

# The Role of Embracing the Authority of Ahl al-Bayt (a) in the Formation of Righteous Actions in *al-Mīzān*

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## Abstract

It is crucial for individuals to learn about the factors contributing to their salvation. Quranic verses refer to “righteous actions” among such factors. Many hadiths in the exegesis of these verses state that true instances of righteous believers are the followers or *Shi’as* of Imam ‘Alī, the first Shiite Imam. This raises the idea that there is an inextricable tie between embracing the Imamate and *wilāya* (authority) of Ahl al-Bayt (Prophet Muḥammad’s Household) and righteous actions. In this article, we scrutinize the semantics of “righteous actions” (*al-‘amal al-ṣāliḥ*) and the common effects of such actions and embracement of the authority of Ahl al-Bayt to establish the above connection: a necessary condition for an action to be characterized as righteous is that its agent embraces the authority of Ahl al-Bayt. The method of this research is descriptive-analytic and library-based, and given the significance of the Quranic exegesis *al-Mīzān*, it is taken as our source for interpreting the verses in question.

**Keywords:** Authority of Ahl al-Bayt, *wilāya*, righteous action, *al-Mīzān*.

## Introduction

It is the ultimate dream of all free-spirited individuals to attain happiness and salvation. Human actions are the most essential factors that contribute to their deliverance. However, it goes without saying that not all actions can be salvific, only those that satisfy certain conditions to conduce individuals to happiness. Like “faith,” which is a general concept in need of explanation, “righteous action” also requires semantic analysis. On the face of it, any good deed could be described as a righteous action, but this seems doubtful in terms of Quranic verses.

According to hadiths, for an action to be accepted by God, certain conditions should be fulfilled, including the embracement of the authority (*wilāya*) of Ahl al-Bayt (Prophet Muḥammad’s Household). Books and articles concerning righteous actions have

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considered factors such as intentions, sincerity (*ikhhlās*), and faith as factors contributing to righteous actions, without providing an adequate treatment of embracing Ahl al-Bayt's authority as an essential component of such actions. Examples of such works are: "A study of the semantics of 'righteous actions' in the Quran" by Hossein Khoshdel Mofrad, and "Righteous actions from the perspective of the noble Quran" by Kamran Izadi Mobarakeh. In this article, we provide an account of this relationship through a consideration of the semantic link between "righteous actions" and the relevant concepts as well as the factors contributing to righteous actions and their effects in exegeses of the relevant Quranic verses and hadiths, comparing the effects of righteous actions and Ahl al-Bayt's authority.

## 1. The Semantic Link between "Righteous Actions" and the Relevant Quranic Concepts

In this section, we study the literal and terminological meanings of "righteous actions" (*al-'amal al-ṣāliḥ*) and the terms associated with it such as *ḥasana* (virtuous deed), *birr* (pious deed), *ma'rūf* (right deed), and the like.

### 1.1. Righteous Actions

The word *'amal* is a general Arabic term referring to anything that is done (Ibn al-Fāris 1399 AH, 4:145). In his *al-Mufradat*, al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī says that *'amal* is an action intentionally done by a living being (Rāghib, n.d., 587). In his Quranic exegesis *al-Mizān*, 'Allāma Ṭabāṭabā'ī quotes al-Rāghib's definition, stating that, unlike *fi'l* (doing), *'amal* (action) is what one lives with posthumously, affecting one's life in the hereafter (Ṭabāṭabā'ī 1374 Sh, 6:277).

The Arabic root *ṣ-l-h* has several cognates, such as *ṣalāh*, which means righteousness, goodness, and non-corruption (Ibn al-Manzūr 1414 AH, 516), and *ṣāliḥ*, which means righteous, worthy, and having the right religious beliefs and actions (Moein 1383 Sh, 715).

In his *al-Mizān*, Ṭabāṭabā'ī quotes al-Rāghib as saying that *ṣalāh* is contrast to *fisād* (corruption) (Rāghib, n.d., 289), adding that a *ṣāliḥ* (righteous) action is what the human innate nature finds pleasant and is worth being dedicated to God (Ṭabāṭabā'ī 1374 Sh, 6:363).

There are different interpretations of *al-ṣāliḥāt* as in the Quranic verse "those who have faith, do *ṣāliḥāt* (righteous actions)" (Quran 2:277):

1. In his *Qāmūs Qur'ān* (Dictionary of the Quran), Qorashi says that, given the juxtaposition of faith and righteous actions in Quranic verses, it is implied that a righteous action is effective if it is coupled with the faith in God. In his view, when there is faith, any worthy action that conforms to criteria of justice and fairness is accepted by God and included as a "righteous action," whether or not there is a religious ruling about it (Qorashi 1361 Sh, 4:144).

2. In *Tafsīr nimūni*, Ayatollah Makarem Shirazi says that a righteous action is any good praiseworthy action that draws God's pleasure and leads to social progress and individual flourishing, regardless of whether it is specified in religious laws (Makarem Shirazi 1371 Sh, 27:299).
3. Another group of Quranic exegetes (Bānū Iṣfahānī, n.d., 11:342, Javadi Amoli 1374 Sh, 307, Ṭabarsī 1412 AH, 4:248) have inferred from Quranic verses that a righteous action is what conforms to the Islamic Sharia and the commands of the Prophet, which includes performance of obligations and recommended actions (*mustahabbāt*), as well as good deeds endorsed by the prophets. This view is maintained by some Sunni exegetes as well, including Ṭabarī 1412 AH (13:135)<sup>1</sup> and Wāhidī (n.d., 2:700).<sup>2</sup>

Given the exegeses and hadiths pertaining to these verses, it seems that none of the above views provide a comprehensive definition of righteous actions and their requirements. For an accurate definition of such actions, we consider their concepts to clarify the semantics of “righteous actions.”

### 1.2. Virtuous Deeds (Hasana)

A concept that is semantically tied to that of righteous actions is *hasana* (virtuous deed), which comes from the Arabic root *h-s-n*, meaning beauty and goodness. It refers to a delightful blessing, in contrast to *sayyi'a* (disaster or misdeed). *Hasana* includes the blessings of this world and the hereafter (Qorashi 1361 Sh, 2:124). In the Quran, this term is sometimes used generally to include all good deeds, including righteous actions: “Whoever brings *hasana* [virtue or good deeds] shall receive [a reward] ten times its like” (Quran 6:160), and is sometimes used to refer to divine rewards, as in a hadith from Prophet Muḥammad, “he who fasts on the first day of the Sha‘ban month will receive seventy *hasanas* [rewards] from God, each being equal to one hundred years of worship” (Shaykh al-Ṣadūq 1406 AH, 62).

Accordingly, “virtuous deed” is a general concept, including righteous actions as just one of its subcategories. In other words, every righteous action is virtuous, but not all virtuous actions are righteous. For a virtuous deed to be qualified as a righteous action, further conditions must be met.

### 1.3. Right Deeds (Ma'rūf)

A right deed (*ma'rūf*) is what leads to solace (Ibn al-Fāris 1399 AH, 4:281) as the agent finds it good and delightful (Ibn al-Manzūr 1414 AH, 9:240). Al-Rāghib believes that such an action is what is known to reason and the religion. There is a considerable semantic overlap between righteous and right actions, as in Sura Luqman, where good

1. He says, “and did righteous actions; that is, they obeyed God and conformed to His commands and prohibitions.”

2. He says, “and did righteous actions; that is, they performed the obligations.”

treatment of one's parents is described as an instance of *ma'rūf* (31:14-15). However, not all right actions count as righteous (Ahmadzadeh 1398 Sh, 2).

#### 1.4. Pious Deeds (Birr)

Quranic exegetes have interpreted *birr* (piety) as generosity in good deeds, both psychological and physical deeds (Ṭabāṭabā'ī 1374 Sh, 1:428). Moreover, piety is deemed a particular instance of good deeds.<sup>1</sup> However, a pious action is not equivalent to a good action, since the former requires an intention on part of the agent, while the latter does not (Askarī 1412 AH, 1:191). Most exegetes hold that piety (*birr*) and God-wariness (*taqwā*) are complimentary concepts in that the former includes positive components such as righteous actions, obedience of God, and generosity in good deeds, whereas God-wariness involves negative components such as avoidance of sins (Ālūsī 2015, under Quran 5:2). It follows that righteous actions are more specific than pious actions as well.

#### 1.5. Good Deeds (Khayr)

The Arabic word *khayr* literally means choice, and a true good (*khayr*) action is what is desirable for its own sake and thus we have chosen it after having compared it with other things (Ṭabāṭabā'ī 1374 Sh, 3:208). Semantically speaking, righteous actions are definitely more specific than good actions, since they are good in comparison to other actions. However, not all good deeds (that is, deeds that are not evil) count as righteous, since the latter is semantically limited.

The upshot is that “righteous action” is semantically more specific than other related terms, even relative to the concept of “virtuous action” that has a striking semantic overlap with “righteous action.”

## 2. Factors contributing to Righteous Actions

For an action to be righteous, it needs to fulfil certain conditions such as faith, free choice, pure intentions, embracement of Ahl al-Bayt's authority, and so on. In what follows, we consider these requirements.

### 2.1. Faith and the Right Belief

A factor contributing to righteous actions, which is asserted in many Quranic verses, is faith or belief. The concept of faith is distinct from that of righteous actions, but they are coupled in more than seventy Quranic verses, which has aroused discussions of how the two notions relate.

In his Quranic exegesis *al-Mīzān*, Ṭabāṭabā'ī believes that not every good and praiseworthy action is valuable. For it to be valuable, it must be coupled with faith (Ṭabāṭabā'ī 1374 Sh, 9:273). In his view, the Quranic association between righteous

1. These are as interpretations of the following Quranic verses: “Will you bid others to piety and forget yourselves, while you recite the Book? Do you not exercise your reason?” (Quran 2:44).

actions and faith implies that an action, as good as it might be, is deemed worthless on the day of resurrection unless it is coupled with faith (Ṭabāṭabā'ī 1374 Sh, 17:233). The efforts of a faithless person to do good deeds are futile, since they do not count in the hereafter (Ṭabāṭabā'ī 1374 Sh, 14:458).

## 2.2. Free Choice

Another element without which an action does not count as righteous is free choice. An action is worthless if it is not done freely (Ṭabāṭabā'ī 1374 Sh, 13:484), say out of coercion. Human beings have the ability to control their instinctive impulses and choose to do certain actions. It is the free preference of one course of action to another that makes the action valuable (Mesbah Yazdi 1394a Sh, 106). Free choice is thus a necessary condition for righteous actions.

## 2.3. Pure Intentions

Another requirement of righteous actions is the purity of one's intention. As noted above, an action is righteous and effective only if it is done faithfully and freely. However, faith and free choice are not sufficient for a righteous action; rather, they need to be completed with pure and sincere intentions (Ṭabāṭabā'ī 1374 Sh, 10:208). Human free actions spring from a motivation or intention that produces an urge towards the action. Actions or speeches are indeed manifestations of one's hidden wills or intentions. If one performs an action with a non-divine motivation, then the action will have no spiritual and divine effects, even though it is good and praiseworthy. Even if the action happens to promote the religion, it does not lead to salvation, since it was not done with divine intentions that bring the agent closer to God. What God takes into account is the inner motivation underlying an action: if it is divine, then He accepts the action; otherwise, He rejects the action, no matter how good its extraneous layer may be, as the Quran (Quran 22:37): "It is not their flesh or blood that reaches Allah; rather, it is your piety that reaches Him" (Mesbah Yazdi 1392b Sh, 2:371).

## 2.4. Embracing Ahl al-Bayt's Authority

God has devised a plan for the human guidance towards perfection and eternal happiness. In this plan, humans can discover God's commands only through His messengers. Since humans encounter new problem every day and hence need a constant guide, the discovery of God's rulings and commands is made by possible through Prophet Muḥammad's successors. Accordingly, one can comply with God's commands only if one embraces the authority (*wilāya*) of the Prophet's successors and obeys their orders. In a hadith transmitted by Zurara from Imam al-Bāqir (a), when the Imam was asked about the secret behind the superiority of Ahl al-Bayt's authority over the prayer, zakat, fasting, and hajj, he replied: "the authority is key to those worships, and the holder of the authority is the guide to them" (Kulaynī 1375 Sh, 2:18).

According to Quranic verses, the crucial factor in acceptance of righteous actions by God is embracement of the authority (*wilāya*) of God and His messenger (Ṭabāṭabā'ī 1374 Sh, 14:278; Ṭabarsī 1412 AH, 7:23). The Arabic word, *wilāya*, is from the root *w-l-y*. As to other derivations from this root, *wilā'* and *tawālī*, al-Rāghib says that they refer to a continuity between two or more things such that nothing else is interposed between them, stating that *wilā'* as “closeness” is metaphorical, be it closeness in place, relation, kinship, religion, sincerity, help, or belief. In *Ṣiḥāḥ*, two meanings are mentioned for *wilā'*: closeness and supervision (or authority) (Jawhārī al-Fārābī 1407 AH, 6). In some books of Arabic dictionary, such as *Aqrab al-mawārid* and *Lisān al-'Arab*, only the second sense (supervision) is mentioned. The best way to learn about the meaning of the word *walī* in Quranic verses and hadiths is to consider the associated evidence, which may denotes things as such as friendship, love, help, kinship guardian or supervisor, or ruler.

Ṭabāṭabā'ī believes that the main meaning of the word *wilāya* is control of things or authority, although it is frequently used to mean love as well (Ṭabāṭabā'ī 1374 Sh, 3:236). While the concepts of authority and love are mutually associated, they are conceptually distinct. According to Ayatollah Mesbah Yazdi, since the relation of authority tends to involve emotional attachments, it is associated with love as well, but this love is just an implication of, and distinct from, the authority. However, since they always go together in actuality, they are sometimes used instead of each other (Mesbah Yazdi 1394a Sh, 3:109). As to the wide range of the meanings of *wilāya*, Mesbah Yazdi traces them all to the notion of “closeness,” which encompasses the other senses of the term such as help, supervision, control, and manipulation (Mesbah Yazdi 1391 Sh, 5-12)

Even though factors such as faith, free choice, and sincerity are crucial to the righteousness of an action, the final requirement is embracement of Ahl al-Bayt's authority, since an action is worthless unless it is performed in accordance with the commands of God's *walī* (a holder of authority on behalf of God). An action is valuable if it is an instance of obeying God. If a person freely and faithfully moves a large stone every day to draw God's pleasure, without it being an obedience God's orders, the action will be absurd and futile.<sup>1</sup> In contrast, if an individual performs an insignificant act as an obedience of the “holder of authority on behalf of God” (*walī Allāh*), then he will see that this minor action will lead him to divine pleasure, just as the Quran says, “To Him ascends the good word, and He elevates righteous conduct” (Quran 35:10). What elevates one's stature in the hereafter is performance of righteous actions, a necessary condition of which is to embrace the authority of God's Messenger and his Household (Ahl al-Bayt).

1. According to a hadith, “If a man stays vigilant at night and fasts during the days and gives all his money for charity and goes to the hajj pilgrimage throughout his lifetime, but does not know the authority (*wilāya*) of the holder of authority on behalf of God to embrace his authority and perform all his actions under his guidance, he deserves no rewards from God” (Majlisī 1403 AH, 23:294).

### 3. A Comparison between the Effects of Righteous Actions and Embracement of Ahl al-Bayt's Authority

#### 3.1. Salvation and Happiness

The issue of salvation has been controversial since the early Islamic period. There are three views on salvation in Islamic theology:

1. *Murji'a* who believe that faith is the main requisite for salvation. Mere faith is sufficient for deliverance from divine punishment and entry into the heaven, regardless of one's sins (Farmanian 1387 Sh, 54).
2. The view diametrically opposed to the *Murji'a* view is that committing only one major sin leads to excommunication from Islam, in which Muslims can legitimately take possession of one's property and wife. This view was advocated by Kharijites or *Khawārij* (Farmanian 1387 Sh, 42).
3. Ahl al-Bayt, or Shiite Imams, believed that both positions are wrong. One cannot go to the heaven just because of having faith in one's heart and despite having committed sins. There are many hadiths in which the Imams warn their followers against both groups, asserting that the right path is faith coupled with righteous actions (Farmanian 1387 Sh, 69).

The third position is confirmed by Quranic verses, since the Quran describes disbelievers as appearing before the Lord on the day of resurrection while embarrassed, telling God, "Our Lord! We have seen and heard. Send us back so that we may act righteously. Indeed we are [now] convinced" (Quran 32:12). Ṭabāṭabā'ī infers from this verse that salvation is owed to faith and righteous actions, since as a result of meeting God, these disbelievers asked God to return them to the world so that they could perform righteous actions, since they knew that these are essential to salvation (Ṭabāṭabā'ī 1374 Sh, 16:378). This demonstrates that righteous actions (with the conditions outlined above) lead to salvation and deliverance from the hell and help attain happiness.

The main reason for being thrown into the hell is God's wrath, just as the main reason for going to the heaven is God's pleasure. The phrase "God's displeasure" (*sakhat Allāh*) appears in three Quranic verses: verse 80 of Sura al-Māida, verse 28 of Sura Muhammad, and verse 162 of Sura Al 'Imran: "Is he who follows [the course of] Allah's pleasure like him who earns Allah's displeasure and whose refuge is hell, an evil destination?" (Quran 3:162). In an interpretation of this verse, Imam al-Ṣādiq says about those who earn God's displeasure: "these are the people who deny the rightfulness of 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib and us the leaders of Ahl al-Bayt" (Ḥuwayzī 1415 AH, 1:406). This verse contrasts God's pleasure to God's displeasure.

In part of the pilgrimage supplication known as al-Jāmi'at al-Kabīra, a crucial factor contributing to happiness and divine pleasure is said to be the embracement of Ahl al-Bayt's authority, whereas the denial of their authority is said to earn God's

displeasure: “The triumphant have won by virtue of your authority, since it is with you that one can journey towards [God’s] pleasure, and he who denies your authority will face the wrath of the all-Compassionate God.”

Another hadith says about the term *sayyi’ā* (misdeed) in the Quranic verse “whoever commits [or acquires] misdeeds” (Quran 2:81): “that is, whoever denies the authority of Amir al-Mu’minīn [Imam ‘Alī], he will reside in the fire for eternity” (Kulaynī 1375 Sh, 1:429). In fact, the major “misdeed” that leads to eternity in the hell is the denial of the authority of Ahl al-Bayt.

### 3.2 Forgiveness of Sins and Increase in Virtuous Deeds

Another consequence of righteous actions is forgiveness of one’s sins, which is a prerequisite of eternal happiness. Unless one is forgiven by God, one cannot be happy. Forgiveness precedes happiness, which is why God has promised forgiveness and a great reward to righteous believers (Quran 48:29; 5:9; 11:11; 22:50; 34:4; 35:7). Six Quranic verses in which the phrase “those who have faith and do righteous deeds” is used involve references to forgiveness and the great reward (Quran 35:7; 11:11), forgiveness and a major reward (Quran 48:29; 5:9), and forgiveness and an honorable livelihood (Quran 34:4; 22:50). This divine promise indicates the importance of righteous believers, although the promise of forgiveness implies that although they are among the best servants of God, they are still in need of His forgiveness.

While it seems that there is an overlap between *takfīr* (atonement) for the sins and forgiveness (*ghufrān*) of the sins, the difference between the two can be compared to the distinction between *‘afw* (excuse), *ṣafḥ* (forbear), and *ghufrān* (forgive) (Quran 64:14), as “excusing” is about condoning the sins, while forbearance is a kind of forgiveness without reproaching the person in question, and forgiveness is one in which even the traces of the sins are conceal (Ṭabāṭabā’ī 1374 Sh, 19:516).

The theme appears in several Quranic verses, including: “But those who have faith and do righteous deeds and believe in what has been sent down to Muhammad—and it is the truth from their Lord—He shall absolve them of their misdeeds and set right their affairs” (Quran 47:2); “He answers [the supplications of] those who have faith and do righteous deeds and enhances them out of His grace. But as for the faithless, there is a severe punishment for them” (Quran 42:26), and “As for those who have faith and do righteous deeds, We will absolve them of their misdeeds and We will surely reward them by the best of what they used to do” (Quran 29:7).

According to some hadiths, love of Ahl al-Bayt conceals sins and increases one’s virtues. Imam al-Rida says, “love of us, Ahl al-Bayt, conceals the sins and doubles virtues” (Majlisī 1403 AH, 68:100). Moreover, Muḥammad b. Muslim al-Thaqafī asked Imam al-Bāqir about verses 68-70 of Sura al-Furqan, “Those who do not invoke another deity besides Allah . . . shall encounter its retribution, the punishment



being doubled for him on the Day of Resurrection. In it he will abide in humiliation forever, except those who repent, attain faith, and act righteously. For such, Allah will replace their misdeeds with good deeds, and Allah is all-forgiving, all-merciful” (Quran 25:69). The Imam relied, “the sinful will be brought to justice on the day of resurrection. God will appraise his deeds without anyone else knowing about it. Then, God reminds him of his sins so that he confesses to them. God then tells the scribes to turn his sins into virtuous actions and make them public. People will say, ‘This servant did not commit even one sin!’ He will subsequently taken to the heaven. This verse pertains to the sinful among our followers [Shias].” Another hadith, widely known to both Shia and Sunni Muslims, states that “Love of ‘Alī is a virtue that is not harmed by any misdeed, and enmity to ‘Alī is a misdeed with which no virtue would be helpful” (Ibn Shahrāshūb 1376 AH, 3:197).

It should be noted that there are other hadiths by Shiite Imams, in which they warn their followers against the consequences of their actions.<sup>1</sup> The harm can be interpreted as eternal stay in the hell, and hence it does not mean that they face no punishments for their sins. There is another aspect in which we can make sense of the idea that, with love of Ahl al-Bayt, sins do not harm, and without their love, good deeds are futile. Imam Khomeini believes that love of Ahl al-Bayt enlightens the heart, which enables one to immediately recognize one’s sins or mistakes and quickly repent to God (Khomeini 1386 Sh, 573).

This is the reason why Imam ‘Alī says in his sermons: “O people! protect your religion and do not give up on it, since committing sins with adherence to the religion is better than doing good deeds without adherence to the religion. With the religion, sins are forgiven, but without it, worships and good deeds are not accepted” (Kulaynī 1375 Sh, 2:464).

“Righteous action” in the above verses and hadiths refers to not a superficially good action, but to an action done under the authority of Ahl al-Bayt, in which case it can lead to deliverance from afterlife punishments.

### 3.3. Going to the Heaven

Another frequently cited consequence of faith and righteous actions is the qualification for entering the heaven, as in verse 8 of Sura Luqman, verse 58 of Sura al-‘Ankabut, verse 19 of Sura al-Sajda, verse 56 of Sura al-Hajj, and verse 23 of Sura Ibrahim:

1. A companion of Imam al-Ṣādiq says, “I told Abū ‘Abd Allāh [Imam al-Ṣādiq’s title], ‘you said that all Shias will go to the heaven, despite their sins,’ and he said, ‘yes! I told you the truth. I swear to God that all of them have a place in the heaven.’ I said, ‘May I be sacrificed for you! I have committed many major sins.’ He said, ‘On the day of resurrection, all of you will be in the heaven with the interception of the Prophet and his successors whose requests are confirmed by God, but I swear to God that I fear your state in the intermediate Barzakh world.’ I said, ‘what is Barzakh?’ He said, ‘The grave from the time of death to the day of resurrection.’” (Kulaynī 1375 Sh, 3:242).

“Those who have faith and do righteous deeds will be admitted into gardens with streams running in them, to remain in them [forever], by the leave of their Lord. Their greeting therein will be ‘Peace!’” (Quran 14:23). In verse 107 of Sura al-Kahf, righteous believers are promised to be given the gardens of Paradise (Firdaws) as the highest degrees of the heaven: “As for those who have faith and do righteous deeds, they shall have the gardens of Firdaws for abode” (Quran 18:107). There are hadiths concerning the interpretation of this verse, to some of which we refer in what follows.

According to a hadith from Imam ‘Alī cited in the Quranic exegesis *al-Burhān*: “everything has a pinnacle, and the pinnacle of the heaven is the garden of paradise, which is dedicated to Muhammad and his Household” (Bahrānī 1378 Sh, 4:253). In the Quranic exegesis *al-Durr al-manthūr*, a hadith is quoted from the Prophet stating, “When you request from God, ask Him for the paradise, which is located in the middle of the heaven at the highest point there, above which is only the Throne of God. Heavenly streams spring from that place” (Suyūṭī 1404 AH, 4:254). In *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, Abū Baṣīr is quoted as transmitting a hadith from Imam al-Ṣādiq in reply to a question about the interpretation of the above verse: “This was revealed about Abū Dharr, Salmān, Miqdād, and ‘Ammār b. Yāsir, for whom God made the gardens of paradise as an abode” (Qummī 1367 Sh, 2:46).<sup>1</sup>

On this account, prime examples of righteous believers, who are promised the gardens of paradise, are Ahl al-Bayt and their companions like Miqdād and Abū Dharr.

### 3.4. Dominance and Rule over the Inhabitants of the Earth

The final reward for righteous believers is the rule over the inhabitants of the earth. Verse 55 of Sura al-Nur promises righteous believers to dominate the earth: “Allah has promised those of you who have faith and do righteous deeds that He will surely make them successors in the earth, just as He made those who were before them successors, and He will surely establish for them their religion which He has approved for them, and that He will surely change their state to security after their fear, while they worship Me, not ascribing any partners to Me. Whoever is ungrateful after that—it is they who are the transgressors” (Quran 24:55). There are different views of the instances of “those of you who have faith and do righteous deeds” and when the promise comes true.

Ṭabāṭabā’ī believes that an unbiased treatment of the verse implies its application to the community that will be established after the reappearance of Imam al-Mahdī. However, he later extends the application to the succession of the entire Islamic nation as a case of linguistic predominance, as in the case of *shams* (sun) and *qamar* (moon),

1. Ṭabāṭabā’ī cites these hadiths, pointing out that they should be interpreted as applying to true believers, as prominently exemplified by the four people above. Otherwise, a problem arises in that if the verse was literally revealed about Salmān, he had converted to Islam in Medina, while the above verse was revealed before that in Mecca (before the Prophet’s migration to Medina). Moreover, the chain of the transmission of this hadith is not strong enough.

which are collectively referred to as *shamsayn* where *shams* predominates *qamar* (Ṭabāṭabā'ī 1374 Sh, 15:217).

By the succession of the entire nation as a case of predomination, Ṭabāṭabā'ī means that a group of Shias will succeed God in the earth before the reappearance of Imam al-Mahdī. Even though the verse is primarily applicable to the government of Imam al-Mahdī after his reappearance, Shiite governments before his reappearance may count as instances of the verse as there are hadiths in which “those of you who have faith and do righteous deeds” is interpreted as referring to Shias.<sup>1</sup> Back to the example of the phrase *shamsayn*, even though the sun (*shams*) predominates when referring to both the sun and the moon, the moon has the function of guiding in the darkness of light when the sun is absent. Similarly, in the absence of Imam al-Mahdī and before his reappearance, the whole Islamic nation is charged with forming an Islamic government, although their relation to Imam al-Mahdī prospective government is like that of the moon to the sun.

Other Quranic exegetes such as al-Shaykh al-Ṭabarsī believe that the verse applies to the Prophet and his Household given the relevant hadiths (Ṭabarsī 1412 AH, 17:164). These hadiths are cited in *Tafsīr nimūni* as quoting from *Rūḥ al-ma'ānī* and other Quranic exegeses from Imam al-Bāqir and Imam al-Ṣādiq (Makarem 1371 Sh, 14:532; Ṭabarsī 1412 AH, 4:330). In one hadith, Imam al-Sajjād states that the verse applies to the Shias (followers) of Ahl al-Bayt.

These hadiths imply that the prime example of righteous believers in the Quran are the Shias of the Prophet and his successors. Those who listen to their Imams in worldly and afterlife matters and abide by their commands deserve the best divine blessings in this world (pure life and succession on the earth) and in the hereafter.

#### **4. An Account of the Mutual Relation between Embracing Ahl al-Bayt's Authority and Acceptance of Righteous Actions**

The requirement of embracing Ahl al-Bayt's authority for righteous actions can be inferred from the definition of faith as submission to God and His messenger, since during his lifetime the Prophet had frequently commanded people to obey Imam 'Alī and his children as his successors (e.g., Hadith al-Ghadīr and Hadith al-Manzila). It follows that for good actions to have afterlife, in addition to worldly, effects and hence become righteous, they need to be coupled with a true belief in God and His messenger, embracing the Prophet's authority and obeying his Household and successors.

1. After reciting this verse, the Fourth Shiite Imam al-Sajjad said, “These are, I swear to God, the followers of us, Ahl al-Bayt. God will do this to them in the hands of a man from us; that is, the Mahdī of this nation. He is the one about whom the Messenger of Allah said, ‘if just one day remained of this world, God will prolong it until a man from my household comes, his name is my name and his teknonyms (kunya) is my teknonyms. He will fill the earth with justice and fairness just as it was filled with injustice and oppression.” The same hadith is transmitted from Imam al-Bāqir and Imam al-Ṣādiq as well.

On this account, an action unsupported by a belief in Ahl al-Bayt's authority will be absurd and futile. In a hadith, Imam al-Šādiq said, "if one does not acknowledge Amīr al-Mu'minīn's [Imam 'Alī's] authority (*wilāya*), his actions and worships will be invalid and null, just like an ash in the face of winds." Furthermore, in a hadith cited in *Uṣūl al-kāfi*, Muḥammad b. Muslim quotes Imam al-Bāqir as saying, "If one espouses a religion, takes certain actions as worship, and performs some deeds out of ignorance without following an Imam, his actions will not be accepted. Indeed, such a person is misguided. He is like a sheep that has lost its shepherd, wondering what to do and where to go during the night, until a wolf comes and devours it. I swear to God, any person from this nation who spends the night without knowing and following the Imam appointed by God will be dead like a disbeliever. You, Muḥammad b. Muslim, beware that unjust Imams [leaders] and their followers have no religion. They are misguided and misguide people. Their actions are like an ash gone by winds" (Burūjirdī 1366 Sh, 3:429).

In another hadith, Imam 'Alī encourages people to protect their religions, since committing sins while being religious is better than doing good things without being religious, since with religions the sins are forgiven, whereas without it, even good deeds are not accepted. Indeed, virtuous acts that do not fulfil the requirements (such as faith and embracement of Ahl al-Bayt's authority) may be even worse than misdeeds by believers who are in a state of "fear and hope" in virtue of their faith (Khomeini 1386 Sh, 573).

#### 4.1. The Impact of Commitment to the Divine Authority in Performing Righteous Actions

To shed light on how righteous actions relate to commitment to Ahl al-Bayt's authority, we can allude to the contrast between the righteous (*ṣāliḥūn*) and transgressors (*fāsiqūn*) in the Quran and the semantics of *fiṣq* (transgression), which is about breaching the pledge to the authority. Literally, *fiṣq* in Arabic means to deviate from the right path, as the Quran says about Iblis: "He was one of the jinn, so he transgressed against his Lord's command" (Quran 18:20). A disbeliever is a transgressor who has fully deviated from religion, but a sinner is a transgressor who deviated certain religious practices (Qorashi 1361 Sh, 5:176). The contrast is explicit in verses 19 and 20 of Sura al-Sajda.<sup>1</sup> This semantic contrast implies that righteousness is to obey God, the Prophet, and his successors.

### 5. Conclusion

We provided a semantic analysis of the "righteous action" and distinguished it from all of its associated notions, such as virtuous, pious, and right deeds, showing

1. "As for those who have faith and do righteous deeds, for them will be the gardens of the Abode—a hospitality for what they used to do. As for those who have transgressed, their refuge will be the Fire. Whenever they seek to leave it, they will be turned back into it and told: 'Taste the punishment of the Fire which you used to deny'" (Quran 32:19-20).

that not all good deeds may count as righteous. For an action to qualify as righteous, it needs to satisfy certain additional conditions.

In light of Quranic verses and hadiths, the conditions necessary for a righteous action include faith, free choice, pure intentions, and embracing Ahl al-Bayt's authority. The similarities between the effects of righteous actions in the Quran and the effects of embracing Ahl al-Bayt's authority in hadiths led us to the idea that there is a close tie between righteous actions and embracement of Ahl al-Bayt's authority. Indeed, the latter may count as the ultimate factor contributing to the constitution of righteous actions, without which actions do not qualify as righteous, as defined by the Quran.

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