

Scroll of Deeds

It can be concluded from verses of Quran and traditions that all good and bad deeds, words, beliefs and views of man are recorded in a scroll by the angels appointed on him by the Almighty Allah.

The Holy Quran says:

وَإِنَّ عَلَيْكُمْ لَحَافِظِينَ * كِرَامًا كَاتِبِينَ * يَعْلَمُونَ مَا تَفْعَلُونَ

And most surely there are keepers over you. Honorable recorders, they know what you do.

(82: 10-12)

That writing in the terminology of Quran is named as 'bird' and 'book'.

It is also said in Quran that:

وَكُلُّ إِنْسَانٍ لِّزِمْنَهُ طَائِرُهُ فِي عُنُقِهِ وَنُخْرِجُ لَهُ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ كِتَابًا يَلْقَاهُ مَنشُورًا * اقْرَأْ كِتَابَكَ كَفَىٰ بِنَفْسِكَ الْيَوْمَ عَلَيْكَ حَسِيبًا

And We have made every man's actions to cling to his neck, and We will bring forth to him on the resurrection day a book which he will find wide open: Read your book; your own self is sufficient as a reckoner against you this day. (17: 13-14)

Raghib Isfahani has interpreted 'bird' as good and bad deeds, which a person performs or commits.¹

According to verses of Quran, angels appointed by Allah on each man make two scrolls: scroll of good deeds and scroll of evil deeds. Scrolls related to him would be hung from his neck, so that on Judgment Day he may read it and become aware of his character.

'Book' implies a written thing. Writing in general parlance among us is interpreted as inscribing of letters, words and sentences, which prove a particular meaning according to social consonance inscribed on sheets of paper or any other tablet, which is capable to preserve those inscriptions. So that in future he

can read it himself and other who are aware of the situation may also know what is written therein. But in any case, the reasoning of these writings and words is nominal and conventional and not actual or real.

Now the question that arises is that whether the writing of angels and preparation of the scroll of deeds from human beings is also of the same kind or some other kind? Would they rely on these same writings of lines and pictures? Would all these deeds be written on sheets of paper or other tablets? And would these be hung from necks of people, so that they may remain till Judgment Day? Such a supposition is basically unimaginable. Apart from this, it is not compatible with the contents of some Quranic verses, since it is concluded from verses and traditions that in Qiyamat, man would see his actual good and bad deeds and not their written records.

The Almighty Allah says in the Holy Quran:

يَوْمَ تَجِدُ كُلُّ نَفْسٍ مَّا عَمِلَتْ مِنْ خَيْرٍ مُحْضَرًا وَمَا عَمِلَتْ مِنْ سُوءٍ تَوَدُّ لَوْ أَنَّ بَيْنَهَا وَبَيْنَهُ أَمَدًا بَعِيدًا وَيُحَذِّرُكُمُ اللَّهُ نَفْسَهُ وَاللَّهُ رَءُوفٌ بِالْعِبَادِ

On the day that every soul shall find present what it has done of good and what it has done of evil, it shall wish that between it and that (evil) there were a long duration of time; and Allah makes you to be cautious of (retribution from) Himself; and Allah is Compassionate to the servants. (3:30)

And He also says:

وَوُضِعَ الْكِتَابُ فَتَرَى الْمُجْرِمِينَ مُشْفِقِينَ مِمَّا فِيهِ وَيَقُولُونَ يَا وَيْلَتَنَا مَا لِهَذَا الْكِتَابِ لَا يُغَادِرُ صَغِيرَةً وَلَا كَبِيرَةً إِلَّا أَحْصَاهَا وَوَجَدُوا مَا عَمِلُوا حَاضِرًا وَلَا يَظْلِمُ رَبُّكَ أَحَدًا

And the Book shall be placed, then you will see the guilty fearing from what is in it, and they will say: Ah! woe to us! what a book is this! it does not omit a small one nor a great one, but numbers them (all); and what they had done they shall find present (there); and your Lord does not deal unjustly with anyone. (18:49)

Many important points can be concluded from these verses:

1. In Qiyamat, the actual good and bad deeds of man would be presented before him and he would observe them and not a record of them.
2. The bad character of man (which was in his conscience) would not be separated from him and a desire to be separated from it would be useless.
3. All the good and bad deeds of man would be recorded in the scroll of deeds and even the smallest act

would not be missed. He would see them (gathered) at a single place and would be astounded by it.

The same meaning is intended in some traditions.

Abul Jarud has narrated from Imam Muhammad Baqir (as) that he said in the interpretation of the verse:

وَكُلِّ انِّسَنَ اَلْزَمْنَهُ طَيْرُهُ فِى عُنُقِهِ

And We have made every man's actions to cling to his neck... (17:13)

The Imam said:

The good and bad deeds of man would accompany him and it would not be possible to be separated from them, till the scroll of his deeds is given to him in Qiyamat.²

Khalid bin Najih has narrated from Imam Ja'far Sadiq (as) that he said:

When the Judgment Day would be established, the scroll of deeds of every man would be given to him. At that time he would be told: Read your book.

The narrator asked: Does he know what is written therein?

Imam (as) replied:

The Almighty Allah would remind him of every act. Thus he would remember whatever he had done all through his life, even though it might be in the blink of an eye, or a word that he spoke or a step that he took; as if he has committed it that very moment.

Therefore the Quran says:

يَوْمَئِذٍ نَّأْتِنَا مَالٌ هَذَا الْكِتَابِ لَا يُغَادِرُ صَغِيرَةً وَلَا كَبِيرَةً إِلَّا أَحْصَاهَا

Ah! woe to us! what a book is this! it does not omit a small one nor a great one, but numbers them (all)... (18:49)³

Amirul Momineen (as) said:

On the last day of his worldly life and the first day of his entry into the world of the hereafter, the man would see his wealth, children and deeds. Thus he would address his wealth and say: I put myself into great hardships for your sake and was greedy; what help can you render to me today? His wealth would reply: Take your burial shroud from me. Then he would address his children: I had been fond of you and throughout my life, I took good care of you; what help can you render to me today? They would reply:

We would give you a proper burial. Then he would ask his deeds: I was shortcoming in observing you and you were difficult for me; what will you do about me?

His deeds would reply: I would be there with you in the grave and on the Judgment Day, till you are presented before your Lord. Thus if he is a believer, a fragrant, handsome and a well-dressed person would appear and say: Glad tidings to you of 'happiness and bounty' (Rooh wa Raihan) and Paradise. Blessed be your arrival; you are welcome! The dead man would ask: Who are you? He replies: I am your good deeds. I have come with from the world and I would accompany you till Paradise."⁴

Therefore, true and false beliefs, good and bad morals, good and bad character are present in the inner being of man in this world also but due to worldly preoccupations, he is unaware of their existence. But in Qiyamat, when the curtain would be removed from his conscience, he would find all of them with himself at one and the same time. He would exclaim due to this astounding phenomenon and he would be told: Just as you were unaware of this matter in the world, We removed the curtain from your eyes and today your eyesight has become very sharp.⁵

At this point, a question arises that the good and bad actions and words of man in the world are transient; that is they occur and then pass away; how can it be imagined that they would remain till Judgment Day? For example Prayer consists of Takbiratul Ihram, recitation of Surah Hamd and another Surah, genuflection and prostration, Tashahud and salutation and all of them are transient phenomena, and they cannot remain forever; all the good and bad deeds are of the same kind.

It is better that to solve this difficulty through the statements of a scholar who is well versed with this subject. He writes:

Everything a sane person can understand through his senses would leave an imprint on his soul and it would be stored in the treasure-trove of his perceptions. In the same way, every good or bad deed that he commits, no matter how small it is, its effect is recorded in the scroll of the soul; especially the acts, which become a habit and a second nature as a result of repetition. The same nature would lead one to either remain in Paradise or Hell forever.

Since the carnal habits change into an elemental form that they affect the invention of spiritual bounties and punishments. If the effect of acts and words on the soul had not been permanent and lasting, and do not intensify gradually in such a way that they become a part of that person's nature, no one would have been able to master any art.

Punishment, discipline, training and education of children would also have been useless. And it would have made man same from the time of his childhood till the end of his life and no difference would have been possible. In that case, religious duties (for purification and training of the soul) would be useless and absurd.

And if habits had no permanence and essence and they had not been everlasting, the enduring of the

people of Paradise in bounties and the living of the folks of Hell in punishment forever would have been absurd.

If the source of reward and punishment had been the deeds of man themselves, in the circumstances that actions and words are destroyed, it would necessitate that the effect would remain without the presence of the cause; and this is not correct. Physical action, which occurred in a limited time, how can it be the source of everlasting recompense? Such justifications do not befit the Almighty Allah.⁶

Statement of Imam Khomeini

With regard to this, the Imam writes:

Intention is the practical form and the celestial aspect of the act. And in the holy traditions same point is mentioned when it is said: Intention is superior to action; on the contrary intention is action itself. And this is not an exaggeration as some have suggested, it is a fact, because intention is the perfect form of the act and a part of its whole; and health and decay, perfection and defects of the acts is with regard to it only. Hence an act through the medium of intention is sometimes an honor and sometimes it is disrespect; sometimes it is perfection and sometimes it is defectiveness. Sometimes it is of the high celestial kind in a beautiful form and sometimes it is from the lowest level and in a horrific form.⁷

- ¹. Mufradat, under the term 'Tayr'.
- ². Biharul Anwar, Vol. 7, Pg. 312.
- ³. Biharul Anwar, Vol. 7, Pg. 315.
- ⁴. Al-Kafi, Vol. 3, Pg. 231.
- ⁵. Ilmul Yaqeen, Vol. 2, Pg. 938.
- ⁶. Ilmul Yaqeen, Vol. 2, Pg. 938.
- ⁷. Maad az Deedgah Imam Khomeini, Pg. 339.

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