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The Splendour and Eminence of Supplications Compiled by the Ahlul-Bait [a]

Also, it would be appropriate to ponder about the narrations regarding supplications, as well as to think about the ways and manners of supplications as practised by the sinless Imams [a]; must take a profound look at the exalted themes and subtle meanings which are contained in the supplications compiled by those honourable ones. In order to discover that whatever these impeccable ones have incorporated in their supplications regarding Allah (the Glorious, the Exalted), His Sacred Names, Characteristics, Glory, and Splendour is far deeper than what could be imagined by human thinking and comprehension.

One will discover what sort of beauty and elegance have been shown by them in their etiquette of servanthood; what have been uttered by them regarding the Splendour and Glory of Allah (the Glorious, the Exalted); in what pleasing manners they had asked him for forgiveness and blessings, and by what excuses had pleaded Him for bestowing His love, mercy, benevolence and blessings?

I can swear to my own soul that these exalted themes and sweet pleasing manners of these supplications, are the most explicit manifestation of miracle, proving the authenticity of divine mission of these sinless Imams [a]. And the one who possesses some sense of thinking and some degree of understanding in his heart, if will ponder about these supplications, would certainly accept their vicegerency (*Imamat*)[1] without requiring any further proof and miracle.

And the one who desires to appreciate more about the splendour, eminence, and sweetness of these supplication should engage himself in supplications; without copying from their supplications should compile his own prayer; then he should compare it with the supplications of those noble ones, in order to discover the limits of variation between his own and theirs.

Yes! The aware and enlightened ones who dare to swim in this fathomless ocean of these supplications and with a penetrating eye ponder about their profundities will discover that what sort of learning and sublime realities, to the extent of miracles have been incorporated in their supplications by the sinless

Imams [a].

I myself have not seen even one tenth, rather one hundredth of realities and learning (which have been incorporated in these supplications), in other speeches of those noble ones, even did not find them in narrations and lengthy sermons. (Of course, with the exception of some narrations which deal with communications with Allah, monotheism, praise, and worship).

The mystery of this variation could be that those honourable ones in their narrations had spoken with the people while in their supplications and hymns have spoken with Allah (the Glorious, the Exalted). Obviously, the degree of speech, its culmination, and descent depends upon the degree of intelligence and comprehension of the addressee; the delicate and sensitive points which are spoken before an aware and knowledgeable addressee are not spoken before some one who lacks these characteristics.

Yes! These supplications, reached to us through Sinless Imams of the Prophet's Ahlul-Bait [a] as though form the complete reflection, or echo of whatever is contained in the Holy Qur'an. Or in other words these supplications constitute on Ascending-Qur'an in front of a Descending-Qur'an. The later is the holy scripture which was revealed by Allah (the Glorious, the Exalted), to his esteemed servant - Prophet Muhammad [s], while the former constitutes the Qur'an from Allah's most distinguished servants, ascending upward towards Him. While the Qur'an is Allah's communications and candid words with his esteemed servants; these supplications are a communication of Allah's esteemed servant with Him, and this matter is not accepted and comprehended by any one, except a small number of believers who are thoroughly familiar and enlightened.

Also, it should be emphasized that the sinless Imams [a] through these supplications have done a great favour to us by leaving such precious souvenirs - the souvenirs and blessings, for which we are helpless to thank; it is our obligation to appreciate their worth; in our actions must utilize the etiquette and proper manners as recommended by them; and must try with best of our abilities lest we act as unthankful and unappreciative of truth.

1. Etiquette of the Holy Qur'an and Supplications

As far as the Holy Month of Ramadhan is a month of Qur'an and supplications, it will be appropriate to include some of the instructions and etiquette of recital of the Holy Qur'an and supplications leaving details at their own place, and since the Holy Qur'an has priority and preference over supplications, firstly the etiquette of Qur'anic recital shall be explained:

2. Etiquette of Recital of the Holy Qur'an

As Allah (the Glorious, the Exalted), has said in the following verse:

"Will they then not meditate on the Qur'an, or are there locks on the hearts."

– Holy Qur'an (47:24).

Those who do not ponder over the Holy Qur'an have been reprimanded severely. The first and important instruction and etiquette of Qur'anic recital is deliberation and pondering of the recited verse, because whoever will recite the Holy Qur'an with deliberations inevitably with discover the splendour and majesty of Qur'an and its bearer, and its meanings and contents to the extent of his deliberation and pondering.

And this awareness and understanding will become a cause which would enable him to keep his mind and conscience away from scattered thinking during recital; thus, increasing understanding about the meanings and objectives of the Holy Qur'an in his deliberations. He should renounce whatever acts as obstacles in closing the path of understanding, and whatever positive and negative commands, advice, and exhortations are encountered by him must regards them as though all of them have been revealed especially for him.

It is at this injunctive that deliberations and pondering about the Holy Qur'an will have influence upon him and would excite his mind and soul and it is after this experience that he will find access inside the worlds of beauty and illumination, thus, ascending towards higher spiritual positions. These are some of the instructions and etiquette of recital of the Holy Qur'an, some of them are mandatory while others if not compulsory are indeed precious and esteemed.

3. Understanding of Meanings of the Holy Qur'an

About the understanding of Meanings of the Holy Qur'an, in a nutshell it may be said that it should be understood that the reality of Qur'an is something behind these phrases written on the paper, seen by our eyes, recited by the tongue, and heard by the ears; it is a light from Allah's celestial illumination, which has reflection, glory, and manifestation for all the worlds of existence, whose every reflection and manifestation contain special effects.

In the Hereafter, it will be manifested in a form similar to the faces of prophets, angels, and favourite saints, would speak in the same form and would intercede before Allah (the Glorious, the Exalted). In summary it is a glory from Allah's Glories and a manifestation from Allah's Manifestations. (These are the points which have been emphasized in the traditions of sinless Imams [a] – who themselves are the guardian, companion, and equivalent of the Holy Qur'an). In some aspects, as is evident from the following quotations from the Commander of the Faithful Imam 'Ali [a]:

"I am the speaking Qur'an."

The reality of Qur'an is similar to the reality of the existence of the Holy Prophet [s] and the sinless Imams [a] of his Ahlul–Bait. Yes! The Holy Qur'an possesses a reality so much higher and exalted which cannot be reached through our limited and insignificant amount of knowledge, as Allah (the Glorious, the Exalted), Himself has mentioned in the Holy Qur'an:

"Which none toucheth save the purified."

– Holy Qur'an (56:79).

Since, the understanding of Qur'an's reality, would lead to the understanding of its grandeur, understanding of its grandeur will manifest the Splendour and Majesty of its Descender (i.e. Allah); the one who will comprehend all the above, will keep his mind free from all sorts of scattered thoughts during recital of the Holy Qur'an, will ponder and deliberate about the meaning of each phrase and sentence in order to discover their meanings and goals; and the one who will do so, will earn plenty of goodness and a lot of advantage. He would acquire plenty of knowledge because the Holy Qur'an is an illumination which takes out its followers from the darkness and thus, leading them towards light, Allah's pleasure, and straight path of belief and mysticism. As the Holy Qur'an describes it:

"The scripture which is an exposition, to all things."

– Holy Qur'an (16:89).

And said:

"Not a leaf falleth but He knoweth it, not a grain amid the darkness of the earth, naught of wet or dry, but (it is noted) in a clear record."

– Holy Qur'an (6:59).

4 How to Think and Deliberate Over the Holy Qur'an

It would be appropriate to present an example for showing the method of deliberation over the Qur'an and understanding its meaning. For example, someone who recites the following verse:

"Have you observed the water which ye drink?"

– Holy Qur'an (56:68).

Should not limit himself only to think about the phrase water and its apparent meanings and taste, rather should ponder about it from various dimensions. For example: He should pause and think all the plants of various colours, different species of animals which are found in this world all have been created by this water. He must think about the human being who has been created with water; in addition to his having apparent visible capabilities such as eyes, ears, and tongue also possesses inner-self and strange inner-power so much astonishing that it could help ascend him towards the most higher sublime spiritual stations.

He must ponder that this same man created by water possesses an inner-self so marvellous, astonishing, and vast as though the entire world of creation has been miniatured in his inner-self; it is

from this consideration that he is regarded as a separate entity called a smaller-world (*jahan al-asghar*) as compared to the world of creation which is called the greater-world (*jahan al-akbar*). And in accordance to a more delicate and sophisticated interpretation a human being represents a greater-world as compared to the world of creation being a smaller-world.

Then he must ponder that the water which is needed by all the plants, animals, and human beings, in itself, as told in the Holy Qur'an is a manifestation of Allah's blessing. Further he should think that Allah's blessing is His characteristic which cannot be separated from His Holy Essence, which would make him aware that Allah is the fountain-head and source of all things. Such deliberations are the basis and background of attaining spiritual contemplation (*shahud*)2 and I believe that whoever will deliberate about every thing in this manner, would be able to test the following tradition narrated by Imam al-Sadiq [a] and its truth would become explicitly clear.

"I never saw a thing but saw Allah, before, after, and with it."

Another method which should be mentioned is that: it would be appropriate if the reciter of the holy scripture should deliberate and pause more and more in order to comprehend the meanings and objectives of this great heavenly book more profoundly as follows:

A. One of the method is to deliberate about the lifestyles of prophets. We know that those noble ones in spite of possessing all those sublime spiritual positions and Allah's nearness were inflicted with severe hardships and difficulties in their personal lives. On the one hand they were inflicted with hardships like poverty and sicknesses, while on the other hand they were confronted with severe enmity and assaults from their enemies, who not only persecuted them through cursing, slandering, and impeaching but also tortured and even executed. And in this manner Allah (the Glorious, the Exalted), trained them through infliction of different types of calamities, to the extent that their leader who was the beloved and most dearest of Allah had to say:

"None of the prophet was tortured and suffered like me."

If, the reciter of the Holy Qur'an ponders about the suffering and torture of the divine prophets, he will discover the following constructive points:

● that the Majesty, Splendour, and Magnanimity of Allah are so great that noble personalities of prophets in spite of their possessing all that dignity and grandeur are humbled before the divine will and wisdom and no one could dare to criticise Him.

● that because of obedience and worship (offered by him) should not expect that Allah (the Glorious, the Exalted), will do things according to his desire, or worst than that he might expect such a thing compulsory upon Allah (the Glorious, the Exalted).

● that if he is inflicted with poverty, diseases, and other hardships in his life, he should never feel

hopeless from receiving Allah's blessings and favours.

● that one should never reprimand a believer because of being inflicted with calamities.

● that one should never regard a believer as insignificant, because, of his being in a state of poverty and possessing nothing; may be his poverty and destitution could be an indication of his greatness (*karamat*).

● that the world is quite insignificant and worthless before Allah (the Glorious, the Exalted), and accordingly he too should not regard the world as great and should never feel sorry and unhappy from loosing it.

● that inclination of world towards a person will be indication of his being distant from the privileged spiritual station of Allah's nearness, and world's disinclination towards a person would be an indication of his righteousness and salvation, as it was revealed to Prophet Moses [a]:

"Whenever poverty comes to you say: O' the indication of righteous ones welcome! And whenever wealth approaches you say: the penalty of sins has arrived before their commitment."

B. The other examples upon which he must deliberate are the penalties, punishment, and divine limits which have been prescribed in the holy scripture and *shari'a* for the sinners. For example, he must ponder that the divine punishment for theft of even one fourth Dinar – which apparently is an insignificant sin – is cutting of hand.

Therefore, he will realize how much Allah's wrath and punishments, transgression against Allah's commands through indulgence into major sins would bring. And therefore, this deliberation would become the basis for causing his heart fearful of divine wrath and severe punishments, thus, in order to keep himself immune from them would be mindful of his speaking and other actions; will try to abstain himself from the heart's and tongue's sins which are committed by human beings every day.

C. Another example which must be pondered by reader of the holy scripture is the life histories and deeds of past generations, who were destroyed because of divine wrath. Prophet Jesus [a] asked one of them:

"For which of your deed you have been tormented with such horrible punishment? He replied: 'we loved the world like a child who loves his mother, followed the sinners, had little fear and lot of big desires and spent our lives negligently by indulging into worldly amusements.' Prophet Jesus asked: 'What was their punishment and destruction?' 'In the evening they went to their comfortable beds and were struck by divine wrath', he replied. 'What was it?' the Prophet asked. 'The fountains of Hell–Fire which engulfed us till the Day of Judgement.' He replied.

Prophet Jesus [a] *asked: 'What did you say and hear?' 'We said, if you return us to the world, we will become righteous and pious and were told that you are liars', was the reply. When asked: 'How come no*

one else except you respond to me?' 'The angels of divine wrath and punishment closed their mouths with Hell-Fire, and therefore they were not in a position to open their mouths; and the reason that I am in a position to speak is - that I did not belong to them and was not with them, but since I was among them when divine torment struck them, it also engulfed me; right now, I am sitting at the brink of Hell and don't know what would happen? Whether I will fall inside it or would be rescued?' he replied."

Therefore, we must ponder about their affairs and must learn a lesson from them. For example, one of the past nation (ummah) whose fate is a warning are the "Saturday (sabbath)" companions (*Ashab al-Sabt*) whose faces, were changed as pigs and monkeys, and were destroyed on account of divine wrath and punishment. The one who recites their story in the Holy Qur'an after pondering about their fate must pause and think about his own affairs, lest his own actions and deeds might be similar to theirs.

Yes! Such deliberations and pondering were responsible for taking away comfort and sleep from the eyes of gnostics and righteous ones, and caused them to recite the following slogan:

"How can one who is not immune from his tomorrow, sleep comfortably; one who does not know about his condition the very next morning". These thoughts forced them to look into the mirror repeatedly every day, lest their face might have became blackened, or metamorphosed due to their sins.

5. Obstacles in Qur'an's Understanding

The reciter of the Holy Qur'an in order to have more and better understanding of its objectives in addition to above-mentioned deliberations should also endeavour to remove the obstacles which prevent its understanding. Otherwise, not only would they not be benefited from its recital, on the contrary might suffer even losses. Some of the obstacles which might prevent Qur'an's understanding may be listed as follows:

It has been said that extreme precaution about the grammar and too much emphasis that all the words should be pronounced correctly with precision is something which closes the path of deliberation and pondering which is a means of understanding Qur'anic objectives, thus, preventing the reciter from discovering the aims of the holy scripture.

Some of the abject and low characteristics and filthy habits which results in heart's blackening also make the mind and conscience incompetent to comprehend Qur'anic meanings and objectives. This point has been mentioned in the following verse of the Holy Qur'an:

"Thus doth Allah print on every arrogant, disdainful heart."

- Holy Qur'an (15:35).

It means that Allah (the Glorious, the Exalted), has sealed the hearts of tyrants and arrogant people who look upon others in a degrading manner, and therefore, the path of understanding the realities has been

closed for them. Or, in verses of the Holy Qur'an it has been emphasized that comprehension and realization of realities belong especially for those who restrain themselves from sins, and trust in Allah (the Glorious, the Exalted). Yes! Just like the rust makes a mirror dark and unusable, similarly such sins make the heart rusted and thus, unable to comprehend the realities.

To consider fallacies as true religion and to take position on the basis of that prejudice, and rejecting everything as null and void except his own false belief also closes the path of Qur'anic comprehension. Because very often it might happen that during Qur'anic recitation, some of its realities may be manifested for the reciter, thus, the truth becoming apparent for him, but he did not accept it, because, of its being in contradiction with his imaginations and beliefs. Or, he may interpret and explain them in a manner whereby these manifestation will become harmonious with his fallacies. Such individuals too would remain unable to discover the Qur'anic realities except that they should clean themselves from those fallacies.

Limiting the meanings and aims of the Holy Qur'an to their apparent and exoteric interpretation and treating their commentary (*tafsir*) and esoteric meanings (*tawil*) as false also closes the path of Qur'anic understanding and comprehension, thus, making him deprived from the blessing of discovering the truth.

The one who wants to discover the grandeur and reality of the Holy Qur'an should read it with deliberations as well as should keep himself distant from the obstacles which prevent him from comprehension of its realities. In proportion to his spiritual perfection and attainment of higher sublime positions, the Qur'anic realities and divine learning will become manifested upon him; his soul would be able to quench his thirst from the drink poured by the Glorious Cup, thus, becoming intoxicated with the joy of attaining spiritual contemplation (*shahud*).

It is at this injuncture that his heart would accept various reflections of Qur'anic verses in accordance with their meanings and intentions, and each verse in proportion to his desires and understanding will produce a special joy and ecstasy within his heart. Because in that situation he would feel that every Qur'anic verse has been revealed for his condition, especially for him and addressed to him. It is from this consideration that during recital of Qur'anic verses in accordance with their meanings and realities, each verse will produce different states in his heart like joy, grief, fear, hope, trust, obedience, consent, and Monotheism (*Tawhid*) etc.

And those conditions will initiate a relevant response such as, to seek forgiveness, admittance of guilt, repentance, supplication, thanks, praise, and recital of 'Allah is Great', or 'There is no god but Allah,' at the completion of each verse. For example, when he will be overtaken by fear, he would not find himself in a position to request from Allah (the Glorious, the Exalted), the rewards and eternal blessings which have been promised in the Qur'anic verses for His righteous servants, instead he would complain about his own calamity and misfortune by seeking refuge in Allah (the Glorious, the Exalted).

While at other times, when the state of hope will overtake him, with a heart saturated with an ardent

desire and curiosity, he will beseech Allah (the Glorious, the Exalted), to bestow upon him the exalted spiritual stations, especially reserved for His most favourite righteous gnostics, whereby he could enjoy their enlightened company.

Yes! If the above stages took control of him with perfection (i.e. without least doubt about Allah's bounties and blessings of revelation), it would become clearly manifested upon him and would ascend him to such higher sublime spiritual limits, that in the recital of Qur'anic verses, he would realize and would be able to see, through the heart's esoteric eyes that Allah is speaking to him with love and compassion, and invites and whispers to him with affection.

Here his condition would resemble that of someone who is standing in the presence of an elderly personality in a state mixed with shame and humility hearing his words with sincerity and complete devotion. In case, if he thanked this great blessing with sincerity and accepted the breezing of this breeze in a manner, it deserves to be, then Allah (the Glorious, the Exalted), too would increase His goodness and affection for him, thus, ascending him higher and higher towards exalted spiritual stations, so that he would be able to contemplate spiritually the writer in writings; the speaker in speech; the characteristics in sentences; and facts and realities in phrases. In this background Sheikh Saduq (R.A.) in his (Tawhid)3 has narrated a tradition from Imam al-Sadiq [a] as follows:

"Allah has manifested himself to his servants through His words but they do not see him."

Here it is that he will forget himself, his Qur'anic recital, all other affairs, and will concentrate all his energy and endeavours to see the Speaker - the Speaker who has revealed Himself to him through His words. (I pray to Allah by all pious, immaculate, and near ones to bestow upon us such an exalted spiritual station.)

1. Imamat: The position of leadership in religious and civil matters in the Islamic society is known as the Imamate, and its holder is known as the Imam. It is the belief of Shi'i Muslims that Allah (the Glorious, the Exalted), must have designated an Imam for the people after the death of the Most Noble Messenger [s] to uphold the culture and laws of the religion and to guide people on the way of truth.

The term Imam as used in a technical sense in Shi'ism differs from the general usage of the term in Arabic, where it means "leader" or in Sunni political theory where it means the caliph himself. As used technically in Shi'ism the term refers to the person who contains within himself the "Muhammadan Light" which was handed down through Fatimah al-Zahra [a] the daughter of the Blessed Prophet [s], and 'Ali [a], the first Imam, to the others, terminating with the Hidden Imam who is to appear again one day as the Mahdi.

As a result of the presence of this light, the Imam is considered to be "Sinless" and to possess perfect knowledge of the esoteric as well as the exoteric order. The Imams are like a chain of light issuing forth from the "Sun of Prophecy" which is their origin, and yet they are never separated from that Sun.

Whatever is said by them emanates from the same inviolable treasury of inspired wisdom. Since they are an extension of the inner reality of the Blessed Prophet [s], their words really go back to him. That is why their sayings are seen in the Shi'ite perspective as an extension of the prophetic Hadith, just as the light of their being is seen as a continuation of the prophetic light.

In Shi'ite eyes, the temporal separation of the Imams from the Blessed Prophet [s] does not at all affect their essential and inner bond with him or the continuity of the “Prophetic-light” which is the source of his as well as their inspired knowledge [Tr].

2. shahud: the witnessing of Allah (the Glorious, the Exalted), that excludes any awareness of self and that takes place through the agency of Allah (the Glorious, the Exalted), himself, not by means of any organ or vision, whether outer or inner [Tr.].
3. Tawhid: Divine Unity or Monotheism [Tr].

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