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A Closer Look at the Meaning of Diyafat Allah

Almighty Allah is referred to in the verses of the Holy Qur'an with different names. Sometimes He is introduced with '*Huwa*' (He)1, sometimes with '*Allah*'2, sometimes with '*Rabb*'3 and so on. All these names manifest a certain meaning, which if overlooked may hamper one from understanding the verse perfectly. Authoritative exegetes of Qur'an have alluded to this fine reality in their works4.

Likewise the Ahl al-Bayt ('a), who represent the guardians of Qur'an, and appreciate its kernel, also employ every Divine Name for the purpose of referring to a certain Attribute of Allah (SwT). For example, in the aforementioned prophetic tradition the Holy Prophet 7 said: '*I spend the night near my Lord* (*'inda Rabbi*)*...*' Here the name 'Lord' (*Rabb*) is specifically employed and thus it refers to the aspect of God's Lordship, an extension of which is to perfect and train the human beings. In addition, it also alludes to 'his state of perfection' in particular. The first person pronoun "*y*" in Rabbi (**رَبِّيْ**) alludes to this subtlety.

Therefore, the food and drink in the tradition must be in harmony with what would confer excellence to the Prophet (s). Obviously in his case we speak of higher excellence, for the path towards Absolute Excellence never ends.

With regard to *Diyafat Allah*, the name '*Allah*' is employed. The name Allah is an all-comprehensive Name of God which exemplifies all His Perfect Attributes. That is why it is also known as *al-ism al-a'zam* (the Greatest Name). Its origin is commonly known to be the transitive verb '*alaha*' (he worshipped). Hence it signifies 'The Worshipped One' or 'One Who is worthy of worship'. Consequently, the spiritual food in the month of Ramadan is one that makes us true worshippers of Almighty Allah, those who exemplify all His Sublime Names (*al-Asma' al-Husna*) in themselves. In one of his sermons, Imam al-Khumayni alludes to this subtlety saying:

چه بگوییم در مقابل این نعمت بزرگ الهی که ملتها را دعوت کرده است به

ضيافه الله ضيافه الله با همه اسماء...

“How can we express our gratitude in return for this great Divine Blessing, for the nations have been called to be the guests of All□h with all His Names...5”

In other words, the Holy month of Ramad□n is a month of becoming ‘Abdull□h (an obedient servant of All□h (SwT)). It is a month of adopting the etiquette of All□h (SwT) in the language of tradition or adopting the Divine Color in the language of the Holy Qur’□n. The Holy Qur’□n says:

صِبْغَةَ اللَّهِ وَمَنْ أَحْسَنُ مِنَ اللَّهِ صِبْغَةً وَنَحْنُ لَهُ عَابِدُونَ

“***All□h’s Color; and whose color is more pleasant than All□h’s; and He alone do we worship***.6”

And the Holy Prophet (s) is reported to have said:

تَخَلَّقُوا بِأَخْلاَقِ اللَّهِ.

“Adopt the etiquette of All□h.7”

In fact one of the wonderful supplications taught to us by Im□m B□qir al-‘Ul□m (‘a) is *Du’a al-Mub□hilah*, in which what we seek are the Beautiful Attributes of All□h.

‘All□mah Tab□’tab□’□, the mentor of leading contemporary authorities in *‘irf□n*, would highly emphasize on reading this *du‘□*, ‘for,’ he would say, ‘there is no mention of Paradisal men or women in it.’ Observe the following verses of this radiant supplication:

أَللَّهُمَّ إِنِّي أَسْأَلُكَ مِنْ بَهَائِكَ بِأَبْهَاهُ وَكُلُّ بَهَائِكَ بَهِيٌّ... أَللَّهُمَّ إِنِّي أَسْأَلُكَ مِنْ عَظَمَتِكَ بِأَعْظَمِهَا وَكُلُّ عَظَمَتِكَ عَظِيمَةٌ، أَللَّهُمَّ إِنِّي أَسْأَلُكَ بِعَظَمَتِكَ كُلِّهَا...

“O All□h I seek from You the kind of Your Brilliance (*bah□’ik□*) which is the Most Brilliant, and every Brilliance of Yours is Very Brilliant; O All□h I ask You by Your Brilliance in its entirety.…O All□h I seek

from You the kind of Your Greatness which is the Greatest, and every Greatness of Yours is very Great; O All□h I ask You by Your Greatness in its entirety...”8

The contemporary mystic-scholar Ayatull□h Hasan Z□deh Amuli in his treatise ‘*Light upon Light*’ while enumerating the requirements of observing good manners in front of Almighty All□h, says:

دگر ادب مع اللّه اقتضاء مي‌كند كه از او جز او را نخواهي كه اين عبادت احباب و احرار است. اين امر از بلند همّتى عبد است. كسانى كه دون همّت‌اند به وفق دنائت خود طلب دارند. يكي از مشايخ ما ـ رضوان اللّه تعالى عليه ـ ما را ترغيب مي‌فرمود به مثل دعاي سحر حضرت امام محمّد باقر عليه السّلام (اللّهمّ انّى أسألك من بهائك بأبهاه وكلّ بهائك بهىّ...) كه در آن بهاء و جمال و جلال و عظمت و نور و رحمت و علم و شرف است و حرفى از حور و غلمان نيست، اگر بهشت شيرين است، بهشت آفرين شيرين تر است.

چرا زاهد اندر هواي بهشت است چرا بيخبر از بهشت آفرين است

“Observing etiquette before All□h also requires that you do not seek other than Him, for that is the worship of the free men (*ahr□r*) and lovers (*ahb□b*). Such a supplication originates from the exalted aspiration of the servant of God. Those who are lower than this station, ask for their needs according to their lower stages. One of our mentors (may All□h be pleased with him) would encourage us to read supplications like *Du’□ al-Sahar* [another name for *du’□ al-mub□hilah*] of Hadrat Im□m al-B□qir (‘a): (O All□h I seek from You the kind of Your Brilliance which is the Most Brilliant...) wherein there is Divine Brilliance, Beauty, Majesty, Greatness, Light, Mercy, Knowledge, Nobility, but no mention about Paradisal damsels (*h□r*) or heavenly youthful male servants (*ghilm□n*). If Paradise is sweet, the Creator of Paradise is sweeter.”

Why is the abstinent after Paradise?
*Why is he oblivious of the Creator of Paradise?*9

Later in the same treatise this great mystic quotes *Misb□h al-Shar□’ah*, a masterpiece on the secrets of worship attributed to Im□m al-S□diq (‘a), saying:

لَقَدْ دَعَوْتُ اللّٰهَ فَاسْتَجَابَ لِي، وَنَسِيْتُ الْحَاجَةَ، لأَنَّ اسْتِجَابَتَهُ بِإِقْبَالِهِ عَلى عَبْدِهِ عِنْدَ دَعْوَتِهِ أَعْظَمُ وَأَجَلُّ مِمَّا يُرِيدُ مِنْهُ الْعَبْدُ وَلَوْ كَانَتِ الْجَنَّةَ وَنَعِيْمَهَا الأَبَدَ، وَلٰكِنْ لاَ يَعْقَلُ ذٰلِكَ إِلاَّ الْعَالِمُونَ الْعَابِدُونَ الْمُحِبُّونَ الْعَارِفُونَ، صَفْوَةُ اللّٰهِ وَخَوَاصُّهُ.

Imām al-Ṣādiq (‘a) said: “Indeed I called Allāh and He responded to me, and I forgot my wish, for His Response by giving attention to His servant when he calls upon Him is greater and more magnificent than what the servant wants from Him, even if that be Paradise and its eternal blessings, but none save the Knowledgeable Ones comprehend– those who are worshipful, the Divine lovers, Gnostics, Allāh’s choicest and special servants.10”

We can also say that since the Holy Prophet (s) was a perfect manifestation of an obedient slave of Allāh (SwT), this month is a month of getting closer to the Holy Prophet (s) too. Leading mystics have clearly stated that the Holy Prophet (s) is a manifestation of the Greatest Name of God – Allāh (SwT), which means that he manifests in himself all the Divine Attributes. In other words he is ‘Abd of Allāh. We also bear witness to this during every prayer:

أَشْهَدُ أَنَّ مُحَمَّدًا عَبْدُهُ وَرَسُولُهُ.

“I bear witness that Muhammad is His Obedient Servant and Messenger.”

The Infallible Imāms of the Ahl al-Bayt (‘a) likewise personify the Divine Attributes. Imām ‘Alī (‘a) is reported to have said:

نَحْنُ الأَسْمَآءُ الْحُسْنى الَّتِي إِذَا سُئِلَ اللّٰهُ تَعَالى بِهَا أَجَابَ...

“We (the Ahl al-Bayt) are the Most Beautiful Names of Allāh by which when Almighty Allāh is asked, He Responds.11”

And it is also reported from Imām al-Bāqir (‘a) that:

نَحْنُ الأَسْمَآءُ الْحُسْنى الَّذِينَ لاَ يَقْبَلُ اللّٰهُ مِنَ الْعِبَادِ عَمَلاً إِلاَّ بِمَعْرِفَتِنَا.

“We are the Most Beautiful Names of Allāh, and without knowing us, Allāh does not accept any deed of His servants.12”

In a sermon which he delivered on the first day of the Holy month of Ramadān, Imām ‘Alī (‘a) while addressing the fasting ones said:

أَيُّهَا الصَّائِمُ تَدَبَّرْ أَمْرَكَ، فَإِنَّكَ فِي شَهْرِكَ هٰذَا ضَيْفُ رَبِّكَ، أُنْظُرْ كَيْفَ تَكُونُ فِي لَيْلِكَ وَنَهَارِكَ، وَكَيْفَ تَحْفَظْ جَوَارِحَكَ عَنْ مَعَاصِي رَبِّكَ. أُنْظُرْ أَنْ لاَ تَكُونَ بِاللَّيْلِ نَائِمًا وَبِالنَّهَارِ غَافِلاً، فَيَنْقَضِي شَهْرُكَ وَقَدْ بَقِيَ عَلَيْكَ وِزْرُكَ، فَتَكُونَ عِنْدَ إِسْتِيفَاءِ الصَّائِمِيْنَ أُجُورَهُمْ مِنَ الْخَاسِرِينَ، وَعِنْدَ فَوْزِهِمْ بِكَرَامَةٍ مِنَ الْمَحْرُومِينَ، وَعِنْدَ سَعَادَتِهِمْ بِمُجَاوَرَةِ رَبِّهِمْ مِنَ الْمَطْرُودِينَ...

“...O you who are fasting, reflect on your affair, for surely you are a guest of your Lord in this month; observe how your attitude is during the night and day, and how you protect the members of your body from disobeying your Lord; and make sure that you do not sleep through the night and be heedless during the day, so that your month ends while your burden still remains on your shoulders, such that when the fasting ones are paid their due, you are among the losers, and while they enjoy *prosperity in the neighborhood of their Lord*, you are from the expelled ones...”13

Here one can see that the name ‘*Rabb*’ is employed, signifying that this invitation deals with training the human being so that he may attain his perfection.

If one was to carefully ponder over what is obligatory and highly recommended in this holy month, he would realize that Allāh (SwT) out of His overflowing Mercy compelled the human beings to fast and encouraged them to pray so that they may overhaul themselves and start the journey to Allāh (SwT). Fasting weakens the animal passions and thereby enables the spirit to focus its attention toward the spiritual realms.

In the aforesaid sermon, Imām ‘Alī (‘a) enlightens us with guidelines that would enable us to appreciate and benefit from the Divine invitation of the Holy month of Ramadān. Briefly, he tells us to be careful and not to waste its days in negligence (*ghaflah*) and its nights in sleep (*nawm*), for they are

opportunities for us to elevate our spirits. If we are not able to appreciate the highest level of this invitation, which some mystics consider as '*the banquet*', we should at least struggle to appreciate the lower levels, which in reality serve as introductory phases for the highest level. And the path towards appreciating the different levels of the Divine Banquet is fasting. The level of fasting, however, is what would determine the 'level of Divine Reception'. Muslim ethicians classify the levels of fasting into three[14]:

1. *Sawm al-'Um□m* (the general fast);
2. *Sawm al-Khus□s* (the specific fast);
3. *Sawmu Khus□s al-Khusus* (the most specific fast).

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1. Holy Qur'□n, 112:1.
2. Holy Qur'□n, 2:255.
3. Holy Qur'□n, 1:2.
4. This can be tangibly observed in the excellent exegesis of 'All□mah Tab□'tab□'i's Tafs□r al-M□z□n.
5. Sah□feye Im□m, vol. 18, pg. 497.
6. Holy Qur'□n, 2:138.
7. Sharh Du'□' al-Sab□h, pg. 87.
8. Maf□t□h al-Jin□n, pg. 184.
9. N□run 'al□ N□r, pg. 80.
10. N□run 'al□ N□r, pg. 81.
11. Mad□nat al-Ma'□jiz, vol. 1, pg. 556 .
12. al-Mukhtasar, pg. 129.
13. Fad□'il al-Ashhur al-Thal□thah, pp. 107-108.
14. Many scholars of ethics have adopted this classification. Those familiar with Arabic/Persian literature can refer to vol. 2 al-Mahajjah of al-K□sh□n□ and Asr□r al-Hikam (vol. 2, pg. 568) of Mull□ H□d□ Sabzw□r□.

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