

Lesson Nineteen: The Assumption of Form by Our Deeds

In the past it was believed by specialists in the empirical sciences that an insurmountable barrier existed between matter and energy. Further scientific research discredited this belief so that a new theory entered scientific discourse, one to the effect that matter might be transformed into energy. The transformation of matter is accepted today as an incontrovertible truth. However, empirical science does not propound the reverse of this the transformation of energy into matter.

Since the transformation of matter into energy has now been accepted, it is entirely conceivable that future scientific progress may come to prove the transformation of energy into matter by means of a similar process. There is indeed no proof that energy once scattered cannot be accumulated anew and take on corporeal form.

Every motion and act undertaken by man counts as a good or a bad deed, and at the same time it represents a kind of deposit in the body that is expended in the form of energy. The acts and even the speech in which a person engages are, therefore, differing forms or manifestations of energy, either auditory or mechanical energy, or, in some cases, a mixture of the two.

The fuel our bodies consume is derived, for example, from foodstuffs, and energy is released from the compounding of these foodstuffs with oxygen. This energy in turn is transformed into various kinds of motion and activity, ranging all the way from gentle speech to strenuous physical exertion.

The stability of our mental reminiscences, of our awareness of the forms which lie within the range of our knowledge, is itself an indication of the permanence of our deeds. These forms sometimes lie hidden in our minds for lengthy periods, but they can be brought forth at any moment and exercise various effects upon us, both physical and psychological.

Among the effects that may be caused by the emergence of memories are happiness and joy, sorrow and grief, the palpitation of the heart, the blushing or paling of the face, and the occurrence of

disequilibrium in the glandular secretions.

It can therefore be said that our actions and words, dissolved in the atmosphere in the form of energy, are not annihilated, and that whatever we do in the course of our lifetimes is stored up in the archive of nature, an archive which the powerful hand of God has established and the permanence of which He has assured. The day will come on which nature will return to its true Owner all the trusts that have been deposited in it, and all the energies that have been accumulated in it will display themselves.

Why should the energies that have been expended for the sake of good and virtue, or evil and corruption, not take on a certain compressed form that then assumes an appropriate corporeal form on the day of resurrection? Those forms would be, respectively, unending bliss and delight and unbounded pain and torment.

We have accepted the burden of accountability and we will see the inevitable result of the way in which we have compounded our beings, in terms of both actions and thoughts, for our deeds will themselves rise up to requite us.

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It can even be said that the very pattern of creation imposes certain effects on our acts and behavior without asking for our permission and without our even being aware of it, the result being that they grow and develop in ways we cannot suspect under our current circumstances.

With the passage of time a small seed is transformed into a great, strong tree. Similarly, various factors set to work on sperms and bring forth from them various creatures, great and small, that possess an astonishing variety.

When an alcoholic is under the effect of alcohol throughout his life he will exert a direct, undesirable long-lasting effect on his offspring.

Do not these cases furnish an analogy for the confrontation of man with the consequences of his deeds whether punishment or reward in the hereafter? Is it not conceivable that an act of brief duration should earn man eternal misery or eternal happiness?

Although it is difficult for us at present to grasp this matter completely, the continuous advances being made by science may help us to understand it to a certain degree.

Experts are now able to capture and record sounds from the past. Since all living beings emit a certain kind of radiation, and motion results in the creation of waves, it has become possible to measure and record the waves that are audible from centuries old pottery; it is as if the sounds made by the potter can be heard anew after several centuries. It is also possible to photograph the imprint left by the fingers of thieves at the scene of a crime, thanks to the heat of their bodies.

If all this is possible in this world, why should something similar not be possible for all our deeds in the hereafter?

The great observatories of the world can today record waves emitted by distant galaxies, thanks to the complex receivers with which they are equipped; this permits them to uncover many mysteries and secrets.

Together with the other evidence we have adduced, this permits us to suggest that from a scientific point of view the transformation of energy into matter and, therefore, the assumption of material form by our deeds does represent a tenable hypothesis.

The Non-Existence of Time

Furthermore, time is relative, being the result of the motion of the earth and the sun. If, for example, we were to travel to a certain planet, the events that take place on earth would reach the planet after the passage of a number of years determined by the distance of the planet from the earth. We would then be able to observe precisely our deeds and those of others after the passage of many years.

Similarly, certain stars that emit light and are visible to us today in fact dissolved and disappeared several centuries ago. Nothing of them remains and yet, on account of the distance that separates them from the earth, their light still reaches us on account of the distance between them and the earth.

Man's sensory powers can grasp only the surface aspect of things and are unable to grasp their inner aspects. He is therefore unaware, while in this world, of the deeds that he performs here and of the beneficial or harmful effects they will have in the hereafter. In the next life, however, whatever is hidden will become manifest, and once the book of their deeds is laid open before them, all people will see clearly the pattern their conduct has followed.

The Qur'an, that book imbued with ultimate truth, describes the events that shall occur on the day of resurrection as follows:

“That which was previously concealed from them shall become apparent” (6:28).

The criminals who are bound in the fetters of their own lusts and desires will attempt to gain a measure of false tranquillity by hiding from themselves whatever is likely to harm them and burying the awareness of it deep within their beings. But the truth that they attempt to conceal will come forth to confront them.

The Qur'an says:

“We have made the good and evil deeds of every individual to be a ring around his neck. On the day of resurrection We shall display the record of his deeds, and the record shall be so clear that he will be able to read all its pages at once. A summons will come to him, ‘Read yourself your

own record of deeds, for it is enough that you yourself assess and measure your deeds¹⁴
(17:13-14).

Another verse reads:

“On that day man shall become aware of all the deeds, good and evil, he has committed throughout his life” (75:13).

Someone once asked Imam as-Sadiq, upon whom be peace,

“Does man know what he will see in his record of deeds?”

The Imam replied: “God Almighty will remind him of them, so that there will be no closing of an eye, no taking of a step, no uttering a word, that he will not remember; it will be as if he had done all that the moment before.” (*Tafsir al-Ayyashi*, Vol. II, p. 284)

From this tradition it can be deduced that the nature of the record and of its reading will be utterly different from that of a book and its reading in this world; it will be something akin to a powerful and instant reminder.

It should also be kept in mind that the recording and registering of deeds will include both the acts that man has engaged in directly and the results and consequences of those deeds; it is the combination of all this that will be subjected to assessment and accounting. Thus the Qur'an says:

“We shall restore life to the dead, and We record both the deeds that occurred in the past and the effects to which they gave rise” (36:12).

When in those critical moments the criminals look back at the corridors of time in which they committed their deeds they will exclaim in astonishment:

“Woe Upon us! What kind of a book is this that records and enumerates with precision all of our deeds, great and small?”.... (18:49).

The verse then proceeds:

“They shall see all of their deeds, present before them, and God shall not wrong anyone” (18:49).

“On the day that God raises up all men for the accounting to make them aware of the results of all the deeds He has recorded and they have forgotten; indeed God is a Witness to all creatures in the world” (58:6).

Corrupt friends and evil companions are at the source of much of the misguidance to which man is subject, in the realms of belief, action and morality. When therefore man recognizes on the plain of resurrection those who are the cause of his misfortune, regret will engulf him and he will exclaim,

according to the Qur'an:

“Woe upon me! Would that I had not chosen such-and-such a one as my friend, for his companionship prevented me from following God's path and led me astray” (25:28–29).

This belated attempt at dissociation does not in any way exempt him from responsibility for the sins he has consciously committed throughout his life.

The Qur'an depicts for us a wrongdoer who bites his hands in regret:

“On that day the wrongdoer shall bite the back of his hand in regret and say: `Would that I had followed the path of obedience in the world, in the company of God's Messenger.’” (25:27)

“Indeed the friendship of Satan earns man perdition and misguidance.” (25:29)

They will blame Satan in order to justify themselves, but he will answer them as follows:

“God made a true promise to you, but my promise was false. My only power over you consisted in summoning you to evil. You accepted my summons, so blame yourselves, not me.” (14:22)

It is natural that regret should be the lot of those wretches who are destined for hellfire. However, even the people of paradise are filled with sorrow when they look at the infinitely higher stations occupied by those who have drawn nigh to God; they ask themselves why they did not exert themselves more strenuously during their brief sojourn in this world, thus earning a higher station than that which they occupy.

The Most Noble Messenger, peace and blessings be upon him and his family, said:

“There is no creature that will not be overtaken by remorse and regret on the day of resurrection, but regret will be of no avail. When the blessed look upon paradise and the infinite bounties that God has prepared for the pure and the God-fearing, they will regret not having performed righteous deeds equal to theirs. As for the wretched, the people of hellfire, they will groan and lament when they see the fire and hear its roar, and they will regret not having atoned for their sins while still in the world.” (*Li'ali al-Akhbar*, p. 469)

Two Unequal Scenes

The true worth of everything can best be appreciated by measuring it against its opposite.

The Qur'an therefore juxtaposes the grateful joy of the people of paradise with regret of the people of hell, a regret to which is joined the impossible wish to return to the world in order to make amends.

These two utterly distinct and unequal states are depicted as follows in the Qur'an:

“They will reside in gardens of eternity; they will be adorned with bracelets of gold and pearls, and their garments shall be of silk. They will say: ‘Praise be to God who has removed all sorrow from us: in truth our Creator is merciful and just in dispensing reward. Out of His bounty He has settled us in an eternal abode of bliss; no toil or weariness shall touch us therein.’

The abode of the unbelievers shall be hellfire there neither shall they die, nor shall their penalty be lightened; thus do We punish the unbelievers! They shall cry out, ‘O Lord bring us forth from here so that we make work righteousness, not that which we used to do.’ They will be answered: ‘Did We not give you enough life to receive admonition as others did? Did not one come to warn you? Now taste your punishment, for there is none to aid the wrongdoers.’” (35:33-7)

First these verses depict the tranquil and stable abode of paradise, overflowing with blessings of both material and spiritual nature. There the God-fearing shall enjoy both the satisfaction of their material desires and spiritual peace and tranquillity. The dwellers in paradise will therefore offer thanks to God for having been guided to eternal bliss and rewarded for their deeds of righteousness. They will regard the vast realm of paradise from which all trouble and pain are absent as the result of God's generosity and favor, for they do not consider themselves worthy of it.

When we look in the other direction, we see anxiety and the terror of impending punishment engulfing the sinners. They kneel down in their misery and shame and begin to give voice to their regret in tones of despair. They wish to emerge from their fearful state in order to go back and atone for the corrupt deeds they have done.

None of this avails them, for their brief life is past and now the terrifying fire of hell burns them each second. They are not permitted to die, nor is their punishment lightened.

In short, the two contrasting scenes are of joy and tranquillity on the one hand, and misery, torment, and fruitless remorse on the other.

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Qays b. `Asim relates: “I once set out from afar with a group of companions to visit Medina. We came into the presence of the Most Noble Messenger, peace and blessings be upon him and his family, and I asked him to bestow some counsel upon us. I said: ‘Since we are desert dwellers and only rarely come into the city, we wish to make use of this opportunity and benefit from your eloquent words.’

“The Prophet replied: ‘Pride is followed by humiliation, life is followed by death, this world is followed by the hereafter. Everything that exists is without doubt subject to an accounting, and there is one who watches over all things. There is a reward for every good deed and a punishment for every evil deed. There is a set period for everything.

“O Qays, you have a friend and companion who one day will be buried with you. When you are buried,

he will still be alive although you are dead. If your companion is noble and a man of honor, he will honor you, and if he is lowly and vile, he will torment and trouble you. He will be resurrected together with you, and you will be resurrected together with him. No questions will be put to you; they will all be directed to him. Choose, then a worthy and righteous companion, for if your companion is righteous he will comfort you, but if he be wicked, you will wish to flee him in terror. That everlasting companion and friend is none other than your deeds.” (*al-Amali al-Saduq*, p. 3)

Every wrongdoer shall be resurrected with the inward countenance that he has fashioned for himself. The Qur'an says:

“The wrongdoers shall be recognized by their countenances” (55:4).

The Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him and his family, said:

“The two-faced hypocrite shall be resurrected with two tongues. One tongue will be at the back of his head, and the other in front. Flames shall dart forth from both of his tongues, engulfing his body. Then it will be said concerning him: `This is the man who confronted people in world with two faces and spoke with two tongues.’“ (*Iqab al-Amal*, p. 319)

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