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Lesson 18: Honoring the Divine Majesty and Splendor of Allah

“O Abu Dharr! The majesty and splendor of the Lord of creation ought to increase and do not remember Him lightly as do the ignorant and unenlightened who when they see the dog and pig say, ‘O Allah! Suffocate and choke it to death’.”

The Status of Invocation of Allah in the Qur’an and the Hadiths

The subject of discourse in this section is remembrance of Allah and honoring His majesty. A great deal of importance has been accorded to invocation of Allah in the Glorious Qur’an and *hadiths*, to the extent that topics like incentives for remembrance of Allah, the worldly and heavenly benefits of invocation of Allah, the quantity and quality of imploration of Allah, the place and time of supplication of Allah have all been examined in detail.

Likewise, explications have been made by the *Ahl al-Bayt* (‘a) and religious scholars with regard to which one between invocation with words and invocation with the heart is more important and higher and/or which one is better between supplication in secret solitude and imploration in a public and populous place.

In one *hadith*, Imam al-Sadiq (‘a) states:

“There has not been a nation and people who gathered and forsook invoking Allah and remembering us save that they will reap regret on the Day of Resurrection.”

And he also stated:

“Remembrance of us is tantamount to remembrance of Allah.”^{[1](#)}

Explicating the importance of invocation and remembrance of Allah, Imam al-Sadiq (‘a) states:

“Holy and glorified is your Lord; Allah who is the Mighty and Matchless and is remote from the ignorant description of creatures, and peace and blessings of Allah be upon the prophets (‘a), and praise is especially reserved for Allah who is the Creator of the world.”[2](#)

Therefore, man has to always preserve a state of remembrance of Allah on his tongue and in his heart and this invocation is not confined to a special place, gathering and time. It has been recorded in a sacredly inspired *hadith* that Prophet Moses (‘a) asked, “O My Lord! I feel shy to invoke Your name with my tongue in certain places and states and hence to remember You.” Allah stated, “Invoking My Name in every state is good.”

All these emphases and recommendations to remember and invoke the divine name of Allah are in regard to the role which they play in keeping man aloof from ethical vices and shortcomings and propelling him towards prosperity and well-being, because man abstains from issues which are not compatible with the good pleasure of Allah and he withholds the soul from disobedience if he is always preoccupied with the invocation of Allah and perceives himself as being in the divine presence of Allah.

All the problems and errors which occur as a result of seductions of the carnal soul and the Devil are caused by negligence of invocation of Allah and His punishment and requital. In addition to that, forgetfulness of Allah darkens the heart and consequently the Devil and carnal soul overcome man. In contrast, remembrance and recollection of the divine presence of Allah gives rise to the cleansing and purification of the soul from vices and man’s liberation from the shackles of the appetitive soul. In that case, the heart becomes a manifestation of the Beloved and love of the world, which is the fountainhead of all errors and deviations, departs from the soul.

In a *hadith*, the Noble Prophet (S) states:

“Know that the best and the most proper of your works before Allah and the most sublime of them in your levels and the best thing on which the sun shines is invocation of Allah, because Allah has thus stated with regard to Himself, ‘I am a Companion of one who remembers Me’.”[3](#)

In another *hadith*, Imam al-Sadiq (‘a) states:

“The Honored and Glorified Allah states, ‘I grant to whoever lags behind at asking issues in regard to Me because of invocation more than I grant to the one who asks with respect to Me’.”[4](#)

Allah told Prophet Jesus (‘a):

“O Jesus! Remember Me in solitude so that I may remember you before Myself, and remember Me in a group of men so that I may remember you in a group better than that of men (ie the angels). O Jesus! Soften your heart for Me and remember Me abundantly in solitude and know that what pleases Me is your submission in respect to Me. Keep your heart alive for this work and do not be dead (i.e. sad and dejected).”[5](#)

The emphasis of the Qur'an and its attention to invocation of Allah has reached the extent that prayer in the Qur'an has been introduced as invocation of Allah, with regard to the fact that in Islam prayer has a high status and has been known as a pillar of religion:

وَأَقِمِ الصَّلَاةَ لِذِكْرِي ...

“...and keep up prayer for My remembrance.”⁶

For the reason the aim is more important than the means, it can be inferred from this verse that invocation of Allah is more important than prayer and in truth prayer is a means of remembering Allah; (in reality, from the viewpoint of the Qur'an, invocation of Allah has a purport and reality for which prayer, in spite of all the value it has, is considered as nothing more than a means.) The question is that how possible is it for what embodies all the invocations and even some of the *ayats* and special works and movements to be a means of remembrance of Allah?

In explanation of this point, it ought to be said that prayer is not considered as invocation of Allah because of the shape and form and movements and activities which it has but invocation is a condition of the heart and is an inward attention and is a connection between the heart of man and the divine Essence of Allah. Therefore, man prays so as to give rise to that attention of the heart and inward connection. Therefore, prayer is itself a means and the goal is attention and connection of the heart which is doubtlessly more honorable than prayer itself.

The Quantity and Quality of Invocation of Allah

One of the issues mentioned in the Qur'an and the *hadiths* is the quality and quantity of Allah. Some verses in the Qur'an lay emphasis on the quantity and abundance of invocation of Allah; like the verse:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا اذْكُرُوا اللَّهَ ذِكْرًا كَثِيرًا

“O you who believe! Remember Allah, remembering frequently...”⁷

(In this *ayat* emphasis has been laid on the abundance of invocation.)

It has been recorded in some of the *hadiths* that there is a determined limit for everything, even for prayer too there is a fixed limit: it has been made incumbent upon every adult person competent to undertake religious duties to pray seventeen *rak'ats* in five turns a day and it is recommended to optionally pray twice the number of obligatory *rak'ats* per day, or the incumbency of the *hajj* (pilgrimage to the House of Allah) once in a life time upon every adult and economically able person. Therefore, there is a limit specified for everything, except the invocation and remembrance of Allah for which there

is no limit. However, much man invokes the divine name of Allah, it is still insufficient.

In contrast to the first section of the *ayats* and *hadiths*, there is a section of the verses of the Qur'an and *hadiths* which lay stress on the quality of invocation of the divine name of Allah, amongst them the verse:

...فَإِنَّا قَضَيْنَا مَنَاسِكَكُمْ فَادْكُرُوا اللَّهَ كَذِكْرِكُمْ آبَاءَكُمْ أَوْ أَشَدَّ ذِكْرًا

“So when you have performed your devotions, then laud Allah as you lauded your fathers, rather a greater lauding...”⁸

It is not commanded in this *ayat* to invoke Allah a lot, but it states that invoke Allah greater [or more intensely]. Therefore, the frequency and infrequency of invocation of Allah is not under consideration but rather its weakness and strength and this is related to neither invocation with words nor invocation by the tongue. The purport is not to thicken or weaken the words of invocations, but the attention of the heart.

At the footnote of this verse, the deceased ‘Allamah Tabataba’i states that the custom of the Arabs during the Age of Ignorance was to engage in praising and lauding their fathers after the *hajj* in the area of Mina. But after the advent of Islam, Allah gave orders that this custom should be brought to an end and invocation of Allah should take its place.

In this verse, invocation has been described as strong; this makes it known that in the same way that the amount of invocation of Allah is capable of increasing, it is also capable of strengthening in regard to quality. In addition, invocation of Allah is not a matter of words, but of the heart and is performed with the presence of heart and words are its explanation.⁹

All too often, we confine invocation of Allah to the tongue [and words], when invocation of Allah is recommended, we imagine that invocation implies [just] saying ‘*al-hamdulillah*’ and the Four Praises [*tasbihat-i arba‘ah*] and others of this kind; in the case that all these words are indicative of invocation and in reality the imploration which has been emphasized and recommended is that which goes with remembrance and attention of the heart.

That is to say, man ought to be mindful of Allah at the time of performing duties and obligations, so that he may discharge his duties along with perceiving His divine presence and also at the time of abstaining from sin, man ought to remember Allah so that the perception of Him may cause his forsaking sin.

The connection between invocation of Allah by words and invocation by the tongue and the relationship between the word and the meaning is like the relationship of the skin of the fruit with its core. In reality, invocation by words is a dress for invocation by the heart and invocation by the heart is the core of the fruit.

Therefore, invocations by words are a pre-requisite to the remembrance of Allah by the heart and inner soul and have to certainly be an object of attention. It is for this reason that the numbers and instances of invocations have been specified, like the supplications which have been specified as the invocations after prayer.

The Relationship between Invocation with Words and Invocation with the Heart

It is necessary here to give more explanations in regard to the relationship between invocation with words and invocation with the heart and also to demonstrate why so much emphasis has been laid on imploration of Allah, to the extent that it has been put forward as the goal of prayer. Basically, what role does invocation of Allah have in the life, prosperity and perfection of man? Do those who do not invoke Allah in their lives and are not attentive to Him earn less in life and fail?

When we speak and utter words on the tongue, we have imagined a meaning for that word previously and our aim of speaking is to make known and comprehensible to the others that meaning. Usually, speaking is for the reason of presenting the purport and intention even if sometimes the meaning of words and speaking is not to show a purport but to suggest special psychological issues and offer private spiritual instruction.

One of the recommendations which psychologists and psychotherapists have emphasized in connection with their work is private spiritual instruction, for which, of course, they have selected special words and phrases, so that private instruction may produce effects; like when they say that you ought to sit in solitude and raise your voice to a specified level and repeat a particular sentence [for a stipulated number of times] so as to be effective in the soul. These instances are exceptional and usually man conceives a meaning when he speaks and then after presents it to the other people. A reasonable person does not say anything without visualizing the meaning and intention of their words, because words are indicative of meanings.

At the time of pronouncing invocations with words, like the Four Praises [*tasbihat-i arba'ah*], for which we imagine the meaning and this word is indicative and suggestive of that intention, the intention is not to inculcate that meaning to Allah, the Exalted, and/or the angels and other people, because we have no intention of conversation and dialogue but we want that meaning to have an effect in our hearts. Therefore, the effect is derived from the meaning and the words are nothing more than just a means.

When we say *Allah-u Akbar* (Allah is Great), and we take it as a divine work, our intention is the effects of the meaning of that invocation in the soul of man and his prosperity, otherwise words and letters devoid of meaning are nothing but sounds which emerge out of the tongue, it is for this reason that meaningful words have to be used in invocation of Allah.

We conclude that before uttering invocation with words, a preparatory level of remembrance of Allah

appears in man, thereafter a higher level of invocation of the divine name of Allah appears. When man is reciting invocations of Allah, he initially is reminded of Allah; (otherwise, if he completely becomes negligent of Allah, he does not undertake to invoke the divine name of Allah); no matter how weak man's attention might be, he becomes aware of Allah before invocation of the name of Allah and thereafter recites an invocation which is indicative of the remembrance of Allah. Therefore, before invocation of Allah a level of the remembrance of Allah appears.

Two Benefits of Invocation with Words

The first benefit and goal of invocation of Allah with words is to strengthen that weak stage of remembrance of Allah so that man's attention may be fixed on Allah. In the beginning, he had an obscure attention or his attention was scattered but with the help of invocation with words, especially prayer, that attention becomes strong, concentrated and directed at Allah; this is one of the benefits which can be cited for invocation.

The second benefit of invocation with words is that if that weak level of invocation of Allah with words does not become strong, at least it becomes permanent and does not disappear. Man's states and attentions, amongst them the remembrance of Allah, are always in a state of change and transformation and in the danger of disappearing. It is for this reason that the help of invocation with words has to be sought for the permanence and continuity of that attention of the heart, so that they do not forget the remembrance of Allah. Therefore, two benefits and aims can be cited for invocation of the divine name of Allah and of course the first benefit and goal is higher and better.

Sometimes, it happens that invocation of Allah with words produces no benefits and that occurs in the case that it becomes an idle habit and futile utterances of the tongue to which man pays no attention, like the rest of the habits of the tongue and actions which people exude without the least attention to that habit. Some people continually turn the prayer beads without paying the least attention to the praises they are reciting and their benefit. Or some people who have become accustomed to playing with their fingers and/or beards and moustaches. In regard to habits of the tongue, some children get accustomed to making certain words involuntarily flow on their tongues without paying the least attention to them.

For most of us reciting supplications and invocations has become a dry habit and we do not pay the least attention to the purport of what we recite. It is for this reason that they do not give rise to any effect and transformation in our hearts. It is possible that we initially begin an action and start reciting an invocation with attention, as we have heard in a *hadith* that for example that reciting the invocations of Fatimah ('a) or a certain other invocation brings to hand a certain amount of reward, for this reason we begin reciting this invocation with attention of the heart initially but gradually our attention decreases to the extent that those words become uttered out of habit and without any attention to it. Of course, saying invocations like '*Allah-u Akbar* (Allah is Great)', '*La ilaha illa Allah* (There is no god save Allah)', even without attention, is better than pronouncing vain and ugly words but they still do not give rise to a

desirable spiritual effect.

There have been people who did not have the least belief in God but used to mention the name of God out of habit and this action has become a form of custom among them. There were communists here in Iran who did not have the least belief in Allah and the transcendental cosmos but at the time of separating, according to habit and custom, and out of respect for one another, used to say, '*khuda-hafiz* (may God be your protector)' without paying the least attention to its meaning. In the same way that pronouncing the name of Allah has become a habit and custom for some of us the Muslims, and we do not pay the least attention to its meaning and purport.

Among the Ignorant Arabs and likewise the Arabs who lived at the advent of Islam and had recently reverted to Islam, it was a very prevalent custom among them to pronounce the name of Allah. Whenever they saw a dog or pig, they used to say, "May Allah suffocate or choke it" without having the least attention to the meaning and purport of the words. This was just a habit which was devoid of conviction of the heart. Certainly, these words do not leave any impression in man and are not considered as remembrance of Allah.

In this *hadith*, the Noble Prophet advises Abu Dharr that when you want to praise and glorify Allah, first imagine His greatness and majesty. Remember that the name of Allah, who is the Creator of the whole world and in whose powerful Hands lie everything, has unlimited greatness and glory in the same way that He himself has boundless greatness and glory. It is for this reason that He ought to be remembered with greatness and glory. This occurs in the case that your heart and soul perceives the greatness of Allah, as a result of which you pronounce His name with humility and submissiveness. You ought not to be like those Ignorant people who used to pronounce the name of Allah without paying the least attention to the meaning.

Invocation leaves an effect in the heart and soul of man, becomes the cause of tranquility and the goal of performing the prayers, the cause of man's spiritual ascendance and growth of the soul, and becomes the cause of forsaking vain materialistic thoughts and looking forward to the eternal world and the encompassing blessings of Allah, becomes the cause of a strong connection between man and Allah which is pronounced with attention to the meaning and purport of the invocation and keeping in mind the divine presence of Allah. This is that same invocation in praise of which Allah says:

...إِنَّمَا الْمُؤْمِنُونَ الَّذِينَ إِذَا ذُكِرَ اللَّهُ وَجِلَتْ قُلُوبُهُمْ

"Those only are believers whose hearts become full of fear when Allah is mentioned..."¹⁰

At the end there is room for us to quote the words of Imam 'Ali's ('a) description in regard to the standard of the invocation and remembrance of Allah:

"I have seen the companions of the Prophet (S) but I do not find anyone resembling them. They begun

the day with dust on the hair and face (in hardships of life) and passed the night in prostration and standing in prayers. Sometimes, they put down their forehead and sometimes their cheeks. With the recollection of their resurrection it seemed as though they stood on live coal. It seemed that in between their eyes there were signs like knees of goats, resulting from long prostrations. When Allah was mentioned, their eyes flowed freely till their shirt collars were drenched. They trembled for fear of punishment and hope of reward as the tree trembles on a stormy day.”¹¹

- ^{1.} Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 72, p. 468, Beirut print.
- ^{2.} Usul al-Kafi (with Farsi translation), vol. 4, p. 254, hadith 3.
- ^{3.} ‘Iddah al-Wa’i, p. 238.
- ^{4.} Usul al-Kafi (with Farsi translation), vol. 4, p. 261, hadith 1.
- ^{5.} Ibid., p. 264, hadith 3.
- ^{6.} Surat Ta Ha 20:14.
- ^{7.} Surat al-Ahzab 33:41.
- ^{8.} Surat al-Baqarah 2:200.
- ^{9.} Tafsir al-Mizan, vol. 2, p. 81.
- ^{10.} Surat al-Anfal 8:2.
- ^{11.} Nahj al-Balaghah, p. 286, sermon [khutbah] 96, trans. Fayd al-Islam.

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