

(.Importance of Imamate and the Status of Imam (a.s

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Imamat is a matter of great merit. In fact no other issue in Islam is more significant than the subject of Imamat. Its importance lies in the fact that it's the only reliable means to reach to the true recognition of Allah. It is only through Imamat that one can obtain the true recognition of Allah and comprehend the manner of worshipping Him. If anyone adopts some means of worshipping Allah other than the one suggested by the Imams (a.s), he will never be successful in his endeavor.

The following phrases of Ziarat-e-Jameah-e-Kabirah highlight this point beautifully. *"May my parents, myself, my family and my wealth be sacrificed for you. The one who desired to reach Allah began from you. The one who has acknowledged His Unity has obtained Tauheed from you. The one who loves Allah turns towards you"* (Mafatihul Jinaan)

In this same Ziarat, it is mentioned elsewhere *'The one who comes to you has received salvation and the one who forsakes you is ruined. You invite (the people) towards Allah and point towards Him.'* (Mafatihul Jinaan)

When we ponder over these phrases of Ziarat-e-Jameah, it becomes clear that only the path shown by the Ahle Bait (a.s.) can lead us to true recognition of Allah and His Tauheed and in this manner He can be worshipped as He ought to be worshipped. And should it not be like this? These are the personalities who invite the people towards Allah and show the path towards Him since Allah has created man solely for His worship. Allah says in the Quran **'I have not created man and the jinn except that they should worship Me.'** (Surah Zaariyat, Verse 52)

If man wants to realize the aim of his creation, then he should worship Allah. And for Allah's genuine and acceptable worship it is necessary to tread the path shown by the Ahle Bait (a.s.). In the light of the phrases of Ziarat-e-Jameah let us also cast a glance at the phrases of Dua-e-Nudbah. This Dua is specifically for Imam-e-Zamana (a.t.f.s.). It is recommended to recite it on Idd-ul-Fitr, Idd-uz-Zoha, Idd-e-Ghadeer and every Friday in which it is found *'...Where is that gate of Allah through which it is possible to reach Him? Where is the face of Allah towards whom all other 'friends' Awliya of Allah turn? Where is the one who is the medium between the heavens and the earth?'*

The Imam (a.s) of every era is the means for reaching towards Allah. It is through the Imam alone that Allah's true recognition can be acquired and it is through him that one can learn to worship Allah and reach Him. In this era the 'Proof' (Hujjat) of Allah and the Imam of the time

is none other than our twelfth Imam Hazrat Hujjat bin Hasan Askari (a.t.f.s.). Genuine recognition and Allah's worship i.e. establishing a divine link through knowledge and actions, is facilitated through the belief in Imamat. The belief in the Imamat of Imam-e-Asr (a.t.f.s.) means acknowledging the gate that helps man reach Allah's recognition.

Status of Imamat

Allah has bestowed the illustrious status of Imamat upon our Imams (a.s) not without any reason or wisdom. Allah Himself alludes to this fact in the noble Quran when He declares **'So when they were patient, We made them Imams from amongst themselves who guide the people by Our commands.'**(Surah Sajdah, Verse 24)

This brief verse highlights four crucial points:

1. 'We have made them as Imams.' This shows that the right of appointing an Imam rests exclusively with Allah and with none else. This is a matter of appointment of an Imam for the entire creation and not a matter of appointing some 'Imam' for congregational prayers in a local mosque.
2. Min Hoom (from amongst them) Allah has appointed only a few from the nation for this crucial position. This shows that each and every person is not eligible for this rank. Allah sees the qualities and abilities and only then does He bestow this honor.
3. 'who guide the people by Our commands.' They guide the people by Our commands and orders. There are two types of systems prevalent in the universe viz. (a) Khalq (creation) and (b) Amr (order). The system of creation is that system wherein the things come into existence through the normal process of "cause and effect". For instance the sperm gradually (after passing through various stages) is converted into a man. Or a seed after undergoing through the normal processes finally becomes a tree. On the other hand, in the system of 'Amr' – which is superior to the system of creation – things don't move through the normal process. Nor is time and space a pre-condition for the actualization of the outcome. Here only the intention of 'Be' is sufficient. As Allah says in the Quran:
'His command – when He intends anything – is only to say, "Be" and it becomes.' (Surah

Yasin, Verse 82)

This means that the mere intention of a thing is sufficient to bring about its existence. Neither any cause or reason is essential nor are there any restrictions of time and place. These Imams (a.s) guide by virtue of (this) command of Allah. If they desire to guide someone then a simple intention on their part is enough to guide that person. Like the way Janabe Zohair bin Qain (r.a.) was guided by Imam Husain (a.s). In a brief meeting of a just a few moments, Imam (a.s)

changed Zohair bin Qain (r.a.) completely. But in order to be included in this form of guidance it is necessary that a person raises himself to such a high level that he becomes eligible to derive benefits from the winds of guidance. Idleness is from our side. It is essential for the earth to bear such qualities that will make it profit from the pure drops of rain and will lead to the flourishing of flora and fauna. Today this guidance is present for us in the form of Hazrat Wali-e-Asr (a.t.f.s.). The only precondition is that we should derive benefit from him.

4. 'When they were patient' This particular phrase shows why this distinction of Imamatus was granted to them. It is truly a miracle of Quran that it had explained the exalted status of Imamatus in only two words. As if the entire sea has been capsuled in a pair of hands. Allah – through the phrase 'When they were patient' has defined the foundation of Imamatus and through the phrase 'who guide the people by Our commands.' He has elucidated the responsibility of Imamatus.

The Origin of Patience

Patience has various levels. In logical terminology it is a 'sum total' with different degrees and which cannot be applied universally. It is of three kinds viz. patience near sins, patience in the face of calamities and patience on one's desires. However, it is not our aim over here to get into a detailed discussion on this topic. The origin of patience lies in talking less, in controlling one's tongue, in refraining one's self from talking nonsense or irrational talks. It involves training oneself to talk only when it is necessary and that too in a concise manner. This is the very first stage of patience. There is a lot of emphasis on silence in books related to spiritual training. Along with the tongue it is also essential to keep one's eyes also in control. The 'Nafs' of a person employs these two faculties in a lot of futile things.

Perfect Patience

Gradually a person should prepare himself to be patient on the bounties of this world. The heart should not be accustomed to the comforts of the world, nor should any of its pleasures build a house in it. No form of lust or greed should be allowed to enter the heart. We find in Dua-e-Nudbah 'And when You fixed the condition that they will forsake this detestable world and its luxuries and comforts and will not attach one's self to it, then they accepted this condition. Then when You saw that they fulfilled this demand in totality, You favored them and made them Your proximate and You reserved for them the best of remembrances and the finest of descriptions and adulation and You descended upon them Your angels.' To remain patient on the bounties of this world is just one of the stages. There are many more stages of

patience after this. The stage after the world is that of 'Barzakh'. Another form of patience is to exercise complete restraint and mastery on our thoughts. This particular stage is more arduous than being

patient upon the bounties of the world. Man can turn his face away from the luxuries of this world. But his thoughts too should be in his control. He should have such command and influence upon his 'Nafs' that no thought should be able to enter his mind without his consent. It is not a matter of few moments, hours, days and years. No doubt this is extremely difficult. Just try to keep yourself focused on one particular point for a few moments – taking care that your attention is not distracted by any other thought – you will realize the magnitude of this task. When it is difficult to concentrate for such a small duration of time then to keep one's mind free from distractions and diversions for the whole life is that stage of patience which is far higher than being patient on calamities. Here the mind falters and becomes helpless. Imam Husain (a.s), even when surrounded by grief and calamities says 'In the name of Allah, by the strength and support of Allah and for the sake of Allah.' 'At the time when he (a.s) was strewn with wounds and injuries and when he fell from his horse to the ground and when he was rubbing his blood on his face at that time too he was saying

'Bismillah Wa Billah Wa Fi Sabilliah'

In such dangerous and difficult times too no other thought could distract Imam Husain (a.s) from remembering Allah. 'Allah knows best where He places His message.' (Surah An'aam. Verse 124)

After this world comes the Hereafter. Nothing from the Hereafter should attract a person. Neither the bounties of Paradise nor the chastisement of Hell nor the stages of Mahshar. Ameerul Momineen – Imam Ali Ibne Talib (a.s) has expressed this most eloquently when he says *'Some people worship Allah for the sake of rewards. This is the worship of traders. While some worship Allah due to the fear of being punished. This is the worship of a slave. Yet others worship Allah out of gratitude for His bounties. This is the worship of free men.'* (Nahjul Balagha: trad. 237, vol. 2, Ansariyan Publications)

One should have so much control on one's 'Nafs' that while worshipping Allah he should neither think about the bounties of Paradise nor about the punishments of Hell. It is extremely difficult to reach to this stage of patience. And this stage too demands a remarkable amount of restrain on the 'Nafs'

The ideal worshipper

Allah's worship is solely for Him. Nothing can be associated with Allah in His worship. It means that the sole aim of our worship is to achieve Allah's satisfaction, neither this world nor Barzakh nor the Hereafter. It is obvious that the one who has submitted himself to Allah's love and whose excellence lies in Allah's worship, then to him nothing else matters. All other things are worthless in his eyes. Everything is subservient and obedient to his wishes and orders. It is found in Ziarat-e-Jameah wherein it is said 'Everything is lowly and subservient to you.' Our Imam is not only for humans on this earth. He is the Imam of the entire universe. It is because of presence of Imam (a.s.) that rain descends on the earth, the heaven and the earth are secure in their respective places and our difficulties are repelled.

When a person reaches to this perfect level of worship then he becomes a symbol of divine attributes. In fact many a times those who are far removed from reality and are not well versed with the teachings of Ahle Bait (a.s.) start considering this emblem of divine characteristics as Allah Himself! This complete worshipper – by the permission of Allah – nurtures the entire universe and provides sustenance to each and every individual and arranges for all other necessities of life so that everyone is able to reach to his goal of perfection. It is for this reason that it is mentioned for Imam-e-Asr (a.t.f.s.) 'It is due to his existence that the heavens and the earth are secure in their place and it is due to his benevolence that everyone acquires sustenance.' No doubt that Allah is the One Who is the giver of life. However, He gives it due to the benevolence of Imam-e-Asr (a.t.f.s.). Allah is the One who provides sustenance, but it is through the blessings of Imam-e-Asr (a.t.f.s.). All the bounties that are available on this earth are due to the benevolence of Hazrat Hujjat Ibne Hasan Askari (a.t.f.s.). Now, when all the favors that we receive from Allah are through Imam-e-Zamana (a.t.f.s.) then all our worship and supplications towards Allah will be worthy of acceptance if they are acceptable near Imam-e-Zamana (a.t.f.s.). Keeping in mind the endless benefits that we receive from Imam-e-Zamana (a.t.f.s.) we are obliged to confess with a sense of remorse that 'O Master of the time! It's been a long time since we are receiving benefits through you. We are living our lives through your grace and acquiring Allah's bounties due to your benevolence. It is due to your venerable presence that our body and soul are being nourished. It is only because of you that Allah's kindness reaches us. Yet when we look at our actions and within ourselves, it becomes apparent to us that we have still not been able to acquire your true recognition. We have not recognized your true value nor have we been able to fulfill your rights. We have contributed so much to your suffering that we shudder to think how Allah will take our account. At every step we have derived benefits from you but have not done anything for you. We have acquired fame and status through you but have not done anything to glorify your name. We have received our

sustenance due to your grace but have not spent anything in your way. We have exploited you in all walks of our life for our personal gains but have failed to endure any form of adversity for your sake.' 'O the Yusuf of Janabe Zahra! We – like the brothers of Hazrat Yusuf (a.s.) – are ashamed of ourselves in front of you. We confess that we have oppressed and wronged you.

And we seek forgiveness from you for our actions.

Patience of Imam-e-Zamana (a.t.f.s.)

In light of the latest scientific research, it has been firmly established that past events are present in the atmosphere. However, our perception is so weak that we are unable to comprehend those occurrences. With some focused training of the soul, a person can visualize an event in the past like Day of Ashoora and see it with his eyes. However, there are some episodes in the event of Karbala , which are very heart rending. It is beyond the capacity of ordinary humans to endure them. But the entire event of Karbala – right down to its minutest details – is witnessed by Imam-e-Zamana's (a.t.f.s.), including all those events that are unbearable for the average human being. Besides this, the dress of Imam Husain (a.s) drenched in his blood is present right in front of Imam-e-Zamana's (a.t.f.s.) eyes and fresh blood is continuously dripping from it. This will continue till the reappearance of Imam (a.t.f.s.), when he (a.t.f.s.) finally avenges the massacre of Karbala . Imam-e-Zamana (a.t.f.s.) has to witness all these calamities every day and then be patient upon them. He actually sees the calamities with his eyes and is patient upon them while it is difficult for us to bear it even by listening to them. Indeed what must be the level of Imam's (a.t.f.s.) patience and forbearance? Apart from the tribulations of Karbala , Imam (a.t.f.s.) also witnesses the calamities that befell Janabe Zahra (s.a) and Ameerul Momineen (a.s.), then Imam Hasan (a.s) and every Imam till his father Imam Hasan Askari (a.s). All persecution that was meted out to his friends and lovers (i.e. Shias) are also before his eyes. He sees them, but is extremely patient and forbearing. In spite of having the authority, he has to accept Allah's command and remain in occultation and be patient. If someone reflects on all this, he will comprehend the troubled and distressed condition of Imam (a.t.f.s.). He will also realize the significance of praying for the earliest reappearance of Imam (a.t.f.s.), preparing the ground for his reappearance, bringing the people closer to him (a.t.f.s.) and making them eager and restless for his presence. These are some of our responsibilities in the period of occultation. It should not be that lapses and laziness on our part become the cause of increase in his (a.t.f.s.) pain and suffering. Otherwise we will lose face in front of our Imam and will be very regretful after that. We hope that by pondering on this discussion the readers may have comprehended the significance of the

phrase 'when they were patient' of the verse. Come let all of us present ourselves in front of Allah through Imam (a.s.) and pray to Him that He should forgive our shortcomings. And through the afflictions heaped on Janabe Zahra (s.a), let us beseech and pray for the earliest .reappearance of Yusuf-e-Zahra