

***Al-Sahīfa al-Kāmilah: The Perfect Epistle*¹**

It was during the years of 1950-60 when the Khwāja ‘Abdul Latīf Ansārī, the eminent Pakistani scholar and preacher, was once discussing the glory and high status of the book *al-Sahīfa al-Kāmilah*. He related his experience and contact with an American Christian lady who had come to the East in the course of her research on rituals of prayers by different religions. She had previously come across and studied *Sahīfa ‘Alawiyya* consisting of invocations by his grandson Imam Zaynul ‘Ābidīn (a).

Whilst in Iran, the lady had an opportunity of studying the *al-Sahīfa al-Kāmilah*. Being an educated lady well-versed in the Arabic language, she could easily digest the underlying meaning and interpretation of the invaluable invocations by the Imam. She felt so much impressed and moved 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.

Such being the impact of this holy book, whoever took an opportunity of making a serious study could not remain without showering words of eulogy. Born in 1862 and educated in Al-Azhar University, the prominent Arab Professor of Philosophy and author of many valuable books, Shaykh al-Islam Tantāwī Jawhari from Alexandria was once presented by someone with a gift of *al-Sahīfa al-Kāmilah*. He was so much overwhelmed by the contents that he expressed these views:

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.

After the tragedy of Karbalā Imam Zaynul ‘Ābidīn A.S. was virtually under house imprisonment. People in Medina, where the Imam lived, were still under harsh suppression of the Umayyad rulers of the time. It was a time when Ahlul Bayt were made to be ignored by the man in the street. It was almost impossible for people to approach the descendants of the Prophet to seek knowledge of the Holy Qur’an and Hadith. As the divinely appointed guide for the Ummah, how could the Imam carry on the dissemination of the knowledge of the faith without endangering his safety and that of his followers? The Imam chose the medium of invocation and supplication to Allah, which proved of lasting effect. What a sagacious and wise step this was to preserve the lofty teachings of Islam!

In order that this holy book is preserved for the benefit of posterity, Imam Zaynul ‘Ābidīn (a) had originally dictated the invocations therein to two of his sons, Muhammad ibn ‘Ali and

¹ Ahmed H. Sheriff, *The Light*, Vol. XVI, No. 1, Feb. 1982, Bilal Muslim Mission of Tanzania, with minor editing changes to transliteration of Arabic words.

Zayd ibn ‘Ali. For some years the book was preserved secretly lest it was tampered with. However during the times of Imam Ja‘far al-Sādiq (a), it was copied and circulated around among the followers of Ahlul Bayt. It is said that the copy from the hands of Zayd, after his death, was found to be incomplete whereas the one from Muhammad ibn ‘Ali al-Bāqir was perfect, hence its name *al-Sahīfa al-Kāmilah* became widely popular. The name may also have been meant to imply that this is a perfect book of guidance and spiritual help for the believers in their day-to-day problems.

The book came also to be known as *al-Sahīfa al-Sajjādiyyah*, relating to one of the epithets of the Imam. It has also been referred to as *Zabūr-e ‘Alī Mubammad*, meaning the Psalms of the Children of Muhammad. Certainly the words of the Imam in the book are not below those of Hadrat Dāwūd in the *Zabūr*. It also came to be known as *Injil-e ‘Alī Mubammad* meaning the Evangel of the People of the House of the Prophet.

From in-depth study, the *Sahīfa* will be found unveiling many secrets of learning and mysteries of knowledge. The heartrending invocations therein inspire a reader to abstain from evil and lean towards virtue and piety. One who recites the invocations with understanding is apt to concentrate his attention towards Allah and attain self-purification and spiritual upliftment. The invocations, some sixty-eight of them, pertain to different subjects and were recited on special occasions, like day of Arafat, ‘Eid al-Fitr, ‘Eid al-Adhā, commencement and end of the holy Ramadan. Some are on occasions like thunderstorm, arrival of news of one’s death, when faced with heavy debt, hardships or seeking Allah's forgiveness against sins. On such moments when the human heart is shaken or when one is bewildered [and] not knowing what to do, the sublime words in those invocations do indeed provide great solace and tranquility. Only when one recites the various invocations with full understanding can one can really appreciate the true value of this holy book.

If there was any holy book chosen by an Imam as a gift to be offered to one pious and high caliber jurist, it was *al-Sahīfa al-Kāmilah*. The following story does indeed indicate the profound value and status of it: ‘Allāmah Muhammad Taqī Majlisī, the father of the famous Muhammad Bāqir al-Majlisī was well-known for his piety, excellence of character and his endeavors in the propagation of the traditions of Ahlul Bayt. In his book *Man Lā Yahduburuhu al-Faqīh* Vol. 4, he narrates how in the course of his dreams, he was being guided by the 12th Imam Sāhibul ‘Asr (af) on various knotty questions of jurisprudence and recommendation not to miss the mid-night prayers.

In a dream once, the ‘Allāmah requested the 12th Imam for a gift of a book from which he could constantly benefit. The Imam recommended *al-Sahīfa al-Kāmilah* telling him that it was a gift from him and he should go and collect the book from a person named at a particular place. ‘Allāmah confirms that in accordance with the advice of the Imam, he collected the *Sahīfa* from which he benefited a great deal in his exercises of self-purification. The book was cherished as an invaluable gift from the Imam and circulated round among the believers of the place.