

The Distinguished Position of Ahl al-Bayt

هُم مَوْضِعُ سِرِّهِ وَ لَجَأُ أَمْرِهِ وَ عَيْبَةُ عِلْمِهِ وَ مَوْتِلُ حُكْمِهِ وَ كُهُوفُ كُتُبِهِ وَ جِبَالُ دِينِهِ بِهِمْ أَقَامَ أَنْحَاءَ ظَهْرِهِ وَ أَزْهَبَ ارْتِعَادَ فَرَائِصِهِ ... لَا يُقَاسُ بِآلِ مُحَمَّدٍ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَ آلِهِ مِنْ هَذِهِ الْأُمَّةِ أَحَدٌ، وَ لَا يُسَوَّى بِهِمْ مَنْ جَرَتْ نِعْمَتُهُمْ عَلَيْهِ أَبَدًا. هُمْ أَسَاسُ الدِّينِ، وَ عِمَادُ الْيَقِينِ. إِلَيْهِمْ يَفِيءُ الْغَالِي، وَ بِهِمْ يَلْحَقُ التَّالِي، وَ لَهُمْ خِصَائِصُ حَقِّ الْوِلَايَةِ، وَ فِيهِمُ الْوَصِيَّةُ وَ الْوَرَاثَةُ. الْأَنَ إِذْ رَجَعَ الْحَقُّ إِلَى أَهْلِهِ، وَ نَقِلَ إِلَى مُنْتَقَلِهِ.

“They are the depository of His secret, shelter for His affairs, receptacle of His knowledge, source of His wisdom, caves of His books and mountains of His religion. With them, Allah straightened the bend in religion’s back and removed the trembling of its limbs... None from this Ummah can measure with the Aal (progeny) of Muhammad, blessings of Allah on him and his family. The one on whom their blessings flow can never be equal to them.

They are the foundation of religion and the pillars of certainty. The fast-pacers have to turn back to them and the slow-pacers have to strive to reach them. They possess the special qualities of the right of the vicegerency. The testament and the inheritance (of the Prophet) are concerning them. This is the time when truth has returned to its owner and has been moved to its place.”¹

That which can be understood in these few sentences is the extraordinary spirituality that Ahl al-Bayt enjoy, which places them at a level far above the commonplace. At such a level, nobody can be compared to them. Just as in the case of Prophethood, it is wrong to uphold a comparison of other people to the Prophet; similarly in the affair of Caliphate and Imamate, with the existence of personalities at this level, it is absurd to speak of others.

نَحْنُ شَجَرَةُ النَّبُوءَةِ وَ مَحَطُّ الرِّسَالَةِ وَ مُخْتَلَفُ الْمَلَائِكَةِ وَ مَعَادِنُ الْعِلْمِ وَ يَنَابِيعُ
الْحُكْمِ

“We are the tree of Prophethood, the place of descent of the Message, the place of frequentation of Angels, the treasure-troves of knowledge and the fountainhead of wisdom.”²

أَيْنَ الَّذِينَ زَعَمُوا أَنَّهُمُ الرَّاسِخُونَ فِي الْعِلْمِ دُونَنَا كَذِبًا وَ بَغِيًّا عَلَيْنَا أَنْ رَفَعَنَا اللَّهُ
وَ وَضَعَهُمْ وَ أَعْطَانَا وَ حَرَمَهُمْ وَ أَدْخَلْنَا وَ أَخْرَجَهُمْ بِنَا يُسْتَعْتَبَى الْهُدَى وَ
يُسْتَجْلَى الْعَمَى إِنَّ الْأئِمَّةَ مِنْ قُرَيْشٍ غُرِسُوا فِي هَذَا الْبَطْنِ مِنْ هَاشِمٍ لَا تَصْلُحُ
عَلَى سِوَاهُمْ وَ لَا تَصْلُحُ الْوَلَاةُ مِنْ غَيْرِهِمْ

*“Where are those who falsely and unjustly claimed that they are **“the firmly rooted in knowledge”** (3:7) other than us, although Allah raised us in position and kept them down, bestowed upon us knowledge but deprived them, and entered us (in the fortress of knowledge) but kept them out. With us guidance is to be sought and blindness (of misguidance) is to be changed into brightness. Surely the Imams (divine leaders) are from the Quraysh. They have been planted in this line through Hashim. It would not be appropriate for other than them, nor would leaders other than them be suitable (for this position).”³*

نَحْنُ الشُّعَارُ وَ الْأَصْحَابُ وَ الْخَزَنَةُ وَ الْأَبْوَابُ وَ لَا تُوتَى الْبُيُوتُ إِلَّا مِنْ أَبْوَابِهَا
فَمَنْ أَتَاهَا مِنْ غَيْرِ أَبْوَابِهَا سَمِيَ سَارِقًا

“We are the near ones, the companions, the treasure holders (of his knowledge) and doors (to the Message). Houses are not entered save through their doors. Whoever enters them through other than their doors is called a thief. “⁴

فِيهِمْ كَرَائِمُ الْقُرْآنِ، وَ هُمْ كُنُوزُ الرَّحْمَنِ. إِنْ نَطَقُوا صَدَقُوا، وَ إِنْ صَمَتُوا
لَمْ يُسَبِّحُوا.

“The exalted verses of praise of Qur’an are about them (i.e. the descendants of the Prophet) and they are the treasures of Allah, the Compassionate. When they speak, they speak the truth, but when they remain silent no one can speak unless they speak.”⁵

هُم عَيْشُ الْعِلْمِ وَ مَوْتُ الْجَهْلِ يُخْبِرُكُمْ حِلْمُهُمْ عَنْ عِلْمِهِمْ وَ ظَاهِرُهُمْ عَنْ بَاطِنِهِمْ
 وَ صَمْتُهُمْ عَنْ حِكْمِ مَنْطِقِهِمْ. لَا يُخَالِفُونَ الْحَقَّ وَ لَا يَخْتَلِفُونَ فِيهِ وَ هُمْ دَعَائِمُ
 الْإِسْلَامِ وَ وَلَائِجُ الْإِعْتِصَامِ. بِهِمْ عَادَ الْحَقُّ إِلَى نِصَابِهِ وَ انْزَاحَ الْبَاطِلُ عَنْ مَقَامِهِ
 وَ انْقَطَعَ لِسَانُهُ عَنْ مَنْبِتِهِ. عَقَلُوا الدِّينَ عَقْلًا وَ عَايَةَ وَ رِعَايَةَ لَا عَقْلَ سَمَاعٍ وَ رِوَايَةَ
 فَإِنَّ رِوَاةَ الْعِلْمِ كَثِيرٌ وَ رِعَايَتُهُ قَلِيلٌ

“They are life for knowledge and death for ignorance. Their forbearance tells you of their knowledge, their outward self of their inner self, and their silence of the wisdom of their speech. They do not oppose the truth nor do they differ (among themselves) about it. They are the pillars of Islam and the asylums for its protection. With them, the truth has returned to its proper place and falsehood has departed from the place in which it settled, and its tongue has been severed from its root. They have understood the religion with comprehension, insight and adherence to its precepts, not through (mere) hearsay and narration. Indeed the narrators of knowledge are many, but its guardians are few.”⁶

Aside from these aphorisms in Nahj al-Balaghah, an incident has been narrated where Kumayl ibn Ziyad Nakha'i says:– ‘Amir al-Mu'minin (A.S.) [during the period of Caliphate and his stay in Kufa] took hold of my hand and together we went towards the graveyard, which was on the outskirts of the city.’

As soon as we reached a silent spot in the desert, ‘Ali (A.S.) sighed deeply and began to speak.

At the outset of his talk, he said:– “O Kumayl the hearts of the sons of Adam are in the rank of vessels. The best vessels are those which best preserve their contents. Thus, whatever I say, you record it.”

In this talk which is quite lengthy, ‘Ali (A.S.) divides the people from the viewpoint of pursuance of the true path into three categories. Thereafter he expresses anguish for the reason that he does not find anyone worthy enough to be entrusted the numerous mysteries which are stored in him. However, in the end of his speech, he says: Of course it is not such that the earth remains entirely devoid of any men of God. In every age there are such individuals, although they may be few:

اللَّهُمَّ بَلَى لَا تَخْلُو الْأَرْضُ مِنْ قَائِمٍ لِلَّهِ بِحُجَّةٍ إِمَّا ظَاهِرًا مَشْهُورًا وَ إِمَّا خَائِفًا
 مَغْمُورًا لَيْلًا تَبْطُلُ حُجْجُ اللَّهِ وَ بَيِّنَاتُهُ وَ كَمْ ذَا وَ أَيْنَ أَوْلِيكَ؟ أَوْلِيكَ وَ اللَّهُ الْأَقْلُونَ
 عَدَدًا وَ الْأَعْظَمُونَ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ قَدْرًا يَحْفَظُ اللَّهُ بِهِمْ حُجْجَهُ وَ بَيِّنَاتِهِ حَتَّى يُودِعُوهَا
 نُظْرَاءَهُمْ وَ يَزْرَعُوهَا فِي قُلُوبِ أَشْبَاهِهِمْ هَجَمَ بِهِمُ الْعِلْمُ عَلَى حَقِيقَةِ الْبَصِيرَةِ وَ
 بَاشَرُوا رُوحَ الْيَقِينِ وَ اسْتَلَانُوا مَا اسْتَوْعَرَهُ الْمَتْرَفُونَ وَ أَنْسُوا بِمَا اسْتَوْحَشَ مِنْهُ
 الْجَاهِلُونَ وَ صَحَبُوا الدُّنْيَا بِأَبْدَانٍ أَرْوَاحُهَا مُعَلَّقَةٌ بِالْمَحَلِّ الْأَعْلَى أَوْلِيكَ خُلَفَاءُ

اللَّهُ فِي أَرْضِهِ وَالدُّعَاةُ إِلَى دِينِهِ آهٍ شَوْقًا إِلَى رُؤْيَتِهِمْ

“Indeed the earth is never devoid of one who rises for Allah with a proof, either openly and publicly, or fearfully in secret, in order that Allah’s proofs and signs should not perish. How many are they and where are they? By Allah, they are few in number, but they are the greatest in esteem before Allah.

Through them Allah guards His proofs and signs until they entrust them to others like them and sow the seeds thereof in the hearts of those who are similar to them. Knowledge has led them to real understanding and so they have associated themselves with the spirit of conviction. They find easy what those living in ease regard as hard.

They are familiar with what the ignorant find oppressive. They live in this world with their bodies here but their souls are attached to the highest station. They are the vicegerents of Allah on His earth and the callers to His religion. How I yearn to see them!”⁷

In these sentences, although the names of Ahl al-Bayt are not mentioned even in the form of a hint, yet if we look at similar sentences in Nahj al-Balaghah regarding the Ahl al-Bayt, it becomes obvious that the sentences are in reference to the Ahl al-Bayt.

From all that we have narrated in this saying from Nahj al-Balaghah, it becomes clear that apart from the subject of the Caliphate and the leadership of the Muslims in political affairs, the issue of Imamate has been eloquently and clearly expressed with the particular meaning of the term ‘proof’ (hujjah) as held by the Shi’ah.

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1. Nahj al-Balaghah, Sermon 2.
 2. Nahj al-Balaghah, Sermon 109.
 3. Nahj al-Balaghah, Sermon 144.
 4. Nahj al-Balaghah, Sermon 154.
 5. Nahj al-Balaghah, Sermon 154.
 6. Nahj al-Balaghah, Sermon 239.
 7. Nahj al-Balaghah, Hikmah no. 146.

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