

Worship and Submission

Allah the Almighty declares,

وَمَا خَلَقْتُ الْجِنَّ وَالْإِنْسَ إِلَّا لِيَعْبُدُونِ

“I have not created the Jinns and mankind except to worship Me.” (Qur’an, 51:56)

وَقَضَىٰ رَبُّكَ أَلَّا تَعْبُدُوا إِلَّا إِيَّاهُ

“And your Lord has decreed that you will not worship anybody but Him.” (Qur’an, 17:23)

وَلَقَدْ بَعَثْنَا فِي كُلِّ أُمَّةٍ رَّسُولًا أَنْ اعْبُدُوا اللَّهَ وَاجْتَنِبُوا الطَّاغُوتَ

“And indeed We sent in every nation a Prophet saying, ‘worship Allah and keep away from the rebellious ones.’ (Qur’an, 16:36)

Explaining the first verse, Imam As-Sadiq (‘a) says,

“He created them so that they follow His command, i.e. they worship Him.”¹

Similarly, in another exegesis of the above verse, he (‘a) says,

خَلَقَهُمُ لِلْعِبَادَةِ.

“He created them for worship.”²

Amir al Mu'minin ('a), in the sermon of *Dhi-qar* elucidates,

...فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ تَعَالَى بَعَثَ مُحَمَّدًا - صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَآلِهِ - بِالْحَقِّ لِيُخْرِجَ عِبَادَهُ مِنْ
عِبَادَةِ عِبَادِهِ إِلَى عِبَادَتِهِ، وَمِنْ عُهُودِ عِبَادِهِ إِلَى عُهُودِهِ، وَمِنْ طَاعَةِ عِبَادِهِ إِلَى
طَاعَتِهِ، وَمِنْ وِلَايَةِ عِبَادِهِ إِلَى وِلَايَتِهِ.

“Then surely Allah the Almighty raised Muhammad ('s) with truth to bring out His servants from the worship of His servants to His worship, from the binding of His servants to His Own binding, from the obedience of His servants to His Own obedience and from the mastership of His servants to His Own mastership.”³

To be a slave implies a sense of smallness and slavery. Vice-versa, to be a master means to feel great and lordly. One who is king, is master and the one who is a subject, is a slave. Allah, Who enjoys absolute lordship dominates all affairs, possesses mastership and power of governance over one and all, and His mastership entails commands and prohibitions for everybody without exception. It is necessary that the servants should feel a sense of slavery, submission and humility in His presence. Imam As-Sadiq ('a) says,

لَيْسَ الْعِلْمُ بِالتَّعَلُّمِ. إِنَّمَا هُوَ نُورٌ يَقَعُ فِي قَلْبٍ مَنْ يُرِيدُ اللَّهُ تَبَارَكَ وَتَعَالَى أَنْ يَهْدِيَهُ.
فَإِنْ أَرَدْتَ الْعِلْمَ فَاطْلُبْ أَوَّلًا فِي نَفْسِكَ حَقِيقَةَ الْعُبُودِيَّةِ. وَاطْلُبِ الْعِلْمَ بِاسْتِعْمَالِهِ.
وَاسْتَفْهِمِ اللَّهَ يُفْهِمَكَ.

“Knowledge is not acquired by learning. It is only a light which Allah (Blessed and High is He) penetrates in the heart of one whom He intends to guide. So, if you desire knowledge, then first seek in yourself the reality of servitude. Then seek knowledge for its application. Ask Allah for its understanding, He will make you understand it.” The narrator says I enquired, ‘What is the reality of servitude?’ He ('a) replied,

“It comprises of three things: Firstly, a person should never consider himself to be the master of things endowed to him by Allah the Almighty. He should consider every bounty and wealth to be Allah’s trust and utilize it as Allah wishes.

Secondly, a person should not have any plan opposed to that of his Lord.

Thirdly, all his efforts should be focused on His commands and prohibitions.

Thus, if a person does not consider himself as the master of the bounties granted to him by Allah the Almighty, it is easier for him to use them where Allah has commanded. And if a person does not plan against the planning of Allah, it becomes much easier for him to face the calamities and afflictions of this world. And if he uses all his efforts to act on His commands and prohibitions, he will not have any time left for disputing with the people or lording over them.

Hence, if Allah grants somebody these three things, the world, Iblis and all the creatures will not hold any significance in his eyes. He will not seek this world for lording over the people, he will not seek wealth for the sake of power and superiority and will not forfeit this world of a few days due to his laziness.

All these are from the first degree of piety. Allah the Almighty warns,

تِلْكَ الدَّارُ الْآخِرَةُ نَجْعَلُهَا لِلَّذِينَ لَا يُرِيدُونَ عُلُوًّا فِي الْأَرْضِ وَلَا فِسَادًا وَالْعَاقِبَةُ
لِلْمُتَّقِينَ

“This is the house of the hereafter. We have made it for those who do not seek any loftiness in the earth nor mischief.” (Qur’an, 28:83)

Therefore, a slave is one who feels that his self and all his possession, is under the dominion of his Master. Considering that everything has come and will come into existence only on account of the will (*mashi’at*) of Allah and nothing is independent of it, it will not be incorrect to say that only Allah is the Master and rest everything else is but His creation. For, the existence and survival of every creature in this universe depends on His will and intention.

Imam As-Sadiq (‘a) declares,

لَا يَكُونُ شَيْءٌ فِي الْأَرْضِ وَلَا فِي السَّمَاءِ إِلَّا بِهَذِهِ الْخِصَالِ السَّبْعِ: بِمَشِيئَةٍ وَإِرَادَةٍ
وَقَدَرٍ وَقَضَاءٍ وَإِذْنٍ وَكِتَابٍ وَأَجَلٍ. فَمَنْ زَعَمَ أَنَّهُ يَقْدِرُ عَلَى نَقْضِ وَاحِدَةٍ، فَقَدْ
كَفَرَ.

“Nothing occurs in this earth and in the heaven except with the following seven stages: Will, intention, destiny, decree, permission, book and implementation. Then whoever thinks that he can reduce any of these stages, then indeed he has disbelieved.”⁴

Therefore, in the first instance, nobody has got any right of mastership and superiority over the other and the real master and the true king of one and all is only Allah. All are His subjects and it is obligatory on them to fulfill the right of servitude. They must obey only Him and subject themselves with utmost

humility, modesty and lowliness in front of Him. Considering anybody else as the master is a great sin and is tantamount to denying Him and polytheism. Acknowledging anybody to be at the same level or at par with Him is sheer polytheism.

Allah the Almighty says,

وَاتَّخَذُوا مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ آلِهَةً لِيَكُونُوا لَهُمْ عِزًّا. كَلَّا سَيَكْفُرُونَ بِعِبَادَتِهِمْ وَيَكُونُونَ عَلَيْهِمْ ضِدًّا

“And they take gods other than Allah so that they become the cause of might for them. Nay! Soon they will deny them and will turn into their enemies.” (Qur’an, 19:81–82)

Explaining the above verse, Imam As–Sadiq (‘a) says,

“Those who have taken to gods other than Allah the Almighty, on the day of judgement their gods will be raised to oppose them and their worship.” Then Imam (‘a) said, “Worship and servitude does not imply prostration and bowing. In fact, worship means obedience and submission. Whoever obeys a creature to disobey Allah, has in fact worshipped him.”⁵

Imam Al–Baqir (‘a) says,

“You (Shias) are that group who have refused to worship the rebels. Whoever obeys an oppressor, has indeed worshipped him.”⁶

Amir al Mu’minin (‘a) says,

“Allah deputed Muhammad (‘s) with Truth so that he may take out His people from the worship of idols towards His worship and from obeying Satan towards obeying Him.”⁷

Anybody who thinks himself to be the master and ruler other than Allah the Almighty, he deserves to be left to himself. And anyone who takes a deity and lord besides Allah, He will hand him over to that deity and lord. The Holy Prophet (‘s) says that Allah the Almighty has warned,

أَيُّمَا عَبْدٍ أَطَاعَنِي، لَمْ أَكِلْهُ إِلَى غَيْرِي. وَأَيُّمَا عَبْدٍ عَصَانِي، وَكَلَّتْهُ إِلَى نَفْسِهِ، ثُمَّ لَمْ أَبَالِ فِي أَيِّ وَادٍ هَلَكَ.

“Whoever obeys Me, I will not hand him over to other than Myself. And whoever disobeys Me, I will leave him unto himself. Then I won’t bother in which valley he is destroyed.”⁸

Imam As-Sadiq (‘a) said to Abbad Ibn Kathir Basri,

وَيْلَكَ يَا عَبَّادُ! إِيَّاكَ وَالرِّيَاءَ! فَإِنَّهُ مَنْ عَمَلَ لِغَيْرِ اللَّهِ، وَكَلَّهُ اللَّهُ إِلَى مَنْ عَمَلَ لَهُ.

“Woe unto you O Abbad! Keep away from ostentation. For, whoever works for other than Allah, Allah will hand him over to the one for whom he worked.”⁹

Hence, considering that His slaves and whatever is in their possession, all are the creatures and possession of Allah, the limbs and organs of this body and the entire existence is His property. Deriving benefit from them depends on His permission and satisfaction. Thus, any utilization which is not in conformity with His satisfaction and order, will be deemed as prohibited (*haraam*).

So Allah the Almighty has given power and authority to everybody over their selves and wealth but has outlined their limitations through divine laws and regulations. Consequently, none possesses authority and domination over the other except that it has been granted by Allah the Almighty. He declares in the Holy Qur’an,

قُلِ اللَّهُمَّ مَالِكَ الْمُلْكِ تُؤْتِي الْمُلْكَ مَنْ تَشَاءُ وَتَنْزِعُ الْمُلْكَ مِمَّنْ تَشَاءُ وَتُعِزُّ مَنْ تَشَاءُ وَتُذِلُّ مَنْ تَشَاءُ بِإِذْنِ اللَّهِ يُؤْتِي الْمُلْكَ مَنْ يَشَاءُ وَتَنْزِعُ الْمُلْكَ مِمَّنْ تَشَاءُ وَتُعِزُّ مَنْ تَشَاءُ وَتُذِلُّ مَنْ تَشَاءُ إِنَّكَ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ

“Say O Allah! You are the King of the kingdom. You give the kingdom to whomsoever You please and snatch it away from whomsoever You please. You give respect to whomsoever You please and You degrade whomsoever You please. In Your hand is goodness. Surely You have power over all things.” (Qur’an, 3:26)

It should be borne in mind that all perfection, power and authority that has been endowed by Allah the Almighty to his servants is not because they deserved it and it was not Allah’s duty to bestow these bounties upon them. But it was His obligation and grace on them that He granted these favors. Of course, this obligation too is not devoid of wisdom.

Allah the Almighty brought the servants to the realm of existence from non-existence and granted them the lights of intellect, knowledge, power, authority and freedom. Now, if they derive benefit from these great bounties, lower their necks for His obedience and submission, act with modesty and humility in front of Him, fulfil the duties of worship diligently and express their gratitude for His bounties, they will draw themselves nearer to their real Master and attain great heights and perfection from His side.

But if they adopt the path of disobedience and transgression while He intends to oblige them, He will

snatch away the bounties from them so that they may be attentive towards their poverty and dependence on Him. And if He wants, He will increase their bounties and power so that their disobedience is augmented, thereby becoming eligible for a very severe chastisement in the hereafter.

Therefore, if somebody acts with sins and vices with the bounties that he has received from his benevolent Lord, he should not think that these gifts are due to his transgressions. Rather, these are for preparing him for a great calamity in the next world. Allah the Almighty warns,

وَلَا يَحْسَبَنَّ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا أَنَّ نِعْمَتَنَا لَهُمْ خَيْرٌ لِّأَنفُسِهِمْ إِنَّمَا نُمَلِّي لَهُمْ لِيُزِدُوا إِثْمًا
وَلَهُمْ عَذَابٌ مُّهِينٌ

“Let not those who disbelieve think that the respite that We have given them, is good for them. We have given them respite so that they increase in sins and for them is a debasing chastisement.” (Qur’an, 3: 178)

So, it should be borne in mind that all the powers and authorities are not in line with the power and authority of Allah. Only that power and authority is in line with that of Allah’s which denotes obedience, servitude, humility and modesty in front of Him.

And this government and authority is that of the divine Prophets (‘a), their successors (‘a), those who have been permitted by them to take care of the affairs of the people and do not violate the regulations formulated by them.

Among all these divine luminaries, the persona with the maximum power and authority is that of the Holy Prophet (‘s). All the Imams (‘a), all the chiefs of the armies, governors of cities, judges, scholars, guardians, etc. have all derived their mastership and authority from Allah’s last messenger (‘s). Imam Al-Baqir and Imam As-Sadiq (‘a) say,

إِنَّ اللَّهَ فَوَّضَ إِلَى نَبِيِّهِ - صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَآلِهِ - أَمْرَ خَلْقِهِ لِيَنْظُرَ كَيْفَ طَاعَتْهُمْ.
ثُمَّ تَلَا هَذِهِ آيَةَ: مَا آتَاكُمُ الرَّسُولُ فَخُذُوهُ وَمَا نَهَاكُمْ عَنْهُ فَانْتَهُوا.

“Surely Allah has delegated to His Prophet (‘s) the affairs of His creation so that he overlooks as to how they obey Him. Then he (‘a) recited the verse, **‘Whatever the Prophet gives, take it and whatever he prohibits, refrain from it’.**” (Qur’an, 59:7)¹⁰

Imam Ar-Ridha’ (‘a) says,

“Certainly Allah delegated the matters of His creation to His Prophet (‘s) and said,

مَا آتَاكُمُ الرَّسُولُ فَخُذُوهُ وَمَا نَهَاكُمْ عَنْهُ فَانْتَهُوا.

‘Whatever the Prophet gives you, take it and whatever he prohibits, refrain from it. But He has not delegated to him the affairs of creation and providing sustenance...Indeed, the Creator of everything is Allah as He says, ‘

اللَّهُ الَّذِي خَلَقَكُمْ ثُمَّ رَزَقَكُمْ ثُمَّ يُمِيتُكُمْ ثُمَّ يُحْيِيكُمْ هَلْ مِنْ شُرَكَائِكُمْ مَنْ يَفْعَلُ مِنْ ذَلِكَ مِنْ شَيْءٍ سُبْحَانَهُ وَتَعَالَى عَمَّا يُشْرِكُونَ.

‘Allah is He Who created you, then provided you sustenance, then caused you to die, then He brings to life (once) again. Is there anyone from your partners who can do any of these things? **Glory be to Him and High is He from what they associate.**”(Qur’an, 30:40)11

Imam Al-Baqir (‘a) says,

فَمَا حَرَّمَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ - صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَآلِهِ - فَهُوَ بِمَنْزِلَةِ مَا حَرَّمَ اللَّهُ.

“Whatever the Messenger of Allah (‘s) has prohibited, then it is as if Allah has prohibited it.”12

The same status is enjoyed by the Holy Imams (‘a) who were from the progeny of the Holy Prophet (‘s) and were his successors barring the fact that making a thing permissible (*halal*) or prohibited (*haram*) was beyond their domain. Under the verse

أَطِيعُوا اللَّهَ وَأَطِيعُوا الرَّسُولَ وَأُولِي الْأَمْرِ مِنْكُمْ.

‘Obey Allah and obey His messenger and those in authority among you’, (Qur’an, 4:59)

Imam Al-Baqir (‘a) explains,

هِيَ فِيَّ عَلِيٍّ وَفِي الْأُمَّةِ. جَعَلَهُمُ اللَّهُ مَوَاضِعَ الْأَنْبِيَاءِ، غَيْرَ أَنَّهُمْ لَا يُحِلُّونَ شَيْئًا وَلَا

يَحْرِمُونَهُ.

“This is about Ali and the Imams (‘a). Allah has placed them in the position of the Prophets (‘a) except that they don’t make a thing permissible or prohibited.”¹³

Thus, it is evident that obeying any one of them is equal to worshipping Him. Again, it is known that all power, authority and mastership returns to Allah and they all ultimately belong to Him. So, if any one enjoys any authority and mastership with Allah’s permission and order, then his mastership and authority is considered as that of Allah’s and subservience to such mastership will be considered as His worship.

Now, if anyone accepts his command and obeys him, then he has accepted Allah’s command and obeyed Him and consequently, worshipped Him. But if someone assumes authority and power without His permission and command, then he has indeed usurped a position, placed himself as an opponent of Allah and claimed a status in front of Him.

For, he will expect others to obey him and carry out his commands. Needless to say, those who obey him will only obey him and this obedience and obeisance has got nothing to do with Allah.

The same applies for the mastership, authority and control of a man over his own self and his wealth. If he views them from this angle that they are the endowments of Allah and their utilisation should be in conformity with His commands and prohibitions, then this very thought will be the obedience and worship of Allah the Almighty.

But if it used according to the satisfaction of Allah, unwittingly and unintentionally, then it will not be considered as Allah’s worship. Rather, all his expenditures and efforts will be for someone else and thereby illegal (*haraam*).

Describing the different aspects of mastership (*Wilaayah*), Imam As-Sadiq (‘a) says,

“Mastership is from two aspects: One is the mastership of the rightful and just rulers who have been appointed as guardians of the people by Allah the Almighty. The same goes for those appointed by them as masters and this sequence till the lowest form of mastership. (i.e. all these are rightful masters as they bear divine endorsement).

The second aspect of mastership is that of the oppressors and tyrants and those appointed by them till the lowest form of mastership due to whom people are misguided and deviated.

The legal of these two forms of mastership is obviously that of the just masters whose recognition and mastership has been made obligatory and enjoined by Allah. Obeying the sequence of these masters, down the line, without reducing or adding anything from our side, or distorting his statements, is compulsory and strengthening his position, a recommended act.

For, under the shadow of the just master and those appointed by him, rights are enlivened, justice is established and falsehood and oppression are destroyed. Therefore, one who looks out for such a master and helps him in his efforts is like the one who has made efforts to strengthen the religion of Allah.

But the mastership of the tyrant masters, right from the top to the last one appointed by them, has been condemned and following or assisting them is prohibited because they are the cause of misguidance and deviation of the people. Working with them and accepting their mastership is totally illegal and non-permissible. Whoever does so, becomes liable for a painful chastisement, even if his work is insignificant.

For, any act which is done with the intention of helping and assisting them, is in fact, direct disobedience of Allah and consequently, a great sin. This is because under the shadow of a tyrant master, truth is trampled and falsehood is enlivened. Oppression, tyranny and destruction engulf the entire society, divine Prophets ('a), their books and the believers are thrown to the winds, mosques are destroyed, the traditions of Allah and His laws are subject to distortion.

Therefore, to work with them or to assist them is prohibited (haraam) except in a state of helplessness and coercion just as the occasion when man is forced to drink blood or eat corpse.”¹⁴

So, it is evident that the reality of servitude is submission. And the reality of worship is humility, modesty and lowliness. The obedience of someone is tantamount to being humble and lowly in front of him, thereby resulting in his worship. Therefore, anyone who performs an action with the intention of obeying his master has indeed worshipped him. And if somebody has done something for the satisfaction of his self, then he has worshipped his self.

So, those actions which are performed to gain paradise or for fear of hell, cannot be said to be Allah's worship, although Allah has ordered the same. Because these actions have been performed out of the love of one's self.

But Allah, on account of His grace and nobility, has permitted His servants to perform their actions with both these reasons and has promised them rewards of worship for the same. But it should be borne in mind that the right of worship is that it should be performed with the intention of Allah's love and proximity. Imam As-Sadiq ('a) says,

“Surely the people worship Allah for three reasons: One group worships Him to acquire His rewards and this worship is of the greedy. The second group worships Him for fear of His hell and this is the worship of the slaves. But I worship Him because of my love and affection for Him and this is the worship of the liberals.”¹⁵

Let us strive to worship our Lord for His love and affection and not for the sake of the love of the self, or out of craving for the bounties of paradise or out of fear for the punishment of hell, although Allah can be

worshipped even by these two approaches.

All praise is for Allah the Lord of the worlds as He is worthy and blessings of Allah be on Muhammad (‘s) and his pure, immaculate off-springs.

O Allah! For the sake of Muhammad (‘s) and the Holy Imams (‘a), hasten the reappearance of our beloved Imam of the Time (May Allah hasten his re-appearance).

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1. Ilalush shari’a, p. 13
 2. Ilalush shar’ia, p. 14
 3. Usul al Kafi, vol. 8, p. 386
 4. Usul al Kafi, vol. 1, p. 149
 5. Tafsir, al-Qummi, vol. 2, p.55
 6. Bihar ul Anwar, vol. 23, p. 361
 7. Nahj ul Balagha, sermon 147
 8. Wasa’il al shia, vol. 15, p. 235
 9. Usul al Kafi, vol. 2, p. 393
 10. Usul al Kafi, vol. 1, p. 266
 11. Uyun al akhbar Ar-Ar-Ridha’ (‘a)
 12. Bihar ul Anwar, vol. 17, p. 10
 13. Tafsir, al Ayyashi, vol. 1, p. 252
 14. Tuhaf al Uqul, p. 332
 15. Ilalush shar’ia, p. 12

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