

O Allāh, Fill Our Poverty With Your Needlessness

اللَّهُمَّ سُدِّ فَقْرَنَا بِغِنَاكَ

O Allāh, fill (*sudda*) our poverty (*faqran*) with Your affluence (*bighin*). This verse does not pertain to the need of the commonly needy individuals, but a need that is shared by every human being, or rather every contingent being¹, which due to the nature of its essence, possesses nothing of its own. Therefore, even the apparently self-sufficient among the created beings are termed poor and needy in this verse. Similarly, *ghin* (lit. Your Needlessness) is not the common self-sufficiency shared by some of the human beings, but that which is restricted only to Almighty Allāh. In reality, if one understands the relation between the Creator and the creation, self-sufficiency makes no sense with regard to the creation at all. The Holy Qur'an alluding to this says:

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ أَنْتُمُ الْفُقَرَاءُ إِلَى اللَّهِ وَاللَّهُ هُوَ الْغَنِيُّ الْحَمِيدُ

“O mankind! You are the ones who stand in need of Allāh, and Allāh – He is the All-Sufficient, the All-Laudable.”²

لَهُ مَا فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَمَا فِي الْأَرْضِ وَإِنَّ اللَّهَ لَهُ الْغَنِيُّ الْحَمِيدُ

“To Him only belongs what is in the heavens and what is in the earth; and indeed Allāh is the All-sufficient, the All-laudable.”³

And in his well-known supplication of ‘Arafah, Imām Husayn (as) humbly cries:

إِلَهِي: أَنَا الْفَقِيرُ فِي غِنَايَ، فَكَيْفَ لَا أَكُونُ فَقِيرًا فِي فَقْرِي؟

“O God, I am the poor in my self-sufficiency; therefore how can I not be needy in my state of need?”

And Imām ‘Alī (as) in his famous whisperings (*munājāt*) cries:

مَوْلَايَ يَا مَوْلَايَ: أَنْتَ الْغَنِيُّ وَأَنَا الْفَقِيرُ، وَهَلْ يَرْحَمُ الْفَقِيرَ إِلَّا الْغَنِيُّ؟

“My Master, My Master, You are the All-Sufficient and I am the needy; and who other than the All-Sufficient can have mercy on the needy?”

And in the recommended prayer after ‘Asr, we introduce ourselves as:

... لَا يَمْلِكُ لِنَفْسِهِ نَفْعًا وَلَا ضَرًّا وَلَا مَوْتًا وَلَا حَيَاةً وَلَا نُشُورًا...

“...one who does not own any benefit, nor harm, nor death, nor life, nor resurrection...”⁴

Can we turn into the necessary being?

Faqran (lit. our poverty) refers to the utterly dependent state of the human being, which in the language of metaphysicians is termed as ‘contingency’ (*imkān*), and in the vision of mystics ‘manifestation’ (*zuhūr*). All that exists other than Allāh does not have existence of its own. To come into being and subsist in any state whatsoever requires the Divine Will. The following verse of the Qur’ān expounds the continual process of causation with relation to the creation:

قُلِ اللَّهُ خَالِقُ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ وَهُوَ الْوَاحِدُ الْقَهَّارُ

“Say, ‘God is the Creator of all things, and He is the One, the All-paramount.’”

It should be noted that *Khāliq* in the above verse denotes perpetual creation. This concept is also beautifully expounded by Mullā Sadr in his philosophical texts, where he intellectually establishes, through his well-known theory of transubstantial motion (*harakah jawhariyyah*), the fact that every

contingent being receives existence every moment. Reflect over the following verses of the Holy Qur'an:

أَفَعَيْنَا بِالْخَلْقِ الْأَوَّلِ بَلْ هُمْ فِي لَبْسٍ مِنْ خَلْقٍ جَدِيدٍ ﴿٥﴾

“Were We exhausted by the first creation? Rather they are in doubt about a new creation.”⁵

وَتَرَى الْجِبَالَ تَحْسَبُهَا جَامِدَةً وَهِيَ تَمُرُّ مَرَّ السَّحَابِ ﴿٦﴾

“And you see the mountains, which you suppose to be stationary, while they drift like passing clouds...”⁶

The mystics also vision this reality when they behold this universe. ‘Ayn al-Qudat al-Hamadani says: “Small children, observing a lamp burning continuously, would naturally think that what we see is one single flame. But the grownups know very well that it is a series of different flames appearing and disappearing moment by moment. And from the viewpoint of mystics this must necessarily be the case with everything in the world except God.”⁷

Having understood the aforesaid, we ask: Is it possible for the human being to lose his or her contingent identity and become Essential and Necessary in existence? In other words, is it possible for us to change from the utterly poor to the absolutely affluent? Intellectually speaking, such a phenomenon can never transpire for it is evidently impossible. This is because, ‘a Necessary Being’ (*wajib al-wujud*) is only necessary and essential when it did not and does not depend on any kind of cause whatsoever. If one says that a certain being was contingent (*mumkin*) and thereafter turned into a Necessary Being (*wajib*), this would depict nothing but absurdity. This is because an entity changing from contingency (*imkan*) to necessity (*wujub*) means change of the essence (*dhāt*) of the entity. This change either was causeless or needed a cause. If we say that it did not require a cause and changed by accident, we have said what is intellectually absurd. If we say it needed a cause, then that would also be incorrect because for something to be necessary no cause is needed whatsoever. A Necessary Being is Causeless. It is never brought about. Hence a contingent being can never turn into a Necessary Being.

Therefore, what exactly do we mean when we utter the above verse of this supplication? What do we actually seek from Almighty Allah?

One of the Sublime Names of Almighty Allah is al-Samad. There are several meanings for this name, but they in reality are corollaries (*lawzim*) of its exact lexical meaning⁸ which is: ‘One who is besought and every entity returns to Him for any need.’ One of the corollary meanings of al-Samad is ‘the All-compact (al-musmat).’ Imam al-Husayn (as) is reported to have said:

...الصَّمَدُ: الَّذِي لَا جَوْفَ لَهُ

“As-Samad is One Who has no hollowness.”

Due to His Infinite Existence, there is no gap of deficiency in any of His perfections. If He is All-Knowing, then there is no perforation in His Infinite knowledge, if He is All-Powerful, there is no kind of power that he lacks... In short, He has no kind of deficiency in the level of His Essence, Attributes or Actions. Mullā Hādī Sabzawārī in his Sharh al-Asmā' says:

فأنه لما كان بسيط الحقيقة واجداً للكمالات والخيرات لا يسلب عنه خير، كان
كالمصمت الذي لا جوف له - تعالى عن الشبيه و النظير علواً كبيراً - فهو
بخلاف الممكن الذي هو الأجوف الناقص الجائع الفاقد لكل كمال، في مرتبة
ذاته بذاته...

“Because His reality is Simple⁹ and Non-composite [*Basīṭ al-Haqīqa*] and He possesses all the perfections and virtues, and does not lack any goodness (*khayr*), He is like a compact entity (*al-musammāt*) that does not have any hollowness- highly exalted is He from comparison and similarity- and so He (Allāh) is contrary to a contingent being (*al-mumkin*) who is hollow (*al-ajwaf*), imperfect, hungry, and lacks any perfection in the level of his essence...”¹⁰

Therefore, every dependent entity is hollow in its reality. Only Allāh is al-Samad. Several parables are given to show this relation. One such relation is that of the ocean and its waves. The waves have nothing of their own yet they seem to be different to the Ocean. Perhaps the best comparison is that of the reflection and the mirror. The creation is like the reflection of Divine Names in the Mirror.

Having considered the aforesaid, what do we mean when we ask Almighty Allāh to fill up our existential poverty with His existential affluence?

Seeking the Proximity of Allāh

One of the interpretations of this sacred verse is to seek the state of human perfection through utter submission to Allāh, such that the human being gains sufficiency (*ghinā*) through the Absolutely Sufficient (*al-Ghanī*). The following sacred tradition (*hadith al-quds*) refers to this exalted station:

يَا ابْنَ آدَمَ: أَنَا غَنِيٌّ لَا أَفْتَقِرُ، أَطْعَمَنِي فِيمَا أَمَرْتُكَ أَجْعَلُكَ غَنِيًّا لَا تَفْتَقِرُ. يَا ابْنَ آدَمَ:
أَنَا حَيٌّ لَا أَمُوتُ، أَطْعَمَنِي فِيمَا أَمَرْتُكَ أَجْعَلُكَ حَيًّا لَا تَمُوتُ. يَا ابْنَ آدَمَ: أَنَا أَقُولُ
لِلشَّيْءِ كُنْ فَيَكُونُ، أَطْعَمَنِي فِيمَا أَمَرْتُكَ أَجْعَلُكَ تَقُولُ لِلشَّيْءِ كُنْ فَيَكُونُ.

“O offspring of Adam, I am the All-sufficient, and will never become needy; obey Me, and I will make you All-sufficient such that you will never become needy; O offspring of Adam, I am All-living and will never die, obey Me, and I will make you All-living and you will never die; O offspring of Adam, I say [to a thing] be! And it is; Obey Me in what I have commanded you, and I will make you such that when you say be! [to a thing], it would come into being.”¹¹

In order to attain this fundamental level of proximity (*qurb*), which is the highest point of the first spiritual journey (السير إلى الله) one must rise through the way-stations of human perfection, which are expounded by the experts of gnosis in their manuals of direction. The fundamental stages, however, as we discussed earlier, are yaqzah and tawbah. It should also be understood that for one to maintain himself or herself on the straight path and never divert from it, he or she needs a master of gnosis (*irfān*) who has already traversed the levels of perfection and has the ability to take others as well.

Seeking The Infinite

Another possible interpretation of this verse of the blessed supplication is to seek greater perfection of the Divine attributes one already possesses. The authoritative mystics in their works present different levels¹² in the journey of human perfection. One of the basic classifications they propound is that the human being has two fundamental journeys:

Ibn Maytham al-Bahrānī, in his *Sharhu Mi'at Kalimah* quoting the mystical scholars says:

السَّفَرُ سَفَرَانِ، سَفَرٌ إِلَى اللَّهِ، وَسَفَرٌ فِي اللَّهِ. وَالْأَوَّلُ إِشَارَةٌ إِلَى إِنْتِقَالَاتِ النَّفْسِ فِي مَرَاتِبِ السُّلُوكِ، وَالثَّانِي إِشَارَةٌ إِلَى إِنْتِقَالِهَا فِي دَرَجَاتِ الْوُصُولِ...

“There are two journeys: journey to Allāh, and journey in Allāh; the first alludes to the transformations of the soul in the different levels of wayfaring, and the second refers to its transformations in the stages of attainment (*wusul*)...”¹³

1. *Al-sayr ilā Allāh* (السير إلى الله) (Journey towards Allāh) which culminates with the state of tawhīd when one does not see anything save Allāh.

2. *Al-sayr fī Allāh* (السير في الله) (Journey in Allāh) which never culminates, for it has no end. When we say “in God”, one should not conjecture that God is a vessel (*‘arf*) in which the human being travels. Far is He from any kind of limitation and imperfection whatsoever. *Al-sayr fī Allāh* means journeying in the Attributes of God, or the continual process of coloring oneself with the Divine Attributes. And because Allāh is *al-Samad* and Infinite, all His perfect attributes are infinite too. And since the journey from the finite to the Infinite is infinite, the human being, however exalted he may be, is still in need of more and more perfection. The following famous dictum of Imām ‘Alī (as) according to some scholars¹⁴ refers to

this very journey:

آه مِنْ قِلَّةِ الزَّادِ، وَطُولِ الطَّرِيقِ، وَبُعْدِ السَّفَرِ...

“O, how little is the provision, and how long the path and distant the journey...!”¹⁵

Hence, there will never be an occasion when the human being would be needless of this prayer.

Readers however should note that for the one who has not attained the proximity of Allāh, ‘seeking more’ carries no meaning. He should strive to cover the first journey so that he may be able to swim across the oceans of the different names of Almighty Allāh. Scholars of ethics however advise that in such cases when the supplicant realizes how remote he is from uttering such lofty words, he should pray with utter humility and shame, and while feeling repentant of his state of separation, pin his hopes entirely on the One who can jerk him to start his journey and later have the ability to swim across the vast oceans of His Attributes.

1. Contingent beings are those that do not exist essentially nor are they impossible to exist. Therefore in order for them to exist, they always need a cause. All the created beings are such.

2. Holy Qurʿān, 35: 15

3. Ibid., 22:64

4. Miftāḥ al-Falāḥ, v. 1, pg. 198

5. Holy Qurʿān, 50: 15

6. Ibid., 27:88

7. Zubdat al-Haqāʾiq, pg. 62

8. al-Maʿzūn, v. 20, pg. 391

9. Here ‘simplicity’ denotes the non-compositeness of God. (Author)

10. Sharḥ al-Asmāʾ, pg. 365

11. ‘Uddat al-Dīn, pg. 310

12. It should be noted that the well-known classification, which is not contradictory to what we have mentioned above, is the al-Asfar al-Arbʿah (the four journeys) which Sadru’l Mutaʿallihīn and his school of thought has adopted. We have not mentioned this due to the limited scope of this work.

13. Sharḥ Miʾat Kalimah, v. 1, pg. 40

14. ʿĪyatullāḥ Jawādī ʿamolī alludes to this point in his lessons on Ibn ʿArabī’s Fusṣ al-Hikam. See also ‘Buhuth Fī ‘Ilm al-Nafs’ [Transcripts of the notes of Sayyid Kamāl al-Haydarī on the section about the human soul from Mullā Ḥadī Sabzawārī’s philosophical poetry al-Manẓūmah, page 298]

15. Bihār al-Anwār, v. 34, pg. 284