

Honour and Dignity in Islam, Part II¹

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Abstract: An analysis of the Qur'an verses and Islamic traditions displays principles and rules that aim to preserve the dignity of humankind. Among the list of ethical concepts in Islam, dignity is one of the most—if not, the most—important concept. Using references from the Qur'an and hadith, this series offers the instructions God gives us to appreciate, safeguard, and add to the dignity we were initially given, and then how to extend this dignity to others. This article describes the dignity that God gives to humankind, as well as the extra dignity that God grants to the angels, the prophets, the people of heaven, and the pious.

In the previous part, we outlined this series by explaining the notion of *'izzah*, and referred to specific verses on this subject, thereby establishing that *'izzah* is an important quality of God. In tens of verses, the Qur'an stresses that God is *'Aziz*; this means that He is the source, origin, and treasure of honour and dignity, and if anyone wishes to seek it, they can

¹ This series is based on a series of 12 lectures given by the author in the month of Ramadan 2015 at the Islamic Centre of England.

do this by making themselves closer to God. We then defined *‘izzah* based on different sources. Now let us explore more the Islamic account of this important notion.

God extends *‘izzah* to His creation

Everyone naturally seeks and yearns for *‘izzah*. This yearning reflects our origin, our souls. God has absolute existence, and thereafter grants us existence, and we then strive to keep our life going; we try to prolong it, and we also try and add to the quality of our lives.

Similarly, God is utmost light, and therefore all His creatures seek light. He is utmost merciful, and therefore all His creatures seek mercy and try and achieve it. Hence, there is a very natural connection between the qualities of God and what we as His creation seek. God is *‘Aziz* and we are all striving to obtain some kind of *‘izzah*, and we wish to be *‘aziz* in some way.

Two general ways that people try to achieve honour

There are two ways that people may try to achieve this. The first way is genuine and honest, and that is for a person to qualify himself as a recipient of *‘izzah* from God. The other way is to cheat; for example, some people think that by cheating or offering bribes, they can become *‘aziz*. Or they think that through having power or being part of a gang or a strong party, they can somehow become *‘aziz*.

Arrogance cannot lead to dignity

These people assume that by associating themselves to those who have apparent power that they, too, can become *‘aziz*. The Qur’an says that this kind of thinking is wrong:

الَّذِينَ يَتَّخِذُونَ الْكَافِرِينَ أَوْلِيَاءَ مِنْ دُونِ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ أَبِيتُوا عَنْهُمْ الْعِزَّةَ فَإِنَّ الْعِزَّةَ
لِلَّهِ جَمِيعًا

Those who take the faithless for allies instead of the faithful. Do they seek honour with them? [If so,] indeed all honour belongs to God. (4:139)

For example, if we say that those who achieve good results in their exams will be given good opportunities at university and will ultimately enjoy good jobs, then this will produce two reactions. Some students will study hard and genuinely achieve good results; others, may try to cheat in their exams in order to get good results. These cheaters may deceive some people for some time, but will not be able to deceive everyone forever. We must seek out genuine izzah and not resort to any cheating in the process.

The same principle applies to seeking light. On the Day of Judgement, God says that some believers will have so much light that their light will be displayed and indeed move swiftly in front of them and on their right side:

يَوْمَ لَا يُخْزِي اللَّهُ النَّبِيَّ وَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا مَعَهُ نُورُهُمْ يَسْعَى بَيْنَ أَيْدِيهِمْ وَبِأَيْمَانِهِمْ
يَقُولُونَ رَبَّنَا أَتِمِّمْ لَنَا نُورَنَا وَاعْفُزْ لَنَا إِنَّكَ عَلَى كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ

On the day when God will not let the Prophet down and the faithful who are with him. Their light will move swiftly before them and on their right. They will say, 'Our Lord! Perfect our light for us, and forgive us! Indeed You have power over all things.' (66:8)

Seeing this, the hypocrites, who will have no light on that day, will say:

يَوْمَ يَقُولُ الْمُنَافِقُونَ وَالْمُنَافِقَاتُ لِلَّذِينَ آمَنُوا انظُرُونَا نَقْتَبِسْ مِنْ نُورِكُمْ قِيلَ
 ارْجِعُوا وَرَاءَكُمْ فَالْتَمِسُوا نُورًا فَضُرِبَ بَيْنَهُمْ بِسُورٍ لَهُ بَابٌ بَاطِنُهُ فِيهِ الرَّحْمَةُ
 وَظَاهِرُهُ مِنْ قِبَلِهِ الْعَذَابُ

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. (57:13)

The same applies to *‘izzah*. It is a quality of perfection that God possesses, and He has placed in us that amount of *‘izzah* to bring awareness to the beauty of it, and to encourage us to strive for more genuinely.

Another example is that of Iblis. The problem with Iblis was that he wished to have this dignity for himself, but in a way that was not acceptable or moral. He wanted to have a special position with God by bringing others down and keeping them lower than him. We also see this trait in some human beings. At times, when people cannot achieve good results, they sabotage the progress of others by misguiding them and damaging their prospects, for example, by giving them incorrect information about an upcoming examination. If a person wants to be close to God, then this cannot be achieved by bringing others down.

Iblis desired *‘izzah*, but attempted to achieve it dishonestly. Imam Ali cites the example of Iblis in *Khutbat al-Qāsi‘ah*.² He explains the tragedy of Iblis and how it is possible for us to be influenced by him.

² Sermon 192 of *Nahj al-Balāghah*

In the Qur'an, God says that when He informed the angels about the creation of Adam, He also commanded them to prostrate:

إِذْ قَالَ رَبُّكَ لِلْمَلَائِكَةِ إِنِّي خَالِقٌ بَشَرًا مِنْ طِينٍ فَإِذَا سَوَّيْتُهُ وَنَفَخْتُ فِيهِ مِنْ رُوحِي فَقَعُوا لَهُ سَاجِدِينَ فَسَجَدَ الْمَلَائِكَةُ كُلُّهُمْ أَجْمَعُونَ إِلَّا إِبْلِيسَ اسْتَكْبَرَ وَكَانَ مِنَ الْكَافِرِينَ

'When your Lord said to the angels, "Indeed I am about to create a human being out of clay. So when I have proportioned him and breathed into him of My spirit, then fall down in prostration before him. Thereat the angels prostrated, all of them together, but not Iblis; he acted arrogantly and he was one of the faithless." (38: 71-74)

Although Iblis was not an angel, he was very close to them at that time.

Explaining this refusal to prostrate, Imam Ali says:

اعْتَرَضَتْهُ الْحَمِيَّةُ فَافْتَحَرَ عَلَى آدَمَ بَخْلَفِهِ وَتَعَصَّبَ عَلَيْهِ لِأَصْلِهِ فَعَدُوُّ اللَّهِ إِمَامُ الْمُتَعَصِّبِينَ وَسَلَفُ الْمُسْتَكْبِرِينَ الَّذِي وَضَعَ أَسَاسَ الْعَصِيَّةِ وَنَازَعَ اللَّهَ رِذَاءَ الْجَبَرِيَّةِ وَادَّرَعَ لِبَاسَ التَّعَزُّزِ

His vanity stood in his way. Consequently, he felt proud over Adam by virtue of his creation and boasted over him on account of his origin. Thus, this enemy of God is the leader of those who boast, and the fore-runner of the vain. It is he who laid the foundation of factionalism, quarrelled with God about the robe of greatness, put on the dress of haughtiness.³

Iblis felt he was better than Adam because Adam was created from clay and he from fire, not knowing (or not considering) that Adam's honour

³ Sermon 192 of *Nahj al-Balāghah*

was not from his creation from clay, but from the spirit that God had given him. Iblis's arrogance was due to his assumption that his origin was better than that of Adam.

Imam Ali calls Iblis the leader or fore-runner of the *muta'assibin*, i.e. those who are biased and arrogant, and feel that only they and their party matter. Indeed, we see the results of such an attitude today. Some people are so proud that they feel they have a monopoly over their religion, such as Islam. To them, no one else is Muslim and thus need to be ignored or perhaps even need to be killed. Iblis laid the foundation of bias. He wished to steal the greatness of God, and the dress of dignity which only fits God.

Iblis also showed *ta'azzuz*. *Ta'azzuz* means that in reality a person is not 'aziz, but only wants to present himself as 'aziz. Such people have nothing valuable but want to pretend they are valuable. This is like a person that does not possess knowledge, but wishes to be respected and treated like scholars so he acts like a religious scholar, and dresses like them by e.g. keeping a longer beard or wearing a big *'imamah*.⁴ Imam Ali continues:

وَحَلَعَ قِنَاعَ التَّذَلُّلِ أَلَّا تَرَوْنَ كَيْفَ صَغَّرَهُ اللَّهُ بِتَكْبَرِهِ وَوَضَعَهُ بِرَفُّعِهِ فَجَعَلَهُ فِي
الدُّنْيَا مَذْخُوراً وَأَعَدَّ لَهُ فِي الْآخِرَةِ سَعيراً

He [Iblis] took off the covering of humility. Do you not see how God made him low on account of his vanity and humiliated him for his feigning to be high? He discarded him in this world and provided for him burning fire in the next world.

Then Imam Ali explains:

⁴ Or turban, a headwear done through cloth-binding, traditionally worn by men of various countries and religions.

وَلَوْ أَرَادَ اللَّهُ سُبْحَانَهُ أَنْ يَخْلُقَ آدَمَ مِنْ نُورٍ يَخْطُفُ الْأَبْصَارَ ضِيَاؤُهُ وَيَهْرُ
الْعُقُولَ رَوْادُهُ وَطِيبَ يَأْخُذُ الْأَنْفَاسَ عَرْفُهُ لَفَعَلَ وَلَوْ فَعَلَ لَظَلَّتْ لَهُ الْأَعْتَائِقُ
خَاضِعَةً وَلَحَقَّتِ الْبُلُوى فِيهِ عَلَى الْمَلَائِكَةِ وَلَكِنَّ اللَّهَ سُبْحَانَهُ يَبْتَلِي خَلْقَهُ بِبَعْضِ
مَا يَجْهَلُونَ أَصْلَهُ تَمْيِيزاً بِالْإِخْتِبَارِ لَهُمْ وَتَقِيّاً لِلْأَسْتِكْبَارِ عَنْهُمْ وَإِبْعَاداً لِلْخِيَلَاءِ مِنْهُمْ

If God had wanted to create Adam from a light whose glare would have dazzled the eyes, whose handsomeness would have amazed the wits and whose fragrance would have caught the breath, He could have done so; and if He had done so, people would have bowed to him in humility and the trial of the angels through him would have become easier. But God, the Glorified, tries His creatures by means of those things whose real nature they do not know in order to distinguish [good and bad] for them through the trial, and to remove vanity from them and keep them aloof from pride and self-admiration.

Imam then points out what we can learn from this episode:

فَاعْتَبِرُوا بِمَا كَانَ مِنْ فِعْلِ اللَّهِ بِإِبْلِيسَ إِذْ أَحْبَطَ عَمَلَهُ الطَّوِيلَ وَجَهْدَهُ الْجَهِيدَ
وَكَانَ قَدْ عَبَدَ اللَّهَ سِتَّةَ آلَافِ سَنَةٍ لَا يُدْرَى أَمِنْ سِنِي الدُّنْيَا أَمْ مِنْ سِنِي الْآخِرَةِ
عَنْ كِبَرِ سَاعَةٍ وَاحِدَةٍ فَمَنْ بَعْدَ إِبْلِيسَ يَسْلَمُ عَلَى اللَّهِ بِمِثْلِ مَعْصِيَتِهِ؟ كَلَّا، مَا
كَانَ اللَّهُ سُبْحَانَهُ لِيُدْخِلَ الْجَنَّةَ بَشَرًا بِأَمْرِ أَخْرَجَ بِهِ مِنْهَا مَلَكًا

You should take a lesson from what God did with Satan; namely He nullified his great acts and extensive efforts on account of the vanity of one moment, although Satan had worshipped God for six thousand years - whether by the reckoning of this world or of the next world is not known. Who now can remain safe from God after Satan by committing a similar disobedience? None at all. God, the

Glorified, would not let a human being enter Paradise if he does the same thing for which God turned out from it an angel.

The extensive worship and obedience of Iblis was wiped away because of one moment of pride. This displays the long-standing problem of arrogance. At times a person is apparently good, but then when they are faced with trials and tribulations, one moment of arrogance and bias can destroy their life on both a personal level as well as with their family. We see that sometimes people live together as husband and wife for a few decades and then everything comes crashing down.

One should not think that because they have lived to the age of 30, 40, 50, or even 60, that they are somehow immune to such problems. Nay, these character flaws can be very much hidden and are waiting for the opportunity to come to surface.

Imam Ali makes it clear that no one should feel relaxed and laid-back if they suffer these spiritual diseases. The Qur'an says:

تِلْكَ الدَّارُ الْآخِرَةُ نَجْعُهَا لِلَّذِينَ لَا يُرِيدُونَ عُلُوًّا فِي الْأَرْضِ وَلَا فَسَادًا وَالْعَاقِبَةُ
لِلْمُتَّقِينَ

This is the abode of the Hereafter which We shall grant to those who do not desire to domineer in the earth nor to cause corruption, and the outcome will be in favour of the Godwary. (28:83)

The sermon continues to describe the episode of Iblis and how he deprived himself of the close position he had with God and the close company of the angels.

Hence, some ways of seeking dignity in a wrongful manner is to display arrogance, or to engage in *ta'azzuz*, or create a false image of oneself to gain dignity. However, this in no way helps a person and will not lead to good results. Many may attempt these methods, but will eventually discover that they do not work. Indeed, it is quite the opposite; if a person wishes to acquire a high position and status then humility is required. The world is made such that those who are humble will be raised, and those that are arrogant will be sent down. Imam Sadiq (a) is quoted as saying:

إن في السماء ملكين موكلين بالعباد فمن تواضع لله رفعاه ومن تكبر وضعاه

There are two angels in the heavens who are appointed on the people so that one who is humble for the sake of God may be exalted in status by them and one who is proud and arrogant may be degraded and humiliated by them.⁵

Of course, this humility must be genuine. At times, people speak very humbly about themselves, but this could be to cover their arrogance. For example, some sign off their letters with the word *al-ahqar* which means 'the most insignificant', referring to their position as a lowly servant of God. Sometimes this is written with honesty yet sometimes it may be written to impress the reader. If the latter is the case, then this person does not really think that he is *al-ahqar*, but rather he feels that he is *al-akbar* (the greatest or the most significant) or *al-kabir* (great). This is a very delicate and subtle issue. Sometimes a person can suffer from pride and not realise it.

⁵ *Al-Kāfi*, vol. 2, p. 122.

Therefore, one way of seeking dignity that is a dishonest and unproductive method is through arrogance, i.e. *takabbur* and *ta'azzuz*, as Iblis did, and this can be seen in those who follow his path, such as Pharaoh, who was extremely arrogant and promoted himself as a god. This shows the problem of arrogance: it has no limit. An arrogant person will not be satisfied even after dominating millions of people, or an entire country, or even a few countries. Imam Khomeini used to say that if arrogant people had full control over the entire world, they would look for other planets to control and dominate.

Fir'awn was not happy to be just the king and ruler. He declared himself as a god and wanted people to worship him:

فَقَالَ أَنَا رَبُّكُمُ الْأَعْلَى

[Fir'awn] said, 'I am your exalted lord! (79:24)

On another occasion he said:

وَقَالَ فِرْعَوْنُ يَا أَيُّهَا الْمَلَأُ مَا عَلِمْتُ لَكُم مِّنْ إِلَهِ غَيْرِي فَأَوْقَدَ لِي يَا هَامَانَ عَلَى
الطِّينِ فَاجْعَلْ لِّي صَرْحًا لَّعَلِّي أَطَّلِعَ إِلَى إِلَهِ مُوسَى وَإِنِّي لَأَظُنُّهُ مِنَ الْكَاذِبِينَ

Pharaoh said, 'O [members of the] elite! I do not know of any god that you may have other than me. Haman, light for me a fire over clay, and build me a tower so that I may take a look at Moses' god, and indeed I consider him to be a liar!' (28:38)

Not only did Pharaoh claim to be the greatest and most high god, he also declared that he was the *only* god. This is the path of Iblis. We should not think that these traits will not apply to us, and we should not say that we are far from being Pharaoh or Nimrod (*Namrūd*), as there is a possibility – had we the same power and opportunity – that we could

have been like them. We do not have such opportunities and scope, and therefore it may be easier for us to be humble. However, if we had such power and scope, then that would truly show us whether we were humble or not.

Imam Khomeini, when he was teaching in the *hawzah*,⁶ would be careful not to allow any of his students to walk behind him. A habit of students in the *hawzah* is to follow their teachers to speak about some matters or to simply remain in their company. But Imam Khomeini would always walk alone. If anyone followed him, he would ask them if they had any questions. He would deal with their requests or questions and then bid them farewell. Imam Sadiq (a) is quoted as saying:

إياكم وهؤلاء الرؤساء الذين يتراسون فوالله ما خفت النعال خلف رجل
إلا هلك وأهلك

Distance yourself from those leaders who aspire to position and leadership. By God, the shoes did not move behind any person except that person has been destroyed and had destroyed.⁷

Such pure souls are cautious and may think that if lots of people begin to walk behind me and show me respect, then it may cause me to consider myself as important. Gradually, pride and arrogance may seep in, and so they avoid this.

If we look at history, we find that people who opposed to certain governments, when they took power some of them remained humble and sincere, whilst others had strived for the power, money, and played politics. These people used to call for justice and equity, but later they

⁶ Seminaries where Shi'a Muslim female and male clerics are trained

⁷ *Al-Kāfi*, vo. 2, p. 297.

were intoxicated with power. We have not yet been tested properly in this regard to see clearly whether we are able to remain humble or not.

Association with those in power cannot lead to dignity

Hence, one false way of achieving dignity is arrogance. Another false way is to attach one's self with people who have power and position. This is also not productive. The Qur'an says:

الَّذِينَ يَتَّخِذُونَ الْكَافِرِينَ أَوْلِيَاءَ مِنْ دُونِ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ أَبِيتُوا عَنْ الْعِزَّةِ فَإِنَّ الْعِزَّةَ لِلَّهِ جَمِيعًا

'Those who take the faithless for allies instead of the faithful. Do they seek honour with them? [If so,] indeed all honour belongs to God.' (4:139)

Sins cannot lead to dignity

Another unproductive way is to commit sins and yet expect to achieve dignity and honour. At times, some people feel that by not observing God's rules and regulations they can be successful. They feel they can achieve money, power, and respect. Some of them say that when we are established, we will ask for forgiveness and lead a good life full of good deeds. In other words, they think that I will amass money and power, and later sort my situation out.

No one can gain *'izzah* by disobeying God. *'Izzah* comes from obedience, not from disobedience. If someone offers you a job, business, friendship, relation, etc., if there is a slight act of disobedience to God, then do not even think about it; even thinking about it is wasting your time and energy, let alone accepting it. Indeed, we should be so well-presented to people that they do not even offer us a sinful thing. Such deals can be transactions that involve usury or mischief. People should feel

embarrassed to talk to you about this. Believers must strive to behave and appear in such a way that those who are bad move away from them.

In future, we will discuss how God has given us opportunities to achieve real dignity, not the false dignities and honour that we have discussed above. There is a real dignity that God has given to human beings in general, and then there is extra dignity that they should qualify for.

God grants honour to His creation

We have already said that everything God created possesses some level of dignity. For example, when we know of a renowned and great writer or scholar, then anything written by that person—whether volumes or just something brief—will be deemed valuable. Consider, for example, the late Allāmah Tabataba'i, due to the level of respect we have for him and his knowledge, and his expertise and his *taqwa* (God-wariness); we will appreciate anything written by him, whether it is his famous *Tafsir al-Mizan* or a short essay.

Similarly, for a famous artist or painter, anything they produce is valuable. But among their paintings, some of them are regarded as masterpieces, whilst others although not masterpieces, they nonetheless remain valuable.

The same principle applies to God and His creation. Everything He created is valuable. Even the smallest creation has His signature. We cannot underestimate anything created by God. The names and the greatness of God have filled everything. In Du'a Kumayl we say:

وَبِأَسْمَائِكَ الَّتِي مَلَأْتَ أَرْكَانَ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ

And [I ask You] by Your names, which have filled the foundations of all things.

God's impact can be seen in all things. This aspect is so important that even after tens of thousands of years and even after the rapid development of science and technology, we human beings cannot claim we know everything about even the smallest creature of God. I do not think anyone would dare to claim they know everything about the smallest thing created by God. His creation is so sophisticated that no one can know everything about it, except God Himself.

Among these creatures, when we compare them with one another, some are more honoured and have more significance. The Qur'an mentions them and characterises them as *mukram* (honoured and dignified) or *karim* (great and honourable).

Angels are described as *mukramun*

Sometimes God refers to the angels and describes them as *mukramun*:

وَقَالُوا اتَّخَذَ الرَّحْمَنُ وَلَدًا سُبْحَانَهُ بَلْ عِبَادٌ مُّكْرَمُونَ لَا يَسْبِقُونَهُ بِالْقَوْلِ وَهُمْ بِأَمْرِهِ يَعْمَلُونَ

They say, "The All-beneficent has taken offsprings." Immaculate is He! Rather they are [His] honoured servants. They do not venture to speak ahead of Him, and they act by His command.' (21:26-27)

This verse emphasises that the angels are not God or any kind of deity. They are servants and have been created. However, they are special servants, and are honoured. Angels are pure and clean from any impurity. To explain further, He says:

لَا يَسْبِقُونَهُ بِالْقَوْلِ وَهُمْ بِأَمْرِهِ يَعْمَلُونَ

They do not venture to speak ahead of Him, and they act by His command. (21:27)

The angels, because they are at the service of the absolute truth, are *'ibad mukramun* (honoured servants). If we also want to reach their level of being honoured and dignified then we must also obey God, and we should not behave as those who want to gain dignity and honour by disobeying Him.

Advice of Imam Hasan al-Mujtaba (a)

It is narrated that at the end of the life of Imam Hasan, a person called Junadah ibn Abi Sufyan asked Imam for some advice. The Imam, in the last hours of his life, offers some advice; hence we should treat this as very special and important, because the Imam would have wanted to say something in such a way that it would be sufficient for the listener, and yet comprehensive, and would not require any further clarification, as he would not have the opportunity to see the Imam again. The Imam said:

وَ إِذَا أَرَدْتَ عِزًّا بِلَا عَشِيرَةٍ وَ هَيْبَةً بِلَا سُلْطَانٍ فَاخْرُجْ مِنْ ذُلِّ مَعْصِيَةِ اللَّهِ
إِلَى عِزِّ طَاعَةِ اللَّهِ عَزَّ وَ جَلَّ

If you want to have honour without a big tribe/family to support you, and awe without a kingdom, then exit the state of humiliation of disobedience and enter into the honour of obedience to God.⁸

⁸ *Kifayat al-Athar*, vol. 1, p. 226. A similar hadith is quoted from Imam Ali (a) as well. For example, Shaykh al-Tusi in his *al-Amali* through his chain of narration quotes Imam Ali (a) saying:

مَنْ أَرَادَ عِزًّا بِلَا عَشِيرَةٍ، وَ هَيْبَةً مِنْ غَيْرِ سُلْطَانٍ، وَ غَنًى مِنْ غَيْرِ مَالٍ، وَ طَاعَةَ مَنْ غَيْرِ بَذَلٍ، فَلْيَتَحَوَّلْ مِنْ ذُلِّ مَعْصِيَةِ اللَّهِ إِلَى عِزِّ طَاعَتِهِ، فَانْه يَجِدُ ذَلِكَ كُلَّهُ.

These are two very interesting principles: 1) people disobey God and earn humiliation, and 2) the obedient ones are honoured.

The Imam says that a person does not require a group, party, tribe, a kingdom, or even a government with ministers and an army in order to be honoured and dignified. It is possible to have all of these and yet still not be respected. Obedience to God is the key to honour.

The angels do not perform anything in excess of what God wants and do nothing less than He expects.

Another group of honoured angels

In the story of Prophet Abraham, the Qur'an again mentions that angels are referred to as *mukramun*:

هَلْ أَتَاكَ حَدِيثُ ضَيْفِ إِبْرَاهِيمَ الْمُكْرَمِينَ

Did you receive the story of Abraham's honoured guests?
(51:24)

Those angels that visited Prophet Ibrahim were *mukram* and enjoyed high respect.

Prophets are *mukram*

The prophets of God are also introduced as those with *karamah* and respect. God refers to Prophet Moses in the following way:

وَلَقَدْ فَتَنَّا قَوْمَ فِرْعَوْنَ وَجَاءَهُمْ رَسُولٌ كَرِيمٌ

*Certainly We tried the people of Pharaoh before them,
when a noble apostle came to them. (44:17)*

This verse clearly shows that the messenger who came to the people of Pharaoh was *karim*: he possessed honour and dignity. Moses was indeed a great personality.

إِنَّهُ لَقَوْلُ رَسُولٍ كَرِيمٍ

It is indeed the speech of a noble apostle. (69:40)

In this verse, God makes it clear that the verses of the Qur'an are the words transmitted by a messenger, and are not the words of a poet. A poet has no divine message, and he merely speaks of himself. Here, the apostle referred to is either angel Gabriel or Prophet Muhammad. The same phrase is repeated in another part of the Qur'an.⁹

The people of heaven are *mukram*

The Qur'an describes the inhabitants of heaven as follows:

وَمَا تُجْزَوْنَ إِلَّا مَا كُنْتُمْ تَعْمَلُونَ إِلَّا عِبَادَ اللَّهِ الْمُخْلَصِينَ أُولَئِكَ لَهُمْ رِزْقٌ مَّعْلُومٌ
فَوَاكِهُ وَهُمْ مُكْرَمُونَ فِي جَنَّاتِ النَّعِيمِ

And you will be requited only for what you used to do – [all] except God's exclusive servants. For such there is a known provision – fruits – and they will be held in honour, in the gardens of bliss. (37:39-43)

This passage refers to those that are *mukhlās* (purified); those who have special and distinct qualities, one of which is that they are not brought for judgement. Everyone else will be brought for judgement, but not the *mukhlās*. They will not need judgement, for they are higher than the level of being questioned.

⁹ 81:19.

Another distinction that the *mukhlasin* have is that their reward is not based on their actions. They are so close to God and are so loved and honoured, it is as if they have a blank cheque. Their reward is a much higher level of reward. For them, they are not asked what they have done and then they are given a proportionate reward like a salary; rather they are so loved by God that He treats them with special courtesy. They have a special sustenance decided by God and known to Him. The word employed—*ma'lum*—shows that their reward is something special. Sometimes, when you wish to host someone, you reserve something very special for your guests that is known only to the host. This is a special honour:

أُولَئِكَ فِي جَنَّاتٍ مُّكْرُمُونَ

They will be in gardens, held in honour. (70:35)

Piety

Hence, the angels, messengers, and pure servants of God in heaven, are *mukram*. God also says that the people who are pious in this world also have a special level of *karamah*. This is because, in reality, these pious people are the same people as those in heaven. At the moment they are in this world, but their nature and quality are heavenly. Furthermore, those people that possess more *taqwa* (piety or God-wariness) are even more honoured:

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنَّا خَلَقْنَاكُمْ مِنْ ذَكَرٍ وَأُنْثَىٰ وَجَعَلْنَاكُمْ شُعُوبًا وَقَبَائِلَ لِتَعَارَفُوا إِنَّ أَكْرَمَكُمْ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ أَتْقَاكُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلِيمٌ خَبِيرٌ

O mankind! Indeed We created you from a male and a female, and made you nations and tribes that you may identify yourselves with one another. Indeed the noblest

of you in the sight of God is the most Godwary among you. Indeed God is all-knowing, all-aware. (49:13)

If people understood this then it would lead to a world free of conflict. Our Creator is the same, and our father and mother are the same, but unfortunately people forget this pact, and brothers and sisters in humanity fight each other.

God emphasises that He did not create us into different tribes and nations to fight, but rather to get to know each other. The different colours and ethnicities are there for us to better understand one another. If everyone had been the same, then it would have been difficult for us to recognise each other. We must use these differences as an opportunity to understand one another.

The verse emphasises that none of the worldly things give us any importance: aspects such as tribe, family, ethnicity are all insignificant. Our Creator will judge us on a different criterion. If you imagine a company that manufactures laptops or mobile phones, then the designer of these items is best placed to judge which one is the best of them. Our designer is God. He says that no one is better than another based on colour, ethnicity, or geography. In the sight of God, *the best and most honourable are those who are more pious.*

Everyone can be pious. We cannot decide our gender, colour, ethnicity, and status, and hence these are not important. But what we can control is really what is important, and that is piety (*taqwa*) and knowledge. The Qur'an affirms that people can rise in their ranks, based on piety and knowledge.

أَمَّنْ هُوَ قَانَتْ آثَاءُ اللَّيْلِ سَاجِدًا وَقَائِمًا يَحْذَرُ الْآخِرَةَ وَيَرْجُو رَحْمَةَ رَبِّهِ قُلْ هَلْ
يَسْتَوِي الَّذِينَ يَعْلَمُونَ وَالَّذِينَ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ إِنَّمَا يَتَذَكَّرُ أُولُوا الْأَلْبَابِ

Is he who supplicates in the watches of the night, prostrating and standing, apprehensive of the Hereafter and expecting the mercy of his Lord . . . ? Say, 'Are those who know equal to those who do not know?' Only those who possess intellect take admonition. (39:9)

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنَّا خَلَقْنَاكُمْ مِنْ ذَكَرٍ وَأُنْثَىٰ وَجَعَلْنَاكُمْ شُعُوبًا وَقَبَائِلَ لِتَعَارَفُوا إِنَّ أَكْرَمَكُمْ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ أَتْقَاهُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلِيمٌ خَبِيرٌ

O mankind! Indeed We created you from a male and a female, and made you nations and tribes that you may identify yourselves with one another. Indeed the noblest of you in the sight of God is the most Godwary among you. Indeed God is all-knowing, all-aware. (49:13)

Therefore, the pious are honoured, and those with more piety are honoured even more. Of course, this is in addition to general honour that God has bestowed upon all human beings. The Qur'an says:

وَلَقَدْ كَرَّمْنَا بَنِي آدَمَ

*Certainly We have honoured the Children of Adam.
(17:70)*

Establishing a *Hanif* Nation: Prophet Abraham's Mission and Struggles, Part I¹

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Translated by Mahboobeh Morshedian

Abstract: Prophet Abraham is recognized as the patriarch of the three Abrahamic religions, as well as the prophet and messenger of God, and leader to all the nations of the world in Islam. This part of this series offers an account of Prophet Abraham's early life, specifically about his youth, his search for the truth, and his family and community. This article further explores Prophet Abraham's patience with his father, his uprising, his biological parents, and his deep insight. Despite the ongoing oppression towards him from his idolatrous father and idol-worshipping community, as well as the additional trials he faced, Prophet Abraham's unwavering faith earned himself the title of being one of the five Prophets of Determination.

Prophet Abraham's Early Life and His Monotheistic Movement²

The start of Abraham's retreat from his tribe

He said, - O' Abraham! Are you renouncing my gods?

If you do not relinquish, I will stone you.

¹ From *The Thematic Commentary of the Qur'an Based on al-Mizan*: The 18th Booklet

² Source: The Qur'anic verses in the text and the historical discussion. al-Mizan Qur'anic commentary, vol. 14, p. 19.

Then you should keep away from me for a while!

Abraham said,

- Peace be to you! I shall plead with my Lord to forgive you.

Indeed He is gracious to me.

I dissociate myself from you and whatever you invoke besides Allah.

I will supplicate my Lord.

Hopefully, supplicating my Lord will not be fruitless!

When he had left them

and the idols they worshipped instead of Allah,

We gave him Isaac and Jacob,

and each We made a prophet.

And We gave them out of Our mercy,

and conferred on them a worthy and lofty repute.³

The above verses refer to the ending part of Abraham's call and debate with his father, Azar, who threatened to kill Abraham in the worst manner: stoning him to death, as this is how the rejected ones were tortured during that time.

³ The Qur'an 19: 46-50

قَالَ أَرَأَيْتَ أَنْتَ عَنِ الْهَيْبَةِ يَا إِبْرَاهِيمَ لَنْ لَمْ تَنْتَهُ لَأَرْجَمَنَّكَ وَ أَهْجُرُنِي مَلِيًّا، قَالَ سَلَامٌ عَلَيْكَ سَأَسْتَغْفِرُ لَكَ رَبِّي إِنَّهُ كَانَ بِي حَفِيًّا، وَ أَغْتَرَكُمُ مَا تَدْعُونَ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ وَ أَدْعُوا رَبِّي عَسَى أَلَّا أَكُونَ بِدُعَاءِ رَبِّي شَفِيًّا، فَلَمَّا أَغْتَرَهُمْ وَ مَا يُغْبِذُونَ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ وَهَبْنَا لَهُ إِسْحَاقَ وَ يَعْقُوبَ وَ كُلًّا جَعَلْنَا نَبِيًّا، وَ وَهَبْنَا لَهُمْ مِنْ رَحْمَتِنَا وَ جَعَلْنَا لَهُمْ لِسَانَ صِدْقٍ عَلِيًّا

In return for his father's threat, Abraham said "Salam" (*Peace be to you*) to him as a sign of benevolence and security. He also promised to seek God's forgiveness for his father. In response to his demand, "*Keep away from me for a [long] while!*", Abraham replied: "*I dissociate myself from you and whatever you invoke besides Allah!*"⁴

As for why Abraham said "Salam," *Salam* is the habit and attribute of great people; he returned his father's ignorance by saying "Salam" to him. Azar had threatened to stone Abraham to death and banish him for his true word, and Abraham promised him security, health, and benevolence in return. This is the very Qur'anic guideline, "*And when they come upon vain talk, pass by nobly.*"⁵ Elsewhere, God said in the Qur'an: "*And when the ignorant address them, say, 'Peace!'*"⁶

As why did Abraham say, "*I shall plead with my Lord to forgive you!*", although his father was a polytheist? Because at that moment Abraham was not sure about Azar's disbelief and whether he was a friend of Satan. Azar's heart was replete with disbelief and denial of—and rebellion against—the truth. He considered it probable that his father was an oppressed and deprived ignorant unable to find the truth; and if only he knew the truth, and would follow it, Divine mercy might cover him. As he deemed this possible, he wanted to arouse his feelings through this promise, and he did not consider God's forgiveness as definitely including him and talked of it using "*hopefully*" and "*may*".

⁴ The Qur'an 60:4.

⁵ The Qur'an 25: 72, إِذَا مَرُّوا بِاللَّغْوِ مَرُّوا كِرَامًا

⁶ The Qur'an 25: 63, إِذَا خَاطَبَهُمُ الْجَاهِلُونَ قَالُوا سَلَامًا

Elsewhere in the Qur'an, Abraham—after promising to seek God's forgiveness for his father—added that he could not avail him anything against Allah.⁷

In the chapter al-Tawbah, God also said,

*Abraham's pleading forgiveness for his father was only to fulfil a promise he had made him. So when it became manifest to him that he was an enemy of God, he repudiated him. Indeed Abraham was most plaintive and forbearing.*⁸

In the verse, "*I dissociate myself from you and whatever you invoke besides Allah...*"⁹ Abraham promised to keep away from polytheists and their idols to invoke God sincerely and in seclusion so that his prayer might be granted.

The reason why he expressed hope was that prayer, invocation, and the like do not make anything incumbent on God, rather if God grants us reward in return, it is salvation achieved by His grace. (The criterion is the end of affairs. And nobody except God knows about the unseen and the end of affairs, so the believer is always in a state between fear and hope.)

*When he had left them and the idols they worshipped instead of Allah, We gave him Isaac and Jacob, and each We made a prophet!*¹⁰

⁷ The Qur'an 60: 4.

⁸ The Qur'an 9: 114. *وَمَا كَانَ اسْتِغْفَارُ إِبْرَاهِيمَ لِأَبِيهِ إِلَّا عَنْ مَوْعِدَةٍ وَعَدَهَا إِيَّاهُ فَلَمَّا تَبَيَّنَ لَهُ أَنَّهُ عَدُوٌّ لِلَّهِ تَبَرَّأَ مِنْهُ إِنَّ إِبْرَاهِيمَ لَأَوَّاهٌ*

حَلِيمٌ
⁹ The Qur'an 16: 48. *وَأَعْتَلُكُمْ وَ مَا تَدْعُونَ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ*

¹⁰ The Qur'an 19: 49. *فَلَمَّا أَغْتَلَهُمْ وَ مَا يُعْبُدُونَ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ وَهَبْنَا لَهُ إِسْحَاقَ وَ يَعْقُوبَ وَ كُلًّا جَعَلْنَا نَبِيًّا*

Considering this verse, one can see that God—instead of referring to Abraham’s two sons, Ishaq and Isma’il—mentioned his grandson, Ya‘qub, because He wanted to refer to the chain of prophethood as placed in Bani-Isra’il. In other words, many descendants of Ya‘qub became prophets, and the sentence “*and each We made a prophet*” confirms this.

In the end, God said, “*And We gave them out of Our mercy, and conferred on them a worthy and lofty repute!*”¹¹

Abraham’s seeking forgiveness for his father¹²

In the above verse, God pointed out that after it had turned out that polytheists would be the dwellers of Hell, the Prophet and the believers should not seek God’s forgiveness for them even if they were their relatives:

*Abraham’s pleading forgiveness for his father was only to fulfil a promise he had made him. So when it became manifest to him that he was an enemy of God, he repudiated him. Indeed Abraham was most plaintive and forbearing!*¹³

The reason why it is not permissible to seek God’s forgiveness for polytheists is that it is a futile act, as a believer’s humbleness prevents him from playing with God’s grandeur and doing anything useless.

It is meaningless to seek God’s forgiveness for the one who does not believe in Divine mercy and forgiveness and does not acknowledge

¹¹ The Qur’an 19: 50. وَهَبْنَا لَهُمْ مِنْ رَحْمَتِنَا وَجَعَلْنَا لَهُمْ لِسَانَ صِدْقٍ عَلِيًّا

¹² Source: The Qur’anic verses no. 113-144 of chapter al-Tawbah “*Abraham’s pleading forgiveness for his father was only to...*”¹² Al-Mizan, vol. 18, p. 338.

¹³ The Qur’an 9: 114. وَ مَا كَانَ اسْتِغْفَارُ إِبْرَاهِيمَ لِأَبِيهِ إِلَّا عَنْ مَوْعِدَةٍ وَعَدَهَا إِيَّاهُ فَلَمَّا تَبَيَّنَ لَهُ أَنَّهُ عَدُوٌّ لِلَّهِ تَبَرَّأَ مِنْهُ إِنَّ إِبْرَاهِيمَ لَأَوَّاهٌ حَلِيمٌ

servitude to God. Such a request for intercession is to ridicule God's divinity and servitude to Him. By virtue of man's innate disposition, it is an inappropriate and impermissible act referred to in the Qur'an as "not being entitled to do so".

The purpose of Abraham's uprising and his proof¹⁴

In verses 74-83 of the chapter al-An'am, God referred to the proof He granted to Prophet Abraham with which to debate with polytheists and invite them to the monotheistic religion that God had directed him to.

After these verses, God stated that the prophets are guided, and their hearts are cleansed of polytheism. Among all prophets, He brought up Prophet Noah, who had lived before Abraham and sixteen other prophets, all of whom were Abraham's descendants.

These verses, in fact, expressed the highest rank and the perfect manifestation of faith and necessity of maintaining the "religion based on origination of Allah", disseminating monotheism, and cleansing oneself of polytheism and idolatry

This is the very sacred goal for which Abraham rose against the polytheists. Those days when people forgot monotheism—that which Prophet Noah and the prophets after him taught—and the world were under the control of idolatry, Abraham communicated with them to reveal the existing situation.

These verses with proofs on the "religion based on origination of Allah" are to give Prophet Muhammad more insights into the proofs God had

¹⁴ Source: Qur'anic verse no. 74-83 of the chapter al-An'am, "*When Abraham said to Azar, his father,...* Al-Mizan, vol. 13, p.245.

taught to Prophet Abraham, as mentioned in this chapter and before these verses. On forty occasions, He said, “Say so ... argue so ...”. More than twenty instances of such sentences can also be found before these verses.

God told Prophet Muhammad that when you face your tribe and prove monotheism and negate polytheism which We have inculcated in you, you should remember the reasons Abraham gave his father and his tribe. Consider the proofs that We taught him and through which We showed him the dominion of the heavens and the earth. Abraham debated with his tribe through the knowledge and wisdom We granted him, and not through unreal thoughts limited to imagination and tainted with affectation and self-dependence, all of which are contrary to man’s pure and God-given disposition.

“...This was Our argument that We gave to Abraham...”¹⁵

(A detailed account of the verses and Prophet Abraham’s proofs will be addressed below).

The meaning of Abraham’s primeval thoughts¹⁶

To accurately read the content of narrations, one must consider the content of the narrations, hold a truth-seeking impulse without being affected by the debates of Qur’anic commentators, and have a pure mind emptied of illusory contradictions and of mixing Qur’anic commentaries with contents of hadith, history book, the Torah, and the Israiliyyat. It was Abraham’s common sense, pure innate disposition, and initial perceptions of his wisdom that were manifested in these words:

¹⁵ The Qur’an 6: 83, *وَتِلْكَ حُجَّتُنَا آتَيْنَاهَا إِبْرَاهِيمَ*

¹⁶ Source: The verse no. 79 of chapter al-An’am “Indeed I have turned my face toward Him who originated the heavens and the earth, as a Hanif, and I am not one of the polytheists.” al-Mizan, vol. 13, p.246.

...Thus did We show Abraham the dominions of the heavens and the earth, that he might be of those who possess certitude.

*When night darkened over him, he saw a star
and said, 'This is my Lord!'*

But when it set,

He said, 'I do not like those who set.'

Then, when he saw the moon rising,

he said, 'This is my Lord!'

But when it set,

He said, 'Had my Lord not guided me,

I would surely have been among the astray lot.'

Then, when he saw the sun rising,

He said, 'This is my Lord! This is bigger!'

But when it set, he said,

O my people, indeed I disown what you take as [His] partners.'

Indeed I have turned my face toward Him who originated the heavens and the earth,

as a Hanif, and I am not one of the polytheists.¹⁷

¹⁷ The Qur'an 6: 75-79. وَكَذَٰلِكَ نُرِي إِبْرَاهِيمَ مَلَكُوتَ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَ الْأَرْضِ وَلِيَكُونَ مِنَ الْمُوقِنِينَ؛ فَلَمَّا جَزَّ عَلَيْهِ اللَّيْلُ رَأَى كَوْكَبًا قَالَ هَٰذَا رَبِّي فَلَمَّا أَفَلَ قَالَ لَا أُحِبُّ الْآفِلِينَ فَلَمَّا رَأَى الْقَمَرَ بَازِعًا قَالَ هَٰذَا رَبِّي فَلَمَّا أَفَلَ قَالَ لَئِنْ لَمْ يَهْدِنِي رَبِّي لَأَكُونَنَّ مِنَ الْقَوْمِ الضَّالِّينَ فَلَمَّا رَأَى الشَّمْسَ بَازِعَةً قَالَ هَٰذَا رَبِّي هَٰذَا أَكْبَرُ فَلَمَّا أَفَلَتْ قَالَ يَا قَوْمِ إِنِّي بَرِيءٌ مِّمَّا تُشْرِكُونَ إِنِّي وَجَّهْتُ وَجْهِيَ لِلدِّينِ فَطَرِ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ حَنِيفًا وَمَا أَنَا مِنَ الْمُشْرِكِينَ

In short, if one ponders on these verses fairly, he will no doubt consider Abraham's words with his tribe like the words of a hypothetical primitive man who has spent his life in a tunnel or a cave.

Abraham was a man who has associated with the one who provides him with scanty food just to keep him alive and a garment to protect him from the heat and the cold. A man who has never entered vast cities and has never come across their thoughts and ideas and contradictory religions and denominations. Now he happens to visit a vast land and a large society, and he sees what he has never seen.

Abraham witnessed the hustle and bustle of the city life, active and inactive people, employers and employees, servants and lords, bosses and subordinates, and non-worshippers and worshippers of their gods. Meanwhile, he suddenly sees the sky, and his astonishment doubles as he sees heavenly bodies. Deeply amazed, he inevitably asks about each to know their purposes, like a child who sees the expansive sky and its shining stars and asks his mother in fascination: "What are these shining bodies?" "They're beautiful!" "Who hung them to the sky?" "Who makes them glow all night?" "Who made these lights?"

He asks about the small and large ones, and the features of each. The only difference is that a hypothetical person would first ask about the nature of things closer to his knowledge accumulated during his seclusion. Because his then knowledge was not that of the perception (he did not see or hear anything), and the first thing he asks about is the principal cause of the universe. Yes, in general, mankind tries to know the

unknown through the known. In other words, he uses his basic knowledge and science to discover the nature of the unknown.

For example, when nomadic children come across something new, they first ask about it in a way most familiar to them. In other words, they first ask questions such as: “What is the nature of this?” “Who has made it?” “What is it used for?” “What is it made for?”

The intended hypothetical man is almost a primeval man, and his innate disposition is still pure and cleansed of contamination. As he has come into contact merely with the simplest facilities, his mind is empty of various memories and thoughts that preoccupy the civilized and urban man. Civilized people are so busy with this world and with so unfocused thoughts that they may not experience peace of mind even for a few moments.

There are numerous events occurring in the sky and on the earth around the primitive man without his knowing their natural causes. Thus, his mind is more prepared to think about supernatural causes. If the urban man were free from enumerating natural causes, he would notice the supernatural causes as well. Hence, if the primitive man finds urban people worship a supernatural source, he will take notice of it sooner than others.

Therefore, religiousness and attention to an effort put in the religious ceremonies as well as theological discussions can be found more in Asia than Europe. In Asia, such issues are appreciated more in small towns and villages than in large cities, clearly because the larger a society and the more comfortable the life there, the more material needs and jobs it has. Likewise, the more preoccupied people, the less the spirituality. In

short, their hearts have less capacity to heed to the starting and ending points of mankind.

Abraham as a hypothetical, primitive man¹⁸

If we examine the life story of Abraham in the verses under discussion as well as the verses of chapters Maryam, Anbiya, and Saffat, we can see that in his debate with his father and tribe he was in a state like that of the hypothetical primitive man because Abraham asked: “What are these stone and wood sculptures to which you are submissive to?”

And like a person who had not seen or experienced anything about belief and disbelief, he asked: “What do you do in front of the stars, the sun, and the moon? Why?”

He also asked his father and tribe: “What are these sculptures to which you are submissive to?”

He also asked, “*What is it that you are worshipping?*”¹⁹

In response, they said, “*We worship idols, and we will go on clinging to them [will keep worshipping them]*”²⁰

He asked again, “*Do they hear you when you call them? Or do they bring you any benefit, or cause you any harm?*”²¹

They answered, “*No, rather we found our fathers acting likewise!*”²²

¹⁸ Source: Qur’anic verse no. 74 of the chapter al-An’am, “*When Abraham said to Azar, his father...*” Al-Mizan, vol. 13, p. 248.

¹⁹ The Qur’an 26: 70. مَا تَعْبُدُونَ

²⁰ The Qur’an 26: 71. قَالُوا نَعْبُدُ أَصْنَامًا فَنَظَّلُهَا عَاكِفِينَ

²¹ The Qur’an 26: 72-73. أَوْ يَنْفَعُوكُمْ أَوْ يُضُرُّونَ قَالَ هَلْ يَسْمَعُونَكَ إِذْ تَدْعُوْنَ - أَوْ يَنْفَعُونَكَ أَوْ يُضُرُّونَ

²² The Qur’an 26: 74. قَالُوا بَلْ وَجَدْنَا آبَاءَنَا كَذَلِكَ يَفْعَلُونَ

This tone of speaking is of the one who has seen neither an idol nor an idolater so far, while he has been raised in the cradle of idolatry and polytheism, i.e., Babylon, Chaldea.

Abraham's purpose of such interpretations was not to humiliate the idols because he was too polite to do so. Abraham was the one who had not spoken but politely to his father, Azar. Even when Azar banished him and told him he would stone Abraham to death, he said in response: *"Peace be to you! I shall plead with my Lord to forgive you. Indeed He is gracious to me."*²³

Looking at this verse on the character and manners of Abraham, it is doubtful that someone like him humiliated Azar's gods to the point where it provoked Azar's partiality and bias for idols, especially knowing that God calls Abraham "the *Hanif* nation."²⁴ In this religion, Abraham was forbidden from insulting the polytheists' gods because such behaviour might make the polytheists oppose him the same way.

After the debate with his father and tribe about idols, Abraham started to worship their lords, that is, "the stars, the sun, and the moon". He pointed to a star, saying, *"This is my Lord!"*²⁵

Also, when he saw the moon rising, he said, *"This is my Lord!"*²⁶ And then when the sun rose, he said, *"This is my Lord! This is bigger!"*²⁷

Here, it is clear Abraham had not seen the stars, the moon, and the sun before. His interpretation of the sun is of the one who seems not to know

²³ The Qur'an 19: 47. سَلَامٌ عَلَيْكَ سَأَسْتَغْفِرُ لَكَ رَبِّي إِنَّهُ كَانَ بِي حَفِيظًا

²⁴ The Qur'an 16: 120. أُمَّةً قَانِتًا لِلَّهِ خَنِيفًا

²⁵ The Qur'an 6: 76. هَذَا رَبِّي

²⁶ The Qur'an 6: 77. هَذَا رَبِّي

²⁷ The Qur'an 6: 78. هَذَا رَبِّي هَذَا أَكْبَرُ

what they are. He only knows that people are submissive to these heavenly bodies and make them offerings.

It is like seeing a figure from a distance and knowing this is a human being, but not knowing whether it is the figure of a male or a female, and asking somebody, “Who is this?” and he introduces that man or woman to you. However, if you do not know whether it is a figure of a human being, an animal, or an inanimate thing, you ask, “What is it?” because you do not know about it anything except that it is a thing. Thus, in response to you, it is said, “It is Zayd, or a woman, or a wooden stick.” In fact, you are ignorant, and in your question—among all features of that figure including whether it is human, male or female—you mention the issue you have knowledge of. However, as the respondent has enough knowledge, he observes the reality.

Thus, the surface meaning of what he said, “*This is my Lord!*” and “*This is my Lord! This is bigger!*” was that he had no knowledge about the sun except that it was larger than the stars. In other words, on the surface, his words indicated he had no knowledge about whether the sun was a material mass or a shining plate which managed earth’s creatures through its light and apparently created day and night through its rotation, or whether the moon and the stars all rose at night and then set. All in all, his words indicated his ignorance of the matter.

Abraham, before entering the polytheist society²⁸

Upon looking at verses no. 74-83 of the chapter *al-An‘am* and all verses relating to Abraham’s debate on monotheism with his father and the rest of the tribe, it can be concluded that he had lived far from his father and

²⁸ Source: The Qur’anic verse no. 74 of the chapter *al-An‘am*, “*When Abraham said to Azar, his father...*” *al-Mizan*, vol.13, p.252.

tribe before. Hence, he was not familiar with what people usually knew about beings and common traditions.

Early in his maturity, he left his place and joined his father. It was then that he saw the idols for the first time and asked his father, "What are these?" Receiving the answer, he started to debate with his father to taint the divinity of idols.

After persuading his father, he went to his tribe and attempted to convince them. Then he began to worship the lords of idols, which were the stars, the sun, and the moon. Once he witnessed them set one by one, he invalidated their divinity. To prove his sincere monotheism, he said:

*Indeed I have turned my face toward Him who originated the heavens and the earth, as a Hanif, and I am not one of the polytheists.*²⁹

According to the evidence presented below, this debate took him two days and one night.

The initial insight granted to Abraham³⁰

Abraham himself knew that there was a Creator for the heavens and the earth, Allah, the Almighty, Who had no associate. However, in his debate, he sought an answer the question: "Among God's creatures, is there anything considered the lord of people, including that of Abraham himself?"

For example, is there is the sun, the moon, or something else which is the associate with God in managing the universe? Or whether all universe

²⁹The Qur'an 6: 79. إِيَّاهُ وَجَّهْتُ وَجْهِيَ لِلَّذِي فَطَرَ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ خَبِيفًا وَمَا أَنَا مِنَ الْمُشْرِكِينَ

³⁰ Source: The Qur'anic verses no. 74-83 of the chapter al-An'am, "When Abraham said to Azar, his father....." al-Mizan, vol.13, p.252.

affairs are only under the control of God, the Almighty, and there is no god but Him?

Of course, God helped him in all these steps and kept his heartfelt belief in Him firm through showing him the dominion of the heavens and the earth. Abraham was so realistic that no matter what he saw, he first noticed how it was attributed to God before perceiving it and its effects. First, he observed God's creation and management in everything and then noticed it:

*Thus did We show Abraham the dominions of the heavens and the earth,*³¹

And also:

*Certainly We had given Abraham his rectitude before, and We knew him*³²

Abraham himself told his father:

*Indeed a knowledge has already come to me which has not come to you. So follow me that I may guide you to a right path*³³

An investigation into Abraham's biological parents³⁴

From the Qur'anic verses on Abraham's life story, it can be inferred that his first encounter with his tribe, he came across a man called Azar and referred to as his father in the Qur'an. Abraham persisted a lot in making him to give up his idols and follow Abraham in monotheism. In return,

³¹ The Qur'an 6: 75. وَكَذَٰلِكَ نُرِي إِبْرَاهِيمَ مَلَكُوتَ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَ الْأَرْضِ وَ لِيَكُونَ مِنَ الْمُوقِنِينَ

³² The Qur'an 21: 51. وَلَقَدْ آتَيْنَا إِبْرَاهِيمَ نُشُدَّهُ مِنْ قَبْلُ وَ كُنَّا بِهٖ عَالِمِينَ

³³ The Qur'an 19: 43. يَا أَبَتِ إِنِّي قَدْ جَاءَنِي مِنَ الْعِلْمِ مَا لَمْ يَأْتِكَ فَاتَّبِعْنِي أَهْدِكَ صِرَاطًا سَوِيًّا

³⁴ Source: The Qur'anic verse no. 74 of the chapter al-An'am, "When Abraham said to Azar, his father,... al-Mizan, vol. 13, p. 284.

Azar rejected Abraham, with Abraham having to keep away from him forever!

This can be found out after pondering on the verses of the chapter Maryam:

And mention in the Book Abraham. Indeed he was a truthful one, a prophet.

When he said to his father, 'Father!

Why do you worship that which neither hears nor sees, and is of no avail to you in any way?

Father! Indeed a knowledge has already come to me which has not come to you. So follow me that I may guide you to a right path.³⁵

His father said in response,

Abraham! Are you renouncing my gods?

If you do not relinquish, I will stone you. Keep away from me for a long while.³⁶

Here Abraham said “Salam” to him and promised to ask for God’s forgiveness for him so that he might convert to the Divine religion and attain forgiveness. The Qur’an also narrated how Abraham kept his promise to ask for God’s forgiveness for his father in the chapter *al-Shu‘ara*, where Abraham said:

³⁵ The Qur’an 19: 41-43. *وَ اذْكُرْ فِي الْكِتَابِ اِبْرَاهِيْمَ اِذْ قَالَ لِاَبِيْهِ يَا اَبَتِ لِمَ تَعْبُدُ مَا لَا يَبْصُرُ وَ لَا يَسْمَعُ وَ لَا يُهْدِي سُبُوْحًا لَا يَغْنِيْ عَنْكَ شَيْئًا يَا اَبَتِ اِنِّیْ قَدْ جِئْتُكَ مِنَ الْعِلْمِ مَا لَمْ يَأْتِكَ فَاتَّبِعْنِيْ اَهْدِكَ صِرَاطًا سَوِيًّا*

³⁶ The Qur’an 19: 46. *قَالَ اَرَاغِبُ اَنْتَ عَنْ اِلٰهِيْ يٰ اِبْرَاهِيْمُ لَئِنْ لَمْ تَنْتَهِ لَاَرْجُمَنَّكَ وَ اُخْرِجْنِيْ مِنْهَا*

My Lord! Grant me [unerring] judgement, and unite me with the Righteous.

*Confer on me a worthy repute among the posterity,
and make me one of the heirs to the paradise of bliss.*

Forgive my father, for he is one of those who are astray.³⁷

(He said this prayer after his father's death or upon leaving him).
In its ending part, he said,

*Do not disgrace me on the day that they will be resurrected,
the day when neither wealth nor children will avail,
except him who comes to Allah with a sound heart,³⁸*

From this ending part, it can be concluded that this was not a serious prayer, rather he only wanted to fulfil his promise to the father, for on the one hand, he said:

Forgive my father, for he is one of those who are astray.

On the other hand, he said,

*The Day of judgement is the day when neither wealth nor
children will avail,
except him who comes to Allah with a sound heart.*

The Qur'an referred to this point explicitly in the chapter *al-Tawbah*:

*The Prophet and the faithful may not plead for the
forgiveness of the polytheists, even if they should be*

³⁷ The Qur'an 26: 83-86. رَبِّ هَبْ لِي حُكْمًا وَأَلْجِئْنِي بِالصَّالِحِينَ، وَاجْعَلْ لِي لِسَانَ صِدْقٍ فِي الْآخِرِينَ- وَاجْعَلْنِي مِنْ وَرَثَةِ جَنَّةِ النَّعِيمِ، وَاعْفُزْ لِأَنِّي إِنَّهُ كَانَ مِنَ الصَّالِحِينَ

³⁸ The Qur'an 26: 87-89. وَلَا تُخْرِنِي يَوْمَ يُنْعَمُونَ - يَوْمَ لَا يَنْفَعُ مَالٌ وَلَا بَنُونَ - إِلَّا مَنْ أَتَى اللَّهَ بِقَلْبٍ سَلِيمٍ

[their] relatives, after it has become clear to them that they will be the inmates of hell.³⁹

Abraham's pleading forgiveness for his father was only to fulfil a promise he had made him. So when it became manifest to him that he was an enemy of God, he repudiated him. Indeed Abraham was most plaintive and forbearing.⁴⁰

Both his praying for—and dissociating from—his father occurred early in his life before his migration to Jerusalem. Then Abraham decided to travel to the Holy Land and asked God to grant him offspring. The story of his having children can be found in chapters *Maryam* and *al-Anbiya*:

So when he had left them and what they worshipped besides Allah, We gave him Isaac and Jacob, and each We made a prophet.⁴¹

Abraham's biological parents

In his very old age, after he had migrated to the Holy Land, God granted him a child – Isma'il. Abraham and he took Isma'il to Mecca, built that city as well as the Ka'bah there. There, he said a prayer which reveals the facts about his real father:

Our Lord! Forgive me and my parents, and all the faithful, on the day when the reckoning is held.⁴²

³⁹ The Qur'an 9: 113. مَا كَانَ لِلنَّبِيِّ وَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا أَنْ يَسْتَغْفِرُوا لِلْمُشْرِكِينَ وَلَوْ كَانُوا أُولَىٰ قُرْبَىٰ مِنْ بَعْدِ مَا تَبَيَّنَ لَهُمْ أَنَّهُمْ أَصْحَابُ الْجَحِيمِ

⁴⁰ The Qur'an 9: 113. مَا كَانَ اسْتِغْفَارُ إِبْرَاهِيمَ لِأَبِيهِ إِلَّا عَنْ مَوْعِدَةٍ وَعَدَهَا إِيَّاهُ فَلَمَّا تَبَيَّنَ لَهُ أَنَّهُ عَدُوٌّ لِلَّهِ تَبَرَّأَ مِنْهُ إِنَّ إِبْرَاهِيمَ لَأَوَّاهٌ حَلِيمٌ

⁴¹ The Qur'an 19: 49. فَلَمَّا عَزَّزْنَاهُمْ وَمَا يُغْنِيُونَ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ وَهَبْنَا لَهُ إِسْحَاقَ وَيَعْقُوبَ وَكُلًّا جَعَلْنَا نَبِيًّا رَبَّنَا اغْفِرْ لِي وَلِإِلَهِائِي وَلِلْمُؤْمِنِينَ يَوْمَ يَقُومُ الْحِسَابُ

⁴² The Qur'an 14: 41. رَبَّنَا اغْفِرْ لِي وَلِإِلَهِائِي وَلِلْمُؤْمِنِينَ يَوْمَ يَقُومُ الْحِسَابُ

The term “*my parents*” in this prayer refers only to his biological parents; the word “*father*” can refer to somebody other than the biological father such as grandfather, parental uncle, and so forth, just as the word “father” is references this way in the verse 133 of the chapter *al-Baqarah*.

His “father,” who was prayed for here, is somebody other than the one in the verses in the previous section, called “Azar.”

We saw above that Abraham abandoned and dissociated from Azar as he discovered he was God’s enemy. Therefore, Azar was not his biological father for whom he sought God’s forgiveness in his old age.

Azar was not Abraham’s biological father, so he was called “father” because of his position.

Abraham’s biological father according to narrations, was “Tarukh” in which the Torah confirmed this as well.

The Whispered Prayers of Imam al-Sajjad, Part I

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Abstract: *Munajāt* is the Arabic word for “whispered prayers to God in solitude,” while *du’a*, or “supplication” is the general meaning that refers to a request to God in any manner, whether it be long or short, loud or quiet. Summoning to God is highly encouraged by the Ahlul Bayt, and hence, they left people with a rich corpus of supplications to God, including whispered prayers (*munajāt*). This article covers an introduction to the meaning of whispered prayers as found in Islamic traditions, the internal need for people to whisper to God, and the factors that deprive one from praying to Him.

The meaning of *munajāt* and some of its instances in the Qur’an

The Arabic words *munajāt* and *najwa* are derived from the same root, and they mean to whisper, to tell secrets, and to speak privately to others. Some maintain that *najwa* literally means the time when a group speak together in private, either covertly or overtly. The meaning of *munajāt* does not involve speaking secretly and whispering, rather it is a

conversation away from others.¹ Accordingly, *munajāt* is more in line with speaking softly than speaking loudly and shouting. Hence, reciting *munajāt* (fervent prayers to God in solitude) handed down to us from the Ahlul-Bayt or reading poems composed by some in their *munajāt* to God is not considered *munajāt*. Rather they are regarded as reading a *munajāt* because in supplication one composes and recites a prayer to ask God for something, and reciting prayers handed down to us from the Ahlul-Bayt is not regarded as one's own prayer since when one reads a prayer, he does not mean to compose it; rather, he retells some sentences. In this case, one does not pray but recites a prayer. Even sometimes one does not attend to the meaning of what he is reciting.

Munajāt means telling a secret or speaking privately. There can be *munajāt* (secret, intimate talk) sometimes between two people, sometimes as directed from man to God, and sometimes as directed from God to man. Included in the first type and its blameworthy instances are some Qur'anic references to whispering by hypocrites and disbelievers in God who did so to plot against, sadden, and worry the believers. God addressed the believers, saying,

*O you who have faith! When you talk secretly, do not hold secret talks [imbued] with sin and aggression and disobedience to the Apostle, but talk secretly in [a spirit of] piety and Godfearing, and be wary of Allah toward whom you will be mustered.*²

¹ Sayyid Ali-Akbar Qurayshi, *Qamus-e Qur'an*, vol. 7, p. 27.

² The Qur'an, 58: 9.

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا إِذَا تَنَاجَيْتُمْ فَلَا تَتَنَاجَوْا بِالْأَلْسِنِ وَالْعُدْوَانِ وَمَغْصِبَاتِ الرُّسُولِ وَتَنَاجَوْا بِالْبُرِّ وَالتَّقْوَى وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ الَّذِي إِلَيْهِ تُحْشَرُونَ

According to this verse, it is permissible to whisper in the presence of others only if it is advisable, to do good, and only if it does not sadden and worry others. Otherwise, whispering in itself is impolite and inadvisable.

In another verse about those who frequently came to the Prophet and spoke to him, and bothered him to gain an opportunity or a position and to be cherished and acceptable by others, God said:

*O you who have faith! When you talk secretly to the Apostle, offer a charity before your secret talk. That is better for you and purer. But if you cannot afford [to make the offering], then Allah is indeed all-forgiving, all-merciful.*³

Prior to the revelation of this verse, the rich in Medina constantly came to the Prophet and talked to him, boasting about it and pretending to be elites who were closer to him than the poor. However, after it was revealed and they were ordered to pay alms to talk privately to the Prophet, with the poor being excluded from this rule, nobody but Imam Ali was willing to talk to the Prophet. He sold a dinar for 10 dirhams and for 10 days whenever he was to speak privately to the Prophet, he paid one dirham as alms.⁴ In the end, when Muslims refused to speak to the Prophet for the fear of paying alms, God abrogated the ruling of paying alms and said:

Were you apprehensive of offering charities before your secret talks? So, as you did not do it, and Allah was clement to you, maintain the prayer and pay the zakat,

³ The Qur'an, 58: 12.

⁴ Huwayzi, *Tafsir Nur al-Thaqalayn*, vol. 29, p. 299.

*and obey Allah and His Apostle. And Allah is well aware of what you do.*⁵

***Munajāt* to God in hadiths and the conduct of the religious**

In our religious custom and literature, *munajāt* is applied to man's whisper and private talk with God, and one's spiritual state and the surrounding environment requires men to talk softly to God. For example, when one wants to confess his sins before God, because he does not want others to know about his sins and faults, he does so softly and by no means enumerates his sins loudly lest others may know about them. Likewise, romantic talks between the lover and the loved one are cryptic and private, and when a servant in love with his Lord is in His presence and whispers softly to Him, the nature of such a talk requires it not to be loud in such a way that others are informed of it. Unlike *munajāt*, *nida* (to call) refers to the loud and shouting voice from a long distance. Accordingly, when one calls God, he talks to Him loudly because hardships and afflictions have trapped him, and he calls God out to redress his situation. Compared to these two words, *du'a* (prayer) has a general and broad meaning and refers to any request in any manner from an either long or a short distance either loudly or softly. In the beginning of *Munajāt al-Sha'baniyyah*, all three words *du'a*, *nida*, and *munajāt* are used, and the Infallible Imam said:

⁵ The Qur'an, 58: 13.

أَسْأَلُكُمْ أَنْ تَقْدِمُوا بَيْنَ يَدَيَّ جُؤَاكُمُ صَدَقَاتٍ فَإِذْ لَمْ تَفْعَلُوا وَتَابَ اللَّهُ عَلَيْكُمْ فَاقْبِمُوا الصَّلَاةَ وَآتُوا الزَّكَاةَ وَأَطِيعُوا اللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُ وَاللَّهُ خَبِيرٌ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ

Please accept my prayer, whenever I pray to you, please listen to my call, whenever I call You out, and please pay attention to me when I pray to You fervently in solitude.⁶

Prophet Muhammad was quoted as saying that Prophet Moses said in munajāt to God, “O my Lord! Are You keeping away from me so that I may call You out, or are You close to me so that I whisper to You?” Allah revealed to him, “I am the companion of the one who remembers Me.”⁷

In another narration, Imam Ali said about some virtues of the month of Ramadan and munajāt during it:

O the fasting one! Glad tidings to you; verily you are in the month when it is obligatory for you to fast, your breath is considered as glorification, your sleep is an act of worship, your obedience is accepted [by God], your sins are forgiven, your calls and requests are heard, and your munajāt receives the Divine attention and mercy.⁸

Explaining “your calls and requests are heard,” one should say that sometimes a child, a mentally disabled person, or an unknown person says something in a gathering which remains unattended. Under such circumstances, it is said that his word is unheard, or nobody pays attention to him. Likewise, God may ignore a sinner’s request because of the distance and veil caused by his sins. However, on special and blessed days such as the blessed Month of Ramadan, God grants His servants a

⁶ Mafatih al-Jinan, *Munajāt al-Sha'banniyah*, وَأَسْمِعْ دُعَائِي إِذَا دَعَوْتُكَ وَأَسْمِعْ بِنَائِي إِذَا نَادَيْتُكَ وَأَقْبِلْ عَلَيَّ إِذَا تَأَجَّجْتُكَ

⁷ Hurr Amili, *Wasa'il-u-Shi'a*, vol. 1, the sections on Rulings of Solitude, section 7, p.311, Hadith no. 820.

يَا رَبِّ أَعْبِيدُ أَنتَ مَعِيَ فَأَتَادِيكَ أَمْ قَرِيبٌ فَأَتَا جَنَّتِكَ فَأَوْحَى إِلَيَّ اللَّهُ أَنَا جَلِيسٌ مَنْ ذَكَرَنِي:

⁸ Shaykh Saduq, *Fadai'la al-Ashhur al-Thalathah*, p. 109.

بَقِيَ الصَّائِمُ فَإِنَّكَ فِي شَهْرِ صِيَامِكَ فِيهِ مَقْرُوضٌ وَنَفْسُكَ فِيهِ تَسْبِيحٌ وَتَوَكُّمٌ فِيهِ عِبَادَةٌ وَطَاعَتُكَ فِيهِ مَقْبُولَةٌ وَذُنُوبُكَ فِيهِ مَغْفُورَةٌ وَأَصْوَاتُكَ فِيهِ مَسْمُوعَةٌ وَمَنَاجَاتُكَ فِيهِ مَرْخُومَةٌ

general audience and promises to include them in His vast favour and mercy, to pay attention to and grant their requests. This Divine favour implies the significance of munajāt and its effects during these special days. Of course, according to some narrations, apart from the blessed Month of Ramadan and special times, munajāt is significantly important at certain times like at dawn when it receives special attention of God. Imam al-Sadiq says:

When a servant communes with his Lord in solitude at midnight, Allah will enlighten his heart. Then when he says, 'O' my Lord! O' my Lord!' Allah, the Glorious, the Majestic says in response, 'Here I am, My servant! Ask Me so that I may grant you, trust in Me so that I am sufficient for you.' Then Allah tells His angels. 'O My angels! Look at my servant who is supplicating Me at midnight when the pleasure-seekers are indulging in sensual pleasures in vain, and the ignorant are sleeping. Testify that I will include him in my forgiveness.'⁹

Man's need to whisper to God

Naturally, everybody likes to speak privately to great people. The student likes to attract the instructor's attention to himself; hence, he goes to the instructor after the class to ask him his questions privately. In addition to the times when great people have a general audience, and everybody benefits from their presence, one likes to be honoured with association

⁹ Muhadith Nuri, *Mustardak al-Wasa'il*, vol. 5, p. 207.

وَأَنَّ الْعَبْدَ إِذَا تَخَلَّى بِسَيِّدِهِ فِي جَوْفِ اللَّيْلِ [الْمُظْلَمِ] وَتَاجَاهُ أَثْبَتَ اللَّهُ النُّورَ فِي قَلْبِهِ، فَإِذَا قَالَ: يَا رَبِّ يَا رَبِّ، نَادَاهُ الْجَلِيلُ جَلَّ جَلَالُهُ: لَيْتَكَ عَبْدِي سَلَنِي أَعْطَيْكَ وَتَوَكَّلْ عَلَيَّ أَكْفِكَ. ثُمَّ يَقُولُ جَلَّ جَلَالُهُ لَمَلَايِكَتِهِ: يَا مَلَايِكَتِي، انْظُرُوا إِلَى عَبْدِي فَقَدْ تَخَلَّى بِي فِي جَوْفِ اللَّيْلِ الْمُظْلَمِ وَالْبَطَالُونَ لَاهُونَ وَالْغَافِلُونَ نِيَامُ اشْهَدُوا أَنِّي عَفَرْتُ لَهُ

and friendship to them, to speak to them privately and enjoy their affection and regard. Private conversation with great people is of remarkable significance to men and is desired by them. If we are told that our Leader has given us an appointment, and we can go to him and have a private meeting with him, we accept it wholeheartedly, exult over meeting him, and put up with the expenses and hardships of trip so that we could meet him in person and listen to his words.

No doubt, the believer and the one knowing about the grandeur of God and His compassion and blessings tastes the delight of private conversation with Him and always seeks to retreat in solitude, particularly in the holy Month of Ramadan, which is the spring of prayer and *munajāt*, so that he can talk to his Lord and recite the prayers of Iftitah and Abu-Hamzah Thumali, thereby making his love bond with his Lord stronger. On the other hand, the ignorant have not tasted the pleasure of talking to their Lord. It is the true believers who know how pleasurable the conversation with God is and that the one who has the succour to speak privately is of a high spiritual rank.

In some narrations, the factors in succour for *munajāt* and private conversation with God are referred to. For example, Prophet Muhammad related a Divine Hadith as follows, “Whenever I see a servant often pondering on Me, I make him interested in requesting Me and doing *munajāt* to Me.”¹⁰

Mankind is naturally inclined to the worldly and menial issues, but when one’s attention is mostly directed to God, he will be included in God’s mercy and favour and will taste the pleasure of *munajāt* and conversation

¹⁰ Muhammad Bāqir Majlisi, *Bihar-ul-Anwar*, vol. 93, section 13, p. 162, Hadith no. 42.

إِذَا عَلِمْتُ أَنَّ الْعَالِمَ عَلَى عَبْدِي الْإِسْتِغَالِ يَنْتَقِلُ شَهْوَتَهُ فِي مَسَائِلِي وَمُتَاجَاتِي

with Him to such an extent that his greatest desire is munajāt to Him. On the contrary, when one spends his time and attention mostly on the worldly affairs and pleasures, and his heart is replete with fondness of—and attachment to this world—always thinking about what to wear, what to eat, how to own a luxury house, how to be promoted to a higher position, and indulging himself in watching movies that gives him considerable worldly pleasures, he is deprived of tasting the pleasure of munajāt to God.

Factors that deprive one from whispering to God

Considering the greatness of munajāt to God, the significance of a relationship with God, its role in one's worldly and otherworldly salvation, and the losses incurred by being deprived of this big Divine relief, it is advisable that one knows what causes man not to enjoy whispering to God. In some narrations, these factors are introduced; for example, the Hadith of Heavenly Ascent, where He told His Beloved, Prophet Muhammad:

O' Ahmad! If a servant prays and fasts as much as all dwellers of the heavens and the earth, and if he – like angels – avoids eating foods and wears the garment of the devout [act like them], then to the slightest amount there is love of this world, pretence, hypocrisy, and love for leadership, fame, or the worldly ornaments in his heart, I will deprive him of My proximity and force My love out of his heart (i.e., I will darken his heart so

much that he forgets Me, and I will never make him taste My love.)¹¹

About Prophet David, it is said that God addressed him, saying, “My friend should not endeavour nor grieve for this world because this will take the sweetness of munajāt to Me away from his heart.”¹²

The one who is attached to this world should not expect to have satisfaction in munajāt to God. If such people pray to God, their motives do not go beyond the hope for acceptance of their requests and forgiveness of their sins. Throughout the prayer, they will be weary and lethargic, and will enjoy whispering to Him.

Imam al-Sadiq was quoted as narrating a Divine Hadith addressing Prophet David; God revealed to him:

Do not make a scholar deceived [by this world] as the intermediary between Me and yourselves lest he may prevent you from the path of My love and friendship. That is because they are like robbers [invading] my servants who seek Me. Verily the smallest punishment I impose on them is to deprive their hearts of sweetness of munajāt to Me.¹³

¹¹ *Op. cit.*, vol. 74, section 30, vol. 30, p. 6.

يا أحمد لو صَلَّى العبدُ صلاه أهل السماء والأرض ويصومُ صيام أهل السماء والأرض ويتطوي من الطعام مثل الملائكة ولبس لباس العاري ثم أرى في قلبه من حب الدنيا ذرة أو شئها أو رأسها أو خلتها أو زينتها لا يجاوزني في داري ولا نزع من قلبه محبتي ولا ظلم من قلبه حتى ينساني ولا أذيقه حلاوة محبتي

¹² *Op. cit.*, vol. 82, section 61, vol. 143, p. 26.

¹³ Kulayni, *Kāfi*, vol. 1, section al-Musta'kil bi 'Ilmihi wal-Mubahi bih, p. 46, Hadith no. 4.

لا تجعلُ بيني وبينك غالياً مفتوناً بالدنيا فيصدك عن طريق محبتي، فإن أولئك قطعوا طريق عبادي المرئيين. إن أدنى ما أنا صانع بهم أن أنزع حلاوة مُناجائي عن قلوبهم

***Silah rahim*¹ and its Role in Preventing Sins**

Alireza Maktabdar²

Translated by Mahboobeh Morshedian

ABSTRACT: *Silah Rahim*, or “keeping good relations with family and relatives,” is one of the factors, and indeed, mandatory practices in Islam to help people attain well-being in this world and salvation in the next. Moreover, sin is anything against the natural course of creation, that which has harmful effects on both individuals and society. This article tackles the importance of keeping good relations with family and relatives as that which can assist people in preventing sinful actions, hence providing an effective solution to prevent mental health issues, wrongdoing, and corruption. The terms *silah rahim* and *sin* and its importance in the Qur’an and hadith, as well as the relationship between *silah rahim* and abandoning sins will be explored.

Introduction

Sin, a movement against the natural course of the creation from the religious perspective, has numerous devastating and harmful effects on both individuals and society. Man’s salvation is an ongoing concern in Divine religions and various schools of thought, each attempting to find

¹ Lit. keeping good relationships with relatives

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solutions to prevent the dangerous consequences of sins and crimes in society. From a religious perspective, an effective solution to prevent man from—and to protect him against—sins is to strengthen kinship relationships, or *silah rahim* (lit. keeping good relationships with relatives), which is significant from the viewpoint of the Holy Qur'an and hadiths of the Infallibles. Strong and firm kinship ties based on empathy and benevolence are an effective solution to prevent sins and crimes because, on the one hand, they pave the way for the public monitoring by people who are linked to each other, and on the other, they give the individuals an identity, personality, security, and peace of mind. This important role of *silah rahim* is referred to in a hadith by Imam Sadiq.³

The meaning of *silah rahim* (lit. keeping good relationships with relatives)

Silah means bond and link, and *rahim*⁴ means one's blood relatives and the relatives by marriage or milk-relationship.⁵ There are two types of relationship: 1) by blood and by marriage or 2) milk-relationship, and God has pointed them out explicitly in verse no. 54 of the chapter al-Furqan, saying, "*It is He who created the human being from water, then invested him with ties of blood and marriage, and your Lord is all-*

³ See also, al-Kāfi, vol.2, p.157. *فَصَلُّوا أَرْحَامَكُمْ - وَ بَرُّوا*. إِنَّ صَلَّةَ الرَّحِمِ وَ الْبِرَّ لَيَهْوَتَانِ الْجَسَابِ - وَ يَغْصِمَانِ مِنَ الذُّنُوبِ - فَصَلُّوا أَرْحَامَكُمْ - وَ بَرُّوا

⁴ The word "*Rahim*" literally means "womb", which essentially means the place where the fetus grows in the mother's abdomen. The very limb that God has placed in women's body so that the sperm is grown in it and becomes a full-blown child. This is the main meaning of the word "*Rahim*", but it was later used as a metaphor for the liking between the container and the contained in the sense of kinship, since all relatives come out of one womb. Therefore, the word "*Rahim*" means "relative", and "*Arham*" means one's "relatives". See also the translation of al-Mizan Qur'anic Commentary, vol. 4, pp. 219-220.

⁵ People who are not related by blood are of two types: Sometimes they are related by marriage; for example, the groom is related to his wife's family, and the bride to her husband's family. Some other people are also related through fostering and breastfeeding.

powerful.⁶ Parents are the closest relatives, followed by sisters, brothers, uncles, aunts, and other relatives by blood and marriage or milk-relationship.

According to Tabarsi, *silah rahim* means that a person is responsive to his relatives or gives them financial assistance or other types of help.⁷

In terms of its instances, *silah* includes a wide and indefinite variety of physical and non-physical actions and positive value orientations that are taken with these motives behind them: reverence, benevolence, easing one's conscience, satisfying primary and secondary needs of one's relatives, the fulfilment of one's social duties and expectations, and in short, observing one's moral, legal, and customary rights and duties resulting from kinship ties. *Silah rahim* is meant to strengthen natural and social ties. On the contrary, not complying with ethical, legal, and customary duties; neglecting legitimate demands, and committing acts contrary to kinship rights, knowingly and unknowingly, all which cause dissatisfaction, displeasure, and psychological and social distance among relatives are examples of *qat'i rahim* (or "breaking off relationships with relatives"). Of course, in religious sources, not respecting the legal and moral parents' rights is called '*aq-i walidayn* (meaning "being cursed by one's parents"), and the not observing other relatives' rights is called "breaking off relationships with relatives."⁸

From an Islamic perspective, kinship has a wide range and is not limited to close relatives. In addition, it is necessary and praiseworthy to establish the above-mentioned kinship ties both during the relatives' lives and after

⁶ The Qur'an, 25: 54. وَهُوَ الَّذِي خَلَقَ مِنَ الْمَاءِ بَشَرًا فَجَعَلَهُ نَسَبًا وَصِهْرًا وَكَانَ رَبُّكَ قَدِيرًا

⁷ Tabarsi, 1372 AH, vol. 5, p. 8.

⁸ Sharaf-u-Din, 1394 SAH, p. 92.

their deaths. In what follows, some hadiths referring to the wide range of relatives and the necessity of establishing kinship ties are addressed.

The meaning of sins from the Islamic view

‘Sin’ which is referred to in the Qur’an as *ithm*,⁹ *dhanb*,¹⁰ *khati’ah*,¹¹ *ma’siyat*,¹² *fujur*,¹³ etc. means: crime, error, wrongdoing, guilt, and disobedience to God.¹⁴ In other words, it can be said that ‘sin’ is any act contrary to religious rulings that results in expiation, prescribed punishments, and the like.¹⁵

Within the framework of natural and social laws, the term ‘crime’ refers to any action or abandonment of any action for which a punishment is specified under law.¹⁶ From a sociological perspective, a crime is an action contrary to the social order or common social criteria and values. These criteria and values have been derived from that society’s thoughts, beliefs, and its cultural and social conditions.¹⁷

Some Islamic jurisprudents use the term ‘crime’ only for the legally prohibited actions that have worldly punishments and regard the rest of the forbidden acts as ‘*ma’siyat*’ (or ‘sin’), ‘*khati’ah*’ (‘misdeed’) or ‘*ithm*’ (or ‘wrongdoing’). This definition of crime is so close to the so-called legal term and is, in fact, its synonym.¹⁸ In the religious framework, whatever is contrary to natural and social rules or conflicts with moral virtues,

⁹ The Qur’an, 2: 219.

¹⁰ The Qur’an, 6: 6.

¹¹ The Qur’an, 17: 31, 4: 92.

¹² The Qur’an, 20: 121.

¹³ The Qur’an, 82: 14.

¹⁴ Dikhkuda, 1372 SAH, vol. 11, p. 17006

¹⁵ Anwari, 1382 SAH: vol. 6, p. 6255.

¹⁶ Husayni Ahiq, 1385 SAH, vol. 10, p. 205.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

human dignity, public chastity, and social prosperity is considered a sin, and in some cases the sinner will be punished. Therefore, the religious perspective of the sin is wider. In addition to placing importance on man's physical and social health, Islam also pays attention to mental health and peace of mind.

Since the sin or deviation from the right path of life and movement against the natural conventions afflict the sinner with considerable harm, those concerned about their salvation and prosperity should take actions that facilitate attainment to happiness, and should also avoid actions that make it difficult or impossible to reach it in this world and the hereafter.

The importance of *silah rahim* in the Qur'an

The importance of the *silah rahim* is reflected in several verses of the Qur'an:

1. In one verse, *silah rahim* enjoys the same rank as justice, benevolence, and abandonment of indecency, wrong, and oppression, *"Indeed Allah enjoins justice and kindness and generosity towards relatives, and He forbids indecency, wrong, and aggression. He advises you, so that you may take admonition."*¹⁹
2. In another verse, God referred to severing relations with relatives alongside great sins, such as corruption in the earth, saying, *"May it not be that if you were to wield authority you would cause corruption in the land and ill-treat your blood relations?"*²⁰
3. Likewise, God introduced the ones who sever kinship ties as losers: *"Those who break the covenant made with Allah after having pledged it*

¹⁹ The Qur'an, 16: 90. إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُأْمُرُ بِالْعَدْلِ وَ الْإِحْسَانِ وَ إِتَاءِ ذِي الْقُرْبَى وَ يُنْهَى عَنِ الْفَحْشَاءِ وَ الْمُنْكَرِ وَ الْبَغْيِ يَعِظُكُمْ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَذَكَّرُونَ

²⁰ The Qur'an, 47: 22. فَهَلْ عَسَيْتُمْ إِنْ تَوَلَّيْتُمْ أَنْ تُفْسِدُوا فِي الْأَرْضِ وَ تَقْطَعُوا أَرْحَامَكُمْ

*solemnly, and sever what Allah has commanded to be joined, and cause corruption on the earth—it is they who are the losers.”*²¹

4. Still in another verse, these people are referred to as “cursed and doomed to a bad end”:

*But as for those who break Allah’s compact after having pledged it solemnly, and sever what Allah has commanded to be joined, and cause corruption in the earth—it is such on whom the curse will lie, and for them will be the ills of the [ultimate] abode.*²²

On the contrary, those who make effort to maintain kinship relationships are referred to as those who have respectful fear of God and are fearful of the bad end: “...and those who join what Allah has commanded to be joined, and fear their Lord, and are afraid of an adverse reckoning.”²³ In this verse, fear of God’s punishment and reverential fear of His greatness will prevent one from sinning. On the other hand, feeling safe from God’s deceit and retribution or the lack of submissiveness to His majesty also leads one to commit sins.

The effects of both piety and *silah rahim*

To have a better understanding of the role of *silah rahim* in preventing sins, it is a good idea to look at the effects of piety (or Godwariness and the abandonment of sins) as reflected in some verses and hadiths, and

²¹ The Qur’an, 2: 27. الَّذِينَ يَتَّقُونَ اللَّهَ مِنْ بَعْدِ مِيثَاقِهِ وَيَقْطَعُونَ مَا أَمَرَ اللَّهُ بِهِ أَنْ يُوصَلَ وَيُفْسِدُونَ فِي الْأَرْضِ أُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الْخَاسِرُونَ

²² The Qur’an, 13: 25. الَّذِينَ يَتَّقُونَ اللَّهَ مِنْ بَعْدِ مِيثَاقِهِ وَيَقْطَعُونَ مَا أَمَرَ اللَّهُ بِهِ أَنْ يُوصَلَ وَيُفْسِدُونَ فِي الْأَرْضِ أُولَٰئِكَ لَهُمُ الْعَذَابُ وَ لَهُمْ سُوءُ الدَّارِ

²³ The Qur’an, 13: 21. وَالَّذِينَ يَصِلُونَ مَا أَمَرَ اللَّهُ بِهِ أَنْ يُوصَلَ وَيَخْشَوْنَ رَبَّهُمْ وَيَخَافُونَ سُوءَ الْجِسَابِ

then to compare these effects with those of *silah rahim* to understand the role of kinship ties in achieving piety.

In the Qur'an and hadiths, the development of cities is considered as an effect of both piety and *silah rahim*.^{24 25} Likewise, in some verses, kinship ties have been introduced as a factor in prolonging one's life.²⁶ In some hadiths, committing sins accelerates death;²⁷ and on the other, the prolonged life – in many hadiths – is referred to as a positive outcome of the *silah rahim*.^{28 29 30 31 32} In the Qur'an, increased sustenance and the elimination of poverty are regarded as the fruits of piety.³³ Likewise, in some hadiths, the shower of Divine blessings is also considered a fruit of the *silah rahim*,³⁴ which also protects Divine bounties³⁵ and has been introduced as resulting in increased wealth.³⁶ In addition, entering

²⁴ The Qur'an, 7: 96. وَلَوْ أَنَّ أَهْلَ الْقُرَىٰ آمَنُوا وَ اتَّقَوْا لَفَتَحْنَا عَلَيْهِم بَرَكَاتٍ مِّنَ السَّمَاءِ وَ الْأَرْضِ وَ لَكِن كَذَّبُوا فَأَخَذْنَاهُم بِأَكْثَبِ

بَكْسِينُونَ. See also Makarim-ul-Akhlaq, p.388.

²⁵ The Qur'an, 71: 3-4. أَنْ اعْبُدُوا اللَّهَ وَ اتَّقُوهُ وَ أَطِيعُوا . يَغْفِرْ لَكُمْ مِنْ ذُنُوبِكُمْ وَ يُخَوِّزْكُمْ إِلَىٰ أَجَلٍ مُّسَمًّى إِنَّ أَجَلَ اللَّهِ إِذَا جَاءَ . لَا يُؤَخَّرُ لَوْ كُنْتُمْ تَعْلَمُونَ According to Allamah Tabataba'i, God considered the postponement of death to the appointed time [i.e., the prolonged life] as the outcome of worship of God, piety, and obedience to the Prophet (Tabataba'i, 1374 AH, vol. 20, p. 42).

²⁶ مَنْ يَمُوتْ بِالذُّنُوبِ أَكْثَرُ مَمَّنْ يَمُوتْ بِالْأَجَالِ وَ مَنْ يَعِيشْ بِالْإِحْسَانِ أَكْثَرُ مَمَّنْ يَعِيشْ بِالْأَعْمَارِ. See also Bihar-ul-Anwar, vol. 70, p.354.

²⁷ صِلَةُ الرَّحِمِ تَعْمُرُ الْبَيَّارَ وَ تَزِيدُ فِي الْأَعْمَارِ وَ إِنْ كَانَ أَهْلُهَا غَيْرَ أَحْيَاءَ. See also Bihar-ul-Anwar, vol. 47, p. 163.

²⁸ مَنْ سَرَّهُ النِّسَاءُ فِي الْأَجَلِ وَ الزَّيَادَةُ فِي الرِّزْقِ فَلْيَصِلْ رَحِمَهُ. See also al-Kāfi, vol. 2, p. 152.

²⁹ مَا تَعَلَّمَ شَيْئًا يَزِيدُ فِي الْعُمْرِ إِلَّا صِلَةَ الرَّحِمِ.... See also al-Kāfi, vol. 2, p. 152.

³⁰ يَكُونُ الرَّجُلُ يَصِلُ رَحِمَهُ فَيَكُونُ قَدْ بَقِيَ مِنْ عَمْرِهِ ثَلَاثَ سِنِينَ فَيَصْبِرُهَا اللَّهُ ثَلَاثِينَ سَنَةً وَ يَقْعَلُ اللَّهُ مَا يَشَاءُ. See also al-Kāfi, vol. 2, p. 150.

³¹ In his commentary on Nahj-ul-Balāghah, ibn Miytham wrote on this effect of *Silah rahim*: it makes relatives help each other and collaborate kindly with one another, and this causes them to be more immune from enemies and death and prolongs their life. Second, kinship ties cause the family members to endeavor and pray for the survival of the ones they have established kinship ties with. Their prayer and attempt are a reason for their prolonged life and postponed death. Thus, kinship ties cause postponed death and a long life. See also the Commentary on Nahj-ul-Balāghah, Ibn Miytham, vol. 3, p. 80.

³² The Qur'an, 65: 2-3.... وَ مَنْ يَتَّقِ اللَّهَ يَجْعَلْ لَهُ مَخْرَجًا وَ يَرْزُقْهُ مِنْ حَيْثُ لَا يَحْتَسِبُ

³³ بِصِلَةِ الرَّحِمِ تُمْسِكُ الرِّقْمَ. See also Tasnif-e Ghurar-ul-Hikam, p. 406.

³⁴ جَزَاءُ التَّعَمُّ فِي صِلَةِ الرَّحِمِ. See also Tasnif-e Ghurar-ul-Hikam, p. 406.

³⁵ ... وَ صِلَةُ الرَّحِمِ قَائِلَةٌ مَرَّةً لِلْمَالِ... See also Nahj-ul-Balāghah Subhi Salih, p. 163. Explaining this effect of *Silah rahim*, ibn Miytham Bahrani said, “*Silah rahim* is a praiseworthy good deed liked by human nature and leads to affability. Thus, the one who strengthens his kinship ties with his relatives is

Heaven is also regarded as a good outcome of both piety and *silah rahim* in both the Qur'an³⁷ and the Infallibles' sayings.³⁸ Influencing others (i.e., winning their trust) is also mentioned among the favourable outcomes of both piety and *silah rahim* in both the Qur'an³⁹ and hadiths.^{40 41} Similarly, according to the Qur'an, sins are forgiven as a result of piety,⁴² and hadiths indicate the role of *silah rahim* in this as well.⁴³

The above discussion is only a small number of verses and hadiths that point out the close link between piety and *silah rahim*. Their connection and harmony in Islamic sources should motivate one to give importance to *silah rahim* to abstain from sins and becoming pious; the issues which will be discussed below.

Relationship between *silah rahim* and abandoning sins

Given the close link between the effects of *silah rahim* and piety, the relationship between the two is discussed in the following:

forgiven and shown compassion by others. This makes the benevolent, the powerful, e.g., kings, and others help them, and his wealth will increase as well. See also the Commentary on Nahj-ul-Balāghah, Ibn Miyytham, vol. 3, p. 80

³⁷ The Qur'an, 5: 65. *وَلَوْ أَنَّ أَهْلَ الْكِتَابِ آمَنُوا وَ اتَّقَوْا لَكُنَّا عَنْهُمْ سَبِيلًا* وَأَلَدْنَا لَهُمْ جَنَاتِ النَّعِيمِ

³⁸ من يضمن لي خصلة واحدة أضمن له أربعة: من يضمن لي صلة الرحم أضمن بحب أهله، و بكثرة ماله، و بطول عمره، و بدخوله جنة. رك: المواعظ العددية، p. 341.

³⁹ The Qur'an, 19: 96. *إِنَّ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ سَنَجْعَلُ لَهُمُ الرَّحْمَنَ وُدًّا* According to Allāmah Tabataba'i in al-Mizan, "The word *Wud* and *Mawaddat* mean love, and in this verse, God, the Almighty gave a beautiful promise that, "Indeed those who have faith and do righteous deeds —the All-beneficent will endear them." However, there is no clue as to which hearts, their hearts or others' hearts? In the world, or in the hereafter or in Heaven? As it is not limited, it is not necessary for us, like some people, to limit it to Heaven, or like some others, to limit it to the hearts of all people in the world or something else." (Tabataba'i, 1374 AH, vol. 14, p. 154).

⁴⁰ *صِلْ رَحِمَكَ وَ لَوْ بِشَرْيَةِ مَنْ مَاءٍ وَ أَفْضَلُ مَا تُوصِلُ بِهِ الرَّحِمَ كُفَّ الْأَذَى عَنْهَا وَ صَلَاةُ الرَّحِمِ مُنْسَأَةٌ فِي الْأَجَلِ مَخْبِيَّةٌ فِي الْأَهْلِ* See also al-Kāfi, vol. 2, p. 151.

⁴¹ *صَلَاةُ الْأَرْحَامِ... تُحِبُّ فِي أَهْلِ بَيْتِهِ فَلْيَتَّقِ اللَّهَ وَ لِيَصِلْ رَحْمَهُ*. See also al-Kāfi, vol. 2, p. 152.

⁴² The Qur'an, 57: 28. *يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا اتَّقُوا اللَّهَ وَ آمِنُوا بِرَسُولِهِ يُؤْتِكُمْ كِفْلَيْنِ مِنْ رَحْمَتِهِ وَ يَجْعَلْ لَكُمْ نُورًا تَمْشُونَ بِهِ وَ يَغْفِرْ لَكُمْ*

⁴³ *وَاللَّهُ غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ* See also al-Kāfi, vol. 2, p. 157.

1. *Silah rahim* and paving the way for public monitoring

When knowing all too well there are observers around us, people normally refuse to commit acts that are considered inappropriate from a cultural or religious viewpoint. Others' monitoring one's performance and the importance of their judgement of one's behaviour have always influenced people's orientations and prevents them from committing inappropriate actions in public. Strong ties among relatives pave the way for this monitoring and prevents slips and committing blameworthy acts. This deterrent effect resulting from close monitoring is referred to as shameful fear (*haya*) in religious culture. *Haya* refers to preventing oneself from immorality.⁴⁴ Technically, shameful fear is an unfailing state and a spiritual endowment that results in dejection and sadness about the immoral act, as well as one's refusal to act impolitely for fear of being blamed by others.⁴⁵ Although the closest external observer of man's actions is God, and it is appropriate to be ashamed before Him, as Imam Sajjad said, "Fear God the Almighty because He has power over you, and be ashamed before Him because He's close to you,"⁴⁶ man usually feels ashamed in the presence of others, especially the closest relatives, and abandons many acts out of shameful fear of relatives. However, in relation with Allah, man does not pay due attention to the Divine monitoring because of the believer's hope in God's mercy and his confidence in His disregard for his many slips. Otherwise, his shameful fear in the presence of God—an aware observer—prevents him from committing sins.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Raghib Isfahānī, 1412 SAH: p. 270.

⁴⁵ Jurjani, 1412 SAH: p. 42.

⁴⁶ خَفِ اللَّهَ تَعَالَى لِقُدْرَتِهِ عَلَيْكَ وَ اسْتَخِ مِنْهُ لِقُرْبِهِ مِنْكَ. See also Bihar-ul-Anwar, vol. 68, p. 336.

⁴⁷ This issue has been reflected in the supplication of Abu Hamzah Thumali, received from Imam Sajjad, فلو اطلع اليوم على ذنبي غيرك ما فعلته و لو خفت تعجيل العقوبة لاجتنبت، لا لانك اهون الناظرين الى و اخف المطلعين على بل لانك يا رب خير المتأخرين و ارحم الراحمين.

Expanding and strengthening kinship ties can pave the way for such public monitoring and prevent many slips and sins.

2. Self-value and self-esteem

In kinship relationships, each member plays a role in the development and maintenance of this bond. This role gives each relative self-value and self-esteem, and these feelings prevent one from committing sins. As Imam Ali said, "The one who believes in his spiritual honour and dignity does not humiliate himself by committing sins."⁴⁸

Psychologists believe that the main cause of both humiliation and self-importance is the constant rejection by friends and family members, which this leads to many psychological abnormalities. Psychologically, social relationships, including kinship ties, play an important role in meeting human needs. The need for emotional attachment is only met through interactions with others. Man seeks after loving and being loved by others. Intimacy, which emanates from having a deep sense of dependence and relationship with others, especially relatives, is the basis of our being.⁴⁹ The deeper and more intimate this relationship, the more value it gives to the person and the more worthwhile his abilities seem to him. Undoubtedly, being loved plays an important role in enhancing self-esteem. Likewise, it is only through intimate relationships with others that we can encourage them, and they can contribute considerably to the realization of their talents through our encouragement. In addition, we can benefit from our relatives' experiences and attitudes in our relationship with them, measuring our abilities and growth, and perfection through comparing ourselves with them. Thus, recognizing

⁴⁸ مَنْ كَرُمَتْ عَلَيْهِ نَفْسُهُ لَمْ يُحَيِّهَا بِالْمَغْصِيَةِ. See also Ghurar-ul-Hikam, p.231.

⁴⁹ Salarifar, 1389 SAH: p. 346.

and developing our potentials and talents play a major role in enhancing our self-esteem. This is achievable through establishing social relationships with others, especially our relatives.

3. Fostering a sense of psychological security

Many emotional and psychological needs, including the need for security and peace, can be met through presence among relatives. Addressing these emotional needs through family relationships prevents their satisfaction outside this framework where there are many dangers threatening the person. Firm kinship ties pave the way for creating a sense of security and peace through satisfying one's emotional needs. Many crimes and sins are caused by the anxieties and inner disquiet, and the healthy relationship among relatives, as reliable supports, can eliminate factors in these problems and alleviate their anxiety and unrest, especially in young people. According to Allāmah Ja'fari:

A great deal of our disorders is due to the anxieties and mental disorders, and they ruin our life. Grief, like a hidden axe, is cutting the roots of our life... No factor can contribute to the alleviation of sorrow better than sharing one's feelings with others in hardships and adversities and then enjoying their presence.⁵⁰

Thus, establishing and strengthening kinship ties is key in preventing people from committing sins and crimes both individually and socially. The lack or weakness of such ties creates the conditions for committing sins.

⁵⁰ Ja'fari, 1359 SAH: vol. 5, p. 87.

The important point in the hadiths of *silah rahim* is that it is necessary to maintain such ties even with relatives whose beliefs and codes of ethics do not conform to ours; of course, while we respect some terms and conditions which consist in not being influenced by their beliefs and codes of ethics. In other words, these ties should be maintained to influence them positively.

Below are some hadiths on the necessity of establishing such kinship ties:

A person asked Imam Sadiq, "I have some relatives who do not believe in Islam. Do they have any rights on me?" The Imam said, "Yes, nothing can break off kinship ties. If they have the same religion as yours, then they have two rights on you: kinship rights and rights based on Islam."⁵¹

It is also necessary to have kinship ties with the relatives who aggravate us, if possible. Someone told Prophet Muhammad, "O the Messenger of Allah! I have some relatives with whom I maintain kinship ties but who aggravate me, and I want to abandon them." Prophet Muhammad told him, "Then Allah will abandon you as well." He asked, "So what should I do?" The Prophet said:

Grant the one who has deprived you, visit the one who has left you, and forgive the one who has oppressed you. Then, God, the Almighty and Glorious, will help you against them.⁵²

A servant at Imam Sadiq's house related:

⁵¹ قُلْتُ لِأَبِي عَبْدِ اللَّهِ ع تَكُونُ لِي الْقَرَابَةُ عَلَى غَيْرِ أَمْرِي أَلَهُمْ عَلَيَّ حَقٌّ قَالَ نَعَمْ حَقُّ الرَّجْمِ لَا يَنْقُطُهُ شَيْءٌ وَإِذَا كَانُوا عَلَى أَمْرِكَ كَانَ لَهُمْ حَقُّانِ حَقُّانِ حَقُّ الرَّجْمِ وَ حَقُّ الْإِسْلَامِ. See also al-Kāfi, vol. 2, p.157.

⁵² See also Bihār-ul-Anwar, vol. 71, p. 100.

At the time of the 6th Imam's martyrdom, I was beside him when he fainted. After he had come around, he said, 'Give seventy dinars to Hasan ibn Ali ibn Ali ibn al-Husayn, called Aftas.' He also asked me to give some other sums of money to some other people. I told him, 'Do you give the one who wanted to attack you with a knife?' He said, 'Woe to you! Have not you recited the Qur'an?' I said, 'Yes.' he added, 'Have not you heard the word of God, the Almighty and Glorious, Who said, *'and those who join what Allah has commanded to be joined, and fear their Lord, and are afraid of an adverse reckoning.*'⁵³

Conclusion

Intimate and deep kinship ties considerably reduce factors in many individual and social abnormalities and prevent people from committing sins. Islam emphasizes all the factors helping one attain salvation. Strengthening kinship ties are among these factors. In the process of establishing firm and sincere kinship ties, relatives monitor each other's actions, and this is important in preventing one from committing acts that seem inappropriate to others. Likewise, kinship ties enhance one's self-esteem and prevent from being trampled with whims through committing sins. Security and tranquillity are the final and most important achievements gained because of healthy kinship ties.

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⁵³ The Qur'an, 13: 21. See also Mishkat-ul-Anwar fi Ghurar-ul-Akhbar, p.166.

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Legal Prohibition of Insulting Other Religions and their Sacred Figures and Places in Shi'a Jurisprudence

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ABSTRACT: Insulting or disrespecting other religions and their sacred figures and places is a broad and significant subject in Shi'a jurisprudence. The question often arises as to whether insulting sanctities is legally prohibited or not. Using the Qur'an and hadith as sources, this article—an abridged transcript of Ayatullāh Lankarani's lecture—clarifies the meaning of insult, and covers the consensus in Shi'a jurisprudence with regards to the prohibition of insult to divine *hurumāt* (sanctities), that is, God, angels, prophets, the Qur'an, divine books, mosques, temples, and shrines.

The issue of insult is an important and broad one in Shi'a jurisprudence. There are discussions about insult in various categories, such as insult to a believer, a jurisprudent, holy places, Ka'bah, Mecca, our leader's holy shrines, our other sanctities, even the turbah of Imam Husayn¹ in Shi'a jurisprudence. Often there are two questions posed on these issues: Is it

¹ The soil of his burial place

prohibited (*haram*) to insult *hurumat* and the sanctities or not? And according to some jurists, is it obligatory to venerate the Divine rites or not?

***Hurumat* (sanctities)**

There is consensus on the answer to the first question. In Shi'a jurisprudential texts, consensus has been sought as regards the prohibition of insult to the Divine *hurumat* (the plural of *hurum*, that is, something that should not be desecrated) and sanctities. The following are considered *sanctities*: God, the greatest sanctity, the Heavenly angels, all divine prophets, particularly Prophet Muhammad, the Qur'an, the original Divine books, for example, Torah and Gospel, mosques, temples, holy shrines. In other words, "That which is respected in religion and has a high status before Allah is considered as *hurum*, albeit with different ranks of being *hurum*."² I will explain later that "man qua man" is also included in this list, although it is not specified in Shi'a jurisprudential books. According to narrations and rational arguments, it is *haram* to desecrate a believer or a Muslim, but based on rational arguments and Islamic narrations on what is included in *hurumat*, it is not unlikely that prohibition of desecrating "man qua man" can be also concluded. However, there is consensus about the items whose desecration is prohibited, and even more strongly they are required to be considered as *hurumat* in Islam. In other words, the prohibition of insulting God, Islam, and the Divine prophets is regarded as necessary (*daruri*; self-evident), and if something is necessary in Islam, jurists should not search for a reason for it, and it does not need any reason.

² مطلق ما هو محترم في الدين له شأن عند الله على اختلاف مراتبهم

Besides consensus and necessity, there are Qur'anic verses and hadiths that are necessary to consider on this subject to resolve contemporary issues; for example, the verses “*That. And whoever venerates the sacraments of Allah, that is better for him with his Lord...*”³, and “*That. And whoever venerates the sacraments of Allah —indeed that arises from the Godwariness of hearts,*”⁴ from which some inferred the necessity of veneration of sanctities. Of course, one can infer the prohibition of insulting sanctities as well.

Likewise, the verse “*Do not abuse those whom they invoke besides Allah, lest they should abuse Allah out of hostility, without any knowledge. That is how to every people We have made their conduct seem decorous,*”⁵ in which the insult to the disbelievers’ gods or idols is prohibited.

Likewise, there is a hadith by Imam al-Rida saying, “Surely our opponents forged some hadiths on our virtues...”⁶ The Imam also added in this hadith, “A way of hostility to us – the Ahlul-Bayt – is to forge some hadiths by us on our enemies’ immorality and to insult them so that if the masses and Sunnis heard them, they would insult us.” He also referred to the verse, “*Do not abuse those whom they invoke besides Allah,...*” Likewise, in the book *al-Kāfi*, Imam al-Sadiq was quoted as saying, “Beware of insulting the enemies of Allah because if they hear your

³ The Qur'an, 22: 30. ذَلِكَ وَمَنْ يُعْظِمِ حُرْمَاتِ اللَّهِ فَهُوَ خَيْرٌ إِلَيْهِ عِنْدَ رَبِّهِ

⁴ The Qur'an, 22: 32. ذَلِكَ وَمَنْ يُعْظِمِ حُرْمَاتِ اللَّهِ فَإِنَّهَا مِنْ تَقْوَى الْقُلُوبِ

⁵ The Qur'an, 6: 108. وَلَا تَسُبُّوا الَّذِينَ يَدْعُونَ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ فَيَسُبُّوا اللَّهَ عَدْوًا بِغَيْرِ عِلْمٍ كَذَلِكَ زَيْنًا لِكُلِّ أُمَّةٍ عَمَلُهُمْ

⁶ *Uyun Akhbar-a-Rida*, vol.1, p. 304.

يا ابن أبي محمود ان مخالفينا وضعوا اخبارا في فضائلنا وجعلوها على ثلاثة أقسام أحدها الغلو وثانيها التقصير في أمرنا وثالثها التصريح بمثالب أعدائنا فإذا سمع الناس الغلو فبينا كفروا شيعتنا ونسبواهم إلى القول بربوبيتنا وإذا سمعوا التقصير اعتقدوه فينا وإذا سمعوا مثالب أعداءنا بأسائهم ثلبونا بأساءنا وقد قال الله عز وجل: «ولا تسبوا الذين يدعون من دون الله فيسبوا الله عدوا بغير علم.»

insults, they will ignorantly insult Allah in return...”⁷ Thus, in the Qur’anic verses and hadiths, it is prohibited (*haram*) to insult others.

An important issue to note is that prohibition of insulting God, Islam, or Prophet Muhammad is *mawlawi*.⁸ But a question arises here whether prohibition of insulting idols in the verse is also *mawlawi* or *irshādi*.⁹ Those who hold it to be *mawlawi* believe that it is prohibited and whoever commits it deserves punishment of the hereafter, but those who take it to be *irshādi* believe that its prohibition is in order to avoid the harm which is mentioned in the verse i.e. “*lest they should abuse Allah out of hostility, without any knowledge*” and if one does it that bad outcome happens but if that does not happen there might be no other wrong involved and there might be no punishment in the Hereafter.

Then a general rule can be drawn up; a rule which states that insulting anything sacred to others is not permissible either, but as an *irshadi* (edifying) legal ruling not a *mawlawi* legal ruling.

Of course, there is clearly a difference between insult, dissociation and cursing on the one hand and forbidding wrong on the other. We should encounter and take a stance against others’ immoral actions according to our beliefs. Any oppressive action should be opposed. However, what is emphasised in Islam is that one should abstain from insulting others. This is one topic, and considering others’ deeds and beliefs as wrong is a completely different topic.

⁷ *Al-Kāfi*, vol. 8, p.7.

⁸ The *Mawlawi* legal ruling is issued to urge Muslims to act. According to it, compliance with an Islamic injunction results in a reward, and disobedience ends in punishment, for example, enjoining prayer and forbidding fornication.

⁹ Unlike the *Mawlawi* legal ruling, the *Irshadi* (Edifying) legal ruling is issued merely to edify or guide Muslims, and to make them aware of the good of compliance with an Islamic injunction or the evil of a forbidden deed.

It is strongly prohibited in Shi'i jurisprudence to insult others' sanctities, but not insulting them is one issue; *respecting* a false thing is entirely a different issue. For example, look at the book *Anawin* by Mir-Fattah or the book *Qawa'id-ul-Fiqhiyyah* by the late Bujnurdi; according to them, a Shi'a legal ruling – as I said – is that “Insulting sanctities is haram.” In the first volume of the book *Anawin*, Mir-Fattah writes, “It is Haram to insult and belittle what is religiously venerated.” He continued his argument, resorting to intellect, narrations, and consensus to give this verdict.

It is not permissible to insult what is sacred to others, but it does *not* mean that it is obligatory to venerate what we consider as false, but others consider sacred. Hence, the necessity of venerating the true divine rites can be inferred from these verses discussed above: “*That. And whoever venerates the sacraments of Allah...*”^{10 11} However, the issues which cannot be attributed to God are not Divine rites and sacraments of Allah and cannot be venerated and revered, although it may not be appropriate to insult them for other reasons.

Nowadays an issue under consideration is whether it is permissible to insult what is sacred to others or not. In Shi'a jurisprudence, the legal ruling on insult is very firm. According to Shi'a narrations, if somebody insults a believer, he has invited God to a fight. Likewise, according to hadiths, if someone insults a jurisprudent, he will meet God on the Day of Judgement while He is angry with him. In this regard, we can say using the verse “*Certainly We have honoured the Children of Adam...*”¹² the principle of honouring human beings can be inferred (as it can be inferred

¹⁰ The Qur'an, 22: 30. ذَلِكَ وَمَنْ يُعْظَمْ حُرْمَاتِ اللَّهِ فَهُوَ خَيْرٌ لَهُ عِنْدَ رَبِّهِ

¹¹ The Qur'an, 22: 32. ذَلِكَ وَمَنْ يُعْظَمْ حُرْمَاتِ اللَّهِ فَإِنَّهَا مِنْ تَقْوَى الْقُلُوبِ

¹² The Qur'an, 17: 70. وَلَقَدْ كَرَّمْنَا بَنِي آدَمَ...

from some words of Imam Ali). In other words, it can be said that “man qua man” is dignified, and this dignity requires one to believe that insulting people is not permissible in that they are human beings. This prohibition is stricter in the case of Muslims, and the strictest is the case of insulting jurisprudents. Likewise, it can be said that if “man qua man” is dignified, then his belief or religion, whether it is monotheistic according to our beliefs or not, should not be insulted as it is an aspect of his life. Of course, there is a difference between negating and dissociating from a deviating concept, on the one hand, and insulting it, on the other; they two should not be confused.

I should also point out that in Shi’a jurisprudence, there is, on the one hand, the issue of prohibition of insult, and on the other, the issues of dissociation and forbidding evil. One should not think that they contradict each other; insulting and dissociating from something are separate issues. Dissociation means one takes a stance against the falsehood or someone who has committed a great evil. For example, dissociation from oppression means I – as a human being – dissociate from this oppressor’s tyranny, and no one can say this stance is an insult. When God curses the disbelievers, polytheists, hypocrites, and scholars who hide the truth, it means they are away from God’s mercy, and this, in fact, is to express dissociation from them.

From the verse, “*So should anyone aggress against you, assail him in the manner he assailed you,*”¹³ some might infer that if someone insults you, you should insult him in return. However, no jurisprudent has accepted this inference. Insulting is haram, and it is not wise to do a haram in return for another haram action. We – Muslims – should react to

¹³ The Qur’an, 2: 194. فَتَنِي اعْتَدِي عَلَيْكُمْ وَاعْتَدُوا عَلَيَّ بِمِثْلِ مَا اعْتَدَى

disbelievers' insult to the Qur'an logically, through arguments and proofs. Of course, the society should be made aware of their plot, without insulting them. It is not permissible to return the insult.

The Features of the Shi'a from the Perspective of Imam al-Sadiq¹

Ali Mohammadi

Translated by Mahboobeh Morshedian

ABSTRACT: The Shi'a are those who follow Ali—the cousin and son-in-law of Prophet Muhammad—and believed in his Imamate and caliphate according to the explicitly teachings and testament of the Prophet Muhammad. In this article, Imam al-Sadiq, the sixth Shi'a Imam, gives advice to his companion Abd-Allah ibn Jundab on the features of a true Shi'a, some of which are those who know God, heed the hereafter, constantly engage in self-reckoning (*muhasabah*), being generous, and treat wrongdoers with respect and forgiveness.

In his advice to Abd-Allah ibn Jundab, Imam al-Sadiq first warned the Shi'as of Satanic traps, and then enumerated the features of his true friends and those of other Shi'as. Some prominent features of the Shi'a from Imam al-Sadiq's perspective are as follows:

1. Attention to the hereafter

Imam Sadiq (a) is quoted as saying:

¹ Fahang-e Kawthar Journal

The hereafter is so great in their eyes that they do not exchange it for anything... Likewise, they view this world as a poisonous snake and a dumb enemy.²

The true followers and friends of the Prophet's progeny do not think about anything but the hereafter and measure all their actions and behaviours against it. In the eyes of the believers, this world is a means of attaining a great goal, which is the [felicitous] eternal life in the hereafter. The true friends of the Ahlul-Bayt benefit from worldly blessings, but they never exchange the eternal life for the ephemeral worldly life.

2. Becoming familiar with God

Imam Sadiq (a) is quoted as saying:

They become accustomed to God and are fearful of what the affluent are get accustomed to.³

The believers benefit from Divine blessings, although they do not become dependent on them. Dependence on the worldly wealth leads to one's servitude to material things. The affluent are always dependent on their wealth, but the true Shi'as' hearts find rest in the remembrance of God.

After enumerating these important features, Imam al-Sadiq said, "They are our true friends. Through them, seditions are foiled, and all hardships are solved."⁴

لقد جلت الآخرة في أعينهم حتى ما يريدون بها بدلا... و إنما كانت الدنيا عندهم بمنزلة الشجاع الأرقم و العدو الأعجم

انسوا بالله واستوحشوا مما به استاءنس المترفون

اولئك اوليائي حقاً بهم تكشف كل فتنه و ترفع كل بليه

Self-reckoning

Imam al-Sadiq (a) is quoted as saying:

It befits every Muslim who knows us to present his deeds to himself and reckon them so that he may add to his good deeds, if any, and may repent from his bad deeds, if any, so as not to be subject to abjectness and humiliation on the Day of Judgement.⁵

Generosity

O' the son of Jundab! Verily our Shi'as are known for two features: generosity and forgiveness for their brothers in faith.⁶

Performing 50 rak'ats of prayer and observing the timing of prayer

Our Shi'as perform 50 rak'ats of prayer every day and night, and they do not neglect the timing of dhuhr prayer (i.e., they perform the prayer early).⁷

Avoiding quarrelling and shouting

Our Shi'as do not howl like dogs.⁸

Refraining from avarice

Our Shi'as are not avaricious and greedy like crows.⁹

⁵ حق على كل مسلم يعرفنا ان يعرف علمه في كل يوم وليله على نفسه فيكون محاسب نفسه فان رأى حسنه استزاد منها و ان رأى سيئه استغفر منها، لئلا يخزي يوم القيمة

⁶ يابن جندب! ان شيعتنا يعرفون بخصال شتى: بالسخاء و البذل للاخوان

⁷ و بان يصلوا الخمسين ليلاً و نهارة... و يحافظون على الزوال

⁸ لا يهرون هريز الكلب

⁹ ولا يطمعون طمع الغرب

Keeping away from the enemies

Our Shi'as do not live next to the enemies, and do not ask them for anything even if they starve.¹⁰

Being exact in their diet

Our Shi'as do not eat eels...and do not drink wine.¹¹

A selection of his other pieces of advice

The positive effects of perseverance

If our Shi'as persevere, they will be hand in hand with angels, the clouds of God's mercy will cover them, and they will also shine like the sunlight, will receive their sustenance from both the earth and the heaven, will be granted by God whatever they request Him.¹²

How to treat sinners

1. Referring to their virtues and refraining from hurtful words

O' son of Jundab! Do not tell the Muslim sinners anything but good.¹³

One must bring sinners hope through using kind words and talking about their virtues; he should also refrain from violence against them, hurtful words addressed to them, and any reference to their slips because such

¹⁰ و لا يجاورون لنا عدوا و لا يسألون لنا مبعضا ولوماتوا جوعا

¹¹ شيعتنا لا ياءكون الجرى... و لا يشربون مسكرا

¹² يابن جندب لو ان شيعتنا استقاموا لصاخبهم الملائكة و لاطلهم الغمام و لاشرقوا نهارا و لاكلوا من فوقهم و من تحت ارجلهم ولما ساءلوا الله الا اعطاهم

¹³ يابن جندب لا تقل في المذنبين من اهل دعوتكم الا خيرا

treatments crush their hopes of treading the right path and alienates them from Islam and its teachings.

2. Praying for the sinners' support

Beseech Allah submissively for their support.¹⁴

3. Asking for the sinners' repentance

Repentance constructs men spiritually, and God loves the repentant.

*Indeed Allah loves the penitent.*¹⁵

Repentance is the method recommended by Imam Sadiq in order to be cleansed of sins. The true Shi'as should pray to God for the sinners' regretting their evil deeds and returning to God because "*Indeed Allah is the All-clement, the All-merciful.*"¹⁶

The ways to Heaven

Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq introduced three ways to the seekers of Heaven:

1. Following the Imams
2. Dissociating from the Imams' enemies
3. Speaking based on knowledge and keeping silent when they lack it

Everyone who seeks and follows us, does not follow our enemies, says what he knows and keeps silent at an issue unknown to him (i.e., a dubious issue), he will enter Heaven.¹⁷

¹⁴ واستكبنوا الى الله في توفيقهم

¹⁵ ان الله يحب التوابين The Qur'an, 2: 222.

¹⁶ ان الله هو التواب الرحيم The Qur'an, 9: 118.

¹⁷ فكل من قصدنا و تولانا و لم يوال عدونا و قال ما يعلم و سكت عما لا يعلم او اشكل عليه فهو في الجنة

The value of silence

Whether you are knowledgeable or ignorant, you had better choose silence so that you are considered patient because silence is regarded as an adornment in the presence of the knowledgeable and as a cover in the presence of the ignorant.¹⁸

Keeping away from the deviating beliefs

Heresies, deviating tendencies, and wrong interpretations of Islam have always threatened Shi'a societies.

O' son of Jundab! Tell our Shi'as to beware of giving up their religion because of deviated beliefs.¹⁹

The signs of powerlessness

The powerless are those who are not equipped with patience in the face of afflictions, with gratitude for blessings, and with ease in the face of hardships.²⁰

The superior deeds

O' son of Jundab! Connect with the one who has severed his relations with you; grant [something] to the one who has deprived you [of something]; do good to the one who has done evil to you; say 'Salam' to the one who has insulted you; be fair to the one who has been hostile to you; and the same way you like to be forgiven,

¹⁸ عليك بالصمت، تعد حلما، جاهلا كنت او علما، فان الصمت زين لك عند العلماء و ستر لك عند الجهال

¹⁹ يابن جندب! بلغ معاشر شيعتنا و قل لهم: لاتذهبن بكم المذاهب

²⁰ قد عجز من لم يعد لكل بلاء صبرا و لكل نعمة شكرا و لكل عسر يسرا

forgive the one who has oppressed you so that you may learn a lesson from God's forgiveness. You see that the sun created by God shines on both the righteous and the evil and it rains on both the righteous and the evildoers, don't you?²¹

The pillar of Islam

The last sentence of Imam Sadiq's advice to Jundab concerns the importance and value of love for Ahl-ul-Bayt:

There is a pillar for everything, and the pillar of Islam is the love for us – the Ahlul-Bayt.²²

يا بن جندب! صل من قطعك، واعط من حرمك، واحسن الى من اساء اليك، وسلم على من سبك، وانصف من خاصمك،²¹
واعف عن ظلمك، كما انك تحب ان يعفى عنك، فاعتبر بعفو الله عنك، الا ترى ان شمسهُ اشرفت على الابرار والفجار و ان مطره
ينزل على الصالحين والخطائين
لكل شئىء اساس و اساس الاسلام حبنا اهل البيت²²

Community Building, Part VIII¹

Huj Dr Mohammad Ali Shomali

ABSTRACT: Having a shared identity that works towards a collective cause is vital for a healthy community, and in doing so, a community must share specific qualities to be successful. This series of papers offers a glimpse into the importance of community-building and Prophet Muhammad's efforts to implement it. Character traits such as truthfulness, trustworthiness, justice, and unity were illustrated. The previous article touched upon two topics: 1) our love for God's creation as that which extends to non-human beings, such as animals, plants, and natural resources, and 2) and the importance of marriage and family life in the formation of a stable Islamic community. This article expands on the concept of peace in Islam—as the term Islam is derived from the Arabic root word *silm* (peace)—and the importance of submission to God as a means to achieving peace for ourselves and the entire society.

One of the qualities of an Islamic community is that it provides a peaceful atmosphere for its members and for outsiders. Even animals and plants would benefit from the peace provided by a Muslim community. In this paper, we will share some reflections on the concept of peace in the Qur'an to discover how important it is for Muslims and how the culture of the Qur'an is a culture of peace. Indeed, the term 'Islam' itself comes from the root *silm* which means 'peace'. Islam is designed to bring about peace for

¹ This series is based on a nine-session course conducted by the author on Community Building at the Islamic Centre of England in London in 2009.

everyone by inviting people to submit their souls to God, which is called *tasleem*, from the same root *silm*. *Tasleem* means to submit ourselves to God so that we can both achieve internal peace and establish it among the people. For example, Prophet Muhammad said:

المسلم من سلم المسلمون من لسانه ويده

A Muslim is the one from whose tongue and hands the Muslims are safe.²

Therefore, no innocent person should feel any danger or threat from a Muslim's words or actions. People should be able to be and feel completely safe in an Islamic environment.

Islamic greeting of peace

In Islamic culture, when we greet each other, we say 'Salām'. For example, we may say 'Salāmun alaykum' or 'Alaykum as-Salām'. These phrases all mean 'peace be with you' and sometimes we add also 'peace be with you and the Mercy of God and His Blessings'-'Salāmun alaykum wa Rahmatullahi wa Barakatuh'. For a Muslim, this greeting of peace is not just a formal greeting like 'Hello' or 'Hi' or their equivalent words in different languages. On the contrary, it is a prayer and at the same time serves as a kind of motto for Muslims which is a very important way of educating people about the importance of establishing a culture of peace.

² *Mizan al-Hikmah*, vol. 2, p. 1340 citing from *Kanz al-Ummal*. Shaykh al-Kulayni in *al-Kafi*, vol. 2, p. 234 reports a similar hadith from Imam Baqir:

سليمان بن خالد، عن أبي جعفر (عليه السلام) قال: قال أبو جعفر (عليه السلام): (يا سليمان أتدري من المسلم؟ قلت: جعلت فداك أنت أعلم، قال: المسلم من سلم المسلمون من لسانه ويده، ثم قال: وتدري من المؤمن؟ قال: قلت: أنت أعلم، قال: [إن] المؤمن من اتهمه المسلمون على أموالهم وأنفسهم، والمسلم حرام على المسلم أن يظلمه أو يخذله أو يدفعه دفعة تعنته

Salām: the greeting of the inhabitants of Heaven

In the Qur'an, God talks about the greeting of peace of the inhabitants of Heaven, who when they greet one another they say 'Salāmun 'Alaykum'. Verses 9 and 10 of Surah Yunus are beautiful and profound verses; may God enable us to go and see these beautiful scenes for ourselves, God-willing:

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ يَهْدِيهِمْ رَبُّهُمْ بِإِيمَانِهِمْ تَجْرِي مِنْ تَحْتِهِمُ
الْأَنْهَارُ فِي جَنَّاتِ النَّعِيمِ دَعَوَاهُمْ فِيهَا سُبْحَانَكَ اللَّهُمَّ وَتَحِيَّتُهُمْ فِيهَا سَلَامٌ
وَأَخْرَجُوا دَعَوَاهُمْ أَنْ الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ

Indeed those who have faith and do righteous deeds, their Lord guides them by means of their faith. Streams will run for them in gardens of bliss. Their call therein will be: 'O God! Immaculate are You!' and their greeting therein will be: 'Peace!' and their concluding call: 'All praise belongs to God, the Lord of all the worlds.'

The people of Heaven do *tasbih*, or glorify God, and end their conversations with *hamd*, or praise, exactly like angels do. This is the main speech of the people of heaven. The angels also glorify God and praise Him (2:20). So, angels, as well as the inhabitants of Heaven, glorify (*tasbih*) with praising (*hamd*). Furthermore, when they meet each other they greet each other by saying 'salāmun alaykum' ('peace be unto you') and this salām that the believers (mu'mineen) in Heaven exchange with each other is not just a verbal one; this greeting in Heaven brings us further peace and tranquillity.

One translator of the Qur'an, Yusuf Ali, commented on this verse; he says:

A beautiful piece of spiritual melody. They sing and shout with joy, but their joy is in the Glory of God. The greetings they receive and the greetings they give are of peace and

harmony. From first to last, they realise that it is God Who cherished them and made them grow and His Rays are their light.

In another verse on the greetings of the people of Heaven, God says:

Those who have faith and do righteous deeds will be admitted into gardens with streams running in them, to remain in them forever by the leave of their Lord. Their greeting therein will be 'Peace!' (14:23)

Greetings of peace from the angels

We now turn our attention to the angels' greetings to one another. The Qur'an tells us that the angels also greet each other by saying 'salām'. There are various types of greetings given by the angels:

a) To people in this world

Firstly, we have some instances in the Qur'an in which the angels greeted some people in this world. In a description of a meeting between Prophet Abraham and the angels, these particular angels met with the Prophet before going to punish the people of Lot; and they also gave Abraham the good tidings of having a child. So God says:

وَلَقَدْ جَاءَتْ رُسُلُنَا إِبْرَاهِيمَ بِالْبُشْرَى قَالُوا سَلَامًا قَالَ سَلَامٌ فَمَا لَبِثَ أَنْ
جَاءَ بِعِجْلٍ خَنِيذٍ

Certainly Our messengers came to Abraham with the good news and said: 'Peace!' 'Peace!' He replied. Presently he brought (for them) a roasted calf. (11:69)

So the angels told Prophet Abraham 'salāmen' which means 'we send you salutations, we send you salām (peace)'. He (a) then replied: 'Salām'.

The books on Arabic rhetoric, *al-Balāghah*, notes that Prophet Abraham greeted them in a better way than they greeted him. When we say ‘salāman’ it stands for a verbal sentence. When we say ‘salāmun’ it stands for a sentence which starts with a noun. This is in line with what the Qur’an says about the fact that whenever we are greeted, we must return the greeting in the same way or in a better way:

وَإِذَا حُيِّتُمْ بِتَحِيَّةٍ فَحَيُّوا بِأَحْسَنَ مِنْهَا أَوْ رُدُّوهَا إِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ عَلَى كُلِّ شَيْءٍ
حَسِيرًا

When you are greeted with a salute, greet with a better one than it, or return it; indeed Allah takes account of all things.

For example, if we are greeted with ‘salāmun alaykum’, then we should reply with ‘salāmun alaykum’ or ‘alaykum as-salām’ with a recommended addition ‘wa rahmatullah’. If we are greeted with ‘salāmun alaykum wa rahmatullah’, then we must reply with an equally reciprocal ‘salāmun alaykum wa Rahmatullah’. Our salām in reply must not be less than what had been offered to us. It must be the same or more.

So, in this world, the angels came and offered their greetings of peace to Prophet Abraham, and he replied in a better manner.

b) To people after their death

Angels also offer their greetings of peace to some people after their death. When a good person dies, the angels visit them and greet them by saying ‘salām’. Then the worry and fears of that person will go away. Everyone who dies is very much worried.

“—those whom the angels take away while they are pure. They say (to them): ‘Peace be to you! Enter paradise because of what you used to do.’” (16:32)

For the good people who are dying or have already died, and the angels take their souls, angels say to them ‘peace be with you’ and tell them not to worry as a result of their goodness and good actions, and so they can enter Heaven.

Of course, they are talking about the heavenly part of Barzakh because when someone dies, if they have been good, they may go to that heavenly place even during the time between their death and the Day of Resurrection. However, if someone has been bad, they may go to a place which is like Hell and if they are of a status between the two, maybe they will simply be in the state of sleeping. Therefore, in the hadiths we read:

The grave is either a garden of the gardens of Heaven or one of the holes of Hell.

So that place, which is sometimes described as the grave, is a temporary kind of Heaven or Hell.

c) To people entering heaven

Another time that the angels greet people is at the time of their entrance into Heaven. The Qur’an describes this carefully and precisely:

وَسِيقَ الَّذِينَ اتَّقَوْا رَبَّهُمْ إِلَى الْجَنَّةِ زُمَرًا ۖ حَتَّىٰ إِذَا جَاءُوهَا وَفُتِحَتْ أَبْوَابُهَا
وَقَالَ لَهُمْ خَزَنَتُهَا سَلَامٌ عَلَيْكُمْ طِبْتُمْ فَادْخُلُوهَا خَالِدِينَ وَقَالُوا الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ
الَّذِي صَدَقَنَا وَعْدَهُ وَأَوْرَثَنَا الْأَرْضَ نَتَبَوَّأُ مِنَ الْجَنَّةِ حَيْثُ نَشَاءُ ۖ فَنِعْمَ
أَجْرُ الْعَامِلِينَ

Those who are wary of their Lord will be led to paradise in throngs. When they reach it and its gates are opened, its keepers will say to them: ‘Peace be to you! You are welcome! Enter it to remain (forever).’ They will say: ‘All praise belongs to God, Who has fulfilled His promise to us and

made us heirs to the earth, that we may settle in paradise wherever we may wish!’ How excellent is the reward of the workers (of righteousness)! (39:73-74)

God promised the people that if they are pious, He will grant them heaven; once see the fulfilment of that promise, they say ‘alhamdulillah...’ (or ‘praise be to Allah’), in praise of fulfilling His promise, which is undoubtedly the best thing that we can achieve. The events described in the above verses take place at the time of reaching heaven and entering it. When the gates of heaven are opened, the angels tell people, “Peace be with you. Welcome.”

d) To people inside heaven

At the time of death, at the time of entrance into heaven and, as we will now discover, inside Heaven, the angels greet us with peace, if God-willing we are there:

جَنَّاتُ عَدْنٍ يَدْخُلُونَهَا وَمَنْ صَلَحَ مِنْ آبَائِهِمْ وَأَزْوَاجِهِمْ وَذُرِّيَّاتِهِمْ وَالْمَلَائِكَةُ
يَدْخُلُونَ عَلَيْهِمْ مِنْ كُلِّ بَابٍ سَلَامٌ عَلَيْكُمْ بِمَا صَبَرْتُمْ فَنِعْمَ عُقْبَى الدَّارِ

...the Gardens of Eden, which they will enter along with whoever is righteous from among their forebears, their spouses and their descendants and the angels will call on them from every door: ‘Peace be to you, for your patience.’ How excellent is the reward of the (ultimate) abode! (13:23-24)

From these verses we discover that believers will enter heaven with their whole family if they have been righteous and that a very fundamental quality that helps good people to go to heaven is patience and so without patience we cannot go to heaven. Imam Sajjad (a) is quoted as saying:

الصبر من الايمان بمنزلة الرأس من الجسد، ولا إيمان لمن لا صبر له

Patience for faith is like a head for a body. The one who lacks patience has no faith.³

It is possible for a body to be alive without certain limbs, but it is impossible to have a living body that does not have a head. So, in the same way, patience is a fundamental necessity for a faith which is alive. Hence, the angels will tell people “Peace be upon you for your patience.”

God sends greetings of peace to His servants

So far we have seen that a) the people of heaven greet each other with peace, b) the angels greet us with peace and, c) in this world, we have the case of Prophet Abraham who was greeted with peace by the angels, d) after our death, e) at the time of our entrance into Heaven and f) also inside Heaven, God Himself also greets people with peace.

For example, God sends peace to Prophet Nuh as a reward for doing good deeds:

سَلَامٌ عَلَى نُوحٍ فِي الْعَالَمِينَ إِنَّا كَذَلِكَ نَجْزِي الْمُحْسِنِينَ

Peace to Nuh, throughout the nations! Thus indeed do We reward the virtuous. (37:79-80)

In the same Chapter, verses 109 and 110, God says:

سَلَامٌ عَلَى إِبْرَاهِيمَ كَذَلِكَ نَجْزِي الْمُحْسِنِينَ

Peace be to Abraham! Thus do We reward the virtuous. (37:109-110)

³ *Al-Kāfi*, vol. 2, p. 89. There is a similar hadith from Imam Sadiq (a) which says:

الصبر من الايمان بمنزلة الرأس من الجسد فإذا ذهب الرأس ذهب الجسد كذلك إذا ذهب الصبر ذهب الايمان

Again, in the same Chapter, verses 120 and 121, God speaks about Prophets Moses and Aaron saying:

سَلَامٌ عَلَىٰ مُوسَىٰ وَهَارُونَ إِنَّا كَذَلِكَ نَجْزِي الْمُحْسِنِينَ

Peace be to Musa and Haroun! Thus indeed do We reward the virtuous. (37:120-121)

And then, in the same Chapter, about Ale Yaseen, God says:

سَلَامٌ عَلَىٰ إِيَّاسِينَ إِنَّا كَذَلِكَ نَجْزِي الْمُحْسِنِينَ

Peace be to Iliyas! Thus indeed do we reward the virtuous. (37:131)

Finally, God sends His salām to all the Apostles.

وَسَلَامٌ عَلَى الْمُرْسَلِينَ

Peace be to the apostles! (37:181)

There are verses in Surah Maryam which talk about Prophet Yahya, or John the Baptist. John the Baptist is very special. When Prophet Zakariyyah did not have a child and had become an elderly man, he prayed and prayed for a child, and finally, after an inspiration he had after a meeting with Lady Maryam—when Lady Maryam said the God provides who He wills with sustenance without measure—he prayed again and then God gave him Yahya.

In the Qur'an God says that when he was a child, Yahya was given a mission by God and was asked to be kind with his parents, not to be arrogant, along with other advice. In verse 15 of Surah Maryam (Chapter 19) God says:

وَسَلَامٌ عَلَيْهِ يَوْمَ وُلِدَ وَيَوْمَ يَمُوتُ وَيَوْمَ يُعْثَرُ حَيًّا

*Peace be to him, the day he was born and the day he dies
and the day he is raised alive. (19:15)*

Therefore, at the three most important times in everyone's life, God is giving Prophet Yahya peace. A very important time for us is the day we are born, the beginning of our life in this world. The day we die is also important. If we had the knowledge of our date of death, surely on every application form we would have been asked for both date of birth and date of death. However, since we do not know it, it is not demanded. Nonetheless, when we die is important because it is end of our life, our deadline. And the third is the day we are raised and resurrected. God says "Peace be to Yahya" at all these three times.

We should take some time to reflect on what it means to send peace to a person when he is born, when he dies, and when he is raised. What does it mean? Is it just a formal greeting? Indeed, on the contrary, it is giving a special type of mercy to someone in the name of peace at the three most challenging times in a person's life.

In Surah Naml, (Chapter 27), verse 59, there is another instance in which God gives salām:

قُلِ الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ وَسَلَامٌ عَلَى عِبَادِهِ الَّذِينَ اصْطَفَى

*Say: 'All praise belongs to God and Peace be to His servants
whom He has chosen'. (27:59)*

Therefore, in this world, God sends salām to the prophets, and in particular to Prophet Noah and Prophet Abraham, Prophets Moses and Aaron, Prophet Yahya, and in general, to all the Apostles (or *mursaleen*). In heaven, God also sends His salām to the people.

In Surah Yaseen, God talks about the people of heaven and how they enjoy themselves in heaven, being there with in pairs with their spouses, enjoying the fruits which are there, with whatever they want being available to them. However, a great blessing, indeed maybe the greatest blessing for them from God in heaven is:

سَلَامٌ قَوْلًا مِنْ رَبِّ رَحِيمٍ

'Peace!' A watchword from the All Merciful Lord. (36:58)

God emphasises that this is 'qawl', a word, so maybe they hear a voice saying to them: 'Peace from a Lord Who is All Merciful.'

When we come across this, we can hardly imagine it because throughout our lives, up to the very last moment, we are always worried. On the Day of Judgement, we will also be worried. However, when we enter heaven, God-willing, and then we hear God telling us salām, after His angels have told us this, then we will become relaxed and will have absolute tranquillity.

Greeting of peace existed before the advent of Islam

Another thing that we can understand from the Qur'an is that 'salām' was not introduced only after the advent of Islam, or by the Prophet of Islam, and then continued after him. In Surah Taha, on the conversation that Prophets Moses and Aaron had with Pharaoh, God instructs the two prophets how to speak to Pharaoh:

فَأْتِيَاهُ فَقُولَا إِنَّا رَسُولَا رَبِّكَ فَأَرْسِلْ مَعَنَا بَنِي إِسْرَائِيلَ وَلَا تَعَذِّبْهُمْ قَدْ جِئْنَاكَ بِآيَةٍ مِنْ رَبِّكَ وَالسَّلَامُ عَلَى مَنْ اتَّبَعَ الْهُدَى

*So approach him and say: 'We are the Apostles of your Lord. Let the children of Israel go with us and do not torture them! We certainly bring you a sign from your Lord **and may peace be upon him who follows guidance!**' (20:47)*

In this conversation, they are to offer their peace to Pharaoh if he listens to the message of God.

Prophet Jesus also used salām, and his salām is like the one God sent to Prophet Yahya, but in the case of Prophet Yahya, God says: *“Peace be to him, the day he was born, and the day he dies, and the day he is raised alive!”* (19:15)

In the case of Prophet Jesus, he sends salutations to himself. In Surah Maryam, we read that when he was just a new-born in the arms of his mother, Lady Maryam, when he said:

قال إني عبد الله آتاني الكتاب وجعلني نبيا وجعلني مباركا أين ما كنت
وأوصاني بالصلاة والزكاة ما دمت حيا وبرا بوالدي ولم يجعلني جبارا
شقيئا والسلام علي يوم ولدت ويوم أموت ويوم أبعث حيا

He said: ‘Indeed I am a servant of God! He has given me the Book and made me a prophet. He has made me blessed, wherever I may be and enjoined on me to (maintain) the prayer and to (pay) the zakat as long as I live and to be good to my mother and He has not made me self-willed and wretched. Peace is to me the day I was born and the day I die and the day I am raised alive. (19:30-33)

Prophet Jesus sends peace to himself. We saw above that Prophet Moses greeted Pharaoh with a salām, although of course in a conditional way because, he said: “Peace be with the one who follows guidance.” It was an offer given to Pharaoh, which depended on whether he followed guidance or not.

In Jewish tradition, they say ‘shalom’ in Hebrew, which is like the Arabic ‘salām’. Both come from the same grammatical root. In particular, there is

an article in the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*,⁴ in which an orientalist named Goldziher in which he says that research shows that salām has been used in different traditions much before Islam. Goldziher says that ‘salām’ was already used as a greeting before Islam and that the corresponding Hebrew and Aramaic expressions, which go back to Old Testament usage, were also used as greetings amongst the Jews and Christians. He also refers to inscriptions which are from the Nabataean people in which they also have something from the same root *sil*m. He says that in North Western Arabia and in the Sinai Peninsula, people used a greeting like ‘salām’ in their own language. Therefore, with the evidence we have from the Qur’an, salām had existed before the advent of Islam as it was taught by the prophets (a) to humanity.

Salām is a prayer rather than a mere greeting

The abovementioned verses show that ‘salām’ is not just a greeting; more than anything else, ‘salām’ is a prayer, a word of supplication (*du‘ā*). For this reason, we can even say salām to ourselves as we say in daily ritual prayers, ‘Peace be upon us and the righteous servants of God’ (*as-salāmu ‘alaynā wa ‘alā ‘ibādillāh as-sālihīn*). If it was just greeting for others, then we could not use it to greet ourselves. By ‘greeting ourselves’ we mean that we are requesting God to send peace to us.

‘Salām’ is asking God to give peace to someone

This leads to another important idea. When we say salām to each other, we may think we are simply offering peace to someone, and they in return are offering peace to us. However, ‘salām’ means that we request God to provide

⁴ Published by the University of Leiden

the other person with peace. If we look at Ziyarah Ashura, we can find the reason for this when we say:

اَلْسَّلَامُ عَلَيْكَ يَا اَبَا عَبْدِ اللهِ وَعَلَى الْاَزْوَاحِ الَّتِي حَلَّتْ بِفَنَائِكَ

Peace be to you, O Imam Husayn and to all the people who have sacrificed their lives for your sake.

عَلَيْكَ مِنِّي سَلَامٌ اللهُ

From me to you is the peace which comes from God.

This means that although it is ‘salāmullah’—peace which comes from God—our role is that we request God to give this salām to Imam Husayn.

This is the same as when we recite a ‘salawāt’, or a salutation on Prophet Muhammad and his progeny.⁵ When we send salutation to the Prophet we are indeed asking God to send it to the Prophet. Therefore, in the same way, by giving salām, we are asking God to send peace to someone who is present or absent or even to ourselves. Furthermore, since this ‘salām’ comes from God, it can continue to be given even after we said it and even after we have died. As we read in Ziyarah Ashura:

عَلَيْكَ مِنِّي سَلَامٌ اللهُ أَبَدًا مَا بَقِيَتْ وَبَقِيَ اللَّيْلُ وَالنَّهَارُ

I ask God to send peace to you as long as I remain and as long as the day and night remain.

This means that we are asking for this salām to continue as long as this world continues and so we say ‘salām’ and then even after we die, this salām continues. This demonstrates the great depths of salām. More than anything

⁵ When someone asks us to send a salawāt to the Prophet we say, “Oh God send peace and blessings on Muhammad and the Household of Muhammad!”

else, salām is a request from God, and if it comes from God, it is also an answer from God.

Reason for emphasis on peace

There are important questions to be asked regarding the overall emphasis in Islam on peace, on the necessity of directing our relationships based on peace and on achieving peace in our hearts.

To answer this, we need to reflect on how people can achieve happiness and salvation. God created us in a way that we have great ambitions and expectations for perfection, that nothing can satisfy us except God Himself. For example, a parent tests their child by telling the child they are going to hide somewhere, and the child must come and find them. However, they help the child by giving him or her a description to use as clues. In this description, they mention all the characteristics that match only the parent. The child then goes everywhere, meeting many people along the way. From a distance they may think that someone is their parent but when they get nearer, the child realises that person is not their parent, and so they must continue to search until they reach their goal.

The same thing happens with us. God has given us an innate image of Himself in our heart regarding His qualities, such as Absolute Beauty, Absolute Goodness, Absolute Purity, Absolute Mercy, and Absolute Compassion. Then He asks us to come and find Him. So we go and try different things. Some people think that God is to be found in money and wealth because it gives them absolute power, absolute satisfaction, and absolute beauty in a worldly sense. So, they strive to become rich, but still do not feel satisfied and at peace. Other people think power and position is the absolute good. So, we human beings try everything, but we never become satisfied and at peace because the innate image that we have of God

will not match anything other than He Himself. Therefore, we must continue our search until we find the Real God.

This search becomes especially important for people who have wealthy and affluent lifestyles because the poor and those who face difficulties still think and hope that becoming rich will solve their problems. However, people who have a comfortable life are the first to acknowledge that it is not enough. Therefore, many people commit suicide in modern societies in which people are affluent. The people who are poor normally do not commit suicide even if they are not very religious because they always must struggle, and they have no time to think about more philosophical questions about the meaning of life etc. For them, finding a piece of bread makes their life meaningful. However, a person who is affluent and has everything they need, then finds that their life is still not meaningful because whatever they have does not match the innate image of God that they have in their hearts. Unless they find God, they will not be satisfied and at peace.

Remembrance of God brings peace and tranquillity

The only way for us to achieve peace and tranquillity is to remember God:

الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَتَطْمَئِنُّ قُلُوبُهُمْ بِذِكْرِ اللَّهِ أَلَا بِذِكْرِ اللَّهِ تَطْمَئِنُّ الْقُلُوبُ

-those who have faith and whose hearts find rest in the remembrance of God. Look! The hearts find rest in God's remembrance. (13:28)

Also, in Surah Al-Inshiqāq (Chapter 84), verse 6, God says:

يَا أَيُّهَا الْإِنْسَانُ إِنَّكَ كَادِحٌ إِلَىٰ رَبِّكَ كَدًّا فَمَا لَكَ بِهِ

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

So we are struggling and working hard to meet our Lord; it will be too late if we meet Him only on the Day of Judgement. Everyone will meet Him then, but there are those who will meet Him whilst He is pleased with them, and on the other hand there are those who will meet God while He is not pleased with them. So, we must prepare ourselves for meeting God, for *liqā'ullāh*. A human being can only have peace and tranquillity when he is connected to God.

In one of his whispered prayers, Imam Sajjad says:

Nothing will cool my burning thirst but reaching You.
Nothing can quench my ardour but meeting You, damp my
yearning but gazing upon Your Face, settle my settling place
without closeness to You.⁶

Therefore, there is a thirst for God which is burning in us and nothing can cool it except reaching God and it is only when we reach God that we will feel satisfied. Thus, from a Qur'anic point of view, man's yearning for peace is indeed man's yearning for God. We are looking for peace because we are looking for God. Interestingly, according to the Qur'an, one of the Names of God is 'Salām' meaning 'Peace'. In Surah al-Hashr, a list of some of the Names of God is mentioned:

هُوَ اللَّهُ الَّذِي لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ الْمَلِكُ الْقُدُّوسُ السَّلَامُ الْمُؤْمِنُ الْمُهَيَّمِنُ الْعَزِيزُ
الْجَبَّارُ الْمُتَكَبِّرُ سُبْحَانَ اللَّهِ عَمَّا يُشْرِكُونَ

*He is God-there is no god except Him-the Sovereign, the
All-Holy, the All-Benign (Peace), the Securer, the All-*

⁶ A compilation of the Imam's supplications called *Al-Sahifah Al-Sajjadiyyah*, or the *Psalms of Islam* translated by William Chittick

Conserver, the All-Mighty, the Compeller, the All-Magnanimous. Clear is God of any partners they may ascribe (to Him). (59:23)

So God is 'Peace', (*al-Salām*) and the 'Giver of Safety' (*al-Mu'min*), which means He gives us *amn*, safety and security; hence, with God we can have security. A community with God will have security just as a person with God will have security.

Therefore, if we want real, enduring, and stable peace in our hearts and in our community, we must improve our relationship with God the Almighty. We must obey Him, and then God Himself will show us the ways of peace. Indeed, one of the things that the Qur'an does is to show us the ways of peace:

يَهْدِي بِهِ اللَّهُ مَنِ اتَّبَعَ رِضْوَانَهُ سُبُلَ السَّلَامِ وَيُخْرِجُهُم مِّنَ الظُّلُمَاتِ إِلَى
النُّورِ بِإِذْنِهِ وَيَهْدِيهِمْ إِلَى صِرَاطٍ مُسْتَقِيمٍ

By which Allah guides those who pursue His pleasure to the ways of peace and brings them out from darknesses into the light, by His permission, and guides them to a straight path. (5:16)

Conclusion

For Muslims, everything is related to peace and indeed, as we mentioned at the beginning, the word *Islam* comes from the Arabic root word '*silim*' which means 'peace'. God is Peace, the Qur'an shows the ways of peace and heaven is also the 'abode of peace.' By submitting ourselves to God, we can achieve peace for both ourselves and the whole society. Our understanding and practice of peace must be much more than the mere absence of tension, conflict, and war; and includes avoiding and not allowing anything that might possibly lead to anything that threatens people's safety and security.

May God lead us towards complete and perfect peace in our hearts and in our communities. May God enable us to experience the peace of being connected to Him, the peace of being able to feel His Presence, and that He is happy and pleased with us.