The Divine Invitation

Preface

Each year, as we approach the Graceful Month of Ramada-n, we are considered as the 'Special Guests' of Allah (SwT). What does it mean to be a special guest? What is the difference between an 'ordinary' invitation and a 'special' invitation? Why is the Holy Month of Ramada-n described by the Holy Prophet (s) as 'The Banquet of Alla-h'?

This book goes beyond providing logical analysis to these questions. It is typical of the style the author adopts in his other profound titles for a spiritual wayfarer 'Soaring to the Only Beloved' (a brief treatise on the presence of the heart in prayer) and 'Manifestations of the All-Merciful' (a commentary on a daily supplication of the Holy Month of Ramadan), published by the Islamic Education Board of the World Federation.

Such an approach is ideal for Mubalighi-n, proactive 'Urafa-' and the youth, for it combines beautifully the theme with lexical origins, A-ya-t from the Holy Qur'a-n , aha-di-th of the A'immah ('a), mystical narrations, poetry, fada-il of the Ahlu'l Bayt ('a) as well as touch of historical accounts relevant to the subject.

We live in a time when people feel an urgent need to examine the spiritual dimensions of their lives. The materialistic tendencies which have dominated so much of the modern age are beginning to lose their lustre. People are beginning to realize that their deepest needs cannot be satisfied by consumer products. This book together with a series of related books can go a long way to quench the thirst of spiritual wayfarers and be a catalyst in guiding the traveler towards 'The Host'.

IEB is indebted to Sheikh Muhammad Khalfan who is also an active member of the Editorial Advisory Committee (EAC) that was recently established by the World Federation to ensure high quality, sustainable and effective publications.

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Introduction]]

The Holy Month of Ramada-n: A Month When Alla-h's Servants are Invited to be His Special Guests The Holy Prophet (s) is reported to have said:

"…It is a month in which you have been called to the banquet of Alla-h…[1]" Whenever we speak of diya-fah, we refer to the invitation commonly known and highly encouraged in Islam. Our traditions are replete with emphasis on inviting the believers and feeding them in the way of Alla-h (SwT). In fact a guest is also commonly known as 'the beloved of God'. So much emphasis has Islam laid upon such invitation, that there is a prophetic tradition that says: "A guest is a guide to Paradise.[2]"

In other words, serving a guest is so rewarding that it leads one to Paradise. This dictum also informs us that our hospitality should be such that it should qualify for such a reward. In other words, our invitation should not involve things that instead of making us closer to Alla-h (SwT), separate us from His neighborhood.

In another tradition narrated from the Holy Prophet (s), 'disliking a guest' is equated to disliking Alla-h (SwT): "…surely whosoever hates a guest, hates Alla-h, and whosoever hates Alla-h, Alla-h [likewise] Hates him…"[3] Those who assume a Divine spirit always love guests. One of the most outstanding prophets of Alla-h well-known for his great fondness of serving guests is Prophet Ibra-hi-m ('a). History tells us that he would not eat any of his meals until he found a guest to eat with. At times he would have to travel one or two miles away just for this purpose. Due to his great fondness for guests, he was called Abu- Adya-f. Ima-m al-Sa-diq ('a) is reported to have said: 'Indeed Ibra-hi-m was Aba- Adya-f (lit. father of guests); and whenever he had no guest, he would go out searching for them[4].

He is also known to be the first Prophet of Alla-h[5] to have served a guest. Ima-m 'Ali- ('a) is reported to have said: "Prophet Ibra-hi-m ('a) was the first to host a guest…"[6]

Perhaps the reason why the Holy Prophet (s) and the infallible Ima-ms of the Ahl al-Bayt ('a) highly encouraged the believers to invite each other for ifta-r in the Holy month of Ramada-n was to adopt a Divine Attitude in themselves: In the same way as He has invited His believers to His Banquet and venerated them as well, His followers should adopt the same attitude. A very important point to bear in mind is that every invitation should accompany veneration (ikra-

m). In several traditions the phrase ‘ikra-m al-dayf’ has often been mentioned. This means that no ordinary entertainment is encouraged. One must struggle to observe ‘ikra-m’ (lit. veneration). The Holy Qur’a-n alluding to this trait of Prophet Ibra-hi-m (‘a) says:

“Did you receive the story of Abraham’s honored guests?”[7]

Some exegetes of Qur’a-n allude to the fact that the adjective ‘al-mukrami-n’ in the above verse possibly signifies that the guests of Ibra-hi-m were honored by him and hence are qualified as ‘honored’[8].

Veneration should be manifested in all the levels of the invitation. We should therefore identify ‘the etiquette of the intention of our invitation’, ‘the method of invitation’, ‘the banquet served in the invitation’, ‘the method of serving the banquet’, ‘where should the meal be served’, etc. Islam has the answers to all these queries.

Veneration in the phases of every invitation, however, does not mean that one should overspend to ensure that the best meal is served. It rather means to serve within the bounds of the shari-’ah according to one’s capacity. It is noteworthy that when some of the poor companions of the Holy Prophet (s) asked him whether they would be deprived of the reward of invitation if they cannot bear the expenses of hosting a mu’min brother in this holy month, the Holy Prophet (s) said: ‘Protect yourself from Hell Fire even with a piece of date or a glass of water’, thus indicating that it is not necessary for one to serve what is beyond one’s capacity. This however should not lead one who can afford to serve a decent meal to decide that he can be the host of so many believers by distributing dates in the mosque, and thereby earn much more reward than if he were to call one mu’min brother and serve a decent meal at home. In short, one should serve according to his financial capacity.

One of the most significant attitudes we must adopt is to create a meaningful environment in our invitations. Not only should physical food be served, intellectual and spiritual food should also be served. Able speakers on significant issues that deal with self-reform or reforming the society can be invited to serve such spiritual meals. It is then that we may be able to claim to have adopted a Divine attitude in this holy month. In fact, the great scholars of gnosis have clearly stated that ‘the Divine Banquet’ to which the believers have been called in the Holy month of Ramada-n is ‘a spiritual’ repast.

In order to capture an accurate concept of the relation between the host and the guest, it would be useful for us to have a cursory glance over how lexicographers define this relation:

Lexical Origins

Dayf (lit. inclination) is an infinitive noun of the intransitive verbs da-fa, yadi-fu- (lit. he inclined, he is inclining)[9]; and a guest is known as dayf because he inclines to the host as he alights to

be his guest[10].

The word di-ya-fah likewise is an infinitive noun, and it signifies 'the entertainment of a guest or guests'. And the word 'al-ida-fah' is conventionally employed in grammar when a noun is adjoined to another. Some authoritative lexicographers such as Ja-r Alla-h al-Zamakhshari- say that 'a guest is known to be dayf because he is adjoined to the family and fed with them'[11].

Such linkage however is voluntary and attributive (i'tiba-ri-) and not haqi-qi- (real). In sharp contrast to this, the relation of a guest of Alla-h is such that he not only is existentially linked to the Him but is 'the link' ('ayn al-rabt) itself. This is because he has no independent existence, or accurately speaking, no existence of his own. Whatever he is, together with his belongings, all exist and subsist by the volition of Alla-h (SwT). The following verse of the Qur'a-n alludes to this reality:

"O mankind! You are the ones who stand in need of Alla-h, and Alla-h, He is the All-Sufficient, the All-Laudable."[12] Philosophers describe the link between the guests and the Host as ida-fah ishra-qiyyah (emanational link), thus differentiating it from ida-fah ma'qu-liyyah (categorical link), which is between two independent entities.

In his glosses over his philosophical poetry al-Manzu-mah, Mulla- Ha-di- Sabzawa-ri- says: "…Don't you see that every entity is 'sheer linkage to the Origin' ('ayn al-ta'alluq bi al-Mabda') and not categorically linked, and everything other than the Origin is His emanational link…."[13] In simpler terms, unlike the human beings, where the host, the guest, as well as the banquet served to the host are apparently[14] independent, there is no 'independent existence' for other than Alla-h (SwT).

Therefore, He is the Host of the guest, who is served hospitably with contingent existence and subsistence[15]. The relation is rather subtler than that, for there can be no two independent existents ever conceived. The guest together with what he or she is provided with is nothing but Divine action. The Holy Qur'a-n says:

"And God has created you and whatever you do.[16]"

Another highly significant point to bear in mind is that this kind of hospitality is essentially continual. Because of the utter existential poverty of the human being, he always needs to be provided with his contingent existence[17] and its perfections, and thus is always a guest of the Necessary Being. Both the philosophers as well as the mystics ('urafa-') establish that every entity requires Divine Grace every moment. Perhaps the following supplications allude to this subtlety:

1. On Thursday nights we are taught to recite the following ten times: "O One who continually

confers abundance on the creation…[18]"

2. In the supplication of Jawshan al-Kabi-r we address Almighty Alla-h as: "…O Ever Benevolent…[19]"

3. On Eid day, in one of the supplications we are taught to say: "O One who always does good…[20]"

4. And in one of the recommended supplications on the 18th Day of every month we are taught to address Almighty Alla-h as: "O Ever Bountiful & Generous…[21]"

Some Jews, as narrated in the Holy Qur'a-n, in their utter ignorance and disrespect would say 'God's Hands are tied', thus implying the independence of the creation from the Creator[22], an idea later adopted by a group of ignorant Mu'tazilites who relinquishing the teachings of the Ahl al-Bayt ('a) deviated from the right path. The reality, however, as has been established in the relevant texts, is that the relation between the cause and effect is not like the relation of a builder and a building, both of which can exist independently. Rather, the effect always needs the cause to exist.

Having considered the aforesaid introduction, we can classify 'Divine Invitation' (diya-fah ila-hiyyah) into two kinds:

1. al-Diya-fah al-'A-mmah (The General Banquet)

(2. al-Diya-fah al-Kha-sah (The Specific Banquet

The General Banquet

This refers to the Divine banquet that every human being enjoys. Rather every created entity seeks advantage from its provisions. Every entity, both in its existence, as well as subsistence needs the All-Sufficient. Therefore, he always enjoys from the provisions of the All-Merciful. The Holy Prophet (s) is reported to have said:

"…Surely the inhabitants of the earth are guests and whatever they have at their disposal are loans…[23]" Similarly, Ima-m 'Ali- ('a) says in one of his sermons:

"O servants of Alla-h, surely your beings and what you aspire from this world are guests (athwiya-')[24] for whom a time for departure has been specified…[25]"

Therefore the human beings, rather every dependent entity, is a guest of Alla-h (SwT). Appreciating this, al-Baya-ti- in his Adab al-Diya-fah says: "Inviting a guest in religion is a trait among the traits of Alla-h, the Immaculate and Exalted, Who entertains His creatures in the world of existence in the broad sense of the word. He caters for His servants every day in His Dominion, and invites them to His pleasant sustenance…[26]" This kind of invitation is in reality a manifestation of Alla-h's All-comprehensive Mercy (al-Rahmah al-Rahma-niyyah), about which the Holy Qur'a-n says:

["…but My mercy embraces all things…"[27

The Special Banquet

This kind of invitation takes place on specific occasions. It manifests Alla-h's (SwT) special Mercy which despite given to all, is accepted and benefited from, only by the believers. This kind of Mercy is also known as al-rahmah al-rahi-miyyah, which comes in the first verse of Surat al-Hamd: Bismilla-h al-Rahma-n al-Rahi-m. Following are some noteworthy extensions (masa-di-q) of the special Divine banquet:

1. Special invitation in the Holy month of Ramada-n The Holy Prophet (s) is reported to have said:

"…It is a month in which you have been called to the Banquet of Alla-h…"[28] Ima-m Muhammad al-Ba-qir ('a) is reported to have said:

"…The month of Ramada-n is the month of Ramada-n, and those who are fasting therein are the guests of Alla-h…[29]"

2. Special invitation during Hajj and 'Umrah Ima-m al-Sa-diq ('a) is reported to have said: "Surely the guest of Alla-h is the one who performs hajj and 'umrah until he returns back to his house…[30]"

3. Special Invitation during Prayer (sala-h) The above tradition of Ima-m al-Sa-diq ('a) mentions the second kind of guest as: "…and one who is in his prayers, and thus under Divine protection, until he leaves his prayer…[31]" Ima-m al-Sa-diq ('a) is also reported to have said: "Whosoever prays an obligatory prayer and follows it with another, then he is a guest of Alla-h, and it is upon Alla-h to venerate His guest…[32]" Ima-m Hasan al-Mujtaba- ('a) was known to say the following whenever he would reach the door of the mosque: "O God, Your guest is at Your door; O Virtuous One, certainly the bad doer has come to you; so overlook the ugliness that I possess with the beauty that is with You, O Noble One.[33]"

This perhaps reveals that whenever one is in the mosque, one is in reality the special guest of Alla-h.

4. Special Invitation for those Obedient to Alla-h Ibn Fahd al-Hilli- in his 'Uddat al-Da-'i- narrates a sacred tradition (al-hadi-th al-qudsi-) in which Almighty Alla-h tells Prophet Da-wud ('a) the following:

"The obedient people are My guests…[34]"

5. Special Invitation to the Rememberers of Alla-h The Holy Prophet (s) in a sacred tradition is reported to have said: "And surely Alla-h, free is He from imperfections, Says: Those who remember Me are My guests….[35]"

6. Special Invitation to those who Study the Holy Qur'a-n in the Mosque The Holy Prophet (s)

is reported to have said: “No people sit in a house from among the houses of Alla-h studying the Book of Alla-h and exchanging information between themselves, save that the Angels place a shade over them by their wings until they engage in talking about something else…[36]”

7. Special Invitation for one who Visits His Mu’min brother in the way of Alla-h It is reported in a tradition that the Holy Prophet (s) said: “Whosoever visits his brother at his home, (in the way of Alla-h), Alla-h, the Invincible and Majestic, Says: ‘You are My guest and My visitor, and I am bound to entertain you; and surely I have made Paradise obligatory on you through your love for him…[37]”

8. Special Invitation for the za-’ir (visitor) of Ima-m al-Husayn (‘a) In one of the ziya-ra-t of Ima-m al-Husayn (‘a), we are taught to address him saying: “O Aba- ‘Abdilla-h, I am the guest of Alla-h and your guest as well, and Alla-h is my refuge; and you too are my refuge; and for every guest and seeker of refuge there is a banquet; please therefore make my banquet be at this moment that you ask Alla-h to provide me with freedom from Hell Fire; surely He is All-[Hearing of Prayer…[38”

Spiritual Food

These examples inform us that Alla-h’s (SwT) special invitation does not always concern material satisfaction. The food that Alla-h (SwT) serves in the aforementioned specific invitations are spiritual. In fact in some traditions the word ‘ta’a-m’[39] is translated as spiritual food. Consider the following:

In chapter ‘Abasa [80:24], Almighty Alla-h says:

“Then let man look at his food.”[40]

Under this holy verse, the Shi’ite exegete Sayyid Ha-shim Bahra-ni-, in his Tafsi-r al-Burha-n quotes a tradition narrated by Thiqat al-Islam al-Kulayni- in al-Ka-fi [v.1, p.39, tr.8] from Ima-m al-Sa-diq (‘a) as follows: Zayd al-Shahha-m asks Ima-m (‘a) what “man’s food” stands for in the verse above. The Ima-m (‘a) responds saying: “It refers to the knowledge that he acquires, and its source.”

The Holy Prophet (s) is reported to have said: “I spend the night near my Lord, and He feeds me and quenches my thirst.” Commenting on this prophetic tradition, Sayyid ‘Ali- Kha-n al-Madani- in his magnum opus, Riya-d al-Sa-liki-n says: “And it is known that the Prophet’s food near his Lord is not of the kind of animal food, nor is his drink like the drinks that we see before us. Indeed what is meant here is only the ta’a-m (food) of knowledge and the shara-b (drink) of gnosis (ma’rifah).[41]” ‘Alla-mah Majlisi- also, commenting on this tradition says in his Oceans of Lights: “…and undoubtedly that drink is nothing but Divine gnosis, love, and seeking illumination through the lights of the hidden

realm…[42]" The infinitive noun 'shurb' also, which is commonly translated as 'drinking' does not literally mean 'to drink'. Drinking is only a material extension of 'shurb'- which literally denotes "to convey to one's inside"[43] be that by drinking[44] or otherwise. The Holy Qur'a-n for example, uses shurb for the polytheists who inclined to the worship of a cow after Prophet Mu-sa- ('a) went to be the special guest of Alla-h (SwT), in the following way:
"…and their hearts had been imbued with [the love of] the Calf, due to their faithlessness."[45] Observe that the word 'ushribu-' is employed which does not connote any kind of material intake of drink. Ima-m al-Sajja-d ('a) in his supplication against Satan says:
"O Alla-h, saturate our hearts with the rejection of his works and be gentle to us by destroying his stratagems![46]" And in his supplication of 'Arafah he ('a) says:
"Drench my heart with Your obedience when intellects are distracted…[47]" And Ima-m 'Ali- ('a) is reported to have said: "Indeed Alla-h has a wine for His friends, which if they drink, they get intoxicated, and when they get intoxicated, they get overjoyed, and when they get overjoyed they get pleasant, and when they get pleasant, they melt down, and when they melt down, they get pure, and when they get pure, they seek, and when they seek, they find, and when they find they reach, and when they reach, they unite, and when they unite there is no difference between them and their lover.[48]"

Mystics are Guests of Allah

Some mystics like Ibn al-'Arabi- consider the su-fi-s (those who possess the purity of heart and have attained proximity to God) to be the guests of Alla-h (SwT). In his Futu-ha-t al-Makkiyyah he says: "'The mystics (al-su-fiyyah) are guests of Alla-h, for they journeyed from the pleasures of their lower self and everything in sacrifice for the neighborhood of God; so they alighted in His neighborhood, and hence do not perform any action save by the permission of He, Whose neighborhood they alighted as guests, and that is Alla-h; therefore they do not do anything, nor settle down, nor move save by the Divine Command; and one who does not have such a character, he is [still] walking on the way, crossing the springs of his self until he reaches his Lord, and then it is when he is a guest…'"[49]

Closer Look at the Meaning of Diya-fat Allah

Almighty Alla-h is referred to in the verses of the Holy Qur'a-n with different names. Sometimes He is introduced with 'Huwa' (He)[50], sometimes with 'Alla-h'[51], sometimes with 'Rabb'[52] and so on. All these names manifest a certain meaning, which if overlooked may hamper one from understanding the verse perfectly. Authoritative exegetes of Qur'a-n have alluded to this fine reality in their works[53].

Likewise the Ahl al-Bayt (‘a), who represent the guardians of Qur’a-n, and appreciate its kernel, also employ every Divine Name for the purpose of referring to a certain Attribute of Alla-h (SwT). For example, in the aforementioned prophetic tradition the Holy Prophet 7 said: ‘I spend the night near my Lord (‘inda Rabbi-)…’ Here the name ‘Lord’ (Rabb) is specifically employed and thus it refers to the aspect of God’s Lordship, an extension of which is to perfect and train the human beings. In addition, it also alludes to ‘his state of perfection’ in particular. The first alludes to this subtlety. (رَبِّيْ) -person pronoun “ya-” in Rabbi

Therefore, the food and drink in the tradition must be in harmony with what would confer excellence to the Prophet (s). Obviously in his case we speak of higher excellence, for the path towards Absolute Excellence never ends.

With regard to Diya-fat Alla-h, the name ‘Alla-h’ is employed. The name Alla-h is an all-comprehensive Name of God which exemplifies all His Perfect Attributes. That is why it is also known as al-ism al-a‘zam (the Greatest Name). Its origin is commonly known to be the transitive verb ‘alaha’ (he worshipped). Hence it signifies ‘The Worshipped One’ or ‘One Who is worthy of worship’. Consequently, the spiritual food in the month of Ramada-n is one that makes us true worshippers of Almighty Alla-h, those who exemplify all His Sublime Names (al-Asma-’ al-Husna-) in themselves. In one of his sermons, Ima-m al-Khumayni- alludes to this subtlety saying:

“How can we express our gratitude in return for this great Divine Blessing, for the nations have been called to be the guests of Alla-h with all His Names…[54]”

In other words, the Holy month of Ramada-n is a month of becoming ‘Abdulla-h (an obedient servant of Alla-h (SwT)). It is a month of adopting the etiquette of Alla-h (SwT) in the language of tradition or adopting the Divine Color in the language of the Holy Qur’a-n. The Holy Qur’a-n says: “Alla-h’s Color; and whose color is more pleasant than Alla-h’s; and He alone do we worship.[55]” And the Holy Prophet (s) is reported to have said:

“Adopt the etiquette of Allah.[56]” In fact one of the wonderful supplications taught to us by Ima-m Ba-qir al-‘Ulu-m (‘a) is Du’a al-Muba-hilah, in which what we seek are the Beautiful Attributes of Allah.

‘Alla-mah Taba-’taba-’i-, the mentor of leading contemporary authorities in ‘irfa-n, would highly emphasize on reading this du‘a-, ‘for,’ he would say, ‘there is no mention of Paradisal men or women in it.’ Observe the following verses of this radiant supplication: “O Alla-h I seek from You the kind of Your Brilliance (baha-’ika-) which is the Most Brilliant, and every Brilliance of Yours is Very Brilliant; O Alla-h I ask You by Your Brilliance in its entirety….O Alla-h I seek from You the kind of Your Greatness which is the Greatest, and every Greatness of Yours is very

Great; O Alla-h I ask You by Your Greatness in its entirety…"[57] The contemporary mystic-scholar Ayatulla-h Hasan Za-deh Amuli in his treatise 'Light upon Light' while enumerating the requirements of observing good manners in front of Almighty Alla-h, says:

"Observing etiquette before Alla-h also requires that you do not seek other than Him, for that is the worship of the free men (ahrar) and lovers (ahba-b). Such a supplication originates from the exalted aspiration of the servant of God. Those who are lower than this station, ask for their needs according to their lower stages. One of our mentors (may Alla-h be pleased with him) would encourage us to read supplications like Du'a- al-Sahar [another name for du'a- al-muba-hilah] of Hadrat Ima-m al-Ba-qir ('a): (O Alla-h I seek from You the kind of Your Brilliance which is the Most Brilliant…) wherein there is Divine Brilliance, Beauty, Majesty, Greatness, Light, Mercy, Knowledge, Nobility, but no mention about Paradisal damsels (hu-r) or heavenly youthful male servants (ghilma-n). If Paradise is sweet, the Creator of Paradise is sweeter."

Why is the abstinent after Paradise?

Why is he oblivious of the Creator of Paradise?[58] Later in the same treatise this great mystic quotes Misba-h al-Shari-'ah, a masterpiece on the secrets of worship attributed to Ima-m al-Sa-diq ('a), saying:

Ima-m al-Sa-diq ('a) said: "Indeed I called Alla-h and He responded to me, and I forgot my wish, for His Response by giving attention to His servant when he calls upon Him is greater and more magnificent than what the servant wants from Him, even if that be Paradise and its eternal blessings, but none save the Knowledgeable Ones comprehend- those who are worshipful, the Divine lovers, Gnostics, Alla-h's choicest and special servants.[59]" We can also say that since the Holy Prophet (s) was a perfect manifestation of an obedient slave of Alla-h (SwT), this month is a month of getting closer to the Holy Prophet (s) too. Leading mystics have clearly stated that the Holy Prophet (s) is a manifestation of the Greatest Name of God - Alla-h (SwT), which means that he manifests in himself all the Divine Attributes. In other words he is 'Abd of Alla-h. We also bear witness to this during every prayer:

"I bear witness that Muhammad is His Obedient Servant and Messenger."

The Infallible Ima-ms of the Ahl al-Bayt ('a) likewise personify the Divine Attributes. Ima-m 'Ali- ('a) is reported to have said: "We (the Ahl al-Bayt) are the Most Beautiful Names of Alla-h by which when Almighty Alla-h is asked, He Responds.[60]" And it is also reported from Ima-m al-Ba-qir ('a) that:

"We are the Most Beautiful Names of Alla-h, and without knowing us, Alla-h does not accept any deed of His servants.[61]" In a sermon which he delivered on the first day of the Holy

month of Ramada-n, Ima-m ‘Ali- (‘a) while addressing the fasting ones said: “…O you who are fasting, reflect on your affair, for surely you are a guest of your Lord in this month; observe how your attitude is during the night and day, and how you protect the members of your body from disobeying your Lord; and make sure that you do not sleep through the night and be heedless during the day, so that your month ends while your burden still remains on your shoulders, such that when the fasting ones are paid their due, you are among the losers, and while they enjoy prosperity in the neighborhood of their Lord, you are from the expelled ones…”[62] Here one can see that the name ‘Rabb’ is employed, signifying that this invitation deals with training the human being so that he may attain his perfection.

If one was to carefully ponder over what is obligatory and highly recommended in this holy month, he would realize that Alla-h (SwT) out of His overflowing Mercy compelled the human beings to fast and encouraged them to pray so that they may overhaul themselves and start the journey to Alla-h (SwT). Fasting weakens the animal passions and thereby enables the spirit to focus its attention toward the spiritual realms. In the aforesaid sermon, Ima-m ‘Ali- (‘a) enlightens us with guidelines that would enable us to appreciate and benefit from the Divine invitation of the Holy month of Ramada-n. Briefly, he tells us to be careful and not to waste its days in negligence (ghaflah) and its nights in sleep (nawm), for they are opportunities for us to elevate our spirits. If we are not able to appreciate the highest level of this invitation, which some mystics consider as ‘the banquet’, we should at least struggle to appreciate the lower levels, which in reality serve as introductory phases for the highest level. And the path towards appreciating the different levels of the Divine Banquet is fasting. The level of fasting, however, is what would determine the ‘level of Divine Reception’. Muslim ethicians classify the levels of fasting into three[63]:

1. Sawm al-‘Umu-m (the general fast);
2. Sawm al-Khusu-s (the specific fast);
3. Sawmu Khusu-s al-Khusus (the most specific fast).

The General Fast

The general fast is the fast that is obligatory on every one who meets the conditions of fasting. Basically it is to refrain from eating, drinking, copulation, and all those things mentioned by the esteemed jurists in their books of Divine law. To abstain from some of the basic necessities is really a challenge, but its result is so rewarding that it can determine the eternal salvation of the human being. There is a universal law Almighty Alla-h mentions in the Qur’a-n which despite its brevity reveals a world of meaning. After excusing the traveler and ailing one from fasting in this holy month and allowing them to fast after the holy month, He says:

"…God desires ease for you, and He does not desire hardship for you…"[64] Although this clause is brought after a particular case, it should be known that it applies in every dimension of human life. The ambiguity that remains however is that 'what is the definition of 'yusr' (ease), and whether 'one who is healthy' does not feel the pangs of hunger and thirst. To respond to this query, we should look at the following verse:

"For indeed ease accompanies hardship; Indeed ease accompanies hardship."[65]

Most commentators, appreciating the lexical intricacy involved in the verse say that 'difficulty' is interlinked with two kinds of ease- ease in this world and ease in the Hereafter. Or, more accurately, ease in this world, and ease in the realm beyond; the latter, due to our limited comprehension cannot be fathomed, save by one who is endowed with the penetrating sight mentioned in the following verse of Su-rat Qa-f: "You were certainly oblivious of this. We have removed your veil from you, and so your sight is acute today."[66] Some traditions clearly state that Paradise can be achieved (only) through the pains and difficulties of worship in this world. The Holy Prophet (s) is reported to have said:

"Paradise is enveloped by difficulties and Hell Fire is enveloped by desires."[67] Ima-m 'Ali- ('a) is reported to have said in a lengthy tradition: "I swear by Alla-h, surely the fasting one among you enjoys in the gardens of Paradise, and the Angels pray for his success until he breaks his fast."[68]

Observe the tone of the tradition: Ima-m 'Ali- ('a) swears when he informs his true followers about their state when they fast. Many of those who sincerely fast do enjoy these stations in Paradise while they fast, but the curtains that veil them from perceiving the higher realms of existence do not allow them to appreciate this reality. If the curtains were lifted they would witness their exalted state while they still reside in this mortal world.

In the introduction to his anthology 'Shahrulla-h fi- al-Kita-b wa al-Sunnah', when explaining the kind of Divine Banquet that believers should anticipate in the holy month of Ramada-n, Hujjat al-Islam Muhammadi- Ray Shahri- quotes al-Risa-lah al-Majdiyyah of Shaykh Rida- al-Isfaha-ni-, where the latter explains the kind of Divine Repast that the believers are invited to. At one point he says:

Indeed I have heard several times and repeatedly from one who is closest to me in terms of relationship and kinship[69] saying: ' I was busy reciting the well-known Ziya-rat Ami-n Alla-h' in the holy sanctuary in Najaf, and when I reached the verse 'wa ma-wa-'id al-mustat'i-mi-na mu'addah" (and the banquets of those who seek sustenance are ready) and reflected over its meaning and thought about it, I was suddenly made to see a banquet on which lay different kinds of food and drinks, which I had never thought of, and I was eating from them, and in the

course of that state I was contemplating about an Islamic ruling. Surely it is an amazing state which renders one perplexed! The truth is that this is the reality of [Paradisal] food, which does not break the fast…'[70]

Al-Isfaha-ni later continues[71] saying:

"Do not think that the expressions of this servant resembles the imaginations of the poets and their vain ideas or the theopathetic utterances (shatahiyya-t) of the extremist so-called su-fi-s (mutasawwifah). I dare not transcend the bounds of the speech of the Book of God and the Sunnah, or adopt a course in my belief that is other than what Alla-h and His Messenger brought and ordered [us to follow]. What I only mean here is the word of Alla-h in chapter 'Hal Ata-' where Alla-h Says:

"…and their Lord made them drink a pure drink."[72] Therefore despite the apparent hardship of fasting, 'the ease that it accompanies' is inexpressible. Those endowed with deep insight also term hunger as the 'the clouds from which rains of wisdom heavily fall'. In his poetic masterpiece of Islamic laws & their secrets called Nibra-s al-Huda-, Mulla- Ha-di- Sabzawa-ri says:

["And hunger is a rainy cloud of wisdom."[73

The Specific Fast

The specific fast is a more meaningful fast. In this level, not only does the fasting one refrain from those things that he must avoid during the general fast, but he also ensures that every member of his body fasts. In fact, some traditions consider this fast as the fast[74] anticipated from the believers. Observe the following narratives:

1. The Holy Prophet (s) is reported to have said:

"How often is the share of one who fasts, [nothing save] hunger and thirst, and how often is the share of one who stands in prayer [nothing but mere] vigil.[75]"

2. Ima-m 'Ali- ('a) is reported to have said:

"Fasting is to abstain from forbidden acts the way a man refrains from food and drink.[76]"

3. Hadrat Fa-timah Zahra-' ('a) is reported to have said:

"What should the fasting one do with his fast if he did not protect his tongue, hearing, sight and members of his body?[77]"

4. Muhammad bin 'Ajla-n reports from Ima-m al-Sa-diq ('a):

"Fasting from food and drink does not merely mean that the human being should not eat or drink; rather when you fast, then your ears, eyes, tongue, stomach, and private parts must [also] fast; and safeguard your hand and private parts and observe silence most of the time save from what is good to say; and be kind to your servant.[78]"

5. Ima-m Zayn al-'Abidi-n ('a) in his prayer on the arrival of the holy month of Ramada-n humbly prays:

"O Alla-h, bless Muhammad and his Household; inspire us with knowledge of its excellence, veneration of its inviolability, and caution against what You have forbidden within it, and help us to fast in it by our restraining our limbs from acts of disobedience toward You and our employing them in that which pleases You, so that we lend not our ears to idle talk and hurry not with our eyes to diversion, we stretch not our hands toward the forbidden and stride not with our feet toward the prohibited, our bellies hold only what You have made lawful and our tongues speak only what You have exemplified, we undertake nothing but what brings close to Your reward and pursue nothing but what protects from Your punishment! Then rid all of that from the false show of the false ostentatious and the fame seeking of the fame seekers, lest [we associate therein anything with You or seek therein any object of desire but You![79]"

The Most Specific Fast

The highest level of fasting is to disengage oneself from other than Alla-h (SwT). Every thought, speech, action, etc. is solely for Alla-h (SwT). The fasting one in this level ensures that not only does he observe the first two levels of fasting, but protects his heart from other than Alla-h (SwT). Perhaps this noble dictum of Ima-m al-Sa-diq ('a) refers to this very station:

"The heart is the sanctuary of Alla-h; therefore do not make other than Alla-h reside in the sanctuary of Alla-h.[80]"

The result of such a fast is 'the Paradise of Divine Encounter'[81] (Jannat al-Liqa-'). If we ponder over the supplications of the Holy month of Ramada-n and try to understand what kind of reception and banquet we can anticipate, we would realize that it is this level of fasting that we must struggle to attain.

Ima-m Khumayni- in one of his sermons to the seminarians in Najaf al-Ashraf says: "And enlighten the eyes of our hearts with the light of Your vision, until the vision of the hearts tears through the curtains of light and reaches the Source of Greatness (ma'din al-'azamah).'[82]

The banquet of Alla-h (SwT) is that very "source of greatness." God, the Blessed and Exalted, has invited His servants to enter the source of light and greatness."[83]

He also says:

"The reward of such a fast is God, as He has stated: "The fast is for Me and I am its reward."[84] Nothing else could be the reward of such a fast. The Gardens of Blessings would not count as a worthy reward for such a fast. If a man takes fasting to mean closing his mouth to food but opening it for backbiting, and he engages in backbiting until sahar in the warm and friendly company in the nights when there is opportunity and time, such fasting will be of no

benefit and have no effect…"[85]

Elsewhere he also says:

"In this noble month, in which you have been invited to the divine banquet, if you do not gain insight (ma'rifah) about God the Almighty nor insight into yourself, it means that you have not properly participated in the feast of Alla-h and failed to observe the etiquette of the feast...[86]"

Therefore our aspirations should be high, and we should struggle to attain the position which would enable us enter the Divine Feast. In the supplication of Abu- Hamzah al-Thuma-li, which Ima-m al-Sajja-d ('a) taught to his noble companion, we are taught to pray in the following way: "…And I aspire to be a guest near You…"[87]

Notice 'to be a guest near Alla-h' is quite different from being just an ordinary guest. In the above verse we seek that kind of insight and knowledge that is obtained lada- Alla-h - in the neighborhood of Alla-h; In simpler terms, we are not just after any kind of knowledge, but that which is Divinely inspired, which is also known as al-'ilm al-ladunni- and is, according to the Qur'a-n, a product of piety; it is not a knowledge acquired from a human tutor.

It is, using the words of the Holy Prophet (s) 'a light that Alla-h infuses in the heart of whosoever He wishes to guide.'[88] This is the kind of knowledge, say some exegetes of the Qur'a-n, that the following verse speaks about:

"Be God-wary and God shall teach you, and God has knowledge of all things."[89]

And the path towards achieving taqwa-, as clearly specified in the Holy Qur'a-n, is siya-m (fasting). The Holy Qur'a-n says: "O you who have faith! Prescribed for you is fasting as it was prescribed for those who were before you, so that you may attain taqwa-."[90] Hence, 'fasting' is a factor that can refine the spirit of the human being so much that he can qualify to be taught directly by Alla-h (SwT). Some supplications teach us to ask Almighty Alla-h to be hosted in 'paradise' in this month. In one of the supplications recommended during sahar time of the nights of the Holy month of Ramada-n, we ask Almighty Alla-h for Paradise:

"…And very you have made obligatory for every guest to be entertained; and I am Your guest; therefore make my banquet tonight to be 'Paradise', O the Bestower of Paradise, O Bestower of forgiveness, and there is no strength nor any power save by You…"[91]

It is possible that the reason why this supplication was followed by the two sublime names of Alla-h -'Ya- Wahha-b al-Jannah' and 'Ya- Wahha-b al-maghfirah' was to ask Alla-h (SwT) for Paradise, and thus, necessarily also ask Him for relief from the Hell Fire, which enables one to enter Paradise. In other words, we are trying to seek the same 'qira-' (meal served to the guest) that we seek in holy precincts of Ka'bah during the seventh round of our circumambulation around the Ka'bah. We are taught to say:

“O Alla-h, the house is Your house; and this servant is You servant; and this is where one who seeks Your Refuge from Hellfire stands; O Alla-h, surely I have stopped at Your courtyard; therefore make my banquet to be Your forgiveness.”[92] In fact there is clear mention of seeking salvation from the Hell Fire in many supplications that we are taught to read in the Holy month of Ramada-n. In the famous du‘a- that most of us recite after every prayer, we say: “O Exalted One, O All-Great, O All Forgiving, O All-Merciful….bless me with freedom from the Hell Fire.”[93] And during the a-‘ma-l of laylat al-qadr we are taught to open the Holy Qur’a-n and say: “…and in it is Your Great Name and Your Most Beautiful Names and that which should be feared and hoped for, that you make me from those whom you have freed from Hell Fire…”[94]

Another very important point to bear in mind is that since these supplications were from infallible masters, the Paradise sought is not that which the laity like the author aspire, but levels beyond.

The mystics have classified Paradise into different levels, the highest of which is Jannat al-liqa-’ (Paradise of meeting the Lord). And this is what a true believer’s delight is in. The following prophetic tradition alludes to this verity: “For the one fasting there are two joys: joy [when breaking his fast, and joy when he meets His Lord.”[95

Have You Considered the Lovers in the Cave?

Sometimes the Beloved invites His lovers to a banquet and hosts them for a very long duration in the state of ‘union’ in which state, nothing is beheld save the Beloved. The self also subsides. According to some leading mystics like the late Ayatulla-h Sha-ha-ba-di- - the mentor of Ima-m Khumayni- in mysticism, the companions of the cave were privileged with such union. In volume 2 of his Rashaha-t al-Ma’a-rif, a collection of transcripts of his lessons, while describing a group of the muqarrabu-n (those near to Alla-h) he says:

“A group among the human beings who are the near ones of God, clad in the attire of subsistence through God (baqa-’ bi Alla-h) in the world of annihilation (fana-’), live to perfect other human beings; another faction among the same group (of human beings), however, in their spiritual struggle and exercises are overtaken by the state of Divine Attraction[96] (jadhbah), and like the companions of the cave, are thought by people to be dead; no; rather, out of intense love for God they have been overtaken by Divine attraction and are unaware of themselves; out of extreme Divine love they remain for three hundred and nine years in that state; and the Lord protected their bodies, until He wanted them to come back to their previous state of attention. This is the state of wila-yah (nearness to God) and complete proximity to God...”[97]

These men despite being politically aware and active, were so spiritually elevated, that they were overtaken by Alla-h's (SwT) attraction for more than three hundred years, in which state they saw nothing but Alla-h (SwT). They were oblivious of themselves too. Some authoritative mystics like Ima-m Khumayni- opine that this state is no more 'a banquet'. Here there is no more guest, host and a banquet. Only the Host remains. Rather, the Host who only was, "is". In one of his sermons Ima-m Khumayni- says:

"Right from the Holy Prophet (s) until the Ima-m of time (upon whom be Alla-h's peace) all were afraid of sinning. Their sin was not what you and I possess. They comprehended such greatness that paying attention to the world of plurality was deemed as a major sin to them. Hadrat Sajja-d ('a), as has been narrated, would recite the following supplication until morning: "O Alla-h I implore Thee to save me from the house of deception and help me return to the abode of joy and provide me with readiness for death before the soul is taken.[98]"

This indeed is a great issue. When they consider themselves in front of the Greatness of God, they behold that they are nothing and have nothing. So is the reality. Other than Him there is no one and nothing. When they focus their attention to the realm of plurality, even if that is by Divine command [they consider themselves at fault]. This is the reason why the following saying is attributed to the Holy Prophet (s): "In order that my heart should not gather rust, I seek the forgiveness of God seventy times a day."[99]

He enjoyed a different station form that which we possess. They benefited from the Divine Banquet, and soared beyond that too. They were in the Divine Banquet and because they would comprehend their presence before God and at the same time call the people to the truth, they would sense turbidity in the heart. Paying attention to the manifestations of God, switching the attention from the Unseen to the visible world - i.e. to the Divine manifestations, despite their divine nature, [for they perceive the entities as Divine manifestations] is a great sin [for them]. This is because since the unseen (ghayb) that they seek is 'The perfect connection to God' (kama-l al-inqita-' ilayk), when they pay attention to the manifestations, it is a great sin...This is an abode of deception for Ima-m al-Sajja-d A. Paying attention to the celestial realm [too] is the abode of deception. Paying attention to the realm beyond malaku-t also is da-r al-ghuru-r (the abode of deception). Attention to Almighty God, such that there is no more any banquet comprehensible is specific to the perfect friends of God. In that realm, there is no Divine Banquet any more.[100]"

Then Ima-m Khumayni- pointing to a significant reality says:

"May God make us such that we do not deny these issues. Among the impediments of the path of humanness is to deny the stations of the wayfarers and confine everything to what we

”[commonly comprehend.[101

And All Praises belong to Alla-h, the Lord of the Universe.

Holy Month of Ramada-n 1425 AH [lunar]

Holy Proximity of Bibi Ma’su-mah (‘a)

Qum al-Muqaddasah

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Notes:

[1] al-Iqba-l, vol. 1, pg. 26

[2] Biha- r al-Anwa-r, vol. 75, pp. 460-461.

[3] al-Mahajjat al-Bayda-', vol. 3, pg. 32.

[4] Tafsi-r Nu-r al-Thaqalayn, vol. 1, pg. 555.

[5]It should be noted that 'first' here is in terms of time. Otherwise, it is the Muhammadan light in terms of the existential hierarchy, who by Divine permission, is the first host. This again is in terms of the world of 'contingent existence'. Otherwise there is none save Alla-h Who is and was and will be the Host, and 'a second' to such a Host cannot be comprehended at all.

[6] Biha- r al-Anwa-r, vol. 12, pg. 4.

[7] Holy Qur'a-n, 15:24

[8] See Tafsi-r Majma' al-Baya-n, vol. 9, pg. 23 and Tafsi-r al-Kashsha-f, vol. 4, pg. 401.

[9] It is also employed to mean, 'he alighted to be a guest'. For example, when it is said 'adi-fuhu' it means 'I alighted at his abode as a guest.'

[10] Mufrada-tu Alfa-z al-Qur'a-n, pg. 513.

[11] Lane, EW Lane's Arabic-English Lexicon.

[12] Holy Qur'a-n, 35:15.

[13] al-Manzu-mah, vol. 2, pg. 468.

[14] We say 'apparently' because 'the humanly host, guest, as well as the banquet' all come under contingent existence, which has no dependence whatsoever. Hence in reality there isn't and can never be any host in the independent sense of the word other than Alla-h (SwT).

[15] This can be understood by trying to appreciate the relation between the Primary Cause and every dependent being in the universe. The relation is not like the human builder and his building, who after having built a beautiful edifice, is able to live independent of the edifice and has no existential control over the same, nor does the building need him to exist. If he were to

die, the building would still remain erect.

[16] Holy Qur'a-n, 37:96. This is one of the most explicit verses that endorses the belief accepted by the Ima-mites who neither believe that they are coercively driven by Alla-h (SwT) in every action they do, nor believe that they have complete independence in their action. They rather believe that whatever they do is volitional, but entirely by Alla-h's (SwT) power. Note the subtlety that while the action is attributed to the doer (ta'malu-n), Alla-h (SwT) says that He is the One who Creates the action chosen by His servant.

[17] Contingent beings are those that do not exist essentially nor are they impossible to exist. Therefore in order for them to exist, they always need a cause. All the created beings are such.

[18] Mafa-ti-h al-Jina-n, vol. 1, pg. 33.

[19] Al-Balad al-Ami-n, vol. 1, pg. 405.

[20] al-Iqba-l, vol. 2, pg. 212.

[21] Al-'Adad al-Qawiyyah, vol. 1, pg. 163.

[22] This refers to verse 5:63 of the Holy Qur'a-n. Ima-m Khumayni- has a beautiful note on this issue in his commentary on tradition no. 31 [On the Indescribability of God] of his Forty Traditions.

[23] Biha- r al-Anwa-r, vol. 77, pg. 187.

[24] Athwiya-' is the plural of thawi- which in the Arabic is 'a guest' (Ibn Maytham al-Bahra-ni-, Ikhtiya-ru Misba-h al-Sa-liki-n, pg. 287.

[25] Nahj al-Bala-ghah, sermon 129.

[26] Adab al-Siya-fah, pg. 13.

[27] Holy Qur'a-n, 7:156.

[28] al-Iqba-l, vol. 1, pg. 26.

[29] Fada-'il al-Ashhur al-Thala-thah, pg. 123.

[30] al-KhiSa-l, vol. 1, pg. 127.

[31] al-KhiSa-l, vol. 1, pg. 127.

[32] al-Ka-fi-, vol. 2, pg. 241.

[33] al-Anwa-r al-Bahiyyah, pg. 87.

[34] 'Uddat al-Da-'i-, pg. 252.

[35] Irsha-d al-Qulu-b, pg. 58.

[36] Mustadrak al-Wasa-'il, vol. 3, pg. 313.

[37] al-Ka-fi-, vol. 2, pg. 176.

[38] Mafa-ti-h al-Jina-n, pg. 292.

[39] The verb ta'ima literally stands for 'he tasted'.

[40] Holy Qur’a-n, 80:124.

[41] Riya-d al-Sa-liki-n, vol. 1, pg. 280.

[42] Biha- r al-Anwa-r, vol. 6, pg. 208.

[43] al-Tahqi-q fi- Kalima-t al-Qur’a-n al-Kari-m, vol. 6, pg. 30.

[44] EW Lane, EW Lane Arabic-English Lexicon, see under the root word shi-n ra- ba-.

[45] Holy Qur’a-n, 2:93.

[46] Ima-m al-Sajja-d (‘a), Sahi-fat al-Sajja-diyyah (Eng. Edition), sup. 17, pg. 63.

[47] Ima-m al-Sajja-d (‘a), Sahi-fat al-Sajja-diyyah (Eng. Edition), sup. 47, pg. 185.

[48] This tradition has been narrated by many authorities in mysticism such as Mulla- Ha-di- Sabzawa-ri- in his Sharh al-Asma-’ (pg. 534), Ayatulla-h Hasan Zadeh Amuli- in his Nu-r ‘ala- Nu-r (pg. 89), Mawla- Nara-qi- in his Ja-mi‘ al-Sa‘a-da-t (vol. 3, pg. 152).

[49] al-Futu-ha-t al-Makkiyyah, vol. 9, pg. 416.

[50] Holy Qur’a-n, 112:1.

[51] Holy Qur’a-n, 2:255.

[52] Holy Qur’a-n, 1:2.

[53] This can be tangibly observed in the excellent exegesis of ‘Alla-mah Taba-’taba-’i’s Tafsi-r al-Mi-za-n.

[54] Sahi-feye Ima-m, vol. 18, pg. 497.

[55] Holy Qur’a-n, 2:138.

[56] Sharh Du‘a-’ al-Saba-h, pg. 87.

[57] Mafa-ti-h al-Jina-n, pg. 184.

[58] Nu-run ‘ala- Nu-r, pg. 80.

[59] Nu-run ‘ala- Nu-r, pg. 81.

[60] Madi-nat al-Ma‘a-jiz, vol. 1, pg. 556 .

[61] al-Mukhtasar, pg. 129.

[62] Fada-’il al-Ashhur al-Thala-thah, pp. 107-108.

[63] Many scholars of ethics have adopted this classification. Those familiar with Arabic/Persian literature can refer to vol. 2 al-Mahajjah of al-Ka-sha-ni- and Asra-r al-Hikam (vol. 2, pg. 568) of Mulla- Ha-di- Sabzwa-ri-.

[64] Holy Qur’a-n, 2:185 .

[65] Holy Qur’a-n, 94:5-6.

[66] Holy Qur’a-n, 50:22.

[67] Rawdat al-Wa-‘izi-n, vol. 2, pg. 421.

[68] Mishka-t al-Anwa-r, pg. 170.

[69] It is highly probable says Rayshari-, that he is referring to his father who was a well known saint in his time.

[70] Shahrulla-h fi- al-Kita-b wa al-Sunnah, pg. 21.

[71] Shahrulla-h fi- al-Kita-b wa al-Sunnah, pg. 21.

[72] Holy Qur'a-n, 76:21.

[73] Nibra-s al-Huda-, pg. 236.

[74] In terms of obligation, however, the Islamic Jurists unanimously consider the first fast to be sufficient. However, for those who worship Alla-h (SwT) to attain His proximity such a fast would not avail them save being absolved from their obligation.

[75] al-Ama-li-, pg. 166.

[76] Ibid., vol. 39, pg. 294.

[77] Mustadrak al-Wasa-'il, vol. 7, pg. 366.

[78] Wasa-'il al-Shi-'ah, vol. 10, pg. 165 .

[79] Ima-m al-Sajja-d ('a), al-Sahi-fah al-Sajja-diyyah, sup. 44, pp. 143-144.

[80] Biha- r al-Anwa-r, vol. 70, pg. 25.

[81] Some scholastic theologians being ignorant of the truth of meeting Alla-h have resorted to different fruitless interpretations. Ayatulla-h Maliki Tabri-zi- in his treatise on Meeting Alla-h (Risa-leye Liqa-'ulla-h) criticizes them, saying: "One who tries to understand with a mind free from foreign ambiguities that penetrate the heart, and looks at these different expressions would be convinced that the meaning of meeting God is not encountering His reward, examples of which are 'entering Paradise', 'eating apples', 'sharing the company of heavenly damsels', etc. How is this meaning related to such expressions? If one can attribute the word liqa-' to a meaning of remote relevance, what should he do with regard to the other words [used to indicate the encounter of God]? For example, how should he translate the phrase 'looking at God's countenance'? How should we interpret the statement 'wa alhiqni- binu-rika'l abhaj' (and attach me to your most delightful light)? Can we say that the statement 'And enlighten the eyes of our hearts with the light of their looking at You' means 'to eat pears?

[82] This is a reference to a part of the well-known whispered supplication of Sha'ba-n called Muna-ja-t Sha'ba-niyyah. See Mafa-ti-h al-Jina-n, pg. 158.

[83] Jiha-d-e-Akbar, pg. 45.

[84] It should be noted that this dictum is translated in two different ways. From the context of Ima-m's speech, it is apparent that he reads the dictum as 'wa ana ujza- bihi' (I am its reward) unlike when it is read as 'wa ana- ajzi- bihi' (and I grant its reward). Other divine scholars such as Mulla- Ha-di- Sabzawa-ri- in his Asra-r al-Hikam and Usta-d Shuja-'i- in his Maqa-la-t

[vol. 3, pg. 127] have translated this dictum is a similar manner. Nevertheless, both the meanings are correct.

[85] Jiha-d-e-Akbar, pg. 44.

[86] Jiha-d-e-Akbar, pg. 39.

[87] Mafa-ti-h al-Jina-n, pg. 194.

[88] al-Mahajjat al-Bayda-', vol. 5, pg. 45.

[89] Holy Qur'a-n, 2:282.

[90] Holy Qur'a-n, 2:283.

[91] Mafa-ti-h al-Jina-n, pg. 201.

[92] al-Mahajjat al-Bayda-', vol. 2, pg. 171.

[93] Mafa-ti-h al-Jina-n, pg. 176.

[94] Mafa-ti-h al-Jina-n, pg. 225.

[95] al-Mahajjat al-Bayda-', vol. 2, pg. 122.

[96] Some of the Muslim mystic saints would fall into such a swoon for a long duration of many days and would then come into realization and attention to this world of plurality. Such a state is narrated about the Egyptian mystic poet Ibn al-Fa-rid.

[97] Haydar Tahra-ni- (mu'jizeh), Lessons of Ayatulla-h Mi-rza- Mu-hammad 'Ali- Sha-ha-ba-di-, Rashaha-t al-Ma'a-rif, vol. 2, pp. 9-10, published by Intisha-ra-t-e-Paya-me Aza-d, first print.

[98] Mafa-ti-h al-Jina-n, pg. 236.

[99] Chehel Hadi-th, pg. 342.

[100] Sahi-feye Ima-m, vol. 20, pp. 267-269.

.[101] Sahi-feye Ima-m, vol. 20, pg.269