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Chapter 3: Idolatrous Beliefs with respect to the Resurrection

We will now deal with the question of whether idolaters believed in the Resurrection or not. Did they believe in the world after death or not? To answer this question, we will quote the responses of two prominent scholars.

Two theories about idolatrous beliefs with respect to the Resurrection

1. The books of exegesis "Majma' al-Bay n" and "Kish f" assert that polytheists believed in the Resurrection.

"Allah—there is no god except Him—the Living One, the All-sustainer. Neither drowsiness befalls Him nor sleep. To Him belongs whatever is in the heavens and whatever is on the earth. Who is it that may intercede with Him except with His permission? He knows that which is before them and that which is behind them, and they do not comprehend anything of His knowledge except what He wishes. His seat embraces the heavens and the earth, and He is not wearied by their preservation, and He is the All-exalted, the All-supreme." 1

Tabars thus interprets the above quoted verse, "This verse refutes intercession. That is to say, on the Day of Resurrection, no one will intercede with Allah on anyone's behalf save with His permission. This verse says so because polytheists used to believe that idols will intercede with Allah on their behalf on the Day of Resurrection. This verse repudiates their belief." Another verse similar to the above quoted one is:

"They worship besides Allah that which neither causes them any harm, nor brings them any benefit, and they say, 'These are our intercessors with Allah.' Say, 'Will you inform Allah about something He does not know in the heavens and the earth?' Immaculate is He and exalted above

[having] any partners that they ascribe [to Him]!"3

Regarding this verse, Tabars has said, "Kish has interpreted this verse as denoting that idolaters used to believe in the Resurrection and that one of the ranks which idols will have on that day is the rank of intercessor."4

2. 'All®mah Tab®tab®'®, in the twentieth volume of "Al-M®z®n", states that polytheists did not believe in the Resurrection. 5 A summary of 'All®mah Tab®tab®'®'s assertion is that idolatrous beliefs regarding the Resurrection are divided into four kinds, all of which refute the principle of the Resurrection.

The *first* group consisted of people who vehemently denied the Resurrection, and used to consider the existence of the hereafter as inconceivable. This can be inferred from the following verse:

"The faithless say, 'Shall we show you a man who will inform you [that] when you have been totally rent to pieces you will indeed have a new creation? He has fabricated a lie against Allah, or is there a madness in him? Rather those who do not believe in the Hereafter languish in punishment and extreme error'."6

This verse indicates that idolaters used to believe that the Resurrection is an impossible and inconceivable thing.

The *second* group consisted of people who merely considered the existence of the Resurrection as unlikely and improbable, and thus used to refute its existence, but their denial was not at the same level as that of the first group. The following verse can be adduced to refer to this group:

"Does he promise you that when you have died and become dust and bones you will indeed be raised [from the dead]? Far-fetched, far-fetched is what you are promised! There is nothing but the life of this world: we live and we die, and we shall not be resurrected. He is just a man who has fabricated a lie against Allah, and we will not believe in him."

The *third* group consists of people who held doubts and misgivings with respect to the Resurrection and thus denied its existence. The following verse can be adduced to refer to this group:

"Do they comprehend the knowledge of the Hereafter? No, they are in doubt about it. Rather, they are blind to it."8

The *fourth* group consists of people who in their hearts believed in the Resurrection, but used to deny it out of obstinacy and stubbornness, in the same way that they used to deny monotheism and prophethood and other subsidiary tenets of religion.

The following verse can be adduced to refer to this group:

"Rather they persist in defiance and aversion."9

We concur with 'All®mah Tab®tab®'®, the author of "Al-M®z®n", that polytheists used to deny the existence of the Hereafter, but do not agree with his dividing them into groups and we have comprehensively refuted his reasons in the exegesis of S®rat al-Naba'. Those interested can refer to it.

Response from "Majma' al-Baysn"

Now, the question that arises is that how does "Majma' al-Bay®n", which asserts that idolaters used to believe in the existence of the Resurrection, respond to 'All®mah Tab®tab®'®'s assertion that they never believed in the Hereafter?

Majma' al-Bay n's response can be inferred from the assertion of 'All mah Tab tab n' in "Al-M z n", because according to "Al-M z n", the verse "These are our intercessors with Allah" denotes worldly, not eschatological, intercession. Intercession in this verse means repelling problems and calamities, as well as bringing good to hand.

Idolaters believed that idols were placed in the series of causes and effects and they were effective in cosmic affairs, and could alleviate the problems facing polytheists. In other words, idols could interfere in the will of Allah and influence causes according to their wishes. Therefore, mediation and intercession were related to worldly affairs, not eschatological ones, and this was the meaning of intercession in all Qur'anic verses in which it was mentioned, having no connection whatsoever with eschatological intercession.

In my opinion, we can strike a compromise between the assertions of "Majma' al-Bay In" and "Al-MIZIN" by saying that idolaters used to believe that there is no resurrection, and supposing the Resurrection occurs, idols will solve their problems. The verse "These are our intercessors with Allah" means eschatological intercession, but on the assumption that it occurs; then, idols will intercede with Allah on their behalf. The following verse can be adduced to prove this assertion:

"And if We let him have a taste of Our mercy after distress has befallen him, he will surely say, 'This is my due! I do not think the Hour will ever set in, and in case I am returned to my Lord, I will indeed have the best [reward] with Him'."10

Idolaters and denial of the Resurrection

Now, we will comprehensively quote verses which are related to idolaters' denial of the Resurrection. Some are explicit while others are implicit.

First verse:

"Indeed, your Lord is Allah, who created the heavens and the earth in six days, and then settled on the Throne, directing the command. There is no intercessor, except by His leave. That is Allah, your Lord! So worship Him. Will you not then take admonition? To Him will be the return of you all—[that is] Allah's true promise. Indeed, He originates the creation, then He will bring it back so that He may reward, those who have faith and do righteous deeds, with justice. As for the faithless, they shall have boiling water for drink, and a painful punishment because of what they used to defy."11

From beginning to end, this verse pertains to polytheists. It can be inferred from "To Him will be the return of you all" that the ones addressed did not believe that they would be returned to Allah. "Indeed, He originates the creation" also demonstrates that Allah is capable of easily raising the dead to life.

Second verse:

"Say, 'Indeed, I have been commanded to worship Allah and not ascribe any partner to Him. To Him do I summon [all mankind] and to Him will be my return'."12

This verse denotes that polytheists did not believe in the Hereafter. The Noble Prophet (*s*) was charged with inviting the people addressed to believe in monotheism and the Resurrection, which is returning to Allah after death. This indicates that the people addressed, the polytheists, did not believe in either monotheism or the Resurrection. It is for this reason that the Noble Prophet (*s*) was charged with teaching them these two beliefs.

It is necessary to mention that almost all the prophets ('a) were confronted with polytheists. According to Fakhr Rez, "The earliest of prophets who was confronted with idolaters was Noah ('a)." 13 And all the prophets ('a) were charged with inviting people to monotheism. Perhaps no prophet ('a) can be found who was not faced with idolaters.

Third verse:

"Rather, they say just like what the ancients said. They said, 'What, when we are dead and become dust and bones, shall we be resurrected? Certainly, we and our fathers were promised this before. [But] these are nothing but myths of the ancients'."14

Without the least doubt, the verses before and after the above quoted verses refer to idolaters. The pronoun 'they' in the above quoted verse also refers to polytheists. Therefore, [it can be deduced that] idolaters used to deny the Hereafter and used to consider it as nothing but a myth. This verse explicitly denotes that idolaters used to deny the Resurrection.

Fourth verse:

"And do not invoke another god besides Allah; there is no god except Him, Everything is to perish except His face. All judgment belongs to Him, and to Him you will be brought back." 15

This verse denotes, or at least alludes to, the lack of belief in the Resurrection among polytheists. Allah advises and invites them to believe in monotheism and the Resurrection.

Fifth verse:

"The life of this world is nothing but diversion and play, but the abode of the Hereafter is indeed Life, had they known."16

The above quoted verse has restricted real life to the life of the Hereafter, and adds that idolaters need to know this (*had they known*). It can be deduced from this statement that polytheists did not have awareness and belief in the life of the Hereafter.

Sixth verse:

"And say, 'This is nothing but plain magic!' 'What! When we are dead and have become dust and bones, shall we be resurrected? And our fathers too?!' Say, 'Yes! And you will be utterly humble.' It will be only a single shout and, behold, they will look on, and say, 'Woe to us! This is the Day of Retribution!' 'This is the Day of Judgment that they used to deny!' 'Muster the wrongdoers and their mates 17 and what they used to worship besides Allah, and show them the way to Hell! [But first] stop them! For they must be questioned.' 'Why is it that you do not support 18 one another [today]?'"19

It is very clear that these verses explicitly indicate that idolaters used to deny the existence of the Resurrection.

Seventh verse:

"Say, "I am just a human being like you. It has been revealed to me that your God is One God. So be steadfast toward Him and plead to Him for forgiveness." And woe to the polytheists—those who do not pay the zak and disbelieve in the Hereafter."20

The above quoted verse explicitly mentions two idolatrous beliefs; not paying *zak* and denying the Hereafter.

Eighth verse:

"Look! They are indeed in doubt about the encounter with their Lord! Look! He indeed comprehends all things!"21

The pronoun 'they' refers to polytheists. The lack of belief includes complete denial of the Resurrection as well as holding doubts and misgivings with respect to it.

Obviating a doubt

Some verses explicitly indicate that idolaters used to vehemently refute the Resurrection and consider it a myth but this verse indicates that they were [merely] in doubt with respect to the Resurrection. This shows that idolaters held varying degrees of disbelief in the Resurrection; some of them denied its existence altogether while others merely doubted its existence.

Ninth verse:

"He has prescribed for you the religion which He had enjoined upon Noah and which We have [also] revealed to you, and which We had enjoined upon Abraham, Moses and Jesus, declaring, 'Maintain the religion, and do not be divided in it.' Hard on the polytheists is that to which you summon them. Allah chooses for it22 whomever He wishes and He guides to it23 whoever returns penitently."24

"Hard on the polytheists is that to which you summon them." What is it that the Noble Prophet (s) used to summon idolaters to? The Noble Prophet (s) used to summon polytheists to belief in monotheism and the Resurrection, and accepting both of these beliefs was hard on them. At the beginning of the above quoted verse, the Noble Prophet (s) has been told that his religion is the same as that which had been enjoined on preceding prophets ('a), and it has been clearly demonstrated in a lot of Qur'anic verses that preceding prophets ('a) used to summon people to believe in the Resurrection. Likewise, the Noble Prophet (s) had been charged with summoning people to believe in the Hereafter, as the following verse indicates:

"Thus, have We revealed to you an Arabic Qur'an that you may warn [the people of] the Mother of the Towns25 and those around it, and warn [them] of the Day of Gathering, in which there is no doubt, [whereupon] a part [of mankind] will be in Paradise and a part will be in the Blaze."26

'The Day of Gathering' means the Day of Resurrection. Therefore, the Noble Prophet (*s*) was charged with warning the people about the Resurrection and making them believe in it.

Tenth verse:

"He draws comparisons for Us, and forgets his own creation. He says, 'Who shall revive the bones when they have decayed?' Say, 'He shall revive them who produced them the first time, and He has knowledge of all creation'."27

Even if there are differences of opinion regarding who uttered these words, there is still consensus that he was an idolater. This does not express the words of one man, but the thoughts of all polytheists.

Eleventh verse:

"[They will be] in gardens, questioning concerning the guilty: 'What drew you into Hell?' They will answer, 'We were not among those who prayed, 28 nor did we feed the poor. We used to gossip along with the gossipers, and we used to deny the Day of Retribution, 29 until death came to us'. "30

'Mujrim n' (the guilty) either means idolaters alone or idolaters and other groups of people. The guilty say one of the reasons why they were cast into Hell is that they did not believe in the Day of Retribution [or Resurrection].

Twelfth verse:

"The faithless say, 'Shall we show you a man who will inform you [that] when you have been totally rent to pieces you will indeed have a new creation? He has fabricated a lie against Allah, or is there a madness in him?' Rather those who do not believe in the Hereafter languish in punishment and extreme error."31

- 1. Serat al-Bagarah 2:255.
- 2. Majma' al-Bayn, vol. 2, p. 362.
- 3. Serat Yenus 10:18.
- 4. Majma' al-Bay®n, vol. 5, p. 98, exegesis of the above quoted verse.
- 5. Al-Mezen, vol. 20, p. 159, exegesis of verses 1-3 of Serat al-Naba', which states, "What is it about which they question each other? [Is it] about the great tiding, the one about which they differ?"
- 6. Srat Saba' 34:7-8.
- 7. Srat al-Mu'minnn 23:35-38.
- 8. Srat al-Naml 27:66.
- 9. Srat al-Mulk 67:21.
- 10. Serat Fussilat 41:50.
- 11. STrat YInus 10:3-4.
- 12. Srat al-Ra'd 13:36.
- 13. Tafs T Kab T, vol. 1, p. 11, exeges of verse 5 of S T at al-F tihah, which states, "You [alone] do we worship, and to You [alone] do we turn for help."
- 14. Serat al-Mu'minen 23:81-83.
- 15. Sirat al-Qasas 28:88.
- 16. Sgrat al-'Ankabgt 29:64.
- 17. Or 'their kind,' or 'their counterparts'.
- 18. Or 'help'.
- 19. Serat al-Seffet 37:15-25.
- 20. Srat Fussilat 41:6-7.
- 21. Sirat Fussilat 41:54.

- 22. Or 'for Himself'.
- 23. Or 'to Himself'.
- 24. Srat al-Shawr 42:13.
- 25. That is, the city of Mecca.
- 26. S rat al-Shawr 42:7.
- 27. Strat Yt Stn 36:78-79.
- 28. Or 'We were not among followers of the leaders (or forerunners, mentioned in 56: 10)
- 29. Or 'the Day of Judgment.'
- 30. Sirat al-Muddaththir 74:40-47.
- **31.** Srat Saba' 34:7.

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