

ALI 333: Understanding Servitude

Session Two

وَإِذَا سَأَلَكَ عِبَادِي عَنِّي فَإِنِّي قَرِيبٌ ۖ أُجِيبُ دَعْوَةَ الدَّاعِ
إِذَا دَعَانِ ۖ فَلْيَسْتَجِيبُوا لِي وَلْيُؤْمِنُوا بِي لَعَلَّهُمْ يَرْشُدُونَ

And when **My servants** ask you concerning Me then surely I am very near; I answer the prayer of the supplicant when he calls on Me, so they should answer My call and believe in Me that they may walk in the right way

Sura Baqarah, no. 2, verse 186

Points from the verse

- 1) The verse is in first person. The first person pronoun is used seven times in this verse.
- 2) The address is to 'My servants' rather than mankind or human beings. It shows special regard.
- 3) He did not put a medium between Himself and His servants. The verse does not say 'tell them I am near'. He answers Himself.
- 4) Emphasis on I am near. 'Surely I am near.'
- 5) Present tense of 'I answer' shows a continuous verb.
- 6) The difference between **دعاء** (calling) and **سؤال** (asking). The latter is to get something while the former is just seeking special regard and attention.

Agenda

Hadith Unwan al Basri

Seeking guidance

Persistence and Effort

True knowledge

The Principles of Servitude

Hadith Unwan al Basri

Advice of Imam Sadiq (a) to Unwan al Basri, a seeker of nearness to God. He was 94 years old.

The hadith discusses important principles of Knowledge and servitude.

Many scholars would insist that their students read and be committed to this hadith. Some recommend reading it at least twice a week.

It has been described as a cure for worldliness, lack of spirituality, negativity, restlessness and many other spiritual and emotional disorders.

Seeking knowledge

The path towards knowledge requires certain conditions for success.

1) Self analysis – Unwan al Basri wonders what is wrong with him that Imam is not ready to teach him. He reflects on himself. Blame is directed inwards rather than outwards.

2) Prayer and Supplication – He goes to the mosque of the Prophet (s) and recites a two rakaat salaah. The holy Quran says: *O you who believe, seek help through patience and prayer, Surely Allah is with the patient ones.* (2:153)

3) Removal of all else from the heart – Imam tells him to go to Malik but he has no love for anyone other than the Imam. It is necessary to remove attachment to anyone but Allah before seeking knowledge in His way.

Persistence and Effort

Unwan al Basri persists in seeking knowledge from the Imam despite the obstacles that could deter him from that path. He was determined and put in effort to achieve what he wanted.

Allah says in the Holy Quran; *Man shall have nothing but what he strives for* (53:39).

The Holy Prophet (s) once saw a laborer whose hand had swollen up [due to hard work]. The Holy Prophet raised his hand up and exclaimed, 'The fire of Hell will never burn this hand. This hand is loved by Allah and His Prophet. Whosoever lives on his hand's earnings will receive Allah's blessings and mercy.'

True Knowledge

Knowledge that creates an understanding and an insight. *Only those of Allah's servants having knowledge are in awe of Him (35:28).*

In this hadith Imam Sadiq (a) introduces three ways for acquiring knowledge to Unwan Basri:

1. Search for the reality of worship within yourself
2. Seek *ma'refat* (insight) by acting upon what you know
3. Ask God for understanding so that He may make you understand

The 3 Principles of Servitude

- 1) A servant has nothing that is his. Everything he has belongs to Allah. Slaves own nothing.
- 2) A servant does not manage his own affairs. Allah is the Master Planner and Controller and He decrees all things.
- 3) All his efforts must be solely devoted to fulfilling his obligations to Allah and staying away from what He has prohibited. Slaves obey in complete submission.