

Striving for Right Guidance

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In the Name of Allah, Most Gracious, Most Merciful

Allah, Praise and Exaltation to Him, has said,

“And most surely I am most Forgiving to one who repents and believes and does good deeds then continues to follow the right guidance.” (Qur’an, Taha 20:82)

This glorious verse has proven that repentance, conviction and good deeds are not all sufficient to achieve forgiveness, nor do they (by themselves) please the Most Merciful One except when the condition of right guidance is satisfied.

Imam al-Sadiq (as) is reported to have said, “Allah forgives only one who repents, acquires conviction, does good deeds, then is guided to our *wilayah* (authority), we, Ahl al-Bayt.”

It is understood from this statement that guidance and being guided are two synonymous paths complementing one another, except that guidance is a divine gift whereby Allah, Praise and Glory to Him, grants His favors upon His beings. His guidance has indeed included all of His servants without any exception. This is proven by the verse saying,

“And by the soul and by the One Who made it perfect, then He inspired it to understand what is right and what is wrong ... “ (Qur’an, ash-Shams 91:7)

and by this verse:

We have surely shown him the way: he may thank; or be an ingrate. (Qur'an, al- Dahr or Al-Insan, 76:3)

As regarding seeking guidance, it is the personal effort exerted by a servant of Allah who follows the norms of general guidance in order to reach, after researching, ascertaining, utilizing his intellectual faculties, the knowledge relevant to the difference between what is right and what is wrong, and he willingly chooses the path of guidance after having avoided it. This is deduced from the verse saying,

... so convey the glad tidings to My servants who listen to the word then follow the best thereof, those are the ones whom Allah has guided, and those it is who are the men of understanding. (Qur'an, al-Zumar 39: 17-18)

The meaning of these verses is: A servant of Allah who opens his ears for dialogue and listens to all statements and theories then distinguishes the pleasant ones from the ugly, and the scanty from the wholesome, and who opts to prefer what is right over what is wrong ... such a servant of Allah willingly goes back to the roots of natural guidance and becomes worthy of Allah's praise as being among the **Ulul-Albab** (men of understanding).

The greatest example in explaining guidance and seeking it is what has befallen, and what is nowadays befalling, the Muslims, the nation of Muhammad (S) whom Allah guided through the Prophet (S), taking them out of the darkness into the light, leading them to His path so that they may tread upon His **As-Siratul-Mustaqeem** (the Straight Path), keeping them on the right guidance after having perfected their creed, completed His blessing upon them, and accepted Islam as their religion.

But that nation became disunited after the demise of its Prophet (S) and was divided into parties, groups and numerous sects after being the best nation that was sent to man.

The first reason why it became disunited and divided is due to the Sahaba, the first generation that carried the torch of the Islamic message to posterity.

But those Sahaba became disunited and divided only after the demise of their Prophet (S); nay! They even fought and killed one another, called one another *kafir* (apostate, unbeliever), and dissociated themselves from one another.

They were followed suit by the Tabi'een who made matters worse and widened the gap through the new ideologies and theories they introduced which had nothing to do with the religion of Allah; hence, parties and groups came to exist, sects and creeds abounded, and Muslims started groping in the dark not knowing where they could find the truth simply because each party claimed that it upheld the Holy Qur'an and the Sunnah, and due to the fact that each sect claimed that it followed the line of the Prophet (S), and each party was happy with what it had.

If we set emotions aside, abandon blind following, renounce fanaticism and discern matters through our foresight, we should then inquire about the status of Ahl al-Bayt (as) in comparison to these parties and sects, especially when we come across the traditions (*ahadith*) of the Prophet (S) which enjoin the *Ummah* to refer to Ahl al-Bayt in all theological and secular issues in order to guarantee its guidance and protection against misguidance.

Indeed such traditions are quite a few, and they are authentic. Moreover, they are consecutively reported by adherents of all parties by the token of his statement (S), "I am leaving with you two weighty things: the Book of Allah and my *lirat*, my Ahl al-Bayt; as long as you uphold them both, you will never stray after me at all. I remind you to fear Allah with regard to my Ahl al-Bayt ...," and he repeated his last sentence three times.

One who researches Ahl al-Bayt (as) and the status they enjoy with all Muslims without any exception will find out that they enjoy nothing but respect and veneration. But the will of the Messenger of Allah (S) was not confined to respecting and venerating Ahl al-Bayt; rather, he ordered the Muslims to refer to them and follow their footsteps and way of life and also to emulate them in everything; so much so that he said, "Do not go ahead of them else you should perish, nor should you lag behind them else you should perish ... Do not teach them, for they are more knowledge able than you."

Since the case is such, we nowadays find only one single group that has been implementing the will of the Messenger of Allah (S) and following in the footsteps of his Ahl al-Bayt (as) from the days of the Commander of the Faithful Imam Ali ibn Abu Talib (as) till our time. For this reason, that group was called, during the life-time of the Imam (as), "Shi'atu- Ali," supporters of Ali. As time passed, the word "Shi'a" came to be applied to anyone who accepts Ali and the Pure Imams among Ahl al-Bayt (as) as his/her master.

But if we consult history and turn the pages recorded by historians, we will find out the fact that Ahl al-Bayt (as) and their followers have always been oppressed, excluded from public activity, and fought by the governments and political establishments that ruled the Muslims during the first three centuries.

Those rulers succeeded in isolating the nation from its original leadership and distancing it from the straight path. Yet they did not succeed in obliterating the love and respect treasured by such nation for members of the household of Prophethood. Despite the cursing and taunting from the pulpits, and the forcing of people to do it, those rulers failed in the end to uproot the affection in the heart of the faithful towards the offspring of their Prophet (S).

Through such an argument can we explain the contradiction which we nowadays witness among most Muslims with regard to their attitudes towards Ahl al Bayt. They recognize their superiority and the fact that they are the most knowledgeable of all people, yet they emulate others, referring in matters relevant to their *Ahkam* and *Shari'a* to Imams who did not know the Messenger of Allah (S), nor were they his contemporaries; rather, they were created Imams in the aftermath of the Great Dissension which

distorted the features of the creed, put an end to the righteous, leaving Ahl al-Bayt and their Shi'as as undesirable outcasts. The Imams among Ahl al-Bayt (as) remained unknown to the vast majority of Muslims. If you ask them, "Who are Ahl al Bayt?," they will say, "They are the Prophet's wives!"

It is only natural that when he ordered his nation to refer to his Ahl al Bayt (as), the Messenger of Allah (S) did not mean his wives but he meant the Twelve Imams upon whom we invoke Allah's blessings. He meant them when he said, "The *khulafaa* (caliphs, rulers) after me shall be Twelve: all of them are from Quraish."

Researchers are aware of the fact that the Imams of Ahl al-Bayt (as) tried as much as they could to introduce themselves and bring people back to them, but those people were slaves of the life of this world, and they offered religion no more than lip-service as long as they were receiving their dues. When they were tested by affliction, few among them proved to be true adherents of the creed.

Because of all of this, whenever Imam al-Sadiq (as) recited the verse saying,

"And most surely I am most Forgiving to one who repents and believes and does good deeds then continues to follow the right guidance" (Qur'an, Taha 20:82),

he used to say, "... then continues to follow our right guidance, we, Ahl al Bayt."

It may also be understood from this glorious verse that it is not sufficient at all that Muslims whose hearts were set on conviction, so they believed in Allah and His Messenger (S), then they regretted their sins and started doing good deeds instead of bad one ..., it is not sufficient that they do all of that, and they will not in fact be worthy of achieving the forgiveness of Allah Subhanallu wa Ta'ala except if they satisfy one condition which is: being guided through the Imams of Guidance and the *Wasīs* (successors) of the Prophet (S) who are the only ones qualified enough to teach the Muslims the meanings of the Holy Qur'an and the Sunnah so that their conviction, deeds and repentance will be in total agreement with what Allah has enjoined upon them without any interpretation or adulteration.

Since interpretation has already been applied to the Book of Allah, and since distortion has already inflicted the Sunnah of the Prophet (S), and since each party seeks guidance from its own interpretation of the Book of Allah, the Most Exalted, using the traditions it regards as authentic to justify its beliefs, disagreement has taken place; confusion has occurred, and doubts have surely become abundant.

If a Muslim wishes to know the truth and secure protection against misguidance and salvation on the Day of Judgment in order to win Paradise and please Allah, he has to board the Ark of Salvation and refer to Ahl al-Bayt (as), for they are the security of the nation. Allah does not accept anyone as His servant except through them, nor does anyone enter into guidance except through their gate.

This is what has already been determined by the Messenger of Allah (S), and this is what he had conveyed to his nation as ordered by his Lord.

If we, therefore, refer to the Sahaba and their dissension after the demise of their Prophet (S), we will find out that they differed due to their pursuit of *khilafat*, leadership of the nation. Each and every dissension that broke out after that was due to this same *Khilafat*, for if leadership is usurped by those who are not worthy of it, controlled by those whose qualifications fall short of it, it will most certainly lead the nation to misguidance because of the dictates of such persons due to their ignorance, whims and desires.

These days, with Islamic *khilafat* buried and trusted to the mercy of Allah Ta'ala, and since those who are calling for its return are no more, are Muslims going to retort to their senses and act upon the will of their Prophet and uphold the Book of their Lord and the Sunnah of their Prophet and his *'itrat* so that tranquillity, brotherhood, harmony and peaceful coexistence with others as well as the unity of this nation after its dissension may dress its wounds after being ripped? This is the cry of one who loves it, who is compassionate towards it, the call of a brother to his brother.

We have come to know that guidance is a great bliss which Allah bestows upon His servants.

We have also maintained that guidance to the following and emulating of Ahl al-Bayt is a greater bliss which is worthy of bringing about forgiveness of Allah Ta'ala for His sinning servants; so, how is it like to struggle to remain on such a path?

Jihad in Islam is of two kinds: Jihad against an enemy, which is called the least Jihad, and Jihad against the insinuations of one's own *nafs* (self), which is the greatest of all Jihad.

What concerns us in this regard is the greatest Jihad relevant to the *nafs* and its treatment against deviated doctrinal ailments.

Sometimes one may be conducting Jihad against his own self, and sometimes he may struggle against others. His struggle against his own self means his persistence to do what is good and to keep company with the righteous, and to perform the rites, and his dealing with others in accordance with what has been determined by Ahl al-Bayt (as) who quote their great ancestor (S) who conveys what Allah Subhanahu wa Ta'ala orders him to convey.

Jihad towards others is achieved by enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong and by inviting others to the path of Allah by wisdom and beautiful exhortation. Such a Jihad may sometimes take the form of a statement, or it may be conducted by the pen, which is better and which is regarded by Allah as superior even to the Jihad by the sword. The Messenger of Allah (S) has said, "The ink of scholars is better in the sight of Allah than the blood of martyrs."

This is so due to what scholars record of explanations and promotion of what is right, and to their clarification of various issues so that people may find guidance to the *Assiratul-Mustaqeem* of Allah through great proofs and convincing arguments. It is better in the sight of Allah than waging a war in order to establish the creed by forcing people to accept it, for, as Allah says,

“There is no compulsion in religion; truly the right way has clearly become distinct from error” (Qur’an, al-Baqarah 2:256).

Scholars, therefore, are obligated to disseminate pristine Islam and introduce people to the Imams among Ahl al-Bayt (as) and their knowledge, and to spend in doing so their wealth and time. How many are those establishments set to promote *kufir* (apostacy), agnosticism, and corruption, and which have millions of dollars at their disposal, while wealthy Muslims do not spend in the way of Allah except very little?

We have seen how disbelievers went to Somalia to save it from starvation while their brethren remained indifferent. We have seen how Christian missionaries roam East and West Africa as well as Egypt, the Sudan, Indonesia and other Muslim lands, spending a great deal of money buying food and medicine for people, winning the hearts of the recipients and converting them from Islam to Christianity while wealthy Muslims whom Allah has given of His wealth and entrusted them to employ it for the benefit of His servants, are indifferent.

You can see how some of them perform the *Hajj* as many as twenty times, spending annually a great deal of money, while their neighbors starve without finding anyone who covers his indecency. Has the Messenger of Allah (S) not said, “The nearest among you to Allah is the one who is most beneficial for His servants?”

How, then, can Allah Subhanahu wa Ta'ala accept such action especially since He Subhanahu wa Ta'ala ordered people to perform the pilgrimage once in a life-time, and while all his life, the Messenger of Allah (S) performed the pilgrimage only one single time in order to make us aware of the fact that there are in his Ummah some wealthy and well-to-do individuals who go to extremes in performing the rituals while neglecting to treat others better?

For this reason, he used to quite often say, “Ad-Deen al Mu'amalah”, religion is how you fare with others. What can you say about one who performs the pilgrimage several times while owing people some money, or while he has poor relatives whom he does not help nor be compassionate to?

If we add to these those Muslims who are guilty of extravagance resulting from, say, smoking, for their judgment with Allah will be very hard indeed. If we cast a casual look at the amounts of money wasted on cigarettes in Muslims countries, the statistics will baffle us. For example, if we suppose the number of the Muslims today is more than one billion, and only five percent of them smoke, the results will be: two hundred million smokers who spend an average of two million dollars a day! Yes! Muslims are wasting at least 720 million dollars a year on buying killing diseases.

So fear Allah, O Muslims, regarding your own selves and your wealth, for if such wealth is levied for, say, only ten years, it will amount to \$7.2 billion which can remove the poverty of all poor Muslims in the east of the earth and the west.

“... and you deem it an easy matter, while with Allah it is quite grievous.” (Qur'an, al-Noor 24: 15)

To conclude, I would like to attract the attention of my Shi'a brethren who follow the School of Thought of Ahl al-Bayt (as) to the following:

1. They have to argue with their Sunni brethren in the most beautiful way, and to avoid cursing or taunting anyone which the soul abhors, for the Commander of the Faithful Imam Ali ibn Abu Talib (as) has said, “You should not curse, nor should you taunt; rather, say, 'Among their deeds was such and such,' for this is the most wise way of presenting an argument.”
2. They should avoid, while performing their rituals and dealing with others, any and all innovations introduced during the life-time of the Imams (as) or even during the life-time of the Messenger of Allah (S) such as *tatbeer* (hitting the head with a sharp object) while commemorating 'Ashura and bleeding which repels people and discourages them from embracing the creed of Ahl al-Bayt (as). Imam al-Sadiq (as) has said, “Promote our cause by your deeds, not by your tongues; be our ornaments, and do not disgrace us.”
3. In your lectures and scholarly discourses, emphasize arguments and proofs derived from the *Sahih* books of Sunnis, and avoid weak traditions which excite people and which contradict reason.
4. Exert yourselves in being pious and straightforward, just as your Imams from Ahl al-Bayt (as) used to be, and do not solely rely on the claim that Ali ibn Abu Talib (as) will seek intercession for those who love and follow him, for Ali himself is the one who has said, “Conviction is not achieved through wishes and desires, nor by pretense; rather, conviction (*iman*) is what rests deeply in the hearts and proven by words and deeds.”
5. They should learn moral lessons from the anecdotes that happened during the life-time of the Pure Imams (as) who have left us a heritage the like of which does not exist at all. For example, in *Nahj al Balagha* alone, there is a remedy for every ailment ... Time has come to shake the dust of ignorance and backwardness and raise the nation to the highest peaks of civilization and progress. Since the Imam of all Shi'as is the gate of knowledge, his followers are expected to be in the vanguard of those who seek all types of knowledge.
6. Shi'as who follow Ahl al-Bayt have to unite and renounce all types of political factionalism and regional blocs and work hard to unite all Muslims.

If Shi'as follow these recommendations which I have derived from the Book of Allah, the Most Exalted One, from the Sunnah of His Gracious Prophet (S), and from the School of Thought of Ahl al-Bayt (as) ..., peace and tranquillity will then prevail. If we change whatever ignorance or bias towards anyone besides Allah, our poverty and humiliation will be turned into wealth and honor, and the Imam of our time, al-Mahdi (as), will come out to fill the earth with peace and equity after being filled with injustice and oppression.

And the last of our supplication is: All Praise is due to Allah, Lord of the Worlds.

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