

What is al-Sirat al-Mustaqeem?

The significance of fast will be realized during a much more critical time: when the souls are to pass on *al-Sirat al-Mustaqeem*, the Straight Path, the path regarding which the believers pray Allah to keep their feet firm as they pass on it, the one mentioned in Surat al-Fatiha and regarding which they plead to the Almighty at least ten times a day (twice in each *rek'a*) saying:

"Guide us to the Straight Path (*al-Sirat al-Mustaqeem*)" (Holy Qur'an, Surah Fateha 1:6).

Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq (as), as recorded on p. 41, Vol. 1, of Tabatabai's¹ *Al-Mizan fi Tafsir al-Qur'an*, was asked once about the meaning of this verse; he said, "It means: Guide us to upholding the path that leads to Your pleasure, that ends at Your Paradise, that prohibits us from following our own desires and thus deviate, or follow our own views and thus perish."

In his *Tafsir*, al-Ayyashi quotes Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq (as) saying that *al-Sirat al-Mustaqeem* is the Commander of the Faithful Imam Ali (as). *Al-Sirat al-Mustaqeem* is referred to in verse 61 of Surat Ya-Sin (Ch. 36), in verse 52 of Surat al-Shura (Ch. 42), in verse 16 of Surat al-Maaida (Ch. 5), in verses 126 and 161 of Surat al-An'am (Ch. 6), in verses 70 and 174 of Surat al-Nisaa (Ch. 4), in verse 42 of Surat al-Hijr (Ch. 15), and in other verses where it is described as the *Sabeel*, another word for path, leading to the Almighty.

Abdul-Rahman ibn Muhammad al-Hassani quotes Ahmed ibn 'Eisa ibn Abu Maryam quoting Muhammad ibn Ahmed al-'Arjami quoting Ali ibn Hatim al-Minqari quoting al-Mufaddal ibn 'Umar saying, "I asked Abu Abdullah (Imam al-Sadiq [as]) about the *Sirat*, and he said, 'It is the Path to knowing Allah, the most Exalted, the most Great, and there are two such paths: one in the life of this world, and one in the life hereafter."

The *Sirat* in this life is the Imam whose obedience is incumbent; whoever knows him in this life and follows his guidance will be able to pass on the (other) *Sirat* which is a path over hell in the hereafter, and whoever does not know him in this life, his feet will slip away from the *Sirat* in the hereafter so he falls into the fire of hell." This is recorded on pp. 13-14 of *Ma'ani al-Akhbar* and also on p. 66, Vol. 8, of *Bihar al-Anwar*.

It is when you come to that *Sirat* that you will find out how well you performed your fast in the life of this world. Each and every soul has to pass over *al-Sirat al-Mustaqem*, the straight path over hell, a fire more intense in heat than boiling molten brass, with seven bridges over it the length of each one of which is three thousand years: one thousand to vertically ascend, one thousand to horizontally cross, and one thousand to descend.

It is thinner than a human hair, more sharp than the sharpest sword, and darker than the darkest night inside a tunnel. Each bridge has seven branches, and each branch is like a long lance with sharp teeth: each servant of Allah will be confined on each and every one of them and be asked about all the injunctions the Almighty had required him to perform during his life on this planet. In the first of such stops he will be asked about belief and conviction, about *shirk* and hypocrisy. In the second he will be asked about prayers, what they contain, how to perform them, and whether he performed them properly and on time.

In the third he will be asked about *zakat*, its types, and whether he paid it or not. And it is in the fourth one that he will be asked about the fast... It is then that he will realize whether he upheld this important obligation or not, whether he offered charity or not, and whether he regretted and repented during the month of Ramadhan or not. In the fifth he will be asked about the pilgrimage and *'umra*, why he did not perform them, or why he failed to perform them properly, and how they are to be performed. In the sixth he will be asked about *wudu* (ablution) and *ghusul*, how he performed them, which one is compulsory and which one is optional.

Finally, in the seventh, he will be asked about how kind he was to his parents and kin, and whether he did injustice to any human being. In the absence of sufficient optional good deeds such as offering charity, helping a needy Muslim, performing optional prayers or fasts..., etc., if one gives the wrong answer to any question in any of these stops, he will fall into the pit of hell underneath..., as Abdel-Jabbar al-Rubay'I tells us in his book *Al-Tathkira fi ahwal al-mawt wal akhira*, having collected such details from various books of *hadith* and *Sunnah*.

He adds saying, on p. 130, that the bridges will be shaken by the weight of crossing people who will climb on top of one another, causing these bridges to move like a ship tossed by a wind storm in the midst of the sea. *al-Sirat* separates Paradise from hell. Only those who cross it successfully will achieve salvation and bliss. With reference to those who will fall into hell, the Almighty says:

Have you not considered those who have changed Allah's favor into blasphemy and caused their people to fall into the abode of perdition? (Holy Qur'an, Surah Ibrahim 14:28)

To whomsoever My wrath is due, he shall fall therein. (Holy Qur'an Surah Taha 20:81)

Whoever follows My guidance will not lose his way nor fall into perdition. (Holy Qur'an, Surah Taha 20: 123)

Nor will his wealth benefit him when he falls headlong (into the pit of fire) (Holy Qur'an, Surah Layl 92: 11).

If one is found as having been derelict in performing any of his obligations, the angels questioning him will try to find out whether he somehow made up with optional good deeds. Once he is cleared, he will be escorted into Paradise. It is to such stopping and questioning that the Almighty refers, addressing His angels to

Stop them, for they must be questioned. (Holy Qur'an, Surah Saffat 37:24)

On p. 133, Vol. 17, of his *Al-Mizan*, Tabatabai quotes various views regarding what the questioning will be all about. He says that some scholars are of the opinion that they will be asked about the Unity of Allah, while others believe it will be about the *wilayat* of Imam Ali (as), but he also concedes that such stopping and questioning will take place on the *Sirat* over hell.

On p. 107 of al-Saduq's *Al-Amali*, and also on pp. 64–65, Vol. 8, of al-Majlisi's *Bihar al-Anwar*, al-Waleed quotes al-Saffar quoting Ibn 'Eisa quoting Muhammad al-Barqi quoting al-Qasim ibn Muhammad al-Jawhari quoting Ali ibn Abu Hamza quoting Au Busayr quoting Abu Abdullah Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq (as) saying, "People will pass on different levels on the *Sirat*, and it is thinner than hair and sharper than the sword. Some will pass as swiftly as lightning, while others will pass as fast as a horse, while some of them will crawl on it, some will walk on it, while some others will pass hanging, so the fire will consume some of their body parts and leave others."

Imam Abu Ja'far al-Baqir (as) is quoted on p. 65, Vol. 8, of al-Majlisi's *Bihar al-Anwar* saying, "When the verse saying '...and hell is brought that Day' was revealed, the Messenger of Allah (S) was asked about what it meant, so he (S) said, 'The trusted Spirit (Gabriel) has informed me that when Allah, the One and only God, resurrects all people and gathers their early generations and the late ones, hell will be brought by a hundred thousand angels, very stern and mighty angels, and it will be coming roaring, inhaling and exhaling. The force of its exhalation is such that had Allah not delayed them for the reckoning, it would have caused everyone of them to perish."

Then a flame will come out of it and encircle all humans, the good and the bad, so much so that any servant of Allah, be he an angel or a prophet, will call out: 'Save me, O Lord, save me,' except you, O Prophet of Allah, for you will call out: 'Save my nation, O Lord, save my nation!'" Muqatil, 'Ataa and Ibn Abbas are among the greatest traditionists in the history of Islam without any contention. They are the ones who transmitted the *ahadith* of the Messenger of Allah (S) for all posterity.

All three of them, as stated on p. 67, Vol. 8, of *Bihar al-Anwar*, have interpreted the verse saying, "The Day when Allah shall not humiliate the Prophet" to mean: "Allah will not torment the Prophet (that Day, the Day of Judgment)," and the phrase "and those who believed with him" to mean that He will not torment Ali ibn Abu Talib, Fatima, al-Hassan, al-Husayn, peace be upon them, al-Hamza, and Ja'far, Allah be pleased with them, that "their light runs before them" means "their light shall illuminate the *Sirat*

for Ali and Fatima seventy times more so than light in the life of this world." Their light will then be before them as they continue to cross.

The intensity of their light will be indicative of their *iman*, conviction. Others will follow. "Members of the Ahl al-Bayt (as) of Muhammad (S) will pass over the *Sirat* like swift lightning. Then they will be followed by those who will pass like a speedy wind. Then there will be those who will pass as fast as a racing horse.

Then another group of people will pass in a walking pace followed by those who will crawl on their hands and bellies, and finally by those who will crawl on their bellies (with extreme difficulty). Allah will make it wide for the believers and very narrow for the sinners." Then these narrators interpret the verse saying "Lord! Complete our light for us" to mean "complete it for us so that we may be able to pass on the *Sirat*."

Ibn Shahr Ashub, in his *Manaqib Ali ibn Abu Talib*, comments, as quoted by al-Majlisi on the same page, saying, "The Commander of the Faithful (as) will pass in a howdah of green emeralds accompanied by Fatima on a conveyance of red rubies, and she will be surrounded by seventy thousand *huris*, as fast as lightning."

On p. 182 of his *Amali*, al-Tusi quotes al-Fahham quoting Muhammad ibn al-Hashim al-Hashimi quoting Abu Hashim ibn al-Qasim quoting Muhammad ibn Zakariyya ibn Abdullah quoting Abdullah ibn al-Muthanna quoting Tumamah ibn Abdullah ibn Anas ibn Malik quoting his father quoting his grandfather quoting the Prophet (S) saying, "On the Day of Judgement, the *Sirat* will be spread over hell. None can pass over it except one who carries a permit admitting the *wilaya* of Ali ibn Abu Talib (as)."

Also with reference to the *Sirat*, Abu Tharr al-Ghifari, may Allah be pleased with him, is quoted by both al-Majlisi on p. 67, Vol. 8, of his book *Bihar al-Anwar*, and by al-Kulayni on p. 152, Vol. 2, of his *Al-Kafi*, as saying, "I have heard the Messenger of Allah (S) say, 'The edges of our *Sirat* on the Day of Judgment will be kindness to the kin and the returning of the trust. When one who is kind to his kin and faithful to his trust passes (over the *Sirat*), he will make his way to Paradise, but when one who is unfaithful to the trust and severs his ties with his kin passes, none of his good deeds will avail him, and the *Sirat* will hurl him into hell.'"

There are so many references to *noor*, divine light, throughout the Holy Qur'an, in the *hadith*, and in *du'a*, supplication. It is the light of guidance whereby the Almighty guides whomsoever He pleases both in the life of this fleeting world and in the hereafter. Such light will be most sorely needed especially in the life hereafter.

The reader is reminded that the intensity of his light, be it during the period of the *barzakh*, when most graves will be almost as dark as hell, during the time when people are judged on the Day of Judgment, or as one passes over the *Sirat*..., all depends on the depth and sincerity of his conviction, on his *iman*. No good deeds, no matter how great, will avail him as will his sincere and deep conviction regarding the Unity (*Tawhid*) and Justice (*'Adl*) of the Almighty, the truth which He revealed to His prophets

(*Nubuwwah*), and that we will most certainly be resurrected and judged (*Ma'ad*), so that one will be either rewarded or punished.

There will be no sun in the life hereafter, nor will there be electricity; so, one's own light will be his guiding star. Everything in the life hereafter will have a light of its own; there will be no reflection, nor can one walk in the light of another, nor can one be benevolent and give of his light to another. There will be no giving. The time of giving is right here; so, it is now your golden chance to give your all to your Maker, to worship Him and obey Him as He ought to be worshipped and obeyed ___ or at least try; pay Him His dues, and be aware of your responsibilities towards His servants, believing men and women, and to mankind, your extended family.

Give them of what Allah has given you; pray for them; be kind to them; think well of them so that they may think well of you; observe the fast in months other than the month of Ramadhan in order to remind yourself of the hunger from which others, especially indigent Muslims, suffer, and give by way of charity. Otherwise, keep everything to yourself, hoard, treasure, and be damned. Hell is characterized by its darkness, yet its residents will still be able to see things, and what they will see will not please them at all. May Allah *Subhanahu wa Ta'ala* keep it away from us, *Allahomma Aameen*.

Nobody in the entire lengthy history of Arabia (estimated at more than seven thousand and five hundred years) has ever been known to be more courageous and daring when combatting his foes than Imam Ali ibn Abu Talib (as) who was the right hand of the Messenger of Allah (S), the man who single-handedly uprooted the main gate of the fort of Khaybar, a gate so heavy it required forty men to close or open it. Ali (as) once was suffering acutely from an inflammation of the eye, and he was in extreme pain, screaming, the hero that he was. The Messenger of Allah (S) visited him and saw him scream, so he asked him whether he was suffering from an acute pain or whether it was due to his frustration and agony.

The Imam (as) said, "How intense my pain is! I have never felt such pain..." whereupon the Prophet (S) said to him, "When the angel of death comes to take away the soul of a disbeliever, he brings with him a rod of fire whereby he takes his soul away, whereupon hell itself will scream because of the intensity of his pain and suffering." Having heard him, the Imam (as) stood up then sat and said, "O Messenger of Allah! Please repeat what you have said, for it has made me forget my own pain."

Then the Imam (as) asked the Messenger of Allah, "Will the soul of any member of your nation be taken away as you have described?" The Prophet (S) answered, "Yes! The soul of an unjust ruler, or of one who consumes the wealth of an orphan, or of one who falsely testifies [will be thus taken away]." The disbeliever referred to in this tradition is one who is unfair to Allah, Glory to Him and Exaltation, regarding one of the commandments which He has required him to uphold, one who does not recognize the Prophethood of Muhammad (S) and his Sunnah or anything required by Islam; such is the disbeliever.

You can reduce the agony of your death, or that of your loved one, by offering charity, fasting, or praying *nafl* prayers; among such prayers is one in two *rek'ats* in each of which you should recite Surat al-Fatiha once and al-Ikhlās thrice.

Fasting either a few days or all of the months of Rajab and Sha'ban, according to your ability, will surely reduce the agony of death and the pain of loneliness in the grave. If you are truly concerned about these matters, and you should be, the month of Ramadhan is your golden opportunity to earn as many blessings as Allah enables you to. It is an opportunity that may not recur, for nobody knows when his/her turn comes to die.

We pray the Almighty to enable us to cross over His *Sirat* with hardship only in the life of this world, and without any hardship in the life hereafter, to forgive our sins, and to accept our fast and repentance, *Allahomma Aameen*.

1. His full name is: Muhammad Husayn ibn Sayyid Muhammad ibn Sayyid Husayn ibn Mirza Ali Asgher al-Tabrizi al-Tabatabai, the judge. He was born in 1892 in Tabriz and died in Qum in 1981. His 21-Volume exegesis, *Al-Mizan*, is only one of his numerous works. The edition utilized for this book was published in 1991 by Al-A'jami Establishment of Beirut, Lebanon. Hujjatul-Islam Sayyid Saeed Akhtar Rizvi, founder of the Bilal Muslim Mission of Tanzania, has for years been translating this valuable exegesis into English.

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