

Published on Al-Islam.org (https://www.al-islam.org)

<u>Home</u> > <u>Islam and Religious Pluralism</u> > <u>Below the Zero Point</u> > <u>The Incapable and the Powerless</u> > From the View of the Islemic Sages

Below the Zero Point

So far our discussion has been of the acceptance and non-acceptance of acts of worship and good and positive deeds of non-Muslims, and in other words the above discussion was about what is above the zero point; the discussion was whether their good deeds cause them to ascend or not.

Now let us see what is the state of what is below the zero point, that is, what happens to the sins and evil deeds of non-Muslims. Are they all alike from the aspect of our discussion, or is there a difference?

In addition, in these actions that are evil and bring a person down, is there a difference between Muslims and non-Muslims, and similarly between Shi as and non-Shi as? Does a Muslim, and especially a Shi a Muslim, have a sort of protection with regard to such actions, or not?

In the preceding matter, it became clear that God only punishes people when they commit wrong deeds out of culpability (taqttr), that is, when they do so deliberately and with knowledge, not out of incapacity (quttr). Previously, we translated and explained the verse of Qur'tn from which Scholars of the principles of jurisprudence derive the rule that says "It is evil to punish one without having explained his or her duty."

Now, to clarify the situation of non-Muslims with respect to actions that fall below the zero point and to study their punishment and retribution for the evil deeds they commit, we have no choice but to broach another issue that is touched upon in Isl®mic sciences and is rooted in the Noble Qur'®n; and that is the issue of "incapacity" and "powerlessness" (isti° ®f). Here, we begin our discussion under this heading.

The Incapable and the Powerless

The scholars of Isl®m make use of two terms; they say that some people are "powerless" (musta°®`af®n) or are "awaiting the command of God" (murjawn li–`amrill®h). "Powerless" refers to the unfortunate and unable; "those awaiting the command of God" denotes people whose affairs and status are to be regarded as being with God and in His hands; God Himself shall deal with them as His wisdom and mercy dictate. Both terms have been taken from the Qur'®n.

"And those whose souls the Angels take while they are oppressive to themselves; they say, 'What state were you in?' They say, 'We were weak in the land.' They say, 'Was not God's earth wide, that you may migrate in it?' So the abode of those people is Hell, and evil an abode it is, except the powerless among the men, women, and children who neither have access to any means nor are guided to any way; so perhaps God may pardon them, and God is Ever-Forgiving, Ever-Pardoning."

In the first verse, mention is made of the interrogation of some people by the Divine appointees (in the grave). The Angels ask them, "What state were you in, in the world?" They forward the excuse: "We were unfortunate, our means were inadequate (and we were unable change our state)." The Angels will say, "You were not powerless, since God's earth was spacious and you could have migrated from your homeland and gone to an area where you had greater opportunity; thus you are culpable and deserving of punishment."

In the second verse, the state of some people is mentioned who are truly powerless; whether they be men, women, or children. These are people who had no means and no way out.

In the third verse, the Qur's gives tidings and hope that God may show forgiveness towards the second group.

In his commentary of the Qur'en, al-Mezen, our most esteemed teacher, `Allemah eabe'eabe'e, has this to say regarding these very verses: "God considers ignorance of religion and every form of preventing the establishment of the signs of religion to be oppression, and Divine forgiveness does not encompass this.

However, an exception has been made for the powerless who did not have the ability to move and change the environment. The exception has been mentioned in such a way that it is not exclusive to when powerlessness takes this form.

Just as it is possible for the source of powerlessness to be an inability to change the environment, it is possible for it to be because a person's mind is not aware of the truth, and thus remains deprived of the truth."1

Many traditions have been narrated in which those people who, for various reasons have remained incapable, have been counted among the "powerless."2

In verse 106 of Stratul Tawbah (9), God says:

"And others who are awaiting the command of God, He will either punish them or He will forgive them; and God is Knowing, Wise."

The term murjawn li-`amrill®h (those awaiting God's command) has been taken from this verse.

It has been narrated that Imm Muhammad Ibn `Alm al-Bigir (as) said about this verse:

"Verily there was a people in the early era of Isl®m who were once polytheists and committed grave misdeeds; they killed Hamzah and Ja`far and people like them from among the Muslims. Later, they became Muslims, abandoning polytheism for monotheism, but faith did not find its way into their hearts for them to be counted among the believers and become deserving of Heaven, while at the same time they had forsaken denial and obstinacy, which was the cause of their being (deserving of) punishment. They were neither believers, nor unbelievers and deniers; these then are the murjawn li–`amrill®h, whose affair is referred to God."3

In another tradition, it has been narrated that <code>TumrIn</code> Ibn A`yan said, "I asked ImIm Ja`far Ibn

Muhammad as-<code>TIdiq</code> (as) about the powerless." He replied, "They are neither of the believers nor of the unbelievers; they are the ones whose affair is referred to God's command."4

Though the purport of the verse regarding those whose affair is referred to God's command is that one should say only that their affair is with God, still, from the tone of the verse regarding the powerless, a hint of Divine forgiveness and pardon can be deduced.

What is understood in total is that those people who in some way were incapable and are not blameworthy, will not be punished by God.

In al-Ktft, there is a tradition from Hamzah Ibn tayytr who narrated that Imtm Ja`far Ibn Muhammad as-ttdiq (as) said:

"People are of six groups, and in the end are of three groups: the party of faith, the party of unbelief, and the party of deviation. These groups come into being from God's promise and warning regarding Heaven and Hell. (That is, people are divided into these groups according to their standing with respect to these promises and warnings.) Those six groups are the believers, the unbelievers, the powerless, those referred to God's command, those who confess their sin and have mixed good deeds with evil deeds, and the people of the heights (a`r@f)."5

Also in al-KIfI, it is narrated from ZurIrah that he said: "I visited ImIm Muhammad Ibn `AII al-BIqir (as) with my brother ImIm, or with my other brother BukahIr. I said to the ImIm, 'We measure people

with a measuring tape: Whoever is a Sh® a like ourselves, whether among the descendants of `Al® or otherwise, we forge a bond of friendship with him (as a Muslim and one who will achieve salvation), and whoever is opposed to our creed, we dissociate from him (as a misguided person and one who will not achieve salvation)."

The Im®m said, "Zur®rah! God's word is more truthful than yours; if what you say is correct, then what about God's words where He says, 'Except the powerless among the men, women, and children who find no way out nor find a path?' What about those who are referred to God's command? What about those regarding whom God says, 'They mixed good deeds and other, evil deeds?' What happened to the people of the heights? Who, then, are the ones whose hearts are to be inclined?"

§amm®d, in his narration of this event from Zur®rah, narrates that he said, "At this point the Im®m and I began to argue. Both of us raised our voices, such that those outside the house heard us."

Jam I lbn Darr j narrates from Zur rah in this event that the Im made it incumbent upon Himself that He take the misguided (not the unbelievers and deniers) to Heaven. 6

Also in al-KITI it is narrated from ImIm MISI Ibn Ja`far al-KIdhim (as) that he said: "`A/I (as) is a gate among the gates of guidance; whoever enters from this gate is a believer, and whoever exits from it is a unbeliever; and one who neither enters from it nor exits from it is among the party whose affair is referred to God."

In this tradition, the Im m clearly mentions a party who are neither among the people of faith, submission, and salvation, nor among the people of denial and annihilation.7

Also in al-Ktft, it is narrated from Imtm Ja'far Ibn Muhammad as-ttdig (as):

"If only people, when they are ignorant, pause and don't reject, they will not be unbelievers."8

If one ponders upon the traditions which have come down from the pure Imims (as) and most of which have been collected in the sections "Kitib al-injiah" and "Kitib al-imin wa al-Kufr" in al-Kifi, he or she will realize that the Imim's (as) position was that whatever [punishment] befalls a person is because truth was presented to him or her, and he or she showed prejudice or obstinacy towards it, or at the very least was in a position where he or she should have researched and searched, but didn't do so.

And as for people who, out of incapacity of understanding and perception, or because of other reasons, are in a position where they are not in denial or negligent in researching, they are not counted among the deniers and adversaries. They are counted among the powerless and those referred to God's command. And it is understood from the traditions that the pure Imams (as) view many people to be of this category.

In al-K®f®, in the section "Kit®b al-®ujjah," Shaykh Kulayn® narrates several traditions to the effect that:

"Whoever obeys God with an act of worship in which he exhausts himself, but doesn't have an Im®m appointed by God, his effort is not accepted."9

Or that:

"God does not accept the actions of His servants without recognition of him (the Im Im)." 10

At the same time, in that same "Kit®b al-®ujjah" of al-K®f® it is narrated from Im®m Ja`far Ibn Muhammad as-®®diq (as):

"Whoever recognizes us is a believer, and whoever denies us is an unbeliever, and whoever neither recognizes nor denies us is misguided until he or she returns to the guidance of our obedience which God enjoined upon him or her. So if he or she dies in the state of misguidedness, God shall do what He pleases."11

Muhammad Ibn Muslim says: "I was with Im®m as—®®diq (as). I was seated to his left, and Zur®rah to his right. Ab® Ba®ir entered and asked, "What do you say about a person who has doubts about God?" The Imam replied, "He is a unbeliever." "What do you say about a person who has doubts about the Messenger of God?" "He is an unbeliever." At this point the Im®m turned towards Zur®rah and said, "Verily, such a person is a unbeliever if he or she denies and shows obstinacy."12

Also in al-Kefe, Kulayne narrates that Heshim Ibn al-Bared (eshib al-Bared) said: "Muhammad Ibn Muslim, Abul Khaeeb, and I were together in one place. Abul Khaeeb asked, "What is your belief regarding one who doesn't know the affair of Imemate?" I said, "In my view he or she is a unbeliever." Abul Khaeeb said, "As long as the evidence is not complete for him or her, he or she is not a unbeliever; if the evidence is complete and still he or she doesn't recognize it, then he or she is a unbeliever." Muhammad Ibn Muslim said, "Glory be to God! If he or she doesn't recognize the Imem and doesn't show obstinacy or denial, how can he or she be considered an unbeliever? No, one who doesn't know, if he doesn't show denial, is not an unbeliever." Thus, the three of us had three opposing beliefs.

"When the <code>lajj</code> season came, I went for <code>lajj</code> and went to Im as-<code>lediq</code> (as). I told him of the discussion between the three of us and asked the Imam his view. The Im m replied, "I will reply to this question when the other two are also present. I and the three of you shall meet tonight in Min near the middle Jamarah."

"That night, the three of us went there. The Im®m, leaning on a cushion, began questioning us."

"What do you say about the servants, womenfolk, and members of your own families? Do they not bear witness to the unity of God?"

I replied, "Yes."

"Do they not bear witness to the prophecy of the Messenger?"

"Yes."

"Do they recognize the Imsmate and wilsyah (Divinely-appointed authority) like yourselves?"

"No."

"So what is their position in your view?"

"My view is that whoever does not recognize the Im®m is an unbeliever."

"Glory be to God! Haven't you seen the people of the streets and markets? Haven't you seen the waterbearers?"

"Yes, I have seen and I see them."

"Do they not pray? Do they not fast? Do they not perform sajj? Do they not bear witness to the unity of God and the prophethood of the Messenger?"

"Yes."

"Well, do they recognize the Im m as you do?"

"No."

"So what is their condition?"

"My view is that whoever doesn't recognize the Im m is a unbeliever."

"Glory be to God! Do you not see the state of the Ka'bah and the circumambulation of these people? Don't you see how the people of Yemen cling to the curtains of the Ka'bah?"

"Yes."

"Don't they profess monotheism and believe in the Messenger? Don't they pray, fast, and perform 1ajj?"

"Yes."

"Well, do they recognize the Im m as you do?"

"No."

"What is your belief about them?"

"In my view, whoever doesn't recognize the Imam is an unbeliever."

"Glory be to God! This belief is the belief of the Khirijites."

At that point the Im1m said, "Now, do you wish me to inform you of the truth?"

Hishim, who in the words of the late Faydh al-Kishini, knew that the Imim's view was in opposition to his own belief, said, "No."

The Im®m said, "It is very bad for you to say something of your own accord that you have not heard from us."

Hishim later said to the others: "I presumed that the Imim affirmed the view of Muhammad Ibn Muslim and wished to bring us to his view." 13

In al-Kff, after this tradition, Shaykh Kulayn narrates the well-known tradition of the discussion of Zur rah with Imm Muhammad Ibn `Al al-Brqir (as) in this regard, which is a detailed discussion.

In al-Ktft at the end of "Kitb al-tmt wa al-Kufr," there is a chapter entitled, "No action causes harm with belief, and no action brings benefit with unbelief." 14

But the traditions that have come under this heading do not affirm this heading. The following tradition is among them:

Ya`q®b Ibn Shu`ayb said, I asked Im®m Ja`far Ibn Muhammad as-I®diq (as):

"Does anyone aside from the believers have a definite reward from God?" He replied, "No." 15

The purport of this tradition is that God has given a promise of reward to none but the believers, and without doubt He will fulfil His promise. However, aside from the believers, God has not given any promise for Him to have to fulfil of necessity. And since He has not given any promise, it is up to Him Himself to reward or not to reward.

With this explanation, the Im®m wishes to convey that the non-Believers are counted with the powerless and those whose affair is referred to God's command in terms of whether God will reward them or not; it must be said that their affair is with God, for Him to reward or not to.

At the end of this chapter of al-Kofo there are some traditions which we will mention later under the heading, "The Sins of Muslims."

Of course, the relevant traditions are not limited to those mentioned here; there are other traditions as well. Our deduction from all of these traditions is what we have mentioned above. If someone deduces something else and doesn't affirm our view, he or she may explain his or her view with its evidence, and perhaps we can benefit from it as well.

From the View of the Isl®mic Sages

Isl mic philosophers have discussed this issue in a different way, but the conclusion they have reached in the end corresponds with what we have deduced from the verses and traditions.

Avicenna (Ibn Sina) says: "People are divided into three groups in terms of soundness of body or physical beauty: one group is at the stage of perfection in soundness or beauty, another is at the extreme of ugliness or illness. Both of these groups are in a minority.

The group that forms the majority are the people who in the middle in terms of health and beauty; neither are they absolutely sound or healthy, nor do they, like the deformed, suffer from deformities or permanent sickness; neither are they extremely beautiful, nor ugly."

"Similarly, from the spiritual point of view, people fall into the same categories; one group is in love with truth, and another is its stubborn enemy.

The third group consists of those in the middle; and they are the majority, who are neither in love with truth like the first group, nor its enemies like the second. These are people who have not reached the truth, but if they were shown the truth, they wouldn't refuse to accept it."

In other words, from the Islemic perspective and from a jurisprudential viewpoint, they are not Muslims, but in real terms, they are Muslims. That is, they are submissive to truth and have no stubbornness toward it.

Avicenna says, after this division:

وَاسْتَوْسَعَ رَحْمَةُ اللَّهِ

"Believe God's mercy to be encompassing." 16

In the discussions of good and evil of al-Asfer, Mullah feadre mentions this point as an objection: "How do you say that good overcomes evil even though, when we look at the human being, which is the noblest creation, we see that most people are caught in evil deeds in terms of their practice, and stuck in unsound beliefs and compound ignorance in terms of their beliefs?

And evil deeds and false beliefs destroy their position on the Day of Judgement, making them worthy of perdition. Thus, the final outcome of humanity, which is the best of creation, is wretchedness and misfortune."

Mullsh sadrs, in answering this objection, points to the words of Ibn Ssns and says: "In the next life, people are the same as they are in this life in terms of their soundness and felicity.

Just as the extremely sound and exceedingly beautiful, and likewise the very ill and exceptionally ugly, are a minority in this world, while the majority is in the middle and is relatively sound, so too in the next world the perfect, who in the words of the Qur'sn are al-Ssbiqsn, or "the foremost ones," and similarly the wretched, who in the words of the Qur'sn are Ashsb al-Shimsl, or "the people of the left," are few, and the majority consists of average people, whom the Qur'sn calls Ashsb al-Yamsn, or "the people of the right."

After this, Mullth fadret says:

"Thus, the people of mercy and soundness are predominant in both worlds."

One of the latter sages, perhaps the late <code>@qa®</code> Muhammad Ridh® Qumshi'®, has some unique verses of poetry about the vastness of the Lord's mercy. In these verses, he reflects the belief of the sages, and rather the broadness of the `@rifs' (mystics') stand. He says:

این شرک عارضی بوچ و عارضی یزول, خلقان همه به فطرت توحید زاده ند

این نقطه گه صعود نماید گهی نزول ,یک نقطه دان حکایت ما کان و ما یکون

گر خوانیم ظلوم و گر خوانیم جهول, جز من کمر به عهد امانت نبست کس

Consider all to be Gods', accepted and non-accepted,

From mercy it commenced and to mercy it will return.

From mercy the created ones came, and to mercy they go,

This is the secret of love, which baffles the intellect.

All of creation was born with the innateness of Divine Unity,

This polytheism is incidental, and the incidental subsides.

Says wisdom: Keep hidden the secret of truth;

What will the prying intellect do with love, which pulls aside the curtains?

Consider the story of what was and what will be to be a dot,

This dot sometimes ascends and sometimes descends.

None but I strove to keep the trusts,

Whether you call me oppressive or call me ignorant.

The discussion of the sages pertains to the minor premise of an argument, not the major premise. The sages don't discuss what the criterion of a good deed or the criterion of a deed's acceptance are; their discussion is about the human being, about the idea that relatively speaking, in practice, the majority of people to differing extents are good, remain good, die good, and will be resurrected good.

What the sages wish to say is that although those who are blessed to accept the religion of Isl®m are in a minority, the individuals who possess fi®rah (innate) Isl®m and will be resurrected with innate Isl®m are in a majority.

In the belief of the supporters of this view, what has come in the Qur's n about the Prophets interceding for those whose religion they approve of is in reference to the innate religion, and not the acquired religion, which, through incapacity, they haven't reached, but towards which they show no obstinacy.

- 1. al-Mrzen, Volume 5, Page 51
- 2. Refer to al-Mezen, Volume 5, Page 56-61, "Discussion of the Traditions"
- 3. al-MIZIN, Volume 9, Page 406, from al-KITI
- 4. al-Mezen, Volume 9, Page 407, from Tafser al-`Ayyeshe
- 5. al-Ktft, Volume 2, "Kitab al-Imth wa al-Kufr," section "A'ntf al-Nts," Page 381 (tkhtndt print)
- 6. Ibid., Page 382. The last sentence of the tradition is:

translated as above. But in some texts, it is as follows:

which would mean that the Imam (as) changed his opinion and accepted the view of Zurerah. Obviously, this isn't correct, but based on this reading another meaning is possible, which is that the Imam (as) may have intended that these people will not be punished, but they will also not go to Heaven.

- 7. Ibid., Page 388
- 8. Ibid.
- 9. Ibid., Volume 1, Page 183
- 10. Ibid., Page 203
- 11. Ibid., Page 187
- 12. Ibid., Page 399
- 13. Ibid., Volume 2, chapter on deviation (Dhal®I), Page 401
- 14. Ibid., Volume 2, Page 463
- 15. Ibid., Volume 2, Page 464
- 16. al-Isheret, towards the end of the seventh section (nama)

Source URL:

https://www.al-islam.org/islam-and-religious-pluralism-murtadha-mutahhari/below-zero-point#comme nt-0