

Introduction to al-Sahīfah al-Sajjādiyyah¹

Al-Sahīfah al-Sajjādiyyah is a book comprising a collection of supplications by Imam Ali ibn Husayn ibn Ali ibn Abi Talib عليه السلام. These supplications reflect his lofty soul and teach us the modes of divine praise and glorification. They invite one to show humility in His presence, to confess one's sins, abase the self in worship, love, hope of eternal grace and God's beauty. They demonstrate how a servant should seek success, guidance and every form of good from God. They furthermore demonstrate the path that keeps one aloof from divine punishment, His anger and every form of wretchedness. They illustrate the method of seeking refuge in God from the cunning Satan and the evil prompting soul.

Importance of al-Sahīfah

The Sahīfah contains a sea of ideological and ethical content along with numerous aphorisms 'composed in the most eloquent manner. This combination of knowledge and eloquence has granted it a distinguished position among religious texts and has drawn the attention of scholars, be they philosophers, mystics, literary men or sages. We shall cite some quotes from works of several scholars.

1. While describing the Imam's virtues in the section of his biography in *al-Irshād*, Shaykh Mufid says:

Scholars of al al-Sunnah have traced back numerous sciences to him. They have learned from his admonitions, supplications, jurisprudential rulings, wars and historical events he was involved in. The copious records proving the aforementioned have led to its wide acceptance.²

2. Najjāshī writes in the biography of Mutawakkil, Mutawakkil ibn 'Umayr ibn Mutawakkil narrated the supplications of Sahīfah from Yahyā ibn Zayd ibn Ali.³

3. Shaykh Tūsī writes in his biography, Al-Mutawakkil ibn 'Umar ibn Mutawakkil narrated the supplications of Sahīfah from Yahyā ibn Zayd ibn Ali.⁴

Narrations of Imam Sajjād's عليه السلام supplications in the books of tradition, the four books in particular,⁵ and its presence in other compilations of supplications is indicative of its popularity. In his book of supplications named *Misbāh al-Mutabajjid*, Shaykh Tūsī cites supplications of Sahīfah for different occasions of the year. What is interesting is that while citing supplications from other Imams عليه السلام he introduces them by denoting the names

¹ Muhammad Ali Majd Faqīhī, *An Introductory Commentary to al-Sahīfah al-Sajjādiyyah*, Tr. K. Bhojani, pp. 27 – 38.

² *Al-Irshād*, pp. 260 & 261.

³ Rijāl Najjāshī, Number 1144.

⁴ Shaykh Tūsī, *al-Fibrīst*, number 579, p. 262.

⁵ Reference to the four most famous Shī'a books of traditions: *al-Kāfi*, *man lā yahdurūhu al-faqīh*, *Tabdhīb al-abkām*, *al-Istīhsār*, commonly referred to as kutub al-arba'ah (كتب الأربعة).

of the respective Imam, but when citing supplications from Imam Sajjād عليه السلام he references it as being from the Sahīfah. This shows that this book was renowned as an authentic source of the supplications of Imam Sajjād عليه السلام.

Names of al-Sahīfah

Al-Sahīfah al-Sajjādiyyah is also popularly known as al-Sahīfah al-Kāmilah (the Complete Scroll). Ibn Shahr ‘Āshūb in his book *Ma‘ālim al-‘ulamā* has so called⁶ it the Psalms of the household of Muhammad⁷ and the Gospel of the family of the Prophet.⁸ It has also been named the sister-of the Quran. It is called al-Sahīfah al-Kāmilah (the Complete Scroll) because a smaller version of it, is present with the Zaydiyyah. The Shī‘a Ithnā ‘Asharī version is larger and more comprehensive.⁹

It has been named the Psalms and the Gospel because the-Psalms, similar to the Sahīfah, was the book of David عليه السلام which contained supplications; and the Gospel was the book of Jesus which contained his admonitions and instructions. Sahīfah contains both admonitions and supplications, thus it has been given both names.

Number of Supplications in the Sahīfah

The Sahīfah that is currently available contains fifty-four supplications. Its preface, however, has made mention of seventy-five supplications. Eleven of these supplications were lost by the narrator himself and as a result only sixty-four have remained with the narrator. This shows that another ten supplications were lost by others in the chain of narration. However, in the other chain of transmission from Mutahharī¹⁰ there is no mention of seventy-five supplications, or the eleven that were lost. It only recounts fifty-four of his supplications in detail.

Transmission of the Sahīfah

The introduction of the Sahīfah makes note of how Mutawakkil ibn Hārūn — its first narrator — got access to it. Here we will cite excerpts from it.

Mutawakkil ibn Hārūn says, “I met Yahyā ibn Zayd ibn Ali عليه السلام after the martyrdom of his father as he was setting out towards Khurāsān.

‘Where are you coming from?’ he asked.

‘From pilgrimage of the Holy Ka‘bah’ I replied.

He inquired about his family and cousins in Medina. More so than others, he asked about Ja‘far ibn Muhammad عليه السلام.

⁶ Āghā Buzurg Tehranī, *al-Dharrī‘ah*, v. 13, p. 345.

⁷ Zabūr āl-Muhammad (زبور آل محمد)

⁸ Injīl Ahlul-bayt (انجيل اهل البيت)

⁹ Introduction of ‘Allāmah Sha‘rani to al-Sahīfah al-Sajjādiyyah, p. 11, quoted from Āyatullāh Mar‘ashi Najafi.

¹⁰ Transmission of the Sahīfah from Sayyid ibn Tāwūs, Shaykh Tūsī and in general all the scholars of early period from Mutawakkil - the first narrator is through Muhammad ibn Ahmad ibn Muslim ibn Mutahharī.

I informed him about their situation and their sorrow at the loss of his father Zayd ibn ‘Ali.

Yahyā said, ‘My uncle Muhammad ibn ‘Ali had hinted him to abandon the revolt and informed him what will happen if he leaves Medina. Did you meet my cousin Ja‘far ibn Muhammad?’

‘Yes’, I said in reply. ‘What did he say?’ he queried.

I said, ‘May I be your ransom. I do not desire to inform you what I heard from him.’

‘Do you frighten me from death?! He exclaimed smilingly. ‘Tell me what you heard from him.’

I said, ‘I heard him say that they will hang you and kill you like your father.’

The color of his face faded, and he said, *God makes to pass away and establishes what He pleases, and with Him is the basis of the Book* (Q 13:39). O Mutawakkil! God the Almighty, the Glorious has confirmed this affair for us and has ordained the sword and the battlefield for us while he has given knowledge to our cousins.’

‘May I be your ransom. I see people more inclined to your cousin Ja‘far ibn Muhammad than you and your father’ I said.

He said, ‘My uncle Muhammad ibn ‘Ali and his son Ja‘far ibn Muhammad invite people to life while we invite them to death.’

I asked, ‘O son of the Prophet of God! Do they have more knowledge or you?’

He lowered his head for a while, then lifted it up and said, ‘We all have knowledge, but they know all that we know and what they know we do not know. Then he said, ‘Have you written anything from the words of my cousin Ja‘far ibn Muhammad?’

‘Yes’, I replied.

‘Show me’, he said.

I brought out the scripts that I had written. It contained a supplication which the Imam had written for me and had informed me that his father Muhammad ibn Ali had written it for him and it was from the supplications of his father ‘Ali ibn al-Husayn in al-Sahīfah al-Kamilah.

Yahyā looked at this supplication and said, ‘Would you permit me to copy it?’

I said, ‘O son of the Prophet of God! This is something that has reached me through you. You do not need my permission?’

Then he said, ‘I am going to give you a scroll containing supplications which my father Zayd learnt from his father Ali ibn al-Husayn عليه السلام. He gave it to me so that I may preserve it and not give it to someone unworthy of it’

I rose from my place and kissed his forehead and said, ‘*O son of the Prophet of God! My religion is your friendship and obedience and I hope it will ensure my felicity till I am alive and after my death.’

Yahyā asked for a chest (trunk) to be brought. It was brought to him. He took out a sealed scroll from it. He looked at the seal, kissed it and shed tears for a while. Then he broke the seal and opened the lock. He then opened the scroll, placed it over his eyes and his face and then said, ‘O Mutawakkil! By God, were it not for the words of my cousin that I shall be killed and put on the gallows, I would not give this scroll to you and would exercise

restraint with respect to it. But I am certain his words are true. They are words taken from his forefathers and soon what he said will occur. I fear this valuable knowledge will fall in the hands of the Omayyad and they will hide it in their treasury. So please take it from me and relieve me from the burden of preserving it.

After Yahyā ibn Zayd was killed, Mutawakkil went to Medina and presented himself before Imam al-Sādiq عليه السلام and showed him the Sahīfah. Mutawakkil narrates:

Imam عليه السلام opened the Sahīfah and said, 'I swear by God! This is my uncle's handwriting-and these are supplications of my grandfather Ali ibn al-Husayn عليه السلام. Then he said to 'his son, 'O Ismā'īl, bring those supplications which I had entrusted you for protection.'

Ismā'īl rose from his place and brought the Sahīfah which was like the Sahīfah which Yahyā ibn Zayd had given me. Abū 'Abdillāh عليه السلام kissed it and placed it over his eyes and said, 'This is a script written by my father which was dictated to him by my grandfather in my presence.'

I said, 'O son of the Prophet of God! Allow me to compare it the Sahīfah of Zayd and Yahyā. Imam عليه السلام gave permission and said, 'I see you worthy for this job,' Thereafter I compared the two scrolls. They were the same and there was not a difference of even a letter between the two.

Additions to the Sahīfah

The handwritten manuscripts and the printed versions of Sahīfah contain a section called, 'Addenda to Sahīfah'. In this section some other supplications from Imam Sajjād عليه السلام are cited.

They include:

1. A glorification.
2. A magnification.
3. Supplication in mentioning the Household of Muhammad عليه السلام.
4. Supplication in calling down blessings upon Adam.
5. Supplication in distress and seeking release.
6. Supplication against that which he feared and dreaded.
7. Supplication in abasing himself.

8. Supplications for the Days of the Week.

This section starts with the supplication for Sunday and ends with the supplication for Saturday. Muhaddith Qummī the compiler of the book *Mafātih al-Jinān* has cited these in the beginning of his book.

9. The Fifteen Whispered prayers.

These have been included by Shaykh Hurr al-'Āmilī in his book al-Sahīfah al-Thāniyah. These whispered prayers include:

- a) The whispered prayer of the Repenters.

- b) The whispered prayer of the Complainers.
- c) The whispered prayer of the Fearful.
- d) The whispered prayer of the Hopeful.
- e) The whispered prayer of the Beseechers.
- f) The whispered prayer of the Thankful.
- g) The whispered prayer of the Obedient towards God.
- h) The whispered prayer of the Devotees.
- i) The whispered prayer of the Lovers. -
- j) The whispered prayer of those asking for Meditation.
- k) The whispered prayer of the utterly poor.
- l) The whispered prayer of the Knowers.
- m) The whispered prayer of the Rememberers.
- n) The whispered prayer of those who hold fast.
- o) The whispered prayer of the Abstainers

Themes of al-Sahīfah al-Sajjādiyyah's Supplications

Supplications in al-Sahīfah al-Sajjādiyyah deal with a variety of topics. They can be classified broadly into different groups based on the central theme being discussed in that supplication. Here we list all the supplications under nine different titles:

1. Praise and thanksgiving

- a) Praise of Allah. (1)¹¹
- b) His supplication in giving thanks. (37)

2. Invoking blessings and salutations.

- a) Blessings upon Muhammad (s) and his household. (2)
- b) Blessings upon the bearers of the Throne. (3)
- c) Blessings upon the attesters to the Messengers. (4)

3. Worldly needs.

- a) Supplication when faced with a worrisome task or when misfortune descended and at the time of distress. (7)
- b) Supplication in seeking needs from God. (13)
- c) Supplication when sick or visited by distress or an affliction. (15)
- d) Supplication when perils were repelled, or requests quickly granted. (18)
- e) Supplication when something made him sorrow or offenses made him worry. (21)
- f) Supplication when he asked God for well-being and thanked him for it. (23)
- g) Supplication in hardship, effort and difficult affairs. (22)
- h) Supplication when his provision was stinted. (29)
- i) Supplication for help in repaying debts. (30)
- j) Supplication for removal of worries. (54)

¹¹ Number in the parenthesis indicates its location in the Sahīfah.

4. In seeking spiritual needs and in different spiritual states.
 - a) Supplication for himself and the people under his guardianship. (5)
 - b) Supplication seeking refuge from hateful things, bad moral qualities, and blameworthy acts. (8)
 - c) Supplication in yearning to ask forgiveness from God, Mighty and Majestic is He. (9)
 - d) Supplication in seeking asylum with God, Exalted is He. (10)
 - e) Supplication for good outcomes. (11)
 - f) Supplication in confession and in seeking repentance towards God, Exalted is He. (12)
 - g) Supplication when he asked release from his sins or pleaded in seeking pardon for his defects. (16)
 - h) Supplication on noble moral traits and acts pleasing to God. (20)
 - i) Supplication in fleeing to God. (28)
 - j) Supplication in mentioning and asking for repentance. (31)
 - k) Supplication asking for the best. (33)
 - l) Supplication when he was afflicted or saw someone afflicted with disgrace of sin. (34)
 - m) Supplication in satisfaction when he looked upon the companions of the World. (35)
 - n) Supplication in asking pardon for misdeeds to God's servants and for falling short in their rights and that his neck be set free from the fire. (38)
 - o) Supplication in seeking pardon and mercy. (39)
 - p) Supplication when someone's death was announced to him or when he remembered death. (40)
 - q) Supplication in asking for covering and protection. (41)
 - r) Supplication in fear. (50)
 - s) Supplication in pleading and abasement. (51)
 - t) Supplication in imploring God, Exalted is He. (52)

5. The Night Prayer and the Quran.
 - a) Supplication in confessing sins after finishing the Night Prayer. (32)
 - b) Supplication upon completing a reading of the Qur'an. (42)

6. Supplications for others.
 - a) His supplication for his parents. (24)
 - b) His supplication for his children. (25) .
 - c) His supplications for his neighbors and friends when he mentioned them. (26)
 - d) His supplication for the people of the frontiers. (27)

7. Supplications for specific times.

- a) Supplication in morning and evening. (6)
 - b) Supplication for the coming of the month of Ramadan. (44)
 - c) Supplication in bidding farewell to the month of Ramadan. (45) .
 - d) Supplication on the Day of fast-breaking and on Friday. (46)
 - e) Supplication on the Day of ‘Arafah. (47)
 - f) Supplication on the Day of Sacrifice¹² and on Friday. (48)
8. Supplications to heavenly signs and natural events.
- a) Supplication for asking water during a drought. (19)
 - b) Supplication when he looked upon the clouds and lightening and heard thunder. (36)
 - c) Supplication when he looked at the New Crescent Moon. (43)
9. Repelling the evil of Satan and enemies.
- a) Supplication when hostility was shown to him or when he saw what he did not like in wrongdoers. (14)
 - b) Supplication in repelling the trickery or enemies and driving away their severity. (49)
 - c) Supplication when he mentioned Satan and sought refuge from him and from his enmity and trickery. (17)

¹² Editor: That is the tenth of Dhū al-Hijjah which marks the end of Hajj and is one of the major festivals (along with the feast of fast breaking) celebrated universally throughout the Islamic world.