

The Greatness of the Shia

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Our ethical discussion today is a continuation of the topic on the Greatness of the Shia (فضائل الشيعة). The late 'Allamah Majlisi has presented a very detailed discussion in relation to both the Greatness of the Shia (فضائل الشيعة) and the Characteristics of the Shia (صفات الشيعة) and he narrates many traditions in regards to these two issues.

It is very important that all of us read these traditions and know for ourselves - and then convey to others - the meaning of these traditions so that those people who feel proud just because they have the title of Shia attached to them will know that to be a follower of the teachings of the Ahlul Bait (and to be called a Shia) is not an easy task.

We narrate one tradition which even though does not directly speak about the greatness of the Shia, however it addresses a responsibility that a true Shia must fulfill.

In this short tradition from Imam Ja'far b. Muhammad as-Sadiq (as) addressed to Abu Basir, the Imam explains the characteristics of a Shia

عَنْ مُحَمَّدِ بْنِ إِسْمَاعِيلَ، عَنْ أَبِيهِ قَالَ: كُنْتُ عِنْدَ أَبِي عَبْدِ اللَّهِ : إِذَا دَخَلَ عَلَيْهِ أَبُو بَصِيرٍ ... فَقَالَ يَا أَبَا مُحَمَّدٍ لَقَدْ ذَكَرَكُمْ اللَّهُ فِي كِتَابِهِ فَقَالَ: (إِنَّ عِبَادِي لَيْسَ لَكَ عَلَيْهِمْ سُلْطَانٌ) وَاللَّهُ مَا أَرَادَ بِهَذَا إِلَّا الْأَئِمَّةَ وَشِيعَتَهُمْ، فَهَلْ سَرَرْتُكَ يَا أَبَا مُحَمَّدٍ؟ قَالَ: قُلْتُ: جُعِلْتُ فِدَاكَ زِدْنِي...

It has been narrated from Muhammad b. Isma'il from his father that he said, "I was with Abi 'Abdillah (Ja'far b. Muhammad as-Sadiq (as)) when Abu Basir entered our company. He was breathing heavily when the Imam turned towards him and asked him what was troubling him. Abu Basir said that old age had taken him over and he was finding it very difficult to breathe. He stated that he was on the verge of leaving this world, but worse than all of this, he was worried about what his state would be after death and where he would end up.

The Imam said to him, 'Why are you speaking like this when you have the honour of being classified as a Shia?' At this point, the Imam went on to list the greatness and reasons why one who is a Shia should be proud and every time the Imam mentioned a point, he said to Abu Basir, "Does this not bring pleasure to you (that you possess this trait)?"

Abu Basir would reply to the Imam: "Of course, may I be sacrificed for you, please continue..." Continuing on, the Imam (as) then said, "O' Abu Basir! Surely Allah has spoken about you, our

Shia in the Qur`an when He said, {Surely over My servants no authority shall you (Shaitan) have}(Surat al-Hijr (15), Verse 42)

and verily I swear that Allah has not intended any other servants of His in this verse except the A`immah and their Shia (followers).” (Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 65, pg. 51)

In relation to Shaitan, there are many questions which the youth have recently brought up, and thus it is necessary to review these queries.

Question 1: Why did Allah (SwT) create this filthy, despicable creature known as Shaitan who is able to whisper evil thoughts to us and he takes us away from the path of happiness, whereas we were created to traverse the path of happiness and success?

Answer 1: Allah (SwT) did not create Shaitan as Shaitan - rather, He created him pure and there was even a time when he was classified among the Angels and thus he was not a creation that was made to negatively influence others. Rather, he was a righteous creature and was among the pious, spiritually close worshippers in the presence of Allah (SwT).

However, after choosing the wrong path, he lost his spiritual direction and through his pride and seeing himself as greater than Adam (as) and through his envy and jealousy, he ended up following his low desires. Thus, he sought status and greatness (over Adam (as)) and lowered his rank.

Therefore, the original cause for the spiritual fall of Shaitan was due to him following his low desires and even today, if a person does not follow these in their life, then there is no way that Shaitan can influence him.

:In relation to Shaitan, the Qur`an mentions that

أَبَىٰ وَاسْتَكْبَرَ وَكَانَ مِنَ الْكَافِرِينَ

But he became conceited and developed pride in himself and thus he was one of the “disbelievers.” (Surat al-Baqarah (2), Verse 34)

Due to his actions, Allah (SwT) lowered him to the status that he currently has and thus with this said we see that Shaitan was not always Shaitan as we know him to be.

Retort to Question 1: If Shaitan was part of the group of Angels, and as we know that Angels do not have the ability to make decisions on their own and are all under the command of Allah (SwT), then how did he disobey the orders and turn away from the commandments of Allah (SwT)?

Answer: Shaitan was not an Angel such that he did not have the power to make his own

.decisions - rather, he was from among the Jinn

:Question 2: As it is commonly known, we were all created for happiness and prosperity

مَا خَلَقْتُ الْجِنَّ وَالْإِنْسَ إِلَّا لِيَعْبُدُونِ

I (Allah) did not create the Jinn and Mankind except that they should worship Me.” (Surat al-Nahl (16), Verse 10)

With this said, why was it necessary to have a creation such as Shaitan who would irritate people. As well, him being a creation who can not be seen and thus, it is not possible to defend ourselves from him? This (in our opinion) goes against the actual purpose of the creation of mankind.

Answer 2: The Qur`an states that Shaitan cannot influence anyone through his own accord as the doors to the heart of each person are closed to Shaitan. Thus, it is the person himself who opens the door of his heart to Shaitan. In reality, there is not a single despicable creation that can in any way influence either the country which a person lives in, nor the soul of a person

إِنَّمَا سُلْطَانُهُ عَلَى الَّذِينَ يَتَوَلَّوْنَهُ وَالَّذِينَ هُمْ بِهِ مُشْرِكُونَ

His authority (that of Shaitan) is only over those who take him as a supporter and who join “partners with Allah.” (Surat al-Nahl (16), Verse 100)

That person who sets up Shaitan as a partner to Allah (SwT) and follows him (Shaitan) will also be called a Shaitan on the Day of Judgement

وَمَا كَانَ لِيَ عَلَيْكُمْ مِنْ سُلْطَانٍ إِلَّا أَنْ دَعَوْتُكُمْ فَاسْتَجَبْتُمْ فَلَا تَلُومُونِي وَلُومُوا أَنْفُسَكُمْ

I (Shaitan) had no authority over you except that I invited you and you listened to me.” Therefore, do not reproach or blame me, rather, blame your own souls.” (Surat Ibrahim (14), Verse 22)

It is worthy to note that Shaitan himself is one of the means or instruments towards perfection for the human being who is striving to become a complete person, because since struggling and fighting against him will lead to strengthening ones' own inner faith.

In his book the Philosophy of History, one of the well known writers of the West named Toynby

writes that, "I have studied all of the nations of the world and did not find a single civilization except that at one time or another, they were put face to face with a powerful foreign enemy. In order to defend themselves, they gathered all the people together and in the end, were victorious."

Thus, there is a wisdom in why Shaitan exists. Similarly, if there were no lower desires in a human being, then the mystics ('Urafa) would not become as strong as they are in their closeness to Allah (SwT).

:The Qur`an mentions that

إِنَّ عِبَادِي لَيْسَ لَكَ عَلَيْهِمْ سُلْطَانٌ

Certainly Shaitan has no control or authority over My true servants."

The meaning of this verse is not that Shaitan has no control over the Shia, rather, Allah (SwT) is telling us that He is the defender and protector of those people that come towards Him and worship Him.

This is truly a grand station and it is one of the reasons that those who are the true Shia should have pride that they are not under the influence of Shaitan.

The meaning of this verse is also that those people who are under the influence of Shaitan are not true Shia, and therefore this verse actually increases our responsibility as followers of the Ahlul Bait.

The Shia are not people who are Ma'sum (sinless) and thus, it is possible that Shaitan can go after them, however the Qur`an tells us that

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ اتَّقَوْا إِذَا مَسَّهُمْ طَائِفٌ مِّنَ الشَّيْطَانِ تَذَكَّرُوا فَإِذَا هُمْ مُبْصِرُونَ

When a thought of evil from Shaitan assaults those people who have consciousness of Allah," then they bring Allah to remembrance, then they are able to see straight (the true path) once again!" (Surat al-A`raf (7), Verse 201)

When those people who have tawqa are faced with the evil whispers of Shaitan they rush towards the remembrance of Allah (SwT) (meaning that they bring to memory the rewards and punishments that Allah (SwT) has mentioned in the Qur`an) and in His remembrance, they once again open their eyes to the realities around them.

It is possible that Shaitan can come towards a Shia, but he can not control them and thus, the responsibility of those who are followers of the Ahlul Bait is very heavy.

Thus the powers of Shaitan should have no influence on the individual, society, printed-press, market place and in the temporal and spiritual life of a person and if this does happen (Shaitan takes over) then this is a sign that the person is not really a Shia. It is our prayer that Allah (SwT) gives us the success to have the pride of being classified as !one of those who is a true Shia

سَمِعْتُ أَبَا عَبْدِ اللَّهِ يَقُولُ: إِنَّ أَحَقَّ النَّاسِ بِالْوَرَعِ آلَ مُحَمَّدٍ وَشِيعَتِهِمْ كَيْ تَقْتَدِيَ الرَّعِيَّةَ بِهِمْ

I heard Aba 'Abdillah (as) say, "The closest people to precaution and keeping away from sins (al-Wara') are the family of Muhammad (blessings of Allah be upon him and his family) and their Shia (followers) as long as other people are following them (those who claim to be the Shia or followers)." (Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 65, pg. 166, tradition 21)

Surely being classified as a Shia is a gift from the Imam to us. The Infallible A`immah and the Prophet (S) are all leaders for the fspeople, and the Shia too must be leaders for the people. In reality, within an Islamic society, the Shia must be at the forefront and others must follow behind them - just as we see in the south of Lebanon that among the ranks of those who are struggling (for their rights) are the Shia and the others are following them. Everyone knows and recognizes these people (in South Lebanon) as the ones who are sacrificing themselves and giving up their lives for their cause.

Throughout the entire world, the Shia must not only be known for their struggling and opposition (to tyranny) and their active Jihad (against the enemy), rather they must also be role-models and examples in all aspects of life for others to follow

Some of the (تقوى) is a concept that is even higher than just plain Taqwa (ورع) 'The word Wara great scholars have said that Wara' can actually be divided into four categories:

1. Level One - The Wara' of the Ta'ibin (Those who are repentant): In this level, a person is saved from committing open transgressions (against the laws of Allah (SwT)); and the simplest level of this is that of 'Adalah (the character of being just and upright). By this we mean that after committing a sin and performing sincere repentance, the person returns back to the ranks of those who are upright and just ('Adil).
2. Level Two - The Wara' of the Salihin (Those who are righteous): At this level, a person keeps away from things which are doubtful - meaning that those things which are apparently permitted (halal), however there may be some doubt in regards to them and thus, a person keeps away from these things as well.
3. Level Three - The Wara' of the Muttaqin (Those who have Allah-Consciousness): These

people refrain from sinning, and also refrain from those things in which there is doubt and those things which are permitted (halal) however in which there is a possibility that they will be dragged towards the forbidden (haram) if they perform these acts. For example, a person who speaks little since he fears that if he begins to speak too much, he may unknowingly backbite :another person. In reality, this sort of person has entered into a mental state of

أَتْرُكُ مَا لَا بَأْسَ بِهِ حَذَرًا مِمَّا بَأْسَ بِهِ

I will refrain from those things which there is no problem in performing with the fear that I may“ go towards those things which are problematic (in performing).”

4. Level Four - The Wara' of the Siddiqin (Those who are the Truthful Ones): At this level, one turns his attention completely away from everything other than Allah (SwT) because of the fear that he may waste precious time of his life (on other than His Creator). This person also turns his spiritual eyes away from everything other than Allah (SwT) and focuses all of his attention only on Him so that the time of his life is spent in looking towards the Creator. Truthfully, the most valuable possession of our lives is time, but unfortunately sometimes we waste it and are negligent (of Allah (SwT)). Thus, the truthful ones realize that their level of Wara' is in relation to the time and how they spend it and are careful that they do not waste it in being negligent of Allah (SwT).

Imam Ja'far b. Muhammad as-Sadiq (as) has said that the most precautious of people are the family of the Prophet and their followers (Shia) and that the minimum level that they (the Shia) must be at is the first level - meaning that the Shia must be fair and upright ('Adil) people and leaders for other people. Thus, a Shia must not only be trying to save himself (from the hell fire), but he must also be striving to save others around him.

At the end of Suratul Furqan (25), there are 12 characteristics mentioned for the 'Ibadul :Rahman (Servant of the Most Merciful) of which one of them is

وَالَّذِينَ يَقُولُونَ رَبَّنَا هَبْ لَنَا مِنْ أَزْوَاجِنَا وَ ذُرِّيَّتِنَا قُرَّةَ أَعْيُنٍ وَاجْعَلْنَا لِلْمُتَّقِينَ إِمَامًا

Those people who say, 'O' our Lord grant us from among our spouses and among our children“ that which enlightens our eyes and make us an Imam (leader) for those who have Allah-Consciousness.” (Surat al-Furqan (25), Verse 74)

There are people who pray to Allah (SwT) not to leave their children as 'normal children' - rather that they are made as the light of their eyes and examples for other Muslims. These

people humbly request Allah (SwT) to make themselves a leader (Imam) of those who possess Taqwa. Some may ask that is this goal to make ones' self superior or greater than other people (in a negative context)? No! Rather, this is a person who is seeking sublimity and spiritual greatness.

Therefore, it is clear that to take the name of Tashayyah' (to be a Shia) and to claim among the people that one is in the ranks of a Shia is something that is very simple, however it is extremely difficult to be a true Shia.

Imam az-Zaman (as) and the rest of the Infallible Leaders of guidance expect more from those who are scholars and those who are studying the Islamic sciences and it is these people that must be examples and role models for the rest of the people so that others can follow them.

Thus, the most important form of Tabligh and conveyance of the message of Islam is that a person develops such a level of Taqwa and Wara' within his soul that the people are able to develop a deep cognizance (ma'rifat) of Allah (SwT) within them. Through this, the people will know who a true human being is and who the true Shias are.

The true Shia are those who are brave, patient, full of love, those who keep away from vices and who refrain from the prohibited acts and who do not have the love of status or position (within society) in their hearts.

The conditions in our present day and age are exclusive to today and we are faced with three major crises:

1. The Political Crisis: Never ending problems that have taken place today everywhere in which we do not see any positive outcome for the people of the world.
2. The Economic Crisis: These are problems in relation to affordable housing, the high cost of marriages, problems in relation to unemployment and the tribulations brought about through inflation.
3. The Ethical Crisis: This point is even more important than the first two especially the crisis which has erupted and engulfed the young boys and girls of the society and is pulling them towards corruption. The reasons for this crisis can be divided into the following three categories:

A) The Spread of Various Technologies: Various CDs, photos, movies, satellite dishes, and of course the InterNet have made the issue of sex and sexuality something that is easy to get access to for anyone (who wants these sorts of things).

B) Freedom with no Limits and Boundaries: In other words, slavery under the guise of 'freedom'. By this we mean that people are made slaves of their lower desires under the title of freedom such that Amr bil Ma'ruf and Nahi 'anil Munkar (Forcefully commanding to that which

is ethically right and vigorously forbidding from that which is bad or evil) is now something that people feel embarrassed to perform. The freedom that can lead to perfection of mankind (the religion and teachings of Allah (SwT) which came to perfect man) have now been redefined as the reason why mankind has fallen and descended from his true state (of perfection) (meaning that people are blaming religion and saying that it is actually these sets of ethical guidelines which have corrupted mankind).

C) The Hidden Forces: The enemies are of the belief that if they are able to corrupt the youth, then it will be much easier to take control of them - and this thought is absolutely correct! These people (the enemies of Islam) feel that the only thing stopping them from achieving their goal is the din and akhlaq (moral ethics) of Islam, since when a community becomes polluted by sin and corruption and becomes addicted to smoking and drugs, then they are no longer able to stand up in defiance to the enemy.

Should we remain quiet in the face of these issues and just recite supplications until the reformer (the 12th Imam, may Allah hasten his return) makes his advent? This is the opinion of the person who are timid and lazy.

In Karbala, how many people were present who stood up? Or even at the time of the Prophet of Islam (S) who stood up alone to invite the people to Islam. In addition, Prophet Ibrahim (as) stood alone in his mission. Thus, we must not be afraid of the number of people who are :traversing the path of justice

لَا تَسْتَوْحِشُوا فِي طَرِيقِ الْهُدَى لِقَلَّةِ أَهْلِهِ

Do not be afraid of traversing the path of true guidance due to the small number of people“ who are upon it.”

By the grace of Allah (SwT) even today, the number of people who are on this path is not small. On the 15th of Sha'ban, there are more people around Masjid Jamkaran (the Masjid just outside of Qum, Iran which was built under the direct command of the 12th Imam) than there are on the plains of 'Arafat and that too - most of them are young men and women! If we look at the times of I'tikaf (spiritual retreat to the Masjid), the youth are so anxious and excited that you can not even find a place to sit in the Masjid - and these youth are a part of our army!

The scholars, through their writings and works must be examples so that they are able to stand up in opposition to this moral and ethical crisis. While on this path, our hearts must be content Divine Promises given in the Qur'an and traditions. Even today, people simply see the Scholars

and 'Ulama as those who only come during the Month of Muharram to specific areas and localities for Tabligh purposes. These scholars are supposed to come, give lectures, and then gather all of the problems of the people and after returning back home, present the problems to the leaders and those in charge (to help solve them).

As it has been stated, people are of two groups - there is one group of "common people" who say that they will purify themselves during the month of Ramadhan; however it is the "special group" of people who say that during the month of Sha'ban, they will purify themselves and in this state of purity, they will enter into the month of Ramadhan - since the month of Ramadhan is the month of being the invited guests of Allah (SwT) and the guests must first purify themselves.

The tongue and the eyes must be washed with the water of purity during the month of Sha'ban so that one can benefit from the blessings and bounties during the month of Ramadhan. People should also be taught that the month of Sha'ban is the month of self-building and preparing to be the spiritual guests of Allah (SwT).

We pray for the success in performing our responsibilities and actions and that we do not align ourselves with the various political factions (which divide a community).

We ourselves do not have any problems, rather, we ourselves have brought these problems upon ourselves and thus we must all be united since it is the enemies who have equipped themselves to defeat us, and if they were to infuse themselves into our communities, then they !will not leave anyone alone