

Chapter 6: The Exceptionally Unique

الْوَيْتْرَ الْمَوْتُورَ

The Exceptionally Unique

Commentary

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The original meaning of *al-witr* in the Arabic language is *al-fard* (single) and *man la thaniya lah* (one who does not have a second)¹. And *al-mawtur* which is an adjective of *al-witr* also means the same, but is brought as an emphasis² in this case. A similar example³ has come in the Qur`an with regard to *hijr* (forbidden) and *mahjur* (prohibited), the latter being an emphasis of the former:

يَوْمَ يَرَوْنَ الْمَلَائِكَةَ لَا بُشْرَىٰ يَوْمَئِذٍ لِلْمُجْرِمِينَ وَيَقُولُونَ حَجْرًا مَّحْجُورًا

On the day when they shall see the angels, there shall be no joy on that day for the guilty, and they shall say: It is a forbidden thing totally prohibited. (25:22)

And in the well-known supplication of *al-Sabah*, Amir al-mu`minin `Ali (AS) tries to emphasize *al-layl* (the night) with the adjective *al-alyal* (nightly):

صَلِّ اللَّهُمَّ عَلَى الدَّلِيلِ إِلَيْكَ فِي اللَّيْلِ الأَلْيَلِ وَالْمَاسِكِ مِنْ أَسْبَابِكَ بِحَبْلِ الشَّرَفِ
الأَطْوَلِ

Bless, oh Allah, the guide to You in the darkest night, him who, of Thy ropes, clings to the cord of the longest nobility...4

Some scholars opine⁵ that *al-witr* refers to Imam al-Husayn (AS)'s unique spiritual status which the Holy Prophet (S) and the Infallible Imams of the Ahl al-Bayt (AS) also possess. Hence, in relation to the rest of the creation an infallible leader (*al-imam al-ma'sum*) the like of Imam al-Husayn (AS) occupies a unique station, and hence is *al-witr al-mawtur*.

Amir al-mu'minin 'Ali (AS) describing an Infallible Imam as:

لَا يُوجَدُ لَهُ مَثِيلٌ وَلَا يَقُومُ لَهُ بَدِيلٌ

He is peerless, no substitute can represent him.⁶

And in another tradition, Imam al-Ridha (AS) describing the qualities of an infallible Imam, says:

الإِمَامُ وَاحِدٌ دَهْرِهِ لَا يُدَانِيهِ أَحَدٌ

The Imam is unique in his time. **None can come closer to him in rank...**⁷

We may also say that Imam al-Husayn (AS) is a manifestation of the Divine Name *al-Witru*. The Holy Prophet (S), after speaking about the Divine Names, is reported to have said:

إِنَّهُ وَتْرٌ، يُحِبُّ الوِتْرَ

Surely He [Allah] is Unique, and He Loves the unique⁸

Expounding the meaning of *Ya Witru* in his commentary on the supplication of *al-Jawshan al-Kabir*, Mulla Hadi Sabzawari says:

(يَا وَتْرُ) أَيُّ أَنَّهُ الوجودُ الصَّرفُ البسيطُ الذي لا يخالطه سنخٌ أُخرى من ماهية أو

مادة أو قوة أو استعداد...

Ya Witr means that He is Sheer Existence, which is Simple [Non-composite], and nothing accompanies it like quiddity (*mahiyya*), matter (*madda*), potentiality (*quwwa*) or potential (*isti'dad*)...9

The corollary of being 'sheer existence' (*al-wujud al-sirf*) and 'non-compositeness' (*al-basata*) is uniqueness. This is because it is impossible for a non-composite entity to have a second. Hence, no entity can be likened to His Sacred Essence, nor can any entity be compared to Him.

Imam 'Ali (AS) explaining the meaning of the phrase *Allahu Akbar* says:

يَعْنِي الْوَاحِدُ الْأَحَدُ الَّذِي لَيْسَ كَمِثْلِهِ شَيْءٌ لَا يُقَاسُ بِشَيْءٍ...

It means that He is One, Non-composite, the like of which there is nothing, and nothing can be compared to Him... 10

The Ahl al-Bayt (AS), being the most perfect manifestations of the Divine Names, enjoy such an exalted station near Allah, that none can be compared to them. They undoubtedly are manifestations of the Divine Name *al-Witr*, which means مَنْ لَا ثَانِي لَهُ (One who does not have a second). In a tradition narrated from Zurara, Imam al-Baqir (AS) says:

وَإِنَّا لَا نُوصَفُ وَكَيْفَ يُوصَفُ قَوْمٌ رَفَعَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُمْ الرَّجْسَ وَهُوَ الشَّكُّ

And surely we cannot be described, and how can a people be described from whom Allah has removed impurity, which is doubt... 11

Apparently the doubt that is spoken about in this tradition is related to the realities of the Creator and His creation. The Ahl al-Bayt (AS), due to their lofty spiritual status, transcend the lower levels of conviction and enjoy the level of *haqq al-yaqin* or even higher. Therefore the absence of doubt should not be conjectured to be merely in the conceptual level.

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Some commentators give the possibility that this verse refers to Imam al-Husayn (AS)'s uniqueness with regard to everyone, including Prophet Muhammad (S) and the other members of his infallible progeny (AS). This however is not because his spiritual station is higher than theirs, for all of them unite in the Muhammadan Light (al-Nur al-Muhammadi). In a conversation with Salman and Jundub, Imam 'Ali (AS) says:

أَنَا أَحْيِي وَأُمِيتُ بِإِذْنِ رَبِّي، أَنَا أَنْبِئُكُمْ بِمَا تَأْكُلُونَ وَمَا تَدَّخِرُونَ فِي بُيُوتِكُمْ بِإِذْنِ رَبِّي، وَأَنَا عَالِمٌ بِضَمَائِرِ قُلُوبِكُمْ وَالْأَيْمَةَ مِنْ أَوْلَادِي يَعْلَمُونَ وَيَفْعَلُونَ هَذَا إِذَا أَحْبَبُوا وَأَرَادُوا لِأَنَّا كُلُّنَا وَاحِدٌ، أَوْلْنَا مُحَمَّدٌ وَأَخْرَانَا مُحَمَّدٌ وَأَوْسَطْنَا مُحَمَّدٌ وَكُلُّنَا مُحَمَّدٌ فَلَاتُفَرِّقُوا بَيْنَنَا...

I revive the dead, and make the living ones die by my Lord's permission; I can inform you about what you eat and what you store in your homes by my Lord's permission; and I know what is hidden in your hearts; and the Imams from my progeny (AS) can [also] know this and do the aforesaid if they desired and wanted, because all of us are one: **the first among us is Muhammad, the middle one among us is Muhammad, the last among us is Muhammad, and all of us are Muhammad; therefore do not differentiate between us.** 12

The reason, as some great scholars like the late 'Allama al-Tabataba'i¹³ and Ayatullah Sa'adat Parwar (may Allah elevate their noble spirits) expound¹⁴, why Imam al-Husayn (AS) occupies a unique station, is his utilization of the greater opportunity to manifest his perfect qualities by carrying out his great movement and sacrificing everything he had for the sake of the Only Beloved. The Holy Qur'an says that for everyone are stations according to what they did:

وَلِكُلِّ دَرَجَاتٍ مِمَّا عَمِلُوا وَيُؤْتِيهِمْ أَعْمَالَهُمْ وَهُمْ لَا يُظْلَمُونَ

And for all are degrees according to what they did, and that He may pay them back fully their deeds and they shall not be wronged. (46: 19)

If the other Imams (AS) faced the same conditions that Imam al-Husayn (AS) had encountered, they too would have done what he did. The opportunity however was gifted to Imam al-Husayn (AS) and accordingly he acquired a station that is unparalleled. The following tradition refers to a unique station for Imam al-Husayn (AS):

رُويَ عَنِ الرَّسُولِ الْأَعْظَمِ قَالَ لِزَوْجَتِهِ أُمَّ سَلَمَةَ: أَوْحَى اللَّهُ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ إِلَيَّ أَنَّ لَهُ

(أَيُّ لِحُسَيْنٍ) دَرَجَةٌ لَا يَنَالُهَا أَحَدٌ مِنَ الْمَخْلُوقِينَ.

The Most Noble Messenger (S) said to his wife Umm Salama: Allah Revealed unto me that verily he (al-Husayn) has a station which none of the creation would attain. 15

And Imam al-Husayn (AS) just before his departure from Madina sees the Prophet (S) in his dream saying to him:

وَإِنَّ لَكَ فِي الْجَنَّةِ دَرَجَاتٍ لَا تَنَالُهَا إِلَّا بِالشَّهَادَةِ

And indeed you have stations in the Paradise that you shall not attain save with martyrdom. 16

A Peerless Contingent Being

In his masterpiece *Jalawat-e-Rabbani* Ayatullah Muhammad Ridha Rabbani (may Allah elevate his spirit) believes and tries to establish that Imam al-Husayn (AS) is a peerless contingent being (*mumkin al-wujud bila sharik*). At one place he says: In our book *Tawhid-e-Rabbani* we have comprehensively explained the meaning of the magnificent name Allah. One of its meanings is, “*aliha al-khalq ‘an darki ma’iyyatih wal ihata bikayfiyyatih*” (The creation is baffled in comprehending His whatness and apprehending His howness) 17, which the cleaver of the knowledge of the disciplines of the foremost and latter ones and the fifth brilliant star of Divine Leadership and Guardianship, Hadhrat Imam al-Baqir (AS) has mentioned. Imam al-Baqir (AS) has said that Allah is that God before Whose Essence and Attributes the intellects of the entire creation are bewildered, confounded and mystified.

Sa’di, the Persian poet says:

جهان متفق بر الهيتش

فرو مانده در كنه ماهيتش.

*The entire creation is unanimous in his Godhood
Unable to apprehend the Essence of His Being*

Thereafter Rabbani says that Imam al-Husayn (AS), who is a manifestation of the Name Allah, likewise,

confounds the intellects and overcomes the human beings with perplexity and amazement.

فيك يا أعجوبة الكون غدا الفكر كليلاً. أنت حيرت ذوي اللب وبلبلت العقولا.

O the marvel of existence, the intellect is exhausted in You; You confounded people of insight and confused the intellects

این حسین کیست که عالم همه دیوانه اوست

این چه شمعی است که جانها همه پروانه اوست

Who is this Husayn, that the entire world is mad after him; What candle is this, that all the souls are its moth(s)?

Imam Husayn (AS) not only puzzled and astounded the human world and realm of humanity, but also made the most exalted angels and the residents of the Divine throne as well as the entire chain of the sacred intellects, astonished at his display of intense love and self-sacrifice in the path of the Eternal and Infinite Beloved. 18

الْوَتْرُ الْمَوْتُورُ

The martyr, whose near ones have been killed, but their blood have not been avenged for

Lexicologists like al-Turayhi in his *Majma' al-Bahrayn*, have defined the word *mawtur* as one whose near one has been unjustly killed but his blood has not been avenged for as yet¹⁹. And since he is *mawtur*, he necessarily is the *tha'ir* (avenger of the blood) as well. Muhammad bin Muslima in the battle of Khaybar employs a similar expression when he tells the Holy Prophet (S):

أَنَا الْمَوْتُورُ النَّائِرُ

I am one whose kin has been unjustly killed but his blood not yet avenged, and I am the avenger.²⁰

The word *witr* also signifies ‘the blood that has been spilled unjustly’²¹. Therefore when we address Imam al-Husayn (AS) as *al-witr al-mawtur* we mean he is the martyr whose near ones and companions were unjustly killed, but their blood has not been avenged for. Hence he is the avenger of their blood.

Some commentators opine that if we consider the Imam (AS) to be the one who would avenge the blood of his near ones, then that would transpire during his return to this world (*raj'a*). With regard to *raj'a*, Hamran narrates from Imam Muhammad al-Baqir (AS):

إِنَّ أَوَّلَ مَنْ يَرْجِعُ لَجَارِكُمُ الْحُسَيْنِ فَيَمْلِكُ حَتَّى تَقَعَ حَاجِبَاهُ عَلَى عَيْنَيْهِ مِنَ الْكِبَرِ

Indeed the first one to return is your refuge al-Husayn (AS), who will rule [for so many years] until his eyebrows would hang over his eyes, out of old age.²²

الْوَتْرَ الْمَوْتُورَ

The Alone who was Rendered Solitary

Sometimes the word *witr* is translated as ‘alone’, whereas the word *mawtur* as ‘one whose relation is slain, and so is separated from him and rendered solitary’.²³ Imam al-Husayn (AS) was rendered solitary after he lost his near ones and noble companions and stood alone to fight against the forces of evil.

Some analysts of this radiant *Ziyarat* believe that the enemies of Islam right from the time of the Holy Prophet (S) planned how to isolate and make people be indifferent of the household of the Holy Prophet (S). The word *al-witr* can also allude to this situation that the Imam (AS) experienced. Therefore he was the lonely one, whose relation was slain and who was rendered solitary.

We must understand that the Imam (AS), due to his sublime rank was even lonelier than his companions and family members in the plains of Karbala. The station of Imamate is unique and has no parallel. In this sense he was not only from the strangers (*ghuraba'*) like his companions, but also *gharib al-ghuraba'* (the stranger of the strangers). In a *Ziyarat* narrated from Imam al-Sadiq (AS) we address Imam al-Husayn (AS) as follows:

السَّلَامُ عَلَيْكَ يَا غَرِيبَ الْغُرَبَاءِ

Peace be unto you, o stranger of the strangers.²⁴

In this state of intense *ghurba*, the enemies did not spare the lives of his noble family members and companions, and rendered him solitary and alone. It is in these moments that he cried from the depths of his heart:

هَلْ مِنْ نَاصِرٍ يَنْصُرُ الذُّرِّيَّةَ الْأَطْهَارَ، هَلْ مِنْ مُجِيرٍ لِأَبْنَاءِ الْبَتُولِ، هَلْ مِنْ ذَابٍ
يَذُبُّ عَنْ حَرَمِ الرَّسُولِ؟

Is there any helper to help the immaculate progeny? Is there any protector for the children of al-Batul (AS)? Is there any defender to guard the sanctuary of the Messenger of Allah?

Perhaps Imam al-Husayn (AS) summed up his message to his lovers in these short, but very meaningful expressions. The call was made to ‘the future’ and every receptive heart can hear it every moment. Imam al-Husayn (AS) was the epitome of Islam, and his call was the call for the emancipation of Islam. If we are receptive enough to hear his call, then every step of ours must be geared towards assisting Islam. If we struggle to eradicate sin and try to perfect ourselves as well as others and revive Islam, then we do respond to his call. Otherwise we should not be surprised if we also rank among those who left him alone. May Allah protect us from being among those who leave him alone.

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The Alone and Deprived

Sometimes the word *al-mawtur* is employed to mean ‘one who is deprived’ (*al-manqus*). The following tradition of the Holy Prophet (S) is translated taking this meaning into consideration:

الْمَوْتُورُ أَهْلُهُ وَمَالُهُ مَنْ ضَيَّعَ صَلَاةَ الْعَصْرِ

One who is deprived of his family and wealth is one who wastes the prayer of ‘Asr²⁵

Therefore if we take the word *witr* to mean ‘alone’, the phrase would mean ‘the alone who was deprived of his hometown, family and wealth’.

1. Sayyid Husayn al-Hamadani, *Sharh al-Asma' al-Husna*, p. 143

2. This variable has been discussed by great scholars like al-Naraqī in his *Mushkilat al-Akhbar* (p. 301) and al-Shubbar in

his Masabih al-Anwar (p. 341). 'Allama al-Tabataba'i also translated al-witr al-mawtur as 'the unique one' (Rukhshad, Dar Mahzar-e-'Allameye Tabataba'i, p. 184)

3. Other examples that have come in Arabic literature are: bardun barid, shi'run sha'ir, etc.

4. 'Allama al-Majlisi, Bihar al-Anwar, v. 84, p. 339

5. I heard this opinion from Ayatullah Ansari Shirazi, from whom I would study the 9th volume of the magnum opus al-Asfar of Mulla Sadra.

6. 'Allama al-Majlisi, Bihar al-Anwar, v. 25, pp. 169-170

7. Shaykh al-Kulayni, Al-Kafi, v.1, p. 201

8. 'Allama al-Tabataba'i, al-Mizan, v.8, p. 359

9. Mulla Hadi Sabzawari, Sharh al-Asma' al-Husna, p. 722

10. Shaykh al-Saduq, 'Ilal al-Shara'i', v.2, p. 320

11. Shaykh al-Kulayni, al-Kafi, v.2, p. 182

12. 'Allama al-Majlisi, Bihar al-Anwar, v.26, p.6

13. Muhammad Husayn Rukhshad, Dar Mahzare 'Allameye Tabataba'i, p. 184

14. Ayatullah Sa'adat Parwar, Furugh-e-Shahadat, p.40

15. 'Allama al-Majlisi, Bihar al-Anwar, v. 44, p.225

16. 'Allama al-Majlisi, Bihar al-Anwar, v. 58, p.182

17. 'Allama al-Majlisi, Bihar al-Anwar, v.3, p. 222

18. Ayatullah Muhammad Ridha Rabbani, Jalawat-e-Rabbani, v.1, pp. 278-279.

19. Shaykh al-Turayhi, Majma' al-Bahrayn, v.4, p. 463

20. Al-Zubaydi, Taj al-'Arus, v.7, p. 582

21. Mirza Tehrani, Shifa'al-Sudur, p. 165

22. 'Allama al-Majlisi, Bihar al-Anwar, v.53, p.43

23. Al-Zubaydi, Taj al-'Arus, v. 7, p.583

24. 'Allama al-Majlisi, Bihar al-Anwar, v.98, p.230

25. 'Allama al-Majlisi, Bihar al-Anwar, v.80, p.28

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