

Imam Ali Seeks Explanation

فَقَالَ : عَلِيُّ لِأَبِي : يَا رَسُولَ اللَّهِ أَخْبِرْنِي مَا لَجُلُوسِنَا هَذَا تَحْتَ الْكِسَاءِ مِنَ الْفَضْلِ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ؟

‘Ali then said to my father, “O Allah’s Messenger! Please tell me; what is the value of this gathering of us under this cloak in the sight of Allah?”

The natural course of an intellectual person who recognizes the significance of an event is to seek knowledge of the virtues, rewards, and blessings of such event. That is exactly what Ali ibn Abi Talib (AS) did as he posed the following question upon the revelation of the purification verse. *“What is the value of this gathering under the cloak in the sight of Allah?”* It is a wise and timely question for Imam Ali (AS) to ask and he does so as a service to his followers and devotees who will come in the later generations till the end of time and ponder over that question.

There is no doubt that the person whom the Prophet (SA) referred to as the Gate of Knowledge in the well-known tradition, *“I am the city of knowledge and Ali is its Gate”* must already know the answer to the question he is posing.

How can that not be the case when Imam Ali (AS) is the one who frequently stated in his sermons:

“Ask me before you lose me. By Allah, if you ask me about anything that could happen up to the Day of Judgment, I will tell you about it. Ask me, for, by Allah, you will not be able to ask me a question about anything without my informing you. Ask me about the Book of Allah, for by Allah, there is no verse about which I do not know whether it was sent down at night or during the day, or whether it was revealed on a plain or in a mountain.” (Tarikh al-Khulafa)

The role of Imam Ali (AS) in this gathering is not passive and he is the means by which the Prophet (SA) informs the audience of the eternal significance and bounties of the *Tradition of the Cloak* which they have just experienced. In fact, we owe our due thanks and gratitude to Imam Ali (AS) who posed this very important question on our behalf so that we gain the knowledge and insight behind this historical event.

Up till now, the purpose and significance of the *Tradition of the Cloak* have manifested itself and become obvious to the listener after hearing the divine speech about the purpose of creation and deducing its indications, and capping it with the revelation of the purification verse in the Holy Qur'an.

However, Allah (SWT) presents yet another opportunity for the minds that don't comprehend and the eyes that don't see and those who may belittle or misunderstand the significance of this event under the cloak by the presentation of Imam Ali's question.

The message we extract simply by the posing of this question by a person like Imam Ali (AS) is in itself an indication that this gathering is not random neither is it a coincidence. The *Tradition of the Cloak* is not merely a story that is pleasant to hear, and Allah (SWT) is not a teller of stories without presenting its lessons, morals, and significance that will be effective till the end of time and not just for the contemporaries of that event.

It is interesting to note that when Imam Ali (AS) poses his question to the Prophet (SA), he does not ask "if" there is a reward and value behind their gathering under the cloak. Instead, he asks "what" is the reward and value of this gathering.

Imam Ali (AS) already concluded and knows with certainty, as the successor of the Prophet and the 1st Imam, that *there is indeed* significant merit and value behind this gathering. It is only a matter of gaining that knowledge and understanding and making it available to the public. This is the response of Allah (SWT) through the tongue of Imam Ali (AS) to anyone who wishes to devalue the *Tradition of the Cloak* or dilute its significance.

As Allah (SWT) testifies on behalf of the truthfulness of Imam Ali (AS),

وَجَعَلْنَا لَهُمْ لِسَانَ صِدْقٍ عَلِيًّا

"And We granted them lofty honor on the tongue of truth." (19:50)

According to *Tafsir Bayan Al Sa'ada* by Al Janabidhi, what is intended by "علي" as mentioned in this verse is in reference to Ali ibn Abi Talib (AS), for he possessed a truthful tongue and there was no other tongue more honorable than his. As Imam Ali (AS) himself said in this regards, "*Allah (SWT) makes the truthful tongue of a person in front of the people better than wealth and inheritance.*"

It is cited in the book of *Manaqib Aal Abi Talib* by Ibn Shahr Ashoob that Abu Baseer narrates that Imam Al Sadeq (AS) said that the Prophet (SA) said that, "I prayed to Allah (SWT) to bestow me with a "truthful tongue" (Lisaan Sidq). so Allah (SWT) revealed these verses in Surat Maryam (19:49-50)". Just as Allah (SWT) bestowed Prophet Is-haaq (Isaac) to Prophet Ya'qoob (Jacob), He (SWT) bestowed Imam Ali (AS) as the "truthful tongue" to Prophet Muhammad (SA).

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