

Reflections on the Supplication of Abi Hamzah

Mohammad Ali Shomali¹

The Supplication of Abi Hamza al-Thumāli is narrated from Imam Sajjād (a) and is one of the most precious and well-known of prayers, enjoying a high status amongst great scholars. Abi Hamza al-Thumāli, the narrator of this beautiful *du'ā*, was one of the prominent students of Imam Zayn al-'Abidin (a) and this *du'ā* has been named after him. We should acknowledge and appreciate the great role of the narrators of hadiths and *du'ās* from the Prophet Muhammad (s) and his household (a) such as Abi Hamza al-Thumāli, Kumayl al-Nakha'i and so on and ask God, the Almighty, to cover them with His mercy. According to Islamic hadiths, a person should pass on their knowledge and understanding to future generations who may indeed then take more benefit from the knowledge they have thus received and have a better and more complete understanding of it. Regarding this, the Noble Prophet of Islam (s) has been quoted as saying:

فرب حامل فقه ليس بفقيه و رب حامل فقه الى
من هو افقه منه

How many are those who are not learned but pass on a piece of knowledge to others and how many are those who are learned but pass on their knowledge to those who are more learned than them.²

In any case, one of the most precious pieces of supplication that we have received from the Ahl al-Bayt (a) is the well-known Supplication that Abi Hamza has narrated from the fourth Imam (a). In what follows, we will try to refer briefly to the sources of the supplication and some of its major points very briefly.

Sources of this supplication

This supplication has been narrated by the following scholars of hadiths:

- Shaykh Tusi in his *Misbāh al-Mutahajjid*, pp. 582-598.
- Sayyid ibn Tāwus in his *lq̄bāl al-A'māl*, pp. 67-76.
- Ibrahim ibn Ali al-Kaf'ami in his *Al-Balad al-Amin*, pp. 205-214 and his *Al-Misbāh*, pp. 588-601.
- Allama Majlisi in his *Bihār Al-Anwār*, vol. 95, pp. 82-93.

In his *lq̄bāl al-A'māl*, Sayyid ibn Tāwus narrates this supplication through his chain of narrators from Abi Muhammad Harun ibn Musa al-Tal'ukbari through his chain of narrators from Hasan ibn Mahbub al-Zarrad from Abi Hamza al-Thumāli.

According to Abi Hamza, Imam Sajjād (a) used to recite this supplication during each night of the month of Ramadan near dawn after spending the greater part of the night engaged in prayer and supplicating God.

Some of the major points in this supplication

I. One of the major ideas mentioned in this supplication is how to find a balance between hope and fear. Throughout the supplication, this idea is often repeated and focused on in beautiful and eloquent ways. On the one hand, we find ourselves burdened by so many sins that cause us to be fearful about not deserving the mercy of God. When we look at our myriad problems, our bad actions and behaviour and how we have

misspent our life, then our hope starts to diminish. On the other hand, when we take into consideration the vast ocean of God's mercy and generosity and the way in which He treats sinful people, we become hopeful once again. Therefore, we should be hopeful, not by virtue of our own actions but, rather, by virtue of the mercy of our Lord, whilst simultaneously we should be fearful, not of God but due to our own actions.

II. In this supplication, reference is also made to all the different types of needs and requests of human beings, including requests for both this world and the world to come, for oneself, for one's family and friends and for society at large. This is a particularly good supplication from the aspect of fulfilling our needs because so many different types of needs have been mentioned that if we manage to ask for everything in it then we will have covered everything necessary.

III. One of the frequently mentioned requests in this supplication is to be granted the blessing of taking part in the rituals of the greater pilgrimage (*hajj*). One of the things that is decided in the Month of Ramadan and more specifically in the Night of *Qadr* is the list of those who will be able to perform *hajj*. Therefore, in this supplication and some other supplications of this month, this request is mentioned.

IV. This supplication serves very well in reducing our sense of pride and self-admiration (*'ujb*). It illustrates our absolute need and weakness. One of the requests that has been repeatedly mentioned is for God's forgiveness.

V. Imam Sajjād (a) eloquently mentions different types of the blessings that God has bestowed on us so far in order to develop a deep sense of gratitude and thankfulness in us which is indeed one of the most important qualities that we should endeavour to achieve.

VI. In this supplication, Imam (a) also tries to illustrate the situation that we will face after death in order to encourage and motivate us to remember our death and work harder for the hereafter. For example, in one part of the supplication, Imam Sajjād (a) says:

الهي لو قرنتني بالاصفاد و منعتني سييك من
بين الاشهاد و دللت على فضائحي عيون العباد و
امرت بي الى النار و حلت بيني و بين الابرار ما
قطعت رجائي منك و ما صرفت تاميلي للعفو
عني عنك و لا خرج حيك من قلبي

O' my Lord! Even if You tied me with the chains of hell and You deprived me of Your flowing stream (of favours) from between the witnesses (of the day of Judgment) and You pointed out my scandals to the eyes of Your worshipers and You ordered me into hell and You isolated me from the company of the faithful, my hope in You would not end and I would not lose my reassurance of Your pardon and my love for You would not depart from my heart.

This reminds us of the possibility of actually facing those horrible things due to our own actions and because we deserve it and certainly not because God does not love us and does not want to be merciful towards us. Therefore, we would become more alert and conscious of our death and resurrection and accountability before God on the Day of Judgement. Of course, we should always remain hopeful and remember the way He has treated us so far. Imam (a) then continues:

انا لا انسى اياديك عندي و سترك على في
دار الدنيا

I do not forget the helping hand You bestowed upon me and Your protection of my secrets in life.

So we should not forget everything that God has done for us during our lifetime even if He punishes us.

VII. Imam Sajjād (a) offers up his requests:

سیدی اخرج حب الدنيا عن قلبي

O my Master! Remove the adoration of worldliness from my heart.

We ask God to remove this love for worldly affairs because it has been considered as the main source of all sins, mistakes and problems.

VIII. In this supplication, we ask God, the Almighty, to let us be with the Prophet Muhammad (s) and his household (a):

و اجمع بيني و بين المصطفى محمد و آله
خيرتك من خلقك و خاتم النبيين محمد صلواتك
عليه و آله

And unite me with Mustafa (s) and his family, the dearest of Your creatures and the last of the prophets, Muhammad, Peace from God upon him and his family

IX. This request is followed by two important requests, that is, to be elevated to the station of repentance and to be assisted by being able to cry for one's self:

و انقلني الى درجة التوبه اليك و اعنى بالبكاء
على نفسي

And transfer me to the level of repentance to You
and help me to cry for myself.

Repentance occupies a very high position in Islam. It is considered as a divine blessing and a sign of great divine assistance to be able to cry for ourselves about all the mistakes we have committed and to ask for forgiveness. The most incapable people are those who cannot cry when they remember the Day of Judgment, their sins, God's mercy, and so on.

Imam Sajjād (a) continues by describing his situation and why he needs to cry:

فقد افنيت بالتسويف و الآمال عمرى

For I have wasted my life away with
procrastination and false hopes.

Taswif or procrastination is the state when someone postpones crucial decisions such as repentance and doing righteous deeds. Satan deceives us into postponing such decisions until the month of Ramadan and then during this blessed month, he beguiles us again into leaving it to the day of Eid al-Fitr and then on that day, he whispers to us to delay it further until the day of 'Arafah and so on. Thus we keep postponing changing ourselves in order to become good and faithful people and we keep holding on to dreams that are not realistic.

و قد نزلت منزله الأيسين من خيرى

And now I have come to You hopeless about my
goodness.

When a person persists in postponing such important decisions or in making them but then not keeping to them, they will eventually become completely disappointed with themselves.

Then Imam (a) continues with a passage which should help us to lose our pride in ourselves and to be prepared to cry over our poor situation:

فمن يكون اسوا حالا منى ان انا نقلت على مثل
حالى الى قبرى و لم امهده لرقدى و لم افرشه
بالعمل الصالح لضجعتى

Who is worse off than me, if now in my present state I pass on to a grave which I have not prepared for my repose and have not lined with good deeds for my slumber.

The grave will be people's residing place for a long time. Therefore it requires proper preparation in advance and, faith and good deeds are the very preparations which furnish one's grave. We read in the Qur'an:

By the fig and the olive, by Mount Sinai, by this secure town: We certainly created man in the best of forms; then We relegated him to the lowest of the low, except those who have faith and do righteous deeds. There will be an everlasting reward for them. (95:1-6)

By Time! Indeed man is at a loss, except those who have faith and do righteous deeds, and enjoin one another to [follow] the truth, and enjoin one another to patience. (103:1-3)

Then Imam (a) explains further why he cannot stop weeping:

و ما لی لا ابکی و لا ادری الی ما یکون مصیری و
اری نفسی تخادعنی و ایامی تختلنی و قد
خفقت عند راسی اجنحه الموت

And why would I not weep, for I have no knowledge of my fate and I observe my self deceiving itself and my days are fading away and the wings of death have flapped close by.

فما لی لا ابکی ابکی لخروج نفسی ابکی
لظلمه قبری ابکی لضیق لحدی ابکی لسوال
نکیر و منکر ایای ابکی لخروجی عن قبری عریانا
ذلیلا حاملا ثقلی علی ظهری انظر مره عن
یمینی و اخری عن شمالی اذ الخلائق فی
شان غیر شانی لکل امری منهم یومئذ شان
یغنیه وجوه یومئذ مسفره ضاحکه مستبشره و
وجوه یومئذ علیها غیره ترهقها قتره و ذله

So why wouldn't I weep? I weep about surrendering my life, I weep because of the darkness of my grave, I weep because of the narrowness of my grave, I weep about my questioning by Munkar and Nakīr (the names of the two angels that question the dead after they have been laid in their grave), I weep about leaving my grave (in the hereafter) naked, humiliated and carrying my book (of deeds) on my back, once I look to the right and once to the left and I discover that today people have concerns other than me, for every person that day has a concern of his own and on that day some faces are bright, laughing and joyful whilst other faces are dusty, burdened with submission and humility.

In the above passage, Imam Sajjād (a) enumerates five difficult aspects of human life on which everyone should reflect and about which they should weep if they are not prepared for them:

1. The day when our soul leaves our body. It is one of the most difficult moments for a human being to such an extent that one is not even able to speak at that time.
2. The darkness of the grave.
3. The narrowness of the grave.
4. The time when the angels come to the grave in order to question us.
5. The time when we come out of our graves with no clothing, carrying the burdens of our actions.

In a reflective part of the supplication, by recounting the divine blessings he has received, Imam Sajjād (a) describes himself and enumerates his shortcomings:

سیدی انا الصغیر الذی ربیته و انا الجاهل الذی
علمته و انا الضال الذی هدیته و انا الوضع الذی
رفعتہ و الخائف الذی آمنته و انا الجائع الذی
اشبعته و العطشان الذی ارویته و العاری الذی
کسوته و الفقیر الذی اغنیته و الضعیف الذی
قویته و الذلیل الذی اعززته و السقیم الذی
شفیته و السائل الذی اعطیته و المذنب الذی
سترته و الخاطئ الذی اقلته و انا القلیل الذی
کثرته و المستضعف الذی نصرته و انا الطرید
الذی آویته انا یا رب الذی لم استحیک فی الخلاء
و لم اراقبک فی الملاء انا صاحب الدواهی
العظمی انا الذی علی سیده اجتری انا الذی

عصيت جبار السماء انا الذى اعطيت على
 معاصى الجليل الرشى انا الذى حين بشرت بها
 خرجت اليها اسعى انا الذى امهلتنى فما
 ارعويت و سترت على فما استحييت و عملت
 بالمعاصى فتعديت و اسقطتنى من عينك فما
 باليت فبحلمك امهلتنى و بسترک سترتنى
 حتى كانك اغفلتنى و من عقوبات المعاصى
 جنبتنى حتى كانك استحييتنى

O Master! I am the young one whom You raised,
 And I am the ignorant one whom You educated,
 And I am the misled whom You guided, And I am
 the humiliated whom You elevated, And I am the
 frightened one whom You safeguarded, And the
 hungry one whom You fed, And the thirsty whose
 thirst You quenched, And the naked whom You
 clothed, And the poor one whom You made
 wealthy, And the weak one whom You
 strengthened, And the insignificant one whom
 You honoured, And the sick whom You cured, And
 the beggar to whom You provided charity, And
 the sinner whose secret You have protected, And
 the wrong doer whom You aided, And I am the
 little (creature) You made more significant, And
 the oppressed whom You made victorious, And I
 am the escapee to whom You gave refuge. I am
 the one, O' God, who did not revere You (when I
 committed sins) in secret, nor observed Your
 (commands) in public, I am the possessor of great
 craftiness (bad intentions), I am the one who
 challenged His Master, I am the one who
 disobeyed the Commander of the skies, I am the
 one who awarded bribes upon the disobeying
 of the Magnificent (God), I am the one who when

I was forewarned about it (sins), I hastily raced to it, I am the one from whom You awaited (His reverence) but I did not comprehend, and You veiled my secret (sins) but I did not become demure, and I committed sins until I belligerently insisted, and You then disregarded me but I did not care, but with Your benevolence, You postponed my punishment, and with Your veil, You concealed my secret (sins) as if You had overlooked me, and You shielded me from the punishment called upon me by my sins, all to the extent that it appeared as if You shied off from me.³

X. Imam Sajjād (a) then explains the reasons why a believer may commit some sins and at the end of this passage invokes God as being his only hope in such a situation:

الهي لم اعصك حين عصيتك و انا بربوبيتك
 جاحد و لا بامرک مستخف و لا لعقوبتك متعرض
 و لا لوعيدک متهاون لكن خطيئه عرضت و سولت
 لي نفسي و غلبنی هواي و اعانني عليها
 شقوتي و غرني سترک المرخي على فقد
 عصيتك و خالفتك بجهدی فالآن من عذابک من
 يستنقذني و من ایدی الخصماء غدا من
 يخلصني و بحبل من اتصل ان انت قطعت حبلک
 عنی فواسواتا على ما احصى کتابک من عملی
 الذی لولا ما ارجو من کرمک و سعه رحمتک و
 نهیک اياي عن القنوط لقنطت عندما اذکرها

O my Lord! I did not disobey You when I did because I rejected Your divinity, nor because I belittled Your commands, nor that I was daringly challenging Your punishment, nor that I did not appreciate Your forewarning. Yet the mistake has

occurred, and my ego misled me, and my sinful desires were victorious over me, and my misery contributed to it, and Your protective veil over my sins lured me. For I have disobeyed You and opposed You with my own will, and now from Your retribution who would rescue me, and from the hands of Your angels of punishment tomorrow (in the hereafter), who would redeem me, and on to whose rope do I hold if You cut off Your rope from me? So what a pity for what Your book has recorded about me. Indeed, if it was not for my anticipation of Your generosity and vast mercifulness as well as Your ordering me not to lose hope (in Your salvation) then I would have despaired whenever I remembered it (my sin).⁴

¹ This is the transcript of a lecture given on the topic by the author in Toronto in the month of Ramdan in 2010. The transcription is made by Mr Morteza Karimi.

² *Wasā'il al-Shi'a*, vol. 27 p. 89.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 87-88.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 88.