

(٦) اِهْدِنَا الصِّرَاطَ الْمُسْتَقِيمَ

(٧) صِرَاطَ الَّذِينَ أَنْعَمْتَ عَلَيْهِمْ غَيْرِ الْمَغْضُوبِ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا الضَّالِّينَ

**Guide us to the straight path (6),**

**the path of those upon whom Thou hast bestowed favours, not of those inflicted by Thy wrath, nor of those gone astray (7).**

## Commentary

### Qur'an

**Guide us to the straight path . . . nor of those gone astray:** The meaning of “*al-hidayah*” (الهداية = guidance, to guide) may easily be understood, if we consider first the significance of the “path”. “*as-Sirat*” (الصراط = path) is synonymous with *at-tariq* (الطريق) and *as-sabil* (السبيل).

In these verses, Allah has commended the path that it is straight and that it is the path taken by those upon whom Allah has bestowed His bounties and favours. It is this path guidance to which has been asked for. And it is the ultimate goal of the worship: The servant prays to his Lord that his worship, clean from all impurities, be performed in this path.

Allah has mentioned in His Book that He has laid down a path for man, nay, for all the creation, a path upon which they are proceeding. He says:

**O man! Surely thou art striving to thy Lord, a hard striving, until thou art to meet Him (84:6);**

**. . . and to Him is the ultimate resort (64:3);**

**. . . now surely to Allah do all affairs eventually come (42:53).**

There are many such verses, showing that all are proceeding on a prescribed road and that their destination is Allah. So far as the way is concerned, Allah has said that there are two ways, not one:

***Did I not enjoin on you, O children of Adam! that you should not worship the Satan? Surely he is your open enemy. And that you should worship Me; this is the straight path (36:60-61).***

So, there is a straight path, and also there is another path. Again He has said:

***. . . then verily I am near; I answer the prayer of the supplicant when he calls on Me, so they should answer My call and believe in Me, that they may walk in the right way (2: 186);***

***Call upon Me, I will answer you. Verily, those who are arrogant to My worship shall soon enter hell, disgraced (40:60).***

Obviously, Allah is near to His servants, and the nearer path to Him is that of worship and prayer.

Compare it with description of those who do not believe in Him:

***. . . these shall be called to from a far-off place (41:44).***

Obviously, the station of unbelievers is far-off place. There are thus two ways to Allah, a near one – the way of the believers – and a distant one, that of the others. It is the first difference between the ways.

Second difference:

***Surely (as for) those who reject Our signs and turn away from them haughtily, the doors of heaven shall not be opened for them (7:40).***

What is the function of a door? To let authorized people pass through it and bar the entry to unauthorized ones. The verse shows that there is a passage from the lower level to the upper heights.

On the other hand, Allah says:

***. . . and to whomsoever My wrath descends he shall perish indeed (20:81).***

The word translated here as “shall perish” literally means “shall fall down”. Therefore, there is another passage coming for the upper heights to the lower level. Also He says:

***. . . and whoever adopts unbelief instead of faith, he indeed has gone astray from (i.e., has lost) the right way (2: 108).***

Allah uses the term “polytheism” for “going astray”.<sup>1</sup> Accordingly, people are divided into three categories:

First, those who proceed to the upper heights – those who believe in the signs of Allah and are not arrogant to His worship.

Second, those who fall down to the lower levels – they are those upon whom the wrath of Allah has descended.

Third, those who have gone astray from the right path; they are lost, wandering hither and thither.

The last verse under discussion points to these three categories: “the path of those upon whom Thou hast bestowed favours, not of those inflicted by Thy wrath, nor of those gone astray.”

Obviously, “the straight path” is separate from the last two paths. It is the path of the believers who are not arrogant. At the same time, the following verse shows that the straight path itself may be divided in various “traffic lanes”, ways or branches:

**. . . Allah will exalt those of you who believe, and those who are given knowledge, in high degrees . . . (58:11).**

This statement needs some elaboration:

Every straying is polytheism and vice versa, as may be inferred from the words of Allah:

**. . . and whoever adopts unbelief instead of faith, he indeed has gone astray from the right way (2:108).**

The same is the theme of the verse:

**Did not I enjoin on you, O children of Adam! that you should not worship the Satan? Surely he is your open enemy. And that you should worship Me; this is the straight path. And certainly he has led astray a great multitude from among you (36:60 – 62).**

Likewise, the Qur'an counts polytheism as injustice and vice versa, as may be seen in the words which the Satan shall utter after the judgment will be delivered against him and his followers:

**. . . surely I disbelieved in your associating me with Allah, before; surely it is the unjust that shall have the painful punishment (14:22).**

Then it counts injustice as straying:

**Those who believe and do not mix up their faith with injustice, those are they who shall have the security and they are those who shall be guided aright (6:82).**

It should be noted that they shall be guided aright and shall have security against straying or its resulting punishment only if they do not mix their faith with injustice and inequity.

It is clear from looking at these verses together that going stray, polytheism and inequity all have the same effect; all three are adjunct to each other. That is why it is said that each of them is identifiable by

the other two. For all practical purposes the three are one and the same, although they may be different in their literal meaning.

The straight path, then, is different from that of those who have gone astray; it is a path which is far away from polytheism and injustice. There can be no straying in this path – neither in hidden ideas and beliefs (for example, the disbelief or the thoughts disapproved by Allah); nor in open actions or omissions (like committing a sin or omitting a good deed). It is the true monotheism in belief and in deeds.

And what is there after the truth but error? The above-mentioned verse 6:82 fits on it completely. That verse guarantees security in the way and promises perfect guidance. The promise is inferred from the fact that the original word translated as “guided aright” is noun-agent, and the grammarians say that such a noun is really made for future. This is one feature of the straight path.

Allah has identified those bestowed with divine favours, in the verse:

***And whoever obeys Allah and the Apostle, these are with those upon whom Allah has bestowed favours from among the prophets and the truthful and the martyrs and the righteous ones; and excellent are these as companions (4:69).***

The belief and the obedience have been explained shortly before it in these words:

***But no! by your Lord! they do not believe (in reality) until they make you a judge of that which has become a matter of disagreement among them, and then they do not find any straitness in their selves as to what you have decided, and submit with total submission. And if We had prescribed for them: Kill yourselves or go forth from your homes, they would not have done it except a few of them; and if they had done what they were admonished, it would have certainly been better for them and most efficacious in strengthening (them) (4 :65-66) .***

Those who truly believe are really strong in their servitude and submission, in words and in deeds; in appearance and in secret. Yet such perfect believers shall be placed in a rank behind those upon whom Allah has bestowed favours; that is why Allah has said, “these are with those . . .” and not, ‘among those’. They shall be with them, but not of them. It is further strengthened by the last sentence, “and excellent are these as companions”. Companions are other than the self.

There is another, somewhat similar, verse in fifty-seventh chapter:

***and(as for) those who believe in Allah and His apostles, these it is that are the truthful and the martyrs with their Lord; they shall have their reward and their light . . . (57: 19).***

The believers, thus, shall be included in the ranks of the martyrs and the truthful – in the life hereafter. The fact that it will happen in the next world is inferred from the words, “with their Lord”, and “they shall have their reward”.

Those bestowed with divine favours who are the people of the straight path – with whose relationship the straight path is identified – have greater prestige and higher rank than these believers who have cleansed their beliefs and actions from straying, polytheism and injustice. Pondering on these verses together, one feels sure that this group of the believers (with this quality) still continues; it has not come to its end.

Had this group completed its term, it would have been counted among (and not, “with”) those bestowed with favours; these believers would have gone up and instead of being with those bestowed with favours, would have become part of them. They probably are among those who have been given knowledge from Allah, as He says:

***Allah will exalt those of you who believe, and those who are given knowledge, in high degrees (58: 11).***

The people of the straight path are bestowed with excellent bounties that are more precious than that of the complete faith and perfect belief. This is the second feature of the straight path.

Allah repeatedly mentions *as-sirat* (path) and *as-sabīl* (way) in the Qur'an; but He has never attributed to Himself except one straight path; although He attributes several ways to Himself.

***And (as for) those who strive hard for Us. We will most certainly guide them onto Our ways (29:69).***

Likewise, He has never ascribed “the straight path” to any of his servants, the only exception being this verse under discussion which ascribes it to those who are bestowed with divine favours; but He frequently attributes “the way” to one or the other of His chosen servants:

***Say: “This is my way; I invite you unto Allah; with clear sight(are) I and he who follows me” (12: 108);***

***. . . and follow the way of him who turns to Me (31: 15);***

***. . . the way of the believers . . . (4:115).***

It is an indication that “the way” is other than “the straight path”.

There may be various and different ways taken by various chosen servants proceeding on the way of worship and submission; but “the straight path” is only one, as Allah points to it in these words:

***Indeed, there has come to you a light and a clear Book from Allah; with it Allah guides him who follows His pleasure into the ways of safety and brings them out of utter darkness into light by His permission and guides them to the straight path (5: 15–16).***

See, how the verse refers to “the ways” (in plural), and to “the straight path” (in singular). Now, there

may be two explanations for it. Either “the straight path” is the same thing as “the ways”, or “the ways” on going further join together and then merges into the straight path. There is another difference between the straight path and the way. Allah says:

***And most of them do not believe in Allah without associating others (with Him) (12: 106).***

Note how the believers are said to associate others with Allah. It shows that some sort of polytheism (that is, straying) may co-exist with belief (and the belief is a “way”); in other words the way may co-exist with polytheism. But the straight path cannot do so because it is not the path of those who have gone astray.

Each of these ways has some excellence or some deficiency – but not so the straight path. Each way is a part of the straight path, but is distinguished from the other ways. It may be inferred from the above-mentioned verses as well as from others. For example, Allah says:

***And that you worship Me; this is the straight path (36: 61);***

***Say: “Surely,(as for) me, my Lord has guided me to the straight path; (to) a most right religion, the faith of Ibrahim the upright one” (6: 161).***

The worship and the religion are common to all the ways, and they are also “the straight path”. The relation of the straight path to the ways of Allah is that of the soul to the body. The body, during the life, undergoes countless changes, varies from day to day – from infancy to childhood; from adolescence to youth, from middle to old age and to senility.

But the soul remains the same, and is always one with body at every stage. Sometimes, the body is inflicted with undesirable effects, which the soul would never accept, if left to itself.

But the soul – the creation of Allah, upon which He created the man – never deteriorates. Yet, in all these states, the body remains one with the soul. Likewise, the ways of Allah are one with the straight path; but sometimes a way – the way of the believers, of the followers of the Prophet of those who turn towards Allah or any other way – suffers from some kind of deterioration, although the straight path is immune from all defects and imperfections.

You have seen how one of the ways, the belief, sometimes combines with polytheism and straying, but the straight path does not do so. In short, the ways are of various grades –near or distant; safe or unsafe; clean or unclean – but all are in the straight path, or, let us say, are one with the straight path.

Allah has mentioned this fact, in a parable of truth and falsehood, in these words:

***He sends down water from the heaven, then the valleys flow according to their measure, and the torrent bears along the swelling foam; and from what they melt in the fire for the sake of(making) ornaments or apparatus arises a scum like it; thus does Allah compare truth and falsehood; then***

***as for the scum, it passes away as a worthless thing; and as for that which profits the people, it remains in the earth; thus does Allah set forth parables (13:17).***

It clearly shows that the hearts and mind differ in their abilities and capacities to receive the divine knowledge and spiritual perfection, although all partake of the same divine sustenance. (Its full explanation will be written in the ch. 13).

This was, however, the third feature of the straight path. From the above analysis it may be seen that the straight path is a sort of controller of all the ways leading to Allah. We may say that a way leading to Allah leads a man to Him as long as it remains one with the straight path; but the straight path leads to Allah unconditionally, without any if or but.

That is why Allah has named it “*as-siratu 'l-mustaqim*” (الصراط المستقيم = the straight path). *as-Sirat* means a clear path, and is derived from “*saratttu sartan*” (صرطتُ صراطاً = I swallowed it completely); in other words, this clear path swallows its walkers without letting them go out. “*al-Mustaqim*” (المستقيم = straight) literally means the one who stands on his legs, and has full control of himself as well as of the things attached to him.

In other words, it is a thing which is not subjected to change or variation. Thus “*as-siratu 'l-mustaqim*” = the straight path is the path which never fails to guide and to lead the walker to his destination. Allah says:

***Then as for those who believe in Allah and hold fast unto Him, soon will He admit them to Mercy from Him and (His) Grace, and guide them unto Himself (by) the straight path (4:175).***

Obviously this guidance does not fail; it always succeeds. Also He has said:

***Therefore (for) whomsoever Allah intends that He would guide him aright, He expands his breast for Islam, and (for)whomsoever He intends that He should leave him to err, He makes his breast strait and narrow as though he were ascending into the sky; thus does Allah lay uncleanness on those who do not believe. And this is the path of your Lord, (a) straight (path) (6:125 -126).***

That is, this is Allah's path that never changes, nor does it fail to reach its destination. Again He says:

***He said: “This is a straight path with Me; surely as regards My servants, thou hast no authority over them except those who follow thee of the deviators” (15:41-42).***

The verse declares that this is His settled course which never varies. In this way, it conveys the same idea which is contained in the verse:

***For you shall not find any alteration in the course of Allah; and you shall not find any change in the course of Allah (35:43).***

The above-mentioned discourse has made the following points clear:

First: There are various ways to Allah, each differing with others in perfection, easiness and smoothness. It all depends on its nearness or remoteness from the basic reality, from the straight path, like the way of submission, of faith, of worship, of purity of intention or of humility before Allah.

Some of the ways leading to the opposite direction are disbelief, polytheism, infidelity, exceeding the bounds, committing sins etc. Allah has said:

***And for all are grades according to what they did, and so that He may pay them back fully their deeds and they shall not be dealt with unjustly (46:19).***

The same is the case with the spiritual knowledge which the human mind receives from Allah. They vary according to mental and spiritual capacity of the receivers, and are tinted by colours of visions of the beholders. This fact is shown in the Qur'anic parable mentioned earlier:

***He sends down water from the heaven, then the valleys flow according to their measure . . . (13:17).***

Second: The straight path controls all the ways. Likewise, the people of the straight path (who have been firmly established in it by Allah) do enjoy complete authority to guide the other servants of Allah. Allah says:

***. . . and excellent are these as companions (4:69);***

***Verily, your only Master is Allah and His Apostle and those who believe, those who keep up prayer and pay zakat while they are bowing down (5:55).***

The last mentioned verse was revealed about 'Ali, the Leader of the faithful (a.s.), as *al-mutawatir* Tradition say; and he (peace be on him) was the first to open this door in Islam. More details of it will be given in the fifth chapter.

Third: The import of the guidance to the way depends on the meaning of the way itself. *al-Hiddyah* (الهداية) means to guide, to lead; it accepts two objects, either without any preposition (as in the language of Hijaz) or with *ila* (الى = to) before the second object (as in the language of other tribes). This detail has been given in *as-Sihah* of al-Jawhar<sup>®</sup>, and obviously it is correct.

Before going further, a mistaken notion should be removed. Some people think that the meaning of guidance changes, depending on whether its second object is preceded by the preposition *ila* or not. If there is no such preposition, then according to them, guidance means “to convey to the destination”; if it is preceded by *ila*, then it denotes “to show the path”.

In evidence, they offer the following verses:

***Surely you cannot guide whom you love, but Allah guides whom He pleases (28:56).***

This verse, in which the verbs, “cannot guide” and “guides”, have been used without preposition, says that the Prophet could not guide whom he pleased.

But it is known that he, throughout his life, guided the people, that is, showed them the path of Allah. Therefore, what has been negated must be the other meaning.

What the verse, then, says is this: you cannot convey to the spiritual goal whom you please; but it is Allah who conveys to that destination whom He pleases. This difference in meaning is more clearly seen in the verses:

***And We would certainly have guided them in the right path (4:68).***

The verb (in the Arabic text) has been used without any preposition and it refers to the divine guidance – that is, conveyance to destination. And Allah addresses the Prophet in these words:

***and most surely you guide to the right path (42:52).***

Here the verb is followed by *ila* and the sentence attributes to the Prophet the task of guidance, in the meaning of showing the way.

According to their reasoning the three verses put together show that when guidance is used in the meaning of “conveying to destination”, its second object accepts no preposition; when it is used for “showing the path”, the said object is preceded by *ila*.

But this notion is not supported by the Qur'an. Allah quotes the believer of the people of Pharaoh as saying:

***“O my people! follow me, I will guide you to the right course” (40:38).***

Here the Arabic text has no preposition and yet it does not mean conveying to destination, it only denotes showing the way.

What has been mentioned in the verse 28:56 (***Surely you cannot guide whom you love, but Allah guides whom He pleases***) is the reality or perfection of guidance. The verse shows that the Prophet could not bestow on his people the perfect guidance, the reality of guidance, as it was a task that Allah has reserved for Himself.

In short, the meaning of guidance does not depend on preposition *ila* coming or not coming before the second object. In both cases the meaning is the same.

*al-Hidayah* means to guide, to show the destination by showing the way, or, let us say, to convey to the destination. Guidance, in reality, is reserved for Allah, and He guides His servants by creating such

causes that point the destination to them and lead them to their spiritual goal.

Allah says:

***Therefore (for) whomsoever Allah intends that He would guide him aright, He expands his breast for Islam (6:125);***

***. . . then their skins and their hearts become pliant to the remembrance of Allah; this is Allah's guidance, He guides with it whom He pleases (39:23).***

The verb “become pliant” is followed by the preposition “to”, giving the verb a shade of meaning of inclination and repose. Guidance, thus, means that Allah creates in the heart an aptitude by which it initiates, accepts, inclines towards and becomes serene in the remembrance of Allah.

It has been mentioned earlier that there are many ways leading to Allah. Consequently, guidance for one way would differ from those of the others. Each way has a special guidance of its own. This variation has been hinted at in the verse:

***And (as for) those who strive hard for Us, We will most certainly guide them unto Our ways; and Allah is most surely with the doers of good (29:69).***

A man strives “in the way of Allah”; and another strives “for Allah”. There is a great difference between the two. The first tries to keep the way safe and free from all dangers and blockades; the second's attention is fixed on Allah only.

It is this man who is praised in this verse – he strives hard for Allah; thereupon Allah helps him and guides him on the way most suited to his ability and power; and thereafter keeps guiding him from one way to another until He exclusively attaches him to Himself.

Fourth: The straight path is preserved in the ways of Allah – the ways that are of various grades and levels. Allah guides man to it; and the man is thus guided aright. As mentioned above, Allah may keep guiding a man from one way to the other which is of a higher grade, and then to a third one still higher.

The prayer in this verse, “Guide us to the straight path” (revealed on behalf of those whom Allah has already guided to His worship) points to this very fact. If we keep this point in view, there would be no room for an objection like the following: The one who utters this prayer is already guided aright – how can he pray afresh for guidance?

It would be an attempt to reobtain a thing which is already in hand, and it is just impossible. Also, the worshipper is already on the straight path – how can he pray to be guided again to the same path? Isn't it an impossibility?

But the explanation given by us clears away the mist of such objections.

Another objection: Our Law is the most perfect and most comprehensive of all the laws sent by Allah since the dawn of humanity. Why should we ask from Allah to guide us to the path of those of the previous people upon whom He had bestowed favours?

Reply: Admittedly, the Law brought by Muhammad (s.a.w.a.) is more perfect than any other one. But it does not necessarily mean that all those who follow this Law are more perfect than all those who followed the previous laws. An average follower of the law of Muhammad (s.a.w.a.) cannot surpass Nuh or Ibrahim (a.s.) , although their laws were sent long before the Islamic Law.

It is one thing to accept and follow a law; it is quite another to get spiritual perfection by total submission – by perfectly moulding oneself in that law's pattern. A believer of previous nations who attained a high spiritual level, who became a mirror of divine attributes, is most certainly better than, and superior to, a follower of this law who did not reach that state – even though the latter would be following the most perfect and comprehensive law, that is, the Law of Muhammad (s.a.w.a.).

Therefore, it is quite in order for a believer of lower grade (although he may follow a perfect law) to pray to Allah to help him reach the level of a believer of higher grade (although he might have followed a less perfect law).

An exegete has replied to the above-mentioned objection in a way that is not free from defects. He has said: The religion of Allah is one, and that is Islam. The fundamental truths – the belief in One God, the Prophethood and the Day of Judgement and all that results from this belief – are the same in all the laws and revelations sent by Allah.

The Law of Islam has an added distinction, in that it covers all aspects of human life and is, thus, the most comprehensive one. It looks more properly after public welfare. Moreover, its foundation is laid on reasoning – in all its forms: The logic, the admonition and the godly argumentation.

All divine religions are, thus, the same and the fundamental truths are common to all. The previous people have preceded us in this path. Therefore, Allah has ordered us to look into their affairs, to take lessons from them and to follow them to spiritual perfection.

The author says: The principle upon which this reply is based is against the principles that guide us in exegesis of the Qur'an. The reply assumes that the realities of fundamental truths are on the same level in all the religions; that there is no difference in their grades; that the spiritual perfections and religious virtues are of the same quality everywhere.

According to this view, the highest ranking prophet is equal to the lowest type of believer in his existence and natural perfection – so far as his creation is concerned. The difference, if any, is based on the subjective outlook of *shar'ah*, not on any matter of creation.

In their opinion, this case is similar to that of a king vis-a-vis his subjects – they are not different in their

human existence, the difference is in their subjective and assumed positions only which are laid down by people and which do not have any independent existence.

This thinking, in its turn, is based on the theory of materialism, which teaches that nothing exists but matter; metaphysical “things” have no existence at all (or, at least, we are not in a position to know that they exist). The only exception is God, and we believe in His existence because of logical evidence.

Those who accepted this view did so because, coming under the influence of natural sciences, they put all their confidence in their five senses. Or because they thought that “commonsense” was enough for explaining the divine words, and therefore, neglected to meditate on the Qur'an. God willing, we shall throw more light on this subject at some other place.

Fifth: The people of the straight path are higher in rank than others, and their path is superior to the others' ways. It is because of their knowledge, and not because of their virtuous deeds. They have that knowledge of divine attributes which is hidden from others. (We have explained earlier that perfection of virtuous deeds is found in some of the inferior ways also.

Therefore, deeds cannot be the criterion by which the people of the straight path are given excellence over the rest.) The question arises as to what is that knowledge and how it is acquired. We shall deal with these questions when we shall explain the verse 13:17

***(He sends down water from the heaven, then the valleys flow according to their measure).***

The following verses too point to this fact:

***Allah will exalt those of you who believe, and those who are given knowledge in higher degrees (58:11);***

***To Him do ascend the good words; and the good deed lifts them up (35:10).***

What ascends to Allah is the good words, that is, true belief and knowledge; good deeds lift up the good words and help them in their ascension, without themselves going up. We shall fully discuss this verse when we shall reach it.

## **Tradition**

as-Sadiq (a.s.) said about the meaning of worship: “Worship is of three kinds: some people worship Allah, because they fear Him – so it is the worship of slaves; and a group worships Allah, Blessed and High is He, to seek reward – so it is the worship of hirelings; and a group worships Allah, Mighty and Great is He, because of (His) love – and this is the worship of noble persons, and it is the most excellent worship.” (*al-Kafi*)

Verily, some people worshipped Allah being desirous (of His reward) – so this is the worship of traders;

and some people worshipped Allah fearing (His punishment) – so it is the worship of slaves, and a group worshipped Allah in gratitude (to Him) –so this is the worship of noble men. (*Nahju '1-baldghah*)

as-Sadiq (a.s.) said: “Verily people worship Allah in three ways: One group worships Him in desire of His reward, and it is the worship of covetous ones, and it is greed; and others worship Him in dread of the Fire, and it is the worship of slaves, and it is fear; but I worship Him in His love – Mighty and Great is He and this is the worship of noble ones.

(It is) because Allah has said:

***and they shall be secure from terror on that days (27:89);***

and He has said,

***Say: 'If you love Allah, then follow me, Allah will love you. . .'* (3:31).**

Therefore, whosoever is loved by Allah, he shall be among the secure ones; and it is a hidden position, cannot touch it save the purified ones.” (*al-'Ilal, al-Majalis* and *al-Khisal* )

The author says: The meaning of these Tradition may be understood from the preceding Commentary. The Imams (of *Ahlu '1-bayt*) have variously attributed the worship of the noble ones sometimes to gratitude and sometimes to love, because in final analysis both are one and the same. Gratitude and thankfulness means putting the received bounty in its proper place.

It is the thankfulness for worship that should be addressed to Allah, as only He, Himself, deserves to be worshipped. Allah is worshipped because He is Allah, that is, because He alone holds all attributes of beauty and glory. He, of all things, is Beautiful; He alone is loved for Himself. What is love? It is inclination and attraction towards beauty.

We say: He is worshipped because He is He; we may express the same idea if we say: He is worshipped because He is beautiful and beloved. Again, the same theme may be explained by saying that He is worshipped because He is the Bestower of favours and is thanked through worship. All three expressions carry the same import.

It has been narrated through Sunni chains that as-Sadiq (a.s.) explained the verse, “Thee do we worship . . .” in these words: “We do not ask from Thee other than Thee, and we do not worship Thee by substitute and replacement, as do those who are ignorant of Thee, removed from Thee.”

The author says: This tradition points to what has been explained in the Commentary that worship demands presence (of heart) and purity (of intention) which does not allow diversion to any substitute, to anything else.

as-Sadiq (a.s.) said *inter alia* in a tradition: “And whosoever thinks that he worships (Allah) by (His)

attributes without being conscious of Him, he refers (his worship) to an absent one; and whosoever thinks that he worships the attribute and the person (having that attribute) he nullifies monotheism, because the attribute is other than the person; and whosoever thinks that he ascribes the person to the attribute, he belittles the Great One, and they do not assign to Allah His proper prestige . . . ' (Tuḥafu 'l-<sup>ḥ</sup>uq<sup>ḥ</sup>)

as-Sadiq (a.s.) explained the verse: *Guide us to the straight path*, in these words: “Guide us to adhere to the path that leads to Thy love, and conveys to Thy Garden, (the path that) prevents us from following our desires (lest we be ruined) and from adhering to our opinions (lest we be destroyed). (*Ma`ani l-akhadr*)

The same book quotes `Ali (a.s.) as saying about this verse: “Continue for us Thy help with which we obeyed Thee in our past days, so that we continue to obey Thee in our coming days also.”

The author says: The two Tradition point to two aspects of the reply of the previously mentioned objection – that the prayer for guidance, addressed by a person already guided aright, is trying to obtain a thing in hand, and that it was asking for impossible. The first tradition looks at the difference in the grades of guidance, and the second looks at oneness of guidance in its reality.

Again *Ma`ani l-akhbar* quotes 'Ali (a.s.) as saying: “The straight path, in this world, is that which stops short of excesses and rises above shortcomings, and remains straight; and, in the next world, it is the path of the believers (leading them) to the Garden. ”

The same book quotes the same Imam, explaining the verse: *The path of those. . .*, as follows: “Say: Guide us to the path of those upon whom Thou hast bestowed favours by strengthening them for Thy religion and Thy obedience – not (of those whom Thou favoured) with wealth and health because such things are sometimes given even to the disbelievers or to the sinful.”

(Then he said:) “And those (bestowed with divine favour) are those about whom Allah says:

***And whoever obeys Allah and the Apostle, these are with those upon whom Allah has bestowed favours from among the prophets and the truthful and the martyrs and the righteous ones, and excellent are these as companions (4:69).***

ar-Rida (a.s.) narrates through his forefathers from Amir al-mu'minin (a.s.) that he said: “I heard the Apostle of Allah saying: 'Allah, Mighty and Great is He, has said: “I have divided the Opening of the Book between Myself and My servant; so, its half is for Me and the (other) half is for My servant. And My servant shall get what he asks for.”

When the servant says: ***In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful***, Allah, Great is His Glory, says: “My servant has started with My name, and it is incumbent upon Me that I should complete his works for him and bless him in his affairs.”

And when he says: **All praise is due to Allah, the Lord of the worlds**, Allah, Great is His Glory, says: “My servant has praised Me, and he knows that the bounties that are with him are from Me, and that the misfortunes that have been averted from him were so averted by My grace; (O My angels!) I appoint you as My witnesses that I shall add for him the favours of the next world to those of this world, and will avert from him the calamities of the next world as I have averted from him the calamities of this world.”

And when he says, **The Beneficent, the Merciful**, Allah, Great is His Glory, says: “My servant bore witness for Me that I am the Beneficent, the Merciful; I make you My witness that I will most surely augment his share in My mercy, and I will most certainly increase his portion in My bounties.”

And when he says, **The Master of the Day of Judgement**, Allah, the High, says: “I make you My witness that, as he has acknowledged that I am the Master of the Day of Judgement, I will most certainly make his reckoning easier (for him) on the Day of Reckoning, and I will most certainly accept his good deeds, and look over his sins.”

And when he says: **Thee do we worship**, Allah, Mighty and Great is He, says: “My servant is telling truth, He worships Me only. Be My witness that I will most surely give him for his worship a reward that will be the (object of) envy to all who opposed him when he worshipped Me.”

And when he says, **and Thee do we beseech for help**, Allah, the High, says: “From Me has My servant sought help, and in Me has he taken refuge. Be My witness that I will most certainly help him in his affairs, and will aid him in his difficulties, and will take his hand in his calamities.”

And when he says, **Guide us to the right path** . . . , Allah, Mighty and Great is He, says: “This (part) is for My servant, and My servant shall have what he asks for; and I have answered (the prayer of) My servant, and have given him what he hopes for and have protected him from what he is afraid of.”<sup>1</sup> ”  
(*Uyūnu 'l-akhbar*).

The author says: as-Sadīq has narrated in *'Ilalu 'sh-sharā'i* , an almost similar tradition from ar-Rida (a.s.). The tradition explains the chapter of The Opening in the frame of the daily prayer.

It further confirms the previously mentioned fact that this divine revelation has been sent, as though on behalf of the servants of Allah, to teach them the manners of servitude; to show them how to praise their Lord and how to declare their allegiance to Him. It is a chapter made especially for the purpose of worship; and no other chapter comes near to it in this respect. For example:

1. The entire chapter is a divine speech, revealed on behalf of His servant, so that he may recite it when he stands to worship his Lord.
2. It is divided in two parts: one for Allah and the other for the servant.
3. It contains, in spite of its brevity, all the Qur'anic wisdom. The Qur'an is a vast treasure of fundamental truths, moral values and the most comprehensive *shar'ah* which consists of the rules of worship and

mutual dealings, as well as the penal and civil codes. Further it is a valuable mine of divine promises and threats, stories of previous peoples as well as parables and moral lessons.

But, in spite of this wide scope, all its teachings may be returned to four fundamental truths: the Oneness of God, the prophethood, the resurrection (with all its details) and the guidance of mankind to its bliss in this world as well as in the next. Needless to reiterate that this chapter contains all these basic realities in these very short, and at the same time very eloquent, sentence.

It will not be out of place to compare the beauty, glory and spirituality of this chapter, used in the Muslims' prayers, with the Lord's prayer, used by the Christians in their prayer:

Our Father which art in heaven Hallowed be thy name.  
Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread.  
And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.  
And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil:  
For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory,  
for ever. Amen. (*Matthews 6: 9 –13*)

Ponder deeply on the teachings contained in these sentences, supposed to be of divine revelation, and see what manners of servitude does this prayer teach. First it tells them that their Father (i.e. God, in their terminology) is in heaven. Then it prays about the Father that His name be hallowed, His kingdom come and His will be done in earth as it is in heaven.

The question is: Who will fulfill these wishes which look more like political slogans than spiritual invocation. Then it makes them ask for their daily bread, and for His forgiveness in lieu of their forgiveness – that He should waive His rights as they have waived theirs. But what right do they possess except that which they have been given by God Himself?

Then they beseech Him not to lead them into temptation but to deliver them from evil. This is asking for im possible, because this world is the place appointed for our test and trial, so that we may acquire spiritual perfection. Would not salvation lose its meaning, if there was no test and trial?

And yet some orientalisists have temerity to write: “Islam does not have any superiority over other religions, so far as spiritual knowledge is concerned, because all divine religions invite the men to the belief in one God, and ask them to purify themselves by good character and virtuous deeds. The religions excel one another only in deep-rootedness of their social fruits.”

It is narrated in *Man la yahduruhu '1-faqḥ* and *at-Tafsīr* of al-`Ayyashi that as-Sadiq (a.s.) said: “The straight path is Amḥru'l-mu'minḥn (a.s.).”

as-Sadiq (a.s.) said: ”(The straight path) is the path to the knowledge of Allah. And there are two paths,

one in this world and the other in the next. As for the path in this world, it is the Imam whose obedience is obligatory; whosoever knows him in this world and follows his guidance, he shall proceed on the path which is the bridge over the hell in the next world; and whosoever does not know him in this world, his foot shall slip (over that bridge) in the next world, and he shall fall down into the fire of the hell.” (*Ma`ani '1-akhbar*)

The same book quotes as-Sajjad (a.s.) as saying: “There is no curtain between Allah and His proof, nor is there any screen for Allah against His proof. We are the gates of Allah, and we are the straight path, and we are the (treasure) chest of His Knowledge, and we are the interpreters of His revelation, and we are the pillars of His Oneness, and we are the place of His secret.”

Ibn Shahrashub has quoted from *at-Tafsir* of Wak'ib ibn al-Jarrah from ath-Thawri from as-Suddi from Asbat and Mujahid from Ibn `Abbas that he said about the verse: *Guide us to the straight path*: “Say O group of the servants (of Allah): Lead us to the love of Muhammad (s.a.w.a.) and his family – members.”

The author says: There are other Tradition of the same meaning. Such Tradition are based on the “flow” of the Qur'an, that is, application of the Qur'an wherever it is applicable. It should be noted that the term, “flow” – and it will often be used in this book – has been taken from the Tradition of the Imams of *Ahlu 'l-bayt* (a.s.):

al-Fudayl ibn Yasar said: “I asked Abu Ja'far (a.s.) about the tradition, `There is no verse in the Qur'an but it has an exterior and an interior, and there is no word in it but it has a boundary, and every boundary has a watching place.’ (I asked him) what was the meaning of exterior and interior.

The Imam said: `Its exterior is its revelation and its interior is its interpretation; some of it has already passed (i. e. happened) and some of it has not come about yet; it runs along (or flows) as run the sun and the moon; when a thing of it comes (to its appointed place and time) it happens . . . (*at-Tafsir*, of al-`Ayyash)

This theme is found in other Tradition too. It is the convention of the Imams of *Ahlu 'l-bayt* (a.s.) that they apply a Qur'anic verse to all things it may be applied to. And this convention was correct and reasonable, because the Qur'an was revealed as a “guidance to the worlds”; it guides the mankind to correct belief, correct ethics and correct action. The matter of belief that it has explained is eternal truth; it is not limited to a certain time or certain place.

The virtue or vice and the rules laid down for them are not confined to one person or one period – they are general and applicable to all relevant persons and times. The Tradition explaining the background of revelation of a certain verse – when, why and about whom or what was it revealed – do not affect its general import.

The rule is not restricted to that particular person or event; otherwise, it would cease to be valid in other

similar conditions, and would die with the death of that person. The Qur'anic declaration is general. If it praises some persons, or condemns some others, it is because of the presence of good or evil characteristics in them.

And wherever those good or evil characteristics are found, even in later generations, the verse will in all truth be applied to them. The Qur'an itself proves it, as Allah says:

***With it (i.e., the Qur'an) Allah guides him who follows His pleasure into the ways of safety . . . (5:16);***

***. . . and most surely it is a Mighty Book, falsehood shall not come to it from before it nor from behind it (41:41-42) ;***

***Surely We have revealed the Reminder and We will most surely be its guardian (15:9) .***

There are numerous Tradition, perhaps reaching to hundreds, which apply various verses of the Qur'an to the Imams or to their enemies. They are called the Tradition of "flow". But now that the general principle has been explained, we shall not include those Tradition in this book – except where it becomes necessary for the explanation of a verse or for some reasoning or discussion.

1. As may be seen in the verses 36:60-62, quoted above.

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