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Home > The Emendation of A Shi'ite Creed > 20. Concerning Souls and Spirits (Al-Arwah wa 'n-Nufus)

20. Concerning Souls and Spirits (Al-Arwah wa 'n-Nufus)

ash-Shaykh Abu Ja'far says: "Our belief concerning souls is that they are spirits, and that they were the first of created things; and that they were created for eternal existence; and that they bodies." are strangers in the earth and imprisoned in their ash-Shaykh Abu 'Abdillah says that Abu Ja'far's discussion of souls and spirits is based upon conjecture with no scientific investigation. It would have been wiser had he contented himself with the mere mention of the reports, without involving himself in intricacies of inner meaning, since he is not well- equipped for such a task.

As for 'soul'1, it has different meanings:

- I. The essence of a thing (dhatu 'sh-shay');
- 2. The moving blood (ad-damu 's-sail);
- 3. The breath which is the wind (an-nafas);
- 4. Desire and passion (al-hawa).

Now, the proof of the first meaning is the saying: "This is the very thing itself, that is, its essence and it itself." And the proof of the second meaning is the saying: "Whatsoever is classified as an animal with circulating blood is to be judged thus and thus." And the proof of the third meaning is the saying: "So–and–so has perished, if he ceases to breathe and no air remains in his body to inflate his lungs."

And the proof of the fourth meaning is the speech of Allah;

Surely, the soul of man incites to evil [12:53],

which means passion instigates evil. Soul (nafs) might designate the meaning of retribution, the proof of which is the saying of Allah, the Almighty:

And Allah biddeth you beware of Him (nafsahu) [3:28],

which means 'of His retribution and punishment.'

Ruh (i.e., Spirit), also has several meaning:

- 1. Life (hayat);
- 2. Qur'an:
- 3. A particular one of the angels of the Almighty Allah (malak);
- 4. Jibril.

Now, the proof of the first meaning is the saying: "Everything that is classified as being endued with spirit is to be judged thus and thus," by which they mean every being that has life, and their saying in respect of him who died, "he gave up the Ghost", (lit. the spirit went out of him), which means his life. And the same is their description of the embryo, "a form not endued with spirit", which means that it lacks life.

And the proof of the second meaning is the speech of Allah:

So We have revealed to thee a spirit of Our command [42:52],

which means here the Qur'an. And the proof of the third meaning is the speech of the Almighty:

Upon the day when the spirit and the angels stand in ranks [78:38].

And the proof of the fourth meaning is the saying of the Almighty: Say,

"The Holy Spirit has revealed it" [16: 102],

that is, Jibril, peace be upon him.

As for the narrations which Abu Ja'far reports, that souls were created two thousand years before the bodies; and that those of them who were acquainted with each other are intimate, and those who were strangers to each other are disparate2, it is, in fact, an ahad tradition and a report unsupported except by one narrator.

Nevertheless, it bears an interpretation which differs from that adopted by those who are not acquainted with the fact of the matter. Hence, the sound interpretation is that Allah, the Exalted, created the angels two thousand years before mankind; then those amongst them who were acquainted with each other before the creation of men are also intimate after the creation of men;

whereas those among them who were strangers to each other before, are also strangers after the creation of men. Then, the reality is far from what is maintained by the adherents of transmigration. This specious doctrine has crept into the Hashwites in the ranks of the Shi'ah; who erroneously alleged that our beings which are subject to the commands and prohibitions of Allah were created in the world of

atoms ('alamu 'dh- dhar), and that they were acquainted with each other and endued with the faculties of discernment, comprehension and speech; then Allah created bodies for them after that and put them together.

(Do they not realize) that if this were so, then we would know the state which we occupied before, and that if it were recalled to us, we would remember it and nothing of it would be hidden from us? Do you not realize that if someone was brought up in a place and settled there for a year, and then turned away from it to a second place, he will never forget what he knows about it; and that if he forgets it through absent– mindedness, it would be easy for him to remember it if he was reminded of it?

If this was so, then would it be probable that one of us, who was born in Baghdad and settled there for twenty years and then immigrated to another place, would forget all that happened to him at Baghdad even if he were reminded of it in detail? In fact, this is an assumption which no one endowed with reason will make.

It would have been wiser for those who are not well-equip- ped for such a task to deal with the subject without applying any discussion. What Abu Ja'far, may Allah have mercy upon him, maintained about spirits and souls is unwittingly the actual doctrine of transmigration. So, he committed a fearful crime against himself and others.

As for his opinion regarding the perpetuity of the soul, it is, indeed, a statement to be castigated, since it contradicts the plain meaning of the Qur'an. Allah, the Almighty, says:

All that dwells upon the earth is transient, and none endures for ever but the Face of thy Lord, Majestic, and Splendid [55:26-27].

Thus, what he narrated and erroneously assumed is, in fact, the doctrine of the majority of the heretical philosophers who maintain the eternity of the soul and its incorruptibility and perpetuity, and advocate the opinion that the soul abides, and that it is only the body that undergoes degeneration and corruption.

The same opinion was held by some of the adherents of transmigration, who claim that souls recur perpetually in different forms and bodies, and that neither are they contingent nor will they corrupt or be annihilated. This is one of the most monstrous claims and far removed from the truth. Comparable to it in wickedness and error is the charge of the Nasibah3 (that)4 these are the real doctrines of all the Shi'ah; on the strength of which they brand them with heresy.

Thus, if those who gave authority to such traditions had been aware of the dangers that lay in them, they would never have affirmed them. However, the indiscriminating of our companions, who are incapable of accurate judgment and sound comprehension, often accept the traditions at their face value without checking their authority, and do not distinguish between the true and the absurd without realizing what follows from accepting them or comprehending the real meaning of what they affirm.

What has been affirmed by (genuine) traditions in this respect is that souls after death are of two kinds: those which proceed to reward or punishment; and those which are abolished and therefore known neither reward nor punishment.

A tradition has been related from as-Sadiq, peace be upon him, which confirms and clarifies this interpretation. He was asked: "What will happen to the spirit of the dead? and where will it abide?" He replied: "The dead are of two categories: (a) either purely faithfully, or (b) purely wicked; then the spirits of each passes from his body (lit. house-haykal) to its like, and each is rewarded for its acts till the Day of Resurrection.

On the Day of Ressurrection Allah will restore his body and insert his spirit into it, and call him to accept the final judgment for his deeds. The spirit of the faithful will pass from his dead body to a similar form, and abide in a paradise of Allah, where he will enjoy a perpetual grace till the Day of Resurrection.

But the unbeliever's spirit will pass to a form similar to itself and abide in fire and torture till the Day of Resurrection. And that this is the lot of the believer is proved by the speech of Allah: It was said: "Enter paradise". He said:

"Ah! Would my people had knowledge that my Lord has forgiven me . . . " [36:26-27].

And that the unbeliever's state is as has been mentioned is proved by the speech of Allah:

The Fire, to which they shall be exposed morning and evening, and on the Day when the Hour is come*: "Admit the people of Pharaoh into the most terrible chastisement!" [40:46]5.

Thus, He, the Exalted, tells that a believer, after his death as he is admitted to paradise, says: "Ah! Would that my people had knowledge that . . ." Also, He relates that an unbeliever is admitted to chastisement after his death and that he is tortured morning and evening until the Day of Resurrection he will be made to abide in Hell.

As for him who falls into oblivion (man yulha 'anhu), his spirit will be destroyed after the decomposition of his body; thus, he will be aware of nothing till the Day of Resurrection. This is the state of those who are neither purely faithful nor purely wicked. Allah Almighty speaks of their state and says:

He of them who was fairest in the way will say: "You have tarried only a day" [20: 104].

Thus, He demonstrates that a certain group of people on the Day of Resurrection will not remember how long they were in the tombs, so that some will assume that they were in them ten days, and some will suppose a day only. This, of course, cannot be the state of those who have been tortured or blessed until the Day of Resurrection, since he who has enjoyed perpetual pleasure or punishment will not forget the treatment he experienced, not will he be uncertain about it in his life after death.

It was related from Abu'Abdillah, peace be upon him, that he said: "Only those who are purely faithful or

purely unbelievers will be questioned in the grave, whereas the others will fall into oblivion." He said con- cerning the second coming (ar-raj'ah): "Those who will return at the coming of the Qaim (the Holder), peace be upon him, will be only those who are purely faithful or purely unbelievers; as for the others, there will be no return until the Day of Resurrection."

Also, our companions are of different opinions concerning the question of what is the subject of bliss or punishment. Some are of the opinion that the subject of the eternal bliss or punishment is the spirit to which are addressed the commandments, prohibitions and legal obligations, and they call it a 'substance' (jawhar), others say that spirit is the same life which enters a body which is the replica of that of its lifetime on earth.

Both suggestions are, in fact, conceivable by reason, but the more likely, to my mind, is the one which defines the spirit as 'the substance which Allah commands' (al-jawharu 'l-mukhatab), and this is what the philosophers name 'the simple' (al-basit). It has been related in the traditions that the prophets, peace be upon them, in particular, and the Imams, peace be upon them, after them will be translated to the heavens both body and spirit, where they will enjoy the Divine bliss in their earthly bodies which they inhabited in the lifetime.

But this is a privilege restricted to the Proofs of Allah (Hujaj Allah) only. Also, it is related from the Holy Prophet, peace be upon him and his progeny, that: "He who prays for me by my tomb I will hear him, and he who prays for me from a remote place, his prayer will reach me." He, peace be upon him and his progeny, said: "He who prays for me once, I will pray for him ten times, and he who prays for me ten times I will pray for him a hundred times, then let your prayers for me be many or few." Thus he, peace be upon him and his progeny, made it clear that after he had left the world he would hear the prayer devoted to him, a fact which implies that he is alive with Allah, the Almighty.

The state of the Imams (lit. the Righteous Guides) is the same as those who hear the prayers of a Muslim close at hand or receive his prayer if far away. This is affirmed by sound narrations related on authority. Allah Almighty says:

Account not those who were slain in Allah's way as dead, nay they are alive [3:169].

It has been related from the Holy Prophet, peace be upon him and his progeny, that he stood by the pit of Badr and addressed the unbelievers' corpses, who were slain and thrown into a pit: "You were an evil kinsfolk to the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him and his progeny), you drove him out of his home and chased him away; then you flocked to fight against him. I have found that what my Lord promised me is true; have you found that what your lord promised you is true?"6

'Umar exclaimed, "O Messenger of Allah! What wis- dom is there in addressing mouldering corpses?" Thereupon he replied: "Hush, O son of al-Khattab! I swear by Allah that you do not hear me better than they do, and nothing prevents the angels from clothing them with iron, but my turning my face from them like this."

It is related from 'Ali ibn Abi Talib, the Commander of the Believers, peace be upon him, that after the battle of Basrah7 terminated, he began to inspect the ranks till he came across the corpse of Ka'b ibn Sur8 – *(he was appointed a judge over Basrah by 'Umar ibn al–Khattab and continued to hold office throughout the reigns of 'Umar and 'Uthman [ibn 'Affan]; when the civil war broke out at Basrah, he hung the Qur'an round his neck and incited all his family to fight the Commander of the Believers and they were all slain)* 9.

The Commander of the Believers asked that the corpse be raised by the help of two men. Then he addressed the body and said: "0 Ka'b ibn Sur! I have found that what my Lord promised me is true. Did you find that what your lord promised you was true?" Then he asked that the body be laid aside and went on a little; then he came across the slain body of Talhah ibn 'Ubaydillah, and asked that the body be raised, then addressed it and said: "OTalhah! I have found that what my Lord promised me is true. Did you find that what your lord promised you was true?"

Then he ordered the body to be laid aside. A man exclaimed: "O Commander of the Believers! What was the wisdom of talking to two slain bodies who were unable to follow you?" Thereupon he said: "By Allah, O men! They heard me as the people of the pit (qalib) heard the speech of the Messenger of Allah." Thus, this is one of the narrations which affirm that some of those who die will have their spirits restored to them to enjoy bliss or suffer punishment of the grave; yet this is only an exception and not a general rule which applies to all the dead.

- 1. N reads, qala ash-Shaykh Abu 'Abdillah 'alayhi 'r-rahmah, amma 'n-nafs
- 2. See al-Bukhari, as-Sahih, "Kitabu 'l-Anbiya', "Babu 'l-arwah junud mujan- nadah", no.1; Muslim, as-Sahih, "Kitabu 'l-birr wa 's-silah wa 'l-adab". Tradition no.159.
- <u>3.</u> Nawasib: An appelation used by the Shi'ah to designate those who refuse any pre-eminence to 'Ali ibn Abi Talib (a.s.), sometimes applied to the orthodox indiscriminately. Friedlaender, I., says that "Originally, Nawasib stood for the exact reverse of Rawafid: the 'enemies' or 'haters' of 'Ali, and was confined to the extreme Kharijites. Gradually, its meaning expanded so that it finally embraced all the Sunnites, however far they were from hating 'Ali." (The Heterodoxies of the Shi'ites in the Presentation of Ibn Hazm, vol.2, p. 156). See also, Ibn Manzur, Lisanu 'I-'Arab, vol.I, p.762.
- 4. T, shana'a bihi 'n Nasibah; N, ma shana'a . . .
- 5. * * Not found in N.
- 6. See Ibn Hisham, as-Sirah, Eng. transl. by Guillaume, A., p.306.
- 7. Harbu 'l-Basrah, also called Harbu 'l-Jamal, because 'Aishah, the wife of the Prophet, was mounting a camel, around which the battle was con- centrated. Harbu 'l-Jamal was the first civil war in Islam which took place between Amiru 'l-Mu'minin, 'Ali ibn Abi Talib (a.s.), and Talhah ibn'Ubaydillah, az-Zubayr ibn al-'Awwam and 'Aishah. See at-Tabari, at-Tarikh, vol.1, pt.6, p.3078; Ibnu 'l-Athir, al-Kamil, vol.3, p.165; Ibn Kathir, al-Bidayah, vol.7, p.229; al-Maqdisi, al-Bad' wa 't-tarikh, vol.5, p.211.
- <u>8.</u> Ka'b ibn Sur: (It is written 'Surah' which is a mistake.) A companion, who was sent by 'Umar as a judge to Basrah. He is known to be a man of extreme piety who would pray thoughout the night and fast the whole day; thereupon, his wife complained of him to the Caliph who ordered him to be moderate in his worship and observe his family obligations.

It is reported that he was one of those who refrained from fighting in the early stages of the Battle of Camel (i'tazala 'I fitnah) and shut himself inside a cottage; later on, under the pressure of 'Aishah, he came out displaying his Qur'an in an effort to make peace between the two camps, but was shot down by a stray arrow. See Ibn Sa'd, at-Tabaqat, vol.7, p.65.[Ka'b ibn Sur was not a companion of the Holy Prophet, and he had not heard anything from the Holy Prophet or met him. He was

only a tabiʻi. See Ibn ʻAbdi '1-Barr, al-Istiʻab, vol.3, pp.1318-9; Ibnu 'l-Athir, Usdu 'l- ghabah, vol.4, pp.242-3; Ibn Hajar, al-Isabah, vol.3, pp.314-5. Ibn Saʻd mentions him as a tabiʻi from Basrah who was the companion of 'Umar ibn al-Khattab (ed.)]

9. * * Not found in N.

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