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Lesson 32: The Manifestations of Venerating and Glorifying Allah

“O Abu Dharr! Venerating and honoring Allah the Blessed and High denotes revering elderly Muslims, respecting the bearers of the Qur’an and those who fulfill its teachings and holding the just ruler in high esteem. O Abu Dharr! Every person that is bad-tempered is continuously becoming farther from Allah.”

In this section of the *hadith*, the Noble Prophet (S) reminds us that honoring some of the servants of Allah is tantamount to venerating Allah. On the basis of their rational aptitude and to achieve certain goals, the wise sometimes liken something to something else or a certain action to another deed or they introduce an individual as similar to some other human being; in the same way that it is also said in conventional conversation that this deed is similar to that deed or that this person is like that other human being. This act of likening and juxtaposing is based on the similarity as well as joint aspect which exists between ‘the subject of comparison’ [*mishabbah*] and ‘the object of comparison’ [*mushabbah bih*].

The reason for this comparison and likening is that qualities and characteristics in one individual and/or deed may be concealed and covered up while that same attribute and feature may be apparent in the other individual and/or deed and, in order for that concealed and covered up quality to be recognized or distinguished as well as for the attention of other people to become concentrated upon it, it is introduced as similar to another thing and/or individual which has a more obvious feature and attribute.

In conventional metaphors we see that a brave human being is likened to a lion, regardless that the level of bravery which is found in a lion is not found in man, but they liken that man to a lion for the reason that the lion is well-known for its courage. They do so with the intention of making that individual’s concealed bravery known so that his courage will become completely apparent for other people and so that people’s attention will be concentrated on him. This very attraction and concentration of people’s attention on him can have its own objectives and goals.

In the verses of the Qur’an and the *hadiths* we come across a lot of expressions where individuals have

been introduced as similar to Allah, the Exalted, and/or a deed which is done for people has been presented as a work done for Allah. For example, giving a loan to the needy has been likened to giving a loan to Allah:

مَنْ ذَا الَّذِي يُقْرِضُ اللَّهَ قَرْضًا حَسَنًا فَيُضَاعِفَهُ لَهُ وَلَهُ أَجْرٌ كَرِيمٌ

“Who is it that will lend Allah a good loan, that He may multiply it for him and [that] there may be a noble reward for him?”¹

This likening is done in spite of the fact that Allah, the Exalted, not only has infinite perfection, but, according to the accurate expression of some of the prominent religious scholars, has super-infinite perfection. A person who knows Allah and has faith in Him understands that Allah, the Exalted, has all the perfections in the highest imaginable form.

The Uncomprehended Status of the Prophet (S) and the Pure Imams (‘a)

Not taking Allah, the Exalted, into account, there are amongst created beings those having completion although this completion is limited; however, at times some of these perfections and their standards are disguised and not completely understood by other people.

Examples are the greatest and most perfect of human beings and creatures of Allah, namely the Fourteen Infallibles (‘a), whose worthy prominence and extent of perfection is not completely known to others. It is for this reason that ordinary and common people perceive them as similar to other human beings.

Even some of the people who believe in the Noble Prophet (S) imagine that he was a person similar to other human beings, with the difference that he received divine inspiration, but they cannot conceive how much higher his standing and importance are to that of other human beings!

For people who know the loftiness of the Noble Prophet’s (S) status, there remains no doubt that of all the prophets (‘a) of Allah, he is the most superior, pre-eminent and perfect Prophet (S) and the divine legal code is his. Allah, the Exalted, raised him to the prophetic mission and inspired the Book to him so that he may judge on the basis of justice and equity and rise up upon the order of Allah and guide mankind upon the right path.

By means of logic and words appropriate to the people’s intellect, he was charged with acquainting people with Allah, their interests in this world and the next, and completing their religion. In this regard, he presented manifest proof and demonstrative reasoning and would talk to every person to the extent of their intellect and understanding. In order for the community to become aware of the truth, he used to

provide logical proof and reason:

...لِيَهْلِكَ مَنْ هَلَكَ عَنْ بَيِّنَةٍ وَيَحْيَى مَنْ حَيَّ عَنْ بَيِّنَةٍ...

“So that he who perishes might perish by a manifest proof, and he who lives may live on by a manifest proof...”²

In regard to the status of the Noble Prophet (S), Imam ‘Ali (‘a) states:

“Allah chose him from the family tree of prophets [the family of Abraham], from the flame of light [the light of guidance and deliverance], from the forehead of greatness [from a family distinguished above others], from the land of al-Batha’ [a noble and respected place], from the lamps for darkness [the ancestors of the Prophet were all like lamps of guidance for the lost] and from the sources of wisdom [the members of this family were believers and holders of the Book and others learned wisdom from them].”³

Elsewhere, Imam ‘Ali (‘a) states:

“His place of stay is the best of all places and his origin is the noblest of all origins in the depositories of honor and the sanctuaries of safety. Hearts of the virtuous are captivated by him and the gazes are fixed upon him. Through him Allah buried mutual rancor, put out the flames of revolt, gave them affection like brothers and brought separation among some [like Hamzah and Abu Lahab]. Through his prophethood, He transformed the lowliness and suffering of the faithful to honor and eminence and degraded the infidels from greatness to lowliness and misfortune.”⁴

On the basis of Allah’s words and the sayings which have reached us from the Noble Prophet (S) and the Pure Imams (‘a), we generally understand that those fourteen pure and divine lights have such high stations that even if all human beings were to put their intellects together, they would still not be able to comprehend their great stations, let alone attain any one of them.

This knowledge and awareness has been granted to us on account of the grace and favor of Allah and by the grace of the verses of the Gracious Qur’an and the *hadiths*. It is because the Noble Prophet (S) possesses that high position and superior level that he is the best guide of Allah and after him also he has left two great heritages and legacies, the Book of Allah and his Pure Progeny [‘*itrah*] (‘a), and has advised his people to take refuge in them in order not to deviate. He, the Noble Prophet (S), stated:

“I leave behind for you two precious items, the Book of Allah and my Ahl al-Bayt (household). If you hold fast to them, you will never go astray and those two will never be separated from each other until they meet me at the Pool [hawd] of Kawthar.”⁵

(The meaning of the two not being separated is that the Pure Progeny of the Noble Prophet (S) will

never ever do anything opposed to the book of Allah due to their infallibility.)

The Relationship between Obedience to Allah and Obedience to the Prophet (S) and the Ahl al-Bayt (‘a)

One of the verses which introduces the high station of the Noble Prophet (S) is:

...مَنْ يُطِيعِ الرَّسُولَ فَقَدْ أَطَاعَ اللَّهَ

“Whoever obeys the Apostle certainly has obeyed Allah...”⁶

In this verse there is no limit set for obeying the Noble Prophet (S), it is for this reason that we understand that if a person obeys the Noble Prophet (S), he has in fact obeyed Allah, the Exalted. This verse is considered to be one of the verses denoting the infallibility of the Noble Prophet (S) because it and other verses of this kind impel us to obey the Noble Prophet (S) absolutely.

It shows that he does not order us to do anything that is opposed to the orders and wishes of Allah; otherwise, if Allah were to order us to obey Him on the one hand and then on the other hand order us to obey someone that tells us to oppose His own orders, contradiction would arise.

This same highness and superiority which has been proven for the Noble Prophet (S) has also been ascertained for the Infallible Imams (‘a) and it is because of their station and status that Allah, the Exalted, has allotted them the title ‘those vested with authority’ [*uli’l-amr*]:

...يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا أَطِيعُوا اللَّهَ وَأَطِيعُوا الرَّسُولَ وَأُولِي الْأَمْرِ مِنْكُمْ

“O you who have faith! Obey Allah and obey the Apostle and those vested with authority among you...”⁷

Jabir ibn ‘Abd Allah Ansari says, “After this verse was inspired upon the Noble Prophet (S), I asked the Noble Prophet, ‘O Prophet of Allah! We know Allah and His Prophet (S), but who are those vested with authority whose obedience Allah has mentioned next to His own obedience?’”

In response, the Noble Prophet (S) said:

“O Jabir! Those are my successors and the leaders of the Muslims after me.”

Then, the Noble Prophet (S) enumerated every one of the Imams (‘a) by name until he came to the name of the Twelfth Imam, may Allah hasten his reappearance; then, he stated:

“The twelfth of them has both my name and my pseudonym. He is the proof of Allah on the earth, His remaining one and mercy among His servants, and the son of al-Husayn ibn ‘Ali. He is the very person through whom Allah, the Exalted, will conquer the East and the West.”⁸

The similitude of obedience to the Noble Prophet (S) and obedience to Allah also exists in relation to obedience to the Pure Imams (‘a) and Fatimah al-Zahra’ (‘a), because in the same way that the Noble Prophet (S) has the highest possible perfection a creature can ever have, they too have the same perfection.

In order to better conceive this similitude of obedience to Allah and obedience to the Pure and Infallible *Ahl al-Bayt* (‘a), it is befitting to reflect a bit on the supplication of *Ziyarat Jami‘ah al-Kabirah* in order to understand what has been stated in regard to their lofty station and the need to obey and follow them. In this supplication we read:

“Whoever has obeyed you has in fact obeyed Allah and whoever has disobeyed you has in fact disobeyed Allah and whoever has loved you has indeed loved Allah and whoever has enmity and hatred towards you truly has enmity and hatred towards Allah...”

This purport has been recorded in a more complete manner in the supplication of the days of the month of Rajab:

“O Allah! I request from you all that which those vested with your authority request from you.”

Elsewhere, it states:

“There is no difference between You and them except that they are your servants and creatures.”

The exemplification of divine perfection is within them but the difference lies in the fact that their perfections emanate from Allah and Allah has attached these perfections to them and of course this difference is more than infinite—even though the Pure and Infallible *Ahl al-Bayt* (‘a) have all the perfections and superiorities, still those perfections originally emanate from Allah and they are not anything in and of themselves.

When they are compared with other creatures though, all creatures are in need of them and not only is no one equal with them, there is an utmost difference and contrast between them and others; however, when they are compared with Allah, the Exalted, we notice that there is no correlation between them and Allah because they are absolutely in need and Allah is the Absolute Self-sufficient for the reason that whatever every individual has emanates from Allah.

Even so, comparing the station of the Noble Prophet (S) and the *Ahl al-Bayt* (‘a) with that of Allah is completely proper and we are incapable of comprehending their positions and obedience to them is tantamount to obedience to Allah, love of them is tantamount to love of Allah and enmity and disobedience to them is tantamount to enmity and disobedience to Allah.

In regard to the rank of Fatimah al-Zahra' ('a), the Noble Prophet (S) has said:

“Fatimah is a part of me; whoever gladdens her has gladdened me and whoever saddens her has saddened me. Fatimah is the most beloved person to me.”⁹

It has been said that the stations of the Noble Prophet (S) and the *Ahl al-Bayt* ('a) have been introduced as similar to the eminence of Allah, just as some of the actions that are done in connection with some people have been introduced as similar to the deeds which are done in connection with another being. In the same way, remembering and invoking the Pure and Infallible *Ahl al-Bayt* ('a) has been introduced as remembering and invoking Allah. Allah, the Exalted, states in the Qur'an:

... فَأَذْكُرُونِي أَذْكُرْكُمْ

“Remember Me, and I will remember you.”¹⁰

There is no doubt that Allah, the Exalted, remembers all creatures and He is not negligent of anything or person, but the purport of remembering in the blessed verse is attentive and present remembrance as well as existence of grace and reward. If an individual wants Allah to remember him and not to omit the granting of His blessings, he must remember Him. We observe in the *hadiths* that remembrance of the *Ahl al-Bayt* ('a) has been compared with remembrance of Allah. Imam al-Sadiq ('a) states:

“Remembrance of us is remembrance of Allah and remembrance of our enemy is remembrance of the devil.”¹¹

Comparing remembrance of the *Ahl al-Bayt* ('a) with remembrance of Allah, the Exalted, is for the reason that they are the proxies of Allah and they do not conceive for themselves a station and rank other than servitude of Allah. When one brings to mind the name of the Noble Prophet (S) or an *imam*, does anything other than their being representatives of Allah occur to the mind? Because it does not, hearing their names concentrates one's attention on Allah—that is why remembrance of them is remembrance of Allah.

In exemplifying the station and sovereignty of Allah, the Exalted, the *Ahl al-Bayt* ('a) and the Noble Prophet (S) occupy a high level and they are perfect examples and in every aspect are the complete mirrors and exponents of the Almighty. There is no doubt that a mirror does not show off anything of itself and is only a means for showing the face which looks into the mirror to be seen with clarity. The Noble Prophet (S) and the Pure and Infallible *Ahl al-Bayt* ('a) too do not emanate anything from themselves and whatever they have is from Allah and they manifest Him well.

In view of the fact that the Pure Imams ('a) are the perfect mirrors of Allah, the Exalted, and they are absorbed in the Divine Beauty, to the extent that they manifest the Attributes of Allah, the Exalted, with all their being, Imam al-Sadiq ('a) stated while pointing at his home:

“Every kind of knowledge that does not come out of this house is null and void.” Then he also stated to one of his companions, “If you are in pursuit of correct knowledge, acquire it from the Ahl al-Bayt (‘a). Verily, we have explained every kind of knowledge and interpreted all kinds of wisdom concealed in the divine verses. The knowledge of equitable judgment and arbitration has been entrusted to us. Allah chose us and has not given to anyone that which He has given to us.”^{[12](#)}

The Need to Respect and Honor the Believers

If we consider those who are humble, whoever is more similar to them, that is to say, whoever is more unwavering in servitude of Allah and has distanced himself from egotism and the spirit of narcissism in his worship of Allah, the Exalted—in short, to whatever extent a man rids himself of egotism and becomes a servant of Allah and stops conceiving himself as independent, he acquires the merit of being similar to Allah. In regard to visiting the believer, Imam al-Sadiq (‘a) states:

“To whoever visits his believing brother for the sake of Allah, Allah, the Exalted, has stated, ‘You have visited Me, your reward is with Me and I will not be pleased with granting you a reward less than paradise’.”^{[13](#)}

It has been recorded in a *hadith* that if a believer visits a believing brother for the pleasure of Allah and without having any other intention and earthly demand, Allah, the Exalted, sends an angel to ask him, “Why have you come here and what is your intention?” That believer responds, “I have come to the house of one of Allah’s slaves and my brother in faith so as to meet and see him.”

The angel again asks, “Have you placed any trust in his hands and you have any demands on him?” He replies, “No.” The angel further asks, “What then do you have to do with him and why have you come here?” That believer responds again, “I love him for the sake of Allah and that is why I have come to visit him.” Finally, that angel gives him a message from Allah that, “O my servant! You have come to see Me and you are My guest and your reception is my responsibility.”

Indeed, once a believer has made up his mind to be devoted to Allah and eliminate his egoism and self-worship, he attains a station that visiting him becomes tantamount to visiting Allah. By means of closely observing and examining the verses of the Qur’an and the *hadiths*, we find a lot of varying themes in which visiting a believer and respecting him has been introduced as visiting and respecting Allah, the Exalted.

One of those instances is this very *hadith* in which the Noble Prophet (S), with the intention of advising and guiding Abu Dharr, has mentioned respecting three kinds of the servants of Allah as tantamount to respecting Allah. We have to realize that if it were possible (Allah save us) for man to see Allah and thus revere Him, he would have attained great status. Of course, as devoted servants of Allah, we have to see Allah with the eyes of the heart, and then worship Him. As Imam ‘Ali (‘a) states:

“I have never worshipped a God whom I have not seen.”¹⁴

At the time of devotion and worship of Allah, sometimes a man who sincerely worships attains the position of venerating and honoring Allah. This level can also be achieved by a person who respects three groups of Allah’s servants:

a) Honoring Elderly Muslims

The first group of people are the elderly who have spent their lives faithfully committed to Islam as well as its lofty divine laws and their beards have turned white upon the course of the religion. Respecting and having a high regard for this group of people is tantamount to venerating Allah. For this reason, if we see an elderly Muslim and respect him on account of his being a Muslim and his having lived his life on the path of Islam, we have respected Allah.

It is necessary that we understand what qualities this group of faithful servants and the worthy of Allah have that they have attained this nobility that respecting them is tantamount to venerating Allah.

Perhaps in respect to an elderly Muslim whose beard is white, an example has been made of him because when a person looks at him, he sees a lifetime of servitude and devotion to Allah in his face. His luminous face and white beard, especially when the effects of prostration are also apparent on his forehead, are all indicative of a lifetime of devotion and servitude to Allah:

...سَيَمَاهُمْ فِي وُجُوهِهِمْ مِنْ أَثَرِ السُّجُودِ ...

“... Their marks are [visible] on their faces because of the effect of prostration...”¹⁵

Seeing one lifetime of devotion to Allah is seeing one divine lifetime because servitude and divinity are correlated; that is to say, when we see a devoted servant who has spent a lifetime worshipping Allah, we also see a divine life, wise conduct, guidance and leadership. It is for this reason that it has been said that servitude and lordship are two correlated concepts, like other correlated notions such as father and son, such that once one sees a man from the aspect of fatherhood, he obviously thinks about the son as well.

In the same way, once you look at a man from the aspect of his being a son, without doubt you think about his father. When man observes one lifetime of the devotion of a sincere servant of Allah, he thinks about one lifetime of praying to Allah and this is that same relationship and connection that exists between divine lordship and divine servitude. It is for this reason that such a comparison is proper that it should be said that when you respect him, you have respected Allah; as if, within his own limits, he manifests divine lordship on his face.

The criterion for comparison is the existence of a joint aspect. Now, what joint aspect is better than that

one should manifest the other like a picture which reminds the first of the one in the picture? An elderly Muslim embodies a lifetime of devotional service and worship in his face and when you look at the effects of servitude on his face, you also see Allah's lordship. Therefore, on account of what has been mentioned, in Islam respect towards the elderly is invaluable.

There is need to point out that some of the values that are valid and reputable in Islamic societies are also respected and valid in non-Islamic societies, but the criteria are different. Respect of the elderly is a value which is more or less prevalent in all societies, but it is considered a custom and manner in societies which do not have an Islamic and divine point of view.

For this reason, they do not have correct and stable criteria for respecting the elderly. In the Islamic ethical order, values have logical criteria, strong roots as well as stable foundations although they are considered only worthy of respect in other societies. The elderly are respected in all societies, but in Islamic societies an elderly person is a manifestation of a lifetime of devotional service to Allah.

This criterion is not recognized in other societies at all, however. Therefore, we should pay heed to this fact that if mention about certain values which are also respected in other ethical orders is made in the Qur'an and the *hadiths*, it does not mean that the value that is valid and recognized in Islam is that same value respected and recognized in other ethical orders nor that the criteria are the same; on the contrary, it is possible that the criteria are very different from the measure in the other ethical orders. Ethical criteria of Islam are in fact quite superior and subtle.

With regard to what has been said, we understand that we ought to hold the elderly in high esteem and every one younger must respect the one who is older because he is a devoted servant of Allah and he has lived more years than the younger one, but respect to an elderly Muslim enjoys a special status and is similar to respecting Allah.

In respect to the benefits, in the hereafter, of respecting the elderly, the Noble Prophet (S) states:

"On the Day of Resurrection, Allah will grant safety to everyone who honors and respects the elder Muslims." [16](#)

In regard to decent behavior with Muslims of different ages, Imam al-Sadiq (a) states:

"I advise you that the younger Muslims should conceive the middle aged as their elder brothers, consider the elderly Muslims as their fathers, conduct yourselves with kindness towards the younger ones, be loyal to your brothers in Islam and be good to your fathers in the faith." [17](#)

On account of Islam being a religion of love and affection, and being a religion which breeds affinity and kindness among its followers by inviting them to brotherhood and love and because it wants them, for the purpose of creating unity and eradicating hatred and anger, to preserve the shadow of Allah's mercy upon themselves by speaking kindly with one another, the Noble Prophet (S) states:

“A person who respects his Muslim brother and removes his sorrow by means of speaking kind words to him will forever remain in the shadow of Allah’s mercy for as long as this virtue and quality remains in him.”¹⁸

Therefore, it is befitting of us to respect the elderly who have spent their lifetime on the course of Islam and their beards have become white in this way even if their levels of literacy are not the same as ours because we are not sure whether our ages will reach theirs or whether we will preserve our religion until the time we reach their ages.

There have been youths who were deprived of the gift of divine guidance in their middle ages and died in a state of disbelief and enmity with Allah. Truly, these elderly people who soundly preserved their religion during the entire course of their lives and guarded Islam within their beings merit great respect, even though they may lack a certain series of academic notions. This group of people had much grace that they were honored with the merit to be able to spend the courses of their lives on the path of Islam!

b) Respecting the Teachers and Agents of the Qur’an

The second group is the scholars of the Qur’an and those who put it into practice. First and foremost, respect towards people who are both memorizers of the Qur’an and who act upon it is respect towards Allah and secondarily, respect towards people who are not memorizers but are both scholars of Qur’anic sciences and men of deeds is respect towards Allah. Likewise, a scholar is still worthy of a level of respect even if he is not a practitioner of the Qur’an but understand its sciences. It has been recorded in a *hadith* that the Noble Prophet (S) stated:

“The nobles of my nation are the bearers of the Qur’an and those who keep vigil at night.”¹⁹

Special honor for the teachers of the Qur’an has been established in this *hadith*, but in this section of the *hadith* of Abu Dharr, besides mentioning nobility, it has been said that respect for these people is respect towards Allah; of course on the condition that they also act in accordance with the Qur’an.

Characteristically, the bearers and followers of the Qur’an manifest the will and word of Allah both outwardly and inwardly as well as in words and in deeds. They have both memorized the words of the Qur’an and their minds have understood the concepts of the Qur’an.

In other words, their imagination has acquired the form of the words of the Qur’an, their intellect has apprehended its concepts and in practice they have manifested the Qur’anic truths; that is, their entire being from head to toe has become Godly and Qur’anic. When you look at what they have memorized, you perceive that they are memorizers of the Qur’an. When you look at their knowledge, you see that they are bearers of Qur’anic knowledge and they have understood its concepts.

When you look at their deeds, you perceive that they act according to the dictates of the Qur’an. It is for this reason that their existence is a mirror of the Qur’an; that is to say, their existence is a mirror of the perfection of Allah and, by means of His Word, Allah is manifested in their beings; for this reason respect

towards them is respect to Allah.

In regard to the lofty and high status of the Qur'an, the Noble Prophet (S) states:

“The Qur'an is a guide away from misguidance and a light and liberator from blindness. It is a cause of deliverance from error and a light and brightness in the dark. It is a predictor of what is to come in the future and a protector from perdition; a cause of growth and a guide for finding the right way in misguidance. It is an explicator of every sedition and deviation and takes man from the mean world to the bliss of the hereafter and in it is the perfection of your religion and there is no person who turns away from the Qur'an except that he is led to hell.”^{[20](#)}

Also it has thus been recorded in a *hadith* in regard to the necessity to pay heed to the Qur'an, know it and select it as the book of prosperity and redemption:

“Every person who derives their religion from the Book of Allah and the sunnah of the Prophet (S) is stronger [and firmer] than the mountains and whoever acquires his religion from the people will be misled by those very people.”^{[21](#)}

Elsewhere, in regard to the Qur'an and the *Ahl al-Bayt* (‘a), the Noble Prophet (S) states:

“I will be the first person on the Day of Resurrection to meet Allah, the All-mighty and All-powerful, with the Qur'an and my Ahl al-Bayt (‘a). Then after me will come my nation, from whom I will ask what they did with the Book of Allah and my Ahl al-Bayt (‘a).”^{[22](#)}

That which has been mentioned was for the purpose that we appreciate that the Qur'an has many blessings whether in its material or spiritual aspect and man derives more virtue and benefit from the Qur'an the nearer he is to it, the more affectionate he is with it and the more he reflects upon it. The virtue and superiority of the Qur'an is so much that a *hadith* in this regard has been recorded. It is narrated that an individual asked one of the Infallibles, “What is the cause of your superiority over others?” The Infallible responded, “The cause of our superiority over others is that the knowledge of the Qur'an is with us.”

Therefore, it is befitting that we ought to always strive to honor and venerate the Qur'an and never perceive the Gracious Qur'an in the same light as we perceive other books. Conceiving the Qur'an as higher than other books must not be confined to belief of the heart. Our conduct with the Qur'an should not be the same as our conduct with other books.

In addition to respecting the Qur'an in our hearts, we also have to have outward and apparent respect for the Qur'an; that is to say, our outward and apparent respect of the Qur'an has to be like our inward respect towards it. There is no doubt that this same respectful and cordial conduct with the Qur'an increases our faith.

Some of the prominent Muslim scholars would never sleep in the room where they kept the Gracious

Qur'an. They never even used to sit with their legs stretched out in the rooms where they kept the Qur'an. There is a story narrated by both 'Allamah Tabataba'i and Shahid Mutahhari in regard to Shaykh Muhammad Taqi Amoli, may Allah be pleased with him, that one night as a result of excessive tiredness the late Shaykh Amoli leaned on a pillow and stretched while reciting the Gracious Qur'an. The following day his mentor, the late Mirza 'Ali Aqa Qadi, may Allah be pleased with him, who was also the mentor of 'Allamah Tabataba'i as well as the mentor of other prominent Muslim scholars, promptly said to him, "It is not good to stretch your legs while reciting the Qur'an."

Indeed, on account of venerating the Qur'an and laying the foundation for propagating Qur'anic culture in the society, we have to respect the teachers of the Qur'an and if we ourselves are one of the bearers of the Gracious Qur'an and we see other people respecting us, we should not think that because we are one of the teachers of the Qur'an we are no longer obliged to respect the other bearers of the Qur'an because there is no contradiction in one teacher of the Qur'an respecting another, just as respecting the *sayyids* and the Progeny of the Noble Prophet (S) is incumbent upon all including the *sayyids* themselves. When man sees a *sayyid*, he remembers the Noble Prophet (S) and it is for this reason that he respects him, even if he himself is a *sayyid*.

In regard to one of the great scholars who was also a *sayyid*, it has been narrated that one day as he was leaving a social gathering, his son respectfully paired up his father's shoes so as to make wearing them easy. His father got very displeased with this and said, "Fatimah's progeny do not have to pair my shoes." Therefore, if a person is a *sayyid*, he ought to respect other *sayyids* and if he is a Muslim scholar, he ought to respect other scholars and there is no hindrance in one respected scholar respecting the other scholars. One scholar must respect other scholars on account of the fact that they are also religious scholars and bearers of Qur'anic knowledge and in reality this conduct is tantamount to venerating the Qur'an itself.

c) Respecting a Just and Equitable Ruler

The third group of people whose respect is tantamount to veneration of Allah is the group of just and equitable rulers, and before we embark upon the need to respect the just ruler, we will initially explain the need for a government and the law in a society and the qualifications of a custodian of Muslim affairs.

The Need for a Government and Law in Society

The late 'Allamah Tabataba'i states: "Authority denotes sovereignty, and is one of the necessary relative notions which man is in want of. In any case, the thing which mankind initially has need of is creating a society—in the sense of cohesion and connection of individuals of a community with one another whose every individual has a goal and will for themselves which is other than the goal and will of other individuals—not a society from the aspect of individual persons without cohesion and relationship; for the

reason that every individual person has wants and goals which are different from the wants and goals of other individuals.

Every individual wants to destroy the successes of other people and to overcome them and to violate the rights of other human beings and in the end disorder and chaos arise and a society which is meant to be the cause of prosperity for man becomes the cause of his misery and perdition. In order to get rid of this problem, there is no other way except that the society has to create an invincible and prevailing power in order to bring under its influence the rest of the powers and forces.

This power has to bring all individuals under its control and consequently bring to justice and equilibrium rebellious forces which want to violate the rights of other individuals. This power also emancipates and liberates weak individuals from their weak and defenseless position and brings them into equilibrium until finally all forces of the society become equal in regard to power and weakness and that is when every one of those forces occupies its rightful place, and everyone enjoys his rights.”[23](#)

This makes it clear that man’s life has a social and communal existence. Now some questions come up. Why is man’s life social? Is his communal existence deterministic and one imposed on man or does man’s nature necessitate a social life? Is there or is there not any logical and volitional factor in choosing an effective social life?

All these are topics which are put forward for discussion, but our opinion is that the logical and intellectual factor in choosing social life is effective because man conceives his social benefits and observes that his material and spiritual needs cannot or will not be secured in a desirable manner without social life and for this reason he lives in a community and accepts its conditions.

The other point is that social life entails clashes between the interests of the people in a society. That is to say, when people intend to have social life and live and work together and share and distribute the fruits of joint efforts, disputes arise among their interests. There are certain people who intend to derive a greater share and derive unlimited benefit from natural bounties and would like to deal with other human beings in whatever manner they please and this is not desirable to others.

For this reason, a tug of war inevitably arises on the social scene prevention of which calls for setting up bounds and limits and laws must be devised. This also is a self-evident matter and its clarity lies in the fact that if man were to reflect a little in regard to human desires—whether material or spiritual—of course those related to the social life of man, he would realize that it is not feasible to secure all his wants in an unlimited manner and if people desire to live communally, they must place limits on their desires and not act on whatever their hearts crave.

For this reason, in order to eliminate or reduce conflict, we need limits and laws. If we do not believe in limits and laws for individuals in deriving benefit from social life and if individuals do not obey and follow these limits the aim of social life, which is deriving more and better benefit from natural bounties for the purpose of material and spiritual perfection, will not be fulfilled. Therefore, social life must be managed in

such a way that it provides the background for the day to day perfection of all individuals in a society. It is only in this case that the goal of social life will properly be secured.

In the Islamic order which is based on the Islamic perspective and foundations, it is necessary that the law must be divine. The reason for this matter is the claim that Islam as a comprehensive school of thought has all the laws for managing social affairs. We who are the followers of Islam and believe that acting according to its dictates is a guarantee for everyone's prosperity must resist the different schools of thought and religions and inclinations which are found more or less in the majority of countries and defend our beliefs and ideals with sound reason and invincible logic.

Qualifications of a Righteous and Competent Ruler

Up to this point, the need for government and law in society has been explained and because the creation of a government and enforcement of law without a ruler is not feasible, we will now mention some of the qualifications of the custodian of the government.

1. Knowledge of the law: A person that wants to enforce the law, whether that law is related to internal security, defense, international relations, or other issues, has to have sufficient knowledge of the law, jurisprudence and values on which that law is founded.

2. Piety [*taqwa*]: Piety is a general qualification in Islamic culture and in common culture it is called 'dutifulness'. A person who is in charge of social affairs and is a custodian of people's interests has to think about securing their expedencies, not securing his own personal interests and gratifying his worldly passions after attaining power, in which case such an individual does not have the competence to be a manager of people's affairs and lives and also the executor of the law for the reason that he interprets and defines or abrogates the law oppositely and according to his own wishes and sometimes explicitly opposes the law. For this reason, the second qualification for being a custodian of government affairs is ethical competence, or according to Qur'anic terminology, piety.

3. Expertise: Every person who takes charge of a duty has to have the proficiency to perform it because merely having knowledge of law and piety are not enough for correctly discharging one's duties. Experience and expertise are also necessary to be able to solve short-term and long-term problems which are always presented to authorities.

There is no doubt that human societies need the law in order to solve small clashes and large conflicts and create limits in making use of personal and social amenities and finally creating equilibrium in communal life and every society requires a ruler and administrator in order to correctly enforce the law and prevent the rebellious and disobedient from lawless behavior; however, the question that exists is whether guardianship and custodianship belong to Allah and human beings become guardians and custodians of other people by the will of Allah or whether human beings are by principle competent to be guardians and custodians of other human beings.

In response, it is said that no human being has the right of guardianship and custodianship over other people because man ought to obey only a person from whom he receives his graces and existential blessings and no one's opinion is obligatory to follow for the reason that ordinary people neither grant man existence nor are they effective in his immortality and continued existence.

That people are not forced to obey one another is the primary principle in the lack of authority of human beings. Therefore, for the reason that man receives all his existential gifts from Allah, the Exalted, he is obliged to only obey and comply with His orders and following the orders of other than Allah is contingent on the other person being appointed by Allah.

With regard to what has previously been mentioned, when we read the Qur'an we notice that it rejects invalid guardianship, that is to say authority which has not been approved by Allah:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لَا تَتَّخِذُوا الْيَهُودَ وَالنَّصَارَىٰ أَوْلِيَاءَ بَعْضُهُمْ أَوْلِيَاءُ بَعْضٍ وَمَنْ يَتَوَلَّهُمْ مِنْكُمْ فَإِنَّهُ مِنْهُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يَهْدِي الْقَوْمَ الظَّالِمِينَ

“O you who have faith! Do not take the Jews and Christians for allies: they are allies for each other. Any of you who allies with them is indeed one of them. Indeed Allah does not guide the wrongdoing lot.”²⁴

(The sentence ‘Indeed Allah does not guide the wrongdoing lot’ denotes that those people were an unjust and wrongdoing group and that a wrongdoing oppressor never derives benefit from guidance and never attains his goal and always remains on his wrong path. Therefore, if you too find yourselves in their category, you will never attain your aims and goals.)

In another verse, the just ruler is thus introduced:

إِنَّمَا وَلِيُّكُمُ اللَّهُ وَرَسُولُهُ وَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا الَّذِينَ يُقِيمُونَ الصَّلَاةَ وَيُؤْتُونَ الزَّكَاةَ وَهُمْ رَاكِعُونَ

“Your Guardian is only Allah, His Apostle and the faithful who maintain the prayer and give zakat²⁵ while bowing down.”²⁶

(All Qur'anic commentators are unanimously agreed that the purport of this verse regarding the phrase ‘and the faithful who maintain the prayer and give zakat while bowing down’ is Imam ‘Ali (‘a).)

Therefore, due to the evidence which has been presented regarding the need for a government in the society and also the qualifications which have been mentioned for a just and competent ruler, it is clear that in the era of an infallible man like the Noble Prophet (S) or the Infallible Imams (‘a), they alone must occupy the position of head of the government and it is natural that such a government is quite desirable and ideal.

However, this state of affairs is not always feasible and, even in the time of an Infallible Imam (‘a), he can only rule in the town and province where he lives and only supervise the rest of the cities and provinces by appointing officials and functionaries. In the age of the Occultation of the Infallible Twelfth Imam, may Allah hasten his reappearance, someone has to take charge of this position and lead the Islamic society on the basis of Allah’s laws and the constituents of Islam. He ought to have the following qualifications:

1. Sufficient knowledge of Islam: For the reason that in leadership and government responsibilities, protecting the Islamic laws and values is the responsibility of the ruler of the Muslims and he is the trustee of the religion and the honor of the people and the divine laws, he has to, more than anyone else, have the qualification of knowledge of the law, piety and ethical competence and the power and expertise to manage affairs. There is a *hadith* designating that if in a society a person becomes a leader while there is someone else better qualified and worthy than him, even only one man, the society is doomed to failure and decadence until the Day of Resurrection.[27](#)

2. Piety [*taqwa*]: In a *hadith* the Prophet of Allah (S) has said that one of the qualifications of a competent leader is piety and chastity in regard to observing divine injunctions.[28](#)

Addressing the people of Kufah in regard to the issue of leadership in a society, Imam al-Husayn (‘a) said:

“A person is not an imam and leader unless his government is based on the Qur’an, he establishes justice, he is faithful to the religion of truth and he is totally dedicated to the path of Allah.”[29](#)

Addressing ‘Uthman, Imam ‘Ali (‘a) states:

“You should know that among the creatures of Allah, the most distinguished person before Allah is the just imam who has been guided by Allah and he guides others. He stands by the recognized ways of the Prophet’s (S) behavior and destroys unrecognized innovations. The Prophet’s (S) ways are clear and they have signs, while innovations are also clear and they too have signs. Certainly, the worst man before Allah is the oppressive imam who has gone astray and through whom others go astray. He destroys the accepted sunnah and revives abandoned innovations.”[30](#)

3. Foresight and management: The third qualification is expertise in the administration of affairs and good management of social issues as well as foresight.

The ability of the leader and his skill at management of social affairs in the way of Islam is a necessary qualification for a Muslim ruler and this qualification calls for many preliminary steps, experience and awareness. If a man attains this level of political adeptness and insight, it is possible to entrust the responsibility of Muslim affairs to him.

Imam ‘Ali (‘a) states:

“O people! The one most worthy of leadership is the person that is more capable and more aware about the commands of Allah in regard to it.”³¹

The Religious Jurisprudent [Wali al-Faqih]: the Most Righteous and Competent Person

With regard to the criteria and attributes which have been mentioned for the Muslim ruler, we notice that in our era the circumstances for the government of the most competent individual have been provided. In the past, the possibility of setting up a government with such individuals was very difficult and sometimes seemed impossible, and such discussions too were never held and only the issue of ‘religious authority’ [*marjaʿiyyat-e taqlid*] would be discussed.

It is for this reason that prominent religious scholars who were reformist thinkers and sympathetic to Islam would make an effort to find a person in the form of a religious authority to introduce as the best person to serve the Islamic society.

However, nowadays, thanks to Allah, the circumstances and means are available for bringing governments to hand with competent and worthy individuals in charge and by the grace of this great Islamic revolution and the pure blood of the martyrs, conditions prevail such that the most worthy and competent person can be at the head of government; this blessing has to be greatly appreciated.

We thank Allah that in the Islamic order we enjoy the blessings of the leadership of the ‘religious jurisprudent’ [*wali al-faqih*]. Now expressing thanks for this blessing can sufficiently be done only by obeying and following the religious jurisprudent—he is the guarantor of Islamic honor and the unity of the Islamic community.

During the days of Imam Khomeini’s life, we enjoyed the benefits of this blessing and today with a thousand sorrows we have been deprived of the blessings of that great man. Allah, the Exalted, has continued to bless us with the permanence of the shadow the religious jurisprudent.

We thank Allah that the Guardian Council and the well-informed people of the nation chose the most competent and worthy individual among the companions and helpers of the great Imam Khomeini, may Allah be pleased with him, namely Ayatullah Khamene’i, may Allah prolong his life.

All the people too paid allegiance to him with complete willingness and all the true companions of Imam Khomeini continued on his path with perfect unity. Thanks to Allah that not the least weakness and harm has affected the course of events. We ask Allah, the Exalted, that this unity and solidarity of the authorities may last and become firmer day by day so the great ship of the revolution with the leadership and mastership of our great leader should take us to the shores of safety and desirable goals.

The Noble Prophet (S) advises Abu Dharr that respecting and venerating the just leader who rules in

accordance with divine law and on the basis of justice and equity is tantamount to respecting and venerating Allah. For this reason, respect for the just leader is respect for Allah and one of the attributes and honors of Allah is governance because some of the divine names of Allah are the Ruler and the Sovereign and divine government practically manifests itself in the just laws of Allah and the just Muslim ruler is in charge of this vital matter.

The leadership of the just Muslim and the guardian of Muslim affairs who rules in accordance with the laws of Allah and intends to practically enforce the laws of Allah in the Islamic society has a level of the guardianship of the Noble Prophet (S) and the *Ahl al-Bayt* ('a) because the custodianship of Allah has originally and principally been handed over to the Noble Prophet (S) and the Pure Imams ('a) and its lower level has been handed over to the just leader and guardian of Muslim affairs, and it is for this reason that respecting him is tantamount to respecting Allah, the Exalted.

Therefore, in contrast to the impression of some people that respecting the Muslim ruler is not of great importance, if a person respects the great leader and custodian of Muslim affairs for the sake of Allah and the Islamic order, without personal goals and material ambitions, and his respect is because the custodian of Muslim affairs enforces the divine laws of Islam and is the promoter of the Qur'an, he has attained great virtue.

I deem it a personal duty to mention that one of the best and most commendable practices which has been enlivened in our country after the victory of the Islamic revolution by the efforts of the custodian of Muslim affairs is the practice of reciting and memorizing the Qur'an to the extent that we often see on television even very young girls and boys who are memorizers of the Qur'an.

Sometimes, it is seen that a young girl who has not yet learnt how to pronounce words correctly has memorized a third of the Qur'an with the Arabic accent! If you remember well, before the victory of the revolution we had to endure a lot of pains to teach people how to correctly learn to recite the Opening Chapter [*Surat al-Fatihah*] and one other *surah* (chapter). Even for the educated it was hard to learn to recite *Surat al-Fatihah* correctly. Now, we observe that young girls of six or seven years have memorized a third of the Qur'an and recite it better than us! Is this not a cause of pride? Do we not have to respect a person who has enlivened this practice?

Without the least doubt, respecting such a person is tantamount to respecting Allah and tantamount to respecting the Qur'an. Therefore, we ought not to be negligent of this matter. If we do not observe this respect, the divine rites of Islam will be wiped out. The continued existence of religion in the society is dependent on the continued existence of the rites of Islam. If these divine essentials do not become prevalent and are not common among the people, they will bit by bit be forgotten and remain unappreciated.

For this reason, we who perceive this great blessing which Allah has blessed us with must acknowledge its worth and respect the great leader of the Islamic system. Of course, as mentioned, the value of this

respect is dependent on not having worldly desires and motivations but by discharging our duties for the pleasure of Allah, and respecting the leader of the Muslims is tantamount to respecting the Islamic order and Allah, the Exalted. ﴿٩﴾

- [1.](#) Surat al-Hadid 57:11.
- [2.](#) Surat al-Anfal 8:42.
- [3.](#) Nahj al-Balaghah, p. 321, sermon [khutbah] 107, trans. Fayd al-Islam.
- [4.](#) Ibid., p. 283, sermon [khutbah] 94.
- [5.](#) Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 23, p. 133.
- [6.](#) Surat al-Nisa' 4:80.
- [7.](#) Surat al-Nisa' 4:59.
- [8.](#) Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 26, p. 250.
- [9.](#) Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 43, p. 23.
- [10.](#) Surat al-Baqarah 2:152.
- [11.](#) Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 75, p. 468.
- [12.](#) Ibid., vol. 26, p. 158.
- [13.](#) Ibid., vol. 74, p. 345.
- [14.](#) Ibid., vol. 4, p. 27.
- [15.](#) Surat al-Fath 48:29.
- [16.](#) Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 7, p. 202.
- [17.](#) Murtada Farid, Al-Hadith, vol. 1, p. 306.
- [18.](#) Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 16, p. 84.
- [19.](#) Ibid., vol. 87, p. 138.
- [20.](#) Usul al-Kafi, vol. 4, p. 41.
- [21.](#) Usul al-Kafi, p. 7, introduction [muqaddamah].
- [22.](#) Usul al-Kafi, vol. 4, p. 400.
- [23.](#) Tafsir al-Mizan, vol. 3, p. 144.
- [24.](#) Surat al-Ma'idah 5:51.
- [25.](#) Zakat: the tax levied on various categories of wealth and spent on the purposes specified in Surat al-Tawbah (or, Bara'ah) 9:60. [ed.]
- [26.](#) Surat al-Ma'idah 5:55.
- [27.](#) Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 88, p. 88.
- [28.](#) Usul al-Kafi, vol. 2, p. 266.
- [29.](#) Muhammad ibn al-Nu'man (Shaykh al-Mufid), Irshad, p. 186.
- [30.](#) Nahj al-Balaghah, p. 526, sermon [khutbah] 163, trans. Fayd al-Islam.
- [31.](#) Nahj al-Balaghah, p. 173, sermon [khutbah] 183, trans. Shahidi.

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