

Suratul Baqarah: Verses 153 – 157

(١٥٣) يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا اسْتَعِينُوا بِالصَّبْرِ وَالصَّلَاةِ ۗ إِنَّ اللَّهَ مَعَ الصَّابِرِينَ

(١٥٤) وَلَا تَقُولُوا لِمَن يُقْتَلُ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ ءَمُومًا ۖ تُوۡتٰۤى ءَمُومًا ۚ بَلْ ءَحْيَاءٌ ۗ وَلٰكِن لَّا تَشْعُرُونَ

(١٥٥) وَلَنَبْلُوَنَّكُمْ بِشَيْءٍ ءٍَٔ ۗ مِّنَ الْخَوْفِ ۖ وَالْجُوعِ وَنَقْصٍ ۖ مِّنَ الْأَمْوَالِ ۖ وَالْأَنفُسِ
وَالْثَّمَرَاتِ ۗ وَيَشِّرِ الصَّابِرِينَ

(١٥٦) الَّذِينَ إِذَا أَصَابَتْهُمُ مُصِيبَةٌ قَالُوا إِنَّا لِلَّهِ وَإِنَّا إِلَيْهِ رَٰٔۤى جُعُونَ

(١٥٧) أُوۡلَٓئِكَ عَلَيْهِمُ ۖ صَلَوَاتٌ ۖ مِّن رَّبِّهِمْ ۖ وَرَحْمَةٌ ۖ وَأُوۡلَٓئِكَ هُمُ الْمُهْتَدُونَ

O you who believe! seek assistance through patience and prayer; surely Allah is with the patient ones (153).

And do not speak of those who are slain in Allah's way as dead; nay, (they are) alive, but you do not perceive (154).

And We will most certainly try you with somewhat of fear and hunger and loss of property and lives and fruits; and give good news to the patient ones (155),

who, when a misfortune befalls them, say: "Surely we are Allah's and to Him we shall surely return" (156).

Those are they on whom are blessings and mercy from their Lord, and those are the followers of the right course (157).

General Comment

A single theme joins the five verses like a pearl-string; the sentences form a sequence and the topic is developed harmoniously; the beginning leads to the end, and the end points to the beginning. It shows that they were revealed together, not separately.

The context indicates that they must have been revealed shortly before the law of *al-jihad* (الجهاد) = war in the way of Allah) was promulgated and the Muslims were ordered to fight in the cause of religion.

The verses prepare the believers for some trials which they will have to undergo, some misfortunes which will befall them. Not the usual type of trial and hardship, but some extraordinary misfortunes which will afflict the whole community and will continue, recurring every now and then.

Man, like any other creature in this world, always faces some hardships and troubles which disturb and disrupt the pattern of his personal life.

Death, sickness, fear, hunger, grief, poverty and deprivation are but a few examples of such personal misfortunes. It is the course which Allah has laid down for His servants. This world is a place of struggle and competition; the life is a chain of never ending changes and transformations.

And you shall not find any alteration in the course of Allah; and you shall not find any change in the course of Allah (35:43).

Although personal afflictions and misfortunes are hard to bear for the man so affected, yet they are not as crushing, bewildering and frightening as those which affect the whole community. When an individual is afflicted by a misfortune, he seeks help of others, complementing his own wisdom, determination and steadiness with those of his relatives, friends and compatriots.

But when a misfortune or hardship afflicts the whole community, it stuns them all; it numbs their minds, and clouds their vision; it looks as if the whole society has lost its collective wisdom. It disrupts not only the individual, but even the collective life.

Fear terrorizes, panic overwhelms, and minds boggle down; courage deserts and dread reigns supreme. A collective misfortune is, in short, much more harder to bear and much more bitter in taste. And it is

these that the verse point to.

But not every collective affliction, like epidemic or famine. What the verses describe is in all-encompassing affliction which shall be brought about as a consequence of the believers' faith itself. They have accepted the belief of monotheism; they have answered the call of the truth.

The whole world and especially their own kith and kin are united against them. The enemies are trying, with all the forces at their command, to extinguish the light of Allah, to erase the word of justice, to nullify the call of truth.

The conflict has reached a stage where both parties realize that fighting is the only way out. Both parties have exhausted all other resources they had. The unbelievers first had tried to achieve their goal by arguments and mischief mongering, by whispering campaigns and unsettling rumours.

But all was in vain. All their endeavours failed to give them any satisfaction – they did not harm the Muslims in the way they wanted. Now, from their point of view, nothing was left but to wage war against the Muslims and to annihilate them. Only then, the path of truth could be blocked and the bright light of Islam extinguished.

As from the believers' point of view, only the fighting could now help there in their endeavour to propagate the creed of monotheism, to spread the true religion and just rule, to cut at the root of falsehood. The past experience has proved that truth gains strength only when falsehood is removed – and now it cannot be removed except by force.

In short, the verses indicate that the great trial is near at hand – it mentions martyrdom in the way of Allah, and praises it laudably, saying that it is not a death, it is life – and what a life indeed! Accordingly death in the way of Allah is a distinction which is desirable – not a thing to dislike or fear.

The verses encourage the believers to fight for Islam. They are told that there is coming to them a trial, a hardship. Only if they bear it patiently, they shall reach the high ranks of spiritual perfection, receiving the blessings and mercy of Allah, and being guided aright by Divine Guidance.

Also, it tells them how they may get help in bearing those burdens – they should seek assistance through patience and prayer. Patience will protect them from fear and anguish, and will save their plans from disruption. As for prayer, it will turn their attention to their Lord, and will help them in putting all their affairs in the hands of the Almighty Allah, because all power belongs to Him.

Commentary

Qur'an: O you who believe! seek assistance through patience and prayer; surely Allah is with the patient ones: We have explained briefly about patience and prayer, under the verse:

And seek assistance through patience and prayer; and most surely it is a hard thing except for the humble ones (2:45).

Patience is one of the most important characteristics, which the Qur'an praises very highly. It repeatedly tells the believers to be patient – there are about seventy verses on this theme. It praises it in such laudable ways as:

... and bear patiently that which befalls you; surely it is of the acts which require determination (31:17);

And none are made to receive it but those who are patient, and none are made to receive it but those who have a mighty good fortune (41: 35);

only the patient will be paid back their reward in full without measure (39: 10).

Likewise, prayer is one of the greatest acts of worship and devotion which the Qur'an always exhorts the believers to do. It has been praised in these words:

surely prayer keeps (one) ***away from indecency and evil*** (29:45).

Wherever Allah exhorts the people to some good deeds, prayer is always placed at the head of the list.

Then Allah praises patience that Allah is with those who have got this virtue: In this respect this verse differs from the verse 2:45 which had focused attention on prayer; ***and most surely it is a hard thing except for the humble ones.***

But this verse singles out the patience, because here the talk is about facing the difficulties and fighting against the enemies; and in this context patience acquires a greater importance. Surely Allah is with the patient ones.

It is a special proximity unlike the company mentioned in the verse:

and He is with you wherever you are (13:4).

This latter verse says that Allah controls your affairs and His knowledge encompasses you; while the verse under discussion means that Allah helps and aids the patient ones. Patience, therefore, is the key to get relief from distress.

Qur'an: And do not speak of those who are slain in Allah's way as dead; nay, (they are) alive, but you do not perceive: Some exegetes have said that when the verse says that the martyrs are alive, it actually means that their good names will continue for ever and their heroism will always be remembered with gratitude. Their argument is as follows:

“The verse is addressed to the Muslims, who already believe in Allah, His Messenger and the Day of

Judgment; they are also sure of the life hereafter. They have accepted the call of truth, and have already heard a lot of verses which speak of the Resurrection.

They know that a man's life does not end with death. How could they speak of the martyrs as dead? Moreover, this verse affirms only about the martyrs that they are alive; and describes it as their especial excellence *vis-à-vis* other believers and the unbelievers.

But we know that life after death is not confined to one group, it is a general phenomenon, which covers the whole mankind. Therefore, the life mentioned here must be something special, which is reserved for those who are slain in the way of Allah – and that is their eternal name and ever-lasting fame.”

But this interpretation is unacceptable, because of the following reasons:

First: The life which they have mentioned is not real life; it is an imaginary thing, which has no relation with reality. Such unreal and imaginary things do not deserve to be included in Divine Speech. Allah calls to reality, to truth; and says:

and what is there after the truth but error? (10:32).

Of course, Ibrahim (a.s.) had prayed to Allah:

And make for me a truthful tongue among the posterity (26:84).

But what he meant by “a truthful tongue” was continuation of his true mission after him; he did not mean only that his good name be remembered and his praise be sung by coming generations.

Of course, such imaginary exegesis, such false interpretation is more in line with materialists' thinking. They believe that soul is a material thing, life, is a development of matter; once a man dies the life comes to an end, there is nothing to continue after death; as such, there is no life hereafter. But applying that idea to sociology, they encountered a great difficulty:

The fact is that man by nature believes in continuation of life after death, his instinct tells him that there is happiness and unhappiness in the other world where he goes after death; and if he wants to enjoy happiness there, he will have to sacrifice many comforts of this life.

This is specially true about great affairs and ideals which cannot be established except when their supporters and adherents are willing to die for them, to sacrifice their lives for the cause. They have to die so that others may live.

Now, the dilemma of the atheists and materialists was this: If death is the end of life, if man, after his death, is lost for ever, then why should he sacrifice his life so that others may live? Why should he deprive himself of the comforts and enjoyments which he can easily get through injustice and tyranny? Just to let others live in peace?

What has he got to gain by his sacrifice? Nothing. No sensible man gives something if he is not getting something in return. Human nature rejects the concept of giving without receiving, of leaving something without getting something in exchange. It rejects the idea of dying to enable others to live, the notion of denying oneself the enjoyment of this short life so that others may enjoy it.

When the materialists realized the trouble they were in, they tried to make up this shortcoming by inventing these imaginary gains which had no existence except in their own minds. They said:

A man, emancipated from fetters of superstitions and myths, must sacrifice his life for his country and for other noble goals; this sacrifice will make him immortal because his good name and widespread fame will remain alive for ever.

Likewise, he should deny himself some enjoyments of life so that others may benefit from those things. In this way, society and civilization will remain on right track and the social justice will reign supreme. And that man, because of his sacrifice, will get a noble and sublime life.

Would that I knew who will enjoy that noble life when the man himself is dead, when his physical body has perished, and with it have gone all traces of life including perceptions and feelings? Who will then feel and enjoy that “noble life”? Isn't it just a delirious raving?

Second: The last phrase of the verse, ” but you do not perceive,” does not agree with that explanation. If that was the meaning of “life”, Allah should have said: nay, they are alive because their good name will remain for ever, and people will always sing their praises generation after generation. Obviously, such description would have proved much more satisfying and encouraging, and would have cheered them up to a greater degree than the phrase, “but you do not perceive”.

Third: A similar verse – which in a way also explains it – describes the promised life in such a way as not to allow that interpretation:

And reckon not those who are killed in Allah's way as dead; nay, they are alive (and) are provided sustenance from their Lord; Rejoicing in what Allah has given them out of His grace, and they rejoice for the sake of those who, (being left) behind them have not yet joined them, that they shall have no fear, nor shall they grieve. They rejoice on account of favour from Allah and (His) grace, and that Allah will not waste the reward of the believers (3: 169–171).

Clearly, it is a description of a real, not imaginary, life.

Fourth: It is not difficult to accept that some Muslims, in the middle of the Prophet's era, were unaware of the life after death. What was very clearly mentioned in the Qur'an was the Resurrection on the Day of Judgment. But so far as the life of *al-barzakh* (الْبَرْزَخُ) = the period between death and the Day of Judgment) is concerned, it has been described in the Qur'an, but not so clearly as not to leave any room for ambiguity.

That is why not all the Muslims are agreed on this subject – even today some of them do not accept it. (These are those who believe that soul is not immaterial; that man perishes on death; and Allah will raise him again for judging him on the Day of Judgment.)

This verse, therefore, could have been revealed to affirm that the martyrs were alive in *al-barzakh*. May be, there were some believers who were not aware of it, even if others knew it.

In short, the verse speaks of a real, not imaginary, life. Allah, in several places, has counted the life of an unbeliever after his death as a destruction and perdition. For example:

... **and** (they) **made their people to alight into the abode of perdition** (14:28).

So, it is the life of bliss that is true life, and it is only the believers who will live that life, as Allah says:

and as for the next abode, that most surely is the life – did they but know (29:64).

They did not know it because their senses could perceive only the material aspects of this world's life. As they did not perceive what was beyond their limited perception, they could not differentiate between extinction and life after death.

They thought that there was nothing after death but extinction. That delusion, that conjecture was common to believers and unbelievers alike. That is why Allah said: “nay, (they are) alive, but you do not perceive,” that is, by your senses.

The same is the import of the last phrase in the verse:

that most surely is the life – did they but know (29:64),

that is, with certainty, as He says in the verse:

Nay! if you had known with a knowledge of certainty, you should most certainly have seen the hell (102:5–6).

The meaning of the verse, then, is as follows – and Allah knows better! And do not say about those who are slain in the way of Allah that they are dead. You should not think that they have become extinct, have perished.

Of course, you generally think that death is extinction; in your language death is used as opposite of life; and this delusion is supported by your senses. But it is not correct. The martyrs are not dead, in that they are not extinct; they are alive although you do not perceive that life by your senses, by your perceptions.

This talk was addressed to the believers, although majority of them – if not all – knew that man's life continues after his death. It was done to draw their attention to a fact known to them. The aim was to

cheer them up by reminding them of this reality, in order that they should not grieve, should not be perturbed, should not lose their hearts, when death faces them or their dear ones in the way of Allah.

The only thing that the relatives would be afflicted with, in such cases, is separation from their martyr for a few days, as long as they themselves are alive in this world.

And this temporary separation is not a big problem – especially if compared to the pleasure of Allah, and to the bounties bestowed on the martyr, like the pleasant life and everlasting grace. And the pleasure of Allah is the greatest bounty and bliss.

In this respect, the verse is not unlike the previously explained one where Allah tells His Prophet:

The truth is from your Lord, therefore you should not be of the doubters (2:147).

We know that the Prophet was the first and foremost of those who were sure of the Divine signs and communications. Yet he was told not to be of the doubters. This mode is generally used to show that the subject is so clear, so well-known and so well established that there is no room for any conflicting thought to come into mind.

The Life of al-Barzakh

This verse clearly proves that man remains alive in *al-barzakh* (الْبَرْزَخُ = the period between one's death and the Day of Resurrection). The same is the import of the other verse on this subject:

And reckon not those who are killed in Allah's way as dead; nay, they are alive (and) ***are provided sustenance from their Lord*** (3:169).

Many other verses prove this reality and we shall mention some of them at the end of this essay.

A very strange interpretation has been given to this verse by some people. They say that it was revealed about the martyrs of Badr, and therefore it is reserved exclusively for those martyrs; it cannot be applied to others who are slain in the way of Allah.

A scholar has made an interesting comment on this explanation. Writing about the preceding verse, “seek assistance through patience and prayer,” he prays to Allah to give him patience and forbearance to suffer such interpretations!

Would that I knew what do they mean by that explanation. On one hand, they say that man perishes after death or murder; when his body disintegrates, he becomes extinct. If so, then how could the martyrs of Badr remain alive after being slain?

Was it as a miracle? Was it because Allah had given them a distinction and excellence, which was denied to all the prophets, messengers and friends of Allah, not expecting even the Holy Prophet of

Islam? If there is no life after death, then keeping them alive after their martyrdom is not a miracle – it is an impossibility.

And a miracle does not cover an impossible thing. If it is asserted that such a self-evident proposition was negated for those martyrs, then no confidence can be put in any self-evident truth – let alone other principles.

Or, do they mean that people's perceptions were mistaken about the condition of those martyrs? The martyrs were alive, were getting sustenance from their Lord, were eating, drinking and enjoying all the comforts of life – far away from the range of people's perceptions.

And what the people had seen and perceived with their senses – that the martyrs were killed, their bodies mutilated, their senses gone, and their physique disintegrated – was just a delusion, and nothing of this sort had happened in reality.

If this is what they mean, if people's senses could be so deluded – perceiving correctly in one case and wrongly in another, without any differentiating cause – then no trust can be put in any of the senses at all. Then, may be, we will perceive a non-existent as existing and an existing thing as non-existent. How can a sensible person speak like that? It is nothing but sophistry.

However, that explanation somewhat follows the line adopted by a large group of the scholars of traditions. The latter believe that the things mentioned in the Qur'an and traditions, which are beyond our perception – like angels and souls of believers and other such things – are material and physical.

They are ethereal bodies which may enter and penetrate dense and solid bodies, appearing thus in the form of man, for example, doing all that humans do; they possess powers and properties like ours, except that they are not governed by physical laws: they do not suffer any change or alteration, nor any composition or disintegration; they are not subject to natural life and death.

When Allah wants them to appear, they manifest themselves to our senses; and when He does not want so, or wants them not to appear, they do not appear. It depends entirely on a special will of Allah; there is nothing in their senses, or in their “bodies”, to tip the scale on this side or that.

Such an idea is based on rejection of the system of cause and effect in the world. If such assertions were true, then all the intellectual realities, all the academic principles, will be null and void – not to speak of the fundamentals of religion. Even those “sublime ethereal bodies” (which are supposedly beyond the reach of cause-and-effect) will be negated.

The above description, however, proves that the verse speaks about the life of *al-barzakh*; it is also called the world of the grave, the period between one's death and the Day of Resurrection; it is the world where the dead person is rewarded or punished until the Day of Resurrection.

Some other verses speaking about *al-barzakh* are as follows:

There are the three verses already quoted:

And reckon not those who are killed in Allah's way as dead; nay, they are alive (and) are provided sustenance from their Lord; Rejoicing in what Allah has given them out of His grace, and they rejoice for the sake of those who, (being left) behind them, have not yet joined them, that they shall have no fear, nor shall they grieve. They rejoice on account of favour from Allah and (His) grace, and that Allah will not waste the reward of the believers (3: 169 – 171).

We have already shown how these verses, being similar to the one under discussion, prove the life of *al-barzakh*. Those who think that these verses were revealed exclusively for the martyrs of Badr, should ponder on the wordings of these three, because they indicate that not only the martyrs but also other believers enjoy the life after death, and rejoice by favour and grace of Allah bestowed on them.

Until when death overtakes one of them, he says: "Send me back, my Lord, send me back: Haply I may do good in that which I have left." By no means! it is a (mere) word that he speaks; and before them is al-barzakh until the day they are raised (23:99 – 100).

It very clearly shows that there is an intermediate life between this world's and the one which they will live after the Resurrection. Further explanation will be given when we shall write about this verse, Allah willing.

And those who do not hope for Our meeting, say: "Why have not angels been sent down upon us, or (why) do we not see our Lord?" Now certainly they are too proud of themselves and have revolted a great revolt. On the day when they shall see the angels;

(clearly it refers to the time when they will see the angels for the first time, that is, the time of death – as is described in many other verses;)

there shall be no joy on that day for the guilty, and they shall say: "It is a forbidden thing totally prohibited; And We shall proceed to what they have done of deeds, so We shall render them as scattered floating dust. The dwellers of the garden shall on that day be in a better abiding place and a better resting place. And on the day when the heaven shall burst asunder with the clouds; (now it speaks about the Day of Resurrection;) and the angels shall be sent down a sending. The kingdom on that day shall rightly belong to the Beneficent God, and a hard day shall it be for the unbelievers (25:21–26).

It very clearly proves the life of *al-barzakh*. Further details will be given in its proper place, Allah willing.

They shall say: "Our Lord! twice didst Thou give us death, and twice hast Thou given us life, so we do confess our faults; is there then a way to get out?" (40: 11).

They will say it on the Day of Resurrection. It means that by that time there would be two deaths and two lives. It can be explained only if we accept the life and death of *al-barzakh*. Otherwise, there shall be

only one death between this life and that of the Day of Resurrection. We have explained it to some extent under the verse:

How do you deny Allah and you were dead and He gave you life? Again He will cause you to die and again bring you to life; then you shall be brought back to Him (2:28).

... and the most evil punishment overtook Pharaoh's people: The Fire, they are brought before it (every) morning and evening; and on the day when the hour shall come to pass: Make Pharaoh's people enter the severest chastisement (40:46).

It is known that the Day of Resurrection shall have no morning or evening. Clearly, ***the day when the hour shall come to pass***, that is, the Day of Resurrection is other than the day of *al-barzakh* which has the mornings and evenings.

There are many other verses which indicate, or from which we may infer, this reality. For example:

By Allah, most certainly We sent (messengers) to nations before, but the Satan made their deeds fair-seeming to them, so he is their guardian today, and they shall have a painful punishment (16:63).

The Immateriality of the Soul

The verse under discussion, as well as those quoted above, points to another more comprehensive reality and that is the immateriality of the soul. The soul is something other than matter and body; it is beyond the jurisdiction of the rules governing matter and body, or those affecting various material compounds and mixtures.

Yet, it has a special relationship with the body – keeping it alive, managing its multifarious functions and activities and enabling it to perceive and feel. Ponder on the earlier quoted verses and you will see this reality.

The verses imply that man, *per se*, is not the body; he does not die when the body dies, he does not perish when the body perishes. The body disintegrates, its parts are scattered, but the “man” continues.

Even after the death of his body, he continues to live, either in eternal bliss and everlasting felicity and grace, or in never ending misery and painful chastisement. That bliss or misery is based on his traits, trends, characteristics and actions, which he had acquired and done in this world's life – not in his bodily accomplishments or social achievements.

These themes are understood from the above-mentioned verses. Obviously, these traits are totally different from those of the body, and are diametrically opposed to worldly and material characteristics. Thus, the human soul is different from his body.

Also, the verse 39:42 points to this fact:

Allah takes completely the souls at the time of their death, and those that die not during their sleep; then He withholds those on whom He has passed the decree of death and sends the other back till an appointed term.

“*at-Tawaffiyy*” (التَّوَفِّي) and “*al-istifa'*” (الإِصْطِفَاءُ) both have the same meaning – to take and realize one's right fully and completely. The words used here in reference to the soul – “takes”, “withholds” and “sends back” – clearly prove that the soul is something different from the body.

Another verse:

And they say: “What! when we have become lost in the earth, shall we then indeed be in a new creation?” Nay! they are disbelievers in the meeting of their Lord. Say: “The angel of death who is given charge of you shall take you completely, then to your Lord you shall be brought back” (32:10 – 11).

In this verse, Allah mentions one of the misgivings of those who do not believe in the Resurrection; and then tells His Messenger how to clear their doubt. They said: When we die, our body disintegrates, our limbs and organs are destroyed, nothing remains of our original form, and all our parts are scattered here and there in the earth. No one can then perceive us nor can anyone feel us. How is it possible for us, after such a total destruction, to be created a second time?

This doubt is based on a feeling of improbability. Allah shows the Messenger (S) how to remove that misgiving: **Say: “The angel of death... be brought back.”**

There is an angel who has been given charge of you; he shall take you completely; he will not let you be lost, as you shall be under his protection, his control; what is lost in the earth is your body, not your soul or person (the reality which is referred to by the word “you”), because the angel of death shall take “you” completely.

One more verse: Allah says, mentioning the creation of man:

Then He made him complete and breathed into him of His spirit... (32:9).

Read it in conjunction with the verse:

And they ask you about the soul. Say: “The soul is from the command of my Lord” (17:85).

The soul, therefore, is from the command of Allah, and that command has been explained and defined in these words:

His command, when He intends anything is only that He says to it: “Be”, and it is. Therefore, glory be to Him in Whose hand is the kingdom of everything... (36:82 – 83).

The soul is from the kingdom and it is the word, “Be”. In another place, the command is further explained in these words:

And Our command is but one, as the twinkling of an eye (54:50).

The phrase, ***as the twinkling of an eye***, shows that the command, that is, the word “Be”, is an instantaneous, not a gradual, being. It comes into being at once, and is not bound with the chain of time and space.

It is thus evident that the command including the soul – is different from body, is something immaterial. We know that the material things come into being gradually and are fettered with time and space. Obviously, the human soul is not a material thing and is different from the body, although it has a special relationship with the body.

There are some verses which show the nature of that relation-ship. Allah says:

From it (the earth) ***We created you...*** (20:55);

He created man from dry clay like earthen vessels... (55: 14);

... and He began the creation of man from dust, then He made his progeny from an extract of water held in light estimation (32:7 – 8);

And certainly We created man of an extract of clay, then We made him a small life-germ in a firm resting place, then We made the life-germ a clot, then We made the clot a lump of flesh, then We made (in) ***the lump of flesh bones, then We clothed the bones with flesh, then We caused it to grow into another creation; so blessed be Allah, the best of creators*** (23:12 – 14).

The verses show that man, in the beginning was but a material body, changing into various forms; then Allah made that body into another creation – a creation that has got perception and feeling; now he perceives and wills, thinks and acts according to his thoughts and ideas; he manages and manipulates the things around him as he likes.

These activities and authority are beyond the power of body and matter. Obviously, neither of these activities emanate from body and matter nor does their doer.

We may say that the soul has the same relation to the body – from which it emanates – as a fruit has to its tree, or a lamp flame has to its oil. But these similes are a bit far-fetched. However, these illustrations serve to show the nature of the relation between the soul and the body – how it is attached to the body in the beginning and how that connection is severed on death.

In short, the soul, in the beginning, is the body itself, then it grows into another creation, and lastly it becomes completely independent and separate from the body on death. These facts are understood

from the above-mentioned Qur'anic verses; there are many other verses which allude to and imply this reality, and one may find them on reading the Qur'an with open eyes. And Allah is the Guide.

Qur'an: *And We will most certainly try you with somewhat of fear and hunger and loss of property and lives and fruits:* Allah told them to seek assistance through patience and prayer and forbade them to say about those who are slain in His way that they are dead because those martyrs were in fact alive.

Now, He explains why He has informed them of these realities. It is because the believers were soon to be tried and tested by fighting in the way of Allah.

It was by *al-jihad* that they would reach the pinnacle of their virtues; their noble lives would not be worth living except with *al-jihad*. The upright religion could not gain strength but with fighting.

And while engaged in fighting, their efforts would not be crowned with success unless they were helped by those two helpers, that is, patience and prayer, and were further strengthened by a third factor, that is, the belief that their martyr is neither dead nor lost, and that their endeavours with their wealth and souls is neither forfeited nor fruitless.

If they kill their enemy, they will remain alive while their enemy is destroyed; in this way they would be safe from the rule of injustice and falsehood which the enemy wanted to impose on them. And if they are killed in this endeavour, again they will remain alive for ever and equally safe from that unjust and wrong rule. In either case, they shall enjoy one of the two most excellent things.

Generally, the afflictions consist of fear, hunger and loss of properties and lives. As for the loss of fruits, apparently it means loss of children. When fighting occurs, its most telling result is not the loss of fruits but that of progeny, as the men and especially the youths are killed.

Some exegetes have said that the word "fruits" refers to the dates, and the "property" to other possessions, for example, camels, goats and sheep.

Qur'an: *and give good news to the patient ones who, when a misfortune befalls them, say: "Surely we are Allah's and to Him we shall surely return". Those are they on whom are blessings and mercy from their Lord, and those are the followers of the right course:*

The patient ones are again mentioned in these verses so that Allah may give them good news to begin with, and then may teach them the way of good patience, and thirdly, may explain to them why patience is essential – it is because Allah owns the man – and fourthly, may declare what is its overall recompense, that is, blessing, mercy and being guided aright.

Allah first told His Prophet to give them good news; but did not disclose what was that good news about. This was to show the greatness of the subject matter – it is from Allah, therefore, it must be about something specially good, great and beautiful. Moreover, it is something which Allah Himself has

guaranteed.

Thereafter, He said that the patient ones are those who say these words when misfortune befalls them. “*al-Musibah*” (المُصِيبَةُ) = translated here as misfortune) is any happening that occurs to a man; but it is always used for a distressing happening.

“Who... say: 'Surely we are Allah's...' ”: The word “say” as used here does not mean mere utterance of the sentence with-out keeping its meaning in mind.

Even understanding its meaning is not sufficient, unless one penetrates to the depth of its reality. And that is that man is owned by Allah – in real ownership – and that he is surely to return to Allah, his Master.

If this feeling takes deep root in his heart, the man will observe the highest degree of patience; sorrow, fear and anguish will be totally eradicated, and the rust of heedlessness will be removed from the heart. How?

Man and all his faculties, actions and other concomitants of existence, are there because of Allah. He is his Creator and Originator. Man exists because of Allah, and is dependent on Him in all his affairs and conditions. He does not have any existence or continuity independent of Allah.

The Master has the right to manage His slave's affairs in any way He likes; the slave has no authority whatsoever in his own affairs, because he has no independence at all. Allah owns him; He is the real Owner of man's existence, faculties and actions.

Then Allah allowed man to ascribe his “self” to himself as a property is ascribed to its owner. That is why it is said that “man has existence”. In the same way, He permitted him to ascribe his faculties and actions to himself.

Accordingly, it is said that “man has faculties like hearing and sight”, or “he does some actions like: walking, speaking, eating and hearing”. With-out the Divine permission neither man nor anything else could “own” any such ascription or attribution, because nothing exists without the Divine permission, or independent of Allah's will.

Allah has also informed us that ultimately all things will revert to their original status – the state before Allah allowed them to be attributed to one or the other creature – and then no ownership will remain there except that of Allah, as He says:

To whom belongs the kingdom this day? To Allah, the One, the Subduer (of all) (40:16).

It shows that man – together with all that “belongs” to him or is with him – is to return to Allah.

In short, there is a “real” ownership; it is reserved for Allah, nobody – be he a man or something else –

shares it with Him. And there is an “apparent” ownership, for example, man “owns” his own “self” as well as his children and properties etc.

But the real ownership is of Allah, and man owns them in form and appearance only – and that also because Allah has allowed such attribution. Thus, when man remembers the reality of Divine ownership, and then looks at his own “self”, he knows that he is wholly and totally owned by Allah.

Then, he realizes that his “apparent” ownership – of his “self” as well as of his children and properties, etc. – will soon cease to exist, will become null and void; it will return to his Lord. Then, he will understand that ultimately he owns nothing, either in reality or in appearance.

In this back-ground, there is no reason why he should grieve if he is afflicted with some misfortune. One may be affected only by something which one owns – feeling happiness when it is found or sorrow if it is lost.

But when he believes that he owns nothing, he shall not be affected by finding it or losing it. How can he be afflicted by any loss when he believes that Allah is the real Owner of every-thing, and He may manage His property in any way He likes?

The Ethics

The ethics entail betterment of morals and psychic traits – both in theory and practice. Man acquires the good morals and removes the evil traits by repeatedly doing good – and relevant – deeds, and their continuous observance. Repeated and continuous performance of an action etches its particular knowledge on the psyche.

Gradually, a picture is engraved on the mind which becomes impossible – or extremely difficult – to erase. Habits become second nature. For example, if a man wants to remove the trait of cowardice and acquire that of bravery, he should repeatedly plunge himself into difficulties and dangers.

When-ever he would rush into a perilous and hazardous situation and finds himself coming out unscathed, he would acquire the taste of boldness and courage; and would understand the ignominy of flight, of taking to one's heels.

Every such bold step would leave its mark on his psyche and ultimately bravery and courage would become an integral part of his character. Man has no power to acquire such traits by his own will; yet it may be counted as within his power inasmuch as its preliminary steps – those repeatedly performed deeds – emanate from his will and power.

There are two universally recognized systems to acquire high moral standards and noble manners.

First System: Many people base their moral science on good worldly foundations, that is, the

knowledge, ideas and ideals which are thought praiseworthy and laudable in the society. They acquire a good trait because it is commendable in the eyes of the people.

Chastity, contentedness with what is in one's hand and not looking at what others have – all these virtues create respect and honour in the people's eyes, and one's standing is enhanced in public.

Avarice results in poverty and privation. Greed destroys one's prestige. Knowledge attracts people and bestows respect and dignity in the eyes of elite; it opens the eyes of the knowledgeable person, and protects him from unpleasant things. Ignorance, on the other hand, is blindness. Knowledge protects you while riches need your protection.

Bravery makes you steady and saves you from fickleness; this in its turn makes people sing your praise – no matter whether you win or lose. Cowardness and rashness both cause opposite effect. Justice gives peace of mind, and keeps man alive even after his death inasmuch as his good name continues and his love pulsates in people's hearts generation after generation.

This is the well-known basis on which the moral science is founded. Ancients like Greek philosophers followed this very system.

The Qur'an does not endorse this system, because it depends on the like and the dislike of the public. It looks at what is good in the eyes of the people and what is bad – and accepts the former and rejects the latter. Even in a few verses where the Qur'an appears to use this method, it really refers to the next world's reward or punishment. Ponder, for example, on the following verses:–

... and wherever you are, turn your faces towards it, so that people shall have no argument against you... (2:150).

Here Allah exhorts the Muslims to remain steadfast and firm, and for its reason, He says: “so that people shall have no argument against you”.

... and do not quarrel, for then you will be weak in hearts and your power will depart, and be patient... (8:46).

Allah tells the believers to be patient, as impatience and quarrelling among themselves would weaken their hearts, dilute their power and embolden their enemy.

And whoever is patient and forgiving, that most surely is an act of great resolution (42:43).

Here Allah invites the believers to patience and forgiveness and explains its reason in terms of determination and resolution.

Second System: The second system is to keep in sight the other worldly goals. Allah has used it in many verses of the Qur'an:

Surely Allah has bought of the believers their persons and their properties for this, that they shall have the garden... (9:111)

... only the patient ones will be paid back their reward in full without measure. (39:10)

... surely it is the unjust that shall have a painful punishment. (14:22)

Allah is the Guardian of those who believe; He brings them out of the darkness into the light; and (as to) those who disbelieve, their guardians are the rebels, they take them out of the light into the darkness... (2:257)

There are many verses, on different subjects, which imply the same theme.

We may add here another set of the verses. For example,

No misfortune befalls on the earth nor in your own souls, but it is in a book before We bring it into existence; surely that is easy to Allah (57:22).

This verse exhorts man not to feel any sorrow (or joy) on whatever misfortune (or good thing) comes to him; what has come to him, could not be averted, and what-ever has been lost could not be obtained, because all happenings occur by a firm Divine Decree which is unavoidable.

Sorrow and joy both seem, in this background, meaningless – a believer should not indulge in these vain practices because he believes in Allah and knows that all affairs are in His hands. Allah says:

No affliction comes about but by Allah's permission; and whoever believes in Allah, He guides aright his heart (64:11).

Such verses, like the earlier quoted ones, create high morals by pointing to the sublime goals of the next world. These other worldly goals are real, not imaginary, perfections. T

These verses reform the human character by fixing man's attention to the real already existing causes like the Divine measure and decree, adoption of the Divine characteristics and remembrance of the good names of Allah and His sublime attributes.

Question: Belief in causality of such things as the Divine measure and decree negates the rules governing this life in which we have been given freedom of will and power. This, in its turn, nullifies the noble morals and disturbs the system of this physical world.

If man may rely, in acquiring such good traits as patience and steadfastness, and in refraining from sorrow and joy, on the fact that all things to happen are already firmly decreed and written in the “preserved tablet”, then the same argument may be used if one does not endeavour to earn one's livelihood, to acquire good characteristics, or to refrain from bad habits.

He will sit idle not caring to do any work, and not striving to defend the truth and right. His only reply to all exhortations will be that whatever was happening was already written and decreed. In this way he will neglect acquiring noble characteristics and discarding evil traits. It will be a negation of every perfection.

Reply: What we have written on the subject of “Decree”, is sufficient to clear this misunderstanding. We have explained there that man's actions are integral parts of the causes of the events and effects. Effects cannot happen without their causes.

It would be a manifest error to say: Satiation of hunger is either decreed to happen or decreed not to happen; and in either case, it is useless to eat. We know that satiation of hunger cannot occur unless one takes one's food – and eating is an action with-in one's power, and is a part of the causes of satiation. It is foolishness to expect an effect to appear when one has neglected or negated all or part of its causes.

It is wrong for a man to neglect and negate the principles of “free will and power”, which is the king-pin of this worldly life, and to which are attributed its felicity and infelicity. It is a part of the causes of the events which happen to a man through his actions (or through the conditions and traits resulting from his actions). He cannot say that his will and power are not a part of the causes of events happening to him, or that they have no effect on those happenings.

In the same way, it is wrong to claim that his power is the complete, or the only, cause of the events and that nothing else has any influence on those events. One should not forget that there are countless things happening in the world which have influence on one's circumstances, conditions and the related events, and that the Divine Will is the foremost among them.

If one were to forget this reality, one would be entrapped in many evil traits, like: conceit, pride, miserliness, joy, sorrow and grief, etc.

The ignorant man says: “I did this; I left that.” Thus, he falls victim of conceit, shows arrogance to others or does not spend his money on necessary things. He is heedless to the fact that there are thousands and thousands of other causes – apart from his imperfect “power” – absence of any one of which would nullify the effects of his “power”. He says: “Had I done this, I would have avoided this loss; had I done so, I would have gained that.”

He does not realize that prevention of loss or death depends on thousands and thousands of causes, and even if one of them is absent, the dreaded loss or death is bound to occur, man's own power notwithstanding. Moreover, man's power itself depends on numerous causes which are beyond his power. In short, man's power is not by his power.

The above explanation is a Qur'anic reality, and, as mentioned earlier, it is derived from the Divine teachings. When you know this fact and ponder on the relevant verses, you will see that the Qur'an attributes only some of the good characteristics to the firm decree and the preserved tablet, while it does

not attribute other traits to the above-mentioned Divine Decree.

There are some actions, conditions and traits which, if attributed to the Divine Decree and Measure, would nullify the principle of free will; and accordingly the Qur'an never attributes them to the Divine Decree; rather, it refutes it with full force. For example:

And when they commit an indecency they say: "We found our fathers doing this, and Allah has enjoined it on us." Say: "Surely, Allah does not enjoin indecency; do you say against Allah what you do not know?" (7:28)

On the other hand there are some actions, etc. which, if not attributed to the Divine Decree, would imply that man had complete freedom, that his will and power were the sufficient cause of his actions, etc. and were independent of every outside cause.

The Qur'an, therefore, pointedly ascribes them to the Divine Decree, and thus guides the man to the straight path – a path which does not confuse the walker. In this way, the Qur'an removes from him the base characteristics which would have resulted from that wrong ideas.

For example, it attributes the happenings to the Divine Decree, in order that man should not ignorantly feel joy for what he gets or sorrow for what he loses. Allah says:

and give them of the wealth of Allah which He has given you (24:33);

note that Allah exhorts man to be generous, by reminding him that his wealth has come to him from Allah.

Also, He says:

... ***and spend*** (benevolently) ***out of what We have given them*** (2:3);

the verse calls him to spend by attributing the wealth to the sustenance given by Allah. Again, He says:

Then may be you kill yourself with grief, sorrowing after them, if they do not believe in this announcement. Surely, We have made whatever is on the earth an embellishment for it, so that We may try them (as to) ***which of them is best in deed*** (18:6–7).

In these verses Allah tells His Prophet not to grieve because of the unbelievers' disbelief, reminding him that their disbelief does not mean that they have overpowered Allah; the fact is that what-ever is on the earth has been made and put there by Allah for the purpose of test and trial.

This system of ethics is the one used by the prophets, and a lot of its examples may be found in the Holy Qur'an and other Divine Books.

There is a third system, which is found exclusively in the Qur'an; it is neither seen in the Divine Books

which have been transmitted to us, nor in the teachings of the previous prophets (peace of Allah be on them!); nor is it seen in the knowledge which has come to us from divine scholars.

In this system, man is trained in character and knowledge, and the knowledge is used in a way that does not leave room for base and low traits. In other words, this system removes the vile characteristics, not by repulsing them, but by eliminating all motives other than Allah.

Let us explain it in this way: What is the motive of a work done for other than Allah? It may be honour and might of the 'other than Allah', which the doer of that work longs for. Or his power which he is afraid of. But Allah says:

Surely might is wholly Allah's (10:65);

that the power is wholly Allah's (2:165).

And when one is imbued with this true knowledge, there will remain no question of doing any deed for letting others see, or hear about it; nor will there be any reason why he should fear, or look forward to, or rely on anyone other than Allah.

Once these two realities are firmly known to a man, his psyche will be cleansed from evils of theory and practice. It will rather be adorned by the positive traits, that is, good character and Divine characteristics; for example, fear of and reliance on Allah, strength, self-respect, self-sufficiency and other such virtues.

The Qur'an has repeatedly said that the kingdom belongs to Allah, that the kingdom of the heavens and the earth is His, that to Him belongs all that is in the heavens and the earth, as we have explained several times.

Evidently, this kingdom does not leave any independence to anything, nor does it allow the creatures any freedom from want – except through Allah. Look at anything; you will see that Allah is the Owner of its person and of all its concomitants.

When a man believes in that owner-ship and this belief becomes firmly-rooted in his heart, he does not admit that anything has got any independence at all – in its person, characteristics or activities. Such a man cannot look except at the face of Allah, nor can he bow down before, hope for, or have fear of, anything other than Allah. He will not enjoy or be pleased with any other thing, nor will he rely on, or surrender to, anyone but Allah.

In short, he will not desire or wish for anything except Allah – the Eternal One Who will remain when everything will perish; he will surely turn away from all the false-hood, that is, from everything other than Allah; he will not attach any importance to his own existence nor will he care for himself in face of the Absolute Truth, that is, the eternal existence of his Creator – Great is His Glory. The same is the import of the following verses:

Allah is He besides Whom there is no god; His are the very best names (20:8);

That is Allah, your Lord, there is no god but He; the Creator of all things (6:102);

... Who made good everything that He has created (32:7);

And the faces shall be humbled before the Living, the Self-subsistent God (20:111);

... all are obedient to Him (2:116);

And your Lord has commanded that you shall not worship (any) but Him (17:23);

... is it not sufficient as regards your Lord that He is a witness over all things? (41:53);

... now surely He encompasses all things (41:54);

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

And the same is the import of the verses under discussion, that is, “and give good news to the patient ones, who when a misfortune befalls them, say: 'Surely we are Allah's and to Him we shall return.' Those are they on whom are blessings and mercy from their Lord, and those are the followers of the right course.”

These and similar other verses contain a unique Divine Know-ledge, and produce some real and especial results. Their system is not like any other which a moralist might employ, nor even like that used by previous prophets in their teachings.

According to the moralists, virtue and evil are based on the public's likes and dislikes; and the prophets based their teachings on the general religious beliefs concerning the rules of the *shari'ah* and their recompense. But this third system is based on pure and perfect monotheism and it has been used exclusively by Islam – the best of blessings be on its Prophet and his progeny!

A western orientalist has expressed a really strange and astonishing idea in his History where he discusses the Islamic civilization. A gist of his observation is as follows:

“A scholar should concern himself only with various aspects of civilization which were developed by Islam among its followers, and the excellence and superiority which were its legacy to the Muslims in the form of a developed society and high culture.

As for the religious precepts which Islam teaches, they are merely the moral teachings which are common to all religions and which were popularized by all the prophets.”

Comment: The explanation given by us shows how unfounded his opinion is and how confused his views are. The result emerges from its premises; the effects of training emanate from the knowledge

acquired by the trainee.

As mentioned earlier, there are three types of the teachers of ethics: one invites to a reality of a low grade, another to an average perfection and the third to the pristine reality and highest perfection.

Can it be said that the results of all three will be the same? In other words, the scholars of ethics call the people to the sociological truth; the prophets call mankind to the actual truth and real perfection by which it may get the eternal bliss in the life hereafter; but the Islam invites the people to the Absolute Reality, that is, Allah Himself, and teaches them ethical values by reminding them that Allah is One, and there is no partner in His divinity; this belief produces in man the purest servitude.

Now you see how dissimilar are the systems employed by the three groups, and how different are the results.

This Islamic system created an admirable social structure, and produced a multitude of good servants, divine scholars and Allah's friends – men and women alike. And this single factor is sufficient to ensure the distinguished position of Islam.

Moreover, this system sometimes differ from the other two in its result also. It is based on the love a servant has for his Lord; it teaches him to give preference to his Lord's wishes over his own. We know that love and enthrallment sometimes lure the lover to do things which are not approved by social wisdom (which is the basis of the social ethics), nor are they commended by common sense on which is founded the general religious commandments. Reason has its own rules and love its own. We shall further explain it in some other place, Allah willing.

Qur'an: *Those are they on whom are blessings and mercy from their Lord, and those are the followers of the right course.* It appears from meditation on these words that blessings is to a certain extent different from mercy – look how “blessings” has been used in plural and “mercy” in singular. Allah says:

He it is Who sends His blessings on you, and (so do) His angels, that He may bring you forth out of utter darkness into the light; and He is Merciful to the believers (33:43).

The context shows that the sentence, “and He is Merciful to the believers”, gives the reason of the preceding phrases, “He it is Who sends His blessings on you.” The meaning therefore, is as follows: Allah sends His blessings on you; and it is as it should be, because He is Merciful to the believers, and you are believers; therefore, He sends His blessings on you, to show His mercy to you.

The position of blessing *vis-à-vis* mercy is like that of a premise in relation to its result, or of a glance in comparison to seeing, or of throwing into fire *vis-à-vis* burning. It is in conformity with the explanation, given by some writers of *as-salah* (**الصَّلَاةُ** = the blessing), that it really means turning towards, inclination.

Blessing from Allah means that He turns towards the servant with mercy; when attributed to angels it connotes their turning towards a man and becoming a medium to convey Allah's mercy to him; and when ascribed to man, it means turning to the Lord calling Him with humility. However, it does not mean that blessing itself is not mercy or an example of mercy.

Pondering on the usage of “mercy” in the Qur'an, we find that it is the comprehensive gift of Allah, the All-encompassing Divine Bounty. Allah says:

and My mercy encompasses all things (7:156);

also, He says:

And your Lord is the self-sufficient one, the Lord of mercy; if He pleases, He may take you off, and make whom He pleases successors after you, even as He raised you up from the seed of another people (6:133).

He may take you off because He is Self-sufficient, He does not need you; and He may make others succeed you, as He had raised you up, because He is Merciful. Even then both aspects are attributed to His mercy, and at the same time they may be attributed to His Self-sufficiency. Every creation – be it from matter or without matter – is a mercy, and also a gift and bounty emanating from His Self-sufficiency.

Allah says:

and the bounty of your Lord is not confined (17:20).

And one of His bounties is *as-salah* (the blessing); this too is a mercy, but of a especial type. Probably this is the reason why in the verse under discussion, “blessings” has been used in plural and “mercy” in singular.

Qur'an: and they are the followers of the right course. It looks like the result of the preceding clause, “Those are they on whom are blessings and mercy from their Lord”. That is why Allah did not say, 'on whom are blessing and mercy from their Lord and guidance'; instead He described it in a separate sentence.

Also, He did not say, 'and they are *al-mahdiyyun* (الْمَهْدِيُّونَ) = the rightly guided ones'; instead their acceptance of guidance has been denoted with the word *al-muhtadun* (الْمُهْتَدُونَ) = followers of the right course), because “following” describes the next stage, coming after and resulting from “guidance”.

Evidently, the mercy of Allah consisted of guiding them to Himself; the blessings were like the preliminaries of that guidance, and their following that right course was the result of that guidance. Thus, the blessings, the mercy and the following of the right course, all are different from one another, although looking from another angle all three were but Divine Mercy.

Allah gives good news to these believers of His bestowal of honours to them. To clearly understand the whole sequence, look at the following example: You see in the way a friend of yours who wants to come to your house to be your guest, and is making enquiries as to how to reach your home.

You meet him with smiling face, take him to the proper path, walking with him, not leaving him alone lest he loses the way; this continues until you bring him to your house; while on the way, you tend to his needs and look after his meals and transport, and protect him from every hardship and trouble.

All these things taken together are called “hospitality” accorded to him; and every care taken of him is a particular care and hospitality; for example, showing him the way is separate from hospitality and care – and even then it is a hospitality. Each of the above acts is a care, and each is a guidance and each is a particular hospitality – and all together come under one word, “hospitality”.

Applying this example to this verse, the one comprehensive hospitality is like the mercy, and every attention paid to the friend is like the blessings and his being your guest in your house is like the “following the right course”.

Many syntactical devices of this sentence point to the prestige and rank of those believers: First, it is a nominal clause; second, it begins with a demonstrative pronoun used for distant objects; third, that pronoun has been reinforced with a separate personal pronoun; and fourth, the predicate begins with the definite article.

Traditions

About al-Barzakh and the Soul's Life after Death

Suwayd ibn Ghafalah narrates from the Commander of the faithfuls ('Ali, a.s.) that he said: “Surely, when the son of Adam comes to (his) last day of this world and the first of the next, his property, his children and his actions are portrayed before him. So he turns to his property and says:

'By God! I was covetous of you (and) avaricious; so what have you (now) got for me?' (The property) says: 'Take your shroud from me'. Then he turns to his children and says: 'By God! Surely I was your loving (father), and I was your protector; now what have you got for me?' They say: 'We shall convey you to your pit (i.e., grave) and bury you in it.'

Then he turns to his deeds and says: 'By God! I was indifferent to you, and you were distasteful to me; (now) what is with you (for me)?' So it says: 'I am your companion in your grave as well as on the Day of your gathering – until I am presented with you before your Lord.'

Then (after his death), if he is a friend of Allah, there comes to him (a visitor), the most sweet-scented of all people, of the most beautiful appearance and (wearing) the most adorned apparel, and says to him: 'Rejoice with refreshment from Allah, and flowers and the garden of bounties; you arrived a good arrival'

(i.e., welcome to you).

Thereupon, he says: 'Who are you?' (The visitor) says: 'I am your good deed. Proceed from the world to the garden.'¹ And he recognizes the one who washes his body, and earnestly appeals to his carrier (the bier-bearer) to hasten him (to the grave).

Then when he enters his grave, two angels come to him – and they are the examiners of the grave – with elegantly-dressed hairs, writing on the earth with their teeth; their voices are like roaring thunder and their eyes like streaking lightening.

They ask him: 'Who is your Lord? And who is your prophet? And what is your religion?' And he says: 'Allah is my Lord; and Muhammad is my prophet; and Islam is my religion.'¹

So they say: 'May Allah confirm you in what you like and are pleased with!' And this is (the meaning of) the word of Allah:

Allah confirms those who believe with the sure word in this world's life and in the hereafter...
(14:27).

Then they make his grave spacious for him as far as his eye can see, and open for him a gate to the garden, and say to him: 'Sleep happily the sleep of a fine-looking youth.'¹ And it is the word of Allah:

The dwellers of the garden shall on that day be in a better abiding place and a better resting place. (25:24).

“And if he is an enemy of his Lord, then comes to him a (visitor), the ugliest of the creatures of Allah in attires and the foulest-smelling. And he tells him: 'Welcome to the entertainment of boiling water and roasting in Hell.'¹

And he (the dead person) recognizes the one who washes his body, and earnestly appeals to his carrier (the bier-bearer) to hold him back. And when he is buried in his grave, the examiners of the grave come to him and remove his shroud from him.

Then they ask him: 'Who is your Lord? And what is your religion? And who is your prophet? And he says: 'I do not know.'¹ So they say to him: 'You did not know, nor were you on the right path.'¹

Then they hit him with an iron-rod, a hitting which frightens every creature of Allah – except the *jinn* and the men. Thereafter they open for him a door to the Hell and tell him: 'Sleep in the worst condition.'¹

So he is squeezed in a narrow space like a shaft in an arrow-head, until his brain comes out from between his nails and flesh; and Allah sets on him the serpents of the earth and its scorpions and insects which go on biting him until Allah will raise him from his grave – and he will long for the advent of the Hour, because of the trouble in which he finds himself.” (*at-Tafsir*, al-Qummi)

Abu Bakr al-Hadrami narrates from Abu Ja'far (a.s.) that he said: "No one shall be questioned in the grave except he who shall be of pure belief or of total disbelief." I told him: "And (what about) the rest of the men?" He said: "They will be kept in oblivion." (*Muntakhab Basa'iri 'd-darajat*)

Ibn Zubyan says: "I was with Abu 'Abdillah (a.s.), and he said: 'What do the people say about the souls of the believers after they die?' I said: 'They say (that the souls are placed) in the craws of green birds.' He said: 'Glory be to Allah! The believer is far more honourable near Allah than this!'"

When it happens (i.e., when the believer dies) there come to him the Messenger of Allah and Ali and Fatimah and Hasan and Husayn (peace be on them), and with them (come) the angels of the Mighty and Glorious Allah (who are near to him).

So, if Allah lets his tongue speak the witness of His Oneness and the prophethood of the Prophet and the (*al-walayah* الْوَلَايَةُ) = love, obedience of the *Ahlu 'l-bayt*, then the Messenger of Allah (S) and 'Ali and Fatimah and Hasan and Husayn (peace be on them) and with them the near angels become his witnesses for it.

And if his tongue is tied, Allah confers on His Prophet the knowledge of what is in his (i.e., that believer's) heart of that (belief); so he (i.e., the Prophet) becomes his witness; and then bear testimony of Ali, Fatimah, Hasan and Husayn – because of the testimony of the Prophet – on their group be the best peace from Allah! and (so do) those angels who are present with them.

When Allah takes him to Himself, He sends that soul to the garden, in a shape similar to his (worldly) shape. They eat (there) and drink. When a new-corner comes to them, he recognizes them by that shape which they had in the world." (*al-Amali*, ash-Shaykh at-Tusi)

Hammad ibn 'Uthman narrates from Abu 'Abdillah (a.s.) that he described the souls of the believers and said: "They meet each other." I said: "They meet each other?" He said: "Yes! They ask each other and recognize each other, so that if you see one you will say, '(He is) so-and-so'." (*al-Mahasin*)

Abu 'Abdillah (a.s.) said: "Verily, the believer visits his family and he sees what he likes; and what he dislikes is hidden from him. And verily the unbeliever visits his family and he sees what he dislikes; and what he likes is hidden from him." And he said: "There are some of them who visit (their families) every Friday; and there are others who visit according to their deeds." (*al-Kafi*)

as-Sadiq (a.s.) said: "Verily, the souls are, with the characteristic features of (their) bodies, in a tree of the garden; they know each other and enquire about each other. When a (new) soul comes to (those) souls, they say: 'Let it be, because it is coming from a great terrifying (experience).'"

Thereafter, they ask him: 'What has happened to so-and-so? What has so-and-so done?' If the soul tells them, 'I have left him alive', they hope for his (future arrival); and if it tells them, 'He had died', they say: 'He fell down (to Hell); he perished.' (*al-Kafi*)

The author says: There are numerous traditions on the subject of *al-barzakh*. We have quoted above some comprehensive ones. There is a huge lot of nearly *mutawatir* traditions describing the above-mentioned meanings. These traditions prove that the life of *al-barzakh* is an immaterial one.

A Philosophical Discussion on Immateriality of the Soul

Is the soul immaterial? The word “soul” in this discussion means that thing which every man refers to when he says “I”. Its “immateriality” refers to the fact that it is not a material thing, it is neither divisible nor governed by time or space.

No doubt, I conceive in myself a concept which I refer to as “I”; and it is equally certain that every man has similar conception about himself. It is a conception which we are never oblivious of – as long as we are alive and conscious. It is not a limb of ours; nor is it a part of our body which we perceive by one of our senses or even through reason.

In short, it is not like our external limbs which we feel with our senses of sight or touch, etc., nor is it like our internal organs which we know by senses or experiment. Sometimes we become oblivious of one or another of those limbs or organs – or even of the whole body. But we are never oblivious of the “I”. It proves that the “I” is other than the body and its parts.

One thing more. Body and its limbs and parts as well as the faculties and characteristics found in it, are all material. One of the characteristics of matter is gradual change, dissolution and divisibility. If soul were body or a part thereof, it would have been material and subject to change and division – but it is not so.

If a man looks at this vision of his “self ” and then compares it with that which he used to look at since the beginning of his gnosis of the “self ”, he will find that it is the same vision, the same notion, without the least change or plurality.

It is unlike his body or its parts and characteristics which all undergo continuous change, in substance and form as well as in their conditions and positions. Also, he will realize that it is a notion, simple, indivisible and non-compound, unlike the body or its parts and characteristics.

And matter and every material thing is a compound and divisible. Obviously, the soul is not body, nor is it a part of the body; it is neither a development of the body nor one of its characteristics.

Coming to matter again, it makes no difference whether we perceived it with a sense of ours or by reasoning, or did not perceive it at all – it is matter and material in any case. And matter is subject to change and divisibility. But we have seen that the vision which we call “soul” is not subject to any of the above characteristics of matter. Therefore, soul is neither matter nor material.

Also, this vision of “I” is a notion, simple and one; there is no plurality of parts therein, nor is there any

extraneous item mixed with it; it is an absolute one. Every man finds it in him–self that he is he and not someone else.

Therefore, this vision is a concept subsistent by itself, and distinct; it is beyond the definition of matter and is not subject to its characteristics and properties. It is *a al-jawhar* (الْجَوْهَرُ) = lit. “jewel”; technically, a thing that exists in reality and which is the bearer of the accidents), separate from matter; it has a connection with the body which makes it identifiable with the body – and it is the connection of management.

The above discourse proves our claims in this respect.

All the materialists and a group of Muslim theologians as well as the Zahiristic traditionalists do not accept the immateriality of the soul. But what they have written in support of their view stretches the credulity too far. Let us have a look at the arguments of the materialists. They say:

1. The science has nowadays advanced to a previously–undreamt–of extent in its in–depth and minute researches of natural phenomena. It has found and pin–pointed a natural and material cause for every characteristic of the body.

It has not found any psychological effect which could not be explained according to the material laws. This being the case, why should we believe in the existence of an immaterial soul?

2. The nervous system continuously conveys the perceptions to its centre (i.e., brain) with extreme rapidity. The vision thus perceived is a unified series, having a single position. The pictures formed in mind are substituted with such rapidity that one frame is not distinguishable from another; that is, mind does not realize that the preceding frame has gone and been replaced by another.

It is this composite “one”, this illusory ”unit”, which we see and call our soul, and which we refer to as “I”.

It is true that it is other than all our limbs and organs; but it does not necessarily mean that it is other than body and its characteristics. The fact is that it is a composite series which appears to be one, because of continuous and rapid substitutions – and we are never oblivious of it, because such an oblivion would result in nullity of the nervous system – in other words, death.

Also, it is true that my vision of my “I” is constant. But it is not because there is a thing which is constant and unchanged. In fact, it is only an illusion resulting from a series of constantly and rapidly changing visions.

Suppose there is a water–tank with an inlet and an outlet of the same diameter; water comes in from one side and goes out from the other, with exactly the same speed – and the tank seems always full.

Our sense perceives the water as one, constant and unchanged unit, but in reality it is neither the same

water nor is it constant and unchanged. Even if there is a reflection in the water, of a man, tree or some other object, it will look as unchanged, steady and constant, but actually it is not so – it is not one, it is gradually changing with the gradual change of the water.

The same is the case of the apparent oneness, constancy and unchangeability which we see in our soul, self or “I”.

3. The soul, for whose immateriality arguments have been offered, based on the inner vision, is in fact a composite of natural faculties and characteristics. It is the sum-total of nervous perceptions, which in their turn emanate from mutual action and reaction between external matter and nervous system. It is a composite unity, not the real one.

Comment

1. It is true that the science, based on senses and experiments, with all its minute, delicate and in-depth researches, has not come across a “soul”. Also, it is correct that it has not found any phenomenon which irresistibly led one to the soul as its cause.

But these two premises do not prove that there is not an immaterial soul – after all, we have written earlier the proofs of its existence. The natural sciences, which discuss the laws of nature and the properties of matter, are by definition limited to the researches concerning matter only, which is its subject.

The apparatus and chemicals, etc. which sciences use to conduct and complete their tests and experiments, may throw light on matter and material affairs only. But by the same token these, sciences and their apparatus, etc. cannot pass any judgment – for or against – on metaphysical and immaterial concept and beings.

Utmost that a natural science can say is that it did not find a soul. But “not finding” is not “non-existence”. The natural sciences, by their definition, are not expected to find within their subject (i.e., within matter and its properties and characteristics) something beyond the limit of matter and physical nature.

In fact, their above-mentioned assertion emanates from a gross misunderstanding. They think that those who believed in the existence of soul, did so because they look at some biological functions of their limbs which they could not explain within the framework of their incomplete knowledge, and so they said that there was something immaterial, that is, the soul, that was the source of those functions.

But now the science has developed by leaps and bounds and has pin-pointed the natural causes of all such functions. Therefore, there is no need now to believe in the putative soul. (It is the same trend of thought which they have followed while denying the existence of the Creator.)

Obviously, it is a wrong assumption. Those who believe in the existence of soul, do not do so because of that supposed difficulty; they do not ascribe some bodily function (of known causes) to the body, and some others (of unknown causes) to the soul. Rather, they ascribe all bodily functions to the body – directly – and to the soul – indirectly, through the body. They ascribe to the soul only one function which cannot be ascribed to the body in any way – man's gnosis of self and his vision of his person or "I".

2. They have said that the reality seen by man as one is, in fact, a series of nervous perceptions coming to the central nervous system one after another with extreme rapidity but their oneness is only composite.

But this assertion is quite irrelevant, and it has nothing to do with the vision of the self. We have argued on the strength of the vision of the self; they are talking about arrival of the sensual visions from the peripheral sense-organs to the central nervous system, and its results.

Well, let us suppose, as they say, that actually there are many things, that is, perceptions which have no real oneness; and those perceptions are all material, there is nothing behind them except their own reality; and that the vision which is 'one soul' is in fact the sum-total of these numerous perceptions.

If so, then where did this "one" come from – the one which is our only vision, whose "other" has never been perceived by us? Where did this perceived oneness come from?

The talk about "composite oneness" is more like a jest than a serious proposition. A "composite one" is in reality a collection of numerous things without any oneness at all. Its oneness is imaginary, as we may say one house or one line, which is not one in fact.

What they say amounts to this: The perceptions and sensations which are pluralistic and manifold in themselves are one perceptions in itself.

It means that these perceptions are numerous in reality, having no oneness at all, and at the same time they are actually only one perception; there is nothing beyond these sensual perceptions to perceive them as one perception – unlike a sense or imagination which consecutively and collectively receives manifold sensory or imaginary perceptions, and perceives them as one.

They claim that those manifold perceptions are in themselves one perception – there is no other faculty beyond them which treats this collective vision as a composite one.

Also, it is not possible to say that that perceiving is done by a part of brain which perceives the pluralistic picture as "one" – because it will not remove our objection: The perception of that part of brain is itself a part of those consecutively and rapidly-perceived picture, and our objection covers that perception too.

That part of brain does not possess a separate perception-power which would deal with these perceptions – as an external sense deals with the external matters and acquires through them sensory pictures. (Ponder on this point.)

Exactly the same arguments (as we have offered above against "oneness" of the sensual perceptions) apply with equal force against firmness and indivisibility of this vision which is always changing and divisible by its very nature.

Apart from that, the premises – that these manifold, consequently (and with extreme rapidity) perceived pictures are perceived by mental vision as one – is wrong in itself. What is brain or its faculties? What is perception and the perceived picture?

All these things are material – and matter and material are in their quiddity manifold, changeable and divisible. But the gnosis of "self" is not subject to these material defects. Is it not strange that even then they claim that there is nothing beyond matter and material?

3. They have said that the senses or the perceiving faculties become confused and consequently perceive manifold, divisible and changing things as one indivisible and unchanging thing. But this assertion is manifestly wrong.

Error or confusion is a relative – and not an absolute – effect which occurs when one thing is compared with another. For example, we perceive the celestial bodies as small bright dots.

Of course, this perception is wrong as we know from academic proofs and our other perceptions. But this error is found out when we compare our sensory perception with the reality of these perceived luminous bodies.

As far as that sensory perception itself is concerned, it is a reality – we are actually perceiving small bright dots. And to that extent there is no question of any error or confusion.

The subject under discussion is not different from the above-given example. When our senses and faculties look at numerous divisible and changing things and perceive them as one indivisible and unchanging thing, their confusion and error is found out only when that picture is compared with the real thing existing outside.

But so far as the perceived picture found in that faculty or sense is concerned, it is undoubtedly one, unchanging and in-divisible – and such a thing cannot be material because it lacks the properties of matter and material.

In short, the above discourse shows that the argument offered by materialists on the basis of senses and experiment, only proves that they could not find the soul. The fallacy is that they have proved 'not finding' and think that it proves 'non-existence'.

Also, the picture painted by them to illustrate the vision of self or soul – the vision that is a single, simple and unchangeable reality – is irrelevant and wrong; that picture is in accord neither with established principles of materialism nor with the actual fact.

Now, we should have a look at the definition of soul or psyche as given by the psychologists. According to them, it is the unified condition resulting from the actions and reactions of various psychological activities – like perception, will, pleasure, love, etc. – which give rise to that unified condition.

We have no-thing to say about this definition, because scholars of every branch of knowledge have right to postulate a subject for their scholarly pursuit and deliberation. And so have the psychologists.

Our concern is about the existence (or inexistence) of the soul in reality, quite independent of the assumptions of the thinkers. And it is a question within the domain of philosophy, not psychology.

There are some scholars of theology who believe that the soul is not immortal. They say: It has been established by the disciplines related to human life, like anatomy and physiology, that man's spiritual and biological characteristics emanate from live cells; those cells are the foundations of human and animal lives. Spirit or soul, therefore, is a characteristics and especial effect of those countless cells – each of which contains a life of its own.

What the man calls his soul – and to which he refers as “I” – is a composite entity made up of countless souls. We know that these life conditions and spiritual characteristics cease to exist when the life-giving germs and cells die.

In this back-ground, there is no question of a single immaterial soul or spirit which is supposed to continue even after the body dies. True that the principles of materialism, established after scientific researches, are yet unable to unravel the mysteries of life.

There-fore, we may say that the physical causes are unable to create the soul, and accordingly, it may have been brought into being by a metaphysical being. The attempt to prove the immateriality of the soul by purely rationalistic argument is unacceptable in the world of modern knowledge, which does not rely on anything other than the senses and experiments.

The author says: On meditation you will see that all the objections written against the materialists' arguments apply with equal force to this argument too. The following two objections are over and above that:

First: If the scientific research is upto now unable to unravel the mysteries of soul and realities of life, it does not necessarily mean that it cannot do so even in future; nor that these spiritual characteristics are in fact not based on material causes – although we may not know it. Therefore, the theologians' argument is no-thing but a fallacy by which they have equalized inexistence of knowledge with knowledge of inexistence.

Second: They seem to ascribe some worldly affairs – that is, the physical phenomena – to matter, and some others – that is, spiritual affairs – to a metaphysical cause, that is, the Creator. But it implies that there are two creators in the world. It is a proposition which is neither acceptable to the materialists nor

the theists. And all the arguments of monotheism rebut such assumption.

There are some other objections against immateriality of soul, described in books of philosophy and theology; all of them show that the writers concerned have not pondered on the proof given by us, nor have they understood its main theme. That is why we have refrained from quoting and commenting on them here. Anyone desirous to know them should look into the books concerned. And Allah is the Guide.

A Discourse on Ethics

Ethics is the science which looks into human traits, related to man's vegetable, animal and human characteristics, and differentiates the good traits from the bad ones, in order that man may complete his practical happiness by acquiring the good traits; and thus emanate from him such actions as attract to him general praise from the human society.

Ethics shows that human morality finally belongs to three comprehensive faculties of man. These faculties lead the psyche to acquire practical knowledge, from which emanate all actions of the human species.

These are the desire, anger and rational faculty. Human actions are divided into three categories: Either they are intended to gain some benefit, for example: eating, drinking and wearing clothes, etc.

They issue forth from the faculty of desire; or they are aimed at protecting, or repulsing harmful effects from, one's person, honour or property, etc. These actions emanate from the faculty of anger. Or they are related to mental conception and proposition, for example, arranging syllogism, preparation of argument, etc.

Such mental activities are caused by rational faculty. Man's personality is composed of these three faculties, and they, by joining together, emerge as a composite unit and become the source of all human activities and actions. In this way, man attains his felicity and happiness, which is the final cause of this composition.

It is therefore necessary for man not to let any of these three faculties deviate from the middle path to either the right or the left, not to allow any of these to exceed the limit or to be deficient – as it would disturb the ratio of that particular ingredient, which would result in changing the entire nature of the composite unit, that is, man himself. This would negate the reason for which the man was created, that is, the felicity of the whole species.

The middle course for any of the faculties is to use it as it should be – both in quantity and quality. The middle course for the faculty of desire is called continence, and its two sides of excess and deficiency are greed and undue quiescence, respectively.

The middle course for the faculty of anger is bravery, and the two sides are rashness and cowardice.

The middle course of the faculty of rationality is called wisdom, and the two sides are deception and dull-mindedness.

When the three good characteristics – continence, bravery and wisdom – combine in a man, a fourth characteristic is born, just as a new quality emerges when different ingredients of a medicine or mixture are blended together. And that quality is called justice. Justice gives each faculty its due right and puts it in its proper place.

Its two undesirable sides are inflicting injustice and surrendering to it.

These four – continence, bravery, wisdom and justice – are the roots of all virtuous characteristics, of good morality. Each of them has numerous branches which issue forth from it and belong to it. They have the same relationship with the above-mentioned roots as a species has with its genus.

Examples of these branches are generosity and magnanimity, contentedness and gratitude, patience and gallantry, courage and modesty, sense of honour and sincerity, nobility and humility, and so on. These are the branches of virtuous characteristics, which are given in detail in the books of the Ethics. The following is a 'family-tree' showing its roots and branches¹.

And the Ethics defines each of them and distinguishes the middle course from its two sides of excess and deficiency; then it explains why a virtue is virtue, then shows how it can be acquired, until it becomes a firm trait, that is, by firm belief that it is good and virtuous trait and by repeatedly practising it until it becomes a firmly-rooted characteristic of the soul.

For example: We say to a coward: Cowardice is born when the psyche is gripped by fear; and fear emanates from something which may happen or may not happen – in future; and such a thing, whose existence and inexistence both are equally possible, cannot be tipped to either side without a cause; a man of reason should not indulge in such fantasies; therefore, a man should not allow himself to be gripped by fear.

When a man teaches himself this theoretical aspect, and then repeatedly enters into dangerous situations and resolutely proceeds towards alarming perils, he soon gets rid of the bad trait of fear. The same is the case with all the virtues and evils.

The above description is based on the first system, as was explained in the Commentary. That system tries to reform the character and to create a balance, a moderation, in moral traits, in order that the man may be praised and his virtues lauded by the society.

Somewhat similar is the approach of the second system brought by the prophets and the divine legislators. The only difference is in the aims and objects of the two systems.

While the first system aims at acquiring a perfect trait because it is approved by the society and attracts praise from the people, the second one aims at achieving by it the genuine happiness for the man, that

is, perfection of belief in Allah and His signs, and the felicity of the next world, which is the real happiness and perfection. Yet, both systems are similar in that, the ultimate goal of both is the perfection of man in his character and morals.

As for the third system (which was explained earlier), it differs from the above two, in that it aims at seeking the pleasure of Allah, not at achieving human perfection. Consequently, its goals sometimes differ from that of the earlier two systems. It is quite possible that what appears as the middle way from this point of view, may not look so from the other two angles.

When the faith of a servant proceeds on this path of perfection, when it goes on from strength to strength, his soul is attracted towards meditation about his Lord; he keeps the beautiful Divine Names before his vision, and constantly looks at His lovely attributes which are free from every defect and deficiency; his soul is relentlessly attracted to Allah going higher and higher in his meditation, until there comes a stage where he worships Allah as though he (man) were looking at Allah, and Allah were looking towards him. At this stage he feels the Divine Presence in his attraction, meditation and love.

The love increases from strength to strength, because man by nature loves beauty. Allah has said:

and those who believe are stronger in (their) love for Allah (2: 165).

Such a man begins following the Messenger of Allah in all his doings, in every situation, because love of a thing results in the love of its signs, and the Messenger of Allah (S) is the wonderful sign of Allah. (In fact, the whole universe is a sign and token of Allah.)

This love becomes stronger and stronger until a time comes when the servant cuts himself from every thing, in devotion of Allah; he loves nothing except his Lord, he bows before none other than Allah. Whenever such a man looks at a thing which has some beauty and attraction, he finds in it a sample – although imperfect – of the Divine Beauty.

He knows that it is but a reflection of the inexhaustible perfection, the unending beauty and incomprehensible splendour of Allah. Allah's is the beauty, grace, perfection and magnificence; every beauty and perfection found in other things, in reality belongs to Him, because every thing is a sign of Allah – it is its only reality, it is nothing more than that; it has no other disposition; it is but a reflection showing the image of the original.

This man is, and remains, overwhelmed by love; and he does not look at anything but only because it is a sign of his Lord. In short, all strings connecting his heart to other things are snapped off, leaving it attached only to the love of Allah. Whatever he loves, it is only for the sake of Allah and in the cause of Allah.

At this stage, the mode of his perceptions and actions under-goes a drastic change. When he looks at a thing, he sees Allah before it and with it, every thing loses its independence and identity in his eyes.

What he sees and perceives is different from what other people see and perceive; the people look at things from behind a curtain, while he sees them in their true form.

This shows the difference in perception, and similar is the case of actions. As he does not love anything except Allah, he does not want anything except for Allah, seeking His Sublime Majesty.

He neither seeks nor intends, neither hopes nor fears, neither chooses nor abandons, becomes neither despaired nor depressed, is neither pleased nor displeased – except for Allah and in the cause of Allah. Thus, his aims and goals differ totally from those of other people; his motive is diametrically opposed to that of his fellow beings.

Previously, he acquired a virtue because it was a human perfection, and discarded an evil because it was a defect. But now his only interest is in seeking the Sublime Majesty of Allah; he does not care about any perfection or defect, nor is he attracted to any worldly praise or cherished remembrance; he rises above this world as well as the next; he takes into consideration neither the Paradise nor the Hell – he discards every thing and rises above them. Now, his destination is his Lord; his provision, his humility of servitude; and his guide, his love. As a poet has said:

***Love narrated to me the traditions of amour,
Through its chain of narrators, from neighbourhood
of a distinguished personality,
And narrated to me the breath of fresh breeze,
From the branching trees, from the valley of euphorbia
from the heights of Najd,
From the tear, from my sour eye, from passion,
From sorrow, from my wounded heart, from ecstasy of love,
That my ardor and love have sworn together,
To my destruction till I am laid down in my grave.***

This discourse, although short and concise, explains our theme (if you study it carefully). It shows that in this third system of the Ethics the question of human perfection or defect becomes irrelevant; and the aim is changed from human perfection to the Sublime Majesty of Allah.

As a result, the outlook is changed from those of the other two systems; and it may happen sometimes that what is counted as a virtue in other systems becomes evil in this one, and vice versa.

Now, we should turn our attention to one remaining topic. There is another theory of Ethics which differs from the above-mentioned three systems; and probably it may be counted as a separate system.

They say: Ethics and morality changes in its roots and shoots with the changes occurring in the society, because virtue and vice change with the changing society, they are not based on any permanent, unalterable, firm foundation. Allegedly it emanates from the theory of evolution of matter.

They say: Human society has come into being because of various needs and requirements of life, which man wants to fulfil through the agency of society. He tries to keep the society alive which, he thinks, preserves his own existence. The nature is governed by the law of evolution and gradual perfection.

Consequently, society too undergoes constant changes and proceeds to a more perfect and more developed goal. If an action conforms with the aim of society – that is, perfection – it is called virtue; otherwise, it is vice.

Therefore, virtue and vice cannot remain unchanged, they are not static or permanent. There is nothing like absolute virtue or absolute vice; they are relative ideas, which change with the changing societies, according to regions and times.

As the virtue and vice – being relative factors – under-go changes, so do the ethical and moral values. In other words, Ethics is not absolute; its views on good and bad characteristics are liable to change with circumstances.

From the above, we may infer that Ethics follows the nation-al or social aspirations – the aspirations which are a means of achieving the social perfection (which is the goal of the society); and virtue and vice are governed by it.

Whatever promotes development, whatever helps the society in reaching its goal and achieving its aspiration, is good and virtue; and whatever hinders from that goal, whatever keeps the society backward, is evil and vice.

Accordingly, lie, false allegation, indecency, hard-heartedness, robbery and shamelessness may become good and virtuous, if they promote the aspiration of the society. And truth, chastity and mercy may become bad and evil – if they hinder it from achieving its goal.

This is a gist of this strange theory which has been adopted by the materialist communists. This theory is not a new one, contrary to their claims. In ancient Greece, the Cynics reportedly had the same idea.

Likewise, Mazdakites (the followers of Mazdak, who lived in Iran during the reign of Kisra and was the first to call to communism) were practising it; and even today some primitive tribes in Africa and elsewhere follow this tenet.

However, it is a false theory, and the proof offered in its support is wrong both in its foundation and structure. Before exposing its falsehood, a few points should be made clear:

Every being – that which has external existence – has an inseparable personality of its own. Consequently, one being cannot be another being. For example, existence of Zayd has a personality and a sort of unity which prevents it from becoming the personality of 'Amr.

Zayd is one person and 'Amr is another; they are two persons, two human beings, not one. It is a

premise whose truth cannot be doubted.

(There is a totally different proposition which says: “The physical universe is a being having one individual reality.” This proposition should not be confused with the above-mentioned premise.)

It follows that the external existence is one and the same with personality.¹ But mental ideas are different from external beings and their existence is not their personality. Reason admits that an idea – whatever it may be – may be applied to more than one individual, for example, the idea of man, or that of a tall man, or that of the man standing before us.

The logicians divide idea into general and particular. Also, they divide the particular into two categories of relative and real. But these divisions are done when an idea is seen *vis-à-vis* another idea, when it is put at the side of the other; or when it is seen in relation to external existence.

This property of the ideas – their applicability to more than one individual – is also sometimes called “generality”; its opposite being “individuality” or “unity”.

An external physical being is governed by the law of change and general movement. Therefore, it has an expanse and that expanse is divisible into boundaries and pieces, each piece being different from other preceding or following ones.

Yet, it is connected with them in its existence. Otherwise, without that connection, it could not be said to be changing or evolving. (If a thing is removed completely and is replaced by an entirely new thing, it cannot be said that the first evolved and changed into the second. If one thing is to change into another, there must be a common factor joining them together.)

It follows that that movement is a single thing having its own identity and personality. It looks numerous when it is seen in relation to the boundaries of a thing (as mentioned above). That relation distinguishes one piece from the others. But as for the movement itself, it is a single uninterrupted flow.

This characteristic of the movement – this constant flow – is also called a “generality” in contrast to the relations it has with each boundary; we say “general movement”, meaning a movement free of its relations with the boundaries and pieces.

This “generality” is a thing existing in reality, unlike the “generality of the ideas” mentioned in (2) above, which is mental attribute of idea – an imaginary attribute of an imaginary being.

Undoubtedly, man is a physical being; humanity has many members, as well as its own laws and characteristics. What is created by nature is one individual, singly and separately. It does not create the collection of people which we call human society. Of course, the nature was aware that man needs somethings to perfect his existence which he could not obtain on his own.

Therefore, the nature equipped him with organs, faculties and powers which would be useful in his

endeavours to make up his deficiencies within the framework of society. Obviously, the single man is the goal of creation, primarily and principally, while society is a secondary goal, just a by-product.

The human nature demands a society and proceeds towards it, (if we can use the words of demand, causality and movement – in their real sense – about the society!). What is the real relation between man and this society?

An individual man is a single and personal being (in the sense we have described above). At the same time, he is constantly on move, changing, evolving, proceeding to his perfection.

That is why every piece of his changing being is different from other pieces. Yet his is a nature, flowing, “general”, preserved in all the stages of the changes; in short, his nature is a single personality.

This nature found in this individual man is preserved by the means of procreation, by branching out of one individual into other individuals. It is this factor which is called “nature of the species”.

It is preserved through the individuals, even if they are changed, even if they undergo creation and destruction (in the same way as was explained about the individual's nature). Individual's nature exists and proceeds towards personal perfection.

Likewise, nature of species exists and proceeds towards the perfection of the species. There is no doubt that this endeavour for perfection of species exists in the natural system.

That is what we mean when we say, for example, that the human species proceeds towards perfection; or that today's man is a more perfect being than the primitive man. The same demand for perfection of species is in the minds of those scientists who speak about the evolution of species.

Had there not been a nature of species, existing in reality, preserved in the individuals.(or in species), such talks would not have had any value – it would have been just a metaphorical speech.As with the individuals, so with the society.

There is an individual, or let us say particular, society, which is found amongst the people of a nation, of a time or of a region. Also, there is a general society found in the human species, continuing with its continuation, evolving with its evolution (if it be correct that society, like a social man, is an externally existing condition of an externally existing nature!).

Society moves and evolves with the movements and changes of man. This society is a single entity from the initial stage of the movement to wherever it proceeds to, with a general existence. This “one” (which changes because of its relation with each and every boundary) becomes divided into numerous pieces. And every “piece” is a part of the society, that is, a “man”.

The parts or members of the society rely in their being on the persons of mankind. In the same way the general civilization – in the sense described above – depends on the general human nature. The law

governing a unit is a unit of the law; and the law governing a "general" is the general rule. ("General rule" does not mean an abstract rule, because we are not talking about "general ideas".)

Undoubtedly an individual man, being a single entity, is governed by a rule, which continues with his continuation. Yet that rule undergoes partial changes, following the changes occurring in the man himself. For example, there is the rule that the physical man takes food, acts by his will, has feelings and imagination, thinks and perceives.

These rules exist and continue as long as the man himself exists. Of course, minor changes may occur in those general rules consequent to the changes occurring in the man. The same principle applies to the humanity in general, the general mankind, which exists with the existence of its individuals.

As establishment of society is a law of human nature and one of its characteristics, so the general society is a characteristic of the general human species. (By general society we mean the society, *per se*, the society established by human nature and which is continuing uninterruptedly from the day man came into being to this time.)

This general society exists and continues with the humanity. And the laws of society which it has brought into being will remain intact as long as the general society exists. Of course, some minor changes may occur in it but the main principles will remain unchanged, like the mankind itself, which continues although its individual members go on changing.

Now it is clear that there are some ethical principles which are unchangeable and are valid for ever – like general virtue and vice – as the general society is firm, constant and unalterable from the beginning.

Society cannot turn into non-society (i.e., individuality) – although a particular civilization may give way to another particular civilization. Likewise, general virtue (and vice) cannot turn into non-virtue (or non-vice) – although a particular virtue may evolve into some other particular virtue.

An individual man needs – for his existence and continuation – some perfections and benefits which he must achieve and acquire for his own self. That is why nature has equipped him with organs and faculties to help him in this compulsory quest, for example, alimentary canal for food intake and digestion, and sexual organs for reproduction and continuation of the species. It is obligatory for man to use these systems for the purpose they have been created for.

He should not completely ignore them by leaving them unused, because it would be against the dictate of nature. Likewise, he should not over-indulge in these activities, he should not eat or cohabit more than necessary; for example, he should not go on eating until he becomes sick, or dies, or becomes unable to use his other faculties. He must keep to the middle course in achieving all his requirements, perfections and benefits.

This middle course is called continence; and its two undesirable sides are greed and undue quiescence.

Likewise, we see that every individual, in his existence and continuation, is faced with many such things which are harmful to him and which he is obliged to resist, and repulse from him–self. And this “obligation” is proved by the fact that nature has equipped him with the organs and powers to defend himself with.

Therefore, it is obligatory for him to defend himself and resist the harmful things – keeping himself on the middle course. He should not neglect and crush these powers nor should he overuse them. This middle course is called bravery, and the other two sides are rashness and cowardice.

The same is the case with wisdom and its two sides, deception and dull–mindedness; as well as with justice and its two sides, injustice and surrender to injustice.

These are, thus, the four faculties and virtues which are demanded by the nature of an individual man – the nature which is equipped with its necessary tools: continence, bravery, wisdom and justice. And all of them are good and virtues. Good is that which is in conformity with the ultimate goal of a thing and promotes its perfection and felicity; and, as explained above, all the four are in conformity with the felicity of the individual. And their eight opposites are bad and evil.

When an individual, by his nature and in himself, has this attribute, then he would be having it also within the framework of the society. Society, being a product of nature, cannot negate nature's rules; otherwise, it would be a contradiction in terms. After all, what is society if not the co–operation of the individuals to facilitate the perfection of their natures and achievement of their aspirations.

Human species in framework of the “general” society has the same characteristics as an individual has in his particular society, as mentioned above.

Human species in its civilization tries to achieve its perfection by repulsing what is harmful and acquiring what is beneficial to it; by learning as much as is good for it and practising justice – that is, giving everyone his due right, without indulging into injustice and without surrendering to injustice.

And all these four characteristics are virtues. The civilization, *per se*, decrees that they are absolute virtues and their opposites are absolute vices.

The above discourse clearly shows that in the constant and perpetual human society, there are absolute virtues and absolute vices – society cannot “be” without them. It also shows that the four fundamental ethical values are absolutely good and virtuous and their opposites absolutely bad and evils; as has been decreed by the social nature of humanity. And the case of their branches is not different from that of the roots.

They too are absolute and unchanging – although there may occur some differences sometimes in their applications, as we shall mention afterwards.

Now it is clear that what they have said concerning relativity in morality is not correct:

They said: “Absolute virtue and vice do not exist. What exists is the relative virtue and relative vice; and it is a changing thing which varies with regions, times and societies.”

Reply: It is a fallacy, because they have confused the “generality of idea” with “generality (i.e., continuation) of existence”. It is true that absolute good and vice – in the meaning of general ideas – do not have external (i.e., real) existence.

But here we are not concerned with them. What we are concerned with are absolute virtue and vice – in the meaning of lasting social factors which continue as long as the society exists, by decree of nature.

The aim of the society is the happiness of the species. And it is impossible to think that all happenings and possible events and actions would always be good for the society. Surely some would conform with its needs and some would not.

Accordingly there would always be good and evil in the society. How can we suppose existence of a society – of any type – in which the members do not believe that every one should be given his due right, or that it is necessary to gain benefit to its proper limit, or that they must protect and defend the cause of the society as and when needed, or that the knowledge – by which man differentiates what is beneficial from what is harmful – is a good attribute?

These four beliefs are the above-mentioned justice, continence, bravery and wisdom. As was said, every society, of any description whatsoever, decrees that these four characteristics are good and virtuous. Moreover, how can we think of a society that does not ordain that one must refrain from indecencies? And that feeling is modesty, a branch of continence.

Or a society that does not exhort one to be enraged when rights are usurped or the sanctity of sacred things violated? And it is the earnest sense of honour which is a branch of bravery. Or that one should be happy with his due social rights? And it is contentedness.

Or that one should preserve one's social status without snubbing other people, without putting them out of countenance by one's arrogance? And it is modesty and humility. We may go on enumerating in the same way each and every branch of the ethics and morality.

They say: “The views often differ from society to society on what virtue is. One thing is considered as virtue in one society, while another society treats it as vice.”

Reply: Of course, there are some minor examples of this phenomenon. But it is not because one society believed in acquiring good traits while the other dismissed it as unnecessary. Whatever the difference, it only occurs because one society believes that trait to be good, while the other thinks it is evil. So the difference is not about the principle, it is only in its application.

For example: The societies ruled by autocratic rulers used to believe that the sovereign had total authority over his subjects, and absolute power to do whatever he wished and order whatever he liked.

But that belief was not based on any negative attitude towards justice.

It actually emanated from their belief that that absolute power was the due right of the ruler; they thought that what the ruler was doing was not injustice, he was only exercising his due authority and taking his just right.

Likewise, some societies thought that it was a shame if their kings studied to acquire knowledge, as is reported about French kings of the medieval ages. But it was not because they looked down at the virtue of knowledge; it was only because they thought that acquiring knowledge of politics and studying the ways of managing various government departments would conflict with the king's rightful royal activities and engagements.

In the same way, some societies do not acknowledge any excellence in chastity of women (i.e., not establishing sexual relation with any man other than their husbands), and their modesty. Nor do they believe that their men should feel enraged if their women indulged in licentiousness. The same is the case with some other virtues like contentedness and humbleness etc.

But it is only because those societies do not think that these things fall under continence, modesty, self-respect, contentedness and humbleness. It is not that they do not accept these main virtues as virtues. After all, they praise a judge or a ruler if he practices continence in his rule and judgment.

They appreciate it if one is ashamed of breaking a law; they laud a man who, overcome by national zeal, defends the nation's independence, the cause of civilization, or the sanctity of other sacred values. They praise a man who remains content with what the law has allotted to him; and applaud the loyalty and obedience shown by the public to their leaders and rulers.

They say: "Whether a characteristic is good depends on its conformity with the goals of social aspirations." Then they come to the conclusion that the said characteristic's excellence depends on its conformity with the society's goals. But it is a clear fallacy. Society is an institution which comes into being when its members enforce, and act upon, all the laws decreed by nature.

This society is bound to take them to their happiness and felicity (provided there is no disturbance in its arrangement and flow); and the society is bound to have some rules and regulations like virtue and vice, good and evil. On the other hand "society's aspiration" is just a set of some imaginary ideas, invented for creating a society on prescribed lines by imposing it on its members.

In other words, society and society's aspirations are two completely different things: Society is an established fact, society's aspiration is only a potential which is yet to come into being; the former is an actual fact while the latter is only a plan yet to be implemented.

How could one be equated with the other? The virtue and vice are brought into being by the general society on the demands of the human nature; how could such an actual fact be brought under the

domain of some aspirations – the aspirations which are nothing but some imaginary notions?

Question: The general civilization, brought into being by nature, has no authority of its own; whatever authority there is, it belongs to its goals and aspirations – especially if it is a theory conforming to the happiness of the society's individuals.

Reply: The preceding discussion about virtue and vice and good and evil, shall be repeated in this case again – until the talk stops at a permanent, perpetual and unchanging decree of nature.

Apart from that, there is another difficulty. Let us suppose that virtue and vice as well as all the rules of civilization depend on the goals and aspirations of the society. And it is those aspirations on which the arguments of these people are based.

But it is possible – nay a fact – that there may be different conflicting goals and aspirations within one society, or between different societies. Which aspiration would then prevail? Which one the people should give preference to?

Which would be acceptable to the general society? The fact is that in this situation there will only be one criterion, and that is the power and domination; in other words, might is right. How can it be believed that the human nature led the human beings to a social structure whose parts are in conflict with one another? Can the society be governed by a rule which would negate the society itself? Is it not an ignominious contradiction in the rule of nature and the demands of its existence?

A Few Traditions on some Related Topics

Imam al-Baqir (a.s.) said: “A man came to the Messenger of Allah (S) and said: 'I am keen (and) enthusiastic for *jihad*.' (The Messenger of Allah) said: 'Then do *jihad* in the way of Allah, because if you are killed, you shall remain alive near Allah and sustained, if you die (before that), then your reward is indeed with Allah...'

The author says: The Prophet's words, “and if you die...”, point to the word of Allah:

and whoever goes forth from his house emigrating to Allah and His Messenger, and then death overtakes him, his reward is indeed with Allah... (4:100).

It also shows that proceeding to *jihad* is emigration to Allah and His Messenger.

Imam as-Sadiq (a.s.) said about the prophet Isma'îl, whom Allah has named “Truthful in promise”: “He was named 'Truthful in promise' because he had promised a man (to wait for him) in a place.

So he remained waiting for that man for one year. There-fore, Allah named him 'True of promise'. Then that man came to him after that (long) time and Isma'îl said to him, 'I have been waiting for you...'” (*al-Kafi*)

The author says: It is a thing which average wisdom would probably say was a deviation from middle course, while Allah has counted it as an excellent virtue of the said prophet, increasing thereby his prestige and raising his status, as He has said:

And mention Isma'il in the Book, surely he was truthful in (his) promise, and he was a messenger, a prophet. And he enjoined on his family prayer and alms-giving, and was one in whom his Lord was well pleased (19:54-5).

The fact is that the criterion by which this action was judged is different from the one used by common wisdom. The average wisdom, the common sense, looks at the things according to its own views, and Allah looks after His friends by His Own help and support; and the word of Allah is the High. Many similar events have been narrated about the Prophet, the Imams and other friends of Allah.

Question: How can rules of the *shari'ah* go against the dictates of reason, in situations where reason may have a say?

Reply: True that reason may judge the virtue or vice of an action wherever it is possible for it to do so. But that thing or action should first come within its jurisdiction before it can pronounce its judgment on it.

And we have explained earlier that such actions (as described in the above tradition) are governed by the third system, and that system takes such actions out of the jurisdiction of human intellect and reason – reason does not have any say against or about them. It is the way of the Divine Knowledge.

Apparently the prophet Isma'il (a.s.) had given that man unconditional promise by saying, 'I shall wait for you here until you come back to me.' Therefore, he stuck to that unconditional wording, to save himself from breaking the promise, and to fulfil what Allah had put in his mind and made his tongue utter.

Of the same import is an event related about the Prophet that he was near the Sacred Mosque when one of his companions told him that he would come back to him, and the Prophet promised to wait for him until he would return.

That man went away and did not return, and the Prophet remained there three days waiting for him in the same place which he had promised. That man passed by that place after three days and found the Prophet sitting there waiting for him and he himself had forgotten the promise.

As-Sayyid ar-Radi has narrated from the Leader of the faithfuls ('Ali – a.s.) that he heard someone saying: "***Surely we are Allah's and to Him shall we surely return.***" Thereupon, he ('Ali – a.s.) said: "O man! Verily our word, ***Surely we are Allah's***, is acknowledgment by us that we belong to Him, and, ***to Him shall we surely return***, is acknowledgment by us that we are to die." (*al-Khasa'is*)

The author says: Its meaning is clear in the light of the earlier given explanation. The tradition has been narrated in detail in *al-Kafi*.

Ishaq ibn 'Ammar and 'Abdullah ibn Sinan have narrated from as-Sadiq (a.s.) that he said: “The Messenger of Allah (s.a. w.a.) has said: 'Allah, the Mighty, the Great, has said: “I have given the world as loan to My servants. T

hen whoever gives Me a loan from it, I give him ten times to seven-hundred times in lieu of one. And whoever does not give Me a loan and I take something from him by force, then I give him three things that if I gave one of them to My angels they would be pleased of Me.” ' ' Then Abu 'Abdillah said: ”(It is) the words of Allah:

Who, when a misfortune befalls them, say: 'Surely we are Allah's and to Him we shall surely return.' Those are they on whom are blessings and mercy from their Lord, and those are the followers of the right course.”

Then Abu 'Abdillah (a.s.) said: “It is for the man from whom Allah takes something forcibly.” (*al-Kafi*)

The author says: This tradition is narrated by other chains, all having nearly the same theme.

Imam as-Sadiq (a.s.) said: ”*as-Salah* (الصَّلَاةُ) from Allah is mercy, and from the angels is purification, and from the people is prayer.” (*Ma'ani '1-akhbar*)

The author says: There are other traditions of the same meaning.

At first glance, there appears to be a conflict between this and the preceding tradition. This tradition explains *as-salah* as mercy, while the preceding one counts *as-salah* as other than mercy; and this view is further strengthened by the wording of the verse itself which mentions *as-salah* and mercy separately, “blessings and mercy from Allah”. But in fact there is no contradiction as we have explained in detail in the Commentary.

1. since the author has described the branches of virtuous characteristics in the text in tree form, and in the explanatory figure (of the original work) he has also chosen the tree form representation, we therefore have duplicated the explanatory figure in the same manner (pub.)

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