

30. Concerning the descent of revelation (Nuzulu 'I-Wahy)

Ash-Shaykh Abu Ja'far, may Allah have mercy upon him, says *on the descent of revelation that*¹ , "Our belief concerning this is that there is a Tablet between the two eyes of Israfil . . ." ash-Shaykh al-Mufid, may Allah have mercy upon him, says that Abu Ja'far depends in this matter on a shadhhdh tradition which is not generally accepted. Moreover, he has mentioned previously that the Tablet is an angel of Allah, the Almighty.

Wahy, originally, means a hushed speech; it might also bear the meaning of any speech which is intended to be understood by the hearer privately and by no one else, and directed at him and to no one else. But if it is applied to Allah, the Sublime, then according to the usage of Islam and the law of the Prophet, peace be upon him and his progeny, it signifies what has been reserved for the messengers, peace be upon them, alone and is not given to others.

Allah, the Sublime, says:

So We revealed to Moses's mother, "Suckle him . . ." [28:7];

thereupon Muslims unanimously agreed that the revelation in this case was a vision, or a speech addressed to and heard by Moses's mother alone, when she was asleep. And Allah, the Sublime, says:

And thy Lord revealed unto the bees [16:68],

which means a secret illumination, since it is restricted to the bees, and the bees are acquainted with it without a speech proclaimed loudly by the speaker in order to be heard by others. And Allah, the Sublime, says:

Surely the devils inspire their friends [6:121],

which means that they whisper to their friends through what they introduce into their inmost hearing, by which means they inform privately without telling it abroad. And He, the Exalted, says:

He came forth unto his people from the sanctuary and inspired them [19:11],

which means that he commanded them without the utterance of words. He likened this (i.e., his signal to them) to revelation in being hidden from others and secret from them.

Allah, the Exalted, (might give illumination to many of His creatures in their dreams, the interpretation of which may be proved sound and their truth established, yet they cannot be specified as revelation, since the shari'ah has been settled once and for all. Also, it is not permissible to say of those who are inspired with the knowledge of something that Allah has revealed it to them.

Also (according to our tenets) Allah, the Almighty might inspire the proofs after His Prophet, peace be upon him and his progeny, with speech which descends to them, revealing what will be, but still it cannot be called revelation for the reasons given above, which confirms that the general consensus of the learned Muslims is that no revelation can descend on anyone after our Prophet, may Allah bless him and his progeny and grant him salvation. Therefore, none of these things which we mentioned can be called a revelation to anyone, since it is for Allah, the Exalted, to permit the use of the term at one time and forbid it at another, sometimes to prohibit it and to allow it to others. As for its significance, it never departs from its true meaning as given above.

Chapter: As for the revelation from Allah, the Most High, to His Messenger, may Allah bless him and his progeny, it was conveyed to him, sometimes without an intermediary, and some- times from the lips of the angels who transmitted it to him. What Abu Ja'far, may Allah have mercy upon him, has mentioned concerning the Tablet and the Pen, and what he confirmed on this matter, has only one tradition supporting it.

Yet we do not rely on it, nor do we affirm its authenticity, and we testify only to that which we know, since the tradition is not mutawatir, nor is it confirmed by the consensus of opinion, nor does the Qur'an proclaim it, nor is it established by a Proof (an imam) of Allah, the Almighty, that it would be considered tenable. And the best course is to reserve judgment on it, and to allow it without affirming it or declaring it sound definitively, and keep it within the bounds of possibility. As for the certainty with which Abu Ja'far affirms it and his belief in it, this is nothing but blind imitation, and far be it from us to imitate (anything) blindly.

1. * * Not found in N.

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