

Reflections on Dua Jawshan Kabir

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Dua Jawshan Kabir, literally Great Armor, has been narrated from Prophet Muhammad (s). In his beautiful introduction to this dua, the late Shaykh ‘Abbas Qummi writes,

[This dua] is mentioned in the books, *al-Balad al-Amin* and *al-Misbāh* of al-Kafa‘mi. It is related from Imam ‘Ali ibn al-Husayn Sayyid al-Sajidin from his father from his grandfather, the Prophet of Allah, who received it from the Angel Gabriel during one of the battles. [In that battle] the Prophet had a very heavy coat of armor on to protect himself. The coat was so heavy that it was hurting the Prophet’s body. In this state, the Angel Gabriel came to the Prophet and said, “O Muhammad! Your Lord conveys his salutations to you and tells you to take out this coat of armor (*jawshan*) and to recite this dua [instead], as it is a protection for you and your Ummah.”¹ (Qummi 1994, 86)

¹ The complete narration, including the merits of the recitation of this dua, is recorded by Allama Majlisi in his *Bihar al-Anwar* (Majlisi 1982, 91:482-4).

At this point, the Angel continued to explain the greatness of this supplication to the Prophet. Our limited space does not allow us to quote the entire narration here. However, it suffices us to mention that, according to this narration, whoever writes down this dua on his *kafan* (burial shroud), God will not lead him to the hellfire and whoever recites this dua with a pure intention in the beginning of the month of Ramadan, God will grant him success to witness the Night of *Qadr* and will create for him seventy thousand angels, all of whom will be busy praising and glorifying God. The rewards of this praise and glorification will be given to the person who recited this supplication.

In addition, it is mentioned that whoever reads this supplication three times during the month of Ramadan, God will make the hellfire forbidden to him and will make it certain for him to enter Paradise. For such a person, God will also appoint two Angels to protect him from all evils in this world. Imam Husayn ibn ‘Ali (a), also, has reportedly said, “My father Amir al-Mu’minin ‘Ali ibn Abi Talib (a) bequeathed to me that I should memorize and protect this supplication, write it on his *kafan*, and teach it to my family members, encouraging them to recite it, as it contains one thousand names of God, among which is the Greatest Name (*Ism-i A‘zam*)” (Qummi 1994, 86-7).

Shaykh ‘Abbas Qummi then explains that he has not found any narration to the effect that this dua must be recited particularly on the Night of *Qadr*. However, it could be argued that because it was recommended to recite this dua three times in the month of Ramadan, people gradually over the centuries appropriated the three famous nights (one of which is considered as the night of *Qadr*) for recitation of this dua. Besides, as Shaykh ‘Abbas mentions, the fact that ‘Allama Majlisi, in his *Zad al-Ma‘ad*, has included the recitation

of this dua among the rituals of this night suffices us to believe that reciting the supplication of Jawshan Kabir is specially recommended on these three nights.

Sources and Structure

Dua Jawshan Kabir has been narrated by prominent Shiite scholars, such as ‘Allama Majlisi (1037-1110 AH) in his *Bihar al-Anwar* (Majlisi 1982, 91:384-97), Ibrahim b. ‘Ali al-‘Amili al-Kaf‘ami (840-905 AH) in his *al-Misbah*, (Kaf‘ami 1984, 247-60) and his *al-Balad al-Amin* (Kafami, al-Balad al-Amin 1997, 402-11)

The dua consists of one hundred sections, each containing ten names or attributes of God. It includes, therefore, a total of one thousand names and attributes of the Almighty, some of which are mentioned in the Holy Qur’an.

After every section, the following sentence should be recited:

سبحانك يا لا اله الا انت الغوث الغوث خلصنا من النار يا رب.

Immaculate are You! There is no god but Thee. Help us! Help us! Protect us from the Fire, O my Lord!

The Concept of Tasbih

This very sentence, which is repeated one hundred times in this dua, is very important and significant. According to the Holy Qur’an, when Prophet Jonah (s) was in the belly of the whale, he regretfully asked God for forgiveness. Regarding this, Qur’an 21:87 reads,

وَ ذَا النُّونِ إِذْ ذَهَبَ مُغَاضِبًا فَظَنَّ أَنْ لَنْ نَقْدِرَ عَلَيْهِ فَنَادَى فِي الظُّلُمَاتِ أَنْ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا أَنْتَ سُبْحَانَكَ إِنِّي كُنْتُ مِنَ الظَّالِمِينَ.

And the Man of the Fish, when he left in a rage, thinking that We would not put him to hardship. Then he cried out in the darkness, “There is no god except You! You are immaculate! I have indeed been among the wrongdoers!”

After supplicating God in such manner, the Glorified, answered Jonah positively. The next verse reads,

فَاسْتَجَبْنَا لَهُ وَنَجَّيْنَاهُ مِنَ الْغَمِّ وَكَذَلِكَ نُنَجِّي الْمُؤْمِنِينَ

So We answered his prayer and delivered him from the agony; and thus do We deliver the faithful. (Qur'an 21:88)

Based on this verse, the believers are recommended to call God in the same way and with the same sentence:

سبحانك انى كنت من الظالمين

This phrase is a very well-known one and is called by the scholars *Zikr-i Yunusiyya*, which is recommended to be recited repeatedly especially at nights.

Elsewhere in the Holy Qur'an, however, God, reporting the same story, states,

فَلَوْلَا أَنَّهُ كَانَ مِنَ الْمُسَبِّحِينَ لَلَّيْتُ فِي بَطْنِهِ إِلَى يَوْمِ يُبْعَثُونَ.

“And had he not been one of those who celebrate Allah's glory, he would have surely remained in its belly till the day they will be resurrected.” (Qur'an 37:142-3)

According to this verse, *tasbih* (glorification), which includes attesting to God's oneness, was the main reason for Jonah's deliverance.

Another point that shows us the importance of *tasbih* is the fact that the angels are occupied with doing *tasbih* all the time. This has been referred to in several verses of the Holy Qur'an. For instance, Qur'an 2:30 reads,

وَ إِذْ قَالَ رَبُّكَ لِلْمَلٰٓئِكَةِ اِنِّيْ جَاعِلٌ فِى الْاَرْضِ خَلِيْفَةً قَالُوْۤا اَنْ تَجْعَلَ فِيْهَا مَنْ
يُفْسِدُ فِيْهَا وَ يَسْفِكُ الدِّمَآءَ وَ نَحْنُ نُسَبِّحُ بِحَمْدِكَ وَ نُقَدِّسُ لَكَ قَالَ اِنِّيْ
اَعْلَمُ مَا لَا تَعْلَمُوْنَ .

When your Lord said to the angels, "Indeed I am going to set a viceroy on the earth," they said, "Will You set in it someone who will cause corruption in it, and shed blood, while we celebrate Your praise and proclaim Your sanctity?" He said, "Indeed I know what you do not know."

Qur'an 40:7 refers to the same fact:

الَّذِيْنَ يَحْمِلُوْنَ الْعَرْشَ وَ مَنْ حَوْلُهٗ يُسَبِّحُوْنَ بِحَمْدِ رَبِّهٖمْ وَ يُؤْمِنُوْنَ بِهٖ وَ
يَسْتَغْفِرُوْنَ لِلَّذِيْنَ اٰمَنُوْا رَبَّنَا وَسِعْتَ كُلَّ شَيْءٍ رَّحْمَةً وَ عِلْمًا فَاعْفِرْ لِلَّذِيْنَ تَابُوْا
وَ اتَّبَعُوْا سَبِيْلَكَ وَ قِهِمْ عَذَابَ الْجَحِيْمِ .

Those who bear the Throne, and those around it, celebrate the praise of their Lord and have faith in Him, and they plead for forgiveness for the faithful: "Our Lord! You comprehend all things in mercy and knowledge. So forgive those who repent and follow Your way and save them from the punishment of hell.

According to Qur'an 10:10, the call of the inhabitants of the heaven is *tasbih* as well:

دَعْوَاهُمْ فِيهَا سُبْحَانَكَ اللَّهُمَّ وَتَحِيَّتُهُمْ فِيهَا سَلَامٌ وَآخِرُ دَعْوَاهُمْ أَنْ
الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ

Their call therein will be: "O Allah! Immaculate are You!" And their greeting therein will be: "Peace!" And their concluding call: "All praise belongs to God, the Lord of all the worlds."

Therefore, *tasbih* and *hamd* (praising God) are two important acts performed by both the angels and the believers.

In our prayers, we follow the same pattern when we say, in the state of *ruku'*,

سبحان ربى العظيم و بحمده

And, while prostrating,

سبحان ربى الاعلى و بحمده

So, like the angels and the inhabitants of the heaven, we begin with *tasbih* and conclude with *hamd*.

God has put so much power in *tasbih* that, according to some narrations, the angels gain their energy from *tasbih*. The Prophet (s) is reported to have said,

طعامهم التسيح

Their (i.e. the angels') food is *tasbih*. (Majlisi 1982, 57:249)

The Concept of Dua and Its Proper Meaning

Interestingly, the whole dua Jawshan Kabir contains only one single request i.e. the one contained in the repeated sentence. The rest of the dua is about calling God's names and attributes. This teaches us that, unlike what most people assume, dua is not restricted to asking God one's requests; rather, dua is essentially calling God, even if one does not ask Him anything. Nevertheless, when we call God, we usually ask Him what we need, since we are needy creatures and He is our Merciful Lord, and for many believers, this is the main purpose of dua. Even those who remember God out of their love for Him, usually ask God what they need in their duas, because they do not want to miss this great opportunity. Naturally, therefore, dua comes with requests.

But dua literally means to call, and *ijabat*, on the other hand, means to answer, not necessarily to give something. When you call someone and he answers you, this is *ijabat* and if you, then, ask him something, whether he fulfils your request or not, he already has answered your call.

Thus, whoever calls God, the Almighty will definitely answer him. If he asks God something, He either fulfils his request in this world, quickly or with some delay, or gives him something better in the hereafter. Hence, we read in our narrations that

من اعطى الدعاء اعطى الاجابه.

The one who has the success to call God, his call will be answered. (Kulayni 1986, 2:65)

In a very famous narration, called *qurb-i nawāfil*, the Holy Prophet of Islam (s) quotes God:

و ما تقرب الى عبد بشيء احب الى مما افترضت عليه و انه ليتقرب الى
بالناقله حتى احبه فاذا احبته كنت سمعه الذى يسمع به و بصره الذى
يىصر به و لسانه الذى ينطق به و يده التى يبطش بها ان دعانى اجته و ان
سالنى اعطيته.

The most beloved thing to Me, through which a servant is able to get close to Me, is performing obligatory acts. Then, he gets closer to Me through recommended acts until I love him. When I love him, I will be his ear by which he hears, his eyes through which he sees, his tongue with which he speaks, and his hands with which he strikes. If he calls Me, I will answer him, and if he asks Me something, I will bestow it upon him.” (Kulayni 1986, 2:352)

The Concept of *Ism-i A'zam*

Among the one thousand names of God mentioned in this dua is the Almighty's Greatest Name (*Ism-i A'zam*). If anyone knows *Ism-i A'zam*, whatever they ask God will be fulfilled. On the other hand, *Ism-i A'zam* is in the Holy Qur'an because we read in the supplication for the Night of *Qadr* that

اللهم انى اتوجه اليك بما فيه و فيه اسمك الاكبر و اسموك الحسنى

O Allah! I turn to You through whatever is in the Holy Qur'an. And in it are Your Greatest Name and Your best names. (Muhaddith Nuri 1987, 6:384)

Thus, the *Ism-i A'zam* is to be found among those names and attributes of God that are mentioned both in dua *Jawshan Kabir* and in the Holy Qur'an. But which of those names is the Greatest Name of God?

I believe that *Ism-i A'zam* is not a hidden or strange name of God; rather, it is a combination of some of the divine names we invoke all the time. As a similitude, imagine a password, consisting of ordinary digits that are nothing but zero to nine. What is important is the order of these digits. Without knowing that order, we would not know the password, even if we knew the exact digits that constitute the password. Thus, it is very important to know which names of God, how many times, and when they should be called.

All of these one thousand names and attributes of God are beautiful and profound. In order for their meaning to be absorbed, deep reflection is necessary.

Now, I will focus on two sections of the dua, one of which emphasizes light and the other stresses life.

Light in Section 47

In section 47 of the dua, ten names of God have been mentioned, all of which are related to light. It reads,

يا نور النور يا منور النور يا خالق النور يا مدبر النور يا مقدر النور يا نور كل
نور يا نورا قبل كل نور يا نورا بعد كل نور يا نورا فوق كل نور يا نورا ليس
كمثله نور .

O Light of lights, O Illuminator of light, O Creator of light, O Planner of light, O Estimator of light, O Light of all lights, O Light that precedes in existence every light, O Light that will survive all lights, O Light that is above every light, O Light like of which there is no light. (Majlisi 1982, 90:390)

According to the first attribute in this section, God is the light of lights and every light comes from Him. We read in Qur'an 24:35 that

اللَّهُ نُورُ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ مِثْلُ نُورِهِ كَمِشْكَاةٍ فِيهَا مِصْبَاحٌ الْمِصْبَاحُ فِي زُجَاجَةٍ الزُّجَاجَةُ كَأَنَّهَا كَوْكَبٌ دُرِّيٌّ يُوقَدُ مِنْ شَجَرَةٍ مُبَارَكَةٍ زَيْتُونَةٍ لَا شَرْقِيَّةٍ وَلَا غَرْبِيَّةٍ يَكَادُ زَيْتُهَا يُضِيءُ وَلَوْ لَمْ تَمْسَسْهُ نَارٌ نُورٌ عَلَى نُورٍ يَهْدِي اللَّهُ لِنُورِهِ مَنْ يَشَاءُ وَيَضْرِبُ اللَّهُ الْأَمْثَالَ لِلنَّاسِ وَاللَّهُ بِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ عَلِيمٌ.

Allah is the Light of the heavens and the earth. The parable of His Light is a niche wherein is a lamp the lamp is in a glass, the glass as it were a glittering star lit from a blessed olive tree, neither eastern nor western, whose oil almost lights up, though fire should not touch it. Light upon light. Allah guides to His Light whomever He wishes. Allah draws parables for mankind, and Allah has knowledge of all things.

“Planner of light” means the one who manages the light, who determines which deeds give how much light, and how one may lose one’s light. The planner of light is the one who regulates everything about light.

God has created everything with a portion of light, as is implied in Qur'an 6:1:

الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ الَّذِي خَلَقَ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ وَجَعَلَ الظُّلُمَاتِ وَالنُّورَ ثُمَّ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا بِرَبِّهِمْ يَعْدِلُونَ.

All praise belongs to Allah who created the heavens and the earth and made the darkness and the light. Yet the faithless equate [others] with their Lord.

In dua Kumayl, also, the light of everything is attributed to the divine light:

و بنور وجهك الذى اضاء له كل شيء

And by the light of Your face which illuminates everything. (Ibn Tawus 1997, 3:332)

Thus, everything is shining as far as it is facing God and may become *wajh* (face) of God. Therefore, everything has the capacity to direct us toward God. This is why we read in Qur'an 2:115 that

وَلِلَّهِ الْمَشْرِقُ وَالْمَغْرِبُ فَأَيْنَمَا تُوَلُّوا فَثَمَّ وَجْهُ اللَّهِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ وَاسِعٌ عَلِيمٌ.

To Allah belong the east and the west: so whichever way you turn, there is the face of Allah! Allah is indeed all-bounteous, all-knowing.

Life in Section 70

Section 70 of dua Jawshan Kabir focuses on life:

يا حيا قبل كل حى يا حيا بعد كل حى يا حى الذى ليس كمثله حى يا حى
الذى لا يشاركه حى يا حى الذى لا يحتاج الى حى يا حى الذى كل حى
يا حى الذى يرزق كل حى يا حيا لم يرث الحياه من حى يا حى الذى يحيى
الموتى يا حى و يا قيوم لا تاخذه سنه و لا نوم.

○ Everliving, preceding every living being, ○
Everliving, succeeding every living being, ○
Everliving, like unto Whom there is none, ○
Everliving, Who has no living partner, ○ Everliving,
Who is not dependent on any living being, ○
Everliving, Who causes every living being to die, ○
Everliving, Who has not inherited life from any

living being, O Everliving, Who provides sustenance to every living being, O Everliving, Who quickens the dead, O Everliving, O Self-Subsistent, Slumber seizeth Him not, nor sleep”.

God’s attribute of life is so important that sometimes it is mentioned right after His Oneness, as we read in Qur’an 2:255:

اللَّهُ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ الْحَيُّ الْقَيُّومُ.

Allah – there is no god except Him – is the Living One, the All-Sustainer”.

Based on this verse, if God was not Living, He would not be able to be the All-Sustainer who keeps all the worlds and creatures.

Interestingly, sometimes divine life is mentioned even before His Oneness, as in Qur’an 40:65:

هُوَ الْحَيُّ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ فَادْعُوهُ مُخْلِصِينَ لَهُ الدِّينَ الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ.

He is the Living One, there is no god except Him. So supplicate Him, putting exclusive faith in Him. All praise belongs to Allah, Lord of all the worlds.

“O Everliving, like unto Whom there is none!” This phrase indicates that no living being’s life can resemble God’s perfect life. For instance, human life is always in danger; humans occasionally get ill and, in a defined term, they die. Even if they do not become ill, they regularly go to a lower level of life when they fall asleep.

“O Everliving, Who is not dependent on any living being!” Except for God, every living being is in need of other living beings. Human

beings in order to survive, depend on other humans, animals, plants, etc. Animals are in need of other living beings as well.

“O Everliving, Who causes every living being to die!” One of the Qur’anic principles is that life is given only by God and is taken away only by Him. Even when a murder takes place, the murderer is not the one who literally takes away the victim’s life; rather, his crime leads to the victim’s death only if God permits. Here, the story of Prophet Abraham (a) is worthy to be mentioned. His enemy, Nimrod, claimed that he is the one who gives life and takes it away. Regarding this, Qur’an 2:258 reads,

أَلَمْ تَرَ إِلَى الَّذِي حَاجَّ إِبْرَاهِيمَ فِي رَبِّهِ أَنْ آتَاهُ اللَّهُ الْمُلْكَ إِذْ قَالَ إِبْرَاهِيمُ
رَبِّيَ الَّذِي يُحْيِي وَيُمِيتُ قَالَ أَنَا أَحْيِي وَأُمِيتُ قَالَ إِبْرَاهِيمُ فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ يَأْتِي
بِالشَّمْسِ مِنَ الْمَشْرِقِ فَأْتِ بِهَا مِنَ الْمَغْرِبِ فَبُهِتَ الَّذِي كَفَرَ وَاللَّهُ لَا
يَهْدِي الْقَوْمَ الظَّالِمِينَ.

Have you not regarded him who argued with Abraham about his Lord, because Allah had given him kingdom? When Abraham said, “My Lord is He who gives life and brings death,” he replied, “I [too] give life and bring death.” Abraham said, “Indeed Allah brings the sun from the east; now you bring it from the west.” Thereat the faithless one was dumbfounded. And Allah does not guide the wrongdoing lot”.

God showed Nimrod that he is wrong in his claims. When Nimrod wanted to kill Abraham (a) by throwing him in a huge fire, God saved Abraham (a) in the middle of the fire. Thus, it was made known to everybody that it was only God who gave life and brought death. Regarding this, Qur’an 21:68-70 reads,

قَالُوا حَرِّقُوهُ وَانصُرُوا آلِهَتَكُمْ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ فَاعِلِينَ قُلْنَا يَا نَارُ كُونِي بَرْدًا وَ
سَلَامًا عَلَىٰ إِبْرَاهِيمَ وَأَرَادُوا بِهِ كَيْدًا فَجَعَلْنَاهُمُ الْأَخْسَرِينَ.

They said, “Burn him, and help your gods, if you are to do anything!” We said, ‘O fire! Be cool and safe for Abraham!” They sought to outmaneuver him, but We made them the biggest losers.

“O Everliving, Who has not inherited life from any living being!”

Except for God, every living being inherits life from another living being. All human beings, animals, and plants owe their life to a living being before them.

Finally, let's finish this article by calling God by reading the 14th section of this dua, which is one of its most beautiful sections:

يا دليل المتحيرين يا غياث المستغيثين يا صريخ المستصرخين يا جار
المستجيرين يا امان الخائفين يا عون المومنين يا راحم المساكين يا ملجأ
العاصين يا غافر المذنبين يا مجيب دعوه الضطرين.

O Guide of the waylaid, O Rescuer of those who appeal, O Helper of those who call, O Aider of those who call, O Shelter of the fearful, O Succorer of the faithful, O Merciful to the indigent, O Refuge for the disobedient, O Forgiver of the sinner, O Responder to the supplicant!

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