

Lexical Origins

Dayf (lit. inclination) is an infinitive noun of the intransitive verbs *dafa*, *yadfa* (lit. he inclined, he is inclining)¹; and a guest is known as *dayf* because *he inclines* to the host as he alights to be his guest².

The word *dafa* likewise is an infinitive noun, and it signifies ‘the entertainment of a guest or guests’. And the word ‘*al-idfa*’ is conventionally employed in grammar when a noun is adjoined to another. Some authoritative lexicographers such as Jir Allh al-Zamakhshar say that ‘a guest is known to be *dayf* because he is adjoined to the family and fed with them’³.

Such linkage however is voluntary and attributive (*itibar*) and not *haqq* (real). In sharp contrast to this, the relation of a guest of Allh is such that he not only is existentially linked to the Him but is ‘the link’ (*ayn al-rabt*) itself. This is because he has no independent existence, or accurately speaking, no existence of his own. Whatever he is, together with his belongings, all exist and subsist by the volition of Allh (SwT). The following verse of the Qur’an alludes to this reality:

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ أَنْتُمُ الْفُقَرَاءُ إِلَى اللَّهِ وَاللَّهُ هُوَ الْغَنِيُّ الْحَمِيدُ

“O mankind! You are the ones who stand in need of Allh, and Allh, He is the All-Sufficient, the All-Laudable.”⁴

Philosophers describe the link between the guests and the Host as *idfa ishrqiyyah* (emanational link), thus differentiating it from *idfa ma’qiliyyah* (categorical link), which is between two independent entities.

In his glosses over his philosophical poetry *al-Manzumah*, Mullh Hd Sabzawar says:

...الا ترى أنّ كلّ وجود عين التعلق بالمبدء وليس إضافة مقولية، وللمبدء
إضافة إشراقية على جميع ما سواه...

“...Don’t you see that every entity is ‘sheer linkage to the Origin’ (*‘ayn al-ta’alluq bi al-Mabda’*) and not categorically linked, and everything other than the Origin is His emanational link....”⁵

In simpler terms, unlike the human beings, where the host, the guest, as well as the banquet served to the host are apparently⁶ independent, there is no ‘independent existence’ for other than Allāh (SwT).

Therefore, He is the Host of the guest, who is served hospitably with contingent existence and subsistence⁷.

The relation is rather subtler than that, for there can be no two independent existents ever conceived. The guest together with what he or she is provided with is nothing but Divine action. The Holy Qur’ān says:

وَاللَّهُ خَلَقَكُمْ وَمَا تَعْمَلُونَ

“And God has created you and whatever you do.”⁸

Another highly significant point to bear in mind is that this kind of hospitality is essentially continual. Because of the utter existential poverty of the human being, he always needs to be provided with his contingent existence⁹ and its perfections, and thus is always a guest of the Necessary Being. Both the philosophers as well as the mystics (*‘urafā’*) establish that every entity requires Divine Grace every moment.

Perhaps the following supplications allude to this subtlety:

1. On Thursday nights we are taught to recite the following ten times:

يَا دَائِمَ الْفَضْلِ عَلَى الْبَرِيَّةِ...

“O One who continually confers abundance on the creation...¹⁰”

2. In the supplication of Jawshan al-Kabīr we address Almighty Allāh as:

...يَا دَائِمَ اللُّطْفِ...

“...O Ever Benevolent... 11”

3. On Eid day, in one of the supplications we are taught to say:

...يَا دَائِمَ الْمَعْرُوفِ...

“O One who always does good... 12”

4. And in one of the recommended supplications on the 18th Day of every month we are taught to address Almighty Allāh as:

...يَا دَائِمَ الْجُودِ وَالْكَرَمِ...

“O Ever Bountiful & Generous... 13”

Some Jews, as narrated in the Holy Qur’ān, in their utter ignorance and disrespect would say ‘God’s Hands are tied’, thus implying the independence of the creation from the Creator¹⁴, an idea later adopted by a group of ignorant Mu’tazilites who relinquishing the teachings of the Ahl al-Bayt (‘a) deviated from the right path. The reality, however, as has been established in the relevant texts, is that the relation between the cause and effect is not like the relation of a builder and a building, both of which can exist independently. Rather, the effect always needs the cause to exist.

Having considered the aforesaid introduction, we can classify ‘Divine Invitation’ (*diyāfah ilāhiyyah*) into two kinds:

1. al-Diyāfah al-‘āmmah (The General Banquet)
2. al-Diyāfah al-Khāṣah (The Specific Banquet)

1. It is also employed to mean, ‘he alighted to be a guest’. For example, when it is said ‘adūfuhu’ it means ‘I alighted at his abode as a guest.’

2. Mufradāt al-Fiṣḥ al-Qur’ān, pg. 513.

3. Lane, EW Lane’s Arabic–English Lexicon.

4. Holy Qur’ān, 35: 15.

5. al-Manzūmah, vol. 2, pg. 468.

6. We say 'apparently' because 'the humanly host, guest, as well as the banquet' all come under contingent existence, which has no dependence whatsoever. Hence in reality there isn't and can never be any host in the independent sense of the word other than Allāh (SwT).
7. This can be understood by trying to appreciate the relation between the Primary Cause and every dependent being in the universe. The relation is not like the human builder and his building, who after having built a beautiful edifice, is able to live independent of the edifice and has no existential control over the same, nor does the building need him to exist. If he were to die, the building would still remain erect.
8. Holy Qur'ān, 37:96. This is one of the most explicit verses that endorses the belief accepted by the Imāmites who neither believe that they are coercively driven by Allāh (SwT) in every action they do, nor believe that they have complete independence in their action. They rather believe that whatever they do is volitional, but entirely by Allāh's (SwT) power. Note the subtlety that while the action is attributed to the doer (ta'malīn), Allāh (SwT) says that He is the One who Creates the action chosen by His servant.
9. Contingent beings are those that do not exist essentially nor are they impossible to exist. Therefore in order for them to exist, they always need a cause. All the created beings are such.
10. Mafḥūḥ al-Jinān, vol. 1, pg. 33.
11. Al-Balad al-Amīn, vol. 1, pg. 405.
12. al-Iqbāl, vol. 2, pg. 212.
13. Al-'Adad al-Qawīyah, vol. 1, pg. 163.
14. This refers to verse 5:63 of the Holy Qur'ān. Imām Khumaynī has a beautiful note on this issue in his commentary on tradition no. 31 [On the Indescribability of God] of his Forty Traditions.

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