

Skepticism and Perplexity

The answers of al-Sayyid al-Sadr were clear and convincing, but it was very difficult for a person like me to comprehend them. Twenty-five years of my life had been based on the idea of glorifying and respecting the Companions of the Prophet, especially the Rightly Guided Caliphs. The Messenger of Allah commanded us to follow their teachings, in particular Abu Bakr al-Siddiq and Umar al-Farooq, but I had never heard their names mentioned since I arrived in Iraq. Instead, I heard strange names that I had never come across before, and that there were twelve Imams, and a claim that the Messenger of Allah had stated before his death that Imam 'Ali should be his successor.

How could I believe all that (that all Muslims and the Companions of the Prophet- who was the best of people -, after the death of the Prophet agreed to stand against 'Ali - may Allah honor him) when we had been taught from childhood that the Companions of the Prophet - may Allah bless them all - respected 'Ali and knew very well what kind of man he was. They knew that he was the husband of Fatima al-Zahra and the father of al-Hasan and al-Husayn and the gate to the city of knowledge.

Our Master 'Ali knew the quality of Abu Bakr al-Siddiq, who became a Muslim before anybody else, and accompanied the Prophet to the cave, as is mentioned by Allah, the Mighty, in the Qur'an, and whom the Messenger of Allah charged with the leadership of the prayers during his illness, and said about him, if I was taking a very close friend, I would have chosen Abu Bakr." Because of all that, the Muslims elected him as their caliph.

Imam 'Ali knew the position of our master Umar, with whom Allah glorified Islam, and the Messenger of Allah called him al-Farooq, he who separates right from wrong. Also Imam 'Ali knew the position of our master Uthman, in whose presence the angels of the Merciful felt shy, and who organized al-Usrah's army, and who was named by the Messenger of Allah as "Dhu al-Nurayn", the man who is endowed with two lights.

How could our brothers, al-Shi'a, ignore or pretend to ignore all that, and make these personalities just ordinary characters subject to all worldly whims and greed so that they deviated from the right path and disobeyed the orders of the Messenger after his death. This was inconceivable since we know that these people used to hasten to execute the orders of the Messenger; they killed their sons and fathers and

members of their tribes for the sake of glorifying Islam and its ultimate victory. He who would kill his father and son for the sake of Allah and His Messenger could not be subject to worldly and transitory ambitions such as the position of Caliph, and ignoring the orders of the Messenger of Allah.

Yes, because of all that I could not believe all the Shi'a were saying, in spite of the fact that I was convinced about many things. I remained in a state of doubt and perplexity: doubtful because of what the Shii learned scholars Ulama said to me, which I found sensible and logical; and perplexed because I could not believe that the Companions of the Prophet, may Allah bless them all, would sink to such a low moral stand and become ordinary people like us, neither sharpened by the light of the Message nor able to be enlightened by Muhammad.

O my God, how could that be? Could the Companions of the Prophet be at the level described by the Shi'a? The important thing is that doubt and perplexity were the beginning of weakness and the realization that there were many hidden issues to be uncovered before reaching the truth.

My friend came, then we travelled to Karbala, and there I lived the tragedy of our master al-Husayn in the same way his followers, and only then did I know that he had not died an ordinary death. People tend to crowd around his grave like butterflies and cry with such sorrow and grief that I have never seen before, as if al-Husayn had just been martyred. I heard speakers who aroused the feelings of people when describing the incident at Karbala, accompanied by crying and wailing, and soon the listener loses control of himself and collapses.

I cried and cried and let myself go as if crushed, and felt a relief that I had never experienced before that day; I felt that I had been in the ranks of al-Husayn's enemies and had suddenly changed sides to be one of his followers who sacrificed themselves for his sake. The speaker was reciting the story of al-Hurr, who was one of the commanders in charge of fighting al-Husayn, who stood in the middle of the battlefield shaking like a leaf, and when one of his friends asked him, "Are you afraid of death?" He answered, "No, by Allah, but I am choosing between heaven and hell." Then he kicked his horse and went towards al-Husayn and asked, "Is there a repentance, O son of the Messenger of Allah?"

When I heard that, I could not control myself and fell on the floor crying and felt as if I was in the position of al-Hurr, asking al-Husayn, "Is there repentance, O son of the Messenger of Allah? Forgive me O son of the Messenger of Allah. The voice of the speaker was so moving that people started crying and wailing, and when my friend heard my cries, he embraced me, like a mother embracing her child, and started crying and calling, "O Husayn...O Husayn..."

These were moments, during which I learnt that meaning of real crying and felt that my tears washed my heart and body from the inside, and then I understood the meaning of the Messenger's saying: If you knew what I know, you would have laughed little and cried more.

I was depressed throughout the day, although my friend tried to re-assure me and cheer me up by offering me some refreshments, but I had lost my appetite completely. I asked him to repeat the story of

the martyrdom of al-Husayn, for I did not know much about it except the fact that our religious leaders told us that the enemies of Islam killed our masters Umar, Uthman and 'Ali, and that the same enemies killed our master al-Husayn; and that is all we knew. In fact we used to celebrate Ashura, as one of the festival days of Islam; alms were distributed and various types of food were cooked and the young boys went to their elders who gave them money to buy sweets and toys.

However, there are a few customs in some villages during Ashura: people do not light fires or do any kind of work. People do not get married or celebrate a happy occasion. We usually accept them at face value without any explanation given, and strangely enough, our religious leaders talk to us about the greatness of Ashura and how blessed it is.

After that we went to visit the grave of al-Abbas, the brother of al-Husayn. I did not know who he was, but my friend informed me about his bravery. We also met many pious religious leaders whose names I cannot recall in detail, but I can still recall their surnames: Bahr al-Ulum, al-Sayyid al-Hakim, Kashif al-Ghita, al-Yasin, al-Tabatabai, al-Feiruzabadi, Asad Haidar, and others, who honoured me with their company.

They are truly pious religious leaders, possessing all the signs of dignity and respect, and the Shi'a population respects them and gives them one fifth of their incomes.

Through these donations they manage the affairs of the religious schools, open new schools, establish presses and assist students who come to them from all over the Islamic world.

They are independent and not connected in any way with the rulers; unlike our religious leaders who would not do or say anything without the approval of the authorities, who pay their salaries and appoint them, and remove them whenever they want.

It was a new world that I had discovered, or rather, Allah had discovered for me. I started to enjoy it having previously kept away from it, and gradually blended with it after I had opposed it. I gained new ideas from this new world, and it inspired me with the quest for knowledge and research until I reached the desired truth which always comes to mind whenever I read the saying of the prophet:

The sons of Israel were divided into seventy-one groups, and the Christians were divided into seventy-two groups, and my people will be divided into seventy-three groups, all of which, except one group will end up in Hell.

Here is not the place to talk about the various religions which claim to be the right one and that the rest are wrong, but I am surprised and astonished whenever I read this saying. My surprise and astonishment is not at the saying itself, but at those Muslims who read it and repeat it in their speeches and brush over it without analyzing it or even attempting to find out which the group is going to be saved and which are going to be doomed.

The interesting thing is that each group claims that it is the saved one. At the end of the saying came the following: "Who are they, O Messenger of Allah?" He answered, "Those who follow my path and the path of my Companions." Is there any group that does not adhere to the Book (Qur'an) and Sunnah (the prophetic tradition), and is there any Islamic group that claims otherwise? If Imams Malik or Abu Hanifah or al-Shafii or Ahmed ibn Hanbel were asked, wouldn't each and every one of them claim that he adheres to the teachings of the Qur'an and the Right Sunnah'?

These are the Sunni Madhahib, in addition to the various Shi'i-groups, which I had believed at one time to be deviant and corrupt. All of them claim to adhere to the Qur'an and the correct Sunnah which has been handed down through Ahl al-Bayt (the Prophets Family) who knew best about what they were saying. Is it possible that they are all right, as they claim?

This is not possible, because the Prophets saying states the opposite, unless the saying is invented or fabricated. But that is not possible either, because the saying is accepted by both the Shi'a and Sunnis. Is it possible that the saying has no meaning? God forbid that His Messenger (saw) could utter a meaningless and aimless saying, as he only spoke words of wisdom. Therefore we are left with one possible conclusion: that there is one group which is on the right path and that the rest are wrong. Thus, the saying tends to make one confused and perplexed, but in the meantime it encourages research and study by those who want to be saved.

Because of that, I became doubtful and perplexed after my meeting with the Shi'a, for who knows, they might be saying the truth! So should I not study and investigate?

Islam, through the Qur'an and Sunnah ordered me to study, investigate and to compare, and Allah, the Most High said:

"And (as for) those who strive hard for Us, We will most certainly guide them in Our ways." (Holy Qur'an 29:69)

He also said: "Those who listen to the word then follow the best of it; these are they whom Allah has guided, and those it is who are the men of understanding." (Holy Qur'an 39: 18)

The Messenger of Allah (saw) said: "Study your religion until it is said that you are mad."

Therefore research and comparison are legal obligations for every responsible person.

Having reached this decision and resolution, and with this promise to myself and my Shi'i friends from Iraq, I embraced them and bade them farewell, full of sorrow since I liked them and they liked me. I felt that I had left dear and faithful friends who had sacrificed their time in order to help me. They did it out of their own choice and asked for nothing except the approval of Allah, Praise be to Him. The Prophet (saw) said, "If Allah chooses you to guide one man (to the right path), then that is worth more than all the riches on earth."

I left Iraq having spent twenty days among the Imams and their followers, and the time had passed like a nice dream from which the sleeper was loathe to awake. I left Iraq feeling sorry for the brevity of this period and sorry to leave dear friends who were full of love for Ahl-al-Bayt.

I left Iraq for the Hijaz seeking the House of Allah and the grave of the Master of the First and the Last (saw).

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