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# **Chapter 1: Revelation**

## 1. Meaning of Wahyi & Ilham

"Wahyi" (وحي) literally means inspiration, revelation, suggestion, to point out a thing to someone, to put a thing into the mind of someone secretly; letter, writing: something revealed or written or the idea inspired or revealed; saying; commandment; to dispatch a messenger to someone; to speak with someone secretly; to urge; voice. In Islamic terminology, *wahyi* means communication of idea, command and information from Allah to a chosen human being, conveyed either directly or through supernatural agencies like angels. 1

"Ilham" (الهام) literally means to inspire: to put a thought or an idea into the mind of someone. In Islamic terminology, Ilham means inspiration of an idea or information from Allah to any chosen person.2

It will appear from above that while *Ilham* is limited to unspoken and unwritten inspiration, *wahyi* is used for spoken as well as unspoken and written as well as unwritten inspiration and revelation.

Every religion which believes in God believes in revelation.

## 2. Modes of Revelation

According to the Qur'an, there are three basic methods of revelation:

"It is not possible for a man that he should receive the message of Allah except either by inspiration or from behind a curtain, or Allah sends angels and the angels bring the message of Allah, whatever Allah wishes. Verily Allah is High, Omniscient." (42:51).

### **Inspiration**

There are two types of inspirations:

1. True Dreams: This method is not new. There are at least four instances in the Bible where Israeli prophets received the divine message in dreams. The Dictionary of the Bible records under the word "Dream" about divine dreams: "Dreams, employed by God for the purpose of His Kingdom ... They are (a) intended to effect the spiritual life of individuals; (b) Directive and prophetic dreams... they seem to have carried with them credentials of their divine origin."

Our Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w) even before he was commanded to proclaim his prophethood, used to receive divine messages through this medium. In later days, he saw two dreams, which are mentioned in the Qur'an. In the first dream, he saw that the Umayyads were climbing his pulpit like monkeys. 3 He was so grieved by that dream that he did not smile from then on till his last breath. This sorrow was based upon the sure knowledge that Umayyads would destroy his religion, as they actually did. They used the name of Islam to alter Islamic teachings and Islamic spirit. In the second dream, he saw (in the 6th year of *Hijra*) himself together with his followers entering Ka'bah. 4 It was a time when, by worldly reasoning, he had no chance of doing so. Within less than 2 years, this dream became a reality.

This type of inspiration still continues. The Holy Prophet said, "There is no prophethood after me except the good tidings." He was asked, "And what are the good tidings, O Messenger of Allah?" He said, "Good dreams or true dreams." But the difference between a dream of a Prophet or Imam and that of others is that a Prophet or an Imam appointed by Allah never sees a false dream; whatever he dreams is a message or command from Allah; while other people's dreams are more often than not false, caused by physiological or psychological reasons.

2. **Prophetic Inspirations:** these inspired thoughts may be accompanied with clear words or may be in the form of a thought without words. The Qur'an says,

"He (i.e. the Prophet) does not speak of his own desire, it is nothing but a revelation revealed." (53:3-4).

By the authority of these verses of Qur'an even the traditions of the Holy Prophet are treated as revelation. Their words are not from Allah; but the idea is.

#### From Behind a Curtain

The revelations, which are sent "from behind a curtain" are also of many kinds;

- 1. The first is like hearing some low murmuring sounds (like buzzing of bees) and knowing the interpretation.
- 2. The second is like hearing high-pitched sounds and knowing the interpretation.
- 3. The third is hearing the sound from a material object. The first call to the Prophet Musa (a.s) is one example. He was astonished to see a bush burning and yet remaining unconsumed by fire. As he turned aside, gazing at a sight so unique, he received an authoritative call from God, calling him to prophethood. Another example is of our Prophet (s.a.w) when he ascended to the heavens in mi'raj. He, at last, arrived at a sublime place where neither any prophet nor any angel had ever reached. He saw a curtain of light, and then heard a voice from it.
- 4. The fourth type of this revelation is hearing the voice of an angel without seeing him. It should be mentioned here that this fourth type of revelation "from behind a curtain" is not reserved for the prophets. Other chosen people also may be honored by such angelic conversations. They are called "al–muhaddath" (المحدّث i.e. the one with whom the angels talk.

### **Through Angels**

Now we come to the last type of the modes of revelation, i.e., receiving the message through an angel. Gabriel usually came to our Prophet (s.a.w) to convey the messages of Allah. Sometimes he came in his own image, other times in likeness of a man. Messages sent through an angel were mostly oral. But at least in one case it was a written one. The Torah was sent to the Prophet Musa (a.s.) as "written tablets":

"and wrote we for him in the tablets lessons of every kind ..." (7:145).

# 3. Epilepsy & Revelation: A Christians' Allegation Analyzed

These were, in short, some method by which the messages of God come to the prophets. As I have mentioned earlier, the Divine revelations to our Prophet (s.a.w.) began with "true dreams"; later on, he used to see the heavenly lights and visions and hear the voices, but without seeing the speaker. After that, he saw the angel Gabriel, who brought the Divine message. This was the easiest and clearest form of revelation.

Sometimes, continuous and high-pitched voices would reach his ears, at the end of which he would find the message of God imprinted on his heart. This was the hardest form of revelation. Often, at the time of receiving such revelations, he would be overcast with gloom. The color of his face would fade away. Sometimes he would bend his head, and his companions would understand that he was receiving the

revelation and they also would bend their heads. At times, even during the coldest months, perspiration would pour down from his forehead.

After some time he would raise his head and relate the revelation to them. According to Shaykh as—Saduq, this mode was chosen by Allah when He wished to reveal something to the Holy Prophet without using the agency of Gabriel.6

Having recorded the above-mentioned effects of this type of revelation, Washington Irving says, that "The ringing of ears is a symptom of epilepsy": A Muslim brother from Aden had asked me whether it was true, as many Christian writers had written, that our Holy Prophet was suffering from epilepsy. A short article was published in The Light (May-August, 1968) in reply to that question, some parts of which are reproduced below:

This allegation is the outcome of Dr. Gustav Weil's imagination. He was an orientalist. Latter writers have blindly followed him because it suited their purpose. It is this tendency of the Christians about which Bishop Boyd Carpenter wrote in *The Permanent Element in Religion*: "Muhammad is by many seen only through the fog which dread and ignorance have spread around him. To them he is an object of horror against which anything evil might be said... But, now the mists of prejudice have cleared away, we can afford to see the founder of Islam in fairer light."

Did not those Christian writers know that such effects at the time of receiving revelation were not unique in the history of prophethood? Alfred Guillaume writes in his book *Islam* about the institution of prophethood that "the Hebrew religion gave content and meaning to the word 'Nabi', which, originally, applied to a person who in a state of uncontrollable emotion and excitement proclaimed a message which his hearers attributed to a god... the outward marks of a prophet in Israel were (a) impassioned utterance; (b) poetry: (c) intense pre–occupation with God and moral issues: (d) a sense of compulsion urging him to declare the will of God. Naturally these characteristics varied from prophet to prophet."

Also, the following statement from *Concise Bible Commentary* is worth noting; "The prophets of the (Old Testament) as their writings show, based their teachings largely on ecstasy and vision." Again it says; "Probably the main difference between false and true prophets was that the former used traditional methods to go into ecstasy, while the latter were seized, often against their will, by God."

So, it is crystal clear that "uncontrollable ecstasy" was a common feature of revelation even in Israelite prophets. Are the Christians prepared to say that all the prophets of Israel suffered from epilepsy?

Now let us see the charge of his suffering from epilepsy from medical point of view. *Pears Cyclopaedia*, 68th edition (1959–60) says about epilepsy: "Epilepsy manifests itself in various ways, the common being grand mal–seizures, in which the patient falls down unconscious, his muscles become tense, his jaws clenched so that he is in danger of biting his tongue, and the limbs begin to contract rhythmically. As this phase passes away the patient lays down his limb, and gradually recovers consciousness. Often he does not know what has happened. Sometimes, he is confused, forgets where he is, and wanders

away in an attack of loss of memory (amnesia or epileptic fugue). In petit mal – the name means little sickness – the attack may be hardly noticeable. The patient is perhaps talking or doing somethings, when without any warning, he simply stops, looks dazed or confused for a brief period, and then carries on again."

The thing to note is that neither every attack of epilepsy is accompanied by unconsciousness nor every attack of unconsciousness is a symptom of epilepsy. The *Pears Cyclopaedia* says: "Fits may have many causes. It is important not to jump to the conclusion that because someone has a fit, they therefore have epilepsy, and all such cases should be carefully investigated."

So, according to the medical authorities unconsciousness (even if we accept that the effects at the time of revelation meant 'unconsciousness') and epilepsy are not inter-connected as cause and effect, either way. I fail to understand how can a sane person jump to the conclusion that a prophet must have suffered from epilepsy, just because he appeared to go into ecstasy (or even let us say, unconsciousness)?

The other facts are also worth considering. The Holy Prophet (s.a.w) generally received the Divine message when some event had either taken or was about to take place, or someone had put a question to him. We must remember that: "often (an epileptic) does not know what has happened. Sometimes he is confused, forgets where he is, and wanders away in an attack of loss of memory."

Had the Holy Prophet (s.a.w) ever been attacked by epilepsy after question had been put to him, he would have forgotten as to where he was or who had asked him what. Instead, he always gave most satisfactory and to-the-point answers in an extremely forceful, fluent and eloquent language immediately after this so-called epilepsy attack. Another point to consider is that the fits of epilepsy are more likely to occur at the time of emotional stress on nerves. But no historian has ever said that there was ever such an attack on the Holy Prophet during any battle or distress.

The following words of Alfred Guillaume are enough to expose the hollowness of this malicious and baseless charge: "A past generation of Arabists... advanced the theory that Muhammad was an epileptic. The charge had been made by a Byzantine writer long before. Such a hypothesis seems gratuitous and can safely be ascribed to anti–Muhammadan prejudice. Study of the psychological phenomena of religious experience makes it extremely improbable. Prophets are not normal people; but that does not authorize the assertion that their abnormal behavior is due to a morbid condition.

Moreover, Muhammad was a man whose common sense never failed him. Those who deny his mental and psychic stability, do so only by ignoring the over-whelming evidence... had he ever collapsed in the strain of battle or controversy, or fainted away when strong action was called for, a case might be made out. But all the evidence we have, points in the opposite direction, and the suggestion of epilepsy is as groundless in the eyes of the present writer as it is offensive to all Muslims..."8

(Cairo 1371) p.93; Ibn Manzur, Lisanu 'l-'Arab, vol.15, p.379; al-Mufid, Tashihu 'l-l'tiqad, vol.5 in "Musannafatu 'sh-Shaykhi 'l-Mufid" (Qum: I314) pp. 120-122.

- 2. Majma'u 'l-Bahrayn,vol.4, p. 146; al-Mu'jamu 'l-Wasit (Tehran: Daftar Nashr, 1408) p. 842;
- 3. As-Suyuti, ad-Durru 'l-Manthur. vol.4 (Egyptian edition) p. 191.
- 4. Ibn Hisham, Sirah, vol.2. p.308-322; at-Tabrasi, Majma'u 'I- Bayan, vol.5, p.126
- 5. At-Tirmidhi, Sunan, vol.3, p.264; also quoted by Ahmad ibn Hanbal in Musnad , Nisa'i and Abu Dawud.
- 6. As-Saduq, al-l'tiqadat (in "Musannafatu 'l-Shaykh al-Mufid" [Qum, 1413] vol.5) p.81
- 7. Clarke, W. K. L., Concise Bible Commentary. London: Society for Promotion of Christian Knowledge (S.P.CK), 1952.
- 8. Guillaume, Islam, pp. 25-26.

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