

Discourse 5: Characteristics of The Shia – Part IV

Our ethical discussion today is a continuation of the topic on the Greatness of the Shia (فضائل الشيعة). The late 'Allamah Majlisi has presented a very detailed discussion in relation to both the Greatness of the Shia (فضائل الشيعة) and the Characteristics of the Shia (صفات الشيعة) and he narrates many traditions in regards to these two issues.

It is very important that all of us read these traditions and know for ourselves – and then convey to others – the meaning of these traditions so that those people who feel proud just because they have the title of Shia attached to them will know that to be a follower of the teachings of the Ahlu Bait (and to be called a Shia) is not an easy task.

We narrate one tradition which even though does not directly speak about the greatness of the Shia, however it addresses a responsibility that a true Shia must fulfill.

In this short tradition from Imam Ja'far b. Muhammad as-Sadiq (as) addressed to Abu Basir, the Imam explains the characteristics of a Shia.

عَنْ مُحَمَّدِ بْنِ إِسْمَاعِيلَ، عَنْ أَبِيهِ قَالَ: كُنْتُ عِنْدَ أَبِي عَبْدِ اللَّهِ: إِذَا دَخَلَ عَلَيْهِ أَبُو بَصِيرٍ... فَقَالَ يَا أَبَا مُحَمَّدٍ لَقَدْ ذَكَرَكُمْ اللَّهُ فِي كِتَابِهِ فَقَالَ: (إِنَّ عِبَادِي لَيْسَ لَكَ عَلَيْهِمْ سُلْطَانٌ) وَاللَّهِ مَا أَرَادَ بِهَذَا إِلَّا الْأَئِمَّةَ وَشِيعَتَهُمْ، فَهَلْ سَرَرْتَكَ يَا أَبَا مُحَمَّدٍ؟ قَالَ: قُلْتُ: جُعِلْتُ فِدَاكَ زِدْنِي...

It has been narrated from Muhammad b. Isma'il from his father that he said, "I was with Abi 'Abdillah (Ja'far b. Muhammad as-Sadiq (as)) when Abu Basir entered our company. He was breathing heavily when the Imam turned towards him and asked him what was troubling him. Abu Basir said that old age

had taken him over and he was finding it very difficult to breathe. He stated that he was on the verge of leaving this world, but worse than all of this, he was worried about what his state would be after death and where he would end up.

The Imam said to him, 'Why are you speaking like this when you have the honour of being classified as a Shia?' At this point, the Imam went on to list the greatness and reasons why one who is a Shia should be proud and every time the Imam mentioned a point, he said to Abu Basir, "Does this not bring pleasure to you (that you possess this trait)?"

Abu Basir would reply to the Imam: "Of course, may I be sacrificed for you, please continue..."

Continuing on, the Imam (as) then said, "O' Abu Basir! Surely Allah has spoken about you, our Shia in the Qur'an when He said, {Surely over My servants no authority shall you (Shaitan) have}1 and verily I swear that Allah has not intended any other servants of His in this verse except the A`immah and their Shia (followers)."2

In relation to Shaitan, there are many questions which the youth have recently brought up, and thus it is necessary to review these queries.

Question 1:

Why did Allah (SwT) create this filthy, despicable creature known as Shaitan who is able to whisper evil thoughts to us and he takes us away from the path of happiness, whereas we were created to traverse the path of happiness and success?

Answer 1:

Allah (SwT) did not create Shaitan as Shaitan – rather, He created him pure and there was even a time when he was classified among the Angels and thus he was not a creation that was made to negatively influence others. Rather, he was a righteous creature and was among the pious, spiritually close worshippers in the presence of Allah (SwT).

However, after choosing the wrong path, he lost his spiritual direction and through his pride and seeing himself as greater than Adam (as) and through his envy and jealousy, he ended up following his low desires. Thus, he sought status and greatness (over Adam (as)) and lowered his rank.

Therefore, the original cause for the spiritual fall of Shaitan was due to him following his low desires and even today, if a person does not follow these in their life, then there is no way that Shaitan can influence him.

In relation to Shaitan, the Qur'an mentions that:

أَبَى وَاسْتَكْبَرَ وَكَانَ مِنَ الْكَافِرِينَ

“But he became conceited and developed pride in himself and thus he was one of the disbelievers.”³

Due to his actions, Allah (SwT) lowered him to the status that he currently has and thus with this said we see that Shaitan was not always Shaitan as we know him to be.

Retort to Question 1:

If Shaitan was part of the group of Angels, and as we know that Angels do not have the ability to make decisions on their own and are all under the command of Allah (SwT), then how did he disobey the orders and turn away from the commandments of Allah (SwT)?

Answer:

Shaitan was not an Angel such that he did not have the power to make his own decisions – rather, he was from among the Jinn.

Question 2:

As it is commonly known, we were all created for happiness and prosperity:

مَا خَلَقْتُ الْجِنَّ وَالْإِنْسَ إِلَّا لِيَعْبُدُونِ

“I (Allah) did not create the Jinn and Mankind except that they should worship Me.”⁴

With this said, why was it necessary to have a creation such as Shaitan who would irritate people. As well, him being a creation who can not be seen and thus, it is not possible to defend ourselves from him? This (in our opinion) goes against the actual purpose of the creation of mankind.

Answer 2: The Qur`an states that Shaitan cannot influence anyone through his own accord as the doors to the heart of each person are closed to Shaitan. Thus, it is the person himself who opens the door of his heart to Shaitan. In reality, there is not a single despicable creation that can in any way influence either the country which a person lives in, nor the soul of a person:

إِنَّمَا سُلْطَانُهُ عَلَى الَّذِينَ يَتَوَلَّوْنَهُ وَالَّذِينَ هُمْ بِهِ مُشْرِكُونَ

“His authority (that of Shaitan) is only over those who take him as a supporter and who join partners with Allah.”⁵

That person who sets up Shaitan as a partner to Allah (SwT) and follows him (Shaitan) will also be called a Shaitan on the Day of Judgement!

وَمَا كَانَ لِيَّ عَلَيْكُمْ مِنْ سُلْطَانٍ إِلَّا أَنْ دَعَوْتُكُمْ فَأَسْتَجَبْتُمْ فَلَا تَلُومُونِي وَلُومُوا
أَنْفُسَكُمْ

“I (Shaitan) had no authority over you except that I invited you and you listened to me. Therefore, do not reproach or blame me, rather, blame your own souls.”⁶

It is worthy to note that Shaitan himself is one of the means or instruments towards perfection for the human being who is striving to become a complete person, because since struggling and fighting against him will lead to strengthening ones' own inner faith.

In his book the Philosophy of History, one of the well known writers of the West named Toynby writes that, “I have studied all of the nations of the world and did not find a single civilization except that at one time or another, they were put face to face with a powerful foreign enemy. In order to defend themselves, they gathered all the people together and in the end, were victorious.”

Thus, there is a wisdom in why Shaitan exists. Similarly, if there were no lower desires in a human being, then the mystics (Urafa) would not become as strong as they are in their closeness to Allah (SwT).

The Qur`an mentions that:

إِنَّ عِبَادِي لَيْسَ لَكَ عَلَيْهِمْ سُلْطَانٌ

“Certainly Shaitan has no control or authority over My true servants.”

The meaning of this verse is not that Shaitan has no control over the Shia, rather, Allah (SwT) is telling us that He is the defender and protector of those people that come towards Him and worship Him.

This is truly a grand station and it is one of the reasons that those who are the true Shia should have pride that they are not under the influence of Shaitan.

The meaning of this verse is also that those people who are under the influence of Shaitan are not true

Shia, and therefore this verse actually increases our responsibility as followers of the Ahlul Bait.

The Shia are not people who are Ma'sum (sinless) and thus, it is possible that Shaitan can go after them, however the Qur`an tells us that:

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ اتَّقَوْا إِذَا مَسَّهُمْ طَائِفٌ مِّنَ الشَّيْطَانِ تَذَكَّرُوا فَإِذَا هُمْ مُبْصِرُونَ

“When a thought of evil from Shaitan assaults those people who have consciousness of Allah, then they bring Allah to remembrance, then they are able to see straight (the true path) once again!”⁷

When those people who have tawqā are faced with the evil whispers of Shaitan they rush towards the remembrance of Allah (SwT) (meaning that they bring to memory the rewards and punishments that Allah (SwT) has mentioned in the Qur`an) and in His remembrance, they once again open their eyes to the realities around them.

It is possible that Shaitan can come towards a Shia, but he can not control them and thus, the responsibility of those who are followers of the Ahlul Bait is very heavy.

Thus the powers of Shaitan should have no influence on the individual, society, printed–press, market place and in the temporal and spiritual life of a person and if this does happen (Shaitan takes over) then this is a sign that the person is not really a Shia.

It is our prayer that Allah (SwT) gives us the success to have the pride of being classified as one of those who is a true Shia!

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1. Surat al–Hijr (15), Verse 42
 2. Bihar al–Anwar, vol. 65, pg. 51
 3. Surat al–Baqarah (2), Verse 34
 4. Surat al–Nahl (16), Verse 10
 5. Ibid., Verse 100
 6. Surat Ibrahim (14), Verse 22
 7. Surat al–A`raf (7), Verse 201

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