

Section 16

Surah Al-Baqarah, Verses 133–134

أَمْ كُنْتُمْ شُهَدَاءَ إِذْ حَضَرَ يَعْقُوبَ الْمَوْتَ إِذْ قَالَ لِبَنِيهِ مَا تَعْبُدُونَ مِن بَعْدِي قَالُوا نَعْبُدُ إِلَهَكَ وَإِلَهَ آبَائِكَ إِبْرَاهِيمَ وَإِسْمَاعِيلَ وَإِسْحَاقَ إِلَهًا وَاحِدًا وَنَحْنُ لَهُ مُسْلِمُونَ

تِلْكَ أُمَّةٌ قَدْ خَلَتْ لَهَا مَا كَسَبَتْ وَلَكُمْ مَا كَسَبْتُمْ وَلَا تُسْأَلُونَ عَمَّا كَانُوا يَعْمَلُونَ

133. "Nay, were you witnesses when death approached Jacob? When he said to his sons: 'What will you worship after me?' They said: 'We will worship your God and the God of your forefathers Abraham, Ismail and Isaac, the One (true) God (alone) and to Him we do submit'..."

134. "That is a nation that has passed away; theirs is that, which they have earned, and yours is what you have earned; you shall not be questioned for what they had been doing."

Occasion of Revelation

A group of the Jews believed that when Jacob (as) was on his deathbed, he enjoined on his children the same religion which the Jews currently believe in (with all its corruption of the scriptures). For the nullification of their belief, *Allah* sent down this verse. [1](#)

Everyone is Responsible for his Own Deem

As it is also understood from the apparent meaning of the verse, there were some rejecters of Islam who falsely charged Jacob (as), the prophet of *Allah*, regarding this matter. (The matter was mentioned in the description of the occasion of revelation.)

To reject this false claim, the Qur'an says:

"Nay, were you witnesses when death approached Jacob?.."

Were you there when he frankly questioned his children the way he did? Yes, that which you (Jews) charge Jacob (as) with is not true.

The factual account which occurred was that:

"...When he said to his sons: 'what will you worship after me?'"

"...They said: 'We will worship your God and the God of your forefathers Abraham, Ismail and Isaac, the One (true) God (alone) and to Him we do submit'.

"Yes, he did not enjoin them with anything but to believe in monotheism and to submit to the command of *Allah*, which is the root of submission to all the Divine ordinances.

It can be deduced from this verse that when Jacob was on his deathbed, a feeling of anxiety and worry existed in him about the future of his children. Finally he expressed his anxiety and asked his sons what they would worship after him.

He especially asked 'what (thing) ' and he did not ask 'whom ', because there were some idol-worshippers in the locale who used to prostrate before some particular 'things'. Jacob wanted to know whether there was any tendency towards those beliefs in the depths of their hearts. But when he heard his children's answer, he found, again, his peace of mind.

This is also noteworthy that Ismail (as) was not Jacob's father or forefather, but he was Jacob's uncle, whereas in the verse under discussion, the term / aba' / which is the plural of the word / 'ab / (father) has been applied.

This makes it clear that, in the Arabic language, this word was sometimes used for 'uncle'. Hence, we say that if this word has been used regarding 'Azar in the Qur'an, it does not negate the fact that 'Azar was Abraham's uncle, not his father.

The last of the above verses mentioned is an answer to one of the delusions of the Jews. They emphasized very much on their ancestors and the honour and glory they ascribed themselves in relation to *Allah*. They imagined that even when they tainted themselves with sin, they could be rescued under the comforting shade of such ancestors. Then, the Qur'an says:

***"That is a nation that has passed away;
theirs is that which they have earned, and yours is what you have earned..."***

And, in the same way that they are not responsible for your deeds, also,

"...you shall not be questioned for what they had been doing."

Therefore, instead of expending all your energy trying to prove that you, by right of ancestry, deserve the honour and high position that your pure ancestors enjoyed, you should try to improve your own Faith and deeds.

The addressees in this verse are apparently the Jews and 'the People of the Book', but it is evident that this statement is not specifically referring to them alone, in that this basic principle pertains to us Muslims, too.

Surah Al-Baqarah, Verses 135-137

وَقَالُوا كُونُوا هُودًا أَوْ نَصَارَى تَهْتَدُوا قُلْ بَلْ مِلَّةَ إِبْرَاهِيمَ حَنِيفًا وَمَا كَانَ مِنَ الْمُشْرِكِينَ

قُولُوا آمَنَّا بِاللَّهِ وَمَا أُنزِلَ إِلَيْنَا وَمَا أُنزِلَ إِلَىٰ إِبْرَاهِيمَ وَإِسْمَاعِيلَ وَإِسْحَاقَ وَيَعْقُوبَ وَالْأَسْبَاطِ وَمَا أُوتِيَ مُوسَىٰ وَعِيسَىٰ وَمَا أُوتِيَ النَّبِيُّونَ مِنْ رَبِّهِمْ لَا نُفَرِّقُ بَيْنَ أَحَدٍ مِّنْهُمْ وَنَحْنُ لَهُ مُسْلِمُونَ

فَإِنْ آمَنُوا بِمِثْلِ مَا آمَنْتُمْ بِهِ فَقَدْ اهْتَدَوْا وَإِنْ تَوَلَّوْا فَإِنَّمَا هُمْ فِي شِقَاقٍ فَسَيَكْفِيكَهُمُ اللَّهُ وَهُوَ السَّمِيعُ الْعَلِيمُ

135. "And they said: 'Be Jews or Christians, you shall be guided aright'. Say: 'Nay! Rather the creed of Abraham, the upright; and he was not of those who associate partners to Allah'..."

136. "Say: 'We have believed in Allah and that which has been sent down to us, and (in) what was sent down to Abraham, Ismail, Isaac, Jacob and the tribes; and (in) that which was given to Moses and Jesus and (in) that which was given to all prophet from their Lord. We make no distinction between any of them, and to Him do we submit'..."

137. "If then they believe in what you believe, they indeed are guided (aright); but if they turn away, then they are clearly in schism; Allah will suffice you against them; He is the All-Hearing, the All-Knowing."

Occasion of Revelation

Upon the occasion of revelation of these verses it is narrated from Ibn Abbas that some of the Jewish scholars and some Christians from Najran were disputing with the Muslims. Each of these two groups considered their own creed more superior than the other's regarding the Truth, then they negated each other.

The Jews said that their prophet, Moses (as), was superior and their Book, the Turah, was the best. The Christians, on the other hand, had the same claim. They said Jesus (as) was the best guide and the

Evangel was the best among the heavenly Books.

Even though they could not settle their own disputes between themselves, the followers of both creeds invited the Muslims to their own religion. The above verses were revealed and answered them both. [2](#)

Only Our Creed is True!

Egoism and self-conceit usually cause one to think that Truth is exclusively his own and therefore, he considers others wrong. This very person, consequently, tries to divert others to his own way of seeing things, as the Qur'an through the first verse of the above verses says:

"And they said: 'Be Jews or: Christians, you shall be guided aright'..."

Tell them that distorted religions can never be the source of guidance, but:

"...Say: 'Nay! Rather the creed of Abraham, the upright; and he was not of those who associate partners to Allah'. "

The true believers in pure Faith are those who follow the pure Monotheistic creed, i.e. the Monotheism which has never been tainted with any form of polytheism. The most important basic principle for recognizing the pure religion from the corrupted ones is by keeping in mind this very perfect creed of Monotheism.

Islam instructs us not to make distinction between the divine prophets and to respect their religions totally because the fundamental principles of all Divine religions are entirely the same. Moses (as) and Jesus (as) reinstated the pure (hanif) doctrine of Abraham (as), which is to live and die with faith in the One True God.

They believed in the non-polytheistic creed of Abraham (as), the pure Monotheist, although their religions were later contaminated with polytheism by their ignorant followers. The Jews, though they taught Unity, went after false gods, and the Christians invented the trinity or borrowed it from pagans.

(Of course, if they search for the pureness of truth, they will realize that there is no difference between what their prophets preached and what was brought forth by Islam and that they, in performing their duties today, should follow the divine creed of Islam which has come down from the direction of *Allah* for this Age).

Concerning the statements of the Muslims' opponents, the next verse enjoins the followers of Islam thus:

"Say: 'We have believed in Allah and that which has been sent down to us, and (in) what was sent down to Abraham, Ismail, Isaac, Jacob and the tribes; and (in) that which was given to Moses

and Jesus and (in) that which was given to all prophets from their Lord..."

"...We make no distinction between any of them, and to Him do we submit'."

Self-conceit and tribal or racial prejudices should never lie at the root of our accepting some of the prophets and rejecting the others. They were all Divine teachers who spent their lives training and guiding people in different eras of time. Their aim was only to guide human beings towards pure Unity, Truth, and Justice, although each of them had some particular duties and special qualifications related to their own specific periods of time.

Then it adds:

"If then they believe in what you believe, they indeed are guided (aright)..."

"...but if they turn away, then they are clearly in schism..."

If they do not mix their racial and tribal problems, and the likes of them, with the religion, and formally accept all the prophets, they are also guided, otherwise they have put away the truth and followed the wrong.

The term / siqaq / originally means 'cleft, conflict, and fight' and, here, it has been rendered into 'blasphemy', and sometimes into 'misleading', or 'separation from Truth and tending to falsehood', all of which, in fact, basically point back to the same fact.

Some of the commentators have cited that when the former verse was revealed whereby Jesus (as) was mentioned in a row with some other prophets, some of the Christians said that they did not agree with that statement because Jesus (as) was not like other prophets; he was the son of God. The last verse of the above verses was sent down [3](#) and warned them that they were misguided and they were in schism.

However, at the end of the verse, it encourages the Muslims not to be afraid of the plots of enemies; saying:

"...Allah will suffice you against them; He is the All-Hearing, the All-Knowing."

[Explanation: The Oneness of the Prophets' Invitation](#)

In several occasions, the Holy Qur'an points out that there is no difference between the prophets of *Allah* because all of them had received the revelation from one single Source and pursued one goal.

Therefore, the Qur'an enjoins the Muslims to respect all of the Divine prophets equally. But, as it was stated before, this exhortation does not conflict with the idea that every new religion sent down from *Allah* abrogates the former religions and Islam is the last religion in the world.

Of course, no religion on earth, except Islam, has ever demanded of its adherents to believe equally in

the truthfulness and flawless godliness, sinless purity of conduct and character of the other apostles of *Allah* and in the other sacred scripts as the revealed Word of *Allah*.

This command in Islam was given because the Divine Apostles were like some teachers and everyone of them instructed the human race as one class. It is evident that when the period and the course of one class finishes, the trainees will be promoted to another teacher, to a class of a higher degree.

Therefore, all nations are to fulfill the requirements given by the last prophet of their times, which is the last stage of the development of the religion in their period of time. This statement will never contrast the rightfulness of the invitations of other prophets.

Who were 'Asbat'?

The term / sebt / originally means: 'stretching, or expanding of something easily'. A tree is sometimes called 'sabat' because its branches expand freely. The leading lexicologists expressly declare that / sebt / the plural of which is / asbat / include sons' children and daughters' children. [4](#)

The meaning of the term / asbat /, here is the groups and tribes of Israelites who came forth from Jacob's twelve sons, and, since there were some prophets among them, in the above verse they are counted among those upon whom the Divine verses have been sent down.

So, the objective meaning of the term, here, is the tribe of Israelites or the tribes of Jacob's children who consisted of some prophets, not all the children of Jacob. Some of those children were not entirely eligible to be prophets because they committed sin in their dealings with their own brother.

The Arabic term / hanif / is based on / hanaf / with the meaning 'orthodox, true', or 'inclined from misguidance to right opinion'. So, those pure monotheists who turn away from polytheism and incline to this basic principle are called 'Hanif'.

It is also for this reason that one of the meanings of / hanif / is 'true, straight'.

This explanation makes it clear that the meaning offered by the commentators for the term / hanif / such as Hajj, the pilgrimage to the Ka'bah, adhering to truth, following Abraham (as), and the pureness of deeds, are all reflections of that inclusive meaning and each of them is an example of it.

Surah Al-Baqarah, Verses 138-141

صِبْغَةَ اللَّهِ وَمَنْ أَحْسَنُ مِنَ اللَّهِ صِبْغَةً وَنَحْنُ لَهُ عَابِدُونَ

قُلْ أَتَحَاجُّونَنَا فِي اللَّهِ وَهُوَ رَبُّنَا وَرَبُّكُمْ وَلَنَا أَعْمَالُنَا وَلَكُمْ أَعْمَالُكُمْ وَنَحْنُ لَهُ مُخْلِصُونَ

أَمْ تَقُولُونَ إِنَّ إِبْرَاهِيمَ وَإِسْمَاعِيلَ وَإِسْحَاقَ وَيَعْقُوبَ وَالْأَسْبَاطَ كَانُوا هُودًا أَوْ نَصَارَى قُلْ أَأَنْتُمْ أَعْلَمُ أَمِ اللَّهُ وَمَنْ أَظْلَمُ
مِمَّنْ كَتَمَ شَهَادَةً عِنْدَهُ مِنَ اللَّهِ وَمَا اللَّهُ بِغَافِلٍ عَمَّا تَعْمَلُونَ

تِلْكَ أُمَّةٌ قَدْ خَلَتْ لَهَا مَا كَسَبَتْ وَلَكُمْ مَا كَسَبْتُمْ وَلَا تُسْأَلُونَ عَمَّا كَانُوا يَعْمَلُونَ

138. "(Receive) the baptism of Allah and who is better than Allah in baptizing? And Him do we worship."

139. "Say (to the Jews and Christians): Would you dispute with us concerning Allah Who is our Lord and your Lord? For us are our deeds and for you are your deeds: and we are sincere to Him: "

140. "Or do you claim that Abraham, Ismail, Isaac, Jacob, and the tribes were Jews or Christians? Say: Who then knows best, you or Allah? 'Who is more unjust than he who conceals testimony received from Allah? And Allah is not heedless of what you do. "

141. "That is a nation that has passed away; theirs is that which they have earned and yours is what you earned; you shall not be questioned for what they had been doing."

Following the invitation, in the former verses, to the adherents of all religions to accept the Divine messages of all prophets, in the first verse of this group of verses, it commands them all to:

"(Receive) the baptism of Allah..."

Which is the same as the purification by Faith and true monotheism resulting in the manifestation of one true colour? Then, it adds:

"...and who is better than Allah in baptizing? And Him do we worship."

Thus, the Qur'an commands that all racial, tribal and other separative colours be put aside and that everyone take on (symbolically) the colour of *Allah*.

Some commentators have recorded that it was a custom among the Christians to baptize their new-born children in baptismal water which was mixed with dye or a colour, signifying that the baptized person received new colour in life. They said that this baptism, especially with this particular colour, caused the person to be cleaned from the original sin that he had inherited from Adam (as).

The Qur'an rejects this baseless logic and tells them that in order to purify their souls and minds from

any stain of sin instead of using colours of rituals, superstitions and dispersiveness; they had better accept the colour of truthfulness and godliness.

Truly, what a delicate and beautiful sentence it is! How nice it would be if all people accepted the godly colour, i.e. the colour of unity, purity and virtue! viz. the colour of colourlessness, the colour of justice, equality, patience and perseverance.

Under the light of the colour of unity and sincerity, all conflicts and fights can be put to an end and the main weed of polytheism and dispersion might be rooted out.

This is, in fact, that very colourlessness, or in other words, pulling away of all colours.

In several traditions, commenting on this verse, it is narrated from Imam al-Sadiq (as) who has said that the objective meaning of / sibqatallah / ' the baptism of *Allah* ' is the pure creed of Islam. [5](#)This idea is also a reference to what was said in the above.

Some of the Jews, and some others, occasionally disputed with the Muslims claiming that all the prophets were chosen from among them and their religion was the oldest of all religions, and their book was the most ancient of Divine Books.

They said that if Muhammad (S) had really been a prophet, he would have been appointed from among them. They sometimes said that their race was superior to the Arab race, for the acceptance of creeds, and they were more receptive to revelation than Arabs, because they had practically been idol-worshippers while the Jews were not.

The Jews considered themselves the sons of God, the ones who claimed Heaven exclusively theirs. The Qur'an refuses all of these false imaginations. At first, it tells the Prophet (S):

"Say (to the Jews and Christians): 'Would you dispute with us concerning Allah Who is our Lord and your Lord?..."

This Lord is not exclusively for one particular tribe or a certain race. He is the Lord of all human beings and all creatures in the world of existence.

Addressing them, it adds that they should also know that: there are no privileges for anyone except for those attained by a person's good deeds:

"...For us are our deeds and for you are your deeds:..."

But there is a difference between those deeds. We serve Him sincerely and associate none with Him, (while most of you have polluted Unity with polytheism):

"...and we are sincere to Him..."

The next verse replies to some other vain claims of theirs. It says:

"Or do you claim that Abraham, Ismail, Isaac, Jacob, and the tribes were Jews or Christians?.."
"...Say: 'Who then knows best, you or Allah?'"

Allah knows best of all that they were neither Jewish nor Christian.

You also know, whether you admit it or not, that many of those prophets came in to this world before Moses (as) and Jesus (as), and if you do not know it, then you have ignorantly charged them with such a belie which in itself, is a great sin and an attempt at hiding the true fact. Thus:

"...Who is more unjust than he who conceals testimony received from Allah?..."
"...And Allah is not heedless of what you do."

What a wonder! When it happens that a person's mind is dominated by obstinacy and prejudice, he denies even the well-known facts of history.

For instance, the Jews counted the prophets such as Abraham (as), Isaac (as) and Jacob (as), who came into the world and passed away before Moses and Jesus, as being from among the followers of Moses (as) and Jesus (as).

They denied the above mentioned fact which is pertinent to the fate of their people and defines their Faith and religion. It may be for this very reason that the Qur'an introduces them as the most unjust.

There is no unjust action worse than that some persons intentionally deny some facts in order to misguide people so that they wander aimlessly in that misguidance.

In the last of the verses under discussion, which is also the last verse of the first part (out of the thirty parts) of the Holy Qur'an, the Qur'an answers them in another style indicating that supposing all these claims were correct, then, this is the answer:

"That is a nation that has passed away; theirs is that which they have earned..."
"...and yours is what you earned; you shall not be questioned for what they had been doing."

In conclusion, a nation should rely upon its own deeds, not on its past history. As a person should thrive on his own excellencies, not on those of his ancestors.

[1.](#) Tafsir-i-Abulfutuh-Razi, vol. 1, p. 339

[2.](#) Majma'-ul-Bayan, vol. 1, p. 216

[3.](#) Majma'-ul-Bayan, vol. 1, p. 218

[4.](#) Arabic-English Lexicon, part 4, p. 1294, by: E.W. Lane

[5.](#) Nur-uth-Thaqalayn, vol. 1, p. 132

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