

O Allāh, Reform Every Uneven Affair of the Muslims

اللَّهُمَّ أَصْلِحْ كُلَّ فَاسِدٍ مِنْ أُمُورِ الْمُسْلِمِينَ

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The Meaning

أَصْلِحْ (*Aslih*):

This imperative verb is normally translated as ‘Reform!’ and ‘Rectify!’ It originates from the word *al-salāh*, which means ‘equilibrium’ and ‘balance.’ And ‘*salāh*’ is the opposite of the word ‘*fasād*’, which according to Rāghib al-Isfahānī means:

خُرُوجُ الشَّيْءِ عَنِ الْإِعْتِدَالِ.

“The deviation of an entity from its equilibrium.”¹

Consequently, the word *aslih* literally means ‘Restore [such and such a thing or affair] to [its] equilibrium!’

And the word فَاسِدٌ “*fasid*” means ‘something out of its equilibrium.’

أُمُورُ الْمُسْلِمِينَ

Umru'l Muslimin means "Affairs of Muslims."

Thus we are asking Almighty Allāh to restore all those affairs of the Muslims, which have lost their equilibrium and become distorted. Such affairs may pertain to individual or social life, and may concern all the members of the Muslim ummah or a certain group in particular.

As explained earlier [in the previous discussions of the supplication], whenever one prays for something, he or she must also seek its respective solution. The same law applies here too. Seeking reform in any matter should be preceded by knowledge and effort to facilitate the reform. As we pray for equilibrium in the affairs of the Muslims, we should try to:

- (1) Identify those Muslim affairs which are in the state of disequilibrium,
- (2) Acquire knowledge about the correct and most efficient ways to rectify the state of affairs, and
- (3) Prepare ourselves to effect equilibrium to these respective affairs.

Self-reform is the Beginning

Before embarking on any kind of reform, the aspirant of reform should have the competency to effect it. Mere 'aspiration' to see reform does not qualify one to effect the same. And the most fundamental condition of qualifying to reform others is 'self-reform.' In other words, one must ensure that he or she enjoys the state of equilibrium in order to be able to effect it elsewhere. Otherwise, it would mean that disequilibrium can effect equilibrium, the absurdity of which is quite clear. Metaphysicians express this reality as follows:

فَاقِدُ الشَّيْءَ لَا يُعْطِيهِ.

"One who does not possess a thing cannot confer the same."²

The chaos created by so-called reformers of the past is due to this very reason. They set out to confer equilibrium to the nation, but instead increased its state of disequilibrium. The reason behind this was that they themselves did not enjoy inner stability. They had sullied their souls with selfish desires and their reform movement was nothing but another manifestation of their selfish interests. They forgot that the transience of their life would not be the end of the story. Rather, their 'so-called reform' would be left as a destructive heritage for future generations to inherit. An apt manifestation of such a reform movement is 'the Renaissance', which instead of bringing life to the nations, created a foundation for the destruction of the future generations. The spiritual crisis in the Western world partly reflects this contention.

The Holy Qur'an says:

وَإِذَا قِيلَ لَهُمْ لَا تُفْسِدُوا فِي الْأَرْضِ قَالُوا إِنَّمَا نَحْنُ مُصْلِحُونَ. أَلَا إِنَّهُمْ هُمُ
الْمُفْسِدُونَ وَلَكِنْ لَا يَشْعُرُونَ

“And when it said to them, do not create disequilibrium (mischief) in the earth, they say verily we are reformers. Mind, they themselves are mischief mongers, but they are not aware.”³

This is a very dangerous state, for the hypocrites believe that they really are reformers [after engaging in repetitive ills and losing their power of identifying the elements of equilibrium and disequilibrium]. This reflects their compound ignorance. They imagine that they are reformers and have conviction about the matter whereas in reality, they are mischief mongers.

The following are verses from the Holy Qur'an and traditions that underline the essential requisite of self-reform before one ever tries to embark upon reforming others:

1. Almighty Allah says in chapter 10, verse 35:

أَفَمَنْ يَهْدِي إِلَى الْحَقِّ أَحَقُّ أَنْ يُتَّبَعَ أَمَّنْ لَا يَهْدِي إِلَّا أَنْ يَهْدَى

“...Is He then Who guides to the truth more worthy to be followed, or he who himself does not go aright unless he is guided?”

Readers should not limit ‘guidance’ just to conceptual knowledge that one acquires after having been taught what is right and wrong. Rather ‘guidance’ is a change of the previous state of deviation. When one follows the religion properly and rectifies his previous state, then only can he be known to be guided.

2. Imam ‘Alī (as) is reported to have said:

عَجِبْتُ لِمَنْ يَتَّصِدِّي لِإِصْلَاحِ النَّاسِ وَنَفْسُهُ أَشَدُّ شَيْءٍ فَسَادًا فَلَا يُصْلِحُهَا
وَيَتَّعَاظِي إِصْلَاحَ غَيْرِهِ.

“I am surprised at one who takes charge of reforming the people while his soul is in greater need of reform, and he does not reform it but undertakes to reform others.”⁴

3. Imām ‘Alī (as) is reported to have said:

إِنْ سَمَتْ هِمَّتُكَ لِإِصْلَاحِ النَّاسِ فَاَبْدَأْ بِنَفْسِكَ، فَإِنَّ تَعَاطِيكَ صِلَاحَ غَيْرِكَ وَأَنْتَ
فَاسِدٌ أَكْبَرُ الْعَيْبِ.

“If your aspiration rises to reform the people, then start with your self, because your mission to reform other than yourself while you are corrupt is the greatest of deficiencies.”⁵

4. Imām ‘Alī (as) is reported to have said:

مَنْ لَمْ يُصْلِحْ نَفْسَهُ لَمْ يُصْلِحْ غَيْرَهُ.

“Whosoever does not reform himself would not reform others.”⁶

The Reality of Self-Reform

Having understood the fundamental requisite of self-reform, let us now try to understand its reality. What is ‘*islāh al-nafs*’ (self-reform) in its real sense? As understood earlier, the word ‘*islāh*’ stands for ‘effecting equilibrium [in an entity].’ Therefore ‘*Islāh al-nafs*’ would mean ‘effecting equilibrium in the soul.’ And when does a soul enjoy its equilibrium?

To respond to this query we must understand the basic faculties of our souls. The soul of the human being possesses the following three main faculties:

- 1– The Reality of the Intellect (*al-quwwat al-‘aqliyyah*)
- 2– The Faculty of Desire (*al-quwwat al-shahwiyyah*)
- 3– The Faculty of Anger (*al-quwwat al-ghadabiyyah*)

If the faculty of intellect does not deviate towards the directions of excess (*ifrāt*) or negligence (*tafrāt*) and the faculties of desire and anger are subservient to the faculty of the intellect, the soul would enjoy its equilibrium. And this, according to some ethicists is the state of ‘*adwālah*’ (equilibrium). The esteemed mystic Mullā Hādī Sabzawārī in his excellent commentary of Du‘ā Jawshan al-Kabīr, called *Sharh al-Asmā’* says:

إِنَّ لِلْإِنْسَانَ ثَلَاثَ قُوَى: قُوَّةُ دَرَاكَةٍ، وَقُوَّةُ شَهْوِيَّةٍ، وَقُوَّةُ غَضَبِيَّةٍ، فَاَنْحِرَافُ الْقُوَّةِ
الدَّرَاكَةِ مِنْهُ إِلَى جَانِبِي الْإِفْرَاطِ وَالتَّفْرِيطِ يُسَمَّى (جُرِيْزَةً) وَ (بِلَاهَةً) وَاعْتَدَالُهَا

(حِكْمَةٌ)، وَأَنْحِرَافُ الْقُوَّةِ الشَّهْوِيَّةِ إِلَى طَرَفِي الْإِفْرَاطِ وَالتَّفْرِيطِ يُسَمَّى (شَرَهًا) وَ (خُمُودًا) وَاعْتِدَالُهَا (عِفَّةً)، وَأَنْحِرَافُ الْقُوَّةِ الْغَضَبِيَّةِ إِلَى حَدِّي الْإِفْرَاطِ وَالتَّفْرِيطِ يُسَمَّى (تَهَوُّرًا) وَ (جُبْنًا) وَاعْتِدَالُهَا شُجَاعَةٌ. وَهَذَا الْإِعْتِدَالُ هُوَ الْمُسَمَّى (بِالْعَدَالَةِ) وَهُوَ الصِّرَاطُ الْمُسْتَقِيمُ الَّذِي هُوَ أَحَدٌ مِنَ السِّيفِ وَ أَدَقُّ مِنَ الشَّعْرِ...

“Surely the human being has three faculties [of the soul]:

- The faculty of comprehension (sometimes known as faculty of intellection)
- The faculty of appetite
- The faculty of anger (also translated as the irascible faculty)

The deviation of the faculty of comprehension towards the two directions of excess and negligence are called *jurbuzah* (deception) and *balahah* (silliness) respectively, and its state of equilibrium is known as *al-hikmah* (wisdom);

The deviation of the faculty of appetite towards the two directions of excess and negligence is called *sharah* (gluttony) and *khumud* (stillness) respectively, while its state of equilibrium is known as *al-iffah* (temperance/chastity);

The the deviation of the faculty of anger towards the directions of excess and negligence is known as *tahawwur* (recklessness) and *jubnah* (cowardice) respectively, whereas its state of equilibrium is called *al-shuja'a* (courage/bravery).

And this state of *al-i'tidal* (equilibrium of the aforementioned three faculties) is called *al-adalah* (justice) and it is the straight path (*sirat al-mustaqim*) which is sharper than the sword and thinner than hair... “7

In order to have a better picture of what Mullā is trying to say, let us look at what Mullā Fayd Kashān has to say in his *al-Mahajjat al-Bayd*:

...أَمَّا قُوَّةُ الْعِلْمِ فَحُسْنُهَا وَ صِلَاحُهَا فِي أَنْ تَصِيرَ بِحَيْثُ يَسْهُلُ لَهَا دَرْكُ الْفَرْقِ
بَيْنَ الصِّدْقِ وَالْكَذْبِ فِي الْأَقْوَالِ وَبَيْنَ الْحَقِّ وَالْبَاطِلِ فِي الْإِعْتِقَادَاتِ وَبَيْنَ
الْجَمِيلِ وَالْقَبِيحِ فِي الْأَفْعَالِ فَإِذَا تَحَصَّلَتْ هَذِهِ الْقُوَّةُ حَصَلَ مِنْهَا ثَمَرَةُ الْحِكْمَةِ
وَالْحِكْمَةُ رَأْسُ الْأَخْلَاقِ الْحَسَنَةِ وَهِيَ الَّتِي قَالَ اللَّهُ تَعَالَى فِيهَا ۚ وَمَنْ يُؤْتَ
الْحِكْمَةَ فَقَدْ أُوتِيَ خَيْرًا كَثِيرًا ۚ وَإِنَّمَا قُوَّةُ الْغَضَبِ فَحُسْنُهَا فِي أَنْ يَفْتَصِرَ
إِنْقِبَاضُهَا وَانْبِسَاطُهَا عَلَى حَدِّ مَا تَقْتَضِيهِ الْحِكْمَةُ، وَكَذَلِكَ الشَّهْوَةُ حُسْنُهَا

وَصَلَّاحُهَا فِي أَنْ تَكُونَ تَحْتَ إِشَارَةِ الْحِكْمَةِ أَعْنِي إِشَارَةَ الْعَقْلِ وَالدِّينِ، وَأَمَّا قُوَّةُ الْعَدْلِ فَهِيَ فِي ضَبْطِ قُوَّةِ الْغَضَبِ وَالشَّهْوَةِ تَحْتَ إِشَارَةِ الْعَقْلِ وَالشَّرْعِ ...

“The rational faculty is sound and good when it is easily able to discriminate, that is, to distinguish honesty from lies in speech, truth from falsehood in questions of belief, and beauty from ugliness in actions. When this faculty is sound it bears fruit in the form of wisdom, which is the chief of the good traits of character, and regarding which God has said, And whosoever is granted wisdom has truly been granted abundant good. Regarding the faculty of anger, this is sound when its movements lie within the bounds required by wisdom. Likewise, the faculty of desire is sound and good when it is under the command of the religion and the intellect. As for the faculty to effect a just equilibrium, it is this which sets desire and anger under the command of the intellect and the religion...”⁸

Ethicists also quote a tradition that refers to the aforementioned reality:

Imam ‘Alī (as) is reported to have said:

الْفَضَائِلُ أَرْبَعَةٌ أَجْنَاسٌ: أَحَدُهَا الْحِكْمَةُ وَقِوَامُهَا فِي الْفِكْرَةِ، وَالثَّانِي الْعِفَّةُ وَقِوَامُهَا فِي الشَّهْوَةِ، وَالثَّلَاثُ الْقُوَّةُ وَقِوَامُهَا فِي الْغَضَبِ، وَالرَّابِعُ الْعَدْلُ وَقِوَامُهُ فِي إِعْتِدَالِ قُوَى النَّفْسِ.

“Virtues are four kinds: The first is wisdom (*al-hikmah*) which is sustained by intellection (*al-fikrah*), the second is the temperance (*al-iffah*) which is sustained by desires (*al-shahwah*), the third is power (*al-quwwah*) which is sustained by anger (*al-ghadab*), and the fourth is justice (*‘adl*) which is sustained by the equilibrium of the faculties of the soul.”⁹

The equilibrium of the soul can be achieved by following the Holy Qur’an and the Sunnah, which cover Islamic Ideology, Islamic ethics, Islamic law, etc. We must remember however, that equilibrium has different levels. And in order to find one’s way to the higher levels one needs a qualified guide for proper direction, since there is always the danger of stumbling and falling. However, as mentioned earlier, it is possible for a very few to traverse the journey without the direct guidance of a specific master.

The Grand Ayatullah Jawād Ṣādiqī (r) says:

ابدال در اصطلاح سالکانی هستند که تحت تدبیر شخص معین نیستند. و از آنها بعنوان ((مفرد)) یا ((مفرد)) یاد می شود چه این که اینها راه را به تنهایی

طي مي کنند. گرچه سخت است ولي رفتني است و گرچه پيشرفت انسان تحت نظر مدير و مدبر بيستر است، لکن بتنهائي هم مي توان طي طريق نمود

“Abd^{al} technically stands for those wayfarers on the path of God who are not trained by a specific master. They are also called “*mufrid*” or “*mufrad*” This is because they traverse the path by themselves. Despite this being difficult it can be traversed, and although the human being progresses farther under the tutelage of a master and supervisor, one can still traverse the path by himself.”¹⁰

He also narrates:

وقتي از عارفي پرسيدند: ((ابدال)) چند نفرند؟ فرمود: ((أَرْبَعُونَ نَفْسًا)) ابدال چهل تن هستند، و سوال کردند که: چرا نگفتيد: ((أَرْبَعُونَ رَجُلًا))، چهل مردند، و گفتيد چهل نفس هستند؟ در جواب گفت: اولاً: همه اين بزرگان مرد نيستند، بلکه در بين آنان زنان هستند. و ثانياً: کسي که به مقام ابدال نائل مي آيد انسان است و انسان بودن اختصاص به زن يا مرد ندارد.

“When a saint was asked how many are the ‘abd^{al}’? He responded by saying, ‘*Arba‘^{na} nafsan*’ (40 souls). He was asked: Why did you say ‘forty souls’ instead of ‘forty men’? He responded: ‘Firstly: not all of these great personalities are men; rather, we also have women among them’; and secondly: whosoever attains the station of the *abd^{al}* is ‘a human being [in the true sense of the word]’, and being human is not restricted to men.”¹¹

Seeking the support and intercession of the Holy Prophet (s) and his infallible progeny who enjoy proximity to God and who always stand unparalleled, can enable one to soar very high. In fact some great saints have said things worthy of reflection:

1. The late saint ^{ay}atull^h Sayyid H^{sh}im al-M^saw^q reports ^{ay}atull^h al-’Uzm^q Sayyid ‘Al^q Q^qd^q al-Tab^qtab^q’, the spiritual mentor of ‘All^qmah al-Tab^qtab^q’ to have said:

قَالَ لِي أَسْتَاذِي الْمَرْحُومُ الْقَاضِي قُدْسَ سِرِّهِ: أَنَّهُ مُحَالٌ أَنْ يَصِلَ إِنْسَانٌ إِلَى مَقَامِ التَّوْحِيدِ بِدُونِ طَرِيقِ سَيِّدِ الشُّهَدَاءِ عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ.

“My teacher, Marh^qm Q^qd^q (may his spirit be sanctified) said to me that it is impossible for a human being to attain the station of *tawh^qd* [proximity to God] without the path of Sayyid al-Shuhad^q.”¹²

2. ʿAyatullāh Muhammad Husayn Tehrānī in his *'spirit Immaterial'* narrates that Sayyid 'Alī Qāḍī Tabātabā'ī said:

وصول به مقام توحيد و سير صحيح الي الله و عرفان ذات احديت عزّ اسمه
بدون ولايت امامان شيعه و خلفاي به حق از علي بن ابي طالب (ع) و
فرزندانش از بتول عذراء محال است

“It is impossible to attain the station of Divine unity and traverse correctly towards God and attain the knowledge of the His Unique Essence (Invincible is His Name), without the guardianship of the Shāh Imāms (upon whom be peace) and the true Caliphs starting from 'Alī bin Abī Tālib and his progeny through the *Batīl-e-Adhrā'* (Hadrat Fātima (as)).”¹³

3. 'Allāmah Tabātabā'ī, the author of *al-Maẓnūn*, is reported to have said:

آن حضرت (امام الحسين (ع)) را براي رفع حجاب و موانع طريق نسبت به
سالکين راه خدا عنايتي عظيم است

“That Hadrat [i.e. Imām Husayn (as)] has great attention towards the wayfarers of the path of God in removing the veil and impediments on the path of God.”¹⁴

4. ʿAyatullāh Qāḍī Tabātabā'ī, the spiritual mentor of 'Allāmah Tabātabā'ī is reported to have said:

اگر من به جائي رسیده باشم از دو چیز است: (1) قرآن کریم, (2) زیارت سید
الشهداء

“If I have attained any station, it is by two things: (1) The Noble Qur'ān, and (2) *Ziyārah* of Sayyid al-Shuhadā' [Doyen of the Martyrs].”¹⁵

5. Sayyid 'adil al-'Alawī, quotes his late mentor, the pious Shi'ite Marja', ʿAyatullāh al-'Uzmā Shāhāb al-Dīn al-Najafī al-Mar'ashī as having advised him as follows:

إِذَا أَرَدْتَ التَّوْفِيقَ فِي حَيَاتِكَ الْعِلْمِيَّةِ فَعَلَيْكَ بِثَلَاثَةِ أَعْمَالٍ: الْأَوَّلُ: كُنْ دَوْمًا عَلَى
طَهَارَةٍ وَوُضُوءٍ فَإِنَّهُ يُنِيرُ الْقَلْبَ وَيُزِيلُ الْهَمَّ. الثَّانِي: شَيِّعِ الْجَنَائِزَ أَيَّ جَنَازَةٍ رَأَيْتَهَا

وَلَوْ بِأَقْدَامِ. الثَّلَاثُ: شَارِكٌ فِي قَضِيَّةِ الْحُسَيْنِ عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ بِأَيِّ نَحْوٍ مِنَ
 الْمُشَارَكَةِ. ثُمَّ قَالَ: كُنْتُ مِنْ مُدْرَسِي الْحَوْزَةِ الْمَعْرُوفِينَ، وَكُنْتُ أَنْذَاكَ أَوْزَعُ
 الشَّيْءِ عَلَى النَّاسِ فِي الْمَجَالِسِ وَالْمِائِمِ الْحُسَيْنِيِّ.

“If you would like divine succor (*tawfiq*) in your intellectual and practical life, you should practice the following three acts:

- (1) Always be in the state of purity and *wudhu'*, for that illumines the heart and removes anguish.
- (2) Escort the dead body, whoever it may be [among the Muslims], even for a few steps.
- (3) Participate in the matter of Husayn (as) [i.e. any ceremony that concerns his exalted personality]

Then he said to me: I was one of the well-known professors of the Islamic Seminary; and during that period I would distribute tea to the people who attended ceremonies for mourning Imam Husayn (as).”¹⁶

Scholars of ethics and gnosis have produced thought provoking works about the path to self-reform. However, the limited scope of this commentary does not allow the author to delve into all the details of this path. Nevertheless, God willing, we shall try to cover some of the significant rudimentary stations of wayfaring very soon.

In short, one must reflect on the following tradition: both the Shāh as well as Sunnī narrators of tradition quote that the Holy Prophet (s) is reported to have said:

إِنِّي تَارِكٌ فِيكُمْ الثَّقَلَيْنِ مَا إِنْ تَمَسَّكْتُمْ بِهِمَا لَنْ تَضِلُّوا بَعْدِي: كِتَابَ اللَّهِ وَعِترَتِي
 أَهْلَ بَيْتِي.

“...I leave behind you the two weighty things; if you hold fast unto them you will never go astray after me: The Book of Allah and my Progeny...”¹⁷

This, in short, is the path to self-reform. But it is not as easy as it seems. Try to reflect on “holding fast” and its true extensions and you will come to understand what self-reform entails.

Waking Up: The First Stage of Self-Reform

Scholars of *irfan* (gnosis) introduce *‘yaqzah’* (wakefulness) as the first step on the path toward self-reform. So long as the human being is attached to the material world, and oblivious of the purpose of his creation, he is fast asleep. He needs to be woken up in order to begin the journey to Almighty Allah.

Allāh (swt) addressing His Noble Messenger in chapter Saba, verse 46 says:

﴿ قُلْ إِنَّمَا أَعِظُكُمْ بِوَاحِدَةٍ أَنْ تَقُومُوا لِلَّهِ مِثْنَى وَفُرَادَى ﴾؟

“Say [O Prophet of Allāh] I exhort you only to one word: rise for Allāh, in pairs and alone...”

Khawājah ‘Abdullāh Ansārī, in his monumental work of practical gnosis, *Manzīl as-Sīrīn* (the Dwellings of the Wayfarers), which is a text studied by many of the wayfarers on the path of God, after quoting the above verse says:

الْقَوْمَةُ لِلَّهِ هِيَ الْيَقَظَةُ مِنْ سِنَةِ الْغَفْلَةِ، وَالنُّهُوضُ عَنْ وَرَطَةِ الْفَتْرَةِ. وَهِيَ أَوَّلُ مَا
يَسْتَنِيرُ قَلْبُ الْعَبْدِ بِالْحَيَاةِ لِرُؤْيَةِ نُورِ التَّنْبِيهِ.

“To rise for Allāh [as indicated in the verse] means to wake up from the sleep of heedlessness (*ghaflah*) and rise up from the entanglement of lassitude; and that is the first illumination of the heart of the servant with [true] life due to perceiving the light of awakening (*tanbīh*).”¹⁸

When the human being wakes up from the slumber of his heedlessness, his imaginative life subsides and his true life begins. His entire past, which was filled with ‘mundane aspirations’ collapses, and he starts experiencing a life, which would benefit him eternally. So important is this step, the experts of practical gnosis (*al-‘irfān al-‘amalī*) believe that *yaqzah* is: “the first step of wayfaring towards Allāh, and in fact, the foundation of the journey to God.”¹⁹

The late ‘Ayatullāh Khumaynī, who was also known as an authority in gnosis (*‘irfān*), at one time advised the seminarians in Najaf as follows:

تا کی می‌خواهید در خواب غفلت به سر برید، و در فساد و تباهی غوطه‌ور
باشید؟ از خدا بترسید از عواقب امور پیرهیزید از خواب غفلت بیدار شوید.
شما هنوز بیدار نشده‌اید هنوز قدم اول را برنداشته‌اید. قدم اول در سلوک
«يقظه» است. ولی شما در خواب به سر می‌برید چشمها باز و دلها در خواب
فرو رفته است.

“How long do you wish to remain in the sleep of negligence, steeped in corruption? Fear God! Beware of the consequence of your deeds! Wake up from the sleep of negligence! You have not yet awakened. You have not yet taken the first step. The first step of wayfaring is *yaqzah* (awakening), but you are still asleep. Your eyes may be open, but your hearts are asleep...”²⁰

And in his well-known ethical manual Chehel Hadith (Forty Traditions) he says:

منزل اوّل انسانیت «يقظه» است. و آن بیدار شدن از خواب غفلت و هشیار شدن از سکر طبیعت است، و فهمیدن اینکه انسان مسافر است، و هر مسافر زاد و راحله می‌خواهد. زاد و راحله انسان خصال خود انسان است.

“...The first stage of humanness (*insāniyyat*) is *yaqzah*. It signifies the awakening from the slumber of negligence and the intoxication of physical nature, and the realization that man is a traveler, and like any other traveler, he needs some provisions for this journey. His morality and character are his provisions for this journey...”²¹

بدان که اول منزل از منازل انسانیت منزل يقظه و بیداری است، چنانچه مشایخ اهل سلوک در منازل سالکان بیان فرموده‌اند. و از برای این منزل، چنانچه شیخ عظیم الشان شاه آبادی، دام ظلّه، بیان فرمودند، ده بیت است که اکنون در مقام تعداد آن نیستیم.

“...Remember that the first step towards humanness is that of awareness and awakening (*yaqzah*), as mentioned by the leading mystics (*mashāyikh*) concerning the stages of wayfaring. There are ten stages in this step, as elaborated by the great Shaykh Shāhābadī, which we are not in a position to enumerate here...”²²

Now, how and when is *yaqzah* achieved? How does the human being wake up from his long slumber? And what is the source of this spark of wakefulness?

The Holy Qur’ān and the teachings of the Sunnah inform us that the source of this noble spark is Almighty Allāh. It is He who wakes the slumbering human being and enables him to start this significant journey of eternal salvation:

1. Almighty Allāh says in chapter 4, verse 79:

﴿ مَا أَصَابَكَ مِنْ حَسَنَةٍ فَمِنَ اللَّهِ ﴾

“Whatever good befalls you is from Allāh.”

2. And in chapter chapter 16, verse 53 He says:

﴿ وَمَا بِكُمْ مِنْ نِعْمَةٍ فَمِنَ اللَّهِ ﴾

“Whatever blessing you have is from Allāh...”

3. In the morning supplication of “al-Sabḥ”, Imām ‘Alī (as) cries:

إِلٰهِيْ اِنْ لَمْ تَبْتَدِئِنِي الرَّحْمَةَ مِنْكَ بِحُسْنِ التَّوْفِيْقِ، فَمَنْ السَّالِكُ بِي اِلَيْكَ فِي وَاضِحِ
الطَّرِيْقِ؟

“O God, if Mercy from You does not begin with fair success for me, then who can take me to You upon the evident path?”²³

4. Imām Zayn al-‘abidin (as) in his supplication of praise says:

...ثُمَّ سَلَكَ بِهِمْ طَرِيْقَ اِرَادَتِهِ وَبَعَثَهُمْ فِي سَبِيْلِ مَحَبَّتِهِ...

“Then He made them walk on the path of His desire, and sent them out on the way of His love.”

5. Sulaymān bin Khālid narrates that Imām Ja’far al-Sādiq (as) [once] said to him:

يَا سُلَيْمَانَ اِنَّ لَكَ قَلْبًا وَمَسَامِعَ وَاِنَّ اللّٰهَ اِذَا اَرَادَ اَنْ يَهْدِيَ عَبْدًا فَتَحَ مَسَامِعَ قَلْبِهِ
وَاِذَا اَرَادَ بِهٖ غَيْرَ ذَلِكَ خَتَمَ مَسَامِعَ قَلْبِهِ فَلَا يَصْلُحُ اَبَدًا وَهُوَ قَوْلُ اللّٰهِ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ: ﴿
اَمْ عَلٰى قُلُوْبٍ اَقْفَالٌ﴾

“O Sulaymān, surely you have a heart and the sense of hearing, and certainly when Allāh wants to guide a servant, He opens the ears of his heart; but when He wants other than that for him, He closes the ears of his heart, as a result of which he can never attain the state of his equilibrium; and to this does the following speech of God allude: ‘**Or are there locks upon their hearts?**’” [47:24]²⁴

In fact, the entire Qur’ān has been sent down in order to awaken the human being. Almighty Allāh teaches His servants to reflect and ponder over the verses of the Qur’ān so that they can attain the state

of wakefulness. Look at the following verses:

1. In Sūrat Sād (38), verse 29, He says:

﴿ كِتَابٌ أَنْزَلْنَاهُ إِلَيْكَ مُبَارَكٌ لِيَدَّبَّرُوا آيَاتِهِ وَلِيَتَذَكَّرَ أُولُوا الْأَلْبَابِ ﴾

“[It is] a blessed Book that We have sent down to you, so that they may contemplate its verses, and that those who possess intellect may take admonition.”

2. And in chapter 14, verse 1, He says:

﴿ الر. كِتَابٌ أَنْزَلْنَاهُ إِلَيْكَ لِتُخْرِجَ النَّاسَ مِنَ الظُّلُمَاتِ إِلَى النُّورِ بِإِذْنِ رَبِّهِمْ إِلَى صِرَاطٍ الْعَزِيزِ الْحَمِيدِ ﴾

“Alif, Lam, Ra; This is a Book We sent down unto you so that you bring mankind out of darkness into light by their Lord’s permission, to the path of the All-mighty, the All-laudable.”

3. And in chapter 47, verse 24, He says:

﴿ أَفَلَا يَتَدَبَّرُونَ الْقُرْآنَ أَمْ عَلَى قُلُوبٍ أَقْفَالُهَا ﴾

“Do they not then ponder over the Qur’ān or are there locks upon their hearts?”

The reason, we are told, why many are still asleep, is their unpreparedness for receiving the Divine spark. Due to their continual sinning, they have erected barriers in their hearts, and thus are not receptive and cannot wake up from their slumber of heedlessness. So long as they have not ‘locked their hearts’ as explained in the previous tradition and [not] lost their discerning spirit and ‘innate nature’ [like those hypocrites and disbelievers referred to in verses 7 & 18 of Sūrat al-Baqarah] they still have the opportunity to change, and they should not despair. Rather, while trying to prepare themselves to attain this fundamental state by pondering over the verses of the Holy Qur’ān, they should be steadfast in refraining from sin and should obey the laws of Almighty Allāh and perpetually pray for the state of wakefulness.

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

إِلٰهِي أَطْلُبُنِي بِرَحْمَتِكَ حَتَّىٰ أَصِلَ إِلَيْكَ، وَاجْذُبْنِي بِمَنِّكَ حَتَّىٰ أَقْبَلَ إِلَيْكَ.

“O God, Seek me by Your Mercy until I reach You and attract me by Your Favor until I draw towards You.”²⁵

Additionally, the aspirants of wakefulness should refrain from those *makrḥahāt* [abominable deeds] that blur the heart and the intellect from comprehension and should engage themselves in activities that quicken the process of the soul’s enlightenment. The following traditions are worthy of reflection:

1. Imām ‘Alī (as) is reported to have said:

إِسْتَدِيمُوا الذِّكْرَ، فَإِنَّهُ يُنِيرُ الْقَلْبَ، وَهُوَ أَفْضَلُ الْعِبَادَةِ.

“Be constant in the remembrance of God (*dhikr*), for that enlightens the heart, and it is the best worship.”²⁶

Readers should note that ‘dhikr’ must always accompany attention, otherwise it would not have its desired effect. Remembrance of Allāh can be attained by strengthening one’s belief in His Omnipresence. When the supplicant is always mindful that there is someone Infinitely Supreme who witnesses each and every act and thought of his, he would refrain from sin.

2. Imām al-Sādiq (as) is reported to have said:

إِنَّ لِلْقُلُوبِ صَدَأً كَصَدَأِ النُّحَاسِ، فَاجْلُوهَا بِالِاسْتِغْفَارِ.

“Surely there is corrosion for the hearts like the corrosion of copper; therefore burnish them by seeking God’s forgiveness.”²⁷

3. The Holy Prophet (s) is reported to have said:

لَا تُكْثِرُوا الْكَلَامَ بِغَيْرِ ذِكْرِ اللَّهِ، فَإِنَّ كَثْرَةَ الْكَلَامِ بِغَيْرِ ذِكْرِ اللَّهِ تُقْسِي الْقُلُوبَ،
وَإِنَّ أْبْعَدَ النَّاسِ مِنَ اللَّهِ الْقَاسِي الْقَلْبَ.

“Do not talk much about that which concerns other than the remembrance of Allāh, for that hardens the heart; and surely the most remote from Allāh among the people is the one who possesses a hard

heart.”28

4. Imām ‘Alī (as) is reported to have said:

الْبُكَاءُ مِنْ خَشْيَةِ اللَّهِ يُنِيرُ الْقَلْبَ وَيَعْصِمُ مِنْ مُعَاوَدَةِ الذَّنْبِ.

“Weeping out of the fear of Allāh, enlightens the heart and prevents [one] from repeating sin.”29

[We should understand that ‘*khashyah*’ which is translated as fear should not be taken to merely mean ‘the conventional fear’ that we know of. ‘*Khashyah*’, according to Rāghib al-Isfahānī, is:

خَوْفٌ يَشُوبُهُ تَعْظِيمٌ.

‘fear mixed with veneration.’30

And this can only be achieved after knowing God. At the onset our duty is to know God and His Beautiful Attributes even in the conceptual and intellectual level. For every heart, which accepts the truth, this can be a catalyst for achieving the higher levels of ma’rifah, and consequently, the higher levels of *khashyah* as well. Therefore, it is incumbent to introduce and inculcate in oneself the basic knowledge of the roots of religion, especially *tawhīd*, so that one can naturally experience the fear of Allāh with veneration for His Exalted Essence.

5. The Holy Prophet (s) is reported to have said:

لَا تُمِيتُوا الْقُلُوبَ بِكَثْرَةِ الطَّعَامِ وَالشَّرَابِ، فَإِنَّ الْقُلُوبَ تَمُوتُ كَالزُّرُوعِ إِذَا كَثُرَ عَلَيْهِ الْمَاءُ.

“Do not deaden your hearts by a lot of food and drink for surely the hearts die like plantations if a lot of water is put on them.”31

6. Imām Ja’far al-Sādiq (as) is reported to have said:

...طَلَبْتُ نُورَ الْقَلْبِ فَوَجَدْتُهُ فِي التَّفَكُّرِ وَالْبُكَاءِ...

“...I sought for the light of the heart and found it in reflection and weeping [for those things that one should weep for such as regret of sin, etc.]...”³²

7. Imām Muhammad al-Baqir (as) is reported to have advised Jabir al-Ju’fi as follows:

اِسْتَجَلِبْ شِدَّةَ التِّيَقُّظِ بِصِدْقِ الْخَوْفِ.

“Attract extreme wakefulness by true fear.”

And true fear of God can only be achieved when one has knowledge of Allāh and His Sublime Attributes. And the beginning of ‘knowledge’ is conceptual knowledge: knowledge by the intellect. Then comes presential knowledge (*al-‘ilm al-hudurī*), when the spirit reaches its height.

8. The Holy Prophet (s) in a lengthy tradition says:

... وَمَنْ أَحَبَّ عَلِيًّا بَعَثَ اللَّهُ مَلَكَ الْمَوْتِ إِلَيْهِ بِرَفْقٍ، وَدَفَعَ اللَّهُ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ عَنْهُ هَوْلَ مُنْكَرٍ وَنَكِيرٍ، وَنَوَّرَ قَلْبَهُ، وَبَيَّضَ وَجْهَهُ...

“And whosoever loves ‘Alī, Allāh (swt) would send the Angel of death to him in a friendly manner and remove from him the fear of Munkir and Nakir and enlighten his heart and whiten his face...”³³

As pointed out much earlier, it is important to understand what kind of ‘hubb’ of ‘Alī is spoken about in this radiant tradition. Obviously it is not an evanescent emotional pull. For a better understanding of this, look at the following tradition:

عَنْ أَبِي عُبَيْدَةَ عَنْ أَبِي جَعْفَرٍ (ع) قَالَ: مَنْ أَحَبَّنَا فَهُوَ مِنَّا أَهْلَ الْبَيْتِ. قُلْتُ: جُعِلْتُ فِدَاكَ! مِنْكُمْ؟ قَالَ: مِنَّا وَاللَّهِ، أَمَا سَمِعْتَ قَوْلَ إِبْرَاهِيمَ (ع): ؟ فَمَنْ تَبِعَنِي فَإِنَّهُ مِنِّي ؟

“Abū ‘Ubaydah is reported to have said that Imām Muhammad al-Baqir (as) said: “Whosoever loves us then he is from us the Ahlu’l Bayt (as).” Abū ‘Ubaydah said: “May I be made your ransom; “from you [the Ahl al- Bayt (as)]?” Imām Muhammad al-Baqir (as) responds: “[yes] from us, I swear by Allāh; have you not heard the statement of Prophet Ibrāhīm (as): **Then whosoever follows me, then verily he is from me.**” [Sūrat Ibrāhīm, v. 36]

This tradition is narrative of a love that is concordant with following the Ahlu’l Bayt (as). Were we to

ponder a little more, we would come to understand true love is the unity of the lover with the beloved. The veracity of one's claim of the love of Ahlu'l Bayt (as) becomes apparent when one reflects their attributes in one's own personality. Readers are requested to ponder over this point carefully.

Fudayl Wakes Up!

History informs us of people who, at a sensitive moment of their lives, woke up from their deep slumber, and underwent a transformation that became the foundation of their eternal salvation. One such person was Fudayl bin 'Ayyūb.

In the beginning Fudayl was well-known as a caravan robber. He would stop different caravans in the middle of their journeys and would steal from them whatever he desired. However, it is said that he would not transgress the limits by hurting anyone or leaving them with no provisions to reach their destination... Once he got in love with a certain woman, and headed for her house. While climbing the wall of her house, he happened to hear the following verse of Qur'an from someone who was reciting the Qur'an in the neighborhood:

﴿ أَلَمْ يَأْنِ لِلَّذِينَ آمَنُوا أَنْ تَخْشَعَ قُلُوبُهُمْ لِذِكْرِ اللَّهِ ... ﴾

“Has the time not yet come for the believers that their hearts turn humble for the remembrance of Allah...?”³⁴

On listening to this verse, he underwent a transformation and cried:

Yā Rabb qad āna

O Lord, the time indeed has come!

Thereafter he left the place and returned back and adopted a path of detachment from the world and self-reform. It is also said that he had a son called 'Alī who was higher than him in rank in terms of detachment, worship and self-reform; however, he did not live for long. One day while he was standing near the spring of Zamzam in Masjid al-Harām he heard the following verses of Qur'an from someone nearby:

﴿ وَتَرَى الْمُجْرِمِينَ يَوْمَئِذٍ مُّقَرَّنِينَ فِي الْأَصْفَادِ. سَرَابِيلُهُمْ مِنْ قَطْرَانٍ وَتَعْشَى
وُجُوهُهُمُ النَّارُ ﴾

“And you will see the guilty on that day linked together in chains. Their shirts made of pitch and the fire

covering their faces.”³⁵

On hearing this verse, he fell down and died.³⁶

Such changes do not happen for all. One must prepare himself or herself in order to be overtaken by the Divine Grip. Despite Fudayl’s evil attitude, he must have had qualities that enabled him to be receptive and wake up from his slumber. We should not imagine that wakefulness is reserved for a certain class, and others are deprived of the same. The following universal law sums it up:

﴿...لَهَا مَا كَسَبَتْ وَ عَلَيْهَا مَا اكْتَسَبَتْ...﴾

“...For it (i.e. the soul) is what it has earned, and against it is what it has earned...”³⁷

Therefore one should struggle to refine his heart and prepare it for the first spark to ignite.

The Ahlu’l Bayt (as) – Intermediaries of Allāh’s Grace

Seeking the support of the Holy Prophet (s) and his sinless progeny (upon whom be peace) can also be very helpful in igniting the spark of wakefulness. Rather, as we pointed out earlier, it is impossible for one to attain the heights of perfection without their support.’ This is because the Ahlu’l Bayt (as) are the intermediaries of Allāh’s Grace. Every thing that anyone possesses originates from Almighty Allāh, but passes through them. This should in no way make us think that they bestow grace independently, for every unit of the world of contingent existence entirely subsists by Allāh, including the noble beings of the Prophets (as) and Imāms (as).

Imām ‘Alī (as) is reported to have said:

إِنَّا صَنَائِعُ رَبِّنَا، وَالنَّاسُ بَعْدُ صَنَائِعُ لَنَا.

“We are the handicrafts of our Lord and the people then are our handicrafts.”³⁸

Imām al-Sādiq (as) is reported to have said:

نَحْنُ السَّبَبُ بَيْنَكُمْ وَبَيْنَ اللَّهِ تَعَالَى.

“We are the intermediary between you and Allāh.”³⁹

Look at the following verses of the famous Ziyarah of Jami'ah for a better understanding of the significant role played by the Holy Prophet (s) and his infallible progeny (as):

مَنْ أَرَادَ اللَّهَ بَدَأَ بِكُمْ.

“Whosoever seeks Allah begins through you.”

وَمَنْ قَصَدَهُ تَوَجَّهَ بِكُمْ.

And whosoever intends Him pays attention to Him by means of you.⁴⁰

Therefore the light of wakefulness originates from Allah but passes through the station of *wilayah* (which the Holy Prophet (s) and his infallible progeny occupy by Allah's permission).

Past history has manifested this fact in different places. An example of such light of wakefulness can be seen in the personality of Zuhayr bin Qayn, who is counted as one of the highly esteemed supporters of *Sayyid al-Shuhadā'* (as) in the plains of Karbalā'. At the onset he was among those who disliked confronting the Imam (as). Later however he is said to have woken up by the Imam's (as) special attention.

The Spark Ignited by Imam al-Husayn (as) in Zuhayr!

The companions of Zuhayr narrate:

During the very days when Imam Husayn (as) left Makkah for Kufah, we were also leaving Makkah with Zuhayr. Due to the path being the same between the stopovers on our way, we would reach the gathering of the Imam (as) but try to remain aloof from them and disliked to move with the Imam (as) and his group. And Zuhayr was the same. Whenever the caravan of the Imam (as) moved, we would remain behind so that we should not be together; then we would continue our way; and wherever the Imam (as) stopped, we would move and continue. This trend continued until we reached a stopover when the Imam (as) together with his companions camped on one side, and we too had no option but to camp on the other side. While we were seated eating our meals, a messenger from the Imam's camp came to us, and after expressing his salutations addressing Zuhayr, said: 'Imam (as) is calling you.' Witnessing this we were so overtaken that we dropped the morsels of food from our hands and were left in amazement. The wife of Zuhayr, who also was with him, said to him: Subhānallāh! The son of the Messenger of Allah is calling you and you are thinking whether to go or not?! Rise and go and see what he has to say. Zuhayr stood up and in the state of astonishment went to the presence of the Imam (as)

and entered the personal tent of the Imām (as). It did not take long before we saw Zuhayr coming out of the Imām's tent, while his face was radiant and he was in the state of complete happiness and joy. When he reached us, he said: Remove my tent and place it near the tent of the Imām (as). And he said to his wife 'I have resolved to be in the company of the Imām (as) and sacrifice my soul for him. Then he left her in the company of one of his relatives so that he may take her to her family.⁴¹

Ethicians believe that the sudden transformation in Zuhayr needed the special attention of Imām Husayn (as), who was also an intermediary of grace.

Dear readers this light of wakefulness can take a person so high that he can rank among those who had the privilege of being a noble companion of Imām Husayn(as). If we carefully read the Ziyārah of the martyrs of Karbalā' we come to realize how exalted was Zuhayr and his likes:

السَّلَامُ عَلَيْكُمْ يَا أَوْلِيَاءَ اللَّهِ وَ أَحِبَّاءَهُ...

“Peace be on you O friends of Allāh and His lovers...”

السَّلَامُ عَلَيْكُمْ يَا أَنْصَارَ دِينِ اللَّهِ.

“Peace be on you O helpers of the religion of Allāh.”

السَّلَامُ عَلَيْكُمْ يَا أَنْصَارَ رَسُولِ اللَّهِ.

“Peace be on you O helpers of the Messenger of Allāh.”

السَّلَامُ عَلَيْكُمْ يَا أَنْصَارَ أَمِيرِ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ.

“Peace be on you O helpers of the Commander of the faithful.”

السَّلَامُ عَلَيْكُمْ يَا أَنْصَارَ فَاطِمَةَ سَيِّدَةِ نِسَاءِ الْعَالَمِينَ.

“Peace be on you O helpers of Fātimah, the Mistress of the Women of the Universe.”

السَّلَامُ عَلَيْكُمْ يَا أَنْصَارَ أَبِي مُحَمَّدٍ الْحَسَنِ بْنِ عَلِيٍّ الزَّكِيِّ النَّاصِحِ.

“Peace be on you O helpers of Abū Muhammad al-Hasan bin ‘Alī...”⁴²

And is it possible for one to be a helper of someone whom he has not met or seen? Why do we say that these companions were the helpers of the Holy Prophet (s), Imām ‘Alī (as), Hadrat Fātima (as) and Imām al-Hasan (as) while they accompanied and supported Imām Husayn (as)? This is because they are the helpers of religion (*ansāra dīnillah*). Therefore they help all those who have sacrificed their lives for the sake of *dīn*. Hence they live before their time. They live with ‘Adam (as), they live with Nūh (as), they live with Ibrāhīm (as); they live with Mūsā (as), they live with ‘Īsā (as), they live with all the Prophets of Allāh (swt). This is because they sacrificed their lives to revive the teachings of religion and woke the slumbering folk. Such people live in the past, present, and future. They are beyond time and place. Small wonder it is that we are taught to address them saying:

فِيَالْيَتَنِي كُنْتُ مَعَكُمْ فَأَفُوزَ مَعَكُمْ.

“I wish I would have been in your company so that I may have succeeded with you.”⁴³

After one has woken up from his deep slumber and attained the light of *yaqzah*, there are particular effects that he would experience. Such effects are outlined and expounded in books of practical gnosis. Observing brevity here we would not like to cover their details. Instead, let us briefly look at the second fundamental stage of self-reform:

The second stage of self-reform is *al-tawbah* (return to Allāh).

The Reality of Tawbah

Tawbah (which literally means “to return”) is a state of the return of God’s servant to his Lord.

Wakefulness makes one realize the extent of injustice one had done to himself all his life. This reality does not give him any rest, and he struggles to clear himself of sin. It is not as simple as it seems, but the wakeful wayfarer, is always resolute in cleansing himself of the dirt by which he blemished his heart all his life.

Ethicians believe that before the servant returns to his Lord, Almighty Allāh returns to His servant with His Mercy. It is small wonder that one of the beautiful names of Almighty Allāh is *al-Tawwāb* [The One Who often turns in Mercy]. This reality is manifested in the following verse of the Qur’ān:

﴿ وَعَلَى الثَّلَاثَةِ الَّذِينَ خَلْفُوا حَتَّىٰ إِذَا ضَاقَّتْ عَلَيْهِمُ الْأَرْضُ بِمَا رَحُبَتْ وَضَاقَتْ
عَلَيْهِمْ أَنفُسُهُمْ وَظَنُّوا أَنْ لَا مَلْجَأَ مِنَ اللَّهِ إِلَّا إِلَيْهِ ثُمَّ تَابَ عَلَيْهِمْ لِيَتُوبُوا إِنَّ اللَّهَ هُوَ
التَّوَّابُ الرَّحِيمُ ﴾

“And to the three who were left behind, until, when the earth became strait for them, for all its breadth, and their souls became strait for them, and they thought that there was no shelter from God except in Him, then He turned towards them [Mercifully] [tawba ‘alayhim], that they may turn [liyatub]; surely Only Allah is Oft-returning [with mercy] [al-Tawwab] and is All-Compassionate.”⁴⁴

This verse refers to three Muslims who refused to participate in the battle of Tabuk due to their laziness. Then after the battle, when the Holy Prophet (s) and the Muslims returned to Madinah, the three went to the Prophet (s) and expressed their apology, but the Prophet (s) did not speak to them, and the Muslims likewise, following the Prophet (s), did not speak to them, and left them alone. The children too stayed away from them and their own wives were not responsive to them. In this way, they were left so much alone, that the town of Madinah was a constriction for them, and they left for the mountains and open grounds. The situation had become such that both time and place was a source of constriction for them. And finally they knew that besides Allah, there was no point of hope. This is when Almighty Allah turned to them in Mercy, as a result of which they started repenting and doing tawbah. Then Almighty Allah again returned to them in His Mercy by forgiving them.

The aforementioned verse therefore informs us that the first tawba (return in mercy)⁴⁵ is from Allah. This then enables the servant to turn to Him and repent. Then he needs another *tawba* (return) from Almighty Allah so that his sins are forgiven. Therefore the tawbah of the servant is sandwiched by two returns of Almighty Allah. The verse also indicates that Allah’s return to his servants was continuous, until they repented and returned to their Lord. The letter “waw” at the beginning of the verse “wa ‘al-thalathah” is a conjunction, which indicates a continuation of the previous verse which talks about the return of Allah in Mercy to His Prophet (s), the Emigrants and the Ansar. Thus, apart from Allah returning in Mercy to the Holy Prophet (s), the emigrants, and the helpers, He also returned in Mercy to the three men (wa ‘al-thalathah “...and the three men”) who did not participate in the battle of Tabuk. Then Allah (swt) once again turns to the three men in Mercy: “thumma tawba” (thereafter He turned in Mercy). Therefore there is a clear mention of two consecutive *tawbas* (returns) before the phrase “liyatub” (so that they may repent and turn to Allah): one through the conjunction and the other by the phrase “thumma tawba”. This subtle aspect needs a little attention to understand.

If tawbah is taken in its universal sense, it is the second and the last station before Meeting Almighty Allah. This is because the process of traversing the different stages of practical gnosis is in fact covering the degrees of returning to God. Every return from Almighty Allah makes the wayfarer return, until he attains the proximity of Almighty Allah. The following verse is worthy of contemplation:

﴿ وَتُوبُوا إِلَى اللَّهِ جَمِيعًا أَيُّهَا الْمُؤْمِنُونَ لَعَلَّكُمْ تُفْلِحُونَ ﴾

“...And turn to Allāh all of you, O believers, so that you may attain salvation.”⁴⁶

Ponder over the phrase, ‘*tawbah ilallāh* [return to Allāh].’ Firstly, all believers are enjoined to return to Allāh. This means that *tawbah* (in all its various levels) is the path to Almighty Allāh. Secondly, since Almighty Allāh is the end of the journey, the journey is necessarily endless, for one can never reach the Absolute and Infinite Perfection which is Allāh. In other words, however far one travels on this journey, he still only possesses finite perfection. Consequently, the imperative verb *tawbah* [return] also includes the great saints who already enjoy the last stage of wayfaring – but still need wayfaring, for the journey never ends. Experts say that after a certain limit of perfection has been attained the journey is no more vertical, but horizontal. In the words of the people of gnosis – after *sayr il Allāh* (journey to Allāh) ends, *sayr f Allāh* begins and never ends. Because the journey is towards Infinite Perfection. In simple terms the journey from the finite to the Infinite is infinite. *Fa tawbah ilallāh!!!* Therefore return to Allāh, O believers.

Although *tawbah* in its initial stages signifies returning from denial and sin to approval and obedience and from heedlessness and forgetfulness to remembrance and seeking God, later there would be nothing like sin or heedlessness. Rather the return would be from ‘other than God’ to God ‘and from’ shirk in its very minute level ‘to’ tawhid in its highest levels’, and from the ‘self’ to the ‘Only beloved.’ Ustād Muhammad Shujā‘ in his monumental ethical masterpiece alludes to this reality.⁴⁷

Conditions of Tawbah

Have we ever thought about the conditions of true *tawbah*? Many of us may conjecture that perhaps the factors of ‘regret’ and expression of ‘sorrow’ to God can suffice for *tawbah*. The reality of the matter, however, is quite different. *Tawbah* is not just a transient emotional experience but ‘a transformation of one’s state.’ It is the process of clearing one’s heart and soaring to the higher planes of existence. It begins as follows:

وَقَالَ (ع) لِقَائِلٍ قَالَ بِحَضْرَتِهِ (أَسْتَغْفِرُ اللَّهَ): تَكَلَّتْكَ أُمَّكَ أَتَدْرِي مَا الْإِسْتِغْفَارُ؟
الْإِسْتِغْفَارُ دَرَجَةُ الْعَلِيِّينَ، وَهُوَ اسْمٌ وَقَعَ عَلَى سِتَّةِ مَعَانَ: أَوَّلُهَا النَّدَمُ عَلَى مَا
مَضَى. وَالثَّانِي الْعَزْمُ عَلَى تَرْكِ الْعُودِ إِلَيْهِ أَبَدًا. وَالثَّلَاثُ أَنْ تُؤَدِّيَ إِلَى الْمَخْلُوقِينَ
حُقُوقَهُمْ حَتَّى تَلْقَى اللَّهَ أَمْلَسَ لَيْسَ عَلَيْكَ تَبَعَةٌ. وَالرَّابِعُ أَنْ تَعْمِدَ إِلَى كُلِّ فَرِيضَةٍ
عَلَيْكَ ضَيَعْتَهَا فَتُؤَدِّيَ حَقَّهَا. وَالخَامِسُ أَنْ تَعْمِدَ إِلَى اللَّحْمِ الَّذِي نَبَتَ عَلَى
السُّحْتِ فَتُذِيبُهُ بِالْأَحْزَانِ حَتَّى تُلْصِقَ الْجِلْدَ بِالْعَظْمِ وَيَنْشَأَ بَيْنَهُمَا لَحْمٌ جَدِيدٌ.

وَالسَّادِسُ أَنْ تَذِيقَ الْجِسْمَ أَلَمَ الطَّاعَةِ كَمَا أذَقْتَهُ حَلَاوَةَ الْمَعْصِيَةِ. فَعِنْدَ ذَلِكَ
تَقُولُ: (أَسْتَغْفِرُ اللَّهَ).

“Once in the presence of Imām ‘Alī (as) a person said: *Astaghfirullāh* (I seek forgiveness from Allāh). Hearing this, the Imām (as) said to him: *Thakalatka ummuka; atadr ma’l istighfir* (May your mother weep after you; do you know what is ‘seeking forgiveness’?) Then he continued as follows: *Istighfir* is a station of the exalted ones (*‘illiyyīn*); and it is a name, which stands for six things:

1. First is to regret for what one has done [of sin]
2. Second, to resolve never to return to what one has done [of sin]
3. To return to the creatures their rights so that you meet Allāh while you have nothing on your shoulders.
4. To intend to perform every compulsory act that you had wasted and paying its due right
5. To melt the flesh that has been grown out of unlawful means with sorrows [and hardships] until the skin touches the bone and new flesh grows [out of lawful sustenance] between them.
6. To make the body taste the pain of obedience the way you made it taste the sweetness of sin

That is when you say: *Astaghfirullāh* (I seek Allāh’s forgiveness.)”⁴⁸

Therefore, in order for one to successfully achieve this level of tawbah, which would purify the heart and make it ready for the higher stations of spiritual wayfaring, one must struggle to meet the abovementioned conditions.

Entirely His Grace

It should be noted however that when one is in the state of tawbah, no kind of self esteem should ever deceive him. He should never think that it is his tawbah that would transport him to the house of the Only Beloved. Rather it is entirely Allāh’s Grace and Mercy that enables him to undertake this great journey. Indeed tawbah is necessary, and in fact a succor (*tawfīq*) of Almighty Allāh Himself, but that should never deceive the repentant. He should always hopeful of its acceptance and understand the fact that it is not his struggle that would reap any benefit, but Allāh’s Grace and Mercy. This is a monotheistic vision of the reality. Imām al-Sajjīd (as) teaches us the same in supplication no. 16 of his radiant work al-Sahīfat al-Sajjīdiyyah as follows:

لَوْ بَكَيْتُ إِلَيْكَ حَتَّى تَسْقُطَ أَشْفَارَ عَيْنَيْ، وَأَنْتَ حَبِيبٌ حَتَّى يَنْقَطِعُ صَوْتِي، وَقُمْتَ لَكَ

حَتَّى تَتَنَشَّرَ قَدَمَايَ، وَرَكَعْتُ لَكَ حَتَّى يَنْخَلَعَ صُلْبِي، وَسَجَدْتُ لَكَ حَتَّى تَتَفَقَّأَ
 حَدَقَتَايَ، وَأَكَلْتُ تُرَابَ الْأَرْضِ طُولَ عُمْرِي، وَشَرِبْتُ مَاءَ الرَّمَادِ آخِرَ دَهْرِي،
 وَذَكَرْتُكَ فِي خِلَالِ ذَلِكَ حَتَّى يَكِلَّ لِسَانِي، ثُمَّ لَمْ أَرْفَعْ طَرْفِي إِلَى آفَاقِ السَّمَاءِ
 اسْتِحْيَاءً مِنْكَ، مَا اسْتَوْجِبْتُ بِذَلِكَ مَحْوَ سَيِّئَةٍ وَاحِدَةٍ مِنْ سَيِّئَاتِي. وَإِنْ كُنْتُ تَغْفِرُ
 لِي حِينَ اسْتَوْجِبُ مَغْفِرَتَكَ، وَتَعْفُو عَنِّي حِينَ اسْتَحِقُّ عَفْوُكَ، فَإِنَّ ذَلِكَ غَيْرُ
 وَاجِبٍ لِي بِاسْتِحْقَاقٍ، وَلَا أَنَا أَهْلٌ لَهُ بِاسْتِجَابٍ، إِذْ كَانَ جَزَائِي مِنْكَ فِي أَوَّلِ مَا
 عَصَيْتُكَ النَّارَ، فَإِنَّ تُعَذِّبُنِي فَانْتِ غَيْرُ ظَالِمٍ لِي...

My God,

were I to weep to You until my eyelids drop off,

wail until my voice wears out,

stand before You until my feet swell up,

bow to You until my backbone is thrown out of joint,

prostrate to You until my eyeballs fall out,

eat the dirt of the earth for my whole life,

drink the water of ashes till the end of my days,

mention You through all of that until my tongue fails,

and not lift my glance to the sky's horizons in shame before You,

yet would I not merit through all of that

the erasing of a single one of my evil deeds!

Though You forgive me when I merit Your forgiveness

and pardonest me when I deserve Your pardon,

yet I have no title to that through what I deserve,

nor am I worthy of it through merit,

since my repayment from You

from the first that I disobeyed You

is the Fire!

So if You punishe me,

You do me no wrong.⁴⁹

Due to the brevity of this commentary we would suffice with these fundamental stations of the path towards Almighty Allāh over here. Those interested in understanding the intricacies of each and every station of wayfaring may refer to texts such as the *Manḥẓil al-Sḥīrīn* of Khwājah 'Abdullāh Ansārī and other relevant texts of practical gnosis.

Having known the basics of self-reform, which is the beginning of every kind of reform, let us now look at how one can effect reform in others. It is incumbent, however, for us to first understand the

characteristics of a true reformer.

Characteristics of a True Reformer

The Holy Qurʿān, chapter 7, verse no. 170, says:

وَالَّذِينَ يُمَسِّكُونَ بِالْكِتَابِ وَأَقَامُوا الصَّلَاةَ إِنَّا لَا نُضِيعُ أَجْرَ الْمُصْلِحِينَ ﴿١٧٠﴾

“And those who [1] hold fast by the book and [2] keep up prayer; verily We waste not the recompense of the reformers.”

The above verse informs us that a reformer must:

1) Hold steadfast onto the book

The great Shāhʿah exegete, Shaykh Tabrāsī in his *Majmaʿ al-Bayān* says:

أَمْسَكَ وَمَسَّكَ وَتَمَسَّكَ وَاسْتَمَسَكَ بِالشَّيْءِ بِمَعْنَى وَاحِدٍ: أَيِ اعْتَصَمَ بِهِ.

“The verbs *amsaka* and *tamassaka* and *istamsaka bi al-shayʿ* all have the same meaning, which is ‘to adhere to something.’”⁵⁰

And in his *al-Mufradāt*, an authoritative dictionary of Qurʿānic words, Rāghib al-Isfahānī says:

إِمْسَاكُ الشَّيْءِ: التَّعَلُّقُ بِهِ وَحِفْظُهُ.

“*Imṣāk al-shayʿ* (to adhere to something) means to cling to it and protect it.”⁵¹

Therefore, to adhere to the Book in this verse would mean: To hold fast to it and protect it.

Obviously, such adherence and protection should not be imagined to mean safeguarding the physical Qurʿān from being torn, mishandled or misplaced [all of which are also important]. Holding fast to the Qurʿān and protecting it means to follow its teachings and revive them in the different dimensions of human life. The Holy Qurʿān is a book of instructions for both individual as well as social reform. It teaches us how to refine our spirits and beautify it with the Attributes of Almighty Allāh; it outlines the skills and conditions necessary to revive a society; one, therefore, who holds fast to it and protects its

teachings would obviously qualify to be a reformer. And protection of its teachings substantially concerns the practical plane. It is not a matter of being learned and able to expound the sublime teachings of the Qur'an. It is a matter of action and qualification.

2) Establish Prayer:

'Allamah Tabataba'i in his monumental *al-Mizan* says:

وَتَخْصِيصُ إِقَامَةِ الصَّلَاةِ بِالذِّكْرِ مِنْ بَيْنِ سَائِرِ أَجْزَاءِ الدِّينِ لِشَرَفِهَا وَكَوْنِهَا رُكْنًا
مِنَ الدِّينِ يُحْفَظُ بِهَا ذِكْرُ اللَّهِ وَالْخُضُوعُ إِلَى مَقَامِهِ الَّذِي هُوَ بِمَنْزِلَةِ الرُّوحِ الْحَيَّةِ
فِي هَيْكَلِ الشَّرَائِعِ الدِّينِيَّةِ.

“And the particular mention of establishing prayer from among the parts of religion is due to its sacred position and that it is the pillar of religion, which protects and ensures the remembrance of Allah, and humility to His exalted station, the latter being the living spirit in the body of religious creeds.”⁵²

One who establishes prayer is different from one who only prays. The expression that the Holy Qur'an employs in this verse as well as other verses is not 'yusallina' (those who pray) but 'aqimussalata' (those who establish prayer), which calls for responsibility. One who establishes prayer, observes all the perfect etiquette of prayer and ensures that others pray as well. Such a person is not satisfied in observing prayer alone; his selfless spirit would like to see others benefiting from this means of ascension to God. In order to be able to reform an individual or community, one should have the ability to establish prayer. The fundamental significance of prayer can well be appreciated by looking at the following traditions:

1. Imam 'Ali (as) is reported to have said:

وَأَعْلَمُ أَنَّ كُلَّ شَيْءٍ مِنْ عَمَلِكَ تَبِعُ لِحِلَاتِكَ.

“And know that every thing that you do is according to your prayer.”⁵³

2. Imam Muhammad al-Baqir (as) is reported to have said:

إِنْ قُبِلَتْ قَبْلَ مَا سِوَاهَا.

“If it [i.e. *Salat*] is accepted the other actions would be accepted.”⁵⁴

3. Imām al-Ridā (as) is reported to have said:

...وَأَوَّلُ مَا يُحَاسَبُ الْعَبْدُ عَلَيْهِ الصَّلَاةُ، فَإِنْ صَحَّتْ لَهُ الصَّلَاةُ صَحَّتْ لَهُ مَا سِوَاهَا، وَإِنْ رُدَّتْ رُدَّتْ مَا سِوَاهَا...

“...The first thing that a servant would be accounted for is prayers; if his prayers are in order, then all else would be correct, and if it is rejected then all else would be rejected...”⁵⁵

Understanding this link between the spirit of prayer and the spirit of action calls for one to revive his prayer so that his acts would carry meaning and value. The reason why many people end in committing *al-shirk al-khafī* (hidden polytheism) is their ignorance of what they recite in prayer. One who infuses the spirit of utter monotheism in his prayer, his acts would bear the color of monotheism.

Social Reform

Reforming a society and conferring to it its equilibrium is to revive the teachings of Islam and the Qur’ān in the society. The phrase ‘**Surely we do not waste the recompense of the reformers**’ of the aforementioned verse (7: 170) clearly alludes to the fact that “reviving the teachings of the Qur’ān” (*yumassikūna bi’l kitābi*) is the reality of effecting equilibrium (*islāh*).’ In order for a society to enjoy its state of equilibrium, it must be governed by laws that ensure its stability and purpose. And the only person who can formulate such laws is Almighty Allāh who knows every subtle aspect of the human being and his salvation. The Holy Qur’ān says:

أَلَا يَعْلَمُ مَنْ خَلَقَ وَهُوَ اللَّطِيفُ الْخَبِيرُ ؟

“Would He who has created not know? And He is the All-Attentive, the All-Aware.”⁵⁶

And when one is successful in reforming society, the individuals that form the society would easily be able to attain perfection.

In his *al-Ma‘zūn*, the late ‘Allamah Tabatabā‘ī says:

...لَكِنَّ سَعَادَةَ الشَّخْصِ مَبْنِيَّةٌ عَلَى صَلَاحِ الظَّرْفِ الإِجْتِمَاعِيِّ الَّذِي يَعِيشُ هُوَ فِيهِ، وَمَا أَصْعَبُ أَنْ يَفْلَحَ فَرْدٌ فِي مُجْتَمَعٍ فَاسِدٍ أَحَاطَ بِهِ الشَّقَاءُ مِنْ كُلِّ جَانِبٍ.

وَلِذَلِكَ إِهْتَمَّ فِي إِصْلَاحِ الْمُجْتَمَعِ إِهْتِمَامًا لَا يُعَادِلُهُ فِيهِ غَيْرُهُ وَيَذَلَّ الْجُهْدَ الْبَالِغَ فِي جَعْلِ الدَّسَاتِيرِ وَالتَّعَالِيمِ الدِّيْنِيَّةِ حَتَّى الْعِبَادَاتِ مِنَ الصَّلَاةِ وَالْحَجِّ وَالصَّوْمِ اجْتِمَاعِيَّةً مَا أَمْكَنَ فِيهَا ذَلِكَ، كُلُّ ذَلِكَ لِيَسْتَصْلِحَ الْإِنْسَانُ فِي نَفْسِهِ وَمِنْ جِهَةِ ظَرْفِ حَيَاتِهِ.

“...But the prosperity of a person depends on the equilibrium of the social conditions where he lives, and how difficult it is for a person to achieve salvation in a corrupt society, which is embraced with wretchedness from all sides!

And that is why it (the Qur’ān) gave unparalleled importance to effecting equilibrium in the society and strived to enact religious commandments and laws to be of a social nature, including devotions, such as the canonical prayer, hajj and fasting. All this was done so that the human being may attain equilibrium of himself and the vessel of his life...”⁵⁷

One of the very important conditions of social reform is the support of the people that form the social unit. Although one may have the qualities of a true reformer, if he is not supported by the people, the state of social equilibrium cannot be attained. There is a subtle allusion to this truth in the following verse:

﴿ لِيُقُومَ النَّاسُ بِالْقِسْطِ ... ﴾

“...so that the people rise with justice.”⁵⁸

Almighty Allāh informs us here that the ‘nās’ have a determining role to play. He does not tell us that the Prophets (as), would effect justice and equilibrium to the society, but says ‘so that the people (nās) rise in justice.’ This alludes to collective participation. And this truth is evident for every sound intellect. If the components of the society were to be adamant in their rejection, the reformer would not be able to effect equilibrium. A majority of the masses need to undergo transformation, so that the society returns to the state of its equilibrium. The Holy Qur’ān narrates the destructive end of many of the past nations, who simply refused to change themselves. Due to their obstinacy, they had to face a despicable doom. Look at the following verses:

﴿ وَلَقَدْ أَهْلَكْنَا الْقُرُونََ مِنْ قَبْلِكُمْ لَمَّا ظَلَمُوا وَجَاءَتْهُمْ رُسُلُهُمْ بِالْبَيِّنَاتِ وَمَا كَانُوا لِيُؤْمِنُوا كَذَلِكَ نَجْزِي الْقَوْمَ الْمُجْرِمِينَ ﴾

“Indeed We destroyed generations before you when they did wrong: their Messengers came to them with Clear Signs, and they were not those who would believe. Thus do We requite those who sin!”⁵⁹

It should be noted here that those referred to in the above verse were so degenerate that they could not be changed. They are defined as “*wa mā kānu liyu ’minu*” (they were not those to believe). This state obviously was a result of their own misdeeds.

Political Stability: A Fundamental Unit of Social Reform

Reforming a society has always been a challenging task, but perhaps it has become even more challenging in the contemporary era. The prerequisite of social reform is political reform. So long as there is no valid political power, the other dimensions of the society would always be in the state of disequilibrium. Islam, which is a complete religion, and therefore caters for every need of the human being in different dimensions of his life, has not left mankind without a direction for political power and authority. The Holy Qur’ān and the traditions as well as Islamic history vividly illustrate the unity of religion and politics. Islam would like to ensure that the laws of Allāh prevail and that the government makes its decisions entirely on the principles laid by the Qur’ān and the Sunnah. This is when every kind of imbalance in the society can be obliterated. Under a firm Islamic government, all the economic problems that stem from different kinds of mischief would be terminated. Under a strict government, promiscuity and other evils would lessen. The atmosphere of such a society would then enable the people to wake up from their slumber and attain Allāh’s proximity.

One of the most rational and sublime concepts of political thought in Islam is the concept of *wilāyat al-faqīh* (the governance of the Islamic jurist). Its rational definition is that in the absence of the 12th holy Imām (as), the jurist identified as pious and knowledgeable in Islamic laws can govern a collectivity and lead it towards its material as well as spiritual prosperity. Such a person who enjoys sublime traits, is far from selfish interests, and is also well-aware of Islamic Law as well as the circumstances of his time, can ably control the government and lead the nation toward prosperity. To consider such a clear fact as dependant on what different clerics believe, and refrain from thinking about or involving oneself in the future of a collectivity of human beings who need to attain eternal salvation, is unreasonable.

The Timeless Reformer of Karbala

Sometimes a historical incident can conquer its spatial limitations and serve as an example for all times, places and people. Immortality is one issue and transcending time and space is another. Immortality deals with the future, but the conquerer of spatial limitations embrace and cover the past as well. The event of Karbalā’, which is known to evoke the emotions of the coldest reader, was not only a tragedy as it is so labeled usually, but a reform movement (*harakah islahiyyah*) that could serve as a lesson both

before and after it transpired. As it has been a source of inspiration for the followers of the Imām (as) after Imām Husayn (as), it has also been a source of inspiration for the preceding prophets of God too. Narrations indicate how the previous Prophets would curse the perpetrators of the heinous massacre [and thus take a stance]. If we understand Imām Husayn’s motive, we would fully realize the movement’s sublimity. In one of his addresses to Muhammad bin Hanafiyyah, he says:

إِنَّمَا خَرَجْتُ لِطَلْبِ الْإِصْلَاحِ فِي أُمَّةِ جَدِّي (ص)، أُرِيدُ أَنْ أَمُرَ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَأَنْهَى
عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ، وَأَسِيرَ بِسِيرَةِ جَدِّي وَأَبِي عَلِيِّ بْنِ أَبِي طَالِبٍ (ع).

“I have only risen to seek reform and equilibrium in the nation of my grandfather, the Messenger of Allāh; I would like to invite to good and dissuade evil; and adopt the path of my grandfather and my father, Alī bin Abī Tālib.”⁶⁰

It looks like as if Imām Husayn (as) informs us of his motive, the method of achieving it, and those who also employed the method:

Motive: Seeking reform and equilibrium in the nation (*ummah*)

Method: *Amr bil Ma’rūf* and *Nahy ‘ani ‘l Munkar*; Adopting the path of his grandfather and father.

Therefore, he aspired to restore equilibrium to the society. He desired that the society enjoy both material as well as spiritual prosperity. The physical amenities bestowed to man are means for his upliftment, and hence should also be given importance. Nevertheless, the main motive should not be neglected and remain forgotten.

The timeless reformer with his utter steadfastness calls out to all epochs: ‘Do not allow the destruction of human values in any social organization! Do not sit quiet while oppressors control the affairs of the people! Struggle to eradicate all kinds of disequilibrium in the Muslim society! The prayer under discussion is a verbal expression. Husayn’s was a practical expression. He, like his noble grandfather, practically manifested his concern of eradicating all kinds of social as well as individual vices. His eagerness in restoring Islamic values was to see the eternal prosperity of humanity.’

Awaiting for the Noble Government

In the famous *Du‘ā al-Iftitāh*, we pray:

اللَّهُمَّ إِنَّا نَرْغَبُ إِلَيْكَ فِي دَوْلَةٍ كَرِيمَةٍ تُعِزُّ بِهَا الْإِسْلَامَ وَأَهْلَهُ، وَتُذِلُّ بِهَا النِّفَاقَ
وَأَهْلَهُ، وَتَجْعَلُنَا فِيهَا مِنَ الدُّعَاةِ إِلَى طَاعَتِكَ، وَالْقَادَةِ إِلَى سَبِيلِكَ، وَتَرْزُقُنَا بِهَا

كَرَامَةُ الدُّنْيَا وَالْآخِرَةِ...

“O Allah, indeed we ask you for a noble government in which you would elevate Islam and its followers, and degrade hypocrisy and its adherents, and make us among those who invite to your obedience, and leaders on your path, and to grant us by it, nobility in this world and the Hereafter...”

Our *hadith* literature clearly mentions many signs preceding the reappearance of our 12th Holy Imām (as). Many of us observe that a number of these signs already exist. Some of us have the tendency to say that ‘the world is so corrupt today; it is high time that 12th Imām should reappear.’ Such rhetoric may be found in different circles. But objectively speaking, it reveals the narrow-mindedness of those who speak about it. This does not mean that the signs prevalent would not precede his reappearance. However, one should try to observe whether the factors that would prepare the ground for the Imām’s reappearance exist or not. The 12th Holy Imām (as) does not need corruption to reappear. He rather needs the support of the masses who overtly yearn for his reappearance so that equilibrium is created in the society. So long as the masses yearn for his reappearance without being ready for it, it would be futile for him to appear. We must remember that the 12th Imām’s mission is to create a global Islamic government. For such a government to take form, he needs our support [*liyaqūma al-nāsu bi al-qist* (so that the people stand in justice)]. And support, we must understand, can be to forgo so many of our worldly interests. It may seem to be a simple issue, but the reality of the matter is quite different.

The concept of awaiting for the 12th Imām should be understood in its correct meaning. The secret to its understanding is to ask ourselves about the purpose behind our intizār. Why are we waiting for his reappearance? To create social stability and prosperity? To eradicate corruption and oppression? If that is so, does our prayer conform with our practical lives? Do our actions reveal that we are practically working to create order and eradicate oppression in any circle that is in our limited sphere and power? Have we started with our family and neighborhood and observed whether we truly aspire for that great person who would effect reform globally? We should always try to measure ourselves against the purpose of intizār, and ask: ‘Do our actions tally with the spirit of effecting reform?’

Characteristics of the Helpers of our 12th Imām (as) in the Reformation Process

In a tradition narrated in *Bihar al-Anwār* we are informed that the 12th Imām (as) would have 313 sincere companions who would assist him in his reform process. Every one of us who has developed knowledge and love of the Imām (as) and knows his sublime aim as well, would aspire to be one of the 313 companions mentioned in the *hadith*. But in order for us to qualify for this sacred mission we should identify the characteristics that such reformers would possess. Many who have the strength to revive themselves and adopt a life full of spiritual blessings do have the opportunity to qualify. Mothers too, who

can rear their children with excellent morals can shape their future and create the ground for their offspring to qualify for this lofty station. Youth also, who aspire to get married and select such spouses of noble descent and excellent morals that would enable a generation of purity to ensue, can also facilitate personalities who would qualify to be the Imām's loyal supporters. And what exactly are the characteristics of the helpers of the 12th holy Imām (as)? The following are traditions that outline the characteristics of the supporters of the 12th Holy Imām (as):

1. Possessing an Indepth Knowledge about God:

Imām 'Alī (as) is reported to have said about the soldiers of the 12th Holy Imām (as) that:

...رَجَالٌ عَرَفُوا اللَّهَ حَقَّ مَعْرِفَتِهِ، وَهُمْ أَنْصَارُ الْمَهْدِيِّ (ع) آخِرَ الزَّمَانِ...

“...Men who know Allah as He should be Known, and they are the helpers of al-Mahdī at the end of time.”⁶¹

Here obviously, the absolute knowledge of God is not meant, for that is beyond the reach of any dependent being, including the Prophet (s) who is reported to have said: *mā 'arafnāka haqqā ma 'rifatika...* we have not known You the way You absolutely deserve. Obviously, no finite being can ever comprehend the Infinite Being.

2. Possessing the Attributes of a Qualified Islamic Leader:

Imām al-Sādiq (as) is reported⁶² to have said in a lengthy tradition that those who would come out with Imām al-Mahdi (as) would be as follows:

وَلَكِنَّ هَذِهِ (الْعِدَّة) الَّتِي يُخْرِجُ اللَّهُ فِيهَا الْقَائِمَ (ع)، وَهُمْ النُّجَبَاءُ، وَالْقُضَاةُ
وَالْحُكَّامُ، وَالْفُقَهَاءُ فِي الدِّينِ...

“They are:

- Of noble Descent [*nujab*]
- Qualified to rule [*al-hukkam*]
- Qualified to judge [*al-qudat*]
- Highly learned in religion [*al-fuqah' fi al-Din*]

These characteristics therefore create responsibilities for us: if we are of noble descent and marry the

nujab (of noble descent), our children too would be of noble descent, if we rear our children and teach them how to be responsible from a young age and enable traits such as bravery, knowledge, etc., to develop, we can create the ground for them to be future leaders, if we inculcate the spirit of seeking religious knowledge in our children, their interest, zeal, etc., would attract them towards gaining indepth knowledge of religion and thus create in them the essential characteristics of the 12th Imam's noble supporters.

Our Duties

Having understood the steps of reform, each one of us would be able to decide where he or she stands, and what is his or her immediate responsibility. Wherever it is possible for us to effect reform, however limited, we should do so. Otherwise, our supplication would be mere rhetoric or out of ignorance.

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1. Mufrad^{at} Al^{fi}zⁱl Qur'^{an}, new ed., pg. 636
 2. This is also a proverb in the Arabic language.
 3. Holy Qur'^{an}, 2: 11–12
 4. Ghuraru'l Hikam wa Duraru'l Kalim, tr. 4853, pg. 240
 5. Ibid., tr. 4765, pg. 237
 6. Ibid., tr. 4772, pg. 237
 7. Sharhu'l Asm^{ah} 'al-Husn^{ah}, pg. 213
 8. Mawl^{ah} Muhsin Fayd K^{ash}an^{ah}, al-Mahajjat al-Bayd^{ah} ', v. 5
 9. Bih^{er} al-Anw^{ar}, v. 75, pg. 81
 10. Zan dar ^{ine}ye Jal^{al} o Jam^{al}, pg. 233
 11. Ibid.
 12. 'ar^{if}un F^{ah} al-Rih^{ab} al-Qudsiyya, pg. 47
 13. R^{ah}e Mujarrad, pg. 329
 14. Dary^{ay}e 'Irf^{an}, pg. 97
 15. Ibid., pg. 98
 16. Qabas^{at} min Hay^{ati} Sayyidina al-Ust^{adh}, pg. 118
 17. al-Ihtij^{aj}, v. 2, pg. 380
 18. Man^{az}il al-S^{ir}ir^{an}, ch. 1 , pg. 36
 19. Maq^{alat}- Tar^{iqe} 'Amaliyyeye Tazkiyeh (1), pg. 24
 20. Jih^{ad}-e Akbar, pg. 51
 21. Chehel Had^{ith}, tr. Four, On Kibr pp. 97–98
 22. Ibid., tr. Ten – On Desire and Hope
 23. Maf^{atih} al-Jin^{an}, Du'^{ah} al-Sab^{ah}, Arabic ed., pg. 93–94
 24. Bih^{er} al-Anw^{ar}, v. 5, pg. 203
 25. Maf^{atih} al-Jin^{an}, Du'^{ah} 'Arafah
 26. Ghuraru'l Hikam wa Duraru'l Kalim, tr. 3654
 27. Muntakhab M^{az}an al-Hikmah, pg. 432, tr. 5357
 28. Ibid., pg. 431, tr. 5333
 29. Ghuraru'l Hikam wa Duraru'l Kalim, tr. 3730
 30. al-Mufrad^{at}, new ed., pg. 283
 31. Bih^{er} al-Anw^{ar}, v. 63, pg. 331

32. Mustadrak al-Was'īl, v. 12, pg. 173
33. Bihār al-Anwār, pg. 277
34. The Holy Qur'ān, 57:16
35. The Holy Qur'ān, 14:49 & 50
36. Maqālāt- Tarīqah 'Amaliyyeye Tazkiyeh (1), pp. 29–30
37. The Holy Qur'ān, 2:286
38. Nahj al-Balāghah, letter 28. Al-Khu'ī in his Minhāj al-Bar'ah, a comprehensive commentary on the Nahj al-Balaghah says: Imām ʿ by his statement wannāsu sanayī 'un lanā (and the people are our handicrafts) meant that they are the intermediaries of Almighty Allāh's grace (Mīrzā Ḥabībullah al-Ḥashimī al-Khū'ī, Minhāj al-Bar'ah, vol.9, pg. 98)
39. ʿAyatullāh Hasan Zādeh ʿmulī quotes Bishrāt al-Mustafī, pg. 90 in his gloss over the Minhāj al-Bar'ah of al-Khū'ī
40. Mafṭīḥ al-Jin, Arabic ed., pp. 620–626
41. Maqālāt- Tarīqah 'Amaliyyeye Tazkiye (1), pg. 37
42. Mafṭīḥ al-Jin, Arabic ed., pg. 503
43. Ibid.
44. Holy Qur'ān, 9:118
45. The readers should note that tawbah is a relative matter, for with regard to Almighty Allāh it means “to Return in Forgiveness and Mercy” whereas with regard to His servants it means “to return in repentance”.
46. Holy Qur'ān, 24:31
47. Maqālāt Tarīqah 'Amaliyyeye Tazkiye (1), pp. 86–87
48. Nahju'l Balāghah, pg. 549
49. al-Sahīfah al-Sajjīdiyyah (The Psalms of Islām, English Translation by William Chittick), Supplication no. 16, pp. 59–60.
50. Tafsīr Majma' al-Bayān, v. 4, pg. 762
51. Al-Mufradāt, pg. 768
52. Tafsīr al-Mīzān, v. 8, pg. 299
53. Was'īl al-Sh'ā, v. 4, pg. 161
54. Tahdhīb al-Aḥkām, v. 2, pg. 239
55. Bihār al-Anwār, v. 80, pg. 20
56. Holy Qur'ān, 67:14
57. al-Mīzān fī Tafsīri'l Qur'ān, v. 12, pg. 330
58. Holy Qur'ān, 57:25
59. Holy Qur'ān, 10:13
60. Bihār al-Anwār, v. 44, pg. 368
61. Muntakhab al-Athar, volume 3, pg. 177
62. Ibid.