

Reflections on the Munajat of Imam Ali in the Mosque of Kufa

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This Munajat ("whisper prayer") is very similar to a monologue, recited by Imam Ali (a) addressing God. The Imam (a) highlights and emphasizes that God is the only one who can bestow on us mercy, as He is the Creator, the Infinite, and the Great, whilst we are the created, the finite, and the lowly. It is a very moving and heart-trembling supplication.

Sources

This supplication has been narrated in following sources:

- Al-Balad al-Amin by Ibrahim ibn 'Ali al-'Amili al-Kaf'ami (4 -9 A.H), pp. 19-
- Bihar al-Anwar by 'Allama Majlisi (17-111 A.H), vol. 91 pp. 19-111
- Ibid., vol. 97 pp.419-4

Concept of Munajat

Munajat is derived from the root n-j-w, which denotes speaking to someone while being very close to them. Munajat is a type of whispering, but not a one-sided whispering; its grammatical form signifies a reciprocal action. Thus, it is used when a person has a very intimate conversation with God, in which the Almighty listens and perhaps responds to him. According to a narration, God whispers to those who love Him, i.e. He puts His ideas into their hearts and minds.

Regarding this, Imam Rida (a) quotes the Holy Prophet (s) as saying,

إن موسى بن عمران سأل ربه ورفع يديه فقال يا رب ابعد أنت فأناديك أم قريب فأناجيك؟ فأوحى الله تعالى إليه يا موسى أنا جليس من ذكرني

Once, Prophet Moses (a) raised his hands and asked God, "O Lord! Are you far so I call you, or are you near so I whisper to you?" God replied, "I am next to the person who remembers Me." (Majlisi 14 AH, 9 :)

Three Sections of Munajat- First one

This munajat has three important sections.

In the first section, Imam Ali (a) describes the worries about the Day of Judgment. There are serious issues to happen for every one and Imam Ali (a) declares his need for protection on that great day. This day has been described in various ways in the Holy Quran and Imam Ali (a) quotes some of the relevant verses. Based on this, Imam Ali (a) starts his munajat with the following phrase:

اللهم إني أسئلك الأمان يوم لا ينفع مال ولا بنون إلا من أتى الله بقلب سليم

"O God, I ask You for protection on the day when property will not avail, nor sons, except he who comes with a heart free (from evil)1. (Majlisi 14 A.H, 91:1 9)

According to this phrase, neither money nor children, i.e. our greatest worldly achievements, will benefit us on that day unless we have a pure heart. Surprisingly, this was Prophet Abraham's (a) concern as well, since he said,

ولا تخزني يوم يُبعثون يوم لا ينفع مال ولا بنون إلا من أتى الله بقلب سليم

"Do not disgrace me on the day that they will be resurrected; the day when neither wealth nor children will avail, except him who comes to God with a sound heart. (Quran 6: 7-9)

Of course, Prophet Abraham (a) managed to have a pure heart. The Quran states,

وَإِنْ مِنْ شِيعَتِهِ لِإِبْرَاهِيمَ . إِذْ جَاءَ رَبَّهُ بِقَلْبٍ سَلِيمٍ .

"Indeed Abraham was among his followers, when he came to his Lord with a sound heart. (Quran 7:83 8-4)

Then Imam Ali (a) continues the munajat:

وَأَسْأَلُكَ الْأَمَانَ يَوْمَ يَعَضُّ الظَّالِمُ عَلَى يَدَيْهِ يَقُولُ يَا لَيْتَنِي اتَّخَذْتُ مَعَ الرَّسُولِ سَبِيلًا

" And I ask You for protection on the day when the unjust one will bite his hands saying, "O would that I had taken a way with the messenger.2 (Majlisi 14 A.H, 91:1 9)

وَأَسْأَلُكَ الْأَمَانَ يَوْمَ يُعْرَفُ الْمُجْرِمُونَ بِسِيمَاهُمْ فَيُؤْخَذُ بِالنَّوَاصِي وَالْأَقْدَامِ

And I ask You for protection on the day when the guilty shall be recognized by their marks so they shall be seized by the forelocks and the feet.3 (Majlisi 14 A.H, 91:1 9)

On that day, one's face shows whether he is righteous or wrongdoer; there is no need to ask or even to read the record of his actions, where everything including intentions has been registered. This record is a formal procedure; otherwise, one's face reveals his destiny. According to the Holy Quran, believers are known by their light:

يَوْمَ لَا يُخْزِي اللَّهُ النَّبِيَّ وَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا مَعَهُ ۖ نُورُهُمْ يَسْعَىٰ بَيْنَ أَيْدِيهِمْ وَبِأَيْمَانِهِمْ يَقُولُونَ رَبَّنَا أَتْمِمْ لَنَا نُورَنَا وَاغْفِرْ لَنَا ۖ إِنَّكَ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ

On the day when God will not let the Prophet down and the faithful who are with him. Their light will move swiftly before them and on their right. They will say, "Our Lord! Perfect our light for us,

and forgive us! Indeed You have power over all things." (Quran 66: 8)

The light being on their right may be due to the fact that their record of actions is in their right hand. It is noteworthy that they ask for their light to be perfected since they know that, because of the effects of some of their sins, their light is not yet complete; therefore, they ask for forgiveness. This verse is a glad tiding for believers, as it implies that even on the Day of Judgment, there is a chance for believers to ask for forgiveness, while there is normally no chance to do good deeds after death.

The Quran also states,

يَوْمَ تَرَى الْمُؤْمِنِينَ وَالْمُؤْمِنَاتِ يَسْعَى نُورُهُمْ بَيْنَ أَيْدِيهِمْ وَبِأَيْمَانِهِمْ بُشْرَاكُمُ الْيَوْمَ
جَنَّاتٌ تَجْرِي مِنْ تَحْتِهَا الْأَنْهَارُ خَالِدِينَ فِيهَا ۚ ذَلِكَ هُوَ الْفَوْزُ الْعَظِيمُ

"The day you will see the faithful, men and women, with their light moving swiftly before them and on their right, [and greeted with the words:] "There is good news for you today! Gardens with streams running in them, to remain in them [forever]. That is the great success." (Quran 57: 12)

On the other hand, the hypocrites have no light, and on the Day of Judgment they will implore the believers for light:

يَوْمَ يَقُولُ الْمُنَافِقُونَ وَالْمُنَافِقَاتُ لِلَّذِينَ آمَنُوا انظُرُونَا نَقْتَبِسْ مِنْ نُورِكُمْ قِيلَ
ارْجِعُوا وَرَاءَكُمْ فَالْتَمِسُوا نُورًا فَضُرِبَ بَيْنَهُمْ بِسُورٍ لَهُ بَابٌ بَاطِنُهُ فِيهِ الرَّحْمَةُ
وْظَاهِرُهُ مِنْ قِبَلِهِ الْعَذَابُ

"The day the hypocrites, men and women, will say to the faithful, "Please let up on us, that we may glean something from your light!" They will be told, "Go back and grope for light!" Then there will be set up between them a wall with a gate, with mercy on its interior and punishment toward its exterior. (Quran 57: 13)

The difference between these two groups is instructive: the believers, who have some portion of light, ask God for more light; the hypocrites, who have no light, ask the believers instead of God for light. This shows that even on that situation, they ignore the fact that if they want something they have to ask their Lord for it.

Regarding people's faces on the Day of Judgment, the Holy Quran divides people into two groups:

وُجُوهُ يَوْمَئِذٍ مُّسْفِرَةٌ ضَاحِكَةٌ مُّسْتَبْشِرَةٌ وَوُجُوهُ يُومَئِذٍ عَلَيْهَا غَبَرَةٌ تَرْهَقُهَا
قَتَرَةٌ أُولَئِكَ هُمُ الْكٰفِرَةُ الْفٰجِرَةُ

"That day some faces will be bright, laughing and joyous. And some faces on that day will be covered with dust, overcast with gloom. It is they who are the faithless, the vicious. (Quran 80:38-42)

Another verse describes the faces as follows:

وُجُوهُ يَوْمَئِذٍ نَّاضِرَةٌ إِلَىٰ رَبِّهَا نَاطِرَةٌ وَوُجُوهُ يُومَئِذٍ بَاسِرَةٌ تَظُنُّ أَنْ يُفْعَلَ بِهَا
فَاقِرَةٌ

Some faces will be fresh on that day, looking at their Lord, and some faces will be scowling on that day, knowing that they will be dealt out a punishment breaking the spine. (Quran 75 :22 -25)

Thus, on the Day of Judgment, the reality of every person will appear on his face.

In his munajat, Imam Ali (a) refers to other verses of the Quran as well:

وَأَسْأَلُكَ الْإِمَانَ يَوْمَ لَا يَجْزِي وَالِدٌ عَنْ وَلَدِهِ وَلَا مَوْلُودٌ هُوَ جَازٍ عَنِ وَالِدِهِ شَيْئًا
إِنَّ وَعْدَ اللَّهِ حَقٌّ،

And I ask You for protection on the day when a father shall not atone for his child, nor the child shall atone for its father in any way. Indeed God's promise is true⁴. (Majlisi 14 A.H, 91:1 9)

وَأَسْأَلُكَ الْإِمَانَ يَوْمَ لَا يَنْفَعُ الظَّالِمِينَ مَعْذِرَتُهُمْ وَلَهُمُ اللَّعْنَةُ وَلَهُمْ سُوءُ الدَّارِ،

And I ask You for protection on the day when the unjust shall not benefit from their excuse and for them is curse and for them is the evil abode⁵. (Majlisi 14 A.H, 91:1 9)

وَأَسْأَلُكَ الْإِمَانَ يَوْمَ لَا تَمْلِكُ نَفْسٌ لِنَفْسٍ شَيْئًا وَالْأَمْرُ يَوْمَئِذٍ لِلَّهِ،

And I ask You for protection on the day when no soul shall control anything for (another) soul and the command on that day shall be entirely God's6. (Majlisi 14 A.H, 91:1 9)

وَأَسْأَلُكَ الْإِمَانَ يَوْمَ يَفِرُّ الْمَرْءُ مِنْ أَخِيهِ وَأُمِّهِ وَأَبِيهِ وَصَاحِبَتِهِ وَبَنِيهِ لِكُلِّ امْرِئٍ
مِنْهُمْ يَوْمَئِذٍ شَأْنٌ يُغْنِيهِ

And I ask You for protection on the day when a man shall flee from his brother, and his mother, his father, his spouse, and his children, each one of them on that day will have a concern which will occupy him.7 (Majlisi 14 A.H, 91:1 9)

وَأَسْأَلُكَ الْإِمَانَ يَوْمَ يَوَدُّ الْمُجْرِمُ لَوْ يَفْتَدِي مِنْ عَذَابِ يَوْمِئِذٍ بِبَنِيهِ وَصَاحِبَتِهِ
وَأَخِيهِ وَفَصِيلَتِهِ الَّتِي تُؤْوِيهِ وَمَنْ فِي الْأَرْضِ جَمِيعًا ثُمَّ يُنْجِيهِ

And I ask You for protection on the day when the guilty will wish to redeem himself from the chastisement of that day by (sacrificing) his children, and the near of kin who gave him shelter and all those that are in the earth (wishing) that this might deliver him.8 (Majlisi 14 A.H, 91:1 9–1)

Based on these phrases, the Day of Judgment will be so horrible that a person will want to escape from all his beloved ones and is even be ready to sacrifice them to get rid of the severe punishment of that day. The situation is so severe that a mother would ask the angels of punishment to take her beloved child instead of her. The same is true with one's parents and children.

This is not surprising as we see that impious people, when confronted with difficulties, forget their parents or children in this world and are ready to escape the difficulties at the expense of their beloved ones. Thus, in the next world, when such people encounter the unimaginable severity of God's punishment, they will do the same. As mentioned before, this is the situation of non-believers. As for the believers, they never forget their parents and children even in the most difficult situation of the next world.

Regarding this, the Holy Quran says,

الْأَخِلَاءُ يَوْمَئِذٍ بَعْضُهُمْ لِبَعْضٍ عَدُوٌّ إِلَّا الْمُتَّقِينَ

"On that day, friends will be one another's enemies, except for the God-wary. (Quran 4 :67)

Thus, the God-wary will not be one another's enemies, since their friendship is not based on Satanic desires. If a friendship is based on worldly affairs or sinful matters, on the Day of Judgment, it will turn into enmity. If, however, it is based on taqwa, it will survive the tests of the Day of Judgment. A believer will be concerned about his family and friends even on that great day.

Based on some narrations, this situation may occur: in the Hereafter, a person will be allowed to enter Paradise, however, his family members are not righteous enough to accompany him to the Paradise. At this time, the believer will tell God that whatever he has done in the world, he has done for himself and his family, and he asks God to let them be with him. Then, God will tell the angels to let his family join him without reducing his good deeds in return for this favour.⁹ The same idea has been mentioned in the Quran:

وَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَاتَّبَعَتْهُمْ ذُرِّيَّتُهُمْ بِإِيمَانٍ أَلْحَقْنَا بِهِمْ ذُرِّيَّتَهُمْ وَمَا أَلَتْنَاهُمْ مِنْ عَمَلِهِمْ مِنْ شَيْءٍ ۚ كُلُّ امْرِئٍ بِمَا كَسَبَ رَهِينٌ

"The faithful and their descendants who followed them in faith We will make their descendants join them, and We will not stint anything from] the reward of [their deeds. Every man is a hostage to what he has earned. (Quran 52:21)

Thus, a clever believer does good deeds while intending the reward to be, not only for himself, but also for his family, for his friends, and even for the whole community as well.

Second Section of Munajaat

After mentioning his worries, Imam Ali (a) introduces himself and his Lord, in the second part of the munajat, by using various attributes: By mentioning his own attributes, he confesses to his weaknesses and defects before God, who has all attributes of perfection and excellence. In each case, after mentioning one attribute for himself and one attribute for his Lord, Imam Ali (a) declares that only God and no one else can have mercy on him. He starts this section with the following phrases:

مَوْلَايَ أَنْتَ الْمَوْلَىٰ وَأَنَا الْعَبْدُ وَهَلْ يَرْحَمُ الْعَبْدَ إِلَّا الْمَوْلَىٰ، مَوْلَايَ يَا مَوْلَايَ أَنْتَ الْعَزِيزُ وَأَنَا الذَّلِيلُ وَهَلْ يَرْحَمُ الذَّلِيلَ إِلَّا الْعَزِيزُ، مَوْلَايَ يَا مَوْلَايَ أَنْتَ الْخَالِقُ وَأَنَا الْمَخْلُوقُ وَهَلْ يَرْحَمُ الْمَخْلُوقَ إِلَّا الْخَالِقُ، مَوْلَايَ يَا مَوْلَايَ أَنْتَ الْمُعْطِي وَأَنَا السَّائِلُ وَهَلْ يَرْحَمُ السَّائِلَ إِلَّا الْمُعْطِي

My Master, O my Master! You are the Master and I am the servant, and who can have mercy on the servant except the Master?

My Master, O my Master! You are the Possessor and I am the possessed, and who can have mercy on the possessed except the Possessor?

My Master, O my Master! You are the Mighty and I am the low, and who can have mercy on the low except the Mighty? My Master, O my Master! You are the Creator and I am the created, and who can have mercy on the created except the Creator?

My Master, O my Master! You are the Magnificent and I am the insignificant, and who can have mercy on the insignificant except the Magnificent?¹⁰ (Majlisi 14 A.H, 91:11)

The other attributes that the Imam (a) mentions for himself and for his Lord respectively are as follows:

- The Giver and the beggar
- The Ever-living and the one who will die
- The Provider of sustenance and the one in need of sustenance
- The Generous and the stingy
- The Reliever (of affliction) and the afflicted
- The Great and the insignificant
- The Guide and the one lost
- The Ruler and the one on trial
- The Proof and the confused
- The Forgiver and the sinner
- The Victor and the defeated
- The Cherisher and the cherished
- The Sublime and the humble.

Third Section of Munajat

Having mentioned his worries and concerns about the Hereafter and having stated that no one can save him except God, Imam Ali (a) implores his Lord:

مَوْلَايَ يَا مَوْلَايَ اِرْحَمْنِي بِرَحْمَتِكَ، وَارْضَ عَنِّي بِجُودِكَ وَكَرَمِكَ وَفَضْلِكَ يَا ذَا
الْجُودِ وَالْاِحْسَانِ وَالطَّوْلِ وَالْاِمْتِنَانِ، بِرَحْمَتِكَ يَا اَرْحَمَ الرَّاحِمِينَ .

My Master, O my Master! Have mercy on me, through Your mercy, and be pleased with me, through Your generosity, and Your grace and Your favours. O Possessor of generosity and favour and might and gratitude, by Your mercy, O most Merciful of the Merciful! (Majlisi 14 A.H, 91:111)

The concept of Divine Mercy plays a key role here. God shows much mercy toward His servants throughout their lives, so Imam Ali (a) expects such Merciful God not to deprive him of His mercy when he desperately needs it. God's mercy showers upon us even before our creation. He puts mercy in the hearts of our parents so that they love and take care of us. Then, His mercy continues to be with us throughout our lives. Thus, we do not expect our Lord to leave us alone in the Hereafter.

Therefore, Divine Mercy is the key which can open every lock. If one has any problem in his life, he should ask God to solve it by His vast mercy. Definitely, God is always there to help, but He helps those who ask for His help. If we confronted the most generous person but did not ask him for help, he would not help us. Therefore, God showers His mercy on those who appreciate it.

Of course, in this world, His mercy includes even those who do not appreciate it. In the Hereafter, however, it will cover only those who deserve it.

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1. See Quran, 26:88-89.
2. See Quran , 25:27.
3. See Quran, 55 :41.
4. See Quran 31:33 .
5. See Quran 40:52 .
6. See Quran 82:19.
7. See Quran 80: 34-37.
8. See Quran 70:11-16.
9. The text of the hadith is as follows:

وأخرج الطبراني وابن مردويه ، عن ابن عباس ان النبي صلى الله عليه وأله قال: إذا دخل الرجل الجنة سال عن ابويه وذريته وولده ، فيقال انهم لم يبلغوا درجتك وعملك فيقول: يا رب قد علمت لي ولهم ، فيومر بالحقهم به. وقرا بن عباس في قوله: والذين آمنوا واتبعتهم ذريتهم الآية

10. Bihar Al- Anwar, vol. 91 p. 11

Category:

Supplications [4]

General [5]

Spirituality [6]

Featured Category:

Spirituality [7]

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