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# **Chapter 4: Idolatrous Religious Rites**

Before commencing the discussion, it is necessary to mention that polytheists used to perform special rituals or idolatrous religious rites with the intention of worshipping idols and manifesting their love for them. Among the many proofs of this discussion is the following verse:

"Say, 'Indeed, my Lord has guided me to a straight path, the upright religion, the creed of Abraham, a han f, and he was not one of the polytheists.' Say, 'Indeed, my prayer and my worship, my life and my death are for the sake of Allah, the Lord of all the worlds. He has no partner, and this [creed] I have been commanded [to follow], and I am the first of those who submit [to Allah].' Say, 'Shall I seek a Lord other than Allah, while He is the Lord of all things?' No soul does evil except against itself, and no bearer shall bear another's burden; then to your Lord will be your return, whereat He will inform you concerning that about which you used to differ."1

It can be gathered from the above quoted verses that Abraham ('a) was not one of the polytheists; "...Abraham, a han f, and he was not one of the polytheists." The Noble Prophet (s) is being ordered to follow in the footsteps of Abraham ('a), a han f, and to perform all religious rites, whether they are prayers or the hajj, for the sake of Allah, as well as to live and die for Him. This shows that the opposing camp, the polytheists, never used to perform their religious rites for Allah the One God, but for idols.

It seems that the outstanding difference between the Noble Prophet (s) and idolaters was that the Noble Prophet (s) used to perform his acts of worship for the sake of Allah while polytheists used to perform their rites for idols.

## **Idolatrous rites**

We will hereunder cite examples of polytheistic rites:

## a) Slaughtering animals in the name of idols

Idolaters used to slaughter their animals in the name of an idol and perhaps one of the reasons why

Islam has ordered that it is obligatory to mention the name of Allah at the time of slaughtering animals is to counter wrong idolatrous rites. It is clear that idolaters used to slaughter animals in the name of idols, but not clear which idol was invoked at the time of slaughtering; whether it was the name of the greatest idol, or the name of the clan idol, or the local idol.

One of the verses which denote that polytheists used to slaughter animals in the name of idols is:

1. "You are prohibited carrion, blood, the flesh of swine, and what has been offered to other than Allah, and the animal strangled or beaten to death, and that which dies by falling or is gored to death, and that which is mangled by a beast of prey barring that which you may purify2—and what is sacrificed on stone alters [to idols], and that you should divide by raffling with arrows. All that is transgression."3

This verse enumerates forbidden foods. One of the foods whose eating is forbidden is "...what has been offered to other than Allah". This means an animal slaughtered in the name of other than Allah, in the name of an idol.

2. "And they say, 'These cattle and tillage are a taboo: none may eat them except whom we please,' so they maintain, and there are cattle whose backs are forbidden and cattle over which they do not mention Allah's name, fabricating a lie against Him. Soon He will requite them for what they used to fabricate."4

It can be deduced from the above quoted verse that idolaters never used to slaughter four legged animals in the name of Allah, but in the name of idols.

## b) Cutting and/or slitting the ears of animals

One of the idolatrous beliefs was cleaving and/ or slitting the ears of animals. The following verse proves this:

"They invoke none but females besides Him, and invoke none but a froward Satan, whom Allah has cursed, and who said, 'I will surely take of Your servants a settled share, and I will lead them astray and give them [false] hopes, and prompt them to slit the ears of cattle'." 6

"Whoever takes Satan as a guardian instead of Allah has certainly incurred a manifest loss."7

In this verse, Satan threatens to deprave and corrupt the children of Adam (i.e. mankind) by making them cut and/or slit the ears of animals.

## c) Slaughtering animals with the intention of gaining proximity to idols

One of the special rituals of idolaters was slaughtering animals with the intention of gaining proximity to idols. This can be inferred from the following verse:

"You are prohibited carrion, blood, the flesh of swine, and what has been offered to other than Allah, and the animal strangled or beaten to death, and that which dies by falling or is gored to death, and that which is mangled by a beast of prey barring that which you may purify8—and what is sacrificed on stone alters [to idols], and that you should divide by raffling with arrows. All that is transgression."9

### "And what is sacrificed on stone alters [to idols]"

has been interpreted in two ways: 1) an animal that has been slaughtered in the name of an idol; and 2) an animal that has been slaughtered with the intention of gaining proximity with an idol.

"Majma' al-Bay®n" has explained that after slaughtering an animal, idolaters used to smear its blood on idols with the intention of consecrating the sacrificed animal to idols.

## d) Animals whose use was forbidden

Polytheists used to believe that using certain animals in particular conditions was forbidden for some or all people. The following verse proves this assertion:

"Allah has not prescribed any such thing as Bah@rah, S@ibah, Was@lah, or H@m; 10 but those who are faithless fabricate lies against Allah, and most of them do not apply reason."11

*'Bah rah'* has been construed in a number of ways:

- 1. A camel which had reproduced five times; they slit its ears and refrained from killing and mounting it and never stopped it from drinking water and pasturing on meadows if it gave birth to a male on its fifth reproduction.
- 2. A camel which had reproduced five times; they slaughtered it and both men and women would partake of its meat if it gave birth to a male on its fifth reproduction, and slit its ears and call it *Bah* rah if it gave birth to a female. Mounting it was forbidden and women were not allowed to drink its milk and derive any other benefit from it, but men were allowed to derive benefit from it. Both men and women would partake of its meat when it died. *Bah* rah means to be slit or ripped or torn.

*'S 'ibah'* too has been interpreted in a number of ways:

- 1. An animal which they used to liberate on account of having made a solemn vow [nadhr] and never again would they derive any benefit from it. They never used to restrain it from drinking water and pasturing on meadows.
- 2. An animal which was freed for the sake of idols. S is a verbal noun or gerund which denotes being liberated and set free.

'Was lah' has also been construed in a number of ways:

- 1. It has been transmitted from Im al-S diq ('a) that during the Age of Ignorance, a camel would be named *Was lah* if it reproduced twins, and killing it as well as eating its meat were forbidden. [Kanz al-Dag 'ig].
- 2. If a sheep reproduced a female, it would belong to its owner and if it reproduced a male, it would be sacrificed for idols. If it reproduced both a male and a female, they used to say that a brother has been connected to its sister and would forgo killing it.

HEm: If ten young were reproduced from the loins of a male camel, they used to forbid mounting it and used to set it free to graze on meadows and drink water, and used to say that the back (i.e. loins) of that animal has been closed.12

In the above quoted verse, Allah has refuted all these idolatrous prohibitions and has stated that He has not prescribed such kinds of prohibitions, and that the faithless have fabricated lies against Him.

It is necessary to mention that verses 138 and 139 of  $S \mathbb{T} rat al-An' \mathbb{T} m$  implicitly interpret verse 103 of  $S \mathbb{T} rat al-M \mathbb{T}' idah$ .

"And they say, 'These cattle and tillage are a taboo: none may eat them except whom we please,' so they maintain, and there are cattle whose backs are forbidden and cattle over which they do not mention Allah's Name, fabricating a lie against Him. Soon He will requite them for what they used to fabricate. And they say, 'That which is in the bellies of these cattle is exclusively for our males and forbidden to our wives. But if it be still-born, they will all share it.' Soon, He will requite them for their allegations. Indeed, He is All-wise, All-knowing." 13

e) Apportioning yield from animal and crop husbandry between Allah and idols

The following Qur'anic verse proves this matter:

"They dedicate to Allah out of what He has created of the crops and cattle a portion, and they say, 'This is for Allah,' so do they maintain, 'and this is for our partners.' But what is for their partners does not reach Allah, and what is for Allah reaches their partners. Evil is the judgment that they make."14

This verse has been interpreted in a number of ways:

- 1. Idolaters used to dedicate a part of their yield from animal and crop husbandry to Allah and another portion to their idols. If the yield dedicated to Allah was good while the yield dedicated to idols was poor, they would use the yield designated to Allah for their idols, and would say, "Allah is needless."
- 2. If the yield from the animals and crops they had designated to their idols was good and the yield from

animals and crops dedicated to Allah was poor, they would give to idols the share dedicated to them and to Allah the share dedicated to Him, and would say that Allah was needless.

[In short, they seemed to always favor the idols, unless the yield from both apportionments was equal.]

## f) Killing children on account of fear of poverty

It can be gathered from Qur'anic verses that one of the very indecent or unbecoming idolatrous customs was killing their children due to fear of hunger and the privations of poverty. The following verse proves this assertion:

- 1. "Say, 'Come, I will recount what your Lord has forbidden you from. That you shall not ascribe any partners to Him, and you shall be good to your parents, you shall not kill your children due to penury—We will provide for you and for them'."15
- 2. "Do not kill your children for the fear of penury: We will provide for them and for you. Killing them is indeed a great iniquity." 16

## g) Ignominy for having daughters and burying female newborns alive

From a historical point of view, it is clear that one of the greatly wrong and villainous idolatrous beliefs was feeling ashamed of having female children. They used to bury their female children alive as a result of the shame they felt. Some Qur'anic verses, like the one quoted hereunder, prove the existence of this evil belief.

"When one of them is brought the news of a female [newborn], his face becomes darkened and he chokes with suppressed agony. He hides from the people out of distress at the news he has been brought: Shall he retain it in humiliation, or bury it in the ground! 17 Look! Evil is the judgment that they make. 18 When one of them is brought the news of what he ascribes to the All-beneficent, his face becomes darkened 19 and he chokes with suppressed agony, [and says] 'What! One who is brought up amid ornaments and is inconspicuous in contests?" 20

## h) Worshipping and supplicating idols

One of the idolatrous customs and rites was worshipping, prostrating before and entreating idols. It is necessary to mention that supplicating idols denotes the same as worshipping them.

It is necessary to clarify the meaning of worship before beginning this discussion; we hold that worship denotes absolute humility and abjection, and no additional determining factor is considered. This viewpoint is contrary to what others hold that worship means utmost abjection, humility and submission vis-à-vis another [being], and do not consider any kind of humility as worship. The truth of the matter will be clarified by adducing Qur'anic verses and <code>had</code>ths in future discussions.

There are many Qur'anic verses in this regard; mentioning a few examples will suffice to prove this assertion:

#### First verse:

"Look! [Only] exclusive faith is worthy of Allah, and those who take guardians besides Him [claiming,] 'We only worship them so that they may bring us near to Allah.' Allah will indeed judge between them concerning that about which they differ. Indeed, Allah does not guide someone who is a liar and an ingrate."21

Idolaters admitted that they used to worship idols with the intention that they may intercede on their behalf with Allah.

#### **Second verse:**

"Say, 'O people! If you are in doubt about my religion, then [know that] I do not worship those whom you worship besides Allah. Rather, I worship only Allah, who causes to die, and I have been commanded to be among the faithful, and told: 'Dedicate yourself to the religion, as a han fand never be one of the polytheists. Never invoke besides Allah that which neither benefits you nor can do you any harm; for if you do so, then you will indeed be among the wrongdoers'."22

It is clear that 'O people!' refers to polytheists, because verse 104 continues to say, "...if you are in doubt about my religion, then [know that] I do not worship those whom you worship besides Allah." and verse 105 says, "...and never be one of the polytheists."

Verse 104 explicitly states that idolaters used to worship idols besides Allah. Verse 106 expresses it in another way, meaning that invoking idols is the same as worshiping them, so

"Dedicate yourself to the religion as a han f, and never be one of the polytheists. Never invoke besides Allah that which neither benefits you nor can do you any harm; for if you do so, then you will indeed be among the wrongdoers."

#### **Third verse:**

"Say, 'O faithless ones! I do not worship what you worship, nor do you worship what I worship; nor will I worship what you have worshipped nor will you worship what I worship. To you your religion and to me my religion'."23

This *S*rat very explicitly spells out that idolaters used to worship idols.

### **Fourth verse:**

"They invoke none but females 24 besides Him, and invoke none but a rebellious Satan, whom Allah has cursed." 25

#### "They invoke none but females besides Him"

refers to idolaters. This verse has been interpreted in three ways:

- 1. 'Females' refers to idols, and the reason for this kind of expression is that idolaters used to give female names to their idols.
- 2. 'Females' refers to angels, because idolaters used to worship angels under the impression that they were Allah's daughters.
- 3. 'Females' means receptivity, passivity and the state of being affected and ineffective. This denotation includes women too. Allah seems to say that their objects of worship are not capable of doing anything, are passive or ineffective, whereas an object of worship ought to be active and capable of doing something. [Kanz al-Dage'iq, Tafser al-Mezen].

In "Majma' al-Bay n", the verse 'They invoke' in both the verses "They invoke none but females besides Him, and invoke none but a rebellious Satan" has been construed to mean worship, they worship none but females and a rebellious Satan. This means that in reality, worshipping idols is tantamount to worshiping Satan because it is he who orders and incites man to worship idols.

But in "Tafs Ir al-MIZIN", the first 'invoke' in the verse "They invoke none but females besides Him" has been construed to mean worship because idolaters used to worship idols asking them to alleviate their problems and needs; and the second 'invoke' in "...and invoke none but a rebellious Satan" has been interpreted to mean obey and follow.

It appears that "Majma' al-Bay®n" is right in interpreting both verses as worship, because worship denotes obedience, as we will later prove that there is no distinction between these two terms, and we will also critique "Al-M®z®n" in order to make this issue clearer.

- 1. Sgrat al-An'gm 6:161-164.
- 2. That is, by duly slaughtering the animal wounded by the beast of prey.
- 3. Srat al-Mridah 5:3.
- 4. Srat al-An'm 6:138.
- 5. Most of the idols and deities worshiped by Arab pagans had female names, e.g. Let, Manet, Ne'ilah etc.
- 6. This refers to the pagan practice of slitting the ears of camels as a sign of their dedication to pagan deities.
- 7. STrat al-Nist' 4:119.
- 8. That is, by duly slaughtering the animal wounded by the beast of prey.
- 9. Srat al-Mi'idah 5:3.
- 10. The pre-Islamic Arabs used these terms for individual camels and sheep, which were subject to such practices as the slitting of ears, the forbidding of their use for burden, their dedication to idols, and restriction of their flesh to males. The commentators give different descriptions of these primitive customs and their significance, reflecting probably their varying practice among pre-Islamic Arabs.
- 11. Serat al-Me'idah 5:103.

- 12. Tafs@r 'Ill@yy@n, p. 124, exegesis of the above quoted verse, as quoted from "Majma' al-Bay@n".
- 13. Serat al-An'em 6:138-139.
- 14. S@rat al-An'@m 6:136.
- 15. Srat al-An'm 6:151.
- 16. Strat al-Isrt' (or Bant Isrt'tl) 17:31.
- 17. This refers to the practice of pre-Islamic Arabs of burying their newborn daughters alive.
- 18. Serat al-Nahl 16:58-59.
- 19. That is, when he is brought the news of the birth of a daughter.
- 20. Serat al-Zukhruf 43:17.
- 21. Sirat al-Zumar 39:3.
- 22. Strat Ytnus 10:104-106.
- 23. Strat al-Ktfirtn 109:1-6.
- 24. Most of the idols and deities worshipped by Arab pagans had female names, e.g., Let, Manet, 'Uzze, Ne'ilah, etc.
- 25. STrat al-Nist' 4:117-118.

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