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Continue Your Effort Till You Gain Complete Victory Over Your Lower Self

Part 3. 1: Interpretation of Surah al-Hamd by Ayatullah Ruhullah Khumayni

I have been asked to say something on the exegesis of Surah al-Hamd. The fact is that the exegesis of the Qur'an is not a thing of which we may be able to acquit ourselves well. In every period of Islamic history the top scholars including both the Sunni and the Shi'ites have compiled a large number of books on this subject. But every scholar has written his book from the angle with which he was well conversant and has interpreted only one aspect of the Qur'an. Still it cannot be said whether even that aspect has been covered fully.

During the past fourteen centuries the gnostics such as Muhyuddin ibn Arabi, Abdur Razzaq Kashani, Mulla Sultan Ali etc. have written excellent commentaries on the Qur'an and dealt well with the subject in which they had specialized. But what they have written is not the exegesis of the Qur'an. At the most it can be said that they have exposed some aspects of it. The same case is with Tantawi, Jawhari, Sayyid Qutb etc. They have compiled their exegeses in a different style, but their books are also not the exegesis of the Qur'an in every sense.

There are other interpreters of the Qur'an who do not belong to either of the above mentioned two groups. The Majma'ul Bayan by Shaykh Tabrasi is an excellent commentary and combines what the Sunni and Shi'ah authorities have said. There are so many other commentaries, but they all cover only certain aspects of the Qur'an. The Qur'an is not a book all aspects of which may be exposed by us or by anybody else. There are some Qur'anic sciences which are beyond our comprehension. We can understand only one angle or one form of the Qur'an. Others are to be explained by the Imams who were the real exponents of the Holy Prophet's teachings.

For some time past there have appeared some interpreters of the Qur'an who are totally unfit for the task. They want to attribute their own wishes and desires to the Qur'an. Surprisingly enough even some leftists and communists pretend to be partisans of the Qur'an and show interest in its interpretation. In fact they do so only to promote their evil designs. Otherwise they have nothing to do with the Qur'an; let

alone its interpretation. They just want to pass their doctrines under the name of the teachings of Islam.

That is why I say that those who do not possess enough knowledge of Islam and the young men who are not fully conversant with the Islamic problems, have no right to meddle in the exposition of the Qur'an. But if they still try to misinterpret it for some ulterior motive of theirs, our youth should ignore their interpretation and pay no attention to it. Islam does not allow anybody to interpret the Qur'an according to his personal opinion or private judgment. Anybody who tries to impose his own opinion on the Qur'an is either a materialist misinterpreting the Qur'an or is one of those who give some spiritual meaning to the Qur'anic verses. Both these groups interpret the Qur'an according to their own wishes. Therefore it is necessary to keep away from both of them. As far as the Qur'an is concerned our hands are tied. Nobody is allowed to attribute his opinion to the Qur'an and claim that the Qur'an says so.

The interpretation which I am going to give is only a possible interpretation. When I explain any verse of the Qur'an, I do not claim that the verse means only what I say. I do not say anything for certain. I am hinting a possibility only.

As some gentlemen have asked me to say something on the exegesis of the Qur'an, I have decided to speak briefly once a week about the Surah al-Hamd. I would like to repeat once again that the interpretation which I give is nothing more than a possibility. I do not want at all to interpret the Qur'an according to my own opinion or wish.

It is possible that the 'bismillah' in the beginning of each surah of the Qur'an is related to the verses following it. Generally it is said that the bismillah is related to a verb understood (omitted), but probably it is related to the surah following it. For example, in the Surah al-Hamd it is related to al-Hamdu lillah. In this case the whole sentence would mean that:

With the name of Allah all praises belong to Him. Now what does a name signify. It is a mark or a sign. When man gives a name to any person or thing, that name serves as a symbol for the recognition of that person or thing. If any person is named Zayd, people can recognize him by that name.

Allah's Names are the Symbols of His Person

Whatever little information man can get about the Divine Being, he can acquire it through His names. Otherwise man has no access to His Person. Even the Holy Prophet did not have, though he was the most learned and the noblest of all human beings. No one other than Him can know Him. Man can have access only up to the Divine names.

The knowledge of the Divine names has several grades. Some of them we can comprehend. Others can be grasped only by the Holy Prophet and some of his chosen followers.

The Whole World is a Name of Allah

The whole world is a name of Allah, because the name of a thing is its sign or symbol and as all the things existing are the signs of Allah, it may be said that the whole world is His name. At the most it can be said that very few people fully understand how the existing things are the signs of Allah. Most people know only this much that nothing can come into existence automatically.

Nothing, the existence of which is only possible, can come into existence automatically.

It is intellectually clear and every body knows it intuitively that anything the existence and non-existence of which is equally possible, cannot come into existence automatically and that there must be an external force to bring it into existence.

The first cause of bringing into existence all possibly existing things must be an eternal and self-existing being. If it is supposed that the imaginary upper space, and it must be imaginary because it is a non-entity, has always existed, then it possibly can neither automatically turn into anything nor anything can come into existence in it automatically.

The assertion of some people that in the beginning the whole world was an infinite vacuum (anything being infinite is questionable in itself) in which subsequently appeared a sort of steam from which everything has originated, does not stand to reason, for without an external cause no new thing can appear nor can one thing change into another thing.

For example, water does not freeze nor does it boil without an external cause. If its temperature remains constant and does not go below 0 degrees nor above 100 degrees it will always remain water. In short, the existence of an external cause is essential for every change. Similarly nothing the existence of which is only possible can come into existence without an external cause. These facts are self-evident truths.

All Existing Things are a Sign of Allah

This much can be easily understood by all that all existing things are a sign and a name of Allah. We can say that the whole world is Allah's name. But the case of this name is different from that of the names given to the ordinary things. For example, if we want to indicate a lamp, or a motor car to someone, we mention its name. The same thing we do in the case of man or Zayd. But evidently that is not possible in the case of the Being possessing infinite sublime qualities.

Anything Which is Finite is a Possibly Existing Thing

If an existing thing is finite, it is a possibly existing thing. As Allah's existence is infinite, He should evidently possess all sublime qualities, for if he lacked even one quality, He would become finite and as such possibly existing. The difference between a possibly existing being and an essentially existing

being is that the latter is infinite and absolute in every respect. If all the sublime qualities of the essentially existing being were not infinite, that being would not be the essentially existing being and the source of all existence. All the things caused by this source of existence are endowed with the qualities possessed by the essentially existing Being, but on a smaller scale and in varying degrees. What is endowed with these qualities to the utmost possible degree is called the Grand Name or al-ism al-a'zam.

What is the Grand Name?

The Grand Name is that name or sign that is somewhat endowed with all the Divine qualities to the greatest possible degree. As compared to other existing things it possesses the Divine qualities most perfectly, though no existing thing lacks them completely, for everything has been endowed with them according to its nature and capacity. Even those material things which appear to us to be totally devoid of all knowledge and power are not really so and possess some degree of perception and knowledge.

All Existing Things Glorify Allah

As we are veiled, we cannot perceive it. but it is a fact that the sublime qualities are reflected even in the things lower than man and animals. At the most these qualities are reflected in them according to the capacity of their existence. Even the lowest creations possess the quality of perception. The Qur'an says:

There is not a thing that does not praise Him, but you do not understand their praise. (Surah Bani Isra'il, 17:44)

As we are veiled and do not understand the praise of all existing things, the ancient scholars did not know that the imperfect beings also possessed perception. that is why they took this praise to mean the praise indicated by the creation of all things, but in fact this verse has nothing to do with that kind of praise, which is quite a different matter as we already know. According to a tradition once the people heard the pebbles in the Holy Prophet's hand praising Allah.

They could understand the praise of the pebbles, but this praise was such that the human ears were quite unfamiliar with it. It was in the pebbles' own language, not in any human language. Hence, it is clear that the pebbles possess perception, although of course according to their existential capacity.

Man who considers himself to be the source of all kinds of perception, thinks that other things are devoid of it, but that is not a fact, although it is true that man has a higher degree of it. Being veiled, we are unaware of the perception of other things and their praising Allah, and think that there is no such thing.

There are Many Things that we do not Know

There are many things about which man thinks that they do not exist, but in fact they do, though we may be unaware of them. Every day new discoveries are being made, Formerly it was believed that the plants were inanimate objects, but now it is said that they have a hearing system. If you put the tissues of a tree in hot water and pass a voice through them, there will be a reaction and you will hear some voices in response.

We do not know how far this report is correct. But it is certain that this world is full of voices and sounds. The whole world is living and is a name of Allah. You yourselves are a name of Allah. Your tongues and your hands are names of Allah.

All Movements are the Names of Allah

The praise you make of Allah is His name. When you go to the mosque after washing your feet, you go with the name of Allah. You cannot part with the name of Allah because you yourselves are His name. The beat of pulse, the throbbing of heart and the blowing of wind are all names of Allah. Perhaps that is what is meant by the names of Allah in this verse.

There are many other verses in which the phrase: "With the name of Allah" has been used. As we have said, everything is the name of Allah, and the name has passed away in the named. We think that we have an independent existence, but that is not a fact.

If that Being, who has brought everything into existence by means of His will and the reflection of the light of His glory withdrew His light for a moment all the existing things would be annihilated immediately and return to their pre-existing state. Allah has created the whole world by the light of His glory which is the true nature of existence and the name of Allah. The Qur'an says:

Allah is the light of the heavens and the earth. (24:35)

Everything is illuminated by His light. Everything has appeared by dint of His light. This appearance itself is a reflection of His light. Man's appearance is also a light. Therefore man himself is a light. Animals are also a light of Allah's glory. The existence of the heavens and the earth is a light from Allah. This light has so passed away in Allah that the Qur'an has said: Allah is the light of the heavens and the earth.

It has not said that the heavens and the earth are illuminated by the light of Allah. The reason is that the heavens and the earth are a nonentity. Nothing in our world has an independent existence of its own. In other words there is nothing here that is self-existing. In fact there is no existent other than Allah, That is why the Qur'an says: With the name of Allah all praise belongs to Allah. 'With the name of Allah say: He is Allah the One'. Perhaps the Qur'an does not ask you to utter the words: 'With the name of Allah, the Compassionate, the Merciful ' It actually mentions a fact.

By asking you to say so with the name of Allah, it means that your saying so is also a name of Allah. The Qur'an has said: 'Whatever there is in the heavens and the earth glorifies Him.' It has not said whoever there is in the heavens and the earth glorifies Him. That means that everything whether animate or inanimate praises and glorifies Allah, for all are a reflection of the light of His glory and it is His glory that causes all movements.

Everything in the World is A Manifestation of His Glory

The cause of all that occurs in the world is the manifestation of Allah's glory. Everything is from Him and everything returns to Him. No creature has anything of its own. If anybody claims to have anything of his own, he virtually wants to compete with the source of Divine light, while as a matter of fact even his life is not of his own. The eyes you have are not your own.

The light of Divine manifestation has brought them into being. The praise of Allah that other people or we express, is a Divine name, or it is because of a Divine name. That is why the Qur'an says: With the name of Allah and praise belongs to Allah.

The Word Allah is a Comprehensive Manifestation of Divine Glory

It is a manifestation that includes all manifestations. Allah's names, Rahman (the Compassionate) and Rahim (the Merciful) are the manifestations of this manifestation.

Because of his mercy and benevolence Allah has bestowed existence in the existing things. This is itself is a show of mercy and kindness. Even the existence conferred on the harmful and obnoxious things is a show of His favor, which is common to all existing things. It is the manifestation of the glory of His name, Allah, which is a true manifestation of His glory in every sense.

Allah is a station. It is a comprehensive name, which is itself a manifestation or Divine glory in every sense. Otherwise the Divine Being has no name apart from His Essence or Person. Allah His names including Allah, Rahman, and Rahim are only the manifestations of his glory. In the 'bismillah' His names Rahman and Rahim have been added to His comprehensive name Allah, because they signify His self-sustaining attributes of mercy, favor and compassion. His attributes of retribution, anger etc. are subservient to these attributes.

The praise of any kind of excellence is actually the praise of Allah. When a man eats something and says how delicious it is, he praises Allah unconsciously. When a man says about another man that he is a very fine man or that he is a great scholar or philosopher, he praises Allah because a philosopher or a scholar has nothing of his own. Whatever there is, it is a manifestation of Allah's glory. The man who understands this fact, he and his intellect are also a manifestations of Allah's glory.

No Praise is of Anyone Else's Praise

Whenever we praise anybody, we say that he has such and such good qualities. As everything belongs to Allah, the commendation of any merit of any person or a thing virtually amounts to praising Allah. We, being veiled, do not realize this truth and think that we are praising Zayd or Amr, the sunshine or the moonlight. When veil is lifted we will come to know that all praises belong to none but Allah and that everything we praise is nothing but a manifestation of Allah's glory.

The Qur'an says: Allah is the light of the heavens and the earth, In other words, every excellence and every sublime quality, wherever it may be, is attributable to Allah. He is the cause of the whole world and the whole world is a manifestation of His glory. The things we do, are not actually done by us.

Addressing the Holy Prophet Allah said in the Qur'an:

You did not throw (the pebbles), when you threw (them), but Allah threw (them). (Surah al-Anfal, 8: 17)

Consider the words: 'You threw' and 'You did not throw.' Both of these phrases are a manifestation of 'but Allah threw.' There is another verse that says:

Those who swear allegiance to you, swear allegiance only to Allah. (Surah al-Fath,, 48: 10)

Being veiled as we are, we do not understand the truth these verses imply. As a matter of fact we all are under a veil except the Holy Prophet who was educated direct by Allah and the Holy Imams of the Holy Prophet's Progeny who received training from him.

So there is a possibility that the preposition 'bi' and the noun 'Ism' in 'bismillah' may be related to 'al-Hamdu; meaning, 'With the name of Allah all praises belong to Him.' It is a manifestation of the glory of Allah that draws every praise to it and does not allow any praise to be a praise of anyone other than Allah, for howsoever you may try, you will not find anyone existing other than Him.

Therefore whatever praise you express, it will be a praise of Allah. It may be noted that praise is always made of positive qualities. The defects and faults being negative qualities, do not actually exist. Everything that exists has two aspects. It is positive aspect that is praised and it is always free from defects and faults.

There exists only one excellence and one beauty and that is the excellence and beauty of Allah. We should try to understand this truth. Once we are convinced of this fact, everything else will be easy. As a matter of fact it is easy to acknowledge something verbally, but it is difficult to persuade oneself to believe even a rational thing firmly.

To Believe Something Intellectually is One Thing and to be Convinced of it is Another

To be convinced of the truth of a thing is different from believing it intellectually because of the existence of some scientific arguments to prove it. The impeccability of the Prophets was due to their firm conviction. A man who is fully convinced of a truth, cannot act contrary to his conviction.

If you were sure that somebody was standing near you with a drawn sword in his hand and that he would kill you if you uttered a single word against him, you would never say anything against him because your first concern was to save your life. In other words, as far as this matter was concerned, you were so to say infallible.

A man who was convinced that if he slandered anybody behind his back, his backbiting would assume the shape of a dreadful animal with a long tongue stretching from the slanderer to the slandered and this animal would be crushing him, he would never indulge in backbiting anybody. If a man was sure that "slandering is the food of the dogs of hell" and the slanderer would be ceaselessly devoured by them, he would never stoop to this vice. We occasionally indulge in backbiting only because we are not fully sure of the consequences of this bad habit.

Man's Deeds Will Assume a Concrete Shape

If man was convinced that whatever deeds he performed would be embodied in the hereafter, the good deeds assuming a good shape and the bad one a bad shape, and that he would have to give an account of all that he did, he would not commit a bad deed even unconsciously. We need not go into the details of this affair.

It is enough to say that everything will be reckoned. If a person slandered anyone else, he would be accountable for doing that. If anybody harassed or injured the faithful, he would go to Hell. The good men would get Paradise. One must be fully convinced and sure of this procedure. It is not enough to read the law in the books or to understand it rationally. Knowing and understanding are quite different from heart-felt conviction. By heart I mean the real heart, not an organ of the body.

Man often knows and understands a truth, but not being firmly convinced of it, does not act according to what a belief in it requires. He acts only when he gets fully and firmly convinced. It is this firm conviction that is called faith. Simply knowing a Prophet is of no use. What is beneficial is having faith in him. It is not enough to prove the existence of Allah. What is necessary is to believe in Him and to obey His commandments whole-heartedly. With the true faith, everything becomes easy.

If a man was convinced that there was a Being who was the source of this world, that man was accountable and that his death would not be his end but would only mean his shifting to a more perfect

stage, he would surely be saved from all errors and slips. The question is how can he be convinced?

I have already described one aspect of the verse saying: 'With the name of Allah all praises belong to Allah.' I once again emphasize that what I say is only a possibility, not a definite interpretation of the Qur'an. Anyhow, it appears that a man fully convinced that all praises belonged to Allah, could never have any polytheistic ideas in his mind, for whomsoever anybody praises, he actually praises some manifestation of Allah's glory.

Anybody who composes or intends to compose an ode in honor of the Holy Prophet or Imam Ali, that ode of his is for Allah because the Holy Prophet and the Imam are not but a great manifestation of Allah, and therefore their eulogy is the eulogy of Allah and His manifestation. A man who is convinced that all praises are due to Allah, would never indulge in bragging, boasting and self-praise. In fact man is self-conceited because he does not know himself. 'He who knows himself, knows Allah.'

A man knows Allah only when he is firmly convinced that he himself has no significance and that everything belongs to Allah only.

In fact, we neither know ourselves nor Allah. We have faith neither in ourselves nor in Him. We are neither sure that we are nothing nor that everything is Allah's. So long as we are not certain of these things, all arguments to prove the existence of Allah are of little use, and all that we do is based on egoism. All claims to leadership and chieftaincy are the result of self-conceit and personal vanity.

Self-Conceit is the Cause of All Troubles

Most of the troubles man faces are the result of his vanity and empty pride. Man loves himself and desires to be admired by others. But that is his mistake. He does not realize that he himself is nothing and that he is the property of another Being.

Man's self-conceit and love of power are the cause of most of his troubles, sins and vices, which ruin him and drag him to Hell. Because of his selfishness man wants to control everything and becomes the enemy of others whom he rightly or wrongly considers to be a hindrance in his way. He knows no limits in this respect and that is the cause of all troubles, misfortunes and calamities.

All Praises Belong to Allah

It appears that the Book of Allah begins with the question that includes all questions. When Allah says: 'All praises belong to Allah', we feel that so many questions have appeared before our eyes.

The Qur'an does not say that some praises belong to Allah. That means that if somebody says to another person: 'I know that Allah is Almighty and Omnipotent, but still I am praising you, not Allah', even then his praise would go to Allah, because all praises are Allah's praises.

The Qur'an says: 'All praises belong to Allah'. This means that all kinds of praises in all conditions belong to Him. This short verse resolves many problems. This verse is enough to cleanse man's heart from the impurity of all kinds of polytheism provided he is fully convinced of its truth. He who said that he had never committed any sort of polytheism, said so because he had intuitively discovered this truth and grasped it mentally.

This state of conviction cannot be secured by any argument. I do not mean that argument is of no use. It is also required. But it is only a means of understanding the question of Allah's monotheism according to one's intellectual capacity. To believe in it is the next step.

Philosophical Reasoning is not much Effective

Philosophy is a means not an end. Philosophical arguments help in understanding the problems, but they do not lead to a firm faith, which is a matter of intuition and taste. Even faith has several grades.

I hope that we will not be contented with reading and understanding the Qur'an, but will have a firm faith in every word of it, because it is the Divine Book that reforms man and wants to turn him into a being created by Allah from His 'Ism A 'zam' (grand name). Allah has gifted man with all kinds of faculties but many of his potential capabilities are dormant.

The Qur'an wants to raise man from this lower position to the high position worthy of him. The Qur'an has come for this very purpose. Allah the Prophets have come to help man in getting out of the depths of selfishness and seeing the Divine light so that he may forget everything other than Allah.

May Allah bestow this favor on us also!

The Difference between the Bismillah of each Surah

The 'bismillah' preceding one surah is different from that preceding another surah.

We were saying to which word the preposition and the noun it governs in the 'bismillah' are related. One of the possibilities is that the 'bismillah' of every surah is related to some appropriate word of that very surah; for example in the Surah al-Hamd it may be related to the word, al-Hamd. In that case 'bismillahi al-hamdu lillahi' would mean: With the name of Allah all praises belong to Allah. On the basis of this possibility 'bismillah' would signify differently in every surah, for in each surah it would be referring to a different word. If it was related to the word 'al-hamdu' in the Surah 'al-Hamd,' we would have to look for some other appropriate word, for example, in the Surah 'al-Ikhlās'.

According to a rule of theology, if somebody pronounced the bismillah with some surah and then wanted to recite another surah, he would have to repeat the bismillah, and the previous bismillah would not be enough for him. This rule shows that 'bismillah' does not have the same meaning everywhere. It has a different significance with each surah, although there are some people who wrongly maintain that

'bismillah' is not the part of any surah and it is quite a separate verse revealed as a benediction.

If it is accepted that 'bismillah' was related to 'al-Hamd' then 'hamd' might include everything to which the word 'hamd' applied, that is every kind of praise expressed by anybody on any occasion. Thus the verse would mean that every praise expressed is with the name of Allah, because he who expresses it is himself a name of Allah; his organs and limbs are a name of Allah and the praise he expresses is also a name of Allah. From this point of view every praise is with the name of Allah.

We all are His names, or manifestations of His names, because we all are His signs, He is our originator, who has brought us into existence. The Divine Originator is in several ways different from a natural cause or agent. One of the points of difference is that anything that is brought into existence by the Divine Originator, or in other words, anything that emerges from the Divine source disappears in that very source.

To illustrate this point to some extent, let us take up an example, although this example falls too short of the relation between the Creator and the created. Anyhow, let us take up the example of the sun and its rays. The rays have no existence separate from the sun. The same is the case with the Divine Originator or the Creator.

Anything coming into existence from this source depends on it for its existence as well as continuation. There is no existing being which can continue to exist if Allah withdraws from it even for an amount the light on which its existence depends. As no existing thing has any independent position, it is said to be lost in its source.

Every Possibly Existing Thing Depends on Allah for its Existence as well as Continuation

Every possibly existing being is Allah's name, His deed and a manifestation of His glory. He Himself says:

Allah is the Light of the heavens and the earth (Surah an-Nur, 24:35).

Every possibly existing being is a manifestation of the glory of Allah, but not Allah. Everything that appears in the world is so related to the source of its origin that it cannot have any independent existence. That is why it has been said in the Qur'an that:

'Allah is the light of the heavens and the earth.'

If it is admitted that the definite article 'al' in al-Hamdu indicated 'Comprehensiveness', the verse would mean that every praise by whomsoever it might be expressed, takes place with the name of Allah.

As he who praises Allah, is himself, one of Allah's names, it may be said that in a sense the praiser and

the praised are one and the same. One is the manifestation and the other is the manifester. Some sayings of the Holy Prophet, such as: 'You are as You have praised Yourself', and 'I seek refuge from You in You', point in this direction.

As the relationship between the praiser and the praised is that of passing away of the former in the latter, the former cannot claim that it is he who praises. In fact it is the 'praised' who praises Himself, for the praiser has passed in Him.

According to another possibility it may be said that the definite article in 'al-hamdu' is not for showing comprehensiveness, but it indicates that the word, 'hamd' signifies general praise without any qualification being attached to it. In this case the praise of Allah performed by us is not actually His praise. His praise is only that which He performs Himself.

The reason is that Allah is the Infinite Being while all others are finite. Any praise expressed by a finite being will naturally be finite and limited and therefore it cannot be the praise of the infinite Being.

While mentioning the first alternative we said that every praise was Allah's praise. Even when you think that you are commending the merits of a beautiful handwriting, you are actually extolling Allah. Similarly when you believe that you are paying tributes to the world, in that case also you are praising none but Allah.

That is why, while describing the first alternative or the first possibility, we said that every praise was that of Allah, whosoever might be the praiser, for nothing except Allah has an independent existence. Every excellence, every beauty and every perfection belongs to Him only. If Allah withdraws the manifestation of His glory, nothing would be existing any longer.

All Existing Things Are A Manifestation of Allah's Glory

The existence of everything depends on Allah's glory. While discussing above the first possibility, we pointed out that everything existing is the outcome of a divine light. Allah Himself says that He is the light of the heavens and the earth. If He takes away this light, everything is bound to disappear and come to an end.

As nothing except Allah has any excellence of its own, nothing except Him is worth praising. In fact there is no excellence except His. He excels in His essence, His attributes and the state of His manifestation. All the merits attributed to anything or anyone else are His merits. Anybody who praises anyone for his excellence and merit, actually praises Him. This is true if we accept the first possibility mentioned above.

In the case of the second possibility, which is also no more than a mere guess or a possibility, the word 'al-hamdu' does not imply totality or comprehensiveness. It only signifies absolute praise without any qualification, restriction or any conception of its opposite being attached to it. But the praise that we perform is definitely not absolute.

It is a particular praise expressed by a particular to a particular. We do not have access to the Absolute, nor can we perceive Him. So how can we praise Him. Even at the time of saying, 'al-hamdu lillah', you do not perceive the Absolute Truth, and as such the question of praising the Absolute does not arise.

Whatever praise is expressed, that actually is not the praise of Allah, but is the praise of some manifestation of His glory. In the case of the previous possibility no praise was that of Allah except that expressed by Himself. In this case the word 'ism' (name) in 'bismillah al-hamdu lillah' will not have the same meaning as we stated earlier when we said that everybody is Allah's name including you and me.

Now the name of Allah is a symbol for His absolute and unqualified manifestation, the meaning of which can neither be explained nor grasped. It is this name of Allah that is praised and this praise can be expressed only by Allah Himself. This is a possible explanation based on the assumption that 'bismillah' is connected with 'al-hamdu lillah'. In short there are two possibilities. According to one possibility every praise is the praise of Allah and according to the other, praise of Allah is only the absolute and unqualified praise pronounced and performed by Allah Himself.

According to the first possibility there is no praise that is not of Allah; and according to the second possibility a praise can be of Allah only in its limited sense, not in its absolute sense. In this case the 'hamd' (praise) in 'al-hamdu lillah' will mean an absolute and unqualified praise. Allah can be praised only by the name that is worthy of Him. This rule is also a mere possibility.

There is another possibility that 'bismillah' might have no link with the surah following it. We know that some scholars maintain that the preposition and the noun in 'bismillah' are linked with an omitted but understood verb, 'Zahara' (appeared), meaning, existence appeared. Thus the sentence would mean:

Existence appeared with the name of Allah. In other words the name of Allah is the source of everything existing. This name of Allah is the same that is alluded to in a Prophetic tradition in the following words: 'Allah created His will Himself and created all other things through His Will.'

Here Allah's Will means 'the first manifestation of His glory' that was created by Him direct. It is this manifestation that has been called existence in the ellipsis mentioned above, namely 'Existence appeared'. On the basis of the assumption that 'bismillah' is not linked with the surah following it, some grammarians hold that some such elliptical phrase as 'We seek the help' exists before 'bismillah'

These grammarians may not realize, but in fact, whoever seeks the help of Allah, he invariably seeks the help of His name. It is not possible to seek His help in any other way. Though it is not necessary to always use the words, 'with the name of Allah', the fact remains that in everything His appearance or presence is His name and thus the help of His name is invariably sought.

It is this appearance the help of which we seek and with the help of which everything is done. The grammarians may not be aware of this conception, but it is a fact that seeking help means turning to Allah. This much as to which word 'bismillah' is linked with. We said earlier that a name is the sign of the

named. But there is nothing which is not the sign of Allah.

Whatever you see, you will find that to be a sign of Him. Of course signs also have degrees. There are some names which are perfect signs of Him in every respect. There are some others that cannot be said to be so perfect signs. Anyhow, all existing things are His signs and manifestations in varying degrees.

A tradition says: 'We are the beautiful names of Allah'. Anyhow, at the stage of manifestation the loftiest and the most splendid names of Allah are the Holy Prophet and the Imams who, unlike us who are still lying in the abyss of base desires, have reached the highest stages of spiritual journey towards Allah.

Emigration

We have not yet started even moving, but there are some people who have not only come out of the abyss but have also emigrated from that stage. The Holy Qur'an says:

He who leaves his home, emigrating for the sake of Allah and His Messenger and is then overtaken by death, shall surely to be rewarded by Allah. (Surah an-Nisa', 4:100)

According to one possible interpretation 'emigration' here might have meant going from oneself to Allah and 'home' might have meant one's lower self. In this case the whole verse would mean that there were some people who came out of the dark and dingy home of their base desires and continued to move towards Allah till they were overtaken by death, that is they passed away from self to survive in Allah, who was to reward them.

In other words Allah Himself is their reward, for they attach no importance to Paradise and the bounties found therein. Their sole objective is Allah, because for a person who undertakes the path of self-annihilation and proceeds towards Allah and His Prophet, nothing is left which he could call his own. For him everything belongs to Allah.

He who reaches this stage is surely to be rewarded by Allah. It may be noted that there are some who have reached their desired goal after emigration, while there are some others who though they emigrated, yet they could not reach the stage of passing away in Allah. The third category is that of the people like us who could not emigrate at all and are still groping in darkness.

We are not only lost in the labyrinth of the mundane things but are also a prey to selfishness and egoism so much that we cannot see anything beyond our self-interest. We want everything for ourselves, for we think that nothing except us has any value. We have not yet thought of emigrating, because our thinking is limited to this world only.

Seventy Years Back

We do not discard the faculties with which Allah has equipped us, but we use them for mundane purposes as if we were to live in this world forever. As the time passes, we continue to get away farther and farther from the source to which we should have emigrated.

According to a report once the Holy Prophet was sitting along with his companions when a loud sound of something falling was heard. The Holy Prophet's companions were startled. They enquired what had happened. According to the report the Holy Prophet said: 'A stone was rolling down in the middle of Hell. Now after 70 years it has fallen into a well located at the other end of it. This was the sound of its fall.'

This event is said to be an allegorical description of a wicked man who died at the age of 70. We are all rolling down towards the same hole. I may go there at the age of 80. You will also go to that side in a few years.

Worst Enemy

It is our selfishness and egoism that are responsible for our present condition. The following maxim expresses the same truth: 'Your worst enemy is your lower self that is within you.' It is this idol which man worships most and to which he is attached most. Man cannot become godly unless he smashes this idol, because an idol and God cannot go together.

An egoist can never be a devout person. We may apparently be religious, but in reality are idol-worshippers unless we get rid of our selfishness and egoism, which are the root-cause of all our troubles and evils. While offering prayers we say: 'You alone we worship and You alone we ask for help' but unfortunately all our thoughts remain concentrated on ourselves. We offer prayers to serve our own selfish interests and thus in reality worship ourselves only.

Egoism the Cause of All Quarrels

All wars in the world are due to man's egoism. Believers are not expected to fight each other. If they do, they are not believers.

A dishonest and selfish man wants to seize everything for his own benefit. It is this attitude which gives rise to all sorts of troubles. I want a position for myself; you want it for yourself. As both of us cannot occupy it at one and the same time, a quarrel is bound to arise. I want to take this chair; you also want it.

When I and you want to take the same thing, naturally there will be an altercation. If two persons attempt to occupy this country, a war would ensue. All wars and battles are the outcome of selfishness, the result of the conflict of personalities and their interests. As the holy men are not selfish, they do not fight each other.

Even if all the holy men gather together at one place, there would be no fight and no quarrel among them, for whatever they do, they do for the sake of Allah. As they are neither selfish nor egoistic, they do not oppose each other.

They all have the same source and the same direction. It is we who are lying in a well that is as dark as possibly can be. This darkness is that of our egoism. So long as we do not give up our egoism, we cannot get out of this darkness. We are selfish and self-conceited. That is why we do not attach importance to others and consider ourselves alone to be all important. If a thing is advantageous to us, we accept it. If it is not, we reject it howsoever right it may be.

We believe only that thing, which is in our favor. All this is egoism and selfishness. It is this attitude that is the cause of all our troubles and is responsible for all misfortunes of humanity. I want to pursue my interest and you want to pursue yours. There can be no godliness so long as selfishness persists. Then what is the remedy? Man has within himself an idol-temple. It is not easy for him to get out of it. He needs Divine help, a hidden hand which may take him out of this dungeon. The Prophets have come for this very purpose.

Aim of the Prophets

All the Prophets and the revealed Books have come only to smash this idol-temple and to take man out of it. The Prophets have come to set up a divine order in this fiendish world ruled by the Devil whom we all obey. Our base desires are the Devil's manifestation. The greatest Devil being our own appetitive soul, whatever we do become devilish.

That is the reason why nothing that we do is free from selfishness. The Devil holds influence over us and we are dictated by the Devil. We can get out of this labyrinth only if we emigrate from our present stage, act according to the teachings of the Prophets and other holy men and cease to be selfish and egoistic. If we do so we will gain an inconceivable success. This emigration is essential for anybody who aspires to attain to perfection.

Major Jihad

He who wishes to get out of the dungeon of egoism, must strive to emigrate from his present state. According to a Prophetic tradition once certain companions of the Holy Prophet came back from a Jihad (holy war). The Holy Prophet said to them:

'You have returned after carrying out a minor jihad, but still owe a major one'. A major jihad is carried out against one's lower self. All other jihads are subservient to this one. Any other jihad performed by us will be worth the name only if we succeed in the major jihad. Otherwise all other jihads will be nothing more than a satanic act.

If a person takes part in the holy war with a view to obtain a slave girl or to provide for his livelihood, these very things would be his reward. But if a person performs jihad for the sake of Allah, then it would be Allah's responsibility to reward him. In fact the reward depends on the quality of the job performed. Obviously there is a vast difference between the quality of our performance and that of the holy men and friends of Allah, for our aims and objects are quite different from theirs.

Devotion is the Criterion

Has it been said without any reason that at the war of Ditch (Khandaq) one stroke of Imam Ali's sword was more meritorious than all the acts of worship performed by the jinn and mankind? Apparently his stroke was no more than a blow to kill a person. But it had a far greater significance.

At that time Islam was facing the combined forces of infidelity and if Muslims had been defeated in that encounter, the very existence of Islam would have been endangered. There is still another aspect of the question, and that is the dedication and devotion involved in Imam Ali's act.

Once while Imam Ali was on the chest of an enemy, he spat on the Imam's face. Imam Ali at once got off so that his act might not be affected by the motive of personal vengeance.

The spirit of such a stroke is certainly superior to all acts of worship. It is this spirit which gives the acts of a true believer their proper meaning and significance. Outwardly the acts performed by the polytheists and the monotheists, the idolaters and these who do not worship the idols, look alike. Apparently there is no difference in them.

Abu Sufyan also used to offer prayers. Mu'awiyah was himself the Imam of Congregational prayers. They performed their religious acts like others. It is the spirit of prayer that accords sublimity to it. If the spirit is there, prayer is a devotional act. Otherwise it is nothing more than a mere show and a fraud. This principle applies to us also. We simply deceive each other.

Our Worship is For Paradise

All our devotional acts serve our own interests only. Those who are more pious among us perform them for the sake of Paradise. Take away the temptation of Paradise, then see who performs them. Imam Ali's case is different. He was in fact fond of the acts of devotion and worship. It is said about him that he loved the acts of devotion and embraced them.

As a matter of principle it is not of much significance to perform acts of worship for the sake of Paradise. A person who has reached the stage of passing away in Allah, attaches no importance to Paradise. He actually does not care for it. Paradise and Hell are alike for him who has annihilated himself. He praises Allah because he believes that Allah deserves devotions.

This position is attained by those who are fond of acts of worship. They worship Allah because they

believe that He is fit for being worshipped.

There are many degrees of devotion. Anyhow, the first step is shunning the selfishness and getting out of the narrow hole of egoism.

For this purpose the first thing to be done is to wake up for the sake of Allah and not to remain sleeping. At present we are asleep, although apparently awake. Our waking is that of animals, not of man.

A tradition says that people are asleep; they will wake up when they will die. At that time they will realize that they were totally unconscious of the real situation. A Qur'anic verse says: 'Hell is surrounding the unbelievers'. It means that Hell is even now surrounding them but man being in a state of unconsciousness does not perceive that.

When he will gain his consciousness, he will realize that there is a fire all round him. We all have to go by this path. Therefore it is better for us to wake up and walk along the 'straight path' shown to us by the Prophets.

Prophets Come to Reform Men

Reforming mankind is the mission of all Prophets. For this purpose they set up a just order. It is man who is just or unjust. To establish a just order means turning the wicked into the righteous and the unbelievers into believers. The Prophets' job is to transform the people. If people were left to do what they liked, they would certainly fall into the deep pit of hell.

It is the Prophets who guide them to the right path. Alas! We are not yet following it. I am 70 years old, but am still where I was. I have not emigrated. Perhaps my condition will not change till the end of my life. Anyhow, it is essential for everybody to follow the straight path. There is no alternative.

An Appeal to the Youth

You are young and can adopt this path better. Do not worry about us, for we are already a spent force. You can purify your soul easily as you are closer to the world of divinity than we the old people. Comparatively you have deteriorated less but things are becoming worse day by day. The more delay will make the matter more difficult. It is difficult for an old man to be reformed, but a young man can be reformed quickly.

It is easier to reform thousands of young men than to reform an old man. Therefore do not postpone the task of reform to old age. Begin this work while you are still young. Follow the teachings of the Prophets. This is the starting point.

The Prophets have shown us the way we should follow. While we are unaware of it, the Prophets are familiar with the way of safety and security. If you want safety, follow the way shown by them. Gradually

pay less and less attention to your desires.

You will not get the desired result immediately, but gradually you can get rid of your egoism. One day all our desires will come to naught. It is not in our interest to pay attention to them. Lasting is only that which relates to Allah. The Qur'an says:

What is with you will come to an end, what is with Allah will remain. (Surah an-Nahl, 16:96)

Man has that 'which is with you' as well as that 'which is with Allah'. All the things that keep your attention directed to yourselves, are that 'which is with you'. All these things will vanish. But those things that keep your attention directed to Allah, are lasting and permanent.

Continue Your Effort Till You Gain Complete Victory Over Your Lower Self

You and we should make every effort to change our present state. Those who achieved success in their struggle against the unbelievers, never worried as to how many people were with them. After all it was he¹ who said that even if all the Arabs were combined against him, he would not give up. As he was doing the duty assigned to him by Allah, there was no question of failure in it, what to say of being repulsed.

Then there is another question. Suppose you retreat, but where will you go to? Those who advanced in the jihads, went forward without caring for their lives or their personal interests. They fought against their lower self to the utmost degree. The struggle of those who occupied a higher spiritual position was proportionately more intense.

In fact man can achieve nothing unless he fights against his lower self. He cannot go forward unless he ignores his desires and keeps clear of this world, which is another name of base desires. The desires of every body are his world. It is this world which has been denounced, not the physical world.

This world is within you. When you pay attention to your lower self, you yourself become this world. Thus this world of everybody is within him. It is this world which has been condemned, not the sun, the moon or any other natural object. All the natural objects, being the signs and manifestations of Allah, have been praised.

It is this world in the above mentioned sense that deprives man from gaining proximity to Allah. May Allah grant us success in getting out of the deep dungeon of egoism. It is the friends of Allah who have gained success in being delivered from the catastrophe of egoism.

¹. Imam Ali (Peace be upon him).

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