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By the Grace of God, we are pleased to be able to present to our dear readers the new issue of the Message of Thaqaalayn. Similar to the previous two issues, in this issue we once again address different aspects of Islamic thought including the Doctrines, Spirituality, Law and History.

Publication of this issue has coincided with the last three months of the Islamic Lunar Calendar i.e. Shawwal, Dhu'l-Qa'dah and Dhu'l-Hijjah. Perhaps one can say that the highlight of this season is hajj, the pilgrimage to Mecca. Every year millions of Muslims from all over the world leave behind their home, business and dear ones and go to the holy city of Mecca in response to the divine call:

“And proclaim among men the Pilgrimage: they will come to you on foot and on every lean camel, coming from every remote path.” (22:27)

This positive response is formally declared when the pilgrim utters the words of talbiyah i.e. “labbayk. Allahumma labbayk” which mean “Here I am at your service, my Lord. Here I am.” However, it remains a lifelong undertaking to discover to what extent we are prepared to be at the service of our Lord and prefer His Will to our own wants and desires. In the full version of talbiyah, the pilgrim is recommended to say these sentences:

لبيك اللهم لبيك لبيك لا شريك لك لبيك إن الحمد والنعمة لك والمُلْك لا شريك لك لبيك ذا المعارج لبيك لبيك داعياً
إلى دار السلام لبيك لبيك غفار الذنوب لبيك لبيك أهل التلبية لبيك لبيك ذا الجلال والإكرام لبيك لبيك مرهوباً
ومرغوباً إليك لبيك لبيك تُبدي والمعاد إليك لبيك لبيك كَشَّاف الكُرب العِظام لبيك لبيك عبدك وابن عبدك لبيك
لبيك يا كريم لبيك

Here I am, O' Allah, Here I am. Here I am, no partners do you have, Here I am. Verily the Praise and Bounties and the Kingdom is for you, no partners do you have. Here I am, O' High, Here I am. Here I am, O' One Who calls towards Heaven, Here I am. Here I am O' Forgiver of sins, Here I am. Here I am O' One Who owns my presence, Here I am. Here I am O' Mighty and Generous, Here I am. Here I am O' One Who is feared and to Whom there is inclination, Here I am. Here I am O' You Who first created and to Whom all will return, Here I am. Here I am O' One Who averts major calamities, Here I am. Here I am,

Your servant and the son of Your servant, Here I am. Here I am O' Generous, Here I am.” (Al-Kafi, Vol. 4, p. 336)

It seems appropriate to say that hajj is all about celebrating unity. It starts with the positive response of the faithful to One God by following in the footsteps of Abraham, the Champion of tawhid, who successfully denied all the false deities not only in words but also in practice. Hajj continues with giving up your own preferences and your own ways of doing things in day to day life and instead devoting yourself, at least during the hajj, to God the Almighty. During hajj one must learn how to overcome differences and achieve brotherhood and unity with others. Elsewhere, I have written:

Pilgrimage to Mecca is full of unforgettable experiences. Among them, perhaps the most outstanding are selflessness, brotherhood, equality and simplicity. Every year millions of Muslims from different continents leave their home, family, business, and whatever else is dear to them, and set out on their journey towards Mecca, located in a desert. Everyone is asked to be present there in the same places at the same time all wearing the same clothes and performing the same rites. The rich and the poor, the king and the ordinary man, the elite and the layman all stand shoulder to shoulder and wear two pieces of white cloth. This is something that everyone must experience at least once in his lifetime, and should then try to implement lessons learnt from the experience in his day to day life. (Shomali, M. A. Discovering Shi'a Islam, Chapter Four)

This issue includes six papers, two of which are devoted to the topic of Muslim Unity. The first of the six papers is entitled: “The Prophet’s Night Journey and Ascent to Heaven”. Concluding his discussion in the last two issues about the life of the Prophet Mohammad (S) before and at the time of his mission, in this paper Hujjatu’l-Islam Dr. Sayyed Ahmad Rahnamaei studies two miraculous events in the life of the Prophet Mohammad (S) i.e. his night journey (isrāʿ) and ascent to Heaven (miʿrāj).

He argues that they were not limited to the Prophet’s spirit; rather his body was also involved in these two journeys. Hujjatu’l-Islam Dr. Sayyed Ahmad Rahnamaei is an assistant professor in the Dept. of Education at the Imam Khomeini Education & Research Institute, Qum. This paper is a revised version of part of his M.A. dissertation submitted to the faculty of Graduate Studies and Research, McGill University, Montreal, Canada, in 1995. The author has revised this paper especially for this issue of the Message of Thaqalayn.

The second paper is entitled: “Different Treatments of Spirituality.” Continuing the discussion on spirituality in the last two issues (i.e. “The Significance of Self-control and Self-purification” and “Different Methodological Approaches to Spirituality”), in this paper Hujjatu’l-Islam Dr. Mohammad Ali Shomali studies three different ways the Qur’an and hadiths have treated the process of self-development and described man’s effort and struggle to achieve piety and spirituality.

Spirituality or the process of self-building is described as a kind of battle, medicine and as a journey. Hujjatu’l-Islam Dr. Shomali is an associate professor and the head of the Dept. of Religions at the Imam

Khomeini Education & Research Institute, Qum. He is also the Dean of Postgraduate Studies for the International Students at Jami'at al-Zahra, the Islamic University for Women in Qum. God-willing, other theoretical and practical aspects of Islamic spirituality will be studied by the same author and others in the forthcoming issues.

The third paper is entitled: "The Shi'i Approach to the Interpretation of the Qur'an: Two Classical Commentaries." In this paper Hujjat'ul-Islam Dr S. Ahmad Rahnamaei describes the development and some of the characteristics of the Shi'i exegesis of the Qur'an and then focuses on two classic commentaries i.e. the Tafsir by Ali b. Ibrahim Qummi and Al-Teby'n by Shaykh Muhammad b. Hasan al-Tusi. Hujjat'ul-Islam Dr Namazi is an assistant professor in the Dept. of Philosophy at the Imam Khomeini Education & Research Institute, Qum.

The fourth paper is entitled: "A Probe into Wilayah and its Social Dimensions." In this paper, Hujjat'ul-Islam Dr Mohammad Ali Shomali studies the meaning and nature of wilayah and then focuses on its collective nature. Based on the Qur'an and the Sunnah, the believers are really brothers and sisters and the members of the faith community must function as different parts and organs of the same body. The paper was originally written in Farsi and published in the Ilmiyyat-e Ijtima'i, a quarterly journal for the social studies and translated into English by Mrs. Seyyedeh Zahra MirFendereski.

The fifth paper is entitled: "Proximity amongst Islamic Schools of Thought: A Necessity for Muslims in the Contemporary Era." In this paper Hujjat'ul-Islam Abdulhusein Moezzi deals with the challenges that face Islam and Muslims in the contemporary world and argues that the only way for Muslims to survive and revive Islam is to be united. Hujjat'ul-Islam Abdulhusein Moezzi is the Director of the Islamic Centre of England.

The sixth and final paper is entitled: "Pearls of Wisdom: A Selection of Hadiths from the Prophet Muhammad." In this paper Hujjat'ul-Islam Husayn Naghavi presents fifty hadiths from the Prophet Muhammad (S) on different aspects of human life. Hujjat'ul-Islam Husayn Naghavi is a PhD student of the Abrahamic Faiths at the Imam Khomeini Education and Research Institute, Qum.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all who have contributed to this volume and pray for their success. I especially want to thank Mrs. Fatima Khimji of Canada for editing and proofreading all the papers of this publication and making valuable comments.

I also want to thank Mrs. Zainab Rezavi of the UK for reading and commenting on draft of the fourth paper of this work. I would also like to thank the Ahlul Bayt World Assembly and the Islamic Centre of England for their support and encouragement. And last, but not the least, I thank God the Almighty for His guidance and favour upon us in the past and present and to help us all achieve a unified worldwide community.

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