

MESSAGE OF THAQALAYN

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

IN THE NAME OF GOD,
THE MOST GRACIOUS, THE MOST MERCIFUL

MESSAGE OF THAQALAYN
A QUARTERLY JOURNAL OF ISLAMIC STUDIES



The Ahlul Bayt (A) World Assembly

www.messageofthaqalayn.com

MESSAGE OF THAQALAYN (UK ED.)

ISSN 2045-1040

A Quarterly Journal of Islamic Studies

Volume 13, Number 4, Winter 1434/2013

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PUBLISHED BY

Islamic Centre of England
140 Maida Vale, London W9 1QB, UK

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Ahlul Bayt (A) World Assembly

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The *Message of Thaqaalayn* feels responsible to present the teachings of Islam in general and the School of the Ahlul Bayt (a) in particular with complete honesty and accuracy and at the same time to emphasise the common ground that binds all Muslims together. Strengthening ties of brotherhood amongst all Muslims, whatever school of Islam they may adhere to, and establishing genuine, enduring and intimate friendship between all those who believe in God are two of the main aims and tasks of the *Message of Thaqaalayn* and indeed, any responsible media.

Editor-in-Chief

SPIRITUAL DIMENSIONS OF MOURNING FOR IMAM HUSAYN (A)

PART I: THE DIVINE PLAN FOR HUMAN SALVATION¹

MOHAMMAD ALI SHOMALI

ABSTRACT: Human beings are labouring towards their Lord and will eventually encounter Him. Once we struggle to eliminate the superficial aspects of this world we will be able to achieve the new life given to those who believe, purify themselves, and perform righteous deeds. Given that the outcomes of our deeds count for very little in this long journey, God, with His infinite mercy, provided male and female role models who are on the straight path to assist people in purifying themselves to live a prosperous life and achieve eternal bliss. He also multiplies the righteous deeds of the faithful; our task is to learn how to use shortcuts to felicity presented by God. One of these shortcuts is enduring hardships which are a prerequisite for progress for spiritual elevation provided that they are accompanied with gratitude as opposed to complaining. Another quick path is to share in Imam Husayn's grief during the Battle of Karbala. This address offers the benefits people can derive from Imam Husayn's sacrifices to preserve Islam by mourning over the magnitude of the event's hardship. People are to love Imam Husayn by learning from his teachings and resembling him in his conduct. Since on the Day of Judgment, the Ahlul Bayt will enjoy the uppermost status everyone will wish to have, we also are given permission to reach that position by sharing in Imam Husayn's hardship.

¹This is the first part of an address originally presented at the Manchester Islamic Institute in the UK on the Day of Ashura 1429 A.H. (January 19th, 2008). It is published here with slight changes.

God, the Almighty, has granted mankind physical life by means of which human beings may reach a higher state of living. It is definitely better that man does this by his own efforts, for even if he does not, as the Qur'an states, it will inevitably happen:

O man! You are labouring toward your Lord laboriously, and you will encounter Him. (84:6)

In this verse, God is giving a general message: O' mankind! Willing or not, understanding it or not, you are labouring towards your Lord and you will encounter Him. That meeting will undoubtedly take place. But for those who are impure, that meeting will be painful, instead of being sweet. This is similar to weak beings like ourselves being harmed if we stand too close to the sun. We would not benefit from the sun's rays or even be able to watch and enjoy them. In the Hereafter, meeting Allah will be painful for those who are not purified or well-prepared. However, man is able to improve himself in this world by thoroughly purifying his soul and increasing its capacity to such an extent that not only will meeting Allah be incredibly sweet for him in the Hereafter, he might also be able to experience it in this world. Thus, it is not necessary for him to die to experience it. This is a new life that people can find, even in this world. In other words, life in the hereafter currently exists, although it is hidden. In this regard, the Holy Qur'an states:

"They know just an outward aspect of the life of the world, but they are oblivious of the Hereafter." (30:7)

Those who are negligent about the Hereafter only notice the superficial aspect of this world's appearance and are thus inattentive to the Hereafter; if we remove this superficial aspect and delve deeper, we would see that the Hereafter truly exists right here and now, parallel to the life that we are living in this world. It is only a matter of pulling the curtain aside. When a person dies, he will be

from you, and so your sight is acute today.” (50:22) O’ mankind! When you die, you will see that you were negligent about this: “...they are oblivious of the Hereafter.” (30:7)

The negligent are those who know and have access to it, yet even so they are inattentive to it. This is a similar case for those who wear glasses. They may sometimes think they lost their glasses and end up looking for them while they are unaware that they already have them on. This is an example of negligence. The Holy Qur’an says: “*You were certainly oblivious of this.*” (50:22)

As said in the Qur’an, Allah would then remove this cover:

لَقَدْ كُنْتُمْ فِي غَفْلَةٍ مِنْ هَذَا فَكَشَفْنَا عَنْكَ غِطَاءَكَ فَبَصَرُكَ الْيَوْمَ حَدِيدٌ

We have removed your veil from you, and so your sight is acute today. (50:22)

God says that He has pulled the curtains aside. Rather than referring to an enormous curtain that separates the people of this world and that of the spiritual life or the Hereafter, this curtain is indeed that of which people place in front of themselves. The Arabic term ‘*ghitā’ak*’ refers to our own curtain. This veil can range from being extremely long to having no curtain at all. Afterwards, God says He has removed your curtain from in front of you “*so your sight is acute today.*” Now your eyes are so sharp you can see anything. Therefore, it is obvious that there is life in the Hereafter, though a curtain prevents us from seeing that. If we can release our soul from material bonds and achieve a new life, then what will inevitably take place after death could easily happen right now. God, the Almighty, mentions this new life in some verses of the Qur’an, amongst which is the following:

Whoever acts righteously, [whether] male or female, should he be faithful, We shall revive him with a good life and pay them their reward by the best of what they used to do. (16: 97)

Rather than merely reading these verses, take them in with all your heart. Imagine the Prophet (s) reciting this verse to you. God says that He will give a new life to everyone, whether male or female, to those who perform good deeds and is a believer. Islam might make differences between men and women in certain rulings, but on the path to perfection and on the journey to meet Allah, there is no difference between them. And where there are differences between them in Islamic rulings, it is only for the good of the people and society. However, whenever self-purification and getting closer to God is considered, the way is open to all, regardless of gender.

‘Allamah Tabataba’ī commented with regards to giving a new life to those who do good deeds by saying that this does not mean that the person’s everyday life will change; rather, he will experience an entirely new life. The Qur’an continues: “...and pay them their reward by the best of what they used to do.” (16:97)

The reward God will provide for them is according to the best deeds they performed. It may be that if someone has recited his best two-*rak’at* prayer, God will consider all his prayers accordingly. Similarly, if he has completed one sincere pilgrimage, God will count all his pilgrimages accordingly. When God wants to reward someone, He will not merely count the good deeds separately and reward accordingly. He multiplies them, and even gives specific people immeasurable rewards:

... Indeed the patient will be paid in full their reward without any reckoning. (39:10)

A person who performs righteous deeds will enjoy paradise in this world. Indeed, he will become a ‘walking paradise’ through whom those who come in contact with would be able to smell the fragrance of heaven. Elsewhere the Qur’an says:

O you who have faith! Respond to Allah and the Apostle when he summons you to that which will give you life. (8:24)

It is important to note that there are two requirements in the verses “Whoever acts righteously, [whether] male or female.....”² and “O you who have faith!,” two requirements are stated: one is faith and the other is righteous deeds. We also read:

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)

This verse also refers to the same fact that being faithful and obeying God and His Prophet leads us to having a second life.

What is meant by righteous deeds is submitting to religion by following the path which God has shown to us out of His Mercy. In doing so, that new life can be achieved. According to the Holy Qur’an, that right path is worshipping Him: “Worship Me. That is a straight path.” (36:61)

To understand what the right path is, God says in the Holy Qur’an: “Guide us on the straight path, the path of those whom You have blessed.” (1: 6-7)

Thus, people are to look for those who are on this “straight path” and emulate them. And those whom God “blessed” are the revered infallibles. Taking into account that naming ourselves after them is not enough, we are to follow their lead. For example, having the name Mohammad Ali does not guarantee that I am a follower of Muhammad (s) and Ali (a). Some people are named Hasan; others are named Husayn. We also have names such as Sadiq, Kazim, Jawad,

² Qur’an, 16:97

Mahdi, Amir and the like. Knowing too well that having these beautiful names is not enough to help us find the right path, we must strive to successfully pass the classes taught by the infallibles. These names are merely entry requirements that can help us find the right path; yet unless we attend the actual course, we will not know the meaning of the name or the one after whom we are named. While being grateful to God for signing up, it is incumbent upon us to be in the presence of the immaculate teachers of this school and listen to them.

One great teacher in this school is the Holy Prophet (s) who “...purifies them, and teaches them the Book and wisdom.”³ The Prophet (s) “purifies” and “teaches”. The teachers in this school do not only educate the students on theoretical matters; rather, they inform others while being the perfect exemplars of what they teach. The Prophet (s) did not order people to do anything unless he acted upon it first. If we want to join those whom God has blessed, we are to enter this school fully engaged in what is expected from us and ready to act upon our duties. With regards to this, the Holy Qur’an states: “Whoever obeys Allah and the Apostle, they are with those unto whom Allah has bestowed favor...” (4:69)

Those who obey God and His Apostle (s) will find themselves beside those whom God has fully blessed. After this, Allah specifies the four groups who are blessed:

...from among the Prophets and the most truthful and the witnesses and the righteous, and what a good company they are. (4: 69)

These four groups are our role models and we are required to follow them. But how? Through obedience, as seen in the verse, “Respond to Allah and the Apostle.....” along with performing righteous deeds,

³ Qur’an, 62:2 & 3:164

since “Whoever acts righteously, [whether] male or female, should he be faithful...”⁴

One of the most successful and perfect of those teachers is Imam Husayn (a), with whose instruction, we can easily and comfortably succeed in this path. To further explain this point, it is necessary to understand the outcome of our good deeds in that no matter how much a human being obeys and performs righteous deeds, it would still count for very little. When we consider our distance from God in addition to our weaknesses and limitations, we will see that there is a long way ahead of us and however much we struggle, we will not be able to gather enough provisions and resources for this long journey. Imam Ali (a) - with all his sincere worships and great services for Islam, while fully comprehending this journey – as well as his actions – said:

آه من قلة الزاد و بعد السفر و وحشة الطريق⁵

Alas! The provision is so little, the journey is so distant,
and the path is so lonely.

Imam Ali (a) felt concerned when he remembered his little provision on the one hand and the far journey to be made in loneliness on the other. If this is how Imam Ali (a) feels then where do we stand? Why is the journey so long? Isn't it because we are heading towards infinity?

Thus, it would be wrong to believe that those daily prayers we recite, which are many times carelessly done, are enough. It is not even certain that during our entire lifetime, we have done two units (*rak'ahs*) of prayer with the presence of heart. We do some so-called fasting while we might commit numerous sins as well. We perform hajj whilst possessing impure intentions or might be annoying or even hurting our fellow pilgrims. In short, what can we say? We will be so

⁴ Qur'an, 16: 97

⁵ *Sharh Nahj al-Balāqah*, Ibn Abi al-Hadid, vol. 18, p. 226.

miserable if we pride ourselves for the little that we do, such as performing some religious obligations, attending religious functions, giving sermons, or having built several mosques. If we are fully aware that we are heading towards God, we will understand that even though we have gathered many provisions, it will still count for very little. However, it is not wise to renounce performing good deeds and forsake the right path because of this.

Another way to achieve eternal bliss is to make sincere efforts while fully realizing that our actions are not enough, and to implore God, saying: “O’ God! I did what I could. Please have mercy upon me and accept and grow it.”

God multiplies the righteous deeds of the faithful. It may be that a person gives a little charity, but God will increase it so much that its worth may become greater than Abu Qubays Mountain (in Mecca) on the Day of Judgment. Sometimes we may be surprised with the way God assigns great rewards for certain deeds such as visiting Imam Husayn’s (a) holy shrine, reciting the chapter *Tawhid* of the Holy Qur’an once, or fulfilling the need of a brother or sister in faith. God knows that we will not achieve much through our day-to-day performance. If God wants to give us only one reward for each action we perform, we would not get anywhere. On the other hand, God does not want to give us reward without us doing anything, because in this way we would not try to progress or improve. God creates opportunities for us to progress, and those who take advantage of and appreciate those opportunities will benefit tremendously. On the Day of Judgment, someone who does not receive that many rewards mentioned in narrations (*hadiths*) cannot complain that he had gone to hajj once and yet expects to receive the rewards for going to hajj a thousand times. God will remind that servant of the worth of fulfilling a person’s need, which is much greater than performing the hajj pilgrimage. Thus, on that day, people will have no excuse. God, the Almighty, has and always will give us scores of opportunities and if we appreciate and use them, He will have a reason to reward us.

One issue in Shi'a jurisprudence is the rule of compromise in the reasoning of recommended rulings (*al-tasāmuh fi adillah al-sunan*). We have many narrations from the Prophet (s) and Imams (a) implying that if a person is told that performing a certain deed receives a certain amount of reward and the person does that deed hoping to receive it, then he or she will eventually be given that reward, even if the Prophet (s) had not actually said it:

مَنْ بَلَغَهُ شَيْءٌ مِنَ التَّوَابِ عَلَى (شَيْءٍ مِنَ الْخَيْرِ) فَعَمِلَهُ كَانَ لَهُ أَجْرُ ذَلِكَ (وَ إِنْ كَانَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ ص لَمْ يَقُلْهُ)

Whoever receives some narration about a reward for performing a good action and he actually performs that action in order to get that reward, he will be given that reward even if that narration was not said by the Messenger of God.⁶

Thus, if you hear or read a hadith that, for example, recommends a certain prayer in the *Night of Qadr* (*Laylat al-Qadr*) because it earns a special reward and a person actually reads the prayer, he or she would be given that reward even if that hadith was mistaken or forged. Of course, the narration and the recommended action must be in themselves reasonable and in compliance with the Qur'an, established sunnah, and reason.⁷

This is why our jurists are more flexible in declaring an act as recommended (*mustahabb*) than to declare an act as obligatory or forbidden. It's as if God is saying, "My servant made an effort while hopeful of receiving a reward, and so I will reward him; no one can complain or ask why I did not offer the same to them."

⁶ *Wasā'il al-Shi'a*, vol. 1, p. 80 & vol. 30, p. 246. There is a chapter about this issue in vol. 1, pp. 8-82 which has ten hadiths.

⁷ Of course, everyone has to be careful, not to accept everything, because there are many superstitions or ideas that make no sense which are clearly far from truth and no one should act upon such narrations.

Or God offers to forgive all those who go on the Day of ‘Arafah to the plain of ‘Arafāt. The only condition for this is that you have to be aware and ask for forgiveness. So, if we do not benefit from this offer and are not forgiven, we should not complain and question why others have been forgiven. As far as God was concerned, He was ready to forgive all mankind. And even the person who could not actually go could at least have the desire in their heart to be there, and God would still give them something. Therefore, if we take up the opportunities that God has given us on our journey, then we could have some hope. But if we want to only consider our own actions such as performing the daily prayers and fasting only in the month of Ramadan, then our expectations will not be fulfilled. And if we do not act upon these duties, then we cannot have any hope. But it is also clear that no one should misunderstand this reasoning and say that if this is so then our deeds are in vain. You must try to do as much righteous deeds as possible, while realizing these are not enough.

We must be aware. Certainly the faithful person is astute. The most astute faithful was the Commander of the Faithful (a). He showed that being astute is the one who makes business with God. Knowing that there is none more trustworthy and generous than God, negotiating with anyone apart from Him is a deception. Even if it is not a deception, the person will eventually become bankrupt because his assets will be limited. Therefore, it is crucial that people only negotiate with Him.

If we want to use our lives properly and enjoy every moment of them in the most productive way, we must use those shortcuts presented to us by God. For example, one of those shortcuts and great opportunities is the Night of Qadr. This is the night which is “*better than one thousand months.*”⁸ Every good action performed in this night is rewarded by God as if it has been performed every night in one thousand months.

⁸ Qur’an, 97:3

Thus, since we cannot excessively perform good deeds such as fasting, performing prayers, and reciting the Qur'an to receive rewards, enduring hardships is a shortcut given by God to the faithful who love God. Of course, we should do as much as we can because it gives us the strength to endure hardships. And if we truly comprehend what this hardship is for, we are to thank God for it. This is why after reciting *Ziyarat 'Āshurā* we prostrate to God and say:

اللَّهُمَّ لَكَ الْحَمْدُ حَمْدَ الشَّاكِرِينَ لَكَ عَلَى مُصَابِهِمْ الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ عَلَى عَظِيمِ زُرِّيَّتِي

O God! To You belongs the praise of the grateful ones for their hardships. All praise is due to Allah for my great tragedy.

We also recite in a recommended supplication after the daily prayers in the month of Rajab: “O God! Truly I ask you to grant me the patience of the thankful...”

Hence, people are to praise God like those who are patient and grateful to Him for their suffering. We must be among those who learned from Imam Husayn (a) that hardships can be blessings. We must be among those who learned from Lady Zaynab that hardship is beautiful in her famous statement: “I saw nothing but beauty!”⁹

Thus, it is not surprising that on the Day of Judgment the faithful will see that the rewards God gives them for their hardships are greater than the rewards given for their worship. There are many kinds of troubles from which we may suffer. On the Day of Judgment, the rewards given to the faithful for being patient in difficulties will bore than what they will be given for their religious obligations. Of course, prayer and fasting are the basic requirements for their success. The requirement for benefitting from these hardships is to have faith and to perform righteous deeds; otherwise, instead of benefitting from those opportunities, complaining or nagging will cause people to lose their

⁹ *Bihār al-Anwār*, vol. 45, p. 115.

rewards. Prophet Jacob considered Joseph's abduction "*a beautiful patience*" (12:18 & 83). This is the patience that is accompanied by gratitude, not the kind followed by complaints and objections against God. How pathetic we must be to lose a reward after we have faced hardships! If we are experiencing a hardship, adversity, calamity or any other trouble, of which a faithful person undoubtedly experiences, we are enduring that situation anyway, so why not make an investment of it for our Hereafter? Make benefit of it for seeking nearness to God! Praise Him and do not complain!

According to a narration in Abi Faad Hillī's '*Uddat al-Dā'ir*', on the Day of Judgment, when the faithful see what God gives them instead of what they wanted and did not receive in this world, they will wish none of their requests in this world had been answered. You may have taken care of a patient who has not been cured yet, wanted money which God has not given you, or attempted to marry without success. Everyone has his own problems and beseeches God and mourns about them. Sometimes it proves beneficial when a request is granted, and sometimes it is not. On the Day of Judgment, when we see what God will give us instead of what we had wanted and did not receive, we would wish that none of our requests in this world were granted. We would wish that all of it had been saved up for the Hereafter. On the Day of Judgment, all of us will wish we had suffered more hardships in this world. Currently, we do not perceive for our eyes are closed. We do not know the benefit of these hardships.

Concerning the qualities of the Imams' followers, Imam Sadiq (a) states, "We are patient, but our followers are more patient than us." This narration becomes more comprehensible in the following part: "We are patient with respect to what we know and they are patient with respect to what they do not know."¹⁰ The Imams are patient while knowing the positive outcomes of sufferings, but their followers are patient while being unaware of the other side of sufferings. The

¹⁰ *Al-Kāfi*, vol. 2, p. 93. The hadith reads as follows:

انا صَبْرٌ و شِيعَتُنَا اَصْبِرُ مِنْنا لِاَنَّا نَصْبِرُ عَلٰى مَا نَعْلَمُ وَ هُمْ يَصْبِرُوْنَ عَلٰى مَا لَا يَعْلَمُوْنَ.

faithful person who is enduring hardships in this world, for example, whose family has left him or whose children do not respect him, does not currently know what he will gain for enduring these hardships for the sake of God. This is why it is difficult for him. The underprivileged whose poverty is not due to laziness and is still poor does not understand how many blessings he will receive after this poverty and so it is difficult for him to remain persistent. For those who know, not only is it easier to endure hardships; rather, they will also thank God. The patience of the grateful is then not so difficult. Therefore, the Imam (a) regarded his followers as more patient than the infallibles.

What is the patience of grateful people like? If I want to give an example, it could be compared to the difficulty we face when we want to pass an exam. We will study hard before the exam and we may have been sleepless for a week or more. But this is not bitter for us. It might be difficult, but not bitter. Sometimes, something is difficult *and* painful for people though it is not bitter. The same pertains to the hardships faced by Household (a). Do not ever think that the events of 'Ashura were not difficult. They were extremely difficult. They were painful, but they were not bitter. They were not ugly. That is why in *Ziyarat 'Ashura*, the supplicant thanks God by saying, "O God! To You belongs the praise of the grateful ones for their hardships."

On the Day of Judgment, the one who has endured hardships the most will have the greatest reward. The Holy Prophet (s) stated, "No Prophet suffered hardships like me." You may wonder why God's beloved servant should suffer most from hardships. The answer is that enduring hardship is not a sign of being disliked; God loved him more than anyone and he had to face hardships in order to be spiritually elevated. The person who is a nearer to God might face more hardships. Why? Is He an enemy of the servant? Does He want to annoy the servant for no purpose? No. The servant is given hardships for two reasons: 1) Hardship is the prerequisite for progress, and 2)

God only tests when He knows that the one tested is competent for the test.

God will not impose more on the faithful than they are able to endure; but He might gradually increase their capacity and their hardships accordingly. A good teacher does this. A trainer will do likewise. A good trainer will not expect everything of us on the first day. He would first evaluate our competence and then, when our capacity has increased, he will intensify his instructions. God increases the hardships of those whom He loves as their competence increases.

In the next part, we will study the suffering of Imam Husayn (a) and the way we can benefit more from mourning for him in our pursuit of salvation.

PHILANTHROPIC IDEALS IN IMAM ALI'S RULE

IZZATULLAH MAWLANIYA AND
MAHMUD RIDA TAWAKKULI

TRANSLATED BY JABIR CHANDOO

ABSTRACT: Philanthropy enjoys a unique position in human relations. Issues related to philanthropy have constantly caught the attention of man throughout human history. The concept of philanthropy and its issues have been time and again reviewed and deliberated upon by scholars and intellectuals. Philanthropy is a capacious word. Writing an article on it, or even authoring a book for that matter, would not suffice to discuss all problems surrounding it, as this requires comprehensive research and ample time. However, among the issues directly associated with philanthropy is that of governance, that is, the manner in which the state treats its citizens, and the degree to which the statesmen respect and stand for human dignity in relation to their subjects. This paper examines the ethical ideals in the practice of Imam Ali particularly as illustrated in his letter to Malik al-Ashtar, and demonstrates the philanthropic principles that statesmen ought to observe vis-à-vis their subjects from the viewpoint of the Imam. Being just with people, consulting them in matters related to the society, being open to criticism, fighting against institutionalised discrimination, being answerable to the masses, establishing peace and security in the society, and the like, are among some philanthropic principles given by Imam Ali which shall be reflected upon.

Preamble

Man is a social being by nature. On the one hand, he is not able to survive and prosper without founding a human community and cooperating with fellow human beings; on the other hand, the very social life of man requires special conditions without which the prosperity of human societies would be imperilled.

Furthermore, man is constituted of two dimensions: human and animal. The human dimension drives him to acquire lofty and angelic attributes, whereas the animal dimension presses him to take up the path of animal instincts such as excessive eating, sleeping, and anger.

Therefore, it is necessary for man to be guided toward lofty human traits and for human societies to have the right system of administration based on divine teachings.

As the final and most complete of all divine religions, Islam has sufficiently addressed these two realities pertaining to man and society without any shortcoming. However, beside the Qur'an, we have also the practice (*sirah*) of the Prophet of Islam and his progeny as a source of guidance for mankind.

The exercising of love of people by political leaders and statesmen is indeed an essential element in the administration of a society and in the directing it towards perfection. In other words, how the government functionaries treat their subjects and their responsibilities in this regard, as well as the degree of respect to human dignity shown by the state are extremely instrumental in the prosperity of a society. For this reason, much attention has been given to this matter in Islamic sources. Imam Ali (a) carefully addressed the matter in its different dimensions and has presented the right course of action to humankind in the form of principles; if implemented, they would guarantee the stability of a society as well as the material and spiritual development of mankind.

A cursory look at the modern societies, especially Western societies, clearly reveal that the socio-political ideas that dominate them are all based on the incorrect perception of the philanthropic ideals which, in turn, has led to the failure of their implementation.

The only achievement of the modern materialistic thought until now is that it has transformed man into a commodity and subjected the concept of human dignity to scepticism. The reality is that this materialistic civilization tries to cover the shameful degradation of modern man under the guise of material prosperity, the impropriety of which has been admitted even by the proponents of this civilization. The bitter truth is that modern man has not been able to retrieve his lost treasure amidst material prosperity.

Moreover, could it be imagined that one could search for and find such basic human ideals as dignity, honour, freedom, liberality, justice, equality, brotherhood, love, philanthropy, and sacrifice amidst the iron wheels of industrialization? The sad reality is that modern society has relinquished the precious gems of humanity and philanthropy in return for industrialization and material progress. What a malign transaction this has been. What else other than turning away from the divine teachings could be the reason for such a tragedy?

This paper aims at pointing out to some philanthropic principles concerning the relationship between the state and the citizen in light of Imam Ali's letter to Malik al-Ashtar. This letter was apparently written to Malik but it has been, in fact, addressed to all political leaders, statesmen, and government functionaries for all times to come. These are a set of principles whose enforcement by the statesmen would guarantee the subsistence and happiness of a society.

It is worth mentioning that the relationship between the people and the statesmen is reciprocal in nature such that the citizens of the state also have responsibilities towards their rulers as it has been demonstrated

in the words of Imam Ali. However, this topic is beyond the constraints of this paper.

The Philanthropic Principles in the Practice of Imam Ali

The core discussion concerns the primary duties of the statesmen vis-à-vis their subjects in light of critical reflection on the Imam's letter. We shall focus on the philanthropic principles illustrated in this letter.

-Reforming the Self

Purification of the soul is a firm foothold for upholding political leadership and administration, and a requisite for love of humankind. Self-purification serves as a qualifying test for undertaking the crucial responsibility of serving the people. According to Imam Ali, unless one passes this test, one is not entitled to step into this enterprise.

Imam Ali maintains that a political ruler ought to realize within himself such spiritual consciousness that the political position he holds would not impinge on his personality and influence his decisions. In one of his letters to his military commanders, he says,

From the servant of God, Ali bin Abi Talib, the
Commander of the Faithful, to the territorial
garrisons...¹

As it is apparent from this statement, the Imam is referring to himself as the slave of God. This implies that the political supremacy could not breed vainglory in the Imam, as his only pride was that he was the servant of God. Further in the letter, he states:

The ruler ought not to change [behaviour] against his
people due to the acquisition of wealth or endowment
with exclusive distinction; rather, what Allah has
bestowed on him of His bounties should increase him

¹ Sayyid Radi, p. 562, 1378.

in earning proximity to His creatures and being sympathetic towards his brethren.²

According to Imam Ali, holding an administrative post is considered as a platform of service to the people, not an opportunity for misappropriation of public wealth or making people indebted to oneself.

Caring for people and acting on the basic principles of humanity are among the things recognized and endorsed by the Imam in these few lines of his letter.

As a matter of fact, Imam Ali considers individual reform to be a necessary requisite for any kind of social reform. He says:

I wonder at a person who undertakes the reforming of other people while he himself is more corrupt than any other being.³

In his letter to Malik al-Ashtar also, the Imam invites him to God-consciousness, to restrain the commanding self (*al-nafs al-ammārah*), and to refrain from pride and vainglory. ‘Allamah Muhammad Taqi Ja‘fari says in this regard:

In this charter, particularly in its prelude, building the personality of Malik through God-consciousness (*taqwa*) and preparing him to develop the sense of dedication toward the administration of the society has been the greatest concern of Imam Ali – the Master of the God-fearing.⁴

He further continues and says:

² Ibid.

³ Āmīdī, v.2, p.495, 1366.

⁴ Ja‘fari, p.123, 1369.

The directives of the Imam on self-reform to Malik al-Ashtar, who is himself the executor of the charter, substantiate best the claim that for the proper administration of the society and procurement of social felicity, the proficiency of the executor of law is more effectual and important than the law itself. It is true that the divine laws guarantee complete felicity for humankind only if its executor is also divine; however, critical historical analysis into the social life of human societies attest to the fact that a society which has the best law does not necessarily enjoy the best standard of life, because the competency or incompetency of the one who enforces the law bears greater significance and impact than the law itself.⁵

It is based on this very outlook that the Imam says on another occasion:

“How can a wicked person remedy other people?”⁶

On the same note, he says in sermon 175 of *Nahj al-Balāghah* referring to himself:

O people! By Allah I do not impel you to obedience except after I have preceded you in it; and I do not restrain you from disobedience except after I have desisted from it before you.⁷

With regard to the necessity of self-reform by the leaders and administrators of the society, Imam Ali says:

Whoever puts himself up as a leader of the people ought to start with educating himself before educating

⁵ Ibid, p.124.

⁶ Ibid, p. 555.

⁷ Sayyid Radi, p. 332-333, 1378.

others as he ought to discipline [the people] through his conduct before he does so through his tongue. One who educates his self and disciplines it is more worthy of reverence than he who educates the people and disciplines them.⁸

Purification of the soul holds such a great position in the eyes of the Imam that in both of his two extended letters, one to his son Imam Hasan and another to Malik al-Ashtar, he proffers essential guidelines for the rearing of a complete, believing, and virtuous human being.

It could be indisputably said that if there was nothing in the words of the Imam concerning self-purification beside these two letters, they would have definitely sufficed to show the degree of importance given by the Imam to this notion.

After discussing self-reform as an essential requisite for undertaking an administrative post, we shall henceforth examine the philanthropic principles in the words of Imam Ali, particularly in light of his letter to Malik al-Ashtar as mentioned earlier.

-Observing Justice

Justice and impartiality of the state in giving privileges and services to the citizens is among the primary ethical ideals in the Islamic political system. Failure to abide by this ideal would naturally call into question the very basis of the Islamic government. It is precisely due to this reason that Imam Ali attached great significance to this principle and beckoned for it.

Imam Ali set out to enforce justice in the social and political system of his society by starting, first and foremost, with himself as the head of state, and thereafter with his ministers, governors, and close

⁸ Ibid, p. 639, saying no. 65.

associates. This feature in the rule of Ali grants him distinction from other political rulers and thinkers.

Part of his letter to Malik al-Ashtar reads as follows:

Be just with God and be just with people [giving them what is their due] from yourself, from your close relatives, and from those of your subjects towards whom you are most affectionate. If you fail to do this, you will be an oppressor. And he who oppresses the servants of God will find that God, as well as His servants, will oppose him.⁹

From the viewpoint of Imam Ali, justice serves as the strongest support for any social system. The Almighty God has decreed justice to be a means to straighten human affairs on the earth and to protect man from oppression, disorder, and disobedience; as it is through justice only that social laws can be revived in the society and effectively put into force.¹⁰ He also says in the same letter:

The greatest source of joy for the governors is the establishment of justice in the land, and the emanation of love from his subjects.¹¹

Imam Ali was determined even to put right the injustices that were committed in the previous administrations before him:

By Allah, if I were to find that through this [misappropriation of public funds] women have been married or slave-girls have been purchased, I would surely get it back; for there is indeed comfort in justice.

⁹ Sayyid Radi, p. 569, 1378.

¹⁰ Khwansari, v.1, p. 11, 1360 and Fakiki, p. 185-189, 1361.

¹¹ Kishwari, p. 48, 1379.

And whoever finds justice distressing, then injustice would be even more distressing for him.¹²

In his letter, the Imam also portrayed his concern over the issue of appointment of unbiased juries who would pursue the course of serving the public and establish justice in the society is also vital:

Choose as judges those whom you consider the most excellent of your subjects—those who are not confused by complex matters, nor angered by disputants; who do not persist in error, and are not reticent about turning to the truth when they perceive it; whose souls are not susceptible to avarice; who, dissatisfied with a superficial understanding, will probe deeply.¹³

-Public Cooperation

Consulting the public and seeking their input on matters affecting them is an essential element in administrating a society. This would naturally enhance collaboration between the state and its citizens, and would encourage people to assist the statesmen.

Public cooperation on the part of the statesmen exhibits itself in consultation with the public and in providing a platform to them to voice their opinions. This matter constitutes, in the context of the Islamic government, one of the most important pillars of philanthropy.

Respect to the public and taking their opinion as the basis of running the society, either directly through their right of voting or indirectly through their respective representatives, are among the commendable ideals in the Islamic government.

Imam Ali put great emphasis on this ideal as he considered it to be the undisputable right of the public. In sermon 216 of the *Nahj al-*

¹² Sayyid Radi, p. 58, 1378.

¹³ Kishwari, p. 51-52, 1379.

Balāghah, the Imam insists on the fact that a ruler ought to consult the public in matters related to them and to know their opinion. In sermon 205, the Imam states:

Verily, I do not see myself to be above making any mistake, nor do I consider myself immune of it in my actions, except in what Allah protects me from that of my soul over which He has more control than myself.¹⁴

According to Imam Ali, consultation is an important principle in life which ought to be observed by everyone in crucial matters, for he who seeks advice has associated himself with their knowledge.¹⁵

To act on this principle is essential for all the rulers and administrators, as the decisions they make determine the fate of the society. However, failure to do so would raise the probability of them making an incorrect decision due to lack of thorough study of all dimensions of a matter and inadequate knowledge of the perspectives of others.

In this very regard the Imam says, “He who entertains different opinions would realize the instances of errors.”¹⁶ It is in view of this that Imam Ali recommends to Malik al-Ashtar that he should study much with the scholars and hold discourses with the sages so that he may make use of their knowledge and experience for the wellbeing of the society.

Therefore, the Islamic government is duty-bound to involve its citizens in the policy-making process, and the experts or organizations it consults need to stem from the public and truly represent their interests.¹⁷

¹⁴ Sayyid Radi, p. 240, 1378.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, p. 664.

¹⁶ Ibn Shu'Ybah, p. 80, 1376.

¹⁷ Ma'rifat, v.6, p. 195, 1378.

However, according to sermon 205 of *Nahj al-Balāghah*, public consultation is only to take place in matters whose ruling has not appeared in the Qur'an or the practice (*Sunnah*) of the Holy Prophet; in other than this case this principle would not apply.¹⁸ The Imam himself used to resolutely rule down the opinion of his advisors if it stood in contrast with the truth. For example, he is reported to have told Ibn 'Abbas, "It is your right to advise me and I am obliged to look into it, but if I thereafter make a decision contrary to your opinion, then you ought to obey me."¹⁹

Being Open to Political Critics

In his letter to Malik al-Ashtar, Imam Ali plainly points out to the fact that truth is always hard to accept for the rulers and administrators.²⁰ However, the Imam maintains that it is extremely necessary for this class of people to develop the spirit of accepting the truth; for he who finds difficult to accept the truth would find acting on it to be even more difficult.²¹ As the head of state, Imam Ali would himself urge people to remind him of the truth in all situations, and not to consider him as immune to making mistakes or needless of any advice and counsel.²²

Hence, possessing the spirit of accepting criticism is, from the viewpoint of Imam Ali, among the significant qualities of a ruler, such that he ought not to get annoyed by listening to the comments of his critics; rather, he should welcome and respect their views and try to work on them if, at all, they happen to be right. This is the very principle of respecting others' opinions which is considered to be one of the standards of philanthropy in the avenue of governance.

¹⁸ Sayyid Radi, p. 427, 1378.

¹⁹ Ibid, p. 706.

²⁰ Ibid, p. 564-591.

²¹ Ibid, p. 444.

²² Ibid.

In his letter to Malik al-Ashtar, which is, in the actual fact, the charter of the governance of Ali, the Imam advises him saying:

Within this group, give preference to the one who most sincerely speaks the truth, however bitter it may be to you, and who supports you least in doing that which God dislikes for His friends, however painfully this may strike at your desires.²³

According to Imam Ali, the political critics need to be also fully supported by the Islamic government. He would himself object to the deviations of the previous rulers before him as well as extend his full support for the political critics. Among such critics was Abu Dharr al-Ghaffari who used to audaciously voice his criticisms against the government and openly accuse its functionaries of financial corruption to the extent that the caliph of the time had no choice but to send him into exile. However, Abu Dharr enjoyed complete support of the Imam throughout this period, as he together with his two sons and a group of his followers sided with him until the final moments before his extradition.²⁴

Imam Ali himself was subjected to criticism, at times in a disrespectful manner, but he would never get disappointed by such criticisms and would rather always try to convince his critics through reasoning and logical answers.

This is the manner in which Imam Ali would respect the rights of other people even though they were his opponents. Does this attitude signify but adherence to philanthropic principles, respect for freedom of speech, and regard for human rights?

One day Malik al-Ashtar objected to the Imam about his nomination of the children of 'Abbas for the government posts. Justifying his

²³ Ibid, p. 570.

²⁴ Mas'udi, v.2, p. 351.

appointments, he replied to him saying, "If at this stage you know of people more capable than them, let me know and I shall appoint them for these offices."²⁵

Regarding the necessity of being tolerant to criticism, the founder of the Islamic revolution in Iran, the Late Imam Khomeini says:

We should never think that none has the right of objection on what we say or do. To criticize, or rather to point out faults, is a divine gift for the development of humankind.²⁶

Equality before the Law

According to Imam Ali, yet another duty of the rulers and statesmen vis-à-vis the citizens is their strict adherence to the law.

In the eyes of Ali, the ruler and the ruled all enjoy equal rights, and they are all equal before the law. Affluence, association with a political party, or belonging to a particular social class can, in no way, give legal distinction to a group of people over the other. The Imam maintains that even the government functionaries and officers ought not to consider themselves to be superior to the ordinary citizens and to subsequently demand for extra legal rights.²⁷

Adherence to the law and combating favoritism has a special place in the life and practice of Imam Ali. He would enforce the law of God regardless of the personality and social status of the person involved. In one incident, he strongly turned down any mediation to pardon a member of the tribe of Asad from being flogged according to the Shari'ah law.²⁸ Similarly, when Najjashi - the poet and propagandist loyal to Imam Ali in the battle of Siffin - was convicted of anti-

²⁵ Ibn Abi al-Hadid, v.15, p. 98, 1965.

²⁶ Khomeini, v.20, p. 170, 1365.

²⁷ Kaffash, p. 18, 1379.

²⁸ Muhammadi Reyshahri, v.4, p. 166-167, 1421.

Islamic behaviour, the Imam subjected him to the Islamic punishment. As a result, Najjashi separated from the Imam and joined the camp of Mu‘awiyah.

That the truth ought to be defended at any cost is among the most fundamental principles in the school of Ahlul Bayt. However, the mode of defence would vary as per the conditions prevailing in every age.

In his letter to one of his governors who misappropriated the public funds, Imam Ali says:

By Allah, if Hasan and Husayn were to do what you have done, there would have been no clemency on my part for them, nor could they have affected my determination until I have taken back the right from them and have done away with the wrong produced by their unjust action.²⁹

Thus, adherence to the law by the rulers and statesmen, and their holding everyone equal before it, is undoubtedly among the philanthropic ideals in the relation between the statesmen and the citizens which was repeatedly called for and acted upon by Imam Ali.

Accountability to the People and Being among Them

Among the other important duties of the government officers and one of the undisputable right of the citizens, is that the officials have to be available to people; they should have active presence in public assemblies, respond to the queries of the people, and address their concerns. In other words, the sources and channels of information utilized by the statesmen ought to be more comprehensive and not limited to indirect sources only. Furthermore, the citizens should have all the right to voice their views and complains openly and explicitly,

²⁹ Sayyid Radi, p. 548, 1378.

without any constraints.³⁰ In his recommendations to Malik al-Ashtar, Imam Ali states:

Apportion a part of your time to those who have special needs, making yourself free to attend to them personally, sitting with them in a public assembly with all due humility before God, your Creator. Keep your soldiers, guards, and officers away from them so that they can speak to you in an uninhibited manner, for I heard the Messenger of God say - God bless him and his family - on more than one occasion, 'A nation in which the rights of the weak are not wrested in an uninhibited manner from the strong will never be blessed.' Bear patiently any coarseness or inarticulate expression that they might manifest; do not show any irritation or disdain towards them.³¹

Thus, according to Imam Ali, the head of state and his ministers ought to be answerable to the people and address their problems without any sort of bureaucratic behaviour or regulation. He advises Malik at length in this regard and says:

In addition to all of this, do not prolong any period of absence from your subjects, for the isolation of the governors from their subjects is a kind of constriction and causes deficiency in awareness of their affairs. Such isolation cuts rulers off from acquiring knowledge about things hidden from them, so that which is great will appear small, and that which is small, great; the beautiful will appear ugly, and the ugly, beautiful; the true will be mixed with the false. The governor is but a human being: he cannot know what people hide from him. There are no visible signs on the truth, by virtue of

³⁰ Makarim Shirazi, p. 107.

³¹ Sayyid Radi, p. 582-584, 1378.

which apparent expressions of veracity can be distinguished from falsehood.

You can only be one of two types: either a man who gives himself generously for the sake of the truth - in which case why seclude yourself [thereby preventing yourself] from bestowing a necessary right or performing an honourable deed? Or else you are a man afflicted with refusal [to give of oneself] in which case, how quickly people will refrain from making requests of you, despairing of your generosity! This, despite the fact that [fulfilling] most of the needs which people present to you is not burdensome, whether they be complaints against injustice or demands for fairness in transactions.³²

What is striking of the above piece of advice is that the Imam's recommendation entails ultimate respect for the public in that it insists on the presence of Malik among the people not with the aim of deceiving them or securing their votes; rather, in order for him to come to know of the public opinion, needs, and demands.³³ In his letter to his governor of Mecca, Imam Ali says:

You ought not to have any ambassador to the public but your tongue, nor any guard but your face. Do not stop any needy from meeting with you, for if he is returned unsatisfied from your door in the first instance, then even fulfilling it thereafter shall not bring you praise.³⁴

Knowledge of public demands and the necessity of addressing them is so important in the rule of Imam Ali that he highlights the matter for Malik al-Ashtar in the following manner:

³² Ibid, pp. 584-586.

³³ Mir Musawi, v.3, p. 341, 1380.

³⁴ Sayyid Radi, p. 606-608, 1378.

Keep a watchful eye over the affairs of those who have no access to you, and who are disdained by men of high standing. Appoint from among those you trust a God-fearing and humble person to be responsible for bringing their affairs to your attention. Treat these people in a manner such that God may excuse you on the day you meet Him.³⁵

For those of his citizens who were not willing for any reason to verbally voice their complaints and criticisms against the head of state or other government functionaries, the Imam had established an independent office during his rule called *Dār al-Qiṣaṣ* (House of Reports) for receiving public grievances in written form.

Good Conduct of the Statesmen Vis-à-Vis the Citizens

The following lines below from Imam Ali's letter to Malik al-Ashtar demonstrate the position of good behaviour of the statesmen in the rule of Ali. Although apparently written to Malik, this letter has been, in the actual fact, addressed to all political leaders, statesmen, and government functionaries of all times. The underlying message of the letter calls upon the political leaders and administrators to have high regard for their people and treat them on human principles. The Imam writes:

Infuse your heart with mercy for the subjects, love for them, and kindness towards them. Be not like a ravenous beast of prey above them, seeking to devour them. For they are of two types: either your brother in religion or your like in creation. Mistakes slip from them, defects emerge from them, deliberately or accidentally. So bestow upon them your forgiveness

³⁵ Ibid, p. 582.

and your pardon, just as you would have God bestow upon you His forgiveness and pardon.³⁶

These lines are replete with such philanthropic ideals as being kind and humble with people, being generous and sympathetic towards them, treating them equally, eliminating ethnic discrimination, and the like.

Acting against Breach of Public Trust by the Government Officials

How the state officials and government functionaries handle the government resources at hand is among the sensitive issues closely followed by the public. Proper use of these resources would provide mental security to the public, and increase their confidence in the government's commitment towards improving its citizen's standard of life. On the contrary, the mishandling of these resources shall have serious implications, the most detrimental of which would perhaps be the public's loss of confidence in the government, and the rise in economic insecurity in the society.

Therefore, the state ought to take necessary measures to ensure the proper use of government resources, and at the same time firmly act against any form of misappropriation of public funds.

In his letter to Ziyad bin Abih – the deputy governor of Basrah, Imam Ali says:

I swear by Allah and I am resolute in my oath, that if I come to know that you have misappropriated the funds of the Muslims - small or big - I shall take you to task such that it will leave you empty-handed, without means of sustaining your family, and humiliated.³⁷

³⁶ Ibid, p. 566-567.

³⁷ Ibid, p. 499.

In a similar letter to his governor of Azerbaijan – Ash’ath bin Qays, the Imam reprimands him on his misconduct and reminds him that he should not consider his assignment to be a means of acquiring wealth; rather, it is a trust on his shoulders that must be preserved. He also notes that as a governor, he is accountable to the authority who has appointed him for the office, and ought not to act freely in the affairs of the public without clear instructions from the head of state.³⁸ This matter is so crucial that the Imam gives his approval to corporal punishment in relation to those officials who breach the public trust:

Also pay attention to your assistants: should any one of them stretch his hand towards some treacherous deeds — and your observers are unanimous in their report, which you deem sufficient evidence of the act — then impose corporal punishment upon him. Let him be chastised on account of the affliction affected by his act. Let him be disgraced, brand him a traitor, and gird him with the ignominy of accusation.³⁹

These words speak volumes about the importance attached to justice and public rights by Imam Ali bin Abi Talib.

Campaign against Bribery

According to Imam Ali, bribery brings destruction and drives one towards wrongdoing. This immoral phenomenon is engendered by government officials who deny people of their rights, thus compelling them to demand them by resorting to bribery.

Indeed, bribery does earn someone a privilege, but by trampling on the rights of other people. It is quite obvious that the gifts received by the government officials and functionaries are by virtue of their positions, otherwise, as ordinary citizens, they would have certainly

³⁸ Ibid, p. 485.

³⁹ Ibid, p. 571.

not received them. Consequently, the one who has been offered the gift and has accepted it would naturally be obliged, at some point, to comply with the wishes of his benefactor, even if that meant snatching away the rights of other people.⁴⁰

During the period of his caliphate, one day Imam Ali was brought a gift by an influential personality in the city of Kufah. The Imam recounts this incident in a sermon and says:

A man came to us in the night with some kind of food in a covered container, but [since he intended to bribe me with it,] I showed my aversion to it as though it was mixed with the saliva of a serpent or its vomit. I inquired whether it was a present, or zakat (poor-tax) or charity, as these [two] are forbidden for us – the members of the Prophet's family. He said it was neither this nor that, but a gift [from him]. So I told him, 'May the mothers mourn you! Have you come to [bribe me and] mislead me through the religion of Allah? Have you gone mad? Or are you afflicted by the Jinn? Or you have lost your senses?

By Allah! If I were to be given the seven domains with all that is under their skies so that I may disobey Allah with regard an ant, snatching from it the husk of a barley grain, I would never do so. Verily, this world of yours is more worthless in my eyes than the chewed leaf in the mouth of a locust.⁴¹

The act of giving or receiving bribery is sharply opposed to philanthropic ideals and the dispensation of justice in the society. Imam Ali openly stood against it lest it becomes instituted in the society such that right is seen as wrong, and wrong as right.

⁴⁰ Kaffash, p. 24, 1379.

⁴¹ Sayyid Radi, p. 461, 1378.

Conclusion

It becomes clear from the above discussion that in the words and practice of Imam Ali bin Abi Talib, governance over the people is not regarded as a privilege; rather, it is an opportunity to serve humankind.

According to the Imam, a good governor is someone who dedicates himself to the service of the people, attend to the affairs of the weak and the poor, and take appropriate measures to combat such social ailments as bribery, corruption, injustice and insecurity. In one word, he would direct all his efforts in protecting human dignity of his citizens, and in dispensing justice and humanity in the society.

The letter of Imam Ali to Malik al-Ashtar on the matter of governance entails all the basic philanthropic ideals and principles necessary for the effective enforcement of justice in the society. He truly did not leave anything unsaid in this regard and has informed us of all that was necessary for us to know.

Therefore, by following these directives of Imam Ali, the Muslim community can lay the foundations of an ideal society, which would then serve as an exemplar for other communities around the world.

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A GLANCE AT THE HADITH OF UNWAN BASRI
MOHAMMED MAHDI ASEFI
TRANSLATED BY ZAINAB MOHAMMED

ABSTRACT: Unwan Basri's ardent love for Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq as well as his eagerness to gain from intellectual gatherings and courses motivated him to benefit from the Imam's knowledge. In a one-on-one meeting with Basri, Imam Ja'far Sadiq spoke to him about the reality of true servitude along with its practical instructions. This article presents this hadith and elucidates the relation between understanding and fearing God, the relation between understanding and (*sulook*) wayfaring towards God, the sources of insight (*ma'rifa*), and the reality of servitude. In order to comprehend true servitude, one must believe God to be the true owner of all creation, entrusting one's affairs to Him (*tafweedh*), wholeheartedly accepting all that God wants for a servant (*tasleem*), and acting within the boundaries of God's commands and prohibitions.

Hadith of Unwan Basri

Allameh Majlisi in *Biharul Anwar* says, "I have seen this tradition in the handwriting of my teacher, Sheikh Bahai: Sheikh Shams ud-Deen bin Makki has related: From the handwritten notes of Sheikh Ahmad Farahani, I narrated from Unwan Basri (aged 94):

For many years I attended Malek bin Anas's classes. When Ja'far bin Mohammed¹ entered the city of Medina, I began to attend his classes and benefitted from his presence just as I benefitted from Malek. One day Ja'far bin Mohammed said to me:

My movement is being controlled by the government, and I am also engaged in prayers throughout the entire day, so please do not prevent me from my prayers. You may continue to gain knowledge from Malek like you did in the past.

I was very saddened by this and as I was leaving his place I said to myself, "If Ja'far bin Mohammed had seen any goodness in me he would not have prevented me from visiting him." So I entered the Prophet's mosque and saluted him. The next day I returned to the Prophet's shrine and recited two units of prayer after which I raised my hands in prayer and said, "O Lord, O God! I ask you to make Ja'far's heart considerate towards me, and make me benefit from his knowledge so much so that I may be guided to the right path." Then I returned home. Due to my love for Ja'fer, I no longer visited Malek. From then onwards I would not leave my house except to participate in congregational prayers. Finally my patience ran out.

One day after reciting my evening prayers, I left my house and headed towards Ja'far's place. Upon reaching his house when I asked for permission to enter, his servant asked me, "May I help you?" To which I replied, "I would like to greet the noble one."² The servant informed me that He was busy praying at his alter, so I sat on his doorstep waiting for a reply. After a while, the servant granted me permission, and I entered the house. I greeted Ja'far, he replied, and invited me to sit down. Then he said, 'May God have mercy upon you.' His head was bent down and after a few moments of silence he asked me, "What is your teknonym (*kunya*)?" I replied, "Abdullah."

¹ The 6th Holy Imam

² Imam Ja'far (a)

He said, "May God make you firm upon your title. What is it that you would like?" In my mind I replied to him, saying, "If there were to be no benefit in this visit except for this prayer, it would suffice me."

He asked again, "What is your question?" I said, "I have asked God to make your heart considerate towards me and to benefit me from your knowledge. I hope God will accept my prayer in this regard."

He said, "Knowledge cannot, as you might think, be achieved through learning; rather, it is a light which reaches into the heart of the one whom God wishes to guide. If you are seeking knowledge, then look for true devotion to God within yourself, seek knowledge through practice, and ask God to grant you the power of understanding so that you will be able to understand."

I said, "Oh noble one!"

He said; "Say, Oh Aba 'Abdillah."

I asked, "Oh Aba 'Abdillah. What is true devotion?"

He answered, "It consists of three things: the servant must not consider himself as the true owner of what God has conferred upon him, for servants own nothing and they believe that the wealth belongs to God alone. Therefore, it has to be spent on what God has commanded.

Servants must not entrust their affairs to themselves and all their attention must be directed to God's commands concerning what to do or not to do.

Hence, when a servant does not consider himself as the true owner of what has been conferred upon him, it will be easy for him to spend it on what God has commanded; and when the servant entrusts his affairs to the Almighty, the divine providence, it will be easy for him to withstand worldly misfortunes; and when the servant directs all of

his attention to God's commands concerning what to do or not to do, he will spare no time on boasting and vying.

If a servant is favoured by God with these three characteristics, it will be easy for him to deal with this world, Satan, and people. He will not seek after worldly gains to amass possessions, nor will he demand fame. Furthermore, he will not seek might and superiority other people have, and will not let his days pass by vainly. This is the first step to piety. The Almighty God - blessed is He and high exalted - says, "*That is the hereafter abode which We will set for those who do not seek for high-handedness or corruption on the earth, and the blissful conclusion is for the pious.*"

No information as such can be found concerning Unwan Basri in the books of *Rijāl*³ and little is known about him except that which is offered in this tradition: he was 94 years old, and though he was one of the elders of society in his time, he was very fond of gaining knowledge as he eagerly attended intellectual gatherings and classes.

Commentary of the hadith

Knowledge, insight, worship, devotion to God are the most important features illustrated in this hadith.

-Knowledge and insight

The knowledge intended in this hadith is an insight and understanding different from what is commonly meant by the word 'knowledge.' Insight is closely related to spiritual journey (*Seyr-o-Sulook*) and Islamic ethics. The connection between ma'rifat, sulook, and ethics can be understood more clearly from the following verse: "...*Only those of Allah's servants having knowledge are apprehensive of Him (35:28).*"

³ Literally meaning 'men'. It is the science in which the narrators of hadith are investigated.

Those who have knowledge in this verse refers to the ‘*Urafā*.⁴ The verse conveys the relation between insight and the fear of God. A person’s benefit from the fear of God depends on his knowledge and understanding of God, and so an increase in such knowledge results in an increase of apprehensiveness.

The relationship between understanding and apprehensiveness

On two occasions, the Qur’an mentions an exclusive relation between understanding God and fear of God. On one occasion, “fear of God” has been restricted to those who have understanding; in another, the Qur’an has limited the fear of those who have an understanding to the fear of God alone.

1. In the verse (35:28), fear of God has been restricted to those who have understanding. Only those of Allah's servants who have knowledge fear Him.

2. In the verse (33:39), “...*deliver the messages of Allah and fear Him, and fear no one except Allah, and Allah suffices as reckoner,*” the fear held by the knowledgeable is limited to fear of God alone, given that those who carry out the message of God to the people are to be understanding and knowledgeable.

According to one hadith, once a Bedouin went to the Prophet, who in turn asked one of his companions to teach the Qur’an to the Bedouin. The companion began to recite the chapter 99⁵ for him until he reached the verse, “*So whoever does an atom's weight of good will see it - and whoever does an atom's weight of evil will see it.*” The Bedouin said, ‘That which you have read suffices me,’ and then he left. When the companion related the incident to the Prophet, the Prophet said, “When this man came he was a simple Bedouin, but now on his return he has deep understanding.”

⁴ Gnostics

⁵ Chapter al-Zilzal - *The Shaking* – verses 7 & 8

The logical relation between understanding and sulook

There is a logical relation between understanding and wayfaring towards God which is also indicated in the Qur'an: "... *Only those of Allah's servants having knowledge fear Him*" (35:28). According to this verse, fear of Allah is a result of understanding and knowledge, and God increases His servant's fear for Him depending on the extent of his cognizance in relation to Him. The opposite of this statement is also true. God has said: "... *Be wary of Allah and Allah shall teach you* (2:282)."

Sheikh Mohammed 'Abduh in *Tafseer al-Manār*⁶ denies this interpretation of the verse. He says, "This kind of interpretation supports the Sufi way of thinking. According to them knowledge cannot be acquired except through education and piety. To fear God is not a means of acquiring knowledge."

If we were to take the word 'knowledge' in its technical meaning - which is the opposite of understanding and insight - then we can accept Sheikh Mohammed Abdah's words. But if the word 'knowledge' in this particular verse means cognizance and understanding of God, then the Sheikh's words are debatable. God says in the Qur'an:

O you who have faith! Be wary of Allah and have faith in His Apostle. He will grant you a double share of His mercy and give you a light to walk by...And He has also said O you who have faith! If you are wary of Allah, He shall appoint a criterion for you.⁷ And in this manner God bestows this light and ability to separate truth from falsehood by means of piety to His servants.

God also says:

⁶ This commentary contains the teachings of Abdah, but it has been written and compiled by his student Rashid Reza.

⁷ Anfal 8:29

Is he who was lifeless, then We gave him life and provided him with a light by which he walks among the people, like one who dwells in a manifold darkness which he cannot leave? To the faithless is thus presented as decorous what they have been doing.⁸ God places this light -which is the recognition and ma'rifat of Him - in the heart of whosoever loves him, and the good doers benefit from it in their path to perfection.

Sources of Ma'rifat

In this hadith, Imam Sadiq introduces three ways for acquiring *ma'rifat* to Unwan Basri:

1. Search for the reality of worship within yourself
2. Seek *ma'rifat* (insight) by acting upon what you know
3. Ask God for understanding so that He may make you understand

The First Source: Searching for the reality of worship within oneself

There are three aspects which a person must understand in order to realize the reality of worship of God and devotion to Him: they are God, oneself, and one's relation with God. The human soul is God's creation and is owned by Him; therefore, God is its protector and is ultimately the one who sustains it. Certainty and belief in these matters is in actual fact the reality of devotion to God. God says, "*Allah draws a parable: a chattel who has no power over anything;...*"⁹ When a person understands the reality of worship by means of understanding his relation with God, he will also be able to clearly comprehend the effects of such devotion to God. These realities can be understood from two angles: first, such a person attributes these realities to God, and second, he does not attribute them to other than

⁸ An'aam, 6:122

⁹ Nahl, 16:75

God without God's permission: ...and fear Him, and fear no one except Allah.¹⁰ It is through self-knowledge that one can understand these teachings and facts.

Second Source: Searching for knowledge by acting upon what you know

Action is one of the main sources of knowledge, as the Qur'an says, "*Be wary of Allah and Allah shall teach you.*"¹¹

Sheikh Mohammad Abdah in his *Tafseer al-Manār* has claimed that the following explanation for the above verse paves the way for scholars to gain knowledge, especially those scholars who claim to have understood God, the Qur'an, and the secrets of jurisprudential laws without having studied. They also believe piety to generate an increase in knowledge, which confirms their status in the eyes of the public. Sheikh Mohammed explains this verse by saying:

The combination of the phrases '*Allah teaches you*' with '*be careful of (your duty) to Allah*' in this verse is a sign that there is no relation between these two elements, because the two conjunctive elements should differ from each other. The difference between the two conjunctive elements is a known fact, but we should not forget that the conjunction of the two elements is also a sign of connection between them. What is the connection in this verse? Without a doubt, the knowledge mentioned in the second element is not the knowledge acquired at schools and in classrooms. For this conjunction to be correct, there must be a relation between acting carefully in our duty towards Allah and the knowledge that is attained from it. On the other hand, it cannot mean that this teaching by God would

¹⁰ Ahzab, 33:39

¹¹ Baqarah, 2:282

make us needless of learning the Qur'an, hadiths, and jurisprudence.

We can conclude from the above that this verse indicates a subtle reality from the Qur'an; piety of the heart - i.e. carrying out one's duty to God - paves the way for a person to receive more wisdom and knowledge from Allah. Sometimes two people will read verses from the Qur'an, yet only one of them will gain deeper understanding which will help him in his journey to perfection. Every human being can see the signs of God in the natural world around them, yet only a few of them through this reach higher understanding and a deeper grasp of the oneness of God.

Piety gives a person the power and ability to understand monotheism (*tawheed*) and wisdom (*hikma*); it enlightens his heart to the extent that God prevents him from making a mistake. The Qur'an says, "O you who have faith! If you are wary of Allah, He shall appoint a criterion for you, and absolve you of your misdeeds."¹² In this verse, knowledge has been made conditional upon piety; these two elements are not in conjunction with each other as was seen in verse 2:282. The fact that piety can be increased through knowledge is known to all, as piety is one of the many fruits of knowledge. God says:

Indeed those who were given knowledge before it when it is recited to them, fall down in prostration on their face, and say, 'Immaculate is our Lord! Indeed Our Lord's promise is bound to be fulfilled' weeping, they fall down on their faces, and it increases them in humility. (17:107-109)

Likewise, knowledge and understanding is one of the outcomes of piety, and therefore there is a bilateral relation between these two. Imam Sadiq said, "Knowledge is alongside action, so whoever knows acts according to his knowledge, and whosoever does so will know."

¹² Anfal 8:29

But these words do not mean piety alone makes a person needless of studying, or that by relying on piety a person becomes needless of teachers, books, or attending a classroom. In the journey to seek knowledge, piety and effort coincide with one another. The Prophet said, “Hazrat Musa met Prophet Khizr and said to him, ‘Advise me.’ To which Khizr replied, ‘Enfold your heart with piety so that you may attain knowledge.’”

In *Misbah a-Shariyah* it has been reported from Imam Baqir that piety is the criterion and measure for every knowledge and wisdom. Sheikh Kulayni, in his book *al-Kāfi* has quoted Imam Baqir’s statement to Sa’d al-Khair:

And thereafter, I advise you to piety and abstinence [from wrongdoing] for surely in it there is safety from misuse and profit in the hereafter. It is by means of piety that God prevents evils from a person which not a single person has ever thought of, and He removes the blindness of the inner eyes and ignorance by it.

Many hadiths have been narrated in this regard. For example, the Prophet and his family have said that whosoever acts according to what they know, God will teach him that which he does not know. The Prophet also has said, “Whoever acquires knowledge and acts accordingly for the sake of Allah, Allah will teach him that which he does not know.” Similarly, Imam Baqir said, “Whoever practises his knowledge for the sake of Allah, Allah will teach him that which he does not know.”

Third Source: Asking God to grant understanding (ma‘rifat)

Imam Sadiq in his narration to Unwan Basri says, “Ask God for understanding so that He may make you understand.” According to this tradition, knowledge is a light which is placed by God in the heart of whosoever He wishes to guide. This light – as has been mentioned earlier – is the understanding and insight which only God can give to a

person. God in the Qur'an says, "*And one whom Allah has not granted any light has no light*" (24:40).

Therefore, if a person wants a flame of this light, he has no choice but to ask Allah for it, because such a light cannot be found except with Him. Of course, we should not think that asking Allah to bestow this light is sufficient and would make us needless of any kind of effort. Both performing the ritual prayer and striving are required because every victory is given by Allah, as said in the Qur'an, "*...victory comes only from Allah*" (3:126). In Arabic literature, negating or making an exception indicates exclusiveness, so initially one would think this verse limits victory to the will of God. But God also teaches us that in order to gain victory and success, we must prepare the grounds for it by organizing the necessary causes. God said, "*Prepare against them whatever you can...*" (8:60). Most certainly, making necessary preparations does not contradict one's belief in that all victory is given by God. Knowledge and insight is also bestowed by God, but this also does not contradict a person's need to strive to gain this knowledge.

The Reality of Devotion to God (servitude)

After asking the Imam about the reality of knowledge, the most important question asked by Unwan Basri is: What is the reality of devotion to God?

Devotion to God and servitude are one of the main sources of knowledge and therefore it is not surprising that Unwan asks such a question. In his reply, Imam Sadiq points out three features:

- The servant of God does not feel any kind of ownership in that which God has given to him. True servants acknowledge that everything they possess is from God, and they do not use it except in ways which He has commanded.
- The servant does not plan for himself.

- All of his actions are within the limits of God's commands and prohibitions.

God is the Owner

In the Qur'an, only God owns the skies and the earth:

Do you not know that to Allah belongs the kingdom of the heavens and the earth? (2:107)

Say, "O Allah, Master of all sovereignty! You give sovereignty to whomever You wish, and strip of sovereignty whomever You wish..." (3:26)

To Allah belongs the kingdom of the heavens and the earth, and Allah has power over all things. (3:189)

...and to Allah belongs the kingdom of the heavens and the earth. (5:18)

These verses have a direct effect on the way a person lives his or her life because when a person believes that God is the absolute owner of the skies and earth - and what is in it - and that there is no owner other than Him, this person would then reduce his or her worldly desires and be detached to this world. This is what the ethicists call *zuhd* (asceticism), which is the opposite of attachment to this world.

Imam Ali (a) summarizes the meaning of *zuhd*: "Zuhd has been explained in two sentences of the Qur'an: 'So that you may not grieve for what has escaped you, nor be exultant at what He has given you; and Allah does not love any arrogant boaster' (57:23)."

A pious man does not feel remorse when losing something and does not rejoice when he receives something. Attachment to this world will make a person feel heavy and tied down, causing indolence and snatching away the light feeling needed to approach Allah:

O you who have faith! What is the matter with you that when you are told: 'Go forth in the way of Allah,' you sink heavily to the ground? Are you pleased with the life of this world instead of the Hereafter? But the wares of the life of this world compared with the Hereafter are but insignificant. (9:38)

The question then arises: How can a person not feel a sense of ownership over that which God has bestowed on him? Such a matter can only be achieved when a person sees himself as the servant of God. The Imams' words offer a chain-like form. The first link of this chain is that a person should see himself as a servant of God, and the meaning of servitude should be understood in compliance with this verse (16:75): "...the servant who has no power to carry out anything." A servant must know that without God's benevolence, he will not own anything; and without God's consent and permission he will be unable to do anything. After passing this stage, a person no longer sees himself as the owner of that which is around him. This second stage is a natural result of the first link, because it is only natural that when a person accepts God's ownership over everything he realises that he himself does not own anything.

To justify this, Imam Sadiq conveys to Unwan Basri that servants are not owners; they believe everything belongs to God, and they use the property in the way which God has commanded them to do so.

The third link in this chain of reasons is piety in this world. If a person believes that God is the real owner and that nothing is for himself, he will most certainly result in a balanced love for the material world, which is piety (*zuhd*).

The fourth and final link in this hadith from the Imam to Unwan Basri is this: When a servant does not see himself as an owner in that which God has bestowed to him, giving charity in the way God has commanded becomes easy for him. It is the attachment to the material

world which results in stinginess and prevents one from giving charity in the way of Allah. Certainly, when such attachment is removed, giving charity would then become easy.

Submitting one's affairs to God

If God had left the affairs of the people to themselves, human civilisation would have been destructed many years ago, and we would have reached a dead end. However, God governs all affairs, big and small, and those who perceive will see the hand of God planning their lives whether in hardship or sorrow. Human life and the maintenance of the world in general are not possible without the God's planning. In the same way a person needs to be created in order to come into this world, continuation of his existence is also dependent on God:

It is God who gives victory or defeat. (3"126 & 160)

He is the provider of sustenance. (11:6)

He amplifies some people's sustenance whilst reducing others. (13:26 & 17:30)

Whoever seeks honour [should know that] honour entirely belongs to Allah. (35:10)

Say, 'O Allah, Master of all sovereignty! You give sovereignty to whomever You wish, and strip of sovereignty whomever You wish...' (3:26)

He will grant you a double share of His mercy and give you a light to walk by... (57:28)

...and one whom Allah has not granted any light has no light. (24:40)

Evidently, each one of the policies mentioned in these verses has specific reasons. Whether God helps a group of people, or leads them to defeat; if He improves the sustenance of a group or tightens it; or whether He places the light of guidance in a person's heart or repels it from him, all is a result of the person's actions based on his or her free will. Indeed, God does not carry out these matters in vain given His attributes of wisdom and mercy:

...Indeed Allah does not change a people's lot, unless they change what is in their souls... (13:11)

If the people of the towns had been faithful and Godwary, We would have opened to them blessings from the heaven and the earth. But they denied; so We seized them because of what they used to earn. (7:96)

If a person perceives this reality and sees the Hand of God in the ups and downs of his life and accepts that he is dependent on God's planning, he will always leave the affairs of his life to Him. Imam Sadiq said, "Ask God for grace, because Musa asked for a flame of fire yet God gave him prophethood."

Tafwid

Tafwid refers to entrusting all of one's affairs to God. One does not accept any effect or role for oneself and believes that all existence belongs to God. God commands and plans, and there is no movement or stillness in this world except by His order and command.

Tafwid is different from *tawakkul*.¹³ When a person does *tawakkul*, he makes God his deputy in different aspects of his life and in what he wants: "Allah is sufficient for us, and He is an excellent trustee" (3:173). But *tafwid*, as the mystic Khwāja Abdullah Ansari said, has a wider and finer meaning: "In *tafwid*, the servant, due to his trust in

¹³ Relying upon Allah

God, does not believe in any authority or management for himself, and he entrusts everything to Allah.” Allamah Tabataba’i says:

Tafwid is when a servant turns the affairs which are related to him back to God, and his condition becomes that of one who has no effect on his surroundings and no one turns to him. *Tawakkul* is when a servant makes God his deputy in all affairs under His control. *Taslim*, or submission, is when a person wholeheartedly accepts everything God wants from him...These are three stages from the stages of devotion to God and servitude, and each one more precise than the other; *tafwid* is more accurate than *tawakkul*, and more accurate than both is *taslim*.¹⁴

When making God a deputy, the servant sees himself as absent and puts God in place of himself. But in the idea of *tafwid*, the servant sees himself as non-existent and therefore being present or absent is meaningless for him; he does not see anything other than God’s will, power, and management. In such a condition, the servant refers everything to God. This can be seen in the story of the believer from amongst the people of Pharaoh (*mu’min-i āl-i Fir’awn*) when he says:

...and I entrust my affair to Allah. Indeed Allah sees best the servants. (40:44)

Tasleem means to have complete submission to the will of God, which is more subtle in meaning than *tafwid* and it is applicable in all hardships and ease.

Proper understanding of the generative (*takwini*) relation between the servant and his Creator leads to a deep spiritual state in which the servant refers everything to the will, wisdom, and desire of God. In such a condition the servant does not experience any attachment,

¹⁴ *Tafseer Al-Mizan*, volume 17, p. 353 (available in Farsi)

uncertainty, sadness, and worry in the face of problems in life. This is because he completely believes that his existence is in the hands of a wise, kind, and powerful king who is the most caring and sees the condition of his servant at all times: “*Surely God is watchful over His servants.*” (40:44)

This idea does not mean that people do not have will or choice in their lives as such a thought would result in humans not having any sense of responsibility for their own actions. Also, it does not mean that people should put aside their efforts and free will in order to improve their condition – whether it is for this world or for the hereafter.

As understood from the Qur’an, God has created human beings to have free will, choice, and understanding. It is up to the person himself to use this to improve his condition in this world and in the hereafter: “*And that nothing belongs to man except what he strives for*” (53:39). It is also obvious that human life is governed by the pleasant and unpleasant events he must face. This is true for both good-doers and bad-doers. It is in this stage that *tafwiḍ* plays its role. In such situations a person must leave himself to the will and wisdom of God and entrust his life to Him. A person entrusts himself to the power of God who is All-Seeing, Wise, and the most Merciful. If a person realises that all of his strengths and choices depend on the power and will of God, that he is merely an owned servant, and is unable to do anything without the permission of God, he will then find certainty in the divine decree (*qaḍā*) and measure (*qadar*) of God and submit himself to God’s decision. This idea can be found in many of the supplications taught to us by the household of the Prophet: “O Lord! Make me pleased with that which you have ordained for me, and make me humble at all times. O Lord! Make me certain in what has been destined for me, and make me pleased with your choice.”

Tafwiḍ does not mean that a person should not try to save himself by shouting for help or praying to God when he is drowning. Instead, he should know that his cries for help and his prayers are an extension of

God's power. It is only if God wills that he will be saved. *Tafwid* means that in such a situation it is God who will either save the drowning person or let him drown, and in both cases He is wise, forgiving, and watchful over His good servants. It is in these moments and with such understanding that a person shouts for help and prays to God. If God saves him he will thank and praise Him, and if God's decree is for him to drown and die, he will submit himself to the decree of God whilst having certainty that God is All-seeing, Wise, and most Merciful.

These matters are in predestined situations in which a person does not have a choice, and is therefore not responsible for them; but in circumstances under which God has made His servants responsible and has given them choice, every person is responsible for his or her own actions. And "*Indeed Allah does not change a people's lot, unless they change what is in their souls*" (13:11).

The Beginning and End of Knowledge

The Prophet said, "The beginning of knowledge is in knowing God, and its end is in leaving matters to Him (*tafwid*)."

I recall reading this hadith from my books during the initial years of my studies, yet I didn't quite understand it at the time. After a while, I sat and thought about it and realised that this hadith consists of the entire journey one might take to achieve understanding (*ma'rifat*) from the very beginning until the end.

It is a long and hard journey, beginning with recognising Allah and ending in *tafwid*. The journey begins when a person realises that all affairs, including this vast existence, are in God's hands;¹⁵ that only He can give and take;¹⁶ He gives life and takes it away, and dignifies and weakens, elevates, and lowers;¹⁷ He is the Creator and the

¹⁵ Yunus 10: 49

¹⁶ Baqarah 2:245

¹⁷ Aale Imran 3:26

Manager;¹⁸ He can give benefit¹⁹ or loss²⁰ and sustenance²¹ and He forgives.²²

This is the first stage in understanding God, and tafwid is the final stage of this journey. If a person becomes certain that it is only God who handles the affairs and that only He can give and take, forgive and prevent, and give benefit and loss, undoubtedly such a person would submit his affairs to God. Here tafwid means to submit and believe, to believe that all the affairs are handled by God, and to submit to His command in all conditions.

The Prophet said, "I am surprised to see that God does not predestine for a believer anything unless it results in goodness for him." He also said, "Whosoever from amongst the creatures knows God better God more is more worthy of submitting himself to the will of God."

Imam Sadiq said, "One of the revelations from God to Musa was, 'The dearest of my creation to me is a believing servant. Whenever I afflict him with a calamity it is for his good, and whenever I give him something that is also for his good. So he should be patient during calamities, thank me for my blessings, and be pleased with what I ordained.'"

Imam Sadiq also said, "The most knowledgeable of people are those who are the most content with the will of God."

Ibn Sanan has narrated from someone who asked Imam Sadiq, "How can one realise whether a person is a real believer. To which the Imam replied, "By submitting oneself to the will of God in whatever happiness and sadness which befalls him."

¹⁸ Talaq 65: 3

¹⁹ Yunus 10: 18

²⁰ Taghabun 64:11

²¹ Isra' 17: 45

²² Baqarah 2:105

Imam Sadiq has also said, “The Prophet never said, ‘In relation to that which had occurred and passed, I wish it had happened in another way.’”

Anas bin Malek said, “For ten years I was a servant of the Prophet and never did he ask me ‘Why did you do that?’ in relation to what I had done, or ‘Why didn’t you do that?’ in relation to what I had not done. And when he said, ‘I wish it had been...’ and whenever a person disrespected his family in my presence, he would say, ‘Leave him. If there is something in the decree of God it will certainly happen.’”²³

It has been narrated in *al-Kāfi*, “Once Imam Husayn met Abdullah ibn Ja‘far and he said, ‘O Abdullah, how can a believer be a believer knowing that God manages all affairs, yet he is sad about his share in life resulting in lowering his level? I guarantee that if a person was to only be satisfied with the decree of God, his prayers would be always answered.’”

The household of the Prophet – held secure and confident hearts, and God has said about them, “*O soul at peace! Return to your Lord, pleased, pleasing!*”²⁴

Ibn Sina in his book *Ishārāt*²⁵ has also pointed out this fact when explaining the level of the mystics; he says, “A mystic is happy, smiling, and joyous. He respects the young ones as he would the elders because of his humbleness, and meets with respect and openness both intelligent and unintelligent ones. How can he be sad when God is his happiness and when he sees God in everything?”²⁶

²³ Of course, such traditions should not be understood alone, and it must be investigated alongside other traditions in order that the right meaning be understood. (Translator)

²⁴ Fajr 89:27-28

²⁵ A philosophical book written by the great Muslim scholar Bu Ali Sina.

²⁶ Commentary on *Ishārāt*, vol. 3, p. 391

Stages of the Path

It is beyond the constraints of this paper to discuss the many stages between knowing God and tafwid. When a person realises that God is the Lord of the universe and that He is forgiving and caring, he will naturally be thankful and will certainly choose to worship and obey Him. When he realises that God answers the prayers of his servants he will pray; when he understands God's forgiveness he would spend time to repent; when he perceives God's severe punishment he would fear Him; when he appreciates God's extensive mercy he will find hope in him; and when he realises that God loves his servants and that he honours them, he would love God.

Therefore, the journey to Allah is a long journey that begins with knowing God and its end lies in tafwid. The traveller of this path must pass many stages such as worship, obedience, fear, hope, devotion, love and humility. These realities have been mentioned in many of the Islamic hadiths. In what follows, we refer to some of those hadiths:

The Prophet: "Whosoever recognises God would guard his tongue from vain talk, his stomach from impure food, and would force himself to observe modesty through fasting and praying."

Imam Ali: "I am amazed by a person who knows his Lord and yet does not strive for his eternal abode."

The following hadiths have been reported from Imam Ali (a):

O Lord, make us of those who have prevented themselves from desires by your remembrance.

If recognition of God rests in one's heart, then that heart would feel needless of people.

It is not worthy of a person who understands the greatness of God to feel great himself.

Whoever recognises God more is more fearful of God.

The peak of insight (*ma'rifat*) is in fear of God.

The objective of knowledge is fear of God.

The most knowledgeable person is the one who asks God for his needs more often.

I am amazed by a person who recognises God but his fear of God does not increase.

It is proper for those who know God to fear Him.

The heart of one who knows God should not be vacant from the fear of God even for an instant.

The face (apparent) of a mystic is cheerful, and his heart is sombre.

The worship of the mystics is to weep in the fear of God.

Everything has a source, and the source of piety is the hearts of the mystics.

The lowest level of insight (*ma'rifat*) results in piety in this world.

The fruit of insight (*ma'rifat*) is disinclination to this world.

Whoever recognises God becomes a [true] monotheist.

Imam Sadiq: “Whosoever attains recognition would be wary of God, and whosoever is wary of God his soul will pass from this world easily.”

Each one of these hadiths is considered to be stations on the journey to perfection and understanding in relation to God. *Ma'rifat* – as has been mentioned in the traditions – is the pillar of movement towards piety in this world and detachment from it, independence from people, humility, prayer, supplication, reliance on God, fear of God, hope in God and sadness.

This is a section of the stages that are passed throughout a person's journey to perfection and as said before, it begins with understanding and ends with tafwid. Some may ask: Why does the journey end with tafwid? In this last stage, a person sees no other authority in this world other than God's power. This results in the person's will and satisfaction to follow completely the will and pleasure of God. Such a person's pleasure would be in the pleasure of God and he would submit himself wholly to His decree and would be pleased with it. Such a person would not feel the presence of 'ego.' This is truly the end of the path.

Within the boundaries of the commands and prohibitions of God

To act within the boundaries of God has been mentioned as the third sign of worship in the hadith of Unwān Basri. A true servant's ambition which plays on his mind throughout the day is to ensure he does what his master wants from him, and to abandon that which he has prohibited, because his aim in life must be the pleasure of his master which evidently lies in keeping within these boundaries. If a person is true to his claim in that he is a servant, he should continuously think about this. Even heaven - with all its bounties and blessings prepared by God for his worthy servants - should not preoccupy his mind and intentions.

Whosoever reaches this stage, no matter how much he strives in the way of obeying God, would still feel guilty and negligent in relation to his actions. This feeling will increase in proportion to the increase in a person's understanding of obedience. This is because he never sees himself in a position to be able to carry out the Lord's orders in their most perfect form, and therefore he is never overtaken by pride or vanity. This causes him to feel an increase in his shortcomings and sins. He laughs less and cries more. Such a person has much grief and plays little. Vanity, pride, greediness, showing off, boasting, or any other levels of worldly attachment cannot be found in him, and the

hardship of obeying God prevents him from acquiring any of these attributes.

The abovementioned attributes are some of the effects of a careless and unrestrained life. Heedlessness and occupation both have different effects and side effects on a person's life. The effects of carelessness are greed and dispute over worldly possessions, pride and boasting, (extreme) happiness and seeking pleasure, enmity and quarrelling over worldly affairs, and interacting with people under the shadow of selfishness and pride.

Thus, true servitude is constantly performing what the Master wants of him and to abandon what He prohibited because the aim in life is the Master's pleasure. Little did Unwan Basri know that his devotion to Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq as well as his keenness for gaining knowledge would result in this memorable meeting in which the Imam lovingly shared from his vast wisdom, and wherein numerous people continue to learn from until today.

EXAMINING SELECTED JURISPRUDENTIAL DIFFERENCES AMONG MUSLIMS

ZAHRA NAQAVI

TRANSLATED BY HOWRAA SAFIEDDINE

ABSTRACT: Following the demise of the Holy Prophet (s), intellectual and ideological distinctions between Shi'as and Sunnis prompted jurisprudential differences among them. These differences existed between the two groups for a long time and they continue to this day. The purpose of this study is to take a brief overview at some of the jurisprudential differences between Shia's and Sunnis in matters such as *wudu* (ablution), *adhān* (the call to prayer), prayer, *khums*, *Tawāf al-Nisā*, and fasting. By examining the evidence from both sides concerning each matter, it is possible to conclude that the Shi'a view in the issues is closer to God's true verdict.

Introduction

The physical and spiritual presence of the Holy Prophet of Islam (s) was itself considered one of the reasons for unity among Muslims. The disputes that existed among Muslims began to appear the day the Prophet (s) died, and the differences about the successorship of the Prophet (s) extended to differences in jurisprudential and practical laws. These differences slowly reached theological doctrines such as intercession (*shafā'ah*) and return (*raj'a*). Thus, the root cause of any differences is the dispute concerning the principle of Imamah. This

paper briefly examines some of the jurisprudential differences between Shi'as and Sunnis in addition to evidence from both sides.

Wudu (Ablution)

All Muslims agree that performing wudu is necessary before prayer (*salat*). The famous hadith by the Prophet (s), 'There is no prayer but with purification,'¹ verifies this. Where Muslims differ, however, is in the way wudu is performed. This difference comes from two different interpretation of the following verse where God states:

يا ايها الذين آمنوا اذا قمتم الى الصلاة فاغسلوا وجوهكم و أيديكم الى المرافق و امسحوا برؤوسكم و ارجلكم الى الكعبين

O you who have faith! When you stand up for prayer, wash your faces and your hands up to the elbows, and wipe a part of your heads and your feet, up to the ankles. (5:6)

The different interpretations of this verse have resulted in two main differences in the way Muslims perform their wudu:

1. Difference in the way the forearms are washed

Interpreting this verse, the Shi'a consider it necessary to wash the forearms from the elbows downward; washing the opposite way invalidates the wudu. The reasons for their claim are the following:

a. Hadith from the Ahlul Bayt (a)

Sheikh Tusi narrated on this subject that both Bukayr and Zurarah asked Imam Baqir (a) about the way the Prophet (a) performed his wudu. They were told that during the washing of the forearms, the Prophet (s) washed from his elbow down to his fingertips.²

¹ *Man lā Yahduruhu al-Faqīh*, vol. 1, p. 33; Sunnis relate a hadith from the Prophet (s) in a similar way: "God does not accept prayer but with purification." *Sunan ibn Majah*, vol. 1, p. 100; *Sunan at-Tirmidhi*, vol. 1, p. 3.

² *Kitab al-Khilāf*, vol. 1, p. 78-79.

b. Intellectual Argument

Note the following example: When we tell an artist to paint a wall up to the top, we mean ‘paint the entire wall’; anyone with common sense would begin painting at the top and end at the bottom.

On the other hand, Sunnis believe that according to the verse, the forearms should be washed starting from the fingertips going up to the elbow, but the reverse is also fine and does not invalidate the wudu. Their reason for this claim is due to the apparent meaning of the verse because the preposition *ilā* (إلى) denotes the end. Thus, the elbow should be the last part of the forearm to be washed.

Analysis:

First of all, the usage of the preposition *ilā* intends to specify the amount necessary for washing the forearms. This means that the entire forearm must be washed up to the elbow; the order in which the forearms are washed has been assigned to the Prophet (s) and his rightful successors.

Second, if the aforementioned meaning is not taken, the verse does not specify the amount necessary for washing and in order to eliminate its inconclusiveness, one must refer to the hadiths on this subject.

Third, the preposition *ilā* only refers to ‘an end’ for a motion when it is preceded by the preposition *min* (من) comes before it; in this verse it does not.³

c. Difference in the way the feet are wiped

The Shi‘a all emphasize on wiping the feet as opposed to washing them. The following are reasons for their claim:

First, in verse 6 of chapter *al-Ma'idah*, God says, “*And wipe a part of your head and your feet.*” According to this verse, the word *arjulikum* (feet) is in conjunction with *ru'usikum* (heads). According to some

³ *Fi Rehab Ahlul Bayt (a)*, p. 15.

recitations, *arjul* is recited with *kasrah* (that is, *arjulikum*). This makes it obvious that feet must be wiped as the head is wiped. According to others, it is recited with a *fatha* (that is, *arjulikum*). Again, in the state of *nasb*, the wiping of the feet can be inferred because *ru'ūsikum* is in a dative state; it should have been *ru'usakum* but for the preposition *bi*. In other words, the object 'feet' is for the verb 'wipe'.⁴

Second, existing traditions in both Sunni and Shi'a sources denote the wiping of the feet. Rāfi' ibn Rifā'ah says, "I sat next to the Holy Prophet (s) who said concerning wudu:

إنها لا تتم صلاة لآحد حتى يسيغ الوضوء كما أمره الله تعالى . يغسل وجهه ويديه إلى المرفقين ، ويمسح برأسه ورجليه إلى الكعبين .

Prayer is not valid unless one performs wudu the way God has commanded. One must wash his face and his hands up to the elbows and the head and feet are wiped up to the ankles.⁵

Similarly, the late Kulayni narrates via Muhammad ibn Muslim that Imam Sadiq (a) said, "Wipe the front of your head and wipe your feet."⁶

Third, the actions and sayings of some of the companions of the Prophet (s) suggest that wiping the feet is the correct way. For example, Ibn Abbas says in this regard: "The people have only washed their feet and I discovered in God's book the rule of wiping the feet."⁷ Tabari also quotes Ibn Abbas as saying, "Wudu involves two washes and two wipes."⁸

⁴ *Al-Intisar lil-Sayyid Murtada*, p. 106.

⁵ *Sunan Ibn Majah*, vol. 1, p. 156; *Musnad Hamidi*, vol. 1, p. 26.

⁶ *Kafi*, vol. 3, p. 29.

⁷ *Sunan Ibn Majah*, vol. 1, p. 56.

⁸ *Jami' al-Bayan*, vol. 6, p. 175.

Fourth, the opinion of some Sunni exegetes suggests their agreement with the Shi‘a view. Tabari relates from ‘Akramah and Qutādah that they also consider wiping the feet as God’s ruling.⁹

Prayer

Prayer is a principle shared by all religions. Likewise, all Muslims agree that saying ritual prayer is an obligation and rejecting it bars one from the religion. Having said this, Muslims differ about some of its particulars, a few of which are discussed below:

1. Adhān

Among the guaranteed *mustahab* (recommended) acts in Islam are *adhān* (call to prayer) and *iqāma* (call to line up for prayer). Muslims – including Shi‘as and Sunnis – are unanimous in this regard; where they differ is in its parts and components. In other words, is saying *Hayya ‘alā khayr al-‘amal* (‘Rise up for the best of deeds’) in *adhān* and *iqāma* needed or not?

1. Sayyid Murtada in *al-Intisār* believes that saying the invocation (*dhikr*) “*Hayya ‘alā khayr al-‘amal*” in *adhān* and *iqāma* are among those matters which are specific to the Twelver Shi‘as. Shi‘a scholars unanimously agree upon the reason for its obligation. Sayyid Murtadh also adds that according to the remarks of Sunni scholars, this invocation was at times said during the age of the Prophet (s) but was afterwards abrogated and removed. In his turn, Sayyid Murtada rejects this idea and takes it to be ungrounded.¹⁰

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 176.

¹⁰ *Al-Intisar*, p. 137.

2. ‘Allamah Hilli holds that Shi‘a scholars have consensus about this phrase being part of adhan and iqama due to the most frequently narrated hadiths (*mutawātir*).¹¹
3. After referring to the words of Shi‘a scholars about this phrase, the author of *Jawāhir al-Kalām* writes: “Based on a famous fatwa, adhān includes 18 parts and *Hayya ‘alā khayr al-‘amal* is included in it; in this respect adhan and iqama do not differ from one another.”¹²

In order to prove their claim, the Twelver Shi‘a refer to the practice of the companions of the Prophet (s) as well as available hadiths from the Imams:

- The companions of the Prophet (s): In Sunni as well as Shi‘a sources, there are reports that well-known figures such as Bilal Habashi, Abdullah ibn ‘Umar, and Sahl ibn Hunayf used to invoke this phrase during their adhān.¹³ For example, ‘Ammār and ‘Umar, two sons of Hafs, related from their father that when Bilal Habashi would say the adhan, he would also say “*Hayya ‘alā khayr al-‘amal*.”¹⁴ Nāfi‘ relates that Abdullah ibn ‘Umar, after saying “*Hayya ‘alal-falāh*” (‘Rise up for salvation’) would sometimes include “*Hayya ‘alā khayr al-‘amal*.”¹⁵
- The Imams (a): Numerous hadith have been received in this regard from the Imams (a). For example, Imam Ali (a), in his address to

¹¹ *Tadhkirat al-Fuqaha*, vol. 3, p. 42.

¹² *Jawahir al-Kalam*, vol. 9, p. 81-82.

¹³ It should be noted that for the Shi‘a the practice of the companion is a valid proof, if it can help us understand the practice of the Prophet (s). However, for Sunnis all the companions of the Prophet (s) in whatever they did or said are *hujjah* (proof).

¹⁴ *Kanz al-‘Ummāl*, vol. 4, p. 266.

¹⁵ *Al-Sunan al-Kubrā* by Bayhaqi, vol. 1, p. 424. It has to be noted that one cannot simply dismiss these hadiths if they are not mentioned in *Sahih* of Muslim or *Sahih* of Bukhari, because there are many hadiths that are accepted by Sunni scholars which are not cited in the *Sahihayn*. For example, Hākim al-Nishaburi has compiled five-volume hadith collection and he claims that all the hadiths in it were authentic according to the conditions of either *Sahih* al-Bukhari or *Sahih* Muslim, or both.

Ibn Nubāh who would recite “*Hayya ‘alā khayr al-‘amal*” in his adhan, said, “Greetings to those who say justice and say to the prayer, ‘Hello and welcome!’”¹⁶ Abu Bakr Haḍrami and Kulayb Asadi narrated from Imam Sadiq (a) that he would invoke *Hayya ‘alā khayr al-‘amal* in his adhan.¹⁷

2. *Separating or combining two prayers*

Can there be a gap in time between the two *zuhr* (noon) and ‘*asr* (afternoon) or *maghrib* (sunset) and ‘*ishā* (night) prayers? Shi‘a and Sunnis have different views regarding this issue.

The Shi‘a believe that performing every prayer during its prescribed time (*waqt-e faḍilat*) is preferable. Hence, it is better, according to the first verdict, to separate the two prayers. However, due to hardships and difficulties that arise from separating the two, especially in congregational prayers, the Prophet (a) and infallible Imams (a) have ruled it permissible to combine them. Therefore, although the Shi‘a do not deny that it is recommended (*mustahab*) to separate two prayers, combining the two has been accepted. Herein, we can point to a hadith by Abdullah bin Sanān who quotes Imam Sadiq (a) as saying, “The Holy Prophet (s) combined his *zuhr* and ‘*asr* as well as *maghrib* and ‘*ishā* prayers during his travel because he was in a hurry.” Then Imam Sadiq (a) said, “Separating the two is better.”¹⁸ In addition, Sunni sources include hadiths that show the possibility of combining of two prayers without there being any excuse.¹⁹

On the other hand, Sunni jurisprudential texts have not presented merely one view. Sarkhasi, a jurist from the Hanafī sect, in his book entitled *al-Mabsūt*, does not consider it permissible to combine two prayers except in two places: ‘*Arafāt* and *Muzdalifah*. He says that

¹⁶ *Man la Yahduruhu al-Faqih*, vol. 1, p. 287-288.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 289-290.

¹⁸ *Wasa'il al-Shia*, vol. 4, p. 220.

¹⁹ More of this hadith will be mentioned.

Shafi'i permits combining prayers during travel and when it rains.²⁰ Similarly, he considers Malik as someone who, in addition to travel and rain, permits combining the prayers when ill. Yet according to Mabsūt's narrations, he makes it clear that Ahmad ibn Hanbal permits combining two prayers even when not in a state of travel.²¹

Considering what has been said, one can claim that most Sunni jurists do not permit the combining of two prayers except in special circumstances. Their evidence for this claim can be explained as follows:

First of all, the verse 2:238: "*Be watchful of your prayers, and [especially] the middle prayer...*" suggests that prayer should be recited during its own specific time.

Secondly, the verse 4:103: "*...for the prayer is indeed a timed prescription for the faithful*" means that prayer should be read during its set time.²²

Thirdly, it has been narrated from Ibn Abbas that the Holy Prophet (s) said, "Whoever combines two prayers without an excuse, one of the doors of greater sins will open to him."²³

Fourthly, Bayhaqi has narrated that 'Umar ibn Khattāb wrote to Abu Musa Ash'ari that combining two prayers is one of the greater sins except when there is an excuse.²⁴

Evaluation

Before commenting on the above arguments, it should be noted that

²⁰ Shafi'i himself, in *Kitāb al-Umm*, has narrated a hadith from the Holy Prophet (s) in which he combined two prayers in the battle of Khandaq as well as Arafat. *Kitāb al-Umm*, vol. 1, p. 106.

²¹ *Al-Mabsut*, vol. 1, p. 149.

²² *Ibid.* Qur'an, 4:103

²³ *Mustadrak Hakim*, vol. 1, p. 275.

²⁴ *Al-Sunan al-Kubra*, vol. 1, p. 169.

the differences among different schools of Islam is rooted in their differences in the principle of Imamah, and if there was consensus in the principal, these differences would not have ensued.

With this, in reply to the first two reasons, these two verses only emphasize the importance of prayer and paying special attention to the time for prayer respectively. This by itself does not specify the timing for each prayer. Also, this does not contradict the permission to combine two prayers, which can be seen in the *sirah* – the practices - of the Holy Prophet (s).

If the hadith narrated by the Sunnis were to be accepted, in response it can be said that this hadith is inconsistent with numerous hadiths that have been narrated from the Prophet (s), just as Ibn Abbas narrated that the Prophet (s) combined two prayers without an excuse and when it was not raining.²⁵ Ibn Abbas has also narrated that he, along with the Prophet (s), combined the two zuhr and ‘asr or maghrib and ‘ishā prayers.²⁶ These hadiths are so strong that the great Sunni exegete Alūsi acknowledged that combining two prayers has been emphasized in the traditions of Sahihayn.²⁷

3. *Is Bismillah a part of a chapter?*

Among the differences raised between Sunnis and Shi‘as is whether *bismillah* (*‘In the Name of God, Most Beneficent, Most Merciful’*) is a part of any *surah* (a chapter of the Qur’an) – in which case it is obligatory to recite it with the *surah* in prayer – or is not a part of a *surah* – in which case it is not obligatory to read alongside the *surah* in prayer.

The Shi‘a Imams and, in following them, the Shi‘a scholars, all agree

²⁵ *Sahih Muslim*, vol. 1, p. 152.

²⁶ *Ibid.*; *al-Mabsut Sarkhasi*, vol. 1, p. 149. Hadiths confirming permission to combine two prayers are not limited to the two traditions mentioned.

²⁷ *Tafsir Ruh al-Ma‘ani*, vol. 15, p. 132-133 as cited in *Al-Jam‘ bayn al-Salātayn* by Mohammad Reza Mudarresi, p. 8.

that bismillah is a part of every surah, except for the Chapter *Tawbah*. Thus, it is obligatory in prayer to recite bismillah with the surah. Doing otherwise renders the prayer invalid.²⁸ In this regard, in addition to citing the practice of Muslims,²⁹ one can adhere to many Sunni and Shi‘a hadiths:

- a. Mua‘āwiya ibn ‘Ammar says, “I asked Imam Sadiq (a), ‘When I get ready to pray, should I also say “*Bismi-llāhir-rahmānir-rahim*” when reciting surah *Hamd*?’ Imam (a) replied, ‘Yes.’ I asked, ‘Should I also recite it when I read the [second] surah [in prayer]?’ He replied, ‘Yes.’”³⁰
- b. Ibn Qudāmah, in his book, relates from Umm Salamah that the Holy Prophet (s) would utter “*Bismi-llāhir-rahmānir-rahim* in his prayer.”³¹

This is while Sunni scholars do not have a consensus on this issue. Shafi‘i explicitly considers it correct that bismillah is a part of the chapter *Hamd*. On the other hand, he regards it invalid to consider bismillah as a part of the rest of the chapters.³² Similarly, despite the fact that Ibn Qudāmah of the Hanbali sect deems most scholars to believe that bismillah is a part of every chapter, he considers Malik as disagreeing with this view, even for the chapter *Hamd*.³³

In justifying their own view, those opposed to the Shi‘a view may adhere to the following two hadiths:

- a. Qutāda, via Anas bin Malik, has narrated that the Prophet (s), Abu Bakr, ‘Umar, and ‘Uthman would recite the chapter *Hamd* in their prayer beginning with the verse “*Al-hamdu lillāhi rabbil-‘ālamīn*”(1:1) – “All praise belongs to Allah, Lord of all the

²⁸ *Al-Mabsut al-Shaikh al-Tusi*, vol. 1, p. 105.

²⁹ Refer to *al-Dar al-Manthur li-al-Suyuti*, vol. 1, p. 7.

³⁰ *Kafī*, vol. 3, p. 312-313.

³¹ *Al-Mughni*, vol. 1, p. 520.

³² *Kitab al-Umm*, vol. 1, p. 129-130.

³³ *Al-Mughni*, vol. 1, p. 521.

worlds”.³⁴

- b. Abdullah bin Mughaffil says, “While praying, my father heard me recite *bismi-llāhir-rahmānir-rahim*. He forbade me from doing this and said, ‘I prayed with the Holy Prophet (s), Abu Bakr, ‘Umar, and ‘Uthman and none of them began their recitation with bismillah’.”³⁵

Evaluation

Shafi’i, one of those opposed to the first hadith, in reply to the mentioned hadith says, “What is meant by this hadith is that the Prophet (s) and the three Caliphs would recite the *Fatiha* before the chapter. This means that he would begin recitation with the chapter *Hamd*.”³⁶

Moreover, it can be said that these two hadiths are in conflict with numerous and stronger hadiths which indicate that bismillah is a part of each chapter of the Qur’an.³⁷

4. Rules regarding prayer during travel

Another difference among Muslims that deals with prayer concerns the prayer of a traveller. All Muslims agree that praying *qasr*³⁸ when travelling over long distances is a lawful matter. The Qur’an says:

When you journey in the land, there is no sin upon you in shortening the prayers, if you fear that the faithless may trouble you; indeed the faithless are your manifest enemies. (4:101)

They differ, however, in whether praying *qasr* is merely permitted or

³⁴ *Sunan al-Tirmidhi*, vol. 1, p. 155.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 154-155.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 156.

³⁷ For further reading refer to *al-Durr al-Manthur*, vol. 1, p. 7.

³⁸ Shortening the four unit prayers to two units when travelling over long distances

it is obligatory.

Following the teachings of the Prophet (a) and the Ahlul Bayt (a), Shi'a jurists have ruled it obligatory to pray qasr during travel for prayers consisting of four-rak'as.³⁹ This means that if someone knowingly does not pray qasr for a four-rak'a prayer during travel, he must repeat his prayer.⁴⁰ Shaykh Tusi holds that there is a consensus among the Shi'a regarding this view and has similarly introduced 'Umar ibn Khattāb as agreeing with the Shi'a on this matter.⁴¹

According to the Sunna of the Prophet (s), many hadiths narrated by Sunnis can be noted. For example, Ibn Abbas says, "God has prescribed - through the word of your prophet - to pray two rak'as during travel."⁴²

Regarding the *sira* of Muslims, a Jāfi' quotes Abdullah ibn 'Umar as saying, "I travelled with the Holy Prophet (s), Abu Bakr, and 'Uthman who prayed two rak'as for their zuhr and 'asr prayers and they did not do such a thing before and after their trip; and if I was there before or after the trip, I also would have prayed the full prayer."⁴³

In another hadith, Abdullah bin 'Umar narrates: "The Holy Prophet (s), Abu Bakr, 'Umar, and 'Uthman would continuously pray qasr during their travels."

After relating this hadith, Tirmidhi writes: "Practicing in accordance with this hadith is affirmed according to most scholars of the companions of the Prophet (s) and others."⁴⁴

'Imrān ibn Hasin also says, "I performed the Hajj with the Prophet (s),

³⁹ i.e., Thuhr, 'Asr, and 'Isha

⁴⁰ *Kitab al-Khilāf*, vol. 1, p. 569.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² *Sahih Muslim*, vol. 2, p. 143.

⁴³ *Sunan al-Tirmidhi*, vol. 2, p. 28.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

Abu Bakr, ‘Umar, and ‘Uthman and everyone prayed qasr.’⁴⁵

However, there is no consensus among the Sunni jurists in this regard. Abu Hanifa, like the Shi‘a, considers qasr prayer obligatory upon the traveller.⁴⁶ Similarly, Malik, like the Shi‘a, considers it a confirmed Sunna of the Prophet (s) in that there is no account of the Prophet (s) praying his prayers in full.⁴⁷

On the other hand, Shafi‘i believes that a traveller may choose to either pray qasr or not to⁴⁸ even though qasr is better.⁴⁹ Muhyi al-Din al-Nawawi, a Shafi‘i jurist, attributes this view to ‘Uthman ibn ‘Affan, Sa‘d ibn Abi Waqqas, ‘Aisha, Abdullah bin ‘Amir and others.⁵⁰ Hanabilah too, like the Shafi‘i, considers it optional for the traveller to pray qasr or complete.⁵¹ Those who permit a traveller to pray either qasr or full may bring forth the following reasons:

First of all, in the verse, God says, *‘There is no sin upon you’*. Meaning, there is no problem with praying qasr. This interpretation only fits with having choice between qasr and complete.⁵²

Secondly, there are hadiths that suggests choice between qasr and full prayer for a traveller. For example, Muslim narrates from Ya‘lā ibn Umayyah who said, “I asked ‘Umar ibn Khattab about the verse *‘...there is no sin upon you in shortening the prayers, if you fear that the faithless may trouble you...’*. He said, ‘I asked the Prophet (s) about this and he (s) said, ‘Qasr in prayer is a charity that God, through it, has favoured you so accept His charity.’⁵³ Some Sunni scholars argue that as accepting charity is not mandatory, it is also

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 29.

⁴⁶ *Kitab al-Majmu’ li-Muhyi al-Din al-Nawawi*, vol. 4, p. 337.

⁴⁷ *Kitab al-Khalaf*, vol. 1, p. 569; *al-Qasr fi al-safar ‘ala Dhow’ al-Kitab wa al-Sunnah*, p. 5.

⁴⁸ *Kitab al-Umm*, vol. 1, p. 207-208.

⁴⁹ *Kitab al-Majmu’ li-Muhyi al-Din al-Nawawi*, vol. 4, p. 337.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ *Al-Mughni*, vol. 2, p. 90-95.

⁵² *Kitab al-Majmu’ li-Muhyi al-Din al-Nawawi*, vol. 4, p. 339.

⁵³ *Al-Sunan al-Kubra li al-Bayhaqi*, vol. 3, p. 141.

unnecessary to pray qasr during travel.⁵⁴ It has been reported that Aisha said, “We were with the Prophet (s) on a trip. He prayed qasr and did not fast but I prayed full and fasted. The Prophet (s) said to me, ‘Well done, O Aisha’.”⁵⁵ Similarly, she has narrated that while travelling, the Holy Prophet (s) would pray qasr as well as complete.⁵⁶

Evaluation

Concerning the first reason, it must be said that the interpretation for ‘*there is no sin upon you*’ does not necessarily mean permission and choice because the Holy Quran, in another verse, states, “*Indeed Safa and Marwah are among Allah’s sacraments. So whoever makes hajj to the House, or performs the ‘umrah, there is no sin upon him to circuit between them.*”⁵⁷ Concerning this verse, no jurist has given a verdict that a pilgrim may choose whether or not to perform Sa‘yi between Safā and Marwa. Also, about the verse under discussion, God intends to say that it is wrong to think there is a problem in doing so. This means that those who consider qasr prayer a deficiency and regard it prohibited realize that it is not the case.⁵⁸

As for the hadith by ‘Umar ibn Khattab from the Prophet (s), it can be said that, firstly, the command to accept this charity infers its obligation. Secondly, even though people have the right to choose whether or not to accept one another’s charity, when the Wise God gives something to the people in the name of charity, it suggests there is a public interest (*maslaha*) in it, and therefore it is required to accept it.⁵⁹

Likewise, concerning Aisha’s first hadith from the Prophet (s), some researchers, after carefully looking at the *sirah* and life history of the

⁵⁴ *Al-Qasr fi al-safar ‘ala Dhow’ al-Kitab wa al-Sunnah*, p. 38.

⁵⁵ *Al-Sunan al-Kubra li al-Bayhaqi*, vol. 3, p. 142.

⁵⁶ *Kitab al-Majmu’ li-Muhyi al-Din al-Nawawi*, vol. 4, p. 340.

⁵⁷ Surat *al-Baqarah*, verse 158.

⁵⁸ *Al-Qasr fi al-safar ‘ala Dhow’ al-Kitab wa al-Sunnah*, p. 13.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 39-40.

Prophet (s), have answered thus: In addition to the weak chain of narrations, it has been narrated by Aisha that the Prophet (s) went to Mecca in the month of Ramadan to perform the individual ‘Umrah whilst Sunni historians attest to the fact that he never went to perform the individual ‘Umrah in the month of Ramadan. Meanwhile, how is it conceivable that Aisha, who would observe the Prophet (s) and companions not fasting and praying qasr, conversely fast and pray complete prayers? This point is so astonishing that Ibn Taymiyya ruled this hadith as false.⁶⁰

According to Aisha’s second hadith, it may also be said that this hadith contradicts many hadiths that Aisha herself, as well as other esteemed Sunnis, narrated from the Prophet (s) concerning the necessity of qasr prayer during travel.

5. *Reciting in prayer a surah with the verses of sajdah (prostration)*

Another difference between Sunnis and Shi‘as regarding prayer is the permissibility or impermissibility of reciting surahs in prayer that include verses of prostration (*suwar ‘azā’im*). The Shi‘a believe that reciting a surah that includes a sajdah verse invalidates the prayer because reading such a surah requires one to prostrate during the prayer, which is an extra action and nullifies the prayer; if one does not prostrate, he has committed a sin.⁶¹ Zurarah narrates the following from Imam al-Sadiq (a):

Do not recite from the surahs that include sajdah verses since prostration [caused by reading a surah with a sajdah verse] is something extra in prayers.⁶²

Sunnis, on the other hand, consider it permissible to recite surahs that have a sajdah verse. Regarding this, they resort to the *sirah* of the

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 42-45.

⁶¹ *Al-Nehayat al-Shaikh al-Tusi*, p. 77; *Shara-i’ wa-l-Islam*, vol. 1, p. 65.

⁶² *Al-Kafi*, vol. 3, p. 318.

caliphs ‘Umar bin Khattab and ‘Uthman⁶³ as well as the *sirah* of companions like Abu Hurayrah⁶⁴ who in their prayers, have recited surahs with sajdah verses and have prostrated on the spot.

6. The number of takbirs⁶⁵ in the funeral prayer

One of the compulsory acts accepted by all Muslims is praying for the deceased. Moreover, both Shi‘a and Sunni jurists have affirmed that the funeral prayer is a *wājib kifā’i*.⁶⁶ Where they differ is in the number of takbirs for the funeral prayer.

Shi‘a jurists believe that five takbirs must be said in the funeral prayer.⁶⁷ The late Kulayni and Shaykh Tusi have narrated numerous hadiths from the Prophet (s) and infallible Imams (a) regarding this. For instance, Imam Sadiq (a) has narrated from the Prophet (s) who said, “The Almighty God has made obligatory five prayers and has made one takbir from each prayer for the deceased.”⁶⁸ Imam al-Baqir (a) also narrates: “The Prophet (s) prayed over his son Ibrahim and recited five takbirs.”⁶⁹

In contrast, Sunni jurists consider only four takbirs as mandatory for the funeral prayer. Regarding this, after presenting a hadith from Abu Hurayra, Shafi‘i has given a fatwa requiring four takbirs in prayer.⁷⁰ Similarly, Muhyi al-Din al-Nawawi in *al-Majmū‘* regards ‘Umar ibn Khattab, Abdullah ibn ‘Umar, and Zayd ibn Thabit to have recited four takbirs in the funeral prayer. He also relates from Zaid bin Arqam and Ibn Masud the obligation for reciting five takbirs while he relates from Ibn Abbas and Anas bin Malik who consider three takbirs to be

⁶³ *Al-Muhallā* by Ibn Hazm, vol. 5, p. 108-109.

⁶⁴ *Sahih Muslim*, vol. 2, p. 89.

⁶⁵ The Arabic word for the phrase ‘*Allahu Akbar*’ – ‘God is Great.’

⁶⁶ The collective obligation on all Muslims until it is performed by one or a few among them, thus relieving the rest of the obligation. *Kitab al-Sarair*, vol. 1, p. 359; *Kitab al-Majmu‘ li-Muhyi al-Din al-Nawawi*, vol. 5, p. 211.

⁶⁷ *Kitab al-Khalaf*, vol. 1, p. 724; *Kitab al-Sarair ibn Idris Hilli*, vol. 1, p. 359-360.

⁶⁸ *Al-Kafi*, vol. 3, p. 181; *Man la Yahduruhu al-Faqih*, vol. 1, p. 164.

⁶⁹ *Al-Istibsar*, vol. 1, p. 474.

⁷⁰ *Kitab al-Umm*, vol. 1, p. 308.

obligatory.⁷¹

Along the same lines, Bukhari has introduced a chapter in his book entitled ‘*Takbir upon the deceased are four*’ and has narrated hadiths which show that the *sirah* of the Prophet (s) was reciting four takbirs in the funeral prayer.⁷² One example is a hadith narrated by Abu Hurayra. In this hadith, the Prophet (s) uttered four takbirs in the funeral prayer of Najashi.⁷³

In criticism of the Sunni view, it can be said that since there are differences found in Sunni sources (e.g., some believing in five or even three takbirs) that have been narrated by respected people like Ibn Mas‘ud and Ibn Abbas, verifies the uncertainty of the obligation to recite four takbirs.⁷⁴

7. Fasting during travel

In accordance with the Qur’an, both Shi‘as and Sunnis have given a fatwa on the obligation of fasting in the month of Ramadan. However, what has caused this disparity is whether it is obligatory upon the traveller to fast or break it in the month of Ramadan. The Shi‘a, in following the verses of the Qur’an and hadiths from the Prophet (s) and pure Imams (a), believe that the fast of a traveller is void. Sheikh Tusi says regarding this: “For every trip that requires qasr prayer, breaking fast is also required.”⁷⁵ Concerning this issue, the Quran states:

And as for someone who is sick or on a journey, let it be a [similar] number of other days. Allah desires ease for you, and He does not desire hardship for you.
(2:185)

⁷¹ *Al-Majmou’*, vol. 5, p. 231.

⁷² *Sahih Bukhari*, vol. 2, p. 91; *Sahih Muslim*, vol. 3, p. 54-55.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ *Al-Majmou’*, vol. 5, p. 231.

⁷⁵ *Kitab al-Khalaf*, vol. 2, p. 201.

Concerning this, Yahya ibn Abil-‘Alā narrates from Imam Sadiq (a) who said, “The traveller fasting in the month of Ramadan is like the one not fasting in his homeland.” He then narrates that a man went to the Prophet (s) and said, “Should we fast in the month of Ramadan while travelling?” The Prophet (s) answered, “No.” The man said, “It is easy for me.” The Prophet (s) said, “God has established the instruction that the sick and the traveller of my nation must not fast in the month of Ramadan. Does anyone like it when he gives another charity and the latter rejects it?”⁷⁶

However, the Sunni leaders and jurists believe that a traveller in the month of Ramadan may choose whether or not to fast. Muhyi al-Din al-Nawawi Shafi‘i, Abu Hanifa, Ahmad Hanbal, and Mālik are of the same opinion.

The Sunnis adhered to hadiths from the Prophet (s) concerning this issue. One such hadith is by Aisha who said, “Hamzah ibn ‘Amr al-Aslami asked the Prophet (s) during his trip in hajj, ‘Should I fast while travelling?’ The Prophet (s) answered, ‘You may fast if you wish and you also have the choice to avoid it.’”⁷⁷

Evaluations

In reviewing the Sunni hadith sources, it becomes clear that the hadiths available in those sources are of two categories. The first category points to the permissibility of fasting during travel; the second one points to the impermissibility of fasting during travel.

The following hadiths can be mentioned from the second category:

- a. The Prophet (s) said, “Fasting during travel is not righteous.”⁷⁸
- b. During the Conquest of Mecca, they informed the Prophet (s) that

⁷⁶ *Man lā Yahduruhu al-Faqīh*, vol. 2, p. 140.

⁷⁷ *Sahih Bukhari*, vol. 2, p. 237; *Sunan Tirmidhi*, vol. 2, p. 107.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 238; *Sahih Muslim*, vol. 3, p. 144; *Sunan Tirmidhi*, *Ibid.*

a number of Muslims were fasting. The Prophet (s) said twice, "They are sinners."⁷⁹

It is worth mentioning that in *Sunan of Tirmidhi*, this hadith has been recognized as correct.⁸⁰

Considering these hadiths, it can no longer be said that a traveller can fast in the month of Ramadan.

Khums

Among the obligatory acts shared by all Muslims is khums. Consistent with the holy verse (8:41), "*Know that whatever thing you may come by, a fifth of it is for Allah and the Apostle, for the relatives and the orphans, for the needy and the traveller...*," Muslims consider it obligatory to pay khums. However, there are differences between Shi'as and Sunnis regarding the items to which khums belongs.

The Shi'a believe that khums is applicable to seven items, including the earnings from business and trade. Sheikh Tusi writes: "Khums is obligatory for all profit obtained from trade, produce and fruit... None of the jurists (i.e., the four Sunni imams) agree with us in this matter."⁸¹

Numerous hadiths have been narrated about this from the pure Imams. Samā'ah says, "I asked Imam Kazim (s) regarding khums. The Imam replied, 'Khums is for everything that people profit from, be it a little or a lot.'"⁸²

On the other hand, even though Sunnis accept khums as a divine obligation, they consider it obligatory for only a few things such as spoils of war, minerals, and treasure. Also, profits from trade are not

⁷⁹ *Sahih Muslim*, vol. 3, p. 141-142.

⁸⁰ *Sunan Tirmidhi*, vol. 2, p. 107.

⁸¹ *Kitab al-Khilaf*, vol. 2, p. 118.

⁸² *Wasa'il al-Shia*, vol. 9, p. 503.

subject to khums.

It is worth noting that Sunni jurists have not allocated a special section in their jurisprudence and related books to khums; they only bring it up amid discussions on zakat and jihad.⁸³ Even Shafi‘i, in his book *al-Umm*, despite having the belief that during the lifetime of the Prophet (s) his family would receive khums instead of zakat, has not discussed khums independently.⁸⁴

Tawāf an-Nisā

One of the very important duties prescribed for all Muslims is the performance of hajj, which is obligatory on every able person. The Almighty God has greatly stressed on the performance of hajj. Like all other duties, hajj includes obligatory (*wājib*) and recommended (*mustahab*) acts, an important one of which is the circumambulation (*tawāf*) of the Ka‘ba. *Tawāf* itself includes different types, which is where Shi‘as and Sunnis differ. The primary difference among the Sunni and Shia concerns *Tawāf an-Nisā*.

The Shi‘a believe that *Tawāf an-Nisā* is obligatory in two situations: the first is in *hajj al-tamattu’* after the end of hajj deeds; and second, in *‘umrah mufradah* after performing the *‘umrah* rituals. The Shi‘a believe that the permissibility of having marital relation with one’s spouse becomes only lawful again after performing the *Tawāf an-Nisā*.⁸⁵ Consistent with the Shi‘a traditions, *Tawāf an-Nisā* existed even during Prophet Adam⁸⁶ and Prophet Nuh’s⁸⁷ hajj performance.

However, in Sunni jurisprudence, essentially *Tawāf an-Nisā* has not been mentioned. On the other hand, *Tawāf al-Qudūm*, *Tawāf al-*

⁸³ *Ma’ al-Shia al-Ithna Ashari fi al-Usul wa al-Furu’*, vol. 4, p. 168.

⁸⁴ *Kitab al-Umm*, vol. 2, p. 88-89.

⁸⁵ *Kitab al-Khalaf*, vol. 2, p. 348.

⁸⁶ *Al-Kafi*, vol. 4, p. 190-191.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 212.

Ifādah, and *Tawāf al-Widā'* have been discussed.⁸⁸

Temporary Marriage

Another issue differing among the Muslims is the permissibility or impermissibility of temporary marriage (i.e., *mut'ah*). In other words, the religion of Islam has greatly recommended marriage and consider it the sunnah of the Prophet (s). Marriage can take place in two ways: permanent marriage and temporary marriage. All Muslims accept the first type of marriage, though there are differences concerning the second type.

The Shi'a believe that according to the Qur'an as well as traditions, *mut'ah* is permitted and lawful.⁸⁹ Their arguments for its lawfulness include:

1. The Holy Qur'an:

...For the enjoyment you have had from them thereby, give them their dowries, by way of settlement... (4:24)

What is interesting is that this verse has been read by great personalities like Ibn Abbas, Ubayy ibn Ka'b, Sa'id ibn Jubayr⁹⁰, Ibn Mas'ud, Jabir bin Abdullah Ansari and 'Umran ibn Hasin⁹¹ in the following manner:

فما استمتعتم به منهن الى اجل مسمى فاتوهن اجورهن فريضة

For the enjoyment you have had from them thereby for a specified term, give them their dowries, by way of settlement.

2. Traditions and *sirah* of the companions of the Prophet (s):

⁸⁸ *Kitab al-Majmu'*, vol. 9.

⁸⁹ *Kitab al-Khalaf*, vol. 4, p. 340.

⁹⁰ *Jami' al-Bayan Tabari*, vol. 5, p. 18; *Tafsir al-Qurtubi*, vol. 5, p. 130.

⁹¹ *Asl al-Shia wa Usuliha*, p. 254.

There are also traditions in the Sunni sources about this, some of which include:

- a. Jabir bin Abdullah and Salmah ibn Akwa‘ have narrated, “The Prophet’s (s) herald announced that the Prophet (s) has allowed you to do mut‘ah.”⁹²
- b. Jabir bin Abdullah says: “To the testament of the Messenger of God (s) and Abu Bakr, we had mut‘ah until ‘Umar forbade us from this practice.”⁹³

According to the last hadith, this practice occurred even during Abu Bakr’s caliphate and was announced forbidden during the second caliphate.

- c. Ibn Abbas says: “Mut‘ah was a blessing from God for the Prophet’s (s) Ummah. Had it not been forbidden, no one would find the need to commit adultery except for a few people.”⁹⁴

Sunni jurists, in following their four Imams, have given a fatwa forbidding temporary marriage.⁹⁵ Their arguments are as follows:

First, the Prophet (s) has forbidden it. Rabi’ bin Sabrah has said, “The Prophet (s) has forbidden mut‘ah in his farewell pilgrimage and said, ‘I have allowed mut‘ah and God has forbidden it until the Day of Resurrection.’ In addition, Imam Ali (a) said that on the day of the Battle of Khaybar, the Prophet (s) made mut‘ah prohibited (*harām*).”⁹⁶

Second, the verse considered by the Shi‘a has been abrogated by other verses such as “*except from their spouses or what their right hands possess*” (23:6), since this verse restricts sexual relation to two cases.

⁹² *Sahih Muslim*, vol. 4, p. 130.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 131.

⁹⁴ *Al-Nihayah ibn Athir*, vol. 2, p. 488.

⁹⁵ *Al-Mughni Ibn Qadamah*, vol. 7, p. 571; *Al-Majmu*, vol. 252.

⁹⁶ *Sunan Tirmidhi*, vol. 2, p. 295.

Evaluation

In reply to the first argument, it should be noted that the two traditions cited in Sunni sources about banning mut‘ah contradict each other. According to one of them, mut‘ah was forbidden from the day of Khaybar, but the other hadith suggests that it was forbidden in the farewell pilgrimage of the Prophet (s) to Mecca. There is yet another hadith that suggests it was forbidden from the day of the Conquest of Mecca.⁹⁷

Moreover, how can the Prophet (s) cancel the ruling of the Qur’an? If the ruling of the Qur’an were to be cancelled it must have been done by God Himself and mentioned in the Qur’an. God is the only lawmaker. This is known as unity with respect to legislation (*tawhid tashri‘i*).

Furthermore, these traditions contradict other Sunni traditions which indicate that the banning took place in the time of the second Caliph. For example, Jabir ibn Abdullah says, “We used to perform mut‘ah during the time of the Messenger of God (s) and Abu Bakr, until ‘Umar forbade us from this act.”⁹⁸ Also, in his book, Bayhaqi narrated from ‘Umar who said, “Indeed, there were two types of mut‘ah during the time of the Prophet (s); I forbid them both, and I will punish those who practice it. They are: Mut‘ah of Women and Mut‘ah of the Pilgrimage.”⁹⁹

In reply to second argument, it should be noted that verse 23:6 does not abrogate verse 4:24, because spouse (*zawj*) includes both one’s permanently married spouse and one’s temporarily married spouse.

Thus, temporary marriage is a lawful matter and was approved by

⁹⁷ *Al-Sunan al-Kubra li al-Bayhaqi*, vol. 7, p. 706.

⁹⁸ *Sahih Muslim*, vol. 4, p. 131.

⁹⁹ *Al-Sunan al-Kubra li al-Bayhaqi*, vol. 7, p. 706. The original text is as follows:

انهما كانتا متعتان على عهد رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم وانا انهى عنهما واعقاب عليهما احدهما متعة النساء... والاخرى متعة الحج.

both the Holy Prophet (s) and Abu Bakr, although it was forbidden by Umar bin Khattab.

Conclusion

The results obtained from this paper include:

1. In wudu, the Shi'a wash their forearms from top to bottom and consider wiping the feet a must. In contrast, Sunnis regard it correct to wash the forearms in any direction and have given a fatwa for washing – as opposed to wiping - the feet.
2. The Shi'a are required to say “*Hayya ‘alā khayr al-‘amal*” in the adhan and iqama; however, Sunnis maintain it is not a part of adhan and iqama.
3. Contrary to Sunnis, Shi'as believe that although separating the two tuhr and ‘asr as well as maghrib and isha prayers is better, there is no problem in choosing to combine the two.
4. Shi'as regard bismillah to be a part of every surah, except for surah *Tawbah* and believe that it is mandatory to be recited in the daily prayers. This is while Shafi'i – one of the Sunni Imams – regards bismillah as a part of surah *Hamd* only and Malik rejects bismillah as even being a part of surah *Hamd*. Other Sunni jurists agree with the Shi'a opinion about this.
5. Shi'as regard praying qasr during travel as obligatory. On the other hand, Sunnis differ in this area.
6. Concerning the funeral prayer, the Shi'a rule five takbirs obligatory while Sunnis believe in four takbirs.
7. Contrary to the Sunnis who believe a traveller may choose whether or not to fast, the Shi'a have given a fatwa nullifying the fast of a traveller.

8. The Shi'a hold that khums is applicable to one's earning though business, trade and salary.
9. The Shi'a believe that performing *Tawāf an-Nisā* in Hajj is necessary.
10. The Shi'a believe that the Qur'anic ruling about mut'ah has not been abrogated and it was practised in the time of the Prophet (a). So it is still permissible and is considered a legal type of marriage.

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INTRODUCTION TO ISLAMIC SCIENCES

PART III

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ABSTRACT: The previous article - *Introduction to Islamic Sciences, Part II* – touched upon two subjects: *Fiqh* (Islamic Jurisprudence), and *Usul of Fiqh* (Principles of Jurisprudence), and offered a glance at its history, key subjects, and sources. This article delves into four additional subjects: Hadith Sciences, Qur’anic Sciences, the Science of Exegesis and the Science of Islamic Ethics. Hadith studies includes studying its history – such as the phenomenon of forging hadiths and its branches – Rijal, Dirayah al-Hadith, Fiqh ul-Hadith, Gharib ul-Hadith, ‘Alaj ul-Hadith, and ‘Ilal ul-Hadith. Qur’anic sciences include revelation studies, the Qur’an’s miraculousness, and the compilation of the Qur’an. This will be followed by a brief study of the history and important methods of exegesis. The paper ends with a brief introduction to Islamic Science of Ethics.

6. Hadith Sciences

After the Glorious Qur’an, the conduct (*sunnah*) of the noble Prophet (s) and the Infallibles (a) is the main reference for Islamic rulings and

beliefs. The Infallible Imams (a) are the true heirs to the Prophet's (s) knowledge, and their hadiths reflect the Prophet's (s) conduct.

After the Prophet (s) passed away, the necessity of referring to Prophetic hadiths became inevitable to Muslims; thus, since then they began collecting and organizing hadiths. Although narrating and registering hadiths were banned by the first three caliphs and this ban continued in the Sunni world until the reign of 'Umar ibn 'Abdulaziz, Shi'a narrators from the onset were involved in narration and compiling collections of hadiths.¹

The History of Hadith among the Shi'a

The history of hadiths among Shi'a underwent different stages as any other discipline, though two major periods are generally referred to: the period of early scholars of hadith and the period of later scholars.

The former period includes the first five centuries. In this period, the Imams (a) initially issued hadiths as their companions and transmitters of hadith wrote them. Those hadiths were classified and organized by scholars of later centuries and were finally included in the Four Books² by the first three scholars of hadith:³ Sheikh Kulayni, Sheikh Ṣadūq, and Sheikh Ṭūsī. Most hadiths in this period are received from Imam Baqir (a) and Imam Sadiq (a). Tens of thousands of hadiths were accurately recorded from them by their companions and students and transmitted to later scholars.

The later period is when complementary collections of hadiths were compiled by Shi'a scholars. This period began from the early sixth century AH and continued until the time of the contemporary scholars. In that period, great scholars of hadith emerged who compiled valuable works in hadith. The most eminent scholars of that period were Sheikh Ḥurr 'Āmilī, author of *Wasā'il al-Shī'a*, Feyḍ Kāshānī, author of *Al-Wāfī*, and Allamah Majlisī, author of *Biḥār al-Anwār*. By

¹ Ma'ārif, Majid, *Tārīkh 'Umūmī Hadīth*.

² The four most important Shi'a reference books of hadiths

³ A hadith scholar and/or transmitter

comparing the two mentioned periods, it is understood that the hadiths among the Shi'a is the fruit of the former period in one sense, and the works of the later period is a classification, completion, and analysis of the works of the earlier period.

The Phenomenon of Fabricating Hadiths and the Necessity of Knowing Authentic Hadiths

One of the factors that increased the importance of hadith studies in Islamic sciences was the phenomenon of fabricating hadiths. This was the insertion of forged hadiths fabricated and attributed to the Prophet (s) or any of the Infallibles (a). The history of fabricating hadiths goes back to the time of the Prophet (s) when he (s) introduced the Qur'an as the main factor for finding genuine hadiths. The issue of recognizing genuine hadiths from fabricated ones became more important during the time of Imam Baqir (a) and Imam Sadiq (a) due to factors such as the expansion of the Islamic world, interest in narrating hadiths, freedom of writing [i.e. recording hadiths] after the period of prohibition, and the activities of *Ghulāt*⁴ and *Taqīyyah*.⁵ That was when Imam Baqir (a) and Imam Sadiq (a) introduced the examination criteria in recognition of genuine hadiths, most importantly to check the hadiths with the Qur'an and the Prophet's (s) Sunnah.⁶

Knowing the mechanisms of recognizing genuine hadiths and removing fabricated hadiths are very important in hadith studies; thus, hadith scholars have long been adopting criteria to distinguish genuine hadith from fabricated hadiths and have written accordingly such as *Al-Ḍu'afā'* by Bukhārī (d. 256 AH), *Al-Mawḍū'āt* by Naqqāsh (d. 414 AH), *Al-Mawḍū'āt* by Ibn Jawzī (d. 543 AH), *Al-Luma' fi Asmā' man waḍ'a* by Suyūṭī (d. 911 AH) and Tustarī's *Al-Akhhbār al-Dakhīlah*.

⁴ Literary meaning: exaggerators. Referring to those exaggerating about the Imams (a)

⁵ The principle of preservation, which suggests hiding one's belief in case of danger, or other reasons.

⁶ Rafī'ī Muhammadi, Nāsir, *Darsnāmeḥ Vaz' hadith*, p. 302.

The followings are among the most important criteria introduced by hadith scholars to distinguish fabricated hadiths:⁷

- A. Confession of the transmitter to fabricating hadiths or existence of evidence that can serve as his confession
- B. Contradiction of a hadith with the indisputable and frequently mentioned sunnah of the Prophet (s) and the infallible Imams (a)
- C. Contradiction of a hadith with self-evident intellectual propositions
- D. Contradiction of a hadith with rules agreed by the Islamic Nation (*Ummah*)

Different Branches of Hadith Studies

The following introduces the different branches of Hadith Studies:

1. Rijāl

This discipline studies the trustworthiness of the transmitters in the chain of the hadith. In The criteria, which approve the transmitters' reports, are also studied. They include: Reliability of the transmitters, their capability in recording hadiths, and their commitment to religious laws. Various of the biographical details such as the dates of births and deaths, or the land and clan of the transmitter are usually not considered. Such issues are discussed in another discipline i.e. *Tarājim* (Writing Biographies).⁸

Most important works

Shi'a scholars have long been examining the transmitters of hadiths and wrote about them accordingly, although those works are currently unavailable. The oldest related available work is *al-Rijāl* by Ahmad ibn Muhammad ibn Khālid Barqī (d. 274 AH). Among other

⁷ Ibid., pp. 195 – 259.

⁸ Jamshidi, Asadullah, *Tārīkh Hadīth*, p. 374

important works in this field are *Rijāl Kashī* written by Muhammad ibn ‘Umar ibn ‘Abd al-‘Azīz Kashī contemporary with Sheikh Kulayni, Sheikh Tūsī’s *Al-Fihrist*⁹, Najashi’s *Al-Fihrist*¹⁰ which mostly introduces Shi‘a authors, and Sheikh Tūsī’s *Rijāl* which introduces and describes the Infallibles’ companions and their contemporaries.

2. *Dirāyah al-Hadith*

This branch of hadith studies a) the methods of recognizing genuine hadiths from fabricated ones and b) the criteria in accepting or rejecting hadiths. The subject matter of this discipline is the narrator of the hadith and the narrated text to see if it can be accepted or not.¹¹

After hadith scholars know the transmitters of hadiths in *Rijāl* studies, they examine the criteria to evaluate the authenticity of hadiths and classify them accordingly. Early Shi‘a scholars classified hadiths into two groups: genuine (*ṣaḥīḥ*) and not genuine (*ghayr ṣaḥīḥ*). They verified genuine hadiths by locating them in the authentic books of hadiths. They also verified the reliability and trustworthiness of each author. Since the time of Ahmad ibn Ṭāwūs¹² or Allamah Ḥillī,¹³ Shi‘a scholars have been examining the criteria for judging the various hadiths by classifying them according to their transmitters. They defined the hadiths as follows:

- a. *Ṣaḥīḥah*: The transmitters of a ṣaḥīḥ hadith are reliable Twelver Shi‘as whose trustworthiness has been expressly confirmed, and the chain of transmitters is unbroken.
- b. *Ḥasanah*: The transmitters of this hadith are reliable Twelver Shi‘as although their reliability has not been expressly verified.

⁹ Contains information about written works of Shi‘a and also names of more than 900 Shi‘a authors

¹⁰ d. 450 AH

¹¹ Shahīd Thānī, *Al-Ri‘āyah Liḥāl al-Bidāyah fi ‘Ilm al-Dirāyah*, p. 51.

¹² d. 673 AH

¹³ d. 726 AH

- c. *Muwathaqaḥ*: The transmitters of this hadith are described to be reliable, although at least one of them is not a Twelver Shi‘a.¹⁴
- d. *Da‘īf*: Contrary to the above hadiths, this type of hadiths is not acceptable by scholars and cannot be considered as a valid evidence. However, if such a hadith enjoys popularity among the narrators (*shuhrat-e rivā‘i*) or popularity among jurists in issuing fatwa accordingly (*shuhrat-e fatwā‘i*) its validity is reinforced, the same way that if scholars have not acted upon a hadith that can be technically authenticated the validity of that hadith will be decreased.

The criteria for weak hadiths are as follows:

- a. A person in the chain of the transmitters of the hadith has been accused of lying
- b. The transmitter is accused of fabricating hadiths
- c. The transmitter is known for making mistakes
- d. The transmitter is known for his lewdness
- e. The transmitter is unknown or revealed in some sources as reliable and elsewhere as an unreliable.¹⁵

Among the most important works in the branch of hadith studies is Shahid Thani’s¹⁶ *Al-Ri‘āyah Liḥāl al-Bidāyah fi ‘Ilm al-Dirāyah* and Sheikh Bahai’s¹⁷ *Al-Wajīzah*. Moreover, great works have been written by contemporary scholars. For example, one may refer to Ja‘far Subhani’s *Uṣūl al-Hadith wa Aḥkāmuhu fi ‘Ilm al-Dirāyah*.

3. *Fiqh al-Hadith*

Fiqh al-Hadith studies the interpretation of hadiths. Consequently, commentaries on the *Four Books of Shi‘a* and *Ṣaḥīḥ Bukhārī* are written accordingly. Among the most famous commentaries written

¹⁴ *Tārīkh Hadīth*, pp. 390 – 392.

¹⁵ Rabbānī, Mohammad Hasan, *Dānesh Dirāyah al-Hadīth*, p. 98.

¹⁶ 911 – 965 AH

¹⁷ 935 – 1030 AH

on the Four Books of Shi‘a are *Mir‘āt al-‘Uqūl* by Allamah Majlisi¹⁸ and *Rawḍah al-Muttaqīn* by Muhammad Taqi Majlisi.¹⁹

4. *Gharīb al-Hadith*

This branch focuses on lexicological studies and hadith terminology. Tahiri’s²⁰ *Majma‘ al-Baḥrayn* is one of the most important references among the Shi‘a scholars.

5. *‘Ilāj al-Hadith*

This branch of hadith studies the contradictions and disagreements between hadiths. One important work in this field is Sheikh Ṭūsī’s²¹ *Istibṣār*.

6. *‘Ilal al-Hadith*

This branch of hadith analyses the decrease in the validity and authenticity of some hadiths.²²

7. *Qur’anic Sciences*

Qur’anic sciences are a collection of sciences that are used to understand the Qur’an and respond to misunderstandings regarding its validity and divine origin. It addresses issues such as the revelation of the Qur’an, its order, method of collection, writing it, its recitation, and *nāsikh*²³ and *mansūkh*²⁴ verses in the Qur’an. This does not include the sciences of the Qur’an regarding sciences such as theology, cosmology, and anthropology. The Qur’anic sciences deal with various issues about the Qur’an from an outsider’s perspective.²⁵

¹⁸ d. 1111 AH

¹⁹ d. 1070 AH

²⁰ 907 – 1085 AH

²¹ d. 460 AH

²² Rabbānī, Mohammad Hasan, *Ibid.*, pp. 13 – 14.

²³ Those ayahs which bring a new rule over a previous rule

²⁴ The ayahs, rule of which have been abrogated by other ayahs

²⁵ Cf. Eskandarloo, Mohammad Javad, *‘Ulūm Qur’āni* (excerpting from speech scripts of Ayatullah Ma‘rifat’s classes), p. 12.

The necessity of studying Qur'anic sciences is that looking through the meaning of the Qur'an is meaningful if first it is proved that the Qur'an is from God. To reach the original message descended upon the Prophet (s), it must be first clarified whether all the recitations (*qirā'at*) versions or some of them lead us to the original message. Regarding the issue of naskh,²⁶ recognition of a *mansūkh* verse from a *nāsikh* verse is also a prerequisite.

Historical Background and Related Works

The first figures who studied issues under this discipline were among the companions of the Prophet (s). Scholars of Qur'anic sciences believe that from among the companions of the Prophet (s), Ali ibn Abi Tālib (a) was one of the pioneers in Qur'anic sciences; another eminent figure in the field was Ibn Abbas.²⁷

However, topics related to Qur'anic sciences were organized in the second century AH. It is important to notice that Qur'anic sciences as understood today are different from what was meant in the early centuries AH. In the past, Qur'anic sciences also included topics discussed in hermeneutics, but later, due to the variety of topics, hermeneutic issues about the Qur'an became separate from Qur'anic sciences.

Generally, the related works in Qur'anic sciences are classified in four groups:

1. Works written in the early centuries in a specific branch of Qur'anic sciences. Distinguished authors who wrote such works include: Yaḥya ibn 'Umar (d. 89 AH) who wrote a book regarding the recitations (*qira'āt*) of the Qur'an; Hasan Baṣrī (d. 110 AH), author of *Nuzūl al-Qur'an wa 'Adad Āy al-Qur'an*; Abdullah 'Āmir Yaḥṣibī (d. 118 AH), author of *Ikhtilāf Maṣāḥif al-Shām wa al-Hijāz*; 'Aṭā' ibn Abi Moslim Maysirah al-Khurāsānī, the

²⁶ Abrogation of a rule by bringing a new rule over a previous rule in a later descended ayah

²⁷ Zarkashī, Muhammad ibn Bahādur, *Al-Burhān fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'an*, vol. 2, p. 87.

pioneer in collecting rulings of the Qur'an, Abān ibn Taghlab (d. 141 AH); the first author in the science of the recitation (*qira'āt*) of the Qur'an, Khalīl ibn Ahmad Farāhīdī (d. 170 AH); the inventor and author in dots and drawings, Ali ibn Abdullah Sa'di, an ingenious author in the events of revelation (*asbāb al-nuzūl*); Muhammad ibn Junayd (d. 281 AH), a scholar in the analogies of the Qur'an and Muhammad ibn Yazīd Wāsiṭī (d. 306 or 309 AH), the leading writer on miracles of the Qur'an and author of *Miracles of the Qur'an* available to use today.²⁸

2. Books regarding various branches of Qur'anic Sciences.
3. Works by authors who attempted to include all issues related to Qur'anic sciences such as: *Al-Burhān fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'an*, the most comprehensive work in Qur'anic sciences by Zarkashi in the eighth century, and Jalal al-Din Suyuti's²⁹ *Al-Itqān fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'an*, one of the most important references in Qur'anic sciences inspired by Al-Burhan. In recent centuries, valuable works have been published with similar approach in Qur'anic sciences, among of which are: *Manāhil al-'Irfān fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'an* by Muhammad 'Abdul'azīm Zaraqāni, *Mabāḥith fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'an* by Dr. Şubḥī Şāliḥ, *Ḥaqā'iq Hāmmah Ḥawl al-'Ulūm al-Qur'an* by Sayyid Ja'far Murtaḍā 'Āmilī and *Al-Tamhīd fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'an* by Muhammad Hadi Ma'rifat.
4. Commentaries at the beginning of which exegetes have discussed some issues of the Qur'anic sciences such as *Jāmi' al-Tafsīr* by Rāghib Işfahānī, and *Ālā' al-Rahmān* by Sheikh Muhammad Javad Balighi, *Tafsīr* by Qurṭubi, *Tafsīr* by Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr* by Ṭabarī and *Tafsīr Ālā' al-Rahmān*.³⁰

²⁸ Javān Ārāsteh, Husayn, *Darsnāmeḥ 'Ulum Qur'ani*, p. 32.

²⁹ d. 911 AH

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

Significant Topics Studied in Qur'anic Sciences

The following are some of the most fundamental topics in Qur'anic Sciences:

1. *Revelation Studies* focuses on the nature of revelation from the viewpoint of the Qur'an, the different types of revelation, and the relation between revelation and infallibility.
2. *Miraculousness of the Qur'an* covers issues such as different aspects of its miraculous nature in both its language and content.
3. *Compilation of the Qur'an* covers the different ways the Qur'an was descended (either gradually or at once), the order in revelation, and the way of writing the Qur'an and different recitations.
4. *Immunity of the Qur'an* studies immunity of the Qur'an from any type of distortion; it also focuses on historical evidence for the frequency of reports on the singularity of the text of the Qur'an, and answers questions raised by the believers regarding its distortion.
5. *Principles of understanding the Qur'an* includes issues such as the possibility of understanding and interpreting the Qur'an, linguistics of the Qur'an, the means and resources for interpreting the Qur'an, the way of distinguishing *muḥkam*³¹ verses from *mutashābih*³² verses, and understanding *nāsikh* (abrogating) and *mansūkh* (abrogated) verses.

8. The Science of Exegesis

Qur'anic exegesis is amongst the primary Islamic sciences. Through the use of various methods, this science expounds upon the intricate meanings of the Holy Qur'an. These methods may include the use of Qur'anic verses [to shed light upon other verses], the narrations of the

³¹ Verses having explicit meaning

³² Verses having implicit meaning

Infallibles (a), and the intellect.³³ In this sense, exegesis differs from *ta'wil*.³⁴ Through the use of Arabic linguistics and the rational principles of speech and dialogue, *exegesis* is the study of the apparent meaning of the Qur'an. *Ta'wil*, on the other hand, considers the hidden aspects and meanings which otherwise cannot be ascertained using these methods.³⁵

History

The history of this science is rooted in early days of Islam. The Prophet of Islam (s) is the first person, who upon the command of God, was tasked with explaining the divine verses to the masses.³⁶ After him, the Ahlul Bayt and their companions used the Qur'an and narrations left by the Prophet (s) to expound upon the verses.

In the second century, manuscripts that were translated and the influence of Roman and Iranian ideology amongst the Muslims led to the introduction of intellectual reasoning as another method of approaching Qur'anic exegesis.

The centuries that followed brought about the development of various sciences. Scholars, through the scope of their respective fields, referred to the Qur'an to expand upon the verses that discussed matters pertaining to their area of expertise. This resulted in the emersion of exegeses from perspectives such as Islamic theology (*kalām*), mysticism, and jurisprudence (*fiqh*).

The scholars' efforts in collecting the narrations of the Infallibles (a) and the dedication of exegetes in striving to understanding Qur'anic

³³ Ridayi Isfahani, Muhammad 'Ali, Methods and Directions of Qur'anic Exegesis

³⁴ Derived from the root word '*awwala*', the word *ta'wil* literally means to 'explain' or 'interpret'. As an expression, it is defined as the skill used in expounding upon the inner and concealed meanings of the Qur'an.

³⁵ Rajabi, Mahmud, The Method of Qur'anic Exegesis, Page 20.

³⁶ "...[and sent them] with manifest proofs and scriptures. We have sent down the reminder to you so that you may clarify for the people that which has been sent down to them, so that they may reflect." Chapter Nahl, Verse 44.

concepts can be witnessed today in the invaluable inheritance they left for seekers of religious knowledge. Of course, benefiting from these works requires a structured course of study and comprehensive research skills.

The Most Important Methods of Exegesis

The most important methods of exegesis include:

A) Interpreting the Qur'an by the Qur'an

In this method, the exegete aims to explain the meaning of the verse by making reference to another verse. In other words, the goal is to create a connection between the two verses to display the hidden meaning of one verse by means of the other.

The most common sub-methods of this approach consist of:

- a. Referring *mutashabih*³⁷ verses to those which are *muhkam*³⁸
- b. Exegesis of absolute (*mutlaq*) verses in light of conditional (*muqayyid*)
- c. Exegesis of general (*'ām*) verses in light of specific (*khās*) verses,
- d. Explaining brief (*mujmal*) verses through the use of those which are expressive (*mubayyin*) or detailed (*mufassal*),
- e. Determining the application of a verse through the means of other verses
- f. Using the context or style of the verse in exegesis

³⁷ These are the verses which can possess many meanings according to the rules of the Arabic language. Therefore, assigning meanings to these verses requires thorough thinking so that an appropriate understanding is derived from them.

³⁸ These are the verses which possess only one meaning according to the rules of the Arabic language. Therefore, the meanings of these verse are clearly known.

- g. Considering similar verses, giving attention to opposing verses and resolving any apparent differences
- h. Using other verses to determine Qur'anic expressions,
- i. Selecting one meaning over others by considering different Qur'anic verses
- j. Collecting abrogating (*nāsikh*) and abrogated (*mansukh*) verses

The following are among the most important books in which the method of explaining the Qur'an by means of the Qur'an has been extensively used:

-*Al-Mizān fi Tafsir al-Qur'an* by 'Allamah Tabataba'i (1321-1402 AH);

-*al-Qur'an fi Tafsir al-Qur'an bi al-Qur'an* by Muhammad Nādiq Tehrani (a contemporary exegete);

-*Ālā' al-Rahman fi Tafsir al-Qur'an* by Shaykh Muhammad Jawad Balaghi.³⁹

B) Interpreting the Qur'an by Hadiths

The method of exegeses through narrations is one of the oldest and most common methods of Qur'anic exegesis. In this method, to interpret the meaning of the verses, the exegete makes use of the hadiths of the Prophet (s) and the Ahlul Bayt (a). The use of this method began during the time of the Prophet (s) and continued throughout the lives of the Ahlul Bayt (a) and their companions. Ultimately, these works were gathered into valuable compilations of exegesis.

In brief, the application of narrations in Qur'anic exegesis is described as follows: Interpretation of the words within a verse, applying verses to different cases, expressing the intricate details and conditions of verses pertaining to Islamic law, explaining abrogating (*nāsikh*) and

³⁹ Born in 1352 AH.

abrogated (*mansukh*) verses, and stating the conditions in which verses were revealed along with their inner meaning and *ta'wil*.

The following are the most important and renowned Shi'a narration-based exegesis:

-*Tafsir al-Qummi* by Ali ibn Ibrahim ibn Hashim Qummi (born 307 AH)

-*Tafsir al-'Ayyāshi* by Abu Nadr Muhammad ibn 'Ayyash Samarqandi

-*Tafsir al-Sāfi* by Mulla Muhsin Fayd Kashani (1007-1091 AH)

-*Al-Burhān* by Sayyid Hashim Husayni Bahrani (born 1107 AH)

-*Tafsir Nur al-Thaqalayn* by 'Ali ibn Jum'ah 'Arusi Huwayzi (born 1112 AH)

C) Intellectual Interpretation of the Qur'an

The intellectual approach to exegesis – often titled the *ijtihādi* approach – holds a special place amongst the methods of exegesis. In this method, intellectual reasoning in the form of logical evidence (*qarā'in*) and proofs are used to gather verses and narrations. For example, logic dictates that when the Qur'an states, "...the hand of Allah is above their hands" (48:10), what is intended is certainly not a hand as a limb with five fingers. The clear reason is that God is not a material being who is limited in creation or capable of being annihilated. He is infinite and immortal by nature; He possesses no beginning or end in His existence. Bearing this in mind, we understand verse 48:10 to mean that the power of God is above all else.

Though the companions of the Prophet (s) and the next generation (*tābi'in*) held narrations pertaining to exegesis in high esteem, they also considered reflection, deliberation, and intellectual reasoning to be the foundation of understanding verses. They looked at narrations as one of the prerequisites in understanding the Qur'an. Of course, in

cases where narrations did not refer to the meaning of a particular verse, they used the intellect to discover the meanings of the Qur'an.⁴⁰

Among the Shi'a books of exegesis that implement the intellectual approach one may refer to:

-*al-Tibyān* by Shaykh al-Tusi

-*Majma' al-Bayān* by Tabarsi

-*al-Mizān fi Tafsir al-Qur'an* by 'Allamah Sayyid Muhammad Husayn Tabataba'i

9. *The Science of Islamic Ethics*

In the classical books of Islamic seminaries, the science of ethics (*'ilm al-akhlāq*) has been presented as an independent field of study. This science addresses the positive and negative qualities pertaining to man's self (*nafs*) and the actions associated with it. Furthermore, it explains how one should go about developing these positive attributes and abstaining from those that are negative in their nature. In turn, it is intended to lead a person to becoming inclined towards performing good deeds and distancing oneself from bad deeds.⁴¹ That having been said, the Islamic concept of ethics, as taught by the Qur'an and the Ahlul Bayt (a), is associated with two different meanings: One refers to the fundamental questions posed by the ethical sciences, which is commonly discussed today in the field of the philosophical ethics; the other defines ethics as a means of developing man's qualities and traits to render him a "complete" human being. Thus, this path seeks to discover both the theoretical and practical means through which a person can reach the highest of spiritual states.⁴² Bearing these definitions in mind, Islamic ethics pertains to discussions within the fields of philosophical ethics, theoretical ethics, and practical ethics.

⁴⁰ 'Amid Zanjani, 'Abbas'ali, *The Foundations and Methods of Qur'anic Exegesis*, p. 331.

⁴¹ Tusi, Khajjah Nasir al-Din, *Ethics of Nasir*, Page 48.

⁴² Ahmad Daylami and Mas'ud Adharbayjani, *Islamic Ethics* (second edition), p. 26.

Major Characteristics of the Islamic Ethical System

The most important qualities pertaining to the field of Islamic ethics include:

A) The Close Link between Ethics and One's World View

In Islamic ethics, ethical values influence how a person advances upon the path toward true perfection. In this system of ethics, to reach perfection lies in gaining proximity to God and recognizing His majestic Essence. This can only be achieved through servitude to Him. For this reason, Islamic ethics considers morality and purification of the self as keys to earning the highest levels of happiness. This happiness, of course, lies in gaining proximity to God and ascending to the eminent stages of humanity.⁴³

B) Comprehensive System of Values

The Islamic system of values stands in contrast to many other systems of ethics in terms of its comprehensiveness. While many schools of thought solely limit themselves to topics concerning social ethics, Islam discusses ethical values in a number of arenas. Included in this field are topics pertaining to man's association with his Lord, other forms of creation, himself, his family, society, and even matters pertaining to international relations. Since these various matters constitute the different aspects of man's life, each requires special consideration.⁴⁴

C) Taking into Account All Dimensions of Man

A point of criticism often made against many schools of ethics – including but not limited to emotivism, utilitarianism, conscious-

⁴³ Misbah Yazdi, *Ethics in the Qur'an*, Research and Composition: Muhammad Husayn Iskandari, Page 95.

⁴⁴ Misbah Yazdi, Muhammad Taqi, Critique and Assessment of Ethical Schools, Research and Composition: Ahmad Husayn Sharifi, Page 352.

centric ethics, power-centric ethics – is that they often consider only one dimension of man’s existence while ignoring other aspects. Meanwhile, Islam’s theocentric system of ethics considers the various aspects of man’s being – physical, mental and spiritual – and thus, brings into the fold all positive qualities found within these different schools. Therefore, if someone reaches the highest stage of ethical perfection (i.e. proximity toward God), they will in turn reach an immortal existence, the purest form of everlasting pleasure, and the most complete form of strength.⁴⁵

Different Methods in Islamic Ethics

Muslim scholars and experts within the field of ethics have generally adopted one of the following methodological approaches in their ethical studies:⁴⁶

A) Philosophical Ethics

This approach is heavily influenced by the concept of middle position or moderation when approaching the matter of ethics. Immoderation is considered an undesirable moral quality. This approach studies different human faculties, along with the concepts of moderation and immoderation, as its main point of focus in all ethical discussions. The following books have been written using this method: *Tahdhib al-Akhlaq* and *Tahārah al-A‘rāq* by Ibn Miskawayh, *Akhlaq al-Nasiri* by Khajjah Nasir al-Din Tusi, and to an extent *Jāmi’ al-Sa’ādāt* by Muhammad Mahdi Naraqī.

The Principles of Anthropology in Philosophical Ethics

Principle One: The human soul has three distinct faculties: *shahawiyyah* (the faculty of desire or appetites), *ghadabiyyah* (the faculty of anger), and *nātiqiyyah* (the faculty of intellect).

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 354.

⁴⁶ Ahmad Daylami and Mas’ud Àdharbayjani, *Islamic Ethics* (second edition), pp. 22-25.

Principle Two: These three faculties interact with and are influenced by one another.

Principle Three: The quality that renders man distinct from other forms of creations is his awareness and ability to foster wisdom.

Principle Four: The perfection of each being is dependent on their ability to completely manifest and perfect each of their distinctive attributes. It is these attributes that separate that being from other forms of creation, thus, granting them a separate identity. A person's ability to reach perfection also depends on this process; before attaining perfection, he must first completely manifest the trait that distinguishes him from others – that trait being the faculty of intellect.⁴⁷

B) Mystical Ethics

This approach to ethics, which has generally been adopted by mystics, primarily focuses on the concepts of ethical development and spiritual wayfaring. In this method, striving against the desires of one's self is considered the means of attaining ethical perfection. For an individual embarking upon this path, the various stages – leading to the ultimate goal of attaining perfection – are specified.

Mystics believe that in the same manner in which the world is comprised of a manifest reality (*'ālam al-shahādah*) and a hidden reality (*'ālam al-ghayb*), man too is a being composed of both manifest and hidden realities. They consider the hidden aspect of man's existence capable of maturing through ten stages. When a person is born, they possess the lowest and most manifest degree of humanity – otherwise known as the animalistic self. However, over time and as that individual develops in terms of their intellect, other aspects of their existence begin to display themselves. Mystics state that in order to acquire true perfection and prosperity, one must delve deep within the inner-most levels of their hidden self. In doing so, these stages of development can be reached through means of the

⁴⁷ Mahdi Ahmadpoor and Others, the Book of Understanding Islamic Ethics, Page 30.

potentials that exist intrinsically within man's self. In each stage of development, the spiritual wayfarer must meet certain requirements in order to advance further. These requirements, in addition to the basic principles of ethics, may necessitate enduring spiritual trials and tribulations along with adhering to particular rules and ethics.⁴⁸

The most renowned work based on this approach within the field of Islamic ethics is the book *Manāzil al-Sā'irin* by Khajah 'Abdullah Ansari. This book contains 100 subjects, most of which address the topic of man's relationship with his Lord. Meanwhile, some subjects concerned with the topic of "individual ethics" expound upon that specific topic or explain the various stages of ethics. In addition, parts of this book touch briefly upon the topic of social ethics.⁴⁹

Scripture Based Ethics

This refers to works containing compilations of narrations from the Infallibles (a) concerning the topic of ethics. These books are solely collections of narrations and may, at the very most, categorize the narrations contained within based on their subject. This approach relays ethical points that have been revealed in the Qur'an and traditions of the Infallibles (a) without giving heed to the order or association between the points presented. Instead of explaining the foundations of ethical concepts or guiding one to their practical implementation, this method focuses primarily on describing ethical concepts.⁵⁰

The following works have been written using this approach:

-*Musādaqat al-Ikhwān* by Shaykh Saduq

-*Ihyā' al-'Ulūm* by Muhammad Ghazali

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 45.

⁴⁹ Ibid., pp. 198-199.

⁵⁰ Ahmad Daylami and Mas'ud Àdharbayjani, *Islamic Ethics* (second edition), pp. 22-25.

-*Mishkāt al-Anwār* by Tabarsi, *Al-Mahajjat al-Baydā* by Fayd Kashani

-*Ghurar al-Hikam* by ‘Abd al-Wahid Āmudi

General Characteristics of Scripture-Based Works on Ethics

1. Islamic ethics and Islamic etiquettes and manners (*ādāb*) are discussed together.
2. The volume of these works is generally greater than those based on other schools of ethics. Furthermore, books of traditional ethics tend to cover more subjects than those written in the philosophical or gnostic approach.
3. Generally speaking, the contents of these books are not arranged using a specific method of organization. Therefore, the narrations presented on a given topic may not necessarily be uniform in their level or may not be intended for a particular audience.⁵¹

The next part of this series is on the historical origins of the most important religious seminaries in the Shi‘a world.

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 57.

A GLIMPSE OF TAFSIR *AL-MIZĀN*: THE MIRACLE OF THE QUR'AN

SHAHNAZE SAFIEDDINE

ABSTRACT: In verse 2:23 in the Qur'an, God challenges the unbelievers to bring a book like the Qur'an, or to bring ten chapters or even one chapter like it. This all-inclusive challenge directed to both the layman and elite is not limited to its style and eloquence, but also takes into consideration its morality, spirituality, just legal code, and proof of the unseen. The claim that the Qur'an is a miracle verifies both the occurrence of miracles, and that the Qur'an is one of those miracles. This article is a synopsis of Allamah Tabatabai's interpretation of verse 2:23 in his *Tafsir al-Mizān* where he focuses on the five qualities that render the Qur'an a miracle: Its a) knowledge, b) unschooled recipient, c) prophecies, d) consistency and e) eloquence. Additionally, Allamah responds to objections raised about abrogation and the miraculous nature of speech. The Qur'an is a continuation of the teachings of earlier prophets and considers every topic relevant to one's spiritual and social life – such as morality and jurisprudence – that will remain valid and guide humankind until the end of the world. Prophet Muhammad (s), an untaught person, suddenly conveyed a Book unsurpassed in its eloquence, knowledge, predictions, and knowledge of the unseen. Its superiority in all the above-mentioned aspects astonished the pre-Islamic Arabs who were unrivalled in linguistic excellence by their contemporaries. This led some to venerate the Qur'an and act upon its teachings, while others who were resentful falsely accused the Prophet of having been educated by third parties. The knowledge it contains is reserved for Allah, and this renders people incapable of producing a piece similar to its perfectly arranged words that require expertise in eloquence, intelligence, and understanding – all qualities that categorize writers and speakers into different levels.

وَإِنْ كُنْتُمْ فِي رَيْبٍ مِمَّا نَزَّلْنَا عَلَىٰ عَبْدِنَا فَأْتُوا بِسُورَةٍ مِّنْ
مِّثْلِهِ وَادْعُوا شُهَدَاءَكُمْ مِّنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ صَادِقِينَ

And if you are in doubt concerning what We have sent down to Our servant, then bring a sūrah like it, and invoke your helpers besides Allah, should you be truthful. (2:23)

In the above verse, God challenges the unbelievers to bring something “like it” - i.e. a Qur’anic chapter. In other verses, God challenges the believers to bring ten chapters. An alternative interpretation takes the expression “like it” to refer to bringing the like of the Qur’an written by someone like Prophet Muhammad (s) given that he was untaught by any teacher.

The assertion that the Qur’an is a miracle that challenges its adversaries not only verifies the occurrence of miracles, but also confirms that the Qur’an is one of those miracles. Allamah Tabatabai first approaches this subject by proving that the Qur’an is a miracle, which in turn proves the prophethood of Prophet Muhammad (s) and inevitably verifies the reality of miracles. Afterwards, Allamah delves into the concept of miracles to answer the probing question: How can something that is contrary to the universal law of cause and effect occur?

The miracle of the Qur’an is universal, whereas other miracles are temporal, and limited by time and space. This all-inclusive challenge is not merely restricted to its eloquence and style; rather, its morality, just legal code, and evidence of the unseen are also included. It also assuredly includes unforeseen events of the past and future; people

generally do not have the courage to bring about a book that claims to have knowledge of the unseen.

The Qur'an is a miracle for people of all academic fields and spiritual ranks – sages, poets, sociologists, psychologists, linguists, politicians, layman and elite, Muslim and non-Muslim alike – all are considered and invited towards guidance. It addresses itself to all of humankind: "...this Qur'an has been revealed to me that I may warn thereby you and whomever it may reach...",¹ "Yet it is just a reminder for all the nations"² and "Indeed it is one of the greatest [signs] – a warner to all humans."³

The qualities that render the Qur'an a miracle are five: 1) the knowledge it holds, 2) the illiteracy of its messenger, 3) predictions and knowledge of the unseen, 4) its consistent nature, and 5) its eloquent style.

Its Knowledge

One way that Allah challenges the unbelievers is through the knowledge contained in the Qur'an. He revealed the Qur'an "*explaining clearly everything*"⁴ and takes into consideration every topic, regardless of its scope: "...nor is there a grain in the darkness of the earth, nor anything fresh or withered but it is in a manifest Book."⁵ It offers the most comprehensive path of guidance, in terms of a person's spiritual and social life. Fundamental teachings based on both monotheism and human nature have been offered for which its details are relevant to one's life and character, such as moral virtues and religious laws covering worship, social regulations, and penal

¹ Qur'an, 6:19

² Qur'an, 68:52

³ Qur'an, 74:35-36

⁴ Qur'an, 16:89

⁵ Qur'an, 6:59

codes taught by the Prophet: *“Take whatever the Apostle gives you, and relinquish whatever he forbids you...”*⁶

Moreover, it not only contains the knowledge of previous divine books but also puts the finishing touches on them as it is a continuation of the teachings of earlier prophets: *“He has prescribed for you the religion which He had enjoined upon Noah and which we have [also] revealed to you, and which We had enjoined upon Abraham, Moses and Jesus.”*⁷

The Qur’an’s perfect knowledge is eternal; it will remain valid until the end of the world and will continue to guide mankind with relevance to human needs: *“...and most surely it is a Mighty Book: Falsehood shall not come to it from before it nor from behind it; a revelation from the Wise, the Praised One.”*⁸ In other words, the Qur’an is beyond the reach of the law of change and development; it will never be affected by abrogation. Some people question whether such a book is capable of giving guidance. They argue that there are many changes that occur over time, and thus the laws and regulations controlling society must change to cope with fluctuations in society. Therefore, how can the Islamic law (*shari’a*) continue to apply to all generations without any change or abrogation?

According to Allamah, although aspects such as food and technology change over time, the basic need for happiness is universal. Islam offers a set of laws that governs human nature and provides for our essential needs. For instance, it advises people to eat and drink as they please, but warns against eating and drinking harmful products such as pork and wine. Likewise, it instructs people to dress as they like within the boundaries of dressing modestly.

⁶ Qur’an, 59:7

⁷ Qur’an, 42:13

⁸ Qur’an, 41:41-42

The Qur'an has built its laws on the foundation of monotheism and morality that stem from a healthy human nature. However, those who believe laws controlling society must change in relation to vicissitudes in society overlook the spiritual side of monotheism and morality, and instead focus entirely on the material advancement of society.

The Receiver of Revelation

Without having been taught or trained by an educator, nor having delivered a lecture or even created a single line of poetry, Prophet Muhammad (s) suddenly conveyed a Book whose words and meanings are perfect, dumbfounding the giants of literature with its unique eloquence and unmatched style. Nonetheless, adversaries who harbored envy and malice in their hearts accused him of having learned such truths from third parties. These allegations are as follows:

- *First allegation:* The Prophet learned the stories in the Qur'an from Christian monks during his business travels to Syria.

Response: Having gone to Syria only twice – once with his uncle Abu Talib and another time with Khadija's slave Maysara – neither traveling companion reported any such meeting with a teacher. But if he did meet with someone, who was it that taught him divine monotheistic knowledge? How did he receive such wisdom? And how did he learn unsurpassed elocution and eloquence?

- *Second allegation:* The Prophet learned these truths from a Roman blacksmith.

Response: Allah replies to this allegation in the Qur'an: “*And certainly we know that they say: ‘Only a mortal teaches him.’ The tongue of him whom they are inclined to blame for it is barbarous, and this is*

clear Arabic language.”⁹ The Qur’an was revealed in the Arabic language, whereas the language of the man to whom they ascribed it is Roman. Furthermore, this verse demonstrates that the miracle of the Qur’an is not limited to its content; its eloquence is also beyond man’s capability.

- *Third allegation:* The Prophet gained this knowledge from Salman al-Farsi who was apparently well-versed in religions and sects.

Response: Salman converted to Islam after meeting the Prophet in Medina while a major portion of the Qur’an was revealed in Mecca beforehand.

Predictions and Unconventional Knowledge

The verses concerning the unseen are divided into four categories: 1) information relating to previous prophets – such as Prophet Joseph and Prophet Jesus - and their nations,¹⁰ 2) foretelling future events, for instance, that the Romans will avenge their defeat as well as the signs that will appear before the Day of Judgment,¹¹ 3) verses about scientific phenomenon that were not yet discovered¹² such as the formation of clouds and rain, and 4) verses that refer to major events that would occur in the Islamic community and the world after the death of the Prophet.¹³

⁹ Qur’an, 16:103

¹⁰ Qur’an, 11:49 – after the story of Prophet Yusuf; 12:102 & 3:44- regarding the story of Lady Mariam; 19:34 - regarding Prophet Jesus.

¹¹ Qur’an, 30:2-4 – Romans would avenge their defeat; 28:85 - The Prophet would return to Mecca after his hijrah; 48:27 - The vision of the Prophet would come true; 48:15 - regarding the future behaviour of a group of Muslims; 5:70 – no one would be able to harm the Prophet; 5:19 – the Qur’an will remain under Allah’s protection; 21:95 – 7; 24:55; 6:65 - Signs appearing before the Day of Judgment

¹² Qur’an, 15:22; 15:19; 78:6-7 - verses based on scientific realities unknown during revelation and discovered after research

¹³ Qur’an, 5:54; 10:47-50; 30:30-32 - verses that refer to the future events of the Islamic community, or in the world in general, after the death of the Prophet

Its Consistent and Eternal Nature

The Qur'an does not include the slightest discrepancy. Allah says: *“Do they not then meditate on the Qur'an? And if were from any other than Allah, they would have found in it many a discrepancy.”* (4:82)

This material world is governed by law, change, and development; human beings constantly undergo change and development as they struggle to upgrade themselves, realizing with every passing hour the mistakes committed in the past hour. However, the Qur'an – with all its universal spiritual knowledge, ethics, and laws – was brought piece by piece during the course of twenty-three years, in Mecca and Medina, through thick and thin. Had such a book been revealed from other than Allah, it would have undoubtedly contained flawed eloquence and style, and many inconsistencies.

More importantly, the Qur'an is not only free from contradiction, but there is no difference in the complexity of ideas over time. An author's first edition may not bear any contradictions, but it is able to improve over time. The next editions are usually more polished, as they require improvements and modifications, especially after authors gain further knowledge and experience. However, the Qur'an is kept intact, never improving and is thus in no need of editing or revision.

Some use the following verse to show the many instances of abrogation in the Qur'an: *“Whatever signs We abrogate or cause to be forgotten, We bring one better than it or like it;¹⁴ and when We change (one) communication for (another) communication, and Allah knows best what He reveals...”¹⁵* Thus, abrogation is misunderstood as being a change in opinion, an inconsistency, or a contradiction.

However, abrogation is not to be viewed as a discrepancy. A rule is abrogated when the society or rule changes to the extent that the underlying wisdom of the rule is no longer effective. But the Qur'an contains verses to demonstrate that a given order was temporary, and

¹⁴ Qur'an, 2:106

¹⁵ Qur'an, 16:101

that it would soon be abrogated. For example, there was a time when Muslims were asked to give charity when they wanted to whisper to the Prophet. This rule was temporary. Another instance was when marital relations were temporarily prohibited during the Month of Ramadan. The verses that mention a rule that was abrogated indicate that these rules were not permanent.

Furthermore, abrogation may be a mere legislation following another. It may also be used to test people or to prepare them for a future law. Indeed, God does not change His plan, and although a given ruling may appear to be a firm decision, His real decision is known beforehand.

Its Eloquence

The Qur'an addresses both jinn and man when it challenges its adversaries to bring a written or spoken piece resembling its eloquence. The challenge is to produce a similar book, ten chapters,¹⁶ or even a single chapter like it.¹⁷

Prophet Muhammad (s) conveyed the divine message when the society's predominant talent and focus revolved around eloquent speech and beautiful poetry. Pre-Islamic Arabs took great pride in carefully articulating their language, and did not allow any other nation to surpass them in this regard. Linguistic structure played a vital role in their lives, since Arabic was mainly a spoken language with memorization as the primary means of preserving their literature. Their oral literature consisted of poetry and prose that entailed the most elegant expression, style, and flow, and it was widely accepted that they had reached the highest level of eloquence, incomparable to previous and contemporary nations.

¹⁶ Qur'an, 17:88; 11: 12-3

¹⁷ Qur'an, 2:23; 10:38

Allah revealed the Qur'an during this era, when its unique and bewildering linguistic excellence surpassed the highest literature. The revelation of the Qur'an astounded the Prophet's contemporaries who were not only articulate in their language, but revered others who held high linguistic abilities. They were so hopeless in competing with the Qur'an that they labeled the Prophet either mad or a magician given that it provided linguistic excellence unparalleled in the history of the Arabic language, as it was revealed in the most eloquent, articulate, and elaborate style.

The Qur'an's challenge to the nation provoked anger in its opponents, who hid themselves to avoid hearing its recitation: *"Now surely they fold up their breasts that they may conceal from Him; now surely, when they put their garments as a covering, He knows what they conceal and what they make known."*¹⁸

Objections

The following objections have been made regarding whether or not language can be considered a miracle:

Objections: Speech cannot become a miracle or rise above human ability because language is created by people to meet their social needs and to convey their thoughts and feelings. Even if it reaches a high level, the Qur'an entails various styles and structures. Not all styles are miraculous; thus, one type would fall short of that standard.

Response

Counter-argument: Some scholars held that it is Allah who renders man unable to produce something like the Qur'an to preserve and protect the sanctity of prophethood; the miracle was in Allah's power to prevent people from bringing its like. However, this theory is invalid. The challenge is meant to prove that the Qur'an is a revelation

¹⁸ Qur'an, 11:5

that is revealed by Allah's knowledge, rather than being forged by the Prophet or produced by Satan.

The knowledge contained in the Qur'an is humbling, since true knowledge is reserved for Allah:

Or, do they say: 'He has forged it?' Say: 'Then bring a chapter like this and call whom you can besides Allah, if you are truthful.' Nay, they have rejected that of which they have no comprehensive knowledge, and its final interpretation has not yet come to them...¹⁹

It is Allah's knowledge that renders people unable to bring something like it. People simply lack this knowledge; it is not that they initially possessed this ability and God prevented them from undertaking the task. According to the Qur'an, both human beings and jinn are unable to develop a piece that is entirely free of inconsistencies.²⁰

Response: The invention of words for particular meanings does not teach man how to perfectly arrange, plan, draft, and deliver the speech to reveal its meaning; this requires intelligence, deep knowledge, and aptitude in eloquence and delivery. Both skill and knowledge is what places writers and speakers at different levels.

The three aspects of human speech include:

- a) *Knowledge of language:* having comprehensive knowledge of language without being able to articulate it.
- b) *Elocutionary skill:* being a good speaker without necessarily being knowledgeable.
- c) *Knowledge of realities:* being knowledgeable without being able to clearly express one's views.

¹⁹ Qur'an, 10:38-39

²⁰ Qur'an, 4:82

Knowledge of language is invented by man's social instinct whereas elocutionary skill and knowledge depend on intellectual refinement.

Human intelligence is limited; it cannot comprehend each and every detail of an event or fact. Thus, no person can ensure that his or her knowledge is flawless because people's perceptiveness naturally shifts from deficiency to perfection. The same holds for any person's speech; it cannot be guaranteed that it is completely free of flaws, or that its knowledge and skill is on the same level as the earlier or future speech. Given this observation, the perfection of both eloquence and knowledge in the Qur'an cannot be the result of a human being's effort.

Moreover, language being invented by people does not necessarily prove that only they can produce the best piece of literature. An inventor of an object does not guarantee his or her expertise in using it. For example, the inventor of the paintbrush will not necessarily be the best painter.

Thus, miraculous eloquence is not merely a product of words alone. The Qur'an's perfect eloquence consists of language that is in harmony with the proposed meaning, and this meaning must be in conformity with the established fact. Its words are sweet, its style flowing, its sentences concise, its meaning applicable, and its ideas factual.

Conclusion

The all-encompassing challenge directed towards both the layman and elite to bring a literary piece similar to the Qur'an is not restricted to its style and eloquence; instead, it takes into account morality, spirituality, a just legal code, and proof of the unseen. The five characteristics that render the Qur'an a miracle are its a) knowledge, b) unschooled recipient, c) prophecies, d) consistency and e)

eloquence. The Qur'an is not only a continuation of the wisdoms of earlier prophets; it also includes every important aspect of a person's social and spiritual life, with its moral and religious laws remaining valid and applicable until the end of time. Moreover, it was revealed to Prophet Muhammad (s), an untaught individual. The Qur'an's superiority in all the above-mentioned aspects amazed the Prophet's contemporaries, many of whom excelled in the field of prose and poetry. While some respected the Qur'an and valued its teachings, others showed animosity, and consequently accused the Prophet of having been secretly taught by holy men and academics. The knowledge it contains is reserved for Allah, rendering anyone incapable of bringing something like it, complete with flawless word arrangement that can only be produced by intelligence and eloquence that is beyond human capacity.

IMAMAH AND WILAYAH¹

PART V

MOHAMMAD ALI SHOMALI

ABSTRACT: Having a leader and a guide who draws people nearer to righteousness is a blessing and grace of God. The concept of Imamate in Shi'i Islam deems it necessary to have a guide who will lead the Muslim society after the Prophet's death by presenting true Islam as well as being a political leader. This guide is appointed by God and possesses qualities of piety, knowledge, wisdom, and infallibility. Part IV of this series verified that the Shi'a understanding of Imamate is compatible with the Qur'an in that God refers to Himself as having rule, governance, sovereignty, and the power to choose, and people are asked to obey Him, the Prophet, and those "*vested with authority among the people*" (i.e. the infallibles). This part studies the group of verses that refer to the profound concept of *witness*, including his roles and qualities. According to these verses, there must be a witness amongst every generation of people. The Qur'an indicates that the witness who followed Prophet Muhammad (s) was from him and had knowledge of the Book; these qualities can only be found in Imam Ali (a).

¹ This paper is based on lecture 12 of a series of lectures delivered by Dr Mohammad Ali Shomali in summer 2004 in Qum.

As described in the previous part, in the Qur'an, God refers to Himself as having rule (*amr*), governance (*hukm*), full sovereignty (*mulk*), and the power to choose (*ikhtiyār*). He is our guardian (*wali*) and He is to be obeyed (*tā'ah*). These attributes ascertain His sole power to choose and legitimize a leader, because He gives it to whomever He pleases. People are asked to obey Him, the Prophet, and those “*vested with authority among the people*” i.e. the infallibles. These verses without a doubt verify that the Shi'a understanding of Imamate is compatible with the Qur'an.

Part I: The Concept of Witness in the Qur'an

According to the Qur'an, the most outstanding groups of people are those whom the people upon whom God has bestowed His blessings, and every Muslim at least ten times a day in his prayers asks God to guide him towards their path, the Right Path (1:6 & 7). These groups are four:

All who obey God and the messenger are in the company of those on whom is the Grace of God, - of the prophets (who teach), the most truthful, the witnesses (who testify), and the Righteous (who do good): Ah! what a beautiful Fellowship! (4:69)

Thus, the witnesses come in rank in line with the prophets and the most truthful. Indeed, many witnesses were Prophets and all witnesses were undoubtedly truthful. Several verses in the Qur'an refer to who these witnesses are:

One Day We shall raise from all Peoples a Witness: then will no excuse be accepted from Unbelievers, nor will they receive any favours. (16:84)

On the Day of Judgement, when all nations will be brought before Allah, a witness will come from each nation; hence, there is no nation without someone acting as a witness over them. This witness points

out the right way and will testify that that divine message was clearly conveyed to all peoples, in addition to the divine signs witnessed in nature. There will then be no room for any excuses. For this reason, the Qur'an says: "*No excuse will be accepted from Unbelievers, nor will they receive any favours.*" The Qur'an also says:

So how shall it be, when We bring from every nation a witness and We bring you as a witness to them?(4:41)

One day We shall raise from all Peoples a witness against them, from amongst themselves: and We shall bring thee as a witness against these (thy people): and We have sent down to thee the Book explaining all things, a Guide, a Mercy, and Glad Tidings to Muslims. (16:89)

Thus, the Qur'an clearly indicates that a witness must be a human being from amongst the people themselves, a witness who understood them and was known to them. This verse also confirms that the Prophet Muhammad (s) will be witness against the people who lived during his mission. He will be a witness against those who believed in him and the Book he brought, and against those who rejected him and his message.

The roles of a witness

The roles and characteristics of witnesses are as follows:

-God's Hujjah

Although *hujjah* is often translated as a proof or argument, it technically means something or someone that helps you to understand the will of God. Anything or anyone that can be trusted in understanding the will of God or any person is a *hujjah*. A *Hujjah* can be used by people to defend their position if they have acted according to him. On the Day of Judgment, both Allah and His servants refer to

the *hujjah*. Allah asks and judges us according to the *hujjah* He provided us with.

The main *hujjah* are our intellect ('*aql*) and the Prophets (a) who have received divine message for mankind through revelation. Since there must be a *hujjah* in each age, the Imams are a *hujjah* after Prophet Muhammad.

Thus, the witnesses are people who can be taken as a *hujjah*. By looking at them and considering what they do and say, you can have good *hujjah* to justify your conduct. For example, Allah says:

The day He will call out to them and say, 'Where are My partners that you used to claim'? We shall draw from every nation a witness and say, 'Produce your evidence'. Then they will know that all reality belongs to God and what they used to fabricate will forsake them. (28:74 & 75)

When Allah asks people regarding what they did and failed to do, He chooses one of them as a witness and asks him to give an account of a) what they were *expected* to believe and practice, and b) what they *actually* believed and practiced. In this way, the faults of the wrongdoers and those who have gone astray will be exposed. Thus, the role of a witness is that he serves as a standard in this world and hereafter.

-A witness confirms those who lie against Allah

On the Day of Judgment, the witnesses will confirm those who denied the signs of Allah and attributed lies to Him:

Who doth more wrong than those who invent a lie against God. They will be turned back to the presence of their Lord, and the witnesses will say, "These are the ones who lied against their Lord! Behold! the Curse of God is on those who do wrong! (Hud, 18)

Allah says that on the Day of Judgement for both those who have denied divine communications and told lies the witnesses will report the lies they attributed to their Lord.

-A witness protects the Divine Book

Another task of witnesses is to protect the Divine Books:

We sent down the Torah containing guidance and light. The prophets, who had submitted, judged by it for the Jews, and so did the rabbis and the scribes, as they were charged to preserve the Book of God and were witnesses to it. So do not fear the people, but fear Me, and do not sell My signs for a paltry gain. Those who do not judge by what God has sent down—it is they who are the faithless. (5:44)

The Prophets who have submitted themselves to Allah ruled or judged the Jews according to the Torah. Afterwards, Allah speaks of the people who were given the task of preserving the Torah - “*to them was entrusted the protection of God’s book and they were witnesses thereto.*” These people were witnesses upon the Torah: If the Torah was distorted, they will testify on the Day of Judgment as to whether they dutifully maintained the book, or deliberately destroyed it.

Note: Some non-Shi‘a scholars assert that the Prophet (s) was the witness against people of his time and all the future generations until end of this world. However, it can be understood from the Qur’an itself that a witness, in this particular sense, must live with and amongst the people whom he is going to be witness against. According to the Qur’an, when God asks Prophet Jesus (a) whether he told the people to take him and his mother for gods besides God, his answer will be:

I did not say to them [anything] except what You had commanded me [to say] “Worship God, my Lord and your Lord.” And I was a witness to them so long as I was

among them. But when You had taken me away. You Yourself were watchful over them, and You are witness to all things. (5:117)

Although Jesus (a) did not die, his position as a witness continued only as long as he lived among the people and ended when God raised him and took him away. Thus, there is no way to hold that the Prophet (s) was a witness in this sense for the period after his demise. There must have been a witness after him, and that witness must be followed by another witness; and this continues until end of this world.

Part II: Imam Ali as a Witness of God

There are at least two verses (11:17 & 13:43) that clearly indicate that Imam Ali was the witness after the Prophet (s). In what follows, these verses will be examined.

Imam Ali was a witness from the Prophet ('minhu')

The Qur'an says:

Can they be (like) those who accept a Clear (Sign) from their Lord, and whom a witness from Himself doth teach, as did the Book of Moses before it, - a guide and a mercy? They believe therein; but those of the Sects that reject it, - the Fire will be their promised meeting-place. Be not then in doubt thereon: for it is the truth from thy Lord: yet many among men do not believe! (11:17)

The sentence "*Can they be (like) those who accept a Clear (Sign) from their Lord*" clearly refers to the Prophet since he who possesses a manifest proof from His Lord. The line "*...and whom a witness from Himself doth teach*" must then refer to someone who is a witness from the Prophet, although he is not the Prophet himself given the word *minhu* (from himself).² Indeed, he comes after (*yatlū*) the Prophet.

² The word *minhu* (from him) has also been used in the Prophet's hadith regarding Imam Husayn: "Husayn is from me and I am from Husayn."

This person is none other than Imam Ali. The verse of *Mubāhala* and the chapter *The Immunity* (*Barā'a*) attest that Imam Ali was he who was *from* the Prophet (*minhu*).

a) *The Event of Mubahala*

The Event of Mubāhala occurred between the Christians of Najran and Prophet Muhammad on the 10th of Hijrah. When the people of Najran deified Jesus, the Prophet called for a *Mubahalāh* – a meeting in which both sides gather their men, women, and children to pray to God and invoke a curse on those who lie:

If any one disputes in this matter with thee, now after (full) knowledge hath come to thee, say: 'Come! let us gather together, - our sons and your sons, our women and your women, ourselves and yourselves: Then let us earnestly pray, and invoke the curse of God on those who lie!' (3:61)

The Prophet took Imam Hasan and Husayn as “*our sons*,” Lady Fatima as “*our women*,” and Imam Ali as “*ourselves*.” Imam Ali clearly does not fit into the category of “*our sons*” and “*our women*” which means he must have been from “*ourselves*.” Furthermore, no one can claim to be closer to the Prophet than Imam Ali, and he was the sole person qualified enough to represent the Prophet. Sunni scholars likewise agree that those whom the Prophet summoned are none other than Ali, Fatima, Hasan, and Husayn.³

b) *Declaration of the Chapter Barā'a*

The Prophet was ordered to reveal the chapter *Barā'a* (*The Immunity*) in condemnation to the unbelievers and polytheists. This involved prohibiting them from entering Masjid ul-Haram⁴ and asserting that a person cannot enter heaven without being a believer. Additionally,

³ *Sahih Muslim: The Book of Merits* in “The Merits of Imam Ali”; *Sunan of Tirmidhi* no. 3085

⁴ The Grand Mosque that surrounds the Ka'ba in Mecca.

those who entered were no longer permitted to circumambulate the Ka'ba unclothed as this was one of their previous customs.

The Prophet first asked Abu Bakr to deliver it to the people of Mecca. When Abu Bakr set out, he left for a short time until the Prophet instructed Imam Ali to reach Abu Bakr and ask him to return and to deliver the message himself. The difficulty of being asked to turn back brought Abu Bakr to tears as he supposed that perhaps Allah has revealed something against him personally and thus ordered the Prophet to send him back. The Prophet informed him that there was nothing about him personally, telling him that it was due to a special command of Allah that no one should communicate this to the people except him or a man from him.⁵

The event of *Mubahala* and the revelation of the chapter *Barā'a* verify that the caliphs were not regarded as *from* the Prophet (*minhu*) apart from Imam Ali. Thus, when Allah says, "a witness from himself follows him" in verse 11:17, this can only refer to Imam Ali.

Imam Ali was the witness who followed the Prophet and had knowledge of the Book

The following verse also confirms Imam Ali (a) as the witness after Prophet Muhammad:

*The Unbelievers say: "No messenger art thou" Say:
"Enough for a witness between me and you is God, and
such as have knowledge of the Book." (13:43)*

⁵ *Musnad* of Imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal; *Sunan* of Tirmidhi; *Mustadrak* of Saheehayn. Original texts in Arabic are as follows:

«إِنَّ النَّبِيَّ بَعَثَهُ بِبِرَاءَةٍ إِلَى أَهْلِ مَكَّةَ، فَسَارَ ثَلَاثًا ثُمَّ قَالَ لِعَلِيٍّ: الْحَقُّهُ، فَرَدَّ عَلَيَّ أَبَا بَكْرٍ وَبَلَغَهَا، فَلَمَّا قَدِمَ أَبُو بَكْرٍ عَلَى رَسُولِ اللَّهِ (ص) قَالَ: يَا رَسُولَ اللَّهِ حَدِّثْهُ شَيْءًا، قَالَ: مَا وَجَدْتُ فِيكَ إِلَّا خَيْرًا، لَكِنِّي أَمَرْتُ أَنْ لَا يُبَلِّغَ إِلَّا أَنَا أَوْ رَجُلٌ مِنِّي...»

Ahmad ibn Hanbal, *Musnad* (Beirut: Dār Sādir), vol. 1, p. 3. See also *Sahih* of Tirmidhi, vol. 5, p. 594.

روى أَنَّ أَبَا بَكْرٍ لَمَّا كَانَ بِبَعْضِ الطَّرِيقِ - أَي لَتَبْلِيغِ سُورَةِ بِرَاءَةِ - هَبَطَ جِبْرَائِيلَ (عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ)، فَقَالَ: «يَا مُحَمَّدُ: لَا يُبَلِّغُن رِسَالَتَكَ إِلَّا رَجُلٌ مِنْكَ، فَأَرْسَلْ عَلَيًّا...»

Zamakhshari, Jarullah, *Al-Kashshāf* (Beirut: 1987, Dār ak-Kitāb al-'Arabi), vol. 2, p. 243.

This verse clearly indicates that in addition to God, there was a witness between Prophet Muhammad and the unbelievers who is introduced as the one who had knowledge of the Book. This question becomes extremely important if we reflect on the fact that there is a great difference between having knowledge of the Book (*'ilmul-kitāb*) and *some* knowledge of the Book (*'ilmun minal-kitāb*). According to the Qur'an, having some knowledge of the Book enabled Asif ibn Barkhiyā to bring the throne of the Queen of Saba' to Prophet Solomon (a) in a twinkling of an eye:

The one who had knowledge of the Book said, 'I will bring it to you in the twinkling of an eye.' So when he saw it set near him, he said, 'This is by the grace of my Lord, to test me if I will give thanks or be ungrateful. And whoever gives thanks, gives thanks only for his own sake. (27:40)

If this is what a person who has some knowledge of the Book can do, one can only imagine the ability of a person who has all the knowledge of the Book. Who was the one who had knowledge of the Book other than God and the Prophet and was therefore qualified to be a witness between the Prophet and the people of his time?

Apart from the Prophet, Imam Ali undoubtedly outshined everyone in his wisdom, knowledge, and intelligence. The Prophet said, "The most knowledgeable person in my nation after me is Ali."⁶ The Prophet lay emphasis on heeding to Imam Ali given his sophistication and intellect. He said, "I am the City of Knowledge and Ali is its gate. Whoever wants to enter this city must first pass through its gate."⁷ Indeed, Imam Ali is a role model for those who possess an ardent desire to live and die like the Prophet, and eventually dwell in Paradise:

⁶ *Manaqib al-Imam Ali ibn Abi Talib* of Ibn al-Maghazeli al-Shafi'i

⁷ *Sahih al-Tirmidhi*, v5, pgs. 201, 637; *al-Mustadrak* by al-Hakim, v3, pgs. 126-127, 226; *Fada'il al-Sahaba* by Ahmad ibn Hanbal, v2, p. 635, tradition # 1081 [as seen in *A Shi'ite Encyclopedia*]; *Mustadrak ul Sahihayn* vol. 3 p. 163.

Whoever becomes glad and happy with a life like my life and with a death like my death and with dwelling in the everlasting paradise of my Lord, loves Ali and considers him as his guardian (*wali*), loves the lover of Ali, and follows my household after me, because they are my progeny, they have been created from my clay, and they have been given my knowledge and understanding. Grievous is the one from my nation who denies their merits, and cut the relation between me and them. May God not grant them my intercession.⁸

Given his knowledge and perceptiveness, Imam Ali upholds the mission of protecting the Book. Moreover, his governance is precisely based on the Qur'an, rendering him the sole person to be taken as a standard in understanding Islam and its obligations.

Thus, the one to be taken as a standard in a) understanding Islam, b) understanding what to do, c) upholding the actual task of protecting the Book, and d) judge and rule according to the Book after the Prophet (s) is Imam Ali.

Conclusion

The most outstanding groups of people as said in the Qur'an are the prophets, the truthful, the righteous, and the witnesses. On the Day of Judgment, a witness from each nation who lived with his people and

⁸ *Kanzul Ummal*, vol. 6, p. 155; *Mustadrak* by al-Hākim, vol. 3, p. 128; *Kanz al-'Ummāl*, vol. 6, p. 155; *Al-Manāqib* by Khawarazmi, p. 34; *Yanābi' al-Mawaddah*, p. 149; *Tārikh* by Ibn 'Asākir, vol. 2, p. 95; *Hilyat al-Awliyā*, vol. 1, p. 86; *Al-Jāmi' al-Kabir* by al-Tabrani and *Al-Isābah* by Ibn Hajar. The original text is Arabic is as follows:

«من سره أن يحيا حياتي، ويموت مماتي، ويسكن جنّة عدن غرسها ربي، فليوال عليا من بعدي وليوال وليه، وليقتد بأهل بيتي من بعدي، فإنهم عنرتي خلقوا من طينتي، ورزقوا فهمي وعلمي، فويل للمكذّبين بفضلهم من أمّتي، الفاطميين فيهم صلّتي، لا أنالهم الله شفاعتي.»

It should be noted that unfortunately some Sunni writers have tried to question the authenticity of this hadith. For example, Ibn Hajar in his *Al-Isābah* questions the chain of narration for this hadith because of weakness of Yahyā ibn 'Ya'lā while both Muslim and Bukhāri have trusted him and narrated hadiths from him. People like *Dhahabi* have also taken his trustworthiness out of question.

revealed the straight path will testify that the divine message was clearly conveyed to all people, thus eliminating any room for excuses. They verify those who denied the signs of God and attributed lies to Him. They also bear the task of protecting the Divine Book. The Prophet Muhammad (s) was a witness for the people who lived during his time, both for those who believed and rejected his message. Another type of witness is our intellect (*'aql*).

Several verses of the Qur'an indicate that after the Prophet's death, Imam Ali bore the responsibility of being a witness amongst his people. In the chapter *Hud*, verse 17, the line "...and whom a witness from Himself doth teach" refers to a witness from the Prophet (*minhu*). The verse of *Mubāhala*, the chapter *Barā'a*, and the chapter *The Ra'd* attest that this witness - who followed the Prophet and had knowledge of the Book - was none other than Imam Ali.