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4. Metonym and Metaphor (in the Qur'an)

Abu Ja'far, may Allah have mercy upon him, has said, concerning the interpretation of the Speech of Allah, the Exalted:

(O Iblis!) What prevented thee from prostrating thyself before that I created with My two hands (yadayy)? [38:75].

(By 'two hands'), He means 'My strength and My power (qudrati wa quwwati).'

Abu 'Abdillah (al-Mufid) says: This is not correct1, since it involves repetition in meaning and implies that Allah says: 'By My strength, by My strength', or 'By My power, by My power', because literally 'strength' is equivalent to 'power', and vice versa, and there is no meaning in such a statement.

The correct explanation is that advanced above concerning grace (lutf); consequently, the verse signifies, 'Allah's double grace in this world and the world hereafter'. In the same way, the ba in Allah's saying (bi yadayya), 'with My two hands', stands for (lam), as if Allah has said: "(Khalaqtu liyadayya), I have created for My hands", meaning by this, 'for My double grace', as He has said:

And I have not created jinn and mankind except to worship Me [51:56],

since worship is a gift from Allah, and His grace upon them, for it leads them to His perpetual grace. A probable meaning of 'both My hands', is the double meaning of power and grace as though the Almighty said, "created with My own power and grace". Another explanation is that the attribution of the 'hands' to Allah was intended to stress the overwhelming power of Allah, and the act was accomplished by His sole will, irrespective of His strength or grace or anything else.

This interpretation is supported by the verse:

That is for what thy hands have forwarded [22: 10],

and it means 'what you have forwarded of your deeds'; and also by Allah's saying:

Whatever misfortune may visit you is for what your own hands have earned [42:30],

which signifies 'what you have acquired'. The Arabs often used the proverb: "Thy hand hath tied, and thy mouth hath blown into it" (yadaka awkata wa fuka nafakh)2, in the sense that it was your doing and you carried it out and performed it though you did not use your actual hands (limbs) in it.

- 1. T, laysa hadha huwa 'l-wajh fi 't-tafsir: N, laysa huwa 'l-wajh.
- 2. See al-Maydani, op. cit., vol.2, p.248.

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