

PINNACLE OF ELOQUENCE

A Commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*

Volume 1



Tahir Ridha Jaffer

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**Pinnacle of Eloquence – A Commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*
(Volume 1)**

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In the name of Allāh, the Omnipotent, the Merciful

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DEDICATION

We dedicate this work to our master, Amīr al-Mu'minīn 'Alī ibn Abī Tālib, may Allāh bless him along with his master, the Messenger of Allāh, peace be upon him and his pure progeny. We also dedicate it to our parents who raised us as lovers and followers of Imām 'Alī.

TRANSLITERATION TABLE

ء	'	ط	ṭ
ا	a	ظ	ẓ
ب	b	ع	‘
ت	t	غ	gh
ث	th	ف	f
ج	j	ق	q
ح	h	ك	k
خ	kh	ل	l
د	d	م	m
ذ	dh	ن	n
ر	r	و	w
ز	z	ي	y
س	s	ه	h
ش	sh	ة	h (or not transliterated)
ص	ṣ		
ض	ḍ		

Long Vowels

ا	ā
و	ū
ي	ī

Short Vowels

—	a
—'	u
—"	i

(s) : ﴿سَلَام﴾ - Peace and blessings be upon him and his family

(‘a) : ﴿أَللّٰهُمَّ﴾ - Peace be upon him (or her, or them)

SERMON NUMBERING SEQUENCE

P	S	M	F	I
1	1	1	1	1
2	2	2	2	2
3	3	3	3	3
4	4	4	4	4
5	5	5	5	5
6	6	6	6	6
7	7	7	7	7
8	8	8	8	8
9	9	9	9	9
10	10	10	10	10
11	11	11	11	11
12	12	12	12	12
13	13	13	13	13
14	14	14	14	14
15	15	15	15	15
16	16	16	16	16
17	17	17	17	17
18	18	18	18	18
19	19	19	19	19
20	20	20	20	20
21	21	21	21	21
22	22	22	22	22
23	23	23	23	23
24	24	24	24	24
25	25	25	25	25
26	26	26	26	26
27	27	27	27	27
28	28	28	28	28

P	S	M	F	I
29	29	29	29	29
30	30	30	30	30
31	31	31	31	31
32	32	32	32	32
33	33	33	33	33
34	34	34	34	34
35	35	35	35	35
36	36	36	36	36
37	37	37	37	37
38	38	38	38	38
39	39	39	39	39
40	40	40	40	40
41	41	41	41	41
42	42	42	42	42
43	43	43	43	43
44	44	44	44	44
45	45	45	45	45
46	46	46	46	46
47	47	47	47	47
48	48	48	48	48
49	49	49	49	49
50	50	50	50	50
51	51	51	51	51
52	52	52	52	52
53	54	53	53	53
54	55	54	54	54
55	56	55	55	55
56	57	56	56	56

P	S	M	F	I
57	58	57	57	57
58	59	58	58	58
59	60	58	59	59
60	61	58	60	60
61	62	59	61	61
62	63	60	62	62
63	64	61	63	63
64	65	62	64	64
65	66	63	65	65
66	67	64	66	66
67	68	65	67	67
68	69	66	68	68
69	70	67	69	69
70	71	68	70	70
71	72	69	71	71
72	73	70	72	72
73	74	71	73	73
74	75	72	74	74
75	76	73	75	75
76	77	74	76	76
77	78	75	77	77
78	79	76	78	78
79	80	77	79	79
80	81	78	80	80
81	82	79	81	81
82	83	80	82	82

P: Pinnacle of Eloquence (this work) **S:** Şubhī Ṣāliḥ edition **M:** Muhammad ‘Abduh edition
F: Fayd al-Islām edition **I:** Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd edition

COMMENTARY KEY

- R Quṭb al-Dīn Abū al-Ḥusayn Sa‘īd ibn Hibatillāh al-Rāwandī (d. 573 AH), *Minhāj al-Barā‘ah fī Sharḥ Nahj al-Balāghah*
- I ‘Izz al-Dīn ‘Abd al-Ḥamid ibn Hibatillāh ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd (d. 656 AH), *Sharḥ Nahj al-Balāghah*
- M Kamāl al-Dīn Maytham ibn ‘Alī ibn Maytham al-Baḥrānī (d. 679/699 AH), *Sharḥ Nahj al-Balāghah*
- MB Ḥabībullāh Muḥammad ibn Hāshim al-Mūsawī al-Khūyī (d. 1324 AH), *Minhāj al-Barā‘ah fī Sharḥ Nahj al-Balāghah*
- Z Muḥammad Jawād ibn Maḥmūd Āl Mughniyah al-Āmilī (d. 1400 AH), *Fī Zilāl Nahj al-Balāghah*
- T Muḥammad Taqī ibn Muḥammad Kāzim al-Tustarī (d. 1415 AH), *Bahj al-Ṣabāgha fī Sharḥ Nahj al-Balāghah*
- J Muḥammad Taqī Ja‘farī al-Tabrīzī (d. 1419 AH), *Tafsīr Nahj al-Balāghah*
- N Nāṣir ibn Muḥammad Karīm Makārim al-Shīrāzī (b. 1345 AH), *Nafahāt al-Wilāyah*
- S ‘Abdullāh Jawādī Āmulī (b. 1351 AH), *Salūnī Qabl an Tafqīdūnī*

INTRODUCTION

All praise is for Allāh, Lord of the worlds, and peace and blessings upon His Prophet and Messenger, Muhammad, and his pure progeny.

Nahj al-Balāghah is a work that holds great value, particularly for the Shi‘ah of ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib (‘a). With over a hundred commentaries written on it by both Sunnī and Shī‘ī scholars, *Nahj al-Balāghah* is deemed second only to the Qur’ān in terms of the sheer number and volume of its commentaries. Depending on the edition, it contains around 240 sermons, 79 letters, and 461 aphorisms. Some editors chose to combine or separate some of the sermons and aphorisms, resulting in a slight variation in the numbers.¹ Most sermons and letters are only excerpts, ranging from a few lines to about a page in length, with a handful between two and five pages long. Within the section of aphorisms, there is a subsection which lists nine apothegms containing rare (*gharīb*) words, with a brief lexical commentary. As noted in his introduction, al-Rađī did not follow a thematic approach in compiling the *Nahj*; rather, he only categorized the Imām’s speech based on its type.

The book comprises a range of diverse topics including theology, eschatology, history, human life and psychology, as well as politics, and religion. Its contents may be broadly categorized into two general subjects: contemporary history, including politics and governance, and Islamic teachings comprising doctrine, theology, ethics, and pragmatic wisdom. Due to the literary character of the work and the goal of its compiler, chains of transmission have not been adduced in the volume. Instead, each text is prefaced with phrases such as “from a sermon by him (meaning, Imām ‘Alī),” and in a few instances, a brief context is provided. While al-Rađī does

¹ We have included a table of variant sermon numbers in order to make it easier to find a specific sermon, even if the reference is from a different edition.

not clearly indicate how he came to obtain the content of what he mentions in *Nahj al-Balāghah*, his introduction suggests that he reviewed different books containing the words of Imām ‘Alī. He also states that the reason there may be some repetition in the book is due to differences in the narrations of the Imām’s words. This implies that al-Rađī was reading different texts, with some containing alternative versions of the same traditions. Furthermore, it also suggests that al-Rađī had sources to which he referred, and it is likely that some of these sources are no longer extant.

The uniqueness of *Nahj al-Balāghah* is based on, but not limited to, its literary elegance (*faṣāḥah*) and eloquence (*balāghah*).² Its multi-dimensional nature makes it highly valuable, especially because its teachings are anchored in the Qur’ān and the sayings of the Noble Prophet (ṣ). The statements of Amīr al-Mu’minīn contained in it urge worship of the Creator, promote awareness of the transience of human life in this world, and underscore the urgent need to prepare for the imminent Hereafter. There is exhortation to truthfulness, gratitude, and patience, and extolment of the benefits of living a modest and balanced life. Many of his sermons and letters delineate the art of just leadership that integrates compassion, wisdom, integrity, and accountability to Allāh. Due to these beautiful teachings, which are lastingly relevant to human life on this earth, *Nahj al-Balāghah* has retained, even after a millennium, the same attractiveness, freshness, charm and beauty for the present-day audience that it provided to the people of earlier times.

The historical references found in the *Nahj* are mostly from the period of Imām ‘Alī’s life when he ruled as caliph of the Muslim empire (from 36 AH to 40 AH), with a few quotes from earlier years. It presents a nuanced depiction of some historical personalities and known individuals from Amīr al-Mu’minīn’s time, starting with the Noble Prophet (ṣ) and other members of his family, as well as some of the supporters of Imām ‘Alī, such as Abū Dharr al-Ghifārī (d. 32 AH), ‘Ammār ibn Yāsir

² In a recent trip to Najaf (in December of 2023), I had the opportunity of sharing a meal with the esteemed scholar Sayyid Munir al-Khabbāz. Among the numerous discussions we had was one in which he spoke about how much easier it is to memorize the Qur’ān than it is to memorize *Nahj al-Balāghah*. Then he made the comment, “Some of the great scholars had opined that the *Nahj* is more eloquent (*ablāgh*) than the Qur’ān.” “This is surely an extreme position,” I reacted, questioningly; to which the Sayyid simply smiled and said nothing. Perhaps as a tacit approval from him for my humble assessment, or perhaps something more. In any case, it is quite telling that some scholars actually hold such an opinion about the eloquence of the words of Imām ‘Alī (‘a) as recorded in the *Nahj*.

(d. 37 AH), Mālik al-Ashtar (d. 37 AH), and Muḥammad ibn Abī Bakr (d. circa 38 AH). There is also mention of some of his opponents, chief among whom was Mu‘āwiyah ibn Abī Sufyān (d. 60 AH) and ‘Amr ibn al-‘Āṣ (d. circa 42 AH), as well as those who later turned against him like Ṭalḥah ibn ‘Ubaydillāh (d. 36 AH), al-Zubayr ibn al-‘Awwām (d. 36 AH), and the Prophet’s wife ‘Ā’ishah bint Abī Bakr (d. 58 AH). It also traces the trajectories of some major events, such as Imām ‘Alī’s accession to the caliphate, and the Battles of Jamal (36 AH), Ḳifṭin (37 AH), and Nahrawān (38 AH), as well as the evolution of the Khawārij who rebelled against the Imām.

The style of the Imām’s speeches and statements reflects his oral milieu. Amīr al-Mu‘minīn lived in a society where writing was rare and mostly reserved for official documents and correspondence. His sermons and sayings, and even his written letters, reflect the aesthetic of orality, articulated in rhythmic prose with condensed sentences and parallelisms. They also include graphic and often astounding imagery drawn from everyday life, with extended similes and fascinating dramatization. Furthermore, we note the presence of techniques that would engage an audience such as use of emphasis and real and rhetorical questions, which invite the audience to participate by means of internal response and sometimes overt reply, comment, and action. His recorded speech is further characterised by a meticulously chosen, condensed vocabulary that is eloquently articulated. Indeed, the Imām’s style was unique and demonstrates high acumen as well as exceptional creativity. Even more baffling is the fact that many of his speeches were impromptu and not rehearsed.

It is small wonder, then, that Imām ‘Alī’s words influenced many orators and scholars of Islam, even across sectarian boundaries. His words were repeated by early orators who memorised them and alluded to them, or quoted them in their speeches and debates. Once of the chief secretaries of the Umayyad court, ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd al-Kātib (d. 132 AH), whose epistles are considered to be founding texts for written Arabic prose, said that he had learned eloquence by memorising the words of ‘Alī. Other famous prose writers like al-Jāhiẓ (d. 255 AH) paid homage to him and described him as the exemplar par excellence of eloquence. Al-Mas‘ūdī (d. 345 AH) noted that people during his time had memorised more than four hundred and eighty speeches by Imām ‘Alī, which they frequently quoted. Among the many compilations of the Imām’s words, *Nahj al-Balāghah* has earned the highest acclaim and been widely circulated, studied, and even memorised over the centuries. For the

Shī‘ah, the text possesses sanctity second only to the Qur’ān and the Prophet’s ḥadīth; yet it is also revered by many Sunnī Muslims and even Arab Christians.³

Nahj al-Balāghah has been widely studied over the centuries, and many have voiced their praise for it, especially the text’s commentators such as al-Rāwandī (d. 573 AH), Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd (d. circa 656 AH), and Muḥammad ‘Abduh (d. 1905 CE), all of whom have said that ‘Alī’s words are below the words of Allāh and His Prophet, but above the words of human beings. Muḥammad ‘Abduh even went as far as declaring that memorizing and studying *Nahj al-Balāghah* is “essential to those who seek the precious gems of the Arabic language and wish to rise in its ranks.” The work has also enjoyed enormous currency among the faithful believers and it is often quoted in speeches, informal talks, and discussions among students of the seminary. Further evidence of the enormous reception and wide circulation of *Nahj al-Balāghah* is gleaned from the large number of its manuscripts produced in different parts of the Muslim world. There have been close to two hundred early manuscripts of the text, dating from the 5th through the 12th centuries, that are known. These include some manuscripts transmitted even among Sunnīs, from Khurāsān to Yemen.⁴

The superiority of Imām ‘Alī’s words was such that even his staunchest enemies could not deny his unrivalled articulateness. There are recorded instances where Mu‘āwiyah ibn Abī Sufyān also acknowledged the Imām’s extraordinary eloquence. He is reported to have rebuked one of those who sought to curry favour with him by speaking ill of ‘Alī (‘a), saying, “Quraysh knew nothing about eloquence before him. It was he who taught them the art of eloquence!”⁵ The words of Amīr al-Mu’minīn had such a profound effect on his listeners that it is said his sermons would make hearts tremble and draw tears from the eyes of those who were present. After narrating his famous sermon titled al-Gharrā’, al-Sayyid al-Raḍī says, “As ‘Alī (‘a)

³ See: Rāji Anwar Hayfā, *al-Imām ‘Alī fī al-Fikr al-Masiḥī al-Mu‘āṣir*. In it he quotes individuals like Naṣrī Salhab stating: “The collected sermons and speeches in *Nahj al-Balāghah* clearly show that Imām ‘Alī is the spiritual father of rhetoricians in the Arabic Language.” (p. 558). Some other non-Muslims who have praised and been influenced by *Nahj al-Balāghah* are mentioned in Shahīd Mutahharī’s work *Glimpses from Nahj al-Balāghah*.

⁴ See for example: Hasan Ansari, *Rivāyat-e Nahj al-Balāghah: Az Neyshāpūr tā Yaman* (<https://ansari.kateban.com/post/3225>)

⁵ Muṭahharī, *Sayri dar Nahj al-Balāghah*, p. 9.

delivered his sermon, tears flowed from the eyes of the listeners and hearts quivered with emotion.” Indeed, even today, whoever carefully listens to or reads Imām ‘Alī’s sermons cannot help but feel a wave of strong emotions in his heart.

In his advice to the youth, al-Sayyid al-Sistānī mentions three books that every young person should read and reflect upon. The second of the three is *Nahj al-Balāghah*, which he describes as a book that explains the meanings of the Qur’ān in an eloquent style, provoking a spirit of reflection, contemplation, learning, and wisdom. He further recommends that one should read it whenever he has a chance, and imagine that Imām ‘Alī is addressing him directly. He also recommends that special attention should be paid to the letter of Imām ‘Alī (‘a) to his son, Imām al-Hasan (‘a).⁶ This is just one example of a plethora of statements issued by renowned scholars on the importance of *Nahj al-Balāghah* – and these scholars were more well versed in the nuances of authenticating statements attributed to the Infallibles than many of those who have only studied Islam in the West, and that too from mostly non-Muslim teachers.

About the Author

Al-Sharīf al-Rađī, was born in 359 AH. He was a descendant of the Noble Prophet (s) from both parents. Paternally, his lineage goes back to Imām Mūsā al-Kāzim (‘a) and maternally, his ancestry can be traced back to Imām Zayn al-‘Ābidin (‘a). Al-Sayyid al-Rađī⁷ lived during the reign of the Buyids (334-454 AH). The Buyids had Imāmī inclinations, and hence, during their reign the Shī‘ah community enjoyed more freedom to engage in scholarly activities than before. It was at this time that scholars such as al-Mufid, al-Rađī and his brother al-Murtadā, and al-Tūsī, prospered and excelled. The Buyid era ended at the hands of the Seljuks. Al-Sayyid al-Rađī’s father, Abū Aḥmad al-Ḥusayn ibn Mūsā, was well respected by both the Abbasid caliph as well as the Buyid rulers. He was designated as the Naqīb al-Ashrāf – the chief of the progeny of Abū Ṭālib (Ṭālibiyyīn) – and made responsible for Dīwān al-

⁶ See: <https://www.sistani.org/english/archive/25240/>

⁷ We use the term ‘al-Sayyid’ and ‘al-Sharīf’ interchangeably since they both signify the same thing, namely being a descendant of the Noble Prophet (s).

Mazālim, which was a position of authority on specific sociopolitical matters. He also played a role in settling any disputes that arose between the caliph and the Buyids.

However, in 369 AH al-Sayyid al-Rađī's father was arrested and imprisoned in Shirāz by ‘Ađud al-Dawlah due to his political influence, and his property was confiscated. Al-Rađī was nine years old at the time, and he saw how his mother sold her possessions to support him and his brother as they continued their studies. He managed to complete his formal education by the time his father was freed in 376 AH by Sharaf al-Dawlah, son of ‘Ađud al-Dawlah. Al-Sharīf al-Rađī served as the Naqīb after the death of his father in 403 AH.⁸ The position enabled him to be in the proximity of the caliph and high-ranking officials, which gave him the opportunity to demonstrate his qualifications and knowledge. Al-Rađī's demeanour and eloquence earned him the admiration of scholars and dignitaries of his time. Aside from his charismatic character, al-Rađī was also a great poet. Al-Tha‘ālibī (d. 429 AH), who was one of his contemporaries, says that al-Rađī composed his first poem shortly after the age of ten.⁹ Al-Sayyid al-Rađī died shortly after his father, in 406 AH, at the age of forty-seven. He was very well respected by the people, despite his young age.

Al-Sharīf al-Rađī is said to have lived all his life in Baghdad, although sources report that he also had a house in Sāmarrā'. He studied with some famous scholars, including the grammarians al-Sīrāfi (d. 368 AH), al-Fārisī (d. 377 AH), and Ibn Jinnī (d. 392 AH). His teachers in other fields of study included al-Shaykh al-Mufid (d. 413 AH), Ibn Nubātah (d. 374 AH), Abū ‘Ubaydillāh al-Marzubānī (d. 384 AH), and al-Qāđī ‘Abd al-Jabbār (d. 415 AH). The sources further mention some of his other teachers in philology, genealogy, jurisprudence, ḥadīth, and Qurān recitation as well. Al-Rađī had a number of students, including the poet Mihyār al-Daylamī (d. 428 AH), who converted from Zoroastrianism to Islam under his guidance. Toward the end of his life, al-Rađī reportedly had a confrontation with the Abbasid caliph regarding the Prophetic lineage of the rival Fātimid dynasty. Having seen al-Rađī's poetry wherein

⁸ It is reported that al-Sharīf al-Rađī was only twenty years old when he was appointed as aide to his father in the three key positions of Naqīb al-Ashrāf, director of the annual *hajj* pilgrimage, and chief judge over the *mazālim* court. In 396 AH, Bahā' al-Dawlah appointed al-Rađī to these positions independent of his father, and when his father died in 403 AH, al-Rađī's area of responsibility was expanded “to all the lands” of the Abbasid empire. It is said that al-Sayyid al-Rađī was the first *sharif* to be honoured in this way.

⁹ Al-Tha‘ālibī, *Yatīmat al-Dahr* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah), vol. 3, pp. 155-178.

he expressed his wish to live under Fātimid rule, the caliph insisted he sign a manifesto denouncing their lineage. Al-Rađī refused and was thus stripped of his official positions at the Abbasid court.

Despite his short life, al-Sharīf al-Rađī compiled many books, composed much poetry, and left an admirable legacy. It is reported that he authored sixteen works including a commentary on the Qur’ān and on ḥadīth, history, biography, poetry, as well as some glosses on jurisprudential and grammatical texts. However, only eight of his works are extant. He wrote *Haqā’iq al-Ta’wīl fī Mutashābih al-Tanzīl* (lit. “The Truth of the Deeper Interpretation of Equivocal Verses”), a book about the meanings of the different allegories used in the Qur’ān, and their interpretation, which he completed in the year 402 AH. This is a book in which he has demonstrated how well versed he was in theological discussions, and his deep understanding of the opinions of the Ash‘arī and Mu‘tazilī schools, which he refers to throughout the book either directly or indirectly. He also wrote *Talkhīṣ al-Bayān fī Majāzāt al-Qur’ān* (lit. “A Summary Exposition of the Qur’ān’s Figurative Concepts”) about the language used in some verses of the Qur’ān, which he completed in the year 401 AH, as well as another book about the metaphors used in the Prophet’s traditions, *al-Majāzāt al-Nabawiyah*.

Al-Rađī’s *Dīwān* contains just under seven hundred poems with approximately ten thousand verses on various subjects such as encomium for rulers and viziers, lamentation for the martyrdom of Imām al-Ḥusayn (‘a), censure of evils that were prevalent, love, and other miscellaneous subjects. The work was later re-arranged alphabetically by rhyme letter. Al-Rađī’s *Rasā’il* (lit. “Letters”) is the result of his lengthy exchange with Hilāl al-Ṣābi’ (d. 448 AH), but only a small portion thereof is extant. Al-Rađī’s *Amthāl* (lit. “Proverbial [verses]”) compilation is partially preserved in al-Irbilī’s (d. 677 AH) *Mukhtaṣar* (lit. “Abridgment”). His eight lost works are mentioned in the early biobibliographical sources. They include four poetry anthologies, two annotations – one on legal differences among jurists, titled *Ta’līq Khilāf al-Fuqahā’* (lit. “Annotation on The Jurists’ Disagreements”), which is perhaps an annotation of al-Ṭabarī’s (d. 310 AH) *Ikhtilāf al-Fuqahā’*, and the other on al-Fārisī’s (d. 377 AH) grammar manual, *Ta’līq fī al-Īdāh li-Abī ‘Alī* (lit. “Annotation on Abū ‘Alī’s Elucidation”), and two historical works, namely *Sīrat Wālidih al-Tāhir* (lit. “A Biography of

[al-Rađī's] Father, the Pure One"), and *Akhbār Qudāt Baghdađ* (lit. "A History of the Judges of Baghdad").

The words of praise from his contemporaries, as well as later scholars who knew him only through his works, depict al-Sayyid al-Rađī as a prominent Shī'ah thinker, poet, and man of letters (*adīb*). Al-Rađī's book on the merits and unique traits of the Imāms, *Khaṣā'iš al-A'immah*, became the source of his inspiration for compiling *Nahj al-Balāghah*, and from his introduction, we understand that the latter work was an expansion of the former. He started compiling the *Khaṣā'iš* in the year 383 AH, but never finished it. In his introduction to *Nahj al-Balāghah*, he writes that the vicissitudes of life and its obstacles were the reason for this. He further states that when people read what he wrote about Imām 'Alī in the *Khaṣā'iš*, they encouraged him to compile a book about his sayings, and that became the motivation for compiling *Nahj al-Balāghah*, which he completed in the year 400 AH. It is clear that al-Sayyid al-Rađī was very impressed by the depth and profundity of the messages found within the statements and orations of Imām 'Alī, over and above the eloquence. This is reflected in his comments and notes that are seen in different places within the *Nahj*.

From what we know of al-Sayyid al-Rađī, he was a polymath and his interests went beyond love for poetry and literature. He was a keen student of theology, history, and exegesis of the Qur'ān and ḥadīth. As such, though it is commonly understood, and even alluded to in his own introduction, that he was aiming to compile the most eloquent speeches and statements of Imām 'Alī ('a), there is a very real possibility that other motivating factors also drove him to write *Nahj al-Balāghah*. For instance, he may have wanted to preserve the otherwise scattered traditions of Amīr al-Mu'minīn ('a) in a single volume. It should be noted that this was a sensitive time when there were some anti-Shī'ah sentiments in some quarters of Baghdad, which would later come to a boil leading to an attack on, and destruction of, both the main Dār al-'Ilm library as well as the personal library of al-Sharīf al-Rađī's father. It has also been suggested that another incentive for compiling this work may have been al-Rađī's interest in countering the theological arguments of other schools of thought using the statements of Imām 'Alī ('a). For instance, some

of the sermons in *Nahj al-Balāghah* clearly negate the anthropomorphic beliefs that some of the Ash‘arīs held.¹⁰

An Overview of Studies on *Nahj al-Balāghah* in the Hawzah and Beyond

There are many studies based on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, some of which go back to the years soon after it was initially written. They include commentaries, translations, supplements, abridgments, glosses, concordances, works on its sources, and thematic essays. Among the first to study *Nahj al-Balāghah* and narrate it were al-Naqībah, the daughter of al-Sayyid al-Murtadā, as well as Abū Ja‘far al-Tūsī (d. 460 AH), the student of al-Murtadā.¹¹ Within just over a century of its publication, a number of commentaries were written on it by both Sunnī and Shī‘ah authors, with the first commentary (proper) being written by the 6th century scholar Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad al-Wabarī, or according to a more recent hypothesis, by Faḍlullāh al-Rāwandī (d. circa 550 AH).¹² Since then, many books and articles have been written about *Nahj al-Balāghah*, and while it would be neither practical nor beneficial to mention all of the available work here, we will attempt to present an overview and give a few examples of the better-known texts.

In his anthology of Persian and Arabic works on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, Haydar Kāzim al-Jibourī has listed 593 titles.¹³ Since its publication in 2012, there have been many other books written on the *Nahj*, so this number has definitely gone up. Furthermore, even if we were to assume that al-Jibouri’s anthology is complete, the fact that he only included Arabic and Persian works means that many books in other languages are not included. There have been numerous works from other parts of the world, and indeed even one of the first English translations of the *Nahj* was carried out by a scholar from the subcontinent. Books in Urdu abound, and there are also translations of *Nahj al-Balāghah* in most of the major languages. The number of known Arabic and Persian commentaries varies between 81 and 210. The reason for

¹⁰ Usama al-Attar, *Theology of Nahj al-Balāghah* (Phd. Dissertation, 2019), pp. 21-22.

¹¹ Al-Sarakhsī, *A‘lām Nahj al-Balāghah* (Tehran: Wizārat al-Thaqāfah wal-Irshād al-Islāmī, 1994), p. 12.

¹² ‘Abd al-‘Azīz al-Ṭabāṭabā‘ī in “*Nahj al-Balāghah ‘abr al-Qurūn*,” *Turāthunā* vols. 35-35 (1414 AH), p. 160.

¹³ Al-Jibourī, *Maṣādir al-Dirāsah ‘an Nahj al-Balāghah* (Najaf al-Ashraf: al-‘Atabah al-Alawiyah al-Muqaddasah, 2012).

this wide range is that some estimates include commentaries on a single sermon, a single letter, or a single aphorism. After the Qur'ān, *Nahj al-Balāghah* arguably has the largest number of commentaries of any Arabic work.

Several commentaries on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, including one that is perhaps the most famous, are by Sunnī scholars. The twenty-volume *Sharḥ Nahj al-Balāghah* by the Mu'tazilī author Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd (d. circa 656 AH) is very well known and oft-quoted. One of the earliest extant commentaries is by 'Alī ibn Zayd al-Bayhaqī (d. 565/1170), a Sunnī author from Khurāsān. Prominent Sunnī authors whose commentaries are lost include Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606 AH) and Sa'd al-Dīn al-Taftāzānī (d. 793 AH). Commentaries by Twelver-Shī'ah scholars abound. Early Shī'ī commentators include 'Alī ibn Nāṣir al-Sarakhsī (d. 6th century), Quṭb al-Dīn al-Rāwandi (d. 573 AH), Quṭb al-Dīn al-Kaydarī (d. after 576 AH), and Maytham al-Bahrānī (d. 679 AH). Over the centuries, many other commentaries followed, written in both Arabic and Persian. The Zaydī-Shī'ī Imām Yaḥyā ibn Ḥamzah al-Yamānī (d. 749 AH) also wrote a commentary. These early commentaries differ in their style and approach. Some focus on lexical and rhetorical matters, and others try to provide context and transmission history. The longer commentaries include extensive historical, doctrinal, and literary notes, as well as further texts attributed to Imām 'Alī and other historical figures.

Like exegeses on the Qur'ān, commentaries on *Nahj al-Balāghah* could be very diverse. As expected, each commentator interpreted its contents according to his own background and method. For example, we note that al-Wabarī's commentary was theological in nature whereas Quṭb al-Dīn al-Rāwandi's commentary was largely literary. Maytham al-Bahrānī was perhaps the first scholar to read *Nahj al-Balāghah* as a theological-cum-mystical text.¹⁴ To be sure, the *Nahj* contains a variety of discussions that span different subjects and themes, so when a commentary focuses on one particular aspect of the text, some other important aspects tend to be left out or overlooked. That is perhaps the reason why most recent commentaries do

¹⁴ *Miṣbāḥ al-Sālikīn* is the larger of al-Bahrānī's two commentaries on the text, and was written in 677 AH in honour of 'Atā'ullāh Malik al-Juwainī, with whom al-Bahrānī had a good relationship. His *Ikhtiyār Miṣbāḥ al-Sālikīn* is an abridgment of his larger commentary, and was written in response to al-Juwainī's request to write a commentary suitable for his two young sons. It was written in 681 AH. See: Ali al-Oraibi, *Shī'ī Renaissance: A Case Study of the Theosophical School of Bahrain in the 7th/13th Century* (Phd. Dissertation), pp. 50-51.

not limit themselves to any single aspect of the text, but try to address as many different facets as possible.

Since al-Sayyid al-Rādī did not include chains of narrators, others later took up the task of collecting the *asānīd* of *Nahj al-Balāghah*. Perhaps the most comprehensive book in this regard is *Ruwāt wa Muḥaddithīn Nahj al-Balāghah* by the contemporary scholar Muḥammad Dashtī. This work has been published in two volumes and is arranged as per the original, with only extensive footnotes containing chains of narrators of each part or section of the sermons, letters, and aphorisms of the *Nahj*. The famous work by al-Sayyid ‘Abd al-Zahrā’ al-Husaynī, *Maṣādir Nahj al-Balāghah*, published in four volumes, is a compilation of the sources of the *Nahj*. It is said that like the author of *al-Ghadīr*, al-Husaynī travelled widely and visited many libraries in different cities in order to get the information he needed for this work. These two works (and others like them) sufficiently fill in the gap that would give rise to queries about the sources and chains of transmission of the contents of *Nahj al-Balāghah*. As for the transmission of the *Nahj* itself, and how it was passed on from the time of al-Rādī onwards, the bio-bibliographical sources mention several chains of transmission, and al-Sayyid Muḥammad Husayn al-Jalālī has painstakingly compiled these in his work *Dirāsah Hawl Nahj al-Balāghah*.¹⁵

The *mustadrak* genre is particularly significant when it comes to *Nahj al-Balāghah*, especially since the text is known to contain sermons and letters that are incomplete. At the same time, there are numerous other orations and treatises from the Imām that have not been included by al-Rādī. There are no less than five published works of this kind, most of which were written quite recently. *Nahj al-Balāghah al-Thānī* by Ja‘far al-Ḥāfirī has been published in three volumes, and it is structured according to al-Rādī’s work. It has comparatively fewer sermons, letters, and aphorisms (139, 71, and 336 respectively), but the sources used by its compiler are mentioned at the end. The famous *Tamām Nahj al-Balāghah* by al-Sayyid Ṣādiq al-Mūsawī is an eight-volume work wherein the author has compiled the complete orations that have only been mentioned by al-Rādī in part. It took him eighteen years to collect all the sermons, letters, and aphorisms of Imām Ali (‘a) for this work. He is said to have visited more than 150 libraries in India, Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, Syria,

¹⁵ This work is generally considered one of the best introductions to *Nahj al-Balāghah* and contains valuable information about different aspects of the text.

Egypt, Yemen, Tunisia, and Morocco, and to have referred to more than seventy thousand books. Other similar works include *Nahj al-Sa‘ādah fī Mustadrak Nahj al-Balāghah* by Muḥammad Bāqir al-Maḥmūdī and *Mustadrak Nahj al-Balāghah* by Hādī Al Kāshif al-Ghitā?

A number of dictionaries that explain the meanings of words contained within *Nahj al-Balāghah* have also been written. These are mostly in Persian, though it should be noted that many published editions of the original Arabic text do contain footnotes explaining the meanings of difficult words in the text. Muḥammad ‘Alī Sharqī’s *Qāmūs Nahj al-Balāghah* in four volumes is perhaps the most comprehensive dictionary of the *Nahj* to date. It bears repeating that works on *Nahj al-Balāghah* are not limited to Persian and Arabic languages. Many scholars from the subcontinent have also written books and articles on the text. In his dissertation, Wasim Hussein even mentions two non-Shī‘ah scholars, Arshi Rampuri and Ra’is Ahmad, who have written a treatise on the sources of *Nahj al-Balāghah* and an Urdu translation of the text respectively. There are at least three different Urdu translation of the text, and as noted earlier, even the early English translations thereof were written by scholars from the subcontinent. A former classmate translated the *Nahj* into Uygur not too long ago, and two English translations that have been published recently (or will soon be published) are by scholars who have roots in the subcontinent, namely Tahera Qutbuddin¹⁶ and Amjad Shah Naqavi.

The research work on different aspects of *Nahj al-Balāghah* is still ongoing, and in recent years new texts have been found which clearly show that, even more than previously assumed, the contents of *Nahj al-Balāghah* have strong chains from early sources of the *adab* and *ḥadīth* genres, as well as works of history and theology. There are a number of conferences organized annually to discuss various themes related to the *Nahj* in Iran, in the UK (particularly in Peterborough), and a few other locations around the world. There are also some institutes dedicated to the study of *Nahj al-Balāghah* in different languages, and they regularly publish papers and journals or magazines on the subject. A couple of years back, the Computer Research Centre of Islamic Sciences in Qum made their latest software on *Nahj al-Balāghah* available. *Dānišnāmeh ‘Alawī* version 2 contains over 170 titles that are deemed most important

¹⁶ Qutbuddin’s translation was published just as this work was being sent for typesetting and proofreading.

in the study of *Nahj al-Balāghah*, including over thirty commentaries, numerous translations in a variety of languages, as well as five different editions of the text itself. We have relied on some of these works for the present commentary. All in all, a lot of research is currently ongoing in the field of *Nahj al-Balāghah* studies and it is hoped that the results of these worthy endeavours soon come to fruition.

The Question of Authenticity

The question about the authenticity of *Nahj al-Balāghah* generally pertains to one of two things: its provenance, or its attribution. The first issue relates to whether the text was indeed authored by al-Sayyid al-Rađī, and the second is about whether or not the attribution of its contents to Imām ‘Alī (‘a) is correct. These questions could equally be posed regarding most materials from the early period of Islam, which were usually transmitted by word of mouth over two or three generations before being transcribed into books, especially after paper became more accessible in the Islamic world around the early third century AH. Although vulnerable to errors and, to a lesser degree, fabrication, robust oral transmission, supplemented by a small amount of written text, ensured that a substantial quantity of genuine pronouncements from early times was correctly captured and recorded.¹⁷ Strong memories coupled by mnemonic devices facilitated memorisation, and teachings were passed on from person to person in a mix of verbatim and meaning-based transmission until they were systematically collected and written down.

Imām ‘Alī (‘a) was one of the most revered personages of early Islam and his eloquence was proverbial. During the period of his caliphate he preached lengthy sermons, frequently to large, public audiences. It is our contention that much of the recorded material attributed to him is authentic, be it verbatim or in essence. Moreover, the presence of some Qur’ān-based themes and nature-based analogies, as well as accounts that are compatible with the historical and literary ambiance of the time, only serve to increase certitude that they represent a true picture of Imām ‘Alī’s teachings. Scholars generally opine that as with other well-known early compilations, most parts of *Nahj al-Balāghah* are genuine, while some might be later

¹⁷ See: Tahera Qutbuddin, *Arabic Oration: Art and Function* (BRILL, 2022), pp. 21–63.

additions or modifications. In order to determine the probability of authenticity, individual statements must be examined, rather than the compilation as a whole. It is a known fact that through the centuries, Imām ‘Alī’s words were collected by a large number of individuals, and al-Rađī draws on these written compilations, as well as on other historical and literary sources – some of which are now lost – for *Nahj al-Balāghah*.

However, almost three centuries after the *Nahj* began circulating, the Damascene historian Ibn Khallikān (d. 681 AH) raised doubts about its attribution, claiming that “the compiler was himself the author,” and that al-Sharīf al-Murtadā (d. 436 AH), al-Rađī’s brother, was the book’s compiler. Fifty years later, the Ḥanbalī theologian Ibn Taymiyyah (d. 728 AH) declared that most of the contents of *Nahj al-Balāghah* were not found in any earlier source. The Ḥanbalī historian al-Dhahabī (d. 748 AH) also pronounced its contents as counterfeit, because they contained insults to Abū Bakr and ‘Umar, among other contradictions and “lowly things”.¹⁸ These writers were then quoted by some later scholars. In the contemporary world, *Nahj al-Balāghah* continues to be harshly criticised in certain quarters, especially among the Wahhābī scholars. The main critiques of its detractors are simply incorrect. The contents of *Nahj al-Balāghah* is indeed found in many early sources (as ‘Abd al-Zahrā’ has shown in his *Maṣādir Nahj al-Balāghah*, for example). As for the claim that the book contains insults aimed at the first three Sunnī caliphs, only a handful of texts in it refer to Abū Bakr and ‘Umar, and they say nothing directly critical. Even regarding ‘Uthmān, whose administration many Muslims censured, the book contains no overt reproach.

The only exception is the Sermon known as “Shiqshiqiyah”, which states that the first three caliphs assumed the caliphate while knowing that Imām ‘Alī’s position was like “the pivot to the grinding stone,” meaning they all knew that he was the Noble Prophet’s rightful successor. However, similar texts are found in numerous Sunnī-authored books as well. And we have discussed these in brief below. What the book does contain is abundant castigations of Mu‘āwiyah ibn Abī Sufyān and ‘Amr ibn al-Āṣ, and, to a lesser extent, Ṭalḥah and al-Zubayr, all individuals who brought armies to fight against Imām ‘Alī. ‘Ā’ishah, also a lead instigator in the Battle of Jamal, is not referred to directly for reasons of decorum, but the few texts that

¹⁸ See: Muhammad Waris Hassan, *A Critical Study of Nahj al-Balāghah* (Phd. Dissertation), pp. 28-32.

criticise women are, according to many commentators, probably directed at her. It is more likely that the main reason for this compilation being singled out for censure, and why it is often referred to in sectarian circles as a “Shī‘ī book”, is because it includes material outlining certain ‘distasteful’ political realities in early Islamic history. In fact, this brilliant ecumenical work belongs to the collective heritage of Islam, the communal legacy of Arabic, and the shared inheritance of humanity.

Those who took a stand against this work did not always limit themselves to words. There have also been some instances of tampering with the text of the *Nahj* by some unscrupulous actors. For instance, in his introduction, al-‘Aṭṭār mentions that the author of one manuscript made changes to the Sermon of Shiqshiqiyah and even appended a note trying to deny its attribution to Imām ‘Alī (‘a), simply because he was not pleased by its contents.¹⁹ That author even went as far as calling al-Sayyid al-Raḍī insane for attributing the speech to Amīr al-Mu‘minīn.²⁰ In the following section of our introduction, we will present a discussion on the doubts raised about the authenticity of the text and the answers we can give to those who have expressed reservations, for various reasons, about the reliability of the *Nahj*. The questions posed about the work will be discussed in brief and the answers that scholars have given will also be presented. It should be noted, again, that the majority of the book conforms, at least broadly, to the orality-based norms of that time, and the known history of the life of Imām ‘Alī (‘a).

Since the reliability of al-Sayyid al-Raḍī himself is central to this discussion, we begin by examining his credentials and what scholars have said about him. It is clear that Shī‘ah scholars consider him to be reliable and trustworthy, but even Sunnī scholars have spoken highly of him. The famous Ḥanbalī ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn al-Jawzī (d. 597 AH) praised him, noting that he had memorized the Qur’ān in a short time, and had a strong grasp of jurisprudence (*fiqh*). He described al-Raḍī as a great scholar (*‘āliman fāḍilan*), a skilled poet, and a pious individual.²¹ Likewise, al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī (d. 463 AH) had only good things to say about al-Raḍī, calling him a

¹⁹ Al-‘Aṭṭār (ed.), *Nahj al-Balāghah*, pp. 41–42.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

²¹ Ibn al-Jawzī, *al-Muntaẓam fi Tārikh al-Mulūk wal-Umām* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah 1412 AH), vol. 15, p. 115.

praiseworthy man of letters (*ahl al-fadl wal-adab*) and admiring his masterful ability in poetry.²² Therefore, we note that almost all the early scholars were in agreement regarding his reliability. As such, the allegation that al-Rādī himself invented the contents of *Nahj al-Balāghah*, or fabricated a part thereof, cannot be accepted.

Ibn Khallikān, who made such spurious claims more than two and a half centuries later, was obviously wrong because firstly, he neither offers any evidence whatsoever for his allegation nor does he quote a single source. Secondly, Ibn Khallikān's own opinion cannot be taken since he is known to have been biased against the Ahl al-Bayt and the progeny of ‘Alī (‘a), while having love and admiration for the likes of Yazīd ibn Mu‘āwiyah.²³ Interestingly, all those who would later echo the same doubts regarding the attribution of the text of *Nahj al-Balāghah* simply parroted Ibn Khallikān, sometimes repeating his allegations verbatim, without giving a second thought to his lack of evidence. Some of those who followed in his footsteps without presenting a single shred of proof for their claims include al-Dhahabī,²⁴ al-Ṣafadī (d. 764 AH),²⁵ al-Yāfi‘ī (d. 768 AH),²⁶ and Ibn al-‘Imād (d. 1089 AH),²⁷ among others.

There are many types of doubts that have been raised about *Nahj al-Balāghah* over the ages, and we will briefly mention ten of the main misgivings about the text, along with the answers given by scholars in order to respond to these doubts and assuage any uncertainty they bring about:

(1) Cursing Companions: Some scholars, like al-Dhahabī, have alleged that since the *Nahj* contains certain statements wherein the first two caliphs are cursed, it cannot possibly be from Amīr al-Mu’minīn ‘Alī (‘a).²⁸ However, in response to this allegation, our scholars say that firstly, there is no explicit curse against the caliphs as al-Dhahabī has alleged. In fact, he has not provided a single example of any such statement. Secondly, even if we were to hypothetically agree that there is such an explicit curse in the text, it would not necessitate that the entire book is a

²² Al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Tārikh Baghdād* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, 1417 AH), vol. 2, p. 243.

²³ See: Ibn Khallikān, *Wafayāt al-Āyān* (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir), vol. 4, p. 354.

²⁴ Al-Dhahabī, *Tārikh al-Islām* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Arabi, 1413 AH), vol. 29, p. 434.

²⁵ Al-Ṣafadī, *al-Wāfi bil-Wafayāt* (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā’ al-Turāth, 1420 AH), vol. 20, p. 231.

²⁶ Al-Yāfi‘ī, *Mir‘āt al-Jinān* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, 1417 AH), vol. 3, p. 43.

²⁷ Ibn al-‘Imād, *Shadharāt al-Dhahab* (Damascus, Dār Ibn Kathīr, 1406 AH), vol. 5, p. 165.

²⁸ Al-Dhahabī, *Mīzān al-I‘tidāl* (Beirut: Dār al-Ma‘rifah li al-Tibā‘ah wal-Nashr, 1382 AH), vol. 3, p. 124.

fabrication. Rather, it would only be that particular statement that could be deemed a fabrication. Thirdly, if cursing companions is a yardstick for fabrication, what would the likes of al-Dhahabī say regarding the works that contain reports of such cursing yet are still considered some of the authentic works of the Ahl al-Sunnah?²⁹ What *Nahj al-Balāghah* contains is a critique of some of the actions and behaviour of a number of Companions. This does not amount to cursing or reviling the Companions, as al-Dhahabī seeks to portray. Furthermore, it is surprising that al-Dhahabī has paid no attention to the parts of *Nahj al-Balāghah* where Companions have been praised.³⁰

(2) Problematic Structure of Statements: The presence of what some deem to be improperly articulated statements that are not befitting of someone as great as ‘Alī (‘a) has led them to doubt its attribution to him. Al-Dhahabī, for example, says that the contents of *Nahj al-Balāghah* do not match what is known of the eloquence and articulateness of ‘Alī (‘a).³¹ However, the first response to this is that there is not even a single example provided for this claim. Secondly, while al-Rađī was an expert in Arabic literature, al-Dhahabī himself had no training in Arabic literature as such. In fact, he was not even an Arab – he was from Turkmenistan. On the other hand, al-Rađī was an Arab, from the Quraysh, and from the progeny of the Noble Prophet (ṣ). How, then, can the claim of the former be taken over the latter? Thirdly, many of those who were experts in Arabic language have attested to the eloquence of the statements of Amīr al-Mu’minīn found in *Nahj al-Balāghah*. They include Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd,³² Maḥmūd Shukrī al-Ālūsī (d. 1342 AH),³³ and the contemporary scholar Muhy al-Dīn ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd (d. 1392 AH),³⁴ among others.

(3) Sources and Chains of Transmission: One of the main objections to *Nahj al-Balāghah* in the present age pertains to its lacking chains of transmission, and the presence of some statements that are not found in earlier sources. This was the

²⁹ For an example of how ‘Umar cursed Abū Hurayrah, see: al-Ḥākim, *al-Mustadrak ‘alā al-Ṣaḥīḥayn*, vol. 2, p. 387.

³⁰ See: al-Rađī, *Nahj al-Balāghah*, sermon 96.

³¹ Al-Dhahabī, *Mīzān al-I’tidāl*, vol. 3, p. 124.

³² Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd, *Sharḥ Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 1, p. 35.

³³ Maḥmūd Shukrī al-Ālūsī, *Bulūgh al-Arab fī Ma’rifat Aḥwāl al-‘Arab* (Cairo: Dār al-Kitāb al-Miṣrī), vol. 3, p. 180.

³⁴ See: “Qālū fī al-Nahj al-Sharīf” (<https://inahj.org/literatureghadir/675>)

misgiving expressed by Ibn Taymiyyah (d. 728 AH) in his *Minhāj al-Sunnah* where he says, referring to the sermons of Imām ‘Alī (‘a) narrated in *Nahj al-Balāghah*, that since many of them are not found in any earlier source, they are mere fabrications.³⁵ In response to this, it must be noted firstly that al-Sharīf al-Rađī was aiming to compile a literary text, not a ḥadīth compendium or reference manual for issues of creed or jurisprudence. That is why he did not see the need to include chains of transmission. Whoever wishes to evaluate the authenticity of its statements, therefore, must refer to the primary sources from which he related the material. This practice was not new, and it was not invented by al-Sharīf al-Rađī. Many Sunnī scholars have done the same thing in their works, narrating traditions without including the chains of transmission. Secondly, in his introduction, al-Sayyid al-Rađī categorically states that he has related the statements of Amīr al-Mu’minīn (‘a) from primary sources. In fact, in some instances he has also mentioned some of his main sources.³⁶ Thirdly, the sermons he quotes were all known and circulating among the people even before his time, as attested to by many scholars. Had this not been the case, that would have been the first thing al-Rađī could have been held to account for, and it would not have taken three centuries, until the era of Ibn Taymiyyah, for them to realize that. Furthermore, today we have encyclopaedic works that mention all the sources of *Nahj al-Balāghah*, thereby leaving no room for this doubt to persist.

(4) Alternative Attributions: One of the doubts that has been raised in the past by the likes of Ibn Taymiyyah, and in recent times by scholars like Wadād al-Qāđī³⁷ and others, is that some of the statements attributed to Imām ‘Alī have actually been attributed to others as well. Hence, this would mean that al-Rađī took some eloquent statements from other individuals and attributed them to Amīr al-Mu’minīn. This accusation has been explicitly made by Ibn Taymiyyah in his *Minhāj al-Sunnah* where he states that the author of *Nahj al-Balāghah* took statements of other people and presented them as the words of ‘Alī (‘a). He also notes that there are instances where the same statements he has attributed to ‘Alī (‘a) have been attributed to others by

³⁵ Ibn Taymiyyah, *Minhāj al-Sunnah* (Riyadh: Jāmi‘at al-Imām Muḥammad ibn Sa‘ūd, 1406 AH), vol. 8, p. 55.

³⁶ See al-Rađī’s notes after aphorism 448, before aphorism 362, and after sermon 32, for example.

³⁷ See for instance: Wadād Al-Qāđī, “An Early Fātiimid Political Document,” in *Studia Islamica* (Brill), no. 48 (1978), pp. 71-108.

the likes of al-Jāhīz in his *al-Bayān wal-Tabyīn*.³⁸ In response to this, we say that firstly, Ibn Taymiyyah and others who have made this accusation have not clarified how many statements and narrations attributed to Amīr al-Mu'minīn ('a) in the *Nahj* have also been attributed to others. In fact, Ibn Taymiyyah himself has not mentioned a single example of such sermons with multiple attributions. Finding one statement or a few statements whose attribution is doubtful does not mean that the entire book is fabricated. And if indeed there were some parts that were known to be fabricated, why did those who claim this not compile a 'corrected' and 'authenticated' version (which could have been titled *Ṣaḥīḥ Nahj al-Balāghah*) as they did with other texts?³⁹ Secondly, the fact that some statements (or orations, or letters) attributed by al-Raḍī to Imām 'Alī ('a) have also been attributed to others does not necessarily mean that al-Raḍī was a liar. It could just as well have been the other attribution that was fabricated. What evidence is there that the latter did not take it from the former? In fact, even Wadād al-Qāḍī's claim that the letter to Mālik al-Ashtar was actually a Fatimid political document is very weak. If it was an official document, al-Raḍī would never get away with falsely attributing it to Imām 'Alī ('a). Rather, it makes more sense that the Fatimids, who believed in the *imāmah* of 'Alī ('a), took from his teachings and incorporated them in their own legal documents. Finally, as for what al-Jāhīz has said, it should be borne in mind that al-Jāhīz was known for relating lies and then attributing them to reliable people.⁴⁰

(5) Knowledge of the Unseen: Another doubt that some have raised about *Nahj al-Balāghah* pertains to a number of reports that speak about future events and prophesize what is to come. This, they say, implies that the speaker had knowledge of the unseen (*ghayb*), because he foretells things with certitude, not probability. As such, they reject the assertion that such things were said by Amīr al-Mu'minīn ('a), insisting that knowledge of the unseen is only with Allāh. One of the scholars who raised this doubt was 'Abbās Maḥmūd al-'Aqqād (d. 1964). He claimed that the prophecies regarding al-Ḥajjāj ibn Yūsuf, the sedition of the Zanj, the raids of the Tartars, and so on were things that were later attributed to the Imām by those who

³⁸ Ibn Taymiyyah, *Minhāj al-Sunnah*, vol. 8, p. 55.

³⁹ See the works of this type by Muḥammad Nāṣir al-Albānī, for example.

⁴⁰ See, for example, what Ibn Ḥajar has to say about him in *Liṣān al-Mīzān* (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-A'lamī lil-Maṭbū'āt, 1390 AH), vol. 4, p. 357.

copied the book after the events had transpired.⁴¹ The problem with this argument, however, is that firstly, they think that knowledge of the unseen cannot be possessed by anyone other than Allāh. This goes against the explicit verses of the Qur’ān which state that Allāh can give this type of knowledge who whomever He sees fit (see: Q72:26,27). Therefore it is clear that Allāh can Himself decide to bestow some knowledge of the unseen to certain chosen servants. Furthermore, there are a number of traditions considered authentic by Sunnī scholars wherein the Prophet (ṣ) is said to have shared knowledge of future events with some Companions like Hudhayfah.⁴² Hence we see that there is nothing surprising if Imām ‘Alī, who was the closest person to the Messenger of Allāh, were to know of similar things, having been informed of them by the Noble Messenger (ṣ). Furthermore, the Tartars came after the time of al-Sayyid al-Rađī, so there was no way that he could have fabricated the prophecy himself.

(6) Verbosity: Some of those who have doubted the attribution of *Nahj al-Balāghah* argue that a number of sermons and letters contained therein are very long, and this was not something common among the Arabs of that time. One of the first people to bring up this argument was Aḥmad Zakī Ṣafwat (d. 1975) who noted that one of the causes of doubt in the attribution of the letter to Mālik al-Ashtar is its prolixity, which was not a practice that caliphs would generally undertake in those times when appointing governors. Additionally, he said that the presence of two very long orations, namely al-Qāsi‘ah and the Sermon of Ashbāh, gave him pause and reason to doubt.⁴³ This, however, can be answered in a number of ways. Firstly, the length of an oration or letter cannot itself be a reason to question its attribution to Imām ‘Alī (‘a), since verbosity is sometimes used as a device to attain certain objectives by an eloquent speaker. Secondly, it is unreasonable to arrive at a general conclusion that lengthy speeches or letters were unheard of in the early days after examining the small number of orations and correspondence that have reached us from the Noble Prophet (ṣ) or the other early caliphs. Doing so means overlooking the historical evidence for the presence of lengthy works among the

⁴¹ ‘Abbās Maḥmūd al-‘Aqqād, ‘Abqariyyat al-Imām ‘Alī (UK: Mu’assasat Hindāwī, 2017), p. 114.

⁴² See: Muslim ibn al-Ḥajjāj, Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim (Cairo: Dār al-Ḥadīth, 1412 AH), vol. 4, p. 2217.

⁴³ Aḥmad Zakī Ṣafwat, *Tarjumat ‘Alī ibn Abī Tālib* (Cairo: Matba‘at al-‘Ulūm, 1350 AH), p. 130.

Arabs of that time, as chronicled by some scholars of Arab history. There are even recorded instances of a person giving a speech that lasted an entire day!⁴⁴ Furthermore, there is a report in one of the works considered authentic by the Ahl al-Sunnah that states: one day the Prophet (ṣ) gave a sermon after Fajr prayers until Zuhra, then after that he continued the sermon until ‘Aṣr, and after that he continued giving the sermon until sunset.⁴⁵ The same source also narrates that Ibn ‘Abbās once gave a sermon that lasted from the time just after ‘Aṣr until Maghrib, and he was going on until people began shouting that it was time for prayer.⁴⁶ Many similar examples of this exist, and it is not surprising at all. Furthermore, it is known that the Arabs of that time had strong memories, and were thus able to memorize these lengthy sermons. Additionally, there were some companions of the Imām who always tried to write down and record whatever they heard from him, thereby saving it for posterity.

(7) Rhyming Prose: It has been alleged by some authors that the style used in *Nahj al-Balāghah* contains literary devices that were not known or employed in the early days, most important among which was rhyming prose (*saj’*). The Egyptian scholar Aḥmad Amīn (d. 1954) mentioned a couple of early and contemporary scholars who doubted the attribution of the contents of *Nahj al-Balāghah* to Amīr al-Mu’minīn for this reason.⁴⁷ The futility of this argument becomes evident when we see that there are even statements from the Noble Prophet (ṣ) himself that contained rhyming prose.⁴⁸ In fact, it takes only a little effort to find numerous orations recorded from the early period that contain such rhyming prose. Some scholars even say that the Qur’ān itself contains *saj’* and they give examples of verses that have this kind of rhyming structure.⁴⁹ Additionally, we note that Aḥmad Amīn referred to two scholars who made this claim: al-Ṣafadī and Huart, but the former

⁴⁴ See: Al-Jāhiz, *al-Bayān wal-Tabyīn* (Beirut: Dār Ṣāb, 1968), p. 76.

⁴⁵ Muslim ibn al-Ḥajjāj, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, vol. 4, p. 2217.

⁴⁶ *Ibid*, vol. 1, p. 491.

⁴⁷ Aḥmad Amīn, *Fajr al-Islam* (UK: Mu’assasat Hindāwī, 2017), p. 169.

⁴⁸ Al-Ṭabarānī, *al-Mu’jam al-Kabīr* (Cairo: Maktabat Ibn Taymiyyah), vol. 12, p. 69. (It states in part: *man ḥāshā māt, wa man māta fāt, wa kullu mā huwa ātin ātī...*). There are a number of other examples as well, even in works considered completely authentic, such as *Saḥīḥ Muslim*, where the Messenger of Allāh (ṣ) is reported to have employed rhyming prose. (See: Muslim ibn al-Ḥajjāj, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, vol. 4, p. 2088).

⁴⁹ Al-Taftāzānī, *Mukhtaṣar al-Ma‘ānī* (Qum: Dār al-Fikr, 1411 AH), p. 295.

has been shown to be a blind follower of Ibn Khallikān (mentioned earlier) and thus his opinion holds no weight, and the latter was an Orientalist whose purpose was to undermine Islam and its teachings, so his view has no value.

(8) Descriptions of Monotheism: Some have questioned the authenticity of *Nahj al-Balāghah* because it contains certain words and phrases, particularly in its descriptions of *tawhīd*, which were used much later by the Mu'tazilah. They say that this is a sure sign that the sermons and letters with such descriptions were later attributions to Imām ‘Alī, especially since al-Sayyid al-Raḍī himself inclined towards the Mu'tazilah. The Saudi scholar Ṣāliḥ al-Fawzān mentions this argument and claims that since the Rāfiḍah were known for taking teachings from the Mu'tazilah, al-Sharīf al-Murtadā fabricated *Nahj al-Balāghah* or participated in its fabrication due to the presence of Mu'tazilī descriptions of monotheism in the text.⁵⁰ Shaykh Aḥmad Salmān has responded to this claim by saying that this is the vilest of all accusations made regarding the *Nahj*, as it essentially means that because its contents do not agree with their set of beliefs, they find its attribution questionable! Instead of providing any rational evidence, the likes of Ṣāliḥ al-Fawzān only use their assumed beliefs as a yardstick for what to accept as authentic. Since the descriptions of *tawhīd* found in *Nahj al-Balāghah* differ from their own conceptions of *tawhīd*, they reject the text out of hand.⁵¹ Interestingly, the very same scholars accept other texts which are deemed fabrications and have no reliable chain of transmission simply because their contents align with their creed and system of beliefs.⁵²

(9) Scientific Facts: A number of contemporary thinkers have raised doubts about the authenticity of *Nahj al-Balāghah* due to the mention of certain facts and realities that were not commonly known at the time of Imām ‘Alī, and were understood only much later. The detailed description of how the heavens and earth came about, and other such phenomena, as well as some detailed philosophical and linguistic expositions, led such thinkers to claim that this work was authored much later and could not possibly have been spoken by the Imām. Yet the problem with

⁵⁰ Ṣāliḥ al-Fawzān, *al-Bayān li Akhṭā’ Ba’ḍ al-Kuttāb* (Riyadh: Dār ibn al-Jawzī li al-Nashr, 1427 AH), p. 101.

⁵¹ Aḥmad Salmān, *Nahj al-Balāghah Fawq al-Shubuhāt wal-Tashkīkāt* (Beirut: Dār al-Baydā’, 1435 AH), pp. 103–104.

⁵² Examples of such works include *Kitāb al-Radd ‘alā al-Jahmiyyah* attributed to Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal and *Kitāb al-Sunnah* attributed to ‘Abdullāh ibn Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal.

this argument is the general assumption that these facts were completely unknown among the Arabs at that time. While it is true that most of the lay people did not know many of these facts, there is no valid reason to claim that they were completely unknown in that era. We know, for example, of the engagement between different cultures in that period, and we see reports of how people from other lands, like India for example, did indeed travel to Arabia and interact with the people there. Furthermore, this whole argument is premised on the idea that Amīr al-Mu'minīn was an ordinary individual, while this is not the case. Being the closest person to the Noble Messenger (ṣ), he was made privy to many things that were hitherto unknown, and since the Prophet was a recipient of divine knowledge and revelation, there is nothing that would fall outside the realm of possibility as far as what the Imām could have been taught by the Prophet himself. Indeed, we have numerous traditions, reported in the works of both schools, that attest to the fact that the Messenger of Allāh (ṣ) taught Imām ‘Alī (‘a) certain secrets which nobody else knew.⁵³

(10) Alterations and Amendments: It has been claimed by some that while al-Sharīf al-Rađī did not himself make any false attributions, over time there were some extremist elements (like the *ghulāt*) who incorporated material which was not spoken by Amīr al-Mu'minīn into the *Nahj*. They further assert that because of this, the whole book becomes suspect, as one would never be certain whether the section being attributed to Imām ‘Alī was actually spoken by him or was added later into the work by others. In response we say that firstly, even if, hypothetically, this were to have happened – and there is no proof that it ever did – it would not make the entire work a fabrication. The only thing it would lead to is the need for scholars and experts to sift through the text to distinguish the authentic statements from the inauthentic ones, and this is something that we do with all ḥadīth texts anyway. Once we have identified the weak narrations that cannot be attributed to the Imām (‘a), the rest of the work would be deemed perfectly reliable, and there would no longer be any reason to doubt its contents. This is the generally accepted practice, even if we refute the notion of intentional malicious distortion of the text by late

⁵³ For instance, in one report Imām ‘Alī is quoted as having said, “The Messenger of Allāh (ṣ) taught me one thousand doors of knowledge, each of which opens up another thousand doors!” (See: al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfi*, vol. 1, p. 296).

corrupters, since there is a plethora of other reasons for the possible inclusion of weak traditions in the text. Those who follow the school of the Ahl al-Bayt believe that other than the Glorious Qur'ān, there is no book on earth that is 100% authentic and beyond scrutiny. Humans are imperfect beings, and their works are therefore imperfect. Mistakes are the order of the day, and this is especially true for early works, due to a variety of reasons. It is precisely this realization that has led Shī'ah scholars to reject the notion of a completely *ṣahīḥ* (authentic) ḥadīth compendium, and they do not accept the idea that works like *Ṣahīḥ al-Bukhārī* and *Ṣahīḥ Muslim* are entirely authentic, as the Sunnīs do. Secondly, if such distortion in the contents of *Nahj al-Balāghah* did actually occur, there can be only one of two possibilities: either the distortion took place after the book was compiled by al-Sayyid al-Raḍī, or it happened before he compiled the work. The first possibility cannot be accepted because of how popular the book became soon after al-Raḍī published it, and how widely circulated it was, with some individuals even memorizing its contents and writing commentaries on it. Furthermore, the original manuscript written by al-Raḍī was available to scholars and researchers for many centuries, and has been mentioned by them.⁵⁴ As for the second possibility, there is no evidence showing that it did actually happen, so the claim itself is spurious.⁵⁵

Having noted these ten points of doubt and the responses given to each by our scholars, we would like to briefly present the generally accepted position of most scholars when it comes to the question of authenticity of the contents of *Nahj al-Balāghah*. Most Shī'ah scholars have always considered *Nahj al-Balāghah* to be an important source from which we can learn the teachings of the Commander of the Faithful and get to drink from the sea of knowledge of the Prince of Believers, Amīr al-Mu'minīn ('a). It would suffice to see what the greatest scholars of the *madhhab* have said about this work in order to understand the value it holds in their eyes. They accept its provenance and have no doubt that it was compiled by al-Sharīf al-Raḍī. Furthermore, there is also no doubt that al-Raḍī deemed what he had collected and compiled in it to be the words of Imām 'Alī ('a), and nowhere in the text has he

⁵⁴ For instance, in his commentary, Ibn Abī al-Ḥadid says that he had access to the original manuscript written by al-Raḍī himself.

⁵⁵ A more detailed discussion about the doubts in the authenticity of *Nahj al-Balāghah*, including what some Western academics have to say about it, can be found in: Ghassemi Zavieh, *The Authenticity of Nahj al-Balāghah* (Masters Thesis), McGill University, 1994.

explicitly expressed misgivings about the attribution of any statement to the Imām. However, this does not mean that our scholars accept everything in the *Nahj* is from Imām ‘Alī, and as we have mentioned earlier, there is no book that is deemed one hundred percent authentic, other than the Glorious Qur’ān.

The question then is: what is the correct way to approach the text of *Nahj al-Balāghah*? Since our scholars have not generally said that its contents are entirely authentic, even though it is a reliable text overall, it should be dealt with the way we deal with other important ḥadīth texts, like *al-Kāfi*, for example. This means that those who are experts in the field should be relied upon to scrutinize what is found in the *Nahj* and give their verdict regarding the reliability of specific statements. Some scholars have outlined in detail how one should go about navigating the text of the *Nahj* and dealing with those sections about which one gets the feeling of uncertainty. They say that if the statement pertains to legal or jurisprudential matters, then one should leave it to the jurists to decipher its scope and validity. Such statements are, however, very few in *Nahj al-Balāghah* to begin with. If the statement relates to creedal matters, then the Shī‘ī creed is generally known, so if it conforms to what is certainly part of Shī‘ī beliefs, then there is no problem accepting it. However, if it contravenes the Shī‘ī creed then it is rejected. If the statement is about a historical event or details thereof, there is no problem in accepting it as long as we have no established reason for rejecting it, such as a stronger report that differs in its details. Finally, if the statement pertains to an ethical matter, such as advice on how to behave or act, then one can also accept this unless there is a good reason not to do so.⁵⁶

Regarding the contents of *Nahj al-Balāghah* related to creedal matters, there are a number of points that have been deemed questionable by some. We will herewith present a few examples of these and then mention the responses given by our scholars:

(1) Tawassul and Istighāthah: Seeking intercession and intermediation through the chosen ones of Allāh (such as Prophets and Imāms) is generally an accepted practice among the Shī‘ah. However, some have misinterpreted the following statement of the Imām, “When you have any need [that you wish for] from

⁵⁶ Ahmad Salmān, *Nahj al-Balāghah Fawq al-Shubuhāt*, pp. 143-144.

Allāh, the Glorified, then start by sending salutations on the Prophet (*s*) and then ask Allāh for your need, for Allāh, the Most High, is too generous to fulfil one of the two supplications that are made to Him and refuse the other.”⁵⁷ They claim that since Imām ‘Alī did not instruct anyone to go to the grave of the Prophet, or of any of the saints (*awliyā’*), it means that he was not a proponent of intercession as the Shī‘ah practice it.⁵⁸ The answer to this faulty logic is simple: the fact that Amīr al-Mu’minīn instructed believers to send salutations upon the Messenger of Allāh (*s*) does not negate the validity of seeking intercession or visiting the blessed graves of the Prophet and his pure progeny. Furthermore, this method of supplication which is preceded by *ṣalawāt* is actually a form of intercession itself.

(2) The Divine Appointment of Imāms: It is interesting to note that some have tried to question the beliefs of the Shī‘ah by claiming that there is nothing in *Nahj al-Balāghah* that speaks of Imāms as divine appointees.⁵⁹ In response, we say that firstly it has never been claimed by anyone that *Nahj al-Balāghah* contains all the words Imām ‘Alī (*‘a*) ever spoke. So not finding something in the *Nahj* does not automatically mean that Amīr al-Mu’minīn never said anything about it. Secondly, one who reads the work carefully will indeed find therein references to the divine nature of the appointment of Imāms (or what is termed *al-imāmah al-ilāhiyyah*). One example is the Sermon of Shiqshiqiyah in which Imām ‘Alī describes himself as the rightful successor of the Prophet whose right was usurped by others. Another example is the second sermon, in which the Imām describes the family of the Prophet as the guardians of his secret, the keepers of his knowledge, etc. In it, he clearly says that no one in the *ummah* can ever be compared to the family of the Prophet (*s*), and then goes on to describe their virtues and merits. Actually, there are a number of places in *Nahj al-Balāghah* where the Imām speaks of the Ahl al-Bayt explicitly, and mentions their superiority over others and how Allāh has especially blessed them. Nevertheless, those who object to the idea of the divinely appointed Imām use some of Amīr al-Mu’minīn’s statements to further their case. For instance, when he was approached by the people after the assassination of ‘Uthmān, the Imām

⁵⁷ Al-Rađī, *Nahj al-Balāghah*, aphorism no. 350.

⁵⁸ Al-Jumay‘ān, *Qirā’ah Rāshidah li Kitāb Nahj al-Balāghah* (1427 AH), p. 88.

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, p. 18.

said, “Leave me and approach someone else instead...”⁶⁰ Hence, they say if indeed the Imām was appointed by Allāh, why would he tell the people to choose someone else to lead them in his stead? In fact, some Sunnī commentators of the *Nahj* also use this and other similar statements of the Imām to argue that the Prophet (ṣ) had not appointed him as his successor as the Shī‘ah claim.⁶¹ In response to this, certain scholars claimed that these specific statements have been falsely attributed to the Imām, while others said that they have been misinterpreted and misrepresented. Indeed, there are numerous other traditions and statements which categorically state that the Imām was appointed by the Prophet (ṣ), by the command of Allāh.

(3) Infallibility: Those who take aim at Shī‘ī beliefs through what is found in *Nahj al-Balāghah* say that there are passages within the text that belie the notion that Imām ‘Alī was infallible (*ma’sūm*). For one, he admits his own sins in his supplications, saying that he has wronged himself.⁶² Unfortunately, it seems they have not understood what is meant by such invocations, for we have the same kind of language employed in the supplications of the Messenger of Allāh (ṣ) himself, yet none of the Muslims object to the infallibility of the Prophet. Actually, such invocations were recited as a means of teaching the believers how they should supplicate to Allāh, and even if we were to assume that the Imām was supplicating for himself, and repenting or seeking forgiveness, it would not be for committing forbidden actions or disobeying Allāh. Rather, it may have been because of his abandoning a better course of action (*tark al-awlā*), which is not a sin *per se*, but saints still reprimand themselves for such acts. Furthermore, the Infallibles supplicate with the intention of praying for the entire nation of believers, not just themselves. And this is due to their kindness and compassion for the believers. A second passage that those who question the belief in infallibility of Imāms produce as evidence is the statement wherein Amīr al-Mu’minīn is reported to have said, “I do not regard myself to be above erring, nor am I safe from this in my actions, unless Allāh suffices me in that which He has more control over than me.”⁶³ They take this to be an

⁶⁰ Al-Raḍī, *Nahj al-Balāghah*, sermon no. 91.

⁶¹ Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd, *Sharḥ Nahj al-Balāghah* (Qum: Maktabat Ayatullah Mar‘ashī, 1404 AH), vol. 7, pp. 33-34.

⁶² Al-Raḍī, *Nahj al-Balāghah*, sermon no. 215.

⁶³ *Ibid*, sermon no. 216.

admission by Imām ‘Alī (‘a) that he is not infallible.⁶⁴ In response, we note that the problem is in their misunderstanding of infallibility. They think it is an intrinsic quality of the infallible individuals, whereas in reality, it is a special grace that Allāh grants to them which leaves them with no desire for sin or disobedience, despite having the ability to do both.⁶⁵

(4) The Question of Revelation: In some passages of *Nahj al-Balāghah*, there is an exposition on the nature of revelation and how it came to a close with the Final Messenger and the Seal of the Prophets. Some have tried to argue that this shows there is no link between the Ahl al-Bayt and the heavens, and therefore, the progeny of the Noble Prophet (ṣ) were just ordinary individuals like everyone else. One such passage states: “He sent him after an interval in the sequence of Messengers, during a period of conflicting opinions [among the people]. He made him follow the earlier Messengers and through him brought revelation to a close.”⁶⁶ However, in response we say that it is not a claim of the Shī‘ah that revelation was sent down to the Ahl al-Bayt after the Messenger of Allāh, thereby making them recipients of divine revelation the same way the Noble Prophet (ṣ) was its recipient. Rather, they were blessed with special knowledge from Allāh through the Prophet, by inspiration, and according to some traditions, through the angels as well.⁶⁷

(5) The Uprightness of All Companions: Even though it is neither from the foundational principles (*uṣūl*) of the religion of Islam, nor its corollaries (*furū‘*), there are some Muslims who give this matter a lot of importance, and treat it as if it were one of the pillars of faith without which one would lose his way and exit the fold of Islam! Some of them even adduce certain passages from *Nahj al-Balāghah* to prove that all the Companions were indeed upright and just individuals, and to negate the claim of the Shī‘ah that there were among them some who were more upright than others, and even some who lost their way. One such passage states: “I have seen the companions of Muḥammad (ṣ), and I do not see anyone among you resembling them. They spent their days with dishevelled hair and dusty faces, and passed the night in

⁶⁴ Al-Jumay‘ān, *Qirā’ah Rāshidah li Kitāb Nahj al-Balāghah*, p. 27.

⁶⁵ Al-Hillī, *al-Bāb al-Ḥādī ‘Ashar* (Mashhad: Astane Qudse Razavi, 1370 AH Solar), p. 37.

⁶⁶ Al-Raḍī, *Nahj al-Balāghah*, sermon no. 133.

⁶⁷ Al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfi*, vol. 1, p. 271, h. 5.

prostration and standing in worship. They would alternate between placing their foreheads and their cheeks [on the earth], and stood [quivering], as if their feet were on live coals, from the thought of their resurrection. Between their eyes were calluses [that looked] like the knees of goats, from their long prostrations. When Allāh was mentioned, their eyes flowed with tears until their collars became wet, and they trembled just as trees shake on a stormy day, out of fear of punishment and hope for reward [from the Almighty].”⁶⁸ In response to this we say that firstly, the Shī‘ah believe that among the Companions were some virtuous individuals and some corrupt individuals. We do not believe that all the Companions strayed from the right path. At most, we only say that not all of them were upright or just. In fact, it is narrated that there were twelve thousand companions of the Noble Prophet, eight thousand from Madīnah, two thousand from Makkah, and two thousand among the *tulaqā’* (freed slaves), many of whom would weep in their worship, out of awe of Allāh.⁶⁹ Secondly, there are statements in *Nahj al-Balāghah* wherein the Imām voices his displeasure at some of the Companions. Thirdly, it is amazing how the same people who raised an objection to *Nahj al-Balāghah* because it contains statements cursing the companions, as noted above, now say that the book proves the uprightness of the Companions!

These were the misgivings pertaining to creedal matters. There are also questions raised about a number of historical reports contained in *Nahj al-Balāghah*. Some of these questions include:

(1) The People of Syria: Some historians have tried to portray the differences between Imām ‘Alī and the Umayyads in the matter of avenging ‘Uthmān as political rivalry that had nothing to do with religion at all. They have referred to passages of *Nahj al-Balāghah* to make their case for this position, saying that Imām ‘Alī never called the Syrians apostates; rather, he considered them believers and Muslims. That is why he said, “The whole thing began when we and the Syrians met in an encounter, although our Lord is one and the same, and our Prophet is one and the same, and our call in Islam is the same... we only differed on the question of

⁶⁸ Al-Rađī, *Nahj al-Balāghah*, sermon no. 96.

⁶⁹ See: Al-Ṣadūq, *al-Khiṣāl*, vol. 2, pp. 639-640, h. 15.

‘Uthmān’s blood...’⁷⁰ In response, firstly we note that some scholars have questioned the authenticity of this passage because it may have been from the reports of the fabricator Sayf ibn ‘Umar.⁷¹ Secondly, the Imām was speaking regarding their apparent position as believers, but he did not endorse their understanding of Islam or categorically define them as true believers. There is a huge difference between these two, for saying that someone is a Muslim is quite different from saying that he is apparently a follower of Islam. We know that if someone professes the faith and recites the testimonies thereof (*shahādatayn*), he is deemed a Muslim. It was this outward acceptance of Islam that the Imām was referring to. Thirdly, this letter was sent to argue a specific case against those enemies who tried to claim that they simply rose up to avenge ‘Uthmān and nothing more. He aimed to show the weakness of their argument, and upon reading the rest of the letter it becomes evident that the Imām was using a conciliatory tone to try and avoid bloodshed, which they adamantly insisted upon. Finally, anyone who reads history would know the reality of the relationship between Imām ‘Alī and Mu‘āwiyah, and what each of them stood for. Therefore, reducing the whole conflict to merely political differences is completely wrong.

(2) The Imām’s Rebuke of his Shī‘ah: This is one of the issues raised by those who stand against the Shī‘ah. They point out that the Imām himself criticized his followers, especially among the people of Kūfah. One example they quote is his addressing his followers and saying to them, “I am troubled by those who do not obey when I command and do not respond when I call... I stand among you shouting and call out to you for help, yet you neither listen to my words nor obey my orders, until [your] actions manifest their evil consequences. Then no blood can be avenged with you and no goal can be achieved.”⁷² In answering this claim, firstly it should be remembered that the orations of Amīr al-Mu‘minīn (‘a) were addressed to those who were present at that time, and not to all people. Therefore, those who have been described by him in such a manner were specific individuals who were in the audience as he spoke. Secondly, this statement (and others like it) were addressed

⁷⁰ Al-Rađī, *Nahj al-Balāghah*, letter no. 58.

⁷¹ Al-Tustarī, *Bahj al-Šabāgha fī Sharḥ Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 9, p. 467.

⁷² Al-Rađī, *Nahj al-Balāghah*, sermon no. 39.

to his army of Kūfans at that time, and these were not a homogenous lot in terms of their beliefs, meaning they were not all Shī‘ahs. Rather, the Shī‘ah were a minority whereas the rest were fighting for Amīr al-Mu’minīn because they considered him to be the caliph of the Muslims. Many of them belonged to tribes who had sworn allegiance en masse, and not because they believed Imām ‘Alī to be the appointed successor of the Noble Prophet (ṣ). Some of the fighters even had ulterior, worldly motives such as desire for spoils of war. Thirdly, there are also statements in *Nahj al-Balāghah* and other early sources wherein the Imām praises the people of Kūfah. For example, in one of his letters addressed to the Kūfans, the Imām refers to them as, “the Noble Helpers and the elite among the Arabs.”⁷³ Finally, if these people being rebuked by the Imām were the Shī‘ah, then where were the Ahl al-Sunnah? If we were to accept, for argument’s sake, that all those who were in his army were Shī‘ah, it means the Ahl al-Sunnah were those who stood and fought against him, thereby making their crime far worse. If the Shī‘ah fell short in their assistance of the Imām and were therefore rebuked by him, at least they were not as bad as those who declared open enmity and drew swords to fight him!

We also find that some have questioned the authenticity of *Nahj al-Balāghah* due to certain jurisprudential matters it contains. We will look at two examples here and mention the responses given by our scholars to the same:

(1) The Proscription of Grieving (*al-jaza‘*): One of the things for which the Shī‘ah are known is their mourning ceremonies where they gather, to recall the tragedy of Karbalā’ as well as the martyrdom of other Infallibles, and express their grief through crying and weeping. This is done in order to keep the memory of these individuals alive and remind the believers of the injustice that was done to them as well as their lofty teachings. Certain passages of *Nahj al-Balāghah* are quoted by some to claim that Imām ‘Alī (‘a) himself forbade the expression of grief in this way. One of the examples they give is the statement of Amīr al-Mu’minīn to Shurahbil al-Shibāmī, who was one of the nobles of his tribe, when he heard women weeping after the Battle of Ḥiṭṭin. The Imām said to him, “Do your women have control over you as regards what [weeping] I hear? Do you not prevent them from this lamenting?”⁷⁴

⁷³ Ibid, letter no. 1.

⁷⁴ Ibid, aphorism no. 313.

However, it should be understood that firstly, such passages do not denote proscription (*tahrīm*), but rather disapproval (*karāhah*). Secondly, the example mentioned above pertains to a specific case, since the army was in a state of war and the lamentation of women would cause the soldiers to lose their resolve. Thirdly, the Shī‘ah do not conduct mourning ceremonies to commemorate the tragedy of Karbalā⁷⁵ as a mere emotional outburst. Rather, they do so because of the numerous traditions emphasizing the importance of commemorating and mourning the martyrs of Karbalā⁷⁶. This was something that even the Noble Prophet (ṣ) and the foremost among the Companions had practiced. The Prophet had cried over the death of his son Ibrāhīm and also when he was told about what would happen to his grandson al-Ḥusayn (‘a). And there are reports of some Companions and wives of the Prophet lamenting over their dead as well.⁷⁵

(2) The Time of Prayer: Some have adduced the text of *Nahj al-Balāghah* to prove that the Shī‘ah are going against the teachings of Amīr al-Mu‘minīn (‘a) with respect to the times of prayer (*awqāt al-ṣalāt*). They note that in the 52nd letter, the Imām says, “Offer the *zuhr* prayer with the people until the sun shifts [and its shade extends] to the extent of the [wall of a] goats’ pen. Offer the *‘asr* prayer with them while the sun is still shining brightly, in a part of the day wherein one could still travel the distance of two *farsakhs* [in daylight]. Offer the *maghrib* prayer with them when the fasting one opens his fast and the pilgrim proceeds to Minā. Offer the *‘ishā* prayer with them [from] when the twilight disappears until a third of the night. And offer the early morning prayer with them when a man can recognize the face of his companion.” Yet despite his mentioning five separate times, the Shī‘ah combine their prayers and pray three times a day instead of five. In response, we say that those who have raised this doubt seem to be ignorant about basic Shī‘ī jurisprudence. No one says that there are three times for prayer in a day, as alleged. Rather, it is only said that the *zuhrayn* and *maghrabayn* prayers share part of their respective times, with the beginning time (*awwal al-waqt*) of each being specifically for *zuhr* and *maghrib* respectively. Furthermore, the timings mentioned by Amīr al-Mu‘minīn for *zuhr* and *‘asr*, and *maghrib* and *‘ishā*, is only to explain how the beginning time is specifically for the first of the two prayers, and that the gap between the prayers is

⁷⁵ Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī, *Fath al-Bārī Sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* (Beirut: Dār al-Ma‘rifah, 1379 AH), vol. 5, p. 74.

a time given for the performance of recommended (*nāfilah*) prayers. Further details regarding this can be found in other narrations from Imām al-Bāqir (‘a).⁷⁶ Moreover, there are narrations in Sunnī sources that also permit the combining of prayers, even without a reason like rain, etc. Therefore, those who raise this doubt seem to have neglected what is found even in their own texts.

These were some of the doubts that have been raised regarding the text of *Nahj al-Balāghah* and their responses. We will also deal with some of the other doubts as we embark on the commentary, as and where necessary. Suffice it to say that scholars have attempted to provide answers to all these misgivings and on the whole, most of the contents of *Nahj al-Balāghah* is deemed entirely authentic.

The Present Commentary

The need for an English commentary of *Nahj al-Balāghah* cannot be overstated. While it is true that many capable scholars have worked on a much-needed good English translation of the *Nahj*, it was felt that this is one of those works that no translation can ever do justice to. That is why we decided to embark on writing a commentary which is based on the available commentaries in other languages, primarily Arabic, that were written much earlier by well-known scholars. We decided to name this work *Pinnacle of Eloquence*, because that is what the *Nahj* is – the absolute pinnacle of human eloquence. Of course, the title is not a translation of *Nahj al-Balāghah*, which means the path of eloquence, or as one translator put it, ‘the measure of eloquence’. Growing up, we always thought it meant the peak of eloquence, as that was the title given to one of the first English translations of the text. Having gone through the commentaries that would be used as the main references for this work, it was decided that the book would require five volumes. The first three volumes will be a commentary on the sermons, the fourth will be on the letters, and the final volume will be an explanation of the aphorisms and sayings of the Imām, God-willing.

This work is not meant to be exhaustive. As the first complete commentary of *Nahj al-Balāghah* in English, it is aimed at making a difficult text more accessible to lay readers and non-specialists. Indeed, there are many commentaries of the *Nahj* in

⁷⁶ See: al-Ṣadūq, *Man Lā Yahduruhu al-Faqīh*, vol. 1, p. 217.

Arabic, Persian, Urdu, and other languages that extend to numerous hefty tomes, some running to twenty or more volumes, and even these are not exhaustive. Our commentary is meant to take readers beyond the literal meaning of the text when necessary, to clarify difficult passages, and to give a context to the words of the Imām especially when it is not apparent from the text itself. Our hope is that this exposition will enable readers to interact on various levels with the *Nahj*. We intend to present our commentary in a style which is similar to that used by the editor of the Study Qur’ān. This is because we noted from our own reading of the Study Qur’ān, that the method of referring to the sources was much easier and less intrusive for the reader.

Herewith are the main source commentaries that have been used with a brief introduction to each:

(1) **Quṭb al-Dīn Abū al-Ḥusayn Sa‘īd ibn Hibatillāh al-Rāwandī** (d. 573 AH), *Minhāj al-Barā‘ah fī Sharḥ Nahj al-Balāghah*: This is the oldest commentary we have used in this work. Quṭb al-Dīn al-Rāwandī completed writing his commentary at the end of Sha‘bān 556 AH, and it subsequently became a source for other commentaries that were written later. Though it is largely a literary commentary, it does contain certain theological discussions as well. Al-Rāwandī apparently did not write the title of his book; it was his student Muntajab al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 585 AH) who first mentioned the title as *Minhāj al-Barā‘ah fī Sharḥ Nahj al-Balāghah*. Some other commentators like Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd considered al-Rāwandī’s work to be the earliest commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*. However, as noted above, recent research has shown that there were at least three other commentaries that predate al-Rāwandi’s. In his introduction, al-Rāwandī says that he initially wrote a detailed commentary on the first sermon of the *Nahj*, and only after that was completed did he decide to write a commentary on the whole of *Nahj al-Balāghah*. For this reason, only the first sermon has been explained in detail by him, while for the rest of the sermons and letters he has only offered explanations for the difficult words and phrases.

(2) **‘Izz al-Dīn ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd ibn Hibatillāh ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd** (d. 656 AH), *Sharḥ Nahj al-Balāghah*: This is arguably the most famous commentary of *Nahj al-Balāghah*. One of the reasons for this is, perhaps, that it refers to both Shī‘ī and Sunnī sources, and covers a wide range of issues, including the literary, historical, and theological.

In his introduction, Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd mentions some of his own beliefs, such as the superiority of ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib over the other caliphs, and that those who rebelled against him will be inmates of Hell. However, he also thought that the Prophet (ṣ) made no explicit appointment regarding his successor. There are also certain things mentioned in this commentary that go against the beliefs of the Imāmī Shī‘ah. That is to be expected of a Mu‘tazilī Shāfi‘ī scholar like Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd. Based on what he says at the end of his work, it took him four years and eight months to write this commentary – the same as the duration of the caliphate of Imām ‘Alī (‘a). He completed it in the year 649 AH, and later gifted the work to the Shī‘ah vizier of the Abbasid court, Ibn ‘Alqamā, receiving some handsome rewards and gifts in return.

(3) Kamāl al-Dīn Maytham ibn ‘Alī ibn Maytham al-Bahrānī (d. 679/699 AH), *Sharḥ Nahj al-Balāghah*: The title of this commentary is *Miṣbāḥ al-Sālikīn*, and as noted above, al-Bahrānī also wrote an abridged version of it titled *Ikhtiyār Miṣbāḥ al-Sālikīn*. This commentary is quite versatile in that it contains mystical and theological discussions as well as literary and historical discourses. Al-Bahrānī has prefaced his commentary with a lengthy introduction, and has also commented on al-Sayyid al-Raḍī’s introduction to the text. He also discusses certain logical and linguistic concepts such as the various types of meanings that can be implied by words, and then proceeds to refer to these in his commentary on various sermons, letters and sayings. Al-Bahrānī was requested to author this work by the Ismā‘īlī historian and vizier to the Mongol emperor Hulāgū Khān, ‘Aṭā’ullāh Malik al-Juwainī. He did not mention any title for his main work, but after completing the abridged version, he gave it the title *Ikhtiyār Miṣbāḥ al-Sālikīn*, so Aghā Buzurg Tehrānī inferred from this that his main commentary was titled *Miṣbāḥ al-Sālikīn*.⁷⁷ Al-Bahrānī completed this work in 677 AH, and in some instances he makes references to earlier commentaries and either accepts or rejects what their authors have said.

(4) Ḥabībullāh Muḥammad ibn Hāshim al-Mūsawī al-Khū‘ī (d. 1324 AH), *Minhāj al-Barā‘ah fī Sharḥ Nahj al-Balāghah*: This commentary has the same title as the earlier one by al-Rāwandī. It was written with the intention of simplifying some of the difficult words and phrases found in the *Nahj*. One of the unique qualities of this commentary is the mention of the chains of transmission of the sermons, letters and

⁷⁷ Tehrānī, *al-Dhāri‘ah ilā Taṣānīf al-Shī‘ah*, vol. 21, p. 110.

sayings, as well as some of the historical context thereof. Al-Khū'ī wrote the commentary of 229 sermons of *Nahj al-Balāghah* but passed away before he could complete the rest. Later, the esteemed scholars Hasanzādeh Āmulī (d. 1443 AH) and Muḥammad Bāqir Kamare’ī (d. 1415 AH) completed his work, with the latter commenting on the aphorisms and the former completing the remaining sermons and letters of the Imām (‘a). Though he had written other books, this work was the author’s magnum opus. While acknowledging the earlier commentaries written on the *Nahj*, al-Khū'ī expressed his disapproval regarding some of their flaws. From all the early commentaries, he found al-Bahrānī’s to be the best, though he also criticized it for the author’s inattention to ḥadīth and over reliance on rational discourse. Since he felt that none of the available commentaries had done due justice to the *Nahj*, al-Khū'ī embarked on authoring his own commentary. Despite being unable to complete his work, al-Khū'ī is said to have presented part of his work to the Qājār ruler Muẓaffar al-Dīn, who proceeded to order that it should be published.

(5) **Muḥammad Jawād ibn Maḥmūd Āl Mughniyah al-Āmilī (d. 1400 AH), *Fī Zilāl Nahj al-Balāghah*:** This commentary of *Nahj al-Balāghah* was first printed in four volumes in 1972 by the Lebanese publishing house Dār al-‘Ilm lil-Malāyīn. In his introduction, the author notes that every commentary is subjective and reflects the author’s own worldview. He then goes on to briefly speak about his own worldview and what he considers the role of religion to be in the life of human beings. He also expresses appreciation for the work that has already been done by scholars of the past as pertains to the commentary of the *Nahj*. At the same time, he admits that he has rejected some of their views which he found wanting or disagreed with, as he authored his own commentary. Mughniyah adopts the style that he used in his exegesis of the Qur’ān, *al-Kāshif*. He divides long texts into smaller sections thematically, and then proceeds to give a commentary on each section. He first clarifies the meaning of the vocabulary used, then moves on to discuss the grammatical structure of the phrases. Subsequently, he discusses the meaning of each section at length, focusing on the parts he deems most important. Though this commentary is relatively shorter, it contains some interesting discussions that are not found in other commentaries.

(6) **Muhammad Taqī ibn Muhammad Kāzim al-Tustarī** (d. 1415 AH), *Bahj al-Ṣabāgha fī Sharḥ Nahj al-Balāghah*: This fourteen-volume commentary is one of the most interesting commentaries on *Nahj al-Balāghah* ever written. The author discusses the variances in the words and phrases as found in the different manuscripts of the text, and then gives his opinion on the most correct version, based on the Qur’ān and Ḥadīth. Having studied the earlier commentaries by Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd, al-Baḥrānī, and al-Khū’ī, ‘Allāmah Muḥammad Taqī Shūshtarī (which is read al-Tustarī in Arabic) decided that since they were all incomplete in some way, he would embark on writing a commentary that filled the gaps left by them. He notes at the end of his introduction that he named his work *Bahj al-Ṣabāghah* (lit. the Seasoning of Delight) because as he was engrossed in writing the commentary, Allāh blessed him with a special bounty that filled him with joy and delight. What is unique about this commentary is that it has been arranged thematically, and not in the order of the text as found in the *Nahj*. The author has divided his commentary into sixty chapters (*faṣl*), and a total of 933 topics (*‘unwān*). Each volume contains a list of all the chapters contained therein. Though it is difficult to navigate this work, since its recent digitization, this problem has been greatly mitigated and finding the commentary of any specific section of *Nahj al-Balāghah* has become much easier. The inclusion of the historical context for most of the sermons and letters makes this commentary more valuable.

(7) **Muhammad Taqī Ja‘farī al-Tabrīzī** (d. 1419 AH), *Tafsīr Nahj al-Balāghah*: This Persian commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah* is one of the well-known contemporary commentaries. The author was a prolific writer and researcher whose interests included subjects such as philosophy and mysticism, and he studied the works of both non-Muslim western academics as well as Muslim scholars. He spent the last two decades of his life working on a comprehensive translation and commentary of the *Nahj*. To this end, he referred to numerous variegated sources such as exegeses, historical works, books of poetry, and even works by foreign researchers. Due to his ill health, he was only able to translate and comment on the first 185 sermons of *Nahj al-Balāghah*, the last of which he wrote while undergoing treatment in London. His valuable but incomplete work was published in 27 volumes. The uniqueness of this commentary is in its comprehensive nature. The author has addressed a wide range of issues ranging from the social and legal to the philosophical and mystical.

He has addressed political matters and theological debates, as well as psychological discussions. In short, it is its wide scope that makes this commentary stand out. Had he continued until the end in the same style, his commentary would have spanned at least 40 volumes. ‘Allāmah Ja‘fārī reserved the entire first volume (of more than 300 pages) for his introduction, in which he also speaks about the merits and qualities of Amīr al-Mu’minīn (‘a).

(8) **Nāṣir ibn Muḥammad Karīm Makārim al-Shirāzī (b. 1345 AH), *Nafahāt al-Wilāyah*:** The complete title of this commentary is *Nafahāt al-Wilāyah - Sharḥun Ḥasriyyun Jāmi‘un li Nahj al-Balāghah*. As noted in the title, this work aims to present a comprehensive contemporary commentary on the *Nahj*. It was published about seven years before the author’s Persian commentary titled *Payāme Imām Amīr al-Mu’minīn* (‘a). Both works were carried out by a group of scholars under the author’s supervision. The Persian commentary was published in 15 volumes while this Arabic version was published in 10 volumes. The Persian commentary is complete, and covers all the sermons, letters, and sayings of Imām ‘Alī (‘a). It took twenty years to write, and was completed in the year 1433 AH. The Arabic *Nafahāt*, however, is not complete and only goes up to the 53rd letter of *Nahj al-Balāghah*. Since the author is the same, we have referred to both works in tandem, and wherever the Arabic commentary is lacking, that is made up for by the Persian one. However, the Arabic text is the primary reference, and that is why we have not included both works as separate sources.

(9) **‘Abdullāh Jawādī al-Āmulī (b. 1352 AH), *Salūnī Qabla an Tafsīdūnī*:** This is the latest commentary which is still being published (5 volumes have been published to date), with about two new volumes released annually. Since the publication of this work coincides with our own commentary, we have referred to it up to the point of availability and will continue to do so in later volumes, God-willing. One of the unique features of this commentary is the particular importance given to the context of the sermons of Imām ‘Alī, which in turn gives us a better understanding of the background and circumstances surrounding what he said.

Aside from the above, we occasionally refer to other works such as *Tamām Nahj al-Balāghah*, and certain secondary sources as well. In each case, we have mentioned the work that has been referred to so that those who wish to check the references

may do so. Our target audience is primarily those who are interested in a detailed understanding of the contents of *Nahj al-Balāghah*, but cannot access the original commentaries in Arabic or Persian. However, even academics and scholars who are able to read the original commentaries might find it useful to get a brief idea of the text from this commentary before proceeding to delve deeper and refer to the primary sources whenever they deem it necessary. To make the text more accessible, we have opted to use the Study Qur’ān style of referencing, where we refer to the primary source with a simple letter, like (R), or (T), and the reader can then refer to that source when needed. It is only in the few instances where secondary sources have been used that we mention them by name. Aside from this, the usual conventions when it comes to naming, transliteration, etc. have been employed.

Out of the many different editions available, the one upon which this commentary is based was published by al-‘Atabah al-‘Alawiyyah in Najaf, in conjunction with the Amīr al-Mu’minīn (‘a) library in Mashhad, in the year 1437 AH.⁷⁸ It has been critically edited by al-Shaykh Qays Bahjat al-‘Attār, who referred to a sizeable number of different manuscripts, over twenty of which were in good condition and could be easily read. Out of these, he selected four main manuscripts which he carefully compared before coming up with his final edition. The primary manuscript selected was that of ‘Alī ibn Muḥammad ibn al-Sakūn al-Hillī (d. circa 600 AH), which is said to have been written around 564 AH. Ibn al-Sakūn was an individual who was known for his erudition and expertise in language and grammar, as well as his eloquence.⁷⁹ During his lifetime, he also copied manuscripts of other important works such as *al-Ṣahifah al-Sajjādiyyah*, the *Amālī* of al-Shaykh al-Ṣadūq, *al-Miṣbāḥ al-Kabīr* and *al-Miṣbāḥ al-Ṣaghīr* by al-Shaykh al-Ṭūsī, and others.

The differences between manuscripts are of many types, and al-‘Attār lists over twenty types of variance in his introduction, including differences in wording, verb tenses, use of conjunctions or lack thereof, etc.⁸⁰ Interestingly, there are even variances between the different copies of Ibn al-Sakūn’s own manuscript. The possible reasons for this are that he might have made some changes to subsequent manuscripts based

⁷⁸ In a few instances where there are slight variances in the manuscripts, we have opted to select the one that best fits the context of the statement. However, this does not result in any major difference in the overall meaning.

⁷⁹ Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī, *Mujam al-Udabā'*, vol. 15, p. 75.

⁸⁰ Al-‘Attār (ed.), *Nahj al-Balāghah*, pp. 14-16.

on new material he came across, or that he did not stick to a single source and used multiple sources for his manuscripts. Another possibility is that Ibn al-Sakūn used to teach the *Nahj* and scrutinize the language and grammar of the text while he did so, giving his own opinions on the same and recording them alongside what he had come across in the sources. In any case, al-‘Attār states that all his renditions and corrections are of the highest standards in terms of accuracy and eloquence, and none of them contain any major flaws or errors.

We did not deem it necessary, for our purposes in this commentary, to repeat the footnotes of the published Arabic text, with all its references to the variances found in the different manuscripts consulted. That is something only a specialist would be interested in, and specialists would easily be able to access the original Arabic text to find this if they need to. In the few instances where it was noted that a completely different meaning is given in a variant reading, we have attempted to highlight the same by mentioning it in the commentary. Most of the variances, however, do not change the general connotation of the speech of the Imām (‘a). According to Sayyid Jawād al-Muṣṭafawī, there are 249 words that have been recorded with variances in the different manuscripts of *Nahj al-Balāghah*.⁸¹ Indeed, a separate tome would be required to investigate all the variances and their sources, and that is beyond the scope of our work here.

⁸¹ Al-Muṣṭafawī, *al-Kāshif ‘an Alfāz Nahj al-Balāghah*, Appendix.

AL-SAYYID AL-RADĪ'S INTRODUCTION

My Lord, help and aid [me].

We proceed after praising Allāh, Who made [His] praise the price of His bounties, the refuge from His trials, the pathway to His Gardens [of Paradise], and the means for increase of His favours. And blessings be upon His Messenger, the Prophet of mercy, the leader of all leaders, the beacon of light for the community, the chosen one from origins most noble, and a genealogy of honour longstanding; [from] the plantation with deep-rooted glory, and the branch of sublimity full of fruits and foliage. And [blessings be] upon his Ahl al-Bayt who are lanterns [of guidance] in the darkness, means of protection for the nations, shining lamp-posts of the religion, and the highest standards of greatness [and merit]. May Allāh shower them all with blessings befitting their distinction, as reward for their actions and commensurate with the excellence of their lineage and origin, [for] as long as the mornings dawn at sunrise and the risen stars set.

In my early age and the prime of my youth, I began compiling a book on the unique traits of the Imāms ('a), covering the accounts of their virtues and their eloquent statements. I was motivated to embark on this by a goal which I mentioned at the beginning of the book, making it my introduction. I finalized the portion pertaining to the unique qualities of Amīr al-Mu'minīn, 'Alī ('a), but I could not complete the remainder of the book due to the impediments of the time and hinderances that came about in those days. I divided the book into [several] chapters and sections, placing at the end a section comprising what has been narrated from him ('a) of pithy sayings, containing advice and wise counsel, as well as maxims and proverbs, instead of his lengthy sermons and detailed letters.

A number of friends expressed admiration for the contents of the section that we have mentioned, appreciating its excellence and being awed by its clear eloquence. Hence, they asked me to start compiling a book which would cover a selection of the

words of Amīr al-Mu'minīn ('a) in all its various forms and diverse types, including sermons, letters, sayings, and adages. They knew that all this contains amazing eloquence, astounding articulateness, gems of Arabic expressions, and brilliant statements pertaining to faith and this world, none of which has been collected in any treatise, nor is it found compiled in any book. [They were especially interested in this] since Amīr al-Mu'minīn ('a) is the pathway to eloquence and its wellspring, the source of articulate elocution and its fountainhead. By him ('a) its hidden aspects were made manifest, and from him its principles were derived. It is his aphorisms that every speaker and orator quoted, and it is his speech that availed every eloquent preacher.

Even then, he ('a) is far ahead while they have fallen short, he had advanced while they have tarried [behind], because his words are statements that have traces of Divine knowledge and are replete with the fragrance of Prophetic utterances. Hence, I acceded to their request to start this [compilation], as I knew that in it there is great benefit, extensive scope, and a treasure of [otherworldly] reward. I intended to use it to clarify [and expound] the great status of Amīr al-Mu'minīn as pertains to this merit [of unrivalled eloquence], in addition to the numerous other excellent qualities and innumerable distinctions. Furthermore, he ('a) was matchless in the successful attainment of its pinnacle among all the erstwhile predecessors from whom only a few statements, infrequent and sporadic, are quoted [here and there]. As for his speech, it is like a [boundless] sea without a shore, an overflowing eloquence that cannot be matched.

I wish to segue into an expression of my pride due to [my descent from] him – may Allāh shower His blessing upon him – by quoting a couplet of al-Farazdaq:

*These are my forefathers, so bring me anyone like them,
when we meet, O Jarīr, at the gatherings.*

I found that his ('a) speech revolves around three distinct axes, first among which are sermons and decrees, second are letters and correspondence, and third are wise sayings and aphorisms. I decided, with Allāh's help, to begin compiling the brilliant sermons first, then the excellent letters, and finally the best [of his] wise sayings and aphorisms, devoting a separate section for each category and leaving

[extra blank] pages in-between each [section] so that if anything has been [inadvertently] left out and later comes to me, it may be easily be inserted therein.

If I came across any of his other speech which was spoken during a discussion, or was a reply to a question, or had some other aim that did not fit within any of the mentioned categories that I decided to base this work upon, I included it in the category that was most suitable, or to which its contents were most similar. Among what I have selected, sometimes there are certain passages that are not ordered consistently and [some of his] brilliant statements that are not well arranged. This is so because I am only [after] adducing [the most] illustrative and brilliant [speech], and do not intend to array or arrange [it].

From his amazing qualities, which are unique to him ('a) and which he remains ever secure from having to share with anyone, are his statements on abstemiousness, admonition, remembrance of Allāh, and restraint. When a person reflects on them, and a thinker ponders over them, having purposely overlooked the fact that they are the words of a man like him – who enjoys a great status, whose command is established, and whose authority encompasses all the people – he would have no doubt that these are the statements of one who has no interest in other than abstemiousness, and no activity save worship. [He would imagine that such a person] has secluded himself in the interior of some house, or isolated himself on the slope of some mountain where he hears nothing but his own murmur and sees no one but himself.

One would find it hard to believe that these are the statements of a person who plunges into battle with his sword drawn, severing necks and vanquishing warriors, and then returns with his sword trickling and dripping with blood. Yet even in that state, he was one of the most abstemious among the ascetics, and chief among the saints. This is one of his amazing merits and wonderful characteristics by which he brought together [within himself] contradictory qualities and joined together varying attributes. I often mention this to my brothers-in-faith and cause them to marvel over it. Indeed, it is something to learn from and reflect upon.

Sometimes within my selection, one may come across a word that has been repeated or a theme that recurs, and the reason for this is that the narrations of his ('a) speech differ greatly. At times the selected statement is found in a narration and related as is, then it is found in another tradition, expressed in a manner different

from the first, either with some specific addition or with wording that is more beautifully articulated. As such, it is deemed worthy of being repeated as a means of emphasizing what had [previously] been mentioned, and out of a sense of possessiveness for [his] exemplary speech. In some instances it may also be that what had been first selected [and mentioned] appeared much earlier and then was repeated out of forgetfulness or inattention, not purposely or intentionally.

Nevertheless, I do not claim that I have covered all of Amīr al-Mu'minīn's statements, such that not even the uncommon escaped me, nor did the unusual get left out [from my compilation]. In fact, I do not rule out the possibility that what has escaped me might be far more than what I have come by [and collected], and that which I am aware [and have knowledge] of is far less than what has remained beyond my reach. My only task was to strive to the best of my ability, and to the extent of my capacity, and it is upon Allāh, the Glorified, to open up the way and guide [me] to the goal – if Allāh so wills.

I decided [after having completed my work], to name this book *Nahj al-Balāghah* (The Path of Eloquence), since it opens the doors of eloquence for the reader, and brings it closer for the seeker. It contains what is needed by [both] the scholar and the student, and what is aspired to by [both] the rhetorician as well as the renunciant. Within it one comes across a wonderful discussion on Oneness (*tawhīd*) and justice (*'adl*), and how Allāh, the Glorified and Exalted, is free from resembling [any of] the creatures, as well as that which can quench every thirst [for wisdom], provide a cure for every malady [of unbelief], and polish off every [stain of] doubt.

It is from Allāh, the Glorified, that I seek success and protection from error, and I request the attainment of my goal and assistance. I seek refuge from Him from mistakes of the heart before mistakes of the tongue, and from slips in speech before slips of the feet. He [alone] is sufficient for me and is the best Protector.

ORATIONS

1

CREATION OF THE EARTH AND SKY, AND OF ĀDAM

1 All praise is for Allāh, whose extolment cannot be adequately expressed by speakers, whose bounties cannot be enumerated by counters, and whose right cannot be fulfilled [even] by those who strive. Neither can the heights of intellectual endeavour grasp Him, nor can the depths of understanding reach Him. There exists no definable limit for His description, no available epithet, no specified time, and no protracted duration.

2 He brought forth creation through His omnipotence, dispersed winds by His mercy, and made His swaying earth steady with [massive] rocks.

3 The beginning of faith is recognizing Him, and the perfection of recognizing Him is affirming His presence, and the perfection of affirming His presence is believing in His oneness, and the perfection of believing in His oneness is regarding Him immaculate, and the perfection of regarding Him immaculate is negating [external] attributes from Him, since every attribute

١ الحَمْدُ لِلّٰهِ الَّذِي لَا يٰلُغُ مِدْحَتَهُ
الْفَائِلُونَ، وَلَا يُحْصِي نَعْمَاءَ
الْعَادُونَ، وَلَا يُؤَدِّي حَقَّهُ
الْمُجْتَهِدُونَ؛ الَّذِي لَا يَدْرِكُهُ بَعْدُ
الْهِمَمِ، وَلَا يَأْلَهُ غَوْصُ الْفِطْنِ،
الَّذِي لَيْسَ لِصِفَتِهِ حَدٌ مَحْدُودٌ، وَلَا
يَعْتَقُ مَوْبُحُودٌ، وَلَا وَقْتٌ مَعْدُودٌ،
وَلَا أَجْلٌ مَمْدُودٌ.

٢ فَطَرَ الْحَلَاقَ بِقُدْرَتِهِ، وَتَشَرَّرَ الرِّيَاحَ
بِرَحْمَتِهِ، وَوَثَّدَ بِالصُّخُورِ مَيَانَ
أَرْضِهِ.

٣ أَوْلُ الْدِينِ مَعْرِفَتَهُ، وَكَمَالُ
مَعْرِفَتِهِ التَّصْدِيقُ بِهِ، وَكَمَالُ
الْتَّصْدِيقِ بِهِ تَوْحِيدُهُ، وَكَمَالُ
تَوْحِيدِهِ الْإِخْلَاصُ لَهُ، وَكَمَالُ
الْإِخْلَاصِ لَهُ نَفْيُ الصَّفَاتِ عَنْهُ
لِشَهَادَةِ كُلِّ صِفَةٍ أَنَّهَا غَيْرُ
الْمُوْضُوفِ،

testifies that it is different from what it describes and everything that is described testifies that it is different from the attribute [that describes it].

- 4 Thus whoever describes Allāh has paired Him, and whoever pairs Him has ascribed duality to Him, and whoever ascribes duality to Him has divided Him, and whoever divides Him has misjudged Him, and whoever misjudges Him points at Him, and whoever points at Him has limited Him, and whoever limits Him has quantified Him.
- 5 Whoever says, “Wherein [is He]?” has confined Him; and whoever says “Whereupon [is He]?” has isolated Him. [He is] a Being who did not come into being; Existent but not from non-existence. [He is] with everything, but not by association, and other than everything, but not by detachment.
- 6 He acts, but not by movements or instrument. He sees even when there are none among His creation to be seen. He is alone since there is no companion whose intimacy He seeks or whose absence leaves Him forlorn.

وَشَهَادَةٌ كُلُّ مَوْصُوفٍ أَنَّهُ غَيْرُ الصِّفَةِ.

٤ فَمَنْ وَصَفَ اللَّهَ سُبْحَانَهُ فَقَدْ قَرَنَهُ، وَمَنْ قَرَنَهُ فَقَدْ شَاءَ، وَمَنْ شَاءَ فَقَدْ جَرَأَهُ، وَمَنْ جَرَأَهُ فَقَدْ جَهَلَهُ، وَمَنْ جَهَلَهُ فَقَدْ أَشَارَ إِلَيْهِ، وَمَنْ أَشَارَ إِلَيْهِ فَقَدْ حَدَّهُ، وَمَنْ حَدَّهُ فَقَدْ عَدَهُ.

٥ وَمَنْ قَالَ: «فِيمَ؟» فَقَدْ ضَمَّنَهُ، وَمَنْ قَالَ: «عَلَامَ؟» فَقَدْ أَحْلَى مِنْهُ. كَائِنٌ لَا عَنْ حَدَثٍ، مَوْجُودٌ لَا عَنْ عَدَمٍ. مَعَ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ لَا بِمُقَارَنَةٍ، وَغَيْرُ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ لَا بِمُزَايَلَةٍ.

٦ فَاعِلٌ لَا بِمَعْنَى الْحَرَكَاتِ وَالْأَكْتَاءِ، بَصِيرٌ إِذْ لَا مَنْظُورٌ إِلَيْهِ مِنْ خَلْقِهِ، مُتَوَّحِّدٌ إِذْ لَا سَكَنٌ يَسْتَأْتِسُ بِهِ وَلَا يَسْتَوِحُشُ إِلْفَعْدِهِ.

CONTEXT

This is one of the most important sermons of Imām ‘Alī (*a*) and was probably chosen as the opening sermon by al-Sayyid al-Raḍī for this very reason (N). It

contains a summary of the Islamic worldview, commencing with the beautiful and perfect attributes of the Almighty and the subtleties of man's relationship with his Creator. Then the wonderful and amazing creation of the world is recounted, along with the story of the angels and Ādam, the father of mankind. Subsequently, the Imām speaks about the philosophy of divine guidance through Prophets and heavenly scriptures, especially the Qurān. Finally, he talks about religious injunctions, specifically mentioning the annual *hajj* pilgrimage and its benefits. It is not known exactly when this sermon was delivered, but one can surmise from its contents that it was likely during the early period of the Imām's caliphate. Some commentators say that this sermon was delivered between the years 38 and 40 AH in the city of Kūfah, which had become a melting pot of multifarious ideologies such as those of the Zoroastrians, Manichaeans, Christians, and Jews. This environment led to the rise of incertitude among the believers and it is for this reason that the Imām elucidated some of the fundamentals of the faith (S).

COMMENTARY

1 Some commentators consider *hamd* and *madh* to be synonyms as both connote praise (I), whereas others restrict *hamd* to praise for only those laudable acts that are volitional, or for favours carried out by one who possesses knowledge (MB). The fact that the Imām did not use a verbal sentence (such as "I praise Allāh") shows that his praise for the Almighty is constant (R). It is narrated that a mule belonging to Imām al-Bāqir ('a) was once lost so he said, "If Allāh brings it back to me, I will praise Him with extolment that would please Him." Not long after, it was brought back to him with its saddle and bridle intact. Once he had sat on it, he raised his head to the sky and said, "All praise is for Allāh (*al-hamdu lillāh*)" and nothing more. Then he said, "I have not left out anything and have stated that all forms of praise are for Allāh. Hence there is no type of praise but that it is included in what I have said" (T). His *extolment cannot be adequately expressed by speakers* due to their inability to extol and praise Him as He deserves to be praised. That is why the Prophet is reported to have said in one of his supplications, "I cannot extol You as You deserve [O Lord]; rather, You are just as You have praised Yourself (*anta kamā athnayta 'alā nafsik*)" (MB). The extolment of human beings and angels is limited by their own perceptions of the Almighty, and is nowhere close to the extent of His perfections (*kamālāt*). Hence, the highest level of praise

we can offer is an acknowledgement that we are incapable of praising Allāh as He deserves to be praised (N). The Imām chose to use the term speakers (*qātilūn*) instead of extollers (*mādīhūn*) because the former is more general and encompasses the latter (MB). His *bounties cannot be enumerated by counters* as explicitly stated in the Qur’ān: *If you enumerate Allāh's blessings, you will not be able to count them* (Q16:18).

Indeed, even the recognition of one's inability to enumerate the blessings and thank the Almighty adequately for them is itself a blessing one must be grateful for, as mentioned in a number of traditions and supplications of the Ahl al-Bayt (N). It is for this reason that His *right cannot be fulfilled [even] by those who strive*. The word 'right' (*haqq*) has been mentioned in the singular, while we know that He has many rights upon His servants, either because the term is meant as a verbal noun (*maṣdar*) and hence represents all instances, or because we are incapable of fulfilling even a single of His many rights upon us (R). Some say that these three statements show the levels of human inability – they are unable to adequately extol the Almighty with their tongues, reckon His blessings with their minds, and fulfil His rights with their limbs (T). *The heights of intellectual endeavour cannot grasp Him* since every form of intellection is based on conceptualization of the perceptible, or imagination, or that which is experienced within oneself, and all these are limited (I). The phrase *nor can the depths of understanding reach Him* actually employs the allegory of diving into the depths of the ocean, where the illimitable nature of Divine attributes cannot be truly fathomed no matter how deep one goes (M). The reason for there being *no definable limit, no available epithet, no specified time, and no protracted duration* for His description is that all these qualities are applicable to material entities, while He is far above that (T).

2 A question that then arises is: if Allāh cannot be grasped by the intellect, how can we know Him? In response, we are told that the only way to know Him is through His actions (*af‘äl*) (R). *Brought forth* renders '*faṭara*' which is a term that was unclear for some early Muslims. Ibn ‘Abbās is reported to have said, “I did not know the meaning of the verse ...*the originator (fāṭir) of the heavens and the earth* (Q6:14) until I came across two bedouins quarrelling about ownership of a well and one of them said, ‘I brought it out (*anā faṭartuhā*)’ meaning I am the one who initiated it (*ibtada’tuhā*)” (T). Allāh created the universe through His boundless power (*qudrat*), and *dispersed winds by His mercy*. Indeed, the way in which winds blow and their various types and effects is something amazing to behold. It is this

aspect of nature that gives us different weather based on our geographical location, and it is also responsible for the propagation of life through pollination, among other benefits (J). He *made the swaying earth steady with [massive] rocks* in the form of mountains which act as pegs and hold the earth firm. Were it not for these huge mountains, the earth would shake beneath us and would not be steady enough for creatures to safely traverse upon (N). These two examples (of the winds and mountains) are just instances of the Divine omnipotence mentioned earlier, both of which have been cited in the Qurān (see: Q7:57 and Q16:15 respectively). The clear overarching message of the Imām here is: think about the creation of Allāh, but do not attempt to cogitate on His essence (M).

3 This section contains a summary of the nature of the Divine and outlines the stages of belief. *The beginning of faith is recognizing Him*, meaning that the first step towards having faith in Allāh is to recognize Him. That is because emulation (*taqlīd*) is not permissible in matters of creed (I). Indeed, one cannot worship and submit to a Lord whom he does not recognize, as Imām ‘Alī is reported to have explained to one of his interlocutors (MB). Some have glossed ‘*awwal al-dīn*’ as the foundation or cornerstone of faith, which is one of its implications for without recognizing the Creator, there can be no faith (N). Since the word ‘*dīn*’ evokes the meaning of devotion and obeisance, some commentators have interpreted the phrase to connote the first stage of submission to Allāh (Z). One’s recognition of the Almighty can either be complete or incomplete; it is incomplete when one only recognizes that this universe has a Creator and a Lord. For the recognition to be complete, one has to affirm His presence as a necessity (*al-taṣdīqu bihi*) (MB). Attaining this level of affirmation is contingent upon having rational evidence for one’s belief in Him, but this does not in itself yield complete certitude about His oneness (*tawhīduhu*). Complete belief in His oneness entails the unassailable conviction that none can be like Him and that He alone is immaculate and free from all imperfections (N).

Regarding Him immaculate renders ‘*al-ikhlāṣu lahu*’ which also has the connotation of being sincere in devotion to Him (T). However, given the context, some have considered it unlikely that ‘*ikhlāṣ*’ here is meant in the traditional sense of being sincere in one’s actions and worship (N). Nevertheless, the latter may be deemed a corollary of considering Him immaculate since it would mean that He alone is worthy of worship and hence devotion and worship ought to be reserved for Him only (MB). The most perfect form of regarding Him immaculate is

negating external, contingent attributes from Him. There is a consensus among Muslims that Allāh does have attributes with which He describes Himself; however, it is the details concerning the types of attributes and the mode of attribution that has evoked discussion and disagreement among Muslim theologians throughout the ages (Z). Primarily, the discussion revolves around whether attributes of the Almighty are separate from His essence or not. The Ash'arī theologians believe that Divine attributes are separate from the Divine essence whereas the Mu'tazilah and Shī'ah theologians believe that Divine attributes are not separate from the essence (*dhāt*) of the Almighty (I). This is because every extraneous attribute, by its very existence, *testifies that it is different from what it describes* and what it is attributed to, and the converse of this is also true, meaning everything that is described testifies that it is different from the attribute that describes it. Some commentators have stipulated that this negation of attributes pertains to those that apply to the creation, for the Almighty is above such attributes (N).

4 *Whoever describes Allāh has paired Him*, since the ascription of an external attribute to Him would entail His being paired with that attribute, as is the case in human beings (N). Hence, anyone who ascribes a contingent attribute, like that of the creation, to the Almighty has in fact assigned a compeer for Him (R). By pairing the Almighty with anything other than Him, one places a second entity with him, thereby ‘doubling’ Him (MB). *Ascribed duality to Him* renders ‘*thannāhu*’ and connotes coupling the Almighty with something else, namely an extrinsic attribute, thereby rendering him ‘two’ (M). As a result, the Almighty is ‘divided’ into His essence and His attribute. One commentator suggests the possibility that the second and third phrase of this section have been transposed and should read: *whoever pairs Him has divided Him, and whoever divides Him has ascribed duality to Him*. This, he argues, is because the notion of the Almighty as a composite being is not unanimously rejected whereas all Muslims reject dualism (T). *Whoever divides Him has misjudged Him* translates ‘*man jazzdahu faqad jahilahu*’, and means that regarding Allāh as a composite entity is tantamount to being ignorant of Him (MB). This is because a composite being is dependent upon its parts and since the individual parts are different from the whole, it would mean dependence upon something else, which can never be true with respect to the Almighty (M). Pointing at Him means having a particular perception of Him in the mind. This inevitably results in limiting Him, because the human mind is incapable of

fathoming the unlimited, eternal Lord, so anything it conceives would be circumscribed by its own limitations (N). Furthermore, limiting Him in this way leads to enumerating Him since every limited being leaves room for another. Some commentators interpret the last phrase to mean whoever points at Him counts Him among contingent beings (MB).

5 If one asks, “Wherein is He?” he has constrained the Almighty and confined Him to a certain place, such that He is contained therein. This applies to those who say that He is up in the heavens, for example. And if one asks, “Whereupon is He?” he has isolated Him from somewhere else, meaning that He is upon something specific and is therefore not anywhere else. This applies to those who believe that He literally sits upon a throne (*‘arsh*) for example (T). Both these questions presume a limitation in space, yet Allāh is beyond space and cannot be bound by it. In fact, no kind of limitation whatsoever can apply to Him since He is ‘necessarily existent’ (*wājib al-wujūd*) (N). If He was bound by space, He would be dependent upon it and thus in need of it, and this is a quality of a ‘contingently existent’ (*mumkin al-wujūd*) being, not of the Creator (M). As such, the Qur’ānic verses that state: *He is Allāh in the heavens and on the earth* (Q6:3) and *It is He who is God in the sky and God on the earth* (Q43:84) mean that He is everywhere and not in any particular place. Moreover, the verses that speak about the Divine Throne (*‘arsh*) such as: *The All-beneficent Lord, settled on the Throne* (Q20:5) are all interpreted metaphorically to refer to His omnipotence and sovereignty (M). *Kā'inun lā 'an ḥadath* is rendered *He is a Being who did not come into being*, meaning that His existence is not the result of anything else, such as creation, accident, or any other cause.

He is *Existent but not from non-existence*, since He is pre-eternal and has always existed. He did not come out of non-existence (*adam*) because that would mean that something caused Him to become existent, in which case He would be dependent on that cause. Furthermore, such a notion would inevitably result in an endless string of causes or infinite regress (*al-tasalsul fil-ilal*) which is logically impossible (Z). Hence, He is the Prime Mover and the Uncaused Cause who has always existed and will always exist. As for His creation, He is with them *but not by association* (*lā bi-muqāranah*), meaning that He is with everything in the sense of knowing and witnessing, and not being absent or unaware. However, this is not the closeness that results in association, like the closeness of one body to another (MB). The Qur’ān states: *He is with you wherever you may be* (Q57:4) and *There is*

no secret talk among three, but He is their fourth, nor among five but He is their sixth, nor less than that, nor more, but He is with them wherever they may be (Q58:7). He is other than everything, *but not by detachment* (*lā bi-muzāyalah*). Rather, it is something akin to the distinctness of sunbeams from the sun, where the rays are completely dependent upon the sun for their existence and rely upon it continually, in every moment, yet they are distinct from the sun (N).

6 *He acts, but not by movements or instrument*, meaning all that is manifested from Him and perceived as His actions are neither the result of any movement nor of employing any kind of tool or apparatus (M). Instead, *His command, when He wills something, is to say to it "Be" and it is* (Q36:82). This is because movement only applies to corporeal beings and the use of apparatus is a sign of weakness and need, since it acts as an aid in the execution of any action (MB). However, this does not imply that the Almighty does not assign certain tasks to His angels or allow the system of cause and effect to function; rather, it is by His will that things work in this way, and not out of any necessity (N). He is the All-Seeing (*al-baṣīr*) and sees even when there are none among His creation to be seen since 'seeing' is an attribute of His essence, like omniscience and omnipotence (T). Though, with respect to the Almighty, seeing is not something literal like the vision experienced by human beings. What it connotes, however, is His complete knowledge of all things that can be seen, even before they could be seen (N). In a tradition from Imām al-Ṣādiq ('a), he is reported to have said, "Our Lord Allāh, Glorious and Mighty, always existed with knowledge as His essence, even when there was nothing to know; with hearing as His essence, even when there was nothing to hear; with seeing as His essence, even when there was nothing to see; with power as His essence, even when there was nothing over which to exert power. Then, when He brought things into being, and the thing He had known came to be, His knowledge corresponded to what He had [always] known about it, His hearing to what He had [always] heard, His sight to what He had [always] seen, and His power [devolved] upon what He [always] had power over" (T).

He is alone (*mutawāḥhid*) in His dominion and perfection because *there is no companion whose intimacy He seeks or whose absence leaves Him forlorn*, unlike human beings who are usually alone either due to abandonment or having lost the company of those who were close to them (Z).

CREATION OF THE UNIVERSE

خلق العالم

7 He brought forth the creation and initiated it from the very beginning, without any [prior] deliberation or benefitting from [past] experience; without generating any movement or being stirred by any endeavour. He allotted all things their specific terms, harmonized their differences, instilled [in them] their intrinsic properties, and bound them to their forms; knowing them before their genesis, fully aware of their limits and culmination, and cognizant of their propensities and inclinations.

أَنْشَأَ الْخَلْقَ إِنْشَاءً وَابْتَدَأَهُ ابْتَدَاءً، بِلَا رُوَيْتَهُ أَجَالَهَا وَلَا تَجْرِيَتِهُ اسْتَفَادَهَا، وَلَا حَرَكَةٌ أَحْدَثَهَا وَلَا هَمَامَةٌ نَفَسٍ اضْطَرَبَ فِيهَا. أَحَالَ الْأَشْيَاءَ لِأَوْقَاتِهَا، وَلَامَ بَيْنَ مُخْتَلِفَاتِهَا، وَغَرَّرَ عَرَائِزَهَا، وَأَلْزَمَهَا أَشْبَاحَهَا، عَالِمًا بِهَا قَبْلَ ابْتِدَائِهَا، مُحِيطًا بِحُدُودِهَا وَانْتِهَا، عَارِفًا بِقَرَائِنِهَا وَأَخْنَاثِهَا.

8 Then He, the Glorified, created fissures in the atmosphere, cleaving the sides and the upper strata of the sky. He made water flow therein, with waves surging, swelling layer upon layer. He mounted it on the back of a tempestuous wind and turbulent gale, then commanded the wind to hold it back, giving it control over the intensity of its flow and aligning it with its boundary. The air beneath the wind was spread open while water gushed over it.

لَمْ أَنْشَأْ سُبْحَانَهُ فَتَقَ الْأَجْوَاءُ، وَشَقَ الْأَرْجَاءُ، وَسَكَانَ الْهَوَاءُ، فَأَجْرَى فِيهَا مَاءً مُتَلَاطِمًا تَيَارًا، مُتَرَاكِمًا زَحَارًا، حَمَلَهُ عَلَى مَثْنِ الرِّيحِ الْعَاصِفَةِ وَالرَّغْزِ الْفَاصِفَةِ، فَأَمْرَهَا بِرَدْدَهُ، وَسَلَطَهَا عَلَى شَدِّهِ، وَقَرَّهَا إِلَى حَدِّهِ؛ الْهَوَاءُ مِنْ تَحْتِهَا فَتَيْقُ وَالْمَاءُ مِنْ فَوْقِهَا دَفِيقٌ.

Companionship is usually sought in order to fulfil a need, derive benefit, or protect oneself from potential danger and harm. As such, it leads to a sense of peace and

tranquillity. It is this feeling that is then missed when one is left alone, especially in the face of hardships. However, the Almighty needs nothing and neither seeks benefit nor can He be harmed. As such, He requires no companion and does not feel lonely without one (N).

7 Both '*ansha'a*' and '*ibtada'a*' connote the act of initiating creation; however, some commentators have posited a subtle difference between the two terms, where the first refers to creating something the like of which had never existed before, while the second refers to a creation prior to which there was no creation (M). The description of how Allāh creates shows that it is completely different from the creative actions of human beings, since without any precedent, a lot of thought, deliberation, and planning is required by humans before they can innovate something. And when a precedent exists, they use the experience to facilitate their creation (N). Yet when the Almighty created the universe, He did so *without any prior deliberation or benefitting from past experience*. *Deliberation* translates '*rawiyah*' and connotes any form of pondering, contemplation, or cogitation, the purpose of which is to arrive at an understanding of a previously vague or unknown concept. However, nothing is unknown to Allāh, hence He never needs to deliberate (M).

On the other hand, experience is what makes action easier for human beings because when they have been through something similar before, or have witnessed others doing it, it becomes easier to repeat the action by benefitting from the previous experience. This does not apply to the Almighty since He is omnipotent and nothing is difficult for Him such that it could be made easier through experience (Z). After thought and intention, human beings require movement in order to carry out any action. This is because of the limitations of the corporeal realm as well as the properties of material bodies. But Allāh has no such limitation and thus requires no movement to carry out any action (MB). Commentators differ in their interpretation of the phrase '*hamāmati nafsin*' with some understanding it to mean a strong internal inclination towards something, such that its loss would cause unease (M), while others say that it refers to hesitation and indecisiveness (T), or giving too much importance and attention to a specific matter (Z). Yet all these qualities are negated from the Almighty as He does not get *stirred by any endeavour*. *He allotted all things their specific terms* translates '*aḥāla al-ashyā'a li awqātihā*' but some manuscripts read '*ajāla*' instead of '*aḥāla*', yet both verbs give the sense of allocating, assigning, and placing (MB).

The harmonization of all things, despite their differences and variance, is indeed one of the wonders of creation. A beautiful example of this is mentioned in the verse: *He who made for you fire from the green tree, so that with it you kindle [fire]* (Q36:80). This harmony allows everything in creation to perform its function by facilitating and not hindering the functions of other things (Z).

Furthermore, it is this harmonization that allows 'higher' beings, such as the pure intellect ('aql), to interact with 'lower' ones, such as the physical body (MB). Part of the process of creation was related to instilling the intrinsic properties of things within them and binding them to their respective forms. It is seen how upon their arrival on this earth, some creatures already have certain abilities without having to learn them. Fish know how to swim, animals how to breathe and suckle, etc. This is because these abilities are instinctive and have been 'hard-coded' into the creatures, forming part of their intrinsic qualities (N). The *forms* ('ashbāh' or, in another version, 'asnākh') with which these traits are bound represent the individual character and nature of creatures, such as bravery in some and cowardice in others (MB). Allāh knew about the creation even before they were created since His knowledge is not limited temporally or spatially, like the knowledge of human beings (Z). He was, and is, fully aware of *their limits and culmination* as well as the reality of, and all aspects pertaining to, their existence (M). *Propensities* translates '*qarā'in*' and refers to every quality that conforms to the nature of a creature and is hence conjoined with it (T). '*Ahnā*' is translated as *inclinations* and connotes anything that bends towards a particular direction (N).

⁸ The word *then* ('thumma') in the beginning of this section does not denote the chronological sequence of creation; for the creatures and forms mentioned in the preceding section came after what is described here (I). *Atmosphere* translates '*aqwā'* but some commentators suggest that it connotes the vast expanse that existed before the sky and earth were created (T). The creation of fissures was the first step in opening up space, which was followed by the cleaving of its sides, thereby delineating its boundaries, and then separating the different strata of the sky and layers of the atmosphere. Therefore, the first creation in the corporeal realm was space, wherein the stars, planets, and celestial objects could subsist (N). Some commentators discuss the opinions of philosophers and theologians about the nature of the universe and whether it is pre-eternal and everlasting, or only the latter, or neither.

9 Then He, the Glorified, created a wind, making it barren, fixing its state, intensifying its current, and distancing its source. Then He commanded it to toss the swelling waters and stir up the waves of the oceans. So the wind churned it up like the churning of curd in a milk-bag, and whipped it fiercely with its tempestuous motion in the sky, flipping its fore on its rear and the still on the flowing, until its torrents surged and its swelling waves threw up foam. Then He raised it in the open air and gaping atmosphere, forming therefrom the seven heavens, with the lowermost made into a suspended wave and the uppermost a guarded canopy and elevated ceiling, without any pillar to support them or any fastener to hold them in place. Then He adorned them with the finery of stars and dazzling bright lights. He caused the revolution of the radiant sun and the shining moon in a spherical orbit, a moving canopy, and an oscillating firmament.

٩ ثُمَّ أَنْشَأَ سُبْحَانَهُ رِيحًا أَغْتَقَ مَهْبَهَا،
وَأَدَمَ مُرْبَهَا، وَأَعْصَفَ مَجْرَاهَا،
وَأَبْعَدَ مَنْشَاهَا، فَأَمْرَهَا بِتَصْفِيقِ الْمَاءِ
الرَّحَارِ، وَإِثَارَةِ مَوْجِ الْبَحَارِ،
فَمَحْضَتْهُ مَحْضَ السَّقَاءِ، وَعَصَفَتْ
بِهِ عَصْفَهَا بِالْفَضَاءِ، تَرْدُ أَوْلَهُ عَلَى
آخِرِهِ، وَسَاحِيَةٌ عَلَى مَائِرِهِ، حَشِّي
عَبَّ عَبَابَهُ، وَرَمَى بِالرَّبَدِ رُكَامَهُ،
فَرَفَعَهُ فِي هَوَاءِ مُنْفَتِقٍ وَجَوْ مُنْهَقٍ،
فَسَوَّى مِنْهُ سَبْعَ سَمَوَاتٍ، جَعَلَ
سُفْلَاهُنَّ مَوْجًا مَكْفُوفًا، وَعُلْيَاهُنَّ
سَقْفًا مَحْفُوظًا، وَسَمْكًا مَرْفُوعًا،
بِعَيْرٍ عَمَدٍ يَدْعُمُهَا، وَلَا دَسَارٍ
يَنْظُمُهَا. ثُمَّ زَيَّنَهَا بِزِينَةِ الْكَوَافِيرِ
وَضِيَاءِ التَّوَاقِيرِ، وَأَجْرَى فِيهَا
سِرَاجًا مُسَطِّيرًا وَقَرَارًا مُنِيرًا، فِي
فَلَكٍ دَائِرٍ، وَسَقْفٍ سَائِرٍ، وَرَقِيمٍ
مَائِرٍ.

They point out that the first opinion is untenable because of such descriptions about creation and that even contemporary science theorizes that the universe came about due to one super-cosmic event, namely the 'big bang' (J). *He caused water to flow therein*, meaning in the atmosphere or the vast expanse of space. The adjectives 'surging' and 'swelling' are used to depict the overflowing abundance of

the water. Some commentators deduce from this that the first material creation of the Almighty was water (Z).

Turbulent gale translates ‘*al-za‘za‘ al-qāṣifah*’ and refers to a strong, destructive, howling gale (MB). The tempestuous wind and turbulent gale carried the water and, as commanded, prevented it from flowing (T). Alignment with the ‘boundary’ of the water signifies a complete encompassing of the water from all sides (MB). *Spread open* renders ‘*fatiq*’ and connotes an empty and open space, while ‘*dafiq*’ describes gushing and flowing forth (Z). It should be noted that the terms ‘water’, ‘wind’, and ‘gale’ that are mentioned here represent semblances of what existed at that time, in the beginning of creation (N).

9 A second wind was then created by Allāh and had four distinguishing qualities. It was a *barren* (“*aqīm*”) wind meaning that it did not raise rain clouds or transfer pollen; it had a fixed state that was constant, a strong current, and a distant, unknown source (N). He commanded this wind to agitate and stir up the waters, giving rise to oceanic waves. The wind pounded on the water, churning it the way milk is churned and lunging it with the same ferocity as its own tempestuous motion in the sky, where there is no hindrance (MB). As a result, surging waves crashed down upon the water and gave rise to foam and froth (‘*zabad*’). Commentators differ regarding the pronoun ‘it’ in the phrases *then He raised it... and forming from it the seven heavens*, with some saying that it refers to the foam mentioned in the preceding sentence (N), and others insisting that it refers to the water (I). The rising of this froth could be interpreted to mean its conversion into steam, which is similar to smoke, and this would then explain the verse: *Then He turned to the heaven, and it was smoke* (Q41:11), where ‘*dukhān*’ is glossed by many exegetes as steam. This interpretation is also supported by some traditions from the Ahl al-Bayt (M).

The number ‘seven’ is not meant literally; rather, it refers to numerous heavens, with the description of the lowermost being like a suspended wave (‘*mawjan makfūfan*’) due to the nature of celestial bodies that are always in motion (Z). As for the uppermost being a guarded canopy, this is seen in a number of verses such as: *We made the sky a guarded canopy and yet they are disregardful of its signs* (Q21:32).

CREATION OF THE ANGELS

خلق الملائكة

10 Then He rent open the highest heavens and filled them with different ranks of His angels: some [constantly] prostrating, never bowing; others [always] bowing, never standing upright. Some in array, never leaving their position; others constantly extolling Allāh, never tiring. They are not overcome by drowsiness of the eyes, distractions of the mind, lassitude of the body, or the negligence of forgetfulness.

۱۰ ۴۷۷ فَتَقَ مَا بَيْنَ السَّمَاوَاتِ الْعُلَىٰ
فَمَلَأَهُنَّ أَطْوَارًا مِّنْ مَلَائِكَةٍ:
۴۷۸ مِنْهُمْ سُجُودٌ لَا يَرْكَعُونَ،
۴۷۹ وَرُكُوعٌ لَا يَسْتَصْبُونَ، وَصَافُونَ
۴۸۰ لَا يَتَرَأَلُونَ، وَمُسْبِحُونَ لَا
۴۸۱ يَسْأَمُونَ، لَا يَغْشَاهُمْ نَوْمٌ
۴۸۲ الْعَيْوَنَ، وَلَا سَهْوُ الْعُفُولِ، وَلَا
۴۸۳ فَتْرَةُ الْأَبْدَانِ، وَلَا غَفْلَةُ النَّسْيَانِ.

11 And among them are custodians of His revelation, conveyors [of His words] to His Prophets, who come and go with His decree and command. And among them are the guardians of His servants and wardens of the gates of His Gardens [of Paradise]. Others among them have feet that rest firmly on the lowest regions of the earth, necks that rise above the highest heaven, sides that surpass the boundaries, and shoulders that are level with the columns of the Divine Throne; their eyes downcast before it, their wings folded around them beneath it. Between them and all others are veils of might and screens of power.

۱۱ ۴۸۴ وَمِنْهُمْ أَمْنَاءُ عَلَىٰ وَحِيهِ، وَالسِّنَّةُ
۴۸۵ إِلَى رُسُلِهِ، وَمُخْتَلِفُونَ بِتَضَاعِهِ
۴۸۶ وَأَمْرِهِ. وَمِنْهُمُ الْحَفَظَةُ لِعِبَادِهِ،
۴۸۷ وَالسَّدَّةُ لِإِبْوَابِ جَنَانِهِ. وَمِنْهُمْ
۴۸۸ التَّابِثَةُ فِي الْأَرْضِينَ السُّفْلَىٰ
۴۸۹ أَقْدَامُهُمْ، وَالْمَارِقَةُ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ الْعُلَيَا
۴۹۰ أَعْنَاقُهُمْ، وَالْخَارِجَةُ مِنَ الْأَقْطَارِ
۴۹۱ أَرْكَانُهُمْ، وَالْمُنَاسِبَةُ لِقَوَائِمِ الْعَرْشِ
۴۹۲ أَكْنَافُهُمْ، نَاكِسَةُ دُوَّهُ أَبْصَارُهُمْ،
۴۹۳ مُتَلَفِّعُونَ تَحْتَهُ بِأَجْنِحَتِهِمْ، مَضْرُوبَهُ
۴۹۴ بَيْنَهُمْ وَبَيْنَ مَنْ دُونَهُمْ حُجْبُ الْعِرَّةِ
۴۹۵ وَأَسْتَارُ الْقُدْرَةِ.

They neither imagine their Lord through depiction, nor impute to Him attributes of the creatures; they do not confine Him within places, nor do they allude to Him through similitudes.

لَا يَتَوَهَّمُونَ رَبَّهُمْ بِالْتَّصْوِيرِ، وَلَا
يُجْزِئُونَ عَلَيْهِ صِفَاتِ الْمَصْنُوعِينَ،
وَلَا يَحْدُوْنَهُ بِالْأَمَاكِنِ، وَلَا يُشِيرُونَ
إِلَيْهِ بِالنَّظَائِرِ.

The fact that there are no perceivable pillars that hold the heavens in place is mentioned in the verse: *It is Allāh who raised the heavens without any pillars that you see* (Q13:2). This verse has two possible meanings: either the heavens are raised without any pillars whatsoever or their pillars are not visible, in which case it is not meant literally and could refer to any force (such as the force of gravity) that is beyond direct sensory perception (MB). The heavens were then adorned with *dazzling bright lights*, as the Qurān tells us: *Indeed We have adorned the lowest heaven with the finery of the stars* (Q37:6). The movement of the sun and moon in a spherical orbit is also alluded to in the Qurān, where it says: *And the sun runs in its own fixed orbit; that is the decree of the Mighty, the Knowing. And for the moon We have ordained phases, until it again appears like an old [bent] palm stalk* (Q36:38-9). The last phrases of this section are read by some as descriptions of the movements of the sun and moon – they revolve in a spherical orbit, move in the canopy of space, and oscillate in the firmament of the universe (T). *Firmament* translates ‘raqūm’ which literally means inscription or tablet, yet refers to the heavenly spheres because their orbits are like a written inscription, and it is as though the stars are ‘inscribed’ upon the tablet of the firmament (MB).

10 This section marks the beginning of an interesting discourse on angels. It is noteworthy that the Imām speaks about angels in a number of sermons, giving us some insights into their nature. Of course, as one scholar eloquently puts it, we cannot fathom the essence of angels since we are incapable of fully knowing even our own essence, as noted in Q17:85 (T). One commentator avoids discussing this section of the sermon entirely for precisely the same reason: our inability to comprehend and know the angels, as they form part of the unseen (*ghayb*) (Z). The Mu’tazilah defined angels as beings of light (*hayawānun nūrīyyun*), some of whom are transparent and lack any colour, like air, whereas others possess the colour of the sun (I). In his encyclopaedic compendium of traditions, *Bihār al-*

Anwār, ‘Allāmah al-Majlisī says, “Be it known that there is consensus among the Imāmiyyah, rather among all Muslims, except a few outliers among them... that angels [truly] exist, and that they are subtle bodies of light (*ajsāmun latīfah nūrāniyyah*) that possess wings: two, three or four... they ascend and descend, and were seen by Prophets and their chosen successors, peace be upon them” (MB).

Muslim philosophers are of the opinion that angels are abstract (*mujarrad*) entities that have no bodies whatsoever. Yet this would entail a reinterpretation or metaphorical reading of numerous verses and traditions that speak of angels as beings with bodies, albeit immaterial, which is untenable (N). From the first sentence of this pericope, we learn that the heavens were joined together before the Almighty rent them open and filled them with different kinds of angels. In sermon 90, the Imām further describes how all the space in the heavens was completely filled by angels. In fact, a tradition from Imām Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq (*‘a*) states that there is nothing in creation as numerous as angels; every night seventy thousand angels descend to earth, visit the Ka‘bah and then the Prophet, Imām ‘Alī, and Imām al-Husayn before ascending back to the heavens, never to return (T). The angels engrossed in the worship of Allāh are of four types: those who remain in prostration (*sujūd*) and never raise their heads, those who continuously bow down (*rukū‘*) and never stand up, those who are lined up in ranks [for worship] (*ṣāffūn*), and those who constantly praise and extol Allāh without ever becoming weary (R).

Some commentators have interpreted ‘*ṣāffūn*’ as ‘having spread their wings’, based on the meaning of Q67:19, but the previous interpretation seems more accurate given the context (N). The phrase *they are not overcome by drowsiness of the eyes* has been interpreted by some commentators to mean that angels do experience sleep, but are not overcome by it (R), yet others argue that angels do not sleep at all, just as they do not eat or drink (I). Distraction, lassitude, and forgetfulness do not plague angels as they do human beings since these qualities are inapplicable to angels to begin with (MB).

11 A number of verses (such as Q26:193-4) reflect the description of some angels as custodians (*‘umānā*) of Divine revelation. Accounts of angels visiting Prophet Ibrāhīm and Lūt are examples of their role as conveyors (*‘alsinah* lit. tongues) of the Almighty’s words to His Prophets. And the verse: *The angels and the Spirit descend in it, by the permission of their Lord, for every [decreed] matter* (Q97:4) is one example of how some angels *come and go* (*‘mukhtalifūn*) with His

decree and command (M). From these statements, it could be inferred that Jibrā'il was not the only angel who brought down Divine revelation. Furthermore, the decree and command that is mentioned pertains to Divine injunctions and laws, not to the creative order, since the previous statements all refer to revelation (N). Certain angels act as guardians and protectors of human beings, as mentioned in a number of traditions. For instance, one tradition states that there are two guardian angels with every human being, whose duty is to protect the individual from falling off a cliff or into a well, but when his time of death comes, they leave his side (T).

The duty given to other angels is to act as wardens ('*sadanah*') of the gates of Paradise, which are eight in number according to what has been stated in the traditions. These angels are referred to as the keepers (*khazanah*) of Paradise in the Qur'ān (see: Q39:73) (MB). Another group of angels are bearers of the Divine Throne ('*arsh*') as stated in Q40:7, and they are eight in number according to Q69:17. So prodigious are they that their feet rest on the lowest areas of earth while their necks rise above the highest heavens, with their shoulders reaching the columns of the Divine Throne. One tradition describes these angels as being so humble and submissive that they do not even open their eyes fully and are more reverent and fearful of Allāh than all the inhabitants of the seventh heaven (M). Their eyes are downcast before the Divine Throne and they enwrap themselves with their wings beneath it in utter humility. In the third supplication of *al-Šāhīfah al-Sajjādiyyah*, Imām Zayn al-Ābidīn (*a*) sends salutations upon the Bearers of the Throne and describes them thus: "Their eyes lowered, they do not attempt to look at You; their chins bowed, they have long desired what is with You. Unrestrained in mentioning Your boons, they remain humble before Your mightiness and the majesty of Your magnificence."

Between these archangels and all other creatures, there are *veils of might and screens of power* that prevent them from being perceived or known by the latter. The fact that they do not imagine their Lord or ascribe to Him attributes of the creation, and that they do not consider Him to be confined in space or allude to Him through similitudes, shows that they have the purest understanding of *tawhīd* (N). In the various reports on the Prophet's ascension to the heavens (*mi'rāj*), we find similar descriptions of angels, and it is likely that the Imām's knowledge about the types and nature of angels is informed by what the Prophet witnessed during his ascension.

DESCRIBING THE CREATION OF ĀDAM

صفة خلق آدم عليه السلام

12 Then He, the Glorified, gathered up from some coarse earth and some fine, some sweet earth and some salty, soil which He mixed in water until it was pure, and kneaded with moisture until it became [smooth and] sticky. Then He fashioned from it a figure that had curves and joints, limbs and segments. He let it solidify until it held tightly together and hardened it until it was sonorously dry – for a measured time and a known duration.

١٢ ۚ ثُمَّ جَمَعَ سُبْحَانَهُ مِنْ حَرْبِ الْأَرْضِ
وَسَهْلَهَا، وَعَذْبَهَا وَسَبَخَهَا، تُرْبَةً سَنَهَا
بِالْمَاءِ حَتَّىٰ خَلَصَتْ، وَلَأَطَهَا بِالْبَلَةِ حَتَّىٰ
رَبَّتْ، فَجَبَلَ مِنْهَا صُورَةً ذَاتَ أَحْنَاءٍ
وَوُضُولٍ، وَأَعْصَاءٍ وَفُضُولٍ، أَجْمَدَهَا
حَتَّىٰ اسْتَمْسَكَتْ، وَأَصْلَدَهَا حَتَّىٰ
صَلَصَلَتْ، لِوْقَتٍ مَعْدُودٍ، وَأَمْدَدٍ
مَعْلُومٍ.

13 Then He breathed into it of His Spirit whereupon it arose as a human being possessing mental faculties by which to reflect, intellection by which he could engage [with his surroundings], limbs to put to service, extremities at his disposal, and cognizance by which he could differentiate between tastes and smells, and between colours and categories. His constitution is a compound of different hues, unified forms, contrasting opposites, and distinct admixtures of heat and cold, moisture and dryness, sorrow and joy.

١٣ ۚ ثُمَّ نَفَخَ فِيهَا مِنْ رُوحِهِ فَمَيَّثَ
إِنْسَانًا ذَا أَدْهَانٍ يُجِيلُهَا، وَفَكَرٌ
يَتَصَرَّفُ بِهَا، وَجَوَارِحٌ يَحْتَدِمُهَا،
وَأَدَوَاتٍ يَتَلَبَّهَا، وَمَعْرِفَةٌ يَفْرُقُ بِهَا
بَيْنَ الْأَدْوَافِ وَالْمَشَامِ، وَالْأَلْوَانِ
وَالْأَجَاسِ، مَعْجُونًا بِطِينَةِ الْأَلْوَانِ
الْمُحْتَلِفَةِ، وَالْأَشْبَاهِ الْمُؤْتَلِفَةِ،
وَالْأَضَدَادِ الْمُتَعَادِيَةِ، وَالْأَحْلَاطِ
الْقَبَابِيَّةِ، مِنَ الْحَرِّ وَالْبَرْدِ، وَالْبَلَةِ
وَالْجُمُودِ، وَالْمَسَاءَةِ وَالسُّرُورِ.

Some scholars, such as al-Shaykh al-Mufid, argue that the description of angels as bearers of the Divine Throne cannot be interpreted literally since the ‘*arsh* itself is a metaphor for Divine sovereignty and dominion and is not literally a throne (T).

12 This section begins the account of the creation of man. The attribution of the action of gathering dust to the Almighty is not direct; rather, it is akin to saying, “The prince built the city,” where the actual building was done by workers at his behest. In the same way, traditions tell us that it was the Angel of Death (*malak al-mawt*) who was tasked with the collection of different kinds of earth for the creation of Ādam (MB). Traditions further tell us that Ādam was thus named because he was made from the surface of the earth (*adīm al-ard*) (T). Some commentators see this as evidence for rejection of the notion that human beings existed in a non-material realm before coming to earth, since man was made *from* the earth (Z). *Coarse earth* translates ‘*hazn al-ard*’ and connotes a rough and abrasive kind of earth, like that which is found on rocky mountains; conversely, ‘*sahl*’ refers to soft, fine earth (M). The terms ‘*adhb*’ and ‘*sabakh*’ refer to sweet and salty earth respectively, where the latter is unsuitable for growing crops or farming (T). The fact that these different types of earth were mixed to create human beings holds a deeper significance and conveys the different dispensations, proclivities, and even abilities that human beings possess (N). The earth being mixed in water and kneaded with moisture is a reference to the blending of elements that constitute the physical body of human beings. Water and earth have specifically been mentioned because they are the primary elements (MB). Furthermore, it highlights the role of water in purifying the earth as well as binding the elements together. *It became sticky* renders ‘*lazibat*’ which is derived from the verse: *Indeed we created them from a sticky clay* (‘*tānin lāzib*’) (Q37:11).

The Almighty then fashioned (*‘jabala*) from this sticky clay a figure that had *curves and joints, limbs and segments*, thereby preparing a functional body that could be utilized. He then made the figure solid and firm *until it was sonorously dry* (*‘hattā salṣalat*), meaning that it would make a sound when struck, even by something as light as wind (M). Some have interpreted the phrase *for a measured time and a known duration* – certain versions have ‘*ajal*’ instead of ‘*amad*’, but the meaning is similar – as implying that this is the form that the human being will have until the Day of Resurrection, while others take it to mean that the newly fashioned human body remained in an inert state for a specific amount of time. The second meaning is supported by a tradition from Imām al-Bāqir (*‘a*) wherein

he said that the body of Ādam remained in this state for forty years, and the angels would come around it wondering why he was created (N).

13 After a specific length of time, Allāh *breathed into it of His Spirit* whereupon it became a living human being. The hiatus before this transpired was either to test the angels, or was a form of Divine grace (*lutf*) through which all doubt would be alleviated from them (I). He attributed the ‘spirit’ to Himself in order to show the honourable status of man (T). While different meanings and descriptions of the spirit have been posited by theologians and philosophers, that which is meant in this instance is simply ‘life’ (Z). Once alive, Ādam arose as a complete human being, with *mental faculties by which to reflect* as well as *intellection by which he could engage* with his surroundings and interact with all that was around him. This refers to all faculties of the mind that man possesses which help him traverse the various stages of learning and comprehension, as well as the ability to think and make logical deductions (N). The *limbs* (*‘jawāriḥ*) and *extremities* (*‘adawāt* lit. instruments) could either have the same meaning and refer to parts of the body under the control of the rational soul, or the former could be more general than the latter which comprises of those parts of one’s body that can be controlled and moved, such as hands and feet (MB).

The faculty of cognition by which humans differentiate between good and evil, is one of the most important aspects of the intellect (*‘aql*) and aside from making moral distinctions, it can also discern different perceptible categories such as tastes, smells, and colours (N). Though the sensory organs perceive these categories, it is up to the cognitive faculty to decipher them. The constitution of the human body is a *compound of different hues*, meaning that each part has its own colour: blood is red, bones are white, hair and pupils are black, and so on. The *unified forms* refer to the similar composition of different body parts such as bones and teeth (MB). A number of commentators have interpreted the *contrasting opposites and distinct admixtures of heat and cold, moisture and dryness* as a reference to the four humours of medieval medicine, which modern medicine does not ascribe to. However, one commentator attempts to draw parallels between the hot and cold humours and high and low blood pressure respectively, and between wet and dry humours and the level of hydration in one’s body (N). Yet a more general interpretation can be posited which would simply connote the state of different parts of the body in terms of temperature and level of moisture, or of the soul in terms of its varying emotions.

14 And Allāh, the Glorified, commanded the angels to fulfil the trust He had charged them with, and to comply in submission with the pledge He had enjoined upon them, by prostrating to him and showing humble reverence for him. So He said, “Prostrate before Ādam,” and they prostrated, except Iblīs. Scornful disdain overtook him and wretchedness overcame him; he prided himself upon his own creation from fire and expressed contempt for the creation from clay. Then Allāh granted him respite so that His wrath is fully warranted, the trial is completed, and the promise is fulfilled. Thus, He said, “You are indeed among the reprieved, until the day of the known time.”

15 Then He, the Glorified, settled Ādam in an abode wherein He made his life comfortable and his domain secure; and He cautioned him of Iblīs and his enmity. But his enemy beguiled him, being envious of his heavenly abode and his companionship with the virtuous. So he bartered certainty for his doubt and determination for his weakness. His joy was thus replaced with fear and his deception was followed by regret.

١٤ وَاسْتَأْذِي اللَّهُ سُبْحَانَهُ الْمَلَائِكَةَ
وَدِيعَتَهُ لَدَيْهِمْ، وَعَهْدَ وَصَيْرَهِ
إِلَيْهِمْ، فِي الْإِذْغَانِ بِالسُّجُودِ لَهُ
وَالخُنُوعِ لِتَكْرِيمِهِ، فَقَالَ:
«اَنْجُدُوا لِآدَمَ فَسَجَدُوا إِلَّا
إِلَيْسِ»، اعْتَرَثَهُ الْحَمِيمَةُ، وَغَلَبَتِ
عَيْنِهِ الشَّفْوَةُ، وَتَعَزَّزَ بِخَلْقِهِ
النَّارِ، وَاسْتَوْهُنَ خَلْقَ الصَّلَاصَالِ،
فَأَعْطَاهُ اللَّهُ النِّظِيرَةَ اشْتِحْفَاقًا
لِلشَّخْطَةِ، وَاسْتِشَاماً لِلْبَيْتَةِ
وَإِنْجَازًا لِلْعِدَةِ، فَقَالَ: «فَإِنَّكَ مِنَ
الْمُنَظَّرِينَ إِلَى يَوْمِ الْوَقْتِ
الْمَعْلُومِ».

١٥ ثُمَّ أَسْكَنَ سُبْحَانَهُ آدَمَ دَارًا
أَرْغَدَ فِيهَا عِيشَةً، وَآمَنَ فِيهَا
مَحَلَّهُ، وَحَذَّرَهُ إِلَيْسِ
وَعَدَاؤَهُ، فَاعْغَرَهُ عَدُوُهُ نَفَاسَةً
عَيْنِهِ بِدَارِ الْمَقَامِ، وَمُرَافَقَةً
الْأَبْرَارِ، فَبَاعَ الْيَقِينَ بِشَكِّهِ
وَالْعَزِيمَةَ بِوَهْنِهِ، وَاسْتَبَدَّ
بِالْجَذَلِ وَجَلًا، وَبِالْأَغْتِيرَارِ نَدَمًاً.

16 Then Allāh, the Glorified, offered him the chance to repent, taught him the word of His Mercy, and promised him a return to His Garden. He then sent him down to the abode of trials and procreation of progeny.

١٦ ثُمَّ بَسَطَ اللَّهُ سُبْحَانَهُ لَهُ فِي تَوْبَتِهِ،
وَلَقَاءَ كَلِمَةَ رَحْمَتِهِ، وَوَعْدَهُ الْمَرْدَأِ
إِلَى جَنَّتِهِ، فَأَهْبَطَهُ إِلَى دَارِ الْبَيْتَةِ
وَتَنَاهَلَ الدُّرْرَيَّةِ.

This interpretation is supported by the appended phrase '*wal-masāti wal-surūr*', translated as *and sorrow and joy*, in other editions of this sermon (T).

14 The angels were commanded to fulfil the pledge they had been charged with earlier, namely that they would prostrate to Ādam once the spirit was breathed into him (see: Q15:29). This prostration was a means of showing humility and reverence to Ādam, but was by no means an act of worship or submission to other than Allāh. In fact, some commentators go further by suggesting that the prostration was actually for Allāh and Ādam was only the direction (*qiblah*) for the angels (I). Indeed, the term '*sujūd*' literally connotes submission and humility as seen in the verse: *And the shrubs and the trees prostrate [to Him]* (Q55:6). The emphasis on showing humility and reverence after the command to prostrate is, according to one commentator, in order to ensure that their intentions remain deferential (R). When the command to prostrate before Ādam was issued, all the angels prostrated except Iblīs. This was not a sudden command as the angels, and indeed Iblīs himself, already knew what was expected of them once Ādam was brought to life. Therefore, it seems that Iblīs had already allowed the feelings of disdain and scorn to gradually overtake him, and these feelings were then manifested when the order to prostrate was given (Z). Scholars have debated the reason for Iblīs' inclusion in the command to prostrate and his subsequent punishment for disobedience, despite being of the *Jinn* (Q18:50).

Some said that Iblīs was an earthly angel, since the word *jinn* comes from *ijtinān* which connotes concealment. This is why a foetus is called *janīn* – because it is concealed within the womb of its mother. Thus, an angel can also be referred to as *jinn* since it cannot be seen and is hence concealed. Proponents of this view quote the verse: *And they have set up a kinship between Him and the jinn* (Q37:158) and note that the pagan Arabs considered angels to be the daughters of God;

therefore, *jinn* in this verse refers to angels (M). The wretchedness ('*al-shiqwah*') that overcame Iblīs was the result of his vile attributes, such as jealousy and pride, which had developed in him gradually due to his deeds, and were not part of his essence or uncontrollable nature (N). He considered his own creation from fire to be superior to Ādam's creation from clay, since fire is luminous like light (from which angels have been created), whereas earth has no such quality and is 'dark' (I). The height of his indignation was seen when he was banished from Paradise and cursed by the Almighty. Instead of repenting, Iblis sought respite until the Day of Resurrection so that he could misguide the progeny of Ādam (Q15:39). Allāh granted him respite until a specifically appointed time in order that *His wrath is fully warranted, the test is completed, and the promise is fulfilled*. When the evil ones are given respite, they continue sinning and hence become deserving of greater punishment (Q3:178). The test mentioned here is the trial human beings undergo to see who among them is obedient and the best in deeds, and who follows Satan and his own caprice. As for the promise that is fulfilled by the respite given to Iblīs, it is that all good deeds will be rewarded. Since Iblīs had worshipped Allāh for a lengthy period of time, he was granted respite as a reward for his worship (MB).

¹⁵ Ādam ('a) was then settled in an abode where life was comfortable for him, as the Qurān states: *We said, "O Adam, dwell with your spouse in paradise, and eat thereof freely whencesoever you wish..."* (Q2:35), and where he enjoyed security, as seen in the verses: *Indeed you will neither be hungry in it nor naked. And indeed you will neither be thirsty in it, nor suffer from the sun* (20:118-9). There is some discussion among scholars regarding the abode mentioned here and whether it was the eternal heavenly Paradise or a place on earth. Those who espouse the latter opinion (which is also articulated in some traditions from the Infallibles) interpret the descent (*ihibāt*) of Ādam symbolically to mean his transferal from one place to another (MB). It is evident from a number of verses that Ādam was meant to live on earth. For instance, the Almighty had already told the angels: "*Indeed I am going to set a viceroy on the earth*" (Q2:30). However, it was necessary for Ādam to learn the concept of obedience and repentance, and to know who his enemy was. That is why he was placed in the garden for a specific period of time and given access to everything therein except the forbidden tree (N). Allāh cautioned Ādam about Iblīs saying: "*O Ādam! Verily this is an enemy to you and your spouse. So let him not expel you both from the Garden and thus make you miserable*" (Q20:117). The reason for this mortal enmity on the part of Iblīs was, as mentioned above, his

disdain for a creature whom he considered inferior and because of whom he lost his lofty station in Paradise.

Despite the warning about Satan, Ādām and Ḥawwā' were beguiled by him because, as some commentators state, he swore that he meant them well: *And he swore to them, "I am indeed your well-wisher"* (Q7:21), and since they had never witnessed anyone swearing falsely before, they were deceived by him (MB). Iblīs was envious of Ādām as he still enjoyed comfort in the heavenly abode (*dār al-muqām*) and closeness to the angels, from which Iblīs was now removed. Indeed, Satan's primary goal has always been to deprive the sons of Ādām of the blessings of the Allāh (N). As a result of his beguilement, Ādām bartered his certainty about the forbidden tree for the doubt that resulted from the whisperings (*waswasah*) of Iblīs, and this resulted in the weakening of his determination, as noted in the verse: *Certainly We had made a covenant with Ādām earlier; but he forgot, and We did not find determination in him* (Q20:115) (T). As a consequence, the joy and honour he enjoyed in the Garden was replaced with fear and regret as he was removed therefrom: *Then Satan deceived them, leading to their removal from the [blissful] state they were in; and We said, "Get down, being enemies of one another! On the earth shall be your abode and sustenance for a time"* (Q2:36). Some manuscripts have the term '*al-i'tizāz*' meaning prestige, instead of '*al-ightirār*'. In that case, the translation of the last line in this section would read: *his prestige was replaced with regret* (MB).

16 Then Allāh accepted his plea for forgiveness, but this repentance did not result in permission to continue staying in Paradise, because there was no reason for his continued stay there, as he had already learned what he had to learn therein and experienced what he had to experience (N). Allāh inspired Ādām and taught him the words of repentance by which he would acquire His mercy, as stated in the verse: *Then Adam received certain words from his Lord, and He turned to him clemently* (Q2:37). There are different opinions regarding what these words were. Some believe that the words are recounted in Q7:23: *"Our Lord! We have wronged our own souls, and if You do not forgive us and bestow upon us Your Mercy, we shall certainly be losers."* A number of traditions relate that these words comprised of a request for intercession through the five luminous personages, that is, the Prophet Muḥammad, Imām ‘Alī, al-Sayyidah Fāṭimah, Imām al-Ḥasan, and Imām al-Ḥusayn ('a) (N).

CHOOSING THE PROPHETS

اختيار الأنبياء

17 And He, the Glorified, chose from his progeny prophets, taking their pledge with respect to the Revelation and entrusting them with delivering the Message. This was at a time when most of His creatures had distorted Allāh's covenant with them, such that they ignored His right and set up compeers alongside Him. The devils distracted them from cognizance of Him and stopped them from His worship.

١٧ وَاضْطَفَى سُبْحَانَهُ مِنْ وَلَدِهِ أَنْبِيَاءً
أَخْذَ عَلَى الْوَحْيِ مِيثَاقَهُمْ، وَعَلَى
تَبْلِغُ الرِّسَالَةَ أَمَاتَهُمْ، لَمَّا بَدَّلَ
أَكْثَرُ حَلْقِهِ عَهْدَ اللَّهِ إِلَيْهِمْ، فَجَهَّلُوا
حَقَّهُ، وَاتَّخَذُوا الْأَنْدَادَ مَعَهُ
وَاجْتَأْتُهُمُ الشَّيَاطِينُ عَنْ مَعْرِفَتِهِ
وَاقْطَعْتُهُمْ عَنْ عِبَادَتِهِ.

18 So He raised up among them His messengers and sent to them His prophets in succession, in order to call them to fulfil the covenant of His creation, remind them of His forgotten bounties, remonstrate with them through exposition, and unearth for them the buried intellects. [He instructed that they] show them the signs of [His] omnipotence: from the sky raised above them to the outspread earth placed beneath them, from the provisions that sustain them to the deaths that annihilate them, from the ailments that render them decrepit to the calamities that relentlessly befall them.

١٨ فَبَعَثَ فِيهِمْ رُسْلَةً، وَوَائِرَ إِلَيْهِمْ
أَنْبِيَاءً، لِيَسْتَأْذُهُمْ مِيثَاقَ
فِطْرَتِهِ، وَيُيَذَّكِّرُهُمْ مَسْيَيْ
نَعْمَتِهِ، وَيَحْتَجُوا عَلَيْهِمْ بِالشَّيْلِعِ
وَيُشَرُّو لَهُمْ دَفَائِنَ الْعُقُولِ،
وَيُرُوِّهُمْ آيَاتِ الْمُقْدُرَةِ: مِنْ
سَقْفٍ فَوْقُهُمْ مَرْفُوعٍ، وَمِهَادٍ
تَحْتَهُمْ مَوْضُوعٍ، وَمَعَائِشَ
تُحِيِّهِمْ، وَآجَالٍ تُفْنِيَهُمْ،
وَأَوْصَابٍ تُهْرِمُهُمْ، وَأَحْدَاثٍ
تَنَابِعُ عَلَيْهِمْ.

19 Allāh, the Glorified, never left His creation without a sent prophet, a revealed book, incontrovertible proof,

١٩ وَلَمْ يُحْلِ اللَّهُ سُبْحَانَهُ حَلْقَةً مِنْ نَيِّ
مُرْسَلٍ، أَوْ كِتَابٍ مُنْزَلٍ، أَوْ حُجَّةً لَا زَمَنٌ،

or a clear path. [He chose] messengers who were not curtailed by their small numbers or the multitudes of those who rejected them. Among them was the predecessor who was informed of the name of his successor, or a present one who had been introduced by one who had preceded him. In this way, generations unfolded and ages elapsed, with fathers passing away and sons succeeding them.

أَوْ مَحَاجَةً فَائِمَّةٍ، رُسُلٌ لَا تُقْصَرُ
بِهِمْ قِلَّةٌ عَدَادُهُمْ، وَلَا كَثْرَةٌ
الْمُكَذِّبُونَ لَهُمْ. مِنْ سَابِقِ سُمَّيَ
لَهُ مِنْ بَعْدَهُ، أَوْ غَابِرٍ عَرَفَهُ مِنْ
قَبْلَهُ. عَلَى ذَلِكَ نَسَلَتِ الْقُرُونُ،
وَمَضَتِ السُّدُّوْرُ، وَسَلَفَتِ
الْآيَاءُ، وَحَلَقَتِ الْأَيَّاءُ.

Allāh then promised Ādam that he would return to a peaceful and serene Garden saying: *Should any guidance come to you from Me, those who follow My guidance shall have no fear, nor shall they grieve* (Q2:38). He sent him down to the abode of trials and the abode of procreation of progeny ('tanāsul al-dhurriyyah'), meaning this world.

There is some debate about the chronology of events and whether Ādam repented before he was sent to the world (as mentioned here and in Q20:121-3) or after he was sent down (as in Q2:36-7). Those who opine that it was the latter say that in the verses of Surah Tāhā as well as in this sermon, chronological transposition (*taqdim wa ta'khīr*) has been employed. The purpose of employing this rhetorical device, according to one commentator, is to remove any doubt or delusion in the minds of some regarding the position of Prophet Ādam, as it is known that Prophets do not sin (MB). Furthermore, it is argued that the proscription was not a legal one (*tahrīm*); rather, Ādam was just instructed to keep away from the tree to avoid undesirable consequences. Hence, by eating from the forbidden tree, he did not commit a sin *per se* (N). Some have gone as far as to say that he did not eat from the forbidden tree itself but from a tree that looked like it (see: al-Ḥuwayzī, *Tafsīr Nūr al-Thaqalayn*, 2:11), but this opinion is contrary to the apparent meaning of the Qur’ān and is thus untenable.

¹⁷ From the offspring of Ādam, Allāh chose Prophets, taking a pledge from them that they would convey His message to the people, as mentioned in the

verse: [Recall] when We took a pledge from the Prophets, and from you and from Nūh and Ibrāhīm and Mūsā and Isā son of Maryam, and We took from them a solemn pledge (Q33:7). The goal of sending Prophets and Messengers was to guide the people, teach them how to live fruitful lives and establish a just society (Z). The pledge was taken and the covenant was made because the task was of great importance. The Prophets had to convey the message entrusted to them with the utmost care and precision (N). They were sent at a time when most of the people *had distorted Allāh's covenant with them*, meaning that they had gone against their innate nature (*fitrah*) which clearly points them to the existence of one Creator (R).

Some consider this to be a reference to the primordial covenant taken from humankind in the 'realm of particles' ('ālam al-dharr) as mentioned in Q7:172, while others opine that it refers to the general covenant made with human beings mentioned in the verse: *Did I not make a covenant with you, O children of Ādam, that you should not follow Satan; indeed he is your manifest enemy. And that you should worship Me, that is the straight path?* (Q36:60-1) (T). As a result of not adhering to the covenant, they neglected the right of Allāh upon them and ascribed partners to Him. Satan and his minions also took advantage of the opportunity and distracted the people from knowing Allāh and hindered them from worshipping Him. One way of distracting the people was to delude them into thinking that they were good or righteous, even when they were not (I). Since the Imām says that most of the people had broken their covenant with the Almighty, it implies that there were still some individuals who had remained steadfast upon the path of their *fitrah* (Z).

18 That the Messengers were sent *in succession* is considered by some to mean that there was a gap (*fatrah*) between them, while others opine that there was no period in human history wherein a Prophet or his successor was not present to guide the people (T). Thereafter, the Imām mentions the five goals of prophethood and reasons for sending Messengers to the people. The first was to urge them to fulfil the primordial covenant they had made, namely to believe in His oneness (*tawhīd*). This belief is ingrained within the fabric of human beings and they are only diverted from it by external factors such as what their parents or elders teach them. We find this stated clearly in the prophetic tradition, "Every child is born upon the *fitrah*" (I). Some commentators include belief in prophecy (*nubuwah*) and appointed authority (*wilāyah*) as part of the covenant being referred to here

(MB). The second goal was to remind the people of *His forgotten bounties* ('*mansiyya ni'matiḥ*') because it is only by being aware of God-given bounties that we can utilize them to attain felicity. Conversely, forgetting them leads to neglect, just like the fertile land that is neglected by the farmer who neither waters nor harvests his crops (N). The third reason for sending Prophets was to remonstrate with the people through exposition ('*yaḥtajjū ʻalayhim bi l-taబigh*'), meaning that they would convince the people with discursive argumentation and analytical reasoning. This is because Prophets would never come with any message that was contrary to reason (T).

The fourth goal was to unearth *the buried treasures of the intellects* ('*dafā'in al-ʻuqūl*') which were potentials that had yet to be realized (M). By uncovering these intellectual strengths, human beings were able to advance in many fields and acquire a deep understanding of many realities that were hitherto neglected or unknown to them (N). The fifth reason for sending Prophets was to show people the signs of Allāh's omnipotence by making them observe natural phenomena, such as the sky raised above them and the earth spread beneath them, and urging them to ponder upon the realities of life, such as their sustenance through His bountiful provisions. All that transpires in this world, through a sequence of occurrences, has a lesson for the people. A good example of how Prophets reminded the people about these things is seen in Q71:13-20 which recounts the way Nūḥ ('a) urged his people to think about these realities (T). The consequences of getting people to ponder upon these matters included bringing about a sense of awakening in them and rousing them from their slumber of negligence (N).

19 Allāh has never left His creation without guidance, either in the form of *a sent prophet, a revealed book, incontrovertible proof, or a clear path*. The Qurān addresses the Prophet thus: *Surely We have sent you with the truth as a bearer of good news and a warner. And there is not a people but that a warner has gone among them* (Q35:24). The phrase *incontrovertible proof* ('*hujjatin lāzimah*') refers to an argument that cannot be refuted (T), or the successor left behind by a Prophet to continue guiding the people after him (R). The *clear path* ('*mahabbatin qā'imah*') refers to the established Sunnah of the Prophet (Z). At least one of these four means of guidance is always made available to the people, so that the proof (*hujjah*) of Allāh is conveyed and nobody can have any excuse for not following the right path (N). Imām al-Šādiq ('a) is reported to have said, "The proof [of Allāh]

has existed before creation, alongside creation, and [will continue to exist] after creation" (T).

One of the qualities of the Messengers who were appointed by Allāh is that they were not hindered by the fact that very few people followed them, while those who stood against them were many, and carried out their mission regardless. It is interesting how, from the numerous exemplary qualities of Prophets, this particular quality has been highlighted (N). Such determination and steadfastness was then mirrored by their successors, as seen in the example of Abā ‘Abdillāh al-Ḥusayn (‘a) who stood against an army of thirty thousand with only seventy-two followers (T). Among the Prophets were those who were informed about future Prophets, the way Ḥisā (‘a) was informed about the Noble Prophet Muḥammad (ṣ) and told his followers: "*O Children of Israel! Indeed I am the Messenger of Allāh to you, confirming what is before me of the Torah, and giving good news of a Messenger who will come after me, whose name is Aḥmad*" (Q61:6). Those who were present among the people (the word 'ghābir' is glossed as 'present' (Z)) were introduced to and informed about the Prophets who preceded them; as the Qurān states: *Certainly We have sent Prophets before you. Of them are those We have recounted to you, and of them are those We have not recounted to you* (Q40:78). Believers in the message of their Prophet had to profess faith in the previous Prophets as well, since all of them were sent by Allāh (T). This was the precedent of the Almighty throughout the ages, from generation to generation, one succeeding the other, *and you will never find any change in Allāh's precedent* (Q33:62). Whenever one star of guidance set, another rose up until the Seal of the Prophets brought the final message that would guide mankind till the end of time (R).

20 When Allāh sent Muḥammad (ṣ), His promise was fulfilled and the chain of prophecy was finally completed. This is the same promise that was made by the earlier Prophets regarding the last Prophet who would bring the ultimate message from Allāh to all of mankind (MB). In one of his couplets, the Prophet's uncle and patron, Abū Ṭālib (‘a), is reported to have recited, "Do they not know that we found Muḥammad to be a Prophet like Mūsā, recorded in the earliest books?" (T). Indeed, all the previous Messengers were given glad tidings about the coming of Prophet Muḥammad (ṣ) and a pledge was taken from them in his honour (I). According to some traditions, the pledge they gave was that if Allāh sent him during their lifetime, they would believe in him and assist him (MB).

APPOINTMENT OF THE PROPHET

- 20** Until Allāh, the Glorified, sent forth Muḥammad (ṣ), in fulfilment of His promise and completion of His [line of] prophecy. A pledge was taken from the [earlier] Prophets regarding him, his attributes were well known, [and] his birth was auspicious. At that time, the people on earth were divided into different creeds, varying inclinations, and diverse persuasions. Some likened Allāh with His creation, others committed sacrilege in His name, and some looked towards other than Him. So He guided them, through him, from error and delivered them, through his noble presence, from ignorance.
- 21** Then He, the Glorified, chose for Muḥammad (ṣ) a meeting with Himself, preferring for him of His proximity, honouring him above the abode of the [ephemeral] world, and taking him away from the domain of trials. So He drew him towards Himself with honour (may Allāh bless him and his progeny). And he left amongst you what Prophets leave behind for their communities, as they never abandoned them to stray as they will, without a clear path and a standing banner.

بعث النبي

إِلَى أَنْ بَعَثَ اللَّهُ سُبْحَانَهُ
مُحَمَّدًا لِلنَّجَازِ عِدَتِهِ
وَإِنَّمَا مُبَوِّتِهِ، مَأْخُوذًا عَلَى
النَّبِيِّينَ مِيقَاتِهِ، مَشْهُورَةً سِمَاتِهِ،
كَرِيمًا مِيلَادُهُ، وَأَهْلُ الْأَرْضِ
يَوْمَئِذٍ مِلْلُ مُتَفَرِّقَةٌ، وَأَهْوَاءٌ
مُنْشَرَّةٌ، وَطَرَائِقُ مُسَتَّشَةٌ، بَيْنَ
مُشَبِّهِ اللَّهِ بِخَلْقِهِ، أَوْ مُلْحِدٍ فِي
اَسْمَهُ، أَوْ مُشَيِّرٍ إِلَى غَيْرِهِ،
فَهَذَا هُمْ بِهِ مِنَ الصَّالَةِ،
وَأَنْقَذَهُمْ بِمَكَانِهِ مِنَ الْجَهَالَةِ.
لَمْ احْتَارَ سُبْحَانَهُ لِمُحَمَّدٍ
لِقَاءً، وَرَضِيَ لَهُ مَا عِنْدَهُ،
وَأَكْرَمَهُ عَنْ دَارِ الدُّنْيَا، وَرَغَبَ
بِهِ عَنْ مَقَامِ الْبُلْوَى، فَقَبَضَهُ إِلَيْهِ
كَرِيمًا صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَآلِهِ،
وَحَلَّفَ فِيْكُمْ مَا حَلَّفَتِ الْأَئِمَّةُ
فِي أُمُّهَا، إِذْ لَمْ يَتَرَكُوهُمْ
هَمَّلًا، بِغَيْرِ طَرِيقٍ وَاضِحٍ، وَلَا
عَلَمٍ قَائِمٍ.

The fact that *his attributes were well known* ('*mashhūratān simātūh*') is attested through a number of reports that describe how the Prophet (ṣ) was recognized by certain individuals who had read about his attributes in earlier scriptures (T). Exegetes interpret the verse: *Those whom We have given the Book recognize him just as they recognize their sons* (Q2:146) to mean that the People of the Book knew the qualities of the Noble Prophet and recognized him as clearly as they recognized their own children (MB). *His birth was auspicious* ('*karīman mūlādūh*') meaning that he came from an honourable lineage, or that his birth brought with it great blessings for the people on earth. Indeed, historical accounts speak of how the Prophet's birth was accompanied by certain extraordinary events such as the falling of idols in the Ka'bah, extinguishing of the 'eternal flame' of the Zoroastrians, drying up of Lake Sawah that was worshipped by a small faction, and the destruction of some of the palaces of tyrant kings, all of which symbolized the beginning of a new era of monotheism (N).

The Prophet was sent at a time when different creeds existed in the world. Some of them had revealed laws such as the Jews, Christians, Sabaeans, and Magians, but they had become impious and nothing but the outer shell and semblance of religiosity remained among them. Others had no religion to speak of or were atheists. Some believed in idols or other creatures as divine beings, or as intercessors for them with the Creator (M). Some of those who did believe in God, likened him with His creation *or committed sacrilege in His name* ('*mulhidin fī ismih*') which is interpreted to mean naming idols after Him (N), or distorting His name and its meaning (M). The Qur'aan also mentions this group: *To Allāh belong the Best Names, so supplicate Him by them, and abandon those who commit sacrilege in His names. Soon they shall be requited for what they used to do* (Q7:180). It was at this moment in history that the Noble Prophet was sent, not to any one particular tribe or faction, but with a message for all of humanity (Z). Through him, the Almighty guided the people and delivered them from ignorance.

21 Then Allāh chose to take Muhammad (ṣ) back to His proximity, thereby *honouring him above the abode of the [ephemeral] world* and removing him from the place of hardships and tribulations. Indeed, death is a reality from which there is no escape for anyone, young or old, chosen apostle or evildoer (Z). Yet for the Noble Prophet, it was a means of honouring and elevating him, for by it Allāh *drew him towards Himself with honour*. Indeed, the Prophet is reported to have stated, "Whoever is desirous of meeting his Lord, his Lord is also desirous of meeting him"

(M). Narrations tell us that the Prophet informed his close companions about his impending demise about a month before he left this world, and instructed them on how and where he wished to be buried (T).

After the completion of his mission and the fulfilment of his duty to convey the message of guidance to the people, the Messenger of Allāh was taken by his Beloved (MB). But he did not abandon his followers in abeyance; rather, he left behind *what Prophets leave behind for their communities*, namely a means of guidance so that they do not stray from the right path. This is the very same thing that has been narrated through successive (*mutawātir*) reports wherein the Prophet (ṣ) said, “I leave behind among you two weighty things (*thaqalayn*): the Book of Allāh and my pure progeny (*ītrati*). As long as you hold on to them both, you will never go astray; and they will not separate from each other until they come to me at the pond [of Kawthar]” (N). Thus, the Glorious Qurān and the infallible successors of the Prophet remain present among the people as guides for them, to show them the straight path and the established practices (*ṣunan*) of the final Messenger (ṣ). It is indeed surprising how any Muslim could claim that the Prophet abandoned his followers *to stray as they will* (*'hamalan'*) and appointed no successor after him (Z).

22 This pericope talks about the Qurān and its importance, which is an oft-repeated theme in the sermons of Amīr al-Mu'minīn ('a). *The Book of your Lord*, that is the Glorious Qurān, has certain qualities that distinguish it, such as the clarity of its injunctions which include what is permitted and proscribed, as well as what is obligatory and supererogatory. In essence, this refers to the five categories of human actions, namely the mandatory (*wājib*), the recommended (*mustaḥab*), the permitted (*mubāh*), the discouraged (*makrūh*), and the forbidden (*ḥarām*) (N). As for its abrogating (*nāsikh*) and abrogated (*mansūkh*) verses, they refer to the verses that contain injunctions which abrogate previously revealed injunctions that were time-specific. For example, the verse: *O you who believe! When you talk secretly to the Prophet, offer a charity before your secret conversation* (Q58:12) was abrogated by the next verse: *Were you apprehensive of offering charities before your secret talks? So, as you did not do it, and Allāh turned to you in forgiveness, maintain the prayer and pay the zakāt, and obey Allāh and His Prophet.* We are told that the abrogation here occurred because the Muslims stopped coming to converse privately with the Prophet as they found it difficult to pay charity before doing so – everyone, that is, except Imām 'Alī (N).

THE HOLY QUR'ĀN AND
RELIGIOUS LAW

22 [And he also left] the Book of Allāh, your Lord, having clearly elucidated its permissions and prohibitions, obligations and merits, abrogating and abrogated [injunctions], dispensations and prescripts, specifics and universals, lessons and parables, unconditional and qualified [orders], and unambiguous and equivocal [verses]. He explicated [all] its subtleties and clarified its obscurities.

23 [That was] including what is bindingly necessary to know [and act upon], as well as that which people are permitted to remain ignorant about; injunctions that are affirmed as obligatory in the Book yet are known to have been abrogated by the Sunnah, as well as actions that are commanded in the Sunnah but abstention from which has been permitted in the Book. Also injunctions that are incumbent at their prescribed time but cease to be so later. He divided its proscriptions into major sins, for which He has threatened [them with] His hellfire, and minor ones, for which He has prepared His forgiveness. Some acts being acceptable in minimal form, yet more of which is allowed [and even better].

القرآن والأحكام الشرعية

٢٢ كِتَابُ اللَّهِ رَبِّكُمْ [فِيهِمْ] مُبِينًا حَالَةً
وَحَرَامَةً، وَفَرَائِصَةً وَفَضَائِلَةً،
وَنَاسِخَةً وَمُنْسَخَةً، وَرُحْصَةً
وَعَرَائِمَةً، وَخَاصَّةً وَعَامَّةً، وَعَبَرَةً
وَأَشَالَةً، وَمُرْسَلَةً وَمُحَدُودَةً،
وَمُحْكَمَةً وَمُتَشَابِهً، مُفَسِّرًا جُمَلَةً
وَمُبَيِّنًا عَوَامِصَةً.

٢٣ بَيْنَ مَا تَحْوِي مِيَافِقُ عِلْمِهِ، وَمُوَسَّعٍ
عَلَى الْعِبَادِ فِي جَهَلِهِ، وَبَيْنَ
مُبْتَدَئِ فِي الْكِتَابِ فَرْضَةً
وَمَعْلُومٍ فِي السُّنْنَةِ نَسْخَةً،
وَوَاجِبٍ فِي السُّنْنَةِ أَخْدُوهُ
وَمُرْحَصٍ فِي الْكِتَابِ تَرْكُهُ،
وَبَيْنَ وَاجِبٍ بِوَقْتِهِ وَرَأْيٍ فِي
مُسْتَقْبَلِهِ، وَمُبَايِنٍ بَيْنَ مَحَارِمَهُ،
مِنْ كَبِيرٍ أَوْ عَدَ عَلَيْهِ نِيرَاهُ، أَوْ
صَغِيرٍ أَرْصَدَ لَهُ غُفرَانَهُ، وَبَيْنَ
مَقْبُولٍ فِي أَذْنَاهُ، مُوَسَّعٍ فِي
أَفْصَاهُ.

Its *dispensations* ('rukhaṣahu') refer to those injunctions that one is permitted to overlook or avoid in certain circumstances such as the prohibition of eating carrion in situations of dire hunger, as noted in the verse: *He has forbidden you carrion, blood, the flesh of the swine, and that which has been offered to other than Allāh. But should someone be compelled, without being rebellious or aggressive, there shall be no sin upon him. Verily Allāh is Oft-forgiving, Merciful* (Q2:173). Its *prescripts* ("azā'imahu") refer to those injunctions that are to be carried out as prescribed, such as the fast of the month of Ramaḍān, for those who are not exempt (MB), or to injunctions from which there is no exemption, such as the command to worship only Allāh and not associate any partners to Him (N). Its *specifics and universals* ('khāṣṣahu wa 'āmmahu') refer respectively to the injunctions that apply to specific individuals or groups and those that apply to everyone. For example, the verse: *And a faithful woman if she offers herself to the Prophet...* (Q33:50) applies only to the Prophet (ṣ) whereas the injunction that is oft-repeated in the Qur'ān: *Establish the prayer* (*aqīmū al-ṣalāh*) is universal and applies to everyone (I). The 'specific' (*khāṣ*) verses may also refer to those āyāt that seem to be of general purport but actually refer to a specific group or individual, such as the Verse of Wilāyah which refers specifically to Amīr al-Mu'minīn and nobody else (N). Its *lessons and parables* ('ibarahu wa amthālahu') are meant to give examples for people to reflect upon, as noted in the verse from Sūrah Yūsuf: *There is certainly a moral in their accounts for those who possess intellect* (Q12:111) (T).

The *unconditional and qualified* ('mursalahu wa maḥdūdahu') verses refer to those with injunctions that mention no conditions or qualifications such as the verse: ...*Allāh has made trade permissible...* (Q2:275), and those that are conditional and limited such as the verse: ...*it should be trade by mutual consent* (Q4:29). Of course, in such cases, the conditional injunctions circumscribe the unconditional ones such that, in this example, only trade which is mutually agreed upon is considered valid (N). As for the unambiguous (*muḥkam*) and equivocal (*mutashābih*) verses, they refer to the verses that are clear in meaning and purport, and those that are seemingly unclear until one reflects upon them in light of other verses and traditions. For example, the verse: *Say, "He, Allāh, is One"* (Q112:1) is unambiguous while the verse: *Looking at their Lord* (Q75:23) is equivocal since Allāh cannot be seen (I). By its abstracts explicated ('mufassiran jumalahu' or, in another version 'mufassiran mujmalahu') is meant that those words, phrases, and verses that require elucidation have been explained, such as the phrase "three periods" in the

verse: *Divorced women shall wait by themselves for three periods [of purity]* (Q2:228) (MB). The elucidation of such verses is found in the teachings and traditions of the Holy Prophet and his pure progeny. Similarly, its obscurities ('*ghawāmidahu*'), such as the disjointed letters (*al-hurūf al-muqattā'ah*) in the beginning of some sūrahs, are clarified in the teachings of the Infallibles (N).

23 The Qur'ān contains *what is bindingly necessary to know* ('*mākhūdhin mīthāqu 'ilmihī*') such as the verses pertaining to the Oneness of Allāh and His attributes, as well as the theological concepts that form the basis of religion (*uṣūl al-dīn*) (N). Some commentators also include religious laws and injunctions in this category (M). It also contains *that which people are permitted to remain ignorant about* ('*muwassā'in 'alā al-'ibādi fi jahlihi*') such as the meaning of the disjointed letters or the knowledge of those things which only Allāh knows, like where a person will die and what he will earn tomorrow (See Q31:34), and it is not a duty for anyone to seek knowledge about these things (R). Furthermore, there are certain injunctions in the Qur'ān that were abrogated by the Sunnah, such as the punishment for adultery which was, according to Q4:15, to confine the guilty women in their homes until they die, but this was abrogated by the command of stoning the adulterer according to the Sunnah (I). Some scholars, however, dispute this example saying that Q4:15 was actually abrogated by Q24:2 which states that the punishment for fornication is lashing (T).

The Sunnah also contains certain injunctions that the Qur'ān dispenses with ('*murakhkhaṣin fī al-kitābi tarkuhu*'), meaning that these injunctions were abrogated by the Qur'ān, such as turning towards the Ka'bah as the *qiblah* for Muslims instead of Bayt al-Maqdis, which had previously been the Sunnah (MB). Among the Qur'ānic injunctions are those that are time-bound such that they remain in force only for a specific duration ('*wājibin bi-waqtihī wa zā'ilin fī mustaqbilīhī*'), such as the obligatory fasts of the month of Ramaḍān or the *hajj* which is mandatory only once in a person's lifetime (M). Alternatively, it may refer to something that was obligatory due to the prevailing conditions, such as migration (*hijrah*) which was compulsory during the period of persecution in the early days of Islam and then, after the Conquest of Makkah, it was no longer obligatory (N). The sins mentioned in the Qur'ān are of two types – major ('*kabīr*') and minor ('*ṣaghīr*') where hellfire has been promised for those who perpetrate the former and forgiveness is availed to those who commit the latter. These two types of sin are mentioned in the verse:

Those who avoid major sins and indecencies, excepting [minor and occasional] lapses (Q53:32).

Traditions tell us that the major sins are: ascribing partners to Allāh (Q5:72), despairing of Allāh's mercy (Q12:87), feeling secure from Allāh's plan (Q7:99), filial impiety (Q19:32), taking a life without right (Q4:93), accusing chaste women of indecency (Q24:23), consuming the wealth of orphans (Q4:10), fleeing the battlefield (Q8:16), consuming usury (Q2:275), practicing sorcery (Q2:102), fornication (Q25:68-70), swearing false oaths (Q3:77), breaching trusts (Q3:161), withholding obligatory alms-tax (Q9:35), giving dishonest testimony (Q2:283), drinking intoxicants, abandoning the prayer, and severing ties with near relatives (Q13:25) (T). Some acts mentioned in the Qurān are *acceptable in minimal form* ('*maqbūlin fī adnāhu*') when performed to a modest extent, *yet more of which is allowed* and even better ('*muwassā'iñ fī aqṣāhu*'). This means that the actions have been emphasized but individuals are free to perform them to whatever extent they are able, such as reciting the Glorious Qurān (N), or performing the midnight prayer (MB).

24 After describing the Glorious Qurān, the Imām ('a) turns his focus to one of the obligatory acts in Islam, namely pilgrimage (*hajj*). It is possible that the Imām had also referred to other aspects of worship, but since al-Sayyid al-Rađī was not aiming to compile entire sermons, those sections of the sermon may have been omitted. Nevertheless, the fact that *hajj* is mentioned in such an important sermon shows its significance as one of the principal acts of worship in Islam (N). The Sacred House (*al-bayt al-harām*), that is the Holy Ka'bah, was the first house of worship to be erected for mankind (MB). Traditions tell us that right after the Conquest of Makkah, the Prophet (s) proclaimed, "Allāh made the land of Makkah sacred on the day He created the heavens and the earth, and it will remain sacred until the coming of the Hour" (T). The Ka'bah is a *qiblah*, or a point of convergence for the people, not only during pilgrimage, but also when they pray five times a day, and even while performing supererogatory acts of worship. The description of people flocking towards the Ka'bah during the *hajj* is portrayed as similar to the way thirsty cattle flock to a watering hole ('*yāridūnahu wurūd al-an'ām*'), or how pigeons fly together excitedly towards their lofts and nests ('*yā'lāhūna ilayhi wulūh al-ḥamām*'). Those who truly understand the meaning of *hajj* come to cleanse themselves of their sins and wash their hearts and souls at the spiritual 'watering hole', performing the prescribed rituals in unison, like a flock of birds (N).

AND WHERE HE SPOKE ABOUT HAJJ

24 And He made obligatory upon you pilgrimage (*hajj*) to His [Sacred] House, making it a point of convergence for the people, to which they flock like [thirsty] cattle around a watering hole, or take recourse like excited pigeons. He made it a symbol of their humility before His greatness and their submission to His might. He selected from His creation those who heard His call and responded to it, attesting His word. They stand where His Prophets stood and imitate the angels who circumambulate His Throne, [thereby] acquiring the benefits in the market-place of His worship and hastening towards the tryst of His forgiveness.

25 He, the Glorified, made it a beacon for Islam and a sanctuary for those who seek refuge. He made its right mandatory and pilgrimage to it obligatory, and He prescribed for you its visitation. Thus, He said: *And it is the duty of mankind toward Allāh to make pilgrimage to the House, for those who can afford the journey to it; and should anyone renege [on his obligation], Allāh is indeed without need of [any of His] creation.*

وَمِنْهَا فِي ذِكْرِ الْحَجَّ

٢٤ وَفَرَضَ عَلَيْكُمْ حَجَّ بَيْتِهِ [الْحَرَامِ]
الَّذِي جَعَلَهُ قِبْلَةً لِلْأَنْعَامِ، يَرِدُونَهُ
وَرُؤُودُ الْأَنْعَامِ، وَيَأْلَهُونَ إِلَيْهِ وُلُوهُ
الْحَمَامِ. وَجَعَلَهُ سُبْحَانَهُ عَلَامَةً
لِتَوَاضُّعِهِمْ لِعَظَمَتِهِ، وَإِذْعَانِهِمْ
لِعِزَّتِهِ، وَاحْتَارَ مِنْ حَلْقِهِ شَمَاءً
أَجَابُوا إِلَيْهِ دَعْوَتَهُ، وَصَدَّقُوا كَلِمَتَهُ،
وَوَقَفُوا مَوَاقِفَ أَنْيَائِهِ، وَتَشَبَّهُوا
بِمَلَائِكَتِهِ الْمُطَفِّفِينَ بِعَرْشِهِ،
يُحْرِزُونَ الْأَرْبَاحَ فِي مَنْجَرِ عِبَادِهِ،
وَيَسْبَدُونَ عِنْدَهُ مَوْعِدَ مَغْفِرَتِهِ.

٢٥ جَعَلَهُ سُبْحَانَهُ لِلْإِسْلَامِ عَلَمًاً
وَلِلْعَائِذِينَ حَرَمًاً، فَرَضَ حَقَّهُ
وَأَوْجَبَ حَجَّهُ، وَكَتَبَ عَلَيْكُمْ
وِفَادَتَهُ، فَقَالَ سُبْحَانَهُ: «وَلَهُ
عَلَى النَّاسِ حِجُّ الْيَتِيَّةِ مِنْ
اسْتِطاعَ إِلَيْهِ سَبِيلًا وَمَنْ كَفَرَ
فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ غَنِيٌّ عَنِ الْعَالَمِينَ».

This analogy also symbolizes the rush of pilgrims which is the reason for naming the land 'Bakkah', according to some traditions (MB).

One interesting tradition states that during the period between Prophet Ḥasan and the Holy Prophet (ṣ), the Ka'bah complained to Allāh regarding the paucity of its visitors, so Allāh told it that He would soon send a light upon the earth as a result of which people would flock to it just as cattle flock to their watering holes (T). The Almighty made *hajj* a symbol of humility before His greatness (“*alāmatan li tawāḍu’ihim li ‘azamatihī*”) and submission to His might (“*idhānīhim li ‘izzatihī*”), and this is reflected in the rituals performed during the *hajj*, from the donning of two simple cloths to stoning the pillars, circumambulating the Ka'bah, etc. all of which humble the human being and make him aware of the greatness of his Lord (N). *Those who heard His call and responded to it* refers to the verse: *And call people to the hajj; they will come to you on foot and on every lean mount, coming from every remote path* (Q22:27). It is reported that once he had completed building the Ka'bah, Prophet Ibrāhīm ('a) was commanded to call out to the people. When he asked how his voice would reach them, he was assured that it would. So he stood on the *maqām* and called out in all four directions whereupon his voice was carried until it reached even the unborn children in the loins of their fathers and wombs of their mothers, and they responded to the call with *labbayk* (M). Some narrations state that those who responded to the call are the ones who got the opportunity to go for *hajj* (N).

Pilgrims who embark on the sacred journey get to stand where the Prophets stood and imitate the angels who circle the Divine Throne. Indeed, many Messengers stood on the land upon which the Ka'bah stands, including Ādām, Nūḥ, Mūsā, Ḥasan and Sulaymān ('a) (MB). The circumambulation of angels around the Throne of Allāh became the archetype for the *tawāf* of the Ka'bah, which is part of the rituals performed by pilgrims. The spiritual benefits of *hajj* are then beautifully likened by the Imām to something tangible, namely the profits earned in trade – and can there be any trade better than that which, if performed properly, may lead to the wiping away of all one's sins such that he becomes as he was on the day he was born? This is why going towards it is like hastening towards Allāh's forgiveness (N).

25 The Holy Ka'bah was thus made *a beacon for Islam* ('*lil-islāmi ‘alaman*') and *a sanctuary for those who seek refuge* ('*lil-‘āidhīna ḥaraman*'). It is reported that Imām al-Ṣādiq ('a) said, “The religion will remain standing as long as the Ka'bah stands.” And in another tradition we are told that the most beloved piece of land to Allāh is that upon which the Holy Ka'bah stands (T). As for it being a sanctuary,

this is clearly mentioned in the Qur'ān: *Indeed the first house to be set up for mankind is the one at Bakkah, blessed and a guidance for all nations. In it are manifest signs [and] Ibrāhīm's Station, and whoever enters it shall be secure...* (Q3:96-7). It is the place which hosts one of the largest annual Muslim gatherings and is a symbol of unity for Muslims who come to it from all corners of the world. Indeed, the greatness of the Ka'bah is such that even merely gazing at it is considered worship (N).

Allāh made its right mandatory ('*farāḍa haqqahu*') and pilgrimage to it obligatory ('*awjaba hajjah*') by prescribing its visitation ('*wifādahu*') for all believers who are capable. Thus He commanded: *And it is the duty of mankind toward Allāh to make pilgrimage to the House for those who can afford the journey to it; and should anyone renege [on his obligation], Allāh is indeed without need of [any of His] creation* (Q3:97). In emphasizing the importance of fulfilling the obligation of *hajj* once a person becomes capable of performing it (*mustaṭṭi*), a tradition tells us how anyone who postpones the pilgrimage without a valid excuse until he dies without having performed it will be raised on the Day of Resurrection as a Jew or a Christian, or, in another tradition, as a blind person (MB).



2

UPON HIS RETURN FROM SIFFIN

- 1** I praise Him, seeking the completion of His blessing, submitting to His might, and looking for refuge from disobeying Him. I invoke His help, being needy of His sufficing [aid]. Surely, whomever He guides goes not astray, whoever is His enemy has no sanctuary, and whomever He suffices is never in need. Indeed, this is the weightiest of all that is weighed and the most excellent of all that is treasured.

- 2** I testify that there is no god but Allāh, alone, with no partner – a testimony tested for sincerity, its core [firmly] entrenched. We hold fast to it as long as He gives us life, and save it for the horrors that will face us; for it is indeed the cornerstone of belief, the first step towards virtue, and the means of pleasing the All-merciful Lord and keeping Satan at bay.

۱ أَحْمَدُهُ اسْتِمَامًا لِنِعْمَتِهِ،
وَاسْتِشَارَلَامًا لِعِزَّتِهِ، وَاسْتِعْضَامًا
مِنْ مَعْصِيَتِهِ، وَاسْتِعْيَنَةُ فَاقَةً إِلَى
كِفَايَتِهِ، إِنَّهُ لَا يَضِلُّ مَنْ هَدَاهُ،
وَلَا يَئُلُّ مَنْ عَادَاهُ، وَلَا يُفْتَقِرُ
مِنْ كَفَاءَةٍ؛ فَإِنَّهُ أَرْجَحُ مَا وُزِنَ،
وَأَفْضَلُ مَا حُزِنَ.

۲ وَأَشْهُدُ أَنْ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ وَحْدَهُ لَا
شَرِيكَ لَهُ، شَهَادَةُ مُمْتَحَنًا
إِحْلَاصُهَا، مُعْتَقَدًا مُصَاحِّهَا،
تَمَسَّكُ بِهَا أَبْدًا مَا أَبْقَانَا، وَنَدَّخْرُهَا
لِأَهَوِيَلِ مَا يَلْقَانَا، فَإِنَّهَا غَرِيمَةُ
الْإِيمَانِ، وَفَاتِحَةُ الْإِحْسَانِ، وَمَرْضَاهُ
الرَّحْمَنُ، وَمَدْحَرَةُ الشَّيْطَانِ.

CONTEXT

This sermon was delivered after the Imām returned from the Battle of Ṣiffin, in the year 38 AH. Ṣiffin – an area close to Raqqah on the northeast of the Euphrates – was the location of the battle between the forces of Imām ‘Alī (‘a) and those of Mu‘awiyah ibn Abī Sufyān (MB). This sermon has five distinct themes: (i)

praising Allāh and seeking refuge in His mercy, (ii) the importance of belief in *tawḥīd* and the effects of faith, (iii) belief in prophethood (*nubuwwah*), merits of the Prophet, and descriptions of the Age of *Jāhiliyyah*, (iv) the status and importance of the Ahl al-Bayt, and (v) a description of the hypocrites and how they cannot be compared to the Prophet's progeny (N). Of all the commentators, it is only Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd who has posited that this sermon (or at least part of it) may not have been delivered after the Battle of Ḳiblā. This is because of the statement "Now the right has returned to its owner and has shifted to its proper place," which does not seem like something the Imām would say given the way in which this battle ended, and the ruse employed by the cunning 'Amr ibn al-Āṣ to try and transfer power to Mu'āwiyah (I). However, as other commentators have shown, the statement can be read in a way that fits in perfectly well with the context of the sermon. Furthermore, the arbitration took place eight months after the battle, and Mu'āwiyah was not the victor of the encounter. Therefore, Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's objection to the context offered by al-Sayyid al-Raḍī is unfounded (N).

COMMENTARY

1 Three different types of praise can be conceptualized by human beings. The first is where one acknowledges and recalls the greatness of the praised one, and after realization of his status and merit, the person praises him. The second is where an individual praises the one who bestows a favour upon him out of his own volition, for that demonstrates his kindness and compassion. Third is the praise expressed for one who bestows a general favour upon others, whether that includes the one who is offering the praise or not. The Qur'ān has examples of all three types of praise; see for instance Q6:1, Q39:74, and Q1:2 respectively (J). Praise (*ḥamد*) is considered by many to be synonymous to, or inclusive of, gratitude (*shukr*). Hence, it is a means of 'seeking completion' (*istiitmām*), that is, seeking increase and continuity of blessings, as per what is mentioned in the verse: *And when your Lord proclaimed, "If you are grateful, I will surely enhance you [in blessing], but if you are ungrateful, My punishment is indeed severe"* (Q14:7). Furthermore, gratitude is a precursor to submission (*taslīm*) because it entails a realization of the greatness of the giver, and that in turn helps one keep away from disobedience (M).

After praising Allāh, the Imām immediately prays for help, expressing his neediness, for indeed all of creation is in constant need of the grace of Allāh. The

Qurān describes this beautifully: *O mankind! It is you who stand in need of Allāh, and Allāh is the All-sufficient, the Praiseworthy* (Q35:15). The Imām then lists three reasons for invoking Divine assistance, namely acquiring true guidance, taking refuge in the Almighty, and attaining sufficiency through Him (N). His praise and invocation are, in a sense, a message to his audience that unlike Mu‘awiyah, who employed all unethical means at his disposal to gain the upper hand in battle and thereby disobeyed Allāh, the Imām always kept Allāh’s pleasure as his primary goal (Z). The praise of Allāh is described as the weightiest thing on the scale of deeds – heavier than all other acts of worship (R). Indeed, this means that praising Allāh and showing gratitude for His blessings has benefits both in this world and the next (N).

2 One of the reasons for frequently repeating the testimony of faith in the oneness of Allāh was to make it clear for those who would falsely ascribe divinity to the Imām that their claims were wrong (N). The phrases ‘*mumtaḥanan ikhlāṣuhā*’ and ‘*muṭaqadan muṣāṣuhā*’ refer to the profound sincerity with which this testimony is given, with its roots entrenched deep within the fabric of the Imām’s being (Z). It is this belief that acts as a guiding principle in our lives and forms the basis of our identity and character for as long as Allāh makes us live (“*abādan mā abqānā*”), and it will help us face the horrors that we will encounter in the Hereafter (T). Indeed, it is the requirement of faith for every believer and there can be no conviction without it (Z). Furthermore, this testament of faith brings many blessings as it is, in the Prophet’s words, the best *dhikr* (M).

According to the famous ‘golden-chain’ tradition, when Imām al-Ridā (‘a) was passing through Neyshāpūr, the scholars there requested him to narrate a *hadīth* for them. He thus narrated a sacred tradition (*hadīth qudsī*) from his forefathers, one by one, until the Prophet (ṣ), from Jibraīl, from Allāh the Almighty who said, “The statement ‘there is no god but Allāh’ is My fortress, so whoever enters My fortress is safe from My punishment” (M). This testimony has been named *kalimat al-tawhīd* (the statement of God’s oneness), *kalimat al-najāt* (the statement of salvation) – since there can be no salvation without it, *kalimat al-nadhīr* (the statement of warning) – since it warns that everything other than Allāh will perish, and *kalimat al-tawakkul* (the statement of reliance [upon Allāh]) – since through it we realize that none but Allāh is omnipotent and has power over everything (Z).

٣ I also testify that Muḥammad is His servant and messenger. He sent him with the eminent religion, the evident guidepost, the inscribed Book, the effulgent light, the sparkling gleam, and the unequivocal command, in order to dispel doubts, present clear proofs, issue warnings through signs, and frighten people of punishments. That was a time when people were steeped in vices while the rope of religion was severed, the pillars of conviction were shaken, fundamentals were disputed, the affair turned chaotic, the exit became narrow, and the way out could not be seen; hence guidance was obscured and blindness prevailed.

٤ The All-merciful was disobeyed, Satan was supported, and true faith was forsaken. Its pillars collapsed, its traces could not be discerned, its paths wore away, and its thoroughfares fell into decay.

وَأَشْهُدُ أَنَّ مُحَمَّداً عَبْدُهُ وَرَسُولُهُ
أَرْسَلَهُ بِالدِّينِ الْمَشْهُورِ، وَالْعَلَمِ
الْمَأْثُورِ، وَالْكِتَابِ الْمَسْطُورِ، وَالثُّورِ
السَّاطِعِ، وَالضَّياءِ الْلَامِعِ، وَالْأَمْرِ
الصَادِعِ، إِذَا حَكَمَ لِلشَّبَهَاتِ،
وَاحْتِجَاجًا بِالْيَقِنَاتِ، وَتَحْذِيرًا
بِالآيَاتِ، وَتَحْوِيفًا بِالْمَتَلَاثَاتِ،
وَالثَّائِسَ فِي فِتْنَةِ النَّجْدَمِ فِيهَا حَبْلُ
الدِّينِ، وَتَرَعَّغَتْ سَوَارِي الْيَقِينِ،
وَاحْتَلَفَ الْجُرْمُ، وَشَتَّتَ الْأَمْرُ،
وَضَاقَ الْمَحْرُجُ، وَعَمِيَ الْمَصْدَرُ،
فَالْهَدِيَ حَامِلٌ، وَالْعَمَى شَامِلٌ.

٤ عُصِيَ الرَّحْمَنُ، وُصِرِّ الشَّيْطَانُ،
وَخُذِلَ الإِيمَانُ، فَانْهَارَتْ دَعَائِمُهُ،
وَتَكَرَّرَتْ مَعَالِمُهُ، وَدَرَسَتْ سُبُلُهُ،
وَعَفَتْ شُرُكُهُ.

Indeed, the Holy Prophet (ṣ) is reported to have said, “The best thing brought by me and the Prophets before me to the people is the statement ‘there is no god but Allāh’” (I).

٣ The second testimony of faith is inextricably connected to the first. Indeed, the Prophet was first and foremost a special servant of Allāh before he became His final Messenger (N). *The evident guidepost* translates ‘*al-‘alam al-maṭhūr*’, which some have read ‘*al-ilm al-maṭhūr*’ in which case it would be rendered *the transmitted*

knowledge or a legacy of knowledge (T). The word ‘*māthūr*’ also connotes preference and some commentators have thus opined that it means Islam is the chosen and preferred religion for mankind, above all other religions (MB). The phrase ‘*al-amr al-ṣādiq*’ is derived from the instruction given to the Prophet (s) in Q15:94 to openly proclaim his message. *The effulgent light and the sparkling gleam* are attributes of the Qur’ān because it takes people out of darkness into the light and towards Allāh’s *unequivocal command* (Z).

Four duties and responsibilities of a Prophet or Messenger of Allāh are then summed up as: dispelling doubts, presenting clear proofs, issuing warnings through signs, and frightening people of punishments for their misdeeds (N). The term ‘*mathulāt*’ refers to exemplary punishments as noted from Q13:6. Hence, the Prophets warn the people by recounting the punishments that befell earlier generations for their disbelief. The word ‘*fitan*’ is plural of *fitnah* which, in this context, refers to anything that would take one away from the path of Allāh and bring one closer to his base desires (M). This is why Satan is also called *fattānun myfattin*, as he is responsible for misguiding mankind (Z). Thus, the Imām describes the state of the pagan Arabs by recalling how they were afflicted with lack of understanding and pervasive ignorance (R). By recounting their state before the advent of Islam, the Imām was warning the people about going back to their old, ignorant ways. The phrase ‘*ikhtalafa al-najru*’ has been rendered *fundamentals were disputed* since ‘*al-najr*’ refers to a basic, fundamental principle or precept (MB). That is why some commentators extrapolate this meaning to include all actions that go against the *fitrah* or primordial nature of human beings (N).

The situation at that time became so bad that they could see no escape from it, hence they ended up forsaking guidance completely and evil prevailed in their society. The word ‘*maṣdar*’ is rendered *way out* and literally refers to the point of emergence; however, some commentators have understood it to mean ‘source’ and thus take the phrase “*amiya al-maṣdar*” to mean that the source of strife could not be deciphered (Z), or the source of wise, life-giving teachings could not be ascertained (J).

4 The consequences of rejecting guidance are mentioned here. Selecting the Divine name ‘*al-Raḥmān*’ (the All-merciful, or the Omnipotent) was to emphasize that despite His all-encompassing beneficence, which would naturally motivate people to obey and submit, the people were blinded by their base desires and openly disobeyed Him (N). The *pillars* could be a reference to the saintly

5 They obeyed Satan thereby treading on his tracks and drinking from his watering holes. Through them, his banners flew and his standard was raised; in [a period of] strife that trampled upon them with its soles, trod on them with its hooves, and even stood on its toes. Thus they were lost within it, perplexed, ignorant, and afflicted; [living] in a goodly abode but with bad neighbours. Their sleep was restlessness and their kohl, tears; in a land where the learned were bridled while the ignorant were honoured.

٥ أَطَاعُوا الشَّيْطَانَ فَسَلَكُوا مَسَالِكَهُ
وَوَرَدُوا مَنَاهِلَهُ، بِهِمْ سَارَتْ أَعْلَامُهُ
وَقَامَ لِوَاؤُهُ، فِي فِتَنٍ دَاسَتْهُمْ
بِأَخْفَافِهِ، وَوَطَّنَتْهُمْ بِأَظْلَافِهِ،
وَقَامَتْ عَلَى سَنَابِكِهَا، فَهُمْ فِيهَا
تَائِهُونَ حَائِرُونَ جَاهِلُونَ مُغْنَوُونَ،
فِي حَيْرٍ دَارٍ وَشَرٍ حِيرَانٍ، تَوْمَهُمْ
سُهُودٌ، وَكُحْلُهُمْ دُمُوعٌ، بِأَرْضٍ
عَالِمُهَا مُلْجَمٌ، وَجَاهِلُهَا مُكَرْمٌ.

guides or the prophetic teachings, and their collapse denotes either their obliteration or being forgotten and consigned to oblivion (N). *Its traces could not be discerned* translates ‘*tanakkarat ma’ālimuhu*’ where the traces might refer to heavenly scriptures or divine teachings (N). The statement *its paths wore away and its thoroughfares fell into decay* is an analogy that highlights how all vestiges of religion were gradually wiped out (M).

5 This section details the way in which Satan was supported by those who abandoned guidance. By obeying him, they followed his tracks and drank *from his watering holes*, meaning they were ensnared by him (N). The banners and standard of Satan are allusions to those who call people to his evil path or to his false teachings (M). *Strife* translates ‘*fītan*’ here since this is the second time it appears as an indefinite noun (*nakirah*), and usually this means that the second instance differs in meaning from the first (MB). The description of how the followers of Satan were trampled is portrayed using animal metaphors since *akhfāf*, *ażlāf*, and *sanābik* refer to the hooves of camels, cattle, and horses respectively (N). ‘*Qāmat ‘alā sanābikhā*’ is rendered *stood on its toes* and connotes doing something to the fullest possible measure and extent. The goodly abode (*khayri dārin*) may refer to the Levant, because it is home to the Holy Land (*al-ard al-muqaddasah*), yet its

inhabitants were the most evil neighbours since they made up the army of Mu‘āwiyah (R). Alternatively, it could refer to the sacred land of Makkah (*al-balad al-ḥarām*) while its evil inhabitants were the disbelieving Quraysh (T), as the Prophet himself reportedly used the same phrase (*‘kuntu fī khayri dārin wa sharri jīrānin’*) to describe the state of the Muslims in Makkah before migration (I). One commentator expresses his amazement at how the cities wherein the graves and mausoleums of Prophets and Imāms are found (which are deemed part of the goodly abode) have inhabitants who are mostly wicked and evil (Z).

Those who had restlessness in place of sound sleep, and tears instead of kohl, are either the evil neighbours who were restless because of the success of the believers (I), or the believers who were not granted a moment’s peace and whose tears never dried up because of the incessant persecution they had to bear (N). *The learned were bridled* may be a reference to those monotheists who lived before the advent of Islam. This included individuals such as Zayd ibn ‘Amr, who was forced to leave Makkah due to the persecution he faced for his faith. In contrast, ignorant individuals such as Abū Jahl were honoured in that pre-Islamic society (T). Alternatively, the learned could refer to those who believed in the Prophet (ṣ) and were persecuted for their belief, while the ignorant were those who disbelieved (I). Some scholars read the last sentence in the present tense: *a land where the learned are bridled while the ignorant are honoured*, and say that ‘the learned’ refers to the Imām himself whereas ‘the ignorant’ refers to Mu‘āwiyah and his ilk (R).

6 This section talks about the merits of the Ahl al-Bayt (‘a), meaning the infallible progeny of the Prophet (ṣ) and not, as some have surmised, all his relatives (MB). The pronouns *His* and *He* in this section either refer to the Almighty (MB), or to the Prophet (Z), though most commentators opine that it is the former. The Ahl al-Bayt are *the trustees of His secret* meaning that they have been entrusted with the secret knowledge that other people would not be able to bear (Z). They are *the haven of His affair* meaning that they are the preservers of the divine message that was brought by the Prophet. As custodians of God’s laws, they are the ones to whom one must refer when in doubt about any legal matters (N). If read *‘mawilu hikamih’* instead of *‘hukmih’* the translation would be *the custodians of His wisdom*, meaning those who know about the wisdom pertaining to divine injunctions (N).

ABOUT THE PROGENY OF THE PROPHET

- 6 They are the trustees of His secret, the haven of His affair, the treasure chest of His knowledge, the custodians of His laws, the caverns of His scriptures, and the peaks of His religion. Through them, He straightened its bent back and eliminated the quivering of its flanks.

وَمِنْهَا: يَعْنِي آلَ النَّبِيِّ ﷺ

٦ هُمْ مَوْضِعُ سِرَّهُ، وَلَجَأَ أَمْرِهِ
وَعَيْنَهُ عِلْمِهِ، وَمَوْئِلُ حُكْمِهِ
وَكُهُوفُ كِتَبِهِ، وَجَبَالُ دِينِهِ
بِهِمْ أَقَامَ اِنْحِنَاءَ ظَهْرِهِ، وَأَذْهَبَ
إِرْتِعَادَ فَرَائِصِهِ.

AND: ABOUT THE HYPOCRITES

- 7 They sowed iniquity, watered it with deception, and harvested destruction. Nobody in the *ummah* can compare to the progeny of the Prophet (ṣ), neither can anyone who has benefitted from them be likened to them. They are the foundation of religion and the pillar of certitude. One who oversteps has to return back to them, and one who falls behind has to catch up with them. They possess the characteristics of true vicegerency, and [its] succession and inheritance is among them. Now the right has returned to its owner and has shifted to its proper place.

وَمِنْهَا: فِي الْمَنَافِقِينَ

٧ زَرَعُوا الْفُجُورَ، وَسَقَوْهُ الْمُرُورَ
وَحَصَدُوا الشُّبُورَ، لَا يَنْقَاشِبُ بِآلِ
مُحَمَّدٍ ﷺ مِنْ هَذِهِ الْأُمَّةِ أَحَدٌ
وَلَا يُسَوِّي بِهِمْ مَنْ جَرَتْ نِعْمَتُهُمْ
عَلَيْهِ أَبْدًا. هُمْ أَسَايِسُ الدِّينِ وَعَمَادُ
الْقِيَمِ، إِلَيْهِمْ يَنْفِيُ الْعَالِيُّ وَبِهِمْ
يُلْحَقُ السَّالِيُّ، وَأَهُمْ حَصَائِصُ حَقِّ
الْوَلَايَةِ، وَفِيهِمُ الْوَصِيَّةُ وَالْوَرَاثَةُ،
الآنِ إِذْ رَجَعَ الْحَقُّ إِلَى أَهْلِهِ، وَقُبِّلَ
إِلَى مُسْتَقْلِهِ.

The Ahl al-Bayt are the *caverns of His scriptures*, meaning that they have safeguarded the heavenly scriptures and elucidate the teachings contained therein for the people (M). They are the *peaks of His religion* since their example in Islam is like that of mountains on earth – they keep it steady, stable, and firm. Indeed without mountains the earth would become uninhabitable (Z). Through them, the

religion's back was straightened and made firm against those who would falsely ascribe innovations to it (R). The term *farā'iṣ'* is plural of *fariṣah*, which refers to the flesh or muscle between the side and the shoulder-blade, and near the heart (N). When the Imām says that through the Ahl al-Bayt Allāh made the quivering stop, he means that all forms of disquiet and discord in religion were removed through them (R). Some commentators consider this to be a description of how the Ahl al-Bayt ('a) supported the Prophet (ṣ) during the early days of Islam, when the religion's back was "bent" out of weakness and the believers trembled out of fear of persecution (Z).

7 Since this sermon was delivered after the Battle of Ḫiffin, it is likely that the hypocrites being referred to are the followers of Mu'āwiyah, as well as the Khawārij (N). The description of how the hypocrites watered and harvested the iniquity they had planted serves only to emphasize the work and effort they put into their evil actions and schemes (R). *They sowed iniquity* thereby allowing it to grow and spread, and *watered it with deception* which gave it life, just as water gives plants life, and in the end, they *harvested destruction*, which is the consequence of iniquity (MB). After relating the state of the hypocrites, the Imām once again emphasizes the lofty and unmatched position of the Ahl al-Bayt ('a). Indeed, no one from the community of believers can ever be compared to the pure progeny of the Prophet (ṣ) because they have been purified by the Almighty, as the Qur'ān explicitly states (Q33:33). Furthermore, there is no way anyone from the *ummah* could be equated with the Ahl al-Bayt since all are recipients of the benefits of their blessed presence (N). The pure progeny of the Prophet represent the very foundation of religion and *pillar of certitude* ("imād al-yaqīn"). Some commentators gloss the term '*yaqīn*' as '*haqq*'; meaning that the Ahl al-Bayt are the pillars of truth (Z). As such, the only way to attain salvation is to adhere to their teachings, which represent the right path and the middle way – to which those who transgress the limits must return (N). Indeed, they represent the epitome of merits such as wisdom, chastity, courage, and justice, and all of humanity must aspire to attain these merits by following their guidance (M). They possess the traits of the rightful leaders and are the heirs of the Prophet (ṣ). Finally, the Imām says that the right of leadership has now returned to its legitimate owner, that is, himself, after it had been taken over by others (M). It is befitting that he should mention this here, after stating the merits and rights of the Ahl al-Bayt (N).



3

SERMON OF SHIQSHIQIYYAH

1 Verily, by Allāh, that individual wore the mantle [of leadership] knowing well that my place in it was as central as the pivot to the grinding stone. Down from me pour torrents [of knowledge] and up to me no bird can soar. Yet I drew a curtain over it and kept myself aloof from it. I found myself confronted with two choices: either I should fight with a severed hand or patiently endure the blinding darkness [of tribulation], wherein the adults grow feeble and the young grow old, and in which a true believer toils till he meets his Lord.

PREFERRING PATIENCE

2 I found that patience in these circumstances would be wiser. So I remained patient with a mote in the eye and a bone in the throat, as I watched the plundering of my inheritance. This continued until the first one passed away having handed it over to that individual after him.

[Then he quoted a verse by al-Ashā:]

١ أَمَا وَاللَّهِ لَقَدْ تَقْمَصَهَا فُلَانُ، وَإِنَّهُ
لِيَعْلَمُ أَنَّ مَحَلِّي مِنْهَا مَحْلُ الْفُطْبُ
مِنَ الرَّحْيِ، يَنْحَدِرُ عَنِي السَّيْلُ، وَلَا
يَرْقَى إِلَيَّ الطَّيْرُ، فَسَدَّلُتْ دُوَاهَا
ثُوبَاً، وَطَوَيْتُ عَنْهَا كَشْحَا، وَطَفَقْتُ
أَرْتَئِي بَيْنَ أَنْ أَصْرُولَ بَيْدِ جَدَّاء، أَوْ
أَصْبَرَ عَلَى طَحْيَةِ عَنْيَاء، يَهْرُمُ فِيهَا
الْكَبِيرُ، وَيَشِيبُ فِيهَا الصَّغِيرُ،
وَيَكْدُحُ فِيهَا مُؤْمِنٌ حَتَّى يَلْقَى رَبَّهُ.

ترجيح الصبر

٢ فَرَأَيْتُ أَنَّ الصَّبْرَ عَلَى هَاتَأَا أَحْجَى،
فَصَبَرْتُ وَفِي الْعَيْنِ قَلْدَى، وَفِي
الْحَلْقِ شَجَّاً، أَرَى ثُرَاثِي نَهْبَأً، حَتَّى
مَضَى الْأَوْلُ لِسَبِيلِهِ، فَأَذْلَى بِهَا
إِلَى فُلَانِ بَعْدَهُ.

ثُمَّ تَمَثَّلَ بِقَوْلِ الْأَنْجَشِي:

*How different is my present upon this
camel saddle [of hardship],
from the days of Jābir's brother, Ḥayyān!*

شَانَ مَا يَوْمِي عَلَى كُورِهَا
وَيَوْمُ حَيَّانَ أَخِي جَابِرٍ

- 3 How strange that during his lifetime, he wished to be released from its burden, yet he secured its mandate for another after his death! Firmly they held its udders, sharing it between themselves. Thus he placed it under one who was harsh, where its wounds became severe and its handling rough. The mistakes made were many, as were the excuses given. Its possessor is like the rider of an unruly camel; if he pulls the reins, he would injure its nose but if he lets it loose, he would be thrown down.

فَيَا عَجَبًا بَيْنَا هُوَ يَسْتَقِيلُهَا فِي
حَيَّاتِهِ إِذْ عَقَدَهَا لِآخَرَ بَعْدَ
وَفَاتِهِ، لَشَدَّ مَا تَشَطَّرَ ضَرْعَيْهَا،
فَصَرَّهَا فِي حَوْرَةِ حَشْنَاءِ
يَغْلُظُ كَلْمُهَا، وَيَخْسُنُ مَسْهَاهَا،
وَيَكْثُرُ الْعَيْازُ وَالْأَغْتَدَازُ مِنْهَا،
فَصَاحِبُهَا كَرَاكِبُ الصَّعْبَةِ، إِنْ
أَشْنَقَ لَهَا حَرَمَ، وَإِنْ أَسْلَسَ لَهَا
نَقَّحَمَ.

CONTEXT

This sermon is commonly known as *al-Shiqshiqiyah* due to the use of this term by the Imām to describe his declamation against those who usurped his right to the caliphate. Some have also given it the title *al-Muqammaṣah* because of the term ‘taqammaṣa’ which is found in the first sentence of this sermon (MB). It is unique in that it contains certain points that are found nowhere else, and also because it is arguably the most controversial sermon in *Nahj al-Balāghah* (N). Nevertheless, it has been related by a large number of scholars, both Sunnī and Shī‘ah, from the earliest generations (T). The sermon was delivered either in Kūfah or Ruhbah (a village about 60km from Kūfah) during the last days of the Imām’s rule, after the Battles of Jamal, Ṣiffin, and Nahrawān, as evidenced from the mention of the three groups who were fought in these battles (MB). According to numerous reports, it was articulated in response to a query by Ibn ‘Abbās about the caliphate and in *Kitāb al-Irshād*, al-Shaykh al-Mufid describes how, before

responding to Ibn ‘Abbās and commencing this sermon, the Imām gave a deep sigh (T). In this sermon, the Imām recounts how his right was usurped by the first three caliphs. His aim was not to complain, for indeed he had remained patient throughout these events. Rather, he wanted to set the record straight and clarify the reality for those who were in doubt, and remind those who had forgotten, so that it would be recorded in the annals of history (N).

Furthermore, it is evident that present events are a consequence of the decisions and actions of the past. Hence, in a way, the Imām was trying to explain that what they were witnessing at that time was the result of the grave injustices of the past. The sermon was cut short by the delivery of a note to the Imām which might have contained something he deemed of great importance. He may have, in the few moments it took to read the note, calmed down and seen it unwise to continue his sermon. It is noteworthy that this sermon has more chains of transmission than many other sermons in Sayyid al-Rađī’s compilation (N).

COMMENTARY

1 The word ‘*taqammaša*’ literally means putting on a shirt (*qamīṣ*), which is a simple and even mundane task. However, the caliphate is something difficult to handle and is more akin to a large grinding mill. Hence the Imām states that his position is like the pivot of the grinding stone of the caliphate, something without which it would not function as it ought to (N). This was because he bore the knowledge passed on by the Prophet (s) and espoused his lofty traits and merits that none could ever reach. Yet despite knowing his position, he was deprived of the caliphate and was forced to keep away from it as he lacked sufficient support to stake his claim and knew that if he rose up, it would lead to the fracturing of a nascent community that had not yet firmly established itself (M). Therefore, he drew a curtain over it and remained patient in silence. The fact that Abū Bakr – referred to in this sermon as Ibn Abī Quḥāfah, or simply ‘*fulān*’ – and all the Companions knew about the right of Amīr al-Mu’minīn is attested to in many traditions and historical reports. One particularly glaring account has Mu‘awiyah ibn Abī Sufyān telling Muḥammad ibn Abī Bakr explicitly that his father and those around him were well aware that Imām ‘Alī had been designated the successor of the Prophet (s), yet they purposely decided to take the caliphate (T).

The analogy given by the Imām of his merits is that of a mountain so high that water flows down from its peaks rapidly, almost causing a flood, and no bird is able to fly to its peak (T). He said this about his own knowledge and merits to remind the people of his position; it was neither self-praise, since the Imām is above such vainglory, nor information, since the people already knew about his greatness (N). The Imām then describes how he evaluated the situation and thought about his options, showing that his decision was not made in haste. This is further supported by the description of his choice as one in which great tribulation had to be endured, and as an ordeal that would have turned a young person old (M). This depiction is similar to the verse: ...*how will you avoid the day which will turn children's hair grey?* (Q73:17) which describes the hardships of the Day of Judgment (R). When asked by Ash'ath ibn Qays why he chose not to rise up, the Imām replied that the Prophet (ṣ) had told him about what would happen and had instructed him to take up arms *only* if he had enough supporters, which he did not (T). The phrase *in which a true believer toils till he meets his Lord* refers to the struggle of a true believer in enjoining good and bearing great suffering until he leaves this world (MB).

2 The expression *with a mote in the eye and a bone in the throat* conveys vividly the height of unease and discomfort that was experienced by Imām ‘Alī during this period, as he witnessed the plundering of his inheritance (N). A similar expression of distress is mentioned in sermon no. 26. Of course, by ‘inheritance’ the Imām is not referring to material or worldly inheritance; rather, he is talking about the spiritual heritage of Divine appointment (N). The word ‘*adlā*’ connotes giving and proffering something to someone as a gift or a bribe (see Q2:188 for instance). As such, some commentators say that the caliphate was conferred to the second caliph by the first because of his role in securing it for the latter (I). The Imām then quotes the poetry of A’shā, who was a pagan poet of the pre-Islamic era, where he compares his ‘good old days’ in the company of his benefactor Ḥayyān, the brother of Jābir, when he had great respect and enjoyed a life of ease, to his current state of indigence and disgrace. Indeed, towards the end of his life, A’shā (who was given this title because of his weak eyesight) had to scrounge in the streets and alleyways of Makkah and Madīnah to acquire his daily bread. It is during this time that he uttered these words which later became a couplet used to describe drastic change in circumstances.

Hence, the poem aims to contrast the days when the Prophet was alive and Imām ‘Alī was respected as the one closest to him, to the days when his right was

usurped and passed from one person to another (N). Alternatively, it could be a reference to the vast difference between his state and that of those who usurped the caliphate (M). Some have seen it as a specific comparison between his being deprived of his right to the caliphate during an age when the situation was critical for the Muslims, and the way in which it was passed on to 'Umar when everything was prepared and the groundwork had been laid (I).

3 After alluding to the famous statement made by Abū Bakr where he addressed the people during the beginning of his caliphate and said, "*aqīlūnī fā lastu bi khayrikum*" ('relieve me of it, for I am not the best amongst you'), the Imām expresses his amazement at how he could then pass on the caliphate to someone else if he considered himself unworthy of it. Indeed, this action of his makes it seem that his statement was not sincere (M). The analogy of sharing a camel's udders signifies taking turns, since a female camel has a pair of udders that are milked in turn. In the same way, they took turns in usurping the caliphate from its rightful heir (N). Then the Imām describes what the second caliph was like, and many historical accounts relate his harsh and rough nature. The phrase *fāṣayyarahā fī ḥawzatin khashnād*' literally means 'he drove it in a rough [and rocky] terrain', and is considered to be a metaphor for the hardened and uncaring nature of that individual (N). One account has Ṭalḥah rebuking Abū Bakr, "What will you say to your Lord tomorrow when you have appointed over us a harsh and callous man!" (Z). It was for this very reason that many mistakes were made and at times excuses and apologies were given, as noted from various accounts of 'Umar's reign. Indeed, we see that he would often issue rulings hastily and only later, when his attention was drawn to its erroneousness, would he take back his words and apologize (M).

Such an attitude led to the 'wounding' of the caliphate; an injury that was inflicted by words more than deeds – hence the phrase '*yaghlužu kalmuhā*' (M). Al-Sayyid al-Rađī says that the analogy at the end of this section describes how if a person pulls sharply on the reins of an unruly camel while it struggles to break away, its nostrils get perforated, yet if he lets it loose even slightly, it would plunge forward and he would lose control over it.

4 Consequently, by Allāh, people were tested by that individuals' reckless abandon, vehement hostility, capriciousness, and deviation. Yet I remained patient despite the lengthy duration and the difficulty of the trial, until when he [too] went on his way, he placed the matter before a group, considering me to be their equal. O God, what a council! When was there ever any doubt about me with regard to the first of them such that I was now compared to these men? Yet I descended when they descended and ascended when they ascended. One of them turned against me because of his hatred, another favoured his in-law with this excuse and that, till the third among them arose, heaving his chest amid his discharge and consumption. With him rose the sons of his father, devouring Allāh's property like camels consume spring foliage. [This went on] until its twine was severed; his deeds hastened his own end, and he became a victim of his gluttony.

فَمُنِيَ النَّاسُ، لَعْنَرُ اللَّهِ، مِنْ فُلَانٍ
 بِخَبْطٍ وَشِمَاءِ، وَتَلَوْنٍ، وَاعْتَرَاضٍ.
 فَصَبَرْتُ عَلَى طُولِ الْمُدَّةِ وَشَدَّةِ
 الْمِحْنَةِ، حَتَّى إِذَا مَضَى لِسَيْلَهِ
 جَعَلَهَا فِي جَمَاعَةٍ زَعْمَ أَنَّيِ
 أَحَدُهُمْ، فَيَا اللَّهُ وَلِلشُّورَى! مَىِ
 اعْتَرَضَ الرَّئِبُ فِي مَعِ الْأَوَّلِ مِنْهُمْ،
 حَتَّى صَرُثْ أَقْرَنُ إِلَى هَذِهِ النَّظَائِرِ؟
 لَكِي أَشَفَقْتُ إِذْ أَسَفُوا، وَطَرَثْتُ إِذْ
 طَارُوا، فَصَغَّارَ جُلُّ مِنْهُمْ لِضَغْنِهِ،
 وَمَالَ الْآخَرُ لِصَهْرِهِ، مَعَ هِنْ وَهَنِ.
 إِلَى أَنْ قَامَ ثَالِثُ الْقَوْمِ، نَافِجاً
 حِضْنِيهِ بَيْنَ تَشِلِهِ وَمُعْتَافِهِ، وَقَامَ
 مَعَهُ بُنُو أَبِيهِ يَحْضُمُونَ مَالَ اللَّهِ
 حَضْمَ الْأَبْلِي نِتَّةَ الرَّيْعِ، إِلَى أَنْ
 انْكَثَ عَلَيْهِ فَتْلَهُ، وَأَجْهَرَ عَيْنَهُ
 عَمَلُهُ، وَكَبَثَ بِهِ بُطْنَهُ.

Some commentators consider this to refer to the condition of the believers during the reign of the second caliph where if they attempted to oppose him, he would react very harshly and they would have put themselves in danger of his reprisal; yet if they accepted everything he did and said, they would face another danger, namely the distortion of religion (N). Others opine that the analogy of the unruly

camel signifies the caliphate itself, meaning that if a leader tries to enforce his rule over the people and establish justice by compulsion, it would result in rebellion by some who are slaves to their desire, yet if he leaves the people to do whatever they wish, his negligence will lead to destruction and downfall (MB).

4 The four states mentioned in the beginning of this section describe the test that the people underwent during the reign of the second caliph. *Reckless abandon* translates '*khabṭ*' which is derived etymologically from a camel's striking the ground with its forefoot in a random manner, and later came to signify corruption, derangement, and haphazardness. *Vehement hostility* translates '*shimāṣ*' which also connotes defiance, rebellion, and wickedness. Fickleness and constant change in behaviour, like the changing colours of a chameleon, is summed up as '*talawwun'* or capriciousness. Finally, the test of deviation from the straight path ('*i'rāq*') is mentioned. Indeed, many examples of each of these can be found in historical accounts of the second caliph's rule (N). The hardship was further compounded for the Imām due to the length of Ibn al-Khaṭṭāb's reign and the severity of its trials. Upon his death, the second caliph appointed a consultative council of six members, one of whom was the Imām. In doing so, he was equating the Imām with the other five members, even though it was known that the Imām was far superior to them in merit. The other members of the council were 'Uthmān ibn 'Affān, 'Abd al-Rahmān ibn 'Awf, Ṭalḥah, al-Zubayr, and Sa'd ibn Abī Waqqāṣ. *O God, what a council!* translates the phrase '*yā lallāh wa lil-shūrā*' which also bears the meaning of seeking help (*istighāthah*) from the Almighty (MB). The Imām then proceeds to mention the flaws in the consultative process. He says that there was never any doubt in anyone's mind regarding his excellence over *the first of them*, meaning the first caliph, so how could he then be compared with these other five individuals? Nevertheless, for the sake of communal harmony, the Imām went along with them and, like a bird that flies within a flock, he descended when they did and ascended when they did (Z).

According to another account, the Imām went along with them in order to show how the second caliph had contradicted himself, since he had earlier proclaimed that the Prophet (ṣ) said: "Prophethood (*nubuwah*) and leadership (*imāmah*) do not come together in the same household," using this as an excuse to deprive Imām 'Alī of the caliphate. Yet now, he had himself chosen 'Alī ('a) as one of the six possible candidates for his successor (R).

PLEDGING ALLEGIANCE TO 'ALĪ

5 Nothing alarmed me but the sudden advance of people rushing towards me from every direction, like the mane of a hyena, trampling al-Hasanān and tearing the sides of my cloak. They gathered around me like a flock of sheep and goats. Yet when I took up the reins of government, one group broke their oath [of allegiance], another showed defiance, and yet another acted unjustly; as if they had not heard Allāh say: *That is the abode of the Hereafter which We shall grant to those who seek neither to exult themselves on earth, nor to cause corruption, and the outcome is [best] for the Godwary.*

6 Indeed, by Allāh, they heard it and understood, but this world appeared glittering in their eyes and they were enamoured by its embellishments. Behold, by He who split the kernel and created the human being! Were it not for the presence of the multitudes and exhaustion of the argument due to the upsurge of supporters, along with the pledge taken by Allāh from the learned not to tolerate the gluttony of the oppressor and the starvation of the oppressed, I would have cast its rope on its withers and would have quenched the last with the same cup as the first.

٥ فَمَا رَأَيْنِي إِلَّا وَالنَّاسُ إِلَيَّ كَعْرُوفٌ
الصَّبَعُ، يَسْأَلُونَ عَلَيَّ مِنْ كُلِّ
جَانِبٍ، حَتَّى لَقَدْ وُطِئَ الْحَسَنَانِ،
وَشَقَّ عِطْفَاهَا، مُجْتَمِعُينَ حَوْلِي
كَرِيمَةُ الْغَنَمِ. فَلَمَّا نَهَضْتُ بِالْأُمْرِ
نَكَثْ طَافِئَةً، وَمَرَقْتُ أُخْرَى،
وَقَسْطَ آخْرُونَ، كَانُوهُمْ لَمْ يَسْمَعُوا
اللَّهُ سُبْحَانَهُ يَقُولُ: «تِلْكَ الدَّارُ
الْآخِرَةُ تَجْعَلُهَا لِلَّذِينَ لَا يُرِيدُونَ
عُلُوًّا فِي الْأَرْضِ وَلَا فَسَادًا وَالْعَاقِبَةُ
لِلْمُتَّقِينَ».

٦ بَلِي، وَاللَّهُ لَقَدْ سَمِعُوهَا وَوَعَوْهَا،
وَلَكُنْهُمْ حَلِيتُ الدُّنْيَا فِي أَغْيَنِهِمْ،
وَرَاقُهُمْ زِبْرُجَهَا. أَمَا وَالَّذِي فَلَقَ
الْحَبَّةَ وَبَرَأَ النَّسَمَةَ، لَوْلَا حُضُورُ
الْحَاضِرِ، وَقِيامُ الْحُجَّةِ بِوُجُودِ
النَّاصِرِ، وَمَا أَخَذَ اللَّهُ عَلَى الْعَلَمَاءِ
أَلَا يُقَارِرُوا عَلَى كِظَنَةِ ظَالِمٍ، وَلَا
سَغَبُ مَظْلُومٍ، لَأَلْقَيْتُ حَبَّهَا عَلَى
غَارِبَهَا، وَأَسْقَيْتُ آخِرَهَا بِكَأسِ

أَوْلَاهَا، وَلَا كُنْتَمْ ذِيَّا كُمْ هَذِهِ أَزْهَدْ
of yours less appealing to me than the
عِنْدِي مِنْ عَفْطَةِ عَنْزٍ!
snot of a goat!

During the consultation, due to his hatred and personal vendetta, Sa'd ibn Abī Waqqāṣ voted against Imām 'Alī. Some of his maternal uncles had been killed by the Imām in battle and he bore a deep grudge; so much so that even when Imām 'Alī became the caliph, Sa'd never pledged allegiance to him (N). It was 'Abd al-Rahmān ibn 'Awf who favoured 'Uthmān because he was married to the latter's sister and was thus his brother-in-law. '*Ma'a hanin wa han'* is rendered *with this excuse and that* and is a phrase used in place of certain grave things that are better left unmentioned due to their ugly nature (MB). The third one, meaning 'Uthmān, then arose as the caliph *amid his discharge and consumption*, meaning his main concern was the acquisition and spending of material wealth. And he was not alone in this, for his paternal relatives (from the Banū Umayyah) also partook of the financial corruption, devouring the wealth of this world that did not belong to them like a camel voraciously eats up fresh spring foliage (R). In the end, it was due to his avarice and nepotism that the third caliph was assassinated by the mutineers, and this is mentioned by the Imām as an admonition from which lessons should be taken (N).

5 When 'Uthmān was assassinated, the people swarmed around Imām 'Alī ('a) urging him to accept the caliphate. So great was their number and so unruly the crowd that the Imām worried for the safety of Imām al-Ḥasan and Imām al-Ḥusayn (together referred to as al-Hasanān). The analogy of the hyena's mane is used because it grows over the entire back of the animal and thus symbolizes not only the multitude of people, but also their surrounding the Imām from all directions. Likewise with his description of them as *a flock of sheep and goats*. Indeed, the crowd was so large that they almost trampled on Imām al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn ('a) who were not young children at this time; in fact, they were strong young men of over thirty. This shows how critical the situation was (N). Two alternative meanings have been offered for '*al-Hasanān*'; the first being the two large toes of the feet and the second, the bones of the forearms. Both these meanings do not seem appropriate here since having one's toes stepped on or trampled is too common and insignificant an occurrence to mention, and one's forearms are not

usually trampled upon unless a person falls to the ground. Hence, the meaning of al-Ḥasanān here is Imām al-Ḥasan and Imām al-Ḥusayn (R). Despite such fervour, soon certain groups arose in rebellion against the Imām. These were the oath-breakers (*nākithīn*) of Jamal, the unjust wrongdoers (*qāsiṭīn*) of Ṣiffīn and the defiant deviants (*māriqīn*) of Nahrawān. Interestingly, there are some reports that the Prophet (ṣ) had foretold the rising of these three groups and had instructed Imām ‘Alī to fight them (N). Hence, many of the same people who flocked to the Imām and insisted that he take up the mantle of leadership later rose up against him when they could not tolerate his justice. The Imām says that it was as though they had not read the verse of the Qurān that warns against exultation and corruption and by rising up, not only were they going against the Imām, but also against the Qurān.

6 The rebels did not rise up against the Imām out of ignorance, for they had heard the message of the Almighty and understood it. Rather, it was because of their intense love for this world that they embarked on mutiny. This sums up the main reason behind all three battles. The description of Allāh as *He who splits the kernel* is based on Q6:95. *The presence of the multitudes* translates ‘*ḥuḍūr al-ḥādir*’ and refers to the people who had surrounded the Imām wanting to pledge allegiance to him. Alternatively, but less likely, if read as *the presence of the one in attendance* it could refer to the Omnipresent Lord, or the moment that had been foretold by the Prophet (ṣ) which had now come to pass (N). The presence of a large number of people who were ready to support the Imām exhausted the argument, so to speak, and the Imām was thus forced to accept the caliphate. Additionally, he felt the moral responsibility of restoring justice in society based on the command of Allāh to the learned. Were it not for this, he would have *cast its rope on its withers*, meaning he would have left it as it was, without paying any attention to it (M), just as the reins of a horse are left on its shoulders so that it may move as it pleases. His statement that he *would have quenched the last with the same cup as the first* refers to how he would have continued remaining aloof and patient as he had done during the caliphate of the first three caliphs (T). He further emphasizes his disinterest in worldly power and authority by comparing it to the snot of a goat when it sneezes.

7 They said: “At this juncture in his sermon, a man from the people of al-Sawād stood up and handed him something in writing. So he began looking at it and when he had read it, Ibn ‘Abbās said, ‘O Amīr al-Mu’minīn! Why don’t you resume your speech whence you left off?’ He replied, ‘Alas, it is impossible, O Ibn ‘Abbās! That was [like] the roar of a dromedary camel that burst out [in excitement] but then subsided.’”

فَالْلَّوَا: وَقَامَ إِلَيْهِ رَجُلٌ مِنْ أَهْلِ السَّوَادِ عِنْدَ بُلُوغِهِ إِلَى هَذَا الْمَوْضِعِ مِنْ خُطْبَتِهِ، فَنَأَوَلَهُ كِتَابًا، فَأَقْبَلَ يُنْظَرُ فِيهِ، فَلَمَّا فَرَغَ مِنْ قِرَاءَتِهِ قَالَ لَهُ أَبْنُ عَبَّاسٍ: يَا أَمِيرَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ، لَوْ اطَّرَدْتَ مَقَالَتَكَ مِنْ حَيْثُ أُضَصَيْتَ! فَقَالَ: هَيْهَا تِيَا أَبْنَ عَبَّاسٍ! تِلْكَ شُفْشَفَةٌ هَدَرَتْ ثُمَّ قَرَرْتُ.

8 Ibn ‘Abbās said, “By Allāh, I did not regret missing out on any speech as much as I regretted not having heard [the end of] this speech; since Amīr al-Mu’minīn (‘a) could not finish it as he had intended.”

قَالَ أَبْنُ عَبَّاسٍ: فَوَاللَّهِ مَا أَسْفَتُ عَلَى كَلَامِ قَطْ كَأَسْفِي عَلَى هَذَا الْكَلَامِ أَلَا يَكُونُ أَمِيرُ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ عَلَيْهِ بَلَغَ مِنْهُ حَيْثُ أَرَادَ.

7 The countryside of Iraq was known as al-Sawād because of its dense forests which looked black when seen from afar, a stark contrast from the barren desert plains of Hījāz (N). The phrase ‘*law iṭtaradat maqālatuka*’ (or in other versions, ‘...*khutbatuka*’) literally means “if only your speech (or sermon) would resume.” Ibn ‘Abbās was thus requesting the Imām to carry on where he left off (*‘min haythu afḍayta’*) due to the interruption by the man from Iraq. In response, the Imām says that it would be impossible to do so since it was something extempore that was spoken with emotion, like the faecal bag of an Arabian camel which manifests on the side of its mouth when it is excited or agitated. This is the literal meaning of ‘*al-shiqshiqiyah*’ (wrongly pronounced by some as ‘*al-shaqshaqiyah*’), which is a term that was employed in those days to signify such impassioned speech (N). However, due to the interruption, it was as though the fire of excitement had died down, and for this reason the Imām could not continue his sermon (R). It is

noteworthy here that their infallibility prevents the Imāms from being overwhelmed by emotion to the point of being blinded by it, as some people are. Therefore, this emotion was not something that made the Imām say anything he later regretted.

8 Ibn ‘Abbās seems to have been expecting something more from the Imām and that is why he expressed his regret for not having heard the end of the sermon. Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd narrates from his teacher who said that when he read this sermon and recounted the regret expressed by Ibn ‘Abbās to Ibn Khashshāb, the latter commented, “If I were there at that time, I would have told Ibn ‘Abbās, ‘Did the Imām leave anything unsaid that you regretted not hearing? By Allāh, he said all there was to say about the first and last of the caliphs [who preceded him]!’” When asked whether by this he meant that the sermon was a fabrication, Ibn Khashshāb replied in the negative and affirmed his belief that it was indeed an authentic sermon of Amīr al-Mu’minīn (‘a), in his view (I).



4

ANOTHER SERMON

1 Through us you were guided in the darkness and ascended the peak of loftiness. And through us did you break out of the dark nights into dawn. Deaf be the ears that do not hear the call! And how can one who is deaf to the loud cry listen to a soft voice? Strengthened be the heart that palpitates incessantly [out of fear of Allāh].

2 I always expected the consequences of treachery by you, and I had seen you donning the garb of deceit. The curtain of religion kept me veiled from you, but the truth of intention exposed you to me. I stood for you on the path of truth among misleading tracks where you would gather but find no guide, and would dig for water but find none.

3 Today I shall make these expressive mute signs speak to you. Far removed is the stance of one who turns his back on me! I have never doubted the truth since it was shown to me. Mūsā ('a) did not fear for his own life; rather, he feared the ascendancy of the ignorant and the prevalence of deviation. Today we stand on the crossroads of truth

١ بِنَا اهْتَدَيْتُمْ فِي الظُّلْمَاءِ،
وَسَنَّتُمْ دُرُّوَةَ الْعُلَمَاءِ، وَبِنَا
انْجَرَزْتُمْ عَنِ السَّرَّارِ، وَقَرَّ سَمْعُ
لَمْ يَفْكَهِ الْوَاعِيَةَ، وَكَيْفَ يُرَاعِي
الْبَأْأَةُ مَنْ أَصَمَّتَهُ الصَّيْحَةُ؟ رُبَطَ
جَنَانُ لَمْ يُقَارِفْهُ الْحَفَقَانُ.

٢ مَا زَلْتُ أَنْتَظِرُ بِكُمْ عَوَاقِبَ الْغَدْرِ،
وَأَتَوْسَمُكُمْ بِحَلْيَةِ الْمُعْتَرِّينَ، سَرَّنِي
عَنْكُمْ حِلْبَابُ الدِّينِ، وَبَصَرِنِيكُمْ
صِدْقُ التَّيَّةِ، أَقْمَتُ لَكُمْ عَلَى سَنَنِ
الْحَقِّ فِي جَوَادِ الْمُضَلَّةِ، كَيْثُ
تَلْتَقُونَ وَلَا دَلِيلَ، وَتَحْتَفِرُونَ وَلَا
تُمْهِهُونَ.

٣ الْيَوْمَ أُنْطِقُ لَكُمُ الْعَجْمَاءَ ذَاتَ
الْبَيَانِ، عَرَبَ رَأِيِّ امْرِئِ تَحَلَّفَ
عَنِّي، مَا شَكَكْتُ فِي الْحَقِّ مُذْ
أَرِيَثْهُ، لَمْ يُوْجِسْ مُوسَى عَلَيْهِ لِلَّا خِيفَةَ
عَلَى نَفْسِهِ، بَلْ أَشْفَقَ مِنْ غَلَبةِ
الْجَهَالِ وَدُولِ الْفَسَالِ. الْيَوْمَ تَوَاقَنَا

and falsehood. One who is certain of getting water feels no thirst.

عَلَى سَبِيلِ الْحَقِّ وَالْبَاطِلِ؛ مَنْ وَثِقَ بِمَاءٍ لَمْ يَظْمَأْ.

CONTEXT

Al-Sayyid al-Rađī notes that this sermon is said to have been delivered by the Imām after Ṭalḥah and al-Zubayr were killed in the Battle of Jamal, and it is one of his most eloquent speeches. It contains many profound lessons despite its succinctness (M). Not much is known about the exact context of this sermon; however, part of it seems to be addressed directly to Ṭalḥah and al-Zubayr, or those who joined them after breaking their allegiance to Imām ‘Alī (*a*). This sermon consists of three main pericopes: first the Imām reminds the people of the important role of the Ahl al-Bayt in guiding the people. Then he talks about the oath-breakers and how he always knew that they would one day rebel. Finally, he says that the truth about these individuals now needs to be made known openly, lest others are misguided by them (N).

COMMENTARY

1 The Arabs in pre-Islamic times were ignorant pagans whose lives were ruled by barbarity, infanticide, and bloodshed. With the advent of Islam and direction of the appointed guides, the very same pagans were brought out of the darkness of ignorance and savagery into the light of knowledge and enlightenment (Z). Through this guidance, they attained loftiness in the form of dignity and respect (M). The supplication *deaf be the ears that do not hear the calls* is against those who pay no heed to the advice and counsel given to them (M). An alternative reading would render the same phrase as a declaration rather than an invocation, meaning that those whose ears do not hear these calls are truly deaf (T). The literal meaning of ‘*al-wā‘iyah*’ is a cry, but here it refers to a call comprised of good advice and counsel (I). The *loud cry* (*‘al-ṣayḥah*) refers to the explicit and clear statements of the Qurān and the Holy Prophet (*s*) regarding the status of the Ahl al-Bayt (*a*), whereas the *soft voice* (*‘al-nab’ah*) represents the admonitions of the Imām himself (Z). Alternatively, the *loud cry* could refer to calamitous events such as the death

of one's parents and predecessors which one ought to learn from, and if he does not do so, he would not be in a position to take admonition from an adviser (R).

The last phrase is also a supplication for those whose hearts are always uneasy out of fear of the punishment of Allāh and yearning for His pleasure (Z), or for those who will have to face aggression from the enemies in the future battles of Ḳifṭ and Nahrawān (T). Here, after having described the individuals who turn away from the path of guidance, the Imām praises and prays for those who remain steadfast and always put Allāh first in their lives (M). When used with *qalb* (heart), the verb *rabaṭa* usually means to calm and strengthen with patience. However, some commentators have interpreted the verb to mean 'bound' or 'linked' such as to say: the heart that always fears Allāh or yearns for His pleasure is linked to Him (J).

2 These words are addressed to the oath-breakers who reneged on their pledge of allegiance to the Imām and rebelled against him (Z). From the beginning, Imām ‘Alī saw signs of treachery in them and knew that their pledge was fraught with disloyalty. In fact, it is narrated that when al-Zubayr was swearing his allegiance, the Imām said, "I fear that you will break your pledge and rebel against me." He replied, "Do not fear, for I would never do that..." (I). These rebels wore the *garb of deceit* ('*hilyat al-mughtarrīn*') meaning that they were quickly and easily deceived by falsehood (M). However, since they outwardly expressed loyalty and displayed religiosity, that acted as a barrier which prevented the Imām from taking any steps against them. It is only when the veil of religiosity was removed and their true intentions were exposed that their perfidy was revealed before everyone. Indeed, it was the truth of the Imām's intentions that enabled him to perceive their true nature (Z). Alternatively, this could be read differently to mean that if their intentions were true, they would see the Imām's lofty status and would never think of opposing him (R).

His standing on *the path of truth* ('*sanān al-haqq*') could be a reference to how he established and demonstrated the correct prophetic practices (*sunan*) for the people (T). In one instance, the Prophet (ṣ) is reported to have described the true path using the analogy of a straight walkway with walls on either side. There are numerous open doors on both sides with curtains hanging from them. A caller keeps calling out to people from the other end, reminding them to walk straight through and not be tempted to enter any of those doors, lest they should stray from the straight path (M). The last two phrases of this section are euphemisms for their

inability to arrive at the correct religious rulings and teachings despite struggling to do so, until the Imām guided them (T). Water is used here, as in other instances, to signify knowledge (M).

3 The first sentence of this section has been described as abstruse and mysterious, while at the same time highly eloquent (I). Some commentators interpret the phrase “*ajmā’ dhāta bayān*” as a metaphor for the past and present state of affairs and circumstances, since these conditions are unable to speak and are hence like dumb, inarticulate beasts (M). Yet they are expressive in that lessons may be learnt from them by those who pay heed (N). Those who turned their backs on the Imām thought that there is greater benefit for them in doing so; hence the Imām upbraids them (M). The affirmation that he has never doubted in the truth is repeated verbatim in aphorism 146 and will be explained there, God-willing. His explanation about the fear of Mūsā (‘a) is in reference to the verse: *Then Mūsā felt a fear within his heart* (Q20:67). Though the verse portrays Mūsā as being afraid after Pharaoh’s magicians threw their staffs and made them appear as serpents, the Imām clarifies that his fear was not for his own safety. Rather, it was fear for the people who would be fooled by the sorcery of the magicians and get misguided thereby.

Likewise, the Imām was afraid that the people would be misled by the wiles and tricks of his enemies, who were using the assassination of ‘Uthmān as an excuse to rise up against him (N). While they met on the battleground of truth versus falsehood, it was known to all that the path of ‘Alī is one of truth, as the Prophet (s) had explicitly said that ‘Alī is [always] with the truth and the truth is with ‘Alī (T). The phrase *one who is certain of getting water feels no thirst* is an idiom which means: just as a person who is certain that he has water does not care about his immediate thirst, since he knows it will soon be quenched, likewise a person who is upon the path of truth does not care about the hardships he undergoes because he is sure that a great reward awaits him in the Hereafter (T).



HIS SERMON AFTER THE PROPHET (S) PASSED AWAY

WARNING AGAINST STRIFE

1 O People! Steer through of the waves of strife with the arks of deliverance; turn away from the path of animosity and take off the diadems of vainglory. Prosperous is he who rises with wings or else remains peaceable as others enjoy ease. This is [like] turbid water or a morsel that would choke the person who swallows it. One who picks fruits before they are ripe is like one who cultivates in someone else's field.

HIS CHARACTER AND KNOWLEDGE

2 If I speak out, they will say “He covets power [and authority],” but if I remain silent, they will say, “He is afraid of death.” Far be it – after all that I have been through! By Allāh, the son of Abū Ṭālib is fonder of death than an infant is of his mother’s breast. Rather, I have within me certain hidden knowledge which if I were to disclose, you would start quivering like the rope in a deep well.

النبي عن الفتنة

١ أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ، شُلُّقُوا أَمْوَاجَ الْفِتْنَةِ
بِسُفْنِ النَّجَاهَةِ، وَعَرَجُوْا عَنْ طَرِيقِ
الْمُتَافِرَةِ، وَضَعُوْا تِيجَانَ الْمُفَاحَرَةِ.
أَفْلَحَ مَنْ نَهَضَ بِجَاهَ، أَوْ اسْتَسْلَمَ
فَأَرَاهُ. هَذَا مَاءٌ آجِنْ، وَلُقْمَةٌ يَغَصُّ
بِهَا آكِلُهَا، وَمُجْتَنِي التَّمَرَّةِ لِغَيْرِ
وَقْتٍ إِيَّاعِهَا كَالرَّارِعِ بِغَيْرِ أَرْضِهِ.

خلقه وعلمه

٢ فَإِنْ أَفْلَنْ يَقُولُوا: حَرَصَ عَلَى
الْمُلْكِ، وَإِنْ أَشْكُثْ يَقُولُوا: جَزَعَ
مِنَ الْمَوْتِ. هَيْهَاتْ بَعْدَ اللَّيْلَةِ وَاللَّيْلِيَ!
وَاللَّهُ لَا يُبْنِ أَبِي طَالِبٍ آنِسُ بِالْمَوْتِ
مِنَ الطَّفْلِ بِئْدِي أُمِّهِ، بَلِ اندَمَجَتْ
عَلَى مَكْتُونِ عِلْمٍ لَوْ بُحِثَّ بِهِ
لَا ضَطَرَتْهُمْ اضْطِرَابُ الْأَرْشِيَّةِ فِي
الْطَّوَّيِ الْبَعِيْدَةِ.

CONTEXT

Al-Sayyid al-Rađī notes that this sermon was delivered when, after some Muslims had pledged their allegiance to Abū Bakr at Saqīfah Banī Sā‘idah, Abū Sufyān ibn Ḥarb and ‘Abbās ibn ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib came to Imām ‘Alī (‘a) offering to pledge their allegiance to him. Abū Sufyān said, “Extend your hand so that we may give you our allegiance,” and he even offered to amass a large army to force out any other claimant to power (T). Some commentators say that this was not actually a sermon, as the Imām was not addressing the people from a pulpit. Rather, he was speaking to a specific group of individuals (T). Imām ‘Alī rejected the offer of allegiance by the two well-known individuals because Abū Sufyān had sinister motives, mostly driven by tribal pride and possibly seeking to ignite the flames of civil war (M), while al-‘Abbās was not as influential as others who had accepted Islam much earlier, and his allegiance would have been of little benefit. Al-Kulaynī reports that Amīr al-Mu’minīn said, “If I had with me, after the death of the Messenger of Allāh (ṣ), my uncle Hamzah and my brother Ja‘far, I would not have been forced to pledge allegiance. However, I was tried with [the support of] two men who came late into the fold of Islam: ‘Abbās and ‘Aqīl...” (T). Furthermore, had he accepted any pledge of allegiance, he would be forced to fight to defend his rightful position and neither did he have sufficient followers to do that, nor was it prudent for the fledgling Muslim community that there should be such a struggle for power. Hence, to avoid strife, he was forced to reject the offer of allegiance by these two individuals. Finally, a number of reports describe how the Prophet (ṣ) had told Imām ‘Alī (‘a) not to take the reins of leadership until such a time when the people come to him themselves (T).

COMMENTARY

1 When the Imām says *steer through of the waves of strife*, he is comparing strife to a wavy sea as a metaphor for the tribulations of discord. The only way to navigate this stormy sea is in the *arks of salvation* (‘ṣufūn al-najāt’), which are large and strong enough to face the crashing waves and carry their passengers to the safe shore (N). These arks are none other than the Ahl al-Bayt (‘a), as per the famous statement of the Noble Prophet (R). *Animosity* renders ‘*munāfarah*’ which has the original connotation of pride in the might and strength of one’s tribe, and this leads to hatred and enmity (Z). The same is true of boastfulness and vainglory,

which the Imām warns the people against using the metaphor of diadems or crowns because political power, along with a noble lineage and wealth, constitute the main causes of vainglory (M). The analogy of one who *rises with wings* apparently gives the image of a nestling that is either ready to fly with its developed wings, or remains at ease in its nest until it gains the ability to fly (T). This means that one who has aides and supporters may rise to power while one without such support ought to remain quiet and keep the peace (Z). An alternative reading would render *as others enjoy ease* as ‘to remain at ease himself’ (I).

What the Imām then goes on to describe as *turbid water* and a morsel stuck in the throat is the lack of support for what was clearly his right, and the fact that if he rose up to fight for it, people would turn away from the religion. It is not, as some commentators have claimed, a description of political leadership *per se* (T). He goes on to say that his rising at that moment in time would be akin to picking fruit before it is ripe, or cultivating land that does not belong to him, such that he would not benefit from the harvest (M). An alternative reading of the last phrase would render it ‘...like one who cultivates in the wrong field,’ i.e. in land that is inappropriate for cultivation (N).

2 The phrase *if I speak out* refers to speaking out about his right to the caliphate (Z). History reports that after the second caliph had chosen six people as part of his consultative committee (*shūrā*) to select his successor, he mentioned each individual’s flaws. When he turned to ‘Alī (*‘a*), he said, “Nothing prevented me from handing over the reins to you except your greed for it, though you are the most deserving of all people to take it over and would be more likely than all others to remain steadfast upon the manifest truth and straight path.” A similar statement was also made by the members of the committee once they had elected Uthmān ibn ‘Affān and forced Imām ‘Alī to pledge allegiance to him. They said, “O son of Abū Ṭālib, you are truly very covetous of this.” Whereat the Imām replied, “Verily you are more covetous than I am, and less deserving too. Am I to be deemed greedy if I seek my right, as bestowed upon me by Allāh and His Prophet?...” (T). Then the Imām proceeds to reject the false assertion that his silence is due to fear and reminds them of all that he has been through – the hardships, big and small (which is the literal meaning of the Arabic phrase ‘*al-latayā wal-latt*’), such as those faced in the battles of Badr, Uhud, Khaybar, Ahzāb, and many others where he fought bravely against powerful enemies, putting his life on the line in many instances – how could he then be accused of fearing death?!

His expression *by Allāh, the son of Abū Ṭālib is fonder of death than an infant is of his mother's breast* is unique, and nobody else in history has been recorded as having said this before him (T). The hidden knowledge that the Imām would not disclose was part of the special knowledge bestowed upon him by the Prophet (s), which the people did not have the capacity to bear (Z). In one account, Imām ‘Alī is reported as having said that if he were to divulge this secret knowledge to even those who had pledged their loyalty to him, they would leave his side and only very few would remain (T). It was this very knowledge that led the Imām to take the stance that he did *vis-à-vis* the caliphate (M). He employs the analogy of the vibration and quivering of a lengthy rope used to draw water from a deep well to describe the agitation that his secret knowledge would cause to the people were they to become aware of it. It is known that the longer the rope, the more it vibrates, and a deep well requires a longer rope, hence the aptness of this analogy (M).



6

HIS SERMON WHEN ASKED NOT TO FOLLOW TALHAH AND AL-ZUBAYR

- 1 By Allāh, I shall not be like the hyena that sleeps through the noise until the hunter reaches it and he who lies in wait ambushes it. Rather, I shall always strike deviators from the truth with the help of those who advance towards it, and sinful doubters with the aid of those who listen and obey, till my day comes.
- 2 By Allāh, I have been continually deprived of my right, with others preferred over me, from the day Allāh took back His Prophet (ṣ) until this day of the people.

وَاللَّهُ لَا أَكُونُ كَالْظَّمِيعِ: تَسَامُ عَلَى طُولِ اللَّدْنِ حَتَّى يَصُلَ إِلَيْهَا طَالِبَاهَا، وَيَخْلِلُهَا رَاصِدُهَا، وَلَكِنِي أَضْرِبُ بِالْمُفْقِلِ إِلَى الْحَقِّ الْمُذَبِّعَةَ، وَبِالسَّامِعِ الْمُطِيعِ الْعَاصِي الْمُرِيبَ أَبْدًا، حَتَّى يَأْتِيَ عَلَيَّ يَوْمٌ يَوْمٍ.

فَوَاللَّهِ مَا زِلتُ مَذْفُوعًا عَنْ حَقِّي، مُسْتَأْثِرًا عَلَيَّ، مُنْذَ قَبْضَ اللَّهِ نَيَّةَ هُنْدِيَّةَ حَتَّى يَوْمِ النَّاسِ هَذَا.

CONTEXT

It is narrated that Ṭalḥah and al-Zubayr were among the first people to pledge allegiance to Imām ‘Alī after the death of ‘Uthmān, but when they saw that they would not be granted any special favours, they sought permission to go to Makkah for ‘umrah. After arriving in Makkah, they met with ‘Āishah and some of her followers, and together they proceeded to Baṣrah. Upon entering the city, they killed some of the companions who were loyal to Amīr al-Mu’minīn (‘a) and when news of this reached him, he decided to pursue them despite the advice of some of his subjects to the contrary. It is at this juncture that he spoke these words (R). This is also the context that al-Sayyid al-Raḍī gives for the sermon. However, *Tamām Nahj al-Balāghah* mentions it as part of a much longer sermon in which the Imām addresses one of his sons – which would suggest a different context from the one mentioned by al-Sayyid al-Raḍī. In his *Amālī*, al-Shaykh al-Ṭūsī quotes a

statement by one of the narrators who said that he heard Imām al-Ḥasan trying to convince his father not to pursue Ṭalḥah and al-Zubayr, and the Imām responded with statements that were very similar to those of this sermon.

In his commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, al-Bahrānī also recounts that this sermon was addressed to Imām al-Ḥasan. However, the content of this sermon seems to affirm the view of al-Sayyid al-Raḍī since it would be quite farfetched to claim that the Imām was addressing his eldest son, who would be the Imām after him, in this manner. Furthermore, the narration quoted by al-Tūsī has a weak chain of transmitters and is problematic in terms of content as well, and al-Bahrānī does not provide any chain of transmission whatsoever. Yet if indeed this was addressed to Imām al-Ḥasan (*a*), then it was only apparently so, while the real addressees were those who were listening around him. And Allāh knows best.

COMMENTARY

1 The example of a hyena is given because it was well known that the hyena is a foolish animal that is unable to distinguish between the sound of its hunter and its prey. The Arabs would thus use it as an example to describe a person who is imprudent, especially in dealing with his enemy, saying, “he is more foolish than a hyena!” (I). Imām ‘Alī states that he will not behave like the hyena that sleeps through the noise outside its den, which should have served as a warning to it, thereby letting the hunter catch it unawares (R). Rather, he will rise with the help of those who support the truth, and fight against those who rebelled thereby deviating from the right path. This was the most prudent course of action as historical accounts show that these individuals aimed to use Baṣrah as a launchpad for their rebellion, with Kūfah as their next target (N). As such, countering them immediately was not only the right course of action, but also a duty. The rebels are described as deviators from truth and sinful doubters, because anyone who turns a deaf ear to the command of a just ruler has sinned, and anyone who disobeys him has doubted in his justice (M). When the Imām says that he will fight them ..*till my day comes*, he means until the day he leaves this world (MB).

2 In this section, the Imām reiterates that this rebellion is not the first injustice that was perpetrated against him. Rather, from the time that the Prophet (*s*) left this world, he had been the target of grave injustices, the foremost among which was the usurping of his right to the caliphate (Z). Indeed, the injustice that

Amīr al-Mu'minīn and the Ahl al-Bayt would have to face was foretold by the Prophet himself. It is narrated that at one time, the Prophet (s) came to visit Fātimah ('a) while 'Alī ('a) was asleep. She proceeded to wake him up but the Prophet stopped her from doing so, saying, "Let him sleep, for he will have to spend many long, sleepless nights after I am gone..." Upon hearing this, Fātimah began to weep, but the Prophet (s) consoled her by promising that they would both be with him in Paradise (T). The phrase *this day of the people* could refer to the day when the oath-breakers came out in rebellion against the Imām (MB), or it may mean that even now, when the people had come together to support him and accepted him as their leader, there were still some who would be unjust towards him (N).



7

WHERE HE CENSURES THE FOLLOWERS OF SATAN

- ١ اتَّخَذُوا الشَّيْطَانَ لِأَمْرِهِمْ مِلَاكًا،
وَاتَّخَذُوهُمْ لَهُ أَشْرَاكًا.
- ٢ فَبَاضَ وَفَرَّحَ فِي صُدُورِهِمْ، وَدَبَّ
وَدَرَجَ فِي حُجُورِهِمْ.
- ٣ فَنَظَرَ بِأَعْيُنِهِمْ وَنَطَقَ بِالْسِنَتِهِمْ،
فَرَكِبَ بِهِمُ الرَّلَلَ وَزَيَّنَ لَهُمُ
الْحَطَلَ.
- ٤ فَعَلَ مَنْ قَدْ شَرِكَهُ الشَّيْطَانُ فِي
سُلْطَانِهِ، وَنَطَقَ بِالْبَاطِلِ عَلَى
لِسَانِهِ.

CONTEXT

It is not known exactly when this sermon was delivered. Commentators have suggested, however, that it was meant to rebuke those who opposed Amīr al-Mu'minīn ('a) and rebelled against his command (MB). The compiler of *Tamām Nahj al-Balāghah* places this sermon in a much longer sermon on 'those who have designs on power while they are unworthy of it,' which talks about the different kinds of people who commit wrongs in the name of religion while they are only out to serve their own interests. It has been suggested that this sermon is targeted at specific individuals who fell into Satan's trap, such as Ṭalḥah and al-Zubayr, or Mu'āwiya and the Syrians, or even the Khawārij of Nahrawān (N). Of course, this does not circumscribe the general purport of the message. Rather, it is a clear

admonition to all that they should be wary of the wiles of Satan. In a few words, the Imām vividly describes how Satan insinuates himself into the lives of his would-be followers. He then goes on to describe the effects of allowing Satan to hold sway over one's life. In reality, this is a serious warning for the righteous believers to exercise caution and ensure that they do not fall into the snare of *shayṭān* (N).

COMMENTARY

1 The word *shayṭān* is either from the root *sh-t-n* meaning 'to depart' because Satan departs when Allāh is remembered, or it is from *sh-y-t* meaning 'to burn' because Satan burns with rage when a servant worships Allāh (MB). *Cornerstone* translates '*milāk*', which refers to the foundation, basis, and mainstay of a thing, just as the heart is the cornerstone of the body (M). The word '*ashrāk*' is the plural of *sharīk*, meaning partner, or it could be the less likely plural of *sharak*, meaning snare (MB). In case the latter is intended, it would be considered a revealing analogy of how Satan uses certain individuals to ensnare others (M). When individuals heed Satan and give ear to his beguiling counsel, he ensnares them and becomes a partner in their affair. Such individuals then gradually become a means of ensnaring others and leading them astray. It should be noted, however, that this first stage in Satan's grand scheme depends on the wilful choice of an individual to heed his call. It is not possible for Satan to force his way into one's heart; rather, he gains entry when the door is opened for him (N).

2 The 'laying of eggs' and 'hatching them in their bosoms' are allegories for the whisperings of Satan and indicate the length of his stay with them, since a bird only lays eggs in a place it considers its home (I). The growth and development of Satan in their bosoms symbolizes their gradual indoctrination by him (M). The bosom has been likened to the airy of Satan where, having gained entry, he lays eggs in an attempt to supplant himself and put down roots in order to penetrate the very fibre of the human being. When the eggs hatch, his offspring creep around slowly ('*dabba*') and then gradually crawl a little faster ('*daraja*'). This gradual increase in movement is probably an indication that satanic ideas and plots do not take shape instantaneously or suddenly; rather, they develop in stages, like a planted seed that germinates over time. This is how Satan misguides man, step-by-step (N).

3 His seeing through their eyes and speaking through their tongues means that he becomes one with his host (I). It further demonstrates the control that Satan has over them. It is as though they give up their free will to him and no longer use their rational faculties, except in their satanic pursuits (M). This is because they have given him a place in their hearts, and the heart is the centre that controls all bodily functions, including sight and speech (MB). Hence, their glances become satanic and their utterances become devilish. In this way, Satan drives them towards misdeeds and lapses that take them astray from the straight path. The word ‘*al-khatāl*’ refers to foul speech and drivel (R), or foolishness (Z).

4 The pronoun in *his dominion* could refer to the person who allows Satan to be a partner in his affairs (M) or to Satan, in whose dominion that individual has become a partner (R). The outcome of permitting Satan entry into one’s heart is total domination by him. This is the fate of those *who took devils as guardians instead of Allāh* (Q7:30). By following Satan, they give him authority over themselves (Q16:100) and join his ranks, becoming members of his party (*hizb*), *and indeed the party of Satan are the losers* (Q58:19). Hence their misdeeds and utterances of falsehood are the result of their becoming one with Satan (MB). And so it is that those who used to be human beings are now devils. They are the ones then referred to as “human satans” (*shayāṭīn al-ins*) (J).



WHERE HE INVITES AL-ZUBAYR TO REJOIN HIM

- ١ يَرْعُمُ أَنَّهُ قَدْ بَايَعَ يَدِهِ وَلَمْ يَبَايِعْ بِقَلْبِهِ.
- ٢ فَقَدْ أَقْرَرَ بِالْبَيْعَةِ وَادَّعَى الْوَلِيَّةَ.
- ٣ فَلْيَأْتِ عَلَيْهَا بِأَمْرٍ يُعْرَفُ، وَإِلَّا فَلْيَدْخُلْ فِيمَا حَرَجَ مِنْهُ.
- 1 He maintains that he swore allegiance with his hand and not his heart.
 - 2 So he admits swearing allegiance, yet claims it was dissimulation.
 - 3 Then let him come forward with a clear justification for it, else he must re-enter what he has renounced.

CONTEXT

On the day that al-Zubayr ibn al-Awwām came to pledge his allegiance to Imām ‘Alī (‘a), the Imām said to him, “I fear that you will betray me and renege on your oath of allegiance to me.” He replied, “Do not fear, for I would never do that!” However, when Amīr al-Mu’minīn sent a messenger to Mu‘āwiyah telling him to pledge his loyalty and to instruct the people of Syria to do the same, Mu‘āwiyah wrote a letter to al-Zubayr informing him that the people of Syria were ready to declare their allegiance to him as the new Caliph. He urged al-Zubayr to take control of the key towns of Kūfah and Baṣrah and rally the people under the banner of avenging the blood of Uthmān. When this letter reached al-Zubayr, he was pleased and informed Ṭalḥah about it (I).

A few days after having given their allegiance, al-Zubayr and Ṭalḥah came to Imām ‘Alī seeking to be appointed as governors of Baṣrah and Kūfah, but the Imām turned them down. Disappointed, they sought permission to leave for Makkah in order to perform the minor pilgrimage (*‘umrah*). Amīr al-Mu’minīn contended, “It is not pilgrimage you seek.” They swore by Allāh that they did not seek anything other than pilgrimage. In order to prove their sincerity, they even came forward to renew their pledge of allegiance. When they left after having obtained his

permission, the Imām told his companions who were present, “By Allāh, you will not see them now until the *fitnah* in which they shall fight [against me].” On the way to Makkah, Ṭalḥah and al-Zubayr kept telling people that they were not bound by their allegiance to Amīr al-Mu’minīn because they had been coerced into swearing fealty (I).

On the Day of Jamal, Imām ‘Alī came forward and called out to al-Zubayr. Riding on his horse in full armour, al-Zubayr came to meet Amīr al-Mu’minīn who was himself unarmed. He rode forward until his horse was right next to the Imām’s horse. At that point, the Imām told him, “I called you just to remind you of something that the Holy Prophet (ṣ) had said. Do you recall the day when he saw you embracing me and asked, ‘Do you love him?’ to which you replied, ‘Why would I not love him when he is my dear brother and cousin?’ so he said, ‘Verily, you shall fight him while being an oppressor against him.’ [Do you remember that]?” Upon hearing this, al-Zubayr turned pale and when he returned to his army, his son ‘Abdullāh asked him about what transpired. He replied that he had been reminded of a statement by the Prophet that he had forgotten about and said that he would not fight against Imām ‘Alī (I).

Upon his announcement that he would be deserting the battle, his son (and according to another narration, ‘Ā’ishah) rebuked him for being a coward. Nevertheless, the words of the Prophet rang in his ears and he abandoned the fight. As he made his way across the valley of al-Sibā‘, a group of the Banū Tamīm who had decided to remain aloof from the battle heard about him. They heard how he had been one of the primary instigators of the bloodshed and had then deserted the army. One of them, a man by the name of ‘Amr ibn Jurmūz, followed al-Zubayr and when he caught up with him, he asked about the battle. Al-Zubayr told him that he had abandoned the fighting, thereby confirming the reports that Ibn Jurmūz had heard. When it was time for prayer, al-Zubayr told Ibn Jurmūz that he wanted to pray and sought assurances that he would not be attacked while he prayed. The latter agreed, but no sooner had al-Zubayr started praying than Ibn Jurmūz pounced upon him and killed him (I).

Having assassinated al-Zubayr, Ibn Jurmūz took his sword (and, according to one account, his head) to Amīr al-Mu’minīn in the hope that he would be handsomely rewarded. Upon seeing al-Zubayr’s sword, the Imām commented, “This is indeed the sword by which much distress was alleviated from the Prophet of Allāh!” When Ibn Jurmūz asked for a reward, Amīr al-Mu’minīn said, “Verily I

heard the Holy Prophet (ṣ) say, ‘Give the killer of Ṣafiyah’s son tidings of hellfire!’” Ibn Jurmūz left chagrined and later joined the ranks of the Khawārij. He was killed fighting against the Imām in the Battle of Nahrawān (I).

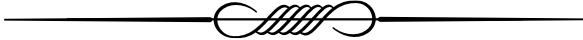
Some have interpreted this turn of events as proof that al-Zubayr repented before he died. For indeed, if his killer deserves Hell, then his own repentance must have been accepted. In response to this, one may say that it is not necessarily the case that since his killer deserves eternal damnation, he must have himself attained forgiveness and salvation. It could be that his killer’s punishment is the result of the latter’s treachery and deceit. He did, after all, kill al-Zubayr in prayer. Alternatively, Ibn Jurmūz may have been given tidings of hellfire because his ultimate end, as one of the Khawārij, was known to the Prophet (ṣ) (MB). This sermon was either delivered when the news of al-Zubayr’s betrayal, and his excuses for the same, reached Amīr al-Mu’minīn, or just before the Battle of Jamal (T).

COMMENTARY

1 Al-Zubayr claimed that he did not really mean it when he apparently pledged allegiance to Imām ‘Alī. He would say, “I gave my allegiance with my hand, not with my heart.” At other times, he could claim that he was coerced into pledging his allegiance or that he employed equivocation (*tawriyah*) when giving his oath of fidelity (I). However, if the allegiance was coerced, why is it that when the Imām repeatedly mentioned al-Zubayr’s pledge, nobody objected that it was taken by force? (T). Furthermore, the conditions for the validity of any oath are: maturity (*bulūgh*), sanity (*‘aql*), volition, and consciousness (as opposed to being inebriated or in a state of unconsciousness, sleep, etc.), and all these were present in al-Zubayr when he pledged his allegiance (J).

2 All these statements (about being coerced or using *tawriyah*) are tantamount to an admission on al-Zubayr’s part that he did indeed pledge allegiance to Amīr al-Mu’minīn (*‘a*). The term ‘*al-walījah*’ refers to something internal and hidden (I). In this context, it means dissimulation or equivocation (R). Here, the Imām confutes al-Zubayr’s claim by emphasizing that his oath was witnessed and heard by the people (since he had pledged allegiance in public), but his claimed dissimulation requires evidence and justification (N). Indeed, such claims demonstrate al-Zubayr’s ignorance about the very ethos of Islam (Z).

3 In response to al-Zubayr's assertion, the Imām asks him to prove that his pledge was dissimulated, otherwise he would still be bound by it. This is especially true since it was known that Imām ‘Alī did not force anyone to pledge allegiance to him, and there were a number of people who had actually refused to do so (N). It should be noted that during the Age of Ignorance (*jāhiliyyah*), the Arabs would take their pledges and covenants very seriously and held individuals responsible for adhering to them, and the same continued after the advent of Islam (R). Indeed, in every system of law, if one gives an oath or enters into a pact openly, he is held accountable for adhering to it, and one cannot later simply claim that he was coerced or forced into the pact, or that he did not mean to enter into it, otherwise everyone would break their agreements whenever it suited them (N).



9

WHERE HE DESCRIBES HIMSELF AND HIS OPPONENTS

- ١ وَقَدْ أَرْعَدُوا وَأَبْرَقُوا.
1 They bellowed like thunder and flashed like lightning.
- ٢ وَمَعَ هَذِينَ الْأَمْرَيْنِ الْفَشَلُ.
2 Yet these two devices go hand in hand with cowardice.
- ٣ وَلَسْنَا تُرْعِدُ حَتَّى تُوقَعُ، وَلَا تُسِيلُ حَتَّى تُمْطَرُ.
3 But we do not thunder until we have pounced, and do not gush forth until we have rained [on the enemy].

CONTEXT

This sermon was delivered during (or after (N)) the Battle of Jamal. In it, Amīr al-Mu'minīn ('a) rebukes the oath-breakers (*al-nākithīn*) i.e. Ṭalḥah, al-Zubayr, and their followers, for trying to frighten his army using noisy war cries and empty threats (MB). In contrast, the Imām insists that he would follow up his words with action and would not suffice with empty speech. Al-Shaykh al-Mufid has narrated this sermon in his historical treatise on the Battle of the Camel, albeit with slight variances. The historian al-Wāqidī also narrates that on the day of battle, when the enemy started shouting, Amīr al-Mu'minīn asked his son Muḥammad, "What are they saying?" He replied, "They are screaming: Uthmān must be avenged! (*yā thārāt Uthmān*)" When Imām 'Alī heard this, he stood up and gave the sermon in which he told his army that the commotion and clamour of the enemy was a sign of their weakness and impending failure (T).

COMMENTARY

1 *Bellowing like thunder* and *flashing like lightning* are allegorical representations of the loud and clamorous threats and war cries aimed at scaring opponents in battle (R). The famous poet Kumayt al-Asadī said: '*Thunder (ar'id) and flare (abriq) O Yazīd, for your threats do me no harm'* (I). Just as thunder and lightning

generally cause anxiety and apprehension, so too do threats from an enemy (M). The clamour and commotion in the Army of the Camel was a sign of their cravenness and impuissance, whereas the Imām's silence and calm was a sign of his courage and valour (Z). One who is powerful does not need to vaunt his strength. Making bold claims and stirring up emotions does not help anyone achieve his objectives. If anything, emotional excitement acts as a hindrance to rational thought (J). The analogy given here is one of clouds that are accompanied by thunder and lightning, giving the impression that they carry glad tidings of downpour, only to then disappoint by disappearing without a drop of rain. In the same way, the threats made by the oath-breakers were empty and devoid of any value (N).

2 The word '*fashal*' denotes weakness, fear, and cowardice, which leads to eventual failure. It is noteworthy that cowards are more noisy on the day of battle than brave warriors, who are usually silent and calm before the fighting begins (I). In fact, silence is a sign of bravery (M). That is why Imām ‘Alī would instruct his soldiers to lower their voices before battle (see sermon no. 124). A striking example of this was witnessed in the Battle of Badr where the Muslims were outnumbered three to one. When the Quraysh saw the small, lightly armed Muslim army, they sent ‘Amr ibn Wahab to go closer and see if there were any reinforcements hiding behind the army. ‘Amr returned saying that while they had no reinforcements, it seemed as though the Muslim army was carrying some lethal poison by which they would easily vanquish their enemy, since they were very silent – just like a deadly viper. The silence of the Muslims at Badr demonstrated their bravery and struck fear into the hearts of their enemies (T).

3 The statement *we do not thunder until we have pounced* indirectly decries the false sense of fervour exhibited by an enemy that lacked the courage and strength to carry out its threats, just like the thunder which is not followed by a single drop of rain (M). Similarly, the phrase *we do not gush forth until we have rained* eloquently portrays the hollow claims of the Army of the Camel, who declared that they would overrun the enemy before the fighting had even started, which is akin to declaring a flood before it rains. The Imām says that his army, on the other hand, makes no claims but instead prefers actions over words. If they pounce upon the enemy, they will do so thunderously, and if they rain upon them, they will gush forth like a deluge (I). Of course, this does not contradict the practice

of motivating the army before battle, or reciting war poetry to inspire and uplift the spirit of the fighters, which is nothing like the hot air of bluster (N).



10

WHERE HE DESCRIBES SATAN AND HIS FOLLOWERS

1 Look! Satan has indeed assembled his party and gathered his cavalry and infantry.

۱ أَلَا وَإِنَّ الشَّيْطَانَ قَدْ جَمَعَ حَرْبَهُ
وَاسْتَجْلَبَ خَيلَةً وَرَجْلَةً.

2 Yet verily my insight is with me; neither have I confounded myself nor has anyone confused me.

۲ وَإِنَّ مَعِي لَبِصِيرَتِي، مَا لَبَسْتُ عَلَى
نَفْسِي وَلَا لُبَسَ عَلَيَّ.

3 By Allāh, I shall fill for them a cistern from which I alone [can] draw water. They will then neither be able to leave it nor return to it.

۳ وَإِنَّمَا اللَّهُ لَأَقْرَطَنَ لَهُمْ حَوْضًا أَنَا
مَاتِحُهُ. لَا يَضْلُرُونَ عَنْهُ وَلَا
يُغُودُونَ إِلَيْهِ.

CONTEXT

When the messengers of Amīr al-Mu'minīn returned from Talhah, al-Zubayr, and 'Aishah with the message of war, rejecting all calls for dialogue and having broken their oath of allegiance, he ('a) turned to the people and told them how he had tried his best to convince them to abandon their designs on power and turn back, but they refused to do so. That is when he gave this sermon as narrated by al-Sayyid al-Rādī. However, this is not the whole sermon and other sources mention the complete version in which the Imām spoke about the importance of *jihād* and explained the reason behind his having to fight those who rebel (T). Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd, however, failed to consider the wider context of this sermon and has thus posited that the Imām may have been referring to Mu'awiyah instead of Talhah and al-Zubayr (I). A number of commentators likewise suggest that these words were spoken in the context of the Battle of Ḥiṭṭin where the Syrian forces had gathered (R, MB). However, that is incorrect as the context of this sermon was clearly the Battle of Jamāl (N).

COMMENTARY

1 The Imām has described Satan's preparation in similar words in sermon no. 22. The inspiration for this statement comes from Q17:64, where the Almighty challenges Satan to do his worst in trying to misguide mankind before reiterating that he would have no sway over the sincere servants of Allāh (T). It is because of the temptations of Satan that Ṭalḥah and al-Zubayr broke their allegiance, seeking worldly power (MB). For this reason, the Imām describes these two individuals and their followers as the infantry and cavalry of Satan (N). Indeed, anyone who opposes the truth and stands with falsehood becomes part of Satan's army (M).

2 The reason for mentioning that he has not been confounded or confused is to refute the claim made by some of the companions who abstained from the Battle of Jamal, that Amīr al-Mu'minīn was mistaken in his decision to fight the 'mother of the believers' and the companions who had been 'promised Paradise'. The fact, as indicated in a number of traditions, is that the Prophet (ṣ) had already foretold the rebellion of Ā'ishah, Ṭalḥah, and al-Zubayr, and had even warned them against it. In one tradition, the Prophet said that just as Ṣafrā' bint Shu'ayb, the wife of Mūsa ('a), rose up against his rightful successor Yūsha' ibn Nūn, and the latter fought her army and defeated it before releasing her respectfully, so too will Ā'ishah bint Abī Bakr rise up against his rightful successor 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib and meet the same fate (T). Some commentators have understood these phrases to mean that the Imām had not been deluded by false hopes or lies (Z). In such cases too, one naturally has to delude himself first before allowing others to delude him (N). When the Imām states that his insight is with him, he means that the same insight and wisdom that was with him during the time of the Prophet (ṣ) is still with him and has not changed (I).

3 The phrase '*waymullāh*' is an oath that means 'I swear by Allāh' (R). We see a similar statement from the Imām in sermon no. 136 (N). The idiomatic expressions employed by the Imām in this section mean that he will teach the treacherous forces a lesson, such that those who come to face him in battle will not return alive, and those who flee will never come back (Z). This is a prophecy about the outcome of the Battle of Jamal which predicted how the enemy will face complete defeat. The Imām uses an analogy by describing the battlefield as a cistern which he will fill with so much water that there will be no escape from it, and those who do manage to flee would never return to it (N). This kind of analogy (of overflowing

water) would often be used to describe the bravery of a warrior in battle – a warrior who would fight and attack the enemy like waves pounding on rocks, until they are completely annihilated (M).



11

ADDRESSING HIS SON MUHAMMAD IBN AL-HANAFIYYAH

- 1** Even if the mountains are dislodged,
do not waver! Grit your teeth, entrust
your head to Allāh, plant your feet
firmly on the ground, set your sights
on the farthest enemy contingent, and
lower your gaze. And know that
certainly succour is from Allāh, the
Glorified.

١ تَرْوُلُ الْجِبَالُ وَلَا تَرُلُ! عَضَّ عَلَى
نَاجِذِكَ، أَعِرِ اللَّهُ جُمْجُمَتَكَ، تَذَفِي
الْأَرْضَ قَدَمَكَ، لِرِمْ بَصَرَكَ أَفْصَى
الْقَوْمَ، وَغُضَّ بَصَرَكَ. وَاعْلَمْ أَنَّ
الْأَنْصَرُ مِنْ عِنْدِ اللَّهِ سُبْحَانَهُ.

CONTEXT

This speech comprises what Imām ‘Alī (*a*) told his son Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥanafiyyah in the Battle of Jamal, before handing him the standard. It was the banner of the Holy Prophet (*s*) himself, and the Imām told his son that it had never fallen in defeat, so he should carry it with valour and charge at the enemy with courage. Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥanafiyyah was Imām ‘Alī’s son with Khawlah bint Ja’far al-Ḥanafiyyah, a slave girl whom the Imām had freed and subsequently married at the behest of her tribespeople (*T*). In his speech, the Imām advises his son to remain steadfast and unwavering as he proceeds into battle. It is said that this was after he initially displayed hesitation upon seeing the onslaught of the enemy and the rain of their arrows. Nevertheless, we know from historical accounts that Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥanafiyyah was a brave warrior and Imām ‘Alī would regularly send him as part of the vanguard in battle. When he was once asked why his father sent him and not his two elder siblings, al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn (*a*), he is said to have responded, “Because they are his eyes and I am his right hand, so he is protecting his eyes with his right hand” (*I*). Numerous accounts portray the efforts made by Amīr al-Mu’minīn to come to a peaceful resolution and avert bloodshed before this battle, but to no avail. The enemy obstinately stood their ground despite being reminded repeatedly of how this fateful event had been

foretold by the Noble Prophet (*s*) himself. It was only when no recourse was left that Imām ‘Alī ordered his army to fight, and then sent his son forward as the standard bearer (N).

COMMENTARY

1 *Even if the mountains are dislodged, do not waver* is a clear instruction against faltering and fleeing from battle. It was as though the Imām was saying, “Let the mountains move from their positions, but you must not!” This means that if something as great as the dislodging of mountains should not cause him to move, obviously lesser occurrences in battle should not faze him (M). Employing such a hyperbole means that no excuse whatsoever would be considered valid for turning away from the battlefield (MB). Indeed, one of the most important elements of success in battle is steadfastness, without which victory can never be attained. Furthermore, the analogy used could be an indirect reference to the well-known tradition that states, “A believer is like a firm mountain that is not shaken by violent winds” (N). The instruction *grit your teeth* (*‘ghadḍa ‘alā nājidhik’*) serves a dual function, psychological and physiological. As one grits his teeth, it removes lassitude and fear, as experienced in times of intense cold or fright. At the same time, it is helpful in preventing deep wounds to the cranium when one is struck on the head in battle. This second effect has been mentioned in another speech where Amīr al-Mu’mīnīn describes how gritting one’s teeth hinders swords from penetrating the skull (M). *Entrust your head to Allāh* renders “*‘a’irillāha jumjumatak*” where *‘āriyah*, from which the verb “*‘a’ir*” stems, literally means to lend or loan something to someone for a temporary period, and the lexical meaning of *jumjumah* is cranium or skull. Here, the Imām is telling his son to place his life in the hands of the Almighty and show readiness to sacrifice it for His cause (N).

One commentator says that this statement was like an assurance that Muhammad ibn al-Hanafiyyah would not be killed in this battle, since the Imām did not say, ‘sell your life to Allāh’; rather, he said ‘lend it to Him’, and that which is given on loan is returned (I). The imperative ‘*tid fī l-arḍi qadamak*’ connotes entrenching ones feet into the ground like firm pegs (*awtād*). Indeed, believers have been instructed that when they meet the enemy in battle, they should remain steadfast: *O you who believe! When you meet a host [in battle] then stand firm, and remember Allāh greatly so that you may be felicitous* (Q8:45). Planting one’s feet

firmly on the ground has two benefits: it increases one's resolve, thereby reducing anxiety, and it shows strength and courage which give rise to fear in the enemy (M). By setting one's sights on *the farthest enemy contingent*, one is able to see their entire army and note the different formations present on the battlefield, which would then enable him to plan the best type of offence (N). It can also be interpreted as keeping the furthest enemy ranks as one's goal, so that the motivation to keep fighting until he vanquishes all the enemies remains high (R). The last piece of advice for battle that the Imām gives his son is that he should lower his gaze ('*ghudda başarak*'). Keeping one's gaze lowered and eyes only half-open during battle is a sign of inner calm, patience, and lack of agitation. This is because looking directly at the glittering swords brings about fear in the heart and can even be harmful for the eyes (M). Lowering the gaze may also refer to paying no heed to the enemy's numbers (R). Finally, Amīr al-Mu'minīn ('a) reminds Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥanafiyah that in the end, any victory attained is solely by the help and succour of Allāh, so that is what he should pray and hope for at all times (N).



12

AFTER ALLĀH GRANTED HIM VICTORY IN AL-JAMAL

1 When one of his companions said to him, “I wish my brother so-and-so would have been present to witness how Allāh granted you victory over your enemies.” He (*a*) asked, “Is your brother a supporter of our cause?” He replied, “Yes.” He said, “Then he was with us. In fact, some of those who are still in the loins of men and wombs of women were also witnesses in this army of ours. Time will bring them forth and through them faith will be strengthened.”

وَقَدْ قَالَ لَهُ بَعْضُ أَصْحَابِهِ: وَدِدْتُ
أَنَّ أَخِي فُلَانًا كَانَ شَاهِدَنَا لِيَرَى مَا
أَصْرَكَ اللَّهُ بِهِ عَلَى أَعْدَائِكُمْ. فَقَالَ لَهُ
عَلِيهِ: أَهُوَ أَخِيكَ مَعَنَا؟ فَقَالَ:
بَعْضُهُمْ. قَالَ: فَقَدْ شَهِدَنَا، وَلَقَدْ شَهِدَنَا
فِي عَسْكَرِنَا هَذَا قَوْمٌ فِي أَصْلَابِ
الرِّجَالِ وَأَرْحَامِ النِّسَاءِ، سَيَرْعَفُ
بِهِمُ الرَّمَانُ، وَيَقُولُ بِهِمُ الْإِيمَانَ.

CONTEXT

This speech, though recorded as part of the Imām’s sermons (*khuṭab*), is clearly more of a conversation than anything else; and the same is true for a number of other orations in *Nahj al-Balāghah* as well (Z). Al-Sayyid al-Rādī tells us that the above exchange took place after the victory at the Battle of Jamal. Al-Nūmānī reports from Imām al-Ṣādiq (*a*) that this battle did not last long, and before midday (lit. ‘before the sun turned yellow’) the rebels had surrendered to Amīr al-Mu’minīn (T). It is noteworthy that after this victory, the Imām did not punish the people of Baṣrah for their role in supporting the rebellion against him; rather, he forgave them in the same manner that the Prophet forgave the inhabitants of Makkah after its Conquest (I). In the complete version of this conversation, the Imām’s interlocutor asks him how those who have not yet been born also participated in the battle, and the Imām explains that they will be individuals who will rise in the end times and pursue the same cause, thereby submitting themselves to his way (*Tamām Nahj al-Balāghah* 5:460). Al-Barqī has narrated the

same thing in *al-Mahāsin* with a slight difference – he says that this discussion took place after the Battle of Nahrawān (1:262). The beautiful message contained within this sermon highlights a spiritual bond between believers, which is stronger than any other bond (N).

COMMENTARY

1 *Was your brother a supporter of our cause?* renders ‘*ahwā akhīka ma‘anā?*’ which can also mean ‘did he consider us as friend?’ Or, ‘was he inclined towards us?’ Some commentators interpret the term ‘*ahwā*’ to mean love and affection (M). *Some of those who are still in the loins of men and wombs of women* translates ‘*qawmun fi aṣlāb al-rijāl wa arḥām al-nisā’* – with the plural ‘*aqwāmun*’ recorded in other manuscripts instead of ‘*qawmun*’. This is a statement which further emphasizes that the questioner’s brother was counted among those who were present as witnesses, since even some of those who were not yet born were potentially (*bil-quwwah*) present in the battle (M). Since they will believe in the same things and support the same cause, given the opportunity, they would surely have joined the Imām in battle against the enemies (N). ‘*Sayar‘afu bihim al-zamān*’ is translated *time will bring them forth*, since the term ‘*yar‘afu*’ literally refers to one who suffers a nosebleed (I). In the same way that blood is present in the veins and is not directly visible, yet when a person nosebleeds the blood is easily seen as it comes forth, so too will the true believers come forth in due course and by their presence, the religion will be strengthened (N). The idea that those who were not physically present can still be counted among those who were there is noted in numerous occasions in history. For instance, when the Holy Prophet (ṣ) returned from Tabūk, he is reported to have stated, “Verily there is a group [of people] in Madīnah who were with you on every path you traversed and every valley you descended; nothing held them back except ailment.” It was said: this is because they had the intention (T).

It is also narrated that when Amīr al-Mu’mīn entered Başrah after this battle and divided the share of the public treasury (*bayt al-māl*) among his companions, a man who had not participated in the battle approached him and sought a share saying, “O Amīr al-Mu’mīn, I was with you in heart despite being physically absent, so please give me something.” Thus, the Imām gave the man his own share (I). Another incident that demonstrates how those who loved and supported the

Imām were counted among the participants of his battles is seen in the encounter between Mu‘āwiyah and the honourable lady Zarqā’ al-Hamadāniyyah, wherein he said to her, “By Allāh, O Zarqā’, you have participated with ‘Alī in all the bloodshed.” She responded with great joy, “What glad tidings you give!” Mu‘āwiyah was surprised at this reaction and asked, “This makes you happy?” She replied, “Yes indeed, these words of yours please me and I hope it is true.” Mu‘āwiyah said, “By Allāh, your loyalty to ‘Alī after his death is more amazing than your love for him while he was alive!” (T).



CONDEMNING THE PEOPLE OF BASRAH

1 You were the army of a woman and followers of a quadruped; when it growled you responded, and when it was hamstrung you fled. Your character is vile and your pledge is disloyal. Your faith is hypocritical and your water is brackish. He who stays among you is held ransom by his sin, and he who leaves your company attains mercy from his Lord. It is to me as though your mosque is like the bow of a ship upon which Allāh has sent chastisement, from above and from below, and everyone in it is drowned.

2 (And in [another] narration:) By Allāh, your city shall certainly drown; it is as though I can even see its mosque like the bow of a boat or a sitting ostrich.

(In another version:) Like the breast of a bird in the waves of the deep sea.

[(And in another narration:) Your city has the most malodorous clay of all God's cities; it is closest to water yet furthest from the sky. It contains nine-tenths of evil. Whoever is confined therein, it is due to his sins and whoever leaves it has received Allāh's

١ كُنْتُمْ جُنْدَ الْمَرْأَةِ، وَأَتْبَاعَ الْبَهِيمَةِ،
رَغَّا فَأَجْبَثُمْ، وَعَقِيرَ فَهَرَبْتُمْ.
أَحْلَاقُكُمْ دَقَاقُ، وَعَهْدُكُمْ شِقَاقُ،
وَدِينُكُمْ نِفَاقُ، وَمَاوِكُمْ رُعَاقُ.
الْمُقِيمُ بَيْنَ أَظْهَرِكُمْ مُرْزَهُنْ بِذِنْبِهِ،
وَالشَّاغِضُ عَنْكُمْ مُسَدَّرُكُ بِرَحْمَةِ
مِنْ رَبِّهِ. كَانَى بِمَسْجِدِكُمْ كَجُوْجُوْ
سَفِينَةٍ، قَدْ بَعَثَ اللَّهُ عَلَيْهَا الْعَذَابَ
مِنْ فَوْقَهَا وَمِنْ تَحْتَهَا، وَعَرِقَ مِنْ
فِي ضِمْنِهَا.

٢ (وَفِي رِوَايَةٍ أُخْرَى): وَإِنَّ اللَّهَ
لَتَغْرِقَنَّ بِلْدَنَكُمْ حَتَّىٰ كَانَى أَنْظَرَ
إِلَى مَسْجِدِهَا كَجُوْجُوْ سَفِينَةً، أَوْ
نَعَامَةً جَاهِمَةً. (وَفِي رِوَايَةٍ)
كَجُوْجُوْ طَيْرٍ فِي لُجَّةٍ بَحْرٍ.

[(وَفِي رِوَايَةٍ أُخْرَى): بِلَادُكُمْ أَنْشَنْ
بِلَادِ اللَّهِ تُبَوَّبَةً، أَقْرِبُهَا مِنَ الْمَاءِ
وَأَبْعَدُهَا مِنَ السَّمَاءِ، وَبِهَا تِسْعَةُ
أَعْشَارِ الشَّرِّ. الْمُحَبَّسُ فِيهَا بِذِنْبِهِ،

forgiveness. It is as though I see this habitation of yours being engulfed in water until nothing can be seen of it except the highest parts of the mosque, appearing like the breast of a bird in the waves of the deep sea.]

وَالْخَارِجُ بَعْفُوا اللَّهُ. كَأَنِّي أَنْظُرُ إِلَى
قَرْيَاتُكُمْ هَذِهِ قَدْ طَبَقَهَا الْمَاءُ حَتَّى
مَا يُرَى مِنْهَا إِلَّا شَرْفُ الْمَسْجِدِ،
كَأَنَّهُ جُوْجُوْ طَيْرٌ فِي لُجَّةِ بَحْرٍ.]

CONTEXT

This speech was given by the Imām to the people of Baṣrah after their defeat at his hands in the Battle of Jamal. The Imām harshly condemns and rebukes the people of this city due to their blind following of those who rose in rebellion, leading to the death of so many Muslims. The bitterness is evident in Imām ‘Alī’s speech and he promises those who were responsible that they will suffer chastisement from the Almighty (N). After the battle, Amīr al-Mu’minīn (‘a) entered Baṣrah and proceeded to the masjid where he climbed the pulpit and addressed the people. Having praised Allāh and sent salutations upon the Prophet (ṣ), he upbraided the people for supporting the illegitimate uprising and informed them of the consequence of their actions (T). Yet we note that the Imām did not exact revenge from them despite knowing that given the opportunity, they would have killed him in battle. This was due to his noble nature and the fact that he wanted to show them mercy just as the Prophet (ṣ) had shown mercy to the Quraysh of Makkah (Z). The harshness and condemnation seen in this sermon should not be misconstrued to mean that all the people of Baṣrah were necessarily evil. Rather, it was in this particular instance that they deserved condemnation for their rebellion and foolishness. In another occasion, we find that the Imām actually praises the people of Baṣrah (M). A number of sources have recounted slightly varying versions of this sermon, thereby speaking to its authenticity. Some of the variations have been mentioned by al-Sayyid al-Raḍī using the phrase “and in another narration...” [as noted above]. Considering all the different reports together gives us a better understanding of the meaning that was intended by the Imām in the sermon.

COMMENTARY

1 *You were the army of a woman* is the first rebuke, since it was considered a shame for Arabs to be led by a woman in battle (MB). While it is true that a large part of the blame for this battle rests on the shoulders of Talhah and al-Zubayr, and historical accounts show that Mu‘awiyah too was an instigator, yet it was the presence of the Prophet’s wife ‘Āishah that led to greater participation on the part of the masses, who rallied to her side under the pretext of supporting the ‘mother of the believers’ (*umm al-mu‘minīn*) (N). The second rebuke describes the Başrans as followers of a four-legged beast, that is, the camel upon which ‘Āishah rode. Her howdah was placed on a camel called ‘Askar, which was specially procured on her behalf for the battle (MB). The description of their rallying to the cry of the camel and fleeing when it was hamstrung serves to highlight their foolishness and lack of discernment (Z). It has been narrated that ‘Āishah’s camel was like the standard of their army in this battle. The rebels gathered around it and fought to protect it. For this reason, Imām ‘Alī ordered that the camel should be hamstrung. It is only when the camel fell that the enemy soldiers fled from the battlefield (N).

The three subsequent reproofs were aimed at their character. The Imām labels their character as vile (*diqāq*), their pledge disloyal (*shiqāq*), and their faith hypocritical (*nifāq*). Their vile character was due to excessive love for material gain, their disloyalty was due to their breaking the pledge of allegiance they had given to the Imām, and their hypocrisy was due to their outward call to defend the Prophet’s wife while secretly harbouring desire for wealth and power (N). *Your water is brackish* translates *‘mā’ukum zu‘āq* which is interpreted literally by some commentators as a shortcoming of their city (I), or a punishment for their sins (R). It has been further posited that the saltiness of their water, which was due to the city’s proximity to the sea, led to a number of physical and psychological maladies, and the latter also resulted in major character flaws (N). It is also possible that the statement was meant figuratively to refer to their base character, as that would fit perfectly with the context. The Imām then describes one who enters the city and remains among its inhabitants as being a captive held ransom by his sin, and commentators say that this is because such an individual either joins the people of the city in their sins, or does nothing to stop them from their vile actions (I).

The notion that proximity with the wicked has a detrimental effect is found in many traditions. For instance, it is reported that Imām al-Hādī (*‘a*) once confronted his companion Ja‘farī and questioned him regarding his presence in the company

of one ‘Abd al-Rahmān ibn Ya‘qūb, who was a known apostate. He responded that ‘Abd al-Rahmān was his uncle. The Imām said, “Do you not know about the way he speaks against the Almighty, attributing to Him the qualities of the creation?” Then he gave him an ultimatum, “Either remain in his company and leave us, or leave his company and stay with us!” (N).

2 The foreboding of the deluge that would flood the city, drowning all but its masjid, actually came to pass. Baṣrah was submerged twice – once during the reign of al-Qādir billāh, and again during the rule of al-Qā’im bi-Amrillāh when the whole town was under water except the uppermost part of the masjid, just as the Imām had foretold (I). Amīr al-Mu’mīnīn likens the top of the masjid, which would remain above water while everything around it is submerged, to the bow of a ship or a sitting ostrich, thereby painting a vivid picture in the minds of his audience (R). It is conceivable that he was actually describing the minarets or the turrets atop the walls of the masjid, which are semi-circular, like the shape of a ship’s bow (N). The final part of this sermon, starting from the third narration, seems to have been marginalia that were later included in the text of *Nahj al-Balāghah*. This is because the lines are not found in a number of manuscripts. When Amīr al-Mu’mīnīn (*a*) describes the clay (*turbah*) of Baṣrah as most malodourous, it is likely due to its filth and pollution. In fact, poets have even composed couplets describing the stench of Baṣrah (T).

One commentator suggests that the cause of the unpleasant smell of the city is due to its being *closest to the water and furthest from the sky*, which results in its receiving less sunlight when compared to other cities, and wherever there is less sunlight, there is greater pollution (N). However, another interpretation could be that it is close to the water that will flood it, and being furthest from the sky, the supplications of its inhabitants are not heard (R). *It contains nine-tenths of evil* is meant as a hyperbole to emphasize the prevalence of evil in this city and lack of noble traits in its inhabitants; it does not mean that out of all the evil in the world, nine-tenths are found in this city (M). *Whoever is confined therein* renders ‘*al-muḥtabasu fīhā*’ and refers to one who is detained in the city or finds himself unable to leave it for some reason – such a person is trapped in it due to his sins. On the other hand, he who leaves the city is successful in doing so due to the forgiveness of Allāh. Alternatively, it could mean that being detained in the city is a form of punishment for one’s sins and leaving the city is a sign of forgiveness for those sins (M).

Finally, in this narration too, the Imām describes what will happen to Baṣrah in the future, namely that it will drown and everything but the top of the central masjid of the city will be submerged. The difference in wording seen in these varying narrations is the result of some narrators relaying the meaning of what they had heard from the Imām, rather than his actual words, or their having erred when they were writing down the sermon from memory. The probability that the Imām repeated this sermon in more than one occasion using different expressions is highly unlikely (N).



14

ALSO CONDEMNING THE PEOPLE OF BASRAH

¹ Your land is close to the water but far from the sky. Your wits are diminished and your minds are plagued by folly. You are thus the target of the archer, a morsel for the devourer, and easy prey for the hunter.

أَرْضُكُمْ قَرِيبَةٌ مِنَ الْمَاءِ بَعِيدَةٌ مِنَ
السَّمَاءِ، حَقَّتْ عُثُولُكُمْ، وَسَفَهَتْ
حُلُومُكُمْ، فَأَشْتَمْ غَرَضٌ لِنَابِلٍ،
وَأُكْلَةٌ لِآكِلٍ، وَفَرِيسَةٌ لِصَائِلٍ.

CONTEXT

This is most likely a continuation of the previous sermon, addressing the people of Başrah after the Battle of Jamal, and for some reason known only to the author, al-Sayyid al-Rađī has presented it separately (N). Al-Shaykh Jawādī al-Āmulī notes that this sermon and the previous one are together part of one and the same sermon that was delivered by Amīr al-Mu'minīn in the year 36 AH at the central masjid of Başrah, on a Friday (S).

COMMENTARY

¹ As noted in the commentary of the previous sermon, the statement *your land is close to the water and far from the sky* either describes the geographical location of Başrah and its negative qualities, or is meant figuratively to depict the spiritual state of its inhabitants. The former interpretation, which constitutes the apparent meaning, highlights the consequences of living so close to a riverbank. Some commentators who prefer this interpretation also say that Başrah is literally the furthest inhabited city from the sky since it is next to Ubullah, which astronomers say is the furthest point on earth from the sky (I). However, it has been pointed out that this belief is contrary to what modern science has demonstrated, which is that like most other cities next to the sea, Başrah's altitude is approximately sea level (or zero-level), and can thus not be considered further from the sky than other similarly located cities (N). *Your wits are diminished and*

your minds are plagued by folly describes the imprudence and irrationality of the Baṣrāns, as was evident by the way they rallied to defend the camel in the Battle of Jamal, even if it meant losing their lives (N). Though the context of this statement was limited to their rebellion against Amīr al-Mu’minīn, there are other traditions that also depict the people of Baṣrah as dim-witted.

For example, al-Kashshī narrates that a group had come to ask Imām al-Ṣādiq (‘a) about some traditions. When questioned, they said that they had heard the traditions from Sufyān al-Thawrī on the authority of Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq and then proceeded to relate the traditions, all of which were fabricated. The Imām asked them if they knew who Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq was and they replied in the negative. The Imām then asked, “If you were to meet him and he told you that these traditions are all lies and fabrications, would you believe him?” They replied, “No.” “Why is that?” he inquired. They said, “Because a considerable number of people we deem to be noble have attested to the veracity of his speech...” Once they had left, the Imām expressed his dismay at their foolishness as they were not ready to accept his rejection of the traditions despite attributing them to him (T). Indeed, it is their dim-wittedness that caused them to become *the target of the archer, a morsel for the devourer, and easy prey for the hunter*. It is evident that inanity and simple-mindedness leads a person to fall into traps and deceptions of those who harbour ill-will. This is why a lot of emphasis has been placed in educating the masses and increasing their awareness about the truth of what is happening in society. That is actually one of the functions of the Friday prayers where the sermons are meant to address contemporary issues, social and political (N).



15

AFTER RETURNING TO THE MUSLIMS THE TRACTS OF LAND
APPROPRIATED BY UTHMĀN

¹ By Allāh, if I had found women married or bondmaids purchased with it, I would still have repossessed it, for indeed in justice there is prosperity, and he for whom justice is restrictive would find injustice to be even more restrictive.

١ وَاللَّهُ لَوْ وَجَدْتُهُ فَإِنْ ثُرُوجَ بِهِ
السَّيِّءَ، وَمُلْكَ بِهِ الْإِمَاءَ،
أَرَدَدْتُهُ؛ فَإِنَّ فِي الْعَدْلِ سَعْيًّا
وَمَنْ ضَاقَ عَلَيْهِ الْعَدْلُ فَالْجُورُ
عَلَيْهِ أَضْيقَ.

CONTEXT

The phrase *to the Muslims* ("alā al-muslimīn") in the title of this sermon is not recorded in some manuscripts and it would seem that this phrase is a later addition since the people from whom the tracts of land were repossessed were also Muslims (T). The tracts of land being referred to were known as '*qatā'i*' (sing. '*qatī'ah*') and consisted of parcels of land that belonged to the Muslim treasury (*bayt al-māl*) but were granted to specific individuals by the ruler (N). The third caliph, 'Uthmān ibn 'Affān, had bestowed many such parcels of land to his tribesmen from the Banī Umayyah, as well as his close friends (I). This speech and the one after it are part of the sermon that the Imām delivered in Madīnah on the second day of his rule (MB). It is noteworthy that one of the earliest actions of Amīr al-Mu'minīn as the ruler of the Muslims was to take back all the property that was misappropriated during the time of 'Uthmān (N). It is said that when news of this reached 'Amr ibn al-'Āṣ, he wrote to Mu'āwiyah warning him of the situation and the likelihood that all his wealth would be stripped away if he did nothing (I).

COMMENTARY

¹ The pronoun 'it' in both ...*purchased with it* and *repossessed it* refers to the wealth that was unlawfully and unjustly appropriated by 'Uthmān. Firm resolve

and determination is evident in Imām ‘Alī’s words when he says that even if the wealth that was unlawfully appropriated from the Muslim treasury was used as dower to marry women or for the purpose of purchasing slave-women, he would still have repossessed it (M). Some have noted that these words of the Imām also had the simultaneous effect of quelling the rage in the hearts of the Muslims who had grown increasingly weary of the nepotism and extravagance of the previous caliph (N). In contrast, the justice of Imām ‘Alī (*a*) was such that he never took anything for himself from the Muslim treasury, except the share that was allocated for every Muslim. Historians report how after distributing all the wealth in the *bayt al-māl* equitably among the people, such that even the needle and thread were given to their rightful recipients, Amīr al-Mu’minīn would sweep the floor and then offer two rak‘ahs of prayer and say, “This is how the *bayt al-māl* should be” (Z). Indeed, it was for this very reason that the usurpers led uprisings against him, as they were deprived of their ill-gotten and unlawfully acquired wealth.

The statement *indeed in justice there is prosperity* is an explanation for the seemingly harsh stance taken by the Imām in seeking to recover all the unjustly distributed wealth, since it is only by so doing that justice would be restored; and justice leads to prosperity for all as it ensures that everyone receives his due (N). Though establishing justice may be difficult as it entails loss of privilege for some, he who finds justice restrictive and difficult would find injustice even more restrictive and harder to bear, for how can one who cannot bear justice ever bear injustice (Z)? When one accepts justice, he would only lose his unlawfully acquired wealth yet if injustice prevails, he will end up losing even his lawfully acquired and rightfully deserved wealth (N). Some commentators interpret the last phrase to mean that if one turns away from justice due to his worldly desires and caprice, he will face greater hardship both in this world and the next. And this was meant as a threat against those who would seek to hold on to the land and wealth that was bestowed to them, in defiance of the Imām’s command (MB).



16

WHEN HE WAS GIVEN THE PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE IN MADINAH

1 The responsibility for what I say is mine and I guarantee it. He who has seen clearly, through experience, the chastisement [befalling others] before him is prevented, by Godwariness, from falling into doubts. Look! Your tribulations have reverted to the state they were in when Allāh first sent His Prophet (ṣ). By He who sent him with truth, you will surely be mixed and shaken, get sifted in a sieve and stirred [like stew] in a pot, until the low amongst you are upraised and the high amongst you are brought down, [and until] those who were behind come forward and those who were in front lag behind. By Allāh, I have neither concealed a single word nor spoken any lie, for I had been informed of this state and this day.

١ ذَمَّتِي بِمَا أَقُولُ رَهِينَةً وَأَنَا بِهِ رَعِيمٌ:
 إِنَّ مَنْ صَرَّحْتُ لَهُ الْعِبْرُ عَمَّا بَيْنَ
 يَدَيْهِ مِنَ الْمُثَلَّاتِ، حَجَرَتِهِ التَّقْوَى
 عَنْ تَفْحُمِ الشُّبُهَاتِ. أَلَا وَإِنَّ بَلِيَّكُمْ
 قَدْ عَادُتْ كَهِيَّتَهَا يَوْمَ بَعَثَ اللَّهُ نَبِيًّا
صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ، وَالَّذِي بَعَثَهُ بِالْحَقِّ لِتَبْلِيلَ
 بَلْلَةً، وَلَتَعْرِبَلَّ غَرْبَلَةً، وَلَشَّاطِنَ
 سَوْطَ الْقِدْرِ، حَتَّى يُعُودَ أَسْفَلَكُمْ
 أَغْلَاكُمْ وَأَعْلَاكُمْ أَشْفَلَكُمْ،
 وَلَيَسْبِقَنَّ سَابِقُونَ كَانُوا فَصَارُوا،
 وَلَيَقْصُرَنَّ سَابِقُونَ كَانُوا سَبَقُوا. وَاللَّهُ
 مَا كَنْمَتُ وَشَمَّهُ، وَلَا كَذَبَتُ كِذْبَهُ،
 وَلَقَدْ ثَبَتَتْ بِهَذَا الْمَقَامِ وَهَذَا الْيَوْمِ.

CONTEXT

According to al-Sayyid al-Rađī, this is an excerpt from one of the Imām's sermons when the oath of allegiance was sworn to him in Madīnah (in the year 35 AH). Since it was the first sermon delivered by Amīr al-Mu'minīn ('a) in his official capacity as ruler of the Muslims, it has been widely transmitted by both Sunnī and Shī'ah tradents, albeit with some variance, and there is much that can be gleaned from this sermon (MB). In it, he informs the people about the end of their affair and classifies them into groups. He reminds them about their state during the Age

of Ignorance and warns them that they have reverted to their previous state. This is due to all the deviation that came about subsequent to the Prophet's demise (N). After recording part of this sermon, al-Sayyid al-Rađī says, "In this part of the speech there is more beauty than can be appreciated, and the level of wonder evoked by it is far greater than the appreciation accorded to it. Yet aside from what we have stated, it has many more aspects of eloquence that can neither be expressed by the tongue nor grasped in totality by any human, and no one can understand what I mean unless he has truly mastered this art and knows its intricate details. *But no one understands it except those who have knowledge* (Q29:43)." A number of commentators have mentioned the sermon in its entirety, including the sections not mentioned by al-Sayyid al-Rađī (T, MB).

COMMENTARY

1 The importance of what the Imām wanted to express here is evidenced from the statement *the responsibility for what I say is mine and I guarantee it*, which some commentators gloss as a way of telling the people not to focus only on the eloquence and verbal dexterity of his speech, but on the content of what is being spoken (J). This is followed by an invitation to consider the events of the past which serve as a lesson for those who would take heed, for by reflecting on the punishments that befell previous nations as a result of their tyranny, oppression, and disobedience, one can enhance his Godwariness ('*taqwā*') thereby protecting himself from falling into doubt or confusion, and repeating the same mistakes they had made (R). The Imām then tells them that their *tribulations* (*baliyyah*) have once again returned to their previous state – the state they were in before Allāh first sent His Prophet (*s*), meaning during the Age of Ignorance (Z). This is due to the discord, dissent, and disunity that had engulfed them and led some of them to espouse incorrect views and ideas, and such a state is indeed a great affliction (MB). As a result, they would *be mixed and shaken* ('*latubalbalunna balbalatan*'), *get sifted in a sieve* ('*latugharbalunna gharbalatan*') and *stirred [like stew] in a pot* ('*latusāṭunna sawt al-qidr*'), until those who are beneath are raised up and those who are above are brought down.

These are figurative descriptions of the hardships and adversities that would befall the people until the proverbial wheat is separated from the chaff, and the righteous are brought to the fore while the wicked are pushed back (N). Some have

interpreted the phrase *those who were behind come forward* as depicting the crowds of people who came forward to insist that Imām ‘Alī take up the mantle of leadership after having stayed behind and remained quiet regarding this matter previously. At the same time, *those who were in front lag behind* refers to individuals who were previously at the forefront in supporting the right of Amīr al-Mu’minīn, like al-Zubayr and Ṭalḥah, yet later turned against him (T). Alternatively, these phrases have a more general purport and refer to all those whose stance changed over time, for better or worse (M). The Imām could perhaps also have been referring to a future time where evil rulers and tyrants will reign over the people, and the virtuous will be abased while the wicked are elevated. Subsequently, the Imām states that he has not concealed *a single word* ('washmah') nor spoken any lie, since he had been informed about all of this by the Holy Prophet (ṣ). Some have offered an alternative reading of this phrase where the verb is passive and would thus be translated: *Nothing has been concealed from me, nor have I been told a lie* [by the Prophet(ṣ)] (T). He does this to emphasize that what he has said about future events is not based on conjecture, but on information given to him by the Messenger of Allāh about what was to come (MB), which the Imām apprised the people of as a warning (N).

2 The analogy Imām ‘Alī gives of sins and Godwariness are unruly and trained horses respectively; the former cannot be controlled by its rider who ends up being thrown by it into the pits of hellfire, while the latter takes its rider to the gates of Paradise. This is indeed a profoundly beautiful analogy as it represents the conceptual using the tangible (MB). One sin usually leads to another and in the end, the perpetrator is dragged, willingly or unwillingly, to his doom. In the same way, Godwariness and virtuous deeds are interlinked and support each other, eventually leading one to felicity and success (N). *There is truth and falsehood and each has its followers* is an evident universal truth, yet both the upholder of truth and the follower of falsehood claim to be upon the right path, so the only way to distinguish between them is through submission to Allāh. He who obeys the Almighty is upon the truth whereas he who disobeys Him has taken the path of falsehood (Z). Some commentators have suggested a link between truth and Godwariness, whereas falsehood is inherently connected to sin (M).

2 Beware! Verily sins are like unruly horses with their riders mounted upon them while their reins are let loose, so they fling them into Hell. Look! Verily Godwariness is like trained horses with their riders mounted upon them holding fast to their reins, so they take them to Paradise. There is truth and falsehood, and each has its followers. If falsehood dominates, it has done so for ages and if truth is diminished, there is always a chance [that it may increase in the future]. Yet it seldom happens that a thing left behind returns to the fore.

3 Preoccupied is he who has Paradise and Hell on his mind. One who strives and acts quickly is saved, while the slow seeker also has hope; yet the delinquent is damned in Hell. On the right and left are misleading tracks. Only the middle path is the [right] way; upon it is what remains with you of the Book as well as the traditions of the Prophet. From it the Sunnah spreads forth and towards it is the ultimate return. He who claims [falsehood] is ruined and he who fabricates [it] fails. Whoever stands in opposition to the truth is destroyed. It is enough of ignorance for a man not to know his worth. That which is rooted in piety is never ruined and

۲ أَلَا وَإِنَّ الْخَطَايَا حَيْلٌ شُمُسٌ
حُمِلَ عَلَيْهَا أَهْلُهَا، وَحُلِعْتُ
لُجْمُهَا، فَتَقْحَمَتْ بِهِمْ فِي النَّارِ.
أَلَا وَإِنَّ التَّقْوَى مَطَايَا دُلُلٌ
حُمِلَ عَلَيْهَا أَهْلُهَا، وَأُعْطُوا
أَزْمَنَهَا، فَأَوْرَدَتْهُمُ الْجَنَّةَ. حَقٌّ
وَبَاطِلٌ، وَلِكُلٌّ أَهْلٌ، فَلَئِنْ أَمْرَ
الْبَاطِلُ لَقَدِيمًا فَعَلَ، وَلَئِنْ قَلَ
الْحَقُّ فَرَبِّمَا وَلَعَلَّ، وَلَقَلَمَا أَدْبَرَ
شَيْءٌ فَأَقْبَلَ.

۳ شُغِلَ مِنِ الْجَنَّةِ وَالنَّارِ أَمَامَهُ. سَاعِ
سَرِيعٌ نَجَا، وَطَالِبٌ بَطِيءٌ رَجَا،
وَمُقَصِّرٌ فِي النَّارِ هَوَى. الْيَمِينُ
وَالشَّمَالُ مَضَلَّةٌ، وَالطَّرِيقُ الْوُسْطَى
هِيَ الْبَادَدَةُ، عَلَيْهَا بَاقِي الْكِتَابِ
وَآثَارُ التُّبُوَّةِ، وَمِنْهَا مَنْفَذُ الْسُّلَّةِ،
وَإِلَيْهَا مَصِيرُ الْعَاقِبَةِ. هَلَكَ مَنِ
أَدْعَى، وَخَابَ مَنِ افْتَرَى، مَنْ أَبْدَى
صَفْحَةً لِلْحَقِّ هَلَكَ، وَكَفَى بِالْمَرْءِ
جَهَلًا أَلَا يَعْرِفُ قَدْرَهُ. لَا يَهِلُكُ
عَلَى التَّقْوَى سِنْحٌ أَصْلٌ، وَلَا يَظْمَأُ
عَلَيْهَا زَرْعٌ قَوْمٌ. فَاسْتَرِوا فِي

what people plant upon it never withers. So hide yourselves in your homes and mend your relationships while repentance is at your heels. Let the extoller praise none but his Lord and the blamer condemn none but himself.

يٰيُوْتَكُمْ، وَأَصْلِحُوا ذَاتَ بَيْنَكُمْ،
وَالْتَّوَبَةُ مِنْ وَرَائِكُمْ. وَلَا يَحْمَدُ
حَامِدٌ إِلَّا رَبَّهُ، وَلَا يُلْمَ لَائِمٌ إِلَّا
نَفْسَهُ.

نَفْسَهُ.

Then the Imām says that *if falsehood dominates, it has done so for ages and if truth is diminished, there is always a chance [that it may increase in the future]*, meaning that there is nothing surprising when one witnesses falsehood fighting for power and dominance, as this has been its wont from the beginning. That is because it is attractive and easy, and in harmony with the base desires of man, so many more people flock towards it (Z). The underlying message here is that those who are on the path of truth should not get overwhelmed by the large numbers of those who follow falsehood and must remain steadfast, as their time will soon come (N). His statement *it seldom happens that a thing left behind returns to the fore* is interpreted by some to mean that it is unlikely for the forces of truth to regain strength and power once they have been weakened and pushed back (M). As such, it is imperative to take the opportunity when it presents itself and not lose it. Of course, all Muslims believe that in the end, with the rise of the awaited saviour of mankind (Imām al-Mahdī), truth will prevail over falsehood (N).

3 This section has been mentioned under a separate heading (*Also from this sermon ('wa min kalāmihi')*) which indicates that a part of the sermon was omitted by al-Sayyid al-Rādī. *Preoccupied is he who has Paradise and Hell on his mind* since he is constantly working to attain the former and safeguard himself from the latter. It is narrated from Imām al-Bāqir ('a) that Abū Dharr used to cry so much out of the fear of Allāh that his eyesight got affected. When asked why he does not pray to Allāh to restore his eyesight, he said, "I am preoccupied with something of greater significance to me." They asked, "What preoccupies you?" He said, "The two great ones (*al-'azīmatān*) – Paradise and Hell!" (T). *One who strives and acts quickly is saved from the hellfire, while the slow seeker also has hope of attaining salvation, yet the delinquent is damned in Hell.* Some believe the three groups described here are the same as those mentioned in the verse: *Then We made heirs*

to the Book those whom We chose from Our servants. Yet some of them are those who wrong themselves, and some of them are average, and some of them are those who take the lead in all the good works by Allāh's will... (Q35:32). In any case, these three groups became clearly distinguishable during Imām ‘Alī's caliphate (N).

The right way (*jāddah*) is described as *the middle path* (*‘al-tarīq al-wusṭā’*), which is the path of moderation, while on either side of it are the misleading tracks (*maḍallah*) of extravagance and extremism. The middle path is the way of the Qurān and the Prophet, meaning that all the teachings in the Qurān and prophetic traditions lead one to that path (Z). *From it the Sunnah spreads forth* renders '*minhā manfadū al-sunnah*' which means that the Sunnah passes through it like light through a window and therefore, the only means of adhering to the Sunnah of the Prophet is through the middle path. *And towards it is the ultimate return* as one may only arrive at his final destination through traversing it (N). He who makes a false claim is ruined and he who fabricates a lie fails, as Mūsā ('a) said to the people, "*Woe to you! Do not fabricate a lie against Allāh, lest He should annihilate you with a punishment. Whoever fabricates lies certainly fails*" (Q20:61). Some commentators suggest that the false claim mentioned here is the claim to leadership (*imāmah*) by one who is not a leader (I). *Whoever stands in opposition to the truth is destroyed* renders '*man abdā ṣafhatahu lil-ḥaqqa halak*' and refers to situations where one manifestly opposes the truth. Some manuscripts append the phrase "*inda jahalat al-nās*" which has led some commentators to suggest another meaning entirely, that is, whoever openly declares the truth and stands in support of it will be overwhelmed by the opposition of the ignorant masses (M). The statement *it is enough of ignorance for a man not to know his worth* is repeated in a number of sayings from Amīr al-Mu'minīn with slight variation. Indeed, being unaware of one's status leads one to many sins, such as arrogance, transgression, making false claims, etc. (M).

The importance of Godwariness and piety is then highlighted using the analogy of a field upon which any plant would thrive with sufficient water and nutrients. Just as these plants develop firm roots and never dry up, so too could human beings remain steadfast and never lose hope through Godwariness (N). The instruction *hide yourselves in your homes and mend your relationships* is actually meant to dissuade the people from rising up in opposition, and tells them to remain away from dissent, concentrating instead on mending fractured relationships and promoting unity. This is because the Imām knew that there would be certain

individuals who would oppose his rule, due to his depriving them of the special favours and stipends they were accustomed to (N). The phrase *repentance is at your heels* means that they need only turn back from sin and seek forgiveness in order to be forgiven (M). Finally, Amīr al-Mu’minīn (‘a) declares that praise is due to none but Allāh and if one wishes to lay blame or condemn anyone, he should blame none but himself. This echoes beautifully the verse that states: *Whatever good befalls you is from Allāh, and whatever ill befalls you is from yourself* (Q4:79) (T).



17

DESCRIBING THE ONE WHO SEEKS TO JUDGE BETWEEN THE PEOPLE
DESPITE BEING UNQUALIFIED TO DO SO

- 1** The most detested of all creation in the sight of Allāh are two individuals: the person whom Allāh has left to his own devices, so he deviates from the straight path and is enamoured with words of heresy and misleading calls. He is thus an affliction for those who are lured by him. Having strayed from the guidance of those preceding him, he misdirects those who follow him during his lifetime and after his death. He thus bears the sins of others besides being answerable for his own sins.

۱ إِنَّ أَبْغَضَ الْخَلَقِ إِلَيْنَا اللَّهُ تَعَالَى رَجُلَانِ: رَجُلٌ وَكَلَّةُ اللَّهِ إِلَيْنَا نَفْسِهِ، فَهُوَ جَاهِزٌ عَنْ قَضَاءِ السَّبِيلِ، مَشْغُوفٌ بِكَلَامِ بِدْعَةٍ وَذُغَاءِ صَلَالَةٍ، فَهُوَ فَتَّشَهُ لِمَنْ افْتَنَ بِهِ، ضَالٌّ عَنْ هُدَىٰ مَنْ كَانَ قَبْلَهُ، مُضِلٌّ لِمَنْ افْتَدَى بِهِ فِي حَيَاةٍ وَبَعْدَ وَفَاتِهِ، حَمَالٌ حَطَابِيَا عَيْرِهِ، رَهْنٌ بِحَطِيبِهِ.

CONTEXT

This was one of the early sermons of Amīr al-Mu’minīn after he came to power, and according to a narration, it was part of his first sermon. As the title indicates, the sermon describes the qualities of those individuals who take up the post of judgeship without being worthy, and end up passing erroneous judgments. The Imām divides these individuals into two groups: the first consists of those who knowingly traverse the path of misguidance, submitting to their vain desires and fabricating innovations in religion. They have strayed from the straight path and mislead others as well. The second group is made up of ignorant individuals who don the garb of scholars and present themselves as knowledgeable men. They take up the responsibility of judging between people without adequate knowledge and end up issuing incorrect rulings. They mix truth with falsehood, spill the blood of innocents, and hand over wealth and property to the wrong people. Some

commentators have suggested that the first group may refer to unjust rulers or people in authority whereas the second addresses unqualified judges, since the word *ḥukm* in the title has a general connotation and can signify both ruler and judge (N). This sermon has been recorded by al-Kulaynī in *al-Kāfi*, al-Mufid in *al-Irshād*, as well as a number of other scholars, with slight differences (T).

COMMENTARY

1 The first of the two kinds of people who are most detested in the sight of Allāh is one who is left to his own devices since he believes that he can manage his own affairs using his abilities, his wealth, his influence, etc. (M). The Infallibles would always pray to Allāh never to leave them alone in such a manner. Examples of this abound, so we will quote just one. In *al-Ṣaḥīfah al-Sajjādiyyah*, Imām Zayn al-Ābidīn ('a) supplicates: "If You entrust my soul to me, I will be incapable of caring for it and would not do what is in its best interest" (Z). The consequence of being abandoned thus is that the person *deviates from the straight path and is enamoured with words of heresy and misleading calls*, because by its very nature, the soul is inclined towards evil and when inspiration and guidance are taken away, it lunges towards sin (MB). Being enamoured with heresy and innovation ('*bid'ah*') is a natural consequence of straying from the straight path. Such a person not only finds heretical ideas appealing, he also propagates them thereby misleading people and inviting them towards misguidance (N). As such, he is an *affliction* ('*fitnah*') for those who are lured by him and fooled by his words, since they end up straying from the right path. Alternatively, the term '*fitnah*' here could mean to deceive or misguide, as some commentators have suggested (Z). *Having strayed from the guidance of those preceding him*, meaning the path of the infallible Prophet and Imāms, *he misleads those who follow him during his lifetime and after his death*, because when a person becomes the embodiment of falsehood, he will be a source of misguidance (M).

Furthermore, this is not something that is limited to his own lifetime, since his ideas and teachings may remain popular for decades or even centuries after his death (N). Consequently, aside from answering for his own misdeeds, *he bears the sins of others* ('*hammālun khaṭāyā ghayrihi*') who follow his erroneous ideas. It is narrated from Imām al-Ṣādiq that in the olden days, there was an individual who was beguiled by Satan and began propagating heretical teachings among the

2 Another is the person who has amassed ignorance and moves expeditiously among the ignorant folk. He dives mindlessly into the darkness of strife and is blind to the benefits of peace-making. Those who just resemble people call him a scholar but he is not one. He goes out early in the morning to amass that of which less is better than more, and when he has quenched his thirst with putrid water and accumulated what has no benefit, he sits among the people as a judge responsible for clarifying that which has confounded others. If an ambiguous problem is brought before him, he presents a flimsy, baseless argument predicated on his own opinion and then passes a decisive judgement based upon it. He is thus entangled in a confusion of doubts, like a spider's web, not knowing whether he is right or wrong. If he is right, he still fears that he may have erred and if he is wrong, he still hopes he was correct.

٢ وَرَجُلٌ فَقَشَ جَهَلًا، مُوْضِعٌ فِي
جَهَالِ الْأُمَّةِ، غَارٌ فِي أَغْبَاشِ الْفِتْنَةِ،
عَمِّ بِمَا فِي عَقْدِ الْهَدْنَةِ. قَدْ سَمَّاهُ
أَشْبَاهُ النَّاسِ عَالِمًا وَلَيْسَ بِهِ، بَكْرٌ
فَأَشَكْتُرُ مِنْ جَمْعٍ مَا قَلَّ مِنْهُ حَيْزٌ
مِمَّا كَثُرَ، حَتَّى إِذَا ارْتَوَى مِنْ مَاءٍ
آجِنٍ، وَأَكْثَرُ مِنْ عَيْرٍ طَائِلٌ، جَلَسَ
بَيْنَ النَّاسِ قَاضِيًّا ضَامِنًا لِتَحْلِيقِ مَا
الْتَبَسَ عَلَى عَيْرِهِ، فَإِنْ تَرَكْتُ بِهِ
إِحْدَى الْمُبَهَّمَاتِ هَيَّا لَهَا حَشُورًا
مِنْ رَأْيِهِ، ثُمَّ قَطَعْتُ بِهِ، فَهُوَ مِنْ لَبِسِ
الشُّبُهَاتِ فِي مِثْلِ سَجِ العَنْكَبُوتِ:
لَا يَدْرِي أَصَابَ أَمْ أَخْطَأَ، فَإِنْ
أَصَابَ حَافَ أَنْ يَكُونَ قَدْ أَخْطَأَ،
وَإِنْ أَخْطَأَ رَجَأَ أَنْ يَكُونَ قَدْ
أَصَابَ.

people. Having gained a large following and much fame and fortune, he was contemplating one day, and realized the error of his ways. He sought forgiveness from the Almighty through penitence, but Allāh sent one of his Prophets to inform the man that he would only be forgiven if all his followers recanted his heresies, including those who had died believing in them (T).

2 The second of the two most detested creatures in the sight of Allāh is the person who *has amassed ignorance* ('qamasha jahlan') and *moves expeditiously*

among the ignorant members of the community, disseminating his false ideas among them (M). Commentators explain that amassing ignorance refers to gathering bits of information that have little or no value, in order to dupe the lay people into thinking that one is a learned scholar (N). The information he gathers consists of hearsay and rumours, unfounded opinions and weak traditions (MB). He *dives mindlessly into the darkness of strife* (“*ārrun* [or “*ādin*” or “*ghādin*” according to other manuscripts] *ft aghbāsh al-fitnah*”) without realizing its potential harm and evil (T). He remains in the darkness because that is where he can successfully propagate his ignorance, for if the light of knowledge were to shine upon him, it would dispel the darkness of his false teachings (N). He *is blind to the benefits of peace-making* since he is oblivious to the benefits of peaceful settlements and resolutions (M). It is evident that the peace-making referred to here does not pertain to the peace treaties with unbelievers, since the whole speech is about those who judge between Muslims (N).

Those who just resemble people translates ‘*ashbāh al-nās*’ which, like ‘*ashbāh al rijāl*’, is a phrase the Imām uses to describe ignorant individuals who cannot distinguish between what benefits them and what harms them (Z), and are thus more like cattle than human beings, whom they only resemble (T). The pretender who feigns erudition strives to *amass that of which less is better than more*, which could either be a reference to worldly goods and material wealth that causes human beings to become negligent and arrogant, or it could refer to vain talk and useless information which hinder a person from what is truly important (N). *Putrid water* translates ‘*mā'in ḥjin*’ which literally means water that has changed in taste or colour, and metaphorically refers to the opposite of knowledge which is symbolized by pure, life-giving water (M). After accumulating information that derives no real benefit, this individual takes up the position of judgeship and begins adjudicating among the people, thinking that he is now in a position to clarify matters others may find confusing. In order to justify his judgments, he offers arguments that are *flimsy* and *baseless* (‘*hashwan raththan*’), founded on his own subjective opinions. He nevertheless passes a firm, decisive judgement as though there is no room for doubt.

3 He is but an ignoramus stumbling in ignorance, a blind man traversing the darkness. He does not sink his teeth firmly into knowledge. Rather, he quotes traditions indiscriminately, just as the wind scatters chaff. By Allāh, he is not capable of solving the problems that come to him, nor is he worthy of the position assigned to him. He does not regard anything he is unaware of to be worth knowing, and he does not consider anything beyond his reach to be attainable by others. If anything is obscure to him, he conceals it because of what he knows of his own ignorance. The blood of innocents cries out against his unjust verdicts, and the inheritance [that was misappropriated by him] screams [in protest].

4 To Allāh do I complain against the group that lives in ignorance and dies misguided. Nothing among them is deemed more worthless than the Book [of Allāh] when it is read as it ought to be read, nor is anything taken to be more valuable or of greater worth than the Book [of Allāh] when its meanings are distorted. To them nothing is more vicious than virtue, nor more virtuous than vice.

٣ جَاهِلٌ حَبَاطٌ جَهَالَاتٍ، عَاشِ
رَكَابُ عَشَوَاتٍ، لَمْ يَعْضُّ عَلَى
الْعِلْمِ بِصِرْسِ قَاطِعٍ، يُنْدِرِي
الرِّوَايَاتِ إِذْرَاءَ الرِّيحِ الْهَشِيمَ،
لَا مَلِيٌّ - وَاللَّهُ - يُؤْصَدَارِ مَا
وَرَدَ عَلَيْهِ، وَلَا هُوَ أَهْلٌ لِمَا
فُوْضَ إِلَيْهِ، لَا يَحْسُبُ الْعِلْمَ فِي
شَيْءٍ مِمَّا أَنْكَرَهُ، وَلَا يَرَى أَنَّ
مِنْ وَرَاءِ مَا بَلَغَ مَذْهَبًا لِغَيْرِهِ،
وَإِنْ أَظْلَمَ عَلَيْهِ أَثْرُ اكْتَشَفَ بِهِ لِمَا
يَعْلَمُ مِنْ جَهَلٍ تَفْسِيهِ، تَصْرُخُ
مِنْ جَوْرٍ قَضَائِهِ الدَّمَاءُ، وَتَعْجَجُ
مِنْهُ الْمَوَارِيثُ.

٤ إِلَى اللَّهِ أَشْكُو مِنْ مَعْشَرِ يَعِيشُونَ
جُهَالًا، وَيَمُوتُونَ ضُلَالًا، لَيْسَ فِيهِمْ
سِلْعَةٌ أَبُورٌ مِنَ الْكِتَابِ إِذَا ثُلِيَ حَقًّا
تِلَاقِتِهِ، وَلَا سِلْعَةٌ أَفْقَقَ يَعِيشَا وَلَا
أَعْلَى ثَمَناً مِنَ الْكِتَابِ إِذَا حُرِفَ
عَنْ مَوَاضِعِهِ، وَلَا عِنْدَهُمْ أَنْكَرٌ مِنْ
الْمَعْرُوفِ وَلَا أَعْرَفُ مِنْ الْمُنْكَرِ.

Some commentators mention Shurayḥ ibn al-Ḥārith (commonly known as Shurayḥ al-Qādī) as an example of such an individual, since he is reported to have been severely rebuked by the Imām for accepting the post of judgeship despite lacking the required knowledge (N). Such a person, the Imām says, gets entangled in a web of doubts and uncertainties, like a spider's web ('*nasj al-ankabūt'*), which is symbolic of the weakest of things (as mentioned in Q29:41), and refers here to his weak mind and judgement (MB). He is never completely certain about the correctness of his judgement, and even when he fortuitously arrives at the right decision, he still suspects that he could have been wrong. And when he is mistaken, he still hopes that he was right. This does not contradict the earlier statement that describes him issuing a decisive judgement, since he actually feigns certainty while issuing a verdict even though in his heart he still has doubts about it (N).

3 This individual is *an ignoramus stumbling in ignorance* ('*jāhilun khabbātu jahālāt'*) and *a blind man traversing the darkness* ('*“āshin rakkābu ‘ashawāt’*'), where both '*khabbātu*' and '*rakkābu*' are hyperboles, meaning he frequently makes mistakes in his judgements (Z). That is because *he does not sink his teeth firmly into knowledge* which figuratively connotes his lack of certainty (R). Some commentators say that the *teeth* ('*dīrs*') being referred to here are wisdom teeth, which usually come in when a person reaches maturity. So in a way, it is like saying that he has not reached the level of intellectual maturity required to properly grasp the knowledge needed for right judgement (N). What he does instead is quote traditions randomly, bereft of anything more than a superficial understanding of their meanings, *just like the wind scatters chaff*, without forethought or benefit (MB). Indeed, such an individual *is not capable of solving the problems that come to him, nor is he worthy of the position assigned to him* ('*limā fuwwiḍa ilayhi*') because he lacks knowledge, adjudicates based on his whims and caprice, and is prone to favouritism and bribery (Z). Some manuscripts have '*qurriṣa*' instead of '*fuwwida*' thereby rendering the translation *nor is he worthy of the praise he receives*, but this reading is deemed erroneous by some commentators (T). Such a person considers that which he is unaware of to be devoid of value and gives it no importance. This includes true knowledge, the attainment of which requires arduous struggle, unlike the little information collected effortlessly by him and deemed to be significant (M).

Another sign of his parochiality is that *he does not consider anything beyond his reach to be attainable by others* and is thus disrespectful of the views of others, whereas true scholars are those who admit their limitations and are constantly

struggling to better themselves. In contrast, the ignorant are steeped in arrogance and always talk as if everything they opine is irrefutable fact (N). In the end, however, such an individual is aware of his own ignorance though he makes every effort to conceal it, especially if anything obscure comes up that he cannot comprehend. Sometimes he does this by pretending he has not heard the difficult question that is posed, and at other times he will act as though he knows the answer despite being ignorant of it. Yet he will never admit his ignorance or ask anyone else about it, or refer the matter to someone more learned, since he feels that it would lower his standing in the eyes of the people (MB). As a result, he ends up issuing verdicts that cause great loss and injustice for the society at large, to the extent that the spilt blood of innocents veritably cries out against his unjust verdicts, *and the inheritance* that was misappropriated by him *screams* in protest. The beauty of this metaphor lies in the way even blood and property are portrayed as possessing awareness and understanding, yet this arrogant shell of a human being perceives naught (N).

4 In closing, the Imām complains against the *group* ('ma'shar') of people who live in ignorance and die misguided – the group to which the two most detestable people in the sight of the Almighty belong – and such a death is the natural result of a life of ignorance (MB). Nothing awaits them, after such a death, except adversity and hellfire (Z). The most worthless thing ('sil'atun abwar' lit. dead stock) to these people is the Glorious Qurān when it is read and understood correctly, for in their ignorance they consider such a reading to be false, and hence of no value (M), or they reject it because it impugns their whims and nefarious goals (MB). Conversely, when its meanings are distorted ('hurrifa 'an mawāḍi'ihi') to match their vain desires and evil intentions, they consider the Qurān to be the most profitable and valuable of all things ('anfaqu bay'an wa aghlā thamanan'), so they constantly seek to distort its true meanings (N). To such individuals, *nothing is more vicious than virtue, nor more virtuous than vice*, since the latter accords with their wicked inclinations while the former goes against it (Z). It is reported that the Noble Prophet (s) once told his companions that a time would come when no one would enjoin good or forbid evil, so his companions were surprised. Then the Prophet said that a time will come when people enjoin evil and forbid good, so his companions were dismayed. The Prophet then told them that a time would even come when evil will be considered virtuous and good vicious (T).



CENSURING THE DIFFERENCES AMONG SCHOLARS IN THEIR RULINGS

- 1 When a legal matter is brought before one of them, he passes judgement on it by giving his opinion. Then, the exact same matter is brought before another and he issues a different verdict. The judges then meet up with the chief who appointed them and he confirms all their [differing] verdicts, while their Lord is One, their Prophet is one, and their Book is one [and the same]!

- 2 Did Allāh, the Glorified, order them to differ so they obeyed Him!? Or did He prohibit them from it yet they defied Him? Or did Allāh, the Glorified, reveal an incomplete religion and seek their help to complete it?! Or are they His partners such that they could make pronouncements and He would have to agree?! Or is it that Allāh revealed a complete religion but the Prophet (ṣ) fell short in communicating and conveying it? Allāh, the Glorified, says: *We have not omitted anything from the Book* (Q6:38) and in it all things are clarified.

١ تَرُدُّ عَلَى أَحَدِهِمُ الْقَضِيَّةُ فِي حُكْمٍ مِنَ الْأَحْكَامِ فَيَحْكُمُ فِيهَا بِرَأْيِهِ، ثُمَّ تَرُدُّ تِلْكَ الْقَضِيَّةَ بِعِينِهَا عَلَى غَيْرِهِ فَيَحْكُمُ فِيهَا بِخِلَافِ قَوْلِهِ، ثُمَّ يَجْمِعُ الْفُضَّاهُ بِذَلِكَ عِنْدَ الْإِمَامِ الَّذِي اسْتَقْضَاهُمْ فَيُصَوِّبُ آرَاءُهُمْ جَمِيعاً، وَإِلَهُهُمْ وَاحِدٌ، وَنَبِيُّهُمْ وَاحِدٌ، وَكِتَابُهُمْ وَاحِدٌ!

٢ أَفَأَمْرُهُمُ اللَّهُ سُبْحَانَهُ بِالاِحْتِلَافِ فَأَطَاعُوهُ؟! أَمْ نَهَا هُمْ عَنْهُ فَعَصَوهُ؟ أَمْ أَنْزَلَ اللَّهُ سُبْحَانَهُ دِينًا نَاقِصًا فَاسْتَعَانُ بِهِمْ عَلَى إِثْمَامِهِ؟! أَمْ كَائِنُوا شُرَكَاءَ لَهُ فَأَهُمْ أَنْ يَقُولُوا وَعَلَيْهِ أَنْ يَرْضَى؟! أَمْ أَنْزَلَ اللَّهُ سُبْحَانَهُ دِينًا نَاقِصًا فَقَصَرَ الرَّسُولُ ﷺ عَنْ تَبْلِيغِهِ وَأَدَاءِهِ وَاللَّهُ سُبْحَانَهُ يَقُولُ: «مَا فَرَطْنَا فِي الْكِتَابِ مِنْ شَيْءٍ» وَفِيهِ تَبَيَّنُ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ.

He further states that verily parts of the Book corroborate other parts, and there is no discrepancy in it. He says: *Had it been from other than Allāh, they would have surely found much discrepancy in it.*

- 3 Verily the exoteric aspect of the Qur’ān is elegant and its esoteric aspect is profound [in meaning]. Its marvels do not end, its wonders do not cease, and the darkness [of ignorance] is not removed except through it.

وَذَكَرَ أَنَّ الْكِتَابَ يُصَدِّقُ بِعُضُّهُ
بَعْضًا، وَأَنَّهُ لَا اخْتِلَافٌ فِيهِ، فَقَالَ
شُبَيْحَةً: «وَلَوْ كَانَ مِنْ عِنْدِ غَيْرِ اللَّهِ
لَوْجَدُوا فِيهِ اخْتِلَافًا كَثِيرًا».

٣ وَإِنَّ الْقُرْآنَ ظَاهِرًا أَنْيَقُ، وَبَاطِنًا
عَمِيقُ، لَا تَفْنَى عَجَابِيَّةُ، وَلَا
تَنَفَّضُ يَغْرَابِيَّةُ، وَلَا تُكْشَفُ
الظُّلُمَاتُ إِلَّا بِهِ.

CONTEXT

Based on its content and a number of reports, this sermon is a continuation of the previous one (N). One commentator takes umbrage at the title that al-Sayyid al-Rādī has chosen for this sermon, saying that scholars (“*ulama*”) is not the right term to describe the individuals being rebuked by the Imām. He notes that the Imām himself does not refer to them as scholars and using this term without a qualifier is not appropriate (T). The underlying message of this sermon is that truth is not subjective, as some philosophers have averred (M). Therefore, the censure and condemnation is aimed at those who would pass judgment based on personal opinions that are founded on analogy (*qiyās*), juristic discretion (*istihsān*), and personal predilections or biases (N). In essence, therefore, it is a criticism of ignorance and inadequate erudition in matters pertaining to religious law (*shari‘ah*), which leads to passing faulty and erroneous rulings by those who act as judges or scholars among the Muslims (Z). The compiler’s subtitle for this sermon also states that it contains criticism of those who follow subjective reasoning (*ahl al-ra‘y*) and emphasizes the referral of all matters to the Qur’ān.

COMMENTARY

1 The scenario described by the Imām depicts differences of opinion among those who would give verdicts on legal matters in religion. At times, they would issue contradictory rulings thereby leaving the lay people confused about the right course of action. This is because they followed conjecture and subjective reasoning instead of adhering to the principles laid down by the *shari‘ah* (Z). It is obvious that two contradictory rulings cannot both be right. Some commentators opine that the Imām is talking specifically about judges who issue differing verdicts, both of which are then endorsed and validated by the chief justice or the overall authority who had appointed the two judges to begin with (N). Though there have been a few Muslim scholars (from without the school of the Ahl al-Bayt) who said that if a jurist offers a legal opinion through *ijtihād*, he is deemed to be correct even if he does not arrive at the actual ruling, this opinion (termed *taṣwīb*) is rejected by the majority and is obviously counterintuitive (MB). Yet such differences can be seen throughout the history of Islam. For instance, it is reported that once al-A‘mash from Kūfah, Mālik ibn Anas from Madīnah, and ‘Uthmān al-Batiyy from Baṣrah had all come to Makkah for *hajj*. They all sat in Masjid al-Ḥarām and each began delivering legal rulings (*fatāwā*) which contradicted what the other said. So a man went to al-A‘mash and asked him, “Do you contradict what the people of Madīnah say?” He replied, “In the past we differed with them, so we took what our scholars said and they accepted what their scholars said” (T).

The Imām, however, criticizes this attitude of indifference towards religious edicts and questions how such differences could exist when the jurists or judges worship the same God, believe in the same Prophet, and follow the same Book (R). The example of this is like the king who sends his royal messenger to the people commanding them to do something – they would not dare contradict his command based on their own opinions (I). The differences do not, therefore, come from the Almighty or His Messenger, or even from His Book; rather, it is from those who erroneously employ subjective reasoning to arrive at divine laws and injunctions (N). It should be noted that differences among qualified scholars and jurists in understanding particular verses of the Qur’ān or sayings of the Prophet (ṣ) is quite natural, and if it leads them to incorrect conclusions, they may be excused as long as they followed the laid down principles of interpretation and earnestly tried to arrive at the actual ruling as it was intended. This is not the same

as the differences that arise due to employing subjective interpretation based on personal opinions, which is what the Imām is addressing here (Z).

2 Imām ‘Alī then poses five rhetorical questions with implied negation (*istifhām inkārī*). The first two questions inquire whether the differences among jurists or judges have been commanded by the Almighty. He has obviously not commanded them to differ; rather, what we glean from the Qur’ān and Sunnah is that such differences have been forbidden (I). The Qur’ān explicitly states: *Hold fast, all together, to Allāh’s cord, and do not be divided* (Q3:103). As such, by differing among themselves they are actually disobeying the command of Allāh. The third rhetorical question pertains to the perfection of religion and contains within it palpable reproof as the Imām asks if Allāh has revealed an incomplete religion and sought their assistance to perfect it. Of course, Allāh states clearly in the Qur’ān: *Today I have perfected your religion for you, and I have completed My blessing upon you, and I have approved Islam as your religion* (Q5:3). While it may seem farfetched for anyone to think this, there have been some recorded instances of individuals making analogous claims. For example, it is narrated that Abū Ḥanīfah said, “If the Prophet had met me and I was alive during his age, he would surely have accepted many of my opinions” (T). The last two rhetorical questions are linked to the preceding one since they ask whether their help was sought by God because they are His partners, such that they could equally partake in revealing religious commandments, and whether the imperfection of the religion was due to a deficiency in the way the Prophet conveyed it to the people (MB).

All five questions are obviously answered in the negative, and the Imām references three verses of the Qur’ān to prove this. The first verse: *We have not omitted anything from the Book* (Q6:38) and the second one: *We have sent down the Book to you as a clarification of all things* (Q16:89) confirm that the revelation was complete and perfect, with nothing required for the guidance of human beings left out. The third verse: *Had it been from other than Allāh, they would have surely found much discrepancy in it* (Q4:82) is aimed at the judges or jurists who give opposing and contradictory rulings, with each one possibly referring to the Qur’ān to prove his position. Yet since there is no discrepancy or contradiction in the Qur’ān, as this verse attests, the problem lies in their reasoning and understanding (N). Therefore, if these scholars followed the correct principles for the interpretation of Qur’ānic teachings, they would never differ in their rulings (MB).

3 Here the Imām apparently digresses from the subject of subjective judgement and briefly describes the beauty of the Glorious Qur’ān. Some commentators have tried to link this theme with the previous one, saying that in this way the Imām is emphasizing the importance of referring to the Qur’ān when issuing religious edicts (N). The fact that the Qur’ān has an exoteric (*zāhir*) and an esoteric (*bātin*) aspect is noted in many traditions. For instance, Imām Muḥammad al-Bāqir (*a*) is reported to have said, “Nobody can claim to have the whole Qur’ān with its exoteric and esoteric aspects, except the [divinely appointed] legatees (*awṣiyā’*)” (T). The exoteric, outward, and apparent aspect of the Qur’ān is elegant and pleasing. The term ‘*anīq*’ refers to something so beautiful that it amazes one who beholds it, giving rise to a sense of pure joy (N). Indeed the eloquence of the Qur’ān, the articulateness of its expressions, and the beauty of its parables and matchless verses is undeniably exquisite. Yet its esoteric, inward, and hidden aspect (*‘bātinuhu’*) is profound (“*amīq*”), and contains certain secrets that can only be attained by the close intimates (*awlīyā’*) of Allāh.

In one tradition, Imām Ja’far al-Ṣādiq (*a*) is reported to have said, “We know what is in the heavens and on earth, we know what is in Paradise and Hell... all this is in the Book of Allāh” (MB). The depth and profundity of the Qur’ān is such that even if all the greatest minds ponder over its verses, they cannot encompass all its meanings (N). *Its marvels do not end and its wonders do not cease* with the passage of time, unlike all other works that may have been greatly admired during their day but their uniqueness did not last. *The darkness of ignorance, faithlessness, and injustice is not removed except through it*, because without following the teachings of the Qur’ān, society may progress materially, technologically, and industrially, but social ills and injustice will still prevail – as it does in many societies today (N).



19

ADDRESSING AL-ASH'ATH IBN QAYS

1 How do you know what is against me and what is for me? Upon you be the curse of Allāh, and the curse of those who curse! Weaver, son of a weaver! Hypocrite, son of an unbeliever! By Allāh, you were taken captive once by unbelief and once by Islam, yet neither your wealth nor your status could save you from either. Verily a man who points the sword at his own people and drives death towards them truly deserves to be scorned by those closest to him and mistrusted by those afar.

١ وَمَا يُدْرِيكَ مَا عَلَيَّ مِمَّا لِي؟ عَيْنِكَ
 لَعْنَةُ اللَّهِ وَلَعْنَةُ الْلَّاعِنِينَ! حَائِثُ ابْنُ
 حَائِثٍ! مُسَاقِقُ ابْنُ كَافِرٍ! وَاللَّهُ لَقَدْ
 أَسْرَكَ الْكُفُرُ مَرَّةً وَالإِسْلَامُ أُخْرَى،
 فَمَا فَدَاكَ مِنْ وَاحِدَةٍ مِنْهُمَا مَالُكَ
 وَلَا حَسْبُكَ. وَإِنَّ امْرَأًا دَلَّ عَلَى قَوْمِهِ
 السَّيْفَ، وَسَاقَ إِلَيْهِمُ الْحَشْفَ،
 لَحْرِيٌّ أَنْ يَمْقُتَهُ الْأَقْرَبُ وَلَا يَأْمَنَهُ
 الْأَبْعَدُ.

CONTEXT

Amīr al-Mu'minīn was in Kūfah delivering a sermon from the pulpit when al-Ash'ath ibn Qays raised an objection to something the Imām said. He interjected, "O Amīr al-Mu'minīn, this is to your detriment, not in your favour." So the Imām lowered his eyes at him ('*khafada ilayhi başarahu*') and then spoke the above words. Al-Ash'ath ibn Qays al-Kindī, whose name was Ma'dikarb but because his hair was always dishevelled, he became known as *al-Ash'ath* (I), was a character despised by all; by the Muslims, the unbelievers, as well as his own tribe (Z). He had accepted Islam during the time of the Holy Prophet (s), and turned apostate after the Prophet left this world. After being captured in one of the battles, he once again professed his faith in order to secure his release, and rejoined the ranks of the Muslims. Later, he became one of the companions of Amīr al-Mu'minīn for a while before turning against the Imām. Narrations tell us that Imām 'Alī (a) was recounting a tradition from the Prophet regarding the importance of safeguarding

the lives of Muslims and protecting them when al-Ash'ath interrupted his speech and said that the tradition was actually against the Imām rather than in his favour (T). Alternatively, Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd opines that the Imām was addressing the question of arbitration and the Khawārij when a man stood up and said, "You forbade us from arbitration and then ordered it; we do not know which instruction is correct." Amīr al-Mu'minīn's response to this is found in sermon no. 121, and it was right after that sermon when al-Ash'ath interjected (I). History records that al-Ash'ath ibn Qays was involved in the assassination of Amīr al-Mu'minīn and advised Ibn Muljam to make haste in striking the Imām. His daughter Ja'dah poisoned Imām al-Ḥasan ('a), and his son participated in the battle against Imām al-Ḥusayn ('a) (Z).

COMMENTARY

1 Imām 'Alī questions al-Ash'ath *how do you know what is against me and what is for me?* in order to highlight the fact that he is an ignorant individual, and it does not behove an ignorant person to question the wisdom of the Imām (M). Then the Imām curses him as he was truly deserving of this, since he was a hypocrite and was even known as the leader of hypocrites, just as 'Abdullāh ibn Ubay had been the leader of the hypocrites during the time of the Holy Prophet (MB). The Imām also explicitly calls him a *hypocrite, son of an unbeliever*, since his father was a *kāfir*. Furthermore, the way in which the Imām curses him, saying *upon you be the curse of Allāh, and the curse of those who curse* is exactly how the hypocrites have been cursed in the Qurān: *Indeed those who conceal what We have sent down of manifest proofs and guidance, after We have clarified it in the Book for humankind, they shall be cursed by Allāh and cursed by the cursers* (Q2:159). In addressing al-Ash'ath as a *weaver, son of a weaver*, the Imām is not literally talking about his occupation since neither he nor his father were known to be weavers. Some have suggested that the term *weaver* was used figuratively to mean those who weave lies and plait untruths in order to mislead the people, and this is something that both al-Ash'ath and his father were known for (N). It could also be an allusion to his ignorance and lack of ability to understand (M), or to his lowly status due to the lowness of his occupation (R). Alternatively, the word for *weaver* in Arabic has the same root as the word for *arrogant* (ḥ-y-k), so some have interpreted the phrase as *arrogant, son of an arrogant one* (N).

Al-Sayyid al-Rađī explains that by *you were taken captive once by unbelief and once by Islam*, the Imām meant that al-Ash'ath had been taken prisoner both during his days of unbelief, before he accepted Islam, and after he had become a Muslim. In the Age of Ignorance (*jāhiliyyah*), al-Ash'ath was captured when he attacked the wrong tribe in an effort to avenge the death of his father Qays. After the demise of Rasūlullāh (ṣ), al-Ash'ath apostatized and joined a group of other apostates who had renounced their faith. Abū Bakr sent Ziyād ibn Labīd to fight them and in the battle, al-Ash'ath was captured again. Upon being taken to Abū Bakr, he expressed regret at what he had done and Abū Bakr forgave him and gave his blind sister Umm Farwah's hand in marriage to al-Ash'ath (N). When the Imām said that neither his wealth nor status was able to save him, it does not mean that he was unable to secure his freedom using his wealth. History tells us that he was able to gain release when he was first captured by paying a huge ransom of three thousand heads of cattle. Rather, what is meant by this statement is that he could not escape capture and imprisonment despite his wealth and status (MB).

Al-Sayyid al-Rađī notes that the Imām's remark about how al-Ash'ath pointed *the sword at his own people* refers to the conversation that took place between him and Khālid ibn al-Walīd in the Battle of Yamāmah, where he used cunning and craftiness to save his own life by giving up his tribe's position so that Khālid could attack and kill them. From that time onwards, they referred to al-Ash'ath as '*urf al-nār*' (lit. 'cockscomb of fire') which is a term they used for traitors. Commentators say, however, that his negotiation for surrender was with Ziyād ibn Labīd, not Khālid ibn al-Walīd, and that he negotiated the surrender for himself and ten other people, leaving the rest of the tribe to their fate (N). It was this act of his that caused him to be rightfully despised by those who were closest to him, namely his own tribesmen, and considered untrustworthy by everyone else (T).



AVERSION TO NEGLIGENCE AND HARKENING TO ALLĀH

1 Verily if you had seen what the dead among you saw, you would become anxious and fearful, and would then have listened and obeyed. But what they have seen is veiled from you, yet the veil will soon be lifted. You have been given the capacity to see [the truth], if you only look, and to hear, if you only would listen, and to be guided, if only you would follow the guidance. It is with truth that I speak to you. Lesson-giving examples have been made apparent for you, and you have been deterred by that which contains admonishment. And after the heavenly messengers, none can convey [the message] from Allāh but a mortal.

فَإِنَّكُمْ لَوْ قَدْ عَائِشُوكُمْ مَا قَدْ عَائِنَ
 مِنْ مَاتَ مِنْكُمْ لِجَرْزِعَتِهِمْ
 وَوَهْلِيَّتِهِمْ، وَسَمِعْتُمْ وَأَطْعَمْتُمْ،
 وَلِكِنْ مَحْجُوبٌ عَنْكُمْ مَا قَدْ
 عَائِنُوا، وَقَرِيبٌ مَا يُطْرَخُ
 الْحِجَابُ. وَلَقَدْ بُصَرْتُمْ إِنْ
 أَبْصَرْتُمْ، وَأَشْمَعْتُمْ إِنْ سَمِعْتُمْ،
 وَهُدِيَّتُمْ إِنْ اهْتَدِيَّتُمْ، وَبِحَقِّ
 أَقْوَلُ لَكُمْ: لَقَدْ جَاهَرْتُكُمْ
 الْعِبَرُ، وَزُجَرْتُمْ بِمَا فِيهِ مُرْدَجَرُ،
 وَمَا يَلْغِي عَنِ اللَّهِ بَغْدَرْسُلِ
 السَّمَاءِ إِلَّا الْبَشَرُ.

CONTEXT

This is from the sermon Amīr al-Mu'minīn delivered on the first Friday after he became the caliph. Al-Kulaynī has recorded part of it in *al-Kāfi*, narrated from Imām Ja'far al-Ṣādiq ('a). Initially, the Imām addressed the people and warned them against betrayal and discord. Then he said what has been recorded here by al-Sayyid al-Raḍī. This sermon comprises general advice to all the people, urging them to wake up from their slumber of negligence and become serious in their servitude to Allāh (N). Alternatively, it could have been addressed specifically to the ignorant and negligent individuals in the community, and those who were wont to disobey the commandments of the Almighty (MB).

COMMENTARY

1 Imām ‘Alī commences his admonition by reminding the people of death. It is known that while human beings are confined in this material world, their bodies act as a veil that prevents them from perceiving what lies beyond the physical realm (M). Death is painful, and the grave is dark and terrifying. If a person keeps this in mind, he would never commit any sin and would instead work towards bettering his Hereafter (Z). Human beings often attain conviction only when they perceive things directly, so the Imām says that if they witnessed what those who had died before saw, they would be greatly troubled and terrified by it, and it would lead them to submit to the will of Allāh. There is some discussion among commentators regarding what exactly the Imām was referring to, but it is evident that there are two things that deeply trouble an individual after death. The first is the consequence of his deeds and the punishments awaiting him because of his actions in the world. The second thing that would trouble him is the overwhelming regret he feels when he realizes how he squandered his life and the opportunity he had to do good in the world (N). Indeed, many traditions describe the pangs of death and the difficulty faced by a dying person. Imām Jaffar al-Ṣādiq (‘a) is reported to have said that when death comes to a person, the Angel of Death holds him firmly, for if he were left on his own, the person would convulse uncontrollably (T).

This sermon is considered by some commentators to be further evidence of the reality of punishment in the grave (I). However, what is experienced and witnessed by the dead is veiled from the living, although some traditions indicate that aside from human beings and jinn, most creatures can hear the chastisement of the dead in their graves (T). *Yet the veil will soon be lifted* since everyone will one day die, and then they will also witness the same horrors (MB). Alternatively, this could be a reference to the Day of Judgement when the veil of negligence is lifted, as stated in the verse: *You had indeed been heedless of this, so We lifted from you your veil and today your sight is piercing* (Q50:22) (M). Yet even though human beings cannot witness these things in the world, they have been informed about them and forewarned, if only they paid heed; this is what being shown the truth and being told about it means (T). With the truth and guidance made available, people no longer have any excuse to remain misguided, and even though what happens after death cannot be perceived directly, information about it has been

made accessible to all (N). The *lesson-giving examples* ('ibar') that have been made apparent and manifest to the people refer to what human beings can clearly see of how the world changes, the state of nations and individuals are altered, and the vicissitudes of fortune come into play (T).

These lessons also act as a warning to deter people from making the same mistake as those who came before them. Hence, *that which contains admonishment* refers to the reports of the fate of bygone nations, as the Qur'ān states: *Reports that contain [warnings and] determent have indeed come to them* (Q54:4) (M). Amīr al-Mu'minīn then says that after the angels bring down the message of Allāh, it is the duty of none but a mortal human being to convey that message to the people. Some opine that by the phrase *but a mortal* the Imām is referring to himself (R), while others consider it to be a general reference to all divinely appointed Prophets (N).



21

ADVICE REPLETE WITH WISDOM

¹ Verily the final destination is in front of you, and behind you is the Hour, driving you forward. Lighten your load so as to catch up swiftly. Indeed, your predecessors have only been kept waiting for the last of you [to join them].

فَإِنَّ الْغَايَةَ أَمَامُكُمْ، وَإِنَّ
وَرَاءَكُمُ الشَّاعَةَ تَحْلُدُكُمْ،
تَحَقَّقُوا تَلْحُقُوا، فَإِنَّمَا يُشَطَّرُ
بِأَوْلَكُمْ آخِرُكُمْ.

CONTEXT

This is part of an oration that Imām ‘Alī delivered during the early days of his rule. Some have even opined that it is an extension of the previous sermon (MB). Others say that the repetition of these phrases in sermon no. 167 shows that these two recorded orations are actually part of the same speech. It is also possible that all three are, in reality, a single sermon that has been divided into three parts (N). After mentioning this sermon, al-Sayyid al-Raḍī states, “If this speech is weighed with any other utterance, aside from the word of Allāh, the Glorified, or the speech of the Messenger of Allāh (ṣ), it would prove weightier and superior in every respect.” He further states that he has explained its meaning in greater detail in his other work *al-Khaṣā’iṣ*.

COMMENTARY

¹ The *final destination* (*‘al-ghāyah*) had been interpreted by some as Paradise or Hell (R), or the reward and punishment of the Hereafter (M). Alternatively, it could mean the end of one’s life in this world, as reflected in the tradition, “Verily death is the final [worldly] end (*ghāyah*) of the creation” (MB). It could also be a reference to the Day of Resurrection, when everyone will have to give account for their deeds (N). All these are realities *in front of* the people in that there is no doubt that everyone will one day face them, and everybody is constantly moving towards

them (M). *The Hour* ('al-sā'ah') refers to the moment of death or resurrection, and some have interpreted its being *behind* figuratively, since it drives the people forward towards their final destination (Z), just as the shepherd drives his sheep (I). There is also the contention that *the Hour* here refers to the hours of the night and day that keep moving forward, pushing the people along with them (MB). *Lighten your load so as to catch up swiftly* translates '*takhaffafū talhaqū*', and it is evident that when one does not have a heavy burden to carry, he can travel much faster (I). The Arabs would usually travel across the desert in caravans, but when a person fell behind for some reason, the caravan could not endanger the lives and property of everyone else by waiting for that one individual. They would thus carry on without him, and it was up to him to rush ahead and try to rejoin them. In such a circumstance, the person would abandon many of his heavy belongings so as to travel swiftly and catch up to the caravan (N).

About this phrase, al-Sayyid al-Rađī says, "As for his statement *lighten your load so as to catch up swiftly*, nothing so pithy with such abundant meaning as this has ever been heard. How profound its words and how beneficial its wisdom!" In the same way, a person unencumbered by the burden of material inclinations in this world quickly joins the saints and those who are close to Allāh (MB). Furthermore, there is something to be said about the benefits of leading a minimalist lifestyle in this world as well. It is reported that at one time there was a fire in Madā'in, so Salmān al-Farsī took his sword and *muṣḥaf* (which were his only possessions) and came out of his house saying, "This is how those who have light burdens are saved!" (T). On the Day of Resurrection, those who were affluent and possessed ample wealth in the world will have to give account for everything, and this will cause them anguish and hardship. Imām al-Šādiq ('a) is reported to have said that for this very reason, the poor will enter Paradise much quicker than the rich (T). Sin is also a burden that will prevent people from arriving at their desired destination quickly (Z). The fact that those who have left this world earlier are kept waiting for those who would join them later further enhances the notion that humankind is like a single caravan, with some in front and others behind, all moving towards the same destination (N).

Some suggest that the waiting mentioned here is metaphorical and refers to the special bounty of Allāh that He will bestow upon all the believers on the Day of Resurrection, and this is what they are being urged to rush towards (M). Though the previous generations died long ago, and there is a long period of time that

separates them from the latter generations, they will all be raised together on the Day of Judgment, so precedence and succession is only in relation to this world and not in the Hereafter (Z).



WHEN INFORMED ABOUT THE OATH-BREAKERS

CENSURING THE OATH-BREAKERS

- 1 Beware! Verily Satan has just instigated his faction and summoned his troops, so that injustice may be restored to its previous position and falsehood may return to its prior place. By Allāh, they could not find in me any blameworthy fault, nor have they done justice between me and themselves.

THE BLOOD OF UTHMĀN

- 2 Indeed they are demanding a right that they themselves renounced, and [vengeance for] blood that they themselves shed. If I were their partner in it, then surely they too have their share of it. But if they undertook it without me, they alone must face the consequence. Their principal argument is thus against themselves. They seek to suckle a non-lactating mother and to revive a heresy that had been abolished. What a failure of a caller! Whom is he calling and what response does he expect?! I am satisfied by the proof of Allāh against them and His knowledge of them [and their deeds].

ذم الناكثين

۱ أَلَا وَإِنَّ الشَّيْطَانَ قَدْ ذَمَرَ حِزْبَهُ،
وَاسْتَجْلَبَ جَلَبَهُ، لِيُعُودَ الْجُحُورُ إِلَى
أَوْطَانِهِ، وَيَرْجِعَ الْبَاطِلُ إِلَى نِصَابِهِ،
وَاللَّهُ مَا أَنْكَرُوا عَلَيَّ مُنْكَرًا، وَلَا
جَعَلُوا بَيْتِي وَبَيْتَهُمْ نَصَفًا.

دم عنان

۲ وَإِنَّهُمْ لَيَطْلُبُونَ حَقًّا هُمْ تَرْكُوْهُ،
وَدَمًا هُمْ سَفَكُوْهُ، فَلَئِنْ كُنْتُ
شَرِيكُهُمْ فِيهِ فَإِنَّ لَهُمْ لَنْصِيَّهُمْ
مِنْهُ، وَلَئِنْ كَانُوا وَلُوْهُ دُونِي فَمَا
الثَّبَّةُ إِلَّا عِنْدَهُمْ، وَإِنَّ أَعْظَمَ
حُجَّتِهِمْ لَعَلَى أَنْفُسِهِمْ،
يَرْتَضِيُّوْنَ أُمَّاً قَدْ فَطَمَتْ،
وَيُحْيِيُّوْنَ بِدْعَةً قَدْ أُمِيَّتْ. يَا
خَيْرَ الدَّاعِي! مَنْ دَعَا، وَإِلَام
أَحِبَّ؟ وَإِنِّي لِرَاضٍ بِحُجَّةِ اللَّهِ
عَلَيْهِمْ وَعُلْمِهِ فِيهِمْ.

THREAT OF WAR

التهديد بالحرب

3 If they refuse [to obey] I will grant them the edge of the sword, which is enough to remedy falsehood and support the truth. It is strange how they send me word to present myself before their spears and to remain patient in the face of their swords. May the weeping women weep over them! I have never felt threatened by battle, nor have I ever been afraid of fighting. Indeed, I am upon certainty from my Lord and have no doubt in my faith.

٣ فَإِنْ أَبْوَا أَعْطِيهِمْ حَدَّ السَّيْفِ
وَكَفَى بِهِ شَافِياً مِنَ الْبَاطِلِ، وَنَاصِرًا
لِلْحَقِّ. وَمِنَ الْعَجَبِ يُعَذِّبُهُمْ إِلَيْهِ
أَنْ أَبْرُزَ لِلْطَّعَانِ، وَأَنْ أَصِرَّ لِلْجِلَادِ؛
هِبَّتُهُمُ الْهَبُولُ! لَقَدْ كُنْتُ وَمَا أَهَدَدُ
بِالْحَرْبِ، وَلَا أَرْهَبُ بِالضَّرِبِ،
وَإِنِّي لَعَلَى يَقِينٍ مِنْ رَبِّي، وَغَيْرِ
شُبُّهَةٍ مِنْ دِينِي.

CONTEXT

Imām ‘Alī (*a*) delivered this sermon in response to a letter that was sent to him by a group of renegade oath-breakers who rose up in the year 36 AH and challenged him to battle under the pretext of avenging the assassination of ‘Uthmān ibn ‘Affān. Some commentators suggest that this sermon was addressed to Mu‘awiyah (R), but others say that it was a reply to the declaration of war by the leaders of those who rebelled in the Battle of Jamal (I). It is, according to some scholars, part of a longer sermon which has been excerpted by al-Sayyid al-Rađī (M). The contents of this oration are similar to sermon nos 137 and 172, which highlight the rebellion of those who broke their oaths and rose up against Amīr al-Mu’minīn, and could possibly have been part of a single sermon (N). However, this oration more clearly references the main pretext of Talḥah, al-Zubayr, and their compatriots, namely seeking to avenge the assassination of ‘Uthmān. There is much historical evidence that shows how this call was insincere and meant only as an excuse to rebel and seek to overthrow Imām ‘Alī. For instance, in one report, ‘Amr ibn al-Āṣ supposedly told ‘Ā’ishah, “I wish you would have been killed on the Day of Jamal.” To which she responded, “Why? Woe be to you!” He said, “You

would have died as fated and entered Paradise, while we would have made you a reason to defame ‘Alī!’” (N).

COMMENTARY

1 The word ‘*dhammara*’ has also been recorded without *tashdīd* as ‘*dhamara*’, yet both mean the same thing – to incite, exhort, and instigate – only that the *tashdīd* connotes greater profusion and emphasis (I). Satan’s faction and troops are those who broke their oath of allegiance and were stoking the flames of rebellion against the Imām. Amīr al-Mu’mīnīn warns the people of the nefarious intentions of this group and exposes their plot to regain the power and position they held during the reign of the third caliph (N). The very fact that they have been referred to as Satan’s faction speaks volumes about their evil designs. The Qur’ān describes such individuals saying: *Satan has prevailed upon them and caused them to forget the remembrance of Allāh. They are Satan’s faction. Verily Satan’s faction are the losers!* (Q58:19). Hence the faction of Satan consists of those who have forgotten the authority of Allāh, His Prophet, and the Ahl al-Bayt (Z). The goal of this group was to restore the previous unjust status quo in which they were the beneficiaries of special favours and were considered influential among the ruling elite. *So that injustice may be restored to its previous position* translates ‘*liya‘ūda al-jawru ilā awtānihi*’ but other manuscripts have ‘...*ilā qitābihi*’ instead, where ‘*qitāb*’ connotes mixture, thereby rendering the meaning ‘*so that injustice may once again be mixed with justice*’ (I). The fault and blameworthy action that they wanted to denounce the Imām for was the assassination of ‘Uthmān, yet history attests that he was in no way involved in the death of ‘Uthmān. If anything, the Imām sought to quell the anger of the masses and prevent bloodshed (N). This is why he says that by trying to place the blame for ‘Uthmān’s death on his shoulders, they have been unjust to him (MB).

2 Some suggest that they were blaming the Imām for remaining silent about ‘Uthmān’s assassination and demanded that he avenge the latter’s death by punishing those who killed him (M). The Imām responds by exposing the role of these same individuals in the assassination of ‘Uthmān, thereby laying bare their hypocrisy. They were demanding the right of retribution against the killers of the third caliph while they had themselves been complicit in his murder. Consequently, they had lost the right to demand any such retribution (MB). Al-Tabarī narrates

that when the uprising against ‘Uthmān started, ‘Alī (‘a) was in Khaybar. Upon his return, ‘Uthmān sent for him and when he arrived, ‘Uthmān pleaded with him for assistance in his predicament. Imām ‘Alī thus went to see Ṭalḥah and tried to convince him to relinquish his plot to foment dissension against ‘Uthmān, but he refused. Seeing that his words had no effect on Ṭalḥah, Imām ‘Alī went to the general treasury (*bayt al-māl*) and ordered that it be opened. When they could not find the key, he instructed that the door be broken and then proceeded to distribute the wealth among the people. This helped to quell the uprising for some time, and when news of the restoration of calm reached ‘Uthmān, he was happy. Soon after, Ṭalḥah came to ‘Uthmān and expressed his regret for what he had done, but ‘Uthmān turned him away saying, “By Allāh, you have only come now because your plot has failed...” (N).

It is also narrated that al-Zubayr urged the people to kill ‘Uthmān, saying that he had changed the religion. When someone said, “But your son is guarding his door!” he responded, “I would want ‘Uthmān dead, even if it means killing my own son first!” (T). As for ‘Ā’ishah, her hatred for ‘Uthmān was well known. She would incite the people against him crying, “Kill Na’thal (meaning ‘Uthmān)!” (Z). Her hatred led her to speak against the third caliph whenever the opportunity arose. It is said she hung one of the shirts of the Prophet (ṣ) in her house and whenever anyone visited her she would say, “This is the shirt of the Prophet which is not yet old, yet ‘Uthmān has rendered the Prophet’s Sunnah old!” (N). The evidence of their involvement in the death of ‘Uthmān is undeniable, yet they sought to blame Imām ‘Alī for it. The Imām thus says that even if their allegation was true, it would not absolve them of their role. They were either his partners or acted alone, and in both cases their calls for retribution are self-implicating arguments (MB). The analogy of suckling a non-lactating mother whose milk has dried up after weaning her child (*fāṭamat*) connotes seeking something after its time has elapsed (I). It has been suggested that the heresy they wished to revive was the common pre-Islamic practice of tribal bloodshed in the name of avenging the death of one’s own (N). The caller described as a failure by the Imām is, according to some commentators, one of the three individuals who were calling for war against Amīr al-Mu’minin, namely Ṭalḥah, al-Zubayr, and ‘Ā’ishah (I).

The questions *whom is he calling and what response does he expect!?* are rhetorical and meant as reproof (Z). The second question can also be read differently to mean *what a [vile] thing it is for which he receives [their] response!* (MB). Some

suggest that through these statements the Imām was actually informing them of their future failure in battle (N). The *proof of Allāh* that the Imām was satisfied with is, according to some commentators, a reference to the verse: *And if two groups of believers fight one another, make peace between them. But if one of them aggresses against the other, fight against the aggressors until they return to Allāh's rule. If they do so, then make peace between them fairly, and do justice. Indeed Allāh loves the just* (Q49:9) (MB).

3 After reasoning with them and having explained how their call is tantamount to self-implication, since they were active participants in the assassination of Uthmān, the Imām sternly warns them not to continue on the path of violent rebellion, otherwise they will be dealt with by force (N). He cautions that if they do not obey and return to their oaths and pledge of loyalty, he will give them *the edge of the sword* which suffices *to remedy falsehood and support the truth*. It is evident that in every community there is always a group of individuals who succumb to their base desires and vain aspirations which clouds their judgement thereby rendering them blind to any form of rational discourse. For such individuals the only recourse is force; as the saying goes, "The final remedy is cauterization!" (N). The Imām then expresses dismay at their war cry despite their knowledge of his bravery, valour, and steadfastness (Z). The word '*ti'ān*' literally means piercing, and is usually used to describe attacks with spears, whereas '*jilād*' comes from *jalada* which connotes striking the body with a whip, staff, or sword (N).

May the weeping women weep over them translates '*habilat-hum al-habūl*' and was a form of imprecation used among the Arabs (M). The term '*habūl*' refers to women who mourn over their dead children (R). Imām 'Alī then reminds them of his renowned heroism in combat, of which even the pagan Arabs were aware, and scoffs at their threat of war saying that he has never feared battle. And why would he fear death when he was certain of the command of his Lord and did not doubt his faith? Indeed, it is only those who doubt that fear death and waver in their faith (N). His statement regarding his certitude of his rightful position also served to increase confidence among his followers and make their support for him firmer (M).



DIRECTING THE POOR TO AUSTERITY AND THE RICH TO COMPASSION

EDIFYING THE POOR

تهذيب الفقراء

1 Now then; verily the Command descends from sky to earth like drops of rain, [bringing] to every soul what is allotted for it, be it plenitude or paucity. So if anyone of you sees his brother with abundance in progeny, or wealth, or numbers, it must not make him resentful. As long as a Muslim does not commit such a vile act that, if it were discovered, he would have to hang his head in shame, and by which wicked people would be emboldened, he remains akin to one who is skilled in the gaming-arrows and expects that the first arrow he draws will bring him great gain and repay his debts.

١ أَمَّا بَعْدُ، فَإِنَّ الْأَمْرَ يَنْزِلُ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ
إِلَى الْأَرْضِ كَفَطْرِ الْمَطَرِ إِلَى كُلِّ
نَفْسٍ بِمَا قُسِّمَ لَهَا مِنْ زِيَادَةٍ أَوْ
نُقْصَانٍ، فَإِنْ رَأَى أَحَدُكُمْ لِأَخِيهِ
غَيْرَةً فِي أَهْلٍ أَوْ مَالٍ أَوْ نَفْسٍ فَلَا
تَكُونَ لَهُ فِتْنَةٌ، فَإِنَّ الْمُرْءَ الْمُسْلِمَ مَا
لَمْ يَعْشَ دَنَاءَةً تَظَاهِرُ فَيَخْشَعُ لَهَا إِذَا
ذُكِرَتْ، وَيُغْرِي بِهَا لِكَامُ النَّاسِ،
كَانَ كَالْفَالِجِ الْيَاسِرِ الَّذِي يَسْتَظِرُ
أَوْلَ فَوْزًا مِنْ قِدَاحِهِ ثُوْجُبُ لَهُ
الْمَغْنَمُ، وَيَرْفَعُ عَنْهُ بِهَا الْمُغْرَمَ.

2 Likewise, the Muslim who is innocent of treachery may expect one of two good things from Allāh: either Allāh's summoner - and what is with Allāh is better for him, or sustenance from Allāh by which he would possess progeny and wealth while maintaining his faith and dignity.

٢ وَكَذَلِكَ الْمُرْءُ الْمُسْلِمُ الْبَرِيءُ
مِنَ الْخِيَانَةِ يَسْتَظِرُ مِنَ اللَّهِ إِحْدَى
الْحُسْنَيَّتِينِ: إِمَّا دَاعِيَ اللَّهِ فَمَا
عِنْدَ اللَّهِ خَيْرٌ لَهُ، وَإِمَّا رِزْقُ اللَّهِ
فَإِذَا هُوَ ذُو أَهْلٍ وَمَالٍ وَمَعَهُ
دِينُهُ وَحَسَبُهُ.

CONTEXT

This sermon is considered to have been excerpted from at least two different orations, with a number of sentences being reordered. A section of the sermon has also been narrated by al-Kulaynī in *al-Kāfi*, from Imām al-Ḥasan ('a) (N). There is some indication that the initial part of this sermon was delivered after the Battle of Ḥiṭṭīn, while the latter part thereof was spoken in Madinah soon after people pledged their allegiance to Amīr al-Mu'minīn (T). The fundamental message of this oration pertains to economic dissonance and how it may be understood as part of divine providence. The importance of eschewing envy that arises by looking at the wealth and possession of others, remaining patient during times of hardship, keeping away from ostentation and falsehood, and the significance of family and community are all themes that have been alluded to in this sermon (I).

COMMENTARY

¹ Now then translates '*ammā ba'd*' which is a phrase commonly used to mark the beginning of an oration after having formally praised Allāh and sent salutations upon the Prophet (ṣ) (MB). The term *Command* ('*al-amr*') here refers to the destiny of humankind that is based on divine will and decree (M). Drops of rain act as a beautiful metaphor for the way in which sustenance is granted to creation, since rain falls uniquely on different lands just as sustenance is granted to each individual distinctively (N). Rain is also the most natural source of sustenance as it gives life to dead earth and causes vegetation to grow therein (Z). Furthermore, just as rain falls from the sky to the earth, divine decree descends from the heavens to the earth, where it becomes actualized (MB). *Drops of rain* translates '*qaṭar al-maṭar*' though other manuscripts read '*qaṭarāt al-maṭar*' which means the same, but the former is more correct (T). Al-Sayyid al-Raḍī notes that the term '*ghafīrah*' means plenitude or abundance, and this is evinced from the statement *al-jam al-ghafīr* or *al-jammā al-ghafīr* which connotes a large group or gathering. He further states that one version reads "*afwatan min ahlin wa māl'* where "*afwah*" refers to the best part of a thing. One would say, *akaltu 'afwat at-ṭā'ām* meaning, 'I ate the choicest food.' It should be noted, however, that this gloss which is attributed to al-Raḍī is not found in some manuscripts.

The Imām says seeing such abundance in the possession of another should not be a cause of *fitnah*, rendered here as being *resentful*. Most commentators

note that the term '*fitnah*' in this instance refers to the negative reaction that people have when they see those who are affluent and possess abundant wealth, especially when they are themselves struggling to make ends meet (N). This feeling is usually a mixture of envy, hostility, and desire, and is a cause of misguidance for people, hence the term '*fitnah*' (MB). In this regard, the Glorious Qurān states: *Do not extend your glance toward what We have provided some among them as a splendour of the life of this world, so that We may test them thereby. And the provision of your Lord is better and more lasting* (Q20:131) (T). The subsequent analogy drawn by Amīr al-Mu'minīn ('a) is meant to juxtapose the goal of retaining one's honour through eschewing vile actions that lead to disgrace with the reality that one is not in control of his own destiny, thereby linking what is in one's control (his actions) to what is out of his control (his sustenance) (N). The term '*al-fālij al-yāsir*' is translated *one who is skilled in the gaming-arrows* and refers to a game of chance using arrows, which was also sometimes used as a means of divination, that was common among the Arabs. Some have interpreted this analogy to mean that one who keeps away from vile actions is like he who is successful in the gaming-arrows and will soon acquire great benefit and recover his losses (Z).

2 In the same way, the Imām continues, if a believer keeps aloof from treachery ('*khiyānah*') by remaining loyal in his obedience to Allāh, in what He has made lawful and forbidden (Z), he will attain one of two good things ('*al-husnayayn*'): he will either leave this world and proceed to the eternal mercy of the Almighty – and indeed what awaits him with Allāh is better for him than the life of this world, or he will continue living in this world with dignity and faith as Allāh provides and sustains him (N). This was beautifully echoed by Imām al-Husayn ('a) when he said, "By Allāh, I know that what Allāh grants us will be the best, whether it be martyrdom or victory in battle" (T). Some commentators have posited an alternative interpretation where *Allāh's summoner* ('*dā'iyyallāh*') refers not to death, but to that which calls one to the proximity of Allāh through inspiration, and leads him to become abstemious and uninterested in the material comforts of this world (M). Nonetheless, one may still question how the Imām could have likened a pious believer to a skilled gambler. Some commentators answer this by explaining that the gaming-arrows were not a form of gambling in the traditional sense, because any loss incurred would be tantamount to gain for the poor since those who drew the arrows would have their shares distributed among the poor, as this would result in great pride and honour for them (N).

3 Verily wealth and children are the tillage of this world while virtuous deeds are the tillage of the Hereafter. And Allāh may indeed combine them both for certain groups. So beware of that which Allāh has warned you of Himself, and be afraid of Him to the extent that no excuse is required. Act without ostentation or seeking fame, for indeed whoever acts for other than Allāh, Allāh leaves him to the one for whom he acted. We ask Allāh [for inclusion in] the ranks of the martyrs, the fellowship of the felicitous, and the company of the Prophets.

DISCIPLINING THE RICH

4 O people! Surely, even if he possesses wealth, a man cannot do without his kinsfolk and their physical and verbal support. Of all people, they are his greatest advocates in his absence, best suited to assist him during unsettling troubles, and most sympathetic when tribulations befall him. The good repute among the people that Allāh confers to a person is better than the wealth he bequeaths to others [after his death].

٣ وَإِنَّ الْمَالَ وَالْبَنِينَ حَرْثُ الدُّنْيَا،
وَالْعَمَلُ الصَّالِحُ حَرْثُ الْآخِرَةِ، وَقَدْ
يَجْمِعُهُمْ مَا اللَّهُ تَعَالَى لِأَقْوَامٍ
فَاحْذَرُوا مِنَ اللَّهِ مَا حَذَرْكُمْ مِنْ
نَفْسِهِ، وَاحْشُوْهُ حَشْيَهُ لَيَسْتُ
بِتَعْذِيرٍ، وَاعْمَلُوا فِي عِنْرِ رِيَاءٍ وَلَا
سُمْعَةٍ، فَإِنَّمَا مَنْ يَعْمَلُ لِغَيْرِ اللَّهِ يَكُلُّهُ
اللَّهُ إِلَى مَنْ عَمِلَ لَهُ. نَسْأَلُ اللَّهَ مَنَازِلَ
الشُّهَدَاءِ، وَمَعَايِشَةَ السُّعَادِاءِ،
وَمُرَافَقَةَ الْأَنْبِيَاءِ.

تَأْدِيبُ الْأَغْنِيَاءِ

٤ أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ، إِنَّمَا لَا يَسْتَغْنِي الرَّجُلُ
وَإِنْ كَانَ ذَا مَالٍ - عَنْ عَشِيرَتِهِ،
وَدِفَاعِهِمْ عَنْهُ بِأَيْدِيهِمْ وَأَلْسِنَتِهِمْ،
وَهُمْ أَعْظَمُ النَّاسِ حِينَطَةً مِنْ وَرَائِهِ،
وَأَلْمَهُمْ لِسَعْتِهِ، وَأَعْطَفُهُمْ عَلَيْهِ عِنْدَ
نَازِلَةٍ إِنْ تَرَكْتُ بِهِ. وَلِسَانُ الصَّدْقِ
يَجْعَلُهُ اللَّهُ لِلْمُرْءِ فِي النَّاسِ حَيْرَةً
مِنَ الْمَالِ يُورِثُهُ غَيْرُهُ.

3 Wealth and children are specifically mentioned here because they are the adornment for human beings in this world, as clearly stated in the Qurān, and by juxtaposing them with virtuous deeds which make up the *tillage of the Hereafter* ('*hart al-ākhirah*'), the Imām is alluding to their insignificance in comparison to the latter (M). The Qurān further states: *Whoever desires the tillage of the Hereafter, We will increase for him his tillage, and whoever desires the tillage of the world, We will give it to him, but he will have no share in the Hereafter* (Q42:20). Yet in His wisdom, sometimes Allāh gives both the good of this world and of the Hereafter to some individuals, though this happens for very few people, as we know that most believers suffer in this world, just as the Prophets and Imāms also suffered (Z). *Beware of that which Allāh has warned you of Himself* translates '*fahdharū min allāh mā hadhdharakum min nafsih*' and is considered to be a reference to the verse: ... *Allāh warns you of Himself, and Allāh is most kind to [His] servants* (Q3:30). This entails fearing Him out of cognizance of His might and majesty, to the extent that one no longer performs any action for which he requires to make up excuses ('*laysat bita'dhīr*'). One only needs an excuse if he falls short of what was expected of him and then seeks to absolve himself, but the Almighty knows what is in the depths of our hearts and souls, so false excuses are of no avail (MB).

Aside from fearing Allāh, one must ensure that his virtuous actions are sincere and done only to please the Almighty, not for ostentation ('*riyā'*) or gaining renown ('*sum'ah*'). The latter may include an action that was done with a sincere intention but an effort is subsequently made to inform the people about it, so that they may hold its doer in high esteem (N). The consequence of carrying out any righteous deed for other than Allāh is the rejection of that deed, as the Almighty says in a sacred tradition (*hadīth qudsī*), "...I accept only that deed which is done sincerely for Me alone" (MB). Finally, Amīr al-Mu'minīn supplicates Allāh for inclusion among *the ranks of the martyrs, the fellowship of the felicitous, and the company of the Prophets*. He begins by seeking martyrdom because through it one may attain the loftiest stations in the Hereafter, which include the company of Prophets (M).

4 This section marks the beginning of part of another sermon. Though some commentators have sought to link this section to the previous one, any such link would be untenable since they are known to be parts of different sermons (T). However, it has been suggested that there are some parallels that can be drawn between the two sections since the previous one comprised of advice to the poor and this one has counsel for the affluent (N). First, Amīr al-Mu'minīn reminds the

people that even if they possess wealth, they still need their families and tribes to support and defend them. In fact, some commentators contend that the wealthier a person is, the needier he becomes of supporters and defenders, as in the case of kings (MB). The best people to whom one can turn for support are one's close relatives, since they have the greatest empathy due to their family bond (M). They can be relied upon to defend a person in his absence and lend a helping hand during hard times.

One example of this is mentioned in the Qur'ān where Prophet Shu'ayb was told by the disbelievers: "*O Shu'ayb, we do not understand much of what you say. Indeed we see you are weak amongst us; and were it not for your tribe, we would have surely stoned you, and you are not venerable to us*" (Q11:91) (T). Another important piece of advice the Imām gives to the well-off members of society pertains to their legacy and how they will be remembered once they leave this world. He encourages them to donate their wealth to charitable causes and assist the needy, thereby acquiring the blessing of good repute ('lisān al-ṣidq') among the people, which is better than leaving the wealth to their heirs. Since wealth cannot benefit anyone after death, and one has no control over how his heirs will use what they inherit from him, the only way one might benefit is by using it to do good while he is alive such that whenever he is mentioned after his death, the people recall him fondly and pray for him (N). The value of this is so significant that even Prophet Ibrāhīm ('a) supplicated: *Confer on me a worthy repute among later generations* (Q26:84) (T).

5 In this part of the sermon, the Imām advises the affluent believers to be careful of their duty towards needy relatives. The term '*khaṣāṣah*' connotes poverty, indigence, and need (M). The poor among one's near relatives have been given priority when it comes to charity, so much so that the Prophet (ṣ) is reported to have said, "No charity is accepted while there is a near relative in need" (Z). By *that which neither increases if it is withheld, nor decreases if spent* the Imām may be referring to the immaterial aspect of charity, where withholding one's wealth yields no increase in blessings while giving it to the needy brings down divine blessings through which one quickly recovers any diminution in his wealth.

AND IN THE SAME SERMON

وَمِنْهَا

- 5 Beware! None among you should ever ignore the relatives whom he finds needy and desist from helping them with that which neither increases if it is withheld, nor decreases if spent. Whoever closes his hand to his kinsfolk only closes one hand to them but will have many hands closed to him [in his time of need]; and whoever has a gentle demeanour will have lasting affection from his people.

۵ أَلَا لَا يُغْدِلَنَّ أَحَدُكُمْ عَنِ الْقَرَابَةِ
يَرَى بِهَا الْحَصَاصَةَ أَنْ يَسْدَدَهَا
بِالْأَذِي لَا يَزِيدُهُ إِنْ أَمْسَكَهُ وَلَا
يَنْفَضُّهُ إِنْ أَهْلَكَهُ، وَمَنْ يَقْبِضُ
يَدَهُ عَنْ عَشِيرَتِهِ فَإِنَّمَا تُقْبَضُ مِنْهُ
عَنْهُمْ يَدُ وَاحِدَةٌ، وَتُقْبَضُ مِنْهُمْ عَنْهُ
أَيْدِي كَثِيرَةٍ، وَمَنْ تَلِنْ حَاشِيَّهُ يَسْدَدُهُ
مِنْ قَوْمِهِ الْمَوَدَّةِ.

Alternatively, some have suggested that it might mean withholding financial assistance from one's needy kin will eventually lead him to suffer either psychologically or by loss of honour and respect in society, whereas helping them will benefit him both in this world and the next (N). Others say that since one is only required to give from his surplus wealth, withholding it would not benefit him and giving it away will not lead to poverty or indigence (MB).

These interpretations are better understood when the pronoun '*hu'* in '*yazīduhu*' and '*yanquṣuhu*' are taken as reference to the owner of the wealth rather than the wealth itself (M). Regarding the phrase *whoever closes his hand to his kinsfolk...* al-Sayyid al-Raḍī remarks that its meaning is truly beautiful, for he who withholds assistance from his own kinsmen holds back only his own hand but when he requires their assistance and is in dire need of their support, they will not help him and turn a deaf ear to his calls. As such, he will be deprived of the support of many hands and the backing of a large group. The phrase '*man talin ḥāshiyatuhu*' literally means one whose edges are soft, and is an idiomatic way of describing a gentle person who treats others with empathy and kindness, thereby making their affection for him last. Another possible meaning of the phrase pertains to the behaviour of one's companions and friends. If the individuals with

whom one keeps company possess good character, people will have affection for him (N).



24

FIGHTING DISSENTERS

¹ By my life, I shall not succumb to appeasement or lassitude in fighting against one who opposes the truth and stumbles into [the darkness of] error. So be mindful of Allāh, O servants of Allāh, and flee unto Allāh from [the wrath of] Allāh. Tread on that path which He has clearly laid down for you and stand by what He has enjoined upon you. For [if you do this] ‘Alī guarantees your eventual success, even if you may not attain it immediately.

وَلَعْمَرِي مَا عَلَيَّ مِنْ قِتالٍ مِنْ
 خَالَفُ الْحَقَّ، وَخَابَطُ الْغَيَّ،
 مِنْ إِذْهَانٍ وَلَا إِيهَانٍ؛ فَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ
 عِبَادَ اللَّهِ، وَفِرُّوا إِلَى اللَّهِ مِنَ الْكُفَّارِ،
 وَامْضُوا فِي الَّذِي نَهَجَهُ لَكُمْ،
 وَقُوْمُوا بِمَا عَصَبَهُ بِكُمْ، فَعَلِيٌّ
 ضَامِنٌ لِفَلْجِكُمْ آجِلًا، إِنَّ لَمْ
 تُمَتَّسِّهُ عَاجِلًا.

CONTEXT

In this sermon, Amīr al-Mu’minīn strongly warns those who stand in opposition to the truth, and clarifies his resolve to fight against them, while negating any possibility of negotiation or compromise when it comes to the issue of justice (N). Some commentators say that the Imām spoke these words from the pulpit in Kūfah after a group of individuals, who sought to avoid having to fight the Khawārij, came and objected to his decision to go to war, urging him to look for a diplomatic solution instead (M). Others opine, however, that this was part of a longer sermon that the Imām delivered before the Battle of Ḥiṭṭin. When Imām ‘Alī wanted to march against Mu‘awiyah, he invited some of the Muhājirīn and Anṣār and sought their advice. Hāshim ibn ‘Utbah, ‘Ammār, and Qays ibn Sa‘d ibn Ubādah all stood up and voiced their support for the Imām’s plan to march against the Syrian army (T). Al-Sayyid al-Raḍī calls this a comprehensive statement (*‘kalimatun jāmi‘ah’*) which comprises justification for fighting the rebels, a call to obey Allāh, and a guarantee of success for those who do so.

COMMENTARY

¹ *Appeasement* and *lassitude* translate ‘*idhān*’ and ‘*īhān*’ respectively, with the former also connoting conciliation, compromise, hypocrisy, and cajolery, while the latter also denotes weakness. The first term has been used in the Qur’ān when describing how the Quraysh wanted the Prophet to compromise concerning their idols: *They desired that you should be pliable, so that they may be pliable [towards you]* (Q68:9). The Imām swears by his life (‘*la’amri*’) that when it comes to fighting those who oppose the truth and opt to enter the path of darkness and error (‘*al-ghay*’), he will never compromise or back down (N). The phrase *stumbles into error* is a hyperbole since error itself causes one to stumble, so one who stumbles into it actually falls further into error and misguidance (I). Subsequently, Imām ‘Alī calls the people towards Godwariness (‘*taqwā*’) and urges them to flee unto Allāh from Allāh (‘*fīrrū minallāh ilallāh*’), which has been interpreted by some to mean fleeing from the wrath and chastisement of Allāh to His mercy (MB). And this is achieved through repentance and turning back to Allāh (R). Others have interpreted the phrase, based on the verse: *...there is no refuge from Allāh except in Him* (Q9:118), to mean fleeing from Him is impossible and any attempt to flee from Him is actually the same as fleeing towards Him (T).

While in this world refuge is normally sought from someone other than the one who is feared, when it comes to Allāh, one can only seek refuge from His wrath in Him and no one else (N). The path that the Almighty has clearly laid down (‘*nahajahu*’) is the path of moderation and avoiding extremes (M), as explicated in the Glorious Qur’ān and the Sunnah of the Prophet (ṣ) (Z). *Stand by what He has enjoined upon you* translates ‘*qūmū bimā ‘aṣabahu bikum*’ and refers either to the divine laws of the *sharī‘ah* in general (MB), or *jihād* in particular (T). It also alludes to the fact that one cannot remain indifferent to divinely prescribed injunctions as it is a responsibility for which he will be answerable (N). For those who do what is required of them, the Imām guarantees their success in the next world, if not in this one (Z).



**WHEN HE RECEIVED REPORTS OF THE OCCUPATION OF MUSLIM LANDS BY
MU'ĀWIYAH'S FORCES**

1 Nothing [is left] for me to hold or extend but Kūfah. If nothing remains but you, with your raging whirlwinds [of sedition], then may Allāh deform you!

[Then he quoted the poet's words:]

*By the life of your righteous father,
O 'Amr, I indeed
have from this bowl nothing but little
remaining grease.*

2 Then he ('a) said: I have been informed that Busr has invaded Yemen. By Allāh, verily I think these people will soon conquer you through their unity upon falsehood and your disunity upon truth, and due to your defiance against your Imām in truth and their obedience to their leader in falsehood. They fulfil the trust to their master, while you betray your master, and [also] because of their good work in their cities and your mischief [in yours]. Even if I were to entrust [something as insignificant as] a wooden pot to one of you, I fear that he would run away with its handle.

١ مَا هِيَ إِلَّا الْكُوفَةُ، أَفْضُّهَا
وَأَبْسُطُهَا، إِنْ لَمْ تَكُونِي إِلَّا أَنْتَ
تَهْبُّ أَعْاصِيرِي، فَقَبَحَكَ اللَّهُ
[وَتَمَثَّلَ بِقَوْلِ الشَّاعِرِ]
لَعْمَرُ أَبِيكَ الْحَيْرِ يَا عَمْرُو إِنِّي
عَلَى وَصْرٍ مِنْ ذَا الْإِنَاءِ قَلِيلٌ

٢ ثُمَّ قَالَ عَلَيْهِمْ: أَئْتُ بُشْرًا قَدِ اطْلَعَ
الْيَمَنَ، وَإِنِّي وَاللَّهِ لَأَظُنُّ أَنَّ هُولَاءِ
الْقَوْمَ سَيِّدُ الْوَنَّ مِنْكُمْ بِاجْتِمَاعِهِمْ
عَلَى بَاطِلِهِمْ، وَتَفَرُّقُكُمْ عَنْ حَقِّكُمْ،
وَبِمَعْصِيَتِكُمْ إِمَامُكُمْ فِي الْحَقِّ،
وَطَاعَتِهِمْ إِمَامُهُمْ فِي الْبَاطِلِ،
وَبِأَدَائِهِمُ الْأَمَانَةَ إِلَى صَاحِبِهِمْ،
وَخِيَاتِكُمْ صَاحِبُكُمْ، وَصَلَاحُهُمْ
فِي بَلَادِهِمْ وَفَسَادُكُمْ، فَلَوِ اتَّمَثَّ
أَحَدُكُمْ عَلَى قَعْدِ لَحْشِيَّثِ أَنْ
يَنْهَبَ بِعِلَاقَتِهِ.

3 O Allāh, I have indeed become weary of them as they are weary of me, and I am averse to them as they are averse to me, so replace them for me with those who are better than them, and replace me for them with one who is worse than me. O Allāh, liquefy their hearts just as salt dissolves in water! By Allāh, I wish that instead of you I had a thousand horsemen of the Banī Firās ibn Ghanm.

*Thereat if you called, to you would come
from them
horsemen, like the swift summertime
clouds.*

Then he descended from the pulpit.

٣ اللَّهُمَّ إِنِّي قَدْ مَلِئْتُهُمْ وَمَلَوْنِي،
وَسَئَمْتُهُمْ وَسَيَمْوَنِي، فَأَبْدِلْنِي بِهِمْ
خَيْرًا مِنْهُمْ، وَأَبْدِلْهُمْ بِي شَرًّا مِنِّي.
اللَّهُمَّ مِنْ قُلُوبِهِمْ كَمَا يُمَاتُ الْمِلْحُ
فِي الْمَاءِ. أَمَا وَاللَّهُ لَوْدِدْتُ أَنْ لِي
بِكُمْ أَلْفَ فَارِسٍ مِنْ بَنِي فِرَاسٍ بْنِ
عَمِّ.

هَنَالِكَ لَوْ دَعَوْتَ أَتَاكَ مِنْهُمْ
فَوَارِسٌ مِثْلُ أَرْمِيَةِ الْحَمِيمِ
ثُمَّ نَزَلَ عَلَيْهِمْ مِنَ الْمُبْتَرِ.

CONTEXT

Al-Sayyid al-Rađī says that when concurrent reports reached Amīr al-Mu'minīn from different regions that the followers of Mu'āwiyah had seized control of some lands, and his two appointed governors of Yemen, 'Ubaydullāh ibn al-'Abbās and Sa'īd ibn Numrān, came to him having been defeated by Busr ibn Arṭāh, the Imām ascended the pulpit vexed by the reluctance of his companions to fight and their opposing opinions. This sermon is actually part of a longer oration that Imām 'Alī delivered in the year 40 AH, after the Battles of Ḥiṣn and Nahrawān, and it was one of his last sermons (I). It is narrated that there was a group in Ṣanā'ā comprised of Uthmān's followers who considered his assassination to be an unforgivable offence, and their pledge of allegiance to Imām 'Alī was not sincere. At that time, the governor of Ṣanā'ā was 'Ubaydullāh ibn 'Abbās and its chief commander was Sa'īd ibn Numrān. When Muḥammad ibn Abī Bakr, whom Amīr al-Mu'minīn had appointed governor of Egypt, was killed, the Syrians expanded their invasion of the lands under the Imām's control. At this point, the followers of Uthmān in

Yemen began inciting people to avenge his assassination. When ‘Ubaydullāh ibn ‘Abbās tried to stop them, even imprisoning some of them, they sent word to their supporters in the army urging them to oust Sa‘īd ibn Numrān and to rise in open rebellion.

Once they did this, many people in Yemen joined them and stopped paying the *zakāt*. ‘Ubaydullāh and Sa‘īd sent a letter to the Imām informing him of the situation. In response, Amīr al-Mu’minīn (‘a) wrote a letter to the people of Yemen and their soldiers, warning them and reminding them of their duty. They replied saying that they would obey the Imām on condition that he dismisses his two governors, then they wrote to Mu‘awiyah apprising him of the situation. That is when Mu‘awiyah sent Busr ibn Arṭāh, who was known to be a stone-cold killer, to Yemen. By the time he arrived in Ṣan‘ā, ‘Ubaydullāh and Sa‘īd had departed, having left ‘Abdullāh ibn ‘Amr al-Thaqafī in charge. Busr attacked San‘ā and took control of the city after killing ‘Abdullāh. When they arrived in Kūfah, the Imām faulted ‘Ubaydullāh ibn ‘Abbās and Sa‘īd for leaving their post. Then he ascended the pulpit and delivered this sermon (M).

COMMENTARY

1 Lack of sincerity, loyalty, bravery, and resolve among his companions was the reason so many regions were falling into the hands of Mu‘awiyah and his proxies. The phrase ‘*aqbidiuhā wa absuṭuhā*’ is translated *to hold or extend* and implies complete control. Even though other cities and towns were apparently under him at that time, only Kūfah was under the Imām’s complete control (N). As such, it is suggested that the pronoun *hiya* in ‘*mā hiya*’ refers to his sovereignty or authority (R). Alternatively, one commentator contends that it was only the ‘holding’ and ‘extending’ that was limited to Kūfah, not dominion, since most of Hijāz, Iraq, and Yemen was still under the Imām’s control. It only meant that of all the places, Kūfah was the single city that Mu‘awiyah could not invade (T). The *you* in the conditional statement *if nothing remains but you* refers to the city of Kūfah. *Your raging whirlwinds* translates ‘*aṭṭasīruki*’ and metaphorically refers to the sedition, discord, and hypocrisy that was rampant among the inhabitants of the city (N). The imprecation ‘*qabbaḥakillāh*’ is rendered literally as *may Allāh deform you* and is meant, in this instance, as a prayer to Allāh to be rid of them (Z).

The Imām then quotes a couplet to emphasize his situation. The term '*wadar*' denotes the little grease or fat that remains at the bottom of a bowl after the food in it has been eaten (I), or the droplets of water that remain in the bowl after it is emptied (N), or the smell of food that remains in an empty bowl (T). In any case, the couplet means that the people of Kūfah, due to their disloyalty and cowardice, are as insignificant as the little remaining grease in a bowl, and it would not be possible to secure all the Muslim lands with their support (N). Alternatively, it could mean that Kūfah is itself insignificant in comparison to all the other lands that have been occupied by the enemy, just as the remaining grease is insignificant in comparison to the whole bowl of food (MB).

2 History attests to the bloodthirsty and evil nature of Busr ibn Arṭāh. He was responsible for killing thousands of innocent believers as well as burning and looting their property, and he did not even spare women and children (Z). It is precisely for this reason that Mu‘awiyah selected him to lead the attack on Yemen, instructing him to kill all the followers and companions of ‘Alī (‘a) he finds on the way and show them no mercy (T). When he arrived in Yemen, he began torturing the people as he forced them to pledge their allegiance to Mu‘awiyah. He executed anyone who stood in his way and even beheaded the two young sons of the governor, ‘Ubaydullāh ibn ‘Abbās (N). News of this greatly disheartened Amīr al-Mu‘minīn and he warned the people of Kūfah that they would all meet the same fate if they did not mend their ways. This tragedy had transpired, he said, due to four main reasons. First, they were disunited despite being on the path of truth while the Syrians were united upon falsehood. The term *falsehood* here refers either to the unlawful occupation of Muslim lands (MB), or the false justification of avenging the blood of Uthmān (T).

Second, they were defiant and disobeyed their Imām, who was the rightful leader, even when he called them to the truth. On the other hand, their enemies obeyed their leader, Mu‘awiyah ibn Abī Sufyān, even when he called them to falsehood and misguidance. This is because Mu‘awiyah would use cunning schemes and bribery to get the people to follow him whereas Imām ‘Alī (‘a) never stooped to such tactics (Z). Third, they were disloyal and untrustworthy whereas their enemies would fulfil their trusts; and it is only through trustworthiness that forces can be rallied, provisions acquired, funds raised, and people can come together to fight the enemy. Without trust, none of these things can be arranged and the only outcome is then loss and defeat (N). Fourth, they were agents of corruption and

mischief in their lands while their enemy was careful in maintaining order and peace in their own lands (MB). After mentioning these four qualities that would eventually lead to their downfall, the Imām rebukes them for their treachery by stating that he could not even trust them with something as insignificant as a cooking pot, so there was no way they could ever be relied upon in important matters (M).

3 Amīr al-Mu'minīn then complains to Allāh against the people of Kūfah, saying that he is weary of them. A person becomes weary of something either because he is physically fatigued, or because he knows for sure that it is not possible to attain the desired goal. In this case, the behaviour of the Kūfans and their incessant obduracy led the Imām to get fed up with them to the point of complaining against them (M). He was weary of their disloyalty, hypocrisy, and defiance while they were weary of his sincerity, justice, and steadfastness (Z). Though *malal* and *sa'am* are considered synonyms, some have suggested that the former refers to weariness caused by speech whereas the latter is caused by action, or the former is weariness expressed openly while the latter is weariness in secret (R). The Imām then prayed to be rid of such subjects and have them replaced with better people who would obey and support him; or he may have been referring to those whose company he would be in after death (MB). He also prayed for them to get another leader who was worse than him, as this is what they deserved. It is said that soon after he made this supplication, Ḥajjāj ibn Yūsuf – one of the most ruthless and cruel tyrants in Islamic history – was born (N).

Finally, Amīr al-Mu'minīn asked Allāh to *liquefy their hearts* ('*mith qulūbahum*'), which some suggest refers to the state of overwhelming fear or sorrow that puts a strain on one's heart (M). The Imām then turned to the people again saying that instead of them, he would have preferred to have only a thousand horsemen of the Banī Firās ibn Ghanm, who were famous for their bravery and loyalty. In another instance, it is reported that Imām 'Alī ('a) said to the Kūfan army, "By Allāh, I wish that instead of a hundred thousand of you, I had three hundred soldiers from [the tribe of] Firās ibn Ghanm" (T). Subsequently, the Imām recited a couplet describing the horsemen of the Banī Firās. Explaining the meaning of the couplet, al-Sayyid al-Raḍī notes that '*armiyah*' is the plural of *ramiy* which means cloud, and in this instance, '*hamūn*' refers to summertime. He further says, "The poet specifically mentioned the summer cloud since it moves swiftly and passes quickly as it is devoid of water. A cloud that is heavy moves slowly because it is laden with

water, but this only happens mostly during specific times in the winter. The poet thus wanted to allude to their swiftness when they are called, and their readiness when their help is required. This is understood from his first verse: *Thereat if you called, to you would come from them...*"



26

THE ARABS BEFORE THE PROPHETIC MISSION (*AL-BI'THAH*)

- 1 Verily Allāh sent Muḥammad (ṣ) as a warner to the worlds and a trustee of the revelation, while you, the Arab nation, were following the worst creed and residing in the worst abode, encamping among jagged rocks and mordacious serpents. You would drink turbid water and eat unsavoury food. You shed each other's blood and severed ties with your kin. Idols were placed [everywhere] among you and sins encompassed you.

١ إِنَّ اللَّهَ بَعَثَ مُحَمَّدًا نَّذِيرًا لِلْعَالَمَيْنَ، وَأَمِينًا عَلَى التَّنْزِيلِ، وَأَنْتُمْ مَعْشَرُ الْعَرَبِ عَلَى شَرِّ دِينٍ، وَفِي شَرِّ دَارٍ، فُنِيَخُونَ بَيْنَ حِجَارَةَ حُشْنٍ، وَحَيَّاتٍ صُمًّا، تَشْرِبُونَ الْكَدِيرَ، وَتَأْكُلُونَ الْجِثَبَ، وَسَفِكُونَ دَمَاءَ كُمْ، وَتَقْطَعُونَ أَرْحَامَكُمْ. الْأَصْنَامُ فِيْكُمْ مَنْصُوبَةٌ، وَالْأَثَامُ بِكُمْ مَعْصُوبَةٌ.

HIS SITUATION BEFORE THEY PLEDGED
ALLEGIANCE TO HIM

- 2 I looked around and found that there was no one to support me except my family, so I refrained from endangering their lives. I shut my eyes even with motes embedded in them, and drank in spite of choking. I remained patient even when held by the throat, and bore that which was more bitter than the taste of colocynth.

٢ فَنَظَرْتُ فَإِذَا لَيْسَ لِي مُعِينٌ إِلَّا أَهْلُ بَيْتِي، فَضَرِبْتُ بِهِمْ عَنِ الْمَوْتِ، وَأَغْضَيْتُ عَلَى الْقَذَى، وَشَرِبْتُ عَلَى الشَّجَاءِ، وَصَبَرْتُ عَلَى أَحَذِ الْكَظَمِ، وَعَلَى أَمَرَ مِنْ طَعْمِ الْعَلْقَمِ.

ومنها صفتة قبل البيعة له

CONTEXT

This sermon comprises sections of a longer sermon that the Imām delivered before proceeding to Nahrawān in the year 38 AH (MB). In it Amīr al-Mu'minīn talks about the condition of the Arabs and the way they lived during the Age of Ignorance before the Prophet was sent to them. Subsequently, he describes his own situation before the Muslims pledged their allegiance to him. Finally, he instructs the people to prepare for battle against the enemy. With regard to the context of this sermon, most scholars say that after Egypt was occupied by Mu'awiyah's forces and Muḥammad ibn Abī Bakr was martyred, a group of individuals came to the Imām and sought to learn his opinion about the earlier caliphs. In response, the Imām rebuked them for asking such a question at a time when there were more pressing concerns such as what was happening in Egypt. Some have suggested that the contents of this sermon indicate that it might have been delivered before the Battle of Ḳiffān, especially since the Imām tells the people to prepare themselves for war. However, it is also possible that this was in reference to another battle that was to take place in the future but when the Imām was martyred, it did not come to pass (N).

COMMENTARY

1 Though the Prophet was both a warner (*nadhīr*) and a bringer of glad tidings (*bashīr*), Amīr al-Mu'minīn mentions only his former attribute here, because warning others and putting fear in their hearts is the most effective way of getting people to eschew sin (M). Some commentators suggest that by stating he was the *trustee of the revelation*, the Imām was subtly alluding to the Prophet's infallibility (N). The description of the Arabs before the Prophet was sent to them is a theme found in a number of the Imām's sermons (Z). In a few words, he summarizes the state of the Arabs during the Age of Ignorance with the aim of reminding the people of their past, and having them compare it to their present state, so that they would realize how much they have been blessed (N). In the past, the Arabs were following *the worst creed* which involved idol worshipping and ascribing partners to Allāh (MB). They lived in *the worst abode* among the *jagged rocks and mordacious serpents* ('*hijāratin khushn wa hayyātin summ'*). The adjective '*summ*' literally means 'deaf' and here it refers to snakes that are unafraid of any noise people would make to drive them away (MB). Some commentators suggest that this phrase

could be understood metaphorically where *jagged rocks* connote either mountains or idols, which in turn signify harsh living or pagan worshipping respectively. These were then replaced with easier and gentler lifestyles and worshipping the One True God.

Mordacious serpents may also be a symbolic reference to cunning enemies since such serpents do not fear loud noises and are thus more dangerous than regular snakes (I). However, other commentators disagree saying that it would not be correct to interpret these words allegorically in this instance (T). The Arabs used to drink turbid water because they were nomads and never remained in one place for long. Hence, they would drink whatever water they came by, and due to the harsh desert conditions, this included muddy water that was hardly fit for consumption (M). As for their food being unsavoury, it is reported that one bedouin was asked, "What animals would you eat in the desert?" He replied, "Anything that moved, except *umm jubayn* (a kind of highly poisonous reptile)" (N). Food that is described as '*khashib*' is generally unpalatable and coarse (R). The Arabs were also known for their barbarity and bloodshed, and they would sever family ties, even going as far as killing their own infants. Ibn 'Abbās reports that when time for a woman to give birth came, she would dig a hole in the ground and sit next to it. If she gave birth to a girl, she would throw the child into the hole and if it was a boy, she would hold on to him (MB). The fact that they placed idols everywhere shows that not only were they unashamed of their idol worship, they actually took pride in it. This was one of the reasons that sin became all-pervasive in the Arab society (N).

2 In this part of the sermon, the Imām recalls what happened after the death of Rasūlullāh (s) and why he never took up arms to fight for his right. He says that upon looking around, he found that his only supporters were members of his family, so he decided to remain silent in order to keep them from harm's way. It is evident that taking a stand against those individuals who had usurped the reins of leadership at that juncture would have been futile, and may have even led to the death of many among the Prophet's pure progeny (N). The verb '*danintu*' derives from *dinnah* meaning niggardliness, tenaciousness, and unwillingness to let go of something. Indeed, in numerous instances the Imām is reported to have said that if he had enough supporters, he would have stood up for his rights (Z). *Al-Ighdā' 'alā al-qadhā* refers to closing one's eyes despite having specks of dust or other foreign particles in them, thereby making the process painful and uncomfortable.

AND IN THE SAME SERMON

ومنها

- 3** He ('Amr ibn al-'Āṣ) did not pledge allegiance [to Mu'āwiyah] until he had stipulated what he would take in exchange for his allegiance. May the hand of the seller never triumph, and may the buyer's contract lead to his disgrace! So ready yourselves for war and prepare your arms and munitions, for its flames have been kindled and its blaze burns bright. [And adhere to patience, for it is indeed the best means to victory.]

٣ وَلَمْ يَبَايِعْ حَتَّىٰ شَرَطَ أَنْ يُؤْتِيَهُ
عَلَى الْبَيْعَةِ ثَمَنًا، فَلَا ظَفِرَتْ
يَدُ الْبَيْاعِ، وَحَزِيَّتْ أَمَانَةُ
الْمُبَيَّاعِ! فَخُذُوا لِلْحَرْبِ أَهْبَاهَا،
وَأَعْدُوا لَهَا عَدَّتَهَا، فَقَدْ شَبَّ
لَظَاهَاهَا، وَعَلَا سَنَاهَا. [وَاسْتَشْعُرُوا
الصَّبْرَ فَإِنَّهُ أَدْعَى إِلَى النَّصْرِ.]

Here it symbolizes the great pain and discomfort the Imām had to endure when his right was usurped. Similarly, *al-shurb 'alā al-shajā* literally connotes drinking water while there is something stuck in the throat, like a bone, which leads to choking and great discomfort (T). It also refers to the heightened anguish and sorrow that causes one to feel as if something is stuck in his throat (N).

Despite experiencing such agony, the Imām endured patiently. The term '*al-kazam*' refers to the windpipe and '*akhdh al-kazam*' can refer to choking (*ikhtināq*) or to a situation where one is so overwhelmed by distress or anger that he finds it difficult to breathe (M). Some commentators interpret this phrase to mean suppressing overwhelming anger (*kazm al-ghayz*) (T). To elucidate the extent of his distress, the Imām gives an analogy of the bitter colocynth ('*alqam*', also known as *hanzal*) and says that what he endured was even more bitter. The colocynth, which is a viny plant that grows in arid areas, was often used as a symbol of bitterness among the Arabs and the Imām compares the bitterness of his experience to the literal bitterness of the colocynth (MB).

3 Here the Imām describes how 'Amr ibn al-'Āṣ gave his allegiance to Mu'āwiyah only after the latter agreed to make him the ruler of Egypt. Historians note that after the Battle of Jamal, Amīr al-Mu'minīn moved to Kūfah and made it the capital

of his caliphate. He then sent Jarīr ibn ‘Abdillāh al-Bajalī to Syria in order to take Mu‘āwiyah’s pledge of allegiance. Mu‘āwiyah was reluctant to give the oath of allegiance to the Imām, so he sought counsel from his advisors about this. His brother ‘Utbah ibn Abī Sufyān said to him, “In this matter, you should take assistance from ‘Amr ibn al-‘Āṣ as he is a very clever individual. You should know, however, that he will never submit to you unless you offer him something considerable, such that he would be ready to sell his religion to you; ...and he will then surely do this because he loves wealth and power.” Mu‘āwiyah wrote a letter to ‘Amr ibn al-‘Āṣ and invited him to Syria. Upon his arrival, he sought his assistance to oppose Imām ‘Ali (‘a). ‘Amr said that ‘Ali ibn Abī Ṭālib was the greatest warrior and the closest to the Prophet of Islam. Furthermore, his knowledge of Islam was unmatched. Then he asked, “If I were to accept your offer, what would you give me in return?” “Anything you want,” replied Mu‘āwiyah. So ‘Amr asked to be made the ruler of Egypt and though Mu‘āwiyah was initially hesitant, he agreed. It is said that ‘Amr ibn al-‘Āṣ specifically asked for Egypt because he had witnessed its beauty and riches first hand when he conquered it during the reign of the second caliph and was subsequently appointed as the latter’s governor to Egypt, where he remained until Uthmān removed him from that post (N).

Some commentators have interpreted the *seller* (*‘al-bā’i*) to be Mu‘āwiyah and the *buyer* (*‘al-mubtā*) as ‘Amr (I), whereas others say that it is the opposite, since ‘Amr ibn al-‘Āṣ sold his religion for the worldly gain granted to him by Mu‘āwiyah (T). Moreover, the word *mubtā* also refers to one who accepts the oath of allegiance (R). The Imām then imprecates both these individuals, praying for their failure and disgrace. Indeed, if one reads about what became of Mu‘āwiyah and ‘Amr ibn al-‘Āṣ, he would see how their love of this world led to their ruin (Z). Some commentators have posited the possibility that these statements were not meant as an imprecation but were declarative, in which case the translation would read: *The hand of the seller will never triumph, and the buyer’s contract will lead to his disgrace* (N). The word ‘*amānah*’ is translated as *contract* and denotes the trust that included the land and wealth of the Muslims which was unjustly appropriated (M). According to some commentators, the war that Amīr al-Mu’minīn tells the people to prepare for is the second battle against Mu‘āwiyah (T). This was because Mu‘āwiyah had himself ignited the flame of war by sending his soldiers to invade the cities and towns that were under the Imām’s control. Finally, as advice to his

followers, Imām ‘Alī (‘a) tells them to *adhere to patience* as that is the best way to attain victory.

The term ‘*istash‘irū*’ derives from the root *sh-‘a-r* and the term *shi‘ār*, which literally refers to the undergarment that is in direct contact with one’s body. This is quite apt given that patience needs to be ingrained within a person’s heart and soul (N). It is noteworthy that this last statement is not found in some manuscripts of *Nahj al-Balāghah*.



URGING THE PEOPLE TO DEFEND THEMSELVES

THE VIRTUE OF JIHĀD

1 Now then; verily *jihād* is one of the gates of Paradise that Allāh has opened for His special friends. It is the attire of Godwariness, the protective armour of Allāh, and His impenetrable shield. Whoever abandons it out of aversion, Allāh drapes him with the garment of disgrace and he is encompassed with affliction. He is rendered submissive by abasement and degradation, and his heart is obscured by loss of reason. The right is sequestered from him by [his] forfeiture of *jihād*, and he is subjected to ignominy and denied justice.

فضل الجهاد

١ أَمَّا بَعْدُ، فِي الْجِهَادِ بَابٌ مِنْ أَبْوَابِ
الْجَنَّةِ، فَتَحَاهُ اللَّهُ لِخَاصَّةِ أُولَائِئِنَّ،
وَهُوَ لِبَائِسِ التَّقْوَىٰ، وَدُرْزُ
الْحَصِينَةِ، وَجُنْجُونُ الْوَثِيقَةِ، فَمَنْ تَرَكَهُ
رَغْبَةً عَنْهُ أَلْبَسَهُ اللَّهُ ثُوبَ الدُّلُّ،
وَشَمَلَهُ الْبَلَاءُ، وَدَيَّثَ بِالصَّغَارِ
وَالْفَمَاءَةِ، وَضَرَبَ عَلَى قَلْبِهِ
بِالْإِسْهَابِ، وَأَدِيلَ الْحَقُّ مِنْهُ تَضَيِّعَ
الْجِهَادِ، وَسِيمَ الْحَسْفَ، وَمُنْزَعَ
الصَّفَّ.

EXHORTING THE PEOPLE

2 Look! I have called you to fight these people night and day, secretly and openly, and told you to strike them before they overrun you, for by Allāh, never have a people been attacked inside their own homes but that they were disgraced. Yet you kept passing over the responsibility to others and forsook it until you were attacked from all sides and your cities were occupied [by the enemy].

استنهاض الناس

٢ أَلَا وَإِنِّي قَدْ دَعَوْتُكُمْ إِلَى قِتَالِ
هَؤُلَاءِ الْقَوْمِ لَيْلًا وَنَهَارًا، وَسِرًا
وَإِغْلَانًا، وَقُلْتُ لَكُمْ: اغْرِزُوهُمْ قَبْلَ
أَنْ يَغْرِزُوكُمْ، فَوَاللَّهِ مَا عَزِيزٌ قَوْمٌ قَطُّ
فِي عُقُورِ دَارِهِمْ إِلَّا ذُلُوا، فَتَوَكَّلُونَ
وَتَحَاذَلُونَ حَتَّى شُتَّى عَلَيْكُمْ
الْغَارَاتُ، وَمُلِكَتْ عَلَيْكُمُ الْأَوْطَانُ.

CONTEXT

Al-Sayyid al-Rađī notes that this sermon was delivered by Amīr al-Mu'minīn ('a) after he received a report about the sacking of Anbār by the army of Mu'āwiyah, without any resistance from the people of that city. In it, he mentions the merits of *jihād*, calls on the people to rise up, affirms his knowledge of warfare, and holds people responsible for disobeying him. This is one of the Imām's more famous sermons and has been recorded in numerous early works, such as Abū al-'Abbās al-Mubarrad's *al-Kāmil*, with slight variance (I). Al-Kulaynī has also mentioned it in *al-Kāfi*, and the author of *Maṣādir Nahj al-Balāghah* notes ten well-known sources that recount this sermon before al-Sayyid al-Rađī (N). When the Imām received word about the fall of the border city of Anbār to Mu'āwiyah's forces, and the killing of Ḥassān ibn Ḥassān, he became angry and began walking towards Nukhaylah (a military camp near Kūfah) where he delivered this sermon (T). He informed the people that Sufyān ibn 'Awf al-Ghāmidī, whom he referred to in the sermon as '*akhū ghāmid*', had invaded the borderlands of Iraq and executed the Imām's governor in Anbār before looting the residents of the town and laying waste to many of their homes; all this while meeting very little resistance from the inhabitants of the city.

Sufyān ibn 'Awf himself relates that Mu'āwiyah instructed him to attack Anbār so that the Iraqis would become frightened and demoralized. He further ordered that the army should be allowed to pillage the town and show no mercy. When Sufyān arrived with his army, Ḥassān ibn Ḥassān al-Bakrī tried to defend the town with a small contingent of about thirty men, but they were overwhelmed by the much larger Syrian army and attained martyrdom (N). News of the event caused great anguish to the Imām and this can clearly be felt from his sermon. Another name for this oration is the Sermon of *Jihād*, and it was delivered during the final days of the Imām's life (MB). In praising this sermon, Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd says that many people have spoken about the importance of *jihād*, but they have all taken inspiration from the words of Amīr al-Mu'minīn in one way or another (I).

COMMENTARY

1 Traditions abound with merits of *jihād*. Here, the Imām describes it as a gate in Paradise that is opened for the special friends of Allāh. These are the individuals

who are sincere in their love and worship of Allāh, and fight only for the pleasure of Allāh and no other reason. When a Muslim leaves his family and embarks on *jihād* knowing that the enemy is out for his blood and would take his family captive if they prevailed, yet he still remains steadfast in obedience to Allāh and seeking His pleasure, then such a person is truly a special friend of Allāh (MB). The Imām subsequently goes on to describe *jihād* as *the attire of Godwariness* ('*libās al-taqwā*'), *the protective armour of Allāh* ('*dir'ullāh al-ḥaṣīnah*'), and *His impenetrable shield* ('*junnatuhu al-wathīqah*'). Just as an attire is a means of preserving one's dignity and adorning oneself, so too does *jihād* protect one's honour and that of his family and community (N). It is also like armour and a shield because it protects a believer from his enemies and from chastisement in the Hereafter (M). Amīr al-Mu'minīn ('a) then outlines the consequences of abandoning *jihād out of aversion* ('*raghbatan 'anhu*') and not for any valid reason such as illness, old age, and the like. Anyone who does this is draped with *the garment of disgrace* ('*thawb al-dhull*') and is *encompassed with affliction* ('*shamilahu al-balā'*). That is because one who does not defend himself and his society from predators and enemies will be left as an open target for them, and that will lead to hardships and afflictions for him (N).

Such a person has no choice but to surrender and submit himself to the abasement and degradation meted out by the enemy. As a result, *his heart is obscured by loss of reason* ('*duriba 'alā qalbihi bil-ishāb*'), which is a natural consequence of complete and utter helplessness. The word '*al-ishāb*' also means incessant babble, and it is common for a person who is overwhelmed with fear and distress to talk a lot without thinking (M). Another consequence of turning away from *jihād* is the loss of one's right, which gets appropriated by the oppressors. Finally, those who do not defend themselves against their enemies are *subjected to ignominy* ('*sīm al-khasf*') and *denied justice* ('*muni'a al-naṣāf*'). Some have suggested that since '*al-khasf*' literally means to sink or disappear, the phrase '*sīm al-khasf*' may also connote taking a step towards one's own annihilation (N).

2 The Imām called the people to fight the enemy *night and day*, just as Prophet Nūḥ ('a) called his people night and day, *but it only made them flee further away* (Q71:5-6) (T). Similarly, he states that he had called them *secretly and openly*, to emphasize the fact that he exhorted them towards *jihād* numerous times and in many ways (M). He urged them to fight the enemy before they were overrun by them, since the invading armies were known for their atrocities and lack of

compunction in perpetrating all sorts of crimes against innocent civilians. Therefore, it was only sensible for them to prepare themselves and meet the enemy on the battlefield before they reached their town (N). Amīr al-Mu'minīn then gives them another reason to go out and fight when he says *never have a people been attacked inside their own homes but that they were disgraced*. Some commentators suggest that this loss and disgrace is a consequence of certain presumptions on the part of the victims who generally think that any enemy who would dare to enter the city would have to be very strong and powerful. This assumption leads even the bravest people to lose hope in their ability to repel the enemy and drive them out of their homes. As a result, they end up becoming weak and are unable to defend themselves (M).

The phrase ‘*uqr dārihim*’ is rendered *inside their own homes* where ‘*uqr*’ literally means cornerstone or origin, and here it refers to the centre of one’s abode. When the enemy attacks people in their homes, they destroy everything in their path and even the weaker members of the community, including children and the aged, are harmed. This is what leads to their disgrace (N). Indeed, there can be no honour or dignity left for any community that is unable to defend itself against its enemies, as history attests (Z). Despite being aware of this, the people kept shrugging off their duty and handing it over to one another (*‘tawākaltum’*) such that in the end, nobody took responsibility for defending the city. When they had all forsaken the duty (*‘takhādhaltum’*), the enemy attacked them from every direction and occupied their city. The verb ‘*shunnat*’ derives from the root *sh-n-n* which connotes scattering or pouring forth, and when used in the context of conflict, it means attacking from all sides (N).

3 Here the Imām describes what happened in Anbār as an example of the consequence of aversion to *jihād*. Anbār was a city about 55 km west of Baghdād and, as noted above, the man responsible for its sacking was Sufyān ibn ‘Awf of the Banū Ghāmid, which was a Yemeni tribe. Mu‘āwiya had given Sufyān command over a large contingent and when he returned after ravaging the city, Mu‘āwiya was pleased and exclaimed, “You have truly met my expectations and have not disappointed me” (Z). Having killed the governor of Anbār, the enemies drove away the border guards and sentries from their post.

٣ Now the cavalry of this Ghāmidī has entered Anbār and he has killed Ḥassān ibn Ḥassān al-Bakrī and removed your sentries from their garrisons. I have been informed that one of them would enter the home of a Muslim woman, and another [woman] under the protection of Islam, and snatch away her anklet and bracelet, her necklaces and her earrings, and she could do nothing to stop him except cry out, ‘Surely to Allāh we belong and to Him we will return’ and plead for mercy. Then, [having pillaged everything,] they left fully laden [with loot]. None of them suffered any injury, nor was any of their blood spilt. If a Muslim dies of grief after [hearing] all this, he cannot be blamed; rather, in my view, that is what behoves him.

وَهَذَا أَخْرُو عَامٍ قَدْ وَرَدْتُ حَيْلَةً
الْأَنْبَارَ، وَقَدْ قَلَ حَسَانَ بْنَ حَسَانَ
الْبَكْرِيَّ، وَأَزَالَ حَيْلَكُمْ عَنْ
مَسَالِحِهَا. وَلَقَدْ بَلَغَنِي أَنَّ الرَّجُلَ
مِنْهُمْ كَانَ يَدْخُلُ عَلَى الْمَرْأَةِ
الْمُسْلِمَةِ، وَالْأُخْرَى الْمُعاِهِدَةِ،
فَيَشْرُعُ حِجَابَهَا وَفُلْبَهَا وَقَلَاتِدَهَا
وَرِعَانَهَا، مَا تَمْتَنَعُ مِنْهُ إِلَّا
بِالاِسْتِرْجَاعِ وَالِاسْتِرْحَامِ، ثُمَّ
اَنْصَرُفُوا وَافِرِينَ، مَا تَالَ رَجُلًا مِنْهُمْ
كُلُّمْ، وَلَا أَرِيقَ لَهُمْ دَمً، فَلَوْ أَنَّ أَمْرًا
مُسْلِمًا مَاتَ مِنْ بَعْدِ هَذَا أَسْفًا مَا
كَانَ بِهِ مَلُومًا، بَلْ كَانَ بِهِ عِنْدِي
جَدِيرًا.

٤ How very strange and baffling! By Allāh, it makes the heart sink and causes deep distress to see the unity of these people upon falsehood and your dispersal from the truth. So woe be to you and may you grieve! You have become the target that is shot at. You are being plundered and you take [back] nothing. You are being attacked yet you do not defend yourselves.

٤ فَيَا عَجَبًا عَجَبًا! وَاللهُ، يُبَيِّثُ الْقَلْبَ
وَيَجْلِبُ الْهَمَّ مِنَ اجْتِمَاعِ هُؤُلَاءِ
الْقَوْمِ عَلَى بَاطِلِهِمْ، وَتَفَرَّقُكُمْ عَنْ
حَقِّكُمْ: فَقَبَحًا لَكُمْ وَتَرَحًا! حِينَ
صَرَّتُمْ غَرَضًا يُزْمَمِي، يَغَارُ عَلَيْكُمْ
وَلَا تُغَيِّرُونَ، وَتَغْرِيَونَ وَلَا تَغْرِيَونَ،
وَيَعْصِيَ اللَّهُ وَتَرْضَوْنَ.

Allāh is being disobeyed and you consent to it. When I instruct you to march against them in the days of summer you say, "This [weather] is scorching hot. Spare us till the heat subsides." When I order you to march in winter you say, "This [weather] is freezing cold; give us time until the cold spell passes." All this just to escape the heat and the cold! If you flee from heat and cold, then you would, by Allāh, be even more likely to flee from the sword.

فَإِذَا أَمْرُتُكُمْ بِالسَّيْرِ إِلَيْهِمْ فِي أَيَّامِ
الْحَرَّ، قُلُّمْ: هَذِهِ حَمَارَةُ الْقَيْظِ
أَمْهَلْنَا يُسَبِّحُ عَنَّا الْحَرَّ، وَإِذَا
أَمْرُتُكُمْ بِالسَّيْرِ إِلَيْهِمْ فِي الشَّاءِ،
قُلُّمْ: هَذِهِ صَبَارَةُ الْقُرْرِ أَمْهَلْنَا يُسَلِّحُ
عَنَّا الْبَزْدُ، كُلُّ هَذَا فِرَارًا مِنَ الْحَرَّ
وَالْقُرْرِ، فَإِذَا كُنْتُمْ مِنَ الْحَرَّ وَالْقُرْرِ
تَفْرُونَ، فَأَنْتُمْ وَاللَّهُ مِنَ السَّيْفِ أَفْزُ.

Garrisons translates 'masālih' which is the plural of *maslahah* meaning an armed guard, particularly at the border or frontier, because that is the place where caches of weapons and munitions (*aslīyah*) are kept and used by soldiers to guard the boundaries of a city or country from invaders (N).

The Imām subsequently recounts one of the atrocities of the invading army that he had been informed about. Since the primary objective of the army was to instil fear in the hearts of the people, Muāwiyah had instructed Sufyān to give his soldiers carte blanche to do as they pleased, even encouraging them to loot and plunder (T). As a result, they transgressed against the helpless women, snatching away their jewellery from their hands, necks, feet, and ears while they could do nothing but cry out and plead for mercy. Commentators have interpreted '*al-istirjā'* either as a kind of crying and sobbing that is muffled, as though the sound is stuck in the throat, or crying out, "Surely to Allāh we belong and to Him we will return (*innā lillāhi wa innā ilayhi rāji‘ūn*)" (N). The men of the city remained cowering and passive as their homes were looted, and the enemies were able to take whatever they wanted without any resistance whatsoever. This is evidenced by the fact that *none of them suffered any injury, nor was any of their blood spilt*. Having pillaged the city, the soldiers left laden with loot ('*inṣarafū wāfirīn*'). By saying that it would behove a Muslim to die of grief upon witnessing or hearing

about this, the Imām hoped to awaken their consciences and incite fervour for *jihād* in them (Z). This statement further shows the importance Islam places on protecting the honour and dignity of women, as well as defending those minorities who live under an Islamic government (N).

4 The repetition of ‘*ajaban*’ is for emphasis, as is the use of the vocative particle ‘*yād*’ (M). It is a strangeness and oddity that causes the heart to sink (*yūmītu al-qalba*’ lit. kills the heart) and one’s distress to intensify (MB). That which the Imām deemed to be strange was the unity and accord of the enemy upon falsehood and the disunity and discord among the believers despite being on the right. It was expected that the believers would remain steadfast and united upon the truth and stand up in its defence. So when they were seen to scatter and disperse, it was surprising and heartbreaking (N). Unlike Mu‘āwiyah’s forces who were ready to obey any command they were given, the Kūfans would express their individual opinions about any instructions the Imām gave them, and this caused them to become divided and disunited (T). *Woe be to you and may you grieve* translates ‘*qubḥan lakum wa tarāḥan*’ where *qubḥ* connotes being distanced from goodness (*khayr*) and *tarḥ* is the opposite of *farḥ*, meaning joy, and thus connotes sadness and grief (R).

Their disunity led to their weakness and lack of resolve, which in turn made them a target for the enemy’s assaults. These attacks increased when the enemy saw no resistance from them. As a result, they were raided and their property plundered while they stood helpless (N). They became *targets* that the enemy *shot at* with arrows or spears when they witnessed the killing of their people and the pillaging of their property, which are actions that contravene the commandments of Allāh, yet remained quiet. Were it not for their silent acceptance and consent, the enemy would never have been able to storm their city in such a manner (MB). ‘*Hamārrat al-qayz*’ is rendered *scorching hot* and connotes extremely hot weather while ‘*ṣabārrat al-qurr*’ is translated *freezing cold* as it connotes very cold climate (I).

The Imām recounts the excuses given by the people when he commanded them to march into battle. In the summer, they asked to be excused due to the heat and in the winter, they sought reprieve due to the cold. In a narration from Farqad al-Bajalī, he reports that Amīr al-Mu’mīnīn (*a*) said, “If I tell you to march against your enemy, you say, ‘the cold is unbearable.’ Do you think your enemy

HIS DISCONTENT WITH THE PEOPLE

5 O you who resemble men, but are not men! [You possess] the acumen of children and the intelligence of cloistered women. I wish I had neither seen you nor come to know you. By Allāh, it is an acquaintance that has brought about regret and resulted in grief. May Allāh assail you! You have filled my heart with purulence and left my chest teeming with rage. You made me swallow mouthfuls of grief, one after the other. You vitiated my counsel through disobedience and desertion, so much so that the Quraysh started saying, “The son of Abū Ṭālib is surely brave but he has no knowledge of [the strategies of] warfare.” Good God! Is any one of them more experienced in the art [of warfare] and a more seasoned veteran of it than I am? I first rose up [to fight] before I was twenty, and [now] here I am, having crossed sixty; nevertheless, one who is not obeyed has no say.

البر بالناس

٥ يَا أَشْبَاهُ الرِّجَالِ وَلَا رَجَالٌ حُلُومُ
 الْأَطْفَالِ، وَعُقُولُ رَبَاتِ الْحِجَالِ،
 لَوْدِدُتْ أَنِي لَمْ أَرْكُمْ وَلَمْ أَغْرِفْكُمْ
 مَعْرِفَةً - وَاللَّهُ - جَرَّتْ نَدَمًا،
 وَأَعْقَبْتُ سَدَمًا. قَاتَلْكُمُ اللَّهُ! لَقَدْ
 مَلَأْتُمْ فَلِي قَيْحاً، وَشَحَّتُمْ صَدْرِي
 غَيْظًا، وَجَرَعْتُمْ نَعْبَ الْهَمَامِ
 أَنْفَاسًا، وَأَفْسَدْتُمْ عَلَيَّ رَأْيِي
 بِالْعِضَيَانِ وَالْخِذْلَانِ، حَتَّى لَقَدْ
 قَالَتْ قُرَيْشٌ: إِنَّ ابْنَ أَبِي طَالِبٍ
 رَجُلٌ شُجَاعٌ، وَلَكِنْ لَا عِلْمَ لَهُ
 بِالْحَرْبِ. لَهُ أَبْوَهُمْ! وَهَلْ أَحَدٌ مِنْهُمْ
 أَشَدُّ لَهَا مِرَاسًا، وَأَفْدَمُ فِيهَا مَقَاماً
 مِنِّي؟ لَقَدْ نَهْضَتْ فِيهَا وَمَا بَلَغْتُ
 الْعِشْرِينَ، وَهَا أَنَا ذَا قَدْ ذَرَفْتُ عَلَى
 السَّتِينَ، وَلَكِنْ لَا رَأْيَ لَمَنْ لَا
 يُطَاعَ.

does not feel cold like you? Rather, you are like the group who were commanded by the Prophet to go forth and fight in the way of Allāh but their leader said, ‘we cannot march in the heat.’ At which point the Almighty told His Prophet: *Say, ‘The fire of Hell is far hotter,’ should they understand (Q9:81)*” (T). The Imām then points

out that if they are afraid of the heat and cold, then they would be more likely to fear the swords of the enemy and flee therefrom (N).

5 In this final section of the sermon, Imām ‘Alī speaks about his own situation and how the behaviour of the people has affected him. He refers to them as those who resemble men (*‘ashbāh al-rijāl’*) in form and outward appearance, but are not real men (*‘wa lā rijāl’*) as they lack courage, magnanimity, and intelligence (MB). This phrase describes men who are cowards, lack manliness, and do nothing to protect their dignity. True men, according to Amīr al-Mu’minīn (as he described elsewhere), are those who remain patient at the loss of a child but could never remain patient when their honour is at stake (Z).

‘*Hulūm al-atfāl*’ is rendered *the acumen of children* since *hulūm* is understood as connoting acumen, discernment, or intellect (T). Some commentators, however, interpret *hulūm* here to mean aspirations since it derives from the root *ḥ-l-m* which literally refers to seeing a dream or vision, in which case the phrase could be translated *the aspirations of children* (N). By *cloistered women* (*rabbāt al-hijāl*) the Imām is referring to those women who remain in their domiciles and hardly ever come out, so they are unaware of what is happening in the world around them (R). Also, at that time, it was generally thought that women were not versant with the geopolitical situation and had little or no knowledge about government or warfare (MB). This state has also been alluded to in the verse: *‘Is it to be one who is brought up amid ornaments and cannot present a clear stand in disputes?’* (Q43:18) (T). Their behaviour led the Imām to wish that he had never known them, for being acquainted with them only *brought about regret and resulted in grief* (*jarrat nadaman wa d’qabat sadaman*). The term ‘*sadaman*’ connotes a mixture of sadness, regret, and anger (R).

Indeed, history attests that the people of Kūfah, and Iraq in general, brought nothing but heartache and disappointment to the Imām throughout the period of his caliphate, with their betrayal, defiance, and cowardice (N). Small wonder it is, then, that the Imām would supplicate against them. The expression *may Allāh assail you* (*qātalakumullāh*) is deemed to be an imprecation by some commentators, since it means that they will get utterly destroyed, as nobody can ever fight the Almighty Lord (M). However, some opine that the expression is not a supplication against the people; rather, it is only an exclamation that conveys astonishment (R). After describing how their defiance and inertness had left him frustrated and annoyed, the Imām depicts their continuous betrayal as their forcing him to *swallow*

mouthfuls of grief, one after the other ('*nughab al-tahmāmi anfāsan*'). The phrase *you vitiated my counsel* translates '*afsadtum 'alayya rā'yī*' but it can also be translated *you rendered my plans and strategies void* (N). The people had done this through their disobedience and desertion, yet the Quraysh thought that it was Amīr al-Mu'minīn who lacked the skill to strategize for war. This is because usually when people see any disorganization or misconduct in a community, they blame the leaders and do not consider that in many instances it is primarily the fault of the people, not of the leader (MB).

The idiomatic phrase '*lillāhi abūhum*' is used as an expression of praise or surprise (N). Here it is meant as an expression of amazement, as evinced by the question that the Imām subsequently poses. He asks if any of those who assume him inept in warfare can match his over forty-year experience in battle, and reminds them of how he started fighting while he was still a young man (Z). Though most of the narrations mention *before I was twenty* ('*wa mā balaghtu al-'ishrīn*'), al-Mas'ūdi reports a narration that reads *before I was thirty* ('*wa mā balaghtu al-thalāthīn*'). One commentator says that this seems more accurate because the first battle he participated in was the Battle of Badr, which was fought in 2 AH. Since the Imām was no less than ten years old when the Prophet's mission began, and the Prophet remained in Makkah for thirteen years, Imām 'Alī would have been about twenty-five years old during the first battle (T). Finally, the Imām says that despite all his expertise and experience, his plans remained ineffectual and futile because the people failed to obey him (M).



ON THE TRANSIENCE OF THIS WORLD AND SALIENCE OF THE HEREAFTER

1 Now then; verily this world has turned back and announced its departure, and the Hereafter has come forward and its approach is visible. Indeed, today is the preparation and tomorrow is the race. The place to run to is Paradise while the end [for the loser] is Hell. Is there no penitent one [who seeks forgiveness] from his sins before his death? Is there no doer [of good deeds] before the day of his wretchedness? Look, verily you are in the days of hope behind which stands death, so whoever acts during the days of his hope before his death comes, his action will benefit him and his death will not harm him. But he who fails to act during his days of hope, before his death comes, his [chance to] act is lost and his death will be detrimental to him.

2 Beware, and act in eagerness just as you act in fear. Indeed, I have not seen anything like Paradise with its seeker asleep, nor anything like Hell with its fleer in slumber. Look, he whom truth does not benefit suffers the harm of falsehood,

١ أَمَّا بَعْدُ، فِإِنَّ الدُّنْيَا قَدْ أَذْبَرْتُ،
وَآذَنْتُ بِوَدَاعٍ، وَإِنَّ الْآخِرَةَ قَدْ
أَقْبَلَتْ، وَأَشْرَفْتُ بِسَاطِلَاعٍ؛ أَلَا
وَإِنَّ الْيَوْمَ الْمِضْمَارَ، وَغَدَادِ
السَّبَاقَ، وَالسَّبَقَةُ الْجَنَّةُ، وَالْغَايَةُ
السَّارُ. أَفَلَا تَأْبِبُ مِنْ حَطِيَّتِهِ قَبْلَ
مَيِّتَهِ؟ أَلَا عَامِلٌ لِنَفْسِهِ قَبْلَ يَوْمِ
بُؤْسِهِ؟ أَلَا وَإِنَّكُمْ فِي أَيَّامٍ أَمْلِ
مِنْ وَرَائِهِ أَجَلٌ، فَمَنْ عَمِلَ فِي
أَيَّامٍ أَمْلِهِ قَبْلَ حُضُورِ أَجَلِهِ فَقَدْ
نَفَعَهُ عَمْلُهُ، وَلَمْ يُضْرِبْهُ أَجَلُهُ،
وَمَنْ قَصَرَ فِي أَيَّامٍ أَمْلِهِ قَبْلَ
حُضُورِ أَجَلِهِ، فَقَدْ حَسِرَ عَمْلُهُ
وَضَرَّهُ أَجَلُهُ.

٢ أَلَا فَاعْمَلُوا فِي الرَّغْبَةِ كَمَا تَعْمَلُونَ
فِي الرَّهْبَةِ؛ أَلَا وَإِنِّي لَمْ أَرْ كَالْجَنَّةَ
سَامَ طَالِبِهَا، وَلَا كَالسَّارَ نَامَ هَارِبِهَا؛
أَلَا وَإِنَّمَّا لَا يَنْفَعُهُ الْحَقُّ يَضُرُّهُ
الْبَاطِلُ،

and he whom guidance does not steer aright is drawn towards destruction by misguidance. Look, you have been ordered to depart and have been shown your provisions. Verily that which I fear most for you is following vain desires and having lengthy aspirations. So take provisions for yourselves from this world, of that with which you can safeguard yourselves tomorrow.

وَمَنْ لَا يَسْتَقِيمُ بِهِ الْهُدَى يَجْرِي
الضَّالَّلُ إِلَى الرَّدَى؛ أَلَا وَإِنَّكُمْ قَدْ
أَمْرُتُمْ بِالظُّفْنِ وَذَلِكُمْ عَلَى الرَّادِ.
وَإِنَّ أَحَدَكُمْ مَا أَخَافُ عَلَيْكُمْ: اتَّبَاعُ
الْهُوَى وَطُولُ الْأَمْلِ، فَشَرَوْدُوا فِي
الدُّنْيَا مِنَ الدُّنْيَا مَا تَحْرِزُونَ بِهِ
أَنْفُسُكُمْ غَدًا.

CONTEXT

About this sermon, al-Sayyid al-Rādī comments, “If there was any speech that could draw the necks towards abstemiousness in this world, and force people to act for the Hereafter, it is this sermon. It is sufficient to sever the entanglements of aspirations and to ignite the bright flames of good counsel and deterrence [from sin].” In his *Kitāb al-Irshād*, al-Shaykh al-Mufid states that this speech of Amīr al-Mu’minīn was well known among the scholars and many of them recorded it in their works (N). While describing this sermon, one commentator says such speech cannot flow except from a spring of divine inspiration and grace, and that in itself gives us a clear indication of the difference between the speech of Imām ‘Alī (*‘a*) and the orations of others (M). The exact context of this sermon is not clear. Some consider it to be part of sermon no. 45 of *Nahj al-Balāghah* which was delivered by the Imām on the day of Eid al-Fitr (M), or part of sermon no. 25 (N). Some narrators have relayed only parts of this sermon and say that it was delivered in Madīnah, soon after the people had pledged allegiance to Imām ‘Alī (T). The author of *Tamām Nahj al-Balāghah* states that this speech is part of a longer sermon titled ‘*al-Bālighah*’ which the Imām delivered on the first Friday of his caliphate, and the entirety of which does not appear anywhere in *Nahj al-Balāghah*.

COMMENTARY

1 *This world has turned back ('adbarat') and announced its departure* since everything in this world is temporary and will soon come to an end, including one's youth, strength, status, and wealth, for that is the nature of the world (M). In contrast, *the Hereafter has come forward ('aqbalat') and its approach is visible* since death, which is the first step to the afterlife, is continually taking people from this world, one after another, and this is something evident for all to witness (N). Indeed, from the day he is born, every breath he takes brings the human being one step closer to the Hereafter and takes him one step away from this world (T). *Today is the preparation* translates '*al-yawm al-midmār*' where the term *midmār* literally refers to the time or place where horses are prepared for racing by feeding them until they fatten before exercising them until they become lean and strong (*taḍmīr al-faras*) (N). The word *today* refers to a person's life in this world, and it is a *preparation* in that the human being has only this time to prepare himself for the Hereafter through God-consciousness and righteous deeds (MB). The Qur'ān also states: *Race towards forgiveness from your Lord and a paradise whose breadth is as wide as the heavens and earth, prepared for those who believe in Allāh and His Messengers* (Q57:21) (T).

Al-Sayyid al-Rađī says, "The most amazing words of this sermon are: *Indeed, today is the preparation and tomorrow is the race. The place to run to is Paradise while the end [for the loser] is Hell*, since besides sublime words, profound meaning, apposite analogy, and factual illustration, they contain a wonderful secret and a nuanced connotation. This is seen in his statement *the place to run to is Paradise while the end [for the loser] is Hell* where he juxtaposes two contrary words that convey two different meanings. He did not say, 'the place to run [from] is Hell' (*al-sabaqatu al-nār*) but rather said *the place to run to is Paradise* ('*al-sabaqatu al-jannah*') because one only races towards that which he likes and to something he seeks, and that is a quality of Paradise and cannot be applied to Hell – we seek refuge with Allāh from it! Hence it was not appropriate to say, 'the place to run [from] is Hell'; rather, he said *the end [for the loser] is Hell* ('*al-ghāyah al-nār*') since the end is something that one may or may not be pleased to arrive at, and it can thus be used for both matters together. In this case, it is akin to the terms destination (*al-maṣīr*) and return (*al-ma'āl*). Allāh, the Most High, says: *Say, Enjoy [for a while], for indeed your destination is hellfire!*" (Q14:30). It is not appropriate in this instance to say: '...for indeed your race is [from] hellfire' so ponder over that.

How wondrous is the inner meaning and how profound the depth [of his words], as is the case with most of his ('a) speech."

The rhetorical question *is there no penitent [who seeks forgiveness] from his sins before his death?* alludes to the verses of the Qur'ān regarding repentance and how it is only valid before the time of death (see: Q4:17-18) (T). Indeed, proper repentance is the precondition for a pious life of virtue (M). A famous tradition beautifully states, "He who repents from sin is like one who has no sin," and the Noble Prophet (s) is reported to have said, "Only one who considers himself to be a sinner is virtuous" (Z). In the same vein, the second question *is there no doer [of good deeds] before the day of his wretchedness?* seeks to awaken the conscience of the people to act before it is too late (N). Indeed, one who does not perform righteous acts in the world will end up wretched in the Hereafter (MB). Amīr al-Mu'minīn subsequently describes the life of this world as *days of hope* and says that those who work during their days of hope will benefit from their good deeds and will not be harmed by death. The expression *days of hope* is interesting because it indicates that hope is available throughout a person's life in this world, until the time of his death, so one can always repent, reform himself, and work to build his Hereafter (N). However, those who fail to do this are losers, since they squandered the only opportunity they had in the world. Hence, death brings with it loss, harm, and destruction for them as they are taken back to their Lord like the runaway slave brought back to his master (MB).

2 Imām 'Alī then tells the people to act in *eagerness* ('al-raghbah') just as they act in *fear* ('al-rahbah'), meaning that they should not be like most people who forget Allāh in times of joy and abundance, and only remember Him when they are afraid due to calamity or tribulation (M). It is quite natural for one to remember the Almighty and turn sincerely to Him when struck by a painful ailment, attacked by a powerful enemy, or on the verge of drowning. However, the Imām instructs the people to turn to Allāh with the same kind of sincerity even in times of prosperity and ease (I). As such, some commentators say the term '*al-raghbah*' here connotes comfort and ease while '*al-rahbah*' connotes hardship (Z). Imām 'Alī then expresses amazement at how those who seek Paradise or want to flee from Hell are asleep in their negligence. When a person has to travel for some important work, it is common to find that he spends sleepless nights in anticipation of his journey, just as a person would lose sleep over an impending hardship or calamity that he is threatened by – so it is quite surprising that when

it comes to the ultimate reward and punishment, people remain neglectful and heedless (N). One who does not derive benefit from truth by following it ends up suffering the harm of falsehood, which drives him towards perdition. Similarly, one who is not steered aright by guidance is drawn towards destruction by misguidance, because the former takes one towards the light while the latter leads to darkness and ignorance (MB).

Since truth and guidance automatically bring benefit while falsehood and misguidance cause harm, the Imām is actually advising the people to pursue that which is beneficial for themselves and eschew that which would harm them (M). The statement *you have been ordered to depart and have been shown your provisions* alludes to the inescapable reality of death and is a reminder to the audience to prepare their provisions for the Hereafter. The provisions that have been shown to the people consist of faith, virtuous actions, and Godwariness, as clearly mentioned in the Glorious Qur'ān (N). Amīr al-Mu'minīn ('a) then mentions two things that he fears most for the people, namely *following vain desires* ('ittibā' al-hawā') and *having lengthy aspirations* ('tūl al-amal'). The Imām mentions these two qualities specifically because they are the main reasons why people are turned away from thinking about the Hereafter and neglect to prepare what they will require in the afterlife (M). Imām 'Ali himself states why these two qualities are detrimental for the believers in sermon no. 42, where he says that following vain desires hinders people from the truth and lengthy aspirations make them forget the Hereafter (N). Finally, the Imām once again urges the people to gather the provisions that would help them safeguard themselves in the next world. These provisions can only be acquired through knowledge and action, both of which depend on the physical body in this earthly realm, hence the use of the phrase '*fa tazawwadū fi al-dunyā min al-dunyā*', which literally means 'so take in this world from this world' (MB).



CENSURING THE LANGUID APATHY AMONG HIS FOLLOWERS

1 O people, you are together physically yet you desire different things. Your [impassioned] talk can shatter even the hardest rocks, yet your action fills your enemy with avidity concerning you! In your sittings you make [huge] claims that you would do this and that, but when the time to fight comes, you [flee and] shout “Turn thee away!” The one who calls you [to fight] is left without a response, and the heart of one who endures you has no solace. The excuses [your make] are illogical, and you ask me for an extension like a debtor who delays repayment.

2 Those who lack courage cannot ward off injustice, and one's right cannot be acquired except through struggle! Which other house besides your own home would you defend? And under which other leader besides me would you fight? By Allāh, beguiled is he whom you have deceived. Whoever wins you [and your support] has won the losing arrow, and whoever uses you to attack [the enemy] has shot a broken arrow [at them].

أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ، الْمُجْمِعَةُ أَبْدَانُهُمْ،
الْمُخْتَلِفَةُ أَهْوَاؤُهُمْ، كَلَامُكُمْ يُوهِي
الصُّمَّ الصَّلَابَ، وَفُكُكُمْ يُطْمِئِنُ
فِي كُمُّ الْأَغْدَاءِ! تَقُولُونَ فِي
الْمَجَالِسِ: كَيْتَ وَكَيْتَ، فَإِذَا جَاءَ
الْقِتَالُ قُلْتُمْ: حِيدِي حِيدِي! مَا عَرَزْتُ
دَعْوَةً مِنْ دَعَاكُمْ، وَلَا اشْتَرَحَ قَلْبُ
مِنْ قَاسَاكُمْ، أَعَالِيلٌ بِأَضَالِيلِ،
وَسَالَّثُونِي الطَّوِيلِ، دَفَاعٌ ذِي
الَّدَّيْنِ الْمَطْوُلِ.

لَا يَمْنَعُ الصَّمِيمَ الْذَّلِيلُ، وَلَا
يُدْرِكُ الْحَقُّ إِلَّا بِالْجِدِّ! أَيَّ دَارِ
بَعْدَ دَارِكُمْ تَمْنَعُونَ؟ وَمَعَ أَيِّ
إِمَامٍ بَعْدِي تُقَاتِلُونَ؟ الْمُعْرُوزُ
وَاللَّهُ مَنْ غَرِّشَمُوهُ، وَمَنْ فَازَ
بِكُمْ فَقَدْ فَازَ بِالسَّهْمِ الْأَحْيَى،
وَمَنْ رَمَى بِكُمْ فَقَدْ رَمَى بِأَفْوَقِ
نَاصِلِ.

٣ By Allāh! I now neither believe your words nor expect your support, nor would I challenge the enemy with you. What is your problem? What is your remedy? What is your cure? These people are also men like you. Is it [for you] mere talk without knowledge, negligence with no piety, and yearning without merit?!

أَضْبَحْتُ وَاللَّهُ لَا أَصْدِقُ قَوْلَكُمْ،
وَلَا أَطْمَعُ فِي نَصْرِكُمْ، وَلَا أُوْعِدُ
الْعُدُوَّ بِكُمْ. مَا بِالْكُمْ؟ مَا دُوَافُكُمْ؟
مَا طِبُّكُمْ؟ الْقَوْمُ رِجَالٌ أَمْ إِنْجَالٌ
أَفَوْلًا بِغَيْرِ عِلْمٍ، وَعَفْلَةٌ مِنْ غَيْرِ
وَرَعٍ، وَطَمَعاً فِي غَيْرِ حَقٍّ؟!

CONTEXT

This sermon was delivered by Amīr al-Mu'minīn ('a) after Mu'awiyah's cohort al-Dahhāk ibn Qays raided a Ḥajj caravan subsequent to the arbitration that followed the Battle of Ṣiffin. In it the Imām urges his companions to rise up and counter the activities of the enemy in their vicinity. Some scholars consider this oration to be part of sermon no. 27 since both sermons address the languid reaction of the Kūfans when they learnt about the attacks by Mu'awiyah's henchmen (MB). Disappointed by their indifference, the Imām attempted to rouse them out of their slumber and heedlessness so as to make them understand the seriousness of the threat they were facing (N). After the ruse of arbitration, Amīr al-Mu'minīn once again began preparing to fight against Mu'awiyah, but when the latter received news of this he was terrified. In order to instil fear into the hearts of Imām 'Alī's subjects, he sent some people to carry out raids, giving them orders to kill and loot without any compunction. One of the people he sent was al-Dahhāk ibn Qays, instructing him to march towards Kūfah and attack any followers of 'Alī ('a) he encountered on the way. Al-Dahhāk led a contingent of about four thousand soldiers and marched towards Kūfah, looting and pillaging all those who had pledged allegiance to Imām 'Alī on the way, and killing many. He did not even spare the pilgrims of a Ḥajj caravan whom he encountered. He was also responsible for killing 'Amr ibn 'Umays, the cousin of the famous companion 'Abdullāh ibn Mas'ūd.

When news of this reached Amīr al-Mu'minīn, he called on the people to rise up and face the invading enemy, but when he found them hesitant and unwilling

to take up arms, he delivered this sermon (I). It is noteworthy, however, that some commentators have questioned this context and suggested that it is possible the sermon was delivered at a different juncture, since many of the other early sources that mention this sermon do not say that it was delivered after the raid by al-Ḍahḥāk (T).

COMMENTARY

1 The fact that they were *together physically* ('al-mujtami'atū abdānuhum') yet *desire different things* ('al-mukhtalifatu ahwā'uhum') accounted for their weakness in defending themselves against the enemy (N). Their words were discordant with their actions because if one were to hear them speak, their impassioned speech would lead him to believe that they are great champions in battle. Their talk would inspire even those with the hardest of hearts, represented symbolically here by hard rocks ('al-ṣumm al-ṣilāb') which are shattered thereby ('yūhi' lit. weakens), but in reality they lack substance (M). Because of this behaviour, the enemy is filled *with avidity* ('yuṭmi'u') and cannot wait to attack them, being aware that they are all talk and have no real courage to face them, and will thus be easy to defeat and plunder (N). While alone in their gatherings, they make gargantuan claims that they will do *this and that* ('kayta wa kayt'), but when the time to fight comes, they flee shouting, "*turn thee away!*" ('hīdi hayād'). The phrase 'hīdi hayād', like *fīhī fayāḥ*, is an imperative that means "turn away from me" and was usually uttered by those who fled from battle (R). Because of their cowardice, the one who calls them to fight is *left without a response* ('mā 'azzat' lit. not empowered) and sees no nobility or courage from them.

The heart of one who endures you has no solace translates '*lā istarāha qalbu man qāsākum*', however some commentators have interpreted '*qāsākum*' as referring to force or coercion, in which case the translation would be *the heart of one who compels you [to fight] has no solace*. This is because he knows that they might flee or turn against him at any moment; and that was why the Imām tried to convince them to rise up rather than forcing them to fight (Z). Amīr al-Mu'minīn then describes their excuses for avoiding battle as lame and illogical, and compares them to the debtor who delays repayment of a loan without good reason. The phrase *and you ask me for an extension* ('wa sa'altumūnī al-taṭwīl') is not present in some manuscripts of *Nahj al-Balāghah* (T).

2 Those who lack honour and courage cannot ward off injustice, and it has always been the wont of the tyrants and despots of the world to trample upon the timid and weak, without any compassion. Hence, the only way to get justice and acquire one's rights is through struggle ('al-jidd'). Rights must be demanded and taken by force if necessary. This is because the nature of this world is such that all kinds of impediments are placed between a person and his goal, so if one lacks determination and makes no effort, he will never achieve his goal (N). The rhetorical question *which other house besides your own home would you defend?* either means they would be in no position to defend the frontiers of Islam (*dār al-islām*) if they cannot even defend their lands in Iraq (MB), or that if they cannot bring themselves to defend their own lands, where they have respect and independence as a blessing from the Almighty, then no other kind of defence could be expected from them (M). Similarly, the question *under which other leader besides me would you fight?* is rhetorical since they would not fight under any other leader because they do not wish to fight at all. They prefer ease and comfort instead (Z). The way the Kūfans had treated Amīr al-Mu'minīn was recorded in history and even decades later, when 'Adī ibn Arṭāh wrote to the Umayyad caliph 'Umar ibn 'Abd al-'Azīz complaining of the disobedience of the people of Kūfah, the latter replied, "Do not expect the obedience of those who abandoned 'Alī ('a) while he was an accepted Imām" (T).

One who is deceived by them is surely beguiled ('al-maghrūr') since they are not true to their word and they look for any excuse to flee from battle. After all the covenants and pledges they had broken, anyone who relied upon them had truly been deceived (M). Their example is like that of *the losing arrow* ('al-sahm al-akhyab') among the gaming arrows that were used as a form of gambling and divination by the Arabs. If anyone picked the losing arrow, it meant that they lost the chance of getting a share of the reward and ended up losing any amount they had invested. The analogy of the losing arrow is meant to depict how any expectation of victory through the support of such individuals is bound to lead to disappointment and failure (N). The paradoxical phrase '*won the losing arrow*' is similar to the Qur'ānic verse: *So give them glad tidings of a painful punishment* (Q84:24) (T). '*Afwaqa nāṣilin*' is translated *broken arrow* since it refers to an arrow with a broken tip (*afwaq*) such that it has no arrowhead, as well as a broken fletching (*nāṣil*), thereby rendering it entirely useless (R).

3 Addressing the people, Amīr al-Mu'minīn expresses his disappointment directly saying, *I now neither believe your words nor expect your support, nor would I challenge the enemy with you.* This was after he saw how these people had repeatedly failed to act (T). It is naturally understandable for anyone to mistrust people who always break their word, as the Arabs say “*inna al-khadhūba lā yaṣduq* (the pathological liar can never be trusted)” (M). As such, the Imām could not rely on them so their support was futile, and depending on them to fight the enemy would have been unwise since they were cowards who could easily be thwarted (Z). The three questions *what is your problem? what is your remedy? and what is your cure?* are meant to upbraid and reproach the people for their problematic behaviour which was caused by some kind of ailment that needed to be remedied (M). The Imām then reminded them that the enemy's ranks are comprised of *men like you* ('*rijālun amthālukum*') who bleed like them and who suffer pain as they do. In the past, it was common for the defeated armies to portray their enemies as being something superior to regular human beings in order to justify their defeat (T). The Imām dismisses this notion by saying that the enemy is only human, with the difference being that they are disciplined and obedient to their commander, unlike his cowardly, disobedient subjects (N).

Is it [for you] mere talk without knowledge translates ‘*aqwālan bighayri 'ilm*’ and refers to their talk about how bravely they would fight against the enemy while they actually never intended to fight (MB). Alternatively, it could be a general reference to their speech, which was based on ignorance rather than knowledge and understanding (N). Some commentators say that “*ilm*” here refers to action (*'amal*). Accordingly, the translation would be *is it [for you] mere talk without action?* (Z). This reading is based on other narrations and seems to be more appropriate given the context (MB). They suffered from *negligence with no piety* since they had abandoned the path of Godwariness (*taqwā*) and fallen into the abyss of worldliness, which made them heedless and negligent (N). For this reason, they became greedy and desired that which they were unworthy of and that which was not their right. This could mean that they sought a greater share from the public treasury (*bayt al-māl*) in order to fight, just as Mu'āwiyah had given his soldiers money as an incentive (M). Some commentators interpret the last phrase as their yearning for victory or being counted among the ranks of the triumphant without being worthy of it, as they had done nothing that was required to merit such a status (N).



ON THE ASSASSINATION OF UTHMĀN

- 1 Had I enjoined it, I would have been a killer, but if I forbade it, I would be considered a supporter. Yet he who supported him cannot now say, 'I am better than the one who deserted him,' and he who deserted him cannot now say, 'He who supported him is better than me.' So let me summarize his case for you. He appropriated [wealth and power] and did so inequitably, you revolted [against him] and did so inordinately. With Allāh lies the final judgment between the appropriator and the revolter.

١ لَوْ أَمْرَتُ بِهِ لَكُنْتُ قَاتِلًا، أَوْ نَهَيْتُ عَنْهُ لَكُنْتُ نَاصِرًا، غَيْرَ أَنَّ مَنْ نَصَرَهُ لَا يُسْتَطِعُ أَنْ يَقُولَ: حَذَلَهُ مَنْ أَنَا حَيْرٌ مِنْهُ، وَمَنْ حَذَلَهُ لَا يُسْتَطِعُ أَنْ يَقُولَ: نَصَرَهُ مَنْ هُوَ حَيْرٌ مِنِّي. وَأَنَا جَامِعٌ لِكُلِّ أَمْرٍ: اسْتَأْثِرُ فَأَسَاءَ الْأَشْرَةَ، وَجَزِعْتُمْ فَأَسَأْتُمُ الْجَرَعَ، وَلَلَّهِ حُكْمٌ وَاقِعٌ فِي الْمُسْتَأْثِرِ وَالْجَانِعِ.

CONTEXT

This is a sermon in which Amīr al-Mu'minīn (*a*) elucidates the event of Uthmān's assassination (*'fi ma'nā qatl Uthmān'*), and presents his assessment of the actions of Uthmān and of the people, before dissociating himself from those who killed him. It is evident that during the final days of his reign, people had become fed up with Uthmān's nepotism and extravagance, and rose up in protest. Seeing this, none of his supporters were ready to stand by him and they remained silent as mobs descended on his residence and killed him. However, after his assassination, a group of people began claiming that he should not have been killed. Rather, he should have been given an opportunity to repent and make up for his past mistakes. At most, he could have been removed from power as killing him in such a manner would set a bad precedent. Furthermore, killing him opened a door for the hypocrites to foment dissent and division among the Muslims. A

third group of individuals, who had little knowledge about the reality of the situation, considered the third caliph to be an oppressed martyr and absolved him of any and all wrongdoing. In this sermon, the Imām clarifies the correct position among these three and succinctly explains what transpired (N).

Some scholars consider this sermon to be part of a letter which the Imām wrote in order that it may be read to the people when he was asked about his view of the earlier caliphs, after Mu‘āwiyah had conquered Egypt and Muḥammad ibn Abī Bakr had been killed (T). Others opine that these words were spoken by the Imām in response to the accusation made by Mu‘āwiyah against him, claiming that he was responsible for the caliph’s assassination (M). It is also possible that the Imām spoke these words and then wrote them down as part of a longer letter that would be read out to the people (N).

COMMENTARY

1 By saying *had I enjoined it, I would have been a killer, but if I forbade it, I would be considered a supporter*, Amīr al-Mu’minīn (‘a) clarifies that he neither enjoined the assassination of ‘Uthmān nor forbade it; rather, he played no role whatsoever in the events that unfolded and eventually resulted in the caliph’s murder. If he had enjoined the assassination of ‘Uthmān, he would have become party to his killing and hence would be considered one of those who had a hand in his murder, albeit indirectly. On the other hand, if he forbade it, he would have been counted as one of his abettors and supporters. By disassociating himself from third caliph’s assassination, the Imām was denying the malicious accusation levelled against him by the likes of Mu‘āwiyah that he was responsible for ordering the killing of ‘Uthmān (MB). In fact, some historians have recorded that once the angry mobs had already gathered around the caliph’s home, Imām ‘Alī attempted to stop the people from harming him. He even sent his two sons al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn (‘a) to stand guard so that nobody would enter ‘Uthmān’s house. When the people cut off the water supply, Imām ‘Alī arranged for water to be sent to him. So when the Imām says that he did not forbid the killing of ‘Uthmān, some commentators conclude that he meant that he did not unsheathe his sword to fight off ‘Uthmān’s killers while at the same time doing nothing to encourage or facilitate his murder (N).

Others suggest that the Imām meant he was neither pleased by ‘Uthmān’s murder nor angered by it (T). Alternatively, some commentators posit the presence of an elided phrase which states: ‘*But I forbade the mobs...*’ before the statement *if I forbade it, I would be considered a supporter*, thereby giving the impression that the Imām had supported him (M). However, this opinion does not seem correct since the Imām clearly states that ‘Uthmān had erred in the way he appropriated the wealth of the Muslims. The reason why one who supported ‘Uthmān could not say *I am better than the one who deserted him*’ is because there were many great companions of the Prophet present in Madīnah when ‘Uthmān was killed, and they all abandoned him. As for those who supported him, they were his viziers and family members who had wrongfully been given a greater share from the public treasury. Hence it could not be said of any such person, *he who supported him is better than me*’ (Z). The Imām then proceeds to summarize the case of ‘Uthmān’s murder for the people, noting that both the caliph and his killers were wrong. The phrase ‘*ista’tharafa asā’ l-atharah*’ has been translated as *he appropriated [wealth and power] and did so inequitably* since the verb ‘*ista’thara*’ literally means according preferential treatment and taking arbitrary decisions in one’s own interests.

When it comes to leadership, it refers to an autocratic ruler who makes decisions without consultation or considering the interests of all his subjects (N). This kind of leadership led to misappropriation of the wealth of the Muslims, nepotism, and corruption, all of which resulted in discontent among the people, and this gradually boiled over, turning into an all-out revolt. That was clearly ‘Uthmān’s own fault. However, the Imām then says *you revolted and did so inordinately* because they exceeded the limits in the way that they treated ‘Uthmān. They deprived him of water while he was alive and prevented his proper burial after he was killed (T). Some commentators say that their revolt was carried out inordinately because they became unruly and killed him while they ought to have ousted him or imprisoned him instead of assassinating him (I). In the end, the Imām says that the final judgment between the people and ‘Uthmān rests with Allāh, since both had transgressed the limits (N).



A MESSAGE TO AL-ZUBAYR THROUGH 'ABDULLĀH IBN 'ABBĀS

1 Do not by any means meet Ṭalḥah, for if you meet him you will find him like a bull with its horns bent. He rides a wild beast saying it has been tamed. Rather, meet al-Zubayr, for he is of a softer disposition, and tell him, “Your maternal cousin says to you, ‘You recognized me [as your leader] in Hijāz yet rejected me in Iraq? What changed between then and now?’”

١ لا تلقين طلحة، فما لك إن لقيت
تجده كالثور عاقصاً قرنة، يركب
الصعب ويقول: هو الذئول. ولكن
الق الزبير، فإنه ألين عريكة، فقل
له: يقول لك ابن خالك: عرفتني
بالحجاج وأنكرتني بالعراق؟ فما
عدا ممّا بدأ؟

CONTEXT

This is not technically a sermon; rather, it is part of a statement made by the Imām addressing 'Abdullāh ibn 'Abbās when he sent him to al-Zubayr ibn al-'Awwām, inviting the latter to return to his pledge of loyalty and obedience before the Battle of Jamal (N). A number of early scholars have mentioned this statement, albeit with slight differences, in their works. Before al-Sayyid al-Raḍī, individuals such as al-Zubayr ibn Bakkār (d. 256 AH), Ibn Qutaybah (d. 276 AH), and Ibn 'Abd Rabbih (d. 328 AH) have all reported it in their respective works. Interestingly, even Ibn Khallikān (d. 681 AH), who was famous for raising doubts about the authenticity of *Nahj al-Balāghah*, has narrated this statement in his work *Wafayāt al-A'yān*, and has testified to its authenticity (N). The Imām was al-Zubayr's cousin since the latter's mother was Ṣafiyah bint 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib, the sister of Abū Ṭālib (R). Ibn Bakkār says that when Ibn 'Abbās delivered the Imām's message to al-Zubayr, his son 'Abdullāh was seated by his side and upon hearing the message he retorted, “Tell him the blood of the caliph lies between us and him...” (T). This is, in all likelihood, why Amīr al-Mu'minīn is reported to have said that al-Zubayr was part of the Ahl al-Bayt until his evil son came of age and misguided his father. It is

further reported that on the day of the battle, the Imām spoke to al-Zubayr alone and reminded him that the Prophet (s) had said to him, “You will surely fight against ‘Alī while being an oppressor against him!” Upon hearing these words, al-Zubayr realized his mistake and left the battlefield. However, he was followed by one of the enemy soldiers and killed at Wādī al-Sibā‘, about five miles from Baṣrah. Ṭalḥah, on the other hand, was one of the instigators in the revolt against ‘Uthmān and he was killed in the Battle of Jamal by Marwān ibn al-Hakam, who was a soldier in his own army. Marwān gave the excuse that he was avenging the blood of ‘Uthmān by killing Ṭalḥah. In this way, both al-Zubayr and Ṭalḥah ironically met their doom at the hands of the very same people they brought to fight against Amīr al-Mu’minīn (*a*) (Z).

COMMENTARY

1 This statement is one example of how the Imām tried his best to exhaust all means of peaceful resolution before fighting against those who had rebelled and broken their pledge of allegiance to him (N). When he told Ibn ‘Abbās to avoid Ṭalḥah, it was because of a specific reason that was known only to him. However, he did say that it was generally because there was no hope that Ṭalḥah would realize his mistake and change his stance. This is because he was *like a bull with its horns bent* (*‘kal-thawri ‘āqīṣan qarnahu*’), which literally describes a bull that has prepared to attack by lowering its head so that its horns are curved towards its enemy. The horns symbolize bravery, but the fact that they are bent shows that Ṭalḥah was ready to fight the Imām and his obduracy would prevent him from being swayed by admonition (M). It should be noted that it was quite common for people to compare others to certain kinds of animals due to their particular character traits, many of which are symbolized by specific animals. For example, a donkey is known for its foolishness and obstinacy, so in many cultures a person who behaves foolishly or stubbornly is called a donkey. The Qur’ān also uses the example of animals to describe certain kinds of people (J). Some commentators have interpreted the phrase *he rides a wild beast saying it has been tamed* (*‘yarkabu al-ṣa‘ba wa yaqūlu huwa al-dhalūl’*) to mean that he would regularly embark on a difficult and problematic task claiming that it was easy or unimportant (J). This behaviour reflects the quality of arrogance and conceit which Ṭalḥah was known for.

Some reports suggest that he developed this trait after acquiring booty from the Battle of Uhud, which led to his becoming affluent (I). Before the battle, Imām ‘Alī had attempted to dissuade both Ṭalḥah and al-Zubayr from fighting, but while Ṭalḥah responded harshly, al-Zubayr displayed some hesitation (T). It is probably for this reason that the Imām sent Ibn ‘Abbās to al-Zubayr only. When he asked Ibn ‘Abbās to tell al-Zubayr *your maternal cousin says to you...* the Imām was actually reminding al-Zubayr about their relationship, just like Hārūn said to Mūsā when he saw the signs of anger on his face, ‘*O son of my mother! Do not hold my beard or my head!*’ (Q20:94), thereby reminding him of their fraternal bond (I). About the final phrase ‘*mā ‘adā mimmā badā*’, al-Sayyid al-Rađī states that he heard this expression for the first time from Amīr al-Mu’minīn (‘a). We have translated it as *what changed between then and now?* and since “*adā*” here means ‘to turn away’ (ṣarafa), the meaning of the question being posed is: what has come about to prevent you from remaining loyal to your allegiance to me? (M). Interestingly, al-Shaykh al-Mufid narrates that Amīr al-Mu’minīn had sent Ibn ‘Abbās to ‘Āishah with a message containing the exact same expression: “You used to be the most vocal opponent of Uthmān, so what changed between then and now (*fa mā ‘adā mimmā badā*)?” (T).



32

CONDEMNING THE PEOPLE OF HIS TIME

THE IMPLICATION OF AN UNJUST ERA

معنى جور الزمان

1 O people, we are now in an era of deviation and a period of ingratitude, wherein the virtuous is deemed vicious and the oppressor keeps getting increasingly defiant [and ruthless]. We do not benefit from what we have learnt, we do not seek to discover what we are ignorant about, and we do not fear calamity until it befalls us.

أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ، إِنَّا قَدْ أَضَبَحْنَا فِي
دَهْرٍ عُودٍ، وَزَمْنٍ كُنُودٍ، يَعْدُ
فِيهِ الْمُحْسِنُ مُسِيئًا، وَيَرْدَادُ
الظَّالِمُ فِيهِ عُتُوًّا؛ لَا تَسْتَفِغُ بِمَا
عَلِمْنَا، وَلَا نَسْأَلُ عَمَّا جَهَنَّمَا، وَلَا
تَحْوَفْ قَارِعَةً حَتَّى تَحْلَ بِنَا.

CONTEXT

Amīr al-Mu'minīn gave this sermon in the masjid of Kūfah in the year 37 AH. However, some have claimed that this was actually Mu'awiyah's speech and they misattributed it to him just as they misattributed many other saying and sermons of Imām 'Alī to others. Al-Sayyid al-Rādī notes, "Some ignorant individuals have attributed this sermon to Mu'awiyah, but it is undoubtedly the speech of Amīr al-Mu'minīn 'Alī ('a). What comparison can there be between gold and clay, or between sweet and bitter water! This has been pointed out by the proficient guide and expert critic 'Amr ibn Baḥr al-Jāhiẓ, as he has mentioned this sermon in his book *al-Bayān wa al-Tabyīn*, and has also mentioned those who attributed it to Mu'awiyah. Then he offers an analysis of its meaning saying, 'This sermon more closely resembles the speech of 'Alī ('a) and accords better with his way of categorizing the people and describing their states, such as subjugation, disgrace, apprehension, and fear.' He also poses the question, 'When have we ever found Mu'awiyah, in any given situation, speaking of the path of ascetics or the way of the worshippers?'" Al-Rāwandī says that the reason for the misattribution of this sermon and others like it was that Mu'awiyah would send some of his people from

Syria to Kūfah in order to listen and record the Friday sermons of Imām ‘Alī. Then, he would deliver the exact same sermon himself on the following Friday, or at a later time, so that is what led to the confusion. In this oration, the Imām describes his time as an era of injustice, divides people into five categories, and then speaks about the importance of abstemiousness in the world. The sermon begins with a kind of admonition and ends with the same; and out of the five types of people mentioned, only one group is considered successful whereas the remaining four are misguided (R).

COMMENTARY

1 The phrase *an era of deviation and a period of ingratitude* translates ‘*dahrin ‘anūd wa zamanin kanūd*’ where ‘*anūd*’ refers to one who deviates from the path of truth (R), or is unjust (I). Some commentators say that since an era is a specific duration of time, it cannot be described with the qualities of sentient beings, so in reality this is a description of the people of that time (R). The term ‘*kanūd*’ means ingrate and one who is unthankful for blessings, and it also appears in the verse of the Qur‘ān: *Indeed man is ungrateful to his Lord* (Q100:6). In some manuscripts of *Nahj al-Balāghah* the word ‘*shadīd*’ appears in place of ‘*kanūd*’ and it has been suggested that ‘*shadīd*’ here connotes avarice, since this is what it means in the verse: *he is indeed avid in the love of wealth* (Q100:8). As such, the phrase ‘*zamanin shadīd*’ would be rendered *period of avarice* (I). The distinguishing features of this era are that in it *the virtuous is deemed vicious and the oppressor keeps getting increasingly defiant*. This points to a reversal or an obverse transvaluation of values where good is considered evil and evil as good. An example of this is seen in the story of Prophet Lūt where the people of his time wanted to expel him and his followers for being ‘too pure’ (see Q27:56) (N). Such a thing happens when most of the people are evildoers and evil becomes the norm, while good is uncommon (MB). Alternatively, some commentators suggest that when evil people do not perform good deeds due to laziness or indifference, they claim that those who do these virtuous acts are only trying to show off or have some other ulterior motive. As such they portray the good people as evil (M). When the evildoers outnumber the virtuous, injustice and oppression becomes rampant.

CATEGORIES OF WRONGDOERS

- 2 People are of four types: Among them is one who is only prevented from mischief on earth by his weak disposition, the dullness of his blade, and the paucity of his wealth. Then there is one who has drawn his sword and openly commits mischief, having rallied his cavalry and infantry. He has prepared himself [for it] and has ruined his faith in order to acquire some fragments [of this world], or gain command over a few troops, or sit on an elevated pulpit. Evil is the transaction where you consider this world a [fair] price for your soul in lieu of what there is with Allāh for you! And among them is he who seeks this world through actions [meant] for the Hereafter, and does not seek the Hereafter through the actions of this world. He presents himself as humble, takes small steps, tucks up his clothes, embellishes himself as trustworthy, and takes the veil of Allāh as an avenue to sin. Then there is the one who is held back from seeking power by his lowliness and lack of means. His state restricts him to his position so he bedecks himself with the facade of contentment and adorns himself with the attire of the ascetics, though

وَالنَّاسُ عَلَى أَرْبَعَةِ أَصْنَافٍ:
 مِنْهُمْ مَنْ لَا يَمْنَعُهُ الْفَسَادُ فِي
 الْأَرْضِ إِلَّا مَهَانَهُ نَفْسِهِ، وَكَلَّا لَهُ
 حَدَّهُ، وَنَصَرِيفُصُّ وَفْرِهِ. وَمِنْهُمْ
 الْمُضْلِلُ لِسَيِّفِهِ، وَالْمُعْلِنُ بِشَرِّهِ
 وَالْمُجْلِبُ بِخَيْلِهِ وَرَجْلِهِ، قَدْ
 أَشْرَطَ نَفْسَهُ، وَأَوْبَقَ دِيَةً لِحَطَامٍ
 يَنْتَهِرُهُ، أَوْ مَقْنَبٌ يُقْوِدُهُ، أَوْ مُبْرِ
 يَفْرُغُهُ؛ وَلِبِسْسُ الْمُشْجُرُ أَنْ تَرِي
 الدُّنْيَا لِفَسِكٍ ثَمَنًا، وَمَمَّا لَكَ
 عِنْدَ اللَّهِ عِوْضًا! وَمِنْهُمْ مَنْ
 يَطْلُبُ الدُّنْيَا بِعَمَلِ الْآخِرَةِ، وَلَا
 يَطْلُبُ الْآخِرَةَ بِعَمَلِ الدُّنْيَا، قَدْ
 طَامَنَ مِنْ شَخْصِهِ، وَقَارَبَ مِنْ
 حَطْوِهِ، وَشَمَّرَ مِنْ ثُوَبِهِ،
 وَزَحَرَفَ مِنْ نَفْسِهِ لِلْأَمَانَةِ،
 وَاتَّحَذَ سِرْتُرُ اللَّهِ ذَرِيعَةً إِلَى
 الْمُعْصِيَةِ. وَمِنْهُمْ مَنْ أَفْعَدَهُ عَنْ
 طَلَبِ الْمُلْكِ ضُئُولَةً نَفْسِهِ،
 وَانْفِطَاعُ سَبَبِهِ، فَقَصَرَتْهُ الْحَالُ
 عَلَى حَالِهِ، فَتَحَلَّى بِاَشْمَاءِ

he has never had any inclination towards these qualities, neither during the day nor at night.

الْفَنَاعَةُ، وَتَرَيْنَ بِلَيْسِ أَهْلِ
الرَّهَادَةِ، وَلَيْسَ مِنْ ذَلِكَ فِي
مَرَاحٍ وَلَا مَغْدَى.

Clearly, oppressors get increasingly defiant and ruthless when they attain power or gain authority, thereby bringing wealth and armies under their control enabling them to do as they please (Z).

Subsequently, the Imām highlights some of the qualities of the people of his era saying, *we do not benefit from what we have learnt and we do not seek to discover what we are ignorant about*. Not benefitting from knowledge means not acting upon it, and traditions tell us that a learned person who does not act upon his knowledge is like an ignorant individual steeped in the heedlessness of his ignorance (T). Some opine that in this particular context, the Imām is referring to those who know the wrongdoers and have learnt about their vile actions, yet do nothing to prevent them from causing mischief and corruption (Z). Not seeking to learn about what one does not know is equally reprehensible given the great value of knowledge. A tradition attributed to Imām Ja'far al-Ṣādiq ('a) states, "Verily people are only destroyed because they don't ask questions [to learn about what they know not]" (MB). Finally, the third quality Imām 'Alī mentions is *we do not fear calamity until it befalls us* meaning that people pay no heed to the warnings that they are given until it is too late, and this is because they lack foresight and understanding (M). It should be noted that the Imām changed the mode of address to the first person plural ('we') in these last sentences in order to avoid evoking a refractory response from the people. It is but obvious that the infallible Imām himself possessed none of these negative qualities (N).

2 Amīr al-Mu'minīn then divides the seekers of this world into four groups. This quadripartite division is not limited to any particular period in history; rather, it applies to all ages (N). The first category of people described by the Imām comprises those individuals who are only prevented from committing mischief and corruption on earth by their weak disposition, lowly status, lack of proper weapons, and paucity of wealth. The phrase *dullness of his blade* translates '*kalālatu haddihī*' and literally refers to a weapon which is ineffective, and this generally represents lack of strength and power. *The paucity of his wealth* translates '*naqdīdu*

wafrihi' since the term '*nadīd*' connotes something very little and is used to describe the few remaining drops of water that trickle down when the flow ends (N). Most of the people belong to this category since it is in their nature to perpetrate corruption and mischief in the land, but they are held back only due to lack of means. The moment they attain power and wealth, their true evil nature rears its ugly head (T). The second category comprises those who, unlike the first group, do not keep their evil intentions hidden. They openly perpetrate injustices and cause corruption in order to acquire some worldly gain. With swords drawn and troops rallied, they ready themselves to fight for what they seek at the expense of their faith.

Prepared himself translates '*ashrata nafsahu*' since the verb '*ashrata*' literally means marking something, and here it refers to marking oneself as a sign of readiness (N). The phrase *rallied his cavalry and infantry* is similar to what is mentioned in the verse of the Qurān where the Almighty challenges Shayṭān: *Instigate whomever of them you can with your voice; and rally against them your cavalry and your infantry...* (Q17:64), and implies expending maximum effort and employing all means at one's disposal (T). What is sought by these people is material benefit, which the Imām aptly describes as *fragments* ('*huṭām*') or debris with no real value, because just like withered plants are worthless in comparison to fresh green foliage, so too is worldly gain valueless in contrast to the virtuous deeds that bring everlasting reward in the Hereafter (M). The word '*minqab*', rendered as *a few troops*, is used to refer to between thirty and forty horsemen (T). Commanding such a contingent actually represents a form of power and authority over the people by which one can gain ascendancy and dominate them (Z). For such individuals, sitting on *an elevated pulpit* is a means of using religion to attain worldly objectives. Many a poet has described how pulpits weep when those who are unworthy sit on them. It is reported that when Saīd ibn al-Āṣ became the governor of Kūfah after al-Walīd ibn Uqbah – who became infamous for having led the people in the dawn prayer while intoxicated and ended up reciting four rak'ahs instead of two – he refused to sit on the pulpit until it was washed saying, "al-Walid was indeed filthy and impure!" (T).

By their actions, those belonging to this second group have sold their souls for the transient triflings of this world and have thus made a loss, as the Qurān states: *They are the ones who bought error for guidance, so their trade did not profit them, nor were they guided* (Q2:16). The third category comprises those who *seek this*

world through actions [meant] for the Hereafter instead of seeking the Hereafter through the actions of this world, meaning they outwardly behave as though they are pious and devoted believers, but they only do this in order to acquire what they desire of this world (M). In reality, the goal of the second group and that of this third group is the same. The only difference is that the former group use force and coercion to get what they want, while this group uses deception and subterfuge (N). They portray themselves as humble, dignified, and noble.

The phrase ‘*tāmana min shakhṣīhī*’ connotes a false display of humility, whereas taking small steps is a way of ostensibly exhibiting piety. They tuck up their clothes to show the importance they place on purity, and they embellish themselves in such a manner that it would appear they are completely trustworthy and upright (Z). These people, who represent themselves as righteous, commit evil actions in private, taking the veil of Allāh (‘*sitrallāh*’) as a way to sin without people knowing, since they know that Allāh is *al-Sattār* and veils the sins of His creatures from others (M). The fourth category consists of those who are only prevented from seeking power by their *lowness and lack of means*. The phrase ‘*du‘ūlatu nafsihī*’ connotes lowness, weakness, and inferiority. This group of individuals are constrained to their position so they adorn themselves with the facade of contentment and the attire of asceticism, even though they have never truly inclined towards these qualities. The terms ‘*marāḥ*’ and ‘*maghdā*’ refer to a place or time of travelling by night and by day, or the place where animals are kept at night and during the day time respectively (N). Alternatively, some suggest that the two terms refer to youth and old age respectively (R). When negated together, as seen here in the phrase ‘*laysa fi dhālikā min marāḥin wa lā maghdā*’, it means that though they act content and abstemious, they have nothing even remotely close to these two qualities in them (T). The difference between this fourth category and the first category is that while both are held back by their weakness, the first group does not turn their weakness into a pretentious show of piety like this last group (N).

THOSE WHO YEARN FOR ALLĀH

الراغبون في الله

- 3** Then there remain the [few] people whose gazes are lowered in remembrance of their return [to Allāh], and who are moved to tears by fear of the resurrection. They comprise the relegated loner, the fearfully subdued, the muzzled mute, the sincere supplicant, and the anguished sufferer, who have been obscured by fright and encompassed by disgrace. They are thus [plunged] in the sea of bitterness, their mouths shut and their hearts wounded. They exhorted [the people] until they got weary, they were subjugated until they became meek, and they were killed until their numbers diminished.

وَبِقَيْ رِجَالٌ غَضَّ أَبْصَارُهُمْ
ذِكْرُ الْمَرْجِعِ، وَأَرَاقَ دُمُوعُهُمْ
حَوْفُ الْمُحْشَرِ، فَهُمْ بَيْنَ شَرِيدٍ
ئَادٍ، وَخَائِفٍ مَقْمُوعٍ، وَسَاكِتٍ
مَكْعُومٍ، وَدَاعٍ مُخْلِصٍ، وَئَكْلَانَ
مُوجِعٍ، قَدْ أَحْمَلْتُهُمُ التَّقِيَّةُ
وَشَهِلْتُهُمُ الدَّلَلَةُ، فَهُمْ فِي بَحْرٍ
أَجَاجٍ، أَفْوَاهُهُمْ ضَامِرَةٌ،
وَقُلُوبُهُمْ قَرَحَةٌ، قَدْ وَعَظُلُوا حَشَى
مُلُوا، وَفَهِرُوا حَشَى ذُلُوا، وَقُتِلُوا
حَشَى قُلُوا.

BEING ABSTEMIOUS IN THIS WORLD

التزهيد في الدنيا

- 4** Let the world be less important in your eyes than dry tanning leaves and the tiny tufts of wool that fall off from a pair of shears. Take admonition from [the fate of] those who preceded you, before those who follow you take admonition from [what happens to] you. Reject its lowliness, for indeed it has rejected those who were more attached to it than you.

فَلَئِكُنَ الدُّنْيَا فِي أَعْيُنِكُمْ أَصْغَرٌ
مِنْ حَثَالَةِ الْقَرَاظِ، وَفُرَاضَةِ
الْجَلَمِ، وَأَعْطُوا بِمَنْ كَانَ
فَبِلَكُمْ قَبْلَ أَنْ يَتَحَظَّ بِكُمْ مِنْ
بَعْدَكُمْ، وَارْفَضُوهَا ذَمِيمَةً،
فَإِنَّهَا قَدْ رَفَضَتْ مِنْ كَانَ
أَشْفَقَ بِهَا مِنْكُمْ.

3 The individuals described here are not part of the blameworthy lot as they have not fallen prey to the evils of their time. Rather, they recognize the majesty of Allāh and know that this world is fleeting (T). The term ‘*al-marji*’ is interpreted by some to mean the grave (Z), while most commentators consider it to be a general reference to the return to Allāh after death. The first quality of this group of pious and righteous individuals is that their *gazes are lowered in remembrance*, meaning they do not look at what is forbidden or that which distracts them from Allāh (MB). Their second quality is that the fear of resurrection causes them to weep as they worry about leaving this world before securing their place in the Hereafter (M). The Imām then lists the five types of individuals who belong to this category. *The relegated loner* translates ‘*sharīdin nād*’ where ‘*sharīd*’ means one who has been expelled or has escaped (*tarīd*), and ‘*nād*’ refers to the one who is alone and separated from others (T). They are banished from society due to the dread felt by worldly people in their presence. ‘*Khāfiñ maqmū*’ is rendered *the fearfully subdued* since ‘*maqmū*’ means subjugated, defeated, and subdued. Those who desire this world are not satisfied by threatening them and constantly strive to harm them or get rid of them, that is why they always live in fear (N). ‘*Sākitin makūm*’ is translated as *the muzzled mute* because ‘*makūm*’ refers to one whose mouth is gagged such that he cannot speak (R).

Some commentators suggest that *the sincere supplicant* (‘*dā'in mukhlis*’) refers to one who earnestly prays for deliverance from the evil of tyrants (T). *The anguished sufferer* is in distress either because of the hardships he has to endure due to his faith or because of the oppression of tyrants (MB). All these individuals face a common fate as they are *obscured by fright* (‘*akhmalathum al-taqiyyah*’) and *encompassed by disgrace* (‘*shamilathum al-dhillah*’). Fearing the evil of tyrants, they have to conceal their true position and beliefs from the people, and as a result they end up being forced to remain on the sidelines. At the same time, they are encompassed by disgrace because every individual who is honourable in the sight of Allāh is deemed lowly in the eyes of His enemies (Z). As such, *they are [plunged] in the sea of bitterness, their mouths shut and their hearts wounded*. Some commentators suggest that the salty sea is a metaphor for this world since just as sea water cannot quench a person’s thirst, likewise the comforts of this world do not benefit one in the Hereafter (M). ‘*Afwāhuhum dāmizah*’ is rendered *their mouths shut* since *damaza* means remaining quiet and not talking (T). *Their hearts are wounded* because of all the evil and corruption they witness around them

which they are unable to prevent (N). Whenever they try to advise the people and admonish them, they receive no response and people are unwilling to listen to them, until they get tired of trying ('wa'azū hattā mallū') (M). They are subjugated and put under so much duress that they become weak and debilitated, either through imprisonment, torture, or other forms of cruelty. Some of them end up being killed and dying as martyrs, leading to a diminishing of their numbers ('qutilū hattā qallū') (N).

⁴ Amīr al-Mu'minīn ('a) then advises the people not to give undue importance to the transient abode of this world saying, *let the world be less important in your eyes than dry tanning leaves and the tiny tufts of wool that fall off from a pair of shears*. These analogies are extremely profound and thought-provoking. '*Huthālat al-qaraz'* refers to the offal of acacia leaves that are used for tanning animal hide and in the process become malodorous and fetid. '*Qurādat al-jalam*' refers to the tiny tufts of wool that fall off the clippers when one shears sheep, getting scattered on the ground, and are of no use to anyone. The first analogy evokes a sense of disgust and derision, while the second exemplifies complete lack of value. The Imām is thus trying to tell the people to consider this temporary world as less important even when compared to such things (N). The advice *to take admonition from those who preceded you before those who follow you take admonition from what happens to you* is aimed at making people heedful of the fact that nothing of this world lasts. Many who lived in the past were blessed with tremendous wealth and prosperity but when their time came, they had to leave everything behind, and the same will happen to everyone (M). The Glorious Qurān has repeatedly called for people to take a lesson from those who preceded them. For instance, regarding the pharaohs of Egypt it states: *How many gardens and springs did they leave behind! And fields and splendid places, and the bounties wherein they rejoiced! So it was; and We bequeathed them to another people. So neither the sky wept for them, nor the earth; nor were they granted any respite.* (Q44:25-29).

In the final statement of this sermon, the Imām urges the people to shun this world and *reject its lowliness* ('urfudūhā dhamīmah'), since the world has rejected those who were more attached to it than them. If it could last for anyone, this world would remain for those who love it the most, but it is the nature of this world to reject all those who love it. Hence, any intelligent person who realizes this would never get attached to it. In an interesting tradition, Prophet Ḥasan ibn 'Alī is reported to have said that he once saw this world in the form of an old woman, wearing all

forms of jewellery. He asked her, "Have you married?" She replied, "To so many that I have lost count!" "Have they all died or did they divorce you?" She said, "Rather, I killed them all!" Hearing this, Ḥasan (‘a) said, "Woe be to those who remain [enthralled by you], how can they not take a lesson from your previous husbands and how you destroyed each and every one of them!" (MB). Clearly, what the Imām means by 'the world' in these admonitions pertains to the material aspect of this world which is sought out by people who desire comfort and power, and not the worldly means through which people may attain a lofty station in the Hereafter (N).



WHEN HE CAME OUT TO FIGHT AGAINST THE PEOPLE OF BAŞRAH

1 'Abdullāh ibn 'Abbās said: I came to Amīr al-Mu'minīn ('a) at Dhū Qār while he was mending his sandal, so he asked me, "What is the price of this sandal?" I said, "It has no value!" He ('a) said, "By Allāh, it is indeed dearer to me than sovereignty over you, except in order that I may establish a right or prevent an injustice." Then he came out and addressed the people saying:

WHY THE PROPHET WAS SENT

2 Verily, Allāh sent Muḥammad (ṣ) [at a time] when none among the Arabs recited a book or claimed prophet-hood. He guided the people until he had settled them in their [proper] place and conveyed them to their salvation. So their state became upright and their society became stable.

فَالْعَبْدُ اللَّهُ بْنُ عَبَّاسٌ: دَخَلْتُ عَلَى أَمِيرِ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ بِذِي قَارِ وَهُوَ يَحْصُفُ نَعْلَةً، فَقَالَ لِي: مَا قِيمَةُ هَذَا النَّعْلِ؟ قَلَّتْ: لَا قِيمَةُ لَهَا! فَقَالَ عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ: وَاللهِ لَهِي أَحَبُّ إِلَيَّ مِنْ إِمْرَاتِكُمْ، إِلَّا أَنْ أَقِيمَ حَقًا أَوْ أَدْفَعَ بَاطِلًا. ثُمَّ خَرَجَ فَحَطَبَ النَّاسُ فَقَالَ:

حَكْمَةُ بَعْثَةِ النَّبِيِّ

إِنَّ اللَّهَ سُبْحَانَهُ بَعَثَ مُحَمَّدًا بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ وَلَيْسَ أَحَدٌ مِنَ الْعَرَبِ يُقْرَأُ كِتَابًا وَلَا يَدَعُ يَهُوَةً، فَسَاقَ النَّاسَ حَتَّى بَوَأْهُمْ مَحَلَّتَهُمْ، وَبَلَغُهُمْ مَنْجَاهُمْ، فَاسْتَقَامُتْ قَائِمُهُمْ، وَاطْمَأَنَّتْ صَفَاتُهُمْ.

CONTEXT

Amīr al-Mu'minīn ('a) spoke these words on his way to fight the people of Başrah who has rebelled. Ibn 'Abbās says that he came to the Imām at Dhū Qār, which was a place near Başrah. It is said that this was also the location of a battle between the Arabs and Persians, in which the former came out victorious (MB). In his *al-Irshād*, al-Shaykh al-Mufid gives a different account. He says that Imām 'Alī

delivered this sermon in al-Rabadhah, where a group of pilgrims had gathered and requested that he address them. It was here, he says, that Ibn ‘Abbās came to the Imām and found him mending his sandals. He informed the Imām that the pilgrims were waiting to hear from him. Imām ‘Alī finished mending his sandals then he came out and delivered this sermon (T). This oration discusses the wisdom behind sending Prophets as well as the Imām’s own merits. In it he also censures the rebels who rose up against him. Al-Sayyid al-Rađī relates this sermon twice in *Nahj al-Balāghah*, the other instance being in sermon no. 103. He notes that this was done because he found two separate narrations with slight differences. Some scholars have said that this shows how careful al-Sayyid al-Rađī was when quoting Amīr al-Mu’minīn, since he would not amalgamate two narrations that were similar. That was his methodology, as can be seen in a number of other instances as well (N).

COMMENTARY

1 The comparison of political authority to a worn-out shoe is extraordinary and unique. Human beings have always sought to gain dominance over others, even if it is over a single person. It is thus inconceivable to most people that a person would consider such authority to have so little value. Those who aspire to power usually have personal motives and seek to fulfil their own whims and caprice. They would go to great lengths and do absolutely anything to secure political leadership and authority. For Amīr al-Mu’minīn, however, such worldly ambition held no meaning and he only accepted the task of managing the affairs of the community in order to ensure that justice was upheld (J). Some commentators interpret the statement of the Imām regarding the caliphate being of less value in his eyes than his old shoe as demonstrative of his deep gnosis and closeness to Allāh (N). Traditions tell us that the Noble Prophet himself would also mend his shoes and in one report, he (ṣ) said that in the near future, Allāh would appoint someone whose heart is full of faith. When different companions asked about the identity of that individual, the Prophet said that he is the ‘mender of the sandal’ (*khāṣif al-na’l*), and at that very moment Imām ‘Alī was seen mending a sandal for the Prophet (T). Ibn ‘Abbās says that he met the Imām at Dhū Qār, which was a place near Baṣrah that either got its name from a spring of water with a colour that resembled tar (*qīr*) (MB), or from the battle fought by the tribe of Banū Shaybān

who owned the land (R). Given the context of this sermon, it has been suggested that when the Imām said he wished to *establish a right or prevent an injustice*, he was referring to his purpose in fighting the rebels in the Battle of Jamal (MB).

2 His statement that the Holy Prophet was sent at a time when *none among the Arabs recited a book or claimed prophethood*, was in reference to a heavenly book. Some commentators opine that this means the Arabs did not read any revealed scripture, because the Torah and Gospel that the Jews and Christians had with them were distorted and not the same scriptures that had been revealed by the Almighty (MB). Others say it means that most of the Arabs did not read or follow any of the revealed books, since they were polytheists (N). Yet others interpret the phrase as a reference to the general illiteracy which was prevalent among the Arabs at that time, as the Qurān says: *It is He who sent to the unlettered [people] a messenger from among themselves...* (Q62:2). Although they had not claimed prophethood, some of them were aware that earlier scriptures had foretold the coming of a Prophet. Umayyah ibn Abī al-Ṣalt was one such individual and when the Holy Prophet (ṣ) proclaimed his mission, Umayyah disbelieved in him out of jealousy because he was expecting to be appointed as the Prophet himself (T).

The Noble Prophet (ṣ) *guided the people until he had settled them in their [proper] place and conveyed them to their salvation* by rescuing them from their deviant beliefs and corrupt practices. He did this by awakening their intellects and enlightening their minds, thereby elevating their station, as well as propelling them towards virtue and righteousness (M). *Their state became upright* translates *fastaqāmat qanātuhum'*, where *qanāt* literally means spear, and represents strength and authority. As such, the literal translation of this phrase would be *their spears were straightened*, but some commentators say that this is a metaphor which connotes the transformation of their state to one of uprightness and strength (MB). Others suggest that it means they became calmer and more confident, since soldiers would embed their spears in the ground when they were no longer threatened by the enemy (N). '*Itma'annat ṣafātuhum'* is rendered *their society became stable* since *ṣafāt* refers to a large, smooth rock which is shaky and unstable. The phrase is therefore figurative and describes how the Arab society, which was previously unstable and volatile, became peaceful and stable after the Prophet (ṣ) came to guide them (M).

THE MERITS OF 'ALĪ

- 3 By Allāh, I would indeed charge after them until they had all fled. I neither showed weakness nor cowardice. This march of mine will also be the same. I shall surely split open falsehood until truth comes out of its side.

۳ أَمَا وَاللَّهِ إِنْ كُنْتُ لَفِي سَاقِيْهَا حَتَّىٰ
تَوَلَّتْ بِحَذَافِيرِهَا، مَا عَجَرْتُ وَلَا
جَبَّتُ، وَإِنَّ مَسِيرِي هَذَا لِمُلْهَمٍ،
فَلَا تَقْبَنَ الْبَاطِلَ حَتَّىٰ يَخْرُجَ الْحَقُّ
مِنْ جَنِيْهِ.

REBUKING THE REBELS

- 4 What have I to do with the Quraysh! By Allāh, I fought them as unbelievers and I shall fight them as dissenters. I stood facing them yesterday just as I do today! [By Allāh, the Quraysh are only vindictive against us because Allāh chose us over them, and when we allowed them into our domain, they became as the erstwhile [poet] said:

*By my life, you continued drinking fresh milk every morning,
And eating to your fill fine pitted dates with butter;
Yet we gave you the nobility which you did not possess before,
And surrounded you with thoroughbred horses and spears.]*

تبنيخ الخارجين عليه

۴ مَالِي وَلَقُرَيْشٍ! وَاللَّهُ لَقَدْ
قَاتَلُتُهُمْ كَافِرِينَ، وَلَا قَاتَلَهُمْ
مُقْتُلَوْنِينَ، وَإِنِّي لَصَاحِبُهُمْ
بِالْأَمْسِ كَمَا أَنَا صَاحِبُهُمُ الْيَوْمَ!
[وَاللَّهُ مَا تَنْقُمُ مِنَاقِرِيْشُ إِلَّا أَنَّ
اللَّهُ احْتَارَنَا عَلَيْهِمْ فَأَذْحَلْنَاهُمْ
فِي حَيْزِنَا، فَكَانُوا كَمَا قَالَ
الْأَوْلَى:

أَدْمَتَ لَعْمَرِي شُرْبَكَ الْمَحْضَ صَابِحًا
وَأَكْلَكَ بِالرُّبْدِ الْمُقْسَرَةَ الْبُجْرَا
وَنَحْنُ وَهَبْتَكَ الْعَلَاءَ وَلَمْ تَكُنْ
عَلَيْاً وَحُطَنَا حَوْلَكَ الْجُرْدَ وَالسُّمْرَا]

3 Here, the Imām describes his valour in battle against the unbelievers during the time of the Prophet. The phrase *I would indeed charge after them until they had all fled* explains how the Imām fought fiercely and fearlessly against the enemy (T).

Since the term ‘*sāqah*’ is used to refer to one who is positioned at the rearguard of the army in order to urge the soldiers forward and prevent them from retreating, some commentators interpret this phrase to mean that the Prophet had given Imām ‘Alī the responsibility to propel the Muslim army and push them forward in the fight against the disbelievers (N). Another possible meaning, based on the root *s-w-q*, is driving the people towards guidance and salvation, and since the purpose of all the battles was to strengthen the true religion by fighting the enemies and defeating them, that is precisely what the Imām achieved (M). He *neither showed weakness* (*‘mā ‘ajaztu’* or *‘mā ḥa‘uftu’* in some versions) in driving the army forward, *nor cowardice* in attacking them until they fled. Indeed, the heroism of Amīr al-Mu‘minīn is legendary in the history of Islam. He killed ‘Amr ibn ‘Abd Wudd in single combat in the Battle of Khandaq and unhinged the gate of Khaybar when no one else could.

Having reminded the people about his gallantry, the Imām said that his march against the rebels will be just like his battles for Islam during the time of the Prophet. The only difference was that the earlier encounters against the unbelievers were for the establishment of the revelation (*tanzīl*), while these battles against the hypocrites would be for the establishment of its interpretation (*ta‘wīl*) (T). By the statement *I shall surely split open falsehood until truth comes out of its side*, the Imām was issuing a threat to the enemy (M). Some commentators say that this statement shows how the hypocrites had obfuscated the truth to such an extent that it was as though the truth had been completely swallowed by falsehood, so it needed to be cut out from the belly of falsehood (T). A deeper reading of this could be that the cornerstone of creation is truth, so inside everything in existence truth can be found. Therefore, when falsehood covers it up, the truth can still be extracted by rending asunder the veils of falsehood (N).

4 The rhetorical question *what have I to do with the Quraysh* has been interpreted in various ways. Some consider it a reference to the enmity that the Quraysh had for Amīr al-Mu‘minīn and how they kept trying to look for excuses to fight against him (M). Others take it to mean that just as Quraysh had fought against the Prophet in the early days of Islam, they were the ones who were stoking the flames of rebellion against the Imām in the Battle of Jamal (N). The Imām then warns that he would fight them now as dissenters (*‘maftūnīn’*) just as he had fought them earlier when they were unbelievers. The term ‘*maftūnīn*’, which also means those who had strayed from the right path (Z), applied to them because they had rebelled

against the rightful leader and were causing corruption and dissent (I). By saying that he is standing against them today as he stood against them yesterday, the Imām was asserting the constancy of his position while at the same time threatening the enemy that he is the same brave lion from whom they had fled in the past battles (MB). The subsequent section is included in parenthesis because it is not considered part of the Imām's sermon by some commentators as it is not found in certain manuscripts (T).

The vindictiveness of the Quraysh against him, the Imām explains, was because Allāh chose the Banū Hāshim over the rest of them. Some commentators say that the phrase *allowed them into our domain* means that the Banū Hāshim kept their ties of kinship with Quraysh, but they in turn tried to sever the ties out of jealousy (Z). *The erstwhile [poet]* translates '*al-awwal*' and refers to one of the earliest known poets or, some commentators posit, the word may actually read '*al-Uwal*' which is the name of one of the lesser known poets, though this is less likely (N). The term '*al-mahd*' means pure milk while '*al-muqashsharah*' refers to pitted dates. '*Al-jurd*' is the plural of *al-ajrad* which refers to a horse with a fine, short mane and this was considered a praise. The term '*al-sumr*' is the plural of *al-asmar* which means spear (MB). Alternatively, it could refer to night sentries and guards who keep vigil to protect the people. In any case, the meaning of this poem is that the Quraysh were treated with kindness by the Banū Hāshim, through whom they received respect and protection. However, instead of showing gratitude, they took up arms and rallied the people against the Banū Hāshim (N).



MOBILIZING THE PEOPLE AGAINST THE SYRIANS

1 Fie on you! I have grown weary of censuring you! Do you prefer this worldly life in place of the Hereafter? And disgrace in lieu of dignity? When I call you to fight your enemy, your eyes roll as though you are in the stupor of death or a daze of intoxication. My speech is not heard by you, so you remain perplexed. It is as though you have lost your minds and do not understand. To me, you are no longer reliable, henceforth and for all time. Neither are you a support that can be depended upon, nor a mighty host that is sought.

2 You are only like camels whose herders have wandered off, so whenever they are gathered on one side, they disperse on the other. By Allāh, you are the worst lot when faced with the flames of war. You are the target of plots and do not scheme [against the enemy]. Even when attacked from all sides, you do not retaliate with fury. You are under constant watch [by a wakeful enemy] yet you are unmindful and heedless. By Allāh, defeated are those who abandon one another. By Allāh, I am certain that if the battle rages and

أَفْ لَكُمْ! لَقَدْ سَيْمَتُ عِتَابَكُمْ! أَرْضِيْمْ
بِالْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا مِنَ الْآخِرَةِ عَوْضًا؟ وَبِالدُّلْلِ
مِنَ الْعِرْ حَلَفًا؟ إِذَا دَعْوَتُكُمْ إِلَى جِهَادِ
عَدُوّكُمْ دَارَتْ أَعْيُنُكُمْ، كَانَكُمْ مِنَ
الْمَوْتِ فِي غَمْرَةٍ، وَمِنَ الدُّهُولِ فِي
سَكْرَةٍ؛ يُرَجُّ عَلَيْكُمْ حَوَارِي فَتَعْمَهُونَ،
وَكَانَ قُلُوبُكُمْ مَالُوسَةً، فَأَشْتَمْ لَا تَعْقِلُونَ.
مَا أَنْتُمْ لِي بِثَقَةٍ سَجِيسَ اللَّيَالِي، وَمَا أَنْتُمْ
بِرُكْنٍ يُمَالُ بِكُمْ، وَلَا زَوَافِرُ عَزْ يُفْتَرُ
إِلَيْكُمْ.

مَا أَنْتُمْ إِلَّا كَإِبْلٍ ضَلَّ رُعائِهَا،
فَكُلُّمَا جُيَعْتُ مِنْ جَانِبِ اِنْتَشَرَتْ
مِنْ آخِرٍ؛ لَيْسَ - لَعْمَرُ اللَّهُ - سُعْرُ
نَارِ الْحَرْبِ أَنْتُمْ. تُكَادُونَ وَلَا
تَكِيدُونَ، وَتُتَقْصُ أَطْرَافُكُمْ فَلَا
تَمْتَعِضُونَ؛ لَا يَنَامُ عَنْكُمْ وَأَنْتُمْ فِي
غَفْلَةٍ سَاهُونَ، غُلَبَ وَاللهُ
الْمَتَحَادُلُونَ! وَإِيمَنُ اللهِ إِنِّي لَأَظُنُّ
بِكُمْ أَنْ لَوْ حَمِسَ الْوَغَى، وَاسْتَحَرَ

death hovers above, you will separate from the son of Abū Ṭālib in the same way that a head is separated [from the body].

الْسَّوْتُ، قَدِ انْفَرَجْتُمْ عَنِ ابْنِ أَبِي طَالِبٍ انْفِرَاجَ الرَّأْسِ.

CONTEXT

Amīr al-Mu'minīn ('a) gave this sermon in order to urge and inspire the people to prepare for a second encounter with the Syrians after having defeated the *khawārij* at Nahrawān. In it, he expresses his disappointment at their negligence and lack of determination in countering the enemy. He also gives them advice and guidance on how to attain success. Though evidently Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd believes this sermon was delivered in Nahrawān, it has been reported that the Imām gave this oration after he returned to Kūfah when he saw signs of lassitude in his soldiers (N). Other commentators explain that after the victory at Nahrawān, the Imām insisted that the army should prepare to march against the Syrians without delay. That was because he knew that if they returned to Kūfah and took off their armour, it would be very difficult to motivate them to prepare for another battle. However, the soldiers began giving excuses such as the harshness of the weather, the presence of many wounded soldiers, and lack of sufficient weapons to fight the enemy, forcing the Imām to let them return to Kūfah. Upon their return, the Imām emphasized the importance of regrouping and preparing to fight the main enemy, but just as predicted, they procrastinated. It was at that juncture that the Imām delivered this sermon and expressed his disappointment (M). This oration has also been reported by earlier scholars such as al-Tabarī in his *Tārīkh* and Ibn Qutaybah in *al-Imāmah wal-Siyāsah*. Some scholars who mention this sermon say that the Imām initially tried to encourage the army to march towards Shām by quoting the verse: *O my people, enter the Holy Land which Allāh has ordained for you, and do not turn your backs or you will become losers* (Q5:21). However, they began complaining that the weather was too cold. The Imām then reminded them that the enemy would also suffer from the cold as they did, but they remained obstinate and were unresponsive. It is then that the Imām delivered this sermon (T).

COMMENTARY

1 The exasperation is palpable in the prefatory expressions of this sermon. This is because of the obvious threat that the enemies posed which was misunderstood and trivialized by the people. By these harsh words, the Imām sought to rouse them from their apathy (N). Despite having grown weary of censuring them, the Imām continued to do so because the enemy was actively raiding and attacking different towns at that time, and the Kūfan army was hesitant to go out and fight them. He could not remain silent when he was continually receiving word of the sacking of different cities by the Syrians (Z). In questioning whether they prefer this worldly life instead of the Hereafter and disgrace instead of dignity, the Imām was actually trying to revive their spirit of *jihād*, since struggling in the way of Allāh leads to reward in the afterlife and honour in this world (M). The description of how their eyes rolled when they were called to fight is reflected in the verse: *So when there is panic, you see them observing you, their eyes rolling, like one swooning upon [the throes of] death* (Q33:19). *The stupor of death or a daze of intoxication* is the state of one who loses his senses on the verge of death (MB), or having become inebriated. *My speech is not heard by you* translates ‘yurtaju ‘alaykum ḥawārī’, but given that the verb ‘yurtaju’ means being closed off, the phrase could also be translated *your speech is impeded and you cannot respond to me* (N). ‘Qulūbakum ma’lūsah’ is rendered *you have lost your minds* since a person is described as *ma’lūs* when he loses his sanity and becomes insane (T). The Imām tells them that he does not consider them reliable *henceforth and for all time*. ‘Sajis al-layālī’ is an Arabic expression that means forever (R). He further says that they are neither *a support that can be depended upon, nor a mighty host that is sought* because of their constant betrayal, dishonesty, and poor etiquette (M).

2 Amīr al-Mu’minīn compares them to *camels whose herders have wandered off* since they lack organization and unity, and cannot distinguish between what is beneficial and what is harmful, thereby making them easy prey for the enemy (N). He also considered them *the worst lot when faced with the flames of war* because they were not prepared to fight fire with fire when the enemy kept invading their lands. Some commentators suggest that the analogy of fire has been employed here as a reference to the hardship endured in battle (M). They were the *worst lot* for battle because of their attitude, which resulted in them becoming the targets of enemy plots while themselves being unable to scheme and plot against the enemy. Even when they were attacked from all sides, and their towns were sacked

and pillaged, they showed no anger and did not retaliate with fury ('*lā tamta'idūn*') (MB).

Despite being *under constant watch* by an enemy that does not sleep ('*lā yunāmu 'ankum*'), they remained unmindful and heedless. It is evident that one who remains oblivious to the actions of his enemy will face complete destruction and ruin. A leader with vision and insight who recognizes the danger would obviously try to warn his people and urge them to rise up against such a foe. One can only imagine how difficult and painful it was for Amīr al-Mu'minīn to deal with those who behaved with such apathy and indifference (N). The only outcome in store for those who abandon their brothers and turn a blind eye to the oppression of their enemies is defeat and humiliation. And this is something we also witness today as the Muslims suffer at the hand of their enemies despite their large numbers (Z). The Imām subsequently expresses his lack of confidence in the Kūfan army by saying that he is sure that if they faced difficulty in battle and sensed that death is near, they would abandon him and flee. The phrase '*infirāj al-ra's*' has been rendered *the same way that a head is separated [from the body]* and signifies a complete separation after which no reattachment or return can be expected (T). Some scholars have given details about the possible origins of this idiomatic expression, but they are all in agreement that it connotes a total separation (MB).

3 The vivid description of how the Kūfans had given their adversary an opportunity to overpower them clearly depicts their weakness, which had led the enemy to become ever more daring in their incursions and raids. Indeed, the bloodthirsty nature of the Syrian army led them to show no mercy whatsoever to the people of Iraq. They killed innocent civilians, including the aged, women, and children as they pillaged the cities, looting everything they could lay their hands on and destroying what they could not carry (N). *To tear off his flesh* translates '*ya'rūqu lahmahu*' which literally means eating away all the flesh, right until the bone. '*Yahshimu 'azmahu*' is rendered *crush his bones* since the verb *yahshimu* means to smash (T). The actions of the enemy described here are analogous to those of a butcher who slaughters an animal, skins it, separates its flesh, and chops its bones on the chopping block (N).

3 By Allāh, he who gives his adversary the opportunity to overpower him, to tear off his flesh, crush his bones and flay his skin, is truly helpless, and his heart, which is encaged within his chest, is weak. You may be this way if you wish, but as for me, by Allāh, before I allow that [opportunity to my enemy], I shall strike him with the *mashrafi* sword in such a way that his skull shatters and his arms and feet are dismembered. Thereafter, Allāh will do whatever He wills.

وَاللَّهُ إِنَّ أَمْرًا يُمْكِنُ عَدُوَّهُ مِنْ نَفْسِهِ،
يَعْرُقُ لَحْمَهُ، وَيَهْشِمُ عَظْمَهُ، وَيَفْرِي
جِلْدَهُ، لَعْظِيمٌ عَجْزُهُ، ضَعِيفٌ مَا
صُمِّتَ عَلَيْهِ جَوَانِحُ صَدْرِهِ。 أَنْتَ
فَكُنْ ذَاكَ إِنْ شِئْتَ، فَأَمَّا أَنَا فَوَاللَّهِ
ذُونَ أَنْ أُعْطِيَ ذَلِكَ ضَرْبٌ
بِالْمُشْرِفَةِ تَطِيرُ مِنْهُ فَرَاسُ الْهَامِ،
وَتَطْلِيعُ السَّوَاعِدُ وَالْأَقْدَامُ، وَيَفْعَلُ
اللَّهُ بَعْدَ ذَلِكَ مَا يَشَاءُ.

THE PATH TO SUCCESS

4 O people! I have a right over you and you have a right over me. As for your right over me, it is to sincerely counsel you, to expend your share of the public treasury for you, to teach you so that you do not remain ignorant, and to educate you so that you may know [how to act]. As for my right over you, it is loyalty in your allegiance, being well-wishers in [both my] presence and absence, responding when I call you, and obeying when I command you.

إِيَّاهَا النَّاسُ! إِنَّ لِي عَلَيْكُمْ حَقًّا،
وَلَكُمْ عَلَيَّ حَقًّ. فَأَمَّا حَقُّكُمْ عَلَيَّ:
فَالنَّصِيحَةُ لَكُمْ، وَتَوْفِيرُ فَيْئُوكُمْ
عَلَيْكُمْ، وَتَعْلِيمُوكُمْ كَيْلًا تَبَهُّلُوا،
وَتَأْذِيُوكُمْ كَيْمًا تَعْلَمُوا. وَأَمَّا حَقُّي
عَلَيْكُمْ: فَالْوَفَاءُ بِالْيَمْعِدَةِ، وَالنَّصِيحَةُ
فِي الْمَشَهِدِ وَالْمَغْيَبِ، وَالإِجَابَةُ
حِينَ أَذْعُوكُمْ، وَالطَّاعَةُ حِينَ
آمِرُوكُمْ.

The Imām says that anyone who would allow his enemy to do this to him is truly helpless and weak, for history has shown that people would rather give up their own lives than have their enemies oppress them in such a way (Z). Some

commentators note that the statement *you may be this way if you wish* was reportedly addressed to Ash'ath ibn Qays, but it is also likely that the Imām was talking generally to all those who would allow their enemies to overpower them in the manner he describes (MB). Amīr al-Mu'minīn swears that he, on the other hand, would never allow the enemy to subdue him in such a manner and would *strike him with the mashrafi sword ('darbun bil-mashrafiyyah')* before that happens.

The *mashrafiyyah* were swords that had been fashioned by the expert swordsmiths at Mashārif, which was one of the Arab villages in Yemen (R). The Imām says that he would strike the enemy with such force *that his skull shatters and his arms and feet are dismembered* because that is the ferociousness with which such bloodthirsty enemies must be fought. After trying his best to fight the enemy, the outcome of the struggle rests with Allāh, and *Allāh will do whatever He wills*. By saying this, the Imām was trying to inspirit those few individuals in the army who had some courage, and bring those who were hesitant among them to his side. And indeed, history attests to the effectiveness of these words and how they breathed new life into the people, motivating them to face the enemy (N).

4 Just as leaders have a right over their subjects, the subjects also have rights over their leaders. This is natural and has also been emphasized in religion, since the Lawgiver is also the Creator (Z). The Imām begins by mentioning the rights of the people over their leader because aside from having a positive psychological effect on the listeners, it demonstrates the importance of the masses in an Islamic government. This is unlike tyrannical monarchies where the rulers feel that they are entitled to rule over the people whom they deem their servants (N). Furthermore, by mentioning these mutual rights, the Imām was informing the people that he had done his duty and fulfilled their rights, but they had not reciprocated in kind (M). In fact, Imām 'Alī would go beyond what was required of him in fulfilling the rights of his subjects while they fell short in fulfilling his rights (T). The first right that people have over the Imām is that he should sincerely counsel them to do what is right and encourage them to espouse virtuous traits and perform good deeds (MB). The term '*al-naṣīḥah*' connotes sincerity and wishing someone well, which is why it is also used to describe good and sincere advice. Some commentators suggest that it could, in this instance, refer to planning a comprehensive system for the material and spiritual prosperity of the people, since the first step in actualizing the positive and sincere wishes a leader has for his people is to undertake such planning (N).

The second right people have over the Imām is that their share of the public treasury is fairly and correctly spent for their own benefit and comfort, not for anything else. The third right is teaching the people so that they do not remain ignorant. Notably, the Imām did not say that it is to teach them so that they become knowledgeable; rather, it is so that they come out of their ignorance. This is perhaps because the favour of saving someone from ignorance is greater and more salient than imparting knowledge to him. We can clearly evince this from how a person would feel if he was called ignorant in comparison to being told he was not learned (M). *To educate you so that you may know [how to act]* translates ‘ta’dībukum kaymā ta’lamū’ where the word *ta’dīb* connotes disciplining, refining, and educating. Some commentators opine that here, the word *ta’dīb* refers to disciplining the people through carrying out the punishments prescribed in religious law (*hudūd*) (Z). Others say that it refers to the general education, discipline, and training that leads to acquisition of better character (N). The Imām then lists his rights upon the people, the first one being unwavering loyalty. This is the most important right because it is only when people remain faithful to their pledge of allegiance and obedience that the government can function (MB). Secondly, just as the Imām sincerely wishes them well, they too must be his well-wishers, both in his presence and absence. That entails not permitting anyone to speak ill of the Imām and not acting as hypocrites who pretend to be loyal companions only to turn against the Imām at the first opportunity (N).

Finally, they must respond immediately when he calls them and obey when he commands them. It is evident that there can be no order in any society if the directives of the ruler are not followed. Though the Imām mentions these as his rights, it is clear that they are in reality beneficial for the people themselves (M).



AFTER THE ARBITRATION

PRAISE DURING TRIALS

- 1 All praise belongs to Allāh, even though time has brought with it an onerous encumbrance and a grievous calamity. I bear witness that there is no god but Allāh, the One, with no partner and no other god besides Him, and that Muḥammad is His servant and His Messenger (may the blessings of Allāh be upon him and his progeny).

THE CAUSE OF CALAMITY

- 2 Now then; verily disobeying the caring well-wisher who is knowledgeable and experienced brings about regret and results in remorse. I had instructed you what to do in this arbitration and sincerely shared with you my personal opinion; if only Qaṣīr's directions were followed! But you turned against me like defiant dissidents and rebellious mutineers, until the well-wisher began to doubt his counsel and the flint withheld its spark. Consequently, my position in relation to you became as the poet of Hawāzin said:

I gave you my instructions at

Mun'araj al-Liwa,

الحمد على البلاء

١ الحمد لله وإن أثني اللهم
بِالْحَطْبِ الْفَادِحِ، وَالْحَدَثِ
الْجَلِيلِ، وَأَشْهُدُ أَنْ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللهُ
وَحْدَهُ لَا شَرِيكَ لَهُ، لَيْسَ مَعْهُ
إِلَهٌ عَيْرُهُ، وَأَنَّ مُحَمَّداً عَبْدُهُ
وَرَسُولُهُ ﷺ.

سبب البلوى

٢ أَمَا بَعْدُ، فَإِنَّ مَعْصِيَةَ النَّاصِحِ الشَّفِيقِ
الْعَالِمِ الْمُعْجَرِبِ ثُورِثُ الْحَسَرَةِ،
وَتُعْقِبُ النَّدَامَةَ، وَقَدْ كُنْتُ أَمْرُكُمْ
فِي هَذِهِ الْحُكُومَةِ أَنْزِي، وَتَخَلَّتُ
لَكُمْ مَحْزُونَ رَأْيِي، لَوْ كَانَ يَطَاعُ
لِقَصِيرٍ أَمْ! فَأَبِيمْ عَلَيَّ إِبَاءَ
الْمُخَالِفِينَ الْجُفَاهَ، وَالْمُنَابِذِينَ
الْعَصَاهِ، حَتَّى ارْتَابَ النَّاصِحُ
بِنُصْحِهِ، وَضَنَّ الرَّانِدُ بِقَدْحِهِ، فَكُنْتُ
أَنَا وَإِيَّاكُمْ كَمَا قَالَ أَخْوُهُوَازِنَ:

*but you did not see the wisdom of my
counsel until noon of the next day.*

أَمْرَتُكُمْ أَمْرِي بِمُنْعَرِجِ اللَّوَى
فَلَمْ تَسْتَبُّوا النُّصْحَ إِلَّا ضُحْنِي الْعَدِ.

CONTEXT

This is part of a sermon given by Amīr al-Mu'minīn (*a*) after news of what transpired at the arbitration reached him. It contains praise of Allāh during trials followed by an explanation about the cause of tribulations. During the arbitration, which took place in a city known as Dūmat al-Jandal, ‘Amr ibn al-‘Āṣ had used cunning and guile to deceive the naive Abū Mūsā al-Ash’arī, thereby trying to strip the caliphate from Imām ‘Alī (*a*) and hand it to Mu‘awiyah. When the Imām, who was back in Kūfah, heard about this, he was greatly disturbed. He stood on the pulpit and addressed the people of Kūfah, reminding them that he was against the arbitration in the first place and wanted his followers to fight until they attained the victory that was close at hand. However, they had insisted upon cessation of the fighting and participation in an arbitration. The situation they found themselves in was the result of their disobedience to him (N). Some reports state that after the debacle, Abū Mūsā al-Ash’arī fled to Makkah and did not return to Kūfah. The other early sources that mention this sermon, albeit with slight variance, include al-Masdūdī’s *Murūj al-Dhahab*, Ibn Athīr’s *al-Kāmil fi al-Tārīkh*, al-Balādhurī’s *Ansāb al-Ashrāf*, al-Tabarī’s *al-Tārīkh*, and Ibn Qutaybah’s *al-Imāmah wal-Siyāsah* (T).

COMMENTARY

1 The Imām begins by praising Allāh, *even though time has brought with it an onerous encumbrance ('al-khaṭb al-fādih')* and *a grievous calamity ('al-ḥadath al-jalil')*. When he says that time has brought this difficulty, it is not to say that time is to be blamed for it; rather, it is only a means of expressing praise for the Almighty both in times of ease and hardship (M). Indeed, the Infallibles taught us to praise Allāh in all circumstances. Whenever something pleasing happened, Imām Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq (*a*) would say, “Praise be to Allāh for this blessing,” and if something distressing occurred, he would say, “Praise be to Allāh in every circumstance,” as narrated in *al-Kāfi* (T). Hence we see that Amīr al-Mu'minīn begins this sermon,

like all his other sermons, by praising Allāh. The term ‘*khatb*’ connotes an important and significant matter that takes place between two individuals or parties. The word ‘*fādih*’ refers to a heavy burden. These expressions describe the failed arbitration between the followers of Mu‘āwiyah and Amīr al-Mu‘minīn, which resulted in a heavy burden and grave difficulty for the Imām (N). Some commentators state that the phrase *the One, with no partner* (‘*wāḥdahu lā sharīka lah*’) has been interpolated into the sermon and was not originally part of it (T). The Imām recited the testimony of faith to emphasize the importance of *tawhīd* and reiterate it (MB), but it may also be an allusion to the fact that the situation had become dire because people had turned away from true belief in Allāh and had stopped following the Sunnah of the Prophet (ṣ), pursuing their vain desires instead (N).

2 Regret and remorse are the consequences of disobedience to one who has the four distinct qualities of being a well-wisher (‘*al-nāṣīḥ*’), caring (‘*al-shāfiq*’), knowledgeable (‘*al-‘ālim*’), and experienced (‘*al-mujarrib*’), because such an individual’s opinion is most likely to be correct (MB). Since all the mentioned qualities were possessed by the Imām, yet they still did not obey him in the matter of the arbitration, they would now have to face the consequences which would bring nothing but regret and remorse for them. This was after he had offered them his sincere and weighed opinion. The term ‘*nakhala*’ means to sift and filter, thereby removing impurities and unwanted elements. Its usage here signifies a strong and well-thought-out opinion (M). Part of what the Imām had advised them was concerning Mu‘āwiyah and ‘Amr ibn al-‘Āṣ, and how they were not proponents of the religion or the Qurān, but were only out to trick the people and deceive them (T). The phrase *if only Qaṣīr’s directions were followed* is a proverb used for one who opposes the view of a wise person. It is said that Qaṣīr was a slave of the Arab king Judhīmah al-Abrash, and was known for his cleverness and sound opinions. Judhīmah had killed the father of al-Zabbā’, the queen of al-Jazīrah, and after some time, al-Zabbā’ sent a marriage proposal to Judhīmah, so he accepted. Qaṣīr warned him against doing this, but he ignored his advice and went ahead with the marriage. Later, she betrayed him and had him killed. That is when Qaṣīr uttered the words: *if only Qaṣīr’s directions were followed*, and this then became a proverb (Z). Instead of following the Imām’s advice, they turned against him in obstinate disobedience, not because they thought he was wrong, but because they were stubborn in their defiance of him (N).

His statement, *until the well-wisher began to doubt his counsel and the flint withheld its spark* is a reference to himself, as if to say: you opposed me with such unity and fervour that I began to doubt my own advice to you, since even when one has the right opinion, if he is opposed by a substantial number of people, he would begin to question his own opinion (I). Alternatively, it means that since the result of his giving them advice was that they began to accuse him due to it (R), he doubted whether he should have advised them in the first place. ‘Zand’, translated as *flint*, refers to a stick which is used to produce a fire by holding it vertically over another stick or piece of wood and twisting it rapidly, thereby producing a fire. The *flint withheld its spark* is a proverb used to refer to one who is deprived of benefit due to his own negligence and unwillingness, and here it refers to their depriving themselves of the beneficial and prudent advice of the Imām due to their rebelliousness and unwillingness to listen to him (N). The line of poetry attributed by the Imām to one of the Hawāzin was recited by Durayd ibn al-Şimmah. Durayd’s brother ‘Abdullāh had fought a group from the Banī Bakr and took spoils from his battle with them. He also raided their camels and took some of them for himself. When he arrived at a place known as Mun‘araj al-Liwā, he stopped there and made a vow that he would not continue onwards until he had slaughtered some of the captured camels, and consumed their meat, before the rest were divided as booty.

Durayd warned his brother not to do this saying that the Banī Bakr were still in pursuit and were looking for them. ‘Abdullāh did not listen to his brother and remained there, slaughtering the camels. Early the next morning, the Banū Bakr caught up with them and launched a ferocious attack. As a result, ‘Abdullāh was killed and Durayd was injured. That is when he recited some poetry that contained the verse: *I gave you my instructions at Mun‘araj al-Liwā, but you did not see the wisdom of my counsel until noon of the next day.* The mention of this verse by the Imām here signifies that those who acted against his advice will likewise regret their decision when they later see the consequences, but by then it will be too late (M).



WARNING THE PEOPLE OF AL-NAHRAWĀN

1 I am a warner unto you, lest you end up slain around the banks of this river and upon the hollows of this sunken land, while you neither have manifest proof from your Lord nor possess a clear authority. You have been expelled as vagrants and caught in fate's deadly snare. I had forbidden you from this arbitration but you rejected [my instructions] in the manner of defiant adversaries, until I was forced to capitulate to your wishes. You are a group of dullards and foolish imbeciles. I have not brought any calamity – may you be deprived of fathers – nor have I wished you harm.

١ فَأَنَا نَذِيرٌ لَكُمْ أَنْ تُصْبِحُوا صَرْعَى
بِأَنْتَاءِ هَذَا النَّهَرِ، وَبِأَهْضَامِ هَذَا
الْغَائِطِ، عَلَى غَيْرِ بَيِّنَةٍ مِنْ رَبِّكُمْ،
وَلَا سُلْطَانٌ مُبِينٌ مَعَكُمْ، قَدْ
طَوَّحْتُ بِكُمُ الدَّارَ، وَاحْتَبَلَكُمُ
الْمِقْدَارُ، وَقَدْ كُنْتُ نَهِيُّكُمْ عَنْ
هَذِهِ الْحُكُومَةِ فَأَيْتَمْ عَلَيَّ إِبَاءَ
الْمُخَالِفِينَ الْمُنَابِذِينَ، حَتَّىٰ صَرَفْتُ
رَأْيِي إِلَىٰ هَوَاكُمْ، وَأَنْتُمْ مَعَاشِرُ
أَخْفَاءِ الْهَامِ، سُفَهَاءُ الْأَحْلَامِ، وَلَمْ
آتَيْتُ لَكُمْ – بُنْجَرًا، وَلَا
أَرْدَثْتُ لَكُمْ ضُرًّا.

CONTEXT

In this sermon, the Imām threatens the Khawārij and frightens them in order to warn them. He gave the sermon just before the Battle of Nahrawān, which was fought at the end of the year 37 AH (N). Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd mentions a number of traditions in which the Messenger of Allāh (ṣ) foretold the rise and destruction of the Khawārij. It is further reported that before his statement, Imām ‘Alī (‘a) reminded the people of his status, and that of the Ahl al-Bayt, in the sight of Allāh and His Prophet (ṣ) (MB). Nahrawān actually consisted of three areas in a vast district between Baghdād and Wāsit, towards the East. It encompassed within it many towns such as Iskāf, al-Šāfiyah, and others (T). It is noteworthy that this

sermon has been titled, “In frightening (*takhwīf*) the people of Nahrawān,” and it was a means by which they were warned about their deviant position before the fighting began. Therefore, it could be seen as a final conclusive argument (*itmām al-hujjah*) after which they would have no excuse for continuing their stance, other than open and outright defiance. It was the practice of the Imām to leave battle only as a last resort, and that is why even on the battlefield, he would give sermons addressing the enemy thereby giving them a last opportunity to turn back. And indeed, some historians report that after hearing the words of Amīr al-Mu’minīn, a number of the Khawārij laid down their weapons and returned to Kūfah, while some even came and joined the Imām (Z).

COMMENTARY

1 By warning them *lest you end up slain around the banks of this river and upon the hollows of this sunken land*, the Imām was actually foretelling the outcome of the battle (N). ‘Ahḍām’, which is the plural of ‘haḍm’, refers to a sunken area, while ‘ghāit’ refers to a low or depressed ground, and this was the description of the place where they would be slain (Z). It is interesting how the Imām chose the word ‘sultān’ to refer to *proof*, which seems like a double entendre of sorts given that the same word is also used to mean authority and dominion (M). Indeed, the Khawārij had no valid reason for defying and opposing the Imām. If they considered the arbitration to have been an error, then rebelling against the Imām was a more grievous mistake (Z). *Expelled as vagrants* translates ‘qawwahat bikum al-dār’, which literally means being thrown out into confusion and destruction. ‘Al-dār’, meaning the abode, has been interpreted here to mean this world (N). Their being *caught in fate’s deadly snare* was due to their own misdeeds that were based on their incorrect reasoning and deviation from the truth. Some commentators have construed ‘al-miqdār’ to mean divine decree (MB), while others have understood it as a reference to their own incorrect thoughts and conclusions (Z).

Indeed, the Imām was always averse to the idea of arbitration but at that moment, these were the people who forced him to accept it. Only later, when its detrimental consequences became known, did they distance themselves from it and even lay blame for it on the Imām (N). Hence, they are duly called *a group of dullards* ('akhiffā' al-hām') and *foolish imbeciles* ('sufahā' al-ahlām'). The first of these two phrases literally means ‘light in the head’, and refers to individuals who

have weak intellects and are thus easily swayed. The second phrase denotes their inability to reason and understand. Together, these two phrases emphasize their overall lack of acumen and discernment (N). Finally, the Imām again reiterated that he has never caused any calamity ('bujr') to come upon them, nor did he ever intend them harm. Rather, whatever befell them was the outcome of their own incompetence and foolishness (MB). If one asks: how could the Imām have used words like *may you be deprived of fathers?* Then it should be understood that such phrases were commonly spoken among the Arabs of those times, and it was not considered a slur or a form of swearing (M).



STATEMENT AFTER THE BATTLE OF AL-NAHRAWĀN

1 So I discharged the duty when others were remiss, I came forward when they were hesitant, and I spoke [clearly] when they stuttered. I proceeded with the light of Allāh when others lingered. I was the most soft-spoken among them but the foremost in action. I flew swiftly, holding its reins, and I alone attained its reward.

2 [I was] like the mountain, which is neither moved by raging winds nor dislodged by stormy gales. No one could find any fault in me nor was there, for any speaker, in me any ill to speak of. To me, the abased is worthy of honour until I secure [his] right for him, and the strong is powerless until I take the right [of others] from him.

3 We are satisfied with the decree of Allāh and submit to His command. Do you see me lying about the Prophet of Allāh (ṣ)? By Allāh, I was indeed the first to believe in him, so I would never be the first to ascribe lies to him.

4 I observed my affair and found that my obedience takes precedence over my allegiance and the pledge pertaining to others [still] rests on my shoulders.

١ فَقُمْتُ بِالْأَمْرِ حِينَ فَشَلُوا، وَتَطَلَّعْتُ
حِينَ تَبَعُّوا، وَنَظَفْتُ حِينَ تَعْنُوا،
وَمَضَيْتُ بِنُورِ اللَّهِ حِينَ وَقَفُوا.
وَكُنْتُ أَحْفَصَهُمْ صَوْتاً، وَأَعْلَاهُمْ
فَوْتاً؛ فَطَرَزْتُ بِعِنَانَهَا، وَاسْتَبَدَذْتُ
بِرِهَانِهَا.

٢ كَالْجَلِ لَا تُحَرِّكُهُ الْقَوَاصِفُ، وَلَا
تُزِيلُهُ الْعَوَاصِفُ. لَمْ يَكُنْ لِأَحَدٍ فِي
مَهْمَزٍ، وَلَا لِقَائِلٍ فِي مَغْمُرٍ. الدَّلِيلُ
عِنْدِي عَزِيزٌ حَتَّى آخُذُ الْحَقَّ لَهُ،
وَالْقَوِيُّ عِنْدِي ضَعِيفٌ حَتَّى آخُذُ
الْحَقَّ مِنْهُ.

٣ رَضِيَّنَا عَنِ اللَّهِ قَضَاءُهُ، وَسَلَّمَنَا لِلَّهِ
أَمْرُهُ. أَتَرَانِي أَكْذِبُ عَلَى رَسُولِ
اللَّهِ ﷺ؟ وَاللَّهُ لَأَنَا أَوَّلُ مَنْ صَدَقَهُ
فَلَا أَكُونُ أَوَّلَ مَنْ كَذَبَ عَلَيْهِ.

٤ فَنَظَرْتُ فِي أَمْرِي، فَإِذَا طَاغَتِي قَدْ
سَبَقْتُ يَعْتَيِ، وَإِذَا الْمِيَاقُ فِي
عُقْبِي لِعَيْرِي.

CONTEXT

This oration comprises of certain statements of the Imām that may be considered something akin to a sermon ('yajrī majra al-khuṭbah'), and it is said to have been spoken by him after the Battle of Nahrawān (N). In the first part of this speech, Amīr al-Mu'minīn recalls his efforts to enjoin good and forbid evil during the events that transpired with 'Uthmān, when everyone else among the Muḥājirīn were silent. The second part pertains to his state during his caliphate, and the third was in response to the accusation and mistrust he perceived from the people when he informed them of what the Messenger of Allāh (ṣ) had predicted about future trials and events. The last part of the oration is where he mentions his condition just after the demise of the Noble Messenger, and how he had promised that he would not fight the people for the matter of his right to the caliphate (T). According to some commentators, the first part of this sermon is in reference to the time when the Noble Prophet (ṣ) had just started teaching people about Islam, during the beginning of his mission, and this seems more likely given the details mentioned by the Imām. It was during those times that he was at the forefront and remained steadfast like a mountain (N). It has been noted that this sermon is actually only a small part of a much longer oration given by the Imām (I).

COMMENTARY

1 'Fashilū' means they were cowardly, weak, and remiss. The phrase 'taṭallaṭu ḥīna taqabbā'ū' is missing in some manuscripts, and it means that he (the Imām) came out openly at a time when others hid themselves and stayed back. This was either due to their fear of persecution by the enemies (M), or because unlike them, he valued what the Prophet (ṣ) had to say and hence followed him everywhere in order to ensure that he does not miss out on anything that the Noble Messenger taught through his words and deeds (Z). He spoke up clearly while the rest of the people stuttered ('taṭa'ū'), meaning that while the others could not articulate themselves due to their lack of knowledge, the Imām clearly explained to the people what they sought to know, including matters pertaining to complex legal rulings (MB), or was able to give answers to questions that left others speechless (N). The *light of Allāh* with which he proceeded forward refers to the light of faith and certitude, or the light of revelation and the Qur'ān (N). He was the most soft-

spoken in the presence of the Messenger of Allāh (ṣ) out of respect and etiquette, and some have said that this was a sign of his heightened emotional intelligence (Z). Nevertheless, when it came to action, he was at the forefront. ‘A’lāhum fawtan’ is rendered as *the foremost in action* and literally means one who never misses anything good and is the first in attaining it (T). This phrase is also used to refer to one who overtakes others and leaves them lagging behind as he rushes ahead of them. He *flew swiftly, holding its reins*, like one who races on his horse while tightly holding on to its bridle, and he *alone attained its reward* by being the victor of that race. Some commentators say that *its reins* refers to the virtue and merit which he held on to in order to get ahead and attain divine reward (M).

2 When he took over the affairs of the caliphate, he was unshakable *like the mountain* in his steadfastness, and was *neither moved by raging winds nor dislodged by stormy gales* of tribulations. He always remained on the path of truth and justice, and nothing was able to cause him to waver from it (I). The term ‘mahmaz’ refers to a flaw or a fault which becomes the cause of reproachment or censure. *Maghmaz* means a reason to slander or speak ill of someone. Indeed, even the enemies of the Imām saw his merits and bore witness to them, and to this day none among the Muslims dares to reject any of his known merits and virtues, whether he is a follower of the Imām or not (Z). He then states that to him, the abased and belittled people are worthy of honour and assistance until he has secured their rights for them from those who oppress them. Conversely, the strong are considered powerless until the rights of others are recovered from them. This sums up the purpose and objective of the Imām’s rule and caliphate, namely to re-establish a just order after years of injustice (N). Whenever the command of Allāh is neglected, power always gravitates towards the strong, and the weak are oppressed. This is the case everywhere in the world throughout history. It is only when we submit to the rulings of Allāh, as prescribed in His religion, that the weak can attain their rights and the strong are held in check (Z).

3 In this part of the sermon, the Imām begins by expressing his satisfaction with the decree of Allāh and submission to His command. While this statement is taken by most commentators to be a preamble to what follows in this section, some consider it as the last part of the previous section of the sermon and take it to mean that the Imām was satisfied with whatever difficulties came his way as he carried out the command of Allāh to support the weak, oppressed people against the strong oppressors (N). As part of this section, however, these words of the Imām

express his submission to the decree of Allāh after the people had voiced their doubt about the information he gave them of the unseen (*ghayb*). Instead of accepting what he said, they belied him and accused him of fabrication. His reaction to this was firstly to declare his submissiveness to the will and command of Allāh, and then to argue against them stating that he was the first to believe in the Noble Prophet (ṣ), so he would never be among those who ascribe lies to him (MB). Indeed, a person usually lies for one of two possible reasons: either due to fear or because of greed. Yet the Imām feared none but Allāh, and desired nothing but the pleasure of Allāh, so how could he ever have thought of ascribing lies to the Messenger of Allāh (ṣ)? That was impossible (Z). Despite this, the people were not ready to take the knowledge he had, even though the Prophet had personally taught him many secrets. In one occasion when the Imām said, “Ask me before you lose me...” a man stood up and asked him how many strands of hair he had on his head and beard! As part of his response, Amīr al-Mu’minīn informed the man that in his house was a child who would kill the son of the Messenger of Allāh (ṣ), and indeed his son, Sinān ibn Anas al-Nakhaī, was the killer of Imām al-Ḥusayn in Karbalā’ (I).

4 This last section of the sermon is considered by some commentators to be the Imām’s response to the question: ‘If you were indeed the rightful and most worthy candidate for the caliphate, why did you remain silent while this right was usurped by others?’ (N). Indeed, we have been told of how the Messenger of Allāh (ṣ) had instructed him to remain patient regarding this matter, so Imām ‘Alī promised him that he would not dispute with them over it (MB). That is why, when the Noble Prophet (ṣ) left this world and the caliphate was usurped, he observed his affair, meaning the matter of the caliphate which was his right, and found that his obedience to the Prophet took precedence over everything else, including his having to pledge allegiance to others before him (Z). Therefore, before pledging his allegiance, he had thought of and recalled the instructions of the Messenger of Allāh regarding this matter (N). As for the *pledge pertaining to others*, it is a reference to the same promise he gave to the Prophet that he would not cause a rift within the community (MB). Some commentators, however, suggest different possible meanings for this entire section, saying that it may refer to the pledge of allegiance that the people offered to the Imām himself. In that case, the meaning would be: ‘I observed the affair and found that my obedience to the Messenger of Allāh takes precedence over my taking the pledge of allegiance from the people, and the pledge

pertaining to others [still] rests on my shoulders.' Alternatively, it could be in reference to the obedience and allegiance of the people themselves, in which case the meaning of this section would be: 'I observed my affair and found that the obedience of the people to me preceded their allegiance to me, and thus I had to accept the caliphate and let the pledge of others rest on my shoulders.' (M).



THE NAMING OF ‘DOUBT’

1 Dubiety is called ‘doubt’ because it resembles the truth. As for the friends of Allāh, their illumination in it is conviction, and their guide directs them towards the right path. But for the enemies of Allāh, their invitation in it is [to] misguidance, and their guide is blindness.

وَإِنَّمَا سُمِّيَتِ الشُّبْهَةُ شُبْهَةً لِأَنَّهَا
شُبْهَةُ الْحَقِّ، فَأَمَّا أُولَيَاءُ اللَّهِ
فَصِرَاطُهُمْ فِيهَا إِلِيقَنٌ وَدَلِيلُهُمْ
سَمْطُ الْهُدَى، وَأَمَّا أَعْدَاءُ اللَّهِ
فَدُعْعَاؤُهُمْ فِيهَا الضَّلَالُ، وَدَلِيلُهُمْ
الْعَمَى.

2 He who fears death cannot escape it, nor is eternal life granted to one who desires it.

فَمَا يَنْجُو مِنَ الْمَوْتِ مِنْ خَافَةً، وَلَا
يُعَطَى الْبَقَاءُ مِنْ أَحَبَّةٍ.

CONTEXT

A cursory look at this sermon suffices to show that it has been extracted from a much longer and detailed oration. It is for this reason that we can see two different sections in this sermon that are clearly unrelated in terms of the subject being discussed. The first section pertains to the reason for doubt being named ‘shubhah’, and the means by which one could be saved from doubts. The second section talks about death and the state of human beings in relation to it (N). It is clear that al-Sayyid al-Raḍī took these two sections from different parts of a longer oration, or from two different orations of the Imām. In any case, this sermon was given by the Imām after Ṭalḥah and al-Zubayr broke their oaths and joined up with ‘Āishah, as they proceeded to Baṣrah in order to kindle the flames of an uprising against the Imām (S). Indeed, the issue of doubt was raised by the Imām because during the Battle of Jamal, a group of people were beset by doubt since they seemed unable to tell which side to join, with Amīr al-Mu’minīn on one side and the likes of ‘Āishah, Ṭalḥah and al-Zubayr on the other. They doubted if it was

right to fight the ‘mother of believers’ and those who were raising the seemingly righteous banner of seeking revenge for the murder of ‘Uthmān (N).

COMMENTARY

¹ Amīr al-Mu’minīn explains why doubt has been called ‘*shubhah*’ – because it resembles the truth (*‘tushbihu al-haqq’*), even though in reality it is falsehood. That is why some people get confused by it and get deceived into thinking that it is the truth (N). Interestingly, some Muslim theologians call the proof adduced by the people of truth and righteousness ‘*dalil*’, while they term the argument presented by the people of falsehood ‘*shubhah*’ (I). In the story where Prophet Mūsā asked the Banī Isrā’īl to slaughter a cow, one of the lame excuses they made in order to justify their delay in complying with his instruction was: *Verily all cows look alike* (*‘tashābaha’*) to us (Q2:70) (MB). Sometimes falsehood can take on the outer form of truth, or it can resemble truth, thereby confusing those who lack the ability to properly distinguish truth from falsehood. For example, one may say that human beings are just driven along like puppets, and have no real volition, since Allāh knows right from the beginning what kind of person one will be, and He knows exactly what one will do, and it is impossible for a person to act contrary to what is known by Allāh. As such, humans do not have any free will of their own. However, this argument is false even if it may seem true, because it is not possible for Allāh to hold human beings to account for their actions if they have no volition or free will. While it is true that Allāh knows everything as stated, that does not mean He controls the decisions of humankind to undertake the actions that they do. Such kind of thinking is an example of a ‘*shubhah*’ (Z). Generally, people are either friends of Allāh, or enemies of Allāh. The lives of the friends of Allāh are illuminated by the light of certitude which enables them to follow the right path through the darkness of doubt.

On the other hand, the enemies of Allāh are steeped in doubt and invite only towards misguidance, and indeed *one for whom Allāh has not placed any light has no light* (Q24:40) (M). This can have two possible meanings: first, because the friends of Allāh possess certitude that is based on revelation, they turn to the Qur’ān and the teachings of divinely appointed guides, and using this light they are able to counter the darkness of doubts and find the right way. The second possible meaning is that certitude here, and the guidance that results therefrom,

refers to rational certitude which is based on universal principles and truths. These truths cannot be doubted by anyone with a sound mind. When such kind of certitude is employed, without being clouded by vain desires and personal biases, it enables one to distinguish between truth and falsehood, and avoid all misleading doubt (N). The enemies of Allāh are people whose hearts are already perverted, so they lack certitude (in both meanings mentioned above), and thus they are astray and can only mislead others towards the path of darkness and blindness (MB). The phrase *their guide is blindness* could also be a reference to their blind following, without any evidence or certitude (Z).

2 Though many commentators say that this section was taken from another oration and placed here, even though it is not related to what precedes it, some say that there might be a connection to the previous statement since it is a way of frightening the enemies of Allāh and warning them that they will surely be held accountable for their actions and will face punishment after death (Z). The message here is clear: even those who fear death can find no escape from it, and those who yearn to remain in this world cannot have everlasting life in it. Indeed, Allāh tells us in the Qur'ān: *Verily the death from which you flee will surely meet you...* (Q62:8); and: *Wherever you are, death will overtake you, even if you were in fortified towers* (Q4:78). Amīr al-Mu'minīn said this in order to remind the people about the evanescence of this world, and to make them realize that attachment to it is futile since they will have to leave it one day, whether they like it or not (M).

Fear of death is of two types: praiseworthy fear and blameworthy fear. The former is what prevents a believer from undertaking any action that he knows to be sinful, since he fears its consequences after death. Furthermore, it helps one prepare for the Hereafter and perform righteous actions in order to secure a place in the proximity of the virtuous. The latter kind of fear, which is considered blameworthy, is fearing death because of one's continuous misdeeds and the attachment one has to this world and its pleasures. This is the kind of fear of death that is experienced by disbelievers and hypocrites. Yet this fear does nothing to save one from death; rather, it may even be one of the means of hastening it (N). The quest for eternal life is as old as history itself, and in every era those who attain some semblance of power seek to prolong their stay in this world indefinitely. Some who have great wealth think that they might be able to use their money to prolong their lives forever: *He reckons that his wealth will make him immortal!* (Q104:3). However, death is an inescapable reality, and nobody lives forever. As

such, there is no real reason to fear death, and no possible benefit in hoping for immortality (N).



REPROACHING HIS FOLLOWERS

1 I am troubled by those who do not obey when I command and do not respond when I call. May you be deprived of fathers! What are you waiting for before you rise in the way of your Lord? Are you not joined together by faith or roused by a sense of zeal? I stand among you shouting and call out to you for help, yet you neither listen to my words nor obey my orders, until [your] behaviour manifests its evil consequences. Then no blood can be avenged with you, and no goal can be achieved.

2 I called you to help your brethren but you growled like the camel suffering pain in its navel, and slackened like the emaciated camel with an injured back. Then a small, wavering and weak contingent came to me from amongst you, as if they were being driven towards death as they looked on (Q8:6).

١ مُنِيبُ بِمَنْ لَا يُطِيعُ إِذَا أَمْرَتُ وَلَا يُحِبُّ إِذَا دَعَوْتُ، لَا أَبَا لَكُمْ! مَا تَسْتَظِرُونَ بِنَصْرِكُمْ رَبِّكُمْ؟ أَمَا دِينُ يَجْمَعُكُمْ، وَلَا حَمِيَّةً تُحِشِّكُمْ؟ أَقْوَمُ فِيْكُمْ مُسْتَضْرِخًا وَأَنَادِيْكُمْ مُعَوْثًا، فَلَا سَمَعُونَ لِي قَوْلًا، وَلَا تُطِيعُونَ لِي أَمْرًا، حَتَّى تَكَشَّفَ الْأُمُورُ عَنْ عَوَاقِبِ الْمَسَاءَةِ، فَمَا يُدْرِكُ بِكُمْ ثَارُ، وَلَا يَيْلَغُ بِكُمْ مَرَامُ.

٢ دَعَوْتُكُمْ إِلَى نَصْرٍ إِخْرَانِكُمْ فَجَرَجَرْتُمْ جَرْجَرَةَ الْجَمَلِ الْأَسْرَ، وَشَاقَلْتُمْ شَاقَلَةَ النَّضْرِ الْأَدْبَرِ، ثُمَّ خَرَجَ إِلَيَّ مِنْكُمْ جَيْدٌ مُتَذَائِبٌ ضَعِيفٌ «كَأَنَّمَا يُسَاوِونَ إِلَى الْمَوْتِ وَهُمْ يَنْتَظِرُونَ».

CONTEXT

According to some commentators, this was part of Amīr al-Mu'minīn's sermon when Egypt was conquered and Muammad ibn Abī Bakr was killed (T). However, most of the commentaries state that this sermon was given by the Imām

when he learned about the assault of Mu‘āwiyah’s henchman al-Nu‘mān ibn Bashīr on the Northern Iraqi town of ‘Ayn al-Tamr (N). It is reported that prior to the attack, al-Nu‘mān had been sent by Mu‘āwiyah to Imām ‘Alī, along with Abū Hurayrah, in order to ask that he hand over the killers of ‘Uthmān to them, so that perhaps it would avert the impending battle and quell the people. Of course, this was a ploy on the part of Mu‘āwiyah for he knew that Imām ‘Alī would not hand over the killers to him, and he wanted these two individuals to bear witness to that before the people of Shām. When they entered in the presence of Amīr al-Mu‘minīn (‘a), Abū Hurayrah spoke first and tried to convince him to hand over the killers to them. He tried to act as peacemaker, saying that if the Imām fulfilled this request, it might prevent war and bloodshed. Then al-Nu‘mān said something similar, but Imām ‘Alī responded by asking him whether he had pledged his allegiance to him like most of his tribe, and al-Nu‘mān replied affirmatively. To show his loyalty to the Imām, he said he would remain behind as Abū Hurayrah returned to Shām. However, a few days later he fled but was caught by Mālik ibn Ka‘b when he arrived at ‘Ayn al-Tamr.

Al-Nu‘mān claimed that he was only a messenger, but Mālik insisted that he would write to the Imām before letting him go. However, the scribe was a relative of al-Nu‘mān and pleaded with Mālik to let him be on his way, and after much back and forth, he agreed on the condition that if he ever saw al-Nu‘mān again, he would strike his neck. Al-Nu‘mān made his way back to Mu‘āwiyah and told him what had transpired. It just so happened that Mu‘āwiyah had already made preparations to attack Iraq, having sent al-Dahhāk ibn Qays with a contingent. Al-Nu‘mān convinced Mu‘āwiyah to send him as well, saying that he had a bone to pick with the people there and was keen to fight. So Mu‘āwiyah sent him with a sizeable contingent of soldiers (numbering about two thousand according to some reports), and al-Nu‘mān marched to ‘Ayn al-Tamr. When he arrived there, Mālik ibn Ka‘b had only a hundred or so men with him to fight them, so he wrote to Imām ‘Alī telling him about the impending attack of al-Nu‘mān’s forces and asking for assistance. When his letter reached Amīr al-Mu‘minīn, he ascended the pulpit and told the people to rise up and go to help their brother Mālik ibn Ka‘b. However, they did not mobilize as he instructed, and only around three hundred men got ready to march. That is when the Imām rose up and gave this sermon (MB).

COMMENTARY

1 Imām ‘Alī’s disappointment is quite evident from what he says in this section of the oration. The intensity of the tone used by him was perhaps what was required to shake the people out of their slumber and lassitude, and get them to rise up (N). When he says that he is *troubled by those who do not obey* when he commands *and do not respond* when he calls, it is clear that the problem he faced was the unwillingness of his forces, and their betrayal through disobedience, which prevented him from being able to send assistance to his followers at ‘Ayn al-Tamr (M). He appealed to their faith by asking what prevents them from helping their Lord, for indeed by serving the cause of truth they are assisting the cause of Allāh. He also reminded them of their bond of brotherhood because of their faith in Islam, which is something they should zealously defend and protect (Z). Indeed, even the greatest of warriors and bravest of champions gets held back by lack of supporters, so when Amīr al-Mu’minīn called out to them to rise up and they turned their backs on him, neither listening to his words nor obeying his orders, he could do nothing, until their behaviour manifested *its evil consequences*, namely the defeat of their brothers at the hands of their enemies (N). Indeed, with soldiers such as these, *no blood can be avenged and no goal can be achieved*, because when it is time to act, they procrastinate, and when they see the outcome of their disobedience, they express regret, but by then it is too late to do anything (Z).

2 Their reaction when called upon for the noble cause of helping their brothers is described by the Imām as growling *like the camel suffering pain in its navel*, and slackening *like the emaciated camel with an injured back*. The term ‘*al-asarr*’ refers to a specific disease that affects the area near a camel’s navel, or according to others, a pain that affects the chest of a camel (N). Just as a diseased camel is hesitant to move, and a tired camel, which is weak and emaciated, cannot proceed with a heavy burden on its injured back, that is how those who were called to mobilize in order to fight acted – as if it was a heavy burden that they were unable or unwilling to carry. So they grumbled in discontent and refused to move as ordered (Z). Al-Sayyid al-Raḍī comments, “The term ‘*mutadhāib*’ means agitated or hesitant, from *tadhābat al-rīḥ* which connotes the scattering and agitation of dust particles. And thus the wolf was named *dhi‘b*, because of the nervous way in which it walks.” This is the term used to describe those few individuals who did step forward and show their readiness, albeit hesitantly, thereby making up a small and weak contingent – too weak to counter such a large enemy. The final

line of the sermon is taken from Q8:6 which states: *They disputed with you about the truth after it had been made clear, as if they were being driven towards death as they looked on.* This verse was revealed about a group of weak and cowardly believers during the time of the Prophet (ṣ).

These were individuals who always looked for excuses to avoid participating in battles and would argue with the Prophet about it. They were hesitant to fight in the Battle of Badr but only later, when the Muslims attained victory, did they realize how wrong they were. Surprisingly, it was this same group who later quarrelled over the spoils of the battle! By mentioning this part of the verse, perhaps the Imām was alluding to the fact that even if such a small group had been firmly determined and steadfast, they could have defeated the much larger enemy, but unfortunately they lacked the resolve and steadfastness (N). One lesson we can learn from this sermon pertains to the importance of obeying the Imām, and indeed any divinely appointed leader, without question – even if it means having to go above and beyond, and push ourselves to the maximum. Because not doing so can only lead to negative consequences that we will later regret. On the other hand, by obeying these divine guides, we can live a balanced life, which some commentators have termed a ‘rational life’ (*hayāt ma‘qūl*) (J).



ON THE SLOGAN OF THE KHAWĀRIJ

1 He ('a) said: A true statement uttered with false intent! Yes, judgment belongs only to Allāh, but these people are saying that there is no governance [except by Allāh]. Yet people cannot do without a ruler, be he virtuous or wicked, so that in his rule the believer may [carry on his righteous] work as the unbeliever enjoys [worldly] benefits. In it, Allāh conveys everything to its fixed term, spoils are collected, the enemy is fought, highways are secured, and the right of the weak is taken from the mighty, until the virtuous enjoys peace and people are safe from the wicked.

2 In another narration [we read that] when he ('a) heard their slogan, he said, "I await the judgment of Allāh regarding you." And he said: As for virtuous governance, the pious one continues his righteous work in it while in the governance of the wicked, and the wretched one takes enjoyment until his time comes to an end and death overtakes him.

١ قَالَ عَلَيْهِمْ: كَلِمَةُ حَقٍّ يُرَادُ بِهَا
بَاطِلٌ! نَعَمْ إِنَّهُ لَا حُكْمَ إِلَّا لِلَّهِ،
وَلِكُنَّ هُؤُلَاءِ يَقُولُونَ: لَا إِمْرَأَ.
وَإِنَّهُ لَا بُدَّ لِلنَّاسِ مِنْ أَمِيرٍ بَرًّا وَ
فَاجِرٍ، يَعْمَلُ فِي إِمْرَاتِهِ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ،
وَيَسْتَمْبَغُ فِيهَا الْكَافِرُونَ، وَيُبَلِّغُ اللَّهَ
فِيهَا الْأَجْلَ، وَيَجْمَعُ بِهِ الْفَارِئِينَ،
وَيَقْاتَلُ بِهِ الْعَدُوُّ، وَتَأْمُنُ بِهِ
السُّبُلُ، وَيُؤْكِدُ بِهِ لِلضَّعِيفِ مِنَ
الْقَوِيِّ، حَتَّىٰ يَسْرِيَحَ بَرُّ،
وَيُسْرَاحَ مِنْ فَاجِرٍ.

٢ وَفِي رِوَايَةٍ أُخْرَىٰ أَنَّهُ عَلَيْهِ
لَمَّا سَمِعَ تَحْكِيمَهُمْ قَالَ: حُكْمَ
اللَّهِ أَنْتَظِرُ فِيْكُمْ. وَقَالَ: أَمَّا
الإِمْرَةُ الْبَرَّةُ فَيَعْمَلُ فِيهَا التَّقِيُّ،
وَأَمَّا الإِمْرَةُ الْفَاجِرَةُ فَيَسْمَتَّعُ فِيهَا
الشَّقِيقُ، إِلَىٰ أَنْ تَنْقَطِعَ مُدَّتُهُ
وَتُنْدِرَ كَهْ مَيْتَهُ.

CONTEXT

This oration was given by the Imām when he heard the slogan of the Khawārij, after the Battle of Ḫiffin (N). The ‘*tahkīm*’ of the Khawārij was not the arbitration that took place between the two sides at Ḫiffin; rather, it was their statement, “*Lā hukma illā lillāh*” (lit. ‘There is no rule except that of Allāh’). The first individual to utter these words, which later became their slogan, was al-Ḥajjāj ibn ‘Abdillāh who was one of the leaders of the Khawārij (R). Their slogan is based on the phrase mentioned in three verses of the Qurān that states: *Judgment belongs to none but Allāh* (Q6:57 & 12:40,67). The Khawārij used their slogan to continually express their disapproval of the Imām for accepting the arbitration which had been forced on him at Ḫiffin, though he had not agreed to it willingly and knew that it was only a ruse. Nevertheless, out of their obstinacy, the Khawārij sought to blame him and used the slogan to try and insist that he was culpable for what happened. When he heard them shouting this slogan, the Imām came out and gave this sermon in which he mentioned four important points.

Firstly, the slogan is fallacious and though its words are true, the way it is being employed is false. Secondly, human beings are always in need of a ruler to govern them. Thirdly, a just ruler has certain responsibilities, and the Imām mentions seven important duties. Finally, the consequence of having a just ruler is briefly mentioned by the Imām (N). Interestingly, the Mu’tazili scholar Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd says that this sermon is a clear statement on the necessity of Imāmah, though the theologians have differed on the subject (I). Some of the same Khawārij who were now blaming the Imām had initially forced the Imām to accept the idea of arbitration, after the enemies raised the text of the Qurān on spears at Ḫiffin, even though the Imām had warned them that this action was just a means of deception. They reportedly said, “We were wrong to do that, and we fell into disbelief (*kufr*) by doing so, but we have now repented, so you too repent for what you did and we will once again accept you as our leader, otherwise our swords will be drawn against you!” But the Imām rejected their argument, and it is possible that if he had done as they asked, they would have turned around and said that they cannot follow a leader who erred in such a way (Z). This is why they began to raise their slogan of defiance and, in the end, had to be fought by the Imām (‘a).

COMMENTARY

1 In this initial section of the sermon, Amīr al-Mu'minīn clarifies why the Khawārij were wrong, and the true intentions behind their slogan. Since they actually meant that any rule which is not found in the Book of Allāh must not be adhered to or followed, they were actually standing against the leadership of any individual and restricting all sovereignty only to Allāh Himself. This was because they claimed no one else has the right to give any command besides Allāh (M). In other words, their slogan "*Lā ḥukma illā lillāh*" ('There is no rule except that of Allāh') was based on a true statement or principle which had been distorted and wrongly interpreted. The exact way in which it had been distorted is explained by the Imām when he says that while it is true that *judgment belongs only to Allāh*, what *these people are saying* and what they mean by this statement is that *there is no governance ('imrah')* except by Allāh. That means no one can rule over the people except Allāh. The term '*imrah'* is interpreted by some commentators to refer to a government chosen by Allāh which is led, in every age, by a representative (*hujjah*) of Allāh who is infallible (R). In response to their misguided understanding of the verse of the Qur'ān upon which they based their slogan, the Imām explains that it does not mean that there should be no government, for indeed *people cannot do without a ruler*. The presence of a ruler does not negate the fact that the ultimate Ruler and Judge is Allāh (N).

According to their discussion with Ibn 'Abbās, the Khawārij were particularly against the arbitration (*taḥkīm*) that had taken place at Ṣiffīn, and that is why they came up with the slogan in the first place. Nevertheless, by their standing against something that was within the jurisdiction of the ruler, and claiming he had no right to make such a decision, they were actually negating any ruler's prerogative to make decisions and lead the people (Z). The reason for his saying *be he virtuous or wicked* when describing the ruler was to emphasize the need of a ruler to begin with, and as a fundamental necessity, without considering whether the ruler is virtuous or not. Since human beings have within them the soul that incites to evil (*al-nafs al-ammārah*), there is always an inclination towards sin. As such, society needs a way to maintain order and organization to keep things systematic and ensure that everything functions properly, in peace and harmony. Order can only be established when there is a government, and a ruler (MB). Of course, the ideal situation would be to have a virtuous ruler, but even when a ruler is wicked, a

system is established and a government is put in place that allows a social order to be adhered to by the people.

Once this happens, at least seven benefits may be gained: (i) A believer gets the opportunity to carry on his righteous work, which includes acts of worship, enjoining good and forbidding evil, and even possibly speaking out against injustice (Z). (ii) The disbeliever also enjoys worldly benefits, since his focus is on the attainment of material gain, which he can embark upon in an orderly manner. (iii) Everything is conveyed to its fixed term by Allāh in relative peace, since everything and everyone has an appointed term in this world. (iv) Wars are fought and *spoils are collected* by the government. (v) The enemy is countered through defensive and offensive measures. (vi) Highways are kept secure since they are the lifeline of the economy upon which the people, and indeed the government, depend. (vii) The right of the weak is taken from the mighty, since even the mighty have to submit to the ruler and he is able to make them give what is owed, whether they like it or not. In the end, due to these many benefits of a social order, the good people live in relative ease and remain safe from the wicked (N). Some have interpreted the last sentence as: *until the virtuous enjoys peace and people are safe from the wicked* by the death or removal of the wicked ruler, since it is only at such a moment that the virtuous feel relief, while the wicked lose their authority through the downfall of the despot's reign (Z).

2 According to another narration, when he heard their slogan, the Imām said *I await the judgment of Allāh regarding you*. By this he may have meant the time when they would be destroyed, after they had remained obstinate despite all the arguments and proofs he presented to them. Alternatively, he was referring to waiting for the judgment of Allāh regarding them, since they had themselves claimed that there was no judgment save the judgment of Allāh (N). The last part of this section mentions a different version of the benefits of having a ruler noted in the previous section. Here we are told that if the ruler is virtuous, the righteous believers will get the opportunity to progress and work during his reign, but if the ruler is wicked, it is the evil people who will enjoy in his rule, until it finally comes to an end through his death, or by other means. It is noteworthy that while *the pious one continues his righteous work* during the rule of a just leader, the evil and *wretched one takes enjoyment* during the reign of a wicked ruler.

This shows that in general, righteous individuals know that the world is not a place of enjoyment, and use their time in it to work and strive to attain closeness

to Allāh and provisions for the Hereafter. On the other hand, evil people take this world as a place of pleasure and enjoyment. Some commentators say that given the context of this oration and what was being discussed, the narration mentioned in the first section seems more correct than this second narration (N).



CONDEMNING TREACHERY

¹ [O people!] Verily loyalty is the counterpart of truthfulness, and I do not know any shield that offers greater protection than it. One who knows how he will return [to Allāh] would never be treacherous. Yet we are now in an era where most people consider betrayal as sagacity, and the ignorant folk attribute to them excellent strategy. What is the matter with them? May Allāh destroy them! One who is aware of the vicissitudes and vagaries of life may see the means of subterfuge but is prevented from it by the commands and prohibitions of Allāh, so he disregards it while having seen it, despite being capable of [employing] it, whereas he who has no qualms in [defying] the religion seizes the opportunity.

اَيُّهَا النَّاسُ! إِنَّ الْوَفَاءَ تَرْوَأْمُ
 الصَّدْقِ، وَلَا أَعْلَمُ جُنَاحَةً أَوْقَى
 مِنْهُ، وَمَا يُغْدِرُ مِنْ عِلْمَ كَيْفَ
 الْمَرْجِعُ، وَلَقَدْ أَضْبَحْنَا فِي
 زَمَانٍ قَدْ اتَّخَذَ أَكْثَرُ أَهْلِهِ الْغَدَرَ
 كَيْسَاً، وَنَسَبَهُمْ أَهْلُ الْجَهَلِ فِيهِ
 إِلَى حُسْنِ الْحِيلَةِ. مَا لَهُمْ?
 قَاتَلُوكُمُ اللَّهُ! فَقَدْ يَرِى الْحُوَلُ
 الْقُلُوبُ وَجْهَ الْحِيلَةِ وَدُونَهَا مَانِعٌ
 مِنْ أَمْرِ اللَّهِ وَنَهِيِّهِ، فَيَدْعُهَا رَأْيٌ
 عَيْنٌ بَعْدَ الْقُدْرَةِ عَلَيْهَا، وَيُشَهِّرُ
 فُرَصَتَهَا مِنْ لَا حَرِيجَةَ لَهُ فِي
 الدِّينِ.

CONTEXT

This is part of a sermon that was delivered by Amīr al-Mu'minīn in Kūfah after the Battle of Ḥiṣn al-Kudrā, in the year 37 AH. Other parts of this sermon have been mentioned by al-Sayyid al-Rādī in sermons 35, 38, and 237 of *Nahj al-Balāghah*. Linking the different segments of this sermon gives us the idea that in this oration, the Imām was addressing the issue of the arbitration which took place after the battle, because when 'Amr ibn al-'Āṣ had the text of the Qur'ān raised upon spears,

some people thought that this ploy was a sign of his cleverness. Alternatively, they came to this conclusion about him after he cunningly tricked Abū Mūsā al-Ash'arī at the arbitration. Imām 'Alī gave this sermon in order to dispel the false notion that such kind of cunningness is a sign of sagacity (S). The three main points which he addresses in this oration are: the importance of loyalty and truthfulness, the fact that craftiness and deceit are not signs of cleverness or sagacity, and the importance of taking advantage of opportunities that come one's way in the path of serving Allāh (N).

COMMENTARY

1 Some versions of this sermon do not contain the phrase *O people!*. The term *loyalty* ('*al-wafā'*), which has been employed by Amīr al-Mu'minīn ('a), refers to a deeply ingrained attribute that keeps an individual steadfast in adhering to his oath and pledge. The attribute of truthfulness is likewise a quality within an individual which makes him speak only that which conforms to what is true, without distortion or lying. Together, these two virtues are directly linked to one's integrity (M). The word '*taw'am*' literally means twin, and whenever two things have a deep bond or close connection, this term is used (N). The reason for loyalty being the most protective shield for humankind is that one who is loyal is protected by Allāh, and is also considered praiseworthy among the people (I). On the other hand, treachery and dishonesty, which are the qualities contrary to it, both stem from an evil source (R). Indeed, one who knows that he will return to Allāh, and will have to account for all the deeds he performed and what he left out, would never act treacherously (Z). However, there are times when the society gets diverted from the right way, and their values get distorted to such a degree that even universal truths are no longer adhered to or respected. When such a thing happens, what is clearly evil behaviour, such as using guile and deceit to manipulate the people, is actually taken as something positive and praiseworthy. The person who craftily cheats others is deemed clever and intelligent. This is precisely what the Imām means when he says that *most people consider betrayal as sagacity, and the ignorant folk attribute to them excellent strategy* (N).

After castigating this attitude of theirs, Amīr al-Mu'minīn answers those of them who think that he is too naive or is unaware of the stratagems of clever politics. He refers to himself as *one who is aware of the vicissitudes and vagaries of*

life ('*al-huwwal al-qullab*'), so he is aware of the stratagems that can be employed and knows of the various means of subterfuge that could get him the results he desires. However, he is held back from this by the commands and prohibitions of Allāh, so he abandons that course despite his ability, because it would go against his principles and his religion (Z). Only that kind of individual would employ subterfuge and look for opportunities to use deceitful plots who is himself least bothered about following the commandments of Allāh. The phrase '*man lā harījata lahu fi al-dīn*' is rendered *he who has no qualms in [defying] the religion*, since he has no piety or Godwariness (I). On the other hand, because he fears Allāh and adheres to the principle of justice with both friend and foe, the Imām states categorically that he would never stoop so low as to seize the opportunity to employ such devices (N).



42

ADMONITION AGAINST VAIN DESIRES AND LENGTHY ASPIRATIONS

1 O people! Verily that which I fear most for you is twofold: following vain desires and having lengthy aspirations. As for following vain desires, it hinders one from the truth, whereas having lengthy aspirations makes one forget the next life. Look, verily this world has turned back, retreating swiftly, and nothing remains of it but residue, like the last few drops in a container that has been emptied. Beware, the Hereafter is advancing; and both of them has its children. So be among the children of the Hereafter and not among the children of this world, for every child shall cling to its mother on the Day of Judgement. Verily today there is action without reckoning, but tomorrow there will be reckoning with no [opportunity for] action.

١ أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ! إِنَّ أَخْرَقَ مَا أَحَادُ عَلَيْكُمُ اتْسَانٍ: اتْبَاعُ الْهَوَى، وَطُولُ الْأَمْلِ؛ فَأَمَّا اتْبَاعُ الْهَوَى فَيَضُلُّ عَنِ الْحَقِّ، وَأَمَّا طُولُ الْأَمْلِ فَيُسِّيِّ الْآخِرَةَ. أَلَا وَإِنَّ الدُّنْيَا قَدْ وَلَتْ حَدَّاً، فَلَمْ يُقْ مِنْهَا إِلَّا صَبَابَةً كَصَبَابَةِ الْأَيَاءِ اصْطَبَاهَا صَابَاهَا. أَلَا وَإِنَّ الْآخِرَةَ قَدْ أَفْبَثَتْ، وَلَكُلُّ مِنْهَا بَنُونَ، فَكُوئُنُوا مِنْ أَبْنَاءِ الْآخِرَةِ، وَلَا تَكُونُوا مِنْ أَبْنَاءِ الدُّنْيَا، فَإِنَّ كُلَّ وَلَدٍ سَيْلَحُ بِأُمِّهِ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ؛ وَإِنَّ الْيَوْمَ عَمَلٌ وَلَا حِسَابَ، وَغَدَّا حِسَابٌ وَلَا عَمَلٌ.

CONTEXT

Amīr al-Mu'minīn entered Kūfah on twelfth of Rajab, 36 AH, following the Battle of Jamal. After being received and welcomed by the people, he proceeded to the main masjid. There, he offered two rak'ahs of prayer before delivering a very eloquent and thought-provoking sermon, part of which has been adduced here by

al-Sayyid al-Rađī. The entire sermon has been mentioned in *Tamām Nahj al-Balāghah* (4:505) under the heading of ‘al-Bālighah’, as the 49th sermon of said text. Some commentators have deduced the context of this sermon from what Naṣr ibn Muzāḥim (d. 216 AH) mentions in his version, which has some slight variance in wording, in his work *Waq’at Ṣiffīn*. In the significantly longer account, he mentions clearly that this sermon was given soon after the Battle of Jamal, when the Imām returned to Kūfah (T). In this oration, the Imām addresses some of the negative characteristics in certain individuals that are particularly manifested when they attain victory after defeating their enemies, especially when there is also the question of gaining spoils and booty. At such moments, those who seek the material acquisitions of this world, and who think that they played an important role in achieving victory in battle, claim a greater share of the spoils. The goal of the Imām in this sermon was to warn the people and to remind them of the lofty objective for which they fought the battle in the first place. He warns them not to fall for the allurements of this world and become ensnared by the trap of vain desires and lengthy aspirations, for these will divert them from the right path and cause them to forget the Hereafter (N). Interestingly, many early sources mention this sermon or parts thereof, including works like al-Kulaynī’s *al-Kāfi*, al-Mufid’s *al-Amālī*, and al-Ṣadūq’s *al-Khiṣāl*. Perhaps that is because of the universally applicable ethical instructions contained therein.

COMMENTARY

1 The reason why the Imām said he fears these two qualities the most is that they are the attributes which are responsible for the destruction of most people (T). This destruction can take different forms. Some commentators give the example of theologians from certain schools who lost their way because of their blind, and even fanatical, adherence to their school of thought, despite their intellectual prowess, simply because they wanted their school to prevail over others, and this vain desire led to their downfall (I). Subsequently, Amīr al-Mu’minīn himself proceeds to explain how these two traits negatively impact human beings. Submitting to vain desires (*hawā*) hinders one from the truth since it entails following that from which one derives pleasure, even when it transgresses the bounds and limits laid down by the *shari’ah*. In addition, having lengthy worldly aspirations makes one forget the Hereafter, being constantly after

the attainment of what he aspires even when it is something unattainable by him (M). In order to clarify the futility of these qualities, the Imām explains the reality of this world stating that it is transient, and is like a creature that *has turned back, retreating swiftly*. Al-Sayyid al-Rađī says, “[The term] *al-hadhdhā'* means swift, but there are some people who have narrated it as *jadhdhā'* with [the letter] *jīm*, meaning that its benefits and enjoyments [will soon] come to an end.” Indeed, life in this world passes very quickly and soon comes to an end, with the march of time proceeding and stopping or slowing down for no one (N).

The other similitude used by the Imām to describe this world is that of a vessel in which *nothing remains of it but residue, like the last few drops in a container that has been emptied*. This again emphasizes the little time we have on this earth, for from the moment we are born, each breath we take pushes us one step closer to the Hereafter, and what remains of our lives should be considered like those few last drops that remain at the bottom of an otherwise emptied vessel (T). After warning the people of the fast-approaching Hereafter, Amīr al-Mu'minīn ('a) says that both this world and the Hereafter *has its children*. Then he warns us to *be among the children of the Hereafter and not among the children of this world*, since *every child shall cling to its mother on the Day of Judgement*. The ‘children’ of this world are those who consider all benefit, loss, good, and evil to be limited to the life of this world. They also give importance to any means which brings them benefit or pleasure in this worldly life. On the other hand, the ‘children’ of the Hereafter are those who believe in the unseen realm, and in the everlasting afterlife. They know that this world is temporary and transient, and are unwilling to trade the former for the latter. They work for both together, yet give more heed and attention to the Hereafter (Z). In another version, the phrase '*bi-abīhi*' is used instead of '*bi-ummīhi*', meaning every child shall cling to its father, rather than its mother, on the Day of Judgement. The meaning is, however, the same – the people will arrive at the reality of that to which they were attached in the world. Those who cared for and believed only in the world will see the embodiment of a life bereft of belief and piety, which will take the form of Hell, as the Qur'ān states: *the abyss of hellfire will be his mother ('fa ummuhu hāwiyah', Q101:9)*. In contrast, those who worked for the Hereafter will find their place in Paradise awaiting them (N).

Finally, the Imām mentions the urgency of working for the Hereafter while one still has the opportunity to do so in this world, since *today there is action without reckoning but tomorrow there will be reckoning with no [opportunity for]*

action. This statement echoes those verses of the Qurān that emphasize the need to seize the opportunity to do good and collect provisions for the Hereafter while one still has life in this world (such as Q63:10, Q23:99-100, and 4:18).



A RESPONSE TO THE SUGGESTION OF PREPARING FOR BATTLE

1 Verily my preparation for battle with the people of Syria, while Jarīr is still there, would be tantamount to closing the door on Syria and preventing its people from that which is good [for them] if they intend it. However, I have set a time limit for Jarīr after which he will not remain, unless he is deceived or is disobedient. My opinion [at this time] is in favour of patience, so be amenable; and I am not against your preparation [for battle].

2 I have deliberated upon this matter meticulously, examining it inside and out, yet I did not find any choice for myself other than battle or unbelief [in what was brought by Muḥammad (ṣ)]. Certainly, there was [before me] a ruler over the *ummah* who brought novel changes, thereby compelling people to speak out. So they did speak, then they rose up [in rebellion] and replaced him.

١ إِنَّ اشْتِعَادَادِي لِحَرْبِ أَهْلِ الشَّامِ وَجَرِيرُ عِنْدَهُمْ، إِغْلَاقُ لِلشَّامِ، وَصَرْفُ لِأَهْلِهِ عَنْ خَيْرٍ إِنْ أَرَادُوهُ، وَكِنْ قَدْ وَقَتْ لِجَرِيرٍ وَقْتًا لَا يَقِيمُ بَعْدَهُ إِلَّا مَحْدُودًا أوْ عَاصِيًّا، وَالرَّأْيُ عِنْدِي مَعَ الْأَنْسَاءِ فَأَرْوَذُوا، وَلَا أَكُرُّهُ لَكُمُ الْإِعْدَادَ.

٢ وَلَقَدْ صَرَبْتُ أَنْفَ هَذَا الْأَمْرِ وَعَيْنَهُ، وَقَبَّلْتُ ظَهْرَهُ وَبَطْنَهُ، فَلَمْ أَرِ لِي فِيهِ إِلَّا الْقِتَالُ أَوِ الْكُفَرُ [بِمَا جَاءَ مُحَمَّدٌ ﷺ]. إِنَّهُ قَدْ كَانَ عَلَى الْأَمْمَةِ وَالْأَهْدَى أَحْدَاثًا، وَأَوْجَدَ النَّاسَ مَقَالًا، فَقَاتُلُوا ثُمَّ نَفَمُوا فَغَيَّرُوا.

CONTEXT

As was the established practice, after the people of Madīnah had pledged their allegiance to Imām ‘Alī (‘a) as their next caliph, the Imām sent official letters to all the governors of the various provinces, who had been appointed by the previous

caliph ‘Uthmān ibn ‘Affān, asking them all to pledge their allegiance to him. Mu‘āwiyah ibn Abī Sufyān, who was the governor of Syria, refused to give his allegiance. When the Imām’s letter reached Jarīr ibn ‘Abdillāh al-Bajalī, who was the governor of Hamadān, he immediately pledged his allegiance in writing, and then travelled to Kūfah in order to give his pledge of allegiance in person. Having been relieved of his post of governorship, Jarīr requested the Imām to allow him to take a letter to Mu‘āwiyah in order to convince him to pledge his allegiance. He made this suggestion because he had some relatives and tribesmen in Syria. Amīr al-Mu’minīn accepted his request and sent Jarīr ibn ‘Abdillāh as his representative to speak to Mu‘āwiyah ibn Abī Sufyān, but the latter stubbornly refused to give his oath of allegiance. When a long time had passed and Jarīr had not returned, the Imām’s companions advised him to make preparations to fight against the Syrians. The Imām did not accept this proposal and presented his clear arguments and reasons for rejecting it (N).

Among those who had given him this advice were Mālik al-Ashtar, ‘Adī ibn Ḥātim, and Shurayh ibn Hāni’, who all stood up and spoke together as one, while all his other companions were against the idea of preparing for battle and suggested that he remain in Kūfah. The three individuals who advised the Imām to prepare to fight insisted that those who had counselled against it sought to instil a sense of fear in the people to avoid fighting the Syrians, yet, “nothing more frightening than death exists in this encounter with the Syrians, and that (martyrdom) is something we desire.” It was at this juncture that the Imām spoke the words of this sermon to explain his decision on the matter (T). This oration actually comprises two sections which appear to have been spoken at different times, but al-Sayyid al-Rađī has mentioned them together here. The first section relates to preparation for battle against the Syrians, while the second pertains to the Imām’s insistence on fighting the battle, and is said to have been spoken in response to a Syrian who came to him at Ṣiffin with the proposition that the Imām abandon his plan to fight (N).

COMMENTARY

1 This statement of the Imām shows that Amīr al-Mu’minīn did not prefer waging war as a means of resolving disputes. Rather, he always sought peaceful means of dealing with disagreements and would constantly try to look for ways of

arriving at understanding through dialogue (N). Hence we find that there are many accounts which mention how the Imām sent messengers to Mu‘āwiyah, one after another, warning him against dissension and defiance (Z). The reason given by him for not wanting to prepare to wage war at that moment in time was logical. As long as Jarīr was in Syria, there was still a possibility that fighting could be averted by Mu‘āwiyah’s pledging allegiance. After all, the Imām had sent the letter to him only as a means of completing the argument (*itmām al-hujjah*) and leaving him with no excuse for the consequence he would face for his defiance (M). Interestingly, the Imām says that he does not wish to close *the door on Syria*, and not on Mu‘āwiyah himself, meaning that he did not wish for the Syrians to be killed in battle due to the idiocy and obstinacy of their headstrong governor (N). Taking such a rational stance at a time when strong emotions were at play is indeed the sign of a wise leader. This wisdom is further exemplified by his having given a timeframe to Jarīr, after which one of two things could have occurred: either he would have been deceived by Mu‘āwiyah, or he would have joined the camp of the disobedient ones (MB). Indeed, the Imām knew that his enemy might try to buy time by delaying his messenger so as to prepare his own army before giving a negative reply (N).

Be amenable translates ‘*arwidū*’ which has been interpreted as ‘*irfaqū*’ meaning be calm and gentle (I), and it seems that the Imām said this in order to allay their heightened emotions and anger (N). Some commentators have distinguished between the terms ‘*isti‘dād*’ and ‘*i‘dād*’, both of which have been translated as *preparation*, in order to show that there is no contradiction in the words of the Imām. The latter (*i‘dād*) is attributed to the companions of the Imām and refers to acquiring something and keeping it as a provision or a means for future use, whereas the former term (*isti‘dād*) is attributed to the Imām and refers to becoming ready by preparing something for an event that is to occur. Hence, when the Imām first said he does not wish to prepare for battle and then, at the end of this section of the sermon, he said he is not against their preparation, there was no contradiction (R). Alternatively, others have suggested that his statement *I am not against your preparation [for battle]* was to ensure that the motivation and resolve that his companions had in wanting to confront the enemy does not weaken or die down, as they would have to go to battle if all attempts at peaceful resolution were to fail (N).

2 This section of the sermon seems to be the complete opposite of the previous one, or it could be considered as the second phase where there was no option but battle (N). *I have deliberated upon this matter meticulously* translates *'Wa laqad darabtu anfa hādha al-amr wa 'aynah'*, which literally means 'I have struck the nose of this matter and its eye'. This is an Arabic proverb which is used to denote deep reflection and deliberation. The nose and eye are specifically mentioned because they form part of the face, and that which is used in deliberation by human beings is the face [and head] (I). After his deep deliberation, and meticulously examining the matter *inside and out* by looking at the position and stance taken by Mu'āwiyah, Imām 'Alī saw no option *other than battle or disbelief*. That is because Mu'āwiyah could only be turned away from falsehood and made to accept the truth by force (Z). Abandoning war at that instance would be tantamount to disbelief in what was revealed to the Messenger of Allāh (s), since it would mean abandoning a *jihād* which was compulsory and mandated, and that is something he would never do (M). Finally, Amīr al-Mu'minīn alludes to the caliphate of Uthmān, whom he refers to as *a ruler over the ummah who brought novel changes thereby compelling people to speak out*. The reason for mentioning this was to clarify what had led to Uthmān's assassination, since it was his own actions and innovations that caused the rebellion of the people against him. He had done things that went against the norms of social justice and the Sunnah of the Prophet (s), which led many people to speak up against his policies. Indeed, the fact that his body lay on the ground for three days after his assassination, with nobody ready to bury him, shows how angry the people were with him (N).



44

IN RESPONSE TO THE FLEEING OF MASQALAH

¹ May Allāh disfigure Maṣqalah! He acted like a nobleman but fled like a slave. Before his lauder could speak, he silenced him, and before his admirer could testify [to his good deeds], he muzzled him. If he had remained [steadfast], we would have taken from him whatever he could easily give and waited [for the balance] until his wealth increased.

١ قَبَّحَ اللَّهُ مَضْقَلَةً! فَعَلَ فِعْلَ السَّادَةِ، وَفَرَّ فِرَارَ الْعِيَدِ. فَمَا أَنْطَقَ مَادِحَةً حَتَّىٰ أَسْكَنَهُ، وَلَا صَدَّقَ وَاصِفَةً حَتَّىٰ بَكَّنَهُ، وَلَا أَقَامَ لَأَخْذِنَا مَيْشُورَةً وَانْتَظَرَنَا بِمَالِهِ وَفُورَةً.

CONTEXT

This was spoken by Amīr al-Mu'minīn after the Battle of Ḳiffīn in 38 AH, when Maṣqalah ibn Hubayrah al-Shaybānī fled to Mu'āwiyah seeking asylum. Maṣqalah had been Imām 'Alī's representative in Ardashīr Khurrah. He had bought prisoners from the tribe of Banī Nājiyah from Ma'qal ibn Qays, who was one of the Imām's military commanders, for a sum of five hundred thousand dirhams. He then set them all free without taking any money from them. Amīr al-Mu'minīn showed his approval of this magnanimous action, and after some time had passed, he wrote a letter to Maṣqalah asking for the payment he owed. Upon receiving the letter, Maṣqalah went to Kūfah and paid two hundred thousand dirhams. When the Imām asked for the balance, he promised that he would arrange for it to be paid as well. Then he left secretly and fled to Syria by night, in order to seek asylum with the Umayyads. It was when Imām 'Alī ('a) learned of his absconderence that he gave this sermon in Kūfah. It is worth noting that when Amīr al-Mu'minīn came to power, twenty-five years after the passing away of the Messenger of Allāh (ṣ), he selected people who would act as his representatives in the various towns and cities. This appointment was of three types: there were those who were directly chosen and appointed by the Imām, such as Muḥammad ibn Abī Bakr, Mālik ibn

Ḩārith al-Ashtar, and ‘Abdullāh ibn ‘Abbās. Others had been appointed by ‘Uthmān, but they pledged their allegiance to Imām ‘Alī (‘a) and he let them continue to remain as governors, such as Jarīr ibn ‘Abdillāh al-Bajalī and Ash‘ath ibn Qays. Finally, there were those who were not directly appointed by him; rather, his governors had appointed them as aides. Maṣqalah ibn Hubayrah was an example of this third group, and he had been appointed by Ibn ‘Abbās (S). It should be noted that due to the paucity of reliable and trustworthy individuals who could manage the affairs of the people, the fact that an individual had been appointed to such a post did not necessarily mean that he was someone who fully agreed with the position of the Imām. There were those among the second and third groups who actually had different approaches and worldviews, but Amīr al-Mu’minīn was watchful of them.

Maṣqalah was one such individual. He was from the tribe of Bakr ibn Wā'il. His mistake was that he carried out an unlawful transaction with wealth from the public treasury (*bayt al-māl*). The Banū Nājiyah were a tribe of Arab Christians who lived near Baṣrah. They had twice rebelled against Amīr al-Mu’minīn and were defeated both times, and those who remained alive among their rebels were taken as prisoners. Their first rebellion was right after the Battle of Jamal, when all the people of Baṣrah pledged their allegiance to the Imām but the Banū Nājiyah refused to do so and prepared an army to fight against him. The Imām sent a contingent to face them and enquire what reason they have for their rebellion, so that perhaps they could come to some resolution. When the Banū Nājiyah found themselves surrounded by the forces of Imām ‘Alī, they became divided into three groups. The first group said, “We were Christians who converted to Islam and became embroiled in the sedition of Jamal. Now we pledge allegiance like the rest of the people.” The second group said, “We were Christians and still profess Christianity, but we were forced to participate in the Battle of Jamal. But now we are ready to pledge our allegiance and pay the *jizyah*.” The problem was with the third group who said, “We were Christians, then we converted to Islam but we did not like it [and want to revert to our previous faith].” It was this third group that obstinately rebelled and fought the Imām, only to be defeated and have their prisoners of war taken to Kūfah. That was their first rebellion.

The second rebellion of the Banū Nājiyah was after the Battle of Ṣiffīn, in the year 38 AH. Khirrīt (of Ḥurayth) ibn Rāshid was one of their leaders, and after the matter of the arbitration had transpired, he came with thirty of his companions to

the Imām and openly declared that he would neither obey him nor pray behind him, and would leave his company. The Imām warned him that if he did this he would essentially be breaking his pledge of allegiance thereby disobeying Allāh. However, despite all that the Imām told him, Khirrīt remained stubborn in his position. He was influenced by the Khawārij and said that he had taken this stance because he felt the Imām had shown weakness by accepting the arbitration. The Imām invited him for a discussion on the matter, and Khirrīt said he would come the following day. Imām ‘Alī accepted this, but warned him not to fall for the guiles of Satan or those who would seek to negatively influence him. However, when he returned to his people, he was swayed by them and eventually rose up to fight and was killed. Some of his followers were also taken as prisoners. The Muslims among them were released, with the others (numbering about 500) being taken to Kūfah as captives. On the way, they passed by the land of Ardashīr Khurrah where Maṣqalah felt pity for them and purchased them from Ma’qal ibn Qays, who was the commander of the contingent that had fought and captured them. He promised to pay their price and set them free.

Though Imām ‘Alī was pleased with this generous action, when Maṣqalah started giving excuses and did not pay what was owed to the public treasury, he wrote him a letter saying, “Indeed the greatest treachery is betraying the community, and the gravest fraud is when a leader defrauds the people of his city. You owe the Muslims five hundred thousand dirhams, so send this amount to me when my letter reaches you...” That is when Maṣqalah went to Kūfah with the sum of two hundred thousand, and subsequently fled to join Mu‘awiyah. He later became one of those who bore false testimony against the sincere companion of the Imām, Hujr ibn ‘Adī, thereby playing a role in his execution. He was then given command of an army by Mu‘awiyah in order to attack Ṭabaristān, and it was there that his army was defeated and he was killed (S). It is reported that Maṣqalah’s tribe had asked the Imām to permit them to intervene and write to him, urging him to return. They claimed that the only thing holding him back from returning was shame and embarrassment, so if they informed him that the Imām had pardoned him, he would surely return. He allowed them to do so, but when they wrote to Maṣqalah, he responded saying that if he did so he would forever remain known to ‘Alī (‘a) as a treacherous individual, and to Mu‘awiyah as a disloyal person. Therefore, he decided to remain with Mu‘awiyah and would not return until he died (T).

COMMENTARY

1 The statement '*qabbahallāhu Maṣqalah*' is rendered *may Allāh disfigure Maṣqalah*, and is a phrase that means: may Allāh keep him far away from all goodness (R). That is because *he acted like a nobleman* when he purchased all those captives and then proceeded to free them, *but fled like a slave* instead of remaining behind and trying to make amends for his mistake. This is the reaction common to thieves, traitors, and hypocrites, all of whom flee from justice and seek to elude it (Z). By such action, he silenced his lauder ('*mādiḥahu*') before he could speak, and muzzled his admirer before he could testify to his good deed. The term '*wāṣifahu*' literally means the one who describes him, and in this context, it refers to one who described his positive trait and action with admiration (MB). *Muzzled him* translates '*bakkatahu*', which literally meant striking someone with a stick and later came to denote reproof or overcoming someone through argument, thereby leaving him speechless (N). By running away and joining Mu‘āwiyah, Maṣqalah had nullified his own good deed of buying and freeing the captives, so nobody could subsequently praise him for that action. In the end, Amīr al-Mu’minīn ('a) explains what the correct course of action would have been for Maṣqalah, saying that if he had remained behind and shown willingness to accept his error and look for a solution, *we would have taken from him whatever he could easily give and waited [for the balance] until his wealth increased.*

If one were to ask: why did the Imām not say that he would forgive his debt instead of saying that he would wait for his wealth to increase so that he could repay it? A possible answer to this is that if the Imām had pardoned him, it would set a dangerous precedent and in the future any other individual might release prisoners of war in this way, which could be perilous for the society, as enemies would get the opportunity to quickly regroup and launch further attacks. Aside from this, such 'liberal' spending from the public treasury can harm the economic strength and stability of the Muslims (N).



45

ON THE DAY OF FITR

PRAISING ALLĀH

- 1** Praise belongs to Allāh, without ever losing hope in His mercy, nor ever deprived of His bounty, nor ever despondent of His forgiveness, nor ever contemptuous of His worship. Beneficence from Him never ceases, and His blessing is never missed.

حمد الله

١ الْحَمْدُ لِلّهِ عَيْرَ مَقْنُوطٍ مِنْ رَحْمَتِهِ،
وَلَا مَحْلُوٌ مِنْ نِعْمَتِهِ، وَلَا مَا يُوِسْ
مِنْ مَغْفِرَتِهِ، وَلَا مُسْتَكْفَى عَنْ
عِبَادَتِهِ، الَّذِي لَا تَبْرُحُ مِنْهُ رَحْمَةً،
وَلَا تُفْقَدُ لَهُ نِعْمَةً.

DISPRaising THIS WORLD

- 2** This world is an abode for which annihilation is ordained, and for its inhabitants, departure. Yet it is sweet and green; it hastens for the seeker and attaches to the heart of the observer. So depart from it with the best provision available to you, and do not seek in it more than you require, and do not pursue from it more than what is necessary.

ذم الدنيا

٢ وَالْدُّنْيَا دَارٌ مِنِي لَهَا الْفَناءُ، وَلَا هُلُّهَا
مِنْهَا الْجَلَاءُ، وَهِيَ حُلْوَةٌ خَضْرَاءٌ
وَقَدْ عَجَلَتْ لِلظَّالِمِ، وَالْتَّبَسَتْ
بِقَلْبِ النَّاظِرِ، فَأَرْتَحُوا مِنْهَا بِأَحْسَنِ
مَا يَحْصُرُونَكُمْ مِنَ الرِّزْقِ، وَلَا تَسْأَلُوا
فِيهَا فَوْقَ الْكَفَافِ، وَلَا تَطْلُبُوا مِنْهَا
أَكْثَرَ مِنَ الْبَلَاغِ.

CONTEXT

This is only part of a relatively long sermon that the Imām gave on the day of Eid al-Fitr. It is comprised of two sections which are not connected and have been excerpted from different parts of the original sermon. In the first section, the Imām praises Allāh, and in the second he speaks against this world, warning the people to avoid its lures, and urges them to prepare provisions for the Hereafter. Despite

its brevity, this sermon contains a wealth of meaning and has important messages for the believers. According to some commentators, al-Sayyid al-Rādī has taken this sermon from three different parts of the original lengthy sermon of the Imām (T). Before al-Sayyid al-Rādī, al-Shaykh al-Šadūq mentioned this oration in its entirety in his work *Man Lā Yaḥḍuru Hu al-Faqīh* (1:514), and after him a number of other scholars have also quoted it in their works. It has further been pointed out that in the first part of this sermon, the Imām has employed what is termed as *muwāzanah*, which is a kind of artistic expression where phrases of identical structure are used, and we see how the terms *maqnūt*, *makhluw*, and *ma'yūs* are all based on the structure of *maf'ūl*. This adds beauty and eloquence to the speech (I).

COMMENTARY

1 In this section, six qualities of Allāh are alluded to by the Imām, each of which encompasses an aspect of divine blessings that motivate a person to praise and glorify Him. First, he states: *Praise belongs to Allāh, without ever losing hope in His mercy*; and how could one ever lose hope in His mercy when it encompasses all things (Q7:156)? Indeed, it is only those who have gone astray that lose hope in Allāh's mercy (Q15:56). Second, he states that no individual is *ever deprived of His bounty* since human beings are constantly being showered by His blessings, both outward and known, as well as inward and hidden (Q31:20). Third, he states that no one should ever be *despondent of His forgiveness*. That is because Allāh has clearly told the Prophet to convey to the people: *O My servants who exceeded the limits against their own souls! Do not despair of the mercy of Allāh. Verily Allāh forgives the sins – all of them; indeed He is the Oft-Forgiving the Merciful* (Q39:53). Fourth, since Allāh is all-perfect, and is worthy of worship, we submit ourselves to Him and are never *contemptuous of His worship* (MB). Furthermore, the first three statements which acknowledge His mercy, bounty, and forgiveness, give us all the reasons we need to submit ourselves fully to Him in humility (N). Indeed, *those who are contemptuous and arrogant, He will subject them to a painful punishment, and they will find none besides Allāh to protect or help them* (Q4:173). Fifth, he says that *beneficence from Him never ceases*. The mercy of Allāh is ever present, continuous, and unending. The phrase '*lā tabrah*' means it does not stop or come to an end ('*lā tazūl*') (R). Finally, the sixth quality the Imām mentions is: *His*

blessing is never missed, meaning that Allāh's blessings are incessant, and present at every moment and in every place.

In these last two statements, the Imām repeats the mention of divine mercy and blessings again, the only difference being that earlier he was talking about the mercy and blessings themselves whereas here he is referring to the continuity and incessant nature of these two qualities (N). Furthermore, these qualities impel one to show gratitude and praise Allāh, so by mentioning them and highlighting the fact that Allāh's mercy and blessings are continuous and incessant, he encourages people to offer thanks to the Almighty (M). If one were to ask: do the first two statements that tell us not to lose hope in His mercy and that no one is ever deprived of His bounty, not automatically mean that His mercy and blessings are ever-present and continuous? Then what was the purpose of repeating this fact? We would answer: No, because not losing hope in His mercy does not necessarily entail its continuity and incessancy, as is evident. Yes, saying that no one is ever deprived of His blessings and bounty does denote that it is never missed by anyone (as mentioned in the last statement). However, it is possible that this only means His blessings encompass all His creatures and do not leave out any of them, in which case the meaning of the second statement is different from what is meant by the last statement of the Imām, so there is no repetition (MB).

2 In this section of the sermon, Amīr al-Mu'minīn ('a) speaks about this world and its true nature. He describes it as an abode for which *annihilation is ordained*, and its inhabitants will one day leave it and depart for the Hereafter. At the same time, it seems sweet – but with a false sweetness, just like the false taste a sick person gets when he tastes food, since in reality its flavour is bitter (T). Likewise, it looks green and fresh but only outwardly, while its reality is something else. The sense of taste and sight have been given as examples, but this world attracts all the senses, and pulls those who are heedless towards it (N). The phrase '*qad'ajilat li al-tālib'* has also been read '*qad'ujjilat li al-tālib*' where the first form means that the world is quick and hastens in coming to its seeker (N), or is a reference to how people who seek it give preference to instant gain, even if it is little and short-lived, over lasting benefit, even if it is great (Z). The second form of the phrase means that it is made quick and short, such that one who seeks it does not have much time to enjoy it (MB). This world attaches itself to the heart of the person who observes it, and the one who seeks it, and the heart of such an individual gets

mixed with love of this world (M). When that happens, he becomes blind to his true goal and objective (Z).

For this reason, one should focus on only that which is good in this world, namely that which will constitute the best provision for him in the Hereafter – Godwariness and good deeds (MB). The term '*'al-kafāf'*' refers to what is sufficient to meet one's requirements and needs, thereby rendering him independent of others. Seeking more than what is required and striving to amass more than what is necessary is futile, since it will all be left behind when one departs this world. If everyone followed these lofty instructions of the Imām ('a), they would all live happy lives, with tranquillity and harmony (Z). Instead of seeking more of this world, believers should gather provisions for the Hereafter. Indeed, traditions tell us that on the Day of Resurrection, every person will wish that he had not possessed anything but the bare essentials in the world (T). These final statements of the Imām are therefore a reminder to us of the long and difficult path that we will have to traverse in the Hereafter, and the short time we have to prepare provisions for that arduous journey (M).



46

HIS SUPPLICATION AFTER DECIDING TO ADVANCE ON SYRIA

1 O Allāh, I seek Your protection from the hardships of travel, the grief of [a sorrowful] return, and the scene of ruin in my household, property, and children. O Allāh, You are the Companion in the journey and You are the One who remains behind to look after the household. None except You can join these two, since one who is left behind cannot be a companion, nor can he who is a companion be left behind.

اللَّهُمَّ إِنِّي أَعُوذُ بِكَ مِنْ وَعْنَاءِ
السَّفَرِ، وَكَابَةِ الْمُنْتَقَلِبِ، وَشَوْءِ
الْمَنَظَرِ فِي الْأَهْلِ وَالْمَالِ وَالْوَلَدِ.
اللَّهُمَّ أَنْتَ الصَّاحِبُ فِي السَّفَرِ،
وَأَنْتَ الْخَلِيقَةُ فِي الْأَهْلِ، وَلَا
يَجْمَعُهُمَا غَيْرُكَ، لِأَنَّ الْمُسْتَحْلِفَ لَا
يَكُونُ مُسْتَضْحِبًا، وَالْمُسْتَضْحِبُ لَا
يَكُونُ مُسْتَحْلِفًا.

CONTEXT

This is not technically a sermon; rather, it is a supplication that was recited by Imām ‘Alī (*a*) when he sat on his mount intending to ride towards Syria and face Mu‘āwiyah (M). According to one account, after sitting on his horse, the Imām recited the *basmalah* and then the verses of the Qur’ān that state: *Glory be to Him Who made this subservient to us, and we could not have done it [otherwise]. And surely to our Lord we will return* (Q43:13-14), before reciting this supplication (MB). Al-Sayyid al-Rađī says that the initial part of this supplication has been narrated from the Noble Messenger (*s*), and it has been embellished with an eloquent addendum by Amīr al-Mu’minīn (*a*) from where he says, “None except You can join...” until the end (*I*). This supplication has been narrated in many early sources, and the initial part thereof is found in a number of Sunnī sources as well. Despite its brevity, this supplication has some interesting and profound lessons. Firstly, the possible difficulties that might arise during travel have been classified into three types, and Allāh’s protection has been sought for them all. Secondly, Allāh has been invoked as both a Companion in the journey and a Vicegerent among the

household that remains behind. Finally, there is emphasis on the fact that it is only Allāh who can do both these things simultaneously (N).

COMMENTARY

¹ The phrase ‘*wāthā’ al-safar*’ is rendered *the hardships of travel* and refers to the difficulty one has to endure while travelling. The word *al-wāth* initially referred to fine sand in which feet would sink, hence making it difficult to walk upon. Then it came to refer to difficulty during travel (R). ‘*Ka’ābat al-munqalab*’ means returning from a journey with sadness instead of joy (Z). This could be for a variety of reasons, including an unsuccessful journey where one did not attain the outcome he was seeking (N), or something bad that happened on the journey or back home while one was away. An unsightly and awful scene of loss and devastation in one’s *household, property and children* is one example of this. Other examples include things like sickness or death of a family member, or loss through destruction of property (T). Allāh is not limited by time or space, so He is everywhere. He is with one who is travelling just as He is with those who remain behind. And it is expected of a fellow traveller that he should look out for his travel companion and help him whenever he needs help. Likewise, it is expected of a vicegerent who remains behind to take care of the affairs that have been delegated to him, such as ensuring that no harm or loss comes to a person or his property (MB).

Thus, mentioning that Allāh is one’s Companion on the journey, and his Vicegerent who remains behind to look after his family and property, brings a sense of ease to the heart of the supplicant, because he knows that Allāh is with him and his family (N). The Imām then states: *None except You can join these two* – meaning the two qualities of being a travelling companion while at the same time remaining behind to take care of one’s household and possessions. That is simply because *one who is left behind cannot be a companion, nor can he who is a companion be left behind*. No creature composed of matter can be at two places simultaneously. It is only Allāh who is neither restricted by time, nor by space. That is why *He is with you wherever you are* (Q57:4) (N).



HIS STATEMENT ABOUT KŪFAH

1 It is as though I see you, O Kūfah, being stretched out like the leather of ‘Ukāz, scraped by calamities and ridden with cataclysms. I certainly know that no tyrant would intend you harm, but that Allāh will afflict him with an ordeal and strike him with a lethal blow.

كَأَنِّي بِكِ يَا كُوفَةُ ثَمَدْيَنْ مَدَّ
الْأَدِيمِ الْعَكَاظِيِّ، تُعْرَكِينَ بِالنَّوَازِلِ،
وَتُرْكِينَ بِالرَّلَازِلِ. وَإِنِّي لَأَعْلَمُ أَنَّهُ
مَا أَرَادَ بِكِ جَبَارٌ سُوءً إِلَّا بِتَلَاهَ اللَّهُ
بِشَاغِلٍ، وَرَمَاهُ بِقَاتِلٍ.

CONTEXT

This statement of the Imām contains two prophesies regarding Kūfah (or, according to one report, about both the garrison cities of Kūfah and Baṣrah). The first pertains to some very difficult calamities that will befall the Kūfans at the hands of merciless tyrants, and the second is about the consequence of their tyranny and how they would end up suffering for their evil (N). The Imām is said to have spoken these words after his arrival into Kūfah from Baṣrah, and this oration has been reported in other sources before *Nahj al-Balāghah* as well (S). There are many statements made by Amīr al-Mu’minīn (*a*) about the city of Kūfah, some of which are negative while others are not. These statements can be found in a variety of early sources (T). Indeed, what the Imām had foretold did come to pass, and among the tyrants who came to rule over Kūfah were Ziyād – who gathered the people in the masjid in order to curse Imām ‘Alī, his son ‘Ubaydullāh ibn Ziyād – whose evil is known to all due to his role in the massacre at Karbalā’, and Ḥajjāj ibn Yūsuf – who was the bloodthirsty tyrant responsible for the brutal killing of numerous innocent individuals, as well as a few others who came after them. Each of these individuals died a painful death, having been afflicted by maladies of different kinds, such as paralysis, leprosy, and the like (MB). Hence we see that Amīr al-Mu’minīn knew what would happen in the future, either because he has been informed about it by the Prophet (*s*), or because he could see the signs

in the behaviour of the people, and knew of the eventual consequences that they would face due to their actions.

COMMENTARY

1 We could paraphrase this statement of the Imām as follows: It is as though I can clearly see your future, O city of Kūfah. I see the hands of tyrants outstretched towards you with all sorts of oppression (M). ‘Ukāz was the name of a marketplace near Makkah where Arab merchants from all over would gather annually for a period of about one month in order to show their wares and carry out business transactions. It was also a place where they would recite poetry and boast about their own tribes. Many vices were practiced there, and that is why after Islam was established among the Arabs, the annual gathering at ‘Ukāz was stopped (N). One of the items that was mostly traded at ‘Ukāz was leather, and that is why the leather of ‘Ukāz became famous (I). The phrase *being stretched out like the leather of ‘Ukāz* is a metaphor used by the Imām to depict the severity of the trials that will befall the people of Kūfah, like the leather which is stretched out with great force (MB). The term ‘*tūrakīnā*’ refers to scraping and rubbing, which is one of the processes used in tanning leather (N). Alternatively, it may refer to vehement conflict and altercation, until one gets completely exhausted by it (I). *Ridden with cataclysms* translates ‘*turkabīna bi al-zalāzil*’ and connotes the wickedness and harshness of tyrannical rulers, whose oppression shakes the people and agitates them like earthquakes (M). Having informed the inhabitants of Kūfah about what awaits them, the Imām proceeds to assure them that all those who would oppress them will be punished for doing so. Of course, this is not something specific to the tyrants of Kūfah – all tyrants and oppressors will certainly be punished for their tyranny (Z). However, his mentioning it here specifically in this manner is perhaps to console the people by assuring them that those who oppress them will certainly face divine wrath.

The phrase *Allāh will afflict him with an ordeal* translates ‘*ibtalāhu Allāh bi-shāghil*’, which literally means that Allāh will try him with that which will preoccupy him, and this is most likely a reference to painful ailments which afflict the tyrants inwardly and keep them preoccupied and aloof. In contrast, ‘*ramāhu bi-qātil*’ is rendered *strike him with a lethal blow*, and refers to events that transpire outwardly and target the evil oppressors, leading to their annihilation (N).



48

HIS SERMON ON THE WAY TO SYRIA

1 All praise is for Allāh whenever night falls and darkness spreads. All praise is due to Allāh whenever a star shines bright and when it sets. All praise belongs to Allāh Whose bounty is never missed and Whose favours cannot be repaid.

١ الْحَمْدُ لِلّٰهِ كُلُّمَا وَقَبَ لَيْلٌ
وَغَسْقٌ، وَالْحَمْدُ لِلّٰهِ كُلُّمَا لَاحَ
نَجْمٌ وَخَفْقٌ، وَالْحَمْدُ لِلّٰهِ غَيْرَ
مُفْقُودٍ إِلَيْعَامٍ، وَلَا مُكَافَأٌ
إِلْفَضَالٍ.

2 Now then; I have sent forth my vanguard, instructing that they remain on the banks of this river until my orders reach them. I have decided to cross over this watercourse to the small group among you that resides on the banks of the Tigris, so as to recruit them to march with you towards your enemy, keeping them as an auxiliary force for you.

٢ أَمَّا بَعْدُ، فَقَدْ بَعْثَثُ مَقَادِيمِي،
وَأَمْرَتُهُمْ بِلُرُومِ هَذَا الْمُلْطَاطِ، حَتَّى
يَأْتِيهِمْ أَمْرِي، وَقَدْ رَأَيْتُ أَنْ أَفْطَعَ
هَذِهِ النُّطْفَةَ إِلَى شَرِذَمَةٍ مِنْكُمْ،
مُوَطَّنِينَ أَكْنَافَ دِجلَةَ، فَأُنْهَضَهُمْ
مَعَكُمْ إِلَى عَذُوْكُمْ، وَأَجْعَلَهُمْ مِنْ
أَمْدَادِ الْقُوَّةِ لَكُمْ.

CONTEXT

As he prepared to counter the rebellion of Mu‘awiyah ibn Abī Sufyān in Syria, Amīr al-Mu’mīnīn (*a*) mobilized forces and dispatched them in phases. This sermon was given by him before the second phase, where another group of soldiers had been readied to march, and he delivered this brief oration after leading the Maghrib prayers. Having completed the sermon, the Imām asked for his horse and proceeded to ride it, leading the troops towards Syria. It is at this moment that he recited the supplication mentioned earlier in sermon no. 46 (S). According to other reports, the Imām (*a*) is said to have delivered this sermon on

the way to Syria, while he was at a place known as al-Nukhaylah, on the outskirts of Kūfah, in the year 37 AH (M). The sermon is comprised of two sections. In the first section the Imām praises Allāh, which was the common practice in most sermons. And in the second section, he informed his troops about the battle plan, the path they would have to follow, and how they should join up with those who had preceded them. He then went towards some of the tribes that lived around the Tigris river, seeking to mobilize them and get them to join his army. It seems as though the Imām wanted to inform his troops, who were not many in number, that they were not alone, and that there were many more who would be mobilized to join them (N).

COMMENTARY

1 Amīr al-Mu'minīn starts by praising and glorifying Allāh beautifully. He says that all praise is due to Allāh at every moment, even when *night falls and darkness spreads*. And just as the cycle of day and night is ever-continuous, as long as this world remains, so too should our praise for Allāh be continuous (N). The terms '*lāha*' and '*khafaqa*' refer to the appearance and disappearance of the stars, respectively (MB). The former term also connotes shining or gleaming, and the disappearance of a star in the sky is due to its setting (N). Mentioning nightfall and the rising and setting of stars is a reminder of the omnipotence of Allāh, as well as the great blessing He has granted to us in the form of night time for rest, and stars for things like navigation and keeping time (MB). It is interesting to note that while some commentators try to look for a deeper meaning in these opening statements of the Imām, others simply interpret them as a means of glorifying Allāh and seeking blessings thereby, nothing more (Z). However, it seems more likely that the Imām mentioned these phenomena specifically because it was early in the night when he gave this sermon, and it was the most apt example to give and one which would be most relatable at that moment. The Imām then reminded the people that Allāh's blessings are all-encompassing, and His *bounty is never missed*, meaning that His blessings never cease, nor are they restricted. Rather, we are blessed by Him at every moment in our lives. Furthermore, Allāh's *favours cannot be repaid* because even the very act of expressing gratitude to Him or praising Him is itself another blessing from Him that necessitates gratitude and praise! So if we

cannot even thank Him for all His blessings, how could we ever repay Him? That is indeed impossible (N).

2 In this section, Imām ‘Alī explains part of his military strategy. He says that he has sent his vanguard, which consisted of twelve thousand soldiers (MB), instructing them to follow the bank of the Euphrates on the west. This was while he himself planned to proceed with his troops towards the east, crossing the Euphrates and aiming for the city of Madā’in, which was next to the Tigris river, in order to mobilize more troops (N). Al-Sayyid al-Rađī says, “The term ‘al-miltāt’ in this sermon refers to the direction that they were to follow, namely the banks of the Euphrates. It is a term that is also used to refer to the shore of an ocean, and its original meaning is level ground. The word ‘al-nutfah’ here refers to the water of the Euphrates, and this is a very odd and peculiar turn of phrase.” The *small group* (*shirdhimah*), being referred to by the Imām, *that resides on the banks of the Tigris*, were the inhabitants of Madā’in (Z). After arriving at Madā’in, the Imām spoke to its inhabitants and admonished them, and before departing, he appointed ‘Adī ibn Ḥātim as his representative. ‘Adī proceeded to mobilize eight hundred soldiers and marched out to join the Imām. He left his son Zayd behind, instructing him to bring anyone else who was ready to join the army, so Zayd later marched out with four hundred more (M). It is reported that as these reinforcements were proceeding towards the main army which had been sent ahead, word reached them that Mu’āwiyah was marching with a large army in their direction. Hence, they decided to cross the Euphrates and advance eastwards to join the Imām, lest they get surrounded by the enemy.

When news of this reached Amīr al-Mu’minīn (*‘a*), he was pleased with their decision and once all the troops had joined together, they all marched against the enemy as one (N). It is noteworthy that aside from being a guide and a ruler, the Imām was, like the Noble Messenger (*s*), an excellent military strategist. He understood the value of motivation, and by mentioning the vanguard and the subsequent auxiliary forces who would join the troops, he heightened the soldiers’ morale. He also planned the exact route to take and where the troops should encamp. All this planning shows that Amīr al-Mu’minīn (*‘a*) was a great tactician as well.



RECOUNTING DIVINE ATTRIBUTES

1 All praise is for Allāh, Who is more concealed than all hidden matters, yet is evinced by manifest signs. He is invisible to the keen eye, yet neither can the eye that does not see Him deny Him, nor can the heart that is sure of Him perceive Him. He supersedes all in sublimity, so nothing is more sublime. He is closer than all in nearness, so nothing is nearer than Him. Yet His loftiness does not distance Him from any of His creation, nor does His nearness bring them on an equal level with Him.

2 He did not inform the minds about the limits of His attributes, yet He never prevented them from attaining essential cognizance of Him. He it is for Whom all signs in existence testify, until He is acknowledged by the heart of the denier. Exalted is Allāh far above the claims of those who liken others to Him and those who deny His existence.

١ الحَمْدُ لِلّهِ الَّذِي بَطَرَ خَفَيَاتِ
الْأَمْوَرِ، وَدَكَّ عَيْنَهُ أَعْلَامُ الظُّهُورِ،
وَأَمْسَحَ عَلَى عَيْنِ الْبَصِيرِ؛ فَلَا عَيْنٌ
مِنْ لَمْ يَرَهُ تُنْكِرُهُ، وَلَا قَلْبٌ مِنْ
أَثْبَتَهُ يُبَصِّرُهُ. سَبَقَ فِي الْعُلُوِّ فَلَا
شَيْءٌ أَعْلَى مِنْهُ، وَقَرُبَ فِي الدُّنْوِ
فَلَا شَيْءٌ أَقْرَبُ مِنْهُ، فَلَا اسْتِغْلَاثُ
بَاعِدَةٌ عَنْ شَيْءٍ مِنْ حَلْقِهِ، وَلَا قُرْبَةٌ
سَاوَاهُمْ فِي الْمَكَانِ بِهِ.

٢ لَمْ يُطْلِعِ الْعُقُولَ عَلَى تَحْدِيدِ صِفَتِهِ،
وَلَمْ يَحْجُبَهَا عَنْ وَاجِبِ مَعْرِفَتِهِ،
فَهُوَ الَّذِي تَشَهُّدُ لَهُ أَعْلَامُ الْوُجُودِ،
عَلَى إِفْرَارِ قَلْبِ ذِي الْجُحْودِ،
تَعَالَى اللَّهُ عَمَّا يَقُولُهُ الْمُشَبِّهُونَ بِهِ
وَالْجَاحِدُونَ لَهُ غَلُوْا كَيْرًا.

CONTEXT

In this sermon, the Imām mentions some of the attributes of Allāh, and it is hence considered one of the ‘sermons on monotheism’ that are found in *Nahj al-Balāghah*. The descriptions found in these sermons are profound and refer to both

the attributes of majesty (*jalāl*) as well as those of beauty (*jamāl*). At the same time, there is a negation of certain false claims made by those who do not understand Allāh, or those who deny His existence (N). Though we do now know exactly when the Imām gave this sermon, the universal nature of its message precludes the necessity of bearing its specific context in mind. At the same time, it should be noted that some of the statements in this sermon have been narrated with variant wordings. These variances are not always small, such as to be dismissed as mere scribal errors. For instance, the words 'eye' and 'heart' have been transposed in one variant, thereby giving a different meaning to the statement. Such variation makes the task of understanding and interpreting these lofty words difficult (S). The beauty of this sermon is in the way Allāh is described by the Imām. Indeed, whoever wishes to know the greatness and majesty of Allāh, and gain an understanding of His attributes, should turn to the lofty teachings of the Ahl al-Bayt ('a) and their narrations on this subject, as they are the bearers of the treasures of knowledge of the Book and the Sunnah (Z).

COMMENTARY

1 The phrase '*al-ladhī baṭāna khafīyyāt al-umūr*' has been translated *Who is more concealed than all hidden matters*, since He is hidden with respect to them, such that even secret matters seem apparent in comparison to His hiddenness (T). However, other commentators have offered different interpretations, based on their understanding of the verb '*baṭāna*'. Some say it means to conceal, in which case the phrase would mean: *Who conceals the secret matters* (I). Others say that it means to know what is hidden, in which case the phrase means that Allāh knows things from their innermost natures and realities, deeply and completely (Z). The reason for these differences in interpretation goes back to the term '*baṭāna*' which may be used as both a transitive or intransitive verb. In the former case, it means being aware of something hidden (*baṭāntu al-amr*), and in the latter, it means being hidden or concealed (N). Even though all the proposed interpretations are true, what is intended by this phrase here seems to be that He is most hidden, because the following phrase states that He is nevertheless *evinced by manifest signs*. Indeed, all that we see around us in creation are the clear signs of a wise and compassionate Creator (M). Though the eyes cannot see Him, *yet neither can the*

eye that does not see Him deny Him, nor can the heart that is sure of Him perceive Him.

This means that any rational and objective individual who ponders over the creation can never deny Allāh's existence. At the same time, those who know with certainty that He exists can never attain complete and encompassing knowledge of Him (N). Some commentators note that in another narration, these two phrases have been transposed: *yet neither can the heart of one who does not see Him deny Him, nor can the eye of one who is sure of Him perceive Him* (I). This latter narration seems to be more correct given the context (T). In the qualities of sublimity ("uluw") and nearness ('qurb'), He supersedes all, *so nothing is more sublime* and *nothing is nearer than Him*. However, one should not think that there is a contradiction here, since *His loftiness does not distance Him from any of His creation, nor does His nearness bring them on an equal level with Him*. While at first glance one may think that there is an evident incongruity between being the most high, and hence the furthest, and being the nearest. Yes, if we think in terms of the creation, who are limited by matter and restricted by space and time, then there would be an obvious contradiction between these two qualities. However, we are talking about Allāh, Who is neither bound by time nor space. Thus He is the nearest while also being the furthest; He is hidden while also being evident. This is something we find difficult to understand because we are immersed in the realm of contingent beings and know of attributes only by what we perceive in this realm. However, through reflection and contemplation, one can attain some understanding of these profound realities (N).

2 Human beings have not been given knowledge of the limits of Allāh's attributes, *yet He never prevented them from attaining essential cognizance of Him*. Indeed, it is not possible for the limited human mind to grasp His perfect attributes, which are the same as His essence ('ayni dhātih) and are boundless and unlimited. Nevertheless, not only has Allāh not veiled or prevented human beings from attaining a basic recognition of Him, He has actually granted each soul a share of this, so as to be able to have cognizance of Him in accordance with its ability. Had that not been the case, it would have been impossible for them to bear the obligations placed upon them in terms of beliefs and actions (MB). *All signs in existence testify to His presence, until He is acknowledged by the heart of the denier*. Even if some people deny Him by their tongues, they know in their hearts that He exists. They may even consider themselves atheists, yet in the depths of their

hearts there is an acknowledgment of a Higher Power, and a Creator. That is because everything in creation testifies to His existence (N).

The last sentence of this sermon is based on the verse: *Glory be to Him, and exalted is He far above what they say!* (Q17:43). Two groups are specified here by the Imām: those who liken others to Allāh ('al-mushabbihūn') and those who deny His existence ('al-jāhidūn'). *Those who liken others to Him* refers to the polytheists who ascribe partners to Allāh and say, for example, *He is the third of a trinity* (Q5:73). The term '*al-mushabbihūn*' here is not a reference to the anthropomorphists (*mushabbihah*) who liken Allāh to the creation; rather, it refers to those who liken the creation to the Creator (MB). In reality, both these groups deny Allāh since those who liken others to Him have imagined something as divine, and believe in it wholeheartedly, rejecting anything that does not match with their imagination. And since what they have imagined is not Allāh, they have essentially denied Allāh. As for the second group, they openly deny Allāh (M). *Exalted is Allāh far above the claims of both these groups.*



ON THE DESTRUCTION OF THE WORLD

1 Verily the root of all [this] strife only lies in vain desires that are acted upon and laws that are innovated. By this, the Book of Allāh is contravened and some people support others thereby, despite it being against the religion of Allāh. For if falsehood had been clear and unmixed with truth, it would not be hidden from the seekers. And if truth had been pure of all traces of falsehood, the obdurate rejecters would have been silenced. However, something is taken from here and something from there, and the two are mixed. At that moment, Satan overpowers his friends, and only those for whom goodness has been sent forth from Allāh are saved.

١ إِنَّمَا بَدْءُ وُقُوعِ الْفِتْنَ أَهْوَاءُ شَيْبَعْ،
وَأَحْكَامُ تُبْتَدَعُ، يُحَالِّ فِيهَا كِتَابُ
اللَّهِ، وَيَسْوَى عَيْنَهَا رِجَالُ رِجَالًا
عَلَى عَيْرِ دِينِ اللَّهِ. فَلَوْ أَنَّ الْبَاطِلَ
خَلَصَ مِنْ مَرَاجِ الْحَقِّ لَمْ يَخْفَ
عَلَى الْمُرْتَادِينَ، وَلَوْ أَنَّ الْحَقَّ
خَلَصَ مِنْ لَبِسِ الْبَاطِلِ انْقَطَعَتْ
عَنْهُ أَلْسُنُ الْمُعَانِدِينَ؛ وَلَكِنْ يُؤْخَذُ
مِنْ هَذَا ضِغْطٌ، وَمِنْ هَذَا ضِغْطٌ،
فَيُمَرْجَانِ. فَهُنَالِكَ يَسْتَوْلِي الشَّيْطَانُ
عَلَى أَوْلِيَائِهِ، وَيَنْجُو الَّذِينَ سَبَقُ
لَهُمْ مِنَ اللَّهِ الْحُسْنَى.

CONTEXT

This sermon is said to have been delivered by Imām ‘Alī (‘a) in the year 37 or 38 AH in Kūfah, after some of his followers, who would later become the Khawārij, had raised objections to the arbitration that took place after the Battle of Ḳifṭan (S). It has also been suggested that this oration was from the period just after the dissension of the Khawārij was dealt with, but the Imām wanted to clarify what had caused that *fitnah* in the first place (T). Alternatively, some have stated that it was spoken by him six days after he took over the caliphate. In this sermon, the Imām talks about one of the most dangerous causes of corruption in human

societies, and specifically the factor that led to deviation from the truth in the Muslim *ummah* after the demise of the Noble Messenger (*s*). He explains how Satan and his followers beguile the lay masses by mixing truth with falsehood in order to achieve their nefarious objectives (N). This oration, or parts thereof, have been narrated by scholars before al-Sharīf al-Raḍī, and after him. For instance, al-Kulaynī narrates it twice, with a slight variance in wording and from two different narrators, in his *al-Kāfi* (1:54, 8:58). In the second narration, it is reported that after giving the sermon, Amīr al-Mu'minīn turned to face his family and close followers and told them that if he were to compel the people to abandon the innovations of the earlier caliphs and return to the way it was during the time of the Noble Prophet, his entire army would surely disperse. He would then be left alone, or would remain only with a few followers who know his status and are aware that it is obligatory to obey him. He subsequently proceeded to give examples of this, saying, for instance, that if he were to return the Maqām of Ibrāhīm to where it was during the time of the Messenger of Allāh, or give back Fadak to its rightful owners – the heirs of Fāṭimah (*'a*), etc., the people would surely object and stop following him (T). In short, this sermon is a rebuke of those who follow whims and misguided innovations in opposition to the Book of Allah, thereby going astray from the right path and causing corruption in the land (MB).

COMMENTARY

1 Based on the context, we understand that the meaning of the term *fītan'* (sing. *fitnah*) here is strife, disagreement, or differing positions and opinions. Use of the restrictive term '*innamā*' points to the fact that the Imām was specifically speaking about the differences that came about among the Companions, after the passing away of the Messenger of Allāh (*s*), in matters of religion and religious laws (Z). The two primary causes of that strife were indulgence in vain desires, and innovation of concocted injunctions. This led to the formation of deviant ideologies and aberrant beliefs, which in turn resulted in discord (I). Furthermore, *the Book of Allāh is contravened* since the innovated rulings that were instituted are found neither in the Qur'ān nor in the Sunnah, and are hence against what is taught in these primary sources of guidance (MB). The phrase *some people support others thereby* translates '*yatawallā 'alayhā rijālun rijālan*' which may simply mean that one group follows another in practicing the innovations that a misguided lot

fabricated before them (R). Or it could be that they blindly follow them in order to support them, doing so out of ignorance or for some worldly motive (N). Alternatively, it may mean that a group of people who follow their vain desires and incline towards false ideas take another group that also does the same as their friends and support them (MB). They do this despite it being contrary to the religion of Allāh.

At times, the truth is clear and evident, such as the proposition that every individual has a right to protect his freedom and dignity. Similarly, there are instances where falsehood is manifest and obvious, such as the idea that every individual has the right to do as he wishes, even if it is against the interests of society. However, this is not always the case, for we find that many times the truth is mixed with elements of falsehood, or vice versa, and that leads to confusion among some people who are unable to recognize and distinguish between truth and falsehood (Z). It is regarding these latter cases that the Imām says: *if falsehood had been clear and unmixed with truth, it would not be hidden from the seekers. And if truth had been pure of all traces of falsehood, the obdurate rejecters would have been silenced.* Manifest truth would be easy to find for those who seek it, and evident falsehood would be indefensible for those who stubbornly cling to it. Therefore, those who follow their vain desires cannot benefit from either of these: the manifest truth goes against their schemes and agenda, while evident falsehood can convince no one and would be of no use to them, since people would not accept it. That is why they mix falsehood with truth – and this is something we see from all the evil politicians in the world (N).

The term '*dīgh*' literally refers to a handful of something, usually some grains like wheat or oats. Here it is used as a metaphor and aims to convey how false ideas are mixed with some truth in order to achieve nefarious objectives (M). It is then that *Satan overpowers his friends*, namely those who are ignorant, obdurate in their indulgence of their whims, incapable of seeing beyond what is apparent, blind followers of their forebears, and fanatical in their adherence to rituals that are familiar. These are the people who are overpowered by Satan and misguided by him (I). The phrase *those for whom goodness has been sent forth from Allāh* is taken from Q21:101, and refers to the sincere seekers of truth who do not follow others blindly or fanatically (T). It is they who are saved from being beguiled by Satan and his followers.



WHEN MU‘ĀWIYAH’S ARMY TOOK CONTROL OF THE WATER

- 1 They seek from you the rations of battle, so either remain in disgrace having forfeited your honour, or drench your swords with blood and quench your thirst with water; for true death is in a life of subjugation, while real life is in dying as heroes.
- 2 Beware, Mu‘āwiyah is leading a small group of foolish insurgents and has kept them in the dark regarding the facts, such that they have made their necks the targets of death.

١ قَدِ اسْتَطَعُمُ كُمُ الْقِتَالَ، فَأَقِرُّوا عَلَى مَذَلَّةٍ، وَأَنْجِبُرُ مَحَلَّةً، أَوْ رَوُوا السُّيُوفَ مِنَ الدَّمَاءِ تَرْزُوا مِنَ الْمَاءِ، فَالْمَوْتُ فِي حَيَاكُمْ مَفْهُورِينَ، وَالْحَيَاةُ فِي مَوْتِكُمْ قَاهِرِينَ.

٢ أَلَا وَإِنَّ مُعَاوِيَةَ قَادَ لَمَّا مِنَ الْعَوَادِ وَعَمَّسَ عَلَيْهِمُ الْحَبْرَ، حَتَّى جَعَلُوا تُحَوَّرَهُمْ أَعْرَاضَ الْمَيْتَةِ.

CONTEXT

Amīr al-Mu’mīnīn gave this sermon when the army of Mu‘āwiyah overpowered his forces and took control of access to the Euphrates at Ḫiffīn, subsequently withholding water from them. It is reported that one of the commanders of Mu‘āwiyah’s army, Abū al-A‘wār al-Sulamī, was involved in a brief altercation with Mālik al-Ashtar after which he retreated and set up camp on the access path to the Euphrates and took control of it, preventing the soldiers of the Imām’s army from taking water from the river when they arrived at Ḫiffīn. When news of this reached Amīr al-Mu’mīnīn, he sent Sha‘shā’ah ibn Shūlān to Mu‘āwiyah with a message stating, “We have traversed this distance in order to meet you, and we are not inclined to commence hostilities before having completed our argument in seeking a resolution to the matter. However, you have sent forth your army and by blocking access to the river, you have announced the start of the war. Open the access to the river and let the water be freely taken so that we may look into our matter. Otherwise, we may have to overlook our main objective and let the troops fight

each other for water!" Sa'ṣa'ah took this message to Mu'āwiyah, and after referring to his advisors, he decided to continue the blockade. Upon learning of this, the Imām gave this moving sermon, and his oration stirred up the troops to such an extent that in a single counteroffensive, they were able to retake the access to the river (N). Commentators state that this was one of the most eloquent and motivating speeches of Amīr al-Mu'minīn (MB).

COMMENTARY

1 The phrase '*qad istat'amūkum al-qitāl*', rendered as *they seek from you the rations of battle*, is allegorical and means that the enemy has sought battle. Just as one would seek food from someone by indicating his hunger, they sought to fight by blocking access to water (N). Using the allegory of asking for food to represent their withholding of water is quite profound and subtle (T). Since the enemy had taken such an aggressive stance by obstructing them from the river, they had in actual fact struck the first blow and commenced the battle. Hence, this phrase is interpreted by some to mean that they have started the battle, so it is time to respond and fight back (R). Having said this, the Imām presented two possible options to his troops: *either remain in disgrace having forfeited your honour, or drench your swords with blood and quench your thirst with water*. The first option was not to fight back, and the outcome thereof would be disgrace and dishonour. But the second option was to fight with all their might, drenching their swords with the blood of their enemies to retake access to the river and quench their thirst. Amīr al-Mu'minīn knew that his soldiers were ready to fight, but he mentioned these two options as a means of inciting their passion and fervour, and motivating them to fight with all their strength (M). This is another example of how the Imām was an excellent military commander who knew how to take the pulse of his troops and how to inspire them. In the same spirit, he said to them, *true death is in a life of subjugation while real life is in dying as heroes*. By this, he was reminding them that life with humiliation is death in reality, whereas death with honour is true life. That is because to a rational person, living in a state of subjugation with disgrace and dishonour is far more difficult to bear than physical death. In fact, it is worse than many successive deaths to one who possesses wisdom. At the same time, death with dignity and honour results in leaving a lasting legacy and being remembered fondly in this world, as well as attaining

great reward in the Hereafter. Hence, in reality it is a lasting life (MB). Indeed, a similar statement was made by Imām al-Ḥusayn ('a) when he refused to pledge allegiance to the tyrant Yazīd ibn Mu'āwiyah, preferring death with honour over subjugation and humiliation.

2 The word '*lumatan*' refers to a group of men. Some have said that it means a small group of between three and ten men, and here it has been used to connote their insignificance and weakness (R). *Foolish insurgents* translates '*al-ghuwāt*', which literally means those who have erred or strayed from the truth. These were individuals who lacked insight and wisdom, and were hence easily manipulated. Mu'āwiyah had hidden the facts from them and *kept them in the dark* ("*ammasa 'alayhim*") by withholding important information (N). The term *al-'ams* means pretending to be ignorant about certain realities while being aware of them, and *amrun 'amūs* refers to something dark and obscure, such that one does not know how to approach it (T). Indeed, Mu'āwiyah pretended not to know that the Imām was on the right, while he was fully aware of it. By mentioning this, the Imām was exposing the crooked foundations of Mu'āwiyah's rule, which was based on lies, deception, and guile. At the same time, he was describing the nature of the Syrians who, in their credulity, fell for his ploys and propaganda, allowing themselves to be manipulated and even brainwashed, to the extent that they were ready to sacrifice their lives for his false cause and *made their necks the targets of death* (N). The Syrians were prepared to put their lives on the line because they thought that they were avenging Uthmān ibn 'Affān who was, in their minds, killed unjustly by the Imām and his companions (MB). In the end, they threw themselves into the arms of death for the sake of Mu'āwiyah and his lies and fabrications (Z). Indeed there is a lesson to be learned from this, for us and for all subsequent generations.



ON ABSTEMIOUSNESS AND RENUNCIATION OF WORLDLY PLEASURES

BEING ABSTEMIOUS IN THIS WORLD

1 Beware, for indeed the world has severed its cord and announced its end. Its virtues have become unrecognizable, and it has turned back, retreating swiftly. Thus, it is driving its inhabitants to annihilation and steering its neighbours towards death. That which was sweet in it has turned sour, and what was clear has become turbid. Now naught remains of it save the few drops of water at the bottom of an emptied water-bag, or a draught in the measure of a water-pebble. If a thirsty person sipped it, he would not be quenched. So resolve, O servants of Allāh, upon departure from this abode, for whose dwellers perishing is ordained. Never let its hope overwhelm you, and never assume your stay in it to be lengthy.

التزهيد في الدنيا

أَلَا وَإِنَّ الدُّنْيَا قَدْ تَصَرَّمَتْ، وَآذَنَتْ
بِانْقِضَاءِ، وَتَكَرَّرَ مَعْرُوفُهَا، وَأَذْبَرَتْ
حَذَّاءَ، فَهِيَ تَحْفَرُ بِالْفَنَاءِ سُكَّانَهَا،
وَتَحْدُو بِالْمَوْتِ حِيرَانَهَا، وَقَدْ أَمَرَ
فِيهَا مَا كَانَ حُلْوًا، وَكَدِيرَ مِنْهَا مَا
كَانَ صَفُورًا، فَلَمْ يَقِنْ مِنْهَا إِلَّا سَمْلَةُ
كَسْمَلَةِ الْإِدَاؤَةِ، أَوْ مُجْزَعَةُ كَجْرَعَةِ
الْمَقْلَةِ، لَوْ تَمَرَّزَهَا الصَّدَيْانُ لَمْ
يَنْفَعُ. فَأَزْمَعُوا عِبَادَ اللَّهِ الرَّحِيلَ عَنْ
هَذِهِ الدَّارِ الْمَقْدُورِ عَلَى أَهْلِهَا
الرَّوَالُ، وَلَا يَغْلِبَنَّكُمْ فِيهَا الْأَمْلُ،
وَلَا يَطُولَنَّ عَلَيْكُمْ فِيهَا الْأَمْدُ.

CONTEXT

This sermon is about asceticism and abstemiousness (*zuhd*) in this world, and the reward attained by those who detach themselves from worldly pleasures and ambitions. In it, the Imām also speaks of the blessings of Allāh to His creation. What has been mentioned here by al-Sharīf al-Rađī is only an excerpt of a longer sermon that the Imām gave on the Day of Sacrifice (*yawm al-naḥr*), which al-Ṣadūq

has narrated in *Man Lā Yahduruhū al-Faqīh* (1:518-521). Other scholars like al-Mufid and al-Ṭūsī have also narrated this sermon in their works, with slight variances in wording. This oration is one of the many found in *Nahj al-Balāghah* that highlight the importance of being indifferent to the gains and pleasures of this world, since it is only a temporary abode. Even on the joyous occasion of 'Eid al-Adhā where, like on other days of celebration, people are thinking about worldly matters, the Imām seeks to remind them not to attach themselves to this world (N).

COMMENTARY

1 By saying *the world has severed its cord and has announced its end*, Imām 'Alī is reminding the people that this world is a transient abode which will soon come to cease. Similar statements about the imminent end of this fleeting world can be seen in sermon no.s 28 and 42. Indeed, any state one finds himself in gradually finishes and changes (MB). The statement could either be an allusion to the entire world, which is soon coming to an end and that is why our era has been termed 'the final age' (*ākhir al-zamān*), or it may be a reference to the short lifespan of each individual human in every age. Given the contents of the rest of the sermon, it seems the second meaning is more likely what was intended. The length of a person's life in this world is so short that it is as if from the moment he is born, he is told, "Get ready to depart!" (N). The phrase '*tanakkara marūfuhā*' is rendered *its virtue has become unrecognizable* and is a reference to the prevalent ignorance regarding true virtue (I). Alternatively, it means alteration and change of that which is good and wholesome, such as in the case where someone enjoys health and prosperity which give him ease and comfort, and with which he becomes familiar and accustomed, yet after some time, these joys come to an end and are replaced with difficulties and hardships. Thus, that which was good and familiar gets changed to something unfamiliar and uncomfortable (M). Put differently, its beauty wanes and turns into ugliness, like the beauty of youth that soon turns into the ugliness of senility in old age. This is depicted as the swift retreat of the world, and its *driving its inhabitants to annihilation and steering its neighbours towards death*. Perhaps the mention of neighbours ('jīrān') after inhabitants ('sukkān') is an allusion to the fact that this world is not the final abode of the human being (N).

The souring of what is sweet and the sullying of what is clear and clean in this world is a witnessed reality of this life, since matters from which one derives pleasure and enjoyment, and which human beings find sweet and agreeable, can change at any moment into something bitter and turbid (MB). The sweetness and clarity that turn sour and murky could refer to the days of one's childhood and youth, when one was active and happy, or the joyous moments in one's life which later ended and disappeared, only to give way to pain and hardship (Z). The term '*samalah*' refers to a small quantity of water remaining at the bottom of a vessel, and '*al-maqlah*' refers to the water-pebble[s] placed inside a vessel as a means of measuring the exact amount each person is allowed to drink during times when water is scarce and needs to be rationed (T). The pebble[s] would be placed in the vessel first and then water would be poured into it until it was full, and that was the share of water each individual would get to drink. Both these terms convey the meaning of insignificance and meagreness, as they represent water which is so little that it would be insufficient to quench a thirsty person (N). Having learned of the reality of this world and its lowliness, it is essential to make a determined resolution to prepare for departure from it by severing all worldly attachments from one's heart and turning towards Allāh, yearning for His good pleasure (MB). Furthermore, one must *never let its hope overwhelm* him, because worldly hopes and aspirations cloud a person's judgment and make him forget the Hereafter; and one should never assume his *stay in it to be lengthy* because life is short and death is near (Z).

2 Having spoken about the importance of being abstemious and indifferent to the world and its pleasures, the Imām further encourages his audience to adopt a life of *zuhd* by mentioning the value of the reward attained through it, and the severity of the punishment in the Hereafter. The overall message of this section is that whatever action we undertake to attain nearness to Allāh and gain His forgiveness is nothing compared to the greatness of His reward that awaits us. '*Al-wullah al-ijāl'* refers to distraught she-camels that have lost their senses due to intense grief caused by losing their young ones (R), and '*hadīl al-hamām*' is the cooing of pigeons with sorrow or fear (MB). The term '*ju'ār*' refers to a cry that is mixed with entreaty and seeking assistance. This is the description of the cry of those monks who have detached themselves completely from the world, living in their secluded monasteries, as they supplicate to their Lord, alone or in unison (N).

THE REWARD FOR ABSTEMIOUSNESS

2 By Allāh, if you were to cry like the she-camels that have lost their calves, or call out like the [sorrowful] cooing of pigeons, or raise your voice like reclusive monks and turn to Allāh, leaving your wealth and children, [all] as a means of securing His nearness and raising your standing with Him, or to attain forgiveness for the sins that have been registered in His books and recorded by His angels, it would [still] be less than what I hope for you of His reward and what I fear for you of His retribution.

BOUNTIES OF ALLĀH

3 By Allāh, even if your hearts melt away and your eyes shed tears of blood out of hope in Him or fear of Him, and then you are made to live in this world as long as the world lasts; even if you spare no effort, your actions would still be insufficient to repay [the Almighty for] His great bounties upon you and His guidance that brought you towards faith.

ثواب الزهاد

٢ فَوَاللَّهِ لَوْ كَنْتُمْ حَنِينَ الْوَلَهِ الْعِجَالِيِّ
وَدَعْوَتُمْ بِهَدِيلِ الْحَمَامِ، وَجَاءَتُمْ
جُوَارَ مُتَبَّلِي الرُّهْبَانِ، وَحَرَجْتُمْ إِلَى
اللَّهِ مِنَ الْأَمْوَالِ وَالْأَوْلَادِ، التِّمَاسِ
الْغُرْبَةِ إِلَيْهِ فِي ارْتِقَاعِ دَرَجَةِ عِنْدَهُ
أَوْ غُفْرَانِ سَيِّئَةِ أَخْصَتُهَا كُتُبَهُ،
وَحَفِظْتُهَا رُسْلَهُ، لَكَانَ قَلِيلًا فِيمَا
أَرْجُو لَكُمْ مِنْ ثَوَابِهِ، وَأَخَافُ
عَلَيْكُمْ مِنْ عِقَابِهِ.

نعم الله

٣ وَتَاللَّهِ لَوْ أَنْمَأْتُ قُلُوبَكُمْ أَنْمَيَاشًا،
وَسَأَلَتْ عَيْوَنَكُمْ مِنْ رَغْبَةِ إِلَيْهِ أَوْ
رَهْبَةِ مِنْهُ دَمًا، ثُمَّ عُمِّرْتُمْ فِي الدُّنْيَا
مَا الدُّنْيَا بِاقِيَّةٌ، مَا جَرَتْ أَعْمَالُكُمْ
عَنْكُمْ - وَلَوْ لَمْ تُبْقِوا شَيْئًا مِنْ
جُهْدِكُمْ - أَنْعَمَهُ اللَّهُ عَلَيْكُمُ الْعَظَامَ،
وَهُدَاهُ إِيَّاكُمْ لِلْإِيمَانِ.

These three examples of wailing and crying out have been given by the Imām since they were commonly known to the people of that time, and the audience was able to relate to the intensity of the weeping and beseeching that was meant by him (M).

ABOUT THE DAY OF SACRIFICE

- 4** For the sacrifice to be proper, its ears should be raised upright and its eyes should be sound. If the ears and the eyes are sound, the sacrificial animal is deemed sound and proper, even if its horn is broken or it drags its leg to the place of sacrifice.

في ذكرى يوم النحر وصفة الأخنية

وَمِنْ تَمَامِ الْأُصْحَى إِشْرَافٌ
أَذْنَهَا، وَسَلَامٌ عَيْنَهَا، فَإِذَا سَلَّمَتِ
الْأَذْنُ وَالْعَيْنُ سَلِيمٌ الْأُصْحَى
وَتَمَّتْ، وَلَوْ كَانَتْ عَصْبَاءُ الْقَرْنِ
تَجْرِي رِجْلَهَا إِلَى الْمَسْكِ.

The Imām ('a) then says that even if one were to leave his homeland, abandoning his wealth and children, only to seek nearness to Allāh and attain His pleasure and an elevated station in His sight, or to gain His pardon, that would still be insignificant in comparison to the reward that is hoped for from Him (MB). Yet Allāh has only expected very little from us, and gives tremendous reward as recompense for paltry action on our part. He has not commanded us to part with all that we possess; rather, He has instructed us to work for this world and the Hereafter. There had indeed been some individuals who wanted to give up everything for the sake of Allāh, but the Prophet (ṣ) forbade them from doing so, as this is not what is expected or sought from us (Z).

3 To further emphasize the same point, Amīr al-Mu'minīn ('a) mentions some hyperboles, stating that even if one's heart were to melt, and his eyes shed tears of blood out of hope and fear of Allāh, then he was given life that lasts as long as this world remains, still his actions, no matter how many or great they are, would not be sufficient to repay Allāh for His great blessings and bounties, and for His guidance. This section has been interpreted by some as an allusion to what later became the position of Baghdādī scholars who believed that divine reward was not mandatory for carrying out obligatory actions, because they are a form of gratitude for divine blessings and thus do not necessitate further reward. However, the Baṣran scholars disagree and say that granting reward is necessary for the All-Wise Creator because He has made it obligatory on us to perform certain actions which are difficult for us, and since performing these deeds entail hardship, there ought to be a recompense that is duly granted to those who devoutly carry out

what has been made mandatory upon them. As for His blessings, they have been bestowed by Him out of His grace and kindness, with no expectation of any form of recompense (I).

Imām ‘Alī states that even if one were to worship Allāh to such a degree that his entire existence becomes absorbed in worship, and all the atoms of his body cry out to Him, and his soul reaches the highest pinnacle of servitude that is possible for any human being to arrive at – and even if he remains in this state for as long as this world lasts, he still would not be able to fulfil the right of gratitude for the blessings of Allāh. Indeed, from the traditions of the Infallibles we realize that the ability to worship and offer thanks is itself a blessing for which one must be grateful (N). If one were to ask: why did the Imām mention Allāh’s guidance (*‘hudāh’*) separately when it is also one of His blessings? We would say: that is because His guidance is the greatest blessing He has bestowed upon us, as it is through this guidance that we may reach the goal and purpose of our creation. All the other blessings He has granted us are means for us to attain right guidance (M).

4 The last section has been mentioned as a separate sermon (no. 53) by some commentators, but in earlier commentaries it is adduced as part of this sermon (R, I). Indeed, even in other early sources, such as al-Ṣadūq’s *Man Lā Yahduruhu al-Faqih* (1:520) and al-Ṭūṣī’s *Miṣbāh al-Mutahajjid* (2:664), this section is deemed part of the current sermon. Nevertheless, most of the contemporary commentators have preferred to separate this section and take it as an independent sermon, as per the edition of *Nahj al-Balāghah* by Ṣubḥī Ṣāliḥ (N). As a result, we note that this is the first point from which a difference in the numbering of sermons in *Nahj al-Balāghah* is seen. Though the subject discussed in this section seems disjunct from the theme of the sermon, given that this oration was delivered on the Day of Sacrifice, it is perfectly conceivable that the Imām decided to mention a specific ruling about the type of animals that should be sacrificed. Animal sacrifices are of two kinds: obligatory and recommended. For the obligatory sacrifices, it is a condition that the animal be sound and not physically deficient. However, for the recommended sacrifice, like that which is carried out on the day of ‘Eid al-Adḥā by individuals who have not gone for pilgrimage, the conditions are a little more relaxed (as mentioned in the books of *fiqh*). Hence, some commentators have interpreted these words of the Imām to be in reference to recommended sacrifices (Z).

The conditions mentioned for the sacrificial animal are: *its ears should be raised upright* meaning its ears or part thereof should not be cut off, and *its eyes should be sound* meaning it should not be blind in one eye or both (MB). Since a broken horn or limping leg are considered physical defects, the words of the Imām *even if its horn is broken or it drags its leg* have been interpreted to mean an outward breakage of the horn, which has no effect on the health of the animal, and a little limp which likewise does not hinder the animal's movement or render it deficient (N). Interestingly, in al-Ṣadūq's narration of this sermon, the words '*fa lā tujzī'* have been mentioned at the end – meaning that if the animal's horn is broken or it is limping, then it is not sufficient or acceptable as a sacrifice. After quoting this oration, al-Sharīf al-Raḍī adds a small note saying that the term '*al-mansak*' here refers to the place of sacrifice (*al-madhbah*).



ON HIS COMPANIONS IN SIFFIN

1 They rushed upon me as thirsty camels spring upon each other when they reach the water hole, having been let loose by their herder after their ropes are unfastened, until I thought that they would crush me or trample each other before me.

2 I have deliberated over this matter, considering its inward and outward aspects until it rendered me sleepless. Yet I found no way out other than fighting them or rejecting what was brought by Muḥammad (ṣ). As such, to face war was easier for me than to face divine retribution, and the hardships of this world were deemed by me to be easier than those of the Hereafter.

١ فَدَاكُوا عَلَيَّ تَدَاكَ الْأَيْلِ الْهَمِ
يَوْمَ وِرْدَهَا، وَقَدْ أَرْسَلَهَا رَاعِيَهَا،
وَخُلِعَتْ مَئَانِيهَا، حَتَّى ظَنَثَ
أَنَّهُمْ قَاتِلَيَ، أَوْ بَغْضُهُمْ قَاتِلَ
بَغْضٍ لَدَيَّ.

٢ وَقَدْ قَلَبْتُ هَذَا الْأَمْرَ بُطْهَةً وَظَهَرَةً
حَتَّى مَعَنِي النَّوْمَ، فَمَا وَجَدْتُنِي
يَسْعُنِي إِلَّا قِتَالُهُمْ أَوِ الْجُحُودُ بِمَا
جَاءَ بِهِ مُحَمَّدُ ﷺ، فَكَانَتْ
مُعَالَجَةُ الْقِتَالِ أَهْوَنَ عَلَيَّ مِنْ
مُعَالَجَةِ الْعِقَابِ، وَمَوْتَاثُ الدُّنْيَا
أَهْوَنَ عَلَيَّ مِنْ مَوْتَاتِ الْآخِرَةِ.

CONTEXT

Regarding the context of this sermon, there are differing opinions and no consensus exists. According to the title mentioned by some editors of the text, the Imām gave this sermon describing a time when his companions were unwilling to fight against the Syrians at Ṣiffin. However, this seems highly unlikely because it contradicts what is mentioned in other sermons wherein his companions are depicted as having been unhappy at the delay in starting the battle with the Syrians (N). In fact, it was this very delay that had caused some of them to become agitated and according to some commentators, the first section of this sermon describes their eagerness to fight. Of course, the reason why Amīr al-Mu'minīn

delayed the start of the battle was that he wanted to consider all the alternatives and exhaust all the other options first. He also did not want to be the one who started the battle (M). Other commentators consider this sermon to be about the pledge of allegiance given to the Imām ('a), after which Ṭalḥah and al-Zubayr, along with their followers, had reneged on their pledges and rose up to rebel. Hence, it would have been spoken by the Imām before the Battle of Jamal in the year 35 AH (I). A third opinion is that this sermon was indeed delivered during the Battle of Šiffin in 37 AH, yet prior to presenting an analysis on the need to fight the battle, the Imām recalled how the people had pledged their allegiance to him. This seems to be the most likely context for the sermon and explains the parallels drawn between the reaction of those present at Šiffin and the way in which people had given their allegiance to the Imām earlier. In it, the Imām highlights their indolence in loyally fulfilling the oaths that they had themselves, voluntarily and wholeheartedly, pledged to him (S). The author of *Maṣādir Nahj al-Balāghah* says that this sermon is a part of sermon no. 26 (as well as some other sermons), and together they make up a long oration that the Imām gave in his own home, addressing a small group of people, after which he instructed them to write it down and convey his message to others (N).

COMMENTARY

1 The description of how people had rushed towards the Imām like *thirsty camels spring upon each other when they reach the water hole* depicts the way in which they all came scrambling towards him, pushing and squeezing each other the same way thirsty camels rush towards the water, *having been let loose by their herder* (R). It is a description that portrays the congestion of crowds that had gathered around him, and were jostling against each other to such an extent that the Imām *thought that they would crush him or trample each other before him* (MB). The term '*mathānīhā*' is translated as *their ropes*, and refers to the cords that are used to bind camels or tie their foreshanks in order to restrict their movement (M). Some commentators suggest that the people rushed to the Imām in such a manner because they recognized that he was the best leader for both their worldly matters and their religion. They knew that he would secure their rights from those who oppressed them. That is why they hastened to him and wanted him to be their caliph (Z). It has also been posited that since in his analogy the camels are let loose

and unfastened, it is probably an allusion to the emotional nature of their action, which was not based on deep cognizance and understanding. By saying this to the people, the Imām was, in a sense, rebuking them for their lack of emotional intelligence. They would at times get so riled up that nobody could reason with them, and at other times they became indolent and unresponsive, such that nothing could motivate them (N).

2 In the second section of this sermon, the Imām explains the reason for his preventing the troops from going to fight, saying that he wished to deliberate over the matter, and consider *its inward and outward aspects* (M). Alternatively, if the context of the sermon was pertaining to the acceptance of the caliphate, his deliberation was regarding whether to accept it or not (MB). The fact that these deliberations were carried out with such seriousness that they rendered the Imām sleepless shows that firstly, he would never simply give in to popular pressure without analysing and considering a matter thoroughly before making a decision. Secondly, when a decision was to be made and the only right option was a painful one, he would be willing to make the sacrifice and suffer the pain in order to fulfil his responsibility. Thirdly, that which mattered the most to Imām ‘Alī was attaining the pleasure of Allāh, whether it was what pleased the people or not. Finally, the choice before him was one between belief and unbelief, between Islam and the practices of Jāhiliyyah. Hence, he expended all effort to counter the rebellion and did not take the easy way out (N). Once the options were clear, there was no way that the Imām would opt for facing divine retribution, which was everlasting, instead of facing battle, which was something short and temporary. The term ‘*mawtāt*’ is a plural of *mawtah*, and here it refers to the hardships and difficulties of this world (MB).



54

ON HIS RELUCTANCE TO GIVE THE ORDER TO FIGHT

1 As for your statement: “Is all this [reluctance] due to the fear of death?”

By Allāh, I do not care whether I enter upon death or death comes out to me.

2 As for your statement: “It is due to [his] misgivings about the people of Syria!” By Allāh, I did not put off war even for a day except in the hope that some group may join me and find guidance through me, and that they may discern my light with their weak eyesight. That is dearer to me than to kill them in their misguidance, even though they bear their own sins.

۱ أَمَّا قَوْلُكُمْ: أَكُلَّ ذَلِكَ كَرَاهِيَةَ
الْمَوْتِ؟ فَوَاللَّهِ مَا أُبَالِي دَخَلْتُ إِلَى
الْمَوْتِ أَوْ خَرَجَ الْمَوْتُ إِلَيَّ.

۲ وَأَمَّا قَوْلُكُمْ: شَكَّاً فِي أَهْلِ
الشَّامِ! فَوَاللَّهِ مَا دَفَعْتُ الْحَرْبَ
يَوْمًا إِلَّا وَأَنَا أَطْمَعُ أَنْ تَلْحَقَ بِي
طَائِفَةٌ فَتَهْتَدِي بِي، وَعَشُورًا إِلَى
ضَوْئِي، وَذَلِكَ أَحَبُّ إِلَيَّ مِنْ
أَنْ أَقْتَلَهُمْ عَلَى ضَلَالِهِمْ، وَإِنْ
كَانَتْ تَبُوءُ بِآثَارِهِمْ.

CONTEXT

Though this sermon has not been narrated in any extant source earlier than *Nahj al-Balāghah* the way it has been narrated by al-Sharīf al-Raḍī, the dissatisfaction of some of the soldiers due to the delay in starting the battle has indeed been recorded in earlier sources. This oration was delivered by the Imām after access to the river had been regained by his army at Ḥiṣn al-Ḥasan, and the enemy's blockade had been broken. Amīr al-Mu'minīn ('a) spoke these words at that very location and responded to two incorrect assumptions that some of his troops had regarding the possible reasons for delaying the battle (S). According to some commentators, the similarity between the subject of this sermon and that of the previous one indicate that they might be parts of the same sermon, or that one was spoken soon after the other (N). Having taken control of the Euphrates, Imām 'Alī ('a) allowed the enemy access to water and did not block them from it as they had done. This act

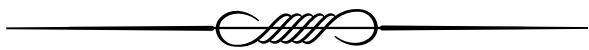
of kindness and justice was hoped to have a positive effect on the Syrians and perhaps lead to some form of truce. After a few days passed in silence, with both armies quiet and no communication going on between them, the soldiers in the Imām's army became uneasy and were not pleased with the delay in his order to fight the Syrians. Hence, they came to him and complained, "We have left our families alone in Kūfah, and have come all the way here only to settle on the outskirts of Shām! Allow us to commence the battle as people have started talking." He ('a) asked, "What are they saying?" They said, "Some of them think that you are afraid for your life and that is why you do not wish to fight. Others think that you are unsure about the lawfulness of fighting the Syrians, and that is why you are hesitant." Upon hearing this, the Imām delivered the above sermon (I).

COMMENTARY

1 The response given by the Imām to those who claimed that his reluctance to start the battle was *due to the fear of death* was simply that he has never feared death and does not care whether it comes to him, or he goes to it. How could it even be assumed that an individual like 'Alī ('a), to whom death was more desirable than a mother's breast to her infant, would be fearful of death? He had himself spoken highly of death on the battlefield, and said that he would find it easier to bear a thousand strikes of the sword than dying on his bed in a state of obliviousness (Z). His actions also spoke louder than his words as his bravery in battle from the earliest days was known far and wide. If one were to posit that perhaps those who held such an assumption were young and had not witnessed his heroism in battle during the time of Rasūlullāh (s), then we would turn and ask: did they not see his valour in the Battle of Jamal that had taken place less than two years prior? It is recorded that his attack on the enemy in that battle was such that in one swoop, he struck like lightening and fell upon the enemy in such a manner that his own followers and friends were overcome by fear for his safety! How could it be imagined that a man whose heart is filled with faith would ever fear death and not long for martyrdom? That is unfathomable (N). The statement: *whether I enter upon death or death comes out to me* is figurative and depicts one's advance towards death or its emergence and pouncing upon an individual, as if it were a dangerous, frightening beast (M).

2 The second false assumption some of the soldiers had was that the Imām had *misgivings about the people of Syria*, meaning he was unsure whether or not the people of Shām deserved to be fought and killed (R), or he was unsure if their position was the wrong position and that they were defiantly upon falsehood (N). Indeed, he was certain about their misguidance, yet he was hopeful that at least some of them would see the light and, realizing the error of their ways, join him. His explanation of this was clear – he preferred to guide them, as it is the duty of the divinely appointed guides, and the friends (*awliyā*) of Allāh, to do their utmost to guide others to the right path, leading them out from the darkness of error and ignorance into the light. This was the reason for his delay in giving the command to fight; not because he was in any doubt concerning the legitimacy of his action (M). The word ‘*ta’shuwa*’ is derived from ‘*ashw*’ which literally means darkness and obscurity. It is a term that is used to describe going towards a fire with the hope of getting something good or being guided. When one says “*ashā ilā al-nār*,” it means he saw a fire in the night from a distance and went towards it in order to benefit from its light. Alternatively, it means that he had weak eyesight and was guided by the light of the fire (S). Here the Imām employs it as a metaphor for his guidance when he states that *they may discern my light with their weak eyesight*. The underlying message of this sermon is that guiding his enemies was more important to the Imām than fighting them, and this gives us an important formula for understanding the whole concept of *jihād* in Islam.

Many of those who do not understand the actual ethos of Islam tend to misunderstand the place of violent struggle in religion. Amīr al-Mu’minīn (*a*) is clarifying for his audience here that for a man of God, neither is battle a goal in itself, nor is it ever the first option or solution to any matter. Rather, it is the final choice when all other possible avenues are blocked and all other cures to the malady prove ineffective. Even then, there is an effort until the very last moment to save even a single soul who might be inclined to accept guidance (N). Interestingly, some commentators have actually listed the names of individuals who, due to the delay in fighting, were able to join the camp of Amīr al-Mu’minīn (*a*). For instance, ‘Abdullāh ibn ‘Umar al-‘Ansī left Mu’awiyah’s side and joined the Imām when he heard that ‘Ammār ibn Yāsir was fighting alongside him, and recalled the statement of the Prophet (*s*) to him, “O ‘Ammār, you will be killed by a rebellious group of transgressors.” Hence we see that some people did indeed get guided at the last minute before the Battle of Šiffīn (T).



DESCRIBING THE COMPANIONS OF THE MESSENGER OF ALLĀH (ṣ)

- 1 Whilst we were in the company of the Messenger of Allāh (ṣ), we would fight our [faithless] fathers, sons, siblings and uncles, and this only increased our faith and submission in continuing on the highway [of truth], patiently bearing the pangs of agony, and in our resolve to counter the enemy. At times one man from our side and another from the enemy would pounce upon each other like champions, with each trying to finish off the other and seeing which of the two would give his opponent a drink from the goblet of death. Sometimes our side defeated the enemy and sometimes the enemy's side defeated ours. When Allāh saw our sincerity, He sent disgrace upon our enemy and sent His succour to us, until Islam was established, [like the camel] with its neck and body resting in its place on the ground. By my life, if we had behaved as you behave, no pillar of the religion would have been raised, nor would any branch of the tree of faith become green. By Allāh, you will now surely milk it for blood, and will then follow it up with regret!

وَلَقَدْ كُنَّا مَعَ رَسُولِ اللَّهِ ﷺ
 نَفْشُلُ آبَاءَنَا وَأَبْنَاءَنَا وَإِخْوَانَنَا
 وَأَعْمَامَنَا، مَا يَزِيدُنَا ذَلِكَ إِلَّا
 إِيمَانًا وَتَسْلِيمًا، وَمُضِيًّا عَلَى
 الْقَمَمِ، وَصَبْرًا عَلَى مَضَضِ
 الْأَلْمِ، وَجِدًا فِي جِهَادِ الْعَدُوِّ.
 وَلَقَدْ كَانَ الرَّجُلُ مِنَّا وَالآخْرُ
 مِنْ عَدُوِّنَا يَتَصَافَّلُونَ تَصَافُلَ
 الْفَحَلَيْنِ، يَتَخَالَّسُانِ أَنْفَسَهُمَا
 أَيْهُمَا يَسْقِي صَاحِبَةَ كَأسِ
 الْمُتُونِ، فَمَرَّةً لَنَا مِنْ عَدُوِّنَا،
 وَمَرَّةً لِعَدُوِّنَا مِنَّا. فَلَمَّا رَأَى اللَّهُ
 صِدْقَنَا أَنْزَلَ بَعْدُونَا الْكَبَتَ،
 وَأَنْزَلَ عَلَيْنَا النَّصْرَ، حَتَّى اسْتَقَرَّ
 الإِسْلَامُ مُلْقِيًّا جِرَانَةً وَمُمْبُوئًّا
 أَوْطَانَهُ، وَلَعْمَرِي لَوْ كَانَتْيَ مَا
 أَتَيْتُمْ، مَا قَامَ لِلَّدِينِ عُمُودٌ، وَلَا
 أَحْضَرَ لِإِيمَانِ غُودٍ؛ وَإِيمُونُ اللَّهِ
 لَتَحْتَبِّهَا دَمًا وَلَتُشْتَغِّلَهَا نَدَمًا!

CONTEXT

These words were spoken as part of an oration that is said to have been given by the Imām during the days of Ḳiffīn, at a time when he was called upon by the people to make peace. When they pressurized him and insisted that he do so, he gave this sermon in which he described the qualities of the companions of Allāh's Messenger (ṣ). He thereby evoked the example of the past to show people how submissive and obedient the early Muslims were to the Messenger of Allāh, and how their steadfastness and courage ultimately led to victory. In so doing, he was hinting to them that if they adopt the same qualities, they too would be victorious against the enemy. This sermon has been narrated in a number of sources before the time of al-Sharīf al-Raḍī, and is also found in some later Sunnī sources as well (N).

Alternatively, this sermon may have been delivered by Amīr al-Mu'minīn after what had transpired with Ibn al-Haḍramī, who was sent by Mu'awiyah to Baṣrah with the intention of wresting authority over it. Having gained control of Egypt following the martyrdom of Muḥammad ibn Abī Bakr, which was masterminded by 'Amr ibn al-Āṣ, Mu'awiyah wrote a letter to the people of Baṣrah, and instructed Ibn al-Haḍramī to convey it and to do whatever it takes to gain a foothold in the city. The latter did as he was told and along with a group of hypocrites, he seized control of parts of Baṣrah. News of this was conveyed to Imām 'Alī by Ibn 'Abbās, who had come to Kūfah to give his condolences on the martyrdom of Muḥammad ibn Abī Bakr. It is at this time that the Imām gave the sermon before sending Jāriyah ibn Qudāmah al-Sa'dī, who was a brave warrior, with a number of soldiers to Baṣrah. Jāriyah was able to fight the forces of Ibn al-Haḍramī and kill them (I). Some commentators say that both these contexts for the sermon, i.e. that it was delivered at Ḳiffīn, and that it was given in Kūfah, could be correct, and the Imām ('a) might well have repeated these words in both places (T).

COMMENTARY

1 The fact that fighting their own unbelieving close relatives only increased their faith and submission is a testament to the way the Noble Messenger was able to plant within the souls of his companions the seeds of revolution and guide them to a singular objective, namely changing the status quo of injustice and removing

it from its very roots. He did this using clear evidence and undisputable proofs thereby leaving no excuse for the rejecters (Z). Indeed, the Qurān clearly states that for true believers, nothing should come before Allāh, His Prophet, and *jihād* in His way: *Say, “If your fathers and your sons, your brothers, your spouses, and your kinsfolk, the possessions you have acquired, the business you fear may suffer, and the dwellings you are fond of, are dearer to you than Allāh and His Messenger and to waging jihād in His way, then wait until Allāh issues His edict, and Allāh does not guide the transgressing lot”* (Q9:24). What is interesting though, is that while it might be expected that fighting against one's close family members would bring about a kind of guilt or regret, it actually strengthened the faith of the sincere Companions, and increased their patience and resolve. The term '*al-laqam*' is translated as *the highway [of truth]*, and literally refers to a wide and clear path, while '*al-madad*' refers to suffering and pain (MB). The description given by the Imām was especially seen in the Battle of Badr where the Muslims had to fight many of their close relatives who had come to face them, yet for the sake of Allāh they were willing to fight and even kill their unbelieving family members and tribesmen (N).

His statement *sometimes our side defeated the enemy and sometimes the enemy's side defeated ours* was a description of the natural outcomes of battle, since it is not the case that the side which is on the right always wins, yet Allāh's help is with those who are sincere. Hence he added *when Allāh saw our sincerity, He sent disgrace upon our enemy and sent His succour to us*. While it is true that Allāh, the Almighty, works through an established system of causes and effects, He does grant increased inspiration to those who are truly sincere, as the Qurān states: *As for those who are [rightly] guided, He enhances their guidance and endows them with their Godwariness* (Q47:17) (Z). Thus, with Allāh's help, the Muslims were victorious and Islam was established [*like the camel*] *with its neck and body resting in its place on the ground*, meaning that it was firmly and unwaveringly fixed, just like a heavy camel that rests its body and neck on the ground and cannot then be moved (I). The phrase '*mutabawwi'an awtānahu*' is also used to depict an individual who was frightened and unsettled before arriving at his home where he became calm and settled. So the word '*awtān*' (lit. dwellings) may be a metaphor for the hearts of believers and the phrase in question denotes tranquillity and calmness (MB). Some commentators have suggested that this statement was an indication

regarding the actual purpose of their battle, namely to get Islam established in the hearts of the people (M).

Finally, Amīr al-Mu'minīn ('a) compares the state of those pious and sincere companions of the Prophet to the soldiers who were with him saying, *if we had behaved as you behave, no pillar of the religion would have been raised, nor would any branch of the tree of faith become green*. This depicts their insincerity, hypocrisy, and disunity. Indeed, the early Muslims were able to establish the pillars of Islam and spread it far and wide with fewer means at their disposal, simply because they were sincere and submissive, and obedient to their leader; but the present company lacked these traits (N). His statement *you will now surely milk it for blood* is in reference to the 'camel' of the caliphate (T), or an allegorical representation of the outcome of their abandonment and refusal to go and fight as instructed. Their recalcitrance was comparable to the camel whose udders are injured due to the excessiveness of its owner (MB). In the end, the outcome of their actions and decisions would be sorrow and regret, when they see the sacred being profaned, blood of innocents being shed, and their honour being violated – and all this happened just as the Imām foretold (Z).



ADDRESSING HIS COMPANIONS

- 1** Know that there will prevail over you after me a man with a broad throat and a protruding belly. He will consume whatever he finds and crave for what he does not. You should kill him, but you will not kill him! Verily, he will command you to curse me and to renounce me. As for the curse, you may curse me, because that will be a means of increase [and elevation] for me and safety for you. But as for the renunciation, you must not renounce me, for certainly I was born upon the innate religion and was foremost in faith and migration.

۱ أَمَّا إِنَّهُ سَيُظْهَرُ عَلَيْكُمْ بَعْدِي
 رَجُلٌ رَحْبُ الْبَلْعُومِ، مُنْدَحِّثُ
 الْبَطْنِ، يَأْكُلُ مَا يَجِدُ، وَيَطْلُبُ
 مَا لَا يَجِدُ، فَاقْتُلُوهُ وَلَنْ تَقْتُلُوهُ!
 أَلَا وَإِنَّهُ سَيَأْمُرُ كُمْ بِسَيِّ
 وَالْبَرَاءَةِ مِنِّي؛ فَأَمَّا السَّبُ
 فَشَوُونِي، فَإِنَّهُ لِي زَكَاةً وَلَكُمْ
 نَجَاهَةً، وَأَمَّا الْبَرَاءَةُ فَلَا تَبَرَّئُوا
 مِنِّي، فَإِنِّي وُلِدْتُ عَلَى الْفِطْرَةِ.
 وَسَبَقْتُ إِلَى الْإِيمَانِ وَالْهِجْرَةِ.

CONTEXT

This sermon was addressed to the people of Kūfah, and was hence spoken between 36 AH and 40 AH. The beginning of the sermon is a prophecy which was first made by the Noble Messenger (ṣ) and repeated by Imām ‘Alī in his own words. It is reported that the Prophet once rebuked Mu‘awiyah and spoke about his future, mentioning certain characteristics that are similar to what has been stated in this sermon. Anas ibn Mālik related that he heard the Messenger of Allāh (ṣ) say, “There will emerge over the people of my *ummah*, a man with a huge abdomen and a wide neck; he will eat but never get sated. He will bear the burden of sin against both the weighty things, and will seek authority [to rule over the people] one day. If you ever meet him, cut open his belly.” In the second part of the sermon,

we find another prophecy: the Imām informs the people of how they will be forced to curse him and disassociate themselves from him.

This prophecy has been reported from Amīr al-Mu’minīn (*a*) in a number of other sources, with slight variation in wording (S). Since the Imām does not mention Mu‘awiyah by name in this sermon, there is some discussion among commentators regarding the identity of the individual. Though most conclude that it must be Mu‘awiyah, given that his description matches what the Prophet (*s*) had said about him, some have mentioned names of other individuals like Ziyād ibn Abīhi, al-Hajjāj ibn Yūsuf, and al-Mughīrah ibn Shūbah (I). However, the only person who matches the description is Mu‘awiyah. In fact, in one report we find that Abū Dharr quoted the prophecy of the Messenger of Allāh in the presence of Mu‘awiyah – that a man with a huge gullet, who will eat but never get sated, will one day seek to rule over the *ummah*, and they should be wary of him. Mu‘awiyah immediately denied that it was referring to him and said, “I am not that man.” However, Abū Dharr responded, “No – it is you that he spoke of. In fact the Prophet himself told me so...” (T). Furthermore, since the practice of cursing the Imām was instituted by Mu‘awiyah, it can be said with a level of certainty that the Imām is referring to him in this sermon (N). One reason why the Imām did not mention Mu‘awiyah by name in the sermon was because doing so may have led to a sense of despondency among his companions (R).

COMMENTARY

1 Narrators have reported that Mu‘awiyah was overweight and had a huge stomach. He used to eat a lot, and whenever he sat down, his stomach would rest on his thighs (Z). Though he was generous with wealth (especially from the public treasury), he was known to be miserly when it came to sharing food. He would eat so much that he got tired of eating, and then tell his servants to take the food away saying, “By Allāh, I am not yet full, it is only that I have become tired of eating!” (I). The phrase ‘*raḥb al-bul’ūm*’ connotes a large gullet, which is the passage through which food goes down the throat into the stomach, and ‘*mundahiq al-baṭn*’ refers to a protruding stomach. The same verb is used to describe a she-camel whose womb comes out from its position after birth. Such a camel is called *dahūq* (R). Having described his voracious nature, the Imām repeats the instruction of the Noble Messenger (*s*) when he says *you should kill him*, and then adds *but you will*

not kill him! Indeed, how could he expect them to obey his instructions and kill him when they were not ready to do so despite the Prophet's own instructions! According to numerous reports, the Messenger of Allāh had unequivocally said, "If you ever see Mu'āwiyah speaking on my pulpit, kill him!" Yet, as Abū Sa'īd al-Khudrī said, "We did not do this, and we failed thereby." What is worse, they not only failed to act on the instructions of the Prophet, they even changed his words in order to falsely attribute praise for Mu'āwiyah to him (T).

As prophesied by the Imām, Mu'āwiyah instructed the people to curse him and to renounce him. One of the reasons mentioned for the instruction to kill Mu'āwiyah was his establishment of the cursing of Imām 'Alī in all the major cities in the Muslim world. This was while the Prophet is reported to have proclaimed, "Whoever curses 'Alī has cursed me." Indeed, any Muslim who curses the Noble Messenger (s) automatically loses his right to live and must be killed (N). Aside from what has been mentioned in the sermon itself, perhaps the permission granted by the Imām to his followers to curse him but not to renounce him was because dissimulation (*taqiyah*) is permitted in cursing, but not in renunciation (*barā'ah*), since renouncing the Imām would be tantamount to renouncing the faith (Z). Furthermore, cursing is something that is spoken and can be said even when it does not match what is in one's heart, whereas renunciation and disassociation is not limited to words but also encompasses one's beliefs and what is in one's heart; that is why the latter was forbidden (MB).

His statement that cursing him would be *a means of increase [and elevation]* ('*zakāt*') for him meant that the curses would only increase his greatness and raise his station, for his memory would rise above all the curses levelled at him and it would not degrade or abase him in the least. And the truth of this statement was proven even after the Umayyads cursed him from the pulpits of a thousand cities, yet it only led to an increase in his honour in the eyes of the people and hatred for the Banī Umayyah (R). When he says that he was born upon the *innate religion*, or *fitrah*' (which does not mean basic intrinsic nature here, since all people are born with that *fitrah*, and there is nothing special in that), perhaps the Imām means that he was born upon the *fitrah* of infallibility, and that since his birth, he has never committed any wrongdoing or any mistake (T).



ADDRESSING THE KHAWĀRIJ

- 1 May you be overtaken by a windstorm
that leaves none of you to tell the tale!
Shall I bear witness to apostasy after
my faith in Allāh and my struggle
alongside the Messenger of Allāh (ṣ)?!
*In that case I will have gone astray, and
will not be among the [rightly] guided. So
depart to the worst destination, and
return on the trail of your [forebears']
heels. Certainly you will face after me
overwhelming disgrace, sharp swords,
and a despotism that will be adopted
by the oppressors as a norm.*

أَصَابُكُمْ حَاصِبٌ، وَلَا بَقِيَ مِنْكُمْ
آثِرٌ! أَبْعَدَ إِيمَانِي بِاللهِ وَجَهَادِي مَعَ
رَسُولِ اللهِ ﷺ أَشْهُدُ عَلَى نَفْسِي
بِالْكُفْرِ؟! لَكَفْدَ صَلَّتُ إِذَاً وَمَا أَنَا
مِنَ الْمُهَتَّدِينَ! فَأُؤْمِنُوا شَرَّ مَآبٍ
وَارْجِعُوهُ عَلَى أَكْرِ الأَعْقَابِ. أَمَا
إِنَّكُمْ سَتَلْقَوْنَ بَعْدِي ذُلْلًا شَامِلًا،
وَسَيِّفًا قَاطِعًا، وَأَئَرَةً يَتَخَذُهَا
الظَّالِمُونَ فِي كُمْ شَتَّةً.

CONTEXT

This sermon dates back to the time after the Imām's discussion with the Khawārij in the year 37 AH. When they regretted their acceptance of the arbitration and admitted their error, which they also deemed an act of apostasy (*kufr*), seeking repentance for what they had done, they asked Amīr al-Mu'minīn ('a) to do the same (S). This oration was his response to them. Their fallacious reasoning and illogical stance, which led them to audaciously demand that Imām 'Alī admit that he had committed an act of apostasy by accepting the arbitration, was entirely ridiculous. It was never his idea to undertake the arbitration in the first place. In fact, he was completely against the idea but was forced to accept it. Yet even if it had been his suggestion, arbitration is not something that goes against the teachings of Islam. The only problem was that it had been corrupted and misused at Ḫiffin (N).

COMMENTARY

1 The term '*ḥāṣib*', translated as *windstorm*, refers to a violent wind that raises dust and small pebbles (*ḥaṣba*) and bears them, casting them down from the sky (MB). According to al-Sharīf al-Raḍī, the phrase '*lā baqiyā minkum āthir*' has been narrated in three ways: the first is with the letter *rā'* in '*ābir*'. We say "*rajulun ābir*" meaning a man who fecundates date palms or puts them aright. The second is [as we have recorded above] with the letter *thā'*, '*āthir*', meaning one who relates a narration or tells a story, and this is the most correct version according to al-Raḍī, since it would mean that the Imām was telling them that none of them would remain to inform others or tell them what had transpired. The third form is '*ābiz*', meaning to leap, assail, or perish. The outrageousness of their demand is palpable in the response of the Imām as he recalls his *faith in Allāh* and *struggle alongside the Messenger of Allāh*. Indeed, he was the first person among the men to believe in the Prophet (ṣ) and follow him. In fact, according to one account, when Ibn ‘Abbās addressed the Khawārij and reminded them that ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib was the first person to believe in the Messenger of Allāh, many of them realized their error and left the rebellious group (Z). The phrase *depart to the worst destination* is a supplication against them, praying that they get the worst position in this world and the next, while *return on the trail of your [forebears] heels* ('*athar al-a‘qāb*') is a prayer that they should face the same outcome as their forebears in the Age of Ignorance, who were just as obstinate and ignorant as the Khawārij and despite seeing all the signs of Allāh, they still rejected them and refused to believe (N). Some commentators have interpreted this statement to be a command by the Imām to the Khawārij, ordering them to return to the path of truth from where they originally came, or a threat to them (MB).

In the end, the Imām mentions a prophecy and informs them that after him they will face abasement, humiliation, and death. This was likely a reference to the killing of the Khawārij at the hands of al-Muhallab ibn Abī Šufrah and others. Indeed, this prophecy, like all his other prophecies, came true and the Khawārij lived a life of abasement, and were caught and killed by those who came to power, until they were eventually wiped out (M). Since the term '*athrah*' literally means highhandedness, preference, and appropriation, some commentators have said that the last statement of this sermon means that the rulers would appropriate the share of wealth from the public treasury that was due to the Khawārij and use it

themselves while depriving the latter, or they would prefer others to them, and indeed this practice became the norm among the tyrants (S).



UPON BEING TOLD THAT THE KHAWĀRIJ HAD CROSSED THE RIVER

¹ The ground upon which they shall be slain is on this side of the river. By Allāh, not even ten of them will survive, while not even ten of you will be killed.

١ مَصَارِعُهُمْ دُونَ النَّطْفَةِ. وَاللَّهُ لَا يُنْفِلُثُ مِنْهُمْ عَشَرَةُ، وَلَا يَهْلِكُ مِنْكُمْ عَشَرَةً.

CONTEXT

This speech dates back to 38 AH when Amīr al-Mu'minīn ('a) was marching against the Khawārij, or when he made the decision to fight them. When someone said, "The Khawārij have passed over the bridge at Nahrawān [and escaped]," he replied pointing out what side of the river they would be killed. This speech has been narrated in many sources and some have said that it even reaches close to the level of *tawātur* (S). The decision to fight the Khawārij was made after the rebellious group committed crimes against the people, and since their stronghold was in Nahrawān, which was not very far from Kūfah, the Imām marched there with his army. As they arrived close to the area, a man came to the Imām and informed him that the Khawārij had fled across the river when they heard of the Imām's approach. Amīr al-Mu'minīn asked him, "Did you witness this with your own eyes?" "Yes," he replied. He ('a) said, "By Allāh they have not crossed it and will not cross it. The place of their death is on this side of the river." Interestingly, it is narrated that a number of other people, even among his own followers, came one after another to give the same report, but he did not accept it.

Then he mounted his horse and went himself to the place where the Khawārij were stationed and had prepared for battle, with their swords drawn. Apparently, those who brought the false report were either enemy agents who had infiltrated the ranks of the Imām's army, or were simpleminded individuals who had come under the influence of one of the enemy agents. Their goal was seemingly to protect the Khawārij from the Imām's forces. In any case, it is reported that there was a young man in the Imām's army who fell into doubt when he saw the Imām

rejecting the ‘eye-witness’ reports of the escape of the Khawārij across the river. The young man said to himself, “I will accompany him, but if the report about their escape turns out to be true, I shall attack the Imām myself while he is unaware!” However, when they arrived and he saw that the Imām was right, he sought forgiveness and pardon from him (N).

COMMENTARY

1 This short oration comprises two prophecies about the future, the first being about where the Khawārij will be killed, and the second about the number of those who will be slain and those who will survive the battle on both sides. Though some commentators deem the first part to be a general statement, and not a prophecy (I), it is quite evident the Imām knew that the seemingly convincing reports were false, and was right about where the Khawārij would fall, having prior knowledge about it. The foreknowledge of Imām ‘Alī (‘a) was part of the unseen (*al-ghayb*), and was from the Noble Messenger (ṣ), from Jibraīl, from Allāh. That is why on one occasion the Imām himself said, “It (what I inform you of) is not out of [my] knowledge of the unseen; rather, it is only what I have been taught by the possessor of knowledge. Allāh taught it to His Prophet (ṣ) who then taught it to me” (Z). Al-Sharif al-Rādī notes that the word ‘*al-nutfah*’ refers to the water of the river, and considers it to be the most eloquent allusion to water. This term has also been used in the same way in sermon no. 48. The term ‘*yuflit*’ means to escape and survive. Indeed, historians have reported that all the Khawārij were killed in this battle save nine individuals. These same nine people then spread out in different cities and later gathered their own followers who were like-minded and shared their ideas. Also, in the Battle of Nahrawān, only eight individuals attained martyrdom from the Imām’s army (N). Some commentators have discussed the emergence of the *ghulāt* after their commentary on this sermon, linking the correct prophecies of the Imām to the false notion in the minds of some individuals that the Imām was more than human (MB, I).



WHEN INFORMED THAT THE KHAWĀRIJ HAD BEEN ELIMINATED

1 No, by Allāh, they still exist as sperma in the loins of men and the uteri of women. Whenever a horn sprouts among them, it shall be cut off, until the last of them will be thieves and robbers.

١ كَلَّا وَاللهِ، إِنَّهُمْ نُطْفٌ فِي أَصْلَابِ الرِّجَالِ وَقَرَارَاتِ النِّسَاءِ؛ كُلَّمَا نَجَمَ مِنْهُمْ قَرْنٌ قُطِعَ، حَتَّىٰ يَكُونَ آخِرُهُمْ لُصُوصًا سَلَابِينَ.

CONTEXT

This oration was given by Amīr al-Mu'minīn ('a) after the Battle of Nahrawān, and in it he spoke about the future of the Khawārij. Following their defeat in battle, some of his companions said that the Khawārij had been annihilated, one and all. In response to their statement, the Imām uttered these words and in so doing, mentioned three prophecies regarding the Khawārij: first, some among them will rise up from the next generation; second, whenever any of them rises, he will be killed; third, the last among them will become bandits. History attests to the veracity of this prophecy, as things turned out just as the Imām had foretold. The complete version of the sermon he gave can be found in other sources, sometimes with a slight variance in wording (S). Some commentators consider this to be part of the previous sermon as it also speaks about the end of the Khawārij and how it will come about (N). According to certain accounts, the Imām was walking among the fallen Khawārij after the end of the battle and commented that they had been beguiled and misled by Satan, and had thus ended up dying in such a manner, having lost their way. That was when a few of his companions expressed their contentment that the Khawārij were no more, but the Imām said that there were still some who would rise up in the future (T).

COMMENTARY

1 By saying that the Khawārij still exist in the loins of their fathers and wombs of their mothers, the Imām is alluding to the fact that the incorrect ideology of the Khawārij will be espoused by groups who would rise in the future (M). The phrase ‘*qarārāt al-nisā’* literally means the receptacles of women, and is a metaphor for the womb and uterus (I), which has also been used in the Qurān (Q23:13). Hence, even if most of them were killed in battle, there would be some among them in the succeeding generation. And indeed just as the Imām predicted, in the subsequent years there were groups that followed in the footsteps of the wretched Khawārij. As noted in the commentary of the previous sermon, nine individuals survived the Battle of Nahrawān and later moved to different cities where they garnered more followers. Furthermore, it is noteworthy that not all the Khawārij were present at Nahrawān. Some of them settled in other places and were also responsible for continuing the spread of their ideology amidst the people (N). The phrase *whenever a horn sprouts among them* refers to the rise of leaders among them, *it shall be cut off* meaning they shall be killed. The use of this metaphor is quite apt since it alludes to their malicious and evil nature (MB). Some commentators have mentioned a number of examples of how the Khawārij and their leaders were killed during the reign of the Banū Umayyah and Banū ‘Abbās (T). In the end, they turned into a group of bandits, and by the time of Hārūn al-Rashīd, that is all that they represented (I). This transformation from a religious ‘sect’ to a band of outlaws was the final prophecy of the Imām which came true, and their names were recorded in history among those who spread corruption on the land (N).



60

ABOUT THE KHAWĀRIJ

¹ Do not fight the Khawārij after me, for one who seeks truth but misses it is not like one who seeks falsehood and finds it.

١ لا تُقاتِلُوا الْخَوَارِجَ بَعْدِي، فَلَيْسَ مِنْ طَلَبِ الْحَقِّ فَأَخْطَأَهُ، كَمَنْ طَلَبَ الْبَاطِلَ فَأَذْرَكَهُ.

CONTEXT

This oration was given after the Battle of Nahrawān, and in it the Imām makes a comparison between the Khawārij and the Umayyads. He also forbids his companions and followers from fighting the Khawārij after his death. Al-Sharīf al-Raḍī says that the last phrase about the seeker of falsehood who finds it refers to Mu‘awiyah ibn Abī Sufyān.

COMMENTARY

¹ The instruction of Amīr al-Mu’minīn (*‘a*) not to kill the Khawārij after his death is interpreted by some commentators to apply only to those of them who do not spread corruption in the land, otherwise the command of Allāh regarding eliminating them would come into effect (Z). Indeed, the reason for his instruction has also been alluded to when he says that *one who seeks truth but misses it is not like one who seeks falsehood and finds it*. That is because one becomes deserving of death only by seeking falsehood and entering into it knowingly and purposely, not merely falling into it mistakenly, while being unaware. And since the Khawārij erred in recognizing the truth and fell into falsehood without being aware, the Imām forbade their killing (MB). Other possible reasons for this have been mentioned by some commentators who say that perhaps the Imām did not want his followers to fight on two separate fronts, against the Khawārij and the Umayyads, and since the Khawārij were also vehemently against Syrian rule, it may have been possible for them to join forces to fight a common enemy (N). In

answering the question: why did the Imām forbid his companions from fighting the Khawārij while he had himself done so, it must be understood that the circumstances were quite different, especially after the Battle of Nahrawān. And a farsighted leader assesses every situation day by day, if not hour by hour, keeping in mind all the changes that transpire (N).

Furthermore, the Imām only fought them when they started causing havoc and corruption, even going so far as to kill some righteous companions of the Imām, as well as other innocent people. Hence, Imām ‘Alī did not fight and kill the Khawārij because of their misguided beliefs, but because of their barbaric and cruel actions (M). Mu‘āwiyah was a far more dangerous adversary, since his goal was never to seek the truth or support it. Rather, he did not care about the religion and only cared about acquiring power and authority (I). Therefore, defeating him and his followers took precedence, as they were actually seekers of falsehood. Some have said that this statement of the Imām stems from the report [which is attributed to the Prophet] that states, “Whoever struggles and attains the truth gains two rewards, and whoever struggles but does not attain the truth [still] gets one reward” (R). However, it should be noted that this tradition is not considered sound by some scholars.



61

WHEN WARNED ABOUT HIS ASSASSINATION BY DECEIT

1 Verily, there is over me a protective shield from Allāh, and when my day comes, it will draw away from me and hand me over [to death]. At that moment, neither will the arrow miss its mark nor will the wound heal.

١ وَإِنَّ عَلَيَّ مِنَ اللَّهِ جُنَاحًا حَصِينَةً، فَإِذَا
جَاءَ يَوْمِي افْرَجْتُ عَنِّي
وَأَسْلَمْتُنِي، فَحِينَئِذٍ لَا يَطِيشُ السَّهْمُ
وَلَا يَبْرُأُ الْكَلْمُ.

CONTEXT

After the Battle of Nahrawān, when Amīr al-Mu'minīn was given a warning about his safety by some of his companions, he spoke these words in Kūfah. Some earlier sources have narrated part of this oration, and it has also been narrated in other works after the time of al-Sharīf al-Rađī. The title given to this sermon reads, *'lammā khuwwifa min al-ghilah'* meaning: when he was threatened with assassination by treachery. According to one report, the Imām's companions had warned him about the evil intentions of Ibn Muljam, which they had come to know of by some of the latter's actions. For instance, it is reported that at one time, while the Imām was giving a sermon, Ibn Muljam was seated near the pulpit and was repeating under his breath, "By Allāh, I will surely relieve them of you!" Some of those who heard him say these words apprehended him after the sermon and brought him to the Imām. Amīr al-Mu'minīn ('a) told them to release him and then he spoke the words mentioned in this oration (N). There are other reports that also mention how the Imām had been warned of Ibn Muljam on a number of different occasions (MB).

COMMENTARY

1 It was evident that Imām 'Alī knew about his killer beforehand. We are told that when he was going out to meet al-Zubayr in the Battle of Jamal, his companions were worried that he was without armour while al-Zubayr was fully

armed. However, Imām ‘Alī told them that al-Zubayr was not going to kill him, and then he described the individual who would kill him. He even explained how he would be assassinated by an act of treachery, being attacked all of a sudden (T). The first part of this oration points to the fact that the appointed time of death for each individual is fixed, and until that time comes, he will not leave this world. Since it is Allāh who decides how long a person will live, nothing can abrogate His decision or hasten a person's demise. As such, one's apportioned lifespan acts as a shield or a guard that protects him from death until it is his time to die. Some traditions even speak of guardian angels who protect an individual day and night, until his time of death comes, at which point they leave his side (N). Then, *when their time comes, they cannot defer it by a single moment nor can they advance it* (Q16:61). But before that time, one cannot die; we are told that *no soul may die except by Allāh's leave, at an appointed time* (Q3:145). As for the causes of death that we see around us, be it starvation, murder, sickness, and so on, all these causes only lead to death once the guardians have left and the person is no longer protected (Z). When the appointed time comes, *neither will the arrow miss its mark nor will the wound heal*, since there is no more protection from death. The phrase '*lā yaṭish al-sahm*' literally means that the arrow will not go awry and turn aside, thereby missing its intended target (R). The term '*kalm*' refers to the effect of an injury or malady, and both the arrow and wound represent the causes of the death of an individual (M).



62

ON THE TRANSIENCE OF THIS WORLD

1 Beware, verily this world is an abode where safety cannot be attained save from within it, and no salvation can be attained from anything done for its sake. People are tested by it through trials. Whatever they have taken of it for its [own] sake, they will be removed therefrom and held to account for. And whatever they have taken thereof for other than itself, they will proceed to it and reside therein. To those possessed of intelligence, it is indeed like the retreating shade – you hardly see it spread out and fully extended before it contracts and shrinks.

١ أَلَا إِنَّ الدُّنْيَا دَارٌ لَا يُسْلَمُ مِنْهَا
إِلَّا فِيهَا، وَلَا يُجْعَلُ بِشَيْءٍ
كَانَ لَهَا. ابْتَلِي النَّاسَ بِهَا فِتْنَةً،
فَمَا أَحَدُوهُ مِنْهَا لَهَا أُخْرِجُوهُ مِنْهَا
وَحُسِبُوا عَلَيْهِ، وَمَا أَحَدُوهُ مِنْهَا
لِعَيْرِهَا قَدِمُوا عَلَيْهِ وَأَقَامُوا فِيهِ،
فَإِنَّهَا عِنْدَ ذَوِي الْعُقُولِ كَفَيْهِ
الظُّلْلُ، يَيْمَنَ تَرَاهُ سَابِغًا حَتَّى
فَلَصَقَ، وَرَائِدًا حَتَّى نَفَقَ.

CONTEXT

In this sermon, Amīr al-Mu'minīn ('a) warns people of the deceptive nature of this world, and its transience. Two important matters have been addressed in it, the first being that it is possible for this world to be a means for salvation just as it could be a cause of damnation for human beings in the Hereafter. The second point concerns the transience and temporary nature of this world. This oration is an excerpt of a longer sermon, and al-Sharīf al-Rađī has only quoted a part thereof. We have no record of this sermon in any extant text before the time of al-Rađī, however it has been recorded in some later works with slight variances. While there is no information regarding when and where this sermon was given, we can conclude from its contents that it was likely given by Imām 'Alī towards the end of his life, in the city of Kūfah (S). The overall objective of this sermon was to advise

people to refrain from becoming attached to this world and to focus their attention on attaining success and felicity in the Hereafter (MB).

COMMENTARY

1 When he says that safety from this world cannot be gained except from within it, the Imām means that it is a malady, the cure for which is found inside it (T). That is because the means by which one can be saved from the consequences of sins he commits in the world is found within the world itself, since sins can only be effaced in one of two ways: either by performing righteous deeds and acts of worship which lead to both reward and the wiping away of misdeeds, or by seeking forgiveness and repenting. And both of these are only possible while one is alive in this world (I). However, the condition is clear – salvation cannot be attained *from anything done for its sake*, meaning for the sake of this world. Therefore, even if one does something ‘good’, if his only objective is a selfish one, to gain something for himself in this world, or for those who are close to him, he will not gain salvation through it (Z). The phrase *people are tested by it through trials* underscores the fact that this world is an abode of trials and examination, and Allāh sometimes tests His servants with ease and comfort, and at other times through hardships and difficulties. The Qur’ān states this fact clearly: *We try you with evil and good as a test, and to Us you shall be returned* (Q21:35). That which is taken of this world for its own sake will be stripped away, and one will be questioned regarding it on the Day of Resurrection. However, that which is *taken thereoffor other than itself*, meaning for the Hereafter, *they will proceed to it and reside therein*, meaning that they will face the outcome of their actions, be they good or evil (M). Put differently, if people use the blessings of this world as a means of attaining felicity in the Hereafter, there will be nothing better; but if they take it as an end in itself, they will face the worst consequence.

The former approach converts transient worldly blessings into eternal bounties of the Hereafter, whereas the latter approach has a very brief period of enjoyment followed by accountability and punishment (N). The last statement is specifically about *those possessed of intelligence*, because it is they who can understand the fleeting nature of this world and take heed of how quickly what is in it passes away and perishes. The analogy of a retreating shade used by the Imām is a metaphor that is commonly found in traditions and poetry (MB). The two

terms ‘*zill*’ and ‘*fay*’ are actually synonyms and both refer to shadow or shade. Some suggest that *zill* is a more general term because *fay*’ only comes about after noontime, and since there is this subtle difference between the terms, it is not incorrect to annex one to the other (I). ‘*Sābigh*’ literally means complete, whereas ‘*qalaṣa*’ means to contract. No sooner does a shadow extend to its full length than it starts to contract; in the same way, the world swiftly passes and comes to an end (N).



ON HASTENING TOWARDS RIGHTEOUS DEEDS

1 Be mindful of Allāh, O servants of Allāh. Hasten with your [good] deeds before your deaths, and purchase what will remain for you [in the Hereafter] with what will depart from you [of this world]. Get ready for departure for you are being driven out, and prepare yourselves for death as it is hovering above you. Be a people who pay heed when called, and who know that this world is not their [final] abode, so they exchange it [for the Hereafter]. Verily Allāh, the Glorified, has not created you aimlessly nor left you without purpose. Nothing stands between any of you and Paradise or Hell except the death that befalls him.

فَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ عِبَادَ اللَّهِ، وَبَادِرُوا
آجَالَكُمْ بِأَعْمَالِكُمْ، وَابْتَاعُوا مَا
يَقَوِي لَكُمْ بِمَا يَرُولُ عَنْكُمْ،
وَتَرَحَّلُوا فَقَدْ جُدِّ بِكُمْ،
وَاسْتَعِدُوا لِلْمَوْتِ فَقَدْ أَظَلَّكُمْ،
وَكُونُوا قَوْمًا صَيَحَّ بِهِمْ فَانْتَهُوا،
وَعَلِمُوا أَنَّ الدُّنْيَا لَيْسَتْ لَهُمْ
بِدَارٍ فَاسْتَبَدُلُوا؛ فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ سُبْحَانَهُ
لَمْ يَحْكُمْ عَبْشًا، وَلَمْ يَشُرُّكُمْ
سُدًّا، وَمَا بَيْنَ أَحَدِكُمْ وَبَيْنَ
الْجَنَّةِ أَوِ النَّارِ إِلَّا الْمَوْتُ أَنْ
يَنْرُلَ بِهِ.

2 Verily, the distance that is shortened by each passing instant and broken down by every fleeting moment ought to be regarded very short. Verily the unseen traveller who is being driven by the two phenomena: the day and the night, is certainly quick to return. And indeed the arriver who brings with him [ultimate] success or wretchedness truly deserves the best of provisions.

وَإِنَّ غَايَةً تَنْفَضُّ هَا اللَّحْظَةُ،
وَتَهْدِمُهَا السَّاعَةُ، لَجَدِيرَةٌ
بِقَصَرِ الْمُدَّةِ، وَإِنَّ غَائِبًا
يُحْدِدُهُ الْجَدِيدَانِ: الْيَوْلُ
وَالنَّهَارُ، لَحَرِيٌّ بِشَرْعَةِ الْأَوْبَةِ،
وَإِنَّ قَادِمًا يُقْدِمُ بِالْفَوْزِ أَوِ
الشُّفْوَةِ لِمُسْتَحِقٍ لِأَفْضَلِ الْعَدَةِ،

So acquire the provisions of this world from this world, by which you may safeguard yourselves tomorrow.

3 The servant should be mindful of his Lord, admonish himself, repent his sins, and subdue his [vain] desire. Verily his death is hidden from him, his hope deceives him, and Satan is always close to him, beautifying sin for him so that he commits it, and assuring him of future repentance so that he delays it. Thus his death sets upon him when he least expects it. O what great regret awaits every negligent one whose life becomes a testimony against him, and whose days lead him to wretchedness.

4 We ask Allāh, the Glorified, to place us and you among those who are not led to wantonness by bounties, who are not prevented from obedience to their Lord by any goal, and who are not overcome by regret and grief after death.

فَتَرَوْدُوا فِي الدُّنْيَا مِنَ الدُّنْيَا حَتَّىٰ يَرُوْنَ بِهِ أَنفُسَكُمْ غَدَاءً.

٣ فَاتَّقُ عَبْدَ رَبِّهِ، نَصَحَّ فَسْسَهُ، وَقَدَّمَ تَوْبَةَهُ، وَغَلَبَ شَهْوَتَهُ، فَإِنَّ أَجَلَهُ مَسْتُورٌ عَنْهُ، وَأَمَلَهُ حَادِعٌ لَهُ وَالشَّيْطَانُ مُوكَلٌ بِهِ، يُرَيِّنُ لَهُ الْمَعْصِيَةَ لِيَرَكِبَهَا، وَيُمْنِيَهُ التَّوْبَةَ لِيُسْوِقَهَا؛ إِذَا هَجَمَتْ مِنِّيَّةُ عَلَيْهِ أَعْفَلَ مَا يَكُونُ عَنْهَا. فَيَا لَهَا حَسْرَةً عَلَىٰ كُلِّ ذِي غَفْلَةٍ أَنْ يَكُونُ عُمُرُهُ عَلَيْهِ حُجَّةً، وَأَنْ تُؤَدِّيَهُ أَيَامُهُ إِلَى الشُّفْقَةِ.

٤ نَسْأَلُ اللَّهَ سُبْحَانَهُ أَنْ يَجْعَلَنَا وَإِنَّا كُمْ مِمَّنْ لَا تُطْرُهُ نِعْمَةٌ، وَلَا تُفَضِّلُنَا عَنْ طَاعَةِ رَبِّهِ غَايَةً، وَلَا تَحْلِلْنَا بَعْدَ الْمَوْتِ نَدَاءَهُ وَلَا كَآنَةً.

CONTEXT

This is an excerpt of a longer sermon which was given by Amīr al-Mu'minīn (*‘a*) named al-Gharrā’. It contains some amazing insights, and was spoken during a funeral. When the deceased was laid in his grave, the relatives began wailing and crying. The Imām asked, “Why do they weep? By Allāh, if they could see what he sees, they would forget the dead person!” Then he stood up and gave this oration.

Part of this sermon has also been narrated in later sources with slight variance in wording (S). It is noteworthy that Ibn Qutaybah and a few others have wrongly attributed this sermon to the Abbasid caliph al-Ma'mūn. However, it is evident that al-Ma'mūn had only memorized the sermon, just as many others would memorize Imām 'Alī's sermons, and then he recited it as his own, without attributing it to the original speaker (T). In this oration, the Imām again reminds the people about the evanescent nature of this world and the importance of preparing for the Hereafter before it is too late (N).

COMMENTARY

1 The first instruction in this sermon relates to espousing Godwariness and being mindful of Allāh. It is a reminder that we are servants of Allāh and it thus behoves us to submit ourselves to Him. Since the subject being discussed pertains to preparation for the Hereafter, it was apt to speak about the best provision for it, *for indeed the best provision is taqwā* (Q2:197) (N). The statement *hasten with your [good] deeds before your deaths* means perform as much good as you can before you die, as if you are vying with death (I). The advice to 'buy' the everlasting Hereafter with this temporary world evokes a sense of eagerness and avidity, since exchanging something that perishes for something that lasts is a profitable transaction by any measure, and no rational person would forgo the opportunity for such a bargain (MB). The phrase *for you are being driven out* translates '*fa qad judda bikum*', which some commentators take to mean: to be urged forward, pushed, or pestered to begin moving (I). Others consider it to refer to seriousness (from *jidd*) in preparation for departure, or in the order to depart (T). It has also been suggested that the phrase refers to an instruction to be quick in readying oneself for departure, since the term *jidd* also means haste (N). In any case, the overall connotation goes back to swiftly preparing to depart this world, and getting ready for death, *as it is hovering above you* like a shade – hence the word '*azallakum*', which literally means: it casts a shadow over you (M). Those who *pay heed when called* are not negligent or remiss; rather, they are aware and attentive. That is why they know that this world is not their final abode, so they seek to exchange it for the Hereafter (MB).

Imām 'Alī ('a) then reminds the people that they have not been created aimlessly or without purpose, and this is indeed the fundamental proof of life after

death, and the Hereafter. If human beings have been created with a purpose, and the goal is limited to the short life of this world, in which wretchedness is the order of the day, then that purpose would be futile. Such a great creation, with a vast cosmos and countless beautiful and amazing creatures, and the subtle way in which human beings have been fashioned, cannot all be for such a trivial end. All the evidence points to a much greater purpose for this creation that the Wise Creator has originated, and that purpose is nothing other than the attainment of perfection and proximity to Allāh, which leads to ultimate felicity in the Eternal Abode (N). The only thing that stands between a human being and his ultimate end in Paradise or Hell is *the death that befalls him*. Indeed, no matter how long one lives, and how healthy and comfortable he is, he will still have to face death one day, after which there is an accounting followed by reward or punishment (Z).

² *The distance* translates ‘*al-ghāyah*’, which literally means limit or end, since what is being referred to here is the lifespan of an individual, or the end of his life which he draws closer to each and every moment. The amount of time one has in this world is reduced by each passing instant, so it behoves one to consider life as short. Despite this fact, people waste the precious little time they have, not realizing that their life is made up of these very moments (N). The *unseen traveller* (‘*ghāib*’) may refer to death; it is death that is driven towards human beings by the two recurring and renewing phenomena (‘*al-jadīdān*’) of day and night. The night and day are referred to as *al-jadīdān* and *al-ajaddān* because they never become impaired by time (T). Based on this meaning of the term *unseen*, the word ‘*al-awbah*’ would mean approaching or coming, not returning (which is its literal meaning), because it cannot be said that death was not present before and has now returned (Z). Some commentators have suggested that since death literally means lack of life, and because human beings were previously non-existent, it is correct to say that death returns to them (MB).

Others have noted that death was present before the creation of human beings, and has always been there with them. However, it is only the appointed term (*ajal*) decreed for human beings which acts as a barrier between them. So it is as if death has been hidden behind that barrier, but with the passage of night and day, and the eventual end of the appointed lifespan of an individual, death once again returns into the picture (T). Alternatively, ‘*ghāib*’ here may mean absent, and might refer to the human being himself, since he is absent from his true abode of the Hereafter to which he will eventually return, and he is being

driven closer to his final home by the passage of each day and night. Based on this interpretation, the word ‘*al-awbah*’ will match its literal meaning, which is to return (M). *The arriver* (*qādīm*) *who brings with him success or wretchedness* may refer to the human being who arrives at his final abode of the Hereafter, carrying with him that which either takes him to felicity or to misery. Such a person ought to take the best provisions with him (N, M, MB). On the other hand, many commentators consider this *arriver* to be death (R, Z, T). In any case, the best provisions for the Hereafter should be collected and prepared *from this world* through which the people *may safeguard* themselves *tomorrow*. And, according to the Glorious Qur’ān, the best of provisions is Godwariness (Q2:197).

3 Since *taqwā* is the best of provisions, let each servant be Godwary and fear his Lord. This entails three actions on his part: admonishing himself, repenting for his sins, and subduing his unlawful desires. Together, these instructions constitute a complete prescription for the attainment of felicity. A person who does not admonish himself never seeks forgiveness for his sins and constantly gives in to his vain desires (N). The urgency of acting upon these instructions is underscored by the subsequent reminder that *death is hidden from us*. So if a person does not know when or where he will die, it behoves him to always be ready for death (Z). Hope can deceive human beings, making them assume that they will live much longer and still have plenty of time to prepare for death and the Hereafter. In addition, Shayṭān is always close to them, enticing them, and making sins seem alluring and attractive for them, so that they commit the misdeeds without thinking of the consequences. He also assures them of opportunities to seek forgiveness in the future thereby making them delay repentance (*taswīf*). This makes people negligent, and they remain in that heedless state until death suddenly comes to them, leaving them with nothing but regret (MB).

Their state at the moment of death is described as ‘*aghfala mā yakūnu ‘anhā*’ meaning that they will be the most negligent they have ever been towards death. That is why some commentators suggest that the term ‘*idhā*’ in the phrase ‘*idhā hajamat maniyatuhu ‘alayh*’ (lit: when death sets upon him) actually connotes suddenness and shock (*mufjāt*). In that case, the translation would be: *suddenly death sets upon him while he is in the most negligent state* (N). In the final statement of this section, the Imām expresses his sorrow at the state of every negligent one who wastes his life, which is a blessing from Allāh, and fails to take the opportunity to perform righteous actions by which he may build his Hereafter. Instead, his

state becomes like that of one who had great wealth but instead of benefitting therefrom, he wasted it and used it to procure that which brought him harm rather than benefit (Z). Thus his lifetime becomes a proof against him on the Day of Judgment, and the days he spent in the world *lead him to wretchedness*.

4 At the end of this sermon, the Imām makes a supplication which is pregnant with meaning and lesson-giving. He asks Allāh for three things, the first being that he and his audience should be *among those who are not led to wantonness by bounties*. The verb ‘*tubṭiru*’ is derived from *baṭara* which means behaving with ingratitude, exultation, conceit, and insolence. The message in this first line of the supplication is to be careful that the blessings of Allāh do not lead us to behave in a manner unbecoming of a believer, such as acting boastfully or transgressing the limits. The second prayer is that they should not be *prevented from obedience to their Lord by any goal*. This means that no material or worldly goal should ever act as an impediment or a hinderance to the obedience and worship of Allāh. Thirdly, he asks Allāh to place them among those *who are not overcome by regret and grief after death*. This means that they should not undertake any action in this world which would lead them to remorse and sorrow when their deaths come (N). The main actions that lead to such regret have already been mentioned previously in this sermon: continually falling into sin and delaying repentance until one meets death while in a state of heedlessness (MB).



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ON THE ATTRIBUTES OF ALLĀH

1 All praise belongs to Allāh for Whom one state does not precede another, such that He would be first before being last, or He would be manifest before being hidden.

2 Every individual who is described as alone, save Him, is meagre and every mighty one, other than Him, is abased. Every strong one, other than Him, is weak and every master, other than Him, is a slave. Every knower, other than Him, is a seeker of knowledge, and every capable one, other than Him, is sometimes able and sometimes unable. Every listener, other than Him, is deaf to faint sounds while loud sounds deafen him and distant ones get away from him. Every seer, other than Him, is blind to invisible colours and subtle bodies. Every manifest thing, other than Him, is not [simultaneously] hidden, and every hidden thing, other than Him, is not [simultaneously] manifest.

١ الْحَمْدُ لِلّهِ الَّذِي لَمْ يَسْبِقْ لَهُ حَالٌ حَالًا،
فَيَكُونُ أَوَّلًا قَبْلَ أَنْ يَكُونَ آخِرًا،
وَيَكُونُ ظَاهِرًا قَبْلَ أَنْ يَكُونَ بَاطِنًا.

٢ كُلُّ مُسَمَّى بِالْوُحْدَةِ غَيْرَهُ قَلِيلٌ،
وَكُلُّ عَزِيزٍ غَيْرَهُ ذَلِيلٌ، وَكُلُّ
قَوِيٍّ غَيْرَهُ ضَعِيفٌ، وَكُلُّ
مَالِكٍ غَيْرَهُ مَمْلُوكٌ، وَكُلُّ عَالِمٍ
غَيْرَهُ مُمْتَلِعٌ، وَكُلُّ قَادِرٍ غَيْرَهُ
يَقْدِيرُ وَيَعْجِزُ، وَكُلُّ سَمِيعٍ غَيْرَهُ
يَصْمُمُ عَنْ لَطِيفِ الْأَصْوَاتِ،
وَيُصْمِمُ كَيْرِهَا، وَيَدْهُبُ عَنْهُ مَا
بَعْدَهُ مِنْهَا، وَكُلُّ بَصِيرٍ غَيْرَهُ
يَعْمَلُ عَنْ حَفِيَّ الْأَلْوَانِ
وَلَطِيفِ الْأَبْسَامِ، وَكُلُّ ظَاهِرٍ
غَيْرَهُ غَيْرُ بَاطِنٍ، وَكُلُّ بَاطِنٍ
غَيْرَهُ غَيْرُ ظَاهِرٍ.

CONTEXT

This is part of a longer sermon that Amīr al-Mu'minīn gave after the Battle of Jamal in which he admonished the people of Baṣrah and mentioned certain

prophecies about future events. Some commentators have suggested that this oration is actually a combination of excerpts of two separate sermons (S). Parts of this sermon have been mentioned in earlier sources, such as al-Kulaynī's *al-Kāfi*, and al-Ṣadūq's *al-Tawḥīd*, where it is stated that the Imām spoke these words when he was preparing to send forces to fight the Syrians a second time (after Ṣiffīn). It is noteworthy that Imām ‘Alī would use every opportunity to teach the people about *tawḥīd*, and explain to them the attributes of Allāh, both of majesty (*jalāl*) and beauty (*jamāl*), even during times of war. Perhaps this is because focusing on His attributes gives strength to human beings and uplifts their hearts and spirits, enabling them to rush forward and counter the enemy with courage and without trepidation (N). An example of this is also seen in the report regarding the bedouin who came to ask Imām ‘Alī about the oneness of Allāh during the Battle of Jamal. When people began criticizing the man for posing such a question in the heat of battle, Amīr al-Mu’minīn ('a) told them to leave him and said that his question pertained to the very matter for which they were fighting, namely the correct understanding of *tawḥīd*. Then he proceeded to explain the concept to the questioner (N).

COMMENTARY

1 Since it is evident that precedence, proximity, priority, and subsequence are all temporal matters that are bound by time, and Allāh is not limited or bound by time; rather, He is the Creator of time, therefore when it comes to His attributes, *one state does not precede another* (M). It is essential to remind ourselves here again that the attributes of Allāh are in no way similar to the characteristics of the creation. That is because He is infinite and perfect in every way, and is beyond all the restrictions of matter, time, and space. That is why when we discuss divine attributes, we come across certain astounding realities which are not seen anywhere else, such as the presence of two contrary attributes that could never exist simultaneously in the realm of creation. For instance, in this realm, what is first cannot be last and what is last cannot be first, what is manifest cannot be hidden and what is hidden cannot be manifest at the same time. However, when it comes to Allāh, He is First and Last, Hidden and Manifest (N). Due to the unique nature of divine attributes, our descriptions thereof can never do justice and may only give us an inkling of a reality that is beyond our comprehension.

He is First without any beginning, and Last without any end. He is Manifest through His signs, which are the testaments of His power and the markers of His wisdom, and He is Hidden since even the imaginations cannot envision Him (MB). None of His attributes precedes others because precedence entails origination in time (*hudūth*), whereas Allāh is pre-eternal (*qadīm*), therefore when we say Allāh is First and Last, He has always been thus, and will always be so; and the same applies to His being Manifest and Hidden (Z). Perhaps a simpler way of explaining these four divine attributes is that He is First since He existed before all things, and is Last because He will exist after everything has perished. He is Manifest since there are numerous proofs around us that point to His existence, and He is Hidden because He cannot be perceived by the senses; and none of these attributes came before the other, as they have always existed together (R). Another meaning of the attribute *al-zāhir* is that Allāh overpowers all things and Has control over them, just as one would say ‘*zahartu ‘alā a‘dāt*’ meaning, “I overpowered my enemies.” Similarly, the attribute *al-bātin* also has the meaning of knowing the deepest aspects of everything, such that nothing is hidden from Him (T).

2 Aside from Allāh, *every individual who is described as alone is meagre* (‘*qalīl*’), because when it comes to the creatures, being alone means isolation and separation from others, as opposed to being in a group. Such a state bespeaks unimportance, weakness, and meagreness. However, when we talk of the oneness of Allāh, and that He alone is Almighty, having no partner or associate, we mean that He is infinite in His presence and power (N). Where more than ‘one’ is conceivable and possible, then ‘one’ gives a sense of littleness, since it is less than two or more. However, such a meaning of ‘one’ does not apply to Allāh and thus does not connote the same thing (MB). *Every mighty one, other than Him, is abased and every strong one, other than Him, is weak*, because His might is independent whereas the might possessed by others depends upon Him and is granted by Him whenever He wishes, and the same goes for strength. That is why we say, “There is no power or might save with Allāh” (Z). Every master, other than Allāh, is an owned slave (‘*mamlūk*’) because *to Allāh belongs the kingdom of the heavens and the earth and whatever is in them, and He has power over all things* (Q5:120). *Every knower, other than Him, is a seeker of knowledge* since His knowledge is an attribute of His essence and does not need to be sought (T).

3 He did not create what He created to fortify His authority, nor for fear of the effects of time, nor to seek assistance against a hostile peer, a proud partner, or a dominating opponent. Rather, all the creatures are cared for [by Him] and are His humble slaves. He is not incarnated in anything such that it may be said, "He exists in it," nor is He separated from anything such that it may be said, "He is detached from it."

٣ لَمْ يَخْلُقْ مَا خَلَقَهُ إِلَّا بِدِيدِ سُلْطَانٍ،
وَلَا تَحْوُفِ مِنْ عَوَاقِبِ زَمَانٍ، وَلَا
إِشْتِعَانَةَ عَلَى نِدْرَهُ مُشَارِبٍ، وَلَا شَرِيكٍ
مُكَاثِرٍ، وَلَا ضِدًّا مُمَافِرٍ، وَلَكِنْ
خَلَائِقُ مَرْبُوبُونَ، وَعِبَادُ دَاخِرُونَ،
لَمْ يَحْلُّ فِي الْأَشْيَاءِ فَيَقَالَ: هُوَ فِيهَا
كَايْنٌ، وَلَمْ يَنْأِ عَنْهَا فَيَقَالَ: هُوَ مِنْهَا
بَايْرٌ.

4 He was not wearied by the creation that He initiated, or by regulating the affairs of what He created. Neither did any weakness overcome Him from His creation, nor did any misgiving occur to Him in what He decreed and ordained. Rather, His verdict is precise, His knowledge is definite, and His command is decisive. Hope is placed in Him despite His chastise-ment, and He is feared despite His blessings.

٤ لَمْ يَئُودْهُ حَلْقُ مَا ابْتَدَأَ، وَلَا
تَذَبَّرَ مَا ذَرَأَ، وَلَا وَقَفَ بِهِ عَجْزٌ
عَمَّا خَلَقَ، وَلَا وَلَجَّتْ عَلَيْهِ
شُبُّهَةٌ فِيمَا أَقْضَى وَقَدْرَ، بَلْ
قَصَاءُ مُسْتَقْنٌ، وَعِلْمٌ مُحْكَمٌ وَأَمْرٌ
مُبِرَّمٌ، الْمَأْمُولُ مَعَ النَّفَقِ،
الْمَرْهُوبُ مَعَ النَّعَمِ.

On the other hand, when human beings are born, Allāh brings them forth from the bellies of their mothers while they do not know anything (See: Q16:78). Thus, they need to seek and gain knowledge with the means provided to them, such as the five senses of perception.

Unlike Allāh, who has power over all things, every other capable one *is sometimes able and sometimes unable*. Even when one is able to do something, that ability depends on certain conditions which may change, thereby rendering him unable to do that very thing (N). When it comes to the senses of hearing and sight also, human beings have limited capabilities. If a sound is too soft or faint, it

cannot be heard, and if it is too loud, it becomes deafening to the ears. The way in which sound-waves reach the ear makes it necessary for the source of the sound to be within earshot, and to be neither too loud, nor too low, in order to be heard properly by the human ear. Similarly, certain colours (like ultraviolet and infrared) cannot be seen by the human eye, just like some subtle or ethereal bodies ('*latīf al-ajsām'*) are not perceptible to it. The latter may be a reference to minuscule creatures like tiny insects, bacteria, etc. (MB), or perhaps creatures like the jinn. Other than Allāh, no manifest thing can simultaneously be hidden, because these two qualities are opposites that cannot co-exist in any of the creatures. However, they do exist simultaneously as divine attributes, as we have noted in the previous section of this sermon (T).

3 Addressing the reason why Allāh originated the creation, the Imām says that it was not *to fortify His authority*, since His authority is already the strongest and needs no fortification. *Nor for fear of the effects of time*, because it is impossible for any change to affect the Almighty, so there is no reason to fear the effects of time. *Nor to seek assistance against a hostile peer, a proud partner, or a dominating opponent*, or for any personal gain, because He needs nothing, and everything is in need of Him (Z). Rather, the reason for creating everything is indicated by the fact that *all the creatures are cared for [by Him] and are His humble slaves*. So His purpose was to bestow favour upon the creatures by granting them existence and caring for them (N). Perhaps the mention of *His humble slaves* is to further emphasize that He does not need to fortify His authority through them (T). The phrase *He is not incarnated in anything* translates '*lam yaḥlul fi al-ashyā'* where *ḥulūl*, which comes from *ḥalla* (lit. alight, settle in a place), refers to substantial union. The connotation of this is negation of the quality of material bodies or substantive accidents from Him (R). As a result, it can never be said about a thing that "*He exists in it*," nor can it be said "*He is detached from it*."

A corollary of the fact that Allāh is pre-eternal and infinite is that He is everywhere and with everything. He encompasses everything in existence. All of creation is limited, and this includes both externally existent phenomena and mentally conceived notions. Even the idea of 'existence', which is one of the most inclusive notions and applies to all known or conceived things, is so weak that wherever it is used, it takes on the colour of that thing. So when we say that a tree or stone exists, we are not talking of existence itself, but the presence of a tree or stone in particular. Hence, the notion of existence takes on the colour of that

which it describes or applies to. However, when it comes to the divine attribute of omnipresence, Allāh is everywhere and with everything but never takes on the colour of anything, and is never described with an attribute other than His divine attributes. That is why the ‘withness’ (*ma'iyyah*) of Allāh with everything cannot be a type of incarnation (*hulūl*) (S).

4 Weariness and exhaustion applies to creatures that carry out their tasks using their limbs. Allah has no body and needs to make no effort to carry out any task; hence, weariness does not apply to Him (M). The first statement in this section of the sermon echoes the verse of the Glorious Qurān which states: *Have they not considered that Allāh, Who created the heavens and the earth and was not wearied by their creation, is able to give life to the dead?* (Q46:33). Since Allāh is omnipotent and His power is independent, there is no question of effort or exertion when it comes to His actions (I). Not only did Allāh originate the creation, He also regulates and manages its affairs at every moment, yet none of this makes Him weary. Weakness did not overcome Him from His creation, since it was a simple act of willing them to ‘be’ (*kun*), as the Qurān tells us: *His command, when He intends anything, is only to say to it, ‘Be,’ and it is* (Q36:82). The Imām’s statement that *no misgiving occurred to Him in what He decreed and ordained* is another indication of Allāh’s unlimited knowledge.

With their limited knowledge, human beings sometimes take some important decisions, however later they discover certain realities which lead them to doubt their decisions, and at times they realize that they were completely wrong and turn back from their previous stance. However, since Allāh’s knowledge is not restricted, and nothing is hidden from Him, any decision He makes or decree He gives cannot have even an iota of doubt (N). Hence, *His verdict is precise, His knowledge is definite, and His command is decisive*. This means that He neither needs to think, nor to know of any event that transpires in His creation, in order to arrive at His decree (T). *Hope is placed in Him despite His chastisement* because His mercy encompasses all things, but at the same time *He is feared despite His blessings* because His punishment is severe and it may come all of a sudden, in the middle of the night for example. Tradition tell us that neither does His anger prevent Him from showing mercy, nor does mercy prevent Him from punishing those who deserve to be punished (Z).



ON THE ART OF COMBAT

1 O company of Muslims! Don the garb of awe [of Allāh] and cover yourselves with tranquillity. Grit your teeth, as that makes the swords skip off the skull. Complete your battle armour and shake your swords in their scabbards before unsheathing them. Stare [at the enemy] furiously and strike on both sides. Attack with the sharp edge and extend your swords by stepping forward.

١ معاشر المسلمين! اشتبهوا
الخشية، وتجلبوا السكينة، واعضوا
على النواجد، فإنه أقربى للسيوف
عن الهم، وأكملوا اللامة، وقلقوها
السيوف في أعمادها قبل سلها،
والحطوا الحزر، واطعنوا الشزر،
ونافحوا بالظى، وصلوا السيوف
بالخطا.

2 Know that Allāh is watching over you and you are in the company of the cousin of the Messenger of Allāh (ṣ). So attack repeatedly and be ashamed of fleeing, for indeed it is a disgrace for your posterity and fire on the Day of Reckoning. Be pleased to give your lives [as martyrs] and walk with ease towards death. Turn your attention to this large contingent and the pitched canopy, and attack its epicentre for verily Satan is hiding in its lower corner. He has stretched out his hand to attack and has kept his foot back to flee. So remain steadfast as you charge ahead!

٢ واعلموا أنكم بعين الله، ومنع ابن
عمر رسولي الله ﷺ، فعاودوا الكروء،
واستحيوا من الفرار، فإنه عار في
الأعقاب، وثار يوم الحساب،
وطيبوا عن أنفسكم نفساً، وامشووا
إلى الموت مشياً سجحاً. وعليكم
بهذا السواد الأعظم، والرّوaci
المطنب، فاضربوا شجنة، فإن
الشيطان كامن في كشره، وقد قدّم
للثوبية يداً، وأخر لثلكوص رجلاً!
قصمداً صمداً!

[Do this] until the beam of truth becomes manifest for you while you have the upper hand and Allāh is with you, and He will not deprive you of [the reward for] your deeds. (Q47:35).

حَتَّىٰ يَبْخُلَيَ لَكُمْ عَمُودُ الْحَقِّ
 وَأَنْتُمُ الْأَعْلَوْنَ وَاللَّهُ مَعَكُمْ وَلَنْ
 يَتَرَكُمْ أَعْمَالُكُمْ.

CONTEXT

It is commonly thought that this was [part of] Amīr al-Mu'minīn's sermon to his companions on the Night of al-Harīr, or just before the first encounter at Ṣiffīn. Laylat al-Harīr was one of the bloodiest nights during the Battle of Ṣiffīn wherein the battle continued even after there had been fighting throughout the day. One report describes the severity and fierceness of the battle thus: "They fought so hard that night, that spears broke and when no arrow was left in their quivers, they began fighting with swords." According to some commentators, this oration was spoken by Imām 'Alī on the day that preceded the Night of al-Harīr (I). This sermon has been reported in a number of early sources, mostly from Ibn 'Abbās, with some variation in wording (T). Before relating this sermon, Ibn 'Abbās described Imām 'Alī saying that no one was as courageous as him. He went on to say that one day in the Battle of Ṣiffīn, he saw the Imām going to different groups of soldiers and addressing them. This was at a time when the Syrian army had arrived and their large numbers had caused fear among some of the troops. Pointing to the enemy ranks, Imām 'Alī told his soldiers that they were weaklings who only outwardly portrayed strength. He said that if the sword of truth fell upon them, the enemies would scatter like locusts in a windstorm. Then he spoke the words of this sermon, advising his army how to proceed (S). This oration comprises the etiquettes and techniques of fighting in battle, summarized in succinct statements. The Imām blends spiritual values into it to heighten the motivation of the fighters and impel them towards self-sacrifice in the way of Allāh (N).

COMMENTARY

- In the first section of this sermon, Imām 'Alī mentions nine instructions related to the art of combat and fighting in the way of Allāh, each of which is very

important and helpful while on the battlefield. The first two directives are: *don the garb of awe [of Allāh] and cover yourselves with tranquillity*. The imperative '*istash'irū*' is derived from *shi'ār* which literally means an undergarment that makes direct contact with one's skin. It is therefore an instruction to make the fear of Allāh like the garment that is closest to one's body. '*Tajalbabū*' comes from *jilbāb* which refers to an outer garment that usually covers the whole body (T). It is interesting that the first instructions the Imām gives pertain to the spiritual and emotional aspect of the soldier. Having a sense of awe and fear of Allāh makes one feel responsible for obediently carrying out His commands, and this feeling is pivotal for the believer who fights on the battlefield in the way of Allāh. It is perhaps the strongest motivation to remain steadfast until his last breath. Likewise, the second directive is imperative for the fighters because by remaining calm and tranquil, they will not allow themselves to be overwhelmed by apprehension and anxiety as they face the enemy in the field of battle. Doing so would be tantamount to a display of weakness and would encourage the enemy to become more audacious in his assault.

Courageous warriors have always been calm and composed, whereas weaklings are always anxious and uneasy. Indeed, as noted in Q48:4, it was tranquillity that led to the victory of Muslims in previous battles (N). The practical advice to *grit your teeth* while fighting is considered beneficial as it *makes the swords skip off the skull*. That is because gritting teeth leads to the contraction and stiffening of the muscles, and that results in greater rigidity which makes it less pervious to the strike of a sword (MB). Alternatively, it could be meant metaphorically to signify increased attention and focus towards fighting, and remaining calm and patient, as that would help keep one safe from the swords of the enemy (R). *Complete your battle armour* means ensuring that the body armour and accoutrements for battle are complete, and one is not missing anything he needs to fight and protect himself in battle (Z). He also instructed them, *shake your swords in their scabbards before unsheathing them* so that it would not take long to draw them when they sought to strike the enemy therewith (T). '*Alhażū al-khazra'* is translated *stare [at the enemy] furiously* since the term '*al-khazr*' refers to narrow eyes with contracted eyelids, which is normally the way one's eyes look when he is angry or concerned. Here it means staring at the enemy with fury and rage, as opposed to looking at him with wide eyes that give the impression of fear and weakness (N).

The seventh instruction he (*a*) gives the soldiers is *strike on both sides* ('*wat'unū al-shazra*'). The term '*al-shazr*' means thrusting and piercing [of a weapon] from the right and from the left (T). The final two directives of the Imām were: *attack with the sharp edge* ('*nāfiḥū bil-zubā'*) and *extend your swords by stepping forward* ('*ṣilū al-suyūf bil-khuṭā'*). The term '*nāfiḥū*' comes from *nafīḥ* which means to blow [air], and here it means that one should be so close to the enemy that it is as if the breath he exhales reaches him. '*Zubā*' refers to the sharp edge of the blade, or at times to the upper part of the sword; in any case, striking with it is more effective in battle (N). The instruction to extend their swords by stepping forward means that if the swords are ever too short to reach the enemy and effectively strike them, they should advance themselves and should not wait until the enemy comes towards them. Such forward movement puts fear in the heart of the enemy (MB).

2 By reminding the soldiers that Allāh is watching over them and that they are *in the company of the cousin of the Messenger of Allāh* (ṣ), the Imām is emphasizing the fact that they are upon the truth in this battle, completely, just as they were when they fought alongside the Noble Prophet (Z). From the Imām's instruction to *attack repeatedly and be ashamed of fleeing, for indeed it is a disgrace for your posterity and fire on the Day of Reckoning*, we learn that firstly it should not be expected that in one attack victory will be attained, and a single assault will suffice to destroy the foundations of the enemy army, wiping them out. Rather, it will take great effort and require many continuous attacks to triumph over them. Secondly, even the thought of fleeing from the battlefield should not be entertained, for such an action would lead to a disgrace that taints even one's progeny, and it also results in damnation in the Hereafter (N). It should be noted that the term '*al-a'qāb*' has also been interpreted as the consequences of one's action, in which case the translation would read: *indeed it is a disgrace for you in the future* (MB). Being ready and pleased to give their lives and die as martyrs in the way of Allāh, and hence walk with ease towards death if need be, makes soldiers fearless in battle.

'*Al-sawād al-aḍam*' literally means 'the great black [mass]' and refers to the amassed army of the Syrians (I), since from a distance a large group of people, with little space between them, looks like a big dark body (N). *The pitched canopy* mentioned by the Imām referred to the large tent of Mu'āwiyah, which had been tied firmly with ropes (Z). He instructed the soldiers to strike at its centre, because *Satan is hiding in its lower corner*. By *Satan*, he was referring to either Mu'āwiyah

or ‘Amr ibn al-‘Âs, and using the term ‘*al-shayṭān*’ to refer to these two individuals is due to their similarity to Satan in the way they misguided people from the path of Allâh. Furthermore, it is more likely that the term has been used in its literal sense, and was not meant metaphorically, except the last phrase: *is hiding in its lower corner*, which meant that Mu‘âwiyah was a coward (MB). The description given matches the nature of Mu‘âwiyah ibn Abî Sufyân to a tee, and his cowardice is emphasized by describing him as having his hand stretched out to attack while keeping *his foot back to flee*. The Qur’ân describes this quality in Satan himself when it states: *When Satan made their deeds seem decorous to them and said, “No one shall overcome you today from among the people, and I will stand by you.” But when the two hosts sighted each other, he took to his heels, saying, “Indeed I am quit of you. I see what you do not see. Indeed I fear Allâh, and Allâh is severe in retribution”* (Q8:48) (N). Imâm ‘Alî then advises his troops to remain firm and steadfast as they charge towards the enemy. That is the meaning of the phrase *fa ṣamdan ᷣamdā*.

The phrase *beam of truth* translates “*amûd al-haqq*”, which literally means the pillar or column of truth, since the verb ‘*yanjalî*’, which means becoming manifest and coming to light, has been used to describe it. The directive here is for the soldiers to remain resolute in fighting for what they know to be true until they are able to attain their goal and witness the establishment of the truth (Z). In closing, Amîr al-Mu’mînîn (‘a) mentions part of verse Q47:35 which gives glad tidings of victory to believers, telling them that they have the upper hand, and that Allâh is with them. It also assures them that Allâh will not deprive them of the rewards for striving in His way. By reciting this, the Imâm was reminding them that a great reward awaits them in the Hereafter, so they should strive hard to obey Him (M).



WHEN INFORMED ABOUT WHAT HAD TRANSPRIRED AT SAQİFAH

- 1 He ('a) said, "Why did you not argue against them that the Messenger of Allāh (ṣ) had instructed that the good among them should be treated well and the bad should be pardoned?" They said, "How would that be an argument against them?" He said, "If leadership was to be theirs, there would have been no such directive in their favour." Then he asked, "What did the Quraysh claim?" They replied, "They argued that they are the lineal tree of the Prophet (ṣ)." So he ('a) said, "They argued for the tree but neglected the fruit."

١ قَالَ عَلَيْهِ: فَهَلَا احْتَجَجْتُمْ عَلَيْهِمْ
بِأَنَّ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ وَصَّى بِأَنْ
يُحْسَنَ إِلَى مُحْسِنِهِمْ، وَيَتَجَاهِزَ عَنْ
مُسِيَّهِمْ؟ قَالُوا: وَمَا فِي هَذَا مِنْ
الْحُجَّةِ عَلَيْهِمْ؟ فَقَالَ عَلَيْهِ: لَوْ كَانَ
الْإِمَامَةُ فِيهِمْ لَمْ تَكُنِ الْوَصِيَّةُ بِهِمْ.
ثُمَّ قَالَ: فَمَا ذَلِكُ قُرْيَشُ؟ قَالُوا:
احْتَجَجْتُمْ بِأَنَّهَا شَجَرَةُ الرَّسُولِ
فَقَالَ عَلَيْهِ احْتَجُّوا بِالشَّجَرَةِ،
وَأَضَاعُوا الشَّمْرَةَ.

CONTEXT

As is evident from the contents of the oration, Amīr al-Mu'minīn ('a) spoke this after the demise of the Noble Messenger (ṣ) in Madīnah, when he received news about the illegitimate decision taken at Saqīfah Bani Sā'īdah regarding the successorship. This was actually the initial clear response given by Imām 'Alī ('a) to the first deviation that transpired after the Prophet passed away. It was led by those from Madīnah who sought to usurp the caliphate. The central theme of this oration is a critique of the view held by some of the Anṣār and Muḥājirīn regarding the caliphate and political leadership. The subject of successorship to the Noble Messenger (ṣ) has been broached time and again in *Nahj al-Balāghah*, and the right of Imām 'Alī and falsity of the claims of others has been emphasized (S). Before the Imām spoke the words mentioned above, he asked those who had

returned from al-Saqīfah, “What did the Anṣār say?” They replied, “They said, ‘Let there be a leader from us and a leader from you.’” Upon hearing this, Amīr al-Mu’minīn gave the response mentioned in this oration (MB). The Imām presented two responses: one to the Anṣār and the other to the Quraysh. Using a subtle point derived from a command of the Noble Prophet regarding the treatment of the Anṣār, he responded to their claim. As for the Muḥājirīn among the Quraysh, he used their own argument against them (N). It is noteworthy that some commentators have related the details of the entire event that transpired at al-Saqīfah in their commentaries on this sermon (T).

COMMENTARY

1 When the specifics of what transpired at al-Saqīfah were related to Imām ‘Alī (‘a), and he was informed of how the Anṣār had suggested that they should have a ruler of their own after their proposal for a caliph from their ranks was rejected, he asked why the people had not used the statement of the Messenger of Allāh (ṣ) about the Anṣār to argue against them. The Prophet (ṣ) had instructed that the Muslims should treat the virtuous among the Anṣār with kindness, and overlook the misdeeds of those of them who are iniquitous. When asked, *“How would that be an argument against them?”* the Imām explained that if leadership was ever meant to be among them, there would be no need for the Prophet to give special instructions regarding their treatment, and *there would have been no such directive in their favour*. It is obvious that when someone gives instructions that certain people should be treated with care and kindness, it means that the decisions rest in the hands of those who are being instructed, not of those for whom the recommendation has been made. This is similar to the case of a father who tells his eldest son before setting out on a journey, “Be careful of your younger siblings and treat them well.” That would only make sense if the eldest son was in charge (N). Interestingly, in later times such an argument was indeed employed by others just the way Amīr al-Mu’minīn had mentioned. For instance, it is reported that when Saīd ibn al-Āṣ died, his young son ‘Amr ibn Saīd went to Mu‘awiyah and the latter asked him, “Whom did your father speak to regarding caring for you?” He responded, “He gave his bequest to me directly and did not speak to anyone else regarding me.” Taken aback by his witty response, Mu‘awiyah said,

“This young man is surely articulate (*ashdaq*).” Subsequently ‘Amr ibn Saīd became known as ‘al-Ashdaq’ among the people (I).

Some commentators have noted that the type of individuals who had gathered at al-Saqīfah were clearly not very intelligent, since even when the Imām presented the argument to them, they did not understand it until he explained it to them (T). When he then asked what the Quraysh said in their argument against the Anṣār, they told the Imām that the Quraysh asserted they are from the same lineage and family tree of the Prophet, since they were from the same tribe as him. Upon hearing this, the Imām said, *they argued for the tree but neglected the fruit*. By this, he apparently meant himself and the Prophet’s progeny (*ahl al-bayt*), who had a greater right to the caliphate based on the very same argument that the Quraysh had presented against the Anṣār (MB).



WHEN MUHAMMAD IBN ABĪ BAKR WAS KILLED IN EGYPT

¹ I had intended to appoint Hāshim ibn ‘Utbah as the governor of Egypt, and had I done so, he would neither have left any room for them nor given them any opportunity. [I say this] without reproach for Muḥammad ibn Abī Bakr, for he was beloved to me and I had raised him.

١ وَقَدْ أَرَدْتُ تَوْلِيَةَ مِصْرَ هَاشِمَ بْنَ عُثْبَةَ، وَلَوْ وَلَيْشُ إِيَّاهَا لَمَّا حَلَّ لَهُمُ الْعَرْصَةَ، وَلَا أَنْهَرَهُمُ الْفُرْصَةَ، بِلَا ذَمًّا لِمُحَمَّدٍ بْنَ أَبِي بَكْرٍ، فَلَقَدْ كَانَ إِلَيْ حَسِيبًا، وَكَانَ لِي رَبِيبًا.

CONTEXT

This is an excerpt of the sermon that Amīr al-Mu’minīn (*a*) gave when Muḥammad ibn Abī Bakr, whom he had appointed to the governorship of Egypt, was overcome in battle and killed. After the Battle of Ḫiṣn al-‘Aqiqah, due to the rebellion of the Khawārij, Mu’āwiyah saw an opening and sought to conquer Egypt, which was one of the important and rich centres of the Islamic empire. At that time Muḥammad ibn Abī Bakr, who was a close companion of Imām ‘Alī, was the governor there. Having promised ‘Amr ibn al-Āṣ the governorship of Egypt, Mu’āwiyah dispatched him with six thousand horsemen. Most of his soldiers were driven by the motivation of seeking revenge for the killing of Uthmān ibn ‘Affān and were under the false impression that Muḥammad ibn Abī Bakr had been one of his killers. In addition, Mu’āwiyah wrote many letters to his supporters in Egypt, calling on them to assist ‘Amr ibn al-Āṣ in fighting Muḥammad ibn Abī Bakr. He likewise sent threatening messages to his foes there. On his part, Muḥammad ibn Abī Bakr wrote to Imām ‘Alī informing him of what was transpiring and seeking his assistance. He was also able to mobilize an army of four thousand men to come out and face ‘Amr ibn al-Āṣ. He sent two thousand ahead to meet ‘Amr and remained behind with the other two thousand. Those who had gone ahead fought valiantly but were defeated and their commander was killed.

When news of this reached them, those who had remained behind were negatively impacted by what they learnt, and a group among them fled while those who remained were scattered. When Muḥammad ibn Abī Bakr saw that he had been abandoned by most of the soldiers and only a few remained by his side, he retreated and went into hiding. ‘Amr ibn al-Āṣ sent Mu‘āwiyah ibn Khudayj after him. The latter looked for him and when he finally found him, he killed him in a very brutal and merciless manner. He beheaded him and placed his body inside the corpse of a dead animal before burning it. When news of his martyrdom reached Imām ‘Alī, he was deeply saddened by it and the expression of his noble face clearly showed his sorrow. It was then, in the year 38 AH, that he spoke the words of this oration (N).

COMMENTARY

¹ Amīr al-Mu’minīn had appointed Muḥammad ibn Abī Bakr as the governor of Egypt before the Battle of Ḫiffin. However, he was not the initial choice. The Imām says that he *had intended to appoint Hāshim ibn Utbah ibn Abī Waqqāṣ* and had he done so, *he would neither have left any room for Mu‘āwiyah and his army, that was led by ‘Amr ibn al-Āṣ, nor given them any opportunity* the way Muḥammad ibn Abī Bakr did by fleeing and hiding (MB). The term ‘al-‘arṣah’ literally means space, room, or vacant area, and here it refers to Egypt. He left Egypt to them and fled, thinking that he would save himself by doing so. But he was not saved, and they seized and killed him (I). Having said this, the Imām clarified that he had mentioned this *without reproach for Muḥammad ibn Abī Bakr, for he was beloved to me and I had raised him.* Asmā’ bint ‘Umays was Muḥammad ibn Abī Bakr’s mother, and she was initially married to Ja‘far ibn Abī Ṭālib, the Imām’s brother. She had migrated to al-Ḥabashah with him and there she gave birth to ‘Abdullāh ibn Ja‘far. When her husband was martyred in the Battle of Mu’tah, Abū Bakr married her and she conceived Muḥammad. After Abū Bakr died, Imām ‘Alī married her and raised Muḥammad as his own son. He would say, “Muḥammad is my son from the loins of Abū Bakr.” Hence we note that the Imām truly loved him (Z). Some commentators have interpreted the Imām’s statement *without reproach for Muḥammad ibn Abī Bakr* to mean that his statement was instead meant as a praise for Hāshim ibn Utbah (R).

It is reported that when Mu‘āwiyah ibn Khudayj al-Kindī found Muḥammad ibn Abī Bakr, the latter was close to dying of thirst. When Amīr al-Mu’minīn (‘a) received Muḥammad’s letter seeking assistance, he immediately dispatched a contingent of two thousand horsemen to Egypt to aid Muḥammad ibn Abī Bakr, but while they were en route, word of his martyrdom and the fall of Egypt reached the Imām (M). Though he had been appointed to the governorship before the Battle of Ḫiffīn, Muḥammad ibn Abī Bakr was killed in 38 AH, while Hāshim ibn ‘Utbah died earlier in 37 AH at Ḫiffīn. The last phrase of this oration has been narrated differently by al-Madā’īnī and al-Ṭabarī who report, instead of *for he was beloved to me and I had raised him*, “he strove to the best of his ability and fulfilled what was due upon him,” which seems more appropriate given the context (T).



REPROVING HIS COMPANIONS

1 How much leniency should I accord you, like the tolerance that is accorded to young camels with injured humps and to threadbare clothes – every time one side is stitched, the other rips apart! Whenever a contingent of the Syrian army draws close to you, every man among you shuts his door and hides himself like a lizard [hides] in its hole, or a hyena in its den. By Allāh, he who is supported by [the likes of] you suffers disgrace, and he who uses you to attack [the enemy] has shot a broken arrow.

2 You are, by Allāh, numerous in the courtyards yet few under the banners [of *jihād*]. I most certainly know what it would take to reform you and how to straighten your crookedness. However, I do not see it prudent to reform you by impairing myself. May Allāh humble your faces and cause your fortunes to fall! You do not understand truth as you understand falsehood, and you do not renounce falsehood as you repudiate the truth!

١ كَمْ أَدَارِيْكُمْ كَمَا ثَدَارَى الْكَارِ
الْعِمَدَهُ، وَالشَّابُ الْمُتَدَاعِيْهُ - كُلُّمَا
حِيَصَتْ مِنْ جَانِبِ تَهَشِّكَتْ مِنْ
آخَرِ! كُلُّمَا أَطَلَّ عَلَيْكُمْ مَنْسِرٌ مِنْ
مَنَاسِرِ أَهْلِ الشَّامِ أَغْلَقَ كُلُّ رَجُلٍ
مِنْكُمْ بَابَهُ، وَأَنْجَحَ رَأْجُوْهَارَ الضَّبَّاهِ
فِي جُحْرِهَا، وَالضَّمِيعُ فِي وِجَارِهَا.
الْدَّلِيلُ وَاللَّهُ مَنْ نَصَرْتُمُوهُ، وَمَنْ
رُمِيَ بِكُمْ فَقَدْ رُمِيَ بِأَفْوَقِ نَاصِلٍ.

٢ إِنَّكُمْ وَاللَّهُ لَكَثِيرٌ فِي الْبَاحَاتِ، قَلِيلٌ
تَحْتَ الرَّأْيَاتِ، وَإِنَّمَا لِعَالَمٌ بِمَا
يُصْلِحُكُمْ، وَيُقْرِيمُ أَوْدَكُمْ، وَلَكُنِي
لَا أَرَى إِصْلَاحَكُمْ بِإِفْسَادِ نَفْسِي.
أَضْرَعَ اللَّهُ حُدُودَكُمْ، وَأَنْعَسَ
جُدُودَكُمْ! لَا تَعْرِفُونَ الْحَقَّ
كَمْعَرِفَتُكُمُ الْبَاطِلُ، وَلَا تُبْطِلُونَ
الْبَاطِلَ كَإِبْطَالِكُمُ الْحَقِّ!

CONTEXT

This sermon was given by Imām ‘Alī after the disappointing failure of the Kūfans in their fight against the Syrians. The oration was apparently spoken in the last days of his life, after the Battles of Jamal, Ṣiffīn and Nahrawān, when the binds that held the army of the Imām had been unravelled. Certain phrases of this sermon have been repeated in other sermons of *Nahj al-Balāghah*, and from some historical sources, we learn that parts of this oration were spoken by Amīr al-Mu’minīn (*a*) on different occasions. For instance, some of the statements herein were spoken by the Imām when he received news about the assault of al-Daḥḥāk ibn Qays al-Fihri on the caravan of pilgrims at al-Thalabiyah, and others were voiced after he heard about how al-Nu‘mān ibn Bashīr attacked and sacked ‘Ayn al-Tamr in the year 39 AH. Likewise, the last part of the sermon is said to have been spoken by Imām ‘Alī when he was informed about the barbaric attack on Ḥijāz and Yemen by Busr ibn Abī Arṭāt (*S*). The tone of this oration is one that gives a clear impression of frustration and disappointment. When Imām ‘Alī witnessed the audacity and boldness of Mu‘awiyah’s troops compared to the indifference and placidity of some of his soldiers, he spoke to them thus. This sermon contains a harsh rebuke against the weakness, abjection, and cowardice of some of the Kūfan soldiers, and there is also a hint of hopelessness in his words regarding their ineffectiveness against the enemy. The purpose of this sermon was to urge their reformation and try to rouse their sense of honour and dignity as they faced the Syrians (*N*). This sermon has also been reported by others before al-Sayyid al-Raḍī, such as al-Balādhurī (d. 279 AH) in *Ansāb al-Ashrāf*, and al-Ya‘qūbī (d. 284 AH) in his *Tārīkh*.

COMMENTARY

1 As the leader and commander of his army, Imām ‘Alī was very disappointed when he saw how the lassitude and apathy of some of his soldier had emboldened the enemy. So he reprimanded them, seeking thereby to awaken their sense of dignity and courage so that they would face the enemy together with strength (*N*). The Imām begins by telling them that he has been lenient with them, *like the tolerance that is accorded to camels with injured humps*. The term ‘*al-bikār*’ is the plural of *al-bakr*, which refers to a young camel, and ‘*al-‘amidah*’, which means propped up, is used here to refer to the camel with an injured or infected hump,

which causes it to rise upright. Other possible meanings for the term ‘*al-‘amidah*’ have been mentioned by some commentators, such as a camel that is overburdened by the weight placed on it, or whose hump is crushed from within (MB). In any case, the example of an ailing camel has been given because such camels require more lenity and kinder treatment (T). The second example he mentions is that of *threadbare clothes – every time one side is stitched, the other rips apart*. These two examples are similar in their lack of firmness and dependability. Just as threadbare clothes cannot be relied upon, so too were the soldiers in the Imām’s army unreliable. Every time he would advise and motivate one group among them, another group would come out in opposition. As such, there was never total unity among them; and these differences were the reason why they were hesitant in battle (M). Whenever they were faced by *a contingent of the Syrian army*, each of them would cowardly run and shut his door, out of fear (MB). The shutting of their doors is meant metaphorically to signify their unwillingness to bravely face and fight the enemy. Instead, they preferred to flee and hide out of cowardice.

They would hide *like a lizard [hides] in its hole or a hyena in its den*. It is said that the example of a lizard has been given because it is known to be a foolish creature, to the extent that sometimes a lizard may even lose its way to its own home. That is why it makes its home close to a smooth rock which can act as a sign to show it the location of its dwelling. Furthermore, it is believed that the lizard is an apathetic and emotionless creature which sometimes even devours its young (N). The hyena is likewise mentioned because of its foolishness. Details about its characteristics have already been noted in sermon no. 6. By giving these examples, the Imām was pointing out their flaws and the reason for the growing boldness of the enemy. After rebuking their cowardly behaviour, the Imām notes that having supporters like them would only cause one to suffer disgrace. The phrase ‘*al-dhalil, wallāh, man naṣartumūh*’ literally means that the one whom you assist [with such an attitude] is humiliated. Finally, he likens them to a broken arrow (*‘afwaqa nāṣil*) with which one cannot effectively attack his foe, and hence it remains unused in battle (MB). This term has also been employed in sermon no. 29.

2 When the Imām says that they are *numerous in the courtyards yet few under the banners*, he means that they are craven and unwilling to face the enemy (M). Interestingly, the Noble Prophet (ṣ) had described the Anṣār in an opposite way, saying, “Indeed you become numerous in times of fright, yet few when it comes to seeking reward [for fighting],” (T). The reason for this behaviour of the Kūfans was

that they had grown accustomed to comfort and ease, and hence were not ready to put themselves in harm's way, even if it meant facing grave consequences later on. Nevertheless, the Imām states that he knows what it would take to reform them and how to *straighten* their *crookedness*, which commentators suggest may refer to one of two things. The first is that he could behave with them the way Mu‘āwiyah or other self-serving rulers in the world do, by bestowing huge sums of money to their leaders from the public treasury and get them to do his bidding thereby. The second possibility is that it means he could behave the way some tyrants do and force them to fight in battle on pain of death (N). However, he did not wish to reform the people by impairing himself and doing that which would put him in a position of displeasing his Creator. There was nothing more important to Imām ‘Alī than obeying Allāh. That is what all his policies as a ruler revolved around, so he never undertook any action that could corrupt his religion for the sake of worldly gain (Z).

The two supplications *may Allāh humble your faces and cause your fortunes to fall* connote abasement and failure respectively (MB). The term '*khudūd*' literally refers to the sides of the face, to the cheeks, and '*judūd*' is the plural of *jadd*, which refers to one's sustenance, position in society, or generally one's lot and fortune (N). The last sentence of this sermon is considered by some commentators as priceless, as it describes the worldly people in every age (T). By stating that their understanding of falsehood was better than their understanding of the truth, the Imām was pointing to the worst kind of ignorance that plagued them, namely compound ignorance – where they actually thought falsehood is the truth. That is why they did not renounce falsehood the way they repudiated the truth (M). Alternatively, it referred to their ignorance about their religious duties and the ordinances of Allāh, as they were preoccupied with futile worldly matters, and their not rejecting or opposing evil (*munkar*) the way they opposed good (*ma'rūf*) (MB).



ON THE DAY HE WAS FATALLY STRUCK WITH THE SWORD

- 1 Sleep overtook me while I was sitting, and the Messenger of Allāh (ṣ) appeared before me. I said, “O Prophet of Allāh, [look] what devousness and animosity I had to face from your *ummah*!” He said, “Supplicate against them.” So I said, “May Allāh replace them for me with those who are better, and replace me for them with one who is worse.”

١ مَلَكَتِنِي عَيْنِي وَأَتَى جَالِسٌ، فَسَنَحَ لِي رَسُولُ اللَّهِ ﷺ فَقُلْتُ: يَا رَسُولَ اللَّهِ، مَا ذَا لَقِيْتُ مِنْ أَمَّيْكَ مِنَ الْأَوْدِ وَالْأَلَّدِ! فَقَالَ: ادْعُ عَلَيْهِمْ. فَقُلْتُ: أَبْدَلْنِي اللَّهُ بِهِمْ خَيْرًا مِنْهُمْ، وَأَبْدَلْهُمْ بِي شَرًا لَهُمْ مِنِّي.

CONTEXT

This oration is a report of what transpired before dawn on the day when Amīr al-Mu'minīn ('a) was attacked and fatally struck. In it, the Imām supplicates against the people as instructed to do so by the Noble Prophet (ṣ). A similar supplication was reported from the Imām in sermon no. 25. Before al-Sharīf al-Rādī, others such as al-Balādhurī, Abū al-Faraj al-Isfahānī, and Qādī Nu'mān al-Maghribī also reported this sermon, albeit with slight variance in wording. According to one narration, this account was given by the Imām to his eldest son, Imām al-Hasan (S). Another report from Abū 'Abd al-Rahmān al-Sulamī states, “When Amīr al-Mu'minīn was on his death bed, I visited him. He said to me, ‘Come closer.’ This was at a time when the womenfolk were crying. I went close to the Imām and he said to me, ‘Last night I wanted to wake my family up when sleep overtook me as I was seated...’” Then he told him what he saw in his dream as mentioned in the above oration. In any case, it is evident from his speech that the Imām was extremely displeased with the betrayal and treachery of a group among the *ummah*, and the pain they caused to him on different occasions (N).

COMMENTARY

1 The phrase ‘*malakatnī‘ayni*’ literally means my eye[s] overcame me, and is a figure of speech that connotes falling asleep. The beauty of this phrase lies in the fact that sleep is depicted as an agent that overcomes an individual, for indeed once one is asleep, he is prevented from undertaking any action, just as a king would, for example, forbid his subject from performing a specific deed (M). Subsequently, he uses the verb ‘*sanaḥa*’, which literally means to show or present oneself, to describe how the Messenger of Allāh (ṣ) appeared to him in a vision or dream. In a footnote, al-Sharīf al-Raḍī himself explains that the terms ‘*al-awad*’ means crookedness and deviation, while ‘*al-ladad*’ refers to antagonism and dissension. He also notes that this is one of the most eloquent speeches. Indeed, one would be hard pressed to find another example of a close servant (*walī*) of Allāh having to bear such a level of animosity, betrayal, and rebellion, as Imām ‘Alī did. Some stood against him from the very beginning, opposing him at every turn during the twenty-five years after the demise of the Prophet when he remained away from the administration, as well as the short period of his caliphate. Hence, it is not surprising that when he saw his beloved Prophet in a vision, he complained of his situation to him (N). In fact, by his complaining thus, we realize how deeply saddened the Imām was due to their behaviour, and by his telling the Imām to supplicate against them, the Noble Prophet also showed his displeasure with them (MB).

In the first part of his supplication, *may Allāh replace them for me with those who are better*, the Imām is either asking Allāh for better companions to support him in this world, or he is seeking a swift transfer to the proximity of the Noble Messenger (ṣ) in the Hereafter (R). Of course, when he says *replace me for them with one who is worse*, that does not mean that he was bad, because the superlative here is not employed in a comparative sense, but only to signify the quality of being extremely bad. Alternatively, it is used from the viewpoint of those people who thought that the Imām was not a good ruler (MB). Indeed, history attests that this supplication was answered by Allāh, for the rulers who came after him were tyrannical and considered far worse in their conduct by the people (Z). A question that may arise here is: if the Prophet is a mercy unto all of mankind, as the Qur’ān states, why did he tell Imām ‘Alī to supplicate against the people? The answer to this is that sometimes the ingratitude and recalcitrance of a group reaches such extremes that no room is left for mercy, and the only thing left for them is divine

punishment. In such cases, cursing them is the single prudent course of action. That is why we see that despite their patience and steadfastness, sometimes the Prophets of Allāh would curse their people. For instance, the Qur’ān quotes Nūh (‘a) praying to Allāh, “*My Lord! Do not leave on the earth any inhabitant among the disbelievers*” (Q71:26). Nevertheless, it was a sign of respect and etiquette on the part of the Imām that he did not pray against the people until he received permission to do so from the Messenger of Allāh (N). Finally, it is noteworthy that some have recounted all the details of the martyrdom of Amīr al-Mu’minīn (‘a) in their commentaries on this sermon (I, T).



CONDEMNING THE PEOPLE OF IRAQ

1 Now then; O people of Iraq, you are like the pregnant woman who was gravid, yet upon completion of her term, she miscarried [her child]. Her husband also died, and her widowhood was long, until her most distant relations inherited from her. By Allāh, I did not come to you of my own accord; rather, I came to you perforce. I have been informed that you are saying “‘Alī lies.” May Allāh condemn you! Against whom do I lie? Against Allāh, while I am the first to have believed in Him, or against His Prophet, while I was the first to attest to his veracity?! Certainly not, by Allāh; rather, it was an expression that you failed to comprehend and of which you were unworthy. Woe be to you! [I offer you] a measure [of knowledge] without any charge, if only there was a vessel [to hold it]; and you will certainly know its tiding after a time.

أَمَّا بَعْدُ، يَا أَهْلَ الْعِرَاقِ، فَإِنَّمَا
أَنْتُمْ كَالْمُرْأَةِ الْحَامِلِ، حَمَلْتُ
فَلَمَّا أَتَمْتُ أَمْلَاصِتُ، وَمَاتَ
قَيْمَهَا، وَطَالَ تَأْيِيمَهَا، وَوَرَثَهَا
أَبْعَدُهَا. أَمَّا وَاللَّهِ مَا أَتَيْتُكُمْ
إِحْيَا رَأَى، وَلَكِنْ حِثٌ إِلَيْكُمْ
سَوْفًا، وَلَقَدْ بَلَغَنِي أَنَّكُمْ
تَقُولُونَ: عَلَيْيِ يَكْذِبُ. فَاتَّلَكُمْ
اللَّهُ! فَعَلَى مَنْ أَكْذِبُ؟ أَعْلَى
اللَّهُ؟ فَإِنَّا أَوْلُ مَنْ آمَنَ بِهِ أَمْ
عَلَى نَيْهِ؟ فَإِنَّا أَوْلُ مَنْ صَدَقَهُ!
كَلَّا وَاللَّهِ، لَكِنَّهَا لَهْجَةٌ غَيْرُ
عَنْهَا، وَلَمْ تَكُونُوا مِنْ أَهْلَهَا؛
وَيْلٌ أَمْهِ! كَيْلًا بِغَيْرِ ثَمَنٍ، لَوْ
كَانَ لَهُ وِعَاءً؛ «وَلَتَعْلَمَنَّ بَأَهْلَهُ بَعْدَ
جِينٍ».

CONTEXT

This is from a sermon that was given after the Battle of Ḥiṣn. Al-Sayyid al-Raḍī has mentioned only part of it here, while other parts thereof have been mentioned

in other sermons of *Nahj al-Balāghah*. Prior to this, al-Shaykh al-Mufid reported this sermon with slight variance in wording, and according to him, Ibn Da'b, who was one of the courtiers of the Abbasid caliph al-Hādī, also related parts of this sermon (S). In this oration, the Imām reproaches a group from the people of Iraq for abandoning the fighting when they had the upper hand and were close to victory. In addition, they had the gall to accuse the Imām of dishonesty and lying, since he had made certain prophecies specifically about the future of Iraq in some of his sermons (N). In the version of this sermon mentioned by al-Mufid in his *Kitāb al-Irshād*, the Imām's address was specifically to the people of Kūfah, and before reprimanding them for their accusation against him that he has lied, he told them about the future they will have to endure. He also mentions the qualities of the tyrants who will come to rule over them and torment them with all kinds of persecution (T).

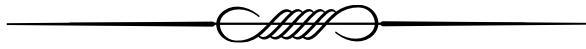
COMMENTARY

1 The comparison of the people of Iraq to a pregnant woman who, *upon completion of her term, miscarried* her child, was quite apt as there are at least five ways in which they were comparable. First, the initial preparations of the Kūfans to fight the enemy is analogous to the readiness of that woman to bear a child. Second, their closeness to victory was similar to the closeness to her date of delivery. Third, their refusal to fight on when victory was at hand was comparable to her miscarrying the child at the last moment, which was something not generally expected. Fourth, disobedience to their leader left them in a state of weakness and disunity, which is just what the woman would have felt upon the death of her husband. Finally, their being overcome by the enemy, who proceeded to raid their camps and steal their wealth, was comparable to the woman who, having lost her child and husband, had no near relative to inherit from her so her wealth went to her most distant relatives (M). Some commentators have interpreted the term '*al-ab'ad*' as the disloyal or treacherous [among her heirs] (R). By stating that he did not come to them of his own accord, the Imām declared that it was not his choice to go to the people of Iraq, and had it not been for the rebellion that led to the Battle of Jamal, Amīr al-Mu'minīn ('a) would not have left Madīnah for Kūfah. Indeed, he would have preferred to remain in the city of the Prophet (ṣ), next to his blessed grave and the resting place of his beloved wife

Fātimah. Yet circumstances had forced him to leave and go to Iraq (I). The Imām then turned his attention to the accusation that he was lying to the people and condemned them for such a vile allegation against him.

He asks them against whom do they allege that he lies – against Allāh, while he was the first among them to believe in Him, or against the Prophet, while he was the first to testify to his prophethood?! The statements he made about the unseen and what would transpire in the future, which people could not comprehend or digest, were what led them to make this accusation against him (MB). This was not the first time that someone accused the Imām of lying. It is reported that one day Imām ‘Alī (‘a) said from the pulpit, “If the opportunity is given to me, I would judge between the people of the Tawrāt with their Tawrāt, and between the people of the Injil with their Injil, and between the people of the Furqān with their Furqān. And there is no verse from the Book of Allāh that was revealed on a plain or a mountain but that I know when it was revealed and about whom it was revealed.” When he said this, one of the people sitting in the gathering commented, “O Allāh! What an untruthful claim!” And there are a couple of other recorded instances where such accusations of dishonesty were levelled at the Imām as well (N). The phrase *‘lahjatun ghibtum ‘anhā’* is rendered *an expression that you failed to comprehend*, and refers to those statements of his which comprised of secrets and signs that were unknown to the people. And by saying that they were, literally, absent or hidden from them, he meant that they lacked the ability to understand and grasp the meanings of those realities (M). It is also possible that he was referring to the statements of the Prophet (ṣ) which he heard while they were absent (I).

The phrase *‘wayl ummih’* has been written as one word in some manuscripts, and as two separate words in others. It is a phrase that is employed for rebuke, but also for praise. Most linguists say that it gives the meaning of expressing wonder and surprise (S). The knowledge that he offered them *without any charge* (*‘bighayri thaman’*), referred to the very same information about the turbulent events (*malāhim*) that would occur in the future (T). The Imām ends with part of a verse of the Qur’ān, saying *and you will certainly know its tiding after a time*, thereby alluding to what would transpire after his death, as that was when people would realize the outcome of their ignorance, rejection, and opposition to what he was saying (MB).



TEACHING THE PEOPLE TO SEND BLESSINGS UPON THE PROPHET (S)

ATTRIBUTES OF ALLĀH

- 1** O Allāh, Spreader of the [vast] surfaces and Raiser of the firmaments, Creator of hearts upon their innate nature: the wretched of them and the felicitous.

صفات الله

١ اللَّهُمَّ دَاحِي الْمَذْهُوَاتِ، وَدَاعِمَ
الْمَسْمُوكَاتِ، وَجَابِلَ الْقُلُوبِ عَلَى
فِطْرَتِهَا: شَقِيقَهَا وَسَعِيدَهَا.

ATTRIBUTES OF THE PROPHET

- 2** Send Your loftiest blessings and most munificent bounties upon Your servant and Messenger, Muḥammad, the seal of what preceded [him] and opener of what had been sealed, the proclaim者 of truth with the truth, the repeller of uprisings of falsehood, and the nullifier of misguiding influences. Since the burden [of prophethood] was placed on his shoulders, he bore it faithfully, carrying out Your commands and rushing quickly towards Your pleasure, without faltering in his stride or weakening in his resolve. He was mindful of Your revelation, protective of Your covenant, striving to execute Your commands; until he lit the torch for the seeker and illuminated the path for those lost in the dark.

صفات النبي

٢ اجْعَلْ شَرَائِفَ صَلَوَاتِكَ، وَنَوَامِيَ
بَرْ كَاتِكَ، عَلَى مُحَمَّدٍ عَبْدِكَ
وَرَسُولِكَ، الْخَاتِمِ لِمَا سَبَقَ،
وَالْفَاتِحِ لِمَا أَنْغَلَ، وَالْمُعْلِنِ الْحَقَّ
بِالْحَقِّ، وَالْدَّافِعِ جَيْشَاتِ الْأَبَاطِيلِ،
وَالْدَّامِغِ صَوْلَاتِ الْأَصَالِيلِ، كَمَا
حُمِّلَ فَاضْطَلَعَ، قَائِمًا بِأَمْرِكَ،
مُسْتَوْفِزًا فِي مَرْضَاتِكَ، غَيْرَ نَاكِلِ
عَنْ قُدُّمِهِ، وَلَا وَاهِ فِي عَرْمِ، وَاعِيَاً
لِوْحِيكَ، حَافِظًا لِعَهْدِكَ، مَاضِيًا عَلَى
نَفَاذِ أَمْرِكَ؛ حَتَّى أَفْرَى فَبَسَّ
الْقَابِسِينَ، وَأَضَاءَ الْطَّرِيقَ
لِلْخَابِطِ.

Hearts were guided through him after being plunged into strife and iniquity. He instituted clear guideposts and enlightening ordinances. He is Your trusted emissary and the custodian of the treasure of Your knowledge. He is Your witness on the Day of Judgement, Your envoy with [the message of] truth, and Your Messenger to the people.

وَهُدِيَّتْ بِهِ الْقُلُوبُ بَعْدَ حُوَّضَاتِ
 الْفِتْنَ وَالْأَنَامِ؛ وَأَقَامَ بِمُوضِحَاتِ
 الْأَعْلَامِ وَتَيَّرَاتِ الْأَحْكَامِ، فَهُوَ
 أَمِينُكَ الْمَأْمُونُ، وَخَازِنُ عِلْمَكَ
 الْمَحْرُّونَ، وَشَهِيدُكَ يَوْمَ الدِّينِ،
 وَبَعِيشَكَ بِالْحَقِّ، وَرَسُولُكَ إِلَى
 الْحَقْ.

CONTEXT

In this sermon, Amīr al-Mu'minīn taught the people how to send blessings (*salawāt*) upon the Noble Prophet (ṣ), and highlighted some of his qualities before praying for him (ṣ). The oration commences with a mention of some of the attributes of Allāh, the Glorified. Unfortunately, we do not have any information regarding the time and place when it was spoken. However, due to the general nature of what is mentioned therein, lack of a specific context for this oration does not impede a correct understanding of what was meant by the Imām ('a). It is noteworthy that a number of sources, prior to al-Sayyid al-Rađī and after him, mention this sermon, with and without chains of transmitters (S). The sermon itself is actually made up of three parts. The first section is quite short, and in it Imām 'Alī speaks about some of the divine attributes as a prelude to requesting that blessings and mercy be showered upon the Noble Messenger. The second section describes how blessings should be invoked for the Prophet, and notes his exemplary traits and unmatched service to humankind and to the cause of truth. In fact, that is the reason for our sending blessings upon him in the first place. Finally, the third section comprises a supplication which is profound in meaning, in which we pray for a continual connection with the Prophet and seek his proximity in the Hereafter (N).

COMMENTARY

1 The first attribute of Allāh he mentions is that He is the *Spreader of the [vast] surfaces*, meaning that He extended the earth and spread it, as stated in the Glorious Qurān: *And Allāh made the earth a vast expanse for you* (Q71:19). The term ‘*almasmūkāt*’ comes from *samk*, which literally means something that is raised up, like a ceiling or canopy, and here it refers to the sky or the firmament (R). The Qurān says: *He raised high its canopy and fashioned it* (Q79:28). The third and final attribute of Allāh mentioned in this section is that He is the *Creator of hearts upon their innate nature* – both the wretched and the felicitous among them. The term ‘*jābil*’ means *khāliq*, i.e. Creator (T). This statement should not be misunderstood to mean that Allāh made wretchedness or felicity part of the nature of certain individuals. Rather, it means that Allāh has placed within all human beings – whether they are those who end up wretched or those who become felicitous – an innate nature and intrinsic knowledge, even though some may use it to attain success and felicity, while others may suppress or misuse it and end up casting themselves into wretchedness. This is also reflected in the well-known prophetic tradition, “Every child is born upon the *fītrah*” (N).

2 In the second section of this sermon, the Imām talks about the attributes of the Noble Prophet (ṣ). He begins by asking Allāh to send His *loftiest blessings and most munificent bounties* upon the Prophet. He then proceeds to list the qualities of the Honourable Messenger saying that he (ṣ) was *the seal of what preceded [him] and opener of what had been sealed*. If the particle ‘*mā*’ is referring to that which possesses intellect (*dhwāi al-‘uqūl*), then the first phrase means that he was the seal of all the Prophets who preceded him, but if it refers to non-intelligent beings, then it means that he (ṣ) was the bringer of the final code of divine laws, thereby abrogating all the previously revealed ordinances (N). As for being the *opener of what had been sealed*, it refers to the opening up of guidance for the people which had been sealed by the prevalent ignorance and distortion of the previously revealed teachings (MB). He was *the proclaim者 of truth with the truth*, meaning that he made it manifest through proofs and clear evidence which was irrefutable and could only be rejected by those who obstinately stand opposed to the truth (Z). Being *the repeller of uprisings of falsehood* and nullifier of the influence of misguidance meant that he stood against the polytheists and their continuous

plots to try and extinguish the light of Allāh, and actively fought against attempts to mislead the people and cause them to deviate from the right path (MB).

Since the burden [of prophethood] was placed on his shoulders, he bore it faithfully translates ‘*kamā hummila fadṭala‘a*’, and some commentators say that the first letter ‘*kāf*’ here may actually give the meaning of ‘*lām al-ta‘lūl*’ meaning: send Your loftiest blessings upon him because he carried out the duties placed upon him faithfully. However, if the letter is understood with its original meaning, the phrase would mean: send Your loftiest blessings upon him in the same way that he carried out the duties placed upon him faithfully. Yet the former meaning seems more correct (MB, N). This statement is followed by some examples of how the Noble Prophet (s) faithfully and devotedly carried out his duty. He executed Allāh’s commands and rushed quickly towards His pleasure, *without faltering in his stride or weakening in his resolve*. The term ‘*mustawfiz*’ literally connotes haste and swiftness, and here it means that the Prophet was quick to do that which would bring him closer to Allāh’s pleasure (N). By saying that he was *mindful* of Allāh’s revelation and *protective* of His covenant, the Imām meant that the Noble Messenger understood the revelation (I), as he listened attentively to it (T), and employed all his faculties to grasp it completely (MB). Then he strove to implement Allāh’s commands, *until he lit the torch for the seeker and illuminated the path for those lost in the dark*. The word ‘*qabas*’ here refers to the light of truth (R), though its literal meaning is ‘flame’ and *al-qābis* is one who seeks fire (T).

The term ‘*al-khābit*’ refers to one who travels by night on an unclear or unknown path that is far from the main road (I), and here it connotes one who is lost in the dark and is unsure about his direction. The *clear guideposts and enlightening ordinances* instituted by the Prophet (s) helped those who were lost in the labyrinth of ignorance to find their way to the truth. These comprised of rules of the *sharī‘ah*, both in social matters as well as individual acts of worship like prayer, fasting, etc. (N). The last five traits of the Messenger of Allāh mentioned in this section, which complete a total of twenty-four qualities that are cited in this sermon, may be deemed a summary of the attributes of the Final Prophet (s). He was a *trusted emissary* and *the custodian of the treasure* of divine knowledge. He is Allāh’s witness on the Day of Judgement, His envoy with the message of truth, and His Messenger to the people. All these five qualities have been mentioned clearly in the Glorious Qur’ān as well (Q53:3-4, Q53:5, Q4:41, 2:119, & Q4:79 respectively).

SUPPLICATION FOR THE PROPHET

الدُّعَاءُ لِلنَّبِيِّ

- 3 O Allāh, grant him a vast expanse in Your shade [of mercy], and award him ever-multiplying boons from Your [infinite] grace. O Allāh, elevate his edifice above all other built structures, ennable his position before You, and perfect for him his light. Reward him for undertaking Your mission by accepting his testimony and agreeing with his words, which are based upon just speech and decisive oration. O Allāh, join us with him in the life of bliss and incessant bounty, satisfied desires and enjoyed pleasures, complete comfort, utmost tranquillity, and gifts of great value.

٣ اللَّهُمَّ افْسِحْ لَهُ مَقْسَحاً فِي ظِلِّكَ،
وَاجْزِهُ مُضَاعَفَاتِ الْحَيْرِ مِنْ
فَصْلِكَ. اللَّهُمَّ وَأَغْلِ عَلَى بَنَاءِ
الْبَانِيَنَ بَنَاءً، وَأَكْرِمْ لَدَيْكَ مَنْزَلَةً،
وَأَتْبِمْ لَهُ تُورَةً، وَاجْزِهُ مِنْ اِنْتِعَاثِكَ
لَهُ مَقْبُولَ الشَّهَادَةِ، مَرْضِيَّ الْمَقَالَةِ،
ذَا مَنْطِقٍ عَدْلٍ وَحُطْبَةٍ فَضْلٍ. اللَّهُمَّ
اجْمَعْ يَسِّنَا وَيَسِّنْ فِي بَرْدِ الْعَيْشِ،
وَقَرَارِ النَّعْمَةِ، وَمَقَى الشَّهَوَاتِ،
وَأَهْمَوَ اللَّذَّاتِ، وَرَخَاءَ الدَّعَةِ،
وَمُنْتَهَى الطُّمَانِيَّةِ، وَتُحَفَّ الْكَرَامَةَ.

3 In this section, Imām ‘Alī supplicates to Allāh for the Noble Messenger (ṣ) and in doing so, he actually teaches the people how to pray for the Prophet. He begins by asking for six things from Allāh for the beloved Prophet. First, he asks Allāh to grant him *a vast expanse in His shade [of mercy]*. Using the metaphor of a shade is apt because one who goes under a shade gains comfort from the intense heat of the sun. In the same way, one who is under the shade of divine mercy gains the comfort of divine proximity while being protected from the heat of hellfire (M). Second, he asks that the Prophet be awarded *ever-multiplying boons from Allāh's [infinite] grace*. By this, he prayed for his blessings to be multiplied manyfold and continuously, since the levels of Allāh's blessings are endless (MB). Third, he asks Allāh to *elevate his edifice above all other built structures*, meaning: make his religion prevail over all other religions (Q61:9). Indeed, the Noble Prophet himself gave the analogy of a building that was erected by previous Messengers and which he completed by laying the final brick. Thus the religion he brought is

the final and most perfect religion, just as he was himself the final Messenger and the seal of the Prophets (T). The fourth and fifth thing he asks for are that Allāh should *ennoble his position before Him and perfect for him his light*. Both of these requests deal with elevating the rank of the Noble Messenger and bringing him even closer to Allāh.

Finally, the sixth thing Imām ‘Alī prays for is that he (ṣ) be rewarded for undertaking Allāh’s mission *by accepting his testimony and agreeing with his words, which are based upon just speech and decisive oration*. This pertains to the Day of Judgment (I), when the Prophet will bear witness and intercede on behalf of his sincere followers (MB). Some commentators equate this reward to the praiseworthy station (*maqāman mahmūd*) mentioned in the Glorious Qur’ān (Q17:79), as noted in certain traditions (N). The last thing that Imām ‘Alī asks Allāh for is to join him with the Honourable Messenger in Paradise, *in the life of bliss* in which there is no toil or hardship *and incessant bounty* that never ends. This is a place of *satisfied desires and enjoyed pleasures* which souls crave and eyes find delightful (Q43:71), *complete comfort, utmost tranquillity, and gifts of great value* reserved for the close friends (*awliyā’*) of Allāh. Bounties that that no eye has beheld and no ear has heard, and no imagination has envisioned before (MB).



ABOUT MARWĀN IBN AL-HAKAM

¹ Did he not pledge allegiance to me after the assassination of ‘Uthmān? I have no need for his allegiance! It is but a [treacherous] Jewish hand; if he were to pledge allegiance to me with his hand, he would betray it with his derriere. Verily, he will come to power for as long as it takes for a dog to lick its nose. He will father four chieftains, and the *ummah* will face bloody days from him and his sons.

أَوْلَمْ يُبَارِعْنِي بَعْدَ قَتْلِ عُثْمَانَ؟
لَا حَاجَةَ لِي فِي يَنْعِمَهِ! إِنَّهَا
كَفُّ يَهُودِيَّةُ، لَوْبَا يَبْغِي بِكَفَّهِ
لَعْدَرَ بِسَبَبِهِ. أَمَّا إِنَّ لَهُ إِمْرَةً
كَلْعَقَةُ الْكَلْبِ أَنْفَهُ، وَهُوَ أَبُو
الْأَكْبُشِ الْأَزْبَعَةِ، وَسَلْفُ الْأُمَّةِ
مِنْهُ وَمِنْ وَلَدِهِ يَوْمًا أَخْمَرَ.

CONTEXT

The Battle of Jamal was fought in 36 AH, and in it the army of Imām ‘Alī was victorious and Marwān ibn al-Hakam was taken captive as a prisoner of war. This oration was made after Marwān was captured, and in it Amīr al-Mu’minīn speaks about the treachery of Marwān before mentioning some prophecies about his future (S). It is reported that he spoke these words in Baṣrah, addressing Marwān indirectly (N). Al-Sharīf al-Raḍī says that when al-Ḥasanayn (‘a) came to seek intercession for him, after accepting their request and releasing him, they asked if Amīr al-Mu’minīn would permit Marwān to pledge his allegiance, and that is when the Imām responded with this oration. Marwān was the son of al-Hakam ibn Abī al-‘Āṣ, who was the paternal uncle of ‘Uthmān ibn ‘Affān, and both he and his son Marwān had been banished from Madīnah by the Noble Prophet (s). They remained in Tā’if until ‘Uthmān came to power and brought them back to Madīnah. There are differing views regarding the reasons for their banishment. Some said that it was because he would hide and listen to what the Prophet was telling his close companions, and then convey the information to the polytheists among Quraysh. Others said that he would spy on the Noble Messenger when he was with his wives

and then mockingly discuss what he saw with the hypocrites. It is further reported that he would mimic the Prophet's walk and gestures in order to make fun of him. In any case, it was clear that he was filled with jealousy and hatred for the Prophet of Allāh (ṣ) and his actions led to his banishment (MB). Indeed, there are many narrations in which the Noble Messenger is said to have cursed Marwān and his father (T). Despite this, during ‘Uthmān's reign, he was made the caliph's confidant, advisor, and scribe (Z). This sermon has been reported through different chains of transmission, and in some versions it contains an additional phrase that is not present in *Nahj al-Balāghah* (I).

COMMENTARY

1 By asking the rhetorical question whether or not Marwān had pledged his allegiance after the death of ‘Uthmān, Imām ‘Alī wanted to emphasize the worthlessness of his pledge, for if he was so quick to rebel against the Imām despite having pledged his allegiance the first time, what difference would it make if he did so a second time? Indeed the Imām was in no need for such worthless oaths or pledges of loyalty (N). By describing it as a [*treacherous*] *Jewish hand*, the Imām meant that it was bound to be betrayed, and the reason for attributing treachery to the Jews is because disloyalty was prevalent among them (MB). In fact, they were known as a treacherous nation from the past, and they would exemplify the worst forms of betrayal and disloyalty in every situation (Z). The reason for mentioning Marwān's backside ('*sabbah*') was either as a means of disparaging and criticizing him, or as a literal reference to his betrayal. This is because it was a common practice among Arabs that when they broke a pledge they had made, they would break wind in order to mock the oath that they had sworn (I). The prophecy that Marwān would one day come to rule over the people is followed by a figurative description of the length of his reign, which the Imām said would be *as long as it takes for a dog to lick its nose*. Indeed, it is reported that he only ruled for six months (R), or four months and ten days (M).

The four rulers from Marwān's progeny are referred to with the term '*al-akbush*', which literally means rams or male sheep, but Arabs would also use this term to refer to chieftains or rulers. They were ‘Abd al-Malik ibn Marwān, who was his immediate successor, ‘Abd al-‘Azīz ibn Marwān, who became the governor of Egypt, Bishr ibn Marwān who was the governor of Iraq, and Muḥammad ibn Marwān

who ruled over al-Jazīrah. All four of these individuals carried out evil acts of tyranny and oppression. Marwān had other children, but it was these four who attained positions of power and they were the ones whom Imām ‘Alī was likely referring to in this sermon (N). Some commentators have mentioned other names, including those of Marwān’s grandchildren, saying that the four despots from his progeny were ‘Abd al-Malik, al-Walīd, Sulaymān, and Hishām (R). The last three were all sons of ‘Abd al-Malik, and grandsons of Marwān ibn al-Hakam. However, since he was the only one whose caliphate was succeeded by four of his sons (the fourth one being Yazīd ibn ‘Abd al-Malik), each of whom became a tyrant, and the Imām had foretold that *the ummah will face bloody days from him and his sons*, they are considered to be the four whom Amīr al-Mu’minīn (‘a) was referring to (M). Indeed, this prophecy also came true, and Muslims saw days of great bloodshed and torment at the hands of these Umayyad rulers, as history attests (Z).



WHEN THE SHŪRĀ DECIDED TO PLEDGE ALLEGIANCE TO UTHMĀN

- 1 You know that I am the most deserving of it over all others. By Allāh, as long as the affairs of the Muslims are secured and there is no oppression in it save upon myself only, I shall submit in the hope of attaining reward for it and merit [from Allāh], and eschewing what you vie for of its attractions and allurements.

لَقَدْ عَلِمْتُمْ أَنِّي أَحَقُّ النَّاسِ بِهَا مِنْ
عَيْرِي، وَوَاللَّهِ لَا شَيْءٌ مَا سَلَمْتُ
أُمُورُ الْمُسْلِمِينَ، وَلَمْ يَكُنْ فِيهَا
جَوْزٌ إِلَّا عَلَيْهِ خَاصَّةً، الْتِبَاسًا لِأَجْرِ
ذَلِكَ وَفَضْلِهِ، وَرُهْدًا فِيمَا تَنَافَشْتُمُوهُ
مِنْ رُّحْرُوفٍ وَزِبْرِجٍ.

CONTEXT

It was in Dhū al-Hijjah of the year 23 AH when ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb was fatally attacked, and before he died, ‘Umar appointed a six-man council to determine who would be the next caliph (S). Three of the appointees gave their vote to ‘Uthmān ibn ‘Affān. ‘Abd al-Rahmān ibn ‘Awf, Sa‘d ibn Abī Waqqāṣ, and Ṭalḥah chose ‘Uthmān to become the next caliph. At that point, Imām ‘Alī held back from pledging his allegiance. He addressed them and reminded them of his special relationship with the Noble Prophet: how he was chosen as the Prophet’s brother during the pact of brotherhood between the Muslims, how he was declared as the *mawlā* of the Muslims by the Prophet, and how his status and relationship to the Messenger of Allāh was compared to that of Hārūn with Mūsā. As he mentioned these unique merits, the atmosphere of the gathering began to shift, and when ‘Abd al-Rahmān saw this, he interrupted him saying, “O ‘Alī, the people want ‘Uthmān, so do not trouble yourself!” Then he turned towards a group of about fifty people, led by Abū Ṭalḥah, who were waiting outside and asked, “What had ‘Umar instructed you to do?” Abū Ṭalḥah replied, “He instructed me to kill anyone among you who opposes the majority opinion and thereby divides the Muslims.” Then ‘Abd al-Rahmān turned to ‘Alī (*‘a*) and said, “So you see, it would be wise for you to give your allegiance otherwise what ‘Umar had instructed would be acted upon

with respect to you." It was at this juncture that the Imām gave this oration before involuntarily pledging his allegiance to 'Uthmān (N). From the various reports that have reached us, it is apparent that the oration mentioned here is part of a longer speech given by Amīr al-Mu'minīn after 'Abd al-Rahmān ibn 'Awf and others had pledged their allegiance to 'Uthmān as the next caliph (I).

COMMENTARY

1 The opening statement of this oration alludes to the fact that those who were present in the council all knew that Imām 'Alī was the most rightful and deserving among them to be the caliph, since they had admitted that they were aware of his unique merits (T). The pronoun 'it' in *deserving of it* refers to the pledge of allegiance (*bay'ah*), or the caliphate itself (Z). Subsequently, the Imām informs them that his interest in it is not out of greed for the glitz and glamour of this world, or out of desire for political power, as was the case with others. Rather, it was only for ensuring that which is good for Islam and the state of the Muslims (MB). Hence, he said that he is ready to submit *as long as the affairs of the Muslims are secured and there is no oppression in it save upon myself*. His acceptance of the matter was not because he deemed 'Uthmān to be more worthy than himself, but because his priority was to safeguard justice and security in the Muslim society, lest the enemy take advantage of any infighting to attack the Muslims. He also wished to prevent unnecessary bloodshed among the believers (N). The question that may then arise is: why did Imām 'Alī not submit to Mu'awiyah, or to the Companions at the Battle of Jamal, and overlook his own rights there for the same reason? The answer, in the view of some commentators, is that the oppression by Mu'awiyah and the Companions of Jamal was not restricted to his person alone; rather, it was against Islam and the Muslims in general. And because they were incapable of ensuring that the same conditions were met, i.e. that oppression should not beset the Muslim society, the Imām could not have submitted to them (I).

However, other commentators deem this to be a weak argument for they note that even during the time of 'Uthmān, oppression and injustice was witnessed against the Muslims. An example of this is how 'Uthmān had dealt with the respected Companion of the Prophet, Abū Dharr. Therefore, they say that the real reason why Imām 'Alī was forced to submit was because he had no supporters at

that time, with whom he could rise up and demand what was rightfully his, but during his caliphate he had an army with which he could counter the mischief of the rebels (MB). Finally, Amīr al-Mu'minīn states that by his submission, he seeks two things: firstly, *attaining reward for it and merit [from Allāh]*, for indeed exhibiting patience for the sake of Allāh is a difficult thing that is praiseworthy and brings great reward; and secondly, *eschewing what you vie for of its attractions and allurements*, since the caliphate was not something he was allured by or craved (N).



WHEN ACCUSED BY THE UMAYYADS FOR ‘UTHMĀN’S MURDER

1 Did their acquaintance with me not prevent the Umayyads from blaming me? Did my precedence [in Islam] not keep these ignorant people from accusing me? What Allāh has admonished them with is far more eloquent than my speech. I am the opponent of the apostates and the adversary of the doubters. It is through the Book of Allāh that ambiguities are resolved, and it is on the basis of what lies in the hearts that servants are requited.

١ أَوْلَمْ يَنْهَا بِنِي أُمَيَّةَ عِلْمُهَا بِي
عَنْ قَرْفِي؟ أَوْمَا وَزَعَ الْجَهَالَ
سَابِقَتِي عَنْ ثَهَمَتِي؟ وَلَمَّا
وَعَظَهُمُ اللَّهُ بِهِ أَبَلَغُ مِنْ لِسَانِي.
أَنَا حَجِيجُ الْمَارِقِينَ، وَخَصِيمُ
الْمُرْتَأِيَنَّ. عَلَى كِتَابِ اللَّهِ
تُعْرَضُ الْأَئْتَالُ، وَبِمَا فِي
الصُّدُورِ تُجَازَى الْعِبَادُ.

CONTEXT

Subsequent to ‘Uthmān’s assassination in Dhū al-Hijjah of the year 35 AH, the Banī Umayyah accused Amīr al-Mu’minīn of participating in ‘Uthmān’s killing. When he heard this allegation, Imām ‘Alī responded to it and gave this sermon. There is another version of this sermon that is slightly longer, found in other sources (S). Historical reports recount how this was not the first time that the Umayyads had levelled such an accusation against the Imām. Al-Ṭabarī narrates that on one Friday, ‘Uthmān ascended the pulpit to give a sermon when someone from the crowd stood up and shouted, “Act upon the Book of Allāh!” ‘Uthmān asked him to sit down, but the man interrupted his speech again in the same manner. When he did this a third time, ‘Uthmān ordered that he sit down. At that point people started pelting ‘Uthmān with pebbles until he fell down from the pulpit, unconscious. He was carried to his house in that state and Imām ‘Alī went to visit him while he was still lying unconscious, with a group of the Banī Umayyah around him. When they saw him, they all turned towards him and said in unison, “O ‘Alī, you are the one who has done this to him...” So Imām ‘Alī left in anger (T).

'Uthmān's reign was fraught with injustice, nepotism, and oppression against the people. As such, a large group of Muslims rose up against him. However, since most of the people considered him culpable, but not deserving of death, the majority were displeased with his assassination. It was for this reason that certain groups with political aspirations used a diabolical ploy to blame their opponents for the death of 'Uthmān in order to defeat them and seize political authority and power. The Banī Umayyah, and foremost among them Mu'awiyah ibn Abī Sufyān, were the most vocal in this regard. Ironically, they had been completely silent when 'Uthmān's house was attacked, as they witnessed what was happening from the sidelines. On the other hand, though Imām 'Alī had rebuked 'Uthmān for his actions, he actively prevented the people from harming him on many occasions. He even sent al-Hasan and al-Ḥusayn ('a) to prevent the people from attacking 'Uthmān's house. Despite this, the Umayyads accused Imām 'Alī of being complicit in 'Uthmān's murder (N).

COMMENTARY

1 The term '*qarf*' literally means finding fault or laying blame, and here it is used to refer to the allegation made against the Imām by the Banī Umayyah. By asking how they could blame him when they knew who he was, the Imām was alluding to their knowledge of his status in Islam, and how he has been praised both in the Book of Allāh and the speech of the Noble Messenger (ṣ) (MB). Furthermore, they were aware of his qualities and knew that he would not stand for the slightest injustice, and would never harm anyone in any way without just cause (N). The word '*waza'a*' means to hold back or inhibit, thus a sheepdog is called *wāzī* because it keeps the wolves away from the flock (T). The precedence of Imām 'Alī in accepting Islam, and his being ahead of all the people in merit and honour, as the most veracious, trustworthy, and upright individual was sufficient evidence that he could not have been an accomplice in 'Uthmān's assassination. His background was known to the people and they were aware of his qualities, having lived by his side for many years. Hence, it could only have been their ignorance that would impel them to make such a baseless accusation. That is why they have been referred to as *the ignorant people ('al-juhhāl')* (Z).

His statement *what Allāh has admonished them with is far more eloquent than my speech* is a kind of argument that explains why such people would stoop so low

as to accuse him – because even the admonishment of Allāh (as in Q49:12) did not affect them or prevent them from making such false accusations (M). Though some early commentators have interpreted the term ‘*al-māriqīn*’ in his statement ‘*ana ḥajj al-māriqīn*’ to refer to the Khawārij (R), that interpretation is anachronistic since this sermon was given before the time of the Khawārij. Rather, it refers generally to all those who have left the religion. Some commentators have understood this statement, which is translated as *I am the opponent of the apostates*, to refer to the role that will be played by Imām ‘Alī in the Hereafter, where he will stand in judgement against certain groups and argue against them (I). However, this construal has been deemed weak by others since it does not match with the context of the Imām’s speech here (N). Likewise, he is the *adversary of the doubters*, meaning that he stands in opposition to them and argues against them with irrefutable evidence (Z).

The term ‘*al-amthāl*’ literally means examples or similes, but since ambiguous matters have many interpretations that are similar to each other in certain ways, the term sometimes refers to ambiguities, as it does here (N). When anything is ambiguous, it is through the Qur’ān that its meaning is made clear, as we are told in a number of traditions (T). Finally, the Imām reminds the people that *it is on the basis of what lies in the hearts that servants are requited*. In other words, not only is he innocent of the accusation they made, he did not even incline towards it in his heart. Rather, they are the ones who would be punished for in their hearts they know that he is innocent, yet they are still wrongly accusing him to further their own ends (I).



ENCOURAGING RIGHTEOUS ACTION

- 1** May Allāh bless the person who listens to a piece of wisdom and learns it, and when he is invited to the right path, he draws near it. He follows a guide and is saved; he is heedful of his Lord and fears his sins; he proceeds with sincerity and acts righteously; he earns valuable treasure and eschews the perilous; he aims at the [right] target and secures [divine] compensation; he overpowers his desires and rejects his [false] aspirations; he makes patience the means to his salvation and piety the provision for his death; he embarks on the illuminated path and sticks to the clear highway. He seizes the opportunity, anticipates death, and takes the provision of [good] deeds.

١ رَحِمَ اللَّهُ امْرَأً سَمِعَ حُكْمًا
 فَوْعَى، وَدُعِيَ إِلَى رَشَادٍ فَدَنَ،
 وَأَخْذَ بِحُجْرَةِ هَادٍ فَتَجَأَ، رَاقَبَ
 رَبَّهُ وَخَافَ ذَبَّهُ، قَدَّمَ حَالَصًا،
 وَعَمَلَ صَالِحًا، اكْتَسَبَ
 مَذْهُورًا، وَاجْتَبَ مَحْدُورًا،
 وَرَمَى عَرَضًا، وَأَخْرَزَ عَوْضًا،
 كَابَرَ هَوَاةً، وَكَذَّبَ مُنَاهَةً، جَعَلَ
 الصَّبْرَ مَطَيَّةً نَجَاتِهِ، وَالتَّقْوَى
 عُدَّةً وَفَاتِهِ، رَكِبَ الظَّرِيقَةَ
 الْغَرَاءَ، وَلَزِمَ الْمَحَجَّةَ الْيَيْضَاةَ،
 اغْتَسَمَ الْمَهَلَ، وَبَادَرَ الْأَجَلَ،
 وَتَرَوَدَ مِنَ الْعَمَلِ.

CONTEXT

Parts of this sermon have been narrated in earlier sources, such as *al-Kāfi*, through Imām Muḥammad al-Bāqir (T). Some of al-Sayyid al-Raḍī's contemporaries have also narrated this sermon. For instance al-Muhaqqiq al-Karājakī (d. 449 AH) has narrated it from Imām al-Ṣādiq (‘a) who said, before quoting this sermon, that Amīr al-Mu’minīn made 24 statements, each of which was as valuable as the weight of the heavens and the earth. Only 20 statements of the sermon have been mentioned in *Nahj al-Balāghah*, however, and this serves as evidence that al-Karājakī

did not narrate it from al-Sayyid al-Rađī (S). Many later scholars, from both schools, have narrated this sermon with some variances. The beautiful ethical advice and moral instruction found in this oration is timeless, and not knowing the exact time or place when it was spoken does not detract from its significance in any way. The title of this sermon, as found in the current editions of the text, shows that Amīr al-Mu'minīn's intent was to encourage the people and motivate them to perform virtuous deeds. Despite its brevity, this oration is pregnant with meaning, and the qualities mentioned in it are so important that the Imām prays for Allāh to shower His mercy on anyone who inculcates them within himself. One commentator opines that this sermon comprises a complete program for spiritual wayfaring in summary form (N).

COMMENTARY

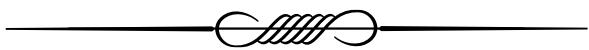
1 The opening statement is a prayer for mercy (*taraħħum*) upon the believer who espouses the traits mentioned therein. This is meant to be a form of incentive for the listeners to try and adopt these qualities in themselves (MB). The first quality mentioned by the Imām is for a person to listen to wisdom and learn it. The term '*ḥukm*' here means wisdom (*hikmah*), the same way it has been used in some verses of the Qur'ān (such as Q19:12) (I). This means that one should listen attentively to wise teachings, learn them, and then act on them (R). The second quality is that when one *is invited to the right path, he draws near it*. The *right path* here refers to the guidance given by the religion in what pertains to an individual's worldly life and the Hereafter (M). Third in the list of qualities to espouse is to follow a guide and thereby be saved. The phrase '*akhadha biḥujzati hādin*' literally means holding on to the waist-band or belt of a guide, and it is a metaphor for holding on firmly to one who guides you aright (R), and letting him lead you to safety. The guide being referred to here is one who shows a person the path to the truth, and it is to him that one must cling and whose words he must act upon (Z). Quality number four is being heedful of one's Lord, which, according to the traditions, means acting upon what Allāh has commanded and abandoning what He has forbidden (T). Ethicists tell us that one of the fruits of strong faith is *al-murāqabah*, which refers to a state of the heart wherein one is ever-heedful of Allāh and careful of doing only that which He approves of (MB).

The fifth quality is for one to fear his sins. This entails eschewing sinful actions to begin with, and if ever a sin were to be committed, to immediately repent and make amends out of fear of disobeying one's Lord and knowledge of the punishment that awaits those who sin in the Hereafter (S). Proceeding *with sincerity* in all actions is the sixth quality to adopt, and it means doing everything sincerely for the sake of Allāh, whether it be words that are uttered or actions that are undertaken (M). A tradition from Imām al-Ṣādiq ('a) states that a sincere action is one for which no praise is sought from anyone save Allāh (MB). The seventh quality is to act righteously, and for an act to be deemed righteous, both its doer and the act itself have to be good. That is why the Qurān always places faith and virtuous deeds side by side (S). Quality number eight is for one to earn *valuable treasure*, meaning that which is stored and reposed for the Day of Need, as a readied provision for when it will be required the most in the Hereafter. And this valuable treasure is nothing other than Godwariness (*taqwā*), and the submission to Allāh that stems therefrom, which takes the form of striving to do whatever pleases Him, as we have been told in the Qurān and the teachings of the Noble Messenger (MB). Ninth on the list of qualities is eschewing *the perilous*, which means keeping away from what one has been warned against of grave sins and misdeeds, and from doing that which has been proscribed in religion, as it would lead to chastisement in the Hereafter (M). Aiming at the right target is the tenth quality, and it means orienting oneself towards the truth, just as one who wishes to shoot a target turns towards it and aims at it, not shooting blindly or without taking aim (I).

The eleventh quality is striving to secure *compensation*, which is divine reward (I), or the eternal provisions of the Hereafter that are exchanged for the perishing provisions of this world (MB). Some commentators say that the phrase *he aims at the [right] target and secures [divine] compensation* is actually an analogy for one who rushes to perform virtuous deeds, just like the person who participates in an archery competition and upon shooting the right target at the perfect time, he wins a prize (T). Overpowering one's desires is the twelfth quality that one should inculcate within himself. In some manuscripts the term '*kābara*' which means overpower, has been written as '*kāthara*', in which case it would mean that he should overwhelm his desires with many rational arguments in his mind, since the word literally means to overwhelm with a multitude or with great numbers (I). Thirteenth in the list of qualities is rejecting one's false aspirations, because

believing in such aspirations leads to destruction (T). Hence, one must firmly reject the aspirations and false hopes that Satan tries to give him, since he has vowed that, among other things, he will misguide the people through false hopes (Q4:119). The fourteenth quality is to make patience the means of one's salvation. The word '*maṭiyyah*', translated here as *means*, literally refers to a riding mount or steed. Patience is described thus because with it one can traverse through the thorny landscape of trials and vain desires, and undertake arduous acts of worship, until successfully completing the test of this life and moving to the Abode of Felicity in the Hereafter (MB). Making piety and Godwariness the provision for one's death is the fifteenth quality, for indeed the Glorious Qurān clearly tells us: *verily the best provision is al-taqwā* (Q2:197). One who espouses Godwariness does not fear death and is ready for it when his time comes (M). The sixteenth quality is embarking on the *illuminated path*, which is a clearly distinguishable road (R), since *rectitude has been made distinct from error* (Q2:256). What is being referred to here is the path of the *sharī'ah*, which is clear and takes the one who follows it closer to Allāh (MB). Seventeenth is sticking to the *clear highway*, which is the same as the *illuminated path*; however, this quality differs from the previous one in that here there is adherence to the path, not simply following it. This adherence (*luzūm*) entails remaining on the path and never diverting from it (M).

Quality number eighteen is that one should seize the good opportunities that are presented to him before they are lost. This is echoed in a tradition from Imām al-Ṣādiq in which he said that when you decide to do something good, then be quick in carrying it out, for the future is unknown to you (T). The nineteenth quality is to anticipate death, meaning be ready for it before it arrives (Z). Since the exact moment when one will die is unknown, a believer is always in a state of submission to Allāh and is never heedless, such that when death comes to him, he does not die in a state of negligence (*ghaflah*) (S). Finally, the last of the twenty qualities mentioned by Imām 'Ali ('a) in this sermon is preparing and taking the provision of good deeds for the Hereafter, where they will be required. We pray that Allāh grants us the ability to inculcate these traits within ourselves, thereby becoming worthy of His mercy and bounty (MB).



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ON THE BANI UMAYYAH

¹ Verily the Banī Umayyah are indeed limiting my access to the inheritance of Muḥammad (ṣ), except in fragments. By Allāh, if I remain [alive], I will get rid of them the way a butcher gets rid of the dust on the flesh [of an animal].

١ إِنَّ بَنِي أُمَيَّةَ لَيَفْوَقُونِي ثُرَاثَ مُحَمَّدٍ تَعْوِيقًاً وَاللَّهُ أَكْبَرُ
بَقِيَتْ لَهُمْ لَا تُغَصِّنَهُمْ نَفَضَ
اللَّحَامُ الْوَدَامُ التَّرَبَةُ.

CONTEXT

Amīr al-Mu’minīn (*a*) is reported to have spoken these words when Sa‘d ibn al-‘Āṣ prevented him from taking what was due to him from the public treasury during the caliphate of ‘Uthmān. The latter had placed his own kinsmen in authority and had appointed Sa‘d ibn al-‘Āṣ as the governor of Kūfah. It is reported that at one time, Sa‘d prepared some gifts and sent them to Madīnah, telling his courier, Hārith ibn Ḥubaysh, to inform the Imām that he had not sent anyone – except the caliph ‘Uthmān – a greater share of these gifts than what he had sent for him. In reality, he sought to show that he had done the Imām a favour thereby. It is in response to this action that Imām ‘Alī is said to have spoken the words of this oration, in order to clarify that what was sent to him was nothing compared to what was his right. Subsequently, he clearly and courageously stated that if he remained alive and attained authority, he would do away with the Banī Umayyah and expose their true vile nature (*N*). Some commentators note that it was the practice of ‘Uthmān to spend lavishly on his family members, and he would send only small sums to the Imām (*Z*).

COMMENTARY

¹ The phrase *‘yufawwiqūnani’* literally means they are giving it to me little by little, just as a nursing she-camel is allowed to suckle its young briefly before it is turned away in order to be milked (MB). Al-Sayyid al-Raḍī notes that the term

implies that they only gave his right to him bit by bit, as the term *fuwāq* literally refers to the interval between two milkings, or the time it takes to open one's hand and grasp the udder and then let it go. Here, it is a metaphor for how they would give Imām ‘Alī only a small portion of what was rightfully his, before blocking him from the rest. Indeed, it has always been a common practice among the worldly politicians to put their opponents in financial constraints and restrict their economic progress in any way they can. And this is exactly what the Banū Umayyah did with Imām ‘Alī (N).

The reason for calling their wealth the *inheritance* ('*turāth*') of the Prophet was that its source was the *fay'*, meaning the collective wealth of Muslims derived from the taxation of conquered disbelievers, without war. Allāh had bestowed this upon the Muslims through the blessed presence of the Noble Prophet, and the message he brought. It was meant for the Imām, not for just anyone among the Muslims, but ‘Uthmān had withheld his right to it, except what was paltry (Z). Some commentators suggest that it may have been a specific reference to the land of Fadak (N). While it is true that Amīr al-Mu’minīn lived an abstemious life, he would nevertheless always take his share of the spoils during the time of the Prophet and use it to assist the needy. The Imām then declares what he will do with them if he remains alive and comes to power. *I will get rid of them* translates ‘*anfudannahum*’ which comes from the verb *nafada*, meaning to shake something vehemently in order that what is upon it might fall off. Some commentators have said that by this he meant he would prevent them from usurping the wealth and seize from them that which is unlawfully in their possession before punishing them for their injustice and evil (MB).

Al-Sharīf al-Raḍī notes that in one version of this oration, the statement ‘*al-turāb al-wadhimah*’ is mentioned instead of ‘*al-widhām al-taribah*’, and this is due to transposition (*al-qalb*) in the narration. He further says that the term ‘*al-widhām*’ is the plural of *wadhamah*, which refers to a piece of flesh from the stomach or liver which falls on the ground, and then the dust is shaken away from it. Some commentators have interpreted this analogy differently, stating that when a piece of flesh falls on the ground and gets covered in dust and soil, people are naturally disgusted by it, so the butcher throws it away, thereby removing it from the other meat he is selling. Likewise, the Imām meant that if he remained alive, he would expose the true nature of the Banū Umayyah and thereby remove them from positions

of authority, since the Muslims would feel aversion towards them when they knew what they were doing, just as people feel revulsion for soiled flesh (MB).



HIS SUPPLICATION

1 O Allāh, forgive me [for] what You know more about than I do; and if I return [to sin], then do return to me with forgiveness. O Allāh, forgive me what I had promised myself yet You found I did not fulfil. O Allāh, forgive me that by which I sought nearness to You of my words, but which my heart then opposed. O Allāh, forgive me for the signalling glances of the eye, the vain utterances, the desires of the heart, and the slips of the tongue.

اللَّهُمَّ اغْفِرْ لِي مَا أَكَبَتْ أَعْلَمْ بِهِ مِنِّي،
 فَإِنْ عُذْتُ فَعُذْ عَلَيَّ بِالْمَغْفِرَةِ.
 اللَّهُمَّ اغْفِرْ لِي مَا وَأَيْتُ مِنْ
 نَفْسِي، وَلَمْ تَحْدُلْهُ وَفَاءَ عِنْدِي.
 اللَّهُمَّ اغْفِرْ لِي مَا تَقَرَّبَتْ بِهِ إِلَيْكَ
 بِلِسَانِي، ثُمَّ حَالَفَهُ قَلْبِي. اللَّهُمَّ اغْفِرْ
 لِي رَمَزَاتِ الْأَلْحَاظِ، وَسَقَطَاتِ
 الْأَلْفَاظِ، وَشَهَوَاتِ الْجَنَانِ،
 وَهَفَوَاتِ اللِّسَانِ.

CONTEXT

This is one of the supplications that Amīr al-Mu'minīn ('a) would recite, and it contains within it some valuable lessons for the people (N). Some commentators consider it to be a part of the previous sermon of *Nahj al-Balāghah*, and suggest that the Imām might have supplicated in this way because he felt that his earlier statement may have had an admixture of rage, even though it was because of the injustice he saw (Z). A narration found in al-Kulaynī's *al-Kāfi* gives us an idea of the possible context of this supplication. He reports from 'Alī ibn al-Nu'mān, who says that Amīr al-Mu'minīn would ascend the hill of al-Şafā, face the Qiblah, and then raise his hands and recite a similar supplication, seeking forgiveness from Allāh. The supplication he quotes contains one of the lines of this supplication, but is not the same (T). It has also been posited that there are clues (*qarā'in*) which suggest that the Imām would regularly recite this supplication (N). In their commentaries on this supplication, some commentators discuss the issue of the

philosophy of supplicating to an Omnipresent and Omniscient Lord, and also talk about the supplications that have reached us from the Noble Prophet (ṣ) and his pure progeny (I). It is noteworthy that this entire supplication is about seeking forgiveness from Allāh, and the forgiveness (*maghfirah*) of Allāh entails covering up a person's sins in the Hereafter, so that he is saved from perdition (M). It bears reminding that since the Imām was infallible, his repentance was not for actual sins; rather, it was either for abandoning a better course of action (*tarku awlā*), or in order to teach the people how to supplicate to Allāh and seek forgiveness (N).

COMMENTARY

1 In the first line of this supplication, Imām ‘Alī asks Allāh to forgive him for that which Allāh knows better than he does. Indeed, Allāh knows even what is hidden in the heart of His servant, and has better knowledge of the sins of His servants. At times a person may do something and not consider it a sin, whereas it is considered a sin, or even a grave sin, in the sight of Allāh. Furthermore, a servant often forgets many of his sins, but Allāh does not forget anything at all (T). Having forgotten his misdeeds, a person often thinks of any sin he commits as his first and only wrongdoing, overlooking the fact that he has committed many similar sins in the past. Hence the Imām asks Allāh *if I return [to sin] then do return to me with forgiveness*. Indeed, such forgetfulness of one's sins is detrimental and one should always try to recall his misdeeds and repent, before it is too late to do so. The Qurān describes this reality beautifully when it states: *On the day when Allāh resurrects them all together, then informs them of what they did. Allāh has kept account of it, while they forgot it; and Allāh is Witness over all things* (Q58:6) (N). The second thing for which Amīr al-Mu’minīn asks forgiveness is that which he had promised himself, yet was not found to have fulfilled. The verb ‘*wāaytu*’ is derived from *wāātā*, which means to promise (I), or to make a decision about something with a firm determination to adhere to it (N). This refers to any promise one makes to himself, or to Allāh (*‘ahd*), that he will undertake or eschew an action, but then fails to keep that promise and adhere to what he had pledged. One seeks forgiveness for this because not fulfilling a promise or pledge in this manner results in being forsaken (*khidhlān*), and its consequence is loss (MB).

The third thing for which forgiveness is sought by the Imām are the words by which he sought nearness to Allāh, but which his heart then opposed. This refers

to those acts of worship which one undertakes, saying that he is performing them to come closer to Allāh, but his heart then thinks of impressing others thereby. Indeed, any act of worship that is not done sincerely for Allāh alone is a grave sin (T). Finally, the Imām seeks forgiveness for four things: *the signalling glances of the eye, the vain utterances, the desires of the heart, and the slips of the tongue*. The phrase ‘*ramazāt al-ahāz*’ refers to signals that are conveyed through glances, usually by looking with the corner of one’s eyes, with the intention of mocking someone or pointing out his faults (N). *Vain utterances* translates ‘*saqatāt al-alfāz*’, which literally means lowly, vile, useless, or vain speech which clearly shows that the speaker is not careful about what he says. A tradition from the Noble Messenger states that if you see a person who neither cares about what he says nor about what is said to him, then know that he is the partner of Satan (MB). The phrase ‘*shahawāt al-janān*’ is translated as *the desires of the heart*, and connotes those things which the heart inclines towards of this worldly life and its glamour which are forbidden (Z). *The slips of the tongue* that the Imām seeks forgiveness for refers to speech that is forbidden, such as backbiting, slander, etc. which is uttered due to negligence, and not on purpose, since the term ‘*hafawāt*’ means slips, blunders, or errors (N). It is precisely to avoid such slip-ups that we have been recommended to speak less. The Noble Prophet (ṣ) is reported to have said, “Blessed is he who spends the excess of his wealth [in charity], and withholds the excess of his words [by speaking less]” (MB).



WHEN SETTING OUT FOR BATTLE AGAINST THE KHAWĀRIJ

1 Do you think you can guide one to the hour at which he may depart without any evil befalling him? Can you caution one about the time at which if he departs, he will be besieged by harm? Whoever accepts this has rejected the Qur'ān and sees no need of seeking Allāh's help in achieving his desired objective and averting misfortune. What you say would necessitate the one who acts upon your words to praise you rather than his Lord, because in your view, you are the one who guided him to the hour in which he would acquire benefit and remain safe from harm!

2 Then he ('a) advanced towards the people and said:

O People, beware of learning about the stars, except that by which guidance is sought on land or sea, because it leads to divination. [Indeed] an astrologer is like a soothsayer, and a soothsayer is like a sorcerer, and a sorcerer is like an unbeliever, and an unbeliever will go to Hell! Depart in the name of Allāh.

١ أَتَرُّعُمْ أَنَّكَ تَهْدِي إِلَى السَّاعَةِ الَّتِي
مِنْ سَارَ فِيهَا صِرْفٌ عَنْهُ السُّوءُ؟
وَتُخَوِّفُ مِنَ السَّاعَةِ الَّتِي مِنْ سَارَ
فِيهَا حَاقَ بِهِ الْضُّرُّ؟ فَمَنْ
صَدَّقَ بِهَذَا فَقَدْ كَذَّبَ
الْقُرْآنَ، وَاسْتَغْنَى عَنِ الْإِسْتِعَانَةِ بِاللَّهِ،
فِي نَيْلِ الْمَحْبُوبِ وَدْفَعِ الْمَكْرُوهِ.
وَيَنْبَغِي فِي قَوْلِكَ لِلْعَامِلِ بِأَمْرِكَ أَنْ
يُولِيكَ الْحَمْدَ دُونَ رَبِّهِ، لِأَنَّكَ،
بِرَعْمَكَ أَنْتَ، هَدَيْتَهُ إِلَى السَّاعَةِ
الَّتِي نَالَ فِيهَا النُّفُعُ وَأَمِنَ الضُّرُّ!

٢ ثُمَّ أَقْبَلَ عَلَيْهِمْ عَلَى النَّاسِ فَقَالَ:
أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ، إِيَاكُمْ وَتَعْلَمُ الْجُجُومُ،
إِلَّا مَا يُهَدِّي بِهِ فِي بَرٍّ أَوْ بَحْرٍ،
فَإِنَّهَا تَدْعُو إِلَى الْكَهَانَةِ، وَالْمُنْجَمِ
كَالْكَاهِنِ، وَالْكَاهِنُ كَالسَّاجِرِ،
وَالسَّاجِرُ كَالْكَافِرِ، وَالْكَافِرُ فِي
النَّارِ! سِيرُوا عَلَى اسْمِ اللَّهِ.

CONTEXT

The context mentioned for this sermon in *Nahj al-Balāghah* itself is that it was addressed to one of the companions of Imām ‘Alī who had advised him to defer his march against the Khawārij, because he feared that they would lose since that is what he had concluded from his knowledge of astrology. He said, “O Amīr al-Mu’minīn, if you march at this moment, I fear that you will fail to attain your goal, as this is what I conclude from [my] knowledge of the stars.” In response, the Imām gave this oration. Other sources give more detailed, but differing, accounts of what led to this oration by the Imām. One report states that Imām ‘Alī decided to march from Kūfah to Ḥarūriyyah (or Ḥarūrā), which was where the Khawārij were based. Among his companions, there was one who was versed in astrology. He said to the Imām, “Do not depart at this hour. Rather, wait for three hours after the day dawns and then depart. If you depart now, great harm will befall you and your companions, but if you go at the time that I advise, you will triumph, and attain your goal.” Imām ‘Alī asked him, “Do you know what is in the womb of my horse – is it male or female?” The man said, “If I calculate, I can come to know that.” So the Imām said, “Whoever believes you has rejected the Qurān, for Allāh says: *Verily with Allāh lies knowledge of the Hour, and He sends down the rain and knows what is inside the wombs...* (Q31:34).”

Then he said, “Verily Muḥammad (ṣ) never claimed to know what you claim to know... So whoever believes in you with regard to this has disbelieved in him, and is like one who has taken a rival or peer for Allāh!” Then he addressed the people and warned them about the evils of astrology, before marching at the time he had already decided. After attaining victory, he again turned to the people and said, “Had we marched at the time given to us by the astrologer, people would have said, ‘They were victorious because they followed the advice of the astrologer.’ O people, put your trust only in Allāh...” Another report differs slightly and states that the Imām intended to march to Nahrawān when an astrologer approached him with advice, which he rejected. A third report says that it was a Persian *dehqān* who had advised the Imām not to proceed on that day; and there are a number of other narrations that differ in their details but give the same overall message (T). It is noteworthy that many commentators of *Nahj al-Balāghah* have also explained the different types of sciences related to stars and celestial bodies, and discussed which of them are permissible and which are not (I, MB, N).

COMMENTARY

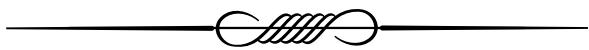
1 The first part of this oration is addressed to the individual who had sought to advise the Imām to delay his march against the Khawārij. Amīr al-Mu'minīn begins by posing two rhetorical questions: *Do you think you can guide one to the hour at which he may depart without any evil befalling him? Can you caution one about the time at which if he departs, he will be besieged by harm?* Some commentators say that the individual was 'Afif ibn Qays, the brother of the accursed Ash'ath ibn Qays al-Kindī who was the head of the hypocrites and the causer of strife during the caliphate of Amīr al-Mu'minīn (MB). By asking these rhetorical questions, the Imām is actually rejecting the notion that one can arrive at definite knowledge of these things through astrology (N). Subsequently, he notes two negative consequences of belief in astrology. The first is that it entails a rejection of the Qurān because it separates events from their natural causes, and consequences from the actions that brought them about, which the Qurān has emphasized in a number of verses. This is the system based upon which Allāh has created the universe, and it cannot be altered. Therefore, everything follows a natural system and universal laws that have been put in place by the Wise Creator, and there is no place for superstitious beliefs that are not based on sound knowledge of these laws and causes (Z).

Another way in which acceptance of astrology entails rejection of the Qurān is that since the astrologer claims to know the future and the unseen, his claim goes against verses that restrict such knowledge to Allāh alone (and to some of His specially chosen servants), like the verse which states: *With Him are the keys [of the treasures] of the Unseen; no one knows them except Him...* (Q6:59) (MB). The second negative consequences of belief in astrology is that *one sees no need of seeking Allāh's help in achieving his desired objective and averting misfortune*. Indeed, when one starts thinking that the stars and other celestial bodies affect his life and bring fortune or misfortune, he stops asking for Allāh's help as he feels bound by those forces. The same goes for other superstitious beliefs in objects that are deemed felicitous or unlucky. The Qurān, on the other hand, tells us that it is only Allāh who decides what harm or benefit should come to an individual: *If Allāh touches you with affliction, there is none who can remove it except Him; and if He visits you with good, then He has power over all things* (Q6:17) (T). The Imām then turns to the astrologer and tells him the outcome of his advice is that the one who acts upon

his words would have to praise him rather than his Lord, because he will attribute his success to the astrologer's advice, and will think that he was the one who *guided him to the hour in which he would acquire benefit and remain safe from harm*. Thus, by making his predictions and claims, the astrologer deems himself worthy of being praised by the one who believes in him (M). In wanting to be praised besides Allāh, the astrologer undertakes an activity that is sullied by *shirk* (N).

2 Having spoken to the astrologer, Amīr al-Mu'minīn turns to the people and addresses them, warning them about the evils of astrology. Indeed, there have been many recorded instances where astrologers were completely wrong in their predictions. For instance, in the year 284 AH, astrologers told the people that there would be a great flood and most of the land would be engulfed by water, yet in the same year, the people experienced such severe drought that they had to travel long distances in search of water (T). The Imām warned the people of learning about the stars *except that by which guidance is sought on land or sea*, for that is one of the legitimate reasons for studying the stars and benefitting therefrom. Hence, we note that while astronomy is a respected and appreciated science, astrology is frowned upon and forbidden. Indeed, the Qur'ān tells us: *It is He who made the stars for you, so that you may be guided by them in the darkness of land and sea* (Q6:97) (Z). Explaining the reason for its proscription, Imām 'Alī says that astrology *leads to divination* ('al-kahānah').

Some early Arabs believed that the soothsayers (*kahanah*) would be given knowledge of certain unseen events by the jinn. Perhaps the reason astrology leads to divination is because it gradually causes one to become interested in divination, or to make claims about the future like those of the soothsayers. That is why *an astrologer is like a soothsayer* (MB). And *a soothsayer is like a sorcerer* because both of them use deception and trickery to dupe simple-minded people, and *a sorcerer is like an unbeliever* since he does not trust in Allāh and relies upon other things. He does not see Allāh as the Ultimate Cause; rather, he looks to magic and sorcery as a means of attaining what he seeks (N). A tradition from Imām al-Ṣādiq states that the Noble Prophet (s) said, "Whoever goes to a sorcerer or a soothsayer, and believes what he says, has thereby disbelieved in what Allāh has sent down in His Book" (Z). Some commentators say that since there is no qualification here, the statement encompasses all types of sorcery and magic in its various forms (MB). Just like *an unbeliever will go to Hell*, so too will the sorcerer and the soothsayer, if they do not repent (T).



CONCERNING WOMEN

1 O People, verily women are diminished in faith, diminished in shares, and diminished in intelligence. As for their being diminished in faith, it is their abstention from prayer and fasting during their days of menstruation. As for their being diminished in intelligence, it is that the testimony of two women is equal to that of one man. As for their being diminished in shares, it is that they inherit half of what men do. So beware of those women who are evil, and be on your guard even from those who are [apparently] good. Do not obey them in virtue so that they do not [then] desire [your obedience] in vice.

١ معاشر الناس، إِنَّ النِّسَاءَ نَوَّاقِصُ
الإِيمَانِ، نَوَّاقِصُ الْحُكْمَوْطِ، نَوَّاقِصُ
الْعُقُولِ. فَأَمَّا نُفَصَانُ إِيمَانِهِنَّ
فَقَعُودُهُنَّ عَنِ الصَّلَاةِ وَالصَّيَامِ فِي
أَيَّامِ حِضْرَهِنَّ، وَأَمَّا نُفَصَانُ عُقُولِهِنَّ
فَشَهَادَةُ امْرَأَتَيْنِ كَشَهَادَةِ الرَّجُلِ
الْوَاحِدِ، وَأَمَّا نُفَصَانُ حُكْمَوْطِهِنَّ
فَمَوَارِيثُ الرِّجَالِ؛ فَاتَّقُوا شِرَارَ
النِّسَاءِ، وَكُوئُوا مِنْ خِيَارِهِنَّ عَلَى
حَدَّرِ، وَلَا تُطِيعُوهُنَّ فِي الْمَعْرُوفِ
حَتَّى لَا يَطْمَعْنَ فِي الْمُنْكَرِ.

CONTEXT

This oration was given by Amīr al-Mu'minīn ('a) after the Battle of Jamal. Though the speech refers to women in general, it is specifically in reference to 'Āishah. Some commentators compare this kind of reference – where a general statement can be used to refer to a specific individual or vice versa – to the verse of Sūrah al-Taḥrīm which mentions the wife of Nūh and the wife of Lūt as an example that applies to all disbelievers (Q66:10). And this interpretation has been accepted even by a number of Sunnī scholars (T). Hence, the purpose of this sermon was to reprimand 'Āishah and castigate those who followed her (MB).

According to some sources, this sermon was actually part of a letter that the Imām wrote after ‘Amr ibn al-Āṣ annexed Egypt and Muḥammad ibn Abī Bakr was martyred. In it he mentioned all the painful events that had transpired after the demise of the Noble Prophet (ṣ). He then instructed that the letter be read out for the people, so that they are made aware of what had happened. However, it is quite possible that this sermon was spoken more than once – the first time being after the Battle of Jamal, and then later again as part of a longer written letter. Some accounts report that Imām ‘Alī gave this sermon in Baṣrah right after the Battle of Jamal was over.

This oration has been narrated with slight variance in earlier sources such as al-Kulaynī’s *al-Kāfi*, al-Thaqafī’s *al-Ghārāt*, and some others (N). It is noteworthy that this sermon has been the object of much debate, especially in recent times. With the advent of the feminist movement, and the seepage of feminist ideas among Muslims through processes such as indoctrination, colonization of education, and the like, some Muslim intellectuals have actually taken up the feminist cause and sought to dismiss or reinterpret anything they deem to be out of line with their ideals. However, it is not only feminists who find this sermon difficult to accept or grasp; even some scholars of the *hawzah ilmiyyah* have raised questions about its attribution to the Imām. The Lebanese commentator Muḥammad Jawād Mughniyah did not give a commentary on this sermon, and instead offered five reasons why the idea that it was spoken by the Imām regarding ‘Ā’ishah was not acceptable to him (Z). On the other hand, there have been some extremely well argued papers that endeavour to explain what the Imām meant by this sermon in a way that would satisfy most readers who have questions regarding it. One such work, written by Ḥaydar Masjidī, is titled *Nadhrat Jadidah li Wasf al-Nisā’ bi Nawāqisi al-Uqūl*, and offers a unique interpretation of this oration.

COMMENTARY

1 At the outset, we should note that general statements, such as those found in this sermon, do not always encompass or include every individual of a group or category. The Glorious Qur’ān itself refers to human beings in many negative ways as being *unjust and ignorant* (Q33:72), *manifest ingrates* (Q43:15), and other such descriptions. Of course, this does not lead us to the conclusion that all human beings are ingrates or ignorant. Rather, it is evident that these general statements refer to

specific individuals who do not follow the path of guidance and rectitude. The same applies to womenfolk; there are some great individuals among them, many of whom outshine men in virtue. On the other hand, there are some who are depraved and evil (N). Keeping this in mind, we can now embark on the commentary of this oration. Addressing the people, Amīr al-Mu’minīn ('a) says that the three things in which women are diminished or deficient are: faith, shares of inheritance, and intelligence. He then proceeds to give an explanation about why this is the case. Their faith is deficient because of *their abstention from prayer and fasting during their days of menstruation*. Some commentators say that the link between prayer and fasting and an individual's faith is clear, since these two acts of worship constitute a spiritual exercise that enhances one's faith, and women are deprived of this for a while during their monthly periods (M). Of course, there are also other acts of worship that they cannot perform during this time such as entering the *masājid* and reciting the verses of the Qur'ān that have to be followed by obligatory prostration. And even though they make up for their fasts later, they miss out on the few days of the blessed month of Ramadān in which they cannot fast (T).

The Imām then says that their deficiency in intelligence is evinced from the fact that *the testimony of two women is equal to that of one man*. The reasoning behind this ruling has been explained by some commentators who say that it is because women are more emotional and can easily be influenced by their sentiments, and this can negatively impact their testimony (N). In one report, we find that a woman once came and asked the Messenger of Allāh why the testimony of two women was equal to that of one man in matters of inheritance. In response, the Noble Prophet said that it was the decree of the Wise Lord who never wrongs any of His creation, and then he (ṣ) proceeded to explain to her how a woman's emotions can negatively influence her (MB). Their deficiency in shares is because *they inherit half of what men do*. This happens in most, but not all, cases as there are times when a woman may actually inherit more than a man, depending on her relationship to the deceased (details of this may be found in the books of Islamic law). The Qur'ān states: *Allāh enjoins you concerning your children: for the male shall be the like of the share of two females* (Q4:11). Scholars and exegetes have offered some explanations as to why the female is given half the share of the male, saying that perhaps it is because he is responsible for providing for his wife and children, while the woman does not have such a responsibility and her wealth is for herself (M).

Subsequently the Imām warns the people about *those women who are evil*, but he also instructs them to be on guard *even from those who are [apparently] good*. Being careful about evil women is understandable, but why would one need to be wary of those who are good? Some commentators suggest that it is because of the nature of women, who are highly emotional and easily influenced. As such, even those who are good among them may at times be negatively influenced (M). Alternatively, it is possible that those being referred to are only apparently good, because their true nature is not yet known. The final statement *do not obey them in virtue so that they do not [then] desire [your obedience] in vice* is also difficult to grasp, and has been explained by commentators in various ways. Some say it does not refer to keeping away from the virtue, but from their obedience; meaning, do not perform the virtuous act out of obedience to them; rather, do it because it is a virtuous deed (I). Refraining from complete submission to women is to ensure that they do not become audacious and expect one to accept whatever they say, and act upon their every instruction, whether it is positive or negative, good or bad. Though these words of the Imām are general, they seem to be more applicable in spousal relationships. As such, they do not contradict the injunction to enjoin good and forbid evil (N). In the end, it bears reminding that what has been mentioned in this sermon does not impugn the egalitarian outlook of Islam when it comes to spiritual matters. Indeed in Islam, the woman and the man are equally able to attain the loftiest stations of the Hereafter through their deeds in this world, as has been mentioned in a number of verses of the Qur’ān (such as Q4:124 & Q16:97).



ABOUT ABSTEMIOUSNESS

- 1** O People! Abstemiousness means shortening aspirations, being grateful for blessings, and eschewing what has been prohibited. If you are unable to do this, then [at least] ensure that what is forbidden does not overwhelm your patience, and that you do not forget to show gratitude for blessings, as Allāh has left no excuse for you by [sending] manifestly lucid proofs and clearly accessible books.

أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ، الرَّهادَةُ قِصْرُ الْأَمَلِ،
 وَالشُّكْرُ عِنْدَ النِّعَمِ، وَالوَرَعُ عِنْدَ
 الْمَحَارِمِ، فَإِنْ عَرَبَ ذَلِكَ عَنْكُمْ فَلَا
 يَعْلِمُ الْحَرَامُ صَبْرُكُمْ، وَلَا تَسْوَى
 عِنْدَ النِّعَمِ شُكْرُكُمْ، فَقَدْ أَغْذَرَ اللَّهُ
 إِلَيْكُمْ بِحَجَجٍ مُسْفِرَةً ظَاهِرَةً،
 وَكُثُرَ بَارِزَةً الْعُدُرِ وَاضْحَى.

CONTEXT

The first part of this sermon has been reported by al-Shaykh al-Ṣadūq in his *Ma'ānī al-Akhbār* and *al-Khiṣāl* before al-Sayyid al-Raḍī. The second part thereof has likewise been reported before al-Raḍī by al-Barqī in his *al-Mahāsin*, albeit with slight variance in wording. A number of scholars after al-Sayyid al-Raḍī have also reported this oration in their works. Though there is no mention of where and when Imām 'Alī spoke these words, its general purport precludes the need to know these details in order to understand what is meant by the Imām in this sermon. The sermon commences with a comprehensive and beautiful description about the reality of *zuhd*. (We have translated *zuhd* as 'abstemiousness', and not the more commonly used 'asceticism'. That is because the latter term comes with baggage from the Christian tradition, and is also linked to self-denial and living without any comfort, which is not an accurate definition of the recommended Islamic practice of *zuhd*). Having explained what *zuhd* entails, the Imām advises those who find themselves unable to practice it to at least refrain from what Allāh has forbidden and show thankfulness for His blessings (N).

COMMENTARY

1 The trait of *zuhd* or abstemiousness is voluntary and applies only to that which is within one's grasp and ability, albeit with some effort. As for what is out of one's reach, *zuhd* cannot apply to that for it would be like the story of the fox and the grapes which it could not reach (Z). Imām ‘Alī uses the term ‘*al-zahādah*’, which here refers to *al-zuhd* (I), and summarizes it into three actions: *shortening aspirations, being grateful for blessings, and eschewing what has been prohibited*. As for the first of these three, scholars have said that *zuhd* has been described in the verse of the Qurān that states: *so that you may not despair over what has escaped you, nor exult in what He has given you* (Q57:23). And one cannot have this kind of indifferent attitude towards what he gains or loses except by shortening his worldly aspirations (T). Having lengthy aspirations and ambitions is a trait of worldly people, but the *zāhid* never espouses such aspirations (N). Some commentators understand *shortening aspirations* to mean being aware of the fact that death can come at any time, and preparing for it with good deeds (Z). The second action mentioned by the Imām is *being grateful for blessings*. The link between *zuhd* and *shukr* is seen when a servant's attention towards, and love for, Allāh increases in proportion to his disinterest in this world. This means the more a person becomes indifferent towards this world, the closer he becomes to Allāh and to the understanding of the truth that all the blessings he enjoys are only from Him. This realization thus makes a person thankful to the Almighty (M).

The third action is *eschewing what has been prohibited*, which is an integral part of *zuhd* and a consequence thereof, for we are told that the root of all evil is love of this world. Therefore, when one is disinterested in this world and its glamour, he would not undertake any action that Allāh has forbidden just to enjoy temporary pleasure in this life (N). Hence we see how these three actions constitute what it means to be abstemious according to Islamic teachings. However, since doing all three of these things is not easy for most people, the Imām gives those who are unable to practice all three together permission to overlook the first action, i.e. *shortening aspirations*, while ensuring that they practice the other two (MB). The term “*azaba*” literally means being distanced from something, and here it means being unable to attain these qualities (N). The *manifestly lucid proofs* he mentions refer to what is perceived by the intellect and the senses (Z), or to evidence from reason and revelation, through the external and internal proofs

(*hujaj*) (MB). The term *accessible* translates '*bārizat al-'udhr*' and describes the Books and scriptures sent by Allāh as guidance for mankind. The literal meaning of '*bārizat al-'udhr*' is something which is so clearly apparent that it can be perceived by everyone, and nobody is left with any excuse for not seeing it. To summarize, keeping away from what is forbidden and being thankful for blessings are two qualities that we have no excuse to overlook, and are considered an integral part of faith (N).



ABOUT THE WORLD AND ITS INHABITANTS

1 How can I describe an abode whose beginning is pain and whose end is annihilation; for that which is lawful of it there is accounting and for what is proscribed of it there is punishment? Whoever becomes rich in it is tested and whoever is poor suffers grief. Whoever hankers after it loses it and whoever ignores it is approached by it. It gives insight to the one who looks through it, but blinds the one who looks at it.

١ مَا أَصِفُّ مِنْ دَارٍ أَوْلَهَا عَنَاءٌ،
 وَآخِرُهَا فَنَاءٌ؛ فِي حَلَالِهَا
 حِسَابٌ، وَفِي حَرَامِهَا عِقَابٌ؟
 مَنْ اسْتَغْنَىٰ فِيهَا فُتَنَ، وَمَنْ افْتَنَرَ
 فِيهَا حَزَنً، وَمَنْ سَاعَاهَا فَاتَّهَـ،
 وَمَنْ قَعَدَ عَنْهَا وَاتَّهَـ، وَمَنْ أَبْصَرَ
 بِهَا بَصَرَنَهُ، وَمَنْ أَبْصَرَ إِلَيْهَا
 أَعْمَنَهُ.

CONTEXT

There are three different contexts reported for this sermon. In the first one, a man is said to have visited Amīr al-Mu'minīn and after offering greetings, he asked the Imām to describe this world to him. So the Imām gave a description similar to what is mentioned here. A second report states that Imām 'Alī was once crowded by people and that is when he addressed them and told them about the true nature of this world (T). The third possible context is that this oration was given by Imām 'Alī when, while he was giving a sermon, a man stood up from the audience and said, "O Amīr al-Mu'minīn, describe this world to us." So the Imām obliged and gave this description. Some scholars have said that the description of this world that is mentioned in this sermon has been narrated through various chains in a number of different sources, and may even be considered *mutawātir*. Even before the time of al-Sayyid al-Raḍī, a number of scholars like al-Ṣadūq, Ibn Shu'bāh, Ibn 'Abd Rabbih, and others mentioned this sermon in their works. And after *Nahj al-Balāghah*, it was included in many other works by both Sunnī and Shī'ah scholars (N). In this oration, Imām 'Alī aims to make people incline away from this world

by pointing out its negative attributes, and to this end he mentions ten of its qualities (MB).

COMMENTARY

1 The opening statement of this sermon is a rhetorical question: *How can I describe an abode whose beginning is pain...* for indeed from the first moment of an individual's life in this world, he is a target of pain (Z). Childbirth is painful for the mother, and is also distressing for the newborn as he is removed from a closed and protected environment to an open one, which is totally different (N). Some commentators interpret this phrase as a reference to how a person has to strive and struggle to acquire sustenance at the start of his life (T). As for its end being *annihilation*, that is understood as an allusion to death, which every soul must taste, at which point a person is removed from this life and separated from his loved ones (MB). The reality of death is not hidden to anyone, and it does not matter what a person's background is. Everyone will one day have to bid farewell to this material world, be it sooner or later (N). The third quality mentioned by Imām ‘Ali is that for what is lawful of this world there will be an accounting in the Hereafter. Indeed, even for our lawfully acquired wealth, we will be asked about where and how we spent it (Z). Fourth is that *for what is proscribed of it there is punishment*. This is obvious and there is no ambiguity regarding it. Hence we see that whether one acquires wealth that is lawful or unlawful, he cannot escape some form of difficulty in the Hereafter. In one tradition we are told that the Noble Prophet (s) said, "The poor will enter Paradise five hundred years before the rich." The reason for this is because the rich will have to give an account for their wealth. Of course, the difference is that those who sought the unlawful will be punished severely (N).

The fifth attribute of this world is that *whoever becomes rich in it is tested*. Indeed, one who deems himself rich and financially independent often neglects to remember Allāh and is thus misguided from the right path. That is why wealth is described as a trial in the Qur'ān, when it states: *Your property and your children are only a trial; but it is Allāh with Whom there is a great reward* (Q64:15) (MB). On the other hand, *whoever is poor suffers grief* since he lives in a world where anything he desires to attain can only be acquired through money. And since he is unable to acquire what he desires because of his poverty, he lives in sadness and grief (M).

The seventh and eighth qualities of this world are that *whoever hankers after it loses it and whoever ignores it is approached by it*. The phrase ‘*sā’āhā*’ literally means to run after it, or make an effort and strive to acquire it (N). It also gives the meaning of overpowering something, and therefore according to some commentators, this phrase means that if one contends with the world, he may acquire something thereof, but he will lose a lot more. That is perhaps because whenever a human being attains something of this world, it opens the door for him to hope for more. As such, it does not fulfil a single desire but that it leads to a thousand more – most of which will forever remain unfulfilled (Z). Another interpretation for the loss suffered by those who hanker after it is that since it perishes very quickly, even what they attain does not last (MB). In any case, what we find in history, and indeed even in our daily experiences, is that striving harder for worldly wealth does not lead to becoming rich, just as being uninterested in this world does not lead to penury (N).

As for its approaching those who ignore it, this reality about the world is portrayed beautifully in a tradition related on the authority of Imām al-Ṣādiq from the Noble Messenger who said, “Verily Allāh, exalted is His Majesty, revealed to this world: ‘Follow the one who serves you, but serve [only] the one who rejects you.’” And it has been said that this world is like a person’s shadow, the more he chases it, the further it runs, but if he leaves it alone, it follows him everywhere (T). Regarding the last two qualities of this world mentioned in the sermon, al-Sayyid al-Raḍī says, “When a thinker ponders over his statement, ‘*It gives insight to the one who looks through it*,’ he finds therein an amazing meaning and a profound connotation, the depth of which is beyond comprehension, especially when it is annexed to his statement ‘*but blinds the one who looks at it*.’ For he finds the difference between looking *through* it and looking *at* it to be as clear as day, and overwhelmingly astounding.” This statement implies that whoever considers the world to be a means for attaining perfection and acquiring a lofty station in the Hereafter, the veils are lifted for him and he sees the realities of this world as they truly are. But the one who looks at the world as an end in itself, not as a means to a higher goal, has his sight covered by a thick veil, such that his heart and mind are not able to perceive its realities. Thus he ends up becoming a lover of this world and its glitz and glamour, forgetting everything else. This sums up the difference between the devoted servants of Allāh and the greedy devotees of this material world.

Two other interpretations have also been offered for these last qualities of the *dunyā*. The first is that looking through this world refers to observing the signs of Allāh in creation, for whoever constantly does this gains insight. On the other hand, looking at this world means restricting one's gaze to the material world, and that results in being deprived of cognizance of Allāh and insight into the realities of this life. The second interpretation is that the phrase *looks through it* refers to looking at the flaws of this world and its temporary nature, and taking a lesson therefrom. Undoubtedly this kind of observation leads to insight and understanding. Conversely, looking at it means gazing at the glitter and apparent beauty of this world, which blinds the inner eyes of a human being. It is possible to join all three of these interpretations, as all of them are applicable (N).



THE SERMON OF AL-GHARRĀ'

1 Praise be to Allāh, Who is exalted by His might, and is near [the creation] by His beneficence; Bestower of every bounty and grace, and Dispeller of every calamity and hardship. I praise Him for His incessant kindness and His copious blessings. I believe in Him as the First and the Manifest, and I seek His guidance as [He is] the Near and the Guide. I seek His succour as [He is] the Subduer and the Mighty, and I depend upon Him as the Sufficer and the Supporter. And I bear witness that Muḥammad (ṣ) is His servant and Messenger. He sent him to execute His commands, leave no room for excuse, and to warn the people.

ENJOINING PIETY

2 I advise you, O servants of Allāh, to be mindful of Allāh, who has set forth parables and determined for you your lifespans. He covered you with apparel and provided abundant sustenance for you. He encompassed you with [His] reckoning and prepared recompense for you. He has honoured you with ample blessings and extensive gifts, and has warned you through unequi-

١ الحَمْدُ لِلّهِ الَّذِي عَلَّا بِحَوْلِهِ
وَدَنَّا بِطُولِهِ، مَانِحٌ كُلَّ غَيْمَةٍ
وَفَضْلٍ، وَكَاشِفٌ كُلَّ عَظِيمَةٍ
وَأَرْلٍ. أَحْمَدُهُ عَلَى عَوَاطِفِ
كَرْمِهِ، وَسَوَاغِعِ نِعْمَتِهِ؛ وَأَوْمَنْ بِهِ
أَوْلًا بَادِيَاً، وَأَسْتَهْدِيَهُ قَرِيبًا
هَادِيَاً، وَأَسْتَعِنُهُ فَاهِرًا قَادِرًا،
وَأَتُوَكَّلُ عَلَيْهِ كَافِيًّا نَاصِرًا.
وَأَشْهُدُ أَنَّ مُحَمَّدًا صَلَّى اللّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ عَبْدُهُ
وَرَسُولُهُ، أَرْسَلَهُ لِإِنْفَادِ أُمُرِهِ
وَإِنْهَاءِ غُدْرِهِ، وَتَقْدِيمِ ثُدُرِهِ.

الوصية بالتقوى

٢ أَوْصِيكُمْ عِبَادَ اللّهِ بِتَقْوَى اللّهِ، الَّذِي
ضَرَبَ الْأَمْثَالَ، وَوَقَّتَ لَكُمْ
الآجَالَ، وَأَبْسَكَمُ الرِّبَاشَ، وَأَرْفَغَ
لَكُمُ الْمَعَاشَ، وَأَحَاطَ بِكُمْ
الْإِحْسَاءَ، وَأَرْضَدَ لَكُمُ الْجَرَاءَ،
وَأَئْرَكَمُ بِالنَّعْمِ السَّوَابِعَ، وَالرَّفَدَ
الرَّوَافِعَ، وَأَنْدَرَكَمُ بِالْحُجَّاجِ الْبَوَالِغِ،

vocal proofs. He has counted your numbers and has decreed for you durations in the place of trial and the abode of admonition, wherein you are tested and for which you are held to account.

فَأَنْصَاكُمْ عَدَدًا، وَوَظَفَ لَكُمْ
مُّدَادًا فِي قَرَارِ حِبْرَةٍ، وَدَارِ عِبْرَةٍ،
أَنْتُمْ مُحْبَرُونَ فِيهَا، وَمُحَاسَبُونَ
عَلَيْهَا.

CONTEXT

This is an amazing oration that is called al-Gharrā', meaning the radiant, brilliant, and splendid. In it are mentioned the attributes of Allāh, Exalted is He, followed by an exhortation to be mindful of Him. Subsequently, there is a call for disaffection with this world, followed by that which pertains to the Day of Judgment. At the end of the sermon, al-Sayyid al-Raḍī states, "It is reported that when he gave this oration, the skins quivered ('iqsha'arrat lahā al-julūd'), the eyes wept, and the hearts trembled. And among the people are some who call this sermon al-Gharrā'." This statement by al-Raḍī shows that this sermon was well-known among the people; so much so that they had even named it. According to some accounts, it is reported that Amīr al-Mu'minīn ('a) was conducting a funeral, and when he placed the deceased into the grave, the man's family members began wailing loudly. At that point, the Imām said, "By Allāh, if these people could see what their deceased relative is seeing, they would forget their mourning [and would instead weep for themselves!]. By Allāh, death will come to each and every one of them, and will not leave out a single one among them!" Then, seeing that the people present at the funeral were receptive to admonition at that moment, Imām 'Alī stood up and gave this sermon.

The contents of this sermon show that the Imām was seriously intent upon preparing the hearts and awakening the souls of his audience. It was in the most appropriate of conditions that he gave this profound and beautiful oration, which contains within it a complete program for self-reform, and it is unlikely that one who reads it carefully would not be positively affected thereby. This sermon has been narrated before al-Sayyid al-Raḍī by a number of authors, including Jāhīz, who reported from some of his teachers that Ja'far ibn Yaḥyā, one of the most

articulate early scholars, used to look for examples of subtle points of eloquence from this sermon (N).

COMMENTARY

1 In the opening section of this sermon, Imām ‘Alī praises Allāh and mentions four attributes of His Majesty. Subsequently, he speaks about the qualities of the Noble Prophet (ṣ) as well. The first attribute of the Almighty he mentions is that He *is exalted by His might*. This is because there is nothing in existence that is higher, or more perfect, or nobler than Him (M). This exaltedness and loftiness is not like what is commonly understood to mean being higher or above in the perceptible or imaginable sense; rather, it is exaltedness by ascendancy and predominancy through might and power (MB). The second attribute is Allāh’s nearness to the creation *by His beneficence*. The term ‘*tawl*’ here means bounty, beneficence, and granting of favour. Thus we understand from this phrase that the nearness of Allāh to His creatures is through His blessings, kindness, and bestowal of favours (Z). And it is not a physical nearness that could be perceived in spatial terms (T). He is the *Bestower of every bounty and grace*, since every blessing comes from Him, and He is the source of every bounty (MB). The Glorious Qur’ān states: *He grants His grace to everyone possessed of merit* (Q11:3). And lastly, *He is the Dispeller of every calamity and hardship*. The term ‘*azl*’ literally refers to narrowness or constriction, and it is also used to denote dire straits and hardship (N). Together, these last two attributes signify that all goodness comes from Allāh, whether it be in the form of something given, like good health, intelligence, and wealth, or something removed, like hardships, etc. (M).

The phrase “*awātifi karamih*” is translated as *incessant kindness*, since it refers to His generous kindness which repeatedly encompasses His servant, time after time (MB). The term ‘*bādiyan*’ is derived from *badw* which means being or becoming manifest, or beginning anew. While most commentators have understood it to refer to the first meaning, the second meaning could also apply here (N), in which case the translation would read: *I believe in Him as the First, and the Originator [of all else]*. Regarding the Imām’s statement *I seek His guidance as [He is] the Near and the Guide*, it has been noted that seeking guidance from one who is far away – even if he is a guide, or from one who is not a guide – even if he is near, is futile. Therefore, both these qualities are necessary in one from whom guidance is sought

(T). Likewise, he seeks help from Allāh as *the Subduer and the Mighty*, since one who is weak and incapable cannot defend himself, so he would be in no position to help anyone else (MB). And since Allāh is *the Sufficer and the Supporter*, he entrusts all his affairs to His care, as He frees him from needing anything from anyone else, and supports him against those who would harm him (Z). Subsequently, Amīr al-Mu'minīn testifies that Muḥammad is the Messenger of Allāh, since that is the second pillar of faith and is inseparable from the first, which is *tawḥīd*. He then proceeds to succinctly describe the responsibility that was placed on the shoulders of the Noble Prophet (ṣ). Allāh sent him *to execute His commands, leave no room for excuse, and to warn the people*. The term '*nudhur*' is plural of *nadhīr*, which means warner, and here it refers to the divine signs and reports of past nations which serve as warnings to the people (N).

2 In the second section of the sermon, Amīr al-Mu'minīn advises the people to be Godwary. He mentions ten things that could motivate them to espouse *taqwā* (N). First, Allāh has *set forth parables* for the people in the Qur'ān in order to explain certain realities to them and to admonish them. In some manuscripts, the word '*lakum*' is present, so it reads '*daraba lakum al-amthāl*' in which case the translation would be: *who has set forth parables for you*, and according to some commentators this is the correct form (T). The Qur'ān itself states: *We have set forth for humankind in this Qur'ān every [kind of] parable, so that they may take heed* (Q39:27). Indeed, one finds numerous parables and examples in the Qur'ān, by which people are invited to remember, reflect, ponder, and take lessons (MB). Second, Allāh has determined the lifespans of the people, which He has decreed for them. And just as each individual has a decreed lifespan, so too does each nation; as the Qur'ān states: *There is a [preordained] term for every nation: when their time comes, they shall not defer it by a single hour nor shall they advance it.* (Q7:34) (Z).

Third, Allāh granted people the blessing of clothes with which they could cover themselves. The term '*al-riyāsh*' is the plural of *al-rīsh*, which means apparel and clothing, especially those that are colourful and fine. It is also used to refer to fruitfulness and wealth, such that when you say *irtāsha fulān*, it means so-and-so has become prosperous. If this meaning is intended, then the verb '*albasakum*', meaning *He covered you*, would have been used in a metaphoric sense (I). Fourth, Allāh *provided abundant sustenance for you*, as the Qur'ān states: *He provided you with good things* (Q40:64) (M).

BEING AVERSE TO THIS WORLD

التغير من الدنيا

3 Verily the watering place of this world is turbid and the path leading to it is muddy. The [outward] appearance of this world is attractive but its reality is destructive. It is a mutable deception, a fading light, a passing shadow, and a bent pillar. When one who was averse to it becomes comfortable with it and one who was not acquainted with it is reassured by it, [that is when] it leaps with its hind legs, hunts him with its snares, targets him with its arrows, and ties the noose of death around the person's neck, dragging him to a narrow grave and a frightful abode where he will be shown his [final] place and the reward of his deeds. This continues generation after generation, with death never ceasing its advance and survivors never turning away from sin. They follow each other's footsteps and proceed in groups towards the final end and the tryst with annihilation.

٣ فَإِنَّ الدُّنْيَا رَنْقٌ مَشْرِبُهَا، رَدْغٌ
مَشْرَعُهَا، يُونِقُ مَنْظُرُهَا، وَيُوْبِقُ
مَحْبِرُهَا، عُرُورٌ حَائِلٌ، وَضُوءٌ آفِلٌ،
وَظِيلٌ زَائِلٌ، وَسِنَادٌ مَائِلٌ،
حَتَّى إِذَا أَنِسَ نَافِرُهَا، وَاطْمَأَنَّ
نَاكِرُهَا، قَمَصَتْ بِأَرْجُلِهَا، وَقَنَصَتْ
بِأَحْبَلِهَا، وَأَفْصَدَتْ بِأَشْهُمْهَا،
وَأَغْلَقَتِ الْمَرْءَ أَوْهَاقَ الْمُنِيَّةِ، قَائِدَةً
لَهُ إِلَى صُنْكِ الْمُضَبَّجِ، وَوَحْشَةً
الْمَرْجِعِ، وَمُعَايَنَةً الْمَحَلِّ، وَثَوَابِ
الْعَمَلِ، وَكَذِيلَكَ الْخَلْفُ بِعَقْبِ
السَّلْفِ، لَا تُقْلِمُ الْمَيَّهُ اخْتِرَاماً، وَلَا
يَزْعُو يَالْبَاقُونَ اجْتِرَاماً، يَحْتَدُونَ
مِئَالاً، وَيَمْضُونَ أَرْسَالاً، إِلَى عَيَّةِ
الْإِنْتِهَاءِ، وَصَيْوِرِ الْفَتَنَاءِ.

Fifth, *He encompassed you with [His] reckoning*, meaning that the accounting of Allāh is precise, and every act of an individual is recorded and scrutinized, with nothing being left out (N). Sixth, He has *prepared recompense for you*, multiplying rewards for those who have performed righteous deeds and reserving a painful punishment for those who perpetrated evil actions (MB).

Seventh, *He has honoured you with ample blessings and extensive gifts*. The term ‘ātharakum’ comes from īthār, which generally means to grant something to someone while being in need of it, thereby preferring that person to oneself. However, it is obvious that this meaning cannot apply to Allāh, so here it means that Allāh chose them and honoured them specifically, by granting them ample blessings and bestowing upon them lofty gifts (Z). A similar meaning of this term has been employed in the Qur’ān where it states: *Allāh has certainly chosen you over us* (Q12:91). Eighth, Allāh *has warned you through unequivocal proofs* comprised of rational arguments, divine revelations, and the intrinsic nature (*fītrah*) present in each individual (T). Ninth, *He has counted your numbers*, and knows precisely how many you are, just as the Qur’ān states: *He has indeed taken account of them, and has numbered them precisely* (Q19:94).

Tenth, *He has decreed for you durations in the place of trial and the abode of admonition*, which summarizes the reality that for our entire lives, we are undergoing trials and tests, and that is the purpose of this world. The fact that Allāh keeps count of everything we do, and has decreed our lifespans, is repeated twice in this section. This could be in order to emphasize these points (MB), or to highlight a different dimension, in which case the previous mention of counting was regarding keeping a record of every action performed by human beings (and that is why it was immediately followed by mention of recompense), while in the second instance it refers to counting the people themselves, without leaving anyone out (N).

3 In this section of the sermon, Imām ‘Alī criticizes the world, after having mentioned that it is a place of trials. He says that *the watering place of this world is turbid and the path leading to it is muddy*. Usually, most of the large rivers from which people would take water were low-lying and could not be easily accessed. For that reason, they would have to dig a path to the edge of the river. That sloping path was called *mashra‘*, and the point at which the water could be accessed was termed *mashrab*. Now if that path became muddy, or the point at which water could be taken became turbid, then it would be extremely difficult to get clean water. By using this beautiful analogy, the Imām is comparing the acquisitions of this world to water which can only be reached by a muddy path and a turbid access point. Seeing this water from afar attracts thirsty individuals but the moment they come closer, they realize that the water is murky. This is the state of all that is attained of this world, be it wealth, status, or embellishments. To attain these things, people have to overlook many moral and ethical matters, and give in to

lying, betrayal, accepting humiliation, etc. all of which are like the muddy path by which to reach what they desire. Then, once they attain what they seek, they see that it is turbid in that it brings about many hardships for them, like jealousy of others, attacks, accusations, etc. (N). This is precisely why *the [outward] appearance of this world is attractive, but its reality is destructive*. The apparent and outward aspect of this world contains beauty, glitter, allure, and delight, all of which cause people to get attracted to it. However, its true nature is different, and contains within it fatal poison that leads those who are enthralled by it to destruction, and to painful punishment in the Hereafter (MB). It is a *mutable deception* because it constantly changes, altering its colour and state. The term ‘*ghurūr*’ can also be read ‘*gharūr*’ in which case the translation would be a *mutable deceiver* (M). This quality of the world shows how when weak-minded people rely upon it, it deceives them and turns against them in betrayal (Z). The Imām also describes this world as a *fading light*, because even though it shines and glitters, its light does not last and fades away quickly. It is like a *passing shadow* which does not remain for one who relies upon it. And it is like a *bent pillar* which cannot support that which leans on it (N). Other analogies are then given by the Imām to describe this world. He compares it to a steed that *leaps with its hind legs*, taking by surprise one who has become *comfortable with it and reassured by it*. He says it is also like the hunter that *hunts him with its snares*, and like the archer who successfully *targets him with its arrows*. Subsequently, it *ties the noose of death around the person's neck, dragging him to a narrow grave and a frightful abode where he will be shown his [final] place*, in Paradise or Hell, *and given the reward and recompense of his deeds*. The phrase ‘*wahshat al-marji‘* has been interpreted by some as a reference to the final return and the Day of Judgment (Z). Others say it refers to the grave and the fight and terror one experiences after being separated from his possessions, children, and loved ones (MB). Finally, the Imām notes that this condition is not limited to any particular time, but continues *generation after generation*, as the people *follow each other's footsteps and proceed in groups towards the final end*. The phrase ‘*tā tuqli‘ al-maniyyatu ikhtirāman*’ literally means death does not stop cutting them off and extirpating them; and indeed it continues its advance until they all meet their annihilation.

AFTER DEATH, THE RESURRECTION

4 Then, once matters are severed, time comes to an end, and the Resurrection draws near, He will take them out from the midst of the graves, the nests of birds, the lairs of beasts, and the sites of destruction. Hastening towards His command, rushing towards the place of final return, in groups quietly standing within arrayed ranks, they shall be within sight and the caller will make them hear [the call]. They will don the garb of submission and [face] the abasement of surrender and humiliation. The contrivances are now rendered ineffectual, hopes are cut short, hearts sink into silence, voices are reduced to whispers, and perspiration is so profuse that it reaches the mouths. Fear abounds, and ears ring with the thundering sound of the caller towards the final judgement, the exchange of recompense, the meting of retribution, and the granting of reward.

بعد الموت البعث

٤ حَتَّى إِذَا تَصَرَّمْتِ الْأُمُورُ، وَتَفَضَّلَتِ
الدُّهُورُ، وَأَرِقَ الشُّوُرُ، أَخْرَجَهُمْ
مِنْ صَرَائِحِ الْقُبُورِ، وَأَوْكَارِ الطَّيُورِ،
وَأَوْجَرَةِ السَّبَاعِ، وَمَطَارِحِ الْمَهَالِكِ،
سِرَاعًا إِلَى أَفْرَهِ، مُهْطِعِينَ إِلَى
مَعَادِهِ، رَعِيلًا صُمُوتًا، قِياماً صُفُوفًا،
يَنْفَذُهُمُ الْبَصَرُ، وَيُسْمِعُهُمُ الدَّاعِي،
عَلَيْهِمْ لَبُوسُ الْإِسْتِكَانَةِ، وَضَرَعُ
الإِشْتِلَامِ وَالذَّلَّةِ، فَذَصَلتِ
الْحَيَلُ، وَانْقَطَعَ الْأَمْلُ، وَهَوَتِ
الْأَقْيَدَةُ كَاظِمَةً، وَحَشَعَتِ
الْأَصْوَاتُ مُهَيْمَمَةً، وَأَلْجَمَ الْعَرَقُ،
وَعَظَمَ الشَّقْقُ، وَأَرْعَدَتِ الْأَسْمَاعُ
لِرُبْرَةِ الدَّاعِي إِلَى فَضْلِ الْخَطَابِ،
وَمُقَايِضَةِ الْجَرَاءِ، وَنَكَالِ الْعِقَابِ،
وَنَوَالِ التَّوَابِ.

4 In this section, Imām ‘Alī talks about what happens to people after death, and what difficulties and terrors await them on the Day of Resurrection. Some commentators consider this section to be the truly brilliant part of this sermon, from which it got its name al-Gharrā’ (N). The Imām starts by mentioning what will happen *once matters are severed, time comes to an end, and the Resurrection draws near*. The phrase ‘taṣarramat al-umūr’ means affairs are cut off and come to

an end (I). This may be a specific reference to the actions and deeds of this worldly life, and the closing of the door of repentance (Z). This is when the time of each individual on the earth has come to an end, and they are now awaiting the Resurrection (M). It is then that Allāh will *take them out from the midst of the graves* if they were buried in graves when they died, or *the nests of birds* if they were eaten by birds of prey, or *the lairs of beasts* if they were devoured by predators, or *sites of destruction* if they were killed in battle, or fell in a well, etc., and wherever they may be, Allāh will raise them up and bring them all together (MB). The phrase *hastening towards His command* echoes what is mentioned in the verse: *the day they will come forth from their graves, rushing, as if they were racing towards a goal* (Q70:43), and *rushing towards the place of final return* decreed by Him is also mentioned in the verse: *rushing toward the Caller...* (Q54:8). The word ‘*muhtī‘in*’ comes from *ahṭā‘a* which literally means extending one’s neck, directing one’s head, and rushing forward (T). The literal meaning of ‘*ra‘il*’ is a troop of horses (I), but here it connotes movement of people in groups. The people who are resurrected shall move together quietly (‘*ṣumūtan*’), and will stand in rows, based on their rank which is determined by their actions and conduct in the world. Hence, people will be grouped along with those who behaved like them and they will face a similar fate.

Alternatively, it could mean that all those who were buried in the same graveyard will rise up and move out together as a group (N). The Qur’ān states: *the Day the Horn will be blown, and you will come [forth] in droves* (Q78:18). Despite being numerous, *they shall be within sight* and none of them will be hidden. Likewise, their vast numbers will not prevent the caller from making them hear his call. In this regard, the Qur’ān states: *And listen [with anticipation] for the Day when the caller calls from a nearby place* (Q50:41). Exegetes say that the call is *from a nearby place* because all the people will hear the call with the same clarity, so it will be as if they have all heard it from somewhere close by (MB). Subsequently, the Imām describes in vivid detail the state of the people on that Day. They will be in a state of submission, abasement, and surrender. That is because now all their *contrivances are rendered ineffectual* and their *hopes are cut short*. And so it is that *hearts sink into silence, voices are reduced to whispers, perspiration is so profuse that it reaches the mouths, and fear abounds*.

ADMONISHING THE PEOPLE

تنبيه الخلق

5 [They are] servants who have been created by [His] power and nurtured by [His] might. With the approach of death, their souls are taken and they are then placed inside graves where they turn to dust. Then they will be resurrected individually and awarded recompense, [after] having been held to account for their own actions. They had been granted respite in order to seek deliverance and were shown the clear path. They were granted a life long enough to make amends. The dark clouds of doubt had been removed for them and they were let free to race towards virtue, to think about how to attain the ultimate objective, and to calmly seek it out with the light of guidance, within the allotted time and the available opportunity.

٥ عِبَادٌ مَّخْلُوقُونَ أَفْتَدَارٌ،
وَمَرْبُوبُونَ أَقْتَسَارًا، وَمَغْبُوضُونَ
أَحْتِضَارًا، وَمَضْمُونَ أَجْدَاثًا،
وَكَائِنُونَ رُفَاتًا، وَمَبْعُوثُونَ
أَفْرَادًا، وَمَدِينُونَ جَرَاءً،
وَمُمَيَّزُونَ حِسَابًا؛ قَدْ أَمْهَلُوا فِي
طَلَبِ الْمُخْرَجِ، وَهُدُدوا سَبِيلَ
الْمَنْهَاجِ، وَعُمِّرُوا مَهَمَّلَ
الْمُشَتَّعِيْبِ، وَكُشِّفَتْ عَنْهُمْ
سُدُوفُ الرَّيْبِ، وَخُلُولُ الْمُضَمَّارِ
الْجِيَادِ، وَرَوَيَّةُ الْإِرْتِيَادِ، وَأَنَاءَ
الْمُعْتَبِسِ الْمُرْتَادِ، فِي مُدَّةِ
الْأَجْلِ، وَمُضَطَّرِبِ الْمَهَلِ.

The phrase '*aljama al-'araq*' literally refers to a line of perspiration that forms around the mouth, like a bridle. This means that one will sweat so much that if he were to open his mouth, it would be filled with perspiration (N). Indeed, we are told in a tradition that people will perspire so much on that Day, that for some it will reach their knees, for others it will reach their chest, and for some it will reach their mouths. Another tradition states that the rich person will be held to account [with severity] until his perspiration will be so much that if it were given to forty camels to drink, it would suffice them (MB). It is then that the *ears ring with the thundering sound of the caller towards the final judgement, the exchange of recompense, the meting of retribution, and the granting of reward*. The reason for

calling it an exchange ('*muqāyadah*') is that recompense is actually granted in exchange for the deeds that were undertaken by the individual (M).

5 This is the section wherein Amīr al-Mu'minīn ('a) admonishes the people by describing their general qualities and reminding them of the purpose of their creation. The statement [*they are*] *servants who have been created by [His] power and nurtured by [His] might* means that the people have not played any role in their own creation and thus do not have any right to go against the commands of their Creator. Since they are nurtured involuntarily, and raised by Allāh from when they are children until they reach old age, without any volition or decision on their part, they have no choice in the matter of obedience, and must be submissive and obedient to Allāh (MB). Of course, this does not mean that human beings lack free will in their own actions; rather, it pertains only to their creation, nurturing, and death, in neither of which they have any say or sway (N). *With the approach of death, their souls are taken and they are then placed inside graves where they turn to dust*, as is known to all and cannot be denied. In fact, this was the reason some people doubted in the resurrection saying: "*When we have become bones and dust, shall we really be raised in a new creation?*" (Q17:49) (T).

The fact that people *will be resurrected individually* and alone, with neither wealth nor progeny, has been stated in the verse: *Certainly you have come to Us alone, just as We created you the first time, and left behind whatever We had bestowed on you* (Q6:94). Subsequently, they will be *awarded recompense, [after] having been held to account for their own actions*. The recompense will depend on their actions: rewards for good deeds and punishment for evil ones. The phrase '*mumayyizūna hisāban*' has been understood as a reference to the separation of believers from disbelievers, and the virtuous from the wicked, on the Day of Judgment (MB). Alternatively, it could mean that each person will account for his own specific deeds and will not bear the burden of the actions of others (N).

The Imām then reminds the people that they have no excuse for going astray, since *they had been granted respite in order to seek deliverance and were shown the clear path*. Indeed, Allāh is just and compassionate, and He would not punish anyone until He has sent His clear proofs and guidance to him. Even when the servant disobeys, out of His mercy, He grants him respite in this world and opens the door of repentance for him. If the individual repents and returns to the right path, He forgives him, but if he persists in wrongdoing, then he becomes deserving of divine punishment by his own actions (Z). *They were granted a life long enough*

to make amends, meaning that the life they were given was sufficiently long for them to earn the pleasure of Allāh and make amends for any action that would bring punishment. The term ‘al-musta‘ib’ comes from *isti‘tāb* which means seeking someone’s acceptance and pleasure (I). *The dark clouds of doubt had been removed for them* through the blessing of the intellect which they were granted, and the Prophets who were sent to guide them and answer any doubts that they had. Thus people have been left to freely *race towards virtue*. The phrase ‘mīdmār al-jiyād’ literally means a racecourse for horses, and here it is used metaphorically to refer to competition and vying among people to do good deeds (M).

They also have the opportunity *to think about how to attain the ultimate objective* and to ponder about what they need to seek out and acquire, as well as what they must ensure to avoid, namely divine wrath and punishment (Z). They have to do this *within the allotted time and the available opportunity* given to them in this world, and to *calmly seek their objective with the light of guidance*. The phrase ‘al-muqtas al-murtād’ literally refers to one who has a torch in his hand and is searching for something lost in the dark with its light. And in this analogy, one moves calmly lest the torch get extinguished, or he inadvertently misses some areas and fails to search there. The phrase ‘mudṭarab al-mahal’, translated as *available opportunity*, literally means the period of movement and effort (Z), since this life is where we can make an effort to seek right guidance and act upon it. Some commentators say that the term ‘mudṭarab’, which also connotes agitation, has been employed because the human being does not know when his death will come upon him (T).

6 Imām ‘Alī (‘a) speaks about the advantage of reminders in the form of examples and advice, and who it is that can really benefit therefrom. He describes the examples and exhortations as *pertinent* and *effective*. This could be in reference to the parables he mentioned earlier in this sermon, or more generally to all the examples and exhortations that have reached us through revelation and the divinely appointed guides (N). They are *pertinent* (‘ṣa‘ibah’) because they conform with reality completely, and they are *effective* (‘shāfiyah’) because they remedy the ailment of immorality and ignorance. This is reflected in the verse that states: *O humankind! There has certainly come to you advice from your Lord, and a cure for what is in the hearts, and a guidance and mercy for the believers* (Q10:57) (T). However, the condition is that they must be *received by pure hearts, attentive ears, firm resolve, and sharp wits*.

THE BENEFIT OF REMINDERS

6 What pertinent examples and effective exhortations they are if received by pure hearts, attentive ears, firm resolve, and sharp wits. So be mindful of Allāh like one who hears and humbly submits, who perpetrates and admits, who fears and acts, who is cautious and hastens, who believes and does good, who is admonished and takes lesson, who is warned and heeds the warning, who is deterred and he desists, who responds to the call and turns [to Allāh], who returns and repents, who follows [the guide] and emulates him, and who is shown so he sees. He is quick in searching [for the truth] and flees to safety. He thus attains provisions and purifies his soul; he builds his final abode and packs supplies for the day of his departure and his intended destination, for his time of need and place of want, sending forth before him for the home of his [eternal] stay. So be mindful of Allāh, O servants of Allāh, while considering the purpose for which He created you, and be cautious of Him just as He has warned you to be cautious of Him, thereby being worthy of what He has prepared for you through the realization of His true

فضل التذكير

٦ فِي أَلْهَا أَمْثَالًا صَانِيَةً، وَمُوَاعِظَةً
 شَافِيَةً، لَوْ صَادَفَ قُلُوبًا
 رَّاكِيَةً، وَأَشْمَاعًا وَاعِيَةً، وَآرَاءً
 عَازِمَةً، وَأَلْبَابًا حَازِمَةً. فَاتَّقُوا اللَّهُ
 تَقْيَةً مَنْ سَمِعَ فَحْشَعَ، وَاقْتَرَفَ
 فَاعْتَرَفَ، وَوَجِلَ فَعَمِلَ، وَحَادَرَ
 فَبَادَرَ، وَأَيْقَنَ فَأَحْسَنَ، وَعَبَرَ
 فَاعْتَبَرَ، وَحُدَّدَ فَحَذَرَ، وَرُجِرَ
 فَأَزْدَجَرَ، وَأَجْهَبَ فَأَنْبَابَ
 وَرَاجَعَ فَقَابَ، وَاقْتَدَى
 فَاحْتَدَى، وَأُرِيَ فَرَأَى؛ فَأَشْرَعَ
 طَالِبًا، وَنَجَا هَارِبًا، فَأَفَادَ ذَخِيرَةً،
 وَأَطَابَ سَرِيرَةً، وَعَمَرَ مَعَادًا،
 وَاسْتَظْهَرَ زَادَ لِيَوْمَ رَحِيلِهِ
 وَوَجْهِ سَيِّلِهِ، وَحَالَ حَاجِتِهِ،
 وَمُؤْطِنَ فَاقِتِهِ، وَقَدَمَ أَمَامَةً
 لِدَارِ مُقَامِهِ. فَاتَّقُوا اللَّهُ عِبَادَ اللَّهِ
 جِهَةً مَا خَلَقَ كُمْ لَهُ، وَاحْذَرُوا
 مِنْهُ كُنْهَ مَا حَذَّرَ كُمْ مِنْ نَفْسِهِ،
 وَاسْتَحْقُوا مِنْهُ مَا أَعْدَ لَكُمْ

promise and being wary of the fright [and shock] of your return to Him.

بِاللَّهِ يُرْسَلُ لِصَدْقٍ مِعَادِهِ، وَالْحَذَرُ
مِنْ هَوْلٍ مَعَادِهِ.

This means that the recipients of these exhortations would only benefit from them if their hearts are ready to accept guidance, their ears are ready to listen and grasp the advice, they are determined in seeking and following the right path, and they employ their intellect to properly understand what is beneficial for them (MB). The adjective '*hāzimah*' comes from *hazm* which means prudence, sound judgment, and firmness of mind. Here it refers to having control of one's affair and carrying it out properly (I), or thinking carefully and pondering deeply about the consequences of one's actions and the different dimensions of any matter (N). The Imām then advises the people to espouse Godwariness *like one who hears and humbly submits*, meaning he turns fearfully in submission to Allāh alone, and not to any other human being like himself. His Godwariness should be like that of one *who perpetrates and admits*, meaning when he sins, he is remorseful and repents; *who fears and acts*, because when one is afraid of something, his fear is manifested in his actions; *who is cautious and hastens*, which describes how he acts due to his fear; *who believes and does good*, meaning he recognizes the truth as it is, and performs his actions well in accordance with it; *who is admonished and takes lesson*, *who is warned and heeds the warning*, and *who is deterred and he desists*, meaning that he acts on the advice he receives (Z).

It is only such a person who *responds to the call and turns [to Allāh], returns and repents, follows [the guide] and emulates him, and is shown so he sees*. These are the actions that define a truly Godwary person and distinguish him from others. Because he is *quick in searching* for the truth and for virtue, and *flees to safety* from evil, He is able to attain provisions for the Hereafter and purify his soul from spiritual filth (MB). He thus *builds his final abode and packs supplies for the day of his departure and his intended destination, for his time of need and place of want, sending forth before him for the home of his [eternal] stay*. The phrase '*istazhabra zādan*', translated as *packs supplies*, literally means to carry one's provisions and supplies on one's back or on the back of one's beast of burden (N).

A REMINDER ABOUT DIVINE BLESSINGS

- 7 He has given you ears for listening to what is significant, eyes for seeing what would have otherwise been dark, and limbs comprised of their parts - with appropriate curvature in the configuration of their forms and their [adequate] durability - in bodies that subsist on what benefits them and with hearts that seek their sustenance. You are steeped in His encompassing bounties, obliging favours, and protective barriers [of wellbeing]. He has decreed for you lifespans kept hidden from you, and has preserved for you the vestiges of bygone peoples as a lesson - those who were enjoying their lives without any hindrance. Yet death overtook them before the fulfilment of their aspirations, from which they were cut off by the end of their allotted time. They did not make arrangements while their bodies were healthy, and did not take a lesson early on in life. Do those who are in the prime of their youth expect anything other than the decrepitude of old age? And do those enjoying the boon of good health expect anything other than the affliction of ailments? And do those who are yet alive expect anything other than the hour of their death?

وَمِنْهَا: التَّذْكِيرُ بِضُرُوبِ النَّعْمَ

جَعَلَ لَكُمْ أَسْمَاعًا لِتَعْيَ مَا
عَنَاهَا، وَأَبْصَارًا لِتَجْلُو عَنْ
عَشَّاها، وَأَشْلَاءً جَامِعَةً
لِأَعْصَائِهَا، مُلَائِمَةً لِأَحْنَائِهَا، فِي
ثَرَكِيبِ صُورِهَا، وَمُدَدِّعِمِهَا،
بِأَبْدَانٍ قَائِمَةٍ بِأَرْفَاقِهَا، وَقُلُوبٍ
رَأْيَدَةٍ لِأَرْزَاقِهَا، فِي
مُجَلَّاتِ نِعَمِهِ، وَمُوجَبَاتِ
مِئَتِهِ، وَحَوَاجِزِ عَافِيَتِهِ. وَقَدَّرَ
لَكُمْ أَعْمَارًا سَتَرَهَا عَنْكُمْ،
وَخَلَقَ لَكُمْ عِبَرًا مِنْ آنَارِ
الْمَاضِينَ قَبْلَكُمْ، مِنْ مُسْتَقْعِ
خَلَقِهِمْ، وَمُسْتَقْعِدِ حَتَّاقِهِمْ.
أَرْهَقَتْهُمُ الْمَنَايَا دُونَ الْأَمَالِ،
وَشَدَّبَهُمْ عَنْهَا تَحْرُمُ الْأَجَالِ، لَمْ
يَنْهَدُوا فِي سَلَامَةِ الْأَبْدَانِ، وَلَمْ
يَعْتَرُوا فِي أُنْفِ الْأَوَانِ؛ فَهَلْ
يَنْتَظِرُ أَهْلُ بَصَاصَةِ الشَّبَابِ إِلَّا
حَوَانِي الْهَرَمِ؟ وَأَهْلُ غَصَارةِ
الصَّحَّةِ إِلَّا نَوَازِلَ السَّقَمِ؟ وَأَهْلُ
مُدَّةِ الْبَقَاءِ إِلَّا آوِنَةَ الْفَنَاءِ؟

This, despite the imminence of separation, the nearness of departure, the restlessness of anxiety, the pangs of affliction, the choking of grief, and the futile search for assistance from one's progeny, close relatives, friends, and companions.

مَعْ قُرْبِ الرَّيْالِ، وَأَزْوَافِ
الإِنْقَالِ، وَعَلَزِ الْقَلَقَقِ، وَأَلَمِ
الْمَضَاضِ، وَغُصَّصِ الْجَرَضِ،
وَتَلَفُّتِ الْإِسْتِغَاةِ بِنُصْرَةِ الْحَفَادَةِ
وَالْأَقْرَبَاءِ، وَالْأَعْزَّةِ وَالْفُرَّانَاءِ.

The Imām then advises the people to espouse *taqwā* once more, keeping in mind *the purpose for which He created them*. The phrase '*jihata mā khalaqakum lahu*' is said to have an elided verb '*aqsidū*', meaning: direct yourself towards the objective for which you have been created, namely His worship (I). Doing this, and being cautious of Allāh as one ought to, will make the people *worthy of what He has prepared for them*. The phrase '*al-tanajuz li šidqi miādīhi*' has been rendered *the realization of His true promise*, and according to some exegetes, it means seeking the fulfilment of His promise through obedience to Him (M). Doing this, and *being wary of the fright [and shock]* people will experience upon *their return to Him* will assist in keeping one Godwary, and thereby deserving of divine reward in the Hereafter.

7 The Imām then proceeds, in this part of the sermon, to remind the people about some blessings of Allāh. He begins by speaking about the faculties that human being have been blessed with, and how beneficial they are. He says that Allāh has given us *ears for listening to what is significant* and useful, since traditions encourage us to turn a deaf ear to that which does not concern us (T). And the term *listening* here is also coupled with understanding and preserving or committing to memory (I). He gave us *eyes for seeing what would have otherwise been dark*, not just in the physical sense, but also in the deeper sense of insight that tears away the veils and darkness of ignorance, and enables us to see the underlying truths and lessons that can be derived from what we witness (M). After mentioning these two faculties that are the primary means of gaining knowledge, the Imām talks of the blessing of *limbs comprised of their parts*. Since both '*ashlā*' and '*ādā*' mean limbs, commentators have attempted to distinguish the two here by suggesting that the latter refers to internal organs rather than external limbs, which is the

meaning of the former term (I). Alternatively, it has been suggested that in this instance ‘*ashlā*’ refers to the entirety of the human body, while ‘*aḍā*’ refers to the limbs thereof (N). However, perhaps the best explanation is that ‘*ashlā*’ refers to the large limbs of the human body, while ‘*aḍā*’ refers to smaller parts thereof, such as the part of the arm which comprises only the hand and the wrist (T).

The limbs have *appropriate curvature*, meaning that each limb is curved in a way befitting its function (Z), *in the configuration of their forms* and their positions within the entire framework of the body. This means that every part of the body has been put in its perfect place considering the function it is meant to perform. As for *their [adequate] durability*, this apparently refers to the concordance of the lifespan of each limb in relation to its counterpart, such that one does not perish before the other (MB). Alternatively, it could be a general reference to making the limbs durable so that an individual can benefit from them throughout his life. By stating that these bodies *subsist on what benefits them*, the Imām means that the bodies we have been blessed with are able to help us achieve our goal and attain that which will benefit us (N). These benefits may be worldly or otherworldly, physical or spiritual (MB). Alternatively, this phrase could mean that every body exists for the benefits it was created to bring (M).

As for the sustenance that the hearts seek, it most likely refers to spiritual sustenance like true knowledge of the *shari‘ah*, understanding the realities, faith, and conviction, all of which lead one to felicity in both worlds (MB). They do this while being *steeped in His encompassing bounties*, which are common (*‘mujallilah’*) in that they encompass and include all people, whether friend or foe, believer or non-believer (N). The phrase ‘*mūjibāti minanīhi*’, rendered as His *obliging favours*, refers to the fact that the favours which Allāh bestows on His servants necessitate the obligation of gratitude on the part of the servants (MB). His *protective barriers* translates *ḥawājizi ḥafiyatihi*, because the term “*ḥafiyah*” has been generally defined as Allāh’s defence of His servant (T). Since the more commonly understood meaning of the term “*ḥafiyah*” is wellbeing, some commentators have suggested that this phrase means the people are in a state of wellbeing wherein Allāh repels all harm from them (I). Others interpret the phrase as a reference to those things that prevent wellbeing from being lost (MB). Alternatively, it has been suggested that it is the wellbeing granted by Allāh which acts as a barrier that protects the people from much pain and difficulty (Z). One commentator says that part of the phrase has been elided here, and what he actually means to say is ‘*mā yamna u ḥawājizi ḥafiyatihi*’.

which would be translated as *that which repels the factors that prevent his wellbeing* (N).

Imām ‘Alī then proceeds to once again talk about the limited time human beings have in this world. The fact that Allāh has decreed how long every individual will live, but has kept knowledge of this hidden, is meant to keep human beings from becoming negligent and heedless. In his explanation to Mufaddal, Imām al-Ṣādiq is reported to have said, “If a person knew how long he would live, and his lifespan was short, he would not enjoy his life as he would always think of his imminent death and be wary thereof..., and if his lifespan was long, he would know that he will remain alive and thus fall into sin and follow his base desires, thinking to himself that he will repent for that towards the end of his life...” (T). Furthermore, the vestiges of earlier nations are a source of lessons and examples to learn from. They included those *who were enjoying their lives* with nothing hindering them. The term *khalāq* in the phrase ‘*mustamta‘i khalāqihim*’ means one’s lot or share. This meaning is also seen in the verse that states: ...*they enjoyed their share [of worldly existence]; you too enjoy your share, just like those who were before you enjoyed their share...* (Q9:69) (I). The phrase ‘*mustafṣahi khanāqihim*’ literally means their throats are expanded and given space to breathe, without being suffocated, and refers to their being given room to enjoy their lives without any hindrance (T). This continued until death *quickly overtook them* (‘*arhaqahum*’) before they could fulfil their hopes and aspirations, from which they were *cut off by the end of their allotted time* in this world. This means that despite the things they enjoyed, they remained unsatisfied and hoped for more. However, their lengthy worldly aspirations and hopes were dashed by the arrival of death (Z).

There is a difference of opinion regarding the term ‘*shadhdhabahum*’, with some commentators saying that it is a compound word, made up of ‘*shadhdha*’, meaning separated or came apart, and ‘*bihim*’, thus connoting separation from this world through death. Others say it is from a single word, ‘*shadhdhaba*’, which means cut off, stripped, or repelled. This latter meaning is preferred by some commentators who say that it fits better with the context of what is being said (N), but in either case, the overall meaning remains the same. Since they were not prepared for death, these earlier generations *did not make arrangements while their bodies were healthy, and did not take a lesson early on in life*. The Imām then asks three rhetorical questions: *Do those who are in the prime of their youth expect anything other than the decrepitude of old age? And do those enjoying the boon of*

good health expect anything other than the affliction of ailments? And do those who are yet alive expect anything other than the hour of their death? This is a reflection of the oft-repeated tradition that advises believers to take advantage of their youth before old age, of their good health before sickness, and of their lives before their death (MB). They failed to prepare for death *despite the imminent separation and the near departure*, for indeed this life is short and death comes suddenly. And with it comes anxiety, pangs, and choking grief. It is at that moment, just as one is about to die, that one looks *for assistance from one's progeny, close relatives, friends and companions*, but to no avail.

8 The Imām then emphasizes the point by again rhetorically asking: *Could those close to him prevent his death? Or were the mourners of any benefit?* The word '*nawāhib*' is the plural of *nāhibah*, which refers to a woman who raises her voice as she wails and cries (I). Indeed, no one is of any benefit at that moment, when one is *abandoned to be confined among the dead and left alone in the narrow grave*. At this point, Imām ‘Alī begins describing what happens to the dead inside the grave. This is where *noxious creatures* ('*al-hawām*') tear one's skin to shreds, and the *agents of decomposition* ('*al-nawāhik*') erode the freshness of one's body. The individual who was known through his physical presence is consigned to oblivion as natural phenomena, such as *strong winds, efface all traces of him* and *the vicissitudes of time obliterate all signs of him*. Then, neither does there remain on the earth any news of him, nor any sign of his grave (MB). *Bodies become skeletons after having been fleshy, and bones decay after having been strong.* The term '*shāhibah*' literally means altered, and here it is used to depict the change of the fleshy body into something different, namely a bare skeleton. That is with respect to the bodies. As for the souls, they *are encumbered by the weight of their burdens* of sin, and of the vile traits that they adopted in their lives (M). This is made worse for them by the certitude they attain *of what they were informed of the unseen*, and what the Prophets and Messengers had told them regarding the Day of Judgment, the Intermediate Realm (*barzakh*), the resurrection, the accounting for their deeds, and the recompense thereof in Paradise or Hell (MB).

8 Could those close to him prevent his death? Or were the mourners of any benefit? Rather, he is abandoned to be confined among the dead and left alone in the narrow grave. His skin is torn to shreds by noxious creatures and the freshness of his body is abraded by agents of decomposition. Strong winds efface all traces of him and the vicissitudes of time obliterate all signs of him. Bodies become skeletons after having been fleshy and bones decay after having been strong. The souls are encumbered by the weight of their burdens [of sin], having now attained certitude of what they were informed of the unseen. Yet neither can good deeds be augmented nor is there any means of atonement for evil actions. Are you not their sons and fathers, their brothers and close relatives, who follow in their footsteps, travel on their trails, and walk on their paths? But the hearts are too hard to benefit [from this lesson], too distracted to follow guidance, and [they] tread upon the wrong tracks; as though the addressee is someone else, and as though felicity is attained through the acquisition of worldly gains.

فَهَلْ دَفَعْتِ الْأَقْارِبُ، أَوْ نَفَعْتِ
 التَّوَاحِبُ؟ وَقَدْ غُودَرَ فِي مَحَلَّةِ
 الْأَمْوَاتِ رَهِينًا، وَفِي ضَيقِ
 الْمَضَاجِعِ وَحِيدًا، قَدْ هَنَكَتِ
 الْهَوَامُ جِلْدَتِهُ، وَأَبْلَتِ التَّوَاهِكُ
 جِدَّتِهُ، وَعَفَّتِ الْعَوَاصِفُ
 آنَارَةً، وَمَحَا الْحَدَّاثُنُ مَعَالَمَةً؛
 وَصَارَتِ الْأَجْسَادُ شَجَةً بَعْدَ
 بَصَّتِهَا، وَالْعِطَامُ تَخْرَةً بَعْدَ
 قُوَّتِهَا، وَالْأَرْوَاحُ مُرَهَّنَةً يَنْقَلِ
 أَعْبَانِهَا، مُوقَّةً بِعَيْبِ أَنْبَانِهَا، لَا
 شُسْتَرَادٌ مِنْ صَالِحٍ عَمِلَهَا، وَلَا
 تُسْتَعْتَبُ مِنْ سَيِّئٍ زَلَّهَا. أَوْ لَسْتُمْ
 أَبْنَاءَ الْقَوْمِ وَالْأَبْاءَ، وَإِحْوَانَهُمْ
 وَالْأَقْرَبَاءَ، تَحْدُذُونَ أَمْثَالَهُمْ،
 وَتَرْكَبُونَ قِدَّتِهِمْ، وَتَطَهُّرُونَ
 جَادَتِهِمْ؟ فَالْقُلُوبُ قَاسِيَةٌ عَنْ
 حَظَّهَا، لَاهِيَةٌ عَنْ رُشْدِهَا،
 سَالِكَةٌ فِي غَيْرِ مِضْمَارِهَا، كَانَ
 الْمَعْنَى سِوَاها، وَكَانَ الرُّشْدَ فِي
 إِحْرَازِ دُنْيَاها.

However, this certitude and realization comes at a time when *neither can good deeds be augmented nor is there any means of atonement for evil actions*, since that can only be done while a person is alive in the world. Most commentators say this line of the sermon means that an increase in their good actions is not sought or expected from them, neither are they given an opportunity to repent or atone for their misdeeds (M). The Imām then addresses the people and asks: *Are you not their sons and fathers, their brothers and close relatives, who follow in their footsteps, travel on their trails, and walk on their paths?* This alludes to the fact that children sometimes die before their parents, and it is not known who will die first among family members (N). They follow in their footsteps by doing what they did, acting the way they acted, and traversing the path they followed. This is reflected in the verse that quotes a group of people saying: *“Surely we found our fathers upon a creed, and we are [simply] following in their footsteps.”* (Q43:23) (MB). Since they follow those who precede them, they ought to realize that they too will one day die like their predecessors.

Then Amīr al-Mu’minīn mentions the main reasons why people do not take a lesson from the death of those who pass away before them. Firstly, it is because *the hearts are too hard to benefit* from this lesson. Indeed, when one’s heart becomes hard, no wisdom can penetrate it. Then it becomes as the Qurān has beautifully described in the verse: *Then your hearts hardened after that, so they are like stones, or even harder. For indeed there are some stones that give way to flowing streams, and indeed there are some that split and water gushes forth from them, and indeed there are some of them that fall [to the ground] in fear [and awe] of Allāh. And Allāh is not heedless of what you do* (Q2:74) (N). Secondly, they are *too distracted to follow guidance*, since the allurements of this world have preoccupied them and taken away their focus from seeking true guidance and looking for that which is truly good and beneficial for them. Thirdly, they *tread upon the wrong tracks* which lead them to destruction and perdition (Z). It is as though they believe *the addressee ('al-ma'niyya')* is someone else, and the guidance and divine commandments are not addressing them (MB), or that death will never come to them (N). They mistakenly assume that the right way to arrive at felicity ('al-rushd') is only *through the acquisition of worldly gains*. That is why they do not take a lesson from the death of those who precede them.

WARNING ABOUT THE HORROR OF
AL-ṢIRĀT

التحذير من هول الصراط

9 Know that your passage will be over *al-*
sirāt, where the feet slip and there is
fear of falling, with dangers one after
the other. So be mindful of Allāh, O
servants of Allāh, as would the wise
person whose heart is occupied by
thoughts [of next world], whose body
is strained by fear, whose short sleep is
interrupted by nightly worship, and
who is kept thirsty in the midday heat
by hope [of reward]. Abstemiousness
has curbed his desires and glorification
[of Allāh] is quick on his tongue. He
remains fearful for his safety [in the
Hereafter] and eschews all diversions
from the clear path. He follows the
most appropriate course towards the
path to his goal, without being
distracted by deceptions or confused
by ambiguities. Having attained the
joy of glad tidings and the serenity of
[eternal] bounty, he experiences the
soundest sleep [in his grave] and
[awaits] a day of safety. He had passed
the corridor of this ephemeral world
in a praiseworthy fashion, and sent
forth provisions for his felicity in the
next. He hastened [towards virtue] out
of fear and was quick to take advant-
age of the opportunity [to do good].

٩ وَاعْلَمُوا أَنَّ مَجَازَكُمْ عَلَى
 الصَّرَاطِ، وَمَرَالِقَ دَحْضِيَّهِ،
 وَأَهَاوِيلِ زَلَلِهِ، وَتَسَارَاتِ أَهْوَالِهِ.
 فَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ عِبَادَ اللَّهِ تَقِيَّةً ذِي لُبِّ
 شَغَلَ التَّفَكُّرَ قَلْبَهُ، وَأَنْصَبَ
 الْخَوْفَ بَدَنَهُ، وَأَشَهَرَ التَّهَجُّدَ
 غِرَازَ نَوْمِهِ، وَأَظْلَمَ الرَّجَاءَ
 هَوَاجِرَ يَوْمِهِ، وَظَلَفَ الرُّهْدُ
 شَهَوَاتِهِ، وَأَوْجَفَ الْذِكْرَ
 بِلِسَانِهِ، وَقَدَّمَ الْخَوْفَ لِأَمَانِهِ،
 وَتَنَكَّبَ الْمَحَالِجَ عَنْ وَضَحِّ
 السَّبِيلِ، وَسَلَكَ أَقْصَادَ الْمَسَالِكِ
 إِلَى التَّهْجِيجِ الْمُطْلُوبِ، وَلَمْ تَفْتَلِهِ
 فَاتِلَاثُ الْغُرُورِ، وَلَمْ تَعْمَلْ عَلَيْهِ
 مُشَتَّبَاهَاتُ الْأُمُورِ؛ ظَافِرًا بِفَرَحَةِ
 الْبَشَرِيِّ، وَرَاحَةِ النُّعْمَى، فِي
 أَنْعَمِ نَوْمِهِ، وَآمِنِ يَوْمِهِ، وَقَدْ
 عَبَرَ مَعْبِرَ الْعَاجِلَةِ حَمِيدًا، وَقَدَّمَ
 رَادَ الْأَجِلَةِ سَعِيدًا، وَبَادَرَ مِنْ
 وَجَلٍ، وَأَكْمَشَ فِي مَهْلٍ.

He was dedicated in seeking [what was to be sought] and in fleeing what was to be evaded. He was watchful during his day for the morrow and always kept his future in mind. Indeed, Paradise suffices as a reward and prize, while Hell suffices as a punishment and torment. Allāh is enough as an avenger and helper, and the Book is sufficient as a decisive argument and disputant.

وَرَغِبَ فِي طَلَبٍ، وَذَهَبَ عَنْ
هَرَبٍ، وَرَاقِبٌ فِي يَوْمِهِ غَدَهُ،
وَنَظَرٌ قُدْمًا أَمَامَهُ، فَكَفَى بِالْجَنَّةِ
ثَوَابًا وَنَوَالًا، وَكَفَى بِالنَّارِ عِقَابًا
وَوَبَالًا، وَكَفَى بِاللَّهِ مُتْقِمًا
وَصَرَيرًا، وَكَفَى بِالْكِتَابِ
حَجِيجًا وَحَصِيمًا.

9 In this section of the sermon, the people are warned of the horror they will face when they cross the *ṣirāt*. Traditions tell us that there is a bridge over Hell which all creatures will have to cross, and it is that bridge which is known as *al-ṣirāt*. Imām ‘Alī describes it as a place *where the feet slip and there is fear of falling, with dangers one after the other*, and we are told in the narrations that it will be thinner than a strand of hair and sharper than the edge of a blade (MB). Some have understood this to be a metaphorical reference to, or manifestation of, the separation between truth and falsehood, faith and disbelief, sincerity and ostentation, and between seeking nearness to Allāh and following one's whims and caprice (N). Furthermore, commentators have said that it is this bridge of *al-ṣirāt* that is being referred to in the verse: *And there is not one of you but that he shall come to it* (Q19:71) (Z). After this warning, the Imām once again exhorts the people to espouse Godwariness and always be mindful of Allāh. He then mentions over twenty qualities of individuals who have *taqwā*, and whom we should emulate. These include *the wise person whose heart is occupied by thoughts of next world, the resurrection, and the accounting*. Such an individual is kept aloof by this preoccupation from love of this world and futile pursuits (M).

Another quality of such an individual is that his *body is strained by fear*, meaning that the fear of Allāh and His chastisement in the Hereafter has put a strain on his physical body, until he becomes lean thereby (MB). Such a person is deprived of deep slumber by his nightly worship, for he prefers using the private time in the night to worship Allāh, while others sleep. The Qurān states in this

regard: *They used to sleep but little during the night, and in the moments before dawn they would plead for forgiveness* (Q51:17-18) (T). He is one who is *kept thirsty in the midday heat by hope of eternal reward*, which either means that he fasts on hot days to attain divine pleasure and reward (M), or that he seeks the reward Allāh has promised the believers by striving and bearing hardships, like a thirsty person seeks water on an extremely hot day (Z). *Abstemiousness has curbed his desires, and glorification [of Allāh] is quick on his tongue.* The term ‘awjafa’ connotes swiftness and agitation, and here it means that the person is quick to remember and glorify Allāh, and does so constantly (M). A truly Godwary individual also *remains fearful for his safety [in the Hereafter] and eschews all diversions from the clear path.* This means that he keeps away from all the diversions that could preoccupy him from the right path, not that he would be kept from straying therefrom by what preoccupies him, as some have suggested (T).

The Godwary one always *follows the most appropriate course towards the path to his goal, without being distracted by deceptions or confused by ambiguities.* Indeed, such an individual is careful to choose the best path to the goal he seeks – a straight, balanced pathway, without diversions or detours – and in so doing, he avoids alluring worldly distractions and confusing uncertainties (M). The consequence of all this is then experienced by such a person when he leaves this world where, *having attained the joy of glad tidings and the serenity of [eternal] bounty, he experiences the soundest sleep [in his grave] and [awaits] a day of safety.* This alludes to the comfort felt by both his body and his soul (Z), and how on the Day of Judgment, he will be safe from punishment. The word ‘yawmihi’ connotes his time in general (M), and hence some commentators suggest that it refers to the safety felt by those who are admitted into Paradise, as the Qurān states: *Verily the Godwary will be amid gardens and springs, [and it will be said to them,] “Enter in peace and security”* (Q15:45-46) (MB). That is because *he had passed the corridor of this ephemeral world in a praiseworthy fashion and sent forth provisions for his felicity in the next.* Thus he left this world in a pure state, and entered the next life satisfied with what he had already sent forth of good deeds and praiseworthy actions (Z).

In this life, such a person *hastened [towards virtue] out of fear*, meaning he performed virtuous deeds out of fear of Allāh (T), or out of fear that he may lose the opportunity to do them later. Hence, he was quick in taking *advantage of the opportunity [to do good]* before his death came and the chance to carry out virtuous

deeds was taken away from him (M). The verb ‘*akmasha*’ denotes being quick to seize something, and here it means swiftness in seizing the opportunity to act (T). The Godwary individual likewise *was dedicated in seeking [what was to be sought] and in fleeing what was to be evaded* in the world. This meant that he would eagerly do whatever pleased his Lord, and would avoid any action that could make him the target of divine wrath (M), or that he would eagerly seek the truth and flee from falsehood (MB). Finally, the last quality of the *muttaqī* that Imām ‘Alī mentions here is that he *was watchful during his day for the morrow*, meaning that he would work in this world for the Hereafter (Z), and *always kept his future in mind*. It is interesting to note that in his description of the Godwary, as in other parts of this sermon, the Imām employs rhyming prose (*saj‘*) as a rhetorical device (M). Finally, Amīr al-Mu’minīn reminds the people that actions have consequences, and there are both rewards and punishments that await people in the next world. He says that *Paradise suffices as a reward and prize, while Hell suffices as a punishment and torment*, and it is between these two that we will find ourselves a destination.

Some commentators bring to mind the statement of Ḥur ibn Yazīd al-Riyāḥī on the night of Āshurā’ when he said, “I find myself at the crossroads between Paradise and Hell!” (T). Subsequently, the Imām declares *Allāh is enough as an avenger and helper, and the Book is sufficient as a decisive argument and disputant*. He avenges the evil of the evildoers by punishing them, and helps the righteous people (Z). The Book being referred to here is the Qurān, which is both a decisive argument or proof against the people, and a disputant against those who contravene its teachings. This means that it is incumbent upon believers to learn the Qurān, teach it to others, and honour it. And it also alludes to the prohibition of trivializing or demeaning the Qurān. While some commentators say that this description of the Qurān is a metaphor, others insist that it is literal and that the Qurān will come on the Day of Judgment to present its case and argue against certain individuals (MB).

ENJOINING GODWARINESS

الوصية بالتقوى

10 I advise you to be mindful of Allāh, Who has left no room for excuse by warning you, and has exhausted the argument by showing you the clear path. He has warned you of the enemy that sneaks into hearts stealthily and whispers into ears furtively, thereby misguiding and destroying, promising and giving false hope. He makes the most evil offences seem decorous and trivializes the gravest sins. Once he has gradually beguiled his associate and bound his hostage, he disclaims what he had embellished, regards as serious what he had trivialized, and cautions about what he had claimed would be safe.

۱۰ أُوصِيْكُمْ بِتَقْوِيْ اللَّهِ، الَّذِي
أَعْلَمَ بِمَا أَنْذَرَ، وَاحْتَاجَ بِمَا
نَهَجَ، وَحَذَّرَكُمْ عَدُوًا نَفَدَ فِي
الصُّدُورِ حَقِيقَةً، وَنَقَثَ فِي
الآذَانِ نَجِيَّةً، فَأَضْلَلَ وَأَرْدَى،
وَوَعَدَ فَمَنْ، وَزَيَّنَ سَيِّئَاتِ
الجَرَائِيمِ، وَهَوَنَ مُؤْيَقَاتِ
الْعَطَائِيمِ، حَتَّى إِذَا اسْتَرَجَ
رَهِيْشَةً، وَاسْتَعْلَقَ رَهِيْشَةً، أَنْكَرَ
مَازِيَّةً، وَاسْتَعْظَمَ مَا هَوَنَ،
وَحَذَّرَ مَا أَمْنَ.

10 Once again, Imām ‘Alī advises the people to practice Godwariness and to always be mindful of Allāh. Indeed there is no possible excuse they could have for not doing so, since Allāh has sent sufficient warning to them (*‘ādhara bi mā andhar’*) and provided clear arguments as guidance for them (*‘ihtajja bi mā nahaj’*) through His revealed Book and appointed Messenger (Z). Furthermore, Allāh has specifically cautioned them about their sworn enemy, Satan. This is a foe who *sneaks into hearts stealthily and whispers into ears furtively* in order to beguile human beings and lead them astray. Like in sermon no. 7, where the Imām described how Satan approaches and misguides people, he reminds the people that Allāh has warned them of how this accursed deceiver operates. He has recounted to them the way in which he misguided their forefather Ādam, causing him to be removed from the Garden, as stated in the verse: *O Children of Ādam! Do not let Satan tempt you, like he expelled your parents from the Garden, stripping them of their garments*

to expose to them their bareness. Indeed he sees you, he and his minions, from whence you cannot see them. We have indeed made the devils friends of those who have no faith (Q7:27). And since he cannot be seen, and approaches human beings stealthily, he is different from other enemies who are visible, and considerably more dangerous than them. It is possible, however, that the enemy being referred to here is generally any devilish misguider, be he from the jinn or humankind, as mentioned in Sūrah al-Nās: [*I seek refuge with Allāh*] *from the evil of the slinking whisperer, who whispers into the hearts of humankind, from among the jinn and humankind* (Q14:4-6) (MB).

The goal of the Shayṭān is to misguide people using falsehood and fallacious arguments, and to lead them to their doom and destruction (Z). He does this by making false promises and causing the people to become engrossed in lengthy worldly aspirations, as he makes them think about a distant future that they will never reach and in so doing, they lose the opportunity to work in the present towards self-reform and building their Hereafter. In addition to this, *he makes the most evil offences seem decorous and trivializes the gravest sins*. Even those actions that are intrinsically abhorred by people are made fair-seeming to them by him, and he presents even the most ugly and vile actions as beautiful and decorous. He gives positive titles and praiseworthy names to the most despicable of acts in order to suppress the natural disgust one would feel for them.

He also presents as insignificant or unimportant those evil deeds that are considered major sins, making them seem trivial and small. That in turn leads people to commit these actions more regularly without compunction or remorse (N). Satan misleads his follower and associate ('qarīnuhu') in this way until he has gradually led him to his perdition ('istadrāja') by beguiling him, and has finally *bound his hostage*, leaving him unable to escape his grasp. Some commentators say that this refers to the time of the person's death and what happens thereafter (T). At that point, the Shayṭān does an about-face and disclaims what he had portrayed as beautiful ('ankara mā zayyana'), regards as serious what he had trivialized ('istażama mā hawwana'), and warns about what he had claimed was secure ('hadhdhara mā ammana'). This betrayal by Satan is depicted in a number of verses of the Qur'ān, such as the verse which states: *Like Satan when he says to man, "Disbelieve!" But when he disbelieves, he says, "I hereby dissociate myself from you. Indeed I fear Allāh, Lord of the worlds."* (Q59:16) (MB).

ALSO: ON THE CREATION OF THE
HUMAN BEING

وَمِنْهَا : فِي صَفَةِ خَلْقِ الْإِنْسَانِ

11 What of this [creature] whom He originated in the darkness of the wombs, within layers of coverings, [from] spilt seminal fluid, to a formless clinging mass, [then] a foetus, a suckling infant, a child, and [then] a young man. Then He granted him a retentive heart, an articulate tongue, and perceptive eyes, so that he may comprehend when taught, and desist when admonished. Once he reaches his prime and attains the height of physical maturity, he turns away conceitedly and treads recklessly. He draws bucketsful of what he desires, striving laboriously for his worldly goals, excitedly yearning for pleasures and [proceeding to] what he craves. Then he neither considers the probability of a calamity nor is he humbled out of fear [of God's wrath]. He thus dies beguiled by temptation, having spent his short life in error. He neither earned any recompense, nor did he fulfil any obligation. The pangs of death suddenly descend upon him in his final moments of recalcitrance and frolic, so he turns perplexed and spends the night sleepless,

۱۱ أَمْ هَذَا الَّذِي أَنْشَأَ فِي ظُلُمَاتٍ
الْأَرْحَامِ، وَشُعْفِ الْأَسْتَارِ، نُطْفَةً
دِهَاقَةً، وَعَلَقَةً مُحَاقَّاً، وَجَنِينَاً
وَرَاضِعاً، وَوَلِيداً وَيَافِعاً。 ثُمَّ
مَنَحَهُ قَلْبًا حَافِظًا، وَلِسَانًا
لَأَفْظُوا، وَبَصَرًا لَاحِظًا، لِيَفْهَمَ
مُعْثَيْرًا، وَيَقْصُرَ مُزْدَجِرًا؛ حَتَّى
إِذَا قَامَ اعْتِدَالُهُ، وَاسْتَوَى مِئَالُهُ،
نَفَرَ مُسْتَكْبِرًا، وَخَبَطَ سَادِرًا،
مَاتِحًا فِي غَرْبِ هَوَاهُ، كَادِحًا
سَعِيًّا لِدُنْيَاهُ، فِي لَذَّاتِ طَرِبِهِ،
وَبَدَوَاتِ أَرِيهِ؛ ثُمَّ لَا يَحْتَسِبُ
رَزِيَّةً، وَلَا يَخْشَعُ تَقِيَّةً، فَمَاتَ
فِي فَتْشِهِ غَرِيرًا، وَعَاشَ فِي
هَفْوَتِهِ يَسِيرًا، لَمْ يُفْدِ عَوْضًا،
وَلَمْ يَقْضِ مُفْتَرِضًا。 ذَهَمَتْ
فَجَعَاتُ الْمُنَيَّةِ فِي عُبُرِ جَمَاجِهِ،
وَسَنَنِ مِرَاجِهِ، فَظَلَّ سَادِرًا،
وَبَاتَ سَاهِرًا،

in the throes of agony and excruciating pains and ailments; in the presence of a brother by birth, a loving father, a lady wailing sorrowfully, and another striking her chest restlessly. All the while, the man is absorbed in anguish, engulfing distress, agonizing moans, an excruciating extraction, and an arduous dispatch [from this world]. Thereafter, he is wrapped in a shroud silently and pulled away easily, without any resistance. He is then placed on planks, [his body] jaded by sickness and emaciated by illness. He is carried by the assistance of his sons' helpers and brothers' companions to his abode of solitude, cut off from all visitors, to remain there all alone. Once those who escorted him have left and the mourners return, he is made to sit in his grave where he can but murmur in response to the questions, due to his bewilderment and [fear of] stumbling in the interrogation. The greatest calamity in this place is the welcome of scalding water and entry into Hell, the bursting flames of the Blaze and the roars of the raging fire. There shall be no period of rest, no comfort to alleviate the pain, no power to impede, no death to bring relief, and no drowsiness to make him forget the anguish.

فِي عَمَرَاتِ الْآلامِ، وَطَوَارِقِ
الْأُوجَاجِ عَوْلَى أَسْقَامِ، بَيْنَ أَخِ
شَقِيقٍ، وَوَالِدٍ شَفِيقٍ، وَدَاعِيَةٍ
بِالْأُولَئِيلِ جَرَعاً، وَلَادِمَةٍ لِلصَّدَرِ
فَلَقاً. وَالْمَرْءُ فِي سَكْرَةٍ مُلْهِيَةٍ
وَغَمْرَةٍ كَارِثَةٍ، وَأَنَّةٍ مُوحِيَةٍ
وَجَذْبَةٍ مُكْرِبةٍ، وَسَوْقَةٍ مُتَعَبَّةٍ.
لَمْ أُدْرِجْ فِي أَكْفَانِهِ مُبْلِسًا
وَجُذْبَ مُنْقَادًا سَلِسًا.

لَمْ أُقْلِي عَلَى الْأَغْوَادِ رَجِيعَ
وَصَبِ، وَنَضَوَ سَقَمِ، تَحْمِلُهُ حَفَدَةُ
الْوِلْدَانِ، وَحَشَدَةُ الْإِحْوَانِ، إِلَى ذَارِ
عُزْتِهِ، وَمُنْقَطَعَ رَوْرَتِهِ، وَمُفَرَّدٌ
وَحَشَتِهِ، حَتَّى إِذَا انْصَرَفَ الْمُشَيْعُ،
وَرَجَعَ الْمُتَفَجَّعُ، أُقْعَدَ فِي حُفَرَتِهِ
تَجِيَّا لِبَهَتَةِ السُّؤَالِ، وَعَنْرَةِ الْإِمْتَحَانِ.
وَأَعْظَمُ مَا هُنَالِكَ بَلَيْهُ ثُرُلُ الْحَمِيمِ،
وَتَضْلِيلُهُ الْجَحِيمِ، وَفُورَاتُ السَّعِيرِ،
وَسُورَاتُ الرَّفِيرِ، لَا فَتْرَةُ مُرِيَحَةٍ
وَلَا دَعَةُ مُزِيَّحَةٍ، وَلَا قُوَّةُ حَاجِزَةٍ،
وَلَا مُؤْتَهُ نَاجِرَةٍ، وَلَا سِنَةُ مُسَلِّيَةٍ؟

Rather, he suffers between manifold deaths and perpetual punishment. We seek refuge with Allāh [from this]!

بَيْنَ أَطْوَارِ الْمُؤْتَمِنَاتِ، وَعَذَابِ
السَّاعَاتِ. إِنَّا بِاللَّهِ عَائِدُونَ!

11 Amīr al-Mu’minīn (‘a) then turns to the subject of the creation of human beings, after having warned them about what awaits them in the Hereafter and advised them to espouse Godwariness. He reminds them of how Allāh has blessed human beings and granted them existence and identity, nurturing them from conception until they reached maturity, and beyond that. He describes the human as a creature that was *originated in the darkness of the wombs, within layers of coverings*. This is the same darkness that is mentioned in the verse: *He creates you in the wombs of your mothers, formation after formation, in threefold darkness* (Q39:6). Exegetes have interpreted these to be the darkness of the membrane that encloses the foetus (*al-mashīmah*), the darkness of the womb itself, and the darkness of the mother’s belly (MB). And this is also what is meant by *layers of coverings* (T). The Imām then lists the stages of human development, from *spilt seminal fluid, to a formless clinging mass, then a foetus, a suckling infant, a child, and then a young man*. Each of these six stages of growth, half of which pertain to prenatal development and the other half to development after birth, has its own peculiarities. Some of these stages are truly marvellous and awe-inspiring, while others are lesson-giving. Causing a drop of fluid to develop into a foetus within a membrane in the womb is indeed a wonderous marvel (N).

Certainly, each stage of human development, if pondered upon, is something from which one can derive lessons. Subsequently, the Imām mentions some of the faculties bestowed upon the human being, namely *a retentive heart, an articulate tongue, and perceptive eyes*. These three qualities together distinguish humankind from the rest of creation. The ability of the heart to retain and remember helps to guide man, since he recalls his past experiences so as to avoid repeating the same mistakes in his life and likewise remembers what was beneficial for him. Furthermore, memory is so important that without it, we would not be able to learn anything in our lives. As for the ability to speak and articulate our thoughts, that is a unique human trait. In fact, language is an inseparable part of what it means to be a human being, and it is even through language that we think and reflect. When it comes to sight, it gives perspective to a human being and shows him what is

going on around him, thereby enabling him to navigate through his life and make the relevant decisions while doing so (Z). These benefits have been summed up by the Imām when he says that these faculties are bestowed to man *so that he may comprehend when taught* about what happened in the past to those who came before him, and *desist when admonished* and advised to keep away from evil. This happens when he learns about the punishments that befell the wrongdoers of the earlier generations. Additionally, through these faculties one can realize the purpose of his own creation, the omnipotence of his Creator, and the need for submission and obedience to Him (MB).

Unfortunately, however, once the human being *reaches his prime and attains the height of physical maturity, he turns away conceitedly and treads recklessly*. The phrase '*khabata sādiran*' literally refers to the camel's striking the ground with its forelegs, and walking forwards without care (I). At this stage in his life, *he draws bucketsful of what he desires, striving laboriously for his worldly goals, excitedly yearning for pleasures, and [proceeding towards] what he craves*. The term '*gharb*' refers to a large leathern bucket usually made of bull's hide, and the reason it has been used to depict desire is that one who owns such a bucket uses it to get water with which to quench his burning thirst just as the one with desire seeks to fulfil it in order to satisfy his soul and quench the thirst of his heart (MB). To this end, the human being expends all his efforts just to acquire what he craves of this world and its short-lived pleasures, as if that was his only purpose in life. The phrase '*badawāti arabīhi*' literally refers to those wishes and desires that one thinks about and craves (N). As he is engrossed in this, he becomes negligent and *neither considers the probability of a calamity* that may befall him as a consequence of his misdeeds, *nor is he humbled out offear [of God's wrath]*. As a result, he *dies beguiled by temptation, having spent his short life in error*, and passing his brief time in the world engaged in vain pursuits and futile ventures, until death comes to him all of a sudden, while he is in the worst state (Z). *He neither earned any recompense in the life of the world, nor did he fulfil any obligation* that his Creator had made obligatory upon him (T).

Imām ‘Alī then describes what happens in the final moments when an individual passes away from this world. He says that death comes suddenly, afflicting him with its pangs unexpectedly, *in his final moments of recalcitrance and frolic*. The phrases '*ghubbari jīmāḥīhi*' and '*sanāni mirāḥīhi*' literally mean the last remnants of his vehement desires and caprice, and the path or course of his joyous

exultation mixed with insolence, respectively (I). This means that it is while he is preoccupied by the pursuit of his vain desires and worldly enjoyment that he will suddenly be struck by the signs of death. *So he turns perplexed* and is stunned, not knowing what to do or how to forestall that for which he was unprepared and fell short (Z). Now he cannot sleep at night, and lies wakeful while *in the throes of agony and excruciating pains and ailments*. The term '*tawāriq*' specifically refers to that which comes in the night, so these agonizing pains are specifically experienced or heightened during the night (T). As the person undergoes this, he is surrounded by his dear ones: *a brother by birth, a loving father, a lady wailing sorrowfully, and another striking her chest restlessly*. Since these people were close to him in his lifetime, they express sadness as he is about to depart from this world. And at the moment when he gets the slightest relief from his pangs and pain, and comes to his senses, he can hear the wailing and moaning of his loved ones, which is another torment for him (N).

The final moments of his life sees the individual *absorbed in anguish* that diverts his attention from his loved ones who are close by, and in a stupor coupled by intense and *engulfing distress, agonizing moans, an excruciating extraction* of the soul by the angels of death as they strip it from the person's body, *and an arduous dispatch* from this world. A tradition tells us that when death comes to a person, the Angel of Death holds him firm, and were it not for that, he would not remain settled [and would convulse violently out of pain] (T). Subsequently, he is *wrapped in a shroud silently and pulled away easily, without any resistance*. The term '*mublisan*' literally means despairing and broken-spirited. It also refers to silence that is brought on by despondency and grief, which is the meaning intended here (Z), and describes the state of the dead person as he is placed in his shroud. *He is then placed on planks of the bier, to be carried thereon until his grave, having been jaded by sickness and emaciated by illness*. The phrases '*rajī'a waṣab*' and '*niḍwa saqam*' are usually employed to describe the sickness and emaciation of camels, but the Imām uses them here as an allusion to the state of the individual.

The term '*rajī'* describes how the sickness repeatedly afflicted the individual, just like the camel that is made to travel on successive journeys without sufficient rest, and '*niḍw*' describes his emaciation just as such an exhausted camel becomes emaciated (M). He is then *carried by the assistance of his sons' helpers and brothers' companions to his abode of solitude, cut off from all visitors, to remain there all alone*. The term '*ḥafadah*' in the phrase '*ḥafadat al-wildān*' is the plural of *ḥāfid*, meaning

helper, servant, or follower. Here it refers to the helpers of the children of the deceased who assist in carrying the dead body. As for '*hashadah*' in '*hashadat al-ikhwān'*, it refers to those who join the company of mourners from all around in order to participate in the funeral procession (Z). *Once those who escorted him have left and the mourners return* whence they came, having accompanied him and remained by his side for a brief while, the deceased is abandoned in his lonely grave (N). At that point, the deceased is *made to sit in his grave where he can but murmur in response to the questions, due to his bewilderment and [fear of] stumbling in the interrogation*. The word '*najīyyan*' has been interpreted as a possible reference to the soft whispering or murmuring of the answers by the deceased to the angels Munkar and Nakīr, due to the overwhelming fear and distress that prevents him from speaking up properly.

Alternatively, it could mean that upon facing the prospect of a terrifying interrogation, the deceased whispers to his Lord, praying to be sent back to the world so that he could do good deeds (MB). Indeed the questioning is frightening, as are the questioners, according to their description in the narrations (T). Hence, it is but natural that the person will be afraid as he responds to their grilling queries, not wanting to err in his response. The term '*imtihān*', translated as *interrogation*, literally means a test, examination, or trial. Having described what happens just before death and in the grave, Amīr al-Mu'minīn proceeds to speak about the Hereafter. He states that the greatest calamities to be met with therein are *the welcome of scalding water and entry into Hell*, as well as *the bursting flames of the Blaze and the roars of the raging fire*. The first part of this statement is a reiteration of what has been mentioned in the Qur'ān, where it states regarding the misguided deniers: *Then [awaiting him shall be] a reception of boiling water, and burning in hellfire* (Q56:93-94). The phrase '*fawrāt al-saīr*' refer to the bursting flames caused by the intense burning of the blazing hellfire, whereas '*sawrāt al-zafīr*' refers to the loud sound of the raging inferno (MB).

For one who meets this fate, *there shall be no period of rest, no comfort to alleviate the pain, no power to impede, no death to bring relief, and no drowsiness to make him forget the anguish*. This frightening portrait is derived from verses of the Qur'ān and clearly depicts both the pain of these torments and the impossibility of escape or relief therefrom (N). Instead, *he suffers between manifold deaths and perpetual punishment*.

12 [O] Servants of Allāh! Where are those who were granted long lives and enjoyed [great] blessings, who were taught and understood, who were given time yet squandered it in vain, and who were granted security [and wellbeing] yet were negligent? They were allowed lengthy respite, granted wonderful bounties, warned of painful punishments, and promised immense rewards! Beware of calamitous sins and culpable vices. Possessors of sight and hearing, of health and wealth! Is there any refuge or escape, any sanctuary or safe haven, any flight or way back, or not? How are you then deluded! Or to where are you diverting! Or by what have you been beguiled? Verily, the only share each of you has from this earth is the length and breadth of land that is equal to his own stature, upon which he will lie with his cheek rubbing the dust! Now is the time, O servants of Allāh, while the noose is loose and the soul is unfettered, in the period of seeking guidance while the bodies are at ease, there is space for gatherings, and some time yet remains for you. [Take heed now,] while there is [still] freedom of choice, a chance to repent, and room to [act and] fulfil one's needs.

١٢ عَبَادُ اللَّهِ، أَيْنَ الَّذِينَ عَمِرُوا
فَنَعْمَمُوا، وَعَلَمُوا فَقَهُمُوا،
وَأَنْظَرُوا فَلَهُوا، وَشَلَّمُوا فَنَسُوا؟
أَمْهُلُوا طَوِيلًا، وَمُنْحُوا جَمِيلًا،
وَحُدَّرُوا أَلِيمًا، وَوَعِدُوا جَسِيمًا!
اَخْدَرُوا الْذُنُوبَ الْمُوَرَّطَةَ،
وَالْعَيْنَوَبَ الْمَسْخَطَةَ. أُولَى
الْأَبْصَارِ وَالْأَسْمَاعِ، وَالْعَافِيَةُ
وَالْمَتَاعُ! هَلْ مِنْ مَنَاصٍ أَوْ
خَلَاصٍ، أَوْ مَعَادٍ أَوْ مَلَادٍ، أَوْ
فِرَارٍ أَوْ مَحَارٍ، أَمْ لَا؟ «فَإِنَّ
ئِؤْفَكُونَ! أَمْ أَيْنَ تُضَرِّفُونَ! أَمْ
بِمَاذَا تَعْتَرُونَ؟ وَإِنَّمَا حَظُّ
أَحَدِكُمْ مِنَ الْأَرْضِ، ذَاتٌ
الْطُّولِ وَالْعَرْضِ، قِيدٌ قَدِيدٌ،
مُتَعَفِّفٌ أَعْلَى خَدِيدٍ! الْآنِ عِبَادُ
اللَّهِ، وَالْخَيْرُ مُهْمَلٌ، وَالرُّوحُ
مُرْسَلٌ، فِي فَيَّةِ الْإِرْشَادِ،
وَرَاحَةِ الْأَجْسَادِ، وَبَاخَةِ
الْإِحْشَادِ، وَمَهْلِ الْبَقِيَّةِ، وَأَنْفُ
الْمَشِيَّةِ، وَإِنْظَارِ التَّوْبَةِ، وَأَنْفَسَاحِ
الْحَوْبَةِ؛

[So act] before the narrowness and constriction, the fear and destruction, and before the approach of the unseen awaited one, and the seizing of the Mighty, the Omnipotent.

قَبْلَ الصَّنْكِ وَالْمُضْيقِ، وَالرَّوْعِ
وَالرُّهْوِقِ، وَقَبْلَ قُدُومِ الْغَائِبِ
الْمُشْتَرِ، وَأَخْدَةِ الْعَزِيزِ الْمُفْتَدِرِ.

The Imām has used the term ‘atwār al-mawtāt’, meaning *manifold deaths*, as a metaphor to illustrate the intensity and severity of the punishment they will face (M). Likewise, the phrase “adhāb al-sāṭāt” refers to the chastisement that continues, hour after hour, moment after moment, in unending succession (T). *We seek refuge with Allāh from this fate.*

12 In the same way the Qurān calls on people to reflect upon what happened to previous generations, Imām ‘Alī draws the attention of his audience by asking rhetorically: *Where are those who were granted long lives and enjoyed blessings, who were taught and understood, who were given time yet squandered it in vain, and who were granted security [and wellbeing] yet were negligent?* One commentator opines that the phrase ‘wa ‘ullimū fa fahimū’ must be the result of a scribal error, because the Imām is censuring the negative qualities of the bygone generations, and being taught and understanding what they have learnt is actually something positive. He therefore suggests that it must have been ‘fa wahimū’ meaning they erred and misunderstood or misconstrued what they were taught. Indeed, this reading matches better with the context and is also supported by what is mentioned in the Qurān (like in Q41:17) (T). Others say that the phrase is correct as is, and means that they were taught about the lawful and unlawful, and they understood it (MB), yet they still chose to go against the commandments of Allāh. That was because they were beguiled by the allurements of this world and therefore spent the valuable time they had in vain and futile pursuits. The term ‘sullimū’ means that they were given security as well as good health and sufficient provisions, yet they neglected and forgot (‘nasū’) the right way that they had been guided to (Z). This was despite the fact that *they were allowed lengthy respite, granted wonderful bounties, warned of painful punishments, and promised immense rewards.*

In short, there was no room left for any excuse; yet neither the respite, nor the bounties, the warnings, or the incentives in the form of great rewards, made them

move towards the path of submission and obedience (N). The Imām then warned them to be cautious of *calamitous sins and culpable vices*. The phrases ‘*al-dhunūb al-muwarriṭah*’ and ‘*al-‘uyūb al-muskhiṭah*’ refer, respectively, to sins that cause one to be cast into perdition and hurled into destruction (I), and to the flaws and vices that incur the wrath of Allāh. Addressing the people directly a second time, the Imām says: [O] *Possessors of sight and hearing, of health and wealth!* He employs this different way of addressing them in order to remind the people that Allāh has blessed them with faculties of hearing and sight, with which they can take in the information and guidance that is given to them; and He has granted them good health and sufficient wealth, leaving them no excuse for negligence and heedlessness. To emphasize the point, he asks: *Is there any refuge or escape, any sanctuary or safe haven, any flight or way back, or not?* Of course this is a negative rhetorical question since it is known that there is no way anyone can escape the judgment of Allāh (M). The term ‘*maḥār*’ refers to a way by which to return or go back. It has been noted that the questioning phrase ‘*am lā?*’ is not found in all manuscripts of the *Nahj*, but is there in most (T). Once it is understood that there is no possible way to flee the outcome of one’s actions, he asks: *how are you then deluded! Or to where are you diverting! Or by what have you been beguiled?* The first of these three expressions is from the Qurān (Q6:95, Q10:34, Q35:3 & Q40:62).

Finally, Amīr al-Mu’minīn again reminds his listeners that no matter what their position in this life, the only share of this earth one will have after death *is the length and breadth of land that is equal to his own stature*, which is the size of his grave. This will be so even if he owned hundreds of orchards or tens of palaces. Once he dies, none of that will change the size of his grave, which will be the same as one who possessed naught of this material world. It is in this earthen tomb that he will lie *with his cheek rubbing the dust*. This might be a subtle allusion to how the softest part of one’s body will be made to rest on the rough earth. Alternatively, it might mean that a person will not even have a share of the earth large enough to rest comfortably therein, and will have to be placed on his right side, as we note that many times the graves are too narrow to allow the body to rest on its back unhindered (N). The phrase *now is the time, O servants of Allāh*, means: act now, and seize the opportunity at this moment (MB), *while the noose around the neck is loose and the soul is unfettered*, before death comes to you.

The phrase ‘*wa al-khināqu muhmal*’ literally means when the cord, which is used to strangle the neck, has still not been tightened. The term ‘*khināq*’ is also employed as a reference to the restriction brought on by death (*fī khināq min al-mawt*). If it is read with a *dhamma* as ‘*al-khunāq*’, then it refers to the neck, and the meaning would then be that the person’s neck is free and has not yet been seized by the Angel of Death. And this reading has been preferred by some commentators (T). As for the soul being unfettered (‘*al-rūh mursal*’), it means that one is free to act and still bears the responsibility to do as commanded, before his soul is taken in death (Z). Indeed, one must act while still alive in this world, which is *the period of seeking guidance, while the bodies are at ease*. Another version reads ‘*faynat al-irtiyād*’ instead of ‘*faynat al-irshād*’ which some consider more correct because it means *the period of seeking and striving*, whereas the latter phrase literally means *the period of guiding others (irshād)* and that does not fit well with the context here (T). The bodies being *at ease* may also be a reference to their vitality and ability to act (Z). The phrase *there is space for gatherings* alludes to the availability of open spaces wherein people can gather with their companions, kin, and the like. This phrase is not found in many of the early manuscripts and may have been a later inadvertent addition, perhaps from some marginal notes (T). Hence, the overall message here is that people should use the time that still remains for them, while there is *freedom of choice, a chance to repent, and room to fulfil one’s needs*. The phrase ‘*unufal-mashi’ah*’ is read by some commentators as ‘*anfal-mashi’ah*’ which literally refers to the initial moments of a decision (I).

The term ‘*al-hawbah*’ means one’s needs or wants (M) or, according to one commentator, it should be read ‘*al-hūbah*’ meaning sin, as that would be more apt after the mention of repentance (T). Another possible meaning of ‘*al-hawbah*’ is state or condition, and if this meaning is taken, the connotation would be that in this world, one is in a state where he has the room to act and do good deeds (MB). That is before *the narrowness and constriction*, and *the fear and destruction* upon one’s death and what is experienced following it. Death, or more precisely, the Angel of Death, is what the Imām is referring to when he speaks of *the approach of the unseen awaited one*. And the *seizing of the Mighty, the Omnipotent Lord*, which is an expression taken from the verse of the Qur’ān: *They denied all Our signs, so We seized them with the seizing of One Mighty, Omnipotent* (Q54:42), is also a reference to death, which is an inescapable, overwhelming reality that comes suddenly and seizes one unexpectedly (Z).

