

Sahīfa Sajjādiyya: the abandoned spiritual treasure

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In 1990 I was attending the first World Ahlul Bayt (a) conference in the Middle East. A Muslim professor from the United States commented that before traveling to the conference he searched various university databases for the word ‘Ahlul Bayt’ and found very few entries. His point was that the Academic world was not fully abreast with the significant role and contribution of the Ahlul Bayt (a) to the history of Islam and Muslims. The situation, *al-hamdu lillāh*, has changed since then. A number of organizations, educational institutions, television channels, college and university courses, etc. carry the title of Ahlul Bayt (a).

The Great Manual of Devotions authored by Imam Ali Zaynul ‘Ābidīn al-Sajjād (d. 95 AH/ 713 CE) popularly known by the title *Sahīfa Sajjādiyya* is suffering a similar fate. Most people are not aware of the treasure of supplications taught by the Imam (a) and are not familiar with its lofty messages.

Visit most Islamic Centers and Madrasahs in the West, or Colleges and Universities that teach Islamic courses and their libraries, and you will find no mention of *Sahīfa Sajjādiyya* in their curriculum. Perhaps you will find a handful of copies of the *Sahīfa* in the center. A huge Islamic center in Eastern Canada for instance, which attracts over 5,000 participants during major occasions, has less than 10 copies of *Sahīfa Sajjādiyya* in the entire complex. On the other hand it has hundreds of copies of *Mafātihul Jinān* and other devotional books. If there was a demand from the devotees of the Center it would undoubtedly carry more copies of the *Sahīfa*.

The great thinker and jurist Āyatullāh Sayyid Muhammad Bāqir al-Sadr penned an ‘Introduction’ to the *Sahīfa* which was first printed in 1960s in Najaf al-Ashraf. The same Introduction has been reprinted repeatedly thereafter and is also included in the English translation of the *Sahīfa* by Sayyid Ahmad Muhani, printed in Tehran (1984) and New Jersey (1997). In this article, al-Sadr enumerates the possible reason for the compilation of *Sahīfa Sajjādiyya*. He states that during the life time of Imam al-Sajjad (a), the world of Islam faced a sudden wave of affluence due to the increase of its political power after many successful conquests. So,

“There was the risk that this new wave of prosperity would expose those who came in contact with wealth, power and worldly pleasures, to contamination and eventually to undermining the very spiritual bases of Islam and destroy the vigor of the moral and spiritual renaissance which derived from belief in God Almighty and the life hereafter. Imam ‘Ali b. Husayn realized this danger and began to take steps to remedy this situation. The foremost of his methods was to take the path of supplication. This book, *al-Sahīfa al-Sajjādiyya*, was one of the works that emanated as part of this great effort. This great Imam was able to produce a work of tremendous significance with the endowments with which he was graced from his lineage and his wonderful

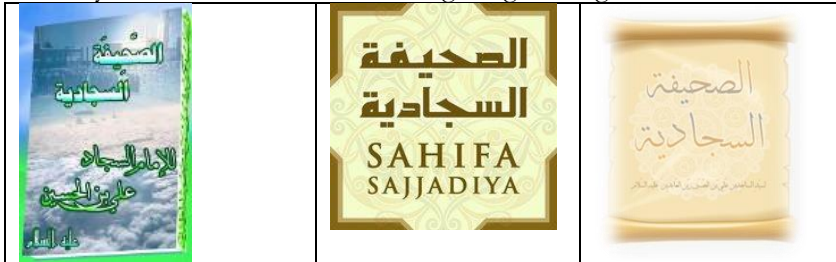
rhetoric and elegant styles in the Arabic language. Using his divinely gifted abilities, the Imam was able to weave out the most splendid and subtle meanings in his description of the links between the human being and the Divine, the links between the people and their Lord and Creator and to emphasize the qualities of faith, moral values and the duties that were necessary to a virile and spiritual society.”¹

Marhūm Ahmed H. Sheriff in his article “Saheefa Al-Kamilah: The Perfect Epistle” begins with an interesting episode. An eminent Pakistani scholar Late Khwaja Abdul Latif Ansari narrated to his audience that he had come across an American Christian lady who was so impressed by the profound invocations found in the *Sahīfa* that she “readily converted to Islam remarking that no other book would surpass this as it contained the supreme possible human approach towards the Creator Allah.” He also quotes the amazement of Shaykhul Islam Tanatawi Jawhari, a prominent Arab Professor of Philosophy, when given the gift of the Sahīfa:

I have studied this book with utmost care. I have gone through the invocations and supplications with searching eyes. I was stunned by the lofty meanings and deep sense contained therein. I was deeply impressed by the value and magnificence of these invocations. I wonder how the Muslims have all along been ignorant of such a valuable treasure. They have been in deep slumber for these centuries. They could not even feel that Allah has supplied them with such a precious store of knowledge. To the extent that I have been able to meditate over it, I notice that its words are above those of the created ones and below those of the creator.²

In order to increase the awareness and interest in the *Sahīfa*, the Academy for Learning Islam (A.L.I.) based in Richmond Hill, ON, Canada (www.academyofislam.com) conducts regular courses on the Sahīfa. It has also undertaken a project, subject to availability of volunteers, to post on its site the entire Arabic text of the Sahīfa with side-by-side English translations by Sayyid Ahmad Muhani and Dr. William Chittick. You may visit www.academyofislam.com/index.php/resourcess/publications/sahifa to read more about the project as well as interesting articles and audio files on the Sahīfa.

You may use one or all of the following images along with the article.



¹ For the entire article visit www.academyofislam.com/resources/publications/sahifa/intro_sahifa_sadr.pdf

² From www.academyofislam.com/index.php/resourcess/publications/sahifa/247-the-perfect-epistle

