

Alhassanain (p) Network for Islamic Heritage and Thought

Waiting and Responsibility

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Awaiting in The Perspective Of Responsibilities

'Awaiting' (Intezar) is the result of two conditions. Firstly, he is not satisfied with the present circumstances and secondly, he expects the improvement in his circumstances. If either of these conditions are not fulfilled then it is not awaiting and the person concerned is not an 'awaiter' *(Muntazir).

The awaiting of Hazrat Imam Mahdi (A.S.) also holds the same distinct characteristics. Even here awaiting purports that an awaiter is not satisfied with his present circumstances and is hoping for a bright and better future.

A believer is a witness to the assaults of the enemies of Islam which they are inflicting on Islam with their full might and munitions. The genuineness of beliefs and deeds are not judged as per the criterion set by Quran and Hadith. Instead they are examined through the clannish prejudice and norms set by their forefathers. In such circumstances, a genuine awaiter should not sit idle. Rather, the Holy Quran has instructed him in these words:

"And say to those who do not believe that you act as much you can. We are also trying. You all await and surely we all are awaiting." It is an open challenge for the enemies, that let them make their best efforts. In the light of this challenge can anyone say that awaiting implies sitting idle and remaining oblivious ? Or awaiting means to remain always alert and defeat enemies on every front. Of course, it necessitates that a believer should never exult on his strength but should always rely on Allah. Because reliance in Allah gives victory to weaklings over their stronger adversaries. Imam Mohammad Baqir (A.S.) said:

"If you act on our advices and teachings and remain in the same conditions, then whosoever dies before the advent of our Qaem (A.S.) will attain martyrdom."

(Beharul-Anwar, Vol. 52, Chap. 22) In another tradition Imam Jafar Sadiq (A.S.) said :

"The one who desires to be among the companions of Hazrat Qaem (A.S.), then he must wait, adopt piety and behave courteously. If he dies in such a condition before the advent of Qaem (A.S.), then his reward will be similar to the one who attains his (Qaem's (A.S.)) era. Hence strive vigorously, await his arrival congratulations to you all for your relentless awaiting".

(Ghaibat-e-Nomani, Chap. 11, Hadith 16)

While the first tradition calls for complete emulation of Ahle-Bait (A.S.) so that human thinking and beliefs may not be distracted from the right path the second tradition exhorts for adopting piety and doing good, so that even in the field of practice, their should not be any aberration. The following tradition further clarifies that awaiting does not mean remaining idle and careless. It never purports mere verbal claim without practice but it signifies endless efforts and incessant endeavors as Hazrat Mahdi (A.S.) himself says:

"Then all of you must do such deeds which draw you nearer to our love and affection. And refrain from such acts which evokes your anger and displeasure"

(Beharul Anwar, Vol. 53, Chap. 21) He is the true awaiter who always seeks to please his Imam (A.S.). His every effort is directed at achieving the invaluable pleasure of Imam (A.S.) and it is but evident that the pleasure of Imam is in abiding by the tenets of Islam and not in its sacrilege. It is a command for us and our Imam has encouraged us and has instilled enthusiasm in us through these words :

"We are not negligent of your affairs and are not forgetful of your remembrance. Had it been so, then terrible calamities would have struck you and your enemies would have destroyed you. Fear Allah, strengthen your hands, so that we may relieve you of the tribulations that have afflicted you."

Such love, kindness, affection, and fondness is not found even in the parents, let alone anyone else. After seeing so much kindness and compassion whose heart will not be moved for action? Whose eyes will not shed tears at the separation from such an Imam, while his love is glowing in his heart when we see such a magnanimity we yearn to place our forehead at his feet. But the burdens of sins benumbed our agility and the clutches of bad character retarded our steps. The reason of being deprived of his esteemed presence, as explained by Imam (A.S.) himself, is that :-

"If our Shias (may Allah give them the grace of obedience) would have fulfilled their covenants with united hearts then surely there would have been no delay in our meeting and they would have received the blessings of our visitation. But the things which increased the distance between us are those news which we have received about them regarding those actions which we dislike and which we do not expect from them."

(Beharul Anwar, Vol. 53, Chap. 21)

In this Tauqee a signed letter from Imam (A.S.) Imam has not only explained the reason for the delay in his reappearance but has also shown a clearway to approach him. When a true awaiter is blessed with the Ziyarat of Imam (A.S.) in Samarra then he addresses his dearest Imam thus : "O Master be a witness I pledge to thee even if your occultation is prolonged to such an extent that my life is on the verge of exhaustion. Still my certitude will enhance every moment. Your love will keep on increasing manifold, with the increment in my trust in you. I will keep waiting for you unwaveringly and I shall be waiting for (your) call of Jihad relentlessly.

"May my life, my wealth, my children, my family and whatever Allah has conferred upon me, be sacrificed for you and I leave them in your authority." [Mafatihul-Jenan, Ziyarate-Imam-e-Asr (A.S.)] It becomes clear after this explanation that a true awaiter never tires of waiting for Imam. He keeps on exerting continuously instead of being a silent spectator.

Merely being discontent with the present circumstances is not sufficient but he must strive to bring change in it. It becomes evident that in such a vicious atmosphere and sinful surroundings, what is the responsibility of a true awaiter? And how important it is? Besides these there are also other responsibilities which are as follows :

Character Building

The foremost thing which a true awaiter is expected to do is to build his character. Character-building implies following the tenets of Islam, developing good traits and purify his self in such a way that every aspect of his personality should reflect the teachings of Ahlebait (A.S.). Often the friends and helpers of Hazrat Mahdi (A.S.) are described with such superlatives :-

"Those who will believe in the hidden Imam they are the most pious ones and their faith is of the highest degree. They will establish prayers and spend generously in the way of God. They believe firmly in Quran and other divine scriptures and they are certain of Qiyamat.'

(Tafsire-Nurus-Saqlain, Vol. 1, Sura Baqarah)

"They are obedient, sincere, honorable, good doers, patient, devout, helpers of the oppressed, cordial and pure-hearted." Their hearts are of steel. If they cast a glance at an iron mountain, it will crumble and reduce to bits. (Ilzamun-Naasib, Vol. 1, Pg. 67)

Their bodies will emit fragrance of musk, while their countenance will be dazzling like a full moon." (Kamaluddin, Chap. 24, Tradition No. 11)

"They will be braver than lions and sharper than spears." (Beharul-Anwar, Vol. 52, Chap. 27, Tradition 17)

"They will worship at night." (Muntakhabul Asar section 9, Chap: 3, Tradition No.1)

(Now whosoever wishes to be among the friends and helpers of Hazrat Mahdi (A.S.) then he must adorn his self with the above mentioned attributes and characteristics)

"In the period of occupation they will hold religious convictions and will not allow the devil to meddle with their faith. (Kamaluddin.Pg.51)

Their gnosis will be pure and veritable, while their faith will increase constantly. They will mould their character in such a way that nothing will stop them from emulating the Ahlebait (A.S.)." (Kamaluddin, Pg, 51)

These excerpts were extracted from various traditions which clarifies that in the period of occultation one of our P vital responsibilities is to absorb the teachings of Ahlebait (A.S.) in our character and personality so that we may not wander hither and thither while our beloved Imam (A.S.) is far from our eyes. In such an aimless wandering, it is quite possible that a wanderer may end up getting attached to any mundane caller, because every belief which is not a product of the teachings of Ahlehait (A.S.) is a clear deviation and every courteousness which does not reflect their mannerisms is intact sheer discourtesy.

It is a proven fact that as much as a man holds Imam (A.S.) dearer that much he will be attracted towards good deeds and demeanors. And he will cleanse his self from bad habits and vices. Numerous such incidents can be found in the hooks, stories of those persons, particularly youths who felt the love of Imam (A.S.) in their hearts which changed their entire lives. Undoubtedly, love is such an elixir by which every impossible is made possible. The Reformation Of Society.

One of our important responsibilities in the period of occultation is the reformation of society. The holy Quran in Surae-Asr has suggested a remedy for those who want to remain secure from loss i.e. enjoining

patience to each other'. Islam is against reclusion and ascetism. Rather it advocates a social and public life. The deplorable aspect of the contemporary world is that people want to lead a social life hut due to the fear of society, they do not want to take any initiative for reformation. The fear of "what the people will say" has superseded the fear of God. Hazrat Imam Ali Naqi (A.S.) has extolled the virtues of those who are fulfilling their responsibilities in the period of occultation in the following words:-

"Had there not been such scholars in the period of occultation who call the people towards the Ahlebait (A.S.), guide towards them, defend their religion with the proofs of Allah, protect weak Shias from the devilish designs, deception of the tyrants and tentacles of the enemies of Islam, then surely all would have deviated from the religion of Allah. But it is they who are guarding the hearts of the weak Shias like a captain guards the passengers on his ship. They are those who enjoy a supreme position in front of Allah".(Mahajjatul-Baizaa, Vol. 1, Pg. 32)

If they would not reform their society then how would it be known that the whole society is awaiting Hazrat Mahdi (A.S.). The following tradition throws light on our responsibilities in the period of occultation :-

In the exegesis of the Holy Quran attributed to Imam Hasan Askari (A.S.), the Holy Prophet (S.A.) had explained the significance of word 'Orphan' in the following verse;

"And when we took the covenant from the children of Israil of not worshipping anyone but Allah and goodness to parents and by giving to near ones and orphans."

(Baqarah : 83) The Holy Prophet (S.A.) said :

"Allah the Almighty has commanded to do good with the orphans and to act as (a source of) guidance for them. Since they are deprived of their kind and affectionate father. Allah will extend his grace to the one who will have mercy on the orphans. If a person caresses the head of an orphan then as many number of hairs come under his hand those many vast and expansive palatial mansions will be given to him in Paradise. This place will contain all sorts of comforts and luxuries in its precincts... These people will stay in it forever."

(Tafseer attributed to Imam Hasan Askari (A.S.),Pg.239)

Imam Hasan Askari further elucidates the tradition of Holy Prophet (S.A.) in these words :

"There is another orphan whose plight is more pitiful. He is the one who is far from his Imam and cannot have access to him. He who is not aware of his religious obligations .

Yes indeed O' people - one who teaches and trains our far off Shias then he is similar to the guardian of an orphan.

Be aware if somebody teaches an ignorant, guides a misguided one, instills the teachings of Ahlebait then on the day of Qiyamat he will be with us. We will give him a seat next to us wherever we may be." (Tafseer attributed to Imam Hasan Askari (A.S.) , Pg. 239)

In this period of occultation, when we are separated from our kind Imam(A.S.) then what else can be the reward of teaching, training, and reforming the society ? Where is the teaching and training of society and

where is the proximity to Masumeen (A.S.) and the fortune of staying with them ? This tradition is sufficient to enlighten the keen and sensitive Shias. Even women can join hands with men in fulfilling this responsibility.

Exposition of a Supplication Relating To Imam Mahdi (A.S)

This supplication begins thus:

It has been recorded by the eminent traditionalist, Shaykh Abbas Qummi (r.a.), in his renowned compilation, 'Mafatihul Jinaan'. He has reported this invocation on the authority of Shaykh Kafami from the latter's 'Misbahul Mutahajjid'. It is recommended that this supplication be recited after every obligatory namaaz or for that matter at any other time. (This supplication is mentioned in 'Mafatihul Jinaan' before the fifteen supplications of Imam Sajjad (a.s.)). Considering the veracity of this supplication, and with an eye on brevity, we have not mentioned the chain of transmitters.

A supplication generally commences by invoking Allah as in 'Allahumma', which means 'O Allah'. The very next word 'arzokna', means grant us sustenance. The word sustenance is by and large associated with food and succour. However, this word is also used to imply bounties associated with both this world, as well as the hereafter. In other words, any bounty, aid, assistance, etc., granted by Allah is dubbed as 'razk' and this could be in the guise of 'taufeeq' to perform some action or it could be some monetary benefit or an increase in knowledge and recognition (ma'refat). Granting sustenance is the exclusive domain of Allah as He Himself mentions in the Quran "Surely Allah is the bestower of sustenance, the Lord of Power, the Strong."

(Chapter of Zariyat, verse 58)

The word 'huva' that precedes 'arrazko' is an added emphasis on Allah's prerogative in granting sustenance to man. This declaration affirming Allah's sovereignty in the matter of succour in the very beginning of this invocation is an admission of man's absolute helplessness and dependence on Allah. (It must be noted that the Quran alludes to others also like responsibility for granting sustenance. However, these can only perform this duty with permission and assistance from Allah and are by no means His associates.)

It is pertinent to note what Imam Mahdi (a.s.) has beseeched from Allah, under the heading of 'arzokna'. And what Imam (a.s.) has sought under the heading 'arzokna'. 'Tawfeeq' is derived from 'Vafq', which means to reform or to rectify. It also means success and fruition. This is again the undisputed right of Allah as expounded in chapter of Hud, verse 88.

"And with none but Allah is the direction of my affair to the right issue."

Thus all success, honour and accomplishment is directly attributed to Allah's assistance and aid. Then, one who wishes to advance in this world as well as the hereafter, must constantly entreat Allah. 'Taufeeq'; plays a crucial role in the performance of actions. For instance, there could be a youth, strong and capable, who is unable to perform a simple action due to lack of 'taufeeq', while a man twice his age may perform an even more formidable task, like say praying Namaze Shab in severe wintry conditions, with 'taufeeq' from Allah' side. However, it is relevant to note that Allah never acts impulsively. His actions are governed by perfect wisdom and reasoning. In other words, Allah will never grant man 'taufeeq' without

some cause. And this cause that draws 'taufeeq' is intention (neeyah). And that is why traditions elucidate this concept thus;

'Taufeeq is in proportion with intention.'

'At-ta'a' means an attraction, inclination or preference towards someone or something. It is commonly used to denote submission, obedience or compliance. In this supplication 'At-ta'a' implies obedience of Allah's commands and edicts. Indeed, submission to Allah is the key to man's problems relating to the world, and the hereafter.

Submission to Allah's commands, is a precursor to man's success, stifles social disputes, wards off Allah's wrath, grants man honour and dignity and averts evil. Then one who obeys Allah's commands will accept death matter-of-factly. He will show urgency in performing all obligatory acts. However, regrettably, today we see the Muslims evading obligatory deeds. Ameerul Mo'mineen (a.s.) protests against this strange trait thus, "When their God invites them (towards goodness) they flee and abscond. But when Satan entices them they heed his call with urgency and rush towards him.'

(Nahjul Balaga, sermon 166)

One must never forget that all bounties are a direct consequence of our obedience to Allah, for nothing can be achieved without His satisfaction. Subservience to the Almighty gains precedence over all other actions. ,

"And help us abstain from sin and disobedience." Verily abstinence from sins is among Allah's greatest bounties. Disobedience is a result of 'asa'. 'Kazalan' means that Allah abandons the servant and deprives him of His bounties;

i.e. He does not care about him. And this only adds to man's depravation and debasement. A Muslim when he sins not only disobeys Allah, but also infringes upon the rights of the Prophet and his progeny (a.s.). That is why Ameerul Momineen (a.s.) declares, 'Undoubtedly the friend of Muhammad (s.a.w.s.) is the one who obeys Allah, even if he bears no blood ties with the Prophet (s.a.w.s.). And the antagonist of Muhammad (s.a.w.s.) is the one who defies Allah even while he boasts of blood ties with the Prophet (s.a.w.s).'

(Nahjul Balaga sermon 96)

Indeed man's behaviour is astonishing. For he evinces urgency in responding to the call of this world, that only invites him to trials, tribulations and misery.

"And inculcate sincerity in my intentions".

Intention is the foundations of all our actions and in fact, the latter are a consequence of the former. An unwavering intention can subdue the weakness of the body. That is why traditions declare, "The believer's intention surpasses his action and the disbeliever's intention surpasses his action."

In this supplication Imame Asr (a.t.f.s.) beseeches Allah to purify his intentions from all blemishes like ostentation, vainglory, pride, disbelief, etc. Such a level of purity in our intention is crucial, for actions are accepted by Allah only if our intention is unfettered with such blemishes; else regardless of the effort, our actions will never be acknowledged by Allah.

Ameerul Momineen (a.s.) proclaims, 'If one is sincere in his intentions, then Allah will multiply manifold his sustenance.'

Imam Sadiq (a.s.) also declares, "One who has pure intentions will experience serenity in his heart. For the heart can only get tranquillity from actions that are performed for Allah's sake alone." Insincere intentions deprive man of his sustenance, hurl him into tribulations and seize 'barakat' from him.

'Irfan' and 'Marefat' imply recognition and comprehension. 'Al Horma' means all those things that are prohibited by the Islamic Shariat. In this supplication, Imam (a.s.) implores Allah to help him recognise the forbidden actions, so that he may exercise restraint in this regard. For surely among the signs of the intellect is that the person abstains from prohibited deeds, especially consuming impure food by which blood is produced in the body. Hence when a Muslim eats what is forbidden by the Shariat, the angels in the heavens and the earth curse that person.

Moreover, worship on a stomach filled with prohibited food, is akin to a house that is built on water. To the extent that traditions pronounce that a person who forsakes a morsel of prohibited food will get reward that exceeds that of two thousand recommended (mustahhab) units of namaz. But this abstinence is possible only if man can clearly identify the prohibited actions. Then one who abstains from the forbidden deeds while he is having the ability and inclination, then Allah will avert from him the fire of Hell and grant him entry in Paradise.

'And grant us honour through guidance and Steadfastness.'

Verily the best guidance is that of Allah. So critical is guidance that Allah has not delegated it to anyone and has kept this responsibility with Himself. In fact, Allah tells the Prophet (s.a.w.s.) in the chapter of Qasas, verse 57,

"(O Prophet) surely you cannot guide whom you love, but Allah guides whom He pleases."

Then if guidance is with Allah, how does man go about acquiring it? Who are the ones fortunate enough to receive it and the wretched who are deprived of it? There are certain actions the performance of which invoke Allah's guidance and mercy, viz.,

- a) belief in Allah,
- b) piety,
- c) repentance and contrition,
- d) abstinence from sins,
- e) endeavours in the way of Allah,
- f) adherence to the Islamic Shariat,
- g) concern and regard for religion,
- h) patience and fortitude,
- i) certitude,
- j) sincere intentions,
- k) consultation,
- l) frequent remembrance of Allah,
- m) acquisition of knowledge,
- n) obedience of the Imams (a.s.).

On the other hand there are certain actions that repel Allah's mercy and guidance viz.,

- a) Injustice - be it on others, or on oneself by way of sins
- b) Disbelief and apostasy
- c) Transgression and unrestraint in the matter of sins
- d) Extravagance
- e) Falsehood
- f) To accede to one's desires
- g) To act without any ma'soom Imam's leadership.
- h) Doubt and scepticism (after certitude)

Steadfastness connotes following the right path, the path of guidance, as opposed to that of deviation and misguidance, as it is mentioned in the first chapter of Quran thus, 'Keep us on the right path.' And the chapter of Hud, verse 112 "Remain steadfast as you have been commanded." Steadfastness and uprightness are among the distinctive features of a believer. Allah has given glad tidings to those who observe fortitude and Steadfastness in their affairs. In fact this is the best means of leading one's life. Then one who wishes to succeed in the world and the hereafter must embrace these characteristics. For as Ameerul Mo'mineen (a.s.) declares,

'One who is steadfast shall get Paradise, but the one who is afflicted with doubt and disbelief shall get the fire.'

(Nahjul Balaga, sermon 119)

Only after being graced by Allah with Steadfastness and guidance can one truly comprehend the meaning of the word 'Akrimna' which means, 'honour us'. For surely One who is blessed by Allah with these two traits will find honour and esteem in the eyes of Allah and His Prophet (s.a.w.s.). 'Direct our tongues to speak truthful and prudent discourses.'

Here 'sawab' means to enjoin upon the right path and 'alsanah' means tongues. 'saddad' means honest and rightful discourses, while 'hikmat' means reflections and talks marked with wisdom and discernment.

A man's tongue plays a crucial role in moulding his personality. Which is why Ameerul Mo'mineen (a.s.) proclaims, 'The tongue determine man's worth.'

Just as a woman's grace and beauty is reflected in her visage, a man's character is (disguised) in his tongue. Indeed the tongue is the root of all goodness and evil. A man can never achieve steadfastness in his character unless he first observes this trait in his speech. That is why Imam Muhammad Baqir (a.s.) exhorts us to guard our tongues with the same judiciousness with which we safeguard gold and silver. In fact in this lies the security of man. For this little piece of flesh used with abandon can cause damage more severe and destructive than swords and lances. Hence we must beseech Allah to help us guard our tongues so nothing comes forth from it but guidance and wisdom.

We must observe a lot of discretion and caution in our speech. As Ameerul Mo'mineen has put it 'The wise man's tongue is hidden behind his intellect, while a fool's intellect is hidden behind his tongue.' (Nahjul Balaga, saying 40).

'And pervade our hearts with knowledge and recognition.'

Indeed knowledge and recognition are such profound concepts that to do justice to them in this short exposition is well-nigh impossible. The great traditionist, Allamah Muhammad Baqir Majlisi (r.a.) has discussed knowledge, recognition and intellect in over two volumes of his celebrated work 'Behaarul Anwaar'. To put it briefly, the Imams (a.s.) have enjoined acquisition of knowledge upon every Muslim man and woman. In fact few other things in Islam have been emphasised with such vehemence by the Imams (a.s.). Despite all these exhortations Muslims today cut a sorry figure steeped in ignorance and regression. And this state of ignorance among his Shias pains Imame Asr (a.t.f.s.) more than anything else.

Our responsibility then, is not only to acquire knowledge, but to disseminate it. Now as far as recognition is concerned, it can only be achieved by strictly adhering to the commands of Allah and His Prophet (s.a.w.s.) as far as obligatory and recommended, prohibited and abominable actions are concerned. And it is important that we always recite the following invocation:

'O Allah, help us recognise ourselves, for surely if we fail to recognise ourselves, we can never recognise Your Prophet. O Allah, help us recognise Your Prophet, for surely if we fail to recognise Your Prophet we can never recognise Your Proof (Imame Asr). O Allah, help us recognise Your Proof, for surely if we fail to recognise Your Proof we shall be deviated from Your religion.'

'And purify our bellies from impure and unclean food.'

The unclean food that finds its way in our bellies is deemed impure on the basis of two criteria; first, it is either obtained from unlawful livelihood or from a livelihood on which khums has not been paid. Second, either the food by itself is impure or it has been acquired from an unclean person. For instance, if one acquires some foodstuff from an unbeliever that has been made unclean with the latter's sweat. Such impure food once consumed sows seeds of rebellion against the Almighty. That is why as mentioned earlier one who forsakes a morsel of prohibited food will get reward that exceeds that of two thousand recommended (mustahhab) units of namaz.

Apart from the effect on our spirituality, impure food has far reaching repercussions on our issues. The impure blood that flows in their veins incites them to revolt against Allah. However, we often find Muslims, especially Indian Muslims, who are negligent about this aspect and advance lame excuses like, it is not possible for any person living in this country to totally avoid unclean food!! Of course that is not true. We find instances wherein a doctor strongly recommends, say a non-vegetarian patient from eating mutton.

The patient actually adheres to the doctor's recommendations and completely stops consuming mutton. If man can go to such lengths to preserve this temporal body, then he should make a more concerted effort for success in the eternal life in the hereafter, and he should constantly endeavour to attain Allah's satisfaction. In this regard it is sufficient to say that impure food is a cause for repudiation of all our prayers and supplications and a means of Imam's displeasure.

'And withhold our hands from injustice and theft.'

Supplement 1

Tyranny and injustice are among the major sins. Allah does not guide the tyrant, on the contrary He sends down His chastisement upon him. Tyranny and injustice are the root cause of all sins and transgression, as Quran proclaims, "And certainly We did destroy generations before you when they were unjust." (Yunus : 13)

Injustice can be broadly divided under three categories.

First is 'Shirk' i.e. to take some associate for Allah. 'Shirk' is so heinous that it has been dubbed by the Quran as the 'zulm azeem' Second is to do injustice to oneself through sins and transgression.

The third category involves injustice to others, by usurping their rights or encroaching upon their property. Another form of injustice involves doubting and questioning a tenet or , fundamental of religion (please refer Tafsire Ayyashi under Chapter of Anam, verse 82). One must never employ coercion with the old and defenceless. That is why Ameerul Mo'mineen (a.s.) exhorts us thus, "When your hand advances to perpetrate injustice remember the justice of Allah. And when you wrest control over someone remember the control Allah exercises over you.'

(Behaarul Anwaar vol. 75, page 322)

One who does injustice or commits theft will find himself in a very wretched state on the Day of Judgement. Allah asserts in the Quran "And the day when the unjust one shall bite his hands, saying: O! Would that I had taken a way with the Apostle." (Furqan : 27)

'And lower our gaze at scenes of transgression and treachery.'

This statement endorses the verse of the chapter of Nur, wherein Allah commands the believers, men as well as women, to lower their gaze. Indeed among the miracles of Quran is how it has succinctly outlined a mode of living for mankind that is in perfect harmony with his inherent nature and at the same time in line with his spiritual needs. No other philosopher or thinker of any age or school of thought has ever formulated (nor will he ever formulate) a mode of lifestyle that even remotely resembles the one advocated by the Quran.

Islam has forbidden Muslims from casting a glance on the na-mahram. Indeed this is the transgression and treachery of the eyes. On the Day of Judgement all eyes will weep save those that when they are confronted with the forbidden, lower their gaze. Those eyes that are habituated to looking at na-mahram will in the hereafter find rods of blazing fire being driven in their eyes. Looking at the forbidden is a potent poison with which Satan spoils the faith of the believer.

On the other hand, the fear of Allah is the anti-dote to this poison. Indeed, the Shia must reflect on it here and now, during the period of occultation. If he desires to look at the forbidden he will never be able to cherish the sight of the luminous countenance of Imam Asr (a.t.f.s.).

*Refrain our hearing from vain talks and backbiting.' Quran declares 'And who keep aloof from what is vain.' (Mo'minoon: 3)

All talks that do not involve some discussion about Allah or His Prophet (s.a.w.s.) or the Able Bayt (a.s.), can be accounted as vain. Even music is

classified as vain and listening to it is forbidden. One who forsakes vain talks will find an elevation in his honour and esteem.

'Ghibat' means to muse over the shortcomings and flaws of a believer in his absence. If indeed those flaws are present in the believer then it constitutes 'ghibat' (backbiting), else it takes the form of 'bohtan' (accusation). Quran has prohibited the believers from backbiting thus; "Not let some of you backbite others. Does one of you like to eat the flesh of his dead brother?"

(Hujrat : 12)

Thus as per the Quran, backbiting of a believer is tantamount to eating the dead brother's flesh. Not only is speaking evil of a believer prohibited, but even lending one's ears to the slanderous talks of the backbiter is forbidden. If it is possible for us, then we should immediately refrain the person from going on any further, and remind him of Allah's displeasure in this regard.

'And bless our scholars and the learned with piety and the ability to give sound advice.'

Indeed if all the scholars of the Islamic nation strive and endeavour in the way of Allah, then most of our problems will be solved. In this supplication Imaam Asr (a.s.) beseeches Allah to bestow His grace and benevolence upon the scholars of the Islamic nation. Indeed if the learned of this nation do not propagate Islam with intensity, and do not exhort the Muslims towards goodness and refrain them from evil, then the only logical consequence will be sedition and disputes.

'And grant inclination to the seekers of knowledge to struggle hard in their quest for knowledge.'

Here there is one thing that must always be kept in mind. The sole objective of acquiring knowledge must be to seek Allah's pleasure and satisfaction. The Holy Prophet (s.a.w.s.) declares that one who seeks knowledge for four reasons shall be worthy of a place in Hell, viz., one who seeks knowledge merely to debate with the scholars, or solely to have some vain talks with the fools and simpletons or some aimless discussions, or to invite the people towards oneself or to acquire some wealth from the affluent.

(Behaarul Anwaar vol 2, vase 38)

'And bless the listeners so that they may respond to invitations of truth and righteousness and lend their ears to sound advice and admonitions.' One must always endeavour to obey and abide by Allah's commands. As Allah asserts in the Quran in the chapter of Baqarah, verse 38 "Then whoever follows My guidance, no fear shall come upon them nor shall they grieve.'

Indeed admonitions keep alive the heart and dispel unawareness and incognizance. The best admonisher is the Quran. Hence we must endeavour to be constantly in touch with this miracle that has come for man's guidance.

'And grant relief and tranquillity to the ailing.'

'And bestow Your mercy and pardon on the dead.'

In the above two statements of the supplication, Imaam Asr (a.t.f.s.) implores Allah to reform the condition of the afflicted and dead among the Muslims. These invocations only serve to remind us of our obligations

towards the sick and dead amongst us. Indeed in our busy lives today, we seem to have overlooked these two sections of the community. Keeping in mind the implorations of Imam (a.s.) for the indisposed and the dead, we must take out time to visit the ailing and pray for their relief and comfort. And as far as the dead are concerned, we should recite the Quran on their behalf and visit their graves regularly and pray for the forgiveness of their sins.

'And bestow dignity and serenity upon our elders'

The elders play a very pivotal role in the progress of the community. The enthusiasm and fervour of the youth can only be reined in by the experience and foresight of the senior citizens of the nation. However, the elders must work alongside the youth keeping in mind their own dignity and honour. Then they should not do anything to violate this respect and esteem. Indeed the similitude of the senior members of society is that of captain of ship, who even in the storm, does not lose his bearings, but musters up all his experience and expertise, steering the ship towards the shore.'

'And endow the youth with a feeling of repentance and contrition.

A man's youth is a period of craze and abandon. The youth should therefore observe caution in this age by obeying Allah, falling in line with His commands and tenets. The juveniles must always bear in mind the transience of their youth, that will soon be replaced with old age and fatigue. That is why the period of one's youth must be used most judiciously. Surely the fervour and intensity of youth is fleeting, and man must exploit it before it is taken away.

Indeed Imam Baqir's admonitions in this regard are most striking. Imam declares, "If I find a youth not engaged in the acquisition of religious knowledge, I will beat him." Surely, Imame Asr (a.s.) when he reappears, will punish all those youths who are incognizant of their religious obligations. O Shia youths!

If your lives have been steeped in sins till now, turn to Allah and seek pardon with sincerity, so that you may be acquainted with the true essence of religion.

'And grant our women modesty and chastity.'

Surely Imame Asr (a.s.) is distressed when he observes the outrageous spectacle of the women of our society with their heads unveiled and exposed. This display of immodesty provokes him into beseeching Allah for instilling modesty among the women. Traditions warn that even if a single strand of hair (of a woman) stands exposed to men, she will on the Day of Judgement be dangled in Hell by that very strand of hair, (provided of course that this exposure was intentional on her part).

However, in their attempt to ape the West, we find people who not only flagrantly violate the Islamic tenets, but on the contrary are not willing to accept the Islamic injunction on the veil and demand evidence from the Quran and traditions in this regard. The Islamic veil constitutes an independent topic by itself and is beyond the scope of this treatise.

Suffice it is to say that both the Quran and traditions of Ahle Bayt (a.s.) have been most vehement in this regard. For further deliberation on this topic, readers are welcome to correspond with our organisation. Quran

proclaims "Do not advance your opinion where you do not have the knowledge." Modesty is a sign of faith and honour. Chastity is the best form of worship. Ameerul Mo'mineen (a.s.) narrates,

"Chastity is the zakaat of beauty and grace." (Ghuraraal Hekam) 'And confer humility and generosity on the affluent and wealthy'

Wealth and riches must at no point of time instill any pride and arrogance in us. This is because abundance is like any other bounty of Allah and He can take it away whenever He pleases. In this regard, history is witness over the fate of Qarun and Firaun. When Allah has bestowed wealth to one section of the community, then they should endeavour to share their good fortune with those who are deprived of it, for tradition exhorts us thus, 'And do good to the people like Allah has done good with you.' Never we should deem our intellect, efforts and capabilities responsible for our wealth and fortune. Tradition declares, 'Allah bestows wealth on a fool so that the wise can perceive Allah's role in apportioning sustenance and the helplessness of their own intellect in its provision.'

'And bestow patience and contentment on the poor and needy.'

Imame Asr (a.t.f.s.) on the one hand exhorts the wealthy to act with humility and on the other hand urges the needy to deal with patience. This is so because Allah has examined the former by their wealth, while the latter have been tried with their poverty and indigence. Man should never complain to Allah about his destitution and penury. On the contrary he should struggle to acquire his livelihood and thank Allah under all circumstances. This is because contentment by itself is good fortune. Contentment is akin to gratitude and protestation to ingratitude. That is why Ameerul Mo'mineen (a.s.) says,

'The contented man is wealthy even while he is hungry and naked.' (Ghuraraal Hikam)

Contentment elevates a man's honour and esteem. Allah accepts easily whatever little deeds such a man has to offer. And it is worth noting that one who is not content in scarcity will never be so in abundance. 'And arm our warriors with (Your) aid and make them victorious.'

This part of Imam's supplication pertains to those warriors who relinquish the comforts of day and forsake their sleep at night only to serve Allah and safeguard His religion.

'And grant respite and succour to the captives.' Indeed no one is more aware of the helplessness and powerlessness of the captives than Imame Asr (a.t.f.s.), who has seen so many of his forefathers brave captivity and imprisonment for long periods of time.

'And assist the judges to perform (their duties) with justice and compassion.' 'And induce the citizens to act with fairness and good ethics.'

Indeed if we act as per the exhortations of Imame Asr (a.t.f.s.), we shall find the world a place of shelter and asylum. 'And bless the pilgrims and visitors (of graves of Imams)/ And assist them in their pilgrimage that you have made as an obligation upon them. By Your Grace and Mercy, O Most Merciful'

In the end, Imame Asr (a.t.f.s.) prays for the pilgrims and visitors (of graves of Imams) and beseeches Allah to increase their sustenance and

provisions so that they can easily discharge their religious obligations. We conclude this brief exposition with a tradition from Imam Sadiq (a.s.) regarding the visitation (Ziarat) of Imam Hussain (a.s.), the Doyen of Martyrs.

'When Allah wishes goodness and happiness for someone, He instills in his heart love for Imam Hussain (a.s.), and an inclination for his visitation.'

Love and Attachment With Imam-E-Zaman

Every living being is overwhelmed with emotions of love and attachment. These are emotions that man is very familiar with, and everyone has experienced these strong emotions at some stage in his life. However, those who reflect on these emotions are few. Even fewer are those who comprehend the reality and foundation of the emotions.

We all understand that love can increase and decrease as well. An intense feeling of love and attachment can melt the most hardened of hearts. It can make a person weep and it can also make a person smile. Love can be witnessed in the battlefield, over there it can be heard from the resonance of swords and spears striking each other. It can also be witnessed in more peaceful and secure times.

Indeed love can have a powerful influence on an individual. An incident in this regard from the highly acclaimed compilation - Najmus Saqib (by Muhaddiss-e-Noori) is worth mentioning over here. Once a group of people belonging to a nomadic Qazaak tribe had lost its way in the desert. They were totally exhausted from trying to find a way out of the desert. Suddenly they saw some smoke emanating from a hillock at a distance. Out of curiosity they went towards the hillock and saw a caravan on the other side. The leader of the caravan was very benevolent and generous and seeing their worn out condition invited them for a meal.

When the Qazaaki group had their fill they left. But seeing the wealth of the caravan, they were tempted and they turned back in order to plunder the caravan. The leader of the caravan was quick to discern their intentions and he drew his sword from its sheath.

He drew a line on the ground and announced in an awesome tone, 'If anyone tries to cross this line, I will behead him.' His voice was so terrifying, that the group of Qazaakis fell down from their mounts. May the lives of our parents be sacrificed upon the benevolent and generous leader of the caravan. O the avenger of Imam Husain's (a.s.) blood! Love can be an overwhelmingly powerful emotion. Love has in it the ability to drown the person with its intensity and force.

However, love has several levels and grades. It has ways and it has gateways; each gateway has its own peculiarities and a different approach should be adopted for every gateway. Likewise, the gateway of Imam's (a.t.f.s.) love has its own peculiarities and requires a completely different approach. We must try to discern the path towards Imam's (a.t.f.s.) love and attachment.

We must try to gauge the different levels of his love and the difficulties involved in the path of his love. We must try to assess the requirements and prerequisites of the love and whether we find those criteria in ourselves. Only after understanding all the prerequisites and conditions involved in Imam's (a.t.f.s.) love, we might claim - We love Imam-e-Zamana (a.t.f.s.). But if negligence overpowers us, then it can expel us from the domain of Imam's (a.t.f.s.) love and attachment.

That is why it is crucial that we understand this love and its criteria. The love of Imam (a.t.f.s.) resides in the heart. For this love to grow and be nurtured, the heart must be clean and pure from all corruption. We have to

see how Allah, the Benevolent and the Merciful, has guided us towards his love. Imam Mahdi (a.t.f.s.) is the last successor and vicegerent of the Chief of the Apostles (a.s.) and the Seal of the Prophets (a.s.).

He is Allah's Proof upon His creatures. Therefore we should also assess the relationship between love and the raising of Prophets (a.s.). We should see how Imam (a.t.f.s.) reminds men of Allah's signs, how he purifies the souls, how he illumines man's existence with the radiance of love.

We should see how our teachers and guides have prepared us for purification with love and how they have awakened us for this love. Only then will we understand that we can never adequately return Imam's (a.t.f.s.) love for us and fall woefully short in this regard. However, history does throw up instances of several personalities who were from an immaculate and cultured background, who possessed amazing prowesses and had.

remarkable accomplishments to their credit and were supported by an unseen force in their efforts. These personalities tread the path of love and affection for Imam (a.t.f.s.). It is not easy to tread on the path which they strode, however it is not impossible either.

That's why we say - we can never 'adequately' return Imam's (a.t.f.s.) love. However, even the inadequate love and attachment that we have for Imam (a.t.f.s.) is very powerful and carries tremendous impact To reach that position requires a Herculean effort. Let us take a look at what the scholars have had to say in this regard.

Scholars assert that love is an emotion that can only be experienced. It is inherent in man's nature. It is an emotion that cannot be defined by mere phrases. Love is too profound for that. However for the sake of litterateurs and writers we can state the definition of love in dictionary is described as, 'Love is an emotion that introduces gentleness and harmony in man's nature. That emotion which inculcates harshness and severity in man's nature is called hatred. Love flows from recognition and comprehension. Therefore as recognition increases, love also increases.

The above definition outlines the meaning of love and hatred. Both these emotions are closely linked to man's conscience and heart. It is a widely accepted fact that Allah has introduced love to the human heart. Here we are discussing two emotions - love and hatred.

To sustain love it is important that man refrains from certain actions and performs others. So every despicable act must be condemned and one must not think of performing such actions, since it will have a destructive effect on man's ability to love. On the other hand, every praiseworthy act must be lauded and man must try his best to rush towards that action, as this will give a fillip to love in his heart.

The illustrious scholar and prolific writer Allamah Murtuza Mutahhari has dealt with this topic in detail in his renowned book, "Polarization around the character of Ali Ibn Abi Talib (a.s.)". However, to discuss details of the book over here is beyond the scope of this short treatise. In brief, it is imperative for us to act on the obligations and necessary conditions of love, to identify the pre-requisites of love and to discharge them in the best possible manner.

Indeed these are the necessary qualifications of love and we must abide by them if we want love to blossom in our hearts. At the same time, we must not ignore the other prerequisite of love - avoiding all such actions that support and give a fillip to hatred.

These actions not only further hatred in a person, but also inhibit the emotion of love. Mankind, Allah's most noble creation has derived its Arabic term. Allah, Who has created man, has outlined adequate means for his survival and progress. Let us glance at the Holy Quran in what it has indicated in this regard. Allah, the Almighty, has announced in the Quran "Surely the (true) religion with Allah is In order to proclaim His path and religion, Allah, the Almighty, raised a number of prophets (a.s.), who guided man towards the divine command.

Finally, Allah raised His greatest Apostle, Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w.a.) and announced in the Quran "He it is Who raised among the illiterates an Apostle from among themselves, who recites to them His communications and purifies them, and teaches them the Book and the Wisdom, although they were before certainly in clear error." (Surah Jumah : 2)

In Islam, it is important to purify the self by reciting the Quranic verses. If the self is not purified, then wisdom and Quranic teachings will be of no benefit. Indeed only if the self is purified, will the brilliance of wisdom and the Quran will permeate in the self and illumine the dark recesses of the heart. With this, man's faith and certainty in Allah increases manifold. With the increase in certainty and faith in Allah, man testifies to Allah's Word and his nature is overwhelmed with love for Allah. Allah declares, Those who believe are stronger in love for Allah (Surah Baqarah : 165)

This is the reason why Imam Husain (a.s.) most willingly sacrificed his life in the way of his Lord out of sheer love and devotion. His face bore a striking radiance with the love of his Lord. Since our discussion is veering from Islam to faith (eemaan) and from faith to love, it is imperative to see how often Allah has discussed love in the Holy Quran. Love - and attachment are two words very closely linked to each other. Both these terms have been used in the Quran extensively.

We see the word love appearing in the Quran 115 times, while attachment is repeated 28 times. And these words are always used in relation to and as an interpretation of faith and love. Another version of the love has not been used in the Quran at all. However, we see this word appearing in the traditions of the infallibles (a.s.). For instance, the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.a.) declares 'The best of men is the one who loves worship.' (Usul-e-Kafi, vol. 2, Chapter of Worship, trad. 3) The word Ishq means 'excessive love'.

Litterateurs believe that this word is more often used to convey illicit and forbidden love. However, the prophetic tradition we have narrated earlier negates this view, as the word has been used to convey love for excessive worship, which is a commendable action'. We have also used this word to convey similar implications, never alluding to the illegitimate form of love. Love for Imam-e-Zamana (a.t.f.s.) is the cause of our existence, the most important objective of our lives and the aim of our creation.

We love our Imam (a.t.f.s.) and are intensely attached to him. Indeed this is what the religion of Islam instructs us. When the early Muslims wanted to thank the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.a.) for his efforts in the way of Islam, they approached him (s.a.w.a.) and said, 'O Prophet of Allah (s.a.w.a.), indeed you have taken us out from the darkness of ignorance and we had the taufeeq of accepting Islam at your hands and thereby we were illumined with the light of faith. We were disgraced but you honoured us. We were deviated but you guided us.

With your grace and favours, Allah gave peace to our distressed hearts. How can we repay you for your efforts in the propagation of the prophetic message?' Allah revealed to the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.a.), 'Say: I do not ask of you any reward for it but love for my near relatives' (Surah Shura: 23)

Then those who understood the underlying message behind this Quranic verse acted upon it. There were others who ignored this command. But the true lovers did not let anything come in between their love and attachment for the Ahle Bait (a.s.). One such group of lovers were in Karbala. They were so intense in their attachment, that Imam Husain (a.s.) proclaimed, 'I have got companions that neither my grandfather (s.a.w.a.), nor my father (a.s.) nor my brother (a.s.) could get.' These were the companions who repaid the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.a.) for his efforts towards Islam, by attaching themselves to his progeny.

They acted on this Quranic verse 'those who believe are stronger in love for Allah' (Surah Raqarah : 165) In fact, they gave ample proof of this by shedding their blood in the way of Islam. And Allah addressed their leader (Imam Husain (a.s.)) as Allah, the Almighty, declares in the Quran that a favour can be repaid only with another favour. The grace and favour of the Prophet (s.a.w.a.) in his propagation of Islam is something that can never be truly repaid by us. Love is the only thing that makes understand the importance of this favour and helps us adorn our character.

The Holy Prophet (s.a.w.a.) used to beseech Allah 'O Allah! Don't let a transgressor confer a favour upon me, thereby introducing his love in my heart.' This tradition highlights an important fact that conferring a favour leads to love, even if that favour is from a disbeliever. Indeed humanity and Islam owe their existence to Imam Husain (a.s.). If the incident of Karbala had not occurred, Islam's appearance would have changed completely and it would have been unrecognisable from the Prophet's (s.a.w.a.) Islam.

If Karbala had not been there true faith would have been considered as what Yazid was observing, Allah forbid! Many of the prohibited acts would have been made permissible and many of the permissible acts would have been made prohibited. Indeed love for Imam Husain (a.s.) is the reward of the prophethood of the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.a.).

This is because Imam (a.s.) rescued Islam, Allah's chosen religion, which was propagated by his grandfathel, the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.a.). O lovers of Imam Husain (a.s.)! The criterion for love is to follow the beloved in letter and in spirit and to give preference to his wishes and desires over our own. We should pay attention to what Imam Husain (a.s.) has said concerning his ninth son, Allah's last proof, and we should try to act upon it. We should mould our behaviour and disposition according to it and we should be

careful that we are not accounted among the ungrateful ones. Abdul Rahman b. Sulait narrates that Imam Husain (a.s.) said, "There will be twelve guides from amongst us.

The first one is Ameerul Mo'mineen (a.s.) - Ali b. Abi Talib (a.s.), while the last one is my ninth son the Qaim (a.t.f.s.). Through him Allah will enliven the dead earth and will make the rightful religion subdue all other religions even if this displeases the apostates. There is an occultation for him, which will be the cause of one group of Muslims rejecting him and returning to disbelief after belief, while another group will continue to believe in him and will remain steadfast in their faith.

Those who will remain steadfast will become the target of taunts and it will be said to them, if reappearance is indeed a promise then when will the promise be fulfilled. Those who are patient and steadfast on the intense difficulties of occultation will attain the status of a warrior who has done jihad alongside the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.a.) against the infidels. (Kamaluclidin, vol. 1, chapter 30) The above tradition related by Imam Husain (a.s.) highlights a few very pertinent points.

- A) Allah's final proof will be the ninth son of Imam Husain (a.s.).
- B) He will rise one day after his occultation.
- C) His occultation will be prolonged.
- D) Allah shall subdue all other religions with the religion of truth.
- E) He shall enliven the earth after its deterioration.
- F) The nation shall be divided in two sections. One shall steadfastly believe in him while the other shall reject him.
- G) The steadfast ones shall be subjected to intense difficulties and calamities.
- H) The steadfast group shall enjoy the same position as that of the early Muslims who did jihad alongside the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.a.) against the apostates.

Supplement 2

This tradition underlines the importance of love for Imam Mahdi (a.t.f.s.). The bond of love must be firm and resolute. It should not be that we accept Imam (a.t.f.s.) by our tongues and fall short in our actions. It should not be that we become despair about the rise of the nation. Even if we aren't struck by pessimism and doubt, it should not be that we believe in Imam (a.t.f.s.) as if it is folklore of a person who will rise one day and will establish truth and justice and will usher in an era of goodness where no evil will exist and in this entire affair we don't have to do anything except sit and watch.

This is the time when we should sit back and reflect on ourselves. We should for a moment consider the loyal companions of the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.a.) who accompanied him (s.a.w.a.) in the battles and willingly gave up their lives to attain martyrdom.

Indeed their character, certainty, determination, faith, love for Allah and love for His Apostle were so firm and unshakeable that we get some idea of what is expected from us. Then we realise that we have not fulfilled the obligations of love. We have not honoured the pre-requisites of attachment.

And if it is not so then why is the occultation of Imam (a.t.f.s.) being prolonged to such an extent? Imam's (a.t.f.s.) reappearance depends upon the steadfast ones of the Islamic nation who are being disgraced but are patient and steadfast on difficulties and everyday recite the verse 'I bear witness in letter and in spirit that certainly you are Imam Mahdi (a.t.f.s.)' (Ziyarate Salaamullahil Kaamil, Mafaateehul Jcnaan)

To perform religious obligations today is a himalayan task. To strive and struggle with the self against the calamities and disputes in this age and to nurture love and affection (for Imam (a.t.f.s.)) is indeed difficult. We are passing through the era about which Holy Prophet (s.a.w.a.) had said (when the earth shall be filled with injustice and oppression). Satan is working overtime to deviate the people. Man is involved in all kinds of diseases, related to the body and the soul. There are new calamities emerging every day. The prophesies of the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.a.) about the last era are unfolding in front of our eyes.

There are a thousand means of deviation and destruction but hardly any source of survival. Man's intellect is stumped and the whole society is engulfed in this epidemic and is unable to decide on a particular course of action, no matter how simple it is. Let us have a glance of the past and the present.

We are living in an age far worse than the age of the Umayyads and the Abbasides. Despite the torment and persecution of those eras, the people had the good fortune of witnessing the Imams (a.s.) in their midst. They could approach the Imams (a.s.) and reap the benefits of their radiant teachings. The glorious traditions of the infallibles (a.s.) and their guidance illumined the darkest recesses of their existence. The love of the Imams (a.s.) in the hearts of the Shias overcame every other distraction, be it wealth, status or the love of this world.

The Shias ignored everything else in favour of the Imams (a.s.) and their teachings. There was a poor and destitute companion of Imam Sadiq (a.s.).

One day in the presence of Imam (a.s.), he made mention of his poverty and compared it to the wealth of the attendants of the Abbasides. Imam Sadiq (a.s.) on hearing of this comparison removed a bag of gold coins and gave it to the companion and said, 'You can take this, however, I would like you to return the love and attachment that you have for me in your heart.'

The companion immediately realised the fallacy in his comparison (between himself and the Abbaside attendants) and continued to lead the rest of his life in poverty and thanked Allah for the love of the Ahle Bait (a.s.). Similarly the companions of Imam Husain (a.s.) must have been deeply stirred and roused by this statement of their master, 'O Allah! Indeed what has one gained by losing You?

And what has one lost after gaining You?' (Dua-e-Arafah) Today the comparison between the lovers (of the Ahle Bait (a.s.)) and the rich will show even more disparity and the lovers will be outnumbered by the rich by a large margin. However, the chain of Aal-e-Muhammad (a.s.) is continuing till date. It is not over as yet. Not only are the Shias saying this, but even the renowned and illustrious scholars of the Ahle Sunnah have admitted this in their compilations.

They have recorded thousands of traditions to support their belief. Today Allah's Proof on the earth exists and is a means of security from disasters.

Those who hold on to his support understand this only too well. Those who don't understand it can try taking the name of Imam (a.t.f.s.) and they will also see the results. Indeed the lovers of Imam (a.t.f.s.) have found a strange soothing effect in his name that helps them overcome the most trying of calamities. The path towards the love of Imam (a.t.f.s.) is strewn with thorns. It is an examination for those who claim to tread the path of his love.

It is a path with many temptations and distractions. It is slippery and beguiling. It has dangerous twists and turns. However, Imam (a.t.f.s.) has not deserted his lovers. His help and guidance always helps them negotiate the perils of this path. A small ray of his light is sufficient to ease the murkiness and gloom of this path. The strong bond of love can help the lovers overcome every hurdle on the path. The (readers of this path must understand the prerequisites and conditions of love so as to reach Imam (a.t.f.s.). We have only briefly outlined a few of those pre-requisites.

1. Seeking favours only from the beloved: One of the most important prerequisites of sincere love is that one does not go to anyone else to seek his demands. He only approaches the beloved in this regard.

2. To maintain contact We must maintain close contact with our beloved ones - our relatives, our friends, our immediate family members, our brethren-in-faith. A companion of Imam Sadiq (a.s.) asked him, 'One believer is drowning and another is being deviated by some people. Who should we rescue?' Imam (a.s.) replied, 'Go to the rescue of the one who is being deviated.' Then Imam (a.s.) elaborated, 'Keep close contact with the one whose faith is exposed to danger, always maintain close relations with him.

Rescue his hereafter.' This is the need of the hour today - to keep in contact with the believers in distant areas and to introduce the Imam of their

time (a.t.f.s.) to them. This is our most important duty today. It is not a difficult task, provided we work with dedication and an unshakeable spirit of sacrifice.

3. Patience and forbearance Love is the greatest test of patience and forbearance. Even death does not act as a hurdle for the person. Love is such a powerful force that it takes a person towards his beloved, step by step, ignoring all obstacles in the path.

4. Maintaining relations Maintaining relations with the relatives is an important duty and benefits the society as a whole. It is a crucial responsibility in this period and a fundamental proof of love for Imam (a.t.f.s.).

5. Acquiring knowledge Love for Imam (a.t.f.s.) and ignorance about him are two opposite events. It is not possible for both these events to occur simultaneously in a person. Imam (a.t.f.s.) is the pillar of knowledge and invites others towards knowledge of Allah and His religion. If we call ourselves his Shias, it is critical for us to acquire this knowledge. If we fail in this duty then we run the risk of being termed (they don't perceive, they don't comprehend).

And the element of love will subside. Moreover our actions lose their significance as to act without recognition (marefat) is futile. Even our love for Imam (a.t.f.s.) will amount to nothing. Therefore we should struggle and endeavour constantly in our quest for knowledge. The thirst for this knowledge can be quenched only at the doorstep of the Ahle Bait (a.s.) otherwise love will be injured and the pain will be unbearable.

6. Activity Laziness, negligence and lethargy are detrimental to love. To reach towards the object of our love we must be active and energetic. We must fulfill our religious obligations. We must be cautious of Satanic whisperings and be vigilant of his devious charms. A believer must fast in the days and maintain vigil in the nights (. Indeed this is the ascension (Meraj) of a believer.

7. Struggle (Jihad) One who loves Imam (a.t.f.s.) must be prepared to struggle and labour with his self, his pen and his wealth in the way of Imam (a.t.f.s.).

8. Constant remembrance (Zikr) Traditions highlight that remembrance is the key that increases love and affection. We should remember and discuss about Imam (a.t.f.s.) excessively that even if our tongues tire, our hearts should not be satiated and our thirst should not be quenched.

9. Gifts To present the beloved with gifts is a proof of love and attachment. The gift must be presented keeping in mind the stature, position and preferences of the person. For instance, we should perform recommended namaz, fasts, recite Quran, etc. for Imam (a.t.f.s.) with utmost sincerity and devotion.

10. Charity and supplications We should constantly pray for the protection and security of Imam (a.t.f.s.) and invoke divine help for his affairs. We must give charity on his behalf to ensure his safety. To supplicate for his earliest reappearance must be a part of our daily schedule. We must complain to Allah about his prolonged absence and must re-affirm our pledge with him.

11. Awaiting the reappearance (Intezar) Imam (a.t.f.s.) shall spread justice and equity across the length and breadth of this world - We must await this era eagerly and always endeavor to be included among the true and sincere awaiting ones. We must never despair of Imam's (a.t.f.s.)

reappearance, as despair and despondence are satanic traits. There are other obligations and duties to be discharged to fulfill the demands of love and affection, but we have sufficed with the few mentioned above. Finally we plead with Allah and beseech Him to bestow us with true recognition of Imam (a.t.f.s.).

This recognition alone will inspire sincere love and attachment for Imam (a.t.f.s.) in our hearts. We pray to Allah to make steadfast our faith, which is the root of love as the Quranic verse proclaims 'Those who believe are intense in their love for Allah.

Propagate The Rememberance of Yusuf-E-Zahra (A.T.F.S.)

The Divine Personality of the last nominee of the last Prophet of Islam (A.s.), will spread the teachings of Islam in the four corners of the world. He will change the strife-torn, miserable, unjust and tyrannical world into a garden of peace, justice and tranquility virtue and righteousness.

He will gather all the disintegrated true believers on the platform of purity and righteous persons, their due status & honour in the society, whilst the enemies, the unjust and evil persons will be degraded and dishonored.

He is the son of Ummul-Momineen Hazrat Khadija (S.A.), the Queen among the Arab ladies, He is the apple of the eyes of Hazrat Fatima Zahra (S.A.) the lady of the two worlds - This and the hereafter - and Ali (A.S.), the magnificent, leader of the Pious Believers. He is the chosen son of the Holy Prophet of Islam Mohammad-e-Mustafa (Pbuh) the last jewel in the crown of Prophethood. He is the one who is the responsible personality of Islam, the only divine representative on this earth. He is none other than Hazrat Hujjat Ibnil Hasan-Al-Askari, Mahdi, Aakhrezzaman.

The Meaning of The Title Imam-E-Zaman (A.S.)

A title reflects the personality of man. His characteristics and qualities are projected through it. Nowadays such instances are extremely numerous where this dictum rarely comes true. The titles are some times promiscuous bestowed without knowing the actual meaning by the patrons and by the patronized which is out of context here.

The Prophets of God are familiar by the titles added with their names which throw light on their proliity and innate qualities endowed in them by the creator. The prophet Moses (A.S.) is addressed as "Kaleem-Ullah" as he had conversation with the Creator of the world, while our last prophet as is specifically mentioned in the Holy Book is known as Rehmatullil Alamin - the one whose existence is a source and fountain of blessings in this world and in the world here after. Like - wise his progeny is also profusely blessed.

Unlike others, the appellations of dignity of Imame-e-Zaman (A.S.) have each got their own significance separately. Janab Muhaddis Noori (may God shower His blessings on him) the author of the book "Najm us Saquib" has mentioned one hundred eighty two names and titles of Imam-e-Zamana with positive references.

Those who are fond of reciting prayers (Dua) not only for consecration and happiness but with a view to attain and get mastery of the philosophy and high ideals taught by the descendents of the Holy Prophet, are fully aware of innumerable titles of Imam-e-Zaman (A.S.) mentioned in those prayers (Dua). In this context, Dua Nudbah and Ziyarat-e-Al-e-Yasin etc deserve special attention. All those Dua are collected and have found place in Mafateehul Jinan. In this article we will throw light in detail only on one title.

IMAM_E_ZAMANA (A.S.)

In our prayers (Dua) and in day to day conversation this assumed name is directly and closely linked with our exalted Imam Mahdi (A.S.). No sooner

as we hear or utter this noble appellation attention is at once drawn to the Awaited Imam (A.S.). Imam-e-Zaman, Imam-e-Asr, Saheb-e-Asr and Vali-e-Asr are all synonyms and directly attached with the last Saviour. We have become accustomed to hear them but have never bothered to know the facts related with them. It is because of this reason that doubts are germinating in our minds. Once the actual meaning is grasped our minds will never be clouded with such notions.

This assumed name is combination of two words, first is Imam, Saheb and Wali while the second is Zaman and Asr. An Imam is called so as he is always ahead of every body except God while other are always behind. He always leads while others are directed and guided by him. This particular point becomes clear when we pray together (Namaz-e-Jamaat) where all the gesture of Imam are strictly followed by his followers. When he performs "Rukoo" it is copied as it is by his followers, when he prostrates they also prostrate : In short Imam holds sway over his followers over the Imam. Saheb and Wali means master and commander. So the followers are dictated by the master.

We address him as Imam-e-Zaman not due to conviction in regard to religion. It is based on facts and has solid foundations and thick back ground. Zamana means the sphere of existence or the whole creation. all the creatures except God are covered in this sphere and nothing under the sky and on earth is beyond the sphere of existence.

The above exegesis explains that the whole creation-the earth, the sky, the moon and the stars, is in the domain of Hazrat Mahdi (A.S.). The universe is in motion at his instance. The time can be changed by him and not he by the time and environment.

After the revelation of these facts one can understand easily the secret of Imam's longevity and youthful exuberance. All the creatures have to go beyond the frontiers of life to the great unknown first by jumping in the vanguard of youth and then to the tail end of the life called old age by evolutions but the Imam (A.S.) is undisputedly invariable with this evolution and would remain young.

The above points are supported by the Holy Quran in Suratul Asr which runs as follows. "I swear by the Time; Surely man is in loss. Except those who believed and did good deeds and advise for the truth and advise for the patience".

Whatever gain and loss is mentioned in the above Sura are for the individuals to face in the hereafter those who are indulging in all the vices; enjoying the colorful life and doing things which are out of tune with the spirit of the religion. Imam-e-Asr (A.S.), Vali-e-Asr (A.S.) and other spiritual leaders (Imams) are undoubtedly above all those things, though they lived and are living in this world. Such type of question can never be raised in the mind against them.

A question that generally pricks the minds of the people is that a being who is high in place of excellence and whose grandeur is beyond the imagination of mankind and for whom this world in spite of all its vastness and attractions nothing but trash why then such a being with all sublimity is kept out of view ?

Among all the Prophets of God, the foremost and the last is Hazrat Mohammad Mustafa (SAW)

who came into being to elevate the minds and to place the mankind in an honoured position. The mission was accomplished to a greater extent in his life time but the whole-some results could not be achieved in spite of the struggle of his predecessors due to intrigues, so the very purpose of his teaching and preaching to place the mankind could not be achieved as desired. The reappearance of our last savior is motivated with an object to fulfil the un accomplished mission of the last Prophet of Islam. "The Awaited" one would fill the world with justice as it was full of tyranny and oppressions." So his noble existence is meant to achieve a destined end.

It is now evident that Imam (A.S.) is root (base) and the world is the tree spread in branches. Imam (A.S.) is before all others in time while the world is last in time. It is a folly to treat it as exaggeration. It is because of him the world is existing and the creatures owe their substances to him only. He is the source of substances for the destitute. The sky and the earth also owe their sustenance to him.

To keep this point ever green in memory, it would not be out of way to repeat the narrations of Ayatullah Waheed Khurasani referred to him Mirza Ahmed son of Akhund Khurasani the author of "Kefayat". He narrates that "my mother was unwell. Day by day her illness was getting worse.

We were very much puzzled. The doctors were in a fix. One day we received the news of the arrival of an elderly person in Najaf-e-Ashraf expert in astronomy. My brother Mirza Mohammad and I went to him and met him in the Holy tomb of Hazrat Amir-al-Momineen (A.S.). We told him that we have come to inquire about an urgent thing from you.

We will concentrate on that problem conscientiously and you give us the reply. The elderly man moved the heads of rosary and said that the disease had spread all over the body of the patient for whom you want to enquire from me. The chance of recovery are very weak and within a day or two the patient would die.. Our intention was to inquire about the reason of illness of our mother. Second time my brother thought conscientiously and requested the saint to tell about it. The heads of rosary were again moved by him but his facial expression suddenly changed. This process was thrice repeated and all the three times he seemed to be much worried.

He then said that the man about whom they wanted to know was first seen in Lebanon and then was found in Kaba, now he is found in Madina. He moved once again the heads of rosary said that I have witnessed that the sun was circling around his head and he is Imam-e-Zamana (A.S.)" This point is pertinent as the Imam (A.S.) is the centre of the universe so the sun has to circle around him.

Today we are living in the domain of such a noble and exalted Imam (A.S.). It is a pity that we are claiming to be his followers but have departed from the ways dictated and directed by him. If we are sincere in claiming to be his followers, we must be attached to him spiritually to free ourselves from the hardship of this world and the world here-after.

May Allah increase our marefat about Imam-e-Mahdi (A.S)

Sadaqah For the Safety of Imam-E-Zamana (a.t.f.s.)

In today's world of science and technology, doctors have found solutions to numerous diseases which were once considered as incurable and fatal. Inventions of sophisticated devices and formulation of new life saving drugs have helped them in their cause. Yet, we find Muslims who say that a person's life and sustenance can be increased and calamities averted merely by giving alms.

Sadaqah is derived from the word Sadq i.e. to be righteous, truthful, alms-giving. We will focus our attention on its third meaning i.e. alms-giving and discuss about it. While going through the pages of history - which are full of incidents about the benefits of giving alms - one incident stands apart.

It is narrated that once Hazrat Isa (a.s.) was passing by a house along with his companions. Celebrations were going on in that house on the occasion of a marriage. Hazrat Isa (a.s.) pointed out to his companions that tomorrow, (the people of) this house will be aggrieved. On the morrow, the companions of Hazrat Isa (a.s.) informed him that nothing like what he had predicted had occurred in that house.

Hazrat Isa (a.s.) decided to visit that house and find out the reason due to which the calamity was averted. On inquiry, the newly married bride of the house spoke about the events of the previous night. She said that last night she had given bread to a beggar who had come to their house. After knowing this Hazrat Isa (a.s.) lifted the bed and they saw that there was a snake with a bread in its mouth. Hazrat Isa (a.s.) showed them that the alms which was given in the form of bread by the bride had saved them from death.

The traditions of the infallibles (a.s.) too speak about the advantages of giving alms. Discussing all of them is beyond the scope of this article. We will restrict our discussion in reviewing only a few of them. It has been narrated from Imam Baqir (a.s.) that giving of alms prolongs one's life and saves a person from seventy types of difficulties at the time of death. (Man la Yahzorohul Faqih p 34 H. No. 1729)

Imam Sadiq (a.s.) says, 'Allah will keep away all the difficulties which descend from the sky in the daytime, if one gives alms early in the morning. And Allah will keep away all the difficulties which will descend from the sky in the night, if one gives alms in the early hours of night.' (Ibid., H. No. 1733)

Hazrat Ali (a.s.) says, "In order to be exonerated of your sins and be included under the grace and love of Allah, give alms and observe the bonds of relationship." (Ghurarul Hekam by Abdul Waahid Aamudi)

A tradition from Holy Prophet (s.a.w.) summarises all the benefits of giving alms. He (s.a.w) says, "There is no god except Allah, giving alms saves a person from sickness, plague, fire, drowning, falling and madness." Then Holy Prophet (s.a.w.) counted seventy difficulties from which a person can be saved by giving alms. (Man la Yahzorohul Faqih, p 35, H. No. 1734)

Now that we are familiar with the benefits and effects of giving alms, the question which comes to our mind is "How can the giving of alms by us be the cause of safety of our last Imam, Imam-e-Zamana (a.s.)?" All human

relations, actions, etc. are based on the natural instincts of love and attachment. This attachment and love may be for worldly gains or for the hereafter. Islam, the last and the perfect religion of Allah is based on attachment. Thus we find in Quran: "And those who believe, love Allah the most." (Baqarah: 165).

The point to be noted here is that when a person shows interest or love towards something, then he will show his love and attachment for everything related to that particular thing. We see in our daily lives that if a person is interested in a particular field of study, engineering for instance, he will not only be interested in the area of his specialization but he will also be interested in all those areas which are related to it. On the basis of the above principle, we know that the most esteemed and honored from among the creatures, in front of Allah, the Almighty, are the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.) and the infallible Imams (a.s.).

We see in a tradition from the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.) that he said, "The faith of no one is acceptable to Allah except for him who loves me more than himself, my family more than his family, my descendants more than his own descendants and myself more than his own self."

It is crystal clear from this tradition that a true Muslim is filled with the love of Holy Prophet (s.a.w.) and his descendants and especially in the present age, with the love of our beloved master, Imam-e-Zamana (a.s.). Also we see a tradition from Imam Mahdi (a.s.) who relates from his father, Imam Hasan al-Askari (a.s.): "O my son know that the hearts of the obedient and sincere people will turn to you as birds turn to their nests." (Kamaluddin, p. 448)

But, only verbal claim that we love the Holy Prophet (s.a.) and our Imam (a.s.) is no proof. Rather, the proof of our love lies in our behavior, manners, dealings, etc. It is but natural that a lover likes the safety and security of the one whom he loves. A person can protect his beloved in two ways, directly or indirectly. Directly means himself protecting and indirectly means by arranging some protection for the beloved. In our age where it is not possible for us to physically see whether our beloved master, Imam Mahdi (a.s.) is protected or not (because of the barrier of occultation) there is no need to lose heart as we can always take the indirect way i.e. giving alms for his safety. A tradition from Ameerul Momineen Alt (a.s.) says (a.s.), "Giving alms dispels calamity."

When we go through the books of history, we realize that the great scholars of Islam have devoted a lot of pages on this topic. One such scholar is Sayyed Ibne Ta'oos (r.a.). He is one of the great Shiite personalities of 7th century hijri. He writes in his will to his son regarding the responsibilities towards Imam (a.s.) that, "Give priority to Imam's need before asking your request.

Donate alms and charity for his glorious being before you do for your own self or for your family and offer supplications for him before remembering yours. In short, in all your good and recommended deeds, give priority to his pious and precious being because this attracts the attention of Imam (a.s.) towards you and will increase his generosity and kindness upon you."

At this juncture, one question might intrigue you and that is, "Does Imam (a.s.), who is having all the blessings, knowledge and kindness of Allah need the alms of a few pennies given by us?"

The answer is certainly not. But as we have seen in the foregoing paragraphs, that when you love someone, that love should be manifested in your behavior, dealings and manners. By giving money in charity, we are manifesting our love towards our Imam (a.s.) and fulfilling the condition of the tradition of the Holy Prophet (s.a.w) that says, "The faith of no one is acceptable to Allah except for him who loves me more than himself....." And also we have to keep this point in mind that Imam-e- Zamana (a.s.) himself says, "Pray more for my early reappearance. Indeed, in it there is salvation for you."

We find that there are many supplications which have been narrated by our Imams (a.s.) to pray for Imam Mahdi (a.s.) in the time of occultation. For more details about invocations refer to the book of Mafateeh-ul-Jinan by Shaykh Abbas Qummi. We also see that Imam (a.s.) himself has asked us to pray for his early reappearance though he is in no need of our invocations. It (reciting invocation) is a sign and manifestation of our love towards him.

Now, after understanding why alms should be given for the safety of Imam (a.s.), the question which arises is "What should we do with money collected as alms? " The reply to this lies in a tradition from Imam Sadiq (a.s.) who says 'If a person is not near and cannot send his gifts to us, then he should give it to our pious Shias. He will get the same reward of giving it to us...' (Man la yahzorohul faqih)

In the end we pray to Allah, the Almighty, to increase our grace and provide us opportunities so that we can manifest our love towards Imam al-Muntazar al-Mahdi (a.s.) by giving alms for his safety and performing only those deeds which bring us closer.

Seeking Mediation of Imam Mahdi

To seek a mediator implies to gain proximity to an individual in order to achieve one's objective through the mediator's recommendation and arbitration. Arabic litterateurs define mediation (tawassul) as Translation, 'When he sought proximity with him through his actions, he aspired to gain his mediation.' (Lisanul Arab vol. 11, page 724).

Mediation in the light of Quran and traditions: Allah declares in the Quran ' O you who believe! Be (careful of your duty to) Allah and seek nearness to Him and strive hard in His way that you may succeed.' (Maidah : 35)

Imam Muhammad Baqir (a.s.) in exposition of this ayat narrates 'Acquire proximity with Allah through the Imam.' (Tafsire Qummi, vol. 1 page 168). Janabe Fatima Zahra (s.a.) proclaims in her sermon, 'Glorify Allah, whose majesty and supremacy command glorification and veneration. And it has been made mandatory upon the residents of the heavens and the earth to seek a mediator towards Allah, and we Ahle Bayt (a.s.) are the mediators appointed by Allah upon His creatures.' (Sharhe Nahjul Balagha, vol. 2, page 211, by Ibne Abil Hadid).

Thus Quran and traditions alike, exhort the Muslims to secure some arbitrator in order to gain proximity with Allah, and achieve eternal deliverance. Why seek mediation of Imam Mahdi (a.t.f.s.)? Any Shia is bound to think, 'What is the rationale for us to seek mediation of our Imam?' There are several facets to this question.

1. The mandate of Quran and traditions Quran proclaims Translation, 'O you who believe! Be patient and excel in patience and maintain contact, and be careful of your duty towards Allah, that you may be successful. (Ale Imran : 199 Imam Sadiq (a.s.) by way of elucidation of the above ayat narrates, Translation, 'Maintain a special affinity with your Imam.' (Noorus Saqalain, vol. 1 page 426)

Every Shia must maintain close ties with the Imam of his era. When weighed from the aspect of Arabic grammar, the word,) is based on "Rabatoo" which implies co-operation and mutual consent, i.e. if a Shia maintains proximity with the Imam of his time, then Inshallah the Imam will also reciprocate that feeling of affinity and consanguinity. Inshallah Imam's grace and clemency on us will multiply. To observe this bidding of Imam Sadiq (a.s.) is crucial, and we must spare no effort to secure that feeling of affiliation and proximity with our Imam (a.s.) in order: to gain Our Imam's (a.s.) special attention.

2. The status of Imam Mahdi (a.s.) Traditions accredit Imam (a.s.) with an august and majestic standing. In Dua Nudbah we recite, 'Imam (a.s.) is that door of Allah's mercy that we have to access so as to reach Allah.' He is a path towards Allah's satisfaction and grace. He possesses powers of intercession vis--vis the Almighty. He is among the Names of Allah, through which we have been commanded to seek mediation and arbitration. As the Quran declares, (Translation, 'And Allah's are the best names, therefore call on Him thereby.' (Araaf : 180)

An exegesis of this ayat reveals a tradition from the Aimmah (a.s.), viz., 'By Allah! We are the best names (asmaae husnaa) through which Allah has

commanded the Muslims to invoke Him.' (Mikyalul Makarim, vol. 1 page 271)

Imam always responds to pleas of help and succour, as has been elucidated in his Ziarat. He never rebuffs the distressed and frightened. Indeed he is the means for the redemption of sins. He alone is the defender of the weak and oppressed. And this is the purport of the following statement of Ziarate Jameaa, 'One who has associated himself with you has triumphed, and the one who has sought asylum with you is protected.'

3. Observe this practice of turning to their chief in moments of anguish or when there is a fear of strike from the enemies. In fact this has also been the custom of the believers, who in times of distress and difficulties have left their affairs completely in the hands of their Imam (a.s.), and have sought redressal from him alone.

As a matter of fact, among the responsibilities of Imam (a.s.), is that he provides refuge to the hapless and a retreat to the outcast. And in this regard it is observed that if a subject of any King is in distress and is confronted with a calamity or affliction then rationale suggests he should approach his leader, ruler, provided of course, the latter is virtuous and capable. Otherwise, then he will be the subject of intense criticism and censure.

And likewise, if in our moments of indigence and grief, we turn to someone other than our Imam for assistance, then we have forsaken one of the crucial obligations enjoined by Allah upon the Muslims and run the risk of incurring His wrath. That crucial obligation has been expounded in 'Then disperse abroad and in the land and seek of Allah's grace.' (Jumaa : 10) By way of elucidation of the above verse Jabir b. Abdullah (r.a.) narrates from Masoomeen (a.s.), 'The grace of Allah mentioned in the ayat alludes to the Imams (a.s.). (Mikyaalul Makaarim vol. 2, pg. 273)

Besides, in the Quran, Allah commands us to enter a house only through its door. Likewise, Allah has designated an Imam in every era, through which the Muslims are commanded to 'enter' into Allah's grace and mercy. And the fact that the Imam (a.s.) of this era is in occultation does not in any way diminish his mediation and arbitration prowess vis--vis Allah; for an Imam is Allah's emissary on this earth, and to that extent there is no difference between an apparent Imam and a hidden one.

Imam (a.s.) is aware of everything that goes around as he himself proclaims, 'Certainly, we with our knowledge are cognizant of all your affairs and your dealings are never concealed from us.' (Behaarul Anwaar, vol. 53, page 175).

In another tradition Imam (a.s.) asserts, Translation, 'We are never neglectful of your guardianship nor are we ever unmindful of your remembrance (Behaarul Anwaar, vol. 53, page 176) And no mountain, bulwark or curtain can ever act as an impediment for Imam (a.s.). In this regard, Syed Ibne Taoos has recorded a tradition in his book, 'Kashful Muhajjah'. 'A companion of Imam Ali. Raza (a.s.) narrates, I wrote a letter to Imam (a.s.). In the letter I mentioned about a person who wanted to offer his demands to Imam (a.s.); those demands that he sought from his God. Imam Raza (a.s.) replied that if he has any requirement, tell him to simply

move his lips, and the response (from my side) shall reach him.' (Mikyal Makaarim, vol. 2, page 273)

In 'Al-Kafi', there is a lengthy tradition narrated by Imam Raza (a.s.), about the elevated station of an Imam. An excerpt of this important narration has been brought below so as to appreciate, although to a very limited extent, the compassionate nature of Imam. Imam Raza (a.s.) pronounces, Translation, 'Imam is a confidant, an aide, a sympathetic father, an affectionate brother, and a caring mother who nurtures her infant.' (Al-Kafi vol. 1, page 200)

The above tradition provides us with a glimpse, albeit a fleeting one, of the immense love and affection Imam (a.s.) has for his Shias. Our affliction and grief disturbs him even more than it disturbs us. He treasures us more than our own parents. His love and regard for us exceeds that of the father.

For any father is confronted with certain limitations which he just can not breach. For instance, a man's love for his son maybe boundless. In his intense endearment and attachment he maybe willing to dispense all his wealth, even if it is a few million rupees. However, there is a limit to his wealth and riches. And this limitation does not permit that father to expend any more wealth, even though he wants to.

This is also the case for other comforts that the father maybe prepared to furnish, but can not due to his obvious limitations. However, these limitations do not impede Imam (a.s.). Imam (a.s.) is Allah's emissary on the earth. He is the Caliph designated by Allah over His creation, he is the Master of the age and exercises complete control over the universe, with Allah's permission. Man's intellect fails to comprehend the powers of the Imam (a.s.).

As a matter of fact there is a separate chapter in Usule Kafi titled, I meaning 'The earth is only for Imam'. There is one tradition in this chapter, wherein Imam Sadiq (a.s.) recounts to one of his companions, (Usule Kafi, Kitabul Hujjat, vol. 1, page 48). Now that we are enlightened with the supreme authority of our Imam, it only follows that we advance our demands and needs in front .of him, knowing that he will fulfill our needs. He is a sympathetic father for his Shias, and the father always experiences a great deal of gratification in resolving his son's difficulties. Ways of seeking mediation with Imam (a.s.)

1. Dua (Supplication): Indeed, there is no paucity of means to invoke and beseech Imam (a.s.). In this . regard, the role of supplications cannot be over stressed. One supplication in particular has been reported in Mikyal Makarim, vol. 2,page 271; 0 Allah! I ask You for the sake of Your representative and Your Proof, Master of Time, that You help me through him in all my affairs.

And Protect me through him from the difficulties of every torturer, dissident and rebel. (Please) help me through him for my efforts are exhausted. And Protect me from every enemy, grief, sorrow, debt, my children and all my family members, my brothers and my close ones, whose deeds do harm unto me. Amin, Lord of the Worlds. (Behaarul Anwaar, vol. 94, p. 34.

2. Repeated invocation for assistance: An important invocation has been recorded in 'Mafatihul Jinnan', page 108 (Urdu edition). The invocation begins thus; An invocation is crucial, since it is through entreaties alone, that the afflicted beseeches his master. This invocation in particular, has some exceptional benefits for the Shias.

Muhaddithe Noori in his celebrated work, 'Najmus Saqib', chapter 10 (concluding part), comments that within hours of reciting this invocation, his demands were miraculously fulfilled. Besides, there are numerous other instances wherein Shias have experienced immediate and untold results from its recitation.

3. Making a written presentation of one's needs to Imam (a.s.) This is a very simple and forthright medium of submitting one's demands to Imam (a.s.). Here, a Shia notes down his demands and aspirations and sends it to Imam (a.s.). In India, this practice is especially conspicuous on 15th Shabaan. On this day, the day of birth of our Imam (a.s.), Shias very enthusiastically list their demands on a piece of paper and cast the letters in the sea.

However, should this practice be observed only on 15th Shabaan? Do we need our Imam's assistance only on the occasion of his birth? Or is it that a single occasion in a year is sufficient for advancing all our requirements, so that for the rest of the year we discern no need for Imam? God forbid, that is not the case! We must regularly write down our needs that we seek from Imam (a.s.).

Surely we can devote some time at least once a week or fortnight to jot down our problems and our state of condition for Imam (a.s.) and then cast the letter in the sea or embed it in the earth. This is indeed very easy and requires minimal effort. However, neglect and preoccupation with the world has made us neglect this very important medium of mediation and arbitration with Imam (a.s.).

And is it necessary that we write to Imam (a.s.) only in moments of distress, and never otherwise? Are we so self-centered that we can not even send a salutation (salaam) upon our Imam, without being confronted by some difficulty or problem??

4. Conversation with Imam (a.s.) This is another very facile mode of communicating with Imam (a.s.). Whenever a Shia finds himself alone, regardless of the time, he can converse with Imam (a.s.), first by sending his salutations upon Imam and then by narrating his plight and condition. Nothing can be simpler than this. Inshallah, even Imam (a.s.) will heed that Shia's narration and will pray for him.

And every Shia must converse with his Imam at least once a day. For although Imam (a.s.) is aware of our state and condition, recounting to Imam (a.s.) our problems and dilemmas has its own appeal. Sayyed's Ibne Taos' testament to his son exhorting him to seek mediation from Imam Mahdi (a.s.) Sayyed exhorted his son in his will thus, 'O my son Muhammad! Allah, the Almighty conferred His favor and benefit upon me through your birth. I found myself completely incapable and powerless in front of Allah and could never glorify Him fittingly for this favor.

And out of gratitude for this bounty, and on Allah's commands, I beseeched Imam (a.s.) on your behalf and sought your servitude in Imam's service. And after that, the misfortunes that afflicted you were also resolved through his mediation and grace. I was graced by Imam (a.s.) in my dreams on several occasions, and he has alleviated my impoverishment with his bounties and favors.

His benefaction upon you is too excessive for me to ever adequately express. That is why your love, affection, spirit of sacrifice and devotion for Imam (a.s.) should also be abundant. The extent of your attachment and disposition towards him (a.s.) should please Allah, and gladden the hearts of the Prophet (s.a.w.s.) and his progeny (a.s.).

O my son! Always give preference to Imam's wishes over your own. Pray for (the well-being of) Imam (a.s.) before you commence praying for yourself. Inculcate in yourself the practice of initiating all your works with 'sadaqah' for (the security of) Imam (a.s.), before you remove 'sadaqah' for yourself or for your loved ones.

If you wish, to faithfully observe his rights, and draw his (a.s.) concern and regard towards yourself, always favor his self over your own. Beseech Imam (a.s.) with unwavering intensity and humility every Tuesday and Thursday, and seek your demands from him. And while seeking your needs from Imam (a.s.), send your salutations upon him and recite the following Ziarat (This Ziarat has been mentioned earlier.) Then recite the below mentioned verse 'O chief? Distress has afflicted us and our family and we have brought scanty money, so give us full measure and be charitable to us; surely Allah rewards the charitable.' (Yusuf: 88) This was a confession of intense regret and remorse expressed by the brothers of Hazrat Yusuf (a.s.) to their father (Hazrat Yaqoob) and their brother.

Hazrat Yusuf and Hazrat Yaqoob (peace be on both) displayed ample clemency and compassion, and forgave their sins. O our Master! Even if we have disobeyed Allah and distressed your ancestors (a.s.), please forgive us because O our Chief and Guardian, certainly you exceed Yusuf (a.s.) in his clemency, forbearance and compassion. Therefore please deal with us in a manner akin to Hazrat Yusuf's treatment vis--vis his brothers, while surely we are most undeserving of such leniency.

(Barnoameh Sa'adat, by Sayyed Ibne Taoos) Innumerable instances of Imam's aid and succour Books abound with incidents wherein aid and relief provided by Imam (a.s.) bears ample testimony to Imam's concern and anxiety for his Shias. There are several books wherein such heartening incidents are reported viz., Behaarul Anwaar, Najmus Saqib, Trysts with Imam (a.s.), Jannatui Mawa, Riyazul Ulama, Minhajus Salah,

Al Kalamut Tayyeb, Isbatui Huda, etc. Among those favoured with Imam's grace and presence and blessed with the opportunity to delight with a glance at his countenance were Bahrul Uloom, Aga Zainul Abedeen Salmee, Maulana Muhammad Hussain Qazveeni, AUama Muhammad Taqi Majlisi, Alama Hilli, Shaykh Hurre Ameli, Shaykh Mufeed, Shaykh Hasan Iraqi, Muqaddase Ardabali, Alt b. Mahziyar, Ismail Harqali, among others. As matter of fact every Shia is included in this list, because there exists not

a single believer but Imam (a.s.) graces him with a benevolent glance, although most of us are neglectful of this fact.

This is all the more perceptible in instances wherein we find ourselves engulfed in calamities with a vice like hold over us, leaving us disturbed, robbing us of our sleep. Then after a just few token entreaties and supplications we find ourselves alleviated in a flash. It seems almost unbelievable. The reason behind this sudden relief is Imam's benevolence and grace. Imam (a.s.) is never one to seek accolades and adulation, which is why he (a.s.) accomplishes his task and leaves in a hurry, knowing he (a.s.), he has a million other Shias to help.

There is an incident involving a person who had lost his way. Imam (a.s.) came to his aid and directed him towards the right path. That person requested Imam (a.s.) to come with him to his house. Imam (a.s.) declined and replied that there were thousands of Shias who were entreating him at that very moment. He had to rush to their rescue just as he had rushed to his. (Mulakate Imam (a.s.) page 289) At least one point becomes crystal clear from the above-mentioned incident - Imam (a.s.) is perpetually engaged in providing relief.

" O master " we ask the intercession through you to God"

The Need of Recognizing Allah's Proof in Worshipping Allah

Allah has created man for His worship. Even wisdom dictates that worshipping God is necessary for man. Obedience to Him is the best way of thanking Him for His bounties. However, wisdom on its own is unable to establish the method of worship, as this is beyond its limit. Those who relied on their wisdom in determining the methods of worship were deviated. They ended up worshipping someone other than Allah.

Allah sent the Messenger to invite the people towards the (worship of the) True God. The Apostles tried to arouse man's 'innate recognition' of God through reminders. They taught man the correct way of worshipping Allah so that their worship may become a means of attaining nearness to Him. The words and actions of Prophets (a.s.) turns the focus of the people towards Allah.

The people then beseech Allah regarding all their matters. Here it is necessary to highlight a very crucial point. How do we distinguish between a true and a false Prophet/Imam? In order to discern between the true Prophet/Imam and an imposter we should observe his assertions and conduct.

If his words and deeds refrain the people, from disobedience and rebelliousness and invite them towards the worship of Allah, then indeed he is a true Prophet/Imam. As against this, if his assertions and conduct incite the people to disobey Allah and alienate them from His worship, then he is an imposter. Here, his falsity is established by his words itself requiring no further proof.

Hazrat Alt (a.s.) asserts, "Recognize Allah by Allah and the Messenger by his message". (Ref. - Usul'-e-Kafi, Kitabut Tawheed, Vol. 1, Pg. 75) Indeed the; sayings of the Ahle Bayt (a.s.) are enough to ascertain the veracity of the claimants.,

Ziarate Jaamea fittingly illustrates the eminence of Ahle Bayt (a.s.). In this Ziarat, Ahle Bait (a.s.) have been depicted, "The practical implementation of His revelation, the pillar of His Unity, the witness over His creation, the flag of guidance for His servants, the minarets of light in His cities, the proof and guides towards His path". Allah has safeguarded them from all types of errors, granted them safety from all types of corruption, refined them of all types of impurities and purified them a thorough purifying.

Despite attaining such a lofty station and acquiring complete dominance over other creatures, the impeccable Ahle Bait (a.s.) never invited the people towards themselves. Disdain, self-esteem and ostentation were never a part of their natural disposition. Indeed their natural disposition was in stark contrast to people who are bloated with self-respect and arrogance after attaining some token standing among the people.

Ziarate Jaamea elaborates further the elevated status of the Ahle Bayt (a.s.) thus, "You (Ahle Bait a.s.) recognised the exalted station of God, honoured His splendour, praised His munificence, enacted His message, attested His covenant. You reinforced the bond of obedience to Him and exhorted (the people) towards His obedience secretly and openly. You

called unto His way with wisdom and good admonitions. (You) sacrificed your lives in seeking His pleasure. (You) endured patiently hardships in His cause. You established the prayers and paid the poor dues. You enjoined what was right and forbade what was wrong. You endeavoured for Allah excessively..."

Indeed the efforts and endeavours of the Ahle Bayt (a.s.) reaped amazing results for the people and their objective was realised. The Ziarat declares further, 'You manifested His summons, made evident His ordinance, firmly established His limits, unfolded the wisdom behind His laws and exemplified His precepts.'

The impeccable Ahle Bayt (a.s.) aimed to execute Allah's message. This message spread to the most obscure parts of the world. Today, whatever Islam is evident in the world is largely due to the efforts of the Ahle Bayt (a.s.).

Allah's worship can be performed only in the manner specified by Him. The daily prayers are a means of worshipping Allah only if the prayers are performed in line with His edicts and decree. For instance, if a person supplements the morning obligatory prayers with two additional units, then this prayer will be rejected and cannot be a way of attaining nearness to Allah,

as it was not performed in accordance to His explicit commands. Imam Jafer Sadiq (a.s.) states, "Allah ordered the angels, Prostrate before Adam (a.s.). All prostrated except Iblis, thus manifesting his envy. Allah asked him, what has stopped you from prostrating in front of Adam?' He replied, 'I am better than him as You have created me from fire and him from clay.'

Hence the first person to act on conjecture (in the matter of worship) was Iblis. He was proud and arrogant. Pride for him acted as a hurdle in Allah's obedience. Iblis requested Allah, "O my God, excuse me from prostrating before Adam, and I will worship you in such a way that neither the angels nor prophets would worship you". Allah replied, "I don't need your worship. I desire to be worshipped in the manner I like. Iblis remained obstinate in his refusal to prostrate. Allah then said, "Get out from here! Surely My curse is on you till resurrection!" (Behaarul Anwaar, vol. 11, pg. 141)

Thus, it is evident even if a person spends his entire life prostrating in front of Allah, but his prostration is not accordance with Allah's wishes, then his worship is worthless. On the contrary it will only serve as means of separation from Allah.

The criterion for belief is not only to attest the unity of Allah (Tauheed) and reject all partners for Him, but also to seek laws of religion from the door that has been declared by Him to be 'His door'. And this 'Door of Allah' are His Messengers (a.s.) and pure Imams (a.s.) Hence, the belief in Nabuwat and Imamat is an absolute must to consummate the belief in Tauhid.

Imam Jafer Sadiq (a.s.) says, "If someone feels that he can deem the permissible as permissible and the prohibited as prohibited, without the recognition of Holy Prophet (s.a.w.s.), then he has in fact not reckoned the permitted of Allah as permitted and prohibited of Allah as prohibited. If a person performs prayers, pays the poor-due, performs Hajj and Umrah

without the recognition of that personality whose obedience has been made obligatory by Allah, then in reality he has not performed anything! Neither he has prayed nor fasted nor paid the poor-due nor performed Hajj and Umrah nor has taken the ritual obligatory bath nor observed purity nor considered prohibited of Allah as prohibited nor permitted of Allah as permitted. His prayers in reality are not prayers, though he bows and prostrates.

His poor-due in reality is not poor-due. Nor is his Hajj accounted as Hajj. All these are deemed legitimate only if they are performed with the recognition and guidance of those personalities whose obedience has been made obligatory by Allah upon the people."

"One who has the recognition of the representative of Allah and acquires the religion and its laws from him alone, only then has he obeyed Allah." (Behaarul Anwaar, vol. 27, pg. 176)

Indeed Imam Sadiq's tradition in this regard is most amazing. Imam (a.s.) narrates, "One worshipper from Bani Israel worshipped Allah and dried up like a toothpick. However, Allah revealed to the Prophet of that era to inform him, that Allah will not accept his worship even if his worship makes him disintegrate like the flesh of the sheep when cooked, until (of course) he gains proximity to Allah from the door from which He has ordered to approach Him".

(Behaarul Anwaar, vol. 27, pg. 176)

The above mentioned traditions make it amply clear that the recognition of the representative of Allah is an important criterion for His worship and obedience.. Another tradition from the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.s.) in this regard is worth noting. This tradition has been recorded by both Shia as well as Sunni scholars. The Prophet (s.a.w.s.) warns,

"One who dies without recognizing the Imam of his time, then his death is that of an ignorant person." (Yanaabiul Mawaddah, vol. 39, pg. 137)

In today's era, belief in the Imamate of Imam Mahdi (a.t.f.s.) is the criterion for Allah's worship. In fact, belief in the Imamate of Hazrat Vali-e-Asr (may our lives be sacrificed for him) is the foundation of the entire edifice of our belief and worship. A doubt (about his Imamate) equal to the measure of a grain will take us away from religion and render our actions void. In this context the following incident establishes the necessity and importance of recognizing the proof of Allah.

There was a family in Bani Israel. Any member of this family who worshipped Allah for forty nights would have his prayers accepted. Their entreaties were never rejected by Allah. One person from this family worshipped Allah for forty nights. Thereafter, he beseeched Allah for fulfilment of his desire. But his prayers were rejected. He presented himself before Hazrat Isa (a.s.) and briefed him about his condition. He requested Hazrat Isa (a.s.) to implore Allah on his behalf. Hazrat Isa (a.s.) performed ablution and prayed. Allah replied to him thus,

'O Isa! This servant of mine has not approached Me through the door from which I should be approached. While he is calling Me, he still has some doubts regarding you. Hence, I will not accept his entreaties even if he

calls Me in such a way that his neck is broken and his fingers fall apart." (Usul-e-Kafi, vol. 2, pg. 400, under 'The Chapter of Doubt')

One can well imagine what will be the consequence of disobeying Allah's proof, when the person from Bani Israel only doubting about him. (Allah's proof). When a person beseeches Allah by disregarding His proof, then he has rejected the means of approach appointed by Allah. That is, he has chosen another mode of approaching Allah in grave disregard of the mode endorsed by Him. The Holy Prophet (s.a.w.a.) has narrated the following Hadithe Qudsi from Jibrael (a.s.) who in turn narrated it from the Allah, the Almighty who declares,

"The one who considers Me worthy of worship, considers Muhammad to be My worshipper and messenger, reckons Ali ibne Abi Taalib to be My caliph, deems the Imams in his lineage to be My proof then out of My mercy I will make him enter Paradise. On the basis of My forgiveness I will deliver him from Hell and give him a place in My neighbourhood. I will ordain My mercy and grace a must for him. I will fulfill My bounties over him. I will enumerate him among my special and sincere friends.

If he calls Me, I will reply to him. If he entreats before Me, I will accept his entreaties. If he asks Me, I will grant him. If he is silent, I will initiate. If he does evil, I will give him a place in My benevolence. If he runs, I will call him towards Me.

If he returns, I will accept him. If he knocks on My door, I will open My doors for him. But one who does not attest to My unity or testifies to it but does not witness the prophethood of My servant and Apostle Muhammad (s.a.w.a) or acknowledges his prophethood but does not accede to the Caliphate of Ali ibne Abi Talib or accedes to the Caliphate of Ali but does not accept the Imamate and Wilayat of Imams in his lineage, then indeed he has rejected My bounties. He has deemed My greatness to be of little value. He has rejected My signs and My book. If he turns towards Me, I will hide Myself from him. If he asks Me, I will not listen to him. If he hopes from Me, I will disappoint him. This is his punishment from My side and I am never unjust to My servants."

The last few words underline how important is the recognition of Allah's proof in reaching Allah. (Kamaluddin, chapter 27, hadith no. 3, pg. 258) Without the recognition of Allah's proof, deliverance from His punishment is inconceivable. Man may do any number of good deeds on account of his knowledge, but if he does not possess the recognition of the 'the True Imam', then his deliverance is impossible.

Imam Jafer Sadiq (a.s.) declares, "Allah does not feel shy from punishing those who accept an Imam whom Allah has not appointed, though they may be from among the-virtuous. And Allah shies from chastising those who believe in an Imam appointed by Him, though they may be from among the sinners." (Usul-e-Kafi, Kitabul Hujjah, vol. 1, pg. 376)

It should be noted that shyness for Allah is not the same as it is for humans. This only connotes Allah's ways and methods. Definitely, this tradition does not mean that committing sins is excusable for those who acknowledge the 'True Imam'. On the contrary after gaining the recognition of the 'True Imam', one should distance oneself from sins and transgression,

so that it can be established that the followers of the Rightful Imam are well aware of the criteria for his belief.

O Lord! Increase (for us) the recognition of the Imam of the era. With every passing moment illuminate our hearts with his love and grant us more opportunities for his service.

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