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O Allāh, Change Our Unpleasant State Into Your Beautiful State

اَللّٰهُمَّ غَيِّرْ سُوْءَ حَالِنَا بِحُسْنِ حَالِكَ

O Allāh, Change Our Unpleasant State Into Your Beautiful State

In order to properly understand the above verse, it is imperative to know the meaning of the word “*husn*” in the phrase ‘*bi husni Hālik*.’ According to Raghīb al-Isfahāni, the word husn means:

اَلْحُسْنُ: عِبَارَةٌ عَنْ كُلِّ مَبْهَجٍ مَّرْغُوْبٍ فِيْهِ، وَذَلِكَ ثَلَاثَةٌ اُضْرِبُ: مُسْتَحْسَنٌ مِنْ جِهَةِ الْعَقْلِ، مُسْتَحْسَنٌ مِنْ جِهَةِ الْهَوَى، مُسْتَحْسَنٌ مِنْ جِهَةِ الْحِسِّ وَالْحَسَنَةُ يُعْبَرُ عَنْهَا عَنْ كُلِّ مَا يَسُرُّ مِنْ نِعْمَةٍ تَنَالُ الْإِنْسَانَ فِيْ نَفْسِهِ وَبَدَنِهِ وَأَحْوَالِهِ وَالسَّيِّئَةُ تَضَادُّهَا...

“*Husn* is every pleasant and desirable thing. And it is of three kinds:

- Pleasant according to the intellect;
- Pleasant according to worldly inclination;
- Pleasant according to sense perception.

And the word *al-hasanah* is employed to mean every pleasant blessing that the human being attains in his spirit, body or states. And *al-sayyi'ah* is opposite to that...”¹

بِحُسْنِ حَالِكَ The personal pronoun “*kaf*” here implies that we are after the utter Beauty of Almighty Allāh, who is the Most Pleasant and Beloved². We can therefore not limit the extensions of *husn* to what al-Isfahānī enumerates in his lexicon of Qur’ānic words. The universal sense of the word itself allows every pleasant entity to come under its conceptual umbrella. In addition, the *Husnu’l Hāl* (the pleasant state) possessed by Almighty Allāh is beyond intellectual and sensory perception.

It should be noted that the main components of *husn* are ‘*mubhij*’ (pleasant, delightful, etc.) and *marghab fah* (desirable). This is one key to understanding the various extensions of beautiful entities.

The particle “*bi*” in the phrase ‘*bi husni hālik*’ here can have two probable meanings:

(1) It can mean into³ (the same as the particle إلى *ilā*). Therefore the prayer would read: “O Allāh change our unpleasant state into Your Beautiful State”. This also reminds us of another supplication which is recommended to be recited on the first day of the solar year – Nawrūz:

...حَوْلَ حَالِنَا إِلَى أَحْسَنِ الْحَالِ...

...change our state into the most beautiful state...⁴

(2) It can denote sababiyyah (mediation)⁵, and thus the prayer would read: “O Allāh change my evil state by Your Beautiful State”.

حَالِ أَحْسَنِ حَالِكَ Hāl denotes ‘a changing state.’ Due to his imperfect nature, the human being undergoes a movement of perfection and thus “*hāl*” can be correctly attributed to him or her. But is it correct to employ it for Almighty Allāh? Does His Exalted Essence undergo change? Intellectually speaking, God, Who is Absolutely Perfect, can never undergo change. Change manifests deficiency and imperfection, while Almighty Allāh is Absolutely Perfect. Thus, it would be incorrect to talk about change with regard to His Sublime Essence. In a morning supplication narrated in the prayer manual Balad al-Amn⁶, we glorify Almighty Allāh saying:

يَا مَنْ لَا يَتَغَيَّرُ مِنْ حَالٍ إِلَى حَالٍ!

“O One Who does not change from one state to another!”

And in one of his sermons, while glorifying Almighty Allāh, Amāru’l Mu’minīn’Alī (as) says:

...الَّذِي لَا يَحُولُ وَلَا يَزُولُ وَلَا يَجُوزُ عَلَيْهِ الْأَقُولُ...

“One Who neither changes nor ceases to exist, nor is He transitory.”⁷

In expounding the meaning of “*lā yahayyalu*” ‘Allāmah Majlis⁸ in his remarks says: *lā yahayyalu ay lā yataghayyaru* [*lā yahayyalu* means ‘He does not change.’]

Then what does ‘*bi husni Hālika*’ mean in this noble supplication? To answer this, we need to understand that the extensions of concepts employed to describe different attributes of contingent entities (*mumkināt*), are not completely the same as those of the Absolute Perfect Being. When we say that a certain person, for example, is kind and merciful, we mean that he or she has a sense of pity which follows acts of support to others. But we can never conceive the state of pity which is an experience of change in the heart with regard to the Exalted Being. Similar is the case with ‘*hāli*’ which when employed for Almighty Allāh is not ‘a changing state’ but rather His Exalted Reality of Absolute Perfection that always was and will ever be. Small wonder it is that Imām Abu’l Hasan al-Ridā (as) in one of his debates with a theologian hired by Ma’mūn is reported to have employed the word “*Hāli*” for Almighty Allāh, which of course does not depict “a changing state”. He says:

...لَا يَكُونُ أَنْ يُحْدِثَ نَفْسَهُ وَلَا يَتَغَيَّرُ عَنْ حَالِهِ، تَعَالَى اللَّهُ عَنْ ذَلِكَ...

“...This is because it is impossible that he created Himself, nor does He change from His State, Exalted is Allāh from that...”⁹

Therefore when we say “*bi Husni Hālika*” we do not mean “a changing state”, Exalted is Allāh from any deficiency whatsoever.

Physical Extensions of Husnu’l Hāli

Our trend so far has been to consider both the apparent as well as the subtle meanings of this noble supplication. In this verse, however, it is clear that the human being opts for the Infinite Beauty and thus the state of physical beauty is not taken into consideration. Nevertheless, it is important to know what Islam has to say with regard to physical beauty. Does Islam consider physical beauty (whose pleasant (*mubhij*) state the sense perception admits) as insignificant and trivial? Ample proofs indicate that although physical beauty is pleasant and important it should not be reckoned as a distinction in the absolute sense. Whereas the Holy Qur’ān promises damsels with beautiful features¹⁰ for the believing men as well as handsome young men¹¹ for heavenly women, and therefore does not consider physical beauty as insignificant, it warns the believing men and women that even if an unbeliever is so beautiful or so handsome, you are not allowed to marry with him or her. Consider the following verses:

وَلَا تَنْكِحُوا الْمُشْرِكَاتِ حَتَّى يُؤْمِنَ وَلَأَمَةٌ مُؤْمِنَةٌ خَيْرٌ مِنْ مُشْرِكَةٍ وَلَوْ أَعْجَبَتْكُمْ
وَلَا تُنْكِحُوا الْمُشْرِكِينَ حَتَّى يُؤْمِنُوا وَلَعَبْدٌ مُؤْمِنٌ خَيْرٌ مِنْ مُشْرِكٍ وَلَوْ أَعْجَبَكُمْ

أُولَئِكَ يَدْعُونَ إِلَى النَّارِ وَاللَّهُ يَدْعُو إِلَى الْجَنَّةِ وَالْمَغْفِرَةِ بِإِذْنِهِ وَيُبَيِّنُ آيَاتِهِ لِلنَّاسِ
لَعَلَّهُمْ يَتَذَكَّرُونَ ﴿٩﴾

“Do not marry idolatresses until they embrace faith. A faithful slave girl is better than an idolatress, though she should impress you. And do not marry [your daughters] to idolaters until they embrace faith. A faithful slave is better than an idolater, though he should impress you. Those invite [others] to the Fire, but God invites to paradise and pardon, by His will, and He clarifies His signs for the people so that they may take admonition.”¹²

It should not be misconceived that Islam discourages one to marry with the physically beautiful. There are traditions which clearly encourage one to be a companion of one who enjoys beautiful features. Imām Abu’l Hasan (al-Ridā) (as) is reported to have said:

ثَلَاثَةٌ يَجْلُونَ الْبَصَرَ: النَّظَرُ إِلَى الْخُضْرَةِ، وَالنَّظَرُ إِلَى الْمَاءِ الْجَارِي، وَالنَّظَرُ إِلَى
الْوَجْهِ الْحَسَنِ.

“Three things enlighten the eye: (1) Looking at greenery, (2) looking at running water, and (3) looking at a beautiful face (al-wajh al-hasan).”¹³

That which Islam considers wrong is to establish the basis of one’s marriage on material interests. Physical beauty without morality would create nothing but chaos in one’s family life. In addition, purity of descent is also highly significant as spiritual heredity plays a fundamental role in one’s future generation. Imām al-Sādiq (as) is reported to have said:

قَامَ النَّبِيُّ (ص) خَطِيبًا فَقَالَ: أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ! إِيَّاكُمْ وَخَضِرَاءُ الدِّمَنِ. قِيلَ: يَا رَسُولَ
اللَّهِ (ص): وَمَا خَضِرَاءُ الدِّمَنِ؟ قَالَ: الْمَرْأَةُ الْحَسَنَاءُ فِي مَنْبَتِ السُّوءِ.

“The Holy Prophet (s) once addressing the people said: O people, beware of the verdure of the dung. He was asked: ‘O Messenger of Allāh, ‘And what does the verdure of the dung mean?’ The Holy Prophet (s) said: ‘A beautiful woman (al-hasnā) from unpleasant roots.’”

Effulgence of the Face!

There is however another group of traditions that talk of spiritual light and the effulgence of the face. They also instruct the aspirants of marriage that the fundamental criteria of spousal selection is ‘the

brilliance of the heart which is manifest on the face'. Imām al-Sādiq (as) is reported to have said that the Holy Prophet (s) said:

قَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ (ص): أَفْضَلُ نِسَاءِ أُمَّتِي أَصْبَحُهُنَّ وَجْهًا وَأَقْلُهُنَّ مَهْرًا.

“The best of the women of my Nation are the most radiant in complexion and seek the least of dowry.”¹⁴

Note that the word أَصْبَحُهُنَّ “*asbahahunna*” is employed in the above tradition and not أَجْمَلُهُنَّ “*ajmalahunna*”, which means that the yardstick of excellence and perfection is radiance and luminance of the complexion and not physical beauty.

In short, while Islam encourages physical beauty and reckons it as something good and naturally pleasant, it warns us from bartering our spiritual beauty for physical beauty. There is a prophetic tradition that says:

اللَّهُ جَمِيلٌ يُحِبُّ الْجَمَالَ.

“Allāh is Beautiful and He Loves beauty.”

Beauty appreciated by the intellect likewise is naturally lovable and pleasant. In fact one of the proofs of God’s existence is by appreciating the orderliness of the world of creation through the intellect. The intellect appreciates that we live in the most beautiful system. In religious terminology this world is known as al-nizām al-ahsan (The most beautiful system). The holy Qur’ān terms the entire creation of Allāh as beautiful. Observe the following verse:

﴿ الَّذِي أَحْسَنَ كُلَّ شَيْءٍ خَلَقَهُ ﴾

“One Who Made Beautiful every thing that He Created.”¹⁵

The beauty of every creature can be well appreciated by intellectually considering the orderliness of its system, and its relation with the rest of the world of creation.

Husnu’l Hāq – A Unique State of Utter Ecstasy

The contemporary mystic-scholar, Allāmah Hasan Zadeh ṣmolā, may the Almighty Allāh protect his noble presence, in his treatise– Nūrūn’Alī Nūr¹⁶, says:

سعی کن تا به آب برسی با اینکه از آب بریده نیستی. و چون به آب رسیده‌ای آن وقت است که حسن حال داری و ابتهاج تو به وصف نمی‌آید. در دعای مأثور آمده است که: (اللَّهُمَّ غَيِّرْ سُوءَ حَالِنَا بِحُسْنِ حَالِكَ). پس خدای تعالی حسن حال دارد، آری این حسن حال همانست که شیخ در فصل هجدهم نمط بهجت و سرور «اشارات» فرمود: «أجل مبتهج بشيء هو الأول بذاته». فافهم.

“Try to reach the water, although you are not cut off from water. And when you reach the water, you would have *husnu 'l h* and your joy would be inexpressible. In one of the narrated supplications we read: O Allāh change our unpleasant state into your Beautiful State. Thus Almighty God Has the State of *Husnu'l H*. Yes, this State of Joy (*Husnu'l H*) is that very state that Shaykh (Ibn Sin) speaks about in chapter eighteen of the section on Joy and Happiness of his monumental work *al-Ishrat*:

أَجَلُ مُبْتَهِجٍ بِشَيْءٍ هُوَ الْأَوَّلُ بِذَاتِهِ.

The Being that has the greatest joy in a thing is the First (i.e. God) as having joy in His Essence.”¹⁷

With regard to Almighty Allāh's sincere servants, the state of Rid is known to be the state of joy and ecstasy. Shaykh al-Ris also mentions this in section nine of his monumental *al-Ishrat*, as follows:

الْعَارِفُ هَشٌّ بِشَيْءٍ بَسَامٌ، يُبْجِلُ الصَّغِيرَ مِنْ تَوَاضُعِهِ مِثْلَ مَا يُبْجِلُ الْكَبِيرَ، وَ يَنْبَسِطُ مِنَ النَّبِيَةِ. وَكَيْفَ لَا يَهْشُ، وَهُوَ فَرَحَانٌ بِاَلْحَقِّ وَ بِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ - فَإِنَّهُ يَرَى فِيهِ الْحَقَّ؟! وَكَيْفَ لَا يُسَوِّي وَالْجَمْعُ عِنْدَهُ سَوَاسِيَةَ أَهْلِ الرَّحْمَةِ قَدْ شَغُلُوا بِاَلْبَاطِلِ!؛

“The Gnostic (*'arif*) is bright faced, friendly and smiling. Due to his modesty he honors the young as he honors the old. He is as pleased with the unclearheaded as he is with the alert. How could he not be bright-faced when he enjoys the Truth (i.e. God) and everything other than the Truth, for he sees the Truth even in everything other than the Truth. Furthermore, how could he not treat all as equal when, to him all are equal! They are objects of mercy preoccupied with falsehoods.”¹⁸

Avicenna's statement “... for he sees the Truth even in everything other than the Truth” reminds us of the Holy Prophet (s), and the Holy Imams of the Ahlu'l Bayt (as). Imam 'Alī (as) is reported to have said:

مَا رَأَيْتُ شَيْئًا إِلَّا وَرَأَيْتُ اللَّهَ قَبْلَهُ وَيَعْدُهُ وَمَعَهُ.

“I did not see anything save that I saw Allāh before it, after it, and with it.”

A similar dictum is reported also from Imām al-Sādiq (as). Some analysts say that the following tradition also alludes to the sublime state of ecstasy and joy of the Leader of martyrs, Imām al-Husayn (as), as he neared his supreme sacrifice, which guaranteed the salvation of Islam forever: Shaykh Sadūq in his Ma’āni al-Akhabar reports Imām al-Sajjād (as) to have said:

لَمَّا اشْتَدَّ الْأَمْرُ بِالْحُسَيْنِ بْنِ عَلِيٍّ عَلَيْهِمَا الصَّلَاةُ وَالسَّلَامُ نَظَرَ إِلَيْهِ مَنْ كَانَ مَعَهُ فَإِذَا هُوَ بِخِلَافِهِمْ، لِأَنَّهُمْ كُلَّمَا اشْتَدَّ الْأَمْرُ تَغَيَّرَتْ أَلْوَانُهُمْ، وَارْتَعَدَتْ فَرَائِصُهُمْ، وَوَجَلَّتْ قُلُوبُهُمْ، وَكَانَ الْحُسَيْنُ عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ وَبَعْضُ مَنْ مَعَهُ مِنْ خَوَاصِهِ تَشْرُقُ أَلْوَانُهُمْ، وَتَهْدَأُ جَوَارِحُهُمْ، وَتَسْكُنُ نَفُوسُهُمْ.

“When the situation became tense for Imām al-Husayn (as) those who were with him looked at him and saw that his state was contrary to theirs, for whenever the situation grew tense they changed color and were shaken and experienced fear, whereas the faces of al-Husayn (as) and some of his companions shone, their bodily members were relaxed and their souls were tranquil...”¹⁹

Such is the spirit which is ready to meet his Lord while both he is Pleased with his Beloved and the Beloved is pleased with him. The last verses of Sūratu’l Fajr, because of which the chapter was also known as Sūratu’l Husayn (as), also depicts the state of Sayyid al-Shuhadā:

يَا أَيَّتُهَا النَّفْسُ الْمُطْمَئِنَّةُ. ارْجِعِي إِلَىٰ رَبِّكَ رَاضِيَةً مَرْضِيَّةً. فَادْخُلِي فِي عِبَادِي. وَادْخُلِي جَنَّاتِي ۖ

“O soul that art at rest! Return to your Lord, well-pleased (with him), well-pleasing (Him), So enter among My servants, And enter into My garden.”²⁰

There is a beautiful statement that Sayyid Haddād al-Māsawī, a great mystic and contemporary of the late ‘Allamah Tabatabā’ī, is reported to have said. His disciple, the late Ayatullāh Muhammad Husayn al-Tehrānī in his Rūh-e-Mujarrad quotes him as saying:

صحنه عاشوراء عالیترین مناظر عشقبازي است و زیباترین مواطن جمال و

جلال الهي و نيكوترين اسماء رحمت و غضب و براي اهل بيت جز عبور از درجات و مراتب و وصول به اعلي ذروة حيات جاويدان و منسلخ شدن از مظاهر و تحقق به اصل ظاهر و فناي مطلق در ذات احديت چيزي نبوده است.

“The scene of ‘ushur is the sublimest expression of love and reveals the most beautiful scenes of Divine Beauty and Glory, and the finest manifestations of the Names of Mercy and Wrath. For the Prophet’s Household it was nothing more than a transition across all the levels and degrees, to reach the highest peak of eternal life, coming off from the ‘manifestations ‘ to realize the Manifesting Principle and to obtain absolute annihilation in the Being of the One.”

ayatullah Tehrani adds saying²¹:

تحقيقاً روز شادي و مسرت اهل بيت است زيرا روز كاميابي و ظفر و قبولي ورود در حريم خدا و حرم امن و امان او است. روز عبور از جزئيت و دخول در عالم كليت است. روز پيروزي و نجاح است. روز وصول به مطلوب غائي و هدف اصلي است. روزي است كه گوشه اي از آن را اگر به سالكان و عاشقان و شوريدگان راه خدا نشان دهند در تمام عمر از فرط شادي مدهوش مي گردند و يكسره تا قيامت برپا شود به سجده شكر به رو در مي افتند.

“Truly it was the day of joy and delight for the Ahlu’l Bayt as it was a day of success and victory, of reception into the Divine Sanctity and the sanctuary of peace and security. It was a day of rising above particularity and entry into the realm of universality. It was the day of triumph and deliverance, the day of the attainment of the ultimate end and the principal goal. It is such a day that if a fraction of it were shown to the wayfarers and ardent lovers of the path of God, they would swoon with extreme ecstasy until the end of their lives and fall on their faces to remain in prostration of gratitude until Judgment’s Day....”²²

In reality, as ayatullah Tehrani later explains in his biographical account of his mentor, the event of Kerbal is like a double sided coin, one side of which is love, zeal, victory and the triumphant attainment of the Imam (as), and the other side is sorrow, grief torment, torture, and mourning. ayatullah Tehrani believes that one can only see its other side (i.e. the side of ‘ishq) after one has seen the sorrowful side and transcended it. He says:

ayatullah Tehrani says²³:

أما سایر افراد مردم که در عالم کثرات گرفتارند و از نفس برون نیامده اند
 حتما باید گریه و عزاداری و سینه زنی و نوحه خوانی کنند تا بدین طریق
 بتوانند راه را طی کنند و بدان مقصد عالی نائل آیند...همچنانکه در روایات
 کثيرة مستفیضة ما را امر به عزاداری نموده اند تا بدین وسیله جان خود را
 پاک کنیم و با آن سروران در طی این سبیل هم آهنگ گردیم

“But those who are still captives within the realm of multiplicity and have not emerged from the domain of the self, they should definitely engage in lamentation and mourning, in beating their breasts and reciting elegies so that thereby they may traverse the way and reach the high goal...Accordingly, in a large number of traditions we have been commanded to mourn, so that we may purify our souls by these means and fall in step with those masters in traversing this way.”²⁴

All these radiant narratives demonstrate that the path is open for the faithful believers too. If one adopts the path of Imām al-Husayn (as) and his sincere followers, he can reach the husnu'l hāl that he or she eagerly asks from Almighty Allāh from this noble supplication.

1. Mufradāt al-Faṣṣal al-Qurʿān, pg. 235

2. In his Mufradāt al-Isfahānī has extensively discussed about the etymology of the word إِلَهِ 'ilāh.' He reports different origins for the same. One of these, he says, is وِلَاةٌ 'wilāh' (passionate love). At the onset it was pronounced as wilāh; thereafter the letter wāw (و) was changed into the letter hamza (إ) and it became ilāh. And God was named wilāh because every created being has passionate love for Him. Al-Isfahānī says:

قال بعض الحكماء: الله محبوب الأشياء كلها، وعليه دل قوله تعالى: وَإِنْ مِنْ شَيْءٍ إِلَّا يُسَبِّحُ بِحَمْدِهِ وَلَكِنْ لَا تَفْقَهُونَ تَسْبِيحَهُمْ

“A certain theosophist is reported to have said, ‘Allāh is the beloved of all things.’ And upon this does the following speech of Almighty Allāh indicate: ‘And there is nothing save that it glorifies Allāh and praises Him, but you do not comprehend their glorification.’” [Mufradāt al-Faṣṣal al-Qurʿān, pg. 83]

3. Dr. Rīm al-Badī ‘Yaʿqūb, Mawsūʿat al-Nahw wa al-Sarf wa al-Iʿrāb, pg. 186

4. Maḥṣn al-Jinn, v. 1, pg. 299

5. Ibid.

6. Balad al-Amn, v. 1, pg. 60

7. Bihār al-Anwār, v. 4, pg. 254

8. Ibid., v. 4, pg. 257

9. Ibid., v. 10, pg. 334

10. Holy Qurʿān, 56:22

11. Ibid., 56:17

12. Ibid., 2:221

13. Wasʿil al-Shaʿa, v. 5, pg. 340

14. Usul al-Kifā, v. 5, pg. 324

15. Holy Qurʿān, 32:7

16. Nūr al-Nūr, section 9, pg. 78

17. al-Ishrāq wa al-Tanbihāt, pg. 350 [trans. By Shams Inati, pg. 78 – Translation]

18. al-Ishrāq wa al-Tanbihāt, pg. 364 [trans. By Shams Inati, pg. 89 – Translation]

19. Ma'āni al-Akhbār, pg. 288
20. Holy Qur'ān, 89:27-30
21. Rih-e-Mujarrad, pg. 84
22. Spirit Immaterial, translated by Sayyid 'Alī Qāṣi Qarīṣī, Al-Tawhid Quarterly Journal, v. 12, no.3, pp. 42-43
23. Rih-e-Mujarrad, pg. 91
24. Spirit Immaterial, translated by Sayyid 'Alī Qāṣi Qarīṣī, Al-Tawhid Quarterly Journal, v. 12, no.3, pp. 52

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