

2) The Miracle And The Long Life

Up to now we have seen that the prolongation of life is scientifically possible. But let us suppose that it is not, that the process of old-age and decrepitude is quite rigid, that it cannot either now or in the long run overcome nor alter its conditions or circumstances – what will this mean? It will mean that the prolongation of human life – as is the case of Noah, or al-Mahdi – runs contrary to the natural laws which science confirmed thanks to modern instruments of experimentation. Thus this condition becomes a miracle that has hindered the applicability of a natural law under a certain circumstances, in order to preserve the life of a particular individual whose role is to cherish the Divine message.

Yet this is not the only miracle of its kind, nor is it remote from a Muslim's faith, which derives from the Qur'an and the sunnah. Moreover the process of old-age is no more rigid than is the process of the passage of heat from a body of higher temperature to another of lower temperature until both of them become equal. This had occurred in the case of Ibrahim (peace be upon him) when the only way to preserve his life was by hindering that process, when it was said to the fire in which he was thrown:

قُلْنَا يَا نَارُ كُونِي بَرْدًا وَسَلَامًا عَلَىٰ إِبْرَاهِيمَ

We said, "O fire be cool on Ibrahim and keep him safe." (Qur'an, 21:69)

So, he emerged from it safe and unharmed. There are also other cases where natural laws were hindered to protect some of the prophets or Proofs of Allah on earth. When the sea was split for Musa (Moses), when the Romans were misled in thinking they had caught 'Isa (Jesus) or when Muhammad (peace and blessing of Allah be upon him and his progeny) left his house, while it was surrounded by the troops of Quraysh who were waiting for hours to attack him but Allah, the Exalted, hid him from their eyes while he was walking in their midst. All of these cases show a hindrance of the laws of nature to protect an individual, whom the Divine wisdom wished to preserve. Therefore, why not include here the process of old-age and decrepitude?

From this we can deduce a general notion, which is that whenever the preservation of the Prophet's life (the Proof of Allah on earth) depends on the hindrance of a natural law, and the prolongation of his life

comes to be necessary for the performance of his task, Divine care then intervenes by delaying the process so that the task of that individual can be accomplished. On the other hand, once the Divine mission of that individual has been fulfilled he either dies naturally or as a martyr depending on what is determined by natural laws.

Thus we find ourselves confronted with the present question in connection with this general notion: How can the process be obstructed? How can the necessary correlation that exists between natural phenomena, be sundered? Does it not contradict science, which discovered the existence of that natural law or process and defined that necessary correlation on experimental and deductive bases?

The answer is that science has already solved the problem by giving up the idea of necessity as far as natural laws are concerned. To clarify this we can say that science discovers natural laws through systematic observations and experiments. For example, when the occurrence of a natural phenomenon is followed another one, we deduce from this a natural law which is: that whenever the first phenomenon comes into existence it is automatically followed by another phenomenon.

However, science does not propose a necessary correlation between the two phenomena stemming from their nature, since necessity is an invisible condition that experimentation and the instruments of scientific and inductive inquiry cannot demonstrate. Therefore, the logic of modern science emphasizes that natural law – as it is defined by science – does not indicate a necessary correlation, but an uninterrupted connection, between two phenomena. But when the miracle occurs and separates one from the other, it does not mean that their correlation was sundered.

The truth of the matter is that the miracle, in its religious sense, has become, in the light of modern scientific logic, more understandable than before, under the classical view of causal correlation. This old view assumed that every two phenomena, in which one is followed automatically by the other must have a necessary correlation, which means that it is impossible to separate one from the other. However, this correlation has been transformed thanks to modern scientific logic into a law of correlation or of consecutive succession between two phenomena without the hypothesis of invisible necessity.

Thereby the miracle becomes an exceptional condition with regard to this connective succession without running against a necessity or leading to an impossibility.

So, in the light of the logical foundation of induction we agree with the modern point of view which says that induction does not demonstrate the existence of a necessary correlation between two phenomena. We find that it shows that there is a common interpretation for the consecutive connection between the two. Since this common interpretation can be formed on the basis of the assumption of subjective necessity, it can also be formed on the assumption of a wisdom that made the Creator of the universe to continuously combine some particular phenomena with others. The same wisdom sometimes calls for exception; thus a miracle occurs.

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