

Innate Recognition of Allah and Its Role in Salat

According to the verses of the Holy Qur'an and the traditions of the Ahlul Bayt ('a), any person who steps into this world, bears the recognition of Allah. This introduction was in a world prior to this and was firmly ingrained in his heart. Imam As-Sadiq ('a) says,

ثَبَّتَتِ الْمَعْرِفَةُ وَ نَسُوا الْوَقْتَ. وَسَيَذْكُرُونَهُ يَوْمًا. وَ لَوْلَا ذَلِكَ لَمْ يَدْرِ أَحَدٌ مَنْ خَالَقَهُ وَ لَا مَنْ رَازَقَهُ.

“Recognition (of Allah) was established and they forgot the occasion. Soon, they will remember it on a day. If this (recognition) was not there, none would have followed who is his Creator and who is his sustainer.”¹

Allah the Almighty orders,

فَأَقِمْ وَجْهَكَ لِلدِّينِ حَنِيفًا فِطْرَةَ اللَّهِ الَّتِي فَطَرَ النَّاسَ عَلَيْهَا لَا تَبْدِيلَ لِخَلْقِ اللَّهِ ذَلِكَ الدِّينُ الْقِيمُ وَلَكِنَّ أَكْثَرَ النَّاسِ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ

“Then turn your face towards the religion, being upright. The nature of Allah on which He has created man. There is no change in Allah’s creation. This is the strong religion but most people know not.” (Qur’an, 30:30)

Explaining the above verse, Imam As-Sadiq ('a) says,

فَطَرَ هُمْ عَلَى التَّوْحِيدِ عِنْدَ الْمِيثَاقِ عَلَى مَعْرِفَتِهِ أَنَّهُ رَبُّهُمْ...

“He created them on monotheism at the covenant (meethaaq) on His recognition that He is their Lord...”²

Imam Muhammad Al-Baqir (‘a), elucidates the term uprightness (*hanifiyah*) in the verse,

حُنَفَاءَ لِلَّهِ غَيْرَ مُشْرِكِينَ بِهِ.

“...being upright for Allah, and not among those who associate with Him.” (Qur’an, 22:31)

هِيَ الْفِطْرَةُ الَّتِي فَطَرَ اللَّهُ النَّاسَ عَلَيْهَا. لَا تَبْدِيلَ لِخَلْقِ اللَّهِ.

“It is the nature (*fitrat*) on which Allah has created mankind. There is no change in Allah’s creation.”

Imam (‘a) reiterates,

فَطَرَ هُمْ اللَّهُ عَلَى الْمَعْرِفَةِ.

“Allah has created them on recognition.”³

Thus, Allah the Almighty has placed His recognition in the soil (*tenat*) of every creature, mixed it with his essence and ruled out the possibility of change in this form. This is the covenant that Allah has taken from all His creatures before their arrival in this world and is attached with them in this world as well to complete His argument upon them. Allah the Almighty informs,

وَإِذْ أَخَذَ رَبُّكَ مِنْ بَنِي آدَمَ مِنْ ظُهُورِهِمْ ذُرِّيَّتَهُمْ وَأَشْهَدَهُمْ عَلَى أَنْفُسِهِمْ أَلَسْتُ بِرَبِّكُمْ قَالُوا بَلَى شَهِدْنَا أَنْ تَقُولُوا يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ إِنَّا كُنَّا عَنْ هَذَا غَافِلِينَ. أَوْ تَقُولُوا إِنَّمَا أَشْرَكَ آبَاؤُنَا مِنْ قَبْلُ وَكُنَّا ذُرِّيَّةً مِنْ بَعْدِهِمْ أَفَتُهْلِكُنَا بِمَا فَعَلَ الْمُبْطِلُونَ

“And (remember) when your Lord removed from the backs of the progeny of Adam (‘a), their off-springs and made them witness against themselves, ‘Am I not your Lord?’ They all said, ‘Yes. We testify.’ (This was) so that you may not say on the day of Judgement, ‘Surely we were unaware of this.’ Or that you say, ‘Our forefathers were polytheists from before and we are only their off-springs. Will you destroy us for what the wrong-doers did?’” (Qur’an, 7:172–173)

So, all the humans have been created on the nature of Allah’s recognition (*ma’arifatullah*) and hence the question of doubt and ambiguity concerning the Almighty. Prophets of Allah (peace be upon them) who came to invite the people towards Him, used to say,

أَفِي اللَّهِ شَكٌّ فَاطِرِ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ.

“Are you in doubt about Allah, the Creator of the heavens and the earth?” (Qur’an, 14:10)

Imam Al-Baqir (‘a) says that the Holy Prophet (‘s) said,

كُلُّ مَوْلُودٍ يُوَلَّدُ عَلَى الْفِطْرَةِ. يَعْنِي: عَلَى الْمَعْرِفَةِ بِأَنَّ اللَّهَ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ خَالِقُهُ. فَذَلِكَ قَوْلُهُ: وَ لَئِنْ سَأَلْتَهُمْ مَنْ خَلَقَ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ لَيَقُولَنَّ اللَّهُ.

“Every child is born on fitrat (God-knowing nature). That is, on the recognition that surely Allah (Mighty and Glorified be He) is his Creator. And this is His saying, ‘And if you ask them who has created the heavens and the earth, they would certainly say, Allah.’”⁴

Therefore, all the human beings, at the time of their birth, possess the recognition of Allah, His Unity, (*Tauhid*) His being their Creator and Sustainer in their nature. But this recognition is simple (*baset*). That is, it is present in their nature but they are not aware of its existence. Had they continued to live in this very way, and there did not come any reminder in their entire lives, they would be neither believers nor unbelievers or polytheists. Someone asked Imam As-Sadiq (‘a) concerning the verse,

كَانَ النَّاسُ أُمَّةً وَاحِدَةً فَبَعَثَ اللَّهُ النَّبِيِّينَ مُبَشِّرِينَ وَمُنذِرِينَ

“People were one nation. Then Allah raised the Prophets as givers of glad tidings and as warners.” (Qur’an, 2:213)

He (‘a) replied,

لَمْ يَكُونُوا عَلَى هُدًى. كَانُوا عَلَى فِطْرَةِ اللَّهِ الَّتِي فَطَرَهُمْ عَلَيْهَا. لَا تَبْدِيلَ لِخَلْقِ اللَّهِ. وَ لَمْ يَكُونُوا لِيَهْتَدُوا حَتَّى يَهْدِيَهُمُ اللَّهُ. أَمَا تَسْمَعُ يَقُولُ إِبْرَاهِيمُ: لَئِنْ لَمْ يَهْدِنِي رَبِّي لَأَكُونَنَّ مِنَ الْقَوْمِ الضَّالِّينَ. ” أَي: نَاسِيًا لِلْمِيثَاقِ.

“They were not on guidance. They were on Allah’s nature on which He created them. There is no change in Allah’s creation. And they could not be guided till Allah guided them. Have you not heard Ibrahim saying, ‘Had my Lord not guided me, I would definitely have been among the deviated ones.’ (Qur’an, 7:77), i.e. I would have been among those who forgot the covenant.”⁵

When Hazrat Ibrahim (‘a), among the greatest monotheists and those who have recognised Allah, confesses in this manner, then how is it possible that others can acquire the cognition of Allah through their intellects and understanding?! How can they recognise a thing that is beyond their intellects and remote from their understanding?

Allah the Almighty says to the Holy Prophet (‘s),

لَيْسَ عَلَيْكَ هُدَاهُمْ وَلَكِنَّ اللَّهَ يَهْدِي مَنْ يَشَاءُ

“Their guidance is not on you but Allah guides whosoever He pleases.” (Qur’an, 2:272)

لَا يُكَلِّفُ اللَّهُ نَفْسًا إِلَّا وُسْعَهَا

“Allah does not place responsibility on a soul but within its capacity.” (Qur’an, 2:286)

لَا يُكَلِّفُ اللَّهُ نَفْسًا إِلَّا مَا آتَاهَا

“Allah does not place responsibility on a soul but what has been given to it.” (Qur’an, 65:7)

Abdul A’laa says I asked Imam As–Sadiq (‘a): ‘Has Allah provided man any faculty by which he can acquire the recognition of Allah?’ He (‘a) replied in the negative. He questioned again, ‘Has he imposed on them a responsibility to acquire His recognition?’ Once again Imam (‘a) answered, ‘No. Explanation is only from Allah’s side.’ Thereafter, he (‘a) recited the last two verses quoted above.’

Imam As–Sadiq (‘a) says,

لَيْسَ لِلَّهِ عَلَى خَلْقِهِ أَنْ يَعْرِفُوا. وَلِلْخَلْقِ عَلَى اللَّهِ أَنْ يَعْرِفَهُمْ. وَاللَّهُ عَلَى الْخَلْقِ إِذَا عَرَفَهُمْ أَنْ يَقْبَلُوا.

“Allah has not imposed any responsibility on His creatures that they recognise Him. It is upon Allah alone to introduce Himself to His creatures. And it is the duty of the creatures that when Allah introduces Himself, they should accept His recognition.”⁶

In yet another tradition, he (‘a) said,

لَمْ يُكَلِّفِ اللَّهُ الْعِبَادَ الْمَعْرِفَةَ. وَلَمْ يَجْعَلْ لَهُمْ إِلَيْهَا سَبِيلًا.

“Allah has not placed any responsibility on His creatures vis-à-vis recognition. Nor has he provided them any path for it.”⁷

Therefore, notwithstanding the fact that Allah, on account of His grace and nobility, has instilled His recognition in the creatures, but for His munificence, none would be able to realise and find Him in the concealed depths of their essence.

Here, another question crops up and that is: What is the use of prior world’s introduction in this life? The answer is that firstly, it is not necessary that this innate recognition be only for this world. Rather, it is quite possible that it might be simply for the sake of completing the argument. Secondly, if prior recognition was not available– as the traditions have stated explicitly– none would be able to recognise their Lord, their Creator and their Sustainer.

Therefore, Allah has not only introduced Himself in the previous world by instilling this cognition in the essence of the people, in fact, even in this world, which is a place of examination and tribulations, it is He Who has lifted the veils of negligence and forgetfulness from the hidden recognition in their nature and guided them towards it. Evidently, the tradition of Allah is that this guidance can be achieved only through the media of causes like sending of the Prophets (‘a), His signs, placing man in difficulties and problems, etc.

Amir al Mu’minin (‘a) considers guiding the people to the innate recognition and reminding them of their covenant to their Lord, as the important aims of sending the Prophets (peace on them):

فَبَعَثَ فِيهِمْ رَسُولَهُ، وَوَاتَرَ إِلَيْهِمْ أَنْبِيَاءَهُ لِيَسْتَأْذِنُوهُمْ مِيثَاقَ فِطْرَتِهِ وَ يُذَكِّرُوهُمْ مَنْسِيَّ
نِعْمَتِهِ...

“Then He raised among them His messengers, and sent successively to them His Prophets, to make them fulfill the covenant of their nature, and remind them of His forgotten bounties...”⁸

And Allah the Almighty addresses His messenger (‘s) thus:

فَذَكِّرْ إِنَّمَا أَنْتَ مُذَكِّرٌ. لَسْتَ عَلَيْهِمْ بِمُصَيِّرٍ.

“Then remind; for you are only a reminder. You are not dominant over them.” (Qur’an, 88:21-22)

Divine emissaries were sent so that they could draw the attention of mankind to the concealed recognition in their nature. They performed this task in various ways and adopting numerous methods. Similarly, their successors (*awsiyaa*) too followed in the footsteps of the Prophets (‘a) and invited the people towards their Lord.

A man came to Imam As-Sadiq (‘a) and requested, “O son of Allah’s messenger! Guide me to Allah as to who is He. For indeed the disputants have argued with me a lot in this regard and have even confused me.”

Imam As-Sadiq (‘a) replied,

“O slave of Allah! Have you ever boarded an ark?”

He replied in the affirmative. Imam (‘a) questioned him further,

“Has it ever happened that the ark was wrecked and there was no other ship which could rescue you? Nor did you know swimming by which you could reach to the shore?” When he replied in the affirmative again, Imam (‘a) questioned,

“At this juncture (when all your hopes have been severed), did you not rely on **some-one** who could save you from this difficulty?” He exclaimed, “Of course.” Imam As-Sadiq (‘a) confirmed,

“The One who was your hope in that moment of calamity and from whom you expected salvation when there was no other saviour, a refuge when there was no other refuge...is Allah”⁹

Therefore, it is clear that philosophical discussions and theological arguments did not bring this man nearer to Allah. But, Imam As-Sadiq (‘a), in his simple and lucid style, reminded him of his Lord, introduced in his (*fitrat*) nature. Of course, this is one of the methods to guide a man towards the recognition of his Lord.

This method which is called as that of difficulties and calamities (*basa wa zarra*) has been used extensively in Qur’an. Allah the Almighty reminds,

رَبُّكُمْ الَّذِي يُزْجِي لَكُمْ الْفُلْكَ فِي الْبَحْرِ لِتَبْتَغُوا مِنْ فَضْلِهِ إِنَّهُ كَانَ بِكُمْ رَحِيمًا.
وَإِذَا مَسَّكُمْ الضُّرُّ فِي الْبَحْرِ ضَلَّ مَنْ تَدْعُونَ إِلَّا إِيَّاهُ فَلَمَّا نَجَّكُمْ إِلَى الْبَرِّ
أَعْرَضْتُمْ وَكَانَ الْإِنْسَانُ كَفُورًا.

“Your Lord is He Who speeds the ships for you in the sea that you may seek of His grace; surely He is ever Merciful to you. And when distress afflicts you in the sea, away go those whom you call except He; but when He brings you safe to the land, you turn aside; and man is ever ungrateful.” (Qur’an, 17:66–67)

Another method which has been extensively relied upon by the Qur’an and the traditions of the infallible Imams (‘a), is to remind man of the bounties of Allah. Ranging from man himself, to the smallest dust particle, not only the existence of every creature, but even their survival is bonded with Allah’s Power and Grace.

Imam Muhammad Al-Baqir (‘a) reveals,

أَوْحَى اللَّهُ تَعَالَى مُوسَى - عَلَيْهِ السَّلَام - : أَحْبَبْنِي وَحَبَّبْنِي إِلَى خَلْقِي. قَالَ مُوسَى: يَا رَبِّ إِنَّكَ لَتَعْلَمُ أَنَّهُ لَيْسَ أَحَدٌ أَحَبَّ إِلَيَّ مِنْكَ. فَكَيْفَ لِي بِقُلُوبِ الْعِبَادِ؟ فَأَوْحَى اللَّهُ إِلَيْهِ: فَذَكِّرْهُمْ نِعْمَتِي وَآيَاتِي. فَإِنَّهُمْ لَا يَذْكُرُونَ مِنِّي إِلَّا خَيْرًا.

“Allah, the High, revealed to Musa (‘a), ‘Love Me and make My creatures love Me.’ Hazrat Musa (‘a) said, ‘O Lord! You know that nobody is dearer to me than You. But how can I change the hearts of the servants?’ On this, Allah revealed to him, ‘Remind them of My bounties and endowments. Then certainly they will not remember anything but good about Me.’¹⁰

The late Ayatullah Mirza Mahdi Isfahaani (may Allah’s mercy be on him) opines in this regard, “The aim of rationalization through the signs is to prevent the denial of Allah’s existence (*hadd e nafi o ta’til*). For, the existence of a creature is impossible without a Creator...Moreover, the conclusion of this reasoning in divine science, is perplexity and confusion in the recognition of His Being, the Most High, –and it is obligatory that it should be thus– and therefore, He is called as ‘Allah’.”¹¹

Thus, it is clear that the natural recognition of Allah implies that He on account of His grace and nobility has bestowed His recognition to the entire mankind and ingrained it in their essence and created them on it. But as this recognition is simple (baseet), they are unaware of its existence in their essence and whenever Allah the Almighty so desires, He will remind them about it and draw their attention.

Of course, their reminder and attention has different levels and grades. Some reminders are very severe and intense while others are weak and yet others are moderate. We have already stated that it is a divine tradition that He usually makes His slave attentive towards Himself and reminds them about this recognition on different occasions, of which we have mentioned a few. One of these instances is Salat.

In Salat, Allah the Almighty remembers His servants and this remembrance is much more than what the servants remember of their Lord. In Salat, the slaves, feeling their need, paucity, degradation and

dependence, raise their hands to beg their Lord, the Self-Sufficient, the Needless. Allah the Almighty fulfils their needs and helps them achieve their desires.

It is known that the most important and greatest desire of a cognizant servant is to attain proximity with His Lord, meeting Allah and rising to the highest levels of recognition. Allah the Almighty on His part, according to His promise, helps him reach to the unprecedented degrees. As a result, when he finds himself in the presence of the Almighty, he realises His greatness and might to such an extent that he is completely oblivious of everything else around him.

Previously, we have narrated the statement of Amir al Mu'minin ('a) that he said,

وَمَعْنَى “قَدَقَامَتِ الصَّلَاةُ” فِيءِ الْإِقَامَةِ أَي: حَانَ وَقْتُ الزِّيَارَةِ وَ الْمُنَاجَاةِ وَقَضَاءِ الْحَوَائِجِ وَدَرَكِ الْمُنَى وَالْوُصُولِ إِلَى اللَّهِ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ وَإِلَى كَرَامَتِهِ وَعَفْوِهِ وَرِضْوَانِهِ وَغُفْرَانِهِ.

“And the meaning of ‘surely the prayers have been established’ in Iqamah is that: ‘The time of visitation, conversation, fulfillment of needs, comprehending the desires and reaching to Allah (Mighty and Glorified be He), His nobility, pardon, satisfaction and forgiveness has arrived.’ Imam Muhammad Al-Baqir ('a) says that Allah the Almighty has said, *“The best thing by which My servants can gain proximity to Me are the obligatory acts who performance has been imposed upon them. And certainly, My servant comes so close to Me by performing the recommended acts that I love him. And when I love him, I become his ear by which he listens, his eyes by which he sees, his tongue by which he speaks and his hand by which he takes. When he calls Me, I answer him and if he asks Me for something, I grant him.”*¹²

The Late Ayatullah Mirza Mahdi Isfahani (may Allah’s mercy be on him) says: True divine recognition cannot be gained except through Him and the reins of this recognition are in His hands. It is upon Him to introduce Himself to His servants. Thus, seeing Him, meeting Him and recognising Him is entirely dependent on Him. Hence, He has made some houses on the earth for His vision and recognition and named them as ‘mosques’.

The timings of Salat are the timings of meeting and recognising Him. To announce the timings of this ascension, He has ordained the Adhan. To attend to His presence, He has imposed some conditions like cleanliness of the body and clothes and the mode of dressing.

The basis of this recognition is to stand before Him with respect and attention and this is done through announcing His greatness (Allahu Akbar), praising Him (Alhamdulillah), purifying Him (Subbuhun Qudus), invoking, modesty, humility, a sense of degradation and lowliness, etc.

As there is no limit for the recognition of Allah and even the levels of this recognition are infinite, hence

Salat has been made obligatory for everybody till their last breath. Anyone who tastes the sweetness of prayers and achieves its aim, will realise that his advent in this world and his imprisonment in this abode, is only for recognition.

For, a person's recognition is incomplete till he enters the house of deprivation and realisation and his changing from one condition to another so that he attains the levels of recognition which cannot be achieved but in such a house.

Therefore, he will know the reason for his arrival in this house of examination and test. Because if man does not witness the conditions of degradation, poverty and helplessness, he will never know might, needlessness and perfection. Consequently, he will never know who is the source of this might and needlessness. And one who is not aware of the pains of veil and ignorance, will never recognise the value of recognition, knowledge and vision.”¹³

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1. Ilalush shar'ia, p. 118
 2. Tauhid, p.330
 3. Tauhid, p.330
 4. Tauhid, p.331
 5. Tafsir, Ayyashi, vol. 1, p. 104
 6. Usul al Kafi, vol. 1, p. 164
 7. Bihar ul Anwar, vol. 5, p. 222
 8. Nahj al Balagha, Sermon 1
 9. Tauhid, p. 230
 10. Bihar ul Anwar, vol. 70, p. 22
 11. Abwab al huda, p. 17
 12. Usul al Kafi, vol. 2, p. 352
 13. Abwab al huda, p. 125-127

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