

Lecture 1: Discussion on Ayat al-Wilayat

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

إِنَّمَا وَلِيُّكُمُ اللَّهُ وَرَسُولُهُ وَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا الَّذِينَ

يُقِيمُونَ الصَّلَاةَ وَيُؤْتُونَ الزَّكَاةَ وَهُمْ رَاكِعُونَ

“Verily your guardian is Allah and His Messenger and those who accept faith and establish prayer and give zakat while they are bowing down.” (5:55)

Before beginning any discussion on this ayat (verse), it is essential that I remind you of some basic facts. Quran is the name of the final Message and the last Communication from God. Since this Book is the last and final Revelation, hence whatever has been said is to last till the Day of Judgement. The orders therein remain valid till that Day and those cancelled will remain null and void till the Day of Judgement.

Similarly, if one is praised, that praise will continue, and if one is rebuked or admonished that too will persist till the Day of Judgement. After the Final Revelation, God has chosen not to say anything, nor send any fresh message. Every ayat in the Quran thus serves as the Last Word in its respective domain.

I wish to draw your attention to the fact that even though the Quran appears to be a modest sized Book, yet it is extremely comprehensive. The Sender of this Book has packed infinite data within its contents, such that we can neither count (*la ta`uddu*) nor fathom (*la tuh`soo*) (14:34) its depth. This Book offers a solution for every conceivable problem or issue that may arise till the Day of Judgment. There is no subject, be it ‘*ratb*’ (soft or good) or ‘*yabis*’ (dry or evil) (6:59) which is not detailed in this Book. God Himself informs us in Surah An-Aam (chapter 6),

مَا فَرَّطْنَا فِي الْكِتَابِ مِنْ شَيْءٍ

“We have not left out anything in the Book” (6:38)

This verse clearly implies that within its finite text, the Book of God encompasses an infinite depth of meaning. For this to be true it is essential that what appears, as a single statement, must actually possess the potential to unfurl a thousand meanings that are wrapped around this one statement!

For this very reason the Prophet of God has told us that, ‘the Quran has a zahir (obvious) aspect and it has a batin (hidden) aspect. In every hidden aspect there is yet another hidden aspect, rather seven of them; in fact, to each there could be seventy hidden aspects’. Our Prophet further tells us that, ‘there is not a single word in the Quran that does not have at least seventy thousand meanings associated with it’.

With our simplistic outlook, we may wonder how it is possible for a single word to generate seventy thousand meanings. The most we can boast of is the use of double meaning words where one word conveys two meanings. That is the limit of our accomplishment. What comparison can there possibly be between our work and the work of the Creator of the Universe! Our weakness on one extreme and His strength on the other. The height of helplessness on this side and the pinnacle of empowerment on His side. So what audacious estimates or comparisons can we mortals form between our efforts and His work!

God, our Creator, has granted us the power of speech. If it is true that we humans are nothing but a collection of dust particles, and we certainly are, then as a rule whatever our origins be, we must eventually return to those origins. Fashioned from clay, eventually we perish and disintegrate back into dust particles. This very process is confirming our physical composition. Nature gathered these particles together and gave them identifying characteristics. When separated these particles could not speak. God combined them in a form that was granted the power of speech. So the One who is empowered enough to give voice to mere dust particles, who will teach Him how to speak? Who can compete with His work?

Where in this world can we find an example of such absolute literary empowerment? God uses one word and hides seventy thousand meanings in that one word! These are hidden from our sight but if one is blessed with nur (spiritual insight), then these barriers are removed. Imam Ali has claimed,

‘If all the veiled barriers are removed from my sight it would not serve to increase my faith’. (Nahjul Balagha)

Do remember, increase is only relevant to a situation where there is some shortage! This prelude was necessary, for if the depth and expanse of the Quran is such that one word can suggest seventy thousand meanings, then a single word of praise bestowed by God translates into seventy thousand

words of praise! A complete sentence in praise of someone thus highlights multitudes of virtues. In fact, some sentences may contribute a million meanings and hence a million virtues. Now if a complete verse comes in praise, then how much praise is included here? And if thirty verses of a Surah come in praise of someone in the form of “**Hal Ata**” (76:1) then who has the stamina to enumerate the virtues of this person?

Here I am reminded of some verses of a senior poet by the name of Ahsan Jaisi. I have great respect for the work of people, who may belong to any sect of Islam, but are neither prejudiced nor inclined to a particular outlook. Ahsan Jaisi expresses his liberal thoughts in the following verse:

منم سنی لیکن از تعصب الاماں گویم

پسند خاطر م انصاف از دنیا و مفیہا

*I am a sunni but I refrain from prejudice
I wish for justice in this world and the hereafter*

What a pious thought! He further says:

سخن سنجیدہ مگویم۔ مضا میں چیدہ می گویم

کتب را دیدہ می گویم۔ چہ باک از طعنہ اعدا

نہ بیم طاعنہ دارم کہ حق را در زبان دارم

خدائے دو جہاں دارم نہ دارم با کئے پرواہ

*I speak serious words and I choose selected topics
I write what I see even though it annoys my enemies
I fear no reaction, for my tongue speaks the truth
I fear no one but the Lord of this world and the next*

Jaisi sahib said all this. Now if I had presented these verses to you, knowing that you share my outlook and with this earnest belief that many of you trust me to be an honest man and if I presented his thoughts without reference to him and claim them to be my thoughts, then it is very likely that my

community would brand these thoughts to be highly exaggerated. Or they might be inclined to label them as such.

Jaisi sahib says,

زتفسیر کلام الله چومی پرسى شود ناطق

که سه صد آیه نازل شد بشأن شوهر زهرا

*A logical and detailed study of the Book of Allah reveals that
Three hundred verses came in honour of Zehra's husband.*

According to this verse, Jaisi sahib says that three hundred ayaat came in honour of Zehra's husband!

We know that the Quran is the Last Word and the Last Message. Everything said therein serves as the final text. Let me add that the Quran is not a Book that aims to praise or degrade someone. The sole purpose of this Book is to guide mankind. Quran is a Book of Guidance.

Quran is a Book that clearly spells out the laws laid down by God Almighty for our guidance. What has law got to do with praise or humiliation of anyone? Laws are formulated by the lawmaker to inform the people about what they should do and what they should not do. Law is a collection of do's and don'ts. Its function is to tell us whom to follow and whom to avoid, whom to trust and whom not to trust; when to say 'yes' and when to say 'no', what to accept and what to reject; which activity is permissible and which is to be avoided. This is precisely what law means.

Quran itself explains the aims and objectives of this holy Book,

ذٰلِكَ الْكِتٰبُ لَا رَيْۡبَ ۚ فِيْهِ هُدًى لِّلْمُتَّقِيْنَ

***“This is the Book; there is no doubt in it, (it is) a guidance for ‘muttaqeen’ (those who fear Allah)”.
(2:2)***

This Book came to guide us. Each surah came for that purpose. The verses in the chapters came for guidance. The entire Quran is for guidance. Each component is for guidance and divine help. If a component is not performing this role then it is not a part of this Book. Without any doubt this is a Book of Guidance for those who fear Allah. This assertion holds for the whole Book and it is only possible if neither the chapters nor the verses are devoid of the basic purpose of guidance. In short, whatever it contains is for the purpose of guidance. Surahs are for guidance, the parts are for guidance and the whole is for guidance. All of the Quran came for the specific purpose of guidance.

Kindly remain attentive. The whole Quran is for guidance. Now if three hundred verses came in honour of Zehra's husband, as the verse by Jaisi suggests, and they are all in praise of Ali and highlight his virtues then the question arises that are these three hundred verses serving as a source of guidance for us or not? If not then they are not a part of the Quran. However, we know for sure that they are a part of the Quran, so we have to accept that these verses of praise are a source of guidance for us.

This clearly establishes that without praise of Ali we cannot do justice to the function of guidance. The purpose of these verses is not to praise the person of Ali. This praise is for the purpose of guidance. Without these verses of praise for Ali, justice could not have been done to the objectives of guidance. Hence, this praise is for the purpose of our guidance. If I can put it in simple words, God wanted us to acknowledge Ali, and by virtue of these verses wanted us to recognize him.

Both praise and rebuke are effective and essential tools for the purpose of guidance. You very well know that Surah Al Hamd is the summary of the whole Quran. The entire Quran has shrunk into its seven verses and the essence of whatever is in the Quran is found in this Surah. Now since Al Hamd is representative of the Quran in its own right, hence God ordained that there is no prayer (namaz or salat) without this Surah. This is a convenience granted to us. Recitation of just these seven verses makes us the readers of the entire Quran. For what is in the whole Quran is to be found in Al Hamd, and prayers cannot be said without this Surah.

The saying that 'there is no prayer (namaz or salat) without the opening Surah Al Hamd', is well known. The daily five time prayers, Friday prayers, Eid prayers, prayer (namaz or salat) e Ayaat, or consider any other prayer; is any devoid of Al Hamd? Prayers can be offered without other Quranic surahs. Surah Ikhlas is not an essential component of the prayer (namaz or salat) and any other surah can be used as a replacement, but there is no alternative for Al Hamd. If instead of this Surah we wish to read another one or a part of another one, this is not permissible. In fact, the question of 'instead' does not arise for there is no replacement for this Surah, and there is no prayer without it.

It is obvious that there is no prayer without rukuh (bending) and there is no prayer without sujood (prostration). Also there is no prayer without Surah Al Hamd. These are some essentials of prayer in the absence of which a prayer ceases to be a prayer. Thus for any kind of prayer, Sura Al Hamd, rukuh and sujood are vital and necessary components.

However, there is one specific prayer that has neither Al Hamd nor rukuh nor sujood. It is a prayer (namaz or salat) but has none of the essential components. Today we are saying this prayer for others and tomorrow we will be requiring others to say this prayer for us. This is a prayer for the deceased (salat e janaza). Is there Sura Al Hamd in it? Or rukuh or sujood? None of the essential elements of prayer are present here but can you say that in the absence of these basic elements this prayer is not a proper prayer? Who can make this claim when the Quran itself terms it prayer?

So there is a prayer which has no Al Hamd but it is a prayer; no bending or prostration, yet it is a prayer.

By the grace of God, the prayer that is valid even without Al Hamd, which is valid without rukuh and valid without sujood, is not valid without offering darood (blessings) on the Prophet and his Aal .

It is important that you stay focused on this issue that in every prayer along with Surah Al Hamd and bending and prostration, sending blessings on Prophet Muhammad and his Aal is an absolutely essential requirement. In other words, without this round of blessings for these pious persons no prayer is complete. Darood is that magnificent component of prayer which cannot be ignored. Thus, we realize that God does not like the prayers where no blessings are showered and where no praise is lavished on our Prophet and his Aal.

I was telling you that the essence of the entire Quran is accommodated in these seven verses. They are termed the summary of the whole Quran. Now, if they represent the summary of the entire Quran then how remarkable each of these verses of Surah Al Hamd must be!

However, if we want the narrative of Prophet Ibrahim, or any other prophet to be a part of this summary, then it will hardly remain a summary. The term summary implies that only the most important things are retained and the less important ones are left out. Do you find the tales of the prophets in Al Hamd? Where are most of the do's and don'ts of the Quran in this Surah? The ones that are included are wrapped around the term “*sirat al-mustaqeem*” (the Straight Path) and are not noticeably visible.

So all those valuable items that abound in the Quran are not visibly present here. Now if you wish to include Surah An-Aam (chapter 6), or Surah Ankabut (chapter 29) in this summary, then is it possible to accommodate them in a seven-verse Surah? Only the very important items can find their place in Surah Al Hamd. Thus, the essentials will be selected and others will be left out.

Let me say now that from the point of view of the Quran both praise and rebuke are necessary elements of the process of guidance. True guidance cannot be justified without praise or without admonishment. There can be no guidance without praising those worthy of praise and reproaching those deserving rebuke. So Surah Al Hamd can neither let go nor lose the purpose of guidance.

The entire Quran is condensed into these seven verses and these contain both praise and rebuke,

صِرَاطَ الَّذِينَ أَنْعَمْتَ عَلَيْهِمْ

“The path of those upon whom You have bestowed Your bounties” (1:7)

clearly indicates those who are worthy of praise and in the sentence

غَيْرِ الْمَغْضُوبِ عَلَيْهِمْ

“not (the path) of those inflicted with your wrath” (1:7)

except for the first word all other words signal rebuke . The words

لَا الضَّالِّينَ وَ

“gone astray” (1:7)

also highlight those deserving reprimand. Hence both praise and reproach are highlighted in this Surah. During prayer each person asks God to keep him or her on the right path. The path of those upon whom He has bestowed His bounties and to save him or her from the path of those who have earned His wrath in the past, are presently facing it, or are likely to face it in the future. So there is praise and there is rebuke.

The subject of praise is strange indeed! So is the subject of reproach. Normal sight will not spot the detail that praise is rendered in the past tense. “**Anamta**” (bestowed bounties) signifies the past tense, informing us that bounties have been bestowed. This task has concluded and is not pending or to be performed at a later stage. There is no reference to the present or the future tense here.

Now, if along with this it had been said, ‘save me from the path of those on whom you inflicted your wrath’, then those who had earned the wrath in the past would be included but those likely to face such consequences ahead would escape the net. Besides, those likely to go astray in the present or future would also not be included in the influence of this dua (prayer). Thus, if this prayer cannot include all those in the range of “**maghzub**” (inflicted with wrath) and “**zaaleen**” (gone astray) then this is hardly a comprehensive dua for one’s protection.

Our limited vision cannot fathom the amazing eloquence of the Quran. Past tense has been used for those rewarded with bounties; and when mentioning those who earn God’s wrath and those gone astray, no verb has been used. A noun clause is used that applies equally to past, present as well as future. Thus, no verb is used. For if the past tense is used then those in the present or future would be excluded. If the present tense were used then those in the past or in the future would be excluded. Likewise, if the future tense were used then both the past and the present lot would face exclusion.

Therefore no verb is used to mention “**zaaleen**” and “**maghzub**” in Surah Al Hamd. Had a verb been used then some time frame would be ascertained, and one or the other group would have escaped the net of admonishment. In the region of rebuke, God only uses nouns, for a noun indicates stability and continuity. Keep us away from the path of those who earn wrath, be they in the past, present or in the future. Save us from the path of those gone astray in the earlier times, in the present, or in times to come. But bounty has already been distributed to those who deserved it. Reward has been granted and the ceremony is over. The deserving have blissfully received their prize!

Now let us return to the three hundred verses coming in honour of Zehra's husband of which every word has the potential of seventy thousand meanings. This is the reason the Prophet claimed, and there is consensus with regard to this hadith (tradition) between both sunni and shia people, that the Prophet had said:

‘All men and jin, using total resources of pen and ink, cannot enumerate the virtues of Ali ibn Abi Talib’.
(Hadith al- nabvi)

So virtues of Ali cannot be counted. This explains the need for three hundred verses to highlight the virtues of Ali. What a splendid collection! When asleep admiration for his sleep, “*man yashri*” (2:207)! When awake applause for his wakefulness! When at home the gift of “*hal Ata*” (76: 1)! On the battlefield the prize of ‘la fatah’! Inside the mosque the tribute of “*innama*” (5:55)! Praise for his travel, praise for his stay; praise for the day, praise for the night; praise for the morning and praise for the evening. At certain locations praise for his silence, at others praise for his speech; praise of his activity and also praise of his inactivity! I am rendering ayaat in my language. When he stands there is praise for that posture, when he sits there is praise for his sitting posture. When he reclines there is praise for his changing positions too!

الَّذِينَ يَذْكُرُونَ اللَّهَ قِيَمًا وَقُعُودًا وَعَلَىٰ جُنُوبِهِمْ

وَيَتَفَكَّرُونَ فِي خَلْقِ السَّمُوتِ وَالْأَرْضِ

“Those who remember Allah, standing, sitting and reclining, and reflect and contemplate on the creation of the Heavens and the Earth” (3: 191)

Whatever he does there is praise for it and whatever he says there is praise for that too. His words are appreciated and his actions are approved. The Quran keeps a watchful eye on him. In fact, it is on the lookout to narrate what he says and relate what he does. Ali keeps performing and the Quran keeps informing. He keeps articulating and the Quran keeps reporting. His words keep transforming into ayaat!

Sublime elevation! Remarkable Meraj! His words scaled the heights where God selected them for His own words. His conversation attained the status where God adopted it as His own version. When Ali said something, they were his words, but when God set His approval on them, He sent them to us as His words!

This is not an occasion for me to go into detail or explain this point in depth. Nevertheless, scholars have written that the sentence ‘to God we belong and to God we return’,

إِنَّا لِلَّهِ وَإِنَّا إِلَيْهِ رَاجِعُونَ

“Verily, we are Allah’s and verily to Him we shall return” (2: 156)

was earlier not in the Quran or hadith and it was not in use by the people. When Ali got news of the death of Jafar al-Tayyar, this sentence was spontaneously uttered. The moment he rendered this elegy, the verse,

وَبَشِّرِ الصَّابِرِينَ

الَّذِينَ إِذَا أَصَابَتْهُمُ مُصِيبَةٌ قَالُوا إِنَّا لِلَّهِ وَإِنَّا إِلَيْهِ رَاجِعُونَ

“Give glad tidings to the patient ones, Who when misfortune befalls them, say, ‘Verily, we are Allah’s and verily to Him we shall return’ ” (2: 155, 156)

came as Quranic inspiration! These were Ali’s words but having received Divine appreciation they became Holy text. God transferred ownership of these words to His Being.

Anyway, the Quran kept collecting the words of Prophet Mohammad (pbuh) and his Ahlul Bayt and it kept recording their deeds. It kept an eye on them and it reviewed their lives so that each and every event was transcribed onto the pages of its heart. These events adorned the Quran and they formed a necessary narrative of the Book.

So the ones whose days and nights were monitored by The Quran, the ones for whom it pledged to preserve and transmit everything they said, the Quran chose to eternalize their lives. It kept compiling whatever they said or did. This suggests that the Book that is commonly known as the Quran, is in fact a Book that documents the biographical details of the Prophet and his Ahlul Bayt, and Quran is the name given to this amazing collection of biographies!

Let me also say here that the way yours, mine and everybody’s account of deeds is being written in an unseen book, the doings of the Prophet and his Ahlul Bayt are also being chronicled in the Quran. It is their record of deeds. Mind you, there is a vast difference between our record of deeds and theirs. The most trivial of these differences is that you cannot access or view my record and I cannot view yours. What to talk of seeing yours, I cannot even see mine own.

So there is no question of gaining access to the record of others. No doubt, it is being written but it is concealed from us. If it were not hidden, why would we refer to God as Sattar, the Concealer? All records are secured from our eyes. As a matter of fact, if my record of deeds were available to you, would you have respected me as you do? If these records were on display would children respect their fathers? Would students respect their teachers? Would young people uphold the dignity of elders?

It is indeed an act of great kindness and an enormous favour to us that God has concealed our records.

If one wants to peep into another's account, it is simply not possible for He protects it. We are pleased with this situation. Why are we pleased? It is so because there are shortcomings in our account, hence it cannot be brought to the forefront. It cannot be displayed publicly.

God ordained all deeds to be recorded but He also ensured their privacy. But why should the record book of the Prophet and his near ones, that goes by the name of Quran, be hidden or concealed? In fact, we are asked to read it: “**fa`aqraoo**” (73:20).

Why procrastinate? We are being urged to read it. Why? For the simple reason that these people are virtuous and free of all wrongdoings. Their records are vivid testimony to their reverence and absolute submission to the Will of God. How remarkable is the worshipper whose single stroke of sword is termed better than the worship of ‘**saqlain**’ (both the worlds)! Rather let me say, how exalted their standard of devotion, by virtue of which they are elevated to the ranks where even looking at them is equivalent to worship! Allama Jaisi, whom I mentioned earlier, says:

عبادت دیدن سے شے بارشاد نبی آمد

یکے کعبہ، دوئم قران، سوئم روئے شہ والا

Our Prophet has informed us that looking at these three things is akin to Worship: The first is Kaaba , the second is Quran and the third is the face of Shah e wala (King of the Sublime)!

Now if casting a glance at his face is akin to worship, then what will be the level of excellence of this worshiper himself! In the light of the Prophet's instructions, consider this particular aspect. You are looking at Ali but you are worshipping God. The person you are looking at is not the one you are worshipping; and the one you are worshipping you cannot see. No doubt desire to look at God can be termed worship, yet how strange that you are looking at Kaaba but you are worshipping God! Beholding Ali but worshipping God! Reviewing the Quran and worshipping God! Apparently this seems illogical but it is resolving an issue.

Please note what is being said is not illogical. In fact it has an amazing logic. You need to put a condition on how you look. What style of glance can be termed worship? It is obvious that all glances are not worthy of this equivalence.

Looking at Kaaba with the intention of destroying it cannot be termed worship. Remind yourself of the incidence of Abraha. A lot of people looked at the Quran with the intention of rejecting it. This cannot be termed an act of worship. When Marhab came to challenge Ali, he surely looked at him; but can this glance be termed reverential? Obviously not. Hence, we conclude that all views are not for the purpose of worship. In fact, a view or a sight itself guides how and with what kind of reverence it should be

viewed.

Looking at something in relation to oneself is not worship. Reviewing it in the context of the world is not worship. If you look at Kaaba as one of the many houses in this world then the intent of worship is missing. However, it will be an act of worship if you look at it with recognition that it is the House of God. When you review it with connection to God and when you associate it with God then it will surely be regarded as worship. When you look at Kaaba, you must do so with the firm belief that it is the House of God. When you look at the Quran do so with certainty that it is the Word of God. When you look at Ali do so with conviction that you look at ‘wajh Allah’ (face of God) or ‘wali Allah’ (friend of God)!

Now I draw your attention to Ayat al-Wilayat,

إِنَّمَا وَلِيُّكُمُ اللَّهُ وَرَسُولُهُ وَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا

يُقِيمُونَ الصَّلَاةَ وَيُؤْتُونَ الزَّكَاةَ وَهُمْ رَاكِعُونَ

“Verily, your guardian is Allah and His Messenger (Muhammad) and those who believe and establish the prayer and give zakat (the poor-rate) while they are in the state of rukuh (bowing down)”. (5:55)

This ayat came in honour of Amir ul Mu’mineen. What a magnificent verse! The Creator of this world selects a word, a title that is equally suitable both for Himself and for His best of creation!

Technically, the words used for God are not the words used for the Messenger of God, and the words used for the Messenger are not used for Ali. The term Rasool Allah, Prophet of God, cannot include God or Ali. Now consider the words Wasi e Rasool, Heir of the Prophet. This term is suitable for Ali, but it certainly cannot be used for the Prophet or for God. There is a separate word for the Prophet and an exclusive word for God. So the specific identities are for differentiating and not for grouping together. There is a particular word for each being and this word can neither be used here nor there. It is exclusively reserved for this designated being.

The All Mighty wished to hold a congregation where He would be addressed by a title, which along with Him could also be used to refer to the Prophet, as well as to remember Ali. Each has a separate identity, but God wished to share a common name that would bind the three together. The shortlisted word is ‘wali’. Selecting this word, He first used it for Himself, then He referred to the Prophet as wali and next He highlighted traits of Ali and granted him the title of wali.

What trait was highlighted? The act of giving zakat during prayers in the bending posture (rukuh). Who are the owners of this trait? They are wali. What is the Prophet? He is wali. What about God Himself? HE is a Wali. So in the word ‘wali’ God detected this enormous capacity to accommodate His own

reference, and the reference of both Ali and the Prophet. God is Wali, the Prophet is wali and Ali is wali.

It is appropriate for me to point out something here. I may declare someone to be a wali but any intelligent person will first check my credentials and authority. Am I suitably qualified to grant this title? If the conferring person has no degree himself then how worthy will his recommendation be? Can an uneducated person confirm the scholarship of another? If it is true that you are uneducated, it is highly likely that whatever you say is based on ignorance. The fact is that only a learned can confirm the scholarship of another educated person. A brave person is one whom a known brave person certifies. A poet can only be acknowledged by another poet, a writer by another writer and a speaker by a reputed speaker.

There is a famous saying, ‘a wali can only be recognized by one who is a wali himself’. If I declare or introduce someone to be a wali, my declaration is without proof. Such an introduction is valid only if a wali introduces a wali. Here Ali is being bestowed the title of wali by one who is referring to Himself as Wali. Who can be a better wali than God Himself? Thus if the Most Authentic Wali confirms another as wali, then that person truly deserves this honour.

Here, I am reminded of a verse in Surah Kahf (Chapter 18). God says:

أَفَتَتَّخِذُونَہٗ ذُرِّيَّتَہٗٓ أَوْ لِبَآءَ مِنِّیۡ ذُوۡنِیۡٓ

وَهُمْ لَکُمۡ عَدُوٌّۭ بِئْسَ لِلظَّٰلِمِیۡنَ بَدَلًا

“What! Will you then take him (shaytan) and his progeny as wali (friends) instead of Me? They are your enemies. Evil would be the exchange for the unjust” (18:50)

God questions mankind whether they want to accept Shaytan (the Devil) and his progeny as their wali, even though they are known enemies. Accepting an enemy for a friend is a poor trade off made by the unjust. The very next sentence admonishes those who are willing to accept Shaytan as their wali and grant him the status of a friend. Listen to this verse,

مَاۤ اَشۡہَدُہُمۡ تۡحِیۡہُمۡ خَلَقَ السَّمٰوٰتِ وَ الۡاَرۡضِ وَ لَا

خَلَقَ اَنۡفُسَہُمۡ وَ مَا کُنَّا لَہُمۡ مُّتَّخِذِیۡنَ اَعۡضَدًا

“I did not call them to witness the creation of the Heavens and the Earth, nor (even) their own creation; nor am I one to take those who lead (people) astray as helpers.”(18:51)

They cannot be wali for they did not witness the creation of the Heavens; they did not witness the creation of the Earth and they did not witness the birth of man. Besides, they cannot be wali for God did not select them to be His helpers.

A result can be drawn from this. Is there a ‘yes’ concealed in this ‘no’? Is there an affirmation hidden in this ‘rejection’ or not? If I were to say to a person, ‘How can you address a majlis (gathering) when you have never done this before, when you have not traversed this path; when you have never delivered a speech and when you are not duly qualified or competent’? This actually means that the gathering will be addressed by one who is a practiced speaker and who is capable and qualified to do so. So the ‘no’ is actually suggesting the presence of a ‘yes’ here. They are not wali for they have not witnessed the creation of the Heavens and the Earth. This clearly means that wali are those who have witnessed the creation of the Heavens and the Earth. They are those who have seen the birth of mankind!

The sentence that God did not select helpers from amidst the Shaytan is also revealing. By referring to the negative traits of the Devil’s clan, their claim to Wilayat is rejected. But this sentence also reveals the presence of some beings that God selected to be His helpers, selected to be His helping hands. If they are not ‘yad Allah’ (God’s hands) then who are they? If they cannot be addressed as ‘yad Allah’ then how should we address them?

These specifications and conditions for Wilayat are impossible to achieve now. For who can witness the creation of the Heavens and the Earth and qualify to be a wali? Who can witness the birth of mankind to qualify for the title of ‘wali Allah’ (friend of God)? A witness to the creation of the Earth can only be one who was present before the creation of the Earth. A witness to the creation of the Heavens has to be present before the Heavens came into being.

Similarly, the creation of the species of mankind can be testified by one who existed before them. Hence, if someone is prior to all this, then he can be a wali. God refers to such a one as His Helping Hand. So if God calls someone the power of His Hand and if the Quran bestows the honour of:

يَدُ اللَّهِ فَوْقَ أَيْدِيهِمْ

“The hand of Allah is above their hands” (48: 10)

then that person qualifies to be a wali. With these conditions God accepts him as His wali.

If the world wishes to accept a wali without these conditions then they are welcome to do so, but this will be their selection. God accepts a wali with these stated conditions. Where these conditions were not met, He drew a protective boundary of “innaama”. The use of “innaama” means ‘no one else’ except God, His Prophet, and one who gives zakat while bending down in prayers. God did not have to witness the creation of the Heavens and the Earth for HE created them!

We now find that the Prophet and one who gave zakat while bending in prayers were created from the Noor or Light that is deemed the very First Creation. There was this Light when there were no Heavens, and this Light was present when there was no Earth. The Prophet said,

‘Me and Ali are part of one single Light (Nur)’

(Hadith al- nabvi).

hence, the protective boundary around them.

Asad ibn Ibraheem was a great scholar of our faith. In his first book he narrates an incidence related to Jabir ibn Abdullah Ansari. One day Jabir was present in Masjid e Nabvi along with others. A few people were asking the Prophet some questions while some were doing ablutions or saying prayers, when a man entered the mosque. He described the situation, that this man’s clothes were torn and soiled as though he had rolled in dust. Looking disturbed he expressed his need to the Prophet in verse.

أَتَيْنُكُمْ وَالْعَذْرُ التَّبَكِّي بِرِقَّةٍ

وَقَدْ زَحَلَتْ أُمُّ صَبِيٍّ عَنِ الطِّفْلِ

وَأُخْتُ وَبَنَتَانِ وَأُمٌّ كَبِيرَةٍ

لَقَدْ كِدْتُ مِنْ فَقْرِي وَزَالَتْ فِي عَقْلِي

‘My daughter is crying with the agony of starvation and my wife is unable to help this infant as she herself is starving. I am so helpless that I fear losing my senses,

لَقَدْ مَسَّنِي عُرْيٌ وَفَقْرٌ وَفَاقَةٌ

وَلَيْسَ لَنَا مَالٌ يُمِرُّ وَلَا يُحْلِي

وَمَلْ مُنْتَهَى إِلَّا إِلَيْكَ مَفَرًّا

وَلَيْسَ الْفِرَارُ إِلَّا إِلَيَّ الرُّسُلِي

Poverty, hunger and deprivation of clothes are the three enemies that surround me and I am willing to swear that I do not own even a small amount of money. But for you, my Leader, I have no protector to turn to. Where shall a man seek refuge except at the doorsteps of the Prophet?’

He recited these four verses to the Prophet. Please listen carefully. The Prophet cried when he heard this poetic rendering.

The narrative of pain moved the Prophet’s heart and tears rolled down his eyes. He cried. Then he asked the people who were present, “Is there anyone here who can redress his needs and help him overcome his pain and affliction? O mankind God has rounded His Great Mercy into this mosque. Is there anyone who will avail this good fortune? At this moment God has placed piles of good fortune in the compound of this mosque. Is there anyone ready to pick up this bounty?” Now the writer says, when the Prophet said these words,

عَلَىٰ يَصَلِّي فِي نَاحِيَةِ الْمَسْجِدِ

Ali was offering prayer in one corner of the mosque and at that moment was in the posture of ‘rukuh’. He gestured to the man in need. The man noticed this gesture and went forward and removed the ring from Ali’s finger. After his need was addressed by this precious token, he moved away. Here Ali donated his ring and the next instance Ayat al-Wilayat was revealed to the Prophet, honouring this gesture of Ali.

The narrator says that after Ali’s donation four hundred people gave their rings to the needy man but this man kept saying,

"هذا من بركات علي ابن ابي طالب"

“This surplus charity is due to the gracious blessings of Ali ibn abi Talib.”

Anyway the rings were donated, but that chapter of acknowledgement was closed for Ayat al-Wilayat had been revealed after Ali’s donation. Later when four hundred rings were donated, no further revelation came. Thus, the revealed verse was purely to honour the one who took the initiative and not for those who followed this example after the revelation.

When the needy man complained to the Prophet of his hunger, poverty and clothes deprivation, his children were not with him. The Prophet did not see their state; he merely listened. Our Prophet, the leader of the world, in fact the pulse of the world, nursed a tender heart. He was visibly moved and wept mournfully and asked the people in the mosque to help the needy man.

Now our Prophet was aware of the times when Imam Hussain, his children and his companions would be subjected to periods of starvation. This needy man had complained of hunger but he did not say his

children were dying of thirst. True he had complained of food deprivation, but his children were not denied water and were not thirsty. His infants were not dying of thirst.

Our lives be sacrificed for the sufferings of the relatives and companions of Imam Hussain in Karbala. Our Prophet surely knew that these sufferings and many more would be inflicted on his children. He knew they would be denied water for three days in grueling heat and that an infant would starve in his cradle.

The camps of Karbala, where the Prophet's family were set up, were resounding with the children's cries of thirst and the companions of the Imam agonized for them. The ladies were patient and uncomplaining but the children in the camps were wailing 'al atash' from thirst. The companions must have cried out in helplessness, 'We are alive and the Prophets daughters are thirsty; the household children are thirsty and we live to hear them cry'. How severe the intensity of this thirst must have been!

I am reminded of a particular time, which my audience too cannot forget. Use your imagination. On the tenth of Moharram, day of Ashur, our thirsty Imam is without an army, or soldiers or any supporters.

نہ لشکرے نہ سپاہے نہ کثرت الناسے

نہ قاسمے نہ علی اکبرے نہ عباسے

He is without Qasim and Ali Akbar and Abbas. The entire household is gone; the garden is deserted. Eighteen funerals from one household! Imam Hussain is alone yet he has to keep a promise. Imam readied himself for the last journey where he was to sacrifice his life. He came to the door of the camp and offered his final salutations to his sisters and wives,

"يَا زَيْنَبُ وَيَا أُمَّ كُلْثُومُ وَيَا رُقَيَّةَ وَيَا رَبَّابُ عَلَيْكُنَّ مِنِّي السَّلَامُ"

"Dear Zainab and Umme Kulsoom and Ruqayya and Rubab, I offer my salaam".

When his sisters heard the farewell call they came to the door and asked him how a brother could think of leaving his sisters in such a difficult situation.

Bibi Umme Kulsum stepped forward and she held her brother and reminded him that he was the incumbent Imam and the dispenser of law. Now according to the law, preparation of a journey requires delegation of a guardian for the family and the children. "You are leaving on a journey from where there is no return, so who have you entrusted us to?" Imam bowed his head and God alone knows with what difficulty he replied, "My dear sister, who should I name? Is there any survivor that I can nominate? I entrust you all to the care of Allah."

"أَسْتَوْدِعُكَ اللَّهَ"

After this he called his dear sister Zainab to help him say farewell to his ailing son. She went along and alerted Ali Zain ul Abideen to receive his father. The son opened his eyes, glanced at his father and tried to get up but was unable to even sit up. He lamented, "Phuppi (aunt), look at my condition. I can see the Prophet's son and I cannot even give due respect. Please help me to sit by supporting my back". Bibi Zainab propped him up with her body support.

Imam Hussain inquired of his son's health to which he replied that by the Grace of God he was doing well. Then the son asked the Imam how he was dealing with the enemy. Bibi Zainab looked at her brother in anticipation of a response. Imam replied, "My son what shall I tell you? The Devil has complete sway over them and they will just not be guided to the truth. The blood of the martyrs has painted the sand of Karbala red and I am here to bid my last farewell to you." In just two sentences the Imam wrapped up the entire story.

When Zain ul Abideen heard the words 'last farewell' he asked in disbelief:

أَيْنَ أَيْنَ عَمِّي أَبُو الْفَضْلِ الْعَبَّاسِ

"Where is my uncle Abbas?" In other words how was this farewell possible in the presence of Abbas? Imam Hussain replied, "He lies on the banks of the river with his arms severed. Abbas has been martyred". The shocked son then inquired of each and every one. "Where is Habib ibn Mazahir? Where is Muslim ibn Ausaja? Where is Zuhair ibn Qain?" When the entire list was exhausted he asked in deep agony:

أَيْنَ أَيْنَ أَخِي عَلِيُّ الْاَكْبَرِ

"What about my brother Ali Akbar, my brother who resembles the Holy Prophet?" Probably our Imam could not use the word 'killed' for Akbar so he said, "Son, you and I are the only surviving male members right now".

On hearing this grim tale Zain ul Abideen asked for his sword and a staff. When Imam asked why he needed these, the son replied the staff was for support and the sword to wage war with. "I too will sacrifice my life for you". Imam counseled his son, "If you too are martyred then who will take my family and the Prophet's daughters back to the Prophet's grave? Who will be the custodian of the Prophet's grave? Who will be the guardian of the whole household"?

The ailing son uttered in despair, "Am I destined to sit in the camp while the Prophet's son is martyred?" Imam Hussain consoled his son, "You are my finest child. After me, you will be the next imam. Your

tribulations are more severe than mine and your patience will be exemplary”. Then the Imam imparted the final instructions. Let my audience listen intently. He said, “My son, you will be imprisoned. Be patient. Your neck will be bound with a restrictive collar. Wear it. Your feet will be chained. Wear the chains”.

Imam Hussain further instructed his son, “At some stage you will be released. When you go back to Medina and when my friends inquire about me, convey my greetings to them. Also tell them whenever they drink water they should remember the thirst of those who were with me in Karbala. Say to them I wish my mourners from amongst them and the subsequent mourners till the Day of Judgement, were there with me on the day of Ashura. I wish that all of them were there and had seen me that day when I was holding my infant son Asghar, and pleading for a few drops of water for him”.

"كَيْفَ اسْتَسْقَى لِطِفْلِي فَأَبُوءَا أَن يَرْحَمُونِي"

“Wish you could see how I pleaded for water, and how ruthless was the response of the transgressors”.

God’s wrath be on the transgressors.

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