

THE VIEW OF THE COMMENTATORS OF ISLAMIC SCHOOLS ON THE VERSES OF THE AS-HAB OF AL-A'RAF IN THE HOLY QURAN - A CRITICAL STUDY

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Abstract

An interesting subject in Surah A'raf is the story about the companions of A'raf (mystics). Different commentators have different views about who the companions of the mystics really are. This paper has divided these views into two categories. The first which is referred to by the majority of Shiite and some Sunni commentators, is that the companions of the mystics are in fact the Imams. The second view, mentioned by most Sunni and only some Shiite commentators, refers to the mystics as sinners whose good and bad wills are of equal value. After examining and analyzing these views, a third and new view arose. It concludes that in verses 46 and 47 of Surah A'raf, the mystics, are a group of sinful believers whose good and bad wills are equal. Verses 48 and 49 of the same sura refer to the mystics as Imams and people of divinity and dignity, who intercede for the first group. This paper tries to point to the superficiality in the differences and distinctions in opinions of the commentators, and present a new way of thought, and show a more correct interpretation of the verses in Surah A'raf.

Keywords: Companions of A'raf (Mystics), Shiite Commentators, Sunni Commentators, Interpretation of the Quran, Surah A'raf, Resurrection.

I. INTRODUCTION

Surah A'raf is a Mekkan Surah and includes 206 verses, which address the pagans and believers in the Prophet of Islam (PBUH). This surah contains a considerable amount of science in divinity, including a description of Iblis and his army, a description of Resurrection, the world of particles and the covenant, and so on. By the end of the first quarter, this surah reveals the truth about the companions of heaven and hell, and depicts the dialogue between the mystics, the heavenly and the damned in four verses. They are as follows:

“And there will be a veil between them. And on the Elevations will be certain men who recognize each of them by their mark. They will call out to the inhabitants of paradise,”

Peace be to you!" (They will not have entered it, though they would be eager to do so (46)

And when their look is turned toward the inmates of the Fire, they will say," Our Lord, do not put us among the wrongdoing lot!") (47)

And the occupants of the Elevations will call out to certain men whom they recognize by their marks," Your rallying did not avail you, nor what you used to disdain (48)

Are these the ones concerning whom you swore that Allah will not extend them any mercy?" Enter paradise! You shall have no fear, nor shall you grieve." (49)

The word mystics has led to many theories among Shiite and Sunni commentators. We can

understand the importance of this subject by the way the sura is named, Al-Araf, and also Shiite and Sunni interpretations. Resurrection is one of the beliefs in Islam, which God has given many warnings about. Surah A'raf has mentioned resurrection a few times. Basically, the name of this surah is derived from a location on Judgment Day, which has been discussed in verses 49-46. God Almighty describes the mystics in verses 46 and 47 of Surah A'raf as follows:

“And there will be a veil between them. And on the Elevations will be certain men who recognize each of them by their mark. They will call out to the inhabitants of paradise," Peace be to you!" (They will not have entered it, though they would be eager to do so (46)

And when their look is turned toward the inmates of the Fire, they will say," Our Lord, do not put us among the wrongdoing lot!") (47)

God describes them differently in verses 48 and 49:

And the occupants of the Elevations will call out to certain men whom they recognize by their marks," Your rallying did not avail you, nor what you used to disdain (48)

Are these the ones concerning whom you swore that Allah will not extend them any mercy?" Enter paradise! You shall have no fear, nor shall you grieve." (49)

According to these verses, we find two opposite attributes for the companions of the mystics which only confuse us in truly recognizing them. So far, there has been a few research about the companions of mystics, which can be found in the article "Mystics and its companions", published in January 2017 in issue 357, "Lessons from the School of Islam" magazine. The mentioned article has briefly discussed the mystics in the Qur'an and Hadith. Another article "Discussion about mystics" written by Yaghoub Jafari in September 2010, issue 593, "Lessons from the school of Islam" magazine, also examines two popular views on mysticism. A third article is "The concept of mystics in interpretive narrations" written in the first issue of the scientific-research journal

"Message of Quran and Hadith" in 2010 by Mehdi Akbarnejad and Ruhollah Mohammadi. They examined the narrations and divided them into two categories. A different paper "Evaluating commentators' point of view in determining the mystics by adapting the context to interpretive narrations" was published in the bi-monthly journal "Quran and Hadith Studies" in the second issue of spring and summer in 2017 using same approach. The fifth article entitled "Mysticism from the perspective of the commentators on the two sects" which was published in the scientific-promotional quarterly "Forough Vahdat" No. 46 in the winter of 2016, examined the opinions of Shiite and Sunni commentators about the companions of the mystics.

Now we must see where the mystics are, who they are, and how they know the heavenly and the damned. This paper first explains the literal meaning of mystics, then proceeds with Shiite and Sunni commentators, and finally offers a new outlook.

2. The meaning of mystics:

2-1. Literary meaning of mystics:

"Ashab" from "Sahab" means companion (Johari, 1/161; Ibn Manzoor, 520/1). It is also used in the sense of standing upright on an object. Similar to the companions of fire, "the companions of the mystics" is used in the same sense (Mustafa, 507).

Some believe that the word mysticism comes from the root (A-R-F) (Farahidi 121/2) and some believe it is from the word "o-r-f" with various meanings. Here it means a place in height covered with sand (Johari, 1401/4). Allameh Tabarsi says: "The best possible place" (Tabarsi 643/4) like most thinkers emphasize only on height (Ibn Manzoor, 236/9; Ibn Faris, 229/4; Zamakhshari, 307; Zubaydi, 241/6; Tarihi, 61/5; Azhari, 275/6). They come to know it as a lions mane or a rooster's comb (Ibn Faris, 218/4; Ibn Skeit, 102; Fayumi, 131; Ibn Darid, 421/1; Firoozabadi, 1081).

Thus, what can be inferred from the literal meaning of mysticism is that, the plural of

mysticism, is a place where the reason of material or spiritual upliftment is known to everyone.

2-2. The literal meaning of mysticism:

Mystics is a special place between heaven and hell, like a high ground between the two, and the people in it can see everyone in both heaven and hell and recognize them from their faces. (Makarem Shirazi, 187/6) Of course, some believe that the companions of the mystics are from the land of mystics and rule over it (Ibn Kathir, 379/3).

By examining the opinions given by commentators, it can be claimed that the republic of the commentators have interpreted "mystics" in verses 46 and 48 of Surah A'raf to mean a place in height between heaven and hell. This can be seen in many Shiite commentators (Qomi, 1988: 232/1; Tusi, 410/4; Tabarsi, 643/4; Razi, 201/8; Sheibani, 336/2; Lahiji, 39/2; Feyz Kashani, 198 /2; Shabar, 147/1; Tayeb, 326/5; Mughniyeh, 332/3; Tabatabai, 122/8) and Sunni commentators' views (Tabari, 136/7; Zamakhshari, 136/2; Zajaj, 342/2; Thalabi, 362/5; Qurtubi, 211/7; Tha'labi, 37/2; Alusi, 177/6).

3. Using mystics in the Holy Quran

The word mysticism is used twice in the Holy Quran, directly and indirectly:

3-1. Direct

The word A'raf is directly used twice in the Holy Quran in the seventh surah. God Almighty has mentioned four groups in verses 46 to 49 of Surah A'raf:

- A) The men of the mystics: Prominent people who know the people of heaven and hell.
- B) Companions of heaven: Righteous people who have been placed in heaven because of their good deeds.
- C) Companions of fire (Nar): Oppressive people who have wronged themselves and others and deserve Nar.

D) The damned entering hell: The damned that have not yet entered hell and the people of the Mystics despiritualize them.

3-2. Indirect

The word Araf can be seen in the following verse:

The day the hypocrites, men and women, will say to the faithful," Please let up on us, that we may glean something from your light!" They will be told:" Go back and grope for light!" Then there will be set up between them a wall with a gate, with mercy on its interior and punishment toward its exterior. (Tabatabai, 122/8)

4. Shiite and Sunni commentators' views on the mystics

Sarat (path): Sarat (Tabari, 137/8; Fakhr Razi, 250/14; Ibn Kathir, 11484/5; Siouti, 211/7) or a high location of Sarat (Hakim Haskani, 264/1; Qurtubi, 213/7, Abu Hayyan Andalusian, 57/5). It is narrated in a hadith from Imam Sadegh (AS) that mysticism is a path between heaven and hell (Saffar, 52/1).

A place in height between heaven and hell: Some believe that mystics means a place in height between heaven and hell, and its people look upon the people of both heaven and hell (Tayyib, 326/5; Tabari, 136/8; Suyuti, 211/7).

A hill between heaven and hell: Some say mystics is a hill or a veil between heaven and hell (Tabari, 136/8; Qurtubi, 211/7; Alusi, 364/4). Some believe people sit on this hill. (Hosseini Astarabadi, 181/1). Others believe that it is a hill between heaven and hell where the prophets intersect the companions and sinners of their time. Some have proposed that the place of mysticism lies between the heavenly and the damned. (Tabatabai, 121/8; Fakhr Razi, 250/14; Zamakhshari, 106/2).

Earth: Based on his principles in the subject of resurrection, Mirbagheri believes that resurrection shall take place on earth and states that mystics are in height and is located between the heavenly and the damned (Mirbagheri, 132). This view is similar to the

previous one, the only difference is that it is located on earth.

Unknown: Some believe that the meaning of mysticism is an unknown location such as hijab or barrier in which monotheistic and mystical men are placed (Feyz Kashani, 1418, 373/1), or it is a place of divinity (Mustafavi, 8/99)

Mount Uhud: Some argue that mystics is actually Mount Uhud, although there is no definite resource to this (Ghartabi, 212/7, Alusi, 364/4).

A spiritual status, not material: Mysticism is not a peak where one climbs to identify everyone, but it is a superior place and whoever reaches it, can recognize everyone (Javadi Amoli, 605/28).

Among these statements, Uhud Mountain and the Unknown place are out of the scope of study due to the lack of intellectual and narrative documents. The difference between the second and fourth cases is limited to whether this hill is located between heaven and hell or between the heavenly and the damned. According to the pronoun *homa* in verse 46 of Surah A'raf, it refers to "Ashab al-Jannah" and "Ashab al-Nar" in verses 44 and 45, the fourth statement is preferred. If, according to the general opinion of the commentators, we consider hijab as equivalent to verse 13 of Surah Hadid, it confirms the fourth statement, indicating that the mystics is in fact a hill between the heavenly and the damned, since in verse 13 of Surah Hadid, the verse is drawn between believers and hypocrites.

Mirbagheri's opinion seems very unlikely; Because, first of all, it has no Quranic document and narration, and second, it is inconsistent with many Quranic epistemological and narrative data, as if the world system will change on the Day of Judgment; For example, the ground will be completely flat and the mountains will fall (Taha / 105). Therefore, there are no peaks or valleys on earth for it to be considered as the place of mysticism.

5. Different opinions about the companions of mystics

According to the commentators, there are various possibilities about the companions of the mystics, including the interpretations of Al-Manar and Tasnim, containing both the opinions of Shiite and Sunni scholars. Others such as Ibn Jawzi, talks about 9 possibilities of the companions of the mystics, Ghartabi of 10 (Ghartabi, 211/7), and Allameh Tababaei of 14 (Alusi, 124/8; Tabataei, 158/8). Allameh Tababaei's narrations are summarized as follows:

- 1) They are nobles who have been distinguished from other creatures by God's dignity.
- 2) They are people whose good and bad deeds are equal.
- 3) They have divine predestination
- 4) They are believers from the tribe of jinn.
- 5) They are children of infidels who have died before maturity.
- 6) They are adulterers
- 7) They are ones of pride in the world
- 8) They are angels who watch over people from the mystics and recognize everyone by their faces
- 9) They are prophets that out of respect and to be witnesses, are separated from other people.
- 10) There are just people from every nation to testify for their people.
- 11) They are peace lovers, jurists and scholars.
- 12) The men of the mystics are: Abbas, Hamza, Jafar and Imam Ali (PBUH) who stand on the Sarat to identify their friends and enemies.
- 13) They are the oppressed who, due to weakness and lack of reasoning, have not matured; such as weak men and women and immature children.
- 14) Mystics are those who are doomed to Nar without the permission of their father, and the people of heaven for being killed in the name of God. (Tabatabai, 159/8).

The fact that they might not be human beings and are either jins or angels is a possibility that cannot be ignored because the word "rijal" means man and jins and angels do not identify with a specific gender. Although they sometimes appear in the form of men, but mere representation in human form is not an absolute correction; In addition, we do not have a valid reason for this (Tabatabai, 122/8), so the fourteen statements mentioned above can be

confined to two views, which are the most popular among Shiite and Sunni commentators.

5-1. First view: Most Shiite and some Sunni commentators: Infallible Imams (AS)

Most Shiite commentators and intellectuals consider the Imams (as) as the companions of the mystics. (Saffar, 453/1; Qomi, 231/1; Ibn Babavieh, 70; Mulla Sadra, 318/9). Allameh Tabatabai, also has the same view (Tabatabai, 162/8). Quoting Abu Ja'far, the author of Tafsir Tebyan says the mystics are in fact "Imams", and the Holy Prophet (PBUH) is one of them. (Tusi, 411/4; Tabarsi, 653/4). It is mentioned in Tafsir al-Burhan that Barid ibn Mu'awiyah asked Imam Baqir (AS) for the meaning of the verse: « وَعَلَى الْأَعْرَافِ رِجَالٌ يَغْرِفُونَ كَلًّا بِسَيِّمَاتِهِمْ », and he replied: "This verse has been descended for this people, and what is meant by rijal are the Imams from Muhammad's generation. The narrator said: "What does mysticism mean?" He said: "There is a path between heaven and hell, whereby every sinful believer whom we, the Imams, intercede for, will be saved from the fire of hell, and whoever we do not intercede for will perish." (Bohrani, / 549). Bohrani also refers to a hadith from Bashir Ibn Habib, who said: "Someone asked about the meaning of this verse; « وَعَلَى الْأَعْرَافِ رِجَالٌ يَغْرِفُونَ كَلًّا بِسَيِّمَاتِهِمْ », and he said: "it is a wall between heaven and hell, where Muhammad, Ali, Hassan, Hussein, Fatima, and Khadijeh Kobra (AS) sit." (Bohrani, 549/2).

Among the Sunni commentaries, Zahak narrates from Ibn Abbas who said: "Mystics is a place on heights on Sarat, where Abbas, Hamza, Ali ibn Abi Talib, and Ja'far Zul-Janahin sit, and recognize the Shiites and their enemies by their faces (Thalabi, 236/4; Alusi, 363/4; Hakim Haskani, 198/1; Razi, 204/8).

5-2. Second view: Most Sunni and some Shiite commentators: Equality between good and bad deeds

Most Sunni commentators consider the companions of the mystics to be those whose good and bad deeds are equal, people who, obey God Almighty, and have also gave in to their lust and the devil. The main document for this are the narrations from people such as Ibn

Abbas, Ibn Mas'ud, Hudhayfah and their followers such as Sha'bi, Amer, Sa'id ibn Jubayr, Abdullah ibn Harth, Qatadah, Mujahid, Zahak, etc. (Tabari, 137/8; Ibn Abi Hatem, 1485/5; Ibn Kathir, 376/3; Qurtubi, 211/7; Siouti, 88/3; Baghavi, 194/2; Tha'labi, 33/3; Qurtubi 212/7; Beizavi, 14/3; Alusi, 364/4; Zamakhshari, 107/2; Fakhr Razi, 248/14). Here we refer to only one of these interpretations as an example:

In al-Manthur, it is narrated from Jabir ibn Abdullah Ansari that: Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said, good and bad deeds will be weighed on the Day of Judgement, one whose goods are heavier than their sins, shall enter heaven, and ones whose sins weigh more than their goods, although rarely, but enter hell. Someone asked him, "What about ones whose good and bad deeds are equal?" He replied: such people are the companions of the mystics who, wish to enter heaven, but can not" (Suyuti, 78/3).

One of the most important reasons for the view that mystics is the place for people with equal good and bad deeds is "لَمْ يَدْخُلُوهَا وَهُمْ يَطْمَعُونَ" "they do not enter and they are obedient", and the verse after that (Zamakhshari, 107/2). There is disagreement among the commentators about Al-A'raf referring to "men of the mystics" or the "companions of heaven". Many consider the pronoun rijal referring to men of the mystics (Tabarsi, 654/4; Zamakhshari, 107/2; Fakhr Razi, 251/14) and some refer it to the companions of heaven (Rashid Reza, 434/8, Tabatabai, 30/8; Javadi Amoli, 606/28).

Jaba'i, Qazi and Ramani Perspectives:

The fact that those who worship God Almighty deserve to enter heaven is not hidden to anyone. But this group, whose good and bad deeds are equal, are the last group to enter heaven by God's grace, not by merit. Jaba'i, Qazi, and Ramani consider the rijals to be the same people addressed in verse 43 of Surah A'raf ; who inherited heaven for their actions. Fakhr Razi refers this to Jaba'i and Qazi, and Tusi refers it to Jaba'i and the Ramani (Tusi, 411/4).

Fakhr Razi's Critique of Jabai, Qazi and Ramani's Perspectives:

Fakhr Razi criticizes the view that the mystics are ones who inherited heaven because of their actions (A'raf / 43) and says: "We do not accept that God has placed them in that place with the intention of honoring them, but He has placed them there because there is a middle ground between heaven and hell. Is it anything other than this?" (Fakhr Razi, 253/14).

A critique of Fakhr Razi's point of view:

Fakhr Razi's words are not convincing because God Almighty describes the companions of the mystics in such a way that their faces show whether they are to be in heaven or in hell, and this knowledge is based on insight. This can be understood from the way the companions of heaven and hell are addressed. Fakhr Razi has avoided giving an answer by raising a new issue.

In some Shiite commentaries, the companions of the mystics are introduced as an ethnic group whose good and bad deeds are equal (Tabarsi, 652/4; Rusi Hoveizi, 87/3). Tusi has mentioned that the mystics are of four groups: The believers, angels in the form of men, people who arrive later than others and people whose good and bad deeds are equal (Tusi, 410/4). In the commentary *Ayashi* we read that Jafar Tayyar asked Imam Sadeqh (AS): who are the companions of the mystics? He replied: They are the ones whose good and bad deeds are equal; So if God takes them to heaven, it is only of his mercy, and if He torments them, He has not wronged them (*Ayashi*, 18/2).

6. The new solution: combining the first and second views: the first section of the verses that the mystics refer to the Imams and the second section that refer to equality in good and bad deeds

6-1. Overview of the new solution

As mentioned, most Shiite commentators believe that the "companions of the mystics" are the Ahl al-Bayt or Imams (AS), and most

Sunni commentators believe that the companions of the mystics are those whose good and bad virtues are equal. But can there be a new view to these beliefs?

Answer: what is the new solution that can resolve the differences between the Shiite and Sunni points of view; There is only a primitive conflict between the first and second groups, because the first group introduces the companions of the mystics as people whose virtues are equal, and in the second group the Infallible Imams (AS) are referred to as the companions of the mystics. But since neither is expressed solely, the two cannot be contradictory.

Therefore, in order to interpret these verses, it can be concluded that the mystics is a land between heaven and hell, with houses, and the Imams (AS) and people whose good and bad deeds are equal, live there with the intercession of the Imams (AS). This commentary is reminiscent of other narrations that have enumerated the role of separating the people of heaven from hell for people from the Ahl al-Bayt (AS), which can an explanaton of the verses about the mystics.

6-2. Detailed description of the new solution

The Sura shows two different and contradictory verses about the companions of the mystics: In verses 46 and 47, the people who are in the mystics wish to enter heaven, but there are some barriers; When they look at the heavenly beings, they greet them and want to be with them; But they cannot, and when they look at the damned, they fear their fate and seek God's blessing (Araf / 47-46)

But verses 48 and 49 indicate that they are influential and powerful people; They blame the sinners and help the cursed in the mystics to reach their destination. (Araf / 49-48)

As mentioned earlier, the mystics is an impassable path on the way to heaven. It is likely that believers and leaders have no difficulty in passing, but ones stuck between their good and bad actions are cursed to remain there. Also, leaders wait until everyone has passed, and rush to aid the weak among

believers. Those who deserve salvation are to be released in the light of relief. There are two groups in the mystics, the weak and the sinners who are in mercy of the great leaders. The first part of the verse points to the weak, and the second points to the prophets, Imams, and the pious (Makarem Shirazi, 190/6).

The new solution points that Imams (AS) and people who have equal good and bad deeds live in the mystics, and enter heaven through the intercession of the Imams (AS). Imam Sadegh (AS) says: "Mysticism is a hill between heaven and hell. When the blessed go to heaven, the prophets and their successors, with the sinful group stand there, just like a commander of an army stands with the weak and defeated armies, then the Prophet's caliph turns to the sinners and says: Behold, your beneficent brothers have entered heaven. They greet the righteous people in heaven; وَ نَادُوا «أَصْحَابَ الْجَنَّةِ أَنْ سَلَامَ عَلَيْكُمْ وَ هُمْ» followed by: «يَطْمَعُونَ» ; meaning even though they desire to enter heaven, they shall not, and they hope that the Prophet or the Imam will intercede for them. Then they turn to the damned and say: Dear Lord, do not place us with the wrongdoers. Then the prophets and Imams turn to the damned and despiritualize them: "Your arrogance did not benefit you. You humiliated this incapable group and boasted them your materialistic life". Then they turn to the other group: you shall enter heaven in God's command. There will be no fear nor will you grieve." (Tabarsi, 117/9).

Feyz Kashani and Javadi Amoli have also mentioned this view in addition to Makarem Shirazi, and have tried to distinguish between the two views mentioned earlier (the view that the companions of the mystics are either the Imams (AS), or the people whose good and bad deeds are equal), with the view that the second group hope for intercession of the first group (Feyz Kashani, 200/2; Javadi Amoli, 606/28). Even Javadi Amoli believes that the story of the mystics is parallel to this view (Javadi Amoli, 606/28).

As seen in these verses, the companions of the mystics are two groups, not one. This point might have been simply overlooked by most

Shiite and Sunni commentators, that is why they have not been able to present an accurate interpretation of the mystics. One of the advantages of this integrated point of view mentioned by both groups is that in facing conflict between the narrations, they are not rejected, rather are all combined to form a view including both Shiite and Sunni commentaries.

We have learned that there are two groups of people in the land of the mystics; The first group: great leaders of divinity and supreme intercessors. The second group: the weak and sinners who hope for mercy. Therefore, the first part of the verses refers to the first group, i.e., the Imams (AS), and the second part refers to the second group, i.e., the weak and the cursed.

CONCLUSION

According to the subjects covered in this paper, mysticism is a location on higher ground between heaven and hell, which overlooks the two, and both people of heaven and hell can be seen, and they see those who are in mysticism as well. By examining the views of Shiite and Sunni commentators, we found that the fourteen views in the literature can be merged into two general ones. In the first view, Ahl Al-Bayt are considered as the mystics and the second view those whose good and bad deeds are equal. The third view proposes the combination of the two views, which is itself two groups: A group of sinful believers who have not entered hell because of their faith and have not entered heaven because of their sins. They greet the heavenly because they believe that they too are heavenly and hope for God's merci and the pious will intercede for them. And when they look upon the damned, they fear their fate and seek merci from God Almighty. They say, "Dear Lord, do not place us with them, they are infidels and we are believers." Verses of the Quran say:

"And they call out to the companions of heaven, "Peace be upon you." They have not [yet] entered it, but they long intensely. When their eyes will turn towards the companions of Hell, they will pray, "Our Lord! Do not join us with the wrongdoers." (A'raf/ 46-47).

These are the people mentioned by most Sunni commentators. Other groups of intercessors, are the Holy Prophet (PBUH), the Imams (AS) and the pious who, with God's permission, intercede for those who are cursed in mysticism. They recognize the people of heaven and the people of hell and the people of mysticism by their faces. They are influential and powerful; As they despiritualize the companions of hell and help the helpless in the mystics to get through and reach eternal happiness, the Qur'an describes them as:

Are these 'humble believers' the ones you swore would never be shown Allah's mercy?" 'Finally, those on the heights will be told:' "Enter heaven! There will be no fear for you, nor will you grieve." (Araf / 49-48).

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