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O All□h, Return Every Stranger

أَللّٰهُمَّ رُدَّ كُلَّ غَرِيْبٍ

Meaning of 'Ghar□b'

Due to an acquaintance with different cultures and languages some of us conjecture that the word '*ghar□b*' means 'poor.' In the Urdu language, however, this word when used in the absolute sense denotes the poverty of a person. But when it is particularized like '*ghar□bu'l watan*' the meaning changes.

In the Arabic, which appears also to be the source language of the word, '*ghar□b*' means 'a remote entity.' Its origin is the word '*ghurba*' which means 'remoteness.' Any thing therefore which is *ghar□b* is far.

In his Commentary of *Sah□fat al-Sajj□diyyah*1, Sayyid 'Al□ Kh□n al-Husayn□, says:

الْغُرْبَةُ بالضمّ: البُعْدُ والنَّوَى.

"*Ghurbah* (with the vowel damma over ghayn) denotes remoteness and distance."

Hence *ghar□b* is anything that is far [in relation to something else].

In the Arabic language, unknown words are also known as ghar□b.

The pain of being a stranger can be well appreciated by only those who have experienced, or are experiencing the state of being far from their hometowns. Whosoever travels abroad, has hope of

returning back to his hometown safe and sound. Obviously, he would not like to separate himself from his near ones or abandon his material assets of life. Those who have left their hometowns and encountered calamities on their way or were stranded in a foreign country can understand how agonizing it is to be far from home.

The recent decades of contemporary history are full of examples that break the heart of every concerned listener: the Zionists, as has been their trend in the ancient past, continue harassing different parts of the weak nations of the world through terrorism and banishment, and thereby drive out scores of innocent men, women and children from their hometowns so that they should bear the painful torture of surviving in refugee camps.

Such innocent victims are really in need of our support. As mentioned earlier, we must try to study the areas where we can play an effective role to support them in any way. If donations are collected by reliable aid organizations, we should try to contribute as much as we can. If we can help a refugee who lives in poverty in our countries, we should strive to support him, so that he may adapt to the new situation he has been forced into. If we are unable to do all this, we should never forget to pray for them and seek their relief from the All-Powerful Creator.

Therefore, when we pray to Allah to return all those who are far away from their hometowns and cannot return due to some difficulties, we should not forget the manifestations of such people in contemporary history; we are duty bound to remember all those who suffer the predicament of banishment such as the Palestinians, the Afghanis, etc.

Extensions of Ghurba

It is possible for one to be a foreigner somewhere, but enjoy a very luxurious life. Consequently one may or may not experience the agony of separation. Those to whom Allah has bestowed affluence do not necessarily experience the agony of separation. The means of communication are easily at their disposal and they have no sense of grief, for whenever they choose to return back they do not face any problems. The following holy tradition alludes to this reality:

Imam ‘Ali (as) is reported[2] to have said:

الْغَنِيُّ فِي الْغُرْبَةِ وَطِنٌ.

“The affluent one is at home in a foreign place.”

Poverty, on the contrary, transforms one into a stranger:

Imam ‘Ali (as) is reported[3] to have said:

الْفَقْرُ فِي الْوَطَنِ غُرْبَةٌ.

“Poverty in one’s town is remoteness.:

Im□m ‘Al□ (as) is reported4 to have said:

الْمُقِلُّ غَرِيْبٌ فِيْ بَلْدَتِهِ.

“The dispossessed is a stranger in his hometown.”

Perhaps this is one reason why in the Urdu language the word *ghar□b* is used to denote poverty.

Other extensions of ghurba are as follows:

1. Im□m ‘Al□ (as) is reported to have said:

الْغَرِيْبُ مَنْ لَيْسَ لَهُ حَبِيْبٌ.

“A stranger is one who does not have a friend.”

3. Im□m ‘Al□ (as) is reported to have said:

الأَحْمَقُ غَرِيْبٌ فِيْ بَلْدَتِهِ، مُهَانٌ بَيْنَ أَعِزَّتِهِ.

“A silly person is a stranger in his hometown, and degenerate among his friends.”

The Relative Aspect of the word ‘Gharib’

The abovementioned tradition indicates that whosoever is silly is *ghar□b* (a stranger). However, this should not be taken in the absolute sense. The word ghar□b is relative. One who is silly despite being *ghar□b* (far) in the company of the learned, is at home in the company of his fellows. Similar is the case with the learned, for they are strangers in the company of the fools, but at home in the company of the learned: Another such instance is when a majority of the population are ignorant. Here again the learned are strangers:

Im□m ‘Al□ (as) is reported to have said:

الْعُلَمَاءُ غُرَبَاء لِكَثْرَةِ الْجُهَّالِ.

“The learned are strangers due to the great number of the ignorant.”

Sometimes, however, the learned can be strangers in the company of the learned themselves. One who is specialized in chemistry, for example, and has no acquaintance with Eastern philosophy is an alien in the company of the Muslim metaphysicians and vice versa.

Furthermore, it is also possible for one to be a stranger and a resident at the same time. For example, a scholar may be far from his hometown, and thus a stranger, but close to the learned class, and hence a resident. Sometimes, a scholar, despite being in his hometown, which is inhabited by the learned class of his own field, is still called a stranger in terms of being far from the proximity of All□h (swt).

Ahlu’l Bayt (as): Positive Extensions of Ghar□b

Most of the Muslims were oblivious to the future consequences of the decision made about the caliphate after the Prophet’s (s) demise. The question of caliphate was not a matter of enjoyment of power for some decades, but the question of safeguarding the true version of Islam and the guardianship of the bearers of the final religion and their future generations. The extreme grief (*karb*) of Hadrat F□tima (as) indeed portrays, how far apart were the masses from her broad vision. She thought of the future, whereas others were heedless of the destruction of Islam, and were concerned with usurping material power. Her spirit wished well for the entire humanity, whereas others only thought of their own schemes. She together with her radiant family and very few trustworthy followers, was ghar□b, since she was remote from those who were disobedient to God and those who could not foresee the calamities that would befall the Muslim nation. Whenever one tries to reflect upon this extension of ghurbah, the heart becomes constricted and the tongue stops and tears roll down the cheeks. The following statement5 of F□tima (as) sums it all up:

Ummu Salama asks Hadrat F□tima (as): “O daughter of the Messenger of All□h (s), how did you approach your morning?”

And F□tima (as) replies:

أَصْبَحْتُ بَيْنَ كَمَدٍ وَكَرْبِ فَقْدِ النَّبِيِّ وَظُلْمِ الْوَصِيِّ.

“I encountered morning in great grief and sorrow of the loss of the Prophet (s) and the oppression of his successor…”

After this fundamental blow on the Muslim Ummah, the Ahlu’l Bayt (as) and their true followers always remained gharīb among a great number of the Muslim Ummah.

The Ghurba of Every Human Being of Tainted Disposition

O Allāh [the Name of the Essence that possesses all the Perfect Divine Attributes], return all the *ghurabā’* (distanced) [who are spiritually far, which means that they do not enjoy the Divine Attributes].

Hāfiz, the great mystic–poet says6:

Man az dayāre habībam na az bilāde gharīb
Muhayminā be rafīqāne khud rasān bāzam

I belong to the beloved’s town, not to the land of strangers;
O Lord, join me again to your friends!

Masters on the path towards human perfection believe that the human being is a traveler in this world. He has a path to traverse, which is ‘the religion’ or in Qur’ānic terms ‘*sirāt al–mustaqīm*’ and a ‘destination’, which is Almighty Allāh Himself. Referring to this Allāh (swt) says:

1. The Human Being is a Traveler: Holy Qur’ān, 84:6

﴿ يَا أَيُّهَا الإِنْسَانُ إِنَّكَ كَادِحٌ إِلى رَبِّكَ كَدْحًا فَمُلاَقِيهِ ﴾

“O human being you are always striving unto Your Lord laboriously and you shall meet Him.”

2. The Path: Holy Qur’ān, 1:6

﴿ إِهْدِنَا الصِّرَاطَ الْمُسْتَقِيمَ ﴾

“Guide us on the Straight Path.”

3. The Destination, Holy Qur’ān, 35:18

﴿ وَ إِلى اللَّهِ الْمَصِيرُ ﴾

"To Allāh is the endless journey."

Religion, if practiced properly, can elevate the human being so high that he can also transcend the angels in perfection. Interested men and women may ask what dhikr or act to perform if one would like to begin the spiritual journey to Allāh. The stereotype that 'the *tarīqa*' (the spiritual path) is other than the '*Sharī'ah*' (the apparent Islamic law) is a great impediment inculcated by the Satan. It is by reading and understanding the Qur'ān and the Sunnah correctly and following the *Tawdīhu'l Masā'il* (the Book of Islamic Laws) that one can attain the heights of perfection. Many of us tend to conjecture that an *'ārif* (a mystic) is one who must isolate himself all the time and practice some specific dhikr and wait for spiritual revelations (*mukāshafāt*). Our Shī'a scholars do not agree with this misconception. They believe that both the Sharī'ah and the Tarīqah enjoy a unity. And it is by practicing the apparent Islamic law and observing both its inner as well as its outer etiquette that a human being can attain Allāh's nearness and transcend the angels.

The human being's ascent to God should not be mistaken with the physical journey. His journey is beyond the confines of time and space. He is in fact coloring himself with Divine Attributes and thus nearing The Gracious Presence. Our holy Imāms (as) who had reached the peaks of perfection were manifestations of Divine Attributes. Look at the following tradition:

Imām Ja'far al-Sādiq (as) is reported7 to have said:

نَحْنُ الأَسْمَاءُ الْحُسْنَى.

"We are the Most Beautiful Names [of Allāh]."

Hence, in order to return back to our hometown, which is Allāh's proximity, we must try to adopt the correct path set by Almighty Allāh: The Holy Qur'ān [35:18] says:

وَمَنْ تَزَكَّى فَإِنَّمَا يَتَزَكَّى لِنَفْسِهِ وَإِلى اللَّهِ الْمَصِيرُ

"And whosoever purifies himself, purifies himself only for his own soul's good. To Allāh is the homecoming (destination)."

Thus the path is 'self-purification', which is not different from following the Islamic Laws.

However, we must realize that the journey is not as easy as it may seem at first. For one to cover the different stations of the journey, a qualified master of gnosis is essential, since the path is full of obstacles and the accursed Satan is always on the watch. He always tries to impede the way of one who

has made a firm resolution to adopt the spiritual path.

This, however, should not dishearten those who are far from places where such masters exist, for there are instances, which indicate that one can attain such exalted destinations without a direct relationship with such masters. [The fundamental role of the Ahlu'l Bayt (as) however always remains. We shall explain this in our later discussions – Insh□ All□h.] The late □yatull□h Muhammad Husayn Tehr□n□ reports a thought-provoking incident in his *Anw□r-e-Malak□t*8 as follows:

Respect for Mother Turns one into a Friend of All□h

[□yatull□h Tehr□n□ narrates that once in Tehran he had gone to the Islamiyya bookshop situated on Buzarjumhar□ Street to purchase books. He was a friend of one of the partners of the organization, H□j Sayyid Muhammad Kit□bch□, who was responsible for the store of the bookshop. He went to the bookshop to meet him and purchase some books as well. It was in the morning and approximately four hours remained to midday. A man had also come to the store to purchase books. Having purchased the books that he required, he started to leave, when suddenly he began saying: My beloved All□h, my physician All□h, my helper, my helper, my soul, my soul. The □yatull□h narrates:] On looking at him, I saw that his face had turned red and he was sweating; he was plunged in happiness and ecstasy beyond limit. Addressing him, I said: 'Dear Sir! Dear Dervish, do not eat all alone; this is not the custom of etiquette'; He took a turn around himself and began chanting some poems of B□b□ T□hir 'Ury□n [a well-known mystic buried in Hamad□n]. Thereafter he kept silent and wept a lot. Then he became happy and laughed. I said: 'Ahsant! [Thereafter a conversation followed. During the conversation, □yatull□h Muhammad Husayn Tehrani asks the saint to inform him how he could attain such an exalted station, and the saint narrates his anecdote as follows:]

I had an old mother who was sick and disabled. She was bed-ridden for many years. I alone was at her service, and would attend to her needs: I would cook food for her, bring water to her for ablution, and was at her service for her different needs. However, she was very ill-mannered and would sometimes abuse me, but I would bear that and respond to her with a smile. Due to this very attitude of hers I did not get married, although my age exceeded forty years. This was because maintaining a family with the kind of character that my mother had was impossible for me. I knew that if I would marry, either she would cause our separation, or I would be forced to leave her. Abandoning my mother, however, was not acceptable to my conscience. Hence, I observed patience in remaining a bachelor, and resigned myself to the situation. Sometimes, due to great patience in front of her ill manners, I would experience a spark of light in my heart, a state of happiness and joy. However this would only be temporary. This situation continued until one cold winter night. I had placed my bed near hers so that she wouldl not be alone and would not need to raise her voice to call me for her necessities. On that night I had filled a jug with water, and placed it near my bedside all the time, so that if my mother required some water I would immediately give it to her. In the middle of that night she asked for water. I stood up immediately and filled a small vessel with water and gave it to her saying: 'Take, dear mother.' She, being in the state of

drowsiness did not realize that I attended to her request immediately; she thought that I had brought her the water late. Upon this, she abused me in odd, abusive language and hit me on my head with the vessel of water. I immediately filled the vessel with water once again and addressing her said: ‘Dear mother, take, and forgive me; I am sorry! Saying this, I was overcome, and didn’t know what happened next. In short, I attained my aspiration: those sparks had tuned into a world of light resembling the radiant sun; and my beloved, my friend, my helper, and my doctor, spoke to me. Thereafter this state never stopped. And it is years now that this state has remained...

Dear readers, there is vast difference between the servant whispering to His Beloved and the Beloved whispering to His servant. Never conjecture that such an incident is farfetched for it was just another practical translation of Imām ‘Alī’s (as) statement in *Nahju’l Balāgha*9 as follows:

وَمَا بَرِحَتْ لِلّٰهِ عَزَّتْ آلاؤُهُ فِي الْبُرْهَةِ بَعْدَ الْبُرْهَةِ، وَفِي أَزْمَانِ الفَتَراتِ، عِبَادٌ نَاجَاهُمْ فِي فِكْرِهِمْ، وَكَلَّمَهُمْ فِيْ ذَاتِ عُقُوْلِهِمْ.

“In all the periods and times when there were no prophets, there have been persons to whom Allāh, precious are His bounties, whispered in their hearts and spoke in the essence of their intellects.”

As long as the opportunity remains, our ‘ardent aspiration’ should be to attain this particular gracious abode before we leave the world and cannot do anything. There is a very thought-provoking incident narrated in *Rawdat al-Kāfī* by Imām Muhammad al-Bāqir (as):10

The Prayer of A Broad Minded Old-Woman

عَنْ أَبِي جَعْفَرٍ (ع) قَالَ إِنَّ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ (ص) كَانَ نَزَلَ عَلَى رَجُلٍ بِالطَّائِف قَبْلَ الإِسْلاَمِ فَأَكْرَمَهُ. فَلَمَّا أَنْ بَعَثَ اللّٰهُ مُحَمَّداً (ص) إِلَى النَّاس، قِيلَ لِلرَّجُل: أَتَدْرِي مَنِ الَّذِي أَرْسَلَهُ اللّٰهُ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ إِلى النَّاس؟ قَالَ: لا. قَالُوا لَهُ: هُوَ مُحَمَّدُ بْنُ عَبْدِ اللّٰهِ، يَتِيمُ أَبِي طَالِب، وَهُوَ الَّذِي كَانَ نَزَلَ بِكَ بِالطَّائِف يَوْمَ كَذَا وَكَذَا فَأَكْرَمْتَهُ. قَالَ: فَقَدِمَ الرَّجُلُ عَلَى رَسُولِ اللّٰهِ (ص) فَسَلَّمَ عَلَيْهِ وَأَسْلَمَ، ثُمَّ قَالَ لَهُ: أَتَعْرِفُنِي يَا رَسُولَ اللّٰهِ؟ قَالَ: وَمَنْ أَنْتَ؟ قَالَ: أَنَا رَبُّ الْمَنْزِلِ الَّذِي نَزَلْتَ بِهِ بِالطَّائِف فِي الْجَاهِلِيَّةِ يَوْمَ كَذَا وَكَذَا فَأَكْرَمْتُكَ. فَقَالَ لَهُ رَسُولُ اللّٰهِ (ص): مَرْحَباً بِكَ، سَلْ حَاجَتَكَ. فَقَالَ: أَسْأَلُكَ مِائَتَيْ شَاةٍ بِرُعَاتِهَا. فَأَمَرَ لَهُ رَسُولُ اللّٰهِ (ص) بِمَا سَأَلَ. ثُمَّ قَالَ لأَصْحَابِهِ: مَا كَانَ عَلَى هٰذَا الرَّجُلِ أَنْ يَسْأَلَنِي سُؤَالَ عَجُوزِ بَنِي إِسْرَائِيلَ لِمُوسَى (ع) ؟ فَقَالُوا: وَمَا سَأَلَتْ عَجُوزُ بَنِي إِسْرَائِيلَ لِمُوسَى؟ فَقَالَ: إِنَّ اللّٰهَ عَزَّ

ذِكْرُهُ أَوْحَى إِلَى مُوسَى أَنِ احْمِلْ عِظَامَ يُوسُفَ مِنْ مِصْرَ قَبْلَ أَنْ تَخْرُجَ مِنْهَا إِلى الأَرْضِ الْمُقَدَّسَةِ بِالشَّام، فَسَأَلَ مُوسَى عَنْ قَبْرِ يُوسُفَ (ع) ، فَجَاءَهُ شَيْخٌ فَقَالَ: إِنْ كَانَ أَحَدٌ يَعْرِفُ قَبْرَهُ فَفُلانَةُ. فَأَرْسَلَ مُوسَى (ع) إِلَيْهَا، فَلَمَّا جَاءَتْهُ قَالَ: تَعْلَمِينَ مَوْضِعَ قَبْرِ يُوسُفَ (ع) ؟ قَالَتْ: نَعَمْ. قَالَ: فَدُلِّينِي عَلَيْهِ وَلَكِ مَا سَأَلْت. قَالَتْ: لاَ أَدُلُّكَ عَلَيْهِ إِلاَّ بِحُكْمِي. قَالَ: فَلَكِ الْجَنَّةُ. قَالَتْ: لاَ، إِلاَّ بِحُكْمِي عَلَيْكَ. فَأَوْحَى اللَّهُ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ إِلَى مُوسَى (ع): لاَ يَكْبُرُ عَلَيْكَ أَنْ تَجْعَلَ لَهَا حُكْمَهَا. فَقَالَ لَهَا مُوسَى (ع): فَلَكِ حُكْمُك. قَالَتْ: فَإِنَّ حُكْمِي أَنْ أَكُونَ مَعَكَ فِي دَرَجَتِكَ الَّتِي تَكُونُ فِيهَا يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ فِي الْجَنَّةِ. فَقَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ (ص): مَا كَانَ عَلَى هٰذَا لَوْ سَأَلَنِي مَا سَأَلَتْ عَجُوزُ بَنِي إِسْرَائِيلَ؟

“Before the advent of Islam, once when the Holy Prophet (s) happen to visit T□’if, someone generously hosted him. Later when the Prophet (s) was appointed as a Messenger of All□h, the said person was asked: ‘Do you know whom did All□h appoint as his Messenger to the people? ‘No.’ he replied. They said: ‘It is Muhammad bin ‘Abdill□h, the orphan of Ab□ T□lib, who, on such and such a day had been your guest in T□’if and you graciously hosted him. Hearing this, the person comes in the presence of the Prophet (s), greets him, embraces Islam, and then says: ‘O Messenger of All□h, do you recognize me?’ The Prophet (s) says: ‘And who are you?’ The man then says: ‘I am the owner of the house in which you had put up in T□’if during the age of ignorance (before the advent of Islam) on such and such a day and I hosted you. The Holy Prophet (s) said: ‘You are welcome; ask what you what.’ The man said: ‘I want 200 sheep together with their shepherds. The Holy Prophet (as) ordered that he be given what he wanted. Then addressing his companions he wished that the man would seek that which the old lady of *Ban□ Isr□’□l* asked from Prophet M□s□ (as).

The companions asked: ‘And what did the old lady of *Ban□ Isr□’□l* seek from M□s□?’ The Prophet (as) said: ‘surely All□h revealed to Prophet M□s□ (as) to carry the bones of Prophet Y□suf (as) before he left Egypt for the holy land in Sh□m. Thereupon Prophet M□s□ (as) asked about the whereabouts of the grave of Prophet Y□suf (as), and an old man approached him and said: If at all any one happens to know the whereabouts of the grave, it is such and such old woman. Prophet M□s□ (as) asked her to be brought to him and when she came in his presence, he asked: ‘Do you know the place of the grave of Prophet Y□suf (as)?’ She said: ‘Yes.’ The Prophet said: ‘Therefore guide me towards the grave and I you will get whatever you ask.’ She said: ‘I shall not guide you towards it except you agree to what I want in return.’ The Prophet (as) said: ‘You shall get Paradise.’ She said: ‘No, except what I want.’ Thereupon Almighty All□h revealed to Prophet M□s□ (as) that agreeing to her request should not seem insurmountable to him. Therefore Prophet M□s□ (as) said: ‘Alright, you would have what you want.’ Thereupon she said: ‘I would like to be with you in the same station that you would have in Paradise on the Day of Judgment.’ Narrating this the Holy Prophet (s) said: ‘why didn’t this man seek that which the

old woman of *Ban□ Isr□'□l* sought?"

This anecdote serves as a very important lesson for us. Ponder over the aspiration of the old woman. The lady is given Paradise but she rejects it. She aspires beyond that. She yearns for the same station that Prophet M□s□ (as) would enjoy in the Hereafter, which is none other than All□h's proximity or *Jannat al-liq□'* (The Paradise of meeting All□h). Following are verses of Qur'□n that allude to this exalted station:

1. Holy Qur'□n: 89:27-30

□ يَا أَيَّتُهَا النَّفْسُ الْمُطْمَئِنَّةُ. ارْجِعِي إِلى رَبِّكِ رَاضِيَةً مَرْضِيَّةً. فَادْخُلِي فِي عِبَادِي. وَادْخُلِي جَنَّتِي □

"O soul at peace, Return to your Lord, while you are pleased with Him, and He is pleased with you, then enter the company of My obedient servants, And ENTER MY PARADISE."

2. Holy Qur'□n 54:54-55

□ إِنَّ الْمُتَّقِينَ فِي جَنَّاتٍ وَنَهَرٍ. فِي مَقْعَدِ صِدْقٍ عِنْدَ مَلِيكٍ مُقْتَدِرٍ □

"Surely the God-wary (pious) are in gardens and rivers. In the seat of truth with the Most Powerful King."

Clearly the aspiration of the old lady of *Ban□ Isr□'□l* draws all of us to 'understand our real innate need' and pray accordingly. Let us not waste the opportunity of the nights of qadr at our disposal. Our aspiration should be the forgiveness of sins and All□h's proximity. Yes, seeking 'long life', 'a lot of sustenance' etc. as 'the means to enable us attain All□h's proximity is also highly recommended. Our supplications are full of expressions of such needs. But the material needs must always be sought as a means for the 'Great Return' to God. Otherwise the same worldly benefits can widen the gap. Let us take a lesson from B□b□ □siya, Fir'awn's wife, who despite enjoying all the worldly pleasures, did not surrender to Fir'awn and faced painful torture from him. Almighty All□h mentions her supplication as follows:

□ رَبِّ ابْنِ لِي عِنْدَكَ بَيْتاً فِي الْجَنَّةِ □

"O my Lord, build for me NEAR YOU a house in paradise."

□yatull□h al-'Uzm□ and the Apple of our eyes, Shaykh Jaw□d□ □m□l□ (may Almighty All□h prolong his exalted shadow), the contemporary commentator of Qur'□n and indeed a true successor of his teacher 'All□mah Tab□tab□'□ in the field of tafs□r says11:

This woman asks for Paradise near God, whereas others only seek Paradise... However, this lady asks for God first, and then asks for a house near God. She does not say: *Rabbibni l□ baytan fi'l Janna* ('O Lord, build for me a house in Paradise', nor does she say: *Rabbibni l□ baytan 'indaka fi'l Janna* ('O Lord, build for me A HOUSE near You in Paradise.' Rather she says: *Rabbibni l□ 'indaka baytan fi'l Janna* ('O Lord, build for me NEAR YOU a house in Paradise). First she mentions 'the proximity of All□h' and then she speaks about Paradise. That is, if it is a matter of *al-J□r Thummadd□r* (First the neighbor, then the house), this lady says: *All□h, thumma al-Janna* (First All□h, and then Paradise). Certainly the Paradise that is *'indall□h* (near All□h) is greatly different from the Paradise 'underneath which rivers flow...

'All□mah Tab□tab□'□12 says:

الْجَمْعُ بَيْنَ كَوْنِ الْبَيْتِ الْمَبْنِيِّ لَهَا عِنْدَ اللّٰهِ وَفِي الْجَنَّةِ، لِكَوْنِ الْجَنَّةِ دَارَ الْقُرْبِ مِنَ اللّٰهِ...

"Seeking a house to be built near All□h and in Paradise at the same time is due to the fact that Paradise is the abode of Nearness to God."

True Believers are Ghar□b!

There are various narrations that clearly state that a believer is a stranger.' For example:

1. Im□m Muhammad al-B□qir (as) is reported13 to have said:

الْمُؤْمِنُ غَرِيْبٌ وَ طُوبَى لِلْغُرَبَاءِ.

"A believer is a stranger; and blessed be the strangers!"

2. K□mil at-Tamm□r14 says:

سَمِعْتُ أبا جَعْفَرٍ (ع) يَقُوْلُ: أَلنَّاسُ كُلُّهُمْ بَهَائِم (ثَلاَثاً) إِلاَّ قَلِيْلٌ مِنَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ،

وَالْمُؤْمِنُ غَرِيبٌ (ثَلاَث مَرَّاتٍ).

“I heard Abū Ja’far [Imām Muhammad al-Bāqir] (as), saying thrice: ‘The people are all beasts save a few of the believers;’ and thrice, ‘a believer is a stranger (gharīb).’”

‘Allāmah Majlisī in his magnum opus ‘*The Oceans of Lights*’ comments on this tradition as follows:

بيان: كلهم بهائم أي شبيه بها في عدم العقل، وإدراك الحق، وغلبة الشهوات النفسانية على القوى العقلانية، كما قال تعالى: “إِنْ هُمْ إِلاَّ كَالأَنْعامِ بَلْ هُمْ أَضَلُّ سَبِيلاً.” إلا قليل كذا... المؤمن غريب لأنه قلما يجد مثله فيسكن إليه، فهو بين الناس كالغريب الذي بـعُد عن أهله ووطنه ...

“Exposition: ‘All are beast’” means that they resemble them in not using their intellect and not comprehending the truth and in their selfish desires dominating their intellectual faculties, as the Most High says: ‘They are like animals; rather, they are more astray’... A believer is a stranger because he rarely finds his parallel so that he may seek repose in him; hence he is among the people like a stranger, who is far from his family and hometown...”[15]

Thus, following can be reasons why a believer is “*gharīb*”:

1. A believer naturally aspires for the company of his All-Loving Creator and struggles to reach this exalted destination. As long as he has not reached the destination he always finds himself a stranger. Imām ‘Alī (as) is reported to have said:

الدُّنْيَا دَارُ الْغُرْبَةِ وَمَوْطِنُ الأَشْقِيَاء.

“The world is a place of remoteness and a residence for the wretched.”

And the following is reported[16] in another tradition:

حُبُّ الْوَطَنِ مِنَ الإِيْمَانِ.

“Love for one’s hometown is a sign of faith.”

2. In the company of the non-believers, believers are strangers. This is because while they live in a world of belief, the love of God and concern for the salvation of humanity, the non-believers do not perceive the realities and attach themselves to the world of matter and its benefits.

Why was Im□m ‘Al□ al-Rid□ (as) known as Im□m al-Ghar□b

Sometimes when addressing our 8th Holy Im□m (as) we say:

أَلسَّلاَمُ عَلَيْكَ يَا غَرِيبَ الْغُرَبَاء.

“Peace be on you, O Stranger of the Strangers.”

The teacher of □yatull□h Muhammad Husayn Tehr□n□ in the discipline of gnosis- Sayyid H□shim Hadd□d, was once asked the reason why Im□m al-Rid□ (as) was known as *Im□m al-Ghar□b*. He responded in some details. Two reasons[17] one can mention about this are:

1. The Im□m enjoyed the station of *wil□yah*, which was so exalted, and close to Divine proximity, but far from other human beings. Necessarily, the majority of the people were not acquainted with the attributes of *wil□ya* and the characteristics of a *wal□* [who is a manifestation of Divine Attributes]. Thus Im□m was ghar□b in their company.

2. Ma’m□n al-Rash□d forced the Im□m (as) to Marv and the Im□m (as) had to leave his hometown, his family and the neighborhood of the Holy Prophet’s (s) tomb. Thus he was *ghar□b*. In addition calling him to Marv was a kind of captivity, exile and imprisonment, for despite granting him power and a princely station, he deprived him from all his functions: he was neither allowed to give legal rulings nor to offer Friday and ‘□*d* Prayers.

In another *ziy□rah*[18] we also call Im□m al-Husayn (as) as *Ghar□b al-ghurab□*. And in a tradition narrated in al-Mashhad□’s *al-Maz□r al-Kab□r*, Im□m Ja’far al-S□diq (as) is reported to have asked the following about a group of people:

فَمَا يَمْـنَعُهُمْ مِنْ زِيَارَةِ قَبْرِ الْغَرِيبِ...

“And what stops them from visiting the grave of al-Ghar□b? [he means Im□m al-Husayn (as)].”[19]

The Hometown of the Gharīb

Sayyid ‘Alī Khān Husaynī, in his *Riyāḍ al-Sālikīn*, quotes the following:

سئل أبو جعفر الشّاشي: من الغريب؟ فقال: الذي يطلبه رضوان في الجنّة فلا يجده، ويطلبه مالك في النّار فلا يجده، ويطلبه جبرئيل في السّماوات فلا يجده، ويطلبه إبليس في الأرض فلا يجده. فقال له أهل المجلس وقد تفطّرت قلوبهم: يا أبا جعفر! فأين يكون هذا الغريب؟ فقال: في مقعد صدق عند مليك مقتدر.

Abū Ja’far al-Shāshī was asked: “Who is a stranger (*gharīb*)?” He said: “He is one whom the Ridwān seeks in Paradise, but does not find, one whom the Mālik seeks in Hell Fire, but does not find, one whom Gabrial seeks in the heavens but does not find, one whom Iblīs seeks in the earth, but does not find.” So the people of the gathering asked him with broken hearts: “O Abū Ja’far, where then is this stranger?” He said: “In the seat of truth with the Most Powerful King (54:55)”

The Great Sign Complains of Ghurbah in the Supplication of Kumayl

The infallibility of Imām ‘Alī (as) is an established fact and hence we would not like to engage in explaining the details of the same. We also know his famous saying:20

لَوْ كُشِفَ الْغِطَاءُ مَا ازْدَدْتُ يَقِيْنًا.

“If the veil was unveiled nothing would be added to my certitude.”

Why then should he show his fear of separation from the Beloved? What kind of separation is this? What kind of unbearable ghurba is this? āyatullāh Khumaynī, in his forty traditions when enumerating the levels of patience of the gnostics says:

Another level is that of *sabr ‘an Allāh* (*sabr* from God) which pertains to the stations of lovers of God and piners for Him, of those blessed with epiphany (*ahl al-shuhūd wa al-‘ayān*) at the time of returning to their own world, the world of plurality and sobriety (after intoxication with God). This is the hardest and the most difficult of the stations, and to it has referred the Master of the Wayfarers, the Commander of the Faithful, and the Leader of the Perfect (i.e. ‘Alī ibn Abū Tālib (as) in the noble *Du‘ā’ Kumayl*:

فَهَبْنِي يَا إِلٰهِي وَسَيِّدِي وَمَوْلاَيَ وَرَبِّي صَبَرْتُ عَلى عَذَابِكَ، فَكَيْفَ أَصْبِرُ عَلَى فِرَاقِكَ؟

"O my God, my Master and my Lord! Even if I were able to endure Your chastisement, how shall I bear Your separation?!"

Perhaps the following dictum of Im□m 'Al□ (as) also explains the reality of the matter:

نَارُ الْفُرْقَةِ أَحَرُّ مِنْ نَارِ جَهَنَّمِ.

"The fire of separation is hotter than Hellfire."21

أَللّٰهُمَّ رُدَّ كُلَّ غَرِيْبٍ.

Hence, when we seek the return of all the strangers we must pray to All□h to:

1. Return all those who have been driven out of their homes and suffer the pain of separation

2. Return all the sinful folk back to the proximity of All□h, which in reality is: (1) Perfecting the human being in terms of Divine Attributes like knowledge, patience, etc., and (2) Lessening the gap between the high-ranking strangers like the *A'immah* (as) and the low-ranking ones like the sinful, and thus removing the *ghurba* of the Im□ms from the rest too. [This point is worthy of reflection]. Otherwise, in another sense, the Im□ms (as) being close to Almighty All□h, were never *ghar□b* (strangers). This is because they were never far from their spiritual hometown. There is a beautiful report narrated by al-Zamakhshari in his *Rab□' al-Abr□r* worthy of reflection. He reports:

لَمَّا أُخْرِجَ يُوْسَفُ (ع) مِنَ الْجُبِّ وَاشْتُرِيَ، قَالَ لَهُمْ قَائِلٌ: إِسْتَوْصُوا بِهٰذَا الْغَرِيبِ خَيْراً. فَقَالَ لَهُمْ يُوسُفُ: مَنْ كَانَ مَعَ اللّٰهِ فَلَيْسَ عَلَيْهِ غُرْبَةٌ.

"When Y□suf (as) was taken out of the well, and bought, a person said to them: 'Take care of this stranger (*ghar□b*). [Hearing this,] Y□suf (as) said to them: whosoever is with Almighty All□h, is not a stranger."22

1. Riy□d al-S□lik□n, v. 1, pg. 473
2. Tasn□fu Ghurari'l Hikam, pg. 369
3. Mu'jamu Alf□zi Ghurari'l Hikam, pg. 810
4. Ibid.
5. Bih□r al-Anw□r, v. 43, pg. 156, tr. 5
6. D□w□ne Khw□jah H□fiz Sh□r□z□, ed. Pezhman, pg. 150, ghazal 334
7. Bih□r al-Anw□r, v. 25, pg. 4, tr. 7
8. Anw□re Malak□t, v. 1 pp. 141-145
9. Nahju'l Bal□gha, Sermon 222 (220-variation)
10. Rawdat al-K□f□, v. 8, pp. 110-111
11. Zan dar □ineye Jam□lo Jal□l, pp. 156-157
12. Al-M□z□n, v. 19, pg. 344
13. Mustadrak Saf□nat al-Bih□r, v. 7, pg. 550
14. Al-K□f□, v. 2, pg. 242
15. Bih□r al-Anw□r, v. 64, pg. 160
16. Saf□nat al-Bih□r, v. 8, pg. 525
17. Al-Tawhid Quarterly Journal, v. XIII, no. 4, pp. 72-85
18. Bih□r al-Anw□r, v. 98, ch. 18, pg. 230
19. al-Maz□r al-Kab□r, pg. 333
20. Bih□r al-Anw□r, v. 40, pg. 153, tr. 5
21. M□r□th-e-Had□the Sh□'e, v. 8, pg. 217
22. Rab□' al-Abr□r wa Nus□s al-Akhb□r, v. 3, pg. 5

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