

ALI 309: Knowing God through the Whispered Prayers

Session One

Whispered Prayer of the Complainers
Munajaat no. 2, Sahifa Sajjadiyyah

Questions for Reflection

- 1) What qualities of the Nafs does the Munajaat complain about?
- 2) Can you connect them to your own life?
- 3) How does recognition of these qualities help the believer in the journey towards God?

Agenda

- Munajaat; a special language of supplication
- Complaining about obstacles towards God
- 4 Questions about the Nafse Ammarah

Munajaat – a special language

Munajaat are whispered prayers which convey deep felt emotions including:

- great need
- inner poverty
- helplessness
- insignificance
- seeking of mercy (Istirhaam)

Obstacles towards God

The Whispered prayer of the complainers complains to God of the obstacles that hinder the believer's journey to God. They are obstacles to perfection, to fulfilling responsibilities

In this prayer the Imam complains of three things:

- 1) The Nafs
- 2) The Shaytan
- 3) A hard heart

The Nafs

وَمَا أُبْرِيءُ نَفْسِي ۚ إِنَّ النَّفْسَ لَأَمَّارَةٌ بِالسُّوءِ
إِلَّا مَا رَحِمَ رَبِّي ۚ إِنَّ رَبِّي غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ

And I do not declare myself free
most surely the self is wont to command towards evil
except such as my Lord has had mercy on
surely my Lord is Forgiving, Merciful.

Sura Yusuf, 12:53

4 Questions about the Nafse Ammarah

- 1) What is the Nafse Ammarah
- 2) Why did God create it in us?
- 3) How does it work?
- 4) What can we do to overpower it?

What is the Nafse Ammarah?

The Nafs is part of the inner self that has desires. It has anger, passion, lust, desire . . . It commands towards fulfillment of these desires, even through wrong ways.

Some definitions:

- Nafse Ammarah is the elementary stage of the inner self or ego or carnal soul.
- It keeps demanding for satisfaction of its low desires, passions and for its constant gratification. Thus it is selfish and self centered.
- In 'Nafs e Ammara' the intelligence is at its lowest ebb and has no part to play. Therefore there is the need of laws to regulate it to higher levels of consciousness.

Why did God create the Nafse Ammarah ?

- 1) God wanted the human being to be perfect and reach *kamal*. That does mean he was created perfect. He had to become perfect by overcoming hurdles such as the Nafse Ammarah. Perfection includes movement, change and overcoming of tendencies.
- 2) To be better than all other creatures the human being must have what is in other creatures and then rise above them.
- 3) For intelligence to manifest itself there must be a judgment to perform – a judgment between good and evil. This process involves two of the most important faculties of the human being; intelligence and free will.

The Inner battle

■ There is constant war between the fitrat of the human being that has been created with an inclination towards God and virtue, and the nafs that leads towards evil.

■ Winning the inner battle creates victory of perfection. Without that there is no movement towards a higher stage, or no journeying towards God.

How does the Nafse Ammarah work?

Through

- commanding evil
- rushing to offenses
- eager to disobey God
- making excuses
- having long hopes and expectations
- anxious when evil touches it
- grudging when good touches it
- inclining towards distractions
- heedlessness and inattention
- delaying repentance

إِنَّ الْإِنْسَانَ خُلِقَ هَلُوعًا إِذَا مَسَّهُ الشَّرُّ جَزُوعًا
وَإِذَا مَسَّهُ الْخَيْرُ مَنُوعًا

Surely man is created of a hasty temperament
Being greatly grieved when evil afflicts him
And niggardly when good befalls him

Sura Ma'arij, 70:19-21

How to overcome the Nafse Ammarah

- 1) Alertness - constant attention to knowing and understanding the self.
- 2) Effort - working on the self, controlling the self, acting against its dictates, opposing its desires, and strengthening intelligence and wisdom.
- 3) Inspirations - closeness to God, reading/listening to wisdom, associating with virtuous people, reflection.