

Suratul Baqarah: Verses 125 – 129

(١٢٥) وَإِذْ جَعَلْنَا الْبَيْتَ مَثَابَةً لِّلنَّاسِ وَأَمْنَا وَاتَّخِذُوا مِن مَّقَامِ إِبْرَاهِيمَ
مُصَلًّى وَعَهِدْنَا إِلَىٰ إِبْرَاهِيمَ هِمَّ وَإِسْمَاعِيلَ أَن طَهِّرَا بَيْتِيَ لِلطَّائِفِينَ وَالْعَاكِفِينَ
وَالرُّكَّعِ السُّجُودِ

(١٢٦) وَإِذْ قَالَ إِبْرَاهِيمُ رَبِّ اجْعَلْ هَذَا بَلَدًا ءَامِنًا وَارْزُقْ أَهْلَهُ مِن
الثَّمَرَاتِ مَنْ ءَامَنَ مِنْهُمْ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ ءَاخِرِ قَالَ وَمَنْ كَفَرَ فَأُمَتِّعُهُ قَلِيلًا
ثُمَّ أَضْطَرُّهُ إِلَىٰ عَذَابِ النَّارِ وَيُئْسَ الْمَصِيرُ

(١٢٧) وَإِذْ يَرَىٰ فِعْ إِبْرَاهِيمُ هِمَّ الْقَوَاعِدِ مِنَ الْبَيْتِ وَإِسْمَاعِيلُ رَبَّنَا تَقَبَّلْ مِنَّا إِنَّكَ
أَنْتَ السَّمِيعُ الْعَلِيمُ

(١٢٨) رَبَّنَا وَاجْعَلْنَا مُسْلِمِينَ لَكَ وَمِن ذُرِّيَّتِنَا أُمَّةً مُّسْلِمَةً لَّكَ وَأَرِنَا مَنَاسِكَنَا
وَتُبَّ عَلَيْنَا إِنَّكَ أَنْتَ التَّوَّابُ الرَّحِيمُ

(١٢٩) رَبَّنَا وَأَبْعَثْ فِيهِمْ رَسُولًا مِّنْهُمْ يَتْلُوا عَلَيْهِمْ ءَايَاتِكَ وَيُعَلِّمُهُمُ الْكِتَابَ
وَالْحِكْمَةَ وَيُزَكِّيهِمْ إِنَّكَ أَنْتَ الْعَزِيزُ الْحَكِيمُ

And (remember) **when We made the House a rendezvous for men and a** (place of) **security, and take** (for yourselves) **a place of prayer on the standing-place of Ibrahim. And We enjoined Ibrahim and Isma'il** (saying): **“Purify (you two) My House for those who make circuit and those who abide** (in it for devotion) **and those who bow down** (and) **those who prostrate themselves”** (125).

And (remember) **when Ibrahim said. “My Lord! make it a secure town and provide its people with fruits, such of them as believe in Allah and the last day” He said: “And whoever disbelieves, I will grant him enjoyment for a short while, then I will drive him to the chastisement of the Fire; and it is an evil destination”** (126).

And (remember) **when Ibrahim and Isma'il were raising the foundations of the House: “Our Lord! accept from us; surely Thou art the Hearing, the Knowing** (127).

Our Lord! and make us both submissive to Thee and (raise) **from our offspring a group submitting to Thee, and show us our ways of devotion and turn to us** (mercifully), **surely Thou art the Oft-returning** (with mercy), **the Merciful** (128).

Our Lord! and raise up in them an Apostle from among themselves who shall recite to them Thy communications and teach them the Book and the wisdom, and purify them; surely Thou art the Mighty, the Wise” (129).

Commentary

Qur'an: And (remember) **when We made the House a rendezvous for men and a** (place of) **security:** It refers to the legislation of the *hajj* and the sanctuary offered by the House. *”al-Mathabah”* (الْمَثَابَةُ) = rendezvous; a place to which one returns) is derived from *thaba, yathubu* (ثَابَ ، يَثُوبُ) = he returned, he will return).

Qur'an: and take (for yourselves) **a place of prayer on the standing-place of Ibrahim:** The conjunctive “and” joins this order with the preceding sentence turning that also into order.

In that case the complete sentence would have the following connotation: And when We told the people, return to, and do the *hajj* of the House and take (for yourself) a place of prayer... Other alternative, suggested by some exegetes, is to imply a deleted word “We said”.

Accordingly, the meaning would be: and We said, take (for yourselves) a place of prayer... *al-Musalla* (الْمُصَلَّى) is deverbal noun of place, derived from *as-salah* (الصَّلَاةُ) = to pray, to invoke); the sentence means: take (for yourselves) a place of prayer and invocation at the place where Ibrahim (a.s.) had stood.

Apparently, the preceding sentence is a sort of introduction, pointing to the reason why prayer in that place was prescribed; that is why this sentence does not put emphasis on “prayer” – in other words, it

does not say, and pray in the standing–place of Ibrahim; it literally says, and take on the standing–place of Ibrahim (a.s.) a place of prayer.

Qur'an: *And We enjoined Ibrahim and Isma'il (saying): "Purify (you two) My House..."*: *al-'Ahd* الْعَهْدُ) = to enjoin, to obligate). The order to purify the House may mean to keep it exclusively reserved for the worship by those who go around it making circuits, those who abide in it for devotion, and those who pray in it.

In this sense, it would be an *isti'arah bi l-kinaya*, and would imply: keep My House exclusively reserved for My worship. Alternatively, the order may be to keep it clean; to be on guard lest it is dirtied by careless people.

ar-Rukka' (الرُّكْعُ) and *as-sujud* (السُّجُودُ) are plurals of *ar-raki'* (الرَّاكِعُ) = one who bows down) and *as-sajid* (السَّاجِدُ) = one who prostrates, one who does *sajdah*) respectively, the phrase refers to those who pray.

Qur'an: *And (remember) when Ibrahim said: "My Lord! make it a secure town..."*: In this way Ibrahim (a. s.) called on his Lord to bestow security and safety as well as sustenance on the residents of Mecca; and the prayer was granted.

Far be it from Allah to quote in His speech an unaccepted prayer without hinting at its rejection; if He were to do so, His talk would amount to a vain ridicule – far beneath the sublime dignity of His truthful speech. He says:

... and the truth do I speak (38:83);

Most surely it is a decisive word, and it is no a jest (86: 13 – 14).

The Qur'an has quoted numerous prayers which this great prophet had pleaded before his Lord for; for example, his prayer for himself in the beginning of his life; his prayer at the time of his emigration to Syria; his invocation to keep his good name alive; his prayer for himself, for his progeny and parents, and for the believing men and women; his invocation, after building the House, for the residents of Mecca; his prayer and pleading for a Prophet to be sent from among his progeny.

His prayers and the favours he asked from Allah are a canvas which graphically shows his hopes and expectations, creates before our eyes a clear picture of his endeavours and efforts in the way of Allah, and provides a glimpse of his sublime spiritual virtues.

In short, these prayers show his status before Allah and his nearness to Him. One may write a detailed history of his life, basing it on his stories and the laudatory phrases used for him in the Qur'an; and we shall write something on these lines in Chapter 6 (The Cattle).

Qur'an: *such of them as believe*: Ibrahim (a. s.) asked his Lord to give the residents of Mecca security

and provide them with fruits. At the same time he realized that not all of the residents would be believers, that some of them would be unbelievers; also he understood that his prayer for their sustenance was general – it covered the believers as well as the unbelievers; and he was aware that he had already declared himself to be separate from the unbelievers and their idols (as Allah says about him:

But when it became clear to him that he, that is, his father, was an enemy of Allah, he declared himself to be clear of him [9:114].

Here Allah bears witness that Ibrahim [a.s.] had declared his separation from every enemy of Allah, not expecting even his father). In this background, as soon as he realized that his prayer included both the believers and the unbelievers, he added the proviso, “such of them as believe...”, although he was well aware that, according to the social structure of this world, sustenance could not be given only to the believing group, to the exclusion of the unbelievers; yet he qualified his prayer.

Even so, Allah knows better how He should decide about His creatures and what He should decree concerning them. Therefore, Ibrahim's prayer was granted for the believers, and was extended to cover the unbelievers also.

The reply given to Ibrahim (a.s.) implies that Allah would give them sustenance according to the system He has created in this world; in other words, believers and unbelievers both would be given their livelihood, because restricting it to the believers would entail unnecessarily breaking the usual and established system.

Ibrahim (a.s.) could have said: and provide the believers of this town with fruits; but he did not, because what he wanted to ask was an attraction, a dignity, for the town which would be centred around the Sacred House of Allah.

That House was built in a valley devoid of every agricultural produce; and if it were not provided with fruits and food–stuff, nobody would settle in it, and the place would remain uninhabited.

Qur'an: “And whoever disbelieves, I will grant him enjoyment for a short while: The word translated, “I will grant him enjoyment”, has been read *umti'uhu* (أُمَّتْعُهُ) and *umatti'uhu* (أُمَّتَعُهُ) from the verbal noun's paradigms *al-if'al* (الْإِفْعَالُ) and *at-taf'il* (التَّفْعِيلُ) respectively. Meaning of both readings is the same.

Qur'an: then I will drive him to the chastisement... ”: It further shows the great dignity of the House and is meant to give even more pleasure to Ibrahim (a.s.). The import of the verse is as follows:

I have granted your prayer (to increase this House's honour by giving sustenance to its believing residents) and have decided to include even the unbelievers in that livelihood; but the unbelievers should not be deluded by that; they should not think that the sustenance comes to them because they have got

any honour in the eyes of Allah; it is actually in honour of this town, because I have accepted your prayer and given you more than you had asked. As for the unbeliever, I will surely drive him to the chastisement of the Fire and it is an evil destination.

Qur'an: *And (remember) when Ibrahim and Isma'il were raising the foundations of the House: al-Qawa'id* (الْقَوَائِدُ) is plural of *al-ga'idah* (الْقَاعِدَةُ) which literally means that part of building which "sits" in the earth'; hence it has been translated as foundation, upon which the rest of the building is raised.

"Raising the foundations" is an allegorical expression, it counts the walls (which were raised upon foundations) as a part of the foundation; another allegorical aspect is to ascribe the rise to the foundations alone without mentioning the walls, although it were the walls which were raised. The words "of the House", point to the intended allegory.

Qur'an: "Our Lord! accept from us; surely Thou art the Hearing, the Knowing: The prayer comes direct from Ibrahim and Isma'il, without any introductory clause like "They said" or "They prayed"; such a clause is not even implied here.

When we read the words, "when Ibrahim and Isma'il were raising the foundations of the House", the scene is flashed before our eyes; it is as though we see them busy building the walls, and then we dramatically hear their voices and their prayer directly from them – there is no need of any intermediary to report to us what they said or did.

Such dramatic presentation is often used in the Qur'an, and it is among its most beautiful styles – and all its styles are beautiful. It presents the story in the most effective way, bringing it within the purview of our senses. It is a style which surpasses all manners of narration and reporting.

Ibrahim and Isma'il did not mention the thing or action which they prayed to Allah to accept, that is, they did not say, accept from us this construction' of Thy House. It shows their humbleness and humility before their Lord; they thought that it was a very insignificant work on their part and was not worthy of their Lord.

This omission of the object has given the following connotation to their prayer: Our Lord! accept from us this in-significant deed, although it is not worthy of Thy name; surely Thou art hearing our prayers, knowing our intentions.

Qur'an: *Our Lord! And make us both submissive to thee and (raise) from our offspring a group submitting to Thee.* The words translated here as submissive and submitting are *muslim* (مُسْلِمٌ) and its feminine *muslimah* (مُسْلِمَةٌ), respectively.

Obviously, the definition of Islam, with which we are familiar, and which comes to our minds as soon as we hear the word, Islam, is just the elementary grade of servitude; it distinguishes a professed convert from the one who openly rejects the faith. This elementary Islam means professing the matters of faith

and doing necessary deeds, no matter whether it is done with true belief or hypo-critically.

Now, Ibrahim (a.s.) was a prophet, a messenger and one of the five *ulu l-'azm* apostles, who gave us the upright faith. It is unthinkable that such a great prophet had not attained, at the time when he was praying, this most elementary grade of Islam.

Likewise, his son, Isma'il (a.s.), was a messenger of Allah and had been offered as sacrifice in His way. Can it be said that they had got that much Islam but were unaware of it? Or that, although they were aware of having attained to that Islam but wanted to continue on it?

Just look at the context of the prayer: Those who prayed were so near to Allah; they were praying while building His Sacred House; they knew whom they were praying to, and who He was and how great His splendour is.

Could they, in that position, ask for such a trivial grade from the Lord Almighty? Moreover, this grade of Islam is among those things which are within the power of man himself; and that is why man can be ordered to accept it; as Allah says:

When his Lord said to him: "Be a Muslim", he said: "I submit myself to the Lord of the worlds" (2:131).

Obviously, such a quality or action cannot be attributed to Allah; likewise, it is meaningless to ask from Allah to do a work which has been placed within the power of the man himself. (Of course, it may be done if there is some special condition which makes Divine interference justifiable.)

Therefore, the Islam they had asked for was not that Islam whose definition we are familiar with. Islam has many grades, as may be seen in the verse quoted above:

When his Lord said to him (i.e., Ibrahim): "Be a Muslim", he said: "I submit myself to the Lord of the worlds" (2:131).

Ibrahim (a.s.) was ordered to be a Muslim at a time when he was already a Muslim. Clearly, the Islam which he was told to attain was other than the Islam he had already attained. There are many such examples in the Qur'an.

This sublime grade of Islam – which we shall explain in detail later on – means total servitude, unconditional surrender of all a servant has got to his Master. No doubt it is within a man's power to prepare the conditions facilitating its attainment.

Yet, when we look at an average man and the usual condition of his heart and mind, such a high standard seems beyond his power to attain. In other words, it is not possible for him – in the conditions surrounding him – to get to that sublime Islam.

From this point of view, that Islam is not different from other positions of *al-wilayah* (الولاية) = friendship of Allah) and its lofty stages, or from other grades of perfection – all of them are beyond the reach of an average man, because he cannot fulfil their necessary conditions.

In this sense, it is possible to count that Islam as a Divine gift which is beyond a man's power to attain by himself. Consequently, it is perfectly right for a man to pray to Allah to bestow on him that sublime quality and make him a Muslim of that high rank.

Moreover, there is another deeper connotations: It is only actions which are attributed to man and emanate from his free will and power; as for his attributes and deep-rooted traits (which are etched on his psyche by repeated actions), they are in fact beyond his power.

Therefore, they may be – or let us say, should be – attributed to Allah, especially if they are good and virtuous attributes which should better be attributed to Allah rather than to man. This observation is based on the style used in the Qur'an. For example:

“My Lord! make me keep up prayer, and from my off-spring (too) ” (14:40);

“... and join me with the good ones” (26:83);

“My Lord! grant me that I should be grateful for Thy bounty which Thou has bestowed on me and on my parents, and that I should do good such as Thou art pleased with, and make me enter, by Thy mercy, into Thy servants, the good ones” (27:19);

“Our Lord! and make us both submissive to Thee and (raise) from our offspring a group submitting to Thee (2:128).

It is now clear that the Islam which Ibrahim and Isma'il had asked for was something different from the Islam to which the verse 49:14 refers:

The dwellers of the desert say: “We believe.” Say: “You do not believe but say: ‘We submit (we accept Islam)'; and faith has not yet entered into your hearts.”

The Islam they prayed for was of a high rank and sublime grade which we shall explain later on.

Qur'an: and show us our ways of devotion and turn to us (mercifully), **surely Thou art the Oft-returning** (with mercy), **the Merciful**: This also points to the sublime meaning of Islam, just referred to *al-manasik* (المناسك) = translated here as ways of devotion) is plural of *al-mansak* (المنسك) which means “worship” or “act of worship”, as Allah says:

And to every nation We appointed (acts of) **worship...** (22:34).

It is a *masdar* used as the first construct of a genitive case. We have explained earlier that a *masdar* used in this way proves the existence of that work or action. Therefore, the phrase, “our ways of

devotion”, refers to those acts of worship which they were doing or had already done; it does not refer to any action which they intended to do in future.

In this context, the phrase “show us” does not mean “teach us” or “help us to do”; rather it means “strengthen us by showing us the realities of our acts of worship”, as we pointed out earlier while writing the verse:

and We revealed to them the doing of good (deeds) and the establishing of prayer and the giving of zakat (21:73).

And later on we shall explain that the revelation mentioned in this verse means to strengthen the doer of that deed; it does not mean teaching them their responsibilities and obligations. Probably, it is to this reality that the verses 38: 45 – 46 refer:

And remember Our servants, Ibrahim and Ishaq and Ya'qub, men of strength and insight. Surely We purified them by a pure quality, the remembering of the (final) abode.

The above explanation makes it clear that this prayer was for an Islam and an insight into worship completely different from ordinary meanings of these terms. The same is the case with their prayer, *tub 'alayna* (تُبْ عَلَيْنَا) = usually translated as, forgive us);

Ibrahim and Isma'il both were prophets, protected by Allah from every error and sin; they could not make any mistake or error; they did not need Allah's forgiveness and pardon as we do when we commit sins, (that is why we have translated it in literal way: *turn to us* mercifully).

Question: It is all right to interpret Islam, showing the ways of devotion and forgiveness in the way you have done maintaining the dignity of Ibrahim and Isma'il (peace be on them both). But it is not necessary to apply the same meanings when these words are used for their offspring. Ibrahim (a.s.) did not include his offspring with himself and Isma'il, except in the prayer for Islam, and that also in a separate sentence.

They did not say: Make us and a group of our offspring submissive to Thee; instead they prayed for themselves, and after that separately pleaded for their offspring, saying, ”and (raise) from our offspring a group submitting to Thee”.

There should be no difficulty in believing that what they had in mind was Islam in its general meaning covering all its ranks and grades – even the most elementary one. Even this elementary grade of Islam gives good results and is instrumental in creating good environment in the society.

It would not be wrong if Ibrahim (a.s.) asked his Lord for this Islam; even the Prophet invited people to just that type of Islam – if they testified that there was none to be worshipped except Allah and Muhammad (S) was His Messenger, they were accepted as Muslims, their lives were protected, marriage with them was allowed and they became entitled to inherit from their Muslim relatives.

Therefore, it should be perfectly right to say that the two sentences refer to two separate ranks of Islam: “Our Lord! and make us both submissive to Thee”, would mean the highest rank of Islam in conformity with the prestige of Ibrahim and Isma’il;

“and (raise) from our offspring a group submitting to Thee”, would refer to the elementary grade of Islam befitting a nation which included hypocrites and people of weak faith as well as those with firm belief – and all are called Muslims.

Reply: Position of legislation for the guidance of people is totally different from the position of praying to Allah, and each has its own rules; what is valid on one plane is not necessarily good on the other.

The Prophet prescribed a minimum standard for his *ummah*, that is, to utter the two testimonies of the Oneness of Allah, and his own prophethood; it was done with a view to widen the circle of Islam and to protect the healthy religious system – that manifest Islam protected the essence of Islam as a shell protects the kernel.

But the plane of invocation and prayer to Allah is much higher than that. At this level, appearances lose their value; it is the reality that matters here; the objective here is actuality and truth, and the desire is for nearness to Allah. At this level, the prophets are not influenced by appearance. It was not because of any worldly love of his offspring that Ibrahim (a.s.) prayed for his progeny.

Had it been so, he would have prayed first of all for his father and would not have declared his separation from him as soon as he came to know that he was an enemy of Allah. Also, if he would have been concerned with appearances, he would not have prayed in the following words:

And disgrace me not on the day when they are raised, the day on which neither property will avail, nor sons, except him who comes to Allah with a heart submissive (26:87 – 89);

nor would have he said: ***And make for me a truthful tongue among the posterity*** (26:84),

instead he would have said, make for me a remembering tongue among the posterity.

Keeping all this in view, it is easy to understand that when he asked from his Lord to raise a Muslim group from among his offspring, he did not mean the elementary rank of Islam; he wanted for them the reality of Islam.

The Qur’anic words, “a group submitting to Thee”, support this interpretation. If he wanted only the appearance of Islam and not its essence, it was enough to say, “a group submitting”, there was no need to add, “to Thee”. (Ponder on this point.)

Qur’an: *Our Lord! and raise up in them an Apostle from among themselves...*: He was praying for the Prophet; and the Prophet used to say: “I am the prayer of Ibrahim”.

Traditions

al-Kattani said: "I asked Abu Abdillah (a.s.) about a man who forgot to pray two *rak'ahs* near the standing-place of Ibrahim, in *at-tawaf* (الطَّوَّافُ = circuit, circumambulation) of the *hajj* and *'umrah*. He (a.s.) said:

'If he is still in the town (Mecca), he should pray the two *rak'ahs* near the standing-place of Ibrahim, because verily Allah says: *and take* (for yourselves) *a place of prayer on the standing-place of Ibrahim*; and if he has departed (from it) then I will not order him to return.' " (*al-Kafi*)

The author says: Almost similar traditions have been narrated by ash-Shaykh in *at-Tahdhib* and by al-'Ayyashi in his *at-Tafsir* with several *asnad* (i.e., chains of narrators). Particulars of this rule (i.e., prayer should be offered near or behind the standing-place – as is narrated in some traditions that:

"No-one should pray the two *rak'ahs* of *at-tawaf* except behind the standing-place..." are inferred from the word *min* (مِنْ = from; here translated as *on*) used in the order, ***and take... a place of prayer on (or, from) the standing-place...***

as-Sadiq (a.s.) said explaining the words of Allah: ***Purify (you two) My House...***: "Keep the polytheists away from it." (*at-Tafsir*, al-Qummi)

as-Sadiq (a.s.) said: " Verily Allah, Mighty and Great is He! says in His Book:

'Purify (you two) My House for those who make circuit and those who abide (in it for devotion) ***and those who bow down*** (and) ***those who prostrate themselves.***'

Therefore, it is proper for a servant not to enter Mecca except that he is clean, (and) has washed away his sweat and dirt and has purified himself."

The author says: This meaning has been narrated in other traditions also. The idea, that if the place of arrival is clean then the one who arrives should make himself clean, may be inferred from other verses too. See, for example, the verse:

and the good things are for good ones and the good ones are for good things (24:26).

Ibn 'Abbas said: "When Ibrahim brought Isma'il and Hajar, he settled them at Mecca; and a time passed; and the people of (the tribe of) Jurhum came to settle there and Isma'il married a woman from that tribe; and Hajar died; and Ibrahim asked per-mission of Sarah (to visit Isma'il); so she allowed him but imposed a condition on him that he would not come down (from his riding animal).

Thus Ibrahim arrived (at Mecca) and Hajar had died, so he went to the house of Isma'il; and he asked his wife: 'Where is your husband?' She told him: 'He is not here, he has gone hunting.' And Isma'il used to go outside al-Haram (الْحَرَمُ = the boundary) to hunt and then return. Ibrahim said to her: 'Do you have

anything to entertain a guest?'

She said: 'I have nothing and there is nobody with me.' Then Ibrahim said to her: 'When your husband comes, tell him (my) *salam* and tell him to change the threshold of his door.' And Ibrahim went away. Then Isma'il came and felt the scent of his father.

So he asked his wife: 'Had anyone come to you?' She said: 'An old man had come to me with such and such features (describing him scornfully).' (Isma'il) said: 'Then what did he say to you?' She said: 'He said to me to give you (his) *salam* and to tell you to change the threshold of your door.' So, Isma'il divorced her and married another (woman).

Thereafter, Ibrahim remained (at his place) as long as Allah wished him to remain (there). Then he asked permission of Sarah to visit Isma'il; and she allowed him, but (again) imposed the (same) condition that he should not come down (from his riding animal). Then Ibrahim came until he reached the door of Isma'il.

And he asked his wife: 'Where is your husband?' She said: 'He has gone for hunting and, Allah willing, he will come back just now; you come down, may Allah have mercy upon you!' He asked her: 'Do you have anything to entertain a guest?'

She said: 'Yes.' Then she brought milk and meat. (Ibrahim) thereupon prayed and blessed her. Had she brought on that day bread, wheat, barley or date, (Mecca) would have become the most plentiful of all the world in wheat, barley or date. Then she said to him: '(Please) come down so that I may wash your head.'

But he did not come down. So she brought (the stone which thereafter was known as) the standing-place (of Ibrahim) and put it on his (right) side, and he put his foot on it, and his footmark was impressed on it; (in this way) she washed the right side of his head; then she shifted the stone to his left side and washed the left side of his head, and (again) his footmark was imprinted on it.

Thereupon (Ibrahim) said to her: 'When your husband comes, give him (my) *salam* and tell him that the threshold of his door is now in order.'

When Isma'il (a.s.) came back, he felt the scent of his father, and asked his wife: 'Had anyone come to you?' She replied: 'Yes, a venerable (old) man, of loveliest features and most pleasant fragrance; he said to me this and this and I told him this and this; and I washed his head and this is the imprint of his feet on (his) standing-place.' (Hearing this), Isma'il said to her: 'That was Ibrahim.' "(*Majma'u'l-bayan*)

The author says: al-Qummi has narrated in his *at-Tafsir* a nearly similar tradition.

as-Sadiq (a.s.) said: "Verily, Ibrahim settled in a valley of Syria. When he got his son Isma'il from Hajar, Sarah was extremely grieved because she herself had no child. And she used to hurt Ibrahim and make him unhappy with respect to Hajar.

So Ibrahim complained to Allah about it, and Allah sent a revelation to him: 'The likeness of woman is like the curved rib; if you leave it (as it is), you will benefit from it, but if you (try to) make it straight, you will break it.' Thereafter, (Allah) ordered him to remove Isma'il and his mother (from that place).

He said: 'O Lord! to which place?' (Allah) said: 'To My holy place, and My sanctuary, and the part of the earth which I created first (of all the earth); and it is Mecca.' Then Allah sent Jibril down to him with *a/-Buraq*¹; and (Jibril) made Hajar, Isma'il and Ibrahim ride on it.

And whenever Ibrahim passed a good place with trees, cultivation and date-palms, he used to say: 'O Jibril! here? here?' And Jibril used to reply: 'No, go on, go on.' (It continued) until they reached Mecca and (Jibril) made them alight in the place where the House is.

And Ibrahim had given Sarah a promise that he would not come down until he came back to her. When they alighted in that place, there was a tree there; Hajar spread on that tree a sheet she had with her, and thus they found a shade under it.

When Ibrahim arranged their affairs and settled them there, he wished to leave them to return to Sarah. Hajar said to him: 'O Ibrahim! Are you leaving us in a place where there is neither human being to keep company nor water nor cultivation?' Ibrahim said: 'Allah, Who has ordered me to settle you in this place, will suffice you.'

Then he took leave of them. When he reached Kada' (a mountain in Dhu Tuwa), Ibrahim turned around and said:

"O our Lord! surely I have settled a part of my offspring in a valley uncultivable near Thy Sacred House, our Lord!, that they may establish prayer; therefore make the hearts of some people yearn towards them and provide them with fruits, haply they may be grateful" (14:37).

Then he went away, and Hajar remained (there). When the sun rose high, Isma'il became thirsty; Hajar stood at the running-place², and she ascended the Safa, and mirage glittered before her in the valley and she thought that it was water; so she descended to the valley and ran (to it).

When she reached Marwah, she could not see Isma'il, therefore, she returned until she reached Safa and again she looked (around, with the same effect); until she did likewise seven times. When she was on Marwah, in the seventh round, she looked at Isma'il and lo! water had appeared from under his feet.

She returned and gathered sand around the water – the water was flowing and she "reined" (Arabic: **زَمَّتْ** = *zammāt*) it with (the sand) which she put around it, and that is why it was called *zamzam*.

And the (tribe of) Jurhum had come down at *Dhu 'l-majaz* and *Arafat*. When water appeared at Mecca, the birds and wild animals gathered around it; the Jurhum saw this gathering of the birds and animals at that place and followed them until they found a woman and a child settled there – they were sitting in the shade of the tree and the water had appeared for them.

They said to Hajar: 'Who are you? And what is the matter with you and this child?' She said: 'I am the mother of the son of Ibrahim, the friend of Allah, and this is his son; Allah has ordered him to settle us here.'

They asked her: 'Would you allow us to remain near you?' She told them: 'Until Ibrahim comes.' When Ibrahim came to visit them the third day, Hajar said: 'O friend of Allah! there are some people of Jurhum here; they request you to allow them to settle near us; so will you allow them?' Ibrahim said: 'Yes.'

Then Hajar allowed them and they settled near them, and erected their tents. In this way Hajar and Isma'il got on friendly terms with them. When Ibrahim came to see them the second time, he looked at the large number of people around them, and he was extremely happy.

When Isma'il grew up – and each one of the Jurhum had presented one or two goats to Isma'il – so Hajar and Isma'il supported themselves with them. When Isma'il came of age, Allah ordered Ibrahim to build the House... When Allah ordered Ibrahim to build the House, he did not know where to build it; so Allah sent Jibril and he drew a line at the site of the House...

So, Ibrahim built the House and shifted Isma'il from Dhu Tuwa. And he raised (the House) nine hands in height. Then (Jibril) led him to the place of the (Black) Stone, and Ibrahim took it out and fixed it in the place where it is at present.

When he built it, he made two doors for it, one in the east and the other in the west; and the door that was in the west is (now) called al-Mustajar. Then he put on it tree (-trunks) and *al-adhkhar* (الأذخر) = a sweet smelling grass (as roof). And Hajar put on the door a sheet she had with her and under which they used to sit. When he built and completed it, Ibrahim and Isma'il performed their *hajj*.

Jibril came to them on the day of *at-tarwiyah*, that is, 8th *Dhu 'l-hijjah*, and said: 'O Ibrahim! stand up and quench your thirst from water' (because there was no water in Mina or 'Arafat); that is why it was named the day of *at-tarwiyah* (التروية) = to quench thirst).

Then (Jibril) took him out to Mina and he stayed there in the night, and Jibril did with Ibrahim what he had done with Adam. Thus, when Ibrahim completed the construction of the House, he said: **'My Lord! make it a secure town and provide its people with fruits, such of them as believe in Allah...'** ”

The Imam explained the fruits as the fruits of the hearts, that is, make people love them, so that they may befriend them and return to them (year after year). (*at-Tafsir*, al-Qummi)

The author says: This is the gist of this story, and it covers many of the traditions narrated about this subject. Some other traditions say that there had happened many miraculous things in the history of the House.

For example, some traditions say that the House in the very beginning was a dome of light; it had descended on Adam and settled in the place where in later days Ibrahim built the Ka'bah; and that dome

remained in the place till the deluge of Nuh; when the earth was submerged in water, Allah took that dome up; and its site was not submerged, that is why the Ka'bah is called the Ancient House.

Other traditions say that Allah sent the foundation of the House down from the Garden.

Yet others say that the Black Stone came down from the Garden – and it was whiter than snow – then it turned black when it was touched by the unbelievers.

Also it is narrated from al-Baqir or as-Sadiq (a.s.) that he said: “Verily Allah ordered Ibrahim to build the Ka'bah and to raise its walls and to show the people their ways of devotion (i.e., *hajj*).

Thereupon, Ibrahim and Isma'il built the House, every day (the height of) a knee until it reached the place of the Black Stone.” And al-Baqir (a.s.) said: “Then the (mountain) Abu Qubays called to him: 'I have something in trust for you;' and it gave him the (Black) Stone, and he put it in its place.” (*al-Kafi*)

ath-Thawri says: “I asked Abu Ja'far (a.s.) about the Stone. He said: 'Three stones came down from the Garden: the Black Stone which was put in place by Ibrahim, and the Standing-place of Ibrahim, and the stone of the Israelites.' ” (*al-'Ayyashi*)

And a tradition says that the Black Stone was an angel.

The author says: There are very many such traditions narrated by both the Shi'ah and the Sunni narrators; and although these traditions are *ahad* and do not reach, in words or meanings, the standard required for a *mutawatir* narration, still they are not unique in the field of religious descriptions, nor is there any reason to discard them altogether.

As for the narration that the dome was sent down to Adam or that Ibrahim rode *al-Buraq* for his journey to Mecca and other such miraculous happenings which have a super-natural character, there is no reason to say that they were impossible. Moreover, Allah had given His prophets many such miracles and super-natural signs, and the Qur'an mentions many such events.

So far as the coming down of the foundations of the House, the Black Stone and the Standing Stone (which is said to be fixed in the structure now known as the Standing-place of Ibrahim) and other such things are concerned, there are many such examples found in the Qur'an and *hadith*. Many vegetables and fruits etc. are said to be from the Garden, or from the Fire and its out-burst.

Of the same genre are the traditions of “substance” saying that the substance of the good people is from the Garden and that of the evil ones is from the Fire; or that they are from *al-'illiyyin* (أَلْعَلِيِّينَ) = lofty place; the Book of the deeds of the virtuous) and *as-sijjin* (السَّجِّينَ) = prison; the Book of the deeds of the evil ones), respectively.

Of similar nature are the traditions to the effect that the Garden of *al-barzakh* (the period between death and the Day of Judgment) is in some specified place on this earth, and the Fire of *al-barzakh* in some other place in it; and that the grave is either a section of the Garden's or a pit of the Fire's.

There are many such informations which one is sure to come upon while studying the traditions. And, as we said earlier, they are so huge in number that the whole lot cannot be discarded, nor is it possible to question its authenticity.

They are parts of the Divine realities expounded by the Qur'an and followed by the traditions. The fact is that all the things seen in this material world have been sent down by Allah; whatsoever is good and lovely, or is a means to or a receptacle of good, has come down from the Garden and will return to it; and whatsoever is bad and evil, or is a means to or a receptacle of evil, has come down from the Fire and will return to it.

Allah says:

And there is not a thing but with Us are the treasures of it, and We do not send it down but in a known measure (15:21).

It shows that everything exists with Allah, and it is an existence without any limit or measure; when it is sent down – a gradual descent – then it becomes subject to limits and measures.

This verse describes the descent of all things in general. But there are also in the Qur'an specific examples of this descent. Allah says:

... and He has sent down for you eight of the cattle in pairs... (39:6);

... and We have sent down the iron... (57:25);

And in the heaven is your sustenance, and what you are promised (51:22).

We shall further explain the meanings of these verses in their proper places, Allah willing. They however prove that every thing descends to this world from Allah. Other verses show that they are also to return to him, as He says:

And that to your Lord is the end goal (53:42);

Surely to your Lord is the return (96:8);

... to Him is the eventual coming (40:3);

... now surely to Allah do all affairs eventually come (42:53).

There are many verses in the Qur'an of the same connotation.

Also, Allah has made it clear that every thing – and all things presently are in middle of their journey – follows a course demanded by its origin, and that origin has some effect on its success and failure, its good and evil, as the Qur'an says:

Say: "Every one acts according to his own manner..." (17:84);

And every one has a direction to which he should turn... (2:148).

We shall explain all these verses in their places; here they have been quoted just to complete the picture, and make the subject of our discussion clearer.

What these verses prove is this: There is reason to believe that the traditions which say about a material thing that it came down from the Garden or from the Fire (when that thing has some connection with the next life's happiness or unhappiness) are on the whole correct, because they are, generally speaking, in conformity with the Qur'anic principles – although it does not mean that each and every such tradition is correct or trustworthy. Ponder on this point.

Someone has said: "The Divine words: **And (remember) when Ibrahim and Isma'il were raising the foundations of the House...**, manifestly show that the two prophets built this House for the worship of Allah in that country of the idol-worshippers.

But the story-tellers and those exegetes who followed them have embroidered what Allah had said. They have added a lot of fanciful details, as, for example, that the House was from the very beginning and Adam did its *hajj*; that it was taken to the heaven during Null's flood; that the Black Stone was one of the stones of the Garden.

Their main purpose was to present the religion in an attractive garment, adorning it with fascinating narratives. Such myths may impress the masses; but the people who have knowledge and wisdom know that spiritual excellence depends on Divine bestowal – it is Allah Who makes one thing to excel the others.

The Ka'bah has excellence because it is the House of Allah, that is, attributed to Him; the Black Stone is excellent because people have been ordered to kiss it – in this respect it represents the hand of Allah. It has no bearing on its excellence whether originally it was a ruby or a pearl or some other rock; nor do such tales add to its real glory.

In reality it makes no difference in the eyes of Allah whether a stone is black or white. The Ka'bah has got its distinction and honour because Allah has called it His House, and has appointed it as the centre for various acts of worship which cannot be performed in any other place – its glory does not lie in the fact that its stones are more valuable than other stones, or that its site is the most attractive of all, or that it was sent down from the lofty heavens.

Likewise, the excellence of the prophets is not based on any distinctive feature of their bodies nor on the quality of their apparel. They got excellence because Allah chose them especially, and selected them for His prophethood which is a spiritual thing; otherwise many people in the world were far superior to them in their adornments and enjoyed greater worldly bounties."

He continues to say: “These traditions are untrustworthy because they contradict each other and some are self-contradictory; they are unauthentic because their chains of narrators are not correct; they are unacceptable because they go against the apparent meaning of the Qur'an.”

He further says: “These traditions are Israelite myths, propagated among the Muslims by unbelieving Jews to make Islam look ridiculous, in order to keep the People of the Book away from it.”

The author says: There is a grain of truth in some things he has said: But he has gone far beyond the limit in disputation, and consequently has lost his bearings and arrived at a hypothesis much more atrocious and repugnant, Let us have a critical look at his arguments:

Objection: “These traditions are untrustworthy and unacceptable because they contradict each other and are against the Qur'an.”

Reply: The fact that some of them contradict the others could be a matter of worry if we were to accept them one by one as separate independent units. But when we accept the whole in their collective capacity (i.e., when we say that the whole lot should not be discarded because, taken all together, they do not tell us anything that is against reason or against the Qur'an or accepted traditions), then it is of no importance if there some minor discrepancies between individual traditions.

But one point must be made clear here: What we have said just now, concerns the traditions narrated from the infallible sources like the Prophet and his sinless family members. So far as other exegetes among the Companions and their disciples are concerned, they, in this respect, are just like any other people; for us it makes no difference whether their talk is free from contradiction or riddled with it.

In short, there is no justification to discard a tradition, or a group of traditions, unless it goes against the Qur'an or other authentic traditions, or the marks of forgery and lie are stamped on it. (However, when it comes to the basic religious knowledge and fundamental beliefs, the only thing accepted as proof is the Book of Allah and the authentic traditions of the Prophet and his sinless progeny; nothing else counts in this area.)

It is now clear that there are some things which must be accepted, that is, the Qur'an and the authentic traditions; and there are others which must be rejected, that is, all that goes against the Qur'an and the authentic traditions.

Then there is a third group: the traditions concerning which there is neither any proof compelling us to reject it, nor forcing us to accept it. These are the traditions which are neither impossible in reason nor unacceptable according to the Qur'an and authentic traditions – and there is no reason why they should be discarded altogether.

Objection: These traditions are unauthentic according to their chains of narrators.

Reply: The above given explanation also dispels this doubt, because weakness of the chains of

narrators does not oblige us to reject the whole group, unless it is against the reason, the Qur'an or the authentic traditions.

Objection: They are against the words of Allah; **And** (remember) ***when Ibrahim and Isma'il were raising the foundation of the House...***

Reply: I wish I knew how this verse proves that the Black Stone was not from the Garden! Or, that the dome did not come down to that place in Adam's time (and there was, therefore, no question of its being taken up at the time of the flood)! The only thing the verse says is that this construction, made of stone and mud, was built by Ibrahim.

What has this got to do – either for or against – the traditions mentioned earlier. The only difficulty with those traditions is that the objector does not like them. And this dislike is based, not on the principles of religion, but on his biased views.

He does not believe that the prophets had any spiritual realities within them; he does not think that the exoteric side of religion is based on its esoteric aspect; he unconsciously is so much over-awed by today's natural sciences that he tries to find a material cause not only for material happenings but even for spiritual things – if they have even a slight connection with matter. For him, the matter rules over all happenings, not excepting the sociological principles.

This man should have pondered on this point: The natural sciences deal with the matter; its properties and its various compounds; they look at the relationship of a natural effect with its cause. Likewise, the various sociological disciplines study the social relationships among various event taking place in society.

But the natural and sociological sciences have no concern at all with the realities which are beyond the sphere of matter, outside its field of action; they have no jurisdiction even over immaterial connections existing between a material thing and an event taking place in the visible world.

The natural sciences and disciplines have no authority or right to confirm or reject these immaterial realities. It is within the jurisdiction of natural science to say that construction of a house depends on things like mud, stone and mason; it may explain how black stones may take the shape of a room.

Likewise, sociological disciplines may describe the factors which led to the building of the Ka'bah – it may explain a part of Ibrahim's biography, Hajar's life, Isma'il's story, history of Tahamah, arrival of the tribe of Jurhum and things like that.

But these sciences and disciplines have no right to discuss what was the relation between a certain stone on one hand and the Garden or the Fire on the other; nor have these branches of knowledge any right to express any affirmative or negative opinion about such narratives.

And you have seen that the Qur'an clearly says that even material and physical things have been sent

down from the treasure which is with Allah, and that they would ultimately return to Him – either to the Garden or to the Fire.

Also, the Qur'an says that the deeds and actions – which are but physical movements and positions – ascend to Allah and arrive at His presence:

To Him do ascend the good words, and the good deed lifts them up (35:10);

again it says:

to Him reaches the piety on your part (22:37),

and piety is but action or a characteristic acquired through repeated actions. It is essential for a student of religion to meditate on these verses and to understand that the religious realities do not have any relationship with material or sociological matters *per se*; they depend on the facts which are beyond the reach of material disciplines.

Objection: The excellence of the prophets, and the things attributed to them like the Ka'bah or the Black Stone, is not based on a material quality; it is a spiritual excellence bestowed by the Divine Grace.

Reply: What he says is right. But he should understand what is the real meaning of what he says. What is that spiritual reality which creates excellence? Is it a mentally posited abstract idea created by social needs, like the designations and offices found in every nation, for example, presidency, leadership of the party, the high price of gold and silver, respect of the parents, sanctity of the laws of the land?

All these are subjective and imaginative abstract forms which the societies have laid down to meet their own needs; but they have no existence outside the imagination, beyond subjective consideration.

Such honours and distinctions cannot be found outside the social life which created them to fulfil its needs; and Allah is too sublime for such needs to reach His presence. Therefore, such social distinctions have no relevance to an excellence given by Allah to any of His creatures.

If the objector thinks that the excellence of the prophets is just like the above-mentioned imaginary and unreal honours, then why should a house or a stone be denied a similar excellence? And if he believes that an excellence given by Allah is the real one, as is found in light *vis-à-vis* darkness, in knowledge *vis-à-vis* ignorance, and in wisdom *vis-à-vis* idiocy, then of course it would be a real and actual excellence.

In that case, the quiddity of the existence of a prophet would be different from the quiddity of other human beings – even if our senses are unable to grasp it.

And such real excellence and distinction is in keeping with the sublimity and sanctity of the Divine actions and wisdom. Allah says:

And We did not create the heavens and the earth and what is between them in sport. We did not create them both but with the truth, but most of them do not know (44:38 – 39).

Such a distinction is real, spiritual, metaphysical and beyond the reach of physical nature. And if such real excellence may be given to the prophets, why can it not be bestowed on some other things, like the Ka'bah and the Black Stone etc.? And, may be, it is this real immaterial excellence which has been described in such words that the people could easily understand.

Would that I knew what would such people do about those Qur'anic verses which say that the people of the Garden will be given cups, ornaments and dresses of gold and silver. These two metals have no inherent excellence except that their price remains high because of their scarcity.

If so, then why should they be used for exalting the people of the Garden? What wealth will they represent in the Garden? After all, the economics of this world will not be valid there!

These and other such Divine words and exoteric expressions are the curtains which hide the esoteric realities; they are the veils covering Divine secrets. And if such expressions are acceptable for the realities of the next world, they can as easily be used for some facts of this one.

az-Zubayri says: "I said to Abu 'Abdillah (a.s.): 'Tell me about the *ummah* of Muhammad (S), who are they?' He said: 'The *ummah* of Muhammad (S) are the Children of Hashim in particular.' I said: 'And what is the proof that the *ummah* of Muhammad are his family members you have mentioned, to the exclusion of the others?'

He said: '(It is) the words of Allah: ***And*** (remember) ***when Ibrahim and Isma'il were raising the foundations of the House: "Our Lord! accept from us; surely Thou art the Hearing, the Knowing. Our Lord! and make us both submissive to Thee and*** (raise) ***from our offspring a group*** (*ummah*) ***submitting to Thee, and show us our ways of devotion and turn to us*** (mercifully), ***surely Thou art the Oft-returning*** (with mercy), ***the Merciful.***"

When Allah answered the prayer of Ibrahim and Isma'il and did (promise to) raise from their offspring a submissive *ummah* and raised up in them an Apostle from among themselves, that is, from among that *ummah* itself, to recite to them His communications, and to teach them the Book and the wisdom, Ibrahim beseeched Allah for another bounty; and asked for that *ummah* purity from polytheism and idol-worship in order that the affair of that Apostle might remain firm and strong among them and they might not need to follow anyone other than themselves.

That is why Ibrahim said:

"and save me and my sons from worshipping idols: My Lord! Surely they have led many men astray; then whoever follows me, he is surely of me, and whoever disobeys me, Thou surely art Forgiving, Merciful" (14:35 – 36).

It proves that the Imams, and the submissive *ummah* in which Muhammad (s. a. w. a.) was raised, cannot be except from the offspring of Ibrahim (a.s.), because he had said: **“save me and my sons from worshipping idols”** ' ”. (al-'Ayyashi)

The author says: The argument of the Imam is absolutely clear. Ibrahim (a. s.) had asked this submissive *ummah* to be from his offspring in particular; and the next sentence, **“Our Lord! and raise up in them an Apostle from among themselves...”**, show that the same submissive group is the *ummah* of Muhammad (S) – and the word, *ummah*, as used here, does not refer to the people whom Muhammad (S) was sent to; nor to those who answered his call and believed in his prophethood, because that *ummah* is not confined to the offspring of Ibrahim and Isma'il; the word in the present context refers to a particular submissive *ummah* from the offspring of Ibrahim (a.s.).

Thereafter, Ibrahim (a.s.) prayed to his Lord to protect him and his sons from idol-worship, to keep them away from polytheism and error – and this Divine protection is *'ismah* (infallibility; sinlessness).

Also we know that there were a lot of people among the offspring of Ibrahim and Isma'il – the Arabs of the Mudar, or particularly the Quraysh – who had gone astray and worshipped idols. It proves that when Ibrahim (a.s.) prayed for his ”sons” to be protected from idol-worship, he did not mean all his sons; he was praying only for his infallible offspring, that is, the Prophet and his purified progeny.

These, then, are the *ummah* of Muhammad (S) in the prayer of Ibrahim (a.s.). Probably, it was for this fine distinction that Ibrahim (a.s.) changed the word, “offspring”, to “sons”; this view is strengthened by the phrases following this prayer,

“then whoever follows me, he is surely of me, and whoever disobeys me, Thou surely art Forgiving, Merciful”.

Note the opening word, “then”, which shows that what follows is based on what has preceded; thereafter, he confirms that those who would follow him would be from him, a part of him; but then he stops and does not say anything about the opposite group, as though he does not recognize them, they are strangers to him. (Think it over.)

The Imam said that Ibrahim (a.s.) “asked for that *ummah* purity from polytheism and idol-worship”. Actually, he had asked protection only from worshipping the idols; but then he mentioned why he had asked for that protection: surely the idols have led many men astray.

In this way, the original prayer for protection from idol-worship became an all-encompassing prayer for protection from all types of straying and error, ranging from idol-worship to small sins – because every sin is a sort of polytheism, as we have already explained under the verse:

The path of those upon whom Thou hast bestowed favours... (1:7).

The Imam said: “It proves that the Imams, and the sub-missive *ummah* in which Muhammad (s. a. w.

a.) was raised, cannot be except from _ the offspring of Ibrahim (a.s.).” That is the Imams are the submissive *ummah*, and they are from the off-spring of Ibrahim (a.s.), as explained above.

Objection: You say that the word, *ummah*, in this verse refers to a small group of the Muslims, and not to the whole nation; you use the same interpretation in some other verses, for example, ***You are the best nation raised up for (the benefit of) men... (3:110)***.

But this obliges us to interpret the word in a metaphorical way – without any justifiable reason. Moreover, the Qur'an addresses itself to the whole *ummah* who believed in the Prophet; it is a self-evident fact which does not need any proof.

Reply: It was long after the revelation of the Qur'an and the spread of Islam that the phrase, *ummah* of Muhammad, was popularly used for “all those who believe in his prophethood”. It is a later usage.

The original meaning of this word is “people”, “nation”, “group”, as Allah says: ***and blessing on you and the people (umam = plural of ummah) from among those who are with you; and there shall be people (umam)...*** (11:48). This word is sometimes used even for one person;

Surely Ibrahim was a “people” (devoutly) obedient to Allah (16:120).

Therefore, it is the context or the intention of the speaker which decides how big or small a circle this word describes in a sentence. Now the words, ***Our Lord! and make us both submissive to Thee and (raise) from our offspring a group submitting to Thee***, were spoken in prayer, and as explained earlier, they could refer to only a selected group out of the multitude who believe in the Prophet.

Likewise, the verse, ***You are the best nation raised up for (the benefit of) men***, was revealed to show the favour of Allah on the people thus addressed; its import is to increase their prestige and enhance their dignity.

Surely, these words could be addressed to the whole *ummah* who call themselves Muslims. How could it apply to the Pharaohs and Dajjals of this *ummah* who did not leave any vestige of the religion without destroying, and who did not come across any religious virtue without crushing it?

(We shall explain it in detail when writing on this verse.) In short, this verse is like the talk of Allah with the Children of Israel:

and that I made you excel the nations (2:47);

we should not forget that a man like Qarun was one of them, and surely this talk does not include him.

Likewise, the complaint of the Prophet, ***O my Lord! surely my people treated this Qur'an as a forsaken thing*** (25: 30), cannot cover all his *ummah* – there are among them the lovers of the Qur'an, ***the men whom neither merchandise nor selling diverts from the remembrance of Allah***.

On the other hand, there is the verse 2:134, which is addressed to the whole *ummah*, and covers all those who believed in the Prophet and even those to whom he was sent:

This is a people that have passed away; they shall have what they earned and you shall have what you earn, and you shall not be called upon to answer for what they did.

An Academic Discourse

Ponder on the story of Ibrahim (a.s.); study his life; see how he took his son and wife to the land where now Mecca stands, and settled them there; how their lives progressed until finally the “sacrifice” of Isma’il took place and, in the last moment, he was ransomed by Allah; read how they together built the Ka’bah.

You will find that it is a complete cycle of devotional journey. It shows how a servant proceeds from his “self” to his Lord, from a far away station to the centre of “Divine Nearness”; how the journey is accomplished avoiding the vanities of this world, shunning its protection, keeping away from its desires – prestige, wealth, women and children – freeing oneself from the intrigues of satans, not letting them pollute the purity of intention, and turning with total surrender and progressing with complete devotion to the Lord, the Great, the High.

These apparently unrelated events are in fact of an unbroken series. They are historical narratives, but they describe the stages of the spiritual journey of a servant from self to the Lord.

They teach us the discipline of that journey, instruct us in the rules and manners of seeking nearness to Allah, of reaching His presence. The more you meditate on his story, the deeper will be your spiritual understanding – you will come to know the demands of Divine love and sincere devotion.

Allah ordered His friend, Ibrahim, to promulgate the *hajj* for the people, and He says:

And proclaim among men the hajj; they will come to you on foot and on every lean camel, coming from every remote path... (22:27).

We do not know the details of the laws of the *hajj* as promulgated by Ibrahim (a.s.). But we know that the *hajj* continued as an event of great religious importance even among the Arabs of the days of ignorance.

Then Allah sent the Prophet and he gave us the rules of the *hajj* as we know them. One thing is certain: He did not go against the rules laid down by Ibrahim (a.s.); what he did was to complete and perfect them.

This fact may be inferred from the words of Allah:

Say: “Surely, (as for) me, my Lord has guided me to the straight path; (to) a most right religion, the faith of Ibrahim, the upright one”... (6:161);

He has prescribed for you of the religion what He enjoined upon Nuh and that which We have revealed unto you, and that which We enjoined upon Ibrahim and Musa and 'Isa... (42: 13).

In any case, all the devotional acts of the *hajj* – the *ihram*, staying at 'Arafat, staying overnight at Mash'ar, sacrificing an animal, throwing pebbles at the pillars, running between the Safa and the Marwah, going around Ka'bah, praying near the Standing-place – all these acts commemorate the events that had happened to Ibrahim, and represent the stands taken by him and his family; and how admirable stands they were – the pure and sublime Divine stands to which they were led by Divine mercy and urged on by the humility of servitude.

The prescribed acts of worship – on their promulgator be the best of *salams!* – are the symbols of the stands of the perfect ones, the prophets, *vis-à-vis* their Lord; every act of worship is a photo which shows to us a stage in their spiritual journey to the station of nearness to Allah, as Allah says:

Certainly (there) is for you in the Messenger of Allah an excellent example... (33: 21).

This is a basic reality. And there is much evidence pointing to this theme in the traditions which have come down to us regarding the philosophy of various acts of worship and the esoteric aspects of their legislation and prescription, as any diligent scholar may find out.

1. al-Buraq is the name of the animal which was also sent to the Prophet (S) to ride during al-Mi'raj (المِعْرَاج) = Ascension). (tr.)

2. The place between Safa and Marwah where the hajjis (pilgrims to Mecca) run seven times. (tr.)

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