

CANDLES OF SPIRIT

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بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

اللَّهُمَّ صَلِّ عَلَى مُحَمَّدٍ وَآلِ مُحَمَّدٍ

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THE BRAVEST

“*The bravest is one who can control his anger.*” This is one of the beautiful dictums of a great man whose very name means “The Exalted” (‘Ali). If we reflect on it a little, we would come to realize how powerful a statement it is. Usually bravery is manifested in front of an external enemy. What if there is an enemy that would like to advance from within? This is when it becomes most challenging! If the attacker is human anger, for example, and we are able to arrest and render it subservient, we would have practically established our bravery and courageousness. This is because the enemy is right inside “us”!



REAL PROSPERITY

If one is able to control his desire (*shahwa*), anger (*ghadab*), and imagination (*khayal*) through the bridle of his intellect (*‘aql*), and direct them for his physical and spiritual advantages, one would always be the prosperous. All the selfish wars, mischief, disturbances, etc., caused by the oppressors return to the mismanagement and disequilibrium of these faculties. This is a word that serves as a principle for those who have minds to reflect!



GUARANTEED PERFECTION

If we would like the vestibules of comprehension that God has bestowed us with, to develop, the key to its door is: “Use every vestibule (eyes, ears, etc.) for the purpose it was given.” This is a guarantee! (Ref: Holy Qur'an, 14:7). Observe that there are people who even at the age of 80s and 90s or above, have a powerful mind. How? Is it by luck? Sound intellectual thought establishes that, “luck” in the crux of its meaning is a non-entity; it simply does not exist. The answer is: “Struggle and right usage!”



SELF-EFFACEMENT

So long as we lurk in the darkness of oblivion, Divine Oneness would always be misconstrued. It needs self-effacement to realize Oneness. Hence we are advised to “*die before we die*”; in other words, we are told: “Strip off the illusory veils from your hearts to behold the Only Beloved” Who *WAS* while nothing *was* with Him and *IS NOW* as He *WAS*.



ALL-EMBRACING MERCY

At the moment my ears are embraced by the sound of abundant rain in the Island of Mombasa. Rain is a manifestation of the All-Embracing Mercy of the Only Beloved. Despite the mischief and disbelief of so many of His creation, the All-Beloved constantly embraces them with

His Mercy. So long as the arrogant disbelievers subsist in this macrocosm, the All-Merciful perpetually hugs them this way, thus availing them the opportunity to wake up. Is there any one to wake up?



THE SPEECH, NOT THE SPEAKER

Consider not “who” said it, but rather “what” is being said. This is one of the brilliant dictums of Imam ‘Ali (‘a), the cousin and son-in-law of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him and his progeny). Despite its brevity, it encapsulates the key to access the vast treasures of knowledge. It literally unlocks the prejudice of so many people, and emancipates them from the dungeon of partial judgment.



READ AND ASCEND!

Scholars of insight define “recitation” as “existential absorption”. In a prophetic tradition we are told that “On the Judgment Day” (which in actuality is the higher reality of this very low realm of existence) the reciter of the Holy Qur’an would be told, “*Iqra’ warqa*” (Read and ascend) denoting the process of how reading is a force of absorption. In simple words, “to read a verse of the Qur’an” is to “absorb” the verse, and thereby ascend. There are many traditions mentioned about the merits of reading different chapters of the Qur’an. One of the principal keys that can open the locks of ambiguity of how “mere recitation” can bring about unimaginable benefits, is this very radiant tradition: “*Read and ascend!*” Otherwise constant recitation without

spiritual absorption, realization and practicalization, would render us far from the main purpose of the Qur'an.



LAWFUL FOOD, ELEVATED THOUGHTS

The Holy Qur'an says: "Then let the human being look at his food!!!" [80:24]. One of the brilliant principles that can positively regulate and direct our lives is the relationship between the human body and the human spirit. Unlike the proponents of Dualism, who consider the human being to be a dichotomy of spirit and body such that there is no kind of interaction whatsoever between the two, theologians of insight hold that the human body is a lower manifestation of his spirit, and the latter is a perfected level of the former. In fact the spirit was born succeeding the movement of perfection of the human body. The Holy Qur'an alludes to this reality in [23:14]. Therefore there exists a unity between the body and the spirit, and whatever happens to the body affects the spirit, and vice versa. Small wonder it is that various traditions emphasize, the quality, quantity and the source of the food that we consume. For example, in one of the traditions we are notified and told that the influence left by earning unlawful sustenance are so far reaching that they also affect our "progeny" too [Al-Kafi, v.5, p.125]. The contemporary master of 'irfan, Ayatullah Jawadi Amuli (may Allah protect him and elevate his status) in one of his masterpiece works *Surat wa Sirate Insan Dar Qur'an* tells us that never can unlawful food and drink turn into sound intellectual reasoning and theoretical gnosis, thus indicating the link between "physical food" and "metaphysical thought" [Ref: <http://www.esra.ir/main.asp>, p.23-24]. Dear readers, this nondescript has availed you with a principle that if observed would facilitate your salvation in this world and the Hereafter.



CONSTRUCTIVE CONTEMPLATION

Constructive contemplation followed by appropriate action can salvage the human being for a very long time. One of the inspiring dictums narrated from Imam al-Sadiq (‘a) reads: “An hour’s contemplation is better than a year’s worship.” If one reflects on the transient and passing nature of this world, and how people after enjoying a good number of years have eventually to depart and emigrate to their graves, he may overhaul himself and change his attitude and prepare for the next world. Reflection of “how one’s past has ruined one’s present”, “how one can derive the utmost from the limited opportunity of his life”, “what is the best intention for every action and worship?” are some keys that can open perpetual doors of happiness and salvation. That worship that is directed by constructive contemplation and accompanied by attention would abundantly reap spiritual benefits. In sharp contrast, excessive worship without a strong foundation and base is remote from its very purpose.



NO TRANSACTIONS!

Friday is an opportunity which has no equal in the entire week. Every moment of this day is precious. Every good action therein is multiplied, for the treasure of Almighty Allah can never be exhausted. Let us therefore appreciate this blessing and engage in the *dhikr*

(remembrance) of Allah to which the Holy Qur'an emphatically invites us. It employs the expression "*fas'aw* ila dhikrillah" (then *struggle* toward the remembrance of Allah). One of the subtle interpretations of the verse, "O you who have faith! When the call is made for prayer on Friday, hurry toward the remembrance of Allah, and leave all business. That is better for you, should you know.(62:9)" is that 'to leave business' not only refers to physical transactions but also spiritual transactions, when the human being prays in anticipation of reward from Allah. In the words of Imam 'Ali ('a), "I did not worship you in fear of your Hell Fire, nor in anticipation of Your reward, but found You worthy of worship, and thus did I worship You". Hence, let us indulge ourselves in the remembrance of the Absolutely Beautiful Beloved "for Him" and not "for food, clothes, amenities of life, Hereafter reward, etc." This is a key for every kind of remembrance of Allah. It should however be known that if there is true remembrance of Allah in prayer then a practical transformation would follow; otherwise, it would be nothing but the "movement of the tongue and the limbs". We pray to Almighty Allah to enable us take the right steps in life.



PEAK OF DIVINE PROXIMITY

One of the remarkable scenarios I recently witnessed in Mombasa's esteemed Jaffery Academy is that two of our brilliant young boys would engage in long prostrations after *zubrayn* prayers. Indeed, I said to myself, this is the age when such prostrations must start. *Tbada* (worship) is not for a later age. When a youth lives a life of sincerity and prostrates in this way, Almighty Allah is proud of him near His angels. And the Holy Prophet (s) is reported to have said: 'Whosoever worships Allah well during his youth age, Allah would place wisdom in him during his old age.' If we consider the past of all the noble people

of the world, we would observe that they treasured their precious opportunity of youth age and spent every moment constructively. *Sajda*, we must appreciate, is the peak and zenith of the human journey to Almighty Allah. Those who pray out of presential knowledge and wisdom, literally behold that nothing save the Infinite One whose very existence cannot accept a second, exists. The ladder is before us. All we have to do is exercise in order to be able to climb it and attain Divine proximity.



THE HUMAN BEING WAS CREATED NOBLE

One of the most excellent traditions of Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq ('a) reads: "The possessor of intellect (*al-aaqil*) is one who does not consider anyone as insignificant." Indeed the radiance of these words penetrate the depths of our hearts, and make us understand two significant realities: (1) The meaning of being intellectual (*'aaqil*). To be intellectual is not simply to theoretically decipher the truth, but also to practicalize the same. In another tradition, when asked about the meaning of intellect (*'aql*), Imam al-Sadiq ('a) said: "Intellect is that with which the All-Beneficent is worshipped, and by which Gardens of paradise are attained". (2) Every human being is worthy of esteem and worship. The Holy Qur'an says: "Indeed we ennobled (*karramna*) the children of Adam...[17:70]". Hence the human being in essence is made worthy of respect and veneration. To gauge people, therefore, according to man-made criteria is to undermine the integrity of Divine law. Unless, however, the human being himself loses his identity and degenerates to animal or plant life. Such people lose their respect due to their intentional loss of human identity. Superiority and excellence, however, is weighed according to how careful one is before God. The Holy Qur'an says: "...Indeed the most noble (*akramakum*) among you is the most God-wary...[49:13]". In fact one who is God-conscious would be so caring for others that every one would naturally show humility before such a figure.



THE SOUND OF LABBAYK!

Yesterday [Wed. Nov.7, 2007] my family was chatting with a friend from California. The latter had been a student in the Holy city of Qum some years ago. One of the most inspiring statements she had made in her conversation was “This year I am planning to go to Hajj and our visas are ready.” "Wow!" I said to my self. "How fast was that!" One of the most common remarks many of us make when asked whether we would be going for Hajj is “The sound of *labbayk* has not yet come. When it comes, we will go.” After I came to realize that it is we who must respond to the Divine Call of Hajj by saying “*labbayk*” in the *miqat* [the place where we wear our *ihram*], I would disregard such statements and consider them as ignorance, until one day when I found the philosophy of this common statement, which is aptly expressed in the Holy Qur’an and our traditions and beautifully expounded in philosophical and mystical works as well. Mawlana Jalal al-Din Rumi in his poetical masterpiece *Mathnawi* illustrates the reality with a beautiful anecdote. He says that one night a person started doing *dhikr* and calling “*Ya Allah*” for a long time. Satan, finding the opportunity, came to him and reprimanded him saying “What is wrong with you? Your calling Allah is of no use, for you have done that for a long time, but have not heard even one “*labbayk!*” as an answer from Him." This greatly discouraged the person and he was overcome by grief. Then he went into a swoon and saw Khidhr (‘a), who said to him: “Why did you stop saying Ya Allah?” The man replied that he had not heard even one *labbayk* as an answer from Allah and felt that he was rejected by Him. Khidhr (‘a) said to him: “God is telling you, "The "*Ya Allah*" of yours is the "*labbayk*" (Here I am) of Ours, and that need, pain, and burning

of yours is in fact Our message to you. Your fear and love are the lasso for Our Grace: under every "O Allah" of yours are (the prior responses of) "Here I am" (from Us). In simple words, Khidhr ('a) was trying to explain to the man that it is Allah who inspires, motivates, and enables one to begin to say "*Ya Allah*". Therefore, in reality He already has responded long before our call. What better response are we after? In the brilliant supplication of 'Arafa of Imam al-Husayn ('a), we cry to Allah, "*Anta al-Dhakhir qabla al-Dhakin...*" (You are the Rememberer before your rememberers). In other words "You remember them so that they may remember You"



UNFORGETTABLE ENCOUNTERS

One of the distinguished figures presently living in Mombasa is a Lebanese scholar by the name of Shaykh Baydhun who leads prayer in the Bahman Shi'a Mosque every day. He has a comely disposition, and my first encounter with him reminded me of a dictum I cannot forget: Imam al-Sadiq ('a) is reported to have said: "Call people [to the truth] without using your tongues." In other words, our actions should be the propagators of truth. When I shook hands with him, he never released his hands until I finally had to release mine. This, I said to myself, is a spirit that should always accompany every believer. Thiqat al-Islam al-Kulayni in his al-Kafi mentions a tradition worthy of consideration: Imam al-Baqir ('a) is reported to have said: "If a person shakes his hand with his companion, the one who adheres to the shaking receives greater reward than the one who releases his hand first. Indeed know that sins are erased between them, until no sin remains.[v.2, p.181]. On another note, a guest from Iran had recently visited Mombasa. He narrated an interesting incident that he had encountered with the late

‘Allama al-Tabataba’i. He said: Some months prior to his demise, I had the privilege of meeting the great philosopher ‘Allama al-Tabataba’i. After the meeting, We shook hands and he never released his hand from mine, [for he was waiting for me to release mine first]; Despite realizing this, I decided to do the same and kept on shaking his hands for some time, until a thought crossed my mind: “I might not get another opportunity to meet ‘Allama, and thus let me kiss his hands.” He said: “The moment this thought came to me, ‘Allama quickly withdrew his hand!!!”



ENLIGHTEN YOUR HEARTS, DON'T BURN THEM!

Divali or *Deepavali* is a Hindu Festival celebrated annually by Hindus, Jains and Sikhs throughout the world. The Sanskrit word *Deepa* [feminine of deep] means earthen lamps and the word *avali* means “a row”. Hence *Deepavali* which was later shortened as *Divali* literally means “rows of clay lamps”. According to Hindus there are different stories affiliated to it, the mention of which is beyond the scope of this blog. The crux of the celebration, however, lies in “the victory of good over evil, light over darkness, and knowledge over ignorance”. In reality, therefore the cause of celebration stems from an innate attraction towards good and repulsion from evil, something which all the heavenly religions highly encourage. The way it is celebrated, however, is worthy of consideration: many people, as it is clearly witnessed, light fire crackers to enhance the festivity and joy of the occasion, or perhaps to symbolically reveal the “inner light” of the victory of good over evil. Past history, however, has clearly taught us the dangers and threats such fire crackers have on innocent people. So many have ended up in the hospital with incurable injuries. According to a recent report houses were burnt due to the use of such fire

crackers. Besides all these, the disturbance caused in the neighborhood due to the sound pollution is inexpressible. If the Hindu nobles which are remembered in this occasion were present today, and they would witness the impact such sounds can have in young children, the old and the physically weak of the community, wouldn't they have prohibited it and advised them to employ means that would instead of covering the true meaning of *Deepavali*, manifest it better? Furthermore, as the Hindu scholars believe, *Deepavali* is the celebration of "inner light". The human being must therefore light the inner lamp of his being. The most pathetic situation is that some Muslims likewise spend a lot of time and money to finally light these crackers and thereby crack the hearts of so many in the neighborhood. Some years back, when I lived in Daressalam and my son Muhammad Zaynul Abidin was very young, we had witnessed one of the most agonizing moments of our lives: people in our neighborhood, disregarding the impact these fireworks can have in children continually kept on cracking "their own hearts" and "extinguishing the inner light of their beings". My family and I know what actual moments of fear our son, who was very young at that time, experienced, until he finally went to sleep. Is this truly *Deepavali*? Should we the Muslims encourage our children to light firecrackers and spend the night in wasting time and money, which if collected from all those Muslims who join in this celebration, can feed so many of the deprived people? Does it behoove of us to spend the night in cracking the hearts of others instead of lighting the lamp of our beings. The night, we are told, is a great opportunity for transformation. The Holy Qur'an says: "Indeed that which transpires at night is deeper in impression and better in harmony with one's speech"



EID AL-ADH-HA:

DECIPHERING OUR SACRIFICING SPIRIT

The Holy Qur'an says: "And We ransomed him with a Great sacrifice." (37:107) Eid al-Adha is the day when Prophet Ibrahim (peace be upon him) was ready to sacrifice his own son in submission to the will of Allah. Despite Satanic insinuations, he took his noble son, and resolved to undertake what Allah wanted from him. As he was about to move his knife, Allah commanded him to stop, and placed a ram and ordered him to slaughter it instead of his son. Ibrahim passed the Divine Test. The Holy Qur'an narrating this scenario employs the expression '*wa fadaynahu bi dhibbin 'azim*' (and we ransomed him with a great sacrifice (37:107)). Exegetes of the Qur'an opine that, as is apparent, "the great sacrifice" mentioned in this verse refers to the ram placed for slaughter instead of Ismail (peace be upon him). This is the apparent extension (*misdaq*) of the verse. There is however a deeper and more perfect extension of the ransom which some exegetes draw from the radiant teachings of the Ahl al-Bayt (peace be upon them). In fact they believe that a ram cannot be termed to be "a great sacrifice" for a great human being like Isma'il (peace be upon him).

Shaykh al-Saduq narrates the following tradition in his 'Uyun Akhbar al-Ridha: Mufaddhal bin Shadhaan narrates: I heard al-Ridha (peace be upon him) saying: When Allah (Blessed and Exalted is He) ordered Ibrahim (peace be upon him) to slaughter the ram that He sent down, instead of his son Isma'il (peace be upon him), Ibrahim (peace be upon him) wished that he would have slaughtered his own son Isma'il (peace be upon him) with his hand and was not ordered to slaughter the ram instead, so that he experiences in his heart that which a father who sacrifices the dearest of his sons with his hand experiences, and as a result, deserves the highest of the stations of the people of reward due to calamities. So Allah, the Invincible and Majestic, revealed unto him: O Ibrahim, who is the most beloved of my creation to you? Ibrahim (peace be upon him) replied: O Lord, you did not create a creation

which is more beloved to me than your beloved Muhammad (peace be upon him and his progeny). Thereupon Allah, the Invincible and Majestic, revealed unto him: O Ibrahim, is he then more beloved to you, or yourself? Ibrahim (peace be upon him) replied: Rather, he is more lovable to me than myself. Allah (the Invincible and Majestic) said: Is then his son more lovable to you, or your son? He said: Rather his son is more lovable. Allah said: Does the slaughter of his son in oppression by his enemies agitate your heart more, or slaughtering your son with your hand in my obedience? He said: Rather, the slaughter of his son in the hands of his enemies agitates my heart more. Allah said: O Ibrahim, indeed a people who conjecture that they are from the *umma* of Muhammad (peace be upon him and his progeny) would soon kill al-Husayn (peace be upon him), his son, after him, in oppression and enmity, in the way a ram is slaughtered, and as a result, they would earn my wrath. This agitated and hurt the heart of Ibrahim (peace be upon him) and he started weeping. Thereupon Allah, the Invincible and Majestic, revealed unto him: O Ibrahim, I have ransomed “your agitation for your son Isma‘il (peace be upon him) if you were to slaughter him”, with “your agitation for al-Husayn (peace be upon him) and his martyrdom”, and have made incumbent for you the highest of the stations of the rewarded ones due to calamities. And that is the word of Allah, the Invincible and Majestic: “*And we ransomed him with a Great Sacrifice*”. (37:107). And there is no power nor strength except through Allah, the Exalted, and Great.

Imam al-Husayn (peace be upon him) not only sacrificed himself, but sacrificed, his sons and family as well as his possessions in the way of Allah. This is the lesson of Eid al-Adh-ha. It is a celebration that should rejuvenate in us the spirit of self-sacrifice. We should carefully examine ourselves in order to decipher whether we have actually returned (Eid is from the word *awd* which means “to return”) to the sacrificing spirit that Allah has naturally endowed us with. If not, then we are indeed distant from the real Eid of Sacrifice. This is the message of Eid al-Adh-ha.



RAISING OUR BEAUTIFUL CHILDREN

Today I received a letter from one of the diligent Shaykhs from Canada, whom I had known in the Holy City of Qum where we both studied some years ago. In his letter he had attached a very beautiful picture of his library with his young daughter. The picture, which was symbolically revealing, reminded me of a tradition of Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq ('a), in which he said: "*Al-banaatu basanaat wal banuna ni'ma.*" (Daughters are beautiful deeds and sons are blessings.) [Al-Kafi, v.6, p.6]. The hadith continues to say "...*wa innama yuthabu 'ala al-basanaat wa yus'alu 'an al-ni'ma*" (...and indeed one is only rewarded for good deeds and interrogated for blessings) which reveals how fortunate the parents of female offspring are. Firstly, since they are good, they produce good, and secondly, because they produce good they are rewarded. In monotheistic terms, Allah gifts them with a female offspring first and then rewards them again for having accepted the reward. The challenge however, is to "maintain" the identity of one's female offspring as "*basana*" (good deed). If we take things for granted and be lax in training our "cutie" little daughters by not giving them a suitable environment to develop in matters of cognition and morality, they can lose their identities and instead of "cuties" turn into "snooties". According to mystic scholars, a woman has the potential to brilliantly manifest Divine Attributes of Beauty if she struggles and travels on the path to Allah. We as parents, therefore, must assist our daughters in this journey. How? In facilitating a foundation that would motivate them to aspire and struggle for Immaculate Beauty. How euphoric it is when one realizes that her daughter is the foundation of an entire radiant generation! In a *hadith*, Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq ('a) explaining the verse "So We desired that their Lord should give them in exchange one better than him in respect of purity and closer in mercy" [18:81] says "[After the death of the child, Allah bestowed the parents with a female offspring from whom came seventy Prophets." [Tafsir al-Burhan, v.3, p.656] Only a brilliant daughter can be the source of seventy Divine Prophets! This is how we should raise our cuties!!!



SACRIFICE PERSONALITY FOR MENTAL PERFECTION?

Many parents, due to genuine limitations, prefer to send their children to schools where they can get both quality and affordable education. This undoubtedly is something that even the wealthy would prefer if they come to realize that their children would grow and develop in an environment which actively taps the different dimensions of their human potentials. Today a substantial number of schools actively concentrate on two fundamental dimensions which undoubtedly deserve the attention: (1) Mental abilities, and (2) Physical abilities. Other areas are not totally disregarded, but given marginal importance. When we speak of mental abilities, we refer to the abilities to focus one's attention, retain what one has already learnt, analyze and compare the same, rephrase and produce it in one's own words, etc. Most of the fundamental areas of the mental dimension are taken very seriously. With regard to physical perfection, facilitating the amenities of sports and physical exercise has become an important segment of nearly every school today. There is a fundamentally determining dimension, however, which if not tapped properly and actively, can facilitate the perpetual ruin of our children. Qualities such as authority, dignity, steadfastness, selflessness, etc. are traits that can either be developed or hampered in the aspiring student. The encounter of every teacher tremendously influences the student, especially because the latter is not facing a mere individual, but rather a small society which consists of the teacher and students of his age. A substantial number of maladies like inferiority complex, emotionally reactive behavior, lack of responsibility, lack of interest in education, etc. stem from such educational setups, which despite its fame of excellence portrays a Darwinic image of "the survival of the fittest" instead of the Muhammadan image of "the emancipation of the weakest". The

success of every school is determined not by its first grades and As, but rather its collective excellence. It is high time we try to decipher how some maladies of personality appear in our children!!!



GRAVES OF FATIMA ('A)

In one of my visits to al-Madina al-Munawwara, when I was honored to visit the graves of the Ahl al-Bayt (peace be upon them) in the well-known cemetery of Jannat al-Baqi, an old woman happen to meet me and asked in the Urdu language: *Qubure Fatima kaha hai?* (Where are the graves of Fatima?) I immediately thought that her sentence was wrong, and what she meant was *qabre Fatima kaha hai* (Where is the grave of Fatima?).

Obviously there is a difference of opinion on where she actually has been buried. Is it near the Prophet's house in the Rawdha (the Aromatic and Paradisal Garden) as some traditions allude, or is it in Jannat al-Baqi? Until now most of us are oblivious of the actual place. Perhaps, as some scholars opine, Fatima (peace be upon her) intentionally wanted her grave to be unknown, so that the future Muslims are led to question whether it is possible for the grave of the daughter of the noblest Messenger of Allah to be hidden. What do the books of history say? Why did Fatima (peace be upon her) not allow some of the contemporaries of the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him) to participate in her burial ceremony? Why did she prefer to be buried in secret? These are questions history has already answered. Those curious should search for the truth.

Today the situation is worse than before. The graves of the four immaculate leaders of the Ahl al-Bayt (peace be upon them) among other esteemed members of the Prophet's family are blocked in such a way that the lovers of the Ahl al-Bayt (peace be upon them) cannot even go near them or sometimes even utter any salutation prayer, just because a group of misinformed watchmen have been ordered by the

Wahhabi leadership to discourage and even disturb anyone who does so.

Why all this disturbance? Is it really because of their concern for the people not to get astray or is it because of a kind of vacuum and jealousy they have been taught to harbor against the Ahl al-Bayt (peace be upon them)? Or is ziyara a catalyst to ignite sparks of revolution and unity of the Umma? These are questions we must try to ponder upon and try to answer.

However, coming back to the question of the old woman, I must say that what she said was not grammatically improper. Yes Fatima does not have one grave. She has several graves: the heart of every lover of Fatima encapsulates Fatima (‘A). However much the kuffar try to spoil, destroy, and insult the edifices of the graves of the Ahl al-Bayt, as long as they reside in the hearts of their lovers, they would remain eternal.



QUALITY IS THE CRITERION

One of the most remarkable events of Islamic history where the peak of sincerity is revealed is the incident of Bibi Shutayta, a spiritually effulgent woman, who lived during the time of Imam Ja’far al-Sadiq (‘a) and Imam al-Kazim (‘A) in the Nishapur area of Iran.

A group of people led by Abu Ja’far Muhammad bin Ibrahim al-Naishapuri left Naishapur for Medina to deliver people’s money to Imam Al-Sadiq (‘a). He was entrusted with 30,000 dinars, 50,000 dirhams, and 3,000 pieces of clothes to take to the Imam of the time. An old woman called Shutayta gives a dirham and a piece of raw cotton material spun by herself for the Imam (‘A). Muhammad bin Ibrahim tells the woman: O woman, I feel ashamed to give one dirham and a piece of cloth to Abu ‘Abdillah [al-Sadiq (‘a)]. She said: Wouldn’t you deliver [it to the Imam]? *Inna Allaba la yastahyi min al-haqq* (Indeed Allah is not ashamed of the truth). Muhammad bin Ibrahim takes the

dirham from her, bends it, and places it in a bag which had lots of money [to be taken to the Imam ('a)].

On the way, he learns that Imam al-Sadiq ('A) had left this world, and Imam Musa al-Kazim ('A) had become his successor. So he goes to Imam al-Kazim ('A). When he arrives in the Imam's presence, the Imam ('a) asks for the bag of money that he had brought. Then he tells him to turn the bag, and drop the money, and he only picks up the bent coin of Shutayta. Then he ('A) asks for the bag of clothes to be opened, and only takes the raw cotton material of Shutayta, and addressing Muhammad bin Ibrahim says "*Surely Allah is not ashamed of the truth*" (the same words that Shutayta had told Muhammad bin Ibrahim when the latter felt ashamed to take her coin).

Then he tells Muhammad bin Ibrahim to convey his salams to Shutayta and gives him a bag of 40 dirhams for her as well as a piece of cloth among the pieces of clothes of his kafan which his noble sister Halima bint Imam al-Sadiq ('A) had spun.

The Imam ('a) also tells him to tell her that she will live for 19 days after Muhammad bin Ibrahim's arrival; she can spend 16 dirhams from the money for herself and give the rest as sadaqa...and informs him that he in person will come to bury her.

Then he told Muhammad bin Ibrahim to return back the wealth that he had brought to their owners...[Later on his return he realizes that except for Shutayta the rest had not accepted Imam al-Kazim (peace be upon him) as the next Imam of the time.]

On her demise, Imam Musa al-Kazim (peace be upon him) travels through tayy al-ardh (traversing of the earth) to Naishapur and prays for her funeral, and also places the earth of shifa (the earth of al-Husayn bin 'Ali ('A)) in her grave. When the Imam ('A) finishes the burial ceremonies he mounts on his camel and facing the people says:

Make your companions know and greet them on my behalf and say to them: Indeed I, and whosoever is in my position among the Ahl al-Bayt ('a) must attend your funerals wherever you may be. Therefore be God-wary in yourselves and make your actions qualitatively beautiful

so that you may assist us in your emancipation and your freedom from the Hell Fire. [Ref: ‘Allama al-Majlisi, *Bihar al-Anwar*, v. 48, pp. 73-75]

Dear readers, this is the story of reality. The quality of one’s action is the *mizan* and balance to sift between the valuable and the valueless. The Holy Qur’an says: “...*Who created death and life that He may try you-which of you is best in deeds (absanu ‘amalan)*”. Hence let us struggle to establish ourselves in this level of sincerity (*ikhlas*) so that we are gradually overtaken by Divine attraction (*al-jadhbba al-ilahiyya*) and instead of merely being from the *mukhLISun* (in the sense of the active participle), we are transported to the level of the *mukhLASin* (in the sense of the passive participle), a level in which Satan can never lay any kind of influence. Satan swears in the Qur’an: “...*and I will certainly cause them all to deviate except Thy servants from among them, who are mukhLASin (purified by Yourself)*” [15:39-40].



COVERER OF DEFECTS

One of the beautiful Names of Allah is *Sattar al-‘Uyub* (One who frequently covers defects). This Name is revealed so brilliantly when our actions are hidden even from the two angels who record our deeds. In the supplication of Kumayl we speak of sins which Almighty Allah hides even from the *Kiraaman Kaatibin* (the Noble Writers). The exalted saint, Mawla Faydh al-Kashani in his ethical masterpiece *al-Mahajjat al-Baydhaa'* narrates the following thought provoking sacred tradition: The Holy Prophet (s) is reported to have asked his Lord about the sins of his nation saying: O Lord, place the [responsibility of] accounting [of their deeds] on me, so that none other than myself knows their evil deeds. Thereupon Almighty Allah revealed unto him: They are your nation, whereas they are My servants, and I am more merciful to them than you are. I will not place the [responsibility of] accounting [of their deeds] on other than Myself, so that neither you nor others see their

evil deeds. [Mawla Faydh al-Kashani, Al-Mahhajjat al-Baydhaa', v.7, p. 260]. In one of his sermons on Laylat al-Qadr, Grand Ayatullah Jawadi Amuli, after mentioning the aforesaid tradition said that Allah would take such accounting in his hands so that the people are not ashamed of their sins near the Prophet. How can they solve the problem of shame near Allah? In response, he mentioned another sacred tradition where Almighty Allah says that in order for them not be ashamed near Him, He would make them forget their sins.



SINNERS ARE MOST WELCOME

Six days of the Holy Month of Ramadhan have elapsed like a flash of light. Have we begun our self-purification or has the habit of procrastination overwhelmed us? Twelve days are left to embrace or be embraced by the mercy of the nights of Qadr. Have we thought of transformation, change, and emancipation? Or has despair overcome us, and we have no hope to turn to the All-Forgiving? Some traditions serve as sparks that penetrate into the heart so deep, that they shake the human being and transform him completely. Perhaps the following sacred tradition (hadith qudsi) can serve as such a spark and enlighten our beings forever: Once Prophet Musa (peace be upon him) called upon His Lord in Mount Sinai, “O God of the worlds!” And Allah responded, “Labbayk (Here I am)”. Musa continued and called, “O God of the obedient ones!” And Allah responded, “Labbayk (Here I am)”. Then Musa said, “O God of the sinners!” Upon this Allah said: “Labbayk, Labbayk, Labbayk!” So Musa asked Allah, “O God, what is the wisdom behind responding to me only once when I called You with the best of Your names, and thrice when I said “O God of the sinners?” Allah said: “O Musa, surely the knowing ones rely on their recognition, the virtuous upon their virtue, and the obedient upon their obedience. But the sinful have none save Me. So if they despair from Me, with whom can they take refuge?”



THE SPLENDOR OF THE GNOSTICS DEPARTS

He was known as Bahjat al-‘Aarifin (the splendor of the Gnostics) and profusely emanated the light of devotion, such that lovers throughout the world were fascinated by his noble spirit. He was well-known for his absorption in prayer, where the true munajat (mutual whispering) between the lover and the Beloved is clearly revealed. In most cases, the awe and veneration of the Infinite would apparently overcome him and he would weep from the depths of his heart in prayer. Although the world came to know him after a long period of his life of splendor, this elevated spirit was known to enjoy great stations of spiritual perfection since his youth. He personified religion in both its exoteric as well as esoteric dimensions. Exoterically he revealed his brilliance as a faqih (referral authority in Divine laws), and esoterically he exhibited the splendor of an absorbed mystic in the alley of the beloved. One of the significant things which powerfully emanated from that great ‘aarif was his steadfastness on the path of the only Beloved. The Holy Qur’an says: “Indeed those who say our Lord is Allah, and then are steadfast, angels descend on them saying: Fear not, nor be grieved, and receive good news of the garden which you were promised...” (41:30)

Some of his spiritual teachings to those thirsty in pursuing the path of spiritual development are as follows [see: <http://www.mtb.ir/>]:

1- There is no litany [dhikr - word of remembering God] more exalted than the litany of action; and there is no litany of action higher than abandoning sin in [one’s] beliefs and acts of devotion. And apparently, abandoning sin in the absolute sense without continual self-vigilance cannot take place.

2- Among the dictums of ‘Ali (‘A) is: “Know that every action of yours is according to your prayer (sala).” You must protect your five times daily prayer in the beginning of their times and with total inclination to Him (Almighty is He), and God-willing you will not lose felicity.

3- We must deal with [the holy] traditions and read them, for [the] cure is in them.

4- If a person realizes the purpose of creation, he would find it extremely sweet to [die as a martyr and] be restored back to life seventy times.

5- The prayer of night (salat al-layl) is the key to occasions of Divine succor (tawfiqaat).

6- It is these very supererogatory (mustahabb) acts that make the human being attain a great station.

7- The reason why we are left behind is our consumption of doubtful wealth; and doubtful wealth brings about doubts and ambiguity.

8- God knows when a human being send greetings to Muhammad and his progeny (i.e. recites salawat) one time and gifts that to the deceased soul, what kind of meaning, form and reality it has!

When a scholar of the caliber of Ayatullah Muhammad Taqi Bahjat (may Allah elevate his noble spirit) tears the curtains of this material world and releases the bird of his spirit from the cage of the corporeal body, the moths of love residing in this terrestrial realm suffer a loss which cannot be recuperated. Bahjat al-‘Arifeen not only served as a lamp for expounding the Shari’a (the Islamic laws), but also as a master for guiding towards the tariqa (the path) which leads to the haqiqa (the Ultimate Reality). The human being fundamentally has been brought in this transient world for this very purpose. The word shari’a which we commonly translate as the Islamic law literally signifies mawrid al-maa’ al-jaari (‘the entrance of flowing water’). When we say shari’at al-Furat, for example, we mean “the entrance of the flowing waters of Euphrates”. But Religion only serves as the shari’a for those of us who would really like to “enter the flowing spiritual waters” and benefit from the same so that we may attain the haqiqa (Absolute Reality). Although Bahjat al-‘Arifin is not among us, the brilliance of his splendor can still be felt. Rather, when does the splendor of such a lamp ever fade? Which lamp was lit by the teachings of Muhammad and His infallible progeny (peace be upon them), and did not turn immortal and eternal?



THE MEANS FOR THE GOAL?

A sister in Islam wrote to me reminding me that calling Allah for other worldly matters is not abhorred, and hence we cannot take the verse *Ud'uni Astajib lakum* (call "ME" and I shall respond to your call) [40:60] to signify that we should always call Allah for Allah. I would like to thank her, and remind the readers that although the literal connotation of the verse is what we had discussed previously, the reality is that there is nothing wrong in seeking other than Allah for Allah. Many of us have the tendency to seek our selfish needs when it comes to supplication. Very few think about the fundamental aim behind creation which is to attain the proximity of Allah. And a substantial number of us do not consider whether the need is “a means” for the fundamental goal behind their creation, or a satisfaction of a material attachment that is firmly rooted in themselves even if it is be spiritually dangerous. Hence we must try to make our supplications meaningful. Whether we directly ask for other needs or Allah, the goal should always be “Him”. If we seek a long life, wealth, position, etc. it must be “for Allah’s obedience, worship, and proximity”. Therefore the crux of the issue is to fundamentally seek Allah. And this is realized either by seeking the MEANS such as health, wealth, marriage, etc. so that one can attain Divine proximity, or directly ALLAH Himself. In some supplications, we are taught to seek “THE MEANS of THE GOAL” while in others we are taught to seek “THE GOAL” directly. An example of the former is: “*Waj'al yaa Rabbi Rizqaka li waasi'an...*” (So provide me, O my Lord, with an extensive provision....” [Isha Du'a: Mafatih al-Jinan]. An example of the latter is: ‘O Allah I ask you for that beauty of Yours which is the most beautiful, and every beauty

of Yours is the most beautiful, O Allah I ask you by Your entire beauty” [Supplication of Sahar: Mafatih al-Jinaan]. Hence we should not misconceive and surmise that it is improper to seek other than Allah from Allah, even if it be the means that assist us in approaching His neighborhood. May the Almighty enable all of us to journey to and achieve perfection.



I AM WITH THE BROKEN HEARTS

The Holy Prophet (s) was once asked, “*Ayna Allah?*” (*Where is Allah?*), and he said “*Inda al-munkasirati qulububum*” (*He is with those who hearts are broken*) [Al-Rawandi, Al-Da’awaat, pp. 119-120]. This brilliant statement unfortunately has sometimes been misconceived and misinterpreted. A common understanding is to focus mainly on the state of the broken heart, regardless of its cause and level of excellence. If this was the case, many hearts break due to the petty issues of material world. Does this dictum also refer to them? A better and more profound understanding of this hadith is gotten when we consider another similar tradition, which specifies the nature of the heart and the cause of its breaking: Amir al-mu’minin ‘Ali (‘a) is reported to have said: “*Tuba lil munkasirati qulububum min ajli Allah*” (*A pleasant final state be to those whose hearts are broken for Allah*) [Al-Aamadi, Ghurar al-Hikam, tr.5937]. The phrase ‘*min ajli Allah*’ (*for the sake of Allah*) here clearly depicts that the principal cause of the brokenness of hearts must be related to Allah. For example, because one has not yet achieved one’s principal goal in life which is Divine proximity, one’s heart is broken!

One of the subtlest meanings of the verse “*Ud’uni astajib lakum*” (*Call Me and I shall respond to you*) [Qur’an, 40:60] is that we are told to seek Allah only. Ud’uni (Call “ME”). How selfish and degenerate of us to call the only Beloved for our material and selfish motives. Ask one who is engaged to someone for marriage, the reason why he tends to call

her constantly? Is it because of her wealth? Is it because of her position and fame? Is it because of the physical enjoyment he anticipates from her? If these are the reasons, then in reality he is engaged with them and not with her. Let us call the Beloved for the Beloved, and nothing else. Let us stop approaching Him as an intermediary for our mundane goals. Let us understand that He is THE GOAL. If we tangibly observe that our hearts are broken "*min ajli Allah*" (*Because of missing Allah*), then we should most surely guarantee His Presence! "*I am in the presence of the broken HEARTS*"



VISION: THE CLIMAX OF HAJJ

When prophet Musa (‘a) went to Mount Sinai and had a secret mutual conversation with Allah for thirty nights [*Wa waa‘adna Musa thalathina laylatan* (and And We made an appointment with Moses for thirty nights- Qur’an 7:142)], they actually were the thirty nights of the holy month of Dhu al-Qa’da [Ref: ‘Allama Majlisi, Bihar al-Anwar, v.13, pp. 213-214], a month when those who aspire to meet the Beloved, and not merely His house (*ka’ba*), engage in spiritual pursuits in preparation for the fundamental vertical (spiritual) journey to the Beloved. Then Allah says "*wa atmamnaahu bi ‘asbr*" (And we completed them with ten [more days]-Qur’an, 7:142). Almighty Allah confers ten more days to Musa (‘a) for munajat. And these ten days are the very first ten days of the holy month of Dhu al-Hijja when the hajjis are busy in their spiritual excursion. Having undergone specific stages of spiritual change through the help of his Lord, Musa (‘a) finally asks for vision. He says, "*Rabbi arini anzuru ilayk*" (My Lord, show [Yourself] to me, that I may look at You!- Qur’an, 7:143). Insightful scholars like Imam Khumayni say that Musa (‘a) did not aspire for vision through the physical eye, free from such kind of thinking are the Prophets of Allah [Ref: Imam Khumayni, Notes on Nubuwwat, p. 352]. He yearned to

see the Beloved through the heart. Such vision obviously is not “complete comprehension” which presumes the comprehending one to encompass the object of comprehension. It rather is a limited comprehension of the Divine Attributes according to the capacity of the beholder. And this can only be achieved through self-purification, whose fundamental stages according to authoritative divine sages are as follows:

- 1) Al-Tajliya (Strictly adhering to the apparent Islamic laws and refraining from whatever Islam has prohibited)
- 2) Al-Takhliya (Cleaning oneself through the water of repentance and tawba)
- 3) Al-Tahliya (Beautifying oneself with the perfections of the Absolutely Beautiful according to one’s capacity)
- 4) Al-Fana (Dissolution in the Beloved, such that one visions that no identity exists save that of Allah)

Aspirants of hajj should try to journey through these stages, so that on the 10th of Dhu al-Hijja they deserve to put on the Ihram of Musa (‘a) and sincerely yearn for the vision of the Only Beloved.

What is so captivating is to behold the Musa of Karbala, who in the Mount Sinai [Bihar al-Anwar, v.98, pp. 108-109] of Ghadhiriyya (another name for Karbala), is reported to have said:

*I left the entire creation in Your Desire
And made my family orphans so that I may see You
So even if you cut me into pieces in my love for You
My heart would not incline to other than You*

This peerless Musa of history was so intensely sacrificing, that the Beloved bestowed him with peerless bestowals, one of which is:

Al-sujud 'ala turbat al-Husayn ('a) yakbriqu al-bujub al-sab' (prostrating on the clay of al-Husayn severs the seven veils [‘Allama Majlisi, Bihar al-Anwar, v.82, pp. 153]). A probably meaning of the seven veils is ‘the seven levels of existence’, the highest of which is in the close proximity of the All-Beloved.

But the Beloved’s love is so special for this Moses of Karbala. According to a tradition narrated from Imam al-Sadiq (‘a) [Ref: ‘Allama Majlisi, Bihar al-Anwar, v.98, pp. 87] Allah on the day of ‘Arafa begins with the visitors of the grave of al-Husayn first, and then the lovers stationed in the sacred plains of ‘Arafa.

We pray to Almighty Allah to enable us comprehend the secrets of Hajj better as we cross the stations of our transient life.



THE LIGHT OF WAKEFULNESS

There is well-known dictum that scholars of ethics and gnosis remind us- who have gone into the slumber of negligence and need to wake up: The Holy Prophet (s) is reported to have said: *“al-naasu niyaamun, fa idhaa maatu intabahoo”* (people are asleep, when they die, they would wake up). Scholars believe that this tradition can allude to two different levels of death:

(a) Forceful Death (*al-mawt al-idhtirari*) tears off the veils of the reality of our thoughts, belief, way of life and actions. Hence when we are forcefully transported to barzakh, which is the higher realm of existence, we wakes up from our deep slumber of negligence and realize how unthankful we had been in the lower realm of existence.

(b) Volitional Death (*al-mawt al-ikhtiyari*), which comes about after we clear ourselves from the sins we have committed, and untie the knot of attachment of this world. Great saints the like of Ayatullah Haddaad Musawi (a contemporary of ‘Allama al-Tabataba’i) is said to have attained such a station after maintaining extreme endurance vis-à-vis the predicaments of his personal life. This is known as *kehal’ al-badan* (stripping of the body from the soul).

We have such a potential in us that we can vision beyond this world and see our stations in barzakh even before our souls are taken by the angel of death. A very interesting anecdote is narrated about ‘Allama al-Tabataba’i while he was busy engaged in the remembrance of Allah in the Mosque of Kufa in ‘Iraq. His mentor in Gnosis (*‘irfan*), Ayatullah Sayyid ‘Ali Qadhi al-Tabataba’i warned him from paying any attention to whatever comes about while he is busy in his remembrance of Allah. ‘Allama is reported to have said that once while he was immersed in the remembrance of Allah (*dhikr Allah*) in the Mosque of Kufa, he suddenly saw a beautiful heavenly damsel (*bour al-‘in*) appear before him with a cup of heavenly wine. Observing the instructions of his mentor, he paid no attention to her. So she appeared to him from the other side and persistently requested ‘Allama to accept her offer, but the latter did not pay attention to her again. ‘Allama writes in his personal memoirs that due to his inattention, she was so frustrated that he can still remember her state. This scenario obviously was not in the present realm of al-dunya, for Houris are damsels of Paradise, and hence, do not have material existence. In reality ‘Allama, was visioning what was beyond this world. Analysts believe that what ‘Allama saw was perhaps the result of his own *dhikr*, which in our traditions can be the cause of the creation of such rewards. What his mentor, however, said was very important and meaningful, because attending to the All Beloved is loftier than attending to the result of one’s own actions (*bour al-‘in*). Further more, it is due the remembrance of the Only Beloved, that makes a loving houri magnetized to ‘Allama al-Tabataba’i and frustrated when he pays no attention to her. According to a beautiful

dictum of a great saint, “*Agar behisht shireen ast, behisht afreen shirintar ast*”(If Paradise is sweet, the Creator of Paradise is even sweeter’).

Small wonder it is that ‘Allama al-Tabataba’i would advise his students to recite the famous supplication of Imam al-Baqir (‘a) during the predawn moments of the month of Ramadhan, where there is no mention of the enjoyments of Paradise (*Allabumma inni as’aluka min Babaa’ika bi abbaabu wa kullu babaa’ika babiyy* (O Allah, I ask you that brilliance of yours which is the most brilliant, and every brilliance of Yours is the most brilliant...)). There is only mention of Allah and His Attributes. And that is why the human being has been created. He does not live to be a happy animal, but lives to soar to the station of a perfect human being, who exemplifies the qualities of Allah.



SAFEGUARDING THE OPPORTUNITY

‘*Ayyuba al-nas, innahu qad aqbala ilaykum shabr Allah bi al-barakati wa al-rahmati wa al-maghfira...*’ (O people, Indeed the Month of Allah has approached you with blessings, mercy and forgiveness...). These are the beginning words of a radiant sermon the Holy Prophet (s) once delivered to his companions on the last Friday of *Sba’ban al-Mu’azzam*, as they approached the Holy month of Ramadhan. Basically, the Holy Prophet (s) spoke about how fundamental an opportunity is this month, what are the most important things one can do therein, who is a loser in this great month, etc. In short: It is an invaluable opportunity, which every intelligent believer should struggle to safeguard. At one point of this sermon Amir al-mu’minin ‘Ali (‘a) stands in humility and asks the Holy Prophet: ‘*What is the best of actions in this month?*’ and the Holy Prophet (s) responds saying: ‘*The best of actions is al-wara’ ‘an mabaarim Allah’* (the best of actions is to refrain from what Allah has forbidden). If one ponders

over this statement, one would come to realize that ‘to refrain from’ in reality is quite different from ‘to engage in’. It is the reality of ‘not doing something’. However in this sermon it has been conferred the station of a deed, or rather ‘the best of deeds’ (*afibbal al-a'maal*). The secret behind this is ‘In order for the mirror to reflect all the different shades of the Beauty of the Beloved, one must polish and clear the stains it has gathered, so that when the Beloved appears before it, His Beauty is depicted in the best possible manner’. In order for us, who have been bestowed with the capacity of manifesting the Attributes of Allah in ourselves, to reflect and exemplify Divine Beauty and Majesty in our beings, we need to first clean the mirror of our hearts through the water of repentance. Sin, in the expression of the Holy Qur'an, is known as ‘*rayn*’ (‘rust and stain that settles over a shiny object and covers it’). The Holy Qur'an speaking of the sinful says, ‘*Kallaa bal raana 'alaa qulubihim maa kaanu yaksibun*’ (No indeed! Rather their hearts have been sullied by what they have been earning, Qur'an, 83:14). It is by refraining from accumulating such stains (*al-wara* ‘an mahaarim Allah) that enables one to experience and enjoy the precious and spiritual moments of the Holy month of Ramadhan, when the Beloved constantly calls every lover to Himself and facilitates a quicker process for achieving His proximity. Another very important point in the Holy Prophet (s)’s sermon is when he says, ‘*al-shaqiy man baruma ghufran Allah fi hadha al-shahr*’ (the wretched is he who is deprived of Allah’s mercy in this great month). The tone of this statement is such that it should be enough to alert and shake every Muslim who is aware of the sins that he has accumulated so far. ‘Despair’ (*al-ya's*) must be blotted out of the dictionary of our spirits. We must fully anticipate to be embraced with the blanket of Divine forgiveness in this month well-known as ‘the month of maghfira’. Anticipation and hope, however pre-requires us to prepare ourselves by harmonizing our spirits with the true meaning of ‘hope’, a manifestation of which is to carry out those things that make us near to the object of our hope. These final glowing days of the Holy month of Sha'ban should therefore motivate us to start preparing. In a beautiful

tradition narrated from Imam al-Ridha (‘a) some of the fundamental steps of preparation are as follows: **(1)** Recite (with understanding and serious intention) the following supplication: *Allabumma in lam takun gharafarta lana fee maa madbaa min Sha’ban faghfir lana fee maa baqiya minbu* (O Allah, if you have not forgiven us in what has passed of the month of Sha’ban, then forgive us in the remaining month).’ In reality if the stains that we have accumulated are totally effaced, we would be able to benefit better from the approaching month of grace. **(2)** Pay the rights of those whose rights are on your shoulders, for that is one of the fundamental conditions of *tawba*. [Those who can take even the beginning steps will find change in the holy month] **(3)** Seriously remove any kind and degree of hatred for any Believing Muslim (regardless of whether he/she hates you, declares himself/herself as your enemy, belittles you, etc...). Obviously so many queries come about here. The hard fact is that ‘we, who would like to qualify to be in a horizon of understanding and compassion of the people of Paradise must remove this rancor from our hearts’. In the Holy Qur’an this is known as ‘*ghill*’. Those who aspire for Paradise cannot enter therein if this impediment exists in their hearts. The Holy Qur’an says that Allah removes it from their hearts: *Wa naza’na maa fi sudooribim min ghill...* (‘We removed whatever rancor there is in their breasts...’ (Holy Qur’an, 15:47)) **(4)** Join the last 3 fasts of the month of Sha’ban with the Holy month of Ramadhan, for that is equivalent to having fasted two months continuously. Furthermore it reveals how the believer in honor of the month of Ramadhan begins fasting in welcoming this great month. **(5)** Recitation of Qur’an, which, according to a well-known prophetic tradition, also enables a person to shine his spirit. Recitation, however must be a way for spiritual ascension. These are not very difficult ventures, and hence let us throw away the impurities of our hearts and welcome this great holy month, in anticipation of transforming ourselves and starting the spiritual journey to Allah, which if we delay, would earn us nothing but intense and perpetual regret in the Hereafter.



UNION WITH THE BELOVED

One of the excellent whisperings of Sha'ban reported to have been recited by all the Imams of the Ahl al-Bayt ('a) is the well-known *al-Munajat al-Sha'baniyya*. The climax of the supplication is as follows: "O God, bestow me perfect connection to Thee, and enlighten the eyes of our hearts with the light of Thy vision, until the sights of the hearts tear the veils of light and reach the Source of Greatness, and our spirits become suspended to the invincibility of Thy sanctity..." In order to understand this verse we must know that the source of the human being is from an exalted plane of existence. Almighty Allah says, "*wa nafakhtu fibi min Rubi*" (I blew unto him from My spirit (15:29)). The human descent to the lowest realm of existence *al-dunya* (*thumma radadnahu asfala saafilin* (then We relegated him to the lowest of the low- 95:5) was to enable him undertake a volitional journey through knowledge and action back to his origin where there is no curtain between the lover and the Only Beloved. The fundamental impediment the human being faces is the material attachment of this world. If he clears himself from sin and worldly attachment, and allows the soul to reign over his body, he tears off the curtains of darkness, and enters a world of light which despite being encouraging can also be deceiving. Whereas the world of light allows one to vision the Only Beloved according to one's existential limitations, it veils one to apprehend the perfect and ultimate possible vision of the face of the Only Beloved. The wayfarer to Allah conjectures that he has finally attained the zenith of his vision, a vision which does not entail any curtain between him and the Beloved, whereas in reality he has still got to sever some veils of light. Gnostics say that the veils of light are nothing but one's limitations of existence. Hence one has still got to struggle to rid away himself from the curtains of light, and continue on his path of

perfection, to attain perfect connection to Allah (*kamaal al-inqitaa*). This supplication narrated by Amir al-mu'minin ('a) in the holy month of *Sha'ban al-Mu'azzam* must wake us up from the slumber of negligence that has taken deep roots into our beings.



Spiritual Aroma Yet to Be Discovered

One of the thought provoking dictums of Imam 'Ali ('a) is *al-mar'atu rayhana wa laysat bi qabramana* (a woman is an aromatic plant and not a dominator). A comprehensive and detailed exposition of this brilliant hadith is beyond the scope of the present writeup. However, it would be worth appreciating the tip of the iceberg: obviously this dictum does not imply that a woman is physically fashioned in such a way that she always emanates aroma. One's physical aromatic condition depends on how one physically conditions oneself. In Islam, however, there are occasions when a woman is not allowed to condition herself with perfume. This however does not imply that she should not keep herself tidy and clean. Applying perfume that would attract the opposite sex who may not be a lawful partner in one's life is one thing and observing cleanliness to avoid any kind of unpleasant smell in one's body is another. What actually does the expression 'aromatic plant' then denote in the abovementioned dictum? Scholars of insight opine that the way there is a physical aroma that attracts those whose olfactory senses are sound, there is a metaphysical fragrance that only attracts those who can appreciate the scent of spiritual realities. Let us deliberate on the following noteworthy traditions to appreciate this truth: The Holy Prophet (s) is reported to have said: **(1)** *There is nothing more pleasant than the scent of a believer (al-mu'min); and indeed his fragrance can be felt in the horizons...*" (Al-Muttaqi, *Kanz al-Ummaal*, v.1, p. 165) **(2)** *There is nothing that stinks more than the stench of the disbeliever (al-kafir), and*

surely his [unpleasant] odor can be felt in the horizons...' (al-'Uqayli, *Dhu'afa al-'Uqayli*, v.4, p.289). **(3)** Imam al-Sadiq ('a) reports from his forefathers, who report from Imam 'Ali ('a) who said: *Inna al-'Aalim al-kaatim 'ilmubu yub'atbu antanu abl al-qiyama riban, jal'anubu kullu daabba, hatta dawaab al-ard al-sigbaar* (A scholar who hides his knowledge would be resurrected as the most foul smelling among the people of resurrection, and every beast including the small beasts of the earth would curse him. (Al-Barqi, *Al-Mabasin*, v.1, p. 231). **(4)** The Holy Prophet (s) is reported to have said: *Inna al-walad al-saalib rayhaanatum min rayaabin al-janna* (Surely a virtuous and good offspring is an aromatic plant among the aromatic plants of the Paradise) (Al-Kulayni, *Al-Kafi*, v.6, p.3) **(5)** Imam al-Baqir ('a) is reported to have narrated a part of what was revealed to one of the Prophets of Allah. In it some of the evil characteristics of a certain creation who are attached to the world is described. One of their description is, '*...alsinatubum abla min al-'asal wa a'maalubum al-baatina antanu mina al-jiyaf...*' ("Their tongues are sweeter than honey, whereas their inner actions stink worse than corpses) (Al-Himyari al-Qummi, *Qurb al-Isnaad*, pp. 28-29) **(6)** The Holy Prophet (s) is reported to have said: I swear by the one in whose hand is the soul of Muhammad the smell that comes out from the mouth of the fasting one near Allah is more pleasant than Musk. (Al-'Amili, *Wasa'il al-Shi'a*, v.10, p.400) **(7)** Imam al-Baqir ('a) is reported to have said to one of his companions called Maysar: Do you gather in private, and discuss and speak what you want [of the truth]? Maysar says: Yes Indeed, by Allah, we do gather in private and discuss and say what we want. Thereupon Imam al-Baqir ('a) said: I swear by Allah, I love to be with you in some of these places. [And] I swear by Allah, I love your scent and your spirits...' (Al-Mazandarani, *Sharh Usul al-Kafi*, v.9, p. 69). **(8)** The Holy Prophet (s) is reported to have said: "Whosoever backbites a Muslim, his fast is invalidated and his minor ablution (*wudhu*) is void, and he would come on the Resurrection Day, while a stench more foul than that of a corpse would come out from his mouth, which would disturb the people of Resurrection. (Shaykh

al-Saduq, *Al-Faqih*, v.4, pp. 14-15). All the aforesaid traditions clearly depict that beyond the physical aroma there is a spiritual fragrance that only those endowed with inner apprehension can comprehend and appreciate. They also enlighten us about the path of attaining a pleasant spiritual aroma in oneself. Perhaps Imam ‘Ali (‘a) by stating that a woman is an aromatic plant wanted to teach us that if she really assumes the role of a woman as guided by the Divine law and the path, her entire being would constantly emanate sweet fragrance and she would actually be a *Rayhana* (an aromatic plant). If the woman prepares herself before, while, and after she practically serves as the manifestation of Allah’s *Khaliqiyya* (power of creation), if she embellishes her inner being with the beautiful traits of Allah and manifests the Divine Attributes of Jamal (Divine Beauty), if she starts feeding the child, in the Name of Allah and entirely for His pleasure and manifests the Divine Attribute of *Raziqiyya* (Nourisher), and if she rears the fundamental faculties of intellect, passion and anger in her offspring and moderates them and brings them into the state of their equilibrium, and hence manifests the Divine Attribute of *Rububiyya* (Trainer) why can’t she really be a *Rayhana*? Small wonder it is that the *Holy Prophet (s)* is reported to have said: *I have been made to love three things from your world: women, perfume, and the apple of my eyes is in prayer.* Love for women, contrary to how the materialists conjecture does not mean physical intimacy between man and woman. It is the Divine role that a woman plays on this earth: she can potentially manifest attributes of perfection in herself and thus emanate the Divine aroma which only the insightful can comprehend.



THE SAGE OF THE REALM BEYOND

On Wednesday night, the 9th of July, the holy city of Qum, rather the entire Shi'a world, lost one of its powerful scholars, who practically lived a life of knowledge and action. Ayatullah 'Ali Panah Ishtihardi (may Allah elevate his spirit) left this mortal world at the age of 87 after having developed himself spiritually and journeyed through the realms of perfection. He was well-known for his utter humility and excellent morals. Some years ago, I had the privilege of studying a section of Shahid al-Thani's excellent commentary on the brilliant text of Islamic jurisprudence called al-Lum'a al-Dimishqiyya with this great sage. Despite his old age, his encounter was like a youth who was extremely astute and full of vigor. Seminarians would gather around him due to his approachable demeanor. Ayatullah 'Ali Panah Ishtihardi would lead Maghrib and 'Isha prayer in the well-known Seminary in Qum called Faydhiyya. After having led Maghrib prayer, the Only Beloved invited this great lover to meet Him. He encountered a heart attack, and despite being taken to the Kamkar hospital, he never resisted in responding to the call of the Only Beloved. When one would look at this sage, he would conclude: despite his earthly presence, he was a sage of the realm beyond. We express our heartfelt condolences to our twelfth holy Imam ('a) on the loss of this fundamental pillar.



A COSMOLOGICAL REALITY OVERLOOKED

According to Islamic cosmology, the universe is not reduced to corporeal and material existence but rather consists of different levels of existence. These levels are closely interrelated and mutually united. Any phenomenon that transpires in the lower realm of existence has a repercussion in the higher level of existence. The lowest level of

existence is called *al-dunya* (fem. gender of *al-adna* which literally means 'the lowest'). According to a tradition narrated from Amir al-mu'minin 'Ali bin Abi Talib ('a), the *dunya* was known as *al-dunya "li annahaa adnaa min kulli shay"* (because it is lower than every thing) (Shaykh al-Saduq, *Ilal al-Sharayi*, v.1, pp. 1-2). The intermediate level of existence which in reality also encompasses the lowest level, is known in Qur'anic terminology (23:100) as *barzakh* (barrier), for it serves as a barrier between the lowest of the realms of existence (*al-dunya*) and the level beyond which the Holy Qur'an terms as *al-qiyama* (the realm of resurrection). *Qiyama* therefore is a much higher reality of the *dunya* than *barzakh*. It is not a separate parallel realm of existence however, that comes after the end of this world in terms of time as the common man conjectures. Human beings endowed with sharp insight, depending on their level of self-purification and self-development, not only comprehend this material world, but can pierce the veils and vision the levels of *barzakh* or even beyond. The Holy Prophet (s) and his infallible progeny would tangibly see the reality of sin as fire, and thus would naturally refrain from the same. Although many of us cannot vision our higher states of *barzakh* and *qiyama*, if the curtains of material existence are unveiled, we would behold our awful state. No wonder, we clearly seek release from Hell Fire in so many supplications that we recite. We do not seek protection of Hell Fire on the Judgment Day but emancipation from Hell Fire now and here. In the well-known supplication of *Jawshan al-Kabir*, for example, we employ the phrase '*kballisna min al-naari yaa Rabb*' (release me from Hell Fire, O Lord'. With this integral principle in mind, let us struggle to release ourselves from the trouble of *barzakh* and beyond and extinguish the fire we have ignited, through the water of *tawba* and *istighfar* (seeking forgiveness).



Months of Spiritual Upliftment

As we embrace the holy month of Rajab al-Murajjab, a group of concerned Muslims throughout the world begin their program of self-purification and self-development. If one tries to study the supplications that the Holy Prophet (s) and his infallible progeny (‘a) would constantly recite in the months of Rajab and Sha’ban, one would realize the fundamental importance of these months: these two months actually serve as preparatory months for the actual Divine feast of the Holy Month of Ramadhan. The Holy Month of Ramadhan thereafter naturally becomes ‘eid (lit. from ‘awd which means “to return” to one’s innate God-seeking nature) for those who were successful in preparing themselves. Imam Zayn al-‘Abidin (‘a) in his brilliant prayer manual al-Sahifat al-Sajjadiyya, while bidding farewell to the Holy Month of Ramadhan, addresses the month of Ramadhan as Eid of the Friends of Allah. He says: *“Assalamu ‘alayka ya shabira Allabi al-akbar wa ya ida awliyaa’ibi”* (Peace be unto you O the greatest Month of Allah and the eid of His close servants). The majority however start their program of self-purification in the Holy Month of Ramadhan. Due to their unprepared state, they cannot enjoy the true spiritual repast that Almighty Allah has prepared for the believers. As a result, the day of eid only serves a day of material enjoyment. They do not comprehend the spiritual state of Return which eid actually manifests. We must therefore ask ourselves whether we would like to be among the minority who can really enjoy the actual spiritual Divine banquet that Allah has prepared for those who have struggled to make themselves spiritually receptive, or the majority, who gain very less due to their laxity and unreceptive nature? The days of this transient life are unpredictable for so many of us. The best resolution therefore would be to start “now”.



HUMAN SWEETNESS

There are ample traditions that characterize the believers (*mu'mins*) with sweetness and love for sweetness. Following are some examples worthy of reflection: The Holy Prophet (s) is reported to have said: (1) A believer is sweet (*al-mu'minu hulwun*), and loves sweetness (*yuhibbu al-halaawa*) [Bihaar al-Anwaar, v.63, p. 285] (2) The heart of a believer is sweet (*qalb al-mu'minu hulwun*) and it loves sweetness (*wa yuhibbu al-halaawa*) [Bihaar al-Anwaar, v.59, p. 295] (3) A believer is like a bee (*al-mu'minu ka al-nabla*): it eats pleasant food, and provides pleasant food. And Imam 'Ali ('a) is reported to have said: (4) Our true followers are like bees (*Sbi'atuna bimanzil al-nabl*); if people would know what is in their stomachs, they would have eaten the same (*law ya'lam al-nas maa fi ajwaafiba la akaluba*) [Shaykh al-Saduq, Al-Khisal]. If we reflect over these traditions with a broad sense of vision, we would come to realize that the entire being of a faithful believer is sweet. In the same way that Amir al-mu'minin 'Ali ('a) says that some parts of the Qur'an explain others, the words of the Ahl al-Bayt ('a), which are commentaries of Allah's Book, likewise are explained with the help of their other statements. This is because akin to the infallible Book wherein there is no contradiction, the words of the Ahl al-Bayt ('a) likewise have no contradiction. Therefore in order to understand their words, we must not look at some of their words and discard others. In our case, due to our intense material tendency, we only try to comprehend sweetness as that which our faculties of taste can appreciate and comprehend. If we were to consider the fundamental dimension of the human being, which is his spirit, the aforementioned traditions would become clearer for us to understand. We must know that the veil of ignorance is from our side, and not from the radiant words of the Ahl al-Bayt ('a), about which we express in Ziyarat al-Jami'a as '*Kalaamukum noor*' (your words

are light). Browsing through the brilliant corpus of the traditions of the Ahl al-Bayt (‘a) we come to understand that there is a sparkling realm of sweetness yet to be discovered. Consider the following narrations: (1) In one of his sermons narrated in Nahj al-Balagha Imam ‘Ali (‘a) describing exalted people says: “Indeed they have tasted the sweetness of knowing Him” [*qad dhaaqu balawata ma’rifatibi*] (2) Imam al-Sadiq (‘a) is reported to have said: “When a believer withdraws himself from the world he soars spiritually high and tastes the sweetness of the love of Allah” (*idbaa takhalla al-mu’minu min al-dunya samaa wa wajada balawata hubbillah*) (3) Imam al-Sadiq (‘a) is reported to have said: Justice is sweeter than water that a thirsty person gets (*al-‘adlu ablaa min al-maa’i yusibuhu al-zam’aan*) [Al-Kafi, v.2, p. 146], (4) In one of the brilliant supplications of Imam al-Sajjad (‘a) he prays to Allah “And make me taste the sweetness of Your forgiveness” (*wa adhiqni balawata maghfiratik*) [Al-Sahifat al-Sajjadiyya, p. 103] (5) In yet another supplication, Imam al-Sajjad (‘a) prays to Allah: “And make us taste the sweetness of Your constant love and proximity” (*wa adhiqna balawata wuddika wa qurbika*) [Al-Sahifat al-Sajjadiyya, p. 411] (6) In a tradition Imam al-Sadiq (‘a) is reported to have said: “And whosoever from among the umma of Muhammad (s) knows the compulsory right of his Imam, would find the taste of the sweetness of his faith” (*faman ‘arafa min ummati Muhammad (s) waajiba haqqi Imamibi wajada ta’ma balawati imaanibi*) [Basaa’ir al-Darajaat, pp. 432-433] (7) In a conversation with Prophet Dawud (‘a) Almighty Allah speaking of the worldly scholars, says: “The least I will do to them is that I will remove the sweetness of munajat from their hearts” (*inna adna ma ana saani’un bibim an anza’a balawata munaajaati ‘an quloobibim*). (8) In the well-known Du‘a Jawshan al-Kabir we address Almighty Allah as “O One whose remembrance is sweet” (*yaa man dbikerubu hubwun*) [Mafatih al-Jinaan, p.93]. Therefore as it is correct in the physical plane of existence to say that a believer naturally loves to eat sweet things, it is correct to say in the plane of his spirit that he loves spiritual sweetness. What literally jerks a human being is when a youth of tender age like Qasim bin al-Hasan (‘a) who

deeply aspires for martyrdom is asked by uncle, Sayyid al-Shuhada ('a), "O my dear son, how is death to you?", he responds, "Yaa 'amm abla min al-'asal" (O uncle, it is sweeter than honey!). [Madinat al-Ma'aajiz, v.4, p. 228]. This clearly reveals how exalted a station had this young boy achieved.



WHEN ALLAH WHISPERS

Munajat is a conversation between the lover and the Beloved. It is therefore no ordinary kind of conversation. It is a mutual conversation that entails secrecy and intimacy. Only those who are close to each other secretly whisper to one another. Our holy traditions introduce the canonical prayer as *munajat*. The Holy Prophet (s) is reported to have said: "O mankind surely when the worshipper (*musalli*) prays, he whispers (*yunaaji*) unto his Blessed and Almighty Lord; therefore he must know that with which he whispers." Whispering to Allah is a phenomenon both encouraged as well as understood. However, very few qualify to be whispered by Allah. Imam al-Sadiq ('a) is reported to have said: "When the Prophet (s) was taken for the nocturnal ascent (*mi'raj*) and he reached the station where Almighty Allah wanted him to, **his Lord Whispered** to him." [Bihar al-Anwar, v.18, p.341]. Jabir bin 'Abdillah al-Ansari narrates that the Holy Prophet (s) called Ali ('a) in the battle of Ta'if, and whispered to him. So the people complained and said 'The Prophet (s) whispered to Ali alone, and did not whisper to us.' Thereupon the Prophet (s) stood and praised Allah and said: 'O people, surely you claim that I whispered to 'Ali; I swear by Allah, I did not whisper to him; rather it is **Allah Who Whispered** to Him.' [Bihar al-Anwar, v. 39, p. 153]. These were examples of the infallibles, for whom such states are understandable. Can other human beings too attain a level in which they have the privilege of being whispered by Almighty Allah? Imam 'Ali ('a) is reported to have said: "In all the periods and times when there were no prophets,

there have been persons with whom Allah, precious are His bounties, whispered in their hearts and spoke in the essence of their intellects". Therefore it is feasible for other human beings to experience such moments of ecstasy as well. One of the instances that raises a person so high that Allah whispers to him is when one sincerely embarks to visit the grave of Imam al-Husayn (‘a). If he enjoys sufficient receptivity, he would have the privilege of being whispered by his All-Beloved Creator. Imam al-Sadiq (‘a) is reported to have said: *"Surely when a person comes out to visit the grave of al-Husayn (‘a), for the first step that he takes when leaving his family, his sins are forgiven; thereafter for every step that he takes, he is sanctified until he comes to the grave. When he reaches al-Husayn's grave, Allah Whispers to him, and Says: My Servant, ask Me, and I shall give you, and call me and I shall respond to your call...*[Wasa'il al-Shi'a, v.14, p.420]



Understanding the Etiquette of Greeting

In different Muslim societies when the day of 'Ashura (10th Muharram) is commemorated, a substantial number of people are clad in black clothes, and as advised by the Imams of the Ahl al-Bayt (‘a), are overcome by sorrow. We are also told by Imam al-Sadiq (‘a) to meet our people with the expression *"May Allah magnify our reward due to our calamity because of what happened to Imam al-Husayn (‘a)..."* This however does in no way absolve us to greet or respond to the greeting of those who sincerely say *"Salamun 'Alaikum"*. According to the strict Islamic Shari'a, whosoever among the Muslims greets you with peace then respond with a better greeting of peace or repeat the same (4:86). One who does not do so is religiously reprehensible and sinful as well. Don't we realize that on the very day of 'Ashura, we employ the same greeting for Abu 'Abdillah al-Husayn (‘a), saying *"Assalamu 'alayka yaa*

Aba 'Abdillab..." An innocent and sincere brother happened to meet one of my acquaintances on the day of 'Ashura, and when the latter greeted him with "*Salamun 'Alaikum*", instead of responding to the greeting, he loudly said "*Azzamallabu Ujurana...*" Indeed his intentions were undoubtedly pure, but his response was incorrect. He would have responded with "*Wa 'alaikum Salam...*" and then have expressed his condolences "*Azzamallabu....*" which is highly recommended. In fact this is how we express our condolences to the Ahl al-Bayt (‘a) in the well-known Ziyarat of Ta'ziya that we recite on Ashura Day. We first express salam "*Asslamu 'alayka Yaa Rasulallah*" (*Peace be unto you O Messenger of Allah*) and then continue with "*Absana Allabu laka al-'Azaad' fi waladika al-Husayn*" (*May Allah grant you the best of consolation on [the loss of] your son Husayn*). Notice "first *salam*" and then "condolences". It is important for us to understand the whyness and whatness of sorrow and express the same as it must be expressed. All the ambiguities clear out when we understand who are we missing and what are we missing him for?



RECEIVE WHAT YOU CONFER

One of the beautiful dictums narrated from Amir al-Mu'minin (‘a), is "*Irham turham*" (*have mercy and you shall get mercy*). This informs us that if we are merciful to people, a time would come that people would be merciful to us. Other traditions also have similar demonstrations about this reality. However, most of us, due to our limited consciousness that is habituated to vision the action (*'amal*) and retribution (*jaza'a*) as separate entities, always anticipate to see two different phenomena to understand this reality. For example, when we are told "have mercy, and you shall get mercy" we feel that if we show mercy, a time will come when we would be in trouble and others will show mercy on us. Obviously this is correct. However, there is another deeper and loftier understanding of this tradition, which considers the action to be the

very retribution. When we say '*Irham, turham*' (*have mercy and you will get mercy*) we are speaking of a single phenomenon that establishes both one's bestowal as well as reception of mercy at the same time. In clearer words, by having mercy on others you are actually receiving mercy yourself". And what greater mercy can one anticipate when he is able to bestow mercy on others! One needs to be loftier to be merciful than to receive mercy. Our aspirations, however, must be more exalted: we must yearn to unite with Imam al-Husayn ('a) and manifest the All-embracing mercy of Almighty Allah. This is what the Imam ('a) manifested. And that is why we address him as: *Ya Rabmatallah al-Waasi'a* (*O the Comprehensive Mercy of Allah*)..."



The Ecstatic Dimension of Karbala [Part 1]

One very important dimension of the Institution of Karbala overlooked by so many of us is its spiritual dimension. Scholars of gnosis (*'irfaan*) however have contemplated over this dimension and narrated so much for us to learn and benefit. In order to make us closer to tangibly perceive the inner dimension of the Karbala event, perhaps the most eloquent revelation is that of Hadhrat Zaynab ('a), the daughter of Imam 'Ali ('a) when asked by Ibn Ziyad how Allah dealt with her brother (Husayn ('a)) and family. It is narrated that when this was asked, she said: *Maa ra'aytu illa jameela* ("I did not vision save beauty"). O Zaynab ('a), when we narrate the tragedy of Karbala nothing but sorrow develops and increases in our hearts. What other version of Karbala do you have? What beauty is this that whereas you were able to comprehend, most of the narrators of the tragic incident were in oblivion? It is here when we come to realize that beyond this material realm of plurality and conflict (*tazaabum*), is a realm of unity, harmony, love and beauty which can only be perceived by those who are spiritually united with that realm. Sayyid Muhammad Husayn al-Tehrani in his Spirit Immaterial (*Rube Mujarrad*) quotes his mentor in

'irfaan (Divine gnosis), Sayyid Haddad al-Musawi to have said: “Ashura is a day of which if only a fraction were to be unveiled for the spiritual wayfarers and ardent lovers, it would keep them in a state of bewilderment out of extreme ecstasy until the end of their lives, and they would fall into the state of prostration until the judgment day, out of gratitude to Allah.” (<http://www.maarefislam.com/>). Here is Zaynab (‘a) with a lofty spirit, and here is Karbala with all the different calamities. Whereas others beheld what apparently transpired, her penetrating vision tore the veils of this transient realm and apprehended the kernel which according to her was nothing save beauty. She was of a personality who would tangibly understand and experience the prophetic tradition “Paradise is under the shadows of swords” (*Al-jannatu tabta zilaal al-suyooif*). She had complete realization of her father’s statement “*calamities are bestowals of Allah*” (*Al-masaa’ibu minhun min Allah*)...



The Ecstatic Dimension of Karbala [Part 2]

Have we ever wondered why we praise Allah for the calamities that befell the warriors of Karbala as we conclude the sacred *ziyaara* of ‘Ashura? We say: *Allahumma laka al-hamdu hamda al-shaakirini laka ‘ala musaabibim; alhamdu lilLabi ‘ala ‘azeemi raziiyati...* (O Allah, praise be to You, the praise of those who thank You, for the calamities that befell them (the martyrs). Praise be to Allah, for my great loss...)” One of the possible interpretations of these brilliant verses is that we praise and thank Allah for having conferred Imam al-Husayn (‘a) and his companions the succor of bearing the great calamities that befell them. Another interpretation is to thank Allah for the kernel and reality of these calamities, which as the daughter of Ali al-Murtadha (‘a) explicitly said,

was nothing save beauty. Consequently, it is a call for every reciter of this *ziyara* to spiritually prepare himself to appreciate this reality in order to be able to naturally express the same. Whereas undoubtedly Bibi Zaynab (‘a) did encounter the hardships of this material world and tangibly felt the same, her penetrating spirit, understood how victorious her brother and the valiant martyrs of Karbala were. Therefore one should not misconceive and think that there is no need for us to mourn and lament for what transpired in the plains of Karbala. Rather, as the 12th Holy Imam (‘a) is reported to have said in his well-known *Ziyarat al-Naabiya*: “...I will, therefore, lament you morning and evening, and will weep blood in place of tears, out of my anguish for you and my sorrow for all that befell you, until I meet death from the pain of the catastrophe and the choking grief...”. In fact there are many traditions that encourage us to weep and lament, and thus we should remove the misconception from our minds. However, what is important for us to realize is that, as expounded by the Holy Qur’an, traditions of the Ahl al-bayt (‘a), and Divine theosophy, the world of reality consists of a hierarchy of existence, and the result of what transpires in the lower realms is exhibited in the higher realms. Karbala had visionaries who could comprehend this tangibly. In one of the salutational recitations (*ziyaraat*) we address them saying: ‘...I bear witness that most surely Allah unveiled for you the curtain...’ And in a tradition Imam Husayn (‘a) reports that the Holy Prophet (s) said to him: “...And surely you shall be martyred there (in Karbala) together with a group among your companions who would not sense the pain of the touch of iron. Then he read the verse: ‘O Fire, be cool and peaceful for Ibrahim (21:69)’. The war [similarly] will be cool and peaceful on you and them.” Small wonder it is that some traditions clearly indicate that the martyrs of Karbala would warmly welcome the arrows that were rained at them. Again one must not misconstrue and think that the companions were death lovers per se. It was rather their unwavering stance of not submitting to Yazid and his forces that brought them to the state of confronting death, which when they encountered was “*sweeter than honey*”. In the well-known *Ziyarat Waarith*

we employ expressions such as *Abibbaa' Allah* (heart lovers of Allah) and *Awidda' Allah* (constant lovers of Allah) for them. They were virtually drunk and intoxicated with the wine of Divine love. It seems that the cup-bearer (*saaqi*) constantly availed them with sips of *sharaaban taboora* (wine of purity). The Holy Qur'an speaks of the near ones that, "*Wa saqaabum Rabbuhum sharaaban taboora*" (*And their Lord made them drink a pure sharaab (76:21)*). According to a tradition narrated from Imam al-Sadiq ('a) this pure drink is such that "*yutabbiruhum 'an kulli shay'in ma siwa Allah*" (*it purifies them from everything other than Allah*). If Allah himself is the intoxicator (*saqaabum Rabbuhum*), when would the lover ever return to the state of consciousness? Here I am transported to the brilliant poetry of Mulla Ahmad Narraqi in his poetical masterpiece *Mathnawiye Taaqdees* when speaking about the great spiritual state of annihilation in God (*al-fana fi Allah*): *In fanaaye bande dar mawla buwad* (this is the annihilation of the servant in his Master); *In fanaa az sad baqaa awla buwad* (this annihilation is better than hundred kinds of subsistence); *Fahme un kbwaabi boro taa Karbala* (if you would like to know the reality of this then go to Karbala) [*Mathnawiye Taaqdees*, p.273]. Al-Naraaqi would like to tell us that the most suitable arena for this kind of exalted spiritual state of beholding the fact that only the Beloved Exists, is Karbala. In the end I would like to quote the words of Ayatullah Maliki Tabrizi about the bilateral experience of Sayyid al-Shuhada. He says in his *Al-Muraqibat* that *although Imam al-Husayn ('a) was apparently struck with such injuries that no Prophet, Divine Successor, or human being, is heard to have encountered, such as his thirst which cannot be intellectually apprehended, his spirit would experience, the delights of the manifestations of the lights of Divine Beauty and the Revelation of Divine Majesty, as well as the eagerness to meet and reach the proximity of God. All this would diminish those difficulties; rather, it would change their severity into pleasure.*



Ali al-Murtadha Karrama Allahu Wajhahu

One of the most spectacular experiences of my recent journey to the *Masjid al-Haram* [Dec 2007] was to behold the pillar opposite the door of the Ka'ba adjacent to the women's entrance of the place where the water of the spring well of *Zamzam* is drawn. The inscription on the pole was so symbolically revealing that I thought of taking a picture of the same. It read "*Ali al-Murtadha karrama Allahu wajhahu*". The entire inscription contained a world of meaning to me. Unlike the names of the other *sababa* (companions of the Holy Prophet (s)) inscribed on other poles of the environs of the Sacred Haram, wherever the name 'Ali came, I found it to be followed by *al-Murtadha* and *karrama Allahu wajhahu*. Ibn 'Abbas is reported to have said that Imam 'Ali ('a) was known as *al-Murtadha* because he would follow what Allah and His Messenger is pleased with in all matters. In other words, Allah's pleasure would be his pleasure. And one who has attained such a lofty station, Allah is already pleased (*raadhi*) with him. Perhaps the most succinct expression so far used is that of Imam al-Husayn ('a) when he says "*Ridha Allah Ridhaana Ahl al-Bayt ('a)*" (the pleasure of Allah is our pleasure- the Ahl al-Bayt ('a)). In fact, ontologically speaking, it is Allah Himself who confers the succor of *ridhaa* (pleasure) to His servant. Therefore, in this case, when Allah is already pleased with His servant, there is no need to supplicate and say "*radhiya Allahu 'anhu*" (may Allah be pleased with him) after his name. What is unique about that is whereas in the case of the other *sababa* the prayer "*radhiya Allahu 'anhu*" (may Allah be pleased with him) is always mentioned, *al-Murtadha* reveals that the prayer has already been accepted and that Imam 'Ali is already one with whom Allah is pleased. And the phrase *karrama Allahu wajhahu* testifies that Imam 'Ali (lit. exalted) never bowed down before any idol. It should be noted however, that unlike "*radhiya Allahu*

'*anbu*"; "*karrama Allahu wajhabu*" is not a supplication but a declaration and narration. It means "Allah ennobled his complexion (from bowing down to any idol (*'an an yasjudu lisanam*))" and not "May Allah ennoble his complexion". However, if we are speaking of higher levels of *karama* (nobility) then there is no problem. This is because only Allah (swt) is *al-Karim al-Mutlaq* (the Absolute Noble One), and the path to His Nobility is endless. What is so symbolic about this picture is that it is adjacent to the *Masqa* (place where one's thirst is quenched) of Zamzam: In the way we witness the water place of *Zamzam* adjacent to the pole that manifests 'Ali ('a), we shall *Insha Allah* witness Imam 'Ali ('a) beside the water place of *kawthar* on the Judgment Day. Rather for people of inner revelation and insight, the Day of Judgment is not a parallel plane of existence that would follow this world, but a higher plane of existence to appear for those who due to the veils of the hearts are devoid of the penetrating vision. O the offspring of Ka'ba, this is an ecstatic moment for this nondescript!



The Pigeon of Haram

Kabutar-e-Haram- Ahmad Abdollahzadeh- wrote to me through the Lisan Scratch Pad Blog, and suggested that I should have a look at his weblog [<http://www.pigeonofharam.blogspot.com/>], which I enthusiastically did and benefited as well. What pierced the depths of my heart is his brilliant epithet of being a pigeon of the Haram. By Haram (sanctuary) here he meant the Haram of Imam al-Ridha ('a) in the holy precincts of Mashhad-Iran, whose brilliance can only be appreciated by those with receptivity. What was remarkable of him was that in his Persian weblog he said that he called himself a pigeon of haram if the Imam ('a) did accept this title. These, I sincerely feel, must

be the pure sentiments of a true lover who relatively understands the exalted character of Imam al-Ridha (‘a), and the privilege of being able to be called a *kabutar-e-haram*. I am transported here to my days in Qum when my family and I were pigeons of the haram as well. We had rented a small house near the haram of Hadhrat Ma’suma (‘a) in Qum, which once upon a time belonged to the author of *Mafaatih al-Jinan*, Shaykh ‘Abbas Qummi. So brilliant and serene was our stay in that house, that I feel that we have had no similar experience in our lifetime. It is in that house that I began the first volume of the book Manifestations of the All-Merciful. It took a very small period of time to complete the entire book, which in the beginning was in the form of an ezine called Horizons of Thoughts. Being a *kabutar-e-haram* is indeed recommended and highly advantageous, but being the haram itself has greater excellence. Living in the proximity of the harams and beholding the magnificent structures of monotheism must constantly inculcate in our beings the lesson of being a haram itself. The Holy Qur’an introduces a group of people whom the angels are attracted to. The angels are privileged to be the kabutars of their harams, which is their hearts. The Holy Qur’an says: *Indeed those who say, “Our Lord is Allah!” and then remain steadfast, the angels always descend upon them, [saying,] “Do not fear, nor be grieved! Receive the good news of the paradise which you have been promised.”*(41:30)



Majaalis- Reviving Religion Itself

One of the brilliant masterpieces of poetry is the famous couplet written by the Sufi saint Mu’in al-Din Chishti, which starts with “*Shab ast Husayn Paadshab ast Husayn Din ast Husayn Din panah ast Husayn...*” What is so remarkable in this poetry is the phrase “*Din ast Husayn*” (*Husayn is Religion*). All those who commemorate Imam al-Husayn (‘a)’s

Divine movement, participate in the mourning sessions of Muharram, and lament for Imam al-Husayn ('a)'s tragic martyrdom, must inculcate this important phrase in their minds and make it their yardstick for deciphering whether the gatherings truly commemorate this unparalleled and unique event in the history of mankind or not. Imam al-Husayn ('a) represents religion in all the dimensions of human life. He is the epitome of Islam and his aim likewise was the salvation of Islam. If our gatherings facilitate the revival of religion within ourselves and the society at large, we must satisfactorily say that we do commemorate the martyrdom of Imam al-Husayn ('a), but if they do not serve the aforesaid purpose and are reduced to gatherings for merely earning thawab (Divine Reward), we must struggle to change and render them to be a means for what al-Husayn ('a) actually rose: *Shah ast Husayn paadshah ast Husayn Din ast Husayn Din panah ast Husayn sar daad nadaad dast dar daste Yazid baqqa ke binaaye la ilah ast Husayn (Husayn in the king, the king of kings; Husayn is Religion; Husayn is the Protector of Religion; He gave his head, but not his hand to Yazid; Truly Husayn is the foundation of negating all deities other than Allah.)* Therefore if one majlis were to ignite our hearts to change our sinful life to that of obedience to Allah, we have really commemorated the tragic martyrdom of Imam al-Husayn ('a). If one marthiya (elegy) were to make us resolve to pray on time with concentration, establish good relations with our near ones, pay our religious dues, respect our parents, refrain from unlawful deeds and reform the situation of the afflicted ones, we truly have commemorated Husayn's movement. If participating the majalis (gatherings of commemoration) revive our inner selves and enable us to relinquish our tarnished past, and begin the life of taqwa, then we truly have mourned for Imam al-Husayn ('a). *Din ast Husayn, Din ast Husayn Din ast Husayn...(Husayn is Religion! Husayn in Religion! Husayn is Religion!)*



The Pillar of Hannana Moans

While I write these words, my ears are caressed with the sweet and melodious sounds of the birds chirping in our neighborhood in the Kizingo area in Mombasa. Are they communicating, supplicating, or glorifying Allah? Indeed most of us are oblivion of our own material realm, leave alone the higher planes of existence. The Holy Qur'an tells us: *'There is nothing but that it glorifies Allah and praises Him, but you cannot comprehend their glorification. Indeed He is forbearing and forgiving.'* [17:44] In expounding this verse, 'Allama al-Tabataba'i in his monumental al-Mizan fi Tafsir al-Qur'an says that the glorification mentioned in the verse should not be mistaken with ontological glorification, which refers to the natural expression of Allah's Absolute and Perfect Reality through the 'limited and deficient nature' of every other thing in the universe. The mention of the Names "Indeed He is forbearing and forgiving" according to one of the strong opinions, is that 'not being able to comprehend the tasbih of the other creatures' is an offense, which Allah bears and forgives. We are told in different traditions that it is our tainted heart that hampers us from beholding the *malakut* (the inner realm of existence) and appreciating the tasbih of the creatures. The pebbles doing tasbih in the hands of the Prophet (s) is a day to day phenomenon witnesses by those endowed with pure hearts, but perhaps when the hearts of a group of Muslims are influenced by Allah's Messenger "to forcefully be receptive to their *tasbih*" it is taken as a miracle. The pillar of Hannana is an unforgettable event in the history of the mosque of Madina. It has been narrated in our traditions that when the Prophet of Allah (s) built his mosque in Madina, there was an old dried date palm pillar besides the *mibrab* (place where the Imam leads prayer). Whenever he (s) would deliver a sermon or speak to the people he would lean on it; but when a mimbar was brought for

him, and he ascended it, a cry was heard from the date palm the way a she camel cries when it separates from its offspring. So the Prophet (s) descended the pulpit and embraced the dry date palm, until it went into silence, and the Prophet (s) returned back. Illustrating this in very beautiful poetry Rumi says: *Ustune Hannane az hajre Rasul Nale mizad hamchu arbabe uqul* (the pillar of Hannana due to Prophet's separation, lamented like those endowed with intellect); *Guft payghambar che khwahi ay sutoon? Guft jaanam az firaqat gasbt kboon.* (The Prophet asked the pillar: what do you want? The pillar said: Due to your separation my soul has turned into blood); *Masnadat budam az man taakhti, bar sare minbar tu masnad saakhti* (I was your support; now you have run away from me; you have devised a place to lean against upon the pulpit)...In the end Rumi hits in the center of our hearts and says: "Hearken, O heedless one! Be not thou less than a piece of wood! Indeed such phenomena are utter realities for those endowed with insight.



RAGING LOVE AND STRONG FAITH

Miqdad, one of the noble readers of this blog, asked me a question on how to cultivate love for the Ahl al-Bayt (‘a) in ourselves. In order to understand the answer to this fundamentally important query, we must realize that love is an offshoot of knowledge. So long as one has no knowledge of the beloved, how can any kind of love and yearning ever come into being? Therefore knowledge of the Ahl al-Bayt (‘a) is very essential. And knowledge about them is not all about historical dates and places. Rather it is the appreciation of their excellent traits and characteristics. When one understands the lofty traits of Imam ‘Ali (‘a) and Abu ‘Abdillah al-Husayn (‘a), he naturally gets inclined to them and intensely yearns to encounter them. Knowledge, however, is not always conceptual. If we clean the taints of sin that we have

accumulated in our hearts, and rear the noble traits of the Imams in ourselves, our love for them would rage. It is such kind of knowledge and love that leads Maytham al-Tammar to water the tree where he is to be later hanged due to love and support of Imam ‘Ali (‘a). It is such knowledge and love that intoxicates Zuhayr bin Qayn to say, “I swear by Allah, I love to be killed, then resurrected, then killed, [then resurrected,] until I am killed like this a thousand times and that Allah thereby protects you and these youth of your family.” The secret of attaining such kind of raging love is in strengthening one’s faith and devotion. The Holy Qur’an alludes to this reality when it says, “...and those who have faith have more intense love for Allah.” [2:165]



A Memorable Encounter in Makka

In one of my journeys to Makka al-Mukarrama for *hajj*, I and a noble companion happen to visit the late martyr Ayatullah Muhammad Baqir al-Hakim. I can still visualize those moments. He had a sparkling face that had so much to narrate. We sought some advise from him, and the great scholar informed us of a brilliant interpretation of the tradition *‘Min tamaam al-Hajj liqaa al-Imam’* [The completion of *hajj* is in meeting the Imam]. One of the possible interpretations of the tradition is that the pilgrims who come to perform *hajj* must know the proper way of undertaking the ritual in its different dimensions. Therefore they should approach the leader (Imam) who has a good understanding of the same. And the leader(s) of the contemporary era [who represent the Imam of the time] are the Muslim scholars, who should be approached [and their advise sought]. I felt enlightened. Indeed in order for one to derive utmost benefit from *hajj*, he should go to the different places of the ‘ulama in Makka, who are well-grounded in the laws and secrets of *hajj*.



The Heart is the Haram of Allah (Part 1)

All the branches of religion are runways of spiritual ascension to the Divine. *Hajj* is no exception. Rather its very literal meaning conveys its profound reality. *Hajj* in the Arabic means ‘*qasd*’ (to intend). From the Islamic legal point of view, however, it refers to ‘intending the House of Allah’ for rites that are obligatory on all the human beings. The Holy Qur’an says: “And escape to Allah...” [51:50]. Commenting on this phrase, Imam al-Baqir (‘a) says that it means ‘*Hujju ila Allah*’ (Perform *hajj* [and journey] to Allah) [al-Kulayni, Al-Kafi, v.4, p.256]. In other words, the reality of performing *hajj* is to escape to Allah. And escaping to Allah means to adopt His Beautiful Attributes. In a well-known prophetic tradition we are told, “*Takballaqu bi Akhlaaqillah*” (and adopt the character traits of Allah). Obviously this does not imply any sort of deification. Whereas Allah’s Attributes are Infinite, the human being is only able to reflect them according to the mirror of his capacity. Such reflection also is utterly by Allah. The Imams of the Ahl al-Bayt (‘a) in their traditions clearly allude to the fact that Allah has tested the pilgrims with mere stones in the holy precincts. They should, however, reflect on the kernel and migrate to the same. The stones symbolize realities that can cause an inner revolution and totally overhaul us. In a well-known tradition, Imam Zayn al-‘Abidin (‘a) explains to a devout pilgrim called Shibli about the subtle realities of every rite in *hajj* thus informing him that there is a meaning to every obligation that we perform. We should therefore not to limit ourselves to the periphery but embrace the center as well. If we have to journey to the house of a beloved, circumambulate around it seven times, but finally depart without meeting and seeing Him, every sound human being would wonder in astonishment. The verse we just quoted above does not say “*Fa firru ila baytillah...*” (And escape to Allah’s House), but says “*ila Allah...*” (to Allah...) thus clearly and distinctly informing us about that the main aim and goal of every aspirant of *hajj* is Allah Himself. Obviously, visiting the House of Allah must prepare us for the real ascent, and cannot be divorced from its kernel. It is interesting to note that the insightful scholars who expound the secrets of Hajj say that

the purified human heart is the House of Allah. The *haji* of the wayfarers is to spiritually emigrate and attain a level of comprehension of his unsullied and pure heart which can really serve as a haram of Allah (swt). Imam al-Sadiq (‘a) is reported to have said: ‘*Al-qalbu haramullah, fala tuskin haramallah ghayrallah*’ (the heart is the sanctuary of Allah, therefore to do not let other than Allah inhabit in it). Perhaps the following brilliant dictum of Imam al-Sadiq (‘a) would increase our vision and understanding: ‘*Nabnu Ka’batullah, nabnu Qiblatullah...*’ (We are the Ka’ba of Allah, we are the qibla of Allah) [Allama Majlisi, *Bibaar al-Anwaar*, v.24, p. 303]. And in another brilliant tradition from Imam al-Sadiq (‘a) we read, ‘*Nabnu Haramullah al-Akbar*’ (And we are the greatest sanctuary of Allah) [Al-Kulayni, Al-Kafi, v.1, p. 221]



The Heart is the Haram of Allah (Part 2)

There is a beautiful anecdote that illustrates the kernel of *haji* and the aspirants of *haji* would really be able to touch the core if they understand it well. In BOOK II of his celebrated *Mathnawi*, Rumi narrates an incident worthy of contemplation: We hereby reproduce the translation before expounding it: [Bayazid [a spiritual sheikh], on his journey (to the *Ka’ba*), sought much to find someone that was the Khizr of his time. He espied an old man with a stature (bent) like the new moon; he saw in him the majesty and (lofty) speech of (holy) men;...He (Bayazid) sat down before him and asked about his condition; he found him to be a dervish and also a family man. He (the old man) said, "Whither art thou bound, O Bayazid? To what place wouldst thou take the baggage of travel in a strange land?" Bayazid answered, "I start for the *Ka’ba* at daybreak." "Eh," cried the other, "what hast thou as provisions for the road?" "I have two hundred silver dirhams," said he; "look, (they are) tied fast in the corner of my cloak." He said, "Make a circuit round me seven times, and reckon this (to be) better than the circumambulation (of the *Ka’ba*) in the pilgrimage; And lay those dirhams before me, O generous one. Know that thou hast made the greater pilgrimage (*haji*) and that thy desire has been achieved; (That) thou hast (also) performed the lesser pilgrimage

(*'umra*) and gained the life everlasting; (that) thou hast become pure and sped up (the Hill of) Purity (*Safa*). By the truth of the Truth (God) whom thy soul hath seen, (I swear) that he hath chosen me above His House. Albeit the *Ka'ba* is the House of His religious service, my form too, in which I was created, is the House of His inmost consciousness. Never since God made the *Ka'ba* hath He gone into it, and none but the Living (God) hath ever gone into this House (of mine). When thou hast seen me, thou hast seen God: thou hast circled round the *Ka'ba* of Sincerity. To serve me is to obey God and glorify God: beware thou think not that God is separate from me. Open thine eyes well and look on me, that thou mayst behold the Light of God in man." Bayazid gave heed to those mystic saying, and put them in his ear as a golden ring. Through him (the old man), Bayazid came into an increase (of spiritual endowment): the adept at last attained unto the end]. Rumi would like to explain to us the spirit of *hajj*. The house of Allah is where He truly resides. It is not the cubic structure that we behold but the heart of the perfect human being. The cubic structure symbolizes His unity and is required to transport to us realization. Perhaps the reason why we are told *'Min tamaam al-Hajj liqaa' al-Imam ('a)* (and the completion of *hajj* is to meet the Imam) is that meeting the Imam would transform us and unite us with him, and thus enable us realize and behold the true *Ka'ba*, where none save Allah resides. In fact the Imam ('a) being a perfect human being whose heart is the sanctuary of Allah, is the *Ka'ba* himself. Small wonder it is that we read in our traditions that visiting the domes of Sayyid al-Shuhadaa or Imam al-Ridha ('a) is equivalent to performing a thousand *hajj* or more. Indeed they are the epitomes of *salaat*, *sawm* and *hajj*. In the brilliant words of Imam al-Sadiq ('a), *'Nabnu al-salat fi Kitabillah 'azza wa jalla wa nabnu al-zakaat, wa nabnu al-siyaam wa nabnu al-hajj.*" (We (the Ahl al-Bayt ('a)) are prayers mentioned in the Book of Allah, and we are the *zakaat*, and we are fasting, and we are *hajj*...) [Allama Majlisi, *Bibaar al-Anwaar*, v.24, p. 303] These allude how they brilliantly exemplify the realities of all these acts of worship in the best way possible. May the Almighty make us understand the devotions that we perform better before our wings of knowledge and action lose their effectiveness.



A MEANINGFUL PREPARATION FOR HAJJ

While some of us are preparing for Hajj in our hometowns, 116 thousand pilgrims are reported to have already entered the holy precincts of Makka and begun the first phase of their rites. The true meaning of preparation, however, must be understood so that we may be able to accomplish the purpose of this ecstatic journey. In a brilliant tradition narrated from Imam al-Sadiq ('a), we are told that there are three kinds of results one can anticipate from Hajj: (1) Utter freedom from Hell Fire, (2) Forgiveness of all sins, (2) Protection of wealth and family on return[Al-Kafi, v.4, p. 253]. Placing these results in mind, we should try to aspire for the best. Aspiration, however, is not a kind of conceptualization or inculcation; rather, it is a resolution, struggle and hardship. And these need preparation. One of the areas we must struggle to attain is “a state of receptivity”. We should try to widen the containers of our hearts in order to benefit from the Divine Banquet while we are the guests of One who perpetually and abundantly bestows with no expectation of any kind of return whatsoever. Two important areas we must work hard on are (1) Repentance (*tanba*) and (2) Acquiring knowledge about the secrets of the journey. These are factors that would enhance our receptivity and enable us accomplish a certain level of perfection. When we speak of *tanba*, the most important element that we should try to achieve is “the state of no return”. Regret should not be an emotional state that does not reap any fruit. It should rather act as a catalyst to overturn our deviant ways and change our states, so that we do not think of going back to sin. Understanding the secrets of hajj would make the journey very meaningful and if we are fortunate to have been given the succor to attain the desired preparation and readiness, we may achieve the apex of Hajj, which is human perfection and Divine proximity. One of the subtle meanings of the hadith of Imam al-Baqir ('a), *Min tamaamil Hajj liqaa' al-Imam'* (The completion of Hajj is in meeting the Imam) is that the perfection and completeness of Hajj is in encountering the characteristics of the imam who is a perfect human being. In other words, the completeness of hajj is to exemplify the attributes of a

perfect human being in oneself. Small wonder it is that one is able to achieve the purpose of Hajj through the ziyara of the Imams of the Ahl al-Bayt ('a) if one is in the state of knowledge of their sanctity and status.



LA ILAHA ILLALLAH IS MY FORTRESS

One of the well-known sacred traditions (*badith qudsi*) that Imam al-Ridha ('a) communicated to a great crowd in Nishapur who had asked him to narrate a hadith before his departure is '*La ilaha illa Allah bisni wa man dakhala fi hisni amina min adbaabi*' (*La ilaha illa Allah* is my fortress, and whosoever enters in it is safe from My punishment). Thereafter as the Imam ('a)'s horse left, he called saying "*bi shurutiba, wa ana min shurutiba*" (on [some] conditions and I am one of them). Exegetes of the tradition say that the Imam ('a) here meant that his *wilaya* (guardianship) was an essential condition for *La ilaha illa Allah* to serve as a fortress. In simpler words, the true meaning of *La ilaha illa Allah* is not detached from the *wilaya* of the Imam ('a). The latter rather is a part of the former. *La ilaha illa Allah*, is not merely a clause to be uttered but a program to be understood and adhered. If we look at it painstakingly we find that it is summed up in '*tawalla*' and '*tabarra*'; in simple words, "*La ilaha*" alludes to seeking remoteness from all false gods, which include false beliefs and ideologies, false cultures, etc. and *Illa Allah* refers to affirming the source of all the attributes of perfection, and adhering to whatever He and His Messengers say. If one would like to expound the practicalization of this clause, he would say "fleeing from imperfection and running towards perfection" is what *La ilaha illa Allah* is all about. And in doing so, we need guidance. We cannot just seek the means of perfection from anyone chosen by the public or selected by someone who himself has to refer to those

well-grounded in knowledge. The Holy Prophet (s) before departing this world clearly said that he leaves behind two weighty sources of guidance: The Book of Allah and the Ahl al-Bayt (‘a), the latter being the epitomes of the former. They are the sources to tell us what would make us perfect and what would distance us from perfection. Obeying them therefore is in reality fulfilling a fundamental condition of the statement *La ilaha illa Allah*. Here I am transported to the beautiful poetry of the well-known saint Mu’in al-Din Chishti who says “*Haqqa ke binaye la ilah ast Husayn*” (Indeed Husayn is the edifice of “*La ilaha*”). In other words Imam al-Husayn (‘a) practically opposed and deserted all kind of deities other than Allah. And scholars of insight consider the ego and nafs to be *umm al-asnaam* (mother of all idols). Rumi in his *Mathnawi* alludes to this reality when he says, “*Maadare buthaa bute nafse shumasf*” (the mother of idols is the idol of your nafs). In conclusion, we should try to realize that even the literalists vocally express the kalima. The challenge however is to understand its profound and accurate meaning, implication, and practical connotation, where they falter and make others follow suit. In several traditions, we are told, whosoever adheres to the Ahl al-Bayt (‘a) , who are the ships of salvation would always be protected from different kinds of dangers. May the Almighty enable us to persist in their ships so that we may finally reach the destination of the Only Beloved.



10 DAYS OF NOBILITY

The first ten days of the lunar month of Dhul Qa'dah are celebrated in some Muslim countries like Iran as *Dabeye Karamat* (ten days of nobility). This is because they start with the birthday of Hadhrat Ma'suma ('a) on the 1st of Dhul Qa'da [173 AH] and meet with the birthday of her sibling, Imam al-Ridha ('a) on the 11th [148 AH] of the same month. Both are epitomes of spiritual greatness and nobility. Their life histories are brim with lessons for us to learn and emulate. Celebrating such occasions is to remember their personalities and instill in us the spirit of obedience to Almighty Allah. When one beholds the tomb of Hadhrat Ma'suma ('a) in the holy city of Qum, which in reality serves as its fundamental source of light, one should be overtaken with the purity it exemplifies. Her radiant shrine constantly echoes a very important message for all her lovers: protect yourself from sin and struggle for infallibility. She was known as al-Ma'suma by her infallible brother Imam al-Ridha ('a) due to her immaculate personality. If we are receptive enough to absorb her message, we would struggle for purity. Celebration in reality is an act of commitment and pledge. We must resolve to flee from sin, in order to celebrate this occasion of joy. Imam al-Ridha ('a) likewise gives a similar message but in another language: the language of Divine pleasure. The word *al-Ridhaa* connotes both *al-Raadhi* (the pleased one) and *al-Mardbi* (the one whom one is pleased with). In other words He is pleased with what Allah does, and Allah is pleased with Him. He thus enjoys the state of a contented soul (*al-nafs al-mutma'inna*), whose status is so high, that Almighty Allah addresses it thus: "O soul at peace! Return to your Lord, pleased, pleasing! Then enter among My servants! And enter My paradise!" (89:27-30) The word "*jannati*" (my Paradise) in the verse refers to the loftiest kind of Paradise, which scholars of authority call

“*Jannat al-Liqa*” (the Paradise of encountering Allah). Such a station is what has to be experienced and words do not qualify to express. Fortunate are those who are able to visit the radiant shrines of Imam al-Ridha (‘a) and her noble sister Hadhrat Ma’suma (‘a). Mere visitation, however, is not enough. We need reflective minds who are able to draw a world of information by beholding such edifices of light, that can transport every receptive heart to the true meaning of belief, action, love, steadfastness, extinction in the Divine, absorption, revolution, emancipation, concern, etc.



MOMENTS OF ACCEPTANCE

As we approach the final moments of Friday, I recall my teenage days in the Holy city of Qum, when after having read about how some saints would recite two units of prayer and do *istighfar*, I would do the same. In those days, these prayers, I feel, had such a satisfying effect in my broken soul, that words are beyond expression. The last hour of Friday is so important that Hadhrat Fatima Zahra (‘a), the daughter of the Holy Prophet (s), would eagerly wait for this time in order to supplicate to the All-loving Beloved, who at each an every moment invites us all to His proximity. In our traditions it is termed as *sa’at al-ijaba* (the period of acceptance of prayer). Due to the eclipse of our hearts, we unfortunately are not able to receive Divine grace. Otherwise, the Bestower constantly bestows. We always recite the following prayer on Thursday evenings : “*Ya Daa’imal Fadbli ‘ala al-Bariyya.*” (O one who perpetually bestows grace on the creation.) There is a tradition, which reveals how constant are the opportunities of *ijaba* (Divine acceptance), while we are in oblivion: The Holy Prophet (s) narrates a sacred tradition in which Almighty Allah says: “Whosoever does something that breaks his *nudbu*, and then does not

perform *wudhu* (minor ablution), surely He has turned away from Me; and whosoever does something that breaks his *wudhu*, and performs *wudhu*, but does not pray two units of prayer, then indeed He has turned away from Me; and whosoever does something that breaks his *wudhu*, performs *wudhu*, prays two units of prayer, and then supplicates to Me, and I do not accept His prayer for what He asks me of matters pertaining to his religion and the Hereafter, then I have turned away from him; and I am not a Lord who turns away.' Therefore let us humbly beseech Allah for "the receptivity" to change and totally transform our imaginal past before the opportunity of this life, whose final point we are not aware of, comes to an end, and regret is of not benefit to us.



THE MECHANICS OF TRANSFER OF TRAITS

Here is another important query. And this time it from a brother called Miqdad. Again, the benefit, I feel, would be for many, and thus I hereby present my answer to all the esteemed readers. The question first: "Where is the balance between arrogance and self-confidence? Or put it this way: when can I say I'm teaching him humility or destroying his self-esteem?" Clearly, as experience has shown, humility is built and transferred through humility. Likewise is the case with humiliation, which is transferred through humiliation. Humility, however, does not contradict self-confidence. A teacher or parent can interact with utter humility, yet instill self-confidence in the child. If the child, for example, fails in a subject, he can humbly introduce ways and means for the future improvement of the child, but confer confidence of getting good marks next time. Contrarily, he can reprimand the child and call him a failure, and dishearten and perhaps create despair in him. The process of transfer of habits is so beautifully depicted in a tradition of the Holy Prophet (s), who says that an offspring is a master (*sayyid*)

for the first seven years, and then a slave (*'abd*) for another seven years, and finally a minister (*wazir*) for the third seven years. The reason why, exegetes of the tradition say, a child is a master (*sayyid*) for the first seven years, is that he must be obeyed and whatever he actually needs must be given to him. When he orders the parents, and the parents say “yes” and “ok” or substitute that with soft and kind words, they have practically taught him the lessons of obedience and soft spokenness. The child registers and understands all the reactions of his parents, and learns from them for the first seven years. At the age of eight, when the parents start requesting him to do things for them, he has already learnt the language of obedience and thus obeys them with no problems whatsoever. If he encounters some problem and cannot obey them, he explains to them in the soft language of love, or even introduces substitutes to what they require. In reality he has learnt his lesson for the first seven years well. Then after having had the practice of obedience for the seven years, he comes to a level of already knowing what His parents prefer and can therefore represent them in their absence. In this stage, without the father telling him to off the lights at 9:30 pm, for example, he runs to do so. This is because he already knows the likes and dislikes of his noble parents. Miqdad also asked, “How can I be sure that when I stand up for something, it is not out of arrogance, and if I don't stand up or say or do something, it is not because I don't believe in myself but rather out of humility.” I feel this is a matter of self-awareness and human intention. Both arrogance and humility have roots-causes and motivations. If one is able to decipher them, he would be able to know whether he is arrogant when he speaks up and humble when he is quiet. The definition of arrogance, however is so explicit, that many an arrogant person would clearly know about his arrogance. Arrogance is defined as “overbearing pride evidenced by a superior manner toward inferiors” The feeling of pride and superiority is something that one presentially witnesses in his heart, and thus can well appreciate his arrogant stance. Many at times, however, humbleness and humility have been misinterpreted and

mistaken with cowardice. If truth is attacked and one is powerful enough to support it, then the question of humility does not arise. Rather the sheer support of truth displays utter humility to truth. But support for the truth has to be done as taught by the truth, which sometimes requires diplomacy, soft encounters, etc. before any kind of aggressive encounters. The subject is vast, and it has been comprehensively covered in books of ethics where the Divine scholars speak of the equilibrium of the faculties of the soul, which needs Divine help to distinguish. May the Almighty assist us in our noble endeavors.



RECTIFICATION BEFORE REGRET

One of the esteemed readers of this blog wrote to me this morning asking me to expound more on the following statement of my previous writeup: "It is high time we try to decipher how some maladies of personality appear in our children!" In order to benefit the other esteemed readers as well I thought of responding to her important query as separate article: The natural course, I feel, would be first to identify the maladies that our children have thus far developed. Since we always interact with our children we know when exactly do they stumble. Do they keep their promises at home? Do they quote events exactly and with authority? Do their expressions manifest optimism or pessimism? Do they show bravery or cowardice in situations that can be handled by children of their age? Can they sift between an act of rashness and an act of bravery? Do most of their conversations display the color of hope or despair? What do their likes and dislikes portray? These are some of the very many keys to open the door of understanding them. Thereafter we should search for the causes of the negative traits in them. The first area of search is at home: How do we behave with them? Is our encounter humiliating or respectful? In cases

of sound pollution, do we shout at them, or do we explain them the consequences of their behavior? Do we deprive them of their healthy likes or do we offer them substitutes? Do we praise them for their good works, even if their flaws cover them, or do we focus on their flaws and negative results? Do we entrust them with work that gradually instills confidence in them or do we undermine them? If we always struggle in the positive direction, and still find the negative traits, we should try to contemplate on their school environment: Who are his teachers? Who is his class teacher? Which teacher does he like the most? Why does he like the teacher? Who are the teachers he hates? Why does he hate them? Is he humiliated in the class by any teacher, because of which he has developed the malady of inferiority complex? Does his low grades and low level of cognition compel the teacher to encounter negatively with him? Who are his friends in class? Why does he like them? Who are his so-called enemies? What do they do? What does the teacher say about him? What does the teacher say about his friends? How do their friends support him? What are the complains of his so-called enemies? Does their information tally with the personality you encounter at home? How can I as an individual with very limited power and resources better the situation in the school? Will the school environment make my child to be respectable in future or despicable? Am I not religiously duty bound to facilitate a better educational environment for my child? These issues are so serious that if we do not attend to them now, future regret would be of no use. If at all we do observe such traits in our children that instead of developing them is literally crushing their personalities, we must immediately and seriously take steps for rectification. One of the motivating forces of training them as human beings is to understand that they are a replica of ourselves. Whatever they do substantially reflects us. These are some of my humble suggestions. The subject is vast, and the foundation starts in the warm laps of the forbearing mother who enjoys a spacious heart.