

Interpretation of Surah al-Hamd

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[Preface]

I have been asked to say something on the exegesis of Surah al-Hamd. The fact is that the exegesis of the Qur'an is not a thing of which we may be able to acquit ourselves well. In every period of Islamic history the top scholars including both the Sunni and the Shi'ites have compiled a large number of books on this subject. But every scholar has written his book from the angle with which he was well conversant and has interpreted only one aspect of the Qur'an. Still it cannot be said whether even that aspect has been covered fully.

During the past fourteen centuries the gnostics such as Muhyuddin ibn Arabi, Abdur Razzaq Kashani, Mulla Sultan Ali etc. have written excellent commentaries on the Qur'an and dealt well with the subject in which they had specialized. But what they have written is not the exegesis of the Qur'an. At the most it can be said that they have exposed some aspects of it. The same case is with Tantawi, Jawhari, Sayyid Qutb etc. They have compiled their exegeses in a different style, but their books are also not the exegesis of the Qur'an in every sense.

There are other interpreters of the Qur'an who do not belong to either of the above mentioned two groups. The Majma'ul Bayan by Shaykh Tabrasi is an excellent commentary and combines what the Sunni and Shi'ah authorities have said. There are so many other commentaries, but they all cover only certain aspects of the Qur'an. The Qur'an is not a book all aspects of which may be exposed by us or by anybody else. There are some Qur'anic sciences which are beyond our comprehension. We can understand only one angle or one form of the Qur'an. Others are to be explained by the Imams who were the real exponents of the Holy Prophet's teachings.

For some time past there have appeared some interpreters of the Qur'an who are totally unfit for the task. They want to attribute their own wishes and desires to the Qur'an. Surprisingly enough even some leftists and communists pretend to be partisans of the Qur'an and show interest in its interpretation. In fact they do so only to promote their evil designs. Otherwise they have nothing to do with the Qur'an; let alone its interpretation. They just want to pass their doctrines under the name of the teachings of Islam.

That is why I say that those who do not possess enough knowledge of Islam and the young men who are not fully conversant with the Islamic problems, have no right to meddle in the exposition of the Qur'an. But if they still try to misinterpret it for some ulterior motive of theirs, our youth should ignore their interpretation and pay no attention to it. Islam does not allow anybody to interpret the Qur'an according to his personal opinion or private judgment. Anybody who tries to impose his own opinion on the Qur'an is either a materialist misinterpreting the Qur'an or is one of those who give some spiritual meaning to the Qur'anic verses. Both these groups interpret the Qur'an according to their own wishes. Therefore it is necessary to keep away from both of them. As far as the Qur'an is concerned our hands are tied. Nobody is allowed to attribute his opinion to the Qur'an and claim that the Qur'an says so.

The interpretation which I am going to give is only a possible interpretation. When I explain any verse of the Qur'an, I do not claim that the verse means only what I say. I do not say anything for certain. I am hinting a possibility only.

As some gentlemen have asked me to say something on the exegesis of the Qur'an, I have decided to speak briefly once a week about the Surah al-Hamd. I would like to repeat once again that the interpretation which I give is nothing more than a possibility. I do not want at all to interpret the Qur'an according to my own opinion or wish.

It is possible that the 'bismillah' in the beginning of each surah of the Qur'an is related to the verses following it. Generally it is said that the bismillah is related to a verb understood (omitted), but probably it is related to the surah following it. For example, in the Surah al-Hamd it is related to al-Hamdu lillah. In this case the whole sentence would mean that:

With the name of Allah all praises belong to Him. Now what does a name signify. It is a mark or a sign. When man gives a name to any person or thing, that name serves as a symbol for the recognition of that person or thing. If any person is named Zayd, people can recognize him by that name.

Allah's Names are the Symbols of His Person

Whatever little information man can get about the Divine Being, he can acquire it through His names. Otherwise man has no access to His Person. Even the Holy Prophet did not have, though he was the most learned and the noblest of all human beings. No one other than Him can know Him. Man can have access only up to the Divine names.

The knowledge of the Divine names has several grades. Some of them we can comprehend. Others can be grasped only by the Holy Prophet and some of his chosen followers.

The Whole World is a Name of Allah

The whole world is a name of Allah, because the name of a thing is its sign or symbol and as all the things existing are the signs of Allah, it may be said that the whole world is His name. At the most it can be said that very few people fully understand how the existing things are the signs of Allah. Most people know only this much that nothing can come into existence automatically.

Nothing, the existence of which is only possible, can come into existence automatically.

It is intellectually clear and every body knows it intuitively that anything the existence and non-existence of which is equally possible, cannot come into existence automatically and that there must be an external force to bring it into existence.

The first cause of bringing into existence all possibly existing things must be an eternal and self-existing being. If it is supposed that the imaginary upper space, and it must be imaginary because it is a non-entity, has always existed, then it possibly can neither automatically turn into anything nor anything can come into existence in it automatically.

The assertion of some people that in the beginning the whole world was an infinite vacuum (anything being infinite is questionable in itself) in

which subsequently appeared a sort of steam from which everything has originated, does not stand to reason, for without an external cause no new thing can appear nor can one thing change into another thing.

For example, water does not freeze nor does it boil without an external cause. If its temperature remains constant and does not go below 0 degrees nor above 100 degrees it will always remain water. In short, the existence of an external cause is essential for every change. Similarly nothing the existence of which is only possible can come into existence without an external cause. These facts are self-evident truths.

All Existing Things are a Sign of Allah

This much can be easily understood by all that all existing things are a sign and a name of Allah. We can say that the whole world is Allah's name. But the case of this name is different from that of the names given to the ordinary things. For example, if we want to indicate a lamp, or a motor car to someone, we mention its name. The same thing we do in the case of man or Zayd. But evidently that is not possible in the case of the Being possessing infinite sublime qualities.

Anything Which is Finite is a Possibly Existing Thing

If an existing thing is finite, it is a possibly existing thing. As Allah's existence is infinite, He should evidently possess all sublime qualities, for if he lacked even one quality, He would become finite and as such possibly existing. The difference between a possibly existing being and an essentially existing being is that the latter is infinite and absolute in every respect. If all the sublime qualities of the essentially existing being were not infinite, that being would not be the essentially existing being and the source of all existence. All the things caused by this source of existence are endowed with the qualities possessed by the essentially existing Being, but on a smaller scale and in varying degrees. What is endowed with these qualities to the utmost possible degree is called the Grand Name or al-ism al-a'zam.

What is the Grand Name?

The Grand Name is that name or sign that is somewhat endowed with all the Divine qualities to the greatest possible degree. As compared to other existing things it possesses the Divine qualities most perfectly, though no existing thing lacks them completely, for everything has been endowed with them according to its nature and capacity. Even those material things which appear to us to be totally devoid of all knowledge and power are not really so and possess some degree of perception and knowledge.

All Existing Things Glorify Allah

As we are veiled, we cannot perceive it. but it is a fact that the sublime qualities are reflected even in the things lower than man and animals. At the most these qualities are reflected in them according to the capacity of their existence. Even the lowest creations possess the quality of perception. The Qur'an says:

There is not a thing that does not praise Him, but you do not understand their praise. (Surah Bani Isra'il, 17:44)

As we are veiled and do not understand the praise of all existing things, the ancient scholars did not know that the imperfect beings also possessed perception. that is why they took this praise to mean the praise indicated by the creation of all things, but in fact this verse has nothing to do with that kind of praise, which is quite a different matter as we already know. According to a tradition once the people heard the pebbles in the Holy Prophet's hand praising Allah.

They could understand the praise of the pebbles, but this praise was such that the human ears were quite unfamiliar with it. It was in the pebbles' own language, not in any human language. Hence, it is clear that the pebbles possess perception, although of course according to their existential capacity.

Man who considers himself to be the source of all kinds of perception, thinks that other things are devoid of it, but that is not a fact, although it is true that man has a higher degree of it. Being veiled, we are unaware of the perception of other things and their praising Allah, and think that there is no such thing.

There are Many Things that we do not Know

There are many things about which man thinks that they do not exist, but in fact they do, though we may be unaware of them. Every day new discoveries are being made, Formerly it was believed that the plants were inanimate objects, but now it is said that they have a hearing system. If you put the tissues of a tree in hot water and pass a voice through them, there will be a reaction and you will hear some voices in response.

We do not know how far this report is correct. But it is certain that this world is full of voices and sounds. The whole world is living and is a name of Allah. You yourselves are a name of Allah. Your tongues and your hands are names of Allah.

All Movements are the Names of Allah

The praise you make of Allah is His name. When you go to the mosque after washing your feet, you go with the name of Allah. You cannot part with the name of Allah because you yourselves are His name. The beat of pulse, the throbbing of heart and the blowing of wind are all names of Allah. Perhaps that is what is meant by the names of Allah in this verse.

There are many other verses in which the phrase: "*With the name of Allah*" has been used. As we have said, everything is the name of Allah, and the name has passed away in the named. We think that we have an independent existence, but that is not a fact.

If that Being, who has brought everything into existence by means of His will and the reflection of the light of His glory withdrew His light for a moment all the existing things would be annihilated immediately and return to their pre-existing state. Allah has created the whole world by the light of His glory which is the true nature of existence and the name of Allah. The Qur'an says:

Allah is the light of the heavens and the earth.(24:35)

Everything is illuminated by His light. Everything has appeared by dint of His light. This appearance itself is a reflection of His light. Man's

appearance is also a light. Therefore man himself is a light. Animals are also a light of Allah's glory. The existence of the heavens and the earth is a light from Allah. This light has so passed away in Allah that the Qur'an has said: Allah is the light of the heavens and the earth.

It has not said that the heavens and the earth are illuminated by the light of Allah. The reason is that the heavens and the earth are a nonentity. Nothing in our world has an independent existence of its own. In other words there is nothing here that is self-existing. In fact there is no existent other than Allah, That is why the Qur'an says: With the name of Allah all praise belongs to Allah. 'With the name of Allah say: He is Allah the One'. Perhaps the Qur'an does not ask you to utter the words: 'With the name of Allah, the Compassionate, the Merciful ' It actually mentions a fact.

By asking you to say so with the name of Allah, it means that your saying so is also a name of Allah. The Qur'an has said: 'Whatever there is in the heavens and the earth glorifies Him.' It has not said whoever there is in the heavens and the earth glorifies Him. That means that everything whether animate or inanimate praises and glorifies Allah, for all are a reflection of the light of His glory and it is His glory that causes all movements.

Everything in the World is A Manifestation of His Glory

The cause of all that occurs in the world is the manifestation of Allah's glory. Everything is from Him and everything returns to Him. No creature has anything of its own. If anybody claims to have anything of his own, he virtually wants to compete with the source of Divine light, while as a matter of fact even his life is not of his own. The eyes you have are not your own.

The light of Divine manifestation has brought them into being. The praise of Allah that other people or we express, is a Divine name, or it is because of a Divine name. That is why the Qur'an says: With the name of Allah and praise belongs to Allah.

The Word Allah is a Comprehensive Manifestation of Divine Glory

It is a manifestation that includes all manifestations. Allah's names, Rahman (the Compassionate) and Rahim (the Merciful) are the manifestations of this manifestation.

Because of his mercy and benevolence Allah has bestowed existence in the existing things. This is itself is a show of mercy and kindness. Even the existence conferred on the harmful and obnoxious things is a show of His favor, which is common to all existing things. It is the manifestation of the glory of His name, Allah, which is a true manifestation of His glory in every sense.

Allah is a station. It is a comprehensive name, which is itself a manifestation or Divine glory in every sense. Otherwise the Divine Being has no name apart from His Essence or Person. Allah His names including Allah, Rahman, and Rahim are only the manifestations of his glory. In the 'bismillah' His names Rahman and Rahim have been added to His comprehensive name Allah, because they signify His self-sustaining attributes of mercy, favor and compassion. His attributes of retribution, anger etc. are subservient to these attributes.

The praise of any kind of excellence is actually the praise of Allah. When a man eats something and says how delicious it is, he praises Allah unconsciously. When a man says about another man that he is a very fine man or that he is a great scholar or philosopher, he praises Allah because a philosopher or a scholar has nothing of his own. Whatever there is, it is a manifestation of Allah's glory. The man who understands this fact, he and his intellect are also a manifestations of Allah's glory.

No Praise is of Anyone Else's Praise

Whenever we praise anybody, we say that he has such and such good qualities. As everything belongs to Allah, the commendation of any merit of any person or a thing virtually amounts to praising Allah. We, being veiled, do not realize this truth and think that we are praising Zayd or Amr, the sunshine or the moonlight. When veil is lifted we will come to know that all praises belong to none but Allah and that everything we praise is nothing but a manifestation of Allah's glory.

The Qur'an says: Allah is the light of the heavens and the earth, In other words, every excellence and every sublime quality, wherever it may be, is attributable to Allah. He is the cause of the whole world and the whole world is a manifestation of His glory. The things we do, are not actually done by us. Addressing the Holy Prophet Allah said in the Qur'an:

You did not throw (the pebbles), when you threw (them), but Allah threw (them). (Surah al-Anfal, 8:17)

Consider the words: '*You threw*' and '*You did not throw*.' Both of these phrases are a manifestation of 'but Allah threw.' There is another verse that says:

Those who swear allegiance to you, swear allegiance only to Allah. (Surah al-Fath,, 48:10)

Being veiled as we are, we do not understand the truth these verses imply. As a matter of fact we all are under a veil except the Holy Prophet who was educated direct by Allah and the Holy Imams of the Holy Prophet's Progeny who received training from him.

So there is a possibility that the preposition 'bi' and the noun 'Ism' in 'bismillah' may be related to 'al-Hamdu; meaning, 'With the name of Allah all praises belong to Him.' It is a manifestation of the glory of Allah that draws every praise to it and does not allow any praise to be a praise of anyone other than Allah, for howsoever you may try, you will not find anyone existing other than Him.

Therefore whatever praise you express, it will be a praise of Allah. It may be noted that praise is always made of positive qualities. The defects and faults being negative qualities, do not actually exist. Everything that exists has two aspects. It is positive aspect that is praised and it is always free from defects and faults.

There exists only one excellence and one beauty and that is the excellence and beauty of Allah. We should try to understand this truth. Once we are convinced of this fact, everything else will be easy. As a matter of fact it is easy to acknowledge something verbally, but it is difficult to persuade oneself to believe even a rational thing firmly.

To Believe Something Intellectually is One Thing and to be Convinced of it is Another

To be convinced of the truth of a thing is different from believing it intellectually because of the existence of some scientific arguments to prove it. The impeccability of the Prophets was due to their firm conviction. A man who is fully convinced of a truth, cannot act contrary to his conviction.

If you were sure that somebody was standing near you with a drawn sword in his hand and that he would kill you if you uttered a single word against him, you would never say anything against him because your first concern was to save your life. In other words, as far as this matter was concerned, you were so to say infallible.

A man who was convinced that if he slandered anybody behind his back, his backbiting would assume the shape of a dreadful animal with a long tongue stretching from the slanderer to the slandered and this animal would be crushing him, he would never indulge in backbiting anybody. If a man was sure that "*slandering is the food of the dogs of hell*" and the slanderer would be ceaselessly devoured by them, he would never stoop to this vice. We occasionally indulge in backbiting only because we are not fully sure of the consequences of this bad habit.

Man's Deeds Will Assume a Concrete Shape

If man was convinced that whatever deeds he performed would be embodied in the hereafter, the good deeds assuming a good shape and the bad one a bad shape, and that he would have to give an account of all that he did, he would not commit a bad deed even unconsciously. We need not go into the details of this affair.

It is enough to say that everything will be reckoned. If a person slandered anyone else, he would be accountable for doing that. If anybody harassed or injured the faithful, he would go to Hell. The good men would get Paradise. One must be fully convinced and sure of this procedure. It is not enough to read the law in the books or to understand it rationally. Knowing and understanding are quite different from heart-felt conviction. By heart I mean the real heart, not an organ of the body.

Man often knows and understands a truth, but not being firmly convinced of it, does not act according to what a belief in it requires. He acts only when he gets fully and firmly convinced. It is this firm conviction that is called faith. Simply knowing a Prophet is of no use. What is beneficial is having faith in him. It is not enough to prove the existence of Allah. What is necessary is to believe in Him and to obey His commandments wholeheartedly. With the true faith, everything becomes easy.

If a man was convinced that there was a Being who was the source of this world, that man was accountable and that his death would not be his end but would only mean his shifting to a more perfect stage, he would surely be saved from all errors and slips. The question is how can he be convinced?

I have already described one aspect of the verse saying: 'With the name of Allah all praises belong to Allah.' I once again emphasize that what I say is only a possibility, not a definite interpretation of the Qur'an. Anyhow, it appears that a man fully convinced that all praises belonged to Allah, could

never have any polytheistic ideas in his mind, for whomsoever anybody praises, he actually praises some manifestation of Allah's glory.

Anybody who composes or intends to compose an ode in honor of the Holy Prophet or Imam Ali, that ode of his is for Allah because the Holy Prophet and the Imam are not but a great manifestation of Allah, and therefore their eulogy is the eulogy of Allah and His manifestation. A man who is convinced that all praises are due to Allah, would never indulge in bragging, boasting and self-praise. In fact man is self-conceited because he does not know himself. 'He who knows himself, knows Allah.'

A man knows Allah only when he is firmly convinced that he himself has no significance and that everything belongs to Allah only.

In fact, we neither know ourselves nor Allah. We have faith neither in ourselves nor in Him. We are neither sure that we are nothing nor that everything is Allah's. So long as we are not certain of these things, all arguments to prove the existence of Allah are of little use, and all that we do is based on egoism. All claims to leadership and chieftaincy are the result of self-conceit and personal vanity.

Self-Conceit is the Cause of All Troubles

Most of the troubles man faces are the result of his vanity and empty pride. Man loves himself and desires to be admired by others. But that is his mistake. He does not realize that he himself is nothing and that he is the property of another Being.

Man's self-conceit and love of power are the cause of most of his troubles, sins and vices, which ruin him and drag him to Hell. Because of his selfishness man wants to control everything and becomes the enemy of others whom he rightly or wrongly considers to be a hindrance in his way. He knows no limits in this respect and that is the cause of all troubles, misfortunes and calamities.

All Praises Belong to Allah

It appears that the Book of Allah begins with the question that includes all questions. When Allah says: 'All praises belong to Allah', we feel that so many questions have appeared before our eyes.

The Qur'an does not say that some praises belong to Allah. That means that if somebody says to another person: 'I know that Allah is Almighty and Omnipotent, but still I am praising you, not Allah', even then his praise would go to Allah, because all praises are Allah's praises.

The Qur'an says: 'All praises belong to Allah'. This means that all kinds of praises in all conditions belong to Him. This short verse resolves many problems. This verse is enough to cleanse man's heart from the impurity of all kinds of polytheism provided he is fully convinced of its truth. He who said that he had never committed any sort of polytheism, said so because he had intuitively discovered this truth and grasped it mentally.

This state of conviction cannot be secured by any argument. I do not mean that argument is of no use. It is also required. But it is only a means of understanding the question of Allah's monotheism according to one's intellectual capacity. To believe in it is the next step.

Philosophical Reasoning is not much Effective

Philosophy is a means not an end. Philosophical arguments help in understanding the problems, but they do not lead to a firm faith, which is a matter of intuition and taste. Even faith has several grades.

I hope that we will not be contented with reading and understanding the Qur'an, but will have a firm faith in every word of it, because it is the Divine Book that reforms man and wants to turn him into a being created by Allah from His 'Ism A 'zam' (grand name). Allah has gifted man with all kinds of faculties but many of his potential capabilities are dormant.

The Qur'an wants to raise man from this lower position to the high position worthy of him. The Qur'an has come for this very purpose. Allah the Prophets have come to help man in getting out of the depths of selfishness and seeing the Divine light so that he may forget everything other than Allah.

May Allah bestow this favor on us also!

The Difference between the Bismillah of each Surah

The 'bismillah' preceding one surah is different from that preceding another surah.

We were saying to which word the preposition and the noun it governs in the 'bismillah' are related. One of the possibilities is that the 'bismillah' of every surah is related to some appropriate word of that very surah; for example in the Surah al-Hamd it may be related to the word, al-Hamd. In that case 'bismillahi al-hamdu lillahi' would mean: With the name of Allah all praises belong to Allah. On the basis of this possibility 'bismillah' would signify differently in every surah, for in each surah it would be referring to a different word. If it was related to the word 'al-hamdu' in the Surah 'al-Hamd,' we would have to look for some other appropriate word, for example, in the Surah 'al-Ikhlās'.

According to a rule of theology, if somebody pronounced the bismillah with some surah and then wanted to recite another surah, he would have to repeat the bismillah, and the previous bismillah would not be enough for him. This rule shows that 'bismillah' does not have the same meaning everywhere. It has a different significance with each surah, although there are some people who wrongly maintain that 'bismillah' is not the part of any surah and it is quite a separate verse revealed as a benediction.

If it is accepted that 'bismillah' was related to 'al-Hamd' then 'hamd' might include everything to which the word 'hamd' applied, that is every kind of praise expressed by anybody on any occasion. Thus the verse would mean that every praise expressed is with the name of Allah, because he who expresses it is himself a name of Allah; his organs and limbs are a name of Allah and the praise he expresses is also a name of Allah. From this point of view every praise is with the name of Allah.

We all are His names, or manifestations of His names, because we all are His signs, He is our originator, who has brought us into existence. The Divine Originator is in several ways different from a natural cause or agent. One of the points of difference is that anything that is brought into existence

by the Divine Originator, or in other words, anything that emerges from the Divine source disappears in that very source.

To illustrate this point to some extent, let us take up an example, although this example falls too short of the relation between the Creator and the created. Anyhow, let us take up the example of the sun and its rays. The rays have no existence separate from the sun. The same is the case with the Divine Originator or the Creator.

Anything coming into existence from this source depends on it for its existence as well as continuation. There is no existing being which can continue to exist if Allah withdraws from it even for an amount the light on which its existence depends. As no existing thing has any independent position, it is said to be lost in its source.

Every Possibly Existing Thing Depends on Allah for its Existence as well as Continuation

Every possibly existing being is Allah's name, His deed and a manifestation of His glory. He Himself says:

Allah is the Light of the heavens and the earth (Surah an-Nur, 24:35).

Every possibly existing being is a manifestation of the glory of Allah, but not Allah. Everything that appears in the world is so related to the source of its origin that it cannot have any independent existence. That is why it has been said in the Qur'an that:

'Allah is the light of the heavens and the earth.'

If it is admitted that the definite article 'al' in al-Hamdu indicated 'Comprehensiveness', the verse would mean that every praise by whomsoever it might be expressed, takes place with the name of Allah.

As he who praises Allah, is himself, one of Allah's names, it may be said that in a sense the praiser and the praised are one and the same. One is the manifestation and the other is the manifester. Some sayings of the Holy Prophet, such as: 'You are as You have praised Yourself', and 'I seek refuge from You in You', point in this direction.

As the relationship between the praiser and the praised is that of passing away of the former in the latter, the former cannot claim that it is he who praises. In fact it is the 'praised' who praises Himself, for the praiser has passed in Him.

According to another possibility it may be said that the definite article in 'al-hamdu' is not for showing comprehensiveness, but it indicates that the word, 'hamd' signifies general praise without any qualification being attached to it. In this case the praise of Allah performed by us is not actually His praise. His praise is only that which He performs Himself.

The reason is that Allah is the Infinite Being while all others are finite. Any praise expressed by a finite being will naturally be finite and limited and therefore it cannot be the praise of the infinite Being.

While mentioning the first alternative we said that every praise was Allah's praise. Even when you think that you are commending the merits of a beautiful handwriting, you are actually extolling Allah. Similarly when you believe that you are paying tributes to the world, in that case also you are praising none but Allah.

That is why, while describing the first alternative or the first possibility, we said that every praise was that of Allah, whosoever might be the praiser, for nothing except Allah has an independent existence. Every excellence, every beauty and every perfection belongs to Him only. If Allah withdraws the manifestation of His glory, nothing would be existing any longer.

All Existing Things Are A Manifestation of Allah's Glory

The existence of everything depends on Allah's glory. While discussing above the first possibility, we pointed out that everything existing is the outcome of a divine light. Allah Himself says that He is the light of the heavens and the earth. If He takes away this light, everything is bound to disappear and come to an end.

As nothing except Allah has any excellence of its own, nothing except Him is worth praising. In fact there is no excellence except His. He excels in His essence, His attributes and the state of His manifestation. All the merits attributed to anything or anyone else are His merits. Anybody who praises anyone for his excellence and merit, actually praises Him. This is true if we accept the first possibility mentioned above.

In the case of the second possibility, which is also no more than a mere guess or a possibility, the word 'al-hamdu' does not imply totality or comprehensiveness. It only signifies absolute praise without any qualification, restriction or any conception of its opposite being attached to it. But the praise that we perform is definitely not absolute.

It is a particular praise expressed by a particular to a particular. We do not have access to the Absolute, nor can we perceive Him. So how can we praise Him. Even at the time of saying, 'al-hamdu lillah', you do not perceive the Absolute Truth, and as such the question of praising the Absolute does not arise.

Whatever praise is expressed, that actually is not the praise of Allah, but is the praise of some manifestation of His glory. In the case of the previous possibility no praise was that of Allah except that expressed by Himself. In this case the word 'ism' (name) in 'bismillah al-hamdu lillah' will not have the same meaning as we stated earlier when we said that everybody is Allah's name including you and me.

Now the name of Allah is a symbol for His absolute and unqualified manifestation, the meaning of which can neither be explained nor grasped. It is this name of Allah that is praised and this praise can be expressed only by Allah Himself. This is a possible explanation based on the assumption that 'bismillah' is connected with 'al-hamdu lillah'. In short there are two possibilities. According to one possibility every praise is the praise of Allah and according to the other, praise of Allah is only the absolute and unqualified praise pronounced and performed by Allah Himself.

According to the first possibility there is no praise that is not of Allah; and according to the second possibility a praise can be of Allah only in its limited sense, not in its absolute sense. In this case the 'hamd' (praise) in 'al-hamdu lillah' will mean an absolute and unqualified praise. Allah can be praised only by the name that is worthy of Him. This rule is also a mere possibility.

There is another possibility that 'bismillah' might have no link with the surah following it. We know that some scholars maintain that the preposition and the noun in 'bismillah' are linked with an omitted but understood verb, 'Zahara' (appeared), meaning, existence appeared. Thus the sentence would mean:

Existence appeared with the name of Allah. In other words the name of Allah is the source of everything existing. This name of Allah is the same that is alluded to in a Prophetic tradition in the following words: 'Allah created His will Himself and created all other things through His Will.'

Here Allah's Will means 'the first manifestation of His glory' that was created by Him direct. It is this manifestation that has been called existence in the ellipsis mentioned above, namely 'Existence appeared'. On the basis of the assumption that 'bismillah' is not linked with the surah following it, some grammarians hold that some such elliptical phrase as 'We seek the help' exists before 'bismillah'

These grammarians may not realize, but in fact, whoever seeks the help of Allah, he invariably seeks the help of His name. It is not possible to seek His help in any other way. Though it is not necessary to always use the words, 'with the name of Allah', the fact remains that in everything His appearance or presence is His name and thus the help of His name is invariably sought.

It is this appearance the help of which we seek and with the help of which everything is done. The grammarians may not be aware of this conception, but it is a fact that seeking help means turning to Allah. This much as to which word 'bismillah' is linked with. We said earlier that a name is the sign of the named. But there is nothing which is not the sign of Allah.

Whatever you see, you will find that to be a sign of Him. Of course signs also have degrees. There are some names which are perfect signs of Him in every respect. There are some others that cannot be said to be so perfect signs. Anyhow, all existing things are His signs and manifestations in varying degrees.

A tradition says: 'We are the beautiful names of Allah'. Anyhow, at the stage of manifestation the loftiest and the most splendid names of Allah are the Holy Prophet and the Imams who, unlike us who are still lying in the abyss of base desires, have reached the highest stages of spiritual journey towards Allah.

Emigration

We have not yet started even moving, but there are some people who have not only come out of the abyss but have also emigrated from that stage. The Holy Qur'an says:

He who leaves his home, emigrating for the sake of Allah and His Messenger and is then overtaken by death, shall surely be rewarded by Allah. (Surah an-Nisa', 4:100)

According to one possible interpretation 'emigration' here might have meant going from oneself to Allah and 'home' might have meant one's lower self. In this case the whole verse would mean that there were some people who came out of the dark and dingy home of their base desires and

continued to move towards Allah till they were overtaken by death, that is they passed away from self to survive in Allah, who was to reward them.

In other words Allah Himself is their reward, for they attach no importance to Paradise and the bounties found therein. Their sole objective is Allah, because for a person who undertakes the path of self-annihilation and proceeds towards Allah and His Prophet, nothing is left which he could call his own. For him everything belongs to Allah.

He who reaches this stage is surely to be rewarded by Allah. It may be noted that there are some who have reached their desired goal after emigration, while there are some others who though they emigrated, yet they could not reach the stage of passing away in Allah. The third category is that of the people like us who could not emigrate at all and are still groping in darkness.

We are not only lost in the labyrinth of the mundane things but are also a prey to selfishness and egoism so much that we cannot see anything beyond our self-interest. We want everything for ourselves, for we think that nothing except us has any value. We have not yet thought of emigrating, because our thinking is limited to this world only.

Seventy Years Back

We do not discard the faculties with which Allah has equipped us, but we use them for mundane purposes as if we were to live in this world forever. As the time passes, we continue to get away farther and farther from the source to which we should have emigrated.

According to a report once the Holy Prophet was sitting along with his companions when a loud sound of something falling was heard. The Holy Prophet's companions were startled. They enquired what had happened. According to the report the Holy Prophet said: 'A stone was rolling down in the middle of Hell. Now after 70 years it has fallen into a well located at the other end of it. This was the sound of its fall.'

This event is said to be an allegorical description of a wicked man who died at the age of 70. We are all rolling down towards the same hole. I may go there at the age of 80. You will also go to that side in a few years.

Worst Enemy

It is our selfishness and egoism that are responsible for our present condition. The following maxim expresses the same truth: 'Your worst enemy is your lower self that is within you.' It is this idol which man worships most and to which he is attached most. Man cannot become godly unless he smashes this idol, because an idol and God cannot go together.

An egoist can never be a devout person. We may apparently be religious, but in reality are idol-worshippers unless we get rid of our selfishness and egoism, which are the root-cause of all our troubles and evils. While offering prayers we say: 'You alone we worship and You alone we ask for help' but unfortunately all our thoughts remain concentrated on ourselves. We offer prayers to serve our own selfish interests and thus in reality worship ourselves only.

Egoism the Cause of All Quarrels

All wars in the world are due to man's egoism. Believers are not expected to fight each other. If they do, they are not believers.

A dishonest and selfish man wants to seize everything for his own benefit. It is this attitude which gives rise to all sorts of troubles. I want a position for myself; you want it for yourself. As both of us cannot occupy it at one and the same time, a quarrel is bound to arise. I want to take this chair; you also want it.

When I and you want to take the same thing, naturally there will be an altercation. If two persons attempt to occupy this country, a war would ensue. All wars and battles are the outcome of selfishness, the result of the conflict of personalities and their interests. As the holy men are not selfish, they do not fight each other.

Even if all the holy men gather together at one place, there would be no fight and no quarrel among them, for whatever they do, they do for the sake of Allah. As they are neither selfish nor egoistic, they do not oppose each other.

They all have the same source and the same direction. It is we who are lying in a well that is as dark as possibly can be. This darkness is that of our egoism. So long as we do not give up our egoism, we cannot get out of this darkness. We are selfish and self-conceited. That is why we do not attach importance to others and consider ourselves alone to be all important. If a thing is advantageous to us, we accept it. If it is not, we reject it howsoever right it may be.

We believe only that thing, which is in our favor. All this is egoism and selfishness. It is this attitude that is the cause of all our troubles and is responsible for all misfortunes of humanity. I want to pursue my interest and you want to pursue yours. There can be no godliness so long as selfishness persists. Then what is the remedy? Man has within himself an idol-temple. It is not easy for him to get out of it. He needs Divine help, a hidden hand which may take him out of this dungeon. The Prophets have come for this very purpose.

Aim of the Prophets

All the Prophets and the revealed Books have come only to smash this idol-temple and to take man out of it. The Prophets have come to set up a divine order in this fiendish world ruled by the Devil whom we all obey. Our base desires are the Devil's manifestation. The greatest Devil being our own appetitive soul, whatever we do become devilish.

That is the reason why nothing that we do is free from selfishness. The Devil holds influence over us and we are dictated by the Devil. We can get out of this labyrinth only if we emigrate from our present stage, act according to the teachings of the Prophets and other holy men and cease to be selfish and egoistic. If we do so we will gain an inconceivable success. This emigration is essential for anybody who aspires to attain to perfection.

Major Jihad

He who wishes to get out of the dungeon of egoism, must strive to emigrate from his present state. According to a Prophetic tradition once

certain companions of the Holy Prophet came back from a Jihad (holy war). The Holy Prophet said to them:

'You have returned after carrying out a minor jihad, but still owe a major one'. A major jihad is carried out against one's lower self. All other jihads are subservient to this one. Any other jihad performed by us will be worth the name only if we succeed in the major jihad. Otherwise all other jihads will be nothing more than a satanic act.

If a person takes part in the holy war with a view to obtain a slave girl or to provide for his livelihood, these very things would be his reward. But if a person performs jihad for the sake of Allah, then it would be Allah's responsibility to reward him. In fact the reward depends on the quality of the job performed. Obviously there is a vast difference between the quality of our performance and that of the holy men and friends of Allah, for our aims and objects are quite different from theirs.

Devotion is the Criterion

Has it been said without any reason that at the war of Ditch (Khandaq) one stroke of Imam Ali's sword was more meritorious than all the acts of worship performed by the jinn and mankind? Apparently his stroke was no more than a blow to kill a person. But it had a far greater significance.

At that time Islam was facing the combined forces of infidelity and if Muslims had been defeated in that encounter, the very existence of Islam would have been endangered. There is still another aspect of the question, and that is the dedication and devotion involved in Imam Ali's act.

Once while Imam Ali was on the chest of an enemy, he spat on the Imam's face. Imam Ali at once got off so that his act might not be affected by the motive of personal vengeance.

The spirit of such a stroke is certainly superior to all acts of worship. It is this spirit which gives the acts of a true believer their proper meaning and significance. Outwardly the acts performed by the polytheists and the monotheists, the idolaters and these who do not worship the idols, look alike. Apparently there is no difference in them.

Abu Sufyan also used to offer prayers. Mu'awiyah was himself the Imam of Congregational prayers. They performed their religious acts like others. It is the spirit of prayer that accords sublimity to it. If the spirit is there, prayer is a devotional act. Otherwise it is nothing more than a mere show and a fraud. This principle applies to us also. We simply deceive each other.

Our Worship is For Paradise

All our devotional acts serve our own interests only. Those who are more pious among us perform them for the sake of Paradise. Take away the temptation of Paradise, then see who performs them. Imam Ali's case is different. He was in fact fond of the acts of devotion and worship. It is said about him that he loved the acts of devotion and embraced them.

As a matter of principle it is not of much significance to perform acts of worship for the sake of Paradise. A person who has reached the stage of passing away in Allah, attaches no importance to Paradise. He actually does not care for it. Paradise and Hell are alike for him who has annihilated himself. He praises Allah because he believes that Allah deserves devotions.

This position is attained by those who are fond of acts of worship. They worship Allah because they believe that He is fit for being worshipped.

There are many degrees of devotion. Anyhow, the first step is shunning the selfishness and getting out of the narrow hole of egoism.

For this purpose the first thing to be done is to wake up for the sake of Allah and not to remain sleeping. At present we are asleep, although apparently awake. Our waking is that of animals, not of man.

A tradition says that people are asleep; they will wake up when they will die. At that time they will realize that they were totally unconscious of the real situation. A Qur'anic verse says: 'Hell is surrounding the unbelievers'. It means that Hell is even now surrounding them but man being in a state of unconsciousness does not perceive that.

When he will gain his consciousness, he will realize that there is a fire all round him. We all have to go by this path. Therefore it is better for us to wake up and walk along the 'straight path' shown to us by the Prophets.

Prophets Come to Reform Men

Reforming mankind is the mission of all Prophets. For this purpose they set up a just order. It is man who is just or unjust. To establish a just order means turning the wicked into the righteous and the unbelievers into believers. The Prophets' job is to transform the people. If people were left to do what they liked, they would certainly fall into the deep pit of hell.

It is the Prophets who guide them to the right path. Alas! We are not yet following it. I am 70 years old, but am still where I was. I have not emigrated. Perhaps my condition will not change till the end of my life. Anyhow, it is essential for everybody to follow the straight path. There is no alternative.

An Appeal to the Youth

You are young and can adopt this path better. Do not worry about us, for we are already a spent force. You can purify your soul easily as you are closer to the world of divinity than we the old people. Comparatively you have deteriorated less but things are becoming worse day by day. The more delay will make the matter more difficult. It is difficult for an old man to be reformed, but a young man can be reformed quickly.

It is easier to reform thousands of young men than to reform an old man. Therefore do not postpone the task of reform to old age. Begin this work while you are still young. Follow the teachings of the Prophets. This is the starting point.

The Prophets have shown us the way we should follow. While we are unaware of it, the Prophets are familiar with the way of safety and security. If you want safety, follow the way shown by them. Gradually pay less and less attention to your desires.

You will not get the desired result immediately, but gradually you can get rid of your egoism. One day all our desires will come to naught. It is not in our interest to pay attention to them. Lasting is only that which relates to Allah. The Qur'an says:

What is with you will come to an end, what is with Allah will remain.
(Surah an-Nahl, 16:96)

Man has that 'which is with you' as well as that 'which is with Allah'. All the things that keep your attention directed to yourselves, are that 'which is with you'. All these things will vanish. But those things that keep your attention directed to Allah, are lasting and permanent.

Continue Your Effort Till You Gain Complete Victory Over Your Lower Self

You and we should make every effort to change our present state. Those who achieved success in their struggle against the unbelievers, never worried as to how many people were with them. After all it was he¹ who said that even if all the Arabs were combined against him, he would not give up. As he was doing the duty assigned to him by Allah, there was no question of failure in it, what to say of being repulsed.

Then there is another question. Suppose you retreat, but where will you go to? Those who advanced in the jihads, went forward without caring for their lives or their personal interests. They fought against their lower self to the utmost degree. The struggle of those who occupied a higher spiritual position was proportionately more intense.

In fact man can achieve nothing unless he fights against his lower self. He cannot go forward unless he ignores his desires and keeps clear of this world, which is another name of base desires. The desires of every body are his world. It is this world which has been denounced, not the physical world.

This world is within you. When you pay attention to your lower self, you yourself become this world. Thus this world of everybody is within him. It is this world which has been condemned, not the sun, the moon or any other natural object. All the natural objects, being the signs and manifestations of Allah, have been praised.

It is this world in the above mentioned sense that deprives man from gaining proximity to Allah. May Allah grant us success in getting out of the deep dungeon of egoism. It is the friends of Allah who have gained success in being delivered from the catastrophe of egoism.

Note

1. Imam Ali (Peace be upon him).

Relationship between Allah and His Creation

We were talking as to which word the word 'ism' in 'bismillah' is connected. In this regard there are several possibilities as I have mentioned.

The Creator and the Created

We cannot understand certain questions in this regard unless we know what sort of relationship there exists between Allah and the creation. We talk about this relationship either parrot-like and repeat some set words, or occasionally in addition to that advance some arguments also. A stage higher than this is the privilege of some other people.

Anyhow the relationship between Allah and the creation is not of the sort that exists, for example, between father and son, that is between two things existing independently but related to each other. The sun and its rays are an example of a closer relationship. In this case also the sun and its rays are two different things, each having a separate existence to some extent. Man and his mental and physical faculties are an example of another kind of relationship.

Even in this case man and his faculties are not identical, though they are closely related. Unlike all these examples, the relationship between the existing things and Allah, Who is the source of their existence, is of quite a different kind and cannot be compared to any of the relationships mentioned above. At several places in the Qur'an and the traditions the relationship between Allah and His creation has been described as Allah's glory. The Qur'an says:

When his Lord revealed His glory to the mountain. (Surah al-A'raf, 7:143).

There is a sentence in the Samat Supplication which says:

'By the light of Your glory You revealed to the mountain and thus sent it down crashing...'

At another place the Qur'an says:

Allah takes away the souls at the times of their death. (Surah az-Zumar, 39:42)

while it is known that taking away the souls is the job of the Death Angel. If somebody kills a person, in that case also it is said that he has put him to death. At another place the Qur'an says:

You did not throw when you threw (the pebbles), but Allah threw. (Surah al-Anfal, 8:17)

All this is the description of a light and a glory. If we ponder over this concept, certain questions occur to our mind.

Meanings of Al-Hamd

We said earlier that the first possibility about the definite article in al-Hamdu is that it might be denoting comprehensiveness. In that case hamd (praise) would mean all praises, and the word 'hamd' as well as the word, 'ism' will have a sense of multitude. From this point of view 'al-hamdu lillahi' would mean that every praise that is made is that of Allah, for it is always the praise of some aspect of His manifestation or glory.

The sun manifests itself in its rays. Man is manifested in his seeing and hearing faculties. Allah manifests Himself far more clearly in every creation

of His. Therefore, when anything is praised actually a manifestation of Allah's glory is praised.

As all the existing things are the signs of Allah, they are His names. According to the second possibility we mentioned, the meaning would be diametrically different, and 'al-hamdu lillahi' would signify that no praise made by any praiser was that of Allah, although in this case also His glory is revealed in all the objects which are praised. But our praise cannot be absolute, nor are we capable of praising the Absolute Being.

Anyhow, as all pluralities are lost and absorbed in the unity of the Absolute Being, it may be said that from one angle even in this case it is the Absolute Being that is praised. The only difference is of the angle from which you look at this issue. If you look at it from the angle of plurality, then every praise would be that of Allah, every existing thing would be His name and every name would be different from other names.

According to this possibility the meaning of bismillah will be different from its meaning according to the other possibility. The main feature of this possibility is that a sense of numerousness is implied in the conception of 'ism' or name. Allah is the name in which the stage of multitude and detail is taken into consideration. This name is the 'Exalted Name' in which Allah's glory is revealed.

Divine Glory in Everything

The glory of Allah's Exalted Name is revealed in everything. Allah's name Rahman (Beneficent) is the reflection of His beneficence in the state of action and His name Rahim (Merciful) is the reflection of His mercy in the state of action. The same applies to 'rabbil 'alamin' (Lord of the Universe), 'iyyaka na'budu' (You we worship) etc.

According to the second possibility, hamd (praise) in 'al-hamdu lillah' signifies absolute and unqualified praise. In this case the conception of Allah, Rahman and Rahim will also be a little different. According to the first possibility 'ism' (name) means every existing thing with reference to its function.

In other words, as the function of anything changes, it becomes a different 'ism' or name. But according to the second possibility 'hamd' in 'al-hamdu lillah' signifies unqualified and absolute 'hamd' with the names of Allah, Rahman and Rahim.

Allah alone can perform such a 'hamd' or praise and He does so with a name that is the name of the manifestation of His glory at the stage of self. In other words, He praises Himself with some of His names at this stage. Allah is the comprehensive name at the stage of self, not at the stage of manifestation.

Allah's every name at this stage is His glory. Rahman (Munificent) is the name of His munificence at the stage of self. Rahim (Merciful) is the name of His mercy at the stage of self. The same is the case with such other names as Rab (Sustainer) etc.

These conceptions can be proved by means of higher philosophy which is different from commonly known ordinary philosophy. But the case of the holy men, the friends of Allah is quite different. They have perceived and grasped these things by traversing the stages of spiritual journey.

Prophets' Observations and Experiences

The holy men cannot tell others what they see. Even in the Holy Qur'an many sublime truths have been mentioned in a simplified and diluted form so that they may be communicated even to the ordinary people not yet free from their low and base desires.

In this respect the hands of the Holy Prophet himself were tied. He was not allowed to explain the truths to the people in clear terms and therefore he stated the truths in a weakened form. The Qur'an has many degrees of meanings and has been revealed in 70 or 70,000 layers.

Having been reduced in intensity in each layer it has come to us in a form which we may be able to understand with our limited intellect. Telling us about Himself Allah says:

Will they not regard the camels how they have been created? (Surah al-Ghashiya, 88:17)

It is our bad luck that while describing lower creations like sun, sky, earth and man, the Prophets felt that there was a knot in their tongue and that they could not express the truth in clear words:

O my Lord! Open my chest for me; make the matter easy and untie the knot in my tongue. (Surah Taha, 20:25)

Other Prophets also had knots in their tongues as well as their hearts, and for that reason they could not express the truths exactly as they perceived them. They tried to a certain extent explain them to us through examples and illustrations.

When an example of camel is used to explain to us the existence of Allah, it should not be difficult to understand where we stand. In fact we are no better than animals, and as such the knowledge we can obtain must be very defective. As for the Prophets the Qur'an says at one place:

And when his Lord revealed His glory to the mountain, He sent it crashing down. And Moses fell down senseless (Surah al-A'raf, 7:143).

When Allah imparted special spiritual training to Moses he said to Allah: 'My lord, let me see you.' Obviously an eminent Prophet cannot ask for seeing Allah with his physical eyes. Therefore his request must have been for a kind of seeing appropriate to the seer and the object to be seen. But even this kind of seeing was not possible, Moses said to Allah: 'My Lord! Let me see you.' The answer was: 'you will not see Me.' Allah further said: 'But gaze upon the mountain.'

What is meant by the mountain here? Does it signify Mount Sinai? Was it that the glory that could not be revealed to Moses, could be revealed to this mountain? If some other people had been present at the Mount Sinai at that time, could they also see the revelation of Allah's glory? The sentence, 'Gaze upon the mountain' implies a promise. Allah said:

'You cannot see Me. But gaze upon the mountain. If it stands still in its place, then you will see Me.' (Surah al-A'raf, 7:143)

There is a possibility that the mountain here might have meant the remnant of egoism still left in Moses. As the result of the revelation of glory the mountain was smashed. In other words egoism of Moses was completely done away with. 'And Moses fell down senseless.' That means that Moses reached the stage of completely passing away of his human attributes.

What happened to Moses is a story for us, but for the Prophets it is an experience. This experience has been narrated to us in the form of a story because we are not yet free from egoism. The mention of the mountain or the Mount Sinai is only for our sake.

Meaning of Glory

People like us think that the glory revealed to Prophet Moses was a light seen by him. It might have been seen by others too. What a novel idea! As if it was a light that could be seen by everybody. Jibra'il (Gabriel), - the Holy Ghost used to recite the Qur'an before the Holy Prophet. Could others hear him? We do not have the slightest idea of the reality and our knowledge is confined to hearsay.

The Prophets can be compared to a person who saw a dream or witnessed something, but is unable to describe what he saw and others are also not fit to understand what he says. The same is the case with the Prophets. Neither they can describe what they see, nor can we understand what they say.

No doubt the Prophets have said something, but we can understand only that which is comprehensible to us. The Qur'an contains everything. It has the rules of law as well as the stories, to the underlying idea of which we do not have access, but we can understand what they apparently mean.

There are certain things in the Qur'an by which everybody can be benefited to some extent, but in the real sense the Holy Qur'an could be understood only by him to whom it was addressed. Of course those Holy men, who were both trained and instructed by the Holy Prophet direct or later imbibed his teachings, also understand the Qur'an.

Through the Holy Ghost the Qur'an was revealed to the heart of the Holy Prophet. The Qur'an itself says:

The Holy Ghost descended with it on your heart (Surah ash-Shu'ra, 26:193)

The Qur'an was revealed many a time and each time it was revealed in a more diluted form. The Qur'an says:

We revealed it on the Night of Power. (Surah al-Qadr, 97:1)

On each Night of Power the same glory is revealed, but on a reduced scale.

In short the Qur'an was revealed to the heart of the Holy Prophet many a time. It was revealed in stages, grades and layers till it finally assumed the form of words.

Nature of the Qur'an

The Holy Qur'an is not a collection of words, nor is it a thing that could be seen, heard or expressed in words. Nor is it a mode or a quality. It has been accorded an easy form for the benefit of us, who could neither hear it nor see it. Those who were really benefited by the Qur'an, were trained on different lines.

Their method of deriving benefit from the Qur'an was quite different. They had a special way of attending to the source from which the Qur'an has emerged. Glory of Allah is revealed from the hidden world and reaches the physical world after having been reduced gradually in intensity.

As there is a vast difference between the various grades of the hidden world and the corresponding grades of the physical world, similarly there is a vast difference between our perception and the perception of those who are superior to us and then between their perception and the perception of those who are still higher.

The Prophets and the Imams enjoy the highest grade of perception. Only they can have that divine glory revealed to them which was witnessed by Prophet Musa and which is mentioned in the Qur'an when it says:

When his Lord revealed His glory to the mountain. ..(7:143) This even has been hinted at in the Samat Supplication also. The Qur'an says:

...a voice was heard saying: 'Moses, surely I am [Allah] your Lord...(20:11-12)

Each of these things is perfectly all right in itself. As for the question what should we do if we want to learn the Qur'an, it must be remembered that these things are not a subject for learning and teaching.

Exegesis of the Qur'an

If we are interested in the interpretation of the Qur'an, we have to study those commentaries which are well-known and commonly available. Some of these commentaries occasionally mention some of these subjects, but all that they say amounts to leading the blind by the blind. The Qur'an deals with all these questions, but only for him who can understand them. It has been said: 'Only he to whom it is addressed, knows the Qur'an.' This fact has been alluded to in the following verses:

The Holy Spirit descended with it on your heart.(26:193)

We revealed it on the Night of Power (97:1)

Nobody can witness the reality of the Qur'an except the Holy Prophet, who was the first addressee of the Qur'an. Here there is no question of intellectual perception nor of any proof or argument. It is a question of witnessing the truth, not with the eye or with the mind, but with the heart, and for that matter, not an ordinary heart, but the heart of the Holy Prophet, who himself was the heart of the world.

The Holy Prophet witnessed the reality of the Qur'an. As its first addressee he knew the Qur'an well. But even he expressed the truth in veiled words and by means of examples. How can we explain sunlight to a blind man? What language should we use for this purpose? Where can we find the appropriate words?

All that we can say is that sight is possible in the light only. What can he who has seen the divine light tell the one who has not seen it? What can he who has a knot in his tongue tell him who has a knot in his ears. The Prophets had a knot in their tongues because their listeners lacked the capacity of understanding what they said.

The Holy Prophet's Embarrassment

This knot was causing a great deal of worry and inconvenience to the Holy Prophet who wondered to whom he should explain the Qur'an which was revealed to his heart. Perhaps there were a good number of things which could not be told to anybody except the person who was occupying the position of absolute Wilayat.

The Holy Prophet is reported to have said: 'No Prophet has been tortured so much as I have been.' If this report is correct, it might have implied among other things that the Holy Prophet was unable to convey to others what he wanted to convey. His position in this respect was that of a father keen to show the sun to his blind child. His frustration can easily be imagined.

The father wants to explain the sunlight to his child, but on account of child's blindness he is unable to do so. He does not find suitable words to convey what he wants to convey.

It is said that knowledge is a great hurdle. It prevents people from undertaking gnostic journey and instead involves them into intellectual questions and scientific theories. For the Holy men knowledge is the greatest barrier and veil.

The more the knowledge, the bigger hurdle it will prove. Man being egoistic and self-centered, feels elated by his limited knowledge and thinks that there is nothing beyond what he knows. Only a few persons guided by the help of Allah refrain from such false notion and silly thinking.

Tendency of Monopolization in Knowledge

Everybody thinks that knowledge is confined to what he has learnt and all achievements depend on it. The jurist holds that the only branch of knowledge that exists is jurisprudence. The gnostic thinks that there is nothing except gnosis.

The philosopher is of the opinion that everything other than philosophy is useless. The engineer maintains that only engineering is important. Nowadays, it is said that knowledge is only that which can be proved by experiment and observation. Everything else is unscientific. Thus knowledge is a big hurdle. There are other hurdles too, but this is the biggest.

Knowledge, which was expected to be a beacon light and a guide has become a hurdle, an obstacle. That is true of all kinds of formal knowledge. Formal knowledge does not allow man to become what he should. It makes him egoistic. Its adverse effect on an untrained mind leads man backward.

As knowledge accumulates, its disadvantages and harmful effects grow. It is no use sowing seeds in a barren soil. A barren soil and untrained mind averse to the name of Allah are alike. Some people are scared by philosophical questions, although philosophy is a branch of formal knowledge. Similarly philosophers shy of from gnosis, while the gnostics consider all formal knowledge to be an idle talk.

Formal Knowledge is a Hurdle in the Way of Remembering Allah

I do not know what we should become, but I know that our training should be such that our formal knowledge should not be a hurdle in the way of remembering Allah. This is an important question. Our pre-occupation with knowledge should not make us forget Allah.

Our pride on account of our knowledge should not make us self-conceited and away from the source of all perfection. Such a pride is common among the scholars and intellectuals irrespective of the fact

whether they are the scholars of medical sciences, Islamic sciences or rational sciences. If heart is not purified the emergence of such a pride is natural. It keeps man away from Allah.

How is it that the study of a book often absorbs man's entire attention, but prayer does not? I had a friend who is dead now. Whenever he forgot something and could not recollect it, he used to say: 'Let me stand up for offering prayers. I hope I'll immediately recollect it.'

He thought as if while offering prayers man was not required to pay attention to Allah and was free to think of anything on the face of earth, even to try to solve any scientific question if he wanted. Knowledge which was meant to help man reaching his goal can thus prevent him from doing so. Religious law and other branches of religious knowledge are only a means, which enable us to act according to Islamic injunctions.

Even action according to Islamic injunctions is not an end in itself. The real objective is to awaken our conscience so that we may be able to reach the veils of divine light after crossing the veils of darkness. According to a tradition there are 70,000 veils of divine light. The number of the veils of darkness is also stated to be the same. Further, the veils of divine light are also after all veils or screens. We have not yet come out of the veils of darkness, to say nothing of the veils of light. We are still wriggling in the veils of darkness.

As the luck would have it, the sciences whether religious or rational, have affected us adversely.

Mental and Concrete

Some of those who are wandering about in darkness call the rational sciences mental sciences. Probably what they mean is that these sciences have no concrete existence. Anyway, all sciences are a means of reaching a goal. Any science that does not serve that purpose is not fit to be called a science.

Any knowledge which does not allow man to achieve the objective for which the Prophets have come, is darkness and a barrier. The Prophets came to take the people out of the darkness of this world and to lead them to the sole source of light. They wanted man to pass away in absolute light. They want the drop of water to be mingled in the ocean and lose its existence. (It must be remembered that the simile does not represent the position fully.)

All Prophets came for this very purpose and all sciences are a means of achieving this goal. The real existence is of that Light only. We are but nonentity. All Prophets came to pull us out of all sorts of darkness and to lead us to the sole and absolute Light, the source of all existence.

Sometimes even scholastic theology becomes a hurdle and a barrier. In this branch of knowledge arguments are adduced to prove the existence of Allah, but in some cases even these arguments lead people away from Him. The method followed by scholastic theology is not that of the Prophets and the Holy men who never adduced arguments. Of course they were aware of the arguments, but did not use them, because they did not like this method of proving the existence of Allah.

Imam Husayn addressing Allah once said: 'When were You not there?' When Allah has always existed, where is the necessity of proving His existence? It is a different thing that a blind eye does not see Him.

Rising for Allah

The Qur'an mentions the first stage of rising in these words:

Say: I advise you to do one thing: that you rise for Allah. (Surah Saba, 34:46)

The gnostics say that this verse describes the first stage of spiritual journey. The Manazil al-Sa'irin¹ also says so. But what the verse mentions may be only a prelude, not a stage. Anyhow, what is important is that Allah through his well-beloved Prophet offers an advice and asks people to rise.

This is the starting point. Those who are sleeping have been told to get up and rise for Allah only. This is the only piece of advice which we have not so far listened to. We have not yet begun walking for Allah. We do walk, but for our own sake. Those who are good and pious, are also good for their own sake only. Yes, there are some friends of Allah whose ways are different.

The advice given in the verse is for us who are sleeping. Those friends of Allah have gone to the higher world. We will also be carried there. Nobody can claim that he would forever stay here. We are being pushed away by the angels controlling our organs. We will go there, but shall we go with all our veils and darkness's?

Love of the World is the Root Cause of all Troubles

Besides being the source of all things, love of the world is the main cause of all mistakes, as a well-known maxim says: 'Love of the world sometimes makes a man so irresponsible that if he feels that Allah has withdrawn something from him, he, in spite of being a believer, gets offended'.

It is said that when a person is about to die the devils who do not want him to die as a believer bring before him certain things to which he was very much attached. For example, if he was a student and loved books, the devils would bring before him his favorite books and would threaten him to set them on fire if he would not deviate from his faith. The same way the devils threaten the person who loves his child or is strongly interested in something else.

It is not correct to think that a worldly person is he who possesses wealth. One may possess a lot of wealth, but still may not be worldly. On the other hand, a student possessing only one book may be worldly if he was too much attached to it. Attachment to worldly things is the criterion of being worldly.

Because of this attachment a person may become hostile to Allah when he finds himself at the time of his death forced to quit his favorite things and thus may die as an enemy of Allah. Therefore, we must lessen our attachment to worldly things. Obviously we have to quit this world one day or other. So it does not make any difference whether we are attached to the world or not.

Suppose you owned a book. Whether you were attached to it or not, it would remain with you. You could use it and could get benefited by it.

Similarly if a house was yours, you could use it in every case. Therefore diminish attachment as much as you can, and if possible, give it up altogether, for it is this attachment that causes trouble. It is because of self-love that man gets attached to the world. Love of self, power and position ruins man.

Love of chair and love of pulpit both show attachment to the world. All these are veils, 'some of them above others.' Instead of saying worldly people are those who possess such and such things, we should see how far we are attached to the things we possess. It is only because of this attachment that we criticize others.

A man who is not egoistic, does not criticize others. If some of us find fault with others, it is because they consider themselves to be cultured and perfect and regard others imperfect and faulty. There is a couplet which I would not recite because it is liable to some objection. Anyway, it says: 'I am just what you say, but are you what you pretend to be!'

Here in the seminary we show that we have come here for the sake of Allah. We call ourselves 'Allah's troops'. Are we really so? At least we should not pretend to be what we are not.

Is hypocrisy something else? Hypocrisy is not merely that a man pretends like Abu Sufyan to be religious while he is not so. It is also hypocrisy that a man claims to be what he is not. Anyway, hypocrisy has degrees, some of which are more severe than others.

Another important thing is that when a man departs this world it should not be said about him that he was merely inviting people to the next world and was indifferent to the present one. The Prophets invited people to the next world, but in this world also they used to set up justice and fair play.

The Holy Prophet was very close to Allah, but he used to say that he sought the forgiveness of Allah seventy times every day as he felt his heart somewhat perturbed. Naturally for a man who wants always to be with his beloved, it is perturbing to meet other people and talk to them. Suppose a man came to you to ask you about a rule of law. He is a very good man, and you know that it is your duty as well as a meritorious act to answer his question, but you still feel perturbed because at that time you wanted to be with your beloved.

'Because of the perturbation of my heart I seek the forgiveness of Allah seventy times every day.' The Holy Prophet is reported to have said some such thing. But for us it would not be proper to involve ourselves in such things. At least we should be as we give ourselves out. If we have a mark of prostration on our forehead, we must not be showy in our prayers. If we profess to be pious, we must not deceive anybody, we must not take usury.

Those who say that spiritual sciences make a man idler, are mistaken. The man who taught these sciences to the people and who next to the Holy Prophet knew the spiritual truths more than anybody else, according to history, took up his shovel and went out to work the same day as he pledged his allegiance to the Holy Prophet. There is no contradiction between spiritual sciences and physical work.

Those who, in order to keep people busy with their worldly affairs, prevent them from praying and saying liturgy etc., are not aware of real

facts. They do not know that it is prayer that builds human character and teaches man how to live in this world respectably. The Prophets prayed and said liturgy etc. and it were they who established justice in the world and rose against the wrongdoers. Imam Husayn also did the same thing. Just see his Supplication of the Day of Arafah and ponder over it.

All their achievements were due to this prayers. It is prayers that make man attentive to Allah. If man recites them properly, then as the result of divine favor brought about by them, his self-attachment is diminished, but his efficiency is in no way affected adversely. Not only that but he becomes more active and ever ready to render service to his fellow human beings.

Some ignorant people criticize the books containing supplications. They do not know what kind of men these books build. Some of these supplications such as Munajat Sha'biniyah, Dua' Kumayl, Dua' Yawmul 'Arafah, Dua' Samat etc. have come down to us from our Imams. What kind of men do these prayers build. Those who recited the Munajat Sha'biniya, wielded the sword also.

According to reports all Imams recited Munajat Sha'biniya. I have not read anywhere about any other prayer or supplication that it was recited by all Imams. Those who recited this prayer, also fought against the unbelievers.

These prayers take man out of darkness and he who comes out of darkness becomes the real man. Then he does everything for Allah's sake. If he wields the swords, he does so for the sake of Allah; if he fights, he does so for the sake of Allah and if rises, he does so for the sake of Allah. It is absolutely wrong to say that prayers make man idle and useless.

Those who say such things, to them this world is everything. They believe everything beyond this world to be fantastic. But one day they will find that the things they thought to be fantastic were real and the things they thought to be real were fantastic. In fact prayers, sermons and the books like Nahjul Balaghah and Mafatihul Jinan help man in building his personality.

When one becomes a real man, he automatically begins to act according to true Islamic principles. He cultivates land, but his cultivation is for Allah. He fights but only against the infidels and wrongdoers. Such people are the monotheists and pious prayerers. Those who accompanied the Holy Prophet and the Commander of the Faithful were devoted worshippers.

Imam Ali himself used to offer prayers while fighting was going on. Fighting and praying went on side by side. Once while fighting was going on somebody asked him a question. He immediately rose and delivered a sermon. Somebody said: 'Sermon even on this occasion?' He said: 'It is for what we fight.' According to a report he added: 'We do not fight against Mu'awiyah to capture Syria. Syria has no importance to us.'

The Holy Prophet and Imam Ali were not keen to conquer Syria and Iraq. They wanted to deliver the people from the oppressors and to reform them morally. It was they who were ardent worshippers. Dua' Kumayl was taught by Imam Ali to Kumayl, who himself was a warrior.

Effect of Prayer on Heart

To prevent people from praying and reciting prayer books one day some wicked people, the followers of Kasrawi etc. collected gnosis and prayer

books and set them on fire. These people did not understand what prayer was and what effect it produced on heart. They did not know that all good things in the world were due to the pious prayerers who prayed and remembered Allah. Although some people repeat their prayer simply parrot-like, yet it produces some effect, for the people who pray are better than those who do not.

A man who offers prayers, of howsoever low quality his prayers may be, is better than a man who does not offer prayers. The former is more cultured. He does not commit theft. Look at the list of the offenders and criminals. How many of them are the students of religious sciences? How many mullas drink wine, commit theft or perpetrate other crimes?

It is true that the smugglers include some unreal mullas and sufi looking persons, but those wicked people neither offer prayers nor do they perform any other meritorious acts. They have assumed this disguise just to achieve their vicious ends. Among those who recite prayers and observe Islamic injunctions, there are few who have ever been charge-sheeted for any serious crime.

The world order rests on the people who pray. Praying must not be done away with. It will be wrong to divert the attention of our young men from prayer on the plea that instead of prayer the recitation of the Qur'an should be popularized. What paves the way for the Qur'an must not be given up. It is a diabolic insinuation that the Qur'an should be recited and the tradition and supplications to Allah should be abandoned.

The Qur'an Without Traditions and Prayer

Those who say that they do not want supplications, would never be able to popularize the Qur'an. Their deceptive ideas are mere devilish insinuations. The young men should consider who have rendered better service to society, those who took keen interest in traditions, supplication and liturgy or those who said that the Qur'an was enough for them. All these charitable institutions and religious endowments are the works of those who offered prayers and recited the Qur'an, not of others.

All the religious schools and hospitals were built by those members of the rich nobility of the previous era who offered prayers. This system should continue. People should be encouraged to keep their attention to the good works. Besides helping in the achievement of spiritual excellence, these prayers and supplications help in the administration of the country also.

Those who attend the mosques and pray do not violate the law of the country nor do they breach the public order. This in itself is a great service to society. Society consists of individuals. Even if fifty per cent individuals in a society, being busy with prayers and supplications, did not commit crimes, it would be a happy situation!

A craftsman who does his job honestly and earns his livelihood, does not commit sins. Similarly those who commit murders and robberies, are not interested in spiritual matters. If they had been interested in them, they would not have committed such crimes.

Prayers and supplications play a significant role in training society. These supplications have been taught by Allah and His Prophet. The Holy Qur'an says:

Say: My Lord would not have cared for you, if you had not been calling Him. (Surah al-Furqan, 25:77)

If you read the Qur'an, you will find that Allah Himself urges people to pray to Him and says that 'He would not have cared for you if you had not been calling Him.' It appears that those who oppose supplications, do not believe even in the Qur'an. If anyone says that he does not want supplications, that means that he is neither interested in the Qur'an, nor does he believe in it. He does not know that Allah says:

Call Me, I will respond to you. (Surah Ghafir, 40:60)

May Allah include us among those who are keenly interested in supplications, prayer and the Qur'an.

Note

1. The name of a book.

Allah and His Glory

It is clear from what we have so far said about 'bismillah' that the 'ba' in it is not for causation, as some grammarians say. In fact in the matter of doings of Allah there is no question of cause and effect. The best way of expressing the relationship between the Creator and the created is that which is found in the Qur'an.

At some places this relationship has been described as glorification: 'Your Lord revealed His glory' and at some others as 'manifestation'. It has been said about Allah that 'He is the First and the Last, the Explicit and the Implicit'.

This relationship is different from that of cause and effect, which implies a sort of tendency that is not appropriate to Allah, and therefore it is not a proper expression of the relationship between Allah and the existing things.

For this purpose we have either to expand the meaning of causation to include glorification and manifestation or to say that the 'ba' in bismillah is not for causation and that 'with the name of Allah' means with His manifestation or with His glorification. Therefore Bismillah al-Hamdu lillah' does not mean that Allah's name is the cause and his praise is the effect.

Anyway, as far as I remember the words, sababiyyat or 'illiyat (cause, effect, causation) are not mentioned anywhere in the Qur'an and the sunnah (traditions). These words are merely philosophical terms used by the philosophers. In this sense the Qur'an and the sunnah have used the words of Khalq (creation), Zuhur (manifestation) Tajalli (glorification) etc.

There is another aspect of bismillah. We have a report about the dot under the 'ba'. I wonder whether this report is mentioned in any authentic book. Apparently it is not. Anyway, Imam Ali is reported to have said: 'I am the dot under the 'ba' of bismillah.

If this report is mentioned anywhere, it may be interpreted in the following way: The 'ba' signifies absolute manifestation. The dot signifies its first specification or determination, which lies in the state of wilayat. If this report was true, the Commander of the Faithful might have meant that as the dot determined the 'ba', similarly the state of universal 'wilayat' is the first determination of the Absolute Manifestation.

The name is synonym with absolute glory. It is primarily determined by the Wilayat of the Holy Prophet, Imam Ali etc.

This fact is true even if it is not mentioned in any authentic book. The first and primary determination of absolute glory is the highest stage of existence and this highest stage of existence is the same as the stage of absolute wilayat. As a matter of fact a divine name is sometimes a symbol of the state of self.

The comprehensive name of this state of self is Allah. Sometimes a divine name is the symbol of the manifestation of some divine attribute such as beneficence, mercy etc. All these names are the reflections of the Exalted Name. Some of these names are the names of the state of self, some of the reflections of the glory of names and some of the reflections of the glory of doings.

The names of the first category are called the state of uniqueness; the names of the second category are called the state of oneness and the names

of the third category the state of will. All these are the terms used by the mystics. The last three verses of the Surah al-Hashr (59:22-24) perhaps hint at this division of the divine names:

(i) He is Allah, there is no other deity but He, the Knower of the invisible and the visible. He is the Beneficent, the Merciful.

(ii) He is Allah, there is no other deity but He, the Sovereign Lord, the Holy One, Peace, the Keeper of Faith, the Guardian, the Majestic, the Compeller and the Superb. Glorified be Allah from all that they ascribe as partners to Him.

(iii) He is Allah the Creator, the Shaper out of naught, the Fashioner, His are the most beautiful names. All that is in the heavens and the earth glorifies Him and He is the Mighty, the Wise.

Possibly these three verses hint at the three states of the divine names as mentioned above. The first mentions the names appropriate to the state of self. The second verse contains the names appropriate to the reflections of the glory of names. The third verse has the names suitable to the reflection of the glory of doings.

Thus there are three stages of divine glorification: the stage revealing self-glory for self, the stage of revealing glory at the stage of divine names and the stage of revealing glory at the stage of manifestation. He is the First and the Last is perhaps the negation of the existence of any other being. He is the First and the Last, the Explicit and the Implicit. This shows that it is He who is manifestation, not that manifestation is from Him, for 'He is the First and the Last, the Explicit and the Implicit.'

Glory is Not Separate From the Glorious

There are several degrees of the revealing of glory, but in no case glory is separate from the master of glory. It is an idea difficult to conceive, but once you conceive it, it is easy to believe it. It is also possible that Allah is the name of divine glory at the state of divine attributes. In this case 'ism' in bismillah will denote the revealing of overall manifestation of glory.

Even in this case it will not be difficult to apply the two possibilities mentioned by us earlier, for Allah's attributes are not separate from His self or essence. In this connection it is to be pointed out that sometimes we look at an event from the point of view as to what our perception says; sometimes from the point of view as to what our intellect says; sometimes from the point of view as to what impression our heart has formed; and sometimes we witness the event at the stage of its actual reality. This rule applies to all spiritual matters.

The farthest limit of our perception is either intellectual perception or argumentative or semi-argumentative perception. We perceive things according to our intellectual capacity. In spiritual matters the lowest degree of our perception should be that we come to understand that there is Allah and His glory. As a matter of fact whatever method of perception we use, we cannot go beyond this limit.

The utmost limit of our perception is either rational perception or argumentative and semi-argumentative perception. We perceive things according to our intellect only. As far as the questions relating to the knowledge of Allah are concerned, the main stage of knowing Him is just to

understand that there is Allah and His glory. In fact whatever method of perceiving Him we employ, our perception cannot go beyond this limit.

His Being And His Glory Are the Real Truth

That is the main question. As for the nature of His glory at the various stages of His essence, His attributes and His actions, the verses we have quoted above indicate only that “*He is the First and the Last and He is the Explicit and the Implicit*”. The real truth is only that there is no existence besides Allah.

In fact it is meaningless to imagine that besides Allah there can be any existence. Sometimes we calculate according to our understanding what our perception is, what our intellect says, whether our rational perception has so firmly been established in our heart that it may be named faith, and whether we have started our spiritual journey in the right direction so that it may be called irfan or gnosis. Anyhow, it is all a matter of our perception rather than that of actualities.

The Real Truth Is Nothing But He

If we look into the question deeply, we come to the conclusion that there is nothing but Allah and that His glory is not but He himself. To illustrate this truth we cannot conceive of any example which may exactly fit in with it. The simile of shadow and the thing casting shadow is defective.

The relation between Allah and His glory can best be illustrated by the example of Sea and its waves.

Perhaps this is the closest similitude. As we know, the waves of the sea are not separate from the sea itself, but still the sea is not the waves, although the waves are the sea. When the sea vibrates, the waves rise in it. At that time the sea and its waves appear to us to be separate from each other. But the waves are a temporary phenomenon. They are again merged in the sea. In fact the waves do not exist independently.

This world is also like a wave. Anyhow, even this similitude is not perfect, for no similitude can properly illustrate the relation between Allah and His creation. We talk only as we perceive. There are two aspects of this question. On the one hand there are some general conceptions like the names of Allah, the names of His attributes and His actions and some stages and stations.

These are the conceptions we can perceive. The second stage is that of adducing arguments to prove that Allah and His glory are not separate from each other. To prove this it is said that Allah is pure and absolute existence that can in no way be qualified or limited, for an existence qualified or incomplete in any way cannot be absolute.

The absolute existence must be perfect, unlimited and free from all restrictions and deficiencies. The attributes of Absolute Existence must also be absolute and unspecified. Neither Allah's mercifulness is specified or limited nor His compassionateness nor His divinity.

Lack of Any Excellence Means Limitation

As Allah is absolute light and unqualified existence, He must automatically combine in Himself all excellences, for the lack of any

excellence would mean specification and restriction. If there were a slightest deficiency or defect at the stage of His essence, the term absolute would not be applicable to Him. He would be imperfect and as such would not be self-existing, because absolute excellence and absolute perfection are essential for being self-existent.

When we think about Allah according to our imperfect mental capacity, we find that Allah is the name of that Absolute Being who has all beautiful names and attributes and who combines in Himself all excellences, and that everything else is nothing but a reflection of His glory.

He is Absolute and unqualified perfection. If there were slightest deficiency in Him, He would become a possibly existing being instead of being an essentially existing Being, as He is. He combines in Himself all the excellences and meritorious qualities.

He is pure and unspecified existence. Every existence is His. He is everything but in an unspecified manner and by the way of absolute perfection. As His names are not separate from His Being, the names of His attributes are also the names of His essence.

All the characteristics pertaining to Allah, pertain to Rahman (Merciful) also. Rahman being absolute perfection and absolute mercy, has all the excellences of existence. The Qur'an says:

Call Allah or call Rahman (Surah al-Isra', 17:110).

In another verse it says:

Call Him by any name, for all the beautiful names are His. (Surah al-A'raf, 7:180)

Allah, Rahman, Rahim and all other names of Him are good and beautiful. Each of them combines all His attributes. He being Absolute, there is no disparity between Him and His names or between one of His names and another.

Allah's beautiful names are not like the names we give to different things for different considerations. His glory and His manifestation are not two different aspects of Him. His manifestation is exactly His glory and His glory exactly His manifestation.

Even this expression is defective. Absolute existence means Absolute perfection and Absolute perfection must be absolute in every respect. Therefore, all His attributes are absolute. No disparity of any sort can be imagined between His essence and His attributes.

Observation is a Step Further than All Arguments and Proofs

It is often said: *“There is no proof of such and such thing”* or *“Reason says so”*. A gnostic is reported to have said: *“Wherever I went, this blind man also arrived there with his stick. By 'the blind man' this gnostic meant Abu Ali Sina (Avicenna)”*.

What he wanted to say was that the person who perceived truth by means of his arguments and cold reasoning could be compared to a blind man who found out his way by means of his stick. This gnostic meant to say: *“Wherever I reached by means of my vision and gnosis, this blind man*

(Avicenna) also reached there rattling his stick, that is by means of his logical arguments”.

People Depending On Arguments Are Blind

The people depending on arguments are blind because they lack the power of vision. Although they have proved unity of Allah and other questions relating to it by means of their arguments and have also proved that the source of Existence is Absolute Perfection, yet what they say is still a matter of arguments, behind the walls of which these people are unable to see anything.

With a great deal of effort the heart perceives that the Essentially Existing Being is pure existence and that He is everything. Still the heart remains like a child who needs to be spoon-fed at every step. He who perceives the rational questions by means of arguments, need, repetition of these arguments and has to make strenuous struggle before his findings are firmly established in his heart.

Faith Means Cordial Perception

When it is cordially accepted that Allah is pure existence as well as all perfection, this conviction becomes a faith. Prior to that it was only a rational idea obtained by means of arguments. Later it produced a particular conception.

When the heart accepted that conception as a truth either by means of rational arguments or through Qur'anic teachings, it became a faith. Intellect discovers the truth and teaches it to the heart. When as the result of repetition and mental exercise it is firmly established in the heart that there is nothing in this world except Allah, that idea becomes a faith or an implicit belief.

Although the stage referred to in the Qur'an by the words: so that my heart may be at ease”, is a stage lower than the vision of the Prophets, yet it is a stage. But the vision of the beauty of Allah is a far higher stage. Glory of Allah was revealed for Prophet Musa. The Qur'an says:

When his Lord revealed His glory to the mountain. (7:143)

In connection with the story of Prophet Musa the periods of 30 days and 40 days and the subsequent events are significant and worth consideration. When Prophet Musa departed from the house of his father-in-law, Shu'ayb, after traversing a little distance he said to his wife: “*I feel that there is a fire*”. His wife and children did not see at all the fire which he felt. Prophet Musa said: “*I am going so that I may bring a live coal from it for you.*”

When he approached the fire, he heard a call saying: “*Surely I am Allah.*” He heard this voice from the fire which was ablaze in a tree. This sort of vision was acquired by the blind man by means of his stick and the gnostic by means of his heart. But Prophet Musa had that vision with his eyes.

The Truth is Higher than What We Say and Hear

We speak about the truths, but they are higher than what we can say about them. “*Surely I am Allah*”. Nobody except Prophet Musa could see the Light of the divine glory that was revealed to the tree.

Similarly nobody could know the nature of the revelation that was received by the Holy Prophet, Muhammad. The whole Qur'an used to be revealed to his heart at one time. How? Who knows? If the Qur'an is what we have, consisting of 30 parts, then it cannot be revealed all at once to an ordinary heart.

Heart Also Means Something Quite Different from What We Understand

In this content heart is different from what we ordinarily understand. The Qur'an is a truth and this truth is revealed to the heart. The Qur'an is a secret - a guarded secret. It must descend from its high position so that it might be revealed to the heart of the Holy Prophet.

Then it must come down further so that it could be understood by others also. The same is true of man. Man is also a closed secret. From what we can see man appears to be an animal and for that matter, an animal lower than many other animals.

But the distinguishing feature of this animal is that it can attain humanity and by traversing various stages of perfection can reach the stage of absolute perfection. Man before his death can become what is difficult even to imagine.

What We Feel Are Qualities and Forms

The whole man is a secret. It is difficult to say what we apparently see in this world, for we cannot perceive bodies or substances. All that we perceive are forms and qualities only. For example, our eyes see a color. Our ears hear a sound. Our tongue feels a sensation of taste. Our hands feel the things by touching them.

All these are forms and qualities. But the actual body is nowhere. When we describe a thing, we mention its length, breadth and depth. Length, breadth and depth are all forms only. We say that such and such thing has attraction. But attraction is also a quality only. Whatever qualities of a thing we may describe, they are all mere forms.

Then where is the body? The body is a secret - a shadow of the divine secret. What we know is only names and qualities, otherwise everything in this world is unknown. Perhaps it is this conception a degree of which has been described by the gnostics as "invisible though apparently visible", for in this world things are visible and invisible at one and the same time.

Only those things are invisible which we can neither see nor can we perceive. If we want to describe a thing we can do no more than mentioning its name, qualities and characteristics. Man cannot perceive a thing which is a shadow of the Absolute Secret, for human perception is defective.

Only that man can perceive things fully who through his 'Wilayat' has attained that position where glory of Allah is fully revealed to his heart. The question of visibility and invisibility is present everywhere. That is why such expressions as the invisible world, the angelic world and the world of the intellects are on the lips of everybody.

The Holy Prophet is the Exalted Name of Allah

All the names of Allah are a secret as well as a known thing. They are implicit and explicit. That is what the following Qur'anic verse means: "*He is Explicit and Implicit.*" What is explicit is implicit as well and what is implicit is explicit as well.

That is how all the names of Allah imply all the grades of existence. Every name covers the concepts of all other names. It is not that Rahman is a name or an attribute different from Rahim. The same is true of all other names of Allah. For example Muntaqim (Avenger) is not the opposite of Rahman (Merciful).

The Qur'an says: Call Him by any name for He has all the beautiful names. All these beautiful names are of Rahman as well as of Rahim. It is not that one name means something and some other name signifies something else. Had it been so Rahman would have signified one aspect of Allah and Rahim another aspect of Him, while the Absolute Existence cannot have many aspects.

The Absolute Existence as such is Rahman as well as Rahim, Nur (Light) and Allah. His being Rahman is not different from His being Rahim. A person occupying that highest position of gnosis in which his heart is enlightened by Allah Himself, not by His glory, will himself be an 'exalted name' of Allah and at the same time will be enlightened by the light of the 'exalted name'.

Such a person could only be he to whose heart the Qur'an was revealed and to whom Gabriel used to come. The glory revealed to his heart comprised all glories. This person was the Holy Prophet who personally was the most exalted name of Allah. The Imams are also reported to have said: "*We are the beautiful names of Allah.*"

Even Our Existence is A Revelation of the Glory of Allah

The topics we have discussed today included the question of causation. We said that it was wrong to raise the question of causation in respect of Allah. In our authentic texts we do not find any mention of it. Some far-fetched examples do not serve any purpose.

Another question we mentioned was that of a dot under the letter 'ba'. I explained the meaning of this tradition in case it was really reported anywhere. Furthermore, some such questions were also discussed as the name at the stage of divine essence, the name at the stage of attributes, the name at the stage of the revelation of glory of action, revelation of the glory of essence to essence, revelation of the glory of essence to attributes, and revelation of the glory of essence to all existing things.

When we talk of the revelation of divine glory, we say that even our existence is the revelation of glory. To illustrate this fact it may be said that if you put 100 mirrors in a place all reflecting the light of the sun, it may be said that there are one hundred lights, but actually there would be only one light reflected in all mirrors. But the light of the sun being limited, even this example is far-fetched.

All Existing Things Are the Result of Divine Glory

It is the light of Allah's glory that is being reflected in all existing things. It is the same light that is reflected everywhere. For each and every thing

there is no separate light. All the existing things are the concomitant result of the same one light. As such in 'bismillah' the 'ism' or the name means the name of divine essence and Allah is the glory of divine essence which includes all glories.

It is this comprehensive glory the name of which is Allah, as well as Rahman, Rahim etc. It is wrong to say that Rahman is the name of one divine attribute and Rahim is the name of another attribute. In fact Allah, Rahman and Rahim are the names of the same divine glory. The whole of that glory is Allah as well as Rahman and Rahim. That is the only possibility. Otherwise Allah will become a limited being, and a limited being is a possibly existing being, not an essentially existing one.

According to the details we mentioned earlier, praise (hamd) will be of Allah and Allah is the name of the Comprehensive divine glory or divine manifestation. Rahman and Rahim are also the names of exactly the same glory. Hamd means either every praise or praise in general. There are three possibilities about the name, Allah.

It can either be the name of the comprehensive divine glory at the stage of essence or at the stage of attributes (This is the stage of will. Every thing is produced by it) or at the stage of action. When we apply these possibilities to the verse of 'bismillah,' a different style of expression emerges in every case.

We talked about Allah on this very basis and said that it is the Comprehensive name at the stage of essence as well as at the stage of attributes and at the stage of the revelation of divine glory producing action. While discussing 'bismillah' we said a few things briefly about the letter 'ba' its dot and the names of Allah, Rahman and Rahim.

The Belief Is Essential

We hope that it will be admitted that the discussion of such problems is necessary. Some people totally deny their importance. Not only that, there are some people who do not believe in gnostic questions at all. Those who are at the stage of animals cannot understand that there is something beyond what they know.

We must have belief in spiritual matters. This is the first step. The foremost thing is that man should not deny everything he does not know. Shaykh Abu Ali Sina says that anybody who denies a thing without any reason, behaves against human nature.

Belief Must Be Based On Reason

As there must be a valid reason to prove a thing, there must also be a valid reason to deny a thing. If you do not have a reason in favor or against a thing, then simply say: "*I don't know*". But there are some obstinate people who deny everything. As these people do not understand, they behave inhumanly.

Whatever you hear you should normally admit that at least there is some possibility of its being correct. Do not reject anything outright without any reason. We do not have access to what is beyond this world. Even about this world our knowledge is defective and limited. At present we have a certain amount of knowledge. In future we will know much more. So many things

which we now know, about this world, were totally unknown till a hundred years ago. In future many more discoveries will be made.

When man is still unable to know and perceive this world fully, how does he dare to deny what the saints (Awliya') of Allah know and see. A man denies the spiritual truths, because his heart lacks the spiritual light. He says that spiritual truths do not exist, but does not admit that he is unaware of them. He alleges that what the believers in spiritual truths say are all fables.

He dares to say so because he is ignorant. He does not know that the things he rejects as fables have been mentioned in the Qur'an too. What the Muslim gnostics say has been derived from the Qur'an and sunnah (traditions). Then how can he deny what the Qur'an confirms?

To Deny What One Does Not Know Is Unbelief

If not legally unbelief, at least it is a sort of unfaithfulness. The root-cause of man's misfortune is that he denies the truths he does not perceive. He rejects these truths because he has not reached the stage that has been reached by the 'Saints of Allah'. This is the worst kind of negationistness.

The foremost thing is that one must not deny what is contained in the Qur'an and sunnah, what is acknowledged by the Imams and what is admitted by the philosophers. If somebody has not perceived the truth himself, he should frankly admit that he does not know. But it is all humbug if some idiot says that he would not believe in Allah unless he himself has dissected Him with his sharp knife.

The most important thing is that we must not deny what we have been told by the Prophets and the Imams. This is the first step. We cannot take the next step if we deny the things in the very beginning. If anybody wants to go forward he should as a first step admit that the spiritual things he does not know, may possibly be correct. Then he should pray to Allah to open for him a way that might lead him to the place where he should reach.

We Must Not Deny the Qur'an and Sunnah

If a man will not deny the Divine things and will pray to Allah, Allah will certainly help him and will gradually open the way for him.

I hope that we will not deny what is in the Qur'an and sunnah. It often happens that a man believes in the Qur'an and sunnah, and does not deny even when he does not understand what is in them, but when somebody else tells him that the Qur'an and sunnah say so, he instead of admitting his lack of knowledge, rejects that outright as nonsense.

Total Denial is a Stumbling Block

Total denial deprives man from acknowledging many truths and prevents him from proceeding on the right path. The veracity of the facts which have been affirmed by the saints of Allah should be acknowledged at least tacitly if not expressly. A man who denies them totally and describes them as nonsense, can never succeed in proceeding further.

We Must Do Away With Negative Attitude

I hope that we will give up the negative attitude and will pray to Allah to make us familiar with the diction of the Qur'an which is of a special type. Like man the Qur'an also has many potentialities. It is a large table on which

many dishes of various tastes have been placed by Allah. From it everybody can have food of his choice, provided he has not lost his appetite, which happens in the case of heart patients.

The Qur'an like this world is a vast dining table. This world is also used by different people differently according to their requirements and taste. Man utilizes it in one way, animals in another and the men who are on the same level as the animals in a third way. As the level goes up, the way of utilization improves. The same is true of the Qur'an. It is for all. Everybody can be benefited by it according to his taste and choice.

Its highest beneficiary is he who is its first addressee and to whom it was revealed. *“Only he knows the Qur'an to whom it was addressed.”*

Denial of Prophethood

We need not be disappointed. Instead we must try to be benefited by the Qur'an. For this purpose it is essential that first of all we remove from our mind the idea that there exists nothing besides physical and material problems and that the Qur'an also has been revealed only to deal with these problems and is exclusively concerned with this worldly life.

This way of thinking amounts to total denial of Prophethood. In fact the Qur'an has come to make man a real human being and all this is a means to an end.

Supplications and Worship Are Means

Worship is a means. Supplications are a means. They are a means to develop real human qualities and to awaken dormant human potentialities so that man becomes a real human being, a godly man, able to see what is right and understand what is right.

Prophets have come for this very purpose. Prophets are also a means. They did not come merely to set up a government. The government has its own place, but the Prophets did not come only for the sake of obtaining power and administering worldly affairs. This is what the animals also do. They also have their own world and they administer the affairs of it.

Justice is a Quality Appropriate to Allah

Those who have an insight look at the discussion of justice as the discussion of a characteristic of Allah. The administration of divine justice is one of the functions of the Prophets. They set up a government as a means of leading man to that position which is the real aim of the Prophets' coming. May Allah help us in all affairs!

Before dealing with the remaining points perhaps it is necessary and useful to point out that the scholars often disagree because they do not understand the language of each other properly. The reason is that each group of scholars has its own language.

A Dispute About Grapes Between An Iranian, A Turk And An Arab

I wonder whether you have ever heard this story. There were three men. One of them was an Iranian; another was a Turk and the third was an Arab. They were discussing what they should have for lunch. The Iranian said that angur would be quite suitable. The Arab said: *“No, we would have inab.”*

The Turk said: *“No, I don't like either. We would have uzum.”* As they did not understand the language of each other, they differed. At last someone of them went out and brought grapes. Then they realized that all of them wanted the same thing.

To express the same thing there are different words in different languages. For example, the philosophers have a particular diction. They have their own terminology. Similarly the sufis have their own language. The jurists have their own terms. The poets have their own poetic diction. The Imams have their own separate style.

Now we have to find out which one out of these three or four groups has a language closer to the language of those who are infallible and to the language of revelation. I do not think that any sensible person will deny that Allah exists and that He is the source and cause of all that exists. Nobody believes that you with your coat and pants are God, nor can any sensible person imagine that any man with a turban, a beard and a staff is Allah. Everybody knows that all men are creatures.

Anyhow the way in which the cause and effect are described and the impression that such description creates, often gives rise to disagreement. We should find out what those who belonged to the gnostic class actually wanted to say and what induced them to use questionable words and a vague style.

How To Reconcile Different Groups And Their Ways Of Expression?

Now I want to reconcile these different groups for they all say the same thing. I do not want to condone all philosophers or to defend all gnostics or all jurists. That is not my intention. I know that many of them are shopkeepers. They say only that which may promote their business. What I mean to say is that in all these groups there are people who are pious.

The differences which exist between them are due to the scholars of to which they belong. Their differences may be compared to the difference existing between the Usulis and the Akhbaris (traditionalists). Sometimes some Akhbaris condemn the Usulis as infidels and unbelievers, and Usulis condemn the Akhbaris as ignorant. They do so despite the fact that the objective of both the groups is the same.

Now the main point of our discourse is that a group of philosophers uses such terms as the primary cause, first effect, second effect, causativeness etc. Such terms as causativeness, source and consequence are some of the favorite terms of the ancient philosophers.

Even our jurists do not refrain from using terms like causativeness and effectiveness nor have they any objection against using such words as creatorness and createdness. There is a class of the Muslim gnostics, who because of difference they have with other classes, use quite different expressions, such as manifest, manifestations, glory etc.

In addition, they use certain other words to which the literalists take exception. Now let us see why they use such words and why some of these words have been used by the Imams also. I do not remember to have seen such words as illiyat, ma'luliyat, sababiyat and musabbibiyat

(causativeness and effectiveness) being used by the Imams, but other such words as khallaqiyyat (creatorship) makhluqiyyat (createdness) tajalli (revelation of glory) zahir (manifest) and mazhar (manifestation) are found in what they have said.

Now let us see why the Muslim gnostics and sufis have refrained from using the terminology of the philosophers as well as the language of the common people. They have invented a style of their own to which the literalists usually object. Let us know the reason.

Cause and Effect

On the basis of causation one thing is considered to be the cause and another to be the effect. As a rule the cause should be on the one side and the effect on the other. In other words they should be in two different places. Take the example of the sun and the sunlight.

There is light in the sun, but it also emits light. The sun and its light have two separate identities and are located at two different places. As the sun emits its light, the sun is the cause and its light is its effect. But the question is whether it is possible in the case of the self-existing being also to imagine such relationship of cause and effect as is found in nature.

For example, fire is the cause of heat and the sun is the cause of light. In nature the effect is a consequence of the cause and the cause and effect are usually found in two separate places.

In nature the cause and the effect are also usually located at two different places. But we cannot say about the Creator and the created that they are in two separate places or exist at two different times. Even it is difficult to say how Allah exists, because He is Absolute and His existence is abstract.

Whatever the way of expression you may adopt, it is impossible to say how Allah exercises His eternal and ceaseless power of creating and sustaining every thing. The Qur'an says:

He is with you wherever you are. (57:4)

What does “with you” mean in this verse? Is Allah by the side of every man?

Meaning of “with you”

This way of expression has been chosen because it is impossible to express the truth exactly. Therefore, words as close to the reality as possible, have to be chosen. It is very difficult to understand where the Creator is and how He is with the created. Is the relation between the Creator and the created the same as between fire and its effect? Or is the relation between them similar to the relation between soul and eyes, ears, nose and other organs?

The second similitude may be closer to the reality. Anyhow it also cannot express the meaning clearly. The Creator is encompassing the whole creation and this encompassing is related to His eternal attributes of creation and sustenance. It is difficult to say anything more. All that may be added is that this encompassing is such that there is no place where Allah may not be.

A tradition says: “If you were dropped to the lowest earth by means of a rope, you would find Allah even there.” This is only a way of expression.

For example if it is said: “*All that exists is Allah*”. This does not mean that any particular man wearing a gown and a turban is Allah. No man who is mentally normal would ever say so. We can only use words which may be as close to the reality as possible. Only to draw the attention of a man not conversant with the reality, to the relation between the Creator and the created it is said that it is true that “*All that exists is Allah*”.

But that does not mean that any particular man or a particular thing may be called Allah. That is why the Muslim philosophers say that Allah is pure existence, and He is all things, but not anything particular out of them. This statement may appear to be somewhat contradictory. But what is meant is that Allah is free from every shortcoming. He is pure existence and has no deficiency or defect. He is characterized with every perfection, whereas all other things are defective.

Therefore He 'is not anything particular out of them'. As Allah is free from every defect and deficiency, He consequently enjoys every perfection. Any perfection found in any creation of His is a reflection of His own perfection. As every perfection is a revelation of His glory, He Himself is all perfection. In the above quoted tradition “*all things*” means all kinds of perfection and “*not anything particular out of them*” means that He is free from every defect and deficiency. “*All things*” does not mean that you are also Allah.

That is why it is said that “*He is not any thing particular out of them.*” In other words He is all perfection while no one else is characterized with every perfection. There is another example of this kind. There is a well-known Persian poetical line that means: 'Because non-attachment became confined to attachment.' This line has nothing to do with any question of divinity.

But those who are not conversant with this topic, often confuse its meaning. This line in fact is concerned with the hostility between two persons. But those who do not understand its meaning say that it amounts to infidelity. In fact it has been misunderstood and misinterpreted. It actually deals with quite a different question, which is why the wars occur in the world.

Why Do the Wars Occur?

Why are the wars fought? What is the basis of the wars? In the above mentioned line and in Persian the word, 'rung' (color) is used in the sense of attachment and 'berungi' (colourlessness) in the sense of non-attachment. Some other poets have also used these words in this sense.

If one is not attached to any thing, there can be no quarrel. All quarrels are caused by somebody's attachment to some thing, which he wants to obtain for himself. The poet who wrote the above mentioned line wants to say that attachment to any particular thing or things is not a part of real human nature and if this attachment to worldly things is done away with there will no longer be any quarrel.

In the story of Prophet Musa and Fir'awn, if Fir'awn had been as indifferent to worldly things as Prophet Musa was, there would have been no trouble. If all the Prophets gathered together at a place there would be no dispute at all, for all disputes and quarrels are due to attachment.

Nature was unattached, but when it became a captive of attachment, quarrels arose. Even Prophet Musa and Fir'awn would make friends, if the sting of attachment was removed. This topic has no concern with divinity. It did not occur to him who objected to this line, that it related to two men quarreling between themselves.

Words in Imam's Supplications

You are already familiar with the words used in Imams' supplications. Now let us see whether the words and phrases used by Muslim gnostics for which they have been charged with unbelief by those who are unaware of reality, are similar to those used by the Imams or the gnostics have a different vocabulary. This topic relates to spiritual journey.

The following words have come in the Sha'baniyah supplication:

“O my Lord! Grant me complete withdrawal to You and enlighten the eyes of our heart with the light of looking towards You so that the eyes of heart may tear off the curtains of light and reach the source of grandeur and our souls get suspended in the honorable chamber of your sanctity.”

Further the text says: *“O my Lord! Grant me that I may be one of those whom you called and they responded, and at whom You looked and they were dumb-founded.”*

What do these words signify? Now what do the critics of the gnostics say? The gnostics have not said anything different from what the Imams have said. Why did all our Imams use to recite this supplication? What does “complete withdrawal” mean?

Imams pray for complete withdrawal

The Imams ask Allah to grant them complete withdrawal to Him, while it was up to them to undertake the spiritual journey themselves, but still they prayed to Allah for it. Why so? They asked Allah to enlighten the eyes of their hearts. What did they mean by the eyes of the hearts with which they wished to see Allah? What does heart mean in this context, and what is the meaning of the eye of the heart?

Thereafter, the aim of all this has been stated in these words: *“So that the eyes of our heart may tear off the curtains of light and may reach the source of majesty and our souls may become suspended in the honorable chamber of Your sanctity”*. Here the question arises what is meant by becoming suspended? The next prayer is:

“O my Lord! Make me one of those whom you called and who responded to You and who were dumbfounded by Your majesty.” The Qur'an also has said about Prophet Musa that he fell down senseless. Are these expressions different from what is called fana' or passing away in the terminology of the Muslim gnostics. Thus climbing up higher and higher the spiritual traveler reaches the stage where the eyes of his heart tearing off all curtains reach the source of majesty.

What is this source of majesty and what does reaching this source mean? Does this not mean gaining that proximity to Allah of which the gnostics talk? Can anything other than Allah be the source of majesty? Only that can be this source of majesty from whom all the favors and blessings can be

contained. Only after reaching this source of majesty “*our souls will become suspended in the honorable chamber of Your sanctity*”.

Anybody who looks over the relationship between Allah and His creation will never use the words, cause and effect for this relationship. The use of these words, wherever it has been made, shows only that this relationship is such that it cannot be expressed in exact terms.

The use of the words Creator and creation is nothing but following the taste of the common people. A far better expression is revealing the glory. The Qur'an says:

Then his Lord revealed His glory to the mountain. (Surah al-A'raf, 7:143)

This is also only a way of using the closest words to state a relationship that cannot be expressed exactly.

A Question Difficult To Conceive, But Easy to Believe

The relationship between Allah and His creation is a question that is difficult to conceive but after having been conceived, is easy to be believed. The difficulty is how to conceive a Being who is everywhere, but still it cannot be said that He is at such and such place.

He is outside of everything as well as the inside of everything. Everything is caused by Him. Nothing is devoid of Him. Now where can we find appropriate words to express these concepts? Whatever words we choose, they will be inadequate. All that can be done is that those who are fit to do so pray to Allah and pray in the style of the Shabaniyah Supplication that He may enlighten them on this subject.

Anyhow, it is not a thing for which one group may declare another group infidel or ignorant, for it is not possible for anyone to express himself clearly on this subject. Try to understand the sentiments of others and what they want to say. Sometimes it happens that as light surges in the heart of somebody, he involuntarily exclaims that he is everything.

Imam Ali is the Eye of Allah, He is the Light of Allah's Eye

You read in the supplications that Imam Ali is the eye of Allah. What does that signify? Imam Ali is often described as the eye of Allah, light of Allah and the hand of Allah. What does the Hand of Allah mean? Such words are used by the Muslim gnostics also. It is reported in our traditions that the alms given to a poor-man reaches the Hand of Allah. The Qur'an says:

You did not throw the pebbles, when you threw them, but Allah threw. (Surah al-Anfal, 8:17)

What does this mean? This is what you all repeat, but you do not allow the gnostics to mention the Hand of Allah. When these poor people cannot say expressly, they say the same thing in a roundabout way. But such expressions are common even in the Qur'an and especially in the Imams' supplications.

Therefore there is no reason why we should suspect the gnostics especially. Try to understand what they mean and why they do not use the diction commonly used by other people. Although they have not used the familiar words and phrases, they have not sacrificed the truth, but have

sacrificed themselves for the sake of truth. If we could understand that truth, we might have used the same diction.

The Qur'an has used the same way of expression. The Imams also have used similar words. If somebody says: *"This is the truth"*, no sensible person will think that he means that this is Allah. Now just see how manifestation of Allah can be interpreted?

In regard to the Imams in a supplication the following words have been used: *"There is no difference between You and them, except that they are your bondsmen; their creation is in Your Hand and their restoration is in Your Hand."* This sentence also shows the inadequacy of expression. That is why the Imams use the words which are closer to the Qur'an than to the words used by others.

About gnostics anyone could say that they were nobody. But there were some other people whom we knew intimately and knew that they had a thorough knowledge of all Islamic sciences. They also used similar words. For example they used to say: *"That reveals Allah's glory"*. In the 'Samat' Supplication there is a word, 'tal'atuka'. This word also means glory. Similarly there is another word nur (light) in the phrase, 'binuri wajhika' (by the light of Your Countenance).

That is why I say: Make peace with the gnostics. I do not mean to say that all of them are good. What I mean is that all of them must not be rejected. When I support the scholars and jurists, I do not intend to support all kinds of scholars and what I mean is that all of them should not be rejected. The same is the case with the gnostics. Do not think that whosoever talks in gnostic terms is an infidel.

Every Thing Must Be Investigated

First of all it must be understood what the other man is saying. If that is understood, perhaps there will be no need of rejecting him. Everywhere it is the same story of grapes – 'inab, angur and uzum.'

One man states a thing in one way; another man uses the terms of cause and effect while saying the same thing; the third man uses the word, mover and consequence; while the fourth man says manifest and manifestation. At some time or other all of them reach a stage where they realize how to describe the Being who is everywhere but is not any of the things we perceive. That is why sometimes someone ever says:

"Ali is Allah's hand; Ali is Allah's eye."

The Qur'an says:

You did not throw when you threw, but Allah threw. It also says: Surely those who pledge their allegiance to you, really pledge their allegiance to Allah. Allah's hand is above their hands. (Surah al-Fath, 48:10)

Does this verse mean that Allah's Hand is literally placed on their hands? Obviously it does not. 'Above' here means at a higher point spiritually. Actually we lack words to express this position properly.

As Allah is far above that he may be mingled with anything or that he may be related to anything in a general sense, similarly he is above that we may be able to understand the nature of His glory. His glory is unknown to us. But we believe that there is certainly something of this sort. We cannot deny its existence.

When we believe that such things exist, we have to admit that they are mentioned in one way or another in the Qur'an and Sunnah. In the Qur'an wherever there is a mention of the glory of Allah, the words revealing or manifesting have been used. In the Surah al-Hadid a verse says: He is Explicit and Implicit.

A report says that the last six verses of the Surah al-Hadid are for the people who will appear “*in the last era.*” Only they will be able to understand these verses which give some account of creation etc. It is in these verses that Allah says:

He is the First and the Last and the Explicit and the Implicit and He is with you wherever you are. (Surah al-Hadid, 57:3-4)

Nobody can easily understand what is meant by 'the last era'. Only one or two persons in the world may be able to understand the significance of this phrase.

Misunderstandings Must Be Removed

The main point which I want to emphasize is that misunderstanding must be removed and there should be an end to the differences between the pedagogues and the scholars. The way to gnosis must not be blocked. Islam is not the name of the rules of law only. The basis of these rules is something else.

The basis should not be considered to be superfluous, nor should it be sacrificed for the sake of derivatives. We must not say that gnosis is not required or has no importance. Someone told me that a person was mentioned before the late Shaykh Muhammad Bahari. He says: “*That man is a righteous infidel.*”

‘How can that be’ we said: ‘Is he righteous and at the same time an infidel?’ Shaykh Muhammad Bahari said: ‘Yes, he is righteous because he acts according to the law of Islam and does not commit any sin. And he is an infidel because the god which he worships is not true God.’

Even the Ant Loves Itself

According to our traditions perhaps the ant thinks that Allah has two horns. This is due to self-love which an ant also apparently harbors. The ant is a very funny creature. It thinks that it is a mark of grandeur to have horns. When we think about our virtues and merits, we also think almost in the same way. It is the same ant which thought that Prophet Sulayman (Soloman) and his troop could not understand anything. The Qur'an says:

An ant exclaimed: 'O ants: Enter your dwellings lest Sulayman and his troops crush you because they do not understand.' 'And he (Sulayman) smiled laughing at her speech. (Surah an-Naml, 27:17-19)

The case of the ant is not a solitary one. Everybody thinks the same way. Even the hoopoe, according to the Qur'an, said:

I know what you do not. (Surah an-Naml, 27:22).

The hoopoe said so to Prophet Sulayman who was a Prophet and who had a companion who brought to him the throne of Bilqis in the twinkling of an eye. How could he do that, is not known. Was there any electric system of transportation, or was it a case of annihilating a thing and then bringing it

back into existence, or was the throne of Bilqis transported after having been converted into electric waves?

According to a report one of the companions of Prophet Sulayman knew a letter of Allah's Exalted Name and by virtue of it could bring anything desired to Prophet Sulayman before the twinkling of an eye. To such a prophet the hoopoe said: 'I know what you do not.'

Anyway, what Shaykh Muhammad Bahari meant to say was that that particular scholar said what he understood and he acted also accordingly.

It Is Bad Luck To Be Unaware of Some Important Questions

I think that it is unfortunate that a group of scholars which includes some very good and pious persons, is unaware of some important questions. When I came to Qum, Mirza Ali Akbar Hakim was there. He had established an Islamic Academy at his house.

The scholars used to receive education there. Such outstanding persons as the late Agha Khawansari and the late Agha Ishraqi used to attend Mirza Ali Akbar's lectures. On that occasion a pious and prominent personality, who is no longer amongst us, remarked: 'Look, to what level has the condition of Islam gone down?'

Now the business of Islam is being transacted at the house of Mirza Ali Akbar.' He made this remark despite the fact that personally he was a pious man. Even after his death one of his representatives said on the pulpit: 'I have myself seen Mirza Ali Akbar reciting the Qur'an.' The late Agha Shah Abadi was very much offended by this remark. Such misunderstandings are regrettable, and keeping oneself aloof from good work is also deplorable.

What a pity that this scholar did not take part in the meritorious act of setting up a learned academy! Philosophy is a common place thing, but some people object to it also. In fact these people do not understand each other and that is why all the disputes arise. A scholar declares another scholar infidel simply because he does not understand what the other man says.

The fault of the other man is that he uses such terms as cause, effect etc., which in the eyes of the former are contrary to the facts. I said earlier that divine name is not separate from the named. The name is a manifestation and a sign, but not such a sign as a milestone is. Therefore it is difficult to say that such and such thing is a sign of Allah. The words used in the Qur'an are closest to the reality but still do not represent it fully. The difficulty is that better words do not exist.

I said earlier that the Qur'an was like a dining table with many dishes placed on it. Everybody can have food according to his choice. No group has a monopoly of the Qur'an. All have a right to be benefited by it equally. The supplications of the Imams are full of spiritual knowledge. But some individuals try to deprive the people of these supplications which impart knowledge and convey the views of the Qur'an. Imams' supplications interpret the Qur'an and explain the questions to which others do not have access.

It is Wrong To Persuade People To Give Up Supplications

It is wrong to say that as we want to concentrate on the Qur'an, the supplications are not required. People should cultivate a liking for the supplications so that they may develop an attachment to Allah. Those who do so, give no importance to worldly things.

They are not self-conceited, and keep themselves busy with the tasks liked by Allah. Such people include those who used to fight for the sake of Allah, and at the same time used to recite the supplications.

Their circumstances were not different from ours, but still they managed to wield the sword and pray at the same time. Just as the Holy Prophet and the Holy Qur'an are not separate from each other, similarly the Holy Qur'an and the supplications are also not separate from each other.

We cannot say that as we have the Qur'an, we do not need the Holy Prophet. The Qur'an and the Holy Prophet go together. *"They will always remain together till they arrive together at the Fountain of Kawthar."* There is no question of their parting.

If some of us take them separately and want the Qur'an to be separate, the Imams to be separate and the supplications to be separate; or if some of us say that the books of supplication are not required, and as such they may be set on fire; or if some of us want the books of the gnostics to be burnt, the reason is simply that the people who say and do such thing are ignorant. A man who exceeds his limit always falls into error.

Kasrawi And Hafiz

Kasrawi was an historian. His knowledge of history was good. He was a fine writer also. But he was self conceited. In the end he began to claim to be a prophet. He, however, believed in the Qur'an, but he was totally against supplications. He lowered Prophethood and brought it down to his own level. As he himself could not rise up, he lowered Prophethood.

The supplications and the Qur'an all go together. The gnostics, the sufi poets and the philosophers all say the same thing. Their points of view are not different. The difference is only that of their diction and the style of expression. Hafiz Shirazi (the Celebrated Persian Poet) has his own individual style. He mentions the same points as others do, but in a different manner.

Their choice of words may be different, but the people should not be deprived of the blessings of the subject matter. It is essential to call people to the vast treasure of knowledge contained in the Qur'an, sunnah and supplications so that everybody may be benefited by them according to his capacity.

This was a prelude to the points I intend to put forward later. If I am spared and mention any expression used by the gnostics as a possibility, it should not be said that I was trying to revive their expressions. In fact their expressions are worth being popularized.

Some craftsmen used to call on the late Agha Shah Abadi, who used to narrate gnostic problems in front of them as in front of others. One day I said: 'Do you narrate these things in front of these people also?' He said: 'Never mind! Let these heresies be heard by them too'.

We also had some such people. I cannot say who they were. It will be wrong to mention anybody by name. Now the topic of discussion is that

“*Bismillahir Rahmanir Rahim*” has al-Rahman al-Rahim and “*Al-hamdu lillahi Rabbil 'alamin*” is also followed by the same words, viz. al-Rahman al-Rahim.

The words al-Rahman and al-Rahi'm may in bismillah either relate to ism or Allah. Both the possibilities are there. God-willing we will see later which of these two possibilities appears to be more reasonable.

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