

Skepticism and Questioning

I stayed in my friend's house for three days, during which I had a rest and thought carefully about what I had heard from these people whom I had encountered and who appeared to me as if they were living on the moon. Why had people always told us nasty things about them, and why should I hate them and despise them without knowing them?

Perhaps all this had come from the rumors we hear about them that they worship 'Ali, and that they view their Imams as gods and believe in reincarnation, and worship stones rather than Allah, and they – as my father had told me after he came back from pilgrimage – came to the Prophet's grave to throw dirt on it, and were caught by the Saudis who sentenced them to death etc.

After hearing all that, it is not surprising that other Muslims hate and despise, even fight the Shi'a. But how could I believe these rumors after all I had seen with my eyes and heard with my ears.

I spent over a week amongst these people and I did not see or hear from them anything that is not compatible with logic. In fact I liked the way they worshipped, I liked their prayers, their manners, and the respect they gave to their learned people, and wished that I could be one of them. I kept asking myself, "Is it true they hate the Messenger of Allah, and every time I mentioned his name, and often I did that just to test them, they shouted from the heart "May Allah bless Muhammad and his household"?

At the beginning I thought they were hypocrites, but later I changed my mind, especially after I read some of their books in which I found a great deal of respect and veneration for the Messenger which I have never found in our books. For example, they believe in the absolute infallibility of the Prophet Muhammad (saw), before and after his mission.

Whereas we, the Sunnis, believe in his infallibility in delivering the Qur'an only, and apart from that he was just another human being, subject to committing mistakes. We have many examples to show that the Prophet was wrong and that he was corrected by his Companions. The Shi'a refuse to accept the fallibility of the Prophet while others were correct. So after that, how could I believe that they hate the Messenger of Allah? How could I? One day while I was talking to my friend I asked him to answer me frankly, and the following dialogue took place:

- You place 'Ali, may Allah be pleased with him, and may He honour him, at the same level as the prophets, because whenever I hear his name mentioned you say "Peace be on him".
- That is right whenever we mention the name of the Commander of the Faithful (Imam 'Ali or one of the Imams of his off-spring we say "Peace be upon him", but this does not mean that they are prophets. However, they are the descendants of the Prophet, and Allah has ordered us to pray for them, therefore we are allowed to say "May Allah bless them and grant them peace" as well.
- No brother, we do not say "May Allah bless him and grant him peace" except on the Prophet Muhammad (saw) and on the Prophets who came before him, and there is nothing to do with 'Ali or his descendants, may Allah be pleased with them all, in this matter.
- I would like to ask you to read more, so that you know the truth.
- Brother, which books should I read? Is it not you who told me that the books of Ahmed Amin are not the authoritative books on the Shi'a, in the meantime the Shi'a's books are not the authoritative books on us and we do not rely on them. Do you not see that the Christians' books which they refer to, state that Jesus said, "I am the son of Allah" while the Glorious Qur'an, which says the absolute truth, quotes Jesus saying

"I did not say anything to them except what you have ordered me to do, and that is to worship Allah, my God and your God." (Holy Qur'an 5:117)

- Well said! I did say that. What I want from you is this, to use one's mind and logic and to base one's argument on the Glorious Qur'an and the correct Sunna (the Prophet Muhammad's (saw) tradition) as long as we are Muslims, and if we were talking to a Jew or Christian then we would have based our argument on something else.
- Well, in which book will I find the truth? Every writer, every group and every creed claims to be the right one.
- I will give you tangible evidence which is agreed on by all Muslims regardless of their creed or group, but you do not know it.
- Say, God, grant me more knowledge.
- Have you read the commentary on the following Qur'anic verse:

"Surely Allah and His angels bless the Prophet. O you who believe call for (Divine) blessing on him and salute him always" (Holy Qur'an 33:56).

All the commentators, Shi'a and Sunnis, agreed that the Companions of the Prophet, about whom the above Qur'anic verse was revealed, cared to see the Prophet and said, "O Messenger of Allah we know

how to salute you, but we do not know how to pray on you."

He said. "Say, may Allah bless Muhammad and the household of Muhammad in the same way as you bless Ibrahim and the household of Ibrahim in the world, You are the Praise-worthy and the Glorious, and do not pray on me by the shortened (al-Batra') prayer." They said, "And what is the shortened prayer, O Messenger of Allah?" He said, "Why do you say may Allah bless Muhammad and then stop, for Allah is perfect and only accepts perfection." After that the Prophet's companions followed the Prophet's order and they performed the complete prayer.

Even Imam al-Shafii said in their honour:

"O household of the Messenger of Allah Your love is an order from Allah revealed in the Qur'an You are highly honored, and he who does not bless you, his prayer is not valid.

I listened very carefully to what he had said, and his words entered my heart and found a positive echo."

Indeed, I had read what he had said in some books but could not remember their titles, and confessed to him that when we say our blessings on the Prophet we also include all his household and Companions, but we do not specify 'Ali with the salutation, as the Shi'a do.

He asked, "What do you think of al-Bukhari?"

I said, "He is a great Sunni Imam and his book is the most reliable book after the book of Allah (the Qur'an)." Then, he stood up and pulled "Sahih al-Bukhari" from his library and searched for a particular page he wanted and gave it to read: "We have been informed by so and so that 'Ali (may Allah grant him peace) ..."

I could not believe my eyes and was very surprised to the extent that I thought it was not "Sahih al-Bukhari", and looked at the page and the cover again, and when my friend sensed my doubtful looks, he took the book from me and opened another page, it read: "Ali ibn al-Husain, may Allah grant them peace." After that I could only say to him, "Glory be to Allah." He was satisfied with my answer, so he left the room and I stayed behind thinking, reading those pages again and making sure of the book's edition, which I found had been published and distributed by al-Halabi & Sons Co. in Egypt.

– O my God, why should I be so arrogant and stubborn, for he gave me a tangible reasoning, based on one of our most reliable books, and al-Bukhari was not Shi'i at all, in fact he was a Sunni Imam and scholar.

Should I submit to them regarding the fact that 'Ali is worthy of the title "may Allah grant him peace", but I am afraid of this fact, since it might bring other subsequent facts that I do like to admit to. I was beaten twice by my friend, the first time when I accepted the non-holiness of Abdul Qadir al-Jilani, the second when I accepted that Musa al-Kazim was more important than him (i.e. al-Jilani).

Furthermore, I agreed that 'Ali was worthy of the title "may Allah grant him peace", but I did not want another defeat, for only days before I was proud of myself for being considered a learned man in Egypt

and the scholars of al-Azhar were praising me. Today I find myself beaten and defeated, and by whom? By those whom I had thought, and still thought, were wrong, and I have always used the word "Shi'a" as a swear word.

It is arrogance and selfishness, it is stubbornness and bigotry, please God grant me forth rightness and help me to accept the truth even if it is bitter, God open my eyes and grant me insight and lead me on Your path and make me one of those who listen to the sayings and follow the best.

God show us the right as right and grant us the ability to follow it; and show us the wrong as wrong and grant us the ability to avoid it.

I went back home with my friend and continued to say these pleas, so he said with a smile,

“May Allah lead us and you and all Muslims to the right path, and He said in His Book: ‘And (as for) those who strive hard for Us, We will most certainly guide them in Our ways, and Allah is most surely with the doers of good.’” (Holy Quran 29:69)

The word strive (Jihad) in the Qur'anic verse carries the meaning of scientific research to reach the truth, and Allah will lead anyone to the truth, if he chooses to seek it.

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