

Some Doubts by those who believe in Tahrif

There are certain doubts which seem to lend some strength to those who believe in *Tahrif*. We must study them, and allay them one by one.

First Doubt

It is a fact that interpolation and omissions have occurred in Torah and Injil. According to the continuous traditions recorded by both, Shi'a and Sunni, all that which occurred in the preceding era must recur in this Muslim Ummah as well. as-Saduq, for example, has recorded the following in his *al Ikmal* from Ghiyas b. Ibrahim who reports from Imam as-Sadiq ('a) through his forefathers:

"The Prophet ('s) said: *All that was in the preceding peoples, must happen in this Ummah, in the wake of their footsteps, exactly identical*"¹

So, it follows that *Tahrif* must occur in the Qur'an also, otherwise this tradition would have no meaning.

This can be answered in many ways.

First, the tradition is not continuous or widely acknowledged one, as alleged. In fact, it is from amongst isolate reports. They have not been recorded in the four great books of Hadith, and as such there can be no comparison between the Qur'an and the Testaments on this point.

Secondly, if this argument is to be considered fully, then one has to accept that together with the omission, some addition has also occurred, just as in the Testaments. This, as we know, is evidently untrue.

Thirdly, many events which occurred among the foregoing peoples never occurred among the Muslims. For example, the worshipping of the calf, the stray wandering of Banu Israel for forty years, the drowning of Pharaoh and his people, the kingdom of Sulaiman over men and jinn, the rising of Jesus alive to the heaven, the death of Harun before Musa, though he was the Wasiy, the great nine signs of Musa, the birth of Isa without father, the curse of transmutation from men to apes and pigs, and many such

occurrences which we cannot all enumerate, have not occurred in this Ummah. The meaning of the tradition, therefore, has got to be construed differently from what it apparently conveys. What it actually means is that certain incidents occurring in this Ummah will have its corresponding counterpart in the ancient history. It does not mean that all of them must recur.

In the case of Qur'an, suffice it to say that the Muslims failed to adhere to the behests of the Qur'an, the same way as the preceding people failed to follow their scriptures, although the text of the Qur'an was preserved. We have already mentioned this sort of *Tahrif* earlier when we quoted a report. It is further stressed by a report by Abu-Waqid Al-Laysi who says: "When the Prophet (s) advanced towards *Khaybar*, he passed by a tree which was revered by the idolaters. It was called *Dhatu Anwat*, upon which they suspended their weapons.

The companions urged the Prophet (s): `O Messenger of Allah, let us have a tree like the one they have'. The Prophet (s) said:

*"Glory be to Allah! This is like what they had asked Musa when they said: `Let us have a god like the one they have'. By God, you are going to follow in the wake of the people before you".*²

This tradition clarifies that certain events in this Ummah will bear resemblance of what transpired in the preceding Ummah, in some way.

Lastly, if we were to accept that the tradition is authentic and also continuous, it does not in any way prove that *Tahrif* would occur in the past, or in the early days of Islam. There is nothing to indicate that the occurrence is confined to those days. The Qur'an is for ever, and as evidenced by al-Bukhari, it will remain till the Day of Judgement. So they should expect *Tahrif* to occur at any time, even in the future. Why should they speak of *Tahrif* in the prime of Islam or at the time of the Caliphs only?

Second Doubt

Imam Ali (a) had a codex of his own, other than the existing one. He brought it to the people, but they did not accept it from him. His codex contained certain sections which are not to be found in the Qur'an we have, and so it proves that the present Qur'an is lesser than the one Imam Ali (a) had collected. This then is the *Tahrif* which is said to have occurred. It is supported by many traditions, like a tradition where Ali (a) is reported to have argued with a group of Muhajirin and Ansar:

*"O Talha, every ayah that was revealed to the Prophet (s) by Allah is with me, dictated by the Prophet (s) and in my handwriting. And an explanation to every ayah in respect of that which is permissible, forbidden, penal code, laws or things of which this ummah may stand in need till the dawn of qiyamah. They are with me dictated by the Prophet (s) and written in my own hand, even the blood money required to compensate a scratch".*³

Again, there is another tradition in which Ali (a) is reported to have told an atheist while arguing with him

that his codex

"..... was a complete Book containing all the revelation and all the interpretations, all clear, canonical verses and those requiring elucidations, the abrogants and those abrogated. In short, every letter from Alif to Lam was there. But they did not accept it".⁴

Another tradition is in *al-Kafi* where the author narrates it with the chain of reporters ending up with Jabir who reports from Imam Mohammad Baqir ('a):

"No one can claim that he has a complete Qur'an with him, its exterior and its interior, except the successors of the Prophet ('s) (i.e. al-awsiya)".⁵

And further, a report from Jabir says:

"I heard Abu-Ja'far ('a) (i.e. Imam Mohammad Baqir ('a), say that whoever claims to have collected the total Qur'an as it was revealed is indeed a liar. None has collected and preserved it in the way it was revealed by Allah except Ali b. Abi Talib ('a) and the Imams ('a) after him".⁶

The answer to all this is very simple. The codex prepared by Ali ('a) differed from the existing Qur'an in the arrangement and order of the *Surahs*. This is beyond any doubt, and has been accepted by the great scholars to an extent that we do not have to go to any length to prove it. Similarly, if we were to accept that the contents of his copy were more than the contents of this Qur'an, there is no evidence to prove that the addition found in his copy belonged to the text of the Qur'an. The truth is that those additions were by way of interpretation, explaining the original intention of the revelation. Or, even if they formed a part of what was revealed by Allah, they came as interpretation, indicating the true meaning.

In fact, this doubt originates from the meaning given to the two words: *tanzil* and *tawil* by the later scholars, in that they construe *tanzil* as that which was sent down as the Qur'an, and *tawil* as that which is supposed to be the true meaning or interpretation of the word, a meaning which may differ from the immediate sense of the word. But these interpretations have been fabricated, because they are not in any way supported by the language nor are they in any way indicated by the authentic traditions of *Ahl ul-Bayt ('a)*.

In Grammar, *tawil* is an infinitive deriving from *al-awil* which means "to refer to" or "to return to". It is also used to mean "the end result" or "the consequence" and also "that to which the matter eventually resorts". Based on these, we find them used in the following *ayahs*.

ويعلمك من تأويل الاحاديث

"And teach you the interpretation of the stories". (Qur'an, 12:6)

نبئنا بتأويله

"Tell us the meaning thereof". (Qur'an, 12:36)

هذا تأويل رؤياي

"This is the meaning of my vision". (Qur'an, 12: 100)

ذلك تأويل ما لم تستطع عليه صبيرا

"That is the meaning of things over which you were unable to hold patience". (Qur'an, 18:72)

And it has been similarly used at several other places in the Qur'an, where *tawil* means an event or a fact to which the speech is related, or its consequence, regardless of whether it is clearly understood by those who know Arabic, or whether it has a hidden meaning not known by anyone except those endowed with profound knowledge.

Similarly, *tanzil* is an infinitive deriving from *an-nuzul*, meaning that which was sent down. In the Qur'an, we find this use in many verses:

انه لقرآن كريم في كتاب مكنون لا يمسه الا المطهرون تنزيل من رب العالمين

"This is indeed A Qur'an, most honourable, In a Book well-guarded, which none shall touch but those who are clean, Sent down from the Lord of the Worlds". (Qur'an, 56:77-80)

As stated earlier, it is not correct to presume that every revelation was a part of the Qur'an. The tradition which states that Ali's ('a) codex had some additions of *tanzil* and *tawil*, does not have any indication that those additions were parts of the Qur'an. This is why we find in certain reports that his codex had clear mention of the names of the hypocrites. This evidently was in the form of elucidation; because we have proved beyond doubt that no omission or addition ever took place in the Qur'an. Moreover the Prophet ('s) in his bid to win over the hearts of the hypocrites, always treated his knowledge about their hypocrisy secretly. It is known to every student of history that the Prophet ('s) displayed utmost patience when dealing with them; therefore it is inconceivable that their names would appear in the Qur'an. If it did, it would mean that the Prophet ('s) was indirectly forcing the hypocrites to curse themselves through the Qur'an openly, and also the Muslims to do the same against the named hypocrites. Could this be possibly accepted without looking into the credibility of the report, or by simply accepting those traditions which mention that the names were there in the codex prepared by Ali ('a)? Of course, there can be no comparison with Abu Lahab who was openly cursed in the Qur'an because of his defiance and because

the Prophet (‘s) knew that he would die an unbeliever. It is quite possible though, that the Prophet (‘s) revealed the names of the hypocrites to his confidante like Ali (‘a) in the exclusive sittings.

To summarise, even if it were accepted as true that Ali's (‘a) codex contained those additions, they were not the part of the text of the Qur’an, nor were they intended for the Prophet (‘s) to reveal to his people. The argument of those who conclude otherwise is incompatible with all the aforementioned proofs advanced against *Tahrif*:

Third Doubt

It is said that there are some widely reported and continuous reports from the *Ahl ul-Bayt* (‘a) which indicate the tampering having occurred.

The fact is that there is no indication in those reports to prove *Tahrif* in the sense which has been a subject of debate. Again, most of them are weak, reported from the book by Ahmed b. Muhammad As-Sayari who has been acknowledged by all scholars of *rijal* as one of corrupt beliefs, like that he believed in reincarnation. Some of them are taken from Ali b. Ahmed al-Kufi who has been described by the scholars of *rijal* as "*kadhab*" a liar; and that his beliefs were corrupt. Of course, the abundance of certain reports from Masumin (peace be upon them) gives us enough reason to presume that they have been correctly attributed. Among them are traditions which have been reliably reported, and therefore we do not see any need to go into the details of their authenticity.

1. Bihar al anwar, v8, p.4, and there are other sunni sources also.
2. Sunan, Tirmidhi, v9, p.26
3. Muqaddimah, Tafsir al burhan, p.28. This tradition also clarifies that the present Qur’an has no addition.
4. 6th Muqaddimah, Tafsir as Safi, p.2
5. al Wafi, v2, kitab al hujjah, chapter 76, p. 130
6. al Wafi, v2, kitab al hujjah, chapter 76, p. 130

Source URL:

<https://www.al-islam.org/collection-and-preservation-quran-sayyid-abu-al-qasim-al-khoei/some-doubts-those-who-believe-tahrif#comment-0>