

Lecture 2: Discussion on Ayat al-Mawaddat

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

قُلْ لَا أَسْأَلُكُمْ عَلَيْهِ أَجْرًا إِلَّا الْمَوَدَّةَ فِي الْقُرْبَىٰ

“Say (O’ Mohammad), I do not ask of you any recompense for it, save love of (my) relatives (near of kin)” (42:23)

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ سَيَجْعَلُ لَهُمُ الرَّحْمَنُ وُدًّا

“Verily those who believe and do good deeds Ar Rahman will appoint for them love” (19:96)

You have gathered here today to hear about ajar-e-risalat (the recompense for the task of Prophethood), or to give it another name, “**mawaddat fil qurba**”, the love for the Ahlul Bayt. In the second verse quoted, God tells us that He has made a commitment to those who believe, “**aamanu**” and do good deeds “**amal us salehat**” that soon He, their Merciful God, will appoint love for them.

Now this is an open verse that expresses a clear commitment with regard to some instruction that is to follow later. Let us look at the words used in making this commitment once again. Those who believe and do good deeds, the Most Merciful will soon pass an edict of love for them. He will send instructions for others to love them.

One thing is clear right away, that ordinary issues are often stated without a preliminary note of introduction. It is as much a folly to issue a preparatory reference for an insignificant thing, as it is to ignore one for an important issue. The speaker is in the best position to know what is of consequence and what is not.

There are instructions in the Quran for prayers (namaz or salat) and for fasting (roza or saum).

Instructions for whatever God wished to convey were given directly by the Instructor. Why should He warn of these in advance? Why should people be made to wait anxiously for this ruling? Why should they be informed that a tremendous ruling is coming in the context of prayer (namaz or salat) or zakat or mandatory fast? Instructions came without a preamble, for these subjects did not require one.

On the other hand, within the Quran, there are certain commands that required a preparatory base. People had to be informed of the impending orders through preliminary directives from the Almighty. Once this was done and the curiosity to learn of the actual command was aroused, then the real order was revealed. The Quranic ayat where God addresses Prophet Mohammad (pbuh) is before you,

يَا أَيُّهَا الرَّسُولُ بَلِّغْ مَا أُنْزِلَ إِلَيْكَ مِنْ رَبِّكَ

“(O’ Mohammad) deliver what has been sent down to you from your Lord” (5:67)

We notice at once that instructions had been disclosed prior to the revelation of this verse and those instructions had to be conveyed now. So the rulings came before the implementation was undertaken. That is why the word used in 5:67 is “**unzila**” and that is why “**ma unzila**” is referring to the already communicated ruling. Orders were to convey it. What came earlier was the preparatory command and the fresh order was for announcement of that command. In the context of the verse quoted, “**deliver what has been sent down to you from your Lord**” (5:67), when we deliberate on the initial information then this ayat comes to mind,

فَإِذَا فَرَغْتَ فَانصَبْ

“So when you have completed (the duties), then establish (your successor)”(94:7)

وَإِلَىٰ رَبِّكَ فَارْغَبْ

“And return to your Lord with fervour”. (94:8)

If the sentence “**when you have completed**” were addressed to us then there would have been instructions telling us what to establish after which task. But this verse is addressed to the Prophet and he very well knew what God wanted. The word “**fargab**” clearly reminded him what task had to be completed and the word “**fansab**” spelt out who had to be established. The instructions had already come in this regard. The Prophet had been informed who was to be established on completion of which

task. He also knew he was to return to the Maker after concluding this mission.

Now on the basis of the earlier ruling our Prophet was asked to ***“Deliver what has been sent down to you from your Lord” (5:67)***. He was asked to convey on that particular day, what had been revealed to him earlier. The earlier communiqué was the preparatory one. The one revealed later required communication of the real intention.

Returning to our title verses, in the pattern of the example just quoted, I wish to submit that first God revealed “Verily those who believe and do good deeds Ar Rahman will appoint for them love” in the form of a pledge. It was addressed to the believers engaged in good deeds, that soon the Most Merciful would send instructions of love for them.

Remember that just as hub and muhabbat are synonyms for love, so are wud and muwaddat. In the verse making the pledge the word used is “wud” and the word “muwaddat” is likely to be used when it is time to honour the pledge. Both words are one and the same thing. God made a commitment, and I wish to add that having made this commitment, He made it mandatory upon Himself to uphold it. Once a pledge is made, Kareem honours it.

In other words when our Kind and Generous Lord promises something He certainly always fulfills it. If an ordinary pledge requires fulfillment then what about those made by Him, who is the essence of Kindness and the most Generous of Givers. Definitely, His commitments will be honoured.

Hurdles often crop up in the fulfillment of promises made by us. We may not be able to uphold them. Sickness may prevent us, circumstances may impede our task or our shortcomings may cause hindrance. This pledge, however, is made by the One who is in absolute Command and is totally Empowered. The One who is never visited by weakness, where absence of control is not a possibility and where hurdles and preventives simply do not exist. When this God pledges, I feel compelled to recite this ayat,

وَمَنْ أَوفَىٰ بَعْدِهِ مِنَ اللَّهِ

“Who can be keep promises better than God”? (9:111)

In the context of promises and commitments, we will not find one that the Prophet of God made and which was not upheld. Likewise, we will not find a pledge made by any of our Imams that they did not honour. Leave alone these pure beings (masumeen), we are not likely to find a commitment made by their companions, those enriched by their nearness and coloured by their virtues, which was not honoured. Whenever a sadiq (truthful) makes a pledge, he ensures it is fulfilled. So I draw your attention back to the words used by God in making His pledge,

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ سَيَجْعَلُ لَهُمُ الرَّحْمَنُ وُدًّا

“Verily those who believe and do good deeds, Ar Rahman will appoint for them love.” (19:96)

At this point I am almost compelled to admit that some words have lost their true meaning due to everyday usage. The significance of such words is reduced to an extent that we cannot even imagine what their real potential may be.

Words like those who believe or the believers or mu'mineen, when these words are used for people like us, or if I begin to use them for people like myself, then what value can we attach to the word Iman (belief) and what standard can we assign to the word mu'min (the believer)? Whenever a speaker addresses a gathering, he refers to his audience as mu'mineen. Now if they are mu'mineen then how do we ascertain who a mu'min is? Then how can we picture the incidence of Prophet Younis (Jonah) chanting hymns as detailed in the Quran?

لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا أَنْتَ سُبْحَانَكَ * إِنَّي كُنْتُ مِنَ الظَّالِمِينَ

“There is no God but You. Glory be to You. Verily, I was of the unjust.”(21:87)

Prophet Younis was busy with this ‘tasbeeh’ (praise) when God says:

فَاسْتَجَبْنَا لَهُ

“Then We responded to him” (21:88)

and accepted the prayers of Younis

وَنَجَّيْنَاهُ مِنَ الْغَمِّ

“And delivered him from grief” (21:88)

relieved him from distress

وَكَذَلِكَ نُنْجِي الْمُؤْمِنِينَ

“Thus do We deliver the believers” (21:88)

this is how we help the believers (mu'mineen).

If you paid attention you would have understood for which eminent personalities the word “mu’mineen” is used in this ayat. It has been used for Prophet Younis and his helpers. Please mark that the words used are not ‘this is how we help out the prophets’.

Now review this:

إِنَّ بَذَا لَهُوَ الْبَلَاءُ الْمُبِينُ

“Verily, that was an open trial” (37: 106)

We wished to test you, we did and then ransomed it with a great sacrifice (zibh azeem).

كَذَلِكَ نَجْزِي الْمُحْسِنِينَ

“Thus we recompense those who do good” (37: 110)

This is how we reward those who do good (mohsineen). Here the group, that includes Prophet Ibrahim, is being referred to as “mohsineen”. Now try to understand how exalted the group of mohsineen is and how elevated their ranks are! These words have really lost their true essence due to excessive usage in everyday matters.

We claim to be believers in possession of Iman, but what is our stature and what is the standard of our belief? When we hear the word Iman we configure it to be a kind of faith that we are in possession of. When God refers to a ‘mu’min’ in an ayat, our imagination usually wander off in the direction of people whom we too classify as mu’min. But, is there any comparison between a person acknowledged a mu’min by God and one who is labeled a mu’min by man himself?

The power of a narrative is essentially determined by the proficiency of the author. The higher the expertise of the author the richer the text is likely to be. There is this word mu’min used by God and there is the word mu’min uttered by me. Can the two be alike? Why should I not say that we have designated some people believers and there are others who have labeled themselves as such. Whoever is in this gathering today is a mu’min and together you all are classified as mu’mineen.

So on the one hand every person in my gathering today is a mu’min and this very word when it surfaces in Surah Hashr, God is “Al Mu’min”,

الْمُؤْمِنُ مِنَ الْمُهِدِ مِنَ الْعَزِيزِ الْجَبَّارِ الْمُتَكَبِّرِ

“the Bestower of conviction, the Guardian, the Ever Prevalent, the Supreme, the Great Absolute”

(59:23)

Now reflect on the word mu'min that is assigned to the likes of me and you, and deliberate on the word Mu'min that God uses for His own Self!

God promises those who believe and do good deeds, that soon He will send a commandment for them to be loved. So, we immediately realize that faith and belief of these fortunate ones is perfect belief and their good deeds signify the ultimate degree of practical goodness. The ones referred to here, are not those who do good at times and indulge in wrongdoing at other times. In fact, God refers to those whose actions are never devoid of goodness; for whom each and every act is an act of virtue and on the basis of these good deeds some may be gifted the title of 'saleh al mu'mineen', the most virtuous of the pious people!

This is a promise. Why is it being made in advance? People are to wait in anticipation and hence a preparatory discourse is being initiated. The truth is that God wishes to convey that the promise is being made on the condition that when He honours it, the people must instantly recognize that the commitment was made for this particular occasion. The promise was for this place and the language and words of the promise were relevant to this situation. The word "**aamanu**" in the ayat (19:96) is used for these virtuous people and the reference to "amal us salehat" is also pointing to them.

Now just as the promise is clearly evident to you, the fulfillment of the promise must also figure noticeably. There was a time when God made the promise, and there had to be a time of fulfillment of this promise. The commandment of love that was due must have been issued, and it must have come in a Quranic ayat. Which verse appears to fulfill the pledge? The verse is,

قُلْ لَا أَسْأَلُكُمْ عَلَيْهِ أَجْرًا إِلَّا الْمَوَدَّةَ فِي الْقُرْبَىٰ

"I do not ask of you any recompense for it save love of (my) relatives (near of kin)" (42:23)

At this stage I wish to highlight a very subtle point and I request you to remain absolutely attentive. The words used in the ayat (19:96) that makes the promise are "**aamanu** and **amal us salehat**". Orders of love are still awaited. For whom are these instructions coming? They are for those who believe and do good deeds. The order of love is due to come for them, and when the order came, what did it say? The Prophet expects no recompense for his task, save love of the near ones, the Ahlul Bayt.

In Ayat al-Mawaddat (42:23) the Ahlul Bayt are mentioned as "**qurba**", and in the earlier ayat of promise (19:96) the words "**aamanu** and **amal us salehat**" distinguish these privileged ones. Technically, the word used in the verse of promise should also have been used in the verse fulfilling the pledge, or else the word to be used in the later verse should have been used in the earlier one as well, but the fact is that the promise is made for those who believe and those who do good perpetually, while the verse fulfilling the pledge came for the relatives of the Prophet. I request full attention at this point.

I wish to highlight one thing here. There are two aspects associated with every task. One that will set a standard or criteria for that task; and the second one that will spell out its identity or describe its characteristics. Standard is one thing and identity is a totally different thing.

The person who is addressing you at the moment has a cap on his head, a cloak on his body, a ring on his finger, his face looks like this, his voice sounds like this, this is his age and he sports a beard of this type. This very person is the speaker in front of you. However, this description has no bearing on the standard of the speech. In fact, it merely identifies the speaker. If this cap was not on my head I could still make a speech. I can take off my cloak and still speak; if my beard was not like this I could continue speaking and if I was not wearing this dress I could easily make a speech in another dress. To tell you the truth, even my name is not the basis of this speech. If I had another name even then it was possible to make this speech!

So the criteria or standard of speech is the fundamental requirement for enabling the speech. If this set of criteria did not exist then it is not possible to make a speech. Hence, the criteria are those requirements without which a speech cannot be made.

The description of the speaker that his dress is like this, his hair or his cap is like that is used to identify the speaker. Even, the name given in the newspaper is for the purpose of identification and not as a measure or criteria of the speech. You select a different name and even that person can make a speech. So, if a name were to be criteria for a speech, then absence of a name would imply no speech.

The standard of speech then is the ability to make a speech, to be worthy of speaking, to have the potential to speak and also the desire or motivation to speak. If this potential did not exist then there is no possibility of a speech. If the intention or desire was missing then too speech was not possible. All those aspects in the absence of which speech is not possible serve as criteria for speech. On the other hand we have indicators in the form of names, clothes, appearances and these serve as identities.

If you can stay focused now, you will appreciate and remember this moment all your life. When the promise was made God did not say that soon He was going to send orders of love for the Prophet's near of kin. These words are not found in the earlier verse, which means that the command to love that was to come would not be based on closeness or linkage to the Prophet. This linkage is not the criteria and their association with the Prophet is not the reason for this command.

In fact God is likely to say 'I have remained neutral and unbiased in this matter. Nuh's son was his close relation and he even pleaded for him, but did I give him any concession? Azar was a relative of a Prophet and this Prophet had also prayed for his forgiveness. I listened and I stopped him from repeating whatever he had already said. Lut's wife also qualified as a near relative but did I make any concessions for her? And if you want to observe my neutrality then open My Book and see. Abu Jahal was the enemy of the Prophet and so was Abu Safyan, but I did not name either of them. If I have named any enemy, it is a relation of the Prophet,

تَبَّتْ يَدَا أَبِي لَهَبٍ وَتَبَّ

“May the hands of Abu Lahb perish” (111: 1)

This verse suggests that even if someone is related to the Prophet and if a state of rebellion exists then others may be shown some leniency, but not these relatives.

I was telling you earlier that when God promised to send orders of love He did not say He was about to send instructions for the Prophet’s family members or near of kin. In fact, He said He was about to issue orders for those who possessed the highest standards of belief and excelled in doing good deeds. This command was not based on their closeness to the Prophet but on the basis of their faith and their good deeds. This order of love for the near ones was being given to acknowledge their sublime faith and their remarkable deeds. On grounds of these merits God wanted the entire universe to love them and for them to be the cherished ones of the universe!

It would be timely to suggest here that the very origin of the universe is love and attraction. The reason for the creation of the Heavens and the Earth too is love.

كُنْتُ كَنْزًا مَخْضِيًّا فَاحْبَبْتُ أَنْ أُعْرَفَ

‘I was a hidden treasure. I wished to be recognized. Thus I brought forth a specific creation.’ (Hadith-e-Qudsi)

Now this creation is here on the basis of the Creator’s wish. It follows that the universe was created for the purpose of love and God wishes that the love that marked the beginning of the universe should also figure at its end. Love of God marked the beginning and now love of His human beings should mark its end. From start to finish it is love and only love. This love is expected from human beings and the basis of this love is indeed the love of God!

Anyway, the promise was made using the words **“those who believe and do good deeds”(42:23)** and the promise was upheld with the words **“save love of (my) near of kin” (19:96)**. We immediately realize that the criteria for making this love for the Ahlul Bayt mandatory is their sublime faith and their good deeds, while the reference of relation is their introduction, their identity, a standard of acquaintance. In other words it is glitter on gold. To possess absolute faith and excel in good deeds and on top of that to be the privileged near ones of the Prophet. It is certainly glitter on gold!

By the grace of God, minds are awakening and imagination is lighting up! Let me ask a few questions here. The morning prayer that I offer, will you be rewarded for it? Will my family or my children be rewarded for it? The sins I am guilty of, will my neighbours or my acquaintances or my near ones be punished for them? Can they be included in the range of punishment? It is ordained,

أَلَّا تَزِرُ وَازِرَةٌ وِزْرَ أُخْرَىٰ

“That no bearer of a burden shall bear the burden of another” (53:38)

One will not carry the load of another. One will not be blamed for another’s fault. The one who prays will earn its reward and the one who sins will face the consequences. The reward of one person’s endeavours cannot be drawn by another, just as the punishment for a person’s sins cannot be shared by another. To be a partner in prayer is one thing. Two can sit and pray together. A congregation can stand for prayer collectively, but when there is no partnership in performance or in deeds, how can there be partnership in reward or punishment?

For this reason the Quran has clearly stated,

مَنْ عَمِلَ صَالِحًا فَلِنَفْسِهِ وَمَنْ أَسَاءَ فَعَلَيْهَا

“Whoever does good, it is for his soul, and whoever sins, is unjust to himself” (41:46)

Now that you have heard this I want to ask you a question. Thousands of good deeds have been done in this world and thousands more will continue to be done, but the merit of the good deeds depends on the potential of the good person. Surely, a good deed is associated with a good person. Now what is the weight or measure of this good deed and what is the capacity of the responsibility that this person can take on? There is a prayer that I offer; there is one that an Imam offered and another that a Prophet offered. The name given to all three will be salaah, but is my prayer of the same value as the one offered by the Imam or the Prophet?

I wish to repeat here that the merit of a good deed depends on the qualitative potential of the person undertaking it. It will correspond to the value and goodness of that person. Now tell me can anybody be more pious than Syed ul Anbia, the most revered of all Prophets? No, it is not possible. Can any act be more valuable than the propagation of God’s Message? What can one say of the Prophet’s prayer? It is the imam of all prayers! What can one say of the Prophet’s fasts? They are the benchmark for all fasts!

All of the Prophet’s good deeds like prayers and fasting and remembrance (zikr) of Allah are on one side and the single task of transmission of God’s message is on the other hand. This is the one task for which our Prophet came into being. This was the function that defined the purpose of his existence; the reason for his nomination for Prophethood. He was selected and chosen for rendering this specific task.

Now let us resolve this logically. The Prophet’s good deeds are far superior to your good deeds. From amongst the Prophet’s good deeds the particular task of transmission of Message is the foremost. This deed is better than any other and crowns all his achievements. There is no comparison to it. So the task named ‘transmission of Message’ is the most formidable assignment and no parallels can be drawn to it.

If the Prophet's good deeds tower all human deeds, and if from amongst his best practices the most sublime one is transmission of the Message, then I wish to submit a query.

For our two rikat prayer (namaz or salat) that is full of shortcomings, which is full of doubt and one that is devoid of humility or fear, God reserves a reward for this kind of insignificant prayer. He informs us that the reward is only for the person concerned and no one else. God is taking full responsibility for our reward, but in the case of our Prophet, he hardly seems to be recompensed for delivering the entire Message of God. This cannot be understood. To top it a verse is revealed asking the Prophet to announce,

قُلْ لَا أَسْأَلُكُمْ عَلَيْهِ أَجْرًا إِلَّا الْمَوَدَّةَ فِي الْقُرْبَىٰ

“I do not ask of you any recompense for it save love of (my) relatives (near of kin)” (42:23)

According to the rules, our Prophet should be rewarded directly because transmission of Message was his best deed, but the compensation being asked of us is not love for the Prophet, but love for his near of kin. It is not clear why the rules changed for the Prophet. God had just informed us,

مَنْ عَمِلَ صَالِحًا فَلِنَفْسِهِ وَمَنْ أَسَاءَ فَعَلِيَهَا

“Whoever does good, does it for his own soul; and whoever sins, does injustice to himself.” (41:46)

God is likely to counsel us that we have not read the verse carefully, especially the part about doing good for the soul (nafs). Had we deliberated, our doubts would have been dispelled. For surely, the Ahlul Bayt deserve to be referred to as the soul of the Prophet! In this context, let me also remind you that the term ***“anfusana”*** in Ayat al-Mubahila (3:61) clearly fits the description of Imam Ali.

If you have not entirely grasped the significance of the term ‘nearness’, let me emphasize that the nearness projected by the term ***“qurba”*** (42:23) is not referring to their close relationship with the Prophet, but with his Prophethood. After all, the recompense is for the task of delivering God's Message. All those who value and sustain this task, then they are associated with the Prophethood, and they are closely linked to the Divine Mission. If such a linkage exists, then this is truly valuable. No doubt, it is very appropriate. It is extremely relevant.

Let me draw your attention to the words used by Prophet Musa in this prayer,

وَأَشْرِكُوا لَهُ فِي أَمْرِي

“And make him share my task.” (20:32)

Our Prophet too has said,

أنت مني بمنزلة هارون من موسى

‘You [Ali] enjoy the same link to me as Haroon did to Musa’ (Hadith-e-Nabvi)

You will remember Prophet Musa prayed to God to appoint his brother Haroon as his vizier and allow him to share the task of prophethood with him. Our Prophet informs us that he shares the same link with Ali that Prophet Musa did to Prophet Haroon. In fact some verses in the Quran shed light on this relationship. Consider the verse,

وَوَضَعْنَاكَ وَزِيرًا

“And taken off from you your burden”. (94:2)

If this suggests that the burden has been shared and the task is over, then who will bear the burden? Who will share the burden of transmission of the Message? Will another prophet come? Will there be another messenger?

Taking off the Prophet’s load implies that the burden is distributed such that the Prophet gets to carry some of it and his near of kin shoulder some of it. Together they propagate the Message. Collectively they share the burden of transmission of the Message and the task of Prophethood.

What an amazing family, whose burden is the burden of the Messenger and whose task is the task of Prophethood. And shouldering this responsibility is their family undertaking! This task was delegated to the near of kin and they became helpers in the Prophet’s mission. This distribution allows them to share the burden and this sharing entitles them to become the beneficiaries of compensation (ajr e risalat)!

It is easily ascertained that people offered to pay whatever recompense the Prophet desired for the toils of Prophethood. The Quran gives us this information. Other prophets too were made this offer, but whenever people drew attention of their prophet towards this compensation, we are informed in the Quran that each one of them replied,

وَمَا أَسْأَلُكُمْ عَلَيْهِ مِنْ أَجْرٍ إِنْ أَجْرِيَ إِلَّا عَلَى رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ

“I ask of no recompense from you; I expect recompense from none other than God.”(26: 109, 26: 127, 26: 145, 26: 164, 26: 180)

Now if our Prophet had said something what could he have said? People urged him to say something in this context, but his stance was that he would not say anything till he got guidance from Allah. Then Ayat al-Mawaddat was revealed,

قُلْ لَا أَسْأَلُكُمْ عَلَيْهِ أَجْرًا إِلَّا الْمَوَدَّةَ فِي الْقُرْبَىٰ

“Say (O’ Mohammad), I do not ask of you any recompense for it save love of (my) relatives (near of kin)” (42:23)

Allow me to say, up to this stage of revelation Ayat al-Mawaddat was incomplete. Every prophet had said,

وَمَا أَسْأَلُكُمْ عَلَيْهِ مِنْ أَجْرٍ

“I ask of no recompense” (26: 109)

None could go beyond that. So we realize that the second part of the verse (42:23) was concealed; it was preserved for a later time. Hence, the earlier prophets could not have articulated this second part and they restricted themselves to just saying,

وَمَا أَسْأَلُكُمْ عَلَيْهِ مِنْ أَجْرٍ

“I ask of no recompense from you”(26: 109, 26: 127, 26: 145, 26: 164, 26: 180)

Had any prophet wished to ask for recompense before the arrival of the last Prophet, then our Prophet too could have wished for it prior to God’s instruction. He did not. But now at this stage since God wishes that the Prophet ask for compensation how can our Prophet not wish for it too? The previous prophets did not ask for recompense because they were constrained by God. There were orders forbidding them to do so.

If I say anything at this point it will be that had the earlier prophets wished to ask for recompense they would not have remained prophets, and if our Prophet had not wished for it, he would not have remained a Prophet. So when he says, “I ask of no recompense” why should he not add, ***“save love of (my) near of kin”(42:23)*** for now God wants him to demand ajr e risalat in the form of love of near ones. When God issues a commandment, how can the Prophet delay or hesitate in carrying out the orders?

Thus, we gather that the Almighty desired compensation at this final stage only, and the earlier prophets

were not instructed to seek it. They complied with what they were asked to do and the last Prophet carried out what he was commanded to do.

The question then arises, why were the earlier prophets not asked and why was our Prophet asked to seek recompense? The response to this would be that their prophethood was at an intermediary stage. Each prophet before departing informed and introduced the people to his successor, such that people eagerly awaited the arrival of the next prophet.

Till such time that one came after another, this process was continuing, and they did not ask for compensation as the task had not yet been completed. Transmission of message had not yet reached its concluding stage. Had these prophets asked for compensation it would have been premature and much before it was due.

However, our Prophet came proclaiming,

لا نبي بعدي

‘There will be no prophet after me’

He was the last Prophet of God. The previous prophets did not seek reward on grounds of assurance that other prophets were to follow. Each departed knowing fully well that a successor was to follow, but our Prophet arrived with this knowledge that no prophet was to come after him. Now if he also does not ask for compensation, who will?

I sometimes wonder why people who argue and furnish proof for the Last Prophethood, do not use this verse as evidence. For surely, seeking recompense is itself solid proof of the closing chapter. No prophet was allowed a reward till this mission was on going. Recompense is only due at the conclusion of a task and hence this demand was put forth at the completion stage.

Now that you have come this far with me, I am sure your spirit will absorb the essence, that when recompense is sought for in the capacity of the Last Prophet, it will not be compensation for this single Prophethood. It will not be reward for the task of one prophet only. It will in fact be recompense for the efforts starting from Prophet Adam and finishing with the efforts of the Last Prophet. It is recompense for the efforts of all the prophets. Names of prophets or the nature of their duties is of no consequence or concern here. The real issue is reward for the toils of collective Prophethood.

At this stage your mind must reflect on the difference between the reverential status of Aal e Mohammad and of the previous prophets. After all God has termed the love of the Prophet’s family as compensation for the toils of the entire Prophethood.

I have raised a point in this regard in some earlier gatherings and I barely have time to go into details

today, but certainly I marvel at the Almighty's scheme of testing mankind in all periods of time! The criteria of these tests vary, but no matter how simple the criteria, in the context of outcome, that criteria appears so difficult that only the righteous succeed while the rest cannot measure up to it.

On one such occasion God made a single 'sajda' (prostration) the criteria of tribulation. Those who bowed down did not enhance the prestige of Adam. They could not enter Adam's domain and they could not surpass his eminence. If my practice or your efforts can raise the prestige of a prophet; if his prestige is at our mercy and can be raised or lowered whenever we feel like, then there has to be a serious shortcoming in the prophet. We may send thousands of blessings for the prophets, but this will not elevate their status and we may use millions of derogatory words for them but this will not lower their stature in any way.

Besides think about it, if God loves someone then will that being ever be dependent on love of others? The one accepted and approved by God, will he dwell on acceptance by others? When all provisions to the prophet are from 'Ghani' (one who is Absolutely and Totally Enriched), then the prophet himself is self-sufficient and needs no acceptance or sustenance from others.

Anyway, returning to our discussion, the 'sajda', a single act of prostration was established as the criteria for judgment. This was selected on the basis of knowledge. God knew Shaytan (the Devil) could do anything but he would never bow down. Our souls are indeed infested with strange weaknesses. Each soul has its inherent shortcomings and these vary from one to another. God knew that Shaytan was weak in this area of bowing down and that he would not agree to prostrate before Adam.

True enough, he proved so weak that this one 'sajda' became a colossal hurdle for him. In fact, it became impossible for him, and he decided that any other order could be obeyed but he would never bow down to Adam. He made this decision despite the fact that he had received a direct command. No intermediary courier or narrator was involved. God had Himself given a command to the Devil so the question of poor communication did not arise. The authenticity of the command could not be challenged. He was hearing the voice of God from close by and without intercession, yet he decided that he could not obey.

Bowing down should not have been difficult for the Devil. He was used to doing that. He was in the habit of performing prostrations day and night. It was his daily routine. His lifetime was spent in prostration but God knew he would not bow in front of any of His creation even if He commanded him to. Here we can easily set apart those who act in accordance with God's wishes.

How easy it was! The word 'sajda' itself tells us how easy this standard of the test was. It did not involve going anywhere. It did not require giving anything or exposing oneself to any danger. All it required was bowing down and by one who was so used to it. For a regular practitioner this was not something new. Anyway, the Devil suffered from this perpetual weakness that he refused to bow to anyone besides God, even on His instructions.

In the same way, for Prophet Nuh's disobedient son, the trial was boarding the Ark. This was a task that was easily possible and yet it proved so difficult. The level of water was rising rapidly. It gushed out of the earth and it rained from the skies. Mountains were submerged in this deluge and in such a situation it should not have been difficult for the son to listen to his father and take refuge in the Ark. However, he chose to drown and terminate his life. He decided to disobey Nuh and deny himself a seat on board.

I wish to say that all these trials and tribulations took place and the criteria for judgment varied from time to time. So should not a standard be established in the time of the Last Prophet such that it would last till the Day of Judgment? On the face of it this criteria appears very simple but it is adjudged difficult on the basis of God's knowledge, such that only a believer can qualify and a non-believer cannot even attempt it.

No doubt the criteria of stability on the battlefield is a great criteria but jihad (fighting in the way of God) is not required in each era, or at all times and in each century. So should there be no criteria for judging us? We live and there is no standard to test us? It was essential that a criteria be established by God to distinguish right from wrong and for it to last till the Day of Judgment.

Now what is this criteria? It is love for the Ahlul Bayt. You will ask, how is this criteria difficult? It appears to be very ordinary, yet I tell you this is a difficult one. What do you know about difficulties? Was bowing down difficult? For those drowning how was accepting a seat in the Ark difficult? Was sitting in the Ark difficult or was not sitting in it difficult?

You may say this criteria of love is no great challenge but in actual life this is a tremendous challenge. People are capable of offering prayers and they are capable of observing fasts and reciting the Quran. They are able to offer non mandatory 'nawafil' (additional prayer) and to perform Haj (Pilgrimage to Mecca). In short they can do anything, but despite all this they seem incapable of loving the Ahlul Bayt.

Loving the Ahlul Bayt can be an elusive task. People will do everything else and yet fail to join the ranks of those who love the Ahlul Bayt. This is regardless of the fact that love of the Ahlul Bayt is the basis of our well-being and guidance. This love would be love for those who are known to give and not take. It would be love for those who are forbidden charity and are not dependent on others for anything. In fact, they are appointed to help us overcome our difficulties, to resolve our issues and to address our needs. Is it difficult to love such people?

They deserve to be loved for they are the nuclei wherein reside the qualities of God! I stress that they deserve to be loved whether or not God wanted us to do so. If their love was not made mandatory even then it was necessary to love them. Please remember that the need to love them was not dependent on any command.

If someone asks, 'is there a Quranic verse directly asking us to love the Prophet's children, or is there a verse that commands us to love the Prophet's sacred hair?' The answer to this is that love is not based on instructions. If it is mandatory to love the Prophet then everything related or associated with the

Prophet is to be revered. In this sense the Prophet's staff or his hair all command respect. You cannot expect a separate commandment for each and every thing.

On the basis of this, am I wrong in saying that just as there is no separate command in the Quran for the Prophet's hair, or a command to respect and revere his shrine; and just as there is no instruction for the Prophet's staff, so in the same way even if there were no specific instructions to love the Prophet's near ones, then too we were bound to love them. But once the orders came to love the Ahlul Bayt then this act of compliance no longer remained an essential requirement (farz). It became a part of our belief (Iman).

Why did I say that? There is a difference between farz and Iman. Mandatory prayer is the best essential practice but when? The question of time arises. A time has to be ascertained. Not all the time. Is any prayer due right now? Even though the real purpose of life is worship, and the foremost worship is prayer, but after offering morning prayers (Fajr) is any prayer essential before mid-day (Zohr)? After Zohr and Asr (evening) is any prayer due before Magrib (sunset)? After offering Magrib and Isha (early night) is any prayer compulsory throughout the night?

Farz is that practice which is essential at some time and not essential at other times. Keep this in your mind. Fasting is essential. Is it necessary to fast in the (lunar) month of Shaban or Shawal or during the nights of month of Ramadan? Of the twelve months they are essential during one month only and that too during the daytime. In addition it is not essential for those who are sick or are traveling. In short, there is no requirement of fasting for eleven months.

Thus, fasting is essential at some time and not essential at other times. It is essential for a minimum period and not essential for a maximum period. Haj is compulsory only once in a lifetime. Rest of the age is free. No fasting for eleven months and half of the twelfth month (night time) is free too. Besides, if you fall sick then the time is further reduced. We conclude that farz is to be practiced at specific times only.

What is faith (Iman)? It is not something that is present at a particular time and absent at another. There is no restriction of time for faith. At what specific time is the acceptance of God as our God, the Prophet as our righteous Prophet or acceptance of imamat of the Imams and justice of the just person essential? There is no question of time. Rather, it should be asked, what time is faith not essential? What name can we give to time, when it exists and faith is not essential!

There is another difference between farz and Iman. During sickness even the essentials can be excused or wavered, but faith can never be deferred or dropped. In fact, as the sickness progresses, faith grows stronger for there is a chance that this may lead to death. During ill health, faith must be consolidated and revitalized, for sickness, being one of the possible causes of death, is right in front of us. Anyway, farz is something that has a replacement. If wuzu (ablution with water) is not possible then it can be substituted with tayammum (ablution with dust).

I ask you now, if you are unable to accept God as our Creator, then can you substitute another one for

Him? Can we reject the Prophet and accept one who is not? In matters of faith replacement is not allowed. Old men who cannot fast are allowed to give a certain amount of food to others as compensation. For fasting there is a substitute. You can be excused from fasting or their numbers may be reduced. Is there a margin of reduction (qasr) in prayer? Yes, it can be reduced by half. But is reduction in the Unity of God possible? Or in the Prophethood? Belief in six out of the twelve Imams? Is this shortening allowed?

Thus, you see there are many differences between farz and Iman. Farz is essential at one stage and not essential at another but faith is imperative at all times. It is for this reason that our Prophet did not decree the love of his ‘Aal’ as an essential practice. Rather he said, ‘their love is Iman, their enmity is kufr’

حبهم إيمان وبغضهم كفر

(their love is a matter of faith and enmity for them is a reflection of disbelief)

People with insight know that love of the Prophet’s Aal has been designated as recompense for toils of prophethood. However, a particular aspect of Ayat al-Mawaddat has gone un-noticed by the world even though the words,

إِلَّا الْمَوَدَّةَ فِي الْقُرْبَىٰ

have drawn the sketch showing the Prophet on a pulpit saying “**la asalokum**” (42:23). There is a group in front, whom the Prophet is addressing. The “**kum**” in the “**asalokum**” in the first part of the verse is for this gathering in sight. They are being addressed,

قُلْ لَا أَسْأَلُكُمْ عَلَيْهِ أَجْرًا إِلَّا الْمَوَدَّةَ فِي الْقُرْبَىٰ

“I ask of no recompense, save love of my near ones” (42:23)

Seated before the Prophet are those to whom he is communicating “**la asalokum**” (I am not asking you) and also in his view are those he is referring to “**qurba**” (my near ones). This clearly indicates that “**kum**” is not addressed to these “**qurba**” and also that their company is not for those included in “**kum**”. Stay focused to see that the Ayat is addressing one set of people and requirement of love is for another group of people.

The foremost question now is with regard to compensation. Grown-ups and young ones, women in view and those not in view; men who are present and those not present; the seen and the unseen; in short this verse is addressed to all humanity past and present and all those who may enter the folds of Islam

till the Day of Judgement,

قُلْ لَا أَسْأَلُكُمْ عَلَيْهِ أَجْرًا إِلَّا الْمَوَدَّةَ فِي الْقُرْبَىٰ

“I ask of no recompense, save love of the near ones” (42:23)

This means that the entire ummat (mankind) is responsible for paying compensation to the Prophet. And what is this compensation? It is love of Prophet’s dear ones. A strange result can be drawn from this. Compensation is expected from everyone and in what form? As love for the near ones. Now since love of “*qurba*” is sought as compensation and the address of “kum” is for entire humanity, then it means the verse is not demanding compensation from these near ones. God has not commanded the Prophet to seek love from them. Thus, everyone is responsible for the compensation except for the Ahlul Bayt.

It is a separate issue what the compensation is, and that too is their love, but what is being highlighted here is the identity of people not addressed by this ayat. The fact, that the Ahlul Bayt are not being asked to pay compensation, is evidence that they were helpers in the task of Prophethood, and asking them for “ajr” would be akin to Prophet Musa asking his brother Haroon for compensation. The Ahlul Bayt are partners in the task of Prophethood, they are functionaries in the mission of the Prophet ;

قُلْ كَفَىٰ بِاللَّهِ شَهِيدًا بَيْنِي وَبَيْنَكُمْ وَأَمَّنَّ عَنْدَهُ عِلْمُ الْكِتَابِ

“Allah is sufficient as witness between me and you, and he who has knowledge of the book” (13:43)

God has appointed the Ahlul Bayt as a witness to the Prophethood. Now if they are a witness then does one give to a witness or do we ask of a witness for something? They are helpers in the task of the Prophet, they are assistants in the mission of the Prophet and they are dedicated as a witness to his colossal task. Together they are required to do whatever needs to be done. They occupy such an amazing position!

At the end of my undertaking let me share a profound consideration with you. The instruction regarding love for the Ahlul Bayt was conveyed to the people by the Prophet. Orders were received through the courtesy of the Prophet, just as the instruction for prayers came through the Prophet and orders for fasts did not come directly, but came through the Prophet.

Directive for prayers was sent to the Prophet and he relayed it to the people. If the instruction for prayers had been conveyed without our Prophet himself performing prayers, then the world would have been justified in saying that he was asking others to do what he himself did not practice. Had he conveyed the order for observing fasts without doing so himself, he would have been targeted by the following verse,

أَتَا مُرُوءَ النَّاسِ بِالْإِبرِ وَ تَذَا سَوَ أَنَا فُسْكُمُ

“Order others to do good but forget to do so themselves” (2:44)

The Prophet conveyed instruction for prayers by personal example of offering prayers; instruction for fasts by observing fasts himself and directive for honouring commitments by fulfilling his promises. Now I wish to ask, was the instruction regarding love for Ahlul Bayt conveyed by our Prophet by demonstration of his own love for them?

The reason why I emphasize this is that in order to deliver any directive, it is essential our Prophet himself performs the task, and that too in a manner which cannot be replicated till the Day of Judgement. That is, the practical demonstration has to be of a standard that it is not possible for anyone to match it. People will offer prayers but nobody can offer them the way our Prophet did. People will fast but no one can observe fasts the way he did. The Prophet’s action has to be superior to the action of all practitioners till the Day of Judgement.

God is great! This is an amazing position where I am at this juncture! God tasked the Prophet to deliver the command of love for his Aal. This command reached the people through the courtesy of the Prophet. Now it is necessary that a practical demonstration of love be given that can be followed by the people. This example should serve as a standard for the people to follow, and also prove helpful in obeying the command. The benchmark should be so sublime that no matter how much love is showered by the followers, it can never reach the standard set by the example.

Who gave this exemplary demonstration? Our Prophet did. If he communicated the order to love the Ahlul Bayt, then he personally gave a demonstration of love for these near ones. God be praised! An example of this standard can never be witnessed again. No matter how intensely or passionately anyone tries, they cannot match the love that our Prophet showered on his Ahlul Bayt.

Who can describe that love? What style of narrative can possibly capture and depict that love? Of all the prayers ever offered, the Prophet’s prayer is the most outstanding. Of all the fasts ever observed his fast is the supreme one and of all expressions of love, his is the most exalted. The Prophet gave a qualitative demonstration of this love. Indeed he set a remarkable example for all to see!

Now I do not wish to remark on the quality of the Prophet’s love for Hussain or the nature of this love. Why mention Hasan and Hussain? If our Prophet ever saw a child play with his grandchildren, even that child became endeared to him. Once our Prophet was going somewhere along with his followers. On the way he saw some children playing. His household children were not among them but he singled out a child for attention. When he came close to the children, he picked up this child, sat down on the ground, gently stroked his head and showered him with looks of love and endearment.

The companions were surprised at this exhibition of love, for the child did not belong to their tribe or

region or family. Who should tell them? Finally they inquired why the Prophet was so affectionate to this child. He told them that once he had seen this child play with his grandson Hussain and while playing he would pick up dust from the footsteps of Hussain and rub his eyes with it. If this was his level of attachment at such a tender age, then what would be its intensity in his youth or old age! The Prophet remarked that Gibrail had informed him that this child would be Hussain's helper in Karbala. Scholars have gathered that this child was Habib ibn Mazahir.

Now consider how Imam Hussain valued this friendship. (In Karbala) He did not summon troops or brigades for assistance. All he did was send out a letter to an old man. He specially wrote this letter to call his childhood friend Habib for help. The courier reached Kufa and knocked at the closed door. When Habib inquired who was at the door, the courier replied,

أنا بريد الحسين

'I have been sent by our leader Hussain'.

On hearing this he opened the door looking greatly worried. Earlier the Prophet had cared for Habib due to his association with Hussain and now Habib values the courier due to his link with Hussain. He holds his hands with reverence, embraces him and kisses his forehead.

The courier informed him that Imam had sent a letter. Habib took the letter, placed it on his head, held it close to his heart, rubbed his eyes with it and when he opened and read it he realized that his Imam was in great distress. Imam's letter acknowledged and reminded Habib that he was very well versed with the rights of the Ahlul Bayt, hence he should not evade the risk of sacrificing his life.

As he read the letter who knows how deeply it moved him. How was it possible to console his heart? He asked his attendant (ghulam) to prepare his horse for journey and further instructed him to take it to a certain location outside the city and wait for him. He would reach there somehow. The attendant did as he was told and waited for his master.

It was not easy to move out of Kufa, especially for Habib who was going to help his Imam. He took unfamiliar routes to throw people off track and even moved in direction of his agricultural land to give the impression he was going there. In short, since he took this long route, he was delayed in reaching the meeting point.

God knows how long it took, for the attendant was despairing and saying to his horse, "I will wait a little longer for my master, but if he does not arrive I will ride on you and go to help my Imam". As the attendant turned to address the innocent animal, the horse raised its head and tears began flowing down the eyes.

When Habib reached the meeting point he overheard the ongoing conversation and saw the horse in this

condition. Upon inquiry, the attendant gave the details and informed him how the horse had been crying ever since. Habib grieved and sent salam to his victimized Imam saying, “How grave the situation is that even the subservient is craving to lay down his life for you. I am a free man, how is it possible that I will not come for your help”?

Saying this he mounted the horse and told his attendant that from now on he was a free man. Probably the reason for this gesture was that Habib noticed the attendant’s eagerness to serve the Imam and found this behaviour very satisfactory. So in a tone and manner similar to his Imam’s, he said, “Go, I have released you.”

The attendant protested, “you kept me with you as long as you needed help from me, and now when staying with you will be a source of eternal bliss and grace for me, you are parting with me”. Habib asked what he desired. He replied he wanted what his master wanted and wished to go where he was going. “Just as you will sacrifice your life for the Imam, I too will sacrifice my life for him. In the name of God please don’t leave me behind”.

Thus, Habib took him along. Master was leading and the attendant followed him. Habib was on the horse and the attendant was on foot. So, the journey of love was being traversed and the two were drawing nearer to the Imam.

When Habib spotted the pole of the Imam’s tent from his horseback he prepared to dismount. The attendant wondered why he was coming down for there was still a substantial distance to cover. Habib informed him that he had sighted the pole of the Imam’s tent and now it would amount to disrespect if he stayed mounted. So both walked.

Preparations for Habib’s welcome were in progress in the Imam’s camp. In short, Habib reached his deeply loved Imam’s presence and was embraced by him. Imam smiled and appeared happy. Seeing their Imam happy, the companions seemed happy too and when the Imam smiled they also smiled. When Bibi Zainab sensed this joy she called Fizza and asked her, “why are the companions of my brother so happy? It appears an army has come to support my brother. Do go out and check.”

Fizza went to investigate and returned saying, “my princess, there is neither an army nor a brigade, but the Imam’s childhood friend Habib ibn e Mazahir has arrived. The Imam and his companions are happy on that account”. On hearing this news Bibi said,

اقري مني السلام

“Convey my salam to Habib”

Fizza went out and called aloud, “Fortunate Habib! Ali and Fatima’s daughter and the Prophet’s granddaughter Zainab Kubra is conveying her salam to you.”

Habib was overwhelmed by this gesture. He beat up his face and while striking it with the hands he kept saying, “Me the sinner, the insignificant, the unworthy; me Habib and salutations for me from the exalted Zainab e Kubra! Me a mere speck of dust and for me greetings from the daughter of Siraj e Munir”!

God’s wrath be on the transgressors.

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