa'id*, vol. 6, p. 239.

<sup>14</sup> *al-Manqib* of al-Khwarazmi, p. 346, no. 364; *Majma' al-zawa'id*, vol. 9, p. 165, and vol. 8, p. 253; *Kanz al-'ummal*, vol. 11, p. 604, no. 32923.

<sup>15</sup> *Tarikh* of Ibn 'Asakir, *tarjam al-imam 'Ali* (the biography of Imam 'Ali), vol. 2, pp. 261-265, nos. 780-785.

Anas narrated from the Prophet who said to Ali, "You are my brother and helper (wazir) and the choicest of men whom I am leaving behind who will pay my debt and fulfil my promise."<sup>16</sup>

A man asked 'A'ishah about her setting off for Basrah to participate in the Battle of al-Jamal (the Camel). She answered, "It was foreordained by God."<sup>17</sup> Again, that man asked her about Ali. She said, "You have asked me about the most beloved of all men to the Prophet and the husband of the most beloved of all women to him."<sup>18</sup> He said to Fatimah, "Are you not satisfied that I gave you in marriage to the best [man] of my Community?"<sup>19</sup>

Salman narrated from Prophet Mahammad who said, "The choicest of men whom I am leaving behind is Ali ibn Abi Talib."<sup>20</sup>

'Abdullah ibn Mas'ud narrated from the Prophet Muhammad who said, "Ali is the best of mankind. Whoever denies that will be an unbeliever."<sup>21</sup>

Abu Sa'id al-Khudri narrated from the Messenger of God who said, "The best man of my Community is Ali ibn Abi Talib."<sup>22</sup>

**Allamah al-Tusi:** Imam Ali was never an unbeliever.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>16</sup> *al-Isabah*, vol. 1, p. 208, no. 992 (Thabit ibn Mu'adh); *Kanz al-'ummal*, vol. 11, no. 32952; *Fadai'l al-khamsah*, vol. 1, p. 382.

<sup>17</sup> *Tarikh Baghdad*, vol. 1, pp. 159-160, no. 10 (Abu Qatadah al-Ansari); *Tadhkirat al-khawass*, p. 100.

<sup>18</sup> *Tarikh of Ibn 'Asakir, tarjamt al-imam 'Ali* (the biography of Imam 'Ali), vol. 2, pp. 162-170, nos. 641-653.

<sup>19</sup> *Khasa'is of al-Nasa'i*, pp. 228-260, nos. 123-145; *Tarikh of Ibn 'Asakir, tarjamt al-imam 'Ali* (the biography of Imam 'Ali), vol. 1, pp. 226-250, nos. 291-319.

<sup>20</sup> *Tarikh of Ibn 'Asakir*, vol. 3, pp. 5-9, nos. 1021 and 1022.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 2, pp. 444-448, nos. 954-965.

<sup>22</sup> *Fath al-bari*, vol. 8, p. 136, with a slight variation.

**Allamah al-Hilli:** Ali believed in the One God when he reached adolescence, as opposed to the other companions who were unbelievers during the Age of Ignorance. The one who had always believed in the One God is superior to a person who was an unbeliever before believing.

**Allamah al-Tusi:** Imam Ali was the most beneficial of all due to his numerous great services to Islam.

**Allamah al-Hilli:** Imam Ali's countless services for Islam rendered him the most beneficial to the Muslims. He performed the most rewarding deeds, rendering him the best of all people.

Imam Ali fought numerous battles and won several conquests through Divine aid. He underwent the hardships which have not been undergone by anyone else. He established such victories for the cause of Islam that the Messenger of God said on the Day of the Parties (al-Ahzab), "One stroke of Ali's sword was more meritorious than all the acts of worship performed by the jinn and mankind."<sup>24</sup>

His good character, renunciation (zuhd), and worship – particularly during the night (tahajjud) – was unachieved by anyone after him. He was an exemplar for others to follow, and taught others how to

<sup>23</sup> *al-'Umdah* of Ibn al-Batriq, p. 222, no. 284; *al-Shafi fi'l-imamah*, vol. 3, pp. 137-144 and vol. 3, pp. 220-242; *Shahih al-Bukhari*, vol. 6, pp. 143-144 and vol. 9, pp. 17-18; *al-Ghadir*, vol. 7, pp. 91-92.

<sup>24</sup> *al-Mustadrak* of al-Hakim, vol. 3, p. 32; *Fara'id al-simtayn*, vol. pp. 255-256, no. 197; *Tarikh* of Ibn 'Asakir, vol. 1, pp. 150-155, nos. 216 and 217; vol. 39, pp. 1-19; *Sharh al-Tajrid* of al-Qushji, p. 486, old print; *Kanz al-'ummal*, vol. 11, p. 623, no. 33035; *al-Tafsir al-kabir* of al-Razi, vol. 32, p. 31 on the commentary on *layl al-qadr* (the Night of Glory); *Shawahid al-tanzil* of al-Hakim al-Haskani, vol. 2, pp. 7-17, nos. 629-636.



attain higher spiritual levels. As for his knowledge, all scholars have relied on him and have benefited from him.

**Allamah al-Tusi:** Imam Ali is highly distinguished for his spiritual, physical, and kinship-based excellences.<sup>25</sup>

**Allamah al-Hilli:** Merits are either of a spiritual, physical or kinship-based nature. As for spiritual and physical excellences, as explained before, Imam Ali had a higher status and was unmatched (except for the Prophet) in his knowledge, renunciation, courage, generosity, good character and chastity. He was endowed with such a high degree of physical power and strength that no one could equal him: Ali cut off the heads of the enemies like paring a reed pen with a knife. His sword stroke never missed its target, but rather his stroke was no more than a blow to kill a person. He wrenched the gate of Khaybar off its hinges, while seventy very strong men could not move it, though he ate very little and even the coarsest food. He also put on the coarsest garment and was content with two worn out garments to wear, fasted often, and persisted in worshipping.

As for his kinship-based excellences, with regard to his noble lineage, he was unrivalled in terms of closeness to the Messenger of God. Al-‘Abbas was the paternal uncle of the Prophet while Ali was his cousin from both paternal and maternal sides – a Hashimite from both sides, as Ali is the son of Abu Talib, who is the son of Abd al-Muttalib ibn Hashim, and his mother is Fatimah, the daughter of Asad ibn Hashim.

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<sup>25</sup> *Sharh Nahj al-balaghah* of Ibn Ab'il-Hadid, vol. 1, pp. 11-30.

As for his relationship to the Prophet by marriage (musaharah)<sup>26</sup>, no one but Ali achieved this merit. He was the husband of the mistress of the women of the worlds. Although Uthman was also the son-in-law of the Messenger of God, Fatimah was the noblest daughter of the Prophet. She was greatly loved by the Prophet and was held in high esteem by him... In traditions, the Prophet counted Fatimah among the four leaders of the women of the worlds in Paradise.

As for his children<sup>27</sup>, they were unmatched in their nobility and perfection. Al-Hasan and al-Husain are the masters of the youths in Paradise, whom the Prophet loved dearly.<sup>28</sup> He bent his head so that they could climb over his back....<sup>29</sup>

Then, al-Hasan and al-Husain fathered children who also attained the highest degree of dignity. For instance, Hasan al-Muthanna

<sup>26</sup> *al-Khasa'is* of al-Nasa'i, pp. 228-261, nos. 123-145; *Tarikh* of Ibn 'Asakir, *tarjamt al-imam 'Ali* (the biography of Imam 'Ali), vol. 1, pp. 226-250, nos. 291-319.

<sup>27</sup> [Fakhr al-Din] al-Razi says in [his] commentary on the Chapter (108) on *al-Kawthar* (Abundance): Surely, God granted him [the Prophet] a progeny which has continued to remain in the course of time. Look how many of the members of the Household of the Prophet (*ahl al-bayt*) were killed. Then, the world has become filled with them, and there have not remained any important members of the Umayyads in the world. Then, look how many great learned men there were among them [i.e., the descendants of the Prophet], such as al-Baqir, al-Sadiq, al-Karim, al-Ride, peace be upon them, and *al-Naves al-Zaniyah* (the pure soul) [I. e., Muhammad ibn 'Abd Allah ibn Hasan ibn al-Hasan ibn Ali] and the like. *al-Tafsir al-caber*, vol. 32, p. 124.

<sup>28</sup> *Tarik* of Ibn 'Aaker, *target al-imam al-Hasan* (the biography of Imam Hasan, peace be upon him), pp. 34-61, nos. 71-112; *al-Manaia* of Ibn Shahrashub, vol. 4, pp. 26-27; *Tarikh* of Ibn 'Asakir, *tarjamt al-imam al-Husain* (the biography of Imam Husain, peace be upon him).

<sup>29</sup> *Tarikh* of Ibn 'Asakir, *tarjamt al-imam al-Husain* (the biography of Imam Husain, peace be upon him), pp. 91-96, 154-160; *Dhakha'r al-'uqba* of Muhibb al-Din al-Tabari, pp. 130-132; *al-Manaqib* of Ibn Shahrashub, vol. 4, pp. 26-27; *Bihar al-anwar*, vol. 43, pp. 261-317; *Tarikh* of Ibn 'Asakir, *tarjamt al-imam al-Husain* (the biography of Imam Husain, peace be upon him).

(Hasan the second), Hasan al-Muthallath (Hasan the third), ‘Abd Allah ibn al-Hasan al-Muthanna, and al-Nafs al-Zakiyyah (the pure soul)<sup>30</sup> and others are among the children of Imam al-Hasan.

As for the children of Imam al-Husain, Zayn al-‘Abidin (the ornament of the worshippers),<sup>31</sup> Al-Baqir (the splitter-open),<sup>32</sup> al-Sadiq (the truthful),<sup>33</sup> al-Kazim (the forbearing),<sup>34</sup> al-Rida (acceptance [of the divine decree],<sup>35</sup> al-Jawad (the generous),<sup>36</sup> al-Hadi (the guide),<sup>37</sup> [known by the title] al-Askari [on account of his life-long stay in a district called al-‘Askar in Samarra],<sup>38</sup> and al-Hujjah (the proof)<sup>39</sup> are counted among them. They possessed knowledge, moral virtues, asceticism, complete devotion to God (al-

<sup>30</sup> *Siyar a ‘lam al-nubala’*, vol. 4, p. 483, no. 185, d. 99 A. H.; *Mukhtasar Tarikh ibn ‘Asakir* of Ibn Manzur, vol. 6, p. 329, no. 207; *Tarikh al-Islam* of al-Dhahabi, p. 107 (the events between 141-160 A.H.); on Hasan al-Muthallath and on Abdullah ibn al-Hasan al-Muthanna, see *Maqatil al-talibiyyin*, p. 179, killed 145 A. H.; *Tarikh al-Islam* of al-Dhahabi, p. 191 (the events between 141-160 A. H.); al-‘Ibar, vol.1, p. 151, and on al-Nafs al-Zakiyyah, that is, Muhammad ibn ‘Abd Allah ibn al-Hasan ibn al-Hasan, peace be upon them, see al-‘Ibar, vol. 1, p. 152; *Tarikh al-Islam*, p. 271 (the events between 141-160); *Maqatil al-talibiyyin*, p. 232.

<sup>31</sup> *Tarikh* of Ibn ‘Asakir, *tarjam al-imam Zayn al-‘Abidin* (the biography of Imam Zayn al-‘Abidin, peace be upon him), vol. 1, p. 120; *Tarikh al-Islam* of al-Dhahabi, p. 431, no. 352 (the events between 81-100 A. H.); al-‘Ibar, vo. 1, p. 82.

<sup>32</sup> *Tarikh* of Ibn ‘Asakir, *tarjam al-imam Zayn al-‘Abidin wa’l-Imam Muhammad ibn ‘Ali al-Baqir* (the biographies of Imam Zayn al-‘Abidin and Imam Muhammad ibn ‘Ali ibn al-Baqir, peace be upon them), pp. 121-173; *Siyar a ‘lam al-nubala’* of al-Dhahabi, vo. 4, p. 401, no. 158.

<sup>33</sup> *Tarikh al-Islam* of al-Dhahabi, p. 88 (the events 141-160 A. H.); *Siyar a ‘lam al-nubala’* of al-Dhahabi, vo. p. 255, no. 117.

<sup>34</sup> *Siyar a ‘lam al-nubala’*, vol. 6, p. 270, no. 118.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., vol. 9, p. 387, no. 125.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., vol. 13, p. 121.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., vol. 12, p. 248.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., vol. 12, p. 265.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., vol. 13, p. 119, no. 60.

inqita' - detachment from all other than God] and renunciation (al-tark) to a great extent, so that distinguished spiritual leaders took pride in serving them. For example, Abu Yazid al-Bastami carried water to the house of Ja'far al-Sadiq<sup>40</sup> and Ma'ruf al-Karkhi (from Karkh, a suburb of Baghdad), who became a Muslim at the hands of Imam Rida, was the doorkeeper of the Imam's house until he died.<sup>41</sup> Renowned scholars took pride in benefiting from the Imams' knowledge through their association with them. When Anas ibn Malik was asked a question at the door of his house, he did not answer the questioner at the door. He was asked why he did not answer at the door. He said: I gained [my] knowledge from Ja'far ibn Muhammad al-Sadiq. When I went to him to benefit from him, he got up and put on the best clothes and perfumed himself and sat in the foremost part of his house and praised God, the Exalted and taught me something.<sup>42</sup> The benefits made by Abu Hanifah from Imam Sadiq are too evident to be in need of proof.<sup>43</sup>

## The Eighth Issue

### On the Imamate of the next eleven Imams

**Allamah al-Tusi:** The widely transmitted traditions prove the Imamate of the other eleven Imams; they are Imams because of the necessity of their infallibility and the non-infallibility of all others, and because of their physical and spiritual perfections.

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<sup>40</sup> *Rawdat al-jannat*, vol. 4, p. 150, no. 371, quoted from *Jami' al-Anwar* and *al-Arba'in* of Fakhr al-Din al-Razi.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 8, p. 123, no. 717.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 7, p. 211, no. 627.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 8, p. 153, no. 731.

**Allamah al-Hilli:** The 11 Imams are: al-Hasan ibn Ali, succeeded by his brother al-Husayn, succeeded by Ali ibn Zayn al-'Abidin, succeeded by Ja'far ibn Muhammad al-Sadiq, succeeded by Musa ibn Ja'far al-Kazim, succeeded by his son Ali al-Rida, succeeded by his son Muhammad al-Jawad, succeeded by his son Ali al-Hadi, succeeded by his son the awaited Imam.

Proof of the Imamate of the eleven Imams:

First, the traditions as conveyed by the Shi'a narrators based on the multiple unbroken chains of transmission [naql al-mutawatir] handed down from generation to generation prove the Imamate of each through the explicit specification of their names.<sup>44</sup> Sunni narrators reported the Imamate through multiple channels, some in brief and some in detail. For instance, among the many traditions in this regard, it has been widely narrated from the Prophet who said to Husayn: "This son of mine is an Imam, who is the son of an Imam [i.e., Imam 'Ali] and the brother of an Imam [i.e., Imam Hasan]; he is the father of nine Imams, the ninth of whom would be the Qa'im (the one who will rise; redresser of wrongs)."<sup>45</sup> It was also narrated from Masruq: "[One day] we were in the company of Abdullah bin Mas'ud [to get our copies of the Quran checked by him so that they were free of errors]. A young man asked, 'Has your Prophet told you about the number of his successors?' He replied, 'You are very young; this is something no one has asked me before. Now I will tell you about it. Yes, our Prophet informed us that

<sup>44</sup> *al-Irshad* of al-Shaykh al-Mufid, pp. 187-188; *Ithbat al-Hudat* of al-Shaykh al-Hurr al-'Amili, vol. 1, p. 675.

<sup>45</sup> *Fara'id al-Simtayn*, vol. 2, p. 132, nos. 430 and 431, and *also hadith al-lawh*, nos. 432-435 and also nos. 442-445 and 447; *Ithbat al-Hudat*, vol. 1, p. 573, nos. 475-478.

indeed there would twelve successors after him and it would be equal to the number of the chiefs of the children of Israel.”<sup>46</sup>

Second, as explained before, the Imam should be infallible, and it is unanimously agreed that except for them, others are not infallible. Infallibility is exclusive to them only; otherwise it would necessitate that the earth be void of an infallible Imam, while we proved it to be impossible.<sup>47 48</sup>

Third, all the spiritual and physical perfections are possessed by each of them. Just as the Imam is perfect in himself, he brings others to perfection.<sup>49</sup> And this entitles him to universal authority, because each of them was superior to anyone else of his time. And it will be rationally wrong to prefer an inferior to a superior. Therefore, it is necessary that each of them be an Imam; this is a causal proof (*al-burhan al-limmi*), an inference from cause to effect.

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<sup>46</sup> *Ithbat al-Hudat*, vol. p. 580, nos. 500, 522 and 524.

<sup>47</sup> The author means that either the Imams are to be the infallibles or there were no infallibles at all and the latter is impossible.

<sup>48</sup> *Ithbat al-Hudat*, vol. 1, p. 580, no. 500; *Risalah fi'l-imamah* at the end of (fi akhir) *talkhis al-muhassal*, p. 428; *Fara'id al-simtayn*, vol. 2, p. 132, nos. 430 and 431.

<sup>49</sup> al-Shafi, vol. 2, p. 41; *Risalah fi'l-imamah*, p. 428; *Ithbat al-Hudat*, pp. 1-3; *Kashf al-ghummah fi ma' rifat al-a'imma*, vol. 1, pp. 54-59.

A GLIMPSE OF NAHJUL BALAGHA'S *SERMON  
OF DISPARAGEMENT (AL-KHUTBAH AL-  
QASI'AH)*

SAYYID JAMAL AL-DEEN DEENPARVAR  
TRANSLATED BY FATEMEH SOLTANMOHAMMADI

**ABSTRACT:** A masterpiece of Shi'i Islam literature, *Nahjul Balaghah*, or *The Peak of Eloquence*, is a celebrated collection of sermons, letters, tafsirs, and narrations attributed to Imam Ali – the cousin and son-in-law of Prophet Muhammad – and compiled by Sharif al-Razi, a Shi'a scholar in the tenth century. Among the 245 sermons, Deenparvar touches upon the 'Sermon of Disparagement', in which the Imam condemns Satan for his arrogance – a quality that lures people to committing a myriad of other immoral actions – and warns people not to fall into Satan's trap. This paper offers a glance into the reasons for Divine trials, qualities of Satan, and the effects and consequences of arrogance and following one's desires.

## Introduction

In the following paper, I will provide a commentary on the excerpt from the 'Sermon of Disparagement' from *Nahjul Balaghah*. Imam Ali said:

Then He put His angels on trial concerning these attributes in order to distinguish those who are modest from those who are vain. Therefore, Allah, who is aware of whatever is hidden in the hearts and whatever lies behind the unseen said:

*"Verily I am about to create man from clay," And when I have completed and have breathed into him of My spirit, then fall ye prostrating in obeisance unto him. And did fall prostrating in obeisance the angels all together, Save Iblis... (38:71-74).*

His vanity stood in his way. Consequently, he felt proud over Adam by virtue of his creation and boasted over him on account of his origin. Thus, this enemy of Allah is the leader of those who boast, and the forerunner of the vain. It is he who laid the foundation of factionalism, quarreled with Allah about the robe of greatness, put on the dress of haughtiness and took off the covering of humility. Do you not see how Allah made him low on account of his vanity and humiliated him for his feigning to be high? He discarded him in this world and provided for him burning fire in the next world.



ثُمَّ اخْتَبَرَ بِذَلِكَ مَلَائِكَتَهُ الْمُقَرَّبِينَ، لِيُمَيِّزَ الْمُتَوَاضِعِينَ مِنْهُمْ مِنَ الْمُسْتَكْبِرِينَ، فَقَالَ سُبْحَانَهُ وَهُوَ الْعَالِمُ بِمُضْمَرَاتِ الْقُلُوبِ، وَمَخْجُوبَاتِ الْغُيُوبِ: (إِنِّي خَالِقُ بَشَرًا مِنْ طِينٍ \* فَإِذَا سَوَّيْتُهُ وَنَفَخْتُ فِيهِ مِنْ رُوحِي فَقَعُوا لَهُ سَاجِدِينَ \* فَسَجَدَ الْمَلَائِكَةُ كُلُّهُمْ أَجْمَعُونَ \* إِلَّا إِبْلِيسَ) اعْتَرَضَهُ الْحَمِيَّةُ، فَأَفْتَحَرَ عَلَى آدَمَ بَخْلَفِهِ، وَتَعَصَّبَ عَلَيْهِ لِأَصْلِهِ. فَعَدُوُ اللَّهِ إِمَامُ الْمُتَعَصِّبِينَ، وَسَلَفُ الْمُسْتَكْبِرِينَ، الَّذِي وَضَعَ أَسَاسَ الْعَصَبِيَّةِ، وَنَارَعَ اللَّهَ رِذَاءَ الْجَبَرِيَّةِ، وَادَّرَعَ لِبَاسَ التَّعَزُّزِ، وَخَلَعَ فِتْنَانَ التَّدَلُّلِ. أَلَا تَرَوْنَ كَيْفَ صَغَّرَهُ اللَّهُ بِتَكْبَرِهِ، وَوَضَعَهُ بِتَرْفُوعِهِ، فَجَعَلَهُ فِي الدُّنْيَا مَذْخُورًا، وَأَعَدَّ لَهُ فِي الْآخِرَةِ سَعِيرًا؟!

### The Trial of Angels

A few points will made using the above excerpt:

1. Divine tests are not limited to humans alone; angels are tested as well.
2. Humility and arrogance exists in the world of angels.
3. The relationship between angels and humans.

The system of creation is a complete structure in which God has made the means and tools for reaching perfection available; tests and trials are one of those means.

Angels were created and tested before humans. 'Testing' means becoming aware of the truth in something. A teacher does not know if the student has studied or not; therefore he must test him to know, although divine tests are not to make Allah aware of the truth of the matter for He knows everything. Some believe the motive is for the angels themselves to know their own rank; others hold that testing angels is for others to understand why some are chosen and others, like Satan, have fallen. In reality, tests are there to separate the lines from one another.

Testing is also defined as: 'to become' or to ripen, develop, and to leave the state of rawness towards the state of completion. If there were to be no trials, development would not happen. Trials are not just to become informed, but are rather an operation and form of transformation in which each person's identity and personality rises and emerges. Testing and trials are a workshop where the reality of a person are formed and revealed. This subject matter is found in a few other areas of the sermon and has come in regards humans as well:

الا ترون ان الله سبحانه اختبر الاولين من لدن آدم صلوات الله عليه  
الي الآخرين من هذا العالم باحجار لا تضر ولا تنفع...

Do you not see that Allah, the Glorified, has tried all the people among those who came before, beginning with Adam, up to the last ones in this world with stones which yield neither benefit nor harm?

And in another instance Imam Ali says:

وَضَعَهُ بِأَوْعَرِ بَقَاعِ الْأَرْضِ حَجْرًا وَ أَقَلِّ تَتَائِقِ الدُّنْيَا مَدْرًا وَ أَصْبَقَ بُطُونِ  
الْأَوْدِيَةِ قُطْرًا بَيْنَ جِبَالٍ خَشِيشَةٍ وَ رِمَالٍ دَمِثَةٍ وَ عُيُونٍ وَ شِلَّةٍ وَ قُرَى  
مُنْقَطِعٍ

He placed the House of Allah in the most rugged stony part of the earth and on a highland with least soil thereon, which no plant grows there, and among the narrowest valleys between rough mountains and soft sandy plains, where travel is difficult upon and springs of scanty water and scattered inhabitants.

In any case, those who are honoured to go for pilgrimage are faced with difficulties they must endure so that they may strengthen

themselves, or at least change their previously held abilities. A group of people are transformed in that short time period and for the rest of their lives find themselves on the path of guidance and bliss; yet some are not able to make use of that environment and opportunity and instead of rising, they fall. Hence, trials themselves are a workshop for self-building. In another instance the Imam says:

قد اختبرهم الله بالمخمصه و ابتلاهم بالمجهده و امتحنهم بالمخاوف...

Allah tried them with hunger, afflicted them with difficulty, tested them with fear, and upset them with troubles.

Thus, trials are not there just to become informed; rather, it is an examination where one must progress and his cruelties get dispelled. In another section it says:

و لكن الله يختبر عباده بانواع الشدائد و يتعبدهم بانواع المجاهد و يبتليهم بضروب المكروه اخراجاً للتكبر من قلوبهم و اسكاناً للتذلل في نفوسهم و ليجعل ذلك ابواباً فتحة الى فضله و اسباباً ذللاً لعفوه...

Allah tries His creatures by means of different troubles, wants them to render worship through hardships and involves them in distresses, all in order to extract out vanity from their hearts. In sermon 91, he emphasizes this very point:

و قدر الارزاق و كثرها و قللها و قسمها علي الضيق و السعه فعدل فيها ليبتي من اراده بميسورها و معسورها، و ليختبر بذلك الشكر و الصبر من غنيها و فقيرها...

He ordained livelihoods with plenty and with paucity. He distributed them narrowly as well as profusely. He did it with justice to test whomever He desired, with

prosperity or with destitution, and to test through it the  
gratefulness or endurance of the rich and the poor.<sup>1</sup>

In truth, the scarcity and abundance in sustenance based on God's wisdom and justice is for people's growth and transformation so that they progress and come to understand that both are to his benefit; just as seen in narrations:

و من الناس من لا يصلحهم إلا الفقر فإذا اغنيته افسده ذلك

There some people whom if reach great livelihood and sustenance, will become corrupt; therefore their best interest and welfare lies in the shortening of livelihood.

If an individual was placed in a crisis with hardships and adversities and did not turn to sin (a prohibited or haram act) and gave thanks to his Lord, his thanks and patience would be the symbol of a positive and building growth and evolution. Clearer and more eloquent than all is the last sentence from saying number 90:

لا يقولن أحدكم: "اللهم آتني أعوذ بك من الفتنه، لأنه ليس أحد إلا و هو مشتمل علي فتنه و لكن من استعاذ، فليستعذ من مضلات الفتن. فإن الله سبحانه يقول: " و اعلموا انما اموالكم و اولادكم فتنه " ، و معني ذلك انه سبحانه يختبرهم بالاموال و الاولاد ليتبين الساخطين لرزقه و الراضي بقسمه و ان كان سبحانه اعلم بهم من انفسهم و لكن لتظهر الافعال التي بها يستحق الثواب و العقاب.

None of you should say, "O Allah, I seek Your protection from trouble" because there is no one who is not involved in trouble, but whoever seeks Allah's protection he should seek it from misguiding

<sup>1</sup> *Nahjul Balaghah*, Sermon of Skeletons (*Khutbah al-Ashbah*).

troubles, because Allah, the Glorified, says: "And know you that your wealth and your children are a temptation!" (Qur'an, 8:28) and its meaning is that He tries people with wealth and progeny in order to distinguish one who is displeased with his livelihood from the one who is happy with what he has been given. Even though Allah, the Glorified, knows them more than they know themselves yet He does so to let them perform actions with which they earn reward or punishment.

This means let a truth be recognized and formed within them; that person who becomes angry, complains, and protests to God because of crises and his livelihood and or that person who is not fazed by the ups and downs, but rather expresses his gratification. Reaching the level of satisfaction after passing through difficulties and hardships is that very truth that is revealed and made present.

Hence, it is made clear that tests and trials are not there to increase God's knowledge; rather it is a workshop where people can grow, develop, and reach perfection or burn and get eliminated. Even clearer than the aforementioned evidence is the following passage:

ثُمَّ اخْتَبَرَ بِذَلِكَ مَلَائِكَتَهُ الْمُقَرَّبِينَ لِيُمَيِّزَ الْمُتَوَاضِعِينَ مِنْهُمْ مِنَ الْمُسْتَكْبِرِينَ  
فَقَالَ سُبْحَانَهُ وَهُوَ الْعَالِمُ بِمُضْمَرَاتِ الْقُلُوبِ وَ مَحْجُوبَاتِ الْغُيُوبِ : "إِنِّي  
خَالِقٌ بَشَرًا مِنْ طِينٍ فَإِذَا سَوَّيْتُهُ..."

To understand this test and trial so that 'humble' (متواضعين) be distinguished from the 'arrogant' (مستكبرين), God the glorified, who knows that which is hidden in the hearts and that which is unseen within,

announced: “*Indeed I am about to create a human being out of clay. So when I have proportioned him and breathed into him of My spirit, then fall down to him in prostration. So thereat the angels prostrated, all of them together, but not Iblis, he refused to be among those who prostrated.*” (Quran, 15:28-31)

The proof in the passage is “و هو العالم بمضمرات القلوب...” – “*And who knows that which is hidden in the hearts...*” - shows that God’s motive behind this test is not to learn something that He did not know.

### **Iblis: A Symbol of Intolerance and Arrogance**

What is zeal (*hamiyyah*)? ‘Zeal’ has various meanings and usually its negative connotations are used, which are arrogance, self-importance, and vanity. For example, the Qur’an uses this word with the suffix ‘pagan ignorance’ (*jahiliyyah*): the bigotry of pagan ignorance (حمية الجاهلية: *hamiyyata l-jāhiliyyati*) inclined to be used in simple constituents. Zeal is a power of anger which when excited will lead to an outbreak. In any case, that which is intended in this sermon is arrogance and pride. A perfect example of this can be seen in Iblis, who showed arrogance towards God and sold his greatness, all of which was revealed in a distinct event. He ignored and objected God’s command in regards to Adam and prostrating to him, and the product of this arrogance and pride were two other vices: boastfulness and the prejudice of pagan ignorance. He bragged about the virtue of his creation and used it as a weapon against his creator; he who was a creation of God, who had nothing of himself to boast about, and all of which he had was from God. Bigotry of pagan ignorance thus refers to blindly advocating and

supporting something with no logical base. Iblis's words here are the root of racism and nationalism, which has caused major difficulties for various nations throughout history, and colonizers have used this deceiving tool and weapon in taking advantage of the deprived.

فعدّو الله امام المتعصّبين و سلف المستكبرين الذي وضع اساس  
العصبيّه و نازع الله رداء الجبريّه و ادرع لباس التعزّز، و خلع قناع  
التذلل

Thus, this enemy of Allah is the leader of those who boast, and the fore-runner of the vain. It is he who laid the foundation of factionalism, quarrelled with Allah about the robe of greatness, put on the dress of haughtiness and took off the covering of humility.

### **The Effects of Arrogance and Pride**

One of the important points made in the *Nahjul Balaghah* (Peak of Eloquence) is the development of thinking and motivation in reflection and contemplation. Those who listen closely to these sermons and study them, fall into deep thought and through struggling to understand, discover the truth and find proper solutions.

Sometimes by means of a one lettered word, like "فا", a matter is brought to mind and conclusions made upon it. For instance, in this section of the sermon, as philosophers would say, the minor premise (*al-sughra*) and conclusion (*natijah*) of a coupled syllogism are clearly stated, and detecting the major premise (*al-kubra*) is left to the reader:

- 1) Satan was arrogant towards God. (Minor Premise)

- 2) Whoever does such towards the Divine, is an enemy of God.  
(Major Premise)
- 3) Then, Satan is an enemy of God. "فعدّو الله" (Conclusion)

Thus, the outcome of arrogance is rivalry with God, which is greater than any sin and the source of all evil and immorality.

Another matter is the headship and leadership of the arrogant: امام المتعصّبين و سلف المستكبرين

That is to say, a person who places himself arrogantly before God as His enemy and opposes His command, not only has he ruined himself and deviated from the right path, but he has played a role in the misguidance and fall of others; just as it has been stated in the Qur'an:

و جعلناهم ائمة يدعون الي النار

*We made them leaders who invite to the Fire.*<sup>2</sup>

#### Four Traits of Iblis

1. The foundation of prejudice is ignorant attachments and blind defense. Wherever there is a thoughtless bias, it is a sign of linkage to Satan, where the biased are inspired by him and act according to his command.

(وضع اساس العصبية: It is he who laid the foundation of factionalism)

2. Iblis ranks at the highest level of the arrogant and bigots. He considered himself equal to God and His might, and saw

<sup>2</sup> The Story (*al-Qasas*) [28:41].



greatness and power in himself. As a result, his course of action was to argue and oppose God's command, and instead of carrying out God's order, he himself issued a command. (نَازَعَ اللَّهَ رِدَاءَ الْجُبِّيَّةِ: quarrelled with Allah about the robe of greatness)

3. He considered himself to be glorious and undefeatable, and overlooked his weakness and vulnerability. (وَادَّرَعَ لِبَاسَ : put on the dress of haughtiness)
4. He separated himself with the garment of modesty and humility and turned in pursuit of transgression and rebellion. (خَلَعَ قِنَاعَ التَّذَلُّلِ: took off the covering of humility)

### The Penalty of the Arrogant

أَلَا تَرَوْنَ كَيْفَ صَغَّرَهُ اللَّهُ بِتَكْبَرِهِ... وَاعْدَلَهُ فِي الْآخِرَةِ سَعِيرًا

After mentioning the effects of arrogance and its manifestations, Imam Ali hints at the punishment of the prideful, in which its consequences are the miseries that will befall upon them: *"Do you not see how Allah made him low on account of his vanity and humiliated him for his feigning to be high? He discarded him in this world and provided for him burning fire in the next world."*

The natural consequences of 'arrogance' and 'vanity' are humiliation, lowliness, disgrace, and punishment. An important point is the relation between the opposition of the proud and their arrogant lives with the system of creation. Whoever argues with this system and the laws of the universe is condemned to defeat; just as he who swims against the water current will get caught up in its waves.

Therefore, he who wants to step foot in the forbidden realm of God's power is like a person who disregards and neglects gravity, and will definitely fall prey to nature's wrath and will fall with force and lose his life. An arrogant person places himself in a spot which is specifically for God alone.

On the night journey of ascension (*mi'raj*), Angel Gabriel told Prophet Muhammad:

لو دنوت انملة لاحترقث

If I get any closer I will burn"; not that they will burn me.

In another words, one can say that these four acts: He belittled and lessened (صغر) Iblis, He brought down his rank (وضع), He discarded him in this world (جعل في الدنيا مدحورا), and He provided for him burning fire in the next world (اعد...) are not direct actions; they are consequences of Iblis's actions.

In this way, God has created the law and system based upon truth and justice, to reach perfection and growth, and as a tool set for testing. For this reason, if people or any other creature steps foot along the appointed path, he will reach this goal and will attain success. And if one discards this path and chooses another, he will break. Hence, the outstanding system of the divine is such that it does not bode well with arrogance, does not accept vanity, and will naturally have a harsh punishment awaiting it. This means that the four acts attributed to God, were in reality Iblis's doing, and since he did not adhere and follow the system and rejected it, he crumbled among the great machinery of the universe's system. Imam Ali says: "صغره الله بتكبره و وضعه بترفعه" It was arrogance and vanity that brought this calamity upon himself, and not God.

### The Divine Secrets of Trial

وَلَوْ أَرَادَ اللَّهُ أَنْ يَخْلُقَ آدَمَ مِنْ نُورٍ يَخْطَفُ الْأَبْصَارَ ضِيَاؤُهُ وَيَبْهَرُ الْعُقُولَ  
رُؤَاؤُهُ وَطِيبٌ يَأْخُذُ الْأَنْفَاسَ عَرْفُهُ، لَفَعَلَ، وَلَوْ فَعَلَ لَطَلَّتْ لَهُ الْأَعْنَاقُ  
خَاضِعَةً، وَلَخَفَّتِ الْبُلُوبُ فِيهِ عَلَى الْمَلَائِكَةِ

If Allah had wanted to create Adam from a light whose glare would have dazzled the eyes, whose handsomeness would have amazed the wits and whose fragrance would have caught the breath, He could have done so; and if He had done so, people would have bowed to him in humility and the trial of the angels through him would have become easier.

وَلَكِنَّ اللَّهَ سُبْحَانَهُ يَتَّبِعِي خَلْقَهُ بَعْضُ مَا يَجْهَلُونَ أَصْلَهُ، تَمْيِيزاً بِالِاخْتِبَارِ  
لَهُمْ، وَتَفْخِياً لِلْأَسْتِكْبَارِ عَنْهُمْ، وَإِبْعَاداً لِلْخِيَلَاءِ مِنْهُمْ

But Allah, the Glorified, tries His creatures by means of those things whose real nature they do not know in order to distinguish (good and bad) for them through the trial, and to remove vanity from them and keep them and keep them aloof from pride and self-admiration.

God's tests are a serious and fundamental matter, and typically must be in tough and productive situations so that people grow and build themselves for their change and transformation to take place. Passing through the difficulties and ups and downs is to attain power and perfection; the more the difficulties, the more the growth and progress, just as reaching the peak of physical strength and developing strong and firm muscles is gained by enduring pressure and perseverance in difficult tasks. If a person is not able to bear the pressure with resistance, he will not reach that summit; and if he

does bear it, buds of growth and perfection will open and the quantity of means will turn into the quality of power.

If man was not created from a dark clay, but rather from a mesmerizing light, and such a light that none felt equal to or even close to in stature, then there would no longer be an excuse for the angels to say that this human made of clay will cause corruption and bloodshed on earth. And before it, Iblis would never say 'I am better, for he is of clay and I am of fire.' Surely prostrating before Adam would have been much easier.

Thus, if the truth and motive behind Adam's creation was known—that he is worthy of being God's representative on Earth (*khalifatullah fil 'ardh*), and the growth, perfection, development, and prosperity that arises will be a result of that which radiates from his existence, Iblis would have never stood before him and would have been submissive and obedient.

In such a situation, testing and trials would not have a purpose, and every person would obey God's commands. It is similar to setting out a colourful tablecloth in a room, with various delicious foods and beverages all acquired with lawful money and then invite a group of hungry people to eat from the lawful food (*halaal*) and not from the distasteful and unlawful food that can be found in another room. If one does not choose to eat from the unlawful food, it cannot be used as proof and reasoning for his faith and piety.

Therefore, the system of the universe set for people and other creatures to reach perfection is not a formality; this system is based upon a set of truths in which people play the main role in. An important act and reaction must form in his existence, and that is

divine testing that reveals and builds the gems of human existence. Divine tests, however, are demonstrated when the ‘tools used for testing’ are a serious matter and to an extent undistinguishable. That is to say, a situation must arise in which, from a spiritual perspective and in order to make a choice, a need for great inner struggle must form in the individual until intellect dominates desires and the state of submission before God comes to life within them. Then after a choice is made, a sacred choice in which its practices are a reflection of one’s inner struggle. Imam Ali says the following in regards to this ambiguity – the secret of divine testing:

Allah tries his servant in a matter they do not know the truth of, and this is ambiguous, for in a situation where they do not know and are unaware of the philosophy behind God’s command, room for doubt and uncertainty is prepared. Therefore, he must think and discern the truth from falsehood and that which he questioned in regards to submitting to God, with the help of the intellect, eliminate from one’s self to finally make a decisive choice to follow God’s command in all situations and give it priority before everything else.

و لَكِنَّ اللَّهَ سَبْحَانَهُ يَبْتَلِي خَلْقَهُ بَعْضُ مَا يَجْهَلُونَ أَصْلَهُ

God’s creation is tried in things whose real nature people do not know. The angels were unaware of the secrets behind Adam’s creation and his eligibility in being God’s representative, and did not know that people’s growth, prosperity and development on earth will occur through him. Knowing the truth behind an obligation is easier. If God created Adam from a light greater than their light,

they would recognize it and know the secret of his creation. For that reason, prostrating to Adam would not have been difficult for them; they would have accepted without question and as a result, being tried and tested would be meaningless.

During Imam Ali's era, people's trials were carried out in a similar situation. During the Battle of Siffeen, Imam Ali issued an order to attack Mu'awiyah's army, but Mu'awiyah created doubt and uncertainty amongst the Imam's followers. From one end, Mu'awiyah's army attached copies of the Qur'an to the end of spears and declaring adherence to the it, and from another end the command to fight (*jihad*) came from the Imam were both uncertain to the people; here the conditions for testing were formed to distinguish the faithful from the faithless.

فاعتبروا بما كان من فعل الله بابليس اذ أحبط عمله الطويل، و جمده  
الجهيد و قد كان عبد الله ستة آلاف سنة لا يدري امن سني الدنيا ام  
سني الآخرة- عن كبر ساعه واحده.

You should take a lesson from what Allah did with Satan; namely, He nullified his great acts and extensive efforts on account of the vanity of one moment, although Satan had worshipped Allah for six thousand years - whether by the reckoning of this world or of the next world is not known.

Two points are taken from this passage:

- 1- Learning from Iblis's test
- 2- A warning from retribution

3- God's tests and trials are not limited to Iblis alone; rather everyone, particularly humans, are being tested. Therefore, his past and his fate should be made a lesson for all. The word "فاعتبروا" is the Imam's direct order to take a lesson from history and to avoid letting time pass by. This has been repeated fifteen times in the sermon, using different terms:

- 1) انظروا: look (4 times)
- 2) فاعتبروا: take lesson (3 times)
- 3) فاحذروا: you should fear (3 times)
- 4) الحذر: beware
- 5) فاتقوا: be conscious
- 6) اتعظوا: take admonition
- 7) استعينوا: seek protection
- 8) الله الله: (fear) Allah! Allah!
- 9) تدبروا: think

None should be arrogant about their worship and faith. Rather, people should constantly be between the two states of 'fear' and 'hope,' for perhaps there are people who worship for many years and seem God-conscious and pious through appearance, but when faced with the ups and downs in life, Satan's calls, and the desires of their souls they lose their stature and exit the realm of religion and piety. A clear example of this is Iblis who had six thousand years of worship under his belt, but when tested he failed and his worship nullified.

An influential method to people's guidance and happiness is preparing the grounds for people to open their hearts, accept guidance and instructions, and walk upon the path of piety and

faith. If people become familiar with the life events of those who have deviated from the truth and see the outcome of sin and rebellion against God, they will accept the truth more comfortably and easily.

Imam Ali initially discusses the events taken place in Iblis's past, accounting the turning points, stumbles, and lapses in judgment. He then uses the appropriate setting and with a sentence to take caution "فاعتبروا" he warns the readers from falling due to such lapses. Similar to the verses regarding the fate of the people of Noah and the people of A'ad and Thamud mentioned plenty in the Qur'an and advised by it to take lessons from them:

انّ في ذلك لآية لمن خاف عذاب الآخرة

*There is indeed a sign in that for him who fears the punishment of the Hereafter.<sup>3</sup>*

## 2- Warning from 'adverse consequences' and 'lost efforts'

Iblis worshiped for six thousand years (though it is unclear if this is based on the years in this world or the hereafter). Either way, all of his worship was nullified because of refusing to prostrate to Adam and carrying out God's command; thus, he became imprisoned by 'adverse consequences.' Whoever disobeys His orders will suffer a doomful fate and will leave this world faithless, unless if he turns back and repents:

وكان من قريه عتث عن امر ربها ورسله فحاسبناها حساباً شديداً و  
عذبناها عذاباً نكراً، فذاقت وبال امرها و كان عاقبه امرها خسراً

<sup>3</sup> (Hud) [11:103].



*How many a town defied the command of its Lord and His apostles, then We called it to a severe account and punished it with a dire punishment. So it tasted the evil consequences of its conduct, and the outcome of its conduct was ruin.*<sup>4</sup>

Verily people should be worried about their future and struggle to preserve their faith, as Imam Ali said:

الدنيا كلها جهل إلا مواضع العلم، و العلم كله حجة إلا ما عمل به، و العمل كله رياء إلا ما كان مخلصاً و الاخلاص علي خطر حتي ينظر العبد بما يهتم له

This world (*dunya*) is in the darkness of ignorance, unless there which the light of knowledge shines; and all of knowledge is proof, other than that which is acted upon; and all actions are hypocritical, other than that which is sincere; and sincerity is in harm's way, until one sees where his end lies ahead.<sup>5</sup>

In truth, we must carry our faith and piety unharmed and unscathed to our destination and till the last moment of our lives protect it so that Satan and our internal desires do not harm it.

In another saying, Imam Ali points out this matter:

الغني و الفقر بعد العرض علي الله

Fortune and misfortune will be determined [on the Day of Judgment] after being presented to God.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Divorce (*al-Talaq*) [65:8-9].

<sup>5</sup> Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 2, p. 29.

<sup>6</sup> Sharh ibn Maytham, vol. 4, p. 246.

That is to say danger threatens people to the last moment and calls for steadfastness and faithfulness to submit until the end.

**The Phrase “*By the reckoning of this world or next*”:**

1- In regards to Iblis’s six thousand years of worship, Imam Ali says that it is not clear whether these six thousand years are years in this world or the next. As you know, a ‘day’ is calculated with the rising and setting of the sun. However, on the Day of Judgment when the system of the universe breaks down, time will have another meaning. Therefore, we must place day, month, and year within a figurative meaning; that is to say in that world’s context, but with a likeness to time in this world in terms of “expanse” and “narrowness.” For instance, the prosecution and punishment of a person who has killed a hundred people compared to a person who has killed one person is not the same; rather, it is a hundred times more than the other. So if the punishment for killing one person is one year, then the punishment for killing a hundred people is a hundred years – this is in terms of the difference between the two crimes, and not the year as similar to worldly years.

“Fifty thousand years” (خمسين الف سنه) in the verse: “...في يوم كان مقداره خمسين الف سنة” regarding the Day of Judgment, or “A thousand years” (الف سنة), indicates this very difference in the time and quantity of difficulties relating to the people of the next world and the relative prolonged and shortened period.

Ibn Abbas said the following about the verse “*Whose span is fifty thousand years*”: For the disbelievers, the Day of Judgment is like fifty thousand years, for the punishment is so severe they will feel that day to prolong that much. Also, in the commentary of Ibn

Maytham, regarding how the righteous and the believers will perceive that day to be short: “Abu Sa’id al-Khudri says someone told the Prophet, “The Day of Judgement is fifty thousand years. How long!” The Prophet replied, “I swear by He who holds my life in the power of His grip, that day is so easy and short for the believers that it is even easier than performing two rak’ahs (set) of obligatory prayers in this world.”<sup>7</sup> Thus, that time in the hereafter is based on a different scale and foundation, for how is it possible for the Day of Judgment to be fifty thousand years for one person and a moment for another?

2- Ibn Maytham writes in his commentary: “In Sharif Radi’s<sup>8</sup> version instead of « لا يُدري » (passive verb), « لا يدري » (active verb) has been used.

Before we discuss the meanings of these two phrases, it is necessary to point out that the quote taken from Ibn Maytham is used given that he had Allamah Sharif Radi’s manuscript of *Nahjul Balaghah*. Although there are similar ones in other places as well,<sup>9</sup> in terms of the authenticity of the document, this is valuable. The chain of narration of this book goes back to over a thousand years and shows that the *Nahjul Balaghah* we hold in our hands today is the same copy as the one written by Sharif Radi. This makes its citations and connection to the time of Imam Ali clear and it preserves our connection with the fourth and fifth century, an era where vast and

<sup>7</sup> Commentary of Ibn Maytham, vol. 4, p 246.

<sup>8</sup> Known in Arabic as al-Sharif al-Radi or in Farsi as Sharif Razi or Sayyid Razi. Born in Baghdad in the year 970 CE. His most notable work is the compilation of the Peak of Eloquence (*Nahjul Balaghah*), a collection of Imam Ali (as)’s quotations. His elder brother, Sayyid Murtadha was also a great scholar; a theologian and poet.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., vol. 4, p. 47 and 275.

countless Islamic resources were untouched, and the tragic events of the Mughal and European invasions along with the destruction of great libraries had not taken place yet. This is one of the rare books which have such authentic scholarly and academic grounds in terms of manuscripts.

Now the primary content: If it is *يَدْرِي* (active verb), the meaning becomes such that Iblis is one of the individuals who also does not know those six thousand years are of what year; it has not been mentioned for anyone to know. However, if we read it as *يُدْرِي* (passive verb), then it must be that Imam Ali briefly heard the Prophet say something regarding this matter, although no commentary or explanation has been given. It could be that the Imam knew the explanation and details concerning it, but did not tell the people, for their minds could not bear to receive and understand it. For instance, if its days were six thousand years then each would be calculated as fifty thousand years in this world. The number 6,000 would be multiplied by (360 x 50,000) which would equal to 108,000,000,000 days.<sup>10</sup>

In any case, the calculation and acceptance of it is implausible for the general public and the best interpretation is the passive tense of *لا يَدْرِي*; meaning “it will not be known.”

### **A Moment of Following One's Desires; A Lifetime of Regret (The extensiveness of one hour)**

Why was Iblis's six thousand years of worship nullified? He was arrogant for an hour. Of course, one hour does not mean sixty

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<sup>10</sup> Commentary of Ibn Maytham, vol. 4, p. 247.

minutes here; it refers to one moment, the moment of decision making and the actions carried out afterwards are dependent on it. Therefore, those individuals who do good deeds and are on the path of worship and piety must pay attention not to be heedless of the path to God which in all arenas, especially political and societal matters, can throw one from the peak of faithfulness to the bottom of faithlessness and can bring to ruins a lifetime's worth of struggle to finally make one a dweller of the hellfire. Those during the time of Imam Ali, who stood facing him in opposition and led three bloody battles against the Imam, fell from such a cliff and were overtaken with arrogance and a thirst for power until finally in a moment, after years of faithfulness, fell to the depths of the hellfire:

ثُمَّ كَانَ عَاقِبَةُ الَّذِينَ أَسَاءُوا السُّوْأَىٰ أَنْ كَذَّبُوا بِآيَاتِ اللَّهِ وَكَانُوا بِهَا يَسْتَهْزِئُونَ

*Then the fate of those who committed misdeeds was that they denied the signs of Allah and they used to deride them.*<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> The Byzantines (*al-Rum*) [30:10].

## IMAM AL-HADI: TORCH-HOLDERS OF GUIDANCE SERIES<sup>1</sup>

JA'FAR ANWARI

TRANSLATED BY MAHBOOBEH MORSHEDIAN

**ABSTRACT:** The need for a leader to apply the Prophet's teachings is necessary to guide humankind for moral and intellectual achievement with precise instruction of the Qur'an and Sunnah, and to justly govern a society. Imamah, the universal administrator of the Islam Nation after prophethood, is one of the five principles of Shi'i Islam. This article is a short biography of Imam al-Hadi, the tenth of the Twelve Imams whom are the spiritual and political successors to the Prophet Muhammad. A short biography will be offered, including Features such as his instructions and the social and political condition during his time.

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<sup>1</sup> Farhang-e Kowrhar.

## Introduction

God has placed tendencies and insights in man's nature. One of these tendencies is curiosity or the desire for discovering the truth.

With this tendency, man constantly seeks to discover the mysteries and hidden facts of creation and the universe. Man is more inclined and motivated to know that which relates to him, and it has a noticeable impact on his life and salvation.

Moreover, knowledge about religious leaders is the main factor in reaching the summit of salvation. From the Shi'a viewpoint, the "Infallible leaders" are the pioneers of treading the path of salvation and torch-holders of Divine guidance, so it is necessary to know them. In the Imam's words, knowing God depends on knowing Imams.<sup>2</sup> Although thinkers and historians have failed to grasp all aspects of the religious leaders' lives, there is certainly room to delve into this issue.

## Imam al-Hadi's life at a glance

### Birth and martyrdom

Imam al-Hadi was born on Zul-Hajjah 15<sup>th</sup> 212 A.H.<sup>3</sup> His name is Ali, and his well-known titles are "Hadi" (Guide) and "Naqi"

<sup>2</sup> According to Abi Abdillah, "Imam Hussain told his companions, "O people! Surely Allah has not created mankind but to know Him ..." A man asked him, "O son of the Messenger of Allah! May my father and mother be sacrificed for you! What is the knowledge of Allah?" He said, "That people of each era know that Imam to whom obedience is obligatory for them" (*Bihar-ul-Anwar*, vol. 5, p. 312, Dar-ul-Kutub al-Islamiyyah).

عن ابي عبدالله (ع) قال: خرج الحسين بن علي (ع) على اصحابه فقال: يا ايها الناس ان الله جل ذكره ما خلق العباد الا ليعرفوه... فقال له رجل: يا ابن رسول الله بابي انت وامي، فما معرفة الله؟ قال: معرفة اهل كل زمان امامهم الذي يجب عليهم طاعته

<sup>3</sup> Mufid, Muhammad, *Irshad*, p. 327, 'Alami Institute, Beirut.

(Pure).<sup>4</sup> His epithet is “Abul-Hasan,”<sup>5</sup> and hadith narrators know him as the “third Abul-Hasan.”

Along with his son Imam al-Askari, he was exiled to the city of Samarra. Since they resided in Askar, they were referred to as Askariyan.<sup>6</sup> After a long stay in Samarra and 33 years of leadership of the Shi’as, he was martyred by an Abbasid caliph and was buried in Samarra, where people visit his shrine until today.

### **His Imamate**

After the martyrdom of his father Imam al-Jawad, in 220 A.H., Imam al-Hadi became the Shi’a leader while he was only 8 years old. Since the Shi’as had seen Imam Jawad beginning his Imamate at the age of 9, it was not difficult for them to accept his leadership. In some hadiths, the Infallible Imams referred to the Qur’anic verses to prove this commonly discussed theological issue.

In response to a question about Jesus Christ’s being the Hujjat (Proof) of God at an early age, Imam al-Baqir put forth Jesus Christ’s word as evidence of this<sup>7</sup> as indicated in the Quran.<sup>8</sup> In justifying the Imamate of Imam al-Jawad, Imam al-Rida also referred to the story of Jesus in the Quran.<sup>9</sup> In the same line, Imam Jawad spoke of the equality of imamate and prophethood.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Majlisi, Muhammad Baqir, *The History of the 14 Infallibles*, p. 975, Sorur Publications.

<sup>5</sup> Ibn Shahr Ashub, Muhammad ibn Ali, *Manaqib*, vol. 3, p. 505, Heydariyyah, Najaf.

<sup>6</sup> Saduq, Muhammad, *Ilal-u-Sharayi*, p.241, a-Dawari Publications, Qum.

<sup>7</sup> Kulayni, Muhammad, *Usul al-Kafi*, vol. 1, p. 446, Beirut, section 147. Halat-ul-A’immah fi-Sinn.

<sup>8</sup> Maryam, 29, 30.

<sup>9</sup> Kulayni, Muhammad, *Usul al-Kafi*, vol. 1, pp. 380, 447, Beirut.

<sup>10</sup> *ibid.*, p.448, section 147.



The hadiths indicate that there is no age requirement for imamate and prophethood. From a rational and philosophical perspective, there is no intellectual obstacle. Therefore, the unlimited power of God and His will necessitate the realization of imamate.

As in the case of other Imams, the Imamate of Imam al-Hadi was established through his father Imam Jawad's explicit referring to him, in addition to the 11<sup>th</sup> Imam's extraordinary acts and the Imams' prophecies. According to Isma'il ibn Mihran, "When Imam Jawad decided to travel to Iraq for the second time, I went to him and told him about my concerns, that is, the next Imam after him. He responded, 'After me, the Shi'a leadership will be assumed by my son, Ali.'"<sup>11</sup>

Shaikh Mufid also wrote, "The next Imam after Imam Jawad is his son, Ali ibn Muhammad, since he possesses all features of an Imam and has reached the peak of perfection in every respect..." There are numerous hadiths in this regard, but since Shi'as agreed on the Imamate and leadership of Imam al-Hadi, and nobody else claimed Imamate then, it is not necessary to refer to all Hadiths here.<sup>12</sup>

According to Hasan ibn Musa Nowbakhti, "The 9<sup>th</sup> Imam's companions and followers accepted the Imamate of his son, Ali ibn Muhammad. There was only a small group who turned to Musa ibn Muhammad (Musa Mubarka'), but they changed their minds shortly after and accepted the Imamate of Imam al-Hadi."<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> *ibid.*, p 381.

<sup>12</sup> *Irshad*, p. 329.

<sup>13</sup> Nowbakhti, Hassan ibn Musa, *al-Shi'a Sects*, p. 91, Heydariyyah, Najaf.

### Features of Imam al-Hadi's era

During his Imamate, Imam al-Hadi was contemporary with six Abbasid caliphs: Mu'tasim, Wathiq, Mutawakkil, Muntasir, Musta'im and Mu'tazz.<sup>14</sup> Mu'tasim and Wathiq followed in Ma'mun's footsteps and treated the Imams leniently yet deceptively. However, when Mutawakkil came into power, the political arena changed entirely, and the 10<sup>th</sup> Imam and his followers experienced severe pressure. Abul-Faraj Isfahani related, "Mutawakkil treated the Alawids worse than all other Abbasid caliphs. His oppression of Alawids was unprecedented in the Abbasid rule."<sup>15</sup>

Mutawakkil feared the presence of Imam al-Hadi in Medina. The thought that the Imam might undertake political activities disturbed his peace of mind. He had been seeking a solution for this problem until he came up with the Satanic idea of exiling the Imam from Medina to Samarra. Concurrently, he received a letter from Abdullah ibn Muhammad, who led the public prayer and commanded the army in Medina. This letter removed all Mutawakkil's doubt about his decision. In his letter, Abdullah wrote, "If you want Mecca and Medina to be under your control, banish Ali ibn Muhammad al-Hadi from these cities since he invites people to accept his Imamate, and many have started to follow him."<sup>16</sup>

In a letter to Mutawakkil, the 10<sup>th</sup> Imam denied this report.<sup>17</sup> In response, Mutawakkil informed him of removing Abdullah ibn

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<sup>14</sup> Tabarsi, Amin-ul-Islam, *'Alam-ul-Wura*, p. 339, Dar-ul-Ma'rifah, Beirut.

<sup>15</sup> Isfahani, Faraj, *Maqatil al-Talibin*, p. 395, Heydariyyah, Najaf.

<sup>16</sup> *Bihar-ul-Anwar*, vol. 50, p 209.

<sup>17</sup> *Irshad*, p. 333.

Muhammad from office and inviting him to Samarra. An excerpt of the letter reads as follows:

In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, Most Merciful, surely Amir-al-Mu'minin appreciates your grandness, observes your kinship rights, considers it necessary to observe all your rights ... Surely I [Amir-al-Mu'minin] have removed Abdullah ibn Muhammad from all his positions, that is, commanding the army and leading the public prayer in Medina.<sup>18</sup>

In analysis of this letter:

1. The wording of Mutawakkil, who had hidden a grudge against the Imam and showed hostility toward him, was literary and decent, pretending to be fond of the Imam, and leaving no doubt about his intentions.
2. He repeated the word "Amir-al-Mu'minin" eight times referring to himself to emphasise his rule and leadership.
3. Although he gave the tenth Imam the choice of travelling to Samarra, he assigned Yahya ibn Harthamah and other military men to accompany him in the trip, although this was to keep the Imam under surveillance and preventing the dissidents' possible measures.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>18</sup> ibid.

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم، اما بعد فان امير المؤمنين عارف بقدرك، راع لقربتك، موجب لحقك... و قد رأى [امير المؤمنين] صرف عبدالله بن محمد عما كان يتولاه من الحرب والصلاة بمدينة الرسول(ص)

<sup>19</sup> Rafi'ee, Ali, *The Tenth Imam*, p.67, The Publications of the Propagation Office, Qum.

Imam al-Hadi thus started this journey, revealing his unwillingness in his statement: "O' Abu Musa! I set out for Samarra reluctantly."<sup>20</sup>

If the Imam had not travelled to Samarra, the words of Abdullah ibn Muhammad and other informers would have been proved true and would have made Mutawakkil more resolute in his hostility towards the Imam.

### **Toward Samarra**

Shaikh Mufid reported his journey as follows, "After the Imam received Mutawakkil's letter, he prepared for the journey, with his family and Yahya ibn Harthamah accompanying him (during which he performed some extraordinary acts). On his way, the Imam was welcomed warmly in Baghdad – the second capital of the Abbasid rule – yet after arriving in Samarra, Mutawakkil ordered the Imam's caravan stay in the slums. According to Salih ibn Sa'id, he aimed to devalue Imam al-Hadi."<sup>21</sup>

The trip included advantageous outcomes:

1. The Imam's good conduct and extraordinary acts made Yahya ibn Harthamah, who had been hostile toward the Imam, fond of him and became his devotee.
2. The mission of Yahya ibn Harthamah was to report how the Imam reacted to Mutawakkil's letter and his agents. The Imam reacted in a way that Yahya instead praised Imam al-Hadi in his report.

<sup>20</sup> *Bihar-ul-Anwar*, vol. 50, p. 129.

<sup>21</sup> *Irshad*, p. 334. يا ابا موسى اخرجت الى سرمن رأي كرها

3. Although Yahya witnessed the people's love for the Imam in Medina, he might have thought that this love was limited to that land, but when the people in Baghdad welcomed the Imam with open arms, he discovered the Imam's reputable position in other Islamic lands.<sup>22</sup>

### **In Samarra**

With the aim of monitoring the Imam's activities closely and preventing him from any revolutionary action, Mutawakkil exiled him to Samarra. However, he did not limit his controlling measures to this and constantly thought of marring the Imam's personality. Of course, it was a failed policy, and ultimately Mutawakkil could not achieve his evil goal.<sup>23</sup>

### **Mutawakkil's stances**

In this article, some instances of Mutawakkil's stances against Imam al-Hadi are referred to:

1. Causing strife between the Imam and Sunnis: Mutawakkil was informed that the Imam interpreted the verse "*The Day that the wrong-doer will bite at his hands*,"<sup>24</sup> as referring to some caliphs. In a meeting with his close assistants, Mutawakkil asked their ideas on this issue. They responded, "The Imam has to be asked to interpret this verse in the presence of people (i.e., Sunnis). If he interprets it as reported to you, people's reactions will be enough for you; and if he interprets it otherwise, he will be disgraced in the eyes of his

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<sup>22</sup> *The Tenth Imam*, p. 67.

<sup>23</sup> *Alam-ul-Wura*, p. 348.

<sup>24</sup> Furqan, 27. يوم يعض الظالم على يديه

followers.” Mutawakkil accepted this plot, s the Sunnis constituted a large population of Samarra. However, he did not know that God knows better to whom to assign the heavy responsibility of the Divine mission.

Thus, one day in the presence of everybody, the Imam was asked about the interpretation of this verse and replied, “They are two men about whom God has talked implicitly, and they are indebted to him for His hiding their names. Does the caliph want to reveal what God has hidden?” Mutawakkil said, “No.”<sup>25</sup>

This way, Imam al-Hadi foiled Mutawakkil’s Satanic plot and disgraced him once more.

2. Plotting to degrade the Imam: Since Mutawakkil was told that Imam al-Hadi kept in his house weapons, letters and other belongings his Shi’a and followers had given him, so he ordered several Turks to make a surprise raid on the Imam’s house. Instead, they found him sitting in a room without carpet or rug, wearing coarse clothing, and carefully reciting the Quran. Regardless, they arrested him and took him to the court.

With a glass of wine in his hand, Mutawakkil greeted the Imam and offered him a drink. In response, the Imam said, “My flesh and blood have never been tainted with wine; exempt me from drinking it.” Mutawakkil accepted his excuse, but then ordered the Imam to recite some lines of poetry. The Imam replied, “I do not recite poetry often.” With Mutawakkil’s insistence, the Imam recited:

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<sup>25</sup> *Bihar-ul-Anwar*, vol. 50, p. 214.

Those who are resting at the heights of government, while the strong men are protecting them, but living at these heights does not make them needless. After they enjoy honour and glory, they are pulled down from their strongholds and are placed in the holes (graves), which are bad places. When they are buried, the caller calls out:

‘Where are the thrones, crowns and the expensive clothes? Where are the faces in luxury and behind the curtains?’ Instead of them, their graves answer: ‘The faces are here, covered with worms which are fighting with each other.’<sup>26</sup>

Participants in the gathering feared that Mutawakkil might decide to treat the Imam adversely, but suddenly they saw Mutawakkil crying, and they started to cry as well. Then Mutawakkil ordered to take away the glasses of wine.<sup>27</sup>

Mutawakkil had planned to devalue the Imam and challenge him by offering the wine, but failed and resorted to inviting the Imam to recite some lines of poetry, assuming he would recite common poems in praise of wine or slave girls. However, the Imam recited the poems that gave moral lessons, and that struck him hard. He

<sup>26</sup> Ja’farian, Rasul, *The Intellectual and Political Life of the Shi’ite Imams*, vol. 2, p. 149.

باتوا على قلل الاجبال تحرسهم غلب الرجال فما اغتتهم القلل  
و استنزلوا بعد عز عن معاقلم فادعوا حفرا يا بئس ما نزلوا  
نادا هم صارخ من بعد دفنهم اين الاساور و التيجان و الحلل  
باتوا على قلل الاجبال تحرسهم غلب الرجال فما اغتتهم القلل  
و استنزلوا بعد عز عن معاقلم فادعوا حفرا يا بئس ما نزلوا  
نادا هم صارخ من بعد دفنهم اين الاساور و التيجان و الحلل

<sup>27</sup> Mas’udi, Ali ibn Hussain, *Murawij-a-Dhahab*, vol. 2, p. 374, published in Egypt, translated, vol. 2, p. 502.

altered the joyful party of Mutawakkil to a gathering filled with sorrow.<sup>28</sup>

3. Imprisoning Imam al-Hadi: Mutawakkil confined Imam al-Hadi, who said while in prison, "To God, I am more revered than the camel of Prophet Salih," and recited the verse, "*Enjoy yourselves in your homes for three days: that is a promise not to be belied!*"<sup>29</sup>

One day later, Mutawakkil apologised to the Imam and released him from prison. Only three days later, three Turks suddenly attacked Mutawakkil and killed him. His son, Muntasir, succeeded him as the next Caliph.<sup>30</sup>

### The political arena

Like the previous Imams, Imam al-Hadi entered into politics, taking into account the time requirements:

#### 1. The idea of the 14 Infallibles' leadership

Imam al-Hadi delineated this politically sensitive and important issue in the form of supplication and Ziyarah. For example, consider Ziyarah al-Jami'ah al-Kabirah: "Peace be upon you, O' the Prophet's household...the leaders of peoples and the chiefs of [God's] servants..."<sup>31</sup> In this excerpt, the Imam introduced the rest of the Infallible Imams as the peoples' leaders and policy makers of God's servants. This emphasis on their leadership negates other caliphs'

<sup>28</sup> Hassani, Hashim Ma'ruf, *The Conduct of the 12 Shi'a Imams*, vol. 2, p. 472, Dar-Ta'aruf, Beirut.

<sup>29</sup> Hud, 65. تمتعوا في داركم ثلاثة ايام ذلك وعد غير مكذوب

<sup>30</sup> *Bihar-ul-Anwar*, vol. 50, p. 204.

<sup>31</sup> Saduq, Muhammad, *Man la Yahduruhul-Faqih*, vol. 2, p. 609, published in Tehran; 'Uyun Akhbar-al-Rida, vol. 2, p. 272.



rule, since only the Infallibles are entitled to govern people, and other forms of government are considered illegitimate usurpation.

## **2. Condemning cooperation with the rulers**

In response to a question about being hired by the Abbasid, the Imam said, "If you are forced to do so, God will accept your excuse, but if it is not compulsive, it is unacceptable." The questioner added, "Through my penetration into the Abbasid court, I can harm the regime." Praising him for this measure, the Imam talked of its rewards.<sup>32</sup>

## **3. Using the word "Taghut" (the illegitimate ruler) about Mutawakkil**

In Quranic concepts, Taghut is the polar opposite of God. When it comes to a person's wilayah, God considers Himself as the Wali of believers, and Taghut as the Wali of the disbelievers:

*Allah is the Wali of those who have faith: from the depths of darkness He will lead them forth into light. Of those who reject faith their Wali is Taghut: from light they will lead them forth into the depths of darkness.*<sup>33</sup>

In another verse, those who resort to the tyrants are rebuked, and their disbelief is emphasised: *"Their [real] wish is to resort together for judgment [in their disputes] to Taghut, though they were*

<sup>32</sup> Hurr Ameli, Muhammad, *Wasa'ilu-u-Shi'a*, vol. 17, p. 190, Dar-ul-Ihya a-Turath al-'Arabi.

<sup>33</sup> Baqarah, 257. *الله ولي الذين امنوا يخرجهم من الظلمات الى النور و الذين كفروا اولياءهم الطاغوت*

ordered to reject him.”<sup>34</sup> Pharaoh is also described as follows, “He has rebelled.”<sup>35</sup>

Now the Imam’s word is considered from this Quranic perspective. When Mutawakkil built Ja’fari building in Samarra, Ali ibn Muhammad predicted the future, saying, “This Taghut will be killed in this building.”<sup>36</sup>

#### 4. The network of Wikalah (meaning *agency*)

Throughout history, Shi’as have been grappling with political problems, and the rulers limited their relationship with the Infallible Imams. As of Imam al-Jawad’s time, sensitivity and limitation have increased. Therefore, to protect Shi’ism and keep the centres of resistance dynamic, it was necessary to establish “The network of Wikalah.” In the time of Imam al-Hadi, because of the important role of Wikalah in society, Mutawakkil hired anti-Alavid people to eliminate his opponents and to terminate the organised activities of the Alavids, particularly the Twelvers.

During his 16-year-old reign, violence and crackdown against Shi’as were so great that some of Imam al-Hadi’s wakils, or agents, all over the Islamic land were tortured to death or were sentenced to years in prison. These measures seriously harmed the network of agency, but Imam al-Hadi kept this network active and dynamic through his conscious attempts.<sup>37</sup> Ali ibn Ja’far al-Wakil, Ibrahim ibn

<sup>34</sup> Nisa, 60. يريدون ان يتحاكوا الى الطاغوت و قد امروا ان يكفروا به.

<sup>35</sup> Nazi’at, 17. انه طغى

<sup>36</sup> Tabari, Muhammad ibn Jarir, *Dala’il-ul-A’immah*, p. 218, Heydariyyah, Najaf.

لما بدء المستوكل بعارة الجعفرى من سرّ من رأى... يا على هذه الطاغية يقتل بهذا البناء.

<sup>37</sup> Nasiri, Muhammad Radi, *Analytical History of Islam*, p. 258.

Muhammad Hamadani, Husayn ibn Abd-e-Rabbah, his son Ali ibn al-Husayn, and Ahmad ibn Ishaq Razi were among his agents.<sup>38</sup>

## The cultural arena

### 1. Fighting with Shi'a extremists

Extremism is a problematic issue throughout the history of Shi'ism. The extremists fault was to elevate the Imams to an inordinately high position and went to extremes in expressing love for them. Imam Ali considered extremism the starting point of spiritual destruction, saying, "Two groups perish [spiritually] with regard to me; those who go to extremes in loving me and those who oppose me."<sup>39</sup>

In addition to their intellectual deviation, the extremists marred the image of Shi'ism and paved the way for the enemies to oppose it. The Infallibles have always pointed out their danger, and required themselves to cleanse Shi'ism of extremism and to deprive the enemies of this weapon. However, extremists not only did not take their advice, but also insisted on their ideology, assuming that the Imams were practicing dissimulation. In a letter to Muhammad ibn 'Isa, the 10<sup>th</sup> Imam wrote, "May God curse Qasim Yaqtini and Ali ibn Hasaka Qummi!"

In another hadith, Hasan ibn Muhammad, known as ibn Baba, Muhammad ibn Nasir Namiri and Fars ibn Hatam Qazwini were cursed by the Imam.<sup>40</sup> Ahmad ibn Muhammad Sayyari was another

<sup>38</sup> Kushshi Muhammad, *Rijal by Kushshi*, pp. 430, 505 and 508, 'Alami Institute, Karbala.

<sup>39</sup> Sayyid Radi, *Nahj-ul-Balaghah*, wise sayings, no. 117 and 469.

<sup>40</sup> *Rijal by Kushshi*, p. 435.

extremist; the one who narrated many Hadiths on distortion of the Quran. Regarding him, Najashi said, “The hadiths he narrated were defective, and his faith was corrupted.”<sup>41</sup>

## 2. Removing doubts about Shi’a beliefs

In the time of Imam al-Hadi, some belief-related issues were among the common theological subjects discussed, such as “the creation of the Quran” which led to the Muslims’ split and disunity as its adverse consequence. Some believed that the Quran was created like other phenomena, and others insisted on its not being created. Imam al-Hadi fought against this evil debate and prevented his followers from getting involved in such useless discussions. In a letter to the Shi’ites, reported by ‘Isa bin Ubaid Yaqtin, Imam al-Hadi wrote:

In the Name of Allah, the Most Beneficent, the Most Merciful ... May God keep me and you immune from this mischief. In my opinion, this debate about the Quran is a blameworthy innovation in the religion.<sup>42</sup>

The issue of “seeing God on the Day of Judgment” also caused great controversy in that time. Ahmad ibn Ishaq sent a letter to the Imam, asking for his idea on this issue. In response, the 10<sup>th</sup> Imam—through logical reasoning—negated seeing God.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>41</sup> 39. *Rijal by Kushshi*, p. 435. ضعیف الحديث، فاسد المذهب.

<sup>42</sup> Saduq, Muhammad, *Monotheism*, p. 224, Islamic Publications.

<sup>43</sup> بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم... عصمنا الله وایاک من الفتنة... نحن نرى ان الجدل في القرآن بدعة  
Tabarsi, Abi Mansu, *Ihtijaj*, vol. 2, p. 251, Nu'man, Najaf.

Another issue delineated by the Imam was “predestination and delegation of all power to human beings (*tafwid*). Through his words, he blocked the way of those who raised doubts about it.”<sup>44</sup>

### 3. Defining the Infallible Imams’ high status

In Ziyarah al-Jami’ah al-Kabirah, Imam al-Hadi offered a course in Imamate Studies. This ziyarah is reported in authentic hadith collections,<sup>45</sup> and many commentaries have been written on it as well. The late Aqa Bozorg Tehrani recorded their names in his book, *a-Dhari’ah*.<sup>46</sup> Some excerpts from this ziyarah are examined:

Peace be upon you...the doors of faith and the safeguard for the secrets of God, the Beneficent...The place where God is known and Divine blessing is sent down... Allah has kept you away from any slip, immune from mischief, and cleansed of any impurity...and the one who holds fast to the rope of your guidance is guided, and the one who follows you will enter Heaven, and the one who opposes you will enter Hell.

### 4. Training students in religious sciences

Training skilled religious scholars and asking for their help when necessary are among the cultural activities the Imams undertook. There were ups and downs regarding this important matter depending on the political situation in Muslim society. Training religious scholars reached its peak in Imam al-Baqir and Imam al-

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<sup>44</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> Tusi, Muhammad, *Tahdhib-ul-Akhlaq*, vol. 6, p. 107, Tehran.

<sup>46</sup> Aqa Bozorg Tehrani, Mohammad Hassan, *a-Dhari’ah*, vol. 13, p. 305, Dar-ul-Adwa’, Beirut.

Sadiq's time because the reduced political pressure paved the way for fostering the Islamic culture in society.

In the time of Imam al-Hadi, great political repression inhibited political activities, but the 10<sup>th</sup> Imam—without losing the slightest chance—embarked on training elites whose names were recorded in historical accounts. The late Shaikh Tusi enumerated around 190 of his companions and students:<sup>47</sup>

### 1. Hassan ibn Rashid (Abu Ali)

About him, Imam al-Hadi said: “May God have mercy on ibn Rashid, who lived in this world spiritually happily and was martyred!”<sup>48</sup>

### 2. Hassan ibn Ali ibn Nasir

Sayyid Murtada praised him: “His virtues in terms of knowledge, asceticism, and jurisprudence are clear-cut. He had propagated Islam in Deylam until this call paid off and led the people from ignorance and error to salvation.”<sup>49</sup>

### 3. Ayyub ibn Nuh

Shaikh Tusi quoted Amr ibn Sa'id Mada'ini, who believed in the Fatahi school of thought, as saying, “I was in the presence of Imam al-Hadi when Ayyub ibn Nuh came in. Upon his leaving there, Imam al-Hadi told me: ‘O’ ‘Amr! If you like to see a dweller of Heaven, look at him.’”<sup>50</sup>

<sup>47</sup> Tusi, Muhammad, *Rijal by Tusi*, pp. 409, Heydariyyah Najaf.

<sup>48</sup> *Rijal by Kushsi*, p. 502.

<sup>49</sup> Khu'i, Sayyid Abul-Qasim, *Mu'jam a-Rijal al-Hadith*, vol. 5, p. 28, Qum.

<sup>50</sup> Tusi, Muhammad, *al-Ghaybah*, p. 212, published in Najaf.

#### 4. Abdul-‘Adhim Hasani

He was a descendant of Imam Hassan Mujtaba through four generations (i.e., Abdul-‘Adhim ibn Abdullah ibn Ali ibn Hassan ibn Zayd ibn al-Hasan al-Mujtaba). His high spiritual position has been recorded in the historical accounts. Today, the Shi’ites and lovers of the Infallible Imams flock to his holy shrine in Rey, near Tehran. He presented Imam al-Hadi with his religious beliefs in order to assess them. This way, he insured them through the Imam’s approving of them. In enumerating the religious obligation, he gave priority to wilayah over daily prayers and other obligations.<sup>51</sup>

Some hadiths on his high spiritual rank can be found in hadith collections. According to the late Ayatullah Kho’i: “These hadiths are defective and lack authority. His grandness, faith, and piety are so clear that we do not need such hadiths to prove them.”<sup>52</sup>

#### 5. Uthman ibn Sa’id

Uthman ibn Sa’id was trained by Imam al-Hadi and progressed spiritually so much that he became the agent of Imam al-Hadi and Imam Hasan al-Askari. He was also the first special deputy of Imam Mahdi during the Lesser Occultation.

#### Imam al-Hadi from the opponents’ perspective

1. In his letter to the Imam, Mutawakkil admitted his greatness, saying, “Surely Amir-al-Mu’minin appreciate your grandness.”<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> *Wasa’il a-Shi’ah*, vol. 1, p. 21.

<sup>52</sup> *Mu’jam a-Rijal al-Hadith*, vol. 10, p. 49.

<sup>53</sup> *Irshad*, p. 333.

2. Yahya ibn Harthamah, who was in charge of taking him to Samarra, described his arrival in Medina and Imam al-Hadi's house as follows:

"When I arrived in Medina, I searched his home. Except for the Quran, and supplication and intellectual books, I found nothing. I was so impressed by his grandness that I took it upon myself to serve him and treat him well."<sup>54</sup>

3. The Sunni scholar, Ibn Hajar 'Asqalani, said in praise of the Imam, "He inherited knowledge and generosity from his father."<sup>55</sup>

4. An eighth-century historian, Hafiz ibn Kathir Damishqi, who talked fervently of the Shi'as as the misled group, praised the Imam as follows, "Surely he was an ascetic worshipper [of God]."<sup>56 57</sup>

### Martyrdom

In religious texts, "martyrdom" is considered the best kind of death. In his historic speech before ibn Ziyad, Imam Sajjad took pride in martyrdom<sup>58</sup> through which all Imams passed away.<sup>59</sup>

Like other Imams, Imam al-Hadi was martyred. The Abbasid caliph, Mu'tazz, committed the crime of poisoning and martyring him, and then hypocritically performed the funeral prayer on him. Of course,

<sup>54</sup> Dakhil, Ali Muhammad, *Our Imams*, vol. 2, p. 251, Beirut.

<sup>55</sup> ibn Hajar 'Asqalani, Ali ibn Ahmad, *a-Sawai'q al-Muhraqah*, p. 207, Cairo. وكان وارث ابيه علما و سخاء

<sup>56</sup> ibn Kathir Damishqi, Hafidh, *al-Bidayah wa a-Nahayah*, vol. 11, p. 19, Beirut. وقد كان عابدا زاهدا

<sup>57</sup> For more information see: *Our Imams*, vol. 2, p. 250.

<sup>58</sup> *Bihar-ul-Anwar*, vol. 45, p. 118.

<sup>59</sup> *ibid.*, vol. 27, p. 209.



before taking his body out of home for the funeral, Imam Hassan Askari had performed funeral prayer on his father.<sup>60</sup>

After funeral, his body was returned home and buried in his prayer place.<sup>61</sup> His holy shrine is now visited by his lovers and the Shi'as.

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<sup>60</sup> Qummi, Abbas, *Anwar-ul-Bahiyyah*, p. 299, Islamic Publications, Qum.

<sup>61</sup> Qummi, Abbas, *Muntah-al-Amal*, vol. 2, p. 683, Hijrah Publications, Qum.

# REFLECTIONS ON MUNAJAT SHA‘BANIYYAH<sup>1</sup>

MOHAMMAD ALI SHOMALI

**ABSTRACT:** Sha‘ban, the eighth month of the Islamic calendar, is considered the month of Allah’s mercy and pleasure. A prayer by Imam Ali attributed to this month, called Munajat Sha‘baniyyah, is a well-known and unique whispered prayer highly regarded by the Infallible Imams as well as mystics and philosophers. With careful attention to its meanings and advice, a person can achieve levels of perfection to reach a high status with Allah. The following offers a glance into some of its passages along with an explanation of the states of a person who calls to Allah, the ways to address Him and ask for His help, the effects of detachment from this world, and a response to a frequently asked question regarding the attitude and condition of a supplicant.

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<sup>1</sup> This paper is based on a lectures delivered by the author in the Shrine of Lady Masumah (a) in Qum on 15<sup>th</sup> June 2013 and another in the Hawzah Ilmiyyah of England in London on 20<sup>th</sup> May 2016.

The Month of Sha‘ban is the month of Allah’s mercy and pleasure. While addressing Allah, Imam Zayn al-Abidin said:

شعبان الذي حَفَفْتَهُ مِنْكَ بِالرَّحْمَةِ وَالرِّضْوَانِ

‘Sha’ban: the month that You have encompassed with  
Your mercy and pleasure.

### **Scholars’ high regard for Munajat Sha‘baniyyah**

The prayer of Munajat Sha‘baniyyah, attributed to Imam Ali, is a highly regarded whispered prayer recited by all the Imams. It has been mentioned by several great scholars in their books: Sayyid ibn Tawus in his *al-Iqbal*, Allamah Majlisi in *Bihar al-Anwar*, Samahiji in *Sahifat al-Alawiyyah* and Shaykh Abbas Qummi in *Mafatih al-Jinan*.

Although the complete chain of narration of this prayer has not been noted in these works, due to its content and high regard that scholars have always had for this whispered prayer, it has not been questioned or objected to by anyone.

The late Imam Khomeini, in many places and on several occasions, had emphasised the significance of this prayer. In one of his sayings he mentions that whilst there are many important mystical poems and prayers that one can extract from the Qur’an and from the whispered prayers of the Imams, the Munajat Sha‘baniyyah is unique, and that though philosophers and mystics may be able to understand some aspects of these whispered prayers, those who truly understand them have actually achieved a high level of closeness to Allah, with a taste or experience of the prayer’s content. Hence, a wayfarer or a traveller to Allah, who has reached at least some level

of what is described in these prayers and has achieved closeness to Allah, can have some grasp of the ideas, although they certainly are not understandable by a beginner in philosophy and mysticism.

Imam Khomeini also says that Munajat Sha'baniyyah is one of the special whispered prayers to which, if someone pays attention, performs reflection, and follows its advice, that person can reach a notable position and can achieve some levels of perfection. The late Mirza Agha Maliki Tabrizi, one of the teachers of Imam Khomeini, especially in the fields of ethics and spirituality, says that Munajat Sha'baniyyah is a well-known whispered prayer, and that 'It contains a wealth of knowledge.'<sup>2</sup>

The prayer contains the etiquettes and manners of beseeching Allah, and how one can pray and ask for forgiveness from Him. Tabrizi then refers to a scholar, without mentioning his name, who wrote a commentary on some parts of the prayer. Subsequently, the late Agha Buzurg Tehrani mentions a commentary on the passage: "إِلَهِي هَبْ لِي كَمَالَ الْإِقْطَاعِ إِلَيْكَ" by the late Muhammad Kadhim Husayn Rashti. Furthermore, Imam Khomeini had asked some great scholars to comment on it, and two of his students – Ayatullah Mazahiri and Ayatullah Muhammadi Gilani – have indeed produced commentaries on this prayer.

Therefore, it is a very special gift from amongst the jewels and treasures of the Ahlul Bayt, and I wish now to reflect on some of its passages so that we may understand it, as well as other whispered prayers recited by the Prophet's household.

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<sup>2</sup> فيه علوم جأ

### Commentary

The prayer commences with the invocation of *salawat* – or sending blessings – upon the Prophet and his pure and immaculate household.

اللَّهُمَّ صَلِّ عَلَى مُحَمَّدٍ وَآلِ مُحَمَّدٍ

In Islam, it is an established etiquette that supplications and prayers should begin and end with this invocation. This is because this invocation is always accepted by Allah. When our prayers begin and end with this, then from cover to cover we have achieved His acceptance, and therefore it is unlikely that what is in between these two, i.e. our desires and wishes, will not be accepted.

وَسَمِعْ دُعَائِي إِذَا دَعَوْتُكَ وَاسْمَعْ نِدَائِي إِذَا نَادَيْتُكَ وَأَقْبِلْ عَلَيَّ إِذَا نَاجَيْتُكَ  
[O Allah] listen to my plea when I plea to You, and  
listen to my call when I call You, and attend to me  
when I whisper to You.

In my view, this portion of the prayer refers to three possible states of a person who calls to Allah, and each is accompanied by a suitable type of calling:

1. The caller is at a distance from Allah: the nature of calling is *nida'* (a call from a distance).
2. The caller is near to Allah: the nature of calling is *du'a* (a call from relatively near).
3. The caller is very close, almost able to 'touch' Allah: the nature of calling is *munajat* (a whisper, from mouth to ear).

These three states are dependent on the condition of the caller to Allah, and not on Allah. Allah is constant, He is always as He is, but His servants and creation experience different levels of closeness, and this affects the way they address Him. Prophet Musa once asked Allah:

Are You close so that I whisper to You, or far so that I call You?" Allah replied: "I am sitting next to the one who remembers Me.

From this we understand that as He is always close and sits next to those who remember Him, there is no need even to call Him, if people remembers Him.

Therefore, we have different ways to address Allah depending on our own condition. Nevertheless, in all three we want His attention, His answer, and His acceptance.

This passage implores Allah to listen to us when we call Him, and to allow us to restore our connection with Him if we have lost touch with Him, whether we call Him from afar or from close by. And once we do this, then we are desperate for Him to come to us, because one that comes to us has surely heard us.

فَقَدْ هَرَبْتُ إِلَيْكَ وَ وَقَفْتُ بَيْنَ يَدَيْكَ

Indeed I have escaped to You and I stand in front of You.

The one who recites this is telling Allah that he has escaped from everything other than Him, despite being faced with challenges and enemies. He has managed to detach himself from everything and approach Allah. This is like a person chased by thieves or murderers

and escapes, and finds a good person and appeals to their help. The expression is one of desperation and need.

The good thing is that this person has at least recognised that Allah is the one he needs, and not anything else. At times, we can be tempted to run towards non-Godly things. But in this prayer we realise that other things are obstacles, and that refuge is only with Allah.

Now that we have reached Him, we ask for His help. When we go to a person who can offer refuge, then the important step is to reach that person. For an ill person it could be a hospital; for a hungry person it is to reach someone who has food. We are beseeching Allah, saying 'Now that I am here, You help me. I have done my part by coming to You, now it is Your turn to help me; it was my job to run away and find You, now it is Your turn to fulfil my requirements.'

Sometimes, when people stand before a helper, a guide, or an *alim*, they stand in a very relaxed manner, almost as if they do not really need him, and in a way that suggests they have only come to him as a matter of formality. They approach with the outer appearance of need without truly meaning it. They approach a doctor, although internally believing themselves to be fine and healthy. But with Allah, when we go to Him and stand before Him, we must know and show we are absolutely desperate and in complete need. There should be no feeling of being relaxed.

مُسْتَكِينًا لَّكَ

I am a *mustakin* in front of You.

In other words, I am completely needy towards You. A *mustakin* is a stronger term than *miskin*, which is a person whose need made him unable to move and completely desperate. However, a *mustakin* is needier than this.

We say: 'O Allah, I have exhausted everything and somehow I have managed to reach here and cannot go anywhere else, not even a step further. I have exhausted everything I have, and I have run out of power and energy to go anywhere else.

مُتَضَرِّعًا إِلَيْكَ رَاجِيًا لِمَا لَدَيْكَ ثَوَابِي

I am humble before You, hopeful for what You have in terms of a reward.

In other words, I humbly beseech you to help me and I know you have everything I need. I have not come to You by chance or accident. I know that I am in the right place and that You have whatever I need. I have utmost hope in Your reward.

وَتَعْلَمُ مَا فِي نَفْسِي

And You know what is in my heart.

As I stand before You, I am aware that You know everything about me. You know my hidden and unhidden needs; You know how desperate I am and how I suffer, and nothing is hidden from You.

وَتَخْبُرُ حَاجَتِي وَتَعْرِفُ ضَمِيرِي

You know my request, and You know what is in my innermost heart.

The Qur'an says:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا اسْتَجِيبُوا لِلَّهِ وَلِلرَّسُولِ إِذَا دَعَاكُمْ لِمَا يُحْيِيكُمْ وَاعْلَمُوا أَنَّ اللَّهَ يَحُولُ بَيْنَ الْمَرْءِ وَقَلْبِهِ وَأَنَّهُ إِلَيْهِ تُحْشَرُونَ



O you who have faith! Answer Allah and the Apostle  
when he summons you to that which will give you life.  
Know that Allah intervenes between a man and his  
heart and that toward Him you will be mustered.  
(8:24)

Allah knows us extremely well. At times, it may take a person hours  
or even days to reflect and identify what is going on in his heart, but  
Allah already knows this:

وَلَا يَخْفَىٰ عَلَيْكَ أَمْرٌ مُّقْتَلِي وَمُنَوَّاي

And nothing is hidden from you of my future and my  
present.

Such is the extent of Allah's knowledge, that He knows even our  
futures, in this world and the Hereafter. We say to Him: 'In this  
world of changes and transformation, You know everything, even  
death and the Hereafter, but I have no clue about these matters. I  
am unsure even about my next day or next moment.'

Allah is aware of our ultimate end, the difficult stations of the  
Hereafter that we must traverse, and our state before death, at death,  
before resurrection, at resurrection, and after resurrection. He knows  
everything, and so He knows our needs as well, more than we do.

وَمَا أُرِيدُ أَنْ أُبْدِيَ بِهِ مِنْ مَّنْطِقِي

[And You know] what I want and the start of all my  
utterances.

In other words, 'O Allah! You know what I am going to say, and  
what I am about to disclose and say to You.'

Even though He knows what we are about to say, we should not think therefore that there is no need for us to say it. It is a matter of etiquette and politeness to mention our requests and needs. We should not think that because Allah knows everything there is no need to ask Him. Indeed, some people who have attained a very high station and have incredible trust in Him (*tawakkul*) may display this special position by not mentioning their requests – such as the great Prophet Ibrahim – but this is not applicable to the vast majority of people.

We must always ask and mention our needs verbally, and this is a matter of etiquette and showing that we are not lazy.

وَأَتَقَوَّهَ بِهِ مِنْ طَلِبَتِي وَارْجُوهُ لِعَاقِبَتِي

I speak about my request, and I am hopeful by it for my ultimate end.

وَقَدْ جَرَتْ مَقَادِيرُكَ عَلَيَّ يَا سَيِّدِي فِيمَا يَكُونُ مِنِّي إِلَى آخِرِ عُمْرِي مِنْ سِرِّي وَعَلَانِيَتِي

And, surely, all of that which You, my Master, have decided for me up to the end of my life, including my secret and open matters.

This is a very important sentence, and must not be misunderstood. In this excerpt, we say to Allah: ‘I know Your measures have embraced me and will apply to me till the end of my life. Nothing about my hidden and public aspects of life are outside Your decisions, Your will, and Your decree, as everything is covered by Your decree.’

This does not mean Islam believes in predestination, and that things are fixed in a way that they cannot be changed. Rather, it is a

confession: 'I know that my entire life and all of my affairs are totally covered and embraced by Your plans. You are the Lord, on Whose will and decision every aspect of my life hangs. In this way, I have not come to a stranger who is not in charge of my affairs; You know everything about me and You are in charge of everything to do with me. I have certainly come to the right place and I am addressing the right person. Everything that will happen to me until the end of my life is part of Your plan for me and for all human beings. Hence, I cannot ask anyone else to change my destiny other than You.'

Therefore, we utter this phrase not in a sense of predestination that allows no change, but with the full recognition that He has a plan that we want to fall into. Ultimately, the direction we follow is up to us.

وَبِيَدِكَ لَا بِيَدِ غَيْرِكَ زِيَادَتِي وَنَقْصِي وَنُفْعِي وَضَرَرِي

And in Your hands, and not in anyone else's, is my  
increase and decrease, my benefit and my loss.

In other words, 'Whilst I know that my destiny is not fixed and that it can be changed, I also know that the source of change is You, and it can only happen by Your hand. You can change me accordingly.'

Such a belief gives us great hope that it is never too late to change. He can bring interests and benefits for us, or He can let us suffer. He can add or take away his blessings.

إِلَهِي إِنْ حَرَمْتَنِي فَمَنْ ذَا الَّذِي يَرْزُقُنِي وَإِنْ حَذَلْتَنِي فَمَنْ ذَا الَّذِي يَنْصُرُنِي

My God, if you deprive me then who can sustain me,  
and if you disregard me then who can help me?

‘O Allah if You deprive me and disregard me in any way, then who else can provide me with what I need?’ Sustenance from Allah can be of many types. It can be physical, spiritual, and psychological; it can be to do with health, progress, food, medicine, water, knowledge, and wisdom. In short, it is anything that contributes to our success. In this passage we recognise that only He is the giver of sustenance.

Furthermore, the prayer states that if Allah forsakes someone, then none else can help. No one would dare to interfere, and none has the power to enact any change. When a powerful ruler, for example, decrees that a person should not be helped under any circumstance, then others would not dare to come and help.

We recognise that there is no other that has independent power and can come and help once He has decided that a person cannot be helped. Therefore, the angels, prophets, imams, etc., cannot help us if Allah has decided not to help us.

إِلَهِي أَعُوذُ بِكَ مِنْ غَضَبِكَ

My God, I seek refuge in You from Your anger.

‘Now that I have realised and have stated that everything is reliant upon You, and that I am in such a desperate situation and completely dependent upon You, what worries me is if You become angry with me and not satisfied with me, what will I do?’

We need our helper and the one who provides us with our sustenance and refuge to be happy with us, but if He is angry then we will be in great trouble. We can incur His anger by insulting Him or those close to Him. And if Allah chooses to declare us as

His enemies then there is no way for us to receive help from elsewhere.

Therefore, in this part of the prayer, we seek refuge in Him from His anger, which is incurred through a person's own immoral performance and behaviour, and is not incurred without reason.

و خُلُولٍ سَخَطِكَ

And your established displeasure.

Anger can come and go. But the term *hulul* refers to something that is well-established and settled. At times, through certain sins and sustained disobedience, Allah's displeasure can become deep and cannot be resolved quickly. Hence, we seek refuge from His well-established anger.

إِلَهِي إِنْ كُنْتُ غَيْرُ مُسْتَأْهِلٍ لِرَحْمَتِكَ فَأَنْتَ أَهْلٌ أَنْ تَجُودَ عَلَيَّ بِفَضْلِ سَعَتِكَ

My God, although I am not qualified to receive Your mercy, You are suited to be generous to me through the grace of Your plenty.

At times we are given instructions that if we are to do certain acts then we will receive certain rewards. Some people have managed to perform good, and in return Allah gives them His mercy. But I? I have done nothing to receive the mercy of Allah, as far as I am concerned.

Hence, we state, 'O Allah, if you do not give me then I cannot blame You. If I had done something of worth then I could have called on it to appeal to Your mercy, but alas I do not have anything like this. I know I am not qualified, but I am still hopeful, because for me to receive Your mercy I am not only reliant upon my

qualifications, but I know You also have qualifications. I have wasted mine, but what about You? One of these qualities of Yours is to give mercy to those who do not deserve it.

When Allah created us, had we done anything to deserve this? When He guides us, is it because we deserve it? Regarding all of the bounties that He bestows upon us, is it due to our deservedness? Nay, it is due to His qualities and not ours. Hence, even though I am not qualified, I still harbour hope due to Your qualities.

O Allah, You and Your qualities is why You should give me Your mercy. For You, it is natural and expected – compatible with Your nature. For people to demand and deserve mercy is not certain; some may deserve it and some may not. My situation is so bad that I know I do not deserve it, as I have not done enough to earn it; but I know you have such good qualities and characteristics that You give mercy to those that do not deserve it, and in this way You keep the channel open between You and Your creation.

### **The meaning of perfect detachment**

Let us reflect on another passage of this prayer, beginning with:

إِلٰهِي هَبْ لِي كَمَالَ الْإِئْتِطَاعِ إِلَيْكَ

O Allah give me perfect detachment from everything,  
[and then attachment] to you.

Our problem is that we, claiming to be believers (*mu'mineen*), who believe in Allah (swt), are still attached to many things rendering us not truly monotheistic. We believe in Allah while at same time think people or material techniques we use are independent of Allah. Many of us think that our success comes either from Allah or from

the various worldly means. There is a kind of polytheism (*shirk*) that unfortunately exists in the minds of many believers:

وَمَا يُؤْمِنُ أَكْثَرُهُمْ بِاللَّهِ إِلَّا وَهُمْ مُشْرِكُونَ

*And most of them do not believe in Allah without ascribing partners to Him. (12:106)*

The majority of the believers are in a sense suffering from hidden polytheism and this is caused by giving independent positions to creatures of Allah, such as our own efforts, skills, and talents. We think our success will come through the efforts of our mother, father, tribe, party, community, government, doctor, boss, and so forth, and hence we have attachment to many things alongside Allah; we also have an attachment to Allah, but it is mostly in a polytheistic way.

At this point in this munajat we ask Allah to give us complete detachment from everything other than Him. This is not in the sense that we forget, neglect, or fail to properly use other things, or neglect them, or that we live in a cave, but in the sense that we do not put hope and trust in them, and that our hope and trust remains only in Allah. So, we continue to act and behave as reasonable people act, and we do not ignore worldly means and the cause and effect system of the world, but neither do we place our hope and trust in them.

Muslims are to strive for excellence. They are to be the best they can in any field they are employed in, whether it be farming, constructing, business dealing, researching, or parenting. We must try to use all the techniques available to us, employ the best technology, methods, plans, while simultaneously doing this whilst

knowing clearly that this will not guarantee our success; Our success rests only in Allah (swt). We must not even have trust in our own works, prayer, fasting, or public service. Indeed, we must not have trust in our own righteous deeds, if there are any, or in our good qualities, if there are any good qualities. We should even not have trust in the Ahl al-Bayt as independent from Allah. Our trust is in our Lord, Allah, and this is the true meaning of:

إِلَهِي هَبْ لِي كَيْلَ الْإِنْقِطَاعِ إِلَيْكَ

O Allah give me perfect detachment from everything,  
[and then attachment] to you.

Therefore, we must begin to detach ourselves from what is bad, and then from what is neutral, and then from what is good, and then from what is holy. This is a process of refinement, and anything other than Allah should be left aside. This is pure monotheism (*tawhid*), to have our hope only fixed on Allah.

Once this is achieved, we can proceed and ask for what is mentioned in the next line, because there is a connection between the first sentence and second sentence.

### **Illumination of the eyes of the heart**

Once we are detached from everything, we will no longer be interested in other things. Hence, we first require a proper orientation. Whenever you want to see something, you will require a proper orientation to face the right direction to see that thing. For something physical, a physical orientation is required, and for something spiritual, a proper spiritual orientation is required, which is measured by the orientation of the heart. Therefore we need to ask: what is filling our heart? What is giving it energy? What is



making it busy and preoccupied? For what is the heart yearning? That will allow us to understand the orientation of the heart. Hence, we ask Allah (swt) to illuminate the eyes of our hearts:

و أنر أبصار قلوبنا بضياء نظرها إليك

And illuminate the eyes of our hearts with the light of observing You.

Our eyes are too little to enable us to look at Allah, but there are eyes of the heart that are capable of seeing Him, because this heart is the best thing we have, with unlimited capacity, given to us by Allah, in which He has called His spirit:

فَإِذَا سَوَّيْتُهُ وَنَفَخْتُ فِيهِ مِنْ رُوحِي فَقَعُوا لَهُ سَاجِدِينَ

*So when I have proportioned him and breathed into him of My spirit, then fall down in prostration before him. (15:29)*

Therefore, this unlimited capacity of the heart renders it capable of looking at Allah. Of course, we cannot contain Him or claim to understand everything about Him, but at least we can have immediate and direct encounter with Him. Anything other than this would be through something else, but it is through the eyes of the heart that you can come to a direct encounter with Allah.

In a physical sense, we require sunlight, electric light, or a candle, etc, so as to look at one another. But to look at Allah, we do not require external light; the light is in Allah himself. We need to look at Him, and His light will help us to see Him.

و أنر أبصار قلوبنا بضياء نظرها إليك

And illuminate the eyes of our hearts with the light of observing You.

By looking at God, our eyes would have light to look at Him. Hence, it is wrong to think there is anything else able to help us in this process. Thinking this way is a sign of not having progressed from the stage of:

إِلَهِي هَبْ لِي كَمَالَ الْإِنْقِطَاعِ إِلَيْكَ

O Allah give me perfect detachment from everything,  
[and then attachment] to you.

But if we reach the stage of *kamal al-inqita* then the light of looking at Allah should come from Allah Himself and not from anything other than Him. Therefore, we say:

وَأُنِرْ أَبْصَارَ قُلُوبِنَا

And illuminate the eyes of our hearts.

And the way this is done is:

بُضِيَاءَ نَظَرِهَا إِلَيْكَ

With the light of observing You.

### **A general remark about the supplications**

Reflecting on this prayer and other prayers, a question may arise: why is it that most of the time the *end results* are asked from God, instead of asking Him to help us in our pursuit of those goals? For example, why do we ask God for complete detachment instead of asking Him to help us detach ourselves from anything other than Him? To answer this question we make few points:

First of all, we should remember that the supplications shared by the Ahlul Bayt are for hardworking people, and not for people who merely pray without putting the effort. Supplications are for those

who dedicate their lives to pursuing perfection and nearness to Allah. These are the prayers of a *mujāhid* and a *sālik*, someone who is struggling in his journey to Allah. It is established that whatever these people ask for is what they have dedicated their lives to.

It does not make sense for a person who is not accustomed to doing any kind of exercise and activity to say that he wants to win the world championship of a particular sport. However, if this is said by a person doing everything possible in the process of training and practicing it would make sense. The supplicant knows he has to work hard, and in fact already has, but he is also aware that he should not rely on his own efforts. It could be that a person prepares all the ground work and all the prerequisites, but the end result still does not materialise. It could be that we go to the best doctor for the best medicine, but the healing (*shifā*) only comes from Allah. It is not sufficient in order to be healed that we merely go to the best doctor and take the best medicine. A person may go to the best school and attend the best hawza and learn from the best teachers, he may study hard and be dedicated, but knowledge is ultimately a gift from Allah; it is not necessarily guaranteed by having the best processes. The end result comes from Him.

The second point is that we do not want to restrict Allah to giving us what we want. Rather, we are to try our hardest, knowing that it could be that Allah will grant us in another way. For example, you may work hard to obtain sustenance (*rizq*), and you cannot say that you will ask Allah without making any efforts. Therefore, you start a business or become employed. But, it could be that Allah sends your sustenance through a gift, though it is not right that you wait for the gift and not do anything, and expect Allah to grant you sustenance

directly. You cannot restrict Allah's method of granting sustenance and insist that He only gives from your business or salary.<sup>3</sup>

In any case, we should not tell Allah to give us knowledge e.g. through attending classes, or to give us sustenance through a certain way, or to grant us nearness to Him through a particular action only; rather, we should request Him to grant us through any way that He sees fit.

The third point is that on the spiritual journey it seems that to some extent it is the individual servant who is initially moving with the help of Allah, and with His guidance and assistance. It is for this reason that we tend to use *ism-e fā'il*, for example, we say *mukhlis* (one who is trying to purify himself, or his actions, or his intentions), or for example we say *mutaqarrib* and *mutatahhir*. But then there comes a stage after which it is only Allah who is the cause of our advancement. At that stage we have exhausted all our efforts and we are like a person who has travelled hard but has then lost his energy and falls down. But then the beloved comes along

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<sup>3</sup> There is an idea – and perhaps there is a degree of wisdom in this – that those people who have fixed salaries have somehow closed the gates of rizq for themselves, because Allah is not able to give them rizq as they have signed a contract for a fixed salary. Whereas those who have their own business, there is more chance for their rizq to come to them, because in a business, Allah can send more clients. But if a person is employed then somehow he has narrowed down the possibilities for his rizq. I am not saying that this is 100% accurate, because Allah can always send rizq in different ways, but there is a degree of truth in it. When you become employed you are saying, "This is what I am going to get." But a tradesman, farmer, shopkeeper, etc, can always ask Allah for rizq because they know that nothing is guaranteed, though it be a little money. Hence, in trade and business there is a risk of having nothing, but then there is the scope of having more opportunities.

and takes him to Himself. It is at this point that we use the term *mukhlas* – one who has been purified by Allah, but who has not started from scratch; rather, he has expended his effort and has exhausted himself. A *muqarrab* is different to a *mutaqarrib* as a *mutahhar* is different from a *mutatahhir*. For example, Allah says:

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. (33:33)*

That is a very high stage. It is at this point that there is no longer a process to go through; as such a person has done everything they can, and all their energies and talents have been used. It is from that point that Allah takes us towards Himself.

Perhaps it is also a matter of being very much attracted to Allah that when a lover of Allah is talking to Him while knowing that everything is in His hands, he completely forgets himself and his efforts. He just asks Allah, because it would be impolite to think of yourself and your efforts. You should not say things like ‘I am also learning’ and ‘I am also doing something’ and ‘I am also doing *ibadat* so just help me to reach the result’; no, you must become totally forgetful of yourself and only think of Allah and what He has.

Hence, there are different reasons as to why a person who does this kind of *ibadah* and recites this kind of *munajat* would be more focused on the end result and on the being who has the end result.