

Preface

By Shaykh Muhammad M Khalfan

All praises belong exclusively to Allah, and may His peace and benedictions be on Muhammad, the most perfect epitome of Divine Attributes and his infallible progeny, the Ahl al-Bayt, who are rightfully known as the ships of salvation, whosoever boards their ship, earns eternal felicity, and whosoever lags behind and is indifferent drowns and attains eternal damnation.

Al-Qanduzi, the Hanafite narrator of traditions, in his radiant collection *Yanabi' al-Mawadda* (lit. Fountains of Constant Love) narrates a tradition from Abu Dharr al-Ghiffari who narrates from the Holy Prophet (S):

إِنَّ مَثَلَ أَهْلِ بَيْتِي فِيكُمْ مَثَلُ سَفِينَةِ نُوحٍ، مَنْ رَكِبَهَا نَجَا وَمَنْ تَخَلَّفَ عَنْهَا هَلَكَ

The similitude of my progeny among you is that of the ship of Noah A; whosoever boards it is saved, and whosoever lags behind would perish¹

The ship of al-Husayn (AS), however, according to another tradition is more rapid: Once a companion of Imam al-Sadiq (AS) asked him about the prophetic tradition “Surely al-Husayn is the lamp of guidance and the ship of salvation” saying: “Aren’t you [the Ahl al-Bayt (AS)] ships of salvation [too]?” The Imam (AS) replied:

كُلُّنَا سُفُنُ النِّجَاةِ إِلَّا أَنَّ سَفِينَةَ الْحُسَيْنِ أَوْسَعُ وَأَسْرَعُ

All of us are ships of salvation, save that the ship of al-Husayn (AS) is **more spacious and faster**.²

This tradition is also endorsed by great mystic scholars who can appreciate the sublime secrets of religion. The late mystic-scholar Ayatullah Mirza Tabrizi in his monumental prayer manual *al-Muraqabat*

says:

It should be known that the door of al-Husayn (AS) is the door of comprehensive mercy, rapid response and approval. And he [the Imam] would say during his life time: 'The similitude of doing good is rain water which covers both the virtuous as well as the sinful.'³

Sayyid Haddad al-Musawi a great Shi'ite saint and a contemporary of 'Allamah al-Tabataba'i, is reported to have quoted their mentor in practical gnosis, Ayatullah Qadhi al-Tabataba'i as having said:

My teacher, Marhum Qadhi (may his spirit be sanctified) said to me that it is impossible for a human being to attain the station of *tawhid* [proximity to God] without the path of Sayyid al-Shuhada'.⁴

And 'Allama al-Tabataba'i is reported to have said:

That Hadhrat [i.e. Imam al-Husayn (AS)] has great attention towards the wayfarers of the path of God in removing the veil and impediments of the 'path of God'.⁵

One of the excellent ways of establishing contact with Imam al-Husayn (AS) is through offering salutations to his exalted personality (*Ziyarat*). This can be achieved either in front of his radiant tomb in Karbala, or in the environs of one's house observing some specific etiquettes.

The secret however is that the *za'ir*, one who performs the *Ziyarat*, must yearn to attain the apex of the meaning of what he recites and unite with the spirit of the *mazur* (the visited one). The grand Ayatullah Jawadi Amuli in his masterpiece '*Adabe Finaye Muqarraban*' says:

Ziyarat is the mystical presence of the fervent lover (*'ashiq*) in the dwelling of the Beloved; it is the visitor's passionate encounter of the abode of the visited one; it is the lover's expression of intense love and consideration for the beloved; it is when the enamored one sincerely gives his heart in the alley of the possessor of the heart...⁶

The present commentary tries to examine and reflect on one of the well-known *ziyarat* that many of the Muslims recite with great zeal and devotion. Most of the Shi'a Muslims express their veneration and sorrow when they recite this sublime *Ziyarat* on the day of 'Ashura'. However, the Infallible Imams of the Ahl al-Bayt (AS) have taught us to recite it very often. Besides its ample merits, it is a program of revolution for the sleeping masses.

The crux of the *Ziyarat* is *al-tabarri*' and *al-tawalli*, which can correctly be translated as 'fleeing from imperfection' and 'seeking perfection', or in the beautiful words of every Muslim *La ilaha illa Allah* – Besides Allah– the Only Beloved, there is no other *ilah* (beloved). The Name Allah exemplifies all the perfect attributes of the Divine Essence, which the human being has been molded to appreciate and naturally seek. The Holy Qur'an says:

'...the innate nature of Allah, upon which the human beings were molded...'(30:30).

Therefore the *Ziyarat* in reality is a call to the unsullied innate disposition (*fitra*) of the human being.

In expressing veneration and seeking the higher levels of peace for Imam al-Husayn (AS) we are trying to unite with his ideas, thoughts and towering volition, and in cursing his opponents, who overtly declared themselves to be Muslims and believers, but were extensions of the hypocrites, we are trying to flee from all their ideas, thoughts and actions. Hence this recital trains the reciter to overhaul himself and unite with the spirit of the sacred Imam (AS). In fact, as we shall come to observe in this *Ziyarat* later, one of the beautiful supplications taught to us when expressing our greetings to the Imam is to seek spiritual harmony with the Imam (AS) in both this world as well as the Hereafter. We say later in this *Ziyarat*:

فَأَسْأَلُ اللَّهَ الَّذِي أَكْرَمَنِي بِمَعْرِفَتِكُمْ وَمَعْرِفَةِ أَوْلِيَائِكُمْ وَرَزَقَنِي الْبِرَاءَةَ مِنْ أَعْدَائِكُمْ
أَنْ يَجْعَلَنِي مَعَكُمْ فِي الدُّنْيَا وَالْآخِرَةِ

So I ask Allah, who ennobled me by knowing you and knowing your friends, and enabled me to seek remoteness from your enemies, to place me in your company in this world and the Hereafter.

Understanding the aforementioned obliges every high-spirited seeker of truth to aim for the achievement of the crux of the *Ziyarat* rather than be selfishly motivated to gain personal benefits. The rewards of the *Ziyarat* which are both sacred and sublime should not be the only factor to lead us to recite it. It is the natural love for the Imam (AS) who exemplifies the Divine Attributes in himself that should transport us to recite this humble presentation. In fact some traditions, as we shall soon consider, clearly state that whosoever visits Imam al-Husayn (AS) in Karbala is as if he has visited Allah at His Throne.⁷

Another very important point to bear in mind is that because the reciter of this *Ziyarat* has been guaranteed by the Imams (AS) that his needs would be fulfilled, he must be very careful in distinguishing 'that which is really a need' from 'that which is not really a need'. The great saint Ayatullah Haddad al-Musawi, a contemporary of 'Allama al-Tabataba'i, would see people clinging onto the radiant enclosure where Imam al-Husayn (AS) is buried, and instead of seeking their real needs, asking for those things that would increase the burden that they had already accumulated. He is reported to have said:

إِنَّ أَكْثَرَ النَّاسِ حِينَمَا يَذْهَبُونَ إِلَى زِيَارَةِ الْعَتَبَاتِ الْمُقَدَّسَةِ يَقْفُونَ مَاسِكِي
الضَّرِيحِ فَيَتَوَسَّلُونَ بِالْإِمَامِ لِحَوَائِجِهِمُ الْمَادِّيَّةِ فَيَحْمِلُونَ ثِقَلًا عَلَى ثِقْلِهِمْ وَلَمْ
يَسْأَلُوا الْإِمَامَ بِأَنْ يَأْخُذَ مِنْهُمْ ثِقْلَهُمْ وَهُوَ التَّعَلُّقُ بِالْدُّنْيَا، بَلْ يَسْأَلُونَهُ بِأَنْ يُعْطِيَهُمْ
بَيْتًا أَوْ وَلَدًا أَوْ زَوْجًا أَوْ سَيَّارَةً، وَمَا سَمِعْنَا عَنْ أَحَدٍ دَخَلَ بِخِدْمَتِهِ وَقَالَ لَهُ خُذْ
مِنِّي كَذَا وَكَذَا

When most of the people visit the holy shrines, they stand holding fast onto the enclosures of the graves and ask the Imam (AS) to mediate on their behalf, so that their material needs are fulfilled. Consequently, they add a burden over their burden. They do not ask the Imam (AS) to remove their burden which is ‘attachment to the world’; rather they ask for a house, an off spring, a wife or a car; and never have we heard from anyone who entered in his service, and asked him: ‘Relieve me from such and such a thing.’⁸

In one of his lessons on practical ethics (*akhlaq*), Ayatullah Mujtahidi (may Allah elevate his status) narrates the following incident:

حاج شیخ عبدالکریم حائری (ره) را در حرم امام دیدند که گریه می کند و به امام می گوید: آقا جان من مجتهد شده ام، ولی می خواهم آدم بشوم.

Haj Shaykh ‘Abd al-Karim Ha`iri [the founder of the Islamic Seminary of Qum] was seen in the haram of Imam al-Husayn (AS) weeping and telling the Imam (AS): O dear master, I have become a juristconsult (*mujtahid*), but I want to become a [perfect] human being.⁹

Some traditions clearly teach us about the ultimate purpose of *Ziyarat*. Observe the following:

1. Safwan bin Mihran is reported to have said:

عَنْ أَبِي عَبْدِ اللَّهِ قَالَ: مَنْ زَارَ قَبْرَ الْحُسَيْنِ وَهُوَ يُرِيدُ اللَّهَ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ شِيعَةَ جِبْرَائِيلَ وَمِيكَائِيلَ وَإِسْرَافِيلَ حَتَّى يَرِدَ إِلَى مَنْزِلِهِ.

Imam al-Sadiq (AS) said: ‘Whosoever visits the grave of al-Husayn (AS) while **he seeks Allah**, the Invincible and Exalted, Jibra`il, Mika`il, and Israfil accompany him until he returns back to his house.’¹⁰

2. Mu`ammar is reported to have said: I heard Zayd bin ‘Ali (AS) saying:

مَنْ زَارَ قَبْرَ الْحُسَيْنِ بْنِ عَلِيٍّ لَا يُرِيدُ بِهِ إِلَّا اللَّهَ تَعَالَى غُفِرَ لَهُ جَمِيعُ ذُنُوبِهِ وَلَوْ كَانَتْ مِثْلُ زَبَدِ الْبَحْرِ، فَاسْتَكْثَرُوا مِنْ زِيَارَتِهِ يَغْفِرُ اللَّهُ لَكُمْ ذُنُوبَكُمْ.

Whosoever visits the grave of al-Husayn bin ‘Ali (AS) while he **does not seek thereby save Allah**, Allah would forgive all his sins even if they be like the foam of the ocean; therefore, visit him often, and Allah would forgive your sins.¹¹

Seeking ‘Allah’ as mentioned in the abovementioned narrations refers to yearning for Allah’s proximity, which in reality is perfecting oneself to attain the attributes of Almighty Allah. If this is the purpose behind *Ziyarat*, the visitor would naturally struggle for a complete unity with religion and divine values.

Before we begin the commentary of this radiant *Ziyarat*, which is also reckoned to be among the sacred traditions¹² (*ahadith qudsiyya*), and understand both its particular as well as its universal import, it is imperative to generally know the significance of *Ziyarat*, and its exalted purpose.

Meaning of Ziyarat

The word ‘*Ziyarat*’ is derived from the word “*zawr*” which means to deflect or draw away from something. A lie is called *zur* because it deflects from the path of truth. The *za’ir* is known to be so, because he deflects from other than “the one he intends to visit”. That is why some lexicographers translate “*Ziyarat*” to mean intention (*qasd*), for the one who deflects from other than a certain entity intends the entity. Al-Fayumi, a well-known lexicographer in his authoritative lexicon *al-Misbah al-Munir* says:

وَالزِّيَارَةُ فِي الْعُرْفِ قَصْدُ الْمَزُورِ إِكْرَامًا لَهُ وَاسْتِنَاسًا بِهِ

The conventional meaning of *al-Ziyarat* is to intend the one to be visited, for his veneration and intimacy.¹³

And it is said that the reason why *Ziyarat* is referred to as visiting the saintly human beings, is because it is to deflect from the material routine and draw away from the corporeal world and incline towards the world of spirit, while one is present in the corporeal environment and maintains one’s bodily form.¹⁴

Sometimes *Ziyarat* is translated as ‘*ittihad al-za’ir bi-al mazur*’ (the unity of the visitor with the visited one). In simpler words: ‘to color oneself with the attributes of the visited one’. This definition does not contradict the former definitions, for ‘seeking and uniting with the attributes of the *mazur* (visited one)’ is nothing but ‘deflecting and drawing away from attributes contrary to the *mazur*’. In a subtler expression, we can say ‘*Ziyarat* is to flee from imperfection while struggling for perfection’.¹⁵

Allusions of this reality can also be gotten from the Qur`anic verse:

‘And flee towards Allah’ (51:50).

Imam al-Sadiq (AS) is reported¹⁶ to have commented on this verse saying “*ay hujju*” (It means ‘perform *hajj*’). And the literal meaning of *hajj* is *qasd* (intention). In a conversation he had with his son Zayd bin ‘Ali, Imam Zayn al-‘Abidin (AS) says:

وَمَعْنَى قَوْلِهِ عَزَّوَجَلَّ: ﴿فَفِرُّوا إِلَى اللَّهِ﴾ يَعْنِي حُجُّوا إِلَى بَيْتِ اللَّهِ، يَا بُنَيَّ إِنَّ
الْكَعْبَةَ بَيْتُ اللَّهِ فَمَنْ حَجَّ بَيْتَ اللَّهِ فَقَدْ قَصَدَ إِلَى اللَّهِ...

And the meaning of Allah's speech "And flee to Allah..." is *Hujju ila baytillah* (Intend the house of Allah); O my dear young son, surely the Ka'ba is the house of Allah; therefore, whosoever intends the house of Allah, has surely intended Allah... 17

Therefore *hajj*, as it is correctly conveyed, is not only 'hajju bayt Allah al-Haram' (intending the sacred House of Allah), but *hajj Allah* (intending Allah) as the verse explicitly conveys: *fa firru ila Allah* (so escape towards Allah). And escaping towards Allah is seeking His noble attributes and fleeing from the contrary. And *hajj* if performed with its proper etiquettes, as the experts of the kernel of Islamic law mention, enables one to attain such noble attributes.

Some narrations explicitly say that doing *Ziyarat* of the Holy Prophet (S) and the infallible Imams (AS) is like doing the *Ziyarat* of Allah. Consider the following traditions:

عَنْ زَيْدِ الشَّحَّامِ قَالَ: قُلْتُ لِأَبِي عَبْدِ اللَّهِ: مَا لِمَنْ زَارَ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ؟ قَالَ: كَمَنْ زَارَ
اللَّهَ عَزَّوَجَلَّ فَوْقَ عَرْشِهِ...

Zayd al-Shahham is reported to have said: I asked Abu 'Abdillah (al-Sadiq (AS)): What is the reward for one who visits the Messenger of Allah? The Imam (AS) said: 'It is like one who has visited Allah at His throne ('*arsh*).'¹⁸

عَنْ زَيْدِ الشَّحَّامِ، عَنْ أَبِي عَبْدِ اللَّهِ قَالَ: مَنْ زَارَ قَبْرَ الْحُسَيْنِ بْنِ عَلِيٍّ عَارِفًا بِحَقِّهِ
كَانَ كَمَنْ زَارَ اللَّهَ فِي عَرْشِهِ...

Zayd al-Shahham is reported to have said: Abu 'Abdillah (al-Sadiq (AS)) said: Whosoever visits the grave of al-Husayn (AS) with the knowledge of his status is like one who visits Allah at His Throne. 19

عَنْ جَابِرِ الْجُعْفِيِّ، قَالَ: دَخَلْتُ عَلَى جَعْفَرِ بْنِ مُحَمَّدٍ فِي يَوْمِ عَاشُورَاءَ، فَقَالَ لِي:
هُؤُلَاءِ زُورُ اللَّهِ وَحَقُّ عَلَى الْمَزُورِ أَنْ يُكْرِمَ الزَّائِرَ...

Jabir al-Ju'fi is reported to have said: I came to Ja'far bin Muhammad (al-Sadiq (AS)) on the day of

‘Ashura’, and he said to me: ‘These people are the visitors of Allah (*zuwwar Allah*), and it is the right of the *mazur* to honor the *za’ir*...20

The above traditions confer the implication that because the Imams (AS) are manifestations of Allah’s sublime names,21 visiting them and seeking their proximity is the same as seeking the proximity of Almighty Allah. Proximity here, we should understand, does not refer to any kind of physical closeness.

Rather, it refers to spiritual proximity. In other words, as the *za’ir* (one who deflects from other than the attributes of the *mazur*) draws spiritually closer to the Imam (AS) he in reality embellishes himself with the attributes of Almighty Allah which the Imam (AS) exemplifies according to his *limitations*. The Imams (AS), however, are sheer manifestations (*mazhahir*) of Allah’s names and thus no attribute independently belongs to other than Allah. The Holy Qur’an says:

اللَّهُ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ لَهُ الْأَسْمَاءُ الْحُسْنَى

Allah, other than Him there is no God; and to Him alone belong the Beautiful Names... (20:8)

Notice here that instead of Allah saying ‘The Beautiful Names belong to Allah’ He says ‘To Him alone belong the Beautiful Names’. In grammatical terminology, the predicate is brought before the subject. And whenever this happens, it signifies restriction. In other words ‘To Him alone [and no one else] belong the Beautiful Names’.

Those who are able to appreciate the secrets of prayer tangibly comprehend this reality in the state of *ruku’* when they vision that no one other than Almighty Allah has any perfection whatsoever. Imam Khumayni in his *Etiquettes of Prayer* says:

إِعْلَمَ أَنَّ عُمْدَةَ أَحْوَالِ الصَّلَاةِ ثَلَاثَةٌ، وَسَائِرُ الْأَعْمَالِ وَالْأَفْعَالِ مُقَدِّمَاتُهَا وَمُهَيِّئَاتُهَا، الْأَوَّلُ: الْقِيَامُ، وَالثَّانِي: لِرُكُوعِ. الثَّلَاثُ: السُّجُودُ. وَأَهْلُ الْمَعْرِفَةِ يَرَوْنَ هَذِهِ الثَّلَاثَةَ إِشَارَةً إِلَى التَّوْحِيدَاتِ الثَّلَاثَةِ... وَفِي الرُّكُوعِ تَرَكُ لِرُؤْيَةِ النَّفْسِ عَلَى حَسَبِ مَقَامِ الصِّفَاتِ وَالْأَسْمَاءِ وَرُؤْيَةِ لِمَقَامِ الْأَسْمَاءِ الْحَقِّ وَصِفَاتِهِ

Beware that the main states of prayer are three, and the rest of the acts serve as introductory and preparatory phases: (1) *qiyam*, (2) *ruku’*, and (3) *sujud*. And the men of gnosis reckon these three acts as the three kinds of unity...and in the state of *ruku’* one cannot behold himself in terms of attributes and names, and beholds God’s exclusive station of Names and Attributes. [In other words, he sees that every kind of attribute or name belongs only to God].22

Ziyarat of Believers

Islam highly encourages one to visit one's Muslim brother or sister. However, it does not emphasize on any kind of *Ziyarat* whatsoever. It encourages meaningful *Ziyarat* – *Ziyarat* with a purpose and aim.

Observe the following traditions:

Imam al-Sadiq (AS) is reported to have said:

قَالَ تَزَاوَرُوا فَإِنَّ فِي زِيَارَتِكُمْ أَحْيَاءَ لِقُلُوبِكُمْ وَذِكْرًا لِأَحَادِيثِنَا وَأَحَادِيثِنَا تُعْطِفُ
بَعْضُكُمْ عَلَى بَعْضٍ فَإِنْ أَخَذْتُمْ بِهَا رَشِدْتُمْ وَنَجَوْتُمْ وَإِنْ تَرَكْتُمُوهَا ضَلَلْتُمْ وَهَلَكْتُمْ
فَخُذُوا بِهَا وَأَنَا بِنَجَاتِكُمْ زَعِيمٌ

Visit one another, for verily in your visitation is the revival of your hearts, and a remembrance of our speeches; our speeches make you harbor affection for one another; and if you act according to them, you would be guided and saved, and if you shun them, you would go astray and perish; therefore follow them while I guarantee your salvation.²³

And Imam al-Baqir (AS) is reported to have said:

تَزَاوَرُوا فِي بُيُوتِكُمْ فَإِنَّ ذَلِكَ حَيَاةٌ لِأَمْرِنَا رَحِمَ اللَّهُ عَبْدًا أَحْيَا أَمْرَنَا

Visit one another in your homes for surely in that is the revival of our affair; may Allah's Mercy be upon one who revives our affair.²⁴

It should be noted that the revival of the affair discussed in the above traditions is nothing but the revival of Islamic values, for the Ahl al-Bayt (AS) are protectors of Islamic values and to remember them and their teachings is to elevate the human spirit in reality. One should not conjecture that there is any personal gain that these infallible leaders of truth derive from such gatherings. Rather it is their followers who benefit.

Another important point to bear in mind is that 'the revival of their affair' cannot be merely achieved by thoughts and words. We must sow the seeds of resolution in our visitations in order to reap the fruits of applying the teachings of the Ahl al-Bayt (AS).

So far *Ziyarat* has been reduced to visitation in the earthly abode. The Islamic worldview, however, due its sharp and accurate cognition of reality, as taught by the Holy Qur'an, the Holy Prophet (S) and his infallible successors, does not limit *Ziyarat* to the corporeal world. It rather believes that human beings

can communicate with those who have transcended this limited world of matter and can listen to them as well. In our daily prayer, we address the Holy Prophet (S) as follows:

السَّلَامُ عَلَيْكَ أَيُّهَا النَّبِيُّ وَرَحْمَةُ اللَّهِ وَبَرَكَاتُهُ

Peace be unto you O Prophet and may Allah's mercy and blessings be on you.²⁵

This statement presumes the presence of the *mukhatab* (the addressee). And therefore we believe that the Prophet (S) is present and can behold our presence too.

One of the important etiquettes of entering the shrine of the Holy Prophet (S) and the infallible Imams of the Ahl al-Bayt (AS) is to read the well-known *idhn al-dukhl* (recital of permission to enter). The *za'ir* (visitor) adopts a very humble attitude, and appreciating the presence of the Holy Prophet (S) seeks his permission to enter his sanctuary. In this well-known recital, we say:

...وَأَعْلَمُ أَنَّ رَسُولَكَ وَخُلَفَاءَكَ أَحْيَاءٌ عِنْدَكَ يُرْزَقُونَ، يَرُونَ مَقَامِي وَيَسْمَعُونَ
كَلَامِي، وَيُرَدُّونَ سَلَامِي...

...and I know that Your Apostle and vicegerents (upon whom be peace) are alive, receiving sustenance in Your proximity, they see where I stand presently, and hear my speech and respond to my salutation...²⁶

Unlike those who consider the human being as an entity which perishes after the worldly death, Islam teaches mankind that death is a purgatory and bridge to the realm beyond. In fact, to be more accurate, death is “tearing of some veils” from the higher reality of everything. Great people like Imam ‘Ali (AS), due to their intense purity, could boldly claim that they can behold the ultimate form of the reality of this world while they still exist in this earthly abode. In one of his famous dictums, Imam ‘Ali A is reported to have said:

لَوْ كُشِفَ الْغَطَاءُ مَا أَزْدَدْتُ يَقِينًا

If the curtains were unveiled nothing would be added to my conviction.²⁷

The tearing of veils, however, should not be considered as being limited to the Prophets (SA) and infallible Imams (AS). Those human beings who are entirely submissive to the laws of Almighty Allah

and have purified their hearts can also relatively enjoy such exalted positions. In fact, Almighty Allah calls the human beings to appreciate the kernel of this world in the following verse:

أَلَمْ يَنْظُرُوا فِي مَلَكُوتِ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ

And do they not look into the kernel of the heavens and the earth? (7: 185)

Hence there is an invitation to tear the veils that we have created for ourselves by sinning. In another interesting dictum of the Holy Prophet (S) we are told:

لَوْلَا أَنَّ الشَّيَاطِينَ يَحُومُونَ عَلَى قُلُوبِ بَنِي آدَمَ لَنَظَرُوا إِلَى مَلَكُوتِ السَّمَاوَاتِ

Was it not for the Satans circling around the hearts of the off-spring of Adam, they surely would have beheld the kernel of the heavens.²⁸

Therefore, the more purity we enjoy, the better we can communicate with those exalted spirits who have left this material world, are alive in the real sense of the word, and due to their exalted station of existential mediation (about which we shall soon discuss in detail) can influence the world of contingent existence and even benefit us in different ways. There have been ample narratives indicating how people visited the shrines of the Ahl al-Bayt (AS) and solved very great problems in their lives.

Our aim of *Ziyarat*, however, must transcend seeking personal benefits. It is therefore important to first decipher the purpose of *Ziyarat*, and the reason why our holy Imams (AS) would teach us particular recitals for visiting the tomb of their grandfather Imam al-Husayn (AS). Of course this does not mean that one should not seek personal benefits from the great personalities, but one must at least have realized the ultimate purpose of *Ziyarat*.

It is through such realization, dear readers, that rain falls from the hearts and embraces every human being, rather every creature beyond time and place. Such realizations tear the veils of the past and future, and release the human being into the world of perpetual bliss and ecstasy. Soon the reader shall understand the words of this nondescript, for the world of Ahl al-Bayt (AS) is a world yet unknown. Their followers have no share save appreciating the tip of the iceberg:

Imam 'Ali (AS) is reported to have said to Abu Dharr:

اعْلَمْ يَا أَبَا ذَرٍّ أَنَّا عَبْدُ اللَّهِ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ وَخَلِيفَتُهُ عَلَى عِبَادِهِ لَا تَجْعَلُونَا أَرْبَابًا وَقُولُوا

فِي فَضْلِنَا مَا شِئْتُمْ فَإِنَّكُمْ لَا تَبْلُغُونَ كُنْهَ مَا فِيْنَا وَلَا نِهَائِيَّتَهُ

Know O Abu Dharr that I am [only] a slave of Allah and His vicegerent over His servants; do not consider us as lords and you may say whatever you want about our merits, for you cannot appreciate the essence of our perfection, nor its zenith...29

And in another tradition he (AS) is reported to have said:

لَا يُقَاسُ بِآلِ مُحَمَّدٍ مِنْ هَذِهِ الْأُمَّةِ أَحَدٌ

...None from this *umma* can be compared with the progeny of Muhammad (upon whom be peace)...30

The Purpose of Ziyarat

One of the fundamental requisites of understanding the purpose of *Ziyarat* is to have a correct worldview. If we realize the purpose of human creation, and submit our volition to our intellectual decision, our deeds would be directed towards our eternal salvation. The purpose of human creation according to Qur`an and Sunna is to worship Almighty Allah:

وَمَا خَلَقْتُ الْجِنَّ وَالْإِنْسَ إِلَّا لِيَعْبُدُونِ

And I have not created the jinn and the men save that they worship me alone. (51:56)

And worship without knowledge carries no meaning. This is because worship is not a mere exercise without any sense of devotion. *'Ibadah* in the literal sense is defined as:

الْعِبَادَةُ هِيَ نَصْبُ الْعَبْدِ نَفْسَهُ فِي مَقَامِ الْمَمْلُوكِيَّةِ لِرَبِّهِ

'Ibada is when the servant places himself in the position of being a bondsman of his Lord.31

And this cannot transpire without the knowledge of the Creator. It is by appreciating His real ownership32 of the entire world of creation, His knowledge over all things, His omnipotence and omnipresence that the human being is overtaken and humbles himself down before Allah. He also realizes that the true Lord and Master is none but his Creator, and thus he places himself in the station of being an obedient

slave of Almighty Allah. Imam al-Husayn (AS), underlining the clear link between knowledge and worship is reported to have said:

إِنَّ اللَّهَ جَلَّ ذِكْرُهُ مَا خَلَقَ الْعِبَادَ إِلَّا لِيَعْرِفُوهُ فَإِذَا عَرَفُوهُ عَبَدُوهُ فَإِذَا عَبَدُوهُ
اسْتَغْنَوْا بِعِبَادَتِهِ عَنِ عِبَادَةِ مَا سِوَاهُ...

Surely Allah (SwT) did not Create His servants except for knowing Him, and when they know him, they would worship Him, and when they worship Him, it would suffice them from worshipping other than Him...33

The worship that results from prior knowledge reaps knowledge itself. Knowledge before worship, however, is mostly intellectual (*'aqli*) and conceptual (*tasawwuri*). It is the result of rationally establishing the existence of God and His attributes as well as the utter poverty and dependence of the entire creation on His infinite existence. Having realized this the impartial servant worships with veneration and awe. If such worship was out of sincerity, then he is availed with a higher form of knowledge, which is beyond the realm of intellect. It is known in the language of traditions as '*yaqin* (conviction)' and 'the vision of the heart' which is knowledge by presence (*al-'ilm al-hudhuri*). Perhaps the following verse of the Qur'an alludes to the close link between worship and conviction:

وَأَعْبُدْ رَبَّكَ حَتَّىٰ يَأْتِيَكَ الْيَقِينُ

And worship your Lord so that conviction comes to you³⁴

In some of the *ziyarat* taught to us by the infallible Imams (AS) we are taught to address the Imams declaring that they had attained the exalted station of *yaqin* through sincere worship. Consider the following examples:

1. In one of the *ziyarat* of the Holy Prophet (S) we are taught by Imam 'Ali (AS) to address his noble being as follows:

...وَأَشْهَدُ أَنَّكَ قَدْ نَصَحْتَ لِأُمَّتِكَ، وَجَاهَدْتَ فِي سَبِيلِ رَبِّكَ، وَعَبَدْتَهُ حَتَّىٰ أَتَاكَ
الْيَقِينُ...

...And I bear witness that you gave counsel to your nation and struggled in the way of your Lord, and worshipped Him until conviction (*al-yaqin*) came to you...35

2. In another *Ziyarat* we address Imam al-Husayn (AS) as follows:

...يَا أَبَا عَبْدِ اللَّهِ أَشْهَدُ أَنَّكَ قَدْ بَلَغْتَ عَنِ اللَّهِ عَزَّوَجَلَّ مَا أُمِرْتَ بِهِ وَلَمْ تَخْشَ
أَحَدًا غَيْرَهُ وَجَاهَدْتَ فِي سَبِيلِهِ وَعَبَدْتَهُ صَادِقًا حَتَّى أَتَاكَ الْيَقِينُ...

...O Aba 'Abdillah, I bear witness that surely you conveyed what you were ordered by Allah (the Invincible and Majestic) and other than Him you never feared anyone, and you struggled in His way, and worshipped Him truthfully until conviction (*al-yaqin*) came to you...36

3. In one of the *ziyarat* of Imam al-Ridha (AS) we are taught to address him as follows:

...أَشْهَدُ أَنَّكَ قَدْ أَقَمْتَ الصَّلَاةَ وَآتَيْتَ الزَّكَاةَ وَأَمَرْتَ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَنَهَيْتَ عَنِ
الْمُنْكَرِ وَعَبَدْتَ اللَّهَ مُخْلِصًا حَتَّى أَتَاكَ الْيَقِينُ، السَّلَامُ عَلَيْكَ يَا أَبَا الْحَسَنِ...

...I bear witness that you kept prayer upright and gave the poor tax and invited to what was good and forbade the evil and worshipped Allah sincerely until conviction (*al-yaqin*) came to you; peace be upon you O Aba al-Hasan...37

There are stages of *yaqin*. The *yaqin* spoken about in the above traditions is beyond the comprehension of the likes of me and you. Obviously it is a level of knowledge by presence, but beyond our description.

Having realized the fundamental role of sincere worship, our *ziyarat*, which also rank among acts of worship, should serve as catalysts to earn the exalted station of appreciating the truth by the vision of the heart. Such a state is only possible for a person who is utterly submissive to Allah.

The *Ziyarat* therefore should teach the *za'ir* the lesson of utter submission to Allah. In other words, the *Ziyarat* should be a means of uniting the *za'ir* with Abu 'Abdillah (an appellation depicting Imam al-Husayn (AS)'s utter submission to Allah). And this can easily be attained after we understand the meaning of the *Ziyarat* and exemplify its teachings in ourselves.

If we read the *Ziyarat* for our lower ambitions in life, there would be no difference between us and the laity who have busied themselves with the world of matter. Therefore we should bear an exalted aspiration and aim for a great transformation in order to unite with the spirit of al-Husayn (AS).

Readers do appreciate that the reason why the allies of contemporary formalists hamper us from expressing our sorrow near the graves of the infallible leaders, is because they have realized the revolution it can create in the hearts.

Imam al-Husayn (AS) is a symbol of uprising against falsehood even at the cost of the sacrifice of every possession. Our *Ziyarat* which is an endeavor of unity and harmony with his noble spirit, therefore, should be a declaration of readiness rather than a mere transaction or habitual recitation.

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1. Al-Qanduzi, Yanabi' al-Mawadda, v.2, p.90
 2. Sayyid 'Adil al-'Alawi, Risalat Islamiyya, v.6 p. 183
 3. Ayatullah al-Tabrizi, al-Muraqibat, p.286
 4. Sayyid 'Ali al-Musawi al-Haddad,'Arifun fi al-Rihab al-Qudsiyya, p.47
 5. Hadi Hashimiyan, Daryaye 'Irfan, p.97
 6. Ayatullah Jawadi Amuli, Adab-e-Finaye Muqarriban, v.1, p. 17
 7. Ibn Qulawayh, Kamil al-Ziyarat, p. 147
 8. Sayyid Ali al-Musawi al-Haddad,'Arifun fi al-Rihab al-Qudsiyyah, p. 146
 9. See the following website:
http://www.tebyan.net/Religion_Thoughts/TheLearned/Contemporary/2008/1/2... [1]
 10. Ibn Qulawayh, Kamil al-Ziyarat, p. 274
 11. Ibid.
 12. Ibid., p.333
 13. Ahmad al-Fayumi, al-Misbah al-Munir, p. 136
 14. Ayatullah Jawadi Amuli, Adabe Finaye Muqarriban, v.1, p. 23
 15. It is important to note that fleeing from imperfection is the same as fleeing towards perfection.
 16. 'Allama al-Tabrasi, Tafsir Majma' al-Bayan, v.9, p. 268
 17. 'Allama al-Majlisi, Bihar al-Anwar, v.3, p. 321
 18. Shaykh al-Kulayni, Al-Kafi, v.4, p. 585. It should be noted here that 'throne' does not refer to the material throne for Almighty Allah is greater than such limitations.
 19. Ibn Qulwayh, Kamil al-Ziyarat, p. 324
 20. Ibid.
 21. A reference to the tradition of Imam al-Sadiq عليه السلام: Nahnu al-Asma' al-Husna' We are the Most Beautiful Names of Allah.'
 22. Imam Khumayni, al-Adab al-Ma'nawiyya li al-Salat, p. 523
 23. 'Allama al-Majlisi, Bihar al-Anwar, v. 17, p. 258
 24. Ibid., v. 17, p. 352
 25. Ayatullah al-Sistani, Minhaj al-Salihin, v.1, p. 226
 26. Shaykh 'Abbas Qummi, Mafatih al-Jinan, new ed., p. 380
 27. 'Allama al-Majlisi, Bihar al-Anwar, v. 40, p. 153
 28. 'Allama al-Majlisi, Bihar al-Anwar, v. 6, p. 332
 29. Ibid., v. 62, p. 7
 30. Ibid., v. 32, p.11 7
 31. 'Allama al-Tabataba'i, Tafsir Al-Mizan, v.1, p.24
 32. Readers must differentiate between real ownership in which the existence and subsistence of an entity is entirely dependent on the owner, and legal ownership in which the existence and subsistence of a property is independent of the owner.
 33. 'Allama al-Majlisi, Bihar al-Anwar, v.23, p.83
 34. Holy Qur'an, 15:99
 35. al-Himyari al-Qummi, Qurb al-Isnad, p. 382
 36. Shaykh al-Kulayni, al-Kafi, v.4, p. 573
 37. Shaykh al-Saduq, 'Uyun Akhbar al-Ridha عليه السلام, v.1, p. 302

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[1] http://www.tebyan.net/Religion_Thoughts/TheLearned/Contemporary/2008/1/29/59850.html