

MESSAGE OF THAQALAYN

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

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

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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

THE SUPREME LIGHT AND CREATED LIGHTS: A QUR'ANIC PERSPECTIVE

MOHAMMAD ALI SHOMALI

TRANSLATED BY HOWRAA SAFIEDDINE

ABSTRACT: Of the most important names God uses to describe Himself in the Qur'an is that of light (*noor*). God Himself is the supreme Light and all that He created are also lights. Using the Qur'an and Islamic traditions, this article addresses some of the major aspects of the concept of light. Light is one of God's qualities, and every being in the universe is endowed with it. Moreover, the amount of light all creatures hold depends on the capacity of their existence; some beings have a fixed amount of light, while rational beings with free will, that is, human beings and jinn, can increase their light with faith and good deeds, or decrease it with disbelief and transgression.

Introduction

Different names and notions are used by people to refer to God, though without a doubt the most important names are those used by God Himself. Among the notions used in reference to God in the Holy Qur'an is that of light (*noor*). It has the advantage in that most people generally comprehend and like this concept. Moreover, many express interest in it and long to escape its opposite, which is darkness. It can be understood from the Qur'an and Islamic traditions that this concept has a range spanning the entire universal existence and is capable of being the basis

for a theological and systematic account of the entire world. In this article, we will attempt to address some of the major aspects of this account.

Light as one of God's qualities

In various languages and religious cultures, the use of the word light in reference to God is not uncommon, and many passages in the Qur'an and hadith affirm the appropriateness of its usage. The Qur'an states:

God is the Light of the heavens and the earth. The parable of His Light is a niche wherein is a lamp - the lamp is in a glass, the glass as it were a glittering star - lit from a blessed olive tree, neither eastern nor western...
(24:35)

In this verse, known as Ayat al-Noor (the 'Verse of Light') in chapter *Noor*, God describes himself as the Light of the heavens and the earth; God is Light, the heavens and the earth have light, and the light of the heavens and the earth stem from God. There are additional verses that use the term "God's light;" however, upon reflection, it becomes clear that they are not about the light which is God Himself. Rather, what is meant is that light that is from God:

They desire to put out the light of God with their mouths, but God is intent on perfecting His light though the faithless should be averse. (9:32)

They desire to put out the light of God with their mouths, but God shall perfect His light though the faithless should be averse. (61:8)

Thus, the 'light' that the opponents of truth and virtues set out to destroy is light that is from God, and not the light of God himself. This light is God's creation and can be increased. But if 'light' were to indicate the light which is God Himself, its completion would have no meaning, since God is the Absolute light.

In the du'a (supplication) of Jawshan Kabeer, we read:

O Light of lights, O Illuminator of light, O Creator of light, O Planner of light, O Estimator of light, O Light of all lights, O Light that precedes in existence every light, O Light that will survive all lights, O Light that is above every light, O Light like of which there is no light.
(Article 47)

We also read in Du'a 'Ahd:

O Allah! Lord of the Great Light, Lord of the Elevated Throne, Lord of the tumultuous seas, and the revealer of the Tawrah, Injeel, and Zaboor, Lord of the shadows and the warmths, and the revealer of the Great Qur'an. Lord of the proximate angels and prophets and messengers. O Allah, I beseech thee, for the sake of Your Nobel Visage, and for the sake of Your Enlightening Visage, and Your ever existing kingdom. O Ever Living! O Controller! I beseech Thee in Your Name which lit the heavens and the earths; and in Your Name, by which the ancient and the latter ones become upright.

We also read in the Dua of Kumayl: "Oh Light, oh Holy [One]."

God is a Light that is far from any defect. In other words, God is an absolute Light in which darkness has no way in. Indeed, darkness is the same as the limitation or defect of light, which can only be conceivable in created lights. This will be explained further below.

Every creature has light

As mentioned earlier, the heavens and the earth – which is for all of existence in the universe – are illuminated through God’s light and are radiant.¹ Right now the heavens and the earth shine: “...I beseech Thee in Your Name which lit the heavens and the earths” (Du‘a ‘Ahd). Thus, the Qur’an’s statement of the earth’s radiance with God’s light on the Day of Judgment does not indicate that there is an absence of light at present; rather, it means that on the Day of Judgment the earth’s radiance will reveal itself and, without the help of sunlight, electricity, and the like, the earth will glow by means of a God-given light.

Referring to the fact that everything is made as a kind of light, the Qur’an says:

All praise belongs to Allah Who created the heavens and the earth and made the darknesses and the light. Yet the faithless equate [others] with their Lord. (6:1)

The creation of the heavens and the earth, and the structure of the universal system based on light and darkness means that every being on this universe is endowed with light. This is a common trait shared by all beings, a trait derived from their Creator who is absolute Light. At the same time, the difference between created beings is also related to the fact

¹ For example, see the verse 24:35 and the extracts from the du‘as.

that they are light. This is because non-light is equivalent to darkness, and darkness - like a shadow - is the absence of matter. This is in fact, according to philosophy, the same as gradation (tashkik) in which the differentiating factor is the same as the common factor. In other words, what all of creation have in common is the fact that they each have light, but they differ in their levels of its intensity.

A being with absolutely no light is inconceivable – there is no such thing as absolute darkness. Based on the premise that the Creator is absolute light, and that light is consequently attributed to Him, all beings possess some degree of light. Every being is a sign of the Divine and in this way is reflective of the Divine’s light. If we perceive all beings from this point of view, we see them as having light, and since this serves as a sign of God and reminds us of God, it will also be the source of our getting closer to Him. If someone or something brings darkness to our hearts and renders us heedless of God, it is not because they are absolutely dark; rather it is because they divert our attention away from God by drawing our attention to themselves or anything independent from God or it is because we have not approached them properly.

In Du‘a Kumayl we read, “And by the light of Your face, for which all things are illumined.” When creations’ attention is turned to God, they illuminate, and if we see them from this angle, we will also be able to witness this illumination because they will also manifest as the “face” of God, as said in the verse, “...so whichever way you turn, there is the face of God.” (2:116)

The amount of light creatures hold depends on the capacity of their existence

For most creatures, their capacity for light is not determined voluntarily and therefore, their light is incapable of escalation or decline. Angels, who have high degrees of brightness, have a fixed capacity: “*There is none among us but has a known place.*” (37:164) This is true for angels as a whole [with respect to other beings] as well as individually [in relation to one another]. For example, no matter how hard angels try, they cannot reach the position of Adam, God’s vicegerent. Likewise, Angel Michael cannot reach Angel Gabriel’s position, nor can Angel Gabriel descend to Angel Michael’s level.

Humans (and Jinn) on the other hand possess freedom of choice and, as a result, if they choose the right path, they can acquire more light; if they choose the wrong path, their light will subside. Therefore, there are three possible states for humans:

- a. The inherent state in which humans naturally possess light and with it can ascend to high levels of nearness to God. Every human is created pure: “Every child is born with a pure nature.”² And every human is created in the best way: “*We certainly created man in the best of forms.*” (95:4) They are also guided and it is through their own choice that they establish their future: “*Then We relegated him to the lowest of the low, except those who have faith and do righteous deeds. There will be an everlasting reward for them*” (95:5-6).³ Every human being

² Kulayni, al-Kafi, vol. 2, p. 13. Original Arabic text is as follows:

كل مولود يولد على الفطرة

³ The Qur’an also says:

“*Indeed We have guided him to the way, be he grateful or ungrateful.*” (76:3)

has been given enough light to find his way towards God and perfection. Of course, based on different factors, humans may also possess different degrees of light from the beginning, as they may have different levels of intelligence. In any case, they all have immense brightness and encounter enough light to find the path and embark on it.

- b. The state of acquired faith and purity that increases human brightness and can eventually make him God's vicegerent, allowing him to spread brightness among other creatures.
- c. The state of acquired disbelief and impurity that decreases human brightness to the point where one becomes lower than an animal, or the lowest of the low (asfala safileen). We read in the Qur'an:

God is the Guardian of the faithful: He brings them out of darkness into light. As for the faithless, their patrons are the Rebels, who drive them out of light into darkness. They shall be the inmates of the Fire, and they shall remain in it [forever]. (2:257)

This verse eloquently illustrates the above three points. Initially it may appear as if there are four states: First, the state of darkness before faith; Second, light that comes after faith; Third, the state of light before disbelief; and Fourth, darkness after disbelief. However, after contemplation, it becomes clear that the above verse refers to the same three states mentioned above:

Considering that a) the states of faith and disbelief are acquired and b) the state before faith and disbelief is the first innate and natural state, a

person's state at the starting point – before consciously choosing faith or disbelief – must be the same. However, because light and darkness are relative, the first state for a believer who acquired brightness during his lifetime is thought to be dark, and his path towards faith starts from darkness towards brightness. But the path of the disbeliever starts from light towards darkness. Thus, the first state for the disbeliever is light.

Therefore, it is appropriate to examine acquired light and the path required to obtain it. It is natural, in a comparative manner, to also turn our focus to acquired darkness, which is attained through disbelief and sin.

Acquired light

The most important factor that causes the acquisition of light is faith. Indeed, by attaining faith, humans are exposed to the radiance of God. The Qur'an states:

Is someone whose breast God has opened to Islam so that he follows a light from His Lord? So woe to those whose hearts have been hardened to the remembrance of God. They are in manifest error. (39:22)

This verse demonstrates that we are not in need of producing light. At most, what we must do is open our heart toward the divine light so that it shines over our hearts: "...*the hearts that are in the breasts!*"(22:46) This is achieved by remembering God, a matter which will be discussed later. The Qur'an also states:

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? (6:123)

If a person lives a faith-based life, a believer who is God-conscious and has strong and true faith in the prophets, he will have light in this world which he will walk with amongst the people: *“O you who have faith! Be wary of God and have faith in His Apostle. He will grant you a double share of His mercy and give you a light to walk by.” (57:28)* This light will, in any state – whether in the work environment, in gaining knowledge, or at home – will accompany him to enlighten him and help him make decisions.

Of course, not everyone perceives this light in a believer. Even the believer himself may not sense it directly. What is certain, however, is that its effects can be detected and comprehended. Sometimes the light of faith appears on the face of the believer in a way that will give a kind of attraction and spiritual beauty that will draw the hearts towards him.

When asked as to why those who say night prayer are the best-looking ones, Imam Sajjad replied, “Because they sought solitude with their lord, so God covered them from His light.”⁴ As said in the Qur’an: *“Their mark is [visible] on their faces, from the effect of prostration” (48:29)* and *“...The All-Beneficent will endear them [to His creation]” (19:96)*.

On the Day of Judgment this light will be so evident that even the hypocrites will witness it and wish to attain it from the believers. In two verses from chapters *al-Tahrim* and *al-Hadid*, God says that this speedy light will move in front of and from the right side of the believer: *“... With their light moving swiftly before them and on their right” (57:12)* Perhaps

⁴ *Bihar al-Anwar*, vol. 84, p. 159.

it will move speedily forward so that it guides them towards heaven where they will join the nobles; it will move from the right because they are the People of the Right (*Ashab al-Yamin*) and the book of deeds will be put in their right hand. When the hypocrites see this they will say to the believers, "Let us take some of your light," unaware of the fact that light cannot be borrowed, loaned, or stolen. Each person must have attained this light for himself in the previous life. It is here, among the believers and hypocrites, where a wall with a door will be hoisted. With the rising of this wall the hypocrites can no longer see the believers and their light, though it will be possible to communicate with them. Presumably, those who have the grounds to obtain forgiveness will head in the direction of this same door. Because this door protects the believers and their light, within the wall dwell the believers and outside the wall dwell the hypocrites; within the wall is the source of protection and mercy and outside the wall is the source of distance and deprivation - a dangerous punishment. The Qur'an says:

The day the hypocrites, men and women, will say to the faithful, 'Please let up on us, that we may glean something from your light!' They will be told: 'Go back and grope for light!' Then there will be set up between them a wall with a gate, with mercy on its interior and punishment toward its exterior. They will call out to them, 'Did we not use to be with you?' They will say, 'Yes! But you cast yourselves into temptation, and you awaited and were doubtful, and [false] hopes deceived you until the edict of God arrived, and the Deceiver deceived you concerning God. (57:13 & 14)

After faith, the other important source of acquired light is doing righteous deeds. The Qur'an says:

Those who have faith in God and His apostles — it is they who are the truthful and the witnesses with their Lord; they shall have their reward and their light. But as for those who are faithless and deny Our signs, they shall be the inmates of hell. (57:19)

According to this verse, true faith in God and His prophets – which is the surrendering of the heart coupled with required practice – will raise humans to the rank of the truthful and the witnesses who are the favorites of God. Such faith is worthy of divine reward and is also accompanied by light. The deniers of God and His prophets, however, will be deprived and disgraced on the Day of Resurrection. This verse depicts the stages of perfection of the faithful, based on faith itself. It is not that one must pass faith to reach the next stage; rather, the process is in faith itself. The levels of perfection are the same as the levels of faith, and anything other than faith, such as good deeds, are necessitated by faith and can be defined as the dependencies of faith. Perhaps this is why God says in the Qur'an:

Indeed those who have faith and do righteous deeds, their Lord guides them by the means of their faith. Streams will run for them in gardens of bliss. (10:9)

In addition to reward, light is also given to the believer (*mumin*). The reward can be in heaven and come in different forms of heavenly blessings. Light, on the other hand, according to the above mentioned verses, is given in this world. It is not that a believer lacks the light of faith and only on the Day of Judgment, after the examination of deeds and

determination of rewards is light given to him. Every good deed increases the light of a believer. The following demonstrates examples of some good deeds that give light:

Wudu'

Imam Sadiq is reported to have said regarding *wudu'* (ablution):

Wudu' upon wudu' is light upon light, and whoever renews his wudu' without [having lost it through] ritual impurity, God will renew his repentance without *istighfar* [asking forgiveness].⁵

Wudu' is not only a prelude to worship: it is by itself a kind of worship and causes light. Thus, wudu' is not only performed for prayer or other acts of worship that require it; rather, wudu' itself is spiritually significant and one is recommended to be in a constant state of wudu'. What is interesting is that wudu' is a kind of remembrance of God and is a source of proximity; repeating it is beneficial as opposed to physical cleanliness in which washing repeatedly may have no use.

God not only legislated wudu' as a prelude for prayer and as a recommended act in itself; it also has a deep, spiritual effect in the real world (*'alam al-takwin*). The water used for other than wudu' purifies only the external; but when used with the intention of performing wudu', it also attains the power of spiritual purification, and its drops are actually droplets of spiritual purity – or in other words, droplets of light. This is why the water of wudu' must be used in wiping while performing it, and

⁵ *Man lā Yahduruh-u al-Faqih*, vol. 1, p. 41. Original Arabic text is as follows:

أَنَّ الْوُضُوءَ عَلَى الْوُضُوءِ نُورٌ عَلَى نُورٍ وَ مَنْ جَدَّدَ وَضُوءَهُ مِنْ غَيْرِ حَدِّبِ آخَرَ جَدَّدَ اللَّهُ عَزَّ وَ جَلَّ نُورَتَهُ مِنْ غَيْرِ اسْتِغْفَارٍ

it is recommended (*mustahab*) not to dry the limbs of ablution so that those drops stay on the body for the longest possible time. In early Islam, the Muslims who were aware of its importance used to take the remaining water from the Prophet's wudu' for blessings (*tabarruk*) and would not let a drop of it fall to the ground. As recounted in hadiths, on the Day of Resurrection, the believers' faces are luminous and vibrant as a result of performing wudu' in this world. The Messenger of God said:

On the Day of Resurrection, God Almighty will gather my Ummah from among the other nations with white foreheads from the effects of ablution.⁶

If this is the light of ablution, then light of prayer can certainly be described as more luminous.

Hajj

Performing hajj (pilgrimage to Mecca) brings its own light. Concerning the light of Hajj, Imam Sadiq said: "The light of the Hajj ritual remains with a pilgrim so long as he or she does not sin after performing it."⁷ Therefore, it is recommended to immediately visit pilgrims upon his return before he sins, resulting in losing his luminance. The Messenger of God said:

Then I saw in my dream a man of my Ummah in such a condition that he had darkness in front of him, darkness on his right, darkness on his left, darkness above him,

⁶ *Bihār al-Anwār*, vol. 77, p. 237. Original text in Arabic is as follows:

يَتَشَرُّ اللَّهُ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ أُمَّتِي يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ بَيْنَ الْأُمَمِ غُرًّا مُخَجَّلِينَ مِنْ آثَارِ الْوُضُوءِ

⁷ *Ibid.* vol. 96, p. 10 & 386. The original text in Arabic is as follows:

لَا يَزَالُ عَلَى الْخَاجِ نُورُ الْحَجِّ مَا لَمْ يُذَيَّبْ

darkness under him—so much so that he was bewildered and baffled, confused, and confounded. Then along came his Hajj and Umrah and both of them took him out of the darkness and both of them placed him in the light.⁸

Or in the case of a person who shaves, it is recommended to read the following supplication:

Oh God, give me light on the Day of Judgment for every hair that is shaved.⁹

Looking after Orphans

In his will to Imam Ali, the Prophet said:

O Ali, for those who pass their hands on an orphan's head as a sign of mercy, God will give them illumination for every single hair (of that head) on the Day of Resurrection.¹⁰

Faith and good deeds

In addition to faith and performing righteous deeds, any kind of remembrance of Allah (swt) generates light. The Qur'an says:

⁸ Ibid., vol. 7, p. 290. The original text in Arabic is as follows:

عَنْ عَبْدِ الرَّحْمَنِ بْنِ سَمُرَةَ قَالَ كُنَّا عِنْدَ رَسُولِ اللَّهِ ص يَوْمًا فَقَالَ [إِنِّي] رَأَيْتُ الْبَارِحَةَ عَجَائِبَ [قَالَ] فَكُنَّا يَا رَسُولَ اللَّهِ وَ مَا رَأَيْتُ حَدِيثًا [بِهِ] فِذَلِكَ أَنْفُسَنَا وَ أَهْلُونَا وَ أَوْلَادُنَا إِلَى أَنْ قَالَ قَالَ ص رَأَيْتُ رَجُلًا مِنْ أُمَّي مِنْ بَيْنِ يَدَيْهِ ظِلْمَةٌ وَ مِنْ خَلْفِهِ ظِلْمَةٌ وَ عَنْ نَيْبِهِ ظِلْمَةٌ وَ عَنْ شِمَالِهِ ظِلْمَةٌ وَ مِنْ تَحْتِهِ ظِلْمَةٌ مُسْتَتِيعًا فِي الظَّلَامَةِ فَجَاءَهُ حُجَّةٌ وَ عَمَّرْتَهُ فَأَخْرَجَاهُ مِنَ الظَّلَامَةِ وَ أَدْخَلَاهُ فِي النُّورِ

⁹ Ibid., vol. 96, p. 304. The original text in Arabic is as follows:

قُلِ اللَّهُمَّ أَعْطِنِي بِكُلِّ شَعْرَةٍ نُورًا يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ

¹⁰ Ibid., vol. 74, p. 60. The original text in Arabic is as follows:

يَا عَلِيُّ مَنْ مَسَحَ يَدَهُ عَلَى رَأْسِ يَتِيمٍ تَرَحُّمًا لَهُ أَعْطَاهُ اللَّهُ عِزًّا وَ جَلَّ بِكُلِّ شَعْرَةٍ نُورًا يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ

O you who have faith! Remember God with frequent remembrance, and glorify Him morning and evening. It is He who blesses you, and so do His angels, that He may bring you out from darkness into light, and He is most merciful to the faithful. (33:41-43)

Commenting on the above verse, the late Allamah Tabataba'i holds that God, after his command for abundant remembrance or remembrance as much as possible, states the fact that if you remember God in such a way, God and His Angels will also send their blessings upon you until it drives you from darkness to light. It becomes clear, therefore, that one of the favours and mercies of God in the right of a believer is sending blessings upon him which is the *cause of leaving darkness and moving toward light*. Receiving these blessings is possible with frequent invocation. Therefore, with invocation, one can move toward the source of light and increase his/her light.

In Dua Kumayl we read: "*O God, verily I seek nearness to You through remembrance of You.*"¹¹ Also: "*O He whose Name is a remedy and whose remembrance is a cure.*"¹² Essentially every being, according to the holy essence of God or His names, is luminous: "*And by the light of Your face, through which all things are illumined!*"¹³ In Dua 'Ahd, we read: "*I beseech Thee in Your Name which lights up the heavens and the earths.*"¹⁴

11 اللهم انى اتقرب اليك بذكرك

12 يا من اسمه دواء و ذكره شفاء

13 و بنور وجهك الذى اضاء له كل شيء

14 و باسمك الذى اشرقت به السماوات و الارضون

Once they think of God, humans also attain light and tranquility: “*Look! The hearts find rest in God’s remembrance! (13:28)*” And whenever they turn away from God, they will descend into darkness and will have a difficult and dark life: “*But whoever disregards My remembrance, his shall be a wretched life*” (20:124).

Meanwhile, it becomes clear from here that since the Prophet constantly remembered Him, God and the Angels continually sent salutations to the Prophet and therefore the Prophet always shined as “*a radiant lamp*” (33:6) and those who follow him are led towards light:

An apostle reciting to you the manifest signs of God that He may bring out those who have faith and do righteous deeds from darkness into light. (65:11)

In verses 35 through 37 of chapter *al-Noor*, God introduces the places where God’s light can be reached. After stating that Divine Light is like a niche wherein is a lamp that emits light, He says:

In houses God has allowed to be raised and wherein His Name is celebrated, He is glorified therein, morning and evening, by men whom neither trading nor bargaining distracts from the remembrance of God, and the maintenance of prayer and the giving of zakāt. They are fearful of a day wherein the heart and the sight will be transformed. (24:36, 37)

This lamp can be reached in those houses which are places for the remembrance of God. It becomes clear that the characteristics of these houses are their connection to those who always remember God, and there is nothing that will make them heedless of remembering Him. This

remembrance is not merely the remembrance of the heart; rather, it appears in individual and social behaviours such as prayer and alms-giving (*zakat*). Thus, people who are constantly reminded of God not only become illuminated, their homes also become a place of manifestation and radiance of the Divine's Light, and whoever wants to obtain light could pay heed to God and benefit from His light, considering these houses and the remembrance of God in them.

As stated in both Sunni and Shia sources, these houses are the houses of the prophets. It is stated in the exegesis *Al-Durr Al-Manthur (The Scattered Pearl)*:

After the Prophet (saws) read the verse '*In houses God has allowed to be raised*' (24:36-37), a man stood up and asked, 'O Messenger of God, which are these houses?' to which the Prophet replied, 'The houses of the prophets.' At this time Abu Bakr stood up and, while pointing to the house of Ali and Fatimah, asked, "O Messenger of God, is this house among them?" The Prophet said, "Yes, indeed it is one of their best."¹⁵

Likewise, Ali ibn Ibrahim al-Qummi in his commentary narrates from Jabir from Imam Baqir (as): "They are the houses of the prophets and Ali's house is one of them."¹⁶

¹⁵ *Al-Durr al-Manthur*, vol. 5, p. 50. The original text in Arabic is as follows:

أخرج ابن مردويه عن أنس بن مالك و بريدة قال: قرأ رسول الله ص هذه الآية «في بيوت أذن الله أن ترفع» فقام إليه رجل فقال: أي بيوت هذه يا رسول الله؟ قال: بيوت الأنبياء. فقام إليه أبو بكر فقال: يا رسول الله هذا البيت منها لبيت علي و فاطمة؟ قال: نعم من أفاضلها.

¹⁶ *Al-Tafsir al-Qummi*, vol. 2, p. 104. The original text is Arabic is as follows:

عن جابر عن أبي جعفر ع في قوله في بيوت أذن الله أن ترفع و يُذكر فيها اسمُهُ قال هي بيوت الأنبياء و بيت علي ع منه

Thus, it is the remembrance of God that causes the light of a person that illuminates the place belonging to him or her. It can be argued that faith also pertains to remembrance. This is why God considers those who lack the light of faith and Islam as hardhearted who are unable to remember God:

Is someone whose breast God has opened to Islam so that he follows a light from His Lord [ad the hardhearted alike]? So woe to those whose hearts have been hardened to the remembrance of God. They are in manifest error.

(39:22)

SINCERITY FOR THE SAKE OF GOD

ALIREZA MAKTABDAR

TRANSLATED BY MOHAMMAD JAVAD SHOMALI

ABSTRACT: Having sincere intentions (*ikhlaas*) in performing deeds done only out of love for God and for the sake of His pleasure is imperative in the lives of the believers, to the extent that the quality of their deeds is judged by the amount of its sincerity. Sincere intentions and deeds brings a person to the highest level of faith and nobility; to have *ikhlaas* is to avoid all wrong intentions that pollute a person's thoughts and actions. This article addresses various aspects of sincerity as viewed in the Qur'an, Islamic traditions, and by Muslim scholars, as well as some of its signs and effects. Moreover, instructions on how to acquire and strengthen *ikhlaas* will also be stated, some of which steps include having true love for God, being certain about His oneness, yearning for what is with Him, controlling our desires.

Introduction

Gold, a high-karat gold not mixed with silver, iron, copper or any other substance to form an alloy and thus, highly valuable. The more gold is mixed with other substances, its karat is reduced, and the less valuable it becomes. As the gold is mixed with other substances, it gradually loses its form and effect. Similarly, an individual's deeds resemble pure gold, as long as they are not spoiled by wrong intentions.

As pure gold is more valuable than impure gold, sincere deeds that are not motivated by pretention or worldly desires are extremely valuable; if not so, they lose their worth.

Sincerity is vital in the lives of the believers, to the extent that the karat of their deeds is judged by the amount of its sincerity.¹ Of course, people are not to judge the intention of others, since they do not possess the ability and knowledge needed. The only one who is aware of people's intentions and sincerity is God.

Lexical and technical definition

In Arabic, the word *ikhlaas* (sincerity) comes from the root *kha-la-sa* referring to that which is clear and not mixed with anything else.² It also denotes purifying something and refining it from other things.³

However, the technical definition of *ikhlaas* is to a) avoid *riya'* (ostentation),⁴ b) to loathe everything other than God,⁵ and c) to perform

¹ وَلَا تَكُ الْعَمَلُ الْإِخْلَاصُ فِيهِ. Refer to: Tasnif-e Ghurar ul-Hikam, Page 155

² Turayhi, Fakhr ud-Din, *Majma' ul-Bahrain*, 1416 AH, Tehran, published by Ketabfurushy Murtazawy, 1416, vol. 4, p. 169

³ Ibn Faris, Ab ul-Husayn Ahmad ibn Faris, *Mu'jam Maghayis ul-Lugat*, 1404 AH, Qum, Daftar-e Tableeghat-e Hoze-ye Elmyye Qum publications, vol. 2, p. 208

⁴ Ibn Manzur, Abulfazl Jamal ud-Din Muhammad ibn Mukram, *Lisan ul-Arab*, 1414 AH, Bayrut, published by Dar ul-Fikr lit-Tiba'ati wan-Nashri wat-Tawzi', vol. 7, p. 26

⁵ Raghīb Esfahany, Husain ibn Muhammad, *Mufradat-e Alfaz-e Qur'an*, 1412 AH, Beirut-Damascus, Dar ul-Ilm and ad-Dar u-Shamyah publications, vol. 1, p. 293; Husayni Wasety Zubaidy, Muhib id-Din Sayyed Murteza, *Taj ul-'Arus min Jawahir ul-Ghamus*, Bayrut, published by Dar ul-Fikr lit-Tiba'ati wan-Nashri wat-Tawzi', 1414 AH, vol. 9, p. 272

acts for the sake of seeking nearness to God and not expecting praise from other than Him.⁶

According to ethics scholars, the opposite of *riya*' is *ikhlaas* (sincerity), that is, purifying one's intention from anything other than God's sake. Any deed with an intention that lacks this purity is devoid of *ikhlaas*.⁷

Fayz Kashani said, "Know that anything can be mixed with other than itself, and when it refines from others and is free of them it is called *khaalis* (pure). Thus, a deed free from any pollution is a *khaalis* deed. In the Qur'an, verse 66 of chapter *Nahl*,⁸ God explains pure milk as milk refined from [intestinal] waste and blood and free from any impurity. The opposite of *ikhlaas* is *shirk* (ascribing a partner to God) and he who is not *mukhlis* is *mushrik*, and shirk has different levels."⁹

As Ghazali said, "*Riya*' occurs when a person exhibits himself as a pious person to gain other's approval and to be respected by them and appear significant and courteous in their sight."¹⁰ Therefore, *ikhlaas* can be defined as the purification of intentions and deeds from any impurity.

⁶ Turayhi, Fakhr ud-Din, *Majma' ul-Bahrain*, 1416 AH, Tehran, published by Ketabfurushy Murtazawy

⁷ Naraghy, Ahmad ibn Muhammad Mahdi, *Mi'raj us-Sa'adat*, 1391 AH, Qum, Tuba-ye Mohabbat publications, p. 527

⁸ من بَيْنِ فَرْثٍ وَ دَمٍ لَبِئْسَ خَالِصًا سَائِعًا لِلشَّارِبِينَ

⁹ Fayz Kashani, Muhsin, *Rah-e Rushan (translation of al-Mahajjat ul-Bayza')*, translator Sayyed Muhammad Sadiq Arif, 1372, Mashhad, Astan-e Quds-e Razawy publications, vol. 8, p. 158

¹⁰ Ghazali, Abu Hamid Muhammad ibn Muhammad ibn Muhammad ibn Ahmad, *Kimiya-ye Sa'adat*, 1380 SH, Tehran, published by Sherkat-e Entesharat-e ilmy Farhangy, vol. 2, p. 212

Ikhlaas in the Qur'an and hadiths

Numerous verses of the Qur'an speak of the *mukhlesin* (the pure) and *mukhlasan* (the purified). It uses various phrases and wordings to describe and praise them:

1. *“Yet they were not commanded except to worship God, dedicating their faith to Him as men of pure faith, and to maintain the prayer, and pay the zakat. That is the upright religion.”*¹¹ (Qur'an 98:5)
2. In another verse, addressing all Muslims, the Qur'an reads: *“So supplicate God, putting exclusive faith in Him, though the faithless should be averse.”*¹² (Qur'an 40:14)
3. This time, an incisive order is directed towards the Prophet: *“Say, ‘Indeed I have been commanded to worship God with exclusive faith in Him.’”*¹³ (Qur'an 39:11)

These verses, along with others that convey the same meaning, portray *ikhlaas* as the foundation of worship.

Below are the descriptions given regarding the *mukhlasan* (the purified):

1. In the chapter *Saad*, we read that Satan, who was expelled from the realm of God, says out of stubbornness: *“By Your might, I will surely pervert them except Your purified servants among them.”*¹⁴ The same is seen in verses 39 and 40 of Chapter *Hijr*,¹⁵ that the *mukhlasan* (the purified) have reached a level that even Satan himself has given up on deceiving them.

¹¹ وَمَا أُمِرُوا إِلَّا لِيَعْبُدُوا اللَّهَ مُخْلِصِينَ لَهُ الدِّينَ حُنَفَاءَ وَيُقِيمُوا الصَّلَاةَ وَ يُؤْتُوا الزَّكَاةَ وَ ذَلِكَ دِينُ الْقَيِّمَةِ

¹² ادْعُوا اللَّهَ مُخْلِصِينَ لَهُ الدِّينَ وَ لَوْ كَرِهَ الْكَافِرُونَ

¹³ قُلْ إِنِّي أُمِرْتُ أَنْ أُعْبِدَ اللَّهَ مُخْلِصًا لَهُ الدِّينَ

¹⁴ قَالَ قَبَّرْتِكَ لِأَعُوْبِيَهُمْ أَجْمَعِينَ إِلَّا عِبَادَكَ مِنْهُمُ الْمُخْلِصِينَ

¹⁵ Verses 39 and 40

2. In the chapter *Saffat*,¹⁶ the mukhlasin are given the promise of a spectacular award whose nature is only known to God: “*And you will be requited only for what you used to do [all] except God’s purified servants.*”¹⁷
3. In same chapter (*Saffat*),¹⁸ the *mukhlasin* have such high rank that on the Day of Judgment “*Everyone will be arraigned before God except for them*”¹⁹ whom will directly enter heaven.
4. Again, in the chapter *Saffat*²⁰ we read: “*Glorified be God from that which they attribute (unto Him) except for the purified servants of God.*”²¹ The only people whose deep understanding allows them to describe God are mukhlasin.
5. In Chapter *Yusuf*,²² God protected Prophet Yusuf against the temptations of Zulaykha, the Egyptian Queen: “*So it was, that We might turn away from him all evil and indecency. He was indeed one of Our purified servants.*”²³

Different accounts are given regarding the difference between *mukhlesin* (those who purify) and *mukhlasin* (the purified). The most plausible one is to describe the *mukhlesin* as those who try to free themselves from any kind of vices, polytheism (*shirk*), and wrong intentions, and persist on

¹⁶ Verses 39 and 40

¹⁷ The Qur’an 37:39-40: إِلَّا عِبَادَ اللَّهِ الْمُخْلِصِينَ وَ مَا نُجْزُونَ إِلَّا مَا كُنْتُمْ تَعْمَلُونَ

¹⁸ Verses 127 and 128

¹⁹ كَذَّبُوهُ فَإِنَّهُمْ لَمُحْضَرُونَ إِلَّا عِبَادَ اللَّهِ الْمُخْلِصِينَ

²⁰ Verses 159 and 160

²¹ سُبْحَانَ اللَّهِ عَمَّا يُصِفُونَ إِلَّا عِبَادَ اللَّهِ الْمُخْلِصِينَ

²² Verse 24

²³ كَذَلِكَ لِنَصْرِفَ عَنْهُ السُّوءَ وَالْفَحْشَاءَ إِنَّهُ مِنْ عِبَادِنَا الْمُخْلِصِينَ

doing so. On the other hand, the *mukhlasin* are the ones who have been purified of the last traces of impurity through God's aid and mercy.

There are two types of impurities in a person. We have the ability to know and remove one of the two and as a result become pure in our intentions, beliefs, and deeds. The other type, however, is hidden and is difficult to be aware of; even if we manage to do so we will not be able to remove it. Regarding polytheism, the Prophet said, "Shirk (and its effect on deeds) is more hidden than the movement of an ant on a black rock in the darkness of the night."²⁴ Without the mercy of God, the wayfarer is unable to purge himself of these impurities. God rewards those who have made all their efforts to purify themselves by purifying them of any remaining impurity, and hence, the title *mukhlasin* (the purified) is given to them.

An individual who reaches this level is free of profane desires, and Satan gives up on tempting him. Satan confesses in the Qur'an that he is powerless against such people.²⁵ These individuals receive God's bounties immeasurably and, unlike anyone else, they can correctly describe God's attributes. And since they have assessed their deeds in this world, on the Day of Judgment, they will directly enter heaven.

In describing the pure servants of God, Imam Ali says, "One of their prominent features is that they have purified themselves for God and God has accepted their *khulus*, (purity) (and taken them to the last levels of *khulus*)."²⁶ Moreover, the Prophet said that Gabriel brought him a writing

²⁴ الْمَشْرُكُ أَخْفَى مِنْ دَيْبِ الثَّمَلِ عَلَى صَفَاةٍ سَوْدَاءٍ فِي لَيْلَةِ ظُلْمَاءٍ refer to: Payande, Abulqasim, *Nahj ul-Fasahah*, Dunya-ye Danesh publications, p. 539

²⁵ The Qur'an 38:82-83

²⁶ Sayyed Radi, Abulhasan Muhammad ibn Husain, *Nahj ul Balaghah*, 1414 Ah, Qum, Hejrat publications, p. 119: قَدْ أَخْلَصَ لِلَّهِ فَاسْتُخْلِصَهُ

in which it was written, "...God, the Almighty, chose Muhammad as His messenger from the blessed tree and purified him."²⁷

In Islamic hadiths, ikhlaas holds a significant place in hadiths. The following lists a few of them:

1. Prophet Muhammad: "There are three things that a Muslim's heart must not betray: Purifying a deed for God, wanting good for the leaders of Islam, and accompanying the community of Muslims."²⁸
2. Also from the Prophet Muhammad: "God says that ikhlaas is one of His secrets and He will place it in the heart of whomever of His servants that he pleases."²⁹
3. Imam Ali: "Ikhlaas is the noblest destination man reaches."³⁰
4. In another place, the Imam Ali: "Ikhlaas is the highest level of faith."³¹
5. Ikhlaas is so important that the Prophet said: "According to their level of ikhlaas, Muslims achieve their status."³²

²⁷ Ibn Babiwayh Qummi, Muhammad ibn Ali ibn Husayn, *Al-Khisaal, Tamam ud-Din wa Kamal un-Nimat*, 1395 AH, Tehran, Islamiyyah publications, vol. 1, p. 228:

فَعِنْدَ ذَلِكَ اسْتَخْلَصَ اللَّهُ عَزَّ وَ جَلَّ لِنُبُوَّتِهِ وَ رِسَالَتِهِ مِنَ الشَّجَرَةِ الْمَشْرُقَةِ الطَّيِّبَةِ

²⁸ Mufid, Muhammad ibn Muhammad ibn Nu'man, *Amali ul-Mufid*, 1413 AH, Qum, published by Kongere-ye Shaykh-e Mufid, p. 187: ثَلَاثَةٌ لَا يُغْلَى عَلَيْهِنَّ قَلْبُ عَبْدٍ مُسْلِمٍ إِخْلَاصُ الْعَمَلِ لِلَّهِ وَ التَّصَبُّحَةُ لِأَيِّمَةِ الْمُسْلِمِينَ وَ اللُّزُومُ لِجَمَاعَتِهِمْ

²⁹ Majlisi, Muhammad Baqir, *Bihar ul-Anwar al-Jami'at lil-Akhbar il-Aemat al-Athaar*, Tehran, Islamiyyah publications, vol. 67, p. 249: إِخْلَاصُ سِرٍّ مِنْ أَسْرَارِي اسْتَوْذَعْتُهُ قَلْبٌ مِنْ أَحْبَبْتُ مِنْ عِبَادِي

³⁰ Tamimi Amudi, Abdul Wahid, *Tasnif Ghurar ul-Hikam*, Qum, Daftar-e Tableeghat-e Hoze-ye Elmye Qum publications, p. 197: إِخْلَاصُ أَشْرَفِ نَحَايَةِ

³¹ Ibid. p. 83: إِخْلَاصُ أَعْلَى الْإِيمَانِ

³² Warum ibn Abi Faris, *Majmuat Warum, Tanbih ul-Khawatir*, Qum, Maktab-e Faqih publications, vol. 2, p. 120: بِإِخْلَاصِ تَنَفَّاضِ مَرَاتِبِ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ

6. Imam Ali introduces ikhlaas as the highest level of certitude.³³
7. Ikhlaas is so significant that if it accompanies a minor deed it will be enough for man's salvation.³⁴
8. Imam Ali reveals the importance of ikhlaas, describes it as the worship of the *muqarabbin* (those who have reached a high level of proximity to God).³⁵
9. Ikhlaas affects all aspects of our lives and gives a divine orientation to our knowledge, actions, love, and hatred. Imam Ali said, "Purify your deeds and knowledge, your devotion and aversion, your reception and rejection, and your words and silence for God."³⁶

According to the Qur'an and the hadiths, to have ikhlaas is to turn your back to all wrong intentions that pollutes and devalues man's deeds. Even a deed done out of fear of hell or out of interest in Paradise is considered by some hadiths as a deed with no ikhlaas, since the fear and interest have non-divine roots and vary greatly from a purified intention. The only deed that possesses highest levels of ikhlaas is a deed done only out of a love for God and for the sake of His pleasure.

As Imam Ali explained there are three groups of worshippers: "There are people who worship God to gain His Favors, this is the worship of traders; there are some who worship Him to keep themselves free from His Wrath,

³³ Tamimi Amudi, Abdul Wahid, *Tasnif Ghurar ul-Hikam*, Qum, Daftar-e Tableeghat-e Hoze-ye Elmye Qum publications, p. 198: غَايَةُ الْبِقِيْنِ الْإِخْلَاصُ

³⁴ Majlisi, Muhammad Baqir, *Bihar ul-Anwar al-Jami'at lil-Akhbar il-Aemat al-Athaar*, Tehran, Islamiyyah publications, vol. 70, p. 175: أَخْلَصُ قَلْبِكَ يَكْفِيكَ الْقَلِيلُ مِنَ الْعَمَلِ

³⁵ Tamimi Amudi, Abdul Wahid, *Tasnif Ghurar ul-Hikam*, Qum, Daftar-e Tableeghat-e Hoze-ye Elmye Qum publications, p. 197: الْإِخْلَاصُ عِبَادَةُ الْمُتَمَرِّينِ

³⁶ Ibid. Amudip. 197: أَخْلَصْ لِلَّهِ عَمَلَكَ وَ عِلْمَكَ وَ حُبَّكَ وَ بُغْضَكَ وَ أَخْذَكَ وَ تَرْكَكَ وَ كَلَامَكَ وَ صَمْتَكَ

this is the worship of slaves; a few obey Him out of their sense of gratitude, this is the worship of free men.”³⁷

A little act, done a few times, but with sincerity, is very valuable. Imam Ali’s act of kindness – when he gave his ring while in prayer to the poor person who came to the mosque – might seem to some as an ordinary act of charity, but because of the Imam’s divine intentions, it had such an extraordinary value that a verse regarding this even was revealed in the Qur’an.³⁸

One who intends to please God, even if he or she does not succeed in performing actions, his mere intention of doing a sincere act will take him closer to God. After the battle of Jamal, one of the companions of Imam Ali told him, “I wish my brother was here to see how God made you victorious over your enemies.” Imam Ali asked, “Does your brother love us?” The companion replies, “Yes, he does.” Imam Ali said, “Then, he has been with us.”³⁹

It is only appropriate at this point to reflect on *riya’* – the opposite of *ikhlaas*, the nullifier of deeds, a sign of a hypocrite, and a type of *shirk*. *Riya’* harms moral virtues and plants the seed of vices in one’s soul. It makes one’s deeds void and stops one from addressing the core. It is with no doubt one of Satan’s best tools for misguiding men.

³⁷ Sayyed Raddi, Abulhasan Muhammad ibn Husain, *Nahj ul Balaghah*, 1414 Ah, Qum, Hijrat publications, sayings 237, p. 510.

³⁸ The Qur’an 5:15: *إِنَّمَا وَلِيُّكُمُ اللَّهُ وَرَسُولُهُ وَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا الَّذِينَ يُتِمُونَ الصَّلَاةَ وَ يُؤْتُونَ الزَّكَاةَ وَ هُمْ رَاكِعُونَ*

³⁹ Ibid. sermon 12, p. 55: *وَقَدْ قَالَ لَهُ بَعْضُ أَصْحَابِهِ وَوَدِدْتُ أَنْ أُنْجِي فَلَا أَمَّا كَانَ شَاهِدَنَا لِيَبْرَى مَا نَصَرَكَ اللَّهُ بِهِ عَلَى أَعْدَائِكَ فَقَالَ* وَ لَهُ عَ أَ هَوَىٰ أَحْبَبْتُكَ مَعَنَا فَقَالَ نَعَمْ قَالَ فَقَدْ شَهِدْنَا وَ لَقَدْ شَهِدْنَا فِي عَسْكَرِنَا هَذَا

One may wonder why intention is importantly emphasized. One might even argue that what matters is the act itself; if the action is good there is no need for the intention to be good as well. A person who donates money to build a hospital, mosque, school road or a bridge is benefiting people. Even if his intention is to show off, his action is still good. Why not let people do their good actions regardless of their intentions?

First of all, every action has two effects: 1) the effect on the person itself, and 2) the external effect. A person who has the intention of being respected and praised by people is harming his soul and furthering himself from perfection and high levels of tawhid. To view people as the source of respect is a kind of shirk and idolatry which leads to numerous moral vices. Secondly, since he is only concerned with the appearance of the act that would please people, he might not heed to doing the job properly, be it building a school or a hospital. This can lead to serious danger to the society.

In other words, when a community engages in *riya'* everything loses its content and becomes hollow, and this extends to culture, economy, politics, hygiene, and even defence forces. Everyone will run after superficialities, neglecting the core and the basis and gradually things will be weak and void inside. This will severely harm the community in different ways that are not difficult to anticipate.⁴⁰

Another question is if even a good act without good intentions becomes worthless, then no one except for the purified can hope for salvation since

⁴⁰Makarim Shirazi, Naser, *Akhlaq dar Qur'an*, 1389 SH, Qum, Imam Ali ibn Abi Talib publications, vol. 1, p. 289-290

the rest have at least bits of impurity in their intentions. Ghazali answers this question in his book *Ihya Ulum ud-Din* as follows:

In this case, the strength of different intentions should be considered; if the religious intention and the wrong intention are equal they will resist each other making the other one ineffective so the act will not cause punishment nor does it deserve a reward. If the profane desire weighs more, then the act deserves punishment but not as severe as if the act was done only out of *riya'* and with no religious intention at all. If the good intention behind the act, which is to get close to God, surpasses the other intention the act deserves a reward given according to the amount of the good intention minus the wrong intention, as said in the Qur'an: '*So whoever does an atom's weight of good will see it, and whoever does an atom's weight of evil will see it*'⁴¹ and also, '*Indeed God does not wrong [anyone] [even to the extent of] an atom's weight.*'⁴²

Therefore, the good intention will not be neglected, and if it is more than the intention of *riya'*, then the bad intention will be subtracted from it and the remaining will be rewarded. Moreover, if the intention of *riya'* is more, [still the good intention will not be neglected] and the punishment caused by *riya'* will be nullified to the extent of the good intention.⁴³

Ikhlaas from the perspective of Muslim thinkers

The prescription for acquiring *ikhlaas* is restraining wrong desires, giving up on greed towards this world, and focusing only on the Hereafter. Many

⁴¹ The Qur'an 99:7-8

⁴² The Qur'an 4:40

⁴³ Ghazali, Abu Hamid Muhammad ibn Muhammad ibn Muhammad ibn Ahmad, *Ihya Ulum ud-Din*, Beirut, Dar ul-Kutub il-Araby publications, vol. 14, p. 191-192

times we think our deeds have been performed with the right intention, but indeed they were actually done out of being deceived, since we did not know the ways that a deed can be polluted.

You might have heard the story of a person who redid thirty years of prayer because he felt that they were not done sincerely before. As the story goes, one day he is late for congregational prayer and there is no room in the first row. He feels embarrassed to be seen in the second row and suddenly realizes he enjoyed being seen in the first row all those years he thought his intention was pure.

A subtle point: Few deeds are free from such contaminations and, indeed, those who neglect this might find their good deeds in a bad form on the Day of Judgment. Regarding such people, God says: *'And there will appear to them from God what they had never reckoned'*⁴⁴ or when he says, *'The evils of what they had done will appear to them'*⁴⁵ and also when he says, *'Say, "Shall we inform you about the biggest losers in regard to works, those whose endeavor goes awry in the life of the world, while they suppose they are doing good."'*⁴⁶

Therefore, knowing the reality of ikhlaas and acting upon it is like swimming in a deep ocean in which everyone but a few drown. They are the same people who Satan gave up on deceiving them: *'Except Your purified servants among them.'*⁴⁷ Thus, a servant is to consider these issues

⁴⁴ The Qur'an 39:47

⁴⁵ The Qur'an 45:33

⁴⁶ The Qur'an 18:103-104

⁴⁷ The Qur'an 15:40

and take them into account; if not he will unknowingly be caught in Satan's traps.⁴⁸

A narrative on ikhlaas

Once, there was a tree worshipped by a group of people. The news reaches an eremite and he decides to cut the tree. On his way he meets Satan who, appearing as a man, asks him where he's going. He replies by saying he's out to cut the tree that the people are worshiping instead of God. Angered by this, Satan tells him that the issue is none of his business. The two quarrel for long, and end up fighting. During the fight, the eremite manages to knock Satan down, and feeling powerless, Satan says, "I know you are going to cut the tree for its reward. I will teach you an act that has more reward. I will put an amount of gold under your prayer mat every day; take it and give it to the poor.' Deceived by Satan, the eremite withdraws from cutting the tree, and return home. Every day, he takes the amount of gold under his prayer mat, and distributes it among the poor. This goes on for days until one day Satan stops putting the gold under his prayer mat. So the eremite takes his axe again and goes to cut the tree. Again, Satan stops him and they start arguing. This time, Satan manages to defeat him and puts him on the ground. Shocked by this defeat, the eremite asks, 'How did you manage to overpower me?' Satan replies, 'The first time your intention was pure and you wanted to cut the tree for the

⁴⁸ Fayz Kashany, Muhsin, *Rah-e Rushan (translation of al-Mahajjat ul-Bayza')*, translator Sayyed Muhammad Sadiq Arif, 1372, Mashhad, Astan-e Quds-e Razawy publications, vol. 8, p. 161-162

sake of God, but this time because of being contaminated by greed, you were going to cut the tree while your intention was not pure.⁴⁹

The signs of ikhlaas

Some signs of ikhlaas mentioned in the hadiths are as follows:

1. *Not expecting to be praised by people:*

The Prophet said, “Truly, every truth has a reality. And a person will not reach the reality of ikhlaas until he does not like to be praised for his godly deeds.”⁵⁰

Also, Imam Baqir said, “No worshipper can worship God as he deserves, unless he closes his eyes on all creatures and focuses on God; then, God will say, ‘This deed has become pure for me, so I will accept it out of my grace.’”⁵¹

2. *Complete submission to God:*

The Prophet said, “The signs of ikhlaas in a person are four: his heart is submitted to God, his organs are submitted to God, he does good to the people, and refrains from harming them.”⁵²

⁴⁹ Naraghy, Ahmad ibn Muhammad Mahdi, *Mi'raj us-Sa'adat*, 1391 AH, Qum, Tuba-ye Mohabbat publications, p. 531-532

⁵⁰ Majlisi, Muhammad Baqir, *Bihar ul-Anwar al-Jami'at lil-Akhbar il-Aemat al-Athaar*, Tehran, Islamiyyah publications, vol. 69, p. 304: *إِنَّ لِكُلِّ حَقٍّ حَقِيْقَةً وَ مَا بَلَغَ عَبْدٌ حَقِيْقَةَ الْإِخْلَاصِ حَتَّى لَا يُحِبَّ أَنْ يُحْمَدَ عَلَى شَيْءٍ مِنْ عَمَلٍ لِلَّهِ*

⁵¹ Warum ibn Abi Faris, *Majmuat Warum, Tanbih ul-Khawatir*, Qum, Maktab-e Faqih publications, vol. 2, p. 108: *لَا يَكُونُ الْعَبْدُ عَابِدًا لِلَّهِ حَقَّ عِبَادَتِهِ حَتَّى يَنْقَطِعَ عَنِ الْخَلْقِ كُلِّهِمْ إِلَيْهِ فَحِينَئِذٍ يَقُولُ هَذَا خَالِصٌ لِي فَيَقْبَلُهُ بِكْرَمِهِ*

⁵² Harany Halaby, Abu Muhammad Hasan ibn Ali ibn Shu'bah, *Tuhaf ul-Uqul an Aalir-Rassul*, Qum, published by Muassasat an-Nashr ul-Islamy under Jami'at ul-Mudarressin, p. 21: *وَأَمَّا عَلَامَةُ الْمُخْلِصِ فَأَرْبَعَةٌ يَسْلَمُ قَلْبُهُ وَ تَسْلَمُ جَوَارِحُهُ وَ بَدَلُ خَيْرِهِ وَ كَتَفُ شَرِّهِ*

How to acquire and strengthen your ikhlaas

After understanding the importance of ikhlaas and its effect in reaching highest levels of proximity to God, acquiring it is the next step:

1. *Loving God:*

Having a strong and honest love for God leaves no room for any impure intention. For a person who has sincere belief in God, nothing is more pleasant than His pleasure. Imam Sadiq said, “No one will reach the reality of belief (*imaan*) unless he loves God more than the people, his parents, children, and wealth.”⁵³ He also said, “When the love of God shines on one’s heart, it frees him from all occupation; and remembrance of all other than God becomes gloomy and darkening to him. The lover of God is the most sincere person in his heart, the most honest in his words, the most loyal to his covenants, the most pious in deeds, the most pleasing of them in remembrance, and the most obedient of them towards God.”⁵⁴

2. *Certitude:*

A sincere intention roots in a deep understanding of divine teachings and a firm belief. The stronger one’s certitude about God’s oneness and the firmer his belief that there is no effect unless it is caused by God, the more likely he will have sincerity in his intentions and deeds. This person will

⁵³ Majlesy, Muhammad Baqir, *Bihar ul-Anwar al-Jami’at lil-Akhbar il-Aemat al-Athaar*, Tehran, Islamiyyah publications, vol. 64, p. 24: لَا يَمْحُضُ رَجُلٌ الْإِيمَانَ بِاللَّهِ حَتَّى يَكُونَ اللَّهُ أَحَبَّ إِلَيْهِ مِنْ نَفْسِهِ وَ أَيْبِهِ وَ أُمِّهِ وَ

وَأُورْدِهِ وَ أَهْلِيهِ وَ مَالِهِ وَ مِنْ النَّاسِ كُلِّهِمْ

⁵⁴ *Misbah us-Shari’ah*, Muasisat al-A’lami lil Matbu’at publications, p. 192: حُبُّ اللَّهِ إِذَا أَضَاءَ عَلَى سِرِّ عَبْدٍ إِذَا أَلْخَصَّ النَّاسَ سِرًّا لِلَّهِ وَ أَصْدَقَهُمْ قَوْلًا وَ أَوْفَاهُمْ عَهْدًا وَ أَرْكَاهُمْ عَمَلًا وَ أَخْلَدَهُ عَنْ كُلِّ شَاغِلٍ وَ كُلِّ ذِكْرٍ سِوَى اللَّهِ عِنْدَ ظُلْمَةٍ وَ الْمُحِبُّ أَخْلَصَ النَّاسَ سِرًّا لِلَّهِ وَ أَصْدَقَهُمْ قَوْلًا وَ أَوْفَاهُمْ عَهْدًا وَ أَرْكَاهُمْ عَمَلًا وَ أَصْفَاهُمْ ذِكْرًا وَ أَعْبَدَهُمْ نَفْسًا

see no cause and source of action but God and so will only work to please Him. Imam Ali said, "Ikhlaas is the fruit of the tree of certitude."⁵⁵

3. *Interest for that which is with God:*

In another hadith, having interest and yearning for that which is with God, which itself is a result of knowledge and certitude, is one way to achieve ikhlaas. Imam Ali said, "Whoever yearns for that which is with God will purify his deeds."⁵⁶

4. *The intellect's control over desires:*

With the numerous subtle obstacles on the way to achieving ikhlaas, it is impossible to be safe from them without seeking refuge to God's mercy. Hadiths include serious alerts about the obstacles of ikhlaas. Imam Ali counts desires as one of the obstacles: "How can he who is controlled by desires be able to have ikhlaas?"⁵⁷ Indeed, it is the worst desire in that it weakens the will to pursue ikhlaas. Desires darken the light of reason and direct one towards *riya'*. Imam Baqir considers lack of ikhlaas as the result of lack of reason: "There is no distance between falsehood and truth except for the weakness of reason. The companions asked, 'How is to so, O son of the Prophet?' The Imam replied, 'A servant does an act in which lies the pleasure of God, but he doesn't do it for the sake of God [and does it for other purposes]. However, had he done it for the sake of God, his other purposes would be fulfilled too and in a shorter time."⁵⁸

⁵⁵ Tamimi Amudi, Abdul Wahid, *Tasnif Ghurar ul-Hikam*, Qum, Daftar-e Tableeghat-e Hoze-y Elmiiye Qum publications, p. 197: الإِخْلَاصُ ثَمَرَةُ الْيَقِينِ

⁵⁶ Ibid. p. 155: مَنْ رَغِبَ فِيمَا عِنْدَ اللَّهِ أَخْلَصَ عَمَلَهُ

⁵⁷ Ibid. p. 306: كَيْفَ يَسْتَصِيبُ الْإِخْلَاصَ مَنْ يُغْلِبُهُ الْهَوَى

⁵⁸ Majlisi, Muhammad Baqir, *Bihar ul-Anwar al-Jami'at lil-Akhbar il-Aemat al-Athaar*, Tehran, Islamiyyah publications, vol. 69, p. 299: مَا بَيْنَ الْحَقِّ وَ الْبَاطِلِ إِلَّا قِيَّةُ الْعَقْلِ قَبْلَ وَ كَيْفَ ذَلِكَ يَا ابْنَ رَسُولِ اللَّهِ قَالَ إِنَّ الْعَبْدَ يَعْمَلُ الْعَمَلَ الَّذِي هُوَ لِلَّهِ رَضَى فَيُرِيدُ بِهِ غَيْرَ اللَّهِ فَلَوْ أَنَّهُ أَخْلَصَ لِلَّهِ لَجَاءَهُ الَّذِي يُرِيدُ فِي أَسْرَعِ مِنْ ذَلِكَ

Avoiding long-term wishes:

Imam Ali regarded wishes as one of the other obstacles on the way of acquiring ikhlaas. He said, “Reduce your wishes so that your deeds become sincere.”⁵⁹

How to avoid riya’

In order to know how to better acquire ikhlaas, the obstacles must be cleared to pave our way towards it. There are clear guidelines by scholars in this field. They say that riya’ has many obstacles; some are clear and some covert, some are very dangerous and some are less dangerous. Satan and our low desires work hard to harm our mind, remove our ikhlaas, and pollute our deeds with riya’.

Some stages of riya’ are so clear that everyone understands them; for example, when Satan tempts one to pray slowly and with all the etiquette so that others would think he is a righteous person. The person will know this is riya’ but Satan says if they think you are righteous they will backbite you, and you can stop them from committing a sin. It is an effort by Satan, but still it is a clear deception that can be avoided.

Sometimes these temptations are more hidden. For example, Satan might whisper to a person during prayer by tempting him to prayer longer and with more etiquette so that others will learn from him and perform their prayers in a better way and he will receive part of their reward. Unfortunately, sometimes we get deceived by such temptations and instead of praying properly to please God we contaminate our deeds with riya’.

⁵⁹ Tamimi Amudi, Abdul Wahid, *Tasnif Ghurar ul-Hikam*, Qum, Daftar-e Tableeghat-e Hoze-ye Elmiye Qum publications, p. 155: قَلِيلُ الْأَمَالِ تَخْلُصُ لَكَ الْأَعْمَالُ

Satan's temptations are sometimes even trickier. Satan may whisper says to some people that a sincere person's prayer in public should not be better than his prayers in private, that he who prays better in public suffers from *riya'*. Then he tempts the person by making him pray better in private so that he can pray longer and better in front of others. This is a hidden *riya'* that many may neglect and are unable to recognize. And there are still more hidden layers of *riya'*.⁶⁰

Of course, as important as this is, it should not become obsessive because that is also another one of Satan's tricks; for example, he may prevent someone from joining the congregational prayers, or causing one to avoid the recommended acts in front of others and pray quickly to avoid *riya'* so people avoid important recommended acts out of this fear caused by Satan.

Personal and social effects of ikhlaas

As one of the most valuable qualities of heart, ikhlaas has significant effects that have been pointed out in our hadiths.

1. Personal effects

- 1.1. Wisdom and vision: A famous hadith from the Prophet reads, "The person who devotes himself sincerely to God for forty days, streams of wisdom will flow from his heart to his tongue."⁶¹ Imam Ali also said, "When ikhlaas actualises, man's vision is enlightened."⁶²

⁶⁰ Fayz Kashany, Muhsin, *Rah-e Rushan (translation of al-Mahajjat ul-Bayza)*, translator Sayyed Muhammad Sadiq Arif, 1372, Mashhad, Astan-e Quds-e Razawy publications, vol. 8, p. 133

⁶¹ Ibn Babiwayh Qummi, Muhammad ibn Ali ibn Husayn, '*Uyun Akhbar ur-Reza*, 1378 SH, Tehran, Nashr-e Jahan publications, vol. 2, p. 69: مَا أَخْلَصَ عَبْدٌ لِلَّهِ عَزَّ وَ جَلَّ أَرْبَعِينَ صَبَاحاً إِلَّا جَرَتْ يَتَابِعُ الْحِكْمَةُ مِنْ قَلْبِهِ عَلَى لِسَانِهِ

⁶² Tamimi Amudi, Abdul Wahid, *Tasnif Ghurar ul-Hikam*, Qum, Daftar-e Tableeghat-e Hoze-ye Elmiyye Qum publications, p. 198: عِنْدَ تَحَقُّقِ الْإِخْلَاصِ تَسْتَبْدِرُ الْبَصَائِرُ

- 1.2. Happiness: Imam Ali said, “Happy is he who obeys [God] out of sincerity.”⁶³ The Imam also said, “Whoever purifies his worship for God has achieved happiness.”⁶⁴
- 1.3. Reaching high status: Ikhlās is counted as a cause for reaching high positions: “Be sincere to reach [high positions before God and reward].”⁶⁵
- 1.4. Achieving wishes and hopes: As Imam Ali says, “Whoever is sincere will reach his wishes.”⁶⁶
- 1.5. Tranquillity: A sincere person who prefers the will of God over his own will enjoys a special kind of tranquillity since he knows that God suffices him and will take care of his affairs; thus, he will not be anxious. This person has understood the meaning of God’s words when He said, “I swear by my dignity, honour, and high position, no one will prefer My will over his in the affairs of this world unless I put his satiety in his being and direct his attention towards the Hereafter, and make the skies and the earth responsible for his sustenance, and I will be his behind the trade of every tradesfolk.”⁶⁷ While mentioning God’s rights upon His servant, Imam Sajjad says, “And the greater right of God upon you is to worship Him and not to

⁶³ Ibid. p. 167: السَّعِيدُ مَنْ أَخْلَصَ الطَّاعَةَ

⁶⁴ Ibid. p. 198: فَازَ بِالسَّعَادَةِ مَنْ أَخْلَصَ الْعِبَادَةَ

⁶⁵ Ibid. p. 198: أَخْلَصُ تَتَلَّ

⁶⁶ Ibid. p. 198: مَنْ أَخْلَصَ بَلَغَ الْأَمَالَ

⁶⁷ Kulayni Razi, Muhammad ibn Yaghub ibn Ishaq, *Al-Kafi*, 1362 SH, Tehran, Islammiyah publications, vol. 2, p. 137:

قَالَ اللَّهُ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ وَجَرَّتِي وَجَلَالِي وَعَظْمَتِي وَتَحَائِي وَغُلُوِّ اِزْتِفَاعِي لَا يُؤَيِّرُ عَبْدٌ مُؤْمِنٌ هَوَايَ عَلَى هَوَاهُ فِي شَيْءٍ مِنْ أَمْرِ الدُّنْيَا إِلَّا جَعَلْتُ غِنَاهُ فِي نَفْسِهِ وَهَمَّتْهُ فِي آخِرَتِهِ وَصَمَّنْتُ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ رِزْقَهُ وَكُنْتُ لَهُ مِنْ وِزَاءِ تِجَارَةِ كُلِّ تَاجِرٍ

associate any partner with Him and when you do so out of sincerity God will suffice your affairs in this world and the hereafter.”⁶⁸

2. Social effects

2.1. Victory: Some believe they can achieve their goals by deception or by spending money, but according to the Qur’an and religious teachings, there is no sustainable way to win people’s hearts or achieve goals without purifying one’s intentions and deeds. In another hadith from Imam Sajjad we read, “The key to success is in the purification of intention”⁶⁹ and “If you purify yourself you will succeed.”⁷⁰

2.2. Dignity: Ikhlaas protects our dignity. “Whoever purifies intention will keep away from humiliating things [bad behaviour and wrong deeds].”⁷¹ Keeping away from impurities, the purified people can direct all their talents and potentials towards valuable things and admirable thoughts and by doing so they can pave the way for advancement of the society.

Stability of affairs: Indeed, the more sincere the action, the more attention will be given to the core of the action rather than its appearance. Therefore, all kinds of work will be done with more stability. On the other

⁶⁸ Ibn Babiwayh Qummi, Muhammad ibn Ali ibn Husayn, *Al-Khisal*, 1362 AH, Jame’e Mudarresin e Hoze Elmye Qum publications, vol. 2, p. 566:

وَإِنَّمَا حَقُّ اللَّهِ الْأَكْبَرُ عَلَيْكَ فَإِن تَعْبَدَهُ لَا تُشْرِكْ بِهِ شَيْئاً فَإِذَا فَعَلْتَ بِالْإِخْلَاصِ جَعَلَ لَكَ عَلَى نَفْسِهِ أَنْ
يَكْفِيكَ أَمْرَ الدُّنْيَا وَالْآخِرَةِ

⁶⁹ Ibid. vol. 2, p. 93:

فِي إِخْلَاصِ النِّيَّاتِ نَجَاحُ الْأُمُورِ

⁷⁰ Ibid. vol. 2, p. 197:

إِنْ تُخْلِصْ نَفْسَكَ

⁷¹ Ibid. vol. 2, p. 197.

مَنْ أَخْلَصَ النِّيَّةَ نَزَّهَ عَنِ الدَّيْبَةِ

hand, if jobs are done out of *riya'*, all the focus will be on the appearance and the outer aspect, and the product becomes hollow and unstable.

Conclusion

Purifying our intentions for God frees us from numerous problems and worries caused by the displeasure of other human beings. One who only considers God's pleasure in his words, deeds, and intentions will not be concerned with the negative views of others about his deeds. Thus, he tries to perform his duty in the best possible way. Furthermore, as a product of *ikhlaas*, the results of one's deeds join to create a great power in his soul,⁷² a power with which he can overcome all problems. Likewise, in the social sense, if actions are done with *ikhlaas*, valuable and firm results are achieved that can facilitate the progress of the society. The key point regarding *ikhlaas* is that what matters is the *quality* of deeds.⁷³ It is only with such an understanding that many loose and parallel actions can be avoided and the energy of people and the society will be used in a way that benefits both the individual and society.

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⁷² Imam Sadiq said, "Ikhlāas increases the results of all deeds together." Refer to: *Bihar al-Anwar*, Majlisi, Muhammad Baqir, Tehran, Islamiyyah publications, vol. 67, p. 245

⁷³ As the Prophet said, "Purify your heart [and then] a little amount of deed will suffice you."

- Ghazali, Abu Hamid Muhammad ibn Muhammad ibn Muhammad ibn Ahmad, *Kimiya-ye Sa'adat*, 1380 SH, Tehran, Sherkat-e Entesharat-e Elmi Farhangi, vol. 2, pp. 207-246
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THE DESCENT OF ADAM IN THE TORAH AND THE QUR'AN

BATUL SADAT AMINI

TRANSLATED BY FATEMEH SOLTANMOHAMMADI

ABSTRACT: The personality of Adam as the first prophet – or even the first human created – as well as the error made by him in heaven is an ongoing topic of discussion amongst followers of the Abrahamic faiths. This article is the comparison between Jewish and Islamic perspectives regarding the descent of Adam and Eve. According to this research, both the Qur'an and Torah include the event of Adam and Eve's descent along with apparent differences in the details regarding the incident.

Introduction

The Abrahamic faiths differ in their viewpoints regarding the creation of man and the events that took place in heaven, and these differences are seen in their views regarding other prophets as well.

Today, the Torah and Bible that was sent to Moses and Jesus from God are not accessible, and to understand the beliefs of Jews and Christians regarding various matters of principles of religion, we refer to the testaments.

The descent of Adam from heaven to earth is among the topics historically discussed by scholars from the Abrahamic faiths. This article is an analysis of the Qur'an and the Torah regarding the event of descent and the details surrounding it.

Descent from a Lexical Viewpoint

The term "descent" «هبوط» derives from the root word «هبط», meaning 'to descend.'

Ibn Faris says, "هبوط indicates descent."¹ Ibn Manzur believes that the word هبوط negates or counters 'ascent.'² Raghib Esfahani says, "Descent is that which forcibly comes down, like the descent or falling of a stone..." Raghib adds that since this term is used regarding a person, the motive is to belittle, as opposed to the descent of honourable things such as angels and the Qur'an.³

According to philologists, descent is to come down from an area of a high position. However, that standing does not necessarily have to be a specific location; descent can be from both a high location or rank.

Thus, the descent of Adam was a type of decline. As to whether this was a descent from a location or rank is a topic of discussion amongst scholars.

The Descent of Adam and Eve at a Glance

¹ Ibn Fars, Mu'jam Maqaees al-Lughah, vol. 6, pg. 30 and Jawhari, Ismaeel bin Hamad, Sihah, article on «هبط»

² Ibn Mandhur, Lisan al-'Arab, vol. 15, pg. 18.

³ Raghib Esfehani, al-Mufradat, pg. 834.

As the first humans created, God placed Adam and Eve in heaven and provided them with all kinds of blessings from amongst foods, drinks, etc. He then warned them not to fall into Satan's trap as Satan is their manifest enemy. However, Adam and Eve fell prey to Satan after living in heaven for some time, and were expelled from heaven and descended to earth.

Scholars discuss various reasons for Adam's descent which includes the idea that it was related to the covenant God had made with Adam.

Article 1: God's Covenant with Adam and Eve

The study of God's covenant with Adam and Eve is one of the important issues on the subject of Adam's descent.

1. *In the Qur'an*

The Holy Qur'an speaks of the covenant made between God and Adam:

وَلَقَدْ عَهِدْنَا إِلَىٰ آدَمَ مِنْ قَبْلُ فَنَسِيَ وَلَمْ نَجِدْ لَهُ عَزْمًا

*Certainly We had enjoined Adam earlier; but he forgot, and We did not find any resoluteness in him.*⁴

As seen in this verse, a covenant existed between God and Adam, one which Adam forgot about. Below are some premises for the meaning of *covenant*:

A) Adam's covenant was the command to not approach the tree.⁵

وَلَا تَقْرَبَا هَذِهِ الشَّجَرَةَ فَتَكُونَا مِنَ الظَّالِمِينَ

⁴ *Ta Ha* [20:115].

⁵ Tabarsi, Fadhl bin Hasan, *Majma' ul-Bayan*, vol. 7, pg. 52; Tabataba'i, Sayyid Muhammad Husayn, *al-Mizan*, vol. 14, pg. 219; and Sayyid Qutb, *Fi Dhilal al-Qur'an*, vol. 4, pg. 2353.

*But do not approach this tree, lest you should be among the wrongdoers.*⁶

Fakhr Razi says, “Without a doubt, the intent of the covenant is that which God commands or forbids, hence, the command to not approach the tree.”⁷

- B) The intent of the covenant was to announce Satan’s enmity towards Adam and Eve, and to warn them of Satan’s victory over them.

فَقُلْنَا يَا آدَمُ إِنَّ هَذَا عَدُوٌّ لَكَ وَلِزَوْجِكَ

*We said, ‘O Adam! This is indeed an enemy of yours and your mate’s.’*⁸

In Tabarsi’s exegesis of the verse, “*Certainly We had enjoined Adam earlier...*,” he cites the verse, “*This is indeed an enemy of yours and your mate’s,*” an indication of his view.⁹

2. Adam’s Covenant in the Torah

The covenant between God and Adam has been explicitly mentioned in the Torah. However, after looking at some of its passages, we can conclude that the meaning of *covenant* was to refrain from eating from the tree of knowledge of good and evil:

⁶ The Elevations (*al-A’raf*) [7:19].

⁷ Fakhr Razi, *Mafatih al-Ghayb*, vol. 3, pg. 26.

⁸ (*Ta Ha*) [20:117].

⁹ Tabari, Muhammad bin Jarir, *Jami’ al-Bayan*, vol. 16, pg.160.

*And God commanded Adam and said, 'You are permitted to eat from all the trees in the garden. However, you are not permitted to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, because the day you eat from it you will die.'*¹⁰

Article 2: The Deceiver of Adam and Eve

Adam and Eve descended to earth after being deceived. Who deceived them?

1. In the Qur'an

The Qur'an speaks of a tree that Adam and his wife were told to stay away from.

وَقُلْنَا يَا آدَمُ اسْكُنْ أَنْتَ وَزَوْجُكَ الْجَنَّةَ وَكُلَا مِنْهَا رَغَدًا حَيْثُ شِئْتُمَا وَلَا تَقْرَبَا هَذِهِ الشَّجَرَةَ فَتَكُونَا مِنَ الظَّالِمِينَ

*We said, 'O Adam, dwell with your mate in paradise, and eat thereof freely whencesoever you wish; but do not approach this tree, lest you should be among the wrongdoers.'*¹¹

According to verses from the Qur'an, Satan deceived Adam and Eve:

فَوَسْوَسَ إِلَيْهِ الشَّيْطَانُ قَالَ يَا آدَمُ هَلْ أَدُلُّكَ عَلَى شَجَرَةِ الْخُلْدِ وَمُلْكٍ لَا يَبْلَى

¹⁰ Genesis 2:15-16.

¹¹ The Cow (*al-Baqarah*) [2:25]. Also refer to: The Elevations (*al-A'raf*) [7:19].

Then Satan tempted him. He said, ‘O Adam! Shall I show you the tree of immortality, and an imperishable kingdom?’¹²

2. In the Torah

The Torah says the following about the forbidden tree:

And out of the ground made the LORD God to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food; the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of knowledge of good and evil.¹³

Later it says:

And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.¹⁴

In regards to Adam and Eve’s deceiver, the Torah says:

Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, “Did God really say, ‘You must not eat from any tree in the garden?’” The woman said to the serpent, “We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, but God did say, ‘You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.’” “You

¹² (*Ta Ha*) [20:120].

¹³ Genesis 2:9.

¹⁴ Genesis 2:16-17.

will not certainly die,” the serpent said to the woman. “For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”¹⁵

Thus, the deceiver is the ‘serpent,’ contrary to the Qur’an where the deceiver is Satan.

Article 3: Signs of Disobedience

Although God, through His mercy, accepted Adam’s repentance, the natural effects of eating from the forbidden tree, even after repentance, remained. Though repentance is effective before God, the effect of the act still remains, which was the scene when their private parts were revealed, consequently covering them with leaves, and descending to earth afterwards. Also, according to the Torah, God warned Adam and Eve that they would die upon eating from the tree. However, we see in the events that took place after eating from the tree, which has been narrated in the Torah, clearly show that this threat was not carried out.

The uncovering of the private parts and the descent in both the Qur’an and Torah will be analysed in the following section:

1. The Exposing of the Private Parts

The exposing of Adam and Eve’s private parts was their first sign of disobedience.

1-1. In the Qur’an

The Qur’an says:

¹⁵ Genesis 3:1-5

فَدَلَّاهُمَا بِغُرُورٍ فَلَمَّا ذَاقَا الشَّجَرَةَ بَدَتْ لَهُمَا سَوْآتُهُمَا وَطَفِقَا يَخْصِفَانِ عَلَيْهِمَا مِنْ
وَرَقِّ الْجَنَّةِ وَنَادَاهُمَا رَبُّهُمَا أَلَمْ أَنْهَكُمَا عَنْ تِلْكَ الشَّجَرَةِ وَأَقُلُّ لَكُمَا إِنَّ الشَّيْطَانَ
لَكُمَا عَدُوٌّ مُبِينٌ

Thus he brought about their fall by deception. So when they tasted of the tree, their nakedness became exposed to them, and they began to stitch over themselves with the leaves of paradise. Their Lord called out to them, “Did I not forbid you from that tree, and tell you, ‘Satan is indeed your manifest enemy?’”¹⁶

According to the above verse, picking a single fruit from the forbidden tree led to such a bitter outcome that they became bare from heavenly garments – the garments of dignity and respect.

Thus, Adam and Eve were not bare before committing the misdeed; rather, they were clothed. However, the Qur’an does not say how they were clothed. Nevertheless, that which they were clothed in was for a mark of Adam and Eve’s character and was considered respectful for them, where with their disobedience it fell from their bodies.¹⁷

2-1. In the Torah

In the Torah, this subject is presented as such:

...she took from its fruit and ate; and she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate. Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked;

¹⁶ The Elevations (*al-A’raf*) [7:22].

¹⁷ Makarim Shirazi, Nasir, *Tafsir Nemuneh*, vol. 6, pg. 117 and 118.

*and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loin coverings.*¹⁸

In the aforementioned, it was made clear that according to the Qur'an, Adam and Eve were clothed until *after* committing the misdeed. However, in the Torah the following has been said: "*And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.*"¹⁹

Thus, we gather that the Torah speaks of Adam and Eve as having been naked even before committing the misdeed, though they did not comprehend its indecency. And when they ate from the forbidden tree of knowledge, their eyes saw through wisdom that they were unclothed, thus realizing their ungainly state.

Therefore, in the Torah, Adam lacked so vastly in knowledge that he was not even able to recognize his own nakedness. However, in the Qur'an, Adam not only knew of his state, but he also knew about the secrets of creation (i.e. knowledge of the names) and was considered a teacher to the angels. Moreover, if Satan was able to influence him, it was not because of his lack of knowledge, but rather because of his purity of heart and innocence.²⁰

2. Descent

The above described the events that led to the descent of Adam and Eve. The following explains the descent.

1-2. Descent in the Qur'an

¹⁸ Genesis 3:6-7.

¹⁹ Genesis 2:25.

²⁰ Makarim Shirazi, Nasir, *ibid.*, vol. 6, pg. 118.

The Qur'an has mentioned the subject of descent and Adam's departure from heaven to earth in at least four instances.

A. Descent in Location or Rank

The Qur'an:

فَأَزَلَّهُمَا الشَّيْطَانُ عَنْهَا فَأَخْرَجَهُمَا مِمَّا كَانَا فِيهِ وَقُلْنَا اهْبِطُوا بَعْضُكُمْ لِبَعْضٍ عَدُوٌّ
وَلَكُمْ فِي الْأَرْضِ مُسْتَقَرٌّ وَمَتَاعٌ إِلَىٰ حِينٍ

*Then Satan caused them to stumble from it, and he dislodged them from what they were in; and We said, 'Get down, being enemies of one another! On the earth shall be your abode and sustenance for a time.'*²¹

Among the various notions regarding the heaven Adam and Eve resided in, some believe it to be the promised paradise for the righteous and pure; however, it seems that it actually was not heaven, but rather a peaceful garden situated in a very green and lush area of earth because:

a) the promised paradise has everlasting blessings, where various verses have mentioned its everlasting and endless quality, and leaving it is not possible,

b) the corrupt and faithless Satan will have no room in that heaven, nor his whispers of temptation, nor any sort of disobedience to God,

and c) prophetic traditions, which have been passed down to us from the Ahlul Bayt, explicitly talk about this topic. One of the narrators of prophet traditions says he asked Imam Sadiq about the heaven Adam resided in.

²¹ The Cow (*al-Baqarah*) [2:36] also refer to: The Cow (*al-Baqarah*) [2:38]; The Elevations (*al-A'raf*) [7:24]; and (*Ta Ha*) [20:123].

Imam replied, “It was a garden, of the gardens of earth where the sun and moon shined upon it, and if it were the promised paradise, Adam would have never left it.”²²

Moreover, it is clear that Adam’s descent and fall to earth was a descent in rank and not in location, from his great status and rank *and* from that green and prosperous garden.

The assumption has also been made that this heaven was on a planet in the sky even though it was not the promised paradise. Some hadiths indicate that this heaven was in the skies; however, it is probable that the word «سما» (sky) in these sorts of narrations indicates ‘a high rank’ and not a high location.

Nonetheless, many sources prove that this heaven was something other than the promised paradise: the promised paradise comes at the end of the journey of mankind, whereas this heaven was at the beginning or middle of Adam’s journey of life. This heaven was the beginning of his deeds and actions, whereas the promised paradise is to be the conclusion of deeds and actions.²³

In regards to this, Allamah Tabataba’i emphasizes that the implication of heaven is not the heaven in the hereafter, and with the use of proof from narrations, he states that the meaning of heaven is a purgatory one.²⁴

B. The Addressees of Descent in the Qur’an

²² Shaykh Saduq, ‘Ilal al-Sharai’, vol. 2, pg. 600 and al-Qummi, Ali bin Ibrahim, Tafsir al-Qummi, vol. 1, pg. 43.

”جنة من جنات الدنيا يطلع فيها الشمس والقمر ولو كان من جنات الاخرة ما خرج منها ابدا“

²³ Makarim Shirazi, Nasir, Tafsir Nemunah, vol. 1, pg. 186 and 187.

²⁴ Tabataba’i, Sayyid Muhammad Husayn, *ibid.*, vol.1, pg. 139 and 140.

Throughout the story of Adam, God commanded descent many times, where in one instance He commanded descent in the singular form:

قَالَ فَاهْبِطْ مِنْهَا فَمَا يَكُونُ لَكَ أَنْ تَتَكَبَّرَ فِيهَا فَاخْرُجْ إِنَّكَ مِنَ الصَّاغِرِينَ

*'Get down from it!' He said. 'It is not for you to be arrogant therein. Begone! You are indeed among the degraded ones.'*²⁵

It is clear here that only Satan is the one being addressed.

In another case, God commands descent in the dual form:

قَالَ اهْبِطَا مِنْهَا جَمِيعًا بَعْضُكُمْ لِبَعْضٍ عَدُوٌّ

*He said, 'Get down both of you¹ from it, all together, being enemies of one another!'*²⁶

Once again, it is also clear here that the people addressed are Adam and Eve.

In three cases God commands descent in the plural form:

فَأَزَلَّهُمَا الشَّيْطَانُ عَنْهَا فَأَخْرَجَهُمَا مِمَّا كَانَا فِيهِ وَقُلْنَا اهْبِطُوا بَعْضُكُمْ لِبَعْضٍ عَدُوٌّ
وَلَكُمْ فِي الْأَرْضِ مُسْتَقَرٌّ وَمَتَاعٌ إِلَىٰ حِينٍ

*Then Satan caused them to stumble from it, and he dislodged them from what they were in; and We said, 'Get down, being enemies of one another! On the earth shall be your abode and sustenance for a time.'*²⁷

²⁵ The Elevations (*al-A'raf*) [7:13].

²⁶ (*Ta Ha*) [20:123].

²⁷ The Cow (*al-Baqarah*) [2:36] and also refer to: The Cow (*al-Baqarah*) [2:38] and The Elevations (*al-A'raf*) [7:24].

God's command of descent to Adam and Eve comes in the plural form here. Qur'anic commentators have different opinions regarding the individuals addressed in this verse.

In some exegeses, Adam, Eve, and Satan are understood to be the ones addressed;²⁸ in other exegeses Adam, Eve, and the whispers of temptation are said to be the target audience.²⁹ Other commentators believe the addressees are Adam, Eve, and their descendants; in other words, if we exile a man and woman from a land, we have also exiled any child that may be produced by them.³⁰ Other Qur'anic commentators consider the addressees to be only Adam and Eve, where in this case they argue that according to Arabic customs, the verb has just come in the plural form «اهبطوا».³¹

C. Repetition of Descent in the Chapter 'The Cow' (al-Baqarah)

In the chapter *The Cow*, the command to descend to earth was given to both Adam and Eve before and after repentance. Regarding the repeated command to descend and whether the event only took place once, the following aspects are considered:

²⁸ Shaykh Tusi, al-Tebyan, vol. 4, pg. 375. Also: Tabarsi, Fadhl bin Hasan, Majma' al-Bayan, vol. 1, pg. 137, Tabatabaei, Sayyid Muhammad Husayn, alOmizan, vol. 1, pg. 132, and Jawadi Amuli, Tasnim, vol. 3, pg. 490.

²⁹ Majma' al-Bayan, vol. 1, pg. 138.

³⁰ Tusi, al-Tebyan, vol. 1, pg. 164; Makarim Shirazi, Nasir ibid., vol. 1, pg. 199; and Ibn 'Ashur, Mohammad bin Tahir, al-Tahrir wa al-Tanwir, vol. 1, pg. 434.

³¹ Mulla Sadra, Tafsir al-Qur'an al-Karim, vol. 3, pg. 109.

1. Jaba'i says, "The first descent differs from the second one: the first was a descent from heaven to the skies of earth, and the second a descent from the skies to earth."³²
2. The descent has been repeated for emphasis.³³
3. Repeating the descent was because each had a different command: the first descent speaks of them as enemies amongst each other; the second descent expresses how whoever obeys God, He will guide them, and whoever disobeys Him, He will become miserable.³⁴ In other words, the first command to descend was given before repentance where the end of this descent was the described enemy. However, the second command to descend was given after repentance and before being expelled from heaven, where with repenting, their lives in this world became accompanied with the guidance of God.³⁵
4. The repeating of descent was to make Adam and Eve aware that the command to descend has not changed. Thus, after repenting, which took place between the two commands to descend, they thought their descent to earth became nullified. Hence, to make them aware of the continuance of the previous command and to help them realize the oath of '*Indeed I am going to set a viceroy on the earth,*' the descent has been repeated.³⁶

2-2. Descent in the Torah

³² Fakhr Razi, *ibid.*, vol. 3, pg. 26.

³³ Zamakhshari, Mahmud, *al-Kashaf*, vol. 1, pg. 129; Qurtubi, Muhammad bin Ahmad, *al-Jami' li-Ahkam al-Qur'an*, vol. 1, pg. 323.

³⁴ Ibn Kathir, *Qasas al-Anbiya*, pg. 33 and Rashid Rida, *al-Manar*, vol. 1, pg. 279.

³⁵ Tabatabaei, Sayyid Muhammad Husayn, *al-Mizan*, vol. 1, pg. 135.

³⁶ Tabari, *Jami' al-Bayan*, vol. 1, pg. 264 and Makarim Shirazi, *Tafsir Nemunah*, *ibid.*, vol. 1, pg. 199.

Before explaining the matter of descent in the Torah, it is interesting to know that in the current Torah, certain punishments have been written for Adam, and Eve, and the serpent.

The serpent's punishment according to the Torah:

*So the LORD God said to the serpent, 'Because you have done this, Cursed are you above all livestock and all wild animals! You will crawl on your belly and you will eat dust all the days of your life. And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.'*³⁷

The following has also come in regards to Eve's punishment:

*To the woman he said, 'I will make your pains in childbearing very severe; with painful labor you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you.'*³⁸

The Torah explains the talk between God and Adam and his punishment as such:

To Adam he said, 'Because you listened to your wife and ate fruit from the tree about which I commanded you, 'You must not eat from it,' 'Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat food from it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. By the sweat

³⁷ Genesis, 3:14 and 15.

³⁸ Genesis, 3:16.

of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return.” Adam named his wife Eve, because she would become the mother of all the living. The LORD God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them. And the LORD God said, “The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil. He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever.”³⁹

Finally, the current Torah says the following about the issue of descent:

So the LORD God banished him from the Garden of Eden to work the ground from which he had been taken. After he drove the man out, he placed on the east side of the Garden of Eden cherubim and a flaming sword flashing back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life.⁴⁰

It is interesting to know that in other Jewish text, the outcome of eating the fruit from the forbidden tree is death:

Death is the result of sinning, and if an individual never commits a sin, naturally he will never die...the angles said the following before the holy essence: O Lord of the universe why did you appoint the punishment of death for Adam? God replied in answer: I gave him an easy task, he violated it. Whenever someone asks of you if Adam the

³⁹ Genesis 3:17-22.

⁴⁰ Genesis 3:23 and 24.

*human did not transgress and eat from the forbidden tree, would he have lived forever and stayed immortal or not, in response to him say that Elijah the prophet never transgressed and he lived forever.*⁴¹

In another text we read:

*God did not make death, and he does not delight in the death of the living. For He created all things that they might exist, and the generative forces of the world are wholesome, and there is no destructive poison in them; and the dominion of Hades is not on earth.*⁴²

According to the Jewish commentary, man fell captive to death through his descent to earth, a death that he would not have succumbed to if he had not sinned. If Adam had not sinned, the entire Torah would have been revealed to him, given that some of rules and regulations had been given to Adam before the Law of Moses, like the observance of Sabbath which was obligatory from his time.⁴³

Conclusion

According to that which has been discussed, it is clear that the descent of Adam and Eve has similarities and differences in the Qur'an and Torah. We can see the similarities through the perspective where pain and suffering is the result of descent. The following lists selected differences and similarities:

⁴¹ Abraham Cohen, *Everyman's Talmud*, p. 92.

⁴² Old Testament Apocrypha, pg. 119.

⁴³ *The Great Islamic Encyclopedia*, vol. 1, pg. 175.

1. The Qur'an: God warns Adam and Eve from Satan's deception and His plan to have them expelled from heaven. However, because of their negligence, Adam and Eve were tempted by Satan.
The Torah does not include any warning from God in regards to the serpent, the whispers of temptation, or deception.
2. The Qur'an includes a record of Satan's animosity towards Adam: after refusing to prostrate and being reprimanded by God, Satan declares Adam and his children to be his enemy.
The Torah includes no such record or history of hatred between the serpent and Adam and Eve.
3. The Torah: Eve was deceived.
The Qur'an: In one instance Adam alone was said to be deceived, and in the chapter *The Elevations*, Adam and Eve were both deceived.
4. The Torah: God orders them not to approach the "fruit tree".
The Qur'an: God order them not to approach the "tree".
5. The Torah: The tree is the tree of knowledge of good and evil.
The Qur'an: From what is deduced from Satan's talk with Adam and Eve, the tree was the tree of immortality.
6. The Torah: The result of eating from the tree's fruit is said to be death.
The Qur'an: The result of eating from the fruit was becoming corrupt and expulsion from heaven.
7. The Torah: After eating the fruit of the tree, Adam and Eve did not die, meaning that which God said in regards to eating from the fruit of the tree did not happen.
The Qur'an: That which God warned took place and they were expelled from heaven.
8. In both the Qur'an and Torah, the result of eating from the tree led to the revealing of Adam and Eve's private parts.

9. In both the Qur'an and Torah Adam and Eve covered themselves with leaves; however, the type of leaves is specified in the Torah – from a fig tree – whereas the type of leaves is unstated in the Qur'an.
10. In both divine books, Adam and Eve descended to earth.

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HUMILITY IN THE CONDUCT OF GREAT SCHOLARS

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TRANSLATED BY MAHBOOBEH MORSHEDIAN

ABSTRACT: Humility is a virtue in which a person does not consider himself superior to others, regards others as better than himself, and is content with his position. Sometimes 'humility' is mistaken for abjectness or meanness, a quality that is rejected in Islam. Verses in the Qur'an and hadith provide criteria for virtuous humility; these criteria distinguish humility from abjectness. In this article, examples of virtuous humility in some contemporary great scholars' conduct have been provided, and praiseworthy humility referred to in the Holy Qur'an and hadiths have been introduced and elaborated on.

Introduction

As said in the Qur'an, the aim of sending prophets to people is to purify and train them.¹ The Prophet spoke of himself as sent down to perfect people's morality. Thus, man's salvation depends on his being purged of vices and enjoying virtues, and one of these virtues is humility. Humility is essential in the growth of man's soul and his elevation to higher spiritual levels. It also guards a person against being trapped by conceit, an

¹ "It is He Who has sent amongst the Unlettered a messenger from among themselves, to rehearse to them His Signs, to purify them, and to instruct them in Scripture and Wisdom," (Jum'a, 2).

abyss in the development of achieving perfection. The lives of great religious scholars indicate that Satan has always failed to inflict scientific conceit or pride on them and to deceive them by suggesting them to boast their knowledge. The lives and conduct of these renowned people set an example for those who seek knowledge and perfection. This can remind them to be humble under any circumstance, thus preventing them from falling into Satan's trap.

The present article provides some examples of humility in the conduct of some prominent religious scholars. It is hoped that it can contribute to dissemination and propagation of humility, albeit a little, through presenting the conduct of these role models.

General Points about Humility

The literal meaning of 'humility' (*tawadu`*) is 'self-effacement' (*tadhallu*) and is the opposite of 'arrogance' (*takabbur*).² A humble person not only does not regard himself as superior to others, but he also considers others better than himself.³ In other words, having humility refers to being content with one's position and indeed one considers himself lower than the position. Hence, humility is different from 'abjectness' which is a disliked quality as mentioned in hadiths.

Given the above discussion, how is 'humility' different from 'abjectness'? In the Qur'an, God refers to some characteristics of His righteous servants in which the criteria for 'humility' can be inferred from. God said in the chapter *al-Furqan*:

² Turayhi, *Majma'ul-Bahrain*, vol. 2, entry "wad" (وضع)

³ Muhammadi Gilani, Muhammad, *Lessons of Islamic Ethics*, p. 356.

*And the servants of the Beneficent God are they who walk on the earth humbly, and when the ignorant address them, they say: "Peace!" And they who spend the night prostrating themselves before their Lord and standing in prayer. And they who say: O our Lord! Turn away from us the punishment of Hell, surely the punishment thereof is a grievous affliction.*⁴

In these verses, God referred to two characteristics of “*the servants of the Beneficent God;*” humility and fearing God. According to God, humble people a) do not walk arrogantly; and b) are not indifferent to the words of the ignorant; rather, they respond to scornful remarks of the ignorant with words void of indecency. In these verses, on the one hand, God demands lenient and humble behaviour of His righteous servants; and on the other, He wants them not to keep silent when facing illogical idle talk. Only does such wise reaction lead to humility that brings man glory.

In addition, Imam Sadiq refers to the criteria for moral humility:

Humility means you are satisfied with sitting in a lowly position in a gathering, say ‘Salam’ to everybody you encounter, do not argue with anybody even though you are right, and do not desire to find fame through your piety.⁵

Considering the above discussion, avoiding self-importance is central to praiseworthy and moral humility, and based on moral principles all acts that are tainted with ostentation is rejected and considered an immoral act.

⁴ *al-Furqan*, 63-65.

⁵ Naraqī, Muhammad Mahdi, *Jami‘-u-Sa‘adat*, vol.2, p.356.

In what follows are some examples of humility in the conduct of the prominent contemporary religious scholars.

Examples of Humility in the Conduct of Great Religious Scholars

1. Grand Ayatullah Borujerdi

About Ayatullah Borujerdi, Ayatullah ‘Abdu-Sahib Langarudi said, “After his class, we used to accompany him [Ayatullah Borujerdi] until he got onto the carriage. One day something strange happened: I suddenly saw the people surrounding him moving backward, and each person was trying to hold on to the person in front of him to prevent themselves from falling backwards. I asked someone, “What’s going on?” and he replied, “Someone bent over to kiss the Ayatullah’s foot, although the Ayatullah was upset with this act, and said:

‘I have not achieved such a high status that I deserved to be kissed on my foot. The Infallibles’ foot must be kissed, not mine! There should be a difference between the Imam and his follower and between the Infallibles and us, fallible people.’

Having said this, he returned home unhappily.”

Likewise, the late religious authority, Ayatullah Fadil Lankarani, said “Whenever we went to Ayatullah Borujerdi, we used to kiss his hand, although he sometimes prevented us from doing so. We always wondered why our master sometimes prevented us from kissing his hand and other times extended it easily. Later, we learnt that when we went to him ourselves, he did not prevent us from kissing his hand, but if he summoned us for a job, he did not allow us to do so.”

Ayatullah Sayyid Mustafa Khansari, a student of Ayatullah Borujerdi, also said, “Once a classmate of mine named Shaikh Ali posed a question in the class and, unconvinced with the Ayatullah’s answer, he rejected it, slightly irritating Ayatullah Borujerdi. After the Maghrib and ‘Isha prayers, the master’s servant came and told me that I was summoned by him. I finished the ‘Isha prayer and went to the Ayatullah. He told me,

I shouldn’t have gotten upset. I have hurt a scholar. I must first go to kiss his hand and ask him to forgive me, and then do Maghrib and ‘Isha prayers.

I told him, ‘He will not come return home in two hours; let me tell him that you will go to him tomorrow.’ The Ayatullah accepted my idea. The next morning, when I was on my way back from the Holy Shrine of Lady Ma’sumah, I saw him waiting for me. When we entered Shaikh Ali’s house, the Ayatullah wanted to kiss his hand, although Shaikh Ali prevented him. In all humbleness, the master told him, ‘Please forgive me; I lost my temper and scolded you.’ Shaikh Ali said in response, ‘You are the chief of Muslims, I take pride in the way you treated me.’ However, Ayatullah Borujerdi twice repeated ‘Please forgive me.’”⁶

2. Allamah Sayyid Muhammad Husayn Tabataba’i

A long-time student of Allamah Tabataba’i wrote about his teacher’s virtues. Allamah was very humble, sincere, and good-tempered. He used to teach serenely, and he would quickly familiarize himself with others and became close to them. He was also a good listener and expressed affection to all. The number of students in his courses – whether large or small –

⁶ Ali Abadi, Muhammad, *The Exemplary Leader*, p. 178.

did not matter to him; sometimes he taught only two or three people. He never interrupted anybody and answered questions without pretension.

In private gatherings, he was usually silent, and only spoke when asked a question. If he did not know the answer, he would clearly and assertively say, “I do not know” to overcome his despotic ego. Whenever he was addressed as “Master” he would say, “I do not like this word. We gather here to explore Islamic teachings through cooperative thinking.”

Ayatullah Ja’far Subhani also said about Allamah, “As a person who was close to him, and I do not remember him saying anything in order to feign knowledge or proposing anything without being asked about.”

Similarly, Hujjat-ul-Islam Musawi Hamadani quoted his master as saying about Allamah Tabataba’i, “I have never seen anybody as void of caprice as he was. Although he is an ocean of knowledge, he used to pray in the last line of the congregational prayer among the travelers behind Ayatullah Milani, the leader of the public prayer.”

Likewise, a scholar of the Qum seminary narrated, “Once I was praising Allamah’s Qur’anic commentary *al-Mizan* in his presence, and Allamah told me, ‘Do not praise me for my book because I may feel pleased and as a result lose my sincerity and intention [to gain proximity to God].’”

Finally, according to Allamah’s student, “One day I bent down to kiss his hand, but he prevented me from doing so by hiding his hand under his cloak, and he blushed while doing so. I told him, “O my master! Hasn’t Imam Ali said, ‘The one who teaches me one word has made me his servant?’ He responded, “Yes, it is a well-known hadith whose content meets of the standards of authority.” I said, “So aren’t we entitled to be blessed by your hands; you who have taught us so much and have made us

your servants many times.” He smiled warmly and said, “We are all servants of God.”⁷

3. Imam Khomeini

The prominent religious authority of the Shi‘a world, Imam Khomeini, is a prime example of honourable humility. Despite his high status, vast knowledge, and greatness, he considered himself a religious student who only fulfilled his religious duty. He was always humble before religious scholars and authorities and never failed to express his devotion to them.

When he was in exile in Iraq, Imam Khomeini proudly and happily spoke of his accompanying the scholars of Najaf and visiting the holy shrines of the Imams there. He wrote in a telegraph:

My residence in Iraq is a great salvation in terms of both visiting the holy shrines of the Imams and being in the presence of the great religious authorities and Islamic scholars of seminaries in Najaf, Karbala, and other religious cities in Iraq.

His close relative said, “When he was about to fly to Paris, his life was threatened and he was faced with an uncertain future. However, he considered facing these dangers unimportant compared to the sacrifices and martyrdom of the Iranians, saying in the Baghdad airport:

I will continue going from one country to another [until I am allowed in a country]; do not fear anything and pursue your objectives. Iranians love martyrdom very much, and I am truly embarrassed [when I think of their self-sacrifice].

⁷ Luqmani, Ahmad, Allamah Tabataba’i: The Scale of Knowledge. p. 54.

Although he – as the leader of Islamic Revolution of Iran – played the main role in its victory, he constantly emphasized the role of people in its victory. He never neglected different social classes, particularly the oppressed and the lower class, and constantly asked the officials to consider people as their masters and not denying them any service. In a letter to members of the Iranian Parliament in February of 1981 AD, he wrote: “Those people who are being killed on the frontiers, war-stricken, displaced and living in tents are servants of God. They are superior to us; why do not we care about them?”

When Imam Khomeini, who spent his entire life offering various services to Islam and achieving sublime purposes, met the self-sacrificing young people who were heading towards the front lines, in his humbleness told them, “I kiss your hands above which are the hands of God, and I take pride in this kiss.” Likewise, when he was informed of the martyrdom of a thirteen-year-old boy who sacrificed his life courageously for Islam and the Islamic revolution of Iran, he felt so humble due to this great self-sacrifice that he said, “My leader is this thirteen-year-old boy.”⁸

4. Grand Ayatullah Khu’i

As for the great humility of Ayatullah Khu’i, Ayatullah Ja’far Subhani said:

Our master used to highly revere the religious scholars. I remember when Ayatullah Muhsin Hakim taught a course in a mosque after Ayatullah Khu’i’s class there. Once after class, Ayatullah Khu’i was still in the instructor’s place due to students’ discussion and questions when Ayatullah Hakim suddenly entered the

⁸ Mukhtari, Rida, *The Features of the Sages*, p.285-287.

mosque. Seeing him, Ayatullah Khu'i nervously picked up his shoes and books, stood up and apologized.

On different incidents, our master used to mention the names of his brilliant students in class, praising them. Also, whenever a religious scholar gave him a valuable writing as a gift, he would write something in praise of it.

In both his youth and old age when he was the religious authority of the Shi'a world, he humbly lived the simple life of a religious student. Whenever he entered a gathering, he said "Salam" loud and clear to all those present. He was never heard saying anything negative. Among the other virtues of this impeccable man are his assistance to the destitute, peaceful treatment of his opponents, kindness to children, forgiveness, and broadmindedness.⁹

5. Ayatullah Khamenei

A relative of Ayatullah Gharawian spoke of some memories of his visit with Ayatullah Khamenei. These memories reveal the humility and tactfulness of the Iranian Leader. An excerpt of them reads as follows:

On Monday August 19th 1995 AD, in Mashhad I went to visit the Iranian Supreme Leader along with Ayatullah Gharawian. After Ayatullah Khamenei entered the room and sat down, he greeted and welcomed all people in the room – about thirty – one by one, while paying special attention to the elderly when he greeted them. There was also a frail elderly man named Shaikh Ali Akbar, who

⁹ A Group of Hawzah Researchers, *The Flower Garden of the Righteous*, pp.236-237.

used to recite *marthiya*¹⁰ in Sarshur Bazaar and lived near the Supreme Leader's house. Ayatullah Khamenei devoted great attention to him.¹¹

6. Ayatullah Jawadi Amuli

According to a student of his,

“One day we performed Thuhr and ‘Asr public prayers led by Ayatullah Jawadi Amuli in Sa’adat Seminary. After Thuhr prayer, I asked him if my family and I could consult with him, and he unhesitatingly set a time and respectfully told us to meet him the next morning at ten o’clock.

The next morning, we went to him at the set time. He opened the door himself and led us to the living room. It was a simple and small, but a quiet and peaceful house which was a sign of his internal purity. Ayatullah Jawadi Amuli sat at the door. Having gained his permission, I started speaking; after thanking him, I asked him, ‘What is the secret of your success?’ Having bent his head silently for some time, he answered, ‘I have not succeeded; however, the secret of others’ success was their love for God and His friends.’ He also added, ‘The more knowledgeable we are, the more grateful we should be. If we consider ourselves superior to others, we in fact amass ignorance. When our humility increases proportional to our increased knowledge, the very knowledge has manifested.’”¹²

7. Ayatullah Misbah Yazdi

¹⁰ An elegiac poem to commemorate the martyrdom or suffering of the Shi’a Imams

¹¹ Muhsin Gharawian, *In the Presence of the Great People*, p. 179.

¹² *ibid*, p.30.

A student of Ayatullah Misbah Yazdi, Ayatullah Gharawian, said, “One day in the course on logic taught by him, Ayatullah Misbah read a sentence from the book and said, ‘Seemingly the word «يؤمن» (meaning ‘believes’) should be «لا يؤمن» (meaning does not believe); otherwise, I cannot define the sentence.’

After the class, he went to his room, and I pondered on the sentence more carefully. It occurred to me that the sentence is meaningful with «يؤمن» in it. After some moments, I went to him and shared my idea. He told me that he would rethink the sentence because my interpretation of the sentence would be correct. I was impressed by his modesty and considering my interpretation possible. The next morning when he came to class, after saying ‘In the name of God, the Beneficent, the Merciful’, he said:

Before starting the new lesson, I must say that yesterday I changed a word in the book and said that I could not define the sentence as written in it. However, one of students did me a favour and defined the sentence for me with that word. I pondered on it and found out that he was right, so today I correct myself.¹³

8. Ayatullah Hasan Zadeh Amuli

Ayatullah Hasan Zadeh Amuli is well-known for his two distinguishing characteristics: being humble and leading a simple life. In 1966 and 1967 when he taught some courses in Qum, he left his family in his hometown due to financial problems, and in a simple small room in Qum, he carried

¹³ *ibid*, p.121.

out his scholarly work. In this very room, he put the diacritics on the text of the book *Usul al-Kafi* and wrote many other books. He is still humble and lives a simple life, while kindly and sincerely receiving people and listening to their concerns.

Ayatullah Salehi Mazandarani said in this regard, "I have visited many great people and leading figures. However, I have never seen anybody as humble as him, leading a simple life."¹⁴

Ayatullah Hasan Zadeh Amuli places great importance on respecting the instructors and being humble before them, pointing out in this regard:

I used to greatly venerate my masters and instructors and attempt not to lean on the wall and not to sit cross-legged in their presence. I was also careful not to repeat my words a lot. I also did not raise objections lest I might upset my instructors. Once when I was in the presence of Ayatullah Qumshe'i, I bent down to kiss his heel. He told me, 'Why have you done so?' I answered, 'I do not deserve to kiss your hand; I take pride in kissing your heel, why shouldn't I?'

9. Allamah Muhammad Taqi Ja'fari

Ayatullah Sayyid Rida Burqe'i, a founder of the Office of Dissemination of Islamic Culture related:

After publication of some parts of the Commentary on *Nahj-ul-Balaghah* by Allamah Ja'fari, one day I went to the Office. A writer came in and started criticizing Allamah

¹⁴ The Flower Garden of the Righteous, vol.3, p. 535.

Ja'fari angrily, saying, 'Who is this man? What kind of commentary is this? These are absurd ideas!' Suddenly, Allamah Ja'fari came in. The belligerent writer did not recognize him, and I knew about Allamah Ja'fari's self-control, piety, and good temper. I told Allamah Ja'fari, 'He is talking about the one who translated and commented on *Nahj-ul-Balaghah*.' Allamah Ja'fari listened to him patiently and carefully. He found no constructive criticism in his words; all that was said was 'absurd ideas' and 'nonsense'. Then he started laughing out of surprise. When that writer finished insulting, I turned to him, pointed to Allamah Ja'fari and told him, 'This is Mr. Ja'fari, the author of this book.' Blushed and ashamed of his behaviour, he immediately turned his face away from Allamah Ja'fari and rushed out of room without saying anything.¹⁵

Conclusion

The first step towards having virtues and purifying one's self is to know virtues and distinguish them from vices. Until one does not have the correct concept of virtues, he cannot take a step to possess them, and he may even tread a path which leads to other objectives. This is also the case with humility. Having an improper understanding of humility might make one err in acting upon it. In addition, inattention to real humility, which is rooted in modesty, may lead to pretension and mislead man. In order to identify acceptable instances of humility, it is worthwhile to refer to the conduct of prominent religious scholars and humble people.

¹⁵ *ibid*, p.520.

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THE HISTORY OF THE ISLAMIC SEMINARIES OF QUM, PART I

RASOUL IMANI KHOSHKU

TRANSLATED BY MOHAMMAD JAVAD SHOMALI

ABSTRACT: The preceding articles in this series explored the historical origins of important religious seminaries in the Shi'a world given its importance in promoting the instructions of the Qur'an and the Ahlul Bayt, and its role in engendering a unique culture in the scientific, social, and political spheres. The seminaries created knowledgeable and pious Shi'a scholars who pursued *ijtihad* with the use of the Qur'an, sunnah, and reason to respond to the needs of the Muslim community. The previous part focused on the Islamic Seminaries of Jabal Aamel, Isfahan, and Mashhad. This article delves into the history of the Islamic seminaries of Qum. Using Islamic traditions and historical records, the significance of Qum according to the Ahlul Bayt will be stated, along with its link to Lady Ma'sumah's arrival to the city and its impact on the future of the seminaries' success.

Imam Ali said, "May God bestow His salutations on the people of Qum. They are the people of ruku' (bowing before God), sajdah (prostrating to God), salah (daily prayers) and fasting. They are wise jurist scholars. They are the religious who love the family of the Prophet, and they are the

people of proper worship. May God grant them His mercy, salutations, and blessings.”¹

History of Qum

Located 145 kilometres south of Tehran in the middle of the highway from Tehran to Isfahan, the holy city of Qum is one of the most important cities in the Islamic world. There have been many discussions regarding the history of Qum and its inception. Some historians believe that Qum had become a holy city given its many fire temples after being reformed religiously and architecturally by a ruler named Qubad during the Sassanid Era.² Other historians believe Qum was made after Islam’s dominance over Iran and from its beginning its entire population were Shi’a.³

In the year 23 AH, the last year of the life of Umar ibn Khattab, the second Muslim Caliph, Qum was conquered by the Muslims. The commander of the Muslim army in this defeat was Abu Musa Ash’ari who, having conquered Ahwaz, now had his eyes on Qum.⁴

The Bani Asad Arabs were among the first groups of Arabs to live in Jamkaran, Qum.⁵ After the advent of Islam, many of the fire temples were demolished and mosques were built in their stead, one of them being the ‘Atiq Mosque.⁶ Only a fire temple, *Mozdjan*, remained until the end of the

¹ Majlesi, Muhammad Baqir, *Bihar al-Anwar*, Volume 57, Page 217

² Qummi, Hasan ibn Muhammad, *Tarikh-e-Qum*, page 24

³ Al-Hamawy, Yaqut, *Mu’jam ul-Buldan*, volume 5, page 396

⁴ Qummi, Hasan ibn Muhammad, *Tarikh-e-Qum*, page 295; Ahmad ibn Yahya Balazary, *Futuh ul-Buldan*, page 304, 305

⁵ Ibid. page 38

⁶ Ibid. page 37

third century as it was located in a mountainous region and because many Maguses lived in the route that led to it.⁷ According to some historians, the first mosque was built in the village of Jamkaran.⁸ Some scholars believe the history of the Shi'a in Qum began after the 'Ash'arites moved to Qum in 83 AH. Abd ul-Rahman ibn Muhammad ibn Ash'as was appointed by Hajjaj ibn Yusuf as the governor of Sajestan. He then rebelled against Hajjaj but was defeated and escaped. Among the companions of Abd ul-Rahman there were seven children of Sa'd ibn Malik Ash'ary who were from the Tabe'in of Iraq. They came to Qum and made major efforts in spreading Shi'a culture. Abdullah ibn Sad Ashlar and his son, Musa, played a key role in these efforts.⁹

This happened during the Imamate of the last Imams and had a great impact on spread of Shi'as in Qum to the extent that, based on the narration of some scholars, at the time of Imam Hadi, Qum had become the most important center for the gatherings of the Shi'as in Iran. It is narrated that Muhammad ibn Dawud Qummi used to give the news regarding Qum to Imam Hadi.¹⁰ Imam Hadi had said that the people of Qum were "forgiven by God" because they had visited the shrine of his grandfather, Imam Rida.¹¹

Qum in the hadiths

⁷ Ibid. page 89

⁸ Ibid. page 38

⁹ Al-Hamawy, Yaqut, *Mu'jam ul-Buldan*, volume 4, page 397-398; Sam'any, Abdul Karim ibn Muhammad, *al-Ansab*, volume 10, page 485

¹⁰ Ja'farian, Rasul, *Hayat-e-Fekri wa Siasy-e-emaman-e-shii*, page 530 and 531

¹¹ Shaykh Saduq, *'Uyun Akhbar ur-Reza*, volume 2, page 260

Qum and its people have been praised in many hadiths; as when Imam Ali was asked what city is the safest place to be during wars and seditions, the Imam mentioned Qum. He also stated that the best of people in terms of lineage come from Qum, and it is the city in which Gabriel journeyed to.¹²

In this regard, Imam Sadiq said, “Calamities are repelled from the people of Qum, and they are [God’s] proof (*hujjah*) over other people.”¹³ The sixth Imam also said, “The soil of Qum is sacred, and its people are with us and we are with them.”¹⁴

In Shi’a hadiths, Qum is referred to by expressions such as “The small Kufa”, “The relying place of Qaim¹⁵ Aale Muhammad,”¹⁶ “The place of awaiting of Aale Muhammad,” “The place of safety and comfort for believers,” “A piece of the Bayt al Muqaddas,” “The nest of Aale Muhammad” and “The shelter of the Fatemiyyun.”¹⁷

Once, a group of people from the city of Rey gathered around Imam Sadiq in Medina. When they told the Imam they were from Rey, the Imam said, ‘Greetings to our brothers from Qum.’ They repeated that they are from Rey yet the Imam said the same again and this happened for a couple of times. Then the Imam said:

إن لله حرما وهو مكة وإن للرسول حرما وهو المدينة، وإن لأميرالمؤمنين
حرما وهو الكوفة، وإن لنا حرما وهو بلدة قم

¹² Hamedany, Ahmad ibn Muhammad, *al-Buldan*, page 531

¹³ Majlesi, Muhammad Baqir, *Bihar al-Anwar*, Volume 57, Page 262

¹⁴ Ibid. Volume 57, Page 218

¹⁵ One of the titles of Imam Mahdi meaning “He who arises”

¹⁶ The household of the prophet

¹⁷ Ibid. Volume 57, Page 211-228

Truly for God there is a sanctuary and that is Mecca; and for the messenger there is a sanctuary and that is Medina; and for the Commander of the Faithful (Imam Ali) there is a sanctuary and that is Kufa; and, truly, there is a sanctuary for us and that is the land of Qum.¹⁸

In another hadith, Imam Sadiq said:

The soil of Qum is sacred. Its people are with us and we are with them. As long as they do not betray [us], anyone who has an evil intention towards them will be quickly punished and if they happen to betray [us], God will make oppressing rules dominant over them. However, they are the helpers of our Qa'im (Imam Mahdi) and the seekers of our right.¹⁹

Then Imam raised his head looking at the sky and said:

الهم اعصمهم من كل فتنه

Oh God, protect them from any tribulation.²⁰

Imam Rida, regarding Qum, said:

When calamity and sedition become widespread, go to Qum and its surrounding areas; for Qum is kept immune from calamities.²¹

The arrival of Lady Ma'sumah to Qum

¹⁸ Ibid. Volume 57, Page 216

¹⁹ Majlesi, Muhammad Baqir, *Bihar al-Anwar*, Volume 57, Page 218 and 219

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid. Volume 57, Page 218 and 214

Due to numerous hadiths about Qum's high status, even before Lady Ma'sumah's arrival in Qum many descendants of the Shi'a Imams – including the descendants of Imam Husayn, Imam Hasan, and Imam Kazim – had moved to Qum.²² As a result, there are over four hundred tombs belonging to the descendants of the Shi'a Imams in Qum today. Imam Rida also stopped at Qum during his journey to Khurasan. The house where he resided is now an Islamic seminary.²³

The arrival of Lady Ma'sumah, the daughter of Imam Kazim, marked the beginning of a new era in the history of Qum. After Lady Fatimah, the daughter of the Prophet, and Lady Zaynab, the respected daughter of Imam Ali, Lady Ma'sumah holds a special status among all women. It was not long after Imam Rida's migration from Medina to Khurasan in 200 AH due to Mamun's order that Lady Ma'sumah decided to visit her brother. According to some historians, she left Medina in 201 AH, and when her caravan reached Saaveh they changed their direction towards Qum due to her illness. Being received by Musa ibn Khazraj, they arrived in Qum, and after seventeen days, she passed away.²⁴ Her place of worship during this short period, *Bayt al-Noor (The House of Light)* is now a place of visit in Qum.

The Shi'a Imams spoke about Lady Ma'sumah's high rank and had informed their followers of her arrival in Qum beforehand. Imam Sadiq had said:

²² Qummi, Hasan ibn Muhammad, *Tarikh-e Qum*, Page 207-240

²³ Ibn Tawus, Sayyed Abdul Karim, Farhat ul-Guza, Page 105

²⁴ Qummi, Hasan ibn Muhammad, *Tarikh-e Qum*, Page 213

الا و إن قم، الكوفه الصغيره الا إن للجنه ثمانيه ابواب ثلاثه منها الى قم تقبضنيها
امراه من ولدى اسمها فاطمه بنت موسى و تدخل بشفاعتها شيعتى الجنه
باجمعهم

Be aware that Qum is the small Kufa. Be aware that heaven has eight gates, three of which open to Qum. A lady from my descendants whose name is Fatima, the daughter of Musa, will be buried there and it is through her intercession that all my Shi'as will enter heaven.²⁵

It can be understood from this hadith that, like Kufa, Qum is the centre for spread of the knowledge of the household of the Prophet, while three of the eight gates of heaven open towards Qum. These three gates may refer to the three valuable privileges of Qum which are:

1. The shrine of Lady Ma'sumah in Qum and its remarkable influence of guiding people towards heaven;
2. The Islamic seminaries of Qum which have guided people for centuries and directed them towards heaven;
3. The holy mosque of Jamkaran and the central position of Qum after Mecca and Kufa as the foothold of Imam Mahdi.

In some hadiths the reward given for visiting the shrine of Lady Ma'sumah is said to be so much to the extent that the visitors of her holy shrine are promised heaven: Imam Rida said, "Heaven is for whomever who visits Fatimah, the daughter of Musa ibn Ja'far, while acknowledging her rights."²⁶

²⁵ Majlesi, Muhammad Baqir, *Bihar al-Anwar*, Volume 57, Page 228

²⁶ Ibid. Volume 48 ,Page 317

Imam Jawad, the son of Imam Rida, said: “Whoever visits my aunt in Qum will be granted [the pass to] heaven.”²⁷

Considering what has been mentioned thus far, the history of the Shi’a and Shi’a culture in Qum goes back years before Lady Ma’suma’s arrival; however, since her arrival in Qum and her burial there, Qum attracted Shi’as from all other cities. The scholars who visited her would sometimes prolong their stay; hence, a strong scholarly community consisting of devotees of the Shi’a school of thought was formed in Qum.

The history of the Islamic seminaries of Qum

Ayatullah Ha’eri Yazdi is generally considered as the founder of the Islamic seminaries of Qum, although these holy seminaries may have an older history. Through scrutinizing the hadiths it becomes clear that the Imams had informed people of great and glorious seminaries in Qum: “Soon Kufa will become empty of believers and, like a snake hiding in its shelter, knowledge will be retracted. And then it will appear in a city called Qum, and it will become the centre of knowledge and virtue.”²⁸

The historical eras of the Qum seminaries are divided as follows:

-The First Era

The first era of the Islamic seminaries of Qum goes back to the lifetime of the Shi’a Imams. The students of the Imams, with their knowledge and ability to propagate the Islam, chose Qum as the foothold of the Shi’a and were involved in spreading the teachings of the Ahlul Bayt. This period

²⁷ Ibid. Volume 48, Page 316

²⁸ Ibid. Volume 57, Page 213

coincided with the arrival of Ash'arites in the second half of the first century and the first half of the second century during the lifetime of Imam Sadiq. It was at that time that the Ash'arites made remarkable efforts to spread Shi'a culture. According to some hadiths it was from that period on that the scholars in Qum had interactions with the Shi'a scholars in Medina and received the attention from the Imams. For instance, it is narrated that once Umran ibn Abdullah Qummi went to visit Imam Sadiq. The Imam first received him warmly in front of the others and then quietly told him something. When he left the session the people asked the Imam about him and Imam replied, "He is the noble one in the group of nobles."²⁹

Isa ibn Abdullah Qummi, the brother of Umran ibn Abdullah, was also a noble. Imam Sadiq said about him, "He is one of us, alive or departed."³⁰

In the second half of the second and third century, Qum was the centre for compiling the Shi'a Imams' hadiths. Meanwhile, Kufa was no longer the first Shi'a base. Ahmad ibn Muhammad ibn Isa Qummi Ash'ari, a companion of Imam Sadiq, is one of the elites of that period.³¹ He was one of the sons of Abdullah ibn Sa'd ibn Amer who had entered Qum along with his brothers.³² It was in the same period that narrators of hadiths (*muhaddith*) who were companions of Imam Jawad and Imam Hadi, namely Husayn ibn Saeed Ahwazi and his brother moved, first to Ahwaz,

²⁹ Kashy, Muhammad ibn Umar, *Rijal-e Kashy*, page 333

³⁰ Ibid. page 332

³¹ Shaykh Tusy, *Rijal-e Tusy*, Page 373

³² Alame Hely, Hasan ibn Yusuf, *Izah ul-Ishtibah*, Page 99 and 100

and then to Qum. Among the books they have written, one of Saeed's works, *Al-Zuhd*, is available to us today.³³

Some of the great scholars of this era are: Adam ibn Abdullah Qummi, Ibrahim ibn Muhammad Ash'ari, Ibrahim ibn Hashim Qummi, Ahmad ibn Ishaq ibn Abdullah Ash'ari, Ismaeel ibn Sa'd Ash'ari, Husayn ibn Aban, and Husayn ibn Malik Qummi.³⁴

During this period, the main fields of knowledge that were common in the Islamic seminaries of Qum were jurisprudence and ethics, both communicated using the hadiths of the Ahlul Bayt.

-The Second Era

This period includes the Minor Occultation and continues after that until the sixth century. During this period, the Islamic seminaries of Qum were very superior to other Shi'a seminaries in terms of quality and quantity; the narrators in Qum are said to have been two hundred thousand and important figures like Ahmad ibn Isa Ash'ari, Muhammad ibn Isa Ash'ari Qummi, Abdul Aziz ibn Muhtadi Qummi, Ali ibn Husayn ibn Babuyeh Qummi, Ibn Waleed Qummi, Muhammad ibn Hasan Furukh us-Saffar, Ibrahim ibn Hashim Qummi and Shaykh Saduq were among the scholars.

In the field of Hadith, the scholars of Qum would not trust all narrators; and narrators such as Ahmad ibn Muhammad ibn Khalid Barqi were expelled from Qum for narrating weak hadiths.³⁵ Qum reached its peak of

³³ Musawi Khouyi, Sayyed Abulqasim, Mu'jam Rijal il-Hadith, Volume 6, Page 266

³⁴ Sayyed Kabayery, Sayyed Alireza, *Howze Haya Elmiyye Shi'e Dar Gostare-ye Jahan*, page 365

³⁵ Ahmad ibn Muhammad ibn Khalid Barqi who was originally from Kufa was a trusted narrator himself but he used to narrate from unreliable narrators. He wrote a lot of books the most well-known of which is *Al-Mahasin*. Barqi was expelled from Qum by Ahmad ibn 'Isa Ash'ary because

magnitude and glory in the third and the fourth century. During this period the hadith-oriented school was the dominant school in Qum. The presence of narrators, who were influenced by the Islamic seminaries of Qum in the city of Rey, helped the Islamic Seminaries of Qum continue to exist in Rey as well. Great scholars in the field of hadith, such as Kulayni, were educated in the seminaries of both Qum and Rey.³⁶

An important point about the available hadith collections from the fourth century is that their authors have cited only the hadiths they believed to be authentic and representing the Shi'a faith. For example, Shaykh Kulayni clearly explains in the introduction of *Al-Kafi* that he compiled this book after being requested by someone who found it difficult to identify authentic hadiths in order to represent the authentic hadiths.

Al-Mahasin by Ahmad ibn Muhammad ibn Khalid al-Barqi and *Basair ud-Darajat* by Muhammad ibn Hasan ibn Saffar Qummi, the famous Shi'a scholar in the field of hadith and also the companion of Imam Askari are some books of hadith in the third century available to us today.

It is during this era and in the Islamic seminaries of Qum that the four hundred principles of hadiths of Shi'a Imams³⁷ remaining from the

he would narrate from unreliable narrators. However, after some time he was returned to Qum. He died in the year 275 AH. Refer to: Najjashy, Ahmad ibn Ali, *Rijal al-Najjashy*, page 76 and 77 and Musawy Khouyi, Sayyed Abulqasim, Mu'jam Rijal il-Hadith, Volume 3, Page 49-61

³⁶ For more information refer to: Jabbari, Muhammad Reza, *Maktab-e Hadithi-ye Qum*, Page 107-115 and Muaddab, Sayyed Reza, *Tarikh-e Hadith*, Page 119 and 120 and Ma'aref, Majid, *Tarikh-e Umumi-e Hadith*, page 328

³⁷ Principles of jurisprudence (usul) are the texts which were compiled by the early Shi'a scholars. Most of the authors of these texts were those who had heard the hadith from one of the Imams, in particular, from Imam Baqir and Imam Sadiq, writing them down in notebooks. Out of these texts compiled the popular ones were four-hundred in number by different authors.

companions of the Imams were classified in chapters by scholars of this field such as Kulayni and Shaykh Saduq. It is for this reason that the fourth century is considered as the period of completing of compilations of Shi'a hadiths. Furthermore, scholars of hadith also compiled books on hadiths of specific subjects: Ibn Babuyeh Qummi wrote *Al-Imamah wal-Tabsarah Min al-Hayrah* to remove the confusion of some Shi'as regarding the Imamate of Imam Mahdi. Likewise, Muhammad ibn Ibrahim Nu'mani compiled *Al-Ghaybah* on Imam Mahdi and Ali ibn Muhammad Khazzaz Qummi compiled *Kifayat al-Athar* to prove the Imamate of all Shi'a Imams.

Shaykh Saduq's treasured books written in this period are the most prominent Shi'a scholarly resources. Having access to the main hadith sources that remained from the companions of the Imams, and writing about three hundred books, Shaykh Saduq managed to compile and formulate ideologies of Islam using his creativity. Such efforts demonstrate the dynamic nature of this field and its scholars.

Parallel to the development of the seminaries of Qum in the field of hadith, the theologians of the school of Baghdad also entered the field of hadith. The book *Amali*³⁸ by the students of Shaykh Mufid, Sayyed Murtadha, and Shaykh Tusi, and compilations such as *Tahzib* and *Istibsar* by Shaykh Tusi reveals the passion these scholars had for compiling hadiths. The key and essential difference between the seminaries of Qum and Baghdad is the rational attitude of the scholars of the school of Baghdad whom, unlike the scholars of Qum, gave importance to reason in

³⁸ The books by the name of *Amali*, as it can be understood from its name, are notes taken by the students in the courses.

their study of hadiths. This difference between the two schools led to theological disputes in different areas as the books *Tashih ul-I'tighad* and *Risalat fi Sahv un-Nabi* were written to study and reject some of Shaykh Saduq's views.³⁹

In the fourth century, the seminaries of Rey flourished and this overshadowed the seminaries of Qum, since with the presence of figures like Shaykh Saduq in Rey, students of Islamic studies preferred Rey over Qum. However, hadith scholars had the tendency not to stay in a specific city for long, and by the means of their travels, in addition to spreading the hadiths of the Infallibles, they would learn hadiths from the teachers of other areas as well. Thus, the scholars of Qum and Rey had cultural interactions and this may be the reason why some scholars of this period are known by some historians of both Qum and Rey as the scholar of their own city.

Sa'd-e Salt, Athir al-Mulk, Sayyed Saeed 'Izzuddin Murtadha, Shamsuddin Murtadha, and Zahiruddin Abdul Aziz are the names of some of the schools in the Islamic seminaries of Qum during that period.⁴⁰

Therefore, the second period of the seminaries of Qum was formed by a large group of scholars in the field of hadith and jurisprudence; these scholars were students in the first period and the teachers of the scholars of the fifth century.

³⁹ Refer to: Jabbari, Muhammad Reza, *Maktab-e Hadithi Qum*, page 434 – 438 and Muaddab, Sayyed Reza, *Tarikh-e Hadith*, Page 122 and 123

⁴⁰ Sayyed Kabavery, Sayyed Alireza, *Howze Haya Elmiyye Shi'e Dar Gostare-ye Jahan*, page 370

-The Third Era

The period starting with the sixth century up until the ninth century is the third era of the seminaries of Qum. By and large, the Islamic seminaries of Qum experienced difficulties during this period. The inhabitants of Qum were massacred several times and the city was turned into ruins. However, for some time Qum was the capital of the Teymurid Dynasty. Of the numerous instances of genocide and demolition observed throughout the history of Qum, the Mongol's attack was the most devastating one, lasting until the Teymurid Dynasty. Perhaps the foundation of the Razawiyah School is the only positive development during this period.

Yet, Shaykh Agha Bozorg Tehrani has named more than thirty of the scholars of the sixth century in his book, *Tabaqat-e A'lam al-Shi'a*. This number decreased to three in the seventh century.⁴¹ Thus, the scientific recession of the seminaries of Qum started in the sixth century and it grew during the seventh and the eighth centuries due to the presence of the ruinous Mongol and Timurid dynasties. In the ninth century, the scholars of Qum took shrewd measures in confronting the cultural recession and strengthening the scholarly foundations of the seminaries.

Qutb al-Din Rawandi (573 AH) was among the great scholars in jurisprudence and hadith who lived in this period and was buried in Qum. He lived in Qum part of his life and had a great impact on protecting the seminaries of Qum and upgrading their academic level by training students. Some of his works during this period are: *Asbab al-Nuzul*, *Fiqh*

⁴¹ Agha Bozorg-e Tehrani, Muhammad Hasan, *Tabaghat-e A'lam-e Shi'a*, Volume 2, Page 225 and 226 and Volume 3, Page 136

al-Qur'an, Jawahir al-Kalam, Sihat-u Ahadith-i Ashabina, and al-Niyah fi Jami' al-'Ibadat.

In addition to Qutb al-Din Rawandi, Shaykh Muhammad ibn Hasan Tusi, the father of Khaje Nasir ud-Din Tusi, was another scholar who lived in Qum during this period. The hadiths he narrated were quoted by his son, Khaje Nasir.⁴²

-The Fourth Era

This era starts in the tenth century and continues until the thirteenth century coinciding with the Safavid, Afghan, Afsharid, Zand, and Qajar dynasties. It is during this period that intellectual sciences became part of the common sciences taught in the seminaries of Qum.

The first part of this period coincides with the Safavid dynasty. The Safavid kings had a strong interest in knowledge and scholars; hence, great scholars such as Allamah Majlisi and others were paid special attention by the rulers, generally titled "Shaykh ul-Islam."⁴³

Such attention paid to the scholars in this period led to the migration of many Shi'a scholars of Jabal Aamel in Lebanon to Iran and this caused the spread of the intellectual approach in Shi'a jurisprudence as opposed to the Akhbari⁴⁴ attitude. During this era, the Islamic seminaries of Isfahan, supported by the Safavid rulers, became the most active seminary in the Shi'a world. Establishing new Shi'a schools in Isfahan and other cities of

⁴² Agha Bozorg-e Tehrani, Muhammad Hasan, *Tabaghat-e A'lam-e Shi'a*, Volume 3, Page 371 - 373

⁴³ "Shaykh ul-Islam" is a title of superior authority in the issues of Islam given to those scholars who acquired deep knowledge of Islam.

⁴⁴ Akhbariyun believe in a very literal understanding of the sources leaving little or no room for rational thought and interpretation..

Iran such as Qum, Shiraz, Qazwin, and Mashhad, religious sciences and Shi'a teachings including rational sciences such as philosophy and theology began to progress.

Meanwhile, the Akhbari approach was also formed, and this put strong emphasis on understanding the literal meaning of hadiths and not tolerating any rational contemplation. When this attitude developed in the seminaries of Isfahan, not only did the scholars who were against this view leave the seminaries, but some scholars of the intellectual sciences were also expelled from this region. The famous philosopher Sadr al-Din Shirazi known as Mulla Sadra was among them.

The migration of Mulla Sadra who was originally from Shiraz, from Isfahan to Qum led to the recession of rational sciences in the seminaries of Isfahan, but it led to their flourishing in the seminaries of Qum. Through training students and by the means of his writings, he paved the way for the Usuli⁴⁵ attitude in the seminaries even though before this period the seminaries trained more Shi'a muhaddiths⁴⁶ than scholars of rational sciences.

Sadr al-Muta'allehin Muhammad ibn Ibrahim Shirazi (979 - 1050 AH) was one Shi'a philosopher and theologian who lived in this period. His stay in the seminaries of Qum was contemporary to his seclusion, when he involved himself in compiling and writing books, training students, and contemplating on sciences rather than socializing.

⁴⁵ Usuli attitude is on the other side of the spectrum in contrast to the Akhbari attitude and it believes in the usage of reasoning in having a sound understanding of the hadiths.

⁴⁶ A scholar in the field of hadith who believe hadiths should be narrated and taken literally and rational interpretation is not needed.

As it was mentioned, in this period, the presence of theosophists led to the formation of the science of the principles of jurisprudence (*usul ul-fiqh*). This which was in contrast with the Akhbari attitude, firstly claimed that the *thahir*⁴⁷ sentences of the Qur'an can be used without using the words of the Prophet and his successors, and secondly that using reason in analyse of the hadiths to understand the rulings is allowed, and is indeed necessary.

Philosophers such as Mulla Sadra paved the way for free thinking in the seminaries of Qum. Hence, Mirza Qummi (1151 – 1231 AH) after studying jurisprudence and its principles in Najaf and Karbala with great teachers such as Wahid Behbahani, decided to stay in Qum; as a result, he expanded the domain of *usul* to Qum. That was when having returned from Iraq, Mirza Qummi did not find the level of studies in the seminaries of Shiraz and Isfahan suitable for himself and thus chose the seminaries of Qum. There, he familiarized the students who loved the teachings of the Ahlul Bayt familiar with Shi'a jurisprudence and the foundations of *ijtihad*⁴⁸ in Shi'ism. He thus became the religious authority for the Shi'as of his time. In writing and teaching the principles of *ijtihad*, he became known as "Muhaqqiq Qummi" ("The Researcher of Qum). The book *Al-Qawanin al-Muhkamah fi 'Ilm il-Usul* is one of his most renowned works; until recent years it was still being taught in the seminaries. Due to his great efforts in launching an *usul*-oriented movement, he is known as the reviver of the science of *usul*. He trained students such as Sayyed Muhammad Baqir Hujjat ul-Islam, Hajj Muhammad Ibrahim Kalbasi,

⁴⁷ Those sentences, the meaning of which is obvious or clear, without any assistance from the context (*qarinah*) although there is a slight possibility of another meaning.

⁴⁸ The act of getting the rulings of Islam from the sources, Qur'an and hadiths

Agha Muhammad Ali Hezar Jaribi, Agha Ahmad Kermanshahi, Sayyed Muhammad Mahdi Khansari, Sayyed Ali Khansari, Mirza Abu-Talib Qummi, Hajj Mulla Asadullah Borujerdi, and Hajj Mulla Muhammad Kazzazi. By doing so he managed to expand the usul-oriented attitude from Qum to the seminaries of Isfahan, Qumshah, and Kermanshah. Through his innovations he triggered a dramatic evolution in the seminaries of Qum and after years of silence and recession he initiated the golden age of ijtihad.

Another newfound science meticulously taught and studied in the seminaries of Qum was the science of kalam or *Usul al-Din*; in other words, theology with a rational and philosophical method. Mulla Sadra himself had been engaged in theological subjects with a philosophical approach in his book *Al-Asfaar al-'Aqliyyah al-Arbi'ah*; however, his son-in-law, Mulla Abdurrazzaq Lahiji (1072 AH) known as Fayyaz, took more serious steps in developing this science. Lahiji was originally from the city of Lahijan in the province of Gilan. Due to his migration to Qum in the early stages of his life⁴⁹ and a long residence there along with teaching in the Ma'sumah school of Qum, he received the title "Qummi."

Writing books such as *Shawariq ul-Ilham*, *Sarmaye Iman*, and *Gowhar-e Murad* and discussing deep theological subjects in the seminaries of Qum, he introduced a new method in writing theological books.

Lahiji was exceptionally talented in theosophy, theology, mysticism, Sufism, logic, poetry and literature. The elites of philosophy and theosophy were astonished by his precision and high attention, saying, "In precision and research this man is one of the great scholars in philosophy

⁴⁹ Bigdely, Azar, *Atashkadeye Azar*, Page 167

and theosophy. He was a strong philosopher in Avicennism, a plenary theosophist in Illuminationism, and an outstanding figure in knowing the opinion of the theologians.”⁵⁰ It has also been said about Lahiji that “Apart from his teacher Mulla Sadra, no one among recent scholars excels him.”⁵¹

After Fayyaz Lahiji, his son, Mirza Hasan Lahijy, and his student Qazi Saeed Qummi, took the field of kalam forward with expanding discussions and publications on it.

During this period more schools were established such as Fayziyeh, Shadghuli, Dar ush-Shifa, Muminyah, and Sarutghi.⁵²

Thus, during this period the seminaries of Qum flourished in academi with an expansion of different sciences such as philosophy, Islamic theology, logic, and principles of jurisprudence.

-The Fifth Era

This period begins in the late thirteenth century and continues to the present day. The turning point was when Ayatullah Haeri entered Qum and resided in its seminaries. Throughout its ups and downs, the seminaries had continued to exist; however, they did not enjoy the benefits of an organised system. With the arrival of Ayatullah Haeri, the seminaries of Qum were revived to the extent that he was given the title “The Founder” (“*Muasses*”) of the seminaries.

⁵⁰ Ashtyani, Sayyed Jalal ud-Din, *Muntakhabat az Athaare Hukamay-e Iran*, Volume 1, Page 299

⁵¹ Ibid. Volume 1, Page 324

⁵² Refer to: Sayyed Kabayery, Sayyed Alireza, *Howze Haya Elmiyye Shi'e Dar Gostare-ye Jahan*, page 373 - 383

Ayatullah Haeri was born in 1276 AH in a village called Mehrjerd in the province of Yazd, when almost everyone in the village thought that his father is not going to have any child. He pursued his primary education in Maktabkhane⁵³ in the city of Ardekan, where he spent his time learning the basics of the sciences, literature, and Qur'anic recitation. He then went to the seminaries of Yazd and resided in the school of Muhammad Taqi Khan. It was not long after his arrival that he was known among the scholars as an aspiring and gifted student of Islamic studies.

He went to Karbala at the age of 18 and although the seminaries of Samira were more active during that period, he spent two years in the neighbourhood of the shrine of Imam Husayn learning and engaging himself in self-building. During these two years, his talent and genius became known to other scholars, and especially to his teacher, Ayatullah Fazil Ardekani. He realised that the seminaries of Karbala were not enough for the growth and flourishing of Abdulkarim's scientific innovations; hence, he sent Abdulkarim to Grand Mirza Shirazi.⁵⁴

Ayatullah Haeri was under the supervision of Ayatullah Mirza Shirazi, and soon he became one of the well-known scholars of that area. In 1333 AH, granting the request of Mirza Mahmud, the son of Hajj Agha Muhsin Araki, he moved to Arak. For more than eight years he administered the seminaries in Arak. The number of the students exceeded three hundred, making Arak the foothold of knowledge and research. In the month of Rajab in 1340 AH, the Ayatullah in the company of Ayatullah Sayyed Muhammad Taqi Khansari visited Qum. Some believe that in addition to

⁵³ Before formation of schools in their current form, students would go to places called Maktab Khane where they would learn Qur'an and literature from their teacher.

⁵⁴ A marja' is the religious authority who people refer to for their jurisprudential questions.

his intention to visit the shrine of Lady Ma'sumah in Qum, he was also encouraged to go to Qum due to the requests he received from its Qum.

It was late winter on the 22nd of Rajab 1330 AH⁵⁵ when Ayatullah Haeri accepted the invitation of the people of Qum and left Arak, accompanied by his son, Ayatullah Murteza Haeri, and Ayatullah Muhammad Taqi Khansari. Qum, which had already been decorated for the Eid of Mab'ath,⁵⁶ was prepared to welcome the Ayatullah. While he was still outside the city, crowds of people flocked to welcome him upon the news of his arrival. For the next few days, the Ayatullah participated in the celebrations of Mab'ath in different part of the city.

Soon after Mab'ath, the birth anniversary of Imam al-Zaman took place simultaneous with the Persian New Year at that time, and this encouraged many from neighbouring cities to journey to Qum to visit the Ayatullah. During the celebrations, the scholars who were familiar with Ayatullah Haeri during their stay in Samira and Najaf spoke of his knowledge and spiritual qualities, thus encouraging the crowds to keep him in Qum.

Before Ayatullah Haeri's arrival, Ayatullah Shaykh Muhammad Taqi Bafqi Yazdi migrated from Najaf to Qum. He prepared the grounds for the foundation of the seminaries of Qum with the cooperation of great scholars such as Ayatullah Hajj Shaykh Abulqasim Kabir Qummi, Ayatullah Hajj Shaykh Mahdi, and Ayatullah Hajj Muhammad Arbab. In their discussions, they decided that to have a scholar from a city other than Qum – a person who is highly knowledgeable and pious, and can

⁵⁵ 1300 according to Solar Hijri Calendar

⁵⁶ Muslims celebrate this day as the anniversary of the day Prophet Muhammad was appointed by God as a prophet.

supervise the seminaries to revive religious sciences. Thus, after successfully convincing Ayatullah Haeri, he decided to reside in Qum.

The fourteenth century – the first year of the foundation of the seminaries of Qum – coincided with the year some scholars were exiled from Iraq to Iran. Ayatullah Sayyed Abulhasan Esfahani, Ayatullah Mirza Husayn Naini, Ayatullah Sayyed Ali Shahrestani, Ayatullah Sayyed Abdulhusayn Hujjat Karbalai, Ayatullah Shaykh Muhammad Husayn Esfehani Gharawi and Ayatullah Shaykh Mahdi Khalesi were among the great scholars who along with their students were forced to leave Iraq for Iran and hence resided in the seminaries of Qum.

Ayatullah Haeri settled in Qum in 1340 AH (1301 SH) and this laid the foundation of the seminaries. These schools gradually blossomed and found their place among the greatest seminaries of the Shi'a world. For this reason, he was known as "The Founding Ayatullah." Had it not been for his presence, not only would have been no signs left of the seminaries, but also the same would have happened to the monotheistic religions.

The most fundamental step the Ayatullah took after funding the seminaries was to renovate the schools. He encouraged discussion circles and deep critical thinking; he also enhanced the instructors' teaching methods and applied the curriculum used in Najaf after his thirty years of teaching experience. These positive changes ended the tragic period of the Qum seminaries that had worsened after Mirzaye Qummi. The Ayatullah's most innovative action choosing a group of scholars whose responsibility was to evaluate the student's academic level, a necessary method applied in today's educational systems.

The initiation of the seminaries coincided with the inception of Reza Pahlavi's sovereignty. The conflicts between the government and the scholars intensified and government restrictions on the seminaries led to the fall of the seminaries and a decrease in the number of its students. According to the statistics, the number of the schools and their students in Iran in the year 1304 SAH were 282 and 5984. After the sixteen years, that is, in the year 1320 SAH towards the end of reign of King Reza Pahlavi this decreased to 207 schools and 784 students.

Despite this, in this period, the Ayatullah made many efforts to organize all affairs of the seminaries. Perhaps it was his non-political attitude that kept the seminaries of Qum less vulnerable to the restrictions planned by Reza Pahlavi's reign. He was very patient with regards to the political events that occurred in the beginning of Reza Shah's period and with respect to the controversial policy that banned the wearing of the *hijab* in Iran. He struggled to protect the newfound Islamic seminaries, as he used to say, "I find protecting the seminaries more important." However, he did confront Reza Shah numerous times regarding the Shah's policies. After that policy was issued and after the massacre of people by the Pahlavi regime in the Gowharshad Mosque in Mashhad, the Ayatullah grieved until his death.⁵⁷

Ayatullah Haeri passed away in 1355 AH at the age of 84. After him, Ayatullah Sayyed Muhammad Hujjat, Ayatullah Sadr, and Ayatullah Khansari administered the seminaries.

In 1363 AH, Ayatullah Burujerdi directed the Qum seminaries. Though he was invited by Ayatullah Haeri to reside in Qum before, he preferred to

⁵⁷ Please refer to Abbas Zadeh, Sa'eed, *Negahban-e Bidar*, Page 67

avoid social positions and kindly turned down the invitation. It was only by the end of 1363 AH and during the presidency of the three Marje's: Ayatullahs Khansari, Hujjat, and Sadr that he resided in Qum and directed the seminaries.

In addition to having mastered Islamic sciences such as jurisprudence (*fiqh*), principles of jurisprudence (*usul al-fiqh*), rijal,⁵⁸ hadith, philosophy, and theology, Ayatullah Burujerdi taught different subjects including philosophy before his arrival to Qum. During his stay in Qum, he taught usul for six years and taught fiqh for the rest of his life.

With the arrival of Ayatullah Borujerdi in Qum, the seminaries of Qum under his supervision flourished and in a very short time undertook major changes. Seminaries, libraries, lessons and discussions, journals and different Islamic sciences progressed on a deeper and higher level. During his administration, the number of the scholars in Qum increased to more than six thousand. His activities also extended to the Islamic world outside Iranian borders. Building the mosque in Tripoli of Lebanon and Imam Ali Mosque in Hamburg, Germany are some of his accomplishments.

Ayatullah Khomeini was one of the Shi'a marje's who became the foremost marja' of his time after Ayatullah Burujerdi. He had a great impact on the seminaries of Qum and the social-political movements and transitions of the time. In his classes, he discussed the scope of jurisprudence and expanded it to include political jurisprudence. Using strong arguments, he introduced the idea of an Islamic government based on governance of the jurist (*wilayatul faqih*). Along with teaching, Imam Khomeini pursued his political activities against the Pahlavi regime. One

⁵⁸ The study of the reporters of hadith

of the most important ones was his speech on the 13th of Khordad in 1342 SAH that led to the famous revolt on the 15th of Khordad, an uprising that finally resulted in the victory of the Islamic revolution on the 22nd of Bahman of 1357 SAH. The seminaries of Qum paid an enormous expense for this victory; one of these events was which the Savak⁵⁹ attacked Feyziyeh, one of the seminary schools and killed all its scholars and students.

Finally, when the Pahlavi regime found Imam Khomeini a serious threat to their rule, they exiled him to Turkey, then Iraq, and finally to France.

Ayatullah Sayyed Shahab ud-Din Husayni Mar'ashy Najafi was among the great scholars who came to Qum through Ayatullah Haeri's request to teach. Ayatullah Sayyed Muhammad Reza Golpaygani and Ayatullah Shaykh Muhammad Ali Araki were among the two great leaders and maraje up until the Islamic Revolution.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ The Pahlavi's Organization of Intelligence and National Security.

⁶⁰ Sayyed Kabavery, Sayyed Alireza, *Howze Haje Elmiyye Shi'e Dar Gostare-ye Jahan*, pages 383-408

SPIRITUAL JOURNEYING IN THE WORDS OF SHI'A MYSTICS

SAYYIDAH IRAM-ZAHRA ZAIDI

TRANSLATED BY MAHBOOBEH MORSHEDIAN

ABSTRACT: In the Islamic mysticism and ethics, 'wakefulness' (*yaqzah*) is the first stage of journey to God and the first phase of spiritual journey. This is to awaken a person from negligence to pay heed to the path a person takes in life. One's inattention to this significant matter and the continuation of his negligence leads to not remembering God and the hereafter, consequently leading him to attachment to this world, committing sins and being drawn away from the status he was created for. Hence, the seekers of salvation must awaken from the slumber of negligence through self-development. The best means of achieving this goal is the instructions given to us by great Shi'a mystic scholars who spent their lives achieving perfection and embarking on the spiritual journey to God.

Introduction

Man has been created by God in the best form (95:4). Through granting him the faculties of reasoning, understanding, and thinking, God has made him distinct from other creatures in the world. This unique status of man and his potential for knowing all Divine names not only pave the way

for his being the vicegerent of God on the earth, but also indicate the ultimate objective of his being created, determining his way to perfection from Earth to Heaven.

However, treading this path is a very difficult task involving considerable risks; hence, it is impossible to undertake it without direct Divine guidance. As the Persian poet, Hafiz, beautifully versified, “Do not take this path without being accompanied by someone like Prophet Khidr – it is dark, be fearful of going astray.” Accordingly, God’s mercy to His servants and His extensive guidance and compassion require that man is not left alone to himself in the darkness of this world and that he benefits from the special divine guidance so as to nurture his innate talents to attain divine virtues through this guidance.

Undoubtedly, God’s first favour to the seeker of both perfection and salvation is to awaken him and to inform him of his situation. As long as man does not know who he is, where he is from, and where he will go, he will be unmotivated to tread the path of perfection and embark on self-purification and self-development.

This paper includes several guidelines by prominent Shi’a mystics for seekers of salvation on how to embark on the journey to God. It is hoped that not only do these enlightening words awaken souls and consciences whose nature have been created in such a way that they seek God and perfection, but they also recommend some guidelines on how to begin the spiritual journey to God through self-purification.

Wakefulness (*Yaqzah*)

According to Islamic mysticism and ethics, wakefulness (*yaqzah*) is the starting point of the spiritual journey. The literal meaning of *yaqzah* is ‘to

wake up.’¹ It technically refers to a state in which man wakes from negligence, pays attention to the path he is treading in his life, safeguards himself against his enemies like Satan,² and tries not to forget his aim.³ Only as a result of such wakefulness can he achieve his ultimate objective, that is, nearness to God.⁴

In Islamic morality and mysticism, negligence is considered an obstacle to self-purification, and the spiritual journey and wakefulness is a prerequisite for them. The first step in the spiritual journey and self-purification is a person’s awareness of his imperfection, and shrewdly understands that he is a traveller in this world with a long distance ahead to reach the ultimate objective of human perfection; thus, he needs provisions and a means of travelling. No doubt, if somebody is neglectful of his being a traveller, he will not progress spiritually.⁵

The following hadith by Imam Ali indicates the important role of waking up from the slumber of negligence: “The spiritual journey and asceticism do not benefit anybody except for those with a wakeful soul.”⁶ The Imam also warns people about neglecting God and committing sins, stating that they are negative consequences of negligence:

¹ Tarihi, *Majma’ul-Bahrain*, vol.4, p. 293; Ibn Mandhur, *Lisan-ul-Arab*, vol.5, p.65.

² “I will certainly lie in wait for them in Your straight path,” (A’raf, 16).

³ “O man! What has made you careless concerning your Lord, the Most Generous,” (Infitar, 6).

⁴ “Then he drew near, then he bowed -So he was the measure of two bows or closer still,” (Najm, 8-9).

⁵ Jawadi Amuli, Abdullah, Thematic Qur’anic Commentary; *The Stages of Morality in the Holy Qur’an*, vol.12, p.23.

⁶ *ibid*, p.326.

O' Man! What has made you neglect your Generous Lord, and what has made you dare to commit sins? What has made you conceited before your Lord, and what factor has aroused your interest in ruining yourself? Isn't there any cure for your ailment, and are you not going to wake up from this slumber of negligence?⁷

Hence, considering the significance of the starting point of the spiritual journey, wayfarers try to take the first step carefully all the time. In the course of their spiritual journey, this first step protects them from carnal and satanic dangers and helps them reach their destination.

Ayatullah Amini quoted Allamah Tabataba'i's starting point for this journey:

On my way from Tabriz to Najaf to continue my Islamic studies, I kept thinking about what to study, under supervision of which master, and using which method so that God may be satisfied with me. As soon as I reached Najaf, I went to the Holy shrine of Imam Ali and told him, 'O' My master! I have come to you to further my Islamic studies, but I do not know which method and plan to adopt, so I ask you to guide me to what is most advisable.⁸

Upon entering the material world, man has been deprived of the invisible world and its truths and has sunk into the material world. Thus, living in this world resembles a deep sleep throughout one's lifetime, as Imam Ali said, "This world resembles sleep, and the hereafter is akin to

⁷ Ibn Abi-l-Hadid, *Commentary on Nahjul-Balaghah*, vol.20, p.362.

⁸ Andisheh Qum Website (www.andisheqom.com), *Biographies of Great Shi'a Scholars*.

wakefulness.”⁹ In this hadith, people in the hereafter and on the Day of Judgment are completely awake; however, in this world, people are for the most part neglectful, forgetting their primary aim and destination. The hereafter is not tainted with negligence and unconsciousness because that is the world where all the truths become manifest and people will have complete wakefulness and attention to God. As Prophet Muhammad said, “The people are asleep and wake when they die.”¹⁰ Thus, people must be awakened.

For some people, fear of Hellfire and its inconceivable punishments help them wake up; in others, it is eagerness for Heaven and its blessings. However, there are also people who are so fond of God that their eagerness to meet Him is sufficient to wake them up from negligence and reach “wakefulness.” That is why those who are near to Him read in the supplication of “*Sha’baniyyah*”, telling God, “O’ My Lord! You have wakened me up to Your love from the slumber of negligence.”

However, what paves the way for wakefulness and a correct understanding of one’s status in the universe is self-purification and piety. Fear of Hellfire, eagerness for Heaven, and love for God are good incentives to detach one’s self from this material world to move toward perfection, but these factors work only for those who enjoy piety and self-restraint to some degree and have taken steps to purge vices from their souls.

Interestingly, it is said about Mulla Sadra¹¹ that when students from all over Iran flocked to Shiraz to attend his classes, he did not accept students

⁹ Ibn abi-l-Hadid, *ibid.*, vol.20, p.326.

¹⁰ Majlisi, Muhammad Baqir, *Bihar al-Anwar*, vol. 4, p. 43.

¹¹ An Iranian Shi’a philosopher, theologian and exegete of the 17th century

who sought fame or who were known to be committing sins or and interested in accumulating wealth through their studies.¹²

Thus, the first step towards achieving perfection and acquiring knowledge and gnosis is to wake up from the slumber of negligence; and this is achieved through disengaging from this world and its ornaments. As long as man is preoccupied with this world and is attached to it, seeking wealth and fame, he cannot develop intellectually and spiritually.

The late Imam Khomeini considered self-purification as the first step towards wakefulness, saying, “Before you lose the opportunity, you should wake up and seek to purge your soul and reform in the first stage.”¹³

Given the above introduction, we will scrutinize some guidelines proposed by mystics as they are the outcomes of their practices and experiences as well as the souvenirs they have given us from their spiritual journey.

Instructions on wakefulness

Shi'a mystics – on the basis of their specific mystic and spiritual inclinations – have given special instructions and introduced “wakefulness” as the beginning point of journey to perfection. Despite various mystic inclinations, all these recommendations emanate from the effect of the Divine attributes of Majesty and Beauty on their soul and lead to a single objective.

A short account of the instructions of Shi'a scholars who sought perfection will be given in the following:

¹² Mukhtari, Rida, *The Features of Sages*, p.66.

¹³ Khomeini, Ruhullah, *The Greater Jihad*, p.61.

1. Akhund Mulla Husayn Quli Hamadani¹⁴

The virtuous mystic, Akhund Mulla Husayn Quli Hamadani, was a prominent mystics and an indirect master of Mirza Jawad Aqa Maleki Tabrizi.

According to his mystical views, the Holy Qur'an is the way to God and a guide to the right path, and the Imams are the objective path to the Noble Qur'an. He considered Islamic law (*shari'ah*) the means of meeting God, and regarded the type of asceticism that is not based on shari'ah as ignorance and corruption. He considered the purity of heart as the basis and teaching (*ta'lim*) as its offshoot. Hence, according to him, knowledge is not a matter of excessive learning; rather, keeping vigil and practicing asceticism are the best ways to acquire true knowledge and gnosis.

For Hamadani, the path to mysticism and love for God is to know the wonderful aspects of the soul. He said, "Man's soul is the manual for the spiritual journey."

In his mystical ideology, the mystic, albeit among people, should remember God and refrain from the factors that make this world dominate him and block his spiritual intuition, including garrulousness, voraciousness, excessive sleep, and improper associations.

Given the above discussion and bases of mystical thoughts of Hamadani, he considered avoiding sins the starting point of achieving perfection, saying, "Restraining from committing sins is the first step of the mystic because only the pure soul can absorb the truths. This is the very secret of the verse, '*None shall touch it but those who are pure [in heart]* (56:79).'"

¹⁴ *Hawzah Magazine*, issue 73.

2. Ayatullah Sayyid Ali Qadi

Hajj Mirza Tabrizi, also known as “Qadi” was a great mystic. In his letter to Allamah Tabataba’i, he introduced the path of gnosis as the best way to salvation and perfection, saying, “As long as man’s soul does not pass the world of ideas (or imagination; عالم مثال), he cannot enter the world of intellect, and until one does not enter the world of intellect, he cannot attain the true gnosis and achieve the desired purpose [namely, nearness to God].”

Then he gave some basic instructions on how to purify one’s soul during the beginning of the spiritual journey:

A person should eat and sleep much less than normal so that his animal nature weakens and his spirituality strengthens. As for eating, first he should eat only twice a day and should not eat anything between these two main meals. Second, during the main meals, he should eat one hour after he feels hungry and should not satiate his appetite. Likewise, besides observing the etiquettes of eating, he should not eat much meat. If possible, he should fast on the first three days of every month. As for reducing the hours of sleep, the mystic should sleep only six hours a day, try to control his tongue, and avoid associating with negligent people. As to staying vigilant, it should last three hours in the winter and an hour and a half in the summer. In the state of prostration, he should continuously recite the Yunusiyah Thikr: "*There is no god but You: glory to You: I was indeed a wrong-doer!*" The more he repeats this invocation, the more

effective it is. It is recommended to be recited at least four hundred times. On strengthening one's spirituality, first, he should constantly feel sorrowful for not having reached the desired objective [that is, nearness to God]; and second, he should not give up remembering God and thinking about God and spiritual matters as much as possible because these two resemble two wings that fly within the sky of gnosis.¹⁵

3. Allamah Sayyid Muhammad Husayn Tabataba'i

The late Allamah Tabataba'i considered self-examination and mystic contemplation as important in the beginning of the spiritual journey, as they are the first steps in self-purification:

Every morning when you get up, intend to take God's satisfaction into account no matter what happens. This way, you will consider the hereafter in all that you do. This state of mind should be kept until bedtime. At bedtime, ponder on your daily actions, considering them one by one for five minutes; thank God for whatever deed that brought about His satisfaction, and ask for His forgiveness for whatever deed that angered Him. Keep taking this action every night. Although this method may be difficult and bitter to you, it is the key to salvation. Every night, if possible, recite the following Qur'anic chapters: Hadid,

¹⁵ *The Propagator of God's Unity*

Hashr, Jum'ah, and Taghabun, and if not, recite only Hashr.¹⁶

4. Ayatullah Muhammad Taqi Bahjat

Like his masters, Ayatullah Bahjat saw abandoning and refraining from sins to be the first and most important step toward self-purification in the spiritual journey to God. According to him, acting upon whatever one already knows paves the way for practical spiritual development and receiving more knowledge from God. In a letter to all seekers of guidance, he wrote:

I ask those who want to be taught, 'Have you acted upon whatever you heard before?' Do you know that if a person practices what he knows, God will teach him what he does not know? If man does not practice what he knows, can he expect his knowledge to increase? No thikr is superior to practical thikr, and no practical thikr is superior to abandoning sins in terms of beliefs and actions. Generally, it seems that abandoning sins is impossible except through constant mystical contemplation. If one possesses the virtues of the pious and follows the prophets and their successors in both beliefs and actions, takes actions or stop taking any measure in accordance with their commands, does not think about anything other than God when performing acts of worship, performs prayers with presence of heart, follows the Imam of the Age in doubtful matters – disagrees with whatever and whoever the Imam of the Age disagrees with and agrees with whatever and whoever the Imam of the Age agrees with, curses whoever he curses and has mercy on whoever he has

¹⁶ *Hawzah Magazine*, issue 46.

mercy on, albeit briefly, such a person does not lack any virtue and does not have any sin and evil.¹⁷

Likewise, a student of Islamic sciences came to him and asked, “Can we act upon instructions either given by such great mystics as the late Bidabadi or those found in the mystical books?” He responded:

The late Bidabadi and other prominent scholars made great efforts in the way of Islam, but each guided people to God through a specific path. My advice to you is one thing which comes down to a few words: *Refrain from sinning*. However, do not assume that refraining from sins is a simple task to do; sometimes it is very difficult. After refraining from sins, other instructions will naturally be known to you.¹⁸

5. Imam Khomeini

What is considerably noticeable in the mystical thoughts of Imam Khomeini is his placing importance on young age as a starting point for self-development and self-purification. According to him, the older a person becomes, the firmer and more deep-rooted false beliefs and evil deeds become, and the more difficult it is to rectify them. In addition, unlike young age, man’s willpower, like other mental powers, weakens with old age, making the spiritual struggle harder. Addressing those who neglect to remember God, he wrote:

¹⁷ *The Propagator of God’s Unity*, compiled by The Research Cultural Institute of Ahlul Bayt, p.217.

¹⁸ *ibid.*

Lo' the negligent! Wake up and prepare for the journey to the hereafter because the call is made, 'It is the time of the journey!' Until you have not lost your youth, try to do good deeds, purify your hearts, unlock the locks of the heart, and remove the veils [that prevent light enter the heart] because young people are closer to God and Heaven, and they can succeed in self-purification while the aged cannot. If worldly chains and Satanic traps are neglected during young age, they will become more deep-rooted and stronger. The deceits of Satan and one's Commanding Soul (*al-nafs al-ammarah*, the soul which is not purified and commands to do bad things) are so dangerous that one cannot guarantee he can be reformed during old age; he cannot postpone self-purification and repentance until the old age when corruption within the self becomes massive and the willpower to purge one's soul becomes weak or even non-existent.¹⁹

Moreover, as for basic duties of the wayfarer to God, he also regarded mystical self-monitoring (*al-muraqabah*) and self-examination (*al-muhasabah*) as necessary for purifying one's self and being immune from the Commanding Soul and Satan:

It is obligatory for the one who treads the path of the hereafter to make every possible effort to protect his knowledge and practice from the Commanding Soul and Satan, to inspect and ponder on his actions and

¹⁹ *Hawzah Magazine*, issue 49.

intentions carefully, to determine the departure point and destination of his spiritual journey, to prepare spiritual food for his soul, and not to disregard Satanic deceptions and traps...[For this purpose,] first, he should pay careful attention to himself, like a kind physician and a compassionate nurse, and should inspect the defects of his spiritual journey; second, he should not disregard seeking refuge in God in private through supplication and invocation.²⁰

6. Allamah Mohammad Baqir Majlisi

In a spiritual advice, he referred to the following points about how to prepare for and pave the way for a successful spiritual journey:

One should avoid useless words [like speaking about something other than God], and abandon eating delicious foods, drinking tasty beverages, wearing elegant clothes, [excessive sexual] associating with wives, and living in luxury houses. He should also refrain from associating with those who are not the Friends of God and should not sleep much. Likewise, the friends of God benefited from constant recitation of: *'O' the Living, the Self-subsisting! O' the One except Whom there is no god!*' (يا حيّ يا قيّوم يا من (لا اله الا انت); I also experienced this thikr, although I mostly say: *'O' God!*' (يا الله). Of course, what matters is that remembrance of God must accompany thorough mystic

²⁰ Ramzi Owhadi, Muhammad Rida, *The Mystic Soul of Ruhullah*, pp.128-129.

contemplation. If this deed is continued for forty days, the doors of wisdom, gnosis, and love for God will open.”²¹

Conclusion

The above discussion was an inquiry about the first step towards perfection and self-purification. Great religious scholars and Shi'a mystics considered “wakefulness” – waking up from the slumber of negligence – as the first step toward moral perfection. Due to being preoccupied with the natural world and constantly dealing with this world and matters related to it, man neglects his reality, departure point, and destination. This negligence prevents him from thinking about the right path. Hence, it is imperative that the seeker of perfection and the hereafter follow the examples of great religious scholars through acting upon the instructions given by them, eventually becoming determined to tread the path of salvation and begin his journey to the perfection he deserves.

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IMAM HUSAYN: THE HEIR OF PROPHET ABRAHAM

MOHAMMAD ALI SHOMALI

ABSTRACT: God, with His wise plan for His creation, does not create in vain or without purpose. It is not possible for us to perfectly understand everything about His plan. However, if we acknowledge the limits of our understanding, benefit from the Qur'an and Sunnah, and reflect on the history of mankind, we are able to understand some aspects of His plan and extract general lessons from historical events. This article outlines the historical role of Imam Husayn and the lessons derived from it.

The ultimate end of the creation of mankind

According to the Qur'an, God has created mankind for their own happiness and this can only be achieved through remembering Him, that is, to turn towards Him and to prevent anything that distracts us from Him. God has also made everything in the skies and the earth manageable to us so that we can responsibly benefit from them for our self-development. Throughout history there have always been pious and virtuous role models even in the darkest ages of ignorance and under the most tyrannical and despotic governments. Lady Asiya, the wife of Pharaoh, is a good example.

Thus, personal progress has always been an available option, but there are also positions available for mankind as a species or as a community that need preparation and other aspects to come together for them to be achieved. In

other words, happiness, which has always been possible to attain, would not be possible for society at large unless other aspects are in place. In a just and supportive society, it is the masses, and not sole individuals, who can easily find their way to happiness. There are also aspects of happiness that cannot be achieved unless there is a virtuous society in which people's relations are based on divine values and are free of egoism. Witnessing a virtuous society is far more attractive and effective than witnessing virtuous individuals.

Providing happiness to humanity as a whole with the complications of social life is no simple task. It requires a just system for fair distribution of good and opportunities, and a great deal of knowledge and wisdom. Therefore, God's second plan to provide humanity with maximum opportunities for happiness is through the establishment of an ideal society.

Prophet Abraham and establishing a monotheistic tradition by envisaging the foundations of a God-fearing society

Prophet Abraham plays a central role in history in implementing God's plan for humanity. It is not possible to imagine how the world would be if Prophet Abraham and his progeny were not there. For example, can you imagine what our world would look like without the Abrahamic faiths: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam? If not, what helps us understand and relate to God today in a monotheistic way is due to Prophet Abraham. Since he was a pure and wholeheartedly submissive servant, God communicated great part of the revealed messages and books after and through Abraham and his progeny. It is not accidental that more than half of the population of the world today is made up of the followers of Abraham.

Prophet Abraham managed to establish *tawhid*, or unity of God, on a number of levels. Firstly, he had to establish *tawhid* in himself, a position not

easily achieved, as he underwent a series of tests and trials. An important trial was to act on the Divine command to slaughter his son, Isma'il, the son who was born after many years.¹ Isma'il was also the son who helped him or was going to help him rebuild the Ka'bah, the one that would be the father of the progeny of Abraham. But Abraham had to be ready to sacrifice him. Despite the tests and challenges, Abraham remained steadfast and wholly obedient to God.

The Qur'an tells us that Prophet Abraham was chosen by God as His friend (*khalil*) (4:125). According to hadiths, one reason for this choice was that Abraham never asked anyone other than God for help. On the other hand, he never refused giving help to others.² This is opposite to those who lack faith, who when they are told to spend on the poor they question doing so since they believe the poor should expect only God to give them (36:47). But when it comes to their own needs, they ask or demand everyone to help. Abraham was the opposite: he was helpful but would not accept help from anyone except God. Even when they wanted to put him in the fire and

¹ Another lesson we can learn from Ibrahim is that we must never lose hope in asking Allah for our requests even if we may think it has become too late, as Allah is always able to do what He wants. For long time Ibrahim (a) did not have any child. Perhaps he never expected that indeed God was going to give him not only healthy children but also He is going to make all later Prophets and Imams through him. God forbid, if he was to complain about not having children, then he would have lost this opportunity. Allah would not have honoured him the way He did. Allah allowed him to continue his legacy from both his children Ishaq and Isma'il. From Ishaq, he had Ya'qub, Yusuf, Musa, Isa, and Bani Israel, and from Isma'il, he had Muhammad and all the Imams.

² *Al-Burhan fi Tafsir al-Qur'an*, vol. 2, p. 177.

Gabriel offered to help, Prophet Abraham refused to ask him for help.³ He was also known for his long prostrations to God.⁴

Prophet Abraham was also very hospitable. In a hadith from Prophet Muhammad, this has been introduced as one of the reasons why Abraham was chosen by God as His friend.⁵ He very much liked to have guests at his home, and if he did not have guests, he would go out and find someone with whom he could share his meal with.

There is a story that illustrates Prophet Abraham's servitude and humbleness. Once he left home to find some guests. Upon returning to his house, he found someone like a man in his house. Abraham asked him, "Who gave you permission to enter this house?" That person repeated three times, "I entered by the permission of the Lord of this house." Abraham quickly understood that this individual was Gabriel, and he quickly praised God. Gabriel said, "A servant of God is chosen by Him as His friend (*khalil*) and I am here to announce this to him." Prophet Abraham was so humble that he did not think that it was he himself who was chosen. Instead he asked, "Please, let me know who the chosen one is so that I may serve him until I die." He was then told that it was him.⁶ In some sources, it is said that at this

³ For example, see *Bihar al-Anwar*, vol. 12, p. 31. The original text of hadith in Arabic is as follows:

فَالْتَقَى مَعَهُ جَبْرَائِيلُ فِي السَّمَاءِ وَ قَدْ وَضِعَ فِي الْمُنْجَنِيْقِ فَقَالَ يَا إِبْرَاهِيمَ هَلْ لَكَ إِلَيَّ مِنْ حَاجَةٍ فَقَالَ إِبْرَاهِيمُ أَمَّا إِلَيْكَ فَلَا وَ أَمَّا إِلَى رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ

⁴ *Tafsir Noor al-Thaqalayn*, vol. 1, p. 554. The original text of hadith in Arabic is as follows:

قلت لأبي عبد الله عليه السلام: لم اتخذ الله عز وجل إبراهيم خليلاً؟ قال: لكثرة سجدته على الأرض

⁵ Ibid. p. 555. The original text of hadith in Arabic is as follows:

جابر بن عبد الله الأنصاري قال: سمعت رسول الله صلى الله عليه وآله يقول ما اتخذ الله إبراهيم خليلاً إلا لإطعامه الطعام وصلوته بالليل والناس نيام

⁶ *Al-Kaṭī*, vol. 4, p. 40. The original text of Arabic is as follows:

عَنْ أَبِي عَبْدِ اللَّهِ ع قَالَ إِنَّ إِبْرَاهِيمَ ع كَانَ أَبَا أَضْيَافٍ فَكَانَ إِذَا لَمْ يَكُونُوا عِنْدَهُ خَرَجَ يَطْلُبُهُمْ وَ أُعْلِقُ بَابَهُ وَ أَخَذَ الْمَقَاتِيحَ يَطْلُبُ الْأَضْيَافَ وَ إِنَّهُ رَجَعَ إِلَى دَارِهِ فَإِذَا هُوَ بِرَجُلٍ أَوْ شِبْهِ رَجُلٍ فِي الدَّارِ فَقَالَ يَا عَبْدَ اللَّهِ

time he joyfully went to his wife and shared the news. To better appreciate Abraham's humbleness and love for God, compare this with the story of Satan when God asked him to prostrate (*sajdah*) once for His vicegerent on the earth and Satan refused to do so. He refused to listen to God with respect to one *sajdah* for His vicegerent, thinking that he was better, but Abraham volunteered to serve a friend of God until the end of his life. Abraham was a true believer, one who was submissive to God.

After establishing tawhid in himself, Prophet Abraham tried to establish tawhid in his community, starting with his uncle Azar (who raised Abraham like a father). Prophet Abraham spread his campaign for tawhid by inviting others to think seriously about it and then by destroying all the idols.

Another important role of Abraham was that he rebuilt the Ka'bah as the icon of tawhid. The Ka'bah had been built before though it was in ruins during that era. Prophet Abraham raised the foundations and erected the vaults of the Ka'bah. God says in the Qur'an: "*As Abraham raised the foundations of the House with Ishmael, [they prayed]: 'Our Lord, accept it from us! Indeed You are the All-hearing, the All-knowing.'*" (2:127)

Prophet Abraham rebuilt the Ka'bah, which is the house of God, the "*First house set up for mankind (الناس)*" and "*blessed and a guidance for all nations*" (3:96) to be the source of light, guidance, inspiration, and a reminder of monotheism and unity of mankind until the end of this world. Imam Ali said in his final will:

Fear God and keep God in mind with respect to your
Lord's house, the Ka'bah. Do not forsake it for as long as

يَا أَيُّهَا مَنْ دَخَلْتَ هَذِهِ الْبَارَةَ قَالَ دَخَلْتَهَا يَا أَيُّهَا رَبِّهَا يَرُدُّ ذَلِكَ ثَلَاثَ مَرَّاتٍ فَعَرَفَ إِبْرَاهِيمَ عَ أَنَّهُ جَبْرِئِيلُ فَحَوَّيْدَ
اللَّهُ ثُمَّ قَالَ أَرْسَلَنِي رَبُّكَ إِلَى عَبْدِي مِنْ عِبِيدِهِ يَتَّخِذُهُ خَلِيلًا قَالَ إِبْرَاهِيمُ عَ فَأَعْلَمَنِي مَنْ هُوَ أَخَذَمَهُ حَتَّى أَمُوتَ
قَالَ فَأَنْتَ هُوَ قَالَ وَ مِنْ ذَلِكَ قَالَ لِأَنَّكَ لَمْ تَسْأَلْ أَحَدًا شَيْئًا قَطُّ وَ لَمْ تَسْأَلْ شَيْئًا قَطُّ فَقُلْتَ لَا

you live. If it is forsaken, you will not have any chance [to survive]. The least with which the one who has gone there for it returns with is forgiveness of his previous sins.⁷

We should always be concerned for the house of our Lord as it should never be left empty or half-attended. As long as people worship God there and show respect to it, Islam is dignified. If, God forbid, there came a time when people stopped praying and performing tawaf there, it would be a thorough darkness and loss for humanity.

Prophet Abraham built the Ka'bah with the help of his son, Isma'il. God asked Abraham to call people for hajj – the pilgrimage to Mecca – after the Ka'bah was ready. It is interesting that the *Khalil* (friend) of God was the one who invited people to the house of God, as stated in the Qur'an:

When We settled for Abraham the site of the House [saying], 'Do not ascribe any partners to Me, and purify My House for those who go around it, and those who stand [in it for prayer], and those who bow and prostrate. And proclaim the hajj to people: they shall come to you on foot and on lean camels coming from distant places.'
(22:26-27)

God made special plans for Abraham; one of them was this house and the tradition of performing the Hajj. If you look at the many rituals of Hajj, we retrace the steps of Abraham, and try to remember what he and his family – Hajar and Ismail – did since these events are to illustrate and remind us of Abraham's role.

⁷ *Al-Kafi*, vol. 7, p. 51. The original text in Arabic is as follows:

اللَّهُ فِي يَدَيْكُمْ فَلَا يَجْلُو مِنْكُمْ مَا بَقِيْتُمْ فَإِنَّهُ إِنْ تَرَكْتُمْ لَمْ تَنْظُرُوا وَ أَدْنَى مَا يَرْجِعُ بِهِ مَنْ أَمَّهُ أَنْ يُغْفَرَ لَهُ مَا سَلَفَ

In addition to fortifying the monotheistic tradition, Abraham took one step further and asked God for permission to build a society – a community of the faithful – around the Ka’bah, to make the land prosperous and secure. He asked God for he, Isma’il, and the nation of their progeny to be submissive to Him:

Our Lord, make us submissive to You, and [raise] from our progeny a nation submissive to You, and show us our rites [of worship], and turn to us clemently. Indeed You are the All-clement, the All-merciful. Our Lord, raise amongst them an apostle from among them, who should recite to them Your signs, and teach them the Book and wisdom, and purify them. Indeed You are the All-mighty, the All-wise. (2:128 & 129)

Thus, Abraham and his son asked God for two things: a) to send a messenger to their progeny, and b) to raise that messenger from among themselves. Abraham’s ambitions were accomplished by the appointment of the final and seal of the Prophets from the progeny of Abraham: Prophet Muhammad. He would complete the message of Abraham by receiving the revelation, by providing the people with a perfect understanding of tawhid, and by showing them the beautiful values of obedience and submission. He brought all the teachings and guidelines together and acted as the perfect role model.

Thus, the historical role of Prophet Abraham is summarised as follows: Prophet Abraham rebuilt the Ka’bah, the House of God, the “*first house built for people* (الناس)” and “*blessed and a guidance for all nations*” (3:96), to be the centre of light, guidance, tawhid, and unity of mankind. This ‘House’ is the focal point for establishing the ideal community. God made Abraham an Imam for the **people** (الناس) (2:124) so as to lead them in their efforts for

establishing the ideal community and a just universal society. Abraham knew this could not be achieved in his or Ismail's lifetime, and so he asked God whether He would also appoint the Imams for the people from his progeny to accomplish this task. God confirmed this by excluding those who were unjust (2:124) since it is clear that the unjust cannot lead people in establishing universal justice. The Imams must be free from any kind of injustice, whether it is personal or social; they must not have done injustice even to an insect.

Prophet Abraham also asked God to make among his progeny "a *submissive nation*" (2:128) who would be guided by "a *messenger sent to them and from themselves*" (2:129). Thus, a nation or community was going to be built around the House of God and the House of the people and to be guided by the Messenger of God, "a *submissive nation*" comprising of *purified* people who were taught "the *Book and wisdom*" (2:129 & 151; 3:164; 62:2).

Prophet Muhammad and reviving the monotheistic tradition and setting the ground for a God-fearing community

Prophet Muhammad started his mission by purifying and teaching the Book and wisdom to the people of Mecca and then the rest of the world:

Blessed is this Book which We have sent down, confirming what was [revealed] before it, so that you may warn the Mother of Cities and those around it. Those who believe in the Hereafter believe in it, and they are watchful of their prayers. (6:92)

Thus have We revealed to you an Arabic Qur'an that you may warn [the people of] the Mother of the Towns and those around it, and warn [them] of the Day of Gathering, in which there is no doubt, [whereupon] a part [of

mankind] will be in paradise and a part will be in the Blaze. (42:7)

The Prophet had a universal mission for all mankind and for all the generations to come: *Blessed is He who sent down the Criterion to His servant that he may be a warner to all the nations. (25:1)* However, he was to first begin with Mecca by establishing a unified and submissive community to God built around the Ka'bah. Three verses speak of the Messenger's ministry as that which will lead to the worldwide victory of the truth:

It is He who has sent His Apostle with the guidance and the religion of truth, that He may make it prevail over all religions, though the polytheists should be averse. (9:33 & 61:9)

It is He who has sent His Apostle with guidance and the religion of truth that He may make it prevail over all religions, and God suffices as witness. (48:28)

The main contrast is between truth and falsehood and between tawhid and *shirk*, not between Islam and other monotheistic religions. The Prophet's success in his universal mission depends on his ability to establish a community who can be witnesses for rest of humanity as he himself is a witness for the community:

Thus We have made you a middle nation that you may be witnesses to the people, and that the Apostle may be a witness to you... (2:143)

Elsewhere the Qur'an refers to the tasks of the Prophet and the way he was planned to establish that middle nation that could be a witness for other nations:

...those who follow the Apostle, the uninstructed prophet, whose mention they find written with them in the Torah and the Evangel, who bids them to do what is right and forbids

them from what is wrong, makes lawful to them all the good things and forbids them from all vicious things, and relieves them of their burdens and the shackles that were upon them —those who believe in him, honour him, and help him and follow the light that has been sent down with him, they are the felicitous.’ (7:157)

The language used in this verse to explain some of the Prophet’s tasks easily appeals to all people, including just Muslims or believers in God. To enjoin *ma’ruf* (the good) and forbid *munkar* (evil), both of which can be understood through common sense; to permit *tayyibat* (that which is pleasant)⁸ to prohibit *khaba’ith* (that which is disliked).⁹ Observing *ma’ruf* means refraining from murder, adultery, theft, and so forth and being kind, helpful, honest, generous, supportive, and respectful. These basic examples of *ma’ruf* and *munkar* can be understood by any person. Who could oppose a Prophet who commanded to perform good actions and avoid doing wrong? Only those who are vicious and insist on doing wrong would oppose such a call. Those who suffer from atheism, polytheism, or immoral habits and practices, without being arrogant or stubborn, would welcome such a prophet. For example, Abu Dharr was a pagan though he was not a vicious

⁸ That is, what people find to be pleasant through instinct or after some training through receiving sufficient data

⁹ That is, what human beings instinctively or after some training dislike or find to be unpleasant and to liberate are understandable and appreciated by all human beings. If terms like *wajib* or *haraam* were used they could not appeal to non-Muslims or even to Muslims who are not religious. This is not to suggest that there is anything wrong with such terms; rather, it is a matter of identifying the targeted audience and then deciding the most appropriate language and tone. *Wajib* and *haraam* are two terms for the people who follow *shari’a* and obviously the Prophet could not start or limit his mission by addressing only the religious Muslims by focusing on ‘observing the *wajib*’ and ‘avoiding *haram*.’

person; he did not have a problem with doing ma'ruf and avoiding haram. When the Prophet brought the divine message, Abu Tharr accepted it wholeheartedly and soon became a close companion of the Prophet. However, there were people like Abu Sufyan, Abu Lahab, and Abu Jahl who had problems with ma'ruf, let alone the sharia; they had moral problems and a vested interest in doing munkar.

A major focus of Prophet Muhammad was to revive tawhid, to invite people to return to the tradition of Abraham. The Prophet used to say, "Say there is not god but God, and you will be saved [or you will prosper]." ¹⁰ Thousands of people in Mecca and Medina accepted the message of the Prophet, and if they had consistently followed the same route after the demise of the Prophet, we would have witnessed an ideal society and would not have had to wait for hundreds or thousands of years to witness the ideal society in end of the time.

After the demise of the Prophet, there were many changes and complications. One significant problem was the division of the Ummah. The Prophet had emphasized on unity; he had called people to be united over the truth and the Word of God, and he had established a society united over tawhid. After the Prophet's demise, many people who were new to the religion lost their direction and did not know who to turn to. And unfortunately within fifty years of the demise of the Prophet, the situation went so wrong that someone declared himself as the Caliph and successor of the Prophet who tried to give power to his son Yazid, a man whose values and beliefs were not on par with that of the Prophet or Abraham. At least it was undeniable that giving power to Yazid was a big mistake, as he did not observe any of the teachings of Islam. For the first time in the history of

¹⁰ *Bihar al-Anwar*, vol. 18, p. 202.

Islam, someone who was unashamed of sinning in public or pretending to be a practicing Muslim was going to rule. He drank, gambled, and publicly committed hideous acts. His father, Mu'awiya, said that he rejoiced over Yazid as a child, yet as he grew, Yazid annoyed him so much that Mu'awiya told him he wished Yazid was never born. Mu'awiya said this, a man who himself has a history of rebelling against Imam Ali and killed thousands, including some of the companions of the Prophet. Moreover, but he was wise enough to tell Yazid not to force Imam Husayn to pay allegiance to him; he knew it is impossible for Imam Husayn to pay allegiance to someone like Yazid.

Imam Husayn and preserving the monotheistic tradition by translating it into a demand for justice and dignity

Had Imam Husayn paid allegiance to Yazid, the message of God would have been entirely lost. Husayn was the representative of the line of tawhid, purity, honesty, and obedience to God. If he paid allegiance, the people would have been completely confused and gone astray; there would have been no hope for guidance afterwards. However, Yazid was determined to have the allegiance of Husayn. He pressured Walid, the governor of Medina, to have Imam Husayn pledge allegiance (*bay'at*). This facilitated the event of Karbala whose roots go back to the time of the demise of the Prophet, if not even earlier.

In response to Yazid's demand, Imam Husayn replied to the governor of Medina:

O governor! We are the People of the Prophet's House,
and we are descendants of the Prophet. Yazid is a drunkard

who murders without reason, and a person like me does not pay allegiance to a person like him.¹¹

It is not a matter of personal battle, but rather a matter of two separate ideologies. How could Husayn give legitimacy to Yazid and become his follower? Allegiance would mean that Imam Husayn and his followers would become Yazid's followers. This means the end of Islam. The next morning, the governor's deputy found Imam Husayn at the grave of Prophet Muhammad and advised the Imam to pay allegiance because it was safer for his life. Imam Husayn replied, "We belong to God and to Him do we return. If Muslim nation is to be ruled by a leader like Yazid, say goodbye to Islam. I have heard from my grandfather, the Messenger of God, say, 'Caliphate is forbidden for the family of Abu Sufyan.'" ¹² Moreover, the destruction of Islam would have marked the end of the divine plan for establishing an ideal society, the facilitation of happiness and mankind's salvation as a whole since there were no prophets to come. The Imam was faced with the challenge of either accepting Yazid's request or resisting and willing to sacrifice his life. We all know that Husayn was not attached to the material world; neither did he have concern for his personal life. None of the Imams feared sacrificing themselves for God.

Husayn was the only one at that time who could save the Ummah. He was the only one to end the deviation, whether by accepting martyrdom or protecting his life if he could oppose Yazid without being killed. Due to the

¹¹ *Bihar al-Anwar*, vol. 44, p. 324. The original text in Arabic is as follows:

إِنَّا أَهْلُ بَيْتِ النَّبِيِّ وَ مَعْدِنُ الرِّسَالَةِ وَ مُخْتَلَفِ الْمَلَائِكَةِ وَ بِنَا فَتَحَ اللَّهُ وَ بِنَا حَتَمَ اللَّهُ وَ يَزِيدُ رَجُلٌ قَاسِيٌّ
شَارِبُ الْخَمْرِ قَاتِلُ النَّفْسِ الْمُحَرَّمَةِ مُعَلِّنٌ بِالْفَسْقِ وَ مِثْلِي لَا يُتَابِعُ مِثْلَهُ

¹² *Bihar al-Anwar*, vol. 44, p. 326. The original text in Arabic is as follows:

إِنَّا لِلَّهِ وَ إِنَّا إِلَيْهِ رَاجِعُونَ وَ عَلَى الْإِسْلَامِ السَّلَامُ إِذْ قَدْ بَلَّيْتُ الْأُمَّةَ بِرَاعٍ مِثْلِ يَزِيدَ وَ لَقَدْ سَمِعْتُ جَدِّي
رَسُولَ اللَّهِ ص يَقُولُ الْخُلَافَةُ مُحَرَّمَةٌ عَلَى آلِ أَبِي سَفْيَانَ

escalating situation, it became clear that he had no other choice but to give his life; by doing so, he was better able to serve Islam. Husayn's life was very productive, constructive, powerful, and inspirational for people. But sometimes there comes a day that a person like Husayn is killed to sacrifice his life to protect the religion of God. He said, "Don't you see that the truth is not followed and the falsehood is not refrained from? The situation is so severe that a believer wishes to meet God (i.e. to die). And today I do not see death but as a prosperity, and living with tyrants is nothing but disgrace."¹³

I humbly request everyone, whether a Shi'a, Sunni, or non-Muslim, to explore the reasons why Husayn reached this conclusion. He lost his life and many members of the community were killed, including some of the best companions of the Ahlul Bayt. The women and children endured much trouble and hardship. But there was one thing that was greater than all of these sacrifices: God's pleasure. The Ahlul Bayt did their best to preserve and save the teachings of Islam. Islam is greater than Husayn. Islam is greater than the children of Husayn. All were ready to sacrifice themselves for Islam to safeguard the message of God for the establishment of an ideal society. If Husayn had not opposed Yazid and had not been martyred as a result, there would no trace of Islam today. Yazid ruled for a little over three years and committed many crimes that included three major ones: he attacked Mecca, he attacked Medina, and he killed Imam Husayn and seventy-two of his companions. It was only through the sacrifice of Husayn that people were awakened to the real problem and the true colors of the ruler.

¹³ *Bihar al-Anwar*, vol. 44, p. 193. The original text in Arabic is as follows:

أَلَا تَرَوْنَ الْحَقَّ لَا يُعْمَلُ بِهِ وَ الْبَاطِلَ لَا يُنْتَهَى عَنْهُ لِيَرْغَبَ الْمُؤْمِنُ فِي لِقَاءِ اللَّهِ وَ إِنِّي لَا أَرَى الْمَوْتَ إِلَّا
سَعَادَةً وَ الْحَيَاةَ مَعَ الظَّالِمِينَ إِلَّا بَرَمًا

Imam Husayn had made his stance clear enough to remind us of the Prophet's mission. The Prophet strived to awaken the people's conscience and teach morality through observing tawhid. After the Prophet's demise, it was difficult for some people to know whom to follow, who was right and who was wrong. Imam Husayn brought such clarity to the issue such that after him, this issue no longer existed. No one could say that the incident of Karbala resulted from two groups of Muslims disagreeing with regards to the Islamic position and therefore each acted upon his own *ijtihad*, or personal scholarly opinion. The situation became so clear that the battle was between those who had humanity and those who lacked it. It was between the people who were committed to Islam and its values and those who were egotistical. No one can say that what 'Umar ibn Sa'd – the commander of Yazid's army – did to the women and children was because of a mistake in *ijtihad*. It was clearly *kufir* (disobedience).

Imam Husayn managed to clearly show people the distinction between the truth and falsehood, between a virtuous and immoral life. Anyone who is familiar with the event of Karbala, regardless of the person's religious affiliation, cannot be indifferent to what happened in Karbala; he or she would certainly sympathize with Imam Husayn. Any rational person would believe the beauties exhibited in the camp of Imam Husayn to be appreciated, the mercilessness of the opposite camp to be condemned, and the capacity for people to become so brutal and be led astray needs to be acknowledged.

Imam Husayn 1) preserved the teachings of Islam, and 2) opened a channel for Islam to reach the people's hearts. As soon as people hear of the movement of Imam Husayn, they sympathize. They also realize that justice and dignity are the most important qualities. Who proved this better than Husayn? If you were to give your life for the sake of justice and dignity, you

are victorious. And powerful, murderous, unjust oppressors will themselves be humiliated and will lose both this world and the hereafter.

Our response to Imam Husayn's call for help

Imam Husayn must be introduced to mankind and followed as a role model by all people, not merely by Muslims. Not much effort is needed; we simply need to ensure that people come to know the realities of Imam Husayn and the event of Karbala. Then he himself would do the rest. We should not keep the Imam for ourselves; we should find out how to share by using different arts, skills, and talents to represent the Imam's life to others.

Just as Prophet Abraham and Prophet Muhammad played key roles, Imam Husayn also did so in preserving the path of the Prophets as articulated and illustrated by Abraham, and paved the way for establishing the ideal community which in turn would establish universal justice, equality, and dignity for all. It is not by chance or accident that in his uprising, Imam Mahdi will make many references to Imam Husayn. Among all his fathers who too were Imams, Imam Mahdi has special affinity to Imam Husayn. For example, when Imam Mahdi starts his movement, he will make an address while standing between the Rukn and Maqam of the Ka'bah.¹⁴ A great portion of this speech relates to Imam Husayn and his martyrdom. Why? The reason for the emphasis may be because Imam Mahdi cannot mobilise the masses to establish universal justice a dignified society without referring to Imam Husayn – without using the example and standards that Imam Husayn set up. Using Imam Husayn as an example before initiating any movement or revolution led by the Shi'a was common after the event of Karbala.

¹⁴ For example, see *Ilzam al-Nasib fi Ithbat al-Hujjah al-Gha'ib* by Shaykh Ali Yazdi al-Ha'iri, vol.

Thus, to pave the way for Imam Mahdi and help him in his universal mission we need to acquaint ourselves and people of the world with Imam Husayn. We should share his life and teaching through our words, actions, conduct, and character.

May God make the months of Muharram and Safar a great opportunity for us to increase our understanding of Imam Husayn's role. We ask God to help us to comprehend our role today to respond to Imam Husayn's call of "*Hal min naasirin yansurnaa* (Is there anyone to help us)?" Husayn began the great mission of bringing the *Ummah* back to the right track, but this mission is still in need of our help given that the *Ummah* is divided with its divergences. God has planned this *Ummah* to be a balanced nation so that it can be a witness for humanity to enable the achievement of God's plan. We should respond to Imam Husayn by saying "*Labbayk*" and to help bring the *Ummah* to its original condition so that it can play the role of witness to humanity.

Conclusion

The divine plan for salvation includes the establishment of a moral and just society, in which opportunities are fairly distributed and people are treated with honour and dignity to better focus on their spiritual journey. God has sent His messengers with the Book and the Balance for people to establish the social justice (57:25). Among the Messengers, Prophet Abraham played an outstanding role in establishing the monotheistic tradition, hence, he is considered to be the founder of all Abrahamic religions. He also envisaged and worked towards establishment of a just society centered on tawhid and built around the Ka'bah. Prophet Muhammad was sent to accomplish the tasks of all the Messengers and laid the theoretical and practical foundations for

establishing a submissive, balanced, united, and just nation. In a very critical time, when the legacies of Messengers were endangered by Yazid's attempt to rule in the name of the Prophet's Caliph and possessing Imam Husayn's authorization to institutionalise injustice in the name of Islam, and falsehood in the name of truth, Imam Husayn knew that the only way to safeguard the divine plan for mankind and to preserve the tradition of Prophet Abraham and Prophet Muhammad was to sacrifice his life. This saved the divine path from loss at that time and paved the way for the future.