“Say about us whatever you like, and excuse us from Divinity” – Hadith Analysis

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Question:

What is your evaluation of the hadith mentioned, whose text is: « Say about us what you like, and excuse us from Divinity », does this hadith not give room to exaggeration about the Ahlulbayt (as), which we have already began to see signs of in the words of some preachers these days? Does this not result in the utilisers of this hadith lying upon the Ahlulbayt (as) if they said – as the hadith mentions – whatever they like?

Answer:

Researching this hadith calls for a set of points:

Some contemporaries may God preserve them (See: al-Imamah al-Ilahiya, vol 1, pg 430), stated that this hadith is mustafeedh or mutawatir, and we should – to confirm this claim, analyse this hadith from the angle of of hadith workmanship and historical research – we should observe this hadith in the Islamic tradition, there are several ahadith that meet with the concept referred to in your question, namely:

What came in the form:

نزّهونا عن الربوبيّة وقولوا فينا ما شئتم، ولن تبلغوا

1
Excuse us from Divinity and say about us what you want, and you will not reach us [in true description]

And this hadith was not mentioned with this wording, in any of the sources of hadith of the Muslims [Sunni and Shia], but rather its something that was circulated on the tongues of the people, and it was used in some books in the last two centuries.

Such as by Shaykh Ahmad al-Ta’n al-Qatifi (1315 AH / 1897 AD), in the book (al-Rasail al-Ahmadiyyah, vol 3, pg 361), and it was mentioned by Shaykh Muhammad Hussein al-Mudhafar (1381 AH / 1961 AD), in the book (‘Ilm al-Imam, pg 76) and others.

It has no source nor chain, and from here it is very likely that it is a transmission by meaning of the other narrations that we will come to soon in sha Allah.

Like the following hadith, that contains the sentence:

لا تقولوا فينا ربّاً وقولوا ما شئتم ولن تبلغوا

Do not ascribe to us Lordship, but say about us what you like and you will not reach [in true description]

As mentioned by Allamah al-Majlisi in (Bihar al-Anwar, vol 25, pg 347), this is merely a summary of a group of narrations, and it is not an independent narration, although it was circulated by some people as an independent narration, so pay attention.

Similar to this it has also reached us as:

نزّلونا عن الربوبية وقولوا فينا ما شئتم ولن تبلغوا

Put us below Divinity and say about us whatever you want

Mentioned by Mulla Ahmad al-Naraqi (1245 AH / 1829 AD) in the book (Rasail wa Masail, vol 3, pg 113), and Mullah Hadi al-Sabzawari (1289 AH / 1872 AD) in the book (Sharh nebras al-Huda, pg 226), and Mirza Hashim al-Amali (1412 AH / 1991 AD) in the book (al-Ma’alim al-Ma’thura, vol 2, pg 249), and among some of our contemporaries as well.

And in these books it was not attributed to any book of hadith or history; because these books which mention this quote were authored very late, and there is no reference to a book of hadith or history, nor are the authors who mentioned this text known for this [the field of hadith and history], rather they are jurists and philosophers. Thus it is likely to be transmission by meaning of all the aforementioned accounts.

And similarly it has also reached us as:
Take from us Divinity and say what you want regarding us of virtues and merits

As mentioned by al-Wahid al-Behbehani (1205 AH / 1790 AD) in his fiqh book (al-Hashiya 'ala Madarik al-Ahkam, vol 3, pg 321), and similarly the hadith:

أنفوا عنّا الربوبية وقولوا ما شئتكم من الفضائل والمحاسن

Reject about us Divinity and say about us what you like

As mentioned by al-Dailami (8th century AH) in his book (Irshad al-Qulub, vol 2, pg 427) and the strongest opinion is that this is a transmission by meaning of the previous narrations, and it is not a new transmission, because they do not mention a source nor chain of narrators, rather al-Dailami said that this is what has reached us about them (as), which means that the quote is not from a particular narration.

It reached us from al-Hafidh Rajab al-Bursi (813 AH) in (Mashariq Anwar al-Yaqeen, pg 101) in a different form, and this is the text of the hadith:

وعنهم اثنهم السلام أنهم قالوا: نزّهونا عن الربوبية وارفعوا عنّا حظوظ البشرية 

And from them (as) that they said: excuse us from Divinity, and increase about us the fortunes of mankind […]

And it also reached us in the book (Musnad Imam Ali, vol 8, pg 74-75) of the contemporary Sayed Hassan al-Qabbanji with the text:

الشيخ فرج القطيفي: وجدت بخطّ الشيخ عبد الله بن أحمد البصري البهري، على ظهر كتاب شرح التجريد ما يلي: روي عن أمير المؤمنين عليه السلام أنّه قال لسلمان الفارسي: يا Salman نحن أسرار الله المودعة في هياكل البشرية، ميتنا لم يمت، وغابنا لم يغاب، نزّهونا عن الربوبية وارفعوا عنّا حظوظ البشرية، فإنّا عنها مبعدون، وعما يجوز عليكم منزّهون، ثمّ قولوا فيما استطعتم، فإنّ البحر لا ينزف، وسرّ الغيب لا يعرف، وكلمة الله لا توصف، يا Salman أمرنا صعب مستصعب لا يحتمله إلاّ ملك مقرب أو نبي مرسل، أو من امتحن الله قلبه للإيمان

Sheikh Faraj al-Qatifi: I found the handwriting of Sheikh Abdullah bin Ahmad al-Basri al-Bahrani on the back of the book Sharh al-Tajrid as follows: It was narrated from the Commander of the Faithful, peace be upon him, that he said to Salman Al-Farsi: « O Salman, we are the secrets of Allah […] excuse us from divinity, and increase about us the fortunes of mankind […]

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This hadith is clearly the earliest appearance of it – in this form – which appeared in the 9th century AH, that is about 600 years ago only, and there is no source mentioned for it by any of the Muslim scholars, and also it has no chain of narrators that it could perhaps depend on, and I do not wish to comment on the book (Mashariq Anwar al-Yaqeen) of Al-Hafidh Al-Bursi...

The third form in which it reached us is by Al-Saffar:

On the authority of Ahmad bin Muhammad on the authority of Al-Hussein bin Saeed, on the authority of Al-Hassan bin Bardah, and Abu Abdullah, on the authority of Al-Jaafar bin Al-Hussein (Bashir) Al-Khazaz, on the authority of Ismail bin Abdul Aziz, He said: Abu Abdullah (as) said to me: « […] O Ismail, do not build a construction higher than its strength for it will collapse. Make us to be as created servants, and then say about us whatsoever you like, you will not reach [us in true description]. […] »

In (Basair Al-Darajat, pg 361), and it was transmitted by Hamza Ibn al-Tusi (560 AH) in his (al-Thaqib fi Al-Manaqib, pg 402), without a chain to Ismail bin Abdul Aziz, and it is apparent that it’s a quotation from Basair Al-Darajat.

However the same narration was transmitted by Al-Rawandi in (al-Kharaj wa al-Jaraih, vol 2, pg 735) in which it says:

Call us created servants and say about us what you want except for Prophethood

As also transmitted by Al-Majlisi in (Bihar Al-Anwar, vol 47, pg 68) this narration is on the authority of the book Kashf al-Ghumma from Kitab Dalail al-Humayri, on the authority of Abdul Aziz similarly. And it came with Al-Aribili (693 AH) in (Kashf al-Ghumma, vol 2, pg 414) on the authority of Malik Al-Jahni on the authority of Abi Abdillah al-Sadiq (as) that he said in a hadith:

… O Malik and O Khalid, say about us what you want but call us created beings …

Al-Majlisi and Al-Rawandi and Al-Aribili do not mention their source to this hadith, nor do they provide a chain, and they are relatively late scholars, and also Malik bin A’yans
reliability is not established by none of the scholars as stated by Sayed al-Khoei (Mu’jam Rijal al-Hadith, vol 15, pg 164), rather we do not even have a chain from al-Arbili to Malik and between them is 5 centuries, even with al-Humayri as intermediary.

As for al-Saffar, if we overlook the issue of the attribution of the book [Basair al-Darajat] to him as Sayed Muhammad Baqir as Sadr has, there is still problems in the chain:

1. **Ja’far bin Bashir al-Khazaz**: neglected narrator in the books of rija’, as researched by al-Namazi in (Mustadrakat ‘ilm Rijal al-Hadith, vol 2, pg 148), after he mentions that he is in the chain of this narration.

2. **Hussein bin Burda**: neglected narrator, not mentioned in the books of rija’, as acknowledged by Shaykh al-Namazi in (Mustadrakat ‘ilm Rijal al-Hadith, vol 3, pg 103), and by the weakness of these 2 men, the path to Ismail bin Abdul Aziz is weakened from 2 angles.

3. **Ismail bin Abdul Aziz**: Nobody established his reliability (see: Mu’jam Rijal al-Hadith, vol 4, pg 65 – 66; Mustadrakat ‘ilm Rijal al-Hadith, vol 1, pg 648-649), and al-Burujerdi said about him in (Taraif al-Maqal, vol 2, pg 9) the following: « There exists no praise for him so that we can rely on him […] », and al-Shabestari acknowledged in (al-Faiq fi ruwat wa Ashab al-Imam al-Sadiq, vol 1, pg 172) that he is of unknown status, and there 4 people with this same name [Ismail bin Abdul Aziz] and all of them have this condition [of being unknown], so the narration is weak in its path to Ismail, while also Ismail himself has weakness.

The fourth form of this hadith is what al-Saffar mentioned in (Basair al-Darajat, pg 527), and what al-Hilli (9th century AH) transmitted in (Mukthasar al-Basair, pg 59, and al-Mukthasar, pg 65) and it states:

الحسن بن موسى الخشاب، عن إسماعيل بن مهران، عن عثمان بن جبلة، عن كامل التمّار، قال: كنت عند أبي عبد الله (as) ذات يوم، فقال لي: يا كامل، اجعلوا لنا ربّاً نؤوب إليه وقولوا فينا ما شئتم، قال: فقلت: نجعل لكم ربّاً تؤوبون إليه ونقول فيكم ما شئناً؟ قال: فاستوى جالساً فقال: ما عسى أن تقولوا، والله ما خرج إليكم من علمنا إلا ألف غير معطوفة

Al-Hassan Ibn Musa Al-Khashash, on the authority of Ismail bin Mahran On the authority of Othman bin Jableh, on the authority of Kamil Al-Tamar, he said: I was with Abu Abdullah (as) one day, and he said to me: Oh Kamil, Make for us a Lord that is returned to [active], and then say about us whatever you wish […]

This hadith also suffers from problems:

1. **It ends with Kamil bin al-‘Ala’-Tammar al-Kufi**, whom Shaykh al-Namazi al-Shahroodi – who is known for his observations and authentications – states about him in (Mustadrakat ‘ilm Rijal al-Hadith, vol 6, pg 297) that he is counted among the unknown narrators, while attempting to prove his goodness with a hadith like the one we quoted, claiming it implies his goodness.

2. **Uthman bin Jableh**, a neglected narrator who is not mentioned in the books of Rija’ nor his authentication (see: Mu’jam rija’ al-Hadith, vol 12, pg 116; Mustadrakat ‘ilm Rijal al-Hadith, vol 5, pg 212). And it is possible that he is ‘Uthman bin Jableh who is authenticated
by Ahlul Sunnah, who was associated with the division of Ibn al-Hajjaj, and was a contemporary to Imam al-Sadiq (as), and this raises doubt in this hadith here, in terms of the possibility that he [this narrator] wanted to say that Al-Sadiq (as) claims everything but divinity.

The fifth form of this hadith was transmitted by Rajab al-Bursi in (Mashariq Anwar al-Yaqeen, pg 257) which is from a long hadith on the authority of Salman and Abu Dharr, on the authority of Ali (as), that he said:

 فلا تدعونا (تجعلونا) أربابًا، وقولوا فينا (في فضلنا) ما شئتم (فإنّكم لا تبلغون كنه ما فينا ولا نهایته).

.. Do not call us (make us) Lords, and say about us (about our virtues) whatever you want [..]

Allamah al-Majlisi quoted it in (Bihar al-Anwar, vol 26, pg 6), where he said at the beginning of it:

أقول: ذكر والدي رحمه الله أنّه رأى في كتاب عتيق جمعه بعض محدثي أصحابنا في فضائل أمير المؤمنين عليه السلام هذا الخبر، ووجدته أيضاً في كتاب عتيق مشتمل على أخبار كثيرة.

I [Baqir al-Majlisi] say: My father [Taqi al-Majlisi], may God have mercy on him, mentioned that he saw this hadith in an old book compiled by some of our companions, whom are speakers of the virtues of the Commander of the Faithful (as), and I also found it in an old book that includes many reports [..]

It is clear that this hadith in this form (and it may be the same as with the previous ahadith but narrated by meaning) appeared – according to what is in our hands of information – in the 9th century AH, and that Allamah al-Majlisi quotes it from old books whom even he himself doesn’t know the author of, adding to not knowing whether he received them in a reliable way, all of this in addition to that there is no explanation for the source of this hadith, and there is no foundational chain for it.

Also we have what was stated in the the Tafseer attributed to Imam al-Askari (as):

 وقال أمير المؤمنين عليه السلام: لا تتجاوزوا بنا العبوديّة، ثم قولوا ما شئتم، ولن تبلغوا، وإيّاكم والغلو كغلو النصارى، فإنني بريء من الغالين.

The Commander of the Faithful (as), said: Do not exceed with us (any more than) the servitude (to Allah), then you can say whatever you like, and you will never be reaching (our description). And beware of the exaggeration like the exaggeration of the Christians, for I am disavowed from the exaggerators.

As mentioned in (Tafseer al-Askari, pg 50; and its quoted in al-Ihtijaj, vol 2, pg 438).
It is well known that Tafseer al-Askari in its entirety is narrated through a path that ends with both Abu Ya'qub Yusef bin Muhammad bin Ziyad and Abu al-Hasan Ali bin Muhammad bin Sayyar, and they are **two men of unknown status**, rather, very neglected (see: Mu'jam Rijal al-Hadith, vol 13, pg 157 & vol 21, pg 186) And this amount of neglect, results in there being **no value to the entire book**.

Hence, this tafsir did not gain much importance among the Shias, and some of our scholars declared it as being fabricated and a lie, Sayed al-Khoei says:

 إنّ الناظر في هذا التفسير لا يشك في أنه موضوع، وجِلَّ مقام عالم محقق أن يكتب مثل هذا التفسير، فكيف بالإمام عليه السلام!

Someone who looks into this tafseer would not doubt that it is a fabrication, even a learned scholar wouldn’t write something like this tafseer, so let alone the Imam (as)!

*Mu'jam Rijal al-Hadith, vol 13, pg 157*

And the unreliability of this tafsir in its entirety is also attributed to:

- Ibn al-Ghadhaeri
- Allamah al-Hilli
- al-Tafrishi
- Muhaqiq al-Damad
- Al-Astarabadi, author of Manhaj al-Maqal
- Muhaqiq al-Ardebili
- Sheikh Muhammad Jawad al-Balaghi
- Muhaqiq al-Tustari
- Mirza Al-Sha’rani
- Sayed Hashem al-Khwansari
- and others…

And also what came in the form of:

ٍإياكم والغلوّ فينا، قولوا: إنّا عبيد مربوبون، وقولوا في فضلنا ما شئتم...  

I admonish you against exaggerating about us. You should say that we are servants of God, but say about our virtues whatever you want. [..]

In (al-Khisal by Shaykh al-Saduq, pg 614) and in the chain for this narration [which exists only in al-Khisal] there is Al-Qasim bin Yahya and Al-Hassan bin Rashid, and **they were not authenticated**.

And also what came in the supplication of Rajab saying:

لا فرق بينك وبينها إلاّ أنهم عبادك وخلقك
There is no difference between Thee and them, save that they are Thy servants and Thy creation

Misbah al-Mutahajid, pg 803

Sheikh al-Tusi did not mention a chain of narrators for this supplication in the first place, but Sayed Ibn Tawus transmitted this narration while saying:

And among the supplications for every day of Rajab, which we also narrated from my grandfather Abu Ja’far al-Tusi (ra) and he said: ‘A group told me, on the authority of Ibn Ayyash, that he said: From what came out at the hands of the great Sheikh Abi Ja’far Muhammad bin ‘Uthman Bin Saeed (ra), what Khair bin Abdullah informed me about, […]’

Iqbal al-A’mal, vol 3, pg 214

Here, in addition to not knowing the group that told Sheikh al-Tusi, this Ibn Ayyash is far from being Muhammad bin Masoud bin Ayyash the trustworthy narrator; because he is seperated more than two layers from Sheikh al-Tusi. Also, it is far from being Aba Bakr bin Ayyash; as he is from the layer of Imam al-Sadiq (as), so how would he have narrated from al-’Amri [the first deputy] from Imam al-Mahdi?!

It is possible that he was Aba Abdullah bin Ayyash, who is Muhmal [Untraceable in Rijal works].

But it is more correct that it is Ahmed bin Muhammad bin Obaidullah bin Al-Hassan bin Ayyash bin Ibrahim bin Ayoub al-Jawhari, who Sheikh al-Najashi said about him:

He heard the hadith and more and was confused at the end of his life … I met this Sheikh, and he was a friend of me and my father, and I heard many things from him, and I saw our Shaykhs weaken him, so I did not narrate anything from him, and avoided him.

Rijal al-Najashi, pg 85-86
And Sheikh al-Tusi, who narrated it from him with a group as intermediary, also said about him:

كان سمع الحديث وأكثر، واختلّ في آخر عمره

He heard the hadith and more, he became confused at the end of his life

Al-Fehrest, pg 79

Conclusion

These are the narrations that flow into the basic direct idea of the topic, and it has been shown that all of them are weak in chain, in fact a part of the narrations has no chain at all, and the important ones are the ones by al-Saffar and al-Khisal, so if we confine our attention to the narrations that appeared in the first seven centuries after Hijri, we will see that what is hadith is nothing but – at best – seven reports, of whom 5 are musnad [have a full chain], and all of them are weak by their chain, none of them from the main books among the Shia except the narration of al-Saffar and the narration of al-Khisal, and with all this weakness in the chains, and with the presence of this small number of narrations, is it possible to call this narration mutawatir [widely narrated], as mentioned by some contemporaries (may Allah preserve them) ?!

And if this narration has tawatur, then what are the narrations that don't have tawatur ?! [implying that by this standard, MANY narrations have tawatur]

And if this [little] amount of narrations is sufficient for reassurance of its issuance, then what is a solitary speculative report ?!

Is this the method of the scholars in jurisprudential and authentication sciences where they get reassurance of its issuance from this amount of weak reports?!

How can reassurance of its issuance take place with the possibility that these narrations are fabricated by some of the ghulat [exaggerators] ? Is this not a matter that possibly affects the strength of this narration?

Is it not possible for there to be common interests among the ghulat [exaggerators] to establish such hadiths in order to justify everything they wanted to say about the Ahlulbayt (as) ?!

So with the presence of this atmosphere, how can there be tawatur or a reassurance of its issuance, in addition to the absence of a report by a trustworthy narrators so one could argue by this?!
Especially the content of the hadith is extremely dangerous and establishes an absolutely unusual ideological view.

**Scholars**

Sayed al-Khoei

He has suggested a different interpretation than what is the famous understanding of this hadith nowadays, his view being that the hadith intends to prove their infallibility, and that we don’t need this hadith to prove this meaning, he gives this interpretation under the premise that the narration was reliable, and if it is weak, we cast it away:

They [the Imams] do not need to be excused from the attributes of the Lord which are specific to him, because save those attributes, they are described by all attributes of perfection that humanity can attain in its [innate] sacred capacity. They are also excused from what is unworthy of an infallible creation, from the mistakes and sins, and we don’t need a narration to establish this meaning, if it was mu’tabar [reliable], and we will cast it away if it is weak and not reliable, and Allah knows best

*Sirat al-Najat, vol 2, pg 452*

Sayed Ja’far Murtadha al-‘Amili

this narration does not have – from what we have seen of its texts and chains – a valid chain for us to rely on.. so review its texts in Basair al-Darjat and Bihar and others

*Mukhtasar Mufeed, vol 13, pg 52*

Sayed al-Burujeardi

Just as Sayed al-Zanjani (ha) quoted the strong condemnation for this hadith by Sayed al-Burujeardi, in a meeting with Imam Khomeini. A translation of what he said:
Where is this hadith? What words do you say?!

Al-Nikah, vol 2, pg 625, Margin No. 1

Sayed Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr

The first aspect: A narration like this one does not have a complete chain, and in addition it is not established at all, as the inference of it – as is well known among the people – is not permissible.

The second aspect: It is tarnished by its expression in it: (And excuse us from Divinity), whereas Divinity is perfection and greatness, and excusing is in connection to deficiency, negativity, and immorality, so this indicates the weakness of its foundation and issuance at all.

Adhwa ‘ala thawrat al-Hussain (as), pg 150

Final words

According to the criteria of the scholars who view that the narration is weak, this hadith is contradicted by the majority of Imami scholars in the first nine centuries. No Shi’ite scholar in these centuries – except rarely – denies that; it is permissible to believe that the infallible can forget, or for the infallible to not know the unseen absolutely [absolute ‘ilm al ghayb], or that wilaya al takwiniya is not established for them, or the lack of establishment for the karamat and miracles that allegedly stem from it, or otherwise, and it is rare to find a Shiite scholar in these first ten centuries, who stated that the Prophet ﷺ and his Ahlulbayt (as) have all the qualities of perfection absolutely except divinity.

And if there are the likes of Sheikh Rajab Al-Bursi then we hope for you to mention their names and texts to us, so that we can see their words regarding the meaning of this hadith here with the meaning that is intended by those who take this hadith, and if this hadith was acceptable to them or mutawatir in meaning as it was said by some, it would
have been the basis for each research that revolves around the perfection of the infallible, and they would’ve referred to this narration when they needed to prove complete perfection of the infallible, although we do not find this hadith mentioned in the books of theology of the Shia except very rarely, and only among the muta’akhireen which is only at most 300 years ago, so pay close attention to this matter, that this hadith isn’t relied on in the Shia theology heritage.

The result is that by combining our previous points, and according to most of them, this hadith is not reliable, rather there is no evidence for the validity of its meaning either, but its content is contrary – according to my minor understanding – of the Noble Qur’an, the Noble Sunnah, facts of history, and the knowledge regarding this matter is with God.