

The Rights of Deeds

حقوق الأفعال

Right n. 10: The Right of the Prayer

حق الصلاة

فَأَمَّا حَقُّ الصَّلَاةِ فَأَنْ تَعْلَمَ أَنَّهَا وَفَادَةٌ إِلَى اللَّهِ وَأَنْتَ قَائِمٌ بِهَا بَيْنَ يَدَيْ اللَّهِ، فَإِذَا عَلِمْتَ ذَلِكَ كُنْتَ خَلِيقًا أَنْ تَقُومَ فِيهَا مَقَامَ الدَّلِيلِ الرَّاعِبِ الرَّاهِبِ الْخَائِفِ الرَّاجِي الْمِسْكِينِ الْمُتَضَرِّعِ الْمُعْظَمِ مَنْ قَامَ بَيْنَ يَدَيْهِ بِالسُّكُونِ وَالْإِطْرَاقِ وَخُشُوعِ الْأَطْرَافِ وَلِينِ الْجَنَاحِ وَحُسْنِ الْمُنَاجَاةِ لَهُ فِي نَفْسِهِ وَالطَّلَبِ إِلَيْهِ فِي فَكَاكِ رَقَبَتِكَ الَّتِي أَحَاطَتْ بِهِ خَطِيئَتُكَ وَاسْتَهْلَكَتْهَا ذُنُوبُكَ. وَلَا قُوَّةَ إِلَّا بِاللَّهِ

Then the right of your ritual prayer is that you should know that it is an arrival at the threshold of God and that through it you are standing before God. And when you realize that, then you will stand in the station of him who is lowly, vile, beseeching, trembling, hopeful, fearful, and abased.

And you will magnify Him Who is before you through stillness, and bowing of the head,¹ and humbleness of the limbs, and yielding of the wing,² and by saying the best supplications to Him in yourself and beseeching Him to release (from punishment) your neck that is encompassed by your offenses and destroyed by your sins. And there is no power but in God.

Imam Sajjad first stresses the importance of prayer since it is the means by which we can appear at the threshold of God. It is the means with which we can migrate from the material world, put all that entertains us behind, attend to the divine grandeur, leave the darkness of this world and enter the world

of brightness. This migration should be according to the requirements stated by the Imam .

Praying is the Greatest Form of Worship

Islam has established the prayer as the most important form of worship, and has made especial recommendations to Muslims regarding it. Islam has made it incumbent upon boys and girls to pray five times each day from the time they reach adolescence. They are supposed to make up any prayers that they may skip for any excuse. Especial times are also specified for saying the prayers.

Times of the Prayer

There are verses in the Holy Qur'an that specify the times of the prayer. Consider the following verse in this regard:

وَأَقِمِ الصَّلَاةَ طَرَفَيِ النَّهَارِ وَرُلْفًا مِّنَ اللَّيْلِ إِنَّ الْحَسَنَاتِ يُذْهِبْنَ السَّيِّئَاتِ ذَلِكَ ذِكْرَى لِلذَّاكِرِينَ

“And establish regular prayers at the two ends of the day and at the approaches of the night: For those things, that are good remove those that are evil: Be that the word of remembrance to those who remember (their Lord).” [The Holy Qur'an, Hud 11:114]

This verse refers to the morning, evening and night prayers. Also, consider the following verse:

أَقِمِ الصَّلَاةَ لِدُلُوكِ الشَّمْسِ إِلَى غَسَقِ اللَّيْلِ وَقُرْآنَ الْفَجْرِ إِنَّ قُرْآنَ الْفَجْرِ كَانَ مَشْهُودًا

“Establish regular prayers - at the sun's decline till the darkness of the night, and the morning prayer and reading: for the prayer and reading in the morning carry their testimony.” [The Holy Qur'an, Bani Israil 17:78]

This verse refers to all the five daily prayers. Also, consider the following verse:

حَافِظُوا عَلَى الصَّلَوَاتِ وَالصَّلَاةِ الْوُسْطَى وَقُومُوا لِلَّهِ قَانِتِينَ

“Guard strictly your (habit of) prayers, especially the Middle Prayer; and stand before God in a devout (frame of mind).” [The Holy Qur'an, al-Baqarah 2:238]

This verse refers to the noon and afternoon prayers.

The Most Hopeful Verse in the Qur'an

There is a tradition in Majma Ul-Bayan which says: “One day Imam Ali looked at the people and asked: Do you know which verse of the Holy Qur'an is the most hopeful one? Some people said it was the following verse:

إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يَغْفِرُ أَنْ يُشْرَكَ بِهِ وَيَغْفِرُ مَا دُونَ ذَلِكَ لِمَنْ يَشَاءُ وَمَنْ يُشْرِكْ بِاللَّهِ فَقَدِ افْتَرَىٰ إِثْمًا عَظِيمًا

“God forgiveth not that partners should be set up with Him; but He forgiveth anything else, to whom He pleaseth; to set up partners with God is to devise a sin most heinous indeed.” [The Holy Qur'an, al-Nisaa 4:48]

The Imam said no. Others said it was the following verse:

وَمَنْ يَعْمَلْ سُوءًا أَوْ يَظْلِمْ نَفْسَهُ ثُمَّ يَسْتَغْفِرِ اللَّهَ يَجِدِ اللَّهَ غَفُورًا رَحِيمًا

“If anyone does evil or wrongs his own soul but afterwards seeks God's forgiveness, he will find God Oft-forgiving, Most Merciful.” [The Holy Qur'an, al-Nisaa 4:110]

Again, Imam Ali said: No, that is not what I mean. Others said it was the following verse:

قُلْ يَا عِبَادِيَ الَّذِينَ أَسْرَفُوا عَلَىٰ أَنفُسِهِمْ لَا تَقْنَطُوا مِن رَّحْمَةِ اللَّهِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَغْفِرُ الذُّنُوبَ جَمِيعًا إِنَّهُ هُوَ الْغَفُورُ الرَّحِيمُ

“Say: "O my Servants who have transgressed against their souls! Despair not of the Mercy of God: for God forgives all sins: for He is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful.” [The Holy Qur'an, al-Zumar 39:53]

Again, Imam Ali said no. Then the people asked him which verse it was. Imam Ali said: I heard God's Prophet say that the most hopeful verse is:[3](#)

وَأَقِمِ الصَّلَاةَ طَرَفَيِ النَّهَارِ وَزُلْفًا مِّنَ اللَّيْلِ إِنَّ الْحَسَنَاتِ يُذْهِبْنَ السَّيِّئَاتِ ذَلِكَ ذِكْرَىٰ لِلذَّاكِرِينَ

“And establish regular prayers at the two ends of the day and at the approaches of the night: For those things that are good remove those that are evil: Be that the word of remembrance to those who remember (their Lord).” [The Holy Qur'an, Hud 11:114]

Moses was Appointed to Establish Prayers

Now consider the following verse which shows that Moses was appointed to establish regular prayers.

وَأَنَا اخْتَرْتُكَ فَاسْتَمِعْ لِمَا يُوحَىٰ إِنَّنِي أَنَا اللَّهُ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا أَنَا فَاعْبُدْنِي وَأَقِمِ الصَّلَاةَ لِذِكْرِي

“I have chosen thee: listen, then, to the inspiration (sent to thee). Verily, I am God: There is no god but I: So serve thou Me (only), and establish regular prayer for celebrating My praise.” [The Holy Qur’an, Ta-Ha 20: 13–14]

The first point mentioned in this verse is the principle of the Unity of God that is the most important part of the call of the Prophets. The next point mentioned is God’s worshipping. Then the instruction to establish regular prayers that is the most important link between the creatures and their Creator is stressed. Praying is the most effective way not to forget God. There is no doubt that there are many factors in man’s life that distract him from God.

This verse clarifies that the appointment of Moses started with a mission to establish regular prayers. Praying several times a day is an effective means to fight this negligence. When man wakes up from his sleep that makes him forget everything in this world, and wants to start his daily activities, God has made it incumbent upon him to start his day with praying. This is done so that he can cleanse his heart and soul with God’s remembrance.

Once man is delved into his daily activities and works all morning long, he hears the call to the prayer at noon that invites him to hurry up to the prayer. He stands at the threshold of the Lord. By saying prayers and supplications, he eliminates any filth that may have covered up his soul in the morning. He does the same thing again in the evening and at night, and remembers God in his soul. God has stressed that the purpose for the prayer is to remember Him. In another verse, He has stated that His remembrance is the only means of the purification of our hearts:

الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَتَطْمَئِنُّ قُلُوبُهُمْ بِذِكْرِ اللَّهِ أَلَا بِذِكْرِ اللَّهِ تَطْمَئِنُّ الْقُلُوبُ

“Those who believe, and whose hearts find satisfaction in the remembrance of God: for without doubt in the remembrance of God do hearts find satisfaction.” [The Holy Qur’an, al-Ra’d 13:28]

Remember God in All Circumstances

The importance of remembering God in all circumstances is expressed in the following verse:

فَإِذَا قَضَيْتُمُ الصَّلَاةَ فَادْكُرُوا اللَّهَ قِيَامًا وَقُعُودًا وَعَلَىٰ جُنُوبِكُمْ فَإِذَا اطْمَأْنَنْتُمْ فَأَقِيمُوا الصَّلَاةَ إِنَّ الصَّلَاةَ كَانَتْ عَلَىٰ

“When ye pass (congregational) prayers, celebrate God’s praises, standing, sitting down, or lying down on your sides; but when ye are free from danger, set up regular prayers: for such prayers are enjoined on believers at stated times.” [The Holy Qur’an, al-Nisaa 4: 103]

The statement “celebrate God’s praises, standing, sitting down, or lying down on your sides” may refer to the various positions in a battle. This is an important Islamic instruction not to neglect God under any circumstances. The above verse has been interpreted in many traditions to refer to the conditions of praying for the ill.” [4](#)

The Sayings of Imam Muhammad Ghazali

The main spirit of the prayer is humbleness and the presence of our heart during the prayer since the main goal of the prayer is to be sincere with God, and to remember the Almighty God with ultimate submission. God the Almighty said: “Establish the prayer in order to remember Me.” God’s Prophet said: “Pray as if you are saying farewell.”

This implies that one must say farewell to his own selfish desires, and everything other than God through praying. One must dedicate his full attention to his prayer.[5](#) Thus, we realize the importance placed on praying by the Qur’an and the philosophy behind it.

True Prayer

The late Fayz wrote in Al-Haqa’iq: “The true spirit of prayer is due to the following:

- 1) Sincere presence of the mind.
- 2) True understanding.
- 3) Humbleness.
- 4) Fear of the Majesty of God.
- 5) Hope in the Forgiveness of God.
- 6) Being shy of God.”

Sincere Presence of Mind

Determination is a very important factor in prayer. It can result in sincere presence of the mind during the prayer. When we are more determined to do something, our mind will be better directed at that affair.

We must believe that the life of the Hereafter is preferable to that of this world since it is eternal and free from trouble as we read in the following verse:

وَمَا هَذِهِ الْحَيَاةُ الدُّنْيَا إِلَّا لَهُوٌ وَلَعِبٌ وَإِنَّ الدَّارَ الْآخِرَةَ لَهِيَ الْحَيَوَانُ لَوْ كَانُوا يَعْلَمُونَ

“What is the life of this world but amusement and play? But verily the Home in the Hereafter, – that is life indeed, if they but knew.” [The Holy Qur’an, al-Ankabut 29:64]

We read in another place in the Holy Qur’an:

وَالْآخِرَةُ خَيْرٌ وَأَبْقَى

“But the Hereafter is better and more enduring.” [The Holy Qur’an, al-A’la 87: 17]

We cannot attain the life of the Hereafter except through praying. Praying is the means of approaching God. When this is combined with the belief that this world is really nothing, then we can find a sincere presence of the mind.

True Understanding

The next important factor after sincere presence of the mind is true understanding of what is being said. If one pays attention to the meaning of what he says, then he will ignore the affairs of this world, and all bothering thoughts during the prayer will leave him alone.

We can compare the situation of one who is praying and is bombarded with bothering thoughts with someone who is trying to rest and think under the shade of a tree, but is disturbed by the sounds of various birds. He picks up a stick and tries to drive them away, but the birds come back again.

Humbleness

Humbleness is a spiritual state that leads to recognition of the Grandeur and Majesty of God. This recognition is the foundation of faith. It also leads to the recognition of one’s smallness and his being subject to divine plans. The recognition of the above leads to a state of humbleness in which bowing to God, our Creator, is more meaningful.

Fear of the Majesty of God

Fear of the Majesty of God is a state of mind for man that is derived from the recognition of God’s endless power and His Will’s influence on everything in the universe. The more we recognize God’s power and influence, the more we fear His Majesty. The late scholar Naraghi has also included sincerity and said: “Sincerity, intention to get closer to God and not being hypocritical are also important in this issue.”⁶

Hope in the Forgiveness of God

This hope is derived from the recognition of the source of Mercy of God. Once you notice God's endless nobility and kindness, and really believe in God's promise to reward us with Heaven for praying, then you will become hopeful of the Forgiveness of God.

Being Shy of God

Once one realizes that he is unable to fulfill God's rights that are incumbent upon him, has faults and weaknesses which constantly pull him towards the luxuries of this life, and realizes that God is Majestic and knows everything that goes on within him, then he becomes shy of God.⁷ We quoted the true aspects of prayer as mentioned by Fayz Kashani so far. Now let us quote what Hajj Mirza Javad Malaki Tabrizi said in this regard.

He refers to the writings of Shahide Awwal⁸ and says: "The Shahid compiled the one thousand obligatory points about the prayer in one book, and compiled the three thousand recommended points about prayer in another book." Then he points out an important philosophy behind the prayer that is expressed in the following verse:

أَنْتَ مَا أَوْجِي إِلَيْكَ مِنَ الْكِتَابِ وَأَقِمِ الصَّلَاةَ إِنَّ الصَّلَاةَ تَنْهَى عَنِ الْفَحْشَاءِ وَالْمُنْكَرِ وَلَذِكْرُ اللَّهِ أَكْبَرُ وَاللَّهُ يَعْلَمُ مَا تَصْنَعُونَ

"Recite what is sent of the Book by inspiration to thee, and establish regular Prayer: for Prayer restrains from shameful and unjust deeds; and remembrance of God is the greatest (thing in life) without doubt. And God knows the (deeds) that ye do." [The Holy Qur'an, al-Ankabut 29:45]

The Qur'an has clearly stated that prayer restrains us from engaging in shameful and unjust deeds. If our praying does not serve this purpose, we can conclude that we are praying out of hypocrisy. Even the slightest bit of sincere attention to the true spirit of the prayer will restrain man from shameful and unjust deeds.⁹

As expressed by this late scholar, there is no other issue in Islam about which there are as many points as there are about praying. The issue of prayer always takes up the biggest chapters in books on traditions and jurisprudence. The description of Imam Sajjad's illuminating words about the prayer presented here are but a few drops of the sea! Praying also has some personal, moral and social effects, which we shall briefly discuss here.

The Personal Effects of Praying

One of the personal effects of praying five times each day and appearing at the threshold of God is the strengthening of our spiritual powers and determination. Thus, we can stand up against the difficulties that we encounter just like a mountain. Another personal effect of praying is the cleansing of our heart from the filthiness of this material world since we separate ourselves from this material world and travel into the divine world each time we pray. Thus, we can attain peace of mind. It has been recorded that whenever the Prophet got troubled with the events that happened, he sought refuge in praying a lot.

Since praying is a state of meeting the Lord, he would forget his sorrow once he rushed to visit God. He said: “Once one of you stands up to pray and says supplications to his Lord, he knows that there is no distance between him and his Lord. God hears his prayers, responds to his call and fulfills his prayer.”¹⁰ Another personal effect of praying is that it will help us get rid of the selfishness and haughtiness we might experience due to our misunderstandings when we get wealth or position. This is a point of human perfection for which we strive. The late Imam Khomeini said the following about the secrets behind standing, bowing down and prostrating in prayer:

الصَّلَاةُ قُرْبَانٌ كُلِّ تَقِيٍّ

“Prayer is a pious believer’s means of approach (to God).”

It is dependant on two acts – one of which is the basis of the other. The first prerequisite is to abandon selfishness – that is true piety. The second prerequisite is to seek the truth and to seek God. This is true ascension and approach to God. That is why we read in the traditions that “praying is the means of approaching God for every pious man.” These prerequisite states are gradually achieved in the three positions of standing up, bowing down and prostrating in prayer.

While standing up, we realize God the Absolute exists and is everlasting. Then we forget our selfishness. While bowing down and seeing the positions of the Names and Characteristics of God, we forget our own selfishness. When prostrating we totally abandon our selfishness, and absolutely submit to and seek God. All the positions and ranks of those who trot in His way are derived from the ranks of these three positions.”¹¹ Another personal effect of praying is that one who prays gets encouraged to improve himself and attain the highest degree of noble characteristics. He tries to eliminate all his moral wickedness. That is why the Holy Qur’an praises the believers for the good characteristics that they attain as we read in the following verses:

قَدْ أَفْلَحَ الْمُؤْمِنُونَ الَّذِينَ هُمْ فِي صَلَاتِهِمْ خَاشِعُونَ

“The believers must (eventually) win through – those who humble themselves in their prayers.”

[The Holy Qur'an, al-Muminun 23: 1-2]

This winning has been interpreted to imply both worldly gains and winning in the Hereafter. Worldly gains imply survival, richness and honor. Winning in the Hereafter implies the following four:

- 1) Lasting without ever being destroyed¹²
- 2) Richness without any poverty
- 3) Honor without any humiliation
- 4) Knowledge without any ignorance

Believers are recognized by being humble in these verses. This implies that their praying is not just a series of meaningless words and actions; rather it is accompanied by full attention to God – such an attention with which they cut off themselves from others than Him.

Factors Which Yield Humbleness

The first factor that yields humbleness is recognition of the Majesty of God and the minuteness of the world. Imam Ali has indicated in *Nahjul Balaghah* that one of the signs of the pious people is:

عَظُمَ الْخَالِقُ فِي أَنْفُسِهِمْ فَصَغُرَ مَا دُونَهُ فِي أَعْيُنِهِمْ.

“Once the Creator was recognized to be Majestic by them, everything else seemed small to them.”¹³

The second important factor that will result in humbleness is to direct one's attention to his prayer and not pay any attention to various other issues. The third important factor is the place where one prays. We should choose a place to pray that is lacking luxury items. That is why it is not recommended to pray in front of pictures, sculptures, open doors or where people cross. Another important factor for becoming humble is to avoid committing sins. It is also important to be well familiar with the meaning of what we say in prayer and understand the philosophy behind the movements. It helps to perform the initial or post-prayer recommendable acts. One must practice praying just like any other thing in order to become apt at it and be careful not to forget to pray.¹⁴

The Social Effects of Praying

Since praying fosters a sense of social responsibility, it has important social effects. There is no doubt that man is created to be a sociable creature. The tendency to live in a group is inherent in man. Living alone bothers us. The worst form of punishment for man is to imprison him in an individual cell. Man has two kinds of responsibilities – that is individual and social responsibility. The Qur'an says:

كُلُّ نَفْسٍ بِمَا كَسَبَتْ رَهِينَةٌ

“Every soul will be (held) in pledge for its deeds.” [The Holy Qur’an, al-Muddath’thir 74:38]

We also read the following verse in the Holy Qur’an:

مَا أَصَابَكَ مِنْ حَسَنَةٍ فَمِنَ اللَّهِ وَمَا أَصَابَكَ مِنْ سَيِّئَةٍ فَمِنْ نَفْسِكَ وَأَرْسَلْنَاكَ لِلنَّاسِ رَسُولًا وَكَفَى بِاللَّهِ شَهِيدًا

“Whatever good, (O man!) happens to thee is from God; but whatever evil happens to thee, is from thy (own) soul. And We have sent thee as an Apostle to (instruct) mankind. And enough is God for a witness.” [The Holy Qur’an, al-Nisaa 4:79]

When we consider social responsibility, it is not the individual that is important. The society is important, and we must consider what social responsibility individuals have. The Noble Prophet said:

كُلُّكُمْ رَاعٍ وَكُلُّكُمْ مَسْئُولٌ عَنْ رَعِيَّتِهِ.

“Each one of you is a ruler, and each one of you is responsible for his subjects.”

One of the most important effects of praying is that it will foster the sense of social responsibility. That is why there is a distinction made in Islam between praying individually and attending congregational prayers. The reward for these two is different. Attending congregational prayers is highly recommended in Islam. Islam has decreed a socio-religious Friday prayer that is held each week, where all the Muslims stand to pray side by side.

The prayer leader delivers his sermons and expresses the social problems of the day for all the people to know. Then they can think of solutions. When all the Muslims stand side by side, their majesty is demonstrated. This will prevent their enemies from plotting against them. Then the Muslims can form an independent nation, rely on themselves and benefit from their power and honor. It is recommendable for the lines of the people attending the congregational prayers to be densely formed and orderly.

It is even more important to note that everyone stands there side by side regardless of his position, wealth, race or nationality, and shakes hands with those around him after the prayers. Thus, the true spirit of social equality is fostered, and class differences that always hinder freedom-loving people are eliminated.

Love and sincerity are substituted for hate and animosity. Attending the congregational prayers also helps the people become aware of each other’s conditions. Should one not attend the prayers one week, others will miss him, and ask what has happened to him. They will then do their best to help resolve his problems. Generally, the prayer unites the whole nation of Islam and establishes an independent society.

The Moral Effects of Praying

Man cannot approach God unless he eliminates his wicked traits and characteristics and prepares himself for the development of noble characteristics. The Qur'an says:

قَدْ أَفْلَحَ مَنْ تَزَكَّى وَذَكَرَ اسْمَ رَبِّهِ فَصَلَّى

“But those will prosper who purify themselves and glorify the name of their Guardian-Lord, and (lift their hearts) in prayer.” [The Holy Qur'an, al-A'la 87: 14-15]

Praying is the means of morally purifying oneself. Continued praying will help educate us in a good moral way, and restrains us from shameful deeds. We read in the Holy Qur'an:

إِنَّ الصَّلَاةَ تَنْهَى عَنِ الْفَحْشَاءِ وَالْمُنْكَرِ

“...For Prayer restrains from shameful and unjust deeds...” [The Holy Qur'an, al-Ankabut 29:45]

Praying will uproot wickedness from man, and plant nobilities instead. The following verses stress this very point:

إِنَّ الْإِنْسَانَ خُلِقَ هَلُوعًا إِذَا مَسَّهُ الشَّرُّ جَزُوعًا وَإِذَا مَسَّهُ الْخَيْرُ مَنُوعًا الْأَمْصِلِينَ الَّذِينَ هُمْ عَلَى صَلَاتِهِمْ دَائِمُونَ

“Truly man was created very impatient – fretful when evil touches him, and niggardly when good reaches him. Not so those devoted to Prayer – those who remain steadfast to their prayer.” [The Holy Qur'an, al-Ma'arij 70: 19-23]

These verses clearly demonstrate the effect of praying in the elimination of impatience, fretfulness and niggardliness from our souls. Those who are devoted to praying can rid themselves of these negative traits. It is narrated in Jami' as-Sadat by Naraghi that Imam Ali was questioned about the meaning of prostrations in the prayer.

He replied: “The first prostration means: O' God! You created us from the dirt. When we raise our head it means: And You brought us out of the dirt. The second prostration means: You will return us to the dirt. And when we again raise our heads it means: And You will bring us out of the dirt again.”¹⁵ It is obvious that if one really considers these points, he would try to improve himself.

Praying and the Obstacles to Perfection

Sheikh Mahmood Shabastari has beautifully expressed the obstacles to the acceptance of our prayers by God in a poetic fashion. To make it short, he states the following four conditions:

- 1) Cleansing one's self from physical filth.
- 2) Purification of one's self from sins.
- 3) Freeing one's self from wicked characteristics.
- 4) Total elimination of other than God in our inner thoughts.

Once one attains these four conditions, he can hope for his prayers to be accepted.

Now that we have briefly expressed the importance of praying, its philosophy, and its personal, social and moral effects, let us consider how Imam Sajjad practically taught his followers about the importance of praying. There were even times when his close relatives felt sorry for him due to his extended prayers.

It is recorded in Bihar ul-Anwar by Allameh Majlesi that once Fatima, the daughter of Imam Husayn went to see Jabir ibn Abdullah and said: "O Companion of God's Prophet! We have rights incumbent upon you. One of these rights is that if you see one of us endangering his life due to worshipping too much you must remind him and ask him to guard himself. O Jabir! Ali ibn Al-Husayn [16](#) has prayed so much that his forehead's skin has hardened, his feet have swollen and his body has lost all the flesh on it. Please ask him to save himself."

Jabir went to see the Imam and asked permission to enter. When he entered, he saw that the Imam was sitting in his praying niche. The Imam stood up and had Jabir sit next to himself, and asked Jabir about his health. Jabir said: "Is it not true that God has created Heaven for you and Hell for your enemies? Then why do you pray so much?"

The Imam replied: "O Companion of God's Prophet! Do you know that God forgave all of the past and future sins of the Prophet, but he still did not stop worshipping? He worshipped so much that his blessed feet became swollen. When told that his past and future sins were forgiven he replied: Should I not be grateful for that?"

Then Jabir realized that his question did not have any effect on the state of affairs. He said: "You are from among the people through whom God fends off the calamities and protects the heavens and the Earth." Then Imam Sajjad said: "I will follow in my father's and my grandfather's footsteps until I meet them." Jabir said: "I have not seen anyone like Ali ibn al-Husayn among the descendants of the Prophets." [17](#)

Tavoos Faqih said: “I saw Imam Sajjad circumambulating the House of God and worshipping God from after the night prayer until dawn. When he looked around and saw that there were few people left who were circumambulating, he looked up to the heavens and said: “O Lord! The stars remaining are few, and are about to set. The eyes have been closed to sleep. However, the gates of your Mercy to those who ask are still open. O Lord! I have come to the door of your House to encompass me with your Mercy, to forgive me, and to show me the face of my grandfather Muhammad in the Hereafter.”

Then the Imam cried and said: “I swear by your Majesty and Honor! I do not intend to oppose you by sinning. I am not ignorant of You and your chastisement when sinning. I do not want to expose myself to your chastisement. However, my Self wants to fool me, and your veil of Mercy helps it. O Lord! Who will save me from your chastisement? O Lord! What shall I hold on to if you cut off your rope of saving from me?

Woe to me! I will be brought to your threshold in the Hereafter. Those whose load is light shall be told to go. Moreover, those whose load is heavy shall be told to stay. I do not know whether I will be from among those whose load is light and are told to go. Or will my heavy load force me to stay there? O Lord! The older I get, the more my mistakes become. Now it is time for me to repent. O My Ultimate desire! Will you burn me in the Fire? Where then is my hope? What will then happen to my friendship? I have come to You with my wicked deeds. There is no one else with crimes like those of mine.”

Then he cried and prostrated on the ground. He felt good. I went to him and cried. My tears dropped on his face. Then he suddenly said: “Who has prevented me from the remembrance of my Lord?” Then I replied: “O Grandson of the Prophet! That is I. I am Tavoos. Why are you doing this? Why do you cry and moan so much? We feel obliged to follow you. O Sir! Your father was such a noble man. Your mother was the Blessed Fatima . Your grandfather was God’s Prophet .” Then Imam Sajjad said: “O Tavoos! Forget about the father, the mother or the grandfather. God has created the Heaven for those who obey Him whether they are a servant or a Tunisian slave. God has created Hell for those who commit sins – even if they are masters from the Quraysh tribe. Have you not heard God say?

فَإِذَا نُفِخَ فِي الصُّورِ فَلَا أَنْسَابَ بَيْنَهُمْ يَوْمَئِذٍ وَلَا يَتَسَاءَلُونَ

“Then when the Trumpet is blown, there will be no more relationships between them that Day, nor will one ask after another!” [The Holy Qur’an, al-Mu’minun 23: 101] [18](#)

Praying and the Forgiveness of Sins

At the end Imam Sajjad said: “...and by saying the best supplications to Him by yourself and beseeching Him to save you from the responsibilities which rest on your shoulders – surrounded by your faults and exhausted by your sins.” You should ask God to save you and forgive your sins that have overtaken you and will finally destroy you. We said earlier that praying is effective in restraining us from committing sins

and wicked deeds. Now let us see how the Prophet of God represents praying as a means of forgiveness of our sins. Abi Basir quoted on the authority of Imam Baqir , on the authority of God's Prophet :

لو كَانَ عَلَى بَابِ دَارِ أَحَدِكُمْ نَهْرٌ وَاغْتَسَلَ فِي كُلِّ يَوْمٍ مِنْهُ خَمْسَ مَرَّاتٍ أَكَانَ يَبْقَى فِي جَسَدِهِ مِنَ الدَّرَنِ شَيْءٌ؟ (قلت: لا. قال) فَإِنَّ مَثَلَ الصَّلَاةِ كَمَثَلِ النَّهْرِ الْجَارِي؛ كُلَّمَا صَلَّى صَلَاةً كَفَّرَتْ مَا بَيْنَهُمَا مِنَ الذُّنُوبِ

“If there was a flowing river right beside your house in which you washed yourself five times each day, would any dirt remain on your bodies?” He was told: “No.” Then he added: “Praying is similar to this river. Whenever you pray the sins you committed between the last time you prayed and this time will all be washed off.”¹⁹

If the person who prays fulfills all the required conditions, he will then surely be forgiven and saved from punishment as the Prophet said. The Commander of the Faithful also said the following that is recorded in *Nahjul Balaghah*:

He advised his companions as follows:

تَعَاهَدُوا أَمْرَ الصَّلَاةِ وَحَافِظُوا عَلَيْهَا وَاسْتَكْبَرُوا مِنْهَا وَتَقَرَّبُوا بِهَا فَإِنَّهَا كَانَتْ عَلَى الْمُؤْمِنِينَ كِتَابًا مَوْفُوتًا. أَلَا تَسْمَعُونَ إِلَى جَوَابِ أَهْلِ النَّارِ حِينَ سُئِلُوا: مَا سَلَكَكُمْ فِي سَقَرٍ؟ قَالُوا لَمْ نَكُ مِنَ الْمُصَلِّينَ. وَإِنَّهَا لَتَحُطُّ الذُّنُوبَ حَطَّ الْوَرَقِ وَتُطْلَقُهَا إِطْلَاقَ الرَّبِيقِ.

*“Adhere to praying and guard it. Pray a lot and seek nearness to God through it, for prayer **..is indeed a timed prescription for the believers**”(4: 103). Have you not heard the answer of the residents of Hell when they are asked: **“What drew you into Hell? They will answer, ‘We were not of those who prayed”**”(74:42-43). Indeed, prayer sheds sins just as trees shed their leaves, and it sets loose (a person's) sins just as bonds are let loose.”*

1. And fix your eyes looking down to the ground. In the other version it is followed by: “You will approach the praye with humbleness, deep from your heart and you will perform it according to its bounds and its rights”. Then it continues.
2. Being humble.
3. Majma' al-Bayan, v.5, p.201.
4. Tafsir Namuneh, v.4, pp. 104–105.
5. Kimiyaye Sa'adat, v. 1, pp. 165–166.
6. Ilm-i-Akhlaq-i-Islami, v.3, p.403.
7. Al-Haqa'iq, p.223.
8. Al-Shahid al-Awwal, Faqih al-Sarbidaran.
9. Translation and Commentary on Risalat al-Huquq, Sepihri, p.92, quoted from Asrar al-Salat, pp. 176–177.
10. Sharh Risalat al-Huquq, Ghopanchi, v. 1, p.292.
11. Adab-i-Namaz, p.350.
12. Being eternal.
13. Nahj al-Balaghah, Fayz al-Islam, Sermon no. 104.

14. Tafsir-i-Namunah, v. 14, pp.204–205.
 15. IIm-i-Akhlaq-i-Islami, v.3, p.442.
 16. Imam Sajjad .
 17. Sharh-i-Risalat al-Huquq, Ghopanchi, v. 1, p.305.
 18. Bihar al-Anwar, v.46, pp.81–82.
 19. Wasa'il al-Shi'ah, v.3, p.7, Tradition no.3.

Right n. 11: The Right of Fasting

حق الصوم

وَأَمَّا حَقُّ الصَّوْمِ فَأَنْ تَعْلَمَ أَنَّهُ حِجَابٌ ضَرَبَهُ اللَّهُ عَلَى لِسَانِكَ وَسَمْعِكَ وَبَصْرِكَ وَفَرْجِكَ وَبَطْنِكَ لِيَسْتُرَكَ بِهِ مِنَ النَّارِ وَهَكَذَا جَاءَ فِي الْحَدِيثِ «الصَّوْمُ جُنَّةٌ مِنَ النَّارِ» فَإِنْ سَكَنْتَ أَطْرَافَكَ فِي حَجَبِهَا رَجَوْتَ أَنْ تَكُونَ مَحْجُوبًا. وَإِنْ أَنْتَ تَرَكَتَهَا تَضَطَّرِبُ فِي حِجَابِهَا وَتَرْفَعُ جَنَابَاتِ الْحِجَابِ فَتُطَّلِعُ إِلَى مَا لَيْسَ لَهَا بِالنَّظَرِ الدَّاعِيَةِ لِلشَّهْوَةِ وَالْقُوَّةِ الْخَارِجَةِ عَنِ حَدِّ النَّقِيَّةِ لِلَّهِ لَمْ تَأْمَنْ أَنْ تَخْرِقَ الْحِجَابَ وَتَخْرُجَ مِنْهُ. وَلَا قُوَّةَ إِلَّا بِاللَّهِ

And the right of fasting is that you should know it is a veil, which God has set up over your tongue, your hearing and your sight, your private parts and your stomach, to protect you from the Fire. This meaning is asserted in the tradition: “Fasting is a shield against the Fire.” Thus if your parts become tranquil within the veil of fasting, you have hopes of being protected.¹ But if you leave them agitated behind the veil and let them lift the sides of the veil, so they look at things that are not lawful for them to look at that incite lust and powers that are beyond the limits of being God-fearing, you will not be safe from tearing through the veil and coming out of it. And there is no power but in God.

The Philosophy behind Fasting

Since sins are usually committed via the tongue, the eyes, the ears, the stomach or the unleashing of sexual desires, Imam Sajjad considers the philosophy behind fasting to be restraining oneself from committing sins. The Imam considers fasting to provide a veil over our body parts that will prevent them from engaging in sin. The Qur'an expresses the same philosophy behind fasting in the following verse:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا كُتِبَ عَلَيْكُمُ الصِّيَامُ كَمَا كُتِبَ عَلَى الَّذِينَ مِنْ قَبْلِكُمْ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَتَّقُونَ

“O’ ye who believe! Fasting is prescribed to you as it was prescribed to those before you, that ye

may (learn) self-restraint.” [The Holy Qur’an, al--Baqarah 2: 183]

We see that self-restraint has been stated to be the main reason behind fasting. Fasting implies self-restraint. It has also been used for abstaining from talking as we read in the following verse in which the Blessed Mary has been ordered not to talk in the form of a fast:

فَكُلِّي وَاشْرَبِي وَقَرِّي عَيْنًا فِيمَا تَرَيْنَ مِنَ الْبَشَرِ أَحَدًا فَقُولِي إِنِّي نَذَرْتُ لِلرَّحْمَنِ صَوْمًا فَلَنْ أُكَلِّمَ الْيَوْمَ إِنْسِيًّا

"So eat and drink and cool (thine) eye. And if thou dost see any man, say, 'I have vowed a fast to (God) Most Gracious, and this day will I enter into no talk with any human being'" [The Holy Qur’an, Maryam 19:26]

Fasting before Islam

From the verse Baqarah 2: 183 that was cited above we can also conclude that fasting is not limited to Muslims and it has been prescribed for those before us. It is most probable that the similarity is only in its prescription for the religions that came before Islam, not in its number of days or time of fasting.

Fasting in the Old Testament

We read the following in the Old Testament regarding fasting:

وَكَانَ هُنَاكَ عِنْدَ الرَّبِّ أَرْبَعِينَ نَهَارًا وَأَرْبَعِينَ لَيْلَةً لَمْ يَأْكُلْ خُبْزًا وَلَمْ يَشْرَبْ مَاءً. فَكَتَبَ عَلَى اللُّوحَيْنِ كَلِمَاتِ الْعَهْدِ
الْكَلِمَاتِ الْعَشْرَ.

“And he was there with the Lord forty days and forty nights; he did neither eat bread, nor drink water. And he wrote upon the tablets the words of the covenant, the Ten Commandments.”² [The Old Testament, Exodus 34:28]

Fasting in the New Testament

We read the following in the New Testament regarding fasting:

ثُمَّ أَصْعَدَ يَسُوعُ إِلَى الْبَرِّيَّةِ مِنَ الرُّوحِ لِجُرَبِّ مِنَ إِبْلِيسَ. فَبَعْدَ مَا صَامَ أَرْبَعِينَ نَهَارًا وَأَرْبَعِينَ لَيْلَةً جَاعَ أَخِيرًا

“Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil. After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry.” [The New Testament, Matthew 4: 1-2]

Fasting of the Disciples

We read the following in the New Testament regarding fasting by the disciples:

وَقَالُوا لَهُ: «لِمَاذَا يَصُومُ تَلَامِيذُ يُوْحَنَّا كَثِيْرًا وَيُقَدِّمُونَ طِلْبَاتٍ وَكَذَلِكَ تَلَامِيذُ الْفَرِيْسِيِّيْنَ أَيْضًا وَأَمَّا تَلَامِيذُكَ فَيَأْكُلُونَ وَيَشْرَبُونَ؟» فَقَالَ لَهُمْ: «أَتَقْدِرُونَ أَنْ تَجْعَلُوا بَنِي الْعُرْسِ يَصُومُونَ مَا دَامَ الْعَرِيْسُ مَعَهُمْ؟ وَلَكِنْ سَتَأْتِي أَيَّامٌ حِيْنَ يُرْفَعُ الْعَرِيْسُ عَنْهُمْ فَحِيْنَئِذٍ يَصُومُونَ فِي تِلْكَ الْأَيَّامِ

“And they said unto him, Why do the disciples of John fast often, and make prayers, and likewise the disciples of the Pharisees; but thine eat and drink? And he said unto them, Can ye make the children of the bridechamber fast, while the bridegroom is with them? But the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken away from them, and then shall they fast in those days.” [3](#) [Luke, 5:33–35]

From the above we can conclude that they fasted too. The number forty is also expressed, but it is not clear how they fasted.[4](#)

The Period of Fasting in the Qur’an

Consider the following verse of the Holy Qur’an:

أَيَّامًا مَّعْدُودَاتٍ فَمَنْ كَانَ مِنْكُمْ مَّرِيضًا أَوْ عَلَى سَفَرٍ فَعِدَّةٌ مِنْ أَيَّامٍ أُخَرَ وَعَلَى الَّذِينَ يُطِيقُونَهُ فِدْيَةٌ طَعَامُ مِسْكِينٍ فَمَنْ تَطَوَّعَ خَيْرًا فَهُوَ خَيْرٌ لَهُ وَأَنْ تَصُومُوا خَيْرٌ لَكُمْ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ تَعْلَمُونَ

“(Fasting) for a fixed number of days; but if any of you is ill, or on a journey, the prescribed number (should be made up) from days later. For those who can do it (with hardship), is a ransom, the feeding of one that is indigent. But he that will give more, of his own free will, – it is better for him. And it is better for you that ye fast, if ye only knew.” [The Holy Qur’an, al-Baqarah 2: 184]

There are two opinions regarding the meaning of “a fixed number of days.” Some consider it to mean three days from each month. Ibn `Abbas adds the fasting on the day of Ashura[5](#) to it. Some consider this fasting to be recommended. Others consider it to be obligatory.

Other commentators have interpreted this to refer to the month of Ramadan.[6](#) The majority of the interpreters of the Holy Qur’an accept this view. They say that God briefly expresses fasting to be for one or two days, and then says it is for a fixed number of days, that is the month of Ramadan. We can also understand from this verse that fasting is obligatory for those who are not ill or on a journey. When ill or on a journey, one should not fast. However, one should compensate by feeding the poor. Abdul Rahman quoted on the authority of God’s Prophet :

الصَّائِمُ فِي السَّفَرِ كَالْمُفْطِرِ فِي الْحَضَرِ.

“One who fasts while on a journey is like one who breaks his fast while he is at home.”⁷

It has been narrated on the authority of Imam Sadiq :

الصَّائِمُ فِي شَهْرِ رَمَضَانَ فِي السَّفَرِ كَالْمُفْطِرِ فِيهِ فِي الْحَضَرِ.

“One who fasts during the month of Ramadan while he is on a journey is like one who is at home and breaks his fast.”⁸

In the interpretation of the above verse, we read in Majma' al-Bayan: Ayashi quoted Muhammad ibn Muslim on the authority of Imam Sadiq that the Prophet never fasted while on a journey. Then this verse was revealed one day at noon when they were in a place called Kara ul-Ghameem. The Prophet asked for a bowl of water, drank some, and ordered the people to drink too. Some of the people said: “It is near the end of the day. It is better to complete our fast.” Then the Prophet called them sinners. They were called sinners until the time of the death of the Prophet .

The Meaning of the Word ‘Ramadan’

The root of the word ‘Ramadan’ in Arabic is ‘ramaz’ that implies strong shining of the rays of the Sun on pebbles. The Arabs named the various months according to the conditions at the time in which they occurred. The month of fasting was coincident with the peak of the heat. Another account states that Ramadan is one of the Names of God. That is why we are instructed not to refer to the month of fasting as ‘Ramadan’ but ‘the month of Ramadan.’ In yet a third account, the month of fasting is called Ramadan because it burns away the sins.

Fasting and Patience

The Qur’an has interpreted fasting as patience. There is a tradition in which Imam Sadiq has been quoted to have said the following in the interpretation of the Almighty God’s statement “Seek help from patience and prayer”: What is meant by patience is fasting. When something really hard descends upon man, he should fast since God the Almighty says “seek help from patience” – that is fasting.”⁹ The late Majlisi has said the following in Mir’atul Uqool: The main part of fasting is imprisonment. Fasting is called patience because it imprisons one and restrains him from eating, drinking and love-making.” ¹⁰

Traditions on the Nobility of Fasting and Its Effects

We can get a better understanding of the nobility of fasting and its importance by reviewing some of the

relevant traditions. Zurarah quoted on the authority of Imam Baqir :

بُنِيَ الْإِسْلَامُ عَلَى خَمْسَةِ أَشْيَاءٍ: عَلَى الصَّلَاةِ وَالزَّكَاةِ وَالْحَجِّ وَالصَّوْمِ وَالْوِلَايَةِ.

“There are five pillars for Islam: praying, paying the alms-tax, the holy pilgrimage, fasting and the friendship (of the Commander of the Faithful and the leaders that came after him).”¹¹

Majlisi said: These may be contemporary things since Islam is shaky without them. Believing in these is a part of Islam. It is also probable that what is meant by friendship is love of the Imams in addition to a belief in them. Isma'il ibn Abi Ziyad quoted on the authority of Imam Sadiq on the authority of his grandfathers that the Prophet told his companions:

أَلَا أُخْبِرُكُمْ بِشَيْءٍ إِنْ أَنْتُمْ فَعَلْتُمُوهُ تَبَاعَدَ الشَّيْطَانُ عَنْكُمْ كَمَا تَبَاعَدَ الْمَشْرِقُ مِنَ الْمَغْرِبِ؟ قَالُوا: بَلَى. قَالَ: الصَّوْمُ يُسَوِّدُ وَجْهَهُ وَالصَّدَقَةُ تَكْسِرُ ظَهْرَهُ وَالْحُبُّ فِي اللَّهِ وَالْمُؤَاذَرَةُ عَلَى الْعَمَلِ الصَّالِحِ تَقْطَعُ دَابِرَهُ وَالِاسْتِغْفَارُ يَقْطَعُ وَتِينَهُ، وَلِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ زَكَاةٌ وَزَكَاةُ الْأَبْدَانِ الصِّيَامُ.

“Do you want me to tell you what you can do that will cause Satan to go as far away from you as the East is from the West?” They said: “O Prophet of God! Yes.” He said: “Fasting blackens Satan’s face. Giving charity breaks his back, love for the sake of God and helping in doing good deeds roots him out, and repentance cuts off his aorta. There is an alms tax for everything, and the alms of the body is fasting.”¹²

The late Majlisi considers this a reliable tradition. Ibn Abi Amir quoted on the authority of some of the companions, on the authority of Imam Sadiq : Almighty God revealed to Moses : What has prevented you from supplicating to Me? He said: The bad smell of my mouth since I am fasting. God the Almighty revealed:

يَا مُوسَى! لَخُلُوفٌ فَمِ الصَّائِمِ أَطْيَبُ عِنْدِي مِنْ رِيحِ الْمِسْكِ.

O Moses! The odour of the mouth of one who is fasting is more agreeable to Me than the fragrance of musk.”¹³

In another tradition, we read that the Prophet of God said:

الصَّوْمُ جُنَّةٌ مِنَ النَّارِ.

“Fasting is a shield against the Fire.”¹⁴

Fasting and the Forgiveness of Sins

Imam Baqir said: God's Prophet told Jabir ibn Abdullah:

يا جَابِرُ! هَذَا شَهْرُ رَمَضَانَ؛ مَنْ صَامَ نَهَارَهُ وَقَامَ وَرَدًا مِنْ لَيْلِهِ وَعَفَّ بَطْنَهُ وَفَرَجَهُ وَكَفَّ لِسَانَهُ خَرَجَ مِنْ ذُنُوبِهِ كَخُرُوجِهِ مِنَ الشَّهْرِ. فَقَالَ جَابِرٌ: يَا رَسُولَ اللَّهِ! مَا أَحْسَنَ هَذَا الْحَدِيثَ. فَقَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَآلِهِ: يَا جَابِرُ! وَمَا أَشَدَّ هَذِهِ الشُّرُوطَ.

O Jabir! This is the month of Ramadan. Whoever fasts during its days, stands in prayer in its nights, keeps his stomach and his private parts away from what is unlawful, and restrains his tongue shall leave all his sins behind as he leaves this month.” Jabir said: “O Prophet of God! How beautiful are these words.” The Prophet said: “O Jabir! And how difficult are these conditions.”¹⁵

Imam Sajjad also mentioned these. In another tradition from the Prophet the condition for fasting to be considered as worship is stated to be not gossiping.”¹⁶

Fasting and the Equality between the Rich and the Poor

It is quoted upon the authority of Imam Sadiq :

إِنَّمَا فَرَضَ اللَّهُ الصِّيَامَ لِيَسْتَوِيَ بِهِ الْغَنِيُّ وَالْفَقِيرُ، وَذَلِكَ أَنَّ الْغَنِيَّ لَمْ يَكُنْ لِيَجِدَ مَسَّ الْجُوعِ فَيَرْحَمُ الْفَقِيرَ لِأَنَّ الْغَنِيَّ كُلَّمَا أَرَادَ شَيْئًا قَدَرَ عَلَيْهِ، فَأَرَادَ اللَّهُ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ أَنْ يُسَوِّيَ بَيْنَ خَلْقِهِ وَأَنْ يُدِيقَ الْغَنِيَّ نَيْلَ الْجُوعِ وَالْأَلَمِ لِيَبْرُقَ عَلَى الضَّعِيفِ وَيَرْحَمَ الْجَائِعَ.

“God made fasting obligatory so that the rich and the poor are made equal. If there were no fasting, the rich would never experience the feeling of hunger that would make them have mercy on the poor, for whenever the rich desire something they are able to acquire it. Thus God desired to place His servants on the same level, and that the rich experience hunger and pain so that they have compassion for the weak and have mercy on the hungry.”¹⁷

We see in this tradition that one of the philosophies behind fasting in the month of Ramadan is to reduce the gap between the rich and the poor people. Wealth has always divided human societies into two classes – the rich and the poor. The rich who possess means of comfort and convenience can never realize the hardships and pains suffered by the poor and experience what they go through. When one fasts, he gets hungry and thirsty. His human emotions get aroused and he starts to think of ways to help those who are hungry. It is interesting to note that according to Islamic jurisprudence no rich man can pay a poor man to fast instead of him. This clearly shows the purpose behind fasting.

Fasting as Viewed by Imam Ali

There are several views about fasting expressed by Imam Ali that are recorded in *Nahjul Balaghah*. For example, he said:

وَزَكَاتُ الْبَدَنِ الصِّيَامُ.

“The alms tax of the body is fasting.” [18](#)

We know that taxing implies growth, development and purification. Here the Imam has referred to the health-related aspect of fasting. In another place he said:

وَصَوْمُ شَهْرِ رَمَضَانَ فَإِنَّهُ جُنَّةٌ مِنَ الْعِقَابِ.

“Fasting in the month of Ramadan is a shield against the chastisement.” [19](#)

In another place he said:

خُمَصُ الْبُطُونِ مِنَ الصِّيَامِ ذُبْلُ الشِّفَاهِ مِنَ الدُّعَاءِ صُفْرُ الْأَلْوَانِ مِنَ السَّهْرِ عَلَى وُجُوهِهِمْ غَبْرَةُ الْخَاشِعِينَ، أَوْلَيْكَ إِخْوَانِي الذَّاهِبُونَ.

“They were those whose stomachs were slim due to fasting, their lips were dry from (continuous) supplications, their faces were pale from staying up at night, and their faces were covered with the dust of humbleness. They were my brothers who are gone now.” [20](#)

In another of Imam Ali’s wise sayings we read:

الصِّيَامُ ابْتِلَاءٌ لِإِخْلَاصِ الْخَلْقِ.

“Fasting is a trial of people’s sincerity.” [21](#)

In another of Imam Ali’s wise sayings we read that on the day of celebration, he said:

إِنَّمَا هُوَ عِيدٌ لِمَنْ قَبِلَ اللَّهُ صِيَامَهُ وَشَكَرَ قِيَامَهُ، وَكُلُّ يَوْمٍ لَا يُعْصَى اللَّهُ فِيهِ فَهُوَ عِيدٌ.

“It is only a day of celebration (Eid) for those whose fasting God accepts and whose standing up in prayer (at night) He rewards. Every day in which one does not disobey God is a day of celebration.” [22](#)

In some of his advice he said:

أوصيكم وجميع ولدي... وصلاح ذات البين

*"I advise you and my children.... to improve your social affairs, since its reward is more than that of praying and fasting."*²³

Fasting Without Any Gains

Imam Ali said:

كَمْ مِنْ صَائِمٍ لَيْسَ لَهُ مِنْ صِيَامِهِ إِلَّا الْجُوعُ وَالظَّمَأُ، وَكَمْ مِنْ قَائِمٍ لَيْسَ لَهُ إِلَّا السَّهَرُ وَالْعَنَاءُ. حَبَّذَا نَوْمُ الْأَكْيَاسِ وَإِفْطَارُهُمْ.

*"There are many who fast and gain nothing from their fasting other than suffering from thirst and hunger. Many stay up at night in prayer and gain nothing but sleeplessness and fatigue. How beautiful is the sleeping of the wise, and the breaking of their fasts!"*²⁴

In the well-known sermon called Qasi'ah, Imam Ali discussed the bad ending of being entrapped by Satan's plots, and pointed out factors that can save man.

و عن ذلك ما حرس الله عباده المؤمنين بالصلاة و الزكوات و مجاهدة الصيام في الأيام المفروضات تسكيناً لأطرافهم وتخشيعاً لأبصارهم وتذليلاً لنفوسهم وتخفيضاً لقلوبهم وإذهاباً للخيلاء عنهم ولما في ذلك من تعفير عتاق الوجوه تواضعاً والتصاق كرائم الجوارح بالأرض تصاغراً ولحوق البطون بالمتون من الصيام تذلاً

*"God protects his believing servants from that (Satan's plots) through praying, paying the alms-tax, striving to fast during the days that fasting is prescribed since these acts will give tranquility to their limbs and hinder them from engaging in sin. They will cause humbleness of the eyes and control of the wild self. They will cause humbleness of the heart and eliminate undue pride and haughtiness. That will be due to tender cheeks being rubbed in the dust out of humility, the most precious limbs cleaving to the earth in abjectness and stomachs adhering to their backs because of fasting in abasement (before God)."*²⁵

It is said that once an Arab who was riding a camel in the desert ran into a man who was praying. His praying fooled the Arab. He got off his camel, sat down next to him and said: "How well do you pray!" The man said: "You do not know. I am also fasting." The man's praying and fasting fooled the Arab, and he entrusted his camel to him. When he returned he saw neither the man nor his camel. He felt sorry and realized that he should not have been fooled by the man's praying and fasting, and should not have

entrusted his camel to him.[26](#)

Now that we have studied the various effects of fasting as expressed by Imam Ali let us see what the master of the jurisprudents, Sheikh Muhammad Hasan who is the author of Jawahir ul-Kalam, has said about the positive effects of fasting in the chapter on fasting. He said: “It has been narrated that God the Almighty said:

الصَّوْمُ لِي وَأَنَا أُجَازِي بِهِ.

Fasting is for Me, and I will reward it (even though I Myself am the reward for fasting).

He added: “The reason it is said that fasting is for God is that it is a private issue which only God knows about. This is opposed to praying that is visible by the people. It is also because through fasting, our physical strength reduces while our intellect and the various faculties are strengthened. Thus we can attain the more precise divine points, heavenly knowledge and the desirable perfections.”[27](#)

The Effects of Fasting as Viewed by Ghazali

Abu Hamed said: “Fasting is for the sake of God and has an especial nobility. Although all forms of worship are this way, there are two points specific about fasting. They are as follows:

1 Fasting is a form of abstaining that is private. It is a secret that others do not see unlike other forms of worship that are seen in public. No one but God knows about fasting, since it is a personal action done with patience.

2 Fasting is a form of self-restraint that is the greatest blow to God’s enemy. This is because lust is the tool of Satan. Eating and drinking strengthen lust. That is why God’s Prophet said:

إِنَّ الشَّيْطَانَ لَيَجْرِي مِنَ ابْنِ آدَمَ مَجْرَى الدَّمِ فَصَيِّفُوا مَجَارِيَهُ بِالْجُوعِ.

“Satan flows through man’s body just like blood. Block off the roaming grounds of Satan via hunger.”[28](#)

Hunger derived through fasting breaks down Satan and acts as a stronghold against him. Whoever defeats Satan has assisted God. This assistance is related to granting success by God since God has said:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا إِن تَنْصُرُوا اللَّهَ يَنْصُرْكُمْ وَيُثَبِّتْ أَقْدَامَكُمْ

“O ye who believe! If ye will aid (the cause of) God, He will aid you, and plant your feet firmly.”

[*The Holy Qur'an, Muhammad 47:7*]

God also said:

وَالَّذِينَ جَاهَدُوا فِينَا لَنَهْدِيَنَّهُمْ سُبُلَنَا وَإِنَّ اللَّهَ لَمَعَ الْمُحْسِنِينَ

“And those who strive in Our (cause), We will certainly guide them to our Paths: For verily God is with those who do right.” [The Holy Qur'an, al-Ankabut 29:69]

In another verse God said:

إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يُغَيِّرُ مَا بِقَوْمٍ حَتَّى يُغَيِّرُوا مَا بِأَنْفُسِهِمْ

Verily never will God change the condition of a people until they change it themselves (with their own souls).” [The Holy Qur'an, al-Ra'd 13: 11]

The change mentioned in this verse is the elimination of lusts, since lusts are the means by which Satan influences man. We cannot discover the Grandeur of God as long as Satan influences us through our lusts. God's Prophet said:

لَوْ لَا أَنَّ الشَّيَاطِينَ يَحُومُونَ عَلَى قُلُوبِ بَنِي آدَمَ لَنَظَرُوا إِلَى مَلَكُوتِ السَّمَاءِ

“If Satans were not hovering around the hearts of the descendants of Adam, men could look at the kingdom of the heavens.”²⁹

Fasting and Health

One of the philosophies behind fasting is health. Before considering the positive effects of fasting on our health, let us see through what ways illnesses affect our health. God's Prophet said:

الْمَعِدَةُ بَيْتُ كُلِّ دَاءٍ وَالْحِمِيَةُ رَأْسُ كُلِّ دَوَاءٍ

“The stomach is the home of every illness, and abstinence (from food) is the chief of all medicine.”³⁰

Imam Kazim said:

الْحِمِيَةُ رَأْسُ كُلِّ دَوَاءٍ وَالْمَعِدَةُ بَيْتُ الْأَدْوَاءِ

“Abstinence is the chief of every remedy and the stomach is the home of illnesses.”³¹

He also said:

لَيْسَ مِنْ دَوَاءٍ إِلَّا وَيُهَيِّجُ دَاءً وَلَيْسَ فِي الْبَدَنِ أَنْفَعُ مِنْ إِمْسَاكِ الْيَدِ إِلَّا عَمَّا يَحْتَاجُ إِلَيْهِ.

“There is no medicine that does not stir up an illness, and nothing is more beneficial for the body than withholding from it all except what it requires.”³²

God’s Prophet said:

صُومُوا تَصِحُّوا.

“Fast, and you will be healthy.”³³

We read in these traditions from the Prophet of God and the seventh Imam who have divine knowledge that the stomach is the home of all illnesses and we can get healthy by abstaining from eating. Al-Asbagh ibn Nubatah narrated that he heard the Commander of the Faithful advise his son Imam Hasan as follows: “O’ my son! Do you want me to teach you a practice that will make you needless of doctors?” Imam Hasan said: “Yes.” The Commander of the Faithful said that the Prophet said:

لَا تَجْلِسُ عَلَى الطَّعَامِ إِلَّا وَأَنْتَ جَائِعٌ، وَلَا تَقُمْ عَنِ الطَّعَامِ إِلَّا وَأَنْتَ تَشْتَهِيهِ، وَجَوَدِ الْمَضْغَ، وَإِذَا نِمْتَ فَأَعْرِضْ نَفْسَكَ عَلَى الْخَلَاءِ، فَإِذَا اسْتَعْمَلْتَ هَذَا اسْتَغْنَيْتَ عَنِ الطِّبِّ.

“Do not sit down to eat unless you are hungry. Cease eating while you still have some appetite to eat. Chew your food thoroughly. Go to the toilet before you sleep. If you adhere to these you will not need medical treatment.”³⁴

This tradition also shows that overeating is the root of all illnesses.

Unorderly Food Intake and Orderly Excretions

The skin, the liver, the kidneys and the lungs are all orderly body parts. Our kidneys even know that we should not be awakened at night in order to urinate. The kidneys reduce their secretions to lower the production of urine depending on the stage of our sleep and the darkness of the room. The skin, the lungs and the liver are similar.

However, our intake is so unorderly that even sometimes instead of taking in good and useful things we let in smoke, dust and alcohol. This will pressurize our metabolism beyond its ultimate strength and

finally make us ill. The body is like a reservoir of what we eat and drink. Many organs are constantly at work trying to excrete the poisonous material in our body. They need a chance to catch up with our unorderly intake. Fasting is the perfect means to give our body a chance to get rid of the poisons within it.[35](#)

The Glands

Consider the following points regarding the glands:

- 1) The functions of the glands are interrelated. If one reduces to secrete some hormone, then the functioning of the other glands will be messed up.
- 2) The hypothalamus is one of the most important glands whose functioning is highly related to the functioning of the suprarenal glands.[36](#)
- 3) The hormones produced by the adrenal (suprarenal) glands[37](#) are very important. They can affect all the cells of our body. Any overeating or eating bad things can have bad effects on the functioning of the hypothalamus.
- 4) It has been proven that the pancreas[38](#) and the adrenal glands have an important role on longevity.
- 5) A close relationship between the functioning of the pancreas gland and the adrenal glands has been proven.
- 6) It has been proven that as we age there is a reduction in the production of the hormones secreted by the pancreas,[39](#) but aging does not affect the hormones secreted by the adrenal glands.
- 7) Vladimir Nikitin who is a professor of biochemistry experimented on rats for many years. He proved that by keeping them hungry through especial means he could extend their life expectancy from 2.5 years to 4.5 years. He believes that when the adrenal glands are kept hungry, they themselves eat up their excess hormones that cause an imbalance. Thus fasting can re-establish our hormonal balance for a while if for some reason our hormones are out of balance.[40](#)

Studies on Metabolism

It is thought that whatever we eat is burnt to produce energy for our body and the excess is let out. This is not a correct image of the way our body works. Our body is not like a pond in which food enters from one side, and leaves from the other side. What enters our body must be fresh, but what leaves it is old. The oxygen that enters our body now will leave our body six months later. The same holds true for calcium. If radioactive nitrogen is added to our food, it will appear in the urine several weeks later.

Therefore, we should not expect an instant replacement of the old food in the body with fresh food that

we eat. We must wait many days to achieve this. Dr. John Feromozan said: The stored amount of glycogen stored in the kidneys and protein in the blood and fat stored in the body is 30% for men and 20% for women. This amount is sufficient for one month.

Dr. Alexis Carrel in his book *Man the Unknown Creature* said the following about fasting: “When you fast, the sugar in the blood pours into the kidneys, the fat stored under the skin, the proteins stored in the muscles, the glands and the kidney cells are released and used up.” When we consider both of these statements we conclude that our body is totally repaired after thirty days of fasting and it gets totally rid itself of poisons and old materials.[41](#)

Fasting and Ulcers

It is a common misunderstanding that fasting causes ulcers. If it was so, then we should ask why the statistics show more cases of ulcers among the non-Muslim nations who do not fast compared to the Muslim nations. If ulcers were only common among Muslims, then we could suspect a relationship between fasting and ulcers existed. However, this is not the case and there is a growing trend of ulcers in the West. If fasting was a cause of ulcers and given the more than fourteen centuries of fasting by Muslims, ulcers should have become a hereditary disease among the Muslims. However, this is not the case.[42](#)

Causes of Ulcers

The causes of ulcers were investigated in an international conference on diseases of the stomach in September 1966 in Tokyo. Those who attended presented their country's medical results as to the causes of ulcers. Among these reports, the following were the most common causes of ulcers:

- 1) Smoking.
- 2) Eating many hot foods.
- 3) Drinking too much water.
- 4) Usual use of coffee and spices.
- 5) Excessive use of salty or sour foods.
- 6) Drinking alcoholic beverages.

The representative from Turkey who attended this conference reported that after the end of the month of fasting it has been found that fasting accelerates this disease. This implies that fasting does not cause ulcers, but if the person is prone to get an ulcer fasting will speed it up. That is why Islam has instructed those who are ill or know that they will get ill if they fast should not fast. Their fasting is postponed to a

later time.

Alexi Soforin's Medical Fasting

When we eat various foods, some of it passes through the digestive system but is not used up by the cells. It gets stored up under the skin, around the heart and around important body organs. These will cause infections after some time and result in various ailments. The more the excess food, the worse the infection will be. The illnesses have different names, but are all rooted in microbes or viruses that live where there exists excess food. Before any treatment, we must get rid of the trash.

This is only feasible if we do not give our body any food and only drink water. The body will then automatically extract the stored food and get rid of it. Then the disease will be uprooted and show signs of treatment. This method will naturally cleanse the body. If we use other methods and take drugs, the drugs will also affect the healthy cells in our body, and our body will react to the drugs. However, fasting does not have any side effects. Also, note that this is a single treatment for all illnesses.[43](#)

So far, we have discussed the views of doctors about ways to treat illnesses. We saw that abstaining and fasting is an important part of this treatment, even the last one. Therefore, God who created us made fasting obligatory so that we derive both spiritual and physical benefits from it. We mentioned earlier that Imam Sajjad stressed the importance of controlling our various organs and directing them in a good way while fasting.

The Secrets of Fasting

The scholars have mentioned three ranks for fasting. The first rank for fasting is just restraining the stomach from eating and drinking, and restraining our sexual desires. The second rank for fasting implies the additional restraining of our ears, eyes, hands, feet and other organs. Imam Sadiq said:

...إِذَا صُمْتَ فَلْيَصُمْ سَمْعُكَ وَبَصَرُكَ وَشَعْرُكَ وَجِلْدُكَ وَ

“When you fast your hearing, your sight, your hair, your skin and other organs should also fast.”

لَا يُكُنْ يَوْمٌ صَوْمِكَ كَيَوْمٍ فِطْرِكَ.

“The day of your fasting should not be like the day that you do not fast.”

In another tradition he said:

وَدَعِ الْمِرَاءَ وَأُذْيَ الْخَادِمِ وَلْيَكُنْ عَلَيْكَ وَقَارُ الصِّيَامِ فَإِنَّ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَآلِهِ سَمِعَ امْرَأَةً تَسُبُّ جَارِيَتَهَا

وَهِيَ صَائِمَةٌ فَدَعَى بِطَعَامٍ فَقَالَ لَهَا: كُلِي. فَقَالَتْ: إِنِّي صَائِمَةٌ. قَالَ: كَيْفَ تَكُونِينَ صَائِمَةً وَقَدْ سَبَّيْتِ جَارِيَتَكَ؟ إِنَّ الصَّوْمَ لَيْسَ مِنَ الطَّعَامِ وَالشَّرَابِ.

Abandon quarrelling and troubling your servant. Let the dignity of those who fast be on you. Once the Prophet heard a woman who was fasting reviling her maid. The Prophet brought her some food and asked her to eat it. She said that she was fasting. The Prophet said: "How could you be fasting when you have reviled your maid? Fasting is not just abstaining from food and drink." [44](#)

The next rank of fasting implies whole-hearted fasting. In this state, we abandon all worldly thoughts that distract us from God. This form of fasting is broken when we start to think about worldly affairs. It is said that it is breaking this form of fast even if you think about what to prepare to break the fast with, since you do not have a strong belief that God will give you the promised daily bread. This rank is specifically for the Prophets and the honest ones who are close to God. God told the Prophet :

قُلِ اللَّهُ تَمَّ ذَرَهُمْ فِي خَوْضِهِمْ يَلْعَبُونَ

..Say: "God (sent it down)": Then leave them to plunge in vain discourse and trifling. [The Holy Qur'an, al-An'am 6:91]

Imam Sadiq narrated that God's Prophet had said:

الصَّوْمُ جُنَّةٌ: أَي سِتْرٌ مِنْ آفَاتِ الدُّنْيَا وَحِجَابٌ مِنْ عَذَابِ الْآخِرَةِ.

"Fasting is a shield: that is, it is a covering against the calamities of this world and a protective barrier against the punishment of the Hereafter." [45](#)

[1.](#) From the Fire of Hell.

[2.](#) King James version.

[3.](#) King James version.

[4.](#) There are also many other places in the Bible where fasting is discussed. Consider the following two cases for example. Daniel fasted for three weeks before receiving his vision: "In those days I, Daniel, was mourning three full weeks. I ate no pleasant bread, neither came flesh nor wine in my mouth, neither did I anoint myself at all, till three whole weeks were fulfilled. And in the four and twentieth day of the first month, as I was by the side of the great river, which is Hiddekel; then I lifted up mine eyes, and looked, and behold a certain man clothed in linen, whose loins were girded with fine gold of Uphaz:

His body also was like the beryl, and his face as the appearance of lightning, and his eyes as lamps of fire, and his arms and his feet like in colour to polished brass, and the voice of his words like the voice of a multitude. And I, Daniel, alone saw the vision: for the men that were with me saw not the vision; but a great quaking fell upon them, so that they fled to hide themselves. Therefore I was left alone, and saw this great vision, and there remained no strength in me: for my comeliness was turned in me into corruption, and I retained no strength. Yet heard I the voice of his words: and when I heard the voice of his words, then was I in a deep sleep on my face, and my face toward the ground. And, behold, a hand touched me, which set me upon my knees and upon the palms of my hands.

And he said unto me, O Daniel, a man greatly beloved, understand the words that I speak unto thee, and stand upright: for unto thee am I now sent. And when he had spoken this word unto me, I stood trembling. Then he said unto me: Fear not, Daniel: for from the first day that thou didst set thine heart to understand, and to chasten thyself before thy God, thy words were heard, and I am come for thy words.” (The Bible, Daniel 10:2–12)

Elijah fasted forty days before speaking with God: “Now Ahab told Jezebel everything Elijah had done and how he had killed all the Prophets with the sword. So Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah to say, “May the gods deal with me, be it ever so severely, if by this time tomorrow I do not make your life like that of one of them.” Elijah was afraid and ran for his life. When he came to Beersheba in Judah, he left his servant there, while he himself went a day’s journey into the desert. He came to a broom tree, sat down under it and prayed that he might die. “I have had enough, Lord,” he said. “Take my life; I am no better than my ancestors.”

Then he lay down under the tree and fell asleep. All at once an angel touched him and said, “Get up and eat.” He looked around, and there by his head was a cake of bread baked over hot coals, and a jar of water. He ate and drank and then lay down again. The angel of the Lord came back a second time and touched him and said, “Get up and eat, for the journey is too much for you.” So he got up and ate and drank. Strengthened by that food, he travelled forty days and forty nights until he reached Horeb, the mountain of God. There he went into a cave and spent the night. And the word of the Lord came to him: “What are you doing here, Elijah?” (The Bible, Kings 19: 1–9).

- [5.](#) The tenth day of the month of Muharram.
- [6.](#) The ninth month of the Islamic year observed as sacred with fasting practiced daily from dawn to sunset.
- [7.](#) Majma’ al-Bayan, v.2, p.274.
- [8.](#) This implies that both acts are wrong.
- [9.](#) Mir’at al-‘Uqul, v. 16, p.201.
- [10.](#) Ibid.
- [11.](#) Ibid, p. 197.
- [12.](#) Mir’at al-‘Uqul, v. 16, p. 198.
- [13.](#) Ibid. p.203.
- [14.](#) Al-Mahajjah al-Bayda, v.2, p. 123.
- [15.](#) Bihar al-Anwar, v.96, p.371.
- [16.](#) Al-Mahajjah al-Bayda, v.2, p. 123.
- [17.](#) Mahajjah al-Bayda, v.2, p. 124.
- [18.](#) Nahjul Balaghah, Subhi Salih, Hikmah no. 136.
- [19.](#) Ibid., Sermon no. 110.
- [20.](#) Nahjul Balaghah, Sermon 120, Fayz al-Islam.
- [21.](#) Ibid., Wise saying no.252, Sobhi Salih.
- [22.](#) Ibid., Wise saying no.428.
- [23.](#) Ibid., Advice no.47.
- [24.](#) Ibid., Wise saying, no. 137, Fayz al-Islam.
- [25.](#) Nahjul Balaghah, Sermon no. 192, Subhi Salih.
- [26.](#) Sarmayeh-e- Sokhan, v. 1, p. 14.
- [27.](#) Jawahir al-Kalam, v. 16, p. 182.
- [28.](#) Kimiya’ye Sa’adat, v. 1, p.208.
- [29.](#) Al-Mahajjah al-Bayda, v.2, p. 125.
- [30.](#) Safinah al-Bihar, v.2, p.78.
- [31.](#) Ibid. p.79.
- [32.](#) Ibid. p.78.
- [33.](#) Ibid. pp.79–80.
- [34.](#) Ibid. pp. 79–80.

- [35.](#) Awallin Daneshgah wa Akharin Payambar, v.3, pp.37–38.
- [36.](#) Located on both sides on the upper kidney poles.
- [37.](#) Cortisone, Aldosterone.
- [38.](#) The pancreas is a very important gland in the body. It digests your food and produces insulin, the main chemical for balancing the sugar level in the blood. The pancreas is a solid gland about 10 inches (25 cm) long. It is attached to the back of the abdominal cavity behind the stomach and is shaped like a tadpole.
- [39.](#) Aldosterone secretion decreases with age, which can contribute to light-headedness and drop in blood pressure with sudden position changes (orthostatic hypotension). Cortisol secretion decreases but the level stays about the same.
- [40.](#) Awallin Daneshgah wa Akharin Payambar, v.3, pp.40–41.
- [41.](#) Ibid. v.3, pp.31–35.
- [42.](#) Ahamiyate Ruzeah az Nazar-i- Ilm-i-Ruz, p.224.
- [43.](#) Fasting as a New Method to Treat Illnesses, translated into Farsi by Imami, p. 12.
- [44.](#) Al-Mahajjah al-Bayda, v.2, p. 131.
- [45.](#) Ibid.

Right n. 12: The Right of the Pilgrimage

حق الحج

وَأَمَّا حَقُّ الْحَجِّ أَنْ تَعْلَمَ أَنَّهُ وَفَادَةٌ إِلَى رَبِّكَ، وَفِرَارٌ إِلَيْهِ مِنْ ذُنُوبِكَ وَفِيهِ قَبُولُ تَوْبَتِكَ وَقَضَاءُ الْفَرَضِ الَّذِي أَوْجَبَهُ اللَّهُ عَلَيْكَ

And the right of pilgrimage¹ is that you should know that it is an arrival at the threshold of your Lord and a flight to Him from your sins; and through it your repentance is accepted and you perform an obligation made incumbent upon you by God.

The Arabic word ‘Hajj’ used for pilgrimage really means goal or intention. It is used in its other forms to mean road since a road helps us reach where we intend to go. The reason these ceremonies are altogether called pilgrimage or ‘Hajj’ is that once you start, you intend to visit the House of God.

Ka’ba: the First House

The Holy Qur’an says:

إِنَّ أَوَّلَ بَيْتٍ وُضِعَ لِلنَّاسِ لَلَّذِي بِبَكَّةَ مُبَارَكًا وَهُدًى لِّلْعَالَمِينَ

فِيهِ آيَاتٌ بَيِّنَاتٌ مَّقَامُ إِبْرَاهِيمَ وَمَنْ دَخَلَهُ كَانَ آمِنًا وَلِلَّهِ عَلَى النَّاسِ حِجُّ الْبَيْتِ مَنِ اسْتَطَاعَ إِلَيْهِ سَبِيلًا وَمَنْ كَفَرَ فَإِنَّ

اللَّهُ غَنِيٌّ عَنِ الْعَالَمِينَ

“The first House (of worship) appointed for men was that at Bakka²: Full of blessing and of guidance for all kinds of beings: In it are Signs Manifest; (for example), the Station of Abraham; whoever enters it attains security; Pilgrimage thereto is a duty men owe to God, – those who can afford the journey; but if any deny faith, God stands not in need of any of His creatures.” [The Holy Qur’an, Al-i-Imran 3:96–97]

This house is the first stronghold of the Unity of God. It is the oldest house of worship on the Earth. There were no centers to worship God before it. We can conclude from the various existing documents on history and Islam that this house was built by Adam . Later it was damaged by a tornado at the time of Noah . The Prophet Abraham reconstructed it as we read in the following verse of the Holy Qur’an:

رَبَّنَا إِنِّي أَسْكَنْتُ مِنْ ذُرِّيَّتِي بِوَادٍ غَيْرِ ذِي زَرْعٍ عِنْدَ بَيْتِكَ

“O our Lord! I have made some of my offspring to dwell in a valley without cultivation, by Thy Sacred House...” [The Holy Qur’an, Ibrahim 14:37]

This verse implies that there were some remains of the Ka’ba when Abraham and his offspring and wife³ arrived at Mecca. Also, consider the following verse:

وَإِذْ يَرْفَعُ إِبْرَاهِيمُ الْقَوَاعِدَ مِنَ الْبَيْتِ وَإِسْمَاعِيلُ رَبَّنَا تَقَبَّلْ مِنَّا إِنَّكَ أَنْتَ السَّمِيعُ الْعَلِيمُ

“And remember Abraham and Isma’il raised the foundations of the House (with this prayer): “Our Lord! Accept (this service) from us: For Thou art the All-Hearing, the All-knowing.” [The Holy Qur’an, al-Baqarah 2: 127]

This verse shows that the foundations of the Ka’ba existed, and all that Abraham and Isma’il did was to build the House. We can conclude the same thing from the writings of the Commander of the Faithful :

أَلَا تَرَوْنَ أَنَّ اللَّهَ سُبْحَانَهُ اخْتَبَرَ الْأُولِينَ مِنْ لَدُنْ آدَمَ صَلَوَاتُ اللَّهِ عَلَيْهِ إِلَى الْآخِرِينَ مِنْ هَذَا الْعَالَمِ بِأَحْجَارٍ لَا تَضُرُّ وَلَا تَنْفَعُ وَلَا تُبْصِرُ وَلَا تَسْمَعُ فَجَعَلَهَا بَيْتَهُ الْحَرَامَ ... ثُمَّ أَمَرَ آدَمَ عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ وَوَلَدَهُ أَنْ يُنْتَوُوا أَعْطَافَهُمْ نَحْوَهُ

“Do you not see that God the Praised One tested the earlier ones from Adam onwards till the later ones in this world, by expecting them to respect stones that neither harm nor benefit, and neither see nor hear – He made them into His Sacred House. God established it to be the place to honor Him.... Then God ordered Adam and his children to turn towards it.”⁴

Therefore, from the above verses and sermon we can conclude that the Ka'ba was built by Adam , destroyed by the tornadoes at the time of Noah and reconstructed by Abraham .

Ka'ba's Privileges

It is clear that the Ka'ba was the first House of Worship as the above verse said. Now let us consider its privileges. At first, it is blessed both spiritually and economically. Its spiritual attractions especially during the pilgrimage season are clear for everyone. Let us first consider it from an economical view. Mecca is located on dry land and from a natural point of view, it is not at all a suitable place to live in. However, Mecca has always been one of the developed towns good for living in, ready for business, and traveling to.

Secondly, the Ka'ba is considered a source of guidance for all the people of the world even for those who worshipped idols. There are many clear signs of the Unity of God and worshipping Him in this House. Its surviving the many attacks by the enemies who intended to destroy it throughout history is in itself one such clear sign. Each one of the following is a great reminder of lasting memories: Zamzam,⁵ Safa and Marwa,⁶ Rukn, Hatim, Hajar ul-Aswad⁷ and Hijr Isma'il.

Each of the four sides of the House is called Rukn. Hatim is the name of the space between Hajar ul-Aswad and the door of the Ka'ba. Hijr Isma'il is an especial place that is constructed like an arch on the northwest side of the Ka'ba. Of these clear signs, the Station of Abraham⁸ is specifically stated in the above verse since it is the place where Abraham stood to construct the Ka'ba, perform the pilgrimage ceremonies or invite the people to perform these great ceremonies. Fourthly, it is a secure house.

After building the Ka'ba, Abraham said: "O God! Please establish this town as a secure one." God accepted the prayer of Abraham and established Mecca as a secure town. Religious laws also consider Mecca so secure that no fighting or war is allowed there. Even animals are secure in Mecca, and no one should bother them. There is a heavy fine established for hunting in the Masjid Al-Haram (the Ka'ba).

Pilgrimage is a Divine Duty

Each Muslim who has attained the required conditions must go on the pilgrimage once. If he has not done so when he is alive, someone else should be hired to do so on his behalf when he dies. The jurists have stated the following conditions for going on the pilgrimage:

- 1) Physical readiness.
- 2) Financial readiness.
- 3) Open road access to the Ka'ba.

Again, consider the following verse:

وَلِلَّهِ عَلَى النَّاسِ حِجُّ الْبَيْتِ مَنِ اسْتَطَاعَ إِلَيْهِ سَبِيلًا

Pilgrimage to the Holy House is a duty men owe to God, – those who can afford the journey...

[The Holy Qur'an, Al-i-Imran 3:96–97]

In this verse, the pilgrimage to the House of God is considered a duty for those who can afford the journey. We can also conclude that this pilgrimage is not limited to Muslims. Rather it is incumbent upon all the people to go there. This is similar to the expression that

الْكُفَّارُ مُكَلَّفُونَ بِالْفُرُوعِ كَمَا أَنَّهُمْ مُكَلَّفُونَ بِالْأَصُولِ.

“The pagans are duty-bound to perform the branches (of religion) as they are bound to abide by the principles.”

Therefore, this verse includes all the people. However, the condition for it to be accepted is to accept Islam. Otherwise, the act will lose its true value.⁹

The Baseless Words of Ibn Abi'l-Awja

Ibn Abi'l-Awja` was a vulgar pagan whom scholars used to avoid. One day he was watching the pilgrims with some of his friends in the Al-Haram Mosque one day. Imam Sadiq was sitting in a corner of the mosque and his followers came to ask him questions. Ibn Abi'l-Awja`s friends told him that it was a good time for him to argue with Imam Sadiq . He agreed with them, went to the place where Imam Sadiq was sitting and said: “O father of Abdullah! It is a fact that such meetings are secure ones. Whoever has some mucous in his chest can cough it up.¹⁰ Will you let me ask a question?” The Imam granted him permission to do so. He was so rude that he dared to say:

إلى كم تدوسون هذا البيدر وتلوذون بهذا الحجر وتعبدون هذا البيت المرفوع بالطوب والمدر وتهرولون حوله هرولة البعير إذا نفر؟ من فكر في هذا وقد علم أنه فعل غير حكيم ولا ذي نظر. فقل فأنت رأس هذا الأمر وسنامه وأبوك أسه ونظامه.

“For how long will you trample on this threshing ground and seek refuge in this rock and worship this house made of bricks and clay, and trot around it like unruly camels? Whoever ponders over this and considers it will know that it is an act of one devoid of wisdom or insight. Therefore speak, for you are the leader of this affair and its best one, and your father was its foundation and its criterion.”

These words implied his inner wickedness and his purely material outlook. The Imam replied:

إِنَّ مَنْ أَضَلَّهُ اللَّهُ وَأَعْمَى قَلْبَهُ اسْتَوْخَمَ الْحَقَّ وَلَمْ يَسْتَعِذْهُ وَصَارَ الشَّيْطَانُ وَلِيَّهُ وَرَبَّهُ وَيُورِدُهُ مَنَاهِلَ الْهَلَكَةِ وَلَا

“He whom God leads astray and whose heart He blinds, finds the truth to be indigestible and disagreeable. Satan becomes his friend and his master and leads him towards the source of total loss from which there is no return.”

The Imam then said that God had established this House as a means by which He shall test men. God has assigned men to visit this House to measure their degree of sincerity of their worshipping Him and submission to Him. This House is the Station of the Prophets. It is the point towards which those who pray turn. The intention is not to worship the stones on the House. Rather the One being worshipped is God who is the Creator of man’s body and soul.[11](#)

A Demonstration of Man’s Spiritual Development

We must realize that all acts of worship including the pilgrimage are indeed demonstrations of the various levels of spiritual development of the Prophets and God’s friends. They display the road covered on the journey towards God. They express how they have moved through the various stages of servitude and reached the position of proximity to God. It is clear that worshipping is the movement of man’s soul towards God. The Noble Prophet said:

إِنَّمَا فُرِضَتِ الصَّلَاةُ وَأُمِرَ بِالْحَجِّ وَالطَّوَافِ وَأُشْعِرَتِ الْمَنَاسِكُ لِإِقَامَةِ ذِكْرِ اللَّهِ، فَإِذَا لَمْ يَكُنْ فِي قَلْبِكَ لِلْمَذْكُورِ الَّذِي هُوَ الْمَقْصُودُ وَالْمُبْتَغَى عَظْمَةً وَلَا هَيْبَةً فَمَا قِيمَةُ ذِكْرِكَ؟

“The prayer was made obligatory, performing the pilgrimage and the circumambulation of the Ka’ba were commanded, and the rituals (of Hajj) were made known, only to establish the remembrance of God. If there is no sense of greatness or awe in your heart for the One remembered Who is the objective and the desired one, then of what value is your remembrance?”[12](#)

Therefore, the pilgrimage ceremonies are a demonstration of a perfect man’s orderly spiritual development that carefully follows the various stages of development. He cuts himself off from all material interests and worldly affairs. He pulls himself out of involvement in the darkness of the self. He reaches the state of submersion in the illumination of the Lord’s Domain. A true pilgrimage is a spiritual motion. It is a development that occurs in the real self.

Pilgrimage stands for perfection. It implies the conversion of a potential power into its physical realization. It is similar to the conversion of one metal to another one in chemistry. It is not a game or entertainment as considered by some fools. How can one compare these childish perceptions with the moving developments of those who are struggling towards proximity to God?

Malik ibn Anas, who is the founder of the Malikiyah sect, narrated that once when he was accompanying

Imam Sadiq on a pilgrimage trip, the Imam who was riding a horse could not say ‘labbayk.’¹³ Every time he tried, his voice got stuck in his throat and he fell down from his horse. Malik said: “O’ grandson of the Prophet of God! Say labbayk. You must say labbayk.” Then Imam Sadiq said:

يا بنَ أبي عامر، كيفَ أجسرُ أن أقولَ: لَبَّيْكَ اللَّهُمَّ لَبَّيْكَ، وأخشى أن يقولَ عزَّ وجلَّ لا لَبَّيْكَ ولا سَعْدَيْكَ

“O son of Abi A’mer! How dare I say “labbayk Allahumma labbayk”¹⁴ when I fear that God the Almighty may reply: “No. I neither accept you nor shall I admit you.”

If one can set out for and reach the Ka’ba, touch the Hajar al-Aswad with his hands, let his heart reside on the slopes of the Arafah Hills, let him realize God’s symbol of the forbidden, sacrifice the lamb of selfish desires using certitude and contentment as a knife, then he is a real Hajji when he returns if he has been converted to a heavenly gem.

Pilgrimage and the Forgiveness of Sins

Imam Sajjad said that pilgrimage is “a flight to Him from your sins.” Once you return from the pilgrimage, your sins are forgiven and you are freed from the heavy burden of sins just as when you were first born. There are many traditions in this regard. We shall refer to a few of them here. It has been quoted on the authority of Imam Sadiq :

إن رسولَ الله صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَآلِهِ تَلَقَّاهُ أَعْرَابِيٌّ فَقَالَ: يَا رَسُولَ اللهِ، إِنِّي خَرَجْتُ أُرِيدُ الْحَجَّ فَعَاقَنِي وَأَنَا رَجُلٌ مَيْلٌ (يعني كثيرَ المالِ) فَمُرْنِي أَصْنَعُ فِي مَالِي مَا أَبْلُغُ بِهِ مَا يَبْلُغُ بِهِ الْحَاجُّ. (قال) فَالتفتَ رسولُ اللهِ إلى أبي قُبَيْسٍ فقال: لو أَنَّ أبا قُبَيْسٍ لَكَ زِنْتُهُ ذَهَبَةٌ حَمْرَاءُ أَنْفَقْتَهُ فِي سَبِيلِ اللهِ مَا بَلَغْتَ مَا بَلَغَ الْحَاجُّ. إِنَّ الْحَاجَّ إِذَا أَخَذَ فِي جِهَارِهِ لَمْ يَخْطُ خُطْوَةً فِي شَيْءٍ مِنْ جِهَارِهِ إِلَّا كَتَبَ اللهُ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ لَهُ عَشْرَ حَسَنَاتٍ وَمَحَى عَنْهُ عَشْرَ سَيِّئَاتٍ وَرَفَعَ لَهُ عَشْرَ دَرَجَاتٍ، فَإِذَا رَكِبَ بَعِيرَهُ لَمْ يَرْفَعْ خُفًّا وَلَمْ يَضَعْهُ إِلَّا كَتَبَ اللهُ لَهُ مِثْلَ ذَلِكَ، فَإِذَا طَافَ بِالْبَيْتِ خَرَجَ مِنْ ذُنُوبِهِ، فَإِذَا رَمَى الْجِمَارَ خَرَجَ مِنْ ذُنُوبِهِ... فَعَدَّدَ رَسُولُ اللهِ كَذَا وَكَذَا مَوْقِفًا إِذَا وَقَفَهَا الْحَاجُّ خَرَجَ مِنْ ذُنُوبِهِ ثُمَّ قَالَ: أَنَّى لَكَ أَنْ تَبْلُغَ مَا يَبْلُغُ الْحَاجُّ؟

A Bedouin visited the Noble Prophet of God and said: I left my house and set out for pilgrimage. However, for some reason I could not proceed, and lost the opportunity to go on pilgrimage. I am a rich man. Tell me what I can do so that God grants me what He grants a Hajji.” The Prophet looked at the Abu Qubays mountain and said: “If this mountain was made of red gold and it was all yours, you could not get the reward that God gives a Hajji if you donated it all for the sake of God.

When a pilgrim begins preparing his provisions for the journey, he is given the reward for ten good deeds and ten of his wicked deeds are forgiven for every step that he takes for its preparation. His rank near God is elevated ten degrees. When he rides in his mount, God will record the same kind of reward for him for every step that he raises up and lowers. Once he performs the circumambulations of the

House of God, his sins are gone. When he throws stones at the symbols of idols, his sins depart.” The Prophet repeated the same sentence for each of the stations. Then he said: “How can you attain the reward that the Hajji attains?”

Then Imam Sadiq added:

وَلَا تُكْتَبُ عَلَيْهِ الذَّنُوبُ أَرْبَعَةَ أَشْهُرٍ وَتُكْتَبُ لَهُ الْحَسَنَاتُ إِلَّا أَنْ يَأْتِيَ بِكَبِيرَةٍ.

“No sins will be recorded for him for four months (after Hajj) while his good deeds will be recorded, unless he commits a major sin.”

Pilgrimage and Asking Others

When Imam Sajjad heard someone beg from the people, he said:

وَيْحَكَ، أَغَيْرَ اللَّهِ تَسْأَلُ فِي هَذَا الْمَقَامِ؟ إِنَّهُ لِيُرْجَى لِمَا فِي بُطُونِ الْجِبَالِ فِي هَذَا الْيَوْمِ أَنْ يَكُونَ سَعِيداً.

“Shame on you! Are you begging from others in this place? Here God’s Mercy is so encompassing that it is even expected that whatever lies in the depths of the mountains shall benefit from it and become prosperous today.”¹⁵

Regarding this tradition, the late Fayz said: “Prosperity is relative. Everything has one form of prosperity. It may be meant that plants grow from the depths of the mountains which may then undergo many changes and finally result in the formation of a fetus that turns into a prosperous man.” In another recording of this tradition in Mustadrak al-Wasa’el instead of ‘depth of the mountains’, it is written ‘inside pregnant women.’ The Arabic words for these two phrases are very similar to each other with one dot being the difference. A man asked Imam Sadiq in the Al-Haram Mosque: “Whose sin is greater than everyone else’s?” He replied:

مَنْ يَقِفُ بِهِذَيْنِ الْمَوْقِفَيْنِ؛ عَرَفَةَ وَالْمُزْدَلِفَةَ، وَسَعَى بَيْنَ هَذَيْنِ الْجَبَلَيْنِ ثُمَّ طَافَ بِهَذَا الْبَيْتِ وَصَلَّى خَلْفَ مَقَامِ إِبْرَاهِيمَ ثُمَّ قَالَ فِي نَفْسِهِ أَوْ ظَنَّ أَنَّ اللَّهَ لَمْ يَغْفِرْ لَهُ فَهُوَ مِنْ أَعْظَمِ النَّاسِ وَزِراً.

“Whoever stops at these two stations of Arafah and Mash’ar, does the ceremonies for between the two hills (of Safa and Marwa), circumambulates around this House and prays at the station of Abraham, then says to himself or thinks that God has not forgiven him – has committed the greatest sin.”¹⁶

Imam Sadiq said:

مَا مِنْ رَجُلٍ مِنْ أَهْلِ كُورَةٍ وَقَفَ بِعَرَفَةَ مِنَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ إِلَّا غَفَرَ اللَّهُ لِأَهْلِ تِلْكَ الْكُورَةِ مِنَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ. وَمَا مِنْ رَجُلٍ وَقَفَ بِعَرَفَةَ مِنْ أَهْلِ بَيْتٍ مِنَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ إِلَّا غَفَرَ اللَّهُ لِأَهْلِ ذَلِكَ الْبَيْتِ مِنَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ.

*“Whenever a faithful man from a village or a town stops in Arafah, God will forgive all the faithful men from that village or town. Whenever a faithful man stops in Arafah, God will forgive all the faithful members of his household.”*¹⁷

It should be noted that faith that is the root of piety is stressed here.

Invitation to Hajj is Honoring Man

God honors man, places the crown of nobility on his head, awakens his long asleep conscience, encourages him to be grateful and invites him to go on pilgrimage and circumambulate His House.

وَلِلَّهِ عَلَى النَّاسِ حُجُّ الْبَيْتِ مَنِ اسْتَطَاعَ إِلَيْهِ سَبِيلًا

“Pilgrimage to the Sacred House is a duty men owe to God, – those who can afford the journey.”
[The Holy Qur’an, Al-i-Imran 3:97]

This means that God who has created man, provided for his sustenance and given him many blessings has the right to invite man to come to His House as a sign of being grateful to Him. This will preserve man’s nobility.

The Amazing Blessings of Hajj

Now let us consider the many blessings that God grants those who visit His House. Sa’d Al-Iskafi narrated that he heard Imam Baqir say:

إِنَّ الْحَاجَّ إِذَا أَخَذَ فِي جِهَارِهِ لَمْ يَخْطُ خُطْوَةً فِي شَيْءٍ مِنْ جِهَارِهِ إِلَّا كَتَبَ اللَّهُ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ لَهُ عَشْرَ حَسَنَاتٍ وَمَحَى عَنْهُ عَشْرَ سَيِّئَاتٍ وَرَفَعَ لَهُ عَشْرَ دَرَجَاتٍ حَتَّى يَفْرُغَ مِنْ جِهَارِهِ مَتَى مَا فَرَغَ.

*“When someone begins preparing his provisions for the Hajj, he does not take a step in its preparation but that God the Almighty records ten good deeds for him, forgives ten of his sins, and raises his rank ten degrees until he finishes his preparations, leaves the house and starts his trip. Then God will give him better rewards.”*¹⁸

Imam Sadiq said:

الْحُجَّاجُ يَصْدُرُونَ عَلَى ثَلَاثَةِ أَصْنَافٍ؛ صِنْفٌ يُعْتَقُ مِنَ النَّارِ وَصِنْفٌ يَخْرُجُ مِنْ ذُنُوبِهِ كَهَيْئَةِ يَوْمِ وَلَدَتْهُ أُمُّهُ وَصِنْفٌ

يُحْفَظُ فِي أَهْلِهِ وَمَالِهِ، فَذَلِكَ أَذْنَى مَا يَرْجِعُ بِهِ الْحَاجُّ.

“The Hajjis are divided into three groups after they return from Hajj. A group of them is freed from the Fire. Another group includes those whose sins are forgiven and are just as they were when they were born. The third group includes those whose family and wealth will be safeguarded. This is the minimum benefit that one gains.”¹⁹

The difference is clear since the reward one gets depends on one’s intention and the degree of recognition of the secrets of worshipping.

- [1.](#) This right has not been mentioned in the version transmitted in Tuhaf al-‘Uqul.
- [2.](#) Bakka same as Mecca, perhaps an older name. The foundation of the Ka’ba goes back to the Prophet Abraham .
- [3.](#) Hagar
- [4.](#) Nahjul Balaghah, Subhi Salih, Sermon no. 192.
- [5.](#) A sacred well in Mecca situated a few metres east of the Ka’ba. The Zamzam well is also called the Well of Ishmael. The well is 35 metres deep and is marked by an elegant dome. The water is considered health-giving, and pilgrims (hajjis) collect it in bottles and bring it back home to their own countries. One of the last things a haji tries to do is to dip his or her future burial clothes in the Zamzam. Muslim tradition tells that the Zamzam was opened by the angel Gabriel to save Hagar and her son Ishmael from dying of thirst when they were in the desert. From the sources available, the Zamzam appears to have been revered long before the Prophet Muhammad , that is from pre-Islamic times.
- [6.](#) Part of the pilgrimage ceremony includes the devotional act of walking seven times back and forth between the knolls of Safa and Marwa. This act retraces the footsteps of Hagar (wife of Prophet Abraham) during her desperate search for water for her infant son Ishmael, after they were left in the desert by the Prophet Abraham in response to a divine vision.
- [7.](#) The sacred Black Stone built into the south-east corner of the Ka’ba at a height of approximately 4 feet.
- [8.](#) The step-stone used by the Prophet Abraham during the original construction of the Ka’ba.
- [9.](#) Tafsir-i-Namunah, v.3, pp. 14–17.
- [10.](#) He meant that whoever has a question that bothers him can ask it.
- [11.](#) Bihar al-Anwar, v. 10, pp.209–210.
- [12.](#) Hajj, Barname’ye Takamul, pp.80, 93.
- [13.](#) An Arabic phrase said in the pilgrimage meaning “Here I am at Your service”.
- [14.](#) Here I am at Your service, O Lord! Here I am!
- [15.](#) Hajj, Barnameye Takamul, p.228; quoted from al-Wafi, v.2, p.42.
- [16.](#) This means that having bad suspicions about God and being hopeless of God’s mercy is very dangerous. It is a great sin.
- [17.](#) Hajj Barnameye Takamul, p.228.
- [18.](#) Hajj Barname’ye Takamul, p.48, quoted from al-Kafi, v.4, p.254.
- [19.](#) Ibid, quoted from al-Wafi, v.2, p.4.

Right n. 13: The Right of Charity

وَأَمَّا حَقُّ الصَّدَقَةِ فَإِنَّ تَعَلُّمَ أَنَّهَا ذُخْرُكَ عِنْدَ رَبِّكَ وَوَدِيعَتَكَ الَّتِي لَا تَحْتَاجُ إِلَى الْإِشْهَادِ، فَإِذَا عَلِمْتَ ذَلِكَ كُنْتَ بِمَا اسْتَوْدَعْتَهُ سِرًّا أَوْتَقَ بِمَا اسْتَوْدَعْتَهُ عَلَانِيَةً، وَكُنْتَ جَدِيرًا أَنْ تَكُونَ أَسْرَرْتَ إِلَيْهِ أَمْرًا أَعْلَنْتَهُ، وَكَانَ الْأَمْرُ بَيْنَكَ وَبَيْنَهُ فِيهَا سِرًّا عَلَى كُلِّ حَالٍ وَلَمْ تَسْتَظْهِرْ عَلَيْهِ فِيمَا اسْتَوْدَعْتَهُ مِنْهَا بِإِشْهَادِ الْأَسْمَاعِ وَالْأَبْصَارِ عَلَيْهِ بِهَا كَأَنَّهَا أَوْتَقَ فِي نَفْسِكَ لَا كَأَنَّكَ لَا تَتَّقُ بِهِ فِي تَأْدِيَةِ وَدِيعَتِكَ إِلَيْكَ، ثُمَّ لَمْ تَمْتَنَنَّ بِهَا عَلَى أَحَدٍ لِأَنَّهَا لَكَ فَإِذَا امْتَنَنْتَ بِهَا لَمْ تَأْمَنْ أَنْ تَكُونَ بِهَا مِثْلَ تَهْجِينِ حَالِكٍ مِنْهَا إِلَى مَنْ مَنَنْتَ بِهَا عَلَيْهِ لِأَنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ دَلِيلًا عَلَى أَنَّكَ لَمْ تُرِدْ نَفْسَكَ بِهَا، وَلَوْ أَرَدْتَ نَفْسَكَ بِهَا لَمْ تَمْتَنَنَّ بِهَا عَلَى أَحَدٍ. وَلَا قُوَّةَ إِلَّا بِاللَّهِ.

And the right of charity is that you should know that it is a storing away with your Lord and a deposit for which you will have no need for witnesses. Then once you know this you will be more confident of it if you donate it in secret than if you donate it in public.¹ It is more appropriate for you to do privately what you now do in public and keep the affairs between you and Him secret under all circumstances. And you should also not take your hearing and sight as witnesses for the donations that you make in charity as if you have the most trust in yourself.²

It should not be as if you are not sure that your donations will be returned to you. Finally you should not remind others of your favors since you have done so for yourself. If you remind them of your favors, you will not be immune from being similarly reminded of others' favors to you. Moreover this will prove that your intentions were not pure. If you had pure intentions you would not remind anyone of it. And there is no power but in God.

Imam Sajjad has stressed three important points here.

1) Charity is a form of savings. Therefore, it will not get lost. It might seem to us that we lose what we give away in charity while it is not so. Rather the Qur'an encourages us to benefit from the wealth of this world as we see in the following verse:

وَلَا تَنْسَ نَصِيبَكَ مِنَ الدُّنْيَا

Nor forget thy portion in this world... [The Holy Qur'an, al-Qasas 28:77]

2) Giving charity in private is better than in public. That may be because there is a possibility of hypocrisy and showing off in acts of charity done in public. In addition to this, the one who is receiving charity will also be belittled when charity is given in public.

3) Charity should not be mixed with mentioning it since that will nullify its effect. As we will explain later, what is donated in charity will reach God first. Even more important is the fact that when charity is given in private it helps in the development of the understanding that God is the real donator in the mind of the one who is donating something. He realizes that he is only an intermediate agent in this affair and understands the real meaning of being a servant of God.

Charity as Viewed by the Qur'an

What Imam Sajjad expressed about charity is supported by many verses of the Holy Qur'an some of which we will discuss here. We should make it clear that charity implies what one donates from his own property in order to get closer to God. It is a general term and covers both the obligatory alms tax and the recommendable forms of giving donations. God the Almighty said:

مَثَلُ الَّذِينَ يُنْفِقُونَ أَمْوَالَهُمْ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ كَمَثَلِ حَبَّةٍ أَنْبَتَتْ سَبْعَ سَنَابِلَ فِي كُلِّ سُنْبُلَةٍ مِئَةٌ حَبَّةٌ وَاللَّهُ يُضَاعِفُ لِمَنْ يَشَاءُ وَاللَّهُ وَاسِعٌ عَلِيمٌ

“The parable of those who spend their substance in the way of God is that of a grain of corn: it groweth seven ears, and each ear hath a hundred grains. God giveth manifold increase to whom He pleaseth: And God careth for all and He knoweth all things.” [The Holy Qur'an, al-Baqarah 2:261]

This parable of how a grain of corn grows and yields a manifold increase shows how one's charity is returned to God. The Qur'an says that each person's actions are a reflection of his personality. It is not true that our actions are manifestations of our physical powers. In this parable, the one who gives charity is said to be similar to one who plants corn. The result of his act is a manifold increase. Things done in the way of God imply acts done for pleasing God alone.

Charity Helps Solve Social Class Problems

The gap between the various social classes has always been one of the major problems facing man. It is even worse today even though there have been tremendous technological advances. There are some people who are extremely rich and many others who are extremely poor today. It is clear that a society in which most of the people are hungry and poor, and some are very wealthy cannot last very long. Undoubtedly there will be stress, animosities or even fights in such a society.

A careful examination of the verses of the Qur'an on this issue clearly indicates that Islam aims to eliminate unjust social differences between the rich and the poor. It aims to establish certain means by which the standard of living of the poor people can be elevated to a point at which they can at least benefit from minimum living necessities. To achieve this goal Islam has absolutely forbidden usury. It has also established certain obligatory taxes such as the alms-tax and the one-fifth levy. It has also encouraged many voluntary forms of charity to help achieve this goal.

Motivations for Charity

The Qur'an clearly shows the various results of charity using various examples and drawing similitude.

Consider the following verse in this regard:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لَا تُبْطِلُوا صَدَقَاتِكُمْ بِالْمَنِّ وَالْأَذَى كَالَّذِي يُنْفِقُ مَالَهُ رِئَاءَ النَّاسِ وَلَا يُؤْمِنُ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ فَمَثَلُهُ
كَمَثَلِ صَفْوَانٍ عَلَيْهِ تُرَابٌ فَأَصَابَهُ وَابِلٌ فَتَرَكَهُ صَلْدًا لَا يَقْدِرُونَ عَلَى شَيْءٍ مِّمَّا كَسَبُوا وَاللَّهُ لَا يَهْدِي الْقَوْمَ الْكَافِرِينَ

“O ye who believe! Cancel not your charity by reminders of your generosity or by injury, – like those who spend their substance to be seen of men, but believe neither in God nor in the Last Day. They are in parable like a hard, barren rock, on which is a little soil: on it falls heavy rain, which leaves it (just) a bare stone. They will be able to do nothing with aught they have earned. And God guideth not those who reject faith.” [The Holy Qur’an, al-Baqarah 2:264]

Consider a hard rock covered by a thin layer of dirt. If seeds are planted in the dirt, there is plenty of good weather and sunshine, and then there is a heavy rainfall, the seeds will be washed off along with the dirt. The rock is so hard that the seed cannot grow on it and the barren hard appearance of the rock will appear again.

This does not happen because the sunshine, the good climate or the rains have had a bad effect. Rather it is because the place was not suitable for growth. It has had a good appearance, but it has been solid hardness beneath.

There has been only a small layer of dirt on the surface while a deep layer of soft soil is needed for the roots to be able to grow and extract nutrients to ensure proper growth. The Qur’an draws a similitude between hypocritical acts of charity that are at times even accompanied by hurting and mentioning; and a shallow layer of dirt on a barren hard rock. This act cannot bear any fruits. It will only result in the efforts being wasted. That is why Imam Sajjad said: “Finally you should not remind others of your favors since you have done so for yourself.”

Now let us consider the points mentioned in Tafsir-i-Namooneh regarding this verse. First, it can be concluded from this verse that some deeds might eliminate the results of other deeds. Secondly, the similitude used here is a very good one since hypocrites usually cover up their wicked inner thoughts with superficial acts of charity that are not deeply rooted in their beliefs. They do so in order to fool the people, but the vicissitudes of life will ultimately uncover their inner thoughts.³

Another Example from the Qur’an

Consider a beautiful garden on a high mountainside. The cool breeze and plentiful sunshine and rain make the flowers and trees grow. Even when there is no rain, the moisture from the dew will maintain the garden’s freshness and beauty. Because of this, the garden will yield double the amount that other gardens produce. Consider the following verse that draws such a similitude:

وَمَثَلُ الَّذِينَ يُنْفِقُونَ أَمْوَالَهُمْ ابْتِغَاءَ مَرْضَاتِ اللَّهِ وَتَثْبِيْتًا مِّنْ أَنفُسِهِمْ كَمَثَلِ جَنَّةٍ بِرَبْوَةٍ أَصَابَهَا وَابِلٌ فَآتَتْ أُكْلَهَا
ضِعْفَيْنِ فَإِن لَّمْ يُصِْبْهَا وَابِلٌ فَطَلٌّ وَاللَّهُ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ بَصِيرٌ

“And the likeness of those who spend their substance, seeking to please God and to strengthen their souls, is as a garden, high and fertile: heavy rain falls on it but makes it yield a double increase of harvest, and if it receives not heavy rain, light moisture sufficeth it. God seeth well whatever ye do.” [The Holy Qur’an, al-Baqarah 2:265]

Being located on the slope of a high mountainside, the garden presents a beautiful scene to passers-by and is safe from the threats of flooding. The people who give charity for the sake of God due to their certain belief in God are similar to such a garden. They will generate great products. It is worth mentioning here that proper motivations for charity are expressed to be seeking God’s pleasure, strengthening one’s faith and gaining a feeling of peace and tranquility in one’s heart.

True sincere donors of charity are those who do so to please God, develop noble characteristics within themselves and terminate their conscious feelings of responsibility for the deprived. The verse ends with a warning that God sees well whatever we do in order to alert us not to harbor ill intentions in our deeds.⁴

Public vs. Private Acts of Charity

By saying “And you should not take your hearing and sight as witnesses for the donations that you make in charity...” Imam Sajjad highly stresses giving charity in private. Of course, this applies to the recommendable forms of charity. Obligatory forms of charity such as the alms-tax can obviously be given in public. Consider the following verse:

إِن تُبْدُوا الصَّدَقَاتِ فَنِعِمَّا هِيَ وَإِن تُخْفُوهَا وَتُؤْتُوهَا الْفُقَرَاءَ فَهُوَ خَيْرٌ لَّكُمْ وَيُكَفِّرُ عَنْكُمْ مِّنْ سَيِّئَاتِكُمْ وَاللَّهُ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ
خَبِيرٌ

“If ye disclose (acts of) charity, even so it is well, but if ye conceal them, and make them reach those (really) in need, that is best for you: It will remove from you some of your (stains of) evil. And God is well acquainted with what ye do.” [The Holy Qur’an, al-Baqarah 2:271]

There is no doubt that both forms of public and private charities are beneficial. When charity is given in public, others get encouraged to participate. This is even more effective if it is the obligatory form of charity. This will also end probable accusations that one has not performed his obligatory duties. If the charity is in a recommendable form, then it can serve as a means to encourage others to serve the poor and the deprived people. However, when charity is given privately it is certainly void of hypocrisy.

We read in Majma’ al-Bayan that “obligatory donations of charity should be made in public, while it is

better for recommended donations of charity to be made in private.”⁵ Charity helps remove some of our sins. What are important are one’s sincerity and good intentions. It does not matter whether the people know or do not know what we do. It suffices that God knows, as He is aware of everything, whether it be done in public or private.

The Role of Charity in Man’s Life

Consider the following verse:

لَيْسَ عَلَيْكَ هُدَاهُمْ وَلَكِنَّ اللَّهَ يَهْدِي مَنْ يَشَاءُ وَمَا تُنْفِقُوا مِنْ خَيْرٍ فَلَأَنْفُسِكُمْ وَمَا تُنْفِقُونَ إِلَّا ابْتِغَاءَ وَجْهِ اللَّهِ وَمَا تُنْفِقُوا مِنْ خَيْرٍ يُوَفَّ إِلَيْكُمْ وَأَنْتُمْ لَا تُظْلَمُونَ

“It is not required of thee (O Apostle), to set them on the right path, but God sets on the right path whom He pleaseth. Whatever of good ye give benefits your own souls, and ye shall only do so seeking the “Face”⁶ of God. Whatever good ye give, shall be rendered back to you, and ye shall not be dealt with unjustly.” [The Holy Qur’an, al-Baqarah 2:272]

It has been quoted on the authority of Ibn `Abbas that Muslims were not willing to give charity to non-Muslims.⁷ Then the above verse was revealed to permit them to do so when necessary. From this verse, we also realize that the benefits of what we do return to ourselves. We all know that when man knows that the results of what he does will benefit him, he will be more eager to do that deed. There are many material and spiritual benefits for charity. The spiritual effect of charity is that it strengthens our sense of self-sacrifice, giving and love for others. Therefore, it is a powerful tool for the development of one’s personality.

The economic benefits of charity are to help reduce the gap between the rich and the poor. Undoubtedly the existence of poor and deprived people in the society will lead to an outbreak of violence and crimes which may at times lead to anarchy. This would make life hard for both the rich and the poor people. Therefore giving charity is good for the society and those who make donations both economically and spiritually.

The reference to “the Face of God” in the above verse is used in a symbolic way meaning that those who give charity should sincerely do it for the sake of God. We are also warned that we will not just gain a small reward for what we give in charity. Rather we get back all that we give and not the least bit of injustice is done to us. This could also mean that our deeds will have a manifestation. After reviewing some of the verses of the Qur’an on this issue let us now study some of the relevant traditions.

Traditions on Charity and its Effects

There are many traditions about charity. We will briefly present a few of them here.

An Increase in Our Share of Daily Bread

Giving charity will increase our share of daily bread. Sakuni quoted on the authority of Imam Sadiq on the authority of God's Prophet :

تَصَدَّقُوا فَإِنَّ الصَّدَقَةَ تَزِيدُ فِي الْمَالِ كَثْرَةً، فَتَصَدَّقُوا رَحِمَكُمُ اللَّهُ.

“Give charity since it will cause an increase in your wealth. Therefore give charity and God will have Mercy upon you.”⁸

Imam Kazim said:

اسْتَنْزِلُوا الرِّزْقَ بِالصَّدَقَةِ.

“By giving charity seek the descension of your daily bread.”⁹

Imam Ridha quoted on the authority of his father on the authority of the Noble Prophet :

خَيْرُ مَالِ الْمَرْءِ وَذَخَائِرُهُ الصَّدَقَةُ.

“The best of a person's wealth and savings is what he gives in charity.”¹⁰

Treatment of Our Patients

The Prophet of God said:

دَاوُوا مَرْضَاكُم بِالصَّدَقَةِ.

“Treat your patients by giving charity.”¹¹

Thus we realize that the ill can be treated by both medications and giving charity. Abdullah ibn San'an quoted on the authority of Imam Sadiq :

دَاوُوا مَرْضَاكُم بِالصَّدَقَةِ وَادْفَعُوا الْبَلَاءَ بِالْأَعْيَاءِ وَاسْتَنْزِلُوا الرِّزْقَ بِالصَّدَقَةِ فَإِنَّهَا تَفُكُّ مِنْ بَيْنِ لَحْيَيْ سَبْعِمِائَةِ شَيْطَانٍ.

“Treat your patients by giving charity, and fend off calamities by supplications. Seek the descension of your share of the daily bread by giving charity since it will free you from the jaws of seven hundred Satans.”¹²

Abdullah ibn San’an quoted on the authority of Imam Sadiq who said:

يُسْتَحَبُّ لِلْمَرِيضِ أَنْ يُعْطِيَ السَّائِلَ بِيَدِهِ وَيَأْمُرَ السَّائِلَ أَنْ يَدْعُوَ لَهُ

“It is recommended for an ill person to give charity to a poor person with his own hands and ask the poor man to pray for him.”¹³

Preventing Calamities

Musa ibn Hasan quoted on the authority of Imam Ridha :

ظَهَرَ فِي بَنِي إِسْرَائِيلَ قَحْطٌ شَدِيدٌ مُتَوَاتِرَةً، وَكَانَ عِنْدَ امْرَأَةٍ لُقْمَةٌ مِنْ خُبْزٍ فَوَضَعَتْهَا فِي فِيهَا لِتَأْكُلَهَا فَنَادَى السَّائِلُ: يَا أُمَّةَ اللَّهِ، الْجُوعُ! فَقَالَتِ الْمَرْأَةُ: أَتَصَدَّقُ فِي مِثْلِ هَذَا الزَّمَانِ. فَأَخْرَجَتْهَا مِنْ فِيهَا وَدَفَعَتْهَا إِلَى السَّائِلِ. وَكَانَ لَهَا وَلَدٌ صَغِيرٌ يَحْتَطِبُ فِي الصَّحْرَاءِ، فَجَاءَ زَيْبٌ فَحَمَلَهُ. فَوَقَعَتِ الصَّبِيحَةُ فَعَدَّتِ الْأُمُّ فِي أَثَرِ الذَّبِّ. فَبَعَثَ اللَّهُ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ جِبْرَائِيلَ عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ فَأَخْرَجَ الْغُلَامَ مِنَ الذَّبِّ فَدَفَعَهُ إِلَى أُمِّهِ. ثُمَّ قَالَ لَهَا جِبْرَائِيلُ عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ: يَا أُمَّةَ اللَّهِ، أَرْضَيْتِ لُقْمَةً بِلُقْمَةٍ؟

There was famine among the children of Israel for many consecutive years. A woman had just one morsel to eat. She put it in her mouth to eat, but a poor man called out and said: “O lady! I am about to die of hunger.” The woman thought that it was time to give charity, so she withdrew the food from her mouth and gave it to the poor man. She had a small child who had gone to the desert to collect some wood to burn.

A wolf came and carried him away and he screamed. The woman heard him scream, and went after the wolf. God sent Gabriel down to save the child from the wolf’s mouth and to hand him over to his mother. Then Gabriel told her: “O bondmaid of God! Are you satisfied with a morsel for a morsel?”¹⁴

This is a clear example of what is meant when Imam Sajjad says: “your donations will be returned to you.”

There is another event supporting this. Ali ibn Ibrahim quoted the following tradition about the events that happened to a Jew at the time of the Prophet on the authority of Ahmad ibn Muhammad, on the authority of Salim ibn Mukarram, on the authority of Imam Sadiq . The man was going to go somewhere. The Prophet said that a black snake would follow him and kill him. The Jew went and returned after a while with a load of wooden sticks on his back. The Prophet asked him to drop the load on the ground.

He did so, and a black snake came out.

The Prophet asked the Jew what he had done that day. The Jew said that he had done nothing special. He said that he had picked up the wooden sticks and had given one of the two loaves of bread he had to eat to a poor man and had eaten one himself. The Prophet told him that his life had been saved due to his act of charity. Then the Prophet said:

الصَّدَقَةُ تُدْفَعُ مِيتَةَ السُّوءِ.

“Giving charity drives away a bad death.” [15](#)

Hanan ibn Sodayr quoted on the authority of his father on the authority of Imam Baqir :

إِنَّ الصَّدَقَةَ لَتُدْفَعُ سَبْعِينَ بَلِيَّةً مِنْ بَلَايَا الدُّنْيَا مَعَ مِيتَةِ السُّوءِ، وَإِنَّ صَاحِبَهَا لَا يَمُوتُ مِيتَةَ السُّوءِ أَبَدًا مَعَ مَا يُدْخِرُ لِصَاحِبِهَا فِي الْآخِرَةِ.

“Giving charity will fend off seventy of this world’s calamities and save you from a bad death in addition to granting you the rewards for the Hereafter.” [16](#)

As seen from the Qur’anic verses cited above giving charity in private or in public is recommendable and has a reward. There are also several traditions that point this out. Imam Sadiq quoted on the authority of God’s Prophet :

صَدَقَةُ السِّرِّ تُطْفِئُ غَضَبَ الرَّبِّ

“Giving charity secretly will quench God’s wrath.” [17](#)

Umar ibn Yazid quoted on the authority of Imam Sadiq :

صَدَقَةُ الْعَلَانِيَةِ تُدْفَعُ سَبْعِينَ نَوْعًا مِنْ أَنْوَاعِ الْبَلَاءِ وَصَدَقَةُ السِّرِّ تُطْفِئُ غَضَبَ الرَّبِّ.

“Giving charity openly will fend off seventy types of calamities and giving charity secretly will extinguish the wrath of the Lord.” [18](#)

Fazl ibn al-Hasan al-Tabarsi wrote in Majma’ al-Bayan that the Imam said:

صَدَقَةُ السِّرِّ تُطْفِئُ غَضَبَ الرَّبِّ وَتُطْفِئُ الْخَطِيئَةَ كَمَا يُطْفِئُ الْمَاءُ النَّارَ وَتُدْفَعُ سَبْعِينَ بَابًا مِنَ الْبَلَاءِ.

*“Giving charity in secret will quench the Wrath of the Lord and wipe out wrong-doings just as water puts out fire. It will also ward off seventy types of calamities.”*¹⁹

Imam Sadiq quoted on the authority of God’s Prophet :

أَرْضُ الْقِيَامَةِ نَارٌ مَا خَلَا ظِلُّ الْمُؤْمِنِ؛ فَإِنَّ صَدَقَتَهُ تُظِلُّهُ.

*“The plains of the Day of Judgment will be full of Fire except for the shadow of the believer, for his acts of charity will shade him.”*²⁰

The Commander of the Faithful said:

صَدَقَةُ السِّرِّ تَكْفِرُ الْخَطِيئَةَ وَصَدَقَةُ الْعَلَانِيَةِ مَثْرَاءٌ فِي الْمَالِ.

*“Giving charity in secret will compensate for wrong-doings and sins, and giving charity in public will increase your wealth.”*²¹

He also said:

سَبْعَةٌ يُظِلُّهُمُ اللَّهُ فِي ظِلِّهِ يَوْمَ لَا ظِلَّ إِلَّا ظِلُّهُ... وَرَجُلٌ تَصَدَّقَ بِصَدَقَةٍ فَأَخْفَاهَا حَتَّى لَمْ تَعْلَمْ يَمِينُهُ مَا تُنْفِقُ شِمَالُهُ.

*“God will shade seven (groups of people) under His Shadow on the Day when there is no shadow other than His... One are those who give charity in the most secret way so that their right hand does not know what their left has given in charity!”*²²

1. In the other version it is followed by: “You should know that it repels calamities and illnesses in this world and it will repel the Fire from you in the Hereafter”.
2. That your donations in charity will be returned to you.
3. Tafsir-i-Namuneh, v.2, p.243.
4. Tafsir-i-Namuneh, v.2, p.243.
5. Majma’ al-Bayan, v.2, p.384.
6. The Arabic word “wajh” literally means face, countenance; hence favor, glory, Self, Presence.
7. Majma’ al-Bayan.
8. Wasa’il al-Shi’ah, v.6, p.257.
9. Ibid.
10. Ibid. p.258.
11. Ibid. p.260.
12. Wasa’il al-Shi’ah, v.6, p.260.
13. Ibid. v.6, p.262.
14. Ibid. p.265.
15. Wasa’il al-Shi’ah, pp.268-277.
16. Ibid.

[17.](#) Ibid.

[18.](#) Ibid.

[19.](#) Wasa'il al-Shi'ah, p.277.

[20.](#) Wasa'il al-Shi'ah, p.256.

[21.](#) Sharh-i-Ghurar wa Durar, v.4. p.207.

[22.](#) Wasa'il al-Shi'ah, v.6, p.207.

Right n. 14: The Right of the Offering

حق الهدى

وَأَمَّا حَقُّ الْهَدْيِ فَإِنَّ تَخْلِصَ بِهَا الْإِرَادَةَ إِلَى رَبِّكَ وَالتَّعَرُّضَ لِرَحْمَتِهِ وَقَبُولَهُ وَلَا تُرِيدَ عَيْونَ النَّاطِرِينَ دُونَهُ، فَإِذَا كُنْتَ كَذَلِكَ لَمْ تَكُنْ مُتَكَلِّفًا وَلَا مُتَصَنِّعًا وَكُنْتَ إِنَّمَا تَقْصِدُ إِلَى اللَّهِ. وَأَعْلَمُ أَنَّ اللَّهَ يُرَادُ بِالْيَسِيرِ وَلَا يُرَادُ بِالْعَسِيرِ كَمَا أَرَادَ بِخَلْقِهِ التَّيْسِيرَ وَلَمْ يُرِدْ بِهِمُ التَّعْسِيرَ، وَكَذَلِكَ التَّذَلُّلُ أَوْلَى بِكَ مِنَ التَّدَهُّقُنِ لِأَنَّ الْكُلْفَةَ وَالْمَثُونَةَ فِي الْمُتَدَهِّقِينَ. فَأَمَّا التَّذَلُّلُ وَالتَّمَسُّكُنُ فَلَا كُلْفَةَ فِيهِمَا وَلَا مَثُونَةَ عَلَيْهِمَا لِأَنَّهُمَا الْخَلْقَةُ وَهُمَا مَوْجُودَانِ فِي الطَّبِيعَةِ. وَلَا قُوَّةَ إِلَّا بِاللَّهِ

And the right of the offering¹ is that through it² you purify your will toward your Lord, and expose yourself to His Mercy, and His approval and not the eyes of the observers lower than Him. If this is so, you will neither be hypocritical nor extravagant. You will only intend the offering for God's sake, and know that God wishes your ease, and does not wish your hardship.

He also wishes His creatures to take it easy, and does not wish them to suffer hardships. Likewise, modesty is better than arrogance, for there lies extravagance and falsehood in the arrogant, while there are no formalities or falsehoods in the humble and the servile, since they are creatures and they exist in nature. There is no power but in God.

The Arabic word 'hada' meaning offering is used to refer to the sacrifice made for the holy pilgrimage to the Ka'ba.³ We read the following verse in the Holy Qur'an:

وَلَا تَحْلِقُوا رُؤُوسَكُمْ حَتَّىٰ يَبْلُغَ الْهَدْيُ مَحَلَّهُ

"And do not shave your heads until the offering reaches the place of sacrifice..." [The Holy Qur'an, al-Baqarah 2: 196]

This is called an offering since it is like a gift some give to others after they sacrifice it. This is similar to the present that the queen of Sheba sent for Solomon as we read in the following verse:

وَأْتِي مُرْسَلَةٌ إِلَيْهِمْ بِهَدِيَّةٍ فَنَاطِرَةٌ بِمَ يَرْجِعُ الْمُرْسَلُونَ

"But I am going to send him a present, and (wait) to see with what (answer) return (my) ambassadors." [The Holy Qur'an, al-Naml 27:35]

This word has been used seven times in the Holy Qur'an. In all instances, it is used to refer to the sacrifice made for the pilgrimage.

The Sacrifice

The second obligatory act in Mina for those who go on the pilgrimage is to send an offering for sacrifice. This offering is intended to be an act to get closer to God. We read the following in Majma' al-Bahrain: "Offering refers to any good deed done with the intention of getting closer to God." If we want to better understand what Imam Sajjad said about the offering, we should review the Qur'anic verses on this issue. Consider the following verse:

وَأْتِمُوا الْحَجَّ وَالْعُمْرَةَ لِلَّهِ فَإِنْ أُحْصِرْتُمْ فَمَا اسْتَيْسَرَ مِنَ الْهَدْيِ وَلَا تَحْلِقُوا رُؤُوسَكُمْ حَتَّىٰ يَبْلُغَ الْهَدْيُ مَحَلَّهُ فَمَنْ كَانَ مِنْكُمْ مَّرِيضًا أَوْ بِهِ أَذًى مِّن رَّأْسِهِ فَفِدْيَةٌ مِّن صِيَامٍ أَوْ صَدَقَةٍ أَوْ نُسُكٍ فَإِذَا أَمِنْتُمْ فَمَنْ تَمَتَّعَ بِالْعُمْرَةِ إِلَى الْحَجِّ فَمَا ... اسْتَيْسَرَ مِنَ الْهَدْيِ

"And complete the Hajj or 'Umrah in the service of God. But if ye are prevented (from completing it), send an offering for sacrifice, such as ye may find, and do not shave your heads until the offering reaches the place of sacrifice. And if any of you is ill, or has an ailment in his scalp, (necessitating shaving), (he should) in compensation either fast, or feed the poor, or offer sacrifice; and when ye are in peaceful conditions (again), if anyone wishes to continue the 'Umrah on to the Hajj, he must make an offering, such as he can afford..." [The Holy Qur'an, al-Baqarah 2: 196]

In this verse God has spoken of the offering three times.

The first occasion is concerned with the situation where you are in the service of God, but you are prevented from completing it because of getting ill. In this case, you must send an offering for sacrifice.

The second occasion is on the day of celebration before shaving the head and after the ritual stoning of devil. It is not allowed to shave until the offering is sacrificed.

The third case is when you are in peaceful conditions again. Sending an offering for sacrifice in Mina is the certain duty of any pilgrim who wants to participate in the pilgrimage ceremonies.

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لَا تَحْلُوا شَعَائِرِ اللَّهِ وَلَا الشَّهْرَ الْحَرَامَ وَلَا الْهَدْيَ وَلَا الْقَلَائِدَ وَلَا أَمِينَ الْبَيْتِ الْحَرَامَ يَبْتَغُونَ

فَضْلًا مِنَ اللَّهِ وَرِضْوَانًا

“O ye who believe! Violate not the sanctity of the symbols of God, nor of the Sacred Month, nor of the animals brought for sacrifice, nor the garlands that mark out such animals, nor the people resorting to the Sacred House, seeking of the bounty and good pleasure of their Lord.” [The Holy Qur’an, al-Maida 5:3]

There are eight decrees in this verse. One is related to animals brought for sacrifice – marked or unmarked. The same issue is pointed out in the following verse:

جَعَلَ اللَّهُ الْكَعْبَةَ الْبَيْتَ الْحَرَامَ قِيَامًا لِلنَّاسِ وَالشَّهْرَ الْحَرَامَ وَالْهَدْيَ وَالْقَلَائِدَ ذَلِكَ لِتَعْلَمُوا أَنَّ اللَّهَ يَعْلَمُ مَا فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَمَا فِي الْأَرْضِ وَأَنَّ اللَّهَ بِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ عَلِيمٌ

“God made the Ka’ba, the Sacred House, an asylum of security for men, as also the Sacred Months, the animals for offerings, and the garlands that mark them...” [The Holy Qur’an, al-Maida 5:97]

In another verse we read:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لَا تَقْتُلُوا الصَّيْدَ وَأَنْتُمْ حُرْمٌ وَمَنْ قَتَلَهُ مِنْكُمْ مُتَعَمِّدًا فَجَزَاءٌ مِثْلُ مَا قَتَلَ مِنَ النَّعَمِ بِحُكْمٍ بِهِ نَزَّاهُ عَدْلٍ مِّنْكُمْ هَدْيًا بَالِغَ الْكَعْبَةِ

“O ye who believe! Kill not game while in the sacred precincts or in pilgrim garb. If any of you doth so intentionally, the compensation is an offering, brought to the Ka’ba of a domestic animal equivalent to the one he killed, as adjudged by two just men among you...” [The Holy Qur’an, al-Maida 5:95]

The compensation must be donated to the Ka’ba. Jurisprudents agree that the expiation related to hunting while in Umrah should be sacrificed in Mecca and that related to hunting while in Hajj should be sacrificed in Mina. They also agree on the place of sacrifice. The issue of the sacrificial animals is again referred to in the following verse:

هُمُ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا وَصَدُّوكُمْ عَنِ الْمَسْجِدِ الْحَرَامِ وَالْهَدْيِ مَعْكُوفًا أَنْ يَبْلُغَ مَحَلَّهُ

“They are the ones who denied Revelation and hindered you from the Sacred Mosque and the sacrificial animals, detained from reaching their place of sacrifice...” [The Holy Qur’an, al-Fath 48:25]

These were the seven instances where the offering to sacrifice is mentioned in the Qur'an. We understand the importance of the offering and realize that this is done in order to obey God and to approach Him, and that it is to be taken to Ka'ba or the place of sacrifice.

The History of Offering for Sacrifice

Everyone is instructed to know when the practice of sending an offering for sacrifice started. Historical records show various forms of offering for sacrifice existed in different nations. The Qur'an has stated the origin of this practice to be at the time of the two sons of Adam as we read in the following verse:

وَأْتَلُ عَلَيْهِمْ نَبَأَ ابْنَيْ آدَمَ بِالْحَقِّ إِذْ قَرَّبَا قُرْبَانًا فَتُقُبِّلَ مِنْ أَحَدِهِمَا وَلَمْ يُتَقَبَّلْ مِنَ الْآخَرِ قَالَ لَأَقْتُلَنَّكَ قَالَ إِنَّمَا يَتَقَبَّلُ اللَّهُ مِنَ الْمُتَّقِينَ

“Recite to them the truth of the story of the two sons of Adam. Behold! They each presented a sacrifice (to God): It was accepted from one, but not from the other. Said the latter: “Be sure I will slay thee.” “Surely,” said the former, “God doth accept of the sacrifice of those who are righteous.” [The Holy Qur’an, al-Maida 5:27]

We can see that presenting a sacrifice to God is one of the means of approaching God. Since the present of one of them was accepted, the other one threatened to kill him. The two sons of Adam used this practice to test their closeness to God. Abraham also tested his closeness to God through presenting a sacrifice.

As understood from the Old Testament, God ordered him to sacrifice an animal.⁴ The children of Abraham expressed their closeness to God through offering sacrificial animals. The offerings at the time of Moses were of two types. They used to sacrifice one group and free the second group for the sake of God. The group that was sacrificed was also of the following three kinds:

- 1) They used to burn one group and only leave its skin for the rabbi.
- 2) They used to burn half of the second group and leave the second half for the rabbi.
- 3) The third group were those whose meat was for everyone.

The Romans used to offer sacrifice for their gods. The Priests used to spread water, honey and rose water at the time of the offering. It is recorded in history that they did not restrict themselves to the sacrifice of animals. At times, they sacrificed people too. The Phoenicians, Canaanites, Persians, Romans and Egyptians practiced this until an order to ban this practice was issued in the year 657 A.D. by the Romanian Parliament.

It is said that each year the Egyptians used to drown a fully made up virgin girl in the river. They did this

with the intention of getting closer to their gods. This wicked practice continued in Egypt until Amr ibn A'as banned it upon the permission of Umar ibn Khattab. This has been quoted on the authority of Ustad Ahmad Jorjani who was one of the scholars in Al-Azhar University.⁵

Islam forbade all forms of offering for sacrifice for idols and men. Islam taught the proper practice of sending an offering to its followers. The verses related to this issue were cited above. Since human nature is inclined towards the belief in God, man likes to offer a sacrifice to Him. Islam taught man the proper way to offer a sacrifice, and the proper thing to offer. We should not think that the blood or the meat of the sacrificed animal would reach God. No. This is just a practice to help man approach God. Therefore, it should be done with the soul intention of approaching Him. That is why God's name should be invoked when we offer a sacrifice to Him.

Offering as a Religious and Intellectual Act

It can be concluded from the above discussion that offering animals for sacrifice is a religious and intellectual act that is done to purify the soul, and improve the economy. The meat of the sacrificed animal should be distributed among the poor people for the sake of God. This we understand from the following traditions.

Imam Sadiq quoted on the authority of God's Prophet :

إِنَّمَا جَعَلَ اللَّهُ هَذَا الْأَضْحَى لِتَتَسَّعَ مَسَاكِينُكُمْ مِنَ اللَّحُومِ فَأَطْعِمُوهُمْ

“God has established this sacrifice in order that your poor may have ample meat to eat. Therefore, give them meat to eat!”⁶

Abi Basir narrated that he told Imam Sadiq : “What is the reason for offering for sacrifice?” The Imam said:

إِنَّهُ يُغْفَرُ لِصَاحِبِهَا عِنْدَ أَوَّلِ قَطْرَةٍ تَقْطُرُ مِنْ دَمِهَا عَلَى الْأَرْضِ وَلِيَعْلَمَ اللَّهُ مَنْ يَتَّقِيهِ بِالْغَيْبِ. قَالَ اللَّهُ تَعَالَى: لَنْ يَنَالَ اللَّهُ لُحُومَهَا وَلَا دِمَائُهَا وَلَكِنْ يَنَالُهُ التَّقْوَى مِنْكُمْ ۗ أَنْظِرْ كَيْفَ قَبِلَ اللَّهُ قُرْبَانَ هَابِيلَ وَرَدَّ قُرْبَانَ قَابِيلَ

‘The sins of the one who is offering will be forgiven when the first drop of blood of the sacrificed animal falls on the ground. It is also a means by which God gets to know those who fear Him in the Unseen. God the Almighty said: “It is neither their meat nor their blood that reaches God: it is your piety that reaches Him...” [Hajj, 22:37]. See how God accepted the offering of Abel, but turned down that of Cain.’^{7 8}

The reward for the one offering the sacrifice and his being forgiven are stressed in this tradition. In

addition, the fact that his purity of intentions is recognized is also outlined. Imam Ali said:

لَوْ عَلِمَ النَّاسُ مَا فِي الْأُضْحِيَّةِ لاسْتَدَانُوا وَضَحَّوْا؛ إِنَّهُ لَيُغْفَرُ لِصَاحِبِ الْأُضْحِيَّةِ عِنْدَ أَوَّلِ قَطْرَةٍ تَقْطُرُ مِنْ دَمِهَا

“If the people only knew the reward for offering animals for sacrifice, they would borrow money to make an offering. Indeed, the sins of the one who is offering a sacrificial animal are forgiven once the first drop of its blood falls on the ground.”⁹

It has been recorded in Wasa`il al-Sh`ah that the Prophet of God told his daughter, the Blessed Fatima :

إِشْهَدِي نَبْحَ ذَبِيحَتِكَ فَإِنَّ أَوَّلَ قَطْرَةٍ مِنْهَا يَغْفِرُ اللَّهُ بِهَا كُلَّ ذَنْبٍ عَلَيْكَ... وَهَذَا لِلْمُسْلِمِينَ عَامَّةً

“Be present beside the animal you offer for sacrifice since your sins will be forgiven the moment the first drop of its blood falls down on the ground.” He then added: “This issue applies to all Muslims.”¹⁰

Imam Kazim quoted on the authority of God’s Prophet :

اسْتَفْرَهُوا ضَحَايَاكُمْ فَإِنَّهَا مَطَايَاكُمْ عَلَى الصِّرَاطِ

“Seek for sacrificial animals that are brisk and agile since they will be your mounts to cross the (Bridge of) Sirat.”¹¹

¹. The animal sacrificed during the holy pilgrimage.

². In the other version it continues: “You desire God and you do not desire His creation; through it you desire only the exposure of your soul to God’s mercy and the deliverance of your spirit on the day you encounter Him.”

³. The House of God.

⁴. Sharh-i-Risalat al-Huquq, Ghopanchi, v. 1, p.365.

⁵. Ibid. pp.366–367.

⁶. ‘Ilal al-Shara’i, p.437.

⁷. The sons of Adam.

⁸. Ilal al-Shara’i, p.438.

⁹. Ibid.

¹⁰. Sharh-i-Risalat al-Huquq, Ghopanchi, v. 1, p.369.

¹¹. ‘Ilal al-Shara’i, p.438, section 179.

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