

Book review:

As- saheefatul- kaamilatus- sajjadeeyah: (the psalms of Islam) the perfect book of Imam Zaynul- Abidenn Ali Ibnul Husain Sajjad. Translated by William C. Chitick with a foreword by S.H.M Jafri. London: The Muhammadi Trust of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, 1988.

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Abstract: *Al-Sahifat al-Sajjadiyya is the oldest manual of supplications among other Islamic sources, and one of the seminal works of Islamic spirituality. This writing is here to introduce its annotated translation accompanied by another work attributed to Zayn al-Abidin (grandson of Imam Ali (p.b.u.h), "The Treatise on Rights". Together, the texts contribute significantly to the understanding of Islamic spirituality and the Muslim's standing in relation to God and the community, not only in the early period, but, given the widespread use of the Sahifa as a devotional guide, up to the present time. It is a book of prayers and sublimations but could be easily regarded as the best book of principles and values of Islam and in fact the humanity.*

Keywords: *Imam Zayn al-Abidin, Al-Sahifat al-Sajjadiyya, supplication, prayer, Dhikr(invocation), names of God, Islamic spirituality*

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The book was originally published in August 1988 in London, and it has been edited for over 10 times and reprinted at least twice in Qom. Also, recently a new edition without the Arabic text was published.

The present book brings alive for the non-Arabic speaker the power and the subtlety of the supplications transmitted from one of the most venerated religious authorities of early Islam, Ali b. al-Husain b. Ali b. Abi Talib, better known as Zayn al-Abidin (the ornament of the worshipers) in which he taught the Muslims the essence of Islamic spirituality through his supplications.

The book is translated in English with an Introduction and annotation by William C. Chittick who translated something which is untranslatable. Among all the varieties of Arabic literature, supplications, especially those of the Imam Zayn al-'Abidin, are perhaps the most difficult to translate into an alien tongue. He must be congratulated on his courage and vision, and on his grasp of the inner meanings of such an emotionally charged and subtle Arabic text. He has admirably rendered into English not only the meaning but also the feelings enshrined in these spontaneous utterances of the heart. Also, he provided a very comprehensive introduction in clear language particularly to the some basic concepts of the book (authenticity, validity, textual history, or even the literary beauty of these supplications) as the writer of these lines found some of them useful to introduce the book.

A brief look at the life and works of the author and translator

- A short biography of Ali Ibn Al- Husain (p.b.u.h)

Ali Ibn Al- Husain is the fourth Imam. His epithet was Abu Muhammad and was popularly titled as "Zaynu'l-Abidin". According to most sources, he was born in Medina, on 5th Shabaan in the 38th year of Hijrah. His mother was Shahr Bano, the daughter of King Yazdgerd, the last pre-Islamic ruler of Persia. She was brought as a captive to Medina during the caliphate of Umar. She embraced Islam and married Imam Husain (p.b.u.h.). She died after giving birth to her only son. Imam Zaynu'l-Abidin spent the first two years of his infancy in the lap of his grandfather Ali ibn Abi Talib and then for twelve years he had the gracious patronage of his uncle, the second Holy Imam al-Hasan ibn Ali. In the year of 61 AH, he was present in Karbala, at the time of the gruesome tragedy of the massacre of his father, his uncles, his brothers, his cousins and all the companions of his father; afterwards he suffered from heartless captivity and imprisonment at the hands of the devilish forces of Yazid.

Being released from confinement, Imam went to live in Medina with his family and to lead a quiet life. He resided in Medina until his death in the Muharram of 95 A.H. He was the object both of great sympathy because of the massacre of his family, and of veneration as the great grandson of the Prophet. He dedicated his life to teaching and worship; and became an authority on prophetic traditions and law.

He used to go to the mosque of the Prophet and some times prayed there all night. These were special prayers in the shape of supplications with great significance than mere ritual. These

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prayers were memorized by his companions, written down by his two sons, Mohammad and Zaid. All these supplications were later collected by his companions in the shape of a book which was named "Al Sahifat al- Sajjadiyya". It is known also as Zabur (Psalm) of Ale Muhammad. The collection is an invaluable treasury of wonderfully effective supplications to the God in inimitably beautiful language. Through these prayers the Imam gave all the necessary guidance to the faithful during his seclusion.

- Life and works of William C. Chittick

Professor William C. Chittick is a dominant Islamist and researcher in the studies and researches related to the Islamic issues, Persian literature, Philosophy, Sufism and Islamic spirituality. He is one the world's leading translators and interpreters of the mystical poetry of Jalaluddin Rumi and also is recognized for his translation and interpretation of the writings of the great Sufi theorist and poet, Ibn Arabi.

William C. Chittick was born and raised in Milford, Connecticut, in 1943. He did his B.A. in history at the College of Wooster (Ohio) and then went to Iran, where he completed a Ph.D. in Persian literature at Tehran University in 1974. He taught comparative religion in the humanities department at Aryamehr Technical University in Tehran and, for a short period before the revolution, was assistant professor at the Imperial Iranian Academy of Philosophy. He returned to the United States in January, 1979. For three years he was assistant editor at the Encyclopedia Iranica (Columbia

University), and from 1983 he has taught religious studies at Stony Brook.

Chittick is author and translator of twenty-five books and one hundred articles on Islamic thought, Sufism, Shi'ism, and Persian literature. The range and authenticity of Chittick's books have no parallel in the list of English-language books on Islamic spirituality. His more recent books include: *The Sufi Doctrine of Rumi* (2005), *The Meccan Revelations* (of Ibn Arabi), translated by William C. Chittick, (2002), *The Heart of Islamic Philosophy: The Quest for Self-Knowledge in the Teachings of Afdal Al-Din Kashani* (2001), *Sufism* (2000), *The Self-Disclosure of God: Principles of Ibn Al-'Arabi's Cosmology* (SUNY Series in Islam) (1997), *The Vision of Islam* (Visions of Reality. Understanding Religions), co-authored with Sachiko Murata (1995), *Imaginal Worlds: Ibn Al-Arabi and the Problem of Religious Diversity* (SUNY Series in Islam) (1994), *Faith and Practice of Islam; Thirteenth Century Sufi Texts* (SUNY Series in Islam) (1992), *The Sufi Path of Knowledge* (1989), *The Sufi Path of Love: The Spiritual Teachings of Rumi* (SUNY Series, Islamic Spirituality) (1983) and etc.

What are As- saheefatul- kaamilatus- sajjadeeyah and al-sahifa's related books?

The title *Al-Sahifat al-Sajjadiyya* means simply "The Book of al-Sajjad". *Al-Sajjad* is one of the titles given to Zayn al-Abidin and signifies the one who constantly prostrates himself in prayer. The book is often called *Al-Sahifat al-Kamilat al-Sajjadiyya*, that is, the "Perfect", or "Complete", book of al-

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Sajjad. According to one of its commentators, Sayyid Alikhan Shirazi, the word *kamila* refers to the perfection of the style and content, some sources state that the adjective was added to differentiate it from another incomplete version of the work, which is known among the Zaydis.

Many supplications have been handed down from Imam Zayn al-Abidin in addition to those recorded in the text of the *Sahifa* as given by this book, and various scholars have collected these together in a series of works known as the "second *Sahifa*" the "third *Sahifa*" and so on. The second *Sahifa* which is about as long as the *Sahifa* itself, was compiled as the sister of the *Sahifa* by Muhammad ibn al-Hasan al-Hurr al-Amili, author of the famous *Wasa'il al-Shi'a*. A third *Sahifa* was put together by the author of *Riyad al-ulum* Mirza Abd Allah ibn Mirza Isa Tabrizi, known as Afandi and a student of Majlisi. The longest of the published versions is *Al-Sahifat al-Sajjadiyyat al-khamisa* (The Fifth *Sahifa* of al-Sajjad') by Muhsin al-Amin, the well known contemporary author of *A'yan al-shi'a*. It includes all the supplications included in the previous *Sahifas*; 130 of these are found in the first and second *Sahifas* and 52 are added.

The *Sahifa* has been called by various honorifics, such as Sister of the Qur'an, Gospel of the Folk of the House, and Psalms of the Household of Muhammad.

The main body of the book

According to Shi'ite tradition, Zayn al-Abidin had collected his supplications and taught them to his children, especially

Muhammad al-Baqir and Zayd. In later times the text became widely disseminated among Shi'ites of all persuasions. It was generally known from earliest times and has been handed down by numerous chains of transmission, while its authenticity has never been questioned.

The main supplications that make up the Sahifa of Imam Ali ibn al-Husain and form the main body of the present book are about 54. Each supplication is illustrated in book in 3 columns the first is the Arabic text, and then comes the transliteration and the third columns stands for the English equivalence. Throughout the book, wherever necessary the translator has illuminated the concepts through the footnotes.

Also there are some additional supplications appended to some copies of the Sahifa which are about 29 that are included in this book as Addende. They consist of the supplications for the days of the week, the whispered prayers of the repenters, the complaints, the fearful, the hopeful and etc.

This comprehensive book of prayer has been a mainstay of the practical dimension of religion, its lived spirituality, for countless souls down through the ages. It not only engages the deepest dimensions of the yearning of the seeker for God, but also contains penetrating insights into the psychology of the soul, acute observations of the nature of life in this world, and meditation upon the divine qualities and attributes. They are not, however, merely supplications; they embody comforting answers to many questions with which the man of his time and the man of our time are confronted. In addition, the book contains moral and ethical teachings, the ideal behavior of the Muslim in daily life, in relation to parents, children, friends and enemies, that are all the more compelling in being presented in the context of a dynamic relationship between the

soul and its Creator. There is presented here, in fact, a veritable treatise on 'Human Rights' but linked to human and spiritual duties.

Some important characteristics of the book

-Exhaustivity of the book in terms of presenting the main supplications attributed to the Imam Zayn al-Abidin (supplications of Sahifa and Treatise on rights) other than supplications or relatively short sayings and letters. "Risalat al-Huquq" is especially important for the manner in which it deals with many of the same themes as the Sahifa in a different style and language.

-Professor Chittick's reedition of this classical text into fluent and elegant English stands as an indisputable masterpiece of translation. The present translation of the Sahifa follows the Arabic original with as much literal accuracy as could be contrived while maintaining a readable and understandable English text. The translator has kept Arberry's Koran Interpreted in view as the model of how this might be done. He has been particularly concerned with maintaining consistency in rendering terms and preserving the concreteness of the original terminology, feeling that the meaning of the text cannot be grasped without due regard for its form. Also, in the introduction he refers to the point that "Where difficulties arose in interpreting the meaning of the text, I have followed the commentary of Sayyid 'Alikhan Shirazi. I have also profited from the excellent Persian translation and commentary by 'Ali Naqi Fayd al-Islam and the

less useful Persian translation of Mirza Abu l-Qasim Sha'rani. I have not tried to be exhaustive in the notes, aiming only to identify proper names, clarify obscurities, and point to a few of the Qur'anic references in order to suggest how thoroughly the text is grounded in the revealed book. In a few cases I have mentioned relevant hadith or discussed the different interpretations offered by the commentators".

-The introduction written by the translator is really a rich source of information on the book and its related subjects that is strongly recommended to read.

-Al-Sahifa al-Sajjādiya, like all supplication books, has dominant characteristics of which are the following:

1. It represents the most perfect freedom from the material world, full devotion and fleeing to Allah, the Most High. Such qualities are the most valuable in this world. In this respect let's listen to the Imām's words:

"O Allah, I showed sincerity by cutting myself off from everything but You. I approached You with my whole self. I averted my face from everyone who needs Your support. I ceased to ask from any who cannot do without Your bounty. I saw that the needy who seeks from the needy is foolish in his opinion, and misguided in his intellect. How many people have I seen, my God, who sought exaltation through other than You and were abased, who wanted wealth from someone else and became poor, who tried to rise high and fell down low! Observing the

likes of them corrects a prudent man; his taking heed gives him success; his choosing the best guides him to the path of right.

2. It shows that the Imām, peace be on him, had perfect knowledge of Allah, the Exalted, and had firm faith in Him. Such knowledge and faith did not result from sentiment or tradition; rather they resulted from deep thinking and pure mind. In his book, the Imām has mentioned many theological views on which the Muslim theologians and philosophers depended in writing about the Necessary Being (Allah). Now, let's read another paragraph of his supplication wherein he has mentioned the tremendousness of the Wise Creator. He, peace be on him, said:

"Praise belongs to Allah, the First, without a first before Him, the Last, without a last behind Him. Beholders' eyes fall short of seeing Him, describers imaginations are not able to depict Him. He originated the creatures through His power with an origination. He devised them in accordance with His will with a devising.

3. It contains absolute humbleness and lowliness before Allah, the Exalted, and with this it has been distinguished from the other supplications of the pure Imāms, peace be on them. In the preface of his *Sahifa*, al-Fādil al-Asfahāni said: "Though the supplications of our master, Imām Zayn al-Ābidin, peace be on him, are numerous, they are distinguished from those of the infallible Imām, peace be on him, by showing pleading, lowliness, and neediness to Allah, the Most High." He added: "Allah, the Exalted,

singled out each of the Imāms with a quality which does not exist in other than him, such as bravery in Imām "Ali, the Commander of the faithful, peace be on him, and his son al-Husain, peace be on him, gentleness and lament in Imām Zayn al- Ābidin's supplications, especially as it concerns the supplications of al-Sahifa al-Kāmila, which our companions Sometimes call the "Psalms of the Household of Mohammed" and sometimes they call it the "Gospel of the Folk of the House"

Let's pay attention to another part of his supplications in which he pled to Allah. He, peace be on him, said:

"My Lord, my sins have silenced me, and my words have been cut off. I have no argument, for I am the prisoner of my own affliction, the hostage to my works, the frequenter of my own offense, the confused in my intended way, the thwarted. I have brought myself to a halt in the halting place of the abased sinners, the halting place of the wretched and insolent, those who think lightly of Your promise. Glory be to You! What insolence I have insolently shown toward You! What delusion with which I have deluded myself! My master, have mercy on my falling flat on my face, the slipping of my foot, grant me my ignorance through Your clemency, and my evildoing through Your beneficence, for I admit my sin and confess my offense: Here are my hand and my forelock! I am resigned to retaliation against my soul! Have mercy on my white hair, the depletion of my days, the nearing of my term, my frailty, my misery, and the paucity of my stratagems! My Master, and have mercy upon me when my trace is cut off from this world, my mention is effaced

among the creatures, and I join the forgotten, like the forgotten ones! My Master, and have mercy upon me at the change of my form and state when my body decays, my limbs are scattered, and my joints are dismembered! O my heedlessness toward what was wanted from me! My Master, have mercy upon at my mustering and uprising and on that day, appoint my standing place with Your friends, my place of emergence with Your beloved ones, and my dwelling in Your neighborhood! O Lord of the worlds!

4. It has opened doors to hope and expectation through Allah's mercy, which embraces all things, for whatever sins and crimes man commits, he should not despair of Allah's mercy, forgiveness, and munificence. In one of his supplications, Imām Zayn al- Ābidin, peace be on him, said:

"O my Allah, by Your mightiness and majesty, if You ask about my sins, I will demand Your pardon, and if You demand my ignobility, I will demand Your munificence."

Most of the Imām's supplications are full of hope which fills the souls with radiance, ambitions, and trust in Allah's pardon and forgiveness.

5. It has opened doors to wonderful debates with Allah, the Exalted. Such debates are full of firm proofs for asking him, the Exalted, for pardon. Let's listen to some of them. He (peace be on him) says:

"My Allah, if You do not forgive Your friends and those who obey You, then where shall the sinners go? If You do not show generosity to those who are sincere to You, then whom shall the evildoers ask for help? My Allah, You have revealed pardon in Your Book, and You

have commanded us to pardon him who wrongs us. We have wronged ourselves, so pardon us, for You are worthier of that than us. You have commanded us not to repel a beggar from our doors. I have come to beg You; therefore, repel me not from Your door! You have commanded us to do good. We are your slaves; therefore release our necks from the Fire!"

6. Most supplications of the Sahifa contain moral programs which purify man's soul. The following is one of them:

"O Allah, bless Mohammed and his Household, cause my faith to reach the most perfect faith, make my certainty the most excellent certainty; take my intention to the best of intentions, and my works to the best of works! O Allah, complete my intention through Your gentleness, rectify my certainty through what is with You, and set right what is corrupt in me through Your power!

7. It is among the spiritual and moral sources in Islamic thought. Therefore, it is a remedy for the perplexed souls, and fresh fountain from which the Allah-fearing and those who turn to him in repentance drink. It represents the philosophy of supplication, which the believer uses as a ladder to climb to Allah, and which makes him reach the highest degree of perfection, for there is nothing in this world's life higher than communicating with Allah, the Exalted, the Creator of the universe, and Giver of life. Surely perplexed souls find their objectives in supplication, for they feel tranquility after anxiety, and hope after despair. Sincere supplication takes man to the Kingdom and frees him from material pleasures. The

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immortal Sahifa of al-Sajjād has clearly contained this brilliant philosophy of supplication.

"Supplication is a beautiful literature, a blessed conversation, a rich language, a valuable religion, genuine eloquence, divine trace, and of prophetic scent."

Among the aspects of splendor and eloquence in the supplications of the Imām, is that he elaborated on describing the bliss, luxury, and beautiful palaces of the Garden, for he wanted men to wish for it through doing good deeds. Also he elaborated on frightening men with the Fire and severe punishment to make them refrain from committing sins. In this he followed the holy Qur'ān, which elaborated on describing the Garden and the Fire in many of its verses, for the same reasons which we mentioned. The rhetoricians have mentioned that the elaboration on such matters is among the highest and the most wonderful degrees of eloquence.

Resources:

1. Al-Qarashi, Bagir Sharif. *The life of Imam Zayn al-Abidin*. Qom: Ansariyan publication, 2000.