

INTRODUCTION¹

ادْعُوا رَبَّكُمْ تَضَرُّعًا وَخُفْيَةً ۗ إِنَّهُ لَا يُحِبُّ الْمُعْتَدِينَ * وَلَا تُفْسِدُوا فِي الْأَرْضِ بَعْدَ
إِصْلَاحِهَا وَادْعُوهُ خَوْفًا وَطَمَعًا ۗ إِنَّ رَحْمَتَ اللَّهِ قَرِيبٌ مِّنَ الْمُحْسِنِينَ

"Implore your Lord plaintively and secretly; behold, He loveth not the transgressors. And do no mischief in the earth, after the reform thereof, hut beseech Him with fear (of His wrath) and craving (for His pleasure); lo the Mercy of God is near those who act handsomely."

Holy Qur'an, Chap. VII, verses 55 & 56.

Prayer, what it is

The importance and universality of prayer is a matter of common observation. It may be said to be a bond of personal love and dependence – of the highest ethical quality – between God and man. Prayer, in the words of H More, “is the application of want to Him who alone can relieve it, the voice of sin to Him who alone can pardon it. It is the urgency of poverty the prostration of humility, the fervency of penitence, the confidence of trust. It is not eloquence, but earnestness, not figures of speech, but compunction of soul. It is the ‘Lord, save us, we perish’ of drowning Peter; the cry of faith to the ear of mercy!” “In the morning,” says W. Seeker, “it is a golden key to open the heart for God's service and in the evening it is an iron lock to guard the heart against sin.”

“It is not truth,” says D. H. W. Beecher, “nor philosophy to say that prayer alters nothing, that the laws of nature are fixed and that entreaty cannot change them. The laws of nature *are fixed on purpose to be used for the granting of prayer*. Any man can use the laws of nature to grant the request of his child. Does he say that God, who made those laws, cannot do with them as he can?”

Its efficacy²

“It is true that the Divine mind knows it all beforehand. It is true that His counsels are wiser than man's and that He will Himself do for us better than we can ask or think. But for all that. He has created and ordained it one of the laws of the universe that when we reach our hands and lift up our voice to Him, consciously, from our hearts, seeking to come into touch with Him, then new floods of the holy spirit flow over us from Him, with their wonderfully calming, illuminating and uplifting power.” (R. A. Armstrong).

¹ Taken from *Sahifat-ul-Kamila* published by Madrasatul Waizin, Lucknow in AH 1389/1969 CE

² See , “What He pleaseth will God abrogate or confirm: for with Him is the source of revelation”, Qur'an, Chap. 13, verse 39 and the saying of Imam Ja'far Sadiq: إِنَّ الدُّعَاءَ يَرُدُّ الْقَضَاءَ يَنْقُضُهُ كَمَا يَنْقُضُ السَّلْكَ وَ قَدْ أُبْرِمَ إِبْرَامَا

“Prayer averts fate and breaks the string of events, even though they may have seemed inevitable.”

“There are,” says J. S. Blackie, the author of ‘Self-Culture’, “higher things than knowledge in the world; there are living energies; and in the moral world, certainly, it is not knowledge but aspiration that is the moving power, and the wing of aspiration is prayer.”

Its object

“We do not pray that we *may* alter the Divine decrees, but that our human will may learn to move in harmony with the Divine will. How far with regard to any special matter, not irrevocably fixed in the Divine concatenation of possibilities, our petition may prevail, we never can tell; but this we do know, that the most natural and the most effectual means of keeping Our own noblest nature in harmony with the source of all vital nobleness, is to hold high emotional communion with that source, and to plant ourselves humbly in that attitude of devout receptiveness which is the one becoming attitude in the created towards the Creator. Practically, there is no surer test of a man's diathesis than the capacity of prayer.

Reconciliation of prayer with resignation

Lord Bolingbroke once asked Lady Huntingdon how she reconciled prayer to God particular blessings, with absolute resignation to the Divine will, “Very easily,” answered her ladyship, “just as I were to offer a petition to a monarch of whose kindness and wisdom I had the highest opinion. In such a case, my language would be – I wish you to bestow on me such or such favour, but Your Majesty knows better than I, how far it would be agreeable to you, or right in itself, to grant my desire, I therefore content myself with humbly presenting my petition, and leave the event of it entirely to you.”

Islamic teaching about prayer

Having quoted *some* of the opinions of modern western writers on the philosophy of prayer, and shown its universality. Let us now examine what Islam teaches us concerning the subject. First of all, the Holy Qur’an inculcates the desire to pray in the most impressive terms. Some of its most important verses on the subject are as follows:

1. *“And your Lord .with, Call upon Me; I will hearken unto you.”* (Chap. 40, verse 60)
2. *“And when My servants ask thee concerning Me, then will I be neigh unto them; I will answer the cry of him that crieth, when he crieth unto Me; so let them respond unto Me; and believe in Me, that they may attain perfection.”* (Chap, 2, 186)
3. *“Say, not on your account doth my Lord care if ye call not Him.”* (Chap. 25, verse 77).
4. *Say, O my servants who have transgressed against yourselves, despair not of God's Mercy; truly, God forgiveth all sins- and really, He is the Forgiving, the Merciful.* (Chap. 39, verse 54.)

In the Hadith, the Prophet of Islam teaches us:

“Prayer is the salvation of the true believer, the pillar of faith, and the light of heaven and earth.”

“The best devotion,” says Ali ibne-e-Abi Talib, the Commander of the Faithful,” is to abstain from what is prohibited; and the most agreeable of earthly acts to God is to pray to Him; for prayer turneth away a decree, even though ordained; it is the key of Mercy; the instrument of the satisfaction of needs, and the shield against every calamity.”

“Whoever prays,” says Imam Muhammad al-Baqir, “shall never want.” And he once said to Mir (one of his disciples), “O Mir, pray! and do not say: Whatever is ordained shall come to pass. Truly, there is a rank of nearness to God, which cannot be attained save by entreaty; and really, one who shuts up his mouth and asks nothing of God, shall receive nothing from him.” To the question, what was the best devotional act, he replied, “There is nothing more agreeable to God than prayer and supplication, for God loves those who pray to Him; and there is nothing more hateful to Him than one who proudly abstains from devotion and prayer.”

The life of Imam Zain-ul-Abidin

Addison has said that a reader seldom pursues a book with pleasure unless he knows something about the character and personality of its author. The lives of great and good men always bound in useful lessons.

Professor Blackie rightly says, “So far as my experience goes, there is no kind of sermon so effective as the example of a great man.” It therefore seems befitting that the reader of these prayers should have before him a summary of the life, character and environment of that honoured personage whose thoughts are reflected herein. He was the Fourth Imam of the Shi’as and the following genealogical table³ will show his ancestors and descendants, all of whom are held in the deepest respect and veneration by Muslims all over the world.

Birth and parentage

Ali, the son of Husain, the son of Ali, the Commander of the Faithful, was born in Medina, in 38 A. H., during the caliphate of his grandfather. His mother was Shahr Banu, a daughter of Yezdgird, the last of the Kayanian Kings of Persia. Thus, owing to his connection with two of the noblest families in Asia, he was called “Ibn-ul-Khairatain”, (i.e. son of the two chosen ancestries). He was the fourth of the twelve Imams, and his piety and devotion won for him the appellations of “as-Sajjad”, (great adorer of God) and “Zain-ul-Abidin” (ornament of the pious). He was barely two years old when his grandfather was assassinated during the morning prayers in the Mosque of Kufa. In his twelfth year, he suffered the loss of the mild and generous (who was also his father-in-law) Imam Hasan, killed by poison, at the instigation of the court of Damascus.

³ See page 4

The massacre of Karbala

He was an eye-witness to the terrible persecution of his revered father Husain, at the hands of Yazid, who demanded of him the oath of fealty, on pain of death. To avoid having to swear allegiance to a man who was pagan at heart, and whose depravity had undermined the foundations of religion and morality, Husain removed himself with his family to Mecca. On reaching there, he found himself in greater peril, and fearing the desecration of the holy precincts of the Ka'ba by bloodshed, he set out for Kufa, in compliance with the invitations of the fickle and perfidious inhabitants of that town. But on his way there, he was intercepted by a large army sent by Yazid, and Husain himself, along with his kinsmen and followers, seventy-two in all, died fighting on the field of Karbala, after suffering insults and pangs of hunger and thirst for three days in succession. Even Husain's infant son, Ali Asghar, and some other children of tender age, fell victims to the monstrous cruelty of his enemies.

The atrocities perpetrated against the kindred of the Prophet at Karbala are too well-known to need further detail. Ali, the author of these prayers, on his return from captivity, was heard to say, "Had the Prophet positively commanded them to kill us, even as he had charged them by his last will and testament to be kind to us, they could not have injured us more than they did at Karbala." "In a distant age and climate," says Gibbon, touchingly, "the tragic scene of the death of Husain will awaken the sympathy of the coldest reader."

Of Husain's heroic band of martyrs, the only individual that survived the massacre was his son, Ali Zain-ul-Abidin. His severe illness at the time, disabled him from bearing arms, and his implicit obedience of his father's command restrained him from attempting to do so. Thus was he spared!

Having beheaded the Prophet's grandson, and having trampled the sacred bodies of the martyrs under their horses' hoofs, the murderous host burnt Husain's tents,

The Shias too, like the Sunnis, believe in the Holy Qur'an and in Muhammad as the Prophet, but they believe in the twelve Imams as the only true representatives of God and the Prophet. These twelve Imams, with the Prophet and his daughter, are collectively styled "Ahl-ul-Bait" (i.e. People of the House). Commentaries on the Qur'an, as written or given out by these Imams and Hadith as collected or described by them are alone acknowledged, and no religious information coming from any other source is accepted as authoritative. The spiritual teachings of Shiaism chiefly consist in freeing the student from all impurities of thought and action; promoting Holiness by communion with God, through prayers; charity and acts of virtue, and last, though not the least, in promoting spiritual love with the Ahl-ul-Bait, who are the best models to copy and follow. The example of Husain, the martyr, who for the sake of truth suffered the most cruel persecution and death, along with his children (Zain-ul-Abidin alone surviving) and cousins and friends at Karbala, stands prominent in the hearts of Shias. Meetings are held, and recitations are made, describing how Husain and his allies in Karbala suffered in the name of Truth, The result is that the Shia, being all love and purity, is harmonised without any other effort, and realises the Oneness (Unity) of God rather imperceptibly."

"Islam", by Muhammad Sarfaraz Husain, Qari Calcutta.

robbed the bereaved women and children of their few belongings and made them captives, while the mangled corpses of the martyrs were left unburied on the burning sands. The captives were then mounted on the bare backs of camels, with Imam Zain-ul-Abidin at their head, and accompanied by the severed heads of the martyrs mounted on spears, they were led through the crowded streets of Kufa, to the court of Yazid's governor, Ibn-e-Ziad. The latter, having expressed his satisfaction at the performance of his subordinates, ordered the prisoners to be taken to Damascus. At length, after a toilsome journey, this caravan of widows, orphans and severed heads, pelted at and insulted by the depraved populace of the cities and townships through which they passed, and, goaded onwards with the spears and whips of their ruthless captors, finally arrived in the court of the monstrous and inhuman Yazid. The captives as well as the heads of the martyrs were then presented before Yazid, who touched Husain's lips with a stick and heaped insults upon that honourable head. Then, turning towards the prisoners, he inquired the names of each of them, and ironically expressed satisfaction at what had befallen them. When Imam Zain-ul-Abidin remonstrated with him, he threatened to put the helpless Imam to the sword, whereupon the latter, with characteristic courage, defied him, saying, "I am not afraid of being killed; nay, in those that have been slain before me I have an example worthy of emulation." At this point, the wailings of the captive ladies interposed, and Yazid desisted from his evil design.

But in order to insult them the more, he ordered a speaker to mount the pulpit of the great mosque, and publicly abuse Ali and his descendants, including Imam Husain. When the speaker did so, Imam Zain-ul-Abidin rebuked him saying, "Woe unto thee; to please a creature thou hast displeased the Creator."

His speech in the Mosque at Damascus

"And what is it that would please the Creator?" asked Yazid. "Let me go on the pulpit, and I will tell you", replied Imam Zain-ul-Abidin. At first Yazid was unwilling to grant this request, but, being persuaded by those who were present, he reluctantly conceded, and the Imam climbed upon the pulpit. After praising God, blessing the Prophet, briefly dwelling upon the transitory nature of the world and exhorting men to be virtuous, he said, "Let all men know and recognise me; I am Ali, the son of Husain . . . I am the son of him who was killed unjustly; I am the son of him whose head was severed from the nape of the neck; I am the son of him who died thirsty: I am the son of him who fell on the field of Karbala; I am the son of him whose mantle and turban were plundered after his death; I am the son of him over whom the angels of heaven mourned. O men, the Almighty has been bountiful to us, since He has placed the standard of guidance in our midst and planted the flag of ruin among those who are not with us; He has given us excellence over all His creatures and conferred on us what He never conferred on anyone else. He has distinguished us with five

things, not to be met with in all creation, taken together: Knowledge; courage; generosity; love of God and love of the Prophet. He has bestowed on us what He did not bestow on any one else in the world!”

At these stirring words, pouring out passionately from the heart of the long suffering speaker, loud wails of lamentation rose from the assembly, and Yazid, finding it expedient to interrupt him, ordered the *muezzin* to call out for prayers. The *muezzin* cried out, “God is great,” and the captive Imam responded, “Yea. God is greater than every great one.” The *muezzin* then said, “I bear witness that there is no god but God,” and the Imam repeated the words after him. But when the *muezzin* said, “I bear witness that Muhammad is the Messenger of God,” the persecuted Imam turned towards Yazid and exclaimed, “Was Muhammad my grandfather or yours?” “Yours,” answered the shameless tyrant. “Then what right had you to slay his children and make their womenfolk prisoners?” asked the Imam. Yazid was dumbfounded, and the cries and lamentations of the audience grew louder and louder. Yazid tried to exculpate himself by laying the fault of the massacre at Ibn-e-Zyad’s door, but finding the reaction too strong and the feelings too deeply stirred against the perpetrators of the heinous crime, the tyrant quickly retired into the security of his palace, full of fear.

Shortly after this incident, with a view to make his subjects forget the atrocities committed by his men at Karbala, and in order to avoid the publicity of the real facts—for ignorance of the masses was one of the mainstays of Umayyad rule—he liberated the prisoners and sent them to Medina.

His death

After his return to Medina, Imam Zain-ul-Abidin retired into seclusion, leading a life of prayer and painstaking devotion. But even in this helpless condition, a strict watch was kept over him by the Syrian ruler, so that even his friends were afraid of meeting him too often, and if any p o e t dared to s i n g his praises in public, he was promptly punished. This is illustrated by the case of the outspoken Farazdaq.

Some historians relate the event of his second captivity, during the reign of Abdel-Malik ibne-Manvan. The ‘Tabe’i, Ibn-e-Shahab az-Zuhri states. “He was put in irons and a strict watch was kept over him. It was with great difficulty that I obtained permission to visit him, and when I saw him with chains and iron fetters on his hands and feet. I began to weep.”⁴

He survived the Tragedy of Karbala by about 35 years, and never ceased mourning throughout that period. “He mourned for his father,” says his grandson, Imam Ja’far-

⁴ Hiilyat-ul-Awalia, Hafiz Abu Naem, published Egypt, Vol. 3. page 135

as-Sadiq, “ while he fasted by day and prayed all night. At the hour of the breaking of the fast, when meat and drink were brought for him, he would say, “My father was killed hungry; my father was killed thirsty.” and the food and water was saturated with his tears, so that it had to be brought again and again, till he could eat and drink a little out of it.” He continued in this condition until he was called to the Mercy of God. He died of poison, administered at the instigation of Waleed ibn-e-Abd-el-Malik, in the year 95 A.H., and he was buried in the graveyard of Baqi, at Medina, beside his uncle Imam Hasan.

As an eye-witness to the heart-rending events of Karbala, his grief at their recollection was immeasurable. One day, one of his servants protested out of tenderness, saying, “How long will your mourn, dear master?” “Alas!” answered the inconsolable Imam, “Jacob the prophet had twelve sons and only one of them disappeared. But so great was his grief that his hair turned grey and his back was bent and his sight was impaired by excessive weeping. As for me, lo, I saw my beloved father and seventeen of my dear ones all mowed down by arrows, daggers, swords and spears in a single day. How then can my grief abate?” After uttering these pathetic words, he wept bitterly and incessantly. The memories of Karbala were so indelibly impressed on his mind that he could never bear to look at the head of a slaughtered sheep.

His hopefulness

In spite of all these sufferings, he was no pessimist, and his prayers, which inspire hope at every step, support this view of his character. The very fact that he prayed is in itself a proof of his hopefulness. A hopeless man would not have thought of praying.

“Blessed be the Lord,” says he in one of his prayers, “I am not despairing. This attitude of mind is accounted for by the fact that he had made the will of God his only standard of happiness.

His devotion and piety

“His sincere piety and wholehearted devotion won for him the appellation, “Ornament of the Pious.” It is said that when he performed the ceremonial washing before prayer, he used to turn pale for fear of God. Being questioned as to the cause of this intense feeling, he replied, “Don’t you know in whose presence I am going to stand?”

One day, while he was saying his prayers, his house took fire and several voices were heard shouting, “ Fire, fire !” but he did not feel at all alarmed and continued to pray as if nothing had happened. In the meantime the fire died out, and when he had finished praying, people said to him, “Son of the Prophet, what made you unmindful of the fire?” “The fire of hell,” replied he. So absorbing was his devotion.

He used to offer one thousand rak’ats of prayer every day and night.⁵ By constantly keep-

⁵ Sawaiq-e-Muhriqa, p. 119.

-ing awake for prayer at night, his complexion turned sallow⁶ and by weeping for fear of God, his eyes were swollen, and by standing for long hours his legs were also swollen. But he never missed the night vigil prayer even while travelling.

Allama Shablanji records that the reporter Taoos once saw him praying in the precincts of the Holy Kaaba, with his forehead touching the ground. Taoos says, "I was curious to hear what he was saying. So I quietly went near. There I heard him say, "O Master, Thy slave is at Thy door; O Lord. Thy beggar is at Thy door. . ." Says the reporter, "I learnt these words by heart, so beautiful were they; and whenever I asked for anything in those sublime words, my wish was always granted. (Ellam ul Wara, by Ibne Talha, ash Shafe'i, p. 1/5)

"Once on a time" says Ibrahim the son of Ali, "I accompanied him on a journey to visit the Kaaba. His camel was very lazy. The Imam had, in his His tenderness of hand, a stick, which he raised at the beast, from time to time, but heart did not strike him." (Matalib us Suool, p. 263). Such was his tenderness of heart.

His forgiveness, forbearance and generosity

One day, one of his slaves was climbed up a ladder, while carrying a large copper vessel containing roasted meat, for some guests on the top of the house. He had scarcely reached the uppermost round, when he and lost hold of the vessel which dropped down causing mortal injury to a child of his master. The accident filled the slave with consternation. But the gentle master thus addressed him, "I know thou didst not do this intentionally, do not be afraid. I forgive thee and emancipate thee."⁷ Such conduct on such an occasion is one of the noblest instances of forbearance and generosity, on record.

He was very lenient and forgiving. "One day" says the author of Sawaiq-i-Muhriqa, "Somebody abused him. The Imam did not mind what he said. Thereupon the fellow said, 'You are very careless.' 'I turn away from thee;' replied the Imam, quoting the verse of the Quran : 'Use indulgence, and enjoin what is just and withdraw from the ignorant' "Another instance of his forbearance is thus mentioned by Qarshi. A man once told the Imam that such a one spoke ill of him. Thereupon, the Imam asked the informer to accompany him to the evil speaker. The man complied believing that his company was solicited for assistance in case of a quarrel. When they reached the evil speaker, (he Imam thus addressed him; "If what you said was true, then may God forgive me, and if false then may He forgive you!" To such a pitch had he carried the cultivation of conscience!⁸

⁶ Allamah Tabrasi

⁷ Noor ul Absar p. 126.

⁸ Speaking of the righteous, Ali, the grandfather of our hero says, "When they are praised, they are filled with fear and pray to the Lord, saying, 'O Lord I know myself well and Thou knowest me still better. Do no call me to account for what they say of me, make me better than they suppose me to be and hide those faults of mine which they do not know.'" *Nahj-ul-Balagha*

One day Abu Hamza Sumali saw a flock of birds circling round and round the Imam and singing, Hamza relates: I was yet wondering at the sight, when the Imam asked, “Do you know what they are saying?”, “You know best,” said I, and he told me “Lo they praise their Lord and pray for nourishment.”⁹

His Charity

Having suffered a great deal himself, he had a great regard for those in distress. “He used to go out at night” says Abu Hamza-e-Sumali, “carrying on his back, a sack full of loaves of bread which he dealt out to the poor. He used to say, ‘Secret almsgiving turneth away divine wrath.’ The traces of carrying burden were discovered on his back when his sacred body was being washed after death. “There were in Medina,” says Abu Ishaq, “many men who lived an easy life, not knowing whence they got their living. When the Imam was no more they learnt that they used to receive their rations from him.”¹⁰

During the lifetime of Abdul Malik² his son Hisham made a pilgrimage to the Kaaba. He tried very much to kiss the celebrated black stone but failed to do so, owing to the presence of the crowd. At length, tired of his futile attempts, he sat down chagrined on a chair near the sacred well, Zamzam and watched the coming and going of pilgrims, while a company of Syrian nobles stood around him. He was sitting in this mood, when Ali suddenly made his appearance. On the approach of the Imam the crowd made way and he kissed the black stone without difficulty. This incident led one of the Syrians to enquire of Hisham about the venerable person, to whom people showed so great respect. Hisham, fearing lest his companions should feel favourably inclined towards the Imam, with affected indifference replied that he did not know who the individual was.

The celebrated poet Abufaras Farazdaq being present was offended at Hisham’s pretended ignorance and declaring that he knew the venerable person well, composed an extempore panegyric, of about 30 lines, celebrating the praises of the great Imam.¹¹ Thereupon Hisham got so offended with Farazdaq that he threw the poet into prison. When the incident was brought to the Imam’s notice he sent the poet a present of 12,000 gold pieces, which he refused to, take, saying that he had praised the Imam for the sake of God, not for the sake of gold. However, when the Imam said: “We the Ahlulbait (the people of the house of the Prophet) do not receive back what we give away,” the poet accepted the gift. This anecdote is significant. It informs us of the Imam’s bounty and of the respect in which he was held by the Moslems in general, and throws light on the Umayyad policy of keeping the masses ignorant of the rights and privileges of the house of the Prophet.

⁹ Matlib-us So’ul 264

¹⁰ He used to feed one hundred families every day. Matalib-us-Suool p.264

¹¹ This well-known poem is justly admired for its energetic style, grandeur of expression and truth of sentiment. It generally forms part of Arabic literary course in India and elsewhere.

Traits in which he resembled his grandfather

It has been observed by Imam Jafar-us-Sadiq, that Ali, the commander of the faithful, never tasted what was forbidden, throughout his life; that when he was given a choice between two things, and found that the more difficult of the two was agreeable to God, he adopted the difficult one; that none, except him, had the strength to worship like the Apostle of God; that when worshiping, he looked like a man detained between Paradise and Hell; that to win divine approbation he emancipated one thousand necks (slaves) out of his personal property, that his own diet and that of his family consisted of olive oil, vinegar, and dates; that his apparel was made of the coarsest material, and if he found the sleeves too long, he cut them short with a pair of scissors, and that none of the Ahlulbait resembled him more than his grandson, Ali the son of Husain (peace be on them all.)

His tenderness of conscience and humility

The following anecdote is an admirable instance of his tenderness of conscience and humility 'I saw', says Taoos, 'Imam Zain-ul-abdin praying in the Baitul Haram (the mosque of Ka'bah) and weeping. I went to him' and said "Son of the Apostle of God, you have three things to secure you from fear, why do you weep?" "What are those three things?" he enquired "Firstly", said I, "you are the son of the Lord's Apostle, secondly, your grandsire's intercession, and thirdly, God's mercy." "These do not assure me" , replied he, " firstly, because, on the day of resurrection God will not enquire about consanguinity, for He says, 'The ties of kindred between them (men) shall cease;'¹² Secondly because the Prophet will intercede only for those approved by God, for He hath said, 'And no plea shall they offer save for whom He pleaseth'¹³ thirdly, the Lord hath said, 'Verily the mercy of God is nigh unto the righteous,'" ¹⁴ Thus we see that in spite of, having a pure conscience and perfect confidence in the grace of God, he never allowed himself to feel too secure,—the true attitude of the pious and lowly in heart. It is owing to this attitude of mind that his prayers abound in expression of fervid earnestness, ardent devotion and sincere, to be found perhaps, nowhere else.

His Learning

As to his learning and wisdom, it has been observed, that he was the most eminent 'Faqih' (jurist) of his age. Besides a small collection of short, didactic, poetical pieces, ascribed to him, his sermons preached on different occasions and his prayers bear testimony to his deep knowledge of human nature, morals and theology. His speech in Damascus, in utter disregard of Yazid's threats, is a good specimen of his oratorical powers, and affords an unquestionable proof of his indomitable courage and presence of mind. "Such souls when they appear," says Emerson, "are the Imperial Guard of Virtue, the perpetual reserve, the dictators of fortune. One need not praise their courage—they are the heart and soul of nature."

¹² A verse from the Quran, II-166

¹³ A verse from the Quran, XXI-28

¹⁴ A verse from the Quran, VII-56

These detached anecdotes do not aim at presenting a perfect biographical sketch, for, it may be said, that after the tragedy of Karbala the Imam's outward life had not in it many events. Their sole object is to enable the reader to get as complete a view as possible, of his excellent character. Of course in the prayers themselves, we may find, a pretty complete "Spiritual" biography of our hero.

Suffering cause of moral excellence

If suffering can make a man advance towards moral perfection, as has been the experience of some of the most eminent sages, then certainly, he was one of the most perfect of men; for, history shows that his share of suffering and sorrow, was superlatively abundant. But let it be borne in mind that a man's innocence is not to be condemned by afflictions.

The name of the book

The "Sahifat-ul-Kamilah" (complete scripture) is a collection of the liturgical utterances of the fourth Imam. It has been so named in order to distinguish it from certain incomplete versions, (e. g. the version current among the Zaidis of Yemen) which were circulated in the days before the invention of the printing press. Great souls and learned divines have treasured its sublime words in their staggeringly prodigious memories, and repeated them in their most fervent prayers. They have often referred to this book as the "Zaboor-e-Al-e-Muhammad" (Psalms of Muhammad's grandson) and the "Injeel-e-Ahl-e-Bait (Gospel of the Prophet's House).

The life of the Fourth Imam shows us his exceptional engrossment in prayers and meditations, which won for him the distinctive titles, "Zain-ul-Abidin" and "Syed-us-Sajideen"— the Ornament of Worshippers; the Prince of Adorers. For although each and every one of the Twelve Imams was outstanding in his devotion to prayer, the mysterious Hand of Destiny had so modelled the circumstances of Imam Zain-ul-Abideen's life as to make them a fertile ground for the exuberance of that divine contemplation and sublime meditation of which the Sahifat-ul-Kamilah is the fruit.

Every night he used to rise from his bed after midnight and spend the remaining hours of darkness in rubbing his face upon the ground and praising and glorifying God, Once when fire broke out in his house, he remained praying and adoring the Almighty completely heedless of the imminent danger. When the fire had been put out, he completed his usual prayers and was told of the incident, he said, "Fear of the Fire of Hell made me oblivious of this earthly fire."

At the age of twenty-two, we see him suffering from a malignant fever which undermined his health so far as to deprive him from seeking the honour of martyrdom with his father at Karbala, What could the invalid do without food, drink or medicine, except sustain himself by patience and prayer? Immediately after the martyrdom of Imam

Husain, we find him a captive, treading barefoot along the thorny path from Karbala to Kufa, from Kufa to Damascus overburdened with heavy chains, bemoaning at each step his sad plight, as he held the rope of a train of camels carrying upon their bare backs his widowed mother, his bereaved aunts and sisters and the helpless orphans of his kith and kin—prisoners all! The malady persists; he still suffers from fever, while the stinging lash bites through his flesh, the iron fetters press against his bones and he is goaded on by piercing spears.

If proof be demanded of the efficiency of prayer or for its power to fortify the mortal soul in facing the most barbarous torture with courage and hope, one single chapter from the life of the ailing Imam can furnish ample proof thereof. Nothing but faith in the Justice and Goodness of God could strengthen anyone to endure the tortures, insults and abuses that were heaped upon the patient Imam in his long sojourn as a prisoner of the tyrant Yazid.

Providence had spared him to proclaim before the world the irreparable injury inflicted by his persecutors and to put his torturers to shame. How honourably he acquitted himself of this painful duty is borne out by the lofty, impassioned and sober addresses delivered by him in the court of Damascus. Should any Arabic scholar be led to doubt the genuineness of the Sahifat-ul-Kamilah, all he need do is to compare the style of these prayers with that of his sermons as recorded in many reliable books of history. Such a comparison will show at once that the two bear the impress of a common authorship.

The last phase of Imam Zain-ul-Abideen's life unfolds another set of heart-rending circumstances. He survived thirty-four years after the tragic Day of Karbala to weep for the innocent blood of all those who were near and dear to him. The houses once occupied by the worthiest sons of Hashim were now desolate. The Imam cried when he saw a lamb being led by a butcher for slaughter, he even wept to see a cup of water, for it reminded him of the three days of hunger and thirst endured by the martyrs in the furnace-like desert. But even his tears were sermons, and throughout his secluded life in Medina, he wasted not a moment but continued the great task of guidance towards the right, path. Amid the general depression and demoralisation caused by the ruthless tyranny of the Umayyad rulers, the moral teachings of the Prophet of Islam were being rapidly forgotten and the spirit of the great faith was withering away. The Imam's purpose in life was neither vengeance nor the seizure of political power. His object was only to keep the spark of spiritual life glowing and the torch of guidance burning. He acquitted himself admirably of this task through the unobjectionable medium of a book containing his prayers and meditations. His sermons, addresses, even his conversations, were constantly being watched by the jealous Umayyad rulers, but prayers were among the only things which aroused no suspicion, and so the Imam employed this mode of imparting to his followers the knowledge of the true faith. Nevertheless, such was the dread of persecution that even these prayers and hymns were not readily disclosed by

those who possessed the manuscripts unless they made sure that the person who asked for them was not a wolf in sheep's clothing. That fact is illustrated by the traditional preface which is usually appended to the Sahifat-ul-Kamilah, to show the source wherefrom it is derived.

Sources clouded by the darkness of centuries of persecution

In contemplating the traditional introduction, we are afforded a glimpse of the precarious condition of the Shias throughout the dark eras of persecution. In those Dark Ages, when the Umayyad and Abbasid tyrants held sway over a mighty Empire there was no crime more reprehensible—no sin more unforgivable than adherence to the Imam descended from the Prophet of Islam. This hostility towards the children of the Prophet appears all the more ironical when we come to think that the very source and fountainhead from which these potentates pretended to derive their authority was the Prophet Muhammad, whose descendants and followers were thus mercilessly tortured. Shias were burnt, tortured, slaughtered, buried alive. Their books were consigned to the flames; their houses were pillaged, and plundered, and they were compelled to keep their real believers to themselves. The provisions of the law of *taqayya* (dissimulation) being applied as a means of self defense, ninety-nine out of every hundred Shias observed them so strictly that even their wives and children remained ignorant of their true beliefs. Under these circumstances it is not at all surprising that a large amount of material concerning the religious aspect of their lives has been irretrievably lost. Indeed, the amazing fact is that a single follower of the Ahl-e-Bait, a single principle of the Shia creed, or a single tradition of the Imams should have survived the merciless oppression and wholesale genocide perpetrated by the blood-thirsty rulers and their minions.

The place of the Sahifa in Islamic Literature

If the facts related in the traditional introduction are accepted, the scholars of the East and West will have to revise their views regarding the earliest books of the Muslims, as the tradition therein contained shows that the book (Sahifat-ul-Kamila) had been committed to writing in the lifetime of Imam Zain-ul-Abidin (d. 95 A. H /713 A. D.). It must therefore be accorded a place among the earliest books of Islam. Ibn-e-Shahr Ashob writes on page 1, of his Ma'alim-ul-Ulama. "According to Ghazzali, the first book in Islam is the work of Ibn-e-Juraih of Mekka, containing traditions of Mujahid and 'Ata relating to the exegesis of the Quran and the accounts of Hadith; the next book is by Mu'ammarr ibn-e-Rashid as-Sighani? then comes the Muwatta by Malik ibn-e-Anas; then the Jame' by Sufian-ath-Thauri. But the truth of the matter is that the first writer in Islam is Amir-ul-Mominin 'Aii (alaih-is-salam) who compiled the Book of Allah (i. e. the Quran); the next is Salman al Farsi; then Abu Zar al-Ghifari; then Asbagh-ibn-e-Nabatah; then Abdullah ibn-e-Abi Rafe; and then Imam Zain-ul-Abidin (alaih-is-salam) author of the Sahifat- ul-Kamila"

This remarkable passage from the pen of ibn-e-Shahr Ashob reveals the astonishing fact that Salman al Farsi, Abu Zar al Ghifari and Abdullah ibn-e-Abi Rafi were among the first writers of books in Islam. These notable companions of the Prophet (razi Allahu anhum) flourished much earlier than any of the writers named by Ghazzali, viz, Ibn-e-Juraih (d. 155 A. H. /771 A. D.), Malik ibn-e-Anas (179 A. H. /794 A. D.), and Sufian ath-Thauri (D. 161 A. H. /777 A. D.). It also proves that the books of the earlier writers must have perished during the persecution of Shias and the destruction of Shia literature, as no trace of any of them is to be found today. Moreover, it is not astonishing that Ghazaali, who is well known for his bigotry and prejudice against the Shias, should have overlooked or ignored the existence of the works mentioned by Ibne-e Shahr Ashob. At any rate Ghazzali's information on the subject seems to be prima facie inaccurate as he even ignores the Seerat by Ibn-e-Is'haq (d. 150 A. H. /766 A. D.) which is one of the source-books of Ibn-e-Hisham (d. 151A. H. /767 A. D.)¹⁵

The learned Ibn-e-Shahr Ashob too, seems to have overlooked the work of Saleem ibn-e-Qais al Hilali. which dates earlier than the Sahifat-ul-Kamila. Saleem's book has been described as the "Abjad-esh-Shia's (The A. B. C. of Shiaism) and the Sirro Al-e-Muhammad (The Secret Doctrine of Muhammad's Children). The Fourth, Fifth and Sixth Imams have verified its authenticity. It is mentioned in the 'Fihrsit' by Ibn-e-Nadeem and in the "Mahasin-ul-Wasael" by Qazi Badr-uddin (d. 779 A. H./1376 A. D.) as the first book of the Shias, and has been published in the Matba'-e-Flaidari at Najaf.

As regards the collection of the addresses, writing and sayings of Amirul-Mominin Ali (alaih-is-salam) known as the Nahjhaul-ul-Balagha and of his prayers known as Sahifat-ul-Alaviyah, though these were delivered, written and spoken at a much earlier date, they were not collected and compiled in the form of books until much later. Hence, they are not included among the earliest books. But the Sahifat-ul-Kamilah is rightly classed among the earliest books of the Muslims.

The source of the Sahifat-ul-Kamila

It is related to us¹⁶ by the noblest Syed Syed Najm-uddin Baha-ush-Sharaf Abul Hasan Muhammad Ibn-e-Hasan ibn-e-Ahmad ibn-e-Ali ibn-e Muhammad ibn-e-Umar ibn-e-Yahya al Alavi al Husaini¹⁷ (may Allah have mercy on him) saying that -'I was informed

¹⁵ See Journal of Semitic Studies, Monograph No. 1: "New Light on the life of Muhammad" by Alfred Guillaume, published by Manchester University Press, about 1960.

¹⁶ The initial expositor of the tradition, while giving the whole chain of reporters does not reveal his own name, thus leaving his identity to be discovered by research. The question is: Who is the person who says, "It is related to us"? Most of all authorities hold this person to be Hibat-Ullafr ibn-e-Haamid al Hilli (d. 609 A. H. /1211 A.D.), though some of them hold that the person is Ibnus-Sukoon All ibn-e-Mohammad Al-Hill', while other incline to the view that he is Shaikh Arabi ibne-Musafir al-'Ibadi {See History of the Sahifat-ul Kamila in Urdu, by Maulana Mirza Ahmad Hasan Saheb Kazimaini, pub. Nizami Press Lucknow}

¹⁷ Several other sources are mentioned in various books which establish that the Sahifa is vouched by several independent series of reporters and that it has come down to us in its original form from Imam Zain-ul-Abidin Ali ibn-

be the Shaikh as-Sa'yed Abu Abdullah Muhammad ibn-e-Ahmad ibn-e-Shahryar the Treasurer of Amir-ul-Mominin Ali ibn-e-Abi Talib (alaih-issalam) in the month of Rabi-ul-Awwal, 516 A. H. who read it out to him and he heard it, from the most truthful Shaikh Abu Mansur Muhammad ibn-e-Muhammad ibn-e-Ahmad ibn-e-'abdul-Azizal- 'Ukbari al Mu'addil (may Allah have mercy on him) who said that it was related to him by the Sharif Abu 'Abdullah Ja'far ibn-e-Muhammad ibn-e-Ja'far ibn-e-Hasan ibn-e-Imam Hasan ibn-e-Amir-ul-Mominin 'Ali ibn-e-Abi Talib (alaihimus-salam) who said that it was related to him by 'Abdullah-ibn-e-Umar ibn-e-Khattab az-Zaiyat in the year 265 A. H. who said that it was related to him by his maternal uncle, Ali ibn-e No'man the most learned, who said that it was related to him by 'Umair-ibn-e-Mutawakkil ath-Thaqafi of Balkh having heard it from his father, Mutawakkil-ibn-e-Haroon, who related as follows:—

“I met Yahya, the son of Zaid, the son of Ali¹⁸ (peace be on them) after his father, Zaid had been slain, and he was going to Khorasan. I greeted him, and after returning the greeting he asked, “Whence comest thou?”

ul-Husain alaih-im-us-salam. To mention all these sources would be to overburden this short preface unnecessarily. Those who wish to study the various sources may refer to the History of the Sahifa referred to above.

One of these chains of reporters may however be mentioned here, as recorded in Behar-ul-Anwar, Vol. 25, p. 157:—

Amir Majid b. Jalaluddin Muhammad al Husaini ad Deshtaki writes in his ija za (certificate) to his pupil Mulla Muhammad Shafi in 1087 A. H /1676 A. D that he derived the contents of the book (Sahifat-ul-Kamila) from his father Muhaqqiq Nizamuddin Ahmad who learnt from his father Mu'izzuddin Ibrahim, who learnt from his father Salam-ullah, who learnt from his father Emad-uddin Masood who learnt from his father Sadruddin who learnt from his father Ghayasuddin Mansoor. who learnt from his father Sadruddin Muhammad, who learnt from his father Ibrahim, who learnt from his father Muhammad, who learnt from his father Umairi, who learnt from his father Hasan, who learnt from his father Husain, who learnt from his father Ali, who learnt from his father Muhammad, who learnt from his father Ali who learnt from his father Ja'far who learnt from his father Ahmad. who learnt from his father Ja'far, who learnt from his father Muhammad, who learnt from his father Zaid ash-Shaheed who learnt from his father Imam Zainul-Abedin Ali ibn-ai-Husain alaih-im-us-salam the contents of this book. As regards Ameer-ur-Roasa Hibat-ullah ibn-e-Haamid al Hilli. He was the pupil of Shaikh Fikhar ibn-e-Ma'ad al-Moosvi (d. 630 A H. /122.2 A. D.) and was a great jurist and man of letters. The father of Shaheed-ul-Awwal Tajuddin b Mo'aiva namely Jalaluddin Abu Ja'far Qasim b .Mo'aiva received a certificate from Ameer ur Roasa in his own handwriting bearing his signature, dated 603 A. H. This certificate was inscribed on a page of the Sahifa in the handwriting of ibnus-Sukoon, to the effect that Jalaluddin Abu Ja'far Qasim b. Mo'aiva has correctly read this Sahifa under my instructions and I have related to him the source thereof as derived by me from Baha ush-Sharaf Muhammad ibn-e-Hasan ib n -e -Ahmad. . . ”

The great divine Meer Baqir-e-Damad writes in his “Ta'leeqat”: “The authenticity of the Sahifat-ul-Kamila is established beyond doubt by consistent evidence from all sources” (ref. MS in the Nasiriyah Library, Lucknow). The chain of reporters usually given in the book is adopted merely because it has been customary to do so, but really requires no chain of reporters.

Our learned contemporary, Muhammad Mishkat is of the opinion that: The derivation of the Sahifat-ul-Kamila is mutawatir, i. e. corroborated unanimously from different sources.” (Vide his Preface to the Sahifa, page “jim”).

Allama Shahabuddin Najafi writes in his Istidrak p. 'Kaf-jim':— “Apart from the Imamia Isna Asharia sect, the Zaidia and Ismailia are also agreed regarding the full corroboration of the Sahifat-ul-Kamila and they have written several commentaries and marginal notes thereon .”

¹⁸ I.e. Hazrat Imam Zain-ul-Abedin Ali-ibn-ul-Husain, alaih-is-salam, the author of these prayers.

“From the pilgrimage,” said I.

He then questioned me about his family and about the sons of his uncles who resided at Medina, and particularly enquired about Ja’far the son of Muhamad¹⁹ (peace be on them), and I gave him their tidings and told him of their sorrow for his father, Zaid.²⁰

Then he said to me, “It was my uncle, Muhammad the son of Ali²¹ who dissuaded my father from rising against the ruling power, and foretold that if he revolted and left Medina, his undertaking would not prosper. But, tell me, did you see my cousin Ja’far the son of Muhammad (peace be on them)?”

“Yes,” answered I.

“Did you hear him mention anything concerning my affairs?”

“Yes,” replied I.

“What was the occasion of his remembering me?”

“Let me be your sacrifice,” said I, “I am loth to divulge what I heard from him.”

At once, Yahya ibn-e-Zaid, guessing the purpose of my secret, rejoined, “Thinkest thou that I am terrified of death?” Tell me plainly what you have heard from him.”

So I said, “I heard the Imam say that thou shalt be killed and crucified, even as they father was killed and crucified”.

On hearing this, the brave Yahya turned pale, and quoted the Holy Quran, saying, “What He pleaseth will God abrogate or confirm, for with Him is the Source of the Book (of Destiny).”²² O Mutawakkil, verily, the Almighty has aided us in this affair,²³ and he has bestowed upon us knowledge and the sword. Both of these belong to us, while He has distinguished our cousins with knowledge alone.

I replied, “May I die for you; Verily, I find men more inclined towards your cousin, Ja’far (peace be on him) than towards you or your father.”

¹⁹ i. e. Hazrat Imam Ja’far as-Sadiq alaih-is-salam, the sixth Imam.

²⁰ i. e. Zaid-ash-Shaheed, son of Imam Zain-ul-Abedin alaih-is-salam. His mother was Umm-e-walad. He was eminent for his piety and learning and for his chivalry and nobility. Although the Zaidis look upon him as their Imam, he himself was a follower of Imam Muhammad al-Baqir and Imam Ja’far as-Sadiq. He was killed in a battle against the Umayyad Hisham ibn-Abd-ul-Malik, and, after burial, his body was disinterred, crucified and burnt and the ashes were scattered to the winds by the beastly Umayyads.

²¹ j. e the fifth Imam, Muhammad al-Baqir alaih-is-salam.

²² Holy Quran, XIII 30

²³ The war of vengeance with Yahya was going to wage against the Umayyads

He answered, “Yes, the reason is that my uncle, Muhammad the son of Ali (peace be on him) and his son Ja’far invite men towards life, while we invite them towards death.”

“O descendant of the Prophet,” said I, pressing my point, “are they more learned or you?”

At this, he sat with head bowed in meditation for a long time, and then answered. “We are all learned, but, they know all that we know, whilst we do not know all they know.”

Then Yahya asked me, “O Mutawakkil, have you written down anything you have heard from my cousin ?”

“Yes,” replied I, and disclosed to him many items of knowledge. Then I showed him a prayer which Abu Abdullah²⁴ (peace be on him) had dictated to me, saying that it had been dictated to him by his father, Muhammad ibn-e-Ali al-Baqir (alaih-im-us-salam) and that it was one of the prayers of his father Ali ibn-ul-Husain (alaih-im-us-salam) — a prayer of the Sahifat-ul-Kamila.

Yahya read the prayer from beginning to end and then asked me, “Have I your permission to copy it?”

I replied, “Descendant of the Prophet, need you ask permission for what is your Own?”

“Behold,” said Yahya, “I will show you the complete book of prayers which my father preserved from his father, and concerning which my father enjoined upon me by will, to guard it carefully and to deny it to the undeserving.”

“Thereupon,” says Mutawakkil, “I stood up before him and kissed his forehead, and said, ‘By the Lord, O son of the Apostle of God, I seek nearness unto God by loving and obeying you, and I fervently hope that He will bless me with your love in my life and in my death.’”

Then he handed over the writing which I had given to him to a boy who was with him, and said, “transcribe this prayer in a clear and beautiful hand and show it to me, so that I may learn it by heart, for I had asked J a’far²⁵ aforesaid to let me have it, but he denied it to me.”

‘On hearing this,’ continues Mutawakkil, ‘I regretted what I had done, and did not know how to undo it, for I had given the book to Yahya because Abu Abdullah (i e. Imam

²⁴ i.e. Imam Jafar as-Sadiq (alaih-is-salam)

²⁵ Yahya ibn Zaid, being closely related to imam Ja'far Sadiq refers to him in this familiar strain.

Ja'far Sadiq a. s.) had not forbidden me to give it to anybody, but now I was told that the Imam had refused to give it to Yahya.'

'Then Yahya called for a bag, and took out from it a book which was covered and sealed; he examined the seal and kissed it with tears in his eyes; then he broke the seal and opened the book, and spreading its pages before him, he caressed it with his face and eyes, saying, "If thou hadst not mentioned the prophecy of my cousin that I shall be killed and crucified, verily. I would never have parted with this book, and I would never have given it to thee. But I know that my cousin's words are always true and he has derived the knowledge of the future from his ancestors, and that his predictions are bound to be fulfilled. So I am afraid lest such a treasure of divine knowledge might fall into the hands of Bani Umayyah, who might conceal it, and exploit it for their own selfish ends. Therefore, take it from me and guard it with thy life, as a sacred trust, to be delivered after the fulfilment of God' decree concerning that tribe (i. e. the Bani Umayyah) and myself, to Muhammad and Ibrahim the sons of Abdullah-il-Husain the son of Imam Hasan, the son of Ali, peace be on them; for they shall take up this matter (i. e. the Jihad against the murderers of the Prophet's children) after me."

Mutwakkil says, "I took the book and kept it and when I came to know that Yahya had been killed, I went to Madina, and visited Abu Abdullah (Imam Jafar Sadiq) and narrated to him Yahya's conversation; on hearing which, he was overpowered by emotions and wept saying. " God bless my cousin and join him with his holy fore-fathers. By the Lord, O Mutawakkil, nothing prevented me from giving him the prayer but what he feared concerning the book of his father. Where is the book?" "Here it is," said I.

He then opened it and remarked, "By God, this is the writing of my uncle, Zaid, and the prayer of my grand-father Ali, ibnul Husain (peace be on them)."

Then he said to his sons "Arise, O Ismail, and fetch me the prayers which I entrusted to your care and protection". So Ismail stood up and brought a book like the book given to me by Yahya. Abu Abdullah (Imam Jafar Sadiq) then kissed it and touched it with his eyes saying "This is (he handwriting of my father, to the dictation of my grand-father (peace be on them) having been written in my presence."

"Son of the Apostle of God, "said I, "will you permit me to compare it with Yahya's copy?" He permitted me to do so, saying, "I find thee worthy of it."

I then compared the books, and found them to be identical, word for word and letter for letter. Then I begged (Hazrat) Abu Abdullah's permission to make over the book to the legatees, and he said, "Verily, God commands you to restore trust unto the owners thereof. So hand over the book to them."

The book was then delivered by Mutawakkil to the legatees in the Imam's presence, and when they had gone away, he related to Mutwakkil a tradition of the Holy Prophet concerning the domination of the tribe Bani Umayyah, the persecution of the Ahl-ul-Bait (house of the Prophet and the cruelties which their followers were to suffer under their rule.”

‘After this,’ says Mutawakkil, ‘Abu Abdullah (on whom be peace dictated the prayers to me, and there were seventy-five chapters, of which eleven were lost, and more than sixty remained with me’.

Several other series of reporters and sources of derivation are mentioned in various books, which go to show how widely accepted it is that the Sahifat-ul-Kamila has come down to us in its original form from Imam Zain-ul-Abidin, Ali Ibn-ul-Husain alaih-is-salam). One of these corroborative sources is mentioned in the footnote on pp. 16. Other sources are omitted as their inclusion would unnecessarily over-burden this short preface.

Collaboration from other liturgical collections

Among the learned Shia divines who have acknowledged the authenticity of the **Sahifa**, mention may be made of—

- (1) Shaikh Mufid; author of the ‘Irshad’ (d. 413 A. H, /1025 A. D.)
- (2) His contemporary; Shaikh Aii b. Muhammad at Khazzat-al-Qummi author of *Kifayai ul Albar*, a pupil of Shaikh Saduq;
- (3) Shaikh ut Ta’efa Abu Jafar Tusi (d 460 AH/1060 A. D.;
- (4) Abul ‘Abbas Najjashi, author of the ‘Rijal’ (d. 450 A. H. 1057 A. D.)
- (5) Mulla Muhammad Taqi Majlisi I; and
- (6) Mulla Mohammad Baqir Majlisi II

Besides, many of the liturgical collections of the Shias contain *Du‘ās* from *the Sahifat-ul-Kamilah*, e. g.:—

- (a) *Misbahul Muahajjid* by the Shaikh-ut-Taefa contains prayers Nos. 6,32,42,43,44,45,46 and 48;
- (b) Shaikh Qutb-ud-din Rawindi (d. 573-1176 A. D.) has copied in his *Prayer Book* the prayers Nos. 11,15 and 40;

- (c) Syed Ibn-e-Baqi (d. 653 A. H. 1254 A. D.) writes Du'ās Nos. 6, 32, 43, 44, 45, 46 and 48;
- (d) 'The Iqbal' of Syed Razi-uddin ibne Taoos (d. 664 A. H. / 1264 A. D.)
- (e) Syed Ali, son of the above-named Syed Ibn-e-Taoos incorporates in his '*Zawaid ul Fawaid* prayers Nos. 7, 42 and 47;
- (f) Shaikh Muhammad b. Makki, the Shaheed-ul-Awwal (d. 782 A. H. / 1379 A. D.) records Du'ā No. 16; and
- (g) The *Baladul Ameen* sets apart a special chapter consisting of Du'ās Nos. 6, 32, and 37, 48

Other Collections of the prayers and Meditations of the Fourth Imam

In addition to the Sahifatul-Kamila there are at least eight other collections of the Du'ās of Imam Zain-ul-Abidin (peace be on him), compiled by various learned and reliable authors. These are:—

- (i) *Sahifat us Sania* (the 2nd Sahifa). compiled by Shaikh Muhammad b. ul Hasan at Hurr ul Amili author of '*Wasael ush Shia*'
- (ii) *Sahifat us Salisa* (the 3rd Sahifa), by Meerza Abdullah Afendi (author of *Ryaz ul Ulama*;
- (iii) *Sahifat ur Rabe'a* (The 4th Sahifa) by Meerza Husain Noori, Tabarsi author of *Mustadrak ul Wasail*
- (iv) *Sahifat ul Khamisa* (the 5th Sahifa) by Syed Hasan al Husaini al Ameen, author of *A'yan-ush-Shia'h*,
- (v) *Sahifat us Sadisa* (the 6th, Sahifa) by Shaikh Muhammad Baqir al Birjundi al Qaeni;
- (vi) *Sahifat us Sabe'a* (the 7th. Sahifa) by Shaikh Hadi b. 'Abbas, al-e- Kashiful Ghata, Najafi. author of *Mustadrak e Nahbut Balagha*;
- (vii) *Sahifat us Samina* (the 8th Sahifa) by Allama Mirza Aii al Husaini al Mar'ashi ush Shahrestani ul Haeri;
- (viii) Another *Sahifa* compiled by Shaikh Muhammad b Muzaffar uz Ziabadi ul Qazwini, a pupil of Shaikh Baha-uddin Amuli', as mentioned by 'Allama Shahabuddin Najafi

As compared to the universally accepted *Sahifatul Kamila*, these later collections are seldom used, though they certainly contain some original Du'ās of the Fourth Imam which are not to be found in the Sahifat-ul-Kamila, which is referred to as the Sahifat ul Oola (First Sahifa) to distinguish it from later collections.

Commentaries and old Manuscripts

There are at least 35 different commentaries of the *Sahifat ul Kamilah* by various eminent writers, including Shaikh-e-Kaf'ami (Shaikh Ibrahim b. Ali, d. 868 A. H.), Majlisi ul Awwal (Syed Muhammad Taqi), Majlisi II (Syed Muhammad Baqir), Syed Muhammad Baqir b. Muhammad Damad among the Isna Asharis, and Syed Mohsin b. Qasim ul Yemani of the Zaidi sect. There are bound to be other commentaries and explanations among the Bohras, but unfortunately nothing is known about them.

Among the oldest manuscripts of the Sahifa, the following may be mentioned:—

- (1) MS. transcribed by Shaikh Muhammad b Makki. known as the Saheed-e-Awwal in 662 A. H. - 1262 A. D. copied by him from the transcript of Ali b Ahmad us Sadeed. This is preserved in the library of Mumtazul Ulama at Lucknow.
- (2) MS transcribed in 573 A. H/1176 A. D. and compared by Shaikh Muhammad b Idris. This copy bears the certificate of correctness from the pen of Shaikh Muhammad b Idris and contains valuable information about its source and derivation. It is preserved in the Kutub Khaneh Nasiriyeh at Lucknow;
- (3) MS transcribed by Muhammad b. Ali b. Ibrahim b. Jamhoor known as the Fazil-e-Ahsai. There is a note on the margin of 47th Du‘ā to the effect that the M.S. has been compared with the M.S. of Zain-ud-din Amuli’s (2nd. Martyrs’) copy six times by several learned men;
- (4) MS transcribed by Shaikh Ibrahim b. Ali-al-Kaf‘ami (author of the *Balad ul Ameen*) having his signature and dated 29th, Shawwal, 867 A. H. 1361 A. C,
- (5) Besides the above-mentioned MSS, there are about 34 old MSS in the library of Hazrat Imam Raza alaih-is-Salam at Meshhed Iran, particulars whereof may be seen in the hand list of the said library.

Beauty of the Sahifa and advantages of reading it

The Sahifa is one of the best collections of devotional literature in the world. It has been called, ‘The Psalms of the Children of Mohammad’ and certainly it is by no means inferior to the immortal utterance of the great King and Prophet, David of Israel, on whom be peace. The Sahifa reveals to us the loftiness of the mind that produced it, and the deep and exact knowledge of human nature, the fervent devotion, the earnest love, the humility of heart, and the constant sense of moral obligation which were essential parts of the character of Imam Zainul Abidin alaih-is-salam. It also affords us glimpses of his sufferings, trials and tests which are unparalleled in the world’s history, and of the patience, hope and fortitude with which he faced them. These are the prayers of one whose father sacrificed himself and his kith and kin for the moral and spiritual welfare of humanity, and did not abandon the remembrance of God even in the last and acutest moments of his agony when he was actually beneath the sword of one of the myrmidons of the tyrant of Damascus. They are the sincere utterances of a devout soul—not the abstruse and incomprehensible sophistries of a metaphysician. They teach men to listen to the silent whispering of their inner-self, and appeal to the head and heart alike. They indicate a very high standard of practical morality by making the reader fully conscious of his responsibilities as a rational being. They contain the gist of religion and morals and, with a few exceptions can be read advantageously by everyone having faith in the unity and grace of God.

These prayers are the best guide to moral self-review, the importance of which is too well-known to require any proof. They hold the mirror upto nature, whereby the reader

finds his most secret faults and most trivial errors faithfully reflected. If regularly read they cannot fail to effect continuous and sustained moral improvement, by enabling the reader to form a correct idea of his defects and moderate view of his merits, thereby eradicating vanity and self-conceit.²⁶ In short, their study is one of the surest ways of cultivating the conscience.

From my own experience, I can bear testimony to the fact that these prayers have been a source of great benefit to me. In sickness, failures, losses and insults—in short, in all temptations, trades and afflictions, they proved a balm to my lacerated heart—a healing ointment to my wounded feelings. They have often solaced my griefs, comforted and calmed my perturbed, distracted mind, and weeded it of grudge, envy and other degrading passions. Some years of continued illness, anxieties and cares, had made me hopeless of accomplishing any good thing in this life, and had the effect of making me averse to every kind of voluntary and useful exertion. I found that my mind had become quite morbid and melancholy. But the regular reading of this prayer-book improved the tone of my mind, and restored me to activity by giving a new direction to my energies. Whenever I read them I am moved to tears, being reminded of my failings and inequities; and I become more charitably disposed towards others, and determined to become a better man and feel considerably relieved.

The most important of all is the fact that these prayers always uplifted my spirits, revived my courage, and guarded me against that most pitiable of all states—despair; and assured me of Divine Grace and Mercy. Hence I can confidently say: ‘Reader, if you will do the same, your profit will be as great as mine. Therefore pray without ceasing and keep yourself in an attitude of reverential dependence on the Supreme Source of all Good’.

But the Sahifa is not merely a book of prayers. It is a testament of life in all its varied aspects. For instance, it expounds the doctrine of Divine Justice and contradicts the erroneous beliefs of the Jabriya sect which held that the Almighty could not be bound by the concept of goodness or justice. This belief became very popular under the Umayyad, and so the Imam was bound to contradict it and show the right path. The correct concept of God is indicated in the first Du‘ā and in the Du‘ās of morning and evening and of repentance.

The concept of the unblemished and immaculate conduct of the Prophet and Imams is enunciated in the 9th Du‘ā, by the following aspiration: —

²⁶ The heart of pride and passion Weed, And there the man is pure indeed.

‘I have been more and more convinced, ‘says Ruskin, ‘the more I think of it that, in general, pride is at the bottom of all great mistakes’. ‘It is’, says J. K. Evans, ‘the great master sin of the human heart.’ ‘Pride’, observes Napoleon Bonaparte, ‘never listens to the voices of reason, nature or religion’. Such being the case, it is our duty to subdue this passion as much as possible, and though we may not quite succeed, we are sure to feel better for the attempt.

“O Lord, make our thoughts, feelings, actions, perceptions and words the cause of obedience unto thee, so that no good deed may remain unperformed by us whereby thy rewards can be merited, and no evil deed may be committed by us whereby thy punishment can be merited.”

In the 16th Du‘ā, he says:—

“We have no power except through Thy power, and we have no strength except by Thy help. Therefore help us by Thy support, and strengthen us by Thy strength; blind our eyes to the things that diminish Thy love, and paralyse our limbs, so that we may be incapable of disobeying Thee, and let our thoughts, words and actions be in accordance with Thy commands.”

In the 11th Du‘ā he says:—

“. . . O that the recording angels should leave us with the record of our misdeeds blank, and the record of our good deeds full.”

In admission of mortal humility as compared to the tremendous obligation owed by us to the ever-present Divine Grace, he says:—

“My Lord, if I were to weep before Thee until my eye-lashes are shed away; and cry until my voice should fail; if I were to stand up in prayer until my feet get swollen; and bow to Thee till my backbone gets disjointed; if I were to offer prostration until my eyeballs came out of their sockets; and if I were to eat the dust all through my life and drink water mixed with ashes till the last breath of my life; and sing Thy praises till my tongue gets tired out, even then I would be unable for shame to lift up mine eyes towards heaven and tell Thee that I had done anything to express my servitude to Thee.”

In the 12th Du‘ā, he again expresses his humility, saying:—

“O Lord, the most lovable of Thy servants is one who has surrendered his pride before Thee; and given up all insistence; and regarded repentance as his duty, so, I am far from being proud, and I seek Thy protection from importunacy; and I seek Thy forgiveness for all my shortcomings; and beg Thy help in all duties which I am too weak to observe.”

On the ideal of self-sacrifice, he says: —

“Lo, we have cast our lives before Thee.”

The duties of a soldier for the cause of Islam are laid down by him in the following words:—

“Show them what they do not see and teach them what they do not know” . . .
 “when they face their enemies, let them forget this deceitful world and all its

vanity; make them oblivious of all thoughts of wealth; and set before their eyes the vision of Paradise . . .”

“Teach him the discipline of shariat; make his judgment sound; keep him away from ostentation and hypocrisy; and make his marching and his halting subservient to Thy will.”

In the 20th Du‘ā, the ideals of good character are thus enumerated:—

“Lord, do not exalt me among men without belittling me in my own estimation, and do not give me any apparent honour without creating within me an equal degree of secret self-contempt.”

In the same Du‘ā, he continues: —

“Let me return love for the malice of the malicious; friendship for the jealousy of foes; confidence for the suspicions of the distrustful; kindness in return for the desertion of my relatives; and the sweetness of fearlessness in place of the bitterness of the awe of tyrants. Vouchsafe that I should be sincere to those who oppose me; merciful to those who are merciless towards me, and appreciative of those who malign me. Let me be thankful to those who are kind to me and forgiving to those who are unkind. Let me not be enchanted by looks; grant me self-respect and let me not suffer from the disease of arrogance. Make me obedient to Thee, but do not spoil my services by self-conceit. Make the people enjoy kindness at my hands but do not let me destroy its merit by relating my favours to them. Give me good character and protect me from vanity.”

“O Lord, perfect my morals by perpetual obedience, by the companionship of the virtuous and by aloofness and dissociation from the innovators and corrupters of Thy teachings. Do not involve me in sloth or misguidance, or in the things that destroy Thy love, or in association with those who have turned away from Thee, or in separation from those who cling to Thee.”

In the 26th Du‘ā, he says,

“Let me fear my parents and let me be kind to them. Make me enjoy obeying them. Make me prefer their wishes above my wishes and their pleasure, above my pleasure. Let me regard their small kindnesses as great; and my own kindness to them as insignificant in comparison to theirs. O Lord, make me speak softly to them, and make my thoughts pure and my feelings affectionate towards them.”

“ . . . Let me be gentle with the weak, relieve the poverty of the poor, tend the sick, give sincere advice, be hospitable to guests, keep their secrets, hide their faults, help those who have been treated unjustly, serve them well, be generous to them and give them their dues before they ask. Let me be kind to those who

wrong me, and forgive those who injure me. Let me suspect them of good intentions and do them good turns and close my eyes to their faults owing to my innate piety. Let me be humble with them and relieve the sufferings of those who are in distress. Let me love them inwardly and wish them to continue in the enjoyment of blessings. Let me treat them equally with my near and dear ones and regard them with the same regard.”

On the necessity of self-help, he says in the 26th Du‘ā:—

“O Lord, do not deprive me of my livelihood; do not leave me at the mercy of Thy creatures; but fulfil my needs; help me and look upon me; pay regard to my benefits . . .”

In the 30th Du‘ā, he says:

“Save me from extravagance and prodigality and put me straight on the path of prudence and temperance; teach me proper distribution and apportionment of expenditure, and protect me, by Thy Grace, from useless spending; provide me with livelihood by lawful means and direct my spending towards good objects; prevent me from acquiring so much wealth as might make me proud or rebellious—whereby I might transgress Thy limits.”

In the 20th Du‘ā he says:

“Let me not bear the evil consequences of earning wealth.”

In the 7th Century of the Christian era, when air was regarded as belonging to the realm of spirits and was consequently believed to be weightless, we find in the sublime Du‘ās of the great Imam a foreknowledge of what Torricelli and Galileo were to discover many centuries later, we find in them statements about the hidden forces of radiations of light, as measured by the Heliometer.

The Imam says:

“Lord! I glorify Thee; Thou knowest the weight of the heavens and the earth, and of the sun and moon, and of darkness and light: and of the shadow and air. Thou knowest the weight of every gust of wind.”

Some unbiased opinions about the Sahifa

Some of the renowned Sunni scholars and theologians have acknowledged the greatness of the Sahifat-ul-Kamila and praised it in the most glowing terms. Al Ghazali describes it as “The Zabur-e-Al-e Mohammad” i. e. the Psalms of the Children of Mohammad) and “The Injeel-e-Ahl-il-Bait” (i.e. the Gospel of the People of the House).

Shaikh Sulaiman al Hanafi al Qandoozi, the Shaikh ul Islam of Constantinople describes it in the same terms.²⁷ The Shafe'i scholar, Sbahabuddin Ahmad ibn Abdul Qadir al Hifzi al 'Ujaili says "The Sahifat-ul-Kamila is a clear proof of the perfect faith, truth, sincerity, depth of meditation, perception, inspiration and inheritance of the knowledge of the Prophet which distinguish its author, Imam Zain-ul-Abidin."²⁸

After seeing the English translation of the Sahifa, published by this Madrasa, Dr. Ranade, the famous professor of Hindu Philosophy, was so impressed that he made a special provision for the teaching of Islamic Philosophy in the University of Allahabad.

Shaikh-ul-Islam Tantavi al Jauhari of Alexandria states,-

"I was astounded by the greatness of this book. It is surprising that the Muslims have been oblivious of this precious, God-given treasure of knowledge for so many centuries. If we take advantage of this great book we are sure to discover the futility of the petty squabbling between the Sunni and Shia sects,"

"Is it not wonderful that these great souls (the Shia Imams) are unveiling for us in their writings those profound truths and divine doctrines of which we have become quite ignorant?"

Commenting on one of the Du'ās, the same writer says;

"Just see how the Imam tells us about our eyes, and their sins; and about our feet and their transgressions; how he describes the torments of the body on the Day of Judgement and the inability of the human frame to withstand the Divine wrath, and then expresses his shame in the presence of God," . . . "Such prayers should really be considered as lessons which have been taught to the Muslims for their guidance, and the re-awakening of their conscience: for the holy Imams themselves never indulged in these sins."

From another angle, these prayers show us many truths about the physical universe-for example: "O Thou that makes the sun and moon move according to fixed calculations and times."

In the realm of ethics, just look at this sublime passage:

"Let me not be counted among those who profess to love the virtuous, but do not try to follow their example; and who profess to dislike the wicked, but do not try to avoid their misdeeds."

²⁷ See Yanabi' ul Mowaddat Chap. 192 (p. 409) published, Constantinople, 1320 A.H.

²⁸ Ref. "Zakheerat-ul-ma'al, MS in the possession of Maulana S. Sibtul Hasan Hansavi Saheb of Aligarh

The benefits of these prayers are not confined to Muslims only, but every capable and reasonable man can derive profit from them.”²⁹

Muhammad Kamil Husain, professor in the University of Egypt and author of “Al-Adab fi Misr il Jslamiyah” and “Marwan ibn e Abi Hafsa”, states, “I have in front of me a book, small in size, but great in its priceless value” . . . “When I read his miraculous expressions, which I am unable fully to explain and comment upon. I become tongue-tied: my mind is struck with wonder and amazement and my pen stops suddenly for want of suitable words in which to praise them.” . . . “Our men o f letters, whether they be poets or prose-writers have, no doubt, produced some masterpieces of the art of expression, and adorned them with all kinds of figures of speech. But Imam Zain ul Abidin has left us a legacy, in the form of prayers and meditations, which exceeds and excels them all, and which may be counted among the miracles of Arabic literature.” Just read this passage:

“All praise be to Allah who shines upon the hearts of men but is veiled from their eyes by His rarity, and who exercises power over all things by His might and majesty; so that eyes cannot bear the sight of Him and imagination cannot gauge His greatness. He rules over all things by His sovereignty and patronises all things by His preciousness, benignity and royalty; Holy is He by virtue of His beauty and excellence: and Honoured is he by virtue of His greatness and loftiness.” It is a pity that people are devoted to Badi’-uz-Zaman Hamdani, Hareeri and Mutanabbi, while, as a matter of fact, the sublimity of our liturgical works far excels anything which these mundane writers have produced, and there can be no comparison between them.”

How the book ought to be read

Having so far enumerated some of the beauties and advantages of the Sahifa, it is desirable now to say something as to how it ought to be read, “Some books,” says Bacon, “are to be tasted; others to be swallowed; and some few to be chewed and digested—that is, some books are to be read only in parts; others to be read, but not curiously; and some few to be read wholly and with diligence and attention.”

Now, the Sahifa is a book which deserves to be “chewed and digested” or, to use the words of Dr. J. Todd, it ought to be read, “deliberately, slowly, understanding and with personal application.” In order to be thoroughly enjoyed, it should be read regularly, at least once every day, for repetition adds to appreciation, and in appreciation lies the secret of enjoyment. But let me add that the true enjoyment of a spiritual book depends

²⁹ See the series of articles entitled “Prayers of Ali Zain-ul-Abidin and what the Muslims can learn from them”, published in the magazine “Huda-l-Islam”. Some of the passages quoted by Tantavi are not to be found in the Sahifat-ul-Kamila, but are to be found in the Sahifat-ur-Rabea, mentioned earlier in this introduction.

upon the degree of morality possessed by the reader—the freer the conscience from guilt, the greater will be the enjoyment.

“A man’s studies” says Ovid, “pass into his character.” The Sahifa, if read with sincere earnestness, will gradually become a part of the reader’s mind—its beauties will go deep down into his heart. How ennobled, purified and uplifted would the soul feel when the contents of such a book shall become an essential part of its mental and moral equipment!

Conditions of prayer

All things are subject to certain pre-requisites or conditions, and prayer, in order to be worthy of the ear of Heaven, and to meet with a favourable response from its Hearer, must conform to certain rules and conditions, the most important of which, according to the best Muslim authorities are the following:—

- (1) Faith—a deep-rooted trust in the Beneficence of God ;
- (2) Purity—moral and physical cleanliness, the first pre-requisite of which is a clear conscience. Hence, prayer for something which is in itself harmful to oneself or others, or forbidden by the divine law is no prayer at all;
- (3) Relaxation—this flows out of the first two conditions, viz. Faith and Purity. Armed with confidence in the Answerer of Prayers and fortified by a clear conscience, untainted by evil intention or hypocrisy or sense of guilt, the devotee should be in an attitude of peace and serenity;
- (4) Concentration—the mind, disconnected with all fleeting images of this transitory existence, should become fixed upon the single idea of pleasure of the Adored;
- (5) Earnestness—this means that the supplicant should believe in the words and not merely repeat them mechanically. The prayer must proceed from the heart and not from the mouth.
- (6) Humility—the realisation of one’s utter insignificance in face of the Great Being to whom we offer our prayers, is a guarantee of His pity and mercy.
- (7) Renunciation—our prayers should not be directed merely for our physical well-being, but the major object should be the everlasting Grace of the Almighty. The temporal gifts should be renounced in favour of the higher and more permanent things;

Add to these, a single-ness of purpose, a feeling of repentance for past sins, cleanliness from all things that may have been acquired through unfair means, and purification —

and furthermore, join with yourself the neighbours and fellow-creatures who are all more or less in need of prayer, and a constancy and persistence in invoking the Name of the All-Highest, and there is no reason why the prayer should not give you the solace, contentment and peace of mind which is necessary for your happiness.

Prayer should be accompanied by a realisation of the Glory of God, a grateful invocation of blessings upon the Prophet and his saintly children, who have shown us the way to obtain His Grace, by saying “Allahumma salla ala Muhammadin wa Al-e-Muhammad”. The devotee must have observed his five daily prayers, and must be preferably *ba wazu*, i.e. having performed the ablutions.

The reason why we are required to lift up our hands towards the sky when praying, is psychological. Firstly, it is a symbolic indication of our humility and the Exalted and Majestic qualities of God. Secondly, it is metaphorically stated that all our sustenance, and guidance, descends from the “Higher Regions” i. e. from the heavens.

To conclude, the most important advantage of these prayers lies in the fact that they give us a direct insight into the character of the Imam. His virtue and piety, his forbearance and charity, his forgiveness and generosity, his tenderness of heart and conscience, his fortitude and presence of mind in adversity, and above all, his hopefulness and humility are worthy of every man’s contemplation and imitation. “It is a long way from Karbala to Calvary,” says Matthew Arnold, “but the sufferers of Karbala hold aloft, to the eyes of millions of our race, the lessons loved by the sufferer of Calvary.” For he said, “Learn of me, I am mild and lowly of heart, and ye shall find rest unto your souls.”³⁰ The revered author of these Du‘ās was one of the chief sufferers of Karbala. May God give us the strength to follow in his footsteps, for the sake of Muhammad and his children—on them be Peace—Amen.

³⁰ “Of sufferings and pains cometh help, for it is not possible by any other way to be rid of our inequity.” Plato
 “He that hath suffered in the flesh ceased from sin.” Peter.

“It is good for me that I have been afflicted, for before that t went astray.” David.

“Suffering is no disgrace to a righteous .man.” Ali

“ I have learned more of God and of myself by one week s suffering than by all the prosperity of a lifetime ,” B. P. Hall