

# Lecture in Praise of Syed ul Anbia, The Supreme Prophet

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

فَدِي جَاءَكُم مِّنَ اللَّهِ نُورٌ وَّكِتَابٌ مُّبِينٌ

***“Indeed there has come to you from Allah Light and a manifesting Book.” (5: 15)***

For the ultimate supremacy and the enormous sanctity of this gathering today, it suffices to say that this assembly is dedicated to the reference of a sublime being in whose honour God decorated the canvas of the whole world. Our intention today is to talk about the chosen one who is the very reason for the creation of this colossal universe.

First of all let me say that considering something easy as difficult is cowardice, but to treat something difficult as easy is not being brave either. In fact, it betrays total lack of comprehension. Praise of Syed ul-Anbia, the greatest of all Prophets, and for us to consider it easy! Supremacy of a being so elevated, that in the realm of possibilities loftier heights cannot be imagined, and our efforts to pay tribute to this extraordinary being with tongues that are so ordinary and imaginations that are so grounded!

I wish to say that in order to highlight the eminence of such an inspirational being, the least that one can hope for is the eloquence of a prophet. For a befitting tribute to the Supreme Prophet, the Leader of all Prophets, the minimum we may expect is the proclamation of a nabi, or that of a wali or perhaps that of Ali. How can we ordinary humans, ever think of doing justice to the praise of a Prophet who is so superior with the limitation of our language that is so inferior!

In my humble opinion, if this task is not considered difficult, then one has not grasped the true eminence of this great Prophet. If anyone has done justice to this narrative of praise for the Prophet, it is the proud Creator of the Prophet, God Almighty Himself. Also if anyone has done justice to submission and

reposing trust in the Prophet, it is Ali, the Commander of the faithful.

At the very beginning let me highlight another important point. If you wish to talk about the very best of human beings without a significant foreword or a credible reference, then this approach certainly lacks depth. A narrative of praise will only be commendable if it is supplemented by a worthy introduction. If you refer directly to the person you wish to honour, then what literary grace have you summoned and what imaginative skill have you employed?

Now tell me, how can we ever extol the virtues of the Supreme Prophet when we are not even suitably qualified to praise the children that he reared and nurtured? We are not even competent to fathom the wisdom and knowledge of those he tutored, nor in any way glorify those privileged ones who imbibed the characteristics of Prophethood from him. When our eyes cannot even glimpse the fortunate ones who were enriched by the Prophet's Noor (radiance) or those who were resplendent with his brilliance, then how can our sight rest on him who is Nur e moazzam, the supreme light?

As a mark of protest I wish to point out that people assume it is easy to pay tribute to the Holy Prophet. They have simplistically adopted a direct pattern of approach. Let me tell them plainly that this is not being fair to the spirit of expression and this approach is neither eloquent nor stylish.

Please reflect on what I have to say next. Is it only todays gathering that aims to honour our Prophet? I say it with authority that all gatherings organised within the realm of Islam, regardless of the name assigned to them, each one of them guarantees a reference to the Supreme Prophet. The gathering may be associated with any personality, but the basis of their selection is purely their connection to the Holy Prophet. It is based on the fact that they were privileged to play and grow in his lap, of being nurtured and reared by the Prophet, and were fortunate to acquire wisdom from him directly.

Besides the Prophet, whoever else the Muslims believed in, it was by virtue of the Prophet's recommendation. Going to the other extreme in our search for the truth, we believe in God only because our Prophet guided us to this belief. When did God come and say to us, 'I am your God'? When did He say to us, 'believe in Me'? When did we see Him?

We saw our Prophet and we discovered God. We believed our Prophet and thus accepted God. The Prophet urged us to believe, hence we declared our faith in God. If our Prophet had not been around who would have believed in God? We accept God by virtue of the Prophet. We believe in Prophet Adam due to him. We acknowledge Prophets Nuh, Ibrahim, Musa and Isa because of him. We believe in Torah, Zabur, Injeel and finally in the Quran because of him. We accept all this because our Prophet instructed us to do so.

By the Grace of God we accepted and accepted whole-heartedly. Whoever our Prophet wishes us to believe in, we will do so without any hesitation and without any ifs and buts. We will not question why we are being asked to place faith in a stone, or why we are required to believe in a non-living and immovable house? For once we affirm faith in the Prophet, then challenging or putting conditions on

acceptance of this or that is akin to following in the footsteps of Shaytan, the Devil.

Open-hearted acceptance means we follow whatever the leader wants us to follow. We accept whatever our mentor wants us to accept, be it a stone, a static one, and even then we are not concerned whether the stone is black or white. Our black and white is in the hands of our leader. Why will we not believe that which he asks us to believe, and why will we put our trust in that which he disproves?

In the context of acceptance, there is no specification that allows us to contest the Prophet's recommendation for those who came before him, or those who were to come after him. There is no choice. On his request we will accept those that came before him and on his advice we will repose trust in those whom he nominates for the times ahead. In short, we accept the past, and we will accept the future because of him. Whatever we believe, it is solely because of him!

It is worth paying a great deal of attention to this fact that we trust only those people proposed by the Prophet and we openly claim that if the Prophet had not asked we would not go along with them. This assertion is verified on the grounds that we do not accept those who are not recommended by the Prophet. This may be perceived by some as our shortcoming or our weakness. But God is a witness that we only desire to follow in the Prophet's footsteps. We are keen to do whatever he says, to obey his orders, to follow his directions and to respect his choice and selection.

Here I will make a statement that will perhaps serve to simplify and explain my chain of thought. By the grace of God all those present here in front of me are followers of Aal e Mohammad (next of kin of Prophet). Can any Muslim ever claim not to be a follower of the Prophet's Aal? But I say to the audience, you followers of Aal e Mohammad, no doubt you are proud to be the followers of the Ahlul Bayt, proud to be believers of Prophet's Aal, yet this claim needs to be corrected. Talking of myself first, although we are believers of Aal e Mohammad, in reality we are not truly followers of this Aal. And why not? This would be true only if we accepted them on their asking us to do so, accepted them on their request.

This is a very complex thought I am sharing with you. The claim of following Ali would be correct only if followers had accepted Ali on his personal request. Acceptance of Khatoon e Jannat (Bibi Fatima), Shabab e Ahle Jannat (Hasnain) or of the Ahlul Bayt would have been their acceptance had we accepted them on their demand or request. But it is strange that a lot has been accepted and will be accepted but on who's asking? They were not accepted on their personal request. They were accepted on the recommendation of someone else.

Now transport your imagination to the plains of Ghadeer. You will hear virtually every voice over there. God obviously said something, in response to which the Prophet said something. Angel Jibrail too communicated some message to the Prophet and he relayed this message to the people. From the elevation of the pulpit the Prophet addressed the gathering. The people listening to the sermon gave their comments. God said what was befitting of the Creator to say. The Angel performed his task as

instructed. The Prophet did justice to what he was inspired and ordained to say.

Yet another thought is crossing my mind. I can visualize a Messenger of God who pleaded for his son and he was warned not to repeat that request. Further insistence would not save his son but it would eliminate his name from the list of Messengers. He is warned that if he repeats this prayer he may risk disqualification. Keep this juncture in mind when a Prophet's saying something threatens his Prophethood. And there is that other stage where the Prophet's not saying something threatens his Prophethood.

يٰ أَيُّهَا الرَّسُولُ إِذْ لَمْ يَأْتِكَ مِنْ رَبِّكَ

وَإِنْ لَمْ تَفْعَلْ فَمَا بَعْدَتْ رِسَالَتُهُ

**“(O Mohammad) Deliver what has been sent down to you from your Lord; and if you do not do it, then, (it will be as if) you have not delivered His Prophethood (at all)” (5:67)**

Reference to not delivering the Message in this verse suggests that the Prophet no longer acts as a Messenger. So there conveying a plea endangers Prophethood and here not conveying a message endangers Prophethood. Thus leading us to observe the height of ineligibility in the earlier case and the pinnacle of eligibility in the latter!

Anyhow, I was saying in the plains of Ghadeer everybody seems to be saying something. God said something; the Angel said something; the Prophet said something and the audience said something. Now turn the pages of history and move ahead. Everybody seems to be saying something. History has recorded a sentence or two from all present, but is there any evidence that where everyone from Heaven to Earth and from Earth to Heaven was vocal, in that enormous gathering did Ali say anything? Any word? Any sentence uttered by him that was recorded, that you are informed about?

The crowd is congratulating Ali. The crowd is chanting ‘bala’ (yes) in acceptance. The Prophet is delivering a message. God and the Angel are both saying something. Everyone is communicating and Ali, as the embodiment of the Quran, is quiet. He did not utter a word. Not a word is uttered by him. Not a sentence is forthcoming from him. He is silent, although he is Quran e Nataq (Speaking Quran), yet at this moment he chooses to remain quiet. Only because the one tasked to show is showing and the viewers are watching.

It follows as a logical outcome, or a combination of logic and law, that if ‘viewing’ something is akin to worship, then ‘showing’ that thing is also a form of worship. The crowd is looking at the person, whose reverence is such that even casting a glance on his face is considered ‘ibadat’. The one exhibiting this face is our own Prophet who is informing the audience by his action and implied words, ‘View Ali’s face,

and enter the domain of worship. I am showing his face to you and also engaging in worship'. All along not a word was uttered by Ali.

Have you ever reflected on this aspect that whatever was said that day, our Prophet was the speaker and the crowd heard and accepted it? I am not interested in the argument whether there were people present who did not accept the Prophets command. Acceptance or non-acceptance is their personal choice. Ali did not say anything. Whatever was said came from the Prophet. Our lives be sacrificed for that silent face. By not saying anything that day Ali said everything!

Had Ali said something in that gathering, this would have given an excuse to some in the crowd to say that Ali himself pleaded to be acknowledged. By remaining silent, Ali conveyed the message that, 'personally I am not seeking recognition. God has asked you or the Prophet of God has asked you. I did not ask you. So those of you who accept me, you are not doing so on my asking, rather you do so because God asked you or the Prophet of God asked you'. Thus it is downright simplicity trying to see who was recognised. What is worth consideration is on whose asking was he recognised and accepted.

A salient fact is evident now. Which prophet are you not a believer of? Is there any prophet whose prophethood you refuse to accept? From Prophet Adam to our Last Prophet there were thousands of prophets whom we acknowledge by name, and there were others we accept even without knowledge of their names. But you are not labeled followers (ummah) of Musa or Ibrahim or followers of Isa. Why not? When you believe in them, why are you not their ummat?

Just as we acknowledge and justify the Prophethood of our Messenger, so we justify the Prophethood of Musa. Just as we accept Quran as our righteous Book so we accept Torah as a Book of God too. So why are we referred to as trustees or people of the Quran? Why are we referred to as ummat e Mustafa (pbuh)? Why not of Ibrahim or Musa or Isa when we accept all of them as genuine Prophets?

The reason for this is that we do not believe in them because they asked us to do so, rather we do so, on our Prophet's request. We are Prophet Mohammad's (pbuh) ummat, for besides him, we accept all others only on his recommendation. Had we accepted Prophets Musa or Isa on their request we would have belonged to their ummat. But since we follow each one of the other prophets on our Prophet's behest, hence it is not their acceptance, rather acceptance of our Prophet.

Using the same logic, keep in mind that if we repose trust in the Ahlul Bayt, we do so because our Prophet asked us to, and not on the Ahlul Bayt's request. Thus, it is only by way of simplification that we refer to ourselves as followers of Ahlul Bayt. Ali did not say, 'I am maula to all those for whom the Prophet is maula'. Ali himself did not say, 'Prophet is the city of knowledge and I am its door'. Ahlul Bayt did not declare that God had purified them. Whatever was said with regard to them was either said by God or by the Prophet of God. Hence it is clear we believe in the Ahlul Bayt because God and the Prophet asked us to. Now tell me honestly, if we follow this line, then are we followers of God and His Prophet, or are we followers of the Ahlul Bayt?

Now if perchance, we do not accept them, despite the request of God and the Prophet, then the world will merely say we did not accept the Ahlul Bayt. But in reality it is non-acceptance of God and His Prophet's recommendation. This would have been rejection of the Ahlul Bayt had they asked us to believe. The believers do not accept them on their request and neither do the non-believers disbelieve on their demand. So those who believe do so because God and His Prophet asked them to, and those who disbelieve actually disobey God and His Prophet. Essentially, this is disobedience of the authority that wished us to love and follow the Ahlul Bayt.

I was saying earlier, that every gathering arranged in the context of Islam, be it milad e Nabi, or milad e Ali or milad e Hussain, or a gathering to celebrate the birth or commiserate the death of any Imam, the focal point of all these gatherings is truly the person of our Prophet. Since, we accept the imamat (leadership) of each one of them on the Prophet's request, hence reference to any Imam is actually a reference to our Prophet himself.

Now I ask you all to keep in mind that often references to personalities are made without establishing a proper introduction. For instance, you may praise a scholar by saying, 'by the grace of God your knowledge is so vast, your abilities are phenomenal, your prose is wonderful and your speech is remarkable'. You can praise him all you like, but remember this praise is not credible since it is without an authentic backing. If you wish to create an impact, or if the scholar deserves a better share then do not restrict yourself to mere mention of his knowledge or his qualification. Rather, narrate the merit of those tutored by this scholar. Praise those who have been nurtured and enlightened by him or those who have acquired valuable guidance from him.

Let us suppose some itar (perfume) is sprinkled on an object. Then one way to detect it would be to sniff at that particular object. But if you truly wish to appreciate the fragrance, then sense the air that caresses that scented object and reaches out to you. To appreciate sunlight, do not ask the sun about its rays. Experience the expanse of the environment illuminated by that light and then assess the richness of the source. If a lamp is lit somewhere then move your gaze away from the wick and the flame. Focus on the surroundings illuminated by the flame and then determine the range and quality of this light.

At dusk, marvel at the luminosity of the setting sun which keeps the horizon aglow for extended daylight. It is only when this radiance fades away that night creeps in. Likewise, at dawn the source of light is miles away, but even when the sun is not yet visible, morning has already been heralded in. This is purely a matter of estimation. Actual emphasis should be on observing how intensely an object illuminates its surroundings or how deeply its fragrance enriches the environment. If these aspects are under constant review then the true magnificence of the source is readily felt.

Do you have any idea of the true eminence of the Prophet? Can you possibly pay tribute to his exalted status beyond just presenting the black locks of his hair or refer to his glowing countenance or even describe his radiant robe? This might be the aesthetic path you select for his praise, but frankly these words will not reflect the real greatness of the Prophet, nor be representative of the true glory of his

esteemed being.

Let me present an issue here that may perhaps surprise you. The Holy Quran informs us of the various titles bestowed by God on His prophets. Prophet Adam was blessed with the title Safiullah. You know that, and a Quranic verse exists as evidence. Prophet Ibrahim earned the title of Khalilullah. Is that a part of a verse or not? Is it mentioned in the Quran or not? Prophet Musa has the title of Kaleemullah. This title too exists in the Quran. Prophet Isa is referred to as Roohullah. Now fellow Muslims, does your Prophet have a title, or is the leader of all prophets without one?

Indeed, his title is so popular that every child refers to him as Habibullah. You do agree that our Prophet has this title? However, you might be momentarily surprised by the following disclosure. The Quran itself was revealed to our beloved Prophet. The Last Book of Revelation was bestowed on him. Now in this Quran several prophets are granted titles but has our Prophet, who was the recipient of this Quran, earned a title or not?

This is a remarkably strange situation that those prophets who did not receive the Book earned various titles and the Prophet for whom this Book came, and who is superior to all other prophets, he is not conferred any title. Have you read any such verse where the Prophet is designated Habib? May be you have come across something but I certainly have not.

The Prophet's title 'Habibullah' is extremely popular. Imam Ali has said, 'Mohammad (pbuh) is chosen as the loved one'. In various duas where reference is made to the titles of Prophets Musa and Isa the title of the last Prophet has also been reaffirmed. So his entitlement is popular amongst the aulia (learned leaders) and it is well known amongst the general public and is frequently used but it is not to be found in the Quranic verses. Its omission can be confusing but trying to understand the reason for its absence is not easy either.

Actually, God did not wish to use a fixed title for His beloved Prophet, for had He wished who could have stopped Him? He truly loved the Prophet but did not elect to specify any title. Infinite love and no mention of it whatsoever! God deemed it appropriate to directly confer titles on the earlier Prophets. He is my Safi, he is my Khalil, he is my Kaleem, he is my Rooh. But when it came to saying, he is my Habib, God decided that this term alone would not do justice to the depth of His love. This word did not have the capacity to encompass or lift the weight of love the Creator felt for His chosen Prophet.

God did not fancy directly acknowledging the Prophet as His loved one so He adopted the technique of indirect praise for expressing this affection. Mind you, the technique of indirect referral was my topic today, and I wish to say a few words in this context.

A king once summoned a renowned scholar and, pointing to his two sons, who were seated beside him, asked: "Are these two princes more dear to you than Hassan and Hussain?" Now let my audience tell me what could the reply possibly be. The scholar could not have said: "Your sons are dearer to me". Mind you, there is a certain direction in which I am trying to guide you and inshallah you will easily follow

the lead.

If you ask the truth, he could neither have said that Hasnain were dearer to him than the two princes. Why? This reply would not have been polite. Hence, this answer too was ruled out. All credit to the scholar's presence of mind and remarkable wisdom! He realizes that clouds of death loom ominously on his head and an unfavourable answer could spell doom but wants to leave behind a reply that will stand out for posterity.

He can neither say the princes are dearer to him than Hasnain, nor is it polite to say that Hasnain are dearer to him. He makes the reply powerful by using an indirect approach. He says: "Qambar, who works for Amir ul Mu'mineen, is dearer to me than your sons". He did not name Hasan or Hussain. He further added: "Not only is he dearer than your sons, in fact he is dearer than you too". This additional remark implies that the position at one end is being raised and the standard at the other end is being lowered. There is no mention of Imam Ali or of his children. The helper of their house is not only dearer than the king's sons but dearer than the king too! This is an indirect but powerful mode of praise!

Now reflect. If the scholar had simply replied that Hassan and Hussain were dearer to him, then this would have been a clear response but not a powerful one. Having understood this point, now it will be easy for you to understand why God called Ibrahim His Khalil, Musa His Kaleem, but when it came to saying My Habib, He did not say it directly. Instead He chose an indirect approach,

فُلِّ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ تُحِبُّونَ اللَّهَ فَاتَّبِعُوْنِي يُحِبِّبُكُمُ اللَّهُ

**"(O Prophet) Say, if you claim to love God then follow me. God will love you." (3:31)**

God wishes to convey that, 'I do not wish to underestimate your eminence by addressing you as My mehboob (dearly loved one). Your eminence cannot be highlighted by merely referring to you as My loved one. Rather, My mehboob is one who follows and obeys you, whosoever he may be. Let all mankind hear this, that the Prophet whose simple follower is so dear to Me, how deeply and how richly loved that Prophet would be' ! In short, God did not directly address the Prophet as His Habib.

There is another verse in the Quran:

لَا أَقْسِمُ بِهَذَا الْأَبَدِ

وَأَنَّكُمْ حِلٌّ بِهَذَا الْأَبَدِ

**"Nay, I swear by this city**

**While you (O Mohammad) are a free citizen in this city" (90: 1, 2)**

I swear by the city of Mecca. (But when?) When you (O Prophet) are present there!

God is not inclined to swear by the Prophet for this will not highlight the supremacy of the Prophet. Instead, He swears by the city when the Prophet is present there. So what is being sworn by? It is not the city, and mind you this is a remarkable example of indirect referral. If you pay attention, a lot of hidden facts are being revealed in this verse.

This is a reference to the city which hosts Kaaba, the House of God. A house is not something that exists one day and is not there the next day. It is there during day and at night. Present now and in future. It is not going to migrate or leave this city and settle in another one. The city in which the House of God dwells is being sworn by, but God does not make His House the focal point or standard for swearing by. Rather, this vow is valid only till such time that the Prophet is present in this city. It implies swearing by a place where the Prophet is. It further means that ‘if you are not there, regardless of the presence of My House, the city is not worthy of being sworn by. The real link is to those worthy of the House (Ahl al Bait) and not the House itself. I like the house where you dwell. I like the place where you live. I like it to the extent that it is worthy of being sworn by’!

Thus, praise that is backed by indirect references is always strong. I will give you another example. A person once asked the Prophet if he was superior in rank and status to Prophet Musa or was it the other way round. Please notice that the question is being asked directly. If the Prophet does not respond than how will guidance take place? What should the answer be? He cannot say Prophet Musa is superior to me for that would be incorrect and if he says he himself is superior than it will be a response but not a suitable or modest one. Allah o Akbar! This difficulty was resolved by the Prophet. He told the man, ‘I will not talk about myself so kindly change your question to, Is Prophet Musa superior to your Ali? And I will answer this question’.

God asked Prophet Musa to

إِذْ هَبَبَ إِلَى فِرْعَوْنَ إِنَّهُ طَغَى

**“Go to Firawn! Verily he has transgressed all bounds” (20:24)**

إِذْ هَبَبَا إِلَى فِرْعَوْنَ إِنَّهُ طَغَى

**“Go both of you to Firawn; verily he has transgressed all bounds” (20:43)**

God asked Musa to go for guidance of Firawn for he had rebelled. Keep in mind what I say: Go towards Firawn. Take Haroon along with you. Do not go alone. Take him along. Go together. When you go do not talk to him in harsh terms.

فَقُوْلَا لَهُ فَوْلَى لَيْنَا لَعَلَّهُ يَتَذَكَّرُ أَوْ يَخْشَى

**“Speak to him, both of you, a gentle word, haply he may be admonished; or may fear.” (20:44)**

Thus, Musa and Haroon are instructed to go together and talk to Firawn in soft tones. The reply Musa gave is recorded in the Quran,

فَالَّرَبِّ إِنِّي قَاتَلْتُ مِنْهُمْ نَفْسًا فَاحْفَافُ أَنِ يَقْتُلُونِ

**“I have killed one of them and I fear they will kill me” (28:33)**

The Prophet informs the people that all this is described in the Quran. He further reminds them of the occasion of the revelation of the first ten verses of Surah Baraa’t (9: 1–10) in which the disbelievers are severely reprimanded. These verses are so fearsome that they do not even begin in the name of the Beneficent, the Most Merciful. There is no hint of any kindness or mercy in these verses, only description of punishment and severe chastisement. When these verses were revealed to the Prophet, he summoned Ali, “O Ali, take these ten verses and recite them to the infidels (kafir) of Mecca”.

There, two were being sent together, here Ali is sent alone. There, instructions were for gentle communication, here the tone is extremely aggressive. Musa had killed only one of them, and here the person being sent has killed countless disbelievers of Mecca. Ever so many homes had grievances on account of Ali’s sword. He who had killed thousands was being sent alone to deliver the ominous verses. Ali went alone to deliver the extremely stern message,

فَاقْتُلُوا الْمُشْرِكِينَ حَيْثُ وَجَدُوكُمْ

وَخُذُولَهُمْ وَاحْصُرُوهُمْ وَاقْعُدُوهُمْ كُلُّ مَرَضٍ

**“Slay the idolaters wherever you find them and seize them and besiege them and lie in wait for them at every ambush” (9:5)**

God sent the command and Ali went to deliver the verses. Musa had lamented, “I have killed one of them thus I am afraid”. The Prophet said, “When I asked Ali to go, did he say I have killed thousands of them? He went without any fear or apprehension to deliver these verses of Surah Baraat”. He further added, “If a Prophet’s Ali is like this than you decide what this Ali’s Prophet would be like! When Ali accepts a person as his Prophet and when Ali recites the Kalima of his Prophethood, what should the grandeur of his Prophethood be like”?

The truth is that we do not possess the potential to praise or highlight the attributes of this great Prophet without credible mediation. Neither do we have the courage to consider paying a direct tribute to the Supreme Prophet who was honoured with sublime Ascension, the magnificent Meraj !

We are conscious of our shortcomings. Thus, when the desire to praise the Prophet surges in our hearts, we resolve this difficulty by trying to remember the children of this household, and by trying to picture the splendour of the environment that was set aglow by the brilliance of his spirituality, his purity and his Nur!

We wonder how privileged those few must be who had directly imbibed traces of energy from the Prophet's Nur. How luminous those faces must be! How fragrant their beings might be! Then we reflect. If mere association with the Prophet's Nur and his fragrance can enrich others so generously, then how absolutely radiant and sweetly fragrant the Prophet himself must be!

The End

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