The Whispered Prayers of Imam al-Sajjad, Part II

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Abstract: *Munajaat* is the Arabic word for "whispered prayers to God in solitude," while du'a, or "supplication" is the general concept that refers to a request to God in any manner, whether it be long or short, loud or quiet. Summoning to God is highly encouraged by the Ahlul Bayt, and hence, they left people with a rich corpus of supplications to God, including whispered prayers (*munajaat*). The previous article covered an introduction to the meaning of whispered prayers as found in Islamic traditions, the internal need for people to whisper to God, and the factors that deprive one from praying to Him. This part further expounds on the means through which God whispers to all prophets, and to all people.

A) God's *munajaat* with all prophets

In the part 1, regarding man's *munajaat* with God, this question was raised: Given the fact that the best succour and opportunity for men lie in munajaat (private conversation) with God and tasting the sweetness of munajaat with Him, why are not some people motivated and willing to

do so? What deprives us from having private conversations with Him? In response, it was said that according to hadiths, attachment to this world and its pleasures is the main factor in being deprived of it. Hence, the key to tasting the pleasantness of munajaat with God is independence from ephemeral worldly pleasures. In this part, God's munajaat with His chosen and sincere servants is discussed.

As mentioned in numerous narrations, God talks with some of His servants in solitude; the divine prophets rank first of those with whom God whispers to in solitude. Indeed, some divine revelations are considered as munajaat.

Among them, Prophet Moses, who was titled "Allah's Interlocutor," was the frequent addressee of divine whispers. As he often went to mount Tur to worship God and spoke to Him for forty days consecutively, he enjoyed the divine munajaat abundantly: *"And We made an appointment with Moses for thirty nights, and completed them with ten [more]; thus the tryst of his Lord was completed in forty nights."*[1]

B) God's munajaat with all people

God's conversation with people other than prophets can be conceptualised in two ways:

1) through the intellect given to all of mankind, which perceives facts, guides man towards good, forbids wrong, and points out some rulings to him proportionate to its capacity. Innate discernment and perceptions of the intellect is a divine guidance provided to men through the intellect. All wise people benefit the intellect.

[1] The Qur'an, 7: 142. وَوَاعَدْنَا مُوسَى ثَلاَثِينَ لَيْلَه وَأَتْمَمْنَاهَا بِعَشْرٍ فَتَمَّ مِيقَاتُ رَبِّهِ أَرْبَعِينَ لَيْلَه

2) To God's elite and exemplary servants due to their own efforts. They qualified themselves, and then God chose them for His solitude. These elite servants chosen by Him for private conversation are of various ranks, and each is close to God and benefits from the conversation with Him in accordance with his spiritual rank.

In his sermon, after reciting this verse, "*men whom neither trading nor bargaining distracts from the remembrance of Allah,*"[1] Imam Ali said,

> Allah, whose blessings are valuable, has always had servants into whose hearts He has whispered and through whose intellect He has talked to them throughout history in various eras and in the age of separation from prophethood [the intervals between two Divine prophets].[2]

Hence, God whispers to His select servants through the intellect. Although all people have been gifted with intellect, with its power to understand facts and rationally perceive, some are deprived of divine inspirations. We are all able to arrange premises and draw conclusions from them. However, not everybody actually knows how to derive conclusions. Sometimes based on an arrangement of premises, some people present an argument others are unable to put forward, though their argument and conclusion are confirmed by all. In other words, premises are arranged through definite methods and the use of previously acquired knowledge; for example, the association of meanings, and this leads to the desired outcome only through a certain process. However,

[1] The Qur'an, 24: 37. رِجَالٌ لَّا تُلْهِيهِمْ تِجَارَه وَلَا بَيْعٌ عَن ذِكرِ اللَّهِ وَإِقَامِ الصَّلَاه وَإِيتَاء الزَّكَاه

[2] Nahj-ul-Balaghah, sermon no. 222. وَمَا بَرِحَ لِلَّهِ عَزَّتْ آلَاؤُهُ فِي الْبُرْهَه بَعْدَ الْبُرْهَه وَفِي أَزْمَانِ الْفَتَرَاتِ عِبَادٌ نَاجَاهُمْ فِي فِكرِهِمْ وَكَلَّمَهُمْ فِي ذَاتِ عُقُولِهِمْ

sometimes one's mind fails to arrange the premises and draw conclusions from them, though suddenly an idea comes to his mind without a priori preparation and paves the way for argumentation and scientific conclusion.

God talks to His elite servants through inspirations and illuminations that are provided to them in the form of special spiritual, scientific, and rational perceptions. The key to enjoying and receiving such spiritual and scientific characteristics which cannot be gained through ordinary means is the constant remembrance of God as well as humble, sincere, and taintless attention to Him. The support that comes with it is delineated in Munajaat Sha'baniyyah, where Imam Ali said, "O' Allah! Make me one of those whom You call and who respond to You; when You look at them, they are stunned by Your majesty. You whisper to them covertly, and they work for You overtly."[1]

The reflection of God's munajaat and the manifestation of His grandeur

The above excerpt of Munajaat Sha'baniyyah indicates that God calls out to His servants. *Nida* (calling out) is used when two persons call each other from a far distance. When there is a distance between God and His servants, He calls them using such expressions, "O mankind!"[2] or "O you who have faith!"[3] and invites them to obey Him. This way, when addressees of the divine call reply, "Here we are!" and act upon divine

[1] Mafatih-ul-Jinan, Munajaat Sha'baniyyah, الاهي وَاجْعَلْني مِمَّنْ نادَيْتَه فأجابَک ولاحَظْتَهُ فَصَعِقَ لِجَلالِک فَناجَيْتَهُ سِرًّا وَعَمِلَ لک جَهْراً

[2] يا أَيُّهَا النّاسُ

[3] يا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا

rulings, they are included in His regard and attention, and they are elevated to higher ranks of servitude to Him.

Looking again at the supplication, "O' Allah! Include me in those whom You have called and invited to Yourselves, and who have answered Your call, are covered by Your special favour and attention, deserve to come to Your presence, and perceive Your glory and grandeur, and Your presence has stunned them," we all know that God sees us, and that we are in His presence. However, there is a difference between when a man feels someone is looking at him from a distance or from behind some veils and when he feels somebody is beside him, staring into his eyes. If one has such knowledge that God has a special attention to him, he will be stunned by comprehending divine attention and being in His presence. For example, Prophet Moses fainted due to the divine manifestation, and God said about him:

> *When Moses arrived at Our tryst and his Lord spoke to him, he said, 'My Lord, show [Yourself] to me, that I may look at You!' He said, 'You shall not see Me. But look at the mountain: if it abides in its place, then you will see Me.' So when his Lord disclosed Himself to the mountain, He levelled it, and Moses fell down swooning. And when he recovered, he said, 'Immaculate are You! I turn to You in penitence, and I am the first of the faithful.'*[1]

God will have a special mercy on His devotee who is wholeheartedly submissive to Him. When he receives his Lord's special favour and

[1] The Qur'an, 7: 143.

وَلَمَّا جَاء مُوسَى لِمِيقَاتِنَا وَكَلَّمَهُ رَبُّهُ قَالَ رَبِّ أَرِنِي أَنظُرْ إِلَيْک قَالَ لَن تَرَانِي وَلَـكِنِ انظُرْ إِلَى الْجَبَلِ فَإِنِ اسْتَقَرَّ مَكَانَهُ فَسَوْفَ تَرَانِي فَلَمَّا تَجَلَّى رَبُّهُ لِلْجَبَلِ جَعَلَهُ دَكا وَخَرَّ موسَى صَعِقًا فَلَمَّا أَفَاقَ قَالَ سُبْحَانَک تُبْتُ إِلَيْک وَأَنَاْ أَوَّلُ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ

attention, he will be stunned due to his great exhilaration. At this stage, when he is qualified enough to understand the divine glory and grandeur and forgets anybody and anything except Allah thanks to this knowledge, God starts to whisper to him. He also heartily seeks to preserve the divine secrets and whispers, not disclosing the details of his meetings with his Lord in solitude. However, he reveals the aspects of the divine whispers and special teachings in his behaviours and objectifies them.

God's conversation with His servant in Heaven

In the hadith of the Heavenly Ascent containing God's whispers and words to His most cherished and beloved servant, Prophet Muhammad, He said about the position and dignity of His addressees and those enjoying special divine attention in Heaven:

> O' Ahmad! In Heaven, there is a castle built of pearls piled up, without any break or knot. My elite servants will dwell in this castle, and I look at them seventy times and expand their castle seventy times every day. When the Heaven dwellers enjoy Heavenly foods and drinks, they enjoy My remembrance and words.[1]

We cannot have an accurate and clear picture of the hereafter, as our conceptions, perceptions, and imaginations are not enough. Although through our five senses we can understand the world's creatures – their colours, forms, and features – we cannot understand the truths of the hereafter because they are inaccessible to us, and our sense cannot enter

[1] *Irshad al-Qulub*, vol. 1, p. 200:

يا أحمد إنّ في الجنه قصراً مِنْ لُؤلُؤٍ فَوْقَ لُؤلُؤٍ ودُرّه فوقَ درّه لَيسَ فيها قصمٌ ولا وصلٌ فيها الخواصُّ أَنْظُرُ إلَيْهِمْ كلَّ يَوْمٍ سَبْعينَ مَرّه وأُكلِّمُهُمْ كلَّما نَظَرْتُ إلَيْهِمْ وأَزيدُ في مُلْكهِمْ سَبعينَ ضِعْفاً وإذا تَلَذَّذَ أهلُ الجنّه بِالطّعامِ وَالشَّرابِ تَلَذَّذُوا أُولئک بِذِكْري وَكَلامي وَحَديثي

its realm. Hence, the features of the hereafter mentioned in the Qur'an and hadith are merely a vague representation of the hereafter. Through limited similarities between this world and the hereafter and the comparison of its blessings with those of this world, we can have a vague picture of the hereafter.

An unconceivable feature of the dwellers of Heaven which God referred to in this hadith is that they have a castle in Heaven in which each floor is made of a monolithic pearl, so crystal clear that no stain or knot can be seen on it, and it is not segmented. It is only the elite who have achieved the highest ranks of knowledge of and proximity to Allah who enjoy this blessing. Perhaps the reason for having such a monolithic castle is their sincere faith, void of any taint of polytheism, doubt, and hypocrisy.

God adds that He looks at them seventy times a day and talks to them. This indicates God's regard for us as the highest divine blessing, and this need for Him has been placed in us as part of our innate disposition (*fitrah*). Likewise, the worse retribution for him is being deprived of God's attention. The same way, children's greatest need is their parent's care: their behaviours, feats, and words are to attract their attention, while their inattention to them is the greatest punishment. In this world, due to our attention to worldly affairs and material needs, we cannot understand the need for divine attention: material preoccupations prevent us from understanding it. However, in the hereafter, where there is no sign of empty worldly needs, and where our real and eternal needs appear, we can understand the infinite grandeur of the need for God's attention. In return, we understand that the deprivation of the divine is by far harsher than the punishment of Hell. Hence, depicting the severe punishment of the unfaithful, God said:

> *...and Allah will not speak to them nor will He [so much as] look at them on the Day of Resurrection, nor will He purify them, and there is a painful punishment for them.*[1]

The Heaven-dwellers can have all the blessings they desire. They will enjoy endless foods and drinks and are constantly covered with divine favours and bounties. However, the elite servants of Allah in Heaven have realised the greatness of God's attention, while being deprived of speaking with Him is the severest divine punishment for them. While the Heaven-dwellers will be happy with their Heavenly foods and drinks, the elite servants will enjoy talking to God so much that they will forget other Heavenly blessings because they have reached a level of proximity to God in this world that their prayers ascend to Heaven and are immediately accepted. They are so fond of hearing God's words that God Himself likes to hear their words "as much as a mother loves her baby."

The above sentence indicates the firm interdependence between a servant's love for God and His love for the servant, and this interrelationship is revealed in all manifestations of love to God. Accordingly, God talked of interdependence between the servant's remembering Him and His remembering the servant, saying, *"Remember Me, and I will remember you..."*[2]

The good end of seeking Divine satisfaction

In another verse, God speaks of those who sincerely seek to perform divine duties and who earned His satisfaction in such a way that just as

[1] The Qur'an: 3:77. وَلاَ يُكَلِّمُهُمُ اللّهُ وَلاَ يَنظُرُ إِلَيْهِمْ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَه وَلاَ يُزَكِّيهِمْ وَلَهُمْ عَذَابٌ أَلِيمٌ
[2] The Qur'an, 2: 152.فَاذْكُرُونِي أَذْكُرْكُمْ

they are pleased with God, He is pleased with them: *"Allah is pleased with them and they are pleased with Him. That is the great success."*[1]

Elsewhere, He said, *"O soul at peace! Return to your Lord, pleased, pleasing! Then enter among My servants! And enter My paradise!"*[2]

Sometimes with the aim of attaining heavenly rewards, we do good deeds, but sincere servants do good only for God's satisfaction, even though He does not reward them for it. They perform a deed because they know God likes it, and they will attain His satisfaction doing so; neither expectation for the His reward nor fear of His chastisement motivates them.

The one who seeks divine satisfaction and does everything for the sake of God receives the worldly rewards along with otherworldly eternal blessings. God also adorns him or her with valuable and admirable virtues. In the hadith of the Heavenly Ascent, God said about the three features of those who had attained the Divine satisfaction:

> Whoever acts to My satisfaction, I will grant him three features: some gratitude not tainted with ignorance, some remembrance not mixed with negligence, and a love to which no other love he prefers. Then when he loves Me, I will love him and open his inner eyes to My glory. I will not hide My elite and chosen servants from him either. In the dark nights and bright days, I will talk to him so that he is separated from people and has no association with them.[3]

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[1] The Qur'an, 5: 119. رَضِيَ اللهُ عَنْهُمْ وَرَضُواْ عَنْهُ ذَلِک الْفَوْزُ الْعَظِيمُ

[2] The Qur'an, 89: 27-30. يَا أَيَّتُهَا النَّفْسُ الْمُطْمَئِنَّه ارْجِعِي إِلَى رَبِّک رَاضِيَه مَّرْضِيَّه فَادْخُلِي فِي عِبَادِي وَادْخُلِي جَنَّتِي

[3] Majlisi, Muhammad Baqir, *Bihar al-Anwar*, vol. 74, pp. 28-29.

Gratitude – a duty and an innate trait – is a praiseworthy deed; we should all be grateful to those serving us. Because God has granted us infinite blessings, we should be thankful to Him, although we fail to count divine blessings and cannot be grateful for them as a result: *"If you enumerate Allah's blessings, you will not be able to count them."*[1]

We are heedless of the blessings God granted us and even avoid thanking Him as a result. Sometimes several hours pass, and we neither ponder on them nor notice that we are showered with them, while our duty is to be grateful for them, and the more we express gratitude to God for His blessings, the more bounties He will grant us. In other words, sincere endeavour for the sake of God and gratitude to Him lead to His increased attention to us and our more enjoyment from His endless worldly and spiritual bounties. Appreciation of divine blessings and gratitude for them are considered a high status that God grants to His servant.

Thus, the first feature He gives to the sincere servant who are on the path of His satisfaction is to know the true status of gratitude to Him, along with some knowledge –void of ignorance–about the greatness of divine blessings. Because we are not aware of all blessings God has granted to us, our gratitude is limited, and we express much ingratitude to Him. Besides this, while aware of a blessing and grateful for it, we are neglectful of many other blessings. As a result, our gratitude is coupled with ignorance of other blessings. However, God expanded the capacity of His sincere servants so delicately and granted them knowledge of His endless

فَمَنْ عَمِلَ بِرِضائي أَلْزِمُهُ ثَلاثَ خِصالٍ: أُعَرِّفُهُ شكراً لا يُخالِطُهُ الْجَهْلُ وَذِكراً لا يُخالِطُهُ النِّسيانُ ومَحَبّه لا يُؤْثِرُ عَلى مَحَبّتي مَحَبّه الْمَخلوقين. فَإذا أَحَبَّني أَحْبَبْتُهُ وأَفْتَحُ عَيْنَ قَلْبِهِ إلى جَلالي. فَلا أُخْفي عَلَيْهِ خاصَّه خَلْقي، فأُناجيهِ في ظُلَمِ اللّيلِ وَنُورِ النَّهارِ حَتّى يَنْقَطِعَ حَديثُهُ مَعَ الْمَخْلوقينَ وَمُجالِسَتُهُ مَعَهُمْ

[1] The Qur'an: 16: 18.

blessings that they always heed to His worldly and spiritual blessings and consistently show gratitude for them.

The second characteristic God grants to the believer is the constant remembrance of God *(dhikr).* A true servant of God is constantly absorbed in remembrance of—and attention to—Him. It is difficult for us to remember God: even when we perform prayers for a few minutes a day or recite remembrance, we are not thinking about God. No matter how hard we endeavour, we cannot remove negligence from our heart and remember Him sincerely. In contrast, the believer who has been showered with God's favour and mercy and whose heart is replete with love for Him cannot forget or abandon love of Him. God has given him some attention void of negligence, so they never forget Him. This believer loves God, and the lover never forgets his beloved.

The third feature God grants to the one satisfied with His will is developing such a love for Him in his heart that he never prefers love for others to God's love, which takes up all his heart, leaving no place for the love of others. It is difficult to understand complete love of God, and we cannot imagine not loving anybody or anything other than Him, let alone loving Him truly and completely. This blessing or high status belongs only to God's Friends, who have gone beyond worldly attachments and earned genuine and matchless divine love. The infinite greatness of divine love prevents them from being trapped by non-divine limited and trivial loves.

When the true servant loves his Lord this way, God also loves him in return and opens his inner eyes to His glory and grandeur. As a result, this stuns the believer. God then introduces His chosen, elite servants–unknown to others–to these believers and gives them the support to

associate with the elite to benefit from their teachings and virtues. In the highest rank of human perfection, such a servant is elevated to a position where God speaks with him in solitude, making him taste the sweetness of conversation with Him so much that he is no longer willing to talk to and associate with other people except when God requires him to do so to meet their needs.