An Approach By Nahj al-Balāghah:

Knowing Allah, His Greatness and His Grace

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Abstract: *Nahaj al-Balāghah is divided into three sections of Sermons, Letters and short Sayings or' Wise Sayings'(□ ikam), as they are usually called. Nah aj al-Balāghah dates back to about one thousand years ago when the late Sayyid Ra di compiled these Letters and Sermons at the end of the third and the outset of the fifth century (400A.H.). It is, thus, a one-thousand-year-old book. It is to be noted, however, before Sayyid Ra di efforts to gather Ali's Sermons and Sayings, they were scattered in the books of the Traditions' and history.*

Faith in Tuhid is the first pillar of Islam. Tuhid or One-ness of Allah is the central point of the teachings of all the prophets. Each prophet put his emphasis on this doctrine. The best means by which seekers of nearness to Allah, the Glorified, the Exalted, seek nearness, is the belief in Him and His Prophet. In this article, the focus is to reveal the importance of Praise in Amir

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al-Mu'minin
's (a.s.) sayings. Also, the approach by which Imam puts forward the most fundamental pillar of Islam will be discussed and analyzed. Blessed is he who sincerely devotes the entirety of his actions, knowledge, love, hatred, receiving, relinquishing, speech, silence, deeds, and statements absolutely to Allah.

Key Words: *Amir al-mu'minin (a.s.) , Nahaj al-Balāghah, monotheism, grace, praise*

Nahaj al-Balāghah is a book comprising the sermons, letters and sayings of Imam Ali (a.s). These sermons and preaching of Imam Ali were so highly valued and venerated in the Islamic world that within a century of his demise(40 A.H, 661 CE) they were taught and read as the last word on the philosophy of monotheism and as the most effective sermons towards piety, a guiding beacon towards truth and justice, marvelous eulogies of the Holy Prophet and the Holy Quran, convincing discourses of the spiritual values of Islam, awe-inspiring discussions about the attributes of Allah, masterpiece of literature, and a model of the art of rhetoric. It is a book of immense prior knowledge about modern scientific theories and discoveries.

To expose the importance of *Nahaj al-Balāghah* from a very prominent Shia figure, Grand Ayatullah Sistān i has been requested to reveal his view in a few sentences regarding *Nahaj al-Balāghah*, which follows:

What has been recorded in this book from words and sayings of the Commander of the Faithful, Ali (A.S) is, without doubt, at the peak and pinnacle of eloquence after the words of Allah, the Exalted, and those of His Prophet (S). That is because the book offers innate (Fitri) methods of thinking and reflection on the universe and the realities in it. As well, the book provides an exposition of the tenets of Islam, its teachings, guidelines and traditions which human life is based upon. Also, the ways to self purification and development of the soul, the purposes of Shari'ah which provide the basis of religious laws have been put forward. Similarly, the etiquettes of statesmanship, its conditions and necessary qualifications, the method of praising and glorifying Allah, invocation and supplication etc. have been explained. This precious book, on the other hand, is a true mirror showcasing the history of Islam and the events that took place following the demise of the Holy Prophet (S) especially the period of the caliphate of Imam Ali (A.S) encompassing an important part of his normative conduct, moral virtues, knowledge and jurisprudence.

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It is befitting for all Muslims to benefit from this book in their religious matters, to learn from it and use it for self-purification. I recommend all – especially the youth – to give special importance to studying this book, reflecting on it and memorizing a part of it.

What is expected of those who claim to love the Imam and who wish to have lived in his time so that they could hear his advice and benefit from his guidance and walk in his path, is to fulfill their wish by benefiting from the contents of this book. The Commander of the Faithful, Ali (A.S) said during the Battle of Jamal: "I am accompanied, in this battle, by those who are still in their fathers' loins and their mothers' uteruses." He referred to those whose true intentions based on their aspirations and desires concerning the presence of the Imam of Time (A.S) and obedience to his commands, God is aware of. These are people who – on the Day of Judgment when every people will be resurrected with their leaders (good or bad) – will be resurrected with divine saints (awliyā). That is because they acted upon the teachings of the Commander of the Faithful (A.S) without casting doubt or making an excuse or showing their attachment towards him by expressing their desires only.

An appraisal, however brief, of the approach of *Nahaj al-Balāghah* and its comparison with that of other schools of thought is essential for it is uncovering the true worth of its views on the problems of theology. We shall confine ourselves to the brief, though not quite sufficient, examples quoted in the foregoing pages and proceed to evaluate them. The subject of the Divine Essence and Attributes is one which has been discussed a lot by the ancient and modern philosophers, mystics and
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But, in general, their method and approach is totally different from that of *Nahaj al-Balāghah* whose approach is highly original and unprecedented. Only in the Holy Quran can a precedent for
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be found. Apart from the Holy Quran, we do not find any other source that provides some ground for the discourses of
Nahaj al-Balāghah
. As pointed out earlier, some scholars because of their failure to trace back the notions elaborated in
Nahaj al-Balāghah
in some earlier sources have questioned the authenticity of ascription of these discourses to

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Imam Ali (A.S). They have suggested that these discourses appeared in a later period, after the appearance of the Mu`tazilites and the assimilation of the Greek ideology, heedless of the following saying: “The mean earth with the sublime heaven does not compare! How ignorant it is to compare the Mu`tazilite and the Greek ideologies with the teachings of *Nahaj al-Balāghah* !

It a common belief in all branches of Islam that the Almighty, and omnipotent God exists as the Creator and Ruler of the universe; and that the traces and signs of His greatness, knowledge, and power is apparent through the different aspects of anything that exists; i.e. in human, animals, vegetations as well as in the planets of the skies and the higher worlds.

The more one thinks over and study the secrets of all being things, the more he will get to know of God's greatness, and the extent of his unlimited knowledge, and power. The progress of scientific research will open new doors, extending the dimensions of our thoughts, which serves to increase our love for HIM, and to take us closer to HIS sacred essence. The approach will draw us to the immense light of God's glorious beauty.

God is an infinite existence in all respects, such as knowledge, power, everlasting and pre-existence. Therefore He will not be contained in time and space, while He is in everywhere and at any time, for being above space/Time. As The Holy Quran – Surah 43: 84 reads:

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"It is He who is Allah in heavens and Allah on earth, and He is full of wisdom and knowledge."

And also The Holy Quran - Surah 57: 4:

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"And He is with you where ever you may be, and Allah sees all that you do."According to Hazrat Ali (A.S.), all virtues generate from a clear and unambiguous concept of *Tuhid*. We find a special emphasis on
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(One-ness) in
Nahaj al-Balāghah
as: Praise is due to Allah whose worth cannot be described by speakers, whose bounties cannot be counted by calculators and whose claim (to obedience) cannot be satisfied by those who attempt to do so, whom the height of intellectual courage cannot appreciate, and the diving of understanding cannot reach; He for whose description no limit has been laid down, no eulogy exists, no time is ordained and no duration is fixed. He brought forth creation through His Omnipotence, dispersed winds through His Compassion, and made firm the shaking earth with rocks. The foremost in religion is the acknowledgement of Him, the perfection of acknowledging Him is to testify Him, the perfection of testifying Him is to believe in His Oneness, the perfection of believing in His Oneness is to regard Him Pure, and the perfection of His purity is to deny Him attributes, because every attribute is a proof that it is different from that to which it is attributed and everything to which something is attributed is different from the attribute.

According to *Nahaj al-Balāghah*, God is one, omnipotent, omniscient, and absolute creator. Everything of this universe is due to Him. Everything is dependent but Allah is independent, self sufficient and self consistent. All phenomenon of nature and universe are His manifestation and due to His manifestation. He is beyond sense perception. He exists by Himself. He has no need of any proof for His existence. He is self-evident. He is with everything but not materially. He created everything without any previous sample, model, and design. Everything existence by His grace and will return to Him surely.“Praise to Allah who is proof of His existence through His creation, of His being external through the newness of His creation, and through their mutual similarities of the fact that nothing is similar to Him. He is One but not by the in counting, is creator but not through activity or labor, Hearer but not by means of any physical organs, is Looker but not by a stretching of eyelids, is Witness not by nearness, is Distinct but not by measurement of distance, is Manifest but not by seeing and is Hidden but not by subtlety (of body).

According to *Nahaj al-Balāghah* in the result of having faith in above said doctrines these feelings develop in a being:

• A complete submission and an absolute servitude to Allah Almighty

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• Welfare of the Humankind

One can achieve the first goal by a firm commitment in Islam. The second objective is an essential result of the first. The spirit of the religious faith is the well fare and betterment of humankind. All fundamentals of religion proceed, develop, and enhance this approach in a follower. In other words, we may say that these two aspects are the complements of each other. As much as a person is close to his lord, so much he will be beneficial to His creature without any discrimination. The person (Holy prophet S.A.W.W) who is the most obedient to His Allah almighty that is held mercy for all the worlds.

Conclusion

Men have varying attitudes towards worship. Not all of them view it in the same light. For some, worship is a kind of deal, an exchange of labor performed for wages. Like an ordinary worker who spends his time and labor for the benefit of an employer and expects a daily wage in return, the devotee also endeavors for the sake of the Divine reward, which, however, he would receive in the Hereafter. Like the laborer, for whom his labor bears fruit in the form of his wages and who would not work except for a wage, the benefit of the devotee's worship, according to the outlook of this particular group of devotees, lies in the wages and rewards which shall be granted to the devotees in the form of the things and the means of comfort in the other world. However, every employer pays wages in return for the benefit which he derives from his employees, but what benefit can the Master of the heavens derive from the labours of a weak and feeble servant of His?

Moreover, if we assume that the Great Employer does remunerate His servants in the form of the blessings and rewards of the Hereafter, then why does He not reward them without any effort and consumption of labour and energy? These are questions which never occur to this class of the pious. From their viewpoint, the essence of worship lies in certain visible bodily movements and oscillations of the tongue. This is one attitude towards worship. Unrefined and vulgar it may be, it is, in the words of Ave Sina, as he puts it in the ninth chapter of his book titled Al-Ishārāt, the attitude of the unenlightened and God-ignorant is acceptable only by the plebeians. Another approach towards worship is that of the enlightened. Here, the aforementioned problems of worker and employer, labour and wage, have no relevance. How can they be relevant when worship is viewed by them as the ladder to attain nearness to Allah, as the means of human sublimity, edification and uplift of the soul and its flight to the invisible sphere of spiritual greatness, an invigorating exercise of one's spiritual faculties and a triumph of the spirit over the corporeal? It is the highest expression of the gratitude and love of the human being towards his Creator, his declaration of love for the Most Perfect and the Absolutely

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Beautiful One and, finally, his wayfaring towards Allah! According to this approach, worship has a form and a soul, an appearance and an inner meaning. That which is expressed by the tongue and the movements of other parts of the body, is the form, the outer mold, and the appearance of worship. Its soul and meaning is something else. The soul of worship is inextricably connected with the significance attached to worship by the devotee, his attitude towards it, his inner motive that drives him to it, the ultimate satisfaction and benefit he derives from it, and the extent to which he covers the Divine path in his journey towards Allah.

As we know, of the most sublime and imaginative themes of Islamic literature, both Arabic and Persian, is the relationship between the ardent love of the devotee for the Divine Essence expressed in delicate and elegant passages in the form of sermons, prayers, allegories, parables, both in prose and in verse. When we compare them with the pre-Islamic notions prevalent in the regions which subsequently constituted the domains of Islam, it is surprising to observe the gigantic leap that was taken by Islam in bestowing depth, scope, sweetness, and delicacy to human thought. Islam transformed a people who worshipped idols, images, fire, or degraded the Eternal God to the level of a human A Father, and whose flight of imagination prompted them to identify the “Father” with the “Son”, or who officially considered the Ahura Mazda to be a material form whose statues they erected in every place, into a people whose intellect could grasp and evolve the most abstract of concepts, the most sophisticated of ideas, the most elegant of thoughts and the most sublime of notions. How was the human intellect so radically transformed? What revolutionized those people’s logic, elevated their thoughts, refined their emotions and sublimated their values? How did it all happen? The al-Mu`allaqat al-sab`a and *Nahaj al-Balāghah* stand only one generation apart from each other. Both of those generations of Arabs were proverbial in eloquence and literary genius. As to the content, they stand as far apart as the earth and the sky. The former sing of the beauty of the beloved one, the pleasures of love, of gallantry, of horses, spears, the nightly assaults and compose praise and lampoon; the latter contains the most sublime of the ideologies of man.

The roots of all spiritual, moral and social aspects of worship lie in one thing: The remembrance of Allah and the obliviousness towards everything else. In one of its verses, the Holy Quran refers to the educative and the invigorating effect of worship and says the following:

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Salat protects from unseemly acts. (29: 45) Adhere to Salat so that you may remain in My remembrance. (20: 14)This is a reminder of the fact that the person who prays remembers Allah and lives by the knowledge that He is always observing and watching him. He does not forget that he himself is His servant.

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