In the Name of Allah, the All-Beneficent, the All-Merciful

A GARDEN OF PARADISE IN MADINA

Almighty Allah says in the Holy Qur'an, chapter 30, verse 15:

فَأَمَّا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ فَهُمْ فِي رَوْضَةٍ يُحْبَرُونَ

Then as to those who believed and did good, they shall be made happy in a beautiful garden.

According to exegetes of Qur'an the word "Rawdha" mentioned in this verse does not mean any kind of garden whatsoever. It literally stands for a specific kind of garden. 'Allama Tabataba'i in his *al-Mizan* and Shaykh Tabrasi in *al-Majma'* say:

الروضة البستان المتناهي منظرا و طيبا .

"Rawdha is that garden whose beautiful visage and aroma have reached their climax".

[Al-Mizan, v. 16, p. 160]

Therefore it is a garden that distinguishes itself from the rest in its beautiful features and scent.

One of the highly significant places in Madina, which draws every pure heart to itself is the "Rawdha", a place which resembles a radiant candle of light surrounded by moths who would like to sear in the fire of love and rest in the hospice of their beloved.

All the Muslims have unanimously narrated from the Holy Prophet (s) that he said:

مَا بَيْنَ مِنْبَري وَ بَيْتِي رَوْضَةٌ مِنْ رِيَاضِ الْجَنَّةِ...

Between by house and my minbar (pulpit) there is a garden from the gardens of Paradise…

[Al-Kafi, v.4, p. 553]

There is a difference of opinion, however, as to what exactly is this beautiful garden that lies between the pulpit of the Holy Prophet (s) and his radiant house. Muslim analysts have contemplated over this painstakingly and sought help from other traditions to understand the Rawdha properly.

The Holy Prophet (s) is reported to have said:

'Be mindful that a grave is either a garden from the gardens of Paradise or a pit from among the pit-holes of Hell Fire…'

And Imam Zaynul 'Abideen ('a) is also reported to have said:

إن القبر روضة من رياض الجنة أو حفرة من حفر النيران

'Surely a grave is either a garden of the gardens of Paradise or a pit among the pit-holes of Hell Fire.'

[Tafsir al-Qummi, v.2, p.94]

Other traditions are clearly indicative that the graves of those who lived the lives of Prophets (upon whom be peace) and were utterly submissive to Almighty Allah, are gardens from the gardens of Paradise. Observe the following traditions:

The Holy Prophet (s) in a tradition informs 'Amaar, one of his companions, about the sanctity of the Noble Lady Fatima bint al-Asad, Imam 'Ali ('a)'s noble mother, after her demise, as follows:

يا عمار إن الملائكة قد ملأت الأفق و فتح لها باب من الجنة و مهد لها مهاد من مهاد الجنة ... و قبرها روضة من رياض الجنة

O Ammaar surely the angels have filled the horizon and have opened for her a gateway towards Paradise and have prepared for her resting place from among the resting places of paradise….and her grave is a garden from the gardens of Paradise

[Bihaar al-Anwaar, v. 35, p.71]

Imam Abu 'Abdillah as-Sadiq ('a) is reported to have said:

مَوْضِعُ قَبْرِ الْحُسَيْنِ (ع) مُنْذُ يَوْمَ دُفِنَ فِيهِ رَوْضَةٌ مِنْ رِيَاضِ الْجَنَّةِ

'The area of al-Husayn's grave from the day he was buried has been a garden from the gardens of Paradise.'

[Man Laa Yahdhuruhul Faqih, v.7, p. 579]

And Imam al-Ridha ('a) after foretelling that the place where he would be buried would be in *Toos, adds:*

إن بخراسان بقعة يأتي عليها زمان تصير موضع مختلف الملائكة فلا يزال فوج ينزل من السماء و فوج يصعد إلى يوم أن ينفخ في الصور فقيل له يا ابن رسول الله و أية بقعة هذه قال هي بأرض طوس و هي و الله روضة من رياض الجنة من زارني في تلك البقعة كان كمن زار رسول الله (ص)...

Surely in Khurasan there is a spot, a time will come when it would be the place where the Angels would descend and ascend; while a group of them would descend from the heaven, another group would ascend, and this shall continue until the trumpet will be blown.

Thereupon Imam al-Ridha ('a) was asked: And which spot is this? And he said: It is in the land of Toos, *and I swear by Allah it is a garden among the gardens of Paradise*; and whosoever visits me in that tomb, it is as if he has visited the Messenger of Allah (s)…

[Rawdhat al-Wa'izeen, v.1, p.733]

In yet another tradition Imam al-Sadiq ('a) is reported to have said:

عن أبي عبد الله (ع) قال سمعته يقول الكوفة روضة من رياض الجنة فيها قبر نوح و إبراهيم (ع) و قبور ثلاث مائة نبي...

'Kufa is a garden from the gardens of Paradise: in it is the grave of Nuh ('a) and Ibrahim ('a) and the graves of 370 Prophets…

[Farhat al-Gharraa', p. 69]

In light of the aforesaid traditions, we can speculate what the "Rawdha" actually is. In some other traditions, however, there is a clear mention that the Rawdha referred to in the Prophetic tradition that we quoted in the beginning is the noble grave of Hadhrat Fatima Zahra ('a), who according to her will, was buried in the absence of those whom she felt did not deserve attending her burial ceremony. Observe the following traditions:

عَنْ مُعَاوِيَةَ بْنِ وَهْبٍ قَالَ قُلْتُ لِأَبِي عَبْدِ اللَّهِ (ع) هَلْ قَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ (ص) مَا بَيْنَ بَيْتِي وَ مِنْبَرِي رَوْضَةٌ مِنْ رِيَاضِ الْجَنَّةِ

فَقَالَ نَعَمْ وَ قَالَ بَيْتُ عَلِيٍّ وَ فَاطِمَةَ (ع) مَا بَيْنَ الْبَيْتِ الَّذِي فِيهِ النَّبِيُّ (ص) إِلَى الْبَابِ الَّذِي يُحَاذِي الزُّقَاقَ إِلَى الْبَقِيعِ...

Imam al-Sadiq (‘a) was once asked: Did the Messenger of Allah (s) say: ‘Between my house and my minbar is a garden of the gardens of Paradise’ and he responded: ‘Yes’, and added: ‘The house of ‘Ali and Fatima is between the House where the Holy Prophet resided up until the door which is parallel to the alley towards Baqi’…

[Al-Kafi, v.4, p. 555]

Imam al-Ridha (‘a) was asked about the grave of Hadhrat Fatima (‘a), and he said: She was buried in her house, and when the Banu Umayya increased the area of the mosque, it became a part of the mosque.

Shaykh Sadooq (may Allah sanctify his spirit), one of the great Muslim scholars has also opted to agree with the opinion that Hadhrat Fatima (‘a) was buried in her house.

Anyways in the ambiguity of the whereabouts of Fatima ('a)'s grave there is an eternal resonance of her complain and opposition to those whom she did not allow to attend at her funeral ceremonies. It resonates their oppression and usurpation of a fundamental right that was in no way personal, but belonged to the Muslim Umma who needed an appropriate guardian to safeguard the religion after the Prophet (s)'s demise, and thus protect their spiritual as well as material lives. However the events that followed the demise of the Most Noble Messenger of Allah (s) subjected a blow which made her perpetually sorrowful and she expressing this she said:

Such calamities befell on me, which,
were they to befall on days,
indeed they would turn into nights

Having understood a brief account about "the Rawdha" which so many pilgrims eagerly yearn to occupy during their presence in the Prophet's holy mosque, so that they may at least perform two units of prayer in *a garden from among the gardens of paradise*, let us ask ourselves: what message has this beautiful garden for us today? How can we benefit from the Rawdha apart from the recommended supplications and prayers that we ardently perform? What kind of realization should dawn in our hearts as we look at this fragrant garden whose aroma can only be deciphered by those who can appreciate paradisal scent while they reside in this earthly abode?

Surely the human being should consider all these important places as signs for him to reflect and change, so that he may soar to the higher levels of human perfection and join the ranks of the muqarrabeen who are the nearmost ones to Almighty Allah:

وَالسَّابِقُونَ السَّابِقُونَ
And the foremost are the foremost,
أُوْلَئِكَ الْمُقَرَّبُونَ
These are they who are brought near (to Allah)
فِي جَنَّاتِ النَّعِيمِ
And they are in gardens of bliss.

[Surat al-Waaqi'a (56), vrs 10-12]

Reflecting over the Rawdha, we should ask ourselves:

How can we be like the Rawdha? What made great exemplars like Fatima ('a) to be a garden among the gardens of Paradise? What kind of life did she live so that the place where she is buried turns into a beautiful garden among the gardens of Paradise? Is possible for me to follow her noble footsteps in the path towards God, so that my grave too resembles hers?

Our Holy Prophet (s) has informed us of ways that can enable us to make our graves as gardens from among the gardens of Paradise. Observe the following traditions:

1. The Holy Prophet (s) is reported to have said:

و أوحى الله إلى موسى ع قم في ظلمة الليل بين يدي أجعل قبرك روضة من رياض الجنة

Almighty Allah revealed to Prophet Musa ('a): Stand in the darkness of the night before Me and I shall Turn your grave into a garden of the gardens of Paradise.

[Al-Da'awaat, p. 744]

Standing in the darkness of the night in prayer and supplication uplifts the spirit of the human being and makes him closer to Allah. However we must understand that prayer without attention to the All-Loving Creator is a superficial prayer without any spirit. Prayer should be a real expression of praise and laudation of Almighty Allah, and not the habitual movement of the tongue and limbs while the supplicant is oblivious of his Addressee. It is noteworthy that the holy Qur'an introduces the night as being very effective in prayer and concentration. Observe the following verse:

إِنَّ نَاشِئَةَ اللَّيْلِ هِيَ أَشَدُّ وَطْءًا وَأَقْوَمُ قِيلاً

Surely the event of the night is deeper in impression
and more concordant to speech.

[Chapter al-Muzammil (73), verse 6]

This means that the supplicant has more attention at night and his heart concords with his speech.

2. The Holy Prophet (s) is also reported to have said:

أفضل الزهد في الدنيا ذكر الموت و أفضل العبادة ذكر الموت و أفضل التفكر ذكر الموت فمن أثقله ذكر الموت وجد قبره روضة من رياض الجنة

'The best kind of detachment from the world is to remember death and the best worship is to remember death, and the best contemplation is to remember death; hence whosoever's scale is made heavy by remembering death' he would find his grave to be a garden from the gardens of Paradise'

[Jaami'al Akhbaar, p. 165]

Remembering death should be considered as a means of preparation before the opportunity subsides. The human being should try to remember his past sins and wash them with the water of repentance and resolve not to repeat his past misdeeds, so that he has no problem at the time of leaving this world. In fact there is a tradition that clearly informs us that the product of true repentance from a Mu'min is that he would find his grave to be a garden from among the gardens of paradise. Observe the following:

In a lengthy tradition, the Holy Prophet (s) is reported to have said:

قال رسول الله (ص) المؤمن إذا تاب و ندم فتح الله عليه في الدنيا و الآخرة ألف باب من الرحمة ... و وجد قبره روضة من رياض الجنة ...

When a true believer repents and regrets [for his misdeeds] Allah opens on him a thousand doors of Mercy in this world and the Hereafter…and he would find his grave to be a garden among the gardens of Paradise…

[Jaami' al-Akhbaar, p. 87]

In addition, death should enable him to prepare himself to go to the higher world with virtues that will always stay with him. Therefore he/she should struggle in performing acts of virtue and embellishing himself with the Attributes of Allah, so that his grave truly manifests a garden of Paradise.

3. And in another tradition the Holy Prophet (s) is reported to have said:

...ألا و من أحب عليا هون الله عليه سكرات الموت و جعل قبره روضة من رياض الجنة...

'…whosoever loves 'Ali ('a) Allah would make easy for him the pangs of death and turn his grave into a garden of the gardens of Paradise.

[Mi'at Manqaba, p.64]

Love, here, we must understand, should not be misconceived to mean a purely emotional experience. Love for 'Ali ('a) must be translated as love for religion in its deepest sense. It means one should be committed to what 'Ali ('a) was committed to; one should live his life and yearn for a death of martyrdom. Love, we must understand is a product of *ma'rifa* and knowledge. This knowledge is not conceptual (*husuli*) but presential (*hudhuri*). So long as one would not embellish himself/herself with the Attributes of 'Ali ('a) how would he/she be able to know who 'Ali is? And it is only after realizing the attributes of 'Ali ('a) according to one's own limitations, is when the fire of love of 'Ali would sparkle in one's heart, and that would make his grave a garden among the gardens of Paradise.

4. In yet another tradition the Holy Prophet (s) is reported to have said:

'Be mindful that the grave is either a garden of the gardens of Paradise or a pit of the pits of Hell; so prepare it will good action

Therefore good action is a key to make one's grave a garden from the gardens of Paradise. However it must be realized that the price and luminosity and value of every action is according to one knowledge and sincerity. The standard and yardstick of a good doer is not quantity of his actions, but rather their quality. The Holy Qur'an is clear about this reality:

الَّذِي خَلَقَ الْمَوْتَ وَالْحَيَاةَ لِيَبْلُوَكُمْ أَيُّكُمْ أَحْسَنُ عَمَلًا وَهُوَ الْعَزِيزُ الْغَفُورُ

Who created death and life that He may try you-- which of you is best in deeds; and He is the Mighty, the Forgiving.

And the beauty of action depends on the understanding and knowledge that one possesses:

عَنْ مُحَمَّدِ بْنِ سُلَيْمَانَ الدَّيْلَمِيِّ عَنْ أَبِيهِ قَالَ قُلْتُ لِأَبِي عَبْدِ اللَّهِ (ع) فُلَانٌ مِنْ عِبَادَتِهِ وَ دِينِهِ وَ فَضْلِهِ فَقَالَ كَيْفَ عَقْلُهُ قُلْتُ لَا أَدْرِي فَقَالَ إِنَّ الثَّوَابَ عَلَى قَدْرِ الْعَقْلِ

It is reported from Muhammad bin Sulayman al-Daylami from his father who said: I informed Imam al-Sadiq ('a) about the 'Ibada and relgiousness and merits of a certain person. Thereupon he asked me: how is his intellect/understanding? I said: I do not know. So he said: 'Surely reward is according to one's intellect/understanding.'

[al-Kafi, v.1, p.11]

Imam 'Ali ('a) is reported to have said:

على قدر العقل يكون الدين
One's religiousness is according to one's understanding

[Ghurarul Hikam, p.49]

على قدر العقل تكون الطاعة
Obedience would be according to one's intellect/understanding

[Ghurarul Hikam, 61]

One should also strive that every action must be performed neither for seeking reward so that it turns into a transaction or out of fear of Hell Fire so that it manifests the worship of slaves. One should struggle to worship and performs acts of virtue because Allah is worthy of worship and because He loves His servants to do the different actions of virtue.

Both Ziyara in Madina and Hajj in Makka are opportunities to transform ourselves so that out graves tomorrow can shine as *Rawdhatun min Riyaadhil Janna*.

And as our innate disposition would like to the salvation and felicity of every mu'min who is not among us, we should also observe the teaching that Imam al-Sadiq ('a) is reported to have said:

إذا نظرت إلى القبر فقل اللهم اجعلها روضة من رياض الجنة و لا تجعلها حفرة من حفر النار

When you see a grave, say: O Allah, make it a garden of the gardens of Paradise and do not make it a pithole from the pitholes of Hell Fire.

[al-Da'awaat, p.264]

If the Muslim society takes these teachings seriously, both their world as well as their hereafter would be radiant, for the reason that "concern for the deceased" would elevate them in this world, and when they die, they would enjoy the prayer of others. This obviously requires the participation of the Muslim society as a whole.