

ALLAHU AKBAR

Al-Mutahhari

In the first chapter of the Holy Quran which we recite as part of the ritual prayer, "We worship only You, Oh, God, and beg only Your help." Here we do not use the word 'I' but 'we' to show that all Muslims are inter-related in an Islamic community. In Islam, 'I' is always replaced by 'we'. All these are lessons to learn. When we say allahu akbar are we expressing our fear of God? It is natural for the human being to be afraid of anything which is great, whether it is a mountain, a sea, or a powerful person. But when we say "God is Greater," in a convinced manner, nothing else and no one can frighten us by their greatness, for God is Greater than anything we may imagine and all other things are trivial in comparison with Him.

Hadhrat Ali says, *God has manifested Himself in the spirit of the true believers and thus everything else unrelated to God seems small in their eyes.*

Smallness and greatness are, of course, relative. If you were in a smaller place before coming here, this hall would seem very large to you; the reverse is also true. Therefore, those who are acquainted with the greatness of God, consider other things insignificant. Sa'di says that for mystics nothing exists but God and only those who understand truth realize the meaning of his words, while others criticize him for those words. He then asks, "If there exists nothing but God then what are the heaven and earth and men and monsters and beasts?" He answers this question himself by saying that all these things are too small to say they exist as compared with God's existence. He then compares this with an ocean and a drop of water and with the sun and a tiny particle.

When you utter the phrase "God is Greater" in all sincerity, His greatness is personified before you and thus nothing else finds enough significance to be flattered or feared or shown humbleness. In this way, devotion to God brings freedom: you become God's servant but free in relation to everything else. Each of the following words in the ritual prayer has a meaning illustrating God's greatness: "God is great. Glory be to God. Praise belongs to God. Glory be to my great Lord and I am praising Him. Glory be to my great Lord and I am praising Him. Glory be to my Lord the Most High and I am praising Him."

Many other phrases have been used in the ritual prayers. Someone asked Ali, peace be upon him, why in each cycle of the ritual prayer there are two prostrations and only one bowing. You know, of course, that prostration shows more humility than bowing. In prostrating, the head, which is the dearest part of the body, is placed on the low earth, as a sign of humility and worship.