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The Ahlul Bayt

The best way to introduce the *Ahlul Bayt* to the Muslim nation is to recall what the Noble Qur'an says about them. Several verses of the Noble Qur'an refer specifically to the virtues of the Ahlul Bayt and their outstanding position in Islam. Whenever the Noble Qur'an refers to the Ahlul Bayt, it refers to a specific group of people who were related not only by blood, but more importantly, by ideology and faith to the Prophet. However, it does not refer to all of his blood relations, his friends or his wives.

The Verse of Purity (Taharah)

Allah only desires to keep away uncleanness from you, O People of the House (Ahlul Bayt), and to make you as pure as possible. ¹

The prominent scholars of Islam and the narrators of the Prophetic tradition unanimously agree that Ahlul Bayt (the household of the Prophet) which Almighty Allah uses in the above verse of the Noble Qur'an refers to the daughter of the Prophet Muhammad, Lady Fatima al-Zahra, his cousin, 'Ali ibn Abi Talib, and their children Hassan and Husayn.² Tabarani narrates from one of the respected wives of the Prophet, Umm Salamah that the Messenger of Allah once told his daughter, Lady Fatima to call her husband 'Ali and their two sons, Hassan and Husayn. When they came, the Messenger of Allah covered them with a cloak, put his hand on them and said, "O Allah, these are *Al-e-Muhammad* (the family of Muhammad), so shower Your blessings and favors upon *Al-e-Muhammad* just as You showered them on *Al-e-Ibrahim*. You are the Praiseworthy, the Glorious." Umm Salamah says that she raised the cloak to join them, but the Prophet took it from her hand saying, "You are also on the right."³

Although the beginning of verse 33:33 addresses the wives of the Prophet and continues to address them up until the middle part of the verse, but upon reaching "Ahlul Bayt" it excludes them.⁴ The previous and subsequent statements which are directed towards the wives of the Prophet are in the feminine pronouns and gender, but this verse referring to the Ahlul Bayt is in the masculine or mixed gender; thus it makes it clear that it is not addressed to the wives of the Prophet. However, even without the grammatical evidence, the relationship between some of the wives of the Prophet does not fit the

spirit of this verse which asserts the physical, mental, and spiritual purity of the family of the Prophet Muhammad.

To emphasize that the phrase “Ahlul Bayt” in this verse refers only to five people—Prophet Muhammad, ‘Ali, Lady Fatima, Hassan, and Husayn—narrators say that whenever the Prophet used to pass by his daughter, Lady Fatima’s house on the way to the masjid for the dawn prayers he would stop there and proclaim, “Come to prayer, O Ahlul Bayt, to prayer. Allah desires to keep away un-cleanliness from you, O Ahlul Bayt, and to make you as pure as possible.”⁵ Imam Anas ibn Malik adds that the Prophet did this for six months every day on his way for his morning prayers at the masjid.⁶

The Verse of Affection (Muwaddah)

Say, I do not ask from you any reward for it (preaching the message) but love for my relatives (qurba which here refers to the Ahlul Bayt⁷).⁸

When explaining this verse, Fakhr al-Din al-Razi says, “Without doubt, no one was as near to the Prophet as Lady Fatima, ‘Ali, Hassan, and Husayn. This is a well-known fact for all the chains of narration, that these were his ‘al’.” Thus, ‘al’ or ‘ahl’ refers only to the immediate family of the Prophet—namely: Lady Fatima, ‘Ali, Hassan, and Husayn.

Some argue that Hassan and Husayn were not the sons of the Prophet because they were the sons of Imam ‘Ali. According to old Arab custom, the mother was considered as only a means to deliver a child, but nonetheless, their direct lineage to the Prophet is through their mother, Lady Fatima al-Zahra.

It has been narrated that the ‘Abbasid caliph Harun al-Rashid asked the seventh Imam of the school of Ahlul Bayt, Imam Musa ibn Ja‘far how he could attribute himself to the Prophet while he was the child of ‘Ali and Lady Fatima – thus, how could he be related to the Prophet? The Imam then cited to him a verse that refers to the descendants of Prophet Abraham (Ibrahim), ***“And from his progeny were David (Dawud), Solomon (Sulayman), Job (Ayyub), Joseph (Yusuf), Moses (Musa), and Aaron (Harun)—thus do We reward the good-doers—and Zachariah (Zakariyya), and John (Yahya), and Jesus (Isaa), and Elias (Ilyas)—each one of them was of the righteous.”***⁹ The Imam then asked the caliph who the father of Isaa (Jesus) was. Harun answered that he was fatherless. The Imam replied, “Then you can see that Allah linked him to Ibrahim through his mother, Mary and Allah did the same for us, linking us to Prophet Muhammad through our mother Lady Fatima al-Zahra.”¹⁰

In many instances, the Prophet refers to Lady Fatima with intense love and affection, such as when he says, “Fatima is a part of me. Her happiness is my happiness, and her pain is my pain.” The Prophet would also point towards the children of Fatima – Hassan and Husayn – and say on many occasions, “These are my sons,” or “This is my son.” That is why the community of the companions in Madina referred to both Hassan and Husayn as the ‘sons of Prophet Muhammad.’

The Verse of Malediction (Mubahilah)

But whoever disputes with you in this matter after what has come to you of knowledge, then say, 'Come, let us call our sons and your sons, and our women and your women, and ourselves and yourselves, and let us beseech Allah and invoke His curse upon the liars.'¹¹

This milestone event in the Islamic history has been narrated by all the historians, narrators, and commentators of the Qur'an. It is an event which reveals the exalted status of the Family of the Prophet. The narrations say that a delegation of Christians from Najran came to the city of Madina in order to meet with the Prophet to discuss his prophethood and the religion he was preaching.

The Prophet proved to them that Jesus (Isa) was the son of Mary; he was a human being, a Prophet, and a servant of Allah as the Qur'an states and that regarding him as the son of God is blasphemy, since Allah, the Exalted is much higher than such human characteristics. After discussing these points extensively, the Prophet found them still deliberately persisting in their false beliefs and traditions—namely on the deification of Prophet Jesus—thus, Allah revealed the verse, which was a major challenge to the Christians, to pray and invoke upon Allah that a curse may overtake the party that insists on falsehood.

Early the next morning, on the 24th of the lunar month of Dhul al-Hijjah, in accordance with Allah's command, the Prophet arrived at the meeting carrying Husayn in his arms, while holding Hassan by the hand, followed by his beloved daughter, Lady Fatima and behind them was his son-in-law and cousin, 'Ali ibn Abi Talib carrying the banner of Islam. Seeing that the Prophet was accompanied only by his immediate family, the Christians were convinced that he was truthful otherwise he would have never dared to bring his dearest kin along with him. The Christian delegation backed away from the malediction argument and returned back to Najran.

Zamakhshari, in his *Tafsir al-Kashshaf*, narrates the event as:

When this verse was revealed, the Prophet invited the Christians to the malediction, to invoke the curse of Allah upon the liars. The Christians held a discourse among themselves that night in which their leader, 'Abd al-Masih stated his views. He said, "O Christians, know that Muhammad is a God-sent Prophet who has brought you the final message from your Lord. By God, no nation ever dared to challenge a Prophet with malediction but that woe befell them. Not only will they perish, but their children will also be afflicted by the curse." Saying this—that it is better to reach a compromise with the Prophet rather than challenge his truth and perish—'Abd al-Masih advised his party to stop hostilities and retain their religion by submitting to the Prophet's terms.

"So if you persist (for a confrontation) we will all perish. But if you, to keep your faith, refuse (to have a showdown) and remain as you are, then make peace with the man (the Prophet) and return to your land." The next day, the Prophet, carrying Husayn in his arms, leading Hassan by the hand, followed by

his daughter Lady Fatima, behind whom came ‘Ali, entered the appointed place and the Prophet was heard saying to his family, “When I invoke Allah, second the invocation.”

The pontiff of Najran, upon seeing the Prophet and his family, addressed the Christians, “O Christians! I am witnessing such faces that if God wishes, for their sake, He would move mountains for them. Do not accept their challenge for malediction, for if you do, you would all perish and there will not remain any Christians on the face of the earth till the Day of Resurrection.”¹² Heeding his advice, the Christians said to the Prophet, “O Abul-Qasim, we have decided not to hold malediction with you. You keep your religion, and we will keep ours.” The Prophet told them, “If you refuse to hold malediction, then submit to Allah, and you will receive what the Muslims receive and contribute what the Muslims contribute.” The Christians delegates, saying that they had no desire to fight the Muslims, proposed a treaty asking for peace which the Prophet of Islam accepted.

Although other women were present in the family of the Prophet at that time, all the commentators, narrators, and historians agree that in reference to the Qur’anic verse, “our women” referred only to Lady Fatima al-Zahra, “our children” referred only to Hassan and Husayn, and “ourselves” referred only to the Prophet and Imam ‘Ali.

The Verse of Prayer (Salat)

Surely Allah and His angels bless the Prophet. O you who believe, call for divine blessings upon him, and salute him with a becoming salutation.¹³

In the five obligatory prayers, during the *tashahud* (testimony), those offering their prayers must salute the Prophet and his progeny—a term exclusively reserved for ‘Ali, Lady Fatima, Hassan, Husayn, and their righteous descendants. The emphasis on the Prophet’s family in salutation is another indication of their pivotal position after the Prophet. By asking the believers to exalt these noble personalities, Allah, the Almighty reminds the Muslim nation that He has chosen the Ahlul Bayt for the role of leading the Muslim nation.

One of the most prominent commentators of the Qur’an, Fakhr al-Din al-Razi narrates the response of the Prophet when he was asked by some of his companions how to send blessings upon him. He said, “Say, ‘O Allah, send blessings on Muhammad and on the progeny of Muhammad as you sent blessings on Ibrahim and on the progeny of Ibrahim. And send grace on Muhammad and on the progeny of Muhammad just as you sent grace on Ibrahim and on the progeny of Ibrahim. You are the Praiseworthy, the Glorious.’”¹⁴

Al-Razi comments that if Allah and His angels send their blessings upon the Prophet, then what need is there for our blessings? He answers his own question by saying that when we send blessings on the Prophet Muhammad it is not because he is in need of them, because he already has the blessings of Allah and thus, he does not even require the blessings of the angels. When we send blessings on him,

we send them to glorify Allah and also to reveal our gratitude towards Allah such that He may have compassion on us and reward us. Thus, the Prophet says, “Whoever sends blessings on me once, Allah will send blessings on him ten times.”

Another verse in the Noble Qur’an asserts the same teaching when Allah the Almighty sends His blessings on the family of the Prophet by saying, **“Peace be upon the Al-e-Yasin!”**¹⁵ According to some commentators, “Yasin” is one of the names of the Prophet, as stated in Surah (chapter) *Ya Sin* when it addresses the Prophet as, “*Yasin*, by the Qur’an full of wisdom, truly you are one of the messengers....”¹⁶

The Verse of Feeding

Truly, the righteous drink of a cup tempered with camphor, a fountain from which the servants of Allah drink, flowing in abundance. They (the Family of the Prophet) fulfill vows and fear a Day, the evil of which is widespread. And they give food out of love for Him to the poor and the orphan and the captive. ‘We feed you for Allah’s sake and pleasure only. We desire from you neither reward nor thanks. Surely, we fear from our Lord a stern, distressful Day,’ so Allah will ward off from them the evil of that Day and cause them to meet with splendor and happiness and reward them for their steadfastness with a garden and with silk.¹⁷

Surah 76 in the Noble Qur’an descended to honor a sacred gesture performed by the Ahlul Bayt. Allah entitled this Surah, *Insan (Mankind)* to draw attention of the people to the beauty of mankind’s deeds on earth, and to tell them that they should not be selfish or greedy; rather, they should be caring and thoughtful people who spend their time thinking of other human beings around them. The chapter begins, “Has there not been over man a period of time when he was nothing to be mentioned? Verily, We and created man from drops of mixed semen in order to try him, so We made him hearing, seeing. Verily, We showed him the way, whether he be grateful or ungrateful.”

This introduction prepares our minds for the big sacrifice of the Family of the Prophet—’Ali, Lady Fatima, Hassan, Husayn, and their maidservant Fiddah. The incident provoking these verses began when Hassan and Husayn fell ill, and Lady Fatima al-Zahra asked her father what to do. The Prophet advised her to make a vow with Allah that if He cured them then the entire family would fast for three days. Hassan and Husayn were cured, and the process of fasting began. At that time there was nothing in their house to eat, so Imam ‘Ali went to a Khaybarian Jew named Shimon and borrowed three measures of barley.

His wife, Lady Fatima milled one measure into flour and baked it into five loaves of bread, one for each of them. ‘Ali, Lady Fatima, and their two sons, Hassan and Husayn along with their maidservant Fiddah fasted for three consecutive days. On the first day, at the time of breaking the fast, a destitute (*miskin*) person came to the door asking for some food. They took the food they intended to eat—a loaf of bread each—and gave it to him. They then broke their fast only with water. On the second day, at the time of

breaking their fast, an orphan came to their door, and they again gave him all their food.

On the third day, at the time of breaking the fast, a prisoner of war (a non-Muslim who had been captured in the defensive wars of Islam and was living in the city of Madina) came to their door and asked for some food, and again, they took all five loaves of bread and gave it to the man, breaking their fast for the third consecutive day with only water. Afterwards, the Messenger of Allah made a visit and saw his daughter, Lady Fatima al-Zahra and her two children, Hassan and Husayn were pale and too weak to speak, and he saw that they were trembling from hunger. Lady Fatima herself was sitting hollow-eyed on her prayer mat, her stomach sunk into her back. As he was asking them the reason for their state, angel Jibril (Gabriel) immediately came to the Prophet with Surah 76, "O Muhammad, Allah congratulates you for the sacrifice of your household."¹⁸

These verses not only translate the generosity and steadfastness of the Ahlul Bayt but also reveal the total submission of the Family of the Prophet and their immaculate and pure personalities.

Commentators of the Qur'an have a consensus that these verses speak of the Ahlul Bayt and place them at the highest level of piety and show them as models for the generosity of mankind. Humanity would be rightly guided if they followed their parable.

The Verse of Guardianship

O you who believe! Obey Allah, and obey the Messenger, and those vested with authority over you ('ul ul-'amr minkum). And if you quarrel about something, refer it to Allah and the Messenger.¹⁹

This verse, as explained in the previous section, refers to the guardianship of Imam 'Ali, and subsequently, the rest of the Ahlul Bayt. The Prophet has said about "those vested with authority over you," that "They are my successors and the leaders of the Muslims after me. The first of them is 'Ali ibn Abi Talib, then al-Hassan and al-Husayn, then 'Ali ibn al-Husayn, then Muhammad ibn 'Ali, who is known as al-Baqir, then al-Sadiq Ja'far ibn Muhammad, then Musa ibn Ja'far, then 'Ali ibn Musa, then Muhammad ibn 'Ali, then 'Ali ibn Muhammad, then al-Hassan ibn 'Ali, then the one who bears my name—Muhammad. And he will be the proof (*hujjah*) of Allah on the earth."²⁰

The Hadith of the Two Weighty Things (Thaqalayn)

It is probable that I will be called soon, and I will respond. So I leave behind me two weighty (very worthy and important) things, the Book of Allah (the Qur'an), which is a string stretched from the heaven to the earth; and my progeny, my Ahlul Bayt. Verily Allah, the Merciful, the Aware, has informed me that these two will never be separated from each other until they meet me at the Fountain of Abundance (the *Hawdh of Kawthar*, a spring in heaven). Therefore, be careful of how you treat these two in my absence, said the Messenger of Allah.²¹

This hadith was declared on, at least five occasions—the first being the farewell speech during the last hajj, the second at Ghadir Khum, the third after the Prophet left the city of Taʿif near Makkah, the fourth at the pulpit in Madina, and the fifth—just before he died—in his room which was full of his companions.

Given the high importance of the Noble Qurʿan, why would the Prophet associate the Ahlul Bayt with the Noble Qurʿan and place them second in importance to it? The answer is that Ahlul Bayt are the best to explain the true meaning and interpretation of this Noble Book. The Noble Qurʿan, as it states itself, contains both clear (*muhkam*) and unclear (*mutashabihah*) verses, and so the correct interpretation of these unclear verses must be passed on from the Prophet himself, as he did to his Ahlul Bayt. In addition, the Ahlul Bayt, due to their closeness to the Prophet, had an unparalleled knowledge of his traditions.

Similar Narrations from the Prophet Muhammad about his Ahlul Bayt

The parable of my Ahlul Bayt is similar to that of Noah's ark. Whoever embarks it will certainly be rescued, but the one who opposes boarding it will certainly be drowned.²²

Just like the stars protect mankind from losing its way in travel, so are my Ahlul Bayt; they are the safeguard against discord in matters of religion.²³

Acknowledgement of the *Al-e-Muhammad* means salvation from the Hellfire; the love of *Al-e-Muhammad* is a passport for crossing the bridge of *Sirat*; and obedience to *Al-e-Muhammad* is protection from divine wrath.²⁴

1. Noble Qurʿan, 33:33

2. al-Suyuti, al-Durr al-Manthur

3. Tirmidhi, Manaqib Ahlul-Bayt, Vol. 2, 308

4. It is not uncommon to find a group of verses discussing one theme and having one verse in the middle that discusses another theme. For example see Qurʿan, Surah 5, verse 3 and Surah 5, v. 66–68.

5. Ibn Mardawayh. Ahmad ibn Hanbal. Tirmidhi. Ibn Mundir. Tabarani. For more details see: Tabatabaʿi, al-Mizan.

6. al-Miqrizi, Fadhaʿil Ahlul-Bayt, 21

7. Ibn Hajar, Sawaʿiq. Vol. 11, 160; Tabaqat al-Kubra, Ibn Saʿad; Sahih Muslim; Musnad Ahmad ibn Hanbal; Tafsir al-Durr al-Manthur

8. Noble Qurʿan, 42:23

9. Noble Qurʿan, 6:84–85

10. Tabarsi, al-Ihtijaj, Vol. 2, Argument 271 and 335

11. Noble Qurʿan, 3:61

12. Musnad Ahmad ibn Hanbal, Vol. 1, 185; Tabari, Tafsir, Vol. 3, 192; al-Hakim, al-Mustadrak, Vol. 3, 150; al-Hafiz Abu Nuʿaym, Dalaʿil al-Nubuwwah, 297; al-Naysaburi, Asbab al-Nuzul, 74; Abu Bakr ibn al-ʿArabi, Ahkam al-Qurʿan, Vol. 1, 115; al-Fakhr al-Razi, Tafsir al-Kabir, Vol. 8, 85; al-Juzri, Usd al-Ghabah, Vol. 4, 25; Ibn al-Jawzi, Tadhkira Sibit, 17; Qurtubi, al-Jamiʿ li-Ahkam al-Qurʿan, Vol. 3, 104; Tafsir ibn Kathir, Vol. 1, 370; Ibn Kathir, al-Bidayah wal-Nihayah, Vol. 5,

52; Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani, al-Isabah, Vol. 2, 503; Ibn al-Sabbagh al-Maliki, al-Fusul al-Muhimmah, 108; Jalal al-Din al-Suyuti, al-Durr al-Manthur, Vol. 4, 38; Jalal al-Din al-Suyuti, Tarikh al-Khulafa, 115; Ibn Hajar, al-Sawa'iq al-Muhriqa, 199; Altogether 47 narrators and commentators of the Noble Qur'an from the four schools of thought narrate that the immediate family of the Prophet were only Lady Fatima, 'Ali, Hassan, and Husayn.

13. Noble Qur'an, 33:56

14. Tafsir al-Kabir, Vol. 3, 56

15. Noble Qur'an, 37:130

16. Ibn Hajar, al-Sawa'iq, Ch. 11

17. Noble Qur'an, 76:5-13

18. Zamakhshari, Tafsir al-Kashhaf, Ch. 76; Fakhr al-Razi, Tafsir al-Kabir, Ch. 76; Tabarsi, Mu'jam al-Bayan, Ch. 76

19. Noble Qur'an, 4:59

20. Tafsir al-Burhan

21. This hadith has been narrated by more than twenty companions of the Prophet and has also been narrated by over 185 narrators mentioned in Sahih Muslim, Vol. 2, 238; Musnad Ahmad ibn Hanbal, Vol. 5, 181-182; Sahih Tirmidhi, Vol. 2, 220.

22. This hadith has been narrated by eight companions of the Prophet and eight disciples of the companions, by sixty well-known scholars and more than ninety authors from the brothers of the Sunni school, such as Ahmad ibn Hanbal, Mishkat al-Masabih, 523; Fara'id al-Simtayn, Vol. 2, 242; al-Sawa'iq al-Muhriqah, 234; 'Uyun al-Akhbar, Vol. 1, 211.

23. al-Hakim, al-Mustadrak (quoting Ibn 'Abbas), Vol. 3, 149

24. al-Shafa, Vol 2, 40

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