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6. Awaiting

Awaiting the reappearance of Imam al-Asr (a.t.f.s.)

Among the most important signs and essentials of recognition of Imam al-Asr (a.t.f.s.) (may Allah hasten his appearance) is awaiting his reappearance. In traditions awaiting the reappearance is described as the best worship. Holy Prophet (s.a.w.s.) declares:

أفْضَلُ العِبادةِ انتِظارُ الفَرَجْ.

'The best worship is awaiting the reappearance.'[1]

Awaiting for all solutions from Allah's side is propounded as worship. When this matter is in relation to the Imams (a.s.), that too in the time of occultation, it assumes special status and becomes the highest form of worship as underlined by traditions. We have brought some of these traditions to impress our point. Imam Sadiq (a.s.) asserts:

من مات منكم وهو منتظر لهذا الأمر كمن هو مع القائم في فسطاطه

'One who dies while he is awaiting this matter (of reappearance), he is like the one who was with Qaim (a.t.f.s.) himself in his tent'.

Then Imam (a.s.) paused for a few moments and said:

لا، بل كمن قارَعَ مَعَهُ بِسَيْفِهْ.

'Nay, he is like the one fought along with him (Qaim (a.t.f.s.)), with his sword.'

Then Imam (a.s.) added:

(لا واللهِ اَلا كَمَنْ اُسْتُشْهِدَ مَعَ رَسُولِ الله (ص.

No by Allah! He is not but like the one who was martyred in front of the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.s.).2

But this will not be the case with every Shia, and not all of them will enjoy such an esteemed position. Only that person will enjoy this exalted status who has complete understanding and deep recognition about his Imam (a.t.f.s.) and his occultation, and is not superficial in his beliefs like others. Only then will he be better than the people of all times. In this context, Imam Zainul Abedeen (a.s.) declares:

O Abu Khalid, certainly people in the time of his occultation, who have belief in his Imamat and are awaiting his reappearance, are the best people of all times. For Allah has given them wisdom, understanding and recognition with which occultation for them is like seeing Imam (a.s.) in person. Allah has made them such as if they have fought in the way of Allah with sword in front of the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.s.). These are the true believers and the real Shias who call towards Allah's religion secretly and openly.'3

These people who are the best of all times have two characteristics – they acknowledge the Imamat of Imam al–Asr (a.t.f.s.) and they await his reappearance, which makes them true Shias as they invite others towards Allah's religion openly and secretly.

Allah's religion implies more than anything else the pure existence of Imam al–Zamana (a.t.f.s.) and calling others towards his recognition and love. Indeed one of the most evident signs of waiting in the period of occultation is this very act of calling others openly and secretly towards Imam al– Asr (a.t.f.s.).

Considering the reappearance as near

Awaiting is purely a spiritual relationship, linked with one's heart. And this spiritual relationship will reach its perfection only when man does not become disappointed of Imam's (a.t.f.s.) reappearance under any condition and does not consider it as a very distant possibility. The awaiting one is attentive and his eyes are focused at Imam's (a.t.f.s.) reappearance every morning and evening and he never considers it as a distant eventually. Keeping such a ready disposition towards reappearance at the time of occultation is the cause of Allah's satisfaction and pleasure. Imam Sadiq (a.s.) declares,

'That person is closest to Allah and Allah is most happy with him, when he has lost his Imam who is not evident, rather he is hidden from him, and he does not know his whereabouts while he knows that his proofs and signs have not vanished. Then at such a time he should await the reappearance every morning and evening.'4

Considering reappearance as very proximate is a spiritual feeling and underlines the unshakeable

certainty and strong faith of the person in relation to the promise of reappearance not being fixed and the possibility of its occurrence at any time, morning or evening. Considering reappearance as near is from the signs of submission because Allah is satisfied with it and the Imams (a.s.) have strongly recommended it.

Those who consider reappearance as near are safe and sound. We recite in Dua al-Ahad:

إِنَّهُمْ يَرَوْنَهُ بَعِيدًا، وَنَرَاهُ قَرِيبًا

'...they (the opponents) consider reappearance of Imam (a.t.f.s.) as distant while we consider it near.'[5]

Of course, believing reappearance as near does not tantamount to fixing a time for it. Because forecasting their appearance incites Allah's wrath and displeasure and is far from the Sunnat of Imams (a.s.). The Imams (a.s.) have also castigated those who fix a time for reappearance and have considered them as liars. Once a person asked Imam Sadiq (a.s.) about the time for reappearance. He asked, 'May I be sacrificed for you, inform us about this affair, which we are awaiting. When will it occur?' Imam (a.s.) warned:

كَذَبَ الوقَّاتون. و هَلَكَ المُسْتَعجِلونْ. ونَجا المُسَلِّمون.

'Those who fix the time are liars, those who hasten are destroyed and those who submit are safe.'[6]

Then those who make claims about reappearance being very near, to attract the people towards Imam-e-Zamana (a.t.f.s.) and provide some background for reappearance in the name of ظهور صغرا (minor reappearance), are themselves deviated and misguide others. The duty of the awaiter is to submit to Allah's destiny with regards to the time of reappearance and never despair of Imam's (a.t.f.s.) reappearance at morning or evening and consider it to be very near. But he must not fall prey to hastening and not to pull oneself or others towards deviation and doubt by creating a false and deceptive atmosphere of reappearance being very near. Therefore, considering reappearance as near should never lead one to forecast the time of reappearance. The former is praised and the latter condemned and both are totally distinct from each other.

Intention of awaiter to help Imam (a.t.f.s.)

The awaiter of reappearance prepares himself for helping Imam (a.t.f.s.) at the time of his reappearance. He fulfills this important responsibility by making a sincere intention from the depth of his heart in the time of occultation. The value of intention in the performance of good deeds is highlighted by the Messenger of Allah (s.a.w.s.) thus:

نيَّةُ المؤمِن خيرٌ من عمله

'The intention of a believer is better than his action'.7

At times a believer decides to do a good deed, but is unsuccessful in doing so. And often with respect to some good deeds he falls prey to ostentation and showoff, which affect his sincerity. Thus the intention behind the deed is very important. As per traditions, intention of a good deed is better than the deed itself and Allah the High, due to His grace and obligation upon believer rewards him just for the intention, regardless of whether He actually performs the action. Imam Sadiq (a.s.) says:

'Surely the poor believer says: O Lord give me sustenance so that I do such and such good deeds. Then since Allah knows that his intention is true, Allah writes the reward equal to that deed as if he has actually performed it. Surely Allah's nobility is boundless.'8

On this basis, correct and sincere intention for a believer assumes extraordinary importance. The intention of a believer should be purely for Allah's and Imam's (a.t.f.s.) pleasure. On the same basis, Imam Sadiq (a.s.) has considered himself as a helper of Sayyadush Shohada (a.s.) in Karbala and believes he will be rewarded like the martyrs of Karbala.

'I do consider myself as one of the martyrs of Karbala and do not consider my reward lesser than their reward. This is because my intention is that if I was present in those days, I would certainly have helped Imam Husain (a.s.). And similarly our Shias are (considered as martyrs), though they may die in their beds.' 9

Therefore one who passes the day in awaiting the reappearance of Imam al-Asr (a.t.f.s.), and if he is sincere in his awaiting, and helps Imam (a.t.f.s.), then even if he does not find the era of reappearance, it will not make any difference to him. This is because he gets the reward of attaining the reappearance and being present along with Imam (a.t.f.s.) and fighting his enemies without actually lifting a sword. He gets this reward in the period of occultation itself.

The rationale behind this reward is that as far as helping the Imam (a.t.f.s.) is concerned, all that the Shia is capable of doing is his intention and spiritual preparation from the heart. As for the actualization of his intention, it is an affair beyond his control and depends on Allah's decree. Then although Allah has deprived him of this taufiq (of helping Imam (a.t.f.s.)), but due to His boundless grace and mercy, He has not deprived him of the reward of intending to help his Imam (a.t.f.s.).

One of the awaiters of Imam al-Asr (a.t.f.s.) was a person by the name of Abdul Hamid Waasti who lived at the time of Imam Baqir (a.s.). Once after narrating his condition of awaiting and discussing about the reappearance of Qaim al-Ahlul Bayt (a.s.), he asked Imam (a.s.): 'If I die before meeting the Qaim (a.t.f.s.), what will happen?'

Imam (a.s.) soothed him by saying:

إنَّ القائل منكم إن أدركت القائم من آل محمد نصرته كالمقارع معه بسيفه.

'Anyone of you who says (from his heart): If I attain the time of Imam al-Zamana (a.t.f.s.), I will help him, he is like the one who wields the sword alongside him.'[10]

Finding such a belief is the outcome of true recognition regarding Allah and the Prophet (s.a.w.s.) and Imam (a.t.f.s.), and cognizance of their rights. Amirul Mo'mineen (a.s.) says:

'Do not venture out (i.e. stay in your house) and be patient in calamites. Do not draw the sword as per the wishes of your tongue and do not be hasty in whatever Allah has not hastened for you. For whoever amongst you dies on his bed while he is aware of the right of Allah, his Lord, and the rights of His Prophet (s.a.w.s.) and the rights of the Ahlul Bayt (a.s.), he dies a martyr and his reward is with Allah and he will find the reward of the good action which was in his intention and that intent ion will be considered (for reward) even if he has not (actually) lifted the sword. And for everything a period and its expiry is fixed.'[11]

A noteworthy point in this tradition is the importance of recognizing the rights of Allah, His Messenger (s.a.w.s.) and Imam (a.t.f.s.), which arises only from their recognition. The level of this recognition of rights varies to the extent of man's recognition about them. His recognition of their rights upon him will enable him to understand his duties better and consequently he will perform these duties in the desired manner. Thus the key to man's actions lies in the depth of his recognition of Imam (a.t.f.s.). Therefore, the true awaiter in the time of occultation is the one who claims with his tongue as well as his heart:

نُصرَتي مُعَدَةٌ لَكُمْ

'My help is ready for you.'[12]

And if all the followers of Imam al-Asr (a.t.f.s.) in the time of occultation have such a condition, then they will not remain deprived of seeing him. Imam Mahdi (a.t.f.s.) in a signed letter (tauqee') to Shaikh Mufid (r.a.) has promised:

'If our followers – may Allah give them taufeeq of His obedience – are united in fulfilling with their hearts, the covenant which they have upon their necks, the bounty of seeing me will not be delayed for them and soon they will achieve the good fortune of our visit with true recognition from their side in relation to us.'[13]

Expressing intention of helping through renewal of allegiance

(bay'at)

For keeping alive the intention of helping Imam (a.t.f.s.), indeed how nice would it be if man brings his intention to his tongue and binds himself by promising Allah that he will never be negligent of this intention. It is with this objective that we are discussing the matter of allegiance (bay'at) to Imam al-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) in the time of occultation. Bay'at is in fact expressing with the tongue and the heart the intention of obeying Imam (a.t.f.s.) and helping him at all times. We repeat this action on several occasions, to renew our intention through a fresh bay at. For instance, renewal of bay'at in Dua al-Ahad every morning is done thus:

'O Allah I renew today morning and on all other days that I am alive, the bay'at for him, which is upon my neck, in such a way that I shall never turn back from it and shall not desist from it. O Allah make me from his friends and helpers, those who defend him, hasten in fulfilling his needs, are obedient to his orders, protect his holy existence, take precedence in fulfilling his wishes and attain the bounty of martyrdom in front of him.'[14]

The promise covers the wishes and aspirations of the awaiter, which he expresses every day. This brings about a transformation in him and every day that he renews his bay'at, his intention becomes stronger and he finds himself more prepared and equipped than earlier in fulfilling his promise towards his master.

One who nears the end of his life in this condition and finds himself confronted with death, while his master has not reappeared, his entire existence burns and is filled with regret. Such a person is overwhelmed with feelings of disappointment and is distressed at praying and waiting for his entire life for his master, only to find death at his doorstep, while his master still has not reappeared. He is left with a feeling of remorse and emptiness at not being able to help his master and considers his life unsuccessful and meaningless.

Consequences of awaiting the entire life for reappearance

Let us see how Imams (a.s.) approach the one who is sincerely awaiting reappearance. Mas'adah narrates, 'I was with Imam Sadiq (a.s.) when an old man, stooping and leaning heavily on a stick entered and did salaam to Imam (a.s.). Imam (a.s.) replied to his salaam. The old man said, 'O son of Allah's Messenger, give me your hand so that I may kiss it.' Imam (a.s.) obliged. The old man kissed it and began crying. Imam (a.s.) asked, 'O Shaykh, why are you crying?'

He replied, 'May I be sacrificed for you, it is now 100 years since I have been faithful to the feet of your Qaim. I keep saying he will reappear this month, this year. But now my age has increased, my bones have become fragile and my death is approaching. And whatever I see about you (i.e. Ahlul Bayt (a.s.)), I do not like. I see you being killed and rendered homeless and on the other hand, I see your enemies dominant. Then why should I not cry?'

The old man's words moved Imam (a.s.) to tears. He said to the old man:

'O Shaykh, if Allah keeps you alive so that you see our Qaim, you will be at an elevated position. But if death overtakes you (and you do not see the time of Qaim (a.s.)) then on the Day of Judgment you will be raised along with the weight ثقل of Hazrat Mohammed (s.a.w.s.) and we are his weight. The Holy Prophet (s.a.w.s.) said so often: 'I am leaving behind you two weighty things. Then fasten to these two things so that you are never deviated: the Book of Allah and my progeny, who are my Ahlul Bayt (a.s.).'

The old man said, 'After hearing this news, I am not afraid and my he art has become tranquil.' He did not know who would be the Qaim of Ahlul Bayt (a.s.). Therefore, Imam (a.s.) introduced him to the Qaim (a.t.f.s.) and said that the Qaim (a.t.f.s.) will be the son of Imam Hasan Askari (a.s.), from the progeny of Hazrat Hadi (a.s.) and he will be (a descendant) of my son.'

Then Imam (a.s.) said:
'O Shaykh! I swear by Allah! If from the age of the world, only one day remains, Allah will lengthen that day so that the Qaim of Ahlul Bayt (a.s.) reappears. Remember that our Shias in the time of occultation will be involved in severe examination and distress. In that period, Allah will keep steadfast in his guidance, those who are sincere. O Allah help them (Shias) in this matter (of sincerity and steadfastness)'15

A similar incident occurred with another old man in the time of Imam Muhammad Baqir (a.s.). Hakam b. Otaibah who witnessed this incident narrates: 'I was with Imam Muhammad Baqir (a.s.) and the house was filled with people. At that moment, an old man entered, leaning on his staff. He stood at the door of the room and said – Salutation to you, O son of Allah's Messenger, and may His mercy and blessings be upon you. Imam (a.s.) replied,

"Peace be upon you and His mercy and blessings."

Thereafter the old man did salaam to those who were present in the gathering and they also replied to him.

Later, the old man turned his face to Imam Baqir (a.s.) and said: O son of Allah's Messenger, please give me a seat near you, may I be sacrificed for you. I swear by Allah that I love you and I love your friends as well. I swear by Allah, my love for you and your friends is not for the sake of the world. I keep enmity with your enemies and I am disgusted with them, and I swear by Allah, keeping enmity and disgust with regards to them is not due to any jealousy between them and me. I swear by Allah, I consider your permissible (halaal) as permissible and your prohibited (haraam) as prohibited and I am awaiting the reappearance of your affair. Now while it is as I have said, may my life be sacrificed for you, what hope (and glad tidings) do you have for me?'

Imam Baqir (a.s.) said:
'Come, come by my side and Imam (a.s.) pointed at a place near him. Then he (a.s.) said to him: O

Shaykh, a man came to see my father, Ali b. Husain (a.s.) and asked him the same question (as you have asked). My father replied to him thus:

'If you die (in this condition) you will join the Messenger of Allah (s.a.w.s.) and Ali (a.s.) and Hasan (a.s.) and Husain (a.s.) and Ali b. Husain (a.s.), your heart will turn cool, your eyes will become bright and you will be welcomed along with the honorable angels, Ruh and Rayhan, as soon as your soul reaches here – and he (a.s.) indicated by his hand to the throat. And if you remain alive, you will see whatever delights your eyes, and reach to the highest grade along with us.'[16]

When the old man heard this statement, he said:
'O Abu Jafer what did you say?' Imam (a.s.) repeated the statement of his father. The old man exclaimed اللهُ أَكْبَرُ 'If I die I will join Holy Prophet (s.a.w.s.) and Ali (a.s.) and Hasan (a.s.) and Husain (a.s.) and Ali b. Husain (a.s.) and my heart will turn cool, my eyes will become bright and I shall be welcomed along with the honorable angels, Ruh and Rayhan as soon as my soul reaches here (i.e. throat). And if I remain alive I shall see whatever delights my eyes and I shall reach at the highest grade along with you?!"

Saying this, the old man starting weeping and lamenting till he collapsed. When others in the crowd saw his condition, all of them cried and wept. Imam Baqir (a.s.) wiped the old man's tears with his own hands. The old man raised his head and said to Imam (a.s.): O son of Allah's Messenger, may Allah sacrifice me upon you, give your hand to me.' Imam (a.s.) gave his hand to him. He kissed his hand and rubbed it on his eyes and cheeks. Then he lifted his dress over his stomach and chest and put Imam's (a.s.) hand over it.

Then the old man rose, did salaam and left. When he had turned his back, Imam (a.s.), looking towards him, turned the people in the gathering and said:

مَنْ أَحَبَ أن ينظُر الى رَجُلٍ مِنَ الجنَّةِ فَلْيَنْظُرُ الى هذا

'If anyone likes to see a person from the people of Paradise, he should look at this man.'

Hakambi n Otaibah said: 'I have not seen any gathering wherein the people were wailing like this.' (i.e. all people were crying very intensely)

Yes, this is the end of the one who has passed his life with the love of Ahlul Bayt (a.s.) and their friends, and hatred and hostility towards their enemies. He accepts whatever is made permissible and unlawful by the Imams (a.s.) and awaits the reappearance of Qaim al–Ahlul Bait (a .s.) with intense fervor and anticipation.

Then let us beseech Allah that he never deprives us of the fervor of awaiting for our beloved Imam (a.t.f.s.) and that separation from him (a.t.f.s.) never makes us forgetful of his remembrance!

...و لا تُنْسِنا ذِكرَهُ و انتِظارَهُ

(O Allah), do not let me forget his remembrance and his awaiting.'[17]

This is one sentence from a dua, which has reached us from the first deputy of I mam al- Asr (a.t.f.s.). Those who await the reappearance of Imam (a.t.f.s.) must recite it after namaz al-Asr on Fridays in the period of occultation.

1. Muntakhabul Athar, Part 15, Chp. 2, Tradition 16
2. Bihar al-Anwar, Vol. 52, Pg. 126, Tradition 18.
3. Kamaluddin, Chap. 31, Tradition 2
4. Kamaluddin, Chap. 33, Tradition 17
5. Bihar al-Anwar, Vol. 102, Pg. 112
6. Ghaibat al-No'mani, Chap. 16, Tradition 11
7. Usul al-Kafi, Kitabul Imaan wal Kufr, Chp. of Niyyat, Tradition 2
8. Usul al-Kafi, Kitabul Iman wal Kufr, Chap. of Niyyat, Tradition 3
9. Mikyalul Makareem, Vol. 2, Pg. 228 quoted from Sharh Sahife Sajjadiyah of Sayyed Naimatullah Jazaeri
10. Rauza al-Kafi, Pg. 81, Tradition 37
11. Nahjul Balagah, Sermon 190
12. Ihtejaj al-Tabarsi, Volume 2, Pg. 317, Ziarat al-Aale Yasin
13. Ihtejaj al-Tabarsi, Vol. 2, Pg. 325
14. Bihar al-Anwar, Vol. 102, Pg. 112
15. Bihar al-Anwar, Vol. 36, Pg. 408
16. Rauza al-Kafi, Pg. 76, Tradition 30
17. Kamaluddin Chp. 45, Tradition 43

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