Nearness to Allah

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Recitation of the Holy Quran Desired by the Holy Prophet (s)

Ibn e Masood was one of the scribes of the revealed Verses of the Holy Quran. He wrote down a verse as soon as it was revealed.

One day, the Holy Prophet (s) said to Ibn e Masood, 'Today I want to hear you recite verses from the Holy Quran.'

Ibn e Masood opened his manuscript and started reciting Surah An-Nisa. The Holy Prophet (s) listened, totally engrossed. When Ibn e Masood reached Verse 41, which read, "How will it be, then, when We summon a witness from every group and summon you as a witness over them?" The Holy Prophet (s), his eyes brimming with tears, said, 'Ibn e Masood, read no more, that will do'.

Two Practices

One day the Holy Prophet (s) entered the mosque and saw two groups of people busy in two different activities. One group was praying and praising Almighty Allah, while the other was busy teaching and learning. He (s) smiled and commented, "Both groups are performing noble acts and will achieve perfection in what they commit themselves to with earnestness, and be blessed for it. However, I have been sent to teach people, guide them on the path of truth and wisdom." Saying this, he (s) proceeded towards the group that was busy learning and teaching and became actively involved in their work.

Allah and His Prophets

It was after midnight. Umme Selma turned in bed to find the Holy Prophet (s) not there. She got up to find out and saw him (s) standing in a corner of the house weeping, with hands raised in prayer. She heard the following: 'O Creator of the universe! Please do not deprive me of the blessings that You have bestowed upon me. Lord! Protect me from the evil of my enemies and the envious. O, Master of the universe! Let not the vices that You have kept me away from contaminate me. O, Sovereign of both worlds! Be not annoyed with me for even a moment.'

Hearing his (s) prayer, Umme Selma started to shiver with fear for herself. She sat down and started weeping. Her sobs got out of control and the Holy Prophet (s) heard her. He (s) came

to her and asked tenderly, ‘Umme Selma, why are you sobbing so bitterly? What is the matter?’ ‘Why should I not weep?’ she cried. ‘You enjoy a most eminent and honorable position in the eyes of the Almighty. You are close to Him being His Chosen Messenger (s). Despite this, you fear and beg Him not to be annoyed with you even for a moment. Tell me, what should be the level of fear in commoners like me?’

The Holy Prophet (s) replied, ‘Umme Selma! How can I be complacent about the position He has chosen for me? Prophet Yunus was left on his own for a moment, and you know what dire problems he got into’.

The Power of Truth

It was the ‘Year of Sorrow’ for the Holy Prophet (s). His uncle, Hazrat Abu Talib (‘a), who had protected and supported him like a wall of iron, passed away, followed by his (s) beloved wife Hazrat Khadija tul Kubra (‘a), his fortress of strength. In short, he lost his supporter within the four walls of the house, and his protector in the life outside the house. It was he who named the year as one of sorrow, because both, who had supported him as the Messenger of Allah(s), had been called back by their Creator. The events following their demise showed the world the significance of the role they had played in the Divine mission of his life.

The Quraysh, on the other hand, could not hide their pleasure and glee. Their only desire was to create as many hurdles in the Holy Prophet’s (s) way as possible.

A few days after facing this loss, the Holy Prophet (s) was passing through a street when somebody threw garbage on him. He had to return home to bathe and change his clothes. His daughter, Hazrat Fatima Zahra (‘a) saw him in that condition, and with tears flowing down her cheeks, started removing the dust from his head. He looked at her and said, ‘Don’t weep, my dear Fatima, and don’t be anxious about my safety. Your father is not alone. The Creator of the universe is with him.’

After this incident, the Holy Prophet (s) decided to go elsewhere to spread the Message. He left alone for Taif, to preach Islam to the Bani Saqeef. Taif was a holiday resort for the wealthy Meccans, because of its peaceful environment and cool, pleasant climate.

He was not expecting any great positive response from the people of Taif. They were, like the rich polytheists in the suburbs of Mecca, living a life of luxury. However, this did not deter him. He was ready to undertake any amount of trouble for the sake of Allah and His Message.

He entered Taif, and as soon as the wealthy came to know that Muhammad (s) had come to speak to them, they refused pointblank, and humiliated him. They sent their handpicked rogues and scoundrels to force him out of Taif, so that the simple hearted would not fall a prey to his

preaching. They hurled stones at him from all sides until he was bleeding from the wounds inflicted by them. He left the town and sat under a tree in an orchard in the outskirts of the town. This orchard belonged to Utba and Shayba, two rich traders of the tribe of Quraysh. By chance, they happened to be inspecting their fruit at that time and saw the Holy Prophet (s) in that injured condition. They smiled at each other, pleased with the sight.

The Holy Prophet (s) sat under the tree, and cleaned the blood from his face. He was alone with his Lord there. He wanted to share his feelings with Him, so he said, "My Master, my Lord! I hereby lodge a complaint with You against these people.They had no reason to treat me, your weak and helpless creature, as they did. Lord! You are the God of the poor and oppressed, You are my God, and You just saw me facing the cruelty and hatred of these hooligans alone. Have You decided to empower my enemies and defeat me? If that pleases You, Lord, then I am content. Nothing else is of consequence besides Your Pleasure. I take refuge in Your Light, which shattered the gloom of the universe and made it bright. Even if You allow disasters to descend on me, I will happily accept everything that comes from You, for my only desire is to gain Your Pleasure. You are the Omnipotent, the Sovereign over everything in the Universe."

Utba and Shayba were watching the alienated condition of the Holy Prophet (s) with pleasure. They placed a bunch of grapes in a plate and ordered their Christian bondsman, Addas, to give it to the injured person sitting under the tree. They warned him to return immediately, and not enter into a conversation with him.

Addas took the plate of grapes and placed it before the Holy Prophet (s).

'They are for you, eat them,' he said.

The Holy Prophet (s) picked a grape from the bunch and said, 'Bismillah.'

Addas had never heard anybody in Taif utter the phrase he had just heard.

'What did you just say? I don't recall hearing it before,' he queried.

'O Addas, where are you from, and which religion do you profess?'

'I am a Christian from Nineveh.'

'Oh, so you are from Nineveh. Yunus ibn e Matti, the man of God, was your fellow citizen.'

'Strange! Indeed, most strange! I fail to understand how you know his full name. Not even ten people knew his father's name when I lived there. I am amazed how you learnt about it.'

'Yunus is my brother. He was a prophet of God and I, too, am a Prophet of God.'

Shayba and Utba noticed that their bondsman was totally engrossed in conversation. They grew anxious. They did not want anyone to communicate with the Holy Prophet (s), because whoever did, almost immediately embraced Islam.

Their fears were not unfounded. They saw Addas suddenly fall on the ground and kiss the

Prophet's (s) hands and feet.

They couldn't have been unhappier. Looking at one another, they said, 'Did you see that? He has misguided poor Addas'.

Fear of Allah

Hubba 'Arni and Nauf Bukali were lying in the courtyard of Dar ul Ammara at midnight, almost asleep. Suddenly, they saw Imam Ali ('a) coming towards the courtyard, but in a strange manner. He seemed to be on the verge of falling, and was supporting himself by placing both hands against the wall. He was reciting the last verses of Surah Aal e 'Imran: Undoubtedly, in the creation of the heavens and earth, and the alternation of day and night, there are many signs for those who understand. Those, who remember Allah standing and sitting, while lying on their sides, and reflect on the creation of the heavens and the earth, and say, 'Our Lord! You have not created this in vain! Glory be to You! Save us then from the chastisement of the fire. Our Lord! Surely, whomsoever You make enter the fire, him You have indeed brought to disgrace, and there shall be no helpers for the unjust. Our Lord! Surely, we have heard a Prophet calling to the faith, saying; "Believe in your Lord!" So, we did believe. Our Lord! Forgive us therefore our faults, and cover our evil deeds and make us die with the righteous. Our Lord! Grant us what You have promised through Your apostles, and disgrace us not on the Day of Resurrection; surely, You do not fail to fulfill Your promise.'

Hubba couldn't believe his eyes and ears and was staring amazed at Imam Ali's ('a) condition. Nauf, on the other hand, was weeping uncontrollably. Imam Ali ('a) came near their beds and asked Hubba: 'Are you asleep or awake?'

'Awake and shocked! Seeing your fear of Allah, we don't stand a chance!'

'O Hubba! We will all face Him one day, with no act of ours concealed from Him. He is closer to us than our own jugular vein, with nothing between.'

He then moved towards Nauf, and asked, 'Are you sleeping?'

'No, Maula, I'm awake, weeping.'

'O Nauf, weeping today out of fear of Allah will brighten your eyes tomorrow on the day of Judgment. Each tear will put out the fire of hell. No man enjoys a status greater than one who weeps due to fear of Allah and befriends for the sake of Allah. He who befriends Allah should befriend only for the sake of Allah and never value anything above it. He should be hostile only for the sake of Allah. This hostility will hold nothing but good for him. Whoever reaches this stage attains the heights of true faith. I have done my duty and warned you. So, fear Allah."

He then walked on, muttering softly: 'My Lord! I wish I knew whether You turn away from me

when I am negligent, or keep watching me? I wish I knew what You think of me during the long hours of forgetful sleep and when I am lacking in thankfulness.'

'By Allah! Ali ('a) spent all night in this state, until the call for the dawn prayer was heard,' said Hubba and Nauf.

Labbaik Allahumma Labbaik

Maalik ibn e Anas, the famous scholar of Medina, once accompanied Imam Jafar al- Sadiq ('a) on the Hajj. On reaching Meeqat, they all dismounted, donned the Ahram, offered the required prayer, and mounted their camels, raising the slogan of the Hajjis,

'Labbaik Allahumma Labbaik, laa Shareeka Laka Labbaik, Innal Hamda wan Ne'amata Laka wal Mulk, laa Shareeka Lak,'

when they found the Imam ('a) in an exceptionally strange state. He was shivering and his voice choking with emotion, unable to pronounce the obligatory slogan of Hajj. Maalik came to him and said, 'Ya ibn e Rasool Allah, try to repeat the words with us. You know it is obligatory.'

'O Ibn e Abi Aamir! I am scared to utter these words. Do you know what they mean? They mean to declare,

"My Lord, I am ready to present myself before You, and ready to submit to Your Will."

How can I proclaim that I am ready to submit to His Will and then disobey? What will I do if Allah responds to my open declaration with, "la Labbaik"?'

Who's Who

The Umayyad dynasty was at its peak of tyrannical rule in the beginning of the second century AH. Hisham ibn e Abdul Malik, the crown prince and heir apparent of the kingdom was trying to reach the Black Stone after circumambulating the K'aaba during the Hajj pilgrimage and failing miserably because of the immense crowds of Hajjis in Masjid al Haram.

The Hajjis were unaware of everything around them except their resolve to perform their rituals with as much devotion as possible. They were all dressed alike, uttering the same phrases, moving in the same direction, i.e. towards Allah. They were totally oblivious of the worldly positions and status of anybody around them. They were performing their duty with purity of heart and soul.

However, the courtiers, accompanying him from Syria, wished to establish his personal identity as the future king of the Islamic Kingdom. The Hajj rituals were of no consequence to them. The pleasure of the 'heir apparent' was more important to them than the pleasure of Almighty

Allah.

Hisham made a final effort to reach the Hajr e Aswad, to complete the ritualistic act of kissing or touching it, but failed. He returned to his companions, who had placed a chair on a raised mound, to make him visible to all. Hisham sat on the chair and started watching the activities of the Hajjis from afar. All the Syrians, who had come to perform Hajj, flocked around him, gaining importance from close proximity to him. They also started enjoying the spectacle of pure devotion that was obvious in the actions and countenance of the Hajjis performing their rituals.

Suddenly, their eyes caught sight of a handsome person. His piety was evident from his entire appearance. His devotion and submission to the Will of the Almighty was written all over his face. Draped in the two cloths of the Hajjis, he quietly circumambulated the K'aaba and then slowly but steadily moved towards the Black Stone.

The multitude had not decreased, the crowds were still jostling one another as they moved, but the crowds automatically moved aside, as if it was understood, by all and sundry, that they must make way for him. The pious devotee kissed the Black Stone and, stopping for a few moments to offer a prayer retraced his steps calmly and left. The crowds became one huge wave once again with no signs of any passageway at all.

The Syrians, with their Crown Prince in their midst, watched the entire scene with amazement, and certainly not without envy. One of courtiers, spellbound by what he had seen, turned towards Hisham and said, 'Who is he?'

Hisham knew it was Ali ibn al-Husain Zain ul Abedin ('a), but pretended to be ignorant and replied, 'I have no idea.'

The people standing around overheard the conversation but did not have the courage to speak up before Hisham, the cruel tyrant, whose sword was always dripping with blood, the blood of innocent people. Identifying the Imam ('a) would have meant certain death.

One person among them was the famous and extremely popular poet of the Arab world, Hammam ibn e Ghalib, known by his penname, Farazdaq. He could not restrain his annoyance by the show of ignorance on the part of Hisham. He stepped forward and said, 'I know him.' Then, climbing up a mound close to the one Hisham was sitting on; he began to recite adulatory verses, which he had composed impromptu, in his loud attractive voice. Addressing Hisham, he said,

Every pebble of Mecca, the K'aaba, the Mosque,
and the dust outside, know him all
The son of the Prophet (s); the pious, the pure,

most loved and respected by all.
You say you don't know him? The loss is but yours,
for his greatness abides beyond measure,
All Arabs, non-Arabs, do know him for sure,
in their hearts he resides, and forever.

The fury of Hisham knew no bounds. He ordered the allowance given to Farazdaq from the State treasury to be discontinued with immediate effect. Next, after the Pilgrimage was over, he imprisoned him in Asphan, a place between Mecca and Medina. This was his punishment for declaring his love for the Holy Prophet and his Household (s). Farazdaq remained undeterred. While in prison, he continued to criticize Hisham, through verses deriding his actions.

When Imam Ali ibn al Husain, Zain ul Abedin ('a) heard about Farazdaq's imprisonment and the reason behind it, he sent him some money through a messenger. Farazdaq, the honorable, returned it, saying, 'I composed those verses as an expression of my belief and faith, only for the pleasure of Allah, not to make you feel obliged.'

The Imam ('a) sent the money again with the message, 'The Almighty is well aware of your intentions and actions and will surely reward you accordingly. This small gift will, in no way, effect that reward. It will only gladden my heart.'

Farazdaq, despite his urgent need of money, accepted it only because he did not wish to sadden his Imam ('a).

A Misconception

Imam Ali ibn e Musa ar Reza ('a) was forced to migrate from Medina to Khurasan by the reigning caliph Mamoon ar Rashid, and, accept the position of heir apparent. He, realizing he had no option, insisted on declaring he would not be involved in the affairs of government. His brother, Zaid ibn e Musa, was creating havoc in Medina and inciting the people to rebel against the caliph.

Mamoon realized the seriousness and delicacy of the situation and, despite being furious, did not order his arrest or execution. He played the diplomacy card, and hypocritically advertised the great respect and affection he had for Imam Reza ('a). He succeeded in confusing and, thus, pacifying the people of Medina.

One day, while still in Medina, Imam Reza ('a) was addressing a public gathering. Zaid stood on a raised platform in one corner of the crowd, and starting distracting the crowd. He wanted the crowd to lend him their ears, not his brother. He loudly and repeatedly claimed that he was the

descendant of the noblest Household, and that the descendants of the Holy Prophet (s) were special, purer than all other people, and thus, deserved greater respect.

Imam Reza (‘a) heard his words, and turning towards him in anger, addressed him in a humiliating manner.

‘O Zaid, what do you think of yourself? You think you are better than all these people here because of what you’ve heard grocers say? You count yourself among the descendants of the Holy Prophet (‘a), and claim that the fire of hell cannot touch you? Let me remove your misconception. The offspring of Lady Fatima Zahra (‘a) are but four: Imam Hasan (‘a), Imam Husain (‘a) and their two sisters.

If what you say is believed, then you are worthy of greater respect than your father, Musa ibn e Jafar (‘a). He was a pious servant of Allah. He spent his entire life praying at night and fasting during the day. He obeyed the commands of the Almighty and served Islam until his last breath. He faced great oppression and suffered imprisonment because of it. He remained heavily chained during the years of imprisonment, and, was finally poisoned to death in prison. You disobey Allah, and yet believe that you are equally honorable and deserving of salvation as he. You are then more fortunate, because you enjoy his status without bearing his suffering or performing any noble deed. You just inherited all the earned treasure and reward without lifting a finger. Most fortunate indeed! That’s what you think! My grandfather, Imam Zain ul Abedin (‘a) explained: ‘Those, among the Ahl al Bayt (‘a), who are pious and perform good deeds, win double the reward. Those who are disobedient to Allah and do evil, earn double the punishment, just as revealed in the Holy Quran for the wives of the Holy Prophet (s). The reason is that a member of this household performs two good deeds while performing one, because he, simultaneously, safegaurds the status of the Holy Prophet (s). While performing an evil act he, simultaneously, disgraces and defames the Holy Prophet (s).’

Saying this, the Imam addressed an Iraqi, named Hasan ibn e Musa Baghdadi, thus: ‘How do the people of Iraq interpret this verse of the Quran,

“This son of yours is not virtuous, therefore, not yours”?’

Baghdadi replied, ‘Some interpret it as it is; others argue that Allah’s saying that he is not your son, means he is not from Noah’s (‘a) seed, because they cannot accept the fact that a Prophet’s son should be declared disobedient, impious. They believe he must be the offspring of Noah’s (‘a) wife from an earlier, evil husband.’

The Imam (‘a) said, ‘Absolutely incorrect! He was Noah’s (‘a) own son, of his seed. The disobedient, impious actions of the son amputated the spiritual relationship between them. Therefore, Almighty Allah declared that he could not be included among the pious, virtuous

individuals. Our family also faces the same situation. A spiritual relationship purely depends on piety, virtuous deeds and total submission to the Will of Allah. Whoever obeys Allah belongs to us, whether he is related or not in seed. Whoever is disobedient, even if he is the real offspring of Lady Fatimah Zahra (‘a), will not be hers.

You yourself, Baghdadi, even though not related in blood or seed, will be one of us, if you become a faithful believer submitting to the Will of Allah.’