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Discourse Twenty: The Account of Shaqq al-Qamar and the Evening Star

Is the miracle of "shaqq al-qamar" (halving of the moon) in agreement with the Qur'an and traditions [akhb@r]? Can it be sanctioned by the laws of human logic and reason even though the size of the moon is in no way analogous to the size of the Holy Prophet's (S) hand—i.e. the container and the contained are entirely disproportionate?

The story of shaqq al-qamar is a trustworthy reality, the truth of which has been verified by the Qur'an and traditions. Even so, the narrations that cite this occurrence vary. Because each of these narrations is a "single tradition" [khabar-e wshid]—they each have a single transmitter—and are thus undependable, we cannot rely on and discuss the qualities that are cited in each of them.

That which can be extracted from them all together is that the moon was split into two halves at the gesture of the Holy Prophet (S) and this is also what the Noble Qur'an indicates.

In the first verse of Serat al-Qamar, for which the Serat was named, the Qur'an states:

"The hour (of Judgment) drew close and the moon was cleft in two."1

This is a miracle performed by the Holy Prophet (S) at the request of some who denied his prophethood and wanted a miracle as proof. It is self-evident that after we accept the feasibility of miracles by the prophets we cannot deny a specific miracle performed by them especially after the Holy Qur'an—which is itself a miracle—verifies its occurrence.

Essentially, there are no rational explanations against miracles except mere unlikelihood. There may, of course, be causes for events beyond those we know of that can produce unusual events.

Response to the critics of shaqq al-qamar

Some critics say that the cleaving of the moon which is indicated in the Qur'anic verse is something that will occur on the Day of Resurrection when the natural world is destroyed and is not something that was done by the hand of the Holy Prophet (S).

The next verse negates this presumption. The Almighty Lord declares:

"And if they (the idolaters) see a sign (shaqq al-qamar) they say it is incessant sorcery." 2

It is clear that if the first verse signified the destruction on the Day of Resurrection, the disregard of the idolaters and attribution of this event to sorcery would be meaningless.

Other critics state that the verse indicates the severance of the moon from the sun which is confirmed by modern science and that this is one of the miracles of the Qur'an that it made this known centuries before this theory was posited.

This view is philologically incorrect because when an object is detached from another in this manner the words ishtiq q or infis are used not inshiq which means 'to be made into two halves'.

Still other detractors maintain that if such an event had transpired surely non-Islamic historians would have recorded it.

One should bear in mind that narrative history is always being written in accordance with the desires of contemporary powers and every story or event that contradicts the fancies of those powers will be hidden or completely forgotten. As we can see in ancient histories there is no trace of the stories of the great prophets such as Abraham, Moses, and Jesus ('a) whereas religiously speaking there is no doubt about the miracles performed by these prophets.

It was Abraham who did not burn in the fires of Nimrod, Moses who had the miracle of the cane, the shining hand, and many more, and Jesus who brought the dead to life. Finally, when the Islamic invitation of Prophet Muhammad (S) appeared, it was against the wishes of all world powers.

Besides, there are many hours of difference in the rising and setting of the moon between Mecca—where the shaqq al-qamar occurred—and Europe with all its historians. The celestial phenomenon that manifested for a short while in Mecca would not be seen from faraway western horizons such as Rome and Athens just as short-lived celestial events in such regions are not visible in the area of glorious Mecca.

Did the Evening Star descend upon the house of 'AII ('a)?!

Does the story that the Evening Star descended upon the roof of Im®m 'Al® ibn Ab® T®lib's ('a) house have verified evidence?!

This story is cited in several narrations; however, they are neither widely transmitted [mutaw®tir] nor are their sources certain [qat'® al-sud®r]. Hence, they are not scientifically reliable.3

- 1. Serat al-Qamar 54:1.
- 2. Srat al-Qamar 54:2.
- 3. Extracted from "Simi-ye Islim".

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