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22. The Belief concerning the questioning in the Grave

*Abu Ja'far says: "Our belief concerning the questioning in the grave is that it is true."*1Abu 'Abdillah ash-Shaykh al-Mufid, may Allah have mercy upon him, adds that what is mentioned by Abu Ja'far does not tell all that should be told about the questioning and its purpose; what should be mentioned in this respect is what I am going to establish by the will of Allah, the Exalted.

The genuine narrations which have been handed down from the Holy Prophet, peace be upon him and his progeny are to the effect that the angels will descend to men in the grave and question them regarding their faith. It is noteworthy that the different reports have a common tone.

One of these runs thus: After death two angels of Allah, the Sublime, named Munkar and Nakir, come to the dead man and question him regarding his Lord, his Prophet his faith and his Imam; if he answers according to the truth, they deliver him to the angels of bliss, and if he falters, they deliver him to the angels of punishment.

Yet, some other reports name the two angels – who come to the unbeliever – Munkar and Nakir, whereas those who come to the believer are called Mubashshir and Bashir. It has been related that the two angels sent to the unbeliever are named thus, because he denies the truth, rejects and scorns what they bring him.

The two angels sent to the believer are named Mubashshir and Bashir because they bring him glad tidings and eternal reward from the Almighty Allah. Moreover, these two names are not their personal names, but designate their acts. These, however, are reports close to each other in content, and of which the meaning is easily conceivable, yet Allah, the Exalted, knows best the truth of it.

We have also mentioned above that the only people whom the two angels will question are those who are purely faithful or completely infidels, whereas all others will fall into oblivion. This is confirmed by the traditions handed down on this matter, and this is why we mentioned the above statement about it.

Chapter: (In point of fact) the two angels will question only him who is alive and him who can understand the content of the question, and is capable of conceiving its meaning. This is clear evidence that Allah, the Almighty, will quicken the dead servant for questioning, and thereafter his life may be perpetuated for eternal grace, if he deserves grace, or for ever–lasting punishment, if he deserves this; let us seek refuge in Allah from His wrath, and let us beg His help to perform what He pleases.

The purpose for which the two angels descend and question the servant is that Allah, the Almighty, will entrust the servant, after his death, to the angels of grace or punishment; they cannot discern what the servant is except as Allah has instructed them. And of the two angels, who come to the servant, one is from the angels of grace and the other is from the angels of punishment.

When they descend to him, they will discern his state by questioning him. Thus, if his answers are satisfactory and deserving of Divine Grace, charge of him will devolve upon the angel of grace, whereas the angel of punishment will abandon him. And if he shows signs of deserving punishment, then he will be in the care of the angel of torment, whereas the angel of grace will abandon him.

Also, it has been related that the angels appointed for reward and punishment are other than those who are appointed for questioning, and that the two angels of grace and punishment will be informed of what the servant deserves by the two angels of questioning, who have the task of questioning the servant and ascertaining what he deserves; they relate this to the angels of retribution and then they ascend to their post in heaven. These narrations are all permissible, yet we do not prefer one to another; since they are of similar import, and since our procedure, in such cases, is to be cautious and non-committal.

Chapter: The purpose for which Allah, the Sublime, entrusts these tasks to the angels of questioning and the angels of punishment and grace, is that they worship Him through this, as is the case with the angels who show their worship through keeping record of the acts of mankind, inscribing, abrogating them and lifting the record (to Allah), and as is the case with those who serve Allah by preserving humanity from harm, or those who are commissioned to destroy the nations, or those who bear the Throne, or those who circumambulate the Ever–prosperous House (al–Baytu '1–Ma'mur), or those who glorify Him or those who are charged with asking forgiveness for the faithful, or those who are employed in showing grace to the people of Paradise, or those who are assigned to torture the people of Hell.

Thus, all worship Him to gain His grace and they do not serve Him in vain2; as men and jinn do not serve Him for play. But all worship Him, looking to His reward, or that He should make Him- self known to them, or to show their thanks to Him, Who favored them with His favors. For Allah is able to punish him who deserves it, or to shower His grace upon him who merits it without mediators, for the reasons given above, and for the Divine wisdom as has been shown.

The position of the two angels who will come and question the dead after their departure from this world is a theme attested by textual proof (as-sam'), whereas the question of Allah quickening the dead at the time of questioning is a theme proved by reason, since questioning the dead or inquiring of an inanimate

body is inconceivable, because speech is only valid with a rational being, capable of understanding speech, and approving it, and thereby bearing the responsibility for what was within his power.

Yet it has been related that to everyone subject to questioning, life will be restored after death, that he may be capable of understanding what is addressed to him; thus the reports which are related confirm what has been proved by reason. And even if we lack traditions, then the proof of reason is, indeed, sufficient in this respect.

- 1. * * Not found in N.
- 2. T, wa ta'abbuduhum bidhalika liyuthibahum 'alayha N, wa 't-ta'abbudu bidhalika liyuthibahum 'ala 'l-a'mali 'l-lati yuadduna biha 't-taklif kamata'abbada 'l-bashar wa 'l-jinn bi 'l-a'mal liyuthibahum 'alayha . . .

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